

HICKORY HORNER DEVIL



Virtual Reality Experience

Written and created by Phoebe Titus
Produced by Banging Rocks

ptitus@gmail.com

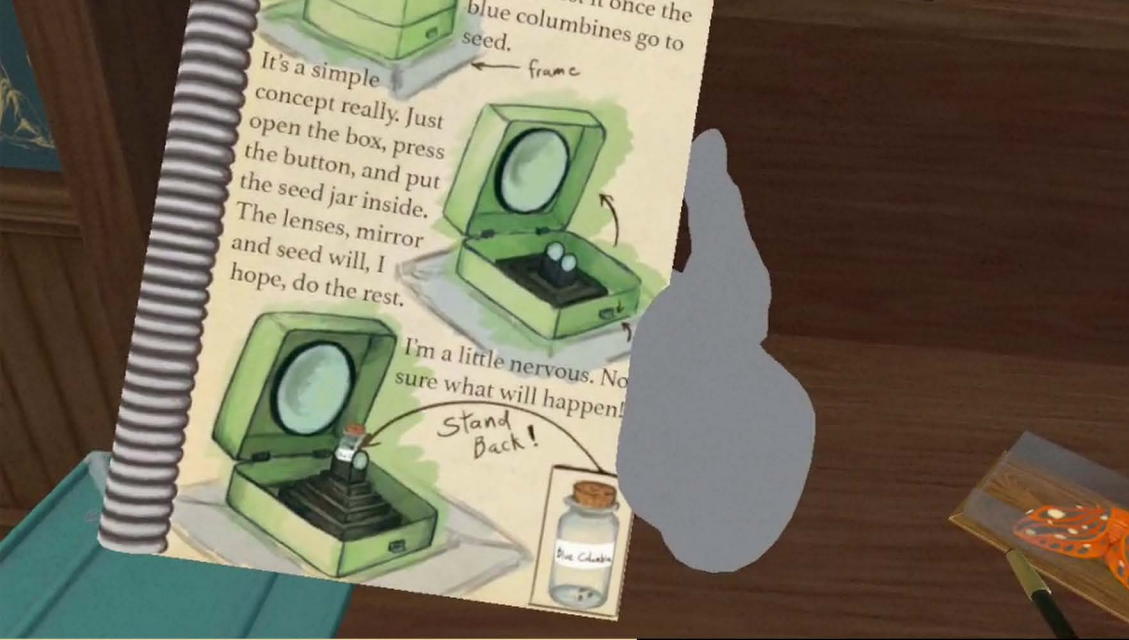


In 1948, a young scientist's world transforms when she uncovers a secret about the seeds from a particular flower patch. Through a magical portal she meets a sentient flower whose wisdom guides her in a pivotal decision.

HICKORY HORNED DEVIL



Step into the world of *Hickory Horned Devil*, an interactive VR narrative experience that transports you to 1948, when your grandmother was on the cusp of a scientific discovery. Follow her story first hand through journals, letters, and artifacts, unfolding her struggles with love, ambition, and the societal limitations of her time. Through interactions with beautifully hand painted objects and environments, travers time and dimensions through the bittersweet legacy of a remarkable woman's life.



Stills from Hickory Horned Devil



Start

HICKORY HORNED DEVIL: AUDIENCE JOURNEY

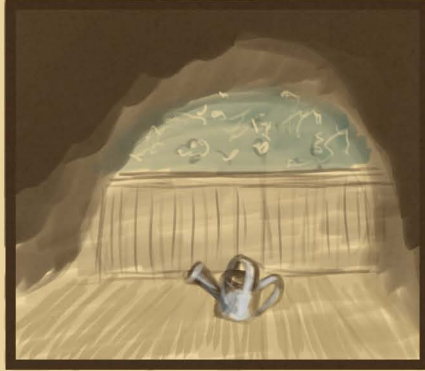
You begin in front of a distant mountain. Text appears, "Shortly before she died, my grandma whispered to me that she's made a world changing scientific discovery back in 1948."



She said she'd tried to tell people at the time and no one listened but she didn't want it to be lost. She gave me her journals from that time and I promised her I'd do what I could."

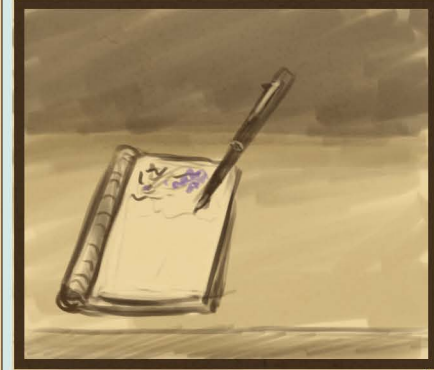
The controls are introduced and the mountains fade away. A chime behind you prompts you to turn around and navigate to a distant table where one of her journals, a beautifully illustrated, nature journal about her emotional connection to a patch of snowdrops.

Next you're transported to a darkened room with elegant wallpaper and wood paneling. A watering can sits on the floor in front of you.



Through VO, you're prompted to pick it up and put it in your inventory. In there you see the journal from before along with some Columbine flower seeds.

The light in the room comes on and you're free to move through the space at your own pace.



