



STAR WARS, GALAXY'S EDGE & WORKING AT DISNEY – FIELD OF VIEW WITH VICKI DOBBS BECK – SIE2

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

SPEAKER: Brought to you by Accenture Extended Reality. This is Field of View.

NICK ROSA: Good morning, good evening, good afternoon, everyone. My name is Nick Rosa and I work for the Accenture Extended Reality Team.

DANIEL COLAIANNI: Hi everyone. My name is Daniel Colaianni and from AIXR, the Academy of International Extended Reality. And it is very exciting to have you all back again for the second episode of Field of View.

NICK ROSA: Yes, because today, we have a very, very special.

DANIEL COLAIANNI: Very special guest, right.

NICK ROSA: Absolutely. We have a person that has been working in the movie industry and at the forefront of innovation of special effects and movie production. And now, is fully engraved in the most incredible VR titles, productions that are on the market, from the winner of the last year experience of the year VR awards, is a pleasure and an honor to have with us today, Vicki Dobbs Beck.

Hi, Vicki, how you doing?

VICKI DOBBS BECK: Hi, it's great to see you both.

DANIEL COLAIANNI: Now, Vicki, I got to just kick start this by just first saying that Nick is the biggest fanboy of your work and your company that I have ever seen.

VICKI DOBBS BECK: Oh, well, all the better to be here. Thank you so much. It's an exciting place to be.

NICK ROSA: Yeah, I mean it's difficult to contain my excitement because since I was a little child, I always dreamt about Industrial Light and Magic and incredible stuff that you were doing with all the Lucasfilm Productions from Indiana Jones, to Star Wars. I mean it's so incredible to have you here and to be able to talk to you about all your previous experience, the present and the future of what VR is going to bring to us.

DANIEL COLAIANNI: I mean, Vicki, we were just chatting, just before this, right, you've been at Lucasfilm – sorry, ILMxLAB now for – well, Lucasfilm technically, for 28 years now.

VICKI DOBBS BECK: Yep, 28 years over about a 32-year span. So when I started at ILM, they were just beginning work on Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade and there were six computer graphic artists. I happened to be located on the same hall as they were and now, we have like approximately 2,000 computer graphics artists spread across five different studios worldwide. So a lot has changed in that time.

DANIEL COLAIANNI: So I mean, Vicki, I mean how does someone get started on this incredible journey that you've been on, are still on? I mean I'm sure there's lots of people watching this and listening right now, but I just wanting and dreaming, just like Nick was as a little child about being in the position that you are now?



VICKI DOBBS BECK: Well, interestingly, when I graduated from business school, I didn't really set out to necessarily be in the entertainment industry. My criteria was that I really wanted to work for a company whose product was something that was inherently creative. So I looked at entertainment. I looked at live theater, wine, fashion. I was really just interested, like I said, in a product that was inherently creative. And I had – well, actually, this is kind of an interesting story because I interviewed with – well, at business school at the time, most people went into either investment banking or management consulting. So in my first year at business school, I interviewed with the traditional management consulting firms and I happened to know the person who was interviewing me. He was a partner at Bain & Company and he honestly gave me the best advice that I've gotten in my entire career and I was so grateful to him because we interviewed and he said, Vicki, you sure you want to go into management consulting? You seem like someone who is really passionate about creativity and creative industries. And he said, my advice to you is to go do something more creative for the summer between the two years of business school. And if after that experience, you come back and you say, I did it, but I'm now convinced I want to be a management consultant, then let's talk about a full-time job afterward, So I started doing – you know, I took his advice and I started investigating what the options were. And I happened to read an article in the Stanford Daily about a guy named Walt Conti, who had been working on animatronics for one of the Star Trek films at ILM. And I didn't really, to be honest, know anything about ILM. So lo and behold, I discovered that they're in Northern California, which was great. And I figured that – so Walt Conti was actually a year or two years ahead of me at Stanford Undergrad.

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So I figured I must know people who would know him and, of course, one thing led to another and I got a connection into ILM, at which point I volunteered to work for free between my two years at business school. And I suggested some projects that I thought I could help with and they turned me down. And I was thinking like how do you turn down free help? But I think I realized in retrospect, they just – I think they were concerned that I was going to be more work than I was worth, if you know what I mean.

So I ended up working for the San Francisco Ballet because I was also interested in nonprofit arts management. And it was a really great experience, but volunteering to work for free actually turned out to pay off in the long run because as I was – I mean one thing that was kind of scary is I literally got to a week before I was going to graduate from business school and I didn't have a job. And I got a call from ILM sort of out of the blue. I mean I had stayed in touch with them and they said, we have an opening and we're wondering if you want to – if you'd like to interview.

