

THE POWER (RECORDS) OF

NEAL ADAMS

by Rob Kelly

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Neal Adams' artistic genius wasn't limited to the world of monthly comics, of course: his work appeared in virtually every medium that might have been even tangentially connected related—newspaper strips, treasuries, digests, merchandising. But there was probably no single side street to the world of comic books that Adams' dazzling draftsmanship dominated more than the Power Records.

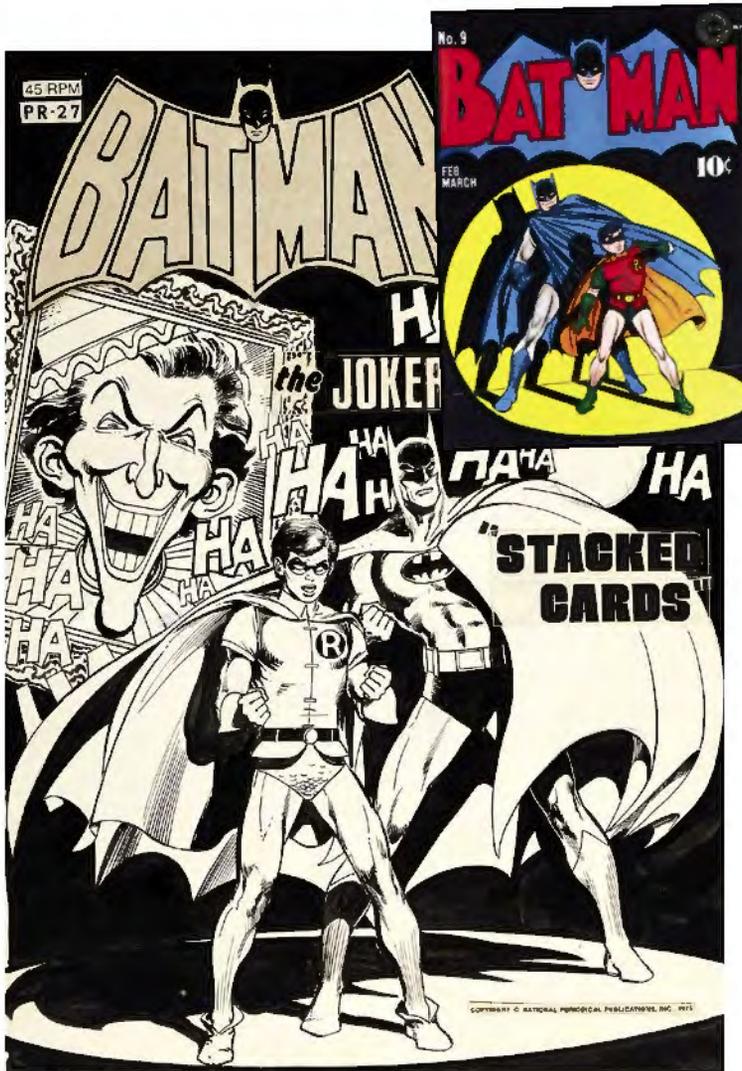
Power Records was an imprint of Peter Pan Records, which across several decades dominated the children's record market. Similar to the legendary Mego Toys, their most remembered decade was the 1970s, when they acquired the licenses to nearly every major comic-book and pop-culture property out there: DC and Marvel, *The Six Million Dollar Man*, *Planet of the Apes*, *Star Trek*, and more. Since the audio adventures featuring these properties were aimed at a slightly older audience, Peter Pan sought to distinguish them via their own imprint, the dramatically named Power Records.

Power Records featured these world famous characters and concepts in a multitude of audio formats, often accompanied by a custom-made comic book that you read while you listened (like I did, on many a weekend afternoon as a kid). While the Peter Pan staff produced the recorded content on the records

themselves (featuring, for the most part, their own stable of writers, producers, and actors), they turned to ringers when it came to designing their record sleeves: Neal Adams and Dick Giordano's Continuity Associates.

While not every "Power" sleeve was produced by Adams, Giordano, and co., the bulk of them were, creating an instantly identifiable visual identity for Power. Adams' peerless, dramatic staging and dynamic figural work made these sleeves pop, becoming collectors' items all their own.

