

# PYRAMID<sup>®</sup>



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## THAUMATOLOGY



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# THE BOOK OF NULL

BY J. EDWARD TREMLETT

*Would you know of my life? Of my magic? So be it, fool. I will tell you now of a lifetime – several lifetimes – wasted in pursuit of power and secrets, each more soul-destroying than the last. I shall tell you of a thousand terrible things that I have done for the Art, and a thousand things that I have left undone because of it. I will fill your head with stories of atrocity and darkness, of horror and pain. And when I am done, you will join me in cursing the Art in all its aspects.*

*I am filth. And this is my story.*

Once upon a time, there was an evil sorcerer whose undeservedly long life was at last coming to a close. Sick and friendless, scabbling in the dark like an insect, he looked back at his grotesque, black-hearted echo of an existence and was regretful of the many things he'd done. But rather than blame himself for his own moral failings, he blamed magic: If it hadn't been for the Art, he'd have been happily dead long ago.

His misplaced bitterness bore terrible fruit. Animated by hideous purpose, he defiled his most prized and powerful grimoire, binding his hatred and shame into it for all time. Then he gruesomely consecrated it with his life's blood – dying as horribly as he lived, ultimately tumbling face first and screaming into the oblivion he craved.

That final, total sacrifice changed the grimoire from a book of powerful magic into its exact opposite: a book that brought an end to magic, turning any who read from it into a source of anti-magic. The cursed book was retrieved from the dead sorcerer's lair by one of his greatest rivals, and when he read from it, he became the first disciple of a new, dark religion: the Null.

## WE HAVE CLOSED OUR EYES FOREVER

The Null are victims of the *Book of Null*, a cursed grimoire that causes all who read it to lose their connection to magic, changing both their physical appearance and psychological makeup. These twisted, insane parodies of humanity then seek out other victims, either to convert or kill. They hope to one day rid the world of all magic, replacing it with a dark kingdom of atrocity, horror, and pain. Their condition could possibly be

reversed, but their madness is so total that they would rather die than be cured.

The *Book of Null* is a large, thick book, bound in the scales of an evil, black dragon, with a large and flat black stone circle on the front cover. The contents are a mind-twisting and ragged collage of what was once a powerful spellbook, but is now the horrible life story of the evil sorcerer who created the book. Hidden within that story are two spells: the first keeps the reader from stopping reading on his own, and the second transforms the reader into a Null at the end.

*Those who believe in nothing are very, very jealous and angry at those who believe in something.*

– Dennis Prager

Oddly enough, the *Book of Null* is not affected by the proximity of the Null, who usually force their conversion victims to read the first page. They then need merely wait for the book to be read – which happens at blinding speed – and the change to take place. It's a loud and painful affair for the victim, and a source of much rejoicing for the Null.

The Null are hairless, with chalk-white skin shot through with small, black divots in disturbing, geometric patterns. They have a single round, flat black stone in the center of their foreheads. Their eyes are stitched shut with thick black thread, but they have no trouble seeing, thanks to the stone. Their teeth are black and twisted stumps, their voices are dark and disconcerting echoes, and they lack both fingernails and nipples.

## WATCHING THE WORLD END

The Null have a single-minded goal: to rid the world of magic by either converting or killing all who can tap magic's energy. They're ecstatically happy with either option.

*Campaign idea: It's the last age of magic. Once those who are currently magicians die, magic passes with it.*

*So the truth was established, and what they did became null.*

*– The Quran, translated by M.H. Shakir, sura 7, verse 118*

The cult is based out of a vast, underground labyrinth, which was once the lair of the sorcerer who made mistake of stealing the *Book of Null*. That thief now serves the cult as the Keeper of the Book, and his labyrinth has been savagely redecorated with the hideous, twisted remnants of the cult's earliest "crusade." Their bodies are strung up on the walls like ornaments, as a reminder of past glories.

The Keeper is the cult's oldest member, but he doesn't really command because he doesn't really have to; left to their own devices, the Null can govern themselves. He simply oversees conversion, speaks of the hidden history of the Null to those who have just joined, and sees to the safety of the grimoire.

