

A woman with brown hair, wearing a red shirt and a dark pinstriped blazer, stands behind a large, illuminated marquee sign that spells out the word 'DREAM'. The sign is made of metal letters with warm white lights. She is positioned in front of a dark brick wall, with large windows on either side showing a bright, hazy outdoor scene. The overall mood is professional yet warm and inviting.

GUARDIAN of the UNIVERSE

KNOWN FOR
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ORGANIZATION,
STRINGENT
ATTENTION TO
DETAIL AND OVERALL
FEARLESSNESS,
MARVEL PRODUCTION
MAVEN VICTORIA
ALONSO DONS THE
HEAVY CAPE OF
RESPONSIBILITY
WITH REMARKABLE
EASE AND GRACE.

WRITTEN BY
ERIN MAXWELL

PHOTOGRAPHED BY
KREMER JOHNSON

Viewers who've waded through more than a few tentpole franchise closing credits know that it takes a village, if not a province, to help steer these big-screen behemoths from start to finish. And though managing a crew of thousands, with budgets of well north of \$100 million average—all while simultaneously handling several different productions for both television and theatrical—might be a tad challenging for some, at this point for Victoria Alonso, it's a Tuesday.

"People always ask what's the secret sauce that has worked for you guys," says Alonso, the president of physical production, postproduction, visual effects and animation at Marvel Studios. "I think the secret sauce is collaboration."

It's not an unusual observation from someone whose first instinct is to deflect credit away from the individual, especially herself, to the collective. "We're pretty good at collaborating with each other and leaning on each other depending on what the needs of the movie or the show are," she adds. "That has never changed. It was there from the very beginning, and it has continued to be there 17 years later."

Marvel Studios is a beast with many masters. A subsidiary of The Walt Disney Studios, Marvel has been churning out blockbusters and event programming since before the Disney merger in 2009, when *Iron Man* (2008) signaled the beginning of a new era for the company previously known as Marvel Films. In its present incarnation, Kevin Feige—president of Marvel Studios and chief creative



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officer for Marvel Comics, Marvel Television and Marvel Animation—and Marvel co-president Louis D'Esposito, oversee the beast, which now spans an empire of comics, movies, television, marketing and theme park attractions.

The Marvel Cinematic Universe's stock-in-trade is the superhero, and the challenge has always been expanding its audience beyond its comic book fan base. It's not as easy as the box office returns might indicate. How does one balance big-screen battles and complex otherworldly environments with compelling narratives and conflicted characters? It's an especially difficult task when new spandex-wearing, breast-plated supers pop up with increasing regularity in theaters and on television.

For Alonso, the trick is not being overwhelmed by the bigness of it all. "It's like eating an elephant," she jokes with her characteristic, unflappable ease. "You've just gotta get through that first bite, chew it, and keep on going. It's one step at a time. I think the same way that you attack an indie film, where you have a crew of 50 or 20, you attack one of these very large productions, which has 6,000 people worldwide. I don't mean just the shooting portion of it. I mean all that it takes—from prep to the last frame that goes into the movie theaters or Disney+."

Alonso cannot emphasize prep and planning enough, but also having a fallback plan. "It's about having not just plan A, because plan A mostly doesn't work," she points out. "You have plan A but also you have plan

B, plan C, plan D, and hopefully one of them will work.”

WORKFLOW GEEK

The Marvel executive’s propensity for organization was apparent early on, when in 1991 she moved from Seattle to Los Angeles, where she was asked by an AD friend to work as a PA on a movie. This led to Alonso working on commercials for Ridley and Tony Scott’s company, RSA Films. Digital Domain, which was doing VFX on one of these spots, took notice of Alonso’s initiative and her inquisitiveness and offered her a job helping out the company’s longtime executive VP of production, Ed Ulbrich, after his assistant broke her leg. What began as a temporary stint lasted four years. She started out as an assistant coordinator on commercial campaigns. But soon she moved on to big-screen, big-budget affairs, ending up as a visual effects producer on Tim Burton’s *Big Fish* (2003) and Ridley Scott’s *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005), among other key credits.

As she told *VFX Voice*, the magazine of the Visual Effects Society, in 2017: “I started asking a lot of questions, and they seemed to think, ‘This girl seems smart enough, friendly enough, cares enough.’” In terms of learning the intricacies of the VFX process, she called her time at Digital Domain on-the-job training.

“I figured if I could understand how they did it, I could help them maximize the efficiencies of how we get the image where it needs to go so that we have happy clients,” she told *VFXV*. “My entire process was in breaking down how to get things done in hours it didn’t appear we had and reassembling the workflow to get ahead of the curve.” Alonso has referred to herself as a

“workflow geek” who was self-taught, eventually figuring out “how to achieve the artistic vision with the team.”

