

Losing Money to Become a Tycoon: Starting with Games

Chapter 450: Journey of the Flying Star

Pei Qian hurriedly clicked open the movie's promotional page.

Journey of the Flying Star

Action / Sci-Fi / Fantasy · 3D IMAX

USA / 134 minutes

Released: 2011-03-12

Synopsis

On the eve of World War I, the traumatized former officer Tim (played by John Stanton) accidentally travels to a mysterious planet and becomes entangled in the conflicts among its many factions. Although these factions all regard him as the key to ending the war—and he even wins the affection of the beautiful Princess Lynn (played by Deija Morton)—can he truly let go of his past and change the fate of this planet?

After reading the synopsis, the excitement Pei Qian had felt was instantly doused with cold water.

This story didn't seem all that appealing!

But then again... weren't most American movies built on this kind of formula? Didn't the globally popular Avatar also involve traveling to another planet and falling for a native girl?

Yeah, close enough.

The key factors were still the director and the investment!

As long as the director was reliable and the budget high enough, crushing *A Better Tomorrow* at the box office would be effortless!

Pei Qian quickly looked up more information about the film.

After reading through it, he let out a long sigh of relief.

Director Darryl had released his first animated short film back in 1988. Since then, he had directed numerous films and received multiple Oscar nominations. In 2005, one of his animated films grossed 600 million dollars worldwide and won the Academy Award for Best Animated Feature. In 2008, his next sci-fi animated movie won the same award again.

Meanwhile, *Journey of the Flying Star* was adapted from a classic American sci-fi novel published in 1911, making this year the 100th anniversary of the original work. The movie's total investment exceeded 170 million dollars. Its cast was packed with stars, and lead actor John Stanton had undergone intense physical training during filming, enduring injuries while also losing a full 25 pounds—a true model of professionalism.

In short, after thoroughly reviewing all the information about the film, Pei Qian instantly felt reassured.

This was the standard Hollywood blockbuster formula!

Just look at the luxurious lineup, the enormous investment, the famous director, the famous actors, plus a solid script. If it was released worldwide,

earning six or seven hundred million dollars at the box office should be no problem at all, right?

And in China alone, casually pulling in five or six hundred million RMB should be guaranteed.

In fact, even that estimate was conservative. With a production budget of 170 million dollars, a worldwide box office of only five or six hundred million would merely count as breaking even.

If it became a massive hit, it would surely aim for over a billion dollars!

By then, theaters would obviously give it huge screening allocations, squeezing A Better Tomorrow completely out of sight with ease.

At present, theaters had already given this movie 31.4% of the screenings on opening day. If its performance remained strong, that percentage would definitely rise even further!

Meanwhile, A Better Tomorrow's screening share had already fallen below 15%.

The only thing Pei Qian found somewhat regrettable was that this movie had premiered more than half a month late. If it had released alongside A Better Tomorrow, it would have been absolutely foolproof!

Still, releasing now wasn't too late. At the very least, it would significantly reduce his future income!

Thinking of this, Pei Qian felt deeply encouraged.

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March 12th, Saturday.

Today was the weekend, so there was no work. But for Pei Qian, every weekend from now on would come with extremely important tasks!

While eating his Moyu Delivery meal, he checked the reservation numbers for the OTTO E1 phone.

As expected, reservations still hadn't reached 5,000. This meant at least 4,000 units from the current stock would remain unsold, which was almost exactly in line with Pei Qian's estimates.

Online, this number had also become the target of widespread mockery.

Because when the OTTO E1 phone launch conference had first been held, the event had generated enormous hype. The launch video even made it onto the digital rankings of the Aili Island website, and Chang You's rapid-fire comedic monologue had inspired countless imitations.

On the day of the launch event, the initial 1,000 units had sold out instantly, briefly creating the illusion that the phone was extremely popular.

Previously, many people had already suspected that this was just hunger marketing. Now that OTTO had opened pre-order reservations with deposits, the total number of reservations still hadn't even reached 5,000 units—an entire order of magnitude lower than the tens of thousands of reservations major smartphone brands typically received.

As a result, the focus of public criticism naturally shifted.

“OTTO Technology really made a terrible move here. They should’ve just kept doing hunger marketing. Selling little by little at least could’ve maintained the phone’s hype. But now that they’re openly selling it, everyone can see exactly what this phone is worth. Fewer than 5,000 reservations total—aren’t they embarrassed?”

“They should at least fake the numbers! Just add another digit to the preorder count and save some face!”

“Heh, I think President Chang got too full of himself. Selling out the first 3,000 phones gave him the illusion that the phone was actually popular, so he opened reservations—and instantly got exposed!”

“When there was no stock, you people said it was hunger marketing. Now that there’s stock, you say the phone isn’t popular enough. Haters are truly invincible...”

“Heh, the facts speak for themselves. I won’t ask for much—if this phone can sell a cumulative total of 30,000 units, I’ll reluctantly admit it’s popular. But can it? Right now it’s only sold 3,000 units with another 5,000 reservations. That’s already the ceiling! This proves that relying on marketing gimmicks and IQ taxes can’t get you far!”

Looking at these comments, Pei Qian felt much better and even ate several extra mouthfuls of food.

Especially that last comment—it sounded righteous and decisive, completely declaring the OTTO phone hopeless. Reading it made Pei Qian extremely pleased.

The only unfortunate thing was that the commenter probably didn't understand the market very well. In reality, just selling those 3,000 phones had already earned him 12 million yuan. Even after redistributing those profits back to other departments, he still made over a million.

If they really sold 30,000 units, wouldn't that practically kill him?

