



BY Rob Kelly

***It's Fun to Read As You Hear!***

Spider-Man proved a popular character for Power Records in the 1970s. Art by John Romita, Sr.

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It should come as no surprise that the *Amazing Spider-Man* was unquestionably the “marquee” character for Power Records’ book-and-record adaptations of Marvel Comics characters, taking up the majority of vinyl real estate alongside his fellow stars Captain America, the Fantastic Four, the Hulk, Conan the Barbarian, and assorted monster characters (whose Power Records we discussed back in *BACK ISSUE* #36). But despite being the headliner of over a dozen different Power Records releases (in both 45 RPM and LP formats), when you’re talking about Spider-Man as a Power Records star, you’re really only talking about six stories: “Mark of the Man-Wolf,” “Invasion of the Dragon Men,” “The Mad Hatter of Manhattan,” “Return of the Conquistador,” “The Bells of Doom,” and “The Abominable Showman.” Power Records never met a story they couldn’t repack, and they got a lot of mileage out of these six audio adventures.

Undoubtedly, the most famous of these stories is the book-and-record adventure “The Mark of The Man-Wolf” (an abbreviated version of *The Amazing Spider-Man* #124, by Gerry Conway, Gil Kane, John Romita, Sr., and Tony Mortellaro), where we learn that J. Jonah Jameson’s astronaut son John, having brought back a mysterious, glowing rock from a recent trip to the moon, is turning into the snarling, savage Man-Wolf at night. As if this wasn’t enough drama, all this takes place just as Spider-Man has reached his limit when it comes to JJJ’s vilifying him in *The Daily Bugle*. Spidey gets so enraged after reading one too many hit-pieces that he heads to JJJ’s office, ready to do ... something. He arrives smack in the middle of the Man-Wolf attacking Jameson, and Spidey succeeds in chasing him off. He is shocked when Jameson demands Spider-Man not continue the hunt, and even threatens the Wall-Crawler if he does. Spider-Man, perplexed and furious, storms off.

Later, J. Jonah gets his son to tell him how all this came about, and even though John warns him to leave, Jonah doesn’t listen. Sure enough, John Jameson turns into a werewolf again, ready to attack his father. Spider-Man, never one to listen to JJJ, shows up and tests a “theory”—that the moon rock around the Man-Wolf’s neck is causing the transformations. In a wonderfully vivid, genuinely frightening (to the then-nine-year-old me, at least) moment, we hear Spidey forcibly rip the moon-rock pendant off of the Man-Wolf’s neck, sounding like it took a nice hunk of skin along with it. The voice actor playing the Man-Wolf (sadly, uncredited) lets loose a piercing howl, a moment as powerful anything Power Records ever produced.

With John back to normal, JJJ is unwilling to bring his son to a doctor, because of the publicity that might generate. Spider-Man, disgusted, walks away, ignoring Jameson’s protests—a typically downbeat ending for a Power Records Marvel Comics story.

While the other Spider-Man stories don’t quite reach the level of oomph that “The Mark of the Man-Wolf” does (maybe because “Man-Wolf” is the only Spider-Man story adapted from an actual Spidey comic book), they all have their moments of fun, excitement, and pure goofiness that were the hallmark of Power Records.

In “Invasion of the Dragon Men” (the only other Spider-Man story to be produced as both a book-and-record set), an astronomy class heads out into the woods to do some star-gazing. Two kids, Jimmy and Sue, sneak off to neck in the woods (although from the way the voice actors play it, it sounds like its a bit more than that!). As written, Jimmy’s an unfunny jerk, but for some reason he’s able to talk Sue into making out (Sue, you can do better). A few moments later, the young couple come

**Spidey vs. Monsters!**

(below) "Invasion of the Dragon-Men" featured an original story, while (right) "The Mark of the Man-Wolf" adapted *Amazing Spider-Man* #124.

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across a small army of reptile men, led by an actual fire-breathing dragon! The dragon in question is named Draco, self-described "King of the Dragon-Men!"

