ANIMATION PRODUCTION

UNIT 2

Consolidating Practice

Ben Kurtaran - 1501651

Development of Script

Where I am at with the project so far

At this stage, I had developed a rough concept for the animation and was exploring ways to refine and expand it further.

The core narrative takes place aboard a spaceship populated by various alien passengers and workers, each occupying separate rooms across the vessel. The story begins when a small, seemingly harmless alien creature unexpectedly boards the ship. Intrigued, the entire crew gathers in one room to see it. Once the moment passes, they return to their respective stations, unaware that the creature has begun to quietly replicate them. One by one, it replaces each crew member with an identical version of itself, eliminating the original in the process. By the end, nearly the entire crew has been replaced, though none realise what has happened. The animation concludes with everyone, now unknowingly transformed, reuniting in the same room once again.

Throughout the animation, I intend to weave in subtle subplots within individual rooms. These smaller storylines may overlap with each other at times, ensuring that every space remains engaging and rewarding to explore.

The experience is designed to be non-linear, allowing viewers to choose from multiple perspectives. They might follow specific characters, focus on individual rooms, or control a small robot to explore the ship freely. The goal is for audiences to watch the animation multiple times from different viewpoints, gradually uncovering layers of the narrative and piecing the full story together over time.

Letting the Viewer Lead: A Shift in VR Storytelling

Through testing my earlier animations from Unit 1 with a wider range of audiences, I discovered that some viewers explored beyond the intended boundaries of my VR Quill environments. They would look outside the constructed ‘set’ and encounter rough, unfinished lines and placeholder objects, which broke the sense of immersion I had aimed to create.

This feedback opened up an unexpected and exciting new direction for my animation. Rather than guiding the viewer along a fixed path, I began to envision an experience where the viewer is placed at the centre of the scene and must physically navigate the environment to uncover the story. This concept aligned closely with my earlier research into untapped uses of VR and pushed me to explore new creative possibilities. Instead of interacting through coded mechanics or transitioning between rooms like in a game, the viewer becomes a part of the narrative itself. They are a moving presence within the space, which heightens both immersion and agency.

As a result, I reconsidered the setting. I had previously explored various alternatives, such as a house, a small village, an underwater facility, a submarine, or a cave system. However, once I embraced a viewer-led exploration format, the spaceship environment proved the most compelling. Placing it in open space meant the scene could be entirely self-contained and visually coherent from all angles, no matter where the viewer looked. This helped reinforce the illusion of realism and deepened the sense of immersion.

This shift in concept also required a change in my approach to modeling. I had to ensure the spaceship environment was fully realised on all sides, with no invisible or unfinished areas, as the viewer could now freely move around it from any perspective.

Looping Narrative

I’ve always had a soft spot for looping animations. In my most recent 2D piece, the story loops back on itself, ending where it began. This circular structure felt like the perfect approach for this animation. The characters are caught in an endless cycle of motion, which creates an almost uncanny effect, as if the animation is alive. It raises an intriguing question: if you take off the VR headset, are the characters still carrying on with their “lives” inside it?

This idea echoes the famous philosophical thought experiment often attributed to George Berkeley: “If a tree falls in a forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?”

I wanted to bring this idea into the piece because, while the story itself is playful and lighthearted, it doesn’t follow a specific philosophical theory. Instead, it is the structure of the animation and the way it interacts with the medium that invites deeper questions about perception, existence, and reality.

Animation Production 2025 - Unit 2 Ben Kurtaran

Research

Since the format of my animation represented a new kind of expressive approach, I needed to find a way to guide my process when developing the script. I began thinking about other mediums that shared similar qualities, such as films set in a single location, one-shot films, and those designed for rewatchability. I decided to research these examples in order to draw inspiration and shape my creative workflow.

Confined in one space - 12 Angry Men

Recently, I watched 12 Angry Men for the first time. I was struck by how the film managed to hold my attention using only one small room as its setting. Despite our modern era of shortened attention spans, shaped largely by social media and the rise of reels and short-form content, the film remains compelling. Its tension is sustained purely through dialogue, keeping viewers invested in how the story will unfold.

However, for my project, I plan to work without dialogue. I believe this will still be effective because of the shorter runtime. Instead of a full-length feature, my animation will only last a few minutes. I will rely on visual storytelling and gags to maintain engagement, making each moment count.

This exploration led me to think about how animation formats can echo both historical and contemporary forms of storytelling. Before cinema, there was theatre, with live performances that, like one-shot films, unfold in real time without cuts. I want my animation to evoke a similar sense of presence and continuity. I want it to feel alive, as though the characters exist beyond the screen, performing continuously, like a pre-recorded stage play looping endlessly.

One-Take Movies

Angus Davies talks on one-shot films and says that the ‘main benefits is that it allows for greater sense of realism and immersion for the audience. By not cutting away from the action the audience is able to follow the characters and their movements closer, in turn making the scene feel more authentic and engaging’. [1] I completely agree with this statement, as I have always found this style of filmmaking to be far more immersive. Since my animation also aims to draw the audience deeply into the experience, I see strong parallels between this approach and my own work. To better understand how to apply it, I explored examples of one-shot films, focusing on how they are orchestrated and structured. This research could help decide how I might approach writing the script for my project.

1917

One-shot films provide valuable insight into creating fluid, continuous scenes. I researched 1917 and found the behind-the-scenes commentary particularly inspiring. Dean-Charles Chapman noted that “the journey of the camera is every bit as interesting as the journey of the actor,” and that “the information you needed happened to fall in front of where the camera was pointing.”[2] He also emphasized the “constant sense of threat, of what isn’t seen and what might be around the corner.” This resonates with my goals. I want to direct attention not just to the main characters, but also to the unseen elements, the quiet details and background movements that enrich the story. Multiple viewpoints will allow me to showcase these hidden narratives and build a layered, engaging scene.

Telling Stories That Grow with Each Viewing

I set out to explore how certain films and games maintain long-term engagement through repeat experiences. Since my animation is designed to reveal new layers of meaning with each viewing, it was important to study examples that use this approach effectively. By analysing how films build toward second and third viewings and what makes games compelling to replay, I aimed to gather strategies for creating a narrative that stays rich and engaging over time. This concept of layered discovery is central to how my animation unfolds.

Get out (2017)

One of the most rewatchable films in recent memory is Get Out. On first viewing, it delivers a powerful twist that most viewers do not anticipate. However, the second watch is where it truly shines. You begin to notice how cleverly the twist was foreshadowed all along, with clues hidden in plain sight. It almost makes you feel foolish for not picking up on them the first time. Every scene is meticulously crafted to hint at what is coming, but it only becomes clear in hindsight. This is something I aim to replicate in my animation. Each loop of the story should reveal new layers, such as subtle hints, hidden meanings, and easter eggs that reframe earlier moments. What first appears to be ordinary will later take on new significance.

