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IIT Bombay

DEP504 | Final Report

Humdrum Hum Drum

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Approval Sheet

The Design Project 3 Titled “ HUMDRUM HUM DRUM ” by **Arnesh Kundu**, **Roll Number 18U130007**, is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the ‘Master of Design’ in the Animation and Film Design at Industrial Design Center, Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay.

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Declaration

I declare that this project report is based on my original work, carried out during the course of the Spring semester, 2023 at the IDC School of Design, IIT Bombay. This submission is a representation of my own ideas in my own words and where others' opinions or words have been included, I have adequately cited and referenced the sources. I also declare that I have adhered to all principles of academic honesty and integrity and have not misrepresented or fabricated any idea, data, fact, or source in my submission.

I understand that any violation of the above will be cause for disciplinary action by the Institute and can also evoke penal action from the sources which have thus not been appropriately cited or from whom proper permission has not been taken when needed.



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Abstract

The story of Dhun, as her anxious foot shaking turns into a musical adventure! Based on my own experiences with anxiety and fidgeting, my journey in making this film made me discover how focusing on my body's rhythm helps me break out of an anxious spiral.

Not only was this my first time working with 3D animation software like Blender, but was also the first time composing music! Learning FL Studio to compose and mix my own music and tunes was quite the experience.

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Introduction

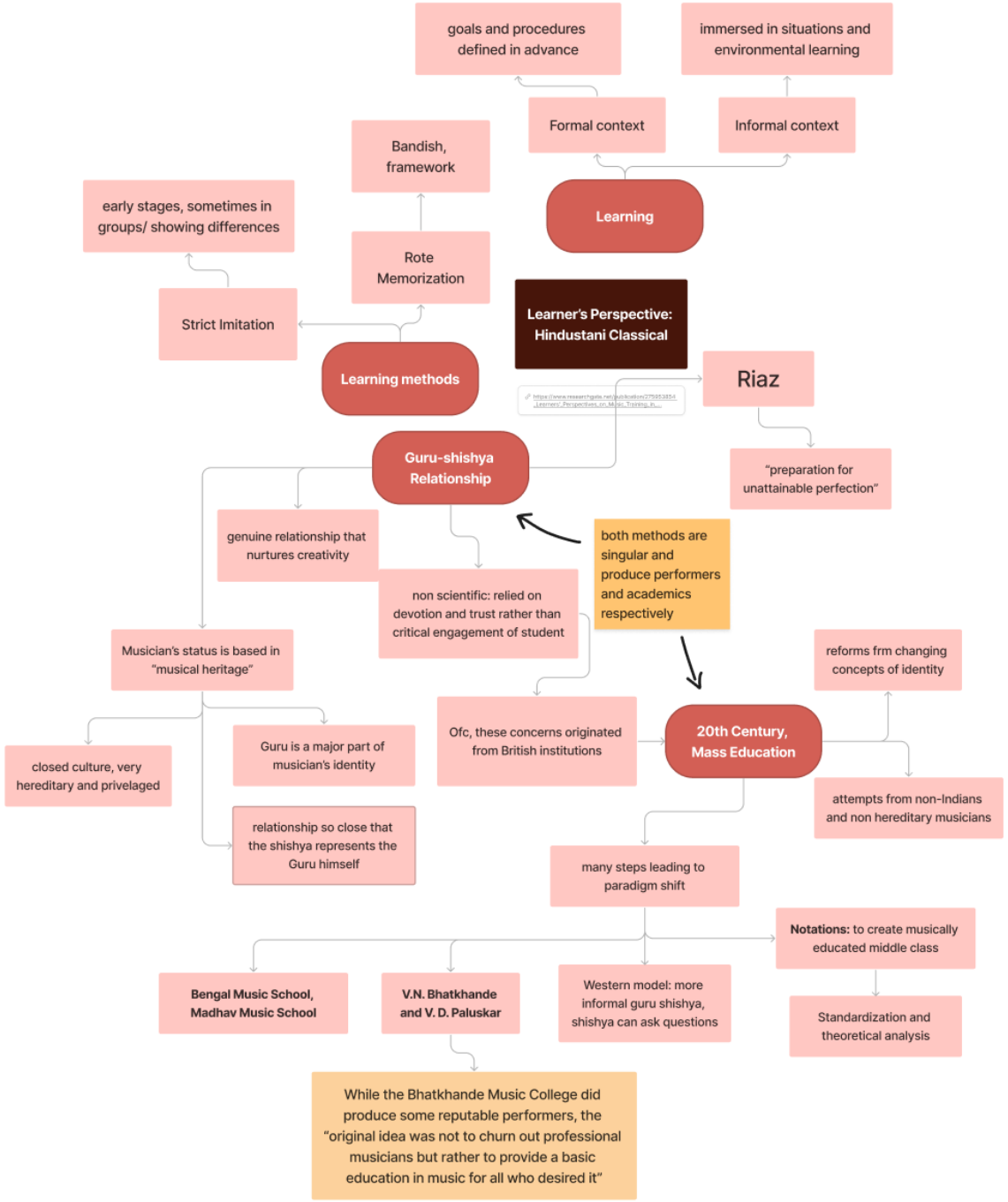
When it comes to Art, one of the biggest challenges we often face are ourselves — specifically, the little voice in our head that isn't satisfied with anything that we do. I think most of us have faced this issue in varying degrees, and my own experiences and struggles have inspired me to make a story about these challenges. I have been a student of Hindustani Classical Vocal Music since I was 11, but ever since college started I've had a turbulent relationship with it. I had left my previous Guruji and was unable to have classes for two years, and during this time I did not allow myself to fully enjoy singing.

The main inspiration behind this film was to delve deeper into my own complicated relationship with music, analyzing both the good and the bad. While the first few weeks of the project was spent creating a concept that dealt with more complex themes and messages, I eventually decided to focus instead on the good aspects of music in my life. I focused on how it helps me block out anxious thoughts, and ventured into creating an experimental animation film on music.

Research

Learners' Perspectives on Music Training in Institutions of North India by Upadhyay & Dalal (2016)
Points expressed in the paper are represented by the mind map shown here. The paper by itself didn't lead to any interesting results but it was an interesting academic analysis of Hindustani Classical pedagogies and teaching methods.

