

Post Magazine

Hong Kong TV debuts: NatGeo's The Great Human Race takes us back 2.4 million years

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In new series *The Great Human Race* (National Geographic Channel, tomorrow at 9pm), experimental archaeologist Bill Schindler and survival expert Cat Bigney attempt to replicate the challenges that early hominid ancestor *Homo habilis* faced 2.4 million years ago, on a foraging journey across the Tanzanian savannah.

By day six, I was starting to feel guilty about drinking a cup of tea from a mug. *Homo habilis* had no pottery, so no "Keep Calm and Carry On" coffee cups for them. They used resources as they found them. A life of constant foraging in an arboreal kitchen meant storing food in the forks of trees and sleeping high up in nests, away from predators below.

While Schindler and Bigney obviously had a full team behind them to ensure they didn't get dehydrated or attacked by lions, the point is made that by using basic tools and developing social skills, *Homo habilis* were able to obtain the nutrients needed for brain growth and, as we know, development of the ol' grey matter and an aptitude with stone utensils gave us the ability to start manipulating the environment around us. Access to resources was the game-changer for *Homo habilis*, the tipping point to the next step in the evolution of the human race.

"The story of human evolution is above all that of a social journey," says Dr Linda Hurcombe, of the University of Exeter's department of archaeology, on Nat Geo's blog, and this important aspect is understandably missing from a series involving only two people. But the programme provides an engaging way to think through some of the challenges faced by our distant ancestors.

Meanwhile, a re-run of series 14 of *CSI* kicks off with *The Devil and D.B. Russell* (Fox Crime, tomorrow at 8.50pm). For a series that by 2012 was named the most watched in the world, each episode of *CSI* does a pretty good job of presenting a murder case and hi-tech-gadget-armed heroes who do a quick bit of deduction, and have it all wrapped up in an hour. That most DNA tests take up to 12 weeks to complete is irrelevant to the *CSI* bunch, who usually get the results back by the end of the commercial break. Hey, why aren't they consulting to Hong Kong government departments?

As with many made-for-television crime series, there's a tendency towards blue mood lighting in *CSI*. I hate blue mood lighting! Sorry, something must have happened in my childhood. No hang on, that's the show's plot. Mood lighting in a police station - where's that then? My minimal experience of police stations has involved photocopied notices about community safety sticky-taped to the walls.

Putting aside the very designed look of the interiors, series 14 takes us back into the chase for sin and redemption, and not necessarily in that order. Some lazy assumptions and connections are used to ensure the momentum is maintained, and I am constantly surprised by the technical multi-skilling abilities of Ted Danson (D.B. Russell; above left) and Elisabeth Shue's character. I struggle to use my phone, let alone pull a sound-frequency analysis from a video recording but, then again, I'm not being paid to keep the perpetrators of evil at bay.

I would, however, like to live in an alternative reality where our heroines, having been shot, wake up in hospital in full make-up. I wake up most mornings covered in spittle.