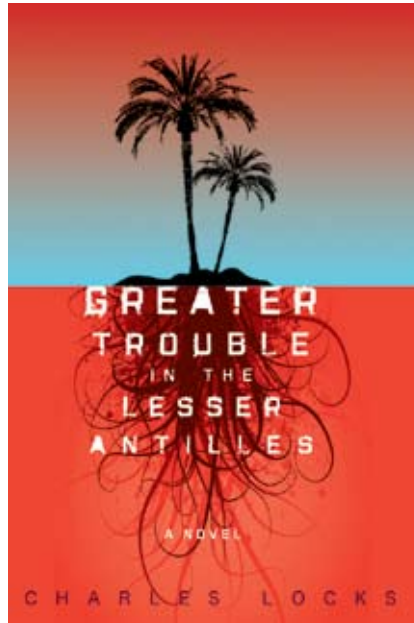


Greater Trouble in the Lesser Antilles, by Charles Locks (Scarletta Press, \$14.95)

Much of the writing in this first novel by Charles Locks is a simple joy to read. The author takes us on a ribald adventure to the fictional island of St. Judas in the Virgin Islands, offering this description of the town of Flamingo Bay: “The road skirted the bay and bobbed and weaved between old stone buildings with red roofs, sturdy doors, and unglazed windows. Brightly colored pennants of laundry waved on clotheslines. Chickens scratched and goats idled in the morning sun. Rusting hulks of abandoned vehicles—transformed by the bush into a permanent part of the landscape—decayed slowly and quietly like the old men who owned them.”

The culture in this exotic locale is a slow-paced mix-and-match of voodoo, reggae, and seafaring types, accented with scintillating romantic encounters. Jimmy Buffet music plays in the background, and there’s a party to




celebrate every occasion, with customized T-shirts designed for each event.

It is by choice that Mr. Locks’s characters live outside the typical boundaries of society. They all have nicknames, such as Pirate Dan, Leif the Thief, and The Shirt. This annoyed me at first, until I realized they were mostly expatriates from the continent, and for any number of personal reasons didn’t need or want a last name.

There’s a murder to be solved, and when the police

show no inclination to pursue the killer, Captain Brian and his romantic counterpart, Billie, begin their own investigation. But the author takes his time getting into the facts of the case, entertaining the reader with often-humorous anecdotes from the outrageous lives of his characters.

Captain Brian narrates in the manner of a Philip Marlowe character—drinking booze and smoking cigarettes while launching satirical one-liners at the world. He’s down on his luck, but romance and new opportunities are on the horizon.

The plot ambles along through the first half of the book; much in the easy-going way the islanders greet a new day. But as time passes, and festivities in Flamingo Bay warm up toward evening, so does the plot, until it’s a page-turning race to the finish. But by then the reader realizes it isn’t so much how the story ends, as the larger-than-life journey of getting there; a concept these island denizens seem to have figured out. 

—Vincent Wyckoff

Wyckoff is the author of Beware of Cat, and Other Encounters of a Letter Carrier, published this spring by Borealis Books