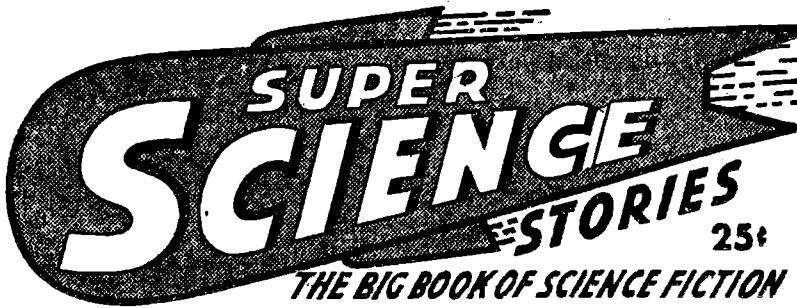


THE BEST IN SCIENCE FICTION



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NO. 1

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# CABAL

SHALLON cursed as he realized that his rod was empty.

He wrenched it from the control socket of the public taxi and, with dark eyes on the gray-haired young woman who was taking off in another taxi, ran across the roof to the dispensing booth.

The attendant eyed Shallon's uniform with cold insolence.

"What do you want, monte?"

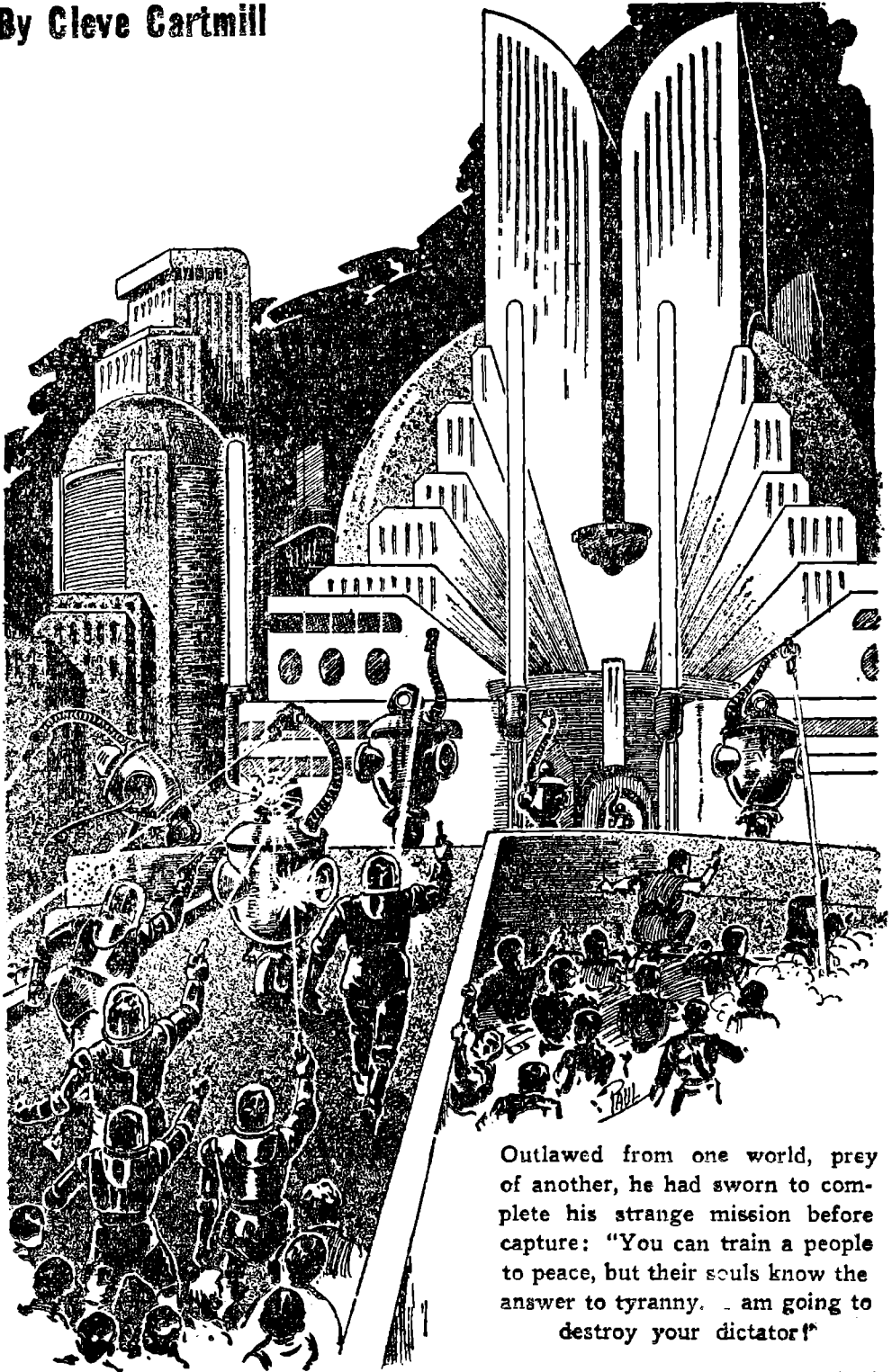
"Refill!" Shallon snapped, and thrust his empty rod through the wicket. "Hurry!"