Inner Art Critic by Anne Dinkelspiel, Ph.D.
We internalize messages from our parents about what is "good" and "bad" in an attempt to protect ourselves from embarrassment or shame. In order to avoid Mom/Dad/ teacher telling us something we did was bad, we give ourselves the message and attempt to elicit the pride and approval of our parents or teachers. We criticize ourselves before anyone else has a chance to do it "to" us. And our inner critics can be so harsh that we can find ourselves frozen with anxiety, doubt, and the very shame that we were trying to avoid. In an extreme, it can lead us to a fear of failure that can leave us paralyzed.



Concept 1

Dhun enters her house while on call with her friend. Her friend is trying to convince her to help their batch win the intercollegiate dance competition. Dhun was a Bharatnatyam dancer for many years before leaving the art behind because of her troubled relationship with it, but because she still yearns for it she agrees. She digs out her Ghungroos from the storage closet, changes into practice clothes and decides to revisit some old routines.

As soon as she steps into her practice area with the ghungroos on, we see the floor boiling subtly, as if there are monsters lurking beneath. She goes about her routines, but soon a small malformed creature with a big mouth emerges from the floor and latches onto her, telling her how her feet placement is wrong. Startled, she stumbles, which causes more creatures to spawn, each commenting on some aspect of her form and performance. She tries ignoring them and continues but they slowly coalesce to form one giant blob on her back. This weighs her down tremendously and she falls to the floor, brokenhearted.

The image of her old Guruji approaches her, and urges her to go on. She urges her to prove herself in the competition, how it shouldn't be a challenge at all, and she needs to push through the pain. Another version of Dhun appears and gives her a different option, talks about how she doesn't deserve this weight and pleads with her to put the Ghungroos back in storage, leaving dance behind once again. Both of them reach out a hand to a panicking Dhun, offering their help. In the midst of this Dhun notices a message from her mother, asking her what she's up to. Dhun has to choose a way out.



Resolution

While breaking down they call their Mother, who reminds them how far they've come since they restarted

Removes themselves from the intense situation of the upcoming competition/performance and just focuses on doing some progress every day, at their own pace.

Mother's voice

Ploughs ahead with practice and brute force until the weight of the parasite becomes something they are used to, but remains internally unhappy with themselves

Teacher's voice

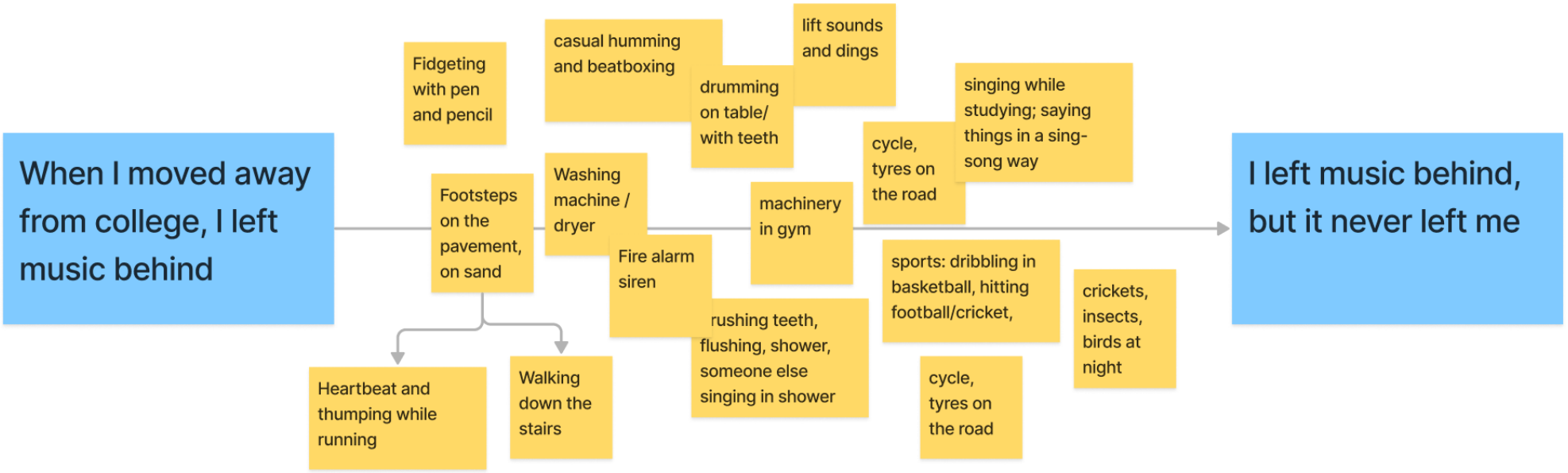
Decides that while they love the art, they don't want to destroy themselves in its pursuit.
They once again stop dancing

Inner voice



Concept 2

While the earlier concept came about from my ill-experiences with art and music, this time I tried focusing on why I still love Hindustani Music. When I left home for college I felt like I was leaving Classical music and Riyaz behind. That was far from true, because music followed me wherever I went, even as I went about my daily life. Hence, I wanted to make an experimental animation film about the various elements of everyday life that carry a tune.



Concept 3

Dhun sits in the reception of an office, waiting in line for the interview. She adjusts her tie for the 100th time as she looks nervously around the room. Looking at everyone else's poker faces makes her even more anxious and she tries desperately to calm her shaking foot. She adjusts her files, checks her tie and collar again. As a final attempt to calm herself down, she closes her eyes.

Dhun notices the steady tempo of her feet tapping against the side of her chair. She starts focusing on the steady rhythm, and slowly music starts flooding into her mind. We see various characters, objects and elements joining in till the music reaches a crescendo. Suddenly we hear a voice calling out Dhun's name, breaking her out of her headspace.

Flushed, Dhun gets ready to enter the interview room. Her anxious thoughts start coming back, with her being embarrassed for having dozed off. This time however, before the voices get too loud Dhun starts softly tapping a beat with her fingers, and that helps her calm herself.



Final Story

Dhun walks up to the reception.

“Um... Dhun Ganguly, here for the admissions interview?”

Receptionist checks the list, “Dhun... right. Be seated, I’ll call your name when you’re next.”

Dhun sits in the waiting area where three other students are sitting currently. She nervously looks around, observing each of them and their behaviours, judging their confidence. Her head is full of thoughts and voices and things start to get overstimulating for her. She decides to ground herself, focusing on her feet and hand tapping. The chaos that’s in her head soon gets organised into music. Visual elements from the room around find their way into the music, while her thoughts from earlier form the lyrics for the music. Dhun is quite scared at first, as apparitions of her head surround her and start musically voicing her inner fears.

As she travels through her inner mind, the music takes more and more precedence as the voices fade out, and Dhun starts grooving to the music.

