

You Were Told to Lose Money By Making Games, and You Actually Did It?

Chapter 64: Video Games? I'm an Expert at Those!

May 31

Morning Star Games.

"Old Gong, how about we go with these three?" Ying Gao asked.

"How many times have I told you? Stop calling me 'old.' You can call me *Little Gong* if you want!"

Gong Qi rolled his eyes before nodding.

"Let's go with them. Compared to the other celebrities, they have almost no scandals, and their political positions are relatively safe."

His tone was somewhat helpless, but there wasn't much they could do.

When Chen Xu first assigned them the task, neither of them thought it would be particularly difficult.

But once they actually started looking, they realized it was much harder than expected.

First of all, the actors had to match the characters of Connor, Markus, and Kara.

They couldn't be too old, and they had to be genuinely capable actors.

That requirement alone eliminated a huge number of candidates.

After all, it's not as though the foreign entertainment industry is free of actors who can barely deliver lines beyond "one, two, three, four, five."

There were plenty of those.

Next, even if someone had both the acting skills and the right appearance, they also had to consider the actor's personal background.

Anyone heavily involved in politics—or with politically controversial views—was immediately ruled out.

And casting actors wasn't as simple as liking someone.

Just because *you* wanted them didn't mean they'd agree to join your project.

You also had to consider their schedules and whether both sides were interested in working together.

When all those factors were combined...

Finding suitable candidates became remarkably difficult.

After carefully comparing countless options, the two of them finally found three actors who fit.

Following preliminary discussions with their agents, both parties agreed to meet at Morning Star Games to negotiate the detailed contract terms.

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"Not bad. They fit quite well."

Chen Xu nodded in satisfaction.

Inside his office, he looked over the profiles of the three lead actors Gong Qi and Ying Gao had selected.

Cold and emotionless Connor.

Android revolutionary Markus.

And gentle, compassionate Kara.

At the very least, their appearances were convincing.

The actress cast as Kara was a French actress named Minka Kelly.

She wasn't particularly famous, but her appearance closely resembled Kara's in the game.

The other two male actors were somewhat better known.

The actor playing Connor was named Ben Lambert.

He had recently appeared in a hit television drama as the third male lead.

In terms of screen time, however, he had mostly served as eye candy.

He was comparable to Legolas from The Lord of the Rings—at least in terms of being the handsome character everyone noticed—but nowhere near that level of popularity.

He had some online buzz, but nothing extraordinary.

As for Markus, he would be played by an established actor named Brian May.

He had even received two Academy Award nominations—one for Best Supporting Actor and one for Best Actor.

His résumé was impressive.

His actual track record, however, wasn't.

Every movie he starred in lost money.

At his peak, he had been a near A-list actor capable of demanding \$7 million per film.

Now he had fallen so far that Hollywood considered him box-office poison.

He couldn't even land roles in commercial productions with budgets exceeding ten million dollars.

Instead, he publicly announced that he had voluntarily lowered his salary to "appear as a favor" in various art-house films.

This time, rather than acting in a movie, he had accepted a performance-capture role for a video game.

Once again...

"As a favor."

His original asking price had been \$7 million.

His "friendship price" was now only \$2 million.

That said, Chen Xu had watched clips from several of Brian May's films.

His acting really was excellent.

He simply had astonishingly bad luck.

Every film he picked ended up losing money, until he eventually became synonymous with box-office failure.

Forget Hollywood, with a record like that, he'd practically be buried alive in any country's entertainment industry.

Chen Xu genuinely hadn't expected Gong Qi and Ying Gao to discover such an exceptional "talent."

Putting everything else aside, the title of "box-office poison" alone was worth at least another \$100,000 in Chen Xu's eyes.

They had chosen a lead actor famous for sinking box offices.

What an auspicious sign!

With luck like that, If Detroit didn't lose money, it simply wouldn't make sense.

"President Chen, how should we arrange the reception?" Zhou Ran asked.

Chen Xu thought for a moment.

"Book them into a five-star hotel for a day's rest, then rent a chauffeured car from the hotel."

If this had been before his first settlement, Chen Xu might have gone all out with extravagant hospitality.

After all, it would have been another opportunity to spend the system's money while enjoying the benefits himself.

But now...

Although he still couldn't afford truly extravagant luxuries, he certainly wasn't short on money when it came to food and daily comforts.

