



# Mechanical Failure

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## **Mechanical Failure** Joe Zieja

A smooth-talking ex-sergeant, accustomed to the easygoing peacetime military of ten years ago, unexpectedly re-joins the fleet and finds himself trying to stop a coup from occurring.

The Great Galactic War resulted in the Two Hundred Years—and counting—peace, a time of tranquility that has never been seen. With an interstellar treaty signed by nearly every colony and enforced through a solid alliance between them, it seemed as if mankind has finally conquered war. This is what Sergeant R. Wilson Rogers experienced for ten years before he left the Meridan Patrol Fleet to become a smuggler.

But when a deal goes south, things quickly turn sour. Rogers is forced back into military service as an ensign and discovers a coup forming within the fleet. His backdoor and criminal experience is the best thing to stop this coup, and somehow, he finds himself working to do just that.

## **Mechanical Failure Details**

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Author : Joe Zieja

Format : 345 pages

Genre : Science Fiction, Humor, Fiction, Did Not Finish, Abandoned

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# From Reader Review Mechanical Failure for online ebook

## Stevie Kincade says

(Audiobook) Mechanical Failure is a farce in space. The obvious reference would be “Spaceballs for Military Science Fiction”.

Unfortunately it read to me like a young adult novel packed to the brim with groan inducing “Dad jokes” and juvenile humour.

This book tries way too hard and attempts to make up for the lack of quality in the joke writing with quantity. It is a bit like listening to a standup comedy special that generates 2 wry smiles in a whole hour of sweaty, earnest performance. There is nothing lamer then someone trying really, really hard to be funny ALL the time.

The book would have been better served editing out the 90+% of jokes that simply aren’t funny or by attempting to include elements of plot or characterisation that made the humour less essential. So many scenes exist purely to setup a dumb gag then we are off to the next gag. This might have been ok if any of them worked.

Author Joe Zieja chose to narrate his own audiobook. He also chose to no-sell his own jokes. If it isn’t funny to Zeija in the first place how is it going to be funny to me? Zeija sounds like a nice enough guy, his voice reminded me of Fry from Futurama. He is not a voice actor and has no sense of comic timing or an ability to deliver the lines in a droll/dry way that \*Possibly\* could have generated a laugh or two. He almost seems embarrassed to deliver his own jokes and tosses them out dismissively as we move on to the next one.

The scenes were repetitive and pointless. When Rodgers arrives on the ship it is clear the military has changed tremendously in the few years he has been gone. We get 3 or 4 scenes in a row that show us that the days of beer drinking and bludging are long gone and everyone in the crew now strictly adhere to protocol. This point was just driven into the ground as scene after scene after scene kept making the same point, the good ol days are gone, the military is now run by strict incompetents.

As I reached the 30% point of the audiobook I realised that the best of the jokes could be described as “mildly amusing”. At the same point of “Sleeping Giants” by Sylvain Nuevel which is clearly NOT a comedy I had already laughed out loud 2 or 3 times.

Before abandoning the book I decided to write down the next 3 jokes to give an idea of the level of humour. Feel free to insert your own drum crash /clown-car honk or slide whistle sound effects

### Joke 1

Droid: *“All infractions must be filed within 1 standard day”*

Rodgers: *The only thing I’m going to file are my nails*

### Joke 2

Ensign: *I’m Ensign McSchmidt Engineering squad commander*

Rodgers: *McSchmidt - that’s kind of an odd name*

Ensign: *Half of my family was German, the other half was Irish*

Joke 3

Droid: *Call Function – Surreptitiously follow Ensign Rodgers*

Rodgers *What the hell was that?*

Droid: *Call Function- Maintain clever hiding place*

I hate to abandon any book and I will normally stick it out but I have too many things I want to read to groan my way through another 7 hours of Dad jokes. Did not finish.

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## **Micheal Nelson says**

Purchased at my favorite local Indie bookstore, Page 158 Books on White St in Wake Forest, NC, for our Scifi BoTM club.

I especially love it when a story demands I read it all in one setting. I started this at 10PM, expecting to fall asleep after a chapter or two and pick it up later. I finished the novel around 5AM the next morning, reading it straight through the night.

4+ stars. Starts out as implausible campy satire, and its good at that. Had some full body laughs in every chapter. Entertainment is what we're after here, isn't it?

