



Half Fry

Project Report

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Dual Degree Animation

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Approval Sheet

The Design Project 2 Titled “ Half Fry: Animated Short Film” by **Saumya Oberoi , Roll Number 18U130028**, 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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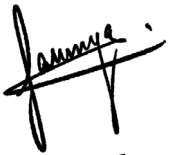
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Declaration

I declare that this project report submission contains my own ideas and work, and if any pre-existing idea or work has been included, the original author(s) have been adequately cited and referenced.

I also declare that I have adhered to all the principles of academic honesty and integrity and have not misinterpreted, fabricated or falsified any idea, data, or fact source in my submission.

I understand that any violation of the above will be cause for disciplinary action by the institute and may evoke penal action from the sources.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Saumya', with a large, sweeping horizontal stroke underneath.

Saumya Oberoi

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Acknowledgements

Half Fry has come about as a labour of love - mine, for sure, but not without the affection of many others, too. I have many people to thank for this experience, and none as foremost as my guides, Prof. Sumant Rao and Prof. Prosenjit Ganguly. Both have been a delight to learn from, and with the help of Prof. Rao I feel as if I've achieved a few years of learning and progress in the span of only a few months. The enthusiasm held by my guides for this project has been infectious, and my own passion reinvigorated thanks to them. The entire project is truly owed to them.

There are many more to thank - very importantly, my classmates at Studio 113. Each of them has been a support beyond anything I could have asked for. The warm company during each long night spent in the studio has kept my energy alive throughout the project, and the film is undoubtedly far better with their contributions than it would have been without.

I owe my lovely friends from Hyde Park, who I've never stopped thinking about. Life with them is what taught me the lessons in care - for the self, or for those around us - that this little film bases itself upon. They have all been my Creatures at some point, and I've been theirs.

As always, I owe thanks to my parents - for their unwavering support, for providing the most comforting haven when I needed nothing more than to rest, for always relaxing my nerves, anxieties, and concerns. They are my strength, and I cannot express my love for them enough.

I must thank my jury panel for their wonderful advice throughout the semester, and particularly Prof. Aditi Chitre whose close attention during the concept development stage led to an unexpected but adored direction for the film. I also thank IDC for the infrastructure it has proved in

the form of the Sr. Animation classroom. Having become another home in the past many months, the comfort of this room has made the hours spent working on the film that much easier.

Finally, I thank every person that has viewed my film, in every stage of its development. Every chuckle, smile, and word of encouragement has kept me motivated to work for this film day after day - has assured me of the worth of my work. I hope that this population of viewers continues to grow, and I hope that they are able to look kindly upon this fruit of my labour.

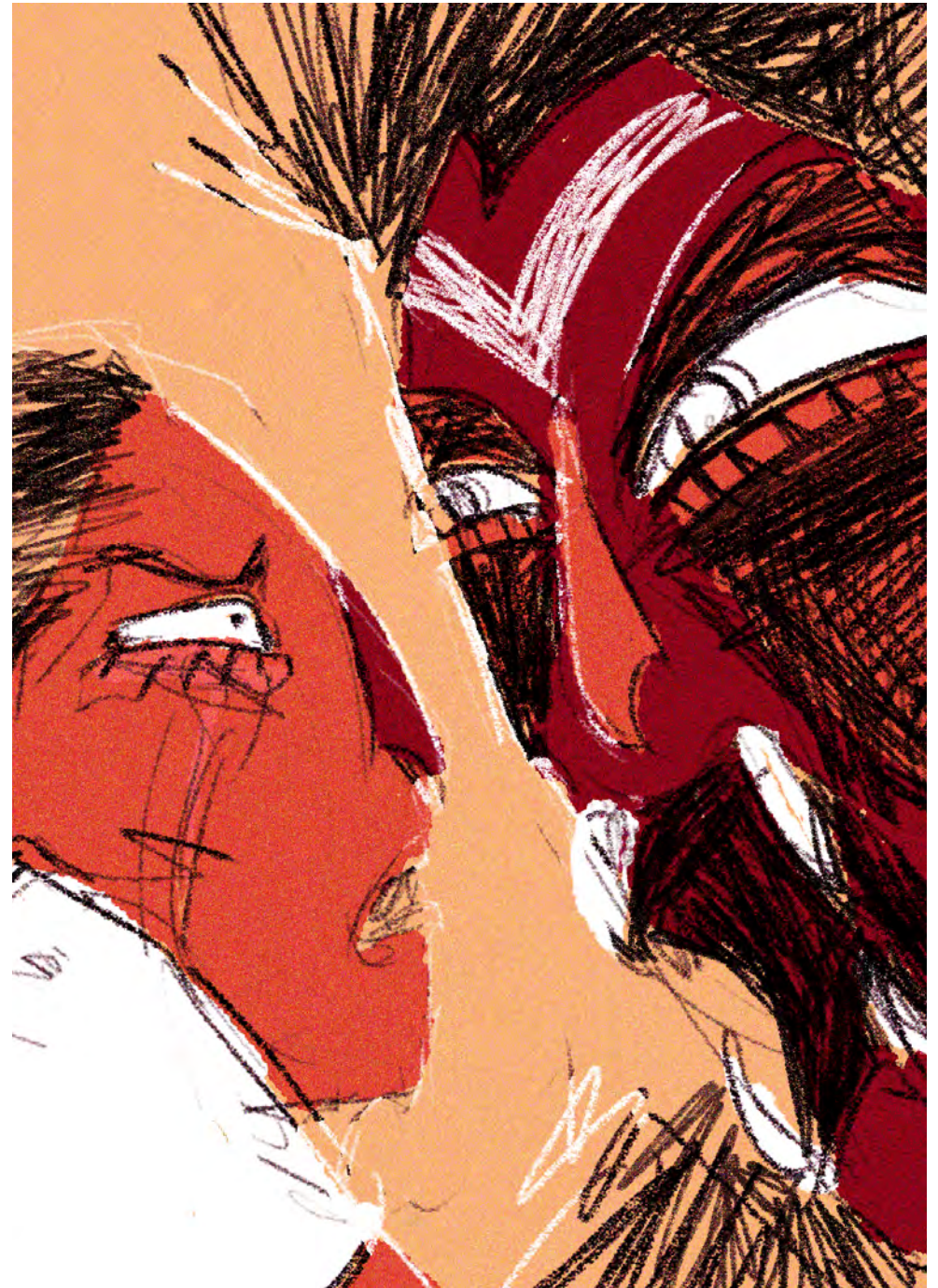
Table of Contents

Abstract	1
Final Output: Link	2
Introduction: A Rocky Start	3
Inspirations	4
Development Process	6
Story Bank	7
Concept Selection	9
Logline, a Few Times	13
Concept Art	15
Storyboards and Animatics	19
Revised Animatic	21
Sound Design	23
Stylistic Treatment	24
Line Tests	26
Colour and Lighting	27
Reflections	28
On Technique	29
On Content	30

Abstract

Half Fry is a short film of roughly one minute, highly autobiographical in nature, which through a rather heightened metaphor attempts to express the urgency of maintaining good health. Our protagonist, a young woman who throughout development has only gone by 'S', neglects sleep and food in lieu of work. This, however, is unacceptable to the Creature — an alter ego who decides to take matters of self-care into her own hands after suffering from S's neglectful behaviour. The film, animated frame-by-frame in Photoshop, serves to remind viewers (and the creator herself!) that if you do not take care of your body, your body will force you to do so through far more unpleasant methods.

The following report describes the processes of conceptualization, development, and production of the short film. Along with details of the creation process are discussions on the themes, inspirations, and creative logic that have contributed to the film.



