

Sky Guns of Singapore

A Coffin Kirk Adventure by Arch Whitehouse

*"Twenty million pounds to fortify Singapore ...
Twenty minutes for complete destruction ...
Twenty days to embroil the world in war!" That
fateful warning meant that Britain's proud new
naval base was doomed—doomed by the Circle of
Death! And when the masked members of that
veiled power learned that "Coffin" Kirk stood in
the path of their poisonous fangs, they only
laughed sardonically. For Kirk was their most
hated enemy. Two scores would be settled with a
single blow!*

OVER Changi on the eastern tip of Singapore, a dull, tropical night was just beginning to fall when that Blackburn Shark first appeared over the island of Tekong.

The black waters of the Old Strait were flowing down from the fringe of Johore. And now from the teak deck of the American aircraft carrier Santiago, which was heading eastward in mid-stream, there roared a flight of Boeing F4B-4's bent on a routine tactical problem.

Narrow necklaces of lights marked the highways of the island. They wound over to the Causeway—the link between Brani and Johore which lay within two miles of the new British naval base. Indeed, these lights seemed to throw a guide line from the swarming pile that was the city of Singapore over to that billion-dollar stronghold on the northern shore.

Heat rose in pungent waves from the peninsular swamps, swept across the island to curdle in narrow streets of Singapore's native sector, where flat-footed Malays padded along, their slant eyes sparkling like dark jewels set in old ivory.

Meanwhile, linen-appareled whites hurried across tree-skirted Kaffles Square. They only paused a moment to glance up at the military planes overhead, then hurried into the bars of the hotels confident in the feeling of security that went with the great new naval bulwark that had strengthened this cross-roads of the East.

Confident in added security? Yes!

And yet as polished admirals' launches left grim warships in the harbor and snaked their way through lazy *sampans* and swaying *prahus* and sped on toward the wharfs, a certain tense and mysterious expectancy permeated the equatorial air.

There would be formal functions that night which would bring out the color and brilliancy of jewel-bedecked gowns, of dress uniforms, and of white ties and tails. Royal Air Force officers and navy commanders were already gathered at the cocktail bars. Some bore stripes that denoted long experience in the service, others were young and new. Some of those eyes that shone through the blue cigarette smoke were the same eyes that had once been pressed against gun sights at Mons and Verdun, the same eyes that had tried to pierce the haze at Jutland, the same eyes that had been half blinded with sand and sun at Gallipoli. Yet these men were in the minority; the younger post-War officers outnumbered them.

But since this was cosmopolitan Singapore, the group was not totally British. There were also broad-shouldered American naval men relating jokes or news items picked up by service radio sets, ponderous Dutch traders from the nearby Netherland East Indies, a few rather silent and overly-dignified Japanese, some important Chinese merchants, and a handful of French and Italian attaches.

IN such a gun-bristling setting as Singapore it seemed inconceivable that there could be a cause for fear. Yet a certain message had somehow found its way into the office of the colony Governor-General. The startling bit of paper had simply sifted out of a sheaf of reports forwarded by the Director of Drainage and Irrigation. Then when they rushed over to question the D.D.I., they found him dead at his desk—strangled with a silken sarong cord, and with a two-inch circular

brand cruelly stamped on his high forehead. The message had read:

Twenty million pounds to fortify Singapore twenty minutes for complete destruction twenty days to embroil the world in war!—The Circle of Death

The Inspector General of Police could throw no light on either the message or the murder. To be sure, the matter could have been dismissed as the work of a madman. But strange things can happen in the Far East, and there was plenty of reason to believe the threat. Singapore was responsible for the protection of wide British interests against which several jealous powers might like to strike.

But the Governor-General's reception and ball had to go on. In fact, it might help ease the tension—for it would at least give the service men responsible for the security of Singapore an opportunity of swinging their thoughts into less-trying channels. A breathing spell assuaged with fine wine, beauty, and music might promote better international understanding and cooperation.

Still, the British and American battleships in the harbor, though gaily bedecked with flags and ceremonial illumination, hummed with tense activity below decks. Skeleton crews sat on metal saddles in the gun turrets, keen-eyed junior officers were in the fire control bridges, and second officers stood watch on the bridge wings. They were on guard against—they knew not what. Yet some satanic power was threatening to snuff out thousands of lives and leave those bedecked battleships floating tombs of sudden death.

THE Blackburn Shark continued on and skirted the north side of Old Strait as the American single-seater fighters turned clear of her riding lights and flew back over the outer harbor of Changi. Those who remember much about it recall only that the British torpedo carrier was not carrying the usual 21-inch torpedo between her wheels, and a few declared she did not carry her Fleet Arm numerals. But in light of what happened afterward it is a wonder anyone in the Straits Settlements was ever able to remember anything.

The Shark finally swung in over the air base, gave the accepted service signals, and continued northwest toward the new Naval Base.

It was then that things began to happen.

A silver Northrop 2-E carrying no registration numbers that could be recognized from the ground, abruptly swung into a searchlight beam that fingered the sky from somewhere east of Mandai. The low-wing craft poised for a moment at the 3,000 foot level, and then when British Archie shells burst across her nose she darted back and forth as though unperturbed. Since she did not deign to pull up, the ground officer in charge of the battery ordered two more three-inchers blasted at her.

The Northrop still gave no salute—she simply nosed down through a blot of AA smoke and hurtled at the British Shark!

Almost instantly, two more searchlight beams splashed their blaze against the night sky and sped across to light up the defiant American ship. Observers below then saw the gunners in the Shark direct a warning burst at the Northrop. But the dull silver monoplane continued its menacing dive on the British service ship.

The ground batteries now held their fire, but the layers worked like beavers to select a new range. Shell fuses were rammed into the automatic selectors, and the gunners stood by in readiness.

And now action had begun above. The Northrop slammed at the Blackburn, and for several minutes a mad aerial engagement took place. It was noted at the time that the Blackburn seemed to be attempting to get inland toward the concrete buttresses of the great new dry-dock, but the Northrop maneuvered continually to keep her out over the Strait.

Two shells burst dangerously close to the Northrop, but they only seemed to goad the American fighter into a new frenzy of action. With a swish she zoomed, curled over on one wing-tip, and went down at the Blackburn spewing a torrent of lead.

The Blackburn staggered, jerked her nose up sharply. Then several missiles fell from her undercarriage racks. Smoke hid this scene from those below.

But there quickly followed four distinct explosions and four gigantic columns of water climbed up into the sky. A thunderous concussion shook the island, and the next thing observers saw was the Blackburn falling through the haze in

unsteady flutters, throwing portions of her wings and tail assembly away. Finally a pennon of flame flickered out and crawled along her lower longerons, then she nosed down and her *Siddeley* Tiger engine raced her into the Strait.

