

Losing Money to Become a Tycoon: Starting with Games

Chapter 475: Taking Old Qiao's Path So He Has No Path Left to Take

April 6th, Wednesday.

After two days of hard work, Pei Qian finally finished writing the rough plot outline for Struggle.

The game's story could be broadly divided into several major stages of life: birth, school, exams, work, romance, marriage, buying a home, having children, and a midlife crisis.

This formed the overall progression. Although both poor and rich characters would go through the same stages, their experiences would be completely different.

For example, from birth to school age, the child of a wealthy family would be cared for by nannies, grow up playing happily in a luxurious mansion, have access to expensive toys, and receive high-quality preschool education from private tutors.

A poor child, on the other hand, would have none of these advantages. They could only watch television, flip through picture books at home, and entertain themselves while their parents were away at work.

The other major stages followed a similar pattern. Anyone could roughly imagine how the story would unfold.

For the poor, everything would be an uphill struggle. For the rich, everything would proceed smoothly.

To make the disparity more apparent, Pei Qian also considered adding quantifiable stats to the game, such as the player's knowledge (professional expertise, financial literacy, etc.), emotional intelligence (social skills, making friends, and so on), mental health, and material wealth.

On the surface, these stats would affect the player's choices. For instance, a wealthy character's financial literacy could accelerate the growth of their wealth, emotional intelligence could increase their chances of meeting influential people, and good mental health could help them cope with workplace stress more effectively.

But that was only the illusion.

In reality, these stats would affect only a few insignificant side stories and would have no impact whatsoever on the ending.

Pei Qian's reasoning was simple: if gameplay could influence the ending, how could the game frustrate players?

If poor characters could rise above their circumstances, or wealthy characters could avoid their predetermined deaths, wouldn't it become a feel-good success story?

Absolutely unacceptable!

Besides, the "it looks like you have choices, but actually you don't" design philosophy was already considered a flawed mechanic in the gaming industry. Most games that did this were heavily criticized.

The game's timeline would end around middle age, when the protagonist was approximately fifty years old.

As Confucius said: *"At thirty, I stood firm; at forty, I had no doubts; at fifty, I understood the mandate of heaven."*

For Pei Qian, fifty was the ideal age for the wealthy protagonist to die.

Any earlier, and there wouldn't be enough content. Any later, and it wouldn't be as upsetting.

A fifty-year-old wealthy man would be in the prime of his life, enjoying a comfortable lifestyle, likely blessed with a successful marriage and children with bright futures ahead of them. Dying at such a moment would be especially difficult for players to accept.

As for the poor protagonist, by fifty, their life would largely be set in stone. Their children would already be showing the same traits as their parents, and the cycle of poverty would be beginning to repeat itself.

In short, ending the game at that age felt just right.

Of course, aside from the fixed progression of life stages, the game would also include random events.

For example: car accidents, illness, a child's experience with school bullying, housing scams, natural disasters, and so on.

These events would slightly alter the course of the game while clearly demonstrating the difference in risk tolerance between rich and poor people when faced with unexpected hardships.

Having learned from the lessons of Game Producer, Pei Qian decided not to include any narration this time.

Everything in the game would be presented as objectively as possible. No dialogue or event would carry any emotional bias. Nothing would deliberately guide the player toward a particular interpretation or trigger a contrarian reaction.

Furthermore, to prevent people from reading too deeply into the game's themes, Pei Qian made the rich and poor protagonists two completely unrelated individuals.

The person who ultimately killed the wealthy protagonist would be a homeless drifter with no connection whatsoever to the poor protagonist.

Moreover, this drifter would not be the kind of honest, hardworking poor person many people imagine. He was perfectly healthy but lazy, idle, and unwilling to work. He murdered the wealthy man out of greed after seeing an opportunity for profit, not as some noble act of resistance against oppression.

Likewise, the wealthy people encountered by the poor protagonist—his supervisors and employers—would have absolutely no connection to the wealthy protagonist's storyline. The poor protagonist would never even entertain thoughts of rebellion.

