



EXCLUSIVE REPORT

AT THE INTERSECTION OF ANIMATION, FILM AND VR

Olly Reid, director and CG supervisor at Axis Studios, talks how high-end visuals, a strong narrative and VR tech converge in *The bOnd*

The *bOnd* marks Axis Studios' first venture into the world of virtual reality. Viewers are taken on an immersive journey, traversing an alien planet

through multiple perspectives. Directed by Olly Reid, *The bOnd* follows TiaMuati as she uses her mystical powers to watch over the alien ecosystem of LuKara. In a trance, she can feel the threads of energy that connect her and every living being to each other. Sensing an imbalance, she enters the minds of the forest inhabitants to help restore equilibrium. Audiences follow TiaMuati and find themselves inhabiting terrified prey, towering predators and tiny insects.

VR film provides a huge opportunity for story-driven, fully cinematic experiences that pull no punches in regard to animation quality. Applying their pedigree to VR, Axis

have expanded the platform's possibilities, experimenting with perspective and cutting-edge sound design. *The bOnd* is Axis Studios' first IP, providing full creative control over every aspect of production. The

VR rulebook is still being written by creators – it's an exciting time, and Axis hope they've contributed a unique entry.

By exploring the possibilities of these rules, *The bOnd* is a perfect example of an experience built solely for the virtual reality platform.

Despite the first-person perspective having an established history in both film and games, the heightened sense of

immersion that's possible in VR creates opportunities for new experiences. When viewers inhabit creatures in *The bOnd*, not only is it possible to voluntarily look around and see your new body, but the perspective

also improves the sensation of movement.

There's a moment in the film where a young Kiuti – a winged creature of LuKara – achieves its first

flight, and the viewer gets to experience vertigo as a Kiuti while it looks over the cliff's edge. As the viewer flies high above the forest, the feeling of depth and motion is directly experienced – rather than observed as it would be on a screen. *The bOnd*

"WE'RE GOING TO SEE SOME HUGE STRIDES IN STORYTELLING TECHNIQUES FOR VR IN THE COMING YEARS"

Olly Reid, director and CG supervisor at Axis Studios



Left: An ancient shrine to the forest spirits, where TiaMuati can connect with the life in LuKara

Below: The cliffs of TuGorra tower over the NiyaKoor forest



explores the effect of direct experience in VR, utilising it as a tool for the narrative.

While experiencing different perspectives, interactions with other characters also become heightened. Witnessing the emotion expressed by the protagonist right in front of you – as well as the other beings populating *The bOnd* – is something unique to the VR-verse, once again bringing the viewer closer to the unfolding narrative. This offered Axis an opportunity to drive the story in new and exciting ways, playing with the viewer's feelings of empathy.

To further ground the viewer in the world of LuKara, Axis utilised the platform's spatial sound features. Unlike normal stereo imaging, which sends sound across outputs ranging from left to right, spatial sound creates a three-dimensional soundscape, providing an accurate sense of distance between objects. With greater depth to sound design, the surrounding world can be brought to life with well-placed Foley. This tool can act as an intuitive way of directing the viewer's attention, an important consideration in VR development. Because viewers can choose where they'd like to look, using sound to entice their view towards the focal point of the story is vital to the narrative. Axis partnered with

VR experts Submersion Audio to take full advantage of spatial sound's capabilities.

"The transition from stereo to spatial sound is key to experiencing the presence of objects around you, being able to hear sounds change with distance and movement. It's something you can't fully experience with 2D animation," explains CG supervisor Michael Zaman.

One of the most natural fits for VR is location-based entertainment. With dedicated hardware, developers can produce powerful high-end experiences, with visuals that are currently unattainable for home users. "VR film has amazing potential within an ever-expanding array of location-based entertainments. It's definitely the most fascinating area of filmmaking at the minute, and I think we're going to see some huge strides in storytelling techniques for VR in the coming years," says Reid.

Through *The bOnd*, Axis Studios have captured this potential, demonstrating high-end visuals, thrilling immersion, and a captivating story through the medium of VR.

FYI You can find *The bOnd* on the Oculus and Steam stores



TiaMuati belongs to an ancient order of Timallan healers