The wreckage hit a chain's length ahead of the anchored V.S.S. *Marblehurst* and sent out a blue-white cloud of vapor and a billowing carpet of flame that unfurled itself across the oily waters.

And with that, the dull-silver *Northrop* cleared, roared through a mad barrage of three-inch anti-aircraft fire, and headed inland in a southerly direction.

IT was the Flag-Officer of the *Marblehurst* who gave the first alarm. This American cruiser was connected by telephone buoy with the *Rutland*, which lay two hundred yards farther downstream.

"For Heaven's sake, batten every gas-tight door you have aboard!" he screamed into the phone. "Every man top-side has been knocked out. The wind is moving it this way. It's gas gas of some"

But that was as far as he got.

The officers aboard the *Rutland* made a game effort to comply and warn other vessels, but their radio man died at his post, his carrier wave still humming in the earphones of the operators on the ships nearby.

Death had struck with a silent scythe. Men dropped where they stood and metal took on a foul greenish tinge. Two Royal Navy patrol boats hurried across the water, to attempt to pick up survivors. But one bashed itself into the side of an oil tanker, and the other, utterly out of control, went aground in the marshes opposite the Naval base.

For three hours Singapore was in a bedlam. A few on duty at the air base managed to get into gas-proof shelters or don masks. The gunners at the Changi anti-aircraft battery base managed to save themselves. But the Strait was choked with sampans, prahus, bum-boats, barges, and admiralty craft, all out of control and all bearing the corpses of men who had died without knowing what had felled them.

The news was telephoned through to the city of Singapore, fifteen miles away, and the Governor-General quickly ordered a thorough search made

for the mysterious *Northrop*. Armored cars raced through the streets with loud speakers ordering all ranks to return to their stations. American swabs swung to the running boards of cars alongside British bluejackets. Garrison Artillery men trotted at the double with blue-clad American Marines. Officers in full dress barked orders at small groups of men and marched them to their emergency stations. Searchlight beams continued to slash back and forth across the skies.

But no trace of the *Northrop* could be found.

By midnight, some semblance of order had been regained. A skeleton crew was placed on the *Rutland* and *Marblehurst*, and the two cruisers were moved out of the Strait while flags drooped at half-staff from the walled walks of the R.A.F. base.

The Circle of Death had struck!

Radiograms immediately apprised the world of the tragedy that had swept Singapore. Parliament hurried to a special session, the President of the United States addressed a harassed Congress in a midnight assembly, and international tension brought threats, riots, and bombings.

Meanwhile, every source available was checked to discover the identity of the mysterious American *Northrop* and its audacious pilot. But only a black-robed group of men sitting about a table in Berlin had even a semblance of an idea. And they could never tell, for they themselves were outside the law. Indeed, they were—The Circle of Death!

TWENTY-FOUR HOURS passed, and another night fell on that Far East city. Would it bring more horror?

Two figures, grotesque in their contrast, hurried through the back alleys along the waterfront. Heat rose in pungent waves and mongrel curs yapped and snapped as they fought over a bit of rotting offal found in the murky gutters.

Dim lights threw eerie shadows on the creaking, perilously hung sign whose gaudy letters announced that here was Kanaka Joe's place. Through the warped doorway, which was partially screened with cheap netting, came the odors of sweat, sawdust, and rot-gut alcohol. A dingy ship's lantern swung somewhere in the

middle of the room and a tinny player piano of doubtful vintage was giving off a pathetic melody.

Toward this dive the two figures made their way. The first—a tall man in an open throated shirt and pith helmet—drew aside the door netting and peered in. The other, a smaller but startlingly stocky individual wearing a dirty yachting cap, dingy denim shirt, and dirty duck trousers, stood outside and assumed the belligerent attitude of a sentry.

In a moment, the tall one returned to the side of his short and rugged companion and said: “Not there, Tank. We’d better try farther along.”

But the short one seemed not to be listening. He stood sniffing and uttering guttural sounds as he eyed a rickshaw which had suddenly stopped about twenty yards ahead.

“What’s up, Tank? Caught something?” The stocky chap only hurried ahead without a word, whereupon the taller fellow followed him with an even-swinging stride, his eyes cold and piercing, his jaw firm.

The man addressed as Tank pulled up in the shadow of a leaning wall and waited. He was sniffing again through a nose that appeared to have seen considerable action in the prize ring. The face was tawny and heavily lined, but the eyes were equally as piercing and keen as that of the taller man.

As the two waited, a dim figure vaulted out of the rickshaw, tossed a coin to the boy, and darted into a dim doorway.

“Um! So he’s gone into the Pirate’s Pit, eh, Tank?” the tall man said. And when the smaller one simply grunted and sniffed again, he continued: “Take it easy. Let him settle down first.”

The man called Tank nodded, then nervously padded about in the shadows on feet encased in rubber-soled sneakers. His great hands at times were drawn up and clenched, and once or twice he thumped them against his chest.

“Now now!” soothed the other. “You’ll get your chance—if it’s the right man. Take it easy, Tank; here’s a cigarette.”

The two sucked on their smokes for a minute or so, then the tall man jerked at his belt and led the way. Together they walked into the dingy den and sauntered up to the bar.

“One gin sling and a *seidel* of beer,” the tall man ordered.

The bartender, a hunchbacked devil with one eye, drew a short cheroot out of his mouth and set it on the counter behind him. He selected the ingredients of the Singapore gin sling with callous skill, mixed them, and drew the beer.

The two newcomers took up their drinks and sipped. And now the tall one peered cautiously, into the dreary slab of mirror behind the bar.

A giant bluejacket with the inscription H.M.S. Eagle on his cap, stood next to them at the bar. He turned in friendly fashion toward the tall one.

“Where was you, Mate, when it ‘appened?” he opened with a booming voice that came from the depths of a barrel chest.

“Beg pardon?” said the tall man.

“I mean, where was you when it ‘appened larst night—the bombing and gassing? Narsty bit o’ business, that!”

“Oh, last night. Rather. Why I was out Mandai way looking at a plantation. I suppose you fellows were quite busy for a time, eh?”

“You weren’t ‘arf lucky missin’ it. I ‘ad a bloomin’ gas marsk on for abart four ‘ours. Dirty fine mess somebody made of somethink, eh?”

“I don’t suppose you’re supposed to talk much,” the tall man said, “but have they found out what actually occurred when the blow-off came?”

“Who’s yer pal?” the bluejacket half-whispered before he answered. He was indicating the stocky, rough-looking fellow who held the big *seidel* of beer.

“Old friend of mine. Call him Tank. He’s all right—an Oxford man in his better days,” the tall man responded quietly. “And as for me, I’m Kirk—Brian Kirk.”

“His associates in crime call him ‘Coffin’—‘Coffin’ Kirk,” the smaller man broke in.

