

Sailor Steve and the Iron Men

By Matthew Baugh

It may come as a surprise to some that Robert E. Howard's most frequently used series character was not Conan, nor Bran Mak Morn nor Solomon Kane. No, that honor goes to Sailor Steve Costigan, Able Bodied Mariner who sailed and fought his way around the seven seas of the early 20th century. Steve is featured in no fewer than thirty-four stories and three unfinished fragments, as well as being mentioned in several of Howard's other stories.

This count is confused somewhat by the fact that Costigan is called "Sailor Dennis Dorgan" in a number of the stories. It is clear that Steve and Dennis really are the same character. They share the same physical description, right down to height and weight, the same personality, many of the same friends and have the same sort of adventures.

The reason for the name change and the other superficial differences in the stories has to do with the sometimes confusing publication history of Howard's stories. Howard wrote the "Sailor Steve" stories for the boxing fiction magazines of the day and secured a niche in both "Fight Stories" and "Action Stories." Unfortunately the Great Depression hit both publications very hard, causing them to fold in 1933. Left without a market for his unpublished Costigan stories.

Howard and his agent, Otis Adelbery Kline find a new outlet in Oriental adventure magazines, unfortunately these magazines are already publishing other stories by Howard and editorial policies prevent them from appearing to use two stories by the same author in the same magazine. Their solution is for Howard to disguise both his name and his character for the new market. He takes a number of his unpublished Costigan stories and alters them. Sailor Steve Costigan becomes Sailor Dennis Dorgan, his dog Mike is now named Spike, his ship, The Sea Girl is renamed The Python and Robert E. Howard becomes Patrick Ervin.

Howard saw only one of these altered stories published in his lifetime. That was "Alleys of Darkness" in "Magic Carpet Magazine" in January, 1934. "Magic Carpet" went out of business soon after that and the rest of the altered Costigan stories went unpublished during Howard's lifetime¹. In 1974 the Dorgan stories were first gathered together and published in hardcover as THE AMAZING ADVENTURES OF DENNIS DORGAN by FAX Collector's Editions. Still later, Necronomicon press began to re-publish the Steve Costigan stories as ROBERT E. HOWARD'S FIGHT MAGAZINE. To date four issues have been published and Costigan/Dorgan fans eagerly await issue #5.

In this article I am assuming that Steve Costigan is the character's true name. It was the first name Howard gave to the character. Like many of Howard's heroes, Steve is one of the last of his breed. He is a sailor in the last years of sail, and a barnstorming boxer during the period when that sport also began to change dramatically.

Steve is a big man at 6'0" and 190 lbs with a shock of unruly black hair and blue eyes. He is not the giant some of Howard's other heroes are, and you might expect his prowess as a fighter to come from blinding speed or phenomenal skill. Actually, Steve has neither of these gifts. He is a perpetual underdog, who faces fighters who are bigger, stronger, faster, more skilled than he is but who never suffers a defeat, except on points or through the bad call of a referee. He succeeds for one simple reason: Steve Costigan will not give up. Steve is Howard's favorite kind of fighter, an "iron man."

Like Joe Grim, a real-life boxer who Howard admired, Costigan holds scientific boxing in contempt. He prefers to stand toe-to-toe with his opponent, giving and receiving punishment until one can no longer continue. Even when he seems to have nothing left to go on he continues to fight and triumphs through force of will as much as through his devastating punches and indestructible body.

Steve's fights can be brutal and you would expect his stories to be grim. Some are, but most are among the most humorous things Robert E. Howard ever wrote, rivaled only by his "Bear Creek" tales. Steve is ignorant and uncultured and these flaws, along with his big heart and fierce temper, allow Howard to place him in outrageous situations to good effect. He is the perennial sucker for a hard-luck story, a get-rich-quick scheme or a pretty face. He never gets the girl, or the treasure, or anything more than another fight but somehow he never comes across as a loser.

Perhaps more than any of Howard's other heroes, Steve fits the stereotype of the mindless man of action who would rather crash into any situation with both fists swinging than pause to think things through. He is brash, boastful, hot-tempered, generous, violent and possessed of a rough personal code of chivalry that he never breaks.

Steve's dog Mike is a close canine counterpart of his master. He is a stocky white bulldog who is as tough, as homely and as loyal and noble of spirit as Steve is. Steve's other companions in adventure are his shipmates, especially Bill O'Brien, Mushy Hanson and the "Old Man", the only name the irascible skipper of the "*Sea Girl*" is ever given.

Steve's ship is a windjammer, one of the last great merchant vessels to cross the deep seas under sail. The Windjammers were the greatest of all sailing vessels built roughly on the lines of the 19th century Clipper Ships but with steel construction, which allowed them to be bigger than any other sailing craft. The *Sea Girl* is never described but was probably over 300' long and capable of hauling more cargo over rougher seas than most steam ships.

A windjammer was the perfect vessel for a character like Steve. She had all the romance of a sailing ship but, like Steve, was a part of a dying breed. By the 1920's and 1930's it was clear that powered vessels would soon rule the oceans

completely and the mighty tall ships were on their way out. This caused a great deal of friction between sailors of windjammers and steamships, something that gets Steve into a scrape on more than one occasion.

In writing about Steve and his adventures Howard created a character that is, by turns ignorant, impulsive, loyal, violent, chivalrous, boastful, generous, foolhardy, courageous and pig-headed. Despite all his many faults, he is a very difficult character not to love. Here is a summary of his life:

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF SAILOR STEVE COSTIGAN A BIOGRAPHICAL CHRONOLOGY

In writing this chronology I have estimated the sailing times the *Sea Girl* might make between the ports in question. I have given her an average rate of 10 knots and used the excellent website at www.distances.com to learn sailing times. My results cannot take into account the highly variable sailing times that weather and other conditions would have produced, but they work out surprisingly well in building this chronology. Sailing times take into account the fact that neither the Suez nor the Panama Canals navigable for the great windjammers and they had to make their way around either the Straits of Magellan or the Cape of Africa to cross between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

1903

Steve Costiganⁱⁱ is born to an Irish immigrant family in Galveston, Texas. His branch of the Costigan family is related to the Lynches and the O'Sullivans. Little is known about Steve's family except that he has a younger brother named Michael who, as "Iron Mike" Costigan will also achieve prize-fighting fame.ⁱⁱⁱ (Date is conjecture.)

