

Atari's 'E.T.' game joins Smithsonian collection

December 15 2014, by Susan Montoya Bryan



This undated photo provided by the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History shows one of the decades-old Atari 'E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial' game that was found in a dumpsite in Alamogordo, N.M. The Atari game cartridge unearthed earlier this year along with about 800 other Atari games, some ET and some others from a heap of garbage buried deep in the New Mexico desert has been added to the video game history collection at the Smithsonian. Museum specialist Drew Robarge made the announcement Monday, Dec. 15, 2014 in a blog post. (AP Photo/Smithsonian's National Museum of American History)

One of the "E.T." Atari game cartridges unearthed this year from a heap of garbage buried deep in the New Mexico desert has been added to the video game history collection at the Smithsonian.

Museum specialist Drew Robarge made the announcement Monday in a blog post. He included a photograph of the crinkled cartridge along with the official serial number assigned to the game by the city of Alamogordo, New Mexico.

The game was one of hundreds recovered at the city's landfill last spring as a team of documentary filmmakers investigated a decades-old urban legend that centered on Atari secretly dumping the cartridges. The "E.T." game had the reputation of being the worst game ever, and it contributed to the demise of the company.

Robarge said the Smithsonian has some amazing artifacts that represent big moments in video game history, including Ralph Baer's "Brown Box" prototype for the first [video game console](#) and a Pong arcade cabinet. However, missing was something that represented what he called "the darkest days" of the early 1980s when the U.S. video game industry crashed.

He describes the "E.T." cartridge as a defining artifact, saying it tells a story about the challenges of adapting blockbuster movies to video games and the end of an era in [video game](#) manufacturing.

"All of these possible interpretations make for a rich and complicated object," he said. "As they say, one man's trash is another man's treasure."

Members of the film crew that sparked the dig at the Alamogordo landfill said they were excited to get the call from the museum.



In this April 26, 2014 file photo, workers sift through trash in search for decades-old Atari 'E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial' game cartridges in Alamogordo, N.M. One of the "E.T." Atari game cartridges unearthed earlier this year from a heap of garbage buried deep in the New Mexico desert has been added to the video game history collection at the Smithsonian. Museum specialist Drew Robarge made the announcement Monday, Dec. 15, 2014 in a blog post. (AP Photo/Juan Carlos Llorca, File)

"Just saying the name Smithsonian resonates throughout the world, and to be part this dig and an iconic museum like the Smithsonian with something that we created and researched and actually had come to fruition is pretty amazing," said Gerhard Runken of Fuel Entertainment.

The documentary debuted on Xbox last month, but it's too soon to say when the "E.T." cartridge might go on display or be worked into an exhibit at the Smithsonian. The museum also has hard hats and a vest from the historic dig.

© 2014 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: Atari's 'E.T.' game joins Smithsonian collection (2014, December 15) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-12-atari-game-smithsonian.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.