

THE TOY BOX

It's a



Christmas

by Rob Kelly

EXCITING CHRISTMAS STORIES

SUPERMAN

Wonder Woman

BATMAN



Santa's Super Helpers

Yep, that's Neal Adams art on the album cover for Power (Peter Pan) Records' *Exciting Christmas Stories with Superman/Wonder Woman/Batman* LP (that's "Long-Playing" record, whipper-snapper!).

Characters TM & © DC Comics.

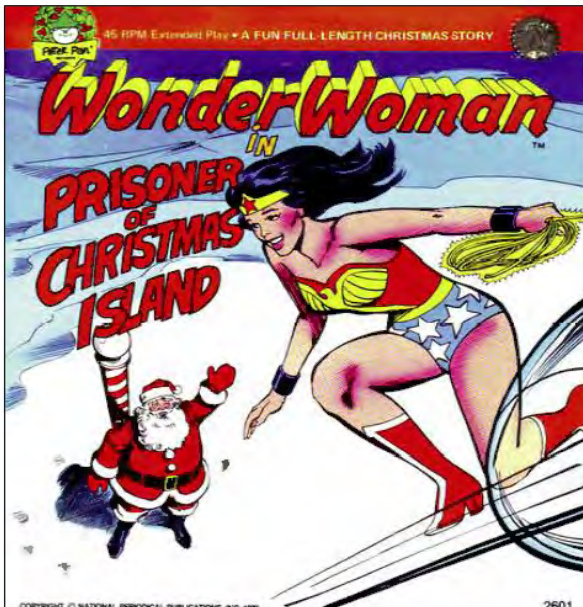
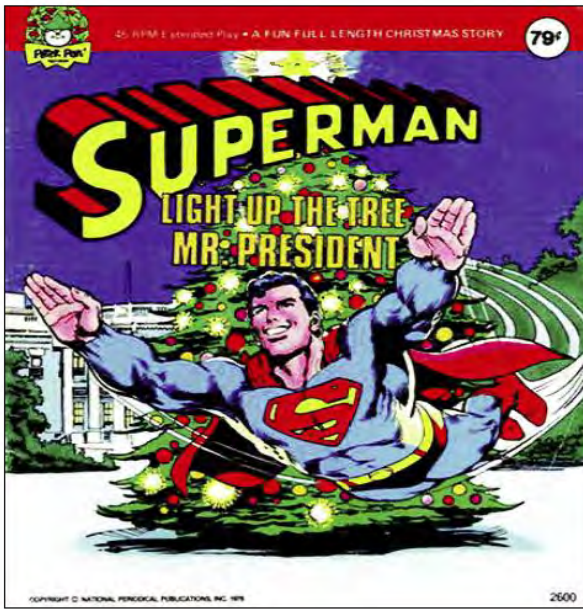
Superman stopping a power-mad scientist from launching the United States' nuclear weapons at the rest of the world. Batman, the target of a Gotham underworld conspiracy to rub him out. Wonder Woman teaming up with Santa Claus to defeat a rogue Nazi with plans to rule the planet. This sounds like a super-fun issue of *World's Finest*, or perhaps a *100-Page Super Spectacular*. Where can I get this comic?

Actually, these stories cannot be found in any DC Comic—they were audio adventures courtesy of the late, great Power Records, released on an LP in time for the 1977 Christmas season. Sporting a—let's just say it—jolly front cover by Neal Adams of the Big Three fully embracing the Christmas spirit, *Exciting Christmas Stories with Superman/Wonder Woman/Batman* (the closest we come to an official title) has our heroes each facing separate holiday-themed threats.

In *Light Up the Tree, Mr. President*, Superman discovers an evil plan hatched by a disgraced, bloodthirsty scientist Thurston Kilgore. Upon lighting the White House Christmas tree, a peace-loving President of the United States will unwittingly blow himself up as well as launch five nuclear missiles. These missiles are aimed at the rest of the world,

which will leave America standing amid the rubble. Kilgore's plan nearly comes off thanks to Superman being lured into a kryptonite trap via a kidnapped Jimmy Olsen, who was covering the event for GBS-TV. But the Man of Steel prevails by turning on the super-speed, stopping the missiles, and apprehending Kilgore, ensuring that America—and the world—has a Merry Christmas. (Superman later realized Kilgore's plan wasn't all bad, and repurposed it in the 1987 anti-nuke documentary *Superman IV: The Quest for Peace*.)

