

## Chapter 2

It was Friday, school had just let out and Kasper walked with a sense of defeat. He had meant to talk to Rylee and Elijah, however their study hall was interrupted by a fire drill, so that plan went out the window. He now was just counting on Saturday for the locals tournament to break the ice. Maybe that would be easier since they would see that he plays System Gate.

Kasper checked his phone, had a little time to kill before he had to be home. His parents were taking him to a family friend's house for dinner. He took advantage of the limited time he had and decided to go to the card shop.

The proprietor of Other World Gaming stood behind the glass counter, flipping through a small book. As Kasper neared he could see the book held cards that Kasper didn't recognize.

Peter raised his eyes to Kasper. "Oh hello Kasper, welcome back." He said in his cheerful tone.

"Is that a trade binder?" Kasper asked out of curiosity. He had done a little research on the community and learned a few details, one of which led him here today.

Peter looked slightly confused till he followed Kaspers look. "Oh no no, this is my spell book for a different game, it's called Card Battle Spirit Link. Made by the same creators as System Gate. If you're interested we play on Wednesdays. What brings you in today?"

“Oh uh.” Kasper said, his gaze going past the different System Gate sets on display. “I was uh, looking for some card sleeves, and a deck box.”

“Sure we got a good selection.” Peter said, pointing to the right of the counter where a display of different colored card sleeves and deck boxes sat on hangers. “Let me know if you need any help with anything.”

Kasper walked over to the display and began his hunt. He decided on Orange sleeves and deck box, as they matched the color scheme of Burnova. He brought them to the counter and checked out.

“You coming tomorrow?” Peter asked as the cash register dinged.

Kasper nodded his head up and down, clutching the sleeves close to his chest. “I was hoping to play against Alger, get some more practice before tomorrow. Though I only got a little bit of time to spare.”

“In that case.” Peter said, reaching below the counter. A bell rang behind Kasper, signaling someone entering the shop. Kasper turned and found the imposing figure of Darryl standing over him with a bag on his shoulder.

“Yo Kasper how's it going?” Darryl asked in a jovial tone. Kasper had to crane his neck just to look at the large man. His presence was intimidating to Kasper, and he felt his knees shaking.

“Oh uh hi Darryl. Um I just was getting some sleeves.” Kasper tried to look behind Darryl, finding no one there.

“You looking for Alger I'm guessing?” Darryl asked. Kasper nodded his head frantically. “He had a test today, so he won't be by. You wanted to get a few games in with him?”

“Uh, yeah.” Kasper said, looking at his feet. “I noticed that he was going easy on me yesterday, so I wanted to play him when he was going all out.”

Darryl looked down on Kasper with a warm smile, though Kasper did not see that as he was admiring his shoes. “How about we play a quick game?”

“Uh oh sure.” Kasper said. He turned back to Peter to grab the deck box he had purchased, seeing Peter holding a yellow deck box and slowly lowering it back down under the counter. “Oh I'm sorry, uh.” Kasper felt panicky as he realized what he had just done.

“Dont worry about it, Darryl is a good player you'll gain a lot from playing him.” Peter Grey said with a casual wave.

Darryl and Kasper sat across the table from each other, Darryl helped Kasper sleeve his deck so they could play faster.

“You're running a different gate?” Darryl said, holding up the gate.

“Yeah, Alger said this one was the one that came in the deck, so I thought maybe it was worth trying.” Kasper said, looking over the gate that Darryl handed back.

Volcano Valley, it allowed him to use Venus cards and made his starting life 18 instead of 20. This downside was fixed with its ability. Once per turn he could pay 1 energy to move an opponent's Unit to the Center. With Burnova's penetrate ability it made the card interesting.

“So, you're coming to play tomorrow?” Darryl asked.

“Yep, I'm excited to play with everyone.” Kasper said. He now shuffled his deck.

“We got a good crowd, however you should know something since you want Alger to go all out.” Darryl said, shuffling his deck in his hands. “Alger is probably one of the best players in the shop. He doesn't win every week, but he wins more often than not.”

“He's that good?” Kasper said, dumbfounded. He felt the gap in their abilities growing larger.

“This game has regional tournaments from time to time. Last year out of over 300 players, Alger made the top twenty. Of course, I got top 40 so I top cutted too.” Darryl explained.

Kasper picked up what Darryl was saying, if he was going to have a hope of beating Alger, he first had to beat Darryl.

“Landon also made the top 40 didnt he?” Peter said, pulling up a seat next to them.

