

Washington Post
Despite the hype, 5G is still a long way from becoming a reality for everyday Americans.

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The game's real achievement is subtler, though. Epic Games managed to produce a hit, sure, but the genius of it is how it's rewritten the idea of what hanging out online can be. Fortnite is a game, but it's also a global living room for millions of people, and a kind of codex for where culture has gone this year — it's a cultural omnibus that's absorbed everything from Blocboy JB's shoot dance to John Wick. It got Ted Danson to learn how to floss. This thing is here to stay, as a new kind of social network.

Fortnite has achieved such a massive scale partially because of those network effects — if all of your friends are hanging out there, you will be too. The game is both free to play and available on every device—consoles, computers, even phones. That's created a kind of lingua franca, a base level of understanding among a large group of people about the experience of playing the game. And even though it's hugely popular, the experience of playing is extremely specific — not so many people outside your peer group are going to know what you mean if you reference a "chug jug" in casual conversation. There's an in group thing going on here.

Recently I was at a bar connected to a restaurant, waiting in line for the bathroom, when two children — they couldn't have been older than 9 — joined me in line. They were talking about Fortnite, naturally, doing dances from the game in the hallway. (One did the "Take the L".) I couldn't tell if they'd played together before, but something else was obvious: here was their common language, the base understanding. It wouldn't have mattered if those kids didn't know each other. They would have still had something to talk about, and an excuse to do it.

Best of all, the game itself continues to stay fun and accessible enough to draw in newcomers. It's focused on casual players; the whole thing is self-consciously silly. Fortnite is the first-person shooter reinvented as a place to stomp around, as a place for friends to chill and talk about whatever's on their minds.

The game is mostly played by teenagers, but even I'm not immune. I have a small group of friends I play with regularly, who are scattered around New York City — they're all busy with their creative, interesting lives, and we don't see each other enough because we all have shit to do. But we talk fairly often, the rotating four or five of us. About our days, about our feelings, about what's really going on. For us, Fortnite is an excuse to talk on the phone. It's an excuse to stay connected.

Adult life, especially in a city, is all too frequently isolating or alienating. As more daily routines are moved online — you can do nearly everything these days without needing to leave your apartment — the fuzzy social interactions you'd have had in public are going away, and fast (dating, shopping, eating). While Fortnite obviously isn't fostering the same kinds of social interaction, it does relieve the kind of ambient loneliness that feels like a feature of the 20-teens.

During the lead up to the midterm elections this fall, a friend and I decided to fill our squad out with random people online. We asked

them about their politics, about who they were voting for, and about whether they were going to vote; we spoke with a variety of people about a number of things, but mostly that wasn't the point. Sure, the game is silly; more intimate than a game about being the last person alive on an island has any right to be; it's certainly always surprising. Anyway, I'm still getting wrecked online by random teens, and I can tell you it's absolutely worth it. – *The Verge*



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