The Null hunt in packs of three or more. They prefer to go after known quantities, so it's customary for new members to lead other Null to their now-former friends and colleagues. They like to sneak up on their quarry and surround them, thus lowering the mana in the area before they strike. They also like to soften up their quarry by killing nonmagical bystanders first, leaving their broken bodies for their true targets to find.

The eternal question is whether they convert or kill. Given that there's only one copy of the *Book of Null*, they often pick the latter out of pure expediency. That said, the most powerful magicians make the most powerful Null, so they will gladly go to the trouble of dragging an archmage back to their center of power. That he'll be unconscious, and possibly near death, for the trip is of no matter: the book heals the reader as it reshapes him.

Magical authorities are well-aware of this growing threat, but they aren't able to do much about it. Magical means of finding, following, or dealing with the Null are rendered almost useless by the Null's singular anti-magical talents. However, magical society is reluctant to turn to nonmagical authorities for assistance, as this would make them appear weak and vulnerable. If they can hold out until they find the cult's center of power, several groups of well-paid mercenaries should be able to deal with the problem once and for all.

But then, who's to say the Keeper won't run away with the book, starting it all over somewhere else?

## THE THING OF SHAPES TO COME

In *GURPS*, the Null have the advantage Mana Damper (Area Effect, 4 yards, +150%) [25], at a number of levels equal to their Magery level before they read the *Book of Null*: If they had Magery at 2, they will have Mana Damper 2 (Area Effect, 4 yards, +150%) [50] when the conversion is over. They will also have Appearance (Monstrous) [-20], Disturbing Voice [-10], Fanaticism [-15], Magic Resistance 5 [10], Sadism [-15], and Unfazeable [15].

If a PC becomes a Null during the course of play, it might be best to turn that character into an adversarial NPC, rather than having to split the narrative and create a situation where some players are trying to kill others.

The adventurers may run into their former friend as a Null, which should be a truly horrifying encounter. Whatever affection and friendship they shared is now totally gone, replaced by a grotesquely evil urge to kill all aspects of the former life.

## DOWN INTO THE DARKNESS

The Null could be used as seldom-seen boogymen, the occasional danger, or an omnipresent threat, depending on the tone of the campaign. For a GM who wants to make them a regular part of the story, here are some ideas.

*The Apprentice:* Tomas the Blue's prized apprentice, Redmane Quill, vanished three months ago and could not be found. Now Tomas' new apprentice has been found hideously murdered, along with his seneschal, his cook, his gardener, and the nearest neighbor. Alone and afraid, Tomas has sent a frantic plea for help to old friends – the heroes. Can they get there before the Null kidnap or kill Tomas? And what will they find if they fail?

*Hunting Null:* The adventurers have been employed by a college of magic to look into the problem with the Null. They have been instructed to investigate their activities, but to do so discreetly, so as not to alert normal law enforcement to the problem. The heroes will have to be careful, not only to avoid troublesome questions, but also to avoid the attention of their quarry – once the Null realize they're being hunted, they will return the favor.

*The Day of Vengeance:* The magicians' guild has at last found the center of the cult of Null, and have employed a substantial group of nonmagical mercenaries to go into the labyrinth and dispatch them, one and all. No one but the Null have ever entered there, so its layout is unknown, as is the state of any traps and dangers the previous owner may have constructed. Can the characters and their NPC companions – read "sword fodder" – persevere down there, in the darkness? Or will they be joining the decorations on its walls?

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

By day an unassuming bookstore clerk, J. Edward Tremlett takes his ancient keyboard from its hiding place and unfurls his words upon the world. His bizarre lifestyle has taken him to such exotic locales as South Korea and Dubai, UAE. He's been the editor of *The Wraith Project* and has seen print in *The End Is Nigh* and *Worlds of Cthulhu*. He's also part of the *Echoes of Terror* anthology. Currently, he writes for Op-Ed News, and lives in Lansing, Michigan, with his wife and three cats.