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AVATAR

THE LAST AIRBENDER™

THE ART OF THE ANIMATED SERIES

Michael Dante DiMartino ☘ *Bryan Konietzko*

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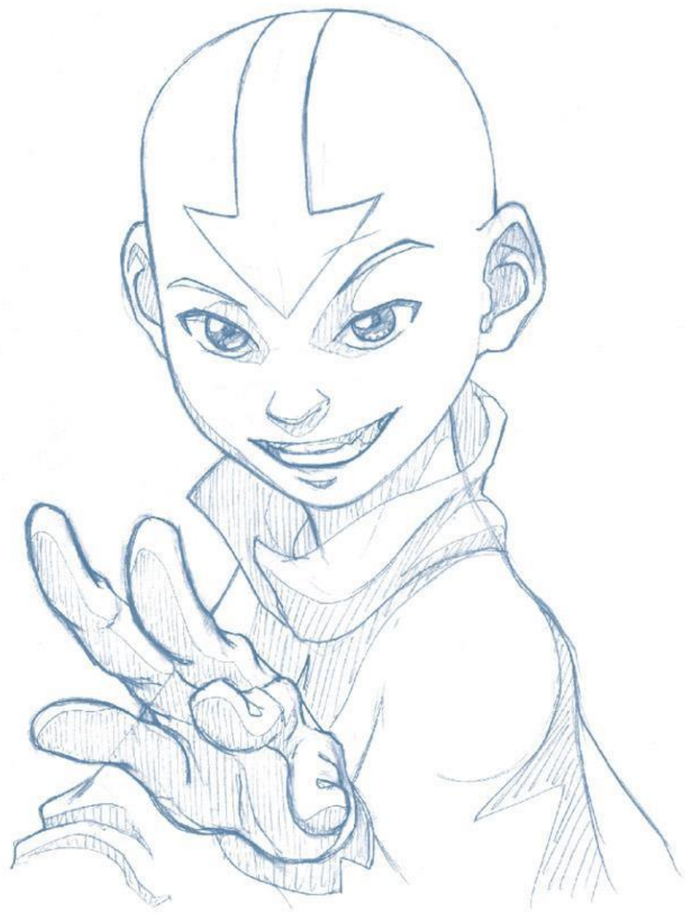

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Bryan Konietzko

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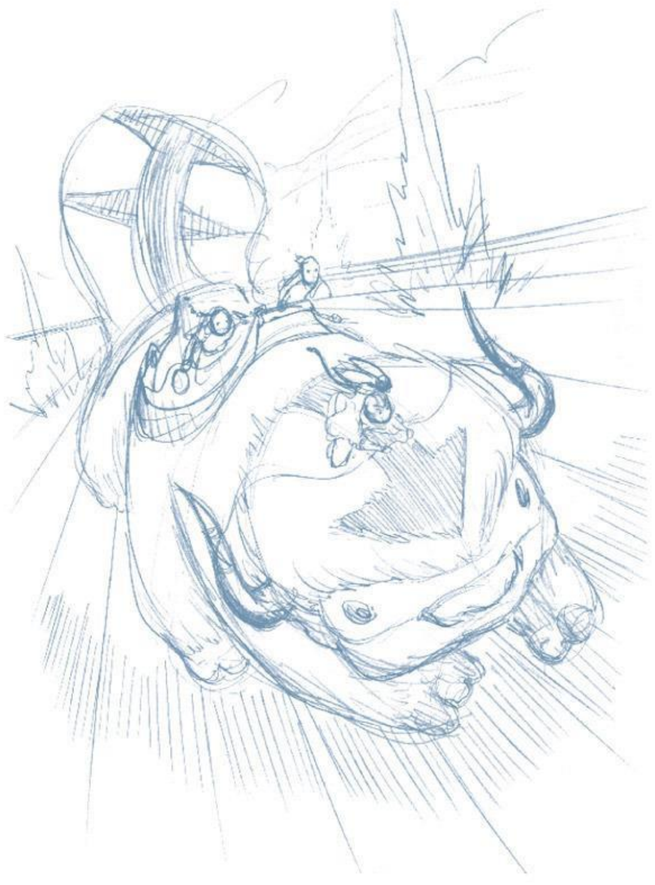
Foreword by M. Night Shyamalan



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Foreword

There is a kind of magic that art can have. It is rare. It is utterly contagious. It is in its genetics, put there by its creators. It is not an agenda. It cannot be willed. It is pure. *Avatar: The Last Airbender* has this magic, and I am completely caught in its spell.

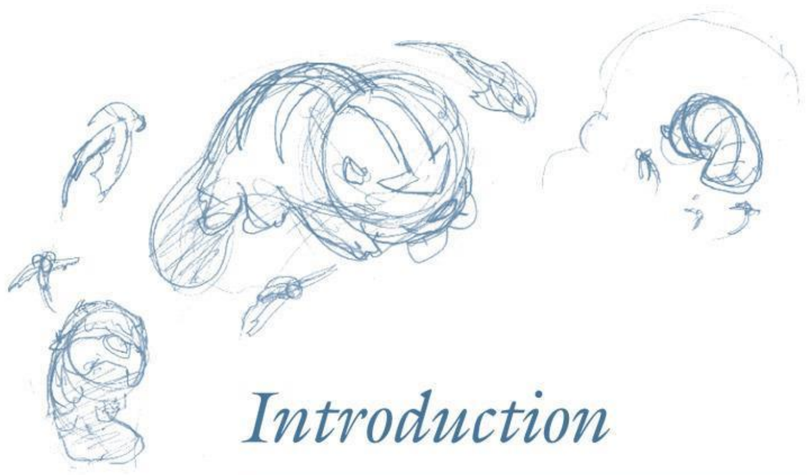
Mike and Bryan have created something of true inspiration. The convergence of their loves of anime, martial arts, Buddhism, naturalism, photography, and philosophy has formed this cinematic tale. As animators and storytellers they have a way of capturing humanity's frailties and transformations.

They have held themselves to the highest standard of artistic integrity, and the world is forming a cult around it.

Mike DiMartino and Bryan Konietzko have become my friends. Their animation is found throughout our house. Zuko, throwing fire, will meet you as you walk down the hall. Sokka, diving with his boomerang, will greet you as you turn another. And of course Aang and Katara are bending the elements in each of the kids' rooms. We are a family of devotees.

This book will definitely be on my coffee table if you come visit—but don't bring any coffee near it or you'll get yelled at by everyone in the house.

—M. Night Shyamalan
November 16, 2009



Introduction

The question people most often ask us about *Avatar: The Last Airbender* is, "How did you come up with the idea?" The second-most-asked question is, "How did you make the show?" And the third-most-asked question is, "What happened to Zuko's mother?" Our goal for this book is to fully provide an answer for the first two questions. Sorry, the last one will have to remain a mystery for now.

We want to take you through *Avatar*'s creative process, from the very first sketch of Aang, all the way through to the epic finale episodes. Because making the series required six years, hundreds of artists, and literally hundreds of thousands of drawings and paintings, unfortunately there's no way to show everything we'd like in this book. The pieces we've selected for this book are really just the tip of the iceberg, but we've tried to highlight the best artwork from every stage of the process to give you an excellent overview of how the show was created and produced.

We're forever grateful to all the artists who worked so diligently on *Avatar* throughout the years, both stateside and in South Korea, helping us to realize our vision and adding to it with their immense talent. And we'd like to send a special thanks out to our design and storyboard teams, for all of their effort and dedication. The finished episodes are a great showcase for all of the animation work that was done overseas, but this book finally offers us the opportunity to also show a wealth of our Burbank team's preproduction art.

—Bryan Konietzko and Michael Dante DiMartino
October 29, 2009

Dedicated to my teacher and mentor, Fritz Drury, and in loving memory of my father, Neil Konietzko, who always had my back.

—Bryan Konietzko

Dedicated to my parents, Alyce and Dante DiMartino, who always supported my artistic dreams.

—Michael Dante DiMartino

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CHAPTER ONE

EARLY DEVELOPMENT

The story of Avatar *really begins several years before its creation . . .*

MIKE: In 1995, I was entering my senior year at Rhode Island School of Design, majoring in film and animation. At a Halloween party, I met an illustration-major sophomore dressed in an elaborate, homemade iguana-superhero costume, wielding a Nerf gun. He aptly called himself "Iguanaman," but I soon discovered his true identity was Bryan Konietzko. Later that year, while I struggled to finish my over-ambitious student film, Bryan kindly neglected his homework to help me paint backgrounds and cels. Little did I know at the time, this was the beginning of our long friendship and the first of many creative collaborations.

After graduating in 1996, I moved to Los Angeles, followed two years later by Bryan. By 2001, I had worked my way up in the animation world, directing on *Family Guy*, *King of the Hill*, and *Mission Hill*, often with Bryan as my assistant director. By day, I drew Hank Hill, but by night, I animated my own independent short called *Atomic Love*. I developed it into a TV series idea and pitched it to a couple studios, but at the time there were already a few animated robot shows in development, so no one was interested.

BRYAN: I encouraged Mike not to give up, and suggested that if the two of us teamed up on an idea we could get a show made for sure. I had a strong feeling, based on our few years of working together and being friends, that together we made a special team. Mike and I approach art and stories from two very different perspectives, yet paradoxically we share very similar sensibilities. I think that is the secret ingredient that has kept our partnership fresh all these years.

MIKE: It was during this time that Bryan became the art director of *Invader Zim* at Nickelodeon. We had toyed with the idea of pitching a coming-of-age show inspired by each of our childhoods spent playing in the woods, but we were so busy with our own jobs that we simply didn't have the time to develop it. Then in January of 2002, Bryan called me with some surprising news that was about to change the course of our careers.

BRYAN: One day in January of 2002, early in a twenty-episode order for season two of *Invader Zim*, the show was abruptly canceled. I called Mike and told him the news and said that I wasn't going to look for another job. Instead, I was going to float for as long as I could on my savings to work full time on our idea until we got it made or I ran out of money. I called my parents and told them the same thing, and my dad replied, "You're not married, you don't have kids, you don't own anything. This is the time to take a risk. We have your back if you need it."

