

= Zero Escape : Virtue 's Last Reward =

Zero Escape : Virtue 's Last Reward is a visual novel adventure game developed by Chunsoft . Released in 2012 for the Nintendo 3DS and PlayStation Vita , it is the second installment in the Zero Escape series , and the sequel to the 2009 game Nine Hours , Nine Persons , Nine Doors .

The story follows the player character Sigma , a man who is abducted and forced along with eight other individuals to play the Nonary Game , which puts its participants in a life @-@ or @-@ death situation . As the story progresses , the characters begin to unravel the secrets behind the Nonary Game , as well as its true purpose . The gameplay alternates between two types of sections : Escape sections , where the player completes puzzles in escape @-@ the @-@ room scenarios ; and Novel sections , where the player reads the game 's narrative and makes decisions that influence the story , making it branch into twenty @-@ four different endings .

Development for the game began as a result of Nine Hours , Nine Person , Nine Doors 's unexpected commercial success in North America . Game director Kotaro Uchikoshi wrote the script , which was then localized by Aksys Games and Rising Star Games for North America and Europe respectively . It received positive reviews from critics , who praised the story and characters , but were divided in their opinions of the Escape sections . Virtue 's Last Reward was a commercial failure in Japan , where it sold less than 16 @,@ 000 copies by year 's end ; this led to the temporary cancellation of its sequel . Development on the sequel was eventually resumed , and Zero Time Dilemma was released in 2016 .

= = Gameplay = =

Virtue 's Last Reward is a visual novel adventure game in which the player assumes the role of a man named Sigma . The gameplay is divided into two types of sections : Novel and Escape . In Novel sections , the player progresses through the storyline and converses with non @-@ playable characters . These sections require little interaction from the player other than reading the dialogue and other text that appears on the screen . During Novel sections , the player will sometimes be presented with decision options that affect the course of the game . One recurring decision option is a prisoner 's dilemma type of choice where the player must choose to " ally " or " betray " the character or pair of characters they are pitted against , with different results depending on what choices the two parties picked .

In between Novel sections are Escape sections , which occur when the player finds themselves in a room from which they need to find a means of escape . These are presented from a first @-@ person perspective , with the player being able to move between different predetermined positions in each room . To escape , the player is tasked with finding various items and solving puzzles , reminiscent of escape @-@ the @-@ room games . At some points , the player may need to combine objects with each other to create the necessary tool to complete a puzzle . The puzzles include various brain teasers , such as Lights Out and sliding puzzles . In each Escape room , a safe can be found , which can be opened with two passwords . One of these passwords gives the player the key needed to escape from the room , while the other grants access to a hidden folder that provides the player with additional backstory or other supplementary information . The player receives hints to the puzzle solutions from the game 's characters ; additional and more direct hints are received if the player sets the puzzle 's difficulty level from " hard " to " easy " .

The player is given access to a flowchart that allows them to immediately revisit or " jump " to any previously completed Novel or Escape section without replaying the game from the beginning . This allows the player to transition to an earlier branching point in the story and choose a different option that causes the story to progress in another direction . For example , the player can jump to a previous decision and ally with their opponent instead of betraying them , and vice versa . While there are 24 endings available , many endings are inaccessible initially and must be unlocked by experiencing events or learning information in other plotlines . For example , if a particular plotline cannot progress because a required password is unknown , the player must jump to other plotlines and find it before returning to the original one . The player is thus required to jump often between the

alternate plotlines in order to advance the game towards the ultimate ending .

= = Plot = =

= = = Characters and setting = = =

Similar to its predecessor , Virtue 's Last Reward features nine main characters who are kidnapped by an unknown individual called Zero . The player @-@ controlled Sigma is joined by Phi , a girl with a " no @-@ nonsense attitude " ; Dio , a rude and insensitive man ; Tenmyouji , an elderly man ; Quark , an energetic child ; Luna , a kind and quiet woman ; Clover , an unpredictable girl who also appeared in Nine Hours , Nine Persons , Nine Doors ; Alice , a powerful and focused woman ; and K , a man who wears an irremovable , full @-@ body suit of armor . Along with the nine participants , Zero III , an artificial intelligence who appears in the form of a CGI rabbit , controls the Nonary Game . Zero III is nicknamed " Zero Jr . " by the participants to distinguish the entity from the human Zero , who is in turn nicknamed " Zero Sr. " Aside from Sigma , each character is fully voice acted in both Japanese and English .

