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Commercial Preview

men in RED

BUDWEISER'S
SUPER BOWL
CONTENDER

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Men in Red

Budweiser's Super Bowl Contender

By Carolyn Giardina

Like the NFL game itself, watching and evaluating Super Bowl commercials has become a part of pop culture. And in this arena, Budweiser has made a name for itself, traditionally creating some of the most talked-about commercials. In recent years, its hits included the highly successful "Frogs" campaign, "Clydesdales," a live-action spot that used visual effects to show the Budweiser icons playing a game of football; and "Lobster," which used visual effects to bring a Bud-bearing lobster to life. The work is typically remembered for its high production value, humor, memorable story – and spots like these have not only hit the right note with viewers but have won prestigious honors in advertising competitions.

Each January, Anheuser-Busch reviews a series of newly produced ads for consideration for the early part of the year. That includes the Super Bowl (and this year Anheuser-Busch has booked the most time of any advertiser) and the Anheuser-Busch Annual Convention. Greg Popp, who is senior VP/group executive producer at Budweiser lead agency DDB Chicago, explained that in selecting its Super Bowl lineup, Anheuser-Busch looks for the work that will have the broadest appeal. This year Anheuser-Busch has produced around 10 Budweiser ads, as well as some for Bud Light.

Among them is "Little Red People," a visually stunning, action-filled :30 created by first-time director Deak Ferrand, an animator/matte painter at Santa Monica-based RIOT Pictures, RIOT's digital effects unit. The ad also marks one of the first RIOT jobs since completing the integration of sister companies POP Animation, POP Film

and Digital Magic. POP Sound remains a separate entity. RIOT is also finishing a massive renovation this quarter.

"Little Red People" features a red-uniformed team of roller bladers skating through a magical red tunnel. At the end, the viewer learns that they are inside a neon Budweiser sign in a bar, and the "Little Red People" are keeping the sign illuminated with their movement.



"With Budweiser, we try to take advantage of the different icons, whether it be the Clydesdales or the truck," explained Don Pogany, DDB Chicago's senior VP/group creative director. "The idea [in "Little Red People"] was to use something you see in every bar, a neon sign. It's to our advantage to leverage the icons that they have had for years."

Kevin Kearns, DDB associate creative director and art director for the spot, said, "The great thing about 'Little Red People' is that we explain the sign," something he likened to a catchphrase. "We want people to look at the signs [in bars] differently."

"Generally for Super Bowl [consideration] you want it to be more visually driven," explained DDB's Pogany. "The key is to ground it in some way... give it a down-to-earth moment." A short line at the end of the spot gives it that moment.

The Greenlight

DDB associate creative director and copywriter Bart Culberson explained that the infancy of "Little Red Men"

actually goes back two years when the team was looking at the sign, and thought it might be "funny if there were guys in there." They dismissed the idea initially, and then revisited the concept and decided to develop it.

"We had a spot that we knew would be expensive to produce. And AB doesn't usually spend millions on an ad," Popp explained, adding that DDB went to companies such as ILM but the bids all came back in the seven figure range. That's when he heard of Deak's interest in directing and RIOT came up with creative production techniques to "make an unaffordable spot affordable."

Ferrand created a storyboard to show the look and feel he envisioned—"very stylized, very dramatic, very moody, dark." Popp was interested, but still concerned about costs.

Ferrand then created an elaborate :13 demo using a DV camcorder, using a wheelchair as a dolly. The RIOT team shot an 18-year-old roller blader in a park. Since this shoot was not green screen, Ferrand went back and hand rotoed each frame to place the skater in the CG tube he had created. James O'Brien of Santa Monica-based Element handled the music and sound design, and POP Sound provided an evening of mixing.



Front row, from left: DDB account executive Steve Canty, Kevin Kerns, Deak Ferrand, Greg Popp, Bart Culberson and Don Pogany on the set with the performers in "Little Red Men."

Ferrand explained that the opening of Ridley Scott's director's cut of *GI Jane*, which features the lead character on a luge, was a reference mark for how he wanted the spot to feel. "It's beautifully shot," Ferrand said. He was also influenced by a David Fincher-directed Pepsi spot, that he described as having a look similar to *Blade Runner*.

Popp said this demo convinced the agency to greenlight the project. That occurred in November 1999. Pogany recalled, "We were impressed with [Ferrand's] film background and effects [work]. He was the guy to pull off this effort... The test was beyond our expectations." RIOT producer Greg Everage said the original intention was to finish it for last year's Super Bowl, but the team feared the production schedule would be too tight. Then in September, Popp called with a January 15 delivery date, and set the project in motion, recalled RIOT producer Greg Everage.

RIOT managing director Richard

Cormier emphasized that RIOT would not compete with or bid against clients. "We will support Deak if an original project comes along, and we will partner with a production company because we are not a production company," he said. "Deak, and whoever is willing to step in, would direct if we are asked to for visual effects intensive projects."

