Eustia of the Tarnished Wings: The Visual Novel in Translation

Matthew R. Bird

University of Massachusetts Amherst

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.umass.edu/masters_theses_2

Part of the Japanese Studies Commons

Recommended Citation
https://doi.org/10.7275/8586837 https://scholarworks.umass.edu/masters_theses_2/398

This Open Access Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Dissertations and Theses at ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. It has been accepted for inclusion in Masters Theses by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. For more information, please contact scholarworks@library.umass.edu.
EUSTIA OF THE TARNISHED WINGS:
THE VISUAL NOVEL IN TRANSLATION

A Thesis Presented
by
MATTHEW R. BIRD

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts, Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 2016

Japanese
EUSTIA OF THE TARNISHED WINGS:
THE VISUAL NOVEL IN TRANSLATION

A Thesis Presented

By

MATTHEW R. BIRD

Approved as to style and content by:

________________________________________
Bruce Baird, Committee Chair

________________________________________
Amanda Seaman, Member

________________________________________
Bruce Baird, Graduate Program Director
Asian Languages and Literatures

________________________________________
William Moebius, Department Head
Department of Languages, Literatures and Cultures
DEDICATION

To my parents, without whose support I wouldn’t have made it this far.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Professor Stephen Forrest, for understanding and academic support.
Lecturer Yuki Yoshimura, for allowing me to vent quite unprofessionally at times.
Librarian Susan Domier, for being as dependable as all librarians should aspire to be.

Caitlin and Megan Bird, for supporting me as only siblings can.
MayaBea Schechner, for challenging me to translate more than I thought possible in a month
Samuel Allen, my once and future translation partner. We’re making it happen someday, man.
Brandon Archambault, for helping me understand Lacan, at least to some extent.
Susan Perez, for her constant comfort over my time here.

And so many others who kept me focused and kept me sane, or at least to a reasonable approximation.
ABSTRACT

EUSTIA OF THE TARNISHED WINGS: THE VISUAL NOVEL IN TRANSLATION

MAY 2016

MATTHEW R. BIRD, B.A., TUFTS UNIVERSITY

M.A., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

Directed by: Professor Bruce Baird

The center of this thesis proposal is a translation of the first book of AUGUST Software’s Eustia of the Tarnished Wings 穢翌のユースティア, a 2011 dark fantasy visual novel. As visual novels are practically unknown in English or Japanese academic writing, this thesis will provide an introduction to the medium’s history, as well as common display and organizational formats of the medium; a literary overview of Eustia of the Tarnished Wings and its characters and themes of choice and sacrifice; and a discussion of translation methodology and goals pursued in the accompanying appendices.

The translation presented consists of selected excerpts from the Prologue of Eustia of the Tarnished Wings, introducing the main characters, the floating city-state of Novus Aether, and the uneasy social climate of the city. Presented scenes are selected on the basis of plot or thematic relevance or translational interest, as well as scenes that are necessary to contextualize plot or character developments discussed in the critical introduction.

This thesis will serve as an introduction to a developing medium that has been overlooked by most academics in the field of Japanese popular culture, as well as a look
at the utilization of choice mechanics and branching story structure to involve the
reader’s own choices in the narrative. In addition, it will present a personal methodology
of and approach to translation as related to Eustia’s many and varied characters, social
strata and situations, and maintaining individual and consistent voices for different
characters and a first-person narrator in fiction.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ........................................................................................................ iv

ABSTRACT ....................................................................................................................... v

LIST OF FIGURES .......................................................................................................... ix

INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................................. 1

CHAPTER

1. HISTORY AND FORMAT OF THE VISUAL NOVEL ................................................... 3
   A. History ..................................................................................................................... 3
   B. The Visual Novel Format ...................................................................................... 5
      1. Visuals: The Screen ............................................................................................. 5
      2. Audio: Music and Voice ..................................................................................... 10
      3. Text: The Story ................................................................................................ 11

2. EUSTIA OF THE TARNISHED WINGS .................................................................. 15
   A. One Visual Novel, Six Books ............................................................................... 18
   B. Characters ............................................................................................................ 19
   C. Letting Go To Live – Choice and Sacrifice ....................................................... 30
   D. Eustia and the Beautiful Fighting Girl ............................................................... 35

3. TRANSLATION METHODOLOGY ......................................................................... 39

APPENDICES

1. THE SAINT’S VISITATION ....................................................................................... 51
2. THE WING HUNTERS ............................................................................................. 60
3. KAIM FINDS EUSTIA ............................................................................................... 78
4. TIA REMEMBERS .................................................................................................. 92
5. PASSING THE HUNTER .......................................................................................... 115
6. THE CHOICE MECHANIC ..................................................................................... 126
7. THE EARTHQUAKE .........................................................................................................130
8. THE QUARTERING .....................................................................................................142
9. EXTRACTION .............................................................................................................153
10. TIA’S ESCAPE ......................................................................................................174
11. KAIM LEAVES ....................................................................................................188
12. RESURRECTION ....................................................................................................200

WORKS CITED .............................................................................................................212
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Diagram of the visual interface</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. An example CG</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Comparison of several visual novel and JRPG interfaces</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Side paths in the narrative structure of <em>Eustia</em></td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The heroines</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Kaim and Tia</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Fione and Kaim</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Eris</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Western architecture and clothing</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figures included in the Appendices are presented with accompanying text and translations directly below.
INTRODUCTION

The term ‘visual novel’ (ビジュアルノベル bijuaru noberu) is a fairly new term for a medium that is not much older. Visual novels, a type of computer software, occupy an intriguing space somewhere in-between more established media formats; they present the text of a novel, accompanied by the background art and character designs of manga, with the music, sound effects and voice acting of an animated show. Some visual novels even utilize limited 2D or 3D animation. With a wide variety of genres represented, from horror to science fiction to romance to historical fiction, visual novels are a rapidly expanding, emergent medium – the fan-run aggregation site Visual Novel Database (VNDB.org) lists over 18,000 commercial and fan-published visual novels and separately marketed materials,1 with the earliest listed release date in May of 1983.

The economic and cultural impact of the visual novel medium in the dōjinshi and commercial spheres, and the complex interplay of adaptations, re-adaptations, supplements, and stylistic and content influences between visual novels, manga, anime and light novels, deserves a much deeper analysis than is possible in this introduction. Instead, this introduction will present a brief overview of the medium’s history and common display and organizational formats of the medium; a literary overview of AUGUST Company’s 2011 dark fantasy visual novel Eustia of the Tarnished Wings (穢翼のユースティア aiyoku no yūsutia) and its characters and themes of choice and

---

1As of December 2015, VNDB lists 362 pages of visual novels, each page showing 50 novels each, for a total of 18,074 visual novels and/or individually marketed supplementary materials.
sacrifice; and a discussion of translation methodology and goals pursued in the accompanying translated appendices.
CHAPTER 1

HISTORY AND FORMAT OF THE VISUAL NOVEL

A. History

While the roots of the visual novel can arguably be found in text-based adventure games and interactive fiction such as Infocom’s 1980 release Zork I, the first hugely impactful step toward its recognition as a separate medium came in 1992 with the release of *Saint John’s Wort* (弟切草 otogirisō) by Japanese game developer Spike-Chunsoft. *Saint John’s Wort* was a ‘sound novel’ (サウンドノベル saundo noberu), a trademark format of Spike-Chunsoft that paired text with audio and simple images to heighten reader investment and immersion. In the same year, ELF Corporation’s *Classmates* (同級生 dōkyūsei) was released, becoming the first in a successful series of erotic dating simulation games.2

In 1994, Spike-Chunsoft released the mystery sound novel *Banshee’s Last Cry* (かまいたちの夜 kamaitachi no yoru). An experiment for the format, *Banshee’s Last Cry* showed that augmented text formats could successfully feature complex plotlines; and in 1996, Leaf Company released *Drip* (雫 shizuku) and *Scars* (痕 kizuato), which were branded as ‘visual novels’ both to avoid infringing on Spike-Chunsoft’s trademarked ‘sound novel’ term and to highlight the addition of more sophisticated visuals, including character art in a strongly manga-influenced style (done by Minazuki

---

2 While dating simulation games and visual novels are not interchangeable, the two formats have exerted influence on each other; a detailed exploration is beyond the scope of this paper, but in general, a visual novel presents one or more storylines for the reader to follow, while a dating simulation is more interactive, for example giving a reader a certain number of in-game days to win the heart of a character by scheduling dates, giving gifts, and having conversations.
Tōru 水無 月徹). *Drip* and *Scars* combined dark, affecting storylines with erotic adult content, and along with Leaf’s 1997 release *To Heart*, these three novels had a major influence on the popularity of the medium.

As software grew more advanced, more intricate and detailed visual novels were released, and the thriving fan publishing, or dōjinshi, community began to expand into visual novels as well. In 2000, dōjinshi circle Type-Moon published *Tsukihime* 月姫 at Comics Market 59, kickstarting the hugely popular “Nasuverse”, named for lead writer and director Nasu Kinoko 奈須 きのこ. Later Type-Moon releases included the smash hit visual novel *Fate/stay Night* (フェイト・ステイナイト feito sutei naito) in 2004, which has been adapted several times into manga, TV anime series, video games, and light novels. While not the first visual novel adapted into an animated series, *Fate/stay Night* and its related properties played a huge role in popularizing the medium, and the franchise remains a commanding presence more than ten years after its inception, with a successful smartphone game, *Fate/Grand Order*, and three theatrical animated films currently in production as of May 2016. In 2010’s *Anime and the Visual Novel*, Dani Cavallaro lists some 30 anime series adapted from visual novels between 1999 and 2009, a list that is by no means exhaustive, and one that has expanded in recent years with titles such as *Majikoi: Oh! Samurai Girls* (マジで私に恋しなさい！ maji de watashi ni koi shinasai) (2011) and *Utawarerumono: The False Faces* (うたわれるもの・偽りの

---


**B. The Visual Novel Format**

The three most significant aspects of the visual novel format are the visual presentation of the screen itself; the audio components of music, voice acting and sound effects; and of course, the text of the novel itself. The examples given below serve only as a broad introduction to the general format; many visual novels modify this format to a lesser or greater extent. Most visual novels that are sold as physical units are distributed on a CD, and thus a computer with a disk drive is required to play them; however, some are distributed online and can be downloaded on multiple system configurations.

1. **Visuals: The Screen**

![Diagram of the visual interface](image)

Figure 1: Diagram of the visual interface

The most immediately recognizable feature of the visual novel genre is, fittingly enough, the visual organization of the screen on which the novel is read. Most visual
novels utilize a standard format for visual presentation; it could be argued that it is this standard format that makes a visual novel a visual novel instead of a voiced animatic or a novel with illustrations, though many variations on the format exist.

The above screenshot, taken from Act 1 of *Eustia of the Tarnished Wings*,\(^4\) shows the general layout of the visual novel screen. At the bottom of the screen is the text box (1), where character dialogue, the internal narration of main character Kaim Astraea, and occasionally onomatopoeia (擬音語 giongo) such as ガチャッ, the sound of a door opening, will be shown (2). Clicking anywhere on screen will cause the text to advance in set increments, generally line-by-line. In most cases, particularly with lines that are voice-acted, one sentence constitutes a line; text will almost never be displayed in a full paragraph, preventing the reader from skimming through a large amount of text and slowing the pace of reading.

When a character is speaking, the text box will display a tag (3) that gives his or her name. This name tag can also play a role in the reader’s narrative experience. When Kaim is physically present in a scene (and thus serving as the narrator), tags are tied to and limited by his knowledge of the characters involved - when someone Kaim does not recognize and cannot see enters a scene, the name tag displays three question marks, and when he learns new information, the name tags are updated to reflect this. For example, in Appendix 2, Kaim mistakenly assumes that Vice-Captain Lang is the leader of the Wing Hunter detachment he has run into, but once he is referred to by his rank, Lang’s dialogue tag changes from ‘Wing Hunter Commander’ 羽狩りの指揮者 to ‘Wing

\(^4\) See Appendix 4.
Hunter Vice-Captain’ 羽狩りの副隊長, and once more to ‘Vice-Captain Lang’ ラング副隊長 once Captain Fione uses his name in front of Kaim.\(^5\) Characters who are introduced in one of the few scenes that are presented in third-person narration rather than Kaim’s first-person limited narration will be given the proper name tags for the duration of the scene, but once they enter a scene tied to Kaim’s narration and physical viewpoint, their dialogue will be tagged with simple physical identifiers (such as ‘Priest’ or ‘Assistant’) until they introduce themselves to Kaim.

Above the text box are character sprites (立ち絵 tachie, lit. ‘standing art’) (4). These sprites are generally full-body, and depending on the novel, can be entirely static, switch between a limited number of pre-drawn poses and facial expressions (as in Eustia), show limited animation (blinking and simulated movement side-to-side), or even show full animation through the use of 3D character models. Sprites generally flip side-to-side depending on character placement, and change with each click to match the dialogue that is being said. On the left side of the text box, a character bust portrait (5) visually identifies the speaker, even if there is also a standing sprite for the speaker present. These portraits also change with each dialogue line, and can keep characters visually present on-screen even in a group conversation scene where there is no room for multiple character sprites.

\(^5\) Appendix 2, page 77.
Backrounds (6) are an important part of the visual novel format as well. Depending on the production budget, developers may use stock photography for backgrounds such as a classroom or the exterior of a school,\(^6\) or use hand-drawn landscapes and interior shots. Consistent use of one particular background for one particular location in the novel can give the reader a sense of familiarity with the location, allowing them to engage with the text and the characters on a closer level. Most visual novels also use CGs (コンピューターグラフィックス konpyūtā gurafikkusu, ‘computer graphics’), detailed pieces of art that replace the background and remove the standing sprites, for impactful scenes in the narrative or as a reward for reaching certain points in the novel. CGs allow for more visually dramatic scenes than standing sprites do, and for visual novels with sexual content, allow the portrayal of sexual activity between characters.

The control panel (7) seems largely self-explanatory, but it is one of the most central points of the visual novel interface. Visual novels provide the ability to save on almost any line of text, the ability to review text that has already been displayed, and in

---

\(^6\) Four Leaf Studios, the collaborative team behind American indie visual novel *Katawa Shoujo* [sic] (2012), used photographs from around Brown University as background art. (https://www.reddit.com/r/katawashoujo/comments/1ibiya/for_those_who_dont_know_the_background_pictures/)
some cases, the ability to “jump back” to previous scenes; analogous to putting in a bookmark, the save feature allows the reader to halt the narrative wherever he or she pleases, and like a video game, records the reader’s choice history in the novel – a feature that will be discussed below. This control panel, and the suite of reading options it allows the reader, remains the biggest difference between visual novels and narrative-heavy video games that blur the lines between these two nominally separate genres of media. Compare the screenshots below – two are from visual novels, and two are from Japanese RPGs (role-playing games), which combine a similarly involved and plot-heavy narrative with gameplay styles and elements that can be as varied and interactive as any other genre of video game.

Figure 3: Comparison of several visual novel and JRPG interfaces
Clockwise from the top-left are *Eustia of the Tarnished Wings; Nekopara: Cats’ Paradise Vol. 1;* \(^7\) *Hyperdimension Neptunia 2;* \(^8\) and *Tales of Zestiria.* \(^9\) Eustia and *Nekopara* are both visual novels, while *Neptunia* and *Zestiria* are JRPGs. The screenshots provided for the latter two are from character conversations that occur outside of the normal, battle-centric gameplay. Note the similarities in presentation between the “standard” visual novel format and the format used by the two JRPGs; there is no clear and immediate visual distinction between the two categories of media, and the differences that do exist (*Zestiria* highlighting the speaking character, the 3D models and full-range animation used in *Nekopara*) are variations at most on a common theme. The major difference is the control panel, which is highlighted in red in the screenshots from *Eustia* and *Nekopara.* While increasing numbers of video games, particularly JRPGs, are adopting the visual novel format of text box and standing sprites, they do not allow the player to save in the middle of a cutscene or character dialogue; in this sense, while video games allow players more interactivity with the action on-screen, visual novels provide readers more control over the narrative experience – not only in terms of its flow, but even in terms of choosing the direction of the narrative itself.

2. **Audio: Music and Voice**

The second benefit to the software format is the inclusion of audio – music, sound effects, and voice acting, depending on production values. Almost all visual novels use

---


\(^8\) Tsunako. *Hyperdimension Neptunia 2 Re;Birth SISTERS GENERATION* 超次元ゲイムネプチューンズmk2 Re;Birth SISTERS GENERATION (2015). Compile Heart. Steam Edition, PC.

background music to set the atmosphere of a scene, to accentuate tension, or to showcase
a character’s personal theme. Music may start or stop on any line change, allowing the
developer fine control over the emotional impact of a scene. Sound effects such as
opening doors, the clash of blades, or the sounds of footsteps can also add immersion to
the reading experience, and can add tension to a battle or a chase scene. Most important,
however, is voice acting. Depending on the visual novel, the text may be fully voiced,
partially voiced, or not voiced at all; American indie visual novel Katawa Shoujo [sic]
does not use voice acting, while Japanese visual novel Okujō no Yurirei-san 屋上の百合
霊さん (published in English as Kindred Spirits on the Roof) uses voice-acting only for
emotionally impactful scenes such as love confessions or character introspection. Eustia
of the Tarnished Wings provides voice-acting for all non-narration text, both for main
characters and for unnamed side characters. This can help with immersion and with
understanding characters’ motivations and emotions, as well as provide context for
certain scenes – for example, if a character whose identity is obscured speaks with a
recognizable voice, an astute reader may pick up on their identity before it is explicitly
stated. Voice acting may also lend a threat or entreaty more power, and give more life to
friendly banter or flirting. Voice acting may appear to be extraneous to the text itself, but
when used, it is an indispensable part of the visual novel reading experience.

3. Text: The Story

One of the biggest advantages visual novels have over books and other physical
media is the lack of physical constraints on the text. On the most basic level, this means

---

that visual novels can be virtually unlimited in length compared to a physical book. For example, I estimate that a complete English translation of *Eustia* will measure around 500,000 words, and the fan-run translation wiki TLWiki lists *Eustia* at merely 43rd for Japanese script size. This is hefty for an individual novel, and as a paper-and-ink text, *Eustia* would almost certainly be divided into its six component Books, which could be sold as a novel series to bypass the problems of weight and bulk inherent to lengthy physical books. Instead, *Eustia* is sold as a single installation CD packaged with a small artbook. However, the most significant advantage the visual novel’s software format has over physical media is not storage utility, but the choice/flag system. While not all visual novels utilize this system, or use it only partially, it provides complexity and replayability to the reading experience that would not be possible in a paper-and-ink book.

The choice system makes up one half of the choice/flag system. At predetermined points in the narrative, the reader will be presented with the ability to choose between several options in response to the situation, a character’s question, or so on. Depending on the story and setting of the visual novel, these choices may seem insignificant or inconsequential, such as choosing whether to eat lunch in the classroom or in the cafeteria. However, these choices may have a significant impact on the flow of the narrative. Some visual novels use these choices as branching paths; choosing to eat lunch in the cafeteria may lead the main character to meet a character who does not appear at all if the reader chooses to stay in the classroom, for instance. This choice may

---

11 *Eustia* ranks at 43rd of the listed visual novels on TLWiki.org of March 2016, with 65,489 lines of text; the longest visual novel listed is the historical fiction *ChuSinGura 46+1*, which is listed with 346,498 lines. However, TLWiki records pure line count, not character count. This ranking does not account or correct for the possibility of a high number of lines that consist entirely of ‘…’, ‘!’, or similar ‘empty’ lines. From “Eroge Script Sizes”, TLWiki.org. [http://tlwiki.org/index.php?title=VN/Eroge_Script_sizes](http://tlwiki.org/index.php?title=VN/Eroge_Script_sizes)
lead the reader down one set of scenes, while choosing option 2 may result in an entirely
different set of scenes. Path 2 may offer access to story content and endings that Path 1
does not, lending the branching-path system an aspect of complexity – especially if Paths
1 and 2 subsequently branch off themselves. This concept can be found in print in the
popular children’s Choose Your Own Adventure series, which provides the reader with
several choices after each scene with instructions to turn to set page numbers depending
on how they wish to continue – for example, ‘If you explore the abandoned mineshaft,
turn to Page 4. If you keep climbing the mountain instead, turn to page 7’. However, the
other half of the choice/flag system would be difficult to implement outside a software
format.

The flag system tracks the reader’s choices at each choice point, generally adding
+1 to a certain tracked number value when the reader makes a choice that a character
approves of – in a sense, raising a ‘flag’, a term that has entered general fan parlance. These flags may then determine which options a reader is permitted to choose at certain
choice points, or even whether a choice is presented at all. Flags are hidden from the
reader, and in visual novels with more complex organization, some experimentation may
be required to find out the exact conditions required to unlock a choice. This can
introduce an element of strategy or planning to one’s reading experience, as a reader
reading through the novel for a second or third time may consciously make choices that
seem likely to trigger these flags in order to unlock a side route that he or she missed the
first time around. In visual novels with complex branching structures, careful

---

12 As in the light novel and anime series If Her Flag Breaks (彼女がフラグをおられたら kanojo ga
furagu wo oraretara), which focuses on a protagonist who is able to see which ‘flags’ are raised on people
in the form of little banners that are invisible to everyone but him.
consideration, planning, or even the use of a flowchart may be required to reach a certain choice point with the right number of flags to unlock a specific choice.

Not all visual novels that use the flag system have complex branching paths, however. For example, *Eustia of the Tarnished Wings* features a single storyline that the reader must progress through linearly. However, at certain points, choices will be offered that minimally affect the flow of conversation or of an action; Kaim will either perform the chosen action or consider it before rethinking, after which the two dialogue paths will reconvene.\(^\text{13}\) These choices do not significantly alter the events of the core storyline, but choosing certain options may apply flags that will then unlock the choice point for the alternate ending of the Book – for example, making decisions that bring Kaim closer to Fione throughout Book II will allow the reader the option to pursue an alternate ending starring her, instead of the ‘true’ ending to Book II that leads into the events of Book III. However, which choices apply which flags are not always clear, requiring careful use of the save function to avoid being locked onto a path the reader did not intend to take.

\(^{13}\) See Appendix 6.
CHAPTER 2

EUSTIA OF THE TARNISHED WINGS

Eustia of the Tarnished Wings is a dark fantasy visual novel published in April 2011 by adult visual novel developer AUGUST. It is AUGUST’s seventh visual novel, and the eighth published work of head writer Sakakibara Taku 榊原拓. Sakakibara made his writing debut in 2000 with One Way Love ~ Mint’s Story (One Way Love~ミントちゃん物語, Minto-chan monogatari), the first and only work created by the dōjinshi 同人誌, or amateur publishing, group Imperial Magic Players’ Troupe (王宮魔法劇団 ōkyū mahō gekidan). After a period of inactivity, in 2001 Sakakibara and other key members of the Imperial Magic Players’ Troupe founded AUGUST together. Sakakibara has served as head writer for all of AUGUST’s releases. The character designs for Eustia of the Tarnished Wings were done by the artist known as Bekkankō, a colleague of Sakakibara’s from the Imperial Magic Players’ Troupe and a fellow founding member of AUGUST. Like Sakakibara, Bekkankō, whose real name is unknown, has worked on every major AUGUST release; his recognizable art style and design aesthetic have led some to call him AUGUST’s representative. Bekkankō’s dōjinshi circle, Rocket Bastard (ロケット野郎, roketto yarō), remains active, most recently participating in Comics Market (Comiket) 89 in December 2015.

http://ameblo.jp/bekkankou/entry-12106630138.html
Though AUGUST has only published seven major visual novels since its inception, the company’s works draw generally favorable scores and enjoy high popularity rankings among fans. On the aggregation site Visual Novel Database, all of AUGUST’s visual novels are rated at 6.2 or above out of 10 by user input. *Eustia* is ranked in 88th place out of over 18,000 visual novels tracked on-site, again by user input. AUGUST’s most recent release, *A Good Librarian Like A Good Shepherd* (大図書館の羊飼い daitoshokan no hitsujikai), was adapted into an anime in the fall season of 2014 to generally positive reviews; a new visual novel, *Sen no Hatō, Tsukisome no Kōki* (千の刃濤、桃花染の皇 lit. The Peach-Blossom Imperial Princess and The Thousand Blades) is set for an as-yet unannounced release date in 2016.

