



Space Viking

H. Beam Piper

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Vengeance is a strange human motivation—it can drive a man to do things which he neither would nor could achieve without it ... and because of that it lies behind some of the greatest sagas of human literature!

Space Viking Details

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From Reader Review Space Viking for online ebook

Becky says

Ok, so I'm a big fan of H. Beam Piper. Yes classic Sci-Fi requires a certain taste, it's certainly not for everyone, and Piper was a bit more on the fringe of political discourse than many of his contemporaries. Space Viking does tend to exhibit Piper's personal beliefs quite plainly, but it is so jam packed with space exploration and battles that it's delicious.

Trask's development as a character is realistic and interesting. Plus, I love series that span an immense amount of time in a created-place, so that you can see how it involves. Strictly speaking Piper didn't write the books as a series, but he did tend to write them in the same created-space, and the degradation of the Old Federation and the rise of the Sword Worlds is fascinating to me.

But I'm a sucker for space operas, and Vikings, so this book has it all.

Plus, just look at the cover and tell me it doesn't fill you with utter nerd love.

Anye says

My other half picked this at random to listen to on a long drive via Audiobooks on his cell phone. What a great find! We now want to go read all his other stuff.

I kept asking when the book was written, since all LibriVox recordings are in the public domain, yet this book discusses hyperdrives and nuclear power and Hitler... turns out it was written in 1963 but it really feels modern and timeless.

This book is partly a store of one man's quest for revenge and how his life didn't really go as planned, and partly a commentary about the futility of various (or possibly all) forms of government. A lot of the political systems described in the book are very pertinent even today, which gives credence to Piper's theme that everything in history tends to repeat itself.

Without being spoilery, I will just say that it took about 10 hours to listen to the whole thing and we were fully engaged right away and throughout. The book has a rather ambiguous moral code (as do the protagonists themselves) that might make you question your opinions.

I can't wait to read his other alternate future works!

Keith Jones says

Takes a while to get going, and I was starting to worry that I wouldn't get through it. Fortunately, they got their base of operations established and started trading with the other systems in the area, and the story really picked up. The evolution of their not really planned little empire was entertaining. I also liked the story's thoughts on governments and civilizations, centering around how all systems are corruptible and all ultimately rely on the goodwill of the governed. The biggest risk of government is for the rulers, elected or whatnot, to become complacent and convinced they know what is right for the people regardless of what the people say they want. Bully people too long or simply ignore them, and sooner or later, they're going to want to do something about it. Sure, you could then take the Space Viking approach and just start shooting the

people you don't like, but you still run the risk of enough of them being able to organize and take over. Anyway, slow start but grows interesting and entertaining.

Erik Graff says

I loved this military science fiction when I was a kid, the drawing on the cover of the Piper novel inspiring a lot of artistic attempts on my own part until I gave up art for study in high school.

Kirt says

I read The Cosmic Computer and Space Viking.

The first is the better of the two, involving a man who uses a rumor of a super-computer on his home planet, once a planet-wide military base of the galactic Federation, to start a boom of reclaiming military salvage so that he can get a working hyperspace ship together so he can revitalize the planet by shipping luxury goods grown on his planet to Terra. Along the way, of course, he discovers the computer, which he thought was fictional, is real, and conceals a terrible secret. This secret is dealt with in a very cynical fashion (the worst part of the book, IMHO), and the story ends.

Space Viking is a much more predictable story of revenge and one man going from being a dreamer, to a destroyer, to the hard-headed creator of one civilization from the ashes of the old. Also, it's the first space opera book I've read to justify the whole stereotypical "space feudalism" thing under the idea that feudalism is just a better system, since democracy pretty much amounts to mob rule, and the barbarians always win out in the end. It doesn't say it in so many words, except in a couple spots, but it underlies the thinking of the whole book. That said, it has a better (tho predictable) ending than The Cosmic Computer.

I can't say I can recommend either book except for those interested in the history of SF; that said, they were somewhat enjoyable as long as I didn't take them too seriously. (It's notable, to get a sense of the level of cynicism involved, that I believe Piper eventually committed suicide.)

Doris says

This book starts out well, but with a lot of philosophical muttering and self justification with what amounts to genocide. In the end our hero seems to wind up more on the side of the bad guys than the good guys, in a universe where achievement equates with firepower.

B. Zedan says

Can we all bask for a moment in the glory of that title?

