

# Selections from The Way of the Shadowlands



## From Chapter One: Dire Warnings

### The Final Letter of Agasha Yasuo

*(found tucked between the stones of the Carpenter Wall)*

I have been pulling little pieces off of my face all night.

It is peculiar and horrifying, yet so very intriguing.

Here I hold what was once my nose. Now it is gone, and I shall never have another. Yet as I look upon the rotting bit of flesh I hardly feel nostalgic. What did this scrap of meat ever do for me? Am I so different now that it is gone? Perhaps one might say rather that I have become more distinct. I am stronger for the fact that I do not need a nose. I wonder how far the decay will spread; when it is done will I be less complete, or purer? Like boiled water, does the Taint slowly distill me to my simplest essence? When all is said and done, will a truer self remain? I toss my nose to the rats. They make better use of it than I, and seem satisfied with the gift.

How strange my life has become.

Those that knew me one year ago would hardly recognize me now, and the degradation of my body is not fully to blame. Once I lived among the high mountains of the Dragon. I was a shy, timid little man who could not help himself. I relied upon others to do my thinking, certain that any course of action I chose of my own volition

would be the wrong one. I was ignored, abused, and passed over more times that I can remember. At all times I hoped for something greater, but I took no initiative. Surely a purpose would find me in time. It was only by pure luck that someone noticed my talent with the kami, and I entered training as a shugenja.

I began my studies with zeal. Surely once I wielded the power of magic my path would be clear. My life would have worth. Others would look to me for guidance. The *kami* would provide the friendship I lacked in the human world. I would be important.

Or so I thought.

Things were no different as a shugenja, save now the kami ignored me as well. They obeyed me readily enough when I spoke the sutras, but the effects were often unimpressive. Those that had eagerly inducted me into the Agasha school began to turn their attentions elsewhere. Once they believed that my potential was limitless. Now they were convinced that they had been mistaken.

I was convinced as well. My spirit broken, I prepared to settle into a life of mediocrity.

Then I began to hear the voices.

It was entirely by accident at first. While communing with the spirits of the mountain, as was my morning routine, I found something strange. A spirit appeared that was different from the rest. It was quick, dark, and clever, much more energetic than the dour spirits of Earth. It seemed excited that I could sense it, and so very happy to meet me.

It was the first time anyone had been happy to meet me.

This spirit was not like the other kami, absorbed in their own strange worlds and alien routines of thought. This one spoke to me as a friend – a friend who shared my dreams, motivations, and desires. A friend who offered to teach me magic greater than that of the Agasha, if I was only willing to learn.

The Agasha had forsaken me. I saw no reason to spurn my new friend.



The spells were so simple, yet amazing. It seemed I had a natural talent, and the spirit was impressed. It offered to teach me more, in return for a favor.

It was such a small price, and the guilt was fleeting in the face of the reward. I was forced to flee my home and family, but that was not such a great price, either. Besides, the spirit has led me to a new home. It is a strange place in many ways, but with each day that passes I feel more strongly that I belong here.

I have no regrets.

This was once my ear...

## From Chapter Two: Hiding the Taint

Those Tainted who openly profess their corruption can expect little sympathy. Victims of the Taint are viewed with the same distaste as murderers, plague victims, and the insane. No one wants to be near someone who is corrupted, for fear that his Taint will spread or that Fu Leng's insanity will overcome him. The most a corrupted soul can hope for is a calm, peaceful monastery populated with other doomed souls. There, he can expect to be monitored every waking moment by Witch Hunters and monks until such a time as they deem him too dangerous to live.

It is no wonder so many Tainted choose to hide their corruption. Granted, many who hide their corruption are willing pawns of evil, but many simply wish to live a normal life. Though the Kuni and Asako have many methods of rooting out hidden Tainted, the corrupted have found many efficient methods of concealing themselves.