During my time on *Invader Zim* I formed a good relationship with Eric Coleman, the head of development for Nickelodeon at that time, and learned that he had taken an interest in recruiting me to create and pitch my own show. My last day on *Zim*, I e-mailed Eric and told him I would love to meet and discuss the possibility of pitching a show idea to him. Eric and I had a long lunch where we talked not about specific ideas for a show, but rather about how we both longed to make something with heart and integrity. We each felt it was possible to make a series that met a network's commercial requirements while still maintaining these virtues. I also took the opportunity to tell him about my plans to work with Mike, whom he had not met at that point. The meeting went so well that we continued it back at Nickelodeon later that day. Never the typical executive, Eric told me he was interested in finding great people to work with, rather than just focusing on finding the million-dollar idea. He was looking for people who were creative, easy to work with, and had the necessary experience to run a show. He believed that great ideas would naturally follow. He said his door was open, and that I should keep pitching until we got a show made. It isn't every day that you get that kind of invitation from a development executive in Hollywood.

At this point I was riding high. I knew Eric would get along with Mike, and I was sure he would love the idea we'd been working on for the past several months. Then at the end of the meeting Eric dropped the bomb, telling me what the network was *not* looking for: coming-of-age, human-character shows. I was crushed! That was exactly the kind of idea we had been crafting! Then Eric continued with the list of things the network *was* looking for. Among the directives were: 1) action and adventure (without violence), and 2) legends and lore. *Lord of the Rings* and Harry Potter were the two biggest things going on in 2002, and Nickelodeon was looking for something to answer those franchises. Eric wanted to see a show that had adventure, action, and magic. I recovered from the surprise information and regained some confidence. I told Eric that Mike and I would come back in one month and pitch him something in those genres.

Mike and I went back to square one. We laid out every idea we had on the table indiscriminately, and I dug through every random personal sketch I had done during my time on *Zim*. I found a drawing that I barely remember making, a lineup of three characters: a robot cyclops monkey with an arrow on his head holding a staff, a morose-looking,

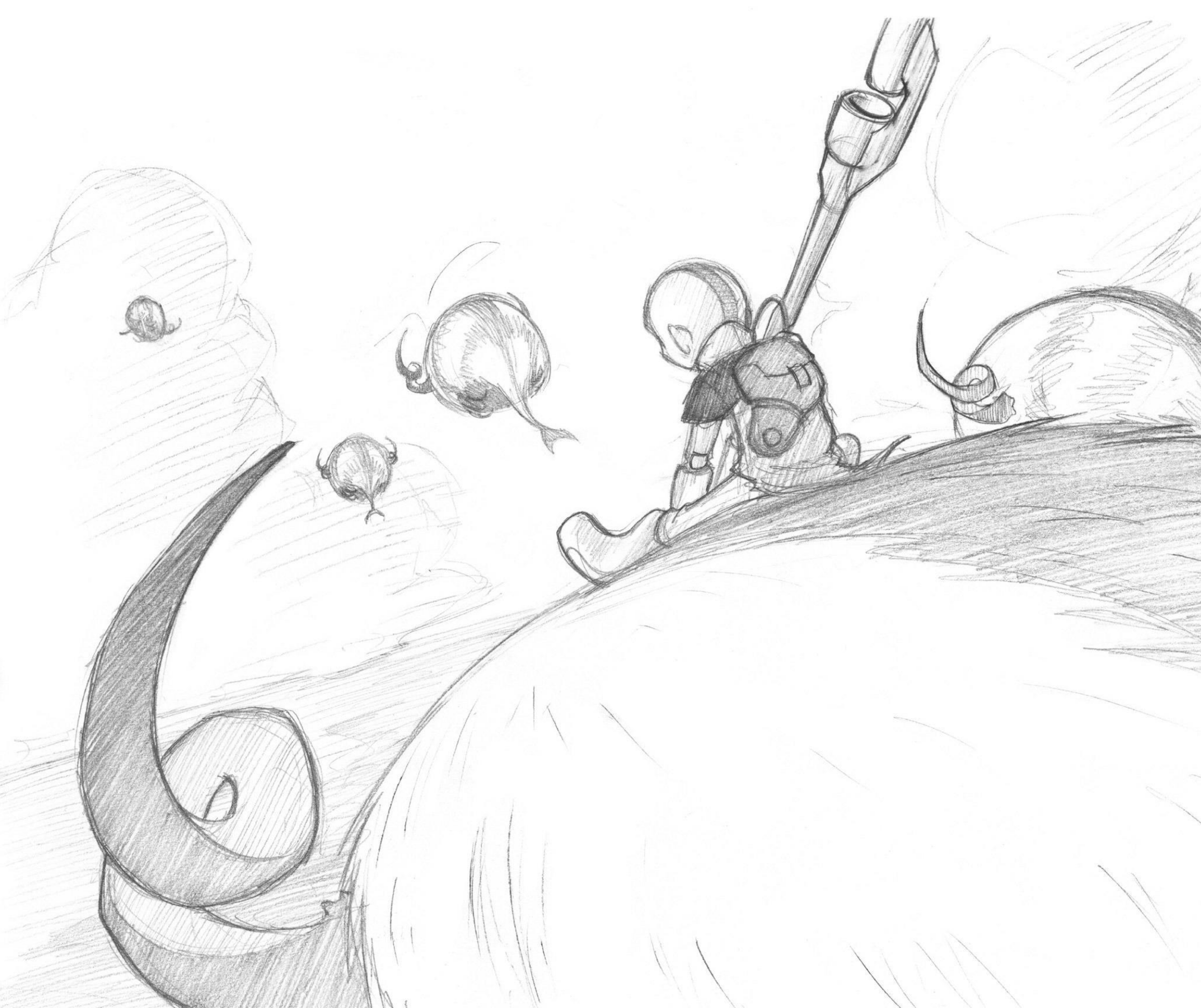
Facing chapter title page: Katara and Sokka find Aang and Appa encased in the iceberg, from the pilot prologue. Art by Bryan Konietzko. Top left: Bryan's seminal drawing of Aang from March, 2002, coming off two years of working on *Invader Zim*. You can see traces of Jhonen Vasquez's idiosyncratic style in the characters' poses. Opposite page: An early sketch of Aang shepherding some flying bison. Art by Bryan Konietzko.

balding human man in his forties wearing a futuristic outfit, and a bipedal polar bear–dog hybrid. I had become a big fan of *Cowboy Bebop* at the time and I think this drawing was a half-baked idea in response, about some trio of oddball characters traveling through space. The drawing intrigued me, but during our meeting, Eric had said to be sure to have a kid POV as an entry point to the show, either with a kid hero as the main character, or a nonhuman character like SpongeBob. Eric advised that the main character in a pitch shouldn't be somebody like a middle-aged tax lawyer, because that just wasn't going to work for Nickelodeon.

The balding guy in the drawing looked about as kid relatable as a tax lawyer, but there was something that I liked about the image. I redrew it, this time making the man a boy, but keeping him bald. I also gave the robot monkey's staff to the boy character, and put the arrow on his head too (as well as on the bear-dog's head). It was a decidedly sci-fi image, and the cheery, curious-looking boy at the center seemed like a great kid entry point to me. Of course, at this point I had no idea what story was behind the drawing, but this was the first drawing of the character that was to become Aang. Later I realized a character sculpted by my friend from college, Chris Sickels of Red Nose Studio, most likely inspired the idea of the arrow tattoo. Chris is a fantastic 3-D illustrator, and I loved a little robot character of his that was covered in various arrow decals. I owe you, Chris!

Mike liked the drawing of the arrow-tattooed boy too, so we added it to our eclectic pile of potential pitch ideas. Having worked on other people's shows for about four years, it was an incredibly liberating time for me as an artist to spend all day drawing my own ideas. I found myself unconsciously drawing fanciful hybrid animals, something I used to do when I was young. Mike and I are big fans of Hayao Miyazaki, and my sketches from this time were heavily influenced by his sensibilities. I started drawing the bald, arrow-tattooed boy herding some bison-manatee creatures in the sky. I wasn't sure how the wingless creatures could fly, but I didn't get in the way of the ideas and just let them flow onto the paper. I was really intrigued by this good-natured Huck Finnesque boy traveling the world on his own:

> *A farmer kid, shepherding mammoth floating livestock like huge manatees (but not for food or dairy). He works in the skies and clouds. Very mischievous, sort of an outcast with ground dwellers, an oddity. Maybe he lives in the clouds? Nomadic? Arrow tattooed or painted on his head so the herd trusts him.*
>
> —Bryan's notebook, March 2002



MIKE: Bryan continued doing sketches while we thought about potential story ideas. One of the inspirations for the Southern Water Tribe came from my fascination with the true survival story of Ernest Shackleton and his men, whose ship was trapped in the Antarctic in 1915. It was a harrowing story of survival against all odds in one of the harshest places on earth. I pitched Bryan the idea that the story could focus on a group of people trapped at the South Pole, where the ice was melting and breaking apart.