The game is set in an abandoned warehouse @-@ like facility , containing a number of different rooms filled with puzzles , where Zero forces the characters to participate in the Nonary Game . The characters are affixed with bracelets that display a point value that is initially set at three . During the game they participate in rounds of the Ambidex Game , in which they have to choose to " ally " or " betray " the other characters . The choices made affect the players ' bracelet points : if two opponents both choose " ally " , each individual gains two points ; if the two opponents both choose " betray " , no change occurs ; and if one opponent chooses " betray " while the other chooses " ally " , the opponent who chose " betray " gains three points while the other opponent loses two points . Participants who gain at least nine points are able to escape , while those who reach zero points are executed .

= = = Story = = =

In 2028 , Sigma is abducted and placed inside an elevator with Phi . Zero III appears on a monitor and informs them that they are participating in the Nonary Game and that they must escape the elevator before it falls . Upon escaping , they find themselves in a warehouse @-@ like facility with Dio , Quark , Tenmyouji , Luna , Alice , K , and Clover . Zero III informs the group that nine individual bracelet points are necessary to escape the facility , and points can only be earned by participating in the Ambidex Game .

At this point , the story begins branching into different timelines that can be experienced in any order , depending on the choices made by the player . While completing the first set of puzzle rooms , the participants learn of a pandemic caused by Radical @-@ 6 , a virus that slows down its victims ' cognition and drives them to suicide . Although dependent on a given timeline , the characters either discover the murdered body of an old woman or antimatter bombs . Additionally , the pasts of the other players are explored : Luna is a humanoid robot , tasked with maintaining the Nonary Game ; Tenmyouji willingly joined the game , together with his adopted grandson Quark , after being promised a chance to find a certain woman ; Alice and Clover are Department of Defense secret agents tasked with stopping the religious cult Free the Soul ; and Dio is a member of Free the Soul . Dio had murdered the old woman and took her place in the game so as to plant the bombs . In the timeline leading to the game 's ultimate ending , Sigma defuses the bombs , while Dio is restrained and incapacitated .

The remaining participants proceed to the next set of puzzle rooms . As Sigma , Phi , and Tenmyouji complete their room , they uncover a holographic message of the old woman , the same woman Tenmyouji has been looking for , Akane Kurashiki . Akane and Zero Sr. had developed the AB project , a project that encompassed the Nonary Game and the Ambidex Game , to train Sigma and Phi to transport their consciousnesses through time . This occurs shortly thereafter , and this

time , they subdue Dio before he can kill Akane . Akane explains that the game 's dangerous elements were necessary to speed up one 's brain to transport one 's consciousness through time , and each participant was infected with Radical @-@ 6 to amplify this increase . The Nonary Game was designed so Sigma and Phi could experience multiple timelines and retain what they learn in each one . Sigma and Phi 's consciousnesses are then returned to the present , where they find everyone has cooperated to acquire enough points to escape .

The group leaves the facility and emerges in a desert landscape on the Moon . The year is 2074 and most of humanity was killed by Radical @-@ 6 after it was unleashed by Free the Soul from a Mars mission test site in 2028 . They re @-@ enter the facility and discover a cold sleep pod . K explains that he grew up in the facility with Zero Sr. and Akane , and each person was brought to the facility to recreate the events that the two had previously experienced . Clover , Alice , and Phi were abducted in 2028 and placed in cold sleep until the Nonary Game began . The pod opens to reveal a clone of Sigma , and then K reveals he is actually Akane in disguise . Depending on whether or not Dio murdered Akane in a given timeline , either Sigma 's clone or Akane was occupying K 's armor , a quantum superposition .

