

His former teachers at the Wizards' Palace had shied away from such study while the One Oath drove him to it. Through other re-worked spells of *Attingo*, he could intimately know the pain of the victim of a direbug. After the initial bite, the first excruciating pain was felt in the eyes. The venom of the direbug prevented the eyes from blinking. As a result, each eye would be left to dry and shrivel. The only thing that extended the victim his sight was the tears which would only prolong the agony.

Sogoth did not know why the victims would not bleed to death as various pieces of them were removed by the hive members. That too was a piece of knowledge he was driven to find. He doubted whether The Creator would ever forgive him for what he did in pursuit of that knowledge. He was glad that the poison he used to imitate the direbugs attack did not allow his subjects to beg.

The Goblin's method, while crude, also took away the self of their victim. The first part of their sport was maiming their prey. All goblins were skilled at maiming. It was a practice that was diligently taught to their young. The favorite method was to cause the terrified prey just enough of an injury that it could not run or fight well. Then they would begin their sport in earnest. They would feign inattention and let the prey escape. The longer the chase lasted the better, and the goblins would hunt it until exhaustion took over. That was what the goblins most enjoyed, watching their victim have to give in to terror and more pain when their bodies would no longer let them flee.

Sogoth needed to know more of that moment in the victim's life. When they gave up, what exactly was given up? In too many experiments to ever allow him back in the grace of The Creator, he had taken that indefinable thing from local peasants. He preferred to work with the young because they more easily gave it up and saved him time.

His experiments often left them with a choice: their cherished ideas of what was good or an end to suffering. Life long devotees of The Book of the Word would forswear it willingly and quickly. Pure maidens would repeatedly debase themselves if it meant the end to the agony or fear. Other times, he would simply have them choose between physical pain and the agony of a loved one.

The wizards of technology provided many of the machines that could methodically tire his subjects. His favorite was a machine that required a subject to hold a heavy stone. After some hours, the subject would tire and want to drop the stone. The closer the stone came to the ground, the more a loved one was stretched on a rack.

That was the easy part. The more delicate part was questioning both subjects. His questions had to be precise. It was only after he learned what was given up that he could learn what it was that made them who they were.

It did not matter who the subject was. Both men and women pleaded and promised to pay any price. In his earliest experiments, Sogoth was surprised at how quickly even the most dedicated parents would offer him their children if he would stop tormenting them. Some would even beg him to take their limbs. After a sufficient number of experiments, the only person who was surprised was the broken parent at how easily she would sacrifice her child.

After the tests were over, they were allowed to return to their homes. Sogoth had no interest in keeping them, and he had no interest in killing them. Physically they would be fine. Sogoth's methods and machines rarely left marks on a body. On the rare

occasions a subject's body had to be damaged, a moderate level of *Curatitus* would restore them to the health they had had before they came to him.

Though they returned with a healthy body, they did not return whole. Something had been taken from them. Few people in all of the lands knew what it was that made them who they were. With each subject and after each test, Sogoth learned.

It was simple really: the first step was to measure the subject; the second was to inflict unbearable pain while taking away any mechanism they had to stop it. They would try everything and test each mechanism at their disposal.

The pattern was remarkably similar among all subjects. The first was always their body. They would squirm and test their bonds. Then, they would use their mind to try to reason their way out. Next, they would use whatever endurance they had to ignore the pain. That, of course, would not work. Predictably, they would then try to communicate with him. He found it best to simply not be seen by the subject. It reduced the time it took them to realize their will did not matter.

The time of the realization did not vary much between subjects. After an interval where their will did not matter, they became accustomed to being helpless. Once they had given up hope that they would ever own their needs again, they were finished. Even his crippled conscience recognized the evil of such a crime. Stealing a person's self, their very soul, was unforgivable.