

Losing Money to Become a Tycoon: Starting with Games

Chapter 518: A Numerical Problem with Struggle

Zhang Wang froze for a moment.

"President Pei, there's really no need for the production cost to reach 400 yuan. Besides, it'll be difficult to raise the cost that high."

Pei Qian frowned.

"Can't raise it?"

"How could it possibly be impossible?"

"Make the box a little bigger."

"Hire a famous artist to redesign its appearance."

"Add gold trim."

"Use higher-quality materials and refine the finish."

"When you made the Shared Phone Booth, you weren't afraid to spend money."

"So why have you become so stingy now?"

Having been criticized by President Pei, Zhang Wang felt deeply ashamed.

"Understood, President Pei."

"I'll do exactly as you say."

He Desheng's expression became rather complicated.

Originally, he had assumed President Pei wouldn't think highly of this project.

Instead, President Pei had not only quadrupled the investment, he had also raised the retail price from 260 yuan to 488 yuan!

No matter how you looked at it, this thing simply wasn't worth that much.

In He Desheng's opinion, it was nothing more than a little novelty toy to pass the time.

If it sold for forty or fifty yuan, perhaps some people might buy one to play with occasionally.

But 488 yuan?

Who would ever buy it?

The design was certainly unusual, but it wasn't particularly attractive.

Nor was it especially entertaining.

Aside from someone like President Ma—with his unconventional way of thinking—who would spend hours arguing with a machine?

Even if a handful of wealthy people with too much free time existed, there was no way they could sell twenty thousand units.

If they mass-produced them and they all ended up sitting unsold in a warehouse, wouldn't that just be pure losses?

He Desheng originally wanted to say something, but after another thought...

Since President Pei had spoken, there had to be a reason.

Better to keep quiet.

Watch carefully.

Learn carefully.

Pei Qian patted Zhang Wang on the shoulder.

The admiration on his face couldn't have been more obvious.

Excellent!

It seemed the Shared Phone Booth had merely been an unfortunate misunderstanding.

This great inventor, Zhang Wang, was still someone worthy of complete trust!

If I could get ten more inventions like this that absolutely nobody wants to buy, I'd lose eighty million yuan with ease.

And they'd even take up warehouse space!

This is wonderful.

...

...

Friday, May 13

Tengda Group – Game Development Department

Hu Xianbin tipped back his coffee, drained the cup in one gulp, and returned to work.

At this point, Tengda's game development department had effectively split into two teams.

Hu Xianbin led one group developing Struggle.

Meanwhile, Min Jingchao led another team operating GOG, constantly matching wits with IOI.

The atmosphere on the two sides couldn't have been more different.

Over on Min Jingchao's side, people enthusiastically discussed new heroes every day.

The office buzzed with energy.

Hu Xianbin's side, however, was gloomy.

Primarily because Struggle itself was an extremely difficult project.

And during development, everyone constantly felt as though the game was reopening old emotional wounds.

It was hard to keep morale high under those circumstances.

Hu Xianbin was still refining the game's script.

It hadn't been finalized yet.

However, almost all of the character concept art had already been completed.

He had to admit, Master Ruan worked astonishingly fast.

Hu Xianbin saved his document before opening the image collection Ruan Guangjian had sent over a few minutes earlier.

But as he flipped through them one by one...

The more he looked, the more confused he became.

The game featured many different characters:

the poor protagonist, the rich protagonist, the poor parents, the rich parents, the poor protagonist's boss, the rich protagonist's boss, and many others.

Because the actors had been cast before the concept art was created, the original plan had simply been to make minor aesthetic enhancements based on each actor's appearance.

However, the illustrations now sitting in front of Hu Xianbin felt as though they had gone far beyond that.

Every single character had been portrayed in a much more exaggerated, extreme fashion.

Some of them were downright bizarre.

For example, the entire poor family was depicted as severely overweight.

Most exaggerated of all was the poor protagonist's mother.