Final Output: Link

Half Fry (in its current state of completion) can be viewed at this link:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1zahDufKaNmARoBSxn6qpL32BrjI-9wrUm?usp=share_link

Introduction: A Rocky Start

At the start of the semester, I found myself dealing with an ‘inability’ to come up with a topic that I felt was appropriate for this project — worth creating a short film on. The creation of a short film is a taxing and dedicated process, and it was quite clear to me that such ideas arrive in a flash of inspiration; they are not constructed. This, of course, led to a few problems; the timeline of the project required me to propose ideas for the film, and in order to do this I chased ideas that only seemed to become more elusive with each ideation attempt. Eventually, a thought began to creep up on me — that perhaps I’d never think of an original idea again.

My answer to this mental block was to pitch a film that was entirely process focused — more of an experiment in technique, and potentially plot-less entirely. The following guidelines, transcribed here as originally written, were meant to shape the project:

- Un-restrain my animation
- Move towards humour
- Play with medium (3D grease pencil, videography, rotoscoping) + 2D techniques
- Justify the need for my film to be an animated one

These guidelines were born from reflections on previous projects. I searched for what I felt lacked in each of them, and collected these ideas into a roadmap of goals for the future. However, as well-justified as this approach was, I remained aware that hidden behind these ideas for artistic progress was a storyteller that had no stories.

What I knew in my heart, I was only able to accept after receiving multiple rounds of advice and scolding from a few individuals who I owe many

thanks to. It’s one thing to focus on the project as an exercise in medium, but a film isn’t a film without a solid intention behind it. I could not be afraid to make stories! The film would happen after all, because I would need to make it happen — when stories wouldn’t drop from the sky, I would have to learn to construct them without fear, and so the learning of this project would not be in technique but in what I’d been avoiding for quite some time. The guidelines would remain, but they would not be an escape method.

Inspirations

It is impossible to discuss the direction and development of this film without discussing the inspirations that have shaped my artistic vision. Some of my favourite short-form animation in recent years has been the work produced by students of Gobelins; in particular, the short films ‘T’as Vendu mes Rollers!’ and ‘Sundown’ for their acting, humour, innovative staging, and breathtaking color palettes.

On the other side of the spectrum from student projects are the works of masters — Satoshi Kon’s ‘Tokyo Godfathers’ and ‘Paprika’ are certainly favourites of mine, one for the touching heart and the other for the beautiful animated complexity. Tokyo Godfathers has some of the most enjoyable animated acting that I’ve witnessed, and certainly sets my sights high. Richard Williams’ unfinished masterpiece ‘The Thief and the Cobbler’ has also occupied a large chunk of my attention in recent times; I’m enamoured by the ambition, the skill, and the character designs. The Tatami Galaxy (dir. Masaaki Yuasa) and its beautifully innovative mixed media animation has become one of my favourite projects in the last year, and I regularly return to it to study the beautiful craftsmanship of its frames.

A viewing of the recently released Kantara (dir. Rishab Shetty) during production of Half Fry became another unexpected inspiration. The presentation of Kantara’s demigod was immediately reminiscent of my own Creature, and served almost as validation of my imagined aesthetic for this film.

It would be remiss to forget the many non-cinematic inspirations for this story! Life as it was lived among 7 flatmates for most of 2021 in a Thane apartment will probably impact me for the rest of my life. From the layout of the kitchen, to the stern love and care that would keep each other rested

and fed, the experience of multiple new adults banding together to stay alive by pooling what little life experience they had certainly impacts the tone and depicted relationship between my two main characters.

Other real-life inspirations for the film are traditions of masked performance arts and theatre from around the world. These, along with my own experience with performing arts, are further discussed in the section titled ‘Concept Art.’

These inspirations shaped the creative mood that I entered this project with. Though I was initially most focused on the visual prowess of my cinematic and theatrical influences, I realized that without the heart that went into each narrative, they would not have had as powerful an impact on me. Once again, I was reminded that I had no choice but to buckle up and make a lovable story.



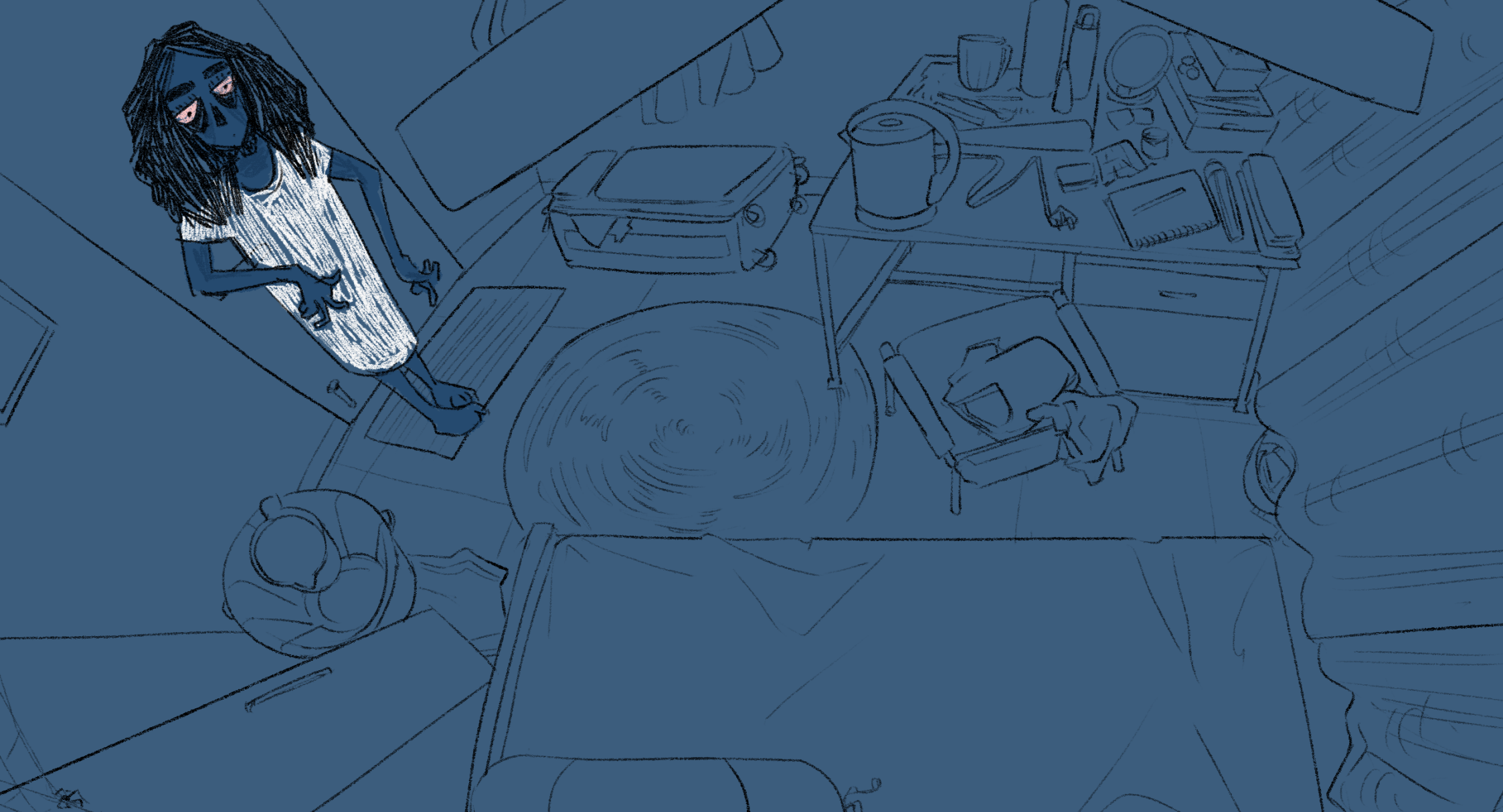
Inspirations,
NOT
Moodboard



<3
look at
them



Img. 1) Inspiration collection



Development Process

Story Bank

Once there had been open communication with my guide about my creative mental block, the first exercise of the project was assigned: to create a bank of at least 10 stories, such that each story could be created into a film in accordance with the project brief. Slow at first and faster as I thought of more, I experienced this exercise as a sort of ‘oiling’ of the gears upstairs. This particular exercise changed another important aspect of my approach — stories and films that I would create no longer felt like they had to connect to a core tenet of myself, but rather could be removed from myself so long as I enjoyed the idea. Though I had known this concept in theory, I’d rarely ever acted in accordance.

