

# H. Beam Piper

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**Henry Beam Piper** (March 23, 1904 – c. November 6, 1964) was an American science fiction author. He wrote many short stories and several novels. He is best known for his extensive Terro-Human Future History series of stories and a shorter series of "Paratime" alternate history tales.

He wrote under the name **H. Beam Piper**. Another source gives his name as "Horace Beam Piper" and a different date of death. His gravestone says "Henry Beam Piper". Piper himself may have been the source of part of the confusion; he told people the H stood for Horace, encouraging the assumption that he used the initial because he disliked his name.

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## Biography

Piper was largely self-educated; he obtained his knowledge of science and history "without subjecting myself to the ridiculous misery of four years in the uncomfortable confines of a raccoon coat." He went to work at age 18 as a laborer at the Pennsylvania Railroad's Altoona yards in Altoona, Pennsylvania. He also worked as a night watchman for the railroad.

Piper published his first short story, "Time and Time Again", in 1947 in *Astounding Science Fiction*, and was primarily a short story author until 1961, when he made a productive, if short-lived, foray into novels. He collected guns and wrote one mystery, *Murder in the Gunroom*.

He committed suicide in November 1964 in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, bringing his career to a premature conclusion. The exact date of his death is unknown; the last entry in his diary was dated November 5 ("Rain 0930")[1], and the date his body was found is reported as November 9 or November 11 by various sources. According to Jerry Pournelle's introduction to *Little Fuzzy*, Piper shut off all the utilities to his apartment, put painter's drop-cloths over the walls and floor, and took his own life with a handgun from his collection. In his suicide note, he gave an explanation that "I don't like to leave messes when I go away, but if I could have cleaned up any of this mess, I wouldn't be going away. H.

## Beam Piper'''

Some biographers attribute his act to financial problems, others to family problems; Pournelle wrote that Piper felt burdened by financial hardships in the wake of a divorce, and the mistaken perception that his career was floundering (his agent had died without notifying him of multiple sales). Editor George H. Scithers, who knew Piper socially, has stated that Piper wanted to spite the ex-wife he despised. By committing suicide, Piper voided his life insurance policy and prevented her from collecting.

An unpublished story, "Only the Arquebus", has gone missing since his suicide; it is probable that he destroyed it along with many of his personal papers.

His output was eventually purchased by Ace Science Fiction and reprinted in a set of paperbacks in the early 1980s. Many of these have since gone out of print, though his two best-known arcs were again reprinted by Ace

in 1998 and 2001. Late in his career, Piper corresponded with Pournelle, who was the Ace editor who helped reprint some of his novels.

Many of his works have been reprinted in the last couple years and are now once more commercially available.

## **Themes and Hallmarks**

Piper's stories fall into two camps: stark space opera, such as *Space Viking*, or stories of cultural conflict or misunderstanding, such as *Little Fuzzy* or the *Paratime* stories.

A running theme in his work is that history repeats itself; past events will have direct and clear analogues in the future. The novel *Uller Uprising* is the clearest example of this, being based on the Sepoy Mutiny. A similarly clear example is the very name of *Space Viking*; although that novel is not a direct reinterpretation of a specific historical precedent, a later theme in the book involves

the takeover of a planet in a manner reminiscent of the rise of Adolf Hitler.

Piper's characterization was rooted in the notion of the self-reliant man: an individual able to take care of himself and willing and able to tackle any situation which might arise. As a result, his yarns tend towards the heroic, and the conflict is usually driven externally.

Piper was interested in General Semantics. It is explicitly mentioned in *Murder in the Gunroom*, and its principles, such as awareness of the limitations of knowledge, are apparent in his later work.

## Impact

Piper did not live to see how influential he was to science fiction writers.

Michael McCollum's first novel, *A Greater Infinity*, was inspired by Piper's notion of the Paratime Police (and to a lesser extent by Isaac Asimov's *The End of Eternity*).

Robert Adams' *Castaways in Time* is similar in many ways to Piper's *Lord Kalvan of Otherwhen*. Adams' book has a group of late-1970s Americans transported to an alternate medieval England where the Roman Catholic Church controls the supply of gunpowder.

Jerry Pournelle's *Janissaries* series is an obvious tribute to *Lord Kalvan*, with several early scenes being very close echoes of corresponding scenes in Piper's work.

Piper's story *Omnilingual* has been much reprinted and has been referred to in many subsequent stories dealing with the translation of alien languages.

