



Librogame's Land is an Italian-language website dedicated to gamebooks. They recently conducted an interview with Joe Dever regarding his four-book *Freeway Warrior* series (1988–89), and they have kindly offered the English-language version of this to Project Aon. This is particularly timely in view of our current work on the first of the *Freeway Warrior* books: *Highway Holocaust*.

The interview covers the background for the story, and also each of the books in turn. Therefore, readers should be aware that this document contains **Spoilers!** If you have yet to read all four of the *Freeway Warrior* books, you may wish to skip the lower half of Page 4 and Page 5 entirely. We have marked where the spoilers begin and end to help fans avoid any such sensitive information that could hinder their enjoyment of the series.

Project Aon would like to extend thanks to the guys at Librogame's Land for allowing us to publish this English translation on our website. To visit their website, click the logo at the top of this page.

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For Sommerlund and the Kai!

The Project Aon Team
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FREEWAY WARRIOR, AN “ON THE ROAD” GAMEBOOK

“The idea came to me during a trip to Dallas to San Diego. Cal Phoenix in Magnamund? The opposite would be better!”

By Alberto Orsini (dragan@librogame.net)

Think of Joe Dever and you think of Lone Wolf, right? Of course, but not exclusively. Certainly, the adventures of the last of the Kai represent the bulk of Deverian production, but his work does not stop there. Many know the *Freeway Warrior* series, which is at the same time very similar to and very different from the *Lone Wolf* epic. The similarities include the moral values of the main character, the game system, and the usual literary style. The differences include the setting (real and contemporary), some game-play differences, and the presence (incredible to say!) of a female interest for the protagonist.

This is not just Lone Wolf in Harley Davidson sauce. The author takes great pains to affirm the strong individual identity of this Freeway Warrior, and is willing to talk about it at length and to some depth.

It was 1988 and after a “recreational journey” to Helgedad, Lone Wolf took a much-deserved two-year rest. During this time, Joe Dever wrote a miniseries set in a completely different scenario. Which circumstances were behind the birth of *Freeway Warrior*?

I was a big fan of the first *Mad Max* movie which I saw in 1979, so I suppose the idea of writing the *Freeway Warrior* series was influenced to some degree by that film. I also very much enjoyed John Steinbeck’s classic novel *The Grapes of Wrath*. You could say that *Freeway Warrior* was a composite of these two influences; an exodus story and a post-apocalypse story combined. Having spent a few years writing and perfecting solo adventures in a fantasy world, I wanted to experiment with the genre and transpose it into a modern world setting. What finally secured the project was the very favourable response I received from my UK and US publishers when I pitched the idea to them.

What differences are there between writing about a completely fictitious scenario and one based on reality? You have stated many times in your interviews that you actually

travelled along Cal’s journey through United States. Can you tell us more about this journey?

The main differences were the technology, especially the weaponry and communications technologies, and the fact that it was set in a real world (albeit a ruined post-apocalyptic world) with cultural references that most people would recognize. I made a road journey from Dallas Fort Worth to San Diego in late 1987 during which the idea for *Freeway Warrior* took shape. Up until that point I’d been thinking of writing a post-apocalyptic mini-series but had not decided on a setting. The journey inspired the setting and provided, literally, the road map for the four books. The idea came to me early on in the journey and so I decided to explore and photograph the various way-points of the trip. I later referred to these pictures and notes when the time came to begin writing the adventures.

How much scientific research did you do before describing the post-atomic world?

Quite a lot. I gathered all the published information I could find about the predicted and estimated effects of a nuclear war upon urban and rural populations. Much had

been written on the subject during the Cold War years, and this gave me a solid scientific foundation on which to build.

You stated that your intention with Lone Wolf was to instill him with values like self-confidence without the arrogance, independence, and self-improvement. What values did you give to Phoenix?

There are certain similarities between the characters of Lone Wolf and Cal Phoenix. They are two young adult males of seemingly average ability who, due to adverse circumstances, find themselves virtually alone in a perilous situation where they must rely on their inner strengths and resolve in order to survive. But whereas Lone Wolf was physically alone and the last of his kind at the start of the Lone Wolf series, I wanted to place Cal Phoenix in a position where he became the protector of a small group of survivors. This put him in a position where he took close responsibility for the lives of others. The idea of a young person finding his true identity, his innate strength, and his greater purpose, due to extraordinary and unexpected circumstances is something that appeals to me a lot. Judging from the success of both series, I think this theme appeals to many other people as well, especially teenagers.

Why on earth was Cal called Mark here in Italy?

That was a decision made by my Italian publishers. They felt that the name Cal would not be as attractive to the Italian readership as Mark. I can't say that I was completely convinced by their argument, but as I assumed that they were aware of their cultural references far better than I was, I went along with their decision. I have since realized that perhaps they got it a little bit wrong.

