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Game Development

A Taste of Power

In many games, often in action/adventure games or RPGs, the beginning of the game will involve allowing the player to rampage around in an overpowered character, usually with excessive health and/or upgrades. The point is, the player will get a taste of extreme power right at the start, then it will be ripped away for various reasons, leaving the player with almost nothing. We will explore why game developers do this, and what makes this trope work well, and why it fails occasionally.

Sometimes this is used for story reasons, and to not overwhelm the player with so many tools and abilities all at once. For example, in the first *Assassin’s Creed* game, the protagonist undertakes a mission with other assassins, well equipped with every blade, bomb, and knife that a mercenary could ask for. After disobeying orders, the player is stripped of their rank, and almost all of their gear. They are sent on different assassination missions in order to regain their good graces with the Assassin Order, and their weapons. The developers gave this taste of power rather well. They offered the player a myriad of options to deal with opponents, but since there was no tutorial for advanced moves, failure was all but inevitable. The player flopped around trying to figure out the longsword vs the shortsword, missing stealth opportunities, and generally screwing up the mission. Failure, however, was the point. The player was supposed to feel clumsy and awkward, as it not only progressed the story, but it softened the blow of having the gear taken away. With an overwhelming amount of moves and tactics to use at the beginning, having some of those taken away for later use might be a good thing. The game lets the player start anew, learning step by step so that once they finally regain all of their gear, they can truly be the expert assassin that they tried to be. The reason this trope worked well here was because the overwhelming use of abilities was supposed to be confusing. The game made very clear that being an expert assassin took training, time and discipline. Otherwise, the player might see the other assassins in the game, and complain that they don’t have all of the special gear that they have. Using this trope in simpler action games might prove unsuccessful, because giving simpler mechanics that the player can quickly understand, then taking them away just seems unfair, and will make the player feel cheated.

This trope is often used in RPGs less as a learning tool, but more as an end goal. In *Shadow of Mordor*, the player, Talion, is a well-seasoned ranger at the wall of Mordor, training his son to fight when an army of orcs attack. Talion shreds through these orcs and the player feels immense power as they decimate waves of enemies, but their sheer numbers overwhelm Talion and he is killed. Later on, his soul is bonded with a wraith, and they are both revived, destined to stop the evil that has fallen over the land. The problem is that Talion is left with nothing, and his body is wounded. He must retrain himself and get new weapons if he wants to take on the Dark Lord. Giving the player a taste of this immense power is rather easy to learn how to use, but it does not rip away everything when it takes the power away. Mainly, health upgrades and advanced tactics are lost, but the fighting system is still very satisfying, even at level 1, and the early power trip only gives a goal for the player to get back to or even exceed as they progress through the game. If the game does give and take away immense power, one of the most key factors to make this successful is to ensure that the game is still fun to play without all of the advanced power. If so, it gives a fun goal, if not, the player will be left feeling underpowered for the entire game and will likely not have much fun at all. If the only way to have fun in the game is to have immense high-level power, then giving the player a chance to use that power early is never a good idea.