

## Adventure Game Finals at Atari

Seven finalists of the ATARI EARTHWORLD™ Contest gathered at Atari on May 2, to battle it out for possession of the coveted EARTHWORLD talisman. EARTHWORLD is the first of the Swordquest™ series of adventure game cartridges designed by Atari for the ATARI 2600 VCS™.

According to Joel Oberman, CED product manager in charge of video adventure games, more than half a million EARTHWORLD game cartridges were sold in the U.S. Of that half million, roughly one percent, or 5,000 people, worked through the clues hidden in the game to reach preliminary competition. And of those 5,000 semifinalists, only seven—less than two-tenths of one percent—made it to the finals.

Those seven included:

Matthew Balasa, 21, a college chemistry major from Bayshore, Michigan.

Steven Bell, 20, of St. Clair Shores, Michigan.

Jacqui Custer, 30, a housewife from Arleta, California, and a member of the American Model Railroad Association.

Douglas Ferry, 18, a college chemistry and computer science major from Chalmeete, Louisiana.

John Hoffman, 30, a wildlife specialist from Waterloo, New York.

Lt. Thomas Heil, 32, a member of the U.S. Coast Guard, from Clariton, Pennsylvania.

James Schweitzer, 16, a high school junior from Bayshore, Michigan.

For the final adventure, a special edition of the EARTHWORLD cartridge was prepared by CED Software programmer Dan Hitchens, who programmed the final game to be supremely difficult. CED copywriter John-Michael Battaglia prepared a special set of arcane clues that the finalists had to decipher in their journey through the game labyrinth.

The eight adventurers met at Atari Headquarters at 1265 Borregas for the final showdown. Ginny Juhnke, CED Press Relations, who helped organize the EARTHWORLD competition, anticipated the final match would last at least an hour and a half, given the difficulty of the clues and the nature of the special EARTHWORLD contest cartridge.

At the appointed hour, the contestants took their seats in a circle around a huge Atari zodiac mandala placed on the ground, around which Atari 2600 units and TVs had been arranged. Clues were distributed, rules explained and the contest began.

As each contestant completed a level of play, a bizarre tune was played by the EARTHWORLD cartridge. Other than that, the contest room was eerily quiet as the players struggled through the maze of underground rooms and passageways that make up EARTHWORLD's fantasy realm.

Then, suddenly, it was over. Steven Bell put down his joystick and stretched as the screen of his TV went wild with color. He had unraveled the twisted plot of clues in 46 minutes, 49.4 seconds—an incredibly quick feat, according to the judges present.

In a ceremony following the contest, Steve was presented the one-of-a-kind EARTHWORLD talisman, specially crafted by artisans at the Franklin Mint. When asked how he was able to solve the puzzle of EARTHWORLD so quickly, Steve replied mysteriously, "You just have to be able to think a certain way." Instead of disappearing in a cloud of smoke, Steve then joined the other contestants for lunch on Atari.

EARTHWORLD is soon to be joined by the second game cartridge in the Swordquest series: FIREWORLD™. Stay tuned for further adventures!



EARTHWORLD finalists (standing, left to right): Jacqui Custer, Thomas Heil, winner Steven Bell, Douglas Ferry, John Hoffman; (kneeling) Matthew Balasa and James Schweitzer.