

Cloning Galinda

Jan Smolders

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Cloning Galinda is an entertaining tale that opens a fascinating window into the controversial subject of hydraulic fracking.

One good Midwestern woman stands up against the overwhelming financial and political might of a corrupt fracking operation in Jan Smolders's David-and-Goliath tale, *Cloning Galinda*.

Mary Jenkins is a mother, common-law wife, and fifth-grade teacher. She has her doubts when hydraulic-fracturing agents seduce her small Ohio town with talk of easy money for its residents. The project boss's secret agenda threatens Mary, her family, and her hometown, hurling her into a battle she's ill-equipped to fight, let alone win.

Mary is the most nuanced, sympathetic, and believable character in the story. She is a woman who is fiercely protective of her home and family, even as she is overworked and overburdened with doubts and concerns: "Her worries about all the complications and financial headaches grew. Who would help her? Friends? The school? Supren? Supren's HR department? Doyle? How about disability payments?"

Other characters, including Mike Doyle, the project boss, have less dimension. Doyle is a stock bad guy, cheating on his wife with the wife of a subordinate, taking money under the table, and much worse. This relatively simplistic characterization puts the novel into melodramatic territory at times.

Plotting is tight, and the pacing is rapid. The narrative keeps developments unfolding, though for Mary they're mostly unpleasant—from her husband's hospitalization, to losing her job, to her kids being bullied at school over her anti-fracking stance.

Crisp, realistic dialogue contributes to the novel's fast pace, breaking up and balancing the exposition, which is limited. It advances the action and effectively shows the characters'—especially Mary's—volatile emotional reactions in the face of the juggernaut bearing down on the town.

The novel shines in its vivid depictions and clear explanations of both the environmental disruption and harm caused by hydraulic fracking, and the advanced, even amazing, technology that is used. There is even a hat-tip to the positives of fracking—low gasoline and heating oil prices not dependent on foreign producers—but along with the mystery of what the bad guy is up to, the novel carries a strong, somewhat one-sided anti-fracking subtext.

Fracking's effects on the town are convincingly written in powerful, verbal language—from the nonstop noise, light and dust, to contamination of the water supply.

Cloning Galinda is an entertaining tale that opens a fascinating window into the controversial subject of hydraulic fracking, and treats it in the compelling and dramatic fashion it deserves.

GARY HENRY (August 1, 2017)

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