

Jeff Hunter

BREAKS

Hollywood Jinx

It Began When H. B. Warner Starred
In the 'King of Kings' 30 Years Ago

By HANK GRANT

Hollywood

TEMPLE Houston is Jeffrey Hunter's first series as a continuing star, but it's more than that. It's proof that he has broken a Hollywood jinx that, for more than 30 years, experts said could never be overcome.

Two years ago, Hunter, a veteran of 37 major motion pictures, accepted the title role as Jesus Christ in "The King of Kings." In the original silent classic, H. B. Warner played Christ, following which his career was virtually at a standstill. Warner, a popular star prior to his Christ role, found himself begging for work, but no one would hire him even for a small role, so indelibly had he impressed with his Christ image. It took years for Warner to make a living again as an actor and even then just in supporting roles.

So, it was no wonder friends thought Hunter had lost his senses when he signed to repeat Warner's original role. But his friends hadn't reckoned with what makes Hunter tick. For one thing, he doesn't believe in jinxes.

"First," he told me, "it was an honor to be asked to play Christ—an inspiring role few actors get the opportunity to play. Even if I believed in jinxes, which I don't, I wouldn't have passed this role by. Call it positive thinking if you will, but I believed my career would be enriched by the role. And it was.

"THE VERY first role I took after completing 'King of Kings' was in TV's Checkmate — as a psychopathic killer. I expected that I or the network would get at least a few outraged complaints, but if there was even one adverse comment on my diversity, I have yet to hear of it.

"I don't want to appear smug that things turned out as I felt they would. Actually, it was something beyond faith in myself—it was faith in the belief that today's film producers are much more mature than they once were and



Jeffrey Hunter (left) and Jack Elam of Temple Houston series.

give audiences much more credit for more mature judgment than they once did.

"It was a tragedy that Mr. Warner wasn't given the opportunity to play another important role immediately following his 'King of Kings.' He would have kept right on climbing, just as I did. Without exception, Hollywood producers accorded me a higher regard as a star after my 'King of Kings' role than I had ever even approached before.

"In fact, I was already set to co-star with Spencer Tracy and James Stewart in 'The Long Flight' when this TV series was sold and I signed to co-star with Jack Elam in Temple Houston.

"And no regrets, either, if my career had ended with 'King of Kings.' Even after two years, I still get an average of 1,500 letters a month from people who saw me in that film and share the beauty and inspiration I derived from it with me. There are some things that can't be measured in dollars and cents and how can anyone put a price—even the price of a million-dollar career—on the role of the greatest Being this mortal world has even known?"