

Event Report: VR Escape-the-Room Adventure Game *Last Labyrinth* Special Fan Meeting



December 12, Tokyo – A special fan meeting event for VR Escape-the-Room Adventure Game *Last Labyrinth* was held on December 01, 2019 at Sound INN Studio in Tokyo.

The event invited 30 attendees, chosen via a drawing, to see a live performance of the *Last Labyrinth* theme song, a roundtable with members of the development team, an exhibit of concept art, and more.

Live Performance of *Last Labyrinth*'s Theme Song



The event opened with Stefanie Joosten's performance of the theme song, "Last Labyrinth," with piano accompaniment by *Last Labyrinth*'s sound designer Takuya Hanaoka and four string accompanists. Joosten was the voice actor for Katia, the young girl that works together with the player throughout the game. The lyrics are neither Japanese nor English, but instead in *Last Labyrinth*'s unique constructed language. While the exact meaning of the lyrics remain a mystery, Joosten's performance drew listeners into the ambience of *Last Labyrinth*.

Roundtable Discussing *Last Labyrinth* and its Development

After the live performance, a roundtable was held featuring Stefanie Joosten, Hiromichi Takahashi (director/producer), and other key members of the development staff. The roundtable portion of the event was split into multiple themes, each focusing on different aspects of *Last Labyrinth*, and answered questions that were collected from fans beforehand.

The first section of the roundtable centered on the "sound of *Last Labyrinth*." Hiromichi Takahashi, Stefanie Joosten, Hiroki Kikuta (main theme composer), and Takuya Hanaoka (sound designer) talked about the creation of the music and sounds within the game.



The roundtable opened with questions about the theme song and the composition process. Takahashi began by talking about how Kikuta came to compose the theme song for *Last Labyrinth*. He stated that he personally likes Kikuta's work and requested for Kikuta to compose a song by messaging him out of the blue on Twitter. According to Kikuta, the wording of the message was polite, but he was able to sense Takahashi's enthusiasm through it.

When discussing the process of composing the song itself, Kikuta surprised Takahashi when he revealed that the song had already started writing itself in his head during the initial concept meeting, and by the end of that meeting, Kikuta already had a clear idea of what the finished composition would sound like.

When asked about singing in a fictional language Joosten stated, "The song is in a made up language, so it was difficult to learn the lyrics. During the recording session, I made sure to double-check the meaning of the lyrics so I could convey the right emotions as I sang." Kikuta added, "When someone says they want a song done in an imaginary language, it makes you wonder if they're being serious. [laughs]"

Hanaoka answered questions about the game's environmental sound effects, and talked about how he created sounds for traps that do not exist in real life. He explained, "After I receive a reference video from the development team, I break down the mechanisms and materials of the traps. Based on that, I mix together sounds from our sound library. For example, for the monitor screen sound, I used a vacuum cleaner sound and processed it..."

Takahashi, surprised by this reveal, interrupted Hanaoka's answer to say, "When you say that, it doesn't feel that scary anymore..."

Regarding the sound effects of the death traps, Takahashi commented, "I want players to feel afraid of the traps, so along with making sure that the traps were visually scary, I asked Hanaoka to use unsettling sounds for them."

At the end of the first section, Takahashi announced that the theme song "Last Labyrinth" was now available on major music streaming and distribution sites. The composer, Kikuta, also announced that he will be selling a jazz arrangement of "Last Labyrinth" at Comic Market 97 (held Dec. 28-31 at Tokyo Big Sight).

Difficulties of Developing for VR

The second section of the roundtable revolved around the "Mansion of Death." Michiko Kusaba (lead environment artist), Park DaeGeon (level designer), and Azusa Amemori (level designer) joined Takahashi and Joosten to discuss the death traps and puzzles that players encounter throughout the

game.



The first question was in regard to who made the puzzles.

Amemori answered that everyone contributed ideas, and Takahashi decided which ideas they would implement. “Takahashi wanted puzzles that ‘looked deceptively easy, and caught players off guard’ and it was difficult to come up with ideas that fit with that request,” she said.