Unfortunately, no official list of what Adams did for Peter Pan/Power exists (Adams' famous signature doesn't even appear anywhere on them). Sourcing these sleeves becomes even harder when you realize some of the other people who worked on them had styles that were similar to Adams' own (like the aforementioned Giordano, as well as Rich Buckler and Mike Nasser), so it's easy to just assume Adams did them all. But after staring at these beauties for 40 years (and consulting my fellow Fire and Water Podcast Network All-Star and *BI* contributor, Chris Franklin, whose eagle eye when it comes to this stuff is sharper than mine), I think we can come close to presenting as complete as possible a full list of all the sleeves Neal Adams did for Peter Pan/Power. I guarantee some of them will surprise you!



This Is No Joke
 (left) Original Adams art to the *Batman* "Stacked Cards" cover, #PR-27, from 1975. Courtesy of Heritage Auctions (www.ha.com). (inset) Neal's pose of the Dynamic Duo was an updating of Jack Burnley's cover for *Batman* #9 (Feb.–Mar. 1942). (right) From the Heritage archives, an extraordinary Adams original art page to the Power Records "Robin Meets Man-Bat" *Batman* comic book.

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DC COMICS

The bulk of the work Neal Adams did for Power Records was for DC properties. With one exception, Adams drew every character they chose to dramatize: Aquaman, Batman, the Flash, Metamorpho (!), Plastic Man, Superman, and Wonder Woman. Batman, of course, appeared in every audio format Peter Pan produced: 45 RPM, Book and Record 45, LP, and Book and Record LP. Batman starred in two audio-only LPs, both featuring Adams art. One (bearing the in-house code of 8167, otherwise simply titled *Batman*) has Batman and Robin running on a beach with Gotham City in the background (funny, I don't think of the crime-ridden Gotham as much of a beach town!) and a closer shot of the Dynamic Duo on the back. It features four stories: "Mystery of the Scarecrow Corpse," "Catwoman's Revenge," "Robin Meets Man-Bat," and "Gorilla City." As was usual with Adams, especially when drawing Batman, the characters are so recognizable and iconic you could have lifted this piece and put it on any number of pieces of merchandise.

The other audio-only LP (again simply called *Batman*, numbered 8155) shows Batman dropping down into a spotlight full of trouble, as he is surrounded by some of his most legendary foes, the Joker, Catwoman, Scarecrow, and the Riddler. No way is the Darknight Detective getting out of this one! Batman's only Book and Record LP, again frustratingly just called *Batman* (BR 512), features

Bats in two stories, both written by longtime comics pros Elliott S! Maggin and Cary Bates. The first story features Batman tackling (literally) Gorilla Grodd, and the second, "Mystery of the Scarecrow Corpse," actually has nothing to do with the classic fear-inducing bad guy; rather it focuses on Batman teaming up with fellow legendary detective Sherlock Holmes. Adams does the cover here, with interior art by the equally talented José Luis García López.

Adams drew (in this author's opinion) one of the single finest Batman images ever put to paper, the cover to the 45 RPM Book and Record adventure "Stacked Cards." This shot of Batman and Robin, an updated take on the iconic cover to *Batman* #9, tells you pretty much everything you need to know about the character and his adventures. Even with Power Records' copy-heavy format, Neal Adams' work pops off the paper. The other Batman-centric Book and Record set was "Robin Meets Man-Bat," one of the few times an original DC Comic story (in this case, three) was adapted as a Power Record—Power borrowed elements from *Detective Comics* # 400, 402, and 407, with additional new material. Adams provides the interior art for both. For whatever reason, neither "Stacked" nor "Man-Bat" was reissued as 45 RPM-only releases. "The Catwoman's Revenge," "If Music Be the Food of Death," and "The Scarecrow's Mirage" were, however, and all of them feature beautiful original covers by Adams.