Shutter Island (2010)

While Shutter Island also delivers a twist, its strength lies not just in the reveal but in how it changes the entire context of the film. The second viewing does not just highlight clues but transforms the narrative. You begin to see the story from an entirely different perspective. I want to borrow from this approach as well. Once viewers realise that the entire crew has been replaced by the alien, the story in my animation should take on a new meaning. While it may not be as dramatic a shift as in Shutter Island, it will still reframe earlier scenes and invite new interpretations.

Memento (2000)

Memento left a lasting impression on me. I was fascinated by how a relatively simple story was told in a way that made it feel complex and disorienting. What made it even more effective was how the audience shared the protagonist's condition, his memory loss, making us experience the narrative as he did. It required active mental participation, and only through piecing together fragments did the story become clear. On a second viewing, everything begins to make sense. I plan to apply a similar strategy in my animation by encouraging the viewer to gradually build their understanding across multiple viewings. The goal is to engage the brain in a kind of narrative puzzle, prompting viewers to connect the dots and form a bigger picture over time.

Fight Club (1999)

Like Shutter Island, Fight Club uses its twist to completely reframe the story. Once the secret is revealed, every scene and character interaction takes on a new meaning. I hope to apply this same narrative layering to my animation. After the first loop, the audience should start to question what they have seen and return to it with fresh eyes. Ideally, the sense of perspective will continue to evolve after each rewatch, uncovering even more nuances and connections.

Conclusion

There is a common thread that runs through many of these films: a focus on mental instability or altered states of perception. Often, the viewer is placed in the same psychological position as the protagonist, which deepens immersion and emotional engagement. I find this fascinating, as it highlights how creators are using narrative structure to draw the audience closer to the characters' experiences. It is something I would like to experiment with in my own work, particularly in considering who the audience is within the world of the story and how their perspective is shaped or manipulated.

Most of these films can be watched two or three times before the viewer fully grasps the details and hidden clues. With my animation, I aim to go further. Because it will be shorter in length, audiences will be able to rewatch it more easily, four or more times in a single session. This gives me the opportunity to pack the environment with subtle interactions and overlapping subplots that may go unnoticed for several viewings. The hope is to keep the viewer's mind actively engaged, constantly searching for new information and assembling the full narrative as a cohesive whole across repeated experiences.

Animation Production 2025 - Unit 2 Ben Kurtaran

Guided Viewing

In the early days of cinema, one of the first devices used to display moving images was the Kinetoscope. Designed by Thomas Edison and his assistant William Kennedy Laurie Dickson, it allowed a single person to view a short film by looking through a small viewing window. Because of this private, enclosed setup, these machines came to be known as "peep-show" devices.

Interestingly, this older technology mirrors the modern experience of VR. You look through a lens to enter a world. The key difference is that, rather than restricting the viewer's perspective, VR expands it and offers a more immersive experience. This indicates that perhaps the use of VR is another groundbreaking step forwards for motion pictures in the future.

Since the earliest days of cinema, audiences have been guided, sometimes even confined, by the director's vision, experiencing the story exactly as it was intended to unfold. My animation challenges this traditional structure by handing over agency to the viewer, allowing them to shape their own experience of the narrative. While the overarching story is carefully curated, the first viewing in particular becomes an exploration of the viewer's own mind. They are free to follow a character, focus on a particular room, or piece together elements from different parts of the scene, with each choice shaping a unique interpretation.

I plan to record these initial viewings to observe what paths viewers take and what meaning they derive. It is an opportunity to compare their early impressions with how their understanding evolves through repeat viewings.

In developing this idea, I explored other media that offer narrative freedom, such as Black Mirror: Bandersnatch and open-world games like Red Dead Redemption and Skyrim. I have found that these interactive experiences often foster a much deeper emotional investment than traditional films because they invite the player to inhabit the world and shape its story themselves.

This kind of immersive, branching narrative also holds intriguing potential beyond storytelling. It could offer insights into individual psychology by revealing what viewers are most drawn to within a scene, almost like a cinematic Rorschach test. Given the choice between focusing on an act of violence or a quiet moment of connection, what does each viewer choose, and what does that say about them?

Process for Script

Although the research I conducted offered inspiration and some guidance, I struggled to find a clear framework for planning a story where multiple events unfold simultaneously in different spaces. This challenge felt understandable, considering the medium I am working with is a relatively new form of storytelling. Because of this, I decided to develop my own methods of scriptwriting that suited my creative process.

I began by creating a grid that mapped out room names alongside timestamps. I used coloured dots to represent each character, placing them at specific points on the timeline. This allowed me to visualise their movement and how they might interact throughout the story.

To better understand my approach, I also reflected on the types of storytellers I relate to. I have always found that my stories tend to grow from a single image, whether it appears in my mind, on paper, or on screen. That one visual spark often guides the rest of the narrative, giving me the freedom to piece things together gradually as new ideas emerge.
There is a quote by George R. R. Martin that resonates with me deeply:

"I think there are two types of writers, the architects and the gardeners. The architects plan everything ahead of time, like an architect building a house. They know how many rooms are going to be in the house, what kind of roof they're going to have, where the wires are going to run, what kind of plumbing there's going to be. They have the whole thing designed and blueprinted out before they even nail the first board up. The gardeners dig a hole, drop in a seed and water it. They kind of know what seed it is, they know if planted a fantasy seed or mystery seed or whatever. But as the plant comes up and they water it, they don't know how many branches it's going to have, they find out as it grows. And I'm much more a gardener than an architect."[3]

I also see myself as a gardener when it comes to storytelling. Ideas are constantly growing, shifting, and evolving, and I believe it is important to leave space for that natural development when deciding where to take a storyline. This openness allows the narrative to unfold in unexpected and often more meaningful ways.

Hayao Miyazaki expresses a similar philosophy in his creative process. He often begins animation and production before the script is fully written, allowing the story to take shape as he works. This method creates space for spontaneity and discovery, enabling the narrative to grow organically rather than follow a fixed path. He says 'knowing the story and knowing what happens in the story are two different things'[4].

I believe this approach will work particularly well for planning my animation, especially given the complexity of multiple events unfolding at the same time. Trying to map out the entire narrative all at once would likely be overwhelming, with so much happening across different areas. Instead, I plan to establish key plot points first and gradually build around them, like assembling a jigsaw puzzle. This method will allow me to develop a timeline piece by piece, filling in the empty spaces until every moment in every part of the VR landscape has something engaging for the audience to experience.

Final Script Plan

This process led me to develop a system made up of three separate "scripts." The first outlined what each of the seven characters would be doing throughout the timeline. The second focused on the events unfolding in each room. The third was a visual map of the spaceship, marked with coloured lines to track the characters' movement through the animation.

I came to realise that the characters were the most important element. Once their actions and paths were in place, I could more easily fill in the gaps within each room, allowing the environments to respond naturally to the characters' presence and behaviour.

I started with a blank framework, which you can see on the right-hand side. Over the course of several weeks, I gradually developed new narrative threads for each character. As the story evolved, it began branching in unexpected ways, leading to exciting moments such as the food burning or the Chef accidentally cooking himself (see the Chef's narrative pathway for more details).

