Left Behind

With *Left Behind,* our vision is to develop a room escape game that both responds to and expands its genre category with its spatial storytelling. *Left Behind* is centered on the bedroom of Kotori, a 10-year-old child and the youngest member of a tightly-knit family of four who has passed away in an accident on their birthday, after which their family decided to keep their room intact - as if they were still alive and living in that room every day. In this game, the player would play as the returning ghost/spirit of Kotori. One night, waking up at 3 a.m. in the morning, they would find themself trapped inside their bedroom and unaware of their death, thinking that it is the same night after the birthday incident that took their life. The player, playing as Kotori, needs to navigate the room to find a way out, solving puzzles by exploring the room and looking into every object and every detail. As the player clicks on an object, Kotori would comment on the object's significance to them and thus gradually construct a narrative which would culminate in an epiphanic resolution - the player and Kotori would discover that Kotori has passed away exactly one year before the events of the game, and they are returning as a spirit in their room that has been meticulously preserved by their mourning family, exactly as it had been when they were alive - except for the pieces of clues that the player would find throughout their journey, hints of a family mourning their child by keeping the place where they used to live.

We hope that *Left Behind* is a game that complicates the genre of room escape games. The narrative is central in this game and consists of both embedded narratives and evocative space. The space of the bedroom is designed to include as many elements as possible that would make the most players recall their memories of their childhood bedroom, and thus attempts to evoke an immersive experience by shaping the player experience to resonate their memories of a place that is very familiar and endearing to them. This space, combined with the narrative that is

hidden in every small element of the room and pieced together by the player through the game, gives Kotori's room a meaning, and makes the player's journey through the game both one of puzzle-solving and one of uncovering a story of a family mourning its small apocalypse - the loss of the youngest child.

We approach the subject of "apocalypse" in the sense of both a "total destruction of the world" by presenting how a family deals with their apocalyptic event, and also a revelative and uncovering experience of this coping process as the player and Kotori discover both Kotori's death and many signs of how the family is mourning them. We see the passing of Kotori, the event that guides the entire game, an apocalyptic event that goes beyond trauma. Throughout the game, we aim to construct the narrative of an extremely tightly-knit family of four, and describe how different their world turned out to be after Kotori's death - how each of the surviving family member interprets the world around them would be so drastically different that, in a sense, their previous world, where Kotori was alive and present as an integral part of their lives, ended. On the other hand, the game is also a revelation of how keeping Kotori's room and leaving everything as if Kotori is still occupying it allows the family to deal with this tragic event. By preserving the physical space, which the player gets to fully experience in the game, Kotori's memories and her presence in the world is somehow preserved, and the family is thus able to avoid, to some extent, the experience of a total destruction of their world.

Through this game, we hope that the player learns about how families preserve their child's bedrooms after they pass away, and to think about the many ways in which we mourn and negotiate with the concept of death and loss when it comes to the people we care about the most. Our original vision of *Left Behind* would feature more puzzles both in quantity and in diversity, and more content in terms of the narrative, including but not limited to more parts of Korori's

room, a planner of Kotori, and the possibility of two endings - one in which the player, as Kotori, chooses to stay in their room as a spirit and continue to "live" there - as their family wished for - and an alternate ending in which the player does not find out about Kotori's identity, opens the door to the horror of Kotori's family members suddenly finding their dead child's locked bedroom door flung open from the inside at 3 a.m. in the morning. While we were not able to implement all of our visions, we are still proud of what we have achieved in our current build of *Left Behind* and hope that it adequately conveys our visions and our goals.