DaeGeon commented on another difficulty the team experienced when creating puzzles. “This was the first time we had ever developed a game for VR, and we had cases where an idea looked fun in 2D, but when we actually tried to implement it in VR, it wasn’t as fun as it seemed on paper.”

The development process involved some trial and error, and Kusaba mentioned that it wasn’t unusual for the overall atmosphere and visual design of a given room and puzzle to take time to be finalized. There was plenty of back and forth between team members during the process of creating backgrounds, and adjustments were made to some puzzles to better suit the movements of the characters.

The team constantly checked how assets and puzzles actually looked and felt in VR as they implemented them. “Everyone had to constantly alternate between looking at their PC screen and the VR environment, and over time, they got really skilled at working with headsets strapped on top of their heads,” Takahashi said.

Within Last Labyrinth, the player and Katia experience a horrific death if they trigger a puzzle’s lose condition. Many fans felt bad for Katia when they had to see her die, and this was reflected in one question: “I want to see whoever made all those ways to kill poor Katia!” Upon hearing the question, everyone at the roundtable immediately looked at Amemori.

“It’s not that I wanted to make Katia suffer,” Amemori explained, “I was thinking up all the ways I would want to try dying in in VR!” She proceeded to excitedly talk about the deaths with the rest of the roundtable.

Due to the game’s atmosphere and the death scenes, several people have called it a horror game, despite Takahashi’s claim that it isn’t. When the question “This game is a horror game, isn’t it?” came up, Takahashi once again tried to claim, “It isn’t horror...”, but Joosten cut in saying, “It is a little horror-like...” Takahashi backpedaled and concluded that “It’s a horror game for people who aren’t good with horror.”

The second section concluded with each panelist sharing which death scene left the biggest impression on them. Joosten, who had acted out all of Katia’s deaths, responded, “There were many gruesome deaths, but being eaten by a giant snake both surprised me and made me laugh.” For DaeGeon, the death that left the biggest impression was in one of the rooms he was in charge of, the “Room of the

Lovers,” where the player manipulates light to solve the puzzle. Amemori recommends the “train room” and mentions how she made several adjustments to get it just right. After some thought, Kusaba replied that the death in the “bug room” was particularly scary in VR and crept her out.

Creation of Katia and Phantom's Ominous Presence

The third and final section of the roundtable was about Katia and Phantom. Tatzuma Tanaka (Katia's character designer and 3D modeler), Tabari Kimia (Phantom's character designer and 3D modeler), Atsuko Fukuyama (lead animator), Alexis Jassmin Broadhead (animator and tools developer), Takahashi, and Joosten talked about the process of developing Katia and Phantom, as well as the intent behind their designs.



Katia has green hair, wears white clothing, along with pink shoes and ribbons in her final design, but it seems there were many changes to her design that occurred during development.

Tanaka recalled when he created the first 3D model of Katia and showed it to Takahashi, “When I showed Takahashi a prototype 3D model of Katia, I was surprised when he told me he wanted her to wear pink shoes.” Takahashi said that the combination of pink shoes and green hair was initially unpopular with the team, but those details remained in the final design. The pink ribbons were also not in the initial design, but were added by Tanaka later to add some pink to her upper body. Tanaka felt that changes like these eventually transformed what was initially a more ordinary design into a unique design that made Katia stand out.

After discussing the initial prototype and character design of Katia, the discussion was directed to Katia's animation. Joosten pointed out that compared to the animations she saw during her first voice recording session, Katia had become a lot cuter by the time she did the second recording session. Fukuyama commented on one small detail that made many of Katia's gestures feel cuter, “Initially, Katia's hands were open a lot of the time, but I found that having her hands clenched [in a fist] during her gestures made them cuter. So I had her close her hands more often.” Joosten added “Like Katia's gesture when she's thinking! I thought that was really cute,” and demonstrated by mimicking Katia's gesture.

