

Development and Creation of the Short Animated Film Safe Space

BcA. Adriana Bendžalová

Master's Thesis
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Ateliér Animovaná tvorba

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Zásady pro vypracování

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SNYDER, Blake. Save the cat!: the last book on screenwriting that you'll ever need. Studio City: Michael Wiese Productions, c2005. ISBN 1-932907-00-9.
HOOKS, Ed. Acting for animators. 4th edition. New York: Routledge, 2017. ISBN 978-1-315-61827-2.
MCKEE, Robert. Story: substance, structure, style, and the principles of screenwriting. [London] : Methuen, 1999. ISBN 978-0-413-71560-9.
MCCLLOUD, Scott. Understanding comics: the invisible art. New York: William Morrow/HarperCollins, 2008. ISBN 978-1-435-24284-5.

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ABSTRAKT

V závěrečné práci je představen veškerý kontext při tvorbě diplomového filmu Adriany Bendžalové. Film, zpracovaný technikou ručně kreslené animace, vypráví příběh mimozemšťanky Novy a jejích dvou lidských přátel, kteří podnikají cestu do hor za unikátním přírodním úkazem - portálem, jenž každých 27 let odhaluje Novinu rodnou planetu, avšak planeta je náhle zničena meteoritem. Tragédie, která nastává po zničení této planety, představuje středobod emocionálního vyprávění filmu, přičemž důraz je kladen na přátelství, podporu a překonání ztráty.

Práce podrobně zkoumá tvůrčí proces filmu od prvotních inspirací až po finální produkci. Zaměřuje se na technické aspekty, jako jsou zvolený animační styl, využití různorodých materiálů pro vizuální stránku, a jednotlivé fáze produkce - tvorbu scénáře, animatiků, střih a hudební doprovod. Současně analyzuje režijní postupy, včetně práce s dabéry a spolupráce s členy produkčního týmu.

Důležitou součástí je reflexe náročnosti a neviditelné práce spojené s tvorbou krátkometrážního filmu. Autorka identifikuje klíčové výzvy, chyby a ponaučení, která mohou sloužit jako cenný zdroj pro budoucí projekty.

Závěrem práce přináší osobní reflexi autorky, přičemž hodnotí svůj růst jako režisérky a animátorky. Tento komplexní pohled poskytuje ucelený obraz o procesu tvorby autorského animovaného filmu a vyzdvihuje význam týmové spolupráce a podpory.

Klíčová slova: Animovaný film, animace, režie, vizuální techniky, 2D animace, scénář, dabing, vývoj postavy

ABSTRACT

This thesis presents the comprehensive context behind the creation of Adriana Bendžalová's master's degree film. The film, crafted using the technique of hand-drawn animation, tells the story of Nova, an alien, and her two human friends who embark on a journey into the mountains to witness a unique natural phenomenon—a portal that appears every 27 years, revealing Nova's home planet. However, the planet is suddenly destroyed by a meteorite. The tragedy that unfolds after the planet's destruction forms the emotional core of the film, emphasizing themes of friendship, support, and coping with loss.

The thesis thoroughly examines the creative process behind the film, from initial inspirations to final production. It focuses on technical aspects, including the chosen animation style, the use of diverse materials for the film's visual elements, and the stages of production—scriptwriting, animatics, editing, and musical accompaniment. Additionally, it analyzes directorial approaches, such as working with voice actors and collaborating with the production team.

An essential part of the thesis is a reflection on the challenges and invisible efforts associated with the making of a short film. The author identifies key challenges, mistakes, and lessons learned, offering valuable insights for future projects.

In conclusion, the thesis provides a personal reflection in which the author evaluates her growth as a director and animator. This comprehensive perspective offers a cohesive overview of the process of creating an independent animated film, highlighting the importance of teamwork and support.

Keywords: Animated film, animation, directing, visual techniques, 2D animation, screenwriting, voice acting, voiceover, character development

I am infinitely thankful to all my teachers, supervisors, everyone who contributed to the project, and my loved ones for their endless support, feedback, and immeasurable help.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores the creation and development of my master's animated short film, *Safe Space*. The film tells the story of Nova, a fun-loving alien girl, and her two human friends as they witness the destruction of Nova's home planet. As this tragic event unfolds, the friends must navigate the intense emotions that affect not only Nova's mind but also transform her body. The purpose of this thesis is to document the entire journey of creating *Safe Space*, from the initial sketches and story ideas to the completion of the final film. Initially planned as a four-minute short, *Safe Space* evolved into a ten-minute film with a larger budget than I had previously worked with and involved collaboration with international creators. The project also required a meticulous and time-consuming animation technique.

While challenging, this experience proved invaluable, enhancing my skills as an animator, creator, and director, and pushing me beyond my comfort zone. This thesis also serves to validate the creative and production decisions made throughout the process, highlighting both the visible and behind-the-scenes efforts by myself and my collaborators. Furthermore, it reflects my growth as a filmmaker, comparing this project with my previous works and acting as a record of the lessons learned. These include the challenges faced, obstacles overcome, and the successes achieved during this journey.

1 CONTEXT AND FOUNDATIONS

During the final year of my master's program in the Animation Department at the Faculty of Multimedia Communication at Tomas Bata University in Zlín, I set out to challenge myself in screenwriting, animation, and storytelling. At the same time, I aimed to keep the project's runtime manageable to avoid the burnout I experienced during the production of my bachelor's film. My goal was to identify key issues in my previous projects and build a stronger foundation for my master's film production.

1.1 The Bachelor's Film Reflection and Lessons Learnt

My bachelor's film, *I Will Die in This House* (2023), was a deeply personal passion project that posed significant challenges. Over three months, I single-handedly completed the film's seven-and-a-half-minute runtime, including cleaned-up animation, colored visuals, and rendered backgrounds. This intense workload resulted in severe burnout and exhaustion, but it also provided valuable lessons on what to avoid in my future creative projects. Reflecting on this experience, I identified key areas for improvement: extreme perfectionism, timing, cluttered storytelling, and overcomplicated visuals. These aspects were frequently mentioned in feedback from various viewers, including classmates, associates, and teachers. Further validating this feedback were screenings at festivals, where audiences found the film overwhelming compared to the other short animated films in the lineup. My perfectionism often led me to fixate on small details, significantly slowing my progress. This tendency is a common challenge for many creators, as noted by Ed Catmull, cofounder of Pixar, who described the concept of *The Beautifully Shaded Penny* (Ed Catmull, Amy Wallace, 2014). This refers to artists at Pixar spending excessive time on details irrelevant to the story. Another significant challenge was the difficulty of streamlining a clear and concise message. This phenomenon is often described as *killing your darlings*, a concept explained by writer Tiffany Yates Martin (Martin, 2022). She highlights how removing beloved elements, despite the emotional difficulty, is essential for achieving clarity and cohesion. Learning to prioritize clarity and conciseness became a cornerstone of my approach to *Safe Space*. This shift resulted in a much more cohesive visual and narrative structure, addressing the flaws of my previous work.

1.2 Revisiting the Basics

To avoid my tendency toward overcomplication, I chose to return to traditional hand-drawn techniques for making *Safe Space*. In my bachelor's film, reliance on digital tools for precision often resulted in lifeless visuals. By embracing pencil and paper, I was able to create more expressive artwork and accept occasional imperfections as part of the process. This return to basics also involved reassessing my artistic skills. My previous stylization had been influenced by pre-existing media rather than a deep understanding of anatomy, shapes, and reality. Recognizing this, I challenged myself—not through overly complex techniques, but by refining fundamental skills such as key poses and the effective use of references. This approach led to more efficient production of the film's assets, including backgrounds, animations, and the overall visual style.

1.3 Refining Storytelling

Not only did my outlook on the visuals change, but so did my approach to storytelling. In my previous projects, I often relied on dark humor and nihilism; however, for *Safe Space*, I wanted to explore vulnerability and create a more uplifting narrative. This shift required me to abandon cynicism as a storytelling crutch and embrace sincerity. To achieve this goal, I turned to a place unaffected by pre-existing media from which to draw inspiration: nature. Nature, with its many unique, unscripted scenes, textures, colors, and sounds, became an endless source of inspiration.

1.4 Personal Experiences

After the first semester of my master's program, I decided to take a trip with two of my closest friends to Harrachov and reconnect with the outside world. The film was in the back of my mind throughout the trip, and I kept thinking about how I could incorporate this experience into the story. Subsequently, I ended up using many of the moments that happened to our group. During our trip to Harrachov, I not only acquired a renewed and refreshed perspective but also discovered a whimsical idea for a key element in my upcoming film. As a prank, we hid little alien plushies in our friend's jacket, sleeping bag, backpack, and other belongings. The prank resulted in a set of humorous photos featuring these miniature alien figures positioned beside trees or nestled in tall grass. This playful scenario inspired a creative idea. The juxtaposition of an alien cartoon toy in the middle of a rural setting was charming and presented the perfect inspiration for an animated film.



Image 1 Photo from author's trip (2024).
(source: own archive)



Image 2 Frame from animatic of *Safe Space* (2024).
(source: own work)



Image 3 Illustrations made during author's trip (2024).
(source: own work)



Image 4 Photo from author's trip portraying the toy plushie (2024).
(source: own archive)

This trip provided ample material for the initial portion of the film, which is characterized by warmth, laughter, and friendship. However, the second part of the film, which adopts a significantly different tone following the destruction of the planet, draws its emotional motives from a much darker place, specifically from my personal connection to the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. At the time of writing this thesis, the war instigated by Russia on Ukraine has been ongoing for over three years. While I do not identify as Ukrainian, I do have Ukrainian roots, and a family out there. This war has had a profound impact on all of us. I vividly recall the distressing moment when I learned that my grandmother might not be able to leave her city due to canceled bus services, amid the reports of shootings and the threat of

bombings. The emotional turbulence I experienced during this time is mirrored in the film, serving not only as a personal outlet for me as a creator but also as a means of raising awareness about the ongoing conflict. This infusion of real-world trauma provided an emotional depth to the narrative, contributing to the film's exploration of loss, survival, and resilience.

1.5 Inspiration for the Visuals and Stylization

The starting point for the visual development of *Safe Space* was a series of smaller animated projects I developed during a plein-air event—a week-long stay at a guesthouse surrounded by woods and nature, organized by the Animation Department at Tomas Bata University. When tasked with creating a small animated project within a limited timeframe, where the goal was to convey an abstract feeling rather than a complex narrative, I found myself liberated from the need to over-explain or overthink. This approach allowed me to produce a solid animated short, *I Hope This Letter Finds You Well*, with traditionally drawn backgrounds in just three days.

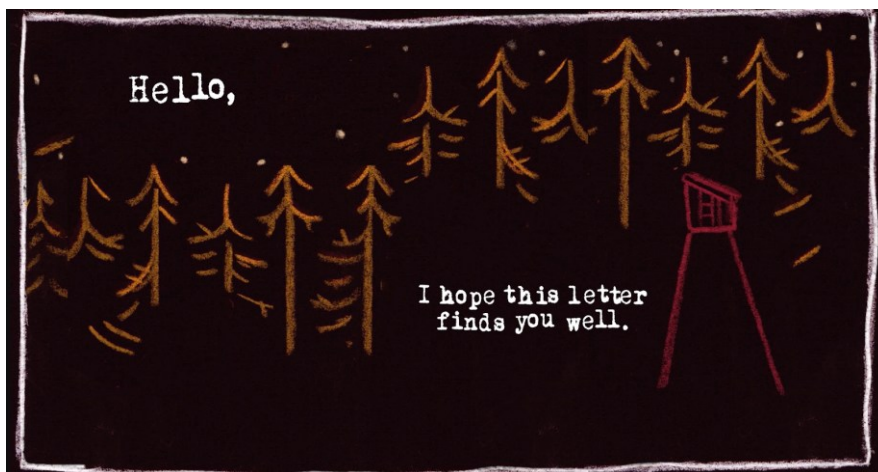


Image 5 Frame from author's plein-air film *I Hope This Letter Finds You Well* (2024).
(source: own work)

The stylization I used in this project became foundational for my approach to the visuals of *Safe Space*. However, I also sought inspiration from other creators. One significant source of inspiration was the LUSTR festival, the largest Czech festival of illustration and comics, where I had the opportunity to closely study the work of both Czech and international illustrators. My intent was not to copy their styles or ideas but rather to observe their artistic approaches. The works I encountered exposed me to a variety of materials, such as ink and pastel, and demonstrated how simplicity and clarity in art can effectively convey emotion.

This experience was both insightful and educational, allowing me to identify specific artists whose work resonated with me the most and to analyze their techniques. For example, the way Austrian artist Sonja Stangl shapes trees using just a few brushstrokes inspired me to experiment with a similar technique to capture the essence of nature in *Safe Space*.



Image 6 Illustration by Sonja Stangl for Austrian Restaurant RAU (2019).
(source: InkyLand <https://inky.land>)

All of these creators did not merely inspire me in the portrayal of nature. They also influenced my approach to simplifying the design of the characters, ensuring that they remained interesting while maintaining solid shapes. The primary artist I drew inspiration from was the American illustrator and cartoonist Tim Peacock, particularly in the way he depicts clothing. His technique involves using just a few well-placed lines to suggest the folds in fabric, allowing it to retain its basic shape while adding depth to the image. This stylization enabled me to focus on refining the overall shapes of clothing and characters and on avoiding unnecessary or misplaced details, which ultimately resulted in less demanding animation.