Suddenly, Dhun’s name gets called out and she snaps out of this vision. The other students have gone, leaving just her and the receptionist in the room. She gets up, ready to head into the interview room. She feels the whispers of her earlier thoughts coming back, but resists them, softly tapping a beet on the portfolio folder she is holding. The music kicks in as she goes in with some confidence.



First round of thumbnails and planning

Early Music Comp.

Since Music is a major component of the film, I started my work with composing and assembling a rough soundtrack for the animatic. Since the music starts off as diegetic, as a foot or a hand tapping on a table, I decided to start composing using only the objects around me and my own vocals.

Because the music starts with tapping, the composition would be based on a beat, and that's where I started. I used my phone to record various sounds of me banging on the table, water bottle, and even a pack of mints. These were then put together in various combinations and beats until I arrived at the one that had the most potential. Coming up with a tune was also a big challenge, especially because I wanted to fuse both Hindustani and Western styles.

While initially the idea was to create an instrumental composition, I wrote a few lyrics as a test and gave it a try. With a showy and humorous voice, I sang about the anxieties that plague my main character, and how he is singing a song to keep his mind clear.

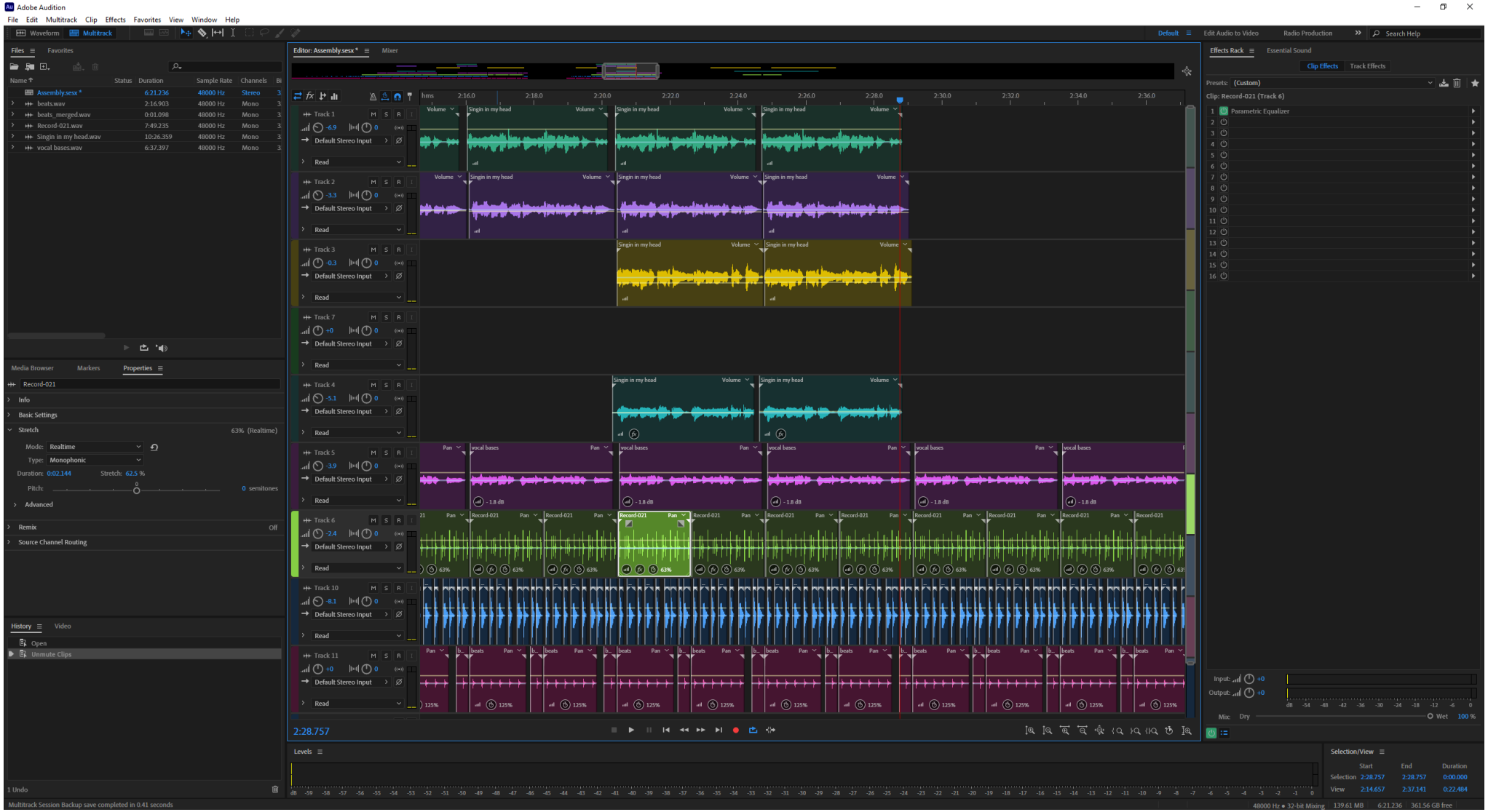
Men in suits, wearing a frown,
Curt and cold, while I'm a clown
Look around, Drown in fear,
gonna really need my mind clear so i'm

Singing in my head again x2

What if I go and puke all over the place?
What if I fall and just forget my face
What if they just look at me and laugh?
What if I'm just not Goo-ood enough

Interview I gotta ace
Need a job, to save my face
Little bit more, won't be long
As long as I keep on singing my song

Singing in my head again x2



Composing using sound clips of various sounds recorded with my phone and things in my room.

I love to experiment with animation mediums and combine them in different ways, taking the opportunity to learn new animation techniques along the way. I have almost no experience in 3D animation, so I decided I would learn it through the project this time.

The plan was to use 2D frame-by-frame animation for the “Real” parts of the story that were taking place in the waiting room, while her mindscape could be rendered in stylized 3D. I also wanted to keep the office section almost monochromatic, while having the dreamscape wacky and full of colour.