"Okay, okay," the man drawled.

*It was a scene of horror, confusion,  
but with overtones of majesty,  
triumph, man's will to go free.*



By Cleve Cartmill



Outlawed from one world, prey of another, he had sworn to complete his strange mission before capture: "You can train a people to peace, but their souls know the answer to tyranny. . . am going to destroy your dictator!"

"Keep your shorts on. That'll be four dollars."

"I haven't any money with me. Take my name and rank. Colonel Robert Shallon, Unit Ten, Center City."

"Oh, no, monte. Cash on the plastic."

Shallon jerked his eyes briefly from the girl who was now some hundred feet above the roof. "Do you want to be arrested?" he snarled. "This is official business!"

The attendant whitened around the mouth at the word "arrested." With almost frantic haste he jotted down the information and pushed a roll of slugs through the wicket. Shallon snatched it up and ran back to the ranks of empty taxis.

He jumped into one of the little planes, jammed his rod into the control socket, and pressed the button which dropped a slug through the energizing slot. He pulled back his rod and the plane shot upward.

Still with his eyes fixed on his quarry, he pushed the rod forward at the proper level and relaxed as her taxi ceased to shrink into the distance.

He had a hunch about this girl. He felt sure that she would lead him to the Cabal, the underground group which was responsible for apparently haphazard sabotage. She must be connected with those rebels who harried General Wickenstein. At the end of their previous meeting, a few months ago, the cold, impersonal contempt with which she had spat into Shallon's face showed that she must be active in the growing revolt against the military which he symbolized.

Slowly her course changed. She crossed the river at an acute angle and swung over the rolling green acres of Center City's southeastern park.

They were the only two planes in this area of sky, and Shallon eased back on his rod, allowing the girl to increase the distance between them. She was a black dot on the horizon when he pushed forward again at full speed.

He remembered her "You beast!" when she had spat on him in the street, and the lines around his youthful mouth hardened. No man likes that, not even a man fresh from Psycho Center, fully adjusted and objective.

That was part of the reason he had dashed from his apartment when he had seen her pass on the street. The rest and most important part was treasonable and, as he well knew, he might face the Hammonds of a firing squad for his pains.

White squares of playgrounds drifted beneath him as the dot of the girl's taxi settled on a distant plateau. Shallon marked the place and swung wide to approach it from the other side.

He caught the bright flash of her taxi and set down in a nearby clearing among thin oaks.

As he moved from cover to cover parallel with footprints in the crushed grass, he reflected that the Cabal had selected its meeting place intelligently. Within the sprawling borders of Center City, no spot was less suspect than the public parks.

**HE FOUND** her sitting by a fern-banked stream, idly watching her coral-tipped fingers in the clear water. For an hour Shallon remained cramped behind a clump of laurel and watched her continue this aimless pastime.