Image 7 Tim Peacock's illustration (2020).
(source: Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/tim.peacock/?hl=cs>)

LUSTR played a pivotal role in shaping my approach to collecting relevant inspiration materials, but it was not the only influence on my process. I also revisited some of my all-time favorite animated films.

1.6 Animation Influence

In addition to the inspiration from the LUSTR exhibition, I drew influence from animated films and media that have deeply resonated with me for years. I studied their techniques to understand how much can be accomplished by emphasizing emotion and the flow of movements and applied these insights to my own film. One such film that I have admired for years is *Ernest and Celestine* (*Ernest et Célestine*, 2012). The film features hand-painted backgrounds and characters with not fully closed outlines, which allows for greater freedom in deforming or exaggerating shapes. This approach helped me determine the direction I would take with my master's film. A particularly striking moment occurs when the title characters Ernest and Celestine, and their mice police pursuers, merge into one large mass with minimal details. This use of fluidity in animation has left a lasting impact on me and influences my approach to movement and expression in my own creative work.



Image 8 Frame from *Ernest and Celestine* (2012).

(source: YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PyU-mSUOnSs>)

Similarly, another film with unique animation, *The Girl Without Hands* (*La jeune fille sans mains*, 2016), employs a very freehand style of animation. It uses varying line weights and incomplete drawings to reflect a spectrum of emotional intensity. This film is truly special, and I sought to reflect a similar technique in my own film, particularly in the moments of despair experienced by the central character Nova. For example, when Nova is plunged into the state of deep anguish after seeing her home planet explode, her line art changes, becoming scratchy and thinner, symbolizing her emotional turmoil.

Analyzing and revisiting these films was crucial to fully understanding the scope and variety offered by different animation styles. I was able to incorporate these findings into my own project to better capture emotional depth and fluidity.



Image 9 Frame from *The Girl Without Hands* (2016).

(source: YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ANbYvxpx8A>)

2 STORY

After reflecting on my experiences and gathering inspiration, I began to narrow down the core ideas that would shape my master's film.

2.1 First Concept

The initial concept for the film was considerably darker than the final version. It revolved around a protagonist burdened by a strange mute creature, connected to her body and soul, and her two friends, who embark on a hike to a mountain. While at the top of the mountain, the main character would suddenly slip and fall into a tight cave, as the mountain begins to collapse. The creature would shield her with its body, allowing her to crawl out. This act would sever their connection, and the creature would remain trapped forever in the mountain.

I was fond of some elements of this concept, such as animating scenes in the complete darkness of the cave and relying solely on lights and shadows. Additionally, writing gags and humorous moments with the creature seemed refreshing. However, upon deeper reflection, the story lacked a satisfying conclusion, theme, and motive. Furthermore, the creature's design, based on the current popular online horror media, was, according to some viewers, unintentionally reminiscent of old, offensive caricatures, as the creature had enlarged teeth and eyes, which were often used in mockery of different social groups. This feedback solidified my decision to rework the story to better align with my values and storytelling goals.



Image 10 Sketches of characters for the first concept of the story (2024).
(source: own work)



Image 11 Further sketches of characters for the first concept of the story (2024).
(source: own work)



Image 12 Concepts for the design of the creature in the first version of the story (2024).
(source: own work)



Image 13 Further sketches for the first version of the story (2024).
(source: own work)

2.2 Further Versions

After discarding the first concept, I explored new ideas inspired by my visit to Harrachov. One concept centered around an alien protagonist who reflects her emotions through her body, using different colors or shapes. This iteration of the story had a strong foundation and clear motives, and I experimented with various contexts and stories. My intention was to explore all the possibilities these themes offered to ensure that I considered every option and was not attached to a specific story if better possibilities for utilizing my ideas existed.

- **Version 1:** Nova is overly forceful and overbearing about seeing the planet, neglects the needs of her friends, and eventually realizes her mistake and grows as a person.

This iteration lacked personal relatability, mainly because it did not focus on the explosion, which was the most emotional part. Nova was also too unlikeable, and her character did not resonate with the viewers.

- **Version 2:** The girls miss the portal opening and return many years later when it opens again, demonstrating that their friendship has stood the test of time.

This version was unsatisfactory and predictable for many viewers. The ending lacked emotional depth and did not align with the personal experiences I aimed to portray in the film.

- **Version 3:** Nova and Zora are in an unhealthy relationship, with Zora dismissing Nova's needs, feelings, and her desire to see the portal.

Although this version offered an interesting spin on the established story, I was reluctant to portray a toxic relationship. It did not align with the lessons and principles I had discussed earlier, and I was even advised against writing and animating a long, heavy story about an unhealthy relationship due to concerns about my own mental health.

- **Version 4:** When the portal opens, it reveals that the planet has already been destroyed.

This iteration left many early viewers either confused or seeking an explanation for the planet's destruction. Introducing a visible meteor aided clarity and proved to be a stronger choice, allowing viewers to connect with the planet before its destruction, thus enhancing the emotional impact.

- **Version 5 – The Final Version:** The reasoning behind choosing the current version—the one where Nova is portrayed as a positive character, and where the explosion of the planet occurs as the girls witness it—instead of any of the versions listed above, is that this narrative allows viewers to become attached to the characters. The tonal shift of the story, from the positive emotions associated with the hike to the somber, depressing aftermath of the explosion, results in a less predictable and more engaging film. This approach enables the audience to become both interested and emotionally invested in the characters. Additionally, the story has acquired a more believable and cohesive narrative when these choices were applied.

2.3 Focusing on the Core Elements of the Story

A unique problem that arose was the realization that the film did not possess a narrative that required animation. The initial solution to this issue was to portray and animate Nova's thoughts, depicting her anxiety and overthinking. In this version, Nova was portrayed as more anxious, selfish, and generally unlikable. This technique was intended to serve as a narrative tool and help the viewer understand the complex lore of the world the film is set in, as Nova would be thinking about aspects that were difficult to communicate through brief dialogue or the environment, such as the portal's opening. However, this concept focused on the wrong elements, and the portrayal of Nova's thoughts was ultimately discarded in favor of improving the clarity of the film. I recognized that there was no need for justification to

animate the story, as it contained elements that would be difficult to portray in live-action—Nova being an alien and the planet's explosion. Moreover, this approach felt condescending to the viewer, as it over-explained and provided excessive exposition.



Image 14 Portrayal of Nova's thoughts in early animatics of *Safe Space* (2024).
(source: own work)



Image 15 Example of portraying Nova's thoughts in earlier animatics (2024).
(source: own work)

After narrowing down the version and establishing the main foundations and beats of the story, further refinement was necessary. Among the significant cuts was a brief interaction in a pub, where a patron insults Nova with an alien slur, hinting at themes of xenophobia or racism against aliens. The scene included another example of how Nova's body reflects her mental state, as she reacts to the insult by changing her color and body shape. However, the entire sequence was ultimately unnecessary, given the already prevalent and stronger

themes, the film's limited runtime, and the fact that Nova's abilities were introduced later in a more natural way through scenes of her joking around with her friends.

Another part that was added later in the production, and repeatedly revised, was a sequence where the girls stand in front of a tight crevice and squeeze through it. In previous versions, there was no clear separation between the human and alien worlds. The neutral space in the middle of the mountain served as both a moment of struggle for the girls—who needed to pass through it to achieve their goal—and as a clear boundary between the established environments. Its importance, length, and emotional tone varied across versions. In one version, Nova struggled to get through while her friends were scratched all over and reluctant to join her. This version was much more serious in tone and also painted Nova as selfish. The final version, however, presents a much warmer and more humorous tone. Nova doesn't want to force her friends through the tight squeeze, but they offer to go through themselves. In the animation, they are squeezed and stretched, and though it's a bit uncomfortable, they are ultimately fine in the end. This sequence also fulfilled my desire to have an animated segment where I could play around with lighting and shadow using ink, a technique I introduced in the first concept. The sequences, shots, and scenes mentioned above were among the major edits. Additionally, a few minor shots and changes, less relevant to the core of the story, were also cut. The key challenge I had to address was ensuring that the story did not feel like a patchwork of scenes from different versions, which could disrupt the overall flow of the film. As noted by Syd Field in his book on screenwriting, the story needs to stem from the character, and when their motives are mismatched or unclear, the story fails to resonate (Field, 2007).

2.4 Timeframe of the Film

During the process of refining my story and creating shots and scenes, I also had to consider the technical aspects of the narrative. This included determining the approximate timeline of events, the duration of the journey, and the overall time frame it would take. While writing the script, I was advised to create a map outlining the sequence of events with corresponding times. This not only helped confirm whether the trip was feasible but also informed the background color choices to reflect the time of day accurately.

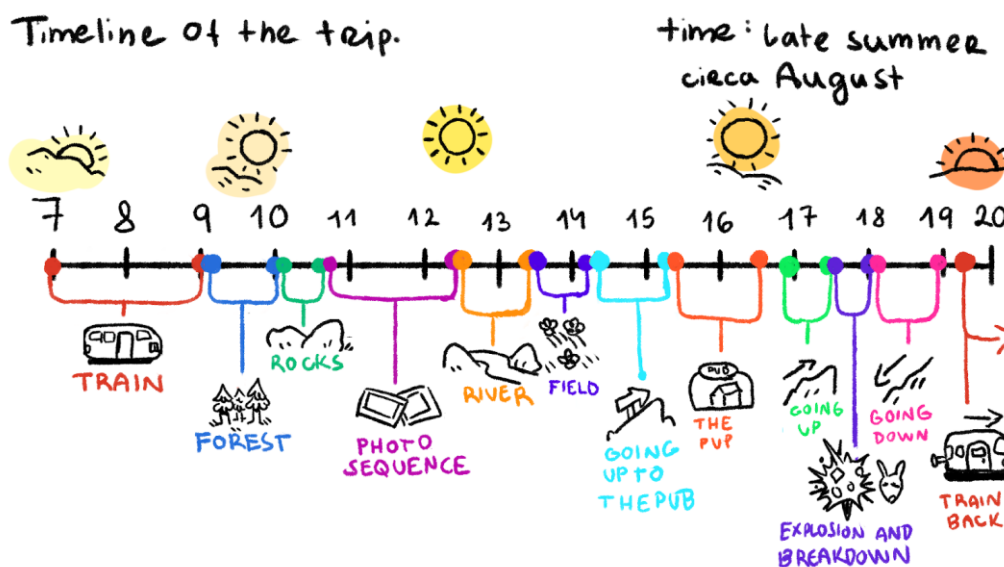


Image 16 Illustrated timeline of the film (2024).
(source: own work)

And to be truly certain, if the journey was manageable within the given time, I consulted an acquaintance who enjoys hiking and has experience with extensive trails, such as the Pacific Crest Trail. She helped me adjust some timing and assured me that the journey was possible, even if the trio took longer breaks, which resulted in a more believable story.

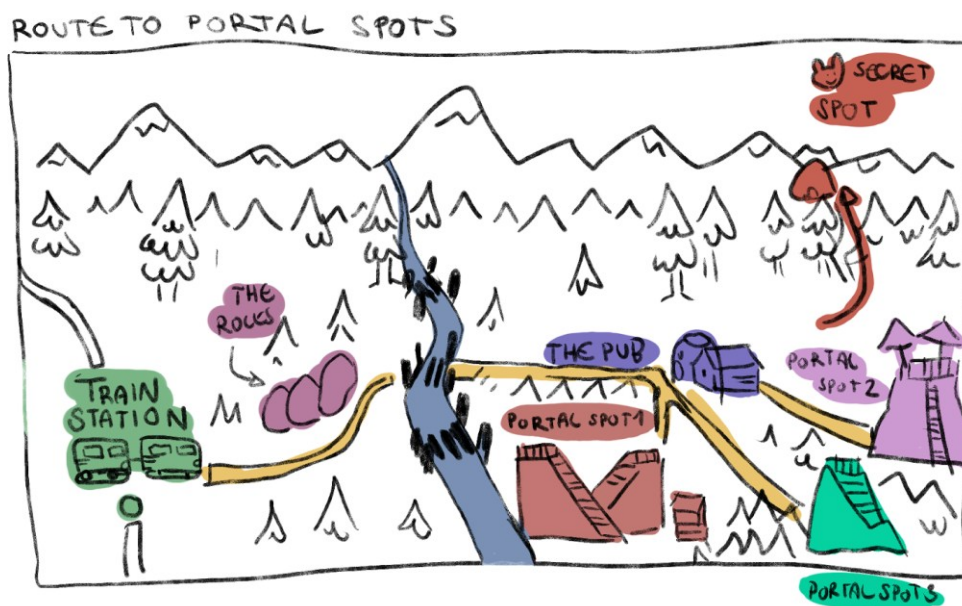


Image 17 Illustrated map of the route taken by the characters in *Safe Space* (2024).
(source: own work)

2.5 Defining the Object at the Ending

One of the most significant elements in the film is the final object presented to Nova as a symbol of hope following the destruction of her planet. Initially, I envisioned this object as a fragment of the planet itself. The intention was to emphasize the friends' sacrifice, as they retrieved the piece despite minor injuries, such as burns and scratches, sustained while attempting to recover the fragments from the rubble. However, I soon realized that offering a grieving character a piece of their destroyed home could be perceived as insensitive. Rather than symbolizing resilience or hope, it felt more like a painful reminder of what had been lost - essentially, a piece of debris rather than a meaningful gesture. I explored alternative options for a symbolic object that would both reflect the tragedy of the loss and highlight the support provided by Nova's friends.

