

## I Need Hat!

*An article proposal for The Escapist*

*James Archibald*

Valve love nothing more than to use their hugely popular online shooter Team Fortress 2 as a platform for experimenting with ways to interact with the community that has grown around the recently made free-to-play game.

For the most part this is a wonderful thing from a gamer's perspective. Constant updates to the game have kept it fresh over the years and there's a surprisingly rich back story starting to emerge behind the nine iconic mercenaries who make up the teams. However, since the game went free to play and Valve have moved to supporting it with micro-transactions for new in-game items a darker side to the game has reared its ugly head. And it's wearing a hat.

Several times per week I'll log in to Steam and find a friend request from a username I don't recognise. I can't just ignore them in case they're genuinely people I've met while playing a game online, but accepting the request can be hazardous. Why? Because the multi-million dollar TF2 hat-trade has resulted in digital-age urchins and beggars who genuinely believe virtual headgear is valuable enough to bother random Steam users in order to beg for their unwanted hats.

Steam community inventories are public by default which means that everyone can see that I have the somewhat rare *Genuine Killer Exclusive* or the classic vintage *Bill's Hat*. I haven't played TF2 in years but I still seem to be accumulating hats through Valve's various promotional deals with other games and services now exist that act as Steam inventory search engines - allowing people to target users who have a specific item that they want.

The article will include real excerpts from my encounters with these people and will cover the aggravating ways that some members of the TF2 community continually find to bend the rules (achievement farming, idling, etc.) and will also present some of the issues with the current Steam community trading system such as the fact that, even if you have blocked a member they can still initiate trade requests.



Previously published writing in PC Gamer Magazine (UK):

Original review of TF2, written shortly after its release:

[http://hunter.weebitmagic.com/images/byline/pcg\\_tf2review.jpg](http://hunter.weebitmagic.com/images/byline/pcg_tf2review.jpg)

Rant about developers ruining the multiplayer experience:

[http://hunter.weebitmagic.com/images/byline/pcg\\_consolemultiplayer.jpg](http://hunter.weebitmagic.com/images/byline/pcg_consolemultiplayer.jpg)