Leaving aside jokes, who do you feel would find himself better in the other's scenario? Is it Cal in Magnamund or Lone Wolf in a post-atomic United States?

That's an interesting question, and one that's set me thinking about the possibilities

of transposing someone from one timeline into another that is totally different and alien. It reminds me of the Thomas Covenant books by Steven Donaldson which are about a cynical leper, shunned by society, who is destined to become the heroic savior of an 'alternative' Earth. On balance, I think that Lone Wolf would probably fare better in Cal's circumstances, rather than the other way around. Having Kai Disciplines in the real world would be hugely advantageous. He would probably view modern technology as a form of magic and deal with it as such.

One of the most important differences between it and the Kai saga is that instead of fighting against monsters and fantasy creatures, the reader must face and kill other human beings. Did you ever think that this could be a bad example for younger readers? Did you ever receive any kind of criticism about this?

I did consider the moral aspects of *Freeway Warrior* very closely, which is why the baddies he faces, fights, and often kills, are irredeemably criminal characters. Given the setting, it would be rather ridiculous if he had taken a 'politically correct' approach to these enemies. They were out to kill him and his colony. The rule of law no longer existed. Civilization as we know it no longer existed, at least not in the territories through which he travelled. The only law in effect was the law of survival. He did what was necessary in order for him and his colony to survive. I had no adverse press criticism or mail about the series whatsoever. Everyone who read the books seemed to accept that the violence was appropriate for the extraordinary circumstances in which the main character found himself.

The game system is similar to the Lone Wolf one, but more particularized. What difficulties were there in addition to having to keep count of variables like water, agility restrictions due to carrying more objects and weapons, and so forth?

Not so much difficulties as challenges. The main challenge was creating a simple yet effective set of rules that incorporated the

use of modern weaponry. But a gun is basically a missile weapon and, as such, it has a lot in common with a bow. The basic purpose is the same, i.e. to hit an enemy or target at a distance. From a game design point of view it was the challenge of creating a workable set of rules for a modern setting but based on the fundamentals established in the *Lone Wolf* series that appealed to me the most. Hopefully, I achieved what I set out to do.

Another fundamental difference is the lack of supportive skills. I often miss the Sixth Sense and Hunting skills, and obviously the Sommerswerd as well. Can it be said that Cal is “more human” than Lone Wolf from this point of view?

Yes, that would be a fair assessment. Not having Kai Disciplines to draw upon to generate options made it a little harder for me to write the *Freeway Warrior* books—from a design point of view, that is—but I don't feel the adventures were lacking as a

result. The settings and the characters were sufficiently different from those in *Lone Wolf* for me to be able to create new dynamics. I was pleased with the end result.

The Combat Results Table is much more complex than the ones in the *Lone Wolf* books. Even with Combat Ratios very favourable and picking the highest number in the Random Number Table, it may occur that very little damage is inflicted upon the enemy, while much damage is sustained; and vice-versa with adverse ratios. Why was this done?

It came about after several play tests. I soon realised that the *Lone Wolf* ratios were not suited to the combats in *Freeway Warrior*. I didn't make a conscious decision to change the tables at the start; it came about purely after playing through the adventures. The Combat Ratios were decided after the books were completed, unlike in *Lone Wolf* where they are usually tested and set down as the story is written.

SPOILERS FOLLOW:

Let's move to the individual books. The first one seems much more difficult than the others. Was it your intention to give the series a hard beginning as a way to immerse the reader in the hardships of a post-atomic reality?

The simple answer is 'yes'. I wanted to get across just how hostile the environment and the adversaries would be in this environment. The difficulty ratios got progressively easier to represent how Cal (Mark) was getting fitter, stronger, and more experienced as he survived and progressed. In this regard, it was a conscious effort on my part to simulate the kind of progression and progress *Lone Wolf* players feel as they gain new Disciplines.

During the second book the relationship between the protagonist and Kate becomes deeper. The presence of a female partner in itself is a huge difference in respect to *Lone*

***Wolf*. Some might say it was about time! What motivated you to introduce this character?**

The setting gave me an opportunity to introduce a traditional kind of love interest to the story, something that is not a part of the *Lone Wolf* series. I never felt that it was *Lone Wolf*'s destiny to find a female partner (or a male one for that matter). I always felt that *Lone Wolf* should be what his name implies. With *Freeway Warrior*, there was a sub-text that Cal (Mark) and Kate were a traditional heterosexual couple that would go on to marry and have kids. Their offspring would represent the start of the first post-apocalypse generation. From a writing point of view, the introduction of a love interest is something that I had wanted to experiment with for some time in the solo adventure style. It was quite a challenge, but the story and the setting were appropriate for it. I had a lot of mail praising the way I'd handled it (and not just from female

readers), and saying how much it added to the depth and believability of the main character.

