

# DEADLANDS

DEADLANDS MEMORIES BY JOHN HOPLER

Wow, hard to believe it's been twenty years. Cliché, I know, but so many of the memories from that time are so vivid they seem like yesterday.

Shane and I met during our freshman year at Virginia Tech and soon became close friends. We were fortunate to find a great group of passionate and creative gamers there. We spent many of our Friday nights making John Goff's job as a GM hell by inventing increasingly elaborate ways to torment the paladin in our party. Horror games made up a large portion of our gaming diet. *Chill, Call of Cthulhu*, and *GURPS Horror* were part of many late-night gaming sessions.

It didn't take long to progress from playing games to wanting to make them. We both did freelance writing for various game companies while we were in school. Post-graduation, Shane opened a game store and continued writing full-time. I got a "real" job and picked up the occasional freelance writing contract.

In the fall of '94 I got the idea for *The Last Crusade*, a CCG set in World War Two. I cobbled a prototype deck together and took it over to Shane's place. I was just looking for some feedback and advice, but to my surprise Shane said, "Why don't we publish this?" That's exactly what we did with the help of another friend, Charles Ryan, who already had an established game company, Chameleon Eclectic. It was a lot of work and a lot of weekends spent poring over photos at the National Archives (but hey, I finally got some practical use out of my history degree).

*The Last Crusade* sold well, but the phrase "Don't quit your day job" comes to mind. But that's exactly what I did when Shane pitched *Deadlands* to me and asked if I would be interested in working on it full-time. How can you say "No" to working on an alternate-history western game with undead

gunslingers and literal fire-and-brimstone preachers?

Putting together that first *Deadlands* book was an awesome creative experience. We'd usually spend the mornings bouncing story ideas and game mechanics off each other and the afternoons writing up everything we had discussed. I still remember the afternoon the first print of Brom's painting of Stone (the Harrowed gunslinger on the cover of the main book) arrived. Once we finished admiring it (which took a while), we were both so inspired we probably doubled our word count for the day. (The fact that Stone was originally intended to be a good guy will be our little secret.)

The summer convention season is a very important time for pen-and-paper game companies and the lead time for getting a book printed was longer then than it is today. There were a lot of long days and late nights getting the first book written and laid out in time for our print date. Luckily, by that time, Matt Forbeck had joined us in the office and his experience sped up the process.

In the end, though, all of the effort was worth it when we debuted *Deadlands* at Gencon. Running demo games and seeing the reactions of the players, watching the stacks of books in the booth grow ever smaller, and seeing flashes of that bright orange book in peoples' hands as you walked around the con was surreal.

Even though it's your goal setting out on a project like this, it takes time for it to sink in that all of these complete strangers are enjoying something you worked on.

I've both run and played in a lot of *Deadlands* games over the last twenty years. One of my favorite characters to play was Emilio "El Gato" Rodriguez, an unknown gunfighter looking to make a name for himself by calling out someone famous like Doc Holliday or Wild Bill Hickock. He never succeeded in his quest for fame, but that didn't prevent him from stopping to fight the evil he encountered along the way. Right now I've got a strong urge to break out the dice and poker chips, make sure Emilio's guns are well-oiled, and hit the trail again.