

The Rise and Fall of the Gamebook

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Abstract

The gamebook is an interactive book that became a huge commercial success in the eighties, with the *Fighting Fantasy* and the *Lone Wolf* series, which sold millions of copies worldwide. The interactive book has come a long way from the experimental novels by Jorge Luis Borges in the forties, to the gamebook in the eighties, when the whole idea of printed interactive books reached a creative and commercial peak.

The subsequent decline of the interest in the gamebook in the nineties coincides with the growth of the computer games industry. Since the computer games evolved rapidly, and became more and more sophisticated, while the gamebook as a printed medium no longer could compete with the rival, all gamebook series were discontinued in the nineties.

The core of this inquiry is to make a comparison between the two biggest and most commercially successful series: *Fighting Fantasy* and *Lone Wolf*. Included in the paper is also a brief history of the interactive book, as well as an analysis of the renaissance the gamebook is currently enjoying, and a look into the future of the format.

Spelboken är en interaktiv bok som blev en stor kommersiell framgång på åttiotalet, med *Fighting Fantasy* och *Ensamma Vargen* serierna, som såldes i miljontals exemplar världen över. Den interaktiva boken har kommit en lång väg från Jorge Luis Borges experimentella böcker från fyrtiotalet, till spelboken på åttiotalet, när hela idén med tryckta interaktiva böcker nådde sin kreativa och kommersiella höjdpunkt.

Det efterföljande sjunkande intresset för spelböcker på nittiotalet sammanträffar med framväxten av dataspelsindustrin. Eftersom datorspelen evolverade snabbt och blev mer och mer sofistikerade, medan spelboken som ett tryckt medium inte längre kunde tävla med rivalen, upphörde alla spelboksserier att ges ut på nittiotalet.

Kärnan i denna undersökning handlar om att göra en jämförelse mellan de två största och mest kommersiellt framgångsrika serierna: *Fighting Fantasy* och *Ensamma Vargen*. En kort historik över den interaktiva boken ingår också i uppsatsen, liksom en analys av renässansen som spelboken för närvarande åtnjuter, och en titt på formatets framtid.

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1. Introduction

1.1 What is a gamebook?

What is a gamebook? The short answer is that a gamebook is part book, part game. The long answer is that the gamebook is a subgenre of the interactive book. The reader takes on a role of a character in a fictional world, usually a fantasy world, but there are some science fiction stories out there too, as well as several other genres.

The difference between a gamebook and an interactive book is that the gamebook is a game. The gamebook consists of numbered sections; in most of these sections the reader is presented with a few choices, and then he or she proceeds to the corresponding numbered section. For example: if you are reading through paragraph 88, and are given the option to either take the right path or the left path, you either turn to paragraph 217 if you want to go right, or turn to paragraph 161 if you would rather pick the left path. In other words a gamebook, just like any other interactive book, is completely non-linear. If you try to read the paragraphs chronologically, i.e. reading 1, 2, 3, et cetera, you will not understand what is going on.

All gamebooks start with paragraph one, and then continues to branch off in different directions. Although, branching is perhaps not the best choice of words as the paths have a tendency to converge every now and then, just to branch off in different directions once more. A better word to describe the process would be intertwining, since there often are certain fixed points in the storyline where all paths come together before taking different directions again.

Even if all gamebooks start with paragraph one, it doesn't necessarily mean that a gamebook must end with the last paragraph. The gamebook series examined in this paper, *Fighting Fantasy* and *Lone Wolf*, have only one end, but some other series have multiple endings.

While the gamebook format originated from the interactive book they are most closely related to the role-playing games (RPGs), and are sometimes referred to as solitaire role-playing. The gamebooks and the role-playing games became big in the seventies and eighties, and attracted millions of young people, teenagers and college-students all over the world. The huge commercial breakthrough of the gamebooks in the eighties was primarily due to the interest of role-playing teenagers. But unlike the RPGs this trend would not last, as the

interest in gamebooks rapidly waned in the nineties. The main reason behind this is because the gamebooks, being a printed medium, were unable to renew and reinvent themselves, while the computer games, being an electronic medium, constantly evolved and became far more complex than the crude original computer games from the late seventies.

1.2 Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to examine the gamebook a bit closer, by looking into the history and origin of the gamebook, and by making a detailed comparison between the *Fighting Fantasy* series and the *Lone Wolf* series. I will also make a prognosis of the future for the gamebook, as the gamebooks are going through a small renaissance right now, as both series are being reprinted again. Through the expository thesis my aim is to make the reader a bit more familiar with the concept of the gamebook; to show why the gamebooks are so attractive to many people; and to expose the differences between *Fighting Fantasy* and *Lone Wolf*.

As for the author's personal opinion on the subject I've had a passion for the gamebook ever since I first stumbled over the *Lone Wolf* books in Swedish in the mid-eighties. I grew up with these books, and they will always have a special place in my heart, especially the first books of the *Lone Wolf* series. The *Fighting Fantasy* books are also nice, but with the exception of a couple of them I've never had quite the same interest in them as I have in the first *Lone Wolf* books. So it's quite possible that I may be slightly biased in my comparison of the two series.

Admittedly, the main reason why I love the original books so much is because of pure, unadulterated nostalgia, which I'm not ashamed to admit. But it's more to it than that. Unlike regular books I read at the time, like *The Lord of the Rings*, *A Wizard of Earthsea*, and so on, the gamebooks transported me to a different world completely. The story in a gamebook is told from a second person's point of view. You are the hero, you make all the decisions. This ingenuous way of telling a story makes it easier to be completely immersed in a story as compared to simply reading about someone else's adventures. In a regular novel you can read about someone discovering things, but in a gamebook you can make these discoveries yourself: you can turn every stone, search every corner, and travel along every path by yourself. It's a wonderful feeling to investigate a world on your own, and not through a third person's point of view.

Furthermore, it has always intrigued me that the interactive book has a near endless potential to reinvent itself, albeit perhaps not in printed form. The computer game does not

suffer from the same limitations as the gamebook, and that's why the computer game's industry keeps expanding while the interactive book is close to its end. With that said it's important to point out that the computer game by definition is interactive, and that it simply is a continuation of the gamebook in an electronic form. The primary aim of both the gamebook and the computer game has always been exploration and problem-solving; to find new ways to beat the game. That never changes.

Anyway, to sum up, the three subjects I will examine in this paper are:

1. The history of the gamebook.
2. The differences and similarities between *Fighting Fantasy* and *Lone Wolf*.
3. What the future of the gamebook may look like.

1.3 Methodology

The main focus of this paper is to examine the differences between *Fighting Fantasy* and *Lone Wolf*. For that reason I have created two categories: **game value** and **entertainment value**, to see how the two series differs in their aims. Simply put, the **game value** measures how challenging a gamebook is; in other words: how many times the game must be played in order to be solved. The **entertainment value** measures the freedom to choose alternate paths in the game, which means that the game can be replayed many times.¹ The difference is that with the **game value** new paths must be explored in order to win the game; the **entertainment value** means that other paths are being explored after the game has been won simply for the sheer joy of investigating every path of the game.

I will not quantify this **game value** versus **entertainment value** thesis because a book for book comparison would be far too extensive for a regular university paper of this size, and it would overshadow other aspects of the gamebook I want to examine. Instead I'm making a general comparison by assuming that no gamebooks of respective series deviates from the norm. This is a risk-free assumption when it comes to *Lone Wolf* since all the books are written by the same author (Joe Dever), but *Fighting Fantasy* has 20 different writers with different styles and different techniques. But as far as I can tell, all *Fighting Fantasy* books follow the idea of making the gamebook as challenging as possible, so there is little risk of deviators from the norm.

¹ For further reference on replay value, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Replay_value Retrieved on 2008-03-17.

2. The history of the gamebook

The roots of the interactive book goes back to 1941 when Argentine author Jorge Luis Borges wrote *Examen de la obra de Herbert Quain* (*An Examination of the Work of Herbert Quain*), a short story supposedly written by the fictional author Herbert Quain between 1933 and 1939.² It contains 13 chapters which is actually a three-part story containing two branch-points, with nine possible readings.³

Another experimental short story written by Borges in the same year is *El Jardín de senderos que se bifurcan* (*The Garden of Forking Paths*), which takes place in the United Kingdom during World War I.⁴ The main character Dr. Yu Tsun contemplates his ancestor's, Ts'ui Pen, work, who went into seclusion to write a novel and to construct a maze. Together with Dr. Stephen Albert, who also knows about Ts'ui Pen's novel, Yu Tsun figures out that the maze and the book are the one and same, and that the book can only be understood if it is read in the correct manner.⁵

This non-linear way of telling a story is definitely a predecessor to the gamebook. The difference is that Borges essentially leaves it up to the reader to use his or hers deductive skills to determine the correct order of reading, while a gamebook comes with instructions the reader must follow to move the story forward.⁶ The invention of the gamebook was still in the future, however; instead a long row of experimental interactive books followed in Borges footsteps.

