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THE UNIVERSE LIVES—AND HUNGERS

If we look too deeply into the roiling chaos of reality, chaos may look back. The Olympian Holobeam Array, funded in part by the U.S. Department of Energy, was built to delve into a fringe theory of physics. It uses highly classified technology that its parent company developed in conjunction with the U.S. military.

A few hours ago, the Holobeam Array went online. A few minutes ago, it went offline in a catastrophic power surge. Its engineers soon restored power and communications. Its lead researcher said everything was fine.

Delta Green, a secret agency dedicated to investigating, stopping, and covering up deadly incursions of unnatural forces, had reason to suspect otherwise. It immediately pulled strings to launch an emergency inspection, sending the players' Agents to investigate under the cover of a team from the Department of Energy.

The Agents have no idea what they'll find when they reach the Array. "Observer Effect" is a complete scenario for DELTA GREEN, the role-playing game of Lovecraftian horror and conspiracy. It is playable with the full rules in the AGENT'S HANDBOOK, or the quickstart rules in DELTA GREEN: NEED TO KNOW, available from Arc Dream Publishing. Learn more at DELTA-GREEN.COM.



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Observer Effect

A Scenario for *Delta Green: The Role-Playing Game*

Written by Shane Ivey

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Introduction

If we look too deeply into the roiling chaos of reality, chaos may look back.

The Olympian Holobeam Array, funded in part by the U.S. Department of Energy, was built to evaluate a strange theory of physics: the “holographic principle,” an idea that the three-dimensional universe is a sort of holographic reflection of the two-dimensional “surface” reality of the cosmological horizon—that space and matter

are merely illusory projections from the boundaries of the universe. Past attempts to find physical evidence for the theory have failed. This attempt uses technologies that the others lacked.

A few hours ago, the Holobeam Array went online. A few minutes ago, the Array went offline in a catastrophic power surge. Its engineers soon restored power and communications. Its lead researcher said everything was fine. Delta Green had reason to suspect otherwise. It immediately pulled strings to launch an emergency inspection, sending the players’ Agents to investigate, under cover of the Department of Energy. The Agents have no idea what they’ll find when they reach the Array.

“Observer Effect” is likely to take two game sessions to play. The first will introduce the Agents to the scenario and probably cover their research into the Array, their arrival at the Array and interviews with its staff, and unnatural incursions leading to catastrophe. The second session will probably cover their “awakening” in a new iteration and their efforts to stave off catastrophe again as it comes quicker and quicker and they remember more and more.



The scenario can be played with whatever Agents the players wish. It assumes that the Agents are members of the official Delta Green program, but can easily be adapted to Agents of the illegal conspiracy. Either way, they'd do well to have at least one Agent skilled in HUMINT and accustomed to conducting interviews. There is one pregenerated Agent, a Department of Energy inspector, who can be a player's Agent or an NPC (see **INSPECTOR HUA** on page 29).

The Agents are all presently in the American Midwest, whether based there or on a temporary assignment.

Iteration One

A few hours before this adventure begins, some of Delta Green's leaders—who'll remain unnamed here—experienced a troubling occurrence. They found notes in their own handwriting about an "unnatural" incursion at the Olympian Holobeam Array outside Chicago.

The notes indicated frantic, confused calls from the Array: an unexpected energy surge, terrible visions, and sudden violent insanity. The notes mentioned Delta Green agents, including at least one of the players' Agents and a case officer who goes by the pseudonym Eve Carpenter.

The leaders had no memory of the calls or of making those notes. Delta Green had not sent any agents to the Array. What it all meant, they didn't know. But if there's an incursion of the unnatural, it must be stopped. And if an unnatural paradox is to be avoided, the players' Agents must be the ones to do it. After all, they have already been exposed.

Delta Green's leaders decided that the players' Agents must not be told that the warnings apparently came from the Agents, at precisely 10:00 a.m., when the Agents themselves were wracked with horror.