The story bank is included below.

Long Distance Relationships

A weiner dog with a cone in a long distance relationship with its tail chases it endlessly, admires it through the mirror, and looks forward to the once-a-week meeting it’s able to have with the tail when it sneaks out to a friendly raccoon that’s able to undo the cone (for a fee), letting the dog spend some quality time with his tail.

Many Origins

A comical-looking crossbred creature doesn’t fully fit into either of their parents’ cultures, and creates a found-family of other crossbreed creatures. Maybe a liger? Maybe something fantastical, griffin-like?

Cookery

A phone call to a mum to ask how to make a dish, at an extremely odd time. The dish, in progress, badly needs salvaging. Hungry friends look on in hope.

Partition

A family fleeing danger leaves behind their most treasured possessions by accident.

Medical Anxiety

A tumble into the mind of a paranoid person with medical anxiety, concluding with an embarrassed call to their doctor to ask if it’s possible for <fungus/parasite to enter their body through an unwashed grape touching a small scrape, causing their insides to become a horroscape of an environment, ultimately resulting in the zombification of the person>

Co-existing

A vigilante crow watches over an apartment complex, serving justice to any wrongdoer. When a series of house-plant murders are committed, crow is on the case. (the criminals: a group of rowdy pigeons)

Anger Management

A sweet young girl, looking forward to an item in a buffet-style meal, is cut in line by a man who takes the last piece. Completely overcome by rage, she attacks him in a shocking and unbelievably violent manner, with anger that will seemingly never subside.

Keeping Organized

A young hostelite tries desperately to keep her room clean, while the secret trash goblin that lives in her room (her own sleepy self) foils her every attempt to keep an organized room

Friends Maturing

A guppy fish watches in sadness as all her best friends, a group of tadpoles, grow up to become frogs and move away. They do their best to visit, but each has their own lives now. Once grown they return to her pond to lay their eggs — her guppy babies and their tadpole babies grow up together.

Tech as Friends

A girl talks to her struggling, sputtering computer as it struggles with a basic task. Coaxing, soothing, and urging it to pull through, she apologizes to the group of people waiting in front of her screen and explains that the

machine has a bit of social anxiety — so please be gentle and say encouraging words.

Once the bank was ready, it was time to evaluate the merit of each idea for this particular project. Though I had had one idea in mind before this exercise, I discarded favouritism to re-evaluate the entire set. The following were the notes I had created to help narrow down the stories to three options.

- Indeed I'm not sure I want to do partition anymore
- 'Co-existing' and 'Long Distance Relationships' might work for a slightly longer film, 1 minute is too short
- Anger management is fun and fits in 1 minute, but is that really something I want to spend months on?
- 'Tech as Friends', 'Friends Maturing', and 'Many Origins' either weak or forgettable to myself, despite personal connections
- Repeatedly thinking about 'Keeping Organized', 'Medical Anxiety' and 'Cookery'

The story bank and narrowing exercise ended the storyteller's funk, and the technique will be effective any time such problems arise in the future. However, one month into the project, I had to ask — *Does this bring me to the topic-selection stage again?*

Indeed it did.

Concept Selection

The three remaining ideas in focus, listed below, seemed to be of equal potential for the project.

Cookery

A phone call to a mum to ask how to make a dish, at an extremely odd time. The dish, in progress, badly needs salvaging. Hungry friends look on in hope.

Medical Anxiety

A tumble into the mind of a paranoid person with medical anxiety, concluding with an embarrassed call to their doctor to ask if it's possible for <fungus/parasite to enter their body through an unwashed grape touching a small scrape, causing their insides to become a horroscape of an environment, ultimately resulting in the zombification of the person>

Keeping Organized

A young hostelite tries desperately to keep her room clean, while the secret trash goblin that lives in her room (her own sleepy self) foils her every attempt to keep an organized room

A first step towards understanding each was to create a single representative concept image for each (represented in Images 2, 3 and 4 respectively). Without any development expected, the idea of this exercise was to capture the image that each prompt conjured in my mind.

With each topic now having a 'poster', the campaign for topic selection could begin. In conversation with my guides, it was recommended that rather than just choose one, expanding the creative process by partially developing each could result in interesting ideas. My quest here was to search for the best story within each topic — identifying the best context

to display the idea in mind. Using knowledge-organization app Miro, each topic was explored simultaneously (Img. 5) — broadening the scope of each and discovering bridges between them until a particular set of digital sticky notes held my attention (Img. 6).

These arose from the 'Keeping Organized' idea, in which a young girl deals with a frustrating alter ego. The first of these sticky notes bore the words 'Is it fair to be angry at your tired self?' A thought that I've contended with in the past, and one that I frequently encounter with my friends, this wording held my attention. It's not uncommon for one to struggle to deal with the 'worst version' of themselves — not malicious, but lazy, exhausted, cranky, a veritable little goblin. The duality of the 'thinking self' and the 'goblin' became a focal point of exploration. Who were each of these? What did they want? How did they behave? How does one reconcile the two?

Going a step further, I explored the topics relation to myself. (Img. 7) Specific to my own experiences, I believe I have (in recent years) found something of an answer to the question of dealing with this inner goblin. Though not the easiest to implement, this personal philosophy works on a system of 'paying it forward' — the thinking self makes things easier for the goblin, who then makes things easier for the thinking self in turn. I don't believe in punishing the goblin self, because that goblin is to me a much simpler creature; one that doesn't understand revenge much the way a pet dog does not understand. The film began to become an expression of this personal philosophy, an appeal to be kind to yourself, an instructive guide on 'Learning To Love Your Inner Goblin'.

From here, a narrative to fit this idea had begun to form, and the creation of a logline was in order.



