

Chapter 19 – “Augmenting the Path”

Bolting upright, Kai groaned as his sore body racked him with phantom pain from what happened just before his mind had been claimed by darkness.

"Fuck me..." He groaned to himself. "And this was supposed to be a gift huh?"

He had only been musing to himself jokingly, but as if to answer just that, a window suddenly popped into existence in his mind.

[You have chosen - **Soul Reaper**]

~Feed upon death, reap the spiritual - warp the power to your whim~

[The Soul Reaper is the bane of the spiritual, consuming the souls of the living and the remnant death energies from any unfortunate beings who might've found themselves in his path of desolation.]

[You can now harness Souls or any Death Energy, be it Death Essence or Miasma, to refine and supplement your own Soul Cultivation.]

[Beware, large amounts of unrefined Souls and Death energies might lead to severe damage to the soul, twisting it beyond recognition.]

[Your pathways and meridians have been remodeled in the way of the Soul Reaper and gained the aspect of the Void.]

[You have gained **Soul Reaper Meridians**]

[Augment is dormant - Limited efficacy until the augment has been awakened by achieving the correlating Body Transformation stage to its slot.]

- **(Augment)**
 - **Skin: (Soul Reaper)**
 - Harness the remnant death essence of recently deceased creatures, souls, or miasma to refine and supplement your own Soul Cultivation.
 - Death energy sense - (Dormant)
 - Soul reaper Meridians - (Minor)
 - Augmented resistance to all death energies - (Minor)

"Ominous, but seems beyond powerful..." Kai muttered to himself absentmindedly, already beginning to wonder what he could do with these new abilities - although hadn't the faintest clue of how to use them...

"So I can eat souls now, huh...?" He droned off. "But that warning... doesn't it seem rather... inconsequential to me, who has no soul to even begin with?"

This could have potentially immense significance for his growth, but it was still clearly beyond his current reach to figure such things out.

Suddenly realizing something, his eyes shot down to scan his body, however, contrary to what he had been expecting to find, the tattoos which had been slithering their way up his body were nowhere to be seen.

Frowning, Kai wondered why that might be, but chalked it up to him either have gone delusional from all the pain in that last one moment, or it was just because he yet to reach **Skin Hardening** and awaken this new augment of his.

Casting a glance at the cloth-covered window and realizing from the sun's weak sun rays spilling through the cloth that no more than an hour had passed since he lost consciousness.

This was also very good since that would mean that Kai still had time before granny got home.

Kai sat up, taking in a deep breath and letting it stream out in one continuous motion, stabilizing his mind.

In the corner of his consciousness, he knew that there was another prompt awaiting his attention, but he took his time before opening it.

Even though the previous experience had been agonizing and painful, probably even traumatizing to others, he in fact felt alive and motivated after seeing it all rather than incapacitated by the dread of what the next five augments might bring.

[Augment - Bone]

-Walk the land, walk the heavens, walk the cosmos-

[Augment - Bone]

-Glimpse the terminus, and make it your own-

[Augment - Bone]

-To surpass all is to embrace vainglory-

Once again, Kai read through the options over and over again, attempting to feel out what the text wasn't saying.

The first option felt like freedom, something he desperately sought himself. However, he couldn't cast off the feeling of as if this was merely the type of freedom of closing your eyes and pretending things not be. Ignorance is bliss.

At least, Kai didn't throw that one out the window immediately and proceeded to the next one which simply gave him an unadulterated feeling of being overwhelmed. If he could not wrangle this untamed beast, it would overwhelm him and ultimately mean his demise.

The last was the one that gave Kai the most apprehension as he couldn't really discern anything from it. It both seemed as if it was to give in and submitting yourself to pride while also dominating at the same time which was contradictory in itself.

Making his choice, Kai chose the second one after no small amount of contemplation.

If this was going to try and overwhelm him, it was sorely mistaken. The hunger and resolve bubbling deep inside within him would never allow another to take control over his own life.

Like before, one second he was sitting in his bed, and the next the world changed around him. However, instead of the vision he experienced before, this time it was images and chaotic scenes that flashed by his vision, each one containing some profound truth that was wholly beyond himself to even attempt to grasp.

