



Dog, Inc.: The Uncanny Inside Story of Cloning Man's Best Friend

John Woestendiek

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What *Stiff* did for the dead and *Fast Food Nation* did for the burger, *Dog, Inc.* does for the stranger-than-fiction world of commercial dog cloning.

It all began with a pit bull named Booger. Former Miss Wyoming Bernann McKinney was so distraught over the death of her dog, whom she regarded as her guardian and savior, that she paid \$50,000 to RNL Bio for the chance to bring her beloved companion back to life. The result were five new Boogers—the first successful commercial cloning of a canine—delivered in 2008, along with a slew of compelling questions about the boundaries of science, commerce, and ethics. Blending shocking investigative reporting with colorful anecdotes, Pulitzer Prize-winning John Woestendiek takes readers behind the scenes of this emerging industry.

But *Dog, Inc.* isn't just a book about pets. Nor is it just a book about science. Rather it's a fascinating look at how our emotional needs are bending the reaches of science and technology, as well as a study of this uncharted territory. With our pet obsession climbing to new heights and our scientific abilities even more so, this combination raises a serious concern: Are we crossing the boundary of controlling science in the name of science, in the name of love, in the name of merchandising—or a blend of all three?

Dog, Inc.: The Uncanny Inside Story of Cloning Man's Best Friend Details

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Janice Crespo says

This book should be on everyone's reading list. John Woestendiek takes you into the various people in the book in depth and lets you get to know each one. While this is a book about science, you will never read another science book like this. The depth, the imagery, the characters are all one of a kind and he brings you right there with him. If all science books were written like this, we would all be science scholars! Thank you John for opening my eyes to quite a bit! You are now on my top author lists! The only downfall? After January 2011 - so many would love to receive this gift over the holidays!

Donna says

It was a coincidence that, a few weeks after putting this book on hold, it became available while my own dog was sick with out what turned out to be a life-ending bone marrow disease. Reading it as her health declined turned out to be oddly comforting, partially because Woestendiek makes it clear in his introduction that he's a lover of shelter mutts. Unlike the people who have cloned their pets, he also doesn't believe it's possible to replace a dog.

Far from presenting a "yay, progress!" paean to cloning, he peels back the veneer of feel-good pet-owner reunification to expose the animal abuse and neglect, international legal battles, scientific fraud, media scandal and dissatisfied pet owners involved in a quest that was ultimately viewed as a stepping stone to cloning humans.

I was disappointed that there are no notes or bibliography appended to the text.

Danielle says

People are cuckoo-la-roo.

Kater Cheek says

This is the kind of book I usually like very much--topical science written for the layperson. It starts out good; the subject is narrow enough to really delve into it, and Woestendiek knows to use biographical information to create a narrative to draw the reader along. Alas, for various reasons, this book will not make my top ten of 2011.

The main characters Woestendiek chooses to focus on are a millionaire who founded the first American cloning-for-profit organization, the Korean scientists who actually succeed in cloning a dog, the police dog Trakr and his handler, and Bertrann McKinney who goes to the ends of the earth to clone her beloved service

dog Booger.

The millionaire first decides to start the company to clone his mother's dog, Missy. Woestendiek spends a chapter or two giving biographical data about this guy and his mom, but I kept losing track of who was who and why they were relevant to the story. Like many millionaires, they aren't as interesting as they think they are. Once we're past the biography, Woestendiek talks about how they found the Missiplicity project, and get Texas A&M researchers to create the technology.

The researchers at A&M aren't successful at first. Difficulties arise because for one, dog eggs are apparently opaque, and secondly, Americans are in general batshit crazy when it comes to dogs. With the restrictions from nature and from animal right's groups, they aren't able to clone a dog, but they do clone other animals.

Woestendiek talks about the cloning of cats, and about the various successes and setbacks thereof. He also talks quite a bit about a remarkably tame bull named Chance, who got cloned by the Texas A&M researchers. The first bull was so tame that toddlers could ride his back. The clone, uncreatively named "Second Chance" gored his owner, who nonetheless refused to believe the bull was any bit different from the first one.

And that's the real philosophical issue raised by cloning in general and explored by this book. Clones are not the same as their parents. Calico cats clones don't have the same markings, cloned bulls don't have the same temperament, and cloned dogs sometimes don't even look like their parent. They are not the same animal, yet grief-stricken pet owners refuse to believe that the clone is anything other than a reincarnation of the Spot or Fido they lost.

The Korean scientists manage to clone dogs, with the aid of a ready supply of egg donor bitches, an incredibly intense work ethic, and the resounding support of the South Korean government. The author implies that successful dog cloning was also made much easier by the Korean's attitude towards dogs, an attitude that many Americans disagree with. (If you put a chicken in a cage for its whole life, then kill it and eat it, that's business as usual. If you do the same to a dog, somehow that's a heinous crime against nature.) When the scientists in Korea are successful, they are hailed as heroes, lauded and practically worshipped, even after allegations of fraud and embezzling surface.