1904

Steve's younger brother Mike is born. (Date is conjecture.)

1912-1916

Steve spends a considerable part of his youth fighting in back-alley brawls. His greatest rival is "Snoots" Riley. The two boys are so evenly matched that neither ever wins a decisive victory over the other. (Dates are conjecture; the reference is from TEXAS FISTS.)

1917

Steve leaves home at the age of 14 to go to sea. He will later say, "*Since I grew up the **Sea Girl**'s been the only home I knowed*" but this is not literally true. We do not know the name of Steve's first ship, but its skipper is a rough sort who teaches him a healthy disrespect for uniforms and procedure. "*The first cap'n I ever sailed with never wore nothing at sea but a pair of old breeches, a ragged undershirt and a month's growth of whiskers. He used to say uniforms was all right for navy admirals and bell-hops but they was a superflooty anywheres else.*" (Reference in ALLEYS OF PERIL)

1920

Steve signs onto the *Sea Girl*, which will remain his ship for the rest of his adventures. He is still a lad, nowhere his fighting peak, and the title of "ship's champion" will remain with "One-Round" Grannigan for several more years. (Date is conjecture.)

1921

One-Round Grannigan loses a fight to beats Battling Slade of the ship *Dauntless*. Several years later Steve will avenge this loss for him.

1922

Steve beats One-Round Grannigan and becomes champion of the ship. It is the only title he will own and, except for several times when he is away from the *Sea Girl* for an extended period, he will keep it throughout his recorded adventures. (Date is conjecture).

Steve loses a match to Mike Leary, of the ship *Blue Whale*, whom Battling Slade had previously defeated.

1923

Steve signs onto the Australian ship *Elinor* in Bristol England so he can rejoin the *Sea Girl* in Madagascar. While on board he beats up the ship's bully, Bucko Brent. This happens "quite a few years" before the events of WATERFRONT LAW.

Steve wins a decision over Boatswain Hagney, then champion of the British naval Asiatic fleet. Hagney would go on to defeat Battling Slade.

1925

Sailor Handler suffers an injury and Steve takes his place to win a close victory over Battling Santos, the Malay Tiger in San Francisco. This is Santos' first loss and he loses his heart for fighting. He loses to Kid Allison^{iv} then suffers two more defeats before quitting boxing and returning to the Solomon Islands in despair. (Date is conjecture; reference is in FIST AND FANG.)

Iron Mike Brennon makes a comeback under the managership of Steve Amber. Though Brennon will never become a skilled boxer he is an "iron man" who cannot be knocked out and who can keep going even after his physical reserves have been exhausted. Brennon will rise swiftly through the ranks of the heavyweights, even fighting Steve Costigan to a 15 round draw, before his career ends three years later. His story is told in THE IRON MAN. Brennon's first fight of note is an upset victory over Jack Maloney. While this win launches Brennon's career, it nearly ruins Maloney's. He will carry a fear of the unstoppable Brennon, which will make him balk in his next fights.

Steve loses a match on points to Kid Delrano in Seattle. (Date is conjecture, reference is in WATERFRONT LAW.)

1926

Steve beats Monagan of Seattle in Tony Vitello's poolroom. (Reference in CIRCUS FISTS)

Around this time Steve also adopts a powerfully built white bulldog who he names "Mike" after his brother. (Date is conjecture.)

Steve loses a decision to Kid Delrano in San Francisco on a bad call of a low blow. (Date is conjecture; reference is in WATERFRONT LAW.)

1927

Steve is laid up for several weeks with a broken leg in an Alaskan fishing village. While he is there he sees Mike win a seemingly hopeless fight with a tall wolf dog. He will remember this to his advantage when he faces Tiger Valois. (Date is conjecture; reference is in THE BULLDOG BREED.)

Battling Slade fights Joe "Sailor" Handler to a 20 round draw just months before his meeting with Steve.

The legendary handler Grendon finds Jack Maloney drunk and in a Mexican jail. Grendon helps the fighter overcome his fears and begin on the road to greatness again. The story is told in THEY ALWAYS COME BACK.

ROUGH NIGHT IN INNSMOUTH – (The events of this story, if any^v, would need to come early in the year, possibly in February. This is the year before the assault on Innsmouth by the US government mentioned in THE SHADOW OVER INNSMOUTH by H.P. Lovecraft.) Steve helps an old buddy out when the man finds himself in a match with, almost literally, an opponent from Hell.

SIGN OF THE SNAKE – (2 days in late April) – This first recorded adventure takes place in Canton. Steve wins a grudge match with Big John Clancy (6'1 ¼" and 230 lbs.) and, almost inadvertently, breaks up a criminal Triad known as the Yo Thans.^{vi}

PIT OF THE SERPENT – (1 day in early May, following 3 days sailing from Canton.) Steve finally gets to beat Battling Slade (5'10" and 188 lbs.) in a bizarre arena in Manila. He breaks his hand in the process.

THE BULLDOG BREED – (5 days in mid-June, including the 3-day voyage from Manila.) The story begins with the *Sea Girl* still in Manila. Steve's hand is fully healed so it is reasonable to assume they have remained in port for at least 6 weeks. The story ends in Hong Kong where Steve beats Tiger Valois (6'1 ½" and 205 lbs.) the champion of the French Navy.

