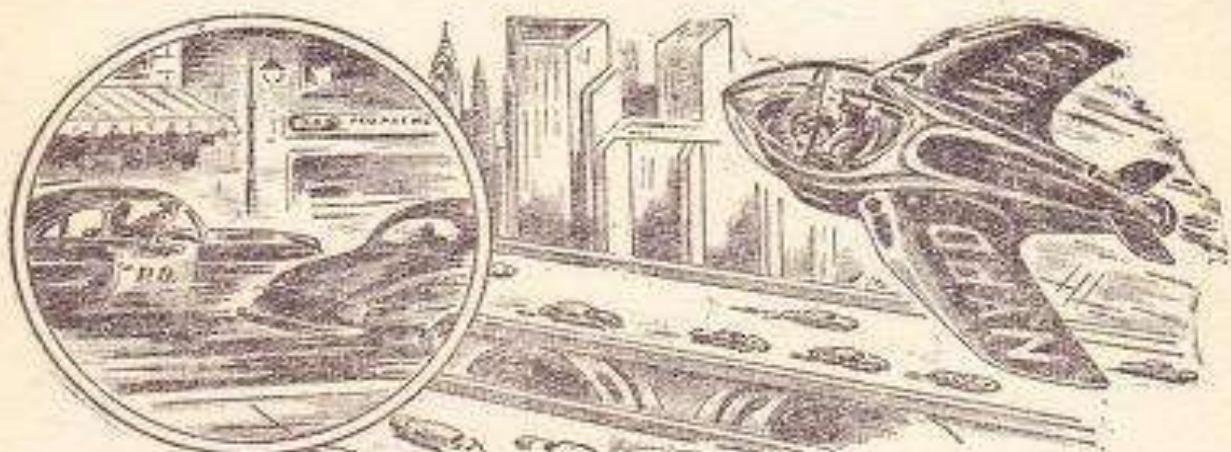


PUBLIC ENEMY

By Kendell Foster Crossen

At long last, Public Police Officer Brad Raynor was going to see some action — perhaps he'd have some of the excitement that policemen in the past experienced every day!



Brad pictured the old days, when cops had a rough but exciting life...



BRAD RAYNOR cruised in the one thousand level above New York and tried to suppress his boredom. Because of his training he was aware that dull routine was preferable, but emotionally he yearned for a little action.

This was Public Police Officer Brad Raynor's fifth day in uniform. It had taken him seven years to achieve that uniform; four years at Harvard and three years at the University of Public Protection. His three degrees—one in psychology, one in sociology, one in criminalistics—were announced to the world by the neat blue uniform and the badge, Number 42,151, he wore.

"Car three thirty-seven," said the voice over the audio-speaker. Brad

Raynor tensed at the first sound of the voice, then relaxed as he heard the number. "Proceed to street level at two eighty-four West Seventieth Street, Signal eighty-three."

Signal eighty-three meant a minor domestic adjustment problem. Brad Raynor idly watched the swerving speck of light on the patrol screen, which indicated the path of Car 337, and sighed.

Secretly, he was amused at himself. No one was prouder than Brad Raynor of the progress made by the middle of the 32nd Century, while all of his training had been directed toward increasing that progress. Still, only five days after becoming a part of the Public Police Administration, he found himself longing for the "good old days" he'd read about when the cops went after a fugitive with blazing guns.

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Written by

Kendell Foster Crossen

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Transcription: Yan Viana

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Email: atomicvintage10@gmail.com

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Not that he was unarmed. The police cruiser was equipped with everything from a lightweight atomic cannon to a tiny nerve-gun which could be concealed between two fingers. Nevertheless, it was a fact that there was seldom any need for the weapons and Brad Raynor was young enough to indulge occasionally in romantic fantasy. In reality, he knew there was nothing romantic about the “good old days.” A complete history of police work was, of course, a required subject at the university and he was well aware that in the old days

most of the police had been incompetent, generally brutal, and for the most part held in contempt by the Public. A favorite subject during some of the bull sessions had been the old question of whether the actions of the police produced the public attitude or whether the attitude formed the police mentality. All of that, of course, had been changed by the 21st Century. Since then all policemen had to be adequately trained and the national, state, and city officials over them were elected by the voters.

