

#Erik van Mechelen's Bound Submission

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##Defying Entropy

In a sentence

Jinn is a librarian of libraries on Saturn's ice moon who refuses to hand over a rare book to an enforcer of Organization Entropy and is pulled into a ongoing struggle to erode the regime's grip on this corner of the galaxy and its history.

The story

Jinn's daily duties in cataloguing libraries on the galaxy's fringe is interrupted by a teenager demanding to see records of the Second Consolidation (a process by which similar or metaphorically alike stories were collected and consolidated one hundred forty-two years prior) in a volume secretly known as *Lonely Wings*, a request that Jinn must report in accordance with Entropy Law. But she decides not to.

Why? Because her husband has only two days ago disappeared with her child leaving nothing but a cryptic note. On top of this, the secret records she's kept for the last thirteen years while working her way up the library ranks are starting to suggest something is amiss.

The teenager leaves and warns someone will be coming to ask for it soon after (this turns out to be an enforcer of Organization

Entropy).

When an enforcer of Organization Entropy arrives, Jinn evades him but is intercepted by the same teenager who warned her of the enforcer's imminent arrival. This boy with the purple hair turns out to be working for a mercenary group hired by certain rebel factions defying Organization Entropy's hidden goal of removing all stories competing with their rise to semi-galactic power.

As an ambitious librarian, seeker of truth, and adept escape artist, Jinn might be a worthwhile member of their team. The teenager also shares the awful news that Jinn's husband and child have been abducted by Organization Entropy (or so it seems...we will later see her husband is working for them).

Jinn is doubtful, but for the moment it is clear she will be a wanted woman for her actions going counter to the enforcer's wishes and the law (and the possibility that inquiry into her case will show thirteen years of clandestine record-keeping).

Jinn decides to go with the boy with the purple hair. Their immediate task is to sever *Lonely Wings* from this library's records and take the book with them. It is dangerous and will probably remove any chance of Jinn returning to work in this department, but enough clues are converging for her to take the risk.

The story will bring Jinn to corners of this ice moon and other moons, to discover the origins of her line of ancestors, and the real reason Organization Entropy desired *Lonely Wings*.

With training and a team, Jinn will help various mercenary groups erode into Organization Entropy's power grip on this ice moon and dig ever deeper into the hidden truth of Organization Entropy's rise to galactic domination...secrets Organization Entropy very much aims to protect.

Stories, whether stored digitally or in ice or stone, are currency. Jinn will team with ice scribes remolding important stories, space

pirates disrupting Organization Entropy's supply lines, and with fellow renegade librarians to uncover the mysteries held deep in the very libraries they've been tasked to oversee.

The question is, where will Jinn's loyalties lie when she must finally confront her husband and the totalitarian system he supports?

Chapter 1: Lonely Wings

Jinn refrained from slamming her hand against the pile of books on her desk. *I need more information. Two people asking for the same book in the same day?* "You do realize you're asking me to break the law, right?"

The man, moments before so strong and menacing, slightly lowered his weapon and his voice. He rubbed his mustache. "Can't you just--?"

An opening. "No, I can't *just* anything." Jinn looked away, holding out her hand above the snack jar. "You're going to have to show me some identification." Jinn didn't know where she found the courage and nearly smirked considering how much she sounded like the hero-criminal in *Catch Me If You Can*, an oldie from her great great grandma's day. "And please," she added, wrinkling her nose, "would you mind getting this rod out of my face."

Somehow her raised eyebrows and the apostrophe of her lip were convincing. The man lowered the silver-colored rod an inch further, stopped for consideration, then dropped it all the way to his side. *Finally*. Jinn had heard stories about what the nerve-nullifiers could do and wasn't interested in finding out the truth on *that* matter. As for this obtrusive officer...

The man's cracked lips formed a wave as if he was chewing on something unnatural. "I'll get you my identification. Same one that gained me access to these here archives." He eyed her from the shadow of his buret, "then my employer will require you give me the book."