Director Ferrand hails from Geneva, Switzerland. There, he knew he wanted to get into filmmaking, but with no local industry, he didn't know how to begin.

"I was kind of a loser," he said with a smile. So he left Geneva and after numerous production experiences found himself at Montreal's Buzz Image Group (which was founded and then run by Cormier), where he worked as an animator and matte painter, and where he served as one of the lead matte painting for *Screamers*, directed by Christian Duguay (*The Assignment*). When Buzz opened Buzz FX in Los

Angeles, Ferrand made the move. That entity eventually became part of POP Animation and now RIOT. There, he worked on such films as the Academy Award-winning *What Dreams May Come*.

Production Begins

Two main elements include designing the costumes and the tube. The original costume design was conceived by French cartoonist Moebius, a friend of Ferrand's.

Akiko Sakagami was then brought in to construct the final costumes for the cast, which consisted of 10 extreme skaters from Montreal and five hero actors. Meanwhile, Ferrand worked closely with lead senior CG artist Martin Lauzon and CG artist Marc-Andre Samson to develop the look of the tube.

The live action, lensed in Super 35, was shot in early November on a green-screen stage at Mel's La Cite du Cinema in Cite du Havre in the

Montreal area, and on location at Le Swimming, Montreal.

A key reason was that Ferrand, whose first language is French, felt more comfortable with a crew that spoke his native language. The choice also enabled the director to work with La Fabrique d'Image, a Montreal-based production company Ferrand frequently worked with during his time in Canada. Longtime colleague Michel Raymond served as line producer. *Screamers'* director Duguay, who is repped by the company, had earlier offered to shoot Ferrand's first spot, the director explained. Instead Duguay recommended several others due to a scheduling conflict. Ferrand already knew DP David Franco, who then became the cinematographer.

"The biggest challenge was shooting greenscreen with no reference," noted visual effects supervisor Eric Mises-Rosenfeld. "We used greenscreen gaffers tape as a reference marker to



French cartoonist Moebius did the initial costume designs, which were constructed by Akiko Sakagami.

represent the center of the tube."

"I had all the best people, and I knew exactly what I wanted so nothing really could go wrong. It was like it was

already made," Ferrand said. "My fear is not technical, it was with the actors. I had to learn how they think. It went

"Little Red People" Budweiser

Client: Anheuser-Busch

Production

RIOT Pictures, Santa Monica, Calif.
Deak Ferrand, director
David Franco, DP
Greg Everage, executive producer
Carl Siebert, executive producer
Eric Mises-Rosenfeld, visual effects supervisor
April Chapman, production coordinator
Richard Cormier, managing director
Jeff Ross, managing director;

La Fabrique d'Images, Montreal.
Michel Raymond, line producer
Richard Marchand, art director
Aris Piliguian, production manager
Carmen Alie, wardrobe
Akiko Sakagami, costume constructor
Moebius, costume design
Andrea Kenyon, casting
Myriam Vezina, casting director

Agency

DDB Chicago
Don Pogany, senior VP/group creative director
Greg Popp, senior VP/group executive producer
Kevin Kearns, associate creative director/AD
Bart Culberson, associate creative director/copywriter

Marty Cohr, VP/management representative

Editorial

Inside/Out, Santa Monica, Calif.
Igor Kovalik, editor
Melissa Shea, assistant editor
Esther Gonzalez, producer

Visual effects/postproduction

RIOT Pictures
Karl Kirschenman, editor/compositor
Claus Hansen, lead compositor
Verdi Sevenhuysen, composers
Martin Lauzon, lead senior CG artist
Marc-Andre Samson, CG artist
Hans Payer, senior CG artist
Kelly Bechtle-Woods, 3-D tracking

RIOT Colors
Beau Leon, colorist

Audio Post

POP Sound, Santa Monica
Jennifer Warren, producer

Music & Sound Design

Element, Santa Monica
James O'Brien, composer
James O'Brien, sound designer
Jennan Earle, producer

really good." Of his first shoot as a director, he said, "It was like I was on drugs, my adrenaline was so high. I loved it."

Ferrand said the DDB team was very supportive, and he also credited line producer Michel Raymond for his help.

After the shoot, Ferrand said the RIOT team "Dealt with me like a normal director. It's funny, I know how to do most of the shots in the computer.

It was good because I need to express my vision to other people. Where I come from I did [the work] myself." The animators said it was helpful to have a director that spoke their language when reviewing scenes. Lauzon added with a laugh, "on the other hand, we couldn't make excuses."

Mises-Rosenfeld explained that in creating the tube the team had to find the right balance between too opaque, for which you couldn't tell that some-

thing was occurring outside the tube, and too transparent, which would have revealed the gag. One way this was accomplished was by taking plates of people in the bar and distorting them in 3-D so that viewers could see motion but couldn't identify what was happening. "The challenge was that nobody's ever been there. If you put a camera in a tube, you would only see red," explained Lauzon. The tube was created in Softimage 3D running on NT workstations. Adobe After Effects was used for a test comp.