Tea of Jade Petals is the most popular method of concealing the Taint. The tea is harvested from specially grown lotus blossoms sprinkled with mystic jade powder in a ritual known only to the monks of the Jade Lotus. The monks have a reputation for discretion, and guard closely the identities of those who purchase the tea. While under the effects of the Tea, one's Taint goes into complete remission. The Taint cannot be detected and spells which harm the Tainted have no special effect. Mental symptoms go into remission, while

minor physical symptoms recede. While using Tea of Jade Petals, the Taint's infection does not increase. The tea is popular among those who contract Taint through no fault of their own, but it is spurned by *maho-tsukai* and minions of darkness. While using the Tea, powers and abilities granted by the Shadowlands Taint cannot be used, and *maho* cannot be cast. The Lost cannot abide the taste of Jade Petal Tea, and will vomit it up if forced to drink it.

Unknown to most, using this legendary tea does little to keep corruption a secret. The monks of the Jade Lotus secretly pass on the identities of all those who purchase and use the tea to the Kuni Witch Hunters, who discreetly pass the information on to the Asako Inquisitors. The Inquisitors use their connections within the Emerald Magistrates to monitor users of the tea, but take care not to expose themselves unless the Tainted subject proves to be dangerous. The Inquisitors are content to let a few harmless Tainted courtiers escape their notice if their discretion leads to more dangerous prey. Through their secret association with the Monks of the Jade Lotus, the Asako have brought many dangerous Tainted to justice.

Corrupted jade is another method of protecting the Taint. Just as jade draws away the dark energies of the Shadowlands, so do slivers of corrupted jade draw away the powers of purity. Many cunning minions of Fu Leng have learned this and carry a bit of corrupted jade wherever they go. There are significant drawbacks to corrupted jade. It is hard to come by – the best place to get it is in the Shadowlands itself. It rots quickly when removed from the Shadowlands. In addition, corrupted jade does nothing to prevent the spread of the Taint, and in fact encourages it. Those who carry corrupted jade become Lost far more quickly than those who do not. It is most frequently used by those that do not care if they become Lost, or by creatures who are naturally Tainted such as bog hags and pennagolan.

A sliver of jade corrupted by the Taint is a potent protection against pure magics. For every such item carried, the TN to detect the bearer's Taint is raised by 10. Effects which would normally detect the wearer's Taint automatically require their user to make a Perception roll vs. TN 10, plus 5 for every additional piece of corrupted jade carried.

Magics which specifically harm Tainted targets are also absorbed harmlessly into the corrupt jade. For every corrupted jade sliver carried, the target can resist 20 Wounds of magic damage, at which time the sliver is immediately reduced to ash. Wounds inflicted by weapons are not negated, even if they are of magical origin.

A sliver of corrupted jade can survive up to five days out of a Tainted area, after which time it crumbles to dust. If multiple pieces are carried together, they feed off of one another's corruption. Only one piece crumbles at a time when carried within ten feet of another.

Any time an individual carrying corrupted jade accumulates additional points of Taint, he gains one more point than normal. If



he is carrying more than three slivers, he gains two extra points each time he gains more Taint. Lost characters do not gain any extra Taint for carrying corrupted jade.

It is very important to note that natural obsidian has none of the above properties; only the “obsidian” created by the infusion of Taint into jade. This Tainted jade is distinguishable from normal obsidian by its soft, greasy texture.

The Crab Clan usually has a large amount of corrupted jade left over from Shadowlands patrols. Supplies vary, as the shugenja of the Kuni carefully purify and destroy all Tainted materials during their regular patrols of the Wall. Many defenders of the Wall are not aware of the danger of corrupted jade, but when it comes to anything Tainted the Crab feel it best to err on the side of caution. The Crab certainly would not sell corrupted jade, no matter the price.

Certain adepts of maho know a few spells that can shroud the Taint. A certain sect of Bloodspeakers has devised a technique they refer to as “Bleeding the Elements,” which allows them to cast a portion of their Taint permanently into the land around them. These dark magics can be very effective in hiding the Taint of their users, but excessive use of maho only brings more corruption and makes the problem harder to hide. (For more information on Bleeding the Elements, see the Cult of the Blood-Red Moon in *The Way of the Wolf*.)

