

# What do people do when the end of the world is near? Video games will give you the answer

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Researching the end of the world and how humanity will react to it is never easy. If you try it when the world is not ending, you probably won't get a good answer. If you try it when the world is about to end, people won't care much about the results because it won't matter much. When an asteroid is about to destroy humanity, most of us will probably just be filled with fear and regret.

A research team, trying to find another way to study humans during the apocalypse, used a video game about that event. The team used the open world, massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) ArcheAge as their experiment. During the study, which took place in its beta phase, participants played the game normally, completing quests, exploring, leveling up, and stocking up on gear as they pleased. However, after 11 weeks, players learned that the servers would be wiped and all their progress and characters would be lost.



**The team believes that erasing the world is a prime example of the end of the real world, with no consequences for the player's actions. They believe this will help them answer the age-old question of whether humans will abandon their moral ideals as the apocalypse approaches.**

The team analyzed more than 270 million records of player behavior in the game, such as leveling data and quest logs, to see if player behavior changed when they knew the 'world' was about to end. The game was relatively peaceful, with a few exceptions that chose to kill indiscriminately.

*" Our findings show no clear behavioral changes related to the pandemic, but some outliers were more likely to exhibit antisocial behavior (e.g., killing players) ," the team writes. " We also found that, contrary to the reassuring statement: 'Even if I knew the world would collapse tomorrow, I would still plant an apple tree,' players abandoned character progression, showing a significant decline in quest completion, leveling, and skill changes by the end of the beta testing period ."*

Basically, when the world is about to end, you probably won't spend much time on self-improvement. The researchers write that people who stay until the end of the game are often the calmest. Meanwhile, people who leave the game earlier on their own accord, which the researchers call "quitters , " tend to exhibit the most antisocial behavior, such as killing other players, because they lose *"a sense of responsibility and attachment to the game ."*

Overall, while the team emphasizes that the results are of course limited by the fact that it took place in a video game, the apocalypse was fairly peaceful, and sometimes even positive, with pro-social behavior emerging at the end of the day.

*" Our finding that the sentiment of specific social groups on chat channels tends to be 'happier' as the apocalypse approaches is a first sign of this pro-social behavior: existing social ties seem to be strengthening ," the team concludes. " Furthermore, we found that players who stayed until the apocalypse showed a spike in the number of temporary subgroups: many new social ties are being formed. "*

So, if the end of the world really comes, maybe a part of us will come together to say "goodbye" to everything or explode with emotion and do the things we have always wanted to do without being bound by anything. The research has really shown an interesting perspective on human nature when faced with the inevitable "death" of all humanity.

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