“Car two ninety-one,” droned the voice from the audio-speaker. “A speeding air-car is headed up toward your sector. Intercept and investigate the cause.”

Brad Raynor glanced at the chronograph on his instrument panel and saw that it was eighteen hundred. He leaned back, lifted the panel behind his seat and removed the record film for the past hour. He inserted it in the projector and quickly ran it off. The film showed all the details of the streets and houses over which he had passed during the previous hour. He spotted nothing unusual and the film was put away to be handed in when his patrol was over.

“Routine,” he muttered to himself. He grinned and reached for the audio-phone. “Car three hundred, on course, at eighteen hundred plus,” he reported. He swung the phone back into place and idly watched the pips of light on the patrol screen.

“Car three twenty. Proceed to street level at one twenty-six East Fifty-third Street and arrest citizen Jon Bair. There’ll be a complete report on your tape by the time you get there in the event you need it. Bair has been under voluntary treatment at Therapy Control because of having trouble with his neighbor, but he has just destroyed some property belonging to this neighbor. Arraign him on the charge of destroying private property, then deliver him to Therapy Control. Watch your screen for a photograph of Bair.”

And that's the way it goes, thought Brad Raynor. Even though he knew it was almost impossible, he found himself wishing that someone would rob a bank — in his sector,

naturally. It would be nice to have a citation on his blue uniform when he got married, an event which was but two weeks away.

“Car three hundred,” the voice said sharply. That was his number, but it was the tone that caused Brad Raynor to straighten up. “Citizen Will Howard broke into the home of Jan Laird, Mayor Of Nyork, ten minutes ago. He stole two hundred world credits, in cash, and a smallbore energy gun. Upon leaving the premises, he encountered Public Officer Arthur Sommers and Killed him without warning.” The voice paused briefly, then continued. “The fugitive escaped in an air-car belonging to the city. He is now in your sector, at the three thousand level — Horizontal sixty-two, approaching Vertical ninety-one.”

THE VOICE droned on, giving a description of the fugitive which included his brain-wave pattern and a chemical analysis, but Brad Raynor was already in action. He still heard the voice and was memorizing the description, but with his left hand he touched the controls so that the cruiser tilted up and leaped ahead. With his right hand, he swumg the radarscope. A minute later, he was picking up the echo of the returning signal. He triggered the cybernetic control and glanced at the tape. The fugitive was traveling at eight hundred miles per hour and still accelerating.

Although this was his first case, Brad Raynor had been so well trained that all of this was already second nature to him. Even as he glanced at the tape-reading, he was punching the fugitive’s brain-wave pattern into the encephalscope and swinging it onto the fix held by the radarscope. A rhythmic pinging came from the tiny receiver and he knew that he was following the right man.

“Watch your screen for the film record of the fugitive’s escape,” said the voice from the audio-speaker.

Brad Raynor glanced up at the video-screen and a moment later saw a full color shot of a big, furtivelooking man hurrying into an air-car. It was enough for a sight identification,

despite the briefness. Brad knew that it had been caught by the sidecamera of one of the street-level patrol cars and he felt a surge of pride at the speed with which headquarters had located it, taken a videoprint and beamed it to him.

“Warning,” said the headquarter’s voice. “The fugitive is armed and is obviously in an unstable condition.”

Brad Raynor grinned up at the audio-speaker. This was turning into just the sort of assignment he’d been thinking about.

“Car three hundred,” the voice said sharply — and it was almost as if the Assignment Officer were reading his mind, although actually he was merely remembering when he too had been a probation patrolman — “under any circumstances, bring this man in alive.”

That was all, but Brad Raynor knew the Assignment Officer was reminding him of Rule 127 in the Handbook of Public Police Procedure. Like the other rules, it was indelibly fixed in his mind. “Public Officers must at all times remember that the criminal is merely a person at odds with his society. The Public Police Administration was not formed to preside at the execution of citizens. Except in those instances where a large segment of the population is endangered, the Officer must always deliver his prisoner alive. Insofar as it’s possible, the criminal must make amends for the results of his crime, and this might be called punishment, but the chief duty of the police is to see that he is brought in for therapy. A criminal cured is a citizen saved.”