She played in the water, apparently waiting for no one, wanting nothing but solitude. When Shallon had

reached the limit of his patience, she flipped sun-jeweled drops from her fingers and pressed her wristwatch.

Shallon heard the time signal:

"When the tone sounds, the time will be exactly fourteen-o'-seven and one quarter, Center City."

Shallon got to his feet, and the sound of his rising brought her upright on tanned legs. Her silvered head was tipped back alertly, and her eyes were wide and blue. One slender hand was clenched; the other rested lightly on the butt of her Hammond, which swung from her belt against blue and yellow shorts.

"I'm a friend," Shallon said quietly.

"I can see you are by your uniform," she said bitterly. "It used to mean friendliness, all right. And warmth, and safety. But now—God knows what it means now."

"I'm proud of mine," Shallon said. "It still means those things, as far as I'm concerned. You can take your hand off your Hammond." He had a sudden thought. "Where did you get it? I suppose you know it's illegal."

"I have a right to it. It was my father's."

"Oh. He had no son?"

"Yes!" she flared. "He had a son, all right!"

Shallon stepped a pace nearer. "Something happen to him?"

"Dead. Thanks to you."

Shallon stared.

"And my baby," she said. "And my husband."

Shallon felt overwhelmed by the flood of her unreasoning bitterness. "But why thanks to me?" he asked.

"You're a monitor, aren't you?" she restorted. "And did the montes do anything after the flood? Did they lift

a single finger? Did people die of exposure? Did they starve?"

"Personally," Shallon said, "I was in Psycho at the time. All I know is General Wickenstein's explanation. He couldn't get supplies.."

"They got supplies when father was alive. Major General Harper got supplies."

Shallon remembered. The name was magic. The man had been loved for his great heart, worshipped for his personal heroism. He bowed.

"Naturally," Shallon said, "I'm sorry about your tragedies. I'm sorry for all the others that died. But that isn't important."

"No?" she said. "My husband? My brother? My baby?"

"To you, yes," Shallon said quietly. "But those who are alive are more important, for the future depends on them. The slow machinery of the democratic World Council was to blame for the deaths following the flood. Our unit had used up its emergency supplies on pirate patrol in the Pacific, and we had to wait for red tape to unwind before we could help. That isn't important. What is important is General Wickenstein's present plans to establish a dictatorship before Main Base learns of it. If he does that, we'll have a war for the first time since the Dark Era."

"War?"

"And people will die,"

"As if they're not dying now," she said, "before Wickenstein's firing squads. More than a hundred were disintegrated last week."

"That's unimportant, too," Shallon went on. "It's only a fragment, compared to war. I followed you here, because I think you can help avert it."

She smiled.

"Yes, you. Listen. If I ever said anything honestly and sincerely, I'm saying it now. I want to get in touch with the Cabal. It seems to be operating haphazardly at the moment. I want to bring some efficiency into its methods. Hit-and-miss sabotage is childish. There isn't time enough. Who are the leaders?"

She continued to smile. She did not speak.

"I know what you're thinking," Shallon continued. "You think I was assigned to unearth the underground movement and destroy it. That's untrue. I'm here on my own."

"Do you really expect me to believe you?" she asked wonderingly. "If what you say is true, you'll betray your commanding officer and your fellow monitors. What generation are you in the International Police?"

"Sixth."

"Then for six generations, your family has been trained to obey. Do you think I'll swallow this—this treason?"

"Listen!" Shallon cried. "I'm fresh out of Psycho Center. My regular five-year adjustment. But General Wickenstein didn't make his trip this time. It's been six years since he was psyched. He's a sick man. I'm not betraying my superior—I'm trying to stop a crazy man from committing mass murder. He isn't my friend, not any more. Once I thought he was almost God. But now he's ill, and my greatest act of friendship would be to save him from this mad scheme to rule a continent!"

"You're lying. You're trying to trap me."

"I'm trying to save you. You and the others."

"You sound confused. Are you sure

it was you, and not the general, who hasn't been psyched?"