This man was a government type. His post seemed awfully strange. His

request stranger. *Lonely Wings* had only just been returned that afternoon, sliding down the silver chute of *her* library! The rarest book in the Northwest, the chances of it being here were a thousand to one *against*, but probably worse than that since Jinn wasn't ever lucky.

This situation was case in point. A rare book she'd only dreamed of reading shows up on her doorstep. But just as she set to feast her eyes on it and who should show up?

First that sullen teenager with purple hair falling over his oversized ice suit. Jinn had perfunctorily turned him away. But he had *warned* her someone would come after him. For it. For *Lonely Wings*.

And here he was: the enforcement officer. Like, really? The good news was he had as little right to read the book as anyone: the waiting list was over two hundred years long.

Jinn plucked a peanut-coated chocolate from the snack jar and popped it in her mouth. She picked up the jar, shaped like a book, and presented it to the man.

"Oh, no thank you," he said, still digging in his uniform's inner pockets for ID.

"You know what I'm going to say next, right?" laughed Jinn. If what she'd learned convincing thousands of readers to try books they'd never dreamed of trying, a little self-congratulatory humor couldn't hurt. She'd already avoided immediate death. A good start to any scene.

"Yeah...you insist?" smiled the officer, though not kindly.

Jinn's eyes said *go ahead, take one*.

The officer's expression grew concerned.

"Can't find your book?" asked Jinn.

Can't find your badge?" asked Jinn.

"No, it's just I can't help but feel you're trying to sweeten me up. For what reason I can't fathom. You're going to give me the book whether you like it or not." The man paused his badge search and reached for a chocolate.

Jinn pulled the jar just out of reach. "Not so fast, Officer...?"

"You don't need to know my name," he said. Jinn noticed the man fidgeting with his nullifier, that insidious rod.

"Just thought as a matter of courtesy," said Jinn nonchalantly.

A buzzer went off three times inside the officer's uniform. It startled both of them. "Right," said the officer. "I mean wrong, there's no time for pleasantries, I'm afraid."

"Well *I'm* requiring them," said Jinn, "as the librarian of this branch." She didn't need that rod inches from her nose again.

"Fine," said the officer. "I'm Officer Spat, and by order of the Enforcers under the Northwest's Flyer Unit, I'm ordering this book be checked out under the Enforcer's Flyer Unit account. I believe everything was set up earlier today."

"I'm not sure you understand how this works--" started Jinn, immediately regretting her tone.

"I'm not sure *you* even understand what's happening," said Spat. "I'm checking out the blasted book!" The officer raised his rod and stretched it mere whiskers away from Jinn's delicate nose.

"You're breaking the law," said Jinn, poised despite sweat on her hands. The chocolate she'd covertly taken from the jar when she'd offered it to Spat began to melt in her hand. *That won't do.*

Jinn put on her sternest yet caring expression. "And you're cutting a two-hundred-year waiting list. You know it costs fifty thousand surru

two hundred year waiting list. You know it costs fifty thousand gals just to *be* on the list, right?"

"You will hand over the book now, Miss."

Jinn slammed her fist on the desk, breaking the chocolate. Book dust spit out in a cloud, surrounding them. Jinn opened a hatch in the floor under her desk and made her escape.

She had to see about a book.

##The Price of Acquisition

A single sentence

Jem searches the sand canyons of Trendera for exotic metals and his daughter as he evades both the grasp of conglomerate bounty hunters paid to eliminate black market merchants like himself and the clutches of the planet itself as it comes alive.

The story

For this one, the opening scene is self-explanatory of setting, character, and motivation (not to mention conflict and beginnings of plot).

Transmission 24.117

Jem played through the artifact while he waited nervously to set the trip-lines.

Legend had it a civilization of sentient machines met its fate here, self-combusted, collapsed into the desert. All that remained was trace metal, atom of their shadow--less than memory. Even the rust had gone to dust.