Borges seems to have started a lasting trend. One of the earliest examples of interactive books after Borges was the *Tutor Texts* series, published between 1958 and 1972 by *Doubleday* in the United States, and reissued by various British publishers.⁷ The purpose of the series was to teach a wide variety of subjects to a mainstream audience.

Another example of interactive pioneers was the French literary group “the Oulipo”, which was active during the sixties; and they called the interactive format “tree literature”.⁸ In German *Die Abenteuer des Katers Lucky Les in fünf Geschichten* (*Lucky Les*) was published

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/An_Examination_of_the_Work_of_Herbert_Quain Retrieved on 2008-03-12.

³ http://www.gamebooks.org/show_series.php?id=1045 Retrieved on 2008-03-12.

⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Garden_of_Forking_Paths Retrieved on 2008-03-12.

⁵ http://www.gamebooks.org/show_series.php?id=1045 Retrieved on 2008-03-12.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ http://www.gamebooks.org/show_series.php?id=457 Retrieved on 2008-03-12.

⁸ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gamebooks> Retrieved on 2008-03-12.

in 1967, making it one of the first examples of an interactive book outside of literary experimentation.⁹ In the book the reader takes control of a cat by making choices and turning pages accordingly.

The Swedish book *Den mystiska påsen* (*The Mysterious Bag*) from 1970 follows the same pattern. The main character is a young boy named Lars who finds a bag full of gems. It's up to the reader to decide whether Lars shall keep the gems or go to the police with them. The target group of this book are junior school pupils.

The Tracker series, published from 1972 to 1980, may be the first interactive books to be published as a series.¹⁰ *The Tracker* series was heavily reliant on illustrations.

Then, in 1974, *Dungeons and Dragons*, the first role playing game (RPG) was published by Gary Gygax ("the father of all RPGs") in the United States, and it became an immensely popular phenomena that gave rise to dozens of RPGs, like *Traveller* (in 1977), *RuneQuest* (in 1978), et cetera. One such RPG was *Tunnels and Trolls*, which offered a simpler game-system than *Dungeons and Dragons*, and could be used for solitaire gameplay.¹¹ The first book published in the *Tunnels and Trolls* series was *Buffalo Castle* in 1976, and that makes *Buffalo Castle* the first real gamebook. However, the books required access to the RPG's rulebook; it was not possible to play the book without it.

Also published at this time was *The Adventures of You*, published in 1976-1977. The writers of this series went on to create the *Choose Your Own Adventure* in 1979, which was to become the longest running gamebook series with almost 200 titles.¹² This series became very popular in the United States, but did not receive much attention in Europe. It wasn't until *The Warlock of the Firetop Mountain* was published in Britain in 1982 that the gamebooks became a huge commercial and international success with millions of sold copies.

In the wake of the success of the *Fighting Fantasy* series a long row of other gamebook series followed. The most successful of these was the *Lone Wolf* series by Joe Dever, which started with *Flight from the Dark* in 1984.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tunnels_and_Trolls Retrieved on 2008-03-12.

¹² <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gamebooks> Retrieved on 2008-03-12.

Fighting Fantasy

The story behind *Fighting Fantasy* began in 1980 when Geraldine Cooke, a *Penguin* editor, met Ian Livingstone and Steve Jackson at *Games Workshop*'s annual Games Day.¹³ Cooke wanted the two founders of *Games Workshop* to write a "how to do it" manual as an introduction to the role-playing games that were spreading like a wildfire at the time. But Jackson and Livingstone came up with the idea of presenting the introduction as a gamebook where the reader takes on the role of the adventurer by having him make choices, and turning to different paragraphs to see what the choices led to. All that was needed to play was a couple of dices, a pen and an eraser.

The pair began to work on the project, and six months later they had finished the manuscript, and sent it to *Penguin* under its working title *The Magic Quest*. The *Penguin* editors didn't know what to do with it at first, since the format could neither be described as a book nor as a game, but somewhere in between. At last it was decided that the gamebook would be published by *Penguin*'s children's books imprint *Puffin Books*. And thus it was released under the name *The Warlock of the Firetop Mountain* in August 1982.

Within the first three months the gamebook had been reprinted three times, and within a year it had been reprinted 20 times.¹⁴ All in all *The Warlock of the Firetop Mountain* has sold over one million copies in fifteen languages.¹⁵

The success of the first book led to a demand for more, and Jackson and Livingstone began writing on new gamebooks. The second *Fighting Fantasy* book, *The Citadel of Chaos*, was written by Steve Jackson, and the third book, *The Forest of Doom*, was written by Ian Livingstone. The sequels continued the success, and the constant demand for more gamebooks would make it hard for Jackson and Livingstone to keep up with work as they also were the owners of *Games Workshop*, so the decision was made to include other writers in the series, and the first new writer was another Steve Jackson. This Steve Jackson, who originated from the U.S.A., would later become the founder of *GURPS (General Universal RolePlaying System)* in 1986. His first gamebook was *Scorpion Swamp*, which was the eight book in the series. He would write three books in total before he moved on to work on his own projects.

Other writers include Jamie Thomson and Mark Smith, who wrote two *Fighting Fantasy*

¹³ <http://www.iconbooks.co.uk/wizard/wffhistory.cfm> Retrieved on 2008-03-13.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Warlock_of_Firetop_Mountain Retrieved on 2008-03-13.

books together before they started their own gamebook series: *The Way of the Tiger*, a fantasy story about a ninja seeking revenge for the murder of his father; and *Falcon*, a science fiction story about a time-travelling agent.

The influx of new writers relieved Jackson and Livingstone from their heavy workload; they would gradually write fewer and fewer books in the late eighties. In total Jackson and Livingstone wrote 22 books in the series, which includes the four books in Jackson's *Sorcery!* series, which was billed "Fighting Fantasy for adults".¹⁶

The *Fighting Fantasy* series was supposed to have ended with number 50, *Return to Firetop Mountain*, written by Ian Livingstone, but the book sold surprisingly well, and rekindled the interest in *Fighting Fantasy* for a while, so *Puffin Books* continued to publish new books.¹⁷ But the waning sales figures put a sudden halt to the production with book 59, *Curse of the Mummy*, by Jonathan Green. His next book, *Bloodbones*, which would have become number 60, was never published. So the whole series was just one book away from ending with a nice round number in 1995. Eventually, Green's book would be published by *Wizard Books* in 2006, eleven years after it was first written.

In total the *Fighting Fantasy* series has been licensed to 17 countries, and sold over 15 million copies worldwide.¹⁸

Today the *Fighting Fantasy* books are being re-published by *Wizard Books*, which is an imprint of *Icon Books*. Aside for the publication of the long expected *Bloodbones* Jonathan Green has also written a new gamebook: *Howl of the Werewolf*. Ian Livingstone has also written a new gamebook: *Eye of the Dragon*, in 2005, twelve years after his last book.

Lone Wolf

After the success of the early *Fighting Fantasy* books a long line of gamebooks tried to emulate the particular style Jackson and Livingstone had established, and the results were mixed. Some of the new gamebook series had moderate successes, while others never managed to take off, commercially speaking. The only other series that actually came close, or even surpassed *Fighting Fantasy* in fame and commercial success, was the *Lone Wolf* series, created by Joe Dever in 1984. The series has been translated to 18 languages, and sold

¹⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fighting_Fantasy Retrieved on 2008-03-13.

¹⁷ <http://www.iconbooks.co.uk/wizard/wffhistory.cfm> Retrieved on 2008-03-13.

¹⁸ Ibid.

nine million copies worldwide.¹⁹ The first book in the series, *Flight from the Dark*, sold over 100,000 copies in its first month of publication.²⁰

The story of *Lone Wolf*, the last survivor of an order of warrior monks defending the kingdom of Sommerlund from their enemies, continued in 28 books before the series was cancelled by the publisher *Red Fox* in 1998. This decision, made by *Red Fox*, caused some resentment among the fans, as the *Lone Wolf* storyline would have come to a conclusion with book 32, and at that time it didn't look like the last four books in the series would ever be published. But in 1999 Joe Dever gave his permission for the *Lone Wolf* books to be published for free on the Internet by the non-profit organisation *Project Aon*.²¹ As of October 2008, 18 of the books have been made available for legal download at the *Project Aon* site.