*Eustia of the Tarnished Wings* takes place on the floating city-state of Novus Aether, raised into the sky several hundred years ago to escape a calamity that devastated the surface world. The bedrock of the city is held together by the constant prayers of the Saint Irene, a title passed down through generations of women. Ten years ago, Saint Irene the 28th faltered in her prayers, and in an event called the Gran Forte, the Lower City district fractured in two, creating a third district of the city – the crumbling, poverty-stricken slum known as the Prison (牢獄 rōgoku). The story follows Kaim Astraea, a former assassin and cutpurse who now works as an enforcer for the crime syndicate that oversees the Prison in the absence of any support from the royal family and official city.

---

18 7.05/10, ranked by 17,386 users as of 4/30/16. <http://myanimelist.net/anime/17827/Daitoshokan_no_Hitsujikai>
guard. In recent years, the epidemical spread of a disease that causes people to grow wings (羽化病 ukabyō) has resulted in an atmosphere of restless paranoia throughout the city, and the violent methods of a Crown-funded paramilitary organization called the Quarantine Corps (防疫局 bōekikyoku) assigned to capture sufferers of the Feathering Disease, called Winged, has the downtrodden population frightened for their lives. Kaim, who still carries deep trauma from living through the Gran Forte when his entire family perished, stumbles upon a girl named Eustia who possesses unexplainable powers. Her dreams of being born for a “grand purpose” and the light that sometimes shines from her body push Kaim to chase after the hidden truths at the heart of the Gran Forte and the whole of Novus Aether itself.

An important matter to note is that Eustia is marketed as an eroge (エロゲ), a netslang term derived from the English phrase ‘erotic game’. Eroge is a hugely popular genre of visual novel both from established producers and fan circles, and can be further divided into smaller categories such as nukige (抜きゲ) or ‘jack-off game’, referring to a game that is intended to provide easy access to sex scenes or other erotic material to facilitate masturbation. While Eustia contains sexual content in the form of sex scenes between Kaim and the heroine of each Book, these scenes are narratively locked, accessible only on the side routes for each Book. This may provide incentive for players to reload a save and attempt new combinations of choices in order to unlock the side routes. However, despite the use of sexual imagery on the box art, including screenshots of several censored sex scenes on the back of the box, sexual content makes up a
comparatively small amount of the novel’s wordcount. Likewise, the title of the novel itself, *Aiyoku no Eustia*, seems to promise titillation; the kanji 稽翼 for ‘tarnished (or defiled) wings’ is given the atypical reading *aiyoku*, a homophone for the kanji compound 愛翼, which refers to earthly desires including sexual lust. As Tia is presented as one of the most innocent characters in the novel, and in fact gives up her physical body in the novel’s climax, this choice of phrasing is perplexing; however, given the atypicality of the given reading for the kanji used, the homophone must be intentional.

**A. One Visual Novel, Six Books**

Kaim’s search for the truth regarding the Gran Forte and his slowly evolving relationship with Eustia are the threads that connect several major incidents over the course of the visual novel, which comprises six major books. Each book chronicles Kaim’s involvement in incidents of unrest, intrigue and violence in Novus Aether, while advancing his search for the truth of the Gran Forte and his investigation into Eustia’s prophetic dreams of calamity.

There are four side paths in *Eustia of the Tarnished Wings*, resulting in a total of five.

---

20 As of May 2016, around 3,000 words of Book II’s estimated 85,000.
endings for the visual novel as a whole. Each book, with the exception of the Prologue, covers an incident of grave import to the city of Novus Aether, from a rash of brutal murders of Winged in Book II: Black Wings, Silver Steel to Prison-wide riots against the Crown in Book IV: Noblesse Oblige that proceed into full-blown civil war in Book V. The circumstances of each incident result in Kaim working closely with a woman who is uniquely placed to solve or unravel the cause of the goings-on; their individual characterizations and presentation will be discussed later. In each book, the side path results in Kaim forming a romantic relationship with his partner, giving up his investigations and settling down; each side path includes two or three sex scenes between Kaim and his partner, leading up to an optimistic happy ending for the pair. However, while the side paths are proper endings, they do not resolve the troubles in Novus Aether, or tie up the remaining story threads.

The main storyline of each book involves a parting of ways between Kaim and his partner as the incidents lead them to differing answers about who they are and what they believe in. In order to delve deeper into the mysteries of Novus Aether and fulfill his and Eustia’s destinies, Kaim must have faith in his partners and the validity of their beliefs, sometimes having no choice but to hurt or be hurt by those important to him. The interactivity of the visual novel format places this burden on the reader, as well; in order to reach the true ending of the visual novel, the reader must forsake the offered happy endings as Kaim does.

---

21 By very early estimate, each alternate ending is around 100 pages in length. As of March 2016, the incomplete Fione Ending is 80 pages long.
B. Characters

Over the course of *Eustia of the Tarnished Wings*, Kaim becomes involved with five women who each challenge his worldview in some way. When the reader is introduced to Kaim Astraea (voiced by Ōishi Keizō 大石けいぞう) at the beginning of the novel, he is a freelance “handyman” for the Untarnished Golden Chain (不蝕金鎖 fushoku kinsa), a crime syndicate that runs the lucrative brothel district of the Prison and maintains order in the stricken area where the Crown refuses to have any real presence. Kaim is cynical despite his young age. A child during the Gran Forte ten years ago, he was forced to turn to street crime and assassination to escape becoming a sex slave, and he is almost completely jaded to the human misery that surrounds him, reporting detachedly through his first-person narration on the high rates of death and drug addiction among the brothel girls, drunk and dying people in the gutters, and the brutal treatment of the Winged by the Wing Hunters. In his introductory scene, Kaim is tasked with hunting down a young man who attempted to elope with one of the Chain’s brothel girls. When he returns to the Chain’s headquarters, he watches impassively as Oz, the Chain’s head enforcer, beats the young man savagely, commenting only that he doesn’t understand the man’s sadistic streak. Apathetic, casually misogynistic, and unsparingly violent when the situation demands, Kaim is a man with sharp edges, falling apart from the center out with the unhealed wound of the Gran Forte still traumatically fresh in his mind. While the reader adopts Kaim’s literal point of view in the presentation of the visual novel, he is not a blank slate for the reader to project him- or herself onto. Kaim’s narration is

---

22 Appendix 2, page 63.
24 See Appendix 7.
colored with his own prejudices and jaded worldview, and although much of his cynicism is shown to be justified when it comes to historical events and generalizations about the state of life in the Prison, the reader is not limited by his interpretation when it comes to events that the narration directly shows. While Kaim’s point of view is given priority in his position as narrator, the early presentation of his cynicism and apathetic acceptance of violence allows the reader to separate him- or herself from Kaim, and take him as a character in his own right rather than an unbiased narrator.

While Kaim himself sees nothing wrong with his life, it is also clear to the reader that he has no real direction – nothing to strive for. That direction comes in the form of five women that Kaim meets, interacts with, and parts with over the course of the novel: Fione Silvaria, a proud and honorable Captain struggling to reform the Wing Hunters’ violent ways and bring respectability to the organization; Eris Floralia, a talented doctor living in the Brothel District who has a history with Kaim; Collette Anastasia, Saint Irene the 29th, the heart of Novus Aether’s faith; Licia de Novus Yurii, the princess of Novus Aether, who leads a sheltered life in the Upper City but is fascinated with the lives her people lead below; and

Figure 5: The heroines. Across the top are Saint Irene, Fione, Eris, and Licia. Eustia takes the center position.
the mysterious girl called Eustia, who has a grand duty to fulfill for the sake of all the people of Novus Aether. Each woman challenges Kaim and his worldview in some way, jarring him out of his stagnant cynicism and forcing him to take another look at the world and himself, and reevaluate if either is as rotten as he thinks it is. As my translation is still in progress, the character analysis in this introduction will focus on Eustia, Fione, and Eris, the three women who Kaim interacts with in the Prologue, Book I and Book II. Along with each character’s story relevance, analysis will be given to their visual design, detailing how they are presented to the reader and discussing how each character’s visual design informs and is influenced by their character concept.

The character who provides Kaim with the first impetus to re-examine himself, and the one whose introduction sparks the central plotline of the novel, is Eustia (voiced by Moriho Shiho 森保しほ), or Tia, an orphan who has spent most of her life as a servant and housemaid in the upper districts of the city. Brought to the Prison in a cart as part of a shipment of girls headed to the Brothel District, Tia is the only survivor of a vicious attack on the cart, and Kaim is assigned to watch over her until she regains her memories and can give the Golden Chain details about the murderer. However, Kaim has his own reasons for harboring her; Tia is Winged, and her wings sometimes glow with the same purple light that presaged the Gran Forte. She also claims to have dreams of the event, in which a voice tells her that she is fated to fulfill a grand duty. Tia’s prophetic dreams and the hint that there is more to the disaster that claimed his family are the first things that shock Kaim out of his apathy, and Tia remains a significant supporting character throughout the visual novel until she takes the fore again as the heroine of Book VI.
Tia provides a strong contrast with Kaim both visually and in characterization. Kaim’s only character sprite shows him as a tall man with sharp features, grey hair, and practical clothes in muted colors. He is visibly armed, and he is facing away from the camera, emphasizing his detached and cynical character presentation. Tia, on the other hand, wears decorative clothing that is brightly colored, has pink hair and bright purple eyes, and is much shorter than Kaim, a fact that he notes several times in the text. Like Kaim’s posture, several elements of Tia’s character design in her basic standing sprite provide hints to her characterization, from her softer eyes to her *ahoge* アホ毛, or ‘idiot hair’ cowlick – common visual shorthand for a character who is airheaded or clumsy, often as a form of comic relief. While several characters have unusual hair colors, such as Siegfried’s blue-black hair and Lang’s light indigo, Tia’s bright color profile pops against the predominantly brown and grey scenery of the Prison, highlighting her status as a newcomer who, even visually speaking, does not fit in.

Though Tia acknowledges both openly and privately that her life has been one of misfortune and suffering, she holds tightly onto her grand duty as a source of strength: “There’s no doubt that [this is] preparation for my important mission…. There will be

---

many hardships ahead, but I’ll be alright. No matter what I go through, I won’t break.”

Despite this, Tia is easily the most cheerful character among the central cast, able to be delighted by simple things like pub food and a cheap necklace Kaim picks up for her at the bazaar. She believes that people are inherently good, and tries to see everything in the best possible light, to Kaim’s exasperation. He initially rejects her attitude out of hand, seeing it only as a defense mechanism, but after her death at the end of the Prologue, he acknowledges that she was something special. “You could call it purity […] Tia had been an unusually good person. When they’re close to a strong sense of purity like that, it tends to make people realize the evil in their own hearts. Comparing themselves to her, they feel their own shame and impurity more deeply than ever before. In that sense, Tia was like a mirror, I guess. […] I’d looked in the mirror and found something dissatisfying about myself, hadn’t I? My corruption, my twistedness, all my lies… Whatever it was, I’ll never know.”

Tia’s death causes Kaim to reflect on what he finds dissatisfying about himself, but he already knows that he will not really change; Tia’s loss will pain him, but it will heal and fade in a few days. However, shortly after he finds her body, Tia begins to glow, her wound closes, and she comes back to life right in front of him – proving to him beyond a shadow of a doubt that the world does not work the way he thought it did. With Tia’s resurrection, Kaim’s ill-defined thought that she might be able to explain more about the Gran Forte is solidified, and his desire to know more becomes the driving force behind the plot of the rest of the novel. While Tia

\[26\] Book I, page 356.
[27] See Appendix 11.
takes a secondary role in the books that focus on Kaim and other characters, she is always a supporting presence, and never far from Kaim’s thoughts.

The heroine of Book II, *Black Wings, Silver Steel*, is Fione Silvaria (Tachibana Sakura 橘桜, who also played a major role in AUGUST’s 2013 release *A Good Librarian Like A Good Shepherd* as heroine Sakuraba Tamamo⁴⁰), a captain of the Wing Hunters who is introduced early in the Prologue. Newly transferred to the Prison branch of the Quarantine Corps, Fione is younger than most of her subordinates and unused to the harsh conditions of life in the city’s slum district. She possesses a strong sense of justice and an unwavering belief that the work of the Quarantine Corps is necessary and right.⁴¹ She deplores the fact that the violent reputation of the group is well deserved in the Prison, and dreams of whipping the Corps into shape as an upright and respectable organization that has earned the trust of the citizenry. Unfortunately, she has her work cut out for her; the people of the Prison distrust the Crown for its abandonment of the stricken district after the Gran Forte, and the Wing Hunters routinely shake down, intimidate and harass people as they please, knowing that they will face no disciplinary action.⁴² Kaim’s first encounter with Fione comes early in the Prologue, and he is initially wary of her, believing that she must be exceptionally violent or cruel to have been made a Captain in the Wing Hunters despite being a woman. Instead, she prevents her Vice-Captain from detaining him on false pretenses, thanks him for his cooperation with their investigation, and leaves him bemused, unsure of how to feel about a Wing Hunter Captain who seems to truly believe in ideals of honorable conduct, transparency.

---

⁴¹ See Appendix 8.
⁴² See Appendix 5.
and respectability. When she takes center stage in Book II, it quickly becomes clear that she is not the hypocritical official Kaim thinks she is. The last member of the once-proud Silvaria family, Fione joined the Quarantine Corps after the disappearance of her older brother Kuger, her hero and a former Captain of the Corps himself. She works to uphold the dignity of her family name and to make her father and brother proud, refusing to let the Quarantine Corps, the organization her family worked so hard for, sink to little more than a group of uniformed thugs.

Visually speaking, Fione’s design has more in common with Kaim’s than with those of the other heroines. She is the tallest of the female cast, and is one of only two of the heroines to appear armed. Her Quarantine Corps uniform uses muted color with only a little ornamentation; the red ribbon differs from the only other shown Wing Hunter, Vice-Captain Lang, who wears a blue cravat. Fione’s standard standing sprite, which is identical to the one shown to the right with the exception of her drawn sword, emphasizes her poised and attentive stance, while her straight posture visually suggests her straightforward personality and strict adherence to her code of honor.

At the beginning of Book II, Fione, in an effort to integrate the Quarantine Corps more smoothly into the Prison, requests the cooperation of the Untarnished Golden Chain

---

33 See Appendix 2 for details.
in a joint investigation into a string of savage murders of Winged and uninfected humans in the Prison. She finds it hard at first to accept that Kaim’s friends are largely gangsters and sex workers, at one point deeply insulting Kaim’s friend Claudia by refusing to let the brothel girl buy her a drink with “money earned through the sale of flesh,”35 and causing friction with Eris and Kaim by insisting on acting based on how she thinks things ought to be instead of in accordance with the realities of life in the Prison. As she continues to work with Kaim, however, she learns to adapt, meeting the people of the Prison face-to-face and starting to see the Winged as people rather than merely as mission objectives.

Even as she and Kaim grow closer, though, they begin to find disturbing clues to the true identity of the murderer – a hideously mutated Winged man called the Blackwing, who possesses inhuman strength and speed. Eventually it is revealed that the Blackwing is Fione’s older brother Kuger. Betraying her ideals and her orders, Fione proposes a trade with Kaim: she will let him keep sheltering Tia, a Winged, in his house if he helps her speak with the Blackwing and help him escape capture by the Wing Hunters. In a climactic final confrontation with Kaim and Fione, Kuger regains his sanity for just long enough to tell Kaim that he was tortured and experimented on in the depths of the Quarantine Corps treatment facility, and he begs Kaim to kill him before the fast-approaching Wing Hunters can capture him and bring him back to the facility. Kaim is faced with the choice to deliver the final blow himself, or let Fione put her brother to rest. This choice point is the major juncture of Book II, and determines whether the reader continues down the main storyline or diverts onto Fione’s epilogue.

Eris Floralia (Shinomiya Kiyomi 篠宮聖美) is the female lead of Book III, *The Girl in the Well*. A friend of Kaim’s from long before the novel begins, Eris is the second major character introduced after Kaim in the Prologue, and plays a strong supporting role throughout the Prologue and Book II before taking center stage in Book III. A brilliant doctor despite her lack of formal medical education, Eris is a familiar face to every sex worker in the Prison’s brothel district, many of whom pay her great respect as a competent, professional and sympathetic figure in otherwise grueling conditions. As a young woman, Eris was subjected to mental abuse by her parents before being sold off to the Golden Chain as a sex worker; when Kaim bought out her contract before she began working, she started to view him as the one she owed her life to. Kaim, wanting nothing more than for her to live her life freely and as she chooses, finds her aggressive devotion stifling, while Eris sees Kaim’s rejection of her feelings as the suggestion that she is unwanted. Book III delves more deeply into their shared history and the nature of attachment and belonging, while Kaim and the Untarnished Golden Chain contend with violent incursions into their territory by the rival criminal organization Windburn (風鎬 fūshō), whose leader Bernard has some connection with Eris.
Visually, Eris’s design is more outwardly feminine than Fione’s or Tia’s. She wears her hair the longest of the three ‘central’ heroines, and her outfit is more clearly focused on form than on function, with ornamentation, hair decorations, and exposed skin. Eris’s outfit serves as a visual marker of her character in much the same way as Fione’s uniform and straight posture do. The ornamentation, detailing, and bright colors of Eris’s clothing reflects her privileged status in the Prison as a close friend and beneficiary of the head of the Golden Chain; similarly, the cool green and brown colors of her dress link her visually to the more subdued palette of the Prison when compared to the bright pinks and reds of Tia’s design or the vibrant white of Saint Irene’s outfit and hair.

Eris falls under the character archetype known as the yandere (from 病む yamu, sick or suffering, and デレ dere, meaning ‘romantic’ or ‘lovey-dovey’). Yandere characters display affection toward their chosen target and act in a typically romantic way until their monopoly of their target’s affections is threatened, either in reality or through paranoia, whereupon their obsessive devotion explodes into violence toward the (real or imagined) “usurper” of affection or toward their obsessive object himself. While Eris displays some of these tendencies – she is implied to have argued Kaim into letting her perform his household chores, and sometimes threatens other characters with scalpels – she never actually exhibits violence against other characters, and Book III’s conflict involves her working to build self-esteem and a sense of belonging among her friends without relying entirely on
Kaim’s affection, culminating in her decision to seek formal medical education and become a true doctor at the end of Book III.

C. Letting Go To Live – Choice and Sacrifice

Three of the central themes presented in the visual novel are those of choices, faith, and sacrifice – the power to choose one’s own path to walk, the faith to let others do the same even if those paths diverge, and the willingness to make sacrifices to see those paths through. At the beginning of the novel, Kaim is essentially directionless – he spends his days in a routine, desensitized to the suffering around him and looking forward mostly to his nightly drinks at Vinoleta. When events force him out of his routine and into interactions with each of the five main heroines, he is jarred out of his stagnant cynicism and given the opportunity to change Novus Aether, and himself, for the better – to finally do something about the conditions he had accepted as inevitable and, eventually, save the city and the people that he still loves, despite everything.

Over the course of the visual novel, Kaim’s path to this ultimate end twists and turns. For much of the first Book, his sole desire is to learn more about the truth of the Gran Forte disaster. Tia’s claims of fate and purpose anger him, and he rejects her beliefs out of a desire to preserve his own comfortable worldview – one that accepts the world as purposeless and unreasonable (理不尽 rifujin36), but the idea of a purposeless world is less frightening than one that selects people, like Kaim’s family, to be fated to die in terror and pain. Kaim’s nihilistic certainty is shaken by irrefutable evidence that Tia has

36 Appendix 4, page 113.
in fact been chosen for something extraordinary when she is resurrected in his arms, and the path he follows for much of the remainder of the novel is Tia’s as they discover the secrets of the Gran Forte and the city itself.

However, the path to uncovering these secrets is not an easy one. In each Book, Kaim works closely with one of the heroines as they attempt to make sense of an incident or trouble in the city, and each heroine offers Kaim another path – a different way to see his life, and a different way to find fulfillment. In many cases, these choices are more appealing than the thought of staying on the road ahead of Kaim. Fione’s choice point in Book II, for instance, gives Kaim (and the reader) the choice whether to kill Fione’s brother Kuger himself, or to let Fione put him to rest. If Kaim chooses to kill Kuger himself, Fione is initially furious with him, but eventually lapses into depression, thinking back on all the people she has brought to the treatment facility – an act she recognizes as all but murdering them herself.37 She refuses to return to her post with the Quarantine Corps, and Kaim, worried about what she might do in a desperate state, offers to let her stay with him for as long as she likes. After Fione delivers her resignation and sells her house, the two confess their love for each other, and Fione begins work alongside Kaim as an enforcer for the Golden Chain, protecting people from danger in a more concrete way, with her head still held high. The story ends on a happy note with the couple enjoying a surprise wedding thrown for them by their friends, and the reader, if satisfied with their choices, can have Kaim and Fione’s happy ending for him- or herself.

---

37 Book II, page 465.
In contrast, the true ending to each Book is not a happy one; if Kaim allows Fione to kill Kuger herself, events play out in much the same fashion, but Fione, even after having a final few moments with her brother as he lays dying, plunges even more deeply into depression, questioning what her life has been worth in the time she’s devoted it to an organization that betrayed and tortured her family. Kaim is forced to resort to drastic measures to turn her anger and hatred outward instead of toward herself, and sacrifices their friendship by cruelly mocking her inability to carry on her brother’s work and uncover the conspiracy behind the treatment facility. Humiliated and furious, Fione returns to her post with the Quarantine Corps, vowing to uncover the conspiracy and prove to Kaim that he is wrong. Given a slap on the wrist for her failure to capture the Blackwing alive, Fione remains dedicated to serving the people of Novus Aether and uncovering the truth, regardless of the sins she has to shoulder to do it. The Book ends in a shouting match between Kaim and Fione that leaves their previously flirtatious and close relationship in frigidly civil shambles.

Unhappy or ambiguous endings in stories are nothing new, but the mechanics of the visual novel medium, specifically the choice system, add an additional layer of depth to the story presentation in *Eustia of the Tarnished Wings*. No matter which choice the reader makes initially, he or she will be conscious of the other story branch; if the reader takes the happy ending path first, the unresolved story arcs will stand out along with the simple fact that there is much more left in the visual novel, while if the reader chooses the main story first, the possibility that there was a different way to resolve the situation without causing such a drastic split may remain in the back of his or her mind. Additionally, the choice mechanic makes the reader complicit in the events of the visual
Choosing the side path allows the reader to experience both the happy ending to the story and the satisfaction of making the right choices to unlock the ending; choosing the main story makes the reader complicit in the emotional break between Kaim and Fione. If the reader is invested in the character of Fione or in Kaim and Fione’s friendship, proceeding through the main storyline requires the reader to make a conscious choice to hurt Fione and sacrifice Kaim’s chance for a happy ending with her; when she appears later in the visual novel, the reader, like Kaim, can do nothing but have faith that she is doing well on her chosen path.

