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Tales of the South Pacific for young adults
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In a time when books, music, movies and video games are filled with sex, violence, and profanity, it is refreshing to find a work that doesn't need any of the three to get its message across.

Such is the case with "Makoona," a novel aimed at young adults—although entertaining for all ages—by John Morano.

Morano, a Monmouth University professor and former magazine editor, has found his niche writing about ecological issues. After the initial release of his first book, "A Wing and a Prayer," which was ultimately reprinted several times, Morano signed a multibook deal for his own eco-adventure series.

"Makoona," book two in the eco-adventure series, includes an introduction by Kathryn S. Fuller, president of the World Wildlife Fund. It takes readers to the South Pacific to follow the story of Binti, a female octopus living in the Makoona coral reef, and Kemar, a Cambodian boy who survived the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge.

In following the lives of the two main characters, it becomes apparent that each is searching for something.

For Kemar, it is a home, somewhere for him to stop running and find safety. Binti is in search of her shell—despite the fact that octopuses do not have shells—so she can communicate with the spirit-fish.

Throughout their adventures, Kemar and Binti encounter many interesting characters. Binti's best friends include a blowfish names Hootie, who has been trying to help her find her shell, and Molo, a psychedelic male octopus that speaks in Grateful Dead lyrics.

While Binti spends most of her time around the coral reef, Kemar's adventures bring him to several locations and in contact with a variety of individuals. They include Bao, who uses less than conventional means to fish off of the coral reef, and Meela, a mechanic whose story is eerily similar to Amelia Earhart's.

Like "A Wing and a Prayer," which is based on the life of an extinct petrel, "Makoona" provides an ecological message: the necessity to preserve coral reefs and their surrounding habitats.

Beyond that, the book also teaches a valuable lesson about the atrocities in Cambodia. Kemar's story is not as graphic as the images depicted in the 1984 film "The Killing Fields," but the book is not sanitized in a way that detracts from the narrative, giving readers young and old an opportunity to learn about the past.

This dual message is what helps "Makoona" succeed, as it shows how lives so completely different can be torn apart, yet are so intertwined in nature without even realizing it.