

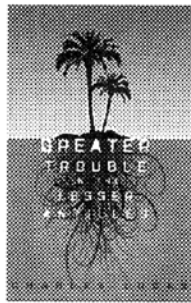
Mysteries that run deep

Three new hot summer reads by Minnesota mystery writers go beneath the surface to explore issues of justice, family, corruption and the meaning of life.

By **MARX SWANHOLM** • Special to the Star Tribune

“GREATER TROUBLE IN THE LESSER ANTILLES”

by Charles Locks, (Scarletta, 296 pages, \$14.95)



This debut mystery delivers more than a clever title. Locks owned and operated restaurants in the Caribbean and evidently picked up enough local color there to fill several bookcases. Everybody's a character on the fictional island of St. Judas, including the book's narrator, Captain Brian Clancy, and his recently murdered friend, Leif the Thief. The local police are corrupt and a joke, so Captain Brian (almost everybody here has a nickname — Pirate Dan, Mechanic Jim, etc.) and the unattainable island heartthrob, Billie, launch an investigation of their own.

In the end, justice is meted out, but the mystery element is not the book's strength. Instead, it's the collection of eccentric characters and madcap happenings. St. Judas may be a kind of paradise, but it's also a hideout for refugees from the mainland, eccentrics who bask in the hot sun of the island's chaos. Locks, through Captain Brian, draws a vivid picture in intelligent, finished prose. Immature, perhaps, but no dummy, Captain Brian is a saltwater philosopher who comes to know that there's more to life than paradise.

Marx Swanholm is a freelance writer and retired senior exhibit curator at the Minnesota Historical Society.