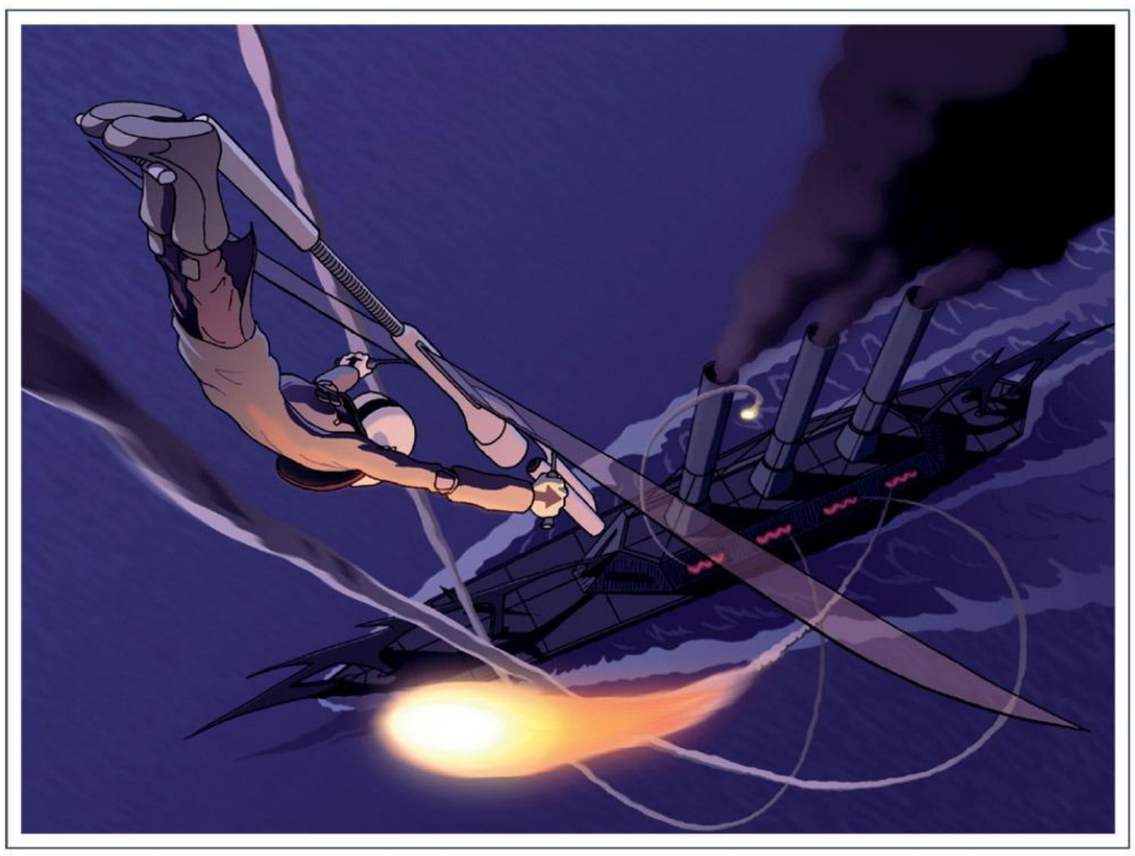
BRYAN: Two weeks after my initial meeting with Eric I went to my usual yoga class. During the first pose, a bolt of inspiration struck me: What if the people stuck in Mike's idea were a group of kids? And maybe there were "fire people" trying to melt the South Pole. And what if the person who could rescue them was this kid in the sky from my drawings? The ideas were crashing into my brain, and I was so excited to tell Mike that I could barely make it through the remaining ninety minutes.

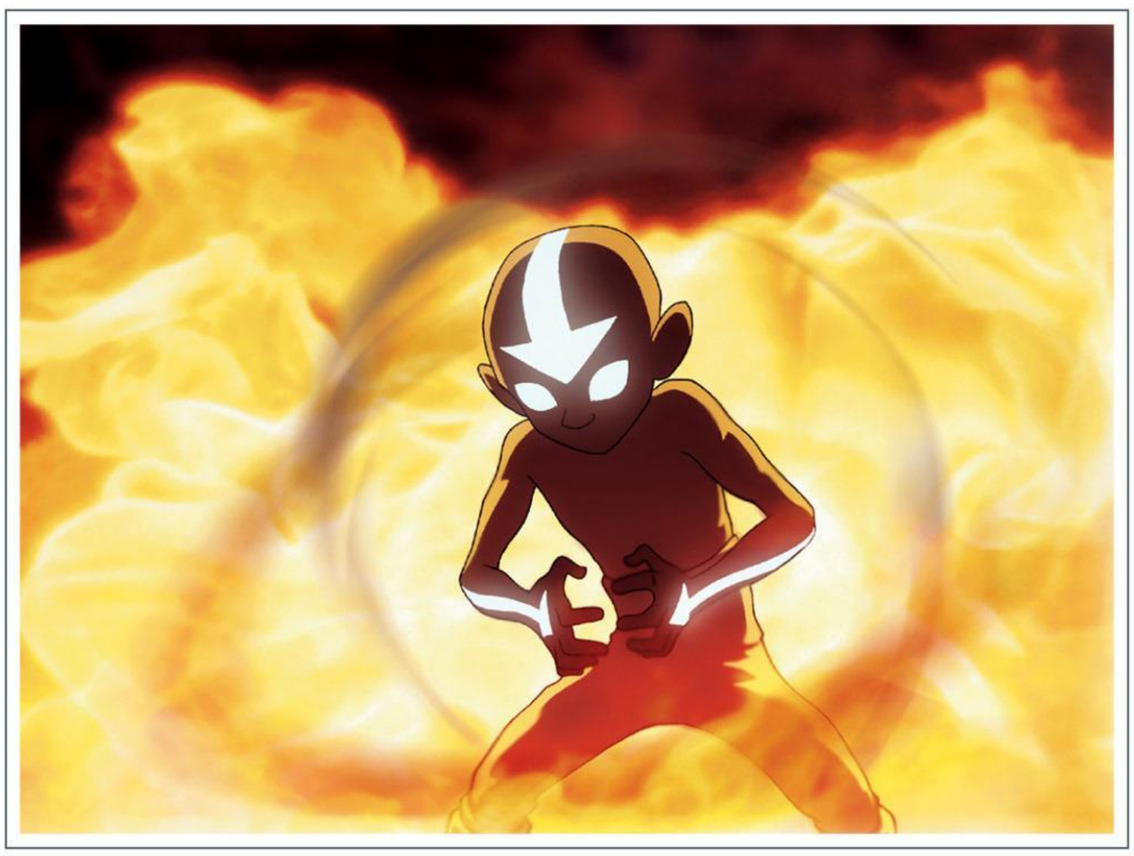
I got out of the class late in the evening and drove straight to Mike's house. These were the days before we had cell phones, so I showed up at his house unannounced and drenched in sweat. "Sorry to show up like this. I know this seems weird! But I think I had some really good ideas that I have to tell you." I pitched the scraps that I had and Mike continued with the idea, which is typical of the back-and-forth, ping-pong style of our working relationship. "The arrow boy is an air kid, and the South Pole kids are water people, the bad guys are fire people, and there are also earth people . . ." The *Avatar* world came together very quickly following that fateful night. We set aside all of our other ideas and scheduled a pitch meeting with Eric for two weeks later. During the days I worked feverishly on sketches and three finished color images that would illustrate this deep world we were conceiving.

Mike and I were big fans of Harry Potter and *Lord of the Rings*, yet we did not have any interest in creating yet another British-based, wizard-driven property. Instead we made the show out of everything we loved, pulling from our interests in Asian cultures and philosophies, traditional martial arts, yoga, anime, and Hong Kong cinema to create our own mythology.

MIKE: Only two weeks after coming up with the concept of the show, we pitched it to Eric Coleman. We showed him Bryan's early sketches of Aang, Katara, and Sokka, as well as three color images that depicted the main aspects of the show: adventure, action, and magic (in the form of bending). We pitched for over two hours, describing the four nations, the characters, and the entire story arc—all three seasons' worth. By the end, we broke every rule of how to pitch a show and overloaded Eric with information, but thankfully, we had him hooked. *Avatar* was officially in development.

Aang, Momo-3, and the unnamed polar bear-dog. Unfortunately, the latter never made it into the show, but we always really liked him and have a feeling he'll turn up somewhere. . . Concepts by Bryan Konietzko.





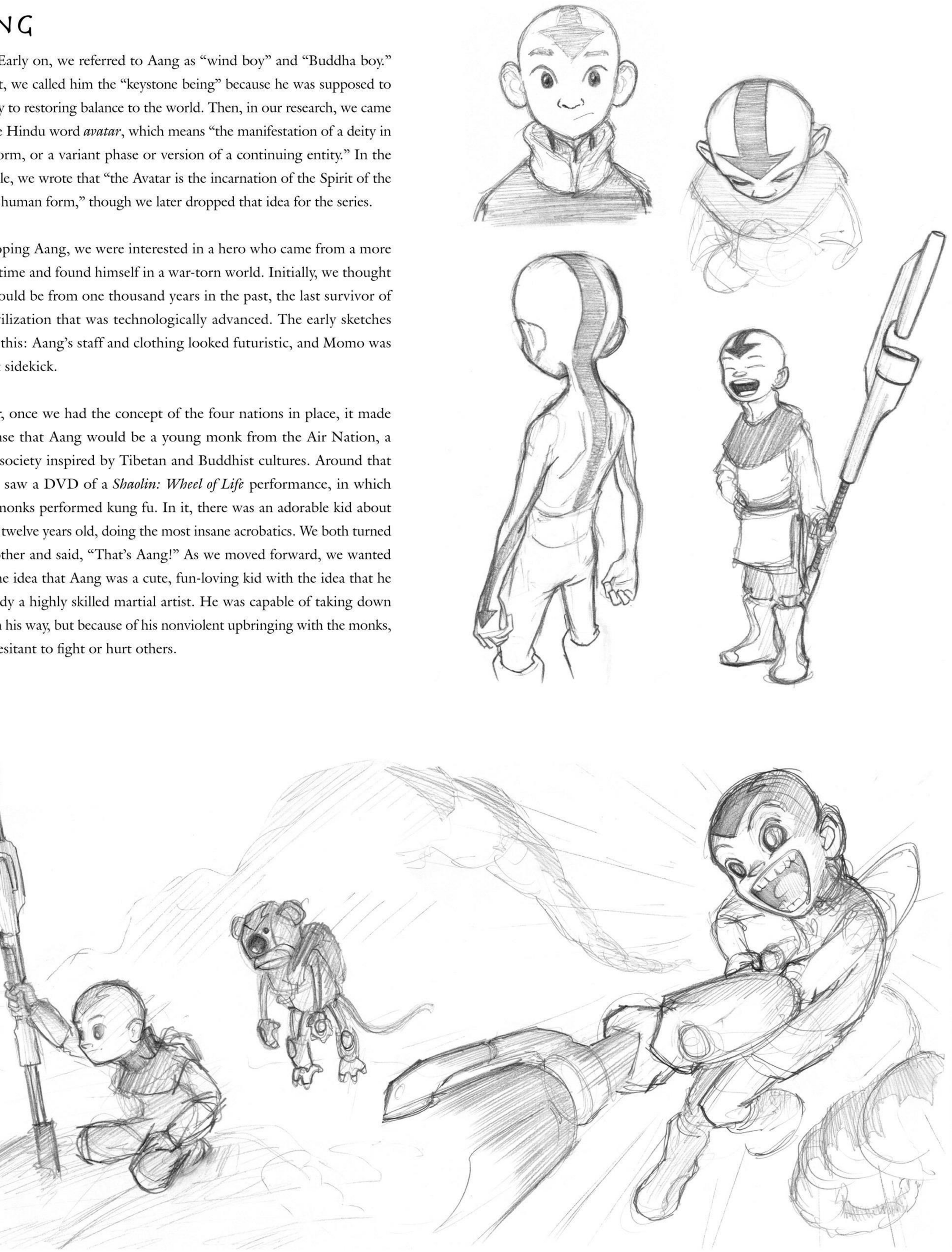
"Adventure, action, magic." Eric Coleman's three directives led to these three images that we presented at the pitch in April, 2002. Aang's glowing eyes were influenced by Naota in the final episode of *FLCL*, one of our favorite anime series. Art by Bryan Konietzko.

