

If you had not noticed, loot crates have been making some waves in the gaming world of late. Bonus containers awarded at the end of a game, these boxes deliver mystery rewards to the player when they finish. Most games use them to give the player “vanity” items, such as new clothes or gestures, but some use them in less welcome ways.

Recently EA and DICE drew serious heat from gamers when it transpired that all progression in Battlefront 2, the latest Star Wars blockbuster game, was managed through loot crates. At the end of each game, the player would “randomly” be rewarded with items and scrap in a loot crate. Scrap could be used to purchase new upgrades, whilst other items and heroes are bought with the in-game credit currency. This currency is awarded to the player through hours of play and through loot crates. A third type of currency can be purchased directly with cash, which can then be converted to loot crates. Get that? Basically, you can hope that luck brings you new items, time brings you more money or you can just buy stuff with real money.

There are a few places where people start to get a bit upset. The first is the amount of time it would originally have taken to unlock heroes by playing the game straight. One Redditor estimated the average player would take about 40 hours to unlock Luke or Vader.

The next bit is a little more complex. Gambling. You see, buying a loot crate does not guarantee that you get what you want, the content is random. The gambling commission in the UK and several other EU states and Hawaii are now investigating if this constitutes real gambling or not. Pay money, randomly get a reward that may or may not be valuable. The argument is that you always get a reward, even if it is not worth much – so is therefore not gambling, but not everyone is convinced.

Another issue is that many feel paying £50 or more should entitle you to the whole game and a fair chance of winning. Whilst it may be common in free to play games on mobile devices, they cost nothing up front. Console games are expensive and it is a bit of a cheek expecting people to then pay more to be able to win!

This leads us to the core gamification lesson here. Fairness. If people feel that the system is not fair and that they do not have a fair chance of winning, they will revolt. EA and DICE have already had to suspend the microtransactions and reduce the time needed to unlock heroes (by 75%!!). **Oh and don't rip people off. That's another big lesson!**

Who knows what the future holds for Loot Crates. I for one hope that they have now jumped the shark and will go back to just being about non-game affecting vanity items, but sadly with the greed shown by many companies, this may still be some way off.

What do you think?

Some further reading on loot crates and gambling ☐

- <https://www.polygon.com/2017/11/24/16696974/uk-gambling-commission-loot-crate>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/games/shortcuts/2017/nov/26/how-much-star-wars-battle-front-ii-and-the-problem-with-paid-for-video-game-rewards>
- <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-42110066>
- <https://www.polygon.com/2017/11/13/16646374/battlefront-2-40-hours-unlock-luke-vader-prices>