

DEADLANDS

DEADLANDS MEMORIES BY MATT FORBECK

Wow, has it really been twenty years?

The thing I remember most about *Deadlands* was the fun. I'm not talking about the game itself—although it's certainly packed full of that—but the people who helped put it all together. We were all pretty young, none of us even 30, and we liked our games and our drinks, not necessarily in that order.

I could write a book on how it all came together, but we don't have the space for that here, so I'm just going to bullet-point some highlights from roughly two decades back.

- Shane Hensley and I started out as drinking buddies at gaming conventions, bonding over the fact we were two of the three fastest freelance writers in the RPG industry. The third was Steve Long, who wound up writing *Deadlands* books for us later too. That speed was one of the reasons we managed to get the game out relatively fast.
- When Shane wanted to publish *Deadlands*, he invited the legendary Greg Gorden and me down to his home in Blacksburg, Virginia, to show us the game. Greg had to back out for personal reasons, but I loved the game so much I asked to become a partner in the company. My wife and I wound up moving to Blacksburg, and I served as the company president for its first four years.
- The main hero in the original RPG, Ronan Lynch, was my player character. I named him after an Irish exchange student pal I went to school with at the University of Michigan. He was one of the funniest, sharpest

writers I ever knew, and he went on to become an investigative journalist and, later, the lead singer in a reggae band in Germany. Years ago, I tracked him down, and he said, "So it's your fault I come up with this zombie cowboy every time I Google my name."

- *Deadlands* debuted at Gen Con in 1996. We were so close on getting the book to press that we had the printer deliver some of the books straight to the convention, but they didn't arrive until Thursday morning. Five minutes before the floor opened, the truck was still in line at the loading dock, so I grabbed a few extra hands, went and knocked on the truck's door, and got the driver to let us unload as many boxes as we could carry with us, right then and there. When the doors to the show opened, we had games to sell.
- We sold out of every copy of *Deadlands* we had shipped to Gen Con. Kind of. I wound up giving away something like a hundred copies of the game to friends in the gaming industry. They'd been giving me free games for years, and it was time for me to return the favor. While it seemed excessive at the time, getting *Deadlands* in the hands of many of the most influential gamers in the nation helped us spread the word about it. I consider that the best marketing we did.

There's more than that, of course—lots more—but looking back, the thing I'm happiest about is that after I left the company, the game went on without me. It's wonderful to see things you worked on decades ago develop their own life. With any luck, *Deadlands* will outlive every one of us who was there when it was created.

After all, it's hard to put down a zombie cowboy for good.

— Matt Forbeck, Beloit, WI,
September 13, 2016