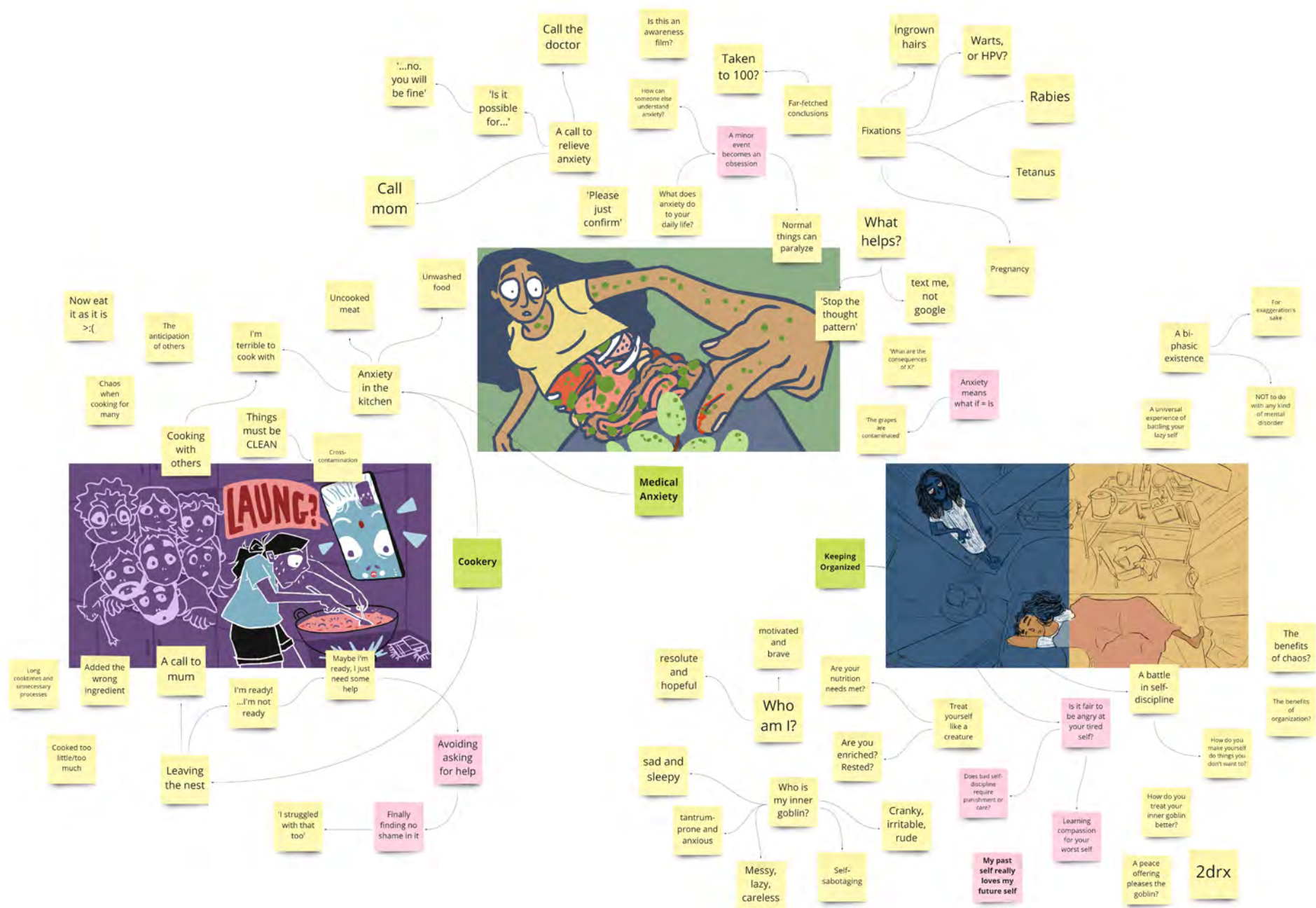
Img. 2) Cookery First Concept



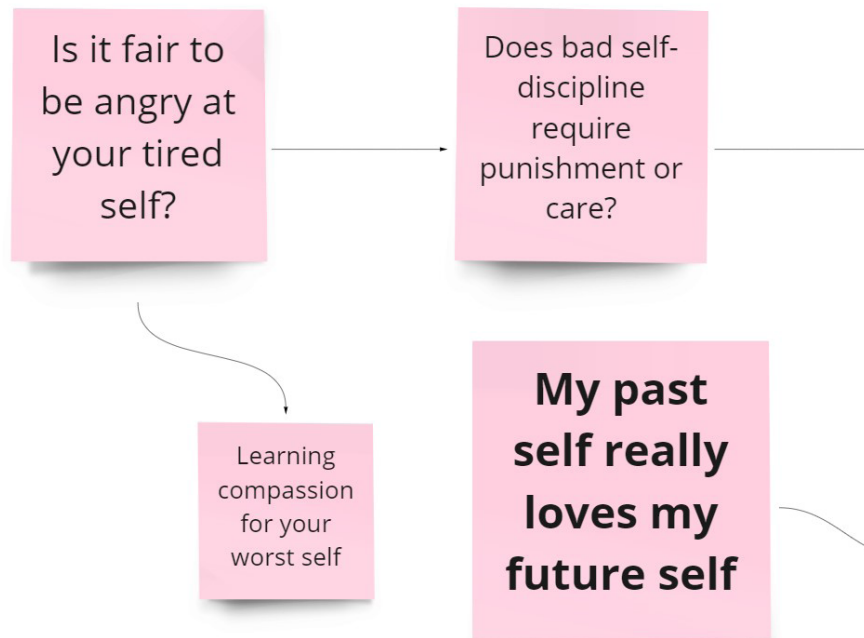
Img. 3) Medical Anxiety First Concept



Img. 4) Keeping Organized First Concept



Img. 5) Finding a Story



Img. 6) The Notes in Focus



Img. 7) Developing the Concept

Logline, a Few Times

With the concept coming together into a nebulous form, I attempted to hammer it into shape with a decisive logline. A sense of hurry began to creep into the project at this point, motivated by the fear of not being left with enough time to make the film if I were to end up spending all my time fine-tuning the idea for it.

This initial logline is inserted below.

A young, stressed hostelite attempts to maintain a clean room and a healthy lifestyle. However, she encounters direct resistance towards this goal from a certain trash goblin that lives with her. The pair slowly work their way through their animosity, to peaceful coexistence and even fondness.

Though I had felt quite satisfied with this, I found myself unable to answer the very basic question of ‘What exactly happens in the film?’ This logline expressed an idea and a context, but no plot or sequence of events. My attempt to detail out the plot resulted in a block of text which would not be adapted effectively in under a minute:

A young, stressed, and eternally busy hostelite attempts to keep an organized room and a healthy lifestyle. However, she encounters resistance in the form of a certain trash goblin that lives with her.

Any attempts towards living well are thwarted by this creature, who our protagonist develops a hatred for. She attempts to punish the creature, and the goblin only rages harder.

One day, the hostelite wakes up with a tired sadness. She proceeds with the regular pick-up that she has to do each morning after the goblin has trashed the room. Before she leaves for the day, she pauses, and leaves a small gift



Img. 8) Early concept sketch



Img. 9) Early concept sketch

for the goblin — a candy bar. When the goblin appears, it too pauses at the sight of the gift. Munching silently, it sits quietly on the bed, and throws the wrapper away in the dustbin. It sleeps.

Slowly, the two learn to coexist. Our protagonist develops a soft spot for the creature. She leaves gifts for the goblin, who in turn does its best to repay the girl however it can — folds some laundry, even if badly; takes vitamins, though it grumbles and grunts the whole time. Our protagonist, for the first time in a long time, wakes up in a clean room with a smile.

The advice received was simple: strip the concept down to its very basics, figure out a single representative event for the main theme of the concept, and document that in a logline.

Following this process led, eventually, to a fork in the conceptual road. I was now choosing between two representations of the idea that one should remain kind to themselves, no matter their frustration. These two options were effectively inverses of each other (Img. 10).

The ‘self’ tries to keep clean, and the ‘goblin’ is uncooperative; shown through a metaphor of clothes piling up in a bedroom

The ‘self’ is neglectful of her health, and the ‘goblin’ keeps her alive; shown through a metaphor of skipping food and water.

Despite personal attachment to both concepts, the latter shone through as the favourite, and a more mature and practical logline was born.

A young woman lives with two selves: a chirpy, forgetful creature who is unable to take good care of herself, and a grumpy, frustrated goblin who takes over when their shared body has been stretched too far.

This logline was accompanied by a more detailed description of the plot, offering a sequence of events to fit within one minute.