SAILOR'S GRUDGE – (3 days in mid-July, following 32 days sailing from Hong Kong.) In Los Angeles, Steve becomes a stuntman in the boxing movie "*The Honor of the Champion*" starring Reginald Van Veer. He and Van Veer's double Bert (6'1" and 199 lbs.) are responsible for some of the most realistic fight footage in Hollywood history.^{vii} The footage was so realistic that Bert was knocked out and spent some time in the hospital recovering from the experience.

Around this time Steve helps out a young middleweight called Shifty Strozza by getting him a preliminary fight at one of his bouts.

FIST AND FANG – (1 day ending in late August, following about 20 days sailing from Los Angeles) The story takes place on the islands of Roa-Tua and Tamaru in the Solomon Islands. Here Steve meets his old opponent, Battling Santos, the Malay Tiger (6'1 ½" and 200 lbs.) in what is probably the most savage match of his career. It is a death match, which Steve only wins after suffering a broken right arm and hand, some broken ribs, and having his ear half torn from his head by his opponent's punches. Presumably he spends several months recuperating in Brisbane after the *Sea Girl* finishes its voyage.

October – Iron Mike Brennon fights a match against Steve's brother, Iron Mike Costigan (5'11" and 195 lbs.) Steve's younger brother is said to be at the peak of his career and is considered a strong contender for the Heavyweight championship; he wins the fight and hands Brennon the first knockout of his career. At the close of THE IRON MAN Brennon retires from fighting and marries his sweetheart Marjory.

November - Jack Maloney fights Iron Mike Costigan and wins. Though he fails to knock out Costigan, Maloney hands him a decisive loss and, at the end of THEY ALWAYS COME BACK seems poised to win the world championship.^{viii}

WINNER TAKE ALL – (1 day ending in late December, sailing time from Brisbane is 17 days.) Steve beats Panther Cortez (about 6'1" and 185 lbs.) in Singapore but has his winnings stolen by a pretty swindler.

1928

WATERFRONT FISTS – (1 day in mid-January, with a sailing time from Singapore of 26 days) Steve falls for another pretty grifter in Honolulu and pummels Red Roach (6'3" and 193 lbs.) an Australian southpaw.

THE CHAMPION OF THE FORECASTLE – (Six months, ending in mid July. The story apparently begins shortly after the *Sea Girl* leaves Hawaii. ^{ix}) Steve spends half a year teaching his shipmate Sven Larson to box so he can fight a rival for the affections of his sweetheart in Stockholm. Steve succeeds but finds himself matched against Sven (6'4" and 245 lbs.) himself.

ALLEYS OF PERIL – (2 days in late September, following at least 61 days of sailing time from Stockholm if the journey was made directly). Steve is in Hong Kong where he loses a match with Red McCoy (5'8" and 185 lbs.) on a bad call of foul, but the bulk of this adventure is spent dealing with the mysterious White Tigress and her criminal gang. ^x

WATERFRONT LAW – (Early November, 1 day and sailing time from Hong Kong is 31 days). Steve meets a pair of old adversaries in Cape Town, South Africa, Kid Delrano and Bucko Brent. He beats Brent (6'1 ¾" and 189 lbs.) in the ring and is narrowly avoids being conned out of his winnings by Delrano.

TEXAS FISTS – (Mid-December, 3 days and sailing time from Cape Town is 33 days.) Steve is in Tampico, Texas when he is kidnapped by a group of cowboys to fight a match against his childhood friend Snoots (now Biff) Leary (5'10" and 195 lbs.) Like their childhood fights, this one is indecisive, in large part because it is interrupted by the Mexican bandit known as Lopez the Terrible.

Steve is still in Texas following the fight and becomes acquainted with Robert E. Howard. He agrees to let Howard write up several of his adventures for publication. Steve is unhappy with the first result, titled THE SIGN OF THE SNAKE, but the two men become correspondents and Steve regularly sends Howard more stories to be written up from this time on.^{xi} This would take place not long before the 03/1929 publication of THE SIGN OF THE SNAKE.

1930

Around mid-January Steve and his pals meet a fighter who makes all modern heavyweights including Dempsey, Iron Mike Costigan and Steve himself look like “cream puffs” by comparison.^{xii} (Date is conjecture; reference is an untitled Sailor Steve fragment reprinted in ROBERT E. HOWARD’S FIGHT MAGAZINE #4) Presumably this takes place somewhere on the journey from Tampico to Australia, possibly in South America or the South Seas Islands.

Early February – Steve is in Australia. (Mentioned in Blow the Chinks Down) Brisbane is 30 days sailing time from Tampico.

BLOW THE CHINKS DOWN – Steve and Bill McGlory are in Hong Kong where they blunder into an adventure involving a pretty girl, a stolen diamond and rival crimelords.^{xiii} Sailing time from Brisbane is 16 days. If we add time for the untold adventure mentioned in the last fragment, this adventure would occur sometime in mid-February.)

Late February – Steve is in Shanghai when Ace Barlow “...drugged my grog and lifter my wad...” This mentioned in “Dark Shanghai as having happened “...six months ago...” (Sailing time from Hong Kong to Singapore is 3 days.)

THE FIGHTEN’EST PAIR – (Late March, 1 day. Steve also seems to have been in Singapore for at least a week. And sailing time from Shanghai to Singapore is 9 days) When Mike is stolen by dog-fighters Steve beats Limey Grieson (6’0” and 189 lbs.) to raise the reward money to find him. Steve also meets “gentleman adventurer” Phillip D’Arcy in this story. A rugged man of many skills, D’Arcy may be another of Howard’s heroes but I am currently unaware of any other stories featuring him or a character who may be him under a different name.

CIRCUS FISTS – (May-July, the story takes place over the course of several months following a sailing time from Singapore of 35 days. This could not really occur any earlier in the year because of the performance season circuses follow.) Steve has a falling out with the Old Man at a small California seaport and is discharged from *the Sea Girl*. He signs onto *Flash Larney’s Gigantic Circus and Animal Show* as a strongman and boxer for most of the shows season. His circus career culminates when he wins a match with heavyweight contender Bill Cairn, the Ironville Blacksmith (6’1 ¼” and 210 lbs.) He is finally reconciled with the Old Man and rejoins the ship in San Francisco.

