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Naked Scientists Launch Live Genetic Fingerprinting Race Across East Anglia...

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The Challenge: Cambridge University's Naked Scientists, a team researchers and doctors who use their spare time to take science to the masses through a series of weekly radio shows, will launch the UK's first ever BBC radio DNA fingerprinting 'race' on 2 December.

Budding scientists in schools across the east of England will be locking horns in a fierce fight to become tomorrow's forensic experts as they compete to be the first to reveal the identity of a villain, live on the radio.

The Crime Scene: Someone from the Naked Scientists team has got criminally smelly feet. We've found a pair of socks that require a health warning, but no one will confess to owning them. We have, however, tracked down five suspects seen entering the changing rooms on the day the socks were discovered and we've collected DNA samples from each of them. We've also obtained DNA from the socks themselves.

The Investigators: Now we need to compare the genetic fingerprints of the five suspects with the DNA from the socks in order to flush out the foul-footed felon who left their toxic socks in the showers. But who is the culprit?

To find out we've enlisted the help of six schools across the eastern region, one representing each BBC local radio station. Research supplies company "Bio-Rad" have kitted out teams of pupils at each school with genetic fingerprinting equipment and samples of the DNA we collected from the five suspects and the environmentally-unfriendly socks.

In a fierce head to head race on Friday 2 December, which will be broadcast on the Naked Scientists programme on Sunday 4 December, the teams will battle to be the first school in the region to unlock the genetic fingerprints of the five suspects and reveal the true identity of the stinky-shoed culprit.

The Prize: But what's at stake? As well as gaining the title of being the fastest fingerprinters in history, Bio-Rad have kindly agreed to let the winning school keep the equipment that took them to victory, so that other pupils can continue to have fun learning about genetics. The socks, meanwhile, have been incinerated.

Background Information: The show is the brainchild of Dr Chris Smith, a clinical lecturer at Cambridge University, who has been hosting the show since its earliest incarnation on a local Cambridge commercial radio station in 1999. Along with team members Adel Fattah, Kat Arney, Ann Lacey and Catherine Hawkins, he firmly believes that science can, and should, be fun and engaging.

He says: "I hope that the opportunity to work as a team and participate in a real DNA fingerprinting experiment, similar to what's shown on television and in books, will encourage the young people who take part in this experiment to become as passionate about science as I am. And identifying the person in need of some "odour eaters" will also make life more pleasant in the studio!"

The Naked Scientists would like to thank Dominic Delaney and Melanie Hanna from Bio-Rad, who have made this experiment possible. The Naked Scientists project is supported by the Wellcome Trust.

Notes for Editors:

The Naked Scientists are a group of Cambridge University doctors and scientists who serve up science with a sense of humour on their weekly BBC radio programme which is broadcast live to 8 counties across the east of England between 6 and 7pm on Sunday evenings, and internationally to a further 40,000 people each week as an Internet podcast which is available from their website – www.thenakedscientists.com

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