The roundtable then moved to talking about Phantom. Tabari elaborated on her design intent for Phantom, “Since I was told that this is not a horror game, rather than making Phantom a scary character, I focused more on making Phantom feel like a mysterious character.” One difficulty during the process of creating Phantom in particular, was making adjustments to ensure that a character fully clothed in black was still clearly visible in a dimly lit VR environment.

One question drew attention to how Phantom seemed to have difficulty walking. In response, Broadhead said, “There is a reason why Phantom moves that way, and the walk is purposely clumsy.”

At the end of the session, they were asked which of Katia and Phantom's animations they particularly

liked and want players to look out for.

“If you look closely at Phantom as you play *Dobutsu Shogi* against Katia, you’ll notice the small gestures that Phantom makes,” Broadhead replied.

Fukuyama said, “In the ‘Room of The World,’ there’s a unique animation when Katia rests on the sofa. So if you get tired, you can have Katia sit on the sofa and take a break together.”

Kimia hints at the story as she said, “When the Phantom appears, try comparing Phantom with your own avatar.”

Tanaka said that as a big fan of ICO, he particularly liked the head shaking animation Fukuyama made for Katia. It gave him a nostalgic feeling.

Lastly, Joosten said, “Phantom has a scary presence, so looking at the gentle Katia when he’s not around is soothing.”

An Experience Hard to Describe with Words



Takahashi closed the event with a message for fans:

“Since *Last Labyrinth* is exclusively for VR, it is sometimes difficult to convey what it is like in words alone, and I’m sure that some players have found that their initial impressions changed after playing the game. We appreciate the fans who have supported us so far, and ask that you continue to support us and spread the word about ‘this odd VR game’ you played.

On behalf of the Last Labyrinth team, thank you for your support and for attending today’s event.”

With this heartfelt message, the *Last Labyrinth* Special Fan Meeting came to a close.

Special Fan Meeting Interview

After the event, a post-event interview was held with Takahashi, Joosten, and Kikuta.

—*What are some of your impressions of this event?*

Takahashi: The fans were really warm and nice. [laughs]

Joosten: I was happy to hear the fans’ impressions of the game and see their enthusiastic reactions.

Kikuta: I liked having the opportunity to talk in person about my work, and how the event let players get closer and more familiar with the game and its developers.

—*During the roundtable, what were some of your thoughts? Were there any new realizations you had?*

Takahashi: Prior to the event, we gathered questions for the roundtable, and even then, I saw that fans liked Katia and Phantom more than I expected. Of course, I want people to love what we create, but we never know for sure how people will feel about our creations until it's out in the open, so I'm happy to see such a positive reaction from players.

Joosten: As I listened to the staff talk about different aspects of the game, I felt that they were very passionate and put a lot of work into the game, all the way down into the smaller details.

Takahashi: Like when we discussed all the ways we wanted try dying.

Everyone laughs.

Kikuta: As I composed and thought about how to express the atmosphere of *Last Labyrinth*, I also wondered what kind of game it would become as a whole. Hearing the reactions and impressions of players today, I felt that this was a title that was created with passion and care for the players and I'm glad that I was able to match that passion and care in my work as well.

Takahashi: We didn't discuss this during the roundtable, but I remember talking to Kikuta about the kind of world and atmosphere that I wanted the theme song to express, and Kikuta came back with the song along with a note on the setting he imagined when making it. This happened around the beginning of development, and Kikuta's song and ideas helped solidify aspects of the setting and the world of *Last Labyrinth*.

—From the time the prototype was created in 2016 to the present, were there any player reactions that were particularly memorable?

Takahashi: The 2016 prototype was intended to feel out the impressions of consumers, but when we presented it, we found that people were already eager for the game and asked us when it was going on sale.

My company, AMATA, is a game developer that mainly does development work for larger game companies and their IP, and we haven't gotten our name out in the world with our own original titles. We were greatly encouraged by the support we saw both inside and outside of Japan through crowdfunding and social media.

