

Operation Please Respond



H. Beam Piper and David Johnson

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Based upon this public domain¹ text:

Operation R.S.V.P. by H. Beam Piper (1951)
(Original *Amazing Stories* publication²)

Cover illustration by Robert Jones from original *Amazing Stories* publication.

This version edited to conform with Piper's Terro-human Future History canon³.

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¹ Original text courtesy of Project Gutenberg (<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/18261>).

² "Operation R.S.V.P.," H. Beam Piper, *Amazing Stories*, Vol. 25, No. 1, January 1951, pp. 49-58.

³ As his commentary in "The Future History" (*Zenith*, May 4, 1964, edited by Peter Weston) makes clear, Piper's Terro-human Future History (TFH) canon is comprised of the stories "Omnilingual" (*Astounding Science Fiction*, February 1957), "Edge of the Knife" (*Amazing Stories*, May 1957), "The Keeper" (*Venture Science Fiction*, July 1957), "Graveyard of Dreams" (*Galaxy Science Fiction*, February 1958), "Ministry of Disturbance" (*Astounding Science Fiction*, December 1958), "Oomphel in the Sky" (*Analog Science Fact—Science Fiction*, November 1960), "Naudsonce" (*Analog Science Fact—Science Fiction*, January 1962), and "A Slave is a Slave" (*Analog Science Fact—Science Fiction*, April 1962), and the novels *Uller Uprising* (*The Petrified Planet*, Twayne, 1952), *Four-Day Planet* (Putnam, 1961), *Little Fuzzy* (Avon, 1962), *Space Viking* (originally serialized in *Analog Science Fact—Science Fiction*, November 1962, December 1962, January 1963, and February 1963), *The Cosmic Computer* (originally published as *Junkyard Planet*, Putnam, 1963), *Fuzzy Sapiens* (originally published as *The Other Human Race*, Avon, 1964), and *Fuzzies and Other People* (Ace, 1984). Additionally, those portions of Piper's story "When in the Course—" (*Federation*, Ace 1981), published posthumously, which are not duplicated in his non-TFH story "Gunpowder God" (*Analog Science Fiction—Science Fact*, November 1964) are also treated as part of the TFH canon. Finally, background material found in the authorized novels *Fuzzy Bones* by William Tuning (Ace, 1981) and *Golden Dream* by Ardath Mayhar (Ace, 1982) is also treated as canonical when it does not contradict Piper's own work.

Vance N. Day, Secretary of State, United States of America and Antarctica, to the Right Honorable Fletcher T. Cecil, Foreign Secretary, United Kingdom of Great Britain, Northern Ireland, India, et al.:

January 15, 2048

Dear Foreign Secretary:

Pursuant to our well known policy of exchanging military and scientific information with the Government of friendly Powers, my Government takes great pleasure in announcing the completely successful final tests of our new *Federation*-class contragravity warship. The test flight was made from Naval Air Station McMurdo; the target was located in the Bering Sea.

In order to assist you in appreciating the capabilities of the new *Federation*-class contragravity warship, let me point out that the distance from launching-site to target is somewhat greater than the distance from launching-site to your capital, London.

My Government is still hopeful that your Government will revise its present intransigent position on the Martian uprising.

I have the honor, etc., etc., etc.,

Vance N. Day

Fletcher T. Cecil, to Vance N. Day:

7 February, 2048

My Dear Secretary:

My Government was most delighted to learn of the splendid triumph of your Government in developing the new *Federation*-class contragravity warship, and at the same time deeply relieved. We had, of course, detected the use of nuclear energy incident to the test, and inasmuch as it had obviously originated in the disintegration of a quantity of radioactives, we had feared that an explosion had occurred at your

Government's secret radioactives works at Nome, Alaska. We have long known of the lax security measures in effect at these works, and have, as a consequence, been expecting some disaster there.

I am therefore sure that your Government will be equally gratified to learn of the perfection, by my Government, of our own new *Commonwealth*-class contragravity warship, which embodies, in greatly improved form, many of the features of your own Government's *Federation*-class contragravity warship. Naturally, your own scientific warfare specialists have detected the release of energy incident to the explosion of our own improved nuclear bomb; this bomb was exploded over the North Polar ice cap, south of the Pole, on about 90 degrees West Longitude, almost due north of your capital city of St. Louis⁴. The launching was made from Royal Naval Air Station Bombay.