For those who fully embrace their Taint, maho tricks and corrupted jade aren’t necessary. Some corrupted learn that there is a certain knack to concealing their Taint. Using meditation methods similar to those used by the Kuni Witch Hunters to detect the Taint, many Tainted have discovered ways of making their Taint more difficult to sense. The Lost refer to this ability as “darkness unseen.” Some have developed a degree of control so great that they can temporarily hide all trace of their Taint. Such Tainted are said to be “beside the darkness.”

## From Chapter Three: Shadowlands Powers (selections)

*“All power has its price. Knowing that price in advance is seldom an option for the ambitious.” – Yogo Junzo*

## The Power of Corruption

Though the Shadowlands Taint is a force of raw corruption, the temptation of power is the catalyst for this corruption. Those who willingly use Jigoku’s blessings fall to its whims more quickly. All characters who bear the Shadowlands Taint may draw upon it in a subconscious manner, adding their Rank in Taint to the total of any Skill rolls involving Strength, Stamina, Agility, or Reflexes and gaining one point of Taint in the process. Once a character gains ten points of Taint, his Taint Rank increases by 1.

This is hardly the limit of the power offered by the Shadowlands. Those who attempt to harness the powers of darkness (consciously or subconsciously) are capable of greater feats. Usually these feats come with an immediate price, causing strange deformities or twisting the character’s psyche. These abilities are classified as Shadowlands Powers, and are divided into three groups.

### Minor Shadowlands Powers

These are relatively minor abilities or simple mutations that give the character powers above the norm. A character must have at least one full Rank of Taint and spend one Experience Point or Character Point before he can acquire a Minor Shadowlands Power (inexpensive, yes, but these characters are paying for their power in other ways). The process of learning a Minor Shadowlands Power causes the character to accumulate one more point of Taint. This is the only sort of power available for most starting characters.

### Major Shadowlands Powers

These abilities are markedly more impressive than Minor Shadowlands Powers. A character must spend five Experience Points before he can acquire one of these powers. The process of learning one of these powers causes the character to accumulate two points of Taint. A character must possess at least one Minor Shadowlands Power for each Major Shadowlands Power he acquires.

### Greater Shadowlands Powers

These rare and terrible powers grant the character extreme capabilities, but also carry heavy prices. A character must spend ten Experience Points before he can acquire a Greater Shadowlands Power. The process of learning one of these powers causes the character to accumulate five points of Taint. A character must possess one Major Shadowlands power for every Greater Shadowlands Power he acquires.



## Learning Shadowlands Powers

The maximum number of Shadowlands Powers that a character may possess is limited by his School Rank. A character who gains a new Rank of Insight may choose to learn a new Shadowlands power in place of a Rank Technique. This new power is learned with no expenditure of Experience, no increase in Taint, and without counting toward their maximum number of Powers. Since the character has technically achieved a new Rank of Insight, he may purchase an additional Power normally.

Characters who fully embrace their Taint (typically Lost characters) can cannibalize old Rank Techniques, transforming them into Shadowlands Powers. By spending an appropriate amount of time refocusing their dark energies, a character may permanently give up his highest level Rank Technique, replacing it with one free Shadowlands Power. This process requires anywhere from two days to several years.

### Shugenja and Shadowlands Powers

Shugenja stand closer to the elements than most. Unfortunately, due to the existence of *maho*, this also means that shugenja risk a greater possibility of corruption. A Tainted shugenja may choose to learn an extra Shadowlands Power rather than increasing in Rank as a shugenja.

