

Jack Kirby, considered by many fans to be the King of the Comic Artists, turned his attention to apes in National's **KAMANDI** book. Drawn and written by 'King' Kirby, the plots were taken from every available source, EXCEPT Jack's own usually vivid imagination, borrowing most heavily from Fox's **PLANET OF THE APES** series. Kirby critic and ape aficionado Doug Murray tells the whole story here...

Remember the last scene of "Planet of the Apes"? Remember that great shot of Charlton Heston kneeling in the sand before the ruined Statue of Liberty, cursing the man-made Armageddon that brought the world to such a tragic end? Remember how that image of Heston and the ruined Statue stuck in your mind (and, if you're normal, probably still sits there)? Remember?

Well, Jack (King) Kirby certainly remembered. Faced with the responsibility of coming up with some new comic titles to replace his "third-world trilogy" (**NEW GODS**, **FOREVER PEOPLE**, **MISTER MIRACLE**) which had just gone down in flames, Kirby set about to use that image, that memory, to sell comic books. The result: **KAMANDI**, the Last Boy on Earth. The cover of **KAMANDI #1** shows a young boy in a raft paddling past (surprise!) a ruined Statue of Liberty that apparently stands in a devastated and deserted city. The splash page reinforces the motif as the scene is repeated in greater detail. The story that follows—and indeed the stories which follow that do little to change this first impression.

In the story, young Kamandi (named after Command D, a missile bunker where he was born and educated) is torn from his grandfather by a murdering band of (get this) intelligent rats. After killing the rats, Kamandi sets out to learn more about his strange world, a world that he knows has been destroyed by a man-made holocaust.

PLANET OF THE APES. And, to make the similarity all the more striking, Kamandi's life is saved by a scientist, Professor Canus (an intelligent dog), who becomes his friend.

APES RUSH IN

Now, you're asking yourself, if Kamandi is a rip-off of the "Ape" films, then where are the apes? Well, hold on, they're

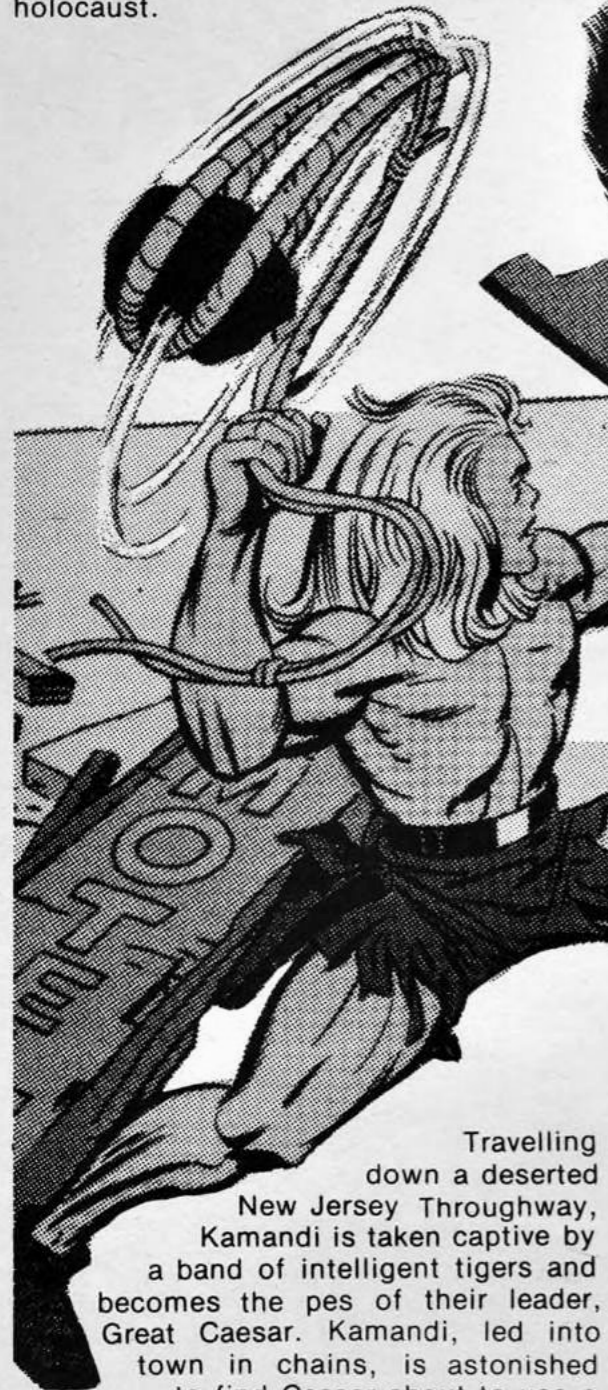
Still keeping to the premise that if they liked it once, they'll love it twice, old King Kirby socks it to us again in **KAMANDI #7**. Here Kamandi hooks up with Tiny, a giant ape who, in the grand finale of the story, pulls Kamandi out of his hotel room and climbs with him to the top of a tall, bespiced building where he is shot off by machine-gun-firing biplanes!

KIRBY & KAMANDI

or "WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE KING"



Jack Kirby's apes not only speak good English and keep inarticulate humans as pets, but sport hip headbands and tasteful loincloths. They're also partial to making life tough for **KAMANDI**, *The Last Boy On Earth*, though the agile youth generally gets the better of his formidable foes.



