

Hunter, as the professor responsible for Wagner's eventual downfall, was believably bland but wasted. How much better this film might have been had Hunter and Wagner exchanged roles!

20. GUN FOR A COWARD. (Universal-International, 1957.) Directed by Abner Biberman.

Cast: Fred MacMurray, Jeffrey Hunter, Janice Rule, Chill Wills, Dean Stockwell, Josephine Hutchinson, Betty Lynn.

In this Western, Hunter appeared as the overprotected second of three sons. "Coward" Hunter eventually proved to be anything but in a rousing climax. Not a great film, but a good one.

21. THE TRUE STORY OF JESSE JAMES. (20th Century-Fox, 1957.) Directed by Nicholas Ray.

Cast: Robert Wagner, Jeffrey Hunter, Hope Lange, Agnes Moorehead, Alan Hale, Alan Baxter, John Carradine.

This was not even good. Robert Wagner was miscast in the title role, and Hunter couldn't begin to breathe life into his role of brother Frank James. All concerned, including the versatile director, got deservedly bad notices.

22. THE WAY TO THE GOLD. (20th Century-Fox, 1957.) Directed by Robert D. Webb.

Cast: Jeffrey Hunter, Sheree North, Barry Sullivan, Walter Brennan, Neville Brand, Jacques Aubuchon, Ruth Donnelly, Tom Pittman.

Far better was this low-budget effort in which Hunter was very fine as an ex-

convict on the trail of stolen gold. A kindly lawman (Sullivan) effects his regeneration, and black-and-white CinemaScope photography greatly enhanced a film that never won the attention it deserved.



Hank, a young woman who works as a waitress, tries to revive Joe, a young man who has been in stir, in *The Way to the Gold* (1957). (The gold of the title refers to a stolen gold cache, and the actors are Sheree North and Jeffrey Hunter.)

23. NO DOWN PAYMENT. (20th Century-Fox, 1957.) Directed by Martin Ritt.

Cast: Joanne Woodward, Sheree North, Tony Randall, Jeffrey Hunter, Cameron Mitchell, Barbara Rush, Patricia Owens, Pat Hingle.

In this one Hunter is married to Patricia Owens. The neighbor couples, in what proves to be a sordid suburbia, are Mitchell/Woodward, Hingle/Rush, and Randall/North. Hunter's wife is attacked by Mitchell; Hunter himself is cruelly beaten when he tries to avenge her; villain Mitchell goes to his death under an auto; his wife Joanne Woodward goes

off in a taxi; and the remaining couples demonstrate their new maturity by going to church. A distasteful mess.

When Hunter reported to Universal-International for *Appointment with a Shadow* (released in 1958), he worked but one day, as an alcoholic ex-reporter on the trail of a supposedly slain gangster. Having become ill with hepatitis, he was replaced by George Nader. Subsequently, Hunter told reporters that only the faithful nursing by his wife, Dusty Bartlett, whom he had married in July, 1957, pulled him through. (She later presented him with two sons. Still later, in September, 1966, she presented him with divorce papers, alleging that he drank to excess and was careless with money.)

24. COUNT FIVE AND DIE. (20th Century-Fox, 1958.) Directed by Victor Vicas.

Cast: Jeffrey Hunter, Nigel Patrick, Annemarie Durringer, David Kossoff, Rolf Lefebvre.

Hunter's most underrated film. A British production, it cast him as an American engaged in counterespionage work with English and Dutch patriots in wartime London. The snake in this hotbed of spies and counterspies is Dutch girl Annemarie Durringer, whom Hunter loves. He refuses to believe the girl's treachery until the final moments, when each shoots the other. She expires in a

deserted basement; he, in a deserted alley. That the Hunter character was very likable, but slightly stupid, enhanced the tension and added an air of realistic tragedy to the last scenes. It was a difficult role, and Hunter never faltered in making it credible.