And I said, well, of course, and they told me the date and the time. And I said, well, unfortunately, I have a group project that's presenting at that time and they're like, well, unfortunately, it's kind of that time or no time. So I talked to my group and they were fantastic. They said, you got to do it. And so, I went up there for the interview. They forgot to tell me that there's no sign that says Industrial Light and Magic on the door. It actually says the Kerner Company or the Kerner Optical Company, I think. And so, I did do a little bit of walking back up and down the street trying to figure out where I was supposed to go. But I ended up going to the interview and it was fascinating because I mean this was a very entry-level position. It was a marketing assistant role and I was panel interviewed by about 15 people at the highest levels of the company, 15. It was like I was literally sitting at a giant conference room table. I was sitting at the end and it was surrounded by all these people.



NICK ROSA: Can I ask you if there was George Lucas in those 15 people?

VICKI DOBBS BECK: No, it's not George Lucas. It went high. Ian Bryce was there. If you know Ian Bryce from the - I think Scott Ross was there. I mean a lot of people whose names you would probably recognize.

NICK ROSA: The big names of the effects. That must have been very daunting though? I mean you're in this room of these 15 people for your first ever real job?

VICKI DOBBS BECK: It was unbelievably daunting. And in the end what happened is they actually had two candidates that they wanted to hire, myself and another woman. She had much more - I mean she had production experience and so forth. So they basically took one job and split it into two. So I joke that I probably had the most interesting lowest paying job in my graduating class, but it was what I wanted to do. So I took the job and when I got there, my boss who's another name well-known in the visual effects industry, Rose Degan. She asked me, do you know how to - can you help write a marketing plan? And I said, sure. I just graduated from business school after all, but I don't know a lot about the industry. So is there a business plan?

And she kind of looked at me and I said, you know, something that sort of looks at the industry overall, the trends, the financial forecast and so forth. And it turns out they didn't really have that. So I said, I'll tell you what. You tell me who to interview, I'll interview them, I'll write a first draft and even if I'm 100% wrong, at least it's something tangible that people can react to. And that's what I did. And so, because of that, they started moving me around Lucasfilm, to different businesses that were either already in existence, but they wanted to get a more refined plan or new ventures.

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DANIEL COLAIANNI: And, Vicki, can I just ask, how old were you during this time as well?

VICKI DOBBS BECK: Well, I graduated from business school in 1988. So I would have been 28.

DANIEL COLAIANNI: Wow, okay.

VICKI DOBBS BECK: Yeah. So it was a fascinating opportunity and that actually is how I ended up at Lucasfilm Learning in the early 90s. And that was actually a very, very pivotal time for me and really led to where I am today. So I ran a small team called Lucasfilm Learning.

NICK ROSA: And you also worked on some of the Lucasfilm games, titles, you told me?

VICKI DOBBS BECK: Well, so Lucasfilm Learning was actually a part of LucasArts. It was actually part of the games division, but it was this small team who was focused on doing educational multimedia. And at the time, I mean I was really fascinated by bringing together storytelling, high fidelity visuals and interactivity. And at the time, the way you had to do that was with a computer driven laser disc, which many people don't even know what that is.

NICK ROSA: You've been pioneering CD-ROMs. I remember some of your titles were the first ones to use CD-ROMs and audio dubbing and the dialogues that were recorded by real artists and so on.

VICKI DOBBS BECK: Yeah, this was actually pre-CD-ROM. The time that I'm talking. Yeah, then CD-ROM came about. There was a project that we did which was essentially a proof of concept called Paul Park Ranger and the Mystery of the Disappearing Ducks. And there's a lot of things about that project that are really cool, but not the least of which was how it was created because it was actually a high school design team paired with the professional design team. And the high school kids actually came up - so they were creating a learning proof of concept that would be targeted at middle schoolers. So they had just been through middle school and who better to design than kids that had just been through that experience.



So they actually came up with the idea of the mystery format, of the idea of this character Paul Park Ranger. And what was interesting about it is it was Paul's cabin. So you go into Paul's cabin. It's a very literal interface, right, it looks just like a cabin with file cabinets and desks and experiments and a video machine, video player and so forth. And Paul has had to - you know, he leaves you a video recording and a message because he's had to go out and solve other mysteries. And he asks you to solve the mystery of the disappearing ducks.