A young working woman with a terribly busy schedule neglects to eat any food for almost 24 hours. As afternoon comes around on the second day, a terrible thing happens: a second head with its own arms pops up from her shoulders. This new entity attacks her and shouts, but speaks no language. The young woman is dragged to the kitchen by force where the second head forces her to make an omelette and get a glass of water. The two heads share the omelette, and the exhausted woman takes a nap. When she wakes, she has only one head. A little dazed, she gets right back to work.

Simultaneous to this development, was the development of the concept from another angle — a visual one.



Img. 10) Deciding between conceptual representations

Concept Art

With the initial concept image for ‘Keeping Organized’ as a starting point, began the development of a moodboard for the film. (Img. 11) Drawing inspiration from a variety of sources, the moodboard involved content from life, media, and art of my own creation along with snippets of text. These covered the following:

- Inspirations for the feel of the setting
- People’s work habits
- Character and Mood references
- Trope names for better articulation of concepts

Rather soon into the process of image curation, and with a bit of nudging from Prof. Aditi Chitre, I stumbled into a rabbit hole of masked theatre. This quickly became a special interest for the project. I found myself enamoured with the Topeng masks of South-East Asia (Img. 12, 13), and went on to reference other folk practices including Chhau of Odisha and Kathakali and Kummattikali of Kerala, as well as modern western masked theatre, especially as facilitated by the masks of Trestle theatre. Collages and illustrations inspired by these references began to shape the look of the ‘Creature’.

At this time, it also became clear to me that both characters would be ‘masked’ — an important aspect of the film was to ensure that I, the creator, loved both alter egos equally. One was not above the other, and this idea would need to be expressed visually. Further, this would imply that both exist in the same plane of reality — that is, neither is more ‘real’ than the other, despite their obvious differences. The anger and exhaustion of the creature extends its dark circles to the end of its face and its teeth past its lips, while the more animalistic look (emphasized by the nose

and ears) express the creature’s prioritization of the more fundamental and physical. The brow lines become dark and pronounced, expressing its disapproval of its more ‘human’ counterpart.

This dive into masked theatre and performance arts seemingly unlocked a thematic layer of the film. My own experience as a Bharatnatyam dancer has always resulted in a certain manner of acting and posing that I employ in my art, and this in combination with the inspiration drawn from masked theatre resulted in a rather theatrical performance from the actors in the film. Largely un-speaking, the two communicate through gestures, eye movements, facial expressions, and body language. The dramatic and supernatural idea of another entity emerging from within yourself fits seamlessly with the themes dealt with in folk theatre. The creature can even be re-defined as the ‘rudra’ form of the main character. The visually heightened metaphor for being forced to take care of your body is fitting of a theatrical treatment; though the film deals with a modern setting, the concept is timeless.

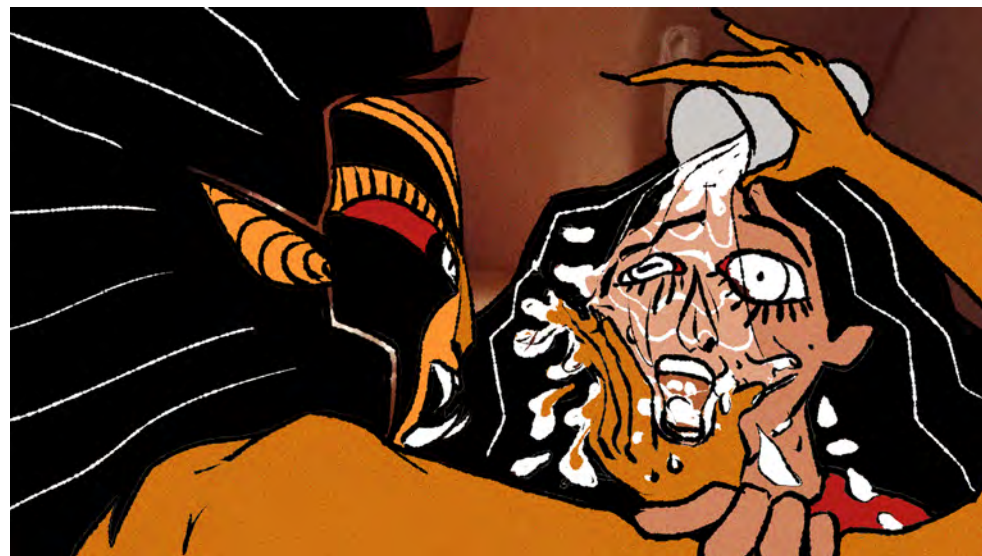
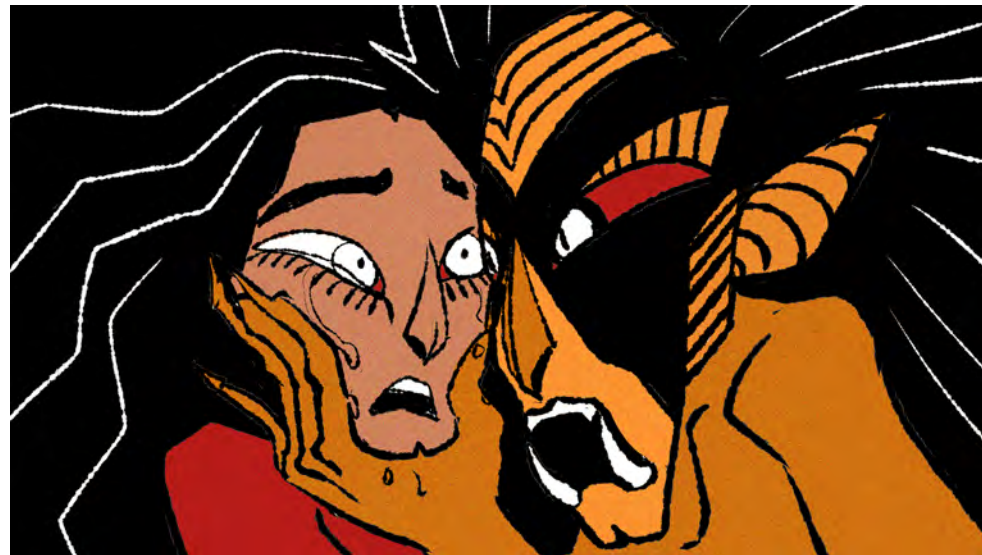
In keeping with the theatrical treatment of the film and my desire to mix media for a unique look, I explored the potential of conducting the events of the film within an actual set, created from a cardboard box. Explorations born of this concept felt promising, but they would be put on pause at this stage and the focus shifted instead to storyboard creation (Img. 18-21).