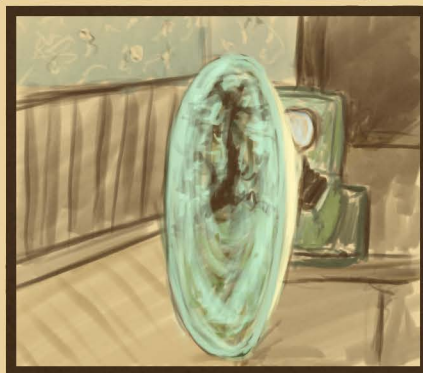
There's a blank journal on the desk with a pen next to it, touching pen to paper another richly illustrated journal fills in. This one tells about the columbine seeds, hinting that these seeds might be storing more than meets the eye.

Further exploration of the room uncovers additional journals, one tells of her feeling of kinship with the Hickory Horned Devil caterpillar, a gigantic, brilliantly decorated caterpillar that becomes a lovely moth.

Another journal tells of her ambivalence around the romantic intentions of a young beekeeper named Hank. She's torn, knowing that marriage would force her to give up her work.



A large specimen jar holds a proposal letter from Hank, begging her to reconsider his proposal, however, it's not clear whether he understands where her hesitation is coming from.



Something magical begins to happen, like a magic lantern or projector, a beam of light shoots out of it, projecting a mysterious portal.

A final journal is found in a drawer, next to a strange green box. It explains that if you place a jar of Columbine seeds into it, it could unlock their secrets. A small empty jar is found on the windowsill. You place the seeds from the inventory into it and place it into the open box.



Entering the portal you find yourself in a magical natural environment. A giant Columbine flower stands by a river, nearly completely wilted. It asks you for water. You fill your watering can in the river, water the flower and it springs to life.



It tells you about the world through its eyes. It knows that the bees respect Hank the beekeeper. It has insight into the poignant life of the Hickory Horned Devil caterpillar who grew and transformed and dreamed about her wings and then when she was ready to fly, she was too weighted down by eggs to do so. Her life is over just when she expected it to take flight.

Reading the journals you find that she decided to marry Hank and they had a full life together, however, he's passed and she misses him bitterly and feels a deep loneliness and awareness of her own mortality. You also learn that she continued her work, but worries now that it will all disappear when she dies.



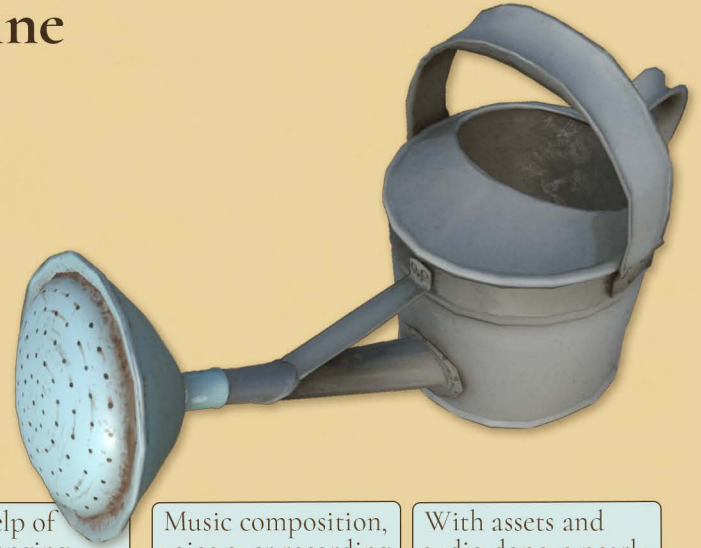
The specimen jar that had held the proposal letter has aged and now holds their two wedding rings, hinting that they've both passed away at this point and this jar has become a family keepsake.

After the conversation, you see the portal has appeared back to the original room, however, when you return it looks very different. Everything has aged, the sun is setting, and the 2 journals in the room are dated 2019.

The gentle, devastating ending gives viewers a chance to hold onto the stories of our grandmothers, recognizing the essential compromises, loves and losses they embodied.

End 

HICKORY HORNED DEVIL: Timeline



Curious about virtual reality, Phoebe attends a VR convention. Something malfunctions in the headset while she's exploring a vr environment and she glitches into an area not intended for viewers and she is stuck. Ideas begin to percolate.

Over the pandemic, Phoebe sketched, created test assets, and contemplated virtual worlds as all worlds outside home became virtual during lockdown. In July 2021 she came up with the story that would become *Hickory Horned Devil*.

With the help of producer, Banging Rocks, Phoebe put together a small team to make a rough tech demo of the first portion of the piece. Feedback from this led to technical improvements and a change in narrative direction.

Music composition, voice over recording and sound design completed. Most assets are complete or near completion. Animation of the Columbine begins.

With assets and audio done, a nearly completed build is tested by a small group. Feedback from this led us to make some final tweaks before completion.

Hickory Horned Devil is completed!

August
2019

July
2021

April
2022

August
2022

March
2023

April
2023

Technical Needs



- Hickory Horned Devil is a Virtual Reality experience for the Quest 2 headset.
- It can be played in as small of a space as 5'x5', but 10'x10' is ideal.
- It is designed for a single user to experience start to finish. There is no save system built in and the experience starts at the beginning each time the file is opened.
- Much of the story involves voice over and the user will need to set audio levels for their comfort level.