



## Episode 2: The Walt Disney Studios – Global Marketing and Virtual Production

### **Ashley and Tony (Podcasts Hosts)**

Welcome to the Life at Disney podcast, the show where you'll discover what it's like to Be Part of the Story in a career with Disney as we bring The Walt Disney Company's core values, culture, and work to life. We are your hosts Tony Williams and Ashley Siegel, and we are going to share some remarkable stories from the perspective of the people and teams behind the magic.

### **Tony**

This week both our guests hail from our Disney Studios Content team. Our Studio is the core of where The Walt Disney Company started nearly 100 years ago. Today it brings quality movies, episodic storytelling, music, and stage plays to consumers throughout the world. It encompasses a collection of respected film studios, that release under the Disney, Walt Disney Animation Studios, Pixar Animation Studios, Marvel Studios, Lucasfilm, 20th Century Studios, and Searchlight Pictures banners. It is also home to Disney Theatrical Productions, producer of world-class stage shows. To kick things off, we are going behind the scenes to Studio Marketing. Let's welcome to the show, Nicole Roberts, Senior Manager of Global Marketing Strategy. Nicole, thanks for joining us today.

### **Nicole**

Thanks so much, Tony. Happy to be here.

### **Tony**

Very, very happy to have you. How are you doing?

### **Nicole**

Good. Can't complain, you know, still working from home, but it's been a good experience so far.

### **Tony**

Awesome. Awesome. I know that's been, it's kind of been a mixed bag for some folks. Always happy to hear that it has been a good experience for you and hopefully for your team, business, and everything happening in content marketing. So really excited to hear about your experience both in joining The Walt Disney Company, your experience and your

role and the incredible work that you're leading. So, I'll start at the beginning, I guess. Tell us a bit about your Disney career and how you got started with the company.

### **Nicole**

Yeah, I'll try and make a long story short, but I started off at the company seven years ago, almost to the month as a temp at the company. I came in as a temporary assistant. My sister thought it'd be a good idea for me to join the temp pool while I was doing some project work on the side. And I did. And the first desk that I ended up on was the head of global publicity at the studio's Michelle Saul and I worked for her and supported her and her team for the couple of months while she was looking for a permanent assistant. And from there, that kind of just started my long-term temp assignment, journey at the company. I went from her desk to multicultural, working for that team for a little bit. Then on to global promotions, and the last desk I ended up on was the president of marketing, at that time who was Ricky Strauss. I was temping as another assistant on his desk and very quickly realized that working at that level and seeing marketing from a high level and just really getting an opportunity to meet executives from all across the company, it'd be a great opportunity for me to step into that role as possible. So, I applied, got the job, and that's where my Disney journey kind of really began was on that desk. And I did that for about two and a half years. Around that time, I was, you know, getting to the point where I was ready for something new. And the president came to myself and the other assistant and let us know that he had been tasked to lead content and marketing for the new Disney SVOD streaming service that was being built out. And we could come if we would like. And we, of course, jumped on the opportunity and we made our way to Disney+. At the time, there wasn't much of a team there that was focused on the content and marketing awareness, marketing of the service. So, we really just were on the ground floor of that whole experience, which was a wild time. And shortly after I moved off of the desk and into the growing marketing department and got the chance to really hop around and experience different teams and again, to make my long story a little shorter, Disney+ launched to really fantastic success. And when the opportunity came up to come back to the Disney Studios side of things and focus on our content that was going to Disney+, I jumped an opportunity because it seemed like a perfect fit. And that's where I am today.

### **Tony**

One, I'm so interested in the long version of that story. There are so many twists and turns in there, which sounds so interesting, but I think there's so many takeaways already. Right. At first that there are opportunities at The Walt Disney Company that are maybe temp opportunities, project hires, right? That one allows you to kind of understand and see more of the organization overall. And that two, that can lead to where you are to. We always say here that Disney is a great place to recreate your career and in that about a minute and 15 seconds, I think you created your career maybe four or five times.

**Nicole**

Yeah. And if you hear the long story, it's, you know, I've been on a creative team. I've reported to somebody in digital strategy, international creative. It's been a very interesting journey. That kind of all led me to where I am, which I think is a perfect fit.

**Tony**

You're at studios marketing, right? Help us understand for the folks that might not be super familiar with Disney overall as an organization. Right. Where do you sit at the intersection of all of our magic? We've got parks, we've got streaming services. We have so many things going on. Where exactly do you sit and where does your work sit?