Img. 12, 13) Illustrations of Topeng Masks
src: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Topeng_dance



Img. 14-17) Digitized collage explorations



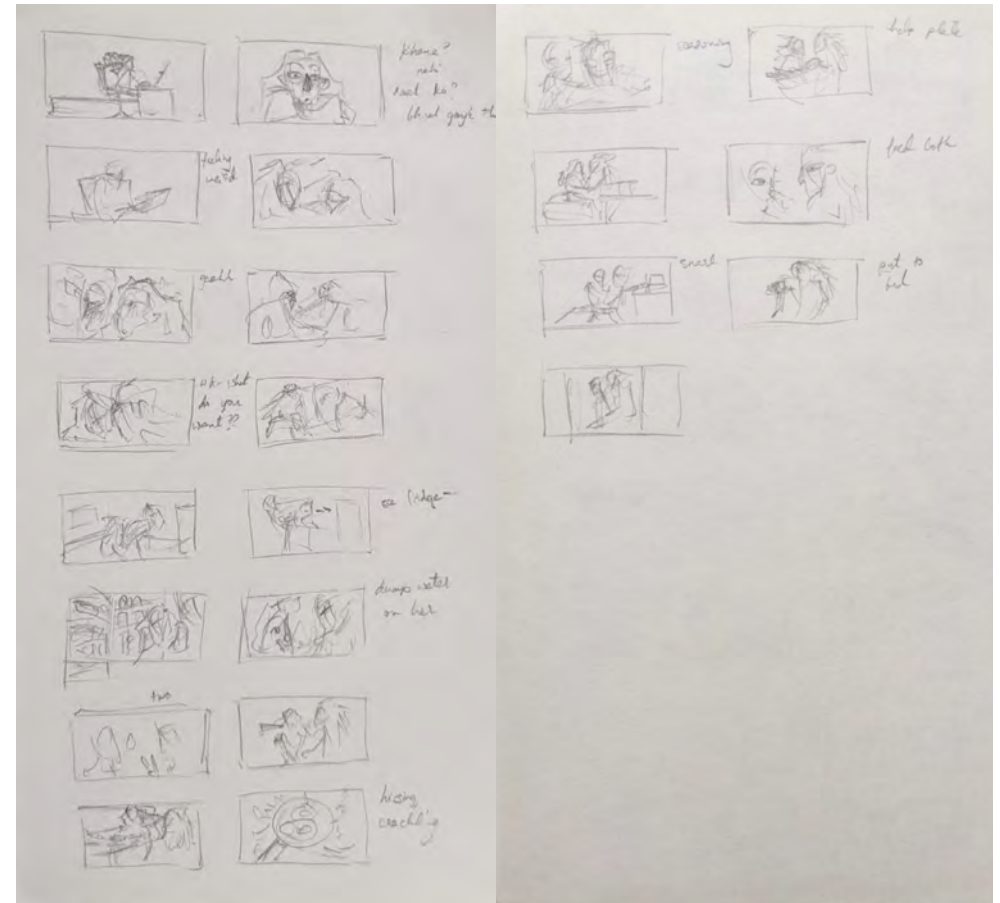
Img. 18-21) Character and concept designs

Storyboards and Animatics

The storyboard for the film was created in a few stages. The very first employed frames that were drawn in no more than 10 seconds each, serving only to communicate with myself the first impression that I had of the flow of the story. This storyboard was created on paper, consisting only of 23 thumbnails (Img. 22).

Versions two and three of the storyboard were drawn digitally, and timed into loose animatics. Each frame was drawn in less than 30 seconds each, employing messy sketches to judge the flow of the film and to check for narrative cohesion. (Images 23-25)

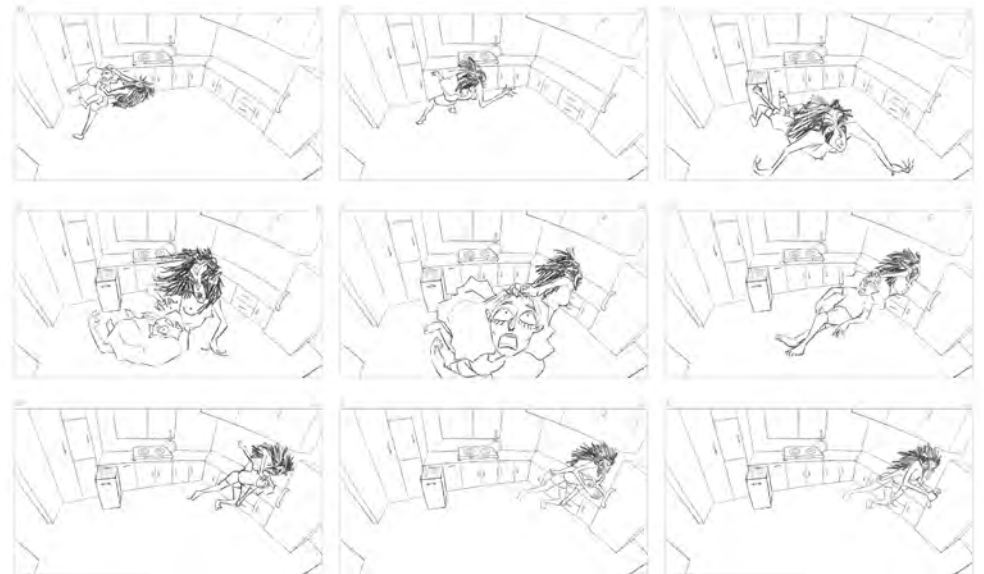
In the fourth version of the animatic, the now-forming film was tightened. Each frame took 2-3 minutes to draw, with added emphasis on acting, anatomy, perspective, and comedic timing. (Images 26-27) Extra effort went into covering some of my initial desires from the film, including an attempt to 'un-restrain' my animation, to choose interesting camera angles, and to employ humour. In this version of the animatic, I attempted to come to the emotional heart of the film through the framing of the characters, and their own actions within the frame. This version of the animatic was accompanied by a bit of drumming, performed on a tiny toy 'dholki' in accordance with the theatrical and folksy roots of the film's aesthetic.



Img. 22) First Storyboard



Figure 2.134



Storyboarder

Revised Animatic

The completion of the animatic and its positive reception (with chuckles in all the right places) felt like a successful endeavour. However, the process of its creation had also left me terribly burnt out both physically and creatively, and to follow were a few weeks of non-activity regarding the film (exacerbated by fairly severe illness).

When I returned to the project and animatic, discussion with my guide revealed that while the film worked on the whole, a good amount of fine-tuning was possible. In order to design the film with purpose, I undertook a reverse shot-breakdown exercise. Through this exercise, I broke down the existing animatic into individual moments, focusing not on the existing staging of the film but rather the purpose of each moment within the film.

1. Set Premise:
 - a. Working at table, zombie-like
 - b. Roommate pops in; 'God, you look terrible. Why didn't you sleep? Eat something, at least?'
 - c. 'Hmmm not now'
 - d. Title splash
2. Creature's first appearance
 - a. S puts her head on the desk, exhausted
 - b. emerges with a SCREAM
 - c. Grabs S by the hair and pulls her up; S is paralyzed with fear and shock
 - d. Whip zoom
 - e. Creature SCREAMS in S's face, her eyes wide and pupils tiny
 - f. S tears up out of fear, creature antagonizes her, face uncomfortably