"The records are public!" Shallon snapped. "I was injured in a fight with pirates, and sent back unconscious. I came out of it into a delirium, and was ordered to Psycho. You can check on it. Otherwise, I shouldn't have been able to take my regular examination. I'd have been like the rest, and like the General. I'd have come back defeated by pirates into the mess here. I'd have fumed at the Council. I'd have followed the General in establishing a sovereignty in Center City."

"For our own good," she murmured.

"He believes it," Shallon insisted. "He has a warped perspective, and it's truth to him. I've talked—no, listened—to him. He thinks he's the modern Napoleon, the new Conqueror." He paused. "Can't we sit down?"

"All right," she said, and sat on the bank of the stream again.

SHALLON sat an arm's length away on the moss. "No, you don't want to be a dictator. That's because you've been to Psycho regularly. But look at General Wickenstein. He has seen the Pacific pirates in operation. They have a dictator, a chief whose word is life or death.

"Look at his problem. He comes back defeated and feeling low about it; just like the Conqueror at Elba. He finds that a flood has created a great emergency. He is powerless to do much because emergency supplies have been exhausted in the Pacific campaign. He tries to rush permission through the World Council, but other matters are pending. By the time that body gets around to granting the request, citizens have taken matters into their own hands. Not too

capable hands, either, as you know. They weren't trained for it. No wonder the General feels as he does.

"No wonder that already his growing identification with Napoleon has jelled into certainty. No wonder that he sneers at democracy."

"But," the girl protested, "it isn't the fault of the Council. He was supposed to have supplies."

Shallon was patient. "I'm not trying to justify the General. I know he's wrong. I know he's crazy. I want to stop him."

She was thoughtful. Then her face hardened. "It's a pretty story, monte, but I don't believe you."

"Then, by God, you're under arrest," he snapped. "I'm tired of playing games with an idiot."

She didn't flinch. She didn't whiten around the mouth. She didn't seem

to feel the horror which the threat of arrest aroused in any normal citizen. Recently, that is.

She sat calmly quiet, and gave him again her smile of tolerant amusement. Shallon repressed an impulse to stare, clenched his jaw to keep it from dropping.

"Did you hear me?" he demanded.

She continued to smile. "I heard you. Of all the empty threats! Do you know who I am? Joyce Kubzynski. That doesn't ring any bells, but remember that I'm Major General Harper's only daughter. So don't strut like a pirate, because I can get into any office in Center City, from Mexico to Canada. For that matter, the name of Harper still carries enough weight to get me a hearing in any of the Twenty Cities."

"Except," Shallon pointed out, "that

you can't get out of Center City. Nor can you get a message through Communications."

She countered, "I can get to General Wickenstein or any of his staff officers, and report your treasonable conduct. So what will you do now, monte?"

"I could do this," Shallon said softly. "I could report that you committed suicide by leaping from your taxi. You were broken to bits and, naturally, it is the duty of a member of the International Police to disintegrate such an unsightly object."

This time her eyes widened, her hands clenched, her mouth whitened. She shrank away.

"You—you're mad!" she whispered.

Shallon kept his face stern. "I didn't say I would do that. I merely pointed out that I could. Where does that leave us?"

She looked at him searchingly for a long moment. Then, "I don't know, until I know exactly what you want."

Fear was in her still, and tension. Shallon spoke soothingly. "Simply this. I want to meet the leaders of the Cabal. I want to organize a quick revolt, and get a message out to Main Base before General Wickenstein has enough defense to withstand a mass attack. This must be done quickly, because he is nearly ready. I can't do it alone, but with enough help—"

"Why can't you?" she broke in. "Why can't you walk into Communications, take over a screen and tell Main Base the facts?"

**S**HALLON made a derisive sound tinged with desperation.

"You don't know how it is at Communications. I can't get through the main lobby. Nobody can but the General himself. It isn't generally

known, but the entire place is guarded by Metaserfs, each tuned to General Wickenstein's private circuit."

She thought it over. "Then what can you possibly do?"

"Die," Shallon said shortly. "If the Cabal is composed of courageous men, and if there are enough, someone could get through."

She gave an involuntary shudder. "Metaserfs," she said.

