

ChäoS;Gate

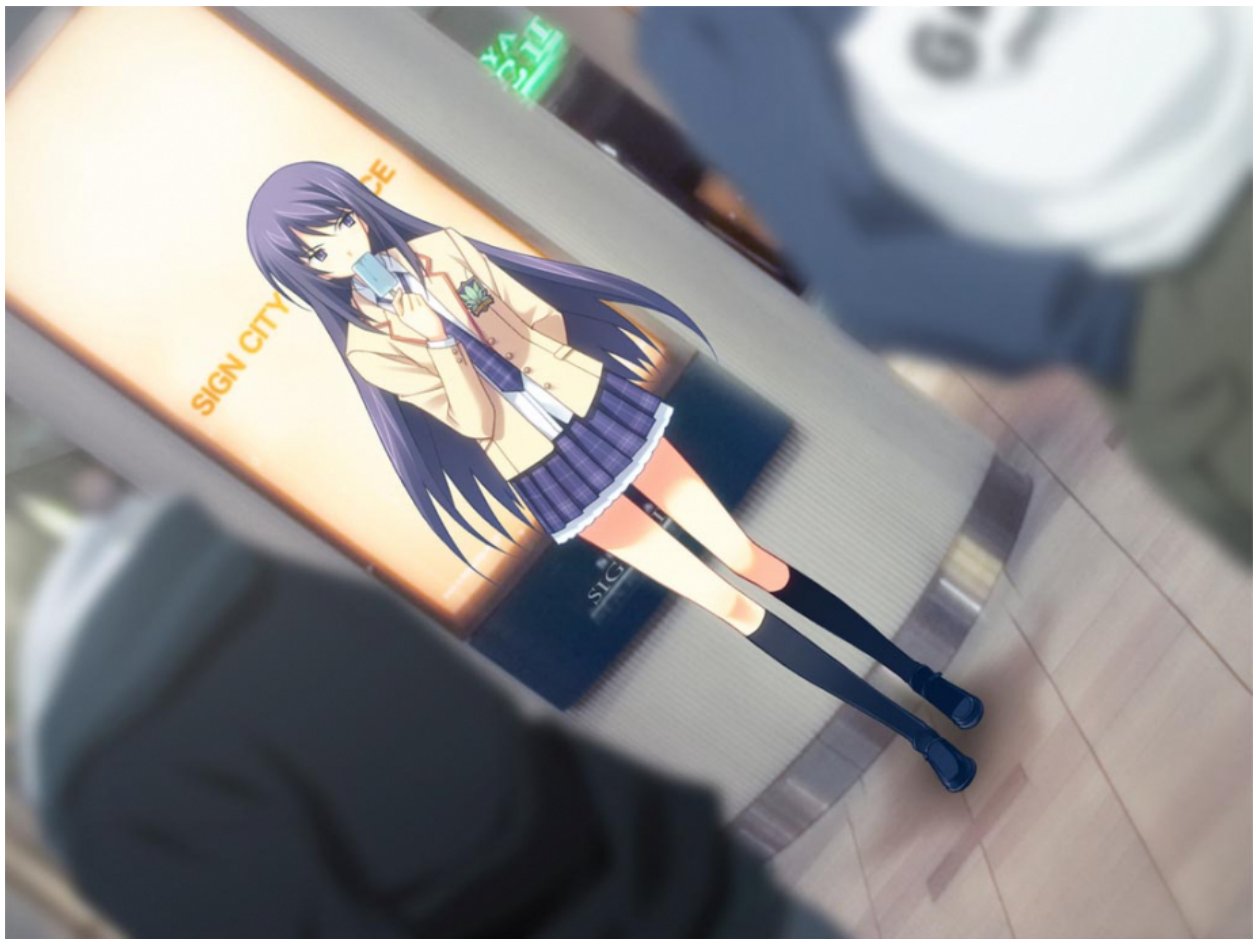
Or, perhaps, a Gigalomaniac's choice of Steins Gate?

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“Tch... I lost him, huh.”

The escalator I’m dashing down is quite lengthy, and it stretches deep into the underground. Upon reaching its end, I click my tongue in annoyance. I shoulder my DI-sword and scan my surroundings.

I chased someone carrying a Nozomi Technology terminal—what the company’s higher-ups seemingly refer to as “porters”—all the way to Shibuya Station, but it seems as though he managed to escape.