On hearing this the big bluejacket looked puzzled. He peered around the front of Kirk’s chest at the swarthy chap farther along.

“Did ‘e say that?” the Limey asked.

“Just his way of joking. Anyhow, he and I are looking for a small copra place down here.”

“‘E looks like a foreigner. But ‘e certainly speaks all right,” the bluejacket said still a little confused at the rugged man’s speech.

“Young man,” the chap called Tank went on over the top of his beer *seidel*. “I can trace my

ancestry back further than the Norman Conquest. You can speak freely in my presence.”

“Seen better days, eh?” the bluejacket said out of the corner of his mouth to Kirk as he eyed the burly Tank.

“Oh, much better. Drink up and have another with me.”

THE BARTENDER set them up again and the Eagle sailor went on confidentially: “Yus, it was narsty business, and that American Northrop seems to be at the bottom of it. At least they think so.”

“Well,” remarked Kirk. “That was the plane that shot the British plane down, wasn’t it?”

“Ah, you’re right there, Matey. But that’s not the bottom of it. I can tell yer somethink that few ‘ere in Singapore knows abart this little matter, me bein’ on the aircraft carrier.”

“Hm! You sound interesting,” said Kirk. Then he looked around carelessly. He’d already noted that the man they sought was sitting at a small table near the far wall. He was a colorless but exceedingly strong looking fellow who sat watching the door anxiously. He fingered a tall glass of amber liquid and at times turned and watched the movements of a slim girl who sauntered about the smoky den selling cigarettes.

Kirk, who now realized that their quarry had evidently been looking at the girl when they came in and had thus missed them, still pretended to be listening to the big seaman beside him.

“Interesting?” the bluejacket was saying. “Why, do you know, Matey, that that Blackburn—the Shark ship wot was shot down—was one of six such planes that have been missing for about a month? I know, because I’m an artificer on one of the Ospreys. Mister Spelter is my pilot.”

Kirk turned his head sharply and spoke out of the side of his mouth as he watched the cigarette girl: “I don’t understand.”

“No? Well, that Blackburn was one of a half dozen that were flyin’ out to the Far East, for the Singapore base. But none of them got ‘ere!”

“What happened?” asked Kirk, still watching the girl.

“Ah, now you ‘ave me, Matey. That’s wot they’d all like to know. The blarsted flight took off all right from Rangoon—that’s in Burma, yer

know. They’d done a lovely show all the way down from Malta without anythink ‘appening—and then, out of nowhere, they all simply well, they just didn’t turn up. And like everything else like this, the whole bloomin’ mess is carefully hushed up. But I know, Matey. I know, ‘cause we blokes on the Eagle went combing the confounded Bay of Bengal lookin’ for ‘em.”

“It’s unbelievable!” said Kirk. “It looks, then, as though someone swiped the lot and now they’re using them to—”

“To ‘do in’ the new business at Singapore,” cut in the giant bluejacket. “Clever bit of work, if you want my opinion. And I says that that bloke in the Northrop knew somethink abart it. ‘E tried to stop that blarsted Blackburn from getting through. I think it was ‘e who made ‘em drop their bombs in the Strait, and if they’d got through to Singapore wiv that gas, there’d be nobody ‘ere tonight to drink beer in the Pirate’s Pit.”

“Which reminds me,” smiled Kirk. “Let’s have another.”

They drank up and stared at each other in the mirror behind the bar.

“That’s a very sensational story,” said Kirk, lighting a cigarette.

“And what worries me,” came from husky Tank on the other side, “is what has happened to the other five.”

The British bluejacket jerked, peered around Kirk again as though he was not quite sure who had spoken.

“You’re right there, Matey,” agreed the Eagle man. “What games will they get up to wiv the other five?”

BUT Kirk was watching the man over near the wall through the mirror now. He noted that the fellow was restless. He continually flicked up the sleeve of his shantung shirt and examined his wrist watch. Then he kept turning to watch the cigarette girl.

Kirk noted that she was now standing near a group of cruel-faced men who were evidently deck-hands from foreign freighters. They seemed to be carrying on the usual chit-chat with the girl, but one of them suddenly made a move that instantly aroused Kirk’s suspicion.

“Look here, sailor,” he said quietly out of the side of his mouth. “I’m going to start a row here. I

think someone is up to something—and if you want to stay out of it, get going now.”

“A row, Matey? A bit of a barney? Count me in. Who do I ‘ave a go at?”

“All right. Just keep quiet until I give you the word.”

Kirk again took up his drink, then began a pantomime of fumbling for a cigarette. The girl was coming up the room with her little tray in front of her, and she was jingling her coins cheerfully in a pocket of a small starched apron.

“Watch now,” warned Kirk. “Watch those birds in the back of the room.”

And with that he started across the floor, while the bluejacket finished his beer with a satisfied gulp of expectancy. Kirk measured his steps so that he reached the man across the room at the same instant as did the girl. She gave him a half-startled smile, then shoved the tray forward to the man at the table.

One pack of cigarettes was shoved forward to the front of the tray, and the man in the shantung shirt made a move to pick it up. But Kirk was a fraction of a second too fast for him. He took the package with his right hand and dropped a coin on the tray with his left.

“Thanks,” he smiled. “I’ve been looking all over the place for a smoke.”

He palmed the cigarettes quickly as the man jumped to his feet and gripped his wrist.

“Drop that!” the fellow hissed at Kirk. “I want that package!”

The girl stood horrified, one hand raised to her lips as if to stifle a cry.

“There’s plenty more cigs there—all you want,” said Kirk with a thin-lipped smile.

“But I want that pack!”

The man now had his viper face close to Kirk’s chin, and his eyes blazed hatred and defiance.

“Try and get it—Trussock. You are Jerry Trussock, aren’t you?”

“Yeah, Trussock’s the name. And I suppose you’re ‘Coffin’ Kirk. But if you don’t hand over that package I’ll see that you’re put in a coffin quicker than you expected.”

They were hissing their sentences now through clenched teeth. The girl had hastily backed away, her other cigarettes spilling off her tray.

“You swine! For the last time—give me that package!”

“Try and get it.”

Trussock gave Kirk’s hand a wrench, but the Yank curled his left hand around quickly and caught his man full under the chin with the heel of his palm. Trussock went over backward, upsetting a table and several chairs.

Almost instantly the Pirate’s Pit was in an uproar. The cigarette girl let out a scream and a bottle swished past Kirk’s head and smashed itself to smithereens against the wall.

“Look out!” bawled the bluejacket.

Kirk turned quickly, threw a quick punch at a man who was rushing toward him with a knife in his hand. Then Tank let out a loud piercing scream and dived in to cover the stabber who now lay on his back on the floor.