Shallon nodded. "They're bad. But I figure that if we can get fifty men, at least a few can reach the top floor. Only one Metaserf is there. Three men can divide his—its—attention so that one can get to a screen control."

The girl looked at Shallon, then away. She trailed her fingers in the crystal water.

"There isn't," she said, "so far as I know, a Cabal."

Shallon was quiet with shock, and the sounds of the forest came to him; birds twittering, wind sighing through the leaves, trees creaking.

"There must be," he blurted. "In the factories, in the tubes, in skyrooms—things happen. I'll admit that the destruction is sporadic, but somebody must be behind it."

The girl shrugged. "Maybe. I don't know."

"But you surely know someone who would be interested in stopping this mad scheme of Wickenstein's?"

This time she was silent. It was a calculating silence. She looked at Shallon with narrowed eyes, studied every inch of him. Her eyes traveled from his, to his dark hair, over his broad shoulders, his lean torso, his slim straight legs.

Then, "I know a half dozen," she said. "But they're my friends. I'm



not going to turn their names over to one of the general's staff."

"Damn it, I'm trying to stop the general," Shallon protested.

"How do I know, monte? If you'll betray your superior, why not an ordinary citizen? How do I know you shouldn't be in Psycho? You give plenty of evidence."

"I don't know how to convince you," he said, slowly.

"You won't have to, monte. Be here at the same time tomorrow. A few of my friends will meet you. If they are not satisfied, they'll telecast me. I'll either turn you in to headquarters or tell them to dispose of you as they see fit."

"That isn't fair. Suppose they haven't been adjusted? Suppose their perspective is twisted? They might decide anything."

"That's a chance you'll have to take."

"Listen," he said, "if I agree to meet your committee here tomorrow, and take my chance, will you give me your word not to mention what has happened here this afternoon? Not to anybody?"

"Yes," she said, without hesitation. "I care nothing about you. You can take your chances with them. Tomorrow is when you'll be in danger, not now. And let me warn you, monte, a psychologist will be in the group. If he isn't satisfied with you, God help you."

He nodded.

"I'll take your Hammond, then."

"No!"

"If another monte catches you with that," Shallon pointed out patiently, "you'll face a firing squad."

"And if I give it to you, I'm helpless," she said.

Shallon snarled, "I don't give a damn about you. Give me your gun. You're of no use to me if you can't get word to your friends."

She looked at him for a long time, and the sounds of the forest came through again. Then without a word or change of expression, she took belt, holster, and all, and silently placed them in his hands.

There was silence between them as they walked to their taxis.

ON HIS return to the administrative sector of Center City, Shallon considered the girl's remarks, and wondered if her doubts of his sanity had any foundation. Had his discharge from Psycho been justified? Had the tension outside, generated by General Wickenstein, brought carelessness into Psycho Center? Was he fully adjusted?

As a reasonable human being, Shallon was forced to admit to himself that somebody might have slipped up. His discharge might have been hurried. Anyone—even the most objective psychologist—might be affected by outside circumstances, and certainly General Wickenstein's acts were enough to upset anyone's emotional balance.

For never in the history of this golden age of man had any person presumed to be better than his fellows. When the world crawled out of the slime of the Dark Era and decided that war must be outlawed forever, the foundation of that resolve was a recognition of the actual brotherhood of Man.

No man, no group, no country, no continent, might dominate another. The pre-Dark Era snarls and battling were to be silenced forever. So an

International Police had been formed, its members mustered equally from every inhabited area, and membership made hereditary. Gradually, as each man was shifted from one unit to another, the personnel of that peace-keeping organization had become free of social and racial discrimination. So, in time, had the World Federation of Twenty Cities.

And now, after four hundred years of supervised peace, a man had decided that democracy was too slow, that a dictatorship was the most efficient form of government.

That decision, history-making in itself, might have created inefficiency in even such a smoothly-running organization as Psycho Center, and Shallon's discharge might have been premature.

He must know.

He canted his rod to one side to take him to Psycho Center, on the outskirts of the hub-shaped administrative sector. He slewed off to the left of Communications, the tall, cylindrical glass building in the sector's center. From this circle the streets radiated, and at the end of one of these was Psycho Center.

