

## COMPREHENDING THE UNNATURAL

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The central premise of Delta Green might be summarized best as this: the power of the Great Old Ones is not only beyond human control, it is beyond human comprehension. Even the most accomplished human operator of the unnatural is a flickering mote—temporary and soon snuffed out—when compared to the vast, eternal, solar orbs that are the all-consuming Great Old Ones and their ilk.

Since the beginning of human thought we have delved, studied, and written down the unnatural processes of the Great Old Ones, communicated to us in dreams, but these spells and rituals are beyond even the strongest human mind. These communications may not even be made on purpose. Like a sun radiates heat, the massive minds of the Great Old Ones spew knowledge, infecting any mind of sufficient capacity to receive the signal, and of course, just because an apparatus can receive a signal, it does not necessarily mean it can decipher it.

Oh, these secrets may *appear* understandable, as most secrets do at first—simple even—but they unfold like a terrible flower the deeper and deeper you look, and it is only too late that you realize the secret is that the universe is a fractal made of teeth. Teeth all the way down. All the species which have arisen since the Great Old Ones warred upon the Earth of sufficient mental capacity were made, guided, and infected by the knowledge of the Old Ones for a singular reason, to enact those rituals which might affect their escape. Many such species have come and gone, risen and fell on the globe, and have come from the stars and between the stars. Most of these species are far in advance of humanity, and look to us as we might look to a lowly ant. Still, even their incredible minds could not feature the power of the Great Old Ones, not really. So what hope does humanity have?

Despite the interregnum of the rule of other unnatural species, humanity is a blip on the cosmic record. We no more conquered this world than it might be said mold has conquered the charcoal, soaking wet ruins of a burned out house. We are a species that has swelled to fill a gap in an interstice of non-glacial time after cataclysmic, earth-shaking wars between forces we cannot understand, and we persist now with only the bare rudiments of senses and consciousness; the simplest container in which the forces of the Great Old Ones might manifest. And like a low watt bulb plugged into a huge energy source, such power may light us, but soon enough we are completely consumed by the fire.

Ironically, many new Handlers have a very hard time with this concept, though, at its core, it's incredibly easy to implement at the game table. This confusion in new Handlers is not hard to understand. Many other role-playing games are about collecting amazing magic things, learning when to apply them to a problem in the game, and then measuring how often you might afford to use them. Magic in Delta Green is like pulling a pin on an old grenade which might destroy the threat, you, the room, the city, or even reality, or then again, might do nothing at all. But each time you try, a little bit of what makes you human unravels into nothingness. This structure—that the unnatural gobbles up the human mind like a cancer—is a deliberate design which leads to the unique and clear feeling of fear and tension at the Delta Green table.

Still.

*But*, the fledgling Handler (often) says to me, *what if an Agent tries to study and understand the unknowable powers of the Great Old Ones?* Well, that's simple: *they will go insane*. Sometimes they may squeeze effects from the universe first—a bizarre spell, a glimpse of the future, a hint of immortality—but the bill always comes due. There's more to this to unpack, of course, but at

its core that's it: the essential interaction between humanity and the infinite. Any attempts to dissect the mysteries of the Great Old One causes humanity, sooner or later, to go insane. Full stop. There is no safety, no parachute, and no cheat. The transaction is always made in favor of the universe. The house always wins.

Despite this simple transaction at the core of nearly all of Lovecraft's tales, Handlers often ask questions which fly in the face of this clear math. However, if you wish to play Delta Green, there's no "what if" outside of this transaction. *It is literally impossible for human faculties to absorb, understand and control the power of the Great Old Ones and it always will be.* Such obsessions will always absorb, kill, or consume that human.

Why? Humanity is simply a local, imperfect species, far down the food chain, which dreams and imagines itself at the top due to its stark ignorance and the simplicity of its sensory organs. To operate these powers requires a fuel which is barely present in humans, and which is burned away as they use it more and more. Willpower, SANITY and POW are the fuel which the impossible burns. *Even then, even as a human might use an unnatural power, they do not understand what it is, how it works, or why.*

To make it so that humanity might understand, control, and deploy the unknowable powers of the Great Old One without negative effect would flip the order of the game on its head. And that order is the entire point of the horror in Delta Green role-playing. As a Handler, how do you keep the game in this track? It's actually very easy—the game is already built to do this. So don't fudge the rules; particularly the rules on Willpower, SANITY and POW when it comes to the unnatural. This will guarantee a downward spiral for those who rely on the unnatural too often. See, I said it would be easy!

But now, on to players and Agents.

Agents will ask these questions too, but that is a *good thing*. That is what humans do; they question the universe. We attempt to isolate, pick apart, test and use such knowledge to make things happen. I never discourage Agents from such attempts—it's only natural after all. They might even *appear* to succeed sometimes. In the end, however, they realize they have paid a terrible price for each piece of impossible they have drummed up. A few pointers are listed below to keep the Agents guessing.

**NO ANSWERS, MORE QUESTIONS:** Scientific study of artifacts and rituals might reveal simple facts ("the ritual seems to be able to act through walls, just not through gold") but the answer as to "why" will never come. Of course Agents with a scientific bend will want to *know*. That, of course, means they have to enact the ritual, and as such, lose Willpower, SANITY and/ or POW in the process. By the time they realize there are no answers coming, those Agents will likely be the property of the Handler.

**GREED:** Even the simplest unnatural effect ("I can see a still image of any location in 1 mile") is *infinitely valuable*. Humans have plotted (and carried out) murder for much more base coin. Greed will likely be the primary motivator of those who witness unnatural effects—particularly those unfamiliar with Delta Green and its mission. Never underestimate what a colleague, bond or other person in an Agent's life might do to gain possession of such an ability. This is a rich resource to mine for Handler's searching for a nice distraction from a main storyline.

**MIX IT UP:** It's best to think of unnatural powers, rituals, items and creatures as not being wholly perceived by the Agents. Creatures persist in higher dimensions invisible to the eye, spells act inside the spiral of math which binds the human world together, items draw on primal

powers completely alien and unknown to earthly science. So, when an Agent tugs on such a power, remember, you as Handler are not there to give them a perfect, predictable result. Who knows what their call might draw out from the dark?

**IMPERFECT RESULTS:** Rituals are often written down first by madmen linked to the transmitting minds of the Great Old One, and then translated throughout hundreds of years of human books. The meaning, actions and rituals shift and change over time, but the needs of the process do not. Sometimes such alterations lead to slight changes in the outcome, disastrous, or imperfect results. Sometimes a simple mistake in enacting a ritual might spark a nightmarish outcome. Handler, keep in mind you can liven things up at any time.

**OTHER STRANGENESS:** Tugging on such levers of powers might wake things beyond. Thinking of a ritual as “three on a match” is a fun thought exercise. Use the ritual once, something wakes. A second time, it sees you. A third time, it...arrives. Who knows what monitors and hunts the skeins of space and time tapped by such ancient rituals.