

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

Chapter 61: Isn't There Already a Ready-Made Motion Capture Department?

May 23

In the break area of Morning Star Games, Shinji, Eiji, and the group of employees who had followed them from Osaka were deep in discussion.

At present, Morning Star Games was divided into three main teams.

- Xiao Dao and Xiu Fu led one group.
- Gong Qi and Ying Gao led another.
- Shinji and Eiji headed the team made up of the employees recruited from Osaka.

"How are we supposed to build a motion capture department?" Shinji said, rubbing his temples.

Several days had passed since that meeting.

The excitement from the motivational speech had long since faded.

Now all that remained was a headache.

The responsibility of establishing an entire motion capture department had landed squarely on their shoulders.

At first, they had been excited—and grateful.

After all, they had only recently joined Morning Star Games, yet they had already been entrusted with such an important assignment.

The budget alone was in the tens of millions of yuan.

Back when they worked at Hyakukin Studio, they wouldn't even have dared dream of having that kind of funding.

But with the excitement came overwhelming pressure.

Setting up a motion capture department was no simple matter.

To ordinary gamers, a mocap department might seem like nothing more than actors wearing motion-capture suits while their movements were recorded.

In reality, it was far more complicated.

First, there was directing.

Different scenes required different camera work, and the gap between a skilled director and an inexperienced one was enormous.

Then there was lighting.

Compared with film, many people underestimated how important lighting was in video games.

But in terms of the final visual presentation, lighting in games could be even more important than it was in movies.

Music was another essential element.

A great soundtrack could elevate the visual experience to an entirely new level.

And those were only the artistic aspects.

On the technical side, there were methods for scanning actors, realistic character rendering, motion matching techniques, deep-learning neural networks, ray tracing, augmented reality technologies...

All of them served the motion-capture pipeline.

The equipment itself was easy enough to buy.

The real challenge was finding people with the necessary expertise.

None of these technologies were particularly cutting-edge by industry standards.

The problem was that they simply didn't have much time.

The motion capture department would need to participate in the game's development almost immediately.

Starting completely from scratch simply wasn't realistic.

"I don't think President Chen expects us to build everything from zero."

After pondering for a while, Eiji spoke up.

During the past few weeks, besides studying Chinese, he had spent a lot of time chatting with Xiu Fu, Gong Qi, and the others.

He had also gained a much better understanding of President Chen's personality.

He was a boss who excelled at guiding his employees toward finding solutions on their own.

If all President Chen wanted was for them to slowly build a mocap department from the ground up, why would he allocate such an enormous budget?

There had to be a deeper intention behind it.

"You mean... acquire an existing motion capture company?" Shinji frowned.

"That would actually be a pretty good idea."

After all, Detroit's development schedule was fairly tight.

The problem was that motion capture companies weren't like outsourced art studios.

There were very few independent mocap companies that existed solely to provide outsourcing services.

Smaller developers rarely spent their limited budgets on high-end motion capture.

As long as the animations looked decent enough, they were satisfied.

Large publishers, on the other hand, had plenty of money.

They almost always maintained their own in-house mocap departments and had little reason to outsource.

Hearing Shinji's reasoning, Eiji nodded in agreement.

That was indeed the problem.

Even if they wanted to acquire one, it wouldn't be easy...

Wait.

As he absentmindedly nodded along, Eiji looked at the thoughtful Shinji sitting across from him.

Then he glanced around at the coworkers surrounding them.

Suddenly, a flash of inspiration struck.

If this were a manga, there would definitely be a glowing light bulb above his head right now.

Who said it wasn't easy to find one?

Wasn't there a ready-made department right in front of them?

And better yet, they were all familiar faces.

They could start working immediately without any adjustment period.

Didn't President Kamiyama's Hyakukin Studio already have a fully established motion capture department?

Having come from Hyakukin Studio himself, Eiji knew the situation extremely well.

Back when Hyakukin Studio had first been founded, it had been the talk of the industry.

After all, its two leaders—Kamiyama Atsushi and Inaba Hideki—were both renowned star game producers.

The reputation of the founders alone had attracted a great deal of investment.

It could be said that in its early days, Hyakukin Studio had no shortage of funding.

From the very beginning, the company had set its sights on becoming a top-tier AAA studio.

But after that, one original game after another either suffered small losses or turned into complete financial disasters.

Under those circumstances, no matter how famous they were, investors weren't going to keep pouring money into the company.

Little by little, Hyakukin Studio had been reduced to an outsourcing studio.

They had even managed to offend Microsoft over outsourcing work.

Had Morning Star Games not suddenly thrown them a contract last year—and had Sekiro not unexpectedly become a massive hit—Hyakukin Studio's situation would likely be far worse than it already was.

That was also why Morning Star Games had been able to poach so many employees from Hyakukin Studio in the first place.

And why Hyakukin Studio had been willing to let them go.

The reason was simple.

They were broke.

As for the motion capture department...

To the current Hyakukin Studio, it had become something of a burden.

The facility's rent.

The salaries of all its employees.

Those were all ongoing expenses.

Even when developers hired Hyakukin Studio as an outsourcing partner, most of those clients were large publishers looking to offload part of their production because of tight schedules.

Those publishers wouldn't use Hyakukin Studio's motion capture department.

Contracts like the one Morning Star Games had previously given them...

Hyakukin Studio would probably only land something like that once every year or two.

"Isn't this perfect?"

Eiji slammed his fist into his palm, excitement filling his voice.

"We desperately need a motion capture department that can start operating immediately."

"And President Kamiyama has probably wanted to get rid of theirs for a long time."

If it weren't for Japanese labor laws, Eiji was convinced that Kamiyama Atsushi would have laid off the entire motion capture department ages ago.

"That's true."

"Kouji and the others have wanted to leave for a while now."

"Not long ago, Yamano was talking to me."

"He said he envied Morning Star Games' benefit and work environment. He even asked whether our company was hiring and said he'd be willing to leave Hyakukin."

Hearing Eiji's suggestion, the employees who had resigned from Hyakukin Studio alongside him all chimed in.

Since joining Morning Star Games, they had kept in touch with many of their former coworkers.

They all knew exactly how difficult things had become at Hyakukin Studio.

"You really are too soft-hearted, Shinji."

Looking at the hesitant expression on Shinji's face, Eiji could tell he felt conflicted about the idea.

He sighed before trying to reassure him.

"Don't burden yourself with it."

"If you think about it from another angle..."

"We'd actually be helping President Kamiyama."

Shinji quickly shook his head.

"No, that's not what I'm worried about."

"I was thinking..."

"Why bother acquiring the whole department?"

"We should just poach the people directly."

"We can buy the equipment whenever we want."

"The real value lies in the talent and experience."

"And if we do it this way, we'll even save President Chen some of the budget."