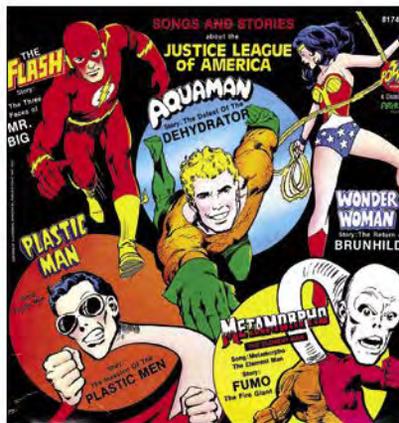
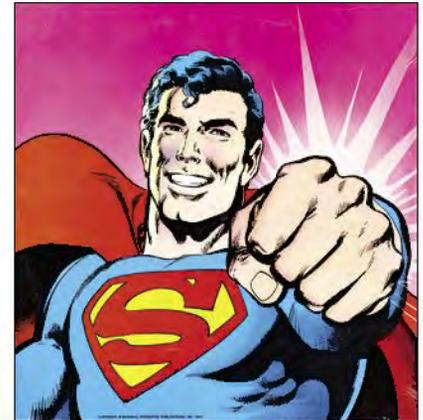
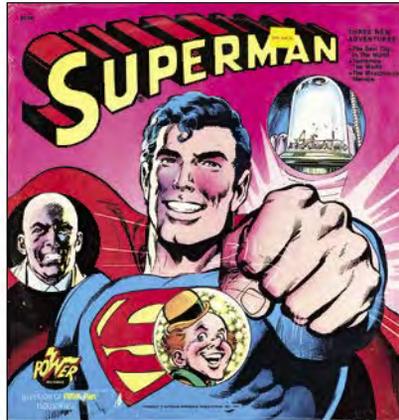
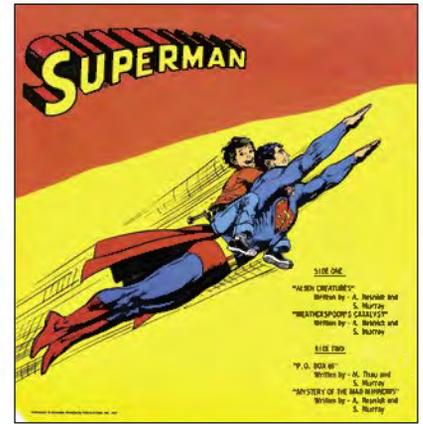
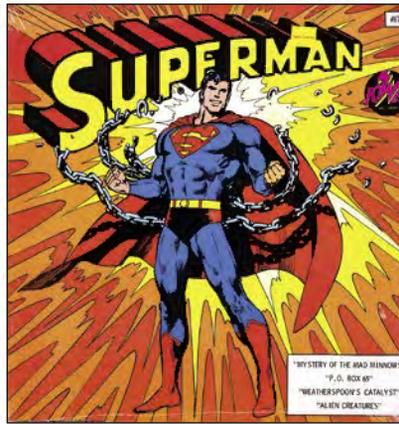
I always wondered why the Penguin never appeared on a Power Record, considering he was much more famous a foe than the Scarecrow (who, unlike the Penguin, never appeared in the 1960s TV show or the Filmation cartoon a few years later). Luckily, pop-culture journalist and fellow *BI* contributor Robert V. Conte spoke to Neal Adams while visiting the Continuity offices in 2005 and they discussed this very topic: "A lot of kids became comics fans of those records," Adams recalled. "They were good audio-visual gateways for them to learn how to read. The Penguin was supposed to be on that cover but the client [Peter Pan] either didn't have the rights to the character or didn't have a story recorded in time. I don't recall completely. Also, the first issues of some of those records had rather bland, type-only labels. That would not do, so we [Continuity] supplied art to correct that."

Unsurprisingly, Superman got just as much vinyl real estate as his World's Finest partner. The Man of Steel headlined five LPs, all simply titled *Superman*. Adams does a gloss on his own classic "busting chains" cover from *Superman* #233 for one of the LPs (numbered 8156), an image that itself was reused (with a different background color) for a Spanish-language version (though Adams' back cover for the former has been replaced by what looks like a Curt Swan Superman to me). Members of Superman's Rogues' Gallery make an appearance on the other LP (8169), with Superman extending a fist surrounded by insets of Lex Luthor, Mr. Mxyzptlk, and the Bottle City of Kandor. For one of the Book and Record LPs (BR 520), the cover features a collage of two Superman images, one of them by Adams, a shot of our hero running that appeared on a lot of other merchandise from around that time.

