

Losing Money to Become a Tycoon: Starting with Games

Chapter 355: The High-Difficulty Version of “Guessing President Pei’s Intentions”

While interviews were underway at Tengda Group Network Technology Co., Ltd., over at Dream Fulfillment Ventures—

President Ma still hadn’t shown up today.

Although President Ma’s whereabouts had always been unpredictable, and although the company truly didn’t have any money lately for new investment projects, the fact that President Ma hadn’t come in still made He Desheng and the others feel a faint sense of unease.

If President Ma were to lose interest in the “nine-protect-one” gaming setup, a lot of people might end up unemployed on the spot!

Even if they didn’t lose their jobs outright, falling out of favor would mean their future career prospects would look extremely bleak.

So these experts—whose main job was professionally accompanying President Ma in games, with investment as a side gig—were all feeling a bit anxious.

After clocking in, the first thing He Desheng did was open his email inbox.

He had sent the game modification suggestions to Fingertip Games last Friday. Today was Monday—there should be a reply by now, right?

Sure enough, there was an unread email from Fingertip Games.

He Desheng skimmed through it.

As expected of a company dealing with shareholders.

Fingertip Games had already replied on Saturday. It was just that Dream Fulfillment Ventures didn't work overtime on weekends, and He Desheng hadn't checked his email then, so he only saw it today.

Still, getting a response within just one day showed how much Fingertip Games valued its shareholders and domestic publisher.

The email was quite long, extremely polite, and full of honorific language.

But although the wording was gentle, the underlying message was very clear.

Translated bluntly, it boiled down to three points:

1. Thank you very much to Dream Fulfillment Ventures for its support and love for the game ioi.
2. Thank you very much for the valuable suggestions provided, which were very inspiring for our game design.
3. However, due to certain reasons that are difficult to explain clearly via email, Fingertip Games cannot promise to make changes based on these suggestions, as game design is a highly holistic matter. Of course, if conditions permit, these changes are not entirely impossible to consider.

After reading this very official reply, He Desheng quietly sighed and closed the email.

There was no helping it, their stance was already crystal clear. They weren't going to make changes.

Although Dream Fulfillment Ventures held shares in Fingertip Games and had obtained exclusive domestic publishing rights, that level of shareholding simply wasn't enough to boss Fingertip Games around.

Moreover, Fingertip Games had always maintained a consistent attitude toward investors: a firm commitment to independence and autonomy.

Getting such a courteous reply so quickly was already quite good. If it were any other company making these suggestions, Fingertip Games probably wouldn't even have bothered replying.

Thinking about it carefully, this was perfectly normal. On the surface, Dream Fulfillment Ventures was just an investment firm. Why would Fingertip Games change a game that was, so far, performing reasonably well just because of an investor's suggestions?

Even if Tengda Group stood behind Dream Fulfillment Ventures, Tengda's influence overseas wasn't that strong. Fingertip Games's response would likely have been the same.

In short, this path was a dead end.

If it were any other matter, giving up would be fine.

But when everyone's livelihoods were on the line, He Desheng felt that they *had* to use a game to regain President Ma's trust.

Since ioi wouldn't work, was there another similar game?

After thinking for a long time, He Desheng suddenly remembered something.

"Isn't Tengda Group also developing a similar game?"

"Departments within the same company should be easier to talk to than Fingertip Games, right?"

He Desheng didn't have Li Yada's contact information, but he was able to get in touch with Assistant Xin.

So, after obtaining Li Yada's contact details through Assistant Xin, He Desheng sent over the modification proposal.

As for whether Li Yada—the person in charge on Tengda Group's side—would accept the proposal...

He Desheng honestly had no confidence.

Even though they were "brother departments," Tengda Group made games to earn money.

If this modification proposal went against Tengda Group's existing design direction, the person in charge there wouldn't possibly overhaul the game just for the sake of personal relationships, completely abandoning their own design philosophy.

Still, there was no harm in asking.

Who knew, maybe the person in charge on the other side would be very interested in the proposal?

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Tengda Group Network Technology Co., Ltd.

“President Pei, sorry to disturb you.”

“Regarding the haunted house project, could you briefly explain your specific requirements?”

“Hao Qiong and I already have some ideas, but we’re worried we might not be able to meet your expectations.”

Looking at the message from Chen Kangtuo, Pei Qian fell into deep thought.

So... he hadn’t managed to brush this off after all.

The two of them had taken the initiative to ask. What now?

Pei Qian really didn’t want to “point them down the right path,” because he felt like his mouth was blessed—whatever he said somehow always came true.

Every time he gave what he thought were terrible suggestions, they somehow turned into brilliant ideas.