To maintain a sense of spontaneity, I structured the timeline using 15-second intervals. This gave me room to play during the animation phase, allowing for the addition of smaller, unexpected interactions within the environment. The first sections I filled in were the moments where the alien arrives and later transforms into the other crew members. It was important to me that these moments did not overlap, so the audience would not immediately realise this was happening to every character during their first viewing.

	0-15s	15-30s	30-45s	45-60s	60-75s	75-90s
CHEF						
BOTANIST						
CAPTAIN						
CLEANER						
SLEEPER						
PASSENGER						
ALIEN						

	0-15s	15-30s	30-45s	45-60s	60-75s	75-90s
CHEF	COOKING ON THE STOVE, FOOD ALMOST READY KITCHEN	HEARS THE ALARM AND GATHERS WITH REST OF THE CREW LIVING ROOM	WALKS IN TO SEE FOOD BURNING ON STOVE. HURRIEDLY RUSHES OVER TO PUT IT OUT AND IN THE TRASH KITCHEN	STARTS PREPPING THE MEAL AGAIN, PUTTING TOMATO AND HIS MINI HEAD IN THE PAN KITCHEN	ENTERS GARDEN AND GETS BOTANIST TO CUT A PLANT FOR THE MEAL. GARDEN	ADDS PLANT TO THE MEAL ON THE STOVE AND LIGHTS FIRE AGAIN KITCHEN
BOTANIST	SLEEPING IN THE SHRUBS GARDEN	HEARS THE ALARM AND GATHERS WITH REST OF THE CREW LIVING ROOM	RETURNS TO GARDEN AND STARTS TENDING THE PLANTS NOTICES SOME EATEN PLANTS AND GOES TO INVESTIGATE. GARDEN	TURNS AROUND TO SEE COPY OF ITSELF, IS TRANFORMED INTO A PLANT IN THE GARDEN. GARDEN	TENDS TO THE PLANTS ALSO EATING A FEW OF THEM AND PERHAPS AN ANIMAL OF SOME SORT. GARDEN	TURNS LIGHT OFF AND HEADS INTO THE SHRUBS TO SLEEP GARDEN
CAPTAIN	AT CONTROL PANEL DRIVING SPACESHIP CONTROL ROOM	COLLECTS THE ALIEN AND GATHERS WITH REST OF THE CREW LIVING ROOM	RETURNS TO CONTROLS WITH ALIEN, ALIEN TRANSFORMS INTO CAPTAIN CONTROL ROOM	BRINGS ALIEN TO BOTANIST AND LEAVES IT THERE, HEADS BACK TO STATION GARDEN	MAKES SOME TECHNICAL ADJUSTMENTS IN THE ENGINE ROOM ENGINE ROOM	OPENS ROOF HATCH TO ALLOW ALIEN INSIDE CONTROL ROOM
CLEANER	CLEANING AROUND ENGINE ROOM ENGINE ROOM	EATS UP GOO LEFT BY ALIEN, SLOWLY MAKES ITS WAY TO LIVING ROOM ENGINE ROOM	EATS GOO LEFT BY ALIEN AND SLOWLY MAKES ITS WAY TO KITCHEN LIVING ROOM	EATS UP TRASH, INCLUDING BURNT MEAL AND SLOWLY MAKES ITS WAY TO CONTROL ROOM. KITCHEN	CLEANS UP CONTROL ROOM, BEFORE MAKING ITS WAY BACK TO ENGINE ROOM CONTROL ROOM	TAKES A BREAK FROM CLEANING TO READ A BOOK ENGINE ROOM
SLEEPER	SLEEPING ON SOFA LIVING ROOM	WAKES UP TO SEE CREW GATHERED WITH ALIEN LIVING ROOM	VERY NONCHALONT ABOUT ALIEN SO FALLS BACK ASLEEP LIVING ROOM	SLEEPING ON THE SOFA LIVING ROOM	SLEEPING ON THE SOFA LIVING ROOM	SLEEPING ON THE SOFA LIVING ROOM
PASSENGER	SITTING ON THE SOFA LIVING ROOM	GATHERS AND IS AMUSED BY THE ALIEN LIVING ROOM	TOUCHES GOO LEFT BY ALIEN AND IS TURNED INTO ALIEN COPY LIVING ROOM	PLAYS SOME TABLE TENNIS WITH THEMSELVES USING 0 GRAVITY. LIVING ROOM	GRABS A SNACK FROM THE VENDING MACHINE LIVING ROOM	SITS TO ENJOY SNACK AND DISCARDS TO THE FLOOR FOR CLEANER TO CLEAN. LIVING ROOM
ALIEN	ENTERS THROUGH THE VENT ENGINE ROOM	TAKEN TO LIVING ROOM BY CAPTAIN LIVING ROOM	GOES WITH CAPTAIN TO CONTROL ROOM AND TURNS INTO CAPTAIN, VOMITS GOO WHICH TURNS INTO ANOTHER CONTROL ROOM	IS LEFT IN GARDEN BY CAPTAIN AND REPEATS PROCESS WITH BOTANIST GARDENS	ONCE CHEF HAS ADDED ITS INGREDIENTS, REPEATS PROCESS ONE MORE TIME KITCHEN	HIDES IN THE SHIP, INSIDE THE LIVING ROOM LIVING ROOM

Further Script Development

Spaceship Plan

As I continued developing the script, I realised I needed a clearer sense of how the spaceship would look. Initially, I imagined it resembling the designs seen in films like Alien or Moon with long corridors, vents, and mechanical details connecting various sections. However, as my process evolved and I shifted toward giving the audience the freedom to explore the environment independently, I saw that narrow corridors could cause problems in VR such as 3D clipping and obstructed views.

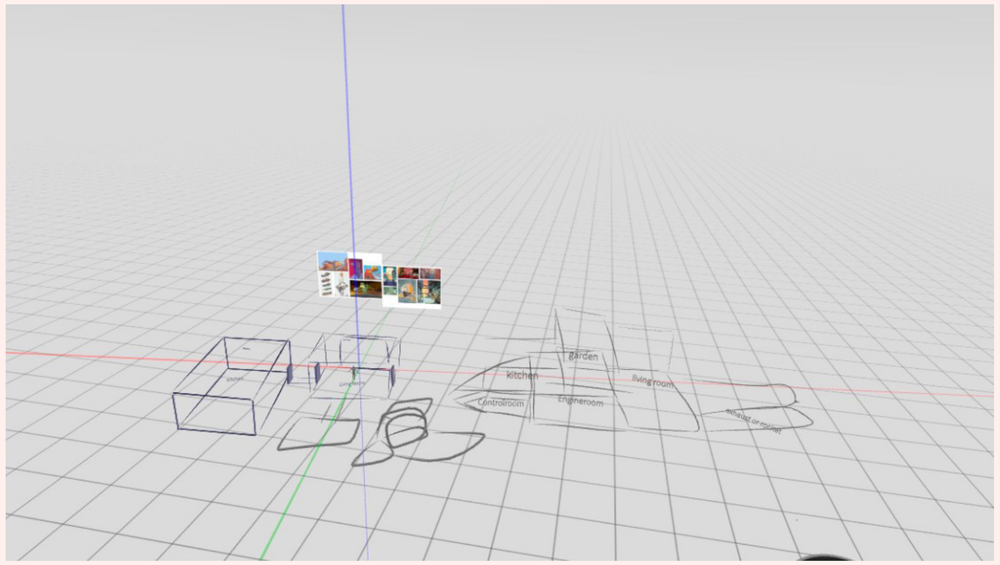
The concept of long hallways also presented pacing issues. Certain rooms might remain uneventful for too long and following a character through a corridor could become visually dull. To address this, I took a more unorthodox approach to the spaceship's design. I opted for large open vertical spaces that would eliminate clipping and provide better visibility in VR. I also decided to connect all the rooms directly, allowing characters to move quickly between areas and keeping the pacing tight and engaging.