25. THE LAST HURRAH. (Columbia, 1958.) Directed by John Ford.

Cast: Spencer Tracy, Jeffrey Hunter, Dianne Foster, Pat O'Brien, Donald Crisp, Basil Rathbone, James Gleason, Edward Brophy, John Carradine, Ricardo Cortez, Wallace Ford, Frank McHugh, Carleton Young, Frank Albertson, Anna Lee.

John Ford paged him again, this time for the role of the nephew of a Boston politician (Tracy) against whom forces conspire for the purpose of destroying his career. Hunter's acting during Tracy's death scene was poignant, and critics and public alike cheered the film whose cast of pros helped make it one of the best films of the year.

26. IN LOVE AND WAR. (20th Century-Fox, 1958.) Directed by Philip Dunne.

Cast: Robert Wagner, Dana Wynter, Jeffrey Hunter, Hope Lange, Bradford Dillman, Sheree North, France Nuyen, Mort Sahl.

It's a miracle that Hunter (and his hapless co-stars) survived this banal film. Hunter was one of several rugged Marines. A 101-minute mishmash that seemed to last twice as long.



From John Ford's film *Sergeant Rutledge* (1960). It is the Southwest, the Civil War is now over, and a criminally-charged black soldier (the title role) has been befriended by Tom Cantrell (an army officer) and Mary Beecher. (*The New York Times*, May 26, 1960, thought Jeffrey Hunter, as Cantrell, and Constance Towers, as Mary, to be "quite persuasive" in their roles.)

27. SERGEANT RUTLEDGE. (Warner Bros., 1960.) Directed by John Ford.

Cast: Jeffrey Hunter, Constance Towers, Billie Burke, Woody Strode, Juano Hernandez, Willis Bouchey.

John Ford rescued Hunter by offering him the role of an army lawyer who defends a black soldier falsely accused of rape and murder. Hunter was believable and moving in this worthwhile film.

28. HELL TO ETERNITY. (Allied Artists, 1960.) Directed by Phil Karlson.

Cast: Jeffrey Hunter, David Janssen, Vic Damone, Patricia Owens, Sessue Hayakawa, Richard Eyer, Miiko Taka, Bill Williams.

Hunter had one of his best roles as a man who as an orphan boy was adopted by a kindly family of (pre-Pearl Harbor)

Japanese-Americans and who later becomes emotionally torn when, as a marine, he is compelled to fight the Japanese overseas. This biographical film had none of the phony embellishments which so often wreck such films; and Hunter, as the Marine hero who captures 800 enemy soldiers and civilians, was powerfully persuasive.

29. KEY WITNESS. (MGM, 1960.)
Directed by Phil Karlson.

Cast: Jeffrey Hunter, Pat Crowley, Dennis Hopper, Joby Baker, Susan Harrison, Johnny Nash, Corey Allen.

A suspense film in which Hunter witnesses a wanton murder, and, because he refuses to keep silent, finds himself and his family threatened. An above-average programmer.

Late in the year 1960, producer Sam Bronston created a controversy when he announced that Jeffrey Hunter had been chosen for the role of Christ in *King of Kings*, to be made in Spain. (H. B. Warner played Christ in Cecil B. DeMille's silent version released in 1927.) Bronston and director Nicholas Ray justified their casting of Hunter by citing his emotional scope as an actor. (Also a factor was the near-hypnotic effect of his blue eyes, which were to become the object of many jests by nit-picking critics.)

Hunter was awed at the prospect of playing Christ, as is attested by the following, which was attributed to him:

"It's absolutely impossible for me to regard this remarkable opportunity as a part for which I, an actor, can prepare! I can only approach it with two guideposts—absolute humility and a willingness to accept the emotional and spiritual leadership of my director and the religious advisers for this film upon whose wisdom we all are relying.