In *Christmas Carol Caper*, Batman gets a singing telegram, except it's not filled with holiday cheer—in fact, it comes from local thug Rudy Snow, a.k.a. "Rudy, the Red-Nosed Hitman," who threatens to kill Batman and Robin in time for Christmas! While on their way to a Christmas party at the Gotham South Side Mission, Rudy tries to rub out the Dynamic Duo, but instead is handed off to the police thanks to a well-aimed Batarang. It turns out that Rudy is just a small part of a larger plot—hatched in secret by crooks who frequent the Mission—to kill Batman once and for all. Luckily, the conspiracy is foiled in time and Batman, Robin, and the South Side Mission have a Merry Christmas.



Super Singles

Neal Adams returned to illustrate the record sleeves for the 45 RPM releases of (top) Superman in *Light Up the Tree, Mr. President* and (center) Wonder Woman in *Prisoner of Christmas Island* (featuring Santa Claus!). (bottom) Their *Six Million Dollar Man* holiday companion, featuring a cover illo by an unknown artist.

Superman and Wonder Woman TM & © DC Comics. Six Million Dollar Man TM & © Universal Pictures.

Finally, in *The Prisoner of Christmas Island*, Santa Claus himself makes an appearance, kidnapped by not-knowing-when-to-pack-it-in Nazis Von Richter and Brunhilde, who use a submarine to break through the North Pole ice. It turns out this whole nefarious plot is the work of Mars, the God of War, who wants to throw the world into chaos during this most peaceful of all seasons. Aphrodite counters Mars by sending in Wonder Woman, who is charged with delivering the ransom money Brunhilde demands in return for old St. Nick. It ends with Wonder Woman in her Invisible Plane chasing Brunhilde and Von Richter, attempting to stop them from bombing the world's major cities and restoring the Nazi Party to power. Of course, they are defeated and Wonder Woman returns Santa Claus to the North Pole just in time for children everywhere to have a Merry Christmas.

One of the reasons Power Records still have a devoted subset of fans, even though they haven't been in production for over 30 years and have still not been officially transferred to a format that anyone born after 1990 knows how to deal with, is that they offer uber-familiar heroes like Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman in a manner not seen before, both in style and content. Sure, as drawn by the legendary Neal Adams on the sleeve, they look just like the characters we all know and love from the comics. But in these audio adventures we get to experience them via Power Records' unique creative point of view. In *Light Up the Tree*, Superman is clearly squaring off against a stand-in for real-life nuclear war cheerleader Gen. Curtis LeMay, who never met a country he didn't want to bomb. For her part, Wonder Woman gets to do the *Brave and the Bold* thing with Santa Claus, in a story that ends with the now-dead Brunhilde riding off to Valhalla, which is regarded as a not particularly strange or noteworthy turn of events. The *pièce de résistance* is in *Christmas Carol Caper*, which features a Batman so jolly that he wanders down the streets of Gotham singing Christmas carols, followed by telling jokes at a speech at the South Side Mission (for the um, *record* ... Batman killed). You got the sense that no one at DC signed off on this material and the staff at Power Records was left to their own devices when crafting the stories. After all, we *are* talking about a Christmas record, ostensibly aimed at little kids, yet it features a potential nuclear holocaust, Batman almost being shot dead, and Nazis preparing to fire-bomb innocent civilians. All this kind of stuff routinely happened in the comics, of course, but when brought to life by Power Records' actors and sound effects, these story elements seem so much more vivid and intense.

Exciting Christmas Stories with Superman/Wonder Woman/Batman was issued as an LP only (no book-and-record combo, unfortunately), with two slightly different covers—one in red, one in green, each with a reworded title. Both the Superman and Wonder Woman adventures were repurposed onto solo 45s featuring new sleeve art, though for some reason *Christmas Carol Caper*—by far the most memorable story on the record—was not. Considering how many Batman records were produced during Power's heyday, it seems odd that he was left behind this time around.

Speaking of odd, it's worth mentioning Power Records' other Christmas-themed releases: None of the Marvel heroes got in on the holiday action, but the Six Million Dollar Man sure did—he got an entire Christmas-centric LP all to himself, an honor not even DC's Big Three were afforded. There were also some records aimed at the younger set, like *Frosty the Snowman* and *The Chipmunk Song*, also featuring covers by Neal Adams. So no matter what characters you liked, or how old you were, Power Records ensured you were parked in front of your record player on Christmas morning.

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