

KING of KINGS

Jeffrey Hunter was chosen to play Christ because of his compelling eyes



Jeffrey Hunter as Jesus Christ preaches the Sermon on the Mount



Spanish actress Carmen Sevilla plays Mary Magdalene, sinner converted by Christ

WITH historical epics, particularly those of a Biblical nature enjoying peak popularity, it was inevitable that, sooner or later, the film companies would pick on the one all-embracing subject for a giant spectacular—the life of Christ.

Samuel Bronston has now made the epic to end all epics with his *King of Kings*, produced for M-G-M.

This production, filmed in Spain, has cost \$8,000,000 — nearly £3,000,000. No expense has been spared to make it one of the most spectacular and realistic pictures ever filmed.

The entire back lot of the Sevilla Studios is occupied by the huge Jerusalem sets. Every available inch of space has been utilised and, towering over all, is the magnificent Temple of Jerusalem.



Rip Torn has a key part as Judas, the man who betrayed Jesus

The man responsible for these sets is George Wakhevitch, the French art

director. Working with his team, he has designed all the sets, costumes and jewelry. All this has been done in close collaboration with some of the world's most prominent biblical scholars.

With this authentic background to work on, the producer, Samuel Bronston, and director, Nicholas Ray, have signed one of the largest international casts ever assembled for one picture.



After a long search, Siobhan McKenna was cast as the Virgin Mary

Jeffrey Hunter will portray Christ. Bronston says that he chose him because of his eyes which are exceptionally compelling and blue.

"It is important that the man playing Christ should have memorable eyes," he says.



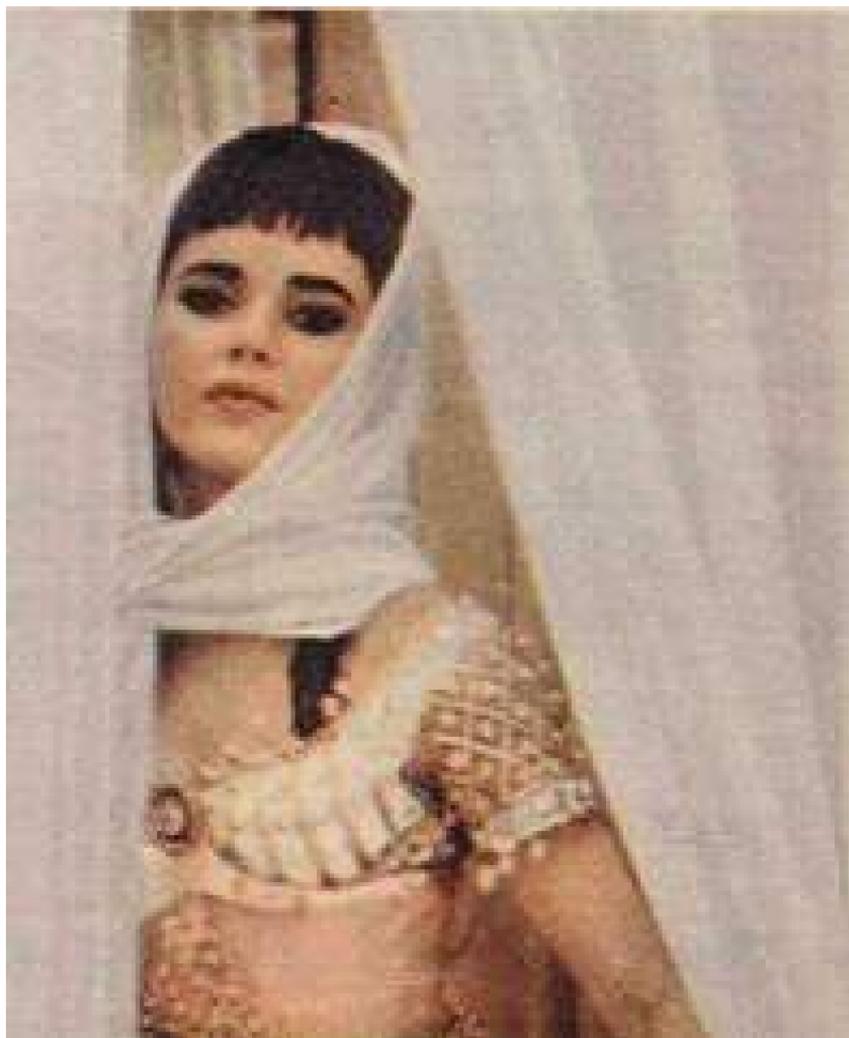
Viveca Lindfors portrays Claudia, the beautiful wife of Pontius Pilate

One of the notable things during the shooting of this film was the atmosphere. Extras were drawn from the local people, who are very devout, and, as Siobhan McKenna, who takes the part of the Virgin Mary, said: "It seemed like a great religious experience to them."

