

THE RIGHT MAN  
AWARD-WINNING ROB COLLINS.

## DYSTOPIA MAN

**ROB COLLINS IS THE STAR OF *THE WRONG GIRL* AND SCI-FI DRAMA *CLEVERMAN*, HAS JUST WON A LOGIE AWARD, AND DOESN'T MIND FLIRTING WITH BLOKES!**

**DNA: Congratulations on the Best New Talent Logie win. You had good odds, though, being nominated for two awards.**

**Rob Collins:** Yes, for the Graham Kennedy Award as well. My *Cleverman* co-star Hunter Page-Lochard and I decided we'd be happy if at least one of us took away an award. So I'm happy with that.

**For those who don't know, can you explain the concept of *Cleverman*?**

It's set in a futuristic, dystopian world where there's a group of people called "the hairies" who are rounded up by a big-brother style government. But central to that is a Cain and Abel story of two brothers, Waruu, who I play, and Koen, played by Hunter Page-Lochard. Because he's the oldest, Waruu believes that the mantle of "the Cleverman", who is like a leader of men and endowed with special powers, belongs to him. But it goes to Koen, which causes rivalry throughout the series.

**Can you tell us where your character, Waruu is headed this season?**

At the end of last season, Waruu had become completely isolated from any sort of community he was involved with, including his family and the people of The Zone. When we meet him again he's actively trying to rebuild. If he can't be the Cleverman then he's going to do the next best thing, which is align himself with someone with power and resources.

***Cleverman* has an eighty percent Indigenous Australian cast, and has earned international praise. As an Indigenous actor, what does this mean for you?**

I'm incredibly proud. I'm proud of a lot of my work, but there's something really special about telling a particular Indigenous story in

this new, exciting way, and having Indigenous people such as the creators, designers and set directors being involved. For me as an actor, it sort of elevates the project and it feels like one I want to get right. I have a responsibility to tell these stories in the best way I can.

**Do you think that acting opportunities for Indigenous Australians have improved over the past couple of years?**

I don't know about that. It certainly feels like we're heading in the right direction and it's absolutely positive, but I think more needs to be done. I'm impatient by nature so I'm hoping shows like *Cleverman* will help us get a real move on in terms of working towards a vibrant Indigenous filmmaking community in Australia; one that doesn't necessarily sit outside of the mainstream but becomes part and parcel of it to the point where it's not considered a cliché or a novelty.

**In some ways, that statement also mirrors the gay community's feelings.**

Absolutely.

***Cleverman* has themes that parallel the present, particularly around outsiders facing adversity.**

**Can you see how it would appeal to the LGBTI community?**

Yes, as it's essentially a story about being true to yourself, and being who you are. Waruu is on that journey. I think those parallels are what made it an international success. It has universal themes that a lot of people can relate to, particularly with marginalised groups. Aside from the social impact, it's also a dramatic and compelling story.

**You have some international actors on *Cleverman*, including Iain Glen from *Game Of Thrones*, who plays Slade. Are you a fan of that show?**

Oh, yes, and I recently brought myself up to date. I'm very familiar with *Game Of Thrones* and Jorah's greyscale disease, which I hope he overcomes!

**I hope Waruu doesn't contract it!**

[Laughing] I've joked about that myself on set with Iain and Hunter. Iain is such a great presence to have and he's got a wealth of experience. Having someone of his calibre, along with Frances O'Connor who plays Charlotte, is fantastic for the production. Not only are they brilliant actors in their own right, but they've helped open it up to the international audience.

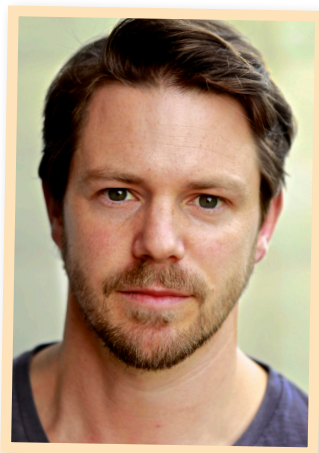
**Iain is also very handsome.**

Oh, Iain is very dapper! I've trawled the internet for old photos of him and, wow, he's a very good-looking older man but he was a sensational looking younger man, too.

**You have a great role as Jack, the celebrity chef, on *The Wrong Girl*. What's that experience like?**

It's a fantastic program to be on and unlike anything I've done before. I had all these ideas about what a network gig might be like, but it was such an eye-opener. It's full of wonderfully talented people including Jessica Marais who is just a constant, beaming lady and, of course, the lovely Ian Meadows. Even between takes it's fun to be on set, including days where we delve into the more dramatic scenes. It was always light and enjoyable

**WHO WOULD YOU TURN GAY FOR?**



"I'd turn for my co-star on *The Wrong Girl*, Ian Meadows (above). Having spent time with him, I've discovered he's funny, charming, sensitive and he's not bad to look at either!"

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I get hit on by men more than I do by women!  
And, I have to say, in those moments, I turn into a bit of a flirt.”

and I've made a number of really good friends.

**How do you find swapping from a heavy character in one series to a more fun character in the other?**

It hasn't been too much of a challenge. I've learned to dial-down certain aspects of myself and turn others up. Everyone, not just actors, has access to a range of emotions. We can all be sad, happy, jealous, enraged, belittled or in love.

**Have you ever played a gay role?**

Yes. When I was studying drama at NIDA, I did a play called *Colder* by Lachlan Philpott. I played opposite Joel Jackson who later went on to be in *Peter Allen: Not The Boy Next Door*. We were in the same year at NIDA and it was such a wonderful piece. I'd love to do a gay role again because you can take on different lives, pretending to be other people who come in all shades of the rainbow.

**Do you have gay family members?**

I do, with the transgender Tiwi Sistergirls, who had their first Mardi Gras this year. They're from the Tiwi Islands, and we are all related!

**You're very good-looking. Do you ever get hit on by men?**

I get hit on by men more than I do by women! And I have to say, in those moments, I turn into a bit of a flirt. Any attention is good attention!

**Having studied at NIDA, what advice would you give to anyone wanting to do the same?**

Never lose sight of yourself. It's an environment where you are forced to strip away old bad habits and for a lot of people, myself included, a large part of your identity. That includes the way you see yourself and the things that you do, and how you move and sound, in a very methodical way. There's this idea that you need to be someone else, when really 'you' are enough. We're in the business of transformation, but in order to do that well, you first have to have a good idea of who you are and stay true to that.

**Who has championed your career?**

Without a doubt, my family. Not only do they shape who I am and what I believe, they're always there backing me. Having that base has made me bolder in my choices as an artist because no matter what the challenge I know they'll always be there.

**This is our fashion issue. Do you have a favourite look?**

I love cooler weather because I love wearing a nice coat. One of my most treasured possessions is a Zara charcoal coat that I picked up at a Salvos store Melbourne. I think I paid twenty-five bucks for it!

**What about underwear?**

Boxers have comfort and support, and you can wear them to bed and then walk around the lounge room feeling inoffensive – just in case the mother-in-law is there!

**So no freeballing?**

Never!

**MORE:** *Cleverman* returns Thursday June 29 on ABC 1