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Send in the clones

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THE gestation period was long and excruciating. When the molecular breakthrough was finally made, the world threw its collective hands up in horror and excitement; and all because we have cloned a sheep.

Er... yes. A pat on the back for researcher Dr Ian Wilmut; what better way to demonstrate the wonders of cloning than to double a sheep? You have to admit, the likeness is unmistakable.

Never mind that clone Dolly shares this likeness with just about every other Scottish Blackface ewe on this planet.

Okay, so that's not the point. The real legitimacy of the discovery lies in the fact that Dolly has exactly the same DNA make-up as her donor.

While the researchers at the Roslin Institute in Edinburgh see in this a more nutritious glass of milk (some no doubt envision a juicy mutton chop), other eyes are gleaming with the possibilities of human cloning.

The fascinating thing about Dolly is that she started life as a single cell, taken from the udder of a Finn Dorset ewe. Which means that the countless cells that currently configure your person are in effect millions of potential yous.

Which also means that the next time you cut yourself you may actually be spilling your seed.

Despite the accompanying furore over religion and ethics, human cloning is bound to happen, and may be less than two years away.

"The fascination is too great. It's like putting 100 alcoholics in a room with a bottle of gin. The gin doesn't stand a chance," says Kansas City Star columnist Bill Tammeus.

Life will take a strange twist when animal cloning arrives in Malaysia. Stranger still with human cloning.

As social standing is measured by how often one is seen at the right places, the average person's social life will improve in leaps and bounds as he/she is seen in all the right places, all the time.

Traffic jams need not result in you being two hours late for every meeting. Instead of the usual sweaty palms you can now keep your cool as your double(s) keep(s) your appointments.

With cloning, we may just be able to manage the much-discussed social ills. Parents, often blamed for the woes that have beset us, can now attend to their child's developmental needs and still be able to earn enough to buy that third BMW.

If your child proves to be more than a handful, clone Mr T for an assistant. But don't attempt to make a more pleasing copy of your child - there's nothing worse than being the class clone.

Parents beware. If your child prefers his own company to that of others, he may turn out to be a cloner.

A successful man going through mid-life crisis could now leave his wife for a younger clone. Show her you'd do it all over again.

Alternatively, cloning can make it easier for the guilt-ridden polygamous husband who simply can't keep up.

For those who missed the intensive course in angkat, masuk, tolak, picit at your local petrol kiosk, cloning could mean a restoration of full service.

The multi-talented actor and playwright Jit Murad may finally have his wish - to write, direct, produce, act and sing all on his own.

Proponents of cloning have emphasised that clones already exist - in the

form of identical twins. But the difference with clones is that you get to see how the original turns out before you decide you want a copy.

However, there is no guarantee that the clone will turn out exactly like the master copy because socialisation comes into play. Which opens up a new host of possibilities.

Fast-talking Radio Four DJ Patrick Teoh could be cloned for that velvety voice - and be tutored to acquire a pleasing personality.

Fellow DJ Yasmin Yusoff can be duplicated and directed to lose the ear-splitting cackle.

One slightly sinister aspect of cloning is that it can happen to you without your knowledge. Now, when you get an invite to the biggest bash in town, someone turning up in the same outfit is not all you have to worry about.

The upside to cloning is that Malaysia could reach its target of 70 million people in no time at all. Of course, this means a loss of individuality, with everyone from teh tarik stall owners right up to the Cabinet being replicated.

And when this happens, no one would bat an eyelid if someone were to ask "Siapa Mahathir?".