

# Divine Path System - Chapter 1 - Varian

## Chapter 1 - Varian

"I won't be merciful just because you're unawakened." the young man said, looking down at Varian in front.

"The thought is mutual." Varian replied in his familiar fighting posture. His lean build was reflected on the polished stage surface.

The crowd seated around the stage was only increasing as time passed. Leon Training Hall wasn't popular for its duels. Today was an exception.

The maid robots served refreshments to the audience as they stared at the large 3D holographic screen. It depicted the duelists with great attention to detail.

This match was not the same as the usual Awakeners duel.

An unawakened challenged Level 1 Body Awakener to a duel! It was crazy in itself, but the Training Hall supporting the unawakened fanned the flames and the news spread like wildfire.

"Are you kidding me? An Unawakened trash beating a Level 1 Awakener?" a high school girl asked her friend who dragged her to join the audience.

"It's true. Varian joined the Hall a year ago, but his combat instincts are unrivalled. Hall Master himself commented he could even reach level 4 should he awaken and become a Mid level Awakener." her friend replied, her gaze glued to the screen.

"Are you sure it's not a sca—"

"Match begins." The AI referee announced. Everyone gazed intensely at the screen. At the Unawakened.

Varian was unfazed by the attention. He maintained his trained posture and took a deep breath, awaiting his opponent's move.

He could take down a dozen normal men in a brawl. He never lost a match against Unawakened.

However, he knew his limits. Based on physical attributes alone, Body Awakeners dwarfed him. They were stronger than the best boxers, faster than the quickest athletes, and more resilient than the best swimmers of Old Earth.

Though a level 1 Body Awakener like his opponent was not strong to the point of dodging bullets or blocking knives, he was a force to reckon with for a normal person. Perhaps a mob could bring down a level 1 Body Awakener, but defeating them in one on one was as real as seeing a ghost ship.

Varian knew all this, but he was more than confident. If there's one way he was going to win, it'd be by using his strength over weakness — his combat experience gained over years of sickening practice and skills honed on broken bones in endless fights.

The Awakener in front had none of those. He was a new Awakened and prided too much in his inherent power and disdained all cultivated prowess.

The opponent finally moved. At a speed beyond normal human's reach, he dashed in front of Varian and punched at his chin.

The audience gasped as they awaited the inevitable. But before the punch was even thrown, Varian had already dodged and returned the punch.

'Boom!'

His opponent took a step back and covered his bleeding nose.

A Level 1 Body Awakener's physical attributes were higher than normal humans. But that didn't mean a normal human had no chance of winning.

"Don't underestimate me, you trash!" The young man lunged at him as he aimed his kick at Varian's chest.

"You're too easy to read." Varian replied and swerved to the right and kicked his opponent's back, causing him to crash into the floor.

Boom!

The kick alone would keep a normal human bedridden for a month, but Awakeners were anything but normal.

His opponent was back to his feet in the next moment and continued raining attacks on Varian. Any attack, if connected, would break Varian's bones, but they all failed to touch him by a hair's breadth.

Despite the power they were packing, they were uncoordinated and full of loopholes.

"Punch to the solar plexus, kick to my guts, and elbow to my ribs." Varian read his opponent's attacks just as he threw them as he dodged every single one of them with ease. His face was calm and even though he was sweating, he didn't look overwhelmed.

It always seemed that Varian was just lucky enough to dodge the attack, but it repeated again and again.

"Damn it! You son of a bi—" a sharp punch to his chin sent him flying and before he could get up, he was kicked in the ribs.

Varian's previously calm face was twisted. He punched his opponent's face and kept on kicking his ribs, breaking them one by one.

Click!

Click!

Click!

His opponent thrashed on the ground and struggled to get up, but every single attempt was countered by another calculated strike which kept him down.

Desperate, he started punching Varian's legs with his inhuman strength.

Crack!

Varian's legs nearly broke as the snapping sound of his bones resounded throughout the stage. He gritted his teeth and endured the pain. Physical pain like this was nothing.

Both were wounding the other deeply, and the duel turned into an endurance match of who first gave in to pain.

The Audience started murmuring as they were already sure who'd lose — Varian.

It was because the pain Varian had to face would be far greater with the difference in their attributes. There was no way he was going to win.

