**Chapter 4**

*Chapter Summary*

A major change occurred in human evolution sometime after 1.8 million years ago. New hominin species, including *Homo ergaster* in Africa, *Homo erectus* in central and east Asia, and *Homo antecessor* in Europe, supplanted *Homo habilis. Erectus* and its contemporarieshad larger brains than *habilis –* somenearly two-thirds the size of modern humans. With its larger brain and greater intelligence, *Homo erectus* adapted to the changing environmental conditions of the Pleistocene Epoch. *Homo erectus* was the first hominin to spread beyond Africa. *Homo erectus* fossils and tools are found in southwest Asia and Eurasia more than 1.7 million years ago, soon after their appearance in Africa. They are not found in Western Europe until later – about 900,000 years ago. A consistent morphology is found in *erectus* fossils from Africa to east Asia, from around 1.8 million to 400,000 years ago.

Greater intelligence appears to have been the key that enabled *Homo* *erectus* to adapt to a wider range of habitats and flourish more than any previous hominin. *Homo erectus* even reached remote islands separated from the continents by ocean. *Homo floresiensis* appears to have been a smaller version of *Homo erectus,* adapted to a smaller landmass, and surviving in southeast Asia until as recently as 50,000 years ago. With new and more sophisticated tools, including the long-lasting Acheulean tradition, new methods of hunting, and the controlled use of fire, *Homo erectus* was a relatively long-lived species. After 400,000 years ago, the Genus Homo exhibits a rapid increase in brain size, ultimately leading to the evolution of *Homo sapiens*. The recent discovery of *Homo naledi,* dating between 335,000 and 236,000 years ago, demonstrates greater variability in the Genus Homo than previously imagined. Future discoveries will undoubtedly continue to sharpen our understanding of the origins of humankind.