Iterations of Reality

Delta Green received the alert from the Agents themselves in a previous iteration of this crisis; think of it as Iteration Zero. The Agents "awakened" at 10:00 that morning, shrieking with uneven memories of horror—or, perhaps, echoes of awareness from another reality. Those half-recalled horrors occurred in an iteration before that—Iteration -1, perhaps—when the Agents were sent to the Array

after alarmed calls of supernatural incursions caught Delta Green's attention. Iteration One is therefore the first that the Agents remember, but the third they have experienced. Two prior, adjacent realities were devoured by Azathoth made manifest. If the Agents are unlucky, they may learn all of this before the end.

ITERATION -1: The Agents arrive at the Array at night, after Delta Green received word of a possible unnatural incursion in progress. By the time they arrive, it is too late. Everyone at the facility has gone insane, and at 22:03:37 hours, everyone in the facility reaches an imperfect but catastrophic communion with Azathoth. This experience has repercussions for versions of those individuals, agents and Array staffers alike, across other iterations of reality. They become unconsciously attuned to the connection that the Array facilitates with the Daemon Sultan.

ITERATION 0: At 10:00 a.m., when the Array starts up, the Agents begin screaming with partial "memories" of what happened in Iteration -1. They report what they know to Delta Green. Delta Green sends them to the Array. But it all goes wrong, and at 22:03:37, everyone in the facility reaches an imperfect communion with Azathoth.

ITERATION 1: Play begins here. At 10:00 a.m., when the Array starts up, the Agents begin screaming with powerfully suppressed "memories" of what happened in Iteration 0. Some of Delta Green's leaders record unconscious "memories" of the reports they received from the Agents in the previous iteration. Delta Green contacts the Agents at 11:00. They have a briefing at 15:00, depart for the Array at 16:00, arrive at 17:00, and begin their investigation. In all likelihood, at 22:03:37, everyone in the facility reaches an imperfect communion with Azathoth.

ITERATION 2: At 18:46:16—the first "pulse" of connection with Azathoth that occurred while the Agents were on site—the Agents wake up shrieking with "memories" of what happened in Iteration 1. Unless they stop it, at 22:03:37, everyone in the facility reaches an imperfect communion with Azathoth.

ITERATION 3: At 20:57:50—nearer to the point of no return—the Agents wake up shrieking as reality resets. Unless they stop it, at 22:03:37, everyone in the facility reaches perfect communion with Azathoth.

ITERATION 4: Singularity. Perfect communion with Azathoth, over and over, throughout untold iterations of reality.

Timeline—Iteration One

Due to a fluke in its design, the Array is facilitating an accumulation of psychic energy. At 10:03 p.m., all that energy will spill out in an imperfect communion with the primal, chaotic force that lurks at the heart of reality. When that happens, reality “resets,” and another iteration of reality is created, this one closer to perfect communion at 10:03 p.m. After that, reality will reset hours further along the timeline. Eventually the “reset” and the communion will be simultaneous, one undifferentiated catastrophe.

Iteration 1 begins at 10:00 a.m.

10:00:00 — The Olympian Holobeam Array is activated. The Agents suffer the aftershocks of mostly-forgotten horrors (see **THE AGENTS**). Delta Green’s leaders receive indications of an unnatural incursion at the Array. They hurriedly activate Operation OBSERVER EFFECT and order the Agents to a briefing in Chicago.

15:00:00 — The Agents meet for a briefing in Chicago (see **THE BRIEFING** on page 4).

15:28:55 — The Array goes offline in an unexpected power surge. Power is soon restored, but there are strange effects. Researcher Helen Klinger vanishes, engineer Ishi Takagawa collapses into a coma, and other Array staffers unconsciously show symptoms of repressed trauma.

16:00:00 — The reactivated Array resumes data collection. About this time, the Agents begin driving to the Array (see **THE COMMUTE** on page 6).

ABOUT 17:00:00 — The Agents arrive at the Array (see page 7).

18:46:16 — Dr. Takagawa awakens (see page 20).

19:52:03 — Dr. Klinger reappears (see page 21).