AANG

MIKE: Early on, we referred to Aang as "wind boy" and "Buddha boy." After that, we called him the "keystone being" because he was supposed to be the key to restoring balance to the world. Then, in our research, we came across the Hindu word *avatar*, which means "the manifestation of a deity in human form, or a variant phase or version of a continuing entity." In the series bible, we wrote that "the Avatar is the incarnation of the Spirit of the Planet in human form," though we later dropped that idea for the series.

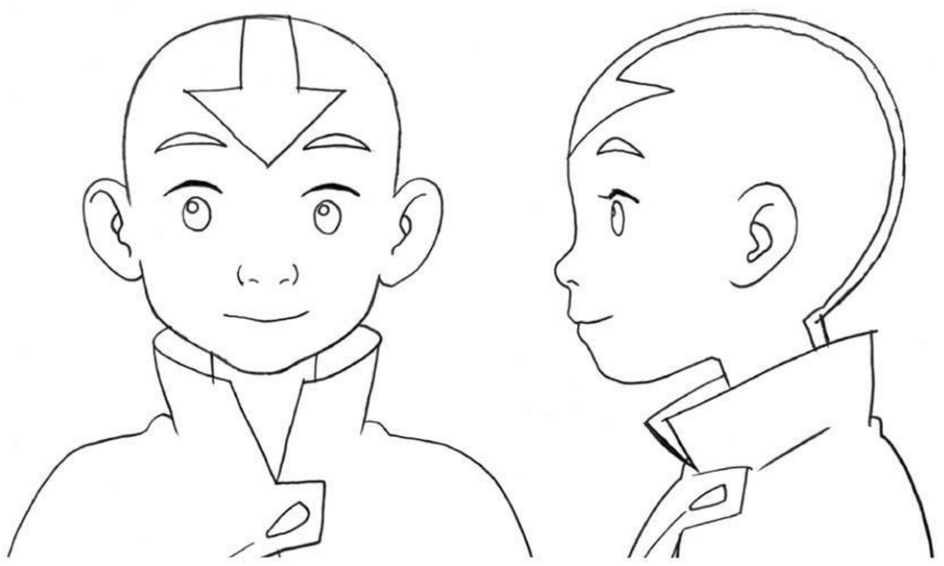
In developing Aang, we were interested in a hero who came from a more peaceful time and found himself in a war-torn world. Initially, we thought that he could be from one thousand years in the past, the last survivor of a lost civilization that was technologically advanced. The early sketches reflected this: Aang's staff and clothing looked futuristic, and Momo was his robot sidekick.

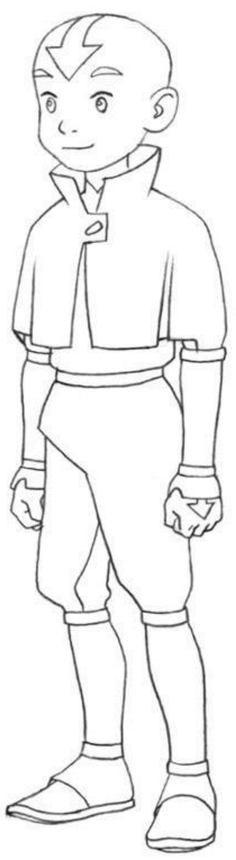
However, once we had the concept of the four nations in place, it made more sense that Aang would be a young monk from the Air Nation, a peaceful society inspired by Tibetan and Buddhist cultures. Around that time, we saw a DVD of a *Shaolin: Wheel of Life* performance, in which Shaolin monks performed kung fu. In it, there was an adorable kid about eleven or twelve years old, doing the most insane acrobatics. We both turned to each other and said, "That's Aang!" As we moved forward, we wanted to fuse the idea that Aang was a cute, fun-loving kid with the idea that he was already a highly skilled martial artist. He was capable of taking down anyone in his way, but because of his nonviolent upbringing with the monks, he was hesitant to fight or hurt others.



Early sketches of Aang from the pitch. Art by Bryan Konietzko.

Sketches of Aang from the series bible. Art by Bryan Konietzko.





Pilot animation director Yoon Young Ki's first stab at a more streamlined version of Aang.

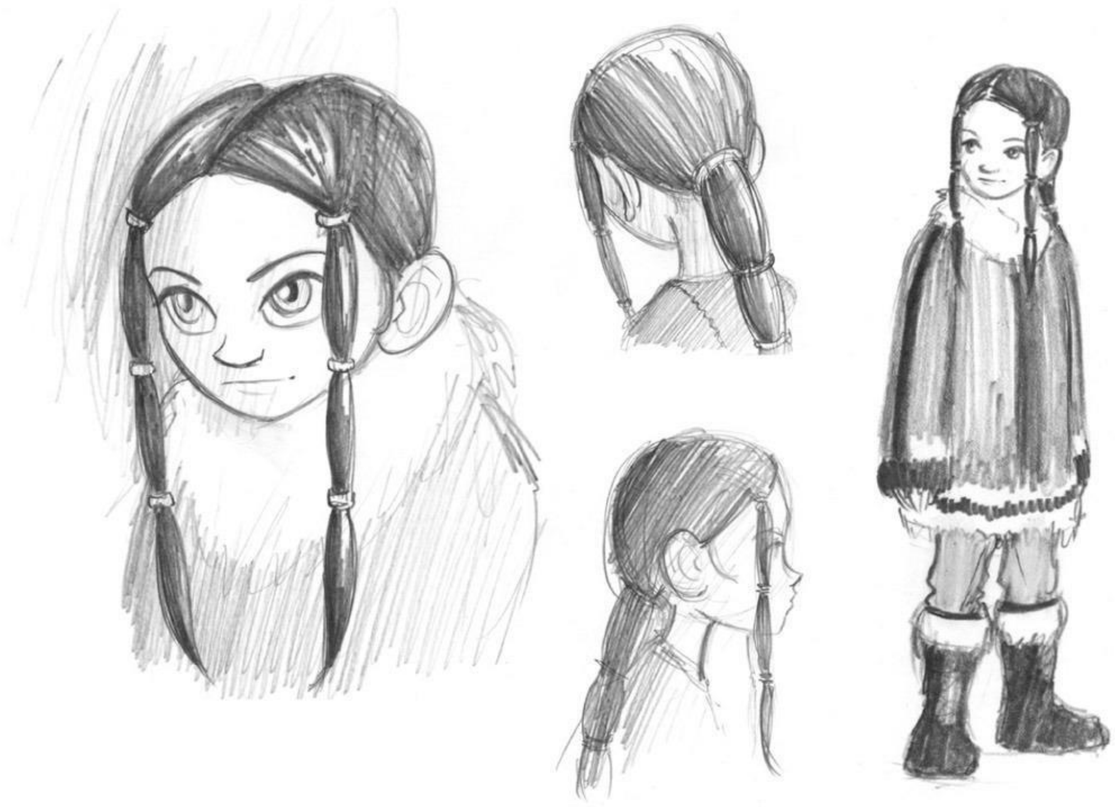
Aang's look was always influenced by the particular styles of the individual storyboard artists and animators who drew him. These drawings, from "The Fortuneteller," showcase one of our favorite interpretations of Aang. Key animation by Myeong Ga Young.

