Power Profiles

DATE OF BIRTH
July 7, 19XX

BIRTHPLACE
Shizuoka, Japan

POSITION
Designer, Studio
Saizensen Ltd., Game
Division

BEST KNOWN FOR
Designing characters
for (and cofounding) Treasure; being
secretive

FAVORITE FOOD
Stir-fried vegetables
and meat

CURRENT PROJECT
Code of Princess

Tetsuhiko "Han" Kikuchi

I f you're a hardcore gamer, you're undoubtedly familiar with Japanese developer Treasure. Over the last two decades, the company has been responsible for beloved titles such as Gunstar Heroes, Guardian Heroes, Mischief Makers, and Sin & Punishment. Though he left the company in 2007, Treasure cofounder Tetsuhiko "Han" Kikuchi played a major part in forging the developer's trademark style; we recently caught up with him to learn more about his role on one of gaming's most respected teams.

NINTENDO POWER
How did you get into the video game business?
TETSUHIKO KIKUCHI
I've been in love with drawing and games since I was a child. Before I joined the gaming industry, I worked in a video game arcade, and after that, as an illustrator for a gaming magazine.

What types of games did you work on before you helped found Treasure?
For a short while, I worked in [Konami's] arcade-game production group.

As a character designer, what was important to you for making good character designs?
The most important things to consider in visual design, to me, are the silhouette, which technique to use, and that the design is favorably received by the player.

Are there any particular character designs that you've made that stand out to you as favorites?
The side characters in Gunstar Heroes and Guardian Heroes are my favorites.

It seems like Treasure was a pretty tight-knit group. What was it like to work there?
They were a lot of fun to work with. Everyone at that company loves video games.

Why do you go by the nickname Han?
It comes from arcade-game name-entry screens, which usually allow only three letters. I picked the name...partly because it's the reading for my favorite kanji, which means "manly man."

What inspired the creation of the original Guardian Heroes?
I was influenced by Aliens vs. Predator (a Capcom arcade title) and Mad Stalker for the X68000 computer. I was in love with pen-and-paper RPGs back then, and I used the characters in my game as the main characters for Guardian Heroes.

What was the genesis of Guardian Heroes's three-plane gameplay?
It might have been Fatal Fury's line system. I was also thinking about the way 2D action platformers use height to evade enemy attacks, and wanted to do something along those lines, but using depth.

Why did you leave Treasure?
For personal reasons. I still respect Treasure and it was an honor to be part of them.

What brought you back to the hack-and-slash genre with Code of Princess?
Other people at the company suddenly felt like making this kind of game, and the idea caught on, so more people got excited and fueled Code of Princess's production.

What do you hope players notice when it comes to the enemy designs and character movement in Code of Princess?
I would be honored if the players enjoy the comical, detailed, exaggerated animations for my characters.

Are there things you

wished you could have achieved with Guardian Heroes that you were finally able to realize with Code of Princess?
We didn't have co-op and versus play over the Internet back then, so I'm very happy to see it realized in Code of Princess.

What are your thoughts on the state of game development and the gaming market in Japan?
This doesn't just apply to Japanese developers, but I'm always impressed by my fellow game creators—all over the world—who struggle through difficult conditions to realize their dreams.

How have things changed in the gaming industry since you started?
I believe both the creators and players have become more organized and strategic. The prevalence of the Internet has also been a big change.

What aspect of creating a video game do you enjoy the most?
My greatest joy is in planning the basic rules of the game, and then seeing them realized. Also, this may sound simple, but I enjoy animating characters.

When you're stumped by a particularly dif-

ficult problem while creating a game, what's your process for working through it?
Set a goal which you can't yield from or compromise on, get there, and then go back to deal with side problems that come up along the way. That's my ideal way of handling tough situations.

What other games or game creators do you most admire or respect, and why?
I respect all the creators, whether they're friends of mine or not, who are in it for the joy of gaming and fun for the players. Regardless of genre, I believe you can see the love in games made by people like that.

Whose works in other forms of media, such as film or literature, do you most admire or enjoy?
I greatly respect anything in any entertainment medium that respects the audience.

What is your favorite hobby or pastime?
My current—and biggest—hobby is taking care of my two-year-old son.

If you could have one superpower, what would it be?
I'd like the ability to read the mind of anything I interact with. Not just humans, either—anything.

GAMEOGRAPHY

Action and shooting games seem to be Kikuchi's fortes—he's contributed to some of the best.

BUCKY O'HARE
1992, ARCADE
ENEMY CHARACTER DESIGNER

GUNSTAR HEROES
1993, SEGA GENESIS
CHARACTER CREATOR

GUARDIAN HEROES
1996, SEGA SATURN
CHARACTER DESIGN, ACTION DIRECTOR, CREATION DIRECTOR

CODE OF PRINCESS
2012, NINTENDO 3DS
ORIGINAL PLANNING, ENEMY CHARACTER DESIGN, MOTION DIRECTOR