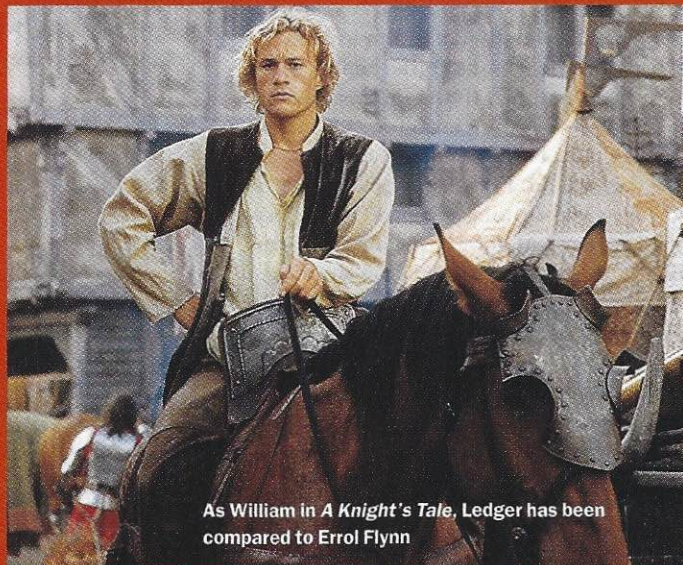


Heathwave!

Australia's Heath Ledger Burns Up the Screen

America is having a Heathwave. Everywhere you turn, posters, billboards, even the sides of buses and phone booths are plastered with Heath Ledger's sexy pout promoting his new film, *A Knight's Tale*. Amazingly, Ledger hasn't noticed. "I guess I don't really pay much attention to that," he says—and it's not false modesty. The 22-year-old actor brushes off comparisons to fellow Aussie actors Mel Gibson (with whom he appeared in *The Patriot*), Russell Crowe, and Hugh Jackman ("must be the accent," he explains), refusing to let the hype go to his head. In fact, the whole idea that he is closing in on the A-list makes him squirm uncomfortably in his seat. "It's weird, you know?" he admits. "You don't wake up in the morning and think, 'Okay, I'm hot.' That doesn't concern me."



As William in *A Knight's Tale*, Ledger has been compared to Errol Flynn

Ledger is adamant about the fact that awards and material objects don't impress him: The Oscars, he has maintained, are "nothing more than a ***** TV show" and (at the risk of sounding Scrooge-like), he never buys Christmas gifts. A self-described "home bug," he'd much rather stay home and do his laundry than go to a Hollywood premiere.

BY SHERYL BERK

CELEBRITY DOSSIER

NAME: Heath Andrew Ledger**DATE OF BIRTH:** April 4, 1979**PLACE OF BIRTH:** Perth, Western Australia**PARENTS:** Father Kim worked in motor sports; mother Sally tutored French. They divorced when he was 10**SIBLINGS:** An older sister, Kate; two half sisters, Olivia, 3 (from father Kim and girlfriend Emma Brown), and Ashleigh, 11 (from mother Sally and husband Roger)**FYI:** "He's not at all into his looks," at-tests celebrity photographer Richard Mitchell, who recently shot Ledger. The actor—a former surfer with the rippling muscles to prove it—was even shy about taking his shirt off. "What I recall most is that he has an amazing smile—and that's when you see the real him coming through."

Yet here he is, putting on his "best promotional face," which makes him look more like a cute college undergrad than a smoldering sex symbol. "Maybe I'm not too typical," he says of being an actor. "Or maybe I'm just daft. I don't know—I tend to analyze things a lot. I think too much." His favorite food for thought today? Why everyone is so fascinated with him dating actress Heather Graham (the fact that she's nine years his senior might have something to do with it); where he's been (most recently Morocco filming *Four Feathers* with Kate Hudson); and where he's going (at the moment, he jokes, just to the loo).

"Acting is really about self-exploration," Ledger adds. "There's part of you in every character, and if you're lucky, you walk away knowing yourself a little better. I'm a big believer in breaking things down, getting to the core. When you do that, it puts everything into perspective."

Heath Andrew Ledger was born April 4, 1979, in Perth, Australia. His father, Kim Ledger, was involved in motor sports and racing; his mother, Sally, was a French tutor. She named her son after her favorite literary leading man, Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*, mainly, says Ledger, "because she's always had a thing for that book."

Heath's parents divorced when he was 10 ("I was okay with it," he says, "because it made me realize that my parents were human"), and his mother remarried shortly thereafter and had a daughter. His father



Like father, like son: playing Mel Gibson's offspring in last summer's Revolutionary War epic *The Patriot*



With Julia Stiles in 1999's *10 Things I Hate About You*, a teen version of *The Taming of the Shrew*

has a 3-year-old daughter with a longtime girlfriend.