This pattern of sacrifice continues throughout the visual novel. Each of the heroines’ side paths give them a happy ending with Kaim, but in order to progress through the main storyline, the reader must purposely choose all the story paths that set Kaim apart from, or in some cases against, his former partners and friends. In the climactic scene of the final Book, Tia sacrifices her chance to have a life with Kaim in order to bring the city of Novus Aether down to earth safely and to purify the land around it; Kaim, while saddened by her loss, realizes as he looks out across the settled city that there will be a lot of work to be done, and sets out to find his friends, make peace with them, and start to construct a new future for the city. Upon reaching this ending, though, even the side paths’ happy endings are tinged with loss in retrospect, as the collapse of the city is still imminent and, without Kaim’s love, Tia’s willpower is not strong enough to save the city. While Kaim may find happiness with Fione or Eris for some months, eventually the collapse will begin, and Tia will not be able to stop it.

The theme of faith, in a secular sense, is closely related to that of choice and sacrifice in the novel. When Kaim is introduced, he is intensely cynical, putting little
stock in anything and remaining disinterested and disengaged from the world around him. His first act in the novel is to scoff at a young man he’s captured for attempting to escape with one of the Golden Chain’s indentured sex workers as the prisoner asks for his understanding, then to watch, uninterested, as the Chain’s lead enforcer, Oz, beats the young man bloody. His cynicism comes from a lack of faith — specifically in others and in the world around him. Having grown up in a pit of human misery where pragmatism bordering on cruelty is the only way to survive, Kaim is shocked and almost personally upset by people like Tia and Fione, who show almost no guile and who hold principles above their own self-interest; the idea of engaging with someone honestly, without cynical sniping or banter and going beyond a dry superficiality, seems foreign to Kaim as he is at the beginning of the novel. In short, he has no faith that others, if he allows them in, will not hurt him — and do so more effectively knowing his vulnerabilities. The world he lives in is much the same; Kaim takes a strange kind of comfort in the idea that the world is “senseless”, a disordered place that offers no answers, and a place that will never reward curiosity, but only punish a lowered guard. His first encounter with Tia, in which he witnesses her body glowing with light the same color as the sky during the Gran Forte disaster, shakes this worldview dramatically. While he initially views her only as a possible source of information about the murders, the possibility that there may be answers to be had about the disaster that took Kaim’s family from him and taught him that the world was cruel sticks with Kaim like a ‘bone in [his] throat’. Try as he might

38 See Appendix 10, page 183.
39 See Appendix 9, page 158.
40 Appendix 4, page 113.
41 Appendix 11, page 191.
to maintain his detachment and not to believe in Tia’s grand purpose, Kaim can’t help but start to hope again once she resurrects in front of him.

As the events of the novel progress, Kaim makes progress toward opening up – instead of remaining closed and cynical, he connects with Tia and with the other characters, becoming more involved in their lives and showing more interest in knowing them as people. Where before he was inert, simply doing his job when told and spending most of his time and money on alcohol, Kaim’s growing involvement with the people around him gives him a goal to work toward, even if that goal is murky to him. With direction comes choices to be made about who he wants to be and what he wants to do with his life, and with choices come sacrifices – the knowledge that there always could have been another option and another resolution. For the reader, this sacrifice is less burdensome than it is for Kaim – as much as the reader may empathize with Kaim on any given route, the ability to save, start over and explore another route always exists. However, the reader’s emotional investment in the characters and the story is what gives these choices weight not only for Kaim but for the reader as well.

D. Eustia and the Beautiful Fighting Girl

It may be tempting to engage with the text on a more theoretical level as well, and analyze the characters with the help of an established theorist, such as noted social scholar and new media specialist Saitō Tamaki; however, when looking at the female characters of Eustia through the lens of Saitō’s most well-known theory, that of the sentō bishōjo or ‘beautiful fighting girl’, the limitations of the theory are made starkly clear.
Saitō originally proposed the theory of the sentō bishōjo in his 2000 treatise on otaku sexuality, Sentō bishōjo no seishin bunseki 戦闘美少女の精神分析 or Psychoanalysis of the Beautiful Fighting Girl, and offers a psychoanalytic perspective to the popularity, and fetishization, of female characters in two-dimensional media, specifically in manga, anime and related media in the Japanese pop cultural sphere. In 2007’s Robot Ghosts and Wired Dreams,42 Saitō describes the sentō bishōjo as such: “What [the male] tries to possess (e.g., the illusion of woman) is actually a stand-in for the singular object a that perpetually eludes his grasp. …The object of otaku desire, the sentō bishōjo, or armored cutie, is none other than object a, the girl who identifies with the penis...”43 In other words, the psychoanalytic theory that makes up the basis of the sentō bishōjo theory thus places the sentō bishōjo in the position of the desirer – a girl who is allowed to seek rather than strive to be sought, who seeks completion rather than to be the completion of someone else. It is this ability to desire rather than be desired that makes the sentō bishōjo, not simply the ability to do battle.

Separated from its psychoanalytical base, this is commendable, privileging women in fiction who display agency, desire and the ability to exert their desires upon the world around them. And indeed, the female main characters of Eustia all display desire and agency. Fione, who best fits the letter of the sentō bishōjo, desires reform for the Wing Hunters and actively works toward it; Eris desires Kaim, but her character development revolves around finding a new goal to strive for separate from him. Even Tia, who repeatedly refers to herself as worthless, eventually finds a goal that she is

---

43 Saitō, p. 234
willing to sacrifice her life to make a reality. Whether in small, but significant acts of rebellion, such as stealing a sleeping powder to drug Kaim and run away – as Tia does near the end of Book I – or in acts as significant as taking positions as leaders on either side of the fracture when Novus Aether breaks into civil war, as Saint Irene and Fione do in Book V, the women of Eustia show time and again that they are forces to be reckoned with. In fact, it is Kaim, and by extension the reader, who shows little agency through most of the visual novel – generally following orders, or going along with the suggestions, requests or commands of the heroines. While Kaim and the reader make choices, in most cases the change in dialogue is negligible (sometimes occurring solely in Kaim’s mind), and most of the crucial choice points that unlock side paths are couched as Kaim following along with or negating a request from one of the heroines. By the end of the novel, he has found something to fight for, and begins to make choices for himself, as well, exercising his agency alongside the heroines.

However, the theory of the sentō bishōjo does not end with the presence of women with agency. Saitō genders the not necessarily gendered “phallus” – the agency and aspect of completeness that the sentō bishōjo nominally possesses – by explicitly and repeatedly referring to it as the ‘penis’, and argues that what truly makes the sentō bishōjo is not agency, but lack – a lack that is fundamental to women, who do not exist in Saitō’s symbolic world. The complete theory of the sentō bishōjo in fact strips completeness away from these female characters who seek, granting value to the sentō bishōjo only in terms of qualities that Saitō genders as male, namely propensity for violence and skill with weaponry. Through this gendered association of violence with

---

44 Saitō, p. 234
agency, what Saitō’s theory privileges is masculinity and maleness, by arguing that the agency shown by female characters who fight is merely a symbolic fragment of the male reader’s traumatically shattered ego – pieces that he can attempt to possess in order to approach, but never truly reach – and by discounting and dismissing agency that takes other forms that are not as culturally linked to masculinity. By presenting these female characters as merely lacking vessels for masculine qualities, defined not by what they are but by what they are not, Saitō’s theory dismisses any value to be had in analyzing characters that should be among the most valuable to look closely into, creating a self-fulfilling analytical mode where women, in fact, may as well not exist.
CHAPTER 3

TRANSLATION METHODOLOGY

There is still much left to do before my translation of *Eustia of the Tarnished Wings* is complete. As of May 2016, I have completed a first draft of Book I, the Prologue; Book II, *Black Wings, Silver Steel*; and made inroads into Book III, *The Girl in the Well*, totaling nearly 140,000 words in English. Book II, with Fione’s side path included, accounts for over 80,000 of those words, and it seems wise to assume that Books III-VI will end up in the same general area – putting the total word count for the novel around 500,000 words, with the Prologue at 50,000 and estimating 130,000 for the final Book. All attached excerpts are from Book I, the Prologue.

First, a note on the Books themselves. What I have chosen to call Books are narrative arcs within the visual novel that follow Kaim’s involvement in a particular incident in Novus Aether, and his involvement with one of the five heroines of the novel. These Books are not technically discrete entities; they are separated within the flow of the narrative only by black screen transitions and an offer to save the reader’s progress, and in this sense, dividing the visual novel into Books is an unofficial decision, done for convenience of reference. That said, the Books are narratively discrete in the manner of a novel series, dealing with specific incidents while developing an overarching plot, and thus it felt natural to approach them as books, and to give them titles.

These titles are not taken from the original text, but were chosen by me to thematically represent the events and the characters that are central to the events of that narrative arc. Thus, Book I is the Prologue; the title of Book II, *Black Wings, Silver*
Steel, makes reference to the murderous Blackwing as well as Fione’s ancestral sword; Book III, The Girl in the Well, makes reference to Eris’s unhappy past; Saint and Sinner and Noblesse Oblige refer to Saint Irene and Princess Licia, respectively, while the final Book naturally carries the name Eustia of the Tarnished Wings. While it may seem excessive to call the entire first Book the prologue, Tia’s death and resurrection at the end of Book I are immediately followed by an animated movie that serves as a title and credits sequence for the visual novel as a whole. With this in mind, and considering that the first Book introduces almost all of the major themes and characters of the visual novel, presenting it as a Prologue – albeit one that is novel-length on its own – seemed the option that made the most sense.

My work translating Eustia has provided me with a number of challenges and opportunities to improve my Japanese that I would not have had the chance to experience otherwise. The text does not provide furigana for any kanji compounds aside from katakana glosses for certain terms, such as glossing わたしの夕焼け (owari no yūyake, Sunset of the End Days) as トラーゲディア (torāgedia, Tragedia), what the people of the Prison call the purple light that shone during the Gran Forte, or for archaic or complex terms that would not be well-known to the average reader.

A major challenge presented by this text, as any Japanese text, was the fact that Japanese has many different ways to express and modify formality, from self-lowering verbs and auxiliary verbs that aggrandize the listener to the use or non-use of honorifics and the various degrees of intimacy and closeness they present. In translation, English

---

45 Appendix 3, page 5.
verbs simply cannot be conjugated with the same degree of precision and social meaning as Japanese verbs. Some constructions map well to English adverbial or prepositional constructions – for instance, some self-humbling speech (謙譲語, kenjōgo) can be adequately expressed by the adverbial ‘I humbly obey/inform/receive’ construction (承る/申し上げる/頂く), etc., and the auxiliary verb くれる kureru, for showing gratitude for something someone has done for you (e.g., 片付けてくれる katazukete kureru), can often be expressed with the addition of ‘for me’ (as in, ‘thanks for cleaning up for me’).

However, other auxiliary verbs, such as the archaic honorific 給う tamau, or しまう shimau, used to express that something has been done completely, accidentally or regrettably, cannot often be translated into natural-sounding speech simply by translating or modifying the verb and must instead be taken as a ‘sense’ that informs the whole of the sentence or conversation. For an example of this, take Kaim’s narration of Eris opening the door for the visiting Siegfried and Melt in Appendix 4, page 102. Kaim’s sentence 開けてやがった akete yagatta modulates the verb 開ける akeru, to open, with the auxiliary verb やがる yagaru, which expresses disgust, dislike or contempt.

Translating this sentence with a modulation of contempt to the verb would be possible (“She fucking opens [the door]”), but requires a strong expletive that overpowers the general mood of the scene, which is Kaim’s exasperated acceptance of Siegfried’s antics and Eris’s playing along, and colors Kaim’s presented view of Eris with undue hostility. In order for Kaim to show both exasperation and fondness, the modulation has to be shifted somewhere else to allow for a gentler take – in this case, by restructuring the sentence to shift focus on the opened door letting Siegfried in as opposed to Eris opening the door (“And she lets the bastard in”, in my translation) and using the context of
Kaim’s previous interactions with Sieg, and the comedic nature of the scene, to let the reader know that ‘bastard’ is at least partially affectionate. In the first draft of this translation, the sentence read “And she lets the fucker in”, but I was worried that, as above, too strong an expletive would overpower the intended emotional timbre of the scene.

Accepting that I would not be able to faithfully and consistently match every different combination of these modes employed by various characters one-to-one with equivalent English modes and conjugations allowed me to focus on emphasizing the various characters’ personal voices, particularly Kaim’s and those of the female lead characters. Saint Irene and Princess Licia, by virtue of their stations, make only limited appearances in the Prison, but Kaim, Tia, Fione and Eris spend much of the Prologue, Book II and Book III interacting closely; their dynamics with each other are integral to the scenes of social interaction that tie each book together. Providing the reader with a clear, consistent and entertaining interplay between the main characters, and keeping an accurate sense of the emotional subtext, was my priority in translating these scenes.

Adding another layer of complexity to Eustia’s translation is the setting. Novus Aether is part of a fantasy world, and is not explicitly identified as representative of any real-world culture; most importantly, there are no hints of Japanese culture present aside from

Figure 9: Western architecture and clothing
allusions to a large social bath in Lilium, the Untarnished Golden Chain’s central brothel. The characters’ outfits and weapons appear generally Western in design, and the architecture of Novus Aether, when shown, is vaguely European. Many characters’ names are European in origin (Siegfried, Fione/Fiona, Licia) while others refer to Biblical figures or prominent Christian saints (most directly Saint Irene of Thessalonica, or perhaps another Saint Irene), and the nobility of the Upper City, when shown, utilizes the titles of the Japanese peerage 華族 kazoku system established in 1869 during the Meiji Restoration. Likewise, the presence of a King (王 ō) rather than an Emperor (天皇 tennō) and the separation of the mechanisms of political and religious power place Novus Aether firmly in a European social mode rather than a Japanese one.

The end result is a world that is entirely non-Japanese in culture and presentation, but still described through the lens of the Japanese language. The largest problem presented by this juxtaposition was the use of honorifics, which are used to express social hierarchy, familiarity, and seniority, among other complex information. While I am a proponent of letting honorifics stand in works set in Japan or in a Japanese cultural mode, the European presentation of Novus Aether’s culture meant that honorifics, though rarely used, would stand out if left in the original Japanese (e.g., ‘Kaim-san, would you like eggs for breakfast?’). Instead, I decided to translate the honorifics with English honorifics appropriate to the characters’ relationships where natural to do so, primarily ‘mister’ or ‘miss’, or in the case of the sex workers, ‘sir’ or ‘lady’ when addressing a

---

social superior. 48 In the case of ちゃん, a diminutive and familiar honorific used primarily for younger girls (in the text, almost exclusively used by characters speaking to Tia), the sense-modulation approach made more sense, presenting the characters as speaking fondly or gently to Tia, as there are no equivalent titles in English.

A particular challenge posed by Eustia is the characters’ opinions on, and ways of speaking about, the thriving prostitution business the Golden Chain runs. Five named characters – Eris, Melt, Claudia, Risa, and Iris – are former or current sex workers, and Siegfried and Kaim live in or very near the brothel district and are closely involved with the Chain’s indentured women. Kaim and Siegfried generally refer to them as simply onna 女, or women, leaving their meaning to be inferred by context; 49 I most often translate this as ‘girls’, to enforce the generally familiar and in some cases dismissive attitude the men take toward the sex workers. Kaim holds no ill will toward the women the Golden Chain has indentured, and is in fact popular in the brothel district due to his good looks and his skill at defending them from violent patrons; that said, he is almost entirely desensitized to the conditions the women face, and gives them no leeway to forget the reality of their situation, reminding Claudia, Risa and Iris that their looks are their trade goods 50 and reacting only with mild distaste when Oz, Siegfried’s second-in-command, invites him to help “discipline” a sex worker who attempted to elope with a customer. 51 Melt and Eris prefer the term ko 子, for ‘girl’ or ‘child’, for the brothel district’s workers. As women who have experienced and escaped the life of a brothel

48 様 sama. See Appendix 5.
49 See Appendix 5, page 6. (どうやら、女に絡みたかっただけのようだ。)
50 Book I, page 262.
51 Book III, page 35.
worker, they take a pragmatic view of the realities of life in the Prison and are never less than honest with the indentured women who speak to them, but where Kaim and Siegfried use ‘girl’ as a means of diminishing the sex workers, Melt and Eris use it as a term of closeness and sympathy, if not comfort. These differing views must inform the characters’ bearings and ways of speaking when discussing topics related to the sex trade, the brothels, or the indentured sex workers themselves. This includes Fione, who as discussed above is initially disgusted as much by the sex workers themselves as by their trade or the existence of the brothels, but who warms to the women, if not their occupation, by the end of Book II.

As discussed above, maintaining consistent and clear individual voices for the main characters was a major concern during my translation process. In particular, as the main character and the narrator, Kaim’s narrative voice colors almost every event the reader experiences over the course of the novel. The infrequent exceptions are short segments called ‘Another View’ (the English term is used\textsuperscript{52}), in which the narration switches to either uncharacterized third-person narration, signified by a green text box as opposed to Kaim’s default black, or to Tia’s first-person narration, signified by a pink text box. Thus, one of the first and most important steps I had to take when I started translating the novel was to find Kaim’s voice, and find a consistent and appealing way to adapt that voice to English text.

While the characters’ names are presented in katakana in the novel itself, supplementary material (the website, accompanying artbook, and opening movie) also

\textsuperscript{52} Appendix 4, page 114.
present the characters’ names in Romanized script. I have maintained these spellings in all cases, with the exception of Kaim’s name. The official spelling given for his name is Caim, but I found that when presented with this spelling, most English-native readers took the pronunciation to be identical to ‘came’ (IPA: keɪm) rather than rhyming with ‘I’m’ (IPA: kaɪm). Spelling his name with a K makes the pronunciation more intuitive to those familiar with Japanese kana, and in conjunction with the voice-acting, should prove easily understandable to non-experienced readers as well.

Kaim uses familiar or dictionary-form Japanese almost exclusively.53 He is short with almost everyone, particularly his old friends Siegfried and Eris,54 and is often cynically laconic; when pushed, that cynicism can turn to sharp words quickly.55 Despite this, Kaim has a charisma that other characters often point out. Tia insists that Kaim is a good person despite his protests otherwise; Sieg and Eris both engage in bantering verbal sparring with him, and Melt the pub owner takes great pleasure in teasing him in his surlier moods. Despite his cultivated prickly exterior, Kaim does care for his friends quite a bit. My aim was to maintain both aspects of Kaim’s personality in the text without glossing over his crueller moments or shortchanging his kindnesses, in order to emphasize his characterization as a good man who has been all but inured to hope. Choosing words and phrasing to match his harshness without going too far was a challenge, but using casual, colloquial speech such as ‘gonna’ and ‘kinda’, and dropping the first words of some sentences,56 provided a suitable way to express Kaim’s laid-back

53 With the brief exception of a meeting with the Upper City noble Lord Lucius at the end of Book II, when he switches to a respectful speech mode.
54 Appendix 4, page 2; pages 7-8.
55 Appendix 7.
56 See Appendix 1, page 2, particularly ‘Guess there’s no choice but to hope that he’s still around’ (まだここにいることに賭けるしかないな。)
and detached attitude while also keeping his narration readable and inviting. I made a conscious effort to restrict his profanity to interjections, to indicate Kaim’s emotional detachment from his day-to-day life and to reserve a separate level of intensity for cases of extremely aggressive, rude or threatening speech – generally from unnamed or side characters rather than Kaim himself. Kaim uses much the same voice in his first-person narration as when speaking; however, his narration also tends to be introspective or contemplative, using more advanced vocabulary and hiding less behind his façade of detachment. Shifting between Kaim’s laconic speech and his wordier narration felt surprisingly fluid, and both modes of his speech inform the reader of the other. Kaim’s intelligence and nuanced grasp of events in Novus Aether are made clear in his narration, making his laconic speech more clearly emblematic of his detachment and disinterest in day-to-day business, while his casual speech tone prevents his narration and background information from sounding didactic, and reminds the reader that Kaim has his own biases.

This two-layered system can be used to great effect for characters other than Kaim, as well. The first switch to Tia’s narration occurs after a scene where Kaim and the other discuss what to do with the amnesiac Tia, who may have information they need about the attack on her cart. The switch to Tia’s “Another View” reveals that Tia, who until then has been presented as a confused and guileless girl by Kaim’s narration, is not only feigning sleep to listen in on the conversation, but is clearly aware that her survival hinges on her ability to keep pretending that she does not remember what happened.

57 See Appendix 5.
58 Appendix 4.
Tia’s calmer, more mature inner narration – the only time she does not reflexively diminish herself in front of someone she believes is her superior – provides another layer to her characterization, one that was vital to preserve in English.

Most of the characters are native to the Prison, and the Untarnished Golden Chain’s brothel district in particular; characters that use the polite desu/masu form of standard Japanese (標準語 hyōjungo) are in the minority, many of them visitors from the Lower or Upper City, and I made an effort to organically preserve this distinction in diction in English. The close-knit nature of Kaim’s social circle, consisting of people he has known for years, lent itself well to this casual intimacy; when characters intrude upon this closeness, they are marked as intruders not only in terms of their social origins but by their linguistic habits as well. Tia in particular speaks deferentially to Kaim and his friends, a remnant of her upbringing as a maidservant in abusive Lower City households, and even after she is accepted into their social circle, her grammar remains respectful, an element that sets her apart textually as well as narratively.

Fione, like Tia, is marked as an outsider to the Prison by her speech, but in a different way. While Fione uses dictionary-form Japanese like most of the cast, she speaks authoritatively and confidently, favoring kanji compounds over ‘softer’ words – using 感謝する kansha suru (lit. ‘I am grateful’) rather than ありがとう arigatō for gratitude, for instance. Fione does not use the feminine role language particle わ, which is generally used to signify high class, mature or refined feminine beauty, or gentleness in bearing; her speech is as straightforward and functional as she is, and reflects both her position of authority and her unbending sense of honor and propriety. Her forthrightness and unwillingness to compromise, initially even on anything as simple as calling the
Prison ‘the Prison’ (牢獄 rōgoku) and not the Specially Designated Disaster Area (特別被災地区 tokubetsu hisai chiku), or that the Quarantine Corps (防疫局 bōekikyoku) should not be referred to as Wing Hunters (羽狩り hanegari), are large parts of her character, and cause conflict between her and the Prison natives; it was important to preserve these insistent qualities throughout her speech. What I settled on was a mixture of formality and informality in English; unlike Kaim, Fione uses proper grammar at all times and favors higher-level vocabulary, but she also uses contractions, reflecting her slightly awkward attempts to break free of her regimented upbringing and fit in with Kaim’s social group.

Eris is a longtime friend of Kaim’s, and holds a considerable amount of influence with Siegfried and the Golden Chain due to her skills as one of the only medically trained people in the Prison. She generally uses casual, femininely marked Japanese, concealing a sharp tongue behind traditionally softening speech patterns and a sweet tone of voice; while she is deeply in love with Kaim, she almost never holds back from insulting him if she disapproves of his behavior. Appropriately, Eris’s speech pattern fits the pattern identified for the yandere archetype by anime blogger Actar, marked both with elements of femininely-coded speech and with a casual or blasé attitude toward pain, violence or death. Some elements of Eris’s speech habits were lost in the translation from Japanese to English, as English lacks a femininely-coded speech mode that would be appropriate for the setting and character; however, I believe it was more proper to maintain her attitude and bearing than to attempt to force a speech mode that would

ultimately misrepresent her character. In this respect, Eris’s dialogue relies more than some other characters’ on her voice acting; with the loss of feminine coding in the transition from Japanese to English and the importance of Eris’s sweet tone and soft delivery to her character, hearing her voice acting is essential.