An Adams photo collage cover was used for the Book and Record 45 "Alien Creatures," and he provided the art for the 45 RPM-only sleeves for "Weatherspoon's Catalyst," "The Mxyzptlk Menace," and a curiously low-key "P.O. Box," which features what looks like Superman catching up on his fan mail. As undisputedly perfect a combo Adams and Batman were, his Superman was just as iconic.

Of course, no Power Record collection would be complete without Wonder Woman! The Amazing Amazon headlined two LPs (one of them being a Book and Record: "Wonder Woman vs. the War God" and "Amazons from Space"), both of them gracing covers by Adams, with interiors by Mike Nasser with Adams inking. I find the solo LP cover (almost assuredly inked by Dick Giordano) completely charming, as Wonder Woman seems to be fending off a dozen armed goons with a smile on her face. How this classic piece of WW art didn't make it onto more merchandise, I'll never know. Adams also inked Wonder Woman's sole 45 RPM Book and Record adventure, "The Secret of the Magic Tiara," with pencils by Rich Buckler. He also drew a single 45 sleeve, "The Return of Brunhilde," which was repurposed for another release (more on that in a moment).

Adams got the chance to draw Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman together in a Christmas LP, which doesn't seem to have an official title other than *Hear Three Exciting Christmas Stories with Superman, Wonder Woman, Batman* (on the record itself it simply says *Christmas Superheroes*). As we will see later on in this article, Christmas was *huge* for Peter Pan, so huge they would commission Adams to produce album art you probably would not suspect.



Flip Sides

(top) For this *Superman* LP, Adams recreated his iconic *Superman* #233 cover, while the record sleeve's back cover featured a lucky kid getting the ride of his life. (middle) Smiling Supie punches foreshortened fist on this cover, featuring bulleted headshots of two Super-foes and Kandor; while its back cover re-presented the front's art, sans add-ons. (bottom left) It wasn't often that Adams drew Plastic Man or Metamorpho, but he did so (as well as three JLA mainstays) for this *Justice League* Power Records cover. Courtesy of Rob Kelly. (bottom right) From the collection of John Schwirian, Neal's recreation of the Power Records Aquaman shot, with embellishments.

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Magic Word Silenced

(top) From *The Art of Neal Adams* vol. 2, original art for an unproduced *Shazam!* Power Record. Courtesy of Rob Kelly. (bottom inset) The Neal Adams/Tom Palmer cover for *Marvel Spotlight* #2 (Feb. 1972), introducing *Werewolf by Night*, was repurposed for (bottom) the 1974 Power Records *Curse of the Werewolf* edition.

Shazam! TM & © DC Comics. Werewolf by Night TM & © Marvel.