With Space Kings and their Space Feudalism! And Space Amish (sort of)! It's interesting and I think another example of how Piper (like another favourite of mine, David Drake) pulls from historic battles and whatnot. The only problem with Piper is that his books are great, I just don't want to ruin a fun story for someone else.

This one has revenge, though—and a space ship named Nemesis. Oooh. By this point in time, colonising is out, along with the core society that ran it. The Vikings are the new colonisers. Interesting and interestinger.

David Nichols says

There's plenty of rip-snorting adventure in Beam Piper's SPACE VIKING: raiding, pillaging, space battles, political coups, gunfights in underground bunkers. But mainly the novel serves as a platform for Piper's political ideas. The planetary democracies in the book (like Marduk) he describes as effete, unstable, and easily toppled by demagogues (like Zasparr Makann) or external foes. Humanity tends on the whole toward "neobarbarism"; increasingly dependent on welfare-state handouts and the benefits of a technological society, they lose sight of those blessings' costs, and either refuse to pay them or tear down their technical infrastructure in a fit of pique. The only society that makes sense to Piper is the feudal-libertarian one that his hero, Lucas Trask, establishes on Tanith. People get what they are willing to work or pay for, no more no less, with the minimal state services Piper believes they need (essentially a night-watchman state) provided by a warrior aristocracy. That the aristocracy also owns much of the means of economic production, making economic transactions intrinsically unfair, doesn't bother Piper much. Kudos to him, anyway, for realizing the feudal tendencies within libertarianism more than four decades before political scientists (like Corey Robin) did so.

Piper doesn't seem to like women much in this novel, by the way. The only positive female characters are Trask's former wife (generally only manifesting as a ghost) and a few simpering little girls. Perhaps HBP's then-recent divorce made him more inclined to misogyny than usual, but IIRC he wrote LORD KALVAN OF OTHERWHEN at about the same time, and it had at least a few strong or sympathetic women in its cast of characters. Another note: as often occurs in mid-century space operas, the weapons that the Men of the Future employ in SPACE VIKING seem rather old-fashioned. Ground troops exchange machine-gun and rocket fire, space-going warships slug away at one another with nuclear bombs and "hellburners" (a sustained fusion-reaction bomb resembling the atomic weapons in Wells's WORLD SET FREE). Technological speculation apparently interested Piper less than political speculation, and, like many of his generation, he found it difficult to imagine a weapon more devastating than a nuclear bomb - except, perhaps, human complacency.

Terence says

A sentimental three stars; this was space opera without too much philosophy...Reading his other stuff (particularly *Uller Uprising*), I found his politics laughably simplistic and increasingly tedious.

Baron Greystone says

This is the first of Piper's books that I've read. Having seen his "Little Fuzzy" in bookstores over the years, I had no desire to check him out. However I recently read the assertion that this book was one of many influences on the Traveller role-playing game. Since I'm a fan of Traveller, and of the series of books that was a major influence on the game (EC Tubb's Dumarest saga), I thought I'd check out Space Viking.

There is a group of worlds in the Traveller universe called the Sword Worlds. The planets are named after famous swords, such as Excalibur. There is very little else written about them in the original, Classic

Traveller game. So there are also Sword Worlds in Space Viking. And they, like the overall Traveller universe, have a feudalistic society that also includes future tech such as spaceships. That's about the only connection I see between the two. So, not so thrilling.

As for the book itself, as a story, it's rather shallow. I could've put it down at any point and never bothered to pick it up again, except for completeness' sake.

I just didn't get the idea that these characters, who seemed like well-educated, likeable (in a shallow old-SF way) fellows, were also "space vikings" who raided other worlds by dropping nuclear bombs on them and then looting them of their museum pieces, treasures and small portable manufacturing plants. They were fully capable of making this stuff themselves, but they just decided to take on entire planets with a few ships, to try and steal it. Then they turned around and went to other planets and sold their loot. Uh, why? I couldn't get my head around it. There was a fundamental difference between the way the characters themselves were portrayed, and the horror of wanton killing that they did as a "career."

The other thing was the odd political statements the author appeared to be trying to make. He had the characters draw connections between political movements they discovered and the historical Hitler. He set up a race of Gilgameshers, who played the role of the Jews in "Hitler's" schemes. Rather uncomfortable to read. Then he went on and on about how governments didn't work, but at the same time should use violence to keep the people in line. *Should.* I just couldn't put all this stuff in my head and turn it into a coherent message.