The bluejacket then thundered into action. First he leaned over the bar and grabbed the bartender by the scruff of the neck and brought his head down with a smash on the edge of the ebony bar. The man let out a groan, went limp, and dropped to the floor on the other side. With that, the husky sailor came into the fray under forced draft. He blundered into four dark men, swung from somewhere near the back of his heel, and scattered them like ten-pins.

“Good work!” cried Kirk. But his words were lost as shouts of “*Look out!*” “*Get him!*”, and “*Grab the girl!*” rent the air.

Then a shot rang out somewhere, and Kirk turned after planting his fist in a longshoreman’s belt. Tank was scrambling on the floor with Trussock. The man had a gun out. But he’d missed in his first try at Kirk.

Tank, however, soon precluded any further marksmanship of this kind. With a mighty heave, he lifted Trussock high in the air and slammed him down on the edge of a table like a side of beef.

“Take it easy, Tank!” yelled Kirk.

But Tank was inflamed now. He sailed into Trussock again, gripped his throat and almost ripped the man’s head off. Trussock let out a low moan and Tank screamed at him. Then with another heave he again hoisted the man high above his head, stood poised for an instant or two, and hurled him broadside at a knot of men who were rushing at Kirk.

Noting that Tank had the remainder of the assailants well in hand, Kirk shoved the pack of

cigarettes into his pocket and went to the aid of the Limey bluejacket. The sailor had taken on two Lascars, and one of them had got through the Eagle man's guard and inflicted a long, blood-spurting gash across his forehead.

With a series of curling hooks, Kirk sent one of the Lascars crashing across the room while the bluejacket downed the other.

By this time, the place was a shambles. Several men lay motionless on the floor, and the few who could move cowered in the corners, their faces battered and jaws swollen. There were no others left to dispute the three; for Tank had just tossed the last fighter the full length of the dingy den.

Kirk's eyes sought the cigarette girl, and now with a quick hop, skip, and jump he darted down the room, leaving the big British sailor to gape at Tank with blank amazement spread across his blood-stained countenance. The Limey had never before seen such physical prowess.

KIRK nailed the girl as she tried to get through a window. He dragged her back kicking and screaming. "Shut up. I won't hurt you," he yelled. "Show me which man here put you up to that cigarette package gag."

"He gave me a dollar to give it to him," the girl whimpered in fright.

"A dollar? Dutch, Mex, or American?"

"American ... here, look ... this is what he gave me."

The girl brought out an American one-dollar bill and showed it to Kirk. He nodded. "But which man gave it to you?" he said as he lugged her forward toward the fallen and cowering men. She pointed to a swarthy bullet-headed man who lay on his back, his body jerking convulsively.

"That's the one," she said pointing. "Black Teddy!"

"Right!" said Kirk, kneeling down and going through the man's pockets quickly. He found a few seaman's papers, some cards of bars all over the Far East, and a few letters. There were also about three hundred dollars in new American currency.

Kirk had a sudden desire to test the Eagle man. "Want it?" he said to the British seaman, who was staring strangely at the man on the floor.

"Not me, Mate. I don't take no money wot don't belong to me. Let 'im 'ave it. I've been shoved abart in bar brawls me-self. An' it ain't

any joke wakin' up and finding yerself stoney broke—an' far from 'ome."

"Good lad!" beamed Kirk.

"Besides, I've 'ad me money's worth. That little barney was worth a month's pay. Let shove orf."

"And now where's that girl?" But the cigarette seller had completely disappeared.

Kirk grabbed Tank, then all three hurried out into the dark street and sought the protective shadows. Police might be along at any minute.

"Just what was that cigarette business all about?" the Limey asked as they turned into Arthur Street and headed for the brighter lights of Colony Road.

"Nothing much. I just didn't like that guy," explained Kirk.

"Know 'im?"

"Used to. He was a cheap transport pilot once, and he was picked up several times for bringing Chinese across the border. Bad character, that bird."

"Your mate 'ere, enjoyed 'imself, didn't 'e? Chucking men abart as though they were stuffed dolls. 'E ought to come in 'andy if any of your elephants go on strike an' you want a few mahogany trees pulled up. Oxford, did you say?"

"Magdalen College. Stroke oar in '21. Ancient ceramic arts," Tank muttered over his shoulder.

"Ah! ceramics I 'eard once means crockery. And I 'ad an idea there was something about slingin' the crockery abart in your pay and mess book, Mate," the big seaman observed quietly after he had let Tank's information sink in. "Well, where to now? You ain't looking for any more cigarettes are you?"

"No. That's all for tonight, Jack—you British tars go under the name of 'Jack', don't you?" smiled Kirk.

"Oh, that name'll do. It's as good as the one your mate 'as, at any rate."

"Well, we'll be leaving you here, Jack. If we're in town tomorrow, we'll look you up, and we'll see what the cocktail bar at the Raffles has to offer, eh?"

"Gawd, matey! Do you mean it?"

"Positive!"

"Give us yer mauley," the tar said gripping Kirk's hand. "I'll be wanderin' near the Raffles from seven till twelve—unless nothink 'appens."

They shook hands, then Kirk and Tank moved away with a final salute.

“And see that you get that gash fixed up before you go back to your ship,” Kirk advised.

“COFFIN” KIRK and his mate, Tank, walked several squares until they found an available conveyance to take them out of town a short distance.

Kirk smiled to himself as he realized what luck he had had that night. He was thankful for the assistance of the big honest Englishman, and he was thankful for the break he had had over the little cigarette girl. But he was more than pleased with the behavior of Tank—his trained ape man.

He would have liked to tell the big English sailor the real story of Tank and how they had practically grown up together since that memorable day twenty years before when they had both escaped from the clutches of the German Secret Police and from the confines of the Berlin Zoo. He would have liked to have told him the story of how the two of them, utter children of their respective species, had managed to sneak across Germany to Hamburg and get aboard a freighter that took them to America.

The big Englishman would not have believed how they had grown up together while Kirk planned in his youthful heart how he would get his revenge on the unscrupulous billion-dollar syndicate that had caused his father’s death. It was hard to credit the story of how he had patiently taught Tank to act or ape human beings and how he had carefully removed most of the natural hair from his face and tattooed a pinkish color to the cheeks and forehead.

The Englishman would have laughed had he known how for years Kirk had studied ventriloquism to “make Tank talk” and how he had added to his own skill and knowledge to carry out the plan which was devised to wipe out that hellish syndicate—the Circle of Death.

Yes, all this had started twenty years before when Dongan Kirk, Brian’s father, had been betrayed by the Circle of Death. Twenty long years of careful planning and control of a bitter hatred. Twenty long years tempered only by the unbelievable loyalty and protection of a trained ape.