As any member of the community would do, he eyed the arriving and departing liners on the skylight roof of Communications. This was the pride of Center City, for it was built of polarized glass, nearly one mile in diameter, the only one of its kind in the world. As a boy, he had hovered, like other boys, high above Communications and watched the traffic there.

Now he was bent on more serious things, and gave but a glance to the censored maelstrom of movement. For to arriving strangers, a front of business-as-usual was maintained under

the eyes of armed monitors. This was not unusual, for monitors guarded the roof of each Communications building the world over. Passengers from other cities saw nothing unusual on the roof, and once inside the city, they did not leave or communicate with others outside its borders.

He dropped gently to the roof of Psycho, maneuvered his taxi into a vacant space in the rank, and pulled his rod from its socket. He replaced the metal ferrule on its tip and snapped it to his belt so that it hung like a sword.

He was admitted to the office of the Chief, Robert Bolton, and sat across the desk from the keen-eyed, bald psychologist, head of the world council of mind and behavior specialists.

"Back again?" inquired Bolton.

"This is a little unusual," Shallon apologized, "but I have an acute problem. Am I all right?"

Bolton spread his hands and shrugged. "After all, my friend, I am also a human being. I can hardly presume to say whether one man is as well adjusted as another without testing him. Come in here."

He led the way into a great white room in which there was nothing to distract the attention save a hood of gleaming metal suspended from a cable of a thousand wires. Beneath this was a chair whose curves automatically fitted themselves to the sitter. When a person was in the chair, and the hood was lowered to within a few inches of his head, he could see nothing but a soothing off-white wall.

"Sit down," Bolton said.

Shallon sat, and waited. He had been here many times, and he knew where to look. Presently a screen

glowed at the spot where his eyes were fixed. Words formed on the screen.

How much is an offensive word?

Shallon smiled. He knew that his thought answer, "There is no such thing as an offensive word," was registered on an unseen screen and recorded by an examining clerk. His qualification, "The question is not sensible, according to our training," he knew, was also recorded.

Questions concerning man's relationship to man, to the world, to restricted society groups, followed. Shallon's thought answers formed quickly or slowly, according to the complexity of the question, and were translated by the thought-analyzing hood into symbols on a far screen, where they were recorded.

After half an hour of this, a command appeared: **Go to Dr. Bolton's office.**

"WHAT worries you?" was the psychologist's first question.

Shallon, quieted by the virginal emptiness of the examination room, folded his hands and thought. Should he tell Dr. Bolton of the scene in the forest and the doubts of his objective sanity raised by the girl? If he did, would Dr. Bolton turn him in?

Shallon snorted. If anybody in Center City would be opposed to General Wickenstein's move to assume personal and complete command, it would be this keen-eyed, quiet adult.

He told Bolton of his actions. How he had reached the point at which he had to do something to rebel against General Wickenstein's offenses against regulated thought and living; how he had followed the girl, talked to her.

When he had finished, Shallon spread his hands. "So there it is. You know me pretty well. I look on you as my best friend. Do you think I'm well-balanced enough to meet with the—ah, revolutionists?"

"Yes."

"There'll be a psychologist among them, you know. And if I don't pass the test, I'll be turned in. You know what that will mean."

"Yes."

In his taxi again, Shallon passed over the barracks of Unit 10, and saw below a scene which was becoming more common these days—an execution. Saboteurs, he supposed they were. A group of four or five herded by a Metaserf against a wall of armor plate.

He was too high to see details, but he could tell that the group faced the monowheel guard with courage. The Metaserf, motionless by virtue of its gyroscope, pointed its heavy-duty Hammond with deadly indifference, and Shallon saw the group disappear one by one. The Metaserf wheeled and rolled back to its nook.

Even though he was too far away to see clearly, Shallon boiled inside. That an army, created to maintain peace and supervise the well-being of its creators, should turn and kill—that indicated some basic fault.