Ledger got an early start onstage in Perth's Globe Shakespeare Company and went on to soar—at age 10—in the title role of *Peter Pan*. During his years at Guildford Grammar School, he balanced an interest in both drama and sports, winning several field hockey awards while also serving as captain of the drama team. It was Ledger who convinced his team to enter the nationwide high-school dance competition, Rock Eisteddfod. "We were the first all-guys school to ever do it," he says. "And no one

thought we could—including us." Ledger, a fervent fan of Gene Kelly, choreographed the entire song and dance routine, and in the end, his team won. He took his victory to be a sign of things to come.

"I said, 'I'm going to do this. I'm going to leave and become an actor.' Just like that. My parents were very understanding. They let me follow my dreams because I think they knew that even if they said no, I was the kind of kid who was going to do it anyway.

"Maybe it was a quest for me—could I do it? Could I succeed? I think I was just eager for my life to get started—I wanted to see



The series *Roar* got Ledger noticed—by female fans as well as by Hollywood agents

the world, to experience new things. I felt, in a way, like life was passing me by.”

The 2,600-mile drive from Perth to Sydney usually takes five days—but Ledger made it in just three. He was 16, had 69 cents in his bank account and his best buddy at his side, and was perhaps “a little overanxious” to find fame and fortune.

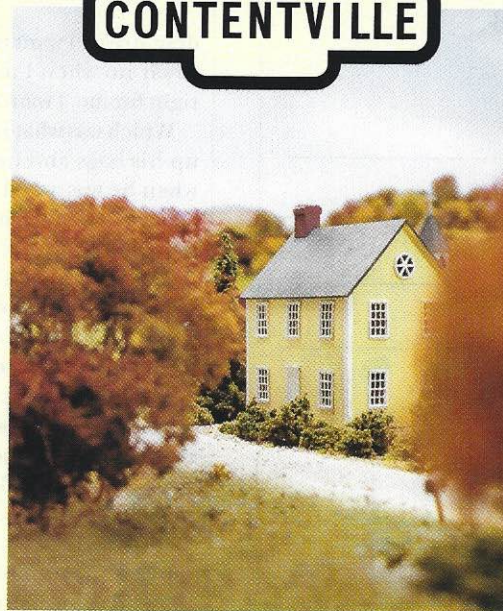
It didn’t take long for him to land parts on two Australian dramas and a sitcom (“all pretty much crap,” he laughs). On one show, *Sweat*, he played a young Olympic hopeful who was also gay. His life was relatively simple and carefree: “Wake up, eat, surf, go out for jobs. That was really all I needed.” After just six months, he snagged a leading role in the 1997 medieval adventure series *Roar*, which was filmed in Queensland. Ledger starred opposite Keri Russell as an Irish youth striving to unite the clans and defeat the invading Romans. Tall (6’4”), blond, and dressed in a loincloth, Ledger quickly won female fans—and eventually an agent in the United States. The series was canceled after a year, so he decided it was time to try his luck in Hollywood.

He did well at first: In 1999, he starred in two films, the black comedy/gangster movie *Two Hands* (with Bryan Brown) and *10 Things I Hate About You*, a teenage take on Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew*. It was this role—playing rebellious Patrick Verona opposite Julia Stiles as the headstrong Kat—that Ledger considers his first big break. But it wasn’t quite the kind of fame he had in mind. For a year and a half, the only parts he was offered were teen heartthrobs—and Ledger wanted to steer clear of the adolescent crowd.

“I didn’t want to do more teen flicks because it’s so easy to get trapped there,” he says. “I think Australians have this indepen-

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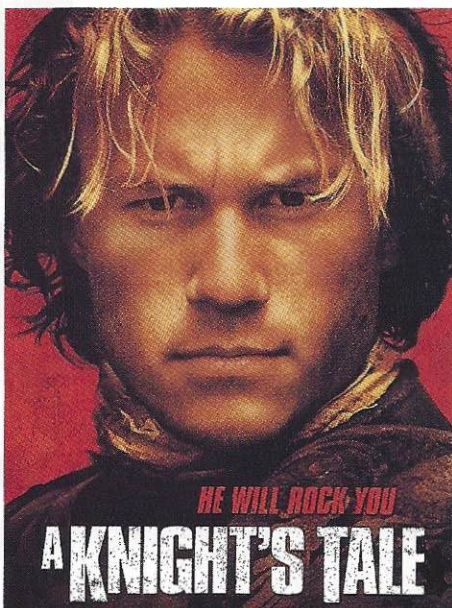
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dent streak. I want to always have the control to say no when I don't think something is right for me. I want to be able to walk away."

