

Approach

I think there's a wealth of really great story-stuff in the script that we can use to create our fantastic, slightly twisted fable. To make this really shine, our production design and casting will have to be spot on. It's essential to the fantastic nature of the spot that the world we create is credible in its own right.

Films like AMELIE and BIG FISH do that quite well~they blend fact and fiction in to a single narrative that keeps the story grounded in real emotion, while the SFX and shifting reality let the imagination soar with implication and possibility.

On a smaller scale, I think that's an attainable wish. To create a spot that's at once funny, unexpected and puts a weird but slightly charming spin on things. In the end, it should combine the fantastic and the ordinary in to a "believable-in-its-own-right" spot.

Casting

This genre of story and how we film it demand we have the right talent in place to make it work. Since environments, costumes, styling and sets will be continually shifting, we need actors who can really stay in role or roles, as their world around them changes.

The Mayor's a great example. We'll need an older man, maybe a bit plump. He should have a small town trustworthiness about him. He's like the Mayor from Monopoly come to life. He can even wear a sash that says "Mayor". It's a great touch~it provides just enough "left-field" to the character so we immediately know we're not in Kansas anymore.

Allen's a recurring face and voice that really works in our favor. He's so identifiable with the previous A&W campaigns that he provides a kind of reality-touchstone from which we can springboard this spot to unexpected places.

We talked about giving him a cameo~I think it help create a familiar transitional element as we go back and forth from Allen reading, to the narrative shifting. Recognizing Allen in character will provide its own kind of "self-winking" moment that is always fun in these things. But having him cameo also provides some subtle traction for the narrative as it changes from one reality to the next.

Allen's daughter should be somewhere between five and eight or nine years old. Its that age range where this kind of fantastic, "what in the world could happen next" story still appeals to their imagination. At the same time, kids are so savvy~even by five or six they've seen enough Nickelodeon to not be too surprised by much.

So at the end, when she says "I want a real story, daddy", we need the moment to have that kind of innocent, poignant honesty of her age, without it being either saccharin or pre-teen mean.

Our boy-hero is a bit older~ten to thirteen. Exactly the coming-of-age time when any young boy could satisfy a monster with a burger. We're not casting Harry Potter here, or anyone too smart-alecky. He's likable with a bit of pre-adolescent charm, and genuinely excited by the prospects of his monster-quest.

Our three monster-hunters are probably thirtysomethings. Its not so important we nail down right now who they are, but its enough to say that physically, they should appear up to the task

of storming the monster's cave armed to the teeth with a small arsenal of weapons and wacky bait-choices.

To a person though, we have to cast for people who will bring credibility to performances that revolve around a fablesque narrative set to the tune of the unbelievable. That means they have to play it straight, but in some cases with a hint of their own surprise at how each and every moment has just shifted the ground under them a bit.

The Story

The key to making this spot work is by not pulling any punches with our shifting, changing narrative. The reason films like *BIG FISH* accomplish this so well, has everything to do with how unapologetic the blurring of lines between reality and fantasy is.

It's the same thing here, we're not trying to resolve our story neatly or explain how or why it works, or in some cases doesn't work. We're creating our version of this story's meta-reality and the more transparent we do that, the more credible the whole thing will come off.

Right out of the gates, our spot has to lay its cards on the table~we open on our charming small town then cued by the script, we see the monster's cave created on the spot to suit the story. The cave's location between homes is humorous testament to the comedic, non-sensical world we're creating.

Our SFX have to work in similar fashion~they're creating our shifting narrative at the speed-of-impromptu storytelling. So when Allen says "...the Sheriff, no the King, I mean the Mayor...", we'll have a succession of quick shots. It'll be the same actor, but his costume will shift on the word to match Allen's on-the-fly delivery.

When our three monster-hunters go after our monster, we have another great opportunity for our changing storyline to layer in humor and texture. They're armed to the teeth with a small arsenal. We can really design some odd looking stuff based on Medieval-era maces and pronged-staffs.