In August 2007 *Mongoose Publishing* began to republish the *Lone Wolf* books, with new covers and new illustrations. The first book, *Flight from the Dark*, has also been extensively rewritten by Joe Dever, stating that he now considers himself to be a better writer, and that it is a good opportunity to make a better beginning.²²

This means that the plot in the first book has been altered from its original conception. This is called “retcon” (retroactive continuity), which simply means that established facts in a piece of fiction has been altered from how it was originally presented. Naturally, this could easily cause a controversy in the fanbase. Fans are usually very conservative when it comes to changes which threaten the way they perceive things. However, it is important to point out that “retconning” is different from revisionism. A perfect example of revisionism in fiction would be the recent changes George Lucas made directly in the original *Star Wars* films from the seventies and eighties. This is a direct alteration of the source material, as Lucas claims the films are now as he always intended them to be, including the now infamous scene where Greedo shoots first. A “retcon” doesn't necessarily have to stir up controversy, and in this specific case the changes made to the story seems to have been accepted by most fans.

Mongoose Publishing will eventually publish all *Lone Wolf* books, including the last four, which may be published out of order as Joe Dever has reportedly already finished the first of the last four books.

¹⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lone_Wolf_%28gamebooks%29 Retrieved on 2008-03-13.

²⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flight_from_the_Dark Retrieved on 2008-03-13.

²¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lone_Wolf_%28gamebooks%29 Retrieved on 2008-03-13.

²² Ibid.

3. Fighting Fantasy and Lone Wolf – a comparison

System

As I have already mentioned the gamebooks are inspired by role-playing games, and these RPGs could have quite an extensive set of game rules, which wouldn't be very practical for a solo adventure, so the gamebooks have a simplified set of rules, which means that the combat system is very straight to the point, and can be solved in a matter of seconds.

In *Fighting Fantasy* there are three values that are vital to keep track of: Skill, Stamina and Luck. These values are determined by rolling two dices, and a high roll is preferable as higher numbers give the player an edge in combat, and makes it a bit easier to survive any ordeals. However, the outcome of the game is not dependent on good statistics alone, as the reader also must make correct choices in order to win the game.

In the *Lone Wolf* series there are only two statistics: Combat Skill and Endurance Points. It's the same thing as with *Fighting Fantasy*: high numbers are the best, but it is also possible to win the game with a low score. *Lone Wolf* is different from *Fighting Fantasy* in that special skills, the so called Kai Disciplines, play a vital role in the game. If the player chose his or her Kai Disciplines wisely it shouldn't be much of a problem to win the game.

Unlike *Fighting Fantasy* there is no real need for dices. Instead there is a Random Number Table at the back of the book. The numbers range from zero to nine, and have been put in random order on the page, so that the reader can close his or her eyes and point on the table with a pen to get a number when instructed to do so.

It is also possible to roll a ten-sided dice instead of using the Random Number Table. This is somewhat similar to the *Sorcery!* series, which featured a pair of dice images at the bottom of each page. The point was that if the reader didn't have access to a couple of dices he or she could always flick through the pages quickly, and stop at any random page to get a dice roll. The main *Fighting Fantasy* series did not incorporate this until *Wizard Books* started re-publishing the series in 2002.

It is also worth noting that the *Fighting Fantasy* series occasionally had some additional statistics and special rules. For instance, *Starship Traveller* had combat rules both for space battles, phaser combat, and close combat. On top of that Steve Jackson was also the first one to introduce magic abilities in the books. In fact, his very first book after *The Warlock of the*

Firetop Mountain was *Citadel of Chaos*, where the reader could chose from a number of spells, which is similar to how the Kai Disciplines are picked in the *Lone Wolf* series.

Format

Most *Fighting Fantasy* books contain 400 numbered sections while *Lone Wolf* has 350 numbered sections, with the exception of *Shadow on the Sand*, which has 400 sections divided into two parts, with the second part starting at paragraph 201, which is a good example of the intertwining that goes on in a typical gamebook, where different paths merge only to be separated again.

Anyway, *Fighting Fantasy* actually breaks its own mould by starting to experiment with the number of paragraphs. Steve Jackson in particular didn't bother to stick to the 400 rule. His shortest book, *Starship Traveller*, only has 343 numbered sections, while his longest book, *The Crown of Kings*, of the *Sorcery!* series, has 800 paragraphs, being twice as long a regular *Fighting Fantasy* gamebook. Furthermore, some of the later writers began to hide the end paragraph inside the book, in order to prevent cheating. So in those books the last paragraph is not the one that ends the game.

Covers

Every gamebook has interior illustrations. That seems to be a requirement of the modern gamebook. This adds a certain atmosphere to the world the gamebook is set in, and is just as efficient in creating a feeling of presence as the second person narrative is. The importance of the illustrator can be seen on the covers of the first eight *Lone Wolf* books where the illustrator Gary Chalk is credited together with the writer Joe Dever on the front cover (see Appendix B). This changed when Gary Chalk quit his job after book eight. The new illustrator, Brian Williams, was not credited on the front cover.

Gary Chalk also illustrated the front cover of the first six books in the series. This is not an entirely uncommon practice in the world of gamebooks.

A fine example of where the interior illustrator has influenced the cover is *The Warlock of Firetop Mountain*. The illustrator, Russ Nicholson, would have done the cover as well if not there had been such confusion over the content of the book.²³ The task to do the cover

²³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Warlock_of_Firetop_Mountain Retrieved on 2008-03-15.

illustration fell on Peter Andrew Jones (see Appendix B). He drew a fairly generic wizard summoning a golden dragon with his crystal ball. But what was most chocking to the publishers on *Puffin Books* was that the title was put in the middle of the cover; and not on top as was standard practice. This meant that the book's title couldn't be seen if it was put on "step" shelves at the bookstores.²⁴ When the book was reprinted five years later, in 1987, the publishers made Peter Andrew Jones do a new cover illustration, very similar to the original, but this time the generic wizard was replaced by Zagor (the warlock) himself. Peter Andrew Jones copied Zagor's distinctive appearance from a full-page illustration of the warlock made by Russ Nicholson.

This isn't the only example of covers being changed. For instance, *The Citadel of Chaos* had a very simplistic cover illustration, which was later replaced by a slightly more elaborate one, made by Ian Miller.

Another thing worth noticing about the *Fighting Fantasy* covers is that the names of Steve Jackson and Ian Livingstone are on the covers of all *Fighting Fantasy books*, regardless if they are the actual writers of the book or not. The name of the writer, if it was someone other than Jackson or Livingstone, could only be found inside the book. This is a tradition *Wizard Books* continued when they started republishing the series.

This means that Jackson's and Livingstone's names both appear on the cover of the first book, *The Warlock of the Firetop Mountain*, since they wrote it together, but as they started writing books separately they had only their own name on the cover, either Steve Jackson or Ian Livingstone. But if the book was written by another writer it had both Jackson's and Livingstone's names on the cover. This actually helped separating Steve Jackson (USA) from Steve Jackson (UK), as the former had both Jackson's and Livingstone's names on the cover.

Setting

When Jackson and Livingstone wrote *The Warlock of the Firetop Mountain* they didn't bother to think much about the setting in which the adventure took place. The book is a simple "dungeon crawl" adventure, i.e. it takes place in a subterranean cave-system, like most of the early role-playing adventures. But as more books were written in the series the need to create a proper setting arose, and thus they created the world of Titan, in which most of the gamebooks are set. There are a few exceptions to this rule, as the gamebooks set in a science

²⁴ Ibid.

fiction environment aren't tied to the fantasy world of Titan. As a matter of fact, in Steve Jackson's *Starship Traveller* it is specifically stated that the crew of the starship in question is trying to find their way back to Earth after being sucked into a black hole:

In the adventure which follows, you are the Captain of the *Traveller*, lost in an unknown universe. Your own skill as a Captain will determine whether you and your crew will ever see Earth again.²⁵

And in another of Jackson's books, *Appointment with F.E.A.R.*, the reader takes on the role of a crime-fighting superhero, living in Titan City. Judging by the name of the city it is implied that the setting of the book has some kind of connection with the fantasy world of Titan, but the city itself is vaguely reminiscent of New York, which isn't surprising as the gamebook is a pastiche of American superhero comics from the seventies and eighties.

Another book written by Jackson that probably takes place on Earth is *House of Hell*, the only *Fighting Fantasy* book that belongs to the horror genre, rather than to fantasy or science fiction.