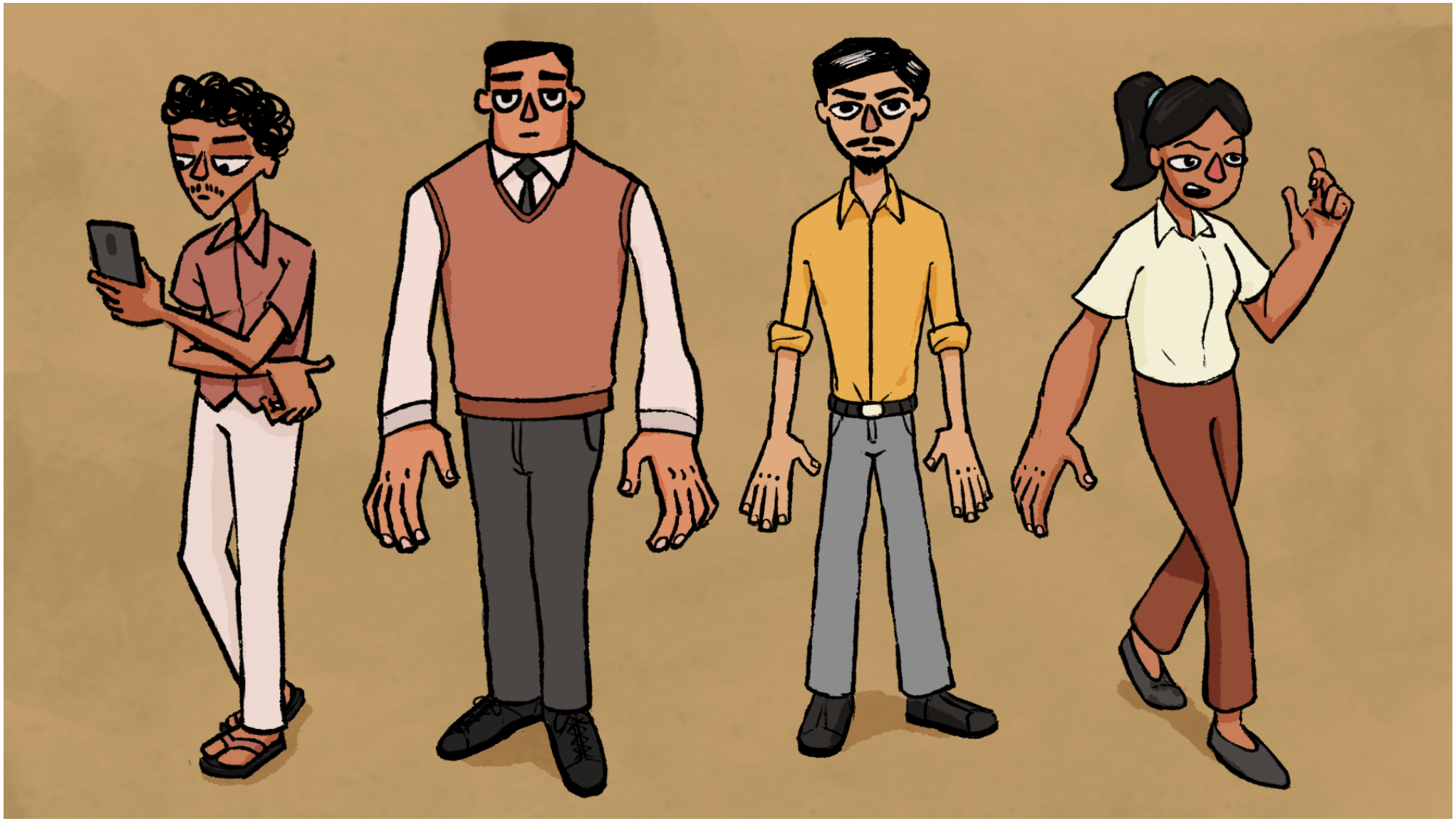
Waiting room concept



Mindscape concept



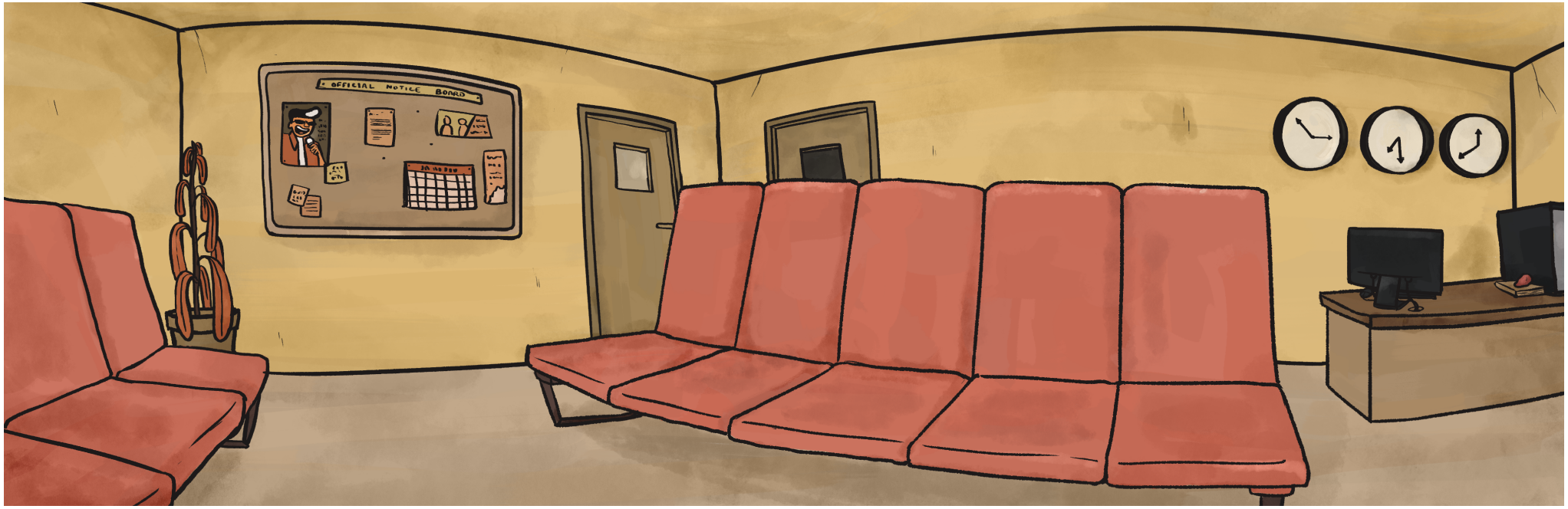
Main Character Design

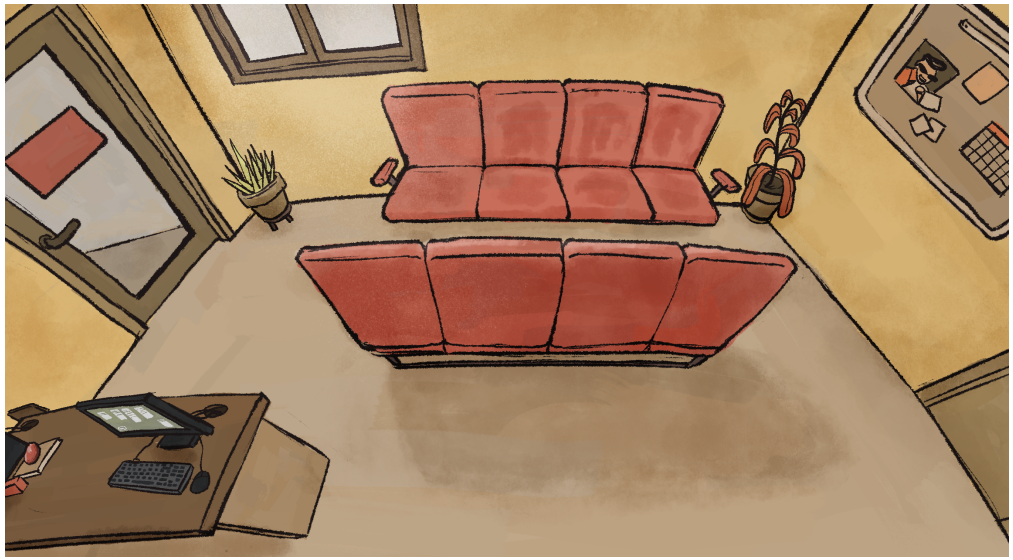


Side Characters



Early Storyboards







Some Backgrounds

Blender Journey

Version 1

My exploration of Blender for this film began by immersing myself in the realm of low poly modeling. As I ventured deeper, I embarked on a journey through various looks and styles, pushing the boundaries of creativity. Through the creation of geometric shapes, I crafted captivating compositions that formed the foundation of my visual storytelling.

To enhance the film's aesthetic appeal, I delved into the world of toon shaders. Drawing inspiration from the charm of hand-drawn animation, I employed toon shaders to infuse the visuals with a whimsical quality and