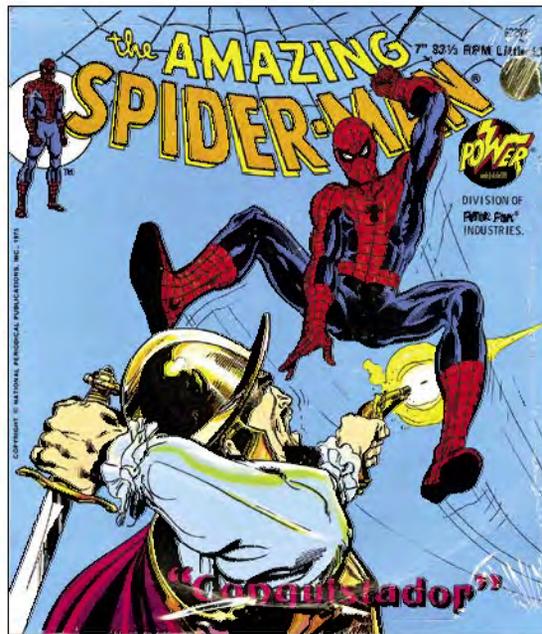
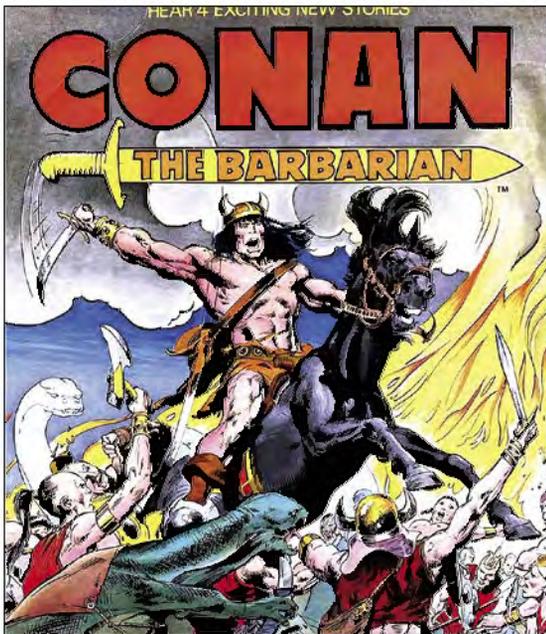
Both Superman and Wonder Woman got their holiday-themed adventures (“Light Up the Tree, Mr. President” and “The Prisoner of Christmas Island,” respectively) released as solo 45s, with Adams handling the cover for Superman. Strangely, the Batman story (“The Christmas Carol Caper”) was not given such an honor. Or, at the very least, I have never been able to find evidence it was. (That’s one of the frustrating things about being a Power Records completist—you still find “new” stuff even after collecting these things for years).

Power Records didn’t just dabble with the Big Three, however—they also released an LP called *Songs and Stories About the Justice League of America*, boasting a cover by Adams starring Wonder Woman, Aquaman, the Flash, Plastic Man, and Metamorpho! This record (a reissue of material from a 1967 LP made by a company called Tifton, meant to tie in with the Filmation DC cartoon shows on the air at the time) contains five adventures, all of them unique except Wonder Woman, which reuses “The Return of Brunhilde” and its cover art (on both the front and back of the sleeve). It also features a you’ve-got-to-hear-it-to-believe-it *musical number*, which various JLAers breaking into song about how they’re going to save the world from “criminals operating in our cities” and “monsters from the depths of the Earth.”

The “one-off” heroes were each paired up and given their own 45s, again reusing Adams’ work from the LP cover: the Flash and Aquaman, and Plastic Man and Metamorpho. Adams also drew a brand new back cover, which ran on several Book and Record 45 RPM sets, of all six DC heroes running towards the camera. I don’t know the legal wrangling it might have taken for DC to use some of the Power Records material, but this shot by Adams seemed perfect for an all-reprint *DC Special* that never was.

Before we move off DC, I previously mentioned that there was one exception to the list of DC characters Neal drew for the Power Records—and that was *Shazam!*/Captain Marvel. Power produced a single—in every sense of that word—audio adventure starring the World’s Mightiest Mortal, released only as a 45 RPM but sporting a Dick Giordano cover (doing his best C. C. Beck). For whatever reason, Captain Marvel was never included in any of the group hero shots alongside his fellow DC stars, the audio was never repurposed on another record, and it’s not even listed as part of the collection on the inside or back covers. In fact, I didn’t even know Power ever did a *Shazam!* record until I stumbled upon it on eBay many years ago. Even more oddly, in *The Art of Neal Adams* vol. 2, published in 1977, it features an Adams original of Captain Marvel, which is stated as being for a Power Record! I’ve never seen this piece anywhere other than this book; perhaps it was the original cover to the sleeve, replaced by Giordano’s piece? We may never know.





**Record Player
Swordplay**
(top left) Adams' Conan the Barbarian LP cover. Courtesy of Rob Kelly. (top right) This "Conquistador" Amazing Spider-Man Power Record cover offers fans a rare glimpse of Neal's rendition of the Wall-Crawler. Courtesy of Heritage.

Conan TM & © Conan Properties International. Spider-Man TM & © Marvel.