The visual novel is an exciting and vibrant new medium that, despite taking elements of presentation from some of the most powerful media in Japanese and international pop culture, continues to carve its own economic and cultural niche in the Japanese anime culture sphere, even exerting notable influence on established media such as light novels, anime, and video games. While less interactive overall than a video game, the visual novel’s suite of options to give readers control over the speed and even course of the narrative allows for complex branching narratives, choice systems that make the reader complicit in the events that unfold, and incentives to read and explore different branches of the story make the visual novel one of the most complex and engaging narrative media formats available. *Eustia of the Tarnished Wings* serves as a strong example of the involved plotlines and integrated visual/narrative design that visual novels can display, and provides complex character voices that require careful attention to detail to accurately and entertainingly portray in English. While the visual novel may be a young medium, it seems safe to say that it will remain a significant presence in Japanese pop culture for years to come.
APPENDIX 1

THE SAINT’S VISITATION (Act 1, p. 15-20)

_Eustia of the Tarnished Wings_ is set on the floating city of Novus Aether, high above the ground below. Originally divided between the Upper City and the Lower City, a disaster that occurred ten years ago known as the Gran Forte caused a large section of the Lower City to collapse and fall, and a further section to settle even below Lower City – a stricken, poverty-ridden slum now known as the Prison. A syndicate known as the Untarnished Golden Chain oversees the Prison from the large brothel district, but rampant crime and poverty keep the Prison in a constant state of desperation. In addition, a highly contagious disease that causes the afflicted to sprout wings before death is spreading throughout the Prison; the official Quarantine Corps assigned to take in the sufferers are known as the Wing Hunters, and are feared for their corrupt conduct and brutal methods.

In this excerpt from early in Book 1, the protagonist Kaim Astraea, an ex-assassin and close friend of the head of the Golden Chain, pursues a young cutpurse who has stolen money from the syndicate. On the way he passes a visitation by Saint Irene, the religious leader of the city.

Kaim: 「想像通りだな…」
Just as expected…

The Prison’s largest plaza is so packed with people that you can’t see the ground.

It’s a ridiculous number of people, no matter how rare blessings from the Saint herself are.

Naturally, the kid’s nowhere to be seen.

He’s probably trying to throw off pursuit in the crowd.

If he’s already left the plaza, there’s no chance of finding him again.

Guess there’s no choice but to hope that he’s still around.

First order of business is to find a better vantage point.

From there, I’ll be able to see anything that happens in the crowd at a glance.

The crowd is seething with excitement.
About the same time as I reach my vantage point, a figure appears on the terrace above.

Excited voices swell up from the plaza.

Unfortunately for the hopes of the people below, it’s a middle-aged priest.

Smiling tightly, the priest fixes the collar of his ceremonial robe.

**Priest:**

Before you are graced with our Saint’s presence, I urge you, the people of the Prison, to recall once again how our city of Novus Aether came to be.

He launches into the usual dull sermon.

Everyone in this city has heard the story countless times since the day they were born.

Long, long ago, God gifted the world with Angels from on high.

Humankind thrived using the power of the Angels, and spread across the land.

While people remembered to give thanks to God for his gifts, they prospered, but as they grew forgetful, God became wroth and withdrew his Angels to Heaven.

As a result, the world was enveloped in chaos.

In the midst of the catastrophe, a pious Saint begged God for forgiveness.

God forgave the Saint and her followers, and lifted their city into the sky, saving their lives.
That was Novus Aether.

That’s the whole story right there, but the priest takes plenty of time reeling it out.

**Priest:**

Saint Irene the First, blessed be her name, with her noble prayer lifted our city of Novus Aether high into the sky, protecting those who would become our gracious ancestors.

Looks like he’s wrapping up.

**Priest:**

That was many centuries ago. Now, the blessed power of the First resides within our very own Saint Irene, who keeps this fair city held up above the clouds.

**Priest:**

This city is the final sacred bastion of humanity, protected by the Saint herself, and we are her chosen followers.

**Priest:**

Offer your gratitude, and your prayers, to the blessed Saint Irene!

The dazzling sound of trumpets reverberates through the plaza.

A hush spreads out across the bustling plaza.

Above the crowd,

Atop the terrace, taking the priest’s place, four palace guards appear.

They split up into teams of two without hesitation, moving to the left and right sides of the terrace.
Not paying any attention to the guards, the crowd holds its breath as one, searching.

The plaza is silent; not even a whisper can be heard.

The only sounds are the cries of the birds flying overhead.

In just moments, the Saint herself will appear.

The woman who keeps the city flying – a presence that can silence even the people of the Prison, so far removed from her devotees.

My throat suddenly dry, I swallow, and then,

From within the pitch blackness of the terrace, a single light shines.

It grows slowly brighter, until I suddenly realize that what looks like light is simply the pure white of a ceremonial robe.
No, it’s not just the robe that’s white.

Her skin, her hair – everything about her shines with holy white light.

She is…

Saint Irene, the Twenty-Ninth.

The Blind Saint steps out into the sunlight.

Droplets of light sparkle in her hair as it blows in the wind.

Her shoulders and arms, left bare by her robe, are so pale she looks almost ethereal.

The finest sculptor in history wouldn’t be able to recreate her features, her demurely closed eyes.

いや、白いのは聖式服だけではない。

その肌も、髪も、彼女のすべてが清冽な白光を纏っていた。

―あれが、

―第29代、聖女イレーヌ。

《盲目の聖女》が、陽光の下へと進み出た。

風に揺れる髪の上を、光の粒が軽やかに転がる。

聖式服に隠されていない肩と腕は、人の手を拒むかに透き通っていた。

慎ましく双眸を閉じた容顔は、最高級の彫刻師が命を賭しても掘り出せるかどうか。
She’s too bright a being for this Prison, sunk deep into greed and desire.

The Saint slowly draws breath.

Saint:

For as long as we offer our thanks and praise, God shall save and protect us.

Saint:

Raise your voices with mine in prayer.

The plaza shakes with shouts of joy.

Without acknowledging the people’s voices at all, the Saint faces the plaza with her eyes still serenely closed.

It’s a little chilly, but it’s much preferable to her smiling and waving like an idiot.

She holds the fates of this city, and everyone living in it, in her hands, after all.

I’d much rather she concentrate on keeping us in the sky than mug for the crowd.

That, and preventing another Gran Forte.

The disaster ten years ago.

The memories I have of it are murky at best, but trying too hard to remember makes my chest start to hurt.

Kaim:

...

I get the feeling that looking at the Saint any longer will stir up things better left forgotten.
**Woman’s Voice:**
Kyaaaaaa?!
Among the joyful shouts, there’s one that doesn’t belong.

**Loud Female Visitor:**
A W-Winged?!

**Middle-Aged Visitor:**
Hey, someone call the Wing Hunters!

**A ring of space forms in the middle of the crowd.**

**In the middle of that ring is a young boy.**

That’s the pickpocket, huh.

**Scrawny-Looking Visitor:**
Stay the fuck away from us! What if it spreads?!

**Tough-Looking Visitor:**
Get the hell out of here, brat!

The boy, who had been standing dumbfounded for a moment, takes off running like he was shot from a bow.

The crowd splits and pulls back from him, making a sort of path.

**Kaim:**
Well, then…

Time to get to work.

With the boy’s appearance sharp in my mind, I take off running too.

It’s a great piece of luck to have found him this fast.

「╌╌╌╌つ！？」
歓声に異質な声が混じった。

「は、羽つきよう！？」

「おい、誰か羽狩りを呼べっ」

群衆の中に、ぽっかりと円形の空白地帯が生まれた。

円の中心にいるのは、一人の少年。

掏撈はあいつか。

「てめぇ近づくんじゃねえ。伝染ったらどうする」

「さっさと失せろ、このガキっ」

周囲を見回し、一瞬呆然とした少年は、事態を察し弾かれたように走り出した。

進行方向の群衆が割れ、道ができていく様はちょっとした見物だ。

「さて」

ひと仕事しよう。

少年の特徴を目に焼き付け、俺も走り出す。

こんなに早く見つかるとは、かなりの幸運だ。
I’ll raise a glass or two for the Saint at the bar tonight.

As I run, I turn back to the terrace and mutter a few quiet words of thanks.
APPENDIX 2
THE WING HUNTERS (Act 1, p. 23-37)

Kaim pursues the young thief deep into the slums, where the boy hopes to lose him. Unfortunately, Kaim isn’t the only one chasing the boy; the Quarantine Corps, a special military unit formed to find and impound sufferers of the Feathering Sickness, are also after him.

From the arrhythmic beat of the Winged boy’s footsteps, I can tell he’s exhausted.

I doubt he expected to be exposed while I was still on his tail.

This time when the boy looks back, a faint look of relief crosses his face. He puts his hands on his knees.

Kaim:
Good try, kid.
I step out of the alleyway where I’d hidden myself.

Winged Boy:
"ひっ!?

From the arrhythmic beat of the Winged boy’s footsteps, I can tell he’s exhausted.

I doubt he expected to be exposed while I was still on his tail.

This time when the boy looks back, a faint look of relief crosses his face. He puts his hands on his knees.

Kaim:
「ご苦労さん」

羽つきの少年の乱れた足音からは、疲労が窺えた。
俺に先回りされているとは、露ほどにも思っていないのだろう。
少年はせわしげに背後を振り返ると、微かな安堵の表情を浮かべ、膝に手をつけた。

Winged Boy:
「ひっ！？」
Ah?!

**Kaim:**
Not a bad idea, running into the slums.

**Winged Boy:**
A-are you… a Wing Hunter?

**Kaim:**
Nope.

**Winged Boy:**
C-come on… don’t scare me like that, you asshole!

The spirit comes back to the boy’s face.

**Kaim:**
Well, I’ll apologize for scaring you, at least.

**Kaim:**
In return, I’d like the cash you stole from the bar.

**Winged Boy:**
Cash? What’re you talking about?

He plays dumb, but his hand goes to his waist.

Probably hiding a knife or something, I would guess.

This kind of kid can be more dangerous than an adult.

In fact, there are kids who use their seeming innocence as a weapon, and sell their services as assassins.

I used to be one of them.

**Kaim:**
「スラムに逃げるってのは悪くないアイデアだ」

「お、お前、羽狩りか」

「違う」

「な、なんだ……てめえ、驚かせんじゃねぇよ」

少年の表情に生気が戻った。

「驚かせたのは謝る」

「その代わり、店から盗んだ金を出してもらう」

「金？何のことだ？」

とぼけた顔をしているが、その手は腰に伸びている。

刃物でも隠しているのだろう。

この手の子供は半端な大人より質が悪い。

むしろ、子供であることを武器に殺しを商売にしている奴もいるくらいだ。

かつての俺がそうだったように。

「腰のものなら、後ろに落としたぞ」
If you’re looking for your knife, you dropped it just now.

**Winged Boy:**

Eh?

In the instant the boy’s expression changes:

**Winged Boy:**

Guh!

I kick him in the face.

As the boy lands on his face, I take the small knife still hanging at his hip.

**Winged Boy:**

Y…you son of a bitch…!

**Kaim:**

Tsk.

I grab him by the hair and haul him up, making him wince in pain.

**Kaim:**

Give back the money you stole.

**Winged Boy:**

What are you talking abou- gh!

Before he can finish the sentence, his face meets the ground a second time.

**Winged Boy:**

I-I stole it fair and square… like hell I’d give it to you, asshole!

I dodge the saliva he spits at me.

The next time I yank his face up from the ground, his nose is bleeding.

**Kaim:**
You’re a feisty one, aren’t you.

Kaim:
But listen up, kid.

Kaim:
The money you stole? That money belongs to the Untarnished Golden Chain.

Kaim:
Not to mention, the woman you stole from has been under Sieg’s personal protection for a long, long time.

Winged Boy:
Sieg?

Kaim:
Maybe you know him by another name? The head of the Untarnished Golden Chain.

Winged Boy:
Wh…what? No way…

Now that he finally understands the situation, the boy’s body begins to quake.

Kaim:
I’m gonna ask one more time… where’s the money?

Winged Boy:
Y-ye-yeah! I-it’s in the bag!

I pat him down and find a surprisingly heavy leather bag.

Kaim:
I’m not gonna find any missing, am I?

Winged Boy:
N-no sir!
I get off the boy.

**Winged Boy:**

U-um, are you a member of the Golden Chain, sir…?

**Kaim:**

I guess.

**Winged Boy:**

Then please, help me! I’ll do anything!

**Kaim:**

Sorry, I’m not big on helping people.

**Winged Boy:**

Anything… I’ll do anything, please…

The boy stretches out his hands, entreating me.

**Winged Boy:**

I’ve lived my entire life in the Lower City.

**Winged Boy:**

But suddenly, somehow I’d caught the Feathering Sickness… and there were wings sprouting out of my back…

**Winged Boy:**

I was chased out of the store I lived and worked in, and I had no choice but to come to the Prison!

**Winged Boy:**

I was so hungry I didn’t know what to do, and that’s… that’s why I stole the money…

With blood dripping down his face, the boy recounts his story to me.
Winged Boy:
I’ve never done anything wrong in my life… so why… why did this happen…?

Kaim:
Who knows?

Winged Boy:
Uuh… wh-what’s going to happen to me now?

Kaim:
I’m going to take you to headquarters.

Winged Boy:
N-no…!

Kaim:
Or rather, that’d be the plan if you weren’t Winged, but…

Kaim:
No one there’s stupid enough to invite a Winged in.

Winged Boy:
Then… will you let me go?

Kaim:
You’re going to take proper responsibility.

I kick the boy in the face.

I don’t like getting violent with children, but consequences are consequences.

If people don’t understand what it means to lay hands on money that belongs to the Golden Chain, we’re going to have problems.

Kaim:
If we’d gone down to headquarters, they’d have taken an arm.

「ボク、何も悪いことしてないのに……何で……こんなことになるの……」

「さあな」

「うっ……ぐすっ……これから、ボク、どうなるんですか？」

「組織に連れて行く」

「あそ、そんな」

「ま、お前が、羽つきじゃなかったならの話だったが」

「組織も、羽つきを家にご招待するほど馬鹿じゃない」

「じゃあ、見逃してくれるんですか？」

「けじめはつけさせてもらう」

少年の横面を蹴り飛ばす。

子供に暴力を振るうのは気が進まないが、けじめはけじめだ。

《不蝕金鎖》の金に手を出すことがどういうことか、わかってもらわないと困る。

「組織の制裁なら、腕の一本は覚悟しなければならないところだ」
Kaim:
Today’s your lucky day.

Winged Boy:
Guh… y-yessir…

Kaim:
Get lost.

The boy stands on shaky legs.

Still facing me, he takes one or two steps back, and:

Winged Boy:
Thank you so much.

He rushes the words, then turns away.

I wonder how far he’ll be able to run from the Wing Hunters.

…Probably not very far.

Winged Boy:
Gah?!

The boy, who had tried to run down another alley, makes a sound like he’s run into a wall.
Man:
This is the end of the line, Winged.
A man with dark, dark eyes steps out of the alley.
More follow him, until five men are visible.
From the looks of their uniforms, they’re a squad of Wing Hunters.

Man:
Confirm the wings.
The man’s clearly in charge; the others follow his orders, bearing the boy to the ground.
I don’t feel like getting to know these guys any better.
It’s time to leave, before I get involved too.

Wing Hunter Commander:
You over there.
A voice calls out to me from behind.

**Kaim:**

…what?

**Wing Hunter Commander:**

I don’t suppose you could answer a few questions?

**Kaim:**

...

If I refuse too rudely, they could accuse me of harboring the Winged.

And if that happens, they could easily put me under constant surveillance.

Best to keep my head down here.

**Kaim:**

Yeah, sure.

**Wing Hunter Commander:**

Thank you for your cooperation.

Quite the polite commander, this one.

Before our eyes, the boy’s clothes are ripped from him by the underlings.

Sure enough, pure white wings sprout from the kid’s back.

**Red-Haired Wing Hunter:**

Vice-Captain, we have wing confirmation.

**Wing Hunter Vice-Captain:**

Take him in.

**Winged Boy:**

Stop… please, forgive me…
**Wing Hunter Vice-Captain:**

You will receive treatment for the Feathering Sickness at the quarantine facility. There’s nothing to be afraid of.

**Winged Boy:**

But… but…!

**Wing Hunter Vice-Captain:**

It’s alright.

**Winged Boy:**

H-hey, mister…

Annoyingly, the boy turns to me, calling out in a weak voice.

**Wing Hunter Vice-Captain:**

Are you a relative of this Winged?

**Kaim:**

Never seen him before in my life.

**Kaim:**

And just so we’re clear, I don’t have any intention of getting in your way, either.

**Wing Hunter Vice-Captain:**

Just the other day, I met a man who said the same thing. The instant I turned my back, he attacked.

**Wing Hunter Vice-Captain:**

One of my subordinates lost his arm. A clean cut just below the elbow.

**Kaim:**

Sorry to hear that.

I spread my hands, doing my damnedest not to look like an enemy.
Kaim:
I’m just gonna leave. That sound good to everyone?

Wing Hunter Vice-Captain:
Well, no need to be in such a hurry.

The Vice-Captain looks at the Winged boy.

Wing Hunter Vice-Captain:
What is your relationship with this man? He hit you, didn’t he?

Winged Boy:
N-no…

Wing Hunter Vice-Captain:
If you cooperate with us, we can arrange for preferential treatment for you at the quarantine facility.

Winged Boy:
...

The boy takes one look at me, then screws up his face like a baby.

Winged Boy:
That man, he’s a member of the group called the Untarnished Golden Chain…

Winged Boy:
He suddenly came up to me and demanded money, and when I refused… he hit me!

Uncertainly confident that he’s gained the Wing Hunters’ good graces, the boy begins spinning his version of the truth.

He manages to summon up quite the impressive vocabulary describing how tough he’s had it, and how unreasonable and cruel I am.
And of course, he doesn’t forget to draw attention to his nose every now and again.

Crafty little shit.

**Wing Hunter Vice-Captain:**

I see…

**Wing Hunter Vice-Captain:**

This boy claims that you are a member of the Untarnished Golden Chain. Well?

**Kaim:**

He’s wrong.

**Kaim:**

Sure, I take jobs from them from time to time, but I’m not a full member.

**Wing Hunter Vice-Captain:**

Then you say the boy is lying?

**Kaim:**

Yup.

**Kaim:**

If you’ve got any pull over at their headquarters, ask if I’m a full member or not. Will that convince you?

**Wing Hunter Vice-Captain:**

Even if we did ask, I doubt they would tell us the truth.

**Wing Hunter Vice-Captain:**

The members of the Untarnished Golden Chain have been very uncooperative. It’s quite a problem.

**Kaim:**

The struggle is real, huh.
Wing Hunter Vice-Captain:
"Truly."

Wing Hunter Vice-Captain:
The truth is, the man who cut off my subordinate’s arm seemed rather like an organization type himself.

The Vice-Captain taps my arm with the flat of his naked sword.

What, is he considering taking a little revenge?

Wing Hunter Vice-Captain:
There’s no need to be so tense. I just want to have a few words with you back at the station.

Wing Hunter Vice-Captain:
Learning about the current state of affairs within the Prison and your organization will allow me to take more Winged into our care, after all.

Wing Hunter Vice-Captain:
And that is a goal directly linked to keeping the peace for everyone in this city, wouldn’t you say?

Something about the Vice-Captain’s smile feels off.

Going along with them might not be the best idea after all.

At worst, I might never see the light of day again.

Kaim:
I know you people have the power to detain anyone who gets in the way of your hunting.
Kaim:
But I’m not giving you any trouble at all. I don’t get why you’re so set on keeping me around.

Wing Hunter Vice-Captain:
That, I will explain at the station.

Kaim:
...

I could cut them down here, but I’d make an enemy of the Wing Hunters for life.

I could get away from this group, but you can’t escape from wanted posters plastered on every streetcorner.

(Folded into text above)

I just want to wash my hands of this, but it doesn’t seem likely with this fellow.

What should I do…?

????:
I believe this man is telling the truth.

A clear voice sweeps through the alley.

The Wing Hunters turn as one.
The person their gazes fall on is
A woman.

Her features are delicate, and her expression suggests a powerful will.

The sharp, fitted lines of the Wing Hunter uniform contrast with the soft-looking curves of her body.

This is the first time I’ve ever seen a female Hunter.

**Wing Hunter Vice-Captain:**

Captain, this is an opportunity to acquire information about the Untarnished Golden Chain-

And she’s the Captain, no less.

I’ve heard that the Wing Hunters, who specialize in combat, get a lot of the recruits who wash out of the palace guard for being too dangerous or reckless.

If they made her a Captain despite her sex, this respectable-looking woman might well be the most twisted of the entire bunch.
Wing Hunter Captain:
Vice-Captain Lang. Collecting information or no, I can’t turn a blind eye to your intimidation tactics.

Vice-Captain Lang:
Intimidation was not my intention…

Wing Hunter Captain:
Would you be so kind as to tell me the name of our soldier who lost his arm?

Wing Hunter Captain:
I’ll have to pay him a visit in the hospital.

Vice-Captain Lang:
That’s…

The Vice-Captain bites his lip.

Ah, I see.

Seems like spending all that time around liars and criminals has gotten to the good Vice-Captain.

Wing Hunter Captain:
I understand that you were eager to get results.

Wing Hunter Captain:
However, our job relies on the cooperation of the people.

Wing Hunter Captain:
We must not betray the people’s faith in us.

Vice-Captain Lang:
As you say, Captain.
The Vice-Captain tosses me a deadly look, sheathing his sword.

Wing Hunter Captain:
I apologize for my subordinate’s actions.

Kaim:
Spare me the second round, okay?
Giving her a loose wave, I turn to leave.

Wing Hunter Captain:
Please, wait a moment.

Kaim:
What?

Wing Hunter Captain:
There is one thing I want to confirm.

Wing Hunter Captain:
Is it true that you’re not a member of the Untarnished Golden Chain?

Kaim:
It’s true.

Kaim:
Out of curiosity, if I was, what would you do?

Wing Hunter Captain:
I would ask how it felt to live off of money stolen from the hands of the weak.

Kaim:
…Oh?

Kaim:
Well, I hope you get your answer someday.
I raise my hand one more time, showing the Wing Hunters my back.

If she asked one of the Golden Chain that question, the best answer she’d get would be ‘well, you would know’.

What a strange Captain she is.
Later the same night, Kaim accepts an urgent job from Sieg, the head of the Golden Chain, to go investigate what has happened to a cartload of girls from the upper parts of the city that were intended to enter the Chain’s brothels. Upon reaching the area where they disappeared, he realizes that something is very wrong.

The Upper and Lower Cities are united in their distaste for the Prison.

And this area here is the center of the rat’s nest.

It’s not unthinkable that the whole cartload of girls could have been murdered in here.

Kaim:

... 

I try not to breathe too deeply of the stagnant and stinking air, following the alleyway Sieg had indicated.

上層や下層の人間が眉をひそめる牢獄。

ここから先は牢獄の最奥。

殺しはもちろん何が起こっても不思議ではない。

「......」

空気の淀みと悪臭に閉口しつつ、ジークに教えられた経路を辿っていく。
There’s not a soul in sight. However, I can feel eyes on me, watching me like hawks from cracks and crevasses in the dark.

