

New breed of superhero descends on Hamleys

George Sandeman

Superman will not be the only superhero mistaken for a bird or a plane when Emily and her flying wheelchair announce themselves to the world at Hamleys this week.

The new hero on the block is the creation of Dan White, 44. He named the character after his daughter, who suffers from spina bifida, seven years ago when she was given her first wheelchair.

To ease the transition Mr White tried to show his daughter other disabled people who she could relate to on television. "But there was nothing," he told *The Guardian*. "Some educational stuff but nothing fun. No one there just as them, rather than 'the character in the wheelchair'. So I did something about it."

Starting in his front room in Hampshire, he created The Department of Ability and a crew of superheroes out to save the world led by Emily, now ten, with her flying wheelchair.

He posted his creations on the Facebook pages of various disability groups and drew such a following that one bone disease charity, Strongbones, got in touch and offered its support.

Now his comic book, which Mr White has been working on full-time, will be launched at Hamleys in London. The store has dedicated three floors to the launch.

Guests include the Paralympic gold medallists Tanni Grey-Thompson and Hannah Cockroft, who appear in the comic, and more than 300 fans are also expected to attend the launch next Sunday.

An indication of how far Mr White has come from sketching characters in his spare time as recently as last year is the backing he has received from Stan Lee, the comic book magnate behind much-loved heroes including Spider-Man, Thor, Iron Man and the Hulk.

"It's incredible," Mr White said. "With the most creative, brilliant, globally known creator of comics and superheroes interested in this project, it will mean that finally disability has its most well-known creative champion."