
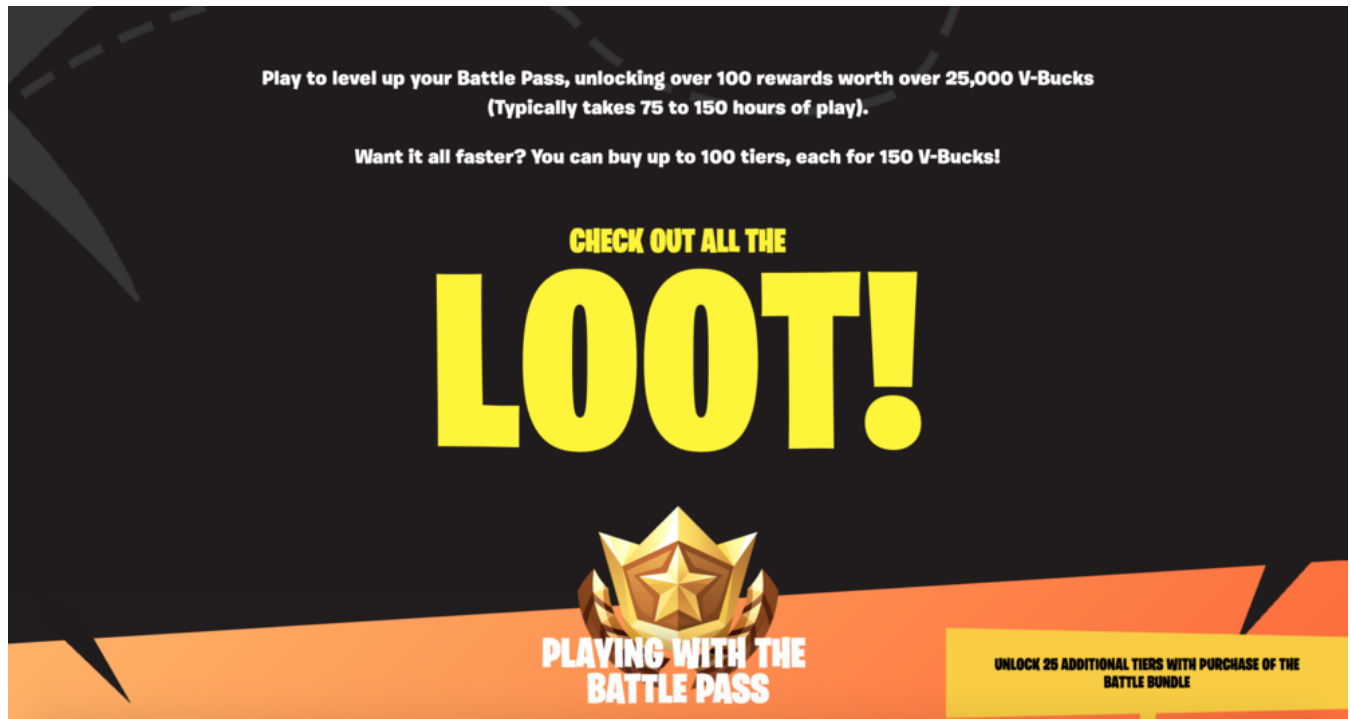


Fortnite And The Downsides of Loot Boxes

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Last week Prince Harry publicly shared his major concern with video gaming and Fortnite in particular. At an event at the YMCA in London, he said game companies are working "to keep you in front of a computer for as long as possible." He spoke about having friends who are struggling with their children over the game. He had just returned from a babymoon, so clearly parenting is on his mind. By the way, I had to look up babymoon and it is a vacation you take with your partner before you have your baby, usually in the second trimester.

Video gaming is a \$180 billion market worldwide. It is larger than film, music, and television. Within gaming, some estimates put the value of "virtual goods" at more than \$50 billion. No wonder why everyone is looking for a piece of this market.

Loot boxes are packages filled with prizes, weapons, gear or an aspect of the game that advances gameplay. You can earn loot boxes by reaching certain levels or paying real money for them with in-game microtransactions. This means if a kid sees a message pop up that offers a loot box for .99 cents and then buys it, your credit card attached to the game (do you remember putting it there for in-app purchases?) will be charged.

Shooter games are not the only ones with loot boxes. You will also find them in games like Candy Crush and Roblox, as well as games geared toward younger children such as Smurfs Village.

Loot boxes are said to resemble gambling. Being able to spend real money for another chance to advance in a game is not that much different than putting one more quarter in the slot machine in hopes of winning more.

"The flashing lights, the colors. It feels good to open. But – it shouldn't because that can really hook some people in and it can be dangerous," 17-year-old gamer Benjamin Malek told TV Station WJLA. A 17-year-old boy in Canada spent \$7,600 on loot boxes in Fifa 16. The 10-year-old son of one of our team members paid more than \$200 in a week on Fortnite loot. There are countless other instances of these "microtransactions" gone wrong.

Seven countries, China, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Australia, Netherlands, and Belgium have restricted, or are considering limits, on video game loot boxes. Last year, the Belgian Gaming Commission declared loot boxes to be in violation of the country's gaming laws and declared them illegal. This means game developers need to completely remove loot boxes of any kind from games shipped to that country. Failure to do so will result in high fines and prison time. Belgium's Minister of Justice, Koen Geens, told the BBC that giving children access to loot boxes is a mix of gaming and gambling and "dangerous for mental health."

In the U.S., at the urging of Senator Maggie Hassan, the FTC said they will look into the use of loot boxes in games and their likeness to gambling. They have yet to start an investigation. In an effort to give parents a heads up, games that are rated by the Entertainment Software Rating Board now have labels indicating whether a game has loot boxes.

The game industry's trade group, Entertainment Software Association, claims that loot boxes enhance a players' experience. They said in a statement to the Washington Post last year, "Contrary to assertions, loot boxes are not gambling. They have no real-world value, players always receive something that enhances their experience, and they are entirely optional to purchase. They can enhance the experience for those who choose to use them, but have no impact on those who do not."

For this TTT, let's talk to our families about loot boxes and other in-game temptations. Here are some questions to get the conversation started (and remember you can always print the TTT via the icon on the let — and thank you for sharing it with anyone who has kids or teens playing video games).

1. What do you know about loot boxes and why are they so appealing?
2. Billions of dollars are made off of virtual things in loot boxes—what do you think about that?
3. What are the downsides of loot boxes?

We would love for you to share this TTT any way that works for you, whether that's on social media or via a newsletter. If you want to send it out in your newsletter we just ask that you credit us and link to our website, and let us know at lisa@screenagersmovie.com.

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