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# Defying a deadly disease



**Matt Baylis**  
on last  
night's TV

**W** E HUMANS have an incredible capacity to look on the bright side. A deadly virus rages through West Africa while a war like no other spreads throughout the Middle East. And both are edging dangerously close to our own corner of the globe.

Yet the most-watched TV show last week was one in which three people competed to see who could make the best Victoria sponge. That's not because of human stupidity but the human need to keep going, to not look too long and hard at the fragility of things.

It was that aspect of our make-up that might perhaps have led many people not to watch **CUTTING EDGE: CURING CANCER (C4)**.

Despite the hope in the title, despite the fact that one in three of us is now expected to receive a cancer diagnosis at some point in our lives, many of us would rather have switched off. I wouldn't blame anyone for that. I would say, however, that they missed some good news, told through engaging and heartwarming human stories.

The programme focused on the work at London's University College Hospital, where clinicians

operate alongside cancer researchers at the very edge of that oft-declared cutting edge.

We followed four cancer patients who'd volunteered to test the latest treatments and diagnostic techniques. These looked in some cases like Star Trek medicine, involving things such as carefully guided heat beams to zap tumours and drugs that shut down the

communication pathways of individual cells.

The use of these pioneering methods led to three of the patients going home very happy indeed. For the fourth, a 73-year-old who had opted as a last resort to try a new drug for his white blood cell cancer, they offered a short spurt of hope followed by a cruel disappointment.

It would be an insult to the man and his family to pretend there

was anything good in that outcome but the end credits told us he's still positive and in a way his story did telegraph the most important message about the human condition.

"Oh well, never mind," his wife said stiffly as the doctor explained that the treatment wasn't working. She didn't mean that, of course, but she meant something like it. Carry on. Keep going. In a way, her words were the most hopeful thing about the whole programme.

It was in many ways like the plot of an adventure film. **SWALLOWED BY THE SEA: ANCIENT EGYPT'S GREATEST LOST CITY (BBC4)** took us under the Mediterranean to the lost Egyptian port city of Heracleion, a thriving trade hub that mysteriously sank beneath the waves in the 2nd century BC.

It was like a perfectly preserved crime scene down below: coins used for paying mercenaries, sunken ships with their goods still on board, government-issued notices about taxes and sad grave memorials from grieving parents.

There was even a chunk of a temple wall on top of the wreck of a boat, like a snapshot of the moment of the (until recently) unexplained disaster that put an end to Heracleion's place on the ancient map.

Unfortunately, while our imaginations were afire with the possibilities of meteorites and tsunamis and earthquakes, the answer (soil erosion) came as a bit of a disappointment.

This, plus archaeologist Lucy Blue's rather flat delivery, turned this promised Indiana Jones epic into just another geography lesson.