

The book cover features a central illustration of a woman with long black hair, wearing a dark, high-collared coat and a wide-brimmed hat. She is surrounded by numerous green, tentacle-like appendages with small blue spikes. The background is a dark, textured blue. The entire scene is framed by a decorative border of red, branching, vine-like structures with small white eyes at their tips. The title 'WEIRD of HALI' is written in large, red, outlined letters at the top.

WEIRD of HALI

Roleplaying The Other Side
Of The Cthulhu Mythos

JOHN MICHAEL GREER

Mythras

Weird of Hali

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Roleplaying the Other Side of the Cthulhu Mythos

John Michael Greer

AEON GAMES

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For the Record...

El•dritch /'el-dritch/ *adj.* [*perh. fr. (assumed) ME elfriche fairyland, fr. ME elf + riche kingdom, fr. OE rice—more at RICH*] (1508): WEIRD, EERIE

—from Webster's *Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, 1986

Introduction

The old woman leans forward, and her eyes glitter in the light of the bare bulb. Shadows crouch in the shabby little room. Outside, night's silence deepens. "You've read stories about the Great Old Ones." Her laugh whispers like falling sand. "Cthulhu, Tsathoggua, Yog-Sothoth, Nyarlathotep, the Black Goat, the King in Yellow—you know those names. The elder races—Deep Ones, voormis, shoggoths, and the rest of them—you've heard of them." When you don't speak, her eyes narrow. "Answer me."

Your throat is dry, but you manage a response: "Yes."

"Of course you have." Her wrinkled face creases in a bleak smile. "All the nonsense about human sacrifice and the rest of it, the same stories they used to spread about Jews and witches, heretics and pagans, eh? The Great Old Ones are indifferent to us, and yet they hate us—don't ask me how that makes sense, but that's what you've been told, oh yes. The Great Old Ones don't care about the world. They don't care about us—us! Man, the conqueror of Nature! Man, the summit of evolution! Man, the measure of all things!"

She laughs again, setting harsh echoes chasing each other among the shadows. You stare at her, trying to master the dread that surges in your blood.

"Lies," she says. The word strikes like a lash. "All lies."

She fixes you with a hard look, and you nod slowly, because you know she's right.

"The Great Old Ones are the gods of Earth," she says then. "They made this world what it is, and the greater world of which it's a tiny part, they made that what it is, too. They own it, and we're just one species on this one little Earth of theirs, no more important than hagfish or aardvarks or blue-green algae. That's the reality behind the lies. We matter to ourselves, oh, no doubt, just as hagfish and aardvarks matter to themselves. To the Great Old Ones? We're monkeys with an overblown sense of entitlement." Her gaze stabs at you. "And they're right."

"I know," you say. It's true, too. The forbidden books you've read, the scraps of evidence you've pieced together, leave you no other conclusion.

"Good." The old woman regards you with a sardonic look. You can see nothing of her but her face; a shapeless brown garment bunches about her, and her arms are crossed, hands buried in joined sleeves.

"You know about the desecration of the seven temples, the bindings placed on the Great Old Ones until the stars are right? You know about—" Her voice drops to a harsh whisper. "The Radiance?" When you nod, she leans forward again. "They still have the terrible powers they stole then. They're still pursuing their

mad and bloodstained dream. They still want to build their Utopia of perfect reason, to force the world to make the kind of sense they want it to make, to scour the Earth clean of every living thing that isn't human, and especially the elder races, oh, yes, them above all. To make the world rational and orderly and sterile and dead, perfectly controlled by a technocratic elite answerable to nobody; no war, no crime, no differences of opinion, every human being reduced to a well-greased cog in their huge machine, doing and saying and thinking exactly what they're told, forever.

"We stand against them. We, the elder races—and the Great Old Ones."

In the silence that follows, the old woman fixes you with her gaze. You know what you need to say. Heart pounding, you say it. "I know. I want to stand with you."