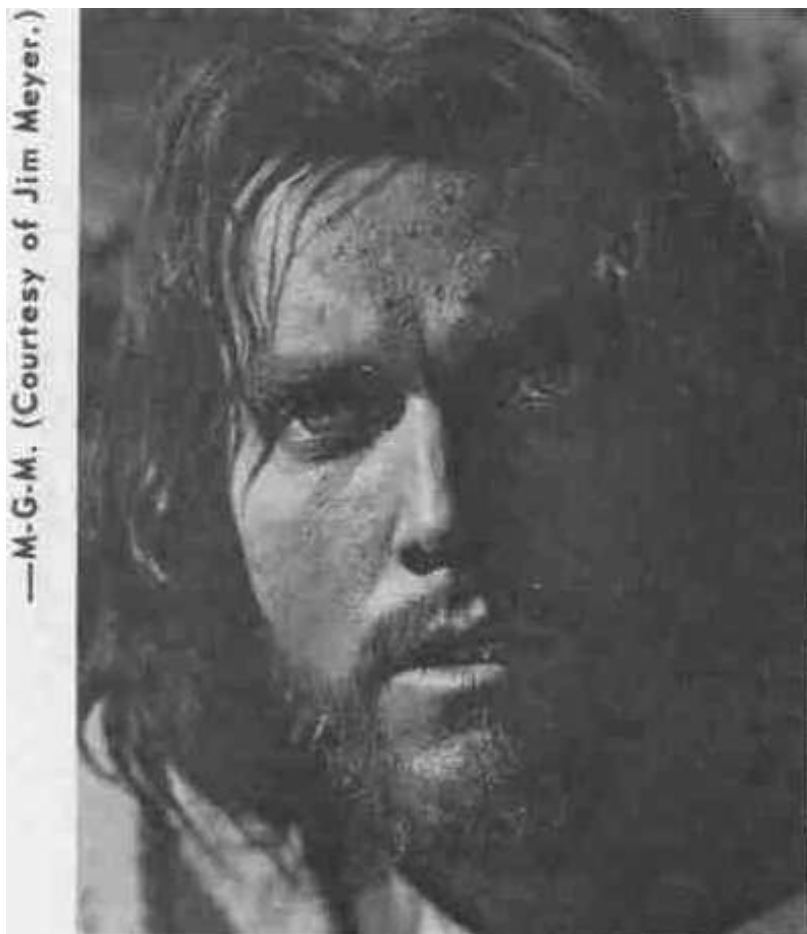
"Mr. Bronston agreed that it would be impossible for me to discuss with authority my feelings about playing Christ, so during the five months I'll be dedicated to this role I'll keep my activities off-the-set anonymous."

"But I wasn't prepared for the reactions I got from thousands of Spanish extras...when I appeared for the Sermon on the Mount; many dropped to their knees. Of course they knew I was an actor playing a part...still I was a living representation of a Figure they had regarded from childhood with awe. I didn't know what to do, but instinctively pretended not to notice rather than intrude upon this gesture of devotion.

"It was then that I began to realize what I'd undertaken and I felt it even more deeply as the film went along. I knew the Bible, of course, but no better than most. The story of Jesus, as it's come to us, is sacred legend. But I'd never thought much about Him as a flesh-and-blood person, as a Man who lived on this earth among people and times not too different from ours, today."

During production, Hunter deliberately

kept himself aloof from others in the cast and crew and in isolation when he wasn't working. "I never smoked," he said, "but Christ drank wine, Christ saw people. He ate with everybody. He wasn't a man of the shadows."



—M-G-M. (Courtesy of Jim Meyer.)

"When the focus is fixed very simply on the figure of Jeffrey Hunter as Jesus Christ and on the acting of a few familiar episodes in the Savior's life, there is a certain photographic reverence and purely pictorial eloquence in Samuel Bronston's elaborate screen biography of the Messiah, 'King of Kings.' "—Bosley Crowther in *The New York Times*, Oct. 12, 1961.

In October, 1961, *King of Kings* had a lavish world premiere at the Egyptian in Hollywood. Everyone's attention was focused on Hunter, who arrived to see, for the first time, his interpretation. (He had avoided viewing the rushes.) The Los Angeles-Hollywood area reviews

were glowing in their praise of the film and Hunter. However, reactions varied widely elsewhere, which led me to believe I was the only non-Hollywood reviewer who thought Hunter was fine in his role.