Gravity Sketch

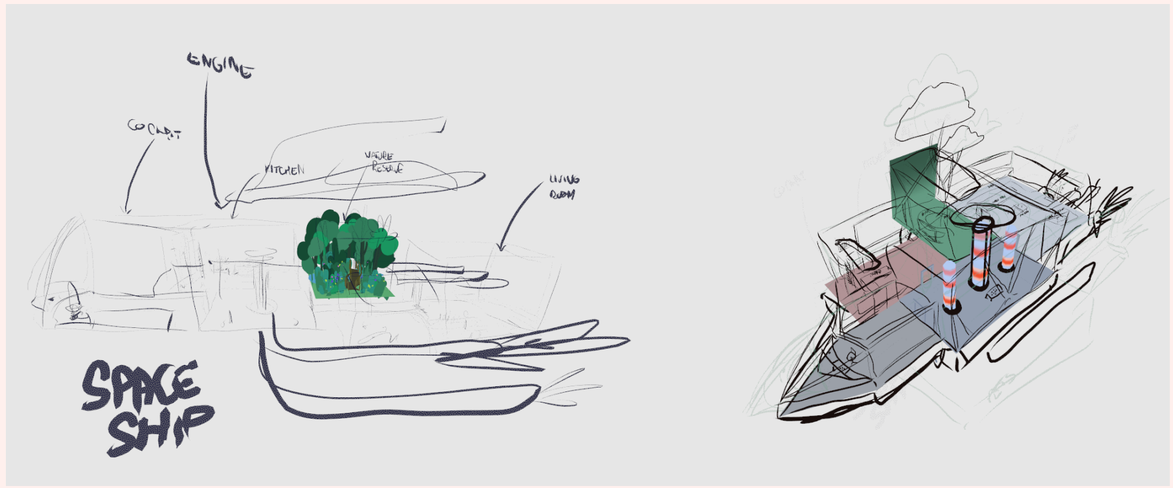
While imagining the layout was helpful, I felt that working with a physical model or at least something more tangible would be far more intuitive. I wanted to get a better sense of spatial relationships and how the characters might navigate through the environment. To do this, I turned to Gravity Sketch, a tool I had been researching in a previous unit. It allowed me to create rough 3D sketches of the environment and also offered collaborative features that made the process more dynamic.

Since my brother owns a VR headset and had some experience using Gravity Sketch, I invited him to join me in the virtual workspace. Together we began shaping the layout of the spaceship, experimenting with ideas and finding a design that supported both the narrative and the needs of immersive VR storytelling.

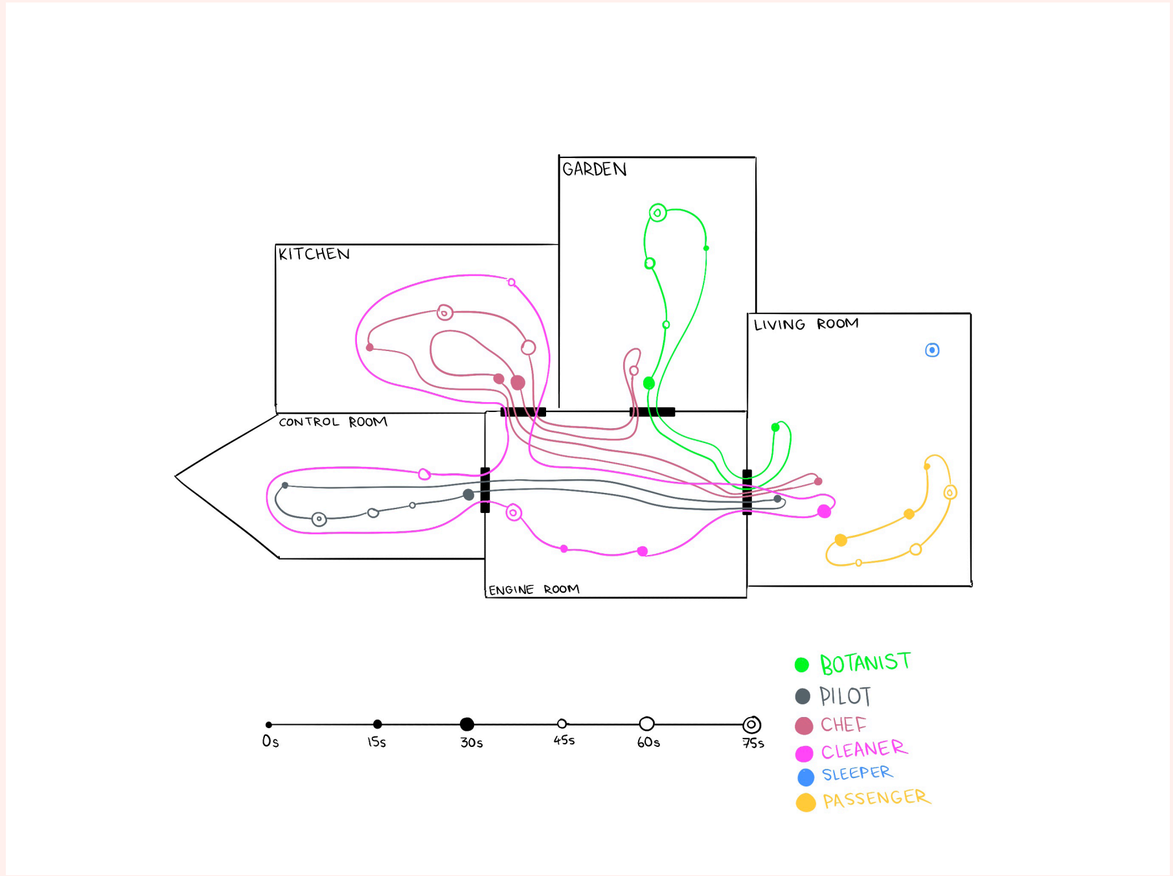
Through this approach, we realised it would be highly beneficial to incorporate large glass windows in every room of the spacecraft. This design choice would allow the audience to observe events unfolding from the outside, offering multiple perspectives at once when viewed from different angles. It would also help create a sense of openness, preventing viewers from feeling confined within the spacecraft's interior.