Which was what he was about to do—pack up his bags and head back to Australia—when he was asked to audition (competing against 200 other hopefuls) for the Revolutionary War epic *The Patriot*. Director Roland Emmerich was searching for an actor to play the headstrong Gabriel, a young man who joins the army against his father's orders. It wasn't an easy part to cast, especially considering dear old dad was being played by Mel Gibson. Besides talent, Emmerich needed a lad who was a looker, someone believable as Gibson's son.

Ledger came to the audition a bit downtrodden. "I wasn't starving—but I was *very* hungry," he recalls. "And I was broke. Every time I'd come close to getting a part I wanted, at the last minute the rug got pulled out from under me. So I wasn't very optimistic." He had prepared two scenes, and the first had gone badly. Halfway through the second, he stopped and told the director and producer, "This is ****. Sorry to waste your time," and walked out. "I thought it was over and I had just blown my last hope."

But three days later the production office called and asked him to try again. This time, Ledger showed them what he was made of. Next came a screen test, a meeting with Mel, and two weeks later ("a nerve-racking amount of time to wait"), he had the part.

Gibson was generous with his praise for his young co-star. "He has an incredible presence—and no pretensions," he said at the time. Critics were equally impressed,

Real-Life Characters

Heath Ledger was named after Heathcliff, the hero in Emily Brontë's classic, *Wuthering Heights*. Here are some other stars whose names were inspired by fictional characters:

Lara Flynn Boyle Named after Lara, a character in Boris Pasternak's *Dr. Zhivago* (Julie Christie played the role in the 1965 film version).

Beau Bridges (born Lloyd Vernet Bridges III) His parents nicknamed him Beau after Ashley Wilkes' son in *Gone With the Wind*.

Bing Crosby (born Harry Lillis Crosby) Got the nickname "Bing" from a newspaper feature called "The Bingville Bugle."

Nathan Lane (born Joseph Lane) Discovering a Joe Lane in Actor's Equity, he changed his name to Nathan after Nathan Detroit from *Guys and Dolls*, a role he had just played in dinner theater (and later would perform again on Broadway).

Jude Law Named after the Beatles song "Hey Jude" and Thomas Hardy's title character in *Jude the Obscure*.

Gilda Radner Named after the title character played by Rita Hayworth in *Gilda* (1944).

Sigourney Weaver (born Susan Weaver) Took her name from a minor character in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*.

Michael Caine (born Maurice Mickelwhite) Renamed himself after *The Caine Mutiny* and the biblical Cain.

and Ledger decided to stick around in the States for a while, "to see where things led."

So far, they're leading to bigger and better things. First, *A Knight's Tale*, which boasts a quirky mix of comedy, romance, and action-adventure—not to mention a killer soundtrack for the MTV generation. The film is loosely based on Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and set against pulsing rock tunes: Ledger jousts while Queen's "We Will Rock You" blares in the background. "What appealed to me is not so much that William changes his stars, but what he learns in doing so," Ledger says of his character. "He goes for gold—the nobility and fame—but he learns that real nobility is finding your head and your heart."

Next up is another costume epic, *Four Feathers*, directed by Shekhar Kapur (*Elizabeth*). Ledger plays Harry, a British officer who resigns his post and receives four feathers from his friends and fiancée (Kate Hud-

(Continued on page 111)

not only quit smoking, but began exercising. Realizing that talking about prevention in terms of age rather than illness was a powerful motivating tool, Roizen tried it out on other patients, and was thrilled with the results.

With the backing of one of those patients—a wealthy businessman—Roizen put together a team of researchers who began analyzing the data from more than 25,000 medical studies and translating them into RealAge terms. The more they researched, the more convinced Roizen became that he was onto something that could help millions of people. The result: his book *RealAge*—followed by appearances on *Oprah*, *The Today Show*, *20/20*, and a host of other national television shows. Within weeks, *RealAge* reached the top of the *New York Times* bestseller list. And Roizen laughingly admits to becoming an “Amazon.com addict,” logging onto the bookseller’s Web site repeatedly, just to see how *RealAge* was selling in comparison to the others. “At one point, I actually knocked *Harry Potter* out of the No. 1 spot—my claim to fame,” Roizen says, laughing.

Before the book came out, he says, he was worried about the reception it would get from doctors, who he feared would view him as “selling out” to pop culture. As it turned out, though, the book was enthusiastically received by his peers. “Do not buy this book for your medical library; buy it for yourself and for your family,” one physician—reviewer advised in the August 2000 issue of the medical journal *Anesthesiology*.

These days, in the rare moments when Roizen isn’t working, he can be found playing his favorite sport, squash, or visiting his children: Jeffrey, 22, who’s in medical school in St. Louis, and Jennifer, 19, an undergraduate at Williams College in Massachusetts (which also is Roizen’s alma mater).