“That was the beginning,” she tells *Produced By*. “(After that) I never left visual effects. Once I was bit by the visual effects bug and realized that you can create anything—*anything*—out of nothing, I saw the true magic of what that department can do. It’s the language I understand most: sound and images.”

But making the jump to VFX wasn’t always easy. Luckily, she happened to pick an industry filled with folks who spoke her language.

“I wasn’t mentored,” says Alonso. “I sort of stumbled through, but I was very curious. The beautiful thing about nerds and geeks, who are my favorites, is if you ask, they’ll teach you, because they love to share their knowledge and to connect with someone who is interested. So I sat for hours on end with a number of digital supervisors and visual effects supervisors, who were all men, and they taught me. They were pretty wonderful. It wasn’t exclusive whatsoever.”

It might have been largely a man’s world, but there were exceptions, which fed Alonso’s determination to succeed despite the odds. “It was mostly male,” she reminds, “but Digital Domain did have a number of female producers. And we did have the head of features, Brooke Breton. I remember watching her—she was pregnant—and she was walking into work and I kept thinking, ‘That’s really cool,’ that she can come in with her big belly and she can do her job. I looked up to her as a mom who could do the job she loved.”

As a high-ranking woman in the VFX field, her visibility as a trailblazer helped lay the groundwork for others to follow her path.

ORIGIN STORY

As with all good heroes, there is a compelling origin story. Raised in Argentina during a time of great turmoil due to the military dictatorship of the era, Alonso’s childhood was plagued by violence and instability. At age 19, she moved from Buenos Aires to Seattle, where she studied psychology and theater at the University of Washington.

“I tried acting a little bit because I thought I loved the theater,” she recalls. “The theater in Argentina saved my life. Because when I wasn’t marching during the military dictatorship, which could become pretty deadly, I was at the theater. So the theater felt very much like a safe place for me to go.”

It was in the theater that Alonso got her first taste of production. “The moment that I started learning what production was, I was hooked.”

THE JUMP TO MARVEL

In 2006, Alonso joined Marvel as the chief of visual effects and postproduction and received her first feature producer credit, as coproducer in 2008 for *Iron Man*—the film that would launch Marvel Studios into the stratosphere and make it a dominant force in the moviemaking industry.

In September of last year, Alonso was promoted to president of physical and postproduction from her previous position of executive VP of production. As such, Alonso surveys the slate of films and series for Marvel Studios, overseeing its vast crews and postproduction.

“She is one of the most dynamic, candid and accessible executives in the industry, and we’re thrilled that she’ll continue to be by our side in this elevated role as we lead Marvel Studios into the future,” Feige said about Alonso at the time of the announcement.



Victoria Alonso confers with director Taika Waititi, right, and exec producer Brad Winderbaum on *Thor: Ragnarok* (2017).

COURTESY WALT DISNEY STUDIOS

During her tenure at Marvel Studios, the films she worked on have hauled in more than \$25 billion at the box office. In just the last few years, she served as executive producer on such megahits as *Spider-Man: Far from Home*, *Avengers: Endgame*, *Captain Marvel*, *Eternals*, *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings*, *Spider-Man: No Way Home*, and *Thor: Love and Thunder*. For Disney+, she worked magic on the MCU series slate including *WandaVision*, *The Falcon and the Winter Soldier*, *Loki*, *What If...?*, the docuseries *Marvel*

Studios: Assembled, *Hawkeye*, and *Moon Knight*.

IN THE LABYRINTH

Perhaps one of the most brilliant plays in recent years from the Marvel playbook has been its ability to use all assets at its disposal to fully flesh out the stories of its superheroes—and the occasional villain. By using Disney+ series, Marvel is able to make large, more complicated aspects of the Marvel universe understandable to the uninitiated.

For example, labyrinthine ideas such as the multiverse or the Time Variance Authority can get convoluted if explained to a casual movie fan who has never picked up a Marvel comic. But by using the small screen to break down the concept and explain it in bite-size bits flavored with tasty character story arcs, the audience is given what they need to conquer the next big-screen effort that fully embraces those hard-to-grasp mythologies.

To make sure everything stays on the right storytelling path, it takes

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a veritable army of creatives under the guidance of Alonso, Feige and D'Esposito, who head communication between the troops—and among themselves with weekly meetings—making sure the fabric of the Marvel tapestry remains intact.

