

DELTA GREEN: FOREKNOWLEDGE

Awareness of the Threat

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FOREKNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING IN DELTA GREEN

A common problem in Delta Green is a bit difficult to explain, but here it goes: *players think their Agents understand something no one in the world of Delta Green understands*. The Agent assumes some sort of conceivable order to the forces of the unnatural ("*oh, so the Deep Ones serve Cthulhu!*") when there is none — or at least none that might be conceived of by the human mind. They believe a single word (like, "ghoul") encompasses a single thing, and not a hundred thousand different unnatural possibilities. In short, they box up a bit of the unnatural and think, "*well, there's a lot of other stuff out there, but at least I have that piece of the unnatural sorted.*"

Except they don't. No one does. Delta Green has been active for decades, MAJESTIC-12 had nearly infinite budget and influence on the world intelligence community, and each force fundamentally misunderstood the totality of the unnatural threat in their own ways. Neither came close to uncovering the "truth", because the truth of the unnatural *cannot be understood by the sane*.

I often hear, "*but what if it COULD be understood!?*" That's a thought-experiment for *another* game, I'm afraid (one you should feel free to play, of course, no judgment here). The world in which the unnatural might be understood and studied is a science-fiction game, not a horror game, and Delta Green is most definitely built for horror. If you want to play it as science fiction; Delta Green loses the personal horror and ruin built in to the game. In short, it fundamentally shifts what the game is about. Fun could be had in either version, of course, as long as the core goals of the game are understood by the GM and players. Delta Green in its purest form is about *personal destruction in the face of an inconceivable apocalypse*.

There are two levels of foreknowledge seen at the table. One is a detriment to the game, and the second encompasses good role-playing (but can also be troublesome if not given careful attention by the Handler).

The first and most common foreknowledge problem is players having book knowledge of monsters, spells, cults, and other things their Agent could never hope to know. Some players just can't help themselves, and *must* trot these facts out (like stats for the monster the Agents are currently facing, the precise mechanical aspects of a spell being unleashed on them, etcetera). This should not be permitted, as it very effectively extinguishes fear and uncertainty at the table — which is the core of the Delta Green experience. Players that do this should be taken aside and spoken to about it. Tell them directly that they're ruining the mood and ask them to curb the behavior. If it continues past that point, positive options are few, but I'd rather have a compelling game with three players than a game devoid of excitement and four players. Your mileage may vary.

The second version goes something like, "*I faced the Fungi from Yuggoth, so my Agent must understand what THAT'S like.*" This is an honest reaction, and is not cheating in any way. It's what an Agent *might* think in such a situation, and players should not be penalized or rolled over the coals for their Agents behaving that way. Instead, I contend it's the Handler's job to never treat their encounters or supposed understanding as reality. If, for example, an Agent that encountered the Fungi from Yuggoth once encounters them again, it is the Handler's sacred duty to scare the shit out of that Agent with the Fungi from Yuggoth. Play with their expectations and then flip them on its head. Confound them with bizarre actions on the part of the threat, or imbue the creature with powers and abilities well beyond the Agent's previous

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understanding. In short, set up the encounter so that they feel more in control than usual facing the unnatural — at first — and then pull the rug out from under them.

KNOWLEDGE OF THE UNNATURAL IN THE WORLD OF DELTA GREEN

Very few people in the world of Delta Green know *anything* about the unnatural. Those that *do* know of the unnatural almost always only know of singular instances of such things, and do not grasp that vast and dark forces from pre-history still haunt the world. In short, as the Handler, only *you* will ever have any real idea of the array of forces, spells, magic and cults the Agents might face.

The greatest mind ever fielded by Delta Green (Joseph Camp, PhD) understood only the dimmest conception of the highest level of what is presented in the Handler's guide, and even then, not in any tangible way. This world-view might be best summarized as: *mankind is the last and least advanced of various inhuman civilizations which occupied Earth for billions of years, some individuals from those cultures persist today. Their science is called "magic" and humans are only barely capable of tapping into it.*

That's it. Beyond that, dates, times, species, books, each is supposition (most often contradictory in nature) that can never be proven or safely rejected.

As such, what appears to be clear knowledge of the unnatural for an Agent might actually be one of many different types of "knowledge" to the Handler. The player might never really understand where their "knowledge" falls on this spectrum (but the Handler *must* understand).

- Δ **WHAT THE AGENT KNOWS:** The Agent is certain of this fact about the unnatural. This usually is some blunt fact: *"The things in the graveyard were inhumanly resistant to bullets, still, explosives did the trick," "the book had a spell in it that showed you the future..."* Handler's should note, that though the Agent might know this fact and be correct, there is always a "but" possible. For example: *"The things in the graveyard were inhumanly resistant to bullets, still, explosives did the trick, but during the full-moon, they were immune to all violence."* or *"the book had a spell in it that showed you the future, but it wasn't necessarily the future we'd experience and it changed each day."*
- Δ **WHAT THE AGENT THINKS THEY KNOW:** The Agent makes assumptions about the unnatural based on what they know even though they have no direct evidence. This is usually a follow on to a blunt fact: *"The things in the graveyard must live in tunnels beneath because they appeared out of nowhere and have been seen there before," "the book is written in 15th century German, so it must somehow be from 15th century Germany."* These suppositions are a rich field to sew for the Handler, and could (and should) conceal nearly any horror.
- Δ **WHAT THE AGENT DOESN'T KNOW:** When an Agent is experienced enough, this feeling should pervade every reveal of the unnatural. The darkness that Delta Green fights to keep at the periphery of human experience is terrible, haunting, and infectious, and good Agents learn quickly that knowing when to not learn about such things can be an advantage.
- Δ **WHAT THE AGENT CAN NEVER KNOW:** The core of the unnatural in Delta Green is its terrible price on human sanity. Only those that have collapsed into utter madness might

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actually begin to understand the concepts, beliefs and powers at work in the world, as well as *why they work as they do*. As an Agent drops in sanity, clever Handlers might sprinkle descriptions of the horrors they face with something resembling *understanding*...

THE KITCHEN SINK PROBLEM

The opposite of the limited world-view often surfaces as a common theme in beginning Handler's operations best summarized as "everything and the kitchen sink" syndrome — "*well, the ghouls are working WITH the Mi-Go, who are serving the cult to make the Fate do their bidding...*"

These kinds of Rube Goldberg-esque plots are the antithesis of the unnatural in Delta Green for two reasons. First, the unnatural is self-isolating, self-consuming, and secret. Cults and creatures spiral in on themselves, destroying the evidence of their existence along with their ability to be a threat over time. Such has always been the way of power... Second, few of these orders or plots survive long enough to establish such connections, and instead rise up and collapse quickly.

Fixing this is as simple as the following thought experiment: *what one creature, book, spell, or organization could I take and present in a new and interesting way to my players?* Stick to that to begin with, and later, perhaps, make it more complicated.