Judging from the illustration, she looked as though she weighed nearly 300 jin (around 150 kilograms / 330 pounds).

The motion-capture actress, of course, wasn't anywhere near that size.

When filming, they would probably have to rely on special techniques to simulate such extreme obesity.

Meanwhile, the rich protagonist was almost too handsome.

He looked like one of Hollywood's top-tier movie stars—perfectly groomed and effortlessly glamorous.

The poor protagonist, on the other hand, not only had an ordinary appearance, his expression clearly conveyed a mixture of ingratiating flattery, along with a faint resentment hidden beneath the surface.

Those two expressions had been forcibly combined onto his face so vividly that simply looking at him instinctively made people uncomfortable.

In other words, Ruan Guangjian had practically written each character's deepest personality traits directly onto their face.

When Hu Xianbin first received this batch of concept art, his immediate reaction was that something felt off.

He couldn't understand it.

How could a master like Ruan Guangjian make such a basic mistake?

Then Ruan Guangjian explained:

"This was all President Pei's instruction."

At that point, Hu Xianbin immediately began wondering whether there was some deeper meaning behind it.

"The downside is obvious."

"It'll reduce the game's sense of realism."

"As for the advantages..."

"The more exaggerated art style and character designs make each role more distinctive and memorable?"

"These almost theatrical, archetypal appearances could serve as symbols, making the game's themes easier to convey?"

"What else..."

"...I can't really think of anything."

Hu Xianbin tried his best to interpret President Pei's intentions.

Although he did come up with a few possible explanations...

None of them felt particularly convincing.

Given how demanding Struggle's development schedule already was, there simply wasn't time to spend endlessly analyzing every design decision.

In the end, Hu Xianbin decided to leave it alone for now.

Once the game is released, everything will become clear.

After checking every piece of concept art, he prepared to send them to the outsourcing studio so they could begin modeling the characters.

At the same time, the motion-capture actors could finally start recording their performances.

Having briefly organized his upcoming workload, Hu Xianbin once again devoted all of his attention to the game's script.

While writing the script, however, Hu Xianbin encountered an extremely serious problem.

It had already been bothering him for two days.

Oddly enough, he had run into a game-balance problem.

Which was rather absurd.

By all rights, this game shouldn't *have* balance problems.

Yet somehow, one had appeared anyway.

The rich protagonist's route worked perfectly.

The problem lay entirely with the poor protagonist's route.

According to President Pei's design, the poor route could have only one ending:

The cycle of poverty continues forever.

Originally, Hu Xianbin hadn't thought there was anything wrong with that.

It was perfectly logical.

The problem was, the game also had to account for exactly how much money both protagonists earned and possessed.

How much money did the poor protagonist have?

How much was required just to maintain a basic standard of living?

How much salary did he earn after getting a job?

Even if the numbers weren't exact, they still needed to make sense.

Otherwise, players would inevitably start picking the story apart.

Suppose a certain story branch required the poor protagonist to run out of money, triggering the downward spiral that ultimately led to the ending.

Then the game had to ensure that he genuinely didn't have enough money.

But no matter how Hu Xianbin calculated it, theoretically, the poor protagonist actually ended up with more money than expected.

Realistically, he shouldn't have fallen into such a miserable ending at all.

Even in the poor route, players still made plenty of choices.

Some decisions earned higher incomes.

Others earned less.

Yet even if players always chose every high-income option, the ending was still exactly the same:

An endless cycle of poverty.

From a numerical standpoint, though, if players made every optimal choice, the poor protagonist should have become far wealthier than his parents.

His quality of life should also have improved significantly.

Changing the ending wasn't an option.

President Pei had already personally decreed it.

Thus, a contradiction emerged.

If things continued this way, the game's internal logic would collapse.

And for a game driven primarily by its narrative, if the story stopped making sense, everything would fall apart.

Both its reputation and sales would be ruined.

Hu Xianbin treated the problem like a major crisis.