KATARA

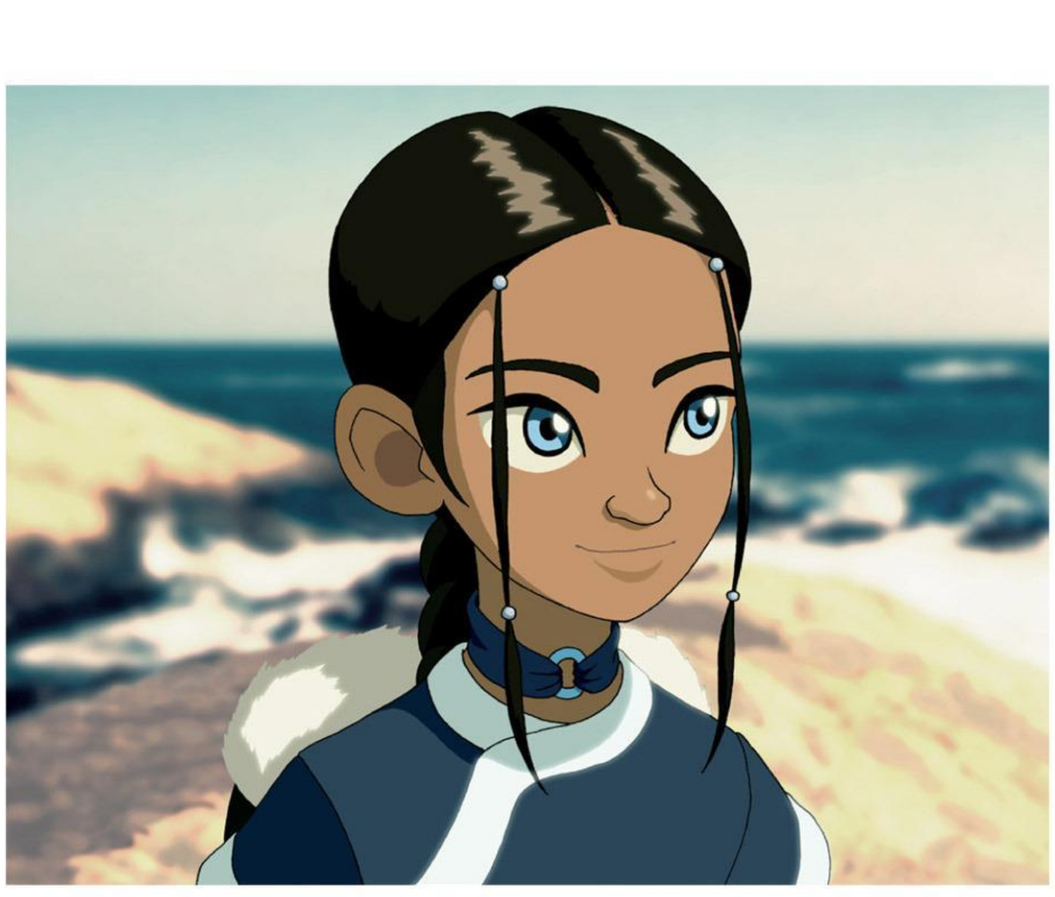
MIKE: Katara is the heart of the show. She represents hope, passion, and love. It was important to us to have a strong female character as part of the main group. We always believed that even though *Avatar* was an action-adventure show targeted to young boys, girls would like it too. And Katara is a big reason that half the fans of the show are female.

Katara and Sokka were created hand in hand. We wanted a sibling rivalry as part of the story, probably due to the fact that we both have sisters. We were attracted to the idea of the sister having bending abilities, but not the brother. And unlike Aang, who was already a master of his native element, she would have only a basic understanding of Waterbending. Out of that came the idea that she didn't know Waterbending because there were no other Waterbenders left on the South Pole.

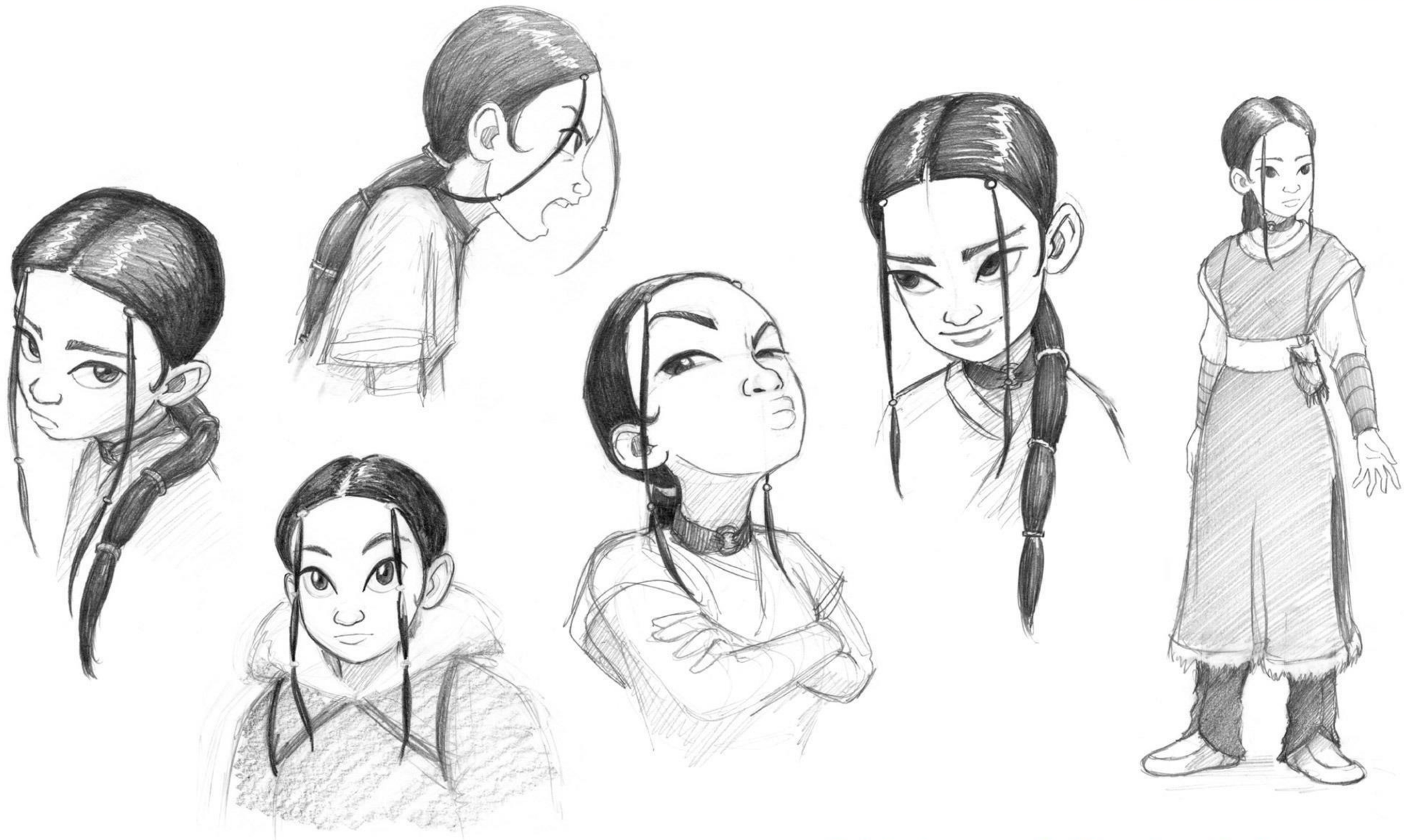
In the eleven-minute pilot, her name was actually Kya, but when Nickelodeon's legal department vetted the name, they discovered there was already a video-game character named Kya, so we had to change it. For a few weeks we called her Kanna, but weren't totally sold on it. Then Bryan called me one day and said, "How about Katara?" The name seemed so foreign at the time, but now I can't imagine it any other way. And later on, we ended up using Kanna for Gran Gran's name and Kya for Katara's mother.



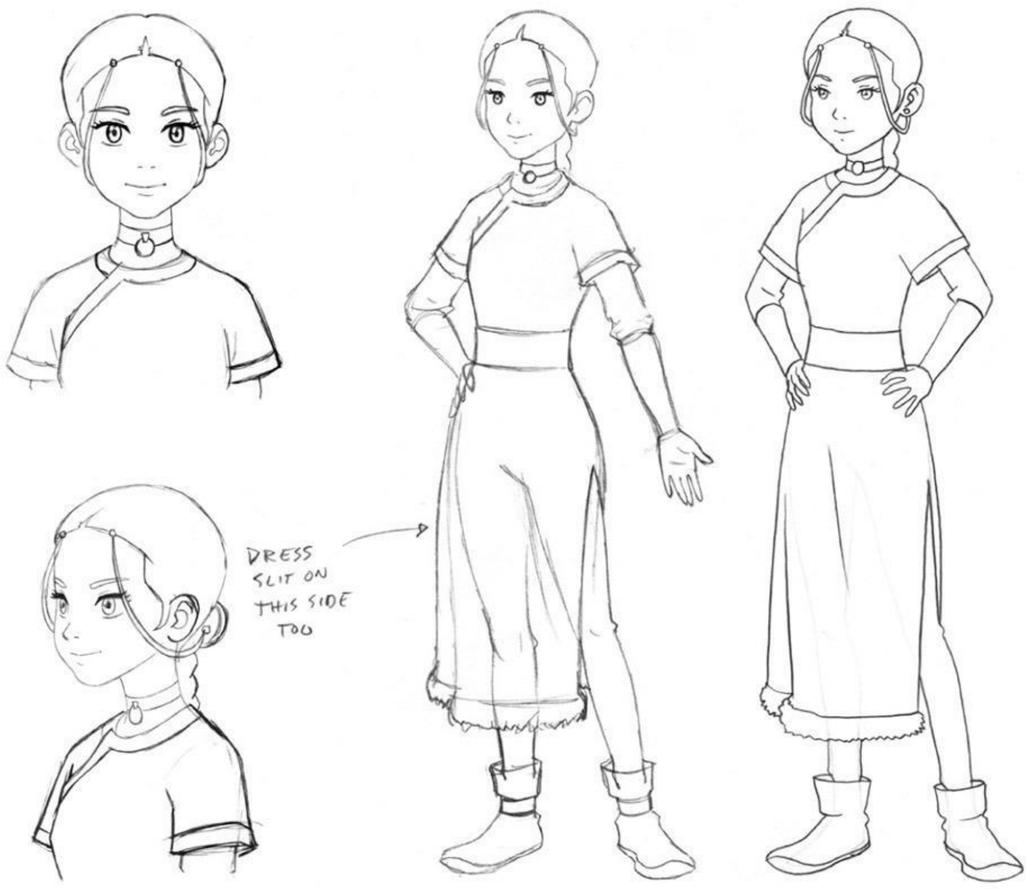
Hours before the pitch, we realized we had been so focused on what Aang looked like that we didn't have any close-ups of Katara or Sokka, so Bryan whipped out these Katara concepts with little time to spare.

