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Summon your inner MAGI

Role-acting game opens at Funplex

BY ELLEN S. WILKOWE
DAILY RECORD

We walked in a novice and walked out still a novice but armed with special powers for our next journey through the 8,000-square-foot kingdom.

Welcome to MagiQuest: One wand, many adventures, all ages appropriate.

One of six nationwide locations, the Funplex site in East Hanover is the latest in the MagiQuest to enchant and empower the general public through the use of magic technological "wands." A one-time cost of \$14.95 lands you a wand. Each hour in the kingdom costs \$9.95. Powers? Priceless.

The kingdom opened to VIPs Thursday and cast its spell on young magi such as 9-year-old Stephen Hoebee-Elardo of Maplewood.

"I like the lightening room because the tasks are the hardest," he said.

During Thursday's grand opening, this particular reporter joined the Woodsy clan -- one of several tribes magi can join that best suit their personality-- and was ushered to training immediately.

Magi first have to complete nine task-oriented quests which upon mastering give them powers known as magic runes. The Ancient Book of Wisdom provides a map of the kingdom and written clues for each quest.

"If I were a vibrantly blue

In the courtyard.

So fair, I'd be waiting for you."

For example, this Dazzle Rune Quest engaged said reporter in a wand-wielding mission through the Enchanted and Dark Forests to unveil five colored crystals.

The ultimate goal is to build and gain power by earning runes and achieve the status of master magi.

Along their journey, magi point their wands at any object bearing a "Q" symbol such as treasure chests, portraits, crystals, that may or may not contain tasks but reveal animated hints or humor such as the following issued by a red-eyed wizard.

"Ho hum, my life is about exciting as watching paint dry."

Rude awakenings such as "Sorry magi, you have not completed enough tasks to play here" alert players to move on before moving forward. Or in this case, backwards: "Sorry magi you have already completed this task."

Live characters such as Eron, are close at hand, eager to provide an assist.

"I am a member of the Woodsy clan," said assistant manager Mike McNelis, a.k.a. Eron. "My father got lost on his quest and I'm trying to find him."

Magi maven Denise Weston, the woman behind the wonders of the wand, paid a personal visit to her latest location.

Frustrated by the one-dimensional passivity of video games, this mom and child psychologist created the ultimate solution in MagiQuest.

MagiQuest
Funplex
182 Route 10 West
East Hanover
(973) 428-1166
Cost: \$14.95 for wand
(Can use at any location)
\$9.95 per hour
www.thefunplex.com
www.magiquest.com
Hours:
Monday-Thursday, 4-9
p.m.
Friday: 4-11 p.m.
Saturday: 10 a.m. -11
p.m.
Sunday: 10 a.m.-9 p.m.

"I thought, 'What if you could become a live character in a video game and experience it?' she said. "This brings people together -- adults and kids and offers a family experience. It's like a big iPod. You're controlling your environment."

"Princess" Patricia Lahn, an employee at Funplex, echoed Weston's sentiments. "It's gender-friendly too," she said. "Girls are equally entranced," she said.

The game takes a total of six hours to complete, Weston said, but magi may become engaged in hours, days and years of quests and adventures. The game tracks every move players make and saves those of individual gamers in a global database.

To our credit, we successfully completed two quests in two hours -- cut us some slack; we had interviews to conduct and deadlines to meet -- but had nine more to go before moving on to new adventures.

There's always another day.

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