

TV Spot Urges Viewers to Come Alive—Read!

When a family needs to be rescued from the malaise caused by the hypnotic glow of its television set, literary characters literally step out from the bookshelves to save the day.

That's the story behind Second Story Books' **Come Alive — Read!** campaign, directed by Zohar Rom of *ilaughedicried.com* in Arlington, Virginia, and shot by cinematographer Rob Lyall.

"I had worked with the owners, Allan and Kim Stypeck, on a similar campaign back in 1999," Rom says. "Those ads were set in their main store, and the characters would come out of the books at night and hang out together. This time, the Stypecks wanted to make it more personal. So, they set the story in a home where the characters could meet a family."

As the spot begins, the family sits in front of the television, bored, fidgety and generally dissatisfied. Soon, characters begin emerging from the shelves behind them, and books suddenly replace knick-knacks. "Come alive — read!" intones a pirate character to the mother. Then Jasmine from *Aladdin* opens the book *1,001 Nights*, and the daughter pulls out a beautiful veil; other family members follow her lead and literary characters join the scene.

"We wanted to communicate the magic of reading, with sounds and objects literally coming out of the books," says Rom.

The visual magic is as compelling as the story. The spot starts with the

family lit by a vague blue glow from the television. But as the characters emerge and begin interacting with the family, brighter, warmer light envelops them. As family members open books, their faces glow with light emanating from within the pages. The light is actually generated by Mini Flos with 12-inch tubes.

"I wanted it to feel like a mini-episode of the old Stephen Spielberg series **Amazing Stories**," Lyall explains, "with rich, vivid colors and contrast."

He shot the spot in 35mm format on Kodak VISION2 500T 5218 film.

"Early in the process, there was some talk about producing this spot in HD," he says, "but I strongly felt I wanted the **Amazing Stories** look, and that definitely required film." Making the case was simple, since Rom and the clients wanted to communicate quality and richness.

He chose the 5218 based on his experience with it as a documentarian.

"The range of the film is just incredible," Lyall says. "Sometimes when I shoot with 5218, I'm actually having to work to keep detail *out* of the shadows. I like the shadows to be inky. But if I need the detail, it's there. I knew the client was going to be involved with this project from start to finish, and I wanted the detail to be on the film."

He shot with an ARRIflex BL-3 camera with a Tiffen half black Pro-Mist filter on the lens. Lyall asked colorist Ted Snavely at Henninger Media Services to use Cokin Soft Diffusion #1 on the Rank telecine during transfer of the film images.

"What that does is leave detail in the mid-tones, but blows out the highlights just a bit," he says. "Putting the Cokin in during telecine does the same thing to the blacks. So, you have a soft quality, but there's still a lot of sharpness in the image."

The spot gave Lyall the perfect opportunity to bring the subjects close to the viewer.

"I love shooting faces, so for me, the close-up shots of the actors reading the books were really wonderful," he says. "The warm, soft light coming from the book itself is a really flattering look, and one you rarely can achieve — to have a soft light source that close to the subject. It's the only situation where I've ever been able to turn the product — a book — into the light source."



In addition to the soft glow from Mini Flos hidden inside the books, he added harder keylight from the side, motivated by practical table lamps. He had a 85mm Zeiss Superspeed lens on the camera for the close-ups.

In another shot, Lyall concentrated on the knick-knacks being replaced by books, using a shallow depth of field to focus the audience's attention.

"The shot racked down the bookshelves, as the knick-knacks are being knocked off. Having that shallow depth of field, where what you're looking at is being dictated by the focal plane, really makes the image much more compelling," he says.

He used a 100mm Zeiss Super-speed lens that was nearly wide open at T2.4.

There are three versions of the 60-second commercial. One version emphasizes children, another the adults, and a third one depicts them equally. They were broadcast in rotation in the Washington, D.C. market during the second half of 2005. Rom says they've been well received by viewers.

"Customers have told the Stypecks that they'll watch TV just to see the commercial," he says. "The level of brainstorming and collaboration on this project was just terrific. The Stypecks, Rob and I all contributed ideas that shaped the final product. They were all receptive to thoughts that came from my feature work and made the story richer. You don't always have clients who are so eager to devote themselves to making a spot exceptional."

Second Story Books has three stores, located in Washington, D.C., and in Rockville and Bethesda, Maryland. To see the spot itself, visit Zohar Rom's website, www.ilaughedicried.com. ■

Below: Actresses Kathryn McFall and L. Sangeetha Webster in a scene from *Second Story Books* spot, shot by DP Rob Lyall and directed by Zohar Rom (above right).