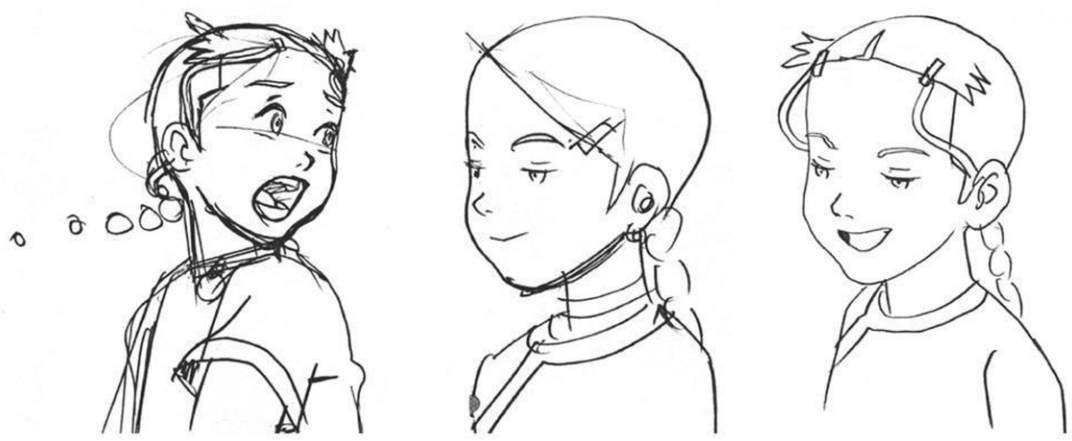


Directly above and middle of page: Katara as she appeared in the series bible. Art by Bryan Konietzko.

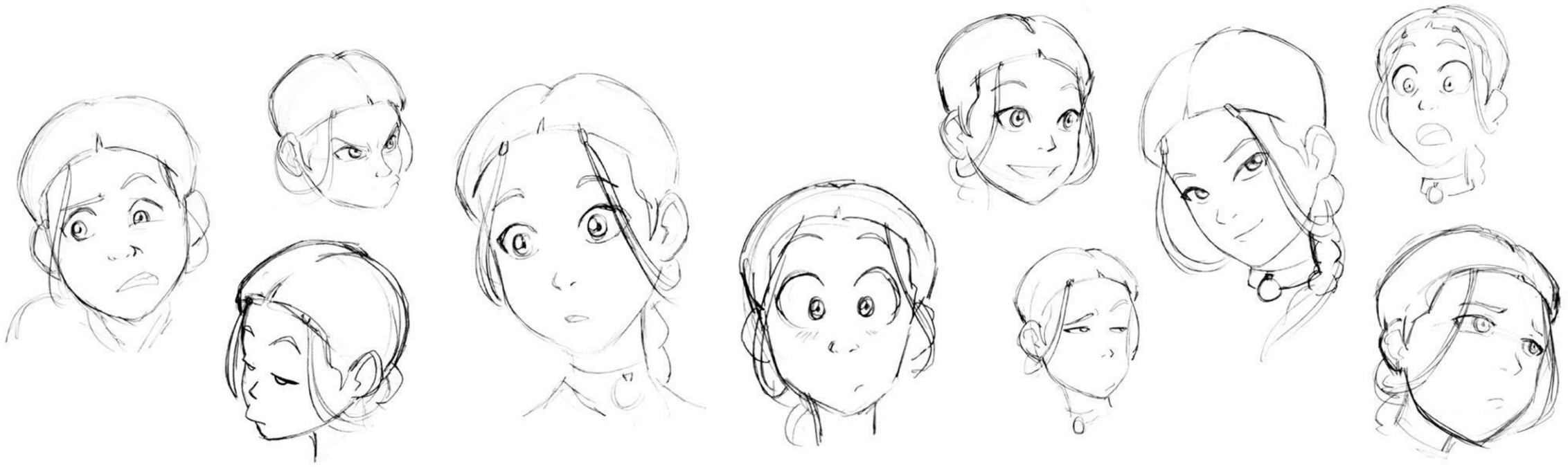


Exploring the many moods of Katara, from vulnerable young girl to commanding parental presence. Series bible sketches by Bryan Konietzko.





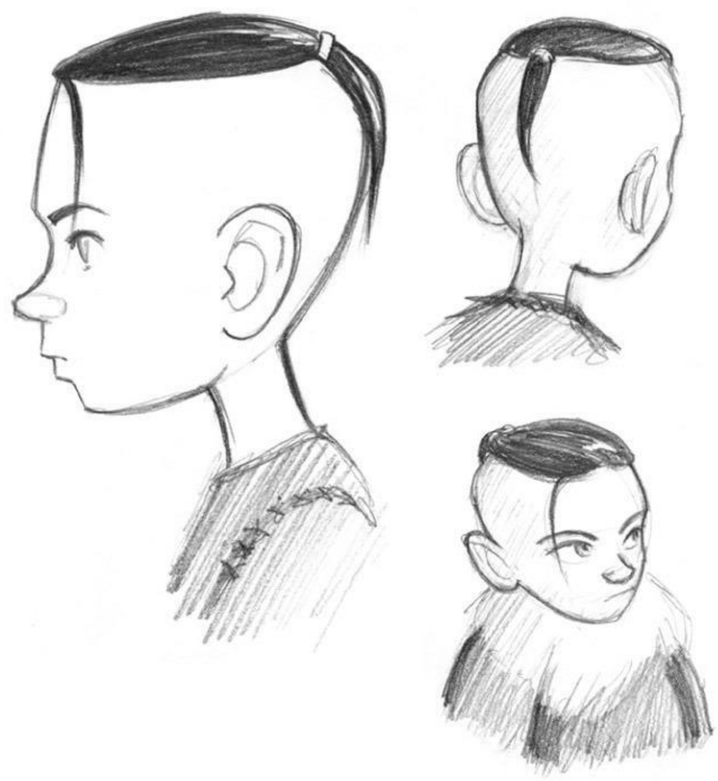
Bryan and Yoon Young Ki worked together on Katara's design for the pilot.



Katara expressions by Bryan from early in season one. Many of these poses are studies of the great work we saw coming back from JM Animation.

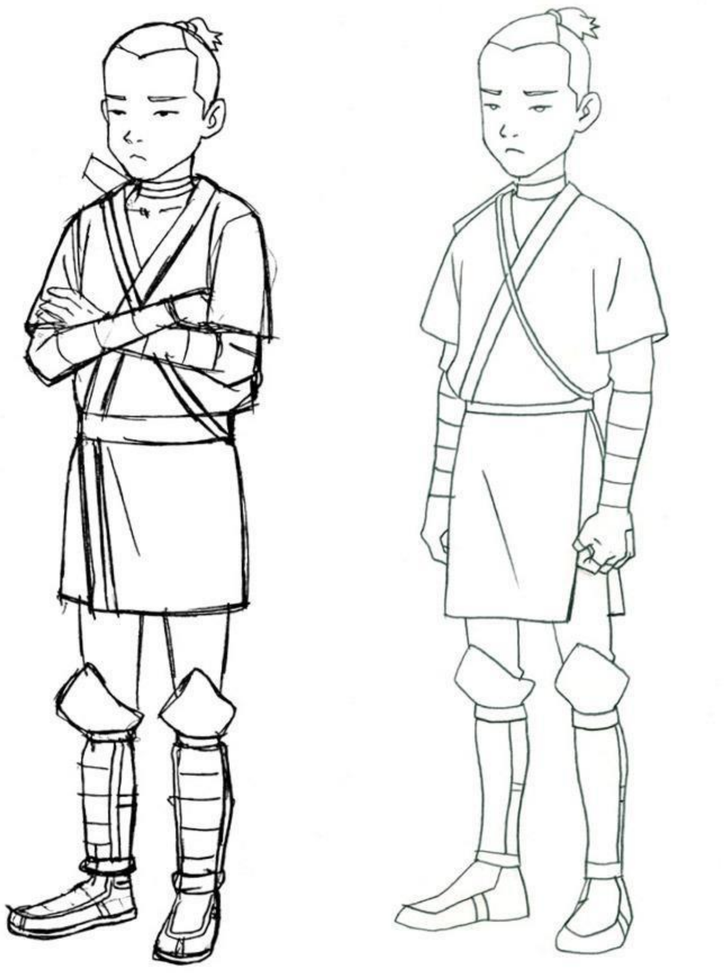
SOKKA

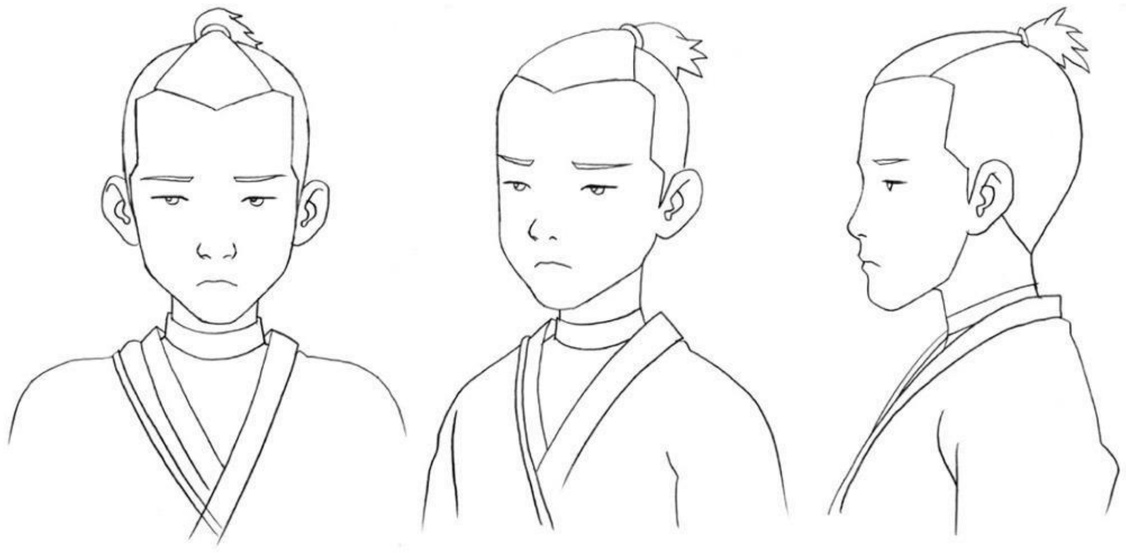
MIKE: Sokka began as the sarcastic "everyman" of the show. His character was pretty simple. He liked to hunt, eat, and annoy his sister. But as soon as we hit upon the idea that all the adult men in the Southern Water Tribe were off fighting in the war, Sokka became much more real and interesting. Now his character had a purpose and a great responsibility, which was to protect his tribe and his sister from the Fire Nation. But although he was a skilled warrior and hunter, he had never really been tested in battle. I loved being part of creating Sokka's character arc, taking him from an inexperienced kid who had never left home to a battle-tested leader who traveled the world.



