

Assignment TV

By TERRENCE O'FLAHERTY

Once again, for the hundredth time that day, I consulted my Trader Horn Map of Southern California which had been cunningly scratched on the back of a label for prune yogurt. Half way between the Old Soldiers Home and the La Brea Tar pits in these vast, uncharted wastes is a glamorous undergrowth

called Beverly Hills. This was my destination.

When the money from television shows rolls in from all over the globe, a large chunk of it settles into crevices in this area. Beverly Hills is a nice place to visit, I discovered, but outsiders are discouraged from settling permanently. Even visitors are required to have a round

trip ticket before a visa is issued.

W. C. Fields' description of this place still stands as definitive: "It's the only place on earth where you can go to sleep under a rosebush in full bloom — and freeze to death."

It was here that I had my rendezvous with Marshall Thompson, an old Africa hand and the star of "Daktari," a successful animal opera conducted by CBS.

I SPOTTED Trader Thompson sweating it out in the midst of a tropical jungle directly behind the Beverly Wilshire Hotel and I cut a path through the millionaires to get to his side. He was sitting in a striped cabana adjacent to a tropica, waterfall operated by a motor that sucked the water up and

pumped is over the falls again and again.

"Daktari Livingston, I presume," I said in impeccable Swahili.

"Here in the jungle we never presume anything," said Thompson.

You can hardly blame him for this attitude. Any actor who is brave enough to appear with a cast of animals has got to be cautious, if not entirely wise.

Marshall is interesting, articulate and modest — a rare combination of virtues in the Hollywood jungle. It was immediately apparent that here was a man who knows both animals and Africa.

WORKING WITH animals in a show like "Daktari" is no circus. It is filmed in a giant imitation jungle twenty miles from Hollywood at a place called "Africa, U.S.A."

—a kind of Leisure World for wild beasts. They are well fed before they go before the cameras.

"We have had no accidents involving animals," said Thompson, knocking on plastic. (There is no wood in Beverly Hills.)

"We never use tranquilizers. We wouldn't dare. We know the animals' likes and dislikes under normal conditions. A pill might change his whole personality."

Thompson gave the lie to many animal stories. The lion is not the King of Beasts. The elephant is . . . A lion would rather sleep than do anything else . . . Animals are consistent in their actions and reactions . . . The stories of "man-killers" are so rare they are passed from one generation to another. They are usually old animals who are driven to attacking man because they are sick and dying.

"LAST YEAR in Africa—the real Africa—I was out of touch for several weeks with the rest of the world," said Thompson. "On return I found it was far more difficult to adapt myself to civilization than it had been to adapt myself to the jungle. When I got home the newspapers and newscasts were full of wars, murder, and graft. Suddenly I realized that animals are much more trustworthy than human beings.

"Of course, animals will get tired working in front of the camera just like any

other actor. And when they are out of sorts or something is wrong they'll let you know with a curl of the lip. There are five tone sounds that a lioness makes. One of them means she is disturbed," said Thompson.

"When you find your co-star is disturbed, what do you do — offer her your arm?" I asked.

"No. It's quite simple. You just get a fresh lioness . . ."

WHY DOESN'T someone use the same formula for tried actresses? This is worth thinking about. Unfortunately there are very few fresh ones left on the sidelines.

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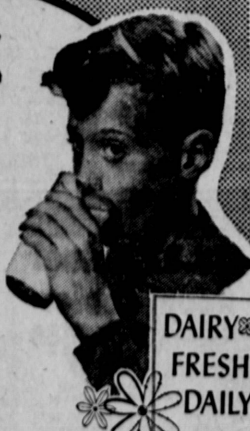
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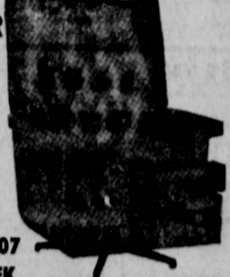


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