2.5.1 Exploring Alternative Objects

The next idea I considered was using a flower that had miraculously survived the planet's destruction. While symbolic, this concept felt somewhat clichéd, as the image of a fragile flower is often associated with softness and nature, making it a predictable choice that detracted from the film's unique elements. During this process, I received varying feedback. Some preferred the idea of the flower or the planet's pieces, while others suggested leaving Nova with nothing, resulting in a much more somber ending where there was no symbolic object - only the support of her friends. This approach would have emphasized the complete loss of the planet. Ultimately, none of these options resonated with the tone and themes I wanted to convey.

I analyzed the film's unique aspects and explored what could distinguish it from other media and symbols. I then turned to a more distinct object: one of the alien star shapes the girls encounter while climbing the hill. This object carried a distinctly alien quality and visually expressed the theme of survival and hope, while also serving as a reminder of Nova's alien heritage. It was unique to the film's environment and provided a more fitting and original symbol.

After refining the pacing and flow of the story, as well as addressing technical details such as time and setting, I focused on revising the dialogue, which was crucial in establishing the tone and overall quality of the film.



Image 18 Sketches and notes about potential objects (2024).
(source: own work)



Image 19 Further exploration of objects through sketches (2024).
(source: own work)

2.6 Writing the Dialogue

In the early stages of development, the dialogue in *Safe Space* felt overly complicated and unnatural. Attempts to mimic real-life conversations often resulted in awkward exchanges, as attempts to replicate unscripted dialogue did not translate well to film, creating unrealistic conversations. Effective dialogue must be concise, understandable, and meaningful, while also offering additional layers of subtext, as noted by Kent Lamm an American director and screenwriter, in one of his video essays (Lamm, 2022). The main lesson I learned was the importance of continuously simplifying and streamlining the dialogue - removing unnecessary filler and focusing on the core elements- without being overly vague or excessively explanatory. I aimed for a natural simplicity in the conversations between the girls. Achieving simplicity became crucial to *Safe Space*. The dialogue needed to convey the friendship between the girls, their journey, and the underlying themes of hope and loss. The script underwent seven major rewrites, with each version stripping away unnecessary jokes, puns, and filler to prioritize clarity and authenticity. This process required careful attention to the individual nature of each character, influencing what and how much they would say, while ensuring that the necessary information was conveyed without forced catchphrases or punchlines. The result is a more believable and cohesive dialogue does not overwhelm the viewer.

2.6.1 Clarity

A major issue was breaking down and clarifying bigger sentences where characters were giving important information. The opening sequence on the train proved particularly challenging—it had to establish the film's premise without overwhelming the audience with exposition. Especially, when Nova needs to inform the others in as simple a sentence as possible, that:

- The portal is a secret location tied to Nova's family, unlike publicly known portals that are global events.
- They need to reach a portal within a specific time frame.

These lines also had to subtly reflect the dynamics between the characters: Nova as the jokester, Zora as the upbeat optimist, and Oly as the stoic, reserved member of the group. Achieving this balance required careful word choice and pacing, and numerous revisions and reworkings of the lines so that the information felt natural and not forced for the sake of

exposition. To lighten the burden put on the dialogue, I addressed this issue by using the environment as a storytelling tool. For example, in the opening sequence, Nova reads a tourist map that contains some information about the portal on its cover, informing the viewer that the portal opens every 27 years and is a widely publicized event. This approach provides an elegant solution to conveying additional information without relying solely on dialogue.

2.6.2 Repetition and Parallels

To strengthen the emotional weight of the story, I used repeated phrases in different contexts, allowing the dialogue to evolve in meaning throughout the film.

- **“Of course. Who else?”**

Early in the film, Nova uses this phrase to affirm the strength of their friendship when Zora expresses excitement about their adventure and asks her if they can really go to the secret portal spot with Nova. Later, Zora mirrors these words during a tense moment, showing her unwavering support for Nova, when they are about to go through the tight cave and Nova asks if her friends are really willing to go through the uncomfortable experience for her.

- **“Come on, Zora! We gotta keep moving!”**

Zora is out of breath when ascending a hill and is teased by Nova. The words are later transformed into a somber line where Zora gently urges the distraught Nova to keep going after her breakdown when the trio is descending the mountain after the catastrophe.

These exchanges demonstrate the shifting emotional tones and deepen the bond between the characters, primarily focusing on Nova and Zora. Oly, being a quieter character, expresses her emotions and relationships more through actions and animation than dialogue, in order to bring a variety of characters whose nature is expressed through different means.

2.6.3 Consistency in Dialogue

To enhance the believability of the dialogue, I aimed to differentiate the way each character speaks by emphasizing their accents, sentence construction, and word pronunciation. However, these phrases might inadvertently hint at social class differences, as reflected by American writer Carrie Jones in her personal experiences, which influenced her style of writing (Jones, 2008). To present the girls as distinct individuals while maintaining their

unity as a believable trio, I decided to make their dialogue more consistent. The focus shifted to voice acting, which helped clarify the characters without creating too much distinction between them.

Another experiment, aimed at grounding the dialogue and emphasizing the girls' friendship involved using diminutives for their names, such as "Zori" for Zora and "Novi" for Nova. This tendency stemmed from my background as a non-native English speaker, applying specific rules from Czech, my mother tongue, to English, which resulted in mismatched words and sentences, including the names. Additionally, these nicknames confused viewers, who were uncertain of the characters' actual names because the nicknames kept changing, disrupting the flow of dialogue. Ultimately, the names remained consistent, except for Olya, who was called "Oly"—a practical choice for easier lip-sync animation. To ensure the characters were all on the same page, I focused on their movement and design while keeping their dialogue consistent in vocabulary and tone. This allowed the viewers to stay focused on the story without being distracted by inconsistencies in character naming.

2.7 Consultation with an Editor

A critical step in the development process was collaborating with Tomáš Bucher, a passionate editing student I met through my university. Tomáš provided invaluable feedback on pacing, shot clarity, and runtime efficiency. His suggestions helped refine the film by removing unnecessary repetition without sacrificing its emotional core. There was one instance of miscommunication that led to a delay in creating new animatics. Initially, more content was cut from the film than I felt comfortable with, resulting in the loss of several crucial emotional moments—particularly the sequence when the trio is descending the mountain, with Nova being unresponsive. This scene was meant to parallel their ascent, where everything was alive and vibrant, while the descent represented the loss of the alien connection to the planet, which had withered away. Once we cleared up the confusion, we discussed the nuances and importance of certain shots and reached a satisfying common ground. We proceeded with the finished animatic, making final adjustments after recording the actors' voice lines.



Image 20 Frame from the animatic of *Safe Space* before a consultation with an editor (2024).

(source: own work)



Image 21 Frame from the animatic of *Safe Space* after a consultation with an editor (2024).

(source: own work)



Image 22 Exploration of thumbnails of shots for *Safe Space* through sketches (2024).
(source: own work)

2.8 Animatics

The next step in production was creating a solid animatic—a rough series of images placed on a timeline—to serve as the foundation for the final animation. With the introduction of dialogue and more intricate timing in this project, there was less room for error and adjustments during animation. Reflecting on my bachelor's film, there were moments that ended up looking awkward in the finished animation, with characters remaining static for too long. This was the result of a less detailed animatic. My bachelor's film used narration and minimal lip sync, which allowed more flexibility; I could deviate from the animatic's timing and work around mistakes. However, with my master's film, this was not an option due to the precise timing and dialogue. Any deviation would have resulted in more visible errors, such as delayed or overly fast character reactions and movements. Determined to avoid repeating those mistakes, I put extra effort into crafting a detailed animatic that bordered on rough animation. This approach provided a clearer roadmap for the final animation and helped me avoid many potential errors.

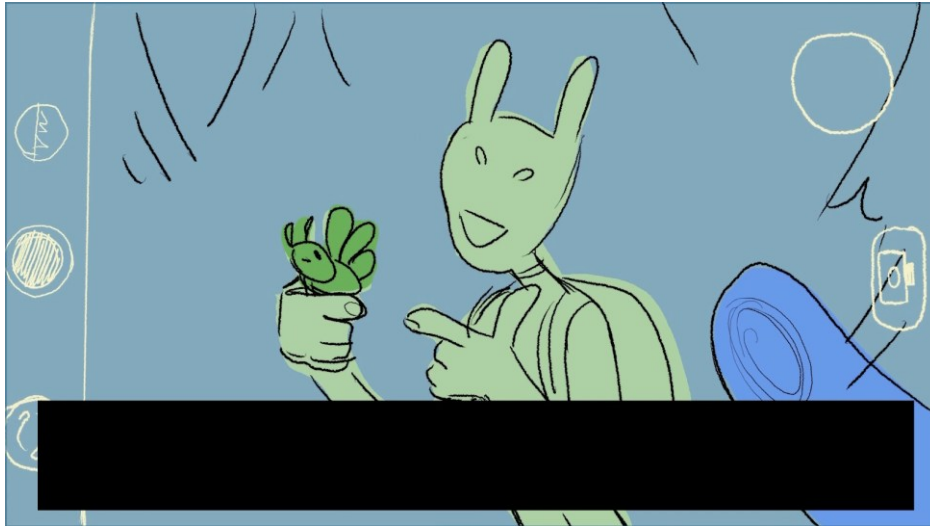


Image 23 Frame from the animatic of *Safe Space* (2025).
(source: own work)



Image 24 Final colored frame from *Safe Space* (2025).
(source: own work)

2.8.1 Animatic Process

Despite these efforts, I underestimated some sequences. One particularly demanding scene, where Zora sings and the girls join her, turned out to be an unexpected challenge. In the final animation, their walk cycles vary significantly depending on their height, weight, and physical condition. I couldn't synchronize the walk cycles naturally to fit the timing of the animatic, so I decided to make Zora more theatrical. I had her pause and interact with the others instead of maintaining a steady walk. This decision resulted in a more engaging scene and provided a moment to highlight Zora's character. In my future projects, I aim to completely eliminate these errors by focusing more on timing and readability. I will not shy

away from sequences that may be demanding in animatics and will ensure I properly sketch them out. Moving from an untimed sketch in the animatic to the final animation often leads to more significant issues that could have been addressed earlier.

2.8.2 The Benefits of a Detailed Animatic

Overall, while creating a detailed animatic can be challenging, time-consuming, and sometimes frustrating - especially when it requires cutting scenes that the author has invested a lot of time in - it offers significant benefits:

- **Emotion and Timing:** While the animatic may not perfectly match the final animation, it provides clear references for the emotional tone and pacing of each scene.
- **Movement Reference:** The animatic serves as a guideline for character movement, ensuring consistency throughout the animation process.
- **Structural Improvements:** The iterative nature of animatics allows for revisions that strengthen the narrative and improve character dynamics.

2.8.3 Additional Animatics

In total, there were about six major animatics created for this film, with additional reimaginings provided by my editor and teacher. The first two animatics were riddled with many issues, including problems with pacing, character development, and story structure. To progress to the next, more polished stage, I focused on strengthening the characters and refining their expressions to ensure a relatable set of protagonists.

3 CHARACTERS

The friendship and dynamics between the characters were central to the story, as it focused on female companionship, support after a tragedy, and the power of friendship. My goal was to depict a positive and meaningful female friendship, while ensuring each character was distinct and engaging. The character design had to be strong and adhere to foundational design principles, but I allowed myself some creative liberties, particularly with color. I experimented extensively with both the portrayal of their friendship and the visual design of the characters.

3.1 The Trio and Focus on Female Friendships

From the start of *Safe Space*'s development, I aimed to create a trio of female characters with a strong bond. Highlighting a healthy female friendship was a priority for me, as much of mainstream media often portrays such relationships in a negative or superficial light, or in ways that I couldn't personally relate to. This perspective aligns with Fatima Jahan Ena's analysis of how frequently female friendships are depicted as toxic or competitive in media (Jahan, 2021). The friendship among the characters was directly inspired by my own experiences, with several moments serving as direct recreations of events I've shared with my friends. However, incorporating such personal elements required careful consideration. I needed to balance the level of intimacy among the characters to avoid making viewers feel like intruders in overly personal moments while maintaining a wholesome and uplifting tone. Their bond was conveyed not only through dialogue but also through quiet moments they shared together. An important visual strategy was depicting the trio physically close in specific shots. For instance, moments where they huddled together to look at a map or posed for a photo emphasized their connection, closeness, and the intimacy of their friendship, creating a sense of unity. To ensure each character's traits complemented one another, I experimented with various versions of their roles, shape language, and color palettes. This process helped define their individuality within the trio while establishing their cohesive dynamic. I drew inspiration from tips provided by experienced Indian animator and visual artist Nikhil Salvi, who outlines strategies for creating complex characters in his article (Salvi, 2023). Amongst personal liberties I took was for example I switched the roles of comedic relief characters and faced different challenges with each design.