So we did this in collaboration with Apple Computer and the Audubon Society. And honestly, I think we were like 30 years ahead of our time. But it is such a perfect sort of metaphor, if you will, for where we are today with VR.

NICK ROSA: Absolutely. So pioneering a new medium that still has to explode, but it has incredible potential for what it can do for the masses.

VICKI DOBBS BECK: Exactly. That experience really - well, first of all, I had no background in education, no real background in technology, but it was one of those things where I was in the right place at the right time. And you know became somewhat of an expert by virtue of being there first. And it was a really exciting time and it really defined my path to this day because I was really then watching for the time when we could combine those three, storytelling, high fidelity imagery and interactivity, when we could do that with a device that actually made it possible to deliver all three of those things and we finally got there.

NICK ROSA: And can you tell us how ILMxLAB has been born because it's not something that's happened like last year. It's been now here for a while. You've been operating for how long, five years now?

VICKI DOBBS BECK: Five years this month.

NICK ROSA: Wow.

VICKI DOBBS BECK: And what happened really was, again, as the technology was advancing and there were a number of us within the company who were really always looking for opportunities to sort of combine the talent of - or leverage the talent from both ILM and LucasArts games and that it was those two worlds started to converge. And there is a guy who you might know, Kim Libreri, who's the CTO -

DANIEL COLAIANNI: I was going to ask - I was going to say I heard that you worked with him and did a lot of work with him as well.

VICKI DOBBS BECK: And he inspired me a great deal and he really brought together this small sort of almost gorilla-like team, meaning it was a little bit kind of hidden away, that was a combination of ILM artists and LucasArts. And what they were doing is really trying to do some groundbreaking work in high fidelity real-time graphics to see how close to cinematic quality we could get. And that really became the foundation for ILMxLAB. Based on that work, we felt that we could build a production studio essentially on top of that with that as a key element of how we would create and what was possible.

And the other thing that Kim did is he introduced me to a book that had a really important impact on my thinking. It was called the Blue Ocean Strategy and the premise, if you're not familiar with it, is that rather than sort of duking it out in the bloody waters, you know, shark-infested waters, it's to redefine the competitive landscape and find a blue ocean, a new opportunity. And that coupled with this sort of groundbreaking research in high fidelity real-time graphics, caused us to think there was a real opportunity to pioneer in storytelling using these new devices that had been announced, but were not at that time available. So virtual reality and eventually, augmented or mixed reality.



DANIEL COLAIANNI: With that as well, I mean how come you didn't decide to call it ILM VR or IMAR or ZR or anything like that?

VICKI DOBBS BECK: I think that was one of the smartest decisions we made because, again, what we were interested in is immersive storytelling and the technology was in the devices were really just ways to deliver these new kinds of stories. So we weren't limiting ourselves to virtual reality. We were interested in the immersive nature of the technology. So, for example, we did the visuals for the Millennium Falcon Ride, Smugglers Run at Galaxy's Edge, so that's not a VR experience, but it's a very, very immersive experience. And we also knew we were going to be interested in the whole mixed reality space too. So what we called it was the Immersive Entertainment.

And I think that encapsulates the creative vision for immersive storytelling as opposed to focusing on the delivery device.

NICK ROSA: And immersive storytelling is also at the foundation of what's happening right now with the Galaxy Edge entertainment that is happening in Disney parks right now. And I know that you recently announced a new product that is going to come out probably later on this year, next year, inspired by this experience that is basically immersive entertainment, but in VR.

Can you tell us a little bit more about this?

VICKI DOBBS BECK: Yeah, I think VR actually does offer some really, really powerful opportunities, right. Its strengths are what people often refer to as the power of presence or the power of being there because you're in a world. And the other is the power of connection. You can connect once you're in that world, you can connect with characters in a unique and compelling way.

So one of our, again, I mentioned before that we're really interested in the idea of connected and complementary experiences and Walt Disney Imagineering created this extraordinary physical location in Galaxy's Edge. But there are there are some things that just simply can't be done in real life either because of the laws of physics, etc., or are just cost prohibitive. We felt like we could extend the world of Galaxy's Edge and Black Spire Outpost on the Planet Batu in VR. So that's exactly what we have set out to do and, unfortunately, I can't talk a lot about it, but it's really, really exciting.

NICK ROSA: I tried.

VICKI DOBBS BECK: More soon. But it is - I think it's a fantastic use of VR and the Imagineering team's really excited about what we're doing and it's been great collaborating with them and building out that world.

