



## The Joy Machine

*James E. Gunn , Theodore Sturgeon (based on the story by)*

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Timshel was once the vacation spot of the galaxy, full of culture, natural beauty, and friendly, hospitable inhabitants. But now Timshel has cut itself off from the universe. No one is allowed to enter or leave. Concerned, the Federation has sent agents to investigate, but none have returned.

Captain Kirk and the crew of the "Starship Enterprisesize="-2">TM" are shocked to discover the truth: the people of Timshel have succumbed to an insidious new technology that guarantees every citizen total pleasure, a soul-destroying ecstasy that has enslaved their entire civilization. Kirk and Spock have faced many threats before, but now

## The Joy Machine Details

Date : Published September 1st 1996 by Pocket Books

ISBN : 9780671002213

Author : James E. Gunn , Theodore Sturgeon (based on the story by)

Format : Paperback 264 pages

Genre : Media Tie In, Star Trek, Science Fiction, Fiction, Star Trek Original Series

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# From Reader Review The Joy Machine for online ebook

## Daniel Kukwa says

It's as if someone decided to do a mash-up of two classic Trek episodes ("This Side of Paradise" & "The Ultimate Computer"), throw in enormous amounts of philosophizing, add a marine mammal sub-plot that doesn't amount to much at the climax, and wrap it all up in an overly portentous tone. Where is the warmth, wit, and command of the regular characters that is the hallmark of all satisfying "Star Trek"? In fact, the presence of Uhura & McCoy are surplus to requirements, and Scotty has what might as well be a cameo. This is one of two Trek novels (the other being "Dyson Sphere") where the author plunges headlong into one strand of Trek's success...at the expense of any of the others.

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## Mark says

Of all of the Star Trek novels out there, there are none that I look forward to reading more than the ones by authors who also scripted episodes of the show itself, in no small part because they developed the canon upon which the entire series is based. Though Theodore Sturgeon's novel was developed from a plot outline for the series by another author (the under-appreciated James Gunn), to read a work originating from the writer of "Shore Leave" and the Vulcan-defining classic "Amok Time" was an exciting prospect, especially considering its origins as a proposed episode for the series.

The result proved every bit as good as I thought it would be. In it the *Enterprise* is dispatched to Timshel, a planet that has quarantined itself off from the rest of the Federation. Beaming down, Captain Kirk finds a population that has turned away from intellectual pursuits to a life structured around laboring daily for a nightly dose of stimulation from the Joy Machine a computer created to provide a life of perfect happiness for the people. As Kirk investigates further, he grapples with the moral questions entailed in ending the Joy Machine's rule, as well as the frightening prospect of falling under the machine's control himself.

Sturgeon and Gunn's plot evokes a lot of the tropes that often recurred in the original series, echoing in particular the first season episode "Return of the Archons" in which a computer's rule established a tranquil population by eliminating individual expression. What sets the novel apart from the episode is the extended exploration of the implications of the Joy Machine's rule. Often this takes the form of dialogues between various characters, as the *Enterprise* crew argues with both the computer and its subjects, who readily and even eagerly accept the computer's programmed regimen and who raise larger questions about the purpose of human lives in the process. In this respect it evokes the moral and ethical dilemmas posed in some of the best episodes of the show, which are explored in greater depth than was ever possible due to the constraints posed by the format. As such Gunn's novel possesses a fidelity to the original series often lacking in other products of the franchise, while at the same time showing just what fresh possibilities exist by exploring its themes using other media.

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## Russell Williams says

I first read this novel back in 2002/3 as part of a *TOS* book marathon I was doing. I didn't really remember much about it, apart from vague flashes of Kirk receiving his "payday", something involving whales and an

evil computer.

I know that some readers aren't huge fans of the **five-year mission** stories, and I can certainly understand the reasoning behind it. For me though, they provide a break from the ongoing 24th century narrative where you've got to be on the ball remembering who's assigned to what ship or station and what happened to the *Enterprise* crew in a Deep Space Nine novel and that sort of thing. Not that I'm complaining, I adore those books. It's just nice to immerse yourself in a simple *TOS* novel.

*The Joy Machine* is probably as *TOS* as it's possible to get as the storyline and the various themes around it were explored in several (and better) episodes such as "The Return of the Archons", "A Taste of Armageddon" and "The Ultimate Computer" which saw Kirk and co come up against computers which think they know the best for humanity and have to be set right. With that traditional, well-trodden ground, it's never really going to excel.