The next morning, Peter Parker's spider-sense goes off, and (after giving Mary Jane the brush-off) he investigates as Spider-Man. He finds Draco and his men operating in an underground base. Despite Draco's impressive size and strength, Spider-Man mocks Draco throughout the story, culminating in a battle atop the Empire State Building. We learn that Draco is a human named Demosthenes Drake who had his blood mixed with a giant species of iguana. Draco lunges for Spidey, only to seemingly plummet to his death. I say "seemingly," because Spider-Man finds a tiny iguana, just as it crawls away into a hole in a wall. Does this mean Draco might return some day? We'll never know, since Power Records didn't do sequels.

The other Spider-Man adventures were audio stories only, appearing all together on an LP, as well as on individual 45s. In "The Mad Hatter of Manhattan!," a Batman-esque crook goes on a crime wave, using a hat of his own invention that gives the wearer almost superhuman powers. In "The Return of the Conquistador," an egocentric Spanish History professor believes he is the reincarnation of an ancient conquistador, bent on taking over the world, one murder at a time.

In "The Bells of Doom," Spidey meets a supervillain named Ultra-Sonic Man, who is seeking revenge against members of the recording industry (and that makes him a supervillain *how?*), but decides to try and take out Spider-Man first. *Good plan!* Finally, in "The Abominable Showman," Peter and Mary Jane go to see a magic act by a guy named Merlin. It seems harmless enough, but nevertheless Peter's spider-sense tells him there's danger. Turns out Merlin's three "assistants" (a rope, a monkey, and a robot) are helping Merlin get revenge on the university eggheads that didn't recognize his vast intellect. Thankfully, Spider-Man puts a stop to all of it before Merlin's plan can come off.

Spider-Man was played by two different actors (one in "Man-Wolf," and one in the other recordings), both of them doing a solid job in the dual role of Peter Parker/Spider-Man (each use the old voice actor's trick of dropping their voice an octave when meek Parker changes into the heroic Spidey). The sound effects are uniformly powerful and evocative (even though the sound of Spider-Man swinging away is the same one as Superman flying into the sky—Power Records knew how to save money), and there are some just plain odd and/or heavy moments for what are meant to be children's records—in "Return of the Conquistador," two cops discuss a victim that's had his ear sliced off (!); in "Bells of Doom," there's a reference to poet Rod McKuen (kids love poet humor!); and I have to wonder what a parent might have thought if the only part of "Invasion of the Dragon Men" they overheard was Jimmy and Sue getting hot and heavy.

The two book-and-record sets make for great packages, featuring top-flight creators (the aforementioned Conway, Kane, and Romita on "The Mark of the Man-Wolf," and Larry Hama, Dick Giordano, and Terry Austin on the art for "Invasion of the Dragon Men") on the accompanying comic book. For whatever reason, Power Records did not see fit to put that kind of effort on the jacket art for the LP-only Spider-Man records; both front and back sleeves feature sloppy, sketchy artwork that looks like it was done in-house rather than by anyone at Marvel.





### Goofy Villains

(right) From Heritage and the Hama/Giordano/Austin art team, an original-art page from the "Dragon-Men" comic, which outclasses the mediocre sleeve art on Power Records' other Spidey entries (above).

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I was curious whether Gerry Conway had any hand in the adaptation of his story for the Power Records version, and here's what he said, giving us some additional insight as to how the Power Records came about in the first place: "No, I had nothing to do with the adaptation or the record, sorry to say. I do recall that this was the product of a deal made by Martin Goodman's son, Chip Goodman, while Martin was out of town. Apparently Chip sold all media rights for all Marvel properties to some guy who offered him a \$5000 advance, with a five-year term, and no guarantee that he'd actually produce anything. This record and a couple of other things (*Stan Lee at Carnegie Hall*, I believe, was one) were the only projects that ever went anywhere as a result of that deal. Needless to say, I heard Martin wasn't too happy with Chip as a result."

Sadly, none of the Power Records material has ever been collected onto a modern platform; apparently various copyright issues prevent it. Which is a darn shame, because the material, with its corny jokes and audio pops and hisses, still works on modern audiences—on my Power Records blog ([powerrecord.blogspot.com](http://powerrecord.blogspot.com)), I've posted entire book-and-record sets, along with MP3 audio files, and on almost every one there's a comment by some now-grown comics fan who says they play the records for their kids, who love them. Power Records truly were powerful!

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