True, the film avoided—unlike DeMille spectacles—showing miracles credited to Christ; granted, too, that Christ's divinity was suggested rather than asserted. Withal, Hunter had me with him, believing in his characterization, all the way.

30. KING OF KINGS. (MGM, 1961.)
Directed by Nicholas Ray.

Cast: Jeffrey Hunter, Siobhan McKenna, Hurd Hatfield, Ron Randell, Viveca Lindfors, Rita Gam, Carmen Sevilla, Brigid Baslen, Harry Guardino, Rip Torn, Frank Thring, Guy Rolfe. Maurice Marsac, Gregoire Asian and Robert Ryan.

Beneath notice except as an example of the depths to which a widely-read critic could sink was *Time* magazine's review, part of which read: "The imitation of Christ is little better than blasphemy. Granted that the role is impossible to cast or play; granted that the attempt may nevertheless be worth making...but what ever possessed them to cast Jeffrey Hunter, a fan mag cover boy with a flabby face, a cute lopsided smile, baby-blue eyes and barely enough histrionic ability to play a Hollywood Marine?" The critic also said the film might better

be called "I Was a Teenage Jesus."

The New York Times's Bosley Crowther, on the other hand, said: "Mr. Hunter wears his make-up nobly and performs with simplicity and taste...."

Controversy over this version of *King of Kings* will perhaps continue for years. Perhaps there is no definitive evaluation—only varying evaluations.

31. MAN TRAP. (Paramount, 1961.)

Directed by Edmond O'Brien.

Cast: Jeffrey Hunter, David Janssen, Stella Stevens, Elaine Devry, Virginia Gregg, Hugh Sanders.

Hunter as a betrayed husband (who was no Boy Scout himself). Though the film was pulp fiction, it benefited from the performances of Stella Stevens as Hunter's tramp of a wife, David Janssen as Hunter's scheming wartime pal, and Hunter himself as the victimized husband whose anguish had a painful intensity.

32. NO MAN IS AN ISLAND.

(Universal-International, 1962.) Directed by John Monks, Jr., and Richard Goldstone.

Cast: Jeffrey Hunter, Marshall Thompson, Barbara Perez, Ronald Remy.

Hunter might well have refused to do this film, ostensibly the true story of George Tweed, the only American sailor on Guam to escape capture during the early years of World War II. The real Tweed was truly heroic, but the screenplay made him, the natives who protected him, and the servicemen with

whom he came in contact, hackneyed characters of the worst sort. Hunter's sincerity and technical competence availed him little.



The Second World War—Guam seized from the Americans by the Japanese—an American sailor on the island must hide—a Chamorro girl helps him. (Jeffrey Hunter and Barbara Perez in the film *No Man Is an Island*, 1962.)

33. THE LONGEST DAY. (20th Century-Fox, 1962.) Directed by Ken Annakin (British scenes), Andrew Marton (American scenes), and Bernhard Wicki (German scenes).

Cast: Eddie Albert, Paul Anka, Arletty, Jean-Louis Barrault, Richard Beymer, Bourvil, Richard Burton, Red Buttons, Sean Connery, Ray Danton, Irina Demick, Fabian, Mel Ferrer, Henry Fonda, Steve Forrest, Gert Frobe, Leo

Genn, John Gregson, Paul Hartmann, Jeffrey Hunter, Curt Jurgens, Alexander Knox, Peter Lawford, Roddy McDowell, Sal Mineo, Robert Mitchum, Kenneth Moore, Edmond O'Brien, Ron Randell, Francoise Rosay, Robert Ryan, Tommy Sands, Rod Steiger, Richard Todd, Tom Tryon, Peter Van Eyck, Robert Wagner, Stuart Whitman and John Wayne.

Hunter in a cameo role in a film which should have been called *The Longest Film*. Seldom has a spectacle won such widespread but undeserved praise. It's enough to note that Hunter was briefly effective as a beached infantryman in this story of the invasion of France by the Allies in World War II.