Akane explains that Sigma , after his abduction in 2028 , had his consciousness transported into his elder self 's body in 2074 , while his elder self 's consciousness was transported into the younger Sigma 's body in 2028 . This was the goal of the AB project , to make it possible for the elder Sigma to prevent the Radical @-@ 6 outbreak in 2028 with his future knowledge ; Dio sought to prevent this goal . Akane makes Phi and Sigma 's consciousnesses jump to 2029 , after the outbreak . Sigma , as Zero Sr. , spends the next 45 years developing the AB project together with Akane , while Phi is kept in cold sleep . Sigma also creates a clone of himself as a spare , in case his own body gets damaged . When they again arrive at 2074 , Sigma and Phi jump back to 2028 to infiltrate the Mars mission test site .

= = Development = =

Virtue 's Last Reward was developed by Chunsoft and directed by Kotaro Uchikoshi , who had previously led the production of Nine Hours , Nine Persons , Nine Doors . While his original intention was to make Nine Hours , Nine Persons , Nine Doors a stand @-@ alone title , its unexpected commercial success in North America prompted him to continue the series . In order to cut down on costs , Uchikoshi asked Chunsoft if he could develop Virtue 's Last Reward and its eventual sequel simultaneously , as both games would use the same engine and digital assets ; Chunsoft agreed to his proposal , and green @-@ lit production .

Development of Virtue 's Last Reward began on the Nintendo DS ; however , during the early stages of production , the Nintendo 3DS and PlayStation Vita were announced . The development team at Chunsoft wanted to utilize the three @-@ dimensional ( 3D ) features of the newer systems , and thus , moved production of the game to the Nintendo 3DS and PlayStation Vita . As neither system had been released yet , the team was under the assumption that the 3D features would require 3D character models . Uchikoshi remarked that designing 3D character models proved to be a challenge for Chunsoft due to company 's inexperience with 3D effects .

= = = Story and themes = = =

Virtue 's Last Reward marked a tonal shift from the suspense present within Nine Hours , Nine Persons , Nine Doors , to a more relaxed and exploration @-@ heavy atmosphere . Uchikoshi stated that the results of a Japanese survey indicated that players who did not purchase Nine Hours , Nine Persons , Nine Doors thought it looked scary ; he " didn 't have a choice but to tone it down " for Virtue 's Last Reward as directed by Chunsoft . Uchikoshi worked alongside a sub @-@ writer , who helped to identify problems present within the story .

When writing the script , Uchikoshi began by writing a basic story . One of the new additions to the story was the Ambidex Game , which was intended to have philosophical significance , as the logical decision made in it hurts the characters both on a group level and on a personal one . He then

designed the characters he felt were necessary to the story . He aimed to create a balanced cast of supporting characters , in terms of genders , personalities , and ages represented . While designing the characters ' personalities , he used the Enneagram of Personality as a reference . It was important to him to create a mystery behind them , to make players curious about who the characters are and what their pasts were like . Another important element was the use of misdirection : By deliberately making certain characters seem like bad people , he would get players to focus on them more , making it more difficult for them to see who the " real bad guy " is . He decided to not give Sigma a strong personality , in order to make it easier for players to empathize with him . Because the Moon was one of the game 's major themes , the character Zero III appears as a rabbit - a reference to the moon rabbit in Japanese folklore .

Some changes were made to the initial plot of Virtue 's Last Reward . During one scene , Dio handcuffs Clover and Tenmyouji to a sink , which prevents them from participation in the Nonary Game ( the punishment for not participating is death ) . Originally , Dio was meant to " do something even more messed up " to Clover , but the president of Chunsoft opposed this scene for " ethical reasons " , after which it was changed . In addition , the game originally ended with humanity dying out , at which point a character would go back in time and change the past so that the future would be saved . Uchikoshi later felt this ending was inappropriate following the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami , so it was changed to be more positive . Uchikoshi also considered including several scientific and philosophical theories / experiments that eventually were left out . These scrapped ideas included Monty Hall problem ( a brain teaser based on probability ) and Capgras delusion ( a mental disorder in which someone believes that a person they know has been replaced with an identical @-@ looking impostor ) .