Every effort would be made to prevent players from interpreting the game as a story about "the rich oppressing the poor" or "the poor rising up against the rich."

There was, however, one final and crucial problem:

How could he stop his greatest threat, Qiao Liang, from overanalyzing the game?

After much contemplation, Pei Qian finally came up with a solution.

If I reveal all the interpretations in advance, then who's going to listen to yours?

And if nobody listens to you, how are you supposed to stab me in the back again?

Pei Qian could roughly guess the angles Old Qiao might use to analyze the game: wealth inequality, the Matthew Effect, unfair distribution of social wealth, class stagnation and entrenchment. If he got even more creative, he might talk about how poor people lack financial literacy and are short-sighted, while wealthy people have a "let them eat cake" mentality and cannot understand the vicious cycle that traps people at the bottom of society.

In short, wealth disparity was a topic that had already been discussed to death around the world. With a little imagination, there were still plenty of related subjects people could branch out into.

So Pei Qian decided that the moment the game launched, he would expose all of these talking points himself.

Take Old Qiao's road and leave him with nowhere to go!

Of course, Pei Qian wasn't foolish enough to sabotage himself directly. Although he planned to officially address these issues, he certainly wasn't going to do it the way Old Qiao would.

The key, as always, was *how* you said it.

When Old Qiao analyzed something, he cited examples from all over, quoted classics, forcefully elevated the discussion, and added layers of meaning. It sounded impressive and easily resonated with audiences.

Pei Qian, however, planned to explain everything in the simplest and most straightforward language possible. The drier and more boring, the better.

He could even intentionally lead players toward some mistaken conclusions. For example, by giving the game two fixed endings, he could encourage players to think the creators held flawed beliefs such as "social classes can never be crossed" or a deterministic worldview.

The principle was similar to telling a joke.

When Old Qiao told a joke, he gestured dramatically and spoke vividly. He carefully built suspense, and when the punchline finally landed, the audience erupted with laughter.

Pei Qian's approach, on the other hand, was to skip all the setup and simply throw the punchline onto the ground right away.

That way, the audience already knew what the punchline was. No matter how much atmosphere Old Qiao created, how much suspense he built, or how eloquently he explained it, the punchline would never land!

Pei Qian felt that what he was doing was equivalent to writing "This person is the murderer" on the very first page of a mystery comic.

That would surely prevent Old Qiao's Masterpiece Showcase videos from ever getting a new installment!

The more Pei Qian thought about it, the more pleased he became. He truly felt like a genius.

After finishing everything, Pei Qian sent the game's story outline to Hu Xianbin and told him to expand it into a full script.

At the same time, the game's various characters would require different motion-capture actors, all of whom needed to be foreigners, so they would have to start scouting talent in advance.

Pei Qian couldn't be bothered with any of that and dumped it all on Hu Xianbin. If things went wrong, that would be even better.

And if everything was done perfectly...

Well, that was fine too. As long as the game's story didn't stray from its intended direction, everything would be under control!

. . .

April 7th, Thursday

After lunch, Pei Qian arrived at the office right on schedule.

The previous afternoon, he had already sent the Struggle story outline to Hu Xianbin. He had also messaged Lin Wan about the Chinese server version of IOI, telling her to coordinate with He Desheng.

As for how exactly the Chinese server should be handled, Pei Qian didn't have any particularly good ideas.

Making substantial changes to the game was practically impossible. Lowering the prices of heroes and skins would also be difficult because Dream Fulfillment Ventures only owned 20% of Finger Company's shares and therefore didn't have enough influence.

From a monetization standpoint alone, IOI was indeed less consumer-friendly than GOG. After all, GOG made all heroes free and sold skins for only a fraction of IOI's prices.

Still, Pei Qian didn't think this was a major issue.

There were already quite a few Chinese players playing IOI, and the game had established a solid player base.

