

MCDONALDS  
DOLL  
Spot: Doll



#### INTRODUCTION

Imagine a place where people from every walk of life gather and eat together. A place that, especially during the holidays, evokes a magical charm of joyful connections and possibilities. It is a slice of 'human' life....

Now, imagine you observed this place every day. Watched the people come and go. But you yourself, never went there. Until Christmas Eve. When somehow, those magical connections tipped the scales in your favour – and next thing you knew, you found yourself in the wonderland you'd spied every day.

And this place was McDonald's. And you, were a doll.

While there's an undeniable charm to this story, perhaps ironically there's also a very relatable *humanity*. We, people, all long to make connections. With each other, new people, with different experiences. A kind of inquisitive wanderlust is part of our DNA. We search out places of communion where simple connections over food and drink, remind us that we're part of a whole.

And that could not be truer here.

This is a story about 'people'. And it's genius is that with the construct you've created, it allows us to see ourselves anew - through the eyes of another species.

A doll.

From her unique vantage point across the street from McDonalds, she observes human life with all it's wonderful diversity. She, literally, has a window to it: the relationships, the emotions, the quirks, the rituals. She sees – and is fascinated – by it all.

And she longs to be part of it but she is separated from it both geographically and physiologically. It is a classic fairytale 'tragedy' in the tradition of Pinocchio or The Little Mermaid. What does she desire most in her life? To be part of the human world.

The conduit to this is, of course, McDonalds. This is her window into the human world. And what a wonderful view it is. Because this place is a microcosm of human life. All walks of life are gathered here.

This is the core of the idea. It is story about the dreams and aspirations of a doll. But it is a *message* about the richness of humanity.

Which leads me to....

## THE APPROACH

In a word, the film needs *heart*.

This is an emotive story. Warm and genuinely touching. But it's important that we don't lose this idea to pure whimsy or fantasy. Although the story is rooted in the fantasy context of a doll's longing, if we simply play this as the story of a toy, we'll really sacrifice the core idea.

So my approach is to transport the viewer into the narrative in a cinematic but *truthful* way. It is, filmically, a 'real' world that we recognize as our own. But there is a sparkle of magic that exists underneath the surface. So, not only is it live-action, it is *believable*. The doll exists in a world that portrays humanity in an authentic way. The people, the relationships, the interactions are realistically drawn (as opposed to being stylized in a whimsical, fantasy way).

It is cinematic, in so far as it will *look* beautiful and the viewer engages with the story as if they're watching a 'movie'. BUT, the stylization (how settings and characters are formed) will be somewhat realistic and in contrast to the fantasy element of the doll.

I think this is critical to capturing the genuine human emotion in the story. The narrative of the doll is fairy tale but what she sees in humans has to ring true. I think this will give the film depth and dimension and *genuine* heart.

## STORY

By imbuing our doll with emotions and a 'need' we walk that fine line between reality and fantasy. The context is recognizable, the story is fiction. But I like to believe that these things could exist around us, right under our nose. A parallel reality, if you will.

Of course, us grown-ups don't notice that toys are alive – only little kids and dogs do. And toy-shop owners. But that is the conceit here. And I like it best if it is as plausible and convincing as possible. The toy-world exists and we just don't see it because it happens 'down there' whilst we're too busy looking 'up here'.

So the real-world context works well in that regard. But the core of the narrative here is the Doll's *desire*. Like all movies, the story is driven by one thing: *what does she want?* We set up a story of yearning around her need to make a quest. She wants to be part of that world. To join humanity, to be purchased and adopted by a family of people.

There are two anchor points: McDonalds, sparkling with patrons from every walk of life representing a kind of Shangri La for the Doll. And the world she inhabits now - a tired vintage toy shop: small, dull, isolated, a little bit lonely. These are the wonderfully opposite ends spectrum of the creative idea. But I don't think the world of the toy-store is depressing or that

she is enslaved there. To me it is more akin to growing up in a drab provincial town, longing for the bright lights of the city. It's not that she wants to 'escape'. It's that she is curious about the wider world. She has grown up.

And I think it's important to set this idea in motion at the start. The owner of the toy shop knows this. And he *wants* her dreams to come true... "*Maybe this year, Doll*" he says at the start. I think this 'father-daughter' relationship is very key to the emotional arc of the story. He wants the best for her. But does he want her to go? Of course not. And perhaps this is the reason why the toys are not flying off the shelves. He doesn't really want to see them leave.