The fact that General Wickenstein had missed his quinquennial trip to the Psycho Center was not enough explanation for Shallon. Such emergencies should have been foreseen. The system was wrong. A citizen—

Suddenly, he had it. He shoved his rod forward to full speed until his apartment building came into sight. He dropped the taxi into the thin rank and hurried down to his rooms. Here

he spent several hours taking notes on a proposition he would present to the meeting in the park tomorrow.

**T**HEY were only six, not the fifty Shallon considered necessary to storm Communications. Six. Shallon smiled wryly as he faced them.

One he knew: Bolton. The psychologist returned his smile, and Shallon knew that he was safe, at least, and would not be turned in. Another, a youth of Shallon's own age, had a disturbing familiarity. The remaining four were strangers, ranging in age from a gray-head to a boy of fourteen or so.

"Is this all?" Shallon asked. "Can't we get more?"

Bolton answered him. "It wouldn't help. We don't have enough armor."

For the first time, Shallon noted the hoods they wore. Hoods with a dull sheen which struck a chord in his memory.

"Pirates!" he exclaimed.

The sextet before him chuckled, drowning the gurgle of the brook behind them.

"The suits were turned over to the bio-electrical lab," Bolton said, "to be analyzed and, if possible, reproduced. I have some authority, as you know, in the council of science, and I borrowed them. We have seven suits of armour, impervious to the rays of a Hammond."

"Not completely, though," Shallon said. "Otherwise, we'd never have captured them. If a Hammond rays one of these suits steadily, its self-generating screen will break down. Remember that. We must keep on the move. We've got to run like hell, once we get into the lobby. I assume you've talked over my plan?"

"We have," Bolton said. "We were considering it, as a matter of fact, before you approached Joyce. All we need to do is set a time."

Shallon blinked. "What's the matter with now?" he asked.

"Nothing!" they chorused. "Let's go!"

"Wait!" Shallon cautioned. "Some of us may not get through alive. Maybe only one of us will. But one is enough. Listen. I've prepared a paper, left it in my apartment. I want to give you the gist of it, and those of us who survive will know what to do."

Shallon said, "We have assumed that the reason for the present situation is that General Wickenstein failed to get his regular adjustment. Well, maybe, as far as this specific condition is concerned. But the main reason is bigger than that.

"The International Police is a caste," Shallon flung at them.

"What else could it be?" Shallon said. "Father to son to grandson to great grandson to—and so on. Every monitor today, in the sixth to tenth generation of service, has the interest of his unit primarily at heart, rather than that of the citizen. It was inevitable. Inside the framework of democracy, we have allowed a class to develop. Class hatred is always possible under those conditions. We've got to destroy it, or it will inevitably destroy us!"

"Why?" demanded the youth who was vaguely familiar. "Monitors have always been proud to serve, to be monitors."

"That's the point," Shallon said. "Monitors are proud to be monitors, instead of citizens being proud to serve a hitch in the military.

"Wait!" he continued as several

started to speak. "If we throw overboard the whole military setup, and reward good citizens with a term in the International Police, such a condition as exists now could never occur. The citizen, knowing that he'd have to return to this world when his term was served, would keep it in good shape. Wouldn't you? You're citizens. Ask yourselves if you'd get delusions of power, if you'd line other citizens against a wall and disintegrate them. Well?"

They didn't answer, but Shallon could see that they agreed. Finally Bolton spoke.

"I think you have an idea, Shallon. It will have to be worked out later, of course."

"Certainly. I wanted you to know about it, so that those of us who come through alive can begin the work. Agree?"

They murmured approval. Then they settled details of the attack, and complete suits of armor were brought from the taxis. Shallon donned his, and with a prayer in his heart, walked heavily to his taxi and took off in the lead.

They strung out behind him, not in formation but in the haphazard fashion in which normal taxi traffic dotted the sky at all times. Shallon circled high over Communications, then sloped down to the street at the entrance of the towering glass building.

The others were down beside him within five seconds. Pedestrians had halted at the unusual sight of taxis landing at this level, and a monitor shouted at them from a nearby building.

Shallon capped his rod, and, swinging it in one hand, led the way into the lobby. The other six crowded his heels.