There was no need to squeeze every possible dollar out of the system.

Besides, this time Morning Star Games was paying the actors to work.

It wasn't as though they were begging them to participate.

As long as basic business etiquette was observed, that was enough.

There was no need to make the reception overly lavish.

As the client, they needed to maintain their position.

They shouldn't make it look as though they were desperately trying to curry favor.

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June 3

Brian May and the other two actors arrived at Morning Star Games to sign their contracts.

Although the actual motion-capture work would take place in Osaka, they still had to travel to Morning Star Games' headquarters in Shanghai to finalize the agreement.

But Brian and the others didn't find the trip troublesome.

Minka and Ben aside—the latter at least had a bit of recognition.

Even so, Ben wasn't really considered even a third-tier actor, since he had no truly notable works to his name.

Landing the role of the third male lead in a hit TV series had given him some attention, but whether he could capitalize on that was another matter.

As for Brian, although he had once been famous, that was all in the past.

Now he couldn't even land a decent commercial film.

The film industry itself was also undergoing major changes.

Apart from megastars and the very top A-list actors, who still had some box-office appeal, most movie stars were becoming increasingly less marketable.

Fading into obscurity was becoming almost inevitable.

So even though he knew very little about the gaming industry, the pay was lower than his film salaries, and the project would take considerably longer—Brian still found it hard to refuse.

After all, opportunities to make money were no longer nearly as plentiful as they had once been.

"This game company seems fairly capable."

On the ride back to the hotel after signing the contracts, Brian chatted with his agent.

"Based on what I've gathered, that's true."

"Their previous game, Sekiro, has already sold 2.5 million copies worldwide and generated over \$100 million in profit."

"This new game is reportedly being developed with a \$25 million budget. And despite being a relatively new studio, they've built an excellent reputation among players."

The agent summarized the information he had collected.

"The script is pretty solid too."

"It explores family bonds, the relationship between humans and machines, and the conflict—and eventual coexistence—between them."

"It may wear the skin of science fiction, but fundamentally it's a very traditional story."

Brian nodded slightly.

The screenplay wasn't particularly groundbreaking, but it was exactly the sort of story that worked well as a commercial film.

Trim away a few story branches, and it could easily become a straightforward science-fiction movie.

As for originality and innovation...

Those had never been priorities for mainstream commercial entertainment.

Whether in the East or the West, the core of commercially successful stories remained remarkably similar.

Just as China had *The Butterfly Lovers*, the West had *Romeo and Juliet*.

No matter the era, stories like these would always remain commercially viable.

At most, creators would wrap them in different settings or add a twist.

"As time goes on, video games are becoming more and more popular."

"The industry surpassed the film business long ago."

"Some of the biggest gaming streamers and content creators may not have the commercial value or earnings of megastars or A-list actors, but they're already far ahead of second-tier celebrities."

"The mainstream commercial films aren't going to cast you anymore."

"And movie awards like the Oscars are becoming less influential every year."

"Trying to return to the A-list—or even the edge of it—through art-house films is practically impossible."

"So I think you should rebuild your public image and find success through a different path."

His agent laid out the analysis.

Their team's driver was behind the wheel, so there was no concern about the conversation leaking.

"You're right."

Brian nodded.

Celebrities all had carefully crafted public personas.

Some championed feminism.

Some promoted world peace.

Some advocated environmental protection.

Others focused on racial equality.

But...

Why couldn't someone build a persona around gaming?

And there was another advantage.

If the game became a hit, he could ride its popularity.

Even if the game turned out badly, as long as he didn't make any mistakes himself, people couldn't pin all the blame on him the way they often blamed actors when a movie flopped.

"Over the next few months, you're going to need to work hard."

"You have to make people believe you're genuinely passionate about video games."

"Take Morning Star Games' previous title, Sekiro."

"It still has plenty of attention."

"Practice it in your spare time, then post about it on X and interact with your fans."

"I've heard it's an extremely difficult game."

"So train hard."

"Then start a livestream and see if you can beat the highest difficulty without taking a single hit."

"That'll firmly establish your image as a hardcore gamer."

"After that, we'll arrange for online promotion through marketing accounts and entertainment reporters."

"If things go well, maybe you'll land some major roles in the future."

Hearing that, Brian smiled confidently.

"No problem."

"Don't underestimate me."

"I'm amazing at playing video games!"