



Mechanical Failure (Epic Failure Trilogy)

By Joe Zieja

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A smooth-talking ex-sergeant, accustomed to an easygoing peacetime military, unexpectedly re-joins the fleet and finds soldiers preparing for the strangest thing—war.

The two hundred years' (and counting) peace is a time of tranquility that hasn't been seen since...well, never. Mankind in the Galactic Age had finally conquered war, so what was left for the military to do but drink and barbecue? That's the kind of military that Sergeant R. Wilson Rogers lived in before he left the fleet to become a smuggler.

But it turns out that smuggling is hard. Like getting-arrested-for-dealing-with-pirates-and-forced-back-into-service kind of hard. It doesn't seem so bad—the military was a perpetual tiki party anyway—but when Rogers returns after only a year away, something has changed. These are soldiers—*actual* soldiers doing actual soldier things like preparing for a war that Rogers is sure doesn't exist. Rogers vows to put a stop to all this nonsense—even if it means doing actual work.

With an experienced ear for military double-speak, Zieja has created a remarkable and sarcastic adventure.

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Editorial Review

Review

“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*.” (?*BiblioSanctum*)

“*Mechanical Failure* is the perfect tonic for those missing the writing of the comedy sci-fi greats. It is as good as Harrison, Grant, and even Adams—highly amusing, clever fiction.” (?*SFBook Reviews*)

“A funny story about a funny man in a funny universe.” (?*Amazing Stories*)

“*Mechanical Failure* often plays like a sci-fi riff on the 1961 satire *Catch-22*. It’s nice to be reminded that sci-fi can be supersilly and supersmart about it, and because sarcastic homicidal robots rule.” (?*B&N Sci-Fi & Fantasy Blog*)

About the Author

Joe Zieja is an author with a long history of doing things that have almost nothing to do with writing at all. A graduate of the United States Air Force Academy, Joe dedicated over a decade of his life to wearing The Uniform, marching around in circles and shouting commands at people while in turn having commands shouted at him. It was both a great deal of fun and a great nuisance, and he wouldn’t have had it any other way.

Joe’s also a commercial voiceover artist and a composer of music for video games and commercials. He’s probably interrupted your Spotify playlist at least once to encourage you to click on the banner below and isn’t the least bit upset that you ignored him.

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Mechanical Failure



Asses to Ashes

“I don’t like the looks of this, Rogers,” Dorsey said in a sort of depressed whine. “There are pirates here.”

“Of course there are pirates here,” Rogers said, looking out the window at the formation of ships floating in front of them. “I invited them. I invited two groups of pirates here. How the hell else do you expect us to make money off this transfer?”

Dorsey looked at him, mostly expressionless except for the heavy-lidded stare that he seemed to have been practicing all his life. He punched a couple of the instruments on the panel and sighed.

“I don’t like pirates,” Dorsey said.

Dealing with intergalactic space pirates was difficult enough; dealing with intergalactic space pirates with

the most cowardly copilot Rogers had ever hired was a whole new level of ass pain.

“They don’t really advertise themselves as likeable people,” Rogers said. “And I didn’t hire you to like them. I hired you to help me make a lot of good money off a lot of bad people. So just keep the controls steady while I work my magic.”

A beep on the panel told him that he had an incoming transmission, and Rogers keyed it in. A gruff, inarticulate voice crackled over one of his several independent communication systems—Rogers had it configured so he could hear everything at once but had to switch channels to transmit. He didn’t want either of the two groups to hear what he was saying to the other.

“You sure this is the right place?” asked a member of the Purveyors of Vitriol, one of the pirate groups.

“Of course I’m sure it’s the right place,” Rogers said with a practiced scoff of indignation.

He wasn’t sure it was the right place. The military had trained him in navigation a bit, of course, but he was an engineer, not a pilot.

The Fortuna Stultus galaxy had been humanity’s home for a thousand years or so—since they’d accidentally collapsed the Milky Way—but that didn’t mean he knew it like the back of his hand. If he was reading the charts correctly on his holosphere, this should have been a desolate little location on the edge of Meridan territory, just outside of an Un-Space drop point that nobody ever used because it led to absolutely nowhere. And if there was one place that Rogers preferred to do hard work—like brokering a deal between two of the system’s most devious pirate groups—it was absolutely nowhere.

“Just give them time,” Rogers said, though he wasn’t sure if he was reassuring the Purveyors or reassuring himself. “They need these supplies. The Garliali will be here.”