At a thought, Jem moved the artifact focus to the planet's details...

Mining. 90% of the planet's GDP went to securing and importing its

fresh water needs. It had once been owned by the multi-solar system conglomerate commodity merchant. But that was over 400 years prior, before the Second Interstellar Tribulation and the pursuant Great Credit Upheaval...

After the collapse the entire region of space had been picked apart by creditors and scavengers alike. Technically, it was disputed territory in at least 11 nearby legal jurisdictions. Lost amid the clamour, the globe had fallen into a state of backwater...

It continued to scrape by due to the abundance of 'rare' and 'exotic' metals (locally, laughable terms given their abundance), haphazardly riding the boom and bust of subsequent technological fads elsewhere in the galaxy, each manufacturer calling for a new exotic metal, fortunes won and lost atop the age-old occupations of bootstrap and elbow grease.

Jem cut the artifact's playback.

The microcomputer was an ICM Salient model Zg Inject. Jem called her Sil. Like a window sill, a window to this world and others. Rather mundane in computing specs, she more than made up her shortcomings in portability: She measured 1x0.5x.01 millimeters in size and was embedded in a bio interface only twice that, which powered the diminutive computer by metabolizing glucose and oxygen from the bloodstream.

“How you holding up?” Jem tapped his temple, aware now of the course of his pulse. He felt for the lump he thought should be there near the tiny, day-old incision. He located it momentarily.

Among her many signal-processing and communication components, the computer comported a transponder ranged just long enough to signal its receiver planted in his back molar. Inaudible to all but its bearer, the microphone eschewed the air waves in favor of vibrating the jaw en route to the ear drum.

“Snugger than a bug in a rug,” Sil’s feminine, sumptuous voice

crackled back over the intracom. "I'm just worried about you." Jem shook his head, grinning his response as he looked over the lip of this minor canyon overlooking the eddie they sought.

At that moment the wind also bared its teeth. Jem let out an unwitting yelp and ducked his head as the desert's metals-rich sand was flung all around him. He stumbled, static roaring in his ears, as the gust ripped him off-balance. Static flooded into the connection as the metals-rich sand swirled.

As the gust receded Jem honored its memory by steeling himself against the larger sandwhirl the gust had tipped off, tightening his helmet's hood and replacing his sweat-rimmed goggles.

Sil, sensing a spike in his blood's adrenaline levels via her bio interface, near-instantaneously convinced the suit to preemptively open ventilation slats on the leeward side in anticipation of a rise in his body temperature. As a result, Jem was steeled against the sandwhirl without breaking a sweat. The suit was of course equipped with standard acclimatization routines but by definition these were reactionary at best. Having a woman's persuasion on his side was taking things to the next level.

She's as surefire as ever, he thought. *I could get used to this.* With a pang of guilt, Jem glanced down at the empty slot in his suit's wrist bracer, which had housed his main computer until just the day before. Despite its rugged craftsmanship, it had never been exposed to conditions quite like this, and Jem had eventually seen the light of reason. But it hadn't been easy. The grit of the desert was giving it a beating.

Convincing himself to relocate his computer had been nothing short of an all-out sentimental uphill war--his inner rebel still deemed talking to one's wrist far more suave than rambling to thin air-- yet he eventually acknowledged the histrionics of insisting on form over function at a time like this; and had bowed to the wisdom of the swap: His body's instincts regarding its own computational heart would protect them both. He begrudgingly congratulated his mature

side on a sound decision.

"How's our little experiment going? And what about the trip lines...anyone following us?"

"I'm completely blind. This sand is infuriating. Whites out any signal beyond 200 meters. I've been trying to program a solution whereby...but there are just too many reflections. Over a kilometer and I can't detect a signal, let alone try and decipher its intent." Sil silenced herself as she often did when preparing a metaphor. "You might as well search a diffuse surface for your own image."