No matter how well the actors create the characters, it is the extras who create the atmosphere which helps to bring the film to life. Examples of the authenticity of their feelings occurred daily.

While the scene depicting the sacrilegious entering and looting of the Temple by the Roman general Pompey (Conrado San Martin) was being filmed, Pompey and his men had to murder the Jewish high priests who were blocking the entrance to the inner sanctum. It was during this sequence that one of the extras was heard to shout out in Spanish: "Look, they're killing our holy men!" So strong was the reality of the scene.

To keep this atmosphere, and to treat the making of this film with as much reverence as possible, no interviews were allowed with Jeffrey Hunter.



Brigid Bazlen as the seductive Salome

But to keep the Press informed, throughout the production the company published its own newspaper in Madrid, which was then circulated all over the world. This newspaper was called "The Star," after the Star of Bethlehem.

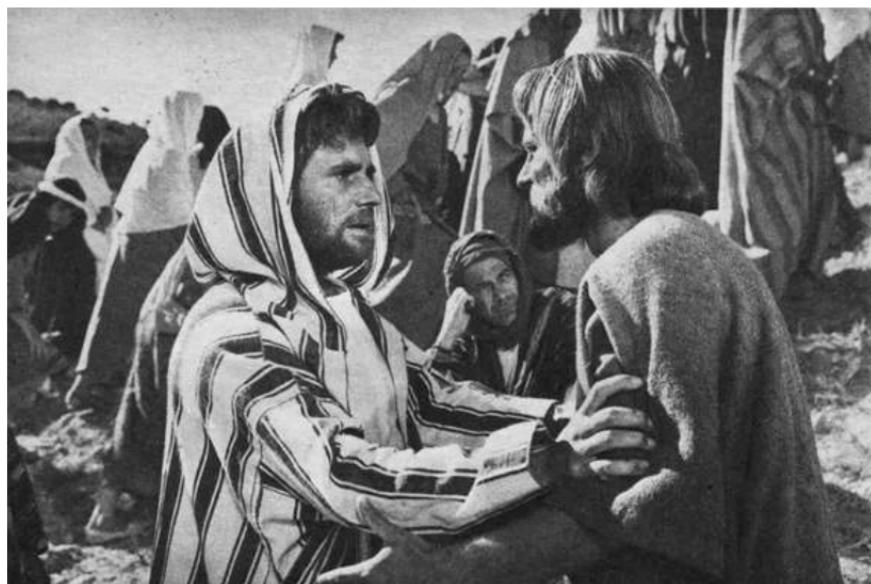
So real that even the extras believed it

Other leading players in the film are Robert Ryan who portrays John the Baptist; Carmen Sevilla who plays Mary Magdalene; Frank Thring and Rita Gam who take the parts of Herod Antipas and his beautiful but evil wife, Herodias; and Hurd Hatfield, who is Pontius Pilate.

Another main part, that of Salome, daughter of Herodias and step-daughter

of Herod Antipas, goes to 16-year-old Brigid Bazlen, from Chicago.

Brigid will not use the traditional seven veils, but will dance using pure Oriental-African movements.



The rebel, Barabbas (Harry Guardino) meets with Judas (Rip Torn) at the Sermon on the Mount

There were many calls for stunt men during production. But perhaps the most hazardous job of all was done by Manolo Gonzalez. He jumped more than 50 feet from the top of the highest tower of the Temple of Israel, into the courtyard below. It was the longest free fall of his career. The price paid for the jump—£45. The date—Friday the 13th !

Falls like these are only highlights that go to make up the whole. No one scene can be singled out as better than another. Perhaps the most moving is the Baptism of Jesus. Crowds of Spanish extras stood about in the water for hours with never a murmur of complaint.

The Sermon on the Mount is another example. To film this sequence, the director had to assemble the largest multitude ever used for a single motion picture scene.

If all this sounds larger than life, it has

to be remembered that this is a subject which is in itself larger than life.

The film has received the blessing of Pope John XXIII, who told Bronston that *King of Kings* deserved support from all sources for the contribution the film would make to the spiritual elevation of mankind.

Everything has been done to keep things on a high spiritual level, and the result is one of the most reverent and emotionally disturbing films ever made.

APRIL, 1961

PHOTOPLAY