The first go 'round, their food offering can be buckets of frogs~really big frogs. Not tiny spring peepers, but large, otherworldly "Gawd I've never seen a frog that size in my life" kind of frogs. The more we can amp up our mythical reality with these touches, the more it'll keep the weird-sensibility of the spot true to form.

Once they're chased out, we'll match cut to them going back for round two. This time, the bait is some weird ancient fish~like that Coelacanth thing those fisherman caught in a net decades ago. It was all finned and weird looking and presumed extinct. They can struggle to carry in something like that.

The third attempt, our monster-hunters go back to the cave, same Medieval chain-linked weapons and evil-looking hooks~but everything baited with burgers. When they fail a third time, it set ups our boy-hero's solution~they have to use the "most amazing burger the world has ever seen".

And since we have this moment served up on a plate, we may as well make the most of it and do a full-fledged product shot. It's so perfect and obvious, that a simple close up of this perfect burger will play less as advertising and more as parody. But funny enough, the message remains unchanged.

Location+Production Elements

The more I think about it, the era of this setting is like a small southern US town, circa 1930's or 1940's. The men still wore vests with timepieces on a chain and hats were the fashion. That kind of production design lends itself to our story.

We're not trying to make this a jaded, contemporary rehashing of some fable no one believes. We're just taking the fairy-tale formula and shaking it up. So I think it goes to overall sensibility (twisted and warped and shifting though it may be) to create sets on location that both defy conventional expectation and visually lend themselves to imaginative re-interpretation.

There's enough quaint Canadian small towns for us to scout and find something suitable. We're looking for a town that looks like something from a 1970's school field trip. Now, I think it's worth exploring some set-building ideas.

Remember that Clint Eastwood western "High Plains Drifter"? At the end, the whole town rebuilds itself, creating new storefronts and façades? I think it would create an interesting dimension if we enhanced our small town similarly.

We're not trying to create a fully-realistic town. But like our story, nothing's on solid ground or is what it appears to be anyway. So we can create some building facades that look like the sets they are. It will lend an almost subliminal vibe to how truly fictional and changeable this story's reality is.

I think we can find a pretty authentic office or meeting hall for our town meeting. From there, we'll add some design elements to dress it up a bit. Allen's daughter's room should be true to character, which is contemporary, middle class.

And pink. It's a little girl's room, so it should read true to taste for a girl her age~a poster or two on the walls, a stuffed animal here and there. We don't want to make it precious, just age and gender appropriate so when she gives her final line, it'll be almost deadpan in that pink bedroom.

For the cave, I think we should build the set with the same kind of curious-reality sensibility as everything else. That is, it should be dark, foreboding, slimy walls~but there's odd touches here and there. A pile of bones heaped at the entrance are giantly oversized. Or just odd shapes, like you can't tell what body-part it's from.

And there can be an unusual assortment of scavengers on the ground and in the air. Creatures that are just off the evolutionary food-chain can kind of scamper around and fly by. It should be easy to see it's a monster's lair, impossible to tell exactly what kind (other than LARGE AND RAVENOUS) creature's abode it is.

Lighting&Cinematography

For the most part, everything takes its cue from our SFX. The speed at which we create, assemble and shift narrative on the go is essential to making our tale buzz with dimension and possibility. When the Sheriff...King...Mayor, undergoes his on-the-spot transformation, our FX have to seamlessly and quickly create that new image in split seconds.

Since Allen's making this up as he goes, improvising the story to keep the attention of his girl, each effect has to mirror that process as the story's narrative is actually created before our eyes.

Overall

In a lot of ways, we don't have to do much, even though we have a lot to do. The script is perfectly suited to the SFX we'll use in making it an "as real as possible, impossible" tale of the tallest order. Our production design will create the necessary realism so each element of our story, from the cave to the little girl's bedroom is true to its own sensibility.

And some well thought out, clever casting can ensure we assemble the right talent to create a really fun and dimensional world where reality and fantasy can cue off one another to create a fable come true. While we watch.

I look forward to getting in to this idea more and seeing how else we can evolve it.