



## Supernova Characters

### Dr Paul Hamilton (Rob Brydon)

Dr Paul Hamilton's arrival at the Royal Australia Observatory from the damp, grey climes of London sets the scene for Supernova's quirky plotlines. Until now, he's been a lecturer in astronomy specialising in the gaseous components of the universe, but he's never worked in the field despite his impressive research record. He's 38, unmarried and stuck in a very deep rut also inhabited by his nagging, humourless girlfriend Ruth and a cat he detests. Paul is shy, nervous and clever, prone to putting his foot in his mouth when things are going badly, and shooting himself in the foot when they're going well.

But Paul is also a dreamer, and takes a chance by applying for a job at a leading-edge observatory in outback Australia. It's a place where his tweed jackets look out of place, and so does he. But Paul desperately wants to fit in, and develops surprising relationships as Supernova unfolds. Youthful Professor Mike French hero worships him – a new and unsettling experience for geeky Paul. Jude develops a crush on him – a development that goes completely over Paul's head. Pragmatic local mechanic Bill is Paul's unusual choice as spiritual and emotional advisor. And he casts the unattainable Rachel as his perfect woman, despite the obvious fact that she's completely out of Paul's league, and already engaged to an astronaut.

This new world and the challenges and characters it holds both terrifies and exhilarates Paul. He is at the frontier of science, optimistically pushing cutting-edge theories one moment, tormented by romantic insecurities the next.

But amid the heat, flies, high-end science and bewildering set of colleagues, Paul slowly begins to find the man he could be.

### Rob Brydon plays Dr Paul Hamilton:

Rob Brydon made his first trip to Australia to take on the role of Dr Paul Hamilton, the British astronomer at the heart of Supernova. The series is the biggest commitment he's made to anything he didn't have a hand in creating, as he explains:

"I read the script and could immediately imagine playing the part of Paul. Sometimes you get scripts and you can't see what you could draw on, but I could imagine this role and how Paul would feel. I knew Matt Lipsey was directing, and we'd worked together before (on Human Remains) – that's one reason I decided to do it. He has a very softly, softly approach that makes you feel really comfortable. And 10 weeks in Australia was very tempting: I'd only heard good things about it."

Brydon says he's "not an actor in the 'traditional' sense", and made the most of the opportunities Supernova presented to improvise.

"Paul certainly evolved as I met the other actors. I felt I got to know him more, and that I could bring out other aspects of him. There are parts of Paul that are headstrong and petulant, even a bit



full of himself. I don't have any great technique, but my most successful stuff is where I improvise, and I had the space in Supernova to do that."

Brydon describes Paul as a man ready to break free.

"Paul is an astronomer who has worked in theory all his life, lecturing. He's frustrated – he's always wanted to see the universe, to do things rather than just teach them or read about them. He's in a relationship that's going nowhere, and having a bit of a midlife crisis. He needs a change. Paul isn't a 'take charge' kind of guy, but he's trying to be – even though he's full of neurosis and insecurities. He's not at all like me!"

Nor does Brydon resemble Paul in his methods for attracting women.

"Ironically, the only time Rachel is interested in him is when he's been sleeping with a biker, and when he challenges a local tough guy. Not like me – I'm a lover, not a fighter! He seems to be attracted to women who tell him what to do – he's like a little puppy with them. But in his infatuation with Rachel, he misses that Jude is taken with him. Rachel isn't the right woman for him, but Jude is probably too much of a space cadet. He needs someone in between."

Brydon ranks Barry Humphries and Bert Newton among his favourite Australian comedians, and is a fan of the television comedy Kath and Kim. "It's a wonderful satire of suburban life," he says.

He was amazed by the informality of Australia:

"It's just so laid back. We went to the Blue Mountains one day, and outside the fire station there was a sign saying 'Fires about – give us a shout'. On the news, there will be a report of a pile-up and they'll say a couple of 'ambos' are on the scene. A current affairs report will talk about businesses going 'down the gurgler'. You'd never get that kind of approach in Britain."

But his expectation that he'd feel a world away from home wasn't realised.

"When I'm in London and speak to friends in Australia or New Zealand, they seem so far away. But when you're there, it doesn't seem far at all. As Bill Bryson says, you expect to see camels on the side of the road. I expected to feel homesick. But it's like Britain in so many ways – Sydney is just like London on steroids and Prozac. And the difference there is the sun is always shining."