Bryan's first sketches of Sokka. When we pitched the show, we imagined that Aang was ten, Katara was twelve, and Sokka was thirteen. Upon Eric Coleman's suggestion, we aged them up a couple years during the development process.

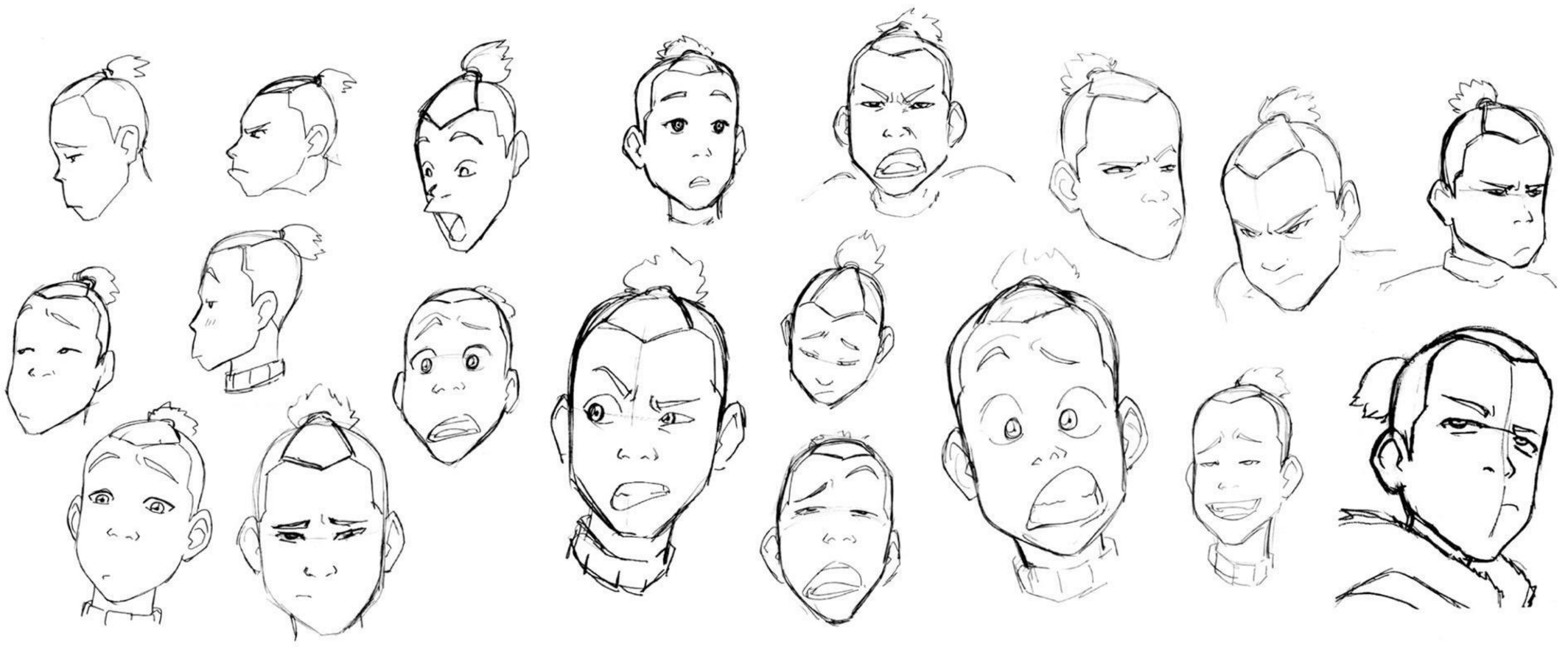
Sokka development sketches from the series bible. Art by Bryan Konietzko.

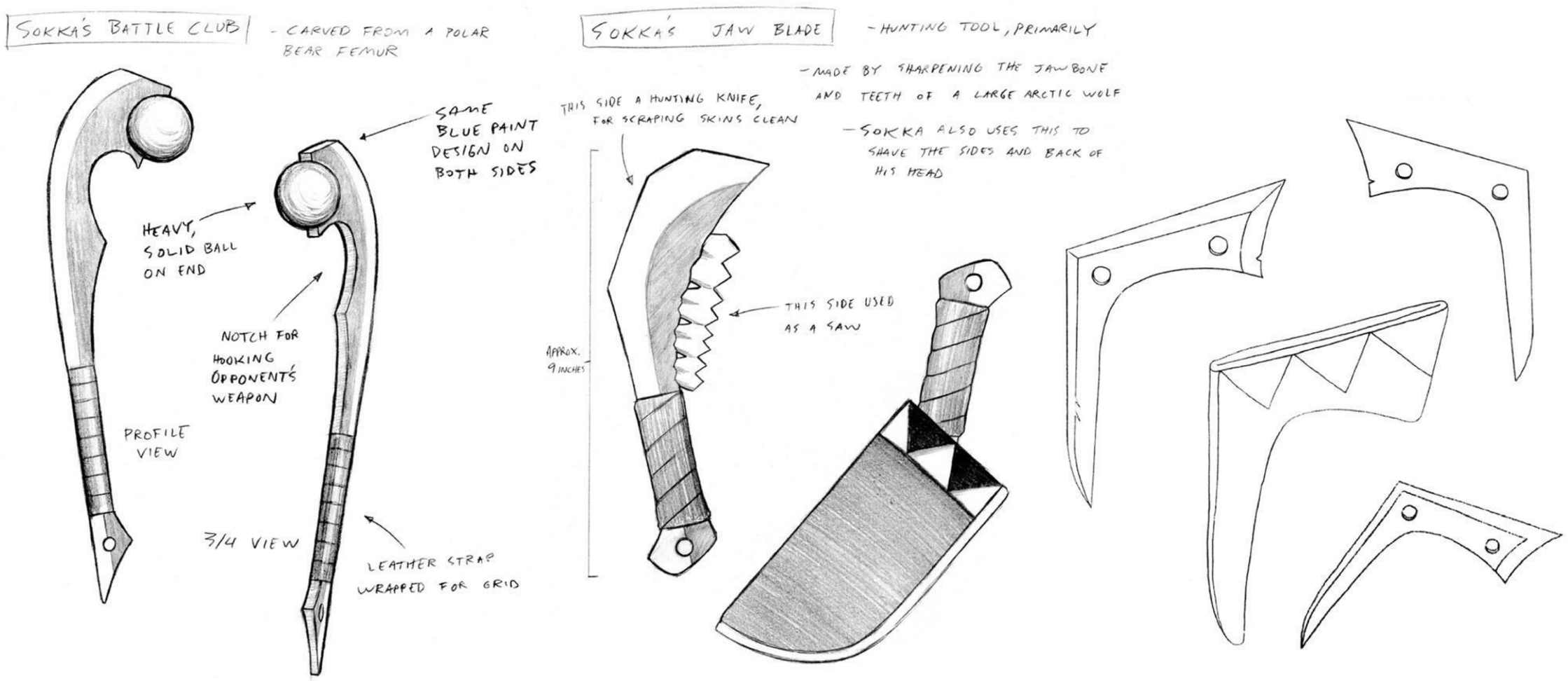




Yoon Young Ki's take on Sokka captured his deadpan expression perfectly.

Below: After JM Animation showed us some early season-one pencil tests, we were impressed by how much life the animators breathed into the characters. Here are Bryan's studies of their work, along with some of his own Sokka expressions.





Sokka's club, knife, and signature boomerang. These Water Tribe props, crafted from bone and leather, were inspired by traditional Native American weapons. Designs by Bryan Konietzko.

APPA

BRYAN: I have always loved manatees—their chubby cheeks and kind faces, the way their cowlike, hulking forms float so gracefully in the water. One day I found myself drawing a herd of mammoth, six-legged, manatee-bison hybrid animals floating in the skies, being shepherded by a lighthearted boy.

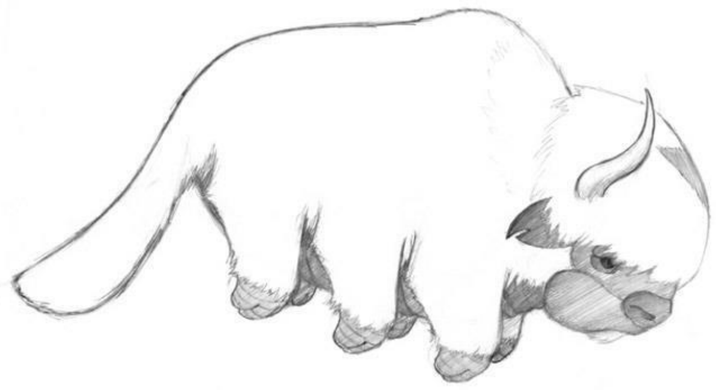
The six legs were a direct homage to the boundless imagination of Hayao Miyazaki's Catbus. I studied the anatomy of both real-life bison and manatees to refine the design, trying to keep it simple enough to be animated by hand. I even had the opportunity to swim with a manatee in the wild, just days before we pitched the series to Nickelodeon. In an early version of the story, I thought Aang could shepherd a herd of twenty bison. But then Mike said, "Where are we going to put all of these giant creatures in every episode?"