Animation Production 2025 - Unit 2 Ben Kurtaran



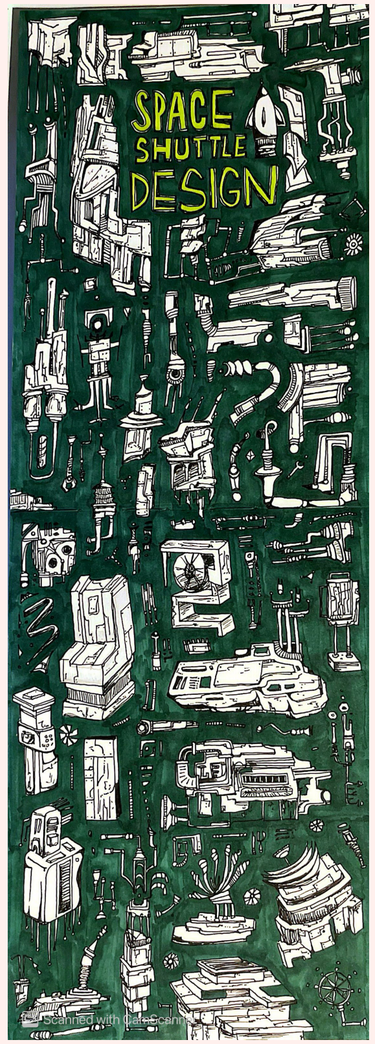
Once I had the base design, I brought it into Quill to give myself more freedom and to begin building the scene in a more structured way. I started with a rough sketch, shown above on the left, and gradually refined it by adding more details, as seen in the version on the right. After that, I used a bird's-eye view to create a 2D layout, which allowed me to map out the characters' paths throughout the animation.



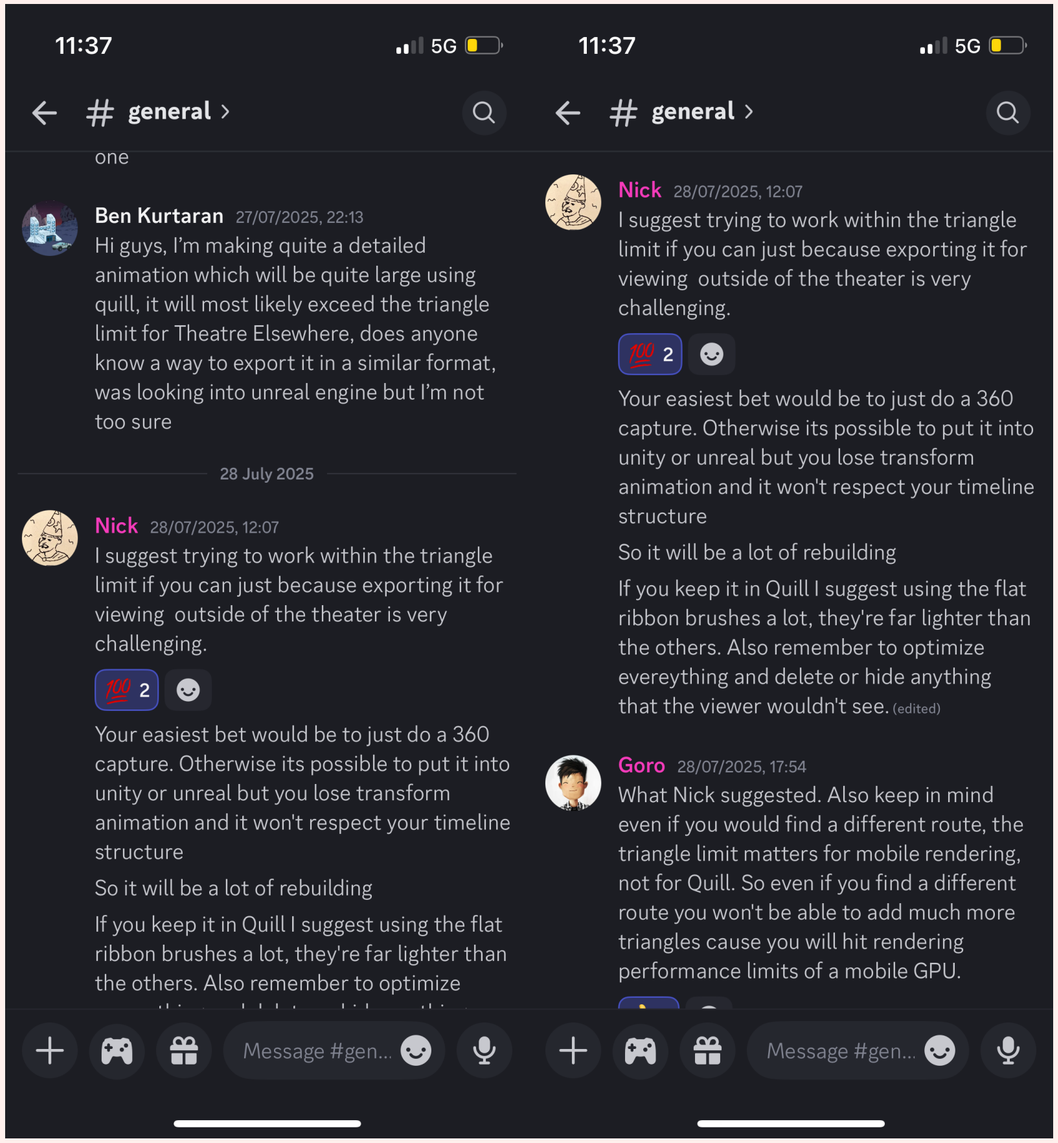
This new visual layout will make it much easier for me to follow the narrative and ensure that all events unfold at the right moments, staying aligned with the intended timeframes.

Visual Style and Triangle Count issues

The next stage was to develop a visual style for my designs. I began by sketching parts of the spacecraft on paper, which I really liked, although they relied heavily on triangular forms. I also created some plant designs in Quill that I was pleased with, but they too were quite triangle-heavy. Concerned about how this might impact performance, I explored the possibility of rendering the scene in Unreal Engine, similar to the VR experience Theatre Elsewhere, where the viewer is free to move around the environment.



However, I couldn't find much information online about how to achieve this workflow, so I turned to the Quill community Discord and posed a question to the group. To my surprise, I received a response from not only an extremely popular and talented artist NickLadd but also none other than Goro Fujita, the lead creator of Quill and the creator of Theatre Elsewhere himself.



He explained that the limitations on triangles and draw cells exist because Quill projects must remain compatible with mobile-based VR headsets, including the one I currently use. I had previously noticed these limits but didn't fully understand the reason behind them. Learning this early on was extremely valuable, as it prevented me from spending time creating complex assets that wouldn't run properly. It also meant I needed to approach the design process more carefully, keeping the visual style simple and relying heavily on flat 2D brushes to stay within the performance threshold.

Although I already felt fairly confident using Quill, I wanted to deepen my skills and refine my workflow. To do this, I followed several tutorials and studied insights from industry professionals. I focused specifically on areas that would benefit my animation, such as character design, basic rigging, and scene optimisation, while also learning about how professionals approach large-scale projects in Quill.