evoke a nostalgic atmosphere. The resulting imagery displayed distinct contours and flat colors, reminiscent of comic books and cartoons, captivating the audience's attention.





Additionally, the grease pencil feature in Blender became a valuable tool in my artistic arsenal. Its versatility allowed me to seamlessly integrate hand-drawn elements into the 3D environment, infusing the film with a dynamic energy and a sense of authenticity. Through meticulous detailing and emphasizing specific areas, the grease pencil brought characters and objects to life, adding depth and personality to the visuals.

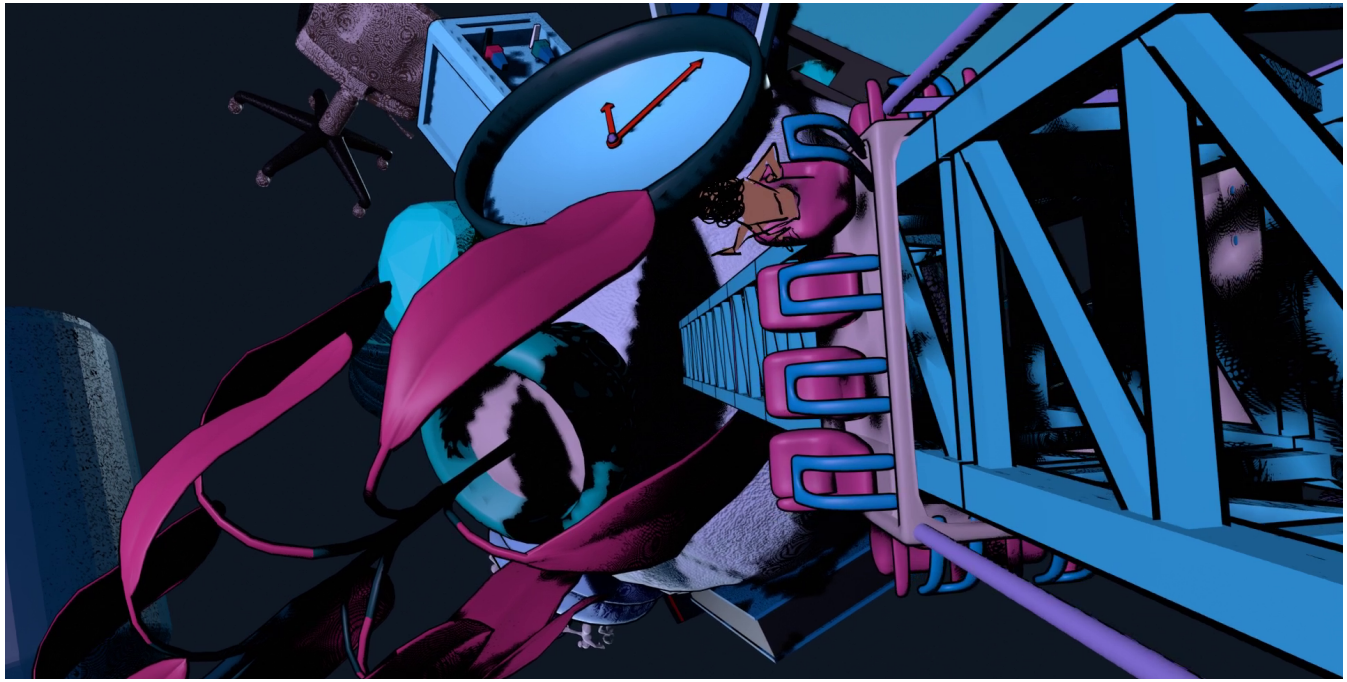
The fusion of low poly modeling, toon shaders, and the grease pencil feature in Blender enabled me to try making a visually captivating film that combines the best of digital and hand-drawn aesthetics.