“Truth there.” Darryl said. “And his Mars deck got an upgrade since that event, heck we all got upgrades. We actually tend to get a strong group here. Rylee has been getting good since Blademaiden came out. Winter can do some damage too.”

Darryl presented his deck to cut. Kasper noticed the flag and Gate master in Darryls zone.

“Wait, that's an item?” Kasper said, confused.

“Yep, my gate master is Arms of the Empress Excalibur. It has the special ability that it can only be my gate master.” Darryl said, showing the card that revealed a large sword. “I’m running a Saturn deck, my gate is Valley of Souls Gate. It has the rules that says I can only have 1 unit on the field at a time, but the trade off is that I can pay 1 energy to let the gate attack. 2 crit, 4k power.”

“That’s so cool!” Kasper exclaimed, his excitement overwhelming him. “I didn’t know things like that existed!” He felt a sense of joy as his knowledge pool filled with these two cards alone.

They rolled two dice, Kasper won, so he decided to go first. He drew his opening hand, deciding which cards to mulligan. Since Darryl could only have one unit on the field Kasper realized his Finale card wouldn’t be the most effective, and he drew two of them. He decided to put them on the bottom of his deck and drew two cards to replace it. He was sad to not see Burnova, but accepted the cards.

Orion’s clothesline, Sapphire Scales, Solar Breath, 2 Flame battle Blaze Hitokage, and Flame Battler El Caliente.

Darryl didn’t mulligan any cards, keeping the six he started with. Kasper shuffled his deck then they both put the top two cards into energy.

“Draw.” Kasper said, Dragon Campfire. “Energize.” He put one of his extra Hitokage into energy to draw. He drew Flame tag team Blaze and Caliente. “I summon El Caliente to the left, then attack for 1”

“I’m at 19.”

“I end my turn.”

“Alright, Draw, Energize.” Darryl said. Darryl smiled. “Never punished on the charge.”

“What do you mean?” Kasper asked, tilting his head in confusion.

“It means I made a risky Energize and it worked out for me.” Darryl said with a laugh in his voice. “Alright, I equip Soul sword of the Dragon Hrotti”

The item was a sword with 2k power, 1 crit, 0 defense. It had the ability ‘Counter, if you have not equipped during this phase you may equip me from your hand’ as well as the keyword abilities Gear swap and Penetrate.

“I don't understand, why does it have that weird equip effect?” Kasper asked, trying to wrap his mind around it.

“The keyword Gear swap.” Darryl began to explain. “Whenever I would equip a new item I add this card back to hand. However, Excalibur has an effect in the gate master zone where I can put it under Excalibur instead, and if I have three soul I can equip Excalibur from the gate master zone.”

Kasper felt his jaw go slack jaw. “That's so cool! Do all decks have interesting effects like this!”

“Oh yeah, every world plays differently. Even decks from the same planets can play drastically differently depending on the gate.” Darryl put a spell on the field. “I play Horror Tea party, I gain 2 energy, and since I have equipped an item this turn I gain two more. Attack El Caliente.”

Kasper debated it. He could use Sapphire scales to keep El Caliente alive, but he had Hitokage in hand to take its place. He let El Caliente be destroyed.

“I end my turn.” Darryl said.

“Draw.” Kasper said, He pulled an El Caliente. “Never punished.” Kasper said.

Peter and Darryl laughed from the statement. “Energize.” He energized Dragon Campfire, then drew another tag battler. Seemed he wasn't going to play Burnova today.

“I summon Tag Team to the right, and El Caliente to the left.” Kasper said.

Flame Tag Team Blaze and Caliente were a limit 2, 11k/5/5k, a huge power. It cost 2 energy to play, and its effect was to move an enemy unit to an open spot on their field, which did nothing currently as Darryl hasn't played any units.

“Tag Team will attack for 5” Kasper declared.

“I cast Guardian Soul.” Darryl declared. “Fizzling the attack.”

“El Caliente will attack for 1.”

“I counter, activating the effect of Symbiotic Armor, Aegis.” Darryl declared. “By paying 1 energy I can equip him from my hand during your turn. This activated Gear swap, and I put Hirotti into the soul of Excalibur.”

Kasper was confused, why activate this effect now? He leaned over and read Aegis effect. It was a 5K/1/0 with gear swap, the previous counter ability, and an effect that read ‘All damage from attacks you take is reduced by 1’. It all made sense at that moment.

“So even though I hit, El Calinte did no damage.” Kasper said, looking over the clever move.

“Yep, and it helped set up my gear swap.” Darryl said.

“I end my turn.” Kasper said.

