

Peter Stack (San Francisco Chronicle) - Hayden Christensen was just waking up in his Vancouver, British Columbia, apartment when he got the call last week telling him he had the part of Anakin Skywalker in Episodes II and III of the ``Star Wars" saga.

``I was stunned and in disbelief," the 19-year-old Canadian actor said by telephone yesterday.

Lucasfilm confirmed that the blue-eyed, 6-foot-1 Christensen will play Skywalker. His selection from more than 442 serious candidates had been rumored after news filtered out of Skywalker Ranch that a few finalists had been invited for test scenes with actress Natalie Portman.

Christensen played Scott Bar ringer in 22 episodes of the Fox Family Channel teen drama series ``Higher Ground." He said ``it's hard to grasp even being screen tested" to play Anakin, last played by Jake Lloyd, 11. ``I mean, he's Darth Vader," Christensen said of the character's ultimate identity. Filming starts next month in Australia.

Hayden was born in Vancouver and grew up in the Toronto area. He started acting at age 12 in a Canadian soap, ``Family Passions." He says he is a shy type, played high school hockey and improvises jazz on the piano, ``but not when anybody's around to hear me."

``Star Wars" casting director Robin Gurland said Christensen has ``vulnerability and edginess. To me, he's just an amazingly seductive and intriguing actor."