20:57:50 — Dr. Klinger vanishes again, reappears, and begins mercy-killing everyone she can reach (see page 21).

22:03:37 — Azathoth extrudes into this reality (see page 22). Reality resets, and Iteration Two begins (see page 23).

Unless the Agents find a way to stop it.

The Agents

It’s a Tuesday morning, 10:00 a.m. Central Time. The Agents are not together; they’re in their separate, everyday lives. Go around the table and have the players describe what their Agents are doing. Are the Agents at work? What kind of work are they doing? Are they at home? Who are they with? Feature each Agent’s Bonds in some way.

When every player has described this ordinary moment, describe how it’s interrupted when their Agents, wherever they are, start screaming.

Every Agent loses 1/1D6 SAN. They don’t know it yet, but somewhere, in some other, forgotten reality, the Agents faced catastrophe.



Whatever caused the terror—we can think of it as Iteration Zero—is swiftly vanishing from memory like a nightmare. An Agent who did not go temporarily insane can deliberately try to remember details. If the players don't think of that, tell them—and tell them that remembering feels like a *bad idea*. (Unlike Delta Green's leaders or anyone else in this reset reality, the Agents are close enough to the truth to recall it if they try.)

If Agents push to remember, one may recall a hint of bone-jarring sound, like a pulsing thunder that shook the Agent down to the molecules. Another may recall screaming horrified into a phone. Another may recall a deep, perfect blackness that slowly begins to resolve into indistinct writhing shapes. The glimpses sound innocuous, but the sense of horror is far deeper. The Agent loses another 0/1D4 SAN, and failing that SAN test adds one point to the Agent's **Unnatural** skill rating.

How does this play out? If an Agent goes temporarily insane, anyone who's with the Agent might assume it's a sudden PTSD flashback from one of those secret "war on terror" assignments the Agent sometimes receives. An Agent at work may be sent home, or may be referred, forcefully, to a psychiatrist to determine whether he or she can handle the stress of the job. An Agent who breaks down violently may be placed on involuntary leave or may be terminated or subject to prosecution. The repercussions do not interfere with the Agent's responsibilities to Delta Green, only his or her utility.

If the Agent is with a **Bond**, an explosion of insanity causes an immediate rift unless the Agent calms things down afterward with a **CHA** test. Failure costs the Bond 1D4 points, or 4 with a fumble; success keeps the Bond intact; a critical success strengthens the Bond by 1 (up to the Agent's **CHA**) in the aftermath, as the subject of the Bond helps the Agent recover.

If an Agent doesn't go insane, the repercussions are up to you. It's obvious to witnesses that the Agent had some kind of panic attack. If the Agent wants to pretend it was not serious, that requires a **Persuade** test. If that fails, the witnesses still believe it was real and know that the Agent just tried to lie about it.

IF THE AGENTS CAN'T OR WON'T RESPOND

If the opening **SAN** loss is enough to make an Agent refuse to go to the briefing, or if the Agent is disabled by the repercussions of the **SAN** loss, let that player play Inspector Hua or another Agent instead. The replacement Agents are at the briefing.

Any Agent who joins in the operation, it turns out, also suffered the traumatic **SAN** loss of 10:00 but decided to answer the call.

The Briefing

An hour later, about 11:00 Central Time, each Agent is contacted by a control officer. This innocuous communication looks meaningless to eavesdroppers. It may look like an unwanted sales call, a wrong number, or a spam email or text. But the Agent recognizes it. It communicates the time and place of a meeting: 15:00 in a downtown Chicago office building that's secretly owned by the FBI. It's Delta Green, and the mission is calling. The Agents have to go.

The briefing is at short notice. Agents in other parts of the country must scramble to make excuses with their jobs and families and get on the next flight to Chicago. If you're keeping track of money, that's a Standard expense that must be paid with the Agent's own money. If one of the Agents lives more than four hours away from Chicago, come up with some reason for the Agent to be nearer. Perhaps he or she is on an assignment nearby. Or a family vacation.