MARVEL COMICS

While Neal Adams did a lot of sensational work at Marvel, his output for their Power Records was comparatively small. Since most of the Marvels were adaptations of pre-existing comics, Peter Pan generally repurposed the covers to those books, for both their superheroes (Spider-Man, Fantastic Four, Hulk, Captain America) and their "Monster" line (Dracula, Frankenstein, Man-Thing, and Curse of the Werewolf [Werewolf by Night]). For *Curse of the Werewolf*, Power Records simply put a new logo onto the cover of *Marvel Spotlight* #2 by Adams and Tom Palmer, and sent it out to terrify a generation of kids not prepared to hear such scary stuff coming from their record player.

Adams' greatest contribution to the Marvel Power Records was undoubtedly his work on Conan the Barbarian. Adams inked "Big" John Buscema for "Crawler in the Mists," a truly atmospheric Conan tale for the sole 45 RPM Book and Record featuring the character, featuring a cover that is often credited to both men but to my eyes looks like all Adams. In an unusual move, this comic was later edited and expanded and then run in an actual issue of *Conan the Barbarian* (#116), reversing the standard trajectory of the Marvel Power Records.

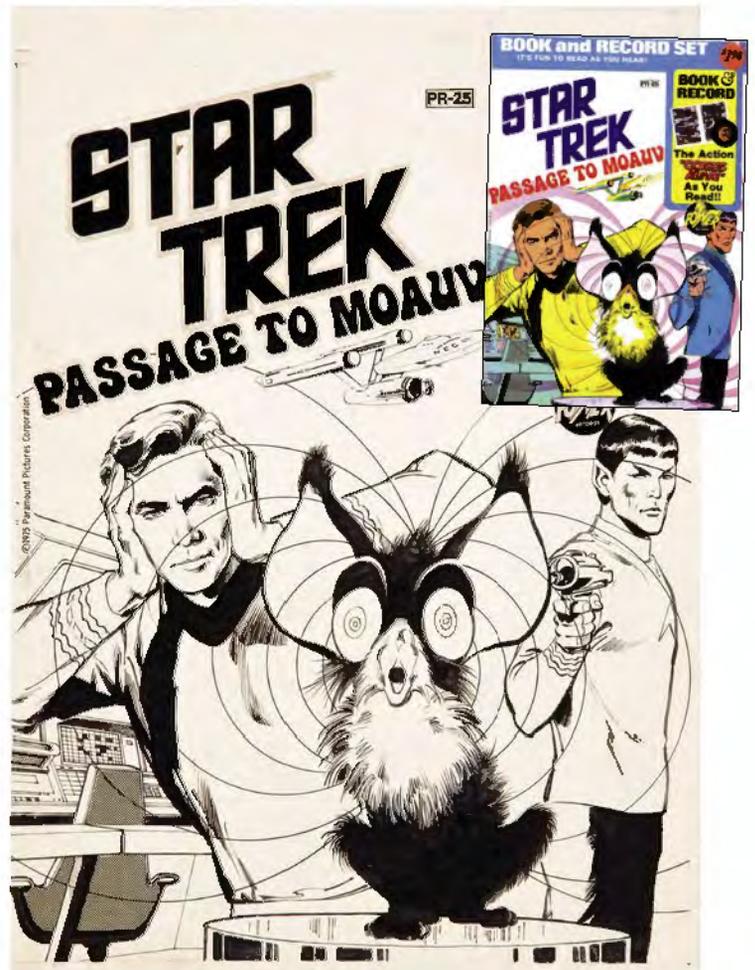
Adams also did the cover to a *Conan the Barbarian* LP, featuring "Mists" and three other similar atmospheric adventures. The credited producer is Cornell Tanassy, who clearly had a handle on this character. Between the audio content and Adams' gorgeous sleeve art, I rank their Conans as some of the best work Power Records ever did.

Adams' sole effort at a Marvel superhero was the 45 RPM sleeve for the Spider-Man adventure "The Return of the Conquistador" (here simply titled "Conquistador"), one of the rare times Adams ever drew Marvel's biggest star. It's one of Spidey's sillier Power Records excursions, given some extra oomph by Adams' peerless art.

But Power Records didn't just rely on DC and Marvel to move some vinyl. Like the aforementioned Mego Toys, they gobbled up every license that kids liked (and some they didn't). Adams' work on what we now refer to as "IP" was just as dynamic, if not as consistent or pervasive as what he did for the DC records.