So, we have a store that is old, uncommercial-looking, not that inviting from the outside – it barely looks open. Hence the lack of sales. But it is full of love inside. And this is the conflict of the story. She wants to go, to see the world that beckons – but her own 'family' in the store are a strong bond too. This is a key part of the story and I think the ending of the film needs to resolve this aspect of the narrative to be really emotionally satisfying.

## LOOK

Another important creative consideration is to keep a certain beauty and levity threading through this idea as it unfolds. And that would be created by shooting this so it looks and feels like a full blown, gorgeously crafted sequence from a feature film. It has to be drop dead, cinematically gorgeous.

But, as I mentioned earlier, the film must be anchored in a beautiful 'realism'. The production design and styling should very considered, but subtle and believable. We should also have the feeling of a passage of time, and the look should evolve to reflect this. We see lighting and weather change through the story; the simple beauty in the first snowflakes as the day gives way to the magic hour. And feel that effervescent giddiness and optimistic energy of the holidays grow as people rush across the street with gift-laden bags, and mingle over their meals at McDonald's.

At the same time, the doll's world should feel equally real. Both in how we see it – as an older, slightly dated shop - and through her eyes, as the only world she's ever known. It's not bad, it's just a little cluttered, dusty and dimly lit.

But by shooting this cinematically, we're allowing the world to be like this but still evocative. And, to have a filmic beauty that makes the magical feel entirely possible.

Having said that, while the story is touching, let's avoid it feeling saccharine. The look shouldn't be too 'misty' and 'chocolate box'. Until she makes a decision to leave her shop, her story's brushed with bitter sweetness and the look of the film should reflect this. The warm glow of the McDonalds compared to the subdued quality of her shop window.

Also, we're aware with Christmas about to come – and go – her window of opportunity to visit the amazing world across the street, is soon closing. And perhaps it might be useful to have the visual device of a calendar that hangs in the store, which we cut to periodically as the story unfolds and we see that the days are counting down.

## CAST

I very much like the doll in your reference – wooden, painted face. Vintage feeling. In a world of branded, mass-produced toys she's uniquely charming. Overlooked because of circumstance rather than a lack of appeal. And therefore, essentially orphaned by a consumer populace who've passed her by for the commercial bright-lights and gaudy colours of Toys R Us or the like.

In terms of production, there are large portions of the story where she doesn't animate very much at all. Only the expression on her painted face need animate – and I think perhaps the nose, eyelids and mouth could have some three-dimensional 'relief' (as if carved) so they have slightly more dimension than just painted-on features. Still naïve but with a little more dimension to emote.

So, I'd suggest we create a *real* doll and shoot 'in camera' with some minimal puppeteering. I think this will have more *soul* than an overtly CGI approach. Also, I think you can 'over-animate' a toy, and inadvertently drain the charm of their inherent 'toyness'. A toy is limited by what it can do in terms of movement – it's material and construction (where it's joints are etc) should determine how it moves. In many instances it's better to do this for real and allow it's restrictions to lead the style of how it animates (otherwise one can end up with a kind of anthropomorphized toy-person-object and lose the charm).

So in most scenarios I think we can use our real doll, and animate her face in very subtle ways. A small, animated motion of her painted eyelids – or a tiny furrow of sadness to her brow. Her eyebrows, the corner of her mouth for a smile – that way we retain the overall reality she's made of wood. We can do motion capture on a real actress to base the subtlety of performance on so it looks convincingly 'human'.

In some instances we can puppeteer the doll – eg. when she lowers her head, saddened by the fact another shopper just left the store. But in other instances where there is more 'dynamic' animation, it may be better to create a CG version of the doll – eg. for when she's crossing the road. Here, we'll put our real puppet in the environment – on the street, by the curb – base our lighting and texture off of it, and then build our CG version from that reference so it's a perfect match.

With the 'action hero' doll, I think we should adopt a similar approach. He is made of plastic and being brand new, I would envisage that he is still 'framed' in the blister-pack he is sold in. So, once again, I think making an in-camera doll where we have all the texture and reality captured for real is the way to go. And from this base, we can animate the face (and perhaps turn the head) in CG.

For our McDonalds patrons, we certainly want to capture a true, broad spectrum of humanity. That is after all, the idea – and part of the wonder our doll perceives. She sees an amazing diversity of people. This array of people, types and faces is what compels her daring escape to visit this world. And in real life, the fact remains that anyone who visits McDonald's can have their own, similar experience.

But I think the focus here is not just the looks but very well-observed moments of human interaction. If we look at humans as a 'species' – like our doll does – we want to see the curious nature of how they interact.

