

Losing Money to Become a Tycoon: Starting with Games

Chapter 448: Mini-Games

March 11th, Friday.

Qiao Liang, with two huge dark circles under his eyes, was still grinding through the storyline of Game Producer.

There was only one expression on his face—unwillingness to accept defeat!

It had been a full week since BE QUIET was officially released.

And up to now, the game's sales were still zero.

Not because the game was bad—on the contrary, players didn't even know what the game looked like yet.

So far, no one had solved the puzzle to obtain the so-called “invitation”!

Quite a few people had already given up in frustration. The development team's willful approach had clearly triggered resistance among players, discouraging many of them.

Those with a short temper would vent on forums, saying things like “the devs must be crazy,” and then stop paying attention to the game entirely.

More patient players would give up but still check the forums daily, keeping track of top players' progress, waiting to copy the solution once someone figured it out.

And then there was a small group of truly hardcore players—like Teacher Qiao—who were still tirelessly searching for the next step in the puzzle.

During this time, they had tried countless methods.

They filled the two input fields with all kinds of content, but the page still showed no response.

So, everyone began to believe that the next clues must be hidden in other games.

Turn Back Before It's Too Late, as one of Tengda Group's classic titles, had been replayed countless times—but no useful clues were found.

Some players even heard rumors that Tengda Group was developing a haunted house project called Fright Hostel, and they actually went there in person to investigate.

In the end, they were politely but firmly turned away by a manager surnamed Chen, who told them that the project wasn't even finished yet and couldn't possibly be part of the puzzle.

After exhausting all other games with no results, Qiao Liang turned his attention back to Lonely Desert Road and Game Producer.

He suddenly realized that, based on his understanding of President Pei, it wasn't impossible that more clues were hidden in just these two games!

Who said a game could only contain one clue?

If players found one clue in a game and then stopped playing it, wouldn't that create a "hiding in plain sight" effect?

Moreover, since the two passwords shared part of the same solution, it suggested that—whether due to time constraints or because President Pei didn't want to make things overly difficult—the puzzle event wasn't designed to be extremely hard.

That meant President Pei might have chosen to save time by only modifying two games—and only making minimal changes!

So, Qiao Liang entered Lonely Desert Road again.

This time, he didn't find any new clues, but he noticed something interesting: originally, it took three hours to collect all the clues, but now the time had been significantly reduced!

His first reaction was frustration.

“So this is how early players get treated? I spent three hours driving, and now others can get the same clues in less than one hour?”

He mentally hugged his round self in sorrow.

But then, he suddenly realized something crucial.

The reduced time meant that after he discovered the clue, President Pei had instructed the programmers to modify the game.

Why?

The clue had already been uncovered—there was no need for others to repeat the same process in Lonely Desert Road. So why make changes?

“Could it be...”

“President Pei is hinting that you must personally find the clues for them to count?”

Qiao Liang instantly grasped something and hurriedly opened Game Producer.

He had once reached the “Utter Financial Ruin” ending, but that was shortly after the game was released—back in April of last year.

Strictly speaking, although Qiao Liang had achieved this ending before, he hadn’t personally discovered this clue!

By now, he was completely familiar with every choice and ending in Game Producer. Moving quickly without hesitation, it took him less than ten minutes to reach the final choice before the “Utter Financial Ruin” ending.

Then, he found that string of clues composed of 0s, 1s, and 2s—this clue had already been deciphered into the phrase “search Fright Hostel.”

“And then what?”

Nothing unexpected seemed to happen.

Controlling his character, Qiao Liang wandered into the final stage of the “Utter Financial Ruin” ending by chance, aimlessly searching around.

Suddenly, he noticed a report hanging on the wall.

In the original ending, this report criticized the failed producer, with the headline: “To truly understand something, you must practice it yourself.”

This report had always been there. It criticized these failed producers (or players) for being all talk and no skill—commenting freely on others’ games but failing miserably when they tried themselves.

The content of the headline hadn’t changed, but Qiao Liang sharply noticed that the font of this title was different from all the other newspaper headlines—it had clearly been modified!

Most players would quit the game after finding the earlier clue, and even if they happened to reach this point, they wouldn’t notice this detail without careful searching.

Qiao Liang quickly exited the game and entered this sentence into the input field on the TPDb website.

As expected, there was still no response.

After a moment of silence, Qiao Liang entered his Tengda Group account and password into the two input fields and pressed Enter.

This time, the page changed!

Qiao Liang instantly realized—he was right!