DARK SHANGHAI – Steve and Bill McGlory are conned into an adventure involving a kidnapped woman and a secret perfume formula by an old enemy named Ace Barlow. (The likely setting is mid-August. Shanghai is 25 days’ sailing time from San Francisco)

VIKINGS OF THE GLOVES – (1 day in early September, 5 days sailing from Shanghai.) Using the alias Lars Iverson, Steve enters a Scandinavians-only boxing tournament in Yokohama to defeat Hakon Torkilsen of Denmark (6’1” and 185 lbs.)

NIGHT OF BATTLE – (2 days in Mid-November, following 67 days sailing from Yokohama.) Steve fights Black Jack O’Brien (6’0” and 190 lbs.) in Port Said, Egypt. Black Jack is just Steve’s size and resembles him closely enough to be a brother. They are so evenly matched that the fight is a draw. Feeling some mutual respect the two boxers join forces to break up a gang of robbers called the “Black Mandarins”^{xiv} and turn them over to Inspector Sir Peter Brent of Scotland Yard. As the story ends they are planning their rematch for that evening.

1930

THE SLUGGER’S GAME – (Approximately 4 days in mid-January following 62 days of sailing from Port Said .) Steve is in Hong Kong where the *Sea Girl* has temporarily left him. When his dog Mike is kidnapped he has to fight Torpedo Willoughby of Cardiff (189 lbs.) to raise the ransom money. Fortunately Mike has escaped and has treed his Chinese dog-nappers and a trained gorilla in the process. This may also be the adventure in which Soapy Jackson leaves the *Sea Girl* to find a career ashore. (Soapy’s fate is revealed in GENERAL IRONFIST.)

Mid-February - In an unrecorded voyage the *Sea Girl* docks in San Francisco following 32 days sailing from Hong Kong. A new hand named John Zachary Grimes signs on to the crew. Grimes is a powerful but soft-spoken fellow from the hill country

of Kentucky who doesn't care much for Steve. Also, shortly before leaving port Steve is given an important letter to give to former shipmate Soapy Jackson.^{xv}

GENERAL IRONFIST – (About 4 days in mid-March, following a 24 day voyage from San Francisco). Steve is back in Hong Kong ahead of the *Sea Girl*. Anxious to deliver his important letter to Soapy he has taken a fast steamer. He initially has trouble finding his friend but manages to impress a local Mandarin warlord named General Yun Chei by defeating a Chinese fighter called the “Yeller Typhoon” (approximately 6'6” and 300 lbs.) with a single punch. General Yun needs a man able to defeat his troublesome ally, General Feng, in a fistfight. He Shanghai's Steve for the job. General Feng turns out to be the alias of an Australian adventurer named Joel Ballerin (6'½” and 200 lbs.) Steve beats Ballerin but he and Soapy barely escape with their lives when the forces of a third warlord, General Whang Shan, attack.

SLUGGERS OF THE BEACH – (3 days in mid June. It would only have taken the *Sea Girl* another week to catch up with Steve in Hong Kong and another 3 days sailing from Hong Kong to Shanghai, but references to the “terrible heat” of the day suggest that it is now Summer. Presumably the *Sea Girl* has been doing local runs between Chinese ports or has been lying at anchor much of this time.) Steve wins an easy match with another sailor named Slip Harper despite the interference of referee Red Hoolihan. He later fights Hoolihan (200 lbs.) on the beach when both men are talked into a treasure hunt by the lovely crook known as Suez Kit. “Kit” was actually Traviце Katherine Ames, a beautiful and highly intelligent but amoral adventuress who crossed the world several times over. She used aliases too numerous to mention but was using her given name when she encountered Doc Savage some years later. This adventure was recorded by Lester Dent as LET'S KILL AMES.^{xvi}

SAILOR COSTIGAN AND THE SWAMI – (Mid-June – Mid August, total sailing time to Melbourne, Batavia, Singapore and back to Batavia is about 22 days. The time of year is confirmed by the fact that it is Typhoon season.) The *Sea Girl* goes on to Melbourne where four hands sign on who want to displace Steve as ship's bully. On the way to Batavia (Jakarta) there is a fight in which Steve lays up the four Aussies and infuriates the Old Man. When they make port Steve is given his walking orders. Steve goes to the Swami Ditta Baksh who reads his fortune and tells him that it is his destiny to go to Singapore and open a fight club. This turns out to be a disaster, especially when a Typhoon wrecks the club and Steve returns to the Swami to “repay” him.

That August in Los Angeles (there is a reference to “late summer”) Steve's Uncle Michael Costigan commits suicide under mysterious circumstances. Michael had been something of a hero to Steve, and was the man his brother Mike was named for. He had been a promising boxer in his day; one of the so-called “white hopes” groomed to defeat the great Jack Johnson. Michael Costigan's career had suffered when he accidentally killed Battling Rourke in the ring. Little is known about the circumstances of his death, but there have been rumors that some ‘curse’ or ‘supernatural’ influence may have been involved. These rumors can, of course, be dismissed as superstitious nonsense. A partial account of these events can be found in the story fragment SPECTRES IN THE DARK.

BY THE LAW OF THE SHARK – (1 day in mid-September following an estimated 20 days sailing from Batavia.) Steve is drunk (possibly drugged) when the *Sea Girl* sails, leaving him stranded in Barracuda, “the toughest port in the South Seas.” While there he falls for pretty French dancer named Diane and fights the brutal Shark Murken (6'2” and 215 lbs.) for her. Steve wins the fight but is less lucky in love. Diane leaves the island with another man. Steve takes a steamer and catches the *Sea Girl* in Tahiti about 6 days later.