A shugenja may also choose to cannibalize his highest Rank of mastery (lowering his School Rank by one) in order to learn a new Shadowlands Power. A shugenja who does so retains all of the spells he possesses, but his Mastery Levels are adjusted accordingly. A shugenja who cannibalizes the purity of his magic in return for dark powers may find himself unable to cast some of his old spells. For this reason, most Tainted shugenja chose to retain their mastery of magic rather than focusing on Shadowlands Powers. Lost shugenja find it difficult to resist the temptation, and soon find the kami turning their backs as they embrace the power of Fu Leng.

## “The Shadowlands School”

Any character who uses a Rank of Insight or cannibalizes Rank Techniques to learn Shadowlands Powers is considered to have a Rank in the “Shadowlands School.” These characters gain Insight and increase their Rank as normal characters, and gain a new Shadowlands Power immediately upon gaining a new Rank. Characters do not need to purchase Different School or Multiple Schools to join the

“Shadowlands School,” but they may never learn any future Rank Techniques from any other schools once they have joined.

### Starting Shadowlands Characters

Player Characters who begin at the “Shadowlands School” are not recommended. Such individuals are doomed to corruption from the start, and make better NPCs. Nevertheless, here are the rules for characters who begin at the “Shadowlands School,” presented for the sake of completion and the GM’s use.

Mechanically, Shadowlands characters are identical to True Ronin. (Usually they are either peasants, ronin, or samurai from vassal families who were not allowed to attend the family school.) Any character who meets the requirements below may join the school, and may pay the listed Character Point cost for the Darkness Beyond Darkness technique.

Unlike most True Ronin schools, Shadowlands Characters may obtain a full 5 Ranks at the “Shadowlands School.” (Or even more, if the GM allows Ranks beyond 5.)

### “The Shadowlands School”

**Required Traits:** Water 3

**Required Skills:** Shadowlands Lore 1

**Other Requirements:** Honor is reduced to 0.0, Dark Secret (Tainted), 1 full Rank of Shadowlands Taint

**Location:** Everywhere

### Darkness Beyond Darkness (3 points)

You may select a Major and Minor Shadowlands power. The Major Power counts as your Rank 1 Technique.

### Deformities

Some of the following Shadowlands Powers impose Deformities. These are special Disadvantages that cause the character to appear inhuman. Anyone who studies the character may notice Deformities by making an Investigation/Perception roll. The TN of this roll is listed with each Deformity. (For example Deformity/15 means a Deformity with a TN 15 to detect.) If you have multiple Deformities, an observer may roll separately to notice each one.

Characters may attempt to disguise a deformity with Acting or Disguise (base TN 10). This will increase the TN to notice the Deformity by 5, plus 5 for each Raise made on the Acting or Disguise check.

### Scarification

Those who practice *maho*, as well as those who frequently use Shadowlands Powers that require scarification, may find it difficult to hide the many cuts they must inflict upon themselves. A character receives a Deformity/20 for scarring himself in such a manner. Each



time he cuts himself a number of times equal to his Earth within the span of one week, this Deformity TN is lowered by 5. Healing the scars (with Unearthly Regeneration or Path to Inner Peace) negates this Deformity.

### Tea of Jade Petals and Shadowlands Powers

All Shadowlands Powers become inactive 1-10 minutes after drinking Tea of Jade Petals and Deformities recede. The tea is frequently used by Kuni Witch Hunters to drug a dangerous Tainted individual, negating his powers and simplifying his arrest and execution.

## Minor Shadowlands Powers

### Blackened Claws

You may instantly extend claws of pure obsidian from the tips of your fingers. You gain one point of Taint every time you extend the claws, but there is no limit to the amount of time they may remain extended. The claws do 3k3 Wounds and gain a +5 initiative bonus

the round they are extended. The Blackened Claws can harm creatures normally vulnerable only to crystal, obsidian, or jade. The Claws may be wielded using either the Tanto or Jujutsu skill, or you may learn a Weapon Specialization in them.

**Drawback:** After taking this power, you grow to prefer using the claws above all other weapons, and must make a Willpower roll vs. TN 5 each round to avoid using the claws in a combat situation. Deformity/0 if the claws are extended.

