

Postmortem: Capcom's Okamiden



By Motohideo Eshiro, Kuniomi Matsushita

[The developers behind [Okamiden](#), the unexpected DS revival of cult classic [Okami](#), share the decision making processes that lead to the form the game took -- including how Chibiterasu and Kuni, the game's two leads, emerged.]

In 2006, [Okami](#) launched on the PlayStation 2 to widespread critical acclaim. It won more than 30 critical awards and praise for game design amongst all global gaming media.

Then in 2008, [Okami](#) launched on the Nintendo Wii system, also with strong critical acclaim -- but both the Wii version and the PS2 original garnered relatively little commercial success.

Without overwhelming sales for support, and in the wake of the closing of original series creator Clover Studios, the prospect of another title in the [Okami](#) universe seemed doubtful.

Vocal fans were hungry for more sunshine and wolf-god adventure. Luckily, there was a talented and dedicated team at Capcom that was eager to see a new game from the [Okami](#) franchise, too.

In 2009, a small passionate team at Capcom developed a unique vision of how to continue the brand exclusively on the Nintendo DS system. The first announcement of [Okamiden](#) came in April 2010; no longer was the gaming community wondering if there was going to be a follow up game in the [Okami](#) franchise.

[Okamiden](#) launched September 2010 in Japan and March 2011 in the pan-Western territories on the Nintendo DS. Making the vivid, colorful world of [Okami](#) portable and appealing to the globe wasn't all sunshine and cherry blossoms during development. Here are some of the notable successes and challenges that occurred during the development and localization process, as recollected by [Okamiden](#) director Kuniomi Matsushita and producer Motohideo Eshiro.

What Went Right

1. Partner System

When we began working on [Okamiden](#), we decided that we did not just want to create a continuation of the original PlayStation 2 [Okami](#) game, but rather, create an entirely new game. By making the game's main character, Chibiterasu, a wolf pup, we were able to maintain the connection with the first game but still create something different enough to stand on its own.



However, since there would only be minor visual differences between Chibiterasu and Amaterasu, players may be left to think, "Doesn't Chibiterasu just do the same things that Amaterasu does?"

That was when the team's ideas all came together. A child version of Amaterasu would only have half the abilities of the adult Amaterasu. It would be rather difficult for half of a god to save the world, but if there were a partner, then the two of them could work together to save the world.

If both Chibiterasu and a partner traveled together, then the ability to use both characters (one person and one animal) would be an entirely new feature not present in *Okami*. And if there were to be a partner for a young god to bring out more depth in the game, then naturally we would want to have this partner be a child as well.

It was that train of thought that led to the creation of one of *Okamiden*'s key features -- the partner system.

2. Choosing the DS Hardware

When playing the PlayStation 2 version of *Okami*, many people thought, "Wouldn't it be great if I could actually use the brush techniques on the screen itself?"

Players were able to get a taste of this with the PS2 controller, then using the Wii Remote, but with the Nintendo DS's stylus, they are now able to master and intuitively use the brush techniques by drawing directly on the screen with the stylus.

With the PS2 controller and Wii Remote, it was often difficult to draw complex lines such as an infinity symbol. However, with the Nintendo DS stylus, not only is one able to draw even more complex lines precisely, but we were able to create even better puzzles and missions that utilize the celestial brush mechanic.

3. Compelling and Heartwarming Story

One of the great things about the original *Okami* was its heartwarming story. Since *Okamiden* comes from the same realm as the original game, it was necessary to have the story for *Okamiden* be just as compelling.

However, since the story of *Okamiden* takes place nine months after the original *Okami*, we needed to come up with another heartwarming story that would not contradict the events of the first game. To do so, we enlisted the help of a famous scenario writer, Yukinori Kitajima, to create this compelling story, and by doing so, the simple plot quickly evolved into a detailed and rich scenario.