To those who don’t use it often, the underground portion of Shibuya Station is like a labyrinth. The station houses numerous public and private railways, making it an infinitely complex area to navigate. From where I’m standing right now, one can take the Fukutoshin Line, the Hanzoumon Line, or the Den-en-toshi Line.

Where the hell did that guy run off to?

“Hey, you! Did you happen to catch sight of a plump man with a rucksack just now?” I call out, addressing a man who just strode past me. Judging by his uniform, he, too, is a high school student.

“Shouldn’t you state your name before daring to ask questions of me, you long-black-haired girl?” he proclaims, his tone unusually pompous. Setting aside my own confusion, I introduce myself as Aoi Sena.

The man whips out his cell phone. “It’s me. I’ve just come into contact with an unusual woman... Yes, it’s possible that she’s an assassin sent by the Organization. Or, perhaps she’s a rebellious fugitive fleeing them... If I don’t call back within an hour, know that I have been

deceived and am facing divine judgement. Carry on with our operations as planned, for that is the choice of Steins Gate. El Psy Kongroo.”

After muttering those incomprehensible words, he returns his phone to his pocket. He then turns to face me, haughtiness written all over his face.

“And who might you be?”

“Like I just said, I’m Aoi Sena. More importantly, did you hear a mechanical noise just now? It’s similar to a whirring—”

“I see.”

Though I haven’t finished speaking, the man is already nodding his head in agreement.

“So *that’s* finally beginning, huh...” he says.

“*That?* Are you referring to the Third Melt?” I demand.

“Indeed. It had a name like that.”

I immediately raise my guard. “Who are you?! Don’t tell me you’re a...”

The man isn’t exhibiting any signs of being a Gigalomaniac... In that case, is he connected to Nozomi Technology? He might even be working with the porter from before... and if he is, I need to extract quite a bit of information from him.

As I keep my guard up, the man’s lips twist into a smirk. Suddenly, he bursts into insane laughter.

“Heheheh... MUHAHAHA! I see you’ve finally unearthed my true nature! I suppose even the Organization has somewhat capable soldiers.”

“...The Organization? What’s that supposed to be?” I ask. Could he be mistaking them for the Committee?

No, that's extremely unlikely. If he were, there would be no way he'd be with Nozomi.

In that case, is he an awakening Gigalomaniac? At the very least, this man doesn't appear to be normal—his heart has clearly been torn in half, like mine.

"Listen, stop deluding yourself!" I say, unconsciously starting to force a warning onto him. "If you don't, you'll be consumed by your delusions before you know it."

"Out of all the living organisms on Earth, only humans can conceive of delusions," I continue. "Delusions like 'If it turned out like this,' or 'If I could do that.' Physically mediocre humans gained the ability to imagine potential situations in order to predict when danger might have struck. However, that power has grown dangerously out of proportion. Have you heard of the dream-devouring bakus?"

"Nope, never heard of them," he replies.

"Go learn about them, why don't you?!" I retort, frustrated by his ignorance.

He abruptly thrusts his index finger at me. I brush it off to the side and scowl at him in return, ticked off by his bizarre behavior. He falters, clearly losing some of his initial confidence.

"Delusions are electronic devices. No, to be precise, the world in its entirety is an electronic device," I continue.

"Virtual reality, huh...?!" The man's face lights up in excitement. "I see, so that's how it's been all along...! The world has already fallen, but we live on as mere data on a quantum server—"

"I never said anything like that."

"Oh, I see..." The man's shoulders slump in disappointment.

What exactly is a quantum server in the first place? I've never heard of anything like that.

“Is the scenery your eyes perceive the real thing?” I ask, monitoring his response. I always use that question to determine whether or not the other party is a threat.

“So not only do you deny your own existence, but you also deny the world’s? Well, your way of thinking is natural, of course, given that the world is manipulated from the shadows by the Organization—”

“I don’t know anything about your ‘Organization.’ Don’t make me repeat myself over and over again,” I reply, forcibly cutting off his farce. This guy seems to enjoy dragging out conversations, and his arrogant attitude is getting on my nerves. I’ve just about had enough of his drivel, so I’ll steer this discussion toward a conclusion and be done with it.

“Always keep what I’ve said in the back of your mind,” I caution.