Incarcerated in a mental institution, Jim (Jeffrey Hunter), a young man who has killed another man, is compelled to undergo psychological testing by Dr. Larstadt (Viveca Lindfors) in the Warner Bros. film *Brainstorm* (1965).

34. GOLD FOR THE CAESARS. (MGM, 1964.) Directed by Andre DeToth.

Cast: Jeffrey Hunter, Mylene Demongeot, Ron Randell, Massimo Girotti,

Giulio Bosetti, Ettore Manni, Georges Lycan.

Hunter hitting his all-time low with perhaps his worst performance. A made-in-Italy film with, as its locale, a Roman colony in ancient Spain. Hunter was an architect-slave who falls in love with the governor's mistress (Demongeot). For this he is to be killed, but the governor first sends him on an expedition to find gold for Rome. Hunter saves himself and finds happiness with Demongeot.

35. THE MAN FROM GALVESTON.

(Warner Bros., 1964.) Directed by William Conrad.

Cast: Jeff Hunter, Preston Foster, James Coburn, Joanne Moore, Edward Andrews, Kevin Hagen, Martin West.

Bad, but mercifully brief. It ran 57 minutes, which was more than enough to tell the trite tale of a brash young lawyer (Hunter) in old Texas. This was the pilot film of Hunter's subsequent and popular television series *Temple Houston*, and had limited large-screen exposure in this country.

36. BRAINSTORM. (Warner Bros., 1965.) Directed by William Conrad.

Cast: Jeff Hunter, Anne Francis, Dana Andrews, Viveca Lindfors, Stacy Harris, Kathie Brown, Philip Pine, Michael Pate, Robert McQueeney.

Fun! This suspense film had Hunter saving the wife (Anne Francis) of his wealthy employer (Dana Andrews) from suicide, falling for the unstable lady, and

then feigning insanity in order to kill Andrews and escape retribution. An intriguing plot woven so skillfully that flaws in its fabric became apparent only after the film ended. And what an ending! what with Hunter going insane (or does he?) under the careful (or cruel) gaze of Viveca Lindfors, as an enigmatic psychiatrist. Was she accurate in her diagnosis that Hunter was insane or was she taking revenge for his slurs on her womanliness? Hunter and Lindfors were seen to good advantage.



In *Murieta* (1965), Jeffrey Hunter (left) played the title role, that of a young Mexican who comes to mid-19th-century California to hunt for gold only to be hunted himself as the leader of a band of Mexican raiders. Arthur Kennedy (right) played Capt. Love, an American who, having befriended Murieta, tries to help him but, as fate would have it, becomes his executioner.

37. MURIETA. (Warner Bros., 1965.)
Directed by George Sherman.

Cast: Jeffrey Hunter, Arthur Kennedy, Diana Lorys, Sara Lezana, Roberto Camardiel, Pedro Osinaga.

Made in Spain, this film had Hunter

playing a humble Mexican who turns outlaw when his wife is raped and killed. Largely overlooked and confined mainly to programmer bookings.

38. DIMENSION 5. (Feature Film Corp. of America, 1965.) Directed by Franklin Adreon.

Cast: Jeffrey Hunter, France Nuyen, Harold Sakata, Donald Woods, Linda Ho.

In this colorful but confusing film, Hunter had few opportunities. He was a secret agent befriended by Oriental girl France Nuyen. The two save Los Angeles from destruction by projecting themselves into the future (in other words, "Dimension 5"), discovering where a bomb has been hidden and foiling a dastardly plot. Does it sound wildly harebrained? It was.

39. A WITCH WITHOUT A BROOM. (Producers Releasing Organization, 1967.) Directed by Joe Lacy.

Cast: Jeffrey Hunter, Maria Perschy, Gustavo Rojo, Perla Cristal.

A filmed-in-Spain fantasy comedy about an American professor at Madrid (Hunter) who is loved by the reincarnation of a 16th century witch (Maria Perschy). They go not only backward in time (to different eras) but also forward (to the 22nd century). Though their mishaps were fairly funny, neither performer was well served. And *Motion Picture Herald* noted that "...Hunter moves through the film with too serious a

demeanor...." (Apr. 26, 1967).