Brad Raynor watched the air-speed needle move past the twelve hundred mark and knew he was gaining on his quarry. He glanced at his other instruments and was surprised to see that he was already up to fifteen thousand feet. Since the cruiser was built to adjust its oxygen supply and pressure automatically, height was no problem. It might, however, cause another problem. Frowning, Brad leaned over and triggered the cybernetic control. The tape revealed that the other ship was at twenty-five thousand.

He pulled the audio-phone to him. "Car three hundred," he reported, "at fifteen thousand feet, gaining. The fugitive is now at twenty-five thousand feet, obviously heading out."

"Try to intercept him before he reaches the limits of Earth's atmosphere," the Assignment Officer said over the speaker. "If this is not possible, then your orders are to arrest him whenever possible. We will arrange clearance with the Space Patrol and with any planetary government when needed. Use your own judgement in the matter of time and place."

Being a normal young man who had never traveled farther than the moon, there was a minute when Brad Raynor thought of letting the fugitive escape from Earth and then catching up with him on, perhaps, Mars. But it lasted no more than a minute, for he took very seriously the responsibility which went with the neat blue uniform. He reached over and shoved the power full on. The cruiser surged forward.

The police cruiser was within a thousand feet of the fleeing air-car by the time they were twenty miles above the surface of the earth. Brad Raynor switched on his sighting screen, turned the nose-cannon over to Manual and fired a shot which would explode wall ahead of the other ship. He pulled over the audio-phone and thumbed the button on its side.

"Public Officer Brad Raynor calling Nyork city car, registration 12Z," he said. He knew the occupant of the car would hear him whether his receiver was on or not. Every air-car built contained a panel which would automatically pickup police calls sent out on a tight beam limited to police work. "City car 12Z, pull up and surrender."

FOR A MOMENT, the air-car continued at the same speed. Then it began to slow up, finally becoming stationary at an altitude of twenty-five miles. The police cruiser approached cautiously, Brad holding himself in readiness to send it flashing away if the other ship tried to ram him. When the two craft were a mere hundred feet apart, he stopped the cruiser and

stabilized it. He was sure that city air-cars were not normally armed and the appearance of the ship in the forward viewing screen revealed nothing that looked like armament. With that. Brad Raynor leaned over and pressed a button on the control panel projecting a tractor beam.

But even as the beam reached for the other ship, it moved. Straight down it flashed, the backwash of power rocking the police cruiser. The tractor beam gyrated in empty space and dissipated itself. Brad switched off the beam, savagely jammed the power on and brought the cruiser around in a whirling dive. But even so the ruse had given the other a start. As the radarscope lined up on the fleeing ship, it was already thirty miles away and accelerating madly. Brad shot the cruiser in pursuit.

It was a wild race earthward. But the fugitive's craft had gained just enough of a lead by the maneuver to stay in front, and it pulled out of the dive only a few hundred feet above the ground. So quickly did the dive end, there was a moment when Brad thought his stomach wouldn't make it.

They had come down over a small town which Brad recognized as one of the suburbs lying north of Nyork. The ship ahead of him darted down to within a few feet of the street and began zooming among the buildings. Brad Raynor followed. As he did so, he thrust his left foot down on a button on the floor and held it there. The grilled nose of the cruiser began broadcastings supersonic waves, out and around the ship ahead, to be picked up by an oncoming craft so that they could get out of the way. At the same time, he flipped another switch which automatically sent out a police identification signal which would be picked up by any other police car in the neighborhood.

Once more the police cruiser slowly gained on the car ahead. Brad was strained forward in his seat, squeezing every bit of speed out of the cruiser that was possible as they zigzagged around buildings. He watched as the nose of the cruiser reached the tail of the other car, then crept up along the side. He was holding a slight elevation advantage of the

other and now he began nosing it to the side and down. It was a delicate operation, with both ships traveling at well over a hundred miles per hour, where one slip might crash both of them.

Then, suddenly, the fleeing car heeled over and flashed into a narrow alley. Brad saw it scrape the side of the building as he flashed by and he winced. Crushing, he threw the cruiser up in a tight top loop, cutting speed at the same time. Even so, he lost several minutes getting back, to the alley.