FLYING KNUCKLES – (40 days, including the estimated sailing time from Tahiti. This would place the main action of the story in mid-October, and Steve would catch up to the *Sea Girl* about the end of the month.) Steve manages to get left behind again, this time in the port of Quito^{xvii}. His friend Johnny Whifferton Plunkett offers him an airplane ride to catch the ship in Valpariso but first they have to make an emergency landing in the Republic of Puerto Grenada. There the country's dictator, Don Rafael Fernandez Pizarro, forces Steve to fight before they can leave. Steve beats Diego Zorilla, a matador turned prizefighter and he and Plunkett narrowly escape the tiny country on an American steamer.

HARD-FISTED SENTIMENT – (1 day in late December following 50 days sailing from Valpariso.) Steve is in Port Arthur (Lushon) when the Old Man announces that his creditors are claiming the *Sea Girl*. Steve sets out to win her back. He tries to call in an old favor from Shifty Strozza, now a middleweight contender, but Strozza refuses to help. Steve knocks Strozza out and takes his place at a planned match. Since Steve is not the draw Strozza is he is only able to keep the crowd by arranging a bizarre novelty match. In succession he faces savate expert Frenchy Ladeau (6'1” and 180 lbs.), jujitsu expert Peter Nagoya (200 lbs. and shorter than Steve) and boxer Bill Brand (6'0” and 190 lbs.) Steve manages to beat all three but not before Nagoya breaks his arm.

THE HONOR OF THE SHIP – (2 days in mid February, following about 6 weeks for Steve’s arm to heal and 11 days sailing from Port Arthur.) Steve and John Zachary Grimes have it out on the beach. The two men have never gotten along and, when Grimes drugs him and takes him place in a match, Steve is outraged. He beats Grimes only to learn something that gives him new respect for his shipmate.

This is the likely placement for the as-yet unpublished BLUE RIVER BLUES, as well as for an untitled fragment which begins, “I had just hung...”^{xxviii}

Steve wins a short but brutal match with Battling O’Rourke. He is interviewed by a sports writer after the fight and recalls a fighter he once met who put all modern heavyweights, himself included, to shame. Sadly, we never get to hear who this super-fighter is. The story appears to take place in an American setting. Since San Francisco is the *Sea Girl*’s most usual port of call it is likely that the story takes place there. (Untitled Fragment published in Robert E. Howard’s Fight Magazine #4.)

THE ALLEYS OF SINGAPORE – (1 day in mid-October). In Singapore, Steve loses a bad decision to a nearly unconscious Kid Leary. He soon learns that all of his crewmates have lost their money betting on him, including the Old Man who was counting to win enough to keep the *Sea Girl* from being repossessed. In his efforts to set things straight he is tricked into helping a gang of extortionists. Fortunately things work out in the end.

THE JADE MONKEY – (1 day in late October following 6 days sailing from Singapore.)^{xix} Steve is in Hong Kong where he beats “Swordfish” Connolly (195 lbs.) of the good ship *Indignation* to win a fifty dollar purse. He uses the purse to help out a damsel in distress and win a fabulous treasure. (It probably won’t spoil too much to say that Steve doesn’t end out with either the fortune or the girl.)

THE MANDARIN RUBY – (1 Day in mid-December.) Steve is still in Hong Kong where he runs afoul of a murder investigation conducted by a detective named Sir Cecil Clayton^{xx}

1932

THE YELLOW COBRA – (1 day in early January following 5 days sailing from Hong Kong). In the Korean port of Fusan (Pusan) Steve meets an old friend, a mining engineer named Jack Randal. In Manchuria Randal accidentally discovered secret mines run with slave labor. He fled to Korea but the mine owners have put a society of assassins called the “Yellow Cobras”^{xxi} on his trail. Steve wins a match with Bull Richardson then immediately has to set out on a desperate race to rescue Jack from the Yellow Cobras.

IN HIGH SOCIETY – (About 3 weeks in late February and early March following 28 days of sailing from Fusan.) In San Francisco Steve is getting ready for a match with Jim Ash when his opponent’s manager, Foxy Barlow, tricks his way into the locker room and squirts belladonna into Steve’s eyes. Steve pummels Ash and Barlow but is forced to wear glasses while his eyes recover. While wearing the cheaters Steve finds he can actually pass for a respectable citizen. He spends some time in Los Angeles with his sports writer friend Billy Dolan while the *Sea Girl* is out at sea. He also meets the Heavyweight Champion, Gentleman Jack Belding, a cultured man and the darling of high society. Steve freely admits that Belding could beat him in a regulation match, but the champion proves no match for him when a polite exhibition turns into a brawl.

PLAYING JOURNALIST – (About 1 week in mid-March.) Steve is still in San Francisco and has recently won a substantial amount of money betting on the horses in Tijuana. He has decided to get out of the fight game and become a sports reporter but this doesn’t last long. As he says at the story’s end, “*I’ve found out the only way I can get along with my feller man is to bust him on the jaw, and I might as well be getting paid for it.*”

THE DESTINY GORILLA – (days in late April and after 32 days sailing from San Francisco.) In Hong Kong, Steve falls for a pretty girl named Teddy Blaine and fights her would-be suitor, Big Bill Elkins for her. As fate would have it, Teddy was just looking for someone tough enough to keep Elkins busy so she could elope with a saxophone player.

A KNIGHT OF THE ROUND TABLE – (About 5 days in early June^{xxii}. The location is not given but it seems likely that it is San Francisco or some other city on the American West Coast.) Steve loses a bad decision to Kid Harrigan, and gets to talking with his old friend Bill Stark who has had a similar experience. Disgusted with the world, the two pledge to leaving boxing and sailing behind. They make a pact that they will make their living for the next six months without turning to either of these trades. Soon they have taken a mysterious job for the eccentric Professor Gallipoli Antipodes Jeppard^{xxiii} and fall into an unlikely series of misadventures. We also learn that, unlike another tough sailor of note, Steve cannot abide spinach.