Samson added what the team called the "ice effect." He explained, "We wanted to show the club through the tube, so we had to develop a refractor shader to show the outside without

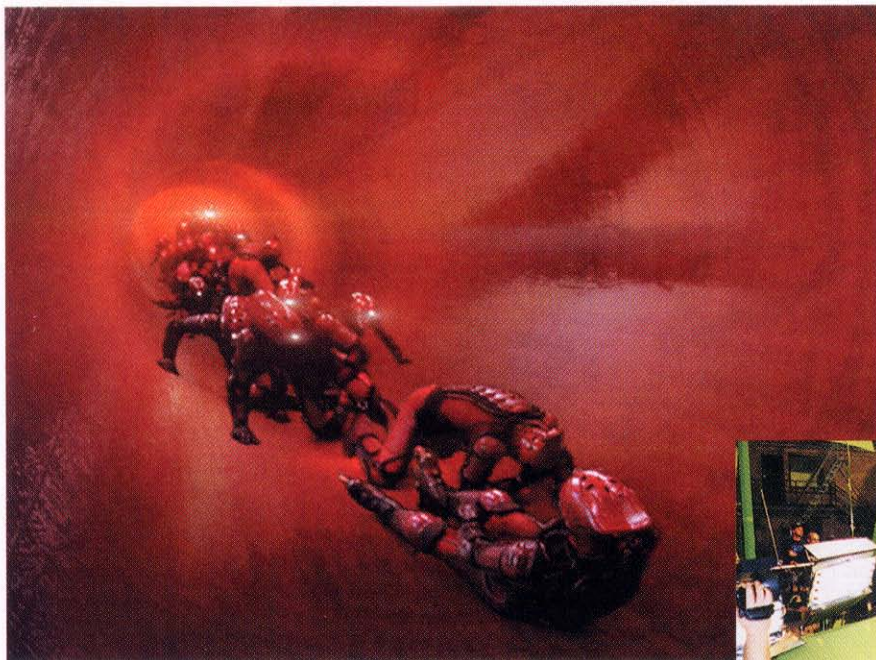


David Ferrand (right) directs an actor

revealing it." He said he used texturing and blur elements.

For lead compositor Claus Hansen, the spot was all about energy. Using discrete's *Inferno*, he added texture, flares, and shakes "to give it energy and an organic feel." He was also very conscious of light, reflections and "getting the guys to interact with the reflective tube." The atmosphere is "steamy and hot."

When one of the skaters falls, the sign flickers as the red people generate the light in the sign. So for that sequence, Hansen said he would add flare lenses and lighting. At this point, the bartender looks at the sign. When he is seen by the little red people from inside



the tube, Hanson distorted the actor.

RIOT's Verdi Sevenhuysen composited a pullout from the red environment that reveals for the first time that the characters are in the neon sign — what Sevenhuysen calls the “crescendo of the spot.” This task entailed lining up and marrying two takes.

Colorist Beau Leon made the look as “red, orangey and firey as possible. We had to do multiple passes... I loved the project because I got to play more than usual for a spot.”

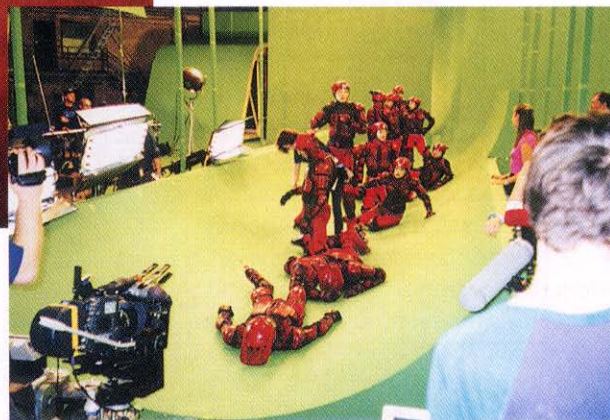
Ferrand admitted that he would like

to have done some of the CG work, but at press time he was busy doing effects for Ron Underwood's *Pluto Nash*, a feature scheduled for release next summer. But he said he would like to do more directing. He said he enjoys commercials, and would like to try music videos and eventually features. Ferrand revealed that he is currently working on a script for a low-budget feature.

Ferrand has also developed an interest

in electronic cinematography. The spot was lensed on film, but Ferrand said he would like to experiment with shooting 24-frame, high-definition digital. He said he would like to talk to clients about that option, noting that it would depend on how much image treatment is required in post. “What's fantastic about this project is to fully control the postproduction process creatively and

Following a greenscreen shoot, the performers were placed in a CG tube created at RIOT.



technically,” said Riot's Cormier. “Control was one of the highlights of this project. RIOT Pictures can support so many companies [by helping them work] efficiently. We could not have dreamed of a better way and a better project to showcase what the new RIOT is all about.”