THE CITY air-car was parked inside the alley on the ground. There was a long dent on one side where it had scraped the wall, but otherwise it seemed undamaged. Brad grounded his cruiser behind it. He swung the encephalscope on the ship, but there was no answering *peep*. It meant that the fugitive had already left the car.

He opened the emergency panel in the cruiser and took out a smaller, portable encephalscope. He hesitated, then took from the rack over his head the tiny nerve-gun. A moment later, he stepped out into the alley. He slowly swung the encephalscope around until it emitted a slight sound. It was pointed toward the solid wall rising beside him.

Brad walked out of the alley and to the front of the building. It was a large apartment house and the faint peep from the encephalscope told him that the fugitive was somewhere inside.

The front door was locked and there were a number of push-buttons along the wall, each one with a tiny two-way video-screen above it. But Brad went directly to the door. He pulled an electronic pick from his pocket and bent over the lock. The door swung open.

Inside, Brad paced along the hall, swinging the encephalscope from door to door. He did the same thing on the second and then on the third floor. It was on the third floor that he finally pointed the instrument to a door and was rewarded with a strong, steady chatter from it.

Again, he used the electronic pick. Then, holding the nerve-gun concealed in his hand, he kicked the door open.

Directly inside, energy gun gripped in shaking hand, stood the large man who had been pictured in the film strip flashed on Brad's screen. For what seemed like several long minutes the two men stared at each other, while the encephalscope fairly purred.

"Drop it," Brad said finally. "It'll do you no good to fight. Even if you get the best of me, you can't escape. There'll be a thousand encephalscopes searching you out the minute my next report fails to come in. So, drop it."

There was another wait, while the hand that held the energy gun trembled more violently. Then, slowly, reluctantly, the fingers spread and the gun dropped to the floor.

"Damn you to hell," the man said bitterly. "Damn all science!"

"You're wrong," Brad said, leaning over to pick up the gun. "Now you feel that you wouldn't have been caught if it hadn't been for science — but the truth is that if it weren't for science you would have been killed while trying to escape. Come along."

He followed the prisoner from the building.

TWENTY-FOUR hours later Brad Raynor landed his cruiser in the space on the roof of the Justice Building in the 22nd Sector of Nyork. Herding his prisoner ahead of him, he entered an elevator and they were carried down to the hearing rooms.

The Public Justice Administrator looked up as they entered. Then he glanced back for a moment at his desk.

"You must be Public Officer Raynor," he said with a smile. "I see that your assignment is the only thing open in this Sector."

"Yes sir," Brad said, saluting. "This is my prisoner."

"Will you charge him. Officer Raynor?"

“Yes, sir. As an officer of the Public Police Administration, I charge this man— Jan Laird, Mayor of Nyork — with the crime of negligence in his responsibility to the people of this city. A citizen, one Will Howard, was permitted to go unemployed. As a result of the unemployment. Will Howard committed robbery and in leaving the premises shot and killed a public officer.”

“How do you plead, Mayor Laird?” the Administrator asked.

There was a moment of silence. Then, “Guilty,” the mayor said huskily.

The Administrator glanced at the papers on his desk. “Your crime, Mayor Laird,” he said, “is doubly serious because of the high position to which you were elected by the people. We have already discovered a number of other citizens who have become slightly unstable because of feeling that they are in a hostile environment. Fortunately, Will Howard was the only one who had reached the point of direct action. I have a report from Therapy Control stating that he will need five or six months of therapy before once again being a smoothly-functioning individual.

“I notice, Mayor Laird, that you have done well in private enterprise and possess considerable surplus wealth. Therefore, it is the judgement of this Administration that you be appointed the guardian of the wife and children of the slain Public Officer Arthur Sommers, responsible for their economic security. This responsibility will continue for the life of the widow and will include the children until they have finished university training. You are also removed as mayor of this city. This is the extent of this Administration’s concern with you. You will now be turned over to Therapy Control for proper treatment.”

With bowed head, the former mayor turned away.

“Good work. Officer Raynor,” the Administrator called after them. Brad Raynor followed the prisoner out, feeling every inch a cop and no longer wishing for the “good old days.”