In front of Kai's sight, an ivory white skeleton of what seemed like a humanoid-figure hovered lazily. No matter what happened, the skeleton endured being cast into star fire, ever frost, nature's wrath, matter itself, void;

The Dao...

For each scene, carvings appeared on the skeleton, the intricate tapestry giving off a sense of truth and concepts pertaining to the chaos flickering before his very eyes.

Before he knew it though, it all faded as his mind was no longer flooded with the chaos that was the Dao. Although he hadn't learned any deeply seeded truths, Kai knew within himself that what he had just witnessed was the Dao.

The laws governing all of existence.

Contrasting his last experience and expectations, no pain racked his body as the augment took effect. It was only like an irritating itch that ran through his bones which he couldn't scratch.

[You have chosen - **Dao Engraver**]

~The Terminus, while fickle, is the foundation of all existence~

[Exposing yourself to the elements and laws governing the universe will allow you to engrave the very building] blocks of existence onto your bones - making them your own.

[Beware, to steal the secrets of the heavens is blasphemy - but only if you don't get away with it.]

[Augment is dormant - Limited efficacy until the augment has been awakened by achieving the correlating Body Transformation stage to its slot.]

- **(Augment)**
 - **Bone: (Dao Engraver)**
 - Imprint the very Dao upon the framework of your body and make it yours.
 - Augmented Dao comprehension - (Dormant)
 - Augmented resistance to natural elements - (Minor)
 - Augmented Dao resistance and absorption - (Dormant)

Shuddering, Kai shook the last vestiges of the phantom itches.

"Well that went a lot better than last time..." Kai chuckled, wiping away a stray drop of nervous sweat from his forehead as he had been expecting worse - much worse...

He only gave the information a cursory glance. Satisfied and not one to stall, Kai continued onwards.

[**Augment - Muscle**]

-Call upon the ancient ancestors, draw upon the power of lineage-

[**Augment - Muscle**]

-Forge a weapon of divine materials and you'll create a divine vessel. However, temper one of humble origin instead, and you could create a weapon that can slay the divine, transcending it-

[Augment - Muscle]

-Quench the destructive fires of life with the incineration of worlds-

Going into deep thought Kai frowned as none of the choices felt like bad ones.

They all gave him different sensations, however, none of them actually seemed like a trap or would become a detriment rather than a boon down the road. Even though the last one seemed definitely questionable, it simply gave off a sense of pure and uncaring power.

But the more he read through them, the more he drew his attention to the second option.

To forge yourself through fire and flames, that was exactly what Kai had embarked into this world to do. It made perfect sense for him, and as such, he picked it without hesitation.

Like the [**Dao Engraver**] augment, Kai was shown a series of images, though these were not chaotic or incomprehensible. Instead, there were awe-inspiring visions of beings rising to power.

Figures being tempered within the core of a star, people who forged their own power on the battlefield and quenched their bodies in the blood of their enemies, and some who refined themselves in the harsh and unforgiving punishment of the heavens.

It all caused his heart to speed up, and Kai found himself wanting to throw himself into combat, just find out what his potential was truly capable of.

Before he knew, he had returned. Unlike [**Soul Reaper**], there was no pain. Instead, he merely felt beyond elated as his muscles felt ready for anything, To be molded by his ambitions.

[You have chosen - Heretical Tempering]

~Temper your body and mind, and emerge anew~

[Shedding the limits of your former mortal flesh, you can temper yourself through any hardship.]

[You have gained - **Heretical Body**]

[Augment is dormant - Limited efficacy until the augment has been awakened by achieving the correlating Body Transformation stage to its slot.]

- **(Augment)**
 - Muscle: **(Heretical Tempering)**
 - Push your body beyond its boundaries, temper in the fires of war, and quench it the blood of your enemies.
 - Augmented physical adaptation - (Minor)
 - Augmented physical resistances - (Minor)
 - Augmented bodily compatibility with treasures and cultivation resources - (Minor)

"Does this mean I'll get better results from my training?" Kai thought excitedly since it fit him perfectly as every single day he pushed his body to the limit, even during normal training, to just get that bit extra amount of strength. Hard work was not something he rejects but embraces.

Nodding to himself, Kai was immensely pleased and he couldn't wait to realize all these augments' effects, and what the last three slots had in wait for him as it all seemed to get better and better.