“Draw, Energize.” Darryl said. “I gear swap, returning Aegis to hand to play Fusing Blade Razor Tooth.” Razor Tooth only had the Gear swap effect, 6K/3/0. “Next, I pay 1 energy to make my gate able to attack, I enter the attack phase.”

Kasper looked over his hand, he could stop one attack, but Orions clothesline looked unhelpful in this match up.

“Razor Tooth attacks your Tag Battler.”

“I stop that with Sapphire Scales!” Kasper declared. “Fizzling the attack and gaining 1 energy.”

“Then I attack with my Gate, attacking El Caliente”

Kasper sadly had to let that happen.

“Gear swap.” Darryl said. The words sent a shock up Kasper’s body. “I swap Razor Tooth for Soul Sword, Brainbiter. I place Razor Tooth below Excalibur.”

Brainbiter was a 6K/2/0 item with Gear swap, cost 1 energy, counter pay 1 energy to equip from hand by paying cost, and enemy skills cannot destroy or return it to hand.

“Brainbiter will attack Tag Battler.” Darryl declared.

Tag Battler was destroyed.

“I end my turn.”

“Draw.” Kasper drew Firespin Thorny, a good draw. “Energize.” He chose Solar Breath. “Firespin to the left. Nova Gift activates, I gain 1 energy and draw 1 card.” His



draw was Venus Energy, which should help keep his units on the field. "Next for two energy I play another Tag Battler."

"Nice Nice." Darryl said.

"I will attack with Tag battler!" Kasper declared.

"Gear swap, playing Aegis for 1 energy and putting Brianbiter under Excalibur. I take only 4 due to Aegis effect, putting me at 15."

"Thorny attacks for 2"

"Reduced by 1 so I take 1, putting me at 14."

"I end my turn."

"Draw, Energize." Darryl said. "Gear swap, returning Aegis to hand to play a new Brainbiter. Next I summon to my left Soul of the Quest Parzival." It was a limit 2, 10K/2/8K and the effect 'Counter, destroy me and pay 1 energy, if you do stand an item'. Kasper already understood the power of that card. He had to time this correctly. "Finally, I pay 1 to let my gate attack. Then I enter the attack phase."

"I activate Orion's Clothesline!" Kasper declared. "I destroy Parzival." Kasper realizes that his initial assessment of Clothesline was wrong. It would be helpful for this game!

"Smart." Darryl said. "Alright, Brainbiter will attack tag battler."

"I play Venus Energy, giving it +5k power and defense and revenge."

"Revenge makes it so I take damage since Tag battler is still around." Darryl said.

Peter whistled. "Good moves, and good damage."

"I'm at 9." Darryl said. "My gate will attack you for 2."

"I'm at 16."

"I end my turn." Darryl said.

Kasper was confused, Excalibur had enough soul, and he could be played as a counter, why didn't he?

"Stand, Draw." El Caliente. "Energize." He Energized Hitokage, drawing Melty chef Dragon. This card was better than he expected. "I summon Melty Chef Dragon to the left." It was a limit 1 3K/2/1K with the ability 'When I attack if there is no unit on your opponent's center, gain 1 life and 1 energy. As well as move, which let Kasper move melty into the center at the start of Darryl's attack phase.

"Attack phase, Tag Battler attacks for five."

"Gear Swap, adding Brianbiter to hand to summon Aegis. I take 4, putting me at 5."

"Melty for 2, giving me life and energy. I'm at 19 Life."

"I take 1." Darryl said.

Kasper felt his heart racing. He could win this, he just needed one more push. "I end my turn."

"Stand, Draw, Energize." Darryl began. "I summon Parzival to the left."

Kasper panicked. Parzival changed a lot.

"Attack phase."

"I cast Orion's Clothesline to destroy Parzival." Kasper declared. He had to hope whatever he drew next turn would be enough.

Darryl raised an eyebrow. "Alright."

“Then I move Melty to the center.”

Right, Aegis attacks Melty.”

Melty was placed in the drop. At least it soaked up one hit. Sadly, Kasper didn't have anything in hand but El Caliente now.

“Now, Gear swap. Switching Aegis for Aegis for 1 energy, then use my last energy to give gate crit.”

Darryl dealt 2 damage with his Gate and his final attack destroyed Tag Battler. Once again, the turn ended without playing Excalibur. It came down to if Kasper drew a good card.

“Draw.” His finale card. “Energize.” He put the finale into the energy, then drew another solar breath. El Caliente only had 1 crit, and because of Aegis armor he wouldn't be able to deal any damage. “I pass my turn.” He decided it was better to hold his hand, if he got another turn he could turn it around, but if El Caliente was destroyed too soon it was over for him.