Version 2

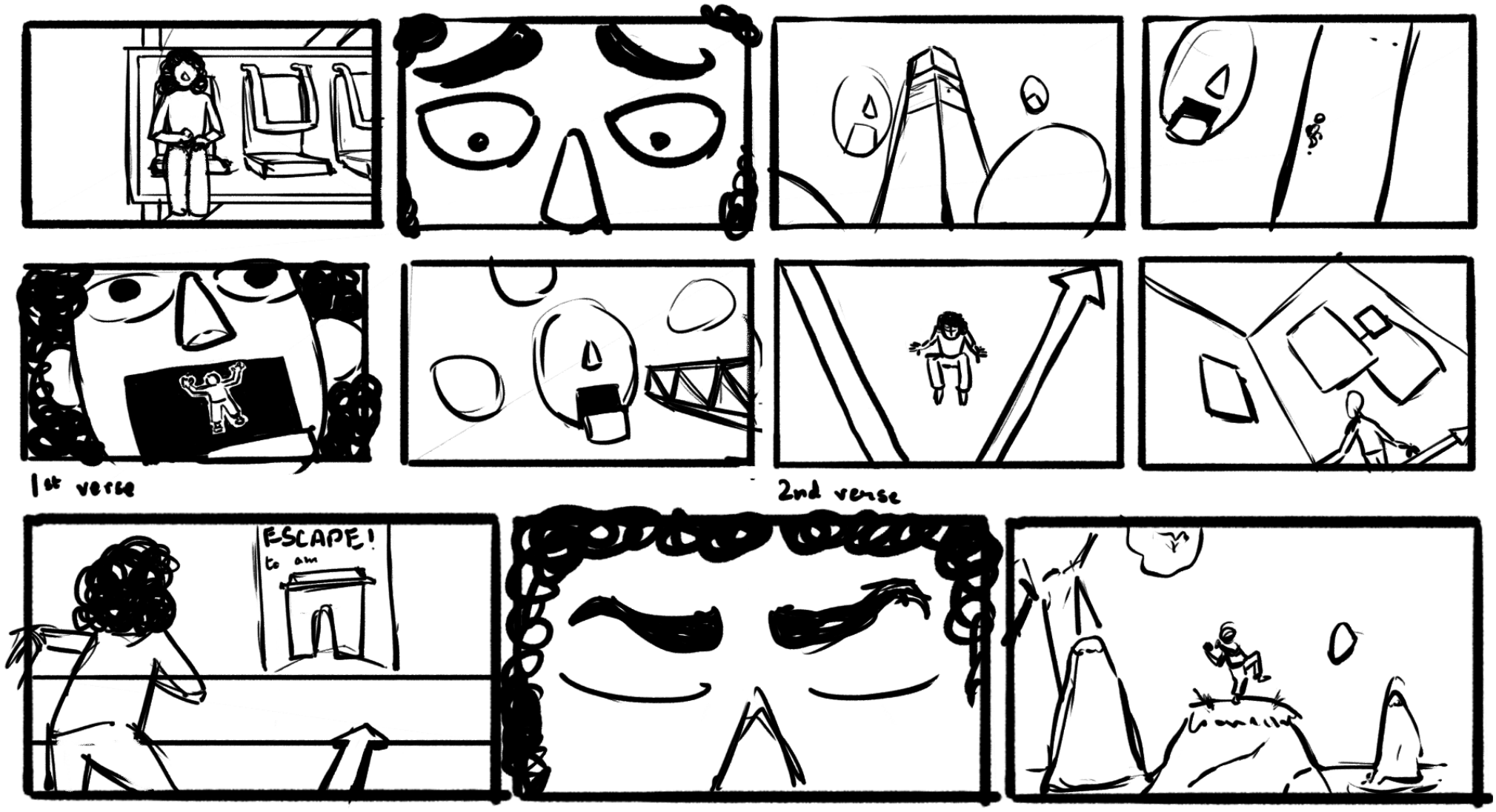
While initially the plan was to have Dhun orbit and fly around the “Planet of Things”, the overall feedback was that that didn’t seem to serve the story well and was too passive.

I then changed the sequence to have Dhun actually fall to the ground of the planet, and run on the surface of the objects itself. I was still trying to get the look of the sequence down, but was unhappy with how the low poly and toon shaders were merging. I tried more psychedelic colour palettes and littered the space with various office objects and items to create the same clustered feel from the concept art. I also wanted to create this whole sequence in a single shot, so I tried my best to plan the shot accordingly.

However, I just couldn’t get the look of this sequence to my liking and I wasn’t sure what to do. After many feedback sessions and re-evaluations, I looked at the sequence from a different perspective. At this point it seemed like the visuals and the music were no longer related, so I went about grounding them to each other.