DANIEL COLAIANNI: I mean I know one of the very first things that the reason why you were put on my radar was for the CARNE y ARENA kind of project that you worked on and that was really when I viewed that and when I had an opportunity to see some of the materials and the thinking behind that. That was when my thinking of the work that you were doing shifted considerably from this idea of, okay, we can use VR for this, we can do Excel for this. But that was genuinely a piece of content that really, for me, I don't know anyone watching or listening to this feels differently, but really switches things up and really showcases what we can do with some of the budget there, with some of the great thinking of minds and then maximizing the potential of technology.

VICKI DOBBS BECK: Yeah, the CARNE y ARENA was really our first major project and was a very, very special project on so many different levels. It was the vision of Alejandro Iñárritu. And I think what makes it so special is Alejandro could see what the unique potential was for VR and he created that experience intentionally for VR. He never intended it as a short film, for example. And he was literally able to put you, in what's in effect a scene, inside of a story, let's call it. And VR has the ability to deliver such a visceral experience.



So the story of CARNE y ARENA is that there's a group of immigrants crossing the border from Mexico into the United States at night and they get caught. And it's funny because even when I say that, just describe that now, having gone through it. I mean last time I went through it was probably in its full glory at LACMA. It was a couple years ago. It still gives me chills. It had that much impact. And I think because you felt like you were there, you felt empathy for the experience that these people were having. And when it started out on CARNE y ARENA, we were concerned about how many characters, like we're thinking maybe four because they all had to run in real time and in the end I can't remember, I think it was like in total, it was something like 15 characters and helicopter and dogs. I mean it was one of those things where you just didn't really know if it was possible to deliver on his vision, but we were able to thankfully do so.

And it was really important that it looked as cinematic as possible. It felt as real as possible. So Alejandro actually did a live-action shoot that became the sort of ground truth for what we were aspiring toward and then, he also spent a lot of time developing the story that the actors were actually people that had crossed the border into the United States. So they weren't really actors in the classic sense. And I think a lot of these factors really delivered the authenticity that made that so powerful.

And then it was, as you know Daniel, was acknowledged by the community. It was the first ever VR experience at the Cannes Film Festival and then it received not only one of the VR awards, but it also received a special Oscar in recognition for this new kind of powerful storytelling.

NICK ROSA: And this is thanks to innovation in storytelling. So can you tell us a little bit more on why does innovation and storytelling matter for your vision and the vision of the artist and directors that you're working with at Lucas and Lucasfilm and IMLxLAB?

VICKI DOBBS BECK: Well, there's a quote that I love from Ursula K. Le Guin and she said, there have been great societies that did not use the wheel, but there have been no societies that did not tell stories. So stories are as much a part of us as life itself. And, obviously, we come from a company that has a long history of storytelling. So when there is a new way to tell stories, we felt that we needed to be there pioneering.

And as I was saying, I think that there is something about, again, VR at the moment, in particular, where we're actually creating memories that have a lasting impact. There's something about the way being in the world and connecting with characters in and where your role matters, that is, I think unique from any other form of storytelling.

NICK ROSA: I remember like 20 years ago, when I was playing the LucasArts or even before the Lucasfilm games, titles, me clicking on a mouse while watching a screen. Well, when I think about Vader Immortal, I clearly remember the first time that I been face-to-face with Darth Vader in the same room and it's incredible because it's part of my memory and it's even if it's completely fiction and it's basically digital immersive theater, is a memory that I bring with myself right now. Do you think that there's a responsibility from the storytellers on how the emotional impact that they provide during those stories towards the audience? Because some of those experiences can be daunting or can be emotionally too impactful.



VICKI DOBBS BECK: I think, as with many things, there is a balance that we're trying to strike. But I do think that the emotional impact, the potential for emotional impact is one of VR's unique strengths. So I think we do as storytellers and content creators, we should recognize that and then lean into it in a way that is compelling and responsible.

I remember hearing at a conference that there was a talk and this guy was - they were doing horror, which is an obvious application of VR, right. I mean where you imagine being in a haunted house, but he literally said that he had PTSD from basically being in such a visceral horror experience day in and day out. And so, for me, like that's where you really do have to acknowledge how powerful that experience is and make good choices.

DANIEL COLAIANNI: Yeah, I mean we were actually having a discussion at the academy the other day about how we find it very interesting that you have these age ratings for video games and for movies and things like that. So we're having a bit of a discussion that perhaps you can look at a normal game that you might play on a console device, on a flat screen TV and that might be a 12 or maybe a 15 or 16. But then if you were to translate that into virtual reality or an experience where you're completely inclusive, would that mean it would keep the same age rating? Does it change? It's a really fascinating thing because something that's a 16 for a 2D flat screen could be an 18 plus in VR.

