

But you won't experience 'Altered States'

Total relaxation waits in a deprivation tank

By Lori Steinhauer
Of the Emerald

In the movie "Altered States," Dr. Eddie Jessup hallucinated his way back to the earliest stage of evolution inside a sensory deprivation tank.

Within the airtight tank, Jessup floated atop a solution of Epsom salts and water and sank deep into meditation. Soon his imagination took a tumble through time and he envisioned himself as a primitive monkey being chased and beaten. A now "altered" and raging Jessup suddenly broke out from isolation and dodged into the city streets.

For viewers of the movie, "Altered States" turned sensory deprivation into a mysterious phenomenon.

However, sensory deprivation, or "floating" as it is termed at the newly opened Eugene Floatation Center, is more a means to relaxation than a mystic mind trip, says Wes Bigelow, owner of the operation. Bigelow says while everyone experiences something

different inside the tank, stress reduction is one of its main functions.

"The first time it will be real novel, and after that it will be a tool that can be used in a lot of ways," he says.

Jane Bernstein says at first the sensation of floating was "scary," since she had never experienced anything like it before. But after a few minutes Bernstein says she became acclimated to the tank, and she now floats for relaxation several times a week.

"When I first went in, it felt like I was going head first into a waterfall, and I didn't know when I was going to hit bottom. But when I got totally relaxed it felt like free falling," she says.

"It's like dreaming, except it's not — I know where I am," says Linda Horsfall, who also enjoys floating. "What's nice about it is you go in there, turn the lights off, turn the sound off, and shut out the rest of the world. It can actually be a kind of sensual experience. It made me be very aware of my body. It's the only place I know of where I can let go."

"The relaxing part doesn't always hit me until maybe an hour after I get out, and it stays with me the rest of the day."

Floating in saline saturated water in a light, sound-insulated shell measuring about 9 feet long and 6 feet wide was the idea of neurophysiologist John Lilly. In 1954 while working for the National Institute of Mental Health, Lilly ventured into the use of flotation tanks to disprove theories that sensory deprivation had adverse effects on the mind.

About two decades later, Glen and Lee Perry began selling tanks for private home use in California.

Today flotation tanks cost anywhere from \$3,500 to \$8,000, with the more deluxe models equipped with lights, music, jacuzzi jets and even video tapes, Bigelow says.

The tank at the Eugene Floatation Center contains a stereo system. In addition, a second tank with the added feature of a video tape machine soon will be available for floating at the center.

Bigelow says that although sensory deprivation tanks have been relatively hazard-free, he takes certain precautions for users of the tank. Before floating, customers must fill out and sign an agreement stating they have no infectious skin disorders. In addition, they must claim responsibility for their physical and mental conditions upon entering the tank.



Photo by Michael Clapp

Sensory deprivation tanks like the one at the Eugene Floatation Center provide the latest way to unwind.

The tank also has an intercom system to Bigelow's desk, in case any problems arise in the tank. The intercom can also be used "if people want to get into some kind of therapy," Bigelow says.

An operator of several flotation centers in the East said after seeing more than 10,000 people come through his center, only four or five people had bad experiences, Bigelow says.

"It's an uncommon occurrence," he adds.

Before entering the tank, customers shower and put plugs supplied by the center in their ears. When the session inside the tank is over, music comes on the speaker in the tank, to signal that time is up.

Floating at the Eugene Floatation Center regularly costs \$20 for an hour and \$45 for three one-hour sessions. Bigelow is running an introductory offer for students, which costs \$15 an hour, or \$10 for any hour between 8 a.m. and 3 p.m. Also, after one float anyone who sends two new clients to the center gets a complementary float. The center is open Tuesday through Sunday from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m., and is located at 1342 High St., Suite 2. For appointments and information, call 484-1530.

Former 'frat' band now a local market sell-out

With the first 1,000 newly pressed copies of their first album "Law and Order" sold-out in nine days, the Crazy 8s could say that they are well liked here in town.

Once a "frat" band from Oregon State University, the group has tightened up its act considerably to become one of the biggest draws in the Northwest, packing clubs-in from Ashland to Vancouver, B.C.

With opening acts resembling the likes of the Clash, Romeo Void and The Blasters, the Crazy 8s are an eight-man band in the "two-tone" tradition of the English Beat and Specials. Still, the band's personal influences extend well beyond that genre, their sound banks fusing ska rhythms with light, funk-laden bass with Latin percussives and punchy horn breaks, all into a pop music framework.

The Crazy 8s will perform at the Factory Restuarant at 47th Avenue and Main Street in Springfield tonight and Saturday. The music begins at 9:30 p.m.



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