**Nicole**

Yeah, so Disney Studios, like in the intro that you mentioned, we have a plethora of brands that feed into Disney Studios. So, there's Lucasfilm, there's Marvel Studios, there's our animation studios, both Walt Disney and Pixar Animation Studios. There's 20th Century Studios, there's Searchlight. So, within Disney Studios, our marketing team is responsible for essentially, keeping it really simple, getting audiences to come watch our content. So, whether that be on Disney+, sometimes on Hulu, in theaters. Our team pushes forward marketing materials, whether that be posters, trailers, advertisements on television, all of that is coming from our team to encourage and get people really excited about our content.

**Tony**

Awesome. And you all do an incredible job because I'm excited about everything that comes out. I might take like a niece and nephew with me sometimes with theatrical releases as an excuse. You all do a great job. I think getting folks really excited about the content and for good reason, right? Knowing how much work goes into creating all of that. And so you've given us an overview of your team, right? Really interested in your day-to-day responsibilities, right? What does a day in the life of senior manager of global marketing strategy look like?

**Nicole**

Sure. I think first I can explain a little bit about what our overall team does. So as a global marketing strategy team at Disney Studios is the team that sets forth the overall marketing strategy for our marketing campaigns. So, within that, my role in particular, I focus on Disney live action titles that are coming theatrically or on one of our streaming services, most likely Disney+ for the titles that I'm working on, and we set out the overall marketing strategy, how we're approaching, reaching certain audiences, the messaging we want to go out into the marketplace. That is all coming from our team. So, for me in particular, I am, you know, kicking off the teams on that marketing strategy early on and the various marketing team's kind of activate under that strategy and start creating their own plans. And it is my job, along with the rest of my team, to make sure that our marketing campaign kind of keeps on the path that we intended from the beginning to make the launch of our show, our film really successful. You also asked about a day in the life, so honestly that my

role is filled with emails and presentations and kick offs. Like I said, kicking off internal teams, external vendors, other parts of the company, and really shaping what our strategy will be for our film. So, my day is filled with all kinds of fun stuff. Getting approvals on creative, how are messaging is being used elsewhere. So yeah, that's a little peek into my day.

**Tony**

What a fun day. Do any of those days include kind of a sneak peek or viewing of content well before it's released?

**Nicole**

Oh, yes, yes, absolutely. That's a really key part of how we think about films. I mean, we are a lot of times getting scripts. So, before projects even go into production, we're reading scripts and starting to shape our thought around how we're approaching the campaign that early on. So, from the production announcement, how that is released, to who were including in the production release, if we're holding back cast for another big announcement down the line. All of that's part of our strategic thinking, really, really early on the campaign. So as soon as an early cut is ready from filmmakers, we are watching that content. We are seeing multiple versions of that content as it is changed and reiterated and reformulated and all the way up until it gets its final version that audiences see in theaters or on platforms.

**Tony**

How cool is that to really see and probably even sometimes touch depending on the activation of the impact of your work. And that's such an important part, I think, of fulfillment in the work that you do, right when you're spending, you know, any number of hours working on a project to be able to say, here's the impact that I'm having for my organization, for my team, for the content, whatever that might be. And I imagine that's probably a really cool moment to have. But of all of those great moments. Right, of all of the amazing magic that you've created for audiences and for viewers. Is there a favorite moment or a favorite campaign or project that you've worked on that you're just like, I love this. I do it again any day.

**Nicole**

Oh, man, there's so many really cool ones. One that always sticks out with me just because of how quickly it came on to our plate and how short the campaign was, was working on *Black Is King*. It showed up on our table very, you know, very. It was just a quick one, and we were just so excited to get that film out into the world. It was we could have burst I mean; I was just so thrilled to finally have that up on Disney+. So that was really exciting. I also really loved working on the first season of *Disney's Launchpad*. So, for those who don't know what that is, it is a program that started within the studio. There's a whole team, the Launchpad team, who is working towards making the entertainment industry more inclusive.

And so, they are tasked to find writers and directors from underrepresented backgrounds who have stories to tell, and they get to do so with the backing of Disney behind them. And it's been an incredible experience to be a part of that from the early stages and really find innovative ways to make sure that underrepresented groups are incorporated, and their voices are really being heard. So those are two.