A terse grunt was the only reply, which didn’t surprise him at all. The Purveyors of Vitriol weren’t known for their eloquence; they were a pirate organization, after all. They were decent chaps once you got to know them, and Rogers knew them well enough. He’d been pretending to be a spy for them for months.

The Garliali Mercenaries for whom they had been waiting, on the other hand, were not fine chaps. Some of them had been trained by the military, but most of them were just common thugs and cutthroats looking for a quick buck, and were pretty indiscriminate when it came to picking targets. Rogers would know; he’d been pretending to be a spy for them for months too.

“The Garliali?” Dorsey asked, his lilting voice cracking with nervousness. “You invited the Garliali Mercenaries here?” His face might have been flat, but his body looked like it wanted to jump out of his seat.

“Were you not even listening when I briefed you on this mission?”

“The Garliali are the biggest pirates in the system! They’ve knocked over armed Meridan patrol units.”

“Yes,” Rogers said, “and they’re dangerously low on medical supplies precisely because they keep knocking over Meridan patrol units.”

“How do you know they’re low on supplies?”

“Because I stole them. Then I gave them to the Purveyors to sell back to the Garliali so that we can get a kickback.”

Dorsey moaned like a cat that couldn't find its litter box. Rogers wanted to throttle him. Of all the pilots in the Meridan system, he had to hire Dorsey. Rogers wished more than one person had responded to the Help Wanted ad.

“Are you sure you know what you're doing?” Dorsey asked.

“I spent ten years in the Meridan Patrol Fleet,” Rogers said. “If you can't learn how to con someone in ten years in the MPF, you can't learn anything.”

Dorsey looked askance at him again, then sighed and went back to the controls.

“I don't like pirates,” he said.

The space around them remained empty for another long few moments, and Rogers had the uncomfortable feeling that he might have made a miscalculation somewhere in his plan. He leaned back in his chair and swallowed the discomfort. He just needed to relax, wait, and resist the urge to lean forward and send a call to his contact in the Garliali Mercenaries.

Rogers leaned forward and sent a call to his contact in the Garliali Mercenaries.

“What's taking you so long?” he cried.

As if on cue, a thin blue line emerged in the backdrop of black space, out of which spewed a handful of Garliali ships. Unlike the Purveyors, they took a bit more pride in the way their ships looked; their shimmering chrome surfaces shone brilliantly in the reflections of the Meridan solar star. The Purveyors, on the other hand, looked like they had assembled their ships from space refuse dump points. Rogers knew better than to judge either of them by their looks. Once those plasma cannons started firing, nobody was really concerned what they looked like.

“Sorry we're late,” a thin, feminine voice came over the comms. “A little trouble with the authorities,” she said. “But asses to ashes, and all that.”

“I'm pretty sure it's 'ashes to ashes,'?” Rogers replied.

“Go back to the place we jumped from,” the Garliali woman said—Rogers didn't recognize her voice—“and you tell me if you can find any asses left.”

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

“Shut up, Dorsey. If you can't keep your cool, I'm going to eject you. I need you to trust me, alright? We'll get through this.”

“I don't—”

“Like pirates, I know. I don't like them either. But sometimes you have to work with people you don't like

so that you can make a ridiculous amount of money.”

Rogers swallowed. Would they really make it through this alright? Maybe he should have stuck to running gambling rings and moving contraband between new recruits.

Looking out his cockpit window and through the many video cameras mounted on the hull of his ship, Rogers could see the two opposing squadrons moving into battle positions. At least, they certainly looked like battle positions; he was pretty sure pirates didn't have a wide variety of formations. But they weren't going to fight each other—not if Rogers could help it, anyway—but that didn't mean that a lot of shiny silver cannon barrels weren't pointed at a lot of other shiny silver cannon barrels. He'd hate to be in the middle of them.

Unfortunately, he was directly in the middle of them.

“If they try anything,” the Purveyor said over the radio, “we're gonna see us some fried Garliali.”

“Fried calamari?” someone else on the Purveyor channel said.

“No, I said fried Garliali.”

“They won't try anything,” Rogers said.

“They won't try anything with what?” the Garliali woman asked. “Who's trying anything?”

Rogers swore and switched the comm system back to the Purveyors' channel.

“They won't try anything,” Rogers said again.

“Why not? Fried calamari is good. You won't know if you like it until you try it.”

