

Tom and Jerry head to the bigscreen

Warner Bros. playing cat and mouse game

By MARC GRASER

Warner Bros. is turning to Tom and Jerry to create its own "Alvin and the Chipmunks"-like family franchise.

Plans are to bring the constantly warring cat and mouse to life as CG characters that run around in live-action settings.

Studio-based Dan Lin, currently producing the upcoming "Sherlock Holmes" and exec producer on "Terminator: Salvation," will adapt the classic Hanna-Barbera property as an origin story that reveals how Tom and Jerry first meet and form their rivalry before getting lost in Chicago and reluctantly working together during an arduous journey home.



Eric Gravning is penning the script.

Scribe wrote "B-Minor," which has Ron Howard attached to helm at Universal; "Mr. Burnout," which is set up at Participant Prods.; as well as "Class Act" at Walden Media, with Halle Berry aboard to star.

Warners owns the rights to Hanna-Barbera's slate of popular animated properties and has several of them in development for bigscreen adaptation.

Those include Robert Rodriguez's version of "The Jetsons" and producer Donald De Line's "Yogi Bear."

The live-action/animated combo has worked for Warners before.

The studio successfully turned "Scooby-Doo" into a live-action franchise with two films that earned a combined \$457 million theatrically and a direct-to-DVD feature in the works. It cast the Looney Tunes characters opposite Michael Jordan in "Space Jam" long before that, and there was Joe Dante's "Looney Tunes: Back in Action," starring Brendan Fraser, in 2003.

Interest in the new projects certainly ramped up after "Alvin and the Chipmunks" earned a whopping \$360 million worldwide, besting even Fox's predictions for the pic, which was budgeted at \$60 million. A sequel was quickly greenlit, with the singing rodents skedded to hit the screen again in 2010.

Revenue potential from worldwide box office, DVD, games and merchandise sales, as well as the potential for sequels and earnings from TV and homevid spinoffs, is considered too good to pass up.

The built-in familiarity of the characters has studio bosses feeling they're not taking the kind of risk associated with creating a new property marketing mavens must promote from scratch.

"Tom and Jerry" originated as a series of 114 animated shorts, produced by MGM's toon studio between 1940 and 1960, and won seven Academy Awards. New toons were produced after that, and Warner Bros. released "Tom and Jerry: The Movie" in 1992 as a feature-length toon.

Lin will produce "Tom and Jerry" through his Lin Pictures, while Jon Silk will co-produce.

Lin is also producing Cameron Diaz starrer "The Box" and Ricky Gervais starrer "This Side of Truth," and he's exec producer on Rodriguez's "Shorts."