June-December – There must be several unrecorded adventures in this time period.

PLAYING SANTA CLAUS – (December 24-25, and about 2 days sailing from Hong Kong.) Steve is in Peiping^{xxiv} where he comes to the aid of an American missionary named Dr. Ebenezer Twilliger who is trying to put together a Christmas celebration for a local orphanage. This adventure is unusual in that Steve has no boxing matches, but he does save the orphans from the bandit horde of Kwang Tzu.

1933

THE TURKISH MENACE – (1 day in mid-January, and less than two days sailing from Peiping.) Steve is wrongly suspected of robbing a payroll. By the time the situation is cleared up he has also tangled with a powerful wrestler named Audullah, the “Terrible Turk.”^{xxv}

The rest of Steve’s adventures for this year have never been written. We have no further information on him until a story fragment, which finds him on the West Coast of the US late in the year. Steve is in the middle of a fight with One-Round McGarley when he gets a message that his Aunt Melicent Lynch is in town. Melicent is Steve’s only rich relative and he stands to inherit \$75,000 from her. He finishes McGarley off quickly so he can rush to her hotel. It is suggested that he will be in competition for the inheritance with a no-good second cousin named Clement Pitzmalley from London who would also be in the running for the family fortune. The setting of the fragment is not mentioned so it may be that Steve is still in San Francisco. (Untitled Fragment published in Robert E. Howard’s *Fight Magazine* #4.)

It is shortly after this that the Dennis Dorgan stories begin to appear. Dorgan is clearly Costigan under an alias. Mike the dog is called Spike in these stories but his description is unchanged. Similarly, the *Sea Girl* has become the Python, but she is still skippered by the Old Man and Bill O’Brien and the rest of the crew is unchanged. My theory is that Great Aunt Melicent was appalled by the many injuries Steve had suffered while prize fighting and by the tragic life and recent death of Michael Costigan. She told him that, if he were to see his inheritance, he would have to give up the sport forever. Unable to comply, but not willing to give up on \$75,000 Steve started using the alias of Dorgan in the ring.

Aunt Melicent was no fool. Steve knew that she was likely to read the boxing journals and see the articles Howard was writing about him. He conferred with his friend and they decided to change the stories enough that Melicent would be hard-pressed to make the connection. Howard agreed not only to fictionalize some of the names, but also to submit the stories to the *Oriental Adventure* market, where it was far less likely Melicent would discover them.

1934

January - The first of the Dennis Dorgan stories came out in *MAGIC CARPET MAGAZINE*, unfortunately it would also be the last for four decades. In May of that year *THE SLUGGER’S GAME* was published in Jack Dempsey’s *Fight Magazine*, followed by *GENERAL IRONFIST* in the June issue and *SLUGGERS OF THE BEACH* in the August issue. These stories disregarded Howard’s arrangement with Steve and published them as “Sailor Steve Costigan” stories!

Aunt Melicent was furious! She assumed correctly (though for the wrong reasons) that Steve was still fighting and cut him off without a cent. Costigan was furious with Howard in turn and only the author’s promise that it had been an editorial decision, made against his will, kept the matter from coming to blows. Costigan forbade Howard to publish any more of his stories. However, knowing that his friend would eventually get over his anger, Howard continued to write more “Dennis Dorgan” stories without submitting them.^{xxvi}

1935

By the time the story *THE HONOR OF THE SHIP* is written John Zachary Grimes has become the president of a steamship company. The story was not published in Howard’s lifetime, but was probably written sometime in 1935. In it Steve refers to Grimes’ position as something that has happened in the fairly recent past.

END NOTES

ⁱⁱ Many thanks to REH scholar Leo Grin for his information on the Costigan/Dorgan question.

ⁱⁱ Steve should not be confused with Stephen Costigan, another Howard character who appears in SKULL FACE and TAVERAL MANOR. For more information on Steven Costigan please see my article *Cliff Marsland, Agent in the Shadows*.

ⁱⁱⁱ Iron Mike Costigan is not to be confused with the retired fighter Michael Costigan in the fragment SPECTRES IN THE DARK. That Costigan fought during the 1909-1915 title reign of Jack Johnson. I believe that Michael was Mike's uncle. (Thanks to Rick Lai for letting me read this fragment, which I had not been aware of.)

^{iv} Kid Allison is another boxer whose adventures have been chronicled by Robert E. Howard.

^v The story is a very good fanfic by Ron Shiflet which can be found at: www.toddalan.com/~berglund/ns12fic07.htm. My tentative use of it here is a reflection on my general reluctance to use fanfic rather than any comment on the quality of the story. In the story, Costigan is referred to as "Dorgan" which suggests that his friend Max Peaster did not write it down until after 1933 when Steve was using the Dorgan alias for all his stories. Alternatively, the 'Dorgan of the story may not be Steve at all but another tough sailor character of Howard's named Mike Dorgan. (Thanks to Rick Lai for telling me about this.)

^{vi} The real reason this story seems so different from the rest of the series is that Howard did not write it as a Sailor Steve Costigan story. Originally the character was named McClarney, the name was changed without Howard's permission by "Action Stories" editor John Byrne. (Thanks to Leo Grin for this information.)

^{vii} When Costigan trounces four other boxers who have come to apply for the job on the movie the studio attendant jokes that he should come back in a month when they will be shooting a jungle picture. Sadly, the timing doesn't work out for this to have been *The Lion Man* starring Stanley Obrowski and Rhonda Terry (See TARZAN AND THE LION MAN).

^{viii} Aside from the fact that there is one month separating the conclusions of THE IRON MAN and THEY ALWAYS COME BACK there is no obvious way to date these stories. Since THE IRON MAN was first published in June, 1930 it seems reasonable to assume that it concluded between the events of FIST AND FANG (published May, 1930) and WINNER TAKE ALL (published July, 1930.) If we arbitrarily give Iron Mike the age of 24 in these stories he would be one year younger than Steve.