Jem nodded. *Like searching a desert with a fine-toothed comb.* The last-minute detour to swap computers had introduced certain risks. Whether the operation was worth the risk of leaving a trail would play out very soon.

Entering the fringe town made them more traceable, made stopping to set trip lines necessary. Gem put his detect mode into low-profile-radar. Transmission signaled the hunted, and likely the hunter as well, of the latter's presence.

Jem looked over the turn of the canyon. "Eddies cascading tumults of sand over the canyon walls, outlining eddies' ghostly twirling bodies. Eerie. Malevolent. These are words that come to mind."

And for his own thoughts only: *This planet is taking on a life of its own.*

##Fabric of Peace

In a sentence

After his life is saved by a Chadian boy with the ability to sew fabrics with unusual properties, Geoff recruits the youth to sew threads of peace in other conflict-laden regions of the world where Geoff's oil connections give them access.

The story

This is a action-fantasy story about an emerging hero (Theo) and his sidekick-mentor (Geoff) who play a small part in resolving some of modern history's toughest geopolitical conflicts in the 1980s.

Geoff is a late-30s trained geophysicist on his first exploration tour with a major oil company Chad. Although he works for a powerful oil company, he empathizes with the locals and the potential negative effects of energy production on the environment and local economy (he has roots in radical movements in the 1960s).

Theo (12) is Geoff's houseboy and a local, born and raised in N'Djamena, Chad. His parents (rebels) have fought the government almost all his life. Theo takes odd jobs to support his brothers and sisters.

Geoff has bought Theo a sewing machine after the boy expressed his dream to become a tailor and support his family.

Little do they know, a civil war is about to break out again.

When Theo saves Geoff's life from a sniper bullet, Geoff inquires further, learning Theo has the ability to sew impenetrable barriers with mere fabric.

At first, Geoff cannot square this fact with what he knows about the material sciences. But seeing that Theo has saved Geoff by defying even his own family (who are part of the rebel group militarily engaging the government), Geoff finds a spark of nostalgia from his radical days supporting anti-establishment movements from Cuba to Vietnam.

Theo has been banished by his family for his actions. Geoff suggests Theo come with him to meet some old friends.

Geoff brings Theo to Amsterdam, where a fledgling underground movement that began with the surrealists in Paris still holds regular meetings. After showing the group what he can do, Theo begins

meetings. After showing the group what he can do, Theo begins training with the group's resident fabric master.

Meeting *his* tribe and like-minded people, Geoff breathes in the idealistic possibilities of removing major violent conflict from the world. He is convinced by the group that his connections to big oil will gain them necessary coverage and access to key conflict areas (oil companies always seem to be involved in high-intensity territory).

Before long, Geoff uses his connections with big oil to take on his and Theo's first real mission together.

As they find minor successes, Theo's skill grows from crafting small-scale fabrics to weaving the larger fabric of connections between conflict-divided people and groups. At this transformation, Geoff's mind is really blown at the possibilities (and the unexplainable nature--at least by science--of what Theo is achieving).

The only thing holding Theo and Geoff back (besides private and governmental forces whose interests prevent peace from breaking out) is Theo's growing desire to return to Chad and reunite his own people.

Episode 1: A Thread of Life - N'Djamena, Chad. 1981

"I'm going to have a look."

The artillery explosions had ceased less than an hour ago. Geoff turned his neck to see his roommate, Han, pulling himself out from under the couch where they'd hid all through the night.

"Mistah, don't do it," said Geoff's houseboy Theo, peeking across from his hiding place under a tribal drum, the only bit of decoration in the house aside from Theo's fabrics.

The boy's head was still, holding the same intensity he applied to his tailoring on the sewing machine Geoff had bought him. The boy had expressed interest in supporting his family.

"He would know," said Geoff to Han. Theo's country had been wartorn for all twelve years of his young life. But Han, a contract pilot for their operation here, preferred action to its alternative. And they'd been under a couch all night.