Someone who wasn’t used to this kind of work might not even realize they were being watched.

My skin prickles in a way I haven’t felt for a long time; the sensation brings back memories.

Back when I worked as an assassin, I walked this kind of alleyway daily.

I’ve crouched in a sewer for two days and nights to catch a target before.

For those two days and nights, it felt like invisible, nameless insects were swarming all over my body.

I’m not an assassin anymore, but my body remembers those days.

It’s not like I chose to become a killer in the first place.

It’s just that, if I hadn’t, I’d either have started selling my body or ended up lying dead in a ditch somewhere.

I didn’t have a choice.

For the first time in a long time, memories of back then filter back into my mind.

Called back by thoughts of my old way of life, probably.

How stupid.

Kaim:
Enough reminiscing.

And then, just as my attention returns to the present—

It’s faint, but I hear an ugly, wet sound ahead.

The sound of something striking human flesh—

To be more precise, it sounds like someone being run over by a horsecart.

Kaim:

I turn corner after corner, the way getting progressively narrower and the air getting thicker and thicker.

The buildings on both sides soar overhead, blocking out the light of the moon.

From within the stifling, murky darkness comes the overpowering stench of blood.

In all likelihood, someone’s been murdered here.

The important questions now are who’s holding the knife, and who’s being killed.

Could it be the girls Sieg bought?

Underneath another splattering sound, I can hear rough breathing.

It sounds like the breath of some kind of animal.
Like whoever it is is getting off on the act of murder.

That’s the sense I get from it.

**Kaim:**

Ugh…

I start to prepare for the coming fight, conserving my energy.

Mentally, I start to work myself up, telling myself that I can win.

This is a ritual I have, to prepare my mind and body for battle.

There’s nothing really special about it.

I do it every time I go to work, to get into the mindset.

Just a little trick I learned from the last head of the Golden Chain.

I draw my knife.

The custom-made matte blade almost vanishes in the darkness.

**Kaim:**

Here we go.
The instant I start to move, leaping out onto the slaughter floor,
A brilliant light illuminates the entire area.
The light quickly fades.
Like nothing had happened at all, the alleyway is once again enveloped in darkness.

Kaim:
No… it can’t be…
The color of that light…

惨劇の舞台へ飛び込もうとした刹那、
強烈な光が周囲を照らし出した。
光はすぐに収束する。
何事もなかったように、路地はまた闇に包まれた。
「そんな、馬鹿な……」

この光の色……
I could never forget it.

That day…

The light that filled the dome of Heaven just before the Gran Forte.

The color of the Tragedia, what people called the Sunset of the End Days.

**Kaim:**

Don’t tell me…

Another Gran Forte—

Before the thought is even finished, profound fear grips my chest.

My breath goes ragged.

I can’t focus my vision.

This insane, insensate dread shakes me to my very core.

Calm down.
Panicking in a situation like this is a great way to reduce your life expectancy.

Steady yourself and regulate your breathing. Just then—

**Kaim:**

Ghh!

I throw my head back reflexively as something flashes at the tip of my nose. Whether it’s a fist or a blade, I can’t tell.

Whatever it was, that was a strike made with killing intent. If I had reacted a split second later, I would probably have lost my head.

I settle into a fighting stance and prepare myself for the next attack.

**Kaim:**

…!

I can’t see my opponent at all.

Looking around in a rush, I catch a fleeting glimpse of a black shadow vanishing into a distant side street.

What the hell was that…?

It was horrifyingly fast.

The one impression I got of it was that it was black all over.

Belatedly, I realize that there’s liquid dripping down my right cheek.
The flesh has been laid open. 何かで切り裂かれたようだ。
I’m lucky to still be alive. 命があっただけでも幸運だった。
I taste the saltiness of the blood on my fingertip and brace myself again. 指先で血液の塩気を味わい、気を引き締める。

**Kaim:**
Alright. 「よし」
I can’t go home without an answer. 確かめなくてはならない。
I need to know what the shadowy black figure was doing in that alley. 黒い人影が、路地の奥で何をしていったのか。
Time to get to the bottom of this tragedy. I proceed into the alleyway. これから直面するであろう惨状を想像しつつ、路地の奥へと進む。

**Scene Change: The Bloody Alleyway**

**Kaim:**
Gh…!
I desperately hold back the urge to vomit. こみ上げる嘔吐感を何とかやり過ごす。
I’d thought I was used to the sight of corpses, but I was wrong. 死体には慣れていると思っていたが、甘かったようだ。
I’ve never seen anything like this massacre. これほどの惨状は見たことがない。
I bite my lip and try to focus my vision, made blurry by shock. 唇を噛み、衝撃で朦朧とした頭に活を入れた。
The entire alleyway is dyed with blood. Everything, from the ground to the walls themselves, is stained pitch-black.

The walls on both sides are splattered with offal, limbs and hair, like some sick reproduction of an anatomy textbook.

To my right, light glints off puddles of blood so deep it looks like a storm had just passed.

Chunks of meat soak in them, like twisted stewpots.

There have to be at least five or six corpses… I can’t clearly tell.

Keeping alert to my surroundings, I inspect the corpses.

To start with, the upper half of a man, still clinging to the wreckage of the cart.

路地は、全てが血に染まり、ただでさえ汚れた道や壁が真っ黒に見えた。
両側の壁には、腸やら指やら毛髪やらがこびりつき、さながら人体部品の展示会だ。
石畳には、一雨あったかのように、なまめかしく光る水溜りができている。
そこに、いくつもの肉塊が浸っている様は、具の多い豪華な煮込み料理にも見えた。
死体はさっと５、６人分だろうか……はっきりとしない。
周囲を警戒しながら、死体を検分していく。
手始めに、馬車の残骸にしがみついている男の上半身を転がした。
Kaim:
This guy must be Sieg’s man…

That confirms it – the other corpses must be the girls Sieg bought.

While I can’t imagine they held any illusions about what life in the brothels would be like, I don’t think any of them envisioned dying like this.

Or perhaps some of them would have preferred this.

While confirming the number of dead, that thought suddenly hits me.

Clatter, clatter-

There’s a sound.

In the shadow of a piece of lumber that had fallen against the wall.

Kaim:
Is somebody there?! 

Seconds pass.

Seconds more.

There’s no answer.

I hold my knife at the ready and move to check the source of the sound.
Lying there is a single girl.

As though praying for someone to save her, she had extended one hand in front of her.

But this is strange…

Her clothes are torn to shreds, but there don’t seem to be many injuries on her skin.

She can’t possibly have been shown mercy by that maniac of a killer, right?

Kaim:

…

First of all, I need to see if she’s alive.

I stretch a hand out toward the back of her neck.
Kaim:
?! 
Her body starts to glow.

Kaim:
Th-that color… it can’t be…
The gleam of the Tragedia.
What the hell is this?
Why is she giving off that color of light?
No, wait, more importantly, why is a human being glowing in the first place?
It has to be an optical illusion.
Then, before my bewildered eyes,
The light that had been enveloping the girl moves like a living thing, collecting at her back.
And then—
It forms into tiny wings.

**Kaim:**

Is she… a Winged…?

However, I’ve never heard of anything like wings made out of light.

What the hell is going on?

As I watch, confused, the girl’s light slowly fades.

**Kaim:**

Hey, are you alive? Hey!

**Girl:**

...

Her back is rising and falling almost imperceptibly.

I don’t know what the deal was with that shadowy bastard, but right now this girl is the only survivor.
I’ll bring her to Eris or something to be cared for, and then we’ll hear what happened here.

Or so I’d like, but I don’t want to carry around a Winged when there’s a chance the Wing Hunters might find us.

What should I do?

If I just leave her here, the street thugs or wild dogs will get to her in no time.

Kaim:

…

Shit.
APPENDIX 4
TIA REMEMBERS (Act 1, p. 135-152)

The day after Kaim rescues the glowing girl from the alleyway, he attempts to question her about the murders and finds that she has amnesia regarding the incident. He asks his friend Eris, the only doctor in the brothel district, to look her over and see if the cause of her memory loss is physical or psychological. Checking in with Sieg, he is told to learn whatever he can, then dispose of her when she is of no further use.

Melt, who appears later in the excerpt, is a former sex worker for the Chain who now runs a pub called Vinoleta in the brothel district. She is close friends with Kaim, Sieg and Eris, and often hosts them for dinner and for discussing Chain business.

I come back inside when she’s finished changing.

The girl is sitting on the bed, hugging her knees.

Kaim:
Huh, you actually clean up pretty well.

しばらくして部屋に入ると、着替えが終わっていた。

少女はベッドで膝を抱えている。

「まともな服着りゃ、多少は見られねじゃないか」
Eris: Oh, so she’s your type, then?

Kaim: More than a pushy doctor who snarks at every little thing.
I blow Eris off and face the girl.

Kaim:
Hey, you. Hungry?

Girl:
Ah... um...

The girl, who had been bracing herself, looks at me.

There’s still some innocence left there, and she has a well-arranged face.

However,
Her expression hovers somewhere between anxiety and fear.

A thin, weak smile automatically crosses her face.

The smile of someone whose life has left them with no path but that of a servant, or a slave.

Kaim:
I’m asking if you’re hungry or not.

Girl:
Y...yes.

I nod slightly as she finally answers.

Eris, taking the cue, brings some food to the bed on a wooden tray.

The girl’s eyes follow the tray like a hawk’s.

I can hear her stomach growling.

Kaim:
Before you eat, there’s something I want to ask you.
Kaim:
When you were attacked, did you see a light of some kind?

Girl:
Light…

A faint look of trepidation settles onto the girl’s face.

Kaim:
Remembered something?

Girl:
I do… feel like I saw something, but…

Girl:
When I try to remember… I start feeling sick…

Kaim:
Try to push through it, please.

Kaim:
As soon as you remember, you can eat.

Girl:
Uh… alright.

The girl’s eyebrows knot.

A faint sheen of sweat begins to shine on her pale forehead.

Kaim:
Well?

Girl:
Mmn… um…

Kaim:
…

Girl:
Uh… alright.

The girl’s eyebrows knot.

A faint sheen of sweat begins to shine on her pale forehead.

Kaim:
Well?

Girl:
Mmn… um…

Kaim:
…
I observe the girl.

Just like last time, something about what she’s saying doesn’t quite add up.

Time to put a little more pressure on her.

Kaim:
Try to remember.

Girl:
I-I’m sorry… I…

Kaim:
Remember.

Kaim:
If you force my hand, you’re going to regret it.

Girl:
Nn…

Girl:
Ugh…

The girl puts her hand to her mouth.

Kaim:
Go ahead and puke.
Eris:
Enough of this.

Eris:
Let her rest, won’t you?

Kaim:
And when did you get so soft, huh?

Eris:
If you push her too hard, she’s going to lose everything she can’t remember. That’s all I’m saying.

Well, Eris is the doctor.

For the time being, I’ll guess I’ll follow her recommendations.

Kaim:
…fine.

Kaim:
Just take it slow, then.
Girl:
…I’m sorry.

She looks disheartened.

However, her focus has already turned to the bread on Eris’s tray.

Kaim:
...

She may honestly not have been able to get anything, but something still stinks here.

Assuming for a moment she was pretending to have forgotten, what’s her reasoning?
I’ll think it over a little.

Girl:
...

She looks at me with feverish eyes.

For someone who was just about to vomit, she knows to look after herself.

Kaim:
Go ahead.

Girl:
...

She immediately tears into the food.

Kaim:
Don’t get crumbs in my bed.

Girl:
Mhm!

Eris:
You’re spilling when you nod, you know.

「……すみません」

しゃげた顔を見せる少女。

だが、関心は早くもパンに向かった。

「……」

確証は得られなかったが、やはりどこか嘘苦しい。

仮にこいつが忘れたふりをしていたたら、理由は何だ？

少し考えてみよう。

「……」

熱っぽい視線を向けられる。

さっきまで吐きそうだったくせに現金な奴だ。

「食っていい」

「……っ！」

即攻でかぶりついた。

「ベッドを汚すな」

「んっ、んっ」

「頬きながらこぼしてるんだけど」
Kaim:
Oh, come on.

Hunger has a way of stripping away the humanity in people.

For just a little bit of food, the ones with power will abuse it, and the ones without will sell their souls.

That’s daily life in the Prison.

Especially lately, the number of people starving has grown.

Prices keep going up, and somehow, the population does too.

From what Sieg says, it’s not just the Prison’s problem.

I guess you could say that the whole city is starving, really.

You have to wonder if something’s happening.

Scene Change: Later That Night

After inhaling her food, the girl drops like a tree someone’s taken an axe to.

Tomorrow, I’ll see if I can’t get her to remember the main points, at least.

There’s a knock at the door.

Just Sieg:
Tee hee, it’s me. Let me in?

Well, that’s unfortunate.

Let’s ignore him.

Just Sieg:
Come on, don’t be so mean.
He’s beyond annoying.
Eris: うざったい。
I’ll see what he wants.
Kaim: 『見てくる』
Ignore him and maybe he’ll go away.
Eris gets up anyway.
Eris: 勝手に動くエリス。
What’s the password?
Just Sieg: 『カイムはエリスにメロメロ、カイムはエリスにメロメロ』
Eris: 『素晴らしい』
And she lets the bastard in.
Just Sieg: 『お・ま・た・せ♪』
Kaim loves Eris – I repeat, Kaim loves Eris.
Eris: 『素晴らしい』
Wonderful.
Just Sieg: 『お・ま・た・せ♪』
Sorry – for – the – wait♪
Kaim: Die.

「死ね」

Melt: Oh, how cruel, Kaim.

馬鹿の後ろからメルトが顔を出した。

Kaim: Oh, I didn’t know you were with him.

「いたのか」

Melt: I was.

「いたわ」

Eris: What’s going on here? You’ll need to give the password too.

「何の用？ここは合い言葉が必要よ」

Melt: Eris loves Melt.

「エリスはメルトにメロメロ」

Eris: 「お客様お帰りです」
Go home, you two.

**Melt:**
Oh, don’t be so chilly.

Sieg and Melt step into my house.

Eris stands next to me, fidgeting while she gives Melt a dirty look.

**Sieg:**
I came to check on things, and brought her with me.

**Melt:**
Are we in the way?

**Kaim:**
Not particularly.

**Kaim:**
But the girl’s asleep already.

**Melt:**
That’s fine. I just wanted to see her, that’s all.

Melt takes a look at the girl in the bed.

**Melt:**
Oh my, she’s a little beauty, isn’t she?

**Melt:**
It’s a pity she can’t enter the trade.

**Sieg:**
It certainly is.

**Sieg:**
And we can’t return her now that she’s grown wings, either.
Melt:
How is she?

Eris:
She ate, and then fell asleep. She’s been sleeping soundly.

Sieg:
Did you get anything from her?

Kaim:
Not a word. Every time I bring up the incident, she starts acting strange.

Melt:
That’s no wonder. It must have been very scary, don’t you think?

Sieg:
Eris, do you have any medicine for memory loss?

Eris:
I do, but the likelihood it’ll just cripple her before we get anything useful is high.

Melt:
Let’s make that the very last resort.

She doesn’t object entirely. Melt, too, is a product of this city.

Sieg:
Isn’t there anything we can do?

Eris:
I think it’s just a temporary memory loss, caused by the shock of the incident.
Eris:
If we can alleviate her fear and anxiety, she’ll probably recover naturally.

Sieg:
Well then, how about I treat her to one of my famous massages?

Melt:
If it’s you giving the massage, it won’t feel good at all, though.

Sieg:
Why must you hurt me in this way?

Kaim:
Anyway, saying we ‘ease her fears’ is easy, but how do you propose we do that?

Melt:
Well, speaking to her gently would be the first step. Can you do that, Kaim?
Kaim: I’ve been nothing but a gentleman.

Melt: Hm, I wonder.

Kaim: Once the girl wakes up, you’ll see.

Melt: That’s quite some self-confidence there. So then – what’s her name?

Kaim: Eris, what’s her name?

Eris: I don’t know.

Melt: What a chivalrous gentleman. Such a wonderful lady.

Melt shakes her head at the two of us.

Melt: Well, the first thing to do is to make sure that she knows she’s not in any danger, and that she’s safe with us.

Kaim: I’m asking for concrete methods here, Melt.

Melt: Hmm, let’s see…

Melt: Why don’t you take her out on the town?
Melt:
Buy her something sweet, you know. At my shop, naturally.

Sieg:
That might help distract her, certainly.

Kaim:
You want me to parade a Winged around the city?

Kaim:
And what do you suggest I do if something happens?

Melt:
If something happens, well, that’s just the time for your skills to come in handy.

Melt:
Play her hero and capture her heart. Every girl likes to be taken care of a little by a man she can depend on.

Eris:
I could stand to be taken care of just a little, you know.

Kaim:
Sorry to hear that.

Sieg:
Come on, we’re all cheering for you. Go for it.

Kaim:
If all you’re doing is sitting there cheering me on, a dog would be just as good.

Sieg:
Wait, you’ve seen a cheering dog? Seriously? When was this?!
I slug him in the shoulder to shut him up.

**Melt:**

So, bring the girl into a dangerous situation, then save her. Simple enough!

**Kaim:**

What’s ‘simple’ about that?

**Eris:**

I can’t support any plan that puts Kaim in danger.

**Kaim:**

If you want to do it, by all means.

**Eris:**

Nope.

**Kaim:**

I don’t think you’re quite pulling your weight here.

**Eris:**

Don’t praise me too much, now.

She gives me a dazzling smile as she replies.

**Sieg:**

Well, it’s better than nothing. Give it a go, at least.

**Sieg:**

And I don’t care if you happen to give her a go on the way, either.

**Kaim:**

I’m set for women, thanks.

**Eris:**

News to me.
Kaim:
Do you have to poke at every little thing?
Sieg taps the tabletop twice with a finger.
Sieg:
Speaking seriously…
Sieg:
As far as I’m concerned, the only purpose of this is to get out of her what you can.
Kaim:
And so you’re having me babysit?
Sieg:
Think of it as keeping surveillance on a person of interest.
Melt:
Oh, what an official turn of phrase!
Eris:
You can do it, Kaim. You can do anything if you try.
Not even she sounds like she believes that.
Melt:
If she gets hungry, you can bring her to me anytime, whether we’re open or not.
Melt:
If she needs a girl to talk to, I think I can do that, too.
This sounds like a pain in the ass, but I have some questions myself, about that light from before.
If my intuition is right and the girl’s just pretending to have forgotten the incident, Sieg...
taking care of her would be worse than her having truly forgotten.

It’d be best to stay near her and keep watch, so no problems of any kind arise.

Kaim:
No choice, huh…

I feign bad grace and accept my assignment.

Kaim:
Just for the record, the only ones who know this girl is Winged are we four, right?

Sieg:
Right.

Kaim:
Alright. Let’s make sure it doesn’t get any farther than this room.

Eris doesn’t really give the time of day to anyone outside the three of us, and Melt’s ability to keep a secret is part of her job.

Shouldn’t be a problem.

Melt:
Well, Kaim, how many days do you think it’ll take you to get the girl to fall for you?

Kaim:
It’s my policy to get annoying things done with as fast as possible.

Melt:
Oh, more self-confidence, I see.

Melt:
Well then, I’ll be waiting for you at the bar.
Eris:
I’ll be heading home as well. Dealing with children always tires me out.

Sieg:
I’m looking forward to a positive report, Kaim.
The door creaks closed.
Off they go.
What a noisy bunch.

Girl:
Mmh…
The girl turns over in her sleep.
Things have turned out troublesome, all because she can’t remember something clearly.

Kaim:
Geez…
I pull the chair out and sit, taking a drink of wine without bothering to dig out any food.
I heave a sigh.
The burn of the alcohol is starting to come through strong in this bottle.
I’ll go to Melt’s tomorrow and buy some new stock.
I look at the sleeping girl.
…might as well bring her with me.
The sole survivor of a massacre.
Someone who refused to die.
In a way, she’s just like me.
Right now, she might be reliving the horror in her dreams.

Why did either of us have to go through such terrible events?

What meaning was there in either of us being involved in those tragedies?

The answer’s simple.

There was no reason to it, and no meaning at all.

Is it unfair?

Yeah, it sure is.

Life is never going to be fair, not in this world.

That’s why what people need most is the strength to shoulder that unfairness and move on.

Without demanding a reason, or wanting to know why.

The strength to accept what happens as cold, hard reality, and not to get attached to anyone or anything.

It took a while, but that’s the conclusion I’ve reached.

I wonder how long it’ll take her to learn?

今頃は、夢の中で煩悶しているかもしれない。

なぜ自分がこんな目に遭わなければならないのか。

自分が巻きこまれた悲劇にどれほどの意味があったのか。

答えは簡単だ。

理由も意味もない。

理不尽?

そう、理不尽なのだ。

泣いても笑っても、理不尽な出来事はこの世から消えない。

だから、人に必要なのは理不尽さを受け入れる強さだ。

理由も意味も求めない。

ただ、目の前の事実を事実として受け入れ、執着しない強さだ。

少々時間はかかったが、俺はこの結論に辿り着いた。

こいつも、いつ答えを見つけるのだろうか？
Melt:
Well then, I’ll be waiting for you at the bar.

Eris:
I’ll be heading home as well. Dealing with children always tires me out.

Sieg:
I’m looking forward to a positive report, Kaim.

The door creaks closed.

Girl:
...

Aside from the man called Kaim, it looks like they’ve all left.

It seems that these people want to know more about yesterday night.

I’ve been pretending not to remember, but...
I wonder if it might be best to tell them everything after all.

But I have to wonder what will happen to me after I speak up.

Maybe they’ll find me someplace to work?

No, not likely.

I’m a Winged now.

No one in the city would hire me.

In that case…

I’ll be discarded, to be found and carried away by the Wing Hunters.

That sounds more realistic.

Girl:

No…

I don’t want to think about this painful subject anymore.

That’s right.

I can’t tell them what I know.

I need to pretend I’ve forgotten, buy what time I can, and sound out the feelings of this man called Kaim.

He… might even actually be a good person.

Girl:

…
I know that would be the best-case scenario for me, but somehow, it makes me feel bad.

I’ll be deceiving him, after all.

I’ve lived my life until now being taken advantage of, but even so, taking advantage of other people feels wrong.

But I have to do something.

Ah…

I wonder if I really am just fated for misfortune and suffering, after all.
APPENDIX 5

PASSING THE HUNTER (Act 2, p. 10 – 18)

As part of Kaim’s bid to gain the girl’s trust and help her remember the night of the attack, Kaim has learned her name – Eustia, shortened to Tia – and has agreed to take her to Melt’s pub for lunch. While walking through the brothel district to Vinoleta, Tia comments on the storefronts.

Claudia, Risa and Iris are three of Kaim’s acquaintances, girls who work at Lilium, the most well-known brothel in the district and the headquarters of the Golden Chain.

Tia:
B-by the way, all the shops on this street are so pretty!

Tia:
Which one are we going to?

Tia forcibly changes the subject.

Most of the storefronts around here are brothels.

「と、ところで、このあたりは綺麗なお店がいっぱいありますね」

「どのお店に行くんですか？」

無理矢理、話題をそらすティア。

周囲の店は、ほとんどの娼館だ。
It’s like she has absolutely no idea where she’s standing.

Kaim:
Good question… how about that one?

I point out Lillium.

Tia:
That one’s the loveliest of them all… won’t it be expensive?

Kaim:
Downright cheap, for the work they do.

Tia:
I – I see.

