

# The Solar Menace

by S. K. Bernfeld

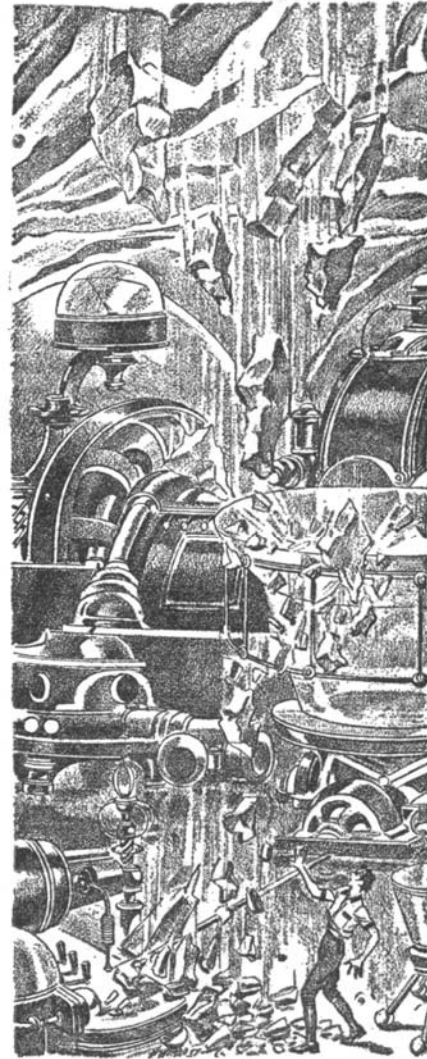
**H**IGH in the stratosphere, Melas Radok piloted his little stratocar. His bulbous forehead and satanic eyebrows shaded a pair of baleful eyes. A cruel, thin-lipped smile on his face, he thought of the escape he had just made from the International prison on Earth. They had thought they could hold him in bondage—the fools! They had called him a menace to society, an arch criminal to be eliminated. But there would be no trial for him now. Friends had smuggled some *euthanil* to him in prison. Radok had discovered this potent sleep producing powder and he alone, in all the world, had its antidote coursing through his veins. One spray of this drug in the air and his guards fell into a coma while he, protected by the antidote, was able to walk safely to the rocket ship waiting for him, that meant freedom. With the click of a switch, he set the stratocar's audio vision set on. A fluorescent picture slowly appeared; color vision apparatus was still too elaborate for rocket ships—and the image of the Planetary Police Patrol captain faded into view.

The executive was addressing a worldwide audience. Already they were broadcasting news of his escape, that he was to be hunted down, instantly ray beamed.

Radok smiled complacently to himself. Let them try and find his hiding place. He set the ship's controls at maximum, and the craft sped through the rarefied air in a direction due south.

In a cavern hollowed out beneath fathomless tons of ice, at the south magnetic pole, was hidden Radok's secret workshop. Built by men he had later killed, the place was unknown to anyone but him. It was stocked with technical resources for the production of any instruments he desired. Food and air

supply were more than ample.



It was too late.

Mankind was a disease. A cancer of the earth. And he, Radok, was determined to cauterize the festering mass. They had outcast him. Well, he'd show them.

And so alone, in his cavern at the south magnetic pole, Radok ruminated on the punishment he would inflict. It would not take long to perfect the needed machinery.

He was going to destroy Earth and humanity by fire. He knew that, with the exception of radioactive energy, the heat of the earth was derived from the glowing ball of the sun. The sun, though only a minor star in the cosmos, was nevertheless able to pour forth titanic quantities of energy in the form of radiation which was dispersed in all directions. And the earth, a mere pinpoint in space, ninety-two million miles away, was able to absorb but a minute portion of this output. But this small fraction of the sun's heat was enough to warm it.

All about the planet and its air envelope was empty space. Here the inconceivably greater portion of the sun's radiation was directed, to travel on and on for many years, perhaps in the end to be charted as a star in the heavens by the denizens on some foreign planet of a distant galaxy.

Radok's scheme was to make use of this immense sum of energy that the sun was radiating all about Earth. He planned his huge solar condensers so that the earth would attract more than its normal share of the sun's rays. The greatly increased amount of heat the earth would receive would parch and wither all the land. So Radok intended to revenge himself upon society.

**S**ITUATED as he was, at the south magnetic pole, Radok was able to draw upon the immense magnetic forces of the earth. Magnetism, in its natural state, affects only a few metals, notably iron. But Radok, with his knowledge of its relations with light energy, knew how to alter its properties. Tapping this force at one of its foci, the South Pole, he directed it through his mighty apparatus, subtly converting it into another type of energy. This had the property of attracting light. As Radok's machines began to function, this new magnetism was sprayed into the air to form a nimbus around the earth, to draw the light as it was poured forth in

tremendous quantities from the sun.

It had been winter when Radok had escaped from his prison in the North, and so the South Pole was in the long day of summer. Safely concealed under the icecap, and far from civilization's outposts, for long hours every day he listened tensely to the radio, hearing the worldwide weather reports, his face aflame with hate and fury.

