

# "SO BADASS YOU CAN'T BELIEVE IT" MAGIC LEAP RAISES \$542 MILLION TO LAUNCH THE FUTURE OF COMPUTING

If you're a card-carrying member of the *Where's my jetpack?* school of innovation, lamenting every new messaging app as a sign of the bankrupt imagination of the tech world, this news is for you: There's a company that, at best, you heard of a week ago, based on the outskirts of Fort Lauderdale, Florida (!), that today announces it has raised a jaw-dropping \$542 million in second-round financing from an unparalleled lineup of bigfoot investors to complete product development and commercialize what its CEO and founder [Rony Abovitz](#) calls "a hardware, software, firmware, and development platform" that, oh, you know, replicates the visual perception system of the human brain as a go-anywhere, [mobile computing platform](#).

The press-release news today is [stealth startup Magic Leap's](#) massive funding event, led by [Google](#) (not either of Google's two venture arms, but corporate Google—more on that in a moment) and including investors such as Qualcomm, Legendary Entertainment and its CEO [Thomas Tull](#), along with A-list VCs Andreessen Horowitz and Kleiner Perkins. But the *real* news is that some of the smartest people in technology and entertainment are putting away their "rectangle fetishism," as one investor describes the tech industry's obsession with screens, and hungrily seeking out what comes after the [smartphone](#) (or smartwatch) to emerge as the next computing interface.

No one is willing today to explain exactly what the heck Magic Leap is making that'll replace all our rectangles, but it sounds like a blending of what we currently call augmented reality and [virtual reality](#). In fact, Dr Paul Jacobs, Qualcomm's executive chairman and one of Magic Leap's new board advisors, along with Google executive

Sundar Pichai, used precisely those two terms in an email to me explaining why he invested. "I'm not sure what the category will be called," Tull says when I ask him, "but it augments and brings you into a world in a completely realistic, immersive

way without taxing your eyes or brain." Jacobs also called Magic Leap "immersive and engaging." Abovitz acknowledges that he's using "dynamic digitized light field technology" to build what an unnamed source let slip is currently called Dragonstone (a reference to half a dozen nerd touchstones, from *Game of Thrones* to  *Skyrim*), and Tull dropped the word "glasses" at one point in our conversation in a way that inadvertently implied that's what Magic Leap's current hardware interface looks like.

Abovitz, though, is most eloquent today in defining Magic Leap by what it's not. "It's not holography, it's not stereoscopic 3-D," he says. "You don't need a giant robot to hold it over your head, you don't need to be at home to use it. It's not made from off-the-shelf parts. It's not a cellphone in a View-Master." Late in our conversation, he begs me not to frame this story as being Google versus Facebook because of the search company's direct investment—and even though I'm not, note that he's the one who backhanded Facebook-owned Oculus VR twice without prompting.





When I press Abovitz about how far along he is in fulfilling his audacious vision, he leans on references to the space program's 1960s heyday, a signal of his ambition and a product of his physical proximity to its epicenter. "The space program had Mercury, Gemini, and Apollo missions, and we're in our Apollo phase," he says. "We know that [space travel](#) is possible. We're in the middle of full-blown product development and commercialization." So is there a goal date to land on the moon? "You almost got me there to reveal the date," Abovitz says with a laugh. "It's very near term. But although we're trying to deliver on a certain date, we're also trying to achieve an 'Oh my god, I feel like I'm a kid again' experience."

Abovitz, who previously founded the pioneering robotic surgery company Mako Surgical, recalls his first "Holy Crap!" moment with his own technology when they got their first pixel to float in space sometime in late 2011 or early 2012. Folks like Tull who have seen Magic Leap in person seem to be having the experience Abovitz is shooting for. "I'm so excited," exclaims Tull, who flew to Florida this past summer to see Magic Leap after learning of it through Richard Taylor at visual effects shop

Weta Digital and then spending time with Abovitz at the annual Allen & Co summer camp for moguls. "It's so badass you can't believe it, David. It's one of the few things I've ever experienced in my life where I came out and said, 'This changes everything. This is a marker of the future.'"

Magic Leap has been quietly courting a lot of creators like Tull (whose Legendary Entertainment produced the *Dark Knight* trilogy as well as the forthcoming *Interstellar*) to develop for what it's building. "This is not a [technology looking](#) for an application. This is a vision looking for technology," Abovitz says, perhaps a mite defensively. "We're bending that tech to make the experience better based on what

people want from us." He says Magic Leap has reached out to both influential Hollywood types like Tull and indie creators, and that he's interested in everything from "new spreadsheets to *Pacific Rim*-type things" being made for his platform. "Nothing matters if you're not making great content," says Tull, who believes Magic Leap will be a natural fit for world creation and video gaming, but he hastens to add, "There's a lot more than what it can do in entertainment."

If Magic Leap is so cool and so close, why the stealth mode combined with the fanfare of one of the largest early funding rounds in history—and all the scrutiny that will bring? Abovitz acknowledges that he and a few others will have to deal with the public a bit more, but there's also more news on its way. He leans on another analogy. "Remember in *The Hobbit* how all you see first is Smaug's eye?" he asks, referencing a project made by his friend and investor Richard Taylor at Weta Digital. "Only later do you see the dragon in its full glory. You see something cool but not all is revealed. We would love for people to come on this journey with us."