



INTO THE TWILIGHT

Deadlands Brand Manager Matthew Cutter
talks about writing the Weird West



In the last of three design diaries, the Big Bug teases the Weird West's future.

The *Deadlands* 20th Anniversary and *Good Intentions* Kickstarters are huge successes by any measure, and that's all thanks to you, the fans. We sure do appreciate it! I'm going to wrap up my reminiscing with the stories of how our newest *Deadlands* comic books and novels were developed, followed by a little of taste of what's coming down the twisted trail next. Oh—were you under the impression *Good Intentions* is the end of the story? Not even close, buckaroos...read on!

DRIVIN' BACK THE DARK

The Weird West of *Deadlands* is a sprawling, variegated setting, and it includes elements of Westerns, horror, alternate history, and even science-fiction. Depending on your posse's location and composition, nearly any type of adventure is possible: shoot-'em-up action, mystery, political, exploration, mercantile, you name it. But at *Deadlands'* core is a single, binding principle that sometimes gets obscured by all the shiny bells and tuneful whistles: For the heroes, it's all about fighting back the fear.

The Reckoners' mad quest to "terrorform" the Earth to their liking, using the four Servitors and other evil entities, is central to every struggle—or at least it should be. Sure, all sorts of hombres and chicas walk the Weird West, and they're all after their own goals. But the battle against terror...that's where the true stakes lie. Winning that fight provides the big payoff, sometimes in the form of Legend Chips but more often as a safe haven for good-hearted folk. Heroes of the Weird West seek to create bulwarks against the darkness, towns where life can thrive.

I try to keep that principle firmly in mind when I'm going about all the other things a Brand Manager does besides writing and editing books, and laying them out in our purty, Western design. Those include working with new authors, helping them adjust to our house style, and ensuring their tales *feel* like the Weird West we've come to know and love. At the same time, we don't want to shoehorn new voices into the same mold; stories should build upon what came before but also add something new.

If you've got a hankerin' to write for *Deadlands*—and we're always accepting One Sheet adventures as "auditions," though we don't pay for those unless they're publishable—always keep fear in mind.

DEAD MAN'S VISIONS

Shane's been looking to get *Deadlands* into various media over the years: films, novels, comic books, video games, anywhere a Weird Western milieu might thrive and spawn entertaining yarns. To that end, we partnered with Chuck Sellner and Charlie Hall at Visionary Comics a few years ago to produce *Deadlands* comic books and novels (in partnership with TOR Books). Although they were kind enough to give me the opportunity to write a short comic book story—"What A Man's Got To Do"—my main job has been to act as the *Deadlands* consultant: in short, making sure any tales in our sandbox embody the power of fear and don't contradict or invalidate anything that's come before. So even though I never got too immersed in Classic *Deadlands* back in the day, over the intervening years I've read every orange sourcebook cover to cover...some of them several times!



Our first outing with Visionary was a series of one-shot tales by leading comic writers and artists, which Visionary collected in the graphic novel *Dead Man's Hand*. It was the Big Bug's job to read the scripts ahead of time, comment on setting elements, and even toss out a few edits and ideas here and there (when I just couldn't resist). I also helped out with the game statistics for the comics' main characters, ensuring those were up to snuff and street legal.

Our next comic book story with Visionary was a little more ambitious in terms of the Weird West's metaplot. *Dead Man's Hand* had explored a range of locations and character types; for the *Raven* graphic novel, we set out to relate the Reckoning's beginnings through the eyes of the man who started it all. And because Shane had already laid out the story's outlines in numerous Classic books, the question wasn't so much what tale to tell, but how to tell it.

Working with Chuck Sellner and artist Greg LaRocque to flesh out Shane's story was one of the most rewarding things I've had the chance to work on during my tenure with Pinnacle. Pulling information from Classic *Deadlands*, we hashed out exactly how Raven and the Last Sons perpetrated their murderous spree in the Hunting Grounds, slaying the Old Ones and cracking open the *Deadlands*' gates. We created all the supporting characters we would need to give the tale depth and pathos, and to humanize Raven a little bit. (But just a little bit; he's one bad dude!)

We delved into *Hell on Earth* to determine Raven's eventual fate, and with the help of our Kickstarter backers gave personalities to the heroes who finally tracked Raven down in the 1980s Sioux Nations. In a rip-roaring online game session—which I was Marshal for, via Roll20, with Shane on the players' side—the backers guided their characters through the actual defeat and binding of Raven. Chuck was on hand to record the results and take notes; the game session is now immortalized, pretty much exactly how it went down, in the *Raven* graphic novel's pages! Never before or since have our fans been so directly involved in writing the Weird West's story; I was proud to be a small part of it.

Finally, I was lucky enough to be included as Shane told a story he'd had under his hat since the earliest days of *Deadlands*: the tale of the Cackler! Although my role was strictly editorial, it was amazing to watch that twisted tale unfold. I won't spoil the *Cackler* graphic novel's payoff for those who haven't had the chance to read it (buy a copy at www.peginc.com, amigo, and get the PDF for free!), but I can say the Cackler's return to the Weird West brought down a pall of twilight...one that has yet to reveal the full extent of its malevolence.

And that, friends, brings us to the year 1883 in *Deadlands* lore. The Servitors are defeated, thwarted, or

their plans delayed...but that doesn't mean the Weird West is a bright and happy place. Quite the opposite.

TWILIGHT OF THE WEST

The Cackler's return brought substantial changes. The Union and Confederacy remain bitter enemies, but their Secret Services—the Agency and the Texas Rangers—have put aside their differences in the face of an implacable foe. After the Cackler's return and the evil acts that ensue, the skies seem a little darker, the vast prairies a little lonelier, the distances between burgs a little longer and more dangerous. It's almost as if a permanent twilight has fallen. In that metaphysical gloom, magic and monsters thrive.

First, a caveat: this is by no means a release schedule or definite in any way...merely a peek behind the curtain at some of the things we've discussed for the next iteration of *Deadlands*. It's also at least a year away, so a lot could change between now and then. All right—now that all those boring qualifications are out of the way, we can get to the nitty gritty!

We've been updating all our game lines to the new, graphic novel format for a few years now. *Deadlands* will get the same treatment, and like *Savage Rifts*® we've discussed splitting the material into a *Player's Guide*, *Marshal's Handbook*, and *Critter Codex* (we might not call it that, but it sounds sweet and I admire alliteration), all of which will be rewritten yet remain compatible with the Reloaded game line.

We have an updated book of *Relics*, by the talented Zach Welhouse, ready to go. As well, for years I've felt *Deadlands* could use a book that allows heroes to build and run a town. This one would give players the opportunity to be entrepreneurs and leaders of a settlement or boomtown, with rules for running establishments; for the Marshal, a complete guide to filling the lives of townsfolk with terror and adventure. And of course, the goal would be to soothe fears and keep the heroes' home safe and sound from things that snarl and slaver in the night.

We're also planning a new line of sourcebooks, each one focused on a particular town and the region around it. These books would include maps, personalities, unique critters and beasts, and a short Plot Point campaign set in the burg's environs—a little like *Deadlands: Ghost Towns*, but far more detailed. Broadly speaking, our goal is to get back to the heart of *Deadlands*: the Weird West itself, and the Westerns and horror stories that fuel it and give it life (or unlife). And did I mention that *Deadlands: Dark Ages* by John "Night Train" Goff is also on the way? I reckon I just did, compadre!

In all these adventures, wherever they may take place, the heroes' objective is to fight back the creeping fear. And we wish 'em luck. —Matthew Cutter