It's been a big year for Jeffrey Hunter – the six feet two inches, thirteen stone black-haired and blue-eyed actor who is thirty-one years old on November 25. And next year looks like being even bigger. The Proud Ones, The Searchers, The Great Locomotive Chase. This is a trio of consecutive hits of which any young actor could be proud. Unquestionably, Hunter's popularity this year comes from his performance in The Searchers (on release this week), one of the finest of John Ford's many outdoor sagas—now sixty-ish, crusty John Ford is a man with the reputation of being not only a brilliant producer-director (four Academy Awards to his credit), but also a fire-eater. No young actor has ever dared to bestride Ford in his den and tell him he wants a certain role in a forthcoming Ford movie. Ford tells them! No one, that is, until Jeff Hunter did it.

Ready for His Chance

But then, ever since his first break in 1950, when he was hauled out of a college play in Los Angeles and offered two contracts at once, Jeff Hunter has been a rebel from the Hollywood conventions. Hunter was twenty-five then. He had been acting since he was a schoolboy, as amateur, as semi-pro, in any play in which he could get a speaking part or a walk-on.

He had been aiming at just such a solid opening as the one that greeted him on May 7, 1950, when Twentieth Century-Fox grabbed him from under Paramount's nose. When it came he was ready for it. His number-one maxim in life has been, still is: "Luck is when preparedness meets opportunity." But he has also adopted another maxim: "Don't take NO for an answer!" This is a wonderful maxim so long as you have the gumption to stick to it.
Jeff Hunter can attribute his present success to one thing: a long-range view of an actor's staying power. When I talked with him, it was already two years since his last star role in a big studio picture. He had given him the part in A Kiss Before Dying. When I finally got through to him, he was loaning himself out for $750 a week, and he didn't need it. He had made enough to buy a house in Hollywood. He could afford to sit back and wait for a good part.

When you're established you can afford to sit back and wait for a good part. When you're not established you work your contract and hope for the best. When you're not established you work your contract and hope for the best. When you're established you can afford to sit back and wait for a good part.

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