

Metamorphosing beast center-stage in Sony game

November 4 2013, by Yuri Kageyama



In this Wednesday, Oct. 23, 2013 photo, Takehito Tsuchiya, artist for Sony Computer Entertainment, speaks about Knack, which was created to be the perfect beast to show off the spectacularly vamped up visual powers of the PlayStation 4 game console, at the SCE office in Tokyo. When Knack runs into serious trouble, the parts collapse in a dramatic pseudo-death, scattering everywhere. It's "Game Over." Tsuchiya who had to sketch all the thousands of parts, including designs that were turned down, calls the birth of Knack so painful it's practically "a miracle." (AP Photo/Shizuo Kambayashi)

Knack was created to be the perfect beast to show off the spectacularly vamped up visual powers of the PlayStation 4 game console. The hero of the game, which is also called "Knack," is made up of 5,000 parts that cluster together and hang in the air to shape its ever-metamorphosing form.

Each part—a metallic gold cube here, a rolling eyeball there, brown triangular fur everywhere—moves distinctly, rattling on roads, bursting into fiery explosions, changing textures and colors.

"Knack" was designed by the special game studio of Tokyo-based Sony Corp., the electronics and entertainment company that also makes Bravia TVs and "Spider-Man" movies.

It's the first time a game from Sony's Japan Studio is part of the launch lineup of a PlayStation console. The PS4 goes on sale Nov. 15 in the U.S. for \$399, and Nov. 29 in Europe for 399 euros. It won't sell in Japan until February. But unlike other regions, "Knack" will be bundled with the machine's 39,980 yen (\$400) price tag here.

Usually, video games start out with a story idea. Designers then come up with the characters to fit the scenario.

What's unique about "Knack" is that, instead, it all started with the main character. The story-line, which centers on the journey of a young boy and a scientist intent on saving the world from an invasion of evil goblins, came later. Knack is their assistant.

The developers brain-stormed for more than a year on the best character to utilize the graphic prowess of the PlayStation 4. Other ideas were considered, such as a character composed entirely of dots or one made of sand. The team finally settled on the idea of multiple parts, called "relics" in the game, a reference to archaeological finds.



This image released by Sony Computer Entertainment shows a scene from Knack, which was created to be the perfect beast to show off the spectacularly vamped up visual powers of the PlayStation 4 game console. The hero of the game, also called "Knack," shown at right, is made up of 5,000 parts that cluster together and hang in the air to shape its ever-metamorphosing form. (AP Photo/Sony Computer Entertainment)

Mark Cerny, an American and creative director of "Knack," said such a character was chosen because marketing studies showed it would likely have international appeal than one with a specific human look.

"It wouldn't be American. It wouldn't be Japanese. But the problem we ran into is that it is very, very hard to make a character like that," he said in a telephone interview. "The result was a very amorphous character, sort of a moving blob."



This image released by Sony Computer Entertainment shows a scene from Knack, which was created to be the perfect beast to show off the spectacularly vamped up visual powers of the PlayStation 4 game console. The hero of the game, also called "Knack," shown in this image, is made up of 5,000 parts that cluster together and hang in the air to shape its ever-metamorphosing form. (AP Photo/Sony Computer Entertainment)

Cerny, the creator of "Crash Bandicoot," was involved in the hardware development of the PlayStation 4 as its "lead architect" to ensure that what he calls the "supercharged" console would be easier to use for game developers.

Still, coming up with the right Knack was a struggle.

Drawing after drawing, creatures with lots of parts stuck to their bodies looked too creepy to be the star of the trademark game for the PlayStation 4.

Knack comes in four sizes: small, which has 60 parts; medium,

composed of 300 parts; large with 1,200 parts and extra-large. The small cute Knack sucks up the pieces to grow bigger.



In this Wednesday, Oct. 23, 2013 photo, Takehito Tsuchiya, left, artist for Sony Computer Entertainment, and SCE Japan Studio Senior Producer Yusuke Watanabe speak each other as they watch Knack, which was created to be the perfect beast to show off the spectacularly vamped up visual powers of the PlayStation 4 game console, on a monitor screen at the SCE office in Tokyo. When Knack runs into serious trouble, the parts collapse in a dramatic pseudo-death, scattering everywhere. It's "Game Over." Tsuchiya who had to sketch all the thousands of parts, including designs that were turned down, calls the birth of Knack so painful it's practically "a miracle." (AP Photo/Shizuo Kambayashi)

The biggest Knack has 5,000 parts, all wobbling in the air to define its fierce robotic shape, and so big it can easily lift a car on its back or knock out evil goblins with a swoop. Because of all the moving parts, Knack's arm seems to stretch when he takes a punch.

The point of the game is to collect parts for Knack from treasure chests, making him grow bigger and bigger. At the same time, the parts are also changing, transforming the creature. Sometimes the relics are rubies. At other times, they are icicles, meaning Knack might melt in the sun. Most of the time, they look like wood chips or cube-shaped scraps.

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"Knack" marks a departure for Sony games' image, more famous for battle and adult action genres.

Designers experimented with an over-sized remote controller to test how the buttons felt for tiny hands. "Knack" targets anyone from 7 to 70, according to Sony. The game can be played in easy or difficult mode, or a combination, allowing parents to play together with kids.

"That was what made 'Knack' so appealing. It can be played by pretty much anyone on the easy setting," said Brian Ashcraft, senior contributing editor for New York-based Kotaku blog specializing in games.

But Yusuke Watanabe, senior producer at the Japan Studio of Sony Computer Entertainment, the company's [game](#) unit, acknowledged one disadvantage for a character with thousands of parts.

"It's going to be so hard making a mascot figure," he said with a laugh.

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