

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

Chapter 21: Being the Client Feels Amazing

Chen Xu looked at the excited Ying Gao and found himself unable to say anything for a long moment.

You put that much thought into a single weapon?

Then what kind of insanity had you poured into the environmental design?

“Do you have concept art for the major locations, like Ashina Castle's keep and Senpou Temple? Let me take a look,” Chen Xu said, feeling his voice grow slightly hoarse.

“Of course, President Chen!”

Ying Gao became even more excited.

“President Chen, for the Ashina Castle keep, I created the initial design according to your requirements. But I also drew inspiration from the connected-tower style of Himeji Castle, as well as the keeps of Osaka Castle and Furumiya Castle.”

“As for Senpou Temple, we used the covered bridge corridors of Tofuku-ji Temple in Kyoto as our primary reference. The area is centered around vast expanses of red maple leaves. The location where players encounter the Corrupted Monk also uses the crimson foliage as a key atmospheric element.”

As Ying Gao explained, he pulled up the concept art on the computer.

Chen Xu fell silent once again.

Although many details differed from what he remembered, the overall style remained remarkably close.

After all, the artistic direction had originally been established by Chen Xu himself using the original Sekiro as a reference.

Once the visual style and core thematic elements were defined, producing artwork became much easier.

Creating something from nothing was difficult, but building upon an existing foundation was not.

At least in Chen Xu's eyes, the concept art Ying Gao's team had produced was exceptionally good.

And when translated into the game itself, given the current world's technology level, it would undoubtedly surpass what FromSoftware had achieved in his previous life in terms of modeling and lighting.

“Very good,” Chen Xu nodded seriously.

At the same time, he made a firm decision.

When the game was finally ready for release, they absolutely could not market the visuals and environments as major selling points.

After all, the most praised aspect of FromSoftware's Souls games had never really been their difficulty or supposed cruelty.

It had always been their world design and artistic direction.

Take Elden Ring as an example—the game that truly propelled FromSoftware into the mainstream.

Many players believed Elden Ring had incredible graphics, but that was largely an illusion created by its art direction.

The intricately designed architecture.

The majestic landscapes.

The breathtaking vistas.

All of it showcased FromSoftware's extraordinary artistic talent.

Yet if one looked strictly at the technical side—models, textures, and lighting—the game was actually quite rough in many places.

Even by the standards of its time, it wasn't considered a top-tier graphical showcase.

But now?

Chen Xu didn't even dare imagine what Sekiro would look like with its distinctive artistic style combined with ray tracing, high-definition assets, and modern modeling technology.

The visual appeal would be terrifying.

The only piece of good news was that since the art workload was enormous, they would need to hire a large number of external contractors.

The spending in this area would be just as high as their expenses with Hyakukin Studio, perhaps even higher.

After all, there would be more people involved, and the production cycle would be much longer.

Thinking about that, Chen Xu finally calmed down a little.

“It's better than before,” he said to Ying Gao.

“But it's still not at the level I'm aiming for. Have Hyakukin revise it again.”

As he set down the mouse and uttered those words, a wave of satisfaction washed over him.

Only someone who had spent years as a contractor could truly understand how good it felt to say things like that as the client.

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Osaka, Japan

“What the hell is with all these demands?!”

Inside Hyakukin Studio, Kamiyama Atsushi—the company president and the project's primary liaison—maintained a warm smile as he escorted Gong Qi out of his office.

The moment the door closed behind him, however, his face instantly collapsed.

As a studio that frequently handled outsourced projects for other game companies, Hyakukin Studio had become accustomed to being the one setting standards after achieving fame.

It had been a very long time since they had been treated like a typical contractor.

Especially in the field of action game development.

Aside from one or two major companies that specialized exclusively in action games, Hyakukin Studio's work was considered the industry benchmark.

Yet now, they were once again experiencing the familiar pain of being tormented by a demanding client.

"Forget it," sighed Inaba Hideki from beside him.

"Let's just polish it further. At least based on their feedback, this really is the style they're aiming for."

Kamiyama rubbed his forehead.

He couldn't deny it.

Annoying as the requests were, the client's feedback was surprisingly precise.

