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 - ▶ Coming Soon
 - ▶ Critics' Grades
 - ▶ Readers' Grades
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 - ▶ Summer Movies
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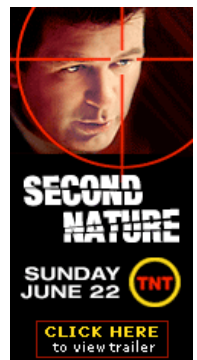
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AGE 34

WHY HIM? Because not only can he wow audiences playing an angst-ridden mutant with retractable nine-inch adamantium claws but he can sing! And dance! Before his Hollywood breakthrough as Wolverine in the "X-Men" movies -- not to mention less sideburn-intensive parts in pictures like "Someone Like You," "Swordfish," and "Kate & Leopold" -- Jackman hoofed his way across the stage in his native Australia (as the villain in a Sydney production of "Beauty and the Beast") and London (in a 1998 revival of "Oklahoma!"). He'll make his Broadway debut this fall when he stars in "The Boy From Oz," a musical based on the life of the late Aussie showman and songwriter Peter Allen. "Peter wasn't the best singer or dancer in the world," says Jackman, "but he was galvanizing on stage."

WHAT HE'S DOING NOW After hosting the Tony Awards in New York in early June, he jetted back to L.A. to finish shooting "Van Helsing," the latest monster mash from "The Mummy" director Stephen Sommers. "I needed a man for the part, not a boy," says Sommers, explaining why he cast Jackman as the film's swaggering 19th-century vampire hunter (who also tangles with Frankenstein and the Wolf Man). "And the only guys out there are either in their 20s or cost \$15 million. Ewan McGregor and Viggo Mortensen were the only other possibilities, but they already have their big swashbuckling franchises." Jackman, of course, also has a franchise of his own, but says the compelling story was reason enough to sign on for another. "It's very fantastical, but not completely



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unbelievable," he says. "And also, to be honest, my agents thought it was time I did [an action movie with my name] above the title."

THE PART THAT GOT AWAY Jackman turned down Richard Gere's role in "Chicago." "I thought I was too young for the role," he says. "You have some 34-year-old guy up against Catherine Zeta-Jones and Renée Zellweger and it becomes a different movie. At one point Harvey [Weinstein, one of the film's producers] was telling me they were thinking of Kevin Spacey, and I told him, 'That's exactly right. You should hire him.' Then I was in New York when the movie opened and the queue was around the block. I sat down and thought that I had probably made the biggest mistake. But I still honestly think that it was the right thing for me to do. I still think I was too young for that part."

ONE PART HE PROBABLY SHOULD HAVE TURNED DOWN "The worst job I ever had was when I was 21 and I worked for the National Parks and Wildlife Foundation in Australia," he recalls. "Half the time I dressed up as a ranger, and the other half I dressed up as a six-foot koala bear. Coeee Koala, I was called. I'd go around the parks and hand out leaflets. It was so hot in that koala suit, I lost track of how many times I passed out."

BEST ADVICE "Trevor Nunn, who directed me in two musicals, told me three key things to do in your career. First, never do it for the money because that's the road to doom. Second, do as little press as possible. And third...um, what was the third thing he said? I had it in my mind a second ago. It must have been pretty amazing but I just can't remember at the moment."

CONTINUE

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