Kaim:
It’s a good place. They’ve got a bunch of women to suit your tastes.

Tia:
Huh?

Kaim:
And they’re all well-disciplined, too.

Tia:
What? Huh? Um…

Kaim:
That’s the place you would’ve been working at.

Tia:
Oh…

She understands.

Her expression grows serious, and she looks down at her feet.

Kaim:
ここがそういう場所のど真ん中だとは思っていない様子だ。

～そうな……あそこにしよう～

リリウムを指す。

「一番立派なお店ですけど……高いんじゃ」

Tia:
「一番立派なお店ですか……高いんじゃ」

Kaim:
「そうな……あそこにしよう」

良い店だぞ、個性的な女が揃ってる

Tia:
「え？」

Kaim:
「いい店だぞ、個性的な女が揃ってる」

Tia:
「え？は？あの？」

Kaim:
「お前が働くはずだった店だ。あれは」

Tia:
「ああ」

納得。

といった顔をしてから、真顔になり、俯く。
Kaim:
All the places around here are the same.

Tia:
I see…

Kaim:
We’ll be eating at a little place just up the road run by a friend of mine.

Kaim:
Let’s go.
I turn and start walking.
However, Tia doesn’t move.

Kaim:
Hey.
She’s staring down at the ground.
She looks kind of depressed.

Kaim:
Sorry. I took the joke too far.

Tia:
No… I’m alright.
She sure as hell doesn’t sound it.

Kaim:
Come on. You’ll feel better with something tasty in you.
Just as I try to urge Tia on,
I see something bad further down the road.
A single man in uniform is walking this way, scowling at everything he passes.
A Wing Hunter.

Tia:

That’s… a Wing…

Tia:

Wh-what should I…?

Kaim:

Keep calm.

Tia:

R-r-right…

The color’s vanished completely from Tia’s face.

That, and the way she’s moving, make her look like some kind of broken doll.

She might as well be screaming ‘I’m suspicious’ with every breath.

Kaim:

If you don’t want to get a lot friendlier with him, calm down.

Kaim:

If you catch his eye, he’ll strip you right here in the street.

Tia:

That’s… ridiculous.

Kaim:

The higher-ups turn a blind eye, it seems.

Kaim:

You understand me, right? If he notices you, it’s over.

Tia:

「あれば……羽……」

「わ、わたしどうしたら……」

「気にするな」

「は、は、は、はい……」

ティアの顔からは完全に血が引いている。

身体の動きも壊れた人形のよう。

これでは、怪しんでくれと言っているようなものだ。

「奴らとお近づきになりたくなかったら普通にしていろ」

「目をつけられたら、その場で服を脱がされるぞ」

「そんな……乱暴です」

「上から許されてるらしい」

「わかるか？お前は、目をつけられたら終わりってことだ」

「でも、でも」
But… but…

Kaim: 「怖くても笑え」
Even if you’re scared, smile.

Kaim: 「できなければこの場に置いていく」
If you can’t, here’s where we part ways.

Tia: 「は、はは、はい」
R-r-right.

Tia: 「え、えへ……えへへ」
Eh… hehe… Ehehe…

Kaim: 「……」
Heh.

It’s a sorry excuse for a smile, but it’ll have to do.

Kaim: 「行くぞ」
Let’s go.

Tia: 「えへへ」
Ehehe.

The Wing Hunter’s already pretty close by now.

He’s walking right toward us with a steely look on his face.

Our eyes meet…

…and then our gazes naturally pass over each other.

Kaim: 「……」
…

Tia: 「……」
…

Then we’re past him.

羽狩りとすれ違った。
Not that I could really say how.

I felt his gaze all over our bodies, but that was it.

Instead of wondering needlessly, we carry on ahead.

When I glance at Tia out of the corner of my eyes, she looks completely calm despite how nervous she was before.

**Thin Wing Hunter:**

Hey, you over there.

A cold voice rings out from behind us.

A chill runs down my spine.

No time to be cursing our bad luck, though.

First we have to deal with our little friend.

**Kaim:**

...

I take a deep breath and turn around.

And there I see the Wing Hunter, accosting three of the ladies from Lillium.

Somehow it seems we weren’t the ones he was after.
Claudia: Do you have some business with us, good sir?

Thin Wing Hunter: I have a few questions for you.

Thin Wing Hunter: There are rumors of Winged being sheltered in this area... have you heard anything about that?

Claudia: Here in the pleasure district, you say?

Claudia: I must beg your pardon, sir, but I simply cannot recall hearing anything of the sort.

Thin Wing Hunter: Really?

Claudia: 'もちろんでございます。羽狩りの方に嘘は申しません'
Most certainly, honored sir. I would never lie to a member of the Wing Hunters.

Thin Wing Hunter:
So you say, but I wonder. We’ve taken in so few Winged from around here, after all…

Sure makes it hard to believe you.

Claudia:
Surely you are joking, sir.

Thin Wing Hunter:
Not at all. You and your ilk deceive men for a living, don’t you?

He suddenly starts looking belligerent.

Looks like he was really just looking to pick a fight with some brothel girls.

Probably payback for some girl who spurned him, I bet.
Risa:
No, no, no, no! Don’t you worry about that!

Risa:
The only men we deceive are our paying customers and good men, and you’re not either.

Thin Wing Hunter:
What?!
The Wing Hunter’s face goes red.

Kaim:
Risa, you little moron, don’t pick a fight…

Tia:
Do you know those women?

Kaim:
A bit.
Normally I’d step in at this point, but with Tia around, my hands are tied.

Claudia:
We beg your gracious pardon, sir.
Claudia bows gracefully before the Wing Hunter, whose expression doesn’t change.

After a moment, Claudia peeks cautiously up at him.

Even that’s a carefully calculated movement.

Thin Wing Hunter:
Hmph… well, whatever.
Thin Wing Hunter:
And what about you? Have you heard any rumors?

Iris:
As if, you pompous shit.

Kaim:
Ooh.

Tia:
Ah…
I saw that coming.

She’s ruined the whole thing in a single instant.

Thin Wing Hunter:
H-how dare you, you little whore?!

Iris:
Go to hell.
**Thin Wing Hunter:**

Y…y…

The Wing Hunter stands shaking and speechless with rage.

Claudia, looking flustered, interrupts.

**Claudia:**

Our sincere apologies, sir. She was raised in the Prison, and does not know how to properly address her betters.

**Claudia:**

I will be sure to discipline her soundly when we return home.

Claudia once again lowers her head before the Wing Hunter.

**Iris:**

...

Iris stands off to the side as Claudia deals with the embers she’s stirred back up… and stares directly at the two of us.
APPENDIX 6

THE CHOICE MECHANIC (Act 2, p. 19 – 21)

Proceeding directly from the previous excerpt, this short scene showcases the choice mechanic in *Eustia of the Tarnished Wings*. At certain points, the reader is presented with two choices; these choices do not cause the narrative to branch off, but can result in different dialogue. Most significantly, the choices the player makes can affect whether the few significant choice points that do split the narrative appear.

I turn and walk away without her.

Tia hurries to catch up with me, but stare at the ground like she wants to say something.

**Kaim:**
If you’ve got something to say, spit it out.

**Tia:**
Ah, no, it’s nothing.

Tia shows a measure of restraint for once.

Even so, she keeps looking at me like she wants to talk.

This girl’s a handful.

先に立って歩きだす。

慌ててついてきたティアだが、何か言いたげに俯いている。

「言いたいことがあるなら言え」

「あ、いえ、結構です」

遠慮するティア。

にもかかわらず、言わねば気が済まないような顔をしている。

手間がかかる女だ。
Kaim:
No need to hold back. I won’t get mad, so go ahead.

Tia:
O-okay.

Tia:
Um… which would have been better, do you think?

Tia:
Between working in a brothel, or becoming Winged…

Kaim:
Heh…

What a stupid question.

She’s just trying to convince herself that becoming Winged was a better fate for her, in the end.

Still, I do have to curry favor with her, at least for a while.

「遠慮するな。怒らないから言ってみろ」

「は、はい……」

「あの、どちらが良かったのでしょう？」

「娼館で働くのと、羽つきになるのでは」

「……」

下らない話だ。

単に、羽つきになったほうがマシだったと思ういただけなのだろう。

しかも、しばらくはこいつの機嫌は取らねばならない。
<CHOICE 1> Humor Her/Don’t Humor Her

**Choice 1: Humor Her**

**Kaim:**
Being Winged is probably the better option, yeah.

**Tia:**
Right… it is, isn’t it?
Tia’s expression brightens a little.
Though I think we both know they’re more or less the same.

**Choice 2: Don’t Humor Her**

**Kaim:**
They’re both horrible.

**Tia:**
Uh… r-right. They are, aren’t they…

**Both choices reconvene here.**

**Kaim:**
Well, you’re working hard in your own way.

**Tia:**
It’s alright. I’m used to hardship, after all.
Tia smiles quietly as she speaks.

Like hell she is.
After all, if she was used to it, she wouldn’t even notice that it was hardship.
There’s a glaring contradiction in terms in her words.
My guess is that it’s just something she tells herself in order to get through the day.

Tia:
I’m sure by now that suffering misfortune is my fate.

Tia:
So really, if I let every little thing bother me, I would never be able to stop.

Kaim:
I guess it’s easier to think like that, yeah.

Tia:
...It is.

Her smile deepens, and her answer almost sounds like a sigh.

Even if it’s not a happy life, she should at least be wishing for a normal one.

Her answer makes it clear that she knows even that’s out of her reach now.

Unfair or not, her situation is reality.

There’s nothing she can do to change it, so all she can do is accept it.

That’s all there is to say about it.
After another day out on the town, during which Kaim buys Tia a small necklace and continues to curry favor with her, Kaim goes to report to Sieg that Tia’s memory loss has not been reversed. While their trip to the marketplace was an attempt to make Tia relax, an encounter with a slave trader and several close run-ins with the Wing Hunters have left both of them somewhat tense. While Tia and Kaim are both well aware that Sieg’s patience is starting to run low, Kaim finds himself worrying about her beyond her usefulness as a source of information.

**Kaim:**
Anything strange happen while I was out?

**Tia:**
No sir. Was everything alright on your errand?

**Kaim:**
We just talked about work. There was nothing to be alright or not alright.
Tia:
You’re quite a handyman, to be on speaking
terms with someone from an organization, Mr.
Kaim.

She looks at me worriedly.

It looks like she more or less understands what
I do now.

Kaim:
Looks like your instincts might not be so
accurate, eh?

Kaim:
You said I was a ‘good person’ before, right?

Kaim:
Pretty far off the mark, weren’t you?

Tia:
Th-that’s not true.

It’s a strong outburst, for Tia.

Tia:
You’re a good person, Mr. Kaim.

Tia:
Even now, you’re letting me stay in your
home.

But that’s just for the value in her memories,
and nothing more.

Tia:
I don’t care what kind of work you do, Mr.
Kaim.

Tia:
Because I know you’re good deep down,
where it really matters.
A warm smile comes to her face.

Kaim:
And I’m telling you, you’re wrong there.

Tia:
A really bad person wouldn’t call themselves a bad person.

That’s some logic.

I get annoyed.

I lift Tia’s chin with a finger.

Kaim:
Is there something you’re hoping to gain from flattering me?

When I look directly into her eyes, Tia looks away, as if fleeing my gaze.

Tia:
...I’m worried.

「だから、それが当てにならんと言っているんだ」

「本当に悪い人は、自分のことを悪いて言いません」

妙な決めつけをしてきた。

イラっとする。

ティアの顎を指で持ち上げる。

「俺を持ち上げて、何か点を稼ぎたい理由でもあるのか？」

瞳を直視すると、ティアは逃げるように目を逸らした。
Tia:
About what will happen to me after this…

Kaim:
Just stay here.
There’s no heart in my words.

Tia:
Can I?

Kaim:
Doesn’t matter to me. I have enough money to support one girl.

Tia:
Thank you.

Tia:
But why?

Kaim:
You must get it. There aren’t that many reasons why a man wants a woman at his side.

I pet Tia’s head roughly.

Tia:
…

After that, Tia quiets down and lets me pet her. Every now and then she looks like she wants to say something, but I ignore her.

If Tia thinks I don’t have feelings for her, it’ll be a problem.

Tia:
…I don’t understand.
She says it in a high, faint voice.

**Tia:**
I don’t understand why you’d be interested in a woman like me.

**Kaim:**
Whether you understand or not, I’m interested in you.

**Kaim:**
Do you not like it?

**Tia:**
It’s not that I don’t like it.

A smile comes to her face.

It’s a forced smile.

It looks like she still doesn’t believe me.

**Kaim:**
You don’t believe me, do you.

**Kaim:**
Can’t be helped; it’s only been a few days since we met.

**Tia:**
No, it’s not that… I’m just surprised.

**Kaim:**
Would it be better if you had some definite proof?

**Tia:**
Eh?

**Kaim:**

「どうして、わたしみたいな女を気に入るのが分かりません」

「お前が分からなくても、俺はお前を気に入っている」

「嫌なのか？」

「嫌ではありません」

笑顔を浮かべるティア。

無理に作った笑いだった。

どうやら、まだ俺の言葉を信用していないようだ。

「信じてないようだな」

「仕方ない、出会ってまだ数日だ」

「え？」

「証拠だよ、俺がお前を気に入っているっていう」
Proof. Something that says without a doubt that I’m interested in you.

Tia:
Ah, um… um…
Tia lowers her head and hugs herself a little.

Kaim:
Tia.

Tia:
Y-yes?
I place my hand on her soft cheek and gently lift her face.
When I make our eyes meet, Tia’s face goes bright red.
A rumble is audible far away.

Kaim:
…that sound…

Tia:
?
The building begins to shake.

Tia:
Kyah?!

Kaim:
Kh!

Tia:
A-an earthquake?!
The sights of that day begin to flood back into my mind.

It’s alright.
I’m alright.

So I keep telling myself, but every muscle in my body is straining tight with tension.

I can’t escape the fear and despair dyed deep into my very bones.

Tia:

Mr. Kaim!

Kaim:

It’s alright. These tremors aren’t…

Something blocks my field of vision.

It takes me a moment to understand what’s happened.

…

I’m being embraced by Tia.

Her sweet scent seems to filter through my whole body.

大丈夫だ。

自分に言い聞かせるが、関節という関節が緊張に強張っていく。

骨の髄まで染みこんだ恐怖と絶望が、まだ抜けきらない。

「カイムさんっ」

「大丈夫だ、大した揺れじゃ……」

視界が何かで塞がれた。

状況の把握に時間を要する。

……。

俺はティアに抱かれているのだ。

鼻から入った甘い香りが体に染みていく。
She’s not wearing perfume; it’s just the natural smell of a woman.

It’s been a very long time.

Comes from having lived my whole life since the Gran Forte surrounded by perfumes and face powders.

The last time I smelled the natural scent of a woman was probably…

…my mother?

Tia:
The tremors… have stopped.

Kaim:

Her embrace eases a little.

Tia:
Are you alright, Mr. Kaim?

Kaim:
Is something…?

Tia:
Oh, no, but you looked so tense, I wondered if you were afraid of earthquakes, perhaps…

Kaim:
Just a little bit of nervousness. Usually they only happen once a month or so.

Kaim:
Get off of me already. I can’t breathe.

Tia:
Ah, I’m sorry.
Tia lets go of me.

**Kaim:**
Still, the Saint these days sure is careless.

**Tia:**
I know… We get tremors a lot.

There’s some kind of commotion outside the door.

**Tia:**
Was anything destroyed, do you think?

**Kaim:**
Take a look outside.

I move past Tia and open the door.
When I stick my head out, screams are filling the air.

There don’t appear to be any fires or collapsed buildings, at least.

Tia:
??

Kaim:
There doesn’t seem to be any physical damage, at least.

Kaim:
Sometimes people just go crazy.

Tia:
Eh?

Kaim:
Pretty much everyone in the Prison suffered during the Gran Forte.

Kaim:
Earthquakes call those memories back.

家から顔を出すと、悲鳴がいくつか聞こえてくる。

火事や家屋が倒壊している様子は見られない。

「？？」

「物理的な被害はないんだがな」

「たまに頭がいかれる奴がいるんだ」

「え？」

「牢獄にいる奴は、ほとんどが《大崩落》で被害を受けるる」

「地震がその記憶を呼び覚ますんだよ」
Kaim:
There are more than a few people who just go crazy with these little earthquakes as the trigger.
The indelible memories of the Gran Forte,
Hatred against a Crown that abandoned us,
The poverty and violence that consumes their daily lives…
All of these together are probably the driving spirit of everyone living in the Prison.

Tia:
But you’re alright, aren’t you, Mr. Kaim?

Kaim:
It was causing trouble in my work, so I got over it.

Kaim:
To the people living down here in the Prison, the Gran Forte hasn’t ended.

Tia:
I think I understand.

Tia:
I feel like I somehow know the Gran Forte, too.

Kaim:
Where were you when it happened? The Upper City? Lower City?

Tia:
Um… I don’t really remember.

Kaim:
How old were you?
Tia: That, either...

Kaim: If that’s how it is, don’t go around saying you understand so lightly.

Kaim: As if you could understand that suffering just from hearing about it.

Tia: B-but I see it in my dreams.

Tia: People falling… and houses crumbling…

Dreams, of all things.

Is she mocking me?

Kaim: There are things it’s not alright to say.

Kaim: You dreamt about it, so you understand?

Don’t make me laugh.

Kaim: Say it one more time. Go ahead.

Tia: I-I won’t say it again.

I take a deep breath and calm down a little.

Kaim: …

Kaim: Anyway, I think you’ve seen enough.
The day after the earthquake, Kaim and Tia head to Vinoleta for dinner with Eris and Melt. In the middle of a joking conversation, the situation takes a turn for the worse.

The door opens.

Melt: 「いらっしゃい……」

Kaim: 「……」

...

The newcomer looks around the store, then nods quietly to Melt.

Wing Hunter Captain: 「失礼する」

Kaim: 「ティア、いつも通りにしてろ」

Tia: 「ははは、はい」
R-ri-ri-right.
She’s clearly nervous.
Let’s hope she doesn’t start crying.

**Melt:**
My sincere apologies, ma’am. The truth is, we’re just about to close for this evening…

**Melt:**
I truly am terribly sorry, but could I ask you to please call again at another opportunity?

Melt’s smile doesn’t budge as she lies.

**Wing Hunter Captain:**
That’s actually more convenient.

Enunciating clearly, the Wing Hunter captain comes closer.

**Wing Hunter Captain:**
My name is Fione Silvaria.

**Captain Fione:**
I’m the captain in charge of the Quarantine Corps in this area.

She extends her hand and gives Melt a handshake over the counter.

Next is Eris.
Then she turns to me.

**Captain Fione:**
You’re… the man from the other day.

**Kaim:**
What a coincidence, huh.

**Captain Fione:**
明らかに緊張している。
ボロを出さなければならないが。
「実は、このあと店を閉める予定になっております」
「大変申し訳ございませんが、またの機会にお願いできますでしょうか」
笑顔を崩さずメルトが嘘をつく。
「むしろ好都合だ」
歯切れよく言って、羽狩りの隊長が近づいてくる。
「私はフィオネ・シルヴァリア」
「この近辺を担当している防疫局の隊長を務めている」
手を伸ばし、カウンター越しにメルトと握手をする。
次にエリス。
そして、俺に向いた。
「貴方は、先日の……」
「奇遇だな」
「ええ。本当に」
Yes, it really is.

I grip the Captain’s offered hand.

It’s a surprisingly strong, firm hand.

I surreptitiously slip my knife back into my belt with my other hand.

**Captain Fione:**

And it’s a pleasure to meet you, too.

The Captain turns to Tia and extends her hand.

Please.

Just go along with it.

**Tia:**

Ah, r-r-right…

**Captain Fione:**

Is something wrong?

差し出された隊長の手を握る。

かなり鍛えられた手だ。

腰には入念に手入れされた剣が下がっている。

「貴女もよろしく」

女隊長は、続いてティアに手を出す。

頼む。

無事乗り越えてくれ。

「あ、は、は、はい……」

「どうかしたか？」

Is something wrong?
Tia:
A-ah, um, no, not particularly, nothing.

Melt:
This young lady had a friend who is currently being looked after by the Wing Hunters, you see.

Melt:
She’s a little nervous, that’s all.

Captain Fione:
Ah, I see.

Taken in by Melt’s story, the Captain smiles and speaks to Tia.

Captain Fione:
I’m very sorry if we scared you.

From now on, we’ll be doing our very utmost not to cause unpleasant experiences for anyone.

Tia:
O-okay.

The Captain takes Tia’s hand and shakes it twice, firmly.

Melt:
Well then, what brings you here, ma’am?

Captain Fione:
Ah, pardon me.

She straightens up.

She has beautiful posture.

Captain Fione:
「あ、あの、いえ、別に、なんでも」

「この娘、前に友達が羽狩りさんの世話になっているんです」

「それでちょっと緊張しているみたい」

「なるほど」

メルトの話を受けた隊長は、笑顔でティアに語りかける。

「怖い思いをさせたのなら申し訳なかった」

「以後、不快な思いをさせないよう極力注意する」

「は、はい」

隊長はティアの手を握ると、力強く2度振った。

「それで、どういったご用でしょうか？」

「これは失礼」

居住まいを正す女隊長。

美しい姿勢だ。

「数刻後に、この近所で羽化病患者の保護を行うことになっている」
In a few hours, we’ll be effecting the transfer of sufferers of the Feathering Sickness in this area into Quarantine Corps care.

**Captain Fione:**
If possible, I would like to requisition this building as a temporary headquarters for that purpose.

**Melt:**
Is there nowhere else?

**Captain Fione:**
This inn is close to the entrance of the brothel district; it’s a convenient location.

**Captain Fione:**
Of course, I insist on paying the balance of any losses you might incur from our presence.

**Captain Fione:**
The inn was to be closed tonight anyway, so I don’t think it will be that significant a blow, but what do you say?

Melt’s dug her own grave.

If she refuses any more, the Captain might start getting suspicious.

Melt glances over to me, and I nod.

**Melt:**
Yes, of course. Please make yourselves at home.

**Captain Fione:**
Thank you for your cooperation.
Smiling faintly, she stamps on the floor three times with the heel of her combat boot.

As if it had been waiting for her, the back door opens.

A group of ten men pours into the inn.

**Melt:**

H-hang on, what do you think you’re doing coming in from the back?

**Captain Fione:**

My apologies. We would have been seen coming in the front door, and blown our cover.

The men aren’t wearing Wing Hunter uniforms, but clothes no different from the men on the street.

Disguises, most likely, to make sure they aren’t recognized as Hunters.

The men remove their clothes as a group, and underneath are the familiar uniforms.

Twelve Wing Hunters total.

They must be planning one hell of an operation.

**Vice-Captain Lang:**

I thought I recognized you.

**Kaim:**

Horrible luck, isn’t it?

**Vice-Captain Lang:**

Truly.
Captain Fione:
Lang, cut the chatter. Get the briefing started.

Vice-Captain Lang:
Understood.

Brushing a loose strand of hair back up, the Vice-Captain passes by my seat.

A faint smell of cologne wafts after him.

Pretty careless for someone who specializes in dirty work to walk around in cologne.

Kaim:
We’ll just get in the way. Let’s head home.

Tia:
R-right, let’s.

I put our money on the counter, then we head for the exit.
The Captain stands in our way.