^{ix} There must be at least one, and probably several, untold adventures during this six-month period. The *Sea Girl* would never have been contracted to carry cargo between Honolulu and Stockholm. A steamer or diesel-powered craft could have done this job in much less time by making use of the Panama Canal but the canal was unusable to the huge windjammers. The *Sea Girl's* fastest course would have been to round South America through the Straits of Magellan. Whether she did this, or sailed west to reach Europe around the Cape of Africa, this would have been the result of several different voyages.

^x The White Tigress is a beautiful English girl with black hair and gray, gold-flecked eyes who was a powerful figure among the Chinese tongs. Her origins are mysterious but she is also featured in the story HELLCAT OF HONG KONG by Marc Cerasini and Charles Hoffman. In this story she meets another Howard hero, John Gorman. The White Tigress has already become a force to be reckoned with in the criminal underworld in HELLCAT so her age can reasonably be estimated as at least 20. Since this story is set in 1913 it follows that she would be about 35 by the time of ALLEYS OF PERIL, though she seems more youthful. Her uncanny gold-flecked eyes, which seem to have a cat-like glow, suggest a possible genetic connection to the Wold-Newton family where such eyes, and a prolonged youthful appearance, are not uncommon. (Thanks to Rick Lai for making me aware of this story and letting me read a copy.)

After splitting with Gorman the Tigress became the lover of a powerful Chinese river pirate. I have been unable to trace the man's identity but his family name seems to have been Lai. In 1914 the two had a daughter names Lai Choi San. When the Tigress abandoned them several years later Lai raised the girl and trained her to succeed him as chief of the river pirates. She grew to be, in the words of one American adventurer, "...Eurasian, beautiful and tough as a hash-heavy top sergeant." Like her mother she took a nom-de-guerre and became known through China as the "Dragon Lady."

^{xi} Howard was just beginning to write biographical stories about boxers for "Fight Stories" and "Jack Dempsey's Fight Magazine" at the time. Wanting to show that he could write a salable article he took some liberties with Steve's story. He gave Steve the rank of First Mate and the vocabulary of a man with a much better education. Steve was appalled and feared that his shipmates would think he was "putting on airs." He demanded that Howard change the story to make it more realistic. The two men finally came to a compromise, Howard kept the story as it was but changed the name of Steve's dog to "Bill" and the name of his ship to the "Panther" so his shipmates would never guess his true identity if they happened to read the adventure. Ironically, the story was accepted but the editors weren't happy with the depiction of Steve. Steve Costigan was fairly well known in the world of boxing by this time and the editors wanted a more realistic portrayal in future stories. With some relief, Howard made the requisite changes.

^{xii} Who could this super-fighter possibly have been? There are several possibilities in the Wold-Newton Universe but it is hard choosing the best possibility. It could have been Doc Savage or Tarzan, though it is hard to imagine the circumstances. Conan might have been able to as well if there were a way he and Costigan could have met somehow across the seas of time. Victor Frankenstein's unhappy creature would certainly have the requisite strength, though Steve seems to be referring to this fighter as a human being. It could have been a primitive human from a time when the race was physically much stronger. Possibly a native of Pellucidar, or some other throwback like Nu of the Niocene or Jim Stone. Clearly more research needs to be done on this mysterious encounter.

One interesting possibility is that the ship's projected voyage could have taken Steve to the remote Pamarung islands where Professor Maxon had conducted a series of experiments nearly two decades earlier trying to create artificial life. The most successful of these experiments had been 13, which resembled a well-formed young man, but which had possessed a strength at least equal to that of Tarzan. The story ends when number 13, or Bulan, as the locals have named him, discovers that he is actually an American millionaire who had been suffering from amnesia.

Despite the best efforts of Sing, the Maxon's cook, the story of how the millionaire came to be mistaken for the real number 13 never quite rings true. It certainly doesn't explain how an ordinary man could have the strength and agility needed to overcome a horde of local warriors, enraged orangutans and several of the superhumanly powerful creatures produced by experiments 1-12 in hand to hand combat. I submit that the amnesia story was a ruse to raise the spirits of the despondent Bulan and that he actually was an artificial human. If Bulan and Virginia Maxon were still living on the islands in 1929, he certainly could have been the inhumanly powerful fighter who Steve and his shipmates encountered. (See THE MONSTER MEN by Edgar Rice Burroughs for the full account of Number 13's story.)

I place this fragment here because it refers to Sven Hanson as "Bull" Hanson. Presumably Hanson got this nickname only after Steve taught him to box and he began a ring career of his own.

^{xiii} This story is also known as House of Peril (you really want an alternate title sometimes) and is one of several stories that Howard submitted to "Action Stories" which were altered to become Costigan stories. Originally this story features a pair of tough sailors named Mike Dorgan and Bill McGlory. Editor John Byrne changed the name of Dorgan to Costigan without Howard's permission. This also happened in the story "One Shanghai Night." (Thanks to Leo Grin for this information.)

^{xiv} Rick Lai points out that this gang has borrowed the name and possibly the methods of an earlier master criminal to help confuse the authorities and frighten potential victims. The original Black Mandarin was killed in 1922 in a clash with Paul Harley. Sax Rohmer, who called the story THE BLACK MANDARIN, recorded the events. Harley is linked to another Rohmer character named Gaston Max through the story AT THE PALACE DE NOSTRA also by Rohmer. Both stories are collected in his TALES OF EAST AND WEST. Max was an enemy of the Scorpion (See Rohmer's THE GOLDEN SCORPION) and the Scorpion was an ally of Fu Manchu. The Black Mandarins who Steve meets in this adventure are neither masterminds nor Asian.

^{xv} While this voyage is hypothetical it is necessary to explain the references to San Francisco in both GENERAL IRONFIST and THE HONOR OF THE SHIP.