Once across the threshold, they scattered toward exits leading upward, and on the second floor encountered Metaserfs.

SHALLON dodged instinctively from the pointed muzzle of the Hammond. But the giant Metaserf—mounted on a single wheel and guided by photocell eyes—was as agile as he.

More agile! Everywhere Shallon turned, he was met by the staggering pressure of the Hammond's rays.

His companions were doing no better. Slowly, a step at a time, they were forced back to the entrance. Metaserfs rolled inexorably forward, battering them with a wall of energy.

Shallon spoke into his chest communicator.

"This armor will break down," he warned. "We can't take this very long. Get out!"

They turned and ran, and Shallon was sick inside. They had had a chance, a new world had been before them, and they were too weak to cross its threshold. It was over now. They'd be captured, executed, and the mad general would establish his dictatorship. The careful work, the planning of centuries scrapped in an instant!

Outside, a great crowd had massed before Communications, and a squad of Monitors, hands on their Hammonds, watched the crowd.

There were murmurs from all sides, merging into a low, uneasy roar. Then a single clear voice emerged.

"This is a bid for freedom!" cried the voice, and Shallon saw the gray-haired girl, Joyce, haranguing the crowd from its center. "Those montes are confused. Don't give them time to focus. Attack! We can defeat the Metaserfs!"

## CABAL

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Then began an event unparalleled in history. Three hundred men and women, citizens conditioned to peace, acted as one unit of violence.

The squad of monitors was confused, as Joyce had said. They turned uncertainly this way and that. They shot a few in the front ranks of the great human beast that surged forward howling; then they ran.

The crowd rolled over the dead in a destructive wave that flung Shallon and his armored companions high on its crest. They jammed helmets back on their heads, and led the way back into Communications at a run.

Many died on the spot, but the others took their places.

It was a scene of horror, confusion, but with overtones of majesty, triumph, man's will to be free. Shallon felt tears of excitement stinging his eyes as he shouted and fought. He flipped an armored hand to fling the tears away, and knocked off his hood. It rolled away, was trampled instantly under seething feet.

He was vulnerable. One blast from a Metaserf, and he was done. And a Metaserf had singled him out on the instant.

Shallon leaped away, flinging his rod in a despairing gesture.

The loaded end of his rod caught the Metaserf squarely in its photoelectric eye. The great robot continued its turning movement until it faced the wall, into which it blindly poured the energy of its Hammond.

Wickenstein, slim, dark, passionate, was at the great screen. "Revolt!"

He broke off as Shallon attacked. He scooped his Hammond from his holster and fired point-blank.

Shallon flung himself at the gen-

eral's legs, and heard a sharp **thwack!** as he did so. General Wickenstein fell to the floor and Shallon fumbled at his belt for the control switch of the **Meta-serfs**. He found it, flipped it, and saw the big robots freeze motionless.

Shallon lay still for a few seconds as emotion drained from him. The others, too, seemed shocked into silence.

"I—I—hit him!"

Shallon rolled over, looked up. Joyce had wide eyes on a bruise over the General's temple. "I hit him," she repeated in her awed whisper.

Bolton stepped forward. "We have things to do. Take him—" he indicated the unconscious general— "to Psycho Center." Two men stepped out of the small group and obeyed. The others were still motionless, shocked. Bolton twinkled at them.

"You feel guilty," he said. "You've regarded violence as the great social crime. Let me assure you that you are not unbalanced. For no matter how carefully men are conditioned to peace, they will always revolt against tyranny. It may take a long time, but in the end they will overthrow tyrants. But more pressing business concerns us now. All of you please go below and send that company of soldiers up here. Colonel Shallon is going to tell the world of his plan, and they should hear. You should, too, so find screens please, and tell the others."

As they trooped out, Shallon turned to the big screen.

"Listen world," he began. "All citizens, all news services please listen!"

As he waited for acknowledgement studs to glow on the control panel, Shallon looked at Joyce. Bitterness was gone from her eyes, and she smiled at him. A personal smile, full of warmth.