"They lied to you... even though it was pretty good for Varian to come this close." The girl stood up from her seat and a few others followed suit.

"Wait!" her friend insisted, and the girl gave her an annoyed glance. But she decided to stay. The match was going to end at any second, anyway.

She carelessly glanced at the screen and the next second, she gaped at the ridiculous scene.

Varian's legs were severely injured, but the frequency of his attacks didn't change. He kept kicking his opponent with his bloodied legs. His opponent's attacks gradually died down and finally, he fainted.

"Varian Wins!" the AI referee announced, halting the audience leaving the hall in their tracks.

Starting at the screen, everyone gawked at the unbelievable. An awakener trashed by unawakened.

The joke of the day became an irrefutable truth.

"Next time you curse my mom, I'll fucking kill you." Varian looked at the bloodied opponent and descended the stage.

He couldn't walk properly because of his almost broken legs, but he limped with a straight back, leaving a trail of blood, mostly his opponent's.

The audience looked at him with a mixture of awe and pity. Awe at his ability to win against an Awakener and pity that he would never be one.

Everyone awakened by the age of 16 in one of the Divine Paths, or Paths in short. Divine paths were classified into one of three groups — Divergents, Elementalists and Dimensionals.

Varian's opponent today was an awakener in Body path.

Body Path was part of Divergent Group. It was also the path Varian wanted to awaken in during his childhood.

But all of that was a mere pipedream now. He turned 18 today.

"Only if talented people like him fought on the frontline, perhaps we'll win against Abyssals and survive." the girl sighed.

"Yeah. Perhaps he could even reach Sovereign level." Her friend shook her head in pity.

"Pfft. Sovereign? You girls are exaggerating too much. Human federation has 8 planets and 50 billion people. But how many Sovereigns? E-i-g-h-t. Only eight." A young man from the next seat pointed out eight fingers and glared at them.

"They are the protectors of humanity. Don't insult them by comparing them with this unawakened trash." He condemned.

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"What do you know? Can you beat him if he is an Awakened?" the girl's friend rebutted with a flushed face. Comparing Varian to a Sovereign was indeed hyperbolic.

"Don't take my word for it. If he really wanted to awaken, he could always go to Dungeons. I'm sure someone will loan him money. But he never went. Not once!" The young man shot up from his seat, drawing attention.

"If he can't even fight against some magic beasts in Dungeons, how can he even dream of being like Sovereigns who fight Abyss Kings?" He sneered and left.

"I think we're too desperate for Heroes who can end the war." The girls sighed and left with mixed thoughts.

They thought imagining Varian would be a Sovereign would be an insult to them. They didn't know then... soon, the whole world would know it was the other way around.

Even Varian himself didn't know that his life would change today.

He entered the locker room and slumped in a chair. The cleaning bots removed the traces of blood and the nursing robot in the room; a floating sphere with two limbs, tended to his wounds as it cleaned and injected the healing medicine. His injury would heal in a few hours.

He felt an itching sensation from his legs, followed by terrible pain. He didn't cry out and gritted his teeth. Getting bones crushed by a mad body awakener was not a pleasant experience, but Varian had worse and more than he could count.

Varian's gaze turned to the dragon bracelet on his right wrist. It was the heirloom of his mom's family. It reminded him of her every day. But it also reminded him of that day. Of that night.

The night he wished was a lie.

On that night, exactly a year ago, he and his mom, Amanda, were celebrating his 17th birthday in his room.

"Varian, didn't you always want to be an Awakener? To win the war and bring peace? Just like your Dad." she smiled at him, a tinge of pride when she spoke of her late husband who died fighting the Abyssals.

"That is, of course! I've been training since I was 11 but I still can't awaken. There is only one way left — Dungeon. But you never let me go. I'm 17 already. Mom, I'll probably never be like Dad." Varian's voice continued to fall, and at the end, it was only a whisper.

Amanda gave a wry smile and repeated the reason she'd been telling him ever since he first wanted to enter a Dungeon.

"We couldn't hire adventurers with our financial status. I can't be like others, letting you venture in without any assurance. What if I lost you too," Amanda paused for a second before stabilizing her emotions "If only I was a skilled fighter, I could've helped you myself." she sighed and pushed the blame to herself.

Amanda herself was a Level 1 Thunder Path Awakener in the Elementalist Group. However, she was not a skilled fighter.