As the solitary days passed, Radok grew careless of his appearance and it was a grotesque figure of a man that sat by the receiving set chuckling often in a weird falsetto. Already the weather bureaus in the North had become perturbed at the mysteriously daily rising temperatures and consequent drouth. In the cities gigantic cooling systems tried to neutralize the heat.

Meteorologists all over the world were frantic. There was much talk of sunspot cycles, and of the aurora borealis. Ten scientists brought forth ten different theories about the weather. They declared, for the most part, that the heat was temporary, not really dangerous. It would eventually go away like all heat waves.

And through it all, Radok sat in his cavern, his frame shaking in silent mirth. It was just beginning. When the seas begin to boil, and the very air scorched the lungs, would they still say, "not dangerous?"

He even gave up listening to the radio reports as he spent weeks tending only to his machines, while his brain was obsessed with the thoughts of revenge that seethed in it.

At length, in an ironic mood, he decided to listen again to some news of the world so that he might hear the sufferings and lamentations of mankind. He pressed a button that controlled the weather report frequencies and prepared himself to listen to the grief-stricken voice of a speaker.

"It is glad tidings that we bring you today, our friends," a joyful voice came through. "The spell of terrific heat that has

greatly disturbed our world appears to be broken. From all over the world, scientists have sent in confirming reports—”

Radok, startled, jumped up incredulously from his chair. Had his machines stopped? He dashed over to them, but they were still operating, emitting the force that drew the heat to the earth. Was it possible that his calculations were wrong? But what, then, of the previous reports he had heard of intense heat? Again he turned his ear to the voice coming from the instrument.

“An ample supply of the much needed rain is here and the crop yield this year promises to be the greatest in history. Further reports have come in that the winter in the north temperate zone will be warm enough for an additional harvest while tropical temperatures appear, at the same time, to be down to comfortable levels—”

With an angry snarl, Radok turned off the voice. What madness possessed Earth’s scientists? How dared their opinions go against his knowledge? And yet, the thought began to dawn that there was a possibility that they were right and he, wrong.

Could it mean that somehow he had been benefiting mankind instead of punishing them? As this realization occurred, an ominous sound rang through the cavern.

Above him, he could hear a crackling noise as countless crystals of ice rubbed over each other. The sound grew louder and louder, but its meaning was lost in the feverish tracts of Radok’s obsessed mind.

**F**OR a moment or two he paced the floor of the cavern in his agony of mind, heedless of everything. But a constant lightly drifting stream of needlelike particles that persisted in falling upon him impressed itself finally upon his consciousness. He recognized them for what they were, sharp bits of ice from the icecap above him. Startled, he looked up, and on the roof of his cavern he saw grim,

greenish cracks which were widening visibly, slowly yawning.

An awareness of what it meant burst upon the frightened man and he looked wildly about for cover. It was too late. The imponderable mass of ice above was breaking up, something he had never expected. With a loud clap, the roof of the cavern fell in. Radok was instantly crushed beneath tons of rending, burying ice.

\* \* \* \* \*

THE AUDIO\_VISION NEWS

Printed in Your Audio Set Ten Times Daily  
Subscription 17 Currency Units Per Annum

Jan. 12, 2093

Edition 9:20 A. M. (G. M. T.)

Word has been received from the Hubert Timkins Expedition at Antarctica of the discovery of a huge cavern beneath the polar icecap. In it was the body of a man, crushed beneath fallen ice. It has been positively identified as the body of Radok, the scientist criminal who mysteriously escaped imprisonment six years ago.

Within the cavern were also many huge machines, which the expedition’s scientists are busily studying. It is believed at Antarctica that these machines have some connection with the intense heat spell that was felt all over the world soon after Radok’s escape.

From a cursory examination, it has been determined that the machines were of a magnetic nature capable of handling intense quantities of force. While their use has not yet been completely discovered, the expedition has at least found out that they attracted the sun’s light to the earth, in tremendously concentrated quantities. This is evidently what brought the heat about.

But this additional heat, of its own accord, cooled the earth, thus forestalling Radok’s plans. The heat due to his engines was first felt at the equator, diminishing

greatly as one approached the polar regions. Therefore the normal difference in temperature between the poles and the equator became greatly increased. This made for additional intensity in the force of the winds, since they are only convection currents.

Due to this increased windiness and a higher temperature on the earth's surface, the process of evaporation of water from the ocean and the waters of the earth was enormously accelerated. An immense bank of clouds was established all around the earth, which effectively reflected back all the increased radiation that was coming to the earth.

Thus, the temperature at the earth's surface was decidedly lowered soon after the onset of the heat and, in addition, the protective cloudbank tempered the winter and provided beneficent amounts of rain.

Radok's death was due to a fault in the layer of ice above him. When the warm spell came, the ice melted slightly. But when the cooler temperatures were reestablished, the icecap developed a fault in its structure when refreezing. This, the Timkins Expedition has established, was the one cause of Radok's death, a death which he brought upon himself just as effectively as if he had committed suicide.