He was right; it was completely impractical to have so many in our main group. So we limited it to a mom and a dad with a few young calves. By the time we got through development, we'd whittled it down to just one, who became Aang's good friend Appa.

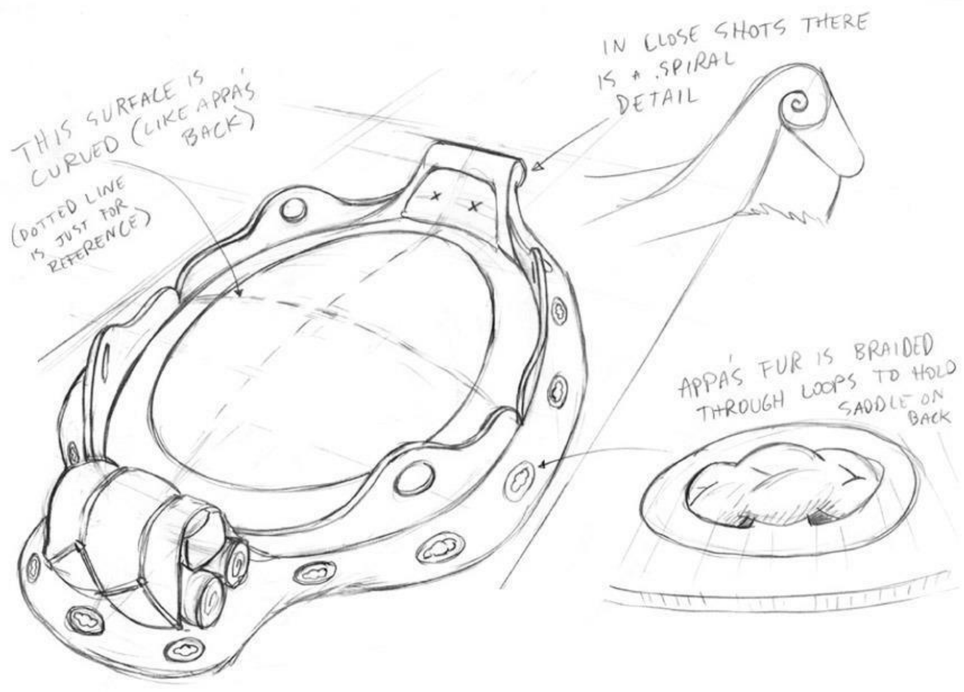
In these sketches, Bryan started to define Appa as a bison-manatee hybrid.

Below: The very first drawing of Appa, and the second drawing of Aang. This early on, Bryan didn't quite know or worry about what kind of animal this might be.

The quiet moment between Aang and Appa in this early sketch captured the epic spirit of the series that we hoped to realize. Sketch by Bryan Konietzko.



We loved the spiral horns in Appa's early design, but we realized they would be too difficult to animate by hand, so we simplified their design. Appa and saddle designs from the pilot by Bryan Konietzko.

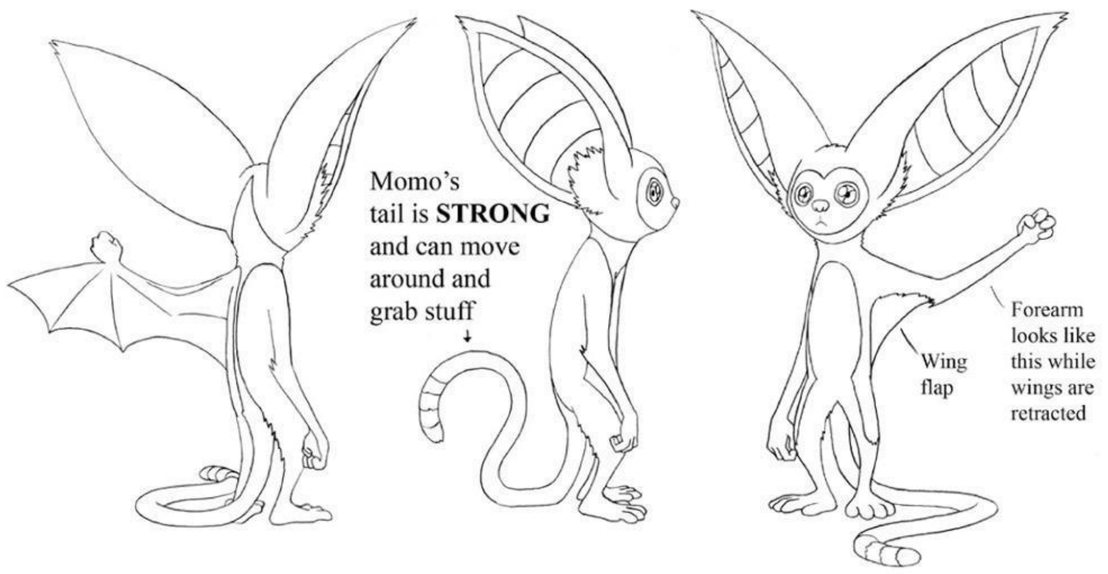


"Ooh! I want a stuffed animal of that!" Time and time again, we heard this exclamation whenever we showed people Appa's design for the first time. It took us a while to convince the consumer products department to fulfill that wish, but when they finally did the plush Appas were a big hit. Designs by Bryan Konietzko.

MOMO

BRYAN: In the earliest days of sketching the ideas that would form *Avatar*, there was a little robot, a cyclops monkey named Momo-3 with an arrow on his head and a futuristic staff. He was to be our main character's equally mischievous buddy.

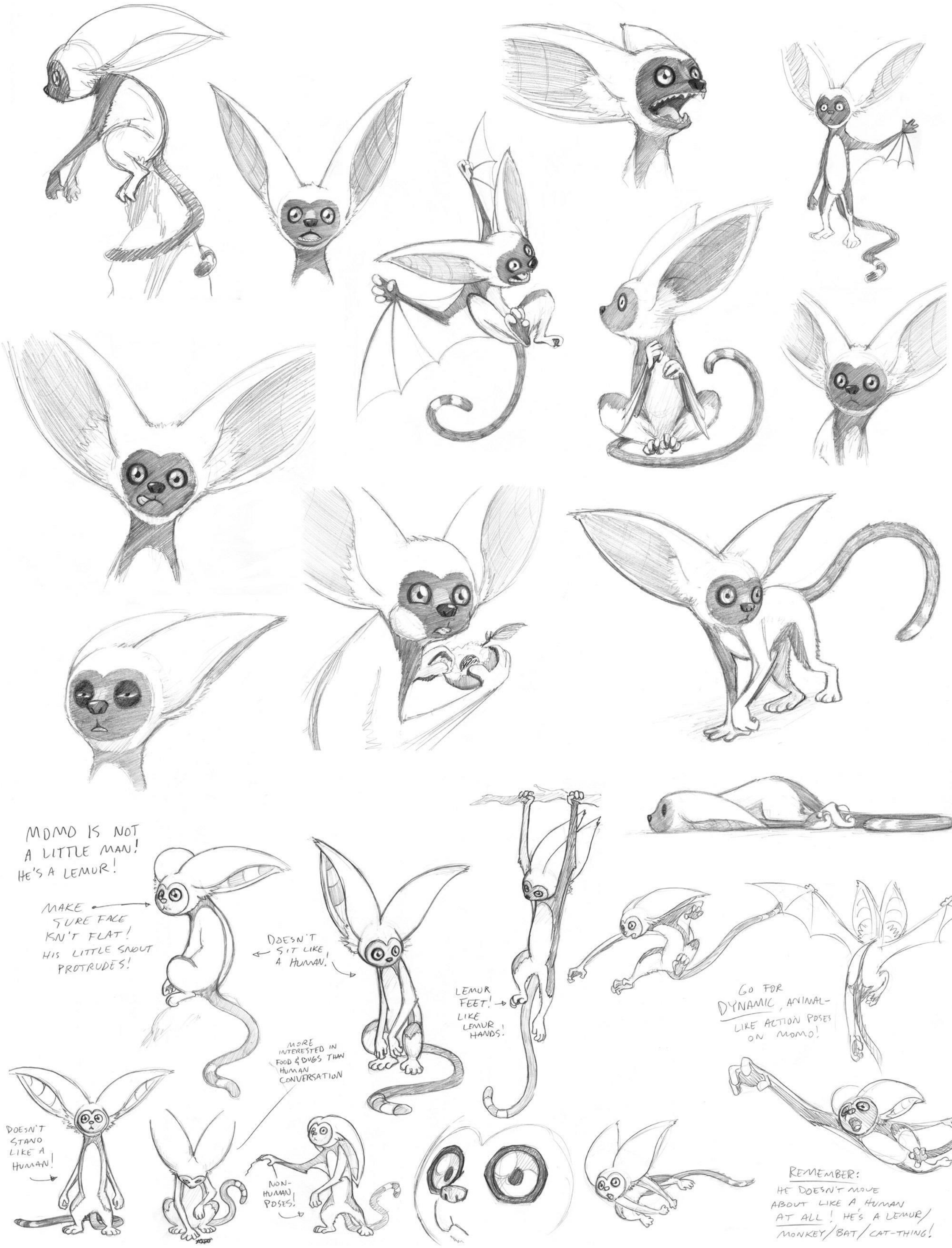
As the concept for the world became less sci-fi, Momo-3 made a quick transition from a robot to a hybrid of a ring-tailed lemur and a spotted bat, two of my favorite animals. He dropped the "3" from his name, and the staff and arrow moved over to Aang's design. He almost didn't make the cut, as we thought it would be too much that both Aang's flying bison and flying lemur ended up in the iceberg with him, but Mike came up with the idea that Aang could find Momo in the otherwise-deserted Air Temple, as a symbol of hope.



Momo's model sheet from the pilot, showing his retractable wings. Designs by Bryan Konietzko.

Above and right: Momo from the series bible. Art by Bryan Konietzko.

Bryan began designing Momo by studying photos of real lemurs, but he wanted him to look more cute and cuddly, so he looked to the face proportions of Hayao Miyazaki's Totoro for inspiration.