THE car carried them on through the outer fringes of the town and along the King Edward road for about five miles. Then, at a signal from Kirk, the Malay driver pulled up at a broad cross-road. A watery moon threw its silver sheen over the swaying background of palms as they got out and walked away. The Alvis car turned and made its way back to Raffles Square.

They walked on in silence for about a quarter of a mile, then turned off across a matted track which curled into the jungle. Their footsteps were softened by the tanga-moss which gave under their feet like a luxurious pile carpet.

“This equatorial jungle business must seem like old times to you, eh, Tank?” Kirk said quietly as he stared up through the nipa palms at the moon.

Then suddenly he realized that Tank might someday want to revert to the jungle. True, he had been born in a city zoo and had never seen a real jungle before. But Kirk sensed that no amount of captivity or confinement could fully erase the inherent desire for the freedom of the natural habitat from where his ancestors had sprung.

The more Kirk thought of the idea, the more it bothered him. He had not considered this when he brought the ape across southern Europe, across Turkey, through Persia, and in long hops over India to the Federated Malay States on this wild dash to attempt to curb this new threat of the Circle of Death.

He walked on, pondering on the new problem—then suddenly realized that Tank was no longer beside him! His throat constricted. He turned sharply. But Tank was nowhere to be seen!

Frantic, he called out and hurried back along the path hoping against hope that the ape-man had stopped to inspect some new evidence of his ancestral past. A fear he had never sensed since that memorable day in the Berlin Zoo twenty years before swept through him like an acidic poison.

“Tank!” he called. “Tank! Come back here!”

He hurried on, broke into a run, then stumbled. He caught himself just in time and kicked at the something that had fouled his feet. He snatched down and drew up the object.

It was Tank’s sailor blouse.

“Tank!” he cried again. Then he saw the dirty duck trousers and the pair of rubber-soled

sneakers lying there in the moonlight on the moss-covered path.

The full realization that he was now alone swept over him in an engulfing tide of despond. Alone, really, for the first time in twenty years. Like a man who has received an unexpected blow from a friend, "Coffin" Kirk drew the back of his hand across his eyes and let out a long sigh. He called once more, but the sound of his voice through the nipa palms only seemed to mock him. Finally, he rolled the ape's still-warm clothing into a bundle, tucked it under his arm, and strode on with leaden steps.

THE plantation house lay about 400 yards ahead. Kirk had arranged for it in Rangoon a week before. The owner, a British planter who was on his way home to clear up the business details of an estate, was glad to let the American take it over for a reasonable sum for a few weeks on the assumption that he was experimenting with a new method of copra pressing.

The building was a well-constructed affair composed of one main living room, three bedrooms, a kitchen, and an attached shack which was rigged out as a sort of laboratory. A few yards away rambled a number of drying sheds, tool houses, and uninhabited shacks which had been used by native workmen when the plantation was being worked.

Kirk wandered in dejectedly and lit a large kerosene lamp which stood on a table near the front window. He placed Tank's clothing on the window sill nearby, then went over to a cupboard and brought out a brandy bottle and a soda siphon.

"I might have known," he muttered, "that there's something about the smell of a jungle that does things even to humans. It was in the cards that Tank should feel the same effect."

He splashed the soda into the glass, took a deep gulp.

Then he suddenly remembered that he had not yet inspected the package of cigarettes which had been the primary cause of the evening's adventure. He sat down in a large wicker chair, stuck his long legs out before him, and produced the now crumpled pack from his white breeches pocket. He soon discovered a slit along one side of the pack-age, and by carefully removing the

adjacent wrapping he quickly brought out a folded sheet of fine tissue paper.

Kirk whistled lightly as he opened the folded sheet. It was buff in color and marked with dark brown lines. He squinted at it as if unable to believe his eyes—for in the upper right-hand corner was printed: "H.M.S. Eagle".

He sat staring across the room, utterly unable to figure out how this particular piece of paper got into the cigarette package.

"H.M.S. Eagle?" he pondered. "Why that's the aircraft carrier that sailor friend of ours came from! This means that he must have delivered this! But how? ... and why? Yet I thought—"

Then he read the message which was plainly printed in telegrapher's capitals:

ALL CLEAR TONIGHT. I HAVE MEN WATCHING K. WILL STRIKE FROM KRANII SIDE AT MIDNIGHT.

SPEL

For a moment, Kirk could not get the full significance of the message, though he was certain it had been intended for Jerry Trussock, whom he'd long suspected of having a connection with the dread Circle and who surely knew something about the events of the night before.

"'All clear tonight,'" he repeated, "and they have me watched, for that 'K' pretty obviously means 'Kirk'. But who the deuce could 'Spel be?'"

Then like a flash it struck. 'Spel' was Flying-Officer E. V. J. Spelter—the son of Sir Eric Spelter, the noted munitions king whose questionable activities had led Kirk to list him on his secret roster of the Circle of Death.

"So his son is in this thing, too—the spawn of a swine who would tilt the caldron of Mars and spread war and destruction on the heads of the unsuspecting. And should that caldron tilt here, a war would flame through the Pacific and leave the wreckage of two great nations in its wake."

He sniffed at himself as he realized the statements he was making. "I'm getting squiffy without Tank around. But I wonder why young Spelter took the chance of writing such a message on a sheet of Eagle signal paper?"

He pondered on that as he consulted his wrist watch again. Then he sensed that Trussock would not have considered the message authentic without such evidence. That much was

reasonable. Still, Spelter must have felt very sure of himself.

The time was 11:17. And the Circle of Death, with five missing Blackburn Sharks, would strike again at midnight.

He got up, crumpled the message, and glanced about again, hopelessly looking for Tank. Then with a low oath he sank into a chair to think.

HARDLY had he seated himself, when he sensed danger. But somehow tonight his muscles were not tuned for quick action. When he did get to his feet to investigate, it was too late.

A rawhide noose had been skillfully dropped over him and his arms were pinned tightly to his sides!

"Damn you!" he started to say. But then he held his breath. He realized he would need all he could muster to get out of this.

Three men were covering him while a fourth was knotting the thong behind his back. They were viper-faced individuals dressed in black alpaca clothing. This was strange apparel for white men in the Far East, but it had served its purpose of covering their movements as they followed Kirk and Tank from where they had left their conveyance.

"Where is that other fellow?" the leader, a rather young looking Englishman, clipped.

Kirk looked at the man. Judging by photos he'd seen of the elder Spelter, this could not be the young flyer. Then Kirk replied: "I don't know where my man is. I suppose he went to bed. Here's his clothes." And he nodded toward the pile of clothes on the window sill.

"Take a look about the place," the young Englishman ordered, flipping a Webley pistol about in an authoritative manner.

One of the others began scrounging his way about the building.

"What's the idea?" asked Kirk in an attempt to eke out some information and confirm what he already knew.

