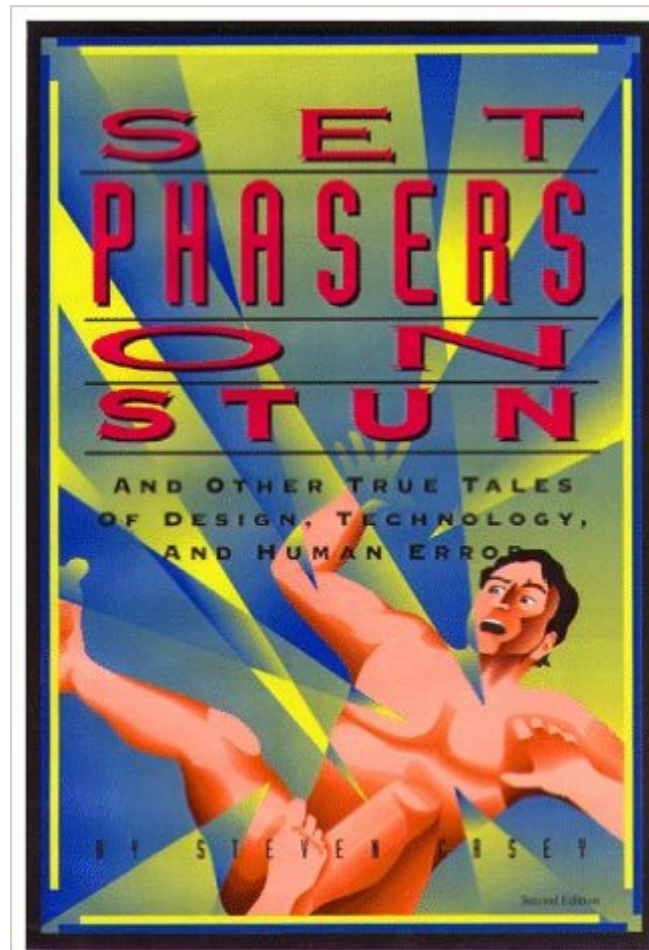


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# Set Phasers On Stun: And Other True Tales Of Design, Technology, And Human Error



## Synopsis

A disturbing share of technological disasters are caused by incompatibilities between the way things are designed and the way people actually perceive, think, and act. Structurally sound aircraft plummet to the earth, supertankers run aground in calm weather, and the machines of medical science maim unsuspecting patients - - all because designers sometimes fail to reflect the characteristics of the user in their designs. Designers and the public alike are realizing that many human' errors are more aptly named designed-induced' errors. Most consumers experience the frustration of using many new products; amusing stories about programming a VCR, operating a personal computer, or finding the headlight switch on a rental car are heard in everyday conversation. The problems consumers experience with modern everyday things are shared by the users of large-scale technologies where the consequences of design can go well beyond simple matters of inconvenience or amusement. In the new second edition of *Set Phasers on Stun' and Other True Tales of Design, Technology, and Human Error*, noted designer and author Steven Casey has assembled 20 factual and arresting stories about people and their attempts to use modern technological creations. Although the operator or pilot usually gets blamed for a big disaster, the root cause can frequently be found in subtle characteristics of the device's human interface.' Technological disasters can often be traced directly to the interplay between people and the design of a device - - be it an airliner cockpit, the controls in an industrial plant, a spacecraft's instruments, a medical system, a nuclear reactor, or even a commercial dishwashing machine. The most effective way to convey the consequences of design-induced human error is with a good story and just the right level of technical detail, and this is what Casey has done in his new book. As stated by Alphonse Chapanis, one of the founders of the human factors engineering discipline, *Set Phasers on Stun* is A tour de force. A collection of gripping and often alarming true stories meticulously documented and skillfully told about design-induced human errors. It should be required reading for all engineers and designers, and everyone else concerned about the ways our modern technological creations can affect our everyday lives. Skylab-4 astronaut Gerald Carr agrees: The book is ...an engrossing tour through the world of human susceptibility to subtle variations in environment and in design.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A perfect 6.0 on technical merit and artistic interpretation! 'Set Phasers on Stun' is a fascinating series of 20 true stories about human factors, user interface design, and design-induced human error. Like a well-told fable used to enforce a useful truth, each story cleverly teaches you something interesting and instructive about the importance of the user interface in modern technology. Casey tells each story from the perspective of the user of the thing or system, so you can really see how people get sucked into a particular situation and understand the unfortunate consequences of the designer's decisions. There is a good blending of technical detail, emotion, and great writing. Addressed are, among other things, a crash in the Airbus computerized cockpit, a Soviet space fatality, assorted medical errors ('Set Phasers on Stun' - the title story about a patient being zapped during a radiation treatment), the launching of a rocket inside a building in Sweden, a diving accident, the Bhopal disaster, and the supertanker Torrey Canyon. I was originally introduced to this book in an engineering class, and it really "turned on the light" as the saying goes.