VICKI DOBBS BECK: You're right and going back to my horror example, I mean I get really easily - like I don't like haunted houses. I get really scared, but I've had to do a lot of VR, obviously, over the years. And so, the one advantage about VR is people don't know when your eyes are closed. So when I've had to do horror experience, if it just gets to be too much, I just shut my eyes because you can do that. And I have heard of experiences where people literally rip off the headset because it's too much.

DANIEL COLAIANNI: Yeah, I mean, Nick, I don't know how you've dealt with this in a situation, but it's actually, we had a new staff member join with us, as well. Literally, this is literally just happened just yesterday and we put her into an experience and all of a sudden, she clipped through the side of the world and started falling and her first reaction was like, no, get me out of here, get me out of here. So I guess there's a lot of responsibility from that point of view.

NICK ROSA: Yeah, and there is a responsibility from the creators, but also from - I think that the public should be educated about the risk and the opportunities of using this kind of experiences. I mean it's a world of fantasy you immerse yourself in. And probably even more when augmented reality devices will be available on the market and wild they spread all around the world, we will be more and more immersed into a reality that will merge with digital content that is going to be even a more - a greater challenge for content creators because doing contextual entertainment and contextual content to the environment is way more difficult than creating something completely synthetic like in VR. But the boundaries of reality between what is real, what is not real. I mean I don't remember my life before my mobile phone, but basically, we are cyborg and we cannot live without it. In the future, this kind of boundaries between digital images and digital reality in the real world would become less and less prominent.

VICKI DOBBS BECK: Yeah, I totally agree. And I mean our relationship to reality is really fundamentally changing and you said it earlier, when you have this memory of coming face-to-face with Darth Vader and it is a memory as if you had actually been there, actually engaging with him, as opposed to maybe remembering watching a movie. It feels different and that was actually one of our original tests. I mean Vader Immortal was a long time coming. It was a journey that sort of spanned four years and we started down some different paths. But at the end or not at the end, but in our journey, we reminded ourselves that the power is being in the world, in this case, in the world of Star Wars, and engaging with that character.



We also knew this had to be your story though. Vader was sort of the experience is about your story in the world and with Darth Vader. So we did this test and it actually is pretty close to what's in the experience now where you're in the cell and the door is open and Darth Vader walks toward you and you hear the heavy breathing and the heavy foot falls and it's terrifying. And then, he comes and he gets face-to-face with you and he looks into your eyes, which is obviously something we can do because the headset knows where your eyes are. And then, in the test, he delivered a line and almost no one heard the dialogue because they were so overwhelmed with just his presence that they literally couldn't process it all.

So it taught us that, A) we could actually have a meaningful relationship/interaction with a character like Darth Vader and that pacing in VR is a really important consideration, especially while it's such a new art form. So you have to let people absorb the experience before you want to deliver a lot of key story, if you will. And I think what'll happen over time is the same thing that has happened in film, which is people over decades have become very familiar with and comfortable with film. And so, the pacing has really picked up over years if you watch an old movie versus a current movie, you'd really feel the difference.

So there were lots of things from that. That little test that were helpful to us in moving Vader Immortal forward.

DANIEL COLAIANNI: So, Vicky, we wouldn't be able to really do this podcast without also talking about location-based entertainment, right, with all of the fascinating stuff that have happened from The VOID and some of the experiences that I know that ILMxLAB have had a kind of first hand in creating and developing for to, I guess, the impact and the change of how that differs from an at-home experience versus go into a place and experiencing it. So it'd be great to get your insight, I guess, on that process has been and, I guess, taking your experience from normal experiencing it at watching it on a 2D screen for you to actually go into a location and actually, having all these other elements that come into play with it as well.

VICKI DOBBS BECK: Location-based immersive experiences are, I think, sort of took us a little bit by surprise in the beginning, but are so powerful. I think what we had been sort of focusing on experiences that you would engage in the home. And when we saw what The VOID was doing and we then had the chance to collaborate with them, it opened up a whole new set of possibilities. And so, now at ILMxLAB we are essentially focused on both location-based experiences and episodic experiences which are generally experienced in the home. So with location-based, you can deliver scope and scale, you control a 100% of the environment, so you can deliver a 4D experience, if you will.