To me the most interesting part of the story was when Kirk was captured and taken the Timshel's polar region to live with the scientists, turned rebels, for a few weeks. It was during Kirk's stay that we learned that the scientists had learned how to communicate with wampuses, a whale-like creature native to Timshel. These wampuses then assist the fleeing scientists escaping an advancing wall of ice. This would be a far more fascinating story to explore, but it's quickly passed over as we get back to tackling the Joy Machine.

First and foremost though, this is a Kirk book. His friend Kemal Marouk is the Paymaster working for (and against) the Machine, yet another love of his life who we don't get any background for has become a slave to the machine and only he can take a "payday" and save Timshel and the Universe! :cardie: Still, I did have to smile when it was revealed that the *Enterprise* computer may have had a big hand in defeating the Machine.

That's not to undo the fact that the other members of the *Enterprise* crew were sidelined. Spock volunteered to undergo a "payday" and thus free himself from incarceration to work on defeating the machine while Kirk was away, but we didn't see any of this. It would have been nice to see his story.

However, one aspect that did surprise me in this novel was how Uhura was handled and used, perhaps explaining her inclusion on the Cross Cult cover. Despite the rather dodgy dialogue to her "being a woman" and "having a higher pain threshold", we get to see her argue a case with the Joy Machine during the final showdown and have fourth billing next to Kirk, Spock and McCoy, something we probably wouldn't have seen on screen.

To sum up then, traditional *TOS* fare with the whole of humanity at risk from a computer who wishes for everyone to feel joy. There were good moments in here, it was good to examine Kirk's friendship with Marouk, but his relationship with Dannie was never given any context and in the end she was completely wasted. Perhaps more threat could have been generated if it was an old flame we had seen such as Areel Shaw or Ruth.

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## Kreg says

This book has elements pulled from several other Trek stories recombined into a new one. That of course has been done on other occasions - and done better in some cases.

The question the book tries to make is if people deserve to have everything they want most? This was also

questioned in TOS: "The Menagerie", "Shore Leave", "This Side of Paradise", "Who Mourns for Adonais", and likely others. Computers controlling a civilization has also featured in many episodes, most notably "Return of the Archons" and "For The World Is Hollow, And I Have Touched The Sky".

It should be noted that the outline of this story was intended to be a televised episode, and it would have been better in that venue or as a short story instead of a full novel.

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### **Paul Lunger says**

From 1996, James Gunn's "The Joy Machine" (based on a story by Theodore Sturgeon) is one of the worst Trek books written in a while. The concept itself doesn't seem all that bad, with the Enterprise being sent to the vacation planet Timshel to find out why the planet has (a) quarantined itself & (b) to find out why 2 previous Federation envoys (including a love interest for Kirk) have come up missing. Upon arrival, Kirk discovers that the people are held under the control of the Joy Machine which allows the residents of the planet to experience "payday" which is a moment of total euphoria for taking on mindless tasks. There is no real law & order & everyone is subject to the pleasure with little regard for anything else.

The problem with this entire story is - why do we even care about the people or the planet itself? The luring of Kirk & the Enterprise to the planet is a convenient plot device along with the shallowness of the characters who are mostly mindless automatons subjected to the will of a computer. A rebellious faction introduced to this world seems like a plot point that even gives the story any semblance of meaning & you almost want to have them wake up the people of the planet from their haze. The story is predictable mostly to a fault although the awakening (briefly) of the Enterprise computer is a nice twist along with the sentient wampus creatures on the planet. The ending is almost preordained from the start & a twist involving Hindu gods & goddesses adds to the unrealistic level of this story. Definitely a skip book for even the best of fans who will find no joy from "The Joy Machine".

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### **Stephen Fender says**

How many Star Trek episodes/novels/comics are about ultimate computers controlling whole civilizations? I've lost count. All things considered, who cares? The Joy Machine is a true Trek adventure, plain and simple. It could have easily substituted for Return of the Archons, The Apple, or A Taste of Armageddon as an actual episode. Heck, this SHOULD have been a 4th season episode for TOS (had there been a 4th season). It fits perfectly into the Star Trek mindset of the late 60's. The supporting characters are well written, as well as the Kirk-Spock-McCoy trio. Granted, this novel is VERY Kirk heavy, and don't look for much having to do with the Enterprise, either. But, none of that matters. Its classic Trek at its very best. The only reason this didn't get 5 stars is because of everything I mentioned in this review (summed up in four words): Been there, done that.