Unlike *Fighting Fantasy* the world of *Lone Wolf* was already developed by Joe Dever before he started writing gamebooks. Magnamund was Joe Dever's campaign world, a fantasy world created for role-playing campaigns. That's one of the reasons why Magnamund is perceived as more vibrant, and more colourful, than Titan.

Aside from Titan there is also the world of Amarillia where *Legend of Zagor* is set (see below for further details), and Orb, a world created by Jamie Thomson and Mark Smith where *The Way of the Tiger* series also is set.

Story

The storyline in *Lone Wolf* spans over 28 books (it will be 32 books once *Mongoose Publishing* has printed all the new books). *Fighting Fantasy* does not have a storyline. Each book is a stand alone adventure, and does not continue over to the next book. The character the reader plays is always assumed to be a new anonymous adventurer.

However, this is a truth with modification. There are in fact a few *Fighting Fantasy* books that are connected with each other, no matter how loosely that may be. For instance, *City of*

²⁵ *Starship Traveller*, p. 18, *Wizard Books* 2005.

Thieves, *Deathtrap Dungeon* and *Island of the Lizard King* were all written by Ian Livingstone in 1983 and 1984, and it is at least insinuated that the anonymous adventurer in those books may be the same person. In *Deathtrap Dungeon* there is a female troll called Ivy who tells the adventurer about her brother Sourbelly who is an Imperial Guard in the city of Port Blacksand, where most of the action in *City of Thieves* takes place. The amusing part is that the adventurer met him in *City of Thieves*, and even if the encounter not necessarily had to have a deadly outcome, it is quite likely that Sourbelly was killed by him.

Interestingly enough *Wizard Books* published the books in the wrong order in 2002, so the awkward moment where the female troll is having a conversation with her brother's killer is pretty much lost as the reader cannot possibly know who Sourbelly is yet.

Anyway, *Island of the Lizard King* completes this unofficial trilogy as it starts with the adventurer leaving the city of Fang, where *Deathtrap Dungeon* is located.

However, regardless of whether or not the anonymous adventurer is the one and same person throughout these books Livingstone actually wrote a real sequel to *Deathtrap Dungeon* called *Trial of Champions*. To a large extent the story takes place in the same dungeon as before, but this time with a new anonymous adventurer. And what's even more interesting is that it also had a sequel, called *Armies of Death*, which begins directly where *Trial of Champions* ended. With the exception of the *Sorcery!* series this is unique in *Fighting Fantasy*: that a story continues over two books, and that the second book takes over exactly where the first ended. However, this does not mean that the game statistics from the previous book could be carried over to the next book. Every skill has to be rolled again, and no items can be carried over from the first to the second book, despite the fact that it is the same anonymous hero in both books.

Another "trilogy", of sorts, are the books that features Zagor as the antagonist. Zagor is the name of the warlock from the first book. As it is revealed he has a tendency to not remain dead for very long. After he was killed in *The Warlock of the Firetop Mountain* he came back from the dead to terrorise the peasants living around the mountain once again, and once again an anonymous adventurer comes to the rescue when the innocent peasants call out for a hero to defend them. Zagor is killed again in *Return to Firetop Mountain*, but he is resurrected once more, this time as a demon, and not in Titan, but in another fantasy-world called Amarillia. The gamebook, *Legend of Zagor*, is unique in that it is a sequel to *The Zagor Chronicles*, a series of novels written by Ian Livingstone and Carl Sargent.

Unlike Jackson, with the exception of his *Sorcery!* series, Livingstone has recurring characters and places in his books, which connect the stories together, no matter how loosely.

Apart from the “trilogies” already mentioned the *Caverns of the Snow Witch* makes lots of references to the characters, places and events in *The Warlock of the Firetop Mountain*, *Deathtrap Dungeon* and *The Forest of Doom*, implying that the anonymous adventurer in the *Caverns of the Snow Witch* may be the same as the one in *The Forest of Doom* as the latter book starts more or less in the same place as the former ended. The only difference from previous examples is that the *Caverns of the Snow Witch* is a “prequel” since it was written after *The Forest of Doom*, but the events in the *Caverns of the Snow Witch* precedes the events in *The Forest of Doom* chronologically.

Regardless of the allusions and implications these examples only strengthens the fact that Livingstone leaves it up to the reader to determine whether or not there is any continuity in the *Fighting Fantasy* series, as none of the events in any book has any real impact on another.

In the *Lone Wolf* series, on the other hand, the decisions made in one book may have a long-lasting impact on the other books. This is especially true for any objects the player finds along the way, to be carried over from one book to the next. It is quite possible that an object found in one book will become useful in a future book. This also holds true for the Kai Disciplines, as one discipline may not be used at all in one book, but will become extremely useful in the next.

Another difference between *Lone Wolf* and *Fighting Fantasy* is that *Lone Wolf* is an actual character, and not some faceless adventurer, even if his face is actually never clearly revealed. Furthermore, *Lone Wolf* has a background, even if his childhood is not brought up until well into the Grandmaster series (books 13 to 20). In fact, *Lone Wolf* is as far from anonymous as he could possibly be since he plays a vital role in the struggle between good and evil, and single-handedly tips the scale in favour of good. It wouldn't be wrong to call him the saviour of Magnamund (and not just of his homeland Sommerlund).

To keep it short the conflict between good and evil in Magnamund has been going on for thousands of years. The foremost agents of evil are the Darklords, powerful beings created by the Dark God Naar to conquer all of Magnamund. The only ones who dare to defy them openly are the Sommlending. The kingdom of Sommerlund has held the Darklords at bay for centuries, mostly due to the prowess of the Kai Order, a group of warrior monks defending Sommerlund against the forces of the Darklands. These Kai warriors have many special and supernatural abilities, which they use to defend Sommerlund, and all free nations of Magnamund.

However, Sommerlund is betrayed by a magician called Vonotar, and the entire Kai Order is massacred in a surprise attack on the Kai Monastery by the Darklords. This is where *Flight*

from the Dark begins. It turns out that one Kai warrior survived the attack, a young cadet called Silent Wolf. His mission is to go to the capital of Holmgard to warn the king that Sommerlund is being invaded by the Darklords, and that they cannot expect any help from the Kai. At the very end of the book Silent Wolf is given the more fitting name Lone Wolf as he is all that is left of the Kai.

This story has many similarities to *Star Wars*, with the Jedi Order being destroyed through betrayal, and only one Jedi Knight surviving the massacres. The supernatural abilities of the Jedi and the Kai only makes the connection more obvious. It's no secret that Joe Dever has been influenced by *Star Wars*. After all, the *Star Wars* films had an immense impact on the culture of the eighties that is hard to image today. Rather than listing fiction writers who have been influenced by *Star Wars* it would be a lot easier to make a list of the fiction writers that have not been influenced by *Star Wars*, as that would be a very short list indeed.

To continue, Lone Wolf's next task in *Fire on the Water* is to travel to Sommerlund's ally Durenor to ask them for help, and to retrieve the Sommerswerd, a powerful artefact that would be useful in the war against the Darklords.

There is no need to get further into the storyline, but it could be worth pointing out that the conflict with the Darklords is eventually solved in book twelve, with the destruction of all the remaining Darklords, and that Lone Wolf goes on to become a grandmaster, and that he eventually rebuilds the Kai Monastery and the Kai Order.

The Dark God Naar takes these setbacks very hard, and decides to take the conflict to a more personal level by directly targeting Lone Wolf. This conflict reaches its climax in book 20, and after that Lone Wolf is no longer a playable character. Instead the role of the champion of justice and freedom is taken over by one of the new Kai grandmasters. But Lone Wolf doesn't simply retire. He continues to play a pivotal part in the conflict between good and evil.

Since the series was cancelled after book 28 it's hard to say what will happen in the last four books, but I think it's safe to assume that there will be some kind of closure for this long series about the epic conflict between good and evil.

The *Lone Wolf* series' advantage over *Fighting Fantasy* is that it has a continuous storyline stretching over dozens of books. Everything and everyone are interconnected. In *Fighting Fantasy* the exact opposite is true: everything and everyone are disconnected.

It is worth pointing out, however, that Steve Jackson's *Sorcery!* series actually predated Joe Dever's *Lone Wolf* series from 1984, so the *Lone Wolf* series cannot claim to be the first

gamebook series with a continuous storyline more than the *Fighting Fantasy* series can claim to be the original gamebook series.

Even though the four *Sorcery!* books aren't part of the main series they are still *Fighting Fantasy*, so Steve Jackson deserves the full credit for being the first one to create a continuous storyline stretching over multiple books.