"Mom, I know you work hard to keep the house running." Varian didn't like blaming others, especially not his mom, who brought him up after his father was martyred.

He knew her concerns and hardships. He didn't dare imagine what she would do if he disappeared one day. That was why he never sneaked into

Dungeons, even if he could. But he couldn't help his frustration and... helplessness.

Amanda looked at Varian's immature face, which hid his mature persona, and giggled. "I won't hide it anymore. As your 17th birthday gift, I saved up enough money to hire Adventurers. You can go to the Dungeon in a week. You will awaken. I believe in you." She caressed his cheek and kissed him on his forehead.

"Really? Wow. I can finally awaken! I will make you proud. And even fulfill Dad's wis—"

BOOM!

The walls of his room were blown away, and the lights went off. Varian turned around, shielding Amanda behind his back, subconsciously trying to keep her safe.

In the dust, a pair of red eyes gazed at them.

Varian held his breath as he prepared himself for a fight. He knew he faced nothing like this. The next few seconds seemed to stretch themselves into eternity as Varian squinted his eyes to identify the intruder.

The silhouette of the thing soon became clear under the moonlight. It was a flaming wolf, 2 meters wide and 5 meters tall. Its fur was covered with blue flames. It was a Magic Beast!

Magic beasts were creatures of Dungeon Dimensions. It was almost impossible to see a magic beast outside Dungeon. But Varian was unlucky enough and won the chance rarer than a lottery.

The Fire Wolf glanced at them for a moment. He was unawakened while his mom was a Level 1 Thunder Awakener.

Each level had more aura than the previous level and Awakened always had more aura than unawakened. Aura was the fuel to progression in Divine paths.

The next moment, it lunged at him, the weaker target.

He was fully capable of dodging the attack, but behind him was his mother. Despite being an Awakener, she was not a combatant.

"Mom, leave." Varian yelled and dashed forward in an attempt to buy time. But ...

"Varian, go!" He was pushed out of the way and crashed to the ground.

Varian grimaced as the sharp debris on fire pierced him. Ignoring the pain of the burning flesh, he looked up.

His heart stopped for a moment as he prayed to every god he knew.

"Roar~" The Flaming Wolf roared and clawed at her. Its power was greater than expected. It was a level 2 magic beast, something impossible for the present him to match. She managed to dodge it by a hair's width.

"Please go!" she shouted as she conjured a ball of lightning to shoot at the Fire Wolf.

The Fire Wolf easily dodged the lightning ball and clawed at her abdomen. This time, it didn't miss and pierced her.

Amanda's abdomen bled, and she cried out in pain. Her face paled, but her gaze was locked with the Fire Wolf. Her body was still shivering from seeing the creature, but she gritted her teeth and took a step forward.

"No!" Varian tried to get up from the ground but to his own horror, he couldn't move.

His body was frozen.

What was it? What happened?

Amanda covered her injured abdomen and created another lightning ball. This time, it hit the eager wolf on the back of its neck and a scorching smell spread throughout the room.

The fire wolf howled in rage as it lunged at her to bite her neck. Amanda barely escaped again, but a chunk of her shoulder flesh was missing.

Varian's heart raced as it literally smashed against his ribcage. His mind was on the struggling figure in front.



Varian tried to move. He prayed. He cursed.

Just move. Move only this one time, and you can stay paralyzed all your life. Please...

His body, however, refused to budge.

His mom couldn't continue the fight and collapsed.

"Mom! Mom..." Varian saw her turning to him.

Amanda's eyes didn't have any fear, but there were tears in the corner of her eyes. She looked at him with hope. With the soothing smile she always gave him, she muttered something.

He couldn't hear her properly. But he knew he missed her final words.

"You beast!" Varian roared, his eyes red and breath ragged.

"Eat me!" He yelled.

"I have more aura." He pleaded.

And failed.

His cheeks were wet and his vision blurred as the wolf opened its mouth and ...

'Tick',

The medi bot's notification snapped him back to reality. The treatment was complete. He could walk without opening the wound and his leg would be completely healed in a few hours.

Varian was lost in thoughts about his past. So he didn't notice his dragon bracelet flashing gray with a tiny string of letters.

[Divine Path System Initializing... 99.00% 99.01%]

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