TV AND MOVIE FAVORITES

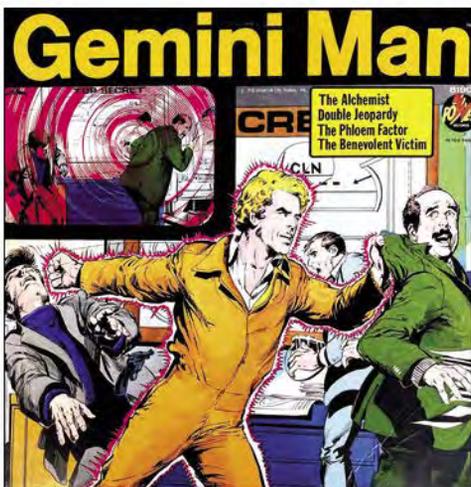
Adams' photorealistic style came in handy when he producing a number of *Star Trek* record jackets. For the 45 RPM Book and Record sets "The Crier in Emptiness" and "Passage to Moauv," we are straight-up looking at the Kirk and Spock we saw on the original series, in all-new adventures! He did the same for single 45 sleeves like "The Time Stealer" (which is essentially a *Trek/Conan* crossover in all but name) and "In Vino Veritas." *Trek* also headlined three LPs,



Boldly Going Where No Artist Had Gone Before...

...at least not with such realism! Adams nails the stars' likenesses on the *Star Trek* "Passage to Moauv" Power Record cover. Original art courtesy of Heritage.

Star Trek © CBS Studios, Inc.



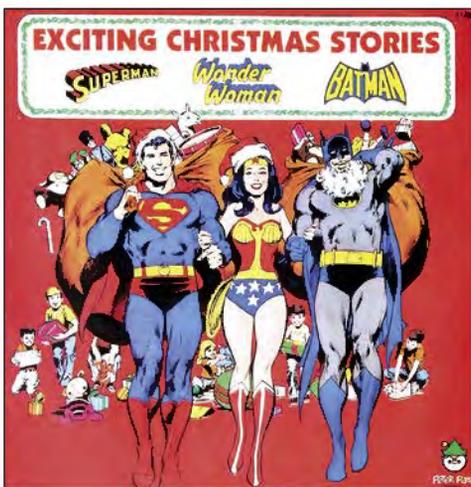
two of which bore Adams covers, front and back. *Star Trek* was a perennial seller for Peter Pan, who dusted off all this audio content in 1980 and reissued all of them with new sleeves, featuring stills from the movie. *Yawn!*

Planet of the Apes was also a big hit for Peter Pan, though for whatever reason Adams was only ever commissioned to do some art for the single 45 adventures "Battle of Two Worlds," "Dawn of the Tree People," and "Mountain of the Delphi." Given Adams' skill at likenesses, it seems strange he wasn't called on to the art for Book and Record 45s that adapted four of the five *POTA* films. I guess he had to sleep sometime.

Adams also did a cover for the *Space: 1999* Book and Record 45 "Return to the Beginning," the self-titled *Six Million Dollar Man* LP, and what to had to be one of Power Records' biggest flops, an LP for *The Gemini Man*, a TV series that ran for all 12 episodes (half of which never aired) in 1976. Adams' cover makes everything look ten times more exciting than the show ever was, which was of course why you hired him in the first place!

Speaking of Adams making things look exciting that were not—fins down, the, uh, record for that was the *Jaws* LP. Produced in 1975, *JOTS* featured three dull-as-dishwater "adventures" all centered on sharks. Since they don't use any of the voice cast (or even sound effects) usually heard on Power Records, my bet is this was pre-existing material that Peter Pan bought on the cheap, hoping they could cash in on Jawsmania. At least they sprang for a new cover, one of Adams' finest. The massive shark is truly terrifying, the only element of this record that comes close to capturing the flavor of the movie.