Anyone with any military XP knows there are those certain MOS's with a history of a scam of some kind going on behind the scenes. The supply guys who could be running anything short of guns, you tend to take care of them because they might hook you up with an extra first aid kit when you are deployed.

The ship's engine room guys are the most likely to have a still, hidden away in the bowels and boilers... and that guy is our unlikely scam-artist and sand-bagger turned reluctant hero. Rogers is exactly that kind of guy, rolled out of the service and smuggling whatever he can, and double-crossing both sides as he does it.

So, for the price of that guy getting scammed and shanghaied back into the service, we earn an excellent guide to narrate us through the crazy world of the shipboard service. You can't con a con man. Rogers notices things are in serious disarray.

People are put out of their occupational specialties in the name of cross training that makes no sense. It's as if someone wants the worst possible people put into the critical roles that count if a war comes... and the word on the fleet is, war is coming, and soon.

Our unlikely hero Rogers has greatness thrust upon him. In the crazy uncanny way Colombo stumbles through an investigation and figures it all out just in time to avert disaster, so seems to go the fast rising star of our Sgt, no, Lieutenant, no Captain Rogers.

I enjoyed the way the usual love interest B-storyline is averted when the would-be love interest is a hulking Viking female Marine officer. Rogers responds with thinly veiled masochistic gravity like a moth to the flame which he wants to get burned by. The droid barber character provides some of the greatest running gags throughout the book. I like the symmetry here, how our hero ends in the equivalent position the story opened with: right in the crosshairs of multiple enemies about to fire at him.

We are all looking forward to Lieutenant Lietenant Zeija presenting book 2 in our morning Intell briefing soon.

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### **Shecky says**

(Full disclosure: I copyedited this book. In truth, that means absolutely nothing, because I'm not paid to have opinions about the books I work on. :D )

Imagine the Stainless Steel Rat books' Slippery Jim diGriz as written by Terry Pratchett in full Discworld mode but in space. *That* is what this book is. I'm not exaggerating when I attest that I giggled my way through this copyedit. So [EXPLETIVE] much fun (and no, GR did not censor that word; it's an inside joke from the book, and it's the very tip of just ONE of the comedic spears in there)!

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### **Scott Bell says**

Super fun read, if you like your heroes more Flashman than Flash. Poor Rogers can't seem to catch a break, and for damn sure can't seem to find a good card game to practice his cheating skills. Instead, it looks like he's going to have to - gasp! - work for a living.

Zieja seems to have graduated from the Douglas Adams School of Writing Humor - if it's not over the top, it's not funny enough. Some of it fell flat for that reason, but overall, I'd say the humor worked more often than not. If John Cleese wrote sci-fi, this is the kind of book he'd write.

Terrific debut, and I look forward to more.

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### **Mogsy (MMOGC) says**

3 of 5 stars at The BiblioSanctum <https://bibliosanctum.com/2016/06/30/...>

As sci-fi spoofs and humorous novels go, *Mechanical Failure* was a lot of fun. When I read parts of this book aloud to my husband, he chuckled and said, "Kinda feels like Terry Pratchett in space." Trust me, coming from him, that's a great compliment. Personally, I think I would liken this more to something like *Spaceballs*, which just goes to show what a tricky genre it is. What's funny and what's not can be so subjective, and picking up a book like this always holds a risk because you never know whether the style or the tone of humor will work for you. If I'm to be honest, overall I felt this novel might've been just a tad too heavy on the goofball side to suit my tastes, but author Joe Zieja is also to be commended for finding a balance to ensure that the shtick never got too old.

The story begins by introducing its protagonist, former military engineer turned smuggler Sergeant R. Wilson Rogers, captain of the *Awesome* (yes, that's really the name of his spaceship). After his latest deal involving space pirates goes horribly wrong, Rogers unexpectedly finds himself pulled back into his old unit with the Meridan Patrol Fleet.

At first, Rogers thinks it couldn't be that bad. The activities he and the old 331st used to get up to are the

kind of stuff that would make someone like Sgt. Bilko weep tears of joy—gambling, drinking, partying, and generally goofing off while trying to look busy. He figures everything will be the same once he gets back.

Unfortunately, before agreeing to this he had no idea that the MPF is actually preparing for war. Rogers arrives at the flagship to find that the entire atmosphere of the fleet has changed, but it just doesn't make sense! Considering the Two Hundred Years (and Counting) Peace is still holding strong, and all the treaties protecting it are airtight, there's simply no evidence of conflict anywhere, but that's sure not stopping the fleet from shoring up their position, drilling the troops, and bolstering morale. Aghast as he is to be doing actual military work, Rogers has to admit though, something here doesn't feel quite right.