Having said that, The Joy Machine was done really well. Solid B+!

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### **Jerry says**

This novel is just plain weird, even for *Star Trek*. It makes a good point about free will and humanity, but it

just didn't do very much for me. I'm glad this didn't make it onto television.

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### **John Yelverton says**

This book is exactly why I've avoided reading "Star Trek" novels. The dialogue and story are incredibly non-Star Trek, and it was quite painful in some places. I definitely wish I'd left this one on the shelf.

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### **Alvin R Mullen says**

There are a lot of not so good reviews, but I liked it. Many say it is too much like old episodes, but originally it was a TOS episode that never got made. Other say too cliché and predictable, but when it was written many of the ideas were not cliché or predictable. This book should be read with a historic understanding of the Star Trek and science fiction community.

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### **Emilyf11 says**

Wonderful mystery

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### **J.W. Braun says**

The author took a story outline for the original Trek's TV series and turned it into a novel; however, there's not enough story for that, so it's very drawn out. It would have been a good classic Trek tv episode, but as a book I found it predictable and a bit boring.

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### **Jesse A says**

No bueno. Just a drag.

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### **Monica Leigh says**

Interesting discussion on the dangers of too much happiness. It was a fun read, but the grammatical errors were distracting and disappointing.

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### **Wesley says**

One of the reasons why I picked up this book was because two of my favorite episodes of TOS were the

Theodore Sturgeon episodes ('Shore Leave' and 'Amok Time'). Even though it was written by James Gunn, I thought that perhaps enough was left of Sturgeon's mark to make it worthwhile. After having read the novel, I'm not really certain there was.

The storyline itself is wonderful, in the same vein of many classic TOS episodes; the idea that an intelligent computer was creating such a perfect world for human beings, to the point where humanity loses its drive to learn and to understand. However, the execution was less than perfect. Once hitting about the middle of the book, I personally lost my interest in it; it could've worked really well as an hour-long episode, but as a 200+ page novel, it became slow and rather dull.

Also, the picture on the front showcases the novel perfectly. It quickly becomes a Kirk-centric story, and all other characters fade to the background. Therefore if you only love Kirk, this book is for you. However, my favorite character is Spock, followed closely by both Kirk and McCoy, so I felt a little bit cheated out of Spock and McCoy, as well as the interactions between the three that makes the show so memorable.

Overall, this is a decent book but leaves the reader with the feeling that it could have been done better.

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## **David King says**

“The Joy Machine” is a Star Trek Original Series novel written by James Gunn based on a story outline written by Theodore Sturgeon. Whilst two of Sturgeon’s outlines got converted into actual episodes, namely “Amok Time” & “Shore Leave” this one didn’t make it and therefore this novel is the only way to actually discover the story.

The story follows the crew of the Enterprise who have been sent to the vacation planet Timshel to find out why the planet has quarantined itself & why two previous Federation investigative teams stopped communicating. Upon arrival, Kirk discovers that the people are under the control of a machine known as the Joy Machine which allows the residents to experience pure pleasure as payment for conducting various mundane tasks. This results in a form of severe social stagnation and the crew of the Enterprise soon realise that if this spreads beyond the planet it could spell the end for the Federation.

This plot is actually rather interesting and does feel like a classic TOS episode with it taking a look at how a perfect world for humans actually results in the loss of drive and exploration which could lead to stagnation and potentially worse. However it is probably stretched out a little bit too much in novel form and I do feel it would have worked much better as an hour long TV episode. I found myself getting a little bit bored at times as it felt a little bit padded which resulted in a rather slow pace. I actually think this may have worked better as a short story as the limited length may have helped to make it feel more like the TV episode it was originally planned to be.

The novel is also very Kirk centric which I actually didn’t mind as most of the other Star Trek novels I have read recently weren’t in this mould. If you are a lover of Kirk then I am sure you will thoroughly enjoy this but you shouldn’t expect to see much from the other characters who tend to fade into the background, especially the original ones who I found to be very underwhelming.

Overall this is a rather average Trek novel which does a good job in capturing the mood of the original series although it does feel a little bit bloated by the conversion from Episode outline to full blown novel. It was quite fun to visualise what could have been if the story had become an episode but beyond that I don’t think

it was anything special. In addition the Kirk centric nature of the story could put some people off. However, if you can't get enough everyone's favourite Starship captain then I think you will enjoy this novel despite the minor issues I have mentioned.

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