Afterward, Pei Qian glanced at player reviews for BE QUIET.

Up until now, players were still arguing over the game's purchase requirements, while actual discussion about the game itself remained extremely rare.

Although sales were still increasing, fewer than 10,000 copies had been sold so far.

Compared to Tengda's previous games, this was practically a dream opening!

Pei Qian was delighted. The discouragement process he had carefully designed was clearly working—and working extremely well!

Of course, the game had also received plenty of criticism.

The biggest point of contention among players online centered around exactly this.

When BE QUIET first launched, players discovered they couldn't purchase it immediately and instead had to complete an ARG puzzle first. Many players had already become furious and even completely lost interest in the game.

Then, after the ARG puzzle-solving process dragged on for an entire week before finally being completed, many people happily prepared to buy the game—only to discover there were additional prerequisites!

And those prerequisites took nearly an hour to complete, required players to finish a horror mini-game, and even forced some players without webcams to go buy one.

Although Lonely Desert Road and Game Producer had already become free games, many people who had never played them before simply didn't want to download or play them at all.

In short, this series of prerequisite steps discouraged a huge number of players and sparked enormous controversy that continued even now.

Some players said Tengda Group had become arrogant and self-indulgent, creating a pointless promotional campaign that ultimately hurt the game's sales, and they were just waiting for the game to flop spectacularly.

Others argued that the game was intentionally filtering its players through this method, preventing impatient casual players from entering the game. That way, it could purify the game environment and improve the overall gameplay experience. According to them, this was all part of the game's marketing strategy—and so far, it had been extremely successful.

Pei Qian found these arguments fascinating to read.

He really wanted to tell everyone: actually, both sides were right!

I really *do* want the game to flop, and I really *am* filtering players—you're all talking about the same thing!

Aside from the two groups fiercely arguing with each other, there were also some posts that made Pei Qian marvel at the wisdom of the masses.

A player named “Super Ordinary” made a forum post compiling a detailed guide for clearing all the prerequisites, including exactly how long to drive in Lonely Desert Road, what choices to make each time in Game Producer, how to operate the TPDb website, and so on.

The most outrageous part was that this poster even figured out the ultimate cheese strategy for clearing the final challenge: cut a hole in a piece of paper and place it over the screen. That way, your eyes only needed to focus on the tiny visible portion through the hole, making you completely immune to all the ghosts and monsters appearing around the edges of the screen.

What was originally supposed to be the ultimate challenge—requiring over half an hour of repeated attempts and tremendous willpower to succeed—could now be cleared by many people on their very first try using this exploit...

As for this post, Pei Qian only had two words for it:

Absolute respect!

Of course, there were ways to patch this loophole. He could continue adjusting the game’s mechanics so that players would be forced to scan every corner of the screen throughout the challenge instead of staring at just one fixed point.

However, considering that the game's sales were currently pretty mediocre, the challenge already had an extremely strong deterrent effect. So Pei Qian decided to turn a blind eye to it.

After all, the players who had actually managed to reach this final step were already a tiny minority within the player base.

Finally, Pei Qian opened the Gouyan app to check the opening-day box office performance of Journey of the Flying Star.

It was only noon, and the movie had already surpassed 11 million yuan at the box office. Its first-day total would probably reach around 24 million.

Pei Qian couldn't help frowning slightly. It didn't seem quite as incredible as he had imagined?

But after thinking it over, today was only the first day of release. Tomorrow was Sunday, which would bring another major wave of moviegoers. Combined across the two days, wouldn't 60 million be effortless?

A famous director, famous actors, massive investment, huge-scale production—there was no way this movie could flop. If it didn't casually rake in six or seven hundred million at the box office, how could it even show its face in public?

Pei Qian still remembered that A Better Tomorrow had earned less than 8 million by midday on its first day, with a total first-day box office around 17 million. Yet the Gouyan app had already predicted a total gross of 2.1 billion yuan.

And afterward, A Better Tomorrow's numbers had continued climbing. By now, Gouyan's predicted box office had already risen to 2.3 billion.

Pei Qian hurriedly clicked on Journey of the Flying Star's projected box office.

"320 million RMB???"

"A movie this good only gets a projection this low? I refuse to believe it!"

Pei Qian almost thought the number was missing a zero.

But then again, Gouyan's box office predictions were only estimates and not necessarily accurate—especially when based on only half a day's worth of data, making them even less reliable.

Wasn't A Better Tomorrow underestimated too?

Come on, Journey of the Flying Star, I believe in you!

Tomorrow, you absolutely must crush Gouyan App in the face with huge box office numbers and teach it what it means to underestimate a movie!

Pei Qian then checked tomorrow's theater allocations. Journey of the Flying Star's screening share had already increased from 31.4% to 32.3%. Although the increase wasn't huge, it would still exert solid pressure on A Better Tomorrow.

After all, A Better Tomorrow had already been in theaters for 19 days and would probably leave cinemas in another ten or so days.

Moreover, Journey of the Flying Star wasn't the only movie putting pressure on A Better Tomorrow's screenings. Several other films had also been releasing during this period.

A Better Tomorrow had now fallen to third place at the box office. The top two spots belonged to Journey of the Flying Star and The Pursuer. The latter had also just premiered a couple of days ago. Although its total box office would definitely never surpass A Better Tomorrow, it was still a new release with strong theater support, allowing its daily earnings to steadily outperform A Better Tomorrow.

At present, the three movies' daily box office revenues were roughly at the levels of 20 million, 8 million, and 4 million respectively.

But under the relentless pressure from the two movies ahead of it, A Better Tomorrow already seemed like a fading hero in its twilight years.