

# Immersed in MOVIES

A blog by Bill Desowitz



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## Alonso Highlights VES Summit



Victoria Alonso described “filling the gap” as the key to storytelling and VFX success at Marvel at yesterday’s 6th annual VES Summit at the W Hotel in Hollywood, while VFX specialist Ben Grossmann, production designer Bo Welch, and DP Dion Beebe discussed the need for VFX to evolve into a more front-loaded collaborative workflow.

Alonso, who’s the balancing voice at Marvel, proclaimed that it wasn’t until this summer’s *Guardians of the Galaxy* that she finally became a comic book fan. “A tree can be a light for his friends, a racoon makes you run away [but not Rocket]. They are misfits. So many of us in VFX are misfits. We have found our way through our work.”

But time is the enemy and therefore it’s important for VFX studios to be honest. “If you don’t have the render power, just tell me.” But she lives, breathes, and hyperventilates story, and plussing the storytelling is the Marvel model. While she’d prefer to keep VFX local, she’s learned to embrace the global workflow to its fullest and most effect. However, since Kathleen Kennedy (her role model) has taken over Lucasfilm, Marvel is now working with ILM again (which has a hand on both *Avengers: Age of Ultron* and *Ant-Man*).

Afterward, Alonso admitted to me that there was more pressure on *Guardians* than any previous Marvel movie. It was so risky that they thought of it as their last movie. “Chris Pratt was a virtual unknown, a tree with a few words of dialog, would they accept Bradley Cooper as the voice of a raccoon?”

But Marvel will only continue to flourish and battle superhero fatigue as well as competition from Warner/DC (which Alonso welcomes) by thinking outside the box.

Meanwhile, during the concluding Visual Imaging panel, VFX Oscar winner Grossmann (*Hugo*), who has started his own company, Magnopus, suggested that VFX needs to be treated as one department like production design and cinematography, and there needs to be synergy with the other departments from beginning to end in this new non-linear workflow.

“Visual Effects is no longer visual effects: it’s production...new technology allows VFX to be broken down for maximum efficiency.” But without all the assets available up front, you get a staggered approach and lose the benefits of virtual cameras and other real-time, on set capabilities.

Cinematographer Beebe said they hit a tech wall on *The Edge of Tomorrow* and took an old school approach because the assets for the aliens were not ready, to which Grossmann responded: “Workflow is simultaneous in an ideal world.”

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