

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

Chapter 44: It Makes Sense... Yet Somehow It Doesn't

"Phew..."

Leaning back in his chair, Yang Chen lit a cigarette and fell into deep thought.

Was the problem with him, or was it with the game?

Why did it feel like every single enemy could kill him?

He couldn't beat the bosses.

He couldn't beat groups of regular enemies either.

His character was as fragile as paper, and healing items were extremely limited.

Even after killing enemies, resting at a Sculptor's Idol caused them all to respawn.

Was he playing the game wrong?

Could it be that the game actually *did* have a difficulty selection, and he'd accidentally chosen the hardest difficulty without realizing it?

Filled with confusion—and beginning to doubt himself—Yang Chen opened the Steam store page.

More than two hours had passed.

The first wave of players should now be able to leave reviews.

"The graphics are gorgeous. Hyakukin's animation work didn't disappoint. The only problem is that the difficulty is way too high."

"Optimization is excellent. My ancient X060 GPU can still maintain a stable 60 FPS on low settings. But the difficulty is absolutely inhuman."

"Trash game! Why call it Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice? They should've called it Sekiro: Shadow Dies. Bosses kill me. Normal enemies kill me. I've died thirty times in two hours!"

"The trailers were completely misleading! I thought I'd look as cool as the guy in the videos. Turns out, I'm one of the random soldiers getting slaughtered."

"The game's quality is great. I just hope the developers release a patch soon. The difficulty is absolutely brutal."

Looking through the reviews beneath the store page, Yang Chen saw that the overall rating was currently Mostly Positive.

The biggest complaint from players was, unsurprisingly, the difficulty.

The biggest sources of praise were the graphics, combat feel, optimization, and art direction.

Optimization in particular received compliments from many players.

"That's a relief."

"I just hope President Chen and the team realize the issue quickly and lower the difficulty."

Yang Chen let out a sigh of relief.

After all, Morning Star Games' ten-million-yuan order had essentially saved his factory.

Naturally, he hoped their game would become a huge success.

And since he understood games reasonably well, he also knew something important.

Once a game launched, things like graphics and combat feel were basically set in stone.

Optimization also wasn't something that could usually be improved overnight.

Those were the hardest parts of game development.

Fortunately, Sekiro had nailed all of them.

Game balance, however, was much easier to adjust.

Just lower the enemies' attack values a bit, add a decimal point here, and remove a zero there.

Just by doing those little things, the player experience would become completely different.

So if Morning Star Games reacted quickly and reduced the difficulty, they could still retain a huge number of players.

What completely stunned Yang Chen—and countless other players—was what happened later that very day.

Morning Star Games released an official announcement.

[To our beloved players:

We sincerely appreciate the feedback from players who feel that the game's difficulty is too high.

However, we must state that difficulty is one of the defining features of Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice.

Therefore, we will not be modifying the game's difficulty.

Lastly, we apologize for any inconvenience this decision may cause.]

The statement wasn't very long, but its meaning was crystal clear.

We know you think the game is too hard.

We're sorry.

But we're even more sorry to tell you we're not changing it.

As soon as the announcement was published, gaming media outlets and players quickly reposted it across forums, message boards, and gaming communities.

"???? Are these developers insane? Are they deliberately trying to annoy people?"

"This is unbelievably arrogant. And they think these numbers are balanced? Give me a break."

"No balance changes? Fine. I'm refunding it. Just don't come crawling back begging for sales later."

"+1. Keep this attitude. I want to see how many copies this game actually sells."

"We appreciate your feedback. We're sorry. But we're not changing anything.' Amazing."

"Isn't it just a hard game? If you're bad, go practice. Stop blaming the game."

"The idiot above probably hasn't even bought it. Brand-new game and you're already pretending to be an expert? Have you actually played it? Link your Steam account and let me see if you even own the game."

"..."

Angry players, curious bystanders enjoying the drama, and keyboard warriors trying to show off.

Together, they painted a wonderfully chaotic picture.

Meanwhile, the game's Steam rating had already fallen from Mostly Positive to Mixed.

It even looked eager to continue sliding toward Mostly Negative.

"President Chen..."

"What are you doing?"

"Why are you being this stubborn?!"

Staring at the announcement, Yang Chen was utterly dumbfounded.

. . .

Morning Star Games.

Everyone at Morning Star Games was closely monitoring Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice's launch in real time.

That included Xiao Dao, Xiu Fu, Gong Qi, Ying Gao, Yamagami Eiji, Aonuma Shinji, and every other employee.

The atmosphere throughout the company was incredibly tense.

"President Chen, we could've just stayed silent!"

"Yeah," Gong Qi said bitterly as he looked at Chen Xu. "After that announcement, we've completely cut off our own escape route."

After the game's release, nearly all player feedback had focused on one thing:

The difficulty.

Everything else had received praise.

Overall, the launch wasn't bad at all.

In fact, the first wave of players had gone into the game with high expectations.

But once that announcement was published, everything changed.

"The difficulty is absolutely not going to be adjusted," Chen Xu said matter-of-factly.

"You all know that."

"It's the soul of Sekiro."

"But President Chen," Gong Qi replied helplessly, "we could've at least put out a vague statement and bought ourselves some time. We could've reassured the players."

*A vague statement?*

*I'm not planning to change the difficulty anyway.*

*What's the point?*

Still, Chen Xu understood that Gong Qi and the others had poured their hearts into this project.

Everyone was under tremendous pressure.

As their boss, he needed to take care of their morale as well.

*Sigh...*

*Being a boss really isn't easy.*

*If we were still in Osaka, I'd take all of you to the bathhouse and a hostess club tonight.*

*Too bad you're not that lucky.*

*Since I can't treat you to karaoke and drinks, you'll all have to settle for a bowl of motivational soup instead.*

*Here, drink it while it's hot.*

"Giving players a vague, evasive response would be irresponsible."

"We know better than anyone that Sekiro's core identity lies in its high difficulty."

"We were never going to change that."

"We should humbly listen to player feedback and reflect on it."

"But while players offer suggestions with good intentions, their suggestions aren't necessarily what's best for the game."

"Take Sekiro, for example."

"Its soul lies in challenging yourself."

"If we give players even the slightest impression that the difficulty might eventually be reduced..."

"They'll hesitate."

"They'll lose the courage to overcome the challenge themselves."

"They'll think 'It doesn't matter if I can't beat this boss. I'll just wait until Morning Star Games nerfs it.'

"And once they realize we never intended to lower the difficulty, they'll become even angrier."

"Right now, they're angry."

"But that anger has also spread awareness of exactly what kind of game Sekiro is."

"Why do players think it's so difficult?"

"Because deep down, they still believe they have a safety net."

"They think we'll eventually reduce the difficulty."

"But now, we've made it clear."

"We won't."

"So what choice do players have?"

"They can only challenge themselves."

"They can only improve their own skills."

"And once they've sharpened those skills, will Sekiro still seem difficult?"

"It's just like the old story of 'breaking the cauldrons and sinking the boats.'"

"By destroying your own means of retreat, you leave yourself no option except victory."

"What we're doing now is sinking the players' boats."

"And besides, didn't we already expect this before development even began?"

"Sekiro was always meant to be a different kind of game."

"So..."

"Everyone, don't worry."

Chen Xu calmly delivered the explanation he'd completely made up on the spot.

Then he walked over to each employee one by one, gently patting them on the shoulder.

Afterward, he turned around and headed toward his office.

Everyone stood there in silence, staring at his retreating back.

While still savoring what they'd just heard, they all arrived at the same strange conclusion.

It made sense, and yet somehow, it didn't.