One of the things that The VOID does, which is so powerful, is that they call it a hyper reality experience and they match the digital world with physical world. So if you see a wall in the virtual world and you reach out, there actually is a wall there. So that one-to-one mapping causes your brain to absolutely buy into the fact that you're there and then, it gets further accentuated by smells and heat and rumbling and all of that. Things that we can't currently do in the home. And then the other big advantage to The VOID was that it was something you do with your friends and family. And so, when that opportunity came up, our first project was Star Wars Secrets of the Empire, we decided to use it as an opportunity to forward this idea of connected and complementary experiences. We knew we were doing Vader Immortal. And so, we said, let's set this - it's almost like Secrets of the Empire is almost like a prequel. So for those that have done Secrets to the Empire, it's set on Mustafar, but an outpost in Mustafar and you see Vader's Castle in the distance. And then when you get to Vader Immortal, you actually go to Vader's Castle and you engage with him in a much more extended way.



So the other thing that's interesting is if you listen to people talk about their experience, like at Secrets of the Empire or Ralph Breaks VR or Avengers Damage Control, they talk about it in a really interesting way. They talk about their role in that experience. It was so great when I - you know, when we were engaging - well, most recently, Avengers Damage Control, it was so cool when we were with the Avengers. But they talk about it from their point of view as opposed to necessarily the narrative that's unfolding.

DANIEL COLAIANNI: It's kind of like when I talk to people about playing video games, for example, and people ask me, oh, why would you want to play a video game? There's some people ask that and I guess that's a bit alien to me and Nick. And I say to them, well, you can watch a movie, but you're just watching people do stuff, right. But when you're in something like a gamified experience, you are in control, you are the main character essentially. You're the person who has all the power and you modify the story and things like that, which I think is important.

NICK ROSA: It's also the opportunity of living hundreds of lives, so you can be a wizard or you can be a Jedi or you can be an Avenger or you can be yourself in real world. But I mean all of this is going to be blended in our future use of technology with augmented reality.

There's an interesting concept that goes from storytelling to story living. Maybe we want to explore this a little bit more, Vicki?

VICKI DOBBS BECK: Sure. So when we started ILMxLAB, and this is still true, our goal was for people to step inside our stories, literally step inside the worlds of our stories. But as we've been pushing the boundaries of immersive storytelling, we're now really aspiring to something even bigger, which is this idea of transitioning from storytelling, which is essentially one-way communication, to story living where you're in a world and you make consequential choices that drive the narrative forward.

Also, for us, we think of story living almost like a mosaic. So going back to this idea of connected and complementary experiences, we're trying to create different experiences each leveraging the unique strengths of whatever the devices or location versus home, etc. And so, if you think about each individual experience as a tile in that mosaic, the tile can stand on its own, but taken together it reveals a much richer, deeper and more complex design.

And so, some of the key elements of story living are the world itself, the world has to be rich in detail and it has to be a place you want to visit and explore. It should invite you to explore. And over time, we want to have worlds that have a sense of persistence of one. So there could be different facets to it which is the world is changing based on the time of day, for example. But more interestingly, if the world evolves based on the choices made by those who visited there and not just your choices, but maybe other people who have visited that world.

So there's a kind of world building and world growing that is incredibly interesting. And then, it's about the compelling interactions with characters.

NICK ROSA: Okay, so can we expect some, I don't know, even a synchronous multi-user or like the choices of the multiple players around the world will influence the experience of other players?

VICKI DOBBS BECK: That is the world we imagine. You know, there's a lot of things that have to happen in terms of the evolution of technologies to make some of these things possible. But, yes, that is exactly the kind of experience or experiences that we envision for the future.

DANIEL COLAIANNI: I guess augmented reality can play a key part in that side of a world that's touched by other people as well?



VICKI DOBBS BECK: Definitely. And, again, each of these you design for the strengths of the platform. Augmented reality is an interesting challenge for Star Wars because Star Wars is a galaxy far, far away. And so, Star Wars is really about in-world storytelling. So when we're thinking about what does AR mean for Star Wars, which we definitely want to engage with, but we want to do it in a way that is true to the franchise and authentic. So that's an interesting question from a creative perspective.

In contrast, for example, Marvel. You know, Marvel does take place in our world or can take place in our world and so, that's a much simpler sort of creative - a more, I wouldn't say simpler, but more straightforward creative opportunity.

DANIEL COLAIANNI: It makes more sense for the story and how it works, right?

VICKI DOBBS BECK: Exactly. But we're very, very excited about augmented reality and what kinds of stories we can tell.