"You know what the idea is," the young Englishman snarled. "Your name is Kirk, and we've just popped in to see that you don't spoil any more of our plans, although I must say I admire your persistence. Now, about that cigarette package business?"

"What about it?"

"You, of course, found the message. And we want it. It's rather—important to us."

"You mean, it rather incriminates one Flying-Officer Spelter, eh?"

"That's the story," admitted the other. "Now hand over that message."

"It's somewhere about, but I'm not quite sure where now. You've rather messed up things here. I'll make myself comfortable, if you don't mind, and try to recall where that blamed message is."

The searching chap came back and reported that there was "no sign of the other blighter".

Kirk sat down, whereupon the young Englishman came over and went through his pockets. The message was nowhere to be found. The crumpled cigarette package still lay on a small table nearby, but the Englishman quickly satisfied himself that the message had been removed from it.

As a matter of fact, Kirk was really puzzled, because for the life of him he could not recall what he had done with the secret note.

"Now come on. There's no use being nasty about this," the young Englishman said. "We can, you know, make things pretty hot for you."

"Well, you'll have to hurry, won't you," Kirk taunted, "if you are going to see the fun at twelve o'clock?"

"There you are, Justin," a heavy-set Limey broke out, addressing the leader. "You see, 'e knows somethink abart it. 'E must 'ave it abart somewhere."

"Let's give him a going-over," said the third man. "We haven't much time anyway."

Justin hesitated a moment, and Kirk spoke up: "Yes, you'd better be moving off if you want to get clear before those other Sharks go into action. I understand there'll be a devil of a show tonight, and I don't think your kind will want to be around these parts after things get moving."

"What about that piece of paper?" spat Justin.

"I tell you I don't know what I did with it. Your little visit has put me off my balance."

"Yer only wastin' time," the big Limey warned his leader. "We've got to get back to Bedok before long, you know."

Justin's lips grew hard, and he approached Kirk with his Webley leveled.

"Go on, you'd better get rid of me now, because I don't know where that paper is," Kirk

said with a grin. "Or are you a little squeamish about killing a man in cold blood?"

"Give it to 'im, Justin," the big Limey bawled. "We'll set fire to this blooming place afterward to make sure nothing leaks out about our part in the doin's."

"You're getting one chance," Justin said. But his voice had gone weak. "Do you hand that paper over, or do we have to get rough?"

"Haven't you been rough enough?" Kirk said.

"'Ere, you 'aven't the guts to do it. Let me 'ave a go at 'im!" And the big Englishman threw a punch at the helpless Kirk and knocked him sprawling out of his chair. Then he started to draw his foot back to add a kick. But the young leader held him back.

"Not that—not that sort of thing, Holloway!"

"You—you ain't got a bit of courage in yer. Let 'im 'ave it now! We're only wastin' time 'ere."

Justin started to turn toward the others. But as he did so, he let out a muffled scream. He stood staring at the window. Then, before any of them could make a move, the full frame of the window came crashing in and a gigantic ape bounded into the room.

WITH a lightning move, Kirk rolled into the shadow of a heavy chair and buried his head between his knees. Then there came a smashing blow followed by a loud scream. Justin had been hurled across the room by a pair of strong hairy arms, and he now lay huddled against the stone fireplace. There was a shot somewhere and another scream as the returned Tank went to work on the other three at one and the same time. He grabbed the big Englishman by the scruff of the neck, swung him clear off his feet, and used him as a human hammer against the remaining two. Finally, when the latter lay still, the huge ape-man swung the now-inert Limey around like a discus thrower—and then tossed his battered body on top of Justin's crumpled form.

One of the others then tried to creep away toward the door. But Tank caught sight of him. With a screech he catapulted across the room and landed full force on the man's back. There was an ominous crack and a piercing cry, then Tank shoved the broken body into a corner.

"Tank! Tank!" yelled Kirk. "Come over here!"

The big ape bounded back, and put his arms around Kirk. Then he sensed that his master was bound, and with a snuffling cry he leaned over and with one wrench of his big teeth bit the rawhide thong in two. Kirk flexed his muscles a moment, then collected the weapons that had been scattered about the floor.

"Where the devil have you been?" demanded Kirk.

But Tank said nothing. He simply bowed his head, looked about the room with a sniff or two, and found his clothing. And while Kirk examined the injured men and took every paper he could find from them, the ape got dressed again and assumed something of a less forbidding appearance.

"You blew in just in time, old boy!" Kirk said as he inspected Holloway and Justin. They were both stone dead. Justin's head was crushed in and Holloway's back was broken. His check also showed that but one of the other two were alive, and that one was so badly injured that Kirk sensed he would never recover consciousness.

"So you succumbed to the spell of the jungle, Tank? Couldn't resist a ramble through the trees, eh? I figured that was it, but I never thought you'd leave me like that."

Tank, realizing he was being censored, hung his great head in retribution. But had Kirk inspected the ape's massive face more closely, he would have noticed a sly smile that bespoke the huge simian's contentment over his little game of hookey.

Kirk was bustling about the room now, looking for the lost message. He picked up the cigarette package and fingered it a moment, then said aloud: "Now what would I have done had it been a cigarette butt instead of a sheet of paper?"

His face brightened and he darted over and searched the fireplace. No, the message was not there. Indeed, he now recalled that one of the intruders had sifted through that same rubbish. But then, just as he was about to give up, a chance, acute-angle glance toward the side of the fireplace brought the secret note to light. The ball of paper was wedged down almost out of sight between the cross bars of a portable cooking grill.

"I must have unconsciously figured it was a cigarette butt and tossed it toward the fireplace—only to miss and hit this cooking gadget," spoke

up Kirk. Then he quickly consulted his watch and barked out an order to Tank. And once the lamp was blown out, the two of them hurried outside and made their way to the big drying shed where the Northrop had been carefully covered with a large strip of jute netting. From the outside, it would have looked for all the world like a pile of drying copra. Together they carefully stripped the covering back and clambered aboard. The tanks were full, for gasoline was available from several scarlet drums which had been brought in at Kirk's orders a week or so before he had arrived. He checked the front guns and saw that Tank's rear weapons were properly loaded and ready for action.

He kicked the Eclipse starter and the big engine opened up. Kirk let her warm for several minutes before moving out. Then with a final blast to check her revs he released the wheel brakes and let the sleek ship race out of the shed and into the roadway beyond.

Carefully setting her for the take-off down the wagon road that ran through the plantation, Kirk held her true, then lifted her into the sky. Both he and Tank had slipped on fairly warm flying clothing, including helmets and goggles, so no one would have suspected that the figure in the rear pit wasn't a human.

THEY climbed higher, heading north all the time. And about two miles south of the new Naval base they saw the first tell-tale signs of warning. Great searchlight beams flashed out and slashed back and forth across the skies. And from the platforms of the cruisers anchored off Tekong, more shafts of light sprayed out, adding to the mad design that was being carved out of the dull blue sky.