Ursula K. Le Guin's Hugo winning novella *The Word For World is Forest* shows similarities to Piper's *Little Fuzzy*.

Elizabeth Bear has stated that her novel *Undertow* was inspired by *Little Fuzzy*.

The Paradox Patrol, in a series of stories by F.

Gwynplaine MacIntyre published in *Analog Science Fiction and Fact*, are a parody of Piper's Paratime Police, although they also pay homage to Alfred Bester in their enforcement of "Bester's Law".

## **Major storylines**

### **Terro-Human Future History**

The Terro-Human Future History is Piper's detailed account of the next 6000 years of human history. 1942, the year the first fission reactor was constructed, is defined as the year 1 A.E. (Atomic Era). In 1973, a nuclear war devastates the planet, eventually laying the groundwork for the emergence of a Terran Federation, once humanity goes into space and develops antigravity technology.

The story "The Edge of the Knife" (collected in *Empire*) occurs slightly before the war, and involves a man who sees flashes of the future. It links many key elements of Piper's series.



Most of the stories take place during the next millennium, during the age of the two Federations. Most notable among these novels are the three Fuzzy novels (starting with *Little Fuzzy*), which concern the recognition of a peculiar alien species as sapient, and the efforts of the two species to learn to live together on the Fuzzies' home adopted world of Zarathustra.

The Federation collapses in the System States War and following Interstellar Wars (a bit of which can be seen in *The Cosmic Computer*), leading to a lengthy interregnum, during which there is no central human power. *Space Viking* is set in this chaotic period.

The interregnum ends with the founding of the first Empire. At least five empires rule humanity during the next four thousand years, but only a handful of short stories (collected in *Empire*) depict this period. Piper generally portrays these empires as benign, ruled by enlightened despots.

Piper's future history resemble in some ways Isaac Asimov's *Foundation Trilogy*, and was probably influenced by it, especially since both authors wrote for John W. Campbell.

## **Paratime**

A much shorter series of alternate history stories is Piper's Paratime sequence, collected in *Paratime*, followed by the novel *Lord Kalvan of Otherwhen*. These stories concern the Paratime Police, a law enforcement outfit from a parallel world which has learned how to move between timelines. They jealously guard the secret, even as they mine other worlds for their resources. Notably, it appears that humans are in fact Martian refugees who escaped a calamity on their home planet and migrated to Earth.

Unlike many alternate histories, these stories tend to focus on points of divergence far back in the past. For instance, *Lord Kalvan* involves a police officer who is accidentally

transported to a world where the ancestors of modern Europeans failed to move into Europe. Instead, the nomadic tribes migrated across Asia and into North America. The people living on the eastern coast of North American in this novel settled the area from the west, and still live in a medieval society.

Many readers point towards the short story "Genesis" (in *The Worlds of H. Beam Piper*) to suggest that the Terro-Human Future History universe is in fact an alternate world in the Paratime universe, where the Martians' escape from Mars resulted in their forgetting their heritage and having to start over. However, in several letters to friends and in an article published in a fan magazine, Piper himself listed the true Paratime stories, and he never identified "Genesis" as one.

## **Published works**

### **Terro-Human Future History**

#### **Federation series**

- *Uller Uprising* (1952) ISBN 0-441-84292-5 (refers to the 1983 edition)
- *Four-Day Planet* (1961) ISBN 0-441-24891-8 (refers to the 1981 edition: *Four-Day Planet/Lone Star planet*)
- *The Cosmic Computer* (1963, originally *Junkyard Planet*) ISBN 0-441-11759-7 (refers to the 1983 edition.) Based on the short story "Graveyard of Dreams", published in *Galaxy Magazine* February 1958.
- *Space Viking* (1963) ISBN 0-441-77784-8 (refers to the 1983 edition)

## Collections

- *Federation* (1981) ISBN 0-441-23191-8
- *Empire*, (1981) ISBN 0-441-20557-7 (refers to the May 1983 Mass Market Paperback Ed.)

## Fuzzy series

1. *Little Fuzzy* (1962) ISBN 0-441-48498-0,
2. *Fuzzy Sapiens* (1964, originally *The Other Human Race*) ISBN 0-441-26196-5
3. *Fuzzies and Other People* (1984) ISBN 0-441-26176-0

Two sequels to the first two Fuzzy novels have been written: *Fuzzy Bones* (1981) by William Tuning ISBN 0-441-26181-7, and *Golden Dream: A Fuzzy Odyssey* (1982) by Ardath Mayhar ISBN 0-441-29726-9. Both books were contradicted by the eventual discovery and publishing of the manuscript of Piper's *Fuzzies and Other People* ISBN 0-441-26176-0.