**Captain Fione:**
I’m sorry, but could I ask you to stay here until our operation is over?

**Captain Fione:**
It’s not that I doubt you two, but we can’t be sure that you won’t report on this to anyone, you see.

**Kaim:**
We’d hardly dream of opposing the Wing Hunters.

**Captain Fione:**
We are not Wing Hunters.

**Captain Fione:**
We’re the Quarantine Corps.

She corrects me, her tone flat.

**Kaim:**
Well, no one in the Prison calls you the Quarantine Corps.

**Kaim:**
Understanding at least that much would probably make your job a bit easier.

**Captain Fione:**
Thank you for the advice.

**Captain Fione:**
But things should be called by their proper names.

Just like a government official to be hung up on the things that don’t matter.
Kaim:
Well, anyway, we have no intention of getting in the Wing Hunters’ way at all.

Vice-Captain Lang:
In that case, why not stay and serve as a witness that we’re earning our pay down here?

Kaim:
Just submit an after-action report.

Vice-Captain Lang:
I’m sorry; that wasn’t a request.

Lang taps his finger on the hilt of his sword.

Captain Fione:
Stop it, Vice-Captain.

Vice-Captain Lang:
Scum like this won’t listen to words, Captain.

So he says to the Captain, looking directly at me.

But he obeys her order.

Captain Fione:
Thank you for your cooperation.

Kaim:
Not at all. It’s an honor to be allowed to watch the Quarantine Corps’ work from so close by.

The Captain gives a wry smile at my sarcasm.

Captain Fione:
隊長に言ってから副隊長が俺を見ると。お手上げの仕草で応じた。

「ご協力感謝する」

「店主、今すぐ店を閉め、誰も入ってこないようにしてください」
Madam, please close the inn straightaway, and make sure no one else comes in.

Melt:
Right away.
Melt starts closing up shop.
The Wing Hunters push together a few of the tables to make a bigger one.

Tia:
Mr. Kaim, what should we do…?

Kaim:
For now, sit down.

Tia:
R-right.
I sit Tia down. Her face has gone completely green.

Penned in here like this, it’s only a matter of time before they find Tia’s wings.

「わかりました」
メルトが戸締まりを始める。
羽狩りたちは、テーブルをいくつか集めて大テーブルを作るようだ。

「カイムさん、どうしたら……」
「取りあえず座れ」
「は、はい」
完全に青ざめているティアを座らせること。
長時間この状態が続ければ、いずれティアの羽は見つかるだろう。
If I can, I want to get her out of here.

I just have to think of a way.
APPENDIX 9
EXTRACTION (Act 3, p. 95 – 111)

With the Wing Hunters quartered in Vinoleta and preparing to begin their raids against the brothel district, tension is high as Kaim attempts to keep their attention off of Tia. In order to distract them and to upset Captain Fione, Eris and Melt drug the Wing Hunters’ ale with an aphrodisiac and rile the men up, causing chaos in the pub and creating an excuse to take Tia upstairs with them. Kaim is left alone with the Wing Hunters.

The sun’s started to set.

With the drug out of their systems, a nervous sort of impatience is spreading among the Wing Hunters.

Seeing them so tense is practically as good as a live show as I down my ale. I lost count of the flagons a while ago.

The straight-laced Captain has her hands pressed against her chest and is mumbling something.

Kaim:
Who are you praying to?

陽が傾き始めた。

薬が抜けた羽狩りの間には、焦燥に似た緊張が広がっている。

神経質に装備を確認する男たちの姿を肴に、俺は何杯目かの火酒を飲み干した。

生真面目な女隊長は、胸に手を当て口の中で何事か唱えている。

「あんた、何に祈る？」
Captain Fione:
To the Holy Saint… and to my family.

She replies without opening her eyes.

Kaim:
Even though you’re about to go rip apart who knows how many families yourself?

Captain Fione:
Without us, the disease would run rampant through this city, and countless more families would be destroyed.

Captain Fione:
It’s necessary work.

A by-the-books answer.

Kaim:
Earlier, you said you’d like to ask one of the gangsters out here how it felt to make a living by violence, right?

Kaim:
Surely you lot understand that feeling pretty well already, don’t you?
Captain Fione: Are you mocking me?

Captain Fione: Any violence we perpetrate is merely a means, not the objective.

Captain Fione: There are times when it’s necessary, to protect the peaceful lives of the citizenry.

Kaim: Oh, yes, I believe that.

The Captain lets out an angry huff and turns away.

Captain Fione: It must be easy to sit on the sidelines and spit sarcasm.

She stands up.

As one, her subordinates stand up as well.

Captain Fione: 「愚弄するのか」

「我々の暴力は手段であって目的ではない」

「民衆の平穏な生活を保つために、どうしても必要な時があるのだ」

「そうだと信じているよ」

女隊長は荒い鼻息をついて、顔を逸らした。

「傍から皮肉を言うのは楽でいいな」

女隊長が立ち上がる。

部下達も一斉に席を立った。

「状況を開始する」
It’s time.
The Captain opens the door to the inn.
The red light of sunset flows into the room, and her body is wreathed in orange fire.

Captain Fione:
I have my feet firmly planted in reality.

Captain Fione:
Unlike you, I don’t believe in living in a dream world.

She says it quietly, then turns and steps into the twilit streets of the brothel district.

Her subordinates follow.

The Vice-Captain is last.

Kaim:
Good hunting.

Vice-Captain Lang:
It’s protective custody.

He corrects me coldly, as if I’d just spoken from misunderstanding, and then the last Wing Hunter leaves the inn.

An empty, still silence is all that’s left behind.

Kaim:
Firmly planted in reality… ha.

What a pompous phrase.

If she had that thought up beforehand and was just waiting for a chance to say it, I feel even sorrier for her.

Her feet may be planted in reality, but her head’s stuck in the clouds, it seems.
Eris:
Looks like they’ve gone.

Melt:
Ah, I’m exhausted.

Tia:
Th-that was so frightening.

The three of them trickle downstairs.

Kaim:
We made it through somehow.

Tia:
Thank you all so very much. It’s all thanks to you.

Melt:
It’s all thanks to my acting ability, you mean!

Eris:
「出て行ったみたいね」

「あー、疲れた」

「こ、怖かったです」

三人が下りてきた。

「何とか切り抜けた」

「ありがとう、皆さんのおかげです」

「私の名演のお陰ね」

「羽狩りなんかに身体触られるなんて、最低」
Being touched by Wing Hunters… how disgusting.

**Kaim:**
Your medicine really saved us, Eris. It worked surprisingly well.

**Eris:**
It’s specially made, after all.

**Eris:**
Do you want to know what I made it for?

**Kaim:**
I really don’t.

**Eris:**
I thought it would put a bit of a spring in your step, Kaim.

**Kaim:**
If you’re just going to tell me anyway, don’t ask if I want to know.

**Melt:**
Oh my, Kaim, you’re already depending on medicine? What a shame.

Outside the inn, a woman screams.

**Tia:**
Ah… that voice…

**Kaim:**
It’s started, then.

**Kaim:**
I’ll go check it out.

**Melt:**
I’ll stay here.
Eris:
I’m tired of looking at those Wing Hunters.

Tia:
I want to see it.

Kaim:
You stay here.

Tia:
Please!

Tia:
I want to see… what happens to the Winged.

Kaim:
Nothing doing.

Tia:
I mean, I have wings myself!

There’s something earnest in Tia’s voice.

Tia:
Just for a few seconds. Please.

Melt:
It won’t be too dangerous if she watches from far away, will it?

Kaim:
...

Eris:
You’re going to regret this.

Tia:
Even so… please.

Tia’s eyes glisten.
Kaim:  
Such a troublesome woman.

I turn to the exit.

Tia:  
Eh?

Melt:  
Go with him.

Tia:  
R-right!

Brothel Owner:  
I beg your pardon, ma’am. Of course there are no Winged here.

Captain Fione:  
All we’re asking is that you permit us to check.

The place the Wing Hunters have set their eyes on is a tiny, filthy brothel in a back alley.
In the middle of a ring of rubberneckers is the Captain, squaring off with the brothel’s owner.

Tia:
What’s going to happen?

Kaim:
Be quiet and watch.

Brothel Owner:
There must be some mistake.

Brothel Owner:
We have paying customers here. There’s no way we’d let a Winged in, is there?

Brothel Owner:
If rumors spread about this, we’re going to lose business.

Captain Fione:
The rumors have already spread. That’s why we’re here.

Captain Fione:
Sir, undergoing an inspection and certifying that nothing is wrong would be better, don’t you think?

There are seven Wing Hunters in front of the building.

There were twelve in Vinoleta, so the other five are probably already circling around to the back.

Brothel Owner:
Of course I would love to cooperate, but it’s business hours right now. Come back tomorrow morning.

Captain Fione:
That won’t do.
The Captain tries to enter the building, and the owner pulls her back.

**Brothel Owner:**
W-well then, at least wait until after the customers enjoying themselves now leave.

**Brothel Owner:**
After that, you’ll have the run of the place.

**Vice-Captain Lang:**
Come now, don’t say that.
The Vice-Captain grabs the owner’s shoulders.

**Vice-Captain Lang:**
The back entrance is covered already. Don’t bother trying to buy time.

**Brothel Owner:**
Rgh…

**Captain Fione:**
Go.

At her command, the Wing Hunters burst into the brothel.

**Brothel Owner:**
Stop it!
The sounds of smashing furniture, shattering pots and plates, women’s screams—

A riot of sound pours out of the brothel.

Tia stands watching it, looking like she’s forgotten how to breathe.

**Vice-Captain Lang:**
女隊長の声と同時に、羽狩りが娼館になだれ込んだ。

「やめろ、お前らっ!!」

「裏口はもう塞いでる。時間稼ぎは無駄だ」

副隊長が主の両肩を掴んだ。

「まあ、そう言うな」

「あとで存分に調べてくれ」

「うっ」

「行け」

家具が倒れる音、器が割れる音、女の悲鳴——

娼館から激しい物音が聞こえてきた。

そんな光景を、ティアは息をするのも忘れて見つめている。

「お前、羽つきを匿ってやる、高い手間賃を取っていたらしいな」
From what we hear, you’ve been sheltering Winged women, and charging rather high sums for them.

**Vice-Captain Lang:**
On top of that, you give the women who aren’t selling anymore a special kind of work…

**Brothel Owner:**
T-that’s ridiculous…

**Vice-Captain Lang:**
Now, don’t be upset; I’m praising you.

---

The Vice-Captain pets the owner’s bald head like a dog’s.

**Tia:**
Mr. Kaim…
Tia whispers to me.

Tia:
What exactly is the ‘special work’ he mentioned?

Kaim:
Selling their bodies in a different way. Having their wings broken, for instance.

Tia:
B-broken?

Kaim:
It’s a service for rich perverts. I hear it’s fairly profitable.

Kaim:
Though, make one misstep and this is what happens.

The Wing Hunters come out of the brothel.

They drag their Winged captives out with them, tied up with rope.

There are three, all girls.

One of them has her wings broken pretty badly, and the feathers that were pure white are staining with fresh blood.

The second has been beaten, and her face and body are red and black with darkening bruises.

The third looks to have lost an arm some time ago, and her eyes are empty and dull.

Girl With Broken Wings:
Sir… help us…

Brothel Owner:

「特殊なお仕事ってなんですか？」
「身体を売りたり、羽を折らせたり、ま、そういうことだ」
「……お、折る」
「金持ちの変態相手の商売だからかなり儲かるらしい」
「ま、一歩間違えばご覧の通り」

娼館の入口から羽狩りが出てきた。
やや遅れて、縄で捕縛された羽つきが引っ張り出される。
少女ばかりが、3人。
一人は、翼が中程で折れ、純白だった羽根が鮮血に染まっている。
一人は、酷く殴られ、顔や身体は内出血で赤黒い。
最後の一人は、いつ失ったのか片腕がなく、目も虚ろだ。
「旦那……助けて……」
「知らん、お前など知らんっ」
Get away! I don’t know you!

Captain Fione:
We’re prepared to show mercy when people are hiding their family or friends, but this…

Captain Fione:
If these girls are part of your establishment, we’ll have to ask about the circumstances of that.

Brothel Owner:
Gh…

The owner falls to his knees in defeat.

He’s likely not afraid of the Wing Hunters per se.

No, he’s afraid of the punishment he’ll get from the Untarnished Golden Chain for stirring up the brothel district.

Captain Fione:
I ask for your cooperation.

Captain Fione:
There’s no need to worry. We will not use force.

Brothel Owner:
Ah…

In the second that the Captain extends her hand to him,

Brothel Owner:
Rraaaaah!

The man’s hand shoots for her unguarded throat.

Something glints in his fist.
There’s a thick, wet sound.

**Kaim:**
Oh?

**Brothel Owner:**
...

**Captain Fione:**
...

Something falls before us.

**Tia:**
Hyah!

It’s a man’s arm.

It’s a wonderfully neat amputation.

**Brothel Owner:**
Aaaaaaaarrrgh!

The man writhes around on the ground.
**Captain Fione:**

That was a foolish thing to do.

The Captain shakes her head as she returns her shortsword to its sheath.

She’s pretty good with that thing.

In particular, the speed of her draw was stunning.

**Captain Fione:**

Citizens of the Prison, thank you for your cooperation.

She speaks to the rubberneckers.

**Captain Fione:**

Thanks to your support, we were able to take these sufferers of the Feathering Sickness into our care.

**Captain Fione:**

These girls, freed from their lives of cruel bondage, can now focus on rest and recovery.

**Captain Fione:**

If you should happen to see any more of the affected after this, we ask that you report to the Quarantine Corps without fail.

That clear, bright voice.

That flowing hair.

That graceful, elegant bearing.

And those unshakeable, untarnished principles of hers.

They’re respectable, but at the same time sickening.

**Captain Fione:**

We’re withdrawing.
Captain Fione:
Let’s not have any incidents. Treat the sufferers with respect.

Vice-Captain Lang:
Understood.

Surrounding the Winged women and the brothel owner, the Wing Hunters form up.

Then, turning toward their new staging area, they start walking.

One-Armed Girl:
Ahhh…

Vice-Captain Lang:
Hey, you!

The one-armed Winged girl breaks away from the line and runs toward us.

What the hell?

One-Armed Girl:
I found you…

She says, grabbing the brothel owner’s severed arm.

One-Armed Girl:
Handy-hand… handy-hand!

One-Armed Girl:
I found it… my handy-hand!

The girl presses the bloody end of the man’s arm up against her own scarred stump.

One-Armed Girl:
Oh… it won’t stay on. Why? Why? Why not?
One-Armed Girl:
Big sister, put it on for me…

Tia:
Hyaa! Aah…

Tia can’t even answer her.
All she can do is shake her head, tears pouring down her cheeks.

Kaim:
You can put it on nice and tight at home.

Kaim:
If you put it on in a hurry, it’ll fall off again.

One-Armed Girl:
Okaaay.

She replies brightly, then heads back to the line.

Tia:
Ah…

Kaim:
Get a hold of yourself.

I pat Tia’s head, but she doesn’t answer me.
All I can hear is her shaking breath and quiet whimpers.

The line of Wing Hunters disappears into the distance, and the onlookers disperse too.
All that’s left in the alleyway is a puddle of blood and an air of desolation.
And us.

Tia:
Nobody’s going to save them, are they?

**Kaim:** The Winged have been taken in.

**Tia:** But they were so badly beaten…

Tia says, her voice thick with tears.

**Kaim:** This was close to the worst I’ve ever seen.

**Kaim:** There are Winged who go along without a fight, even looking happy about it.

**Tia:** But why…

**Tia:** Everyone could have stopped them…
Kaim:
Then why didn’t you step up and do something yourself?

Kaim:
Or are you saying you’d make other people do something you won’t?

Tia looks despondent.

Kaim:
Just being close to a Winged is enough to spread the Feathering Sickness.

Kaim:
Say you did save a Winged…

Kaim:
If because of that, a friend of yours got sick, would you be able to forgive yourself?

Tia:
T-that’s…

Kaim:
The Wing Hunters’ way of doing things might be violent, but there’s a reason no one criticizes them.

Why am I taking the Wing Hunters’ side here?

It feels like the viewpoint I expressed back in Vinoleta has been switched with the Captain’s, and it makes me feel sick.

Kaim:
It’s best to leave the Winged to the Wing Hunters.

Kaim:
…well, you’re different, though.
Tia:
Thank you…

Tia somehow manages a smile.

Kaim:
Let’s go home.

Kaim:
Think you can eat anything?

Tia:
…I’ll try my best.

Tia:
If I don’t eat, I’ll be punished, after all.

What?

Tia’s bearing seems slightly different from usual.

She doesn’t feel like some kind of small animal, surreptitiously sizing me up.

I wonder if she’s had some kind of change in her mental state.

Tia:
Is something wrong?

Kaim:
No, don’t worry about it.

Tia:
You’re acting strange, Mr. Kaim.

Kaim:
…

Tia grabs on tightly to the cuff of my sleeve.
Something is definitely up.
But still, I can’t tell exactly what.

やはり何かがあるらしい。
だが、正体はわからない。
After the horrendous brothel raid, Tia and Kaim return home, very subdued. Tia makes Kaim some tea, and as he drinks she tells him that she has remembered the night of the murders, but can recall no details aside from that the murderer was a man and wore large boots. Kaim is disappointed, but continues to press.

Almost no new information.

To think my expectations were this far off-base…

Kaim:

The light… right, what about the light?

Kaim:

You saw it, right? The light the same color as the Tragedia.

Tia:

…I’m sorry.

Kaim:

新情報がほとんどない。

ここまで期待はずれとは。

「光……そう、光はどうだ？」

「《終わりの夕焼け》と同じ色の光を見ただろう」

「……すみません」

「隠してないだろうな」
You’re not hiding anything from me, are you?

Tia:
I really didn’t see anything, other than what I just told you.

Tia looks down.
It doesn’t seem like she’s lying.

Truth be told, watching people be ripped apart one after the other like that would be too much for a regular person.

Even if she did cover her eyes, I don’t feel like criticizing her for it.

And it’s hard to think that she might be covering for the culprit.

Kaim:
You can’t help not seeing it.

Tia:
I’m sorry I can’t be of any use…

Kaim:
No need to apologize.

Tia:
Okay…
The conversation trails off.

But I can feel Tia’s eyes on me, like she wants to say something.

Kaim:
What is it?

Tia:
Um… the truth is… there’s one more thing I need to apologize for.

「本当に見ていないんです、今お話したこと以外」
ティアが俯いた。
嘘をついているわけではなさそうだ。
実際、次々と人が殺されていく状況を直視し続けることなど、普通の人間には無理だ。
目を塞いでいたとしても責める気にはならない。
ティアが犯人をかばっているという線も考えにくいだろう。
「見てないものは仕方ない」
「ごめんなさい、役に立てなくて」
「謝る必要はない」
「はい……」
会話が途切れた。
だが、何か言いたげなティアの視線を感じる。
「どうした？」
「あの、実は……もう一つ謝らないくてはいけないことがある」
Kaim:
Go ahead, then.

Tia knits her eyebrows together, looking like she’s in pain.

Tia:
I… well… um…

Tia:
About that night… the truth is, I remembered right from the start.

Seems my intuition was spot-on about that, at least.

But I’m hardly going to tell her that.

I let out a big sigh, and decide to keep up the pretense that I was fooled.

Kaim:
Why did you pretend you’d forgotten?

Tia:
Because I knew that once I told you everything, you’d kick me out.

Tia:
I know that’s the only reason there could be to let someone like me stay in your home.

Kaim:
I see. So that’s why you didn’t say anything?

Tia:
Yes… I’m sorry for wasting your time.

Kaim:
No, it’s a natural decision to make.

Kaim:
「言ってみろ」

ティアが苦しそうに眉を歪ませる。

「わたし……あの……ええと……」

「あの夜のこと、初めから忘れてなんかいったんです」

俺の直感は当たっていたようだ。

だが口にするまでもあるまい。

一つ大きくため息をついて、騙されていた素振りをしておく。

「なんで忘れたらふりなんかしたんだ」

「すべて話したら、追い出されるって分かってましたから」

「わたちなんかを家に置く意味、それ以外にありますか」

「なるほど。だから言い出せなかったのか」

「はい、お手間を取らせてすみませんでした」

「いや、当然の判断だ」

「なかなかよく考えたじゃないか」
Seems like you thought it through pretty well.

**Tia:**
I’m sorry for lying to you.

**Kaim:**
I don’t really mind.

It’s not my place to blame her for it.

In order to loosen her lips, I’ve been pretending to be nice to her all this time, after all.

**Kaim:**
Actually, I’d argue that that’s more normal.

**Tia:**
Lying is…?

**Kaim:**
Yeah. What’s wrong with telling lies to stay alive?

**Tia:**
I don’t really understand that.

**Kaim:**
You’re an honest one, after all.

**Tia:**
Are you praising me?

**Kaim:**
Well, you know.

If I had to pick one or the other, it was sarcasm.

Tia’s honesty is a rare thing in the Prison, but it won’t get her anywhere at all.
If anything, it’ll shorten her lifespan.

Tia:
I’m glad.

Tia: To be praised by you, in the end.

The end, huh.

Since we’ve come this far, I’ll be kind to her until the second I hand her over to Sieg.

Kaim:
It’s not really the end.

Kaim:
We’ll talk to Sieg tomorrow about what to do now.

Tia:
That’s enough, Mr. Kaim.

むしろ寿命を縮めることになるだろう。

「よかったです」

最後か。

せっかくだ、ジークに引き渡すその瞬間までは優しくしておこう。

「別に最後じゃない」

「これからのことは、明日ジークと相談しよう」

「もういいんです、カイムさん」
She says it calmly.

**Kaim:**

Hm?

**Tia:**

I told you everything.

**Tia:**

There’s no value in being nice to me anymore.

**Kaim:**

Hey.

**Tia:**

I understand.

**Tia:**

You were being nice to me to get me to talk about the incident, right?

**Kaim:**

You’re imagining things.

Tia shakes her head fiercely.

**Tia:**

I overheard you.

**Tia:**

The first night I stayed at your house, I overheard everyone talking about what to do when this time came.

**Tia:**

So I more or less understood what was going to happen to me after I told you what happened that night.

**Kaim:**

I see…
Having been found out from the very beginning… it’s shameful.

Basically, we both knew the other was lying the whole time.

What a farce these few days with Tia have been.

Kaim:
Hypothetically… assuming your guess is right…

Kaim:
If you knew that it was the end for you once you talked, why would you spill the secret?

Tia:
Because…

Tia bites her lip.

Tia:
I didn’t want to be a bother to you, Mr. Kaim.

Kaim:
To me?

Tia:
If you shelter a Winged in your home, someday it’ll end up like what we saw today.

Tia:
I’m not someone worth protecting.

Tia:
I’m not even worth feeding the scraps you’d give a dog or cat.

Tia:
So, I thought I would let you know that I knew, and have it over with.

初めからばれていたとは、みっともない限りだ。

つまり、俺達は互いの嘘を知っていったということか。

本当に茶番だったんだな、ティアとの数日は。

「仮にお前の想像の通りだったとしてだ……」

「喋ったら終わりだと分かっていて、どうして打ち明けた？」

「それは……」

ティアが唇を噛んだ。

「カイムさんの、ご迷惑になりたくなかったんです」

「俺の？」

「羽つきが家にいたら、いつか今日みたいなことになります」

「わたしは守ってもらうほど価値のある人間じゃありません」

「犬猫と同じ食事ももらえなかった女です」

「だからもう、知っていることはお伝えして、終わりにしようと思ったんです」
Tia speaks falteringly.
For some reason, I get irritated.