### **Tony**

Those are both amazing, right? One, because *Black Is King* involved Beyonce. So automatically amazing. Right, I am just going to put that out there. And to really see the commitment that Disney has made to inclusion reflected in so many ways, we've seen it for a while. I think in our content and in our storytelling. And you're privy to those efforts, certainly in terms of our employee base overall. But to also know when it comes to the folks that are immediately behind the camera and I think maybe some of the a few steps even further removed from that, but that we're thinking about the writers and producers and the people that are really, really touching the content on the other side of the camera. I think it's great to hear that we've made that investment programmatically. Right. And I think in a very practical way, and how cool is that you got to be a part of that work.

### **Nicole**

Yeah. And it's I think it's going to be exciting to see where those filmmakers end up and say, like, we knew them when, you know, so yeah, that's great.

### **Tony**

That's interesting. No, that's, that's great. And thank you for that. Right. That, that the variety of folks that go into telling the story right is just as important as the diversity among the folks for whom the stories are being told. Various communities that are represented by these stories and that community for Disney is global. And we know that The Walt Disney Company, we can find Disney anywhere in the world. Right. And is probably a huge part of that is due to the work of your team. And so, wondering, and you hinted at this a bit, but I want to dig in a bit more. Right. How does your team really take into consideration the global audiences, right for content? Do campaigns look different in different places? Do campaigns maybe even look different for your Disney+ work from your theatrical work? Right. Knowing that your part of those releases as well, how you all contextualize all of that work to address all of those audiences.

### **Nicole**

So, I'd say sometimes, you know, when we're thinking about global audiences, the one thing that stands out is that the Disney name in itself is recognized worldwide, which is a really, really exciting place to be. Yeah. There are times where we have to shift our campaign strategies depending on where we're releasing a film, just because, you know, different audiences have different experiences and cultural understanding. So, there are times where we will have to shift the overall marketing strategy that comes out of our team still is relevant, but we have international teams who will take that information and shape the campaign strategy for their markets. So that's always a possibility. But overall, the global

nature of the Disney name is a strong one. And as we think about how we approach that, it's exciting to know that we can kind of tap into the Disney fan in everyone, quote unquote, everyone because of those touch points. I mentioned where we are reaching people, whether it be, you know, watching an animated film when you're really young or buying a product in a store or an experience that a child or an adult has had at our parks, we already have these touchpoints that we can lean into. And especially for me, I'm working on a lot of these Disney live action titles that tie back to a nostalgia point in people's lives. So, we have *Pinocchio* coming up soon, the live action retelling. And, you know, for those people who've always loved Pinocchio or Tinkerbell, or Geppetto, they have, you know, a soft spot in their heart for that film already that we can tap into as we move forward in our campaign. When we're thinking about sequels like *Hocus Pocus 2*, we have, you know, fans who love, love, loved that first film and are so excited to see, you know, our Sanderson sisters come back to the screen again. And so being able to think about those early touch points along the way that Disney has already had with our audiences is really key to the way we think about our campaigns and how we can reach them again and really tap on that love for the brand or love for the title.

**Tony**

Kudos on the *Hocus Pocus 2* marketing. You know, sequels can be kind of hit or miss, but as a fan, you have me excited for part two.

**Nicole**

Excellent

**Tony**

Which is not easily done, so kudos for y'all for that.

**Nicole**

We're excited to bring that one to you guys. It's going to be a great one.

**Tony**

I'm imagining kind of the marketing office with like a heat map of all of our content. Like this is what hot here. This is really hot there.

**Nicole**

Really, we could, we could yeah.

**Tony**

And then there's just like a big hot point over my house where everything is great, right?

**Nicole**

All the things just lighting up.

## **Tony**

All the things. So exciting, so exciting. And so, you've had such an interesting journey, right? You do really, really interesting work. And what I want to shift us to next, right, is the fact that you're doing that work at Disney and you have obviously had a great journey. You are brilliant in the way that you do your work and you're choosing to do it again at The Walt Disney Company. Why? Why Disney?

## **Nicole**

Why Disney? You know, the Disney brand, the Disney name is iconic. And it's you know, I'm grateful to work for a company that as soon as I say that, I work for The Walt Disney Company, wherever I am, people are often impressed not because of the work that I do necessarily because I think a lot of them probably think I work at Disneyland to this day, but I think they're more impressed because the Disney name is familiar to them, whether it be from our films, from our experiences. There is a familiarity and a nostalgia that is associated with the Disney name. And I think, you know, whether it be innovation or optimism, there are all these really important feelings that people get when they hear Disney. And it's really exciting to be a part of continuing the story of the brand and being a part of that.