“We have our slates and our movies and our storylines plastered on walls,” says Alonso, “and we weave through the different fibers of the MCU. Then it is crafted based on where we are with that story in particular. It is intricate. There’s not just three people (overseeing it). There’s a lot of people taking a look at where things are so that we don’t make mistakes. We have an amazing team of creatives that is consistently saying, ‘Hey, but if we do this, if we put that string there, it will affect these three things that we’re doing here.’ So when one thing starts affecting the other, then we know if it’s going to trigger the domino effect of disaster or if it’s really going to get us through in the way that the story is supposed to be told.”

And what wondrous stories have been told. Thanks to Marvel Studios, longtime fans of the brand finally got to see their favorite Silver Age heroes swing between skyscrapers, enter mystical and magical wars with evil sorcerers, witness the rise of Ragnarok,

and wage grand battles with alien beasts in New York. All were made possible with the groundbreaking VFX under Alonso’s watchful eye. Each constituted a considerable challenge, but a few were perhaps a bit more arduous than others because of sentimental reasons.

“The end battle of *Avengers: Endgame* was not only challenging, but emotional,” recounts Alonso. “I think it’s such a responsibility because we have this saga that has taken over 10 years of telling stories, and all eyes were on every single thing we had ever done.”

Adds Alonso: “We had over 44 characters that we had to pay tribute to. We had to include the head to tell a part of the story. And it had to be so you were not numb by (the time of) the fight. How do you make it emotional when you’re going to lose two of your most important Avengers? How do you not let the emotion of that loss get the most of you as a filmmaker and still tell the story that people want to see over and over—but also that are moved in the way that you are moved? We live with these characters. They become our friends, as they do for other people.”

EARNING A LEGACY

The end result is a legacy for the ages—not just what is on the screen, but also

Alonso herself. To Marvel fans she is part of a credit scroll, but to peers and those in the know, she is seen as an innovator.

“Victoria is a great combination of fearlessness, demanding, and trusting,” says Lynwen Brennan, executive vice president and general manager of Lucasfilm. “Marvel has such a breadth of work in the pipeline that it can develop consistent relationships with VFX vendors. And Victoria works so closely with us; she knows and trusts what we are capable of doing. We have been fortunate enough to work with her and the Marvel team since the first *Iron Man* film, and it has been a wonderful collaboration. Victoria has always been there to encourage us to innovate and go further—whether that be the very first *Iron Man*, or the digital acting advancements in Smart Hulk, the world warping of Doctor Strange or the complex battle scenes in *Avengers: Infinity War*.”

Brennan says there’s a reason why Marvel films “have been nominated for a Visual Effects Academy Award almost every year for the last 14 years. Not only do they contain fantastic visual spectacle, but the spectacle is always in service to the story. That is where Victoria is unique. As an executive producer on all the films and one of the leaders steering the MCU, she is not only in the details of every shot, she knows

why the shot is important.”

In 2017, Alonso became the first woman to be awarded with the VES Visionary Award, recognizing her contribution to the industry, the art of visual effects and her leadership at the studio. It is a badge of honor she is proud of, particularly as one who constantly advocates for more women in the VFX industry.

“Victoria has elevated visual effects as an integral element of the art and business of moviemaking,” said VES board chair Mike Chambers at the time, adding that Alonso’s leadership “is paving the way for future generations of artists and producers” by redefining “the profile of visual effects on a global scale.”

Chambers added that Alonso’s status as a pioneer has to do with her

fearlessness. “She doesn’t shy away from a challenge and she makes sure that she is able to get the resources needed to make it happen,” he explained. “Her honesty builds trust both with the VFX vendors and her teams, and with the directors and her co-executive producers. She will say things that others may not say, but that need to be said. She will push for change and be a champion for those who are not yet equally represented in our industry.”

EQUALITY AND VISIBILITY

Creating a better tomorrow is exactly what Alonso has in mind. Recently, she was honored with the Visionary Award at the Outfest Legacy Awards for her contributions to LGBTQ+ representation

and media visibility, an important acknowledgement for an exec who wants to “stir up” conversation about equality and visibility in Hollywood.

“Diversity and inclusion is not a political game for us,” said Alonso, who is married to a same-sex partner, in her speech. “It is 100% a responsibility because you don’t get to have the global success that we have given the Walt Disney Company without the support of people around the world of every kind of human there is.”

When Alonso looks back at her 30 years in the industry, she emphasizes that there is not one road to success. “Just because it’s worked for others or for me doesn’t mean that you have to follow that road,” she offers. “Follow

Alonso, center, huddles with actors Richard Madden and Gemma Chan on the set of *Eternals*, directed by arthouse darling Chloé Zhao in her Marvel debut.