“We ain't fryin' no calamari!” the Purveyor leader roared. “Get the wax out of your ears and get off the radio or I'm gonna come down from the bridge and rip—” The comms cut off.

Rogers shook his head and sighed. “Pirates . . .”

He looked over at Dorsey, who was still shaking his head and mumbling as he did his control checks. Could he really trust him if this got heated? Rogers didn't need someone that was going to freak out at the first sign of trouble. He needed someone that could help them bug out if people started shooting. Rogers thought it would be a good idea to calm him down a bit.

“Dorsey,” Rogers said, sighing. “Don't worry about anything. This is going to be simple, just like I told you. I know this is your first mission with me, but I'm going to take care of you. All we have to do is be the intermediary for the cargo and the cash. The Garliali are going to start sending us the credits, and then the Purveyors will let us release the cargo. They'll pick it up, and we'll go home. Does that sound so hard?”

Well, it was a little harder than that. Rogers wasn't just planning on getting a kickback; he was going to steal the credits, too. He left that part out. He didn't want to spook Dorsey any further. That and he'd have to give Dorsey a bigger cut if he was honest about the amount. Honesty didn't pay.

Rogers also left out the part about the Garliali getting giant packets of baking flour instead of medical supplies. The . . . unlucky family he'd met at the transportation terminal on Merida's second moon had convinced him that maybe pirates didn't deserve to get patched up properly. That and the hospital there had been willing to buy them. At a discount, of course.

Dorsey looked at him, clearly dubious. "I guess it doesn't sound that bad."

"It'll be easy. Like, uh, what did you used to do before I hired you yesterday?"

"Postal work."

"It'll be like postal work. Just delivering packages. See? You're already an expert. Nobody is going to shoot us."

After a moment of looking at Rogers with open distrust, Dorsey visibly relaxed. He was still shaking his head, but at least he wasn't muttering about not liking pirates anymore.

"Great," Rogers said. "Now, you're in charge of maneuvers while I manage the communications and the cargo. Just like we talked about. Okay?"

"Okay."

Rogers took a deep breath and wiped his hand across his forehead. It was now or never, he supposed.

"Alright," he said to the Garliali over the radio, making sure to switch the comms channel this time. "Get your cargo ship in position and start the transfer."

"Way ahead of you."

A small tugboat-like ship had already separated from the Garliali group and was heading toward the Awesome—Rogers' ship—its heavy-lifting engines emitting an eerie blue glow. It looked like a giant beetle, with two mandibles below its flat cockpit. The Garliali fighters maintained a tight wedge formation, the tip of which pointed right across Rogers' bow and toward the Purveyors, whose formation was more like space popcorn.

"Credits first!" the Purveyor leader belched over the radio.

"Relax," Rogers said. "I'll let them know not to get too ahead of themselves."

Reaching forward, he keyed in the frequency for the Garliali representative.

"Listen up," he said. "You can route the funds through the computer on my ship. I'll remove any traces from the credits so they can't be, uh, traced, and then I'll route them to the Purveyors. When it's halfway done, you can start picking up the cargo. Got it?"

"Got it, Rogers," the female said. "You're a good man."

Rogers had been called a lot of things in his life, but a "good man" wasn't one of them. If the two groups he was tricking were anything but notorious criminal organizations, he might have felt a little bit bad about it.

Mostly, though, he was one careless sneeze away from peeing in his pants in fear.

His digital interface changed as he was notified that the credits were incoming. With a couple swift button presses and an authentication code, the money started flowing.

“That’s kind of strange,” Dorsey said. “Why are they sending us the money?” He made some trim adjustments on the control panel and checked his instruments, fiddling with buttons. Some of the nervousness had already come back—Rogers could see him sitting more stiffly.

“It’s complicated,” Rogers said. “Lots of, um, really technical finance stuff about money laundering and all that. Just pilot the damn ship and make sure we don’t run into the cargo after we release it, alright?”

The “technical finance stuff” was a spoofing program that would funnel all the credits into Rogers’ account. The Purveyors would be receiving empty data packets, but if the finance tech he’d known from his military days had programmed this correctly, they wouldn’t know about it until he was relaxing on a beach on Dathum under an assumed name.

A quiet moment passed as the sequence started working. Rogers saw a lot of code running from his command console—he even understood most of it—and his heart felt like it was trying to climb up his throat and out his nose. Just one over-observant Purveyor, and people would start shooting.