Plot

The Warlock of the Firetop Mountain contains no background-story whatsoever; it's a simple hack and slash, dungeon-crawl kind of adventure. The anonymous adventurer is not a hero, he is not interested in saving the peasants from an evil warlock, all he wants is the warlock's treasure. That's hardly the motives of a noble hero, but rather that of a burglar.

It is never stated in the book that the warlock may have come by his treasure by equally unjust means. This is left to later sources to explain the background of the story: who Zagor was; how he took over Firetop Mountain from the dwarves living there, et cetera. Later books would not require this kind of "retconning", as they had more developed plots and stories.

This doesn't necessarily make them more realistic, though, as the plots sometimes are very absurd. If I may use *The Forest of Doom* as an example: the dwarves of the town of Stonebridge have long held the trolls at bay with the help of the Hammer of Gillibran. The rival dwarf clan of Mirewater had long been jealous of the Stonebridge dwarves, and for that reason they sent an eagle to steal the warhammer. The eagle was successful with the theft, but was attacked and killed by Death Hawks over Darkwood Forest, also known as the Forest of Doom. Apparently the warhammer is the only thing that could cure the dwarves of Stonebridge from permanent apathy. And it is urgent for the adventurer to retrieve the lost hammer before the trolls attack the supposedly helpless town. As the adventure progresses the adventurer finds out that two goblins had found the hammer, but they couldn't decide which one of them should take it. Fortunately for them, they found out that the handle could be unscrewed from the head, so they took one part each and went separate ways. One of the goblins was captured by an ogre, and put in a cage until the adventurer arrived to free him of the cage before killing him. The other goblin was even less lucky: apparently he got killed and eaten by a ghoul, which resides in a sarcophagus in the basement of a locked house, which could only be opened with a key carried by an atavistic mountain-man in some completely different part of the forest. And if that wasn't convenient enough the ghoul had been using the hammerhead as a pillow. And naturally, both parts of the hammer are marked with a "G" so

they wouldn't risk being mistaken for any other two-part hammer lying around in the forest. The hammer is returned to the dwarves, so they can go and defeat the menacing trolls with it, and the adventurer is richly rewarded for saving the hammerless dwarves from destruction.

This is of course an absurd plot, but it isn't unique for *Fighting Fantasy*. Most of these books focus more on the gameplay than a realistic story. They are games rather than proper fiction. There is no more realism in an average *Fighting Fantasy* book than there is in *Monopoly* or *Risk*. That's the reason why there are so many castles and dungeons crammed with vicious monsters and elaborate traps, just waiting for the adventurer to appear rather than to kill each others off, or to accidentally trigger one of the deadly traps. The reader is not meant to ask what they are living of when they have no adventurers to eat, or why they don't leave the stale dungeon for a breath of fresh air every once in a while.

The *Lone Wolf* series is quite different. Everything and everyone has a purpose in the world of Magnamund. The *Lone Wolf* series is story-oriented rather than game-oriented. Some of the characters and monsters are more than just one-dimensional random encounters waiting to happen.

Of course, when one discusses realism it must be taken into consideration that everything is relative, but there is in fact little or no logic in the plot I discussed above. When dealing with a fantasy or science fiction setting it is necessary to accept that they are different from the real world. But there has to be some rhyme and reason within that universe, and some of the *Fighting Fantasy* books have very little of that. There is a little thing called "suspension of disbelief", a term coined by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1817.²⁶ It refers to the willingness of a person to accept the premises of a work of fiction even if they are fantastic or impossible. This works for most fictional stories as there usually are some established rules for what is possible or not within that piece of fiction. For that reason there is a general acceptance as to why Superman can fly, why vampires are afraid of crosses, or why a ring can have a will of its own, et cetera. But the example from above is really pushing the envelope for how many absurd coincidences one can swallow. The only way one can accept the plot is if one regard it as a game rather than as a fictive story; otherwise all the unanswered questions would get in the way of enjoying the game/story.

²⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suspension_of_belief Retrieved on 2008-03-14.

Gameplay

The first books in respective series are the ones that stick out the most, since they are a new concept still looking for its identity. The later books focus more on the story and less on the randomness of gameplay. For instance, *The Warlock of Firetop Mountain* features a labyrinth where the player can get stuck virtually forever unless he or she finds the exit. And *Flight from the Dark* has far more paths to choose from than any later books in the *Lone Wolf* series. Generally speaking, this means that the later books become somewhat more linear, with more fixed encounters, and fewer random events.

But overall, *Fighting Fantasy* offers more paths to choose from than the *Lone Wolf* series. This might be seen as something positive. The problem is that a greater number of choices not necessarily mean greater freedom. In fact, the exact opposite is true. While the *Lone Wolf* series has a limited number of paths the *Fighting Fantasy* books offer more paths to choose from, but only one of those paths is correct, all the others are wrong. And this is arguably the greatest difference between *Fighting Fantasy* and the *Lone Wolf* series: *Lone Wolf* has a limited freedom, while *Fighting Fantasy* has no freedom at all. If you don't travel the right way you will lose. But in *Lone Wolf* it is possible to win regardless of what path you chose, even if some paths definitely are harder to follow than others. The core of my thesis is that *Fighting Fantasy* only offers the illusion of the freedom of choice, as all paths but one are false.

To illustrate my point I will evaluate the two series in two categories: **entertainment value** and **game value**, as I have already mentioned in the Methodology section.

Since *Fighting Fantasy* offers many paths, of which only one is correct, it is safe to assume that it is pointless to take one of the wrong paths. And in order to know which paths are wrong one has to first find the right path, and finding the right path requires a number of attempts to find it. This means that the reader is forced to play repeatedly until the game is solved. It is always possible that he or she may give up, and either stop playing or start cheating to avoid frustration or total boredom.

The aim in most of the *Fighting Fantasy* books is to collect objects which might become necessary to solve the game. This can only be achieved through trial and error; and many of these objects don't seem to fill any function at the time they are found. The reader will often find that he or she has reached the end of the game only to discover that it's not possible to go any further because an object is missing.

This is the standard procedure in *Fighting Fantasy*. For instance, in *The Warlock of the Firetop Mountain* it is quite possible to reach the warlock at the end, but if the reader hasn't found the keys to unlock the warlock's treasure chest he or she cannot finish the game. And furthermore, some of the keys that can be found along the way are false, so one must find out which ones are the correct the hard way: by playing again and again until the right combination has been discovered.

Naturally, this can easily give rise to more frustration than entertainment. A gamebook has a tendency to not be as fun to play the tenth or the twentieth time as it was the first time.

The *Fighting Fantasy* books are far more difficult than the *Lone Wolf* series. They are designed to be tricky to solve.

In contrast, once one has finished a *Lone Wolf* book it is always possible to start again to see what would have happened along another path. But *Fighting Fantasy* doesn't offer any alternative paths. The really hard ones require that the reader draw a map of the entire area, and take notes which objects must be picked up, and so on. So there is hardly any point in trying to get it right at the first attempt since that's virtually impossible.

This approach can get tedious very quickly, but it is the only way to solve the game. Failure to make any progress leads to cheating in order to avoid the frustration of not being able to solve the game. So it's fairly safe to say that the **entertainment value** of the *Fighting Fantasy* books is quite low. But judging strictly by the challenge they offer they have a very high **game value**. The exact opposite is true for most of the *Lone Wolf* books. Some of them are almost too easy.

The different paths in the *Lone Wolf* series are explored for entertainment, while the different paths in *Fighting Fantasy* are explored out of necessity. This contrast is even more striking when one considers that once the right path has been established with the help of maps and notes it is no longer meaningful to ever take the wrong path again. The two series are explored for different reasons: the various paths in a *Fighting Fantasy* gamebook are explored once, because it is necessary, the *Lone Wolf* gamebook is explored because it is fun to follow alternate paths.

This summarises the different philosophies permeating the two series, and might explain why the *Lone Wolf* books have a cult-like following of loyal fans, while the *Fighting Fantasy* fanbase might be bigger than the *Lone Wolf* fanbase, but isn't nearly as devoted. This difference is also shown in the prices of used *Lone Wolf* books, as I shall investigate further in the next chapter.

4. From the present into the future

Even though the gamebooks stopped being published in the nineties, their popularity never died out. There are several gamebook sites on the Internet where the fans can gather. One such site is *Project Aon*, where the old *Lone Wolf* books can be downloaded for free. The *Lone Wolf* fans are particularly devoted to their books, and old *Lone Wolf* books can be sold for well over £100 on various commercial sites. A random pick at Amazon (U.K.) reveals that *The Fall of Blood Mountain* (book 26 in the series) ranges in price from £135 to £166.²⁷ The *Fighting Fantasy* books never reach the same figures. That doesn't mean there aren't any devoted *Fighting Fantasy* fans, it just means that the *Lone Wolf* books are harder to find, which drives up the prices to ridiculous levels. But the surprising part is that the prices aren't going down despite most of the books being available for free downloading, and despite that *Mongoose* has begun republishing them.