Alonso interacts with Robert Downey Jr. and Gwyneth Paltrow during production of *Iron Man 3* (2013).

your own path. And when you're not allowed in certain rooms, create that room for yourself."

HOPE AND FAITH

In addition to hero stories, Alonso is in the business of telling human stories. Though she is not by any means taking a break from Marvel, Alonso is taking a moment to tell a different kind of story—a passion project called *Argentina, 1985* about a public prosecutor, an inexperienced lawyer and a legal team that dared to prosecute the heads of Argentina's military dictatorship despite the personal danger to themselves. Directed by Santiago Mitre for Amazon Studios, Alonso will act as a producer on the film, which is a story that is very near and dear to her heart.

"This is the story of a group of attorneys that took the military dictatorship to court," she explains about the successful prosecution of many of the junta's offenders. "There's an outcome, obviously, that is historical—the first time in history a non-military court got this done. They were heroes in their own way."

The story mirrors Alonso's youth in Argentina, which she describes as an "incredibly sad and heinous chapter of our history. I'm a survivor of the military dictatorship. And I think for my daughter and every other new generation, it's important for them to know that the kind of genocide that was committed should be talked about, and people should be reminded of, because if we don't remind ourselves of the historical past, then we may fall into those hands again."

In all the movies Alonso helps create,



NEW MEMBERS

PRODUCED BY TRAINS THE SPOTLIGHT ON SOME OF THE GUILD'S NEWEST MEMBERS, AND OFFERS A GLIMPSE AT WHAT MAKES THEM TICK.



CATHERINE PAPPAS

Catherine Pappas' TV credits run the gamut from casting (*Wife Swap*) to director (*Undercover Boss*, *Auction Hunters*) to consulting producer (*Jerseylicious*, *Glam Fairy*) to field producer (*The Voice*) to supervising producer (*Cake Boss: Next Great Baker*) to showrunner (*Get Out of My Room*) to executive producer on the current Disney+ series *Family Reboot*, which premiered in June. She says she came to producing from the performance side of things. "As an actor I always loved being part of the ensemble that helped to tell a story, and soon realized that producing carried the same joy for me," she recounts. "As a producer you are the connector, the glue, and you work to build a team and establish an environment that allows people to thrive and bring their best creative work to the table. It's exciting to watch it all come together and know that you had a part in bringing a project to life."

BUCKET LIST

"To produce a project on every continent. I have two left: Australia and Antarctica."

PRODUCER'S ROLE IN A NUTSHELL:

"There are so many variables in this industry that you can't control, but what you can control is the heart you put into your work and the team you put in place to make that happen. Show up, do the work, and surround yourself with a diverse team. A variety of perspectives and life experiences bring creative solutions you may have never considered before—and that brings even more depth and heart to the project. Be the connector."

JUST BECAUSE IT'S WORKED FOR OTHERS OR FOR ME DOESN'T MEAN THAT YOU HAVE TO FOLLOW THAT ROAD," SHE OFFERS. "FOLLOW YOUR OWN PATH. AND WHEN YOU'RE NOT ALLOWED IN CERTAIN ROOMS, CREATE THAT ROOM FOR YOURSELF."

particularly Marvel movies, there is an underlying message of hope and faith. Between the action sequences, battle scenes and spectacular visual effects, there lies a very human story that touches almost everyone who has ever loved a Marvel saga. This is due to the carefully constructed backstories given to not just the heroes, but the villains as well, fleshing out the world in which they live beyond the concept of good versus evil.

This is not an accident. In each Marvel character, the possibility of change for the better lies at the core of their being. For villains who survive to live another day, there is the hope that they will become better people, or gods, and live up to their full potential.

"I think that there's no point in living if you don't have hope," says Alonso. "So of course that in some way is going to seep through our storytelling. I think it's also important for any mind, especially the young minds, to see themselves and

to see that even though at times we all have doubts and we may stumble, a slip is not a fall. Sometimes you just have to get up and get up and get up, like Captain Marvel did. You get up and you get up and you go out again. Because there's always that chance that if you take that one step again, you're going to make it through."

Alonso views this ray of hope not just as a through line in the Marvel universe, but as a responsibility.

"We're quite conscious that we have the eyes and the ears of a global audience," she says, "so a message of positivity and hope is incredibly important. For some kids, the only hopeful moment they have is when they see these movies, because everything else happening in their lives perhaps is of a different kind.

"So to be able to do that, to be able to give that to a kid—or the kid within you—that's the gift of telling these kinds of stories." ■