“There’s the credits,” the Purveyors squawked over the radio. “You’re a good man, Rogers.”

A good man, twice in one day? Something about that made his skin crawl a bit.

Rogers smirked to himself as the transfer reached fifty percent completion. Now all he had to do was unlock the cargo magnets to release the crate, sit back, and collect the best kind of money there was—someone else’s. He flipped the switch to disengage the cargo and watched the open, empty space through the window.

“Beautiful,” Rogers said. “Just beautiful. See? I told you this would be easy.”

The tugboat’s mandibles cinched around the crate and began its flight back to the Garliali escort, and Rogers reached for a bottle of Jasker 120, the finest Scotch in the system. Now was a time for celebration.

A beep came from his instrument panel, which he promptly ignored just like he did most beeps that came from his instrument panel. This was not a time for beeps.

“What’s that?” Dorsey asked.

“It’s nothing. Ignore it. Never believe computers. Just keep your eyes on the controls and keep us steady. We’re going to jump back out of the same point we jumped in from as soon as we’re done.”

The beep sounded again.

“Rogers,” Dorsey said. “There’s a ship coming in.”

“That’s ridiculous,” Rogers said. “We’re in the middle of nowhere. The Meridan Patrol Fleet doesn’t even bother scanning this sector—that’s why I picked it. It’s probably just a late pirate cruiser or something.”

Just to prove him wrong, a void opened in Un-Space and disgorged a bright silver ship bearing the markings of the Meridan Patrol Fleet.

“You’ve got to be kidding me,” Rogers said.

“It’s the MPF!” Dorsey yelled. “I don’t like them, either!”

“What the hell?” the Purveyor yelled over the radio.

“It’s a setup!” the Garliali shouted.

“Cancel the calamari and get to the guns!”

“Wait!” Rogers said, but it was too late. And he wasn’t sure what channel he was talking on, anyway.

Everyone from both sides started to talk into their radios at once, creating such a cacophony of panic that Rogers felt like he should be shooting something. But shooting something would immediately reveal to whatever side he shot that he was not their ally. Running away would do the same thing for both sides. So, Rogers did what he did every time he was in a battle: nothing.

Because in ten years in a peacetime military, ex-Sergeant R. Wilson Rogers had never been in a battle. And he was already pretty sure he didn’t like it.

“All fighters, break formation and engage the Purveyor ships! We’ll teach them to cross us!”

“Take down that Garliali freighter! Those sons of bitches won’t get away with this!”

The Garliali wedge charged toward the Purveyors’ motley formation, engines flaring to life as they converged on the center position that was, unfortunately, the Awesome. A rainbow of cannon fire lit up space like some kind of deranged slot machine in the Heshan casino, and stuff started blowing up.

“Oh god, oh god,” Dorsey said, devolving into an utterly useless stream of babble as he sat back uselessly in his chair and held his hands awkwardly in front of him. He shook his head, his bland expression rapidly approaching panic.

“Snap out of it, Dorsey,” Rogers said, “and get ready to boost us toward the Un-Space point when you can. Who is in that damn patrol ship?” He still knew people in the Meridan Patrol Fleet. Maybe it was a buddy of his and he could convince them to jump back into Un-Space and stop ruining his swindling.

“This is ex-Sergeant R. Wilson Rogers of the Awesome,” he said, keying in to a known Meridan patrol code. “You’re, uh, interrupting me! Interrupting this! Go away! Who is your captain? What’s his favorite beer?”

There was no response. Rogers brought up a command console and started doing research as fast as he could. Maybe if he could find out the ship’s name, he could contact someone he knew on board directly.

“The Rancor?” he said incredulously when the name popped up. “What’s the Rancor doing here?”

“Who’s that?” Dorsey called from under the seat. “Can they help us?”

“Probably not,” Rogers said. “They’re all supposed to be dead. They flew into an asteroid when I was on duty.”

“Oh god,” Dorsey said, “now we have pirates and ghosts!”

Rogers wasn’t entirely sure he disagreed with Dorsey’s assessment. If he hadn’t been covered in a panicked sweat, he might have gotten a chill up his spine.

“Rancor,” he called, not knowing what else to do. “Abandon your course and jump back to the fleet! You’re blocking my exit!” Rogers paused. “Please?”