Within a few hours, they've gathered in a tightly-secured conference room in Chicago. One of them is Inspector Hua with the DOE, a stranger to the other Agents. Hua had the same brush with insanity this morning as the rest of them.

Do they compare notes about the morning's trauma? Realizing all had the same breakdown at the same time costs each 0/1 SAN.

Do they deliberately try to remember and share the forgotten source of the trauma? That awakens memories

of the terrible bone-jarring sound—and, further, a shrieking noise that was so high and piercing as to be barely audible. That costs each another 0/1 SAN.

If the meeting devolves into an argument, the case officer's arrival interrupts it.

The case officer today is not their usual control officer. She is a graying, middle-aged, limping, former agent who calls herself Eve Carpenter. She has the tired eyes of an agent who's seen too much, even if she's only hearing about it second-hand these days.

Carpenter doesn't know about the Agents' bizarre traumas this morning. If asked about them, she says she'll run it up the chain for advice. In the meantime, she has the Agents' objective.

Objective

Carpenter says the Agents' destination is the Olympian Holobeam Array. It's a new, high-tech physics lab in the suburbs of Chicago, not far from Fermilab, run by a handful of academic researchers from MIT and the University of Chicago. It is funded by the U.S. Department of Energy's Office of Science and a private consortium of donors and venture capital firms, most notably Olympian Advances, Inc.

The Array's website says it's built to study the theory that space itself is a sort of three-dimensional hologram cast on a two-dimensional surface. Carpenter cannot explain that idea any further.

The Program (Carpenter says only "the Program," and she silences anyone who begins to say the words "Delta Green") has determined that the Array secretly uses technology derived from Air Force research programs defunded years ago. The Air Force projects were too dangerous to continue and were terminated—but during that process, certain elements were reclassified, privatized, and sold to some of the same donors who sponsor the Array. The Program has an interest in that technology.

At 10:00 today, the Array went online for the first time.

The history of the Array's technology and certain other anomalies indicate an incursion of unnatural forces at the Olympian Holobeam Array. The Agents must go to the Array, isolate it by shutting down its communications with the outside world (including cell phones), and stop the incursion.

If the Agents ask Carpenter for details on those "other" anomalies, she says she does not know. An Agent who succeeds at a HUMINT test senses that's not true, and that Carpenter finds the truth enormously troubling. She cannot yet be made to admit that, and she only grows alarmed if the Agents break protocol by pressing her on it.

(Later in the operation, if the Agents grow desperate and successfully press her for details, she may reveal that the "anomalies" were apparently reports from the Array sent by the Agents themselves. If they have reason to believe that, it costs the Agents 1/1D4 SAN.)

As the briefing is ending, Carpenter gets a call. She listens for a moment and then hangs up. She says that an unexpected power surge at the Array shut down its power a few minutes ago. She does not know how or why. She wishes the Agents good luck.

Make sure the players know their **STANDING ORDERS**. (See page 34.)

Assets

CREDENTIALS: The Agents have clearance under the cover of an inspection team for the Department of Energy tasked with reviewing the site and its records for wrongdoing. There may be specific documents or pieces of technology in the facility that this clearance does not cover. The Agents will have to make do.

These cover identities were constructed in a hurry, borrowing names and employee numbers of retired or deceased DOE employees. They won't stand up to sustained investigation.

CLASSIFICATION: The Program has pulled strings in the DOE to classify the investigation ("Operation OBSERVER EFFECT") such that no real DOE agent can come near it without risking prison, let alone police or private citizens—only the Agents under their false identities. Carpenter warns that if an emergency at the site attracts first responders, there's no telling whether they will obey that restriction.

TRANSPORTATION: The Agents have an unmarked DOE-issued sedan and an unmarked DOE-issued cargo van. In the car trunk, they find DOE service pistols (.40 semi-automatic; 1D10 damage) with three extra magazines each, issued with licenses in the names of their cover identities, and two handheld Geiger counters. If one of the Agents is a doctor, the car trunk also has a medical