So for this to work well, we need to cast 'archetypes' built around quite specific backstories. A romantic couple, a squabbling family, a trio of teenagers banter, an older couple who've acquired their first smart-phone trying to figure it out, an off-duty parking inspector, a bookish lonely heart.....

The characters need to be specific and must ring true. They are little stories of their own. Each has a life, each compelling in it's own way as viewed from the perspective of the doll. And the idea is to create these characters and backstories so we cast with these in mind, to then create

very nuanced, subtle and believable performances that resonate in the most 'human' way possible.

Here's how I think it could play out...

## DOLL

We open close on a picture of a snowy wonderland. A charming little cottage, curls of smoke from the chimney spiral into the sky as a confetti of snowflakes fall all around it. Suddenly, the picture's removed – we pull back to see it's a page from a seasonal calendar being torn off.

The new page says, December 19th, and the picture shows a classic Rudolph The Red Nosed Reindeer scene. The shop's owner – a pleasant man in his 70's with a wisp of white hair and a glint in his eyes – finishes with the calendar and goes about preparing his lovely old shop for the final rush of the holidays. Emphasis on 'old'.

It's a fine store, full of charm. But not many customers.

He gently takes a vintage, wooden Doll from her faded box. And for a moment, just holds her ever so carefully. You almost get the feeling he wants to say something. He leans in...and blows the dust that's settled over her. Then places her on a shelf next to a tin, 1950s robot.

He positions the Doll just so, lowers his glasses. We see she's from another era. And her painted face has seen better days.

With a hopeful, fatherly wink, the old store owner whispers,

“Maybe this year, Doll”.

As he leaves we gently pan up to the Doll – hold on her face for a second and see...her eyes slowly blink. She's alive.

The camera gently rotates to her POV, and we see her perspective on the world through the large front window: The street outside the shop's bustling with holiday shoppers, cars honk, a man walks a massive great Dane. And beyond everything, in the near background a steady stream of people going into a single, warmly-lit restaurant.

Bright yellow arches reach up and almost out of the Doll's sight. A sign says, McDonald's. Through the window of the building the Doll watches people laughing, eating, talking. It's a far away, yet across the street, amazing world.

We cut back – by way of contrast – to the Doll as she sits in the window of the faded, dimly-lit toy store. We push in to see the Doll through the glass as she gazes out towards the McDonalds. The golden arches and liveliness of the world outside reflect in her window.

We cut to see her perspective again and drift slowly towards the McDonald's, across the street, past teenagers and a sweet elderly couple trying to figure out something on a smart phone device, past a family in bright, silly matching holiday sweaters.

Cut to the Doll's face, and her eyes widen with longing. Then we hear a chime and from inside the shop – just as a dad leaves with a train set for a very lucky boy. He wipes past the frame and we rack focus to the Doll – who gives a little sigh, and drops her head. The overhead lights go out as the owner closes for the night. The Doll looks up from the darkness, her face bathed in the soft light from the street outside and the warmth of the McDonald's.

We cut to her point of view once more. And through the window of McDonalds we see two or three more instances of genuine human interaction and rituals; a couple taking a selfie, a woman reading a book on her own, three teenage boys engrossed in an animated conversation about something or other. One laughs hysterically and another looks indignant. "What!??", he seems to be saying.

We fade up on the Rudolph picture – as it's torn aside to reveal – December 20th. We see the shop-owner busy, doing all he can to arrange the toys in artful ways to catch the hopeful eye of a child or their parent. He gives a subtle, worried glance towards the Doll.

We hear the door chime as a mother and her young daughter walk in, and after a quick exchange with the owner, turn and walk out empty handed. The Doll watches them pass in front of her window and walk away.

And as they clear we're left once again with the Doll's point of view to McDonalds and the busy street outside full with happy, busy shoppers and diners. The first delicate flakes of an afternoon snow-flurry fall lazily and this leads us to....

A time transition sequence as people walk back and forth in front of the store and drift in and out of McDonalds. And we intercut the calendar which counts down to Christmas – 21st, 22nd, 23rd....

Day gives way to the magic hour and then to night and the few lazy flakes surrender to a beautiful, steady snowfall. We cut to the calendar which reads 24th December. Inside the store, we find the owner, cup of tea in his hand. He checks his watch. It's time. He flicks the lights off, and darkness embraces the small shop.

The camera moves through the store with him as he heads to the front door to lock up. Past the train sets, puzzles, plush toys and old science kits, to the Doll in the window. We pan slowly off the owner as he locks the door and looks down to the left to where she sits, until we get to...nothing.

The Doll's not in her place. In fact, the Doll's not anyplace. She's, gone. There's an empty space – and beside it just the tin robot with a shocked look on his face (hmmm, he didn't look like that before, did he?).