3.2 Choosing Names for the Characters

I dedicated significant time to selecting names that aligned with the characters' personalities and visual designs. This process was an essential step in defining the characters, as there is a profound connection between sound and imagery in shaping our perceptions. The naming process was influenced by the Bouba-Kiki effect, a phenomenon introduced by Wolfgang Köhler in 1929. In his study, participants were asked to associate two names—'Kiki' and 'Bouba'—with two shapes: one soft and rounded, the other sharp and angular. Most people linked "Bouba" with the softer shape and "Kiki" with the sharper one (Marian, 2023).

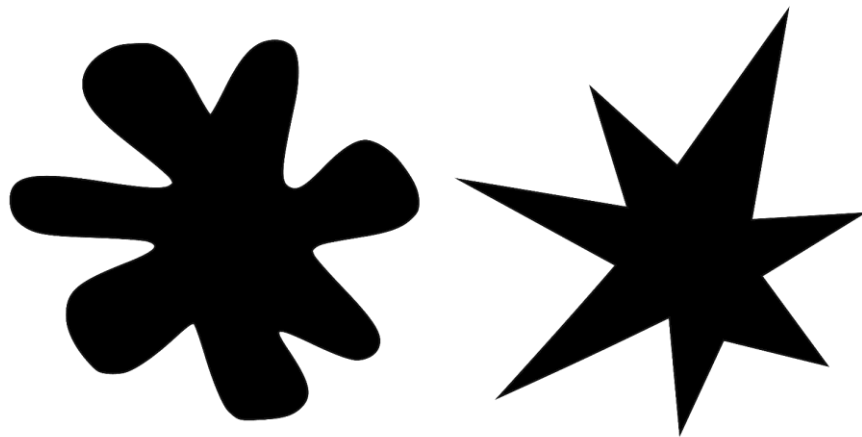


Image 25 Shapes from the Bouba and Kiki effect (2023).

(source: The Behavioural Scientist <https://behavioralscientist.org/its-a-bouba-not-a-kiki-the-relationship-between-sound-form-and-meaning/>)

This insight guided me in choosing names that not only complemented the characters' appearances but also subtly reinforced their personalities. The setting of the story, inspired by Czech and Polish nature, guided my approach to naming the characters. Since the actors were likely to have Slavic accents when voicing the English dialogue, I aimed for names that carried a Slavic tone, aligning with both the film's setting and the characters' accents. Additionally, each name was chosen to reflect the shape language and personality of the characters, creating a cohesive and meaningful connection between sound, design, and identity.

- **Zora:** With a design centered on triangles, Zora's name needed to include sharp, strong sounds, such as the "Z." However, the name couldn't sound harsh or severe, as Zora is an upbeat and positive character. The name "Zora" achieves this balance,

maintaining a sense of energy and strength while reflecting her lively and optimistic nature.

- **Olya:** Her circular design required a name with soft, rounded sounds, like the "O," to convey gentleness. At the same time, the name had to avoid sounding overly soft or childish, as Olya is the more stoic and serious character in the trio. "Olya" struck the perfect balance, combining softness with maturity.
- **Nova:** As an alien navigating a human world, Nova's name needed to strike a balance between familiarity and modernity. It couldn't lean too far into sci-fi territory with names like "Xenerfolob," nor could it be overly common in Czech, such as "Barbora," as these extremes would fail to capture her dual nature. While I initially considered names with an "X" to evoke a futuristic vibe, they felt disconnected from the cohesive tone shared by Zora and Olya's names. "Nova" provided the ideal middle ground, suggesting a contemporary feel while subtly reflecting her alien origin.

I also adhered to the principle that each character's name should start with a different letter to have each character distinct and unique as is advised by an American screenwriter Jason Hellerman (Hellerman, 2024). This helped make the characters distinct and easier to identify, while also contributing to a sense of individuality within their shared cultural and narrative context. The final step involved compiling lists of three to six potential names for each character, considering their meaning, sound, and visual appeal. I sent these lists, along with the character designs, to various individuals and asked them to choose the names they found most fitting. Based on the results and my own judgment, I finalized the names: Nova, Zora, and Olya. These names adhered to the tips and principles I had researched, successfully reflecting the characters' roles, traits, and cultural context. After solidifying the names, I shifted focus to refining the characters' traits and designs.

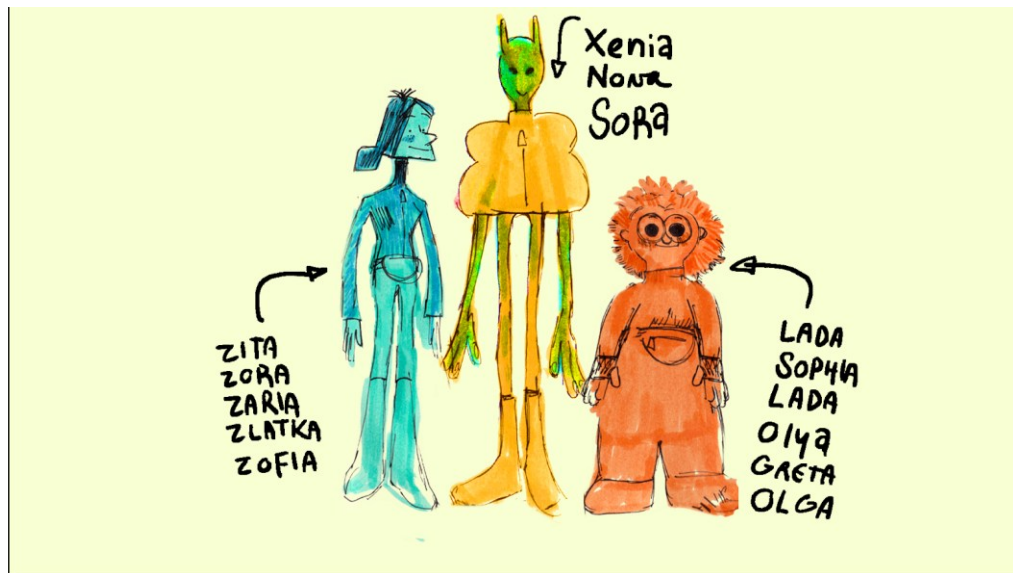


Image 26 The main trio from *Safe Space* with different variations of their names (2024).
(source: own work)

3.3 Nova's Design and Character Writing

Ironically, fleshing out Nova's character was properly done much later in the production. Even when developing *Safe Space* for the first time, I sensed that Nova lacked depth, which was a major issue for the main character, who the viewer is most focused on. I was not able to address this issue, even though I subconsciously realized it was there. After establishing strong fundamentals, it was still difficult for me to go back and rebuild something I had spent a lot of time on. When I listed out the main archetypes of all the characters and their traits, Nova's list was the shortest and least thought-through. She had no personality, and her main goal was simply to get her friends to see the planet because she wanted to—not because it was a special occasion for all of them or a meaningful moment shared between them. That was all there was to her character. Eventually, I realized this significant mistake and reframed Nova completely. I discarded the concept of her being anxious, scared, and selfish and instead reworked her into a bit of a jokester—not necessarily a comedic relief character, but one who teases her friends without being outright mean. To develop this new version of Nova, I looked at different media I was familiar with to find a good reference to align her character with. After reviewing various films and TV shows, I settled on Wendy Corduroy from the animated Disney Channel series *Gravity Falls* (2012–2016). Wendy is a laid-back teenager who tries to play it cool and often pranks her friends.



Image 27 Wendy from the animated Disney TV series *Gravity Falls* (2012).
(source: Gravity Falls Wiki https://gravityfalls.fandom.com/wiki/Wendy_Corduroy)

Having an already pre-existing character not only helped with polishing Nova's traits but also proved valuable as a reference for voice actors. This change also worked better for animation and created a more entertaining character. Now, not only did her body change color depending on her emotions, but she also stretched her body when joking around, making her eventual deformation at the end more believable. This made the sequence with the explosion even more emotionally devastating. Before, her character was plain and neutral, but now, with her warm and hilarious presence, her deformation and the soul-crushing event she experiences became even more impactful for the viewer. While designing Nova, I aimed to emphasize her alien nature while maintaining consistency with her human companions. She couldn't be too human, like a girl with antennas, but she also couldn't look overly cartoonish or stereotypically alien, as that would reflect different values than intended for the film and wouldn't align with her character. Several aspects of her design were crucial for creating a striking and memorable silhouette: the shape of her head, her eyes, antennas, and her jacket. She also had to be the tallest of the trio to highlight her otherworldly nature.

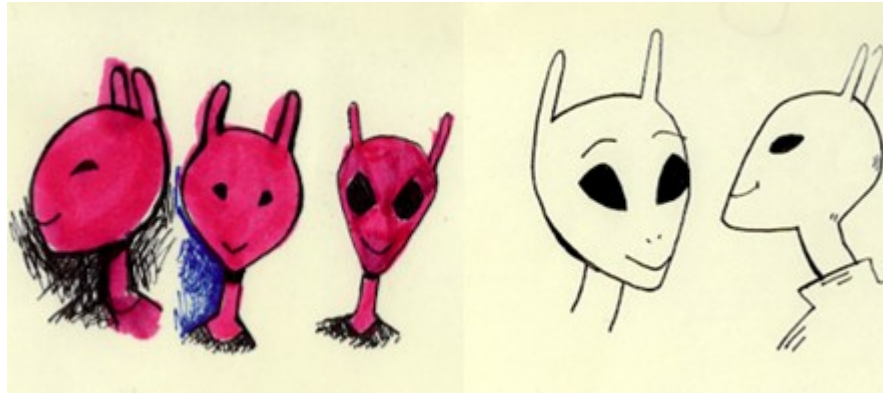


Image 28 Early sketches of Nova's head (2024).
(source: own work)



Image 29 Early sketches of Nova's design (2024).
(source: own work)

I experimented with varying placements and sizes of Nova's eyes, sometimes leaning toward a basic depiction of an alien and other times giving her more human-like eyes. I ultimately decided on making them slightly smaller with moderate spacing between them. Any closer spacing made Nova appear too caricature-like, which didn't suit the emotional tone of the film. Her antennae also underwent significant changes. I experimented with making them short and stubby, as well as long with more circular, wider ends. When the antennae were

too short, they resembled cut ponytails, while excessively long ones didn't align with Nova's developed character, making her appear overly naive. Another critical element was her padded jacket. Initially, the design was exaggerated and oversized, but I discarded this idea, thinking a smaller jacket would be easier to animate. However, one of my professors suggested that the larger jacket worked better visually. Nova's long, thin legs contrasted with her friends' bulkier pant legs, boots, and smaller, tighter-fitting tops. By giving Nova a more top-heavy appearance with her oversized jacket and emphasizing her thinner, more flexible legs, her design conveyed her connection to space and her lesser connection to Earth. This feedback provided valid points that resonated with me, leading to updates in the new designs. I slightly tweaked the oversized jacket and reused it, which resulted in a much more distinctive and interesting silhouette – an essential aspect of strong character design.

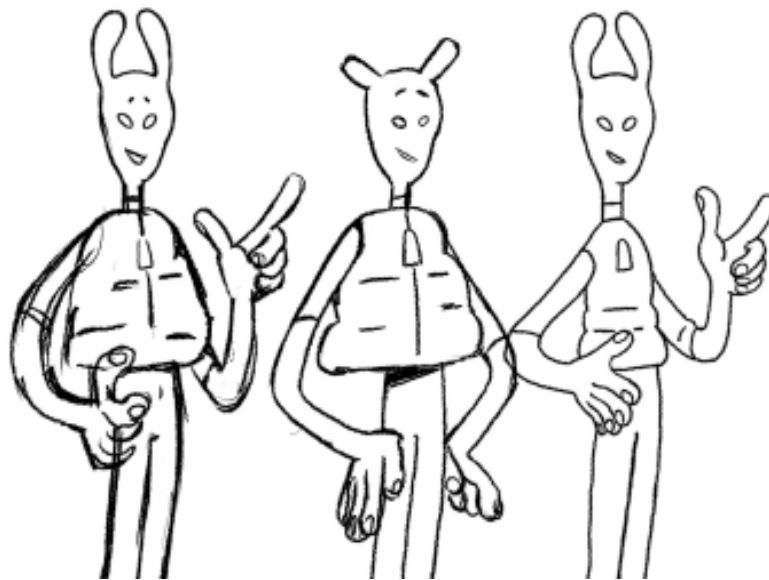


Image 30 Sketches of different versions of Nova's antennae (2024).
(source: own work)



Image 31 Comparison between Nova's earlier jacket and a later iteration (2024-2025).
(source: own work)

The color palette for the characters was another critical factor, as the associations humans have with colors can significantly influence how a character is perceived, as explained by Arash Naghdi, an American writer and filmmaker (Naghdi, 2021). From the beginning, I chose green, traditionally associated with aliens, as Nova's primary body color. While I experimented with other colors, none felt as fitting for her character and often created unintended associations. Green ultimately remained her primary color, harmonizing well with the first part of the film, which is predominantly set in the woods. One significant change involved Nova's eyes. While green represented her connection to Earth, it wasn't directly tied to the alien world, which was characterized by purple and pink tones. After comparing the green with various hues from the alien world, I selected a shade that complemented her green body without clashing. This established a dual connection: green symbolizing her bond with the human world and purple linking her to the alien world. This decision ensured that Nova didn't blend into either environment, while keeping green as her primary color and reinforcing her association with nature.