However, the most interesting story in this book is the one of Bertrann McKinney. Despite living on \$500 a month disability check, she managed to get the Korean firm to discount \$100,000 off the bill, and scrape up the \$50,000 plus expenses to fly to Korea and have her beloved dog Booger cloned. Bertrann's love for her dog is unusual in its depth, and I would admire it if I could sympathize with it. I'm not a dog person. Like chickens, dogs are filthy, stupid, noisy and destructive, but chickens are tasty and even if they attack, they don't maim you so badly that you need a service animal just to put your socks on*, as Bertrann did after her father's dog attacked her.

Bertrann reacts to the death of her dog Booger in the same way that Bella Swan reacts when Edward Cullen leaves her. This behavior, in a lovesick teen pining for her boyfriend, is cute and sad. In a middle-aged woman pining for a mutt named after something you blow out of your nose, it's perverse and bizarre. I've been sad when my pets die, but this level of attachment just struck me as wrong. It was like reading about a woman who is trying to legally marry a dolphin. It's a nearly impossible quest undertaken for love, but it's so unnatural that it just seems mentally ill. The best outcome in Bertrann's case would not be that she get to clone her dog, but that she get some help she could put things into perspective. I wanted to tell her, "It's just a dog, there are a gazillion more out there dying every day. Go adopt one and get over it."

Woestendiek talks about the legal battles between the various organizations, but this interested me not at all. I liked reading about the science involved, but I wished there had been more of it. In general, I wished there had been more about the science, especially detailed explanations of biology, and less biography of unlikeable and unsympathetic people.

The main reason why I didn't like this book more is that it made me uncomfortable. Not because I'm terrified of new technology (though I think cloning a person would be a horrible idea, because none of the clones in the book are anywhere near healthy) but because it makes me uncomfortable when I'm confronted with uncanny pseudo-human role that dogs play in our society. Bertrann and some of the other dog-owners who went to great lengths to recreate their beloved pets treat their dogs like members of the family, child substitutes whom they love with a depth that rivals any human-human bond. I know I'm in the minority when I say this, but dogs are animals, equal to and (in my opinion) no greater than chickens, cats, pigs, horses, sheep and rats. They will never be people, and treating dogs like people--though millions of my countrymen do it--feels as perverse as wanting to marry a dolphin.

If there had been more science and less law, and if the people that Woesteniek followed had passions I could identify with, I think I would have liked this much more. I recommend this for people who love dogs, and those who like to read about bizarre mavericks and psychotic women, and for people who want to know about the cloning technology without being burdened with too much scientific description.

Michelle says

I may or may not have added this book to my to read list because there is a beagle on the cover.

Barb says

Commercial dog cloning. Wrong on so many levels. Regardless, Woestendiek tells the tale of what prompted the research, how the research and ultimately, the "finished products" came about – successes, controversies, scandals, and all – and two dog owners, one of whom won an essay contest to have his dead dog cloned, while the other is a mentally unstable and narcissistic drama queen who wanted her dead dog back. As Mark Westhusin, one of the Texas A&M researchers on the original project says, it's reproduction, not resurrection. Some people can't differentiate between the two. Despite all the science involved, the book is accessible and Woestendiek does an excellent job of explaining the procedures in terms that even I can understand.

Linus Williams says

I wanted to like this book, but the meandering writing style and the unsympathetic characters make it a tough read. Animal cloning is a fascinating area of research, and one that should be easy to write about, but it seems like every other character here is a scumbag. There's the Korean scientists who work inhuman hours (and fabricate results) for national pride, there's the former beauty queen/mormon rapist (no, I'm not making this up) who is legitimately crazy and somehow gets her service dog cloned and is, somehow, able to pay for it (????), there's the rancher who clones an old bull and who is promptly gored for his pains....there are no compelling stories, and there is too much detail in the legal battles. Not a bad read, just not a great one.

Cayr says

It was 1997 when John Sperling, his friend Joan Hawthorne and her son, Lou, were talking about a New York Times article they had all read about cloning. During the natural progression of the conversation, John suggested that maybe Joan's dog, Missy, could be cloned. It was an offhand remark, but it took hold, and before long, Sperling was financing a full scale scientific operation to make it happen.

In Dog, Inc., author John Woestendiek takes the reader behind the scenes during the advent of the pet cloning industry and tells not only Sperling's story, but the story of his competitors domestically and abroad, and the first pet owners to enlist their services. It's a must-read for anybody who has ever entertained the thought of cloning their pet.

Woestendiek doesn't make [read the rest of my review [here](#)]

Nancy says

John Woestendiek has written a real page turner. This book on the history of cloning is a entertaining combination of the Journal Nature and the tabloid National Enquirer. Technical aspects are covered at a level easily understood by an average reader. The legal trials and publicity seeking nature of people involved in cloning provided plenty of verifiable stories for Woestendiek to report. He bring out the ethical dilemmas associated with cloning while giving readers an entertaining story that is hard to put down.

