

# F FEATURE

# Super *VS* Sango FIGHTER

by Brandon Cobb, president of Super Fighter Team

## Chinese war ends in America.

Growing up during the fighting game craze of the early 1990s, it was only a matter of time before I too became swept up in it. My options seemed limited because I didn't own a home game console and was unable to pay 50 cents at the arcade for a two-minute match of Street Fighter II. All we had at home was a 386SX PC running at 33Mhz: a machine which, by most accounts, wasn't powerful enough to tackle an action-packed game with detailed arcade graphics. Luckily, my fighting game needs were filled by an unexpected source.

On the other side of the world, a Taiwanese company named C&E Inc. had just released Super Fighter, a game heavily inspired by Street Fighter II. Passed along dial-up BBS networks, Super Fighter came all the way to Santee, California, my hometown.



■Brandon Cobb with the two game boxes

“I’ll never forget it: the huge, detailed characters; the crisp sound and vocal effects, and the beautiful backgrounds.”

I’ll never forget it: the huge, detailed characters; the crisp sound and vocal effects, and the beautiful backgrounds. Everything about the game was fresh and wonderful - not chopped up or downsampled like the console games my friends were playing. It was an amazing experience.

Months later, I discovered yet another gem. Panda Entertainment, also from Taiwan, had produced a game called San Guo Zhi, more popularly distributed as Sango Fighter. The game was unlike any other title in the genre. For one, its plot revolved around 12 legendary generals drawn from ancient Chinese history, fighting to unite a nation torn apart by civil war. It was also one of the first fighting games to include “super attacks”, which could be performed



In the final years of the Eastern Han Dynasty,

after filling an energy meter at the bottom of the screen. With more graphics and character voices than Super Fighter, as well as a few additional features, Sango Fighter was “the next big thing” for me. I had countless hours of fun.

That could have been the end of the story, but these two games would do far more than keep me entertained as a child. Once I had mastered them, my next quest was to find the people who created them - just to say thanks.

Everyone I encountered, even people in Taiwan, told me I would never succeed, but I soldiered on. I have never been big on rumor, and no one I spoke with could prove their claims about the death or existence of C&E. I wouldn't quit until I reached the finish line, which for me was locating the company's president and telling him how much I loved his game.

That moment came in 2001, when a former C&E employee decided to search the Internet for his name. He came across my

modest Super Fighter website, which had recently been translated into Chinese by Gilbert Cheung, a friend and fellow Super Fighter supporter.

This man, Joseph Chang, had designed



■Sango Fighter

the game's large characters that had so impressed me. Finding my website moved him to tears, and in his first e-mail he offered to help me locate other members of the design team. I later learned from Joseph that he met his wife during their tenure at C&E. He said all they did was argue at first, but eventually fell in love.

Jon Cheng, Super Fighter's programmer, was the next man to whom Joseph introduced me. Jon was delighted to hear of my interest in his game and had a lot to say. He was gracious in answering all of my questions and wished me luck in tracking down his former boss.

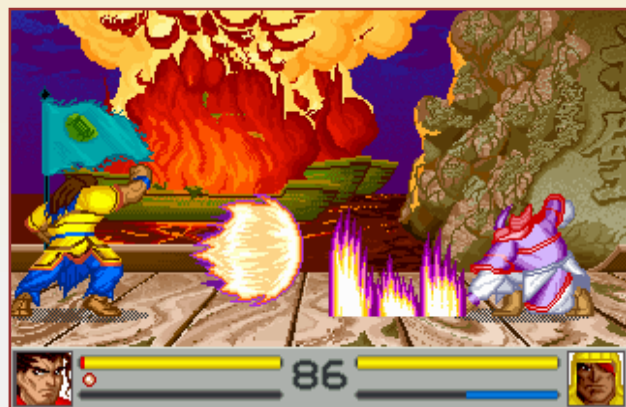


Several months later I finally found C&E's President John Kuo. Contrary to popular belief, his company had survived the tough transition of DOS to Windows and 16-bit to 32-bit game consoles, a feat which few Taiwanese companies had managed. Kuo was professional and businesslike, and his short responses were to the point. Even so, I could sense he was impressed by my efforts to share Super Fighter with the world, something solidified when he allowed me to rename my website the "Official Super Fighter Website."