For anyone who feels military science fiction might be too serious, too gung ho for them, you should consider giving this book a try. *Mechanical Failure* almost feels like a parody of the genre, subverting the image of the hardass space marine with a character like Rogers, a happy-go-lucky smooth-talking scoundrel whose goal in life is to attract the least amount of responsibility as possible. There's a running joke in here where the more he screws up or tries to dodge his duties, the further he gets promoted, until he eventually becomes the personal assistant of the grossly incompetent admiral himself, making Rogers the de facto commander of the entire fleet. Rogers never wanted to be a hero, but sometimes you just gotta fake it till you make it.

Zieja also pokes fun at a lot of sci-fi tropes, riffing on the ideas like the dangers of droid armies or the ineffectualness of military bureaucracy. I had mentioned *Spaceballs* in comparison, and indeed this novel felt like it had a similar "pastiche" feel of a parody film that takes elements and styles from many different works and seeks to imitate or mock them. Granted, much of the humor is campy and sophomoric, driven mostly by slapstick, but you have to hand it to Zieja—he knows how to hold back enough so that it all remained just shy of overdone. While it's pretty much all throwaway stunts or one-liners, every so often I would find something truly laugh-out-loud funny, and I have to admit this book had its moments. The plot also isn't terribly deep, but I wasn't really expecting it to be, knowing the nature of this book beforehand. A funny, light adventure is the order of the day, and that's what *Mechanical Failure* delivers.

All told, this book was very enjoyable, though as usual, I must warn that when it comes to this kind of humor, your mileage may vary. *Mechanical Failure* probably sits right at the threshold of my own tolerance for quirky and absurd humor (I prefer dry and subtle, personally) but I also liked it much more than many novels of its type. It's so easy for authors to get carried away, overdoing a certain kind of comedy, but happily this is not the case here. If what I've described here sounds like something that would interest you, I strongly urge you to give this one a try. I have no doubt this book will find plenty of fans.

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## **Jason says**

Not too bad but unfortunately with most modern novels reads like a screenplay. Having read Douglas Adams and being a fan of *Red Dwarf* this is a poor imitation of these, also visual comedy and slapstick don't work too well in a novel with the author going for a *Police Squad*/*Naked Gun* vibe which is more of a visual medium. The author admits that his serving in the military for 10 years was his inspiration so he would have found this funny just didn't come across as a shared experience. Went on for too long with the same jokes for me.

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## **Jasmine says**

A comedy of incompetence. Does a pretty good job of remaining funny for most of it.

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## **Steve says**

3 painfully-funny stars

So much corniness abounds in this book. If you've ever been in the military, you may be able to relate to the exploits of (newly promoted) Ensign Rogers. If not, you'll be shaking your head in amazement that a military force is able to function like this.

While it's very similar in vein to sci-fi/humor classics, *The Stainless Steel Rat* and *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, the humor becomes quite tedious after a while.

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## **Mia says**

This book is a manual of ineptitude, a kind of reversal of the confederacy of dunces. It's Buck Rogers gone rogue with a brain injury and being dropped into Mel Brooks' *History of the World*.

Roger Rogers is an ex-soldier turned smuggler, a perennial sandbagging, underachieving individual always on the lookout for the next quick buck and/or con. A con gone bad ends up with Rogers being reenscripted into military service where he bungles his way to promotion after promotion.

This is a farcical satire, wrapping societal observations and assertions in humor--broad, literal, hyperbolic, screwball, surreal. It highlights military bureaucracy and over earnestness by creating exaggerated scenarios. In this case, Rogers is assigned to a ship where duties seem to be assigned via dartboard, everyone ill-equipped--in knowledge and experience--for their station. Everybody simply endures, no one thrives, the ship slowly descends into chaos. By default, Rogers is forced to organize the ship into some semblance of order if only so he can escape and not sink with the ship, so to speak.

The author himself narrated this audiobook adding a layer of authenticity. He crafted the personalities, the nuances are his, the variances are as intended.

It's a wild and fun ride. Just make sure you all hold onto your asses lest you lose them.