[**Augment - Flesh**]

-Putrify your enemies, rot all those who oppose, lay desiccation to life-

[**Augment - Flesh**]

-Transform flesh and soul, merge and become one-

[**Augment - Flesh**]

-Consume-

Now, this was the first time Kai really gave pause to the options available. They all seemed beyond dubious, and Kai's mind couldn't help but run loose at what the each of flavor texts implied.

"Putrify your enemies? Merge flesh and soul? Consume....?" Kai hesitated.

He could already throw the second one out the window as he actually lacked any soul to merge, so he doubted that it would be anything worthwhile for him. Also, when he sensed the augment, it simply felt incomplete, partial - which made sense for someone like him.

The first gave off a sensation both vile and disgusting but also promised great power. Kai wasn't one to shy away from whatever form power may come in so he didn't immediately discard it.

But then there was the last choice...

This one... i-it called out to him. It resonated with him.

It called upon his deeply buried and eternal hunger for power.

Before Kai realized it, he had reached out and touched the glyph, causing the two others to wink out of existence and his world to suddenly shift for the fourth time.

Appearing in the endless void of space, Kai looked around at the endless amounts of stars and expanse of space all around him. It did occur to him that it was odd that he could easily make out each star, planet, and moon even though he must be infinitely far away from each one, however, that was simply chocked down to a quirk of the vision as he had other things to direct his attention at.

For example, the colossal demon floating aimlessly through the endless expanse of space. It looked almost like an imp, with its gaunt and hunchback appearance, and two leathery wings protruding from its back big enough to swat away entire stars if they got in the way.

The cosmic creature looked completely emaciated as if it hadn't eaten in millennia, but as Kai looked on, he suddenly went wide-eyed as the demon merely... ate a planet...

Disappearing into its mouth as if into a black hole, the imp simply continued to eat its way through the cosmos, not even content with that small snack as it ate the universe bit by bit.

Just before the vision faded though, something happened that made Kai's heart leap into his throat.

It turned its head, showing its impish face and the razer-filled maw that was pulled up into a devilish smile. Kai could swear that it had looked directly at him - as if it knew he was there...

But Kai was spared the tension as the vision disappeared, and he realized first now that he had been unconsciously holding his breath for quite a while. Gasping for air and completely soaked in sweat from head to toe, Kai shook.

"F-fuck..." He muttered, trying to make his hands stop trembling.

It wasn't just fear that was causing his body to shudder, but the hunger deep down inside him was growing and growing to a fever pitch - a result of his new augment taking effect, awakening and riling up the hunger.

It felt like it wanted to consume the world...

Clamping down, Kai's resolve and determination restrained the desire to consume and devour.

It was **not** going to get the better of him, and it never had.

Kai knew deep inside that it was this hunger that would drive him forward, allow him to achieve what no others could ever achieve. However, that was only if he could control it...

Else, it would consume even him.

[You have chosen - **The Gluttony of the Heavenly Fiend**]

~Consume~

[The Heavenly Fiend was known for his unending and reality-consuming hunger. He would consume entire worlds and galaxies, growing more powerful for each reality he refined. Cosmic deities and those alike, fear none more than the sentient black hole that is The Fiend.]

[Eat the essence saturated corporeal and refine it into your own power and supplement your Body Cultivation.]

[Augment is dormant - Limited efficacy until the augment has been awakened by achieving the correlating Body Transformation stage to its slot.]

- **(Augment)**
 - **Flesh: (Gluttony of the Heavenly Fiend)**
 - Consume the corporeal to refine and supplement your own Body Cultivation.
 - Aura of the fiend - (Dormant)
 - Life energy sense - (Dormant)

"Gluttony of the Heavenly Fiend...?" Kai wondered out loud. "What that really the demon I saw in the vision?"

It obviously could only be, and Kai shuddered at the thought of how much power such a being held. It literally ate whole planets and stars for god's sake!

Leaning against the wall, he let out a shaky breath. While this augment paired perfectly with the bottomless hunger for power that already existed within him, he knew that if he did not control and harness it properly, it would end up controlling *him*.

As such, Kai regained his bearings and went on with the last two augments still awaiting.

The world wasn't going to wait for him after all...