In answer, she draws her hands apart—except that they're not hands. The end of a tentacle protrudes from each of her sleeves. The tip of one tentacle coils around something that gleams and flashes in the dim light.

It's the hardest thing you've ever done, to reach out your hand, palm up. She smiles, and her tentacle puts the glittering thing in your hand. You glance at it, recognize it: the ankh of ancient Egypt, symbol of the life force and of the Starry Wisdom Church.

"412 West Saltonstall Street, here in Arkham," the old woman says then. "Nine o'clock tomorrow night. Don't mention any of this to anybody else, or we'll find out, oh, trust me, and no one will ever find your bones. Bring that." The tip of one tentacle jabs at the ankh in your hand. "That will get you in the door, and then they'll ask you some questions and take you somewhere else. Beyond that, why, it depends on you, and on the Great Old Ones." She laughs again. You draw in a ragged breath, knowing that you've just taken an irrevocable step into an uncanny new world...

* * *

Few authors have had as dramatic an impact on the collective imagination of our age as H.P. Lovecraft (1890–1937), the twentieth century's premier author of weird fiction. Mostly famous now as a horror writer, Lovecraft was also a crucial figure in the emergence of modern fantasy. The Cthulhu mythos—the sprawling universe he and his fellow *Weird Tales* authors created, full of bizarre gods, strange creatures, and books full of secrets humanity was not meant to know—was one of the first great shared worlds of modern

imaginative fiction, a cosmos so vivid that it has been an inspiration to writers ever since his day.

It's a curious comment on the man that all the most brilliant creations of Lovecraft's imagination were presented in his stories as powers of infinite evil. Only scholars and devout Lovecraft fans remember the names of most of his protagonists, but most people these days know about Great Cthulhu, the squid-faced, dragon-winged Great Old One who featured in Lovecraft's most iconic story, and many of his other creations—shoggoths, the *Necronomicon*, and more—have writhed their way just as deeply into the collective imagination of our era.

Lovecraft was also a man of his own era, and much of his fiction enshrines attitudes toward race and society that were widely accepted in his lifetime, but that many people today find understandably repugnant. In recent years, a growing number of authors have responded to the massive cultural shifts between Lovecraft's time and ours by redefining the moral compass of the Cthulhu mythos, celebrating the brilliance of his imagination while telling stories that stand his prejudices on their heads. This game is inspired by one of these, the seven-volume fantasy series *The Weird of Hali* by John Michael Greer.

In the world of *The Weird of Hali*, the Great Old Ones—Cthulhu, Yog-Sothoth, Tsathoggua, Nyarlathotep, and the rest of the pantheon Lovecraft and his friends created—are not powers of evil, though propaganda incessantly spread through every human society paints them in that role. The secretive, multiracial cults that still revere the Great Old Ones despite bitter centuries of prejudice and persecution are innocent of the charges of human sacrifice leveled against them, as those same charges have been leveled against so many other religious dissidents down through the years. In the novels, as in this game, the Great Old Ones are the gods of nature, their worshipers preserve a wisdom older than the human race, and those who stumble across long-suppressed clues dealing with that ancient wisdom may find themselves drawn into a larger and stranger world, full of mysterious powers and dreadful dangers.

Weird of Hali uses a modified version of the *Mythras* rule system, one of the large and popular family of d100 games—roleplaying games that use percentile dice rolls. Except for paper, pencils, and dice, everything you need to play *Weird of Hali* is included in this book. Games Masters who want to draw on other rule systems and supplements, however, will discover that *Weird of Hali* can be combined easily with *Mythras* itself and other *Mythras*-based games.

Differences between *Weird of Hali* and other *Mythras* games

Games Masters and players who are familiar with *Mythras* will notice a few significant differences between it and *Weird of Hali*:

- * In *Weird of Hali*, alongside Standard Skills and Professional Skills, a third class of Skills—Eldritch Skills—represents mastery of the secret lore of sorcery and the Great Old Ones. New characters begin with no Eldritch Skills, but may obtain them in the course of play. The use of sorcery depends on developing Eldritch Skills.
- * Magic Points are renamed Voorish Points, and apply to a somewhat wider range of Skills involving sensing and working with *voor*, the life force.