**Kaim:**
What is it with this nonsensical self-sacrificing streak of yours? Are you aiming to become a nun or something?

**Tia:**
I don’t know.

**Tia:**
I’m stupid, so I don’t understand complicated things like that.

**Tia:**
But you said it yourself, Mr. Kaim.

**Tia:**
If someone became Winged because of you, could you forgive yourself?

**Tia:**
I couldn’t.

**Kaim:**
I’m talking about people important to you. We all lied to you!

**Tia:**
Even so, you were kind to me.

**Kaim:**
Like I said, that…

**Tia:**
That’s enough already!

Tia cuts me off.
Tia:

Please… just stop already…

Is she angry we lied to her? 騙されたことを怒っているのか。

No, she knew what we were doing since the start. いや、俺が騙しにかかるのは初めから知っていたはずだ。

Is she angry at me, for keeping up the charade even after everything was revealed? ばれていることにも気づかず、臆面もなく演技し続けた俺に怒っているのか?

Would she worry about being a bother to a man like that? なら、そんな男に迷惑をかけたくないなどと考えるだろうか?

Not likely. In fact, all the more reason not to feel guilty about it. むしろ利用するのに気が咎めなくていいではないか。

Don’t tell me she’s actually fallen for me? まさか、本気で俺に惚れて?

Not possible. ありえない。

Even though she knew from the start I was lying to her. 騙してくるのが初めから分かっているのに。

I have no idea what she’s thinking— ティアの考えていることがわかられない—
The heart I thought I could read so easily is covered over with black mist.

Yeah, I know this feeling.

The feeling when you part with a woman you’ve grown familiar with.

Someone you thought you’d always understand changes suddenly and completely into an entirely different person, in one single stark instant.

It’s a kind of piling up of emotions that only happens inside women’s hearts.

That’s a fort that no man will ever capture.

I didn’t expect Tia to be feminine in this particular way.

Tia:
I’ve told you everything I can.

Tia:
So I can’t be of any more use to you… I’m like a kept bird that won’t sing anymore.

Tia:
Let’s just have it over with.

Kaim:
And what will you do once it’s over with? Go turn yourself in to the Hunters?

Tia:
I’m afraid of the Wing Hunters, so I’ll go somewhere else.

Kaim:
I’m asking you where you think that is.

今まで、明瞭に見えていた心の裡
が、黒い霧に覆われている。

ああ、この感じは知っている。

馴染んでいた女と別れる時の、あの感じ。

ずっと通じ合っていると考えていった人間が、突然理解不能の別人へと変わる、一瞬の鮮烈な切り替え。

女の中だけで完結した感情の積み重ね。

それは、男には攻略できない堅牢な砦だ。

こんなところで、ティアに女を感じるとは思いもよらなかった。

「話せることは全部話しました」

「だからもう、わたしは役に立たない……唄えなくなった小鳥と同じです」

「終わりにしましょう」

「終わりにしてどうする？羽狩りの詰め所にでも行くのか？」

「羽狩りさんは怖いので、どこか違うところに行きます」

「だからどこに行くんだ？」
**Kaim:**
Someone like you wandering around this place? You’ll be nothing but an easy target for the backalley thugs.

**Tia:**
I’m used to having bad things happen to me, so.

**Kaim:**
Are you an idiot?!

**Tia:**
I am an idiot.

**Tia:**
I’ve told you plenty of times that I am, haven’t I…

Tia’s voice thickens.

Her hands in her lap clench and unclench the hem of her skirt, almost matching the rhythm of her breath.

I can’t say the words I should.

**Tia:**
…I’m an idiot.
Tia: So please, don’t bother yourself any further with a woman like me…

Tia stands up.

Kaim: Hey… ugh!

I try to stand up, and instead, my knees hit the floor.

My body feels heavy.

What is this?

What’s going on?

Kaim: ...

Tia: I’m sorry.

A medicine sachet falls from Tia’s closed hand.

「だからもう、わたしみたいな女は構わんでください」

ティアが立ち上がる。

「おいっ」

追いすがろうとして、俺は床に膝をついた。

身体が重い。

どうした？

何が起こってる？

「……」

「すみません」

ティアの手から、薬包紙が落ちる。
Kaim:
You...

Tia:
This afternoon, I snuck it from Ms. Eris’s medicine chest.

Tia:
I didn’t know how much to put in, so... I put it all.

Tia:
But, it said ‘sleeping medicine’ on the bag, so it’ll be alright, right?

If she got the dosage wrong, I’m dead.

This girl is truly an idiot.

I don’t know what she plans to do on her own.

Kaim:
You... idiot...

Tia smiles faintly.

「……お前..........」

「昼間に、エリスさんの薬箱からこっそり盗っておいたんです」

「分量が分からないので、全部入れてしまいました」

「でも、眠り薬って書いてありますから、きっと大丈夫ですよね」

「でも、眠り薬って書いてありますから、きっと大丈夫ですよね」

量を間違えれば死ぬ。

とことん馬鹿だこいつは。

一人じゃ、何をやらかすかわからない。

「馬鹿……が……」

ティアが儚げに笑う。
Tia:
I’ve been wanting to say it this whole time, but you shouldn’t call people ‘idiot’ or ‘moron’.

Tia:
I really am an idiot, so it’s okay with me, but other people aren’t, so…

Kaim:
Sh… shut up.

A tingling haze is starting to spread through my whole body.

Tia:
Mr. Kaim, thank you for taking care of me.

Kaim:
Ti…a…

Tia:
Farewell…

Tia:
Even if we were lying, it felt kind of like we were lovers, and I was very happy…

「ずっと言おうと思ってたんですが、人のこと馬鹿とかあほとか言っちゃ駄目です」

「わたしは本当に馬鹿だからいいけど、他の人はそうじゃないので」

「う……うるさい」

しびれが、身体に拡がっていく。

「カイムさん、お世話になりました」

「……ティ、ア……」

「さようなら」

「嘘でも恋人みたいなことができて、すごく嬉しかったです」
Tia, having drugged Kaim, has left his house, but unexpectedly, she runs into Captain Fione of the Wing Hunters, who recognizes her but does not see her wings; Fione attempts to bring her home, but Tia, alone and terrified, flees into the rat’s nest of alleyways that make up the central Prison as the rain begins to fall. Meanwhile, Eris brings Kaim back to consciousness and informs him that Tia has run off. As Tia is captured by the Wing Hunters, Kaim, unable to sit still, heads out into the storm to find her.

Eris:
Here it comes.

Eris, standing by the window, whispers to herself.

Eris:
When it rains, the Prison turns into a giant bucket full of mud.
I take a look outside.
The rain is so heavy, you almost can’t see the lights from the other houses.

The darkness continues on endlessly.

In this rain, clothes will stick and wings will be easier to see.

If she can’t find a roof to stay under, the rain will steal away her strength, too.

What an unfortunate woman.

Not even an instant of respite for her.

Eris:
Why don’t you go look for her?

Eris:
She’s probably shivering with cold right now.

Eris’s words make my irritation swell.

It’s not out of concern for Tia’s bodily condition.

Rather, if she dies, I’ll never get this bone that’s stuck in my throat out.

Still, it would be equivalent to sticking my neck out for the Wing Hunters to step on.

Really, there’s very little reason to save Tia.

It’s her own damn foolishness that brought her to this, anyway.

Kaim:
I don’t have anything to do with her anymore.

Eris:
Then you won’t be needing this, will you?
Eris shows me a piece of paper in her hand.

**Kaim:**
What is that?

**Eris:**
A letter from a woman you have nothing to do with anymore.

**Eris:**
Shall I throw it away?

Saying nothing, I walk over to Eris and take the letter.

Seeing my expression, Eris raises an eyebrow.

There are two folded pieces of paper inside. The handwriting is absolute shit.

**Tia:**
Mr. Kaim, though it was only for a short time, thank you for looking after me.

『カイムさん。短い間でしたけどお世話になりました』
Tia:
It was very much fun.

Tia:
Please don’t worry about me.

Tia:
In a certain dream I have sometimes, someone always tells me:

Tia:
‘There is a reason you were born.’

Tia:
‘Someday, you are fated to fulfill a great mission,’ they say.

Tia:
That’s why, no matter how hard it might be, I’ll push on and keep living.

Tia:
Please take care of yourself and do your best to live on, too, Mr. Kaim.

Tia:
Oh, and please try to get along with Ms. Eris.

Tia:
That’s all.

I crumple the letter in my fist.

Eris:
Let me read it.

Kaim:
...

I hand the letter to Eris without a word.

She skims over it quickly, then looks back to me.
I don’t get the feeling she bothered reading it.

Eris lets out a sigh, then starts trying to uncrumple the paper.

She puts the two sheets back on the table.

**Eris:**
Well then, shall we get along?

**Kaim:**
Some other time, okay?

**Eris:**
Something in there bothering you?

**Eris:**
Even though the contents sound like a fantasy.

**Kaim:**
Perceptive, aren’t you?

**Eris:**
Enough to make you this touchy?

**Kaim:**
I’m not being touchy.

I pour some wine into my glass and slug it in one go.

**Kaim:**
Fated, huh…

If such a thing exists, then—
All those people who were dragged down to hell that day, what of them?

Were they born just to die like that?

As if to shake away the vision, I take another gulp of wine.

Fate is nothing but a human invention.

When terrible things happen, people cling to the idea just to help them get by.

I don’t think it’s a bad thing. Rather, I think that in this world, it’s all but necessary to survive.

Tia acting like she’s been directly told that fate is a real thing strangely irritates me.

**Eris:**

She has to believe in fate or something, or she would never have made it this far, you know.

あの日、下界へと吸いこまれていった奴らは、なんだったんだ？

死ぬために生まれてきたというのか？

幻を振り払うように、俺はまたワインを呷る。

運命なんてものは、所詮、人の心が作り出した幻影。

嫌な経験をした時、運命だったと思ったって諦めるのはよくある話だ。

それが悪いことだとは思わないし、こんな世界で生きていくには、むしろ必要なことだとも思う。

それを実在するかのように語るティアが、妙に腹立たしい。

「これは運命だとも思わないや、やってこれなかったってことでしょう」
Kaim:
I know that.

Kaim:
But Tia’s just refusing to see the misfortune waiting for her in the future.

Kaim:
I hate that idiocy of hers.

Eris:
You get mad over the strangest things.

She sighs.

Eris:
Well, even for a fantasy, this girl’s going too far with it.

Eris:
Pretending she’s someone important because of a dream she had.

Kaim:
"それはわかってる"

「だが、ティアは未来の不幸から目を逸らしてるだけだ」

「その頭の悪さが気に入らない」

「面倒な怒り方」

「ま、夢見がちっていっても、この子は行き過ぎてる」

「ま、夢見がちっていっても、この子は行き過ぎてる」

「夢の中で、自分のことを他者に語らせるくらいだ」

「便利な夢だ」
What convenient dreams.

**Kaim:**
She even claimed she saw the Gran Forte in one.

**Eris:**
That’s too much.

A flicker of doubt crosses my mind.

Why did I pick up Tia in the first place?

To find out what that light she was radiating was all about.

A human being shining with light is already crazy talk by itself.

Is it really reasonable to just discard Tia’s dream of the Gran Forte, then?

The light shining from her body was the same color as the Tragedia that appeared right before the Gran Forte.

**Kaim:**

...  

I stand up.

The interaction of the medicine and the alcohol makes my footsteps unsteady.

**Eris:**

That’s why I told you to stop drinking.

**Kaim:**

Bring me my coat.

**Kaim:**

There’s something I want to ask her.
Eris’s eyes go wide, and she looks shocked.

**Eris:**
After all that time saying you wouldn’t go help her, now you feel sorry for her?

**Eris:**
You could have been honest from the start…

**Kaim:**
That’s not it.

**Kaim:**
Think back.

**Kaim:**
When I picked her up, I told you I’d seen a light, right?

**Eris:**
You said it was the same color as the Tragedia.

**Kaim:**
Humans aren’t supposed to glow, but Tia was.

**Kaim:**
That glowing woman has dreams of the Gran Forte.

**Eris:**
So you think she knows something about it?

**Kaim:**
Yeah.

**Eris:**
I see.
Eris has clearly already lost interest.

**Eris:**
So basically, you want to go save her.

**Kaim:**
That’s not what I said.

**Eris:**
You’re acting strangely. This isn’t your usual level-headedness.

**Eris:**
It’s common sense – people don’t glow.

**Eris:**
Therefore, the light you saw was an illusion or a hallucination, nothing more.

**Eris:**
You’re only seeing what you want to be true.

**Kaim:**
I saw it myself! Why would I doubt my own eyes?
Eris:
I hear the same from every drug-addled girl in the district, you know.
I ignore Eris and grab my coat from the wall.

Eris:
I’m opposing this, for the record.

Eris:
You shouldn’t go near the Winged without a good reason.

Eris:
I don’t see why this means so much to you.

Kaim:
I won’t cause any trouble for you all.

Eris:
I’m not talking about trouble for us, I’m talking about trouble for you!

Kaim:

「麻薬中毒の子もよく同じこと言うけど」
エリスを無視して、俺は壁の外套を掴む。
「私、反対」
「理由もなく羽つきを近くに置かないで」
「カメムに何があるかわからない」
「周りに迷惑はかけない」
「周りの話なんかしてない、カメム本人のこと」
「なら、俺が決めるすことだ」
Then it’s my business to decide!

I dig my heels in.

Eris has a point, but I don’t want to give ground.

If I agree that the light was a hallucination and doubt what I saw, what then?

I saw what I saw.

That’s all there is to it.

Twisting things you saw to fit your expectations.

Pretending you didn’t see anything you didn’t want to.

It was nothing as base as that.

I’ve spent my life crawling around in the mud of the Prison.

It’s nothing to boast about, but at the very least it should be proof that I’m a practical person.

Kaim:

Sorry.

I put on my overcoat.

It’s a real downpour outside.

Eris:

I pray you don’t find her.

Kaim:

I’m not coming back until I do.

With my coat on, I melt into the rain-soaked darkness.
After being attacked by a vagrant, Tia is rescued, then taken into custody by the Wing Hunters. Kaim, masked and hot on their trail, is significantly delayed trading blows with Captain Fione, who sends her subordinates on ahead to get Tia to the Wing Hunters’ duty station. As Kaim gives Fione the slip, though, he realizes that someone else is tracking Tia as well – the shadowy, inhumanly strong figure that butchered the girls in the alleyway, and nearly killed him as it escaped.

I turn a corner.

In an instant, the thread of hope I’d been relying on snaps.

There’s a Wing Hunter corpse at my feet.

It’s that hook-nosed bastard.

**Kaim:**

Shit…!

Both of the Wing Hunters are dead.
That leaves...

At the thought of losing her trail, my heart rate quickens.

The image of her torn to shreds in the gutter keeps coming back to me, no matter how many times I shake it away.

Tia... please be safe.

Stealthily, I move forward.

Even so, my own footsteps ring loud in my ears.

My entire body thrums with enough tension that I want to scream.

Kaim:

...!

In the darkness ahead, there’s a person’s shape.

A softly shaped body, curled up and leaning against a wall.

Her face is peaceful.

Her eyes, filled with warmth, look up at me.
Tia: 「......イム、さ......ん......」

Mr. Kaim... Kaim: 「ティア」

Tia! Thank god. Relief fills me from the bottom of my heart. Just then, A beam of moonlight spills through a gap in the clouds. There’s a long, deep, rending wound in her side, from her shoulder to her hip. Fresh blood is flowing from the wound, and it glitters in the moonlight. In the colorless, grey night, it’s a sight I could even call beautiful.

Kaim: 「ティアっ!」

Tia!
I rush to her and cradle her in my arms.

No matter how many times I call her name, she doesn’t respond.

Her pulse is already gone, and her body heat is quickly fading.

Shit…! Someone save her…!

**Kaim:**

Tia! Hey! Hey!

I need to stop the bleeding.

But this wound is huge.

Blood is all but gushing from it.

**Kaim:**

Tia… Tia… Tia!

I shake her body, and her head lolls bonelessly back and forth.
Kaim:

Tia… hey… come on!

The flow of blood is weakening.

Probably, all that could have come out already has.

I understand.

What I’m holding to my chest…

Is Tia’s corpse.

For a while, my mind goes blank.

The only thing audible through the haze in my head is the roar of my heartbeat in my ears.

The first feeling that comes over me isn’t sadness, or even grief.

‘I never thought she could die.’

It’s surprise.

I only realized it after she was gone.

I never thought she could actually die.

No matter what cruelty she experienced, some part of me thought she’d just flounce her way through it.

That carelessness killed Tia, I’m sure.

As regret fills me, a nameless black feeling swells up inside me as well.

Serves you right.

There was no meaning to your life after all.

「ティア……おい……おい……」

出血が弱くなった。

出るものはあらかた出てしまったのだろう。

わかっている。

俺の腕の中にあるのは、

ティアの死体だ。

しばらくの間、頭が働かない。

茫漠とした意識の上に自分の鼓動だけが響いていた。

初めにやってきた感情は、嘆きでも悲しみでもない。

『まさか、こいつが死ぬとは』

という意外さだった。

失って初めて気がつく。

俺は、こいつが本当に死ぬとは思っていなかった。

酷い目に遭っても、ヘラヘラと乗り切ってくれるとどこかで思っていたのだ。

その油断がティアを殺したのだろうか。

悔恨の情と同時に、何故か暗い感情がどこからともなくやってきた。

——ざまない。

——生まれてきた意味など、なかったじゃないか。
It’s a feeling I never knew I had, coming from who knows where.

Before I even have time to deny it, it disappears.

The girl called Tia really is a mystery.

To bring up emotions I’ve never felt before…

This girl might have been something important to me.

Kaim:

…

I look at the corpse’s face again.

She looks peaceful, and there’s a faint smile on her lips.

In her last moments, she was smiling.

If only I had come sooner—

I wish she had scolded me for being late.

Instead, Tia, slowly cooling, smiles a beatific, merciful smile.

It wasn’t my fault, she seems to be saying.

That’s what she’s saying, without knowing just how much pain those words cause me.

It would be so much easier if she reproached me.

自分のどこから来たのかかもわから

ない、全くあずかり知らぬ感情だ。

否定する間もなく、それは一瞬で

消えた。

ティアという女は本当に謎だ。

今まで感じもしなかったことを、

俺の心に浮かびあがらせる。

こいつは、もしかしたら俺にとっ

て何か大切なものを持っていたの

かもしれない。

「……」

改めて死に顔を見る。

穏やかで、口元には微笑さえ浮か

んでいた。

最期の瞬間、こいつは笑ったの

だ。

もっと早く来てくれれば—

そう非難してくれたら、どれほど

楽だったか。

だが、冷たくなっていくティア

は、慈愛に溢れた聖女のような佇

まいで微笑んでいる。

俺は悪くない、そう言ってくれて

いるかのようだ。

俺は悪いな、そう言ってくれて

いるかのようだ。

その言葉が、俺をより苦しめると

ても知らずに。

責められた方が楽なこともある。
Thinking back, she never once had.

She just smiled like an idiot, never once seeing anything as mean-spirited.

You could call it stupidity if you wanted, or you could call it purity.

No matter which you went with, Tia had been an unusually good person.

When they’re close to a strong sense of purity like that, it tends to make people realize the evil in their own hearts.

Comparing themselves to her, they feel their own shame and impurity more deeply than ever before.

In that sense, Tia was like a mirror, I guess.

A few hours ago, when Tia had vanished, I’d felt gloomy.

I’d looked in the mirror and found something dissatisfying about myself, hadn’t I?

My corruption, my twistedness, all my lies...

Whatever it was, I’ll never know.

Kaim:

Goddamnit...

I’m not sad.

I just feel a sense of loss, like I’ve let something important fall.

I wonder if I’ll ever be able to pick it up again.

Impossible.
The wound Tia left me with is small.

In a few days, it’ll scab over, and a few more days after that it will be healed, without even a mark left to show where it once was.

Even while I remember the woman named Tia, the pain I feel right now will fade.

Whether that’s strength or mere stubbornness I don’t know, but right now, I feel slightly empty inside.

**Kaim:**

…

I touch her cheek, and dab away a drop of blood there.

Her temperature is dropping, and her skin is starting to tighten.

Nothing more than a corpse.

I touch a finger to her lips.

I stroke her nose, her brow, her cheek, and then her head.

She was truly an annoying girl.

My life had gotten so busy just having her around.

Even her stupid smile, in my memory, is nostalgic.

It’s absurd.

Tia’s life was just too cruel.

Now she’ll never know what her purpose in life was, will she?
Kaim:
Tia…

I order her bloodied, torn clothes.

Doing so, I notice that she’s tightly grasping something in her right hand.

I use a single finger to gently open her thin, doll-like fingers.

Kaim:

…

She had been clasping the necklace I bought for her.

To think she’d treat a cheap trinket like that so dearly…

‘It’s not a cheap trinket.’

It’s as if I could hear her saying that right then.

I take the necklace from her hand.

I fix the broken link with my teeth, and put it around her neck once again.

Kaim:

Now there’s a fine woman.

If only she was still alive, I’d have bought her more.

If she was okay with things like that, I’d buy her mountains of them.

Kaim:

「ティア……」

ボロボロになってしまった服を整えてやる。

ふと、ティアの右手が堅く握られれているのに気がついた。

人形のように小さな手を両手で包み、優しく指を開かせる。

「……」

握られていたのは、俺が買い与えた首飾りだった。

こんな安物を大事に抱えているとはな。

『安物じゃありません』

そんな声が聞こえるかのようだった。

ティアの手から首飾りを取る。

壊れた鎖を歯で噛んで補修し、もう一度首にかせてやる。

「なかなかいい女だ」

生まれてさえいれば、もっと買ってやれたのに。

こんなもので良ければ、いくらでも。
As I narrow my eyes, Tia’s body starts to glow.

**Kaim:**

?  
Light…  
…  
…

**Kaim:**  
It can’t be…  
This isn’t a hallucination.  
She really is glowing.  
And that color…  
Just before the Gran Forte,  
Four days ago,  
And just now.
Twice before this light has thrown my life out of order, and here it is again.

**Kaim:**
Wha…

The wound that had split Tia’s chest open begins to close.

Just as if time was flowing backwards.

Thump-thump.

Beneath the stitched-together flesh, the sound of life begins to beat.

Tia’s body feels warm.

Was she not dead?

No… she was definitely dead.

Assuming I’m not dreaming, then…
Then Tia…

Has just come back to life.

I can’t see the wound on her chest anymore.

As if the fatal wound had been nothing but a joke, her body has returned to soft, feminine curves.

**Kaim:**

This… isn’t possible…

There’s no way.

There’s no way this could be happening.

Who the hell is this girl?!

Before my shocked eyes,

Her lips, flushed again with pink, move ever so slightly.

**Tia:**

Mr. … Kaim…

ティアは、

蘇生したのだ。

胸の傷はもう見当たらない。

致命傷を負ったことが冗談であったかのように、そこは女らしい曲線に戻っていた。

「馬鹿な……こんなこと……」

あり得ない。

あり得るわけがない。

こいつは一体、何者なんだ！?

驚愕にほぼ頭を乗っ取られた俺の眼前、

桜色を取り戻した唇が、僅かに動く。

「……カイム……さん……」
WORKS CITED

Primary

Secondary


Miyamoto Naoki 宮本直毅、「「オーガスト」がブランドデビュー」”*Ōgasuto ga burando debyū.” 『エロゲー文化研究概論』Erogē bunka kenkyū gairon. 総合科学出版 sōgō kagaku shuppan、2013 年.


212