Naturally, my Government cannot deviate from our present just and reasonable attitude in the Martian independence question. Trusting that your Government will realise this, I have the honor, your Excellency, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera,

Fletcher T. Cecil

From PORT TIMES, 20 February, 2048:

MARTIAN LEADER FETED AT
LONDON

President Earl G. Tranter Confers

With

U.K. P.M. Lindley Stewart

⁴ Washington, D.C., was destroyed in the Thirty Days' War during which, according to "The Edge of the Knife," the United States suffered "grievously" from the Eastern Axis pre-emptive missile strike.

Secretary of State Day to Charles G. Conger, Ambassador at London:

March 3, 2048

Dear Mr. Ambassador:

It is desired that you make immediate secret and confidential repeat secret and confidential inquiry as to the whereabouts of Dr. Donald O. Voigt, the noted Terran Federation contragravity expert, designer of the new *Federation*-class contragravity warship, who vanished a week ago from the Benjamin R. Keene Reaction-Propulsion Laboratories at Cleveland. It is feared in Government circles that this noted scientist has been abducted by agents of the United Kingdom of Great Britain, Northern Ireland, India, et al., possibly to extract from him, under torture, information of a secret technical nature.

As you know, this is but the latest of a series of such disappearances, beginning about two years ago, when the Venusian independence effort first began.

Your utmost activity in this matter is required.

Vance Day

Ambassador Conger to Secretary of State Day:

March 9, 2048

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Since receipt of yours of March 3rd, I have been utilizing all resources at my disposal in the matter of the noted scientist Donald Voigt, and availing myself of all sources of information, e.g., spies, secret agents, disaffected elements of the local population, and including two World Commonwealth High Commissioners on my payroll. I regret to report that results of this investigation have been entirely negative. No one here appears to know anything of the whereabouts of Dr. Voigt.

At the same time, there is considerable concern in U.K. Government circles over the disappearances of certain prominent World Commonwealth scientists, e.g. Dr. Denys Mackintosh-Lewis, the nuclear physicist; Dr. Marie-Sophie Emilie, the great theoretical mathematician; Dr. Kamallesh Ramphal, the electronics expert. I am informed that U.K. Government sources are attributing these disappearances to us.

I can only say that I am sincerely sorry that this is not the case.

Charles G. Conger

Fletcher T. Cecil, to Vance N. Day:

21 April, 2048

My Dear Secretary:

In accordance with our established policy of free exchange with friendly Powers of scientific information, permit me to inform your Government that a new mutated disease-virus has been developed in our biological laboratories, causing a highly contagious disease similar in symptoms to bubonic plague, but responding to none of the treatments for this latter disease. This new virus strain was accidentally produced in the course of some experiments with radioactivity.

In spite of the greatest care, it is feared that this virus has spread beyond the laboratory in which it was developed. We warn you most urgently of the danger that it may have spread to the U.S.A.A.; enclosed are a list of symptoms, etc.

My Government instructs me to advise your Government that the attitude of your Government in the Venusian insurrection is utterly unacceptable, and will require considerable revision before my Government can even consider negotiation with your Government on the subject.

I have the honor, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera,

Fletcher T. Cecil

From PORT TIMES, 12 May, 2048:

VENUSIAN LEADER FETED AT
ST. LOUIS
P.M. sees Gateway Arch Troop Review;
Confers with President McKean

*Claude G. MacDonald, Ambassador at St.
Louis, to Fletcher T. Cecil:*

26 June, 2048

Dear Foreign Secretary:

I regret that I can learn nothing whatever about the fate of the scientists of whom you inquire, namely: Denys Mackintosh-Lewis, Marie-Sophie Emilie, Kamallesh Ramphal, Yaren Howse, Henry MacLeod, and Ayse Sugihara. None of my many sources of information, including Terran Federation Under Secretary-General for Justice Michelson, who is on my payroll, can furnish any useful data whatever. I am informed, however, that the U.S.A.A. Government is deeply concerned about similar disappearances of some of the foremost Terran Federation scientists, including Vinson, Jacoby, Kunio, Baker, Harrison and Pearson, all of whose dossiers are on file with our Secret Intelligence Service. I am further informed that the Government of the U.S.A.A. ascribes these disappearances to our own activities.

Ah, Your Grace, if this were only true!

I have the honor, your Excellency, to be,
et cetera, et cetera,

MacDonald

Day to Fletcher T. Cecil:

October 6, 2048

Dear Foreign Secretary:

Pursuant to our well known policy of exchanging scientific information with the Governments of friendly Powers, my Government takes the greatest pleasure in announcing a scientific discovery of inestimable value to the entire world. I refer to nothing less than a positive technique for liquidating rats as a species.