## **Tony**

That's awesome. And being a part of that. Right. But you are making that right in your world. You are making that magic. You are making that feeling so that when people see a Miss Marvel poster, right? They think optimism. They think innovation, that is that's a direct result of your work. And so, you've given us so many gems, right, from how important it is for you yourself to be flexible, given your journey and adaptable and is to speak up right and share your voice, to bring yourself to your work, right? Those stories that are important to you in the way that you tell stories here. But for folks that are listening and thinking, Nicole has the coolest job in the world. I'm trying to be where she's at, you know, give me give me a couple of years. How do I get there? What advice would you give someone who's interested in your world? Right. Where were you always about the marketing space? Did you find it here? The skills that you should develop and think about here's where the industry's going? What advice would you give?

## **Nicole**

I think I would tell most people not to be afraid to step out and try something new. Like you've heard in my history at Disney I have definitely been given the opportunity to try a few different things along the way as I found my way to the to the right fit. So, always be curious about, you know, where your interests lie and for me, I started off on the public relations side of things. My degree is in that sector. And as I stepped into public relations and doing more of that work and getting a little bit of a hint of the marketing side of the business, I was able to kind of pivot and go in that direction. So, I would say just keep your options open and always stay curious about where your interests will take you. And don't be afraid to try something new. It can be scary, but hopefully taking a step out and

stepping outside of your comfort zone will continue to push you to learn more about yourself. About the world around you and propel your career forward.

**Tony**

That's awesome. Thank you for that. So many things have come up that, again, are themes, I think, in a lot of our Disney experience. And that's innovation, that's curiosity, that's flexibility that's getting outside of your comfort zone. And to hear that those things rings true, right? No matter where we are and in the big world of Disney is really great, I think.

**Nicole**

Absolutely. I mean, for me and my career, there are so many opportunities that I could have stepped away from out of fear. Public speaking for instance is not my forte, but I'm on the podcast. Look at me now. You just never know where saying yes to that scary thing will lead you

**Tony**

Awesome. Nicole, again, thank you so much for your time. Thank you for sharing so much of your Disney experience, the amazing work that you and your team are doing every day to help more folks understand and see what's happening at Disney and to get excited. Right, about the things that are coming from Disney because they're really exciting in and of themselves, really looking forward to hopefully chatting again soon. And thank you again for your time.

**Nicole**

Thank you so much, Tony. It's been a pleasure.

**Ashley**

Now we are going to lean into a specific Walt Disney Studio company, Lucasfilm. Since 1975, Industrial Light & Magic (ILM) has set the standard for visual effects, creating some of the most stunning images in the history of film. At the forefront of the digital revolution, ILM continues to break new ground in the field not only in visual effects but now virtual reality, augmented reality, immersive entertainment, and virtual production. To talk more about this, let's welcome the Virtual Production Supervisor at ILM, Ian Milham. Hey, Ian.

**Ian**

Hi.

**Ashley**

How are you?

**Ian**

I'm doing great, how are you?



**Ashley**

I'm doing well. I'm so glad that you're joining us today. I'm excited to learn more about your work.

**Ian**

Thanks. I'm excited to be here.

**Ashley**

All right. Well, we always say that everybody has a Disney story. So, after 20 years in your career in entertainment, how did you find your way to Industrial Light & Magic in Disney?

**Ian**

Well, you know, like a lot of these things, like a lot of people's journeys, it was sort of circuitous and then you get there, and you find that you unwittingly had been training yourself to be ready for right when that moment did happen. Well, as a kid, I loved to draw that was my favorite thing. But I knew I wasn't really a fine artist. I wasn't a painter. I didn't want to hang in galleries or any of that kind of stuff. And it so happened that my sort of my high school years coincided with sort of a golden age of Disney animation. *The Little Mermaid* came out my freshman year, *Beauty and the Beast* came out my junior year, sort of like right in there, and I thought I was going to do that. But it turned out that my, like, I wasn't fast enough as of a draw. My draftsmanship wasn't that good. That wasn't available to me. But what happened in the nineties is computers came around and suddenly drawing wasn't the gate that, you know, it might have been at an earlier time. So, I went to school to learn illustration and used and started to use computers more and found my way into like you said, the interactive entertainment industry. A lot of video game stuff, a lot of. So, the big difference there is that the graphics are created in real time as opposed to being pre-rendered. And I did that for a long time. And then about five years ago, ILM had this crazy application for real time graphics, and they were looking for some folks to come help that had a lot of experience in that area. And we started to talk and here we are.