The inputs for these two fields were actually very simple: just his own Tengda Group account and password, nothing more!

But the prerequisite was that your account must have actually completed the first clue in Lonely Desert Road and reached the “Utter Financial Ruin” ending in Game Producer to see the second clue!

And this had to be done after BE QUIET was released.

President Pei had even left a subtle hint at the end of the “Utter Financial Ruin” ending—changing the font of the headline “To truly understand something, you must practice it yourself”—to suggest that the key to solving the puzzle was to personally discover both clues.

The reason no one had figured it out for so many days was because everyone assumed that once others found the clues, they didn’t need to do it themselves. As a result, no one fulfilled both conditions at the same time.

People entered their account and password into the fields, but nothing happened.

This created a vicious cycle—everyone became convinced that the fields couldn’t possibly require account credentials, and over time, no one even tried anymore.

Qiao Liang couldn’t help but feel lucky.

Fortunately, he had replayed Lonely Desert Road, noticed the changes, and deduced President Pei’s intention!

Otherwise, he wouldn’t have replayed the “Utter Financial Ruin” ending in Game Producer, nor would he have tried entering his account and password again on the website.

President Pei had only modified these two relatively simple games and the TPDb website, yet managed to toy with so many players!

But... it was still cracked by his confidant, Teacher Qiao!

Qiao Liang couldn’t help but feel a bit smug.

At that moment, the input fields on the black webpage disappeared, replaced by a pale invitation card. Lines of blood-red text began to appear on it, as if they were slowly dripping downward:

“Congratulations, the first lucky one to obtain the invitation.”

“You have proven that your clever mind and unyielding perseverance can become nourishment for the hostel.”

“If now, clever and delicious you are ready to offer yourself to the Fright Hostel, then follow my instructions:”

“First, go find any surveillance camera.”

“Then, log into the game with your account and password, and enter this code at the bloody handprint.”

“We’ve prepared an interesting mini-game for you...”

At the bottom of the letter was a string of random letters and numbers forming a code.

Qiao Liang already had a webcam—he just didn’t use it often. He quickly wiped it clean, clipped it onto his monitor, and pointed it at his face.

Then, he opened BE QUIET and clicked on the bloody handprint.

Originally, nothing happened no matter how many times he clicked it, but now an input box appeared. Qiao Liang immediately entered the code.

He didn’t plan to share this discovery with other players just yet—he wanted to become the very first player of BE QUIET.

The computer screen went black, as if it had entered some kind of mini-program.

In full-screen view, there was a mirror, and in it appeared Qiao Liang's own face.

This in-game program seemed to display the webcam feed inside the mirror, making it feel like he was looking into a mirror through the "window" of the monitor.

However, the mirror looked a bit dim and eerie.

Partly because Qiao Liang's webcam wasn't very high-resolution, and partly because the program seemed to apply some kind of filter to the image.

Next to the mirror was a line of blood-red text: "Keep your gaze fixed on the bloodstain in the mirror."

Inside the mirror, there was also a faint frame outlining the shape of a face, guiding Qiao Liang to adjust the camera so that his face fit properly within it.

Since his webcam was mounted on top of the monitor, he adjusted the angle slightly and leaned back a bit. Once aligned, the frame disappeared.

At that moment, the bloodstain in the mirror began to spread across the surface. Qiao Liang followed it with his eyes as it moved across most of the mirror, until it finally stopped.

Then, the bloodstain vanished, and the text changed: “Face yourself in the mirror. No matter what happens, do not look away.”

“So I just have to keep staring?”

Qiao Liang focused on his reflection and noticed a faint highlight effect marking where his gaze was directed, shifting as his eyes moved.

“Eye tracking?”

He felt both surprised and intrigued.

Eye-tracking wasn’t particularly advanced technology—it had already existed for a few years. By analyzing eye movement and pupil position through the camera, it could roughly determine where someone was looking on the screen.

There were already many programs online capable of this.

Of course, the technology wasn’t as perfect as it sounded. First, the user had to face the camera directly, and some calibration was required—clearly, following the bloodstain earlier had served that purpose.

The process was somewhat cumbersome, but President Pei had cleverly packaged it in a way that made it feel eerie and immersive.

Second, the accuracy of eye tracking was relatively low—it could only determine a general area rather than a precise point.

Still, it was sufficient for this kind of test.

Qiao Liang concentrated and stared intently at his reflection.

But after a few seconds, he suddenly felt something was off.

In the bottom-right corner of the mirror, there seemed to be a patch of black clothing...

And it was stained with dark red blood!