Character Design - My Process

Phase 1 - Physical Drawing

Through this project, I was able to refine a character design process that felt natural and effective for me. I began by identifying the key traits of each character, thinking about what they represented and how those traits could be expressed visually. Since the animation does not rely on dialogue, I emphasized these characteristics using clear visual cues to make each character immediately recognizable.

Although I initially planned to begin directly in Quill, I found that starting with pen and paper was a more intuitive approach. Sketching traditionally provided a stronger sense of flow and helped me connect more deeply with the characters. As the weather had turned hot and sunny, I chose to leave my indoor workspace and draw in a nearby park. Sitting outside in the fresh air created a welcome contrast to the enclosed VR environment. This physical shift helped refresh my thinking and inspired new ideas. To maintain a natural and focused process, I avoided digital distractions and chose to draw without headphones or other devices.

Inclusivity and diversity were central to my design process. I wanted the characters to be mostly non-binary, and to support this concept I designed them as alien creatures. This approach also aligned with my personal interests and creative strengths. Each character varies in shape, size, and appearance, with a distinct identity that sets them apart. This uniqueness is intended to help guide the audience toward connecting with a particular character, allowing them to choose one to follow based on personal resonance during their first viewing.

Phase 2 - Digital Drawing

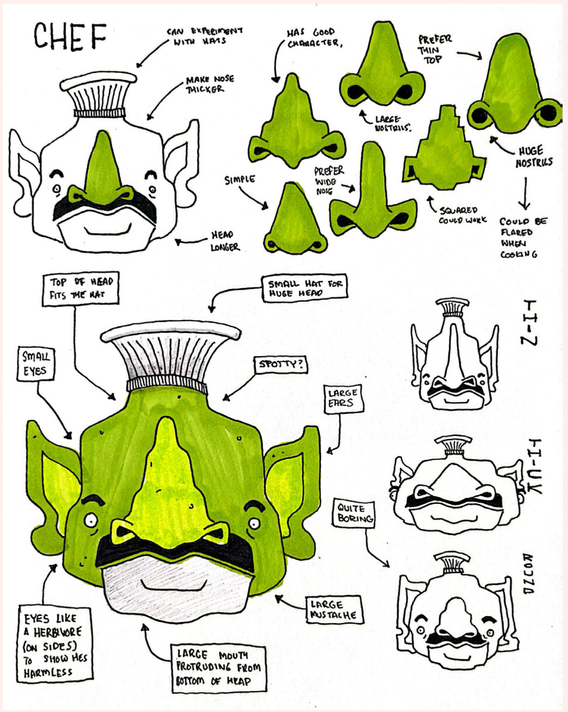
To further develop my initial sketches, I looked at a variety of reference characters that either influenced my early ideas or helped evolve them toward the image I envisioned. I brought these drawings into Procreate, where I refined and adapted them until I was satisfied with the results. Working digitally allowed me to recover from mistakes easily and produce clean, polished outcomes. At this stage, I also remained mindful of how the designs would translate into Quill. The triangle count limit posed a significant challenge, so I focused on simplifying the designs without sacrificing the key attributes that define each character.

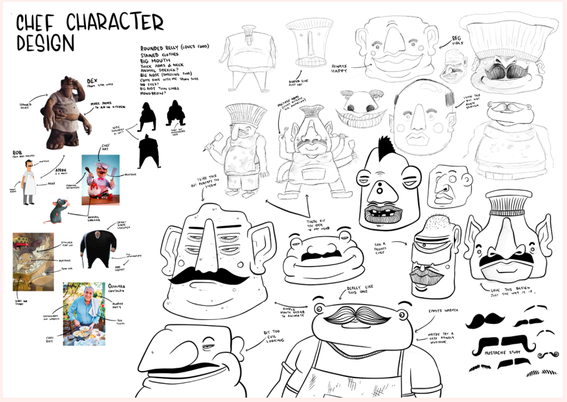
Phase 3 - 3D Quill Modelling

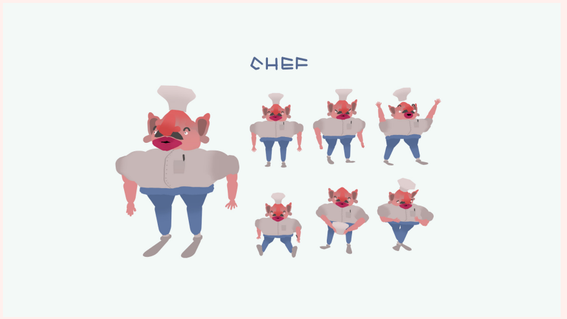
Once the 2D designs were complete, I moved into Quill. I began by importing the sketches as references and building each character from a flat line wireframe. I then converted these into 3D wireframes and filled them using brush strokes, carefully limiting the number of strokes to keep the triangle count low. During this phase, I experimented with proportions, colors, and details to bring the characters into their final form. This part of the process was especially rewarding, as I began to see the characters come to life in three-dimensional space. I added a few simple animations to test how they might move, which made the designs feel alive in a way that reminded me of stop-motion puppetry. It was a unique and satisfying experience to see my characters exist within a nearly tangible digital space.

After completing the models in Quill, I collected them into a single scene file. This allowed me to adjust their scale in relation to one another and finalize their proportions. I then separated them again to create a set of key poses or expressions tailored to each character. For example, instead of facial expressions, the botanist character was explored through variations in leaf design. You can see the development of each individual character below.

Animation Production 2025 - Unit 2 Ben Kurtaran







Character Design - Personality

Chef

A large, broad-shouldered figure with a gentle heart, like a macho BFG. He waddles around the kitchen, heavy-handed in most tasks but surprisingly delicate when it comes to cooking. He is almost always smiling, except when deeply focused. His kitchen is a space of organised chaos. He doesn't care about appearances; what matters is that everything he needs is exactly where it should be.

Captain

Precise and commanding, the Captain moves with robotic efficiency. They walk in straight lines, quick and deliberate, rarely acknowledging the crew. Cold and calculated, they maintain emotional distance. They are gender-fluid or non-binary. Their control room reflects their personality: clean, stark, and obsessively ordered, like the space of a strict minimalist with a military mindset.

Botanist

Graceful and serene, the Botanist glides through the room with fluid, dance-like movements, reminiscent of time-lapse footage of plants growing and swaying. Their body mimics the plants they interact with, shifting shape based on what they touch or heal. Their room overflows with vibrant greenery. It feels wild but is carefully tended. Tiny life forms live among the plants, and some are so well camouflaged they could easily be mistaken for part of the flora.

Cleaner

Blissfully unaware of the chaos around them, the Cleaner cheerfully goes about tidying the ship, happily munching on trash. They sometimes eat things they shouldn't, like a key ingredient from the Chef's meal, which leads to accidental disasters. Regardless of what happens, the Cleaner remains completely joyful.