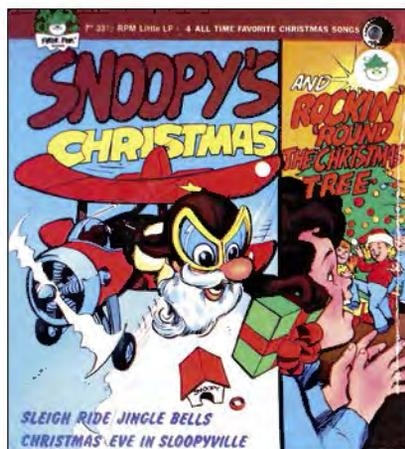
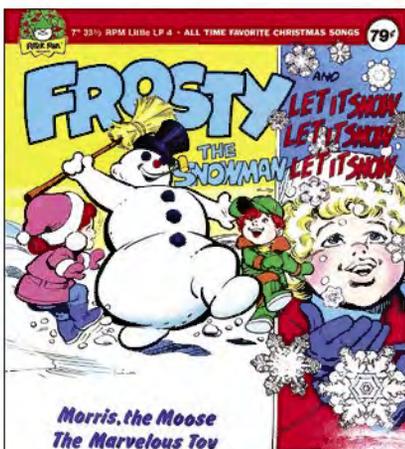
On the opposite end of the quality spectrum, however, was the ungainly titled *A Story of Dracula, the Wolfman, and Frankenstein*, an all-original Book and Record LP with cover and interior art by Adams. A beautifully pulpy story filled with all the classic monster trappings, *Story* is a complete blast, perfect for putting on the turntable during the Halloween season. I wish Power Records had commissioned more original material like this; they might have been able to carve out an identity for themselves and not be so dependent on outside licensing. Fun Fact: this album was re-released as *House of Terror!*, reusing the Adams material but with a second LP filled with goofy "spooky" songs.



CHRISTMAS

As I mentioned earlier, Christmas records were a big seller for Peter Pan. Since a lot of the material was in the public domain, the label didn't have to pay licensing fees, undoubtedly a factor when deciding what to release. Peter Pan generally kept the Power Records imprint wholly separate, except for Christmas time, when they ran back covers featuring Santa Claus letting you kids out there know there were all sorts of fun holiday records out there, like *Superman*, *Wonder Woman*, *Frosty the Snowman*, and *Rudolph*.

Even as a wee kid, I never bothered with any of the "kiddie" records, but one look at the labels for some of these 45s makes it clear that Peter Pan tapped Adams and his



Continuity crew to handle the art for these, too. Using the humor-tinged style he perfected on DC books like *Bob Hope* and *Jerry Lewis*, Adams drew covers for *Frosty the Snowman*, *Rudolph*, *Santa Claus is Comin' to Town*, *I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus*, *Bugs Bunny in 'Twas a Sight Before Christmas*, *Snoopy's Christmas*, and even the *Chipmunk Song*, a knockoff of the more famous version by Alvin and the Chipmunks. Having Adams do all the sleeves gives them sheen of class and visual consistency that makes them a cut above normal kiddie fare. Adams' signature is nowhere to be found, but the sure handed ink line is a giveaway these were the work of the master himself.

As a label, Power Records shut down in the early 1980s, and soon after Peter Pan Records would essentially close up shop. They tried rereleasing some of their '70s superhero output on cassette, using sloppily drawn "rack" cards that are light years away from the excitement Adams brought to the originals.

I still have a record player, and once in a while I give one of my Power Records a spin. But, just as importantly, I sit and stare at the covers when I do.

ROB KELLY is a podcaster, writer, artist, and pop-culture historian. He is the host/co-host of several shows on The Fire and Water Podcast Network, including TreasuryCast, Pod Dylan, Fade Out, For All Mankind, The Power Records Podcast, and many others.



end

The Most Wonderful Time of the Year

(top) You're forgiven if you don't recall TV's short-lived *Gemini Man*, but you won't forget this powerful Neal Adams cover for its Power Records spinoff! Courtesy of Rob Kelly. (bottom) Christmas records were popular for Peter Pan Records, with Neal Adams producing cover art for everything from *Superman*, *Batman*, and *Wonder Woman* adventures to new spins on children's favorites. *Frosty* and *Snoopy* scans courtesy of Rob Kelly.

Gemini Man © Universal. Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman TM & © DC Comics.