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Enter the Dragon team

Building on the success of its animation work on Dragon Booster, Canada's Nerd Corps unveiled its first original kids properties in Cannes last week. Dave Collins reports.



By giving themselves job titles like El Presidente, Supreme Commander and even Dungeon Master, it's clear that the staff of Nerd Corps Entertainment like to approach their work with a sense of humour. But that's only fitting because the Canadian company specialises in entertaining 3D animation for children.

Formed in 2002 by CEO Asaph M Fipke (aka Supreme Commander) and senior VP of production Chuck Johnson (Dungeon Master), it gathered together the best "nerds" and scored a major success with the animation Dragon Booster. A coproduction between The Story Hat and Alliance Atlantis, the series established Nerd's reputation by winning the Best Animated Series Award at Canada's equivalent of the Emmys, the 2005 Gemini Awards.

Now the company is capitalising on that track record by developing its own intellectual properties in the form of two new action-comedy series, Storm Hawks (top left, 52x60') and Teem Awethum (52x11'), both coproduced with Canadian broadcaster YTV.

Storm Hawks follows five mismatched teens in a fantastical world called Atmos as they battle against enemies with the help of motorcycles that can turn into planes. While Teem Awethum (the word 'awesome' pronounced with a lisp) is about four geeks who face all sorts of adversities, ranging from robot substitute teachers to killer poodles.

"From day one, we wanted to create a strategy that would build Storm Hawks into a global brand," explains Ken Faier (El Presidente, right). "We felt 52 episodes would be a great way to truly establish the property. YTV's belief in the property is clear and it gives us the ability to realise our goal. We're in discussions with a number of international broadcasters and partners to close our financing on Storm Hawks and expect to have other announcements shortly."



Those developments should come in the aftermath of MipTV, and are likely to include a US broadcast deal and a toy deal. "We're in pre-production on Storm Hawks," Faier says. "And once we make those announcements we will greenlight the production."

"Our focus at Mip was on those two properties. We will now be closing off the financing on Storm Hawks and hoping to find probably one additional broadcast partner internationally for the development of Teem Awethum. The goal on Teem Awethum would be to produce 52 episodes for delivery in 2007, although it could creep into 2008." Storm Hawks and Teem Awethum were both created by Fipke (who also has the nickname Ace). Faier says: "On Storm Hawks we're working with Rob Hoegee, the story editor for another children's series, Teen Titans.

"Ace's vision is to push a very character-driven comedy, but within an action world. It's about these kids who take on a role as heroes but ultimately they're just a bunch of kids having fun. But of course they do manage to win out at the end of the day, for the most part." The show is influenced by Teen Titans, but Nerd has the philosophy that it doesn't want to imitate a lot of children's cartoons.

"It's really about getting away from the overly dramatic, action smash 'em up," says Faier, "and about defining great characters, great comedy and great character relationships. That drives the show, rather than good versus evil, although that's also in there."

The company's aim is partly achieved through its use of 3D technology. "We take our influences from the great things that 2D can do in terms of giving characters emotional acting. But at the same time, we're taking advantage of what 3D can do in terms of flying the camera, especially