The third book is by far the most dramatic of the series. The presence of a sniper that kills off all the other members of the group one-by-one is unexpected and disturbing. Were these the emotions that you wanted the reader to feel? The final duel against Varken is very thrilling, with a clear reference to the mythical Tombstone shoot-out at the OK Corral. Are you especially interested in the era of the Wild West?

Absolutely. Of all the books, *The Omega Zone* came out as the clear 'Reader's Favourite'. I had wanted to introduce this kind of dynamic into a solo adventure, but the opportunity to do so in *Lone Wolf* didn't really present itself. After two books, the reader of *Freeway Warrior* has established close ties with the members of the colony. They have become his surrogate family. I knew that it would be both exciting and disturbing to introduce a deadly sniper in book three, and I was pleased with the way it worked out. Regarding the Tombstone setting, I've always been a big fan of the Wild West. Even today I still game in this period quite a lot, and I have a large collection of Wild West miniatures. It was coincidental that the progression of the story placed Cal (Mark) in Tombstone in Book 3. I visited the town during my road trip and decided then that I would include it in the story. It was my way of paying homage to the Western genre.

The last book of the series has many emotions ready for its readers. Without doubt, the traitor trial has a great impact. Was there any particular inspiration behind it? The end of the book, on the other hand, appears a little bit too happy!

The idea of the traitor trial took shape while I was writing book two. I had already outlined Book 4 by then, but I decided to change the original outlines to incorporate this sub-plot. I felt it added a new dimension and greater depth to the story. Regarding the ending, I was determined from the start for it to end as happily as it could. After all Cal (Mark) had been through, I felt the reader would feel a bit cheated if he didn't enjoy the success and recognition he deserved for having completed such a difficult series of adventures. I hope I didn't overdo it! There was also some pressure from my American publisher to have the series end on a high and hopeful note. As this was in keeping with what I had already planned, I didn't feel unduly pressurized by them into ending the series the way I did.

Why did you destroy the fantastic car that was with Phoenix for all his long journey just at the end of the road? That was really mean!

He loses the car but gets the girl. Better than the other way around, surely?

From what did you draw your inspiration in creating the motorbike gangs and the prominent antagonist Mad Dog Michigan?

I figured that motorcycles would be the ideal mode of transport for the baddies, given the rarity of fuel. I also think that there were many Wild West parallels in the series, not least of all because of its geographical setting and the fact that the rule of law no longer prevailed. The motorcycles were the equivalent of horses in this regard. They also have a cool and somewhat dangerous image that suited the outlaws perfectly.

END OF SPOILERS

With this series' premise it can be said that you had foreseen an exponential increase in terrorist attacks. Have you thought during the New York, London, or Madrid attacks that terrible scenarios, like the one you wrote about in this series, could become real? What do you think about the world situation at the moment?

I cannot claim to have had any real insight or premonition of the current world situation regarding global terrorism when I wrote the *Freeway Warrior* series. I had proposed, wrongly, that the Soviet Union would last longer than in fact it did. However, I was of the belief back then that traditional forms of warfare would give way to more covert guerilla-style campaigns as embodied nowadays by the way Al-Qaeda operate, for instance. Having grown up in London during the seventies, acts of terrorism (by the IRA) were sadly commonplace, and I think this had some influence on the way I thought the nature of armed conflict would change over the coming years. In this regard I think I was (sadly) correct. As regards my view of the current situation, my answer would likely take up several pages. Suffice to say that I think the current US Administration is the worst thing that has happened to the world in the last eight years. It has caused terrible damage that will take decades to repair. I am looking forward to November 2008 when, finally, the nightmare that is Bush & Cheney will end.

When you imagined your post-apocalyptic scenario, were you in some degree scared by an escalation in the Cold War?

I was a child of the Cold War. I grew up un-

der the threat of the 'four minute warning' and nuclear holocaust. I can still remember the look of abject fear on my parents' faces when on October 27th 1962, when I was just six years old; we were watching the TV news as the Cuban Missile Crisis reached its nadir. I was too young to fully appreciate the potential consequences of the situation, but the fear was palpable. Suddenly, all of the grown-ups were scared, and I mean really scared! It's something I've never seen since and something I've never forgotten. Later I understood they had every reason to be terrified. It was the closest the World has ever come to an all-out nuclear war.

Although the threat was real and ever-present, I can't say that it made me feel insecure or unduly scared. I suppose it did however make it easier for me to imagine and write about a post-nuclear environment, as the outcome of a nuclear war was often discussed and portrayed in the news, films and literature of the sixties and seventies, far more so that it is nowadays.

After the restyling and extension (and, of course, conclusion) being given to the *Lone Wolf* series, would you like to give a similar treatment to this series too?

I've no plans to do so. If ever I was to make changes, it would most likely be to the timeline and story rationale leading up to holocaust.

Is there any possibility of some new adventures for Cal Phoenix?

Not in the foreseeable future, but I would not rule it out entirely.