For these players, the biggest problem wasn't pricing, it was the network connection.

Playing on IOI's international servers through VPNs and accelerators resulted in high latency, and communication with foreign teammates was often difficult.

As soon as the Chinese server launched, these players would almost certainly switch over immediately.

Therefore, Pei Qian wasn't worried at all about the initial growth of the Chinese server version.

Given the abilities of the people at Shangyang Games, a little bit of competent management and promotion would be enough to make it take off.

For the moment, with the two game departments taken care of, Pei Qian felt a great weight lifted from his shoulders.

Even so, he couldn't afford to relax, because there were still many matters waiting for him to handle.

Knock, knock, knock.

A knock came from outside the office. It was Assistant Xin.

"President Pei, this is the survey report on Jingzhou City's fitness industry that you requested. If you don't want to look through all the data, you can just turn to the last page, the conclusion is there."

Pei Qian nodded and accepted the report from Assistant Xin.

After casually flipping through a couple of pages, he found exactly what he expected: page after page of statistics and technical terminology that he couldn't understand at all.

Without hesitation, he turned directly to the last page and read the conclusions while asking:

"So, overall, are gyms in Jingzhou making money or not?"

Assistant Xin thought for a moment.

"Both yes and no. It depends on how they're run."

Pei Qian raised an eyebrow.

"Oh? Explain."

Assistant Xin was clearly already familiar with the fitness industry's current situation. After receiving President Pei's assignment a few days ago, she had conducted an in-depth investigation into Jingzhou's fitness market, so all of the information was fresh in his mind.

"Simply put, given our country's current level of economic development, most people don't have the habit of regularly going to a gym. Even among those who do exercise regularly, many can't afford the costs associated with high-end fitness centers."

"In China's top-tier cities, where there are more white-collar workers, the situation is somewhat better. But Jingzhou is a second-tier city, so this problem is particularly obvious."

"When you take into account venue rent, equipment, staff salaries, utilities, heating and air conditioning, fire safety requirements, and all the other operating expenses involved in running a gym, many gyms rely on low-priced memberships to attract customers. Unfortunately, those memberships often aren't enough to sustain daily operations, let alone generate substantial profits."

"From that perspective, gyms aren't profitable. Many gyms that have gone out of business simply couldn't make ends meet. The larger the investment, the greater the marketing pressure."

"However, the gyms that *are* profitable can make a great deal of money. The main strategy is selling personal training packages to wealthy clients. The more personal training sessions they sell, the more they earn."

"In most gyms, a personal trainer's primary responsibility isn't actually helping clients achieve their fitness goals. It's selling classes. Internal trainer group chats often resemble sales and marketing groups—whoever sells the most packages gets the most praise."

"In short, the business model of profitable gyms today is to sell as many memberships as possible, especially annual memberships to newcomers."

"Most newcomers don't already have a fitness habit and find it difficult to stick with exercise. Once they've bought a membership and stop coming, the gym essentially makes money for free."

"At the same time, low-priced memberships are used to bring in as many customers as possible. Then the trainers use various sales tactics to identify high-net-worth clients and persuade them to purchase personal training packages. That's where the bulk of the profits come from."

"There are other tricks as well. For example, when someone visits for the first time, they're often given a free fitness assessment. Since most modern people have at least some minor health concerns, trainers may deliberately exaggerate those issues as a way to sell training packages."

"Overall, I won't deny that there are some genuinely conscientious gyms in the industry. But generally speaking, it's a chaotic market with many questionable practices and a lack of standardization."

"Many gym-goers strongly dislike these practices as well. However, the reasons behind them are quite complex and aren't something that can be changed overnight."

"If you're thinking about entering this industry, President Pei, that would certainly be a positive thing for the industry itself."

"But these objectively existing problems are things you'll definitely need to take into consideration."

"Even for someone like you, building a high-end and genuinely customer-friendly fitness brand from scratch would not be an easy task."