This left Pei Qian feeling deeply confused and troubled.

That was why, this time around, Pei Qian hadn't said much to Chen Kangtuo and Hao Qiong. He had just let them muddle through on their own, hoping to get by without much involvement.

But clearly, the two of them had sensed something was off. After a whole weekend, they still came back to ask.

Pei Qian didn't want to guide them clearly, but saying absolutely nothing also felt a bit inappropriate.

Hmm. Just one sentence, then.

After thinking for a moment, Pei Qian typed his reply:

"Make it so that the bold have nowhere to spend money, and the timid dare not approach."

Less than two minutes later, Chen Kangtuo replied.

"President Pei, could you explain that a little more...?"

Clearly, he had carefully read those two sentences and then spent two full minutes thinking hard.

And yet, he still couldn't understand what the sentence was supposed to mean, so he could only helplessly ask again.

Although this might make President Pei think he was useless, this was a ten-million-yuan project. Chen Kangtuo didn't dare to carry it out while being completely confused.

Pei Qian chuckled.

Explain?

It was simple, really. It meant to let the bold people who dare to play do whatever they want—keep prices low and don't make money; make timid people too scared to even come—naturally, they won't be able to contribute any revenue to the haunted house.

The timid don't dare come, and the bold who do come can't spend much money—wouldn't the haunted house be guaranteed to lose money?

But of course, he couldn't say that out loud.

Pei Qian also didn't dare explain any further, afraid that one wrong word would trigger even more wild overinterpretation from the two of them.

At this moment, silence spoke louder than words.

So Pei Qian simply replied with three characters:

“Figure it out yourselves.”

Chen Kangtuo: “...Yes, President Pei. I understand.”

He handed the phone to Hao Qiong.

The two of them stared at the three words “figure it out yourselves” on the screen, momentarily speechless.

What a “figure it out yourselves”...

With just a single cryptic hint, wasn't the difficulty of interpreting this a bit *too* high?

Hao Qiong had heard before that when President Pei laid out a general direction, it was usually three or four points, and they were all quite clearly targeted.

But this time, everything had been highly compressed into a single point—and it looked far too vague and unfathomable!

Chen Kangtuo felt his brain starting to ache. "This... how are we supposed to 'figure this out'?"

Hao Qiong took a deep breath. "Calm down. Calm down."

"Director Lin once taught us how to analyze President Pei's intentions. Give me a moment, I'll try to recall the key points."

"Step one: first, firmly establish one belief—no matter how unreliable President Pei's words may sound, they are *always* correct..."

Hao Qiong began analyzing the deeper meaning of President Pei's sentence according to the method Lin Wan had taught them.

The bold people.

The timid people.

These were all the potential customers of a haunted house.

How these potential customers felt about the haunted house would directly determine its success or failure.

Under normal logic, one would try to make both bold customers and timid customers enjoy themselves and willingly pay.

But the problem was, these two types of customers had completely different demands.

Bold customers wanted a more thrilling and intense experience: for example, staff members acting as ghosts and scaring them at close range.

Timid customers, on the other hand, were easily frightened away by overly intense and scary attractions. They might not even dare to enter in the first place, and naturally wouldn't generate any spending.

So the question became: how could these two completely different demands be reconciled?

Chen Kangtuo felt that President Pei's sentence must be hiding the answer!

"Make it so that the bold have nowhere to spend money, and the timid dare not approach."

Did that mean making the haunted house extremely scary, while setting a very low ticket price?

That way, timid people wouldn't dare enter and would naturally stay away, while bold people—despite entering—would have nowhere to spend money because the ticket price was low...

On the surface, this did seem to fit President Pei's words.

But the problem was, this wouldn't make money, and it didn't make sense from a business standpoint.

Why make timid customers stay away? Wouldn't it be better to let them spend as much as possible? Why scare them off on purpose?

It definitely couldn't be that simple.

So this line of thinking had to be completely discarded.

They needed to dig deeper into the true meaning of President Pei's words!

The two of them racked their brains for a long time.

Suddenly, Chen Kangtuo had a flash of inspiration. He slapped his thigh hard and exclaimed, "I've got it! I just thought of something!"

"Let me briefly explain my idea, listen and see if it makes sense."

Hao Qiong nodded, listening intently.

Chen Kangtuo spoke with visible excitement: "What we were just thinking about was essentially a 'high-scare-effect + low-ticket-price' model. That would inevitably lead to massive losses for the haunted house. It's obviously a dead end."

"That must be a complete misinterpretation of President Pei's meaning."

"I'm thinking—did we miss some crucial information?"

"President Pei deliberately left out a key piece of information. This is very likely a test for us."

