

## Bingo and the Eco-Atom Bomb

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### ***Review of 'Jilel'***

Set against the rising sea that is threatening to cover the Marshall Islands, Molina (Tolfina Fakatou) is given a shell of great and mysterious power by her dying grandmother. Though Molina puts this “Jilel” in the best hiding spot she can find, it is stolen and sold for cigarettes by her own brother Ketowate (Jukulius Niedenthal) and his friend Samson (Niten Anni).



Like Tolstoy's forged coupon, the jilel passes from hand to hand, all the while Molina warns Ketowate of the bad luck it will bring to everyone who touches it. Only when everything around him has broken down and nothing else can go wrong does he begin to wonder if there is some truth in his sister's story.

In this film, all of the characters feel real, they look like they are wearing their own clothes and going about their day just as they always do. These are the things people really worry about day to day: getting food, finding work, and outliving their own land.

Writer and director Jack Niedenthal captures all the little details of island life, from straw brooms to stray dogs, the mom-and-pop store with everything in it and the clueless American tourists. Magic, it would seem, is real here, and little girls with big dreams yield great power.

Written almost completely in Marshallese there are bound to be certain wordplays and puns that will go around an English-speakers' ears, nevertheless, humor and hope, when done well, are translatable. The film is set against a repetitive, but haunting soundtrack by Les Anjolok and Steve Latin-Kasper, and as the credits roll, renowned poet Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner fills the silence with a gut-wrenching recitation of “Tell Them.”

Rather than limit itself to what is realistic or what people want to hear, the film ends with the force of an eco-atom bomb. And this is what independent cinema is all about – not replicating some big-budget movie or filming how well pretty girls cry. Leave that to Hollywood. In indie movies, anyone with a DIY-drive and a shoestring budget can say what no one else dares to and hang their sign where everyone will see it.

“Jilel: the Calling of the Shell” is Niedenthal's love letter to the Marshall Islands. Billed as a “global-warming fairy tale,” it is a true piece of literature and refuses to accept the loss of the islands without a fight.