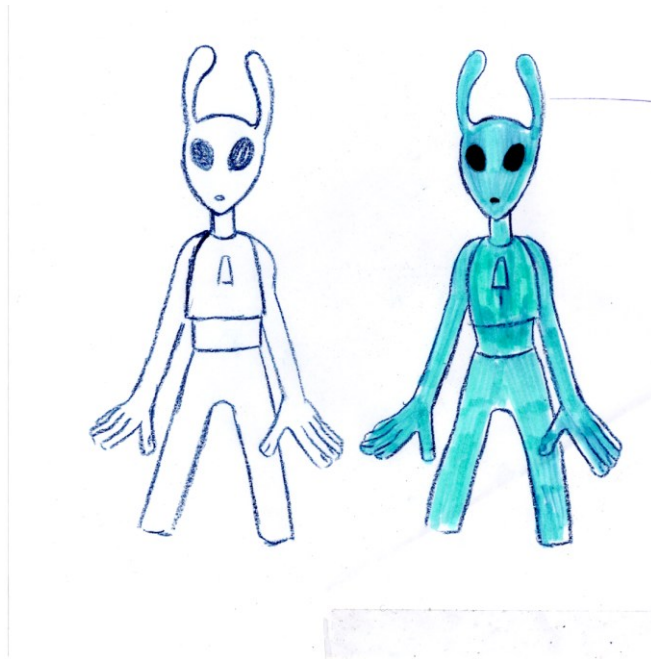


Image 32 Different versions of Nova's primary color (2024).
(source: own work)



Image 33 Final colored frame from *Safe Space* (2025).
(source: own work)

An additional step in Nova's design, compared to the others, was creating her form after the explosion. This process involved not only animating the transformation itself but also finalizing her post-transformation design. In the first animatics, Nova's monstrous form was either too animal-like or too formless. The objective was to design a distorted body that visually conveyed waves of intense, conflicting emotions without leaning too far into a horror aesthetic that might evoke fear rather than emphasize how distraught and emotionally shattered Nova was. The design needed to retain recognizable elements of Nova while presenting her in a profoundly altered emotional and physical state. To establish a design

that wasn't overly horror-like, still resembled Nova, and maintained a connection to the alien world—all to emphasize her emotions, her bond with the planet, and the devastation caused by its destruction—I examined pre-existing elements within the film. This approach ensured a cohesive visual style throughout. The final design drew inspiration from the star-shaped object given to Nova during the train ride back. The star motif is evident in the shape of her deformed head and the hole in her chest, symbolizing the grief she feels after the explosion. This design choice connects to the real-life sensation of intense emotions manifesting as a physical pain in the chest during moments of profound sadness or anger. By incorporating the star shape into her deformed body, the ending sequence gains greater emotional resonance. When she receives the star, it carries a heightened significance, compared to earlier iterations where her body was simply a formless cloud. Her eyes are depicted as hollow, and her head lacks any other facial features, drawing the viewer's focus to her body, which constantly shifts and glitches. It was essential to convey a sense of weight in her hands and feet, which varied as she ran through the woods. This symbolized the emotional heaviness she felt and how out of control her body had become. The design also drew inspiration from the real-life physical sensations emotions can evoke, creating a subconscious relatability for viewers by connecting Nova's turmoil to their own experiences.

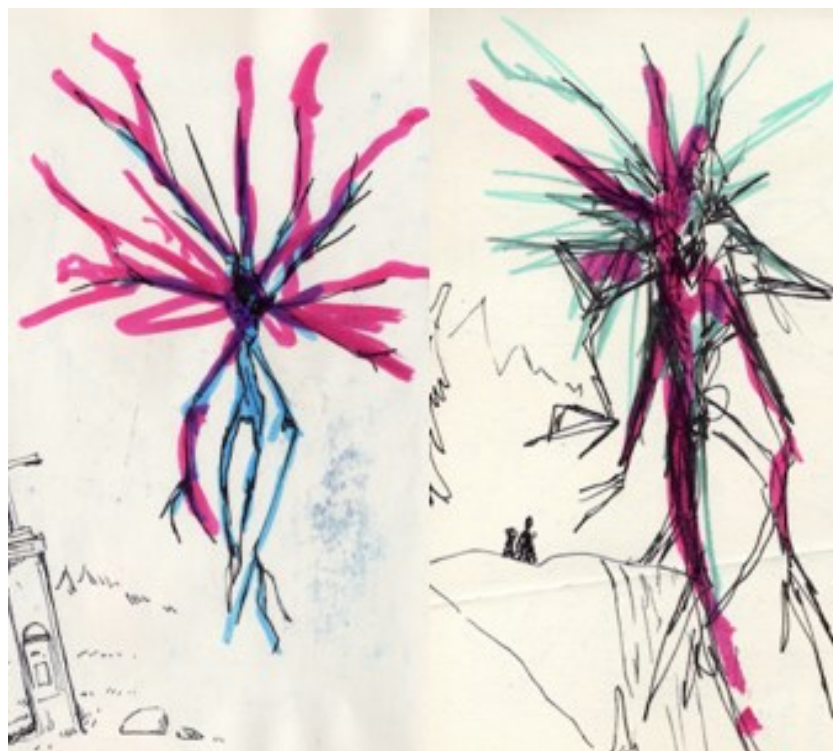


Image 34 Sketches of Nova's transformation (2024).
(source: own work)

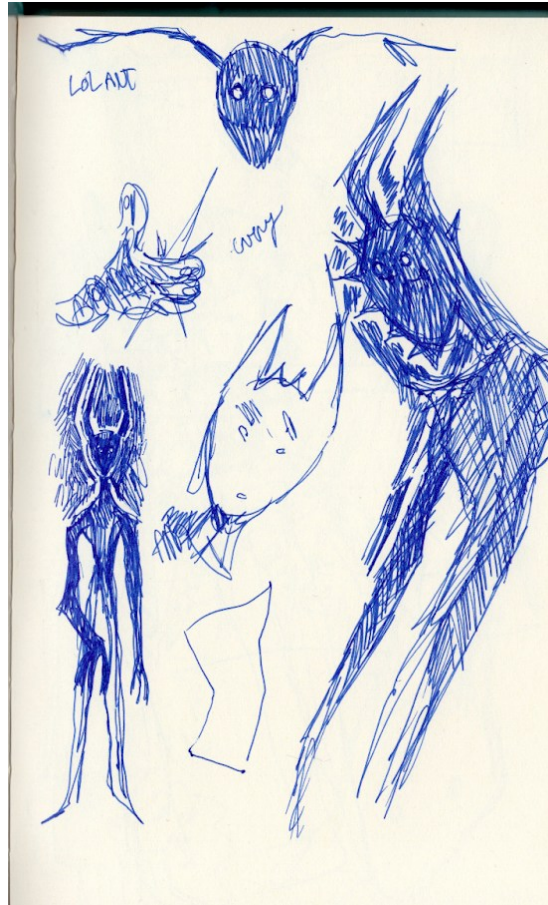


Image 35 Further sketches of Nova's transformation (2024).
(source: own work)



Image 36 Nova's transformation depicted in earlier animatics of *Safe Space* (2024).
(source: own work)

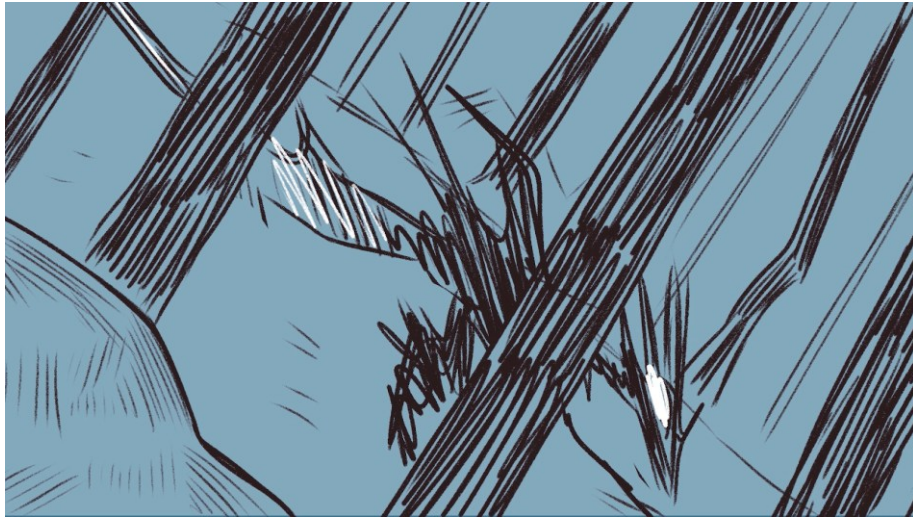


Image 37 Nova's transformation in an earlier version of the animatic for *Safe Space* (2024).
(source: own work)

When animating this design, I employed a Z-like motion for her movement. One part of the body, typically a shoulder, would take the lead and deform to a point along the Z arc before another part of the body took over and deformed further. This approach aimed to reflect the twisting, uncontrollable nature of her transformed body, deviating from standard animation techniques to emphasize the painful and unsettling nature of her transformation.



Image 38 Frames from an early animation test of Nova's transformation (2024).
(source: own work)



Image 39 Final design of Nova's transformation in the finished film (2025).

3.4 Zora's Design and Development

Each character presented unique challenges in their writing and design. For Zora, finalizing her design proved to be the most difficult. While I had a clear vision of her triangular silhouette and her defining tight ponytail, which symbolize her attention to her looks and femininity, these elements often shifted during development, and I struggled to establish consistent proportions, which were needed for a functional animation, so the character would stay consistent and understandable for the viewer. When trying to make several animation tests, her mismatched proportions ended up not working for the animation and I struggled to convey the main motif of her character. The goal was to make her the most expressive character, allowing her movements to be theatrical and dynamic, supporting her nature through her acting and movement. The most significant change was repositioning her ponytail higher than initially designed and enlarging the lower part of her body, particularly her legs and boots. I also wanted her pants to resemble a wide skirt to highlight her femininity, as she is the most traditionally feminine character of the trio. Zora's design challenged some foundational principles of character design and the typical associations people have with shapes and colors. While the characters follow the foundations of traditional character design, I wanted them to feel more authentic and nuanced, deliberately subverting some of the traditional advice given when designing a character as they are mentioned across the animation industry and specifically described by an American lead animator and character designer Tom Bancroft (Bancroft, 2006), where he details the fundamentals, including shapes, color and silhouette. Although Zora is the most upbeat,

feminine, and talkative of the group, her design is based on triangles, a shape often linked with strictness or danger. Her primary color, blue, is commonly associated with sadness or calmness. While these choices might seem counterintuitive, they were intentional with specific personal meaning behind them. I subverted the most feminine character to break away from stereotypical depictions of femininity in animated media. Zora's triangular body shape does not imply danger or malice but instead reflects her being slightly out of shape, as hiking and sports aren't her strengths. The triangle motif was also reimagined as a positive trait—her wide, cartoonish smile. Despite its sharp corners, her smile exudes warmth and positive energy. Additionally, I gave Zora a beauty mark above her lip and a larger, sharper nose—features not commonly associated with positive traits in media, particularly in animated films (Schutt, 2022). These traits are often linked to witches or villains, as discussed by American sociology major and writer Tatum Schutt in her analysis of facial features typically assigned to negative characters in animated films.

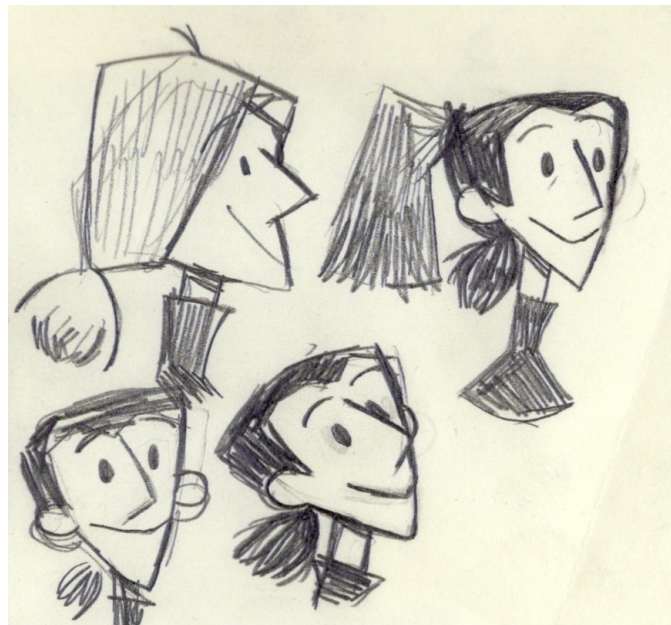


Image 40 Early sketches of Zora's design (2024.)
(source: own work)

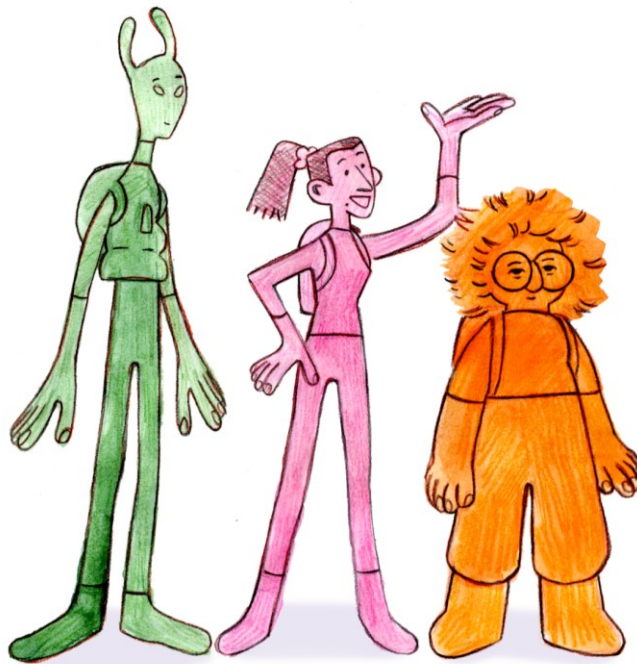


Image 41 Early sketch of the trio with a different primary color for Zora (2024).
(source: own work)

When exploring her color palette, I initially considered pink or orange to emphasize her warmth, optimism, and femininity. However, pink felt too stereotypical for the most feminine character and clashed with the trio's overall color scheme. Orange, while vibrant, overwhelmed her features and distracted from the design. I ultimately chose blue to foreshadow her deep feelings of sadness later in the story. I leaned more into the symbolism of blue as a healing, calm color with underlying elements of sadness. This duality complemented Zora's character, creating an interesting contrast between her vibrant, upbeat personality and her emotional state at the end.