**Ashley**

That is so cool. So how long have you been in the company?

**Ian**

I joined in about five years ago.

**Ashley**

Very cool. So, five years with ILM, and how has that been? What is your day to day look like with the work that you're doing?

**Ian**

So, my job as a virtual production supervisor on ILM StageCraft System really depends on where we are in, you know, in our schedule and what we're working on. If we are shooting something and I will be on set as the leader of the StageCraft team. And what that means

is, people think that's a lot of like directing and telling the StageCraft people what to do. And there's actually not that much of that because the team is excellent. They know what they're doing. They don't need me to tell them what to do, but they need me to be the sort of ambassador, liaison, on connection between the practical production crew, the people that are shooting the movie. And so, I can sort of keep each party up to date with what's going on and making sure that everything is running successfully and everything like that. So, when we're when I'm on set shooting a movie or TV show that's my role. And then in between that, I work with a lot of potential people who want to create movies and TV shows and have something specific that maybe there's a problem they need solving or they want to learn more about how StageCraft might work, or they want to break down a script and like, is this a good idea? Or should we do this? How does this work? And I work with them to make sure that everything has the potential to go great.

### **Ashley**

It's so fascinating. And for those who may not be super familiar with StageCraft, can you explain a little bit what StageCraft is and how that really functions?

### **Ian**

Sure. You know, LED volumes and all this kind of virtual production is getting kind of buzzy and becoming a big thing. But actually, at ILM, it's built on stuff that we've been doing for 30 years as we've built up these sort of different ways of exploring how to make a movie with stuff. You know, virtual production sounds like this crazy word, but what it really means is like production in film industry terms would be shooting a movie. The actual shooting of it, there's pre, there's pre-production, there's post-production. Production is the part where you actually shoot it. So virtual production would be shooting a movie involving things that are there virtually. So, we've been doing that for a long time. But the big innovation now is imagine you're shooting a movie inside of a stage that's entirely made of TVs, and so you can put anything on those TVs and with how powerful computers have gotten. We can, before, like you could put anything on a picture like that's not new, but the ability now to track the camera and change the background per frame to whatever that camera sees means that we can break the plane of this volume, we call it, and make it feel like it's a real place. Like it's not just a picture but it's a portal to a place. And what's amazing there is that we can do all kinds of cool stuff with that potential. So, we started to do this about four years ago, and it's gradually, it's just been exploding. And it's an amazing benefit because not only it compared to maybe shooting against blue screen, everybody can see it, the director could see it, the actors can see it, everybody gets what's going on. Also, you can change it live and it's contributing not only a background, but lighting and reflections over everything so things look that much more real.

### **Ashley**

That's incredible. When we think about the films and the shows that Lucasfilms put out in the last few years, what was the first major project that either you were working on or that StageCraft was involved with?

**Ian**

The big debut of this technology was on *The Mandalorian*. So yeah, I was the virtual production supervisor on that. And the idea was really borne out of the work that Jon Favreau had done previously and some of the growth in technology. So we had and we really needed a project that would commit to the degree to really push through and see if we could pull this off. And *The Mandalorian* was that project. And I'll always be grateful for that.

**Ashley**

That's incredible. So, when we're thinking about creating full environments, like you're explaining, what's your favorite part of that whole process?

**Ian**

I think my favorite part is when working, you know, especially because my job is working frequently with the people outside of the StageCraft team itself is working with a filmmaker or a director of photography or an art director or somebody who maybe thinks they can't do what they were hoping. I think, you know, a lot of times people think about like, oh, I mean, you know, inevitably when you get to the physical filmmaking process, there are compromises. If you want to have something that happens on a remote volcanic island, those are hard to get to. Taking 100 people to a remote volcanic island for weeks is expensive and difficult. There's all, you know, the sun goes down. You can't do sunset for, you know, you can if you write a long scene that happens at sunset, you only get like an hour a day where you can do that and maybe you're going to be there for a long time and maybe someone's going to go, man, that's really expensive. Are we? You know, you're blowing your budget. So, it has to be sunset. And inevitably, the person whose idea that was is like, you're right, okay, maybe we can't do that. What's exciting for me is to be the person who says, yes, who says like, we can save it, we can make it sunset, we can give you a volcanic island and we can preserve that vision that you had and enable it to actually happen. And they're usually very happy when they hear that.