### Collection

- *The Complete Fuzzy* (1998) ISBN 0-441-00581-0 (pbk.)

### Paratime

- *Paratime* (1981) ISBN 0-441-65169-0

- *The Complete Paratime* (2001) ISBN 0-441-00801-1
- *Lord Kalvan of Otherwhen* (1965, reprinted 1984), ISBN 0-441-49055-7, was followed by the sequels *Great Kings' War* (1985) by Roland Green and John F. Carr, ISBN 0-441-30200-9, and *Kalvan Kingmaker and Siege of Tarr-Hostigos* by Carr alone.
- Short stories: "Last Enemy"; "Time Crime" in two parts; "Temple Trouble"; "Police Operation"; and according to some, "Genesis".

## Other novels

- *Murder in the Gunroom* (1953, not science fiction but rather a murder mystery) ISBN 1-882968-02-6
- *Crisis In 2140* (1957, with John J. McGuire, half of Ace Double D-227). This was first serialized in *Astounding Science Fiction* as *Null-ABC*, copyright 1953.
- *Lone Star Planet* (1958, originally *A Planet for Texans*) expanded by John J.

McGuire ISBN 0-441-24892-6. The work is a clear and obvious tribute to H.L. Mencken's classic essay The Malevolent Jobholder (from *The American Mercury*, June 1924), in which Mencken proposed

"...that it shall be no longer *malum in se* for a citizen to pummel, cowhide, kick, gouge, cut, wound, bruise, maim, burn, club, bastinado, flay, or even lynch a [government] jobholder, and that it shall be *malum prohibitum* only to the extent that the punishment exceeds the jobholder's deserts. The amount of this excess, if any, may be determined very conveniently by a petit jury, as other questions of guilt are now determined."

In 1999, the novel won the Prometheus Award, Hall of Fame Award for Best Classic Libertarian SF Novel. This tongue-in-cheek tale features a planet of Texans whose dinosaur-sized cattle

have to be herded with tanks, and whose system of government derives its character from Mencken's essay. The protagonist is an insubordinate junior diplomat who is appointed as ambassador to this cantankerously independent planet in the hope that he will be assassinated (as the previous ambassador had been), thereby justifying the forcible invasion and conquest of the Texans. The crux of the story is the trial of the previous ambassador's assassins--actually paid killers hired by an alien empire also planning invasion--under a legal system that considers the killing of a practicing politician to be justifiable homicide.

- *First Cycle* (1982, Michael Kurland expanded this from a Piper outline) ISBN 0-441-23919-6

## Short stories

- "The Answer" (1959)





Cover of *Hunter Patrol*,  
written with John J. McGwire

- "Crossroads of Destiny" (1959)
- "Day of the Moron" (1951)
- "Dearest" (1951)
- "The Edge of the Knife" (1957)
- "Flight From Tomorrow" (1950)
- "Genesis" (1951)
- "Graveyard of Dreams" (1958)
- "He Walked Around the Horses" (1948)
- "Hunter Patrol" (1959, with John J. McGuire) (1959)
- "The Keeper" (1957)
- "Last Enemy" (1950)

- "The Mercenaries" (1950)
- "Ministry of Disturbance" (with John J. McGuire) (1958)
- "Naudsonce" (1962)
- "Omnilingual" (1957)
- "Oomphel in the Sky" (1960)
- "Operation R.S.V.P." (1951)
- "Police Operation" (1948)
- "Rebel Raider" (1950)
- "A Slave is a Slave" (1962)
- "Temple Trouble" (1951)
- "Time and Time Again" (1947)
- "Time Crime" (1955)
- "When in the Course—" (1981)

## Collections

- *The Worlds of H. Beam Piper* (1983)  
ISBN 0-441-91052-1

## External links

- The Gashta Homepage
- Fan site with the best Bibliography available.
- Works by H. Beam Piper at Project

Gutenberg

- John F. Carr's Lord Kalvan site
- H. Beam Piper at the Internet Speculative Fiction Database
- Bibliography at SciFan
- Archives of the piper-l mailing list
- Lengthy commentary/analysis by Joseph T Major on *Space Viking*.
- Henry Beam Piper's Photo & Gravesite

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