Geoff watched him walk stiffly into the next room. For balance, he ran his hand along the bullet-holed table. He reached the iron shutters.

"Mistah," said Theo, "please." The boy started to take a piece of cloth out of his pocket.

The shutters creaked as Han opened them.

Gunfire. Geoff heard collapsing, gasping, groaning.

Geoff and Theo scrambled to Han, staying crouched below the shutters. With his cloth, Theo wiped the blood from the man's chest, looking for the wound. He tried stopping up the wound with the cloth. "Your kindness is in it," said Theo to Geoff, "but I don't know if my skill was enough." The cloth collected blood. Han whimpered.

Just as dawn crept into the house, the last thread of Han's life left him. Theo folded the bloodied piece of cloth with bloodied hands, pocketed it. Geoff watched, regret rising within. He could have stopped Han.

"I'm going to find my family," said Theo. The boy had joined Geoff under the couch.

"But, the rebels?"

"It's okay," said the boy, but his eyes didn't carry the same vigor they had when he'd warned Han.

"You know better than I," said Geoff. Sometimes Theo would eat with him. Theo would tell him how the fighting would finally stop. One day, the boy would say. How many times had Theo been caught in the middle like this? To Geoff, it was a foreign normal. But if one lived through such trying times, one could only see oneself going on living, right?

"I'll be back for the sewing machine," said Juno.

Geoff nodded slowly. _Can I let him just walk out? _ Was a sniper still watching them? "How will you find your parents?"

"I will find them," said Theo calmly. "Always do."

Geoff saw sadness in the boy's eyes then. But the sense was gone before he could think to ask. Instead, Geoff looked Theo in the eye. "I hope you become the best tailor in N'Djamena."

"Thanks to you," said Theo, and cracked the soft smile he'd offered on their first meeting three months prior, and just once since, when Geoff bought him the sewing machine.

This was the third smile. It was a gift to a friend, Geoff realized. How the boy had ever found such an expression in this wartorn life, he didn't know. The boy's smile lingered only a breath more before threading into thin-lipped determination. "But a normal tailor would be more than enough."

The boy wriggled out from under the couch. Geoff noticed he still had the bloody cloth. Dried as it was, it somehow looked less red than it should.

Geoff stayed under the furniture, but he listened closer than he'd ever listened to the Friday Beatles releases on the radio in his youth. He tuned his ear to the boys toes brushing the concrete floor, his fingers on the backdoor's lock, its click, the frame's light swing—was their a brush of afternoon air creeping in?—and Theo was gone.

He listened, imagined. The boy's feet shifting dirt in the vacant landscape, sidestepping bodies left in the battleground behind the house.

A gunshot tore through his imagination.

Geoff ripped himself from under the couch. He peeked out the door's gap. He only saw the sliver of dirt rushing away over dead bodies to the two story residences perhaps a hundred meters off. He couldn't see or hear Theo. Just the echo of the gunshot ringing in his mind. Flashes of the chest wound Han had suffered.

Geoff wanted to rush out. To help the boy. But how could he help a dead child? He could buy a sewing machine, but he couldn't buy back a boy's young life.

One more night under the couch. The explosion of sound couldn't break Geoff's constricting feeling: he'd let Theo walk out, and then he'd abandoned the boy for dead. Han and Theo, both dead.

In the morning, a sound pulled Geoff from a terrible sleep. "-you there?" Then, an echo. "Geoff, Han, are you there!" The distortion of the megaphone made it difficult to know who spoke.

But Geoff knew the voice. Someone from the office. *Han is here, but he can't come.*

"There is a ceasefire. Come quick, but walk slow! I repeat. There is a ceasefire. Come now and we can all get out of here." Geoff thought of Han again: even if they did get to the airstrip, there was the problem of no longer having a pilot.