Kirk looked at his watch again, then picking up the hand mike of his radio, he began sending a message on the official wave length of the Singapore air base:

Calling R.A.F. base at Singapore! Emergency warning! Five Blackburn Sharks of the Circle of Death will attack dry-dock, graving dock, and gun emplacements at Changi at midnight. Raid expected to begin from Kranii side at any minute. Warn all Naval vessels and U. S. Navy ships in area. Caution city of Singapore to prepare for gas.

He repeated the message as he climbed the Northrop and sought the point of Kranii on the south-west shore of the island. He did not pause to check to see if his message was being accepted, but continued to chant his warning. A few moments later, he caught obvious evidence that his message was getting through. Lights threw fan-shaped glares down the main runway of the R.A.F. base. More lights broke out at the civil air base near the city. And signal lamps blinked on the cruisers. Even so, he did not hang up his mike:

This is Brian Kirk reporting. Five Blackburn Sharks will attempt to destroy the new bases at—

But he got no further. Tank's guns abruptly rang out, spewing the first torrent of lead. Kirk turned, saw three Sharks in wide formation curling around on them from the south.

"They're here!" he screamed, dropping the hand mike and snapping the switch. Then with a quick move, Kirk brought the Northrop around hard, and with a pull on the stick, he rammed her up and under the lead Shark and let drive. His two streams of fire fanged into the belly of the renegade Blackburn and she snapped in the middle as though she had been struck with an invisible chopper. Then flame spat out from her fuel tanks and a dull thud of concussion banged down on them from above. To dodge the falling wreck, Kirk had to let the Northrop go over on one wing and sideslip away.

Tank, chattering and dancing like a madman, now poured a wicked burst into the second Shark. Another bull's eye! And they watched the spiked biplane curl away in a tight but somewhat flat spiral. Immediately, Kirk nosed around after it, hammering through a hurricane of leaden hail from the other Blackburns. Finally he got a bead with his nose guns and poured a terrible burst full into the floundering Shark.

It was the death blow! She broke up with a loud roar, rolled over on her back, threw away her wings, and plummeted down to destruction.

"That's two!" yelled Kirk. "Now keep your eye peeled on the other, Tank."

The Northrop came up out of her dive with a scream, climbed almost vertical. The third Shark was racing away to the north, evidently headed for the naval base.

Kirk shot the sauce to the engine, thundered in pursuit. Then he faced a spray of lead from the

rear pit of the speeding Blackburn Shark. He tangoed about to keep clear of the fire but gradually crept up on the raider. He could see the long torpedo between the wheels of the streaking biplane. That torpedo deposited in the right spot would quickly sink the gigantic naval dock which had been floated out from Britain.

Kirk sensed that he would have to act fast to get her before she got over the naval base. He started a series of long shots. Fortunately, these made her turn, and in turning she lost valuable time. Kirk then gave the Northrop all she would take and dashed into a position dead below that doom dealer of the Circle of Death.

Tank, chattering madly, caught the idea, crudely aimed the two movable Brownings in a vertical position and hung on the triggers. Kirk, watching the sparkle of his tracers, treadled his rudder pedals to bring Tank's shots to their mark.

Here was fixed-gun practice with a new meaning!

Tank screamed as he pressed his trips, and Kirk see-sawed back and forth until the charging boxes were empty. Then suddenly, the Shark wavered into the gleam of a searchlight and rolled sadly. Kirk dragged his stick back, took a quick pot-shot, and managed to get a short burst into the raider.

That was enough.

There was a fan-shaped blast of flame from beneath the fuselage and a battering concussion. Then the Shark dropped its nose, swept into a slow spin, and plunged down. Kirk hammered another burst into her as she passed and watched one of her wing panels fold back and block off the tail assembly.

The stricken Shark hit with a terrible explosion about a mile clear of the naval base, blasting a massive chunk out of a section of reclaimed marshland.

TANK was slapping Kirk on the back when it was all over. He had somehow changed the ammunition boxes on the Browning guns, and was waiting for Kirk to carry out the loading sequence. Kirk leaned back, jerked the loading handles—and again Tank was ready for action.

Then out of nowhere came a new menace.

Three British R.A.F. Hawker Ospreys slammed out of the sky above and set upon the

Northrop. Bullets sizzled past Kirk's head, and he had to wing-over and drop out of the sky like a plummet.

It was obvious they had taken him for one of the raiders—and were taking no chances that he wasn't.

Kirk swore under his breath, zigzagged back and forth, and ran into the clear just east of Mandai. He was swishing back and forth uncertain what course to take, when suddenly he spotted something pass across the gleam of the lights that ran along the Singapore-Jahore Causeway.

The meaning of what he saw struck him squarely between the eyes. The remaining two of the stolen Sharks were taking the contact route across the island to get at the naval base!

Kirk thanked his lucky stars those Ospreys had chased him down. He would never have seen these two raiders otherwise.

But he had to act fast! Darting away from the vengeful Ospreys, he swept the sky-flailing Northrop dead into the path of the first onrushing Shark. Then Tank pressed his trips with split-second speed—and a terrific explosion rent the air as his withering torrent of lead blasted the biplane's bomb rack!

Under the force of that tremendous concussion, the Northrop was tossed down the sky like a battered ten-pin. Frantically, "Coffin" Kirk fought his controls. And finally, hardly two hundred feet from the ground, he righted her and chandelled back into the upper air.

And he got back just in time. For the last Shark was nearing its target—the huge naval dry-dock, nucleus of the British base.

Kirk took a wild chance. Ramming the throttle to the dash, he plunged upon the raider with every forward gun hammering. The minion of the Circle of Death jerked his stick, and his gunner swung his weapons in a futile attempt to fight off the determined Yank. But they were too late. Pounded by Kirk's withering hail, the Shark staggered, threw away a wing panel in a gigantic convulsion—and plummeted to earth!

Kirk twisted quickly in his seat and looked back. Tank was trying to get his guns around to get a bead on another biplane—one of the Ospreys.

“Wait a minute!” screamed Kirk. And he snatched at Tank’s shoulder.

But it was too late. Tank’s guns flared out at the same instant that a burst from that leading Osprey bashed into the nose of the Northrop. With a scream, the Cyclone engine threw a prop blade away and the silver slab of metal wailed as it went skyward.

“That’s done it,” said Kirk, looking about for a landing place.

Then he jerked his stick back just in time—for the Osprey just cleared him with inches to spare.

For some reason, Kirk followed as best he could and sensed that the Osprey’ was also headed earthward. Together the two silver fighters circled wide and finally rolled to bumpy landings in a wide section of cleared plantation not half a mile from the Causeway.

