

LUCKY STARR AND THE BIG SUN OF MERCURY, by Paul French. Doubleday & Co., New York. 1956. 191 pp. \$2.50.

If it's been any secret that "Paul French" is Isaac Asimov in disguise, the cat will be out of the bag with this fourth in the "Lucky Starr" series, in which the Master's three laws of positronic robots are set forth and used to get the young genius out of a mess. This is also a SF-detective blend reminiscent of Asimov's current experiments in the form: sabotage, attempted murder, successful murder (with gravitation as the weapon), a mad robot (whose madness is the crucial clue), weird Mercutian rocklife—they're all here. And David Starr, roving trouble shooter for the Council of Science, is there with his midget pal, Bigman Jones, to untangle the villainies.

It's not up to the last "Starr" book, and by no means in the Heinlein-Norton class. But what is?

PLAGUESHIP, by Andrew North. Gnome Press, New York. 1956. 192 pp. \$2.75.

Andre Norton keeps right up there with Heinlein as one of the two people whose nominal juvenile science fiction is as good as most routine adult fare. Her second book as "Andrew North" is several notches above the first of the Dane Thorsen series, "Sargasso of Space," if not quite up to her other memorable books for other publishers.

This, for my money, is the pure romance of strange places that Sam Moskowitz and others—including myself—have been lamenting as lost from present-day science fiction. We open with Free Traders feeling their way into ticklish negotiations with a strange race, on a strange world, that you're made to feel *is* strange in every detail. Young Thorsen blunders into one success, which is almost offset by complete failure—then at the very moment when they seem to have their fortunes made, a mysterious illness strikes down member after member of the crew of the trader *Solar Queen*, until only the four junior members of the crew are left to bring her back to Earth.

Mystery compounds on mystery: why does that grand character, Sinbad the ship's cat, refuse to go near the hydroponics room? What is the meaning of the "strange behavior of a hoobat"? What is the secret of the Big Burn?

Recommended for teen-agers and anyone else who doesn't demand social significance in his SF, and likes to be taken back to those easy days when worlds were still strange to us all.

NOTE: William C. McCain and Donn Fileti of West Orange, New Jersey (1 Belgrade Terrace) have served notice that they are in process of compiling an index of the science-fiction magazines for 1956. Title will be: "Science-Fantasy Index." Format is approximately six by nine inches, offset-printed. There will be author and title indexes, a magazine checklist, a checklist of science-fantasy motion pictures, and assorted statistics and commentaries. They'll be glad to have your contributions, I'm sure, and I'll report the price when I see the index, early next year.

THE END