Geoff collected his passport and a scrap of sandwich abandoned when the shooting started two days before. He glanced at the Viking helmet from the Halloween party. The headgear had really made the costume.

Real horns from a butchered animal.

He couldn't bring himself to look on Han's body, but it lingered in his peripheral vision as Geoff took in the shape of the sewing machine. Hot air rustled through the room, bringing Geoff's attention to a stray thread lingering on the machine's needle. He thought of Theo, remembering the intensity of Juno's eyes, the intent to create threads, to weave them into something greater.

Geoff's legs were stiff, but it wasn't their recent disuse that made them shake. That would be the fear. These could be his last steps...ever.

He kept his head down. His walk slow. He thought of exploration talks he'd given to executives, how he'd raced through them despite practice runs in the houses's cracked mirror and plans to take it slow.

Patience was uncommon. Undervalued. In his rush the executives ignored Geoff's caution and themselves rushed into Chad, eager to exploit it. "We'll back off if civil war breaks out again."

The sun was harsh, relentless. But the dedication of the silence was more penetrating. This ceasefire was a silence between conflicted lovers. Tension stretched heart threads.

Head still, Geoff's eyes darted from body to body like the ticker line on a seismic chart. Like an anxious sewing needle.

He saw a child. His eyes lingered even as he walked. Geoff's breath held, anticipating the moment of recognition.

But no, it wasn't Theo. Just a child fighter pulled into this ageless war, asked to settle ancient tribal scores.

The white wall the height of two men was perhaps one hundred meters over the red dust. A sprinter could run this in under ten seconds. *Be patient . Take it slow .* Like retreating from a lion on the seismic line. On the belated thinking of the concrete ladder. On the

line. Or the belabored climbing of the corporate ladder. Or the careful carving of peace, the combined efforts of generations.

A group of bodies forced him to deviate from his direct path to the white wall . His peripheral vision brought imaginings of the two-story compound where the sniper must have shot from, killing Han.

"He's going with the foreigners," said Theo.

"He is a foreigner," said a man loading a rifle. "A white man. He is no friend of ours."

"Nor an enemy," said Theo quietly, deferentially. "Papa, he is somewhere in between. Like a thread on the point of a needle." Theo nervously adjusted the bloodied cloth in his breast pocket. "You didn't know I was a friend when you shot at me. Or your son."

This seemed to slow the man's loading of the weapon, but it didn't stop it. He pulled back the sleeves on his rebel uniform. His dark, scarred skin showed what he'd been through. "No son of mine works for the white man," mumbled the man. "You were lucky," he said. "The sun's heat must have changed what I saw through the gun's sight."

"No," said Juno, glancing down along his shirt then up to his father's eyes, "I wasn't meant to be killed."

The man shook his head, dismissing him. "We can make a statement," said the man. "We've taken losses, but the government troops need to know we will do anything to defeat them. This will instill fear." He finished loading the rifle, still peering out the second-story window.

Theo looked, too. Geoff walked slow. Across the dirt, through the bodies, toward the residential compound where the microphone had issued its command over the silent warzone.

"It's just one more body," he said

I'm just one more body," he said.

Theo saw bloodlust in his father's eyes. Though the rebels fought the government troops, a latent emotion stirred against the white man, too. All white men. That was the next battle. If they usurped the government troops. Taking their land, their women, their oil.

Theo's father raised his rifle, narrowed his eyes.

Theo smiled a gentle smile. A smile to transport within him a hope for a land not covered with the dead. Juno stepped in front of the rifle.

"Get out of the way," said Theo's father. "He'll reach safety soon."

Juno stood, a needle poised over unsewn threads.

"Get *out* of the way."

Theo dropped his smile, but stood firm. He filled his chest with air, put a fist over his breastpocket. "Right here. Shoot me right here." It wouldn't be easy. But if Theo was to sew threads of peace, he might as well begin by changing one man. His father.

"If you want to kill the white man, you will kill your son first. I'm just one more body."