It's quite likely that this demand for old gamebooks has spurred the two new publishers to re-publish the books. *Wizard Books*, which is a children's books imprint of *Icon Books*, began to republish *Fighting Fantasy* books in 2002, with new covers, and in the wrong order (see Appendix A for a comparison). They have also incorporated the *Sorcery!* series in the main series, and published a few new books: *Bloodbones* by Jonathan Green, which was written but never published in 1995, *Howl of the Werewolf*, by the same author, and *Eye of the Dragon*, by Ian Livingstone.

As can be seen in Appendix A *Wizard Books* has already republished all books written by Steve Jackson and Ian Livingstone, but the pace at which the new books comes out has slackened considerably after the brisk start, and the current rate of published books seems to be limited to three per year. There are 36 books left to republish, and at the current rate they will have published the last one in 2020. No new books at all have been published in 2008.

Mongoose Publishing is a British manufacturer of role-playing games, card games and miniatures. They have been rapidly expanding since the foundation in 2001, and today their products include games for *Babylon 5*, *Conan the Barbarian*, *Judge Dredd*, *Starship Troopers*, *RuneQuest*, *Traveller*, and *Lone Wolf*. In the case of *Lone Wolf* this includes both a role-playing game based in *Magnamund*, as well as the printing of the gamebooks.

Mongoose has developed their own printing facility where they, among other things, are

²⁷ http://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/offer-listing/0099642018/ref=sr_1_olp_5?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1205921164&sr=1-5 Retrieved on 2008-03-15.

printing the new gamebooks. The first book was released in August 2007, and the fourth book in the series was released in February 2008. Originally the plan was to release one book per month, but *Mongoose* has experienced some problems with the printers, and haven't been able to stick to the schedule. The books are currently being printed in the United States. It was recently announced that they were going to publish the books bimonthly.

The new *Lone Wolf* books come with new covers, new interior illustrations, new maps, and a mini-adventure focusing on one minor character in every book. And furthermore Joe Dever has rewritten the first book, as has already been mentioned. The original edition had 350 paragraphs, and the new edition has 550 numbered sections. It's also worth mentioning that the collector's editions currently being printed have hardbacks. This makes them almost unique, since all previous gamebooks originally have been printed as paperbacks, with a few rare exceptions.

These gamebooks have not exactly been free from errors, and there have been some complaints by the fans over this. Apparently there have been some cases where the text has run off the bottom of the page, and little things like that. Of course, it's never good when books contain errors, but one has to wonder exactly how picky the fans are when they complain over petty details. Perhaps it's just that the *Lone Wolf* fans are more fanatical than other kinds of fans. Regardless, it is quite clear that *Mongoose Publishing* is still in a learning process when it comes to printing, editing and proof-reading books, and that they shouldn't rush products to the market that hasn't been properly checked for errors, despite the fans waiting impatiently for the books to be released.

An interesting fact is that the *Lone Wolf* books have not yet been released in the bookstores. Instead *Mongoose* have arranged a special "Mega-Deal" for the fans to order the entire series of 32 books plus six bonus novels for £299 directly from them.

Mongoose haven't done any special marketing for the books, instead they have relied entirely on the buzz spreading among the fans on concerned sites. Since news travel rapidly over the Internet, the word of mouth, so to speak, has been more than enough to inform anyone with an interest in *Lone Wolf* to pick up the news. The only disadvantage with this cheap buzz marketing is that it's not likely to attract any new fans; but the old fans are probably numerous enough to make up for the costs of printing the books many times over.

I haven't been able to gain any information on the sales figures, but from *Mongoose's* perspective the situation looks quite promising with constant reprints and out of stock books.

As for *Wizard Books* I haven't been able to get any sales figures from them either, but judging from the slow pace of new *Fighting Fantasy* books I can tell that there hasn't been

the same demand for these books as there is for the *Lone Wolf* series. Even though *Mongoose* has just started to republish *Lone Wolf* they will have all books in the series out long before *Wizard Books* has finished republishing the *Fighting Fantasy* series, if they will finish publishing them at all since no new books have been published in 2008. It's possible that *Wizard Books* already has published all the books they want in the series, and that they are not very eager to continue with the rest.

But unlike *Mongoose Publishing* *Wizard Books* has actually put some effort into marketing the books as they have created a 30 second television advertisement to run for seven weeks to a total cost of £250,000.²⁸ The television advertisement was broadcasted on *Cartoon Network*, *Fox Kids* and *Nickelodeon* in November and December 2004, and should have reached three million children according to *Wizard Books*' calculations.²⁹ The television advertisement can be found on *YouTube*.³⁰

Despite the fact that we are in a middle of a renaissance for the gamebook one has to wonder if there really is a future for the gamebook. Yes, the books seem to sell quite well, and yes, there is definitely a demand for the old books. But isn't it just that: a demand for the old books, and not for new ones?

We don't see any new gamebook series being published. We don't see the same craze for the phenomena as there was in the eighties. We don't see the re-printed series selling millions of copies worldwide.

No, this is simply a dash of nostalgia. The interest largely comes from the old fans from the eighties who want to relive childhood memories, or to complete their collections. Perhaps a few youngsters here and there, who are unfamiliar with the format, may pick the books up, but they are in all likelihood few.

I don't see any future for the gamebook in a printed format. The gamebook cannot compete with the computer game. That's the reason it died out in the first place, because everybody got tired of the same old plot over and over again. Many of the *Fighting Fantasy* books were just a rehash of the same plot set in different environments, from deserts and forests to cities and dungeons, and everything between. It gets very repetitive after a while.

Unless someone renews the format, and makes the gamebook interesting again, I don't see how the gamebook could survive.

²⁸ <http://www.iconbooks.co.uk/wizard/wtv.cfm> Retrieved on 2008-03-16.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NZgDNUYgVcU> Retrieved on 2008-03-16.

A computer game has so much more potential than a printed medium. The computer game is constantly reinventing itself. An electronic medium has all the advantages an interactive story could ask for.

The only hope for the gamebooks to survive in the future is to move to the electronic medium. Gamebooks already exist in electronic form, and they have existed for quite some time. One of the oldest genres of computer games are called text adventures, and their golden age coincidences with that of the gamebook's in the eighties. Text adventures like *The Hobbit*, *Zork* and *The Pawn* were very popular at the time. Of course, the computers have developed rapidly since then, and that kind of adventures are no longer being made. Instead we have graphical adventures like *Myst*.

While today's computer games may not be identical with the gamebooks, they share most of their characteristics. The computer game gives room for a freedom of choice the printed interactive book only can dream of.

It's a telling fact that all three of the creators of the two gamebook series: Steve Jackson, Ian Livingstone, and Joe Dever are involved in the computer games industry as designers and creators. Steve Jackson is the co-founder of *Lionhead Studios*,³¹ which among other things has developed the computer game *Black and White*.³² Ian Livingstone has been heavily involved in *Eidos Interactive*,³³ which is best known for the *Tomb Raider* series.³⁴ They have also made a computer game called *Deathtrap Dungeon*,³⁵ loosely based on the gamebook by Livingstone by the same name. And Joe Dever has not been idle on the computer front either. He has designed several best-selling computer games,³⁶ and he is currently working as a lead designer for a computer game based on *Lone Wolf*, developed by Singapore-based *Ksatria Gameworks*,³⁷ which will be released in 2009.

³¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steve_Jackson_%28UK_game_designer%29 Retrieved on 2008-03-16.

³² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lionhead_Studios Retrieved on 2008-03-16.

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³⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lone_Wolf_%28gamebooks%29 Retrieved on 2008-03-16.

5. Summary

The interactive book has come a long way from the early development by experimental writers like Jorge Luis Borges to the modern gamebook. It was born as a literary experiment, grew up as a pedagogical and instructional manual, and came to maturity as a commercial success.

That's a process similar to what most new things goes through: stretching from pioneers to profiteers via the idealists. And then dropped like yesterday's garbage when the profiteers no longer have any use of it, just like the gamebooks were dropped by their publishers in the nineties.

Perhaps the gamebook is nothing more than a trend currently going through its death throes? But it seems to still have some profit in it, just enough for some brave publishers to nurture it. And when they grow tired of trying to keep the gamebook alive the fans who bought all the books will still keep it alive.

