

Disturbing Muslim Cartoon Hunts for US Airtime

The most famous, all-American superheroes like Batman, Superman and Spider-Man are always poised to make another leap into the American consciousness, no matter how long they've been out of cutting-edge popularity.

But, judging from a discussion panel at the most recent Comic-Con event in San Diego, a more insidious form of "superhero" is also lying in wait in an attempt to gain popularity with America's children.

Known as *The 99*, the proposed half-hour animated series follows the exploits of 99 superheroes, who each represent an attribute of the Muslim god *Allah*. The show was produced in 2010 and airs in several overseas nations, but has thus far been unable to land on U.S. television screens despite the fact that the children's TV cable network The Hub was supposed to debut the program in January 2011.

But now, according to the members of the Comic-Con panel called "The 99: The Controversy Continues"—including series executive producer Naif al-Mutawa, story editor Stan Berkowitz, writers Alan Burnett and Henry Gilroy, and managing editor for The 99 comics Marie Javins—the show may receive a new lease on life via an unusual move by officials at The Hub.

"The Hub remains the official home for *The 99* in America, but since they've been holding off airing it, they just recently gave us permission to try and find a new home for it," said Berkowitz. "If another channel decides to pick it up, The Hub will let it go very easily into their hands."

That surprising piece of news came amid an array of sadly unsurprising comments by the rest of the panel, who all scoffed at the idea that the show was designed to indoctrinate

children into accepting the Muslim religion. Yet during an airing of episode 20 from the series, it was clear that the show is awash in Muslim symbolism if not direct messages and that viewers are supposed to root for Muslim characters to save the day.

Thankfully, the episode shown was so poorly made that it's unlikely any other self-respecting channel will take a chance airing it, either.

With a confusing plot and dialogue that was overly expository yet not entertaining, the episode focused on a young Muslim child who awakens from a nightmare about a nuclear explosion and tries to figure out how to prevent it from occurring. A well-meaning yet foolhardy Muslim scientist is nearly done constructing the device in the real world, claiming that it will solve the world's energy problems.

But, someone with more sinister intentions is attempting to steal the device, and a woman member of the 99 superheroes springs into action to make sure the device is deactivated before either side can get hold of it. While this may sound exciting, be assured it isn't. The cheaply computerized animation makes all the humans look and move like androids. This made it hard to be sympathetic to the lead characters or take any of the action seriously.

The clunky dialogue is likely to be confusing to most young children, and the producers and writers seem to be missing the irony of creating a show in which Muslim characters are fighting over a nuclear device. So much for breaking stereotypes.