Joosten: *Last Labyrinth* is not just scary; it's also an experience that really feels like something you can only experience in VR, and I was happy to be a part of it.

Kikuta: When I was first shown the prototype, there was no music and I felt that it would be difficult to narrow the distance between the player and the game's world, so I wanted to help solve that problem with the music I created. VR in particular is a new media and people are not very familiar with it yet. So I didn't aim to impress with special music, but to instead help bring players smoothly into the world of the game. I felt that was the best contribution I could give to the game.

—Within the game, there are several instances where the player plays *Dobutsu Shogi*. How did you come to include *Dobutsu Shogi* in the game?

Takahashi: To be blunt, it's in there because I wanted to put it in. [laughs] As players are aware, *Dobutsu Shogi* appears in critical scenes of the game. Originally, for that scene, we were trying to create an original game with gameplay that was simple yet had some depth. At that time, I happened to come upon *Dobutsu Shogi* and through an indirect connection, I had the opportunity to talk to Madoka Kitao, the inventor of its rules. There are pros and cons to using *Dobutsu Shogi* in these critical sequences,

but the team determined that the player was able to learn the basic mechanics of moving the pieces and figure out the objective, capturing the king (lion), as they played it. So while it looks childish, I felt that the depth of the mechanics made *Dobutsu Shogi* suitable for a serious match while still being simple enough to pick up quickly.

—*Last Labyrinth* does not reveal much background for its world or characters, but some fans have shared their speculations on social media. Have you seen any of them?

Takahashi: Yes, I read them with a big grin on my face. [laughs]

Everyone laughs

Takahashi: The things players paid attention to, the questions they asked, and the impressions they had of the endings as they experienced this VR title varied with each person and that was something I liked seeing when looking at everyone's reactions.

Of course, as a creator, I have a setting in mind as I worked on the game, but I don't want to push that onto the players. In fact, if someone comes up with an interesting interpretation, I think it'll be fine if we go with the flow and say "Yeah, that's exactly right." [laughs]

I think there is meaning in letting people come up with their interpretations. Of course, the scenes in the game have gotten mixed reactions from players due to the lack of clarity or explicit explanations of what is going on, but with what might be the ego of a developer, I tell players that I want them to think about it themselves and see what they come up with.

—*If you had to choose between the protagonist, Katia, and Phantom, whose position would you want to be in?*

Takahashi: Umm, I don't think I want to be any of them. [laughs]

Kikuta: You die no matter who you are. [laughs]

Takahashi: But if I had to choose, I guess I would pick the protagonist. In that situation, I can lead the way and escape.

Stefanie: I would choose the player as well. Although, it would probably be stressful since there's a lot of horrible choices you have to make.

Kikuta: I think being Katia could be fun. In the game, she's a very nice girl, but I'm not, so I want to try being a despicable Katia. The kind of person who would lie straight to your face. [laughs]

Takahashi: You'd always point at everything other than what they want.



Kikuta: And my clothes would be a different color.

Takahashi: Evil Katia. [laughs]

Stefanie: If they had to deal with a Katia like that, I don't think people would want to play... [laughs]

Kikuta: You never know, there might be people who are into that kind of thing. [laughs]

—During the development of the game, *Last Labyrinth* set up many demo booths and opportunities for people to try out the game. Will there be more opportunities like this to play the *Last Labyrinth* demo in the future?

Takahashi: We plan to set up demo booths one or two more times this year. However, while the development schedule had made it difficult to prepare demo versions to release, we do plan to release a demo version of *Last Labyrinth* for each platform. Afterwards, there will no longer be a need to set up demo booths for people to try the game, so we will probably not do it anymore for *Last Labyrinth* after this year.

That said, the demo we previously used to do demo sessions at TSUKUMO stores are still on their displayed equipment, so you can probably still go to a TSUKUMO store and try playing it on one of their devices...and now I'm just advertising TSUKUMO on my own [laughs].