The Rancor didn’t do anything at all. He expected at least for it to call for more ships, but nothing else came out of Un-Space. It simply floated in the middle of a torrent of gunfire, its shields flaring to life every time it took a glancing blow from one of the pirates’ cannons, like a brain-dead animal that didn’t know where its dinner was. The crew on board the Rancor should have recognized his name at least—Rogers had beaten the Rancor’s captain at several rounds of underhanded card games. But the captain was also supposed to be dead, so maybe that put a damper on conversation.

It was all falling apart in front of him, the space quickly filling with the debris of destroyed ships as the battle raged on. Behind the Rancor, ships started flying out of Un-Space as the two groups called for reinforcements. Even though the Meridan ship was blocking the exit, that didn’t mean that a horde of pirates couldn’t jump in, take a quick evasive maneuver, and then move to engage the other pirates. And that’s exactly what they were doing.

Where were they all coming from? It seemed as if both pirate groups were summoning every ship in their respective fleets to come to their aid. This wasn’t a cargo transfer anymore; it was a space battle. And Rogers needed to get out of here fast.

“Aren’t you going to pilot this ship?” Rogers screamed at Dorsey.

Dorsey shook his head and mumbled.

“Ugh! You’re fired!” Rogers shouted, and grabbed the controls.

Equipment crashed around behind him as his frantic yanking of the controls put a couple gee’s worth of force into the ship. Dorsey tumbled sideways out of the chair from the force, and Rogers lost sight of him as he focused on getting the Awesome out of harm’s way. In the background, the comm chatter from the pirates grew even more frantic as each issued orders to its fighters.

“Punch those cannons out of the frigate! They’re tearing our fighters apart!”

“Grab that damn cargo and get back to the fleet so we can get out of here!”

But the tugboat, still dutifully dragging the crate of medical supplies, fell to pieces as it was hit by a barrage of blue cannon fire. The space battle seemed to halt for a moment as Rogers stared at the cracking hull of the tugboat and started counting the seconds until both pirate groups turned on him. He also learned what several hundred pounds of baking flour looked like expanding into open space. In a weird way, he found it kind of pretty.

“Protect the Awesome! All fighters cover his exit!”

“Get Rogers out of here! He’s our best man!”

Rogers sucked in a breath as every fighter in both fleets started charging toward him. To protect him. From each other.

“They’re going after Rogers!” both pirates said simultaneously.

The battle became a massive furball as the two groups of fighters made a valiant effort to simultaneously defend the same target from absolutely no one attempting to attack it.

“Um, guys?” he said over the comms, only to realize that he was still talking to the unresponsive Rancor, who still had done nothing at all. It wasn’t moving to intercept. It wasn’t even issuing any warnings to the two pirates to cease and desist and prepare for boarding, which was standard for all interdictions.

Warnings flared to life on his display as the plasma wash coming from the pirates’ fighters’ engines and cannons slammed into the Awesome. Rogers fell out of his chair as his scheme of evasive maneuvers was roughly interrupted by a stray shot. Luckily, since nobody was actually aiming at him, his shields were absorbing most of the impacts. His brain, on the other hand, didn’t have shields, and he was quickly learning the value of seatbelts.

Rogers crawled back up to the seat and hit something on the communications panel.

“Everyone just relax!” he shouted to nobody.

“Rogers!” one of the Garliali called in a mess of static. “We’re sorry we couldn’t protect you! You were our best—”

“Run, Rogers!” a Purveyor screamed as his ship disintegrated. “Those bastards’ll kill you! Wait, is that flour? What the—”

As suddenly as it had begun, it was over. While the fighters had been distracted killing each other to get to Rogers, the two command ships had brought their giant guns to bear, turning each other into balls of scrap with just a few well-placed shots. The space that had been host to a simple cargo exchange was now a graveyard of gray specks and space dust. The radio went utterly and completely silent.

“Oh,” Rogers said stupidly.

Rogers turned his ship and fired his engines to full. With enough time, he might make it to another Un-Space point or lead the Rancor away, pull a few maneuvers, and double back to the one the Rancor was still blocking.

A beep sounded from his instrument panel.

“What now?” he shouted, looking down, then froze.

This particular warning was one he actually recognized. Two guided shots had been fired from the Rancor at the Awesome. The computer blared a warning: impact in thirty seconds.

“Oh shit,” Rogers said. “Oh shit, oh shit, oh shit.”