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## **Sheila says**

This was funny enough, but was way too try-hard in attempting to emulate a combination of Douglas Adams & Terry Pratchett with a dash of 'Red Dwarf' - legit, from the moment Deet the malfunctioning droid showed up, I kept having the most vivid 'Red Dwarf' flashbacks that only reminded me a) just how old I am, & b) how long it had been since I watched it.

Knowing that Joe Zieja is the voice for those Spotify ads made me read this entire book with his (overly cheerful) voice as the narrative...which either contributed to the laughs it got from me, or took away from my reading experience; I haven't quite decided which yet. Bonus points for the nice cover!

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## **Christopher says**

There were quite a few places where I was cackling out loud because I was stationed with idiots like those in the book. That's not to say you have to have a military background to read the book, but it does make some funny situations even funnier.

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## **Cathy says**

Like many people, my first thought was that it had a bit of a Hitchhiker goes military feel, or whatever humorous sci-fi you want to compare it to. Deet gave a bit of a less depressed Marvin edge to some things, and Rogers had a real Ford Prefect sense to him. But it wasn't as satirical or cleverly silly or as wittily clever, thought that's obviously an impossibly high standard. Zieja tried for the satire, and for the silly, it's certainly picks on a lot of dumb things the military does. But its humor wasn't subtle. A lot of it was pretty darn juvenile. There were a lot of times I just shrugged and "whatevered" and read on waiting for something more entertaining. For instance, his juvenile crush on the Viking.

Zieja probably thought he was being progressive by making Rogers be "in love" with a big strong female marine, but the two marines are two of only three women in the book. And Rogers was totally disrespectful in the way he thought about her and treated her, she was an object, not a person. He didn't know anything about her, he was just obsessed with how she appeared. Being impressed with her strength and size wasn't more respectful than if all he cared about was her eyes or legs. He was still into her appearance and shape, not who she was, which he had no idea about. None of the other officers were women and only one other enlisted personnel. The two marines never talked to each other, they only talked to Rogers. About Rogers. Sergeant Lopez in Engineering was the only one other female in the whole book. At least she never talked about Rogers' love life. I don't usually think about the Bechtel Test, I don't know all of the steps by heart, but I'm pretty sure this book fails big time. Probably Zieja, with a military background himself, thought consciously or unconsciously that the balance of males to females was proportional to how things are now, but even if that's so, that makes no sense for 1000 years from now and on spaceships. What advantage would larger or stronger men have? And why would the military be skewed toward men then when it's already being desegregated now? It's also another book in the future with the strong implication that all of the people, with the exception of the female Lopez who is described as stocky and walnut-colored with dull-brown eyes, are white. The military now isn't all white, all male, all Christian, all anything. Why is this crew? (To be fair, religion isn't a part of the story, just pointing out the lack of homogeneity of the United States military, so for the descendants of the entire Earth's military to predominantly be white seems really unlikely. The U.S. won't even be majority white in a few years.)

So it wasn't as funny as I hoped it would be, but it was amusing, a generally easy read, with some annoyances. It's a lighthearted book with some satire of the military and the way that they do things that seems to be right on point.

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## Hobart says

*This originally appeared at The Irresponsible Reader.*

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No duty was too great that R. Wilson Rogers couldn't find a way to shirk it.

This is the essence of Wilson Rogers (don't ask what the R. stands for) compressed into one sentence -- an engineer for the Galactic Navy during the longest peacetime in Galactic Memory. As a result of all the peace, there's not a whole lot for a Naval ship to do -- nor for the men assigned to it. So, Rogers and his fellow crew members got up to a lot of nonsense -- drinking, gambling and worse. Eventually, Rogers finds himself leaving under less than auspicious circumstances. Not long after that, under even less auspicious circumstances (which I'll leave for you to read about and chuckle over) he finds himself back on the appropriately named *Flagship* which has transformed in his brief absence in to a serious-minded place, full of random inspections, wartime preparations (despite centuries of peace), and odd assignments.

Before long, Rogers finds himself getting promotions, leading a group of battle droids, and seriously considering suicide and desertion (favoring the the latter, I assure you) -- and that's when things really start to get interesting.

This is pretty decent Military SF with a twist of humor, a dollop of irony, a pinch of satire, and so on -- I don't want to compare it to Adams. But I'll compare it to a mix of Scalzi, Harry Harrison, Jack Campbell, Grant Naylor and Peter David. There's a sense of play, even when he's not going for the comedy, which makes the whole thing fun to read.