Having axed its entertainment software division, C&E was unable to promote the game or produce new versions: I was more than happy to take up the task. My childhood idol handed me the rights to Super Fighter at no cost, and all because I had taken the time to find him and say thanks. This friendly partnership became the basis of the small company I founded in 2004. Super Fighter Team, named after the game that had started it all, was formed around the dream that great new titles could be created and released for computers and classic game systems.



■Super Fighter PC box cover



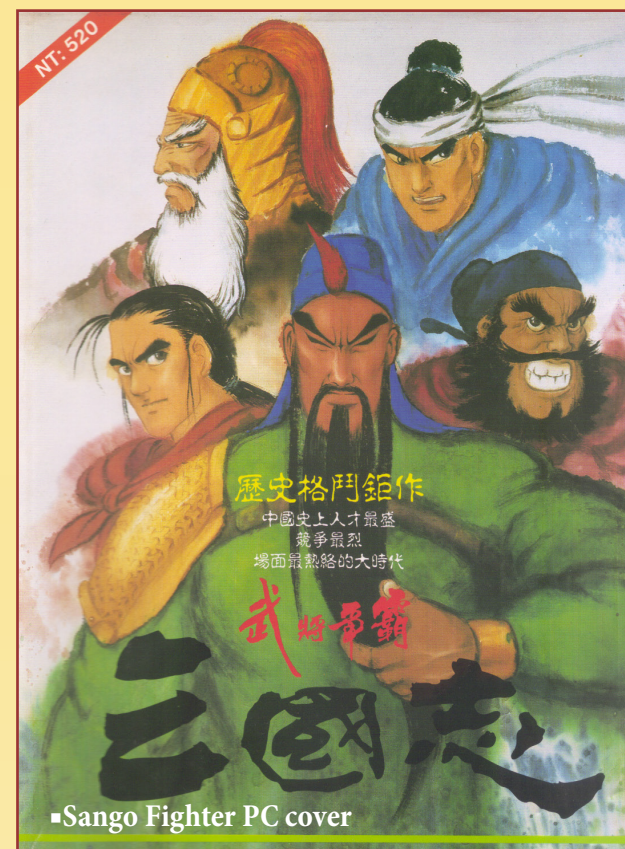
Even with all of the attention Super Fighter was getting, I never forgot about Sango Fighter. As it turned out, both games were created by some of the same people: Joseph Chang designed them and Jon Cheng handled the programming - for two different companies. This came as no surprise, as both games felt very similar; both used almost identical data storage methods and had nearly identical configuration programs.

No, the shocker was Sango Fighter's torrid history, which was explained to me by former Panda employees and confirmed by Kuo. It was a story which, after hearing it, refined and refocused my efforts to support classic gaming.

It started simply enough: after finishing work on Super Fighter, Jon Cheng decided to leave C&E, mostly for personal reasons. His start with the then-fledgling Panda Entertainment, as explained to me in his own words, came about as follows: "A Panda shareholder knew me through a colleague. When he heard that I had decided to leave C&E, he strongly encouraged me to join Panda. After discussing the matter with

a few colleagues, we started a studio and worked by contract for Panda. Our first project was Sango Fighter. At this time there were only four members in our studio: one programmer, one character designer and two artists. Four months later, we formally joined Panda and became shareholders."

Armed with customer feedback for Super Fighter, and recalling his own personal

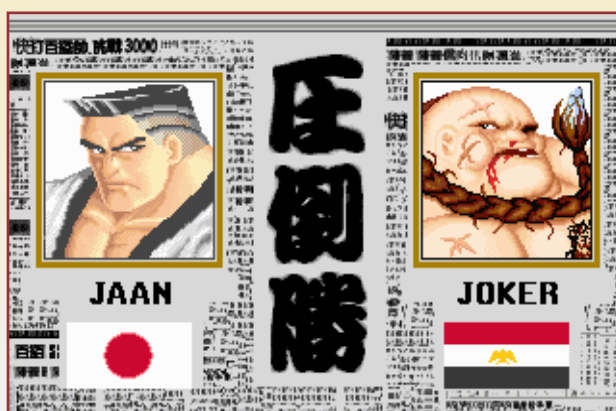


■Sango Fighter PC cover

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■Sango Fighter



■Super Fighter

◀Sango Fighter

experiences with the game, Jon became more focused and vowed to create a superior product. "I didn't have a debugger for Super Fighter, since I'd used all the system memory to store the game data. The only debugger was my eyes. I spent nearly four months rewriting the Super Fighter engine with the help of Soft-ICE, which helped to shorten my debugging time. The resulting game, Sango Fighter, was released by Panda Entertainment and quickly became one of the most successful action games on the Taiwanese market."