Image 42 Sketch of Zora with a different primary color (2024).
(source: own work)

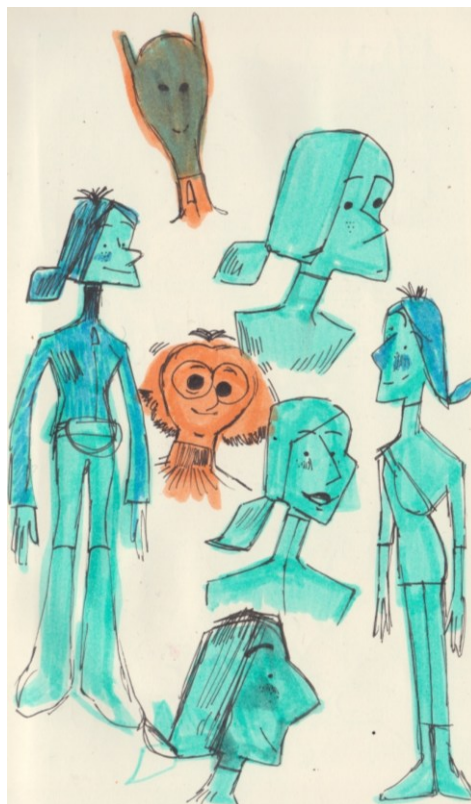


Image 43 Early sketches of Zora's design (2024).
(source: own work)



Image 44 Final design of Zora's character (2024).
(source: own work)

When explaining Zora's character, the main inspiration and references were two characters, one being Ty Lee from the Nickelodeon animated series *Avatar: The Last Airbender* (2005–2008). Ty Lee is a skilled fighter with an exceptionally cheerful, wholesome personality and a high-pitched voice. While Zora was not a direct copy of Ty Lee, her character served as a valuable starting point, particularly in shaping Zora's role as the upbeat, energetic member of the trio. However, Zora's personality was intentionally toned down compared to Ty Lee's overly chipper demeanor and squeaky voice, which leaned too much into a caricature of her traits rather than her actual character. By dialing back these traits, I crafted a character who felt more grounded and fit better within the overall tone of the story.



Image 45 Ty Lee from the Nickelodeon animated series *Avatar: The Last Airbender* (2005–2008).

(source: Postavy.cz <https://www.postavy.cz/ty-lee/>)

3.5 Olya's Design and Development

At the beginning of Olya's development, she was envisioned as the comedic relief character. Her design was round, and she was initially portrayed as out of shape, struggling with the hike up the mountain. However, this approach felt predictable and overly stereotypical, and I aimed to create more complex and nuanced characters. In the early stages, her character lacked depth and complexity. To redefine her design, I leaned into the circle as a symbol of strength and resilience. While she is not overweight, Olya has a broader, stronger build paired with a shorter stature. This choice gave her a grounded and sturdy presence.

Similar to Zora, Olya's primary color contrasts with her outward character traits. Orange, often associated with optimism, confidence, and joy, contrasts with her quiet, sarcastic demeanor. Olya rarely speaks, but when she does, her comments carry subtle sarcasm. She is calm, collected, and very physically durable. However, her choice of orange reflects her inner warmth and deep care for others, and this combination resulted in a more layered character, which was my intention. This duality is seen in her interactions with Nova and Zora, where she supports Nova's pranks and reciprocates her friends' playful energy and jokes. One standout moment that reflects this softer side is in the pub scene, where Olya drinks an overly complicated, sweet drink with a happy expression, offering a glimpse into her playful inner world.



Image 46 Early sketch of Olya (2024).
(source: own work)



Image 47 Later design of Olya's character (2024).
(source: own work)

Regarding the character I drew inspiration from, initially, I sensed a connection to the main character Daria from the animated sitcom *Daria* (1997-2002). Daria is a melancholic and cynical teenage girl, navigating high school with a disillusioned and deadpan attitude. However, Daria's character was too mean and cynical to align with Olya's personality, as I envisioned it. Some inspiration came from Daria's tone of speech, but (in contrast to Zora, and toning down the Ty Lee impression), I had to dial up the way Olya would speak, so she

would sound like she was actually enjoying the trip. After looking at more different media and carefully analyzing portrayed characters to find a matching reference, I found inspiration in Rosa Diaz from the live-action series *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* (2013–2021). Rosa, a hardcore and seemingly emotionless detective, rarely shows vulnerability but is deeply loyal and supportive of her friends, reflecting the same duality that Olya has. This recommendation helped shape Olya into a character who could maintain her stoic demeanor while revealing her caring nature through her actions and occasional moments of humor, which resulted in a more likable character for the viewer.

Olya's hair was one of the biggest challenges in her design. It was a focal point of several visual gags in the film. In early iterations, pieces of the alien planet even got stuck in her hair, which were later given to Nova. The hairstyle is defined by its simple, round form with a few lines suggesting a shape. However, during animation, I discovered that the simplicity of the hair design often felt unstable, with its outline appearing glitchy or inconsistent. As a resolution, I added a sketch layer under the animation of a circle to keep the hair consistent throughout the film. Her clothing also underwent a slight redesign to better reflect her personality. While Olya wears big boots similar to Zora's, her pant legs are tucked into them, adding to her practical and functional appearance. She also wears overalls instead of a separate shirt and pants, slightly resembling a mechanic or repairperson. This detail reinforces her role as the grounded, reliable one in the group—the character who has everything together, even when things fall apart.

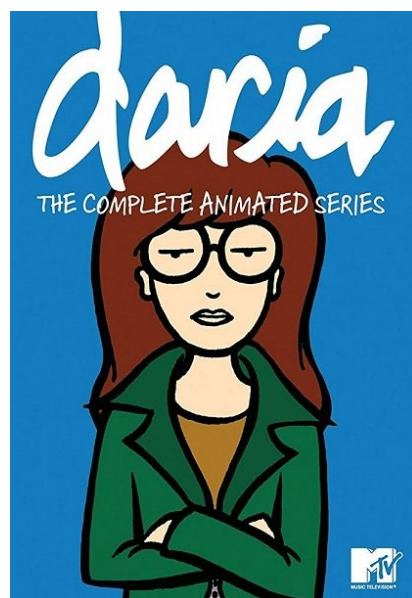


Image 48 Poster for the MTV animated series *Daria* (1997–2001).
(source: ČSFD <https://www.csfd.cz/film/181306-daria/recenze/>)



Image 49 Rosa Diaz from the TV series *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* (2013–2021).
(source: Postavy.cz <https://www.postavy.cz/rosa-diaz/> (2013–2021)).



Image 50 Final design of Olya in *Safe Space* (2025).
(source: own work)

4 VISUAL AND ANIMATION TESTS

After finalizing the characters and gathering inspirational materials, I began developing the unified visual style of the film. This process involved exploring how the characters would be animated while incorporating elements of traditional 2D hand-drawn animation. I also experimented with various materials, including different types of paper, drawing tools, and painting techniques, to achieve a visual style with a handcrafted aesthetic. The goal was to create a look that felt organic and textured, rather than relying entirely on digital methods.

4.1 Animation Tests

When developing the technique for animating *Safe Space*, my initial approach involved taping a peg bar to my graphics tablet and using regular office paper to transfer the digitally animated characters, including their line art. The goal was to maintain the flexibility and mistakes that come with sketching on the tablet, as doing so directly on paper would be too time-consuming, while still achieving the texture and hand-drawn feel in the final transferred image. I originally intended to use a blue gel pen for the line art, but it didn't seem vibrant enough and didn't fit the aesthetic of the film. The entire animation ended up looking too shaky. To address these issues, I transitioned to creating line art digitally, printing the frames with minimal opacity, and coloring them traditionally. This method yielded some promising results, with some frames having a very nice texture and vibrant colors. I started with markers, which I originally liked in my earlier concepts, but they often bled through the paper, and their colors were too intense for the visuals of the film. Similarly, when I used watercolors, the paper often ripped or bled through the barely visible line art, resulting in messy frames. I then tried to adjust it with additional digital effects, but this added unnecessary work that didn't produce the desired results. The natural feel of the pencil on paper seemed appropriate for the film's aesthetics, so I tried transferring the line art done with colored pencils onto paper. I would print out the sketch, trace it with a colored pencil, and then edit each frame in Photoshop to isolate the pencil lines, removing the scanned paper in the background. Afterward, I would slightly color in the character digitally and use a pre-made pencil texture overlay to apply over the characters. However, this approach wasn't ideal, as cleaning the rough pencil texture in Photoshop was tedious. The texture of the pencil left too many white pixels from the paper, and doing this for every single frame was incredibly time-consuming. The process also consumed pencils at an alarming rate, which was problematic due to running out of materials quickly without satisfactory results.

Additionally, the pencil-colored textures felt artificial, leading to mismatched characters and frequent errors when compiling the layers. Next, I attempted to fully color each frame with colored pencils. However, the thinness of the paper allowed its texture to show through, making the characters appear lifeless. After several iterations, one of my supervisors, Martin Kukal, recommended a hybrid approach: using flat digital colors as a base, printing out these digitally colored frames, and then coloring over them with colored pencils. This approach proved both time-efficient and visually effective. It preserved the handcrafted aesthetic I wanted, eliminated the distracting white specks from the paper, and the printed digital colors provided a vibrant foundation for the pencils. This technique offered the ideal balance between traditional and digital methods, fitting the film's style.

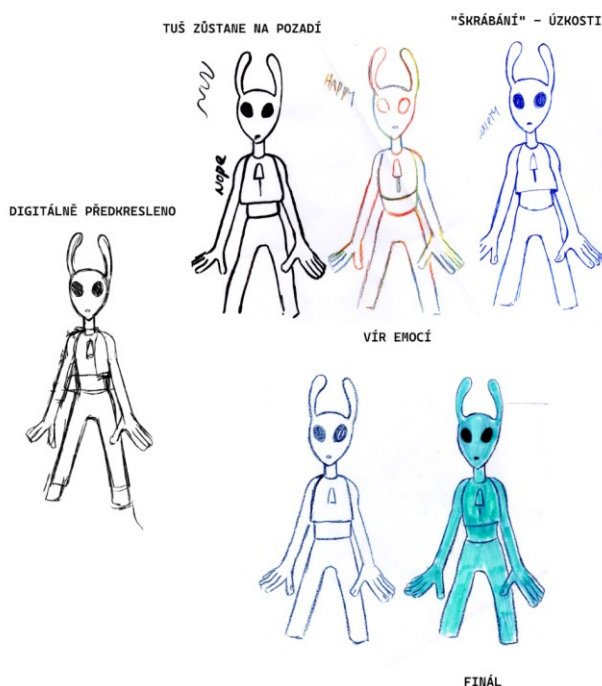


Image 51 Tests of different art techniques (2024).
(source: own work)

The final aspect of the animation tests involved determining the frame rate. Initially, I aimed to challenge myself by animating the entire film at 24 frames per second, which is often the animation industry standard, departing from my usual approach of 12 frames per second, which is also commonly used in films and is less time-consuming. However, after several tests, I realized that adjusting to the faster frame rate would require significant time and practice, which I could not afford given the other demanding aspects of the project. I decided that 12 frames per second was sufficient, so I returned to this setting.

To further differentiate this film from my previous work, I adopted a new approach to character animation. During my bachelor's film, I adhered strictly to turnarounds and meticulously followed character models to ensure consistency, which is important, but overdoing it made the animation feel artificial, sacrificing its natural elasticity. For this project, I developed one model for each character but used it as a loose guide rather than a strict reference. This allowed me to prioritize a more organic and elastic feel in the characters' movements. With the characters' designs, animation techniques, and materials established, I shifted my focus to developing the film's world and its environment.



