

In Pursuit of Running Water

Cornell Charles

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This tale of human drama and interaction is a testament to the truth that everyone has a story.

An American businessman and his wife visit an island in the Caribbean in hopes of buying land for themselves but face potential opposition by the locals in Cornell Charles's fictional *In Pursuit of Running Water*. The couple's plans to hike the island's largest mountain one afternoon set off a chain of events that affect many of the people they've met in this intriguing take on a clash of cultures.

Jim Gallegos is recently retired but still looking for investment ideas. He's not a sympathetic or very likable character—he's brusque, opinionated, rude, and self-entitled. His wife, Betty, serves as a buffer between him and the islanders they meet in this, their third stay on Butterfly Island.

The islanders are a diverse group and have their own powerful story lines. Cosmos Richards is the talkative, patronizing taxi driver hired by the Gallegoses to escort them around to tourist spots; Leslie Vassal is a lawyer whom Jim uses as a liaison in pursuit of land on Goat Mountain; Collins Anderson is the proprietor of the "Bottom of the Hill Disco," a drinking establishment at the foot of the mountain; and Corporal Welch is the hard-drinking ex-soldier who will lead the couple on their mountain trek.

The island atmosphere is exquisitely detailed, from the laissez-faire attitude of the locals in government matters, to their deeply ingrained religious adherence, to the still slightly circumspect questioning of matters of the occult.

The dialogue of the islanders is often written as it might truly be spoken, so this adds uniqueness to their words. Conversations between Jim and Betty are portrayed as occasionally awkward and stilted; this may be intentional because it isn't clear whether they are being truthful with one another.

Humorous and sardonic lines permeate the text. When Cosmos tells the Gallegoses that he doesn't pay any taxes on land he owns, and Betty comments that he is lucky, "Cosmos mused on the word and concluded that luck, to him, was an American visa or a green card."

While the major part of the plot belongs to Jim and his pursuit of island land to claim as his own, side stories are delightful all on their own. Edison John, a giant of a man, digs tubers from his hillside five days a week and with his companion, Marianna, carries the produce to town to sell on Saturdays. Clarissa is Cosmos's girlfriend the last four years; they travel back to their home district when he finally proposes marriage.

The island's past is hinted at once or twice when whispers of old magic appear in reference to catching a murderer, who has mysteriously disappeared. The story slowly builds up to the mountain hike, and then the action comes rather quickly as issues need reconciling. It's a slow buildup to the reward and this might disappoint some, but it's nice traveling along the way.

Those who like adventures, stories with interesting locales, or tales of human drama and interaction will enjoy

Charles's *In Pursuit of Running Water*, a testament to the truth that everyone has a story.

ROBIN FARRELL EDMUNDS (March 22, 2016)

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