The camera turns, looks out the window. And we can just make out the tiny, nimble figure of the Doll scampering away as snowflakes fall around.

We cut to outside. It's suddenly loud and overwhelmingly big. A Doll's perspective on the big, wide world. We hear the sounds of cars passing, people talking, mobiles chiming. It's a thrilling, intoxicating, amplified version of a lovely Christmas Eve atmosphere.

We cut to a new perspective, at ground-level, travelling alongside the Doll as she weaves through this giant world, looking up and through an endless forest of legs and shoes as people walk briskly up and down the street. We move with the Doll as she dodges past the huge wheels of a baby stroller rumbling by, pauses – then quickly darts past walking feet.

She stops at the curb. A car drives past and through a puddle. Splash! She gets sprayed with water. But this is a minor setback. She wipes her face and with some resolve, sets her sights on the destination across the street.

We cut wider to see a group of young ladies, clearly dressed for the night, about to cross the road. As they do, the camera reveals the Doll, who is cleverly using them as 'cover' and running right behind their tottering high heels.

We cut inside the McDonald's, as the group of women walk through the doors, then continue on, passing us, as they head towards the counter. But the camera stays on the doors, and we jib down to reveal the Doll – who's inside the place she's watched for so long. We cut and push in to see her face in close-up, wide-eyed in wonder, slowly taking it all in.

We cut to her POV – people having happy, relaxed and animated conversations, eating, sharing, texting, laughing....

A traffic warden is having a lively conversation with a man sipping a coffee on the table next to her, seeming to explain how her ticketing computer device works as she enjoys a Chicken McNugget.

A pair of middle aged women are comparing their home-made pottery as they each enjoy a soft-serve ice-cream – maybe they just finished an evening class.

A young guy is showing his mate what he's bought his mum for a Christmas present as he tucks into a Big Mac. *"What d'you think?"*. We hold on a couple, as the young man reaches over and hands his girlfriend a French fry – which she leans over, and bites. So this is love.

We cut to Doll – of all the things she seen so far, this strikes a chord. And then....

The young man leans forward revealing something at the table just beyond them. Something – or someone - that catches her eye: a shopping bag from a modern toy store, sits alongside a young dad who's stopped in for a quick burger in his last minute Christmas shop. But it's not him she's interested in.

Because poking out of the top of the bag is a dashing, space action-figure with a quiff, square jaw and bright white teeth. Mr. Fantastic. He's still suspended inside a clear-plastic case which outlines him – but he sees her, as much as she sees him. Oh yes, he sees her. He flashes his million dollar smile.

The Doll smiles, blushes, turns away. But it's love at first sight. She coyly looks back. Could he really be interested in....me? But just then, the man finishes eating and dabs his napkin, preparing himself to leave.

Mr.Fantastic gives her an encouraging look, raising his eyebrows, imploring her. *Come on, take a chance?* It's now or never. We cut back to the Doll, she hesitates, bites her lip. The man stands up to leave. And the Doll quickly hops, skips and jumps across the table and down to the floor. As the bag passes by in her path, Mr.Fantastic holds out his arm for her to grab and climb up. A moment of jeopardy as she reaches for his hand, as the bag is carried away and for a beat she looks like she may have missed the train.

But then, with a last determined push from them both, their hands lock and she is scooped up and over the side of the bag, plopping down inside beside her new friend. They gaze into eachother's eyes, elated, in the intimate privacy of the bag's interior.

We cut outside as the dad leaves McDonalds carrying the bag. He puts his collar up, as the snow falls all around. And then he starts to walk down the street. Just then, we see our Doll

appear from inside the bag, her face peering over the edge. She looks back at the toy store, her home for so long.

We cut to her point of view. And there in the window we see the toy shop owner, standing at the window, watching her go. He smiles a reassuring little smile and gives a brief wave of his hand.

We cut to the Doll looking back as the carrier bag is walked away, down the street. And then we crane up and out to a beautiful, epic, wide shot with our little Doll getting smaller and smaller, as we see the street, then the city in the background, a starry sky...and the wide world beyond. It is almost as idyllic as the calender shot that opened the ad.

A super fades up over this image:

CHRISTMAS IS HERE

McDonald's logo. GOOD TIMES

This is just a lovely, superbly conceived idea. I'd be delighted to help you bring it to life with all the emotion and warmth it deserves. Story and character. That's what this is about. And through this we see the underlying message of humanity – and how all walks of life gather under this one roof.

I'm very excited about the possibilities here. Thanks for the great work, and let's talk again soon.