But most of the time, Roizen is a man on a mission. He’s the scientific advisor for a Web site, www.RealAge.com, where people can take an interactive quiz to determine their RealAge, and learn more about ways to reduce it. (The site itself is owned by outside investors.) And he’s thinking about writing a series of other *RealAge* books, including a cookbook. Says Roizen, “I want to change the health of the nation.”

Laura Muha often writes on health for this magazine.

Heath Ledger from page 74

son)—symbolizing what they believe to be his cowardice.

Although it won’t be released until the

fall, the film is already generating buzz—which will mean more interviews, more magazine covers, more billboards baring his brooding face.

Ledger sighs...then stifles a yawn. So much for the kid racing toward his future a few years ago. These days, he’d rather just take his time and enjoy the scenery. He paints and takes pictures everywhere he goes—mainly faces and landscapes so he doesn’t forget them.

“I’m happy where I am and with what I’m doing,” he says. “It’s a good place to be—I’d like to stay for a while.”

Sheryl Berk is senior entertainment editor for this magazine.

Jude Law from page 45

can’t push ourselves a bit further?”

Next up, Law plays a 1930s newspaper photographer, “a regular bloke who dabbles in the underbelly of life to make money” and moonlights as a hitman in *The Road to Perdition*, due out this winter.

“I wanted a soft-voiced, gentle killer who could bring a combination of danger and charisma to the role,” says Mendes. “I knew Jude could do that. He can create something utterly three-dimensional and complex without ever uttering a word. Plus, he has enormous presence. He’s got that movie-star quality of being able to suck the camera into his eyes.”

Although he might be movie star material now, it wasn’t so long ago that Law was a struggling unknown sharing a cramped apartment with actor Ewan McGregor and counting out pennies for bags of chips. (The two became pals after meeting at a 1990 audition; the director gave them \$50 to devise an improv scene, and instead they blew it in a pub.)

In 1995, McGregor, Law, Frost, and other friends tired of waiting for dollars and dream scripts to roll in and formed a production company called Natural Nylon (short for New York and London) to develop their own pet projects. In the works are *The Hellfire Club*, about an 18th-century drinking fraternity; *Marlowe*, about Shakespeare contemporary and playwright Christopher Marlowe; and a biopic about Beatles manager Brian Epstein, in which Law plans to star.

When you inspire comparisons to Adonis—and Jude Law often does—it would be easy to let your looks drive your career. Instead, he bristles at the phrase “sex symbol.”

“Anything that boxes you in is a drawback, whether you’re known as the strange-looking actor or the scary-looking actor or the good-looking actor. I try to choose parts

that move me away from that.” Note to casting directors: He’d be more than happy to shave off those curls or pack on an extra 40 pounds à la De Niro in *Raging Bull* for the right role.

Besides, his heart belongs to his wife, Sadie. He’s got a tattoo on his forearm with the Beatles’ lyrics “You came along to turn on everyone Sexy Sadie” in her honor, and he once reported to work with a black eye after a fight with a drunk who was hitting on her in a New York bar.

If you believe the British tabloids, Law and Frost are the quintessential celebrity couple, dashing from one glamorous soiree to another. In reality, you’re more likely to find them home making veggie loaf or watching TV with Rafferty, Iris, and Fin. “We’re really boring and normal,” Law says.

As a role model he cites *Road to Perdition* co-star Paul Newman—an actor known, like Law, for his dazzling blue eyes as much as his acting talents. “He’s just untouchable,” Law says. “He’s been doing challenging parts for 40 years, he’s got an amazing relationship with his wife, and he’s got great dignity. That’s what it’s always been about for me—taking it slowly and sticking it out for the long term.”

Kathy Passero is senior editor for Biography Magazine.

Sophia Loren from page 100

and Loren with concubinage, criminal offenses that forced them to live out of the country. Meanwhile, the soap opera continued when Riccardo Scicolone suddenly moved in with Loren’s mother and sister and gallantly offered to manage Loren’s finances. She declined. He would later sue her for libel. Maria, in the meantime, married Benito Mussolini’s son.

Marriage, Italian Style

Ultimately, Ponti and Loren dissolved their Mexican marriage and became citizens of France. There, Ponti got a legal divorce from his wife and remarried Loren. Ponti showered his bride with jewels and presented her with an opulent villa outside Rome filled with an art collection rumored to be worth at least a third of a billion dollars.

Life was good, but Loren’s greatest dream—motherhood—refused to come true. There were miscarriages, but no children. Finally, a Swiss fertility expert diagnosed her with low estrogen, treated her, and in 1969, Carlo Ponti Jr was born. Loren then entered a period of self-described “postpartum nuttiness,” refusing to leave the hospital. They finally threw her out when her baby was nearly two months old.