4. Easy Accessibility

By using the brush techniques and the partner system, we were able to create an easy and fun way to solve puzzles and enjoy the game. The brush technique "Guidance" is introduced to the player in the beginning of the game during the prologue. This gives both novice and experienced players the chance to experience this new technique. Players can utilize the "Guidance" technique not only to team up with your partner and solve puzzles, but also to play and progress through the game much more naturally.





Finding a sweet spot for broad consumer accessibility while satisfying the *Okami* fan as well as marrying the core gameplay with the celestial brush techniques was crucial to the development of *Okamiden*. We think we have succeeded by incorporating the themes and concepts we wanted to communicate in *Okamiden*.

5. Facebook

With the release timing of *Okamiden* in Japan and the pan-Western territories some six to eight months apart, the challenge of marketing a game twice becomes an issue. Since internal development time and resources contribute to the marketing in both markets, the campaign needs careful planning.

Successfully tapping into and enlisting support from the 3rd (most likely 2nd by the time you read this) largest nation in the world -- Facebook -- quick became a boon for *Okamiden*.

With relatively small marketing budgets behind the title, engaging the Facebook community as well as the rabid global fan base built up during the *Okami* years was crucial to getting word about the game out to existing fans, friends of fans and the uninitiated.

Capcom used the Graffiti application and tapped into the 14 million users to create an *Okamiden*-themed Goblin Face contest. This was very successful at building the fan base and getting conversation about *Okamiden* renewed or in some cases started.

Facebook provided, and continues to provide, a platform to make people aware, get people talking and driving praise for the high quality creative assets produced using valuable R&D resources. By utilizing Facebook in this way, the *Okami* brand now has a global hub for any future titles in the series.