This success was short-lived, as the generals would become embroiled in a legal war. "C&E sued Panda, claiming that some of Sango Fighter's music and sound playback code was identical to the code used in Super Fighter. Since the code in question was derived from a book, I wasn't worried about C&E's claim. However, for some reason Panda decided to accommodate C&E by ceasing all sales of Sango Fighter within Taiwan. It seems Panda's general manager wished for us to concentrate on our next game with a clear head, without having to worry about a lengthy legal battle," Jon said.

The story got worse from there. While Sango Fighter did indeed make it to other markets including the USA, Panda Enter-

"Sango Fighter, was released by Panda Entertainment and quickly became one of the most successful action games on the Taiwanese market."



-tainment and its employees never saw a dime from these foreign sales, something Jon remembers clearly. “It’s a long story, but a company called Accend pirated Sango Fighter and sold it in the USA. They even used Sango Fighter to cheat Apogee, the largest shareware company in the USA, out of their 3D game engine. To me, this deception was heartbreaking,” he said.

**T**hough official ports of the game did appear for other machines such as the Japanese PC-98 computer and Taiwan’s own Super Acan game console, they were small accomplishments compared to what could have been. The Acan was a failure, losing its producer UMC over \$6.5 million. The version of Sango Fighter produced for the Acan was highly inferior to the PC original, which Jon blamed on a poor development kit. “I didn’t spend much time with the Acan, but we had one employee who was dedicated to working with it. Its development kit was very difficult to use, so it was hard to create Acan games.”



■Strip Fighter II PC Engine manual cover

Before C&E’s lawsuit, South Korean companies had shown interest in localizations of Sango Fighter, and one small outfit even developed an incarnation of it for the Samsung Aladdin Boy, Korea’s version of the Sega Master System. Hearing about the illegal recreation of the game, Cheng was both surprised and saddened, saying, “Now you see how deeply it hurt Panda to accommodate C&E. When we released Sango Fighter, we received feedback from people all over the world, but the legal accommodation killed our sales plans. We lost many chances to promote this game on the world market.”

Panda eyed the Sega Genesis as an ideal platform for the popular fighting game, but the lawsuit cut these plans short. Panda lost its chance to be a worldwide cross-console name. Though a vastly improved, rewritten from the ground up sequel was released for the PC in 1995, by then it was far too late. “Sometimes, chances don’t wait for you.

Sango Fighter 2 never got the same attention as the original,” Jon said.

**W**hile Super Fighter had similar shortcomings, such as its official USA release being cancelled after widespread piracy of the Chinese original, C&E was able to market its engine to other companies. One example was the smut-peddling Japanese outfit Hacker International, which produced and sold Strip Fighter II for NEC’s PC Engine. Some of C&E’s source code referenced the Hacker partnership, something I later confirmed in an e-mail exchange with C&E President John Kuo.

“When we released Sango Fighter, we received feedback from people all over the world, but the legal accommodation killed our sales plans.”



■Strip Fighter II for PC Engine

I couldn’t feel too bad for C&E - Panda Entertainment practically had its golden goose snatched from its arms. I was even more inspired to obtain the rights to Sango Fighter next and give it a second chance to be presented to and enjoyed by people all over the world. That task would be plagued with difficulties and would take five years to accomplish.

When Panda Entertainment went out of business in 1996, it sold its intellectual properties to another Taiwanese company. Trouble was, no one from Panda could remember that company’s name or anything about it! The search seemed hopeless until Jeff Huang, Panda’s former general manager, sent me an e-mail regarding the situation. “The company was called Art 9 Entertainment. Its general manager arranged the deal with me, but I don’t remember his name.



■Sango Fighter for Sega Master System

Since I’m on the Chinese mainland most of the time, I’m unable to locate the related documents or information,” he said. I was excited: the company name was a starting point, and as long as I had that I was certain I could track down the owner.

After some digging I found a man in Taiwan named Owen, who listed Art 9 Entertainment on his resumé. I contacted him, introduced myself and my intent, and proceeded to ask him if he remembered the name of his former boss at Art 9. “Sure. His name is Andrew Li,” he said. Running the name past Jeff Huang, I got a confirmation: he was the one I needed to talk to.

Finding Li was another challenge altogether. At the time he was working for a large education company in China whose offices spanned a range of the country. No one knew for sure which office he worked at, and the trail ran cold. While several people helping me with the search shrugged and gave up, one of my programmers at Super Fighter Team kept trying. Finally, he presented me with the personal cell phone number of Li.