While the RPGs have had a strong influence in the shaping of the modern gamebook its roots goes back all the way to Borges. As this paper has shown there were several interactive book series existing before the big breakthrough of the RPGs in the mid-seventies. *The Chose Your Own Adventure* books became popular in the U.S.A., but they never received the same attention in Europe. The first real gamebooks were the *Tunnels and Trolls* series, even if it was a gamebook that was dependent on access to RPG rulebooks.

So Jackson and Livingstone did not invent the format in 1982, they just took it one step further and invented a self-contained simple rule system anyone with a couple of dices and a pen could use. Inspired by the success of *Fighting Fantasy* many writers followed in Jackson's and Livingstone's footsteps, but the only one who managed to follow them and even surpass them, was Joe Dever, who started the *Lone Wolf* series in 1984.

The main difference between *Fighting Fantasy* and *Lone Wolf* is the philosophy behind the concept. They may look deceptively similar on the surface, but underneath the two series have a very different attitude to what a gamebook should be all about.

Fighting Fantasy may have an edge over *Lone Wolf* when it comes to writers as there are so many different *Fighting Fantasy* writers (20) while *Lone Wolf* only has one: Joe Dever. But the diversity in environments isn't much of a plus if the plot doesn't alter significantly from one book to the next. The greatest weakness of *Fighting Fantasy* is the lack of a continuous storyline. *Fighting Fantasy* is too episodic to show any significant variety in the

story and plot department. Most of the books are centred on an anonymous adventurer saving some village from a power-mad wizard/warlord.

One could argue that this setup also goes for *Lone Wolf*, but the difference is that even if some *Lone Wolf* books can be a bit repetitive there is a feeling that one is making progress the whole time. This is the advantage of sticking to the same character throughout much of the series. Nothing is reset at the end of the book, but continues over to the next one. This is also the reason why the *Fighting Fantasy* series have more of a game-feeling to it than *Lone Wolf*, which has an elaborate background, storyline, and a far larger set of recurring characters, even if *Fighting Fantasy* have a few of those, like Zagor, and his opposite Yaztromo, a benevolent wizard who helps the various anonymous adventurers throughout much of the series.

But the greatest difference between the two series is by far the difficulty level. *Lone Wolf* is by no means easy, but it is quite possible to get through the book at the first attempt. This is not true for *Fighting Fantasy*. Aside from the combats, which are roughly of equal difficulty, the reader must pick up a number of objects in *Fighting Fantasy* in order to be able to complete the game. It's not made easier by the fact that it makes little or no sense at all to pick up the objects until they suddenly are needed in order to win the game. One cannot win a *Fighting Fantasy* by reason since so many solutions are completely irrational.

To sum up the comparison: *Fighting Fantasy* is like a game you have to beat, *Lone Wolf* is like a novel you want to get to the last chapter of, to see how everything is solved.

Even if the golden age of the gamebook is over there is still some interest in the format, enough for two new publishing companies to have them republished. But the competition from the computer games makes it impossible for a printed medium with limited options to survive in the long run. Their only chance to live on is to take the leap to the electronic medium. Computer games are in many ways similar to the gamebooks. A computer game is by definition interactive, and it has a far greater potential than the simple printed gamebook. The closeness of the gamebook and the computer game is illustrated by the fact that all the great gamebook writers also are working in the computer games industry. That's where the future of the interactive story lies, and that's where anyone who seeks adventure must go.

The format may be dead, or close to death, but the need for a few hours of escapism has not diminished at all. As long as the real world remains grey we will all have a desire to explore strange new worlds, and to boldly go where no one has gone before: to our inner sanctum, to our own imagination. We must realise that the gamebook itself is nothing more but a key we need to enter our very own fantasy realm.

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http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/An_Examination_of_the_Work_of_Herbert_Quain
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eidos_Interactive
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fighting_Fantasy
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flight_from_the_Dark
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gamebooks>
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ian_Livingstone
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joe_Deaver
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lionhead_Studios
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lone_Wolf_%28gamebooks%29
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Replay_value
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steve_Jackson_%28UK_game_designer%29
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suspension_of_belief
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Garden_of_Forking_Paths
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Warlock_of_Firetop_Mountain
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tunnels_and_Trolls

Wizard Books:

<http://www.iconbooks.co.uk/wizard/wffhistory.cfm>
<http://www.iconbooks.co.uk/wizard/wtv.cfm>

YouTube:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NZgDNuYgVcU>

Printed sources:

Jackson, Steve, *Spaceship Traveller*, Wizard Books, Cambridge 2005.

Appendix A – List of *Fighting Fantasy* and *Lone Wolf* gamebooks

Fighting Fantasy:

<i>Puffin Books</i> (1982-1995)	Author(s)	Published
1. <i>The Warlock of the Firetop Mountain</i>	Steve Jackson & Ian Livingstone	1982
2. <i>The Citadel of Chaos</i>	Steve Jackson	1983
3. <i>The Forest of Doom</i>	Ian Livingstone	1983
4. <i>Starship Traveller</i>	Steve Jackson	1983
5. <i>City of Thieves</i>	Ian Livingstone	1983
6. <i>Deathtrap Dungeon</i>	Ian Livingstone	1984
7. <i>Island of the Lizard King</i>	Ian Livingstone	1984
8. <i>Scorpion Swamp</i>	Steve Jackson (USA)	1984
9. <i>Caverns of the Snow Witch</i>	Ian Livingstone	1984
10. <i>House of Hell</i>	Steve Jackson	1984
11. <i>Talisman of Death</i>	Jamie Thomson & Mark Smith	1984
12. <i>Space Assassin</i>	Andrew Chapman	1985
13. <i>Freeway Fighter</i>	Ian Livingstone	1985
14. <i>Temple of Terror</i>	Ian Livingstone	1985
15. <i>The Rings of Kether</i>	Andrew Chapman	1985
16. <i>Seas of Blood</i>	Andrew Chapman	1985
17. <i>Appointment with F.E.A.R.</i>	Steve Jackson	1985
18. <i>Rebel Planet</i>	Robin Waterfield	1985
19. <i>Demons of the Deep</i>	Steve Jackson (USA)	1986
20. <i>Sword of the Samurai</i>	Jamie Thomson & Mark Smith	1986
21. <i>Trial of Champions</i>	Ian Livingstone	1986
22. <i>Robot Commando</i>	Steve Jackson (USA)	1986
23. <i>Masks of Mayhem</i>	Robin Waterfield	1986
24. <i>Creature of Havoc</i>	Steve Jackson	1986
25. <i>Beneath Nightmare Castle</i>	Peter Darvill-Evans	1987
26. <i>Crypt of the Sorcerer</i>	Ian Livingstone	1987
27. <i>Star Strider</i>	Luke Sharp	1987
28. <i>Phantoms of Fear</i>	Robin Waterfield	1987
29. <i>Midnight Rogue</i>	Graeme Davis	1987
30. <i>Chasms of Malice</i>	Luke Sharp	1988
31. <i>Battleblade Warrior</i>	Marc Gascoigne	1988
32. <i>Slaves of the Abyss</i>	Paul Mason & Steve Williams	1988
33. <i>Sky Lord</i>	Martin Allen	1988
34. <i>Stealer of Souls</i>	Keith Martin	1988
35. <i>Daggers of Darkness</i>	Luke Sharp	1988
36. <i>Armies of Death</i>	Ian Livingstone	1988
37. <i>Portal of Evil</i>	Peter Darvill-Evans	1989
38. <i>Vault of the Vampire</i>	Keith Martin	1989
39. <i>Fangs of Fury</i>	Luke Sharp	1989
40. <i>Dead of Night</i>	Jim Bambra & Stephen Hand	1989
41. <i>Master of Chaos</i>	Keith Martin	1990
42. <i>Black Vein Prophecy</i>	Paul Mason & Steven Williams	1990
43. <i>The Keep of the Lich Lord</i>	Dave Morris & Jamie Thomson	1990
44. <i>Legend of the Shadow Warriors</i>	Stephen Hand	1991

45. <i>Spectral Stalkers</i>	Peter Darvill-Evans	1991
46. <i>Tower of Destruction</i>	Keith Martin	1991
47. <i>The Crimson Tide</i>	Paul Mason	1992
48. <i>Moonrunner</i>	Stephen Hand	1992
49. <i>Siege of Sardath</i>	Keith P. Phillips	1992
50. <i>Return to Firetop Mountain</i>	Ian Livingstone	1992
51. <i>Island of the Undead</i>	Keith Martin	1992
52. <i>Night Dragon</i>	Keith Martin	1993
53. <i>Spellbreaker</i>	Jonathan Green	1993
54. <i>Legend of Zagor</i>	Ian Livingstone	1993
55. <i>Deathmoor</i>	Robin Waterfield	1994
56. <i>Knights of Doom</i>	Jonathan Green	1994
57. <i>Magehunter</i>	Paul Mason	1995
58. <i>Revenge of the Vampire</i>	Keith Martin	1995
59. <i>Curse of the Mummy</i>	Jonathan Green	1995

