

Development slate Emanata Studios

Mark Talbot, chief creative officer at Emanata Studios, reveals how the fledgling prodco from Scottish publishing giant DC Thomson is aspiring to become a British version of Marvel Studios. **By Nico Franks**

UK-based prodco Beano Studios and its owner, comic publisher DC Thomson, launched Emanata Studios late last year to develop the UK's largest comic book archive for film and television. The mission? To create a British equivalent to Marvel Studios and its famous cinematic universe, worth an estimated US\$25bn at the box office.

The new company came flying out of the traps last year, its deals in the US with Westbrook Studios, Jerry Bruckheimer TV and Fox Entertainment signalling the demand overseas for comic IP with a quintessentially British spirit.

now has a range of projects in the works across drama, comedy and animation for adults and young adults, while Beano Studios continues to focus on younger audiences.

In the US, where the Dundee- and London-based firm is represented by CAA, Emanata is working with Jada Pinkett Smith and Will Smith's Westbrook Studios on a high-concept drama based on the first British comic book superhero, The Amazing Mr X, who features in the Dandy.

Emanata also has a live-action comedy drama based on Dennis the Menace in development with Jerry Bruckheimer TV and CBS Productions, while Fox Entertainment has picked

a live-action comedy pilot script based on a yet-to-be-revealed but well-known Dandy character.

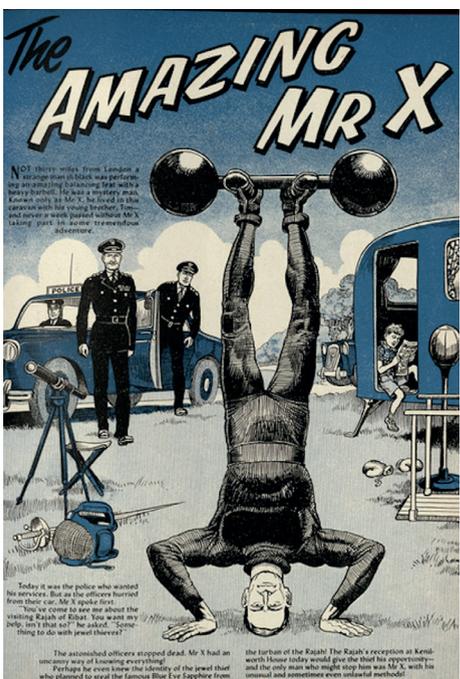
Talbot, who is London-based and reports to Beano Studios chairman James Clayton and CEO David Guppy, is buzzing to be able to blow the dust off some long-forgotten but soon-to-be fondly remembered IP in the likes of Bunty and The Supercats.

But what makes British comic book characters different from US superheroes, apart from having worse teeth? "A lot of the US comic characters teach kids about rules and being good citizens, like Superman, Captain America and even Spider-Man. But the DC Thomson comics are more about mischievousness, rebellion and hilarity," says Talbot. "They're not following rules. They're causing chaos. They're fundamentally good and kind people, but they have fun. And that's what a lot of the IP inspires in the writers."

As the longest-running weekly comic in the world, which published its 4,000th issue in 2019, the Beano has legions of fans not just in the UK but internationally. As a result, Talbot is keen to develop projects for streamers with global appeal.

Meanwhile, the process of developing comic book IP from decades ago for the screen offers Emanata a chance to put a modern twist on characters that are both well known and lesser known.

"When you look at the readers of the Beano, it's boys and girls and we want our shows to be there for boys, girls, men and women. We're very conscious of making sure our slate is representative, and that could be in terms of sex, gender, race, ethnicity – all of those important things."



Westbrook Studios is working on a drama based on The Amazing Mr X

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The DC Thomson comics archive, which reaches as far back as the 1930s, includes such iconic titles as the Beano, Dandy, Commando, Hotspur, Victor, Jackie and Bunty and more than 2,000 stories and characters, among them Dennis the Menace, Desperate Dan, The Amazing Mr X, Nick Jolly the Flying Highway Man and Bananaman.

Chief creative officer Mark Talbot moved over to Emanata Studios last year from sister company Beano Studios, which he joined from Hat Trick Productions in 2019. Emanata

up the rights to Bananaman. An adult animated series is also in the works with Fox-backed Bento Box (*Bob's Burgers*).

Over in the UK, Screen Scotland, backed by the Scottish Government and The National Lottery, has funded a drama written by Rae Brunton and based on the character Nick Jolly the Flying Highway Man, who featured in the Hotspur comic.

It is also developing live-action dramas with each of Sky Studios and Drama Republic and two adult animated projects with MTV Entertainment Group, while UKTV has commissioned