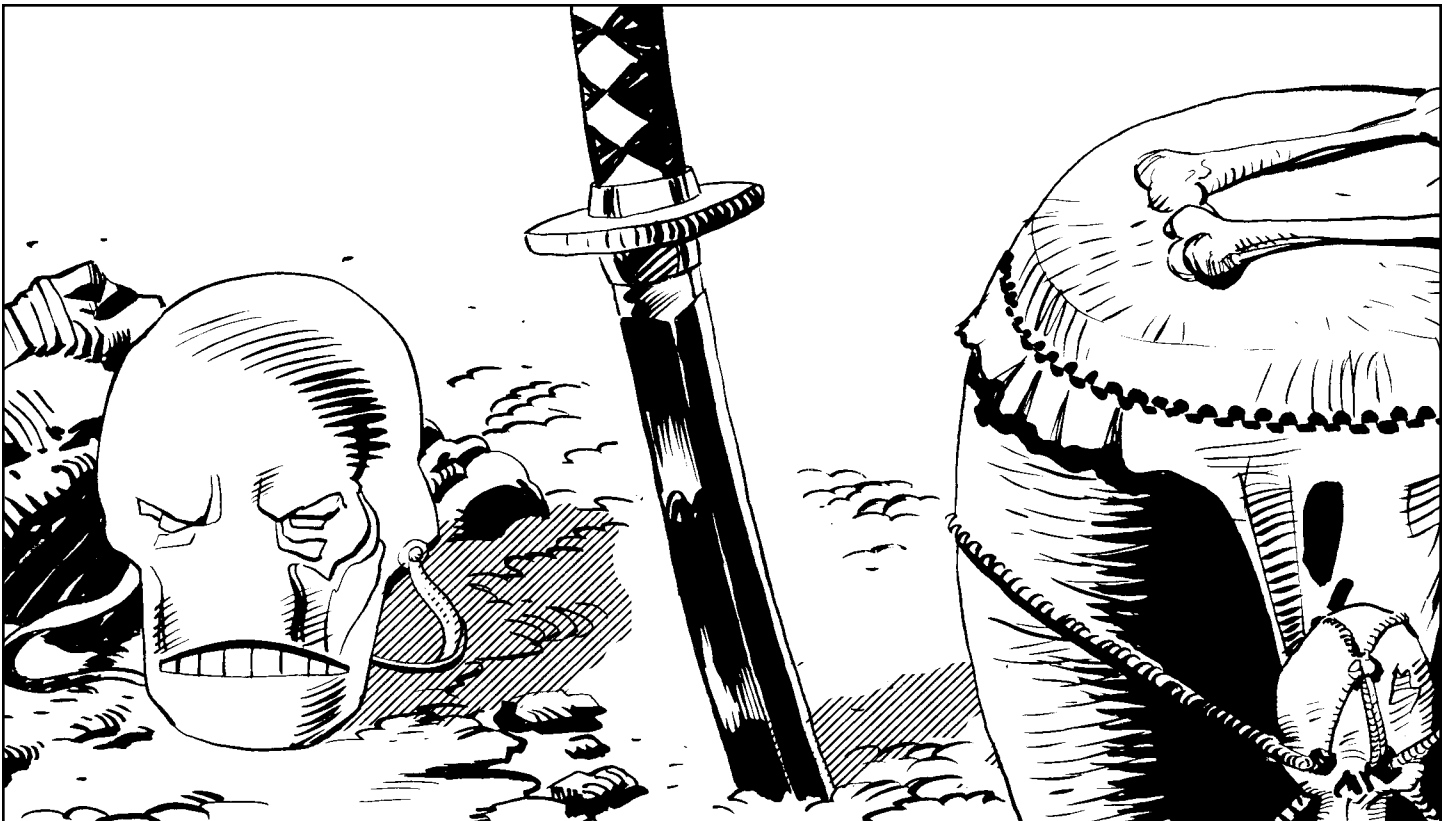
### Blessing of the Dark One

You have gained an uncanny resistance to pain and damage. Your maximum Wounds on each level are increased by 1.

