

The Other Adams

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In September of 1985, Marvel Comics' *Longshot* #1 hit the stands. It was written by Ann Nocenti and featured a hot new artist named Art Adams (inks were ably handled by Brent Anderson and Whilce Portacio). While the character *Longshot* was described as "an artificial, genetically-engineered being who came from a parallel dimension", the real appeal of the book was the incredibly detailed and seemingly free-flowing pencil work by the new, young phenom, Adams. Art can rightfully be credited (or blamed) for introducing the overly detailed rendering style that would culminate with artists like Jim Lee, Rob Liefeld, and Todd McFarlane, and which would eventually dominate the look of comic books in the 1990's. While some of the lesser talented artists that followed would focus almost exclusively on this over-rendered style, Art had the ability to tell a story not only with great detail, but also with wonderful composition, pacing, and energy, and would ultimately prove to have lasting appeal.

Art's first credited work was in the obscure *High Energy* #1, "One Eyed Jack" [1982, 8 page story. *High Energy*], but it was *Longshot* that launched him into the stratosphere and won him instant approval from comic-fandom at large, and allowed him access to Marvel's main stable of characters. In 1986, Art began drawing the covers for *Classic X-Men*, which re-printed earlier *X-Men* stories, and was the primary artist up until 1988. In the early 1990's, Art showed his affection for monsters, tackling projects like *Godzilla*, *Creature From the Black Lagoon*, and *Creepy Fearbook* (where Art got to lend his talents to *Vampirella*).

In 1994, working under the creator-owned imprint *Legend*, with notable talents John Byrne, Frank Miller and Mike Mignola, art created, wrote, and drew his Sci-Fi adventure series

Monkeyman and O'Brien. The first story, aptly titled "Who Are Monkeyman and O'Brien?", was published as a backup feature to Mignola's first *Hellboy* story "Seed of Destruction". The premise again was an alien from another dimension, albeit a highly intelligent scientist-gorilla. As Art describes it "Monkeyman is a ten-foot-tall scientific genius gorilla from another dimension who accidentally comes to Ann O'Brien's world and in the process, there's some kind of big, weird explosion from another dimension and Ann O'Brien gets soaked in some strange, extra-dimensional radiation which causes her to grow to seven feet tall and become incredibly strong. Then they have adventures and stuff!"



Longshot #1 (Marvel Comics, 1985).

With tales like "The Invasion of the Froglodytes", "Attack of the Shrewmanoid", and the classic, inter-dimensional "Into the Terminus", one got the impression that Art was having a lot of fun handling both the writing and illustrating chores, while crafting the not-too-serious adventures. 1998 saw the last published *MM&O'B* story; the *Gen 13/Monkeyman & O'Brien* crossover series, which was a take on the classic *Star Trek* episode "Mirror, Mirror" and showed the heroes battling their evil alter-ego's.



From my collection - Monkeyman & O'Brien Special # 1. Pencils and inks by Art Adams. Lettering added by me ©



After working on various projects with several different publishers for the next couple of years (nearly all of which were covers), Art was again asked to co-create another title in 2001. This time, he'd be working with uber-legend Alan Moore on Moore's own brand new comic line *America's Best Comics* which featured titles like *Tom Strong*, *Promethea*, and the very successful *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (all penned by Moore), and published as an offshoot of Wildstorm Productions (in turn owned by DC). Art's character, *Jonni Future*, a super-hot (sexy hot, not *Human Torch* hot) space heroine, and her sidekick *Jermaal* (a half-man, half-leopard creature), would appear in self contained stories alongside *Tom Strong* in his second self-titled book, *Tom Strong's Terrific Tales*, with writing being handled by Steve Moore (no relation). The stories had the flavor of 1950's Sci-Fi adventures, with a little sex thrown in the mix. Not quite *Little Annie Fannie* meets *Lost in Space*, but fun nevertheless.

I think it can be said, when looking at his long career, that Art's best work has been on the characters that he's had a personal hand in creating. *Jonni Future* is no exception. Art went into overdrive on this series and asserted himself, once again, as one of the best artists currently working in the industry. The first few issues were done twice-up, and a new vitality and enthusiasm could be seen on the pages. He was producing, in the opinion of many, the best work of his career.

Art had always been labeled as one of the few artists who worked too slowly (or too meticulously) to do a monthly title, and seemed perpetually relegated to doing covers. This reputation would eventually catch up to him on this series as well, and the inking chores would be handed off to the super-talented Kevin

Knowlan. In conjunction with his *Jonni Future* work, Art was given the job of creating the covers for the new *Justice League of America* miniseries "*Scary Monsters*", which was right up his alley. He produced some meticulously detailed covers, and got to draw some of DC's main staples for the first time. This would eventually land him the gig as the new *Superman* cover artist, and at present, he continues drawing the covers for *Action Comics*.



From my collection – *Tom Strong's Terrific Tales* (# 10, page 3) chronicles the exploits of the buxom Sci-Fi heroine, *Jonni Future*. Pencils Art Adams, inks by Kevin Knowlan.

Often, when evaluating the career of the average comic book artist, one can find peaks and valleys within the body of work. Typically, the artist reaches their "peak" in the early to mid years, and can never quite recapture the vitality of that period. What follows can vary from perfectly acceptable art, to mediocre and beyond. There are a few, and I think Art Adams is one of them, who can produce exceptional work throughout their entire career. If I'm right about that assessment, then I look forward to the next 20 years Art has to offer.



From my collection – a Jonni Future “sketch” I received in 2004.