**Ashley**

That's super cool. And I assume there's a lot of those instances, especially when you're talking about space and galaxies is far, far away.

**Ian**

Yes. I mean, although it is interesting, I think people think of crazy, fantastical places as the use for this, and yes, but crazy fantastical places, we were always doing that. Right. What is also exciting about this is the real world and the way that we can bring the real world to people in a way that's accessible and in a way that is logistically possible. So, it's not only for space and distant planets, although we end up doing a lot of that. But like the history of *Star Wars* back in the day, they had to shoot it somewhere. So, like, yes, it's a mystery planet, but it's also grounded in reality. And so being able to bring that reality is pretty exciting.

**Ashley**

That's awesome. Thinking about all the different projects that you've taken on. What was the most either favorite or most significant for you when you're thinking about your own growth and development of your career?

**Ian**

Oh, I mean, it is pretty tough to top *The Mandalorian* as the first thing. It was incredibly exciting because, you know, you kind of show up to this very, I'll be honest, very high stakes thing, right? This was a big deal. I mean, when you think about the launch of Disney+, when you think about bringing *Star Wars* to television, and then with this whole new technology and then I show up, I've never done this before. And so, you know, I have a healthy respect for what's going on. The good news is though, if I could calm down for a little minute, no one's ever done this before. We're all learning. We're all trying. So that was very exciting and freeing to be like, man. This is a big deal. And we're all going to learn a lot together. And the great news is, is like three or four days in, we learned, oh my gosh, this is going to work. It's tricky, but like, this is going to work. And that was that was incredibly exciting.

**Ashley**

That's super cool. And I think, you know, you bring up such a good point with how it's being distributed and how it's being created, right? This is not a film, even though it is film quality, film standard. You're making a TV show and it's being distributed on this totally new space for Disney, right? Like streaming is so new for us as a company. So, what an exciting way to be showcasing our innovation on so many levels. Right? The innovation of the storytelling itself and creating of the content, but also all the way through to how that gets distributed out to fans around the world. Like that must have been such an exciting thing to kind of get to be a part of from end to end.

**Ian**

Totally. And it added to the like, I don't know how this is going to go. How many people are going to see this, what kind of thing? And then, you know, until the first time I saw Groggu on set, which was like day two and I went, and I went, oh, oh, this is going to be big. This is going to be a big thing. That's fine.

**Ashley**

How long would you want to hold that in for?

**Ian**

Oh, like a year. A little a year and a half. Yeah. Oh, it was a big deal. That was a that was a big secret. I had, after we were done shooting, I did a presentation of what we learned because we learned a lot so much technically about StageCraft. So, I did a presentation back at ILM to like only, only ILM folks and a very restricted, you know, amount of people were in there. And even still they scrub through every slide of my presentation, and I had missed in the background of one thing. Little, little Groggu, in the back there in the scene and they were like, you got to him out of there. So, I wasn't even allowed to show it to

other ILM folks until, but they were right. Like, it was so magical because that secret was kept for so long,

### **Ashley**

Having a career that you've had for so long in the gaming industry and now moving into the film side of things, how do you really see those industries and those worlds overlapping and how might that kind of continue as technology continues to innovate?

### **Ian**

Well, you're totally right. It's very exciting times on all the aspects because those worlds are coming together, both from a tools and technology perspective, from an art and storytelling perspective, and even from an audience perspective. Where you're seeing more interactivity between audience and creator all around in society. And so, games are really based on that idea of the interact ability and the participation of players, right? And they use real time content that responds to you and changes in real time as the foundation of that. And we're using real time content now to create movies and TV shows as we interact with film crews. And as they make requests, or they wouldn't it be cool if this happened? We can make that happen. And so underneath that, you see that the tools are coming together and you're seeing the attitudes come together. About how the audience and the and the creators all work together. So, it's a really exciting time to be an artist or a storyteller in all these directions. Because we're all engaging with multiple screens in multiple formats and different ideas and that those stories are living from one format to the other and that people are participating or more than one format for the other is very exciting. So, I would say to people who are interested or historically have been filmmakers or people who have historically been interactive artists or who knows all kinds of other stuff to that, it's a great time to move beyond those horizons and work with each other. And you might be shocked at how much your skills translate into the into the other arenas.