Award-winning actor Rob Brydon started his career as a radio presenter for BBC Wales, and presented on local television and radio for six years. During that time, he performed occasional comedy pieces, among them a character who would become one of his best-known figures, Keith Barret. Whilst at the BBC Rob joined the Bath-based improvisational comedy group 'More Fool Us', where he met Julia Davis with whom he would go on some years later to make the award-winning Human Remains. Leaving Cardiff for London, Rob worked mostly as a voice artist on animations and commercials until his role as the traffic warden in Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels prompted him to make a short video of comic characters he had created. The video, 'Rob Brydon - An Extremely Unlucky Traffic Warden', finished with Cardiff cabbie Keith Barret chatting cheerily to a camera fixed to the dashboard.



Rob's television credits include The Keith Barret Show, Marion & Geoff, Human Remains, Cruise of The Gods and Black Books. Marion & Geoff, the dark comedy based on a divorced cabbie coming to grips with his wife's new relationship, was a breakthrough in his career, and in 2000 he received a British Comedy Award for Best Newcomer, a Royal Television Society Award for Best Newcomer, the South Bank Award for Best Television Drama and the Broadcasting Press Guild of Great Britain Best Entertainment Award for the program. He followed this with a British Comedy Award in 2001 for Best Actor for Human Remains, and a Banff TV Festival 2001 Award for Best International Comedy for the same show.

As well as the feature film Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels, Rob appeared in the critically-acclaimed film 24 Hour Party People, and will be seen in two films to be released in 2005, Mirror-mask and Tristram Shandy. He recently completed a 60-date UK stage tour, and is a regular guest on radio and television.

## **Dr Rachel Mann (Kat Stewart)**

Ice princess Rachel Mann is the girl of Paul's dreams. And only in his dreams. An expert in supernovas, she interviews him for the position at the Royal Australian Observatory, and is staggered when faced by the breadth of his research. After a farcical interview, it's the only thing that gets him the job.

Rachel is cool, collected and stylish, and ambitious to a fault. She has the knockout combination all girls dream of – beauty and brains. She's used to being adored by fans like Paul. In fact, she expects it. In Rachel's world, she's queen bee. And as a result the only person she truly respects at the observatory is her boss, Professor Pip Cartwright.

Rachel is black and white, and blunt to the point of rudeness. It isn't that she doesn't have a heart – she does, but there isn't an uncertain bone in her. She sees what she wants, and she goes for it. Mostly, that works for her. But occasionally, it's her downfall, and never moreso than with men. There's a side to Rachel that likes to get down and dirty with a real man. She has a dysfunctional relationship with Chad, a pathologically jealous astronaut, with whom she likes to engage in suggestive chat over the observatory's satellite radio. And she's been known to have the odd brief dalliance at astronomy conferences. Paul lusts after Rachel. She respects him, admires him, and likes him. But it's never going to happen with a polite guy like Paul.

## **Kat Stewart plays Dr Rachel Mann:**

Kat Stewart describes Rachel as "someone who life has come easy to".

"Rachel is brilliant, and she knows it. She wants to be a superstar. She's very ambitious and she wants the spotlight – you see that really clearly when there's a chance she'll get her own television series, and will do almost anything to keep the focus on her. I'm notorious for trying to keep people happy, but Rachel is much more black and white. She's scientific, blunt and brutal. But she's also drawn by a sexual pulse that's pretty strong sometimes. There's definitely a dirty side to her."

The character of Rachel marks something of a departure from Kat's usual roles which have often been defined by the way she looks.



“I’m often misread as surly – I’ve played prostitutes, I’ve done cocaine, I’ve killed people. But the upside is at least those characters are the sort of people who drive their own bus – they aren’t all dewy-eyed and doing nothing. Surliness works for Rachel, and Paul is oblivious to it anyway! Even though her behaviour borders on rude, she understands Paul has a crush on her. And she thaws over the six episodes as she begins to see he has some strength of character – he defends her honour, even though he does it clumsily – and she likes having him around. Without being too serious, he makes her a nicer person.”

How did Kat feel about playing the pin-up of Supernova?

“There’s a pressure in playing someone who’s set up as a beauty,” she says. “But I think Rachel’s beauty is more about how Paul sees her. If she was a supermodel, I couldn’t do it!”