Sleeper

This crew member spends nearly all their time asleep, occasionally stirring in a dreamy haze, as if in a deeply relaxed or altered state. At times, they seem to melt into their sofa, blending into it until someone wakes them. Their presence adds a surreal, spaced-out energy to the ship.

Passenger (Two Heads)

With two contrasting personalities, this crew member constantly interacts with themself. One head is relaxed and content, while the other is restless and easily annoyed. They pass the time playing table tennis alone or interacting with other parts of the room, always engaged in an internal tug-of-war between calm and chaos.

Alien

Small, cute, and seemingly harmless, the Alien hides its true nature. Beneath its innocent appearance lies a cunning and devious entity with plans to take over every other life form it encounters.

Animation Production 2025 - Unit 2 Ben Kurtaran

Building on these character traits, I began developing refined character designs, starting with my three most prominent figures: the captain, the chef, and the botanist. These characters set the visual tone for the rest of the cast, helping maintain a consistent overall style. While consistency was important, it was equally crucial that each character felt distinct and unique. I addressed this by keeping the designs relatively simple by using clean, clear body shapes with minimal detailing and instead focused on varying body proportions to differentiate them.

Working in Quill, I brought all three characters into the same file, which made it much easier to maintain a cohesive design language. Seeing them side by side in this 'physical' VR space allowed for real-time comparison and adjustment.

I can see this approach being especially useful for planning stop-motion projects. I may recommend it to students starting in January, particularly those interested in stop-motion, as Quill offers an intuitive way to visualize and refine character designs in a 3D context.

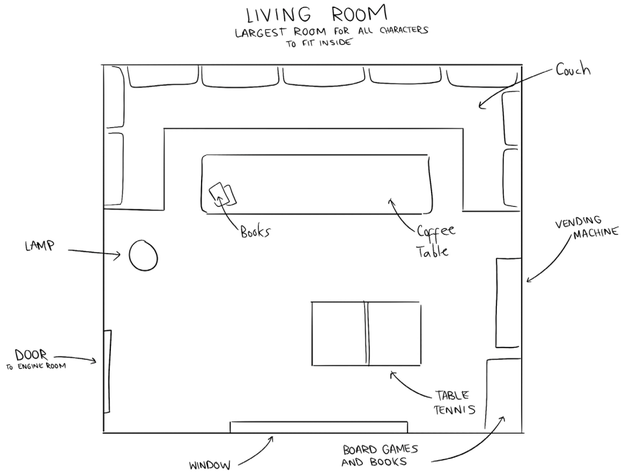
You can find my process for these designs in my process work folder upload.

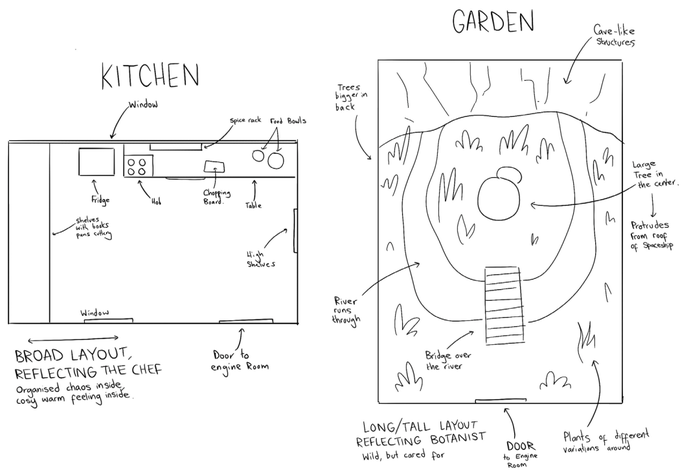
Room Plans

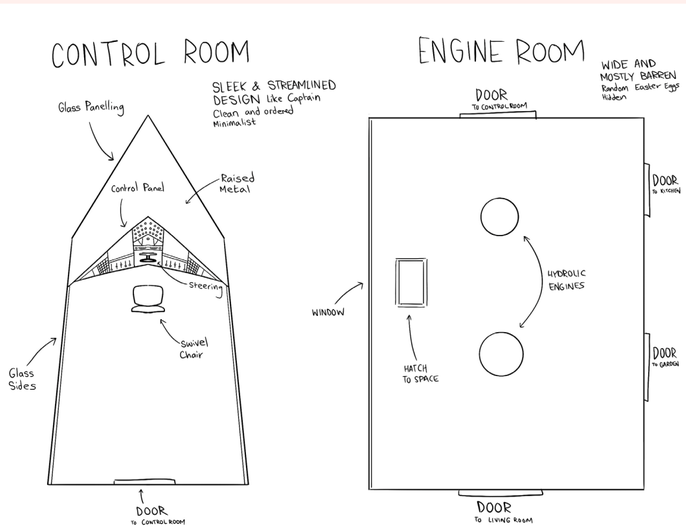
Finally, I created detailed room plans for each area of the spaceship, allowing me to begin building the finalized environments for the next unit without delay. Each room's design reflects the personality of the crew member who inhabits it or serves a specific narrative function within the ship.

The Kitchen is designed to mirror the Chef. It is broad and welcoming, much like his wide shoulders and warm heart, creating a cozy atmosphere. The Control Room is sharp, defined, and streamlined, reflecting the Captain's precise, minimalist nature and emotional reserve. The Garden is tall and slender, echoing the Botanist's form, with plants that grow wildly yet are meticulously cared for. This combination captures a sense of delicate balance.

The Engine Room is mostly empty and barren. It symbolizes the ship's mechanical core and serves as a transitional space for characters moving between rooms, acting as a physical and narrative hub within the story. Finally, the Living Room is the largest space on the ship. It is designed to comfortably accommodate two characters at once while also allowing the entire crew to gather, emphasizing its role as the social heart of the environment.