"President Pei never said that the haunted house could only have *one* attraction, did he?"

Hao Qiong's eyes widened instantly, a look of sudden realization on his face.

That's right!

Those two sentences didn't necessarily refer to the same attraction at all!

The initial investment for the entire haunted house was already tens of millions, with more investment to come later. And it was built in such a remote old industrial area, which is hard to get anywhere from. The only real advantage was the sheer amount of land available, with factories that could be used freely...

So why would President Pei choose this location in the first place?

Obviously, from the very beginning, he never planned to build just a single attraction!

Chen Kangtuo continued, "What if we open two—or even three—large attractions, each catering to different types of consumers?"

"'Make it so the bold have nowhere to spend money'—that means we need to find a way to make money *from the timid*."

"'Make the timid dare not approach'—that means using extremely thrilling experiences to satisfy the bold."

"But we definitely can't actually scare the timid away completely. We need the bold to rave about our haunted house, while the timid are too scared to enter, yet keep lingering at the entrance, watching, hesitating... and eventually transforming themselves into bold players."

“That is President Pei’s ultimate goal!”

As Chen Kangtuo and Hao Qiong continued analyzing, President Pei’s objective gradually became clear.

These two simple sentences could be broken down into several key points.

For bold players, this place should be extremely terrifying, but at the same time, very cheap to play. That way, they would rave endlessly about it, enthusiastically recommend it to friends, and repeatedly bring others along.

For timid players, the horror would instill fear, but it absolutely couldn’t scare them off entirely.

On the contrary, they had to find ways to extract *more* money from timid players!

So how do you charge less for bold players, and more for timid ones?

Simple: discounts and refunds.

For example, the longer a player lasts inside the haunted house, the cheaper the ticket becomes. If they manage to clear the attraction, they could even get 70–80% of the ticket price refunded—or possibly even a full refund, depending on the situation.

That would perfectly satisfy President Pei’s requirements!

Of course, this scenario was somewhat idealized and had a few loopholes.

For timid players to hesitate outside and watch, the prerequisite was that they actually came to the haunted house in the first place.

If they never even considered coming, this whole effect would never happen.

Therefore, the haunted house had to include at least one attraction suitable for mildly timid players.

That way, when timid players were enjoying something that wasn't too scary, they would also see bold players heading into extremely intense and terrifying attractions.

And those terrifying attractions would offer ticket reductions based on how long someone lasted.

Under those circumstances, timid players would be tempted to try, but since they couldn't possibly endure the full experience, their total spending, whether from tickets or add-on purchases, would end up higher.

For example, items similar to the Buddha statue in Turn Back Before It's Too Late could be sold at the entrance. Holding one would not only provide illumination, but also cause the staff acting as ghosts to reduce the intensity of their scares.

This would essentially be a value-added service—just like in a game.

In this way, the experiences of both types of consumers could be fully accommodated!

One attraction that wasn't too scary but was fun and highly social, designed to attract timid players.

One attraction that was extremely terrifying, designed to draw in bold players from all over the country, with ticket discounts based on how long they lasted.

When timid players arrived, they would become curious about the terrifying attraction and generate additional spending. As a result, the haunted house's revenue would be far higher than relying on ticket sales alone, and its profitability would naturally be secured.

At this point, the two of them felt completely enlightened.

"So that's it!"

"Now our mission is crystal clear."

"This haunted house needs at least two or three major attractions. There must be one with a low scare factor but strong social elements, suitable for repeated group play, to attract timid consumers."

"There must be one with an extremely high scare factor—so terrifying that horror enthusiasts nationwide will flock to it. Ticket prices will be reduced based on how long players endure."

"As for the third attraction... it can serve as a transitional one. After all, the jump in horror level from the first attraction to the third would be too drastic, and many timid players still wouldn't dare to try."

"Let them train their courage in the second attraction first. Then they can move on to the third attraction for the ultimate challenge."

The more they discussed, the more excited they became, and they immediately began writing the proposal document.

As Hao Qiong typed, he couldn't help but sigh with emotion:

"Honestly, Director Lin's method for analyzing President Pei's intentions is really effective."

"We managed to analyze so much in one go!"

Chen Kangtuo nodded.

"Yes. But when you think about it, President Pei's guidance is the most important part."

"It seems President Pei had already fully thought through this project long ago."

"Not only did he foresee the project's ultimate form, he was also able to extract the key factors for success and hint at them with just a single, concise sentence!"

"President Pei is truly incredible."

"Since that's the case, what is there for us to worry about?"

"If we just do exactly as President Pei instructed, there can't possibly be a problem!"

Originally, both of them had been full of uncertainty, worried that they might mess things up.