He felt he absolutely had to solve it before he could continue with peace of mind.

After thinking for quite some time, he still had no ideas.

Hu Xianbin reopened the folder of character illustrations.

Absentmindedly, he flipped through them again, hoping they might somehow inspire him.

The rich protagonist appeared in a tailored suit, elegant and impeccably groomed.

At a glance, he looked like someone from the upper class, living comfortably without financial worries.

One detail immediately stood out.

On the cuff of his suit was a distinctive gold emblem, clearly representing a luxury brand.

It consisted of two uppercase gold Ls, mirrored symmetrically and artistically intertwined.

The design looked remarkably stylish.

Hu Xianbin paid it little attention and kept flipping through the images.

Soon he reached the illustration of the poor protagonist after entering the workforce.

The poor protagonist carried a black briefcase tucked under his arm.

Looking more closely...

Hu Xianbin noticed that the briefcase also bore a logo.

The same two intertwined gold Ls.

Something clicked in his mind.

He flipped backward.

There was another illustration showing the poor protagonist during his university years.

His shoes also carried the exact same logo.

Hu Xianbin continued browsing.

Before long, he realized something surprising.

Nearly sixty to seventy percent of all the characters in the concept art wore clothing or accessories bearing this same emblem.

Every wealthy character had it.

Among the poor characters, only those who were relatively better off financially possessed items with the logo.

That made perfect sense.

After all, a luxury brand like this would naturally be beyond the reach of lower-income people.

Hu Xianbin could more or less imagine what Ruan Guangjian had been thinking while creating these designs.

The motion-capture actors had simply been photographed wearing their everyday clothes.

The outfits shown in the concept art had all been redesigned by Master Ruan to better reflect each character's social class and financial status.

To better emphasize the characteristics of the wealthy characters, it was only natural that they needed to wear luxury brands.

So Ruan Guangjian had invented a fictional luxury label based on real-world designer brands and used it as a decorative element throughout the concept art.

As for why there was only one luxury brand...

The answer was obvious.

There was no point in creating more than one.

Players have limited memory while playing a game.

If there were multiple luxury brands, players might confuse them or fail to remember them altogether.

So, following the principle of simplicity and practicality, the game only needed a single luxury label:

Anything bearing the double gold "L" logo was a luxury brand.

Everything else without that logo was simply an inexpensive, ordinary brand.

It was an entirely natural design choice.

When Ruan Guangjian drew it, he most likely hadn't thought much beyond that.

Yet as Hu Xianbin stared at the illustrations, a flash of inspiration suddenly struck him.

Originally, his goal had been to find a logical explanation for why the poor protagonist would end up spending all of his money.

According to his previous calculations, if the poor protagonist bought only necessities and inexpensive products, and if the player consistently made the better choices throughout the game, then the protagonist's salary would naturally accumulate over time.

His life should gradually improve.

But President Pei had explicitly decreed that the story must end with the cycle of poverty continuing forever.

That meant the game somehow had to force the poor protagonist to spend all of that money.

Now, Hu Xianbin finally had a perfectly reasonable explanation.

Luxury goods.

Luxury handbags.

Luxury shoes.

Designer clothing.

Jewelry.

Cosmetics.

And countless other expensive status symbols.

Once the protagonist started buying those things., of course his salary wouldn't be enough anymore.

Hu Xianbin let out a long sigh of relief.

At last, he had patched the plot hole.

This should keep players from picking the story apart now, right?

He added luxury-brand expenditures into the game's financial calculations.

Immediately, the poor protagonist's projected savings vanished.

Not only would he fail to save any money, he would even accumulate debt.

"Perfect."

"Problem solved!"

Hu Xianbin clapped his hands excitedly.

Although the solution felt somewhat crude, the game's internal logic had finally been restored.

He didn't think much more about it.

After all, this wasn't one of the game's core mechanics.

It was merely a small detail used to depict the lifestyles of the rich and the poor.

Most players probably wouldn't even notice it.