# Microtransactions & The Disillusionment of Gaming

There has been no lack of outrage over the gaming industries’ seemingly universal embrace of microtransactions & pay-to-win mechanisms. It should be stated that those two terms are not synonymous; and the true problem is the latter.

[Kevin Anderton noted for Forbes](https://www.forbes.com/sites/kevinanderton/2018/03/07/the-on-going-controversy-of-microtransactions-in-gaming-infographic/#6552be201d9c), that while “few players like the microtransaction system,” a large majority of them are willing to accept game developers utilizing the system-- as long as the purchasable content is purely cosmetic (e.g. has no effect of gameplay.) To rephrase the last point-- gamers find microtransactions most upsetting when purchasing power can give a player in-game advantages.

What is seldom acknowledged about pay-to-win mechanisms in gaming is that they distort the previously egalitarian landscape of video games into the image of our capitalist society.

In the past-- PvP games have generally taken one of two approaches:

\*There is the balance approach. This could be either the early Halo games-- where all players spawn with the same weapons and abilities-- or games like Mortal Kombat & Overwatch -- where the player is provided a variety of character options with unique abilities that have been painstakingly tweaked by the developers in an effort to ensure no character has an inherent advantage over the other.

\*The second common approach is earn-as-you-play: where the player is rewarded for playing the game by unlocking more diverse or powerful abilities. This approach is what propels nearly every single-player game, as-well as many MMORPG’s, and shooters like Call of Duty & Battlefield.

In both of these established approaches (which philosophically resemble communism and smiley-face capitalism, respectively), the player is rewarded only for their skill & their commitment to the game. Increasingly, as AAA PvP titles have embraced in-game marketplaces that accept real world currency; game developers have created worlds (as aesthetically imaginative they may be) that reflect the ugliest elements of our own-- worlds that see you as nothing more than a potential source of revenue. More than that: developers who embrace microtransactions tend to punish the players who try to avoid them with long grinds & less access to content.

As an example: Rockstar Games two big multiplayer IP’s --GTA: Online & it’s western-sister game Red Dead Online -- have both been denounced by critics & players for their in-game economies: the former been accused of [offering game-breaking abilities to players willing to dish out the dough](https://www.gamerevolution.com/features/363099-gta-online-orbital-cannon-makes-pay-win-literal-term), and the microtransactions are so controversial in the latter that it has been suggested [they flatout ruin the game](https://www.geek.com/games/red-dead-online-is-a-great-multiplayer-experience-ruined-by-microtransactions-1764488/).

[The history of microtransactions in gaming](https://www.usgamer.net/articles/the-history-of-gaming-microtransactions-from-horse-armor-to-loot-boxes) has largely told the story of game developers greedly shaking nickels out of the pockets of their loyal customers-- and the worst part about it, is that it removes a barrier between a players real life & their life in game; which rob video games of some of the escape they can provide. The player used to be judged by their in-game merit, but for many multiplayer games that is no longer the case-- and games are worse for it.