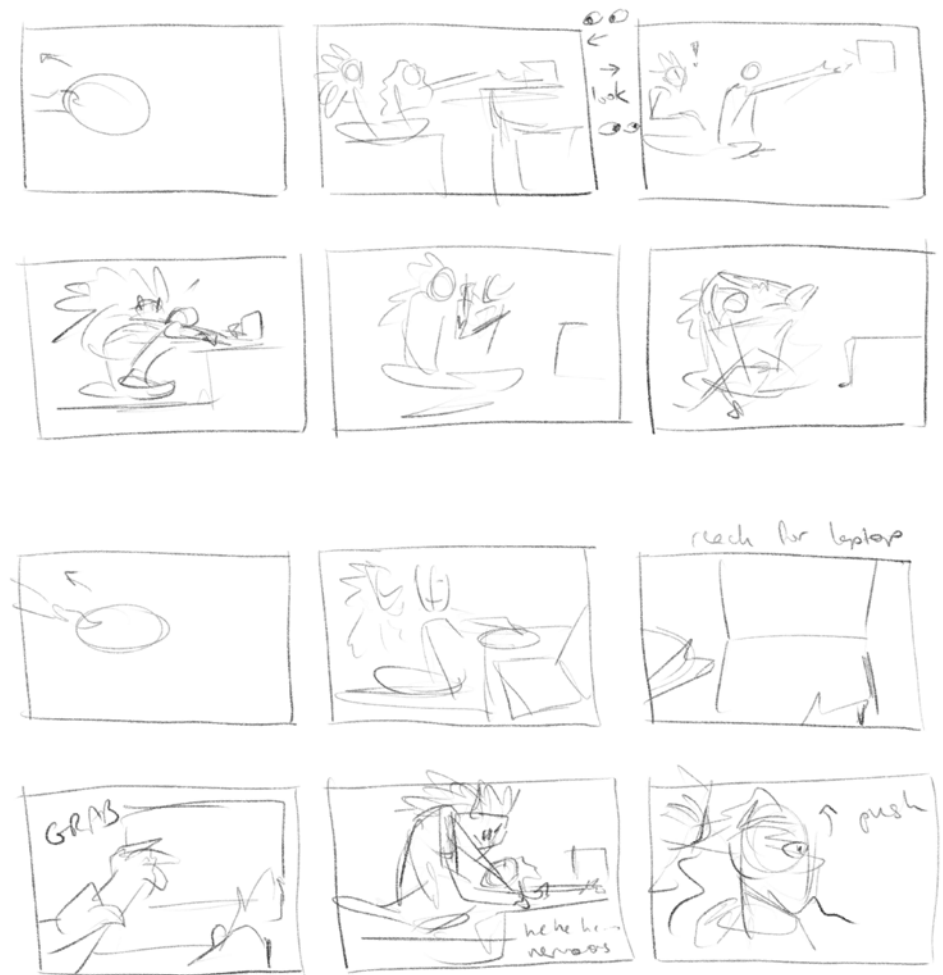
- close to S
 - g. S closes her eyes, fearing the worst, and opens a questioning eye when creature pauses for a second
3. S is dragged to the kitchen
 - a. Knocking against furniture and walls all along the way
 - b. Holds onto the kitchen door frame before being swept inside
 - c. The two stumble onto the counter; S grips it
 - d. Creature tugs S toward the fridge, S's grip fails and they overshoot
 - e. Creature pulls S back towards the fridge, finally pinning her on the counter next to it
 - f. Roommate opens the door to peek in — 'oh good, you're up. About time you ate'
4. Creature opens the fridge door, pulling S up by the hair to look inside
 - a. Creature stares furiously at the eggs
 - b. S follows creature's vision, and offers a single egg tentatively
 - c. Creature indicates that it wants two
 - d. S pulls out another egg
5. Creature tugs S towards the stove
 - a. Puts frying pan onto hob
6. S begins to cook
 - a. Cracks one egg into the pan
 - b. Upon seeing approval, cracks another
 - c. Creature offers S a box of spice (red chili)
 - d. Stunned for a moment, S reaches into the box and sprinkles the eggs with the seasoning
7. The two eat
 - a. Sitting on the bed, S and the Creature stare at the plate
 - b. S is hungry now, when faced with food — she offers a fork to Creature, who pushes it back towards her; indicates, 'eat'
 - c. S takes a bite and another
 - d. Pauses, and offers a bite to Creature
 - e. Creature, surprised, accepts the bite, and watches S eat
8. The plate is put away
9. S, full, now reaches for her laptop

- a. Creature stops her
 - b. A moment of tension, before Creature pushes S into the bed
 - c. S, helpless, lies there waiting for Creature's next move
 - d. To her surprise, Creature curls up right next to S
 - e. Pats S on the head, and closes her eyes
 - f. S also closes her eyes, and the two go to sleep
10. Credits
 11. S wakes up alone, refreshed, and smiles

Once this was complete, I studied the existing staging of each moment to see which could be changed to better meet the purpose of that shot. Highlighted in yellow, these sections were then individually experimented upon. Using quick and messy thumbnails, multiple options for staging and sequencing of those moments were visualized (Img. 28, 29). With these options before me, I was able to choose my favourite visualization and redraw the storyboard accordingly.

This process forced a far greater level of 'deliberate' filmmaking than before. In the process, shots were consolidated or broken up, some added and some subtracted until a more streamlined and efficient structure was obtained. Another constant battle was in keeping the timestamp down, frequently being raised during one edit and then cut in the next.

By the time I had reached the 13th version of the animatic, I felt it was cut to my satisfaction and expressed the story in a crisp manner. Though I might have felt earlier that the 4th version of the animatic had been satisfactory, being led to conduct this round of edits illustrated for me the power of lateral thinking. The rise in quality of the film that resulted from just one extra round of edits became an important moment of learning, and will be a lesson that sticks with me for what I expect will be a very long time.



Img. 28, 29) Variations for scene 9

Sound Design

The 13th Animatic, the one that would carry me into production, was accompanied with more detailed sound than its previous iteration. Along with the drumming of the dholki, (Img. 30) this version of sound added a few other layers. A single line of dialogue sets the context of the film, and in this version of the animatic it had more time to deliver its bit of exposition. Along with this dialogue were included other human sounds — yawns, groans, and grunts of our exhausted protagonist.

However, perhaps most impactful on the texture of the film was the addition of the Creature's screaming. Produced by myself, a series of shrill and tortured screams serve as the only vocalization the Creature produces. Using a faulty instrument microphone heightened the distortion on the voice of the creature, resulting in a convincing sound.

Much of the film takes place in the kitchen, an environment bursting with opportunities for foley. While not recorded for the animatic, a large and complex set of foley sounds will be required for the finished film.



Img. 30) The small dholki used to accompany the animatics

Stylistic Treatment

Though early style experiments had kept a cleaner look, the scratchy look of the animatic grew on me the more I worked on it. Experiments of using a scratchy style on top of the cardboard-box set led to confusing and crowded images (Img. 31). My favourite style treatment, then, arose not from a processed or independently made image but rather from a modification of a panel from the animatic (Img. 32). This style treatment was then taken through a large variety of colour explorations, dealing with three sample frames which were chosen to provide a variety of representation scenarios. They covered contrasting, overlapping, closeup, full-body, and background-heavy framings (Img. 33-40).

Ultimately, the chosen colours are those used traditionally in South Asian cultures. A deep red for the creature to evoke anger, orange for the skin of the protagonist, and clothing to fit within a limited colour palette. Though an exploration which used white hair for the Creature stood out in its ability to make the character feel truly mystical (as well as resulting in beautiful frames), it was ultimately discarded due to its effect of ‘othering’ the Creature and removing the connection between the two alter egos. Explorations using green for the creature, though visually appealing as well, were ultimately not selected as well. In kathakali and other masked traditions of this region, green-colored characters are the heroes. While the Creature is ultimately a force of good, I wished for it to visually be associated with more chaotic characters to keep her soft turn a bit of a surprise.

The colours are designed to express the bright and early morning that the film takes place in, while remaining simple and keeping the focus on the movement of the characters. A noise filter over the entire frame provides texture, cohesion, and an illusion of detail.