VR Escape-the-Room Adventure Game *Last Labyrinth*'s theme song "Last Labyrinth" Distributing on Major Streaming and Download Services



The theme song "Last Labyrinth" is now available for streaming and download through most major services.

This beautiful, mysterious composition was composed by Hiroki Kikuta, known for his work on acclaimed games titles such as *Seiken Densetsu 2&3* and *Sōkaigi*, and the haunting vocals are performed in *Last Labyrinth*'s unique language by Stefanie Joosten, the voice of the mysterious girl, Katia.

Listen and experience a piece of *Last Labyrinth*'s world.



About Hiroki Kikuta

Hiroki Kikuta was born in Aichi Prefecture, Japan in 1962, and is currently a Short-Term Guest Professor at the Tokyo College of Music.

Beginning in 1991 at SQUARE CO., Ltd., his resume includes music production for *Seiken Densetsu 2* and *Seiken Densetsu 3* RPGs for the Nintendo Super Famicom, and *Sōkaigi* for the Sony Playstation. His later works upon going independent include BGM composition for SEGA's *Shining Hearts*, *Shining Blade* and *Shining Ark* RPGs for the PSP, NAMCO's *SOULCALIBUR V* fighting game for the PS3, and Gust's *Atelier Escha & Logy: Alchemists of the Dusk Sky* for the PS3, among many others. He has also worked on multiple soundtrack CDs released under NTT Publishing Co., Ltd. From music composition to scenario writing to film editing, Hiroki is a musical artisan with a multitude of skills honed over many years of experience in entertainment production, constantly striving to achieve his goal of delighting fans and players alike.



About Stefanie Joosten

Stefanie Joosten is a Dutch model, actress, voice-actress and singer. Born and raised in the Netherlands, she moved to Japan as a student in Japanese studies. Stefanie gained success as a commercial model and actress in Japan after her studies and saw an international breakthrough in her career when she was chosen as the voice, likeness and motion capture of Quiet, the main female character in the latest instalment of the immensely popular *Metal Gear Solid* video game series by Hideo Kojima: *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain* (2015). She also made her debut as a singer by performing the theme song "Quiet's Theme" for her character in the game, which she performed live at The Game Awards in LA.

Being able to fluently speak Japanese and English besides her native tongue Dutch, Stefanie has a unique set of skills that attracted thousands of fans from all around the world that follow her on social media. Stefanie recently starred in films productions in Europe such as *Le Retour Sur Soi-Même*, *Transit 17*, and *Hostage X*. Recently she has once again been chosen to be the model and voice of a new video game character, this time in the shooter-adventure game *Spacelords* from Spanish developer

MercurySteam. Stefanie is currently mostly traveling between Europe and Asia and is scheduled to work on various film and video game productions yet to be announced.

Theme Song Distribution



Song Title: 「Last Labyrinth」 / Stefanie Joosten/Hiroki Kikuta
Currently distributing through major streaming and download services.

Download: iTunes Store, RecoChoku, mora, and others

Stream: Apple Music, Spotify, LINE MUSIC, Amazon Music Unlimited, AWA, KKBOX, Rakuten Music, RecMusic, YouTube Music, and others

Link to each service: <https://VAP.lnk.to/LastLabyrinth>

Last Labyrinth Factsheet

Title: Last Labyrinth (ラストラビリンス)

Genre: VR Escape-the-Room Adventure

Supported HMD: PlayStation®VR, HTC Vive, Oculus Rift, Oculus Rift S, Windows Mixed Reality Headset

Supported Hardware: PlayStation®4, VR Ready PC (Minimum Requirements: Intel® Core i5 4590 or above/NVIDIA GeForce GTX 1060 or above)

Distributing Stores (Download only): PlayStation®Store, Steam®, Oculus Store, Microsoft Store

Number of Players: 1

Online Mode: No online play available

Release Date: November 13, 2019

CERO: D

Price: 39.99 USD or 37.42 EUR (Excluding tax) ~ ※Prices may vary depending on the distributing store.

Official Site: <https://lastlabyrinth.jp/en/>

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