The Awesome had a single escape pod that was set to launch at a moment’s notice, rigged with all the equipment needed for a short trip in space. Rogers got up, grabbing his bottle of Jasker 120, and shouted at his copilot.

“Dorsey, we need to get to the—”

The computer notified him that the escape pod had been safely jettisoned just as he saw the trail of blue light cross the viewscreen.

Dorsey was no longer in the cockpit.

“You worthless, cowardly, backbiting—”

A thunderous impact shuddered through the entire ship, interrupting what would have been a brilliant stream of insults. Rogers closed his eyes and wished he had never left the military. At least then he wouldn’t have had such a good chance of being killed.

After what seemed like an eternity, warning sirens blared from the instrument panel, and Rogers came to the unbelievable realization that he was still alive. Opening his eyes, he saw that the Rancor had fired two disabling shots right into his engines with a precision he had never seen in all his days in the fleet.

The damage assessment popped up almost immediately: the engines had been ruined. But why would the Rancor sit there for the entirety of the fight, then just shoot out Rogers’ engines? And why wouldn’t they say anything?

Then Rogers knew. The Meridan fleet had discovered the missing ship—the Awesome, which Rogers thought he had so carefully erased from the fleet’s inventory before leaving with it—pinpointed Rogers as its new owner, revived the Rancor and its crew from the dead using voodoo and a lot of Scotch tape, and sent them after him. Any moment now, they’d come across the radio, tell him to prepare to be boarded, and he’d be on his way back to the closest Meridan magistrate for sentencing. What an end to a relatively short, relatively successful post-military career.

Instead, the Rancor promptly turned around and jumped back into Un-Space.

This was it. Rogers was going to become a rotting corpse on a perfectly good ship with no engines in the middle of nowhere. Nobody had come to pick him up. No ships had transited to which he could send a message. Maybe a spot this remote hadn’t been such a great idea, after all. His life support systems were on their last reserves, and it was only a matter of time now before the oxygen tanks gave out and he started to feel that uneasy, sleepy feeling that foretold a slow and hypoxic death.

He’d been in hypobaric chambers before in training; he knew the signs. First he’d start to taste funny things, then he’d be unable to perform basic mathematical equations. He’d start mumbling incoherently. The last traces of his intellect would vanish as his body no longer put oxygen into his brain. Then he’d be promoted to colonel and run the personnel squadron. It was an inevitable chain of events.

Rogers was an engineer, damn it, and a good one! He should have been able to fix those engines. But the compartment that held his Vacuum Mobility Unit and tools had been sealed when the Rancor blew a hole in

it. Maybe if he held his breath long enough when he went outside . . . he'd been a pretty strong swimmer in his younger days . . .

Rogers shook his head. What was he thinking? Was he getting cabin fever, or . . . He checked his life support systems. He had less than half a standard day's worth of oxygen left.

Dorsey. Horror vids couldn't describe the litany of physical violence Rogers would hire someone else to inflict on him.

The instrument panel gave him another warning about the life support systems, and he almost threw the long-since-empty bottle of Jasker 120 at it. He would have, actually, had he not already done so two days before and missed completely, putting a dent in the storage locker that held the rest of his bottles of Jasker 120 and rendering it unopenable. He'd never had very good aim.

When the panel beeped again, he thought he was going to pry it open with his fingers and start ripping out wires. But the sound was different. It was the sound he'd heard right before the Rancor had come out of Un-Space and started this whole idiotic escapade.

Moments later, a hole opened at the Un-Space point, and two ships popped out like the pus from a black pimple. Two MPF ships.

"Attention, Awesome—wait, is that really the name of this ship?"

Rogers flicked the comms switch and responded in a hoarse, tired whisper.

"Yes."

The name on the registry was sort of a happy accident; Rogers had been messing around with ideas and had typed "I am awesome" into the terminal. He'd accidentally hit return, and the name stuck. Right now, though, he didn't feel very awesome.

He heard muffled laughter over the radio. "Attention, Awesome. You, your crew, and your ship are subject to seizure under Code 9 of the Meridan Laws of Free Space. You will power down your engines and prepare to be boarded. Any resistance will be treated as authorization for the use of deadly force."

"My engines are disabled," Rogers replied. "I can't power them down."

"Well, at least flip the switch," the Meridan ship responded. "We have protocol."

Rogers reached forward and flipped the switch, then flipped the bird. He hated protocol. But not nearly as much as he hated dying from asphyxiation.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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