**Drawback:** Your skin is slightly rubbery and inhuman. Deformity/10 for those who touch your skin.

### Blood Sense

You have a bizarre sense for fresh blood. You instantly detect all warm blood within 50 feet per Rank of Taint you have accumulated. This sense is blocked by 2' of wooden obstructions, 1' of stone, or 6" of metal. It is not blocked by flesh; thus you can sense the location





of living creatures in range. This ability functions exactly as the Sense spell, except that it senses warm, living blood.

**Drawback:** You gain an unnatural thirst for blood. If you see exposed blood you must make a Willpower check vs. TN 5 to prevent yourself from taking a taste.

### Death Sense

You can sense the remains of dead creatures. The range of this sense is 50' per Rank of Shadowlands Taint. This sense is blocked by 2' of wooden obstructions, 1' of stone, or 6" of metal. It is not blocked by earth. This power also makes general distinctions between the type of dead (undead, human corpse, leather saddle, etc.) *Mahotsukai* often make use of this power in order to find corpses to animate as zombies.

**Drawback:** You have a dark, unnatural hunger for dead flesh. If you encounter dead, unmoving flesh you might be tempted to take a bite. Willpower roll vs. TN 5 to resist.

### Fu Leng's Hunger

Your stomach has become a furnace of infernal power, allowing you to eat and digest anything. Poison, acid, broken glass, even fire will do no harm once placed in your mouth and swallowed. You are still vulnerable to injected, inhaled, and contact poisons.

**Drawback:** Soon after gaining this power, you develop a taste for some unusual item (cockroaches, stone, hair) and eat it whenever you get a chance. You may make a Willpower roll vs. TN 5 to resist eating the item in inappropriate company. This roll carries a +10 TN penalty if you think no one else is watching.

### Master of Blood

You are a friend to the *kansen*, a master of dark magics. If you are a shugenja, you may reduce the number of Wounds required to cast a *maho* spell by your Taint. This power may not be taken by non-shugenja characters.

**Drawback:** The *kansen* are jealous masters. The TN of any non-maho spell you cast is raised by 5.

### Uncanny Speed

You can move as quickly as shadows before light. You may move your (Water + Taint) x 5 feet in a round, or double that if you take no other action that round. You face no penalty the round after running full speed (as a normal character does; see Movement on page 164 of the *Player's Guide*). By gaining a point of Taint, you may roll and keep a number of extra dice equal to double your Taint on your Initiative for one round.

**Drawback:** You are naturally fidgety and nervous. This counts as a Deformity/20, though an observer is more likely to think that you

are hyperactive or addicted to drugs than Tainted. This Deformity cannot be disguised.

### Unholy Stamina

Your Taint keeps you eternally full of energy. You may continue functioning without rest or sleep as long as you wish.

**Drawback:** Every three days you use this power causes you to develop another point of Taint, whether or not those three days are consecutive.

## Major Shadowlands Powers

### Blood Domination

Your blood carries a powerful magic, housing many of the will-sapping attributes of the Taint. Any creature that has drunk as little as a thimbleful of your blood becomes subject to your demands. You may make an opposed Willpower roll to cause any such target to obey your every wish for a number of hours equal to your Taint. If you do not command your target, the blood lingers in their system for a number of months equal to your Taint until you invoke this ability. Once you begin commanding the target, you cannot end the magic prematurely to save the effect for later.

Drawing enough blood from yourself to use this power causes one Wound.

**Drawback:** None, though it can be difficult to convince people to drink your blood. Mixing it in with something else is usually a good idea. See the above section on Scarification.