- * To deal with the mental challenges faced by characters dealing with uncanny realities, *Weird of Hali* uses a system of Rationality Points, representing personal commitment to the conventional wisdom of modern culture. These start out initially equal to the Power (POW) Characteristic, but decrease as characters deal successfully with eldritch realities.
- * Magic in *Weird of Hali*—or sorcery, as it is called—is far more limited than in many other games of the *Mythras* family, or in fantasy roleplaying games in general. As a general rule, sorcery in *Weird of Hali* does not affect physical matter directly; it can only affect the minds and nervous systems of living creatures, and even then is subject to certain hard limits.
- * Access to spells is the most important challenge faced by characters who wish to learn sorcery. Tomes containing spells are rare, teachers even rarer, and it is common for a student of sorcery to have to make do with a handful of ill-assorted spells that must be applied with considerable ingenuity to be of use. The quest for even so much as a stray page of the *Necronomicon* or another of the greater tomes may well land characters in an adventure!
- * The sorcerous disciplines available in *Weird of Hali* are Witchcraft, Initiation, and Conjunction. None of these is exactly equivalent to any of the magical disciplines in any of the other games of the *Mythras* family. Each depends on its own set of Eldritch Skills, and has its own set of possibilities, limitations, and dangers.

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No project of this sort is a solitary endeavor. My thanks are owed first of all to my wife Sara, who read and helped edit each of the seven novels in the fantasy sequence *The Weird of Hali* and my other works of fiction set in the same universe, and offered support, encouragement, and good advice throughout. Dana Driscoll and Isabel Cooper also read and made helpful comments on several of these novels, and a great many readers of the novels expressed their enthusiasm for the quirky reimagining of the Cthulhu mythos that shapes those books and this roleplaying game.

This rulebook would not have come into being except for the enthusiasm of Oliver Rathbone of Aeon Games Publishing, who encouraged me to create a roleplaying game based on *The Weird of Hali*, and offered useful advice on many details of the rules as they took shape. I also owe thanks here to Pete Nash and Lawrence Whitaker, designers of the *Mythras* roleplaying game, for permission to use their creation to provide the structure and game mechanics for *Weird of Hali*, and also for their detailed and helpful critique of an early draft of these rules.

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Weird of Hali RPG — based on the novels by John Michael Greer — is an alternative to everything you think you know about the world of H. P. Lovecraft. In this reality, the Great Old Ones are not the evil monsters of Lovecraft's original stories. This is propaganda cultivated by an evil secret society named Radiance.

You will play a human or Mythos creature, part of the small percentage who still fight for the Great Old Ones, and the nature they represent. But the task is not an easy one: Radiance is out to get you at every turn. Following a series of obscure clues, you must try and find them, navigating a world full of mysterious power and danger.

Weird of Hali uses a modified version of the Mythras rule system, part of the popular family of d100 games, which use percentile dice. Except for paper, pencil and dice, the book contains everything you will need to play and can be easily combined with Mythras and other Mythras based games.

John Michael Greer is the award-winning author of more than fifty books, including *The New Encyclopedia of the Occult*, *The Druidry Handbook*, *The Celtic Golden Dawn*, and *Circles of Power: An Introduction to Hermetic Magic*. An initiate in Freemasonry, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, and the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids, Greer served as the Grand Archdruid of the Ancient Order of Druids in America (AODA) for twelve years. He lives in Rhode Island with his wife Sara. Greer is also the author of eleven fantasy and science fiction novels and ten nonfiction books on peak oil and the future of industrial society, and also blogs weekly on politics, magic, and the future at www.ecosophia.net.

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Mythras