= = = Localization = = =

As with Nine Hours , Nine Persons , Nine Doors , Aksys Games localized Virtue 's Last Reward for its North American release . Nobara Nakayama translated the game 's text from Japanese to English , which was then localized by editor Ben Bateman . Bateman later stated that overcoming various translation issues was one of the hardest aspects of editing Virtue 's Last Reward . Although Uchikoshi had written the game with the English language audience in mind , which avoided several plot @-@ related translation problems , a few jokes did not translate properly and had to be changed during localization . Additionally , there were two characters who " talked like animals " in the Japanese version of the game : Zero III , who added " -usa " to the end of its sentences , which is the first half of usagi ( the Japanese word for " rabbit " ) ; and Sigma , who added " -nya " ( the Japanese onomatopoeia for the sound cats make ) to the end of his sentences whenever he talked about cats . Bateman solved this by writing rabbit and cat themed puns . Another challenge for Bateman was keeping track of the story moments from each branching path . It was important to know whether information regarding each character had been revealed yet to the player , as this would ultimately affect the word choice and attitude of each line of dialogue .

For voice casting , the localization team was sent a list of people who might fit the roles , along with short reels for each actor . Once the actors had been chosen , Bateman wrote the voice direction , which were short blurbs the voice actors saw next to the line they were supposed to say , so they would know how to perform it . While the North American version of the game allows the user to select either Japanese or English audio tracks , the European version , which was released by Rising Star Games , only features the Japanese audio track .

= = Release = =

To promote the game , Chunsoft released an original video animation in December 2011 , which Aksys Games later dubbed in English . It was created by the Japanese animation studio Gonzo , and serves as an introduction to the game , showcasing the characters as well as the basic Ambidex Game rules . In addition to the video animation , a Flash game was produced and made available on the official Japanese Virtue 's Last Reward website . The gameplay of the untitled Flash game

has the player attempt to open a metal door by quickly clicking on it . As the door begins to open , Clover is revealed on the other side , and the player begins clicking on her breasts . Richard Eisenbeis of Kotaku was perplexed by the Flash game , stating that : " as it is pretty much the antithesis of everything presented in Virtue 's Last Reward , I truly wonder how this flash game is supposed to convince anyone to play the full title . Perhaps it 's just due to a [ public relations ] department following the old adage : ' sex sells ' . "

Virtue 's Last Reward was released in Japan on February 16 , 2012 . In its first week of release , the Nintendo 3DS version sold 9 @,@ 307 copies while the PlayStation Vita version sold 6 @,@ 538 copies . The game was then released in North America on October 23 , 2012 , and in Europe on November 23 , 2012 ; this was the first Zero Escape game to be released in Europe . People who pre @-@ ordered the North American version of the game through Amazon.com received a replica of the bracelet that the characters wear ; a similar pre @-@ order bonus had been given out for Nine Hours , Nine Persons , Nine Doors . The bracelets could later be purchased through the Aksys Games store , with all proceeds going to the American Red Cross and Hurricane Sandy relief . In July 2016 , Aksys Games announced that ports for other platforms were in progress .

Shortly after the game 's release , players discovered a game @-@ breaking glitch in the North American Nintendo 3DS version : saving the game in specific Escape sections would corrupt the saved game 's data , forcing the player to restart the game from the beginning . In response , Aksys Games recommended that players avoid saving during Escape sections . By 2013 , Aksys Games announced that the glitch had been patched in the Nintendo eShop version ; some players , however , continued to report that the glitch still existed .

= = Reception = =

Virtue 's Last Reward received positive reviews from critics . The aggregate @-@ review website Metacritic rated the Nintendo 3DS version 88 / 100 , and the PlayStation Vita version 84 / 100 , indicating " generally favorable reviews " .

Heidi Kemps of GameSpot praised the story , stating that the plot expertly mixed elements of horror , drama , and science fiction . Edge described the story as " a page @-@ turner with flashes of real intelligence " , but noted that it lacked the shock value of Nine Hours , Nine Persons , Nine Doors . Kimberly Wallace of Game Informer thought that the plot twists came at the perfect moments . Tony Ponce of Destructoid echoed these remarks , but felt that the ending featured too many plot twists , and the revelations were more confusing than suprising . John McCarroll of RPGFan thought that dialogue was humorous , saddening , and harrowing all at the same time . In contrast , Austin Boosinger of Adventure Gamers was heavily critical of the dialogue , calling it one of the slowest and most overwritten adventure games ever made .