This technique involves treatment of male rats with certain types of genetic mutations, which not only renders them reproductively sterile but leaves the rodents so treated in full possession of all other sexual functions and impulses. Furthermore, this condition of sterility is venereally contagious, so that one male rat so treated will sterilize all female rats with which it comes in contact, and these, in turn, will sterilize all male rats coming in contact with them. Our mathematicians estimate that under even moderately favorable circumstances, the entire rat population of the world could be sterilized from one male rat in approximately two hundred years.

Rats so treated have already been liberated in the granaries at Calgary; in three months, rat-trappings there have fallen by 26.4 percent, and grain-losses to rats by 32.09 percent.

We are shipping you six dozen sterilized male rats, which you can use for sterilization stock, and, by so augmenting their numbers, may duplicate our own successes.

Curiously enough, this effect of venereally contagious sterility was discovered quite accidentally, in connection with the treatment of extended exposure to hard radiations during interplanetary travel. Knowing the disastrous possible effects of an epidemic of contagious human sterility, all persons so sterilized were quarantined at the Terran Federation Space Force base on Mars as soon as the contagious nature of their sterility had been discovered, with the exception of a dozen or so who commandeered a transport vehicle and

forcibly removed themselves from the Space Force base. It is believed that at least some of them have made their way into the vicinity of the insurrectionist settlements at Wellstown. I must caution your Government to be on the lookout of them. Should they be successful in making their way from Mars to Terra, an epidemic of sterility among the people of the World Commonwealth would be a disaster indeed.

My Government must insist that your Government take some definite step toward the solution of the Martian uprising; the present position of the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain, Northern Ireland, India, et al. on this subject is utterly unacceptable to the Government of the United States of America and Antarctica, and must be revised very considerably.

I have the honor, etc., etc.,

Vance N. Day

Coded message, Day to Conger:

OCTOBER 25, 2048

ASCERTAIN IMMEDIATELY CAUSE
OF RELEASE OF NUCLEAR ENERGY
VICINITY OF GREENLAND THIS AM
DAY

Coded message, Cecil to MacDonald:

25 OCTOBER, 2048

ASCERTAIN IMMEDIATELY CAUSE
OF RELEASE OF NUCLEAR ENERGY
VICINITY OF GREENLAND THIS AM
CECIL

*Letter from the Provisional Prime Minister
of the Free Colonies of Venus to U.S.A.A.*

*President McKean and U.K. Prime Minister
Stewart:*

26 October, 2048

SEBASTIAN L. MACQUARTE,
Provisional Prime Minister of the Free
Colonies of Venus, on behalf of myself and
my colleague, the Right Honorable Earl G.
Tranter, President of the Free Republic of
Mars: to their Excellencies Arthur N.
McKean, President of the United States of
America and Antarctica, and Lindley
Stewart, Prime Minister of the United
Kingdom of Great Britain, Northern Ireland,
India, et al.,

Greetings,

For the past two years, we have watched, with growing concern, the increasing tensions between your Excellencies' respective Governments, allegedly arising out of the colonial independence question. It is our conviction that this dispute is the utterly fraudulent device by which both Governments hope to create a pretext for interplanetary war, each ostensibly to rescue our unhappy planets from the rapacity of the other. Your Excellencies must surely realise that this is a contingency which the Governments of the Free Colonies of Venus and the Free Republic of Mars cannot and will not permit; it would mean nothing short of the world-wide destruction of civilisation on Terra, and the extinction of the Venusian and Martian peoples.

Your Excellencies will recall that my colleague, President Tranter, and I discussed this matter most urgently on the occasions of our respective visits to your capitals of London and St. Louis, and your respective attitudes, on those occasions, has firmly convinced us that neither of your Excellencies is by nature capable of adopting a rational or civilised attitude toward this question. It appears that neither of your Excellencies has any intention of

abandoning your present war of mutual threats and blackmail until forced to do so by some overt act on the part of one or the other of your Excellencies' Governments, which would result in physical war of interplanetary scope and magnitude. I am further convinced that this deplorable situation arises out of the megalomaniac ambitions of the Governments of the U.S.A.A. and the U.K., respectively, and that the different peoples of what you unblushingly call your "associated" member states have no ambitions except, on a rapidly diminishing order of probability, to live out their natural span of years in peace. Therefore:

In the name of Humanity: We, Sebastian L. Macquarte, Provisional Prime Minister of the Free Colonies of Venus, and Earl G. Tranter, President of the Free Republic of Mars, do decree and command that the political entities known as the United States of America and Antarctica and the United Kingdom of Great Britain, Northern Ireland, India, et al. respectively are herewith abolished and dissolved, and their "associated" member states shall hereafter enjoy complete sovereignty each within its own borders as is right and proper.