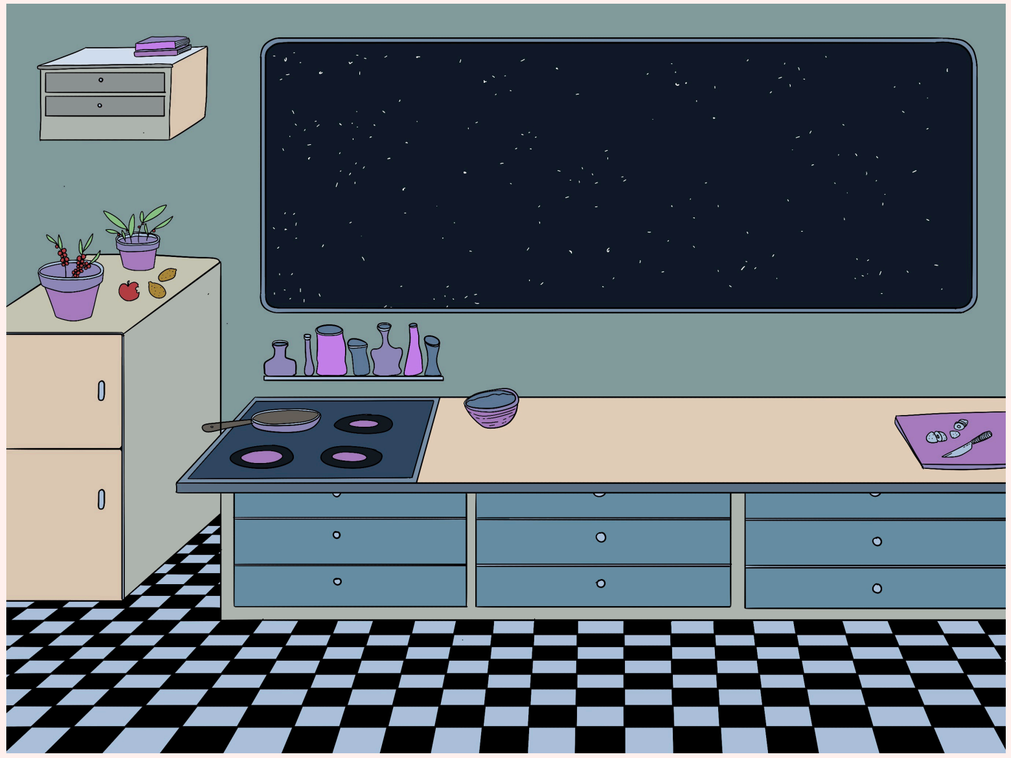
Final Testing

Alien Morph Animation

To explore how my final animation might look, I began testing some key sequences. One of the most important was the alien morphing into another crew member. I used Procreate Dreams to experiment with the shape language of this transformation, aiming for a fluid, organic feel that matched the vision I had in mind. You can find this test in the Digital Documentation folder under the title "Alien Morph Test."

2D Environment Test

Following this, I focused on designing a section of the spaceship to help establish the visual direction for the next unit. I chose to develop an early concept for the kitchen area. I began with a 2D sketch in Procreate to explore the shape language and overall tone of the space. This helped clarify the mood and stylistic choices I wanted to carry forward. You can see this Design in the image below.



3D Environment Test

Using the 2D sketch as a reference, I then recreated the scene in Quill. This was a particularly enjoyable part of the process, as I was able to see the environment come to life in 3D. Bringing the Chef character into the scene also helped me establish accurate proportions and scale for the room and its objects before refining the details. The resulting animation can be found in the Digital Documentation folder under "Kitchen Rough Animation."

Conclusion

This unit has been both challenging and rewarding, as I ventured into creative and technical territories that are still relatively uncharted. While I was not able to fully adhere to the original workplan I outlined at the beginning of Unit 2, the changes I made were often necessary to allow for deeper exploration of the story, characters, and visual style. I am particularly pleased with how the script has developed and how the characters have taken shape through this process. These foundational elements now feel strong and cohesive, giving me a solid base to work from as I enter the next stage of the project.

Despite the challenges faced, I feel confident that I now have the time, resources, and direction required to complete the animation in Unit 3. With the environments fully planned, the characters finalised, and the narrative arc refined, I can now shift my focus to the animation process itself, refining the timing and movement, and enhancing the experience through interaction and audio design.

I am also beginning to explore how and where this work can be shared once completed. I will be researching opportunities to exhibit the animation at VR film festivals and immersive media platforms, while also considering how the piece might serve as a portfolio asset for future employment in the VR industry. Additionally, I hope that by experimenting with new and unconventional approaches to animation, this project might also capture the attention of studios that focus on traditional animation. My goal is to offer fresh ideas that challenge expectations and introduce new ways of thinking about storytelling in both immersive and traditional formats.

This unit has also given me the chance to reflect on how I work best as an artist. I have gained insight into my creative process, learning how to balance spontaneity with structure, and how to manage my time in a way that supports both experimentation and efficiency. This self-awareness will be valuable not only for the completion of this project, but also for future work beyond the course.

In conclusion, while Unit 2 presented its share of obstacles, it also provided space for meaningful growth. I now have a clear vision of the final piece, a deeper understanding of my creative strengths, and a renewed sense of purpose moving forward. I am excited to begin the finalisation phase in Unit 3 and to see how the finished animation will come together as both a complete narrative experience and a reflection of my development as an artist.

Animation Production 2025 - Unit 2 Ben Kurtaran

Workplan for Unit 3

This unit will focus on progressing my animation project from design to final export, with clearly defined phases to guide development and maintain creative momentum. The work will be structured into five main stages: Environment Design, Character Animation, Interaction Design, Audio Design, and Export and Final Output.

Environment Design

The first priority is to complete the designs of all five rooms featured in the animation. Each room functions as a distinct narrative and visual space that contributes to the overall atmosphere and storytelling. I will use Quill to sketch, refine, and finalise each room, beginning with compositional layout and progressing to lighting, detail, and colour. The aim is to create cohesive, immersive spaces that support the tone and pacing of the animation.

Character Animation

Once the environments are completed, I will begin animating the characters within these spaces. The focus will be on expressive, readable movement that communicates the narrative clearly without the need for dialogue. Since the project is intended for an immersive medium, particular attention will be paid to how character movement reads from various perspectives. Animation will begin with the key narrative beats, then progress to refined gestures and subtler motion that deepens the emotional experience.

Interaction Design

With the core animation in place, I will assess how much time remains and begin incorporating smaller interactive moments and ambient details. These might include character-object interactions, environmental motion, or viewer-responsive gestures. This phase is intentionally flexible, allowing space for creative experimentation. Additions will be made in a way that enhances the immersive quality of the animation without distracting from its central narrative flow.

Audio Design

After the visual elements are finalised, I will shift focus to audio design, with an emphasis on spatial sound. I plan to collaborate with a friend who has expertise in immersive and spatial audio. Together, we will craft a layered soundscape that supports the mood, pacing, and sense of presence. This will include ambient sound, environmental cues, and directional audio effects designed to respond to viewer perspective. Spoken dialogue will be avoided, in line with the project's visual storytelling approach.

Final Export

The final stage will involve preparing the project in two formats. The first will be optimised for Theatre Elsewhere, ensuring it runs smoothly and retains visual fidelity in a VR setting. The second will be a stylised 2D version created by exporting the animation into Blender. This cinematic cut will allow the project to reach audiences outside immersive platforms, and will be suitable for use in screenings, festivals, or inclusion in my broader animation portfolio.

Bibliography

[1]Angus Davies (2023). ‘1917’ The Art of the Long Take: How Filmmakers Captivate Audiences. YouTube. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t-gMV7ZJVZ4&list=PLSJov_LzdbyNmF1jwKEIjYS8IFEWKfg-JT&index=2 [Accessed 18 June. 2025]

[2]IMDB (2020). Behind-the-scenes Extended Featurette on One Long Shot. YouTube. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oaI57-BnORA&list=LLeeGPJby_ZUrFrI4fMCh05w&index=2 53 [Accessed 19 June. 2025]

[3]George R.R. Martin (2022). George R.R. Martin > Quotes [Online] Available at: https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/749309-i-think-there-are-two-types-of-writers-the-architects

[4]troytalksmovies (2024). The Studio Ghibli Process. Youtube. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zvY-SlHuDSo [Accessed 1 July. 2025]