■Sango Fighter Sega Master System box cover



■The eternal question...

Li, though busy, was cordial over the phone. He was surprised at my interest to acquire the rights to Panda’s games, and he said he left the video game business years ago. Even so, he still owned the rights to the games, and after several weeks of negotiation we reached an agreement. As a result, on February 24, 2009, the legal rights and ownership to half of Panda Entertainment’s back catalog, including Sango Fighter and its sequel, were officially acquired by Super Fighter Team. [Read the epilogue on the next page](#)



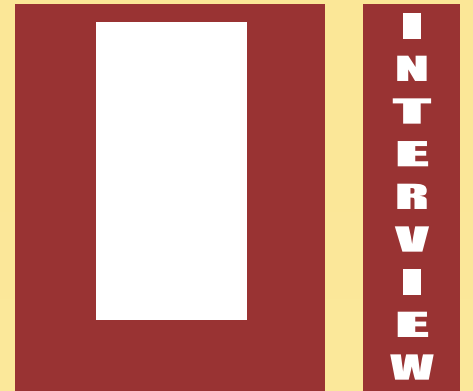
# Interview with Brandon Cobb

president of Super Fighter Team



by Dumitru Condrea (TotalAnarchy)

We gather around the campfire for a Q&A with Brandon Cobb, president of Super Fighter Team - the guys behind the resurrection and localization of various classic console and PC games from the Asian market like Beggar Prince, Legend of Wukong and the fighting games mentioned in the first article of the magazine. The interview was taken in mid-2010, and as such some information is outdated.



## Super *VS* Sango FIGHTER

### Epilogue

Li personally met with Jon Cheng to pick up the source code before it was delivered to me. I personally informed Joseph Chang, who said, "Amazing! You did a wonderful job."

I was beside myself with joy. My favorite games were finally united under the same company banner, opening up huge potential for both. Not in my wildest dreams could I have ever expected to accomplish such a feat.

Two Taiwanese fighting games, each with its own remarkable story, may not have changed the world when they were initially released, but they certainly changed my life. The fighting game craze may have perished in favor of other gaming fads, but it has never left my heart. ♦♦♦



1. We already know about the history behind Super Fighter Team, its ties with your gaming past and love for two fighting classics, Sango Fighter and Super Fighter. But what are the company's goals? What determined you to create it and what are you trying to accomplish in a video game industry that's more focused on innovation?

Everyone has a gaming preference. My preference happens to be 2D games with pixel graphics, charming chip tune soundtracks and simple, fun gameplay. At the advent of the 32-bit machines, the train stopped for me to get off. There are lots of people around the world who share my gaming preference, but there wasn't any new, commercial-quality software being made for us to all enjoy. Vowing to change that, I founded Super Fighter Team.

Where innovation is concerned, we have

changed the whole approach to producing new games for classic systems. We're the only company doing this sort of work that's managed to enchant the mainstream media, raising awareness about the classic gaming movement in a way never before achieved. The answer to how is in the quality level we adhere to with each release: I'm a very selective gamer, demanding perfection in the games I buy. I apply this same policy to our products: if they aren't perfect, they don't ship.

2. How is the prospect of releasing new games for old console systems? The original manufacturers no longer support, nor produce them; furthermore we're seeing how lately publishers rerelease their games through online services such as WiiWare, PSN, XBL and even PC digital distribution stores. A recent example is SEGA's Mega Drive Classics Pack launched on Steam and Gomersgate. Won't gamers prefer to stick with their current-gen platforms even when they need their retro fix, rather than dig up their dusty old Genesis from the basement?

For those who simply want a "retro fix," playing a classic game on modern hardware may indeed be enough. We exist, however, to serve those who live retro: people who don't have to "dig out" their Genesis because it's already plugged in and connected to their TV at all times. With thousands of customers around the world, we have definitely found our audience.



3. Doing a quick browse through your list of released titles we see that Super Fighter Team didn't limit themselves to only one platform. There's Beggar Prince and Legend of Wukong for Genesis and the more recent Zaku for Atari's handheld Lynx. What other consoles do you have your eyes on for further game development?

While we own rights to games for several different platforms including the NES, Super Nintendo and Turbografx-16, we've been too focused on our work for the Genesis, Lynx, mobile phone and PC to consider working any of them into viable products.

Once the backlog clears a bit, I'll make the decision as to which platform we'll expand to next.