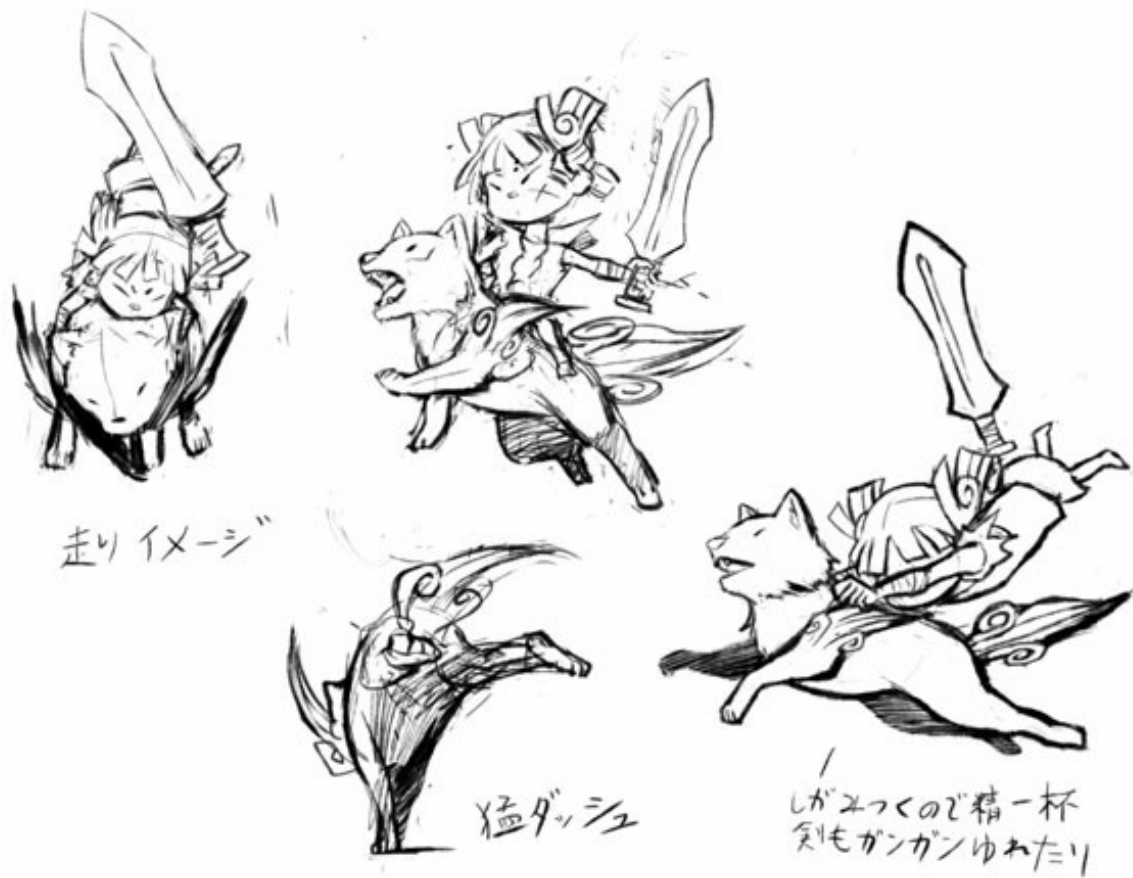


What Went Wrong

1. Character Re-Designs

Once we decided that the game would be played with two characters, Chibiterasu and a partner that rides on the wolf god's back, we began working with the designer on the Kuni character. Since Kuni is the first partner to appear in the game, we had to make sure he was really energetic.

We worked with the design team to lock down the direction we wanted to take with Kuni. The teams would disagree from time to time, but we talked through the issues, came to an agreement, and moved forward with the design. The character model looked great on the Maya 3D engine, and we began programming the basic animations. Finally, the time came to test it out on the Nintendo DS.



When we had Kuni climb onto Chibiterasu's back and run around the screen, something just did not feel right. We tried for hours and hours but simply could not make it satisfactory. We dreaded the possibility that the designers would have to toss their work out and start from the beginning. After all, we cannot force players to play something that we cannot appreciate.

We began working with all of the design teams (character, model, animation, etc.) and discussed the reasons why Kuni did not turn out as we had hoped on the Nintendo DS, not relishing the notion of going back and re-designing Kuni from the start, and how much time this whole process would take. But without a single complaint, the team came together and agreed to make an even better character model.

After discussing what worked and what did not work, we decided to come up with a character direction everyone could agree upon. This way, it was no longer something one was told to make, but rather, something that each person could visualize and contribute. While for some teams this process may have decreased morale, for us, it helped us come together and work even harder.

2. Managing Internal and External Teams

A good team leader is able to work with each department to define clear and understandable roles, and help the leaders with any on-the-spot problems and concerns. Had that been the case, even if something like the Kuni re-design were to happen again, then the team would make sure to move on quickly and do our best to fix it.

Also, by creating an environment that allows everyone to speak freely about what they think about the game, the team would be able to input their own ideas and feel as though they are contributing something to the project. Had the teams been under such management, they would have performed without a problem through simple schedule management and direction.

And while this all sounds good in theory, the schedule for *Okamiden* was not as such. The head of each department held their own sense of pride and responsibility for their piece of the game. Each of the department heads was striving for perfection. Be it Art, Sound, or Programming, this individual "perfection in my group" approach affected the greater whole of the project.

One by one, each of these elements began to take their toll on the schedules and eventually on the latter half of the game itself. Some of the latter half of the game had to be revised and scoped differently than initial plans. Next time, we will be sure to manage our schedules better and work in harmony as collective team for the greater good of the game instead of staying overly focused on perfection in our individual departments.

3. Split Release

Ideally, all games would be produced and sold worldwide at the same time. Since *Okamiden* was developed in Japan, we were asked to complete the Japanese version first. In the time between the releases of the Japanese version and the pan-Western SKUs, information about the game was posted to the internet. We understood that fact and therefore did not place many restrictions on the information or assets used for overseas PR promotions.