NICK ROSA: Going back a little bit in time, augmented reality is something that is probably in the next couple of years that is going to become mass markets. I wanted to deep dive a little bit more into Vader Immortal because I believe that has been one of the most innovative projects that we've seen in VR ever and I suppose it has been an incredible challenge for you to undertake. Can you talk us a little bit more about the production process and the challenges that you had to face along your journey to develop such a masterpiece?

VICKI DOBBS BECK: Sure. I mean we literally had to innovate on almost every level imaginable, creatively, technologically, from a production standpoint, from a business model standpoint. It was when we sort of started, we said, okay, it's not a film, it's not a game, it's not an attraction, but we can actually learn from all of these. And we had to assemble a team that had experience in each of these different areas, bring them together in order to try to create something new.

There had also never been anything of this scope and scale in VR at that point or, like I said, it was a four-year journey. So it was of a unprecedented scope and scale in terms of immersive interactive story as opposed to a straight up game because at the time we were seeing people translating games that existed - that already existed into VR and now we're seeing a lot more experiences that are original to VR, but it was a different undertaking.

DANIEL COLAIANNI: I was going to say, I mean with that, I mean I get asked like all the time when I show people the experience. They always ask me like I say, oh, so I'm going to put you into Vader Immortal. And it's, oh, is that a game? I was like, no, no, it's not really a game. What is it, a film? I said, no, it's not really a film either. I mean it's a narrative experience, it's an experience. And this is something that we've struggled with a lot with the VR awards, for example, is defining, okay, what is a film, what is a game, what is an experience? Because it's just completely different and it's hard to describe, I guess.

VICKI DOBBS BECK: That's true actually and it was one of the most rewarding things was really when people recognized it for what it was, which was it was an interactive narrative. You don't change the outcome. It isn't a choose your own adventure, but your experience is really based on your journey through.

And one of the things going back to just sort of the scope and scale of it all is it's three episodes. So we were interested in episodic storytelling. The first episode is somewhere between 45 minutes and an hour. So it's of the scope and scale of a television pilot, but it's all running in real time. And it was as close to cinematic as we could get and it was designed for a platform that hadn't been released. So that required so much innovation and just guts really. I mean we got a lot of help from Oculus and from Epic and people were really wonderful in trying to help us push the limits of it's essentially a mobile chipset. And I think we surprised most people with what we were able to deliver.



DANIEL COLAIANNI: I was going to say, design it for the Quest on such an ambitious project must have been challenging at best?

VICKI DOBBS BECK: It was very challenging, but we actually believed that the Quest and as a tetherless headset could be a game changer. And I think it's showing that it is a game changer.

NICK ROSA: It is a game changer, yeah.

VICKI DOBBS BECK: Yeah, I mean being able to - so when we set out to do Vader Immortal, we knew people wanted to be in Star Wars, they wanted to engage with Darth Vader and they wanted to hold and wield a lightsaber, right. Those were kind of the three things that we knew we had to deliver on. And the tetherless headset really allowed us to create a very compelling lightsaber experience. But related to that is it was really important to us that everything you did was intentional. So we teach you how to wield a lightsaber in the narrative and then you use it as a tool and a weapon throughout the experience. But we wanted it to be, like I said, very intentional. But we also knew that there were people who would just probably love to spend hours with the lightsaber.

So we actually created a separate module which was, I would love to say that that was by design from the get-go, but it actually evolved over time and we said this is something, let's create two modules, essentially the interactive narrative module and then the Lightsaber Dojo. And that turned out to be really a great combination and we replicated it in each of the episodes with the Lightsaber Dojo becoming more and more sophisticated.

I mean in the episode two, you also had force powers, so you have lightsaber and force powers and it just got even more elaborate in episode three. That's an example of like the choices you have to make about how to make it not - make it really authentic and compelling and intentional in terms of its design.

NICK ROSA: And, Vicki, for everyone that is watching the podcast right now, I just wanted to remind that we recorded a wonderful, Ask Me Everything, on our space with Le Guin and Ben Snow, that is available on YouTube for everyone to see. So if our viewers want to geek out a little bit more about the creative process and the design of the interactions with Invader Immortal, can find probably the link somewhere here. Daniel has the link.

VICKI DOBBS BECK: Excellent.

NICK ROSA: I had a question for you, Vicki. You mentioned that immersive is a device that requires responsibility in the way that you use it because storytelling can be so powerful, but also I believe that for the time that we're living, it's important to give voice to all the minorities and be aware of the diversity of the experience that you can provide, but also design. How important, from your point of view, is to have a diverse team designing an experience that is accessible and it's taking in consideration the voices of everyone, all the minorities and is aware of diversity?

