



## WELCOME ADVENTURERS' TO THE HISTORY AREA

**Greetings** lowly ones! to our Fighting Fantasy history area. If you ever wanted to know more about the history of Fighting Fantasy series, then this area is for you. The history page is an area of the site where we go behind the scenes of the how the Fighting Fantasy series began.

### Where did it start?



It all started in 1980 at Games Workshop's annual Games Day exhibition at the Royal Horticultural Hall in London. Penguin Books had taken a stand to promote a new book called *Playing Politics*. Steve Jackson and Ian Livingstone, the young founders of Games Workshop, met one of the Penguin editors, Geraldine Cooke. The Dungeons & Dragons craze was spreading like wildfire and they tried to persuade Geraldine to publish a book on the growing Fantasy Role-Playing (FRP) hobby. She invited them to send in a synopsis.

This was to be a sort of 'how to do it' manual; an introduction to the world of FRP games. But the pair came up with a much more interesting idea. Why not a simple solo role-playing game presented within the pages of a book? This would get the concept over much more effectively than a dull manual. They would create an individual quest in which the reader becomes the hero of his own adventure, using the mechanic of jumbled paragraphs and a simple dice-based combat system. And so, under its working title, *The Magic Quest*, the gamebook concept came into being.

When Geraldine Cooke received her synopsis of *The Magic Quest*, she didn't quite know what to make of it. Was it a book? Or a game? Was it for children? Or for adults? The manuscript

passed around Penguin editors for a year before a decision was finally made to publish *The Magic Quest*. Steve & Ian now had to turn their idea into a reality. Writing a synopsis was one thing, but a whole adventure was something entirely different. And as they also had Games Workshop to run during normal office hours, all work on the book took place in evenings and at weekends. It took the pair 6 months to write *The Magic Quest*, which by this time had a proper name. The adventure was set inside Firetop Mountain. And the final encounter was with the Warlock Zagor. Hence: *The Warlock of Firetop Mountain*.

The plot itself was split in two. Ian wrote the first half of the adventure, up to the river crossing. Steve wrote the second half, from the river onwards, devised the combat rules and the key system to prevent the reader cheating his way through. But when they finally handed in the manuscript, a very apologetic sub-editor explained that it still needed work. The writing style changed completely when you arrived at the river! The manuscript required a re-write. Word processors had yet to be invented, so that meant re-typing huge sections of text all over again.

But the second draft was fine. The next problem was who would publish it. Geraldine Cooke, who had signed the title, wanted it to be a Penguin book. Others within the organisation thought it should appear in the Penguin's children's list as a Puffin Book. Puffin won the argument and *The Warlock of Firetop Mountain* first appeared in August 1982, published by Puffin Books. Sales at first were nothing exceptional. But word began to spread around schools, colleges and also - thanks to the Games Workshop connection - around the games community. This was something new; part-book, part-game and part-puzzle. Within the first 3 months *Warlock* had been reprinted 3 times. Within the first year it was reprinted twenty times! Penguin desperately needed a sequel. So work started immediately on *The Citadel of Chaos* (Steve) and *The Forest of Doom* (Ian) — any difference in writing styles would no longer be an issue if the two authors were writing on their own. In March 1983, the 3 titles were topping *The Sunday Times* bestseller charts. The Fighting Fantasy phenomenon had arrived!

---



The success of FF inevitably brought its critics. An outspoken member of the Evangelical Alliance called them the work of Satan and demanded they be banned. Frequently asked by the media whether stories of swords, sorcery and demons were suitable for a children's publisher like Puffin, Editorial Director Liz Attenborough did a valiant job of defending the honour of FF. But for every critic there was also a FF supporter. Teachers, for example, reported how FF had been extremely successful in getting teenage boys to read — particularly those classified as 'reluctant readers'.



By now Ian and Steve had become virtual hermits. When they weren't at the Games Workshop office they were writing. They saw very little of their friends and family during this period. Steve had promised Geraldine Cooke a more advanced, series for Penguin. The first book in this Sorcery series was released in late 1983. Ian saw the emerging FF world as described in the first 3 books as needing to be developed to give it 'depth'.

Within the world of Titan, the continent of Allansia was the setting for the Jackson & Livingstone FF books. Through titles like *Deathtrap Dungeon* and *City of Thieves*, Allansia extended its own characters, history and legends, providing a unique richness to the Fighting Fantasy™ mythos. Some say imitation is the highest form of flattery. But Ian and Steve were not particularly flattered to learn that other publishers were soon planning 'me too' fantasy gamebooks. To fend off the imitators, Puffin wanted to up the publication schedule to a book a month.

With the best will in the world, there was no way the two creators of the series could keep up this level of output. New writers were introduced in what became known as the 'Presents series'. The first of these was another Steve Jackson, founder of Steve Jackson Games in Austin Texas. Very confusing! Other writers became well-known FF adventure-creators. But perhaps FF's most prolific talent was Marc Gascoigne, who wrote several adventures, *Advanced Fighting Fantasy* textbooks, novels and went on to become the series editor until Puffin finally ceased publishing. *FF 59: Curse of the Mummy* was the last title ever published in the main FF series.

Why stop on such an odd number? Truth is, the series was due to stop at *FF 50: Return to Firetop Mountain*. But when this sold well and rekindled sales of the FF back catalogue, Puffin decided to keep the new titles coming.

Eventually it ended with number 59. The much-awaited Bloodbones, scheduled to be FF 60, was never released. However this didn't prevent Amazon.com from offering the book for sale as a 'coming soon' item for months after Fighting Fantasy™ was actually out of print. The Puffin series had become a worldwide publishing phenomenon. It was licensed to 17 countries including the USA, Germany, France, Japan and Spain — even Iceland and Estonia! Total sales to date have exceeded 15 million copies.

When Puffin eventually stopped publishing in 1999, there were 59 titles in the main series, 4 Sorcery titles, Out of the Pit Monster Compendium, Titan, Fighting Fantasy the Role-Playing Games and several adventures, FF novels and a colourful 'First Adventures' series for youngsters. In total FF comprised over 70 different titles.



Many of these are long gone. But more recently Fighting Fantasy has emerged as a collectors' item on Internet auction sites. Curiously it is not the early books or first editions which attract the highest auction prices, but the titles published towards the end of the series' life with Puffin. Presumably these are grown-up fans completing the sets they never managed to collect in their youth.



Though Steve and Ian created the series, they are the first to admit it would not have been nearly so successful had it not been for the numerous writers and editors who contributed to the series. The other unsung heroes of FF were the artists. Iain McCaig, Martin McKenna, Chris Achilleos, Brian Bolland, John Blanche, Rodney Matthews, Jim Burns, Les Edwards, Ian Miller, Peter Jones (who did the original Warlock cover) and Russ Nicholson were all big names from the world of British fantasy art whose covers helped bring the series to life for its millions of fans around the world.