Steve Casey has provided a valuable service to engineers, designers, and human factors professionals with his true tales of design-induced human error. These engaging stories range from disasters at sea and failures of space systems, to casualties caused by inappropriate procedures and the packaging of consumer items. The lesson from each story is different, but there is a single theme: the incidents could have been avoided if proper attention had been paid to the user during the design of the item or system. I have given copies of Set Phasers on Stun to several people to illustrate the importance of considering human limitations, as well as capabilities, when designing systems for human use. The book is an entertaining read for anyone. I highly recommend Set Phasers on Stun.

A number of friends had recommended "Set Phasers on Stun" to me as a good book on technology and human error. The 20 short stories in the book cover everything from the accidental launching of a rocket to some horrific accidents in hospitals. Each story is written in a way that takes the reader on an engaging, informative, and, quite often, wild ride. Casey's writing style works perfectly with this short story format. I highly recommend "Set Phasers on Stun" to anyone interested in design and technology, or anyone who likes reading very good short stories. The best part is that all of the events covered by the book are true.

I first read Set Phasers on Stun (the first edition) as a textbook in one of my safety classes in college. In addition to being one of the most entertaining textbooks I ever had, it also had the deepest impact on me as far as illustrating how quickly and easily catastrophes can happen. Many of the cases presented in the book leave you shaking your head and wondering how such a simple mistake or oversight could lead to such horrific consequences. I've used many of the cases in this book as examples when trying to make a point during my safety career. I would highly recommend this book to any engineer or safety professional. It's also entertaining reading for anyone with an interest in technology and complex systems.

This book is very entertaining and an easy read. It's made up of several short cases of how poor user design resulted in catastrophic results. For those who deal with design and human factors occasionally, the stories stay pretty fresh in the mind and serve as a great reminder to ensure reasonable effort is put into human factor design aspects of projects.

This book wasn't as good as I thought it was going to be. The stories of each disaster are good, but I was also expecting a detailed post-mortem on each one, listing and discussing all the things that went wrong, the lessons learned, and more details on the fixes that were applied afterwards. There's almost none of that in the book! The things that went wrong, or were poorly designed, are only mentioned in a conversational way during each story, and sprinkled around the rest of the story. So I felt like almost every story wasn't finished, they need a proper conclusion to each one. I was disappointed about that.

Extremely interesting accounts of tragedy and near catastrophe incidents. I was pleasantly surprised to see numerous references to the incidents discussed at the end of each article so I could follow up. Some cases tell accounts from the first person of people who have perished as a

result of the design flaw / human error, and I had to wonder as to the accuracy of these particular cases - i.e. if they died, how did the author know what they were thinking (?). These are the minority of cases though. Written in a very simple style, which is very easy to read for the layperson or the expert wanting actual events to discuss in training, as examples of the importance of design, or persons simply interested in human error.

It's frightening to read accounts of tragedies and disasters that occur when designers can't put themselves in the position of a typical user operating the equipment they have designed. If I had a dollar for each time a software engineer asked me "why would anyone ever do it that way?"...

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