Travelling down a deserted New Jersey Throughway, Kamandi is taken captive by a band of intelligent tigers and becomes the pes of their leader, Great Caesar. Kamandi, led into town in chains, is astonished to find Caesar about to use a nuclear weapon in his war of conquest against unnamed enemies.

The scene where the warhead is discovered is certainly revealing. A missile is slowly raised out of a hidden silo as the surrounding populace chants "Praise to the Warhead" and other assorted prayers to the mighty engine of destruction. If that sounds familiar to you ape fans, perhaps a little shake of your memory will help:

"Behold the bomb ... Almighty bomb, which destroyed all devils and created angels ..." etc.

Familiar words, words chanted by the mutant populace in **BENEATH THE**

coming.. Starting with issue #3, apes became regular characters in the books. It seems the apes are the unnamed enemies Great Caesar is fighting. And it seems the apes also have this habit of keeping humans as pets, a practice Kamandi doesn't think much of. Incidentally, all other humans in the stories at this point are savages who are incapable of speech. Sound familiar?

Anyway, the stories grind on. Kamandi gets embroiled in the Tiger-Ape War, eventually becoming the mediator in a peace settlement between the two sides, a settlement that includes the use of (of all things) a slot machine! "And to think they used to call them one-armed bandits!" Kamandi exclaims in wonder as peace is achieved.

Kamandi makes friends, of course, and they include the aforementioned Doctor Canus; Ben Boxer and his friends, mutant humans from the mysterious Tracking Site; Tuftan, prince of the tigers and son of Great Caesar; and Flower, a beautiful, bare-chested (with long flowing hair, strategically placed) female human, who, it is found, is capable of speech.

Rejoining Ben Boxer, Kamandi spends the next couple of issues resolving the mysteries of Tracking Site, an old aircraft carrier which once served as the site for spaceship splashdowns. Then it's back to the topical material, as Kamandi is captured by Sacker, an intelligent snake, who is the chief merchant of this new world. While with Sacker, Kamandi meets with Klikklak, a semi-intelligent grasshop-

This paw, which took up most of the cover of **KAMANDI #7**, belonged to an outsized ape named Tiny, whose similarity to King Kong was purely coincidental, down to the last detail.



Beasts That Act Like Men! Men Who Act Like Beasts! Artists Who Act Like Thieves Stealing Schticks And Stories From Every Conceivable Source! All this and more can be found in **KAMANDI**. Why this debut issue (#1) even had a Statue Of Liberty That Acted Like A Statue Of Liberty ... not to mention whole scenes taken directly from the **PLANET OF THE APES!**

per with whom Kamandi is forced to enter a bloody, winner-take-all race! The fact that Secretariat was making national headlines at this point probably had no influence on these stories at all.

The race over, Kamandi goes back to our old friends, the apes, in what is apparently a ruined Washington, D.C. Here, Kamandi, his friend Tuftan, and old Doctor Canus find themselves the captives of the sacred order of "Plumbers" and sentenced to death by the horrible "Watergate Machine," a contraption that apparently plays recording tape at high speed and volume. Obviously this story is too far-out to be "swiped" from anything.

The **KAMANDI** books represent an interesting stage in the career of Jack Kirby. As one of the top men in the field Jack had been allowed to throw his weight around rather freely. His innovations in the super-hero field have been universally hailed as works of genius, and his work at Marvel for **FANTASTIC FOUR** and **THOR** had brought those comics to the top of the sales chart and the peak of popularity.

L Kirby'S KOMPLAINT!

But Kirby grew dissatisfied at Marvel. He wasn't given enough freedom, he thought. Others were writing stories for him, and he was being forced to draw to editors' specifications. He decided he wanted out and signed a multi-year contract with National, a contract that allowed him to write, draw, and edit his own books. A contract that gave his imagination free rein.

The first result of this new deal was the aforementioned "third world trilogy": **NEW GODS**, **FOREVER PEOPLE**, and **MR. MIRACLE**. These three books formed a tremendous, imaginative mosaic of the war between the gods of New Genesis and the minions of Darkseid ... a new mythology in the making.

Unfortunately, the books did not sell. Perhaps the tenuous thread of story line running through three (and sometimes four) titles was too much for the average reader. In any case, the books were killed.

Kirby, his contract still binding, but his enthusiasm dampened, came up with two new titles: **THE DEMON** and **KAMANDI**. **DEMON**, the more innovative of the two, delved into the world of the occult and Demonology, and failed quickly. **KAMANDI**, based on movies, old comic work and general headline cliches, fared better. Kirby, now assured that National's buying public just wanted more of the same old crud, put little effort into **KAMANDI**. Taking story lines from any available source, Kirby cranked out the book (and a few other one-shots) and settled down to let his contract expire.

And there he sits today, still waiting. **KAMANDI** is not the only comic title to steal ideas and even whole scenes from **PLANET OF THE APES**. Marvel does it frequently in **WAR OF THE WORLDS**. Here, however, there's a greater effort to come up with more original scripts (even though they're based on an unoriginal idea) and more realistic dialogue and continuity.

The sad part about **KAMANDI**, "The Last Boy On Earth" is not that it's stolen from the "Apes" films. The sad thing is the utter lethargy and lack of originality that Jack Kirby, once the King, is putting into what could be one of his last works. ■