

Markham firm Transformed into comic book giant



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

BY CAROL COOPER
Special

With all hard work, no play and a little luck, two York Region brothers have transformed a favourite childhood toy into a comic book success story.

The April issue of Transformers: Generation 1 from Pat and Roger Lee's Markham-based company, Dreamwave Productions, was April's best-selling comic book in North America.

With a third run in the works, the first and second printings have sold a total of 210,000 copies, outselling publications from comic book giants Marvel, DC and Image.

"It just has been absolutely incredible," said president, art director and penciler, 26-year-old Pat Lee of Richmond Hill.

"Our company has been through ups and downs, more downs than ups, and the comic book industry wasn't the strongest place to be."

Creating comic books started as a childhood hobby for the brothers. They have little formal training in the field.

"When we were young, we were always drawing comic books," Pat said.

"When we were 12 or 13 years old, we did our first Transformers comic book in our backyard. It was just for fun. It was just something we could show our friends.

'Four years ago, we had no idea we would be a publishing company.'

"Little did we know that we would have a day like this, when we would have a licence for Transformers."

Transformer toys, launched during the early '80s through a TV show, are vehicles such as cars, trucks and planes that can be manipulated to "transform" into robots.

They were favourites of the Lee brothers.

"We collected the toys from the beginning when they first came out," Pat said.

"We were so into the cartoon

show. We memorized the lyrics, the sounds, we memorized everything. Even to this day, we know the lyrics to the song."

A one-page illustration started off Dreamwave's recent success when Wizard magazine asked Pat to create a Transformer art piece for its '80s nostalgia edition.

Based on overwhelmingly positive reader response, Dreamwave beat out 10 big-name competitors to win licensing rights from Hasbro, Transformers' manufacturer, to produce comic books and other items such as posters and calendars.

The licence came in December 2001, just as the studio was preparing to go out on its own. Previously Image Comics published Dreamwave's original comics such as Darkminds, WarLands, Echo and Banished Knights.

Transformers: Generation 1 is the first independent publication for Dreamwave Productions. The company began four years ago with five employees and worked out of Pat's old bedroom.

See TOYS, page 12.

Roger (left) and Pat Lee transform a model of domesticity, the Dirt Devil, into a Transformer poster-eater. The brothers are behind Markham-based Dreamwave Productions, a fast-growing comic book publisher.

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