“Ha, trying to warn me, huh... Who do you think you are?” the man proclaims. He then begins laughing fearlessly. Looking into his eyes, it’s easy to assume that he can see through everything and everyone. Upon closer inspection, though, it seems as if his worldview is just completely twisted.

“However, I have something to bequeath to you as well,” the man states. “Have you heard about the ESPer boy, Nishijou?”

“What’d you just...?”

“I won’t let that happen!” I shout.

“The fomentation period that you know as the year 2000 has ended,” the man continues.

“The *corrosion* has already begun...!”

What the hell is this guy saying? This is the first time that I’ve felt so bewildered in my life. What he believes in is completely disconnected from what I consider to be the truth.

“Aoi Sena, was it? I’m pleased to have been able to meet you,” the man says. “However, the next time we meet, we will be enemies. When that happens, do not hesitate—come and kill me with everything you’ve got. Riding into battle with half-hearted convictions will only lead you to your own demise.”

“...What?”

Kill him? Does that make him a threat, as I initially suspected? That doesn’t make sense, though; up until just now, his standpoint was that of a bystander.

Wait, does ‘the next time we meet’ imply that he’s my ally right now?

Grrr, I can’t make heads or tails of what he’s trying to say.

Suddenly, I understand what’s going on. He isn’t trying to convince *me* of what he’s blathering on about, he’s trying to convince himself. Perhaps his words are merely delusions... No, calling them delusions would be misleading. To put it more aptly, there’s a good chance that everything he has said so far has been entirely random.

“My name is Hououin Kyouma.”

It’s only after a long-winded act of tomfoolery that he finally introduces himself, and he does so with a blatant pseudonym to boot. His unadulterated pompousness is really pissing me off.

“*Houou*- for ‘phoenix,’ then *in*, and finally, *Kyouma* for ‘the horrible truth that must never be revealed.’ I am none other than the insane mad scientist feared by all,” the man declares. “It seems we are fated to meet again... for that is the choice of Steins Gate. El Psy Kongroo.”

He turns his back on me, evidently trying to leave. I kick the back of his knee lightly, just to see what might happen.

“Ah...!” he cries out, collapsing immediately from the impact. I tried not to kick him too hard, but evidently, he just isn’t very strong.

“Gah... To think you’d use a cowardly surprise attack...!” the man chokes out, crouching on the ground. He then grabs his right hand and begins to yell in a strange voice.

“Agh! To think my right hand would choose now of all times... Don’t come near me, or it’ll go rampant...!” he exclaims.

The man’s hand is shaking and spasming, but it’s clearly self-induced. This guy might just be an idiot... No, scratch that. He’s definitely an idiot.

“Can you see it?” I demand.

“S-See what?”

“This right here. What I’m holding.”



I move the tip of my DI-sword before the fallen man's eyes once again. I haven't real booted it, so only people with Gigalomaniac potential can see it right now. The man nods, still holding down his right hand.

"Yes, I see it. It's excessively vivid, such that the viewer's eyes are immediately fixed upon it. Indeed, it's a harshly beautiful sword."

"You can genuinely see it?"

"Of course. I never thought I'd be able to see it in my lifetime, though. The Demon Sword Oboro Setsugekka... Such a beautiful Japanese sword..."

“Don’t lie to me, idiot!” I exclaim. I step on the fallen man’s crotch with all the strength I can muster. He lets out a pathetic scream of agony, and I immediately leave the scene.

Damn it, how confusing. There was no way he could have actually seen my sword. Getting mixed up over nonsense spouted by the likes of him is nothing short of disgraceful. Above all else, the encounter was a waste of time—after all, the porter managed to escape.

As I ponder that, I suddenly hear a ringtone coming from my pocket. I pull out my phone to answer it. When I put the speaker to my ear, I can tell who I’m speaking to thanks to the soft breathing that I hear.

“Hey Kozue. I just ran into a weird guy. Talking to him really wore me out...” I say. And with those remarks, the day comes to a close.

I never thought that the man’s prediction might have held some credibility, but... about a week later, almost everything that he said would happen to Shibuya came to fruition. In the aftermath of the Third Melt, I had no choice but to accept his words as the truth.

For a moment, I was terrified of his foreknowledge. But after that, I figured it was probably just a coincidence.

After I came to that conclusion, I never thought of the man who called himself “Hououin” ever again.