Kat Stewart has worked consistently in Australian film, stage and television since graduating from the National Theatre Drama School in 1998. Her stage credits include roles in *Lysistrata* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* for the National Theatre, and *The Three Musketeers* for the Australian Shakespeare Company. She is a member of the Red Stitch Actors Theatre, and in 2004 received a Green Room Award Nomination for Best Actress in a Fringe Production for its production of *Dirty Butterfly*. The same year, she was the Green Room Award Winner for Actress With An Emerging Career, taking home the Gerda Nicholson Award.

Her television credits include *Blue Heelers*, *Crashburn* and *The Secret Life of Us*. She will be seen in 2005 in the film *The Extra*.

## **Professor Pip Cartwright (Kris McQuade)**

Professor Pip Cartwright heads the Royal Australian Observatory in the Australian outback town of Unagatta. She’s extremely competent and smart, and has been at the helm of the observatory for 15 years. Pip has the unenviable task of wrangling the intellectual rabble she lives and works with, and she does it effortlessly. With her husky voice, utter self-possession and impermeable sense of control, she has the capacity to calm any situation: she’s equally adept at silencing nit-picking adolescents or bolstering Max’s efforts at rage management. Everyone is equal in Pip’s eyes. She’s open-minded and accepting. She’s been there, done that and bought the t-shirt. Pip is a poster girl for mother figures with attitude.

But Pip isn’t all riding crops and wry humour. She has her quirks, and his name is Bill. He’s the local mechanic, Aboriginal and many years her junior. It’s an open relationship – most of the time.

## **Kris McQuade plays Professor Pip Cartwright:**

Kris McQuade was delighted to land a strong, independent female role.

“I’ve played a lot of mothers, and a lot of wives. It’s nice to finally play someone who is my age, who is an interesting character and who is a real individual. She isn’t an appendage to a son or daughter or husband: Pip Cartwright is running the show.



“She’s a bit like a school mistress who knows how to give her students a bit of rein, let them have a bit of fun, but knows when to hold them back. The difference is, these charges are all geniuses, so they’re fairly extreme characters.”

Kris says she identifies strongly with Pip (“I even dress like her – casual, happening, comfortable. My hair’s all crinkly, and for once they loved that!”). She describes Pip as a woman with both masculine and feminine sides.

“The masculine side to her is all about being a scientist. She can handle that in herself, and in others. But she’s very female as well. That’s established in the first episode with all the talk of magnificent shafts and black holes. It’s an added bonus that she has a love life. He (Bill) is younger, very much a toy boy. Her sexuality is alive and well.”

Comedy is a rare offering for Kris, but she jumped at the role in Supernova.

“I love that this series is played straight, and the comedy is allowed to sit around it. It has a wonderful British sensibility – Australian comedy is more on the back foot, more languid, where this is incredibly pacey. Kat and I are the straight men in this – you have to rely on the others for the comedy. And to watch Rob Brydon’s form and timing as a comedian was amazing.”

In a career spanning almost 25 years, Kris McQuade has appeared in some of Australia’s best-loved stage and screen productions. Her film work includes the seminal Australian comedy Alvin Stardust, Baz Luhrmann’s colourful Strictly Dancing, Gregor Jordan’s Ned Kelly and Better Than Sex. She received the AFI Award for Best Supporting Actress in 1982 for Fighting Back, one of five nominations she has received for AFIs over the years (Buddies, Two Friends, Broken Highway, Better than Sex).

Kris’ numerous television credits include two series of Boys from the Bush, Wildside, Stingers, A Country Practice, Grassroots, Farscape and Hell Has Harbour Views.

Her theatre work includes Threepenny Opera, Mourning Becomes Electra (directed by Barry Kosky), The Orestrian Trilogy (directed by John Bell) and national and international tours of the award-winning Cloudstreet, directed by Neil Armfield. Her interpretation of the character Dolly Pickles in the latter earned her nominations for a Mo Award and a Robert Helpmann Award, both for Best Actress.

## **Professor Mike French (Tim Draxl)**

With several published texts, a stratospheric IQ and a stint as an underwear model behind him at only 20-something, Professor Mike French should know a thing or two about the way the world works. Instead, he is naïve, emotionally backward and looking for a hero to worship. That hero, he decides, is Paul.

Mike is a child prodigy. He never had much of a childhood, and still identifies with the Mensa kids who occasionally visit the observatory. He graduated from a string of universities at an early age and was then forced into modelling by his parents. He was a high-profile underpants model for two years before returning to astronomy, much to the disgust of his mother. His trilogy on Time Space



Acceleration, published when he was just 18, remains a seminal text. His most treasured possession is a collection of physicist action figures, among the Einstein and Stephen Hawking.