Img. 31) Experiments with rougher lines on a photographed background



Img. 32) Concept art using a modified storyboard frame



Img. 33-40) A few of the color combination explorations

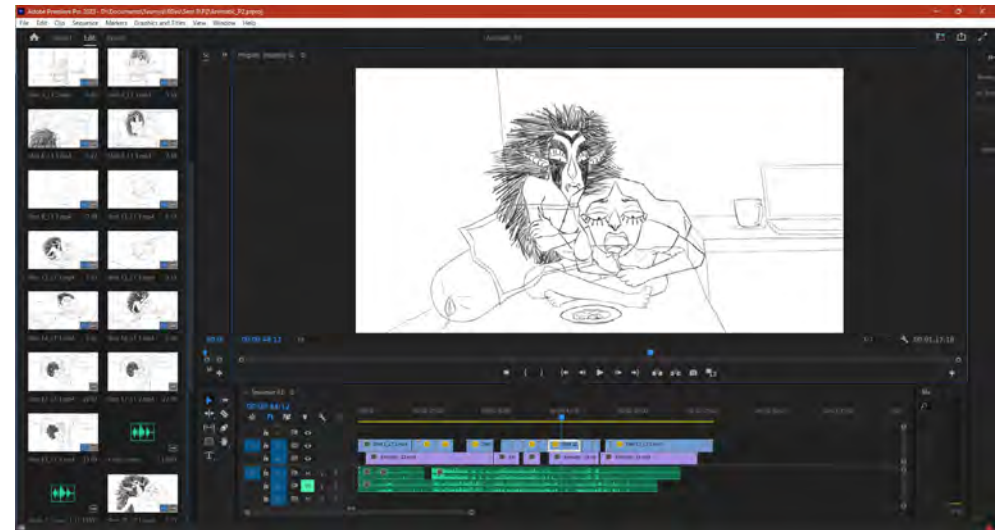
Line Tests

With the animatic and stylization in place, the focus moved to true production. Drawing clean line tests directly by using the animatic as rough animation allowed for a streamlined process while retaining a truly hand-drawn quality of the animation. In this film, I was not so concerned with staying strictly 'on model'. The characters squash and stretch dramatically, and volume is deliberately distorted at times. An important inspiration for this kind of purposeful play with volume comes from the animation of *The Tatami Galaxy* (Dir. Masaaki Yuasa).

The line test also reflected the duality between the relatively clean lines of the protagonist, and the scribbled noise of the creature expressed both through her hair and the markings on her face. The film is animated largely on 2s, in 24fps (effectively 12fps).

Though the film will largely be distributed online, to suggest a more cinematic feel I chose to produce in 1.85:1 rather than my typical 16:9. As the film is composed of raster drawings, the resolution of the images was an important decision — finally drawn in Cinema DCP 4K Flat, i.e. 3996 x 2160 px.

Once all line-test drawings were complete and assembled in Premiere Pro (Img. 41), a re-timing of the film was conducted to have moments of emphasis land according to musical rhythm. Doing so serves a dual purpose of creating a satisfying viewing experience, and providing a consistent rhythm to support the drumming that accompanies the film.



Img. 41) The Premiere Pro workspace, organizing line-test shots

Colour and Lighting

Though (at the time of writing this report) yet to be completed, the colouring of each frame involves just a few solid blocks for the Creature and the protagonist. Rather than be strictly concerned with colouring neatly within the edges, I chose to allow for a rougher look to complement the rough and busy aesthetic of the lineart and story both.

The character begins in a room darkened by a curtain, illuminated by the ghostly glow of her laptop, before being dragged into the bright sunlight of 8 AM where she is forced to take care of herself by eating a spot of healthy breakfast before being laid down for a much-needed nap. The two colour palettes also serve to differentiate between the two primary locations of the story; the bedroom and the kitchen. The lighting is supplied by a simple rim light, helping to lift the characters out of the background as well as to create contrast between them while overlapping. Further creative and narrative logic behind colour palette selection has been detailed out in the section titled 'Stylistic Treatment'.



Reflections

On Technique

Half fry has certainly posed many challenges during its development period. My 'guidelines', as created at the beginning of the project, may act as a sort of rubrik to assess my satisfaction with the project. By their standards, I failed in one of the fundamental expectations I had from myself during this project. In the adage 'why spend 2 hours completing a task when you could spend 5 hours automating it', I unfortunately always gravitate towards those 2 hours spent completing it. Though this yields good results, it has kept me away from experimentation with technology more often than I'd like. My goal to explore unusual techniques and mixed media suffered this time as well, stunted by a very restrictive timeline and thus an aversion to that which hasn't already become a part of my comfort zone.

This promise to myself has been broken repeatedly, and I will need to explore a new way to incentivize myself better next time. In accordance with the message of my film, I'll need to find a way to move this stubborn part of myself despite my frustration with myself.

However, I do believe that this project has been far more of a success than a failure. One of the most important things it has done for me is to erase my fear of spinning stories — a gift that will keep giving, lifelong. Equally important are the lessons I subsequently gained in taking a good idea and pushing it towards greatness in every way possible. I'm grateful to learn this push-and-pull approach to crafting stories, and was amazed to see how following it can ensure an airtight concept arising from almost nothing.

I also believe that I've grown tremendously in my skills of 2D animation and draughtsmanship during this project. I'm rather pleased with how easy it felt to slip into 2D animation of such scope after a long period of working on only still images. I'm also proud of the dramatic increase

in speed from my previous animation project, my B.Des P1. Where a complete shot of that project would take no less than a week to complete, here I am able to complete a shot in less than two days. Admittedly, I have been less ambitious with the look this time — however, the confidence boost from watching a film steadily move towards completion will no doubt help me push the ambition of my next project, this time in a calculated and realistic manner.

On Content

The film, as I mentioned in the introduction, is largely autobiographical. It is too often too compelling to work, and put one's body's requirements lower on priority lists. The message — to take care of your body — is painfully simple, yet always worth repeating. My grandfather repeats to me again and again, his formula for health: aahaar, vyayaam, vishraam (food, work, rest).

It's certainly ironic that for many weeks worth of time, the process of creating this film landed me in the position of its protagonist. A severe 1-week illness violently forced me to rest, just as the film warns, and consistent late nights began to take a toll. Though in the development stage of this film I had worried that perhaps creating such a film was 'preachy', since I had considered myself as having learned the lesson presented in the film already, the process of creating it reminded me that this is a lesson we learn every day and every week, over and over.

In recent times, I have also grown frustrated with any system of work that expects this sort of 'crunch' behaviour from adults and professionals. It is common in creative fields to expect long hours from creatives, because they are passionate about their work and because the work they do is often labour intensive. IDC is not above this, either. The scope versus timeline expectations of each project force crunch culture, and the future is painted in similar colours. In a class on animation production, we were taught that it is essential to 'do whatever is necessary' to meet deadlines, whether that be working into the dead of the night or through illness — often with professors sharing stories of their own time spent in such conditions of overwork. This kind of work culture is not sustainable, and is a surefire way to burn out violently. Having already experienced that in

the middle of the semester once, I know that my career would end very soon if I expected this kind of brutal labour from myself for much longer. I believe it is essential to one's personal dignity to work a balanced number of hours, no matter the field and no matter one's love for their work.

During the production of this film, I personally worked a consistent 13-15 hours for each day of November, save two days where I worked only 8 hours for the sake of my physical health — all while I created a film that stressed the importance of nutrition and rest. This is, of course partially my own fault — there is room to improve my own prioritization and efficiency. However, having been in IDC for 5 years and having closely observed the lifestyles of hundreds of students in that time, it is not difficult to see that IDC's work expectations contribute heavily to this phenomenon of overwork. Of course, design colleges are not alone in this — MBBS and MBA degrees are famous for this exact reason. However, I believe that to some extent, IDC has the choice to change this aspect of its education. As IDC continues to produce batch after batch of young professionals, I sincerely hope that the professors and educators think long and hard about what kind of work ethic they wish to endorse. One should not practice self-care and work-life balance only when they are forced to do so by the loss of health and relationships. Though some crunch is always inevitable in a field of passion, students of this premier institution should be taught, in my opinion, to value their work, their bodies, their minds, and their right to rest.



End.