Judy says

For the record, my family has a dog, a beautiful, neurotic border collie named Bailey. And we love him dearly. There's never been another dog like him and there never will be. He's sweet and crazy and we can't imagine life without him. Seeing as how he's six years old now, in about eight or nine years, we'll have exactly that--life without Bailey. And we'll deal with it.

Woestendiek's book is about dog owners who love their dogs so much, they refuse to have a life without their one-of-a-kind companion, as well as the scientists and entrepreneurs who endeavor to recreate their pets--for a hefty fee, of course.

The book chronicles how a leisurely Sunday morning breakfast discussion at the home of millionaire John Sperling led to a ten year long quest to clone Missy, the family dog. The book traces this journey through the labs at Texas A&M and its attempts at cloning various species, including cats, bulls and pigs; to the Korean scientists who managed to clone dogs and market the business to grieving pet owners; and of course, the eccentric dog owners and the amazing dogs they loved so much.

Woestendiek also relates the irony of just how many animals are required to re-create a handful of pets. "It took 319 egg donors and 214 surrogate mothers to produce the first five dogs and eleven cats--sixteen animals resulting from the creation and implantation of 3,656 embryos." (p. 218)

I was especially fascinated by the story of a reclusive animal lover Bernann McKinney. Living on disability and handouts from her parents, McKinney still managed to have her beloved pit bull Booger cloned by RNL Bio in South Korea.

The message of this book is obvious to everyone but the people who shell out hundreds of thousands of dollars to recreate their canine friends. When that little ball of fur arrives, it is a genetic copy of the original, but isn't the same dog. Dogs, like people, are more than their genetic code. And when there are so many dogs out there in need of a home, who are every bit as special as the one you lost, how can anyone possibly consider this folly?

bookgoddess88 says

I thought this would focus more on the owners who decided to clone their dogs. If your a science buff or scientist, you will enjoy this. As a dog lover, parts were very hard to get through. A lot of experiments on dogs...especially beagles. :(This book didn't hold back and told you the way it is...complete with every species that's been cloned and/or tried to clone. After reading this book, I don't think you should mess with nature...it wasn't for me.

Genevieve says

The title of this book intrigued me, as I had never heard of commercial dog cloning, but it does exist. And this is the investigative story of the history (America vs. Korea) of it, and the people who want to clone their dogs (and one super super crazy lady). For the scientist in me, it's pretty nerdy but also interesting. I remember reading that a dog was cloned, but I hadn't heard anything about it since.

The only thing that irked me about his writing style, is that the author repeats himself A THOUSAND times. At the beginning of each chapter he feels that he has to re-introduce all the characters again. Even though there are maybe five Koreans with similar names, it wasn't necessary.

Amy says

I almost had to abandon the book because of the staccato, clause-heavy writing style. It was like he tried to construct his sentences as clumsily as possible. Once I got over that, I still felt he just didn't give the story enough heart. Fascinating material, but it lacked soul...perhaps, just like clones?

Tasia Jade says

This was an informative and at times laugh aloud hilarious look at the peculiar industry of cloning for profit. I didn't expect so much back story to be involved. If you don't know a lot about science or don't like

technical jargon, then fear this book not. Though plenty of useful solid facts are presented, we also are able to dissect what it is in human nature that leads us to such a conflicted and yet enduring endeavor as to clone our furry loved ones. It reads almost like a story, glimpsing into the lives of the many people involved in the tumultuous journey towards the end goal of cloning "man's best friend."

Kari says

I never gave much thought to what actually happens in order to clone a dog, and to be honest, I was more interested in the emotional ramifications when a dog is cloned. What's it like for the humans? For the clone?

Woestendiek does a fairly good, if repetitive, job explaining the science. First, an egg must be harvested from a dog, and then a surrogate dog must carry the embryo. Probably dozens of times in this book, Woestendiek writes that the DNA of the cloned animal is put into the egg and then zapped with electricity.

Hundreds of dogs have been experimented on, and hundreds of mutant puppies born and killed in the quest to bring dead pets back to life. It's a gruesome business, and sure, maybe acceptable if the end goal is curing cancer, but not for our amusement.

The inhumaneness of the process is driven home: "That dog cloning would go commercial is exactly what animal welfare groups feared most. It would mean more animals being used for their eggs and as surrogates, more capitalizing on the grief of pet owners. And in a world already overpopulated with dogs — where millions a year are put down in America alone — coming up with a new way to create them, factory style, seemed disingenuous, if not irresponsible."

But I found the narrative tiresome. Woestendiek follows the stories of the cloning pioneers, spending more time on the politics and peculiar life histories of the players than what actually happens to the animals, perhaps because that information is not available: "How many trials and errors and eggs and surrogates it took to produce Missy's clone isn't known. With the work being conducted at a private institute in Korea, that data remained secret..."

Another issue is that the people who could afford to pay for their dogs to be cloned are complete weirdos. The one story I'd like to know more about is the German shepherd that was cloned five times. According to this book, that owner wants to sell his own book or movie. I hope he does and that it's more emotionally satisfying than this one.