Mike and Jude are great mates, sharing a sense of humour lost on people like Kat. They can be like naughty children, up to mischief one minute, bickering the next.

Mike dotes on Paul because he's never had a father figure.

## **Tim Draxl plays Professor Mike French:**

Tim Draxl says Professor Mike French is by far the quirkiest role he has ever played.

"The appeal of the part was in its difference. I'd never done anything like it before. There are some aspects where I've drawn on myself – usually when Mike is at his silliest or funniest, and some of his mannerisms are like me. I consider myself quite kooky and moody, which Mike is. Mike is over-emotional, which I am. Part of Mike thinks he's cool and with it, but in reality, he's not."

He describes Mike as someone who has had limited contact with the real world, and who is "personally, way behind the eight-ball", despite his brilliance. "He's completely engrossed in his passions for astronomy, collection of action figures of physicists, Dr Who and scientists."

But there's also the small matter of modelling underwear ...

"It played a bit on my mind, and fed quite a few of my own insecurities. I spent a bit of time in front of the mirror checking things out and trying to figure out if it was believable or not! But in the end, that's just a small part of Mike. Being a model is just a fun back story."

Supernova marks Draxl's first foray into comedy.

"I've never done comedy before, so Supernova was a great learning experience, especially watching Rob (Brydon) – his timing is so impeccable. Supernova for me is in the same comedic vein as Friends. When I read the script, I saw the comedy as big and outrageous. It's very theatrical, so it's easy to go over-the-top. Mike is the most energetic, and the silliest, so it's easy to go too far. It's all about trying to find the limit. But Matt Lipsey has pared it back so it's much more realistic and subtle. This is accessible comedy. And Matt is a director you can completely trust and have confidence in."

Tim Draxl is known for his versatility, which has seen him perform on stage, screen and in his own cabaret show. He is best known for his performances in the television drama Sharknet, for which he was nominated for a Most Outstanding Actor in a Drama Logie, and the films Swimming Upstream and Dirty Deeds.

## **Jude Wardlaw (Hollie Andrew)**

Jude Wardlaw is a walking, talking dichotomy. On one hand, she's a brilliant scientist, able to rattle off scientific theories in a blink. On the other, she's the original dippy chick, with as much a penchant for astrology as astronomy. Her belief in re-incarnation, star signs and off-beat religions is



a tonic to the dry academia of the observatory's work. Her colleagues might all be stargazers, but Jude is the only person truly at one with the universe. She sees it for all its beauty and mystery, and – sometimes aided by a special mushroom or two - feels no need for additional explanations.

Jude is probably the most normal person at the observatory. She's kind-hearted, outspoken and wryly funny. And she really likes Paul. Unfortunately he is so smitten with the unachievable Rachel, he never sees this. He just sees Jude as a friend - and she is always there to give him stern lectures and rousing pep talks when he needs them.

As one of the youngest Jude is constantly competing and fighting with Mike. But when it comes to living life, he can't even come close. Jude has studied at Princeton, trekked in Nepal and Tibet, even had a stint in a Thai prison. She believes in science, but she also believes in fate, karma and love.

## **Hollie Andrew plays Jude Wardlaw:**

Jude is the human face of this very scientific community, says Hollie Andrew.

"Jude is a believer," says Hollie. "She knows the power of thought and belief. Jude can wonder at the beauty of the wind in a tree, but at the same time tell you the wind velocity and how she calculated it. Science intrigues her, but people and nature inspire her. She does a lot of picking up the pieces, she's very perceptive."

So is Hollie like Jude?

"Well, neither of us care about how we look!," laughs Hollie. "The difference is Jude really doesn't have any idea. She could be wearing Prada and not know the difference between that and something from a charity shop. She just likes colour and brightness. Me – I go for more style, of course!

"We're also similar in that we're both quite humane, and we love a good laugh. But she has a worse case of foot in mouth than I do – Jude is the type of person who would ask 'are you pregnant, or just fat?', and not see anything wrong with that."

Jude nurses a not-so-subtle yearning to fall into Paul's loving arms and live happily ever after. But Hollie suspects it's more a crush than true love.

"Jude is the type that falls in and out of love at the drop of a hat. But she's 27, and feeling this raging libido, so when Paul comes along he's male and he's single, and that's enough. There are similarities that make him attractive – they're both scientists, but physically and mentally, they're not scientific. Jude really believes they could be soulmates, even though he isn't exactly a stud. She needs someone as quirky as she is, and he fits the bill."

Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts graduate Hollie Andrew has worked in musical theatre, television and film. Her role in Somersault, which was chosen to screen in the Cannes Film Festival's Un Certain Regard saw her nominated for an AFI Award for her portrayal of Bianca. Her credits include television soap Home and Away and All Saints.



## **Max Talbot (Peter Kowitz)**

Max, the unpredictable, rage-ridden head technician at the Royal Australian Observatory. He's in his late 40s, and in rage management. His job is guiding the telescope and no one does it better than him. But he is very unnerving. Especially for an outsider like Paul. Max's power lies in silent, baleful stares that occasionally erupt in a holocaust of violence. Only Pip can really control him. Max collects strange things, is on medication, and thinks of the observatory like a space ship.

Max is unsophisticated, uncouth, rough and tough – but his heart is in the right place. His comical, edgy brooding is always in evidence, whether he's tackling venomous wildlife, steering the 'ship' or meting out tough, but unexpectedly paternal advice. Max emerges at the most unlikely moments to smack a fistful of plain-speaking into the rarified intellectual environment around him.

## **Peter Kowitz plays Max Talbot:**

Peter Kowitz says Max is a larger-than-life figure reminiscent of some of Australia's best-known exports.

"Max is as much a theatrical device as a full-blown character," Peter says. "He's a caricature in the style of Crocodile Dundee or Steve Irwin. Max knows the terrain, he's oblivious to what others think and he's single-minded in what he does. As a device, he's a counterpoint to everything being experienced by the British new boy, Paul."

An actor with a strong stage background, Peter has worked extensively in comedy.

"Harry Cripps has delivered a very tightly-written script. His characters are very clear and easy to imagine. Playing Max, I relied a lot on (director) Matt Lipsey for what the character actually does – there was no psychological profile as such. Matt's direction let me see Max in various ways, and that makes the experience so much more interesting."

He continues: "Max has some very theatrical moments, and my tendency was to play them big. Matt directed me back from that. When Max meets Paul for the first time he's talking about English vermin and wielding a machete, and my instinct was to be very threatening. To do that in a quieter way makes Max even more threatening."

Peter Kowitz is one of Australia's most prolific stage performers, equally at home with comedy and drama. He has had roles in classics like *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and *A Doll's House*, as well as numerous Shakespearean plays. He is also a familiar face on Australian television, with credits including *Murder Call*, *Rafferty's Rules*, *Wildside*, *Big Sky* and *Halifax f.p. Swimming With Sharks*. He has won two AFI awards – in 1986 when he was named Best Lead Actor in a Telefeature for *The Long Way Home*, and in 1989, when he was awarded Best Performance by an Actor in a mini-series for *Body Surfer*.



## **Bill (Damion Hunter)**

Bill is an Aboriginal mechanic whose family has lived in Unagatta forever. Bill is Pip's lover, and they enjoy a very physical relationship. Practical and down-to-earth, he's a bit of a joker and Paul's only friend outside the observatory. For Paul, he is swathed in local mystique, and is Paul's unlikely choice as spiritual adviser. But Bill is really just about good common sense. As the only non-genius and emotional screw up, he provides Paul with a breath of sanity.

Bill lives in a bus and owns a sacred burial site under the observatory. He embraces Aboriginal tradition in a modern pragmatist's sort of way. And he's been known to flee from Pip's sometimes voracious advances. It is, after all, an open relationship.

## **Damion Hunter plays Bill:**

Damion Hunter loved playing alongside his 'love interest', seasoned professional Kris McQuade.

"It was very easy acting with Kris. We have scenes in bed, but she was completely comfortable, and that made it so easy. The relationship between Bill and Pip is very open in some ways – there's mention of a Venetian glass blower, and an incident with Paul's ex-girlfriend – but it's also very fiery. Pip can be ravenous, and Bill can't keep up the quota from time to time, especially when Venus is close. But there's also a whole platonic side to their relationship. They can sit in bed and do crosswords."

Damion found it easy to play Bill.

"Bill is like me – he's a sassy kind of guy. He plays it up, he's cheeky and naughty. It's easy to play those things – but usually I'm doing them in the lounge room in front of my girl!"

Damion Hunter graduated from the National Institute of Dramatic Art in 1998. He has since had roles in the stage production of Loves Triumph, and the television series Farscape.



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