

GODS AND MONSTERS

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What Dolly the Sheep
tells us about human
folly, fashion victims
and the end of the world.



Clockwise from bottom left: sleeveless lace dress (worn over) and rainbow boots both MARCO DE VINCENZO, short sleeve dress (worn under) and tights stylist's own; on both girls: beige silk dress MARCO DE VINCENZO, lace armbands and leggings stylist's own; white cotton shirt, black frounce trousers, rainbow shirt (worn as belt) and black kitten heels all MARCO DE VINCENZO; sequin dress MARCO DE VINCENZO, lace armbands stylist's own; pink silk shirt and skirt with sheep print and black kitten heels all MARCO DE VINCENZO, leggings stylist's own.



In the cavernous central hall of Edinburgh's National Museum of Scotland stands a taxidermied sheep in a glass box. She looks out sagely from her final resting place, a modest grey plinth decorated with a smattering of hay. Her name is Dolly.

Born in the summer of 1996, Dolly was announced to the world in February of the following year, where she became an overnight media darling. She is, it's safe to say, the world's most famous member of the *ovis aries* species. Photographs from the time show her in her pen surrounded by the flashbulbs of press photographers, like a Hollywood sweetheart making her red carpet debut. Her glamorous name alludes to the part of the body from which she was cloned, namely the mammary glands of an adult Finn Dorset sheep; her creators said they couldn't think of a more impressive pair of glands than those belonging to Dolly Parton.

Yet behind the effusive coverage that accompanied Dolly's immaculate conception, there was something more sinister at work. There had been 276 attempts before Dolly to clone a sheep from an adult cell, most of which ended in disaster. All but 29 didn't even make it to the stage of inserting the nucleus into the enucleated egg, the first part of a process which then sees a jolt of electric current zapped into the cell, kickstarting the growth of an embryo to be placed inside a surrogate mother. Dolly's grand entrance prompted panic in corners of the scientific world: many experts had thought cloning from an adult mammal cell impossible, and with the humble birth of a cuddly Scottish sheep had arrived the chilling possibility of cloning humans. Whether this will ever be legally permissible, nobody can be sure, but it hasn't stopped people trying. In 2003, a sect of the controversial Raelian cult claimed to have cloned a human baby in the otherwise innocuous surroundings of a Holiday Inn in South Florida. Experts were sceptical.

Whenever cloning hits the headlines, it arouses instant suspicion, tapping into cultural anxieties so profound that entire franchises have been built around them: from *Jurassic Park* to *Blade Runner* to *Resident Evil*, the ability to clone is associated with villainy and world domination. The word cloning derives from the Ancient Greek word for twig, the link being an organism that has been propagated asexually. We're all familiar with Medusa and the Cyclops, but less so with Talos, a creature from Apollonius of Rhodes' epic poem *Argonautica* constructed from metal by a god as an ancient warrior android. According to the American historian Adrienne Mayor, Talos's existence within Greek mythology represents an early distrust for technology's ability to create new life. More importantly, however, the place of Talos in the ancient imagination speaks of that ineluctable trait of the Greek antihero: hubris.

After all, why would anybody want to clone a human if not to satisfy their own vanity? Sure, there's the possibility it could lead to major medical breakthroughs; last year, the Chinese macaques Zhong Zhong and Hua Hua were cloned in an effort to offer insights into stem cells, drug testing, gene editing and brain research that would otherwise be impossible. But once the power of cloning leaves the laboratory and enters public hands, we inevitably err towards more selfish motives – look at Barbra Streisand, who last year debuted in the pages of *Variety* the two clones she made from her beloved Coton de Tulear, Samantha, by swiping cells from her mouth and stomach

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Counter-clockwise from front: cream lace skirt, cross necklace (held) and black kitten heels MARCO DE VINCENZO, black top and lace gloves stylist's own; white lace dress and black and pink kitten heels MARCO DE VINCENZO, bra, shorts and lace garters (worn under) stylist's own; rainbow skirt and PVC heels MARCO DE VINCENZO, top, tights and armbands stylist's own; black skirt-trousers and black and pink kitten heels MARCO DE VINCENZO, black body stylist's own.

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