

The Worst Game Ever?



E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial is a video game that came out for the Atari 2600 game system in 1982. It was based on a very popular film of the same name. It cost over 125 million dollars to make. Star programmer Howard Scott Warshaw created it with consultation from Steven Spielberg. And it is widely considered to be one of the worst video games ever created. The massive failure of *E.T.* and its effects on Atari is an often-mentioned reason for the video game industry crash of 1983.

It was July 27th, 1982. Howard Scott Warshaw was hot off the success of his most recent game, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. He received a call from Atari. Atari had bought the rights to make a video game version of Spielberg's movie, *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial*, which had just been released in June. Kassar told Warshaw that Spielberg had specifically asked for Warshaw to make the game. Warshaw was honored, but there was one huge problem.

Atari needed the game finished by September 1st in order to start selling it during the Christmas season.

It had taken Warshaw six months to create *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. The game he made prior to that took him seven months. He was expected to create *E.T.* in around five weeks. Warshaw just did not have enough time to program the game properly, but he accepted the challenge anyway and production began. Spielberg wanted Warshaw to create a simple maze game, similar to *Pac-Man*, but Warshaw had a bigger vision. He wanted players to explore different environments in a 3D world. Warshaw followed his vision.

Atari anticipated that the game would be a huge success. Usually companies like Atari have people test games before releasing them. If there is something that testers really dislike, programmers can fix it before the public gets a chance to play. Atari decided to skip testing due to time limitations. They wanted the game released during the holiday season. It was: *E.T.* was released in December of 1982.

The game sold very well at first. It was a hot holiday item. Unfortunately, Atari overestimated how many they would sell. They made 5 million copies and they only sold 1.5 million. Most people who played the game hated it. The graphics were bad. Game play was awkward. Players got stuck in holes that they couldn't escape. A short time limit made the game difficult to explore and frustrating to play. Some people who stuck with the game grew to like it, but it wasn't the mainstream success that Atari had hoped it would be.

Too many copies of the game sat on store shelves. One employee remembers the game being discounted five times, from \$49.95 to less than a dollar. Many people returned the game. Atari was left with millions of unsold copies. In September of 1983, a newspaper in New Mexico reported that between 10 and 20 semitrailer truckloads of Atari products were crushed and buried at a landfill in Alamogordo. Perhaps a million or more copies of *E.T.* were buried in the desert. When word got out, the drop site had to be covered with cement to prevent scavenging.

Atari lost over \$100 million on *E.T.* The game was so bad that it was said to have affected Atari's reputation. The video game industry soon fell into a deep depression. In 1983 the industry made \$3.2 billion. By 1985 profit fell to just over \$100 million. This was almost a 97% drop. Many critics believe that Atari's blunder on *E.T.* was one of the causes leading to this depression. *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* will long be remembered as one of the worst video games ever made.

Read "The Worst Game Ever" and answer the following comprehension questions.

1. Which of the following is **not** a reason for the failure of *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial*?
 - a. The programmer was not given enough time to finish the game properly.
 - b. Atari did not test the game before its release.
 - c. Atari made too many copies of *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial*.
 - d. The game was released on a new system that only a small number of people owned.

2. Which of the following were effects of the failure of *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial*?
 - a. Perhaps a million or more copies of the game were buried in the desert.
 - b. Atari lost over \$100 million.
 - c. The video game industry sunk into a deep depression.
 - d. All of the above

3. Which of the following was **not** listed as a reason why *E.T.* was considered one of the worst games ever?
 - a. The soundtrack was annoying.
 - b. The graphics were bad.
 - c. A short time limit made the game frustrating.
 - d. Players would get stuck in holes.

4. Which of the following events happened first?
 - a. *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* video game was released to the public.
 - b. The entire video game industry sank into a deep decline.
 - c. Steven Spielberg suggested that the *E.T.* video game should be like *Pac-Man*.
 - d. Atari buried millions of cartridges and game consoles in the New Mexico desert.

5. Who programmed *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial*?
 - a. Steven Spielberg
 - b. Ray Kassar
 - c. Howard Scott Warshaw
 - d. Elliot Thomas

6. Why did Atari decide to skip testing *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial*?
 - a. Testing was too expensive.
 - b. Spielberg would not allow testing.
 - c. They were in a hurry to release the game for the holiday season.
 - d. Testing video games was not common until after *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* was released.

7. When was the game *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* released?
 - a. June 1982
 - b. September 1982
 - c. December 1982
 - d. September 1983

8. According to the text, which group of people would like playing *E.T.*?

- a. People who really enjoyed watching the movie
- b. People who liked playing fast, fun games
- c. People who stuck with the game despite its flaws
- d. People who enjoyed playing *Raiders of the Lost Ark*

9. Which of the following statements is true?

- a. *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* was one of the worst selling games of all time.
- b. *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* sold a lot fewer copies than Atari was hoping it would.
- c. *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* was one of the best selling video games of all time despite its flaws.
- d. Every copy of *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* ever sold was eventually returned.

10. Which of the following is **not** a reason cited in the article why *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* should have been successful?

- a. It was based on an extremely popular movie.
- b. The gameplay was smooth and enjoyable.
- c. Atari spent over \$125 million on its production.
- d. Howard Scott Warshaw programmed the game.