### **Ashley**

So thinking about the teams that you got to work with, I assume there's folks really all over the world that you're working with, depending on what the locations are and both within Lucasfilm and ILM and also across The Walt Disney Company in our studios, so what is really the culture of ILM within Disney and how do you all get to work with the larger Walt Disney Company?

### **Ian**

It is pretty exciting. And what's been pretty great. So obviously we pioneered stagecraft with *Star Wars* and Lucasfilm and Disney+. We've also had an opportunity to work with Marvel on several of the Marvel features. So that's been incredibly exciting and having that broad support and being able to team with such amazing storytellers and visionaries has been really exciting. I think the defining culture of industrial light and magic is you come to ILM when something hasn't been done before, and there's a that it's like, I don't know how we're going to do this. This is, you know, where there's a need to innovate. And so, at ILM, we have to be comfortable with that. ILM is full of incredibly smart, incredibly kind, curious

people who only have kind of an idea about how they're going to accomplish what they're about to try. And that's very exciting. And it leads to a culture of knowledge sharing because you're like, man, how are we going to do this? Well, there's this woman over here who has done something like this a bit before. Not exactly like this. So, I'm going to go ask her. And then there's this person over here who has done something that's kind of like this also in a different way. I'm going to go ask them. And so, you're expected to at ILM to be asking questions and you're expected to share what you've learned before, because that's how we accomplish these things, that you can't just sort of look up a tutorial. You can't just do research by itself because like, no one's ever tried this exactly before. And that spirit is really contagious and exciting. And it leads to sort of this combination of genius and humility that I've really, really enjoyed.

### **Ashley**

That's fascinating. You know, I often ask our guests on this, you know, you could do this work anywhere why Disney? But you really couldn't do this work anywhere. So, it's amazing that ILM is really that right. When you can't do the work anywhere else. Sounds like that's when you have to come to ILM.

### **Ian**

Right! Yeah. Yeah, exactly. I mean, and that combination is really unique of you've got this community of incredible problem solvers that are all about accomplishing and achieving visual solutions and add visuals that have never been done before. And then in the broader Lucasfilm, Marvel, Disney World, you've got these people that are really good at coming up with really compelling problems and visual ideas that would be astonishing if only they could be created and then they come to us and we go, man, I really want to see that. How would we ever do that? And then we get busy, and we figure out how to do it.

### **Ashley**

So, I'm sure there are so many folks who are listening to this just like me and are saying, my gosh, how can I get into some work like that? Right? Like, that is just amazing. What advice do you have for folks who are either starting their career or thinking about making a switch and are really inspired by the type of work you're doing?

### **Ian**

Boy, that's the question. Isn't it? Yeah. One thing that I've learned over my career in my time is that people get very excited about tools and techniques and of course, a certain amount of technical ability and the and that kind of thing is important. And it's how a lot of us achieve our work, day to day. But those things are always changing, and the underlying principles are not. The traditions, and the art and craft of these things are the same, whether you're doing it with a paintbrush or a computer or whatever. So, what I would encourage people is although technical training is important and it's good to pursue those things, don't fall in love with tools and techniques, fall in love with the underlying ideas. And whether that's, you know, it could depend on your role, but an analogy I would use is learning a musical instrument is great, but what we want and what will make you a

valuable contributor as things change is not to be an amazing guitar player or piano player. It's to be a great musician to know and love the music underneath the instrument and then as we all change instruments and we all do things in the future, you'll be ready because you know the music. If you are just an incredible guitar player, when we all switch instruments, you're going to be, you know, not as prepared. So, I would say the learning about color, learning about composition, learning about story, learning about all kinds of traditions, learning about the various things that feed the reason why we do all these things is more important than just learning the tools or techniques. We can teach you that, what takes longer is the underlying ideas.

**Ashley**

Ian, this has been so amazing. It's been so exciting to learn all about what you're doing. Everything that's happening now at industrial light and magic and all of the amazing innovation that you and your teams are leading. So, thank you so much for joining us today, and for really sharing so much of the magic behind Lucasfilm and ILM.

**Ian**

Oh, man. Thank you very much. It's been an honor.

**Ashley**

Remember to subscribe to our show on Apple Podcasts, Spotify or wherever you listen to podcasts. While you're there, show some love for your favorite podcast by leaving us a review. Thanks again for listening to Life at Disney and make sure you join us for our next episode.

**Ashley**

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