40. A GUIDE FOR THE MARRIED MAN. (20th Century-Fox, 1967.) Directed by Gene Kelly.

Cast: Walter Matthau, Robert Morse, Inger Stevens, and guest stars Lucille Ball, Jack Benny, Polly Bergen, Joey Bishop, Sid Caesar, Art Carney, Wally Cox, Jeffrey Hunter, Jayne Mansfield, Hal March, Louis Nye, Carl Reiner, Phil Silvers, Terry-Thomas.

Hunter was one of many guest stars, and his brief appearance (at the outset) went unbilled. He was a mountain climber, clinging fiercely to the side of a mountain "because it's there!" Unless viewers were alert, they'd have missed him.

41. CHRISTMAS KID. (Producers Releasing Organization, 1967.) Directed by Sidney W. Pink.

Cast: Jeffrey Hunter, Louis Hayward, Gustavo Rojo, Perla Cristal, Luis Prendes.

Hunter had the title role, a hero-villain, or in the words of *Variety*, "a real mixed-up kid." He played a lad whose father hated him because the lad's mother had died following childbirth. He created a tragic figure as the doomed young man. *Variety* called his work "fine" and the film, a Western made in Spain, "one of the better entries by producer Sidney Pink."

42. CUSTER OF THE WEST. (Security, 1968.) Directed by Robert Siodmak.

Cast: Robert Shaw, Mary Ure, Jeffrey

Hunter, Ty Hardin, Kieron Moore, Lawrence Tierney, and Robert Ryan.

A sort of action study of General George Custer (Robert Shaw), with Hunter in a supporting role and this tepid observation from *The Film Daily*: "Jeffrey Hunter and Ty Hardin register with some effectiveness as Custer's army aides."

43. THE PRIVATE NAVY OF SGT. O'FARRELL. (United Artists, 1968.) Directed by Frank Tashlin.

Cast: Gina Lollobrigida, Bob Hope, Phyllis Diller, Jeffrey Hunter, Mylene Demongeot, John Myhers, Mako, Henry Wilcoxon, Dick Sargent.

Hunter as a navy lieutenant in a dated comedy set in the South Pacific of World War II.

44. SEXY SUSAN SINS AGAIN. (Caltex, 1969.) Directed by Francois Le Grand.

Cast: Jeffrey Hunter, Pascale Petit, Jacques Herlin, Terry Torday, Femi Benussi, Daniela Giordano.

It was sad to see Hunter in this strained comedy with Terry Torday as Sexy Susan, who, despite bare breasts and bottom, didn't sin all that much. Hunter was revealed bare, too (rear only), and the film served neither himself nor his admirers well.



(Since I intended to confine my notes to Hunter's theatrical films, I will not try

to cite all of his radio, television, and stage credits. However, I should perhaps mention the *Lux Radio Theater* version of the film *Rawhide*; broadcast in 1955, it had Hunter and Donna Reed in the Tyrone Power and Susan Hayward roles. As for his television work, let me point out just a few highlights. He was excellent as an explorer in an episode of *Our American Heritage* (1960), gave an Emmy-worthy performance in "Seven Miles of Bad Road" on *Bob Hope's Chrysler Theatre* (1963), and was particularly memorable as a mutant in a two-part episode of *Star Trek* (1966.)

On May 27, 1969, Jeffrey Hunter, 42, died following brain surgery. Police said he apparently had been injured in a fall in his Van Nuys, Calif., home. He was survived by his third wife, Emily McLaughlin, a television actress, and his sons Chris (by Barbara Rush), Henry H. McKinnies III and Scott (by Dusty Bartlett), and Steele (Miss Bartlett's son by a previous marriage whom Hunter had adopted).

Jeffrey Hunter often said that this would be his best advice to an aspiring actor: "Be natural, sincere and honest on and off screen and stage or radio. A good acting job must come from the mind and heart."

