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German fund Academy pitches \$42m into three Inferno projects

Jeremy Kay in Los Angeles

02 February 2005

Bill Johnson and Jim Seibel's production and financing house Inferno Distribution has received \$42m to finance three projects in 2005 from German film fund, Academy.

The first of the projects is *Southland Tales*, Richard Kelly's follow-up to *Donnie Darko* that centres on a heatwave that culminates in a huge July 4 party in the Los Angeles area. Seann William Scott and Sarah Michelle Gellar star. Darko Entertainment, Cherry Road Films and Persistent Entertainment are producing with Inferno.

Peaceful Warrior is based on Dan Millman's bestselling self-help novel *Way Of The Peaceful Warrior* with Victor Salva attached to direct. Inferno will produce with Sobini Films and DEJ Productions.

License To Steal is based on the story of Walter Shaw Jr, the frustrated son of an inventor who becomes a jewel thief with connections to the mafia.

"We noticed from the start that Inferno was putting an emphasis on material and that attracted us to working with them," Academy managing director Oliver Hengst said.

"Bill and Jim have rapidly established themselves as substantial and reputable producers in addition to their growing foreign sales arm, and we are happy to have a partner like Inferno to bring strong projects to our entrepreneurs."

"Jim and I are focused on delivering high quality, US theatrically released films to our international partners," Inferno's Johnson added.

"We have enjoyed an excellent working relationship with the management and entrepreneurs of Academy as well as their banking partner ABN AMRO. We appreciate the support they've given us this year and look forward to working together on our current and future slate of films."

Inferno is currently in production on *Just Friends* starring Ryan Reynolds, Amy Smart Anna Faris and Chris Klein. Roger Kumble is directing and New Line will handle domestic distribution.

The other Academy managing directors are Wolfgang Schamburg, Thomas Bone-Winkel and Ernst-August Schnieder.