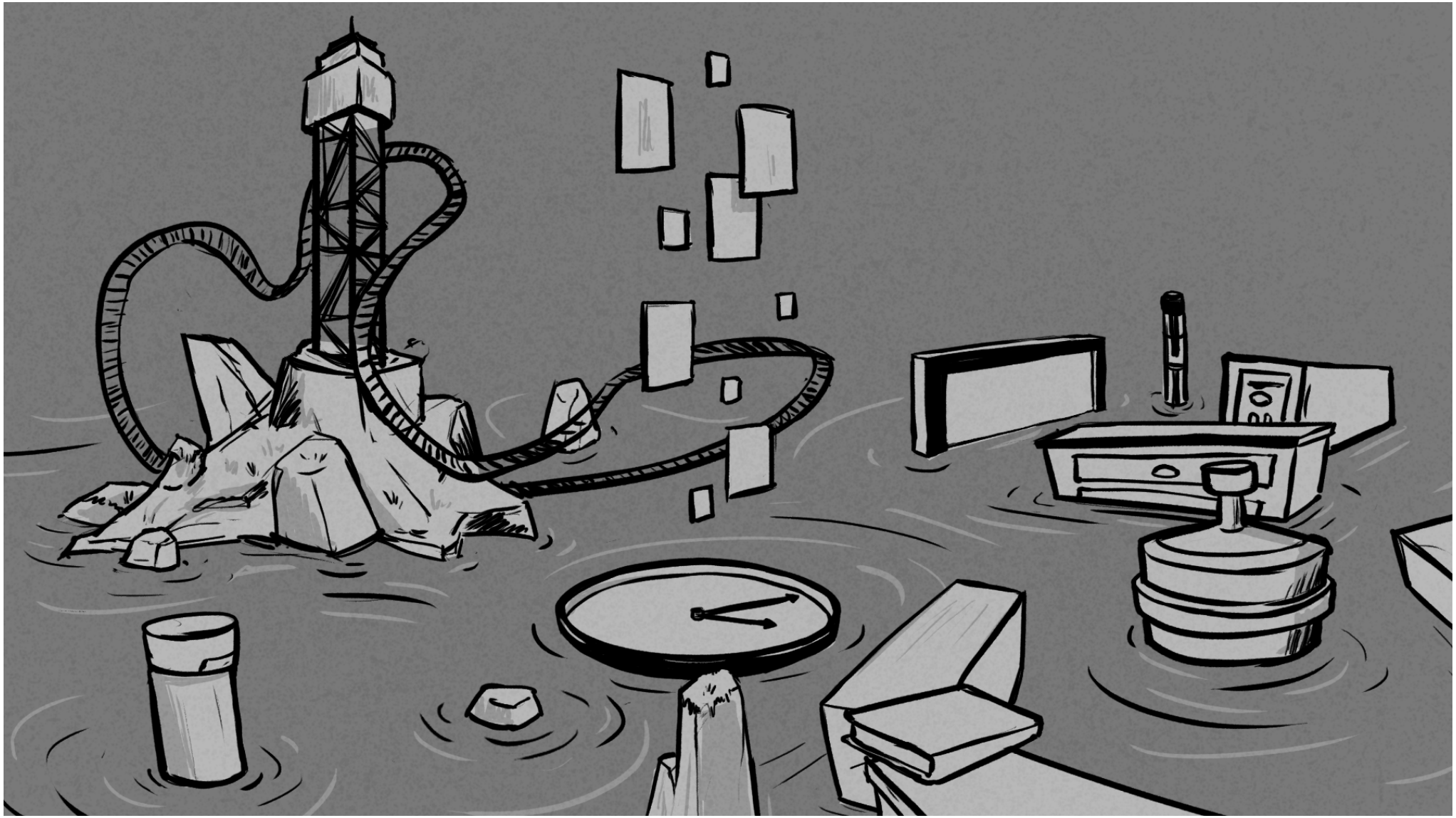


Revisiting Storyboards for the sequence



The song itself has 3 parts that gradually change emotions from extremely scared to groovy. I decided to do away with my One Cut One Location rule, and focused on conveying this through the environments.

I then decided to split the sequence into 3 mini sequences that represented each of these shifts and the lyrics of the song.



Concept for the three stages, still considering putting them all in a single location but decided against it

Location 1: The Tower

The sequence opens on Dhun strapped onto a seat on a drop tower. The height by itself is scare, but soon figures and shapes start emerging from the darkness around her. These shapes turn out to be puppets of her head, voicing her inner thoughts and fear!

I modeled the tower with cubes, and had an overall metallic finish to the structure. The heads are made to look like puppets by stylized modelling and adding a wooden grain textures. I then went about animating the camera, heads, and the drop tower.

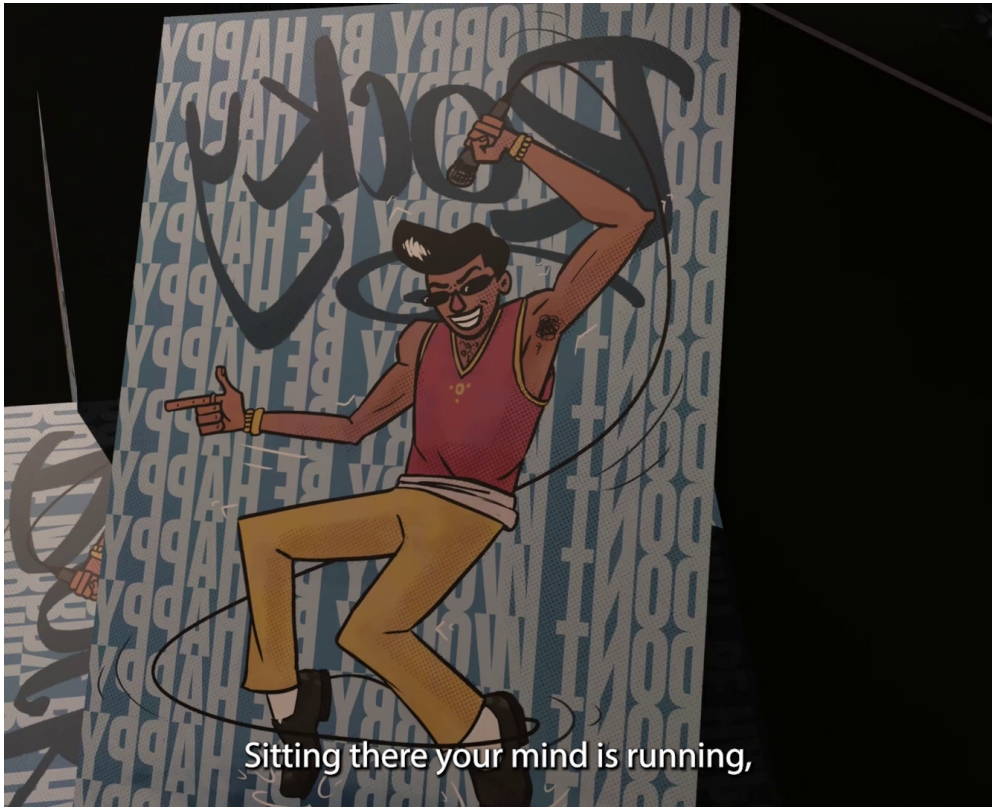


Location 2: The Fall

We follow Dhun down the Drop Tower ride into darkness, and see her falling through a collection of office objects and posters. She eventually escapes through a poster at the very bottom, leading to the next location.

I experimented with geometry nodes in blender to get a randomized array of objects distributed across the scene. The main visible array is full of posters from the noticeboard in the office, while an array of office objects float around the background. Like the posters, Dhun herself is a paper cutout, floating down surrounded by her other inner voices.