Now, in case either of you gentlemen feel inclined to laugh this off, let me remind you of the series of mysterious disappearances of some of the most noted scientists of both the Terran Federation of States and the World Commonwealth of Nations, and let me advise your Excellencies that these Free Scientists are now residents of the Free Colonies of Venus or of the Free Republic of Mars, and are here engaged in research and development work for our Governments. These Free Scientists were not abducted, as you gentlemen seem to believe; they came here of their own free will, and ask nothing better than to remain

here, where they are treated with dignity and honor, given material rewards—resources, laboratories, research assistants, etc.—and are also free from the nationalistic and expansionist demands which make life so intolerable in your respective countries. In return for these benefactions, these eminent scientists have developed, for our Governments, certain weapons. For example:

- 1.) An interplanetary warship, officially designated as the *Independence*-class, vastly superior to your Excellencies' respective *Federation*-class and *Commonwealth*-class contragravity warships. They should be; they were the product of the joint efforts of Dr. Voigt and Dr. Sugihara, whom your Excellencies know.
- 2.) A new type of electronic defence screen, which can not only detect the approach of a guided missile, at any velocity whatever, but will automatically nullify same. In case either of your Excellencies doubt this statement, you are invited to send your contragravity warships against some of our *Independence*-class ships and see what happens.
- 3.) Both the U.K. mutated virus and the U.S.A.A. contagious sterility, with positive vaccines against the former and means of instrumental detection of the latter.
- 4.) A technique for initiating and controlling the Bethe carbon-hydrogen cycle. We are now using this as a source of heat for industrial and even domestic purposes, and we also have a carbon-hydrogen cycle bomb. Such a bomb, delivered by one of our *Independence*-class interplanetary warships, was activated yesterday over the northern tip of Greenland, at an altitude of four miles. I am enclosing photographic reproductions of views of this test, televised to Port Oberth by an

accompanying *Independence*-class warship. I am informed that expeditions have been sent by both the Terran Federation and the World Commonwealth to investigate; they should find some very interesting conditions. For one thing, they won't need their climbing equipment to get over the northern Greenland Ice Sheet; the northern Greenland Ice Sheet isn't there, any more.

- 5.) A lithium bomb. This has not been tested, yet. A lithium bomb is nothing for a planet like Venus to let off inside its own atmosphere. We intend making a test with it within the next ten days, however. If your Excellencies will designate a target, which must be at the centre of an uninhabited area at least five hundred miles square, the test can be made in perfect safety. If not, I cannot answer the results; that will be in the hands of the Free Scientists. No doubt the Free Scientists have ordained the destruction of either St. Louis or London; whichever city the Free Scientists have elected to erase, I will make it my personal responsibility to see to it that the other isn't slighted, either.

However, if your Excellencies decide to accede to our modest and reasonable demands, not later than one week from today, this test-launching will be cancelled as unnecessary. Of course, that would leave unsettled a bet I have made with Dr. Mackintosh-Lewis—a bottle of Hebe's Nectar syrah against a bottle of his favorite London Dry gin—that the explosion of a lithium bomb will not initiate a chain reaction in the planet's crust and so

disintegrate Terra. This, of course, is a minor consideration, unworthy of Your notice.

Of course, I am aware that both your Excellencies have, in the past, fomented mutual jealousies and suspicions among the several "associated" member states under your respective jurisdictions, as an instrument of policy. If these peoples were, at this time, to receive full self-determination, the present inevitability of an interplanetary war on a grand scale would be replaced only by the inevitability of a world-wide war by detail. Obviously, a single, supra-national sovereignty is needed to maintain peace, and such a sovereignty should be established under some leadership not hitherto associated with either the former *U.S.A.A.* or the former *U.K.* I humbly offer myself as leader of such a supra-national organisation, counting as a matter of course upon the whole-hearted support and co-operation of both your Excellencies. It might be well if both your Excellencies were to come here to Port Oberth to confer with me on this subject at your very earliest convenience.

I have the honor, your Excellencies , et cetera, et cetera, et cetera,

Sebastian L. Macquarte

From PORT TIMES, 30 October, 2048:

McKEAN, STEWART,
FETED AT PORT OBERTH
Confer With Prime Minister;
Discuss Peace Plans
Surprise Developments Seen. . . .