Steve Jackson's *Sorcery!* Author Published

1. <i>The Shamutanti Hills</i>	Steve Jackson	1983
2. <i>Kharé – Cityport of Traps</i>	Steve Jackson	1984
3. <i>The Seven Serpents</i>	Steve Jackson	1984
4. <i>The Crown of Kings</i>	Steve Jackson	1985

Wizard Books (2002-) Author(s) Republished

1. <i>The Warlock of the Firetop Mountain</i>	Steve Jackson & Ian Livingstone	2002
2. <i>The Citadel of Chaos</i>	Steve Jackson	2002
3. <i>Deathtrap Dungeon</i>	Ian Livingstone	2002
4. <i>Creature of Havoc</i>	Steve Jackson	2002
5. <i>City of Thieves</i>	Ian Livingstone	2002
6. <i>Crypt of the Sorcerer</i>	Ian Livingstone	2002
7. <i>House of Hell</i>	Steve Jackson	2002
8. <i>Forest of Doom</i>	Ian Livingstone	2003
9. <i>Sorcery!: The Shamutanti Hills</i>	Steve Jackson	2003
10. <i>Caverns of the Snow Witch</i>	Ian Livingstone	2003
11. <i>Sorcery!: Kharé – Cityport of Traps</i>	Steve Jackson	2003
12. <i>Trial of Champions</i>	Ian Livingstone	2003
13. <i>Sorcery!: The Seven Serpents</i>	Steve Jackson	2003
14. <i>Armies of Death</i>	Ian Livingstone	2003
15. <i>Sorcery!: The Crown of Kings</i>	Steve Jackson	2003
16. <i>Return to Firetop Mountain</i>	Ian Livingstone	2003
17. <i>Island of the Lizard King</i>	Ian Livingstone	2003
18. <i>Appointment with F.E.A.R.</i>	Steve Jackson	2004
19. <i>Temple of Terror</i>	Ian Livingstone	2004
20. <i>Legend of Zagor</i>	Ian Livingstone	2004
21. <i>Eye of the Dragon</i>	Ian Livingstone	2005
22. <i>Starship Traveller</i>	Steve Jackson	2005
23. <i>Freeway Fighter</i>	Ian Livingstone	2005
24. <i>Talisman of Death</i>	Jamie Thomson & Mark Smith	2006
25. <i>Sword of the Samurai</i>	Jamie Thomson & Mark Smith	2006

26. <i>Bloodbones</i>	Jonathan Green	2006
27. <i>Curse of the Mummy</i>	Jonathan Green	2007
28. <i>Spellbreaker</i>	Jonathan Green	2007
29. <i>Howl of the Werewolf</i>	Jonathan Green	2007

Lone Wolf:

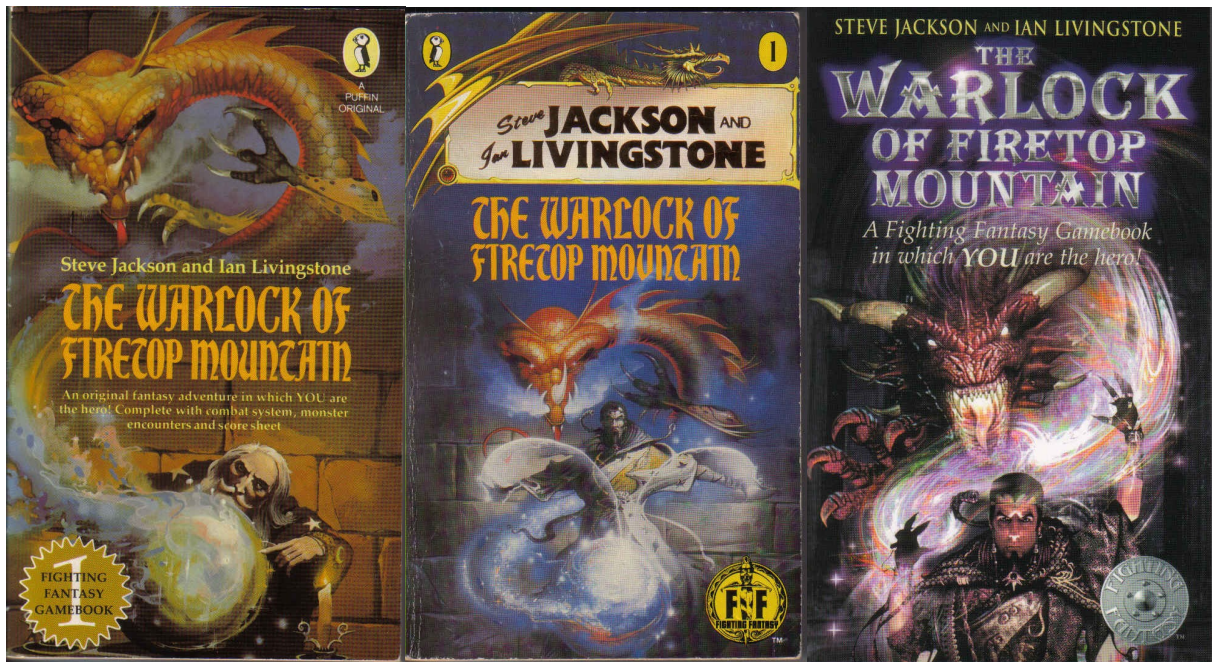
Sparrow Books/Beaver Books & Red Fox (1984-1998)

	Author	Published
1. <i>Flight from the Dark</i>	Joe Dever	1984
2. <i>Fire on the Water</i>	Joe Dever	1984
3. <i>Caverns of Kalte</i>	Joe Dever	1984
4. <i>The Chasm of Doom</i>	Joe Dever	1985
5. <i>Shadow on the Sand</i>	Joe Dever	1985
6. <i>The Kingdoms of Terror</i>	Joe Dever	1985
7. <i>Castle Death</i>	Joe Dever	1986
8. <i>The Jungle of Horrors</i>	Joe Dever	1987
9. <i>The Cauldron of Fear</i>	Joe Dever	1987
10. <i>The Dungeons of Torgar</i>	Joe Dever	1987
11. <i>The Prisoners of Time</i>	Joe Dever	1987
12. <i>The Masters of Darkness</i>	Joe Dever	1988
13. <i>The Plague Lords of Ruel</i>	Joe Dever	1990
14. <i>The Captives of Kaag</i>	Joe Dever	1991
15. <i>The Darke Crusade</i>	Joe Dever	1991
16. <i>The Legacy of Vashna</i>	Joe Dever	1991
17. <i>The Deathlord of Ixia</i>	Joe Dever	1992
18. <i>Dawn of the Dragons</i>	Joe Dever	1992
19. <i>Wolf's Bane</i>	Joe Dever	1993
20. <i>The Curse of Naar</i>	Joe Dever	1993
21. <i>Voyage of the Moonstone</i>	Joe Dever	1994
22. <i>The Buccaneers of Shadaki</i>	Joe Dever	1994
23. <i>Midnight's Hero</i>	Joe Dever	1995
24. <i>Rune War</i>	Joe Dever	1995
25. <i>Trail of the Wolf</i>	Joe Dever	1997
26. <i>The Fall of Blood Mountain</i>	Joe Dever	1997
27. <i>Vampirium</i>	Joe Dever	1998
28. <i>The Hunger of Sejanoz</i>	Joe Dever	1998

Mongoose Publishing (2007-)

	Author	Republished
1. <i>Flight from the Dark</i>	Joe Dever	2007
2. <i>Fire on the Water</i>	Joe Dever	2007
3. <i>The Caverns of Kalte</i>	Joe Dever	2007
4. <i>The Chasm of Doom</i>	Joe Dever	2008
5. <i>Shadow on the Sand</i>	Joe Dever	2008
6. <i>The Kingdoms of Terror</i>	Joe Dever	2008
7. <i>Castle Death</i>	Joe Dever	2008

Appendix B – Covers



The original *The Warlock of the Firetop Mountain* cover from 1982. Cover by Peter Andrew Jones.

Revised cover from 1987. Cover by Peter Andrew Jones.

The Warlock of the Firetop Mountain cover from 2002. Cover by Martin McKenna.



Flight from the Dark 1984. Cover by Gary Chalk.

Flight from the Dark 2007. Cover by Alberto Del Lago.