### Blood Knows Blood

You are able to sense parts of your own body, no matter where they may be. Those who bear this power usually use blood (at least one Wound) as a tracking device, smearing a bit on their quarry and then unerringly following the path. There is no need to roll; the power simply works. The blood normally lingers about a week unless it is intentionally washed away. Those with more ghoulish tastes may leave longer lasting bits of themselves (fingers, etc.). This is not recommended unless you have Unearthly Regeneration, not to mention the reaction bound to occur if the body part is discovered.

Hair and fingernails may not be tracked. Pain seems to be the price for this blessing. If you possess this power and Blood Domination, you may track those who have drunk your blood.

**Drawback:** See the above section on Scarification.



### Father of Lies

When the Shadowlands is subtle, it is at its most dangerous. You may use your Taint to increase rolls involving mental Traits (Willpower, Perception, Awareness, and Intelligence) as well as physical Traits.

Natural Shadowlands creatures with this power instead double one of their mental Traits for a single roll, a number of times per day equal to their Earth.

**Drawback:** A point of Taint is accumulated whenever this power is used, just as when the Taint is used to increase physical Traits. Natural Shadowlands creatures gain no Taint when using this power.

### Speak With the Voices of the Dead

You are able to speak with the spirits of the deceased. By standing over the remains of a dead person, or meditating in the place where they died, you can force their spirit to appear and question them. If you win an opposed Willpower roll with the spirit (assume their Willpower is equal to the amount they had in life) they are forced to answer one question as truthfully as they are able. If they win the roll, they may choose whether or not they wish to answer, or if they wish to lie to you.

**Drawback:** You gain a point of Taint every time you use this power. In addition, the GM rolls for the spirit secretly. You never know whether or not you've succeeded, and spirits hate being treated this way. Natural Shadowlands creatures gain no Taint for using this power, but may only use it once per day.

### Terror of Fu Leng

You radiate the terrible power of Fu Leng, radiating Fear equal to your Taint in a thirty foot radius. This Fear can be sensed by anyone within the radius, but doesn't affect your allies, who know (or hope) that your power is on their side.

**Drawback:** You can't turn this power off without gaining a point of Taint. Once it's off, you can't reactivate it without gaining another point of Taint. Natural Shadowlands creatures cannot turn this power off at all. If a creature already has a natural Fear Rating, the higher of the two Fear Ratings is increased by one.

## Greater Shadowlands Powers

### Book of Souls

Legend has it that Fu Leng's *Book of Souls* contains the frailties, weaknesses, and fears of every living mortal. This power gives you insight into the *Book of Souls*, a powerful ability to determine the

shortcomings of others. By gaining a point of Taint and making an opposed Willpower check with a target, you learn a number of Disadvantages equal to your Taint Rank. The GM chooses which, if any, Disadvantages you learn. Using this power multiple times on the same individual will turn up new Disadvantages each time, until you have learned everything there is to know. You cannot successfully use this power against the same person more than once a month.

**Drawback:** You must look your target in the eyes. If they win the contest of wills, a chill passes through them and nothing happens. This is a foolish stunt to attempt against Kuni Witch Hunters, who are usually familiar with this power, know exactly what you're up to, and don't have anything to hide anyway.

### Drawing Out the Darkness

The Shadowlands is everywhere, in everything. Some people just haven't realized it yet. Using this power requires ten minutes of concentration and constant physical contact with another living being. At the end of this time, you must make an opposed Willpower test against the target. If you succeed, the target gains a number of points of Taint equal to your Taint rank, permanently. You may not use this ability on the same person more than once a month.

**Drawback:** The Kuni Witch Hunters keep an eye open for this sort of thing. A sudden outbreak of Taint in the middle of a city is likely to draw swift retribution. Only fools use this power carelessly.

### Final Blessing of the Dark One

As in the Blessing of the Dark One, but your maximum Wounds on each level are increased by 4. This power is cumulative with both Blessing of the Dark One and Greater Blessing of the Dark One.

**Drawback:** Your skin becomes pale white porcelain, as hard as a china doll. Deformity/0. This Deformity is very difficult to disguise.