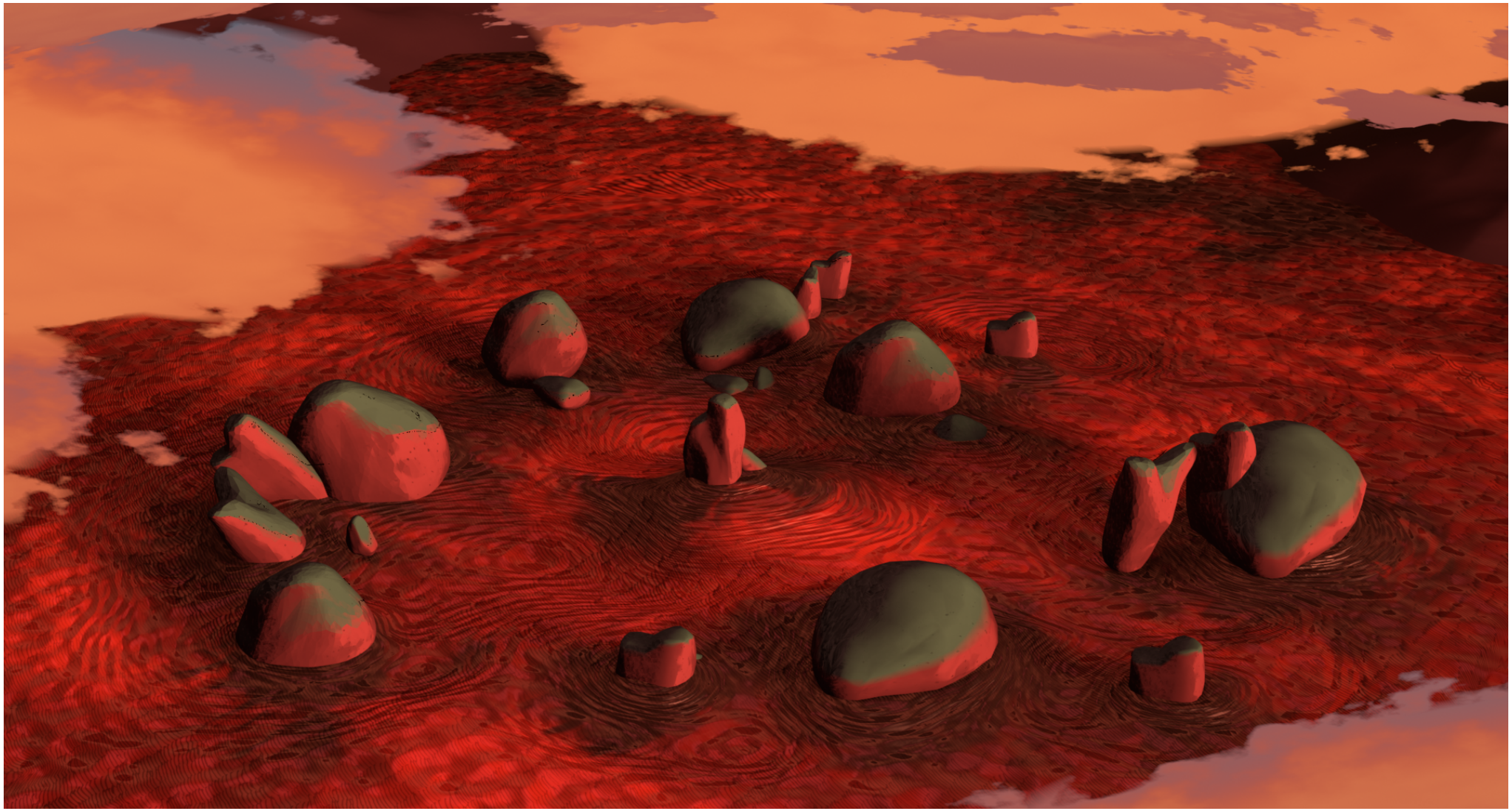




Location 3: The Islands

The sequence flows through the last poster of the Fall sequence, as we enter a red tropical paradise at sunset. Soon, figures in the distance start dancing and grooving to the music. Still confused, Dhun tries to shut it out.

However, her body starts moving to the music on its own, and she eventually decides to let go of her inhibitions and vibe to the music.
I experimented with geometry nodes for this section, along with landscape materials and procedurally generated rocks and grass.



Finalizing Music

The Music too changed quite a lot from my earlier iterations. I began learning FL Studio, a popular music composition software that helped me add instruments and layers to the composition beyond just clips I recorded with my phone. There was a learning to curve to this software too of course, but I found it very interesting to take a deeper dive into music production and mixing.

The form of the song changed quite a bit, finally settling into a three part structure. I changed the lyrics around too, and here is the final:

What if I go and puke all over the place?
What if I fall and just forget my face
What if they just look at me and laugh?
What if I'm just not Goo-ood enough

Sitting there your mind is runnin'
Hands clammy, your leg is shakin'
Look around, drown in fear
Tryna get your mind to clear

Singing in your head again x3
We're singin in your head again


THE QUALITY OF YOUR THINKING, DETERMINES YOUR QUALITY OF LIFE.
WELCOME TO THE SYNCORP FAMILY!
APRIL 04 2023
Rocky
DONT WORRY BE HAPPY
Escape
Forbidden! No sick leave more than 6 days pls!
Team, Casual Friday cancelled due to Pizza Time incident — HR
Sale 50% on all board

Project Limitations

The project encountered significant limitations stemming from the considerable amount of time spent troubleshooting and grappling with a new animation medium. As an unfamiliar territory, this medium became a stumbling block, consuming valuable time that could have been invested in refining the project. The struggle to adapt and become proficient in the chosen animation style hindered the smooth execution of creative ideas, ultimately impeding the progress of the project.

Moreover, the challenges extended to the execution of concepts themselves, as the learning curve of the unfamiliar animation medium affected the overall quality of the work. Struggling to master the techniques and tools in this new realm, the project faced setbacks and struggled to meet its original vision. The constant battle with the medium left less room for exploring creative avenues, limiting the depth and impact of the final output.

Another notable limitation emerged during the creation of the soundtrack, where sound mixing issues surfaced, causing difficulties in achieving the desired audio quality. Despite diligent efforts, resolving these sound mixing problems proved elusive within the project's timeframe. The unresolved audio issues compromised the overall experience, leaving the final product with an unintended impact on the audience and highlighting the need for additional time and expertise in sound editing and mixing.




RECEPTION









Reflections

Reflecting on the semester project, I found the topic of handling anxiety with music deeply meaningful, as it resonated closely with my personal experiences. Throughout the process, I gained valuable insights into more effective ways of managing my own anxiety, allowing me to develop better coping mechanisms. Exploring this subject matter through the project was not only an academic exercise but also a cathartic journey of self-discovery and growth.

The project provided an opportunity to venture into the realm of 3D modeling in Blender, which was both exciting and challenging. Despite my preference for the aesthetics of paintings and comic illustrations, learning 3D modeling equipped me with new skills and knowledge. While I may always gravitate towards my preferred style, this experience broadened my creative horizons, and I now feel confident to delve further into 3D animation and expand my repertoire.





One aspect that proved to be complex was music composition. Although I invested effort and dedication, I acknowledge that there is much more to learn in this field. Composing music is a nuanced art, and I recognize the need for further practice and exploration to refine my skills and create more harmonious soundscapes.

While I am grateful for the guidance and support I received during the project, I admit to losing my way at some point in its execution. The valuable feedback from the jury indicated that the project was on the right track conceptually, but I encountered challenges in translating my ideas into the final product.

Though the film remains incomplete, the desire to revisit and reattempt it entirely lingers within me, and I do foresee myself undertaking this endeavor in soon, armed with the knowledge and experience I gained from this project.