Bob Mackey of 1UP.com wrote that Virtue 's Last Reward did not have to work hard to make the player care about the characters . Martin Robinson of Eurogamer appreciated that the cast was believable and taht each character was powered by real emotion . Boosinger commented that the characters were not well written , and that there was little reason to care about them until their backstories were revealed . Lucas M. Thomas of IGN stated that the English voice acting was " among the best performances I 've ever heard in any game , period " . Kemps commended the voice acting for being a pleasure to listen to even after playing the game for thirty hours . Mike Manson of Nintendo Life similarly praised the Japanese voice acting .

Edge felt that the Escape sections were satisfying to solve , and that they did not impede on the story progression for too long . Wallace thought that solving the puzzles provided a sense of accomplishment that few games could replicate . Kemps commented that the user interface was improved from Nine Hours , Nine Persons , Nine Doors . Boosinger thought the puzzles were dull and uninspired in their variety , but appreciated their connections to the scientific and mathematical themes presented in the game . Robison felt that puzzles were not fun to solve , and that the menus were cumbersome to navigate . Molie L. Patterson of Electronic Gaming Monthly was disappointed by the limited camera movement in the Escape sections . Several reviewers noted that the controls for both the Nintendo 3DS and the PlayStation Vita were awkward and oversensitive .

Many reviewers praised the flowchart for not forcing the player to replay previously completed sections or restart the game from the beginning . Bob Mackey of 1UP.com thought that the flowchart was also useful for keeping track of important story moments from each timeline . However , Boosinger and Edge both criticized the flowchart , as they felt it removed the tension of making the wrong decision . McCarroll felt that many of the environments looked similar , and that they were often colorless . Thomas thought that the 3D visuals were " beautifully " rendered , and that they were much better than those of its predecessor . Patterson remarked that while she was initially skeptical of the visuals from gameplay screenshots , her opinion changed after playing the game . Manson thought that the character models fit well with the realistic environments , but noted that there was a limited amount of character animations .

= = = Accolades = = =

Virtue 's Last Reward received some awards from gaming publications , including : Handheld Game of the Year from GameSpot , Best 3DS / DS Story from IGN , Best Handheld Exclusive from Game Informer , as well as Best Story and Best Graphic Adventure from RPGFan . The game also received nominations for : Best Narrative at the 13th Annual Game Developers Choice Awards , and Game of the Year from Kotaku , Pocket Gamer , and GameSpot . Gamasutra , Game Developer , 1UP.com , and Amazon.com placed Virtue 's Last Reward within their non @-@ ranked lists of the Best Games of 2012 , while RPGFan listed it as one of the thirty essential role @-@ playing video games from the years 2010 to 2015 .

= = Sequel = =

In December 2012 , Uchikoshi mentioned details of a third Zero Escape game , and by June 2013 , he had finished planning the story . However , less than a year later , it was announced that the project was put on hold indefinitely in response to the series ' poor commercial reception in Japan . Uchikoshi examined the possibility of financing the development through the use of crowdfunding on a website like Kickstarter , but felt that the idea would not be persuasive enough for it to meet the goal ; he also sought out opportunities with executives and investors . The series ' fandom created Operation Bluebird , an online campaign to raise awareness of the series and support the game 's development , in response to its hiatus .

In March 2015 , Aksys Games launched the website 4infinity.co , which only consisted of a countdown timer . Fans of the series began speculating that the number fonts on the countdown timer resembled the fonts from Nine Hours , Nine Persons , Nine Doors 's cover art , which led some to believe that the countdown timer would end with an announcement regarding the third Zero Escape game . The countdown ended in July , which coincided with the 2015 Anime Expo . During the Expo , Aksys Games held a panel at which they announced the continued development of the game . It was released in June 2016 , under the new name Zero Time Dilemma .