^{xvi} There is a passage of 17 years between my chronological placement of "Suez Kit's" meeting with Steve and the 1947 date Rick Lai gives to her meeting with Doc Savage. One could easily argue that this would make Kit too old to be Travice Ames. However Travice's own words in LET'S KILL AMES suggest a different possibility. In chapter 2 she says: *"Men are suckers. I haven't met one yet who isn't. They can be played like a violin if you have the right kind of bow and know how to use it. I had discovered this several years ago, when I was about fourteen."* Kit grew up in the American Midwest where she began her criminal career at the precocious age of 14 under the tutelage of the great confidence man Gondorf. She was expert at using makeup to conceal her true age. Initially she used it to make herself appear older, later to look more youthful. She was a mere lass of 17 when she met Steve Costigan, and was thirty-four when she met Doc. Lester Dent interviewed Ames in some detail while preparing to write her account of the adventure she shared with Doc. If he suspected that she was not as young as she let on he was too much the gentleman to say so.

^{xvii} A close study of the coast of South America fails to turn up either the city of Quito or the Republic of Puerto Grenada so the travel times here are more speculative than elsewhere.

^{xviii} Most of this year is a mystery. As THE HONOR OF THE SHIP is the last of the "Costigan" stories and THE ALLEYS OF SINGAPORE is the first of the "Dorgan" stories we can only assume that there are several more Costigan tales that fall in this period, which Howard never got around to recording.

^{xix} China was in a state of relative peace from 1928-1937 with the exception of Manchuria, which was annexed by the Japanese in 1931. After renaming the province Manchukuo the Japanese military proceeded to claim much of the surrounding territory. This is the probable source of Betty Chisom's references to "the war" and her implication that these were Japanese forces acting as police on the Chinese mainland.

^{xx} Sir Cecil was the second son of William Cecil Clayton and the younger brother of William Clayton. William's story is told in *TARZAN OF THE APES* and *THE RETURN OF TARZAN*. Cecil was born during a period when his parents were estranged and never had a good relationship with either his father or his elder brother. His family had been helped once by Sherlock Holmes (according to Philip José Farmer, Cecil's brother William was the child Holmes rescued from kidnappers in *THE PRIORY SCHOOL*) and it was the Great Detective rather than his father became his ideal, something that would lead to his choice of career. His father and brother never measured up in his eyes to his hero.

In *THE ADVENTURE OF THE PEERLESS PEER* author Philip José Farmer asserted that Tarzan had never revealed his true identity to the world. He had gone back to England pretending to be his deceased cousin William in order to assume his peerage. If this is the case (I have reservations about some of Farmer's claims) then Cecil would have been one of the very few who would have seen through the imposture. Why didn't he challenge it and seek to become Lord Greystoke himself? I suggest there are three reasons. 1) Cecil genuinely liked and sympathized with Tarzan. He admired the ape-man and despised his elder brother, especially after learning about William's deception with the fingerprints in *THE RETURN OF TARZAN*. 2) Cecil held himself to the same standards of integrity that he assumed of his hero Sherlock Holmes. Tarzan really was the rightful heir to the title and Cecil couldn't bring himself to thwart him in getting his inheritance, even for his own gain. 3) The responsibilities that went along with the Greystoke title really didn't fit with Cecil's romantic idea of the life of a consulting detective.

There were a great many aspiring detectives in London in Holmes' wake, many of whom were considerably more capable than Cecil. For this reason, and possibly to avoid the family scandal he feared if Tarzan's charade were ever discovered, he decided to relocate to Hong Kong.

^{xxi} The Yellow Cobras are described as a cult with branches all across the Far East. Though there is no clear connection, this does sound very similar to the Si Fan society led by Dr. Fu Manchu. It seems likely that the secret mining operation was an operation of the Si Fan or of its allies. The fate of the operation is never discussed in this story.

Rick Lai suggests that the Yellow Cobras may have been the same as the minions of the nefarious Dr. Yen Sin. This criminal mastermind, whose adventures were chronicled by pulp writer Donald E. Keyhoe, may well have been an ally of Dr. Fu Manchu. Though Yen Sin's minions were usually called the "Invisible Empire" the evil doctor was often referred to as "the Cobra."

^{xxii} The date here is conjectural, but Steve entered into a bet that he could make his own way for six months without resorting to either boxing or sailing. Since this story is set in the Summer, and the following story is set at Christmas it may be that he managed to keep to the terms of the bet after all.

^{xxiii} He is no relation to the "Man-Eating Jeopard" that Robert E. Howard once wrote about. That "Jeopard" was a western hero named Buckner J. Grimes. The "J" was for "Jeopardy" which was corrupted to Jeopard in the course of the story. (Thanks to Rick Lai for the details of this story.)

^{xxiv} Peiping (Beijing) is not a port city so it seems reasonable to assume that the *Sea Girl* was anchored in the nearby port of Tianjin, which served as a gateway to the Forbidden City.

^{xxv} "This story was originally titled "Sailor Costigan" and the Turkish Menace and teamed Steve with other series characters Mike Dorgan and Bill McGlory. When the story was finally published in *THE AMAZING ADVENTURES OF DENNIS DORGAN* Steve Costigan's name was changed to Dennis Dorgan and Mike Dorgan became Mike Leary. (Thanks to Leo Grin for this information.)

^{xxvi} The two had still not reconciled by the time of Howard's tragic death in 1936. Costigan was saddened to hear of his friend's suicide and bitterly regretted not making amends when he had the chance. It was probably this experience that caused him to spurn the offers of other writers to cover his career and adventures.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to all of the members of the New Wold Newton Meteoritic Society for suggestions and encouragement. Special thanks to Rick Lai for many helpful suggestions and comments and for letting me read his copies of the Sailor Steve stories I had no access to as well as a number of other Robert E. Howard stories, fragments and pastiches! This article would never have become this comprehensive without his help!

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