Without giving away any particular spoilers, stages, characters, enemies, and bosses were revealed not with teaser trailers that we posted online. This was a great way to get information about the game out there, but made it difficult to promote the title through traditional PR methods globally and created the need to make additional assets for the pan-Western marketing campaign.





This is obviously a strain on development resources and something we are more acutely aware of now. Japanese consumers and print media seem to prefer screenshots while pan-Western audiences prefer videos and trailers. Using development resources to create these assets can tax the development schedule and team resources. We all worked very hard to make sure the best possible assets were created for each specific market. We will work to improve on this in the future.

4. Mini Canvas: Drawing Sumi-e Smaller

To be frank, this was a painfully difficult process. We knew that bringing the expressive and expansive brushstroke art style used on the PS2 and Wii versions of the game to the Nintendo DS would be tricky. This was an essential step in making the game, and, with all of production on board, we began the long, grueling process of trial and error to make this happen.

The planners suggested fewer characters with more depth, the designers worked to create just the right amount of polygons for the characters and environments, and the programmers worked furiously until the very end to come up with a way to show several things at once on the screen.

At first we tasked the designers to create characters and enemies without a limit on polygon count. This allowed them creative freedom during the design phase. However, once we got to implementation, we were stuck with some obstacles.

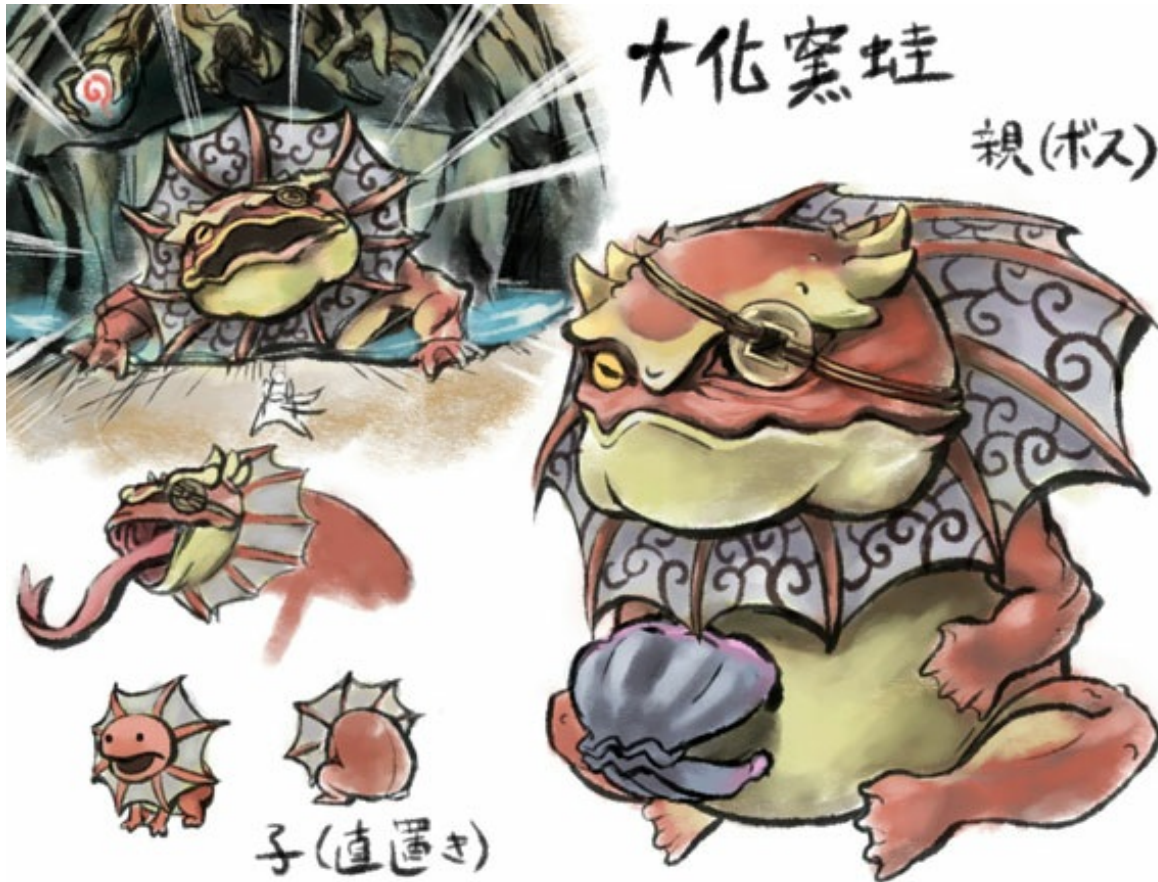
First, our team had such an abundance of strong, creative ideas for the adventures of loveable Chibiterasu that we couldn't possibly fit them all into the game... it would have run too many hours long!

