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Clarion Review

Misconception
Avner Hershlag
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In this riveting medical thriller, author Avner Hershlag brings the idea of human cloning to disturbing life and opens a Pandora's Box of unsettling possibilities. With an intriguing cast of characters and a fast-paced plot, Misconception easily captivates readers from prologue to epilogue.

Despite her strong desire for motherhood, a traumatic event in Dr. Anya Krim's past her has left with a fear of physical intimacy. It has also caused her to avoid delivering babies. She is focusing instead on stem-cell and organ cloning research and acting as fertility specialist to the First Lady. She reluctantly agrees to deliver a baby as a favor to an old friend, but is shocked when the child is born severely deformed, its sex uncertain and true parentage unknown. Before she has a chance to delve into that mystery, she is drawn into another involving the inexplicable pregnancy of a Senator's comatose daughter.

Dr. Jeremy "Cody" Coddington, an acquaintance from Anya's medical school days, now works for a company named Reprotech, where he uses his expertise to clone pets for wealthy clients. His increasingly unstable boss, Hugh Nicholson, suffers from a genetic disorder, and his resentment infects his attitude toward the company's work. When certain business plans fall through, he begins to consider ethically frightening options to keep the company solvent. He explains to Cody, "If you thought there was lots of money in replacement pets, I have news for you: the real money's in replacement children. We just have to work out the science."

Before long, Anya is racing the clock to ensure the viability and physical safety of embryos belonging to the President and First Lady, while simultaneously trying to pull all of the puzzle pieces together. As the threats to both her professional life and physical well-being escalate, Anya frantically tries to protect her patients and salvage her career.

Misconception examines timely ethical and political issues with a story rich in twists and turns that seems just this side of possible. Hershlag's personal expertise as a fertility specialist and his natural storytelling ability ensure that complicated concepts and procedures are clearly explained, moving the plot forward without bogging it down. Characters are credible and well-

developed, and the story structure is solid and suspenseful. While the novel loses a bit of steam toward the end, and a few scenarios feel slightly less than plausible (a character is run over twice and makes a rather miraculous recovery within days), such missteps could easily be corrected. In spite of these issues, the novel remains engaging and Hershlag capably juggles several connected storylines, bringing them all together in an ultimately satisfying denouement.

Misconception is a worthwhile read and a fascinating look inside a world of medical advances that are both lifesaving and ethically questionable.

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