

DOWN DARKER TRAILS

TERRORS OF THE MYTHOS IN THE OLD WEST

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No offence to anyone living or dead, or to the inhabitants of any of these places is intended. Material is fictionalized and used here as the basis for tales inspired from the imagination of H. P. Lovecraft and other writers of weird horror fiction, as well as from the tradition of pulp comics and stories.

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CREDITS

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Clear Credit

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Dedication

This one's for Scott, for being my best friend for so long, and for finally kicking my ass into getting this thing done.
Muchas gracias, mi hermano.



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INTRODUCTION

Make no mistake: Oklahoma is a lot more than a mere pioneer's and promoter's frontier. There are old, old tribes with old, old memories there; and when the tom-toms beat ceaselessly over brooding plains in the autumn the spirits of men are brought dangerously close to primal, whispered things.

—H. P. Lovecraft and Zealia Bishop, *The Mound*

Why had the Indians named it the Valley of the Lost, which white men shortened to Lost Valley? Why had the red men shunned it? Once in the memory of white men, a band of Kiowas, fleeing the vengeance of Bigfoot Wallace and his rangers, had taken up their abode there and fallen on evil times. The survivors of the tribe had fled, telling wild tales in which murder, fratricide, insanity, vampirism, slaughter, and cannibalism had played grim parts. Then six white men, brothers, Stark by name, had settled in Lost Valley. They had reopened the cave which the Kiowas had blocked up. Horror had fallen on them and in one night five died by one another's hands. The survivor had walled up the cave mouth again and departed, where none knew, though word had drifted through the settlements of a man named Stark who had come among the remnants of those Kiowas who had once lived in Lost Valley and, after a long talk with them, had cut his own throat with his bowie knife.

—Robert E. Howard, *The Valley of the Lost*

Down Darker Trails describes a new setting for *Call of Cthulhu* roleplaying, the American West of the late 19th century. It's the era of gold rushes, outlaws and lawmen, discovery, war, and expansion. It's the time of Wild Bill Hickok, Crazy Horse, the Battle of the Little Bighorn, the OK Corral, the James-Younger gang, Geronimo and the Apache, Deadwood and Dodge City, Billy the Kid and the Lincoln County War, and a host of other names and places that have transcended mere history to become legend.

This book seeks to combine the "real" West with supernatural elements, notably the alien races and cosmic horrors of the Cthulhu Mythos. The wildernesses here are inhabited by all manner of unearthly creatures, from mi-go miners to furtive sand dwellers, chakotas and other horrors created or worshipped by indigenous tribes, various creatures from the underground world of K'n-yan, and even

more potent entities—many masked Nyarlathotep and temperamental Yig for instance. There are other creatures of myth and legend here as well: ghosts, werewolves, sasquatch, and thunderbirds. This is a West of hidden worlds, of lost treasures and cities, with a history going back thousands of years, from ancient humans to native peoples to Spanish explorers. It's a half-continent filled with beauty, mystery, terror—and adventure.

The tone of *Down Darker Trails* is intended to be markedly different from other *Call of Cthulhu* settings in a number of ways. Foremost among these differences is the deliberate choice to emphasize the pulp soul of the Western genre, gritty adventure rather than pure nihilistic horror. The horror element is still here, but these Western heroes are much more likely to face it with guns drawn and teeth bared. Thus, *Down Darker Trails* works equally well with *Pulp Cthulhu* as standard *Call of Cthulhu*. Indeed, Pulp Talents have been, optionally, included in the investigator creation chapter. This change in tone was inspired by the fiction of Texas author Robert E. Howard, the creator of Conan, Kull, and Solomon Kane. Howard was also a friend and correspondent of H. P. Lovecraft and an important early contributor to the Cthulhu Mythos. Interested Keepers and players are strongly encouraged to seek out the collection *The Horror Stories of Robert E. Howard* (Del Rey Books) to see where this book's mindset was born.

Down Darker Trails features era specific rules for character creation, as well as for life in the Old West. Also included are period weapons and price lists, setting-specific discussions of chases, and the treatment of insanity. There is also a brief historical overview of the West, including an article on the Civil War, and a timeline of important events and Forteanas. Native American tribes of the West are discussed, and a gazetteer provides brief descriptions of notable historical places and people, from New Orleans to Tombstone, from Wyatt Earp to Calamity Jane.