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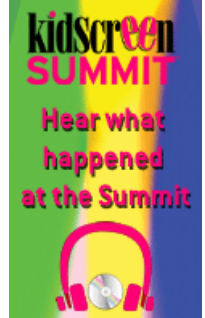
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- not at all
- very little
- some
- a major impact

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October 1, 2005 - KidScreen Magazine
Up Front

Hot Talent: Nerd Corps refocuses its glasses on original series

by Lianne Stewart



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When you say the word "nerd," most folks conjure up an image of a zit-ridden teenager with pants pulled up to his armpits, a pocket protector and thick black-framed glasses. But for Asaph (Ace) Fipke, being a nerd is all about having relentless enthusiasm and an against-all-odds positive attitude - which is why he named his two-year old Vancouver, Canada-based production company Nerd Corps. (Not, as you might suspect, because he likes to play Battlefield and Civilization on-line until 4 a.m.)

Nerd Corps was born when AAC Kids and The Story Hat hired Fipke in June 2003 to help develop Dragon Booster as a 39 x half-hour CGI series. Fipke, who used to work at Mainframe Entertainment as VP of production and development, called on his former colleague Chuck Johnson to create a four-minute animated trailer for the series. (Now senior VP of production at Nerd Corps, Johnson also set up the Vancouver Film School's CGI animation program.)

Fast forward about 30 months: The first season of Dragon Booster is on-air, and the team has grown by more than 80 full-timers - including a former AAC Kids VP of programming and distribution. Ken Faier jumped ship last month to join Nerd Corps as president, but he'll continue to operate out of Toronto. In addition to overall management duties, Faier will spend about half his working hours on the road setting up financing, co-production partnerships, distribution and licensing & merchandising for the company's burgeoning catalogue.

Nerd Corps has shifted focus lately to develop original productions, which is where Fipke concentrated his energies at Mainframe. He and Faier are currently shopping for Canadian, French, British and U.S. co-pro partners and presales for Storm Hawks, an action-adventure series that should be completed by mid-2007. The project centers around a group of kids on a quest to collect a set of missing magical crystals - each one powerful enough to cause vast destruction if it were to fall into the wrong hands.

Story lines are still in development, but Faier says the 52 x half-hour show is already attracting serious interest with its unique graphic style. On the surface, the animation appears to be high-end 2-D, which is in line with its budget of US\$350,000 per half hour. But in fact, it's created in-house using top-of-the-line CGI technology. This allows the company to produce a 2-D look, but with all the layering, depth, richness and control that's achieved with CGI. Once production is underway, Nerd Corps will likely handle the animation itself to save the expense of finding and paying for an overseas service partner.

Next up, but still in the very early stages of development, is a project that speaks to Fipke's inner nerd. Team Awesome is about a group of four very ardent geeks who fight off everything that's cool, and Faier



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says it's appealing because it taps into that little part in all of us that feels awkward and spastic. But comedies don't tend to have the merchandise pull that action-adventure series do, so Team Awesome will be a more challenging sell to co-pro partners.

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