



FROM JAPAN TO THE WORLD

First New Product in 12 Years Taking on New Challenge with ZOIDS WILD

Dinosaur and animal motif mechanical organism ZOIDS were born as motorized kit toys. The first phase was in the 1980s when kids were crazy about ZOIDS, the second phase was in 1999 when ZOIDS became a hit with its popular television animation and now a new beginning in June 2018 with the launch of ZOIDS WILD. How will ZOIDS, which built a market with more than 44 million cumulative units shipped and cumulative sales of over ¥83.0 billion, forge a new era? Mitsutoshi Tokuyama and Teruo Nikaido, in charge of ZOIDS launch and Toshio Hirai and Shu Katayama, core members of ZOIDS WILD development, discuss ZOIDS WILD.

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An Internal Contest Led to the Creation of ZOIDS

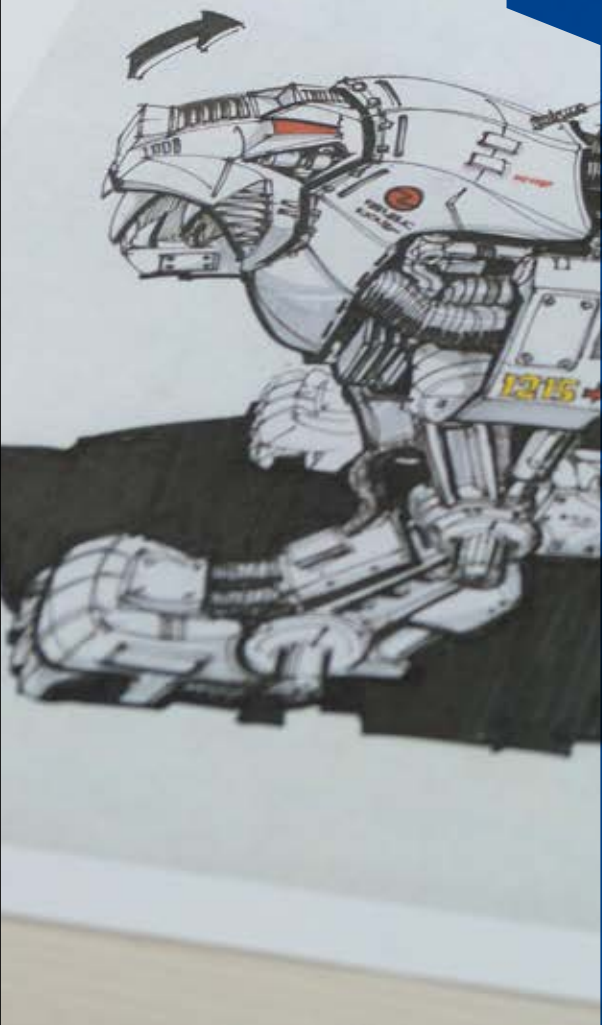
—First, what led to the creation of ZOIDS?

Tokuyama: Originally, before ZOIDS there was a toy called MECHABONICA. This was a dinosaur-shaped robot that moved using micro springs, which was really also a model for ZOIDS. I took charge of marketing for this product in the first year I joined TOMY, and initially, it did not sell well. However, I felt that the fact that it could be assembled and disassembled without glue, and that it moved when assembled, meant it had potential. I flashed on the idea of trying to apply an easily understandable “good and evil” worldview to MECHABONICA.

Nikaïdo: Mr. Tokuyama submitted that idea to an internal contest and ended up winning. That led to the launch of a project team in 1982 and I was appointed the team leader.

Tokuyama: The project team actually only consisted of three people (laughs). First, the team engaged in repeated discussions to create a friend versus enemy story in which there was a conflict between a “Republic” that coexisted with the ZOIDS and an “Empire” that forcibly tamed them to use as tools. TOMY launched this product before its merger with Takara. At that time, although TOMY was insistent on a high degree of perfection in the physical aspects of its products, its approach to the conceptual aspects such as the creation of a world for the toy was weak. Thus, ZOIDS were trailblazers in terms of being a toy with a world created around it.

Nikaïdo: GOJULAS, which was responsible for starting the fad, arrived in 1983. The year after that, RED HORN of the antagonist Imperial Army became the enemy of GOJULAS, setting the stage for the



friend versus foe conflict in the market. It was around that time that children became captivated with these toys.

—**What do you think were the factors that made these toys a hit?**

Tokuyama: I think it was probably because dinosaurs are universally popular with children. They are shown in picture books, and you can see their bones up close at museums. Although dinosaurs existed in the past, there is still much we do not know about them which lends a sense of adventure. I think they are rite of passage for nearly every child.

Hirai: Even now, there are still dinosaur-themed special television programs.

Tokuyama: We intuitively create dinosaur picture books and evolution charts based on these dinosaurs.

—**That was also when the Nintendo Entertainment System was released. Specifically, how did you promote ZOIDS?**

Nikaïdo: Salespeople went to toy stores throughout Japan and set up displays of ZOIDS already assembled and movable. Children who had only played video games discovered the fun of being able to assemble and move the toys on their own. I suppose that, in the children's eyes, ZOIDS appeared fresh and new. Even amid the slumping sales of toys in general, ZOIDS maintained solid sales that actually grew stronger.

—**What did you struggle with?**

Nikaïdo: ZOIDS are dinosaurs, animals and insects and there are certain types in each category that children tend to like.

Tokuyama: In the dinosaur category they like the Tyrannosaurus Rex and in the insect category, they like beetles.