Every revision request pointed toward a very specific vision.

Which meant there was only one thing left to do.

Keep refining it.

How could he not have fantasized about flipping the table and shouting at them, *"We're done! Find someone else!"*?

But those words simply wouldn't come out of his mouth.

Just thinking about Hyakukin Studio's debt...

Then thinking about the penalties written into the contract, along with the involvement of Osaka Bank and the law firm acting as guarantors...

Kamiyama clenched his fists.

There was no helping it.

He would just have to endure it.

“Don't take it too hard,” Inaba said, trying to cheer him up. “Look at it from a different perspective. If we can help make this game a success, it'll be great for our reputation too.”

They clearly had the technical expertise, yet somehow their outsourcing business wasn't nearly as popular as some lower-tier studios.

Part of it was because their rates weren't particularly competitive.

But another factor was the fallout from their previous conflict with Microsoft.

If they could help produce another hit game, however, none of that would matter anymore.

Reputation?

When profit is involved, even a bad reputation attracts people.

When that time came, Inaba didn't believe every game company would be able to do what Morning Star Games had done—bringing in major banks and prestigious law firms to guarantee contract fulfillment.

“But this game...” Kamiyama shook his head.

Although Hyakukin Studio was only responsible for developing the combat system, they naturally had a good understanding of the game's overall direction.

Otherwise, they wouldn't have been able to create assets tailored specifically for it.

As one of the industry's leading action-game developers, Kamiyama felt that Morning Star's mysterious new game had completely overturned his understanding of game design.

Because nearly every design choice in the game was unconventional.

They didn't know the full details of the gameplay systems, progression mechanics, balancing, or level design.

As an outsourced combat-development team, that information wasn't shared with them.

But they could still infer quite a bit from the combat system alone.

Most action games are designed to make players feel powerful.

Developers go out of their way to ensure players don't suffer too much frustration.

Flashy combos.

Spectacular juggling mechanics.

Sometimes combat practically turns into an aerial showcase.

But this game?

The player's primary attack was simply ordinary sword strikes.

That felt incredibly bare-bones.

Then there was the enemy design.

Compared to the player character, the enemies' movesets were significantly more stylish and impressive.

Some were elegant and fluid.

Some were overwhelmingly aggressive.

Some even combined melee weapons with firearms.

The one aspect Kamiyama genuinely found interesting was the game's emphasis on chanbara-style sword fighting.

The sensation of blades colliding.

The tension and excitement created by sword clashes.

Compared to ordinary action games, it definitely had a unique appeal.

“No matter what, if this game succeeds, it benefits us too,” Inaba said.

“I know that,” Kamiyama replied helplessly.

“But it's not our project. And games don't become bestsellers just because we want them to.”

If they possessed that kind of magical ability, they wouldn't still be working to pay off debt.

“What I'm saying is that we should help promote it a little,” Inaba explained.

“Sure, this company is a pain to work with. But haven't you noticed? They're loaded.”

“That much is true.”

Kamiyama fell into thought.

They had already spent a huge amount just hiring Hyakukin Studio.

On top of that, they had retained a major law firm and secured a bank guarantee.

Could a poor company really operate like that?

“If we build a good relationship with them, then the next time they need outsourcing work, won't we be the first studio they think of?” Inaba said.

“That makes sense, but they're rich,” Kamiyama said uncertainly.

If they had that much money, wouldn't they be able to handle their own marketing?

“Money doesn't grow on trees. If they can save some, they'll save some,” Inaba replied with a grin.

“More importantly, this is about building goodwill and strengthening the relationship. That's the key.”

“But what if the game turns out to be terrible?” Kamiyama asked hesitantly.

“Then we don't overcommit.”

Inaba shrugged.

“We just stick to the facts.”

“After all, we only worked on the combat system.”

In other words, if the game became a huge hit, they could claim part of the credit, if it bombed, it wasn't really their fault.

“Good point!” Kamiyama immediately made up his mind.

“I have good relationships with several journalists at Famitsu and NGI.”

“I know people over at 4Gamer and Gamasutra,” Inaba replied with a nod.

The two exchanged a glance.

A plan had already begun forming in their minds.