Second, we had to be realistic about our plans due to the ROM cartridge capacity. Aside from schedule management,



ROM cart limits were another source that played into the removal of the stages and enemies initially scoped for the latter half of the game.

Lastly, to optimize the processing and rendering speed of *Okamiden*'s sumi-e style graphics our programmers had to perform many clever tricks. They worked hard to divide up stages at unnoticeable intervals and maneuvered camera settings so only necessary things were displayed with proper camera settings throughout the stages. Certain animations as well as character and stage traits had to be tweaked and refined numerous times.



Though challenging, and regardless of all our struggles, it was through these hard fought efforts that the team was able to re-create the classic *Okami* art style on the Nintendo DS and everyone walked away feeling accomplished.

5. New Hardware and Competition

For the development of *Okamiden*, the main challenge was to recreate the beautiful world of *Okami* on the Nintendo DS. To do that, the team spent countless hours trying and re-trying, doing everything to increase the quality of the game. Unfortunately, this pushed back the production schedule for the Japanese version of the game. At the same time, we were able to maintain the quality of the localized versions and worked efficiently to get the basic game done ahead of schedule.

Just when we were about to finalize the ROM, news about the Nintendo 3DS and the new *Pokémon* game came out. Even though the news of the Nintendo 3DS was a bit earlier than we had expected, we decided that releasing the pan-Western versions of the game after *Pokémon* and before Nintendo's 3DS would be our best bet.

Conclusion: Draw Color into the World

From a hopeful glimmer in fans' minds to the early prototype whipped up by a tiny and passionate group at Capcom Japan as a side project, the potential of *Okamiden* wasn't understood until gamers and press interacted with the game at events like Tokyo Game Show, E3, GamesCom, San Diego Comic Con.

Okamiden, the spiritual successor of *Okami*, has become a game that resonates with impact and lives up to (most of) the fans' lofty expectations.

It's truly remarkable to be able to make a morally impactful yet fun game whose main verb isn't "shoot!" We love seeing how people respond to its clever scenarios, its themes of friendship, responsibility, and the bond between parent and child and, of course, how people connect with its adorable characters.

We'd like to thank all the development, art, audio, programming and production teams, external and internal, that worked so closely and passionately to make *Okamiden* a beautiful game and provide a return to the magical, mythical world of *Okami* for our loyal fans and respected colleagues.



Data Box



Director Kuniomi Matsushita and producer Motohideo Eshiro

Developer: Capcom

Publisher: Capcom

Release Date: 9.30.2010 (JP), 3.15.2011 (US), 3.18.2011 (EU)

Platforms: Nintendo DS

Number of Developers: 59

- Director - 1
- Planner - 6
- Scenario - 1

- Programmer - 21
- Design - 1
- Model - 1
- Environment - 6
- Motion - 3
- Effect - 1
- ID - 2
- Event - 9
- BGM - 2
- SE - 3
- Product Management - 2

Length of Development: 23 Months

Total Number of Files: 415,502 Files

Total Size of Files: 45.3GB

Software: Code Warrior, Maya, others.

Number of Times the Word "Kawaii" Used During Development: A Million Times!

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