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Next Week

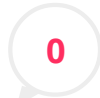


Marvel VFX Powerhouse Promotes Story and Female Empowerment

By **Bill Desowitz** | Thompson on Hollywood

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At Saturday's 6th annual Visual Effects Society Summit at the W Hotel in Hollywood, Marvel's Victoria Alonso stressed the importance of "filling the gaps," in her keynote, whether it's related to storytelling or VFX. In fact, according to the exec producer/exec VP of visual effects & post-production, maintaining an outside-the-box mentality has been the key to Marvel's success.



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Zoe Saldana in 'Guardians of the Galaxy'

Alonso told me afterward that the Marvel method is to emphasize character and theme, not superhero convention, and that's how Marvel has managed to thrive and stay ahead of the curve and avoid superhero fatigue. It began with the off-beat hiring of Robert Downey Jr. as Iron Man. But Alonso's lone female point of view has been pivotal. She implored the VFX community to employ more women to counteract the predominant male points of view.

"It's OK to let the ladies in -- they bring balance," Alonso advises.



Alonso might be a geek but she's not a fanboy, and therefore approaches her job as a filmmaker. She "lives, breathes, and hyperventilates story." And when dealing with VFX vendors around the globe, all she asks is honesty in their partnership. "If you don't have the render power, just tell me. Are you plusing this? Stop letting your ego get in the way -- that's the Marvel way."



Groot in 'Guardians of the Galaxy'

While she'd prefer to stay local, Alonso has learned to embrace the global workflow and has made it work to Marvel's advantage. However, since her role model, Kathleen Kennedy, has taken over Lucasfilm, Alonso has begun collaborating with ILM again on next year's "The Avengers: Age of Ultron" and "Ant-Man."

But Alonso concedes that it wasn't until the recent success of "Guardians of the Galaxy" that she finally became a comic book convert. "They are the characters you didn't know but now adore."

Afterward, Alonso admitted that "'Guardians' was the breakthrough, but that there was more pressure. "We thought it was our last movie. A tree with little dialog is the guiding light; would they accept Bradley Cooper as the voice of a raccoon?"

And yet "Guardians," which is a likely VFX Oscar nominee for its remarkable CG Groot and Rocket combo, emphasizes the prevailing Marvel theme of "belonging, loss, and addictions" with greater



emotion, humor, and clarity.

Robert Redford in 'Captain America: The Winter Soldier'

"We're always thinking outside-the-box and treating these as movies with superhero characters and not superhero movies," Alonso adds. "But the biggest thrill was getting Robert Redford for 'Captain America: The Winter Soldier.' My mother was so impressed."

As for Warner Bros. turning up the superhero heat with a slate of 10 DC movies, Alonso couldn't be more thrilled. She welcomes the competition. It will make Marvel even better. Who knows: DC's gender diversity might even pressure Marvel into doing the same.

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