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Review: *A Wing and a Prayer*
By Jeremy Puglisi

Very few books that I can think of have the narrative grace to appeal to both children and adults. C.S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia* leap to mind, and most recently, J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter books. It seems to take a certain magic to captivate the attention of both the young and old—and John Morano's *A Wing and a Prayer* has that magic. This is a book that parents will read to their children before they go to bed, and then keep reading after their kids are successfully tucked in. The force that pulls the reader into the story is Morano's delightful use of traditional narrative devices; his characters are lovable (and despicable) and his plot is filled with unexpected twists and turns. Morano also has many lessons to teach us about nature, and mankind—and he does so subtly, without being didactic or preachy.

Kurt Vonnegut once said that a successful novel must have a character that wants something desperately, and in the case of *A Wing and a Prayer*, this element is established immediately. The central character, Lupe, believes that he is the last of a dying breed of Guadalupe Petrels. So his motivation is to find a mate before his kind forever becomes extinct—but of course, this is not a simple task. The beginning of the book finds Lupe locked in a cage by a group of humans trying to "save" him. Lupe is obviously in a desperate situation, "[he] knew he must find a female of his flock somewhere on the planet and mate with her before either of them perished," and his desire for both freedom and love propel this tale forward without pause.

Though Lupe's journey is central to Morano's narrative, he is not alone. The author's supporting cast of characters are varied, vividly portrayed, and often hilarious. The first of these delightful characters is Zomis, the pigeon who thinks he is a rat; "It dawned on Lupe that for some reason this...pigeon, believed it was a rat. Not only did it look, smell and act like one, it even spoke like a rat." Zomis provides one example of the type of slapstick humor that Morano excels at—and this humor is spread throughout the book with a careful touch. It is a difficult task to combine humor and drama, and our author does it successfully without ever losing touch of Lupe's all-important mission.

Lupe's mission is made even more intense by the religious backdrop that Morano paints into the Petrel's world. According to the author, "Lupe was convinced Pettr [Lupe's God] would help him escape if he could only reach him through prayer." This religious dimension is gently woven throughout the story and is very well formulated. Lupe's religious beliefs can teach us a lot about the fragile earth we live on, if we listen to them.

This is just a taste of Morano's first book—a book that has a lot to offer to a wide variety of readers. The book has been praised by both young and old alike, and it has garnered quite a following among environmentalists for its message concerning the preservation of endangered species. For maximum pleasure to be received from *A Wing and a Prayer*, I would grab a copy, and grab your children, then turn off the television and enjoy a story that is told with honesty and exuberance. If you don't have children, then you'll have to go the flight alone. Either way, it's good reading brought to you by one of our finest local authors.