Best 'droid since Marvin, best malfunctioning human personality software since Marvin (or Lore -- but not as creepy or murderous), funniest 'droids since Kryten. I could keep those comparisons going -- essentially, I really liked all of the Droids on *Flagship* (especially Deet). The CO reminded me of some sort of hybrid between the pointy-haired boss and Douglas Reynholm is great comic relief, but there's more to him than that.

Honestly, I could go on and on, Zieja assembled a great cast of characters -- real enough that you can like them, outlandish enough that you don't take them terribly seriously. Not just the obviously comedic characters either, there are a few "straight (wo)men" characters scattered throughout, keeping the rest grounded. Rogers is the best of the bunch - there's a little personal growth to him (no one's more surprised and dismayed by that than him), I enjoyed seeing that come out. I liked how despite himself he learns to set aside prejudices, take things seriously, and even act a little heroically. I as amused by (and occasionally disturbed by) his attraction to/fascination with the Amazonian Marine Captain. Rogers' way of looking at the world is pretty relatable (I'm not saying that he's the kind of guy you spend time with, he's the guy you *want* to spend time with), and he'll win you to his side pretty quickly.

One thing that I really appreciated was the respect that Zieja showed to the military personnel throughout this -- too often everyone (with a maximum of a couple of exceptions) in a book like this is depicted as a moron - - think of Richard Hooker's classic for a moment. It's just one example, but it's a good one. You've got Jones, the Painless Pole, Hawkeye, Trapper, Duke, and a couple of nurses here and there who are competent, if not great, doctors. Who else? Everyone else is a "regular Army" schmuck ho shouldn't be allowed in an operating theater or near anything where life and death decisions come into play.

Zieja doesn't play it this way -- these Navy and Marine men and women (with one or two exceptions, because there are always exceptions) are treated as competent, equipped and dedicated people whose greatest problem is that they have nothing to do, so things get a little loopy from time to time. But you give them an enemy, you give them a goal, you give them some way to target their talents and energy -- good things happen. Even the really incompetent turn out to be quite competent when put in the right spot, doing what they're good at (even if that's not what they want to be good at). Problems are solved, crises averted, and enemies thwarted. That's just not seen often enough, and I appreciate Zieja doing that.

That doesn't mean he can't find ways to make fun of the dedicated, the competent, and equipped -- but he doesn't make them into buffoons to do so (mostly).

I knew that I was going to like this book by page 3, I was audibly chuckling by page 4. The rest was just gravy. I laughed, chortled, and grinned my way through this -- practically from beginning to end. The story as pretty good, the story plus the comedy made this gold. If I could think of stronger words to use to endorse this, I'd probably slap them here. But I can't -- just get your hands on this one. Meanwhile, I'm already looking forward to the sequel.

***Disclaimer:** I received a copy of this from the Publisher in exchange for my honest comments on it -- sorry for the delay, I greatly appreciate the book.*

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## **Lindsay says**

A comedy military SF novel with a lazy but competent protagonist returning to a ship gone mad.

Sergeant R. Wilson Rogers returns under duress to the Meridan Patrol Fleet, which in his experience had been a quiet lazy post filled with corruption and graft and a very laid-back life style. But now it's all different. There are droids everywhere, everyone is being cross-trained in specialties that they're not suited for and everything has become a model of manic and insane efficiency. There's something seriously wrong, and Rogers may be just the slacker that the ship needs to fix it.

This one is a bit too goofball for me. I can see where a lot of the humor comes from, particularly as an expression of affection for some of the overt silliness of military life, but it's a life-experience I don't share. It's still funny, but it can be a bit hard to take until the plot really gets moving about two thirds of the way in.

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## **John says**

Amiable comic space opera, featuring a military con man who is (almost!) conned himself, but pulls the fat from the fire with the help of a droid with slight damage to its profanity circuits ("I really don't have the processing power to deal with your MALE BOVINE EXCREMENT.") and a pair of dazzling female marines.

Many memorable lines, such as:

"You see? You see?" Dorsey said, shaking his head. "They're going to take our asses! We're not going to

have asses!"

The man wasn't just a bureaucrat; it seemed as though he pursued bullshit with relentless fervor.

"I'm going to need a VMU. Is there a storage locker nearby that might have some spares?" "Yeah," Hart said.  
"It's in the My Ass room. Let me pull one out for you."

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