“Stand, draw, Energize.” Darryl said. “I attack for 3 with Aegis and my Gate.”

“I'm at 14.” Kasper said.

“Go ahead.” Darryl said.

“Why aren't you playing Excalibur?” Kasper questioned. “You're not going easy on me are you?”

Darryl sighed. “That's not what's happening, your life is too high, it's better for me to hold my resources to finish it in one big swing.”

Kasper took that in, so his life being so high was what kept that sword from coming out?

“Draw.” Melty Chef Dragon. “Energize.” He chose El Cliente, drawing another Melty Chef Dragon. “Summon Melty Chef Dragon to the left and right. Then link attack.” If he did this, he would deal 3 damage instead of 2 if they were separate attacks.

“Smart, if I had a fizzle though I could stop that.” Darryl lifted a card in his hand with an evil look. Kasper grimaces in fear. “Sadly I don't got one, I'm at 2.”

“I gain 2 life and 2 energy, putting me at 16.”

“Looks like he might get you Darryl.” Peter said.

“Possible.” Darryl said. “Stand, Draw, Charge. Paying 1 energy to give my gate ability to attack. Enter the attack phase.”

“I move a Melty to center.”

“Aegis will attack melty., then my gate attacks the other Melty, I end my turn.”

“Draw.” His item! “Energize.” He chose solar breath, and drew El Caliente, he could make this work. “Equip, and summon El Claiente to the left. Link attack! Restanding El Caliente.”

“Guardian Soul!” Darryl declared. “Fizzle the attack.”

“I end my turn.” Kasper said, Aegis stopped El Caliente from dealing damage.

“Stand, Draw, Energize.” Darryl said. “I summon Mysterious Artisan Leprechaun.” It was a limit 2 unit with 7K/3/7K ”Casting Horror Tea party to gain 3 energy.”

Darryl had 7 energy now.

“Attack phase.” Darryl said.

Kasper had to hope he couldn't get 16 damage off.

"Leprechaun attacks for 3." Darryl said.

"13."

"Aegis for 1."

"12."

"Pay 1 energy, my gate attacks for 2."

"10."

"Gear swap, playing Hrotti, attack for 1."

"9."

"Now then." Darryl said. "I play Excalibur."

Kasper panicked as he returned Hrotti to hand, then put Excalibur onto the field. 8K/4/0, it had Soul Guard and Dual Attack, meaning it can restand after it attacks once a turn.

"Excalibur for 4, then again."

"I'm at 1." Kasper said, he could win this. Darryl was out of attacks.

"I remove one soul, and summon a Soul Token, dropping Leprechaun to do it. The token was played from outside his deck, it was a 10K/2/1K limit 3. This move was the final skill of Excalibur.

"Soul token attacks for game."

Kasper sighed in defeat. Darryl held out a hand.

"Good game, you had me on the ropes." Darryl said with a big smile. "No joke, you almost had me."

Kasper took the hand. "Thank you, that was fun, and your deck is so interesting!" Defeat didn't feel good, yet he felt good overall. He had fun, and that feeling outweighed his feeling of defeat.

"Wanna go round 2?" Darryl asked, gathering his cards.

"I would, but I gotta get home, my parents want me to go out tonight." Kasper said.

"Alright, then we'll see you tomorrow right?" Darryl asked.

"Of course!" Kasper said.

He thought over the game as he walked home. Darryl was one of the best players in the shop, and Alger stood at the peak right now. Kasper felt a sense of excitement, he had goals to reach. He had to get to Alger and Darryl's level if he ever had a chance of winning. The feeling of defeat faded as his competitive excitement filled him. He almost sprinted home from the boost the feeling gave him.

## Character Profile- Darryl

Darryl Robinson

Age- 19

Born- June 12th, Gemini

Favorite Food- Brisket Nachos.

Favorite Music Genre- Old School Rock

Hobbies- System Gate, Video games (First person shooters), History

Future Career- College Professor specializing in Math

Deck Profile-

Gate- Valley of Souls Gate

Gate Master- Arms of the Empress, Excalibur

4x Fairy Alchemist, Liza

4x Mysterious Artisan Leprechaun

4x Foundation Scientist, Franklin

4x Royal Soul Pharaoh, Cleopatra

4x Soul of the Quest Parzival

4x Soul Sword, Brainbiter

4x Protection Soul Evalach

4x Symbiotic Armor, Aegis

4x Soul Sword of the Dragon Hrotti

4x Fusing Blade Razor Tooth

4x Horror Tea Party

4x Guardian Soul

2x Endless Cycle