But now, both were brimming with confidence, and full of anticipation for the haunted house that would eventually be built.

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Evening.

Tengda Group's first large-scale recruitment had finally come to an end.

Although there was still the Tengda Spirit Compatibility Test to follow, that stage no longer involved the interviewers or staff.

All interview candidates had already gone through strict screening, and each interview was tightly time-controlled. Although the process ran slightly longer than expected, the deviation was minimal.

Even so, the work still dragged on until after 5 p.m.

That was because, once the interviews were over, the interviewers and staff still had to calculate and weight all the candidates' scores, compile the final list of selected applicants, and notify them.

This time, every department brought in a large batch of new hires.

Among them were seasoned veterans with many years of experience, as well as fresh graduates—or students who wouldn't graduate until next year.

Although the cross-department interview process meant that department heads couldn't directly interview candidates for their own teams, the final results were nonetheless broadly satisfactory to everyone.

Once all the work was done, the heads of each department happily went out for a meal together, exchanging thanks and pleasantries.

After eating for over an hour, they finally prepared to head home.

Taking advantage of the gathering, Li Yada consulted Huang Sibao and Lu Mingliang on several issues.

Although the two of them had somewhat different interpretations of President Pei's intentions, the outcomes seemed to converge in the end.

It wasn't until the gathering broke up that Li Yada finally had a chance to take out her phone and notice He Desheng's friend request—along with the game modification proposal he had sent.

"This kind of proposal... looks pretty risky."

Although Li Yada didn't understand this type of game as deeply as Bao Xu, she had led the development of *GOG* for a long time. She could clearly weigh the pros and cons of most design decisions.

In the eyes of most people, 5v5 competitive games like *Divine Revelation* were unquestionably fair competitive games.

Since they were competitive, higher difficulty naturally created a clearer distinction between skilled players and novices.

However, excessive difficulty also raised the entry barrier, discouraging a portion of less skilled players.

Lowering the difficulty would indeed improve the experience for newcomers—but for many high-level players, “easy to pick up” could also be the very reason they lost their sense of superiority.

In short, these suggestions made a certain amount of sense, but they also carried undeniable risks.

How to strike the right balance was something Li Yada found difficult to decide.

She pondered it for a long time, yet still couldn’t make up her mind.

She originally wanted to consult Bao Xu or President Pei, but then she recalled something Lu Mingliang had said during the dinner...

At that time, Li Yada had asked Lu Mingliang what he thought was the most important quality for a game designer.

After thinking for a moment, Lu Mingliang said that the most important quality was not being overly confident in oneself.

Li Yada didn’t quite understand, so Lu Mingliang gave a brief explanation.

According to him, the vast majority of designers are extremely confident in themselves.

Because before becoming designers, most people first become game enthusiasts—hardcore, experienced players. Only after that do they enter the gaming industry and gradually work their way up.

If someone lacked confidence in themselves, they probably wouldn’t have entered this industry in the first place.

So, most designers are naturally full of self-confidence.

This confidence is, of course, a good thing—but sometimes it can also make people blind.

Every player is just an individual, and tastes and preferences vary enormously.

A game can never satisfy everyone.

A good game only needs to satisfy the tastes and needs of its target player group—that's enough.

But what if what the designer personally likes runs completely counter to what the target audience wants?

Many designers fall into the trap of blind self-confidence. The games they make become disconnected from players, and failure is almost inevitable.

On the other hand, designers who are *less* blindly confident are more willing to listen humbly to feedback, allowing the game to better match the preferences of the majority of players, and thus achieve success.

Therefore, “not being overly confident” doesn't mean doubting yourself.

It means not blindly trusting yourself, and not blindly following others either.

Instead, you should observe players as objectively as possible, and strike a balance between personal preferences and player demands.

Thinking of this, Li Yada couldn't help but reflect on herself.

She wasn't blindly confident, but...

Was blindly trusting Bao Xu really appropriate?

Although Bao Xu indeed had extensive experience with similar games, it was entirely possible that he had fallen into the very trap Lu Mingliang had described: overconfidence.

After careful consideration, Li Yada made her decision.

There was no need to ask Bao Xu or President Pei about this plan.

She would simply make another version.

Among these changes, things like last-hit income, kill bounties, and other core gameplay systems were relatively easy to implement. Shrinking the map would be a bit more troublesome, but it could still be done within a few days. The more difficult parts—such as designing heroes suited for beginners or for high-level players—would take longer, but they weren't urgent.

In the early stage, they could first modify these basic mechanics, create an alternate version, and update it to the Moyu Internet Café as well.

After some time, they could simply compare player data between the two versions.

Whichever version performed better would make the answer obvious.