

**MURDER**  
*IN THE*  
**GUNROOM**

**H. BEAM PIPER**

MYSTERY  
P6652MU

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Baltimore, Maryland  
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## H . B E A M P I P E R : A L I F E O U T O F T I M E

by  
L. Fred Ramsey

*"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

H. Beam Piper wrote his suicide note sometime on the weekend of November 6th, 1964, covered the floor of his apartment with a dropcloth, and shot himself with a pistol from his collection. The note was typical of the man. Offering no excuses for his action, it was in fact an apology for obliging someone else to clear away a mess that he had made. This act of final dependence contradicted a life marked by an exacting adherence to self-reliance. Fear of that dependence led him directly to the place where he found himself that day twenty-nine years ago.

He was brought to this desperation by a life that had grown so financially bleak that he could no longer buy food. Piper found himself reduced to shooting pigeons by the river. He had been living from check to check for fiction sales without any cushion for the inevitable dry spells. The checks had simply stopped coming and he felt, in error, that they would never come again. Convinced that his career was finished and unable by temperament to ask for help, he took the only way out that he felt he had.

The financial problems began in 1954 with the collapse into bankruptcy of the national magazine distribution network. Many science fiction magazines simply disappeared overnight. Piper had never depended on writing for a living, but the sudden loss of most of his markets meant that he sold far fewer stories in the mid-fifties than he had earlier in his career.

In 1955, to the amazement of his friends, Piper married Elizabeth Hirst, a woman who worked in New York City. By all accounts, it was an ill-advised pairing. He was fifty-one, reserved, and accustomed to a solitary life. His diary entries reveal a man unsure of women and in general confused about relationships.

The financial demands of supporting a second person made selling fiction a necessity now, not something done for satisfaction. The markets