So, yeah. Now I can say I read a book that supposedly influenced Traveller. But didn't really.

Give it a pass.

Jim Davis says

I gave up about 10% of the way in. This was bad space opera, especially for 1962. It read more like it had been serialized in a pulp magazine for a penny a word in 1942.

Sean Brennan says

I have always enjoyed Piper's Terra Federation books and even praised Piper as one of the unsung heroes of SF, but this I had major problems with.

Piper states that both Democracy and Government stemming from it are historically flawed concepts, I have no problem with that. Piper's solution is quite frankly authoritarian to the extreme and also contradictory.

"Then your democracy is a farce, and the people only free on sufferance. if their ballots aren't secured by arms, they're worthless"

Then later his solution to an attack on unarmed security by unarmed citizens Piper's solution.

"Put up fifty combat cars. Draw up a deadline, and open machine gun fire as soon as the mob crossed it, and keep on firing till the survivors turned tail and ran"

The Space Vikings themselves operate to imperialistic standards taking over lesser civilizations not out of

altruistic values but for sheer profit. Again the death and destruction this causes Piper has no comment, obviously this falls into a form of Darwinism determinism. This was the last major work before his suicide and quite frankly it shows.

Ian says

What starts as a Space Chase soon takes a back seat to a strange, demi-Randian commentary on governments and the manner in which they interfere with Strong, Sensible Men. Piper includes a couple of "well, who's to say" equivocations, but it's clear the reader is meant to align with the aristocratic Trask and historically-knowledgeable Harkaman, both of whom hold the opinion that if one wants to make an omelet, one has to firebomb a few thousand chicken coops. On top of this, seemingly the only thing keeping one of the (consistently insane and grasping) villains from being named "Bradolf Britler" is the continual marveling comment from Our Heroes about *how very like Hitler he is, why doesn't anyone see it, I guess we're doomed to repeat the past, tut tut.*

The only parts that I really enjoyed were the passages dealing with the logistics of developing a planetary civilization—that's exactly as backhanded a compliment as it sounds—and Piper cheats a bit here, too, simply having Trask import interstellar-civilization technology to an undeveloped planet and treat the whole reformation as a *fait accompli*.

Pass this one by.

Hotspur says

A fun read, in that old-fashioned, chest-thumping, red meat eating and martini drinking fashion. I love a diversion into Space Opera now and again, and Space Viking is a fine example of the genre. The only H.B. Piper I can admit to reading so far has been LORD KALVAN OF OTHERWHEN (a great alt-history type novel, the first of the PARATIME series), plus some well-executed short stories. Space Viking wasn't extremely deep; Piper prefers the bludgeon to the rapier on some of the points he makes, but I didn't care--there's Space Battles, civilization building, Good Guys and Bad Guys and planets in peril. You can't beat it!

Rollie Reid says

Space opera at its finest. Okay, maybe not, but it was a fun read and it was free on Kindle. When Lucas Trask's wife is murdered at their wedding, he gives up his estate, the Barony of Traskon for a ship and declares himself a Space Viking. His vow is to track down and kill the murderer of his wife. Things don't turn out quite the way he imagined. He arrives at the planet Tanith hoping to find his adversary, but what he finds is an opportunity. He comes eventually to lead more than just one ship. He leads a planet, and starts to restore civilization to a planet that had fallen nearly into the stone age.

Space Viking is set in a wide Galaxy long after the fall of a large Empire. Trask is from one of the Sword Worlds, which have held on to a level of civilization. Space Vikings go out to raid on the fallen worlds, outgunning the locals with starships and nuclear weapons. After one series of successful raids, Trask sets up shop to do something he is much better at than raiding, leading and building. Tanith becomes the center of a small trading empire.

When he becomes embroiled in a war on the civilized world of Marduk, he finds his old enemy there.

This sort of thing is really from before my old time. Space Opera had largely faded into the background when I took up reading Science Fiction, but I still find it fun to read from time to time. The most interesting part of this one, is that Trask, our likable hero, is a monarchist. Less in the sense of supporting his own King, when the story opens he does not have one, but the system is feudal and that is the way he thinks it should be. In fact, that is the only way things make sense to him. He is bewildered by what he sees on Marduk, where they have a Representative Democracy with a titular Monarch.

I really do not buy the philosophy and political rhetoric in the story, but I did enjoy the story.