VICKI DOBBS BECK: I think it's incredibly important and I brought up that example of Paul Park Ranger because I think it's potentially a model that we might try to apply in the work that we're doing because one of the problems with the game industry, in general, but very specifically in in this whole new immersive entertainment space is that we don't have a very diverse talent pool from which to draw. So we're going to have to help build that because I think it's critical. But one of the things is first and I can even say this as a woman. I mean there are not even a lot of women in the immersive entertainment space as compared to the number of men. A part of it is I have to see content that resonates for me before I'm really interested in pursuing a career path there.

And so, I mean interestingly in my case, I am not a gamer and I was really interested in immersive and interactive narrative. So I actually helped drive it as opposed to waited to see it created. But I think diversity of content, those making it, the audience, that is absolutely essential to our future and it's a very high priority for us going forward is to figure out how to broaden that for the future.



DANIEL COLAIANNI: Yeah, I mean, Vicky, we have an upcoming board meeting as well with yourself, Ryan and a bunch of other fantastic kind of individuals from across the space, which is going to be looking at how we can tackle these particular challenges together as well.

VICKI DOBBS BECK: And some of what AIXR is doing already is really speaking to that by helping inspire young people when they're like, I think middle school is a really, important time when kids are starting to make decisions about what they want to - you know, directions that they're interested in and so forth.

And I think by exposing kids at like that age to the possibilities and then getting them excited about contributing as creators, as well as audience members, I think that's what I'm talking about is building a pipeline of talent. And it's going to take commitment and I know it's going to be worth it because I know that the content that's going to come out as the diversity of the creators expands is going to be sort of revolutionary in many ways and I'm really excited about that and very passionate about it.

NICK ROSA: Vicky, thank you so much for being with us. This has been incredible, but before we end this episode of Field of View, I just wanted to ask you, can you tell us a little bit more about what's next, what's the future, what's next for ILMxLAB, what's next for you?

VICKI DOBBS BECK: I think this - honestly this idea of story living is a very big idea. And I think we could spend many years taking steps to evolve that into a really rich experience that in so many ways - I mean what I love is that this idea of story has permeated virtually every part of our lives, right. You know, you hear even on the business side, you often hear people talking about stories in order to communicate business principles and so forth.

So story is everywhere and I think creating rich stories - well, one of the things that I think is interesting is this idea of a spectrum of experiences. I was talking about tiles in a mosaic and there's people sometimes refer to it as lean back or plunge in, you know, that's kind of your spectrum, right, lean back being a bit more passive, and plunge in would be sort of full-on like tails from - I would say tails from the Galaxy's Edge will be a plunge in. And so, creating a sort of ecosystem of experiences where your story is unique to you, but it lives inside of this larger context.

And I think if we do it well, it will create something that is dynamic, social, personal and hopefully, it even can be transformational. I think that CARNE y ARENA was an example and give us an indication of what transformational looks like.

DANIEL COLAIANNI: So I mean is Galaxy's Edge going to incorporate some of these elements of story living?

VICKI DOBBS BECK: Yes, it is. I mean we thought we took a step forward with Vader Immortal and Secrets of the Empire. I think that Tales from the Galaxy's Edge by connecting to the park, but offering a unique and complementary experience where just like in the park, you're in the world and you matter, but it's your story.

I think that, yes, I think you'll start to see this as an expansion of the whole story living concept.

NICK ROSA: We can't wait to try it. Thank you so much for being with us. Vicky.

VICKI DOBBS BECK: Thank you both.



DANIEL COLAIANNI: Thank you very much. And I'd just like to remind everyone that is a monthly series for us where we'll be having new guests on each month discussing the possible scopes and the various different areas of innovation within virtual reality, augmented reality, mixed reality, whatever term you want to use for it. And, you know, it's all about not really necessarily about the news, it's not really about what's going on in the space, but it's about these genuine stories that are shaping the industry that we are within. So I'd encourage you to subscribe to the series, leave us any comments and feedback and additional to that, we have the Academy's Slack Group with over 700 members within that at the moment, where you can go into that Slack group, you can chat with people like myself, with Nick. Vicki, I think you're even a member of that Slack group as well. So you can go in there, you can share some stories and keep up to date with things and that's a good way to never miss an episode of Field of View as well.

SPEAKER: Through accessible insights, a solid network of support and recognizing truly outstanding achievements near or far, big or small, we're in this together. AIXR.