Nikaïdo: If we use all their favorites in the first year, there will be nothing left to interest them from the second year forward. Thus, when we were planning for the third year, we had a tough time trying to figure out in what year we should release the coolest character, which made creating a roadmap a challenge. We really struggled from the fourth year in particular, wondering if that was the year a certain ZOID should



play the leading role. We were able to overcome this with a solid story and setting.

Tokuyama: If we had to do all that today, we would have a wider world than just toys to consider. For example, we could collaborate with animation, video games and social media. There was no ZOIDS animation in the initial phase, but I am confident that the world we created at that time could have stood up against other animation programs.

In the second phase, the ZOIDS we developed around animation were a hit. By the way, in my case, about the time the first phase was approaching its end, I left TOMY and jumped into the world of animation, and ultimately wound up creating concept art and image boards.

Nikaïdo: After that, you were fated to return and had the chance to develop content as a TOMY employee.

—**Sounds like you can't get away from ZOIDS anymore (laughs).**

Tokuyama: Right, I've come back to the beginning (laughs). Now I am involved in concept design for ZOIDS WILD. In any case, as ZOIDS require much more time than regular toys, including mold production, other companies absolutely won't do it—they can't do it. This is because of the 35 years of know-how TOMY has built up.

One Product Provides Two Types of Excitement

—**Mr. Hirai and Mr. Katayama, you are in charge of the third phase of ZOIDS WILD. Mr. Tokuyama and Mr. Nikaïdo, what are you particularly focused on in carrying on the vision of your predecessors?**

Hirai: I am thinking about how ZOIDS will evolve over the next three to five years to organize the project. And, it is important to utilize the world of ZOIDS they

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have built up to now while focusing on how we can incorporate ideas that match contemporary trends.

Tokuyama: On that note, my sense is that they will blow a breath of fresh air into ZOIDS WILD as only young people can. For example, long ago we used runner kits that required wire cutters to clip parts out, but with ZOIDS WILD, for the first time the parts will be provided loose in an “excavation bag” and an assembly manual called a “restoration book” will be provided for children to follow as they “restore” the ZOIDS. This is similar to the worldview that ZOIDS are excavated from inside the ground and restored, which is true to the spirit of ZOIDS. This maintains the origin story.

Katayama: We will utilize this worldview while going further into detail.

Hirai: Speaking from the perspective of development, we wanted to avoid making them too advanced. Yet, we thought it necessary to give their eyes a flashy appearance. The older ZOIDS pursued reality in movement, but do children today prefer detailed realism, or should we include a surprising gimmick? The development team members had numerous discussions about this.

Katayama: The result was the creation of the WILD BLAST killer techniques. We did monitor tests involving many children who assembled the ZOIDS, and the reaction was incredibly positive. When the ZOIDS were put together and started moving, the kids exclaimed “Wow!” in excitement, then when they saw the WILD BLAST they were once again surprised. In this day and age when we are surrounded with so many things and information, it is not at all easy to make children excited two times with one toy.





—Is there anything else you think is important?

Tokuyama: It is important that even mechanical organisms have the pulse of life in them. As the subject is dinosaurs, they must not depart from this theme and be real enough to allow children to play with imagination.

Katayama: This is what is “cool” from a designer’s perspective. A perfect 100 points are not enough. We are always aiming for 120 points. What is cool will change depending on age, the environment one is raised in and the prevailing times, so no one knows what the right answer is. But it is because we do not know that designers feel this work is worth doing. That is also what makes this work so challenging (laughs).

Hirai: This time, as a means of expanding on that coolness, we are also taking on a new challenge: the development of a dedicated photo and video shooting app. This app adds lightning, flames and other special effects to images and video shot using it. This is another idea born from discussions about what we can do to convey the appeal of ZOIDS in a cool and easily understandable way.

Katayama: In addition to these camera functions, we also plan to add other functions going forward, including battle games and videos showing how to assemble the ZOIDS.

Developing Content Strategies from Every Angle

—That is also something made possible by today’s technologies, right?

Hirai: ZOIDS are positioned as the opposite of our competition-style toy BEYBLADE BURST. In other words, they are enjoyed by immersing themselves in the action. We think maximizing this aspect will lead to making children happy.

—What is the outlook for ZOIDS going forward?

Hirai: As we said when talking about the looking ahead 3-5 years, we think ZOIDS will become established as a global brand. Ultimately, we want it to become a global hit enabling us to develop new products every year. I think this is incredibly difficult, but this is what we keep in mind as we work toward that goal every day.

Katayama: To that end, what first needs to be done is to establish this product in Japan.

Hirai: Right now, we are working under the keywords “ZOIDS everywhere children look,” and to accomplish this, we are developing content strategies from every angle through a mixture of media. Some of these include an animation program broadcast on terrestrial television through the 28 networks affiliated with MBS/TBS, as well as comics and articles appearing in CoroCoro Comic, a magazine for children published by Shogakukan Inc. In addition, we are promoting other means of embodying the ZOIDS worldview, including software for Nintendo Switch and arcade game cabinets. In terms of merchandise, we are considering a variety of options, from T-shirts to food products.

Nikaido: Currently we are researching overseas markets, and there are several entities outside Japan who have shown interest in getting involved. I want everyone to look forward to these future developments.

Hirai: Today’s children are being born and raised amid a variety of things and information. ZOIDS arouse the power of imagination while being played with using the hands, enabling children to immerse themselves for a time in their own world. And, for children, toys are something regarded as sacred. For this reason, we ourselves must never forget to have fun. I want to continue creating to make all children around the world exclaim “ZOIDS are cool!”