As they hit, the Northrop’s left landing wheel buckled. The fighter went to one knee, slashed the sod with a wing-tip, and spun around hard. But before she had stopped her lumbering, Kirk and Tank were out watching the Osprey come in toward them.

Amazed they saw it roll, bounce twice, and catch itself. Then it came on threatening to smash into the wrecked Northrop, but something made it stop with its prop still ticking over not three feet from the upended wing-tip of the American ship.

For a minute, neither Kirk nor Tank moved. They expected to see the two men get out and cover them. And Kirk’s brain was speeding in an attempt to think up an excuse for Tank’s action against the British plane. And how could he keep Tank’s ape-hood a secret?

Then Kirk realized what had really happened. The Osprey observer was out of sight. He was obviously huddled down in his pit, perhaps dead. The pilot was lying back in a stiff position, his head on the camel hump of the fuselage.

“They’re both dead.” Kirk half-whispered after an examination. “That pilot made a landing somehow and his feet set the brakes when he stiffened just when she was about to hit the Northrop. Now help me get ‘em out of their plane, Tank,” ordered Kirk. “This is a break!”

Within three minutes they had transferred the two dead Britishers from the Osprey to the wrecked Northrop. The Osprey’s Rolls-Royce Kestrel engine still ticked over beautifully; it was

evident that no real damage had been done to the Hawker ship.

As they shoved the pilot into the front seat of the Northrop, hooked his feet into the rudder pedals, and fastened the belt, Kirk slipped the dead man’s left sleeve up and glanced quickly at his silver identification disc. With a gasp he read:

Edward V. J. Spelter

R.A.F.

Church of England

“Whew! Here’s a twist. Spelter’s son —the guy who sent Trusssock the details of the raid tonight! Wait ‘til they try to figure this one out!”

And before Tank knew what was up, Kirk had him in the back seat of the Osprey and was taking off with a beautiful climbing turn and heading south.

THE FOURTH man of the party which had intruded upon Kirk earlier in the evening was dead when they got back to the plantation. And after carefully stowing the Osprey away, they removed the four bodies to a ramshackle out-building and covered them with lime, of which there was plenty for fertilization purposes. Then they went out, hurried down the plantation path to the highway, and caught a bus into the city.

It was just after one o’clock when they were registering at a small hotel less than a block from Raffles Square. They both slept late, had a meal brought to their room, then, in the late afternoon risked a walk through the town.

An extra edition of the Singapore Gazette carried black headlines about the attempted raid on the Naval base. Pictures were included of the wrecked Sharks and of the damage done by the bombs and torpedoes that had missed their mark. But nothing was said about finding two R.A.F. officers dead in an American Northrop plane. Evidently, that was being hushed up prior to an investigation.

“Well, we might as well risk the Raffles and see if our British bluejacket turns up tonight, eh, Tank?” Kirk said. “And first we’ll get some decent togs.”

They spent about an hour in a ready-to-wear clothing shop and came out with two presentable suits of white linen. Then at 7:30 they sauntered toward the Raffles Hotel and soon spotted their

British tar. He greeted them warmly, grinning under a wide patch of surgeon's tape.

"Won't my mates be narked when they 'ear I've been poshin' it at the Raffles tonight?" he boomed. "I put me clean whites on, too. 'Ow do I look?"

"Splendid. A credit to the service," laughed Kirk. "Come on, let's try the bar first."

THEY went in, found a table, and ordered drinks. Then Kirk quietly opened with: "So you fellows had another hot time of it again last night?"

"Ah, but my bloke and his observer ain't back yet," said the bluejacket. "No trace of 'im. I saw 'im orf in the Osprey wiv Mr. Waites immediately after we got the warning. Carn't make out what 'appened to 'im."

"You said you took care of a man named er 'Spelling', was it?"

"The name's Spelter. 'E's a son of Sir Eric, the munitions bloke. Not a bad sort, either. Posh pilot, if you get me."

"You know much about him outside of his family connections?" asked Kirk.

"Not much—except that 'e was a funny bloke in a way. Always sending me out delivering messages to the queerest coves."

"Did you, by any chance, deliver one last night at the Pirate's Pit?"

The tar looked up sharply: "Right, I did. But 'ow did you know?"

"I just wondered. Who did you deliver it to?"

"A bloke named Black Teddy. I forgot all about him after that fight started—then I saw him lyin' on the floor. I guess your man here musta conked him one."

"Well, my friend, without knowing it you played a small part in those mysterious doings last night. But if you keep quiet, I'll give you sufficient information and evidence to cover yourself—in fact it'll probably put you in right with your commander. Now, is this the note you took to the Pirate's Pit?" And Kirk shoved the buff paper across the table toward the big English seaman.

"I guess it is. It's on our signal paper, and it's in Spelter's writin'. But who the 'ell are you? And how—" Then the bluejacket stiffened in his chair. "I remember now. You said your name was Brian

Kirk—and it was from someone named Kirk that the Fleet got the warning. You're the bloke who stopped the raid, eh?" In his excitement, the sailor was now wiping his forehead with a great blue handkerchief.

"They won't be able to prove much," smiled Kirk.

"Why?"

"Because they'll find Spelter and his observer in the wreckage of the American Northrop—if they haven't already found 'em there. I know, for I have seen them—not half a mile from the Causeway, just southwest of Mandai."

"Whew! Then they changed from the Osprey to the Northrop?"

"Your guess is as good as mine. Spelter might have stopped the raid and got himself shot down in the bargain."

The tar sat staring at his drink for several minutes, then said: "Well, that's as good a way as any for an Englishman to go out, eh, mate? I think you're top hole for telling me, too."

"Thanks," said Kirk. "Now let's drink up and go and have some dinner."

"Thanks! And I'll have another drink to get me breath."

"Good! But get this straight. You say nothing about me to anyone. I'll give you a packet of papers that will direct the blame to the right source. You'll get some sort of a reward for it, but you've got to play the game with me."

The tar shoved a massive hand across the table, and Kirk knew he could trust the fellow.

"And while we have dinner, maybe I'll tell you the inside story about myself and my pal here—if you promise not to say anything about it until you get back to England, and then only to your closest friends." Kirk laughed. "In fact, no one else will believe you anyway, and by that time Tank and I will have put many miles behind us."

"Coffin" Kirk did tell him the story—all except the ventriloquism part. And needless to say, the bluejacket never told the tale to anyone—for he didn't believe it himself, and he had no intention of taking the ribbing he was sure any listener would give him.

"A monkey that talks?" the bluejacket muttered to himself as he strolled back to his ship. "Why, you couldn't expect a man to swallow that much!"

It was at dawn next day that a hastily repainted Hawker Osprey was heading northeast from Singapore. “Coffin” Kirk and Tank were again on their way—and only Fate knew what new menace lay ahead.