Image 52 Frame from an early animation test for *Safe Space* (2024.)
(source: own work)



Image 53 Frame from an early animation test of *Nova* (2024.)
(source: own work)



Image 54 Frame from an early animation test of Olya (2024.)
(source: own work)

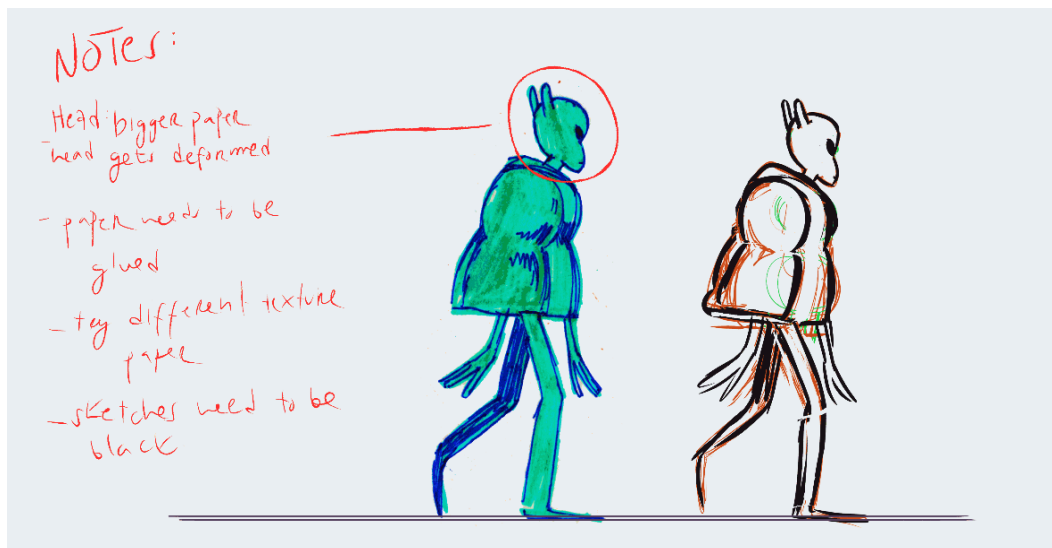


Image 55 Notes for future improvement of Nova's animation (2024).
(source: own work)

4.2 Background Tests

Similar to the characters, the first concepts for the backgrounds were created using colored markers, ink, and gel pens. These initial sketches were early attempts to capture nature through my personal perspective. I aimed to make the backgrounds less cluttered than in my previous projects, focusing on the core shapes of the elements in the background rather than adding unnecessary details. These foundational principles regarding shapes in the environment are recognized in the animation industry as standards and are described by

American layout and background artist Mike Scott Fowler (Fowler, 2002). My initial attempts were drawn on basic white paper using a blue gel pen. Surprisingly, the results presented a similar problem to when this line art was used for character animation. Rather than being overcomplicated, the backgrounds felt vast and empty. The process of testing background designs paralleled the animation tests. I worked with various forms of ink, including traditional black ink diluted with water and different colored inks. I also experimented with fully colored trees and rocks using pencils, watercolor, acrylics, and many other art mediums. Each technique presented a different issue and failed to complement the characters without blending in too much with the environment. I eventually settled on yellow-tinted paper for ink drawing, adding hints of colored pencils to the scenes. However, the backgrounds still felt flat and disconnected from the characters.

After many attempts, I realized that I needed to develop a unified background visual style right from the opening shot. Therefore, all my other experiments with different mediums and techniques were applied in the background of the opening sequence on the train, specifically, the seat the girls were sitting on. To find the correct visual style, I created at least thirty different versions of the train seat, each using a different medium or art technique. While designing organic elements like trees and nature allowed for more fluid drawings, the train seat posed a unique challenge as one of the few man-made settings in the film. Its design needed to establish a consistent visual approach that would work in both natural and man-made environments. I experimented with different papers of varying weights, tints, and textures, as well as numerous techniques: pastels, ink, colored pencils, watercolor, and ballpoint pens. I also tried combining digital line art with traditional coloring by hand, but none of these methods achieved the desired look. Inked line art often overpowered the scenes, while oversimplified backgrounds felt too empty and failed to convey the film's warmth. Finally, I discovered a fitting, slightly sturdier, less yellow-tinted sketchbook paper and used only colored pencils and pastels for the base color. I defined rough shapes and placed more emphasis on the values and shadows. Removing the ink line art helped the characters stand out while maintaining the backgrounds' depth and warmth.

A critical design choice was distinguishing the alien world from the human world with a specific border between the two, each having its own visual style. This separation was essential for both the visual and emotional distinction, with a lot of thought put into each part.

4.3 Development and Contrast Between the Alien and Human World

After numerous attempts to create distinct visual styles for the film's three key environments—the human world, the mountain border, and the alien world—I finalized the following background stylizations:

- **The Human World:** The settings in the human world, such as the train, the woods, and the pub, were designed in warm yellow, red, and green tones to evoke the positive emotions the characters experience at the beginning of their journey. These backgrounds relied heavily on pastels as the base and colored pencils, with no defined line art, creating colorful and warm scenes.



Image 56 Final background for *Safe Space* (2025).
(source: own work)

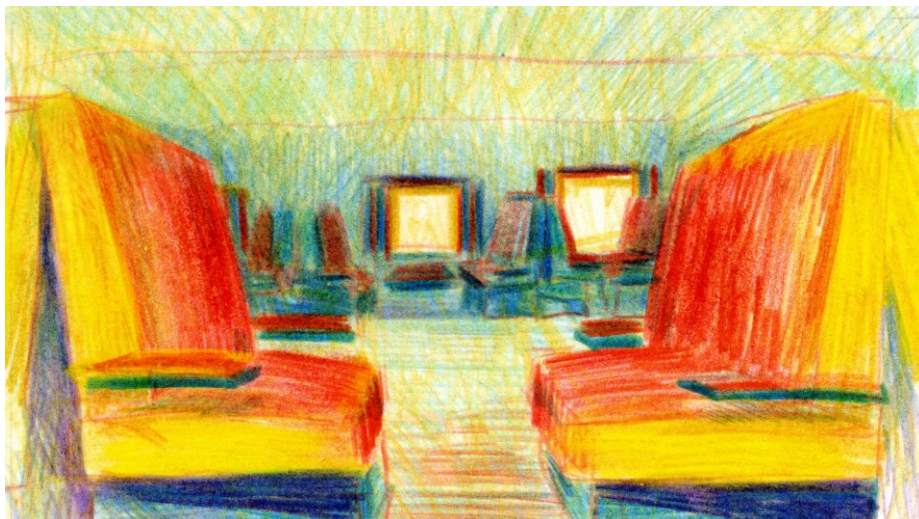


Image 57 Final background for the interior of the train in *Safe Space* (2025).
(source: own work))

- **The Mountain Border:** The mountain, serving as a symbolic and physical border between the human and alien worlds, required its own distinct style. Several attempts were made to design the cracked middle of the mountain, but the pastels and pencils were too overwhelming. Ultimately, I chose to use a mechanical pencil without coloring in the mountain, establishing its neutrality between the two worlds.



Image 58 Final background for the mountain border in *Safe Space* (2025).
(source: own work)

- **The Alien World:** Nova's alien world needed to reflect her essence while maintaining visual separation from the human world, which already used green tones. The alien world required a magical, ethereal quality to heighten the emotional impact of its eventual destruction. This environment had two phases: the world before the explosion and the world after.



Image 59 Digital layout for the background of the alien world in *Safe Space* (2025).



Image 60 Final background of the alien world in *Safe Space*, rendered using pencils (2025).
(source: own work)

For the phase before the explosion, I initially experimented with blue tones to evoke open skies and space. However, this palette felt too similar to Zora's character, which was undesirable, since the alien world needed to be more closely linked to Nova. I shifted the hues to a soft pink, a color not present in the trio except in parts of Nova's eyes, establishing her connection to the alien world. This choice gave the scene a fragile, magical quality. To achieve this look, I created the base digitally using the lasso tool, where I would create a shape and later fill the selection, focusing on the core shapes of the objects. I then printed the designs and enhanced them with colored pencils for texture and depth.

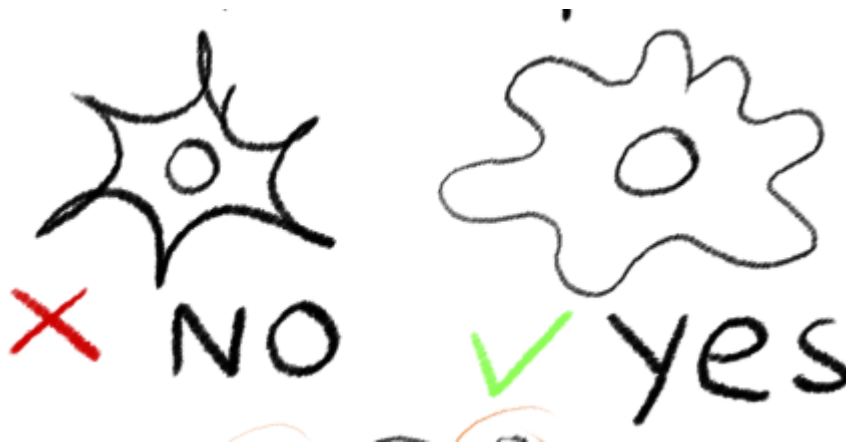


Image 61 Instructions on how to depict the shape of the portal (2025).
(source: own work)



Image 62 Early design of Nova's planet (2024).
(source:own work)

As an extra design detail for the planet, I shaped its patterns to resemble a human heart, complete with veins and tubes. While the image of a broken heart is overused in media, this design was subtle enough to appear as an interesting pattern rather than a direct symbol of a heart, which traditionally symbolizes love or emotional pain. The portal also followed a specific design rule: it had to feature round, soft edges during its opening and when fully open. After the explosion, its edges needed to become spiky, reflecting the dramatic change in tone. For the phase after the explosion, I used the same digital base technique but switched to mechanical pencil for detailed cross-hatching. The resulting sequence is rendered in grey tones with a pink tint, serving as a reminder of the planet's previous color and vitality before its destruction.

For the phase after the explosion, I continued using the same digital base technique but switched to mechanical pencil for detailed cross-hatching. The resulting sequence is rendered in grey tones with a pink tint, serving as a reminder of the planet's previous color and vitality before its destruction.



Image 63 Digital layout for the background of the destroyed alien world in *Safe Space* (2025).
(source: own work)



Image 64 Final background of the destroyed alien world in *Safe Space*, rendered using pencils (2025).
(source: own work)

5 MUSIC AND SOUND DESIGN

Not only were the visuals of the film important, but the entire process of sound design and music played a crucial role as well. While I possess a minimal sense of rhythm necessary for animation, my ability to design or select sound is lacking. Therefore, I was thrilled when Ania Kuznetzova, the sound designer behind my bachelor's film, agreed to collaborate with me again. This was promising for the project, as I already had experience working with her, and she personally resonated with several themes in the project, such as the loss of home and female friendships. Additionally, through some associates I met at the FilmTalent festival in Zlín, I acquired a contact for a Polish composer, Paulina Derska, whose emotional approach to composing aligned with my vision for the film. After I approached her with the project, she expressed interest in working on it and composing the score. Unfortunately, due to personal reasons concerning her family, her work on the project was postponed to a later date.

However, I still needed at least placeholder music for the film's submission, with the option to finalize the score before its official festival release. Ania agreed to select and possibly even compose some music herself, as she is experienced in scoring, though she doesn't consider it her primary skill. To guide her, I discussed the emotional progression of the film, which I had divided into distinct parts. The beginning is upbeat and has the feel of a road-trip movie, then the film transitions into the magical space of the alien world, and finally, it dips into melancholy and depression after the destruction. This emotional journey was further supported by the American composers Tim Maurice, Robin Hall, and Jay Lee (Tim Maurice, Robin Hall, Jay Lee, 2024).

Ania, as a sound designer, appreciated the film's emotional structure, as she tends to establish the emotion first in her sound design. We also discussed specific moments in the film, such as the muffling and silence after the explosion, followed by the gradual return of sounds once Nova is grabbed by Olya. While I gave her creative freedom, I highlighted the key elements that needed special attention, like Nova's crying and its gradual, alien-like distortion. This process was inspired by the ideas described by Raff Marques, a creative director from the United States (Marques, 2021).

I was asked to provide at least a few musical references that would align with my vision, which was challenging given my limited knowledge of music and sound design. However,

before and during production, I created a playlist of songs that evoked the general atmosphere I wanted for the film.

Some tracks were ultimately discarded. For example, *Dve Nevesti* (Macedonia) by the Polish folk band Percival Schutzenbach was initially chosen when the film drew heavily from Czech and Slavic nature and village themes. However, as the story evolved, these Slavic heritage themes became more of a backdrop than a central focus, so the song no longer fit. Another cut song was Meg Myers' cover of *Running Up That Hill* by Kate Bush. It was initially intended to inspire heartfelt moments between the girls, due to its grandiose tone and rhythm. However, as the narrative developed, no fitting scene for the track emerged, and it felt too emotionally charged for the direction of the film. For the film's opening, two songs heavily influenced the tone: *Tongue Tied* by Grouplove and *Wasted Summers* by Juju. While their lyrics differed from my intent, the upbeat, nostalgic vibe of the music perfectly matched the mood I envisioned for the beginning of the film. For the later, more somber part of the film, I drew inspiration from the score of Laika's *Paranorman* (2012), particularly during the scene where the main character fights Agatha in her ghost form. This dramatic score resonated with Nova's transformation. However, since Nova's moment is more tragic and sad, I shared this score with Ania and suggested a toned-down version that retained its central emotion as a reference.



Image 65 Framw from Laika's *Paranorman* featuring its main antagonist in her ghost form (2012).

(source: YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xeRtXFSYLIU>)

6 PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND DIRECTING

A crucial aspect of the production process was managing the project itself. This involved securing funding, overseeing the budget, assembling a team, directing, and ensuring that all aspects of the project were kept on track.

In the early stages, before finalizing the script, I pitched the project at two venues: Filmtalent Zlín (5-minute pitch) and Aniklany Pitch (2-minute pitch). For Filmtalent Zlín, I initially applied with the expectation of being placed in the lower budget tier (40,000 CZK) without the need for a live pitch. My project was selected for the higher budget category (100,000 CZK), which required pitching to a jury of influential figures from the television and film industry.

During this preparation for the pitch, I received crucial insights from my teachers and classmates about my rapid speech, pronunciation, and body language, which were too fast and intense for the audience to focus on my project. I restructured my pitch presentation to focus on clear, key points:

- **Introduction:** I introduced myself, my background, and why I am a trustworthy director for this project. I highlighted the awards my bachelor's project received as proof of my credibility.
- **Project Overview:** A summary of the story and introduction of the characters.
- **Themes and Motifs:** Female friendships, individuality, dealing with loss, and bittersweetness.
- **Personal Connection:** I mentioned the war in Ukraine. Initially, I hesitated, fearing it might seem exploitative, as if I were using the war for personal gain. However, after discussing it with Ukrainians, including my mother, I was encouraged to include it, as shedding light on the Russian atrocities was deemed important.
- **Technical Details:** Information on submission dates, release plans, techniques and materials used, distribution strategies, target audience, length, genre, production schedule, and budget plans.

In retrospect, I could have improved the visual aspect of my presentation for better clarity. For example, the amount of text included could have been shorter, and the plans could have been more fleshed out. However, the presentation was sufficient to receive positive feedback from the jury and secure the full grant of 100,000 CZK. I recognize that

my success in delivering the pitch was largely due to the space and support I received from my school and friends.

At the Aniklany Pitch, an event organized by several animation departments from different universities across the Czech Republic, I refined my presentation further and felt more at ease on stage, despite the shorter time for pitching. These events also provided me with numerous useful contacts that I later utilized for the further development of my film.

6.1 Networking, teamwork and task delegation

Networking was both rewarding and exhausting, as it required constant socializing and communication with others. However, I quickly realized that stepping out of my comfort zone was necessary for the success of the project, and through this effort, I managed to connect with key individuals who helped further develop the film.

A crucial part of managing a small team involved writing numerous emails. While it might seem like a simple task, it took up a significant amount of my time. To alleviate this, I enlisted the help of my partner, Lam Le, who had a strong sense of organization and helped keep everything in order. He became an invaluable project manager, handling emails on my behalf, tracking deadlines and finances through detailed Excel spreadsheets, and ensuring my film was securely backed up both online and on a personal server. He also managed any technical difficulties that arose for me or anyone working on the project and organized my files, ensuring they were properly labeled and stored for an optimal working environment. I had much to learn, not just about file organization, but also about how to write more efficient emails. When I initially contacted people, my messages tended to be long and apologetic. Lam, on the other hand, wrote emails that were concise yet polite and straight to the point. This approach saved a lot of time and energy, as it led to quicker responses and better communication. I adopted this style in future communications, understanding the importance of clear and streamlined instructions while still conveying my vision effectively.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P
1																
2		Budget	Expected	Reality			Workforce	Expected	Reality	Files		Tech	Expected	Reality	Files	
3		Total:	137631	139661			Total:	98500	99400			Total:	22742	24193		
4		Materials	16389	16068			Nova	2500	2500			Tiskárna	15000	16500	■ Bendžalov...	
5		Workforce	98500	99400			Zora	2500	2500			Pronájem Studia	1800	1800	■ Pronájem...	
6		Tech	22742	24193			Olya	2500	2500			Travel Expenses	1500	1500	■ Jízdenk...	■ Jízdenk...
7							Zvukař	15000	15000			Travel - actors	500	490	■ Bilet - W...	■ Bilet - W...
8		Money	Total	Expected			Silňhač	15000	15000			Travel - actors	500	461	■ Alicja TL...	■ Alicja Tick...
9			140000	339	2369		Hudebnice	17000	17900			Autofeed scanner	3442	3442		
10							Kája	5000	5000							
11							Týna	5000	5000							
12							Jana	5000	5000							
13							Verča	0	0							
14							Adela	5000	5000							
15							Animátor	10000	10000							
16							PIU	10000	10000							
17							Aimee	2000	2000							
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Image 66 Excel spreadsheet of finances for *Safe Space* (2024).

I collaborated with one additional animator, Veronika Džíková, a fellow student from Tomas Bata University, who assisted with cleanup and coloring for several shots. Despite having clear guides for animation, there were still occasional setbacks. For example, in one shot, the leg of one of the characters was meant to be in front but was mistakenly drawn further back. To address these issues, I started pre-recording detailed video instructions for each scene, which I uploaded for the animators to follow. If there were still minor discrepancies, such as the placement of a character's clothing, I would send screenshots with annotations explaining the error, along with detailed notes. This approach significantly reduced mistakes and misunderstandings and is a process I plan to apply to all future projects.

Additionally, having a strong team with assigned tasks allowed me to focus more on the film itself while maintaining control over all other aspects without being overwhelmed. Without proper monitoring, this could have led to disastrous consequences and hindered the filmmaking process.

7 DIRECTING OF VOICE ACTORS

One of the most challenging aspects of *Safe Space* was managing and directing the voice actors, which ultimately led to a significant setback in production. My composer, Paulina, was working primarily from Poland and had many contacts in the voice acting industry. She suggested three women in their late twenties for the voice work: Monika Bilska, an audiobook narrator and poet; Alicja Turowska, a singer in a band managed by Paulina; and Ada Chelmińska, an experienced Polish voice actor who had worked on animated films and TV shows. Though initially hesitant, I decided to trust Paulina's recommendations, as the credentials of these women were solid. I wanted to step out of my comfort zone and direct in an unfamiliar environment to test my abilities as a director.

I sent them the character descriptions, including the project details and an animatic with my rough voice acting as a reference. I received several voice lines from the actors, trying out the characters. The results were promising: Monika brought a stoic tone to Olya, Ada's feminine, high-pitched voice suited Zora, and Alicja's laid-back tone with a thicker accent gave Nova an alien-like quality. I later arranged a group call for further rehearsal, and I was reassured that these three women fit the characters.

However, early signs of potential issues emerged. One of the voice actors missed some crucial details, such as the recording time and which character she was voicing. I attributed this to simple miscommunication but grew concerned. Despite this, I felt confident in my direction and their abilities, so I moved forward with the next step: arranging a recording session.

The recording session was set in a studio in Łódź, Poland, through a contact from Monika, which was the most convenient location for all the voice actors. Scheduling the session proved challenging as we had to align everyone's availability, and the studio had a very limited five-hour window for recording. Ideally, each actor should have at least two hours to allow room for mistakes, retakes, and experimentation, but time constraints were unavoidable. As someone with limited experience in vocal coaching, I struggled to articulate my vision for certain lines and dialogue. The time constraints further impacted on the overall quality of the recordings. After receiving the final recordings, I noticed inconsistent emotional deliveries that I had not picked up on during the session. Unfortunately, re-recording was not an option due to financial constraints and the location in Poland. After incorporating the voice acting into the animatic and seeking feedback from supervisors,

classmates, and friends, I ultimately decided to discard the recordings. The performances lacked the emotional connection that the characters required. As Paul Boucher, an experienced American voice actor, discussed in his article, voice acting is critical for bringing a character to life, and without that connection, the characters would not resonate with the audience (Boucher, 2023). Therefore, I made the decision to replace the original voice actors with new ones who were better suited to the emotional depth of the roles.

After discarding the original recordings, a new recording session was needed with different voice actors, which had to be arranged in an extremely short amount of time. Through the University of Tomas Bata, I contacted Tomáš Pešek, a teacher, sound editor, and designer, who agreed to host the recording session in his studio in Zlín. The session also benefited from the presence of sound editor and designer Lukáš Pešek, as well as my supervisor Monika Hasan, whose expertise in vocal and linguistic direction proved invaluable. Due to the urgency of the new voice acting session, given the looming submission deadline, it was crucial to find a date that worked for everyone involved. After several attempts to coordinate through a group chat and spreadsheet, we moved to a more flexible interactive spreadsheet format with specific date and time options for each participant. This made it easier to select timeslots, as some people had only partial availability, while others had the whole day free. For Zora's voice, I reached out to my talented classmate and friend Marie Vrabcová, who had previously done minor voice work for my bachelor's film. Her tone and expressions were a perfect fit for Zora's character. Nova was voiced by Aimee Zia Hasan, who had also voiced the main character in my bachelor's project. She is an experienced actress and vocalist with involvement in many successful projects. Since I was familiar with her work and her ability to convey Nova's laid-back, joking nature, I was confident she would deliver a great performance. For Olya, I ended up voicing the character myself, as Olya resembled me visually. With some coaching, I felt I could deliver her lines effectively.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
1	Pozn. je nutno operativne aktualizovat, pokud nekdo prestane mit cas, pribyde neco v diari... nutno zapsat.								
2	Den	Datum	Zvuk	Adri	Monika	Aimee	Maja	Poznamky	
3	Po	24 brezen			od 17	Ne			
4	Ut	25 brezen		All day	od 18	Ne	All day		
5	St	26 brezen		All day	11:45-14:30	Ne			
6	Ct	27 brezen		All day	od 15:00	Ne			Monika muze si zaridit cele dopoledne, ale potrebuje vedet asap
7	Pa	28 brezen		All day	od 12:30	Od 14:00			
8	So	29 brezen		All day	all day	All day	All day		
9	Ne	30 brezen		All day	all day	All day	All day		
10	Po	31 brezen			NE	Ne	All day		
11	Ut	1 duben		All day	NE	Ne	All day		
12	St	2 duben		All day	NE	Ne	All day		
13	Ct	3 duben		All day	NE	Ne	All day		
14	Pa	4 duben		All day	NE	Ne	All day		
15	So	5 duben			NE	Ne	All day		
16	Ne	6 duben			all day	All day	All day		
17	Po	7 duben	od 17	All day	od 17	Ne	All day		
18	Ut	8 duben	o 18	All day	od 18	Ne	All day		
19	St	9 duben		All day	od 17	Ne	All day		
20	Ct	10 duben		All day	od 17	Ne	All day		
21	Pa	11 duben		All day	od 12:30	Ne	All day		
22	So	12 duben			all day	Cca do 17:00	All day		
23	Ne	13 duben			all day	All day	All day		
24	Po	14 duben			od 17	Ne	All day		
25	Ut	15 duben		All day	od 18	Ne	All day		
26	St	16 duben		All day	od 14:00	Ne			

Image 67 Excel spreadsheet for scheduling the voice acting session for Safe Space in Zlín (2025).
(source: own)

Directing and voicing the character myself allowed me to experience both sides of the process. Being directed and also directing others helped me better understand the challenges actors face, such as finding the right intensity for a line and managing voice loudness. This experience has given me valuable insights that I will apply to future projects. To streamline the recording process, I prepared a printed, numbered script with timecodes for when each line appeared in the animatic. Each character's lines were highlighted in their designated color, which helped the actors stay organized and minimized time spent searching through the pages. Despite having a limited time frame due to the studio's schedule, the session went smoothly, and the actors did a phenomenal job. Monika Hasan and Lukáš Pešek guided me when I voiced Olya. Since I had never voiced a character before—only using my voice for animatics—I found it challenging to follow the directions. Despite these difficulties, Lukáš and Monika managed to help me produce usable material for Olya's character. The new voice recordings were incorporated into the animatic and received overwhelmingly positive feedback from supervisors, classmates, and friends. With the new recordings in place, I could finally focus on animating the scenes with lip-sync and concentrate on completing the film in time for submission.

CONCLUSION

Safe Space was a challenging project that tested all the artistic and technical skills I developed during my studies at Tomas Bata University. I learned to draw inspiration from personal experiences without being overly literal, transforming lived moments into natural occurrences within the film. This process reaffirmed the core of my artistic abilities, often requiring me to return to the basics to produce a better final product.

Additionally, I honed my screenwriting and character development skills, continuously revisiting, refining, and applying new techniques to the script to achieve the best possible outcome for the film. I explored numerous principles of character and environmental design, adhering to them while also learning when to take creative liberties for the sake of crafting a more unique and engaging film.

This project also highlighted the importance of selecting the right team for every aspect of production—whether technical roles, actors, or animators. I realized how easily a poorly considered decision or miscommunication could disrupt the filmmaking process. Effective communication proved to be critical in ensuring the smooth execution of the project.

Throughout the process, I faced numerous obstacles, but in the end, I succeeded in creating an emotionally impactful film with a solid narrative and pacing. This experience has made me a more experienced director and animator. Reflecting on this journey, I have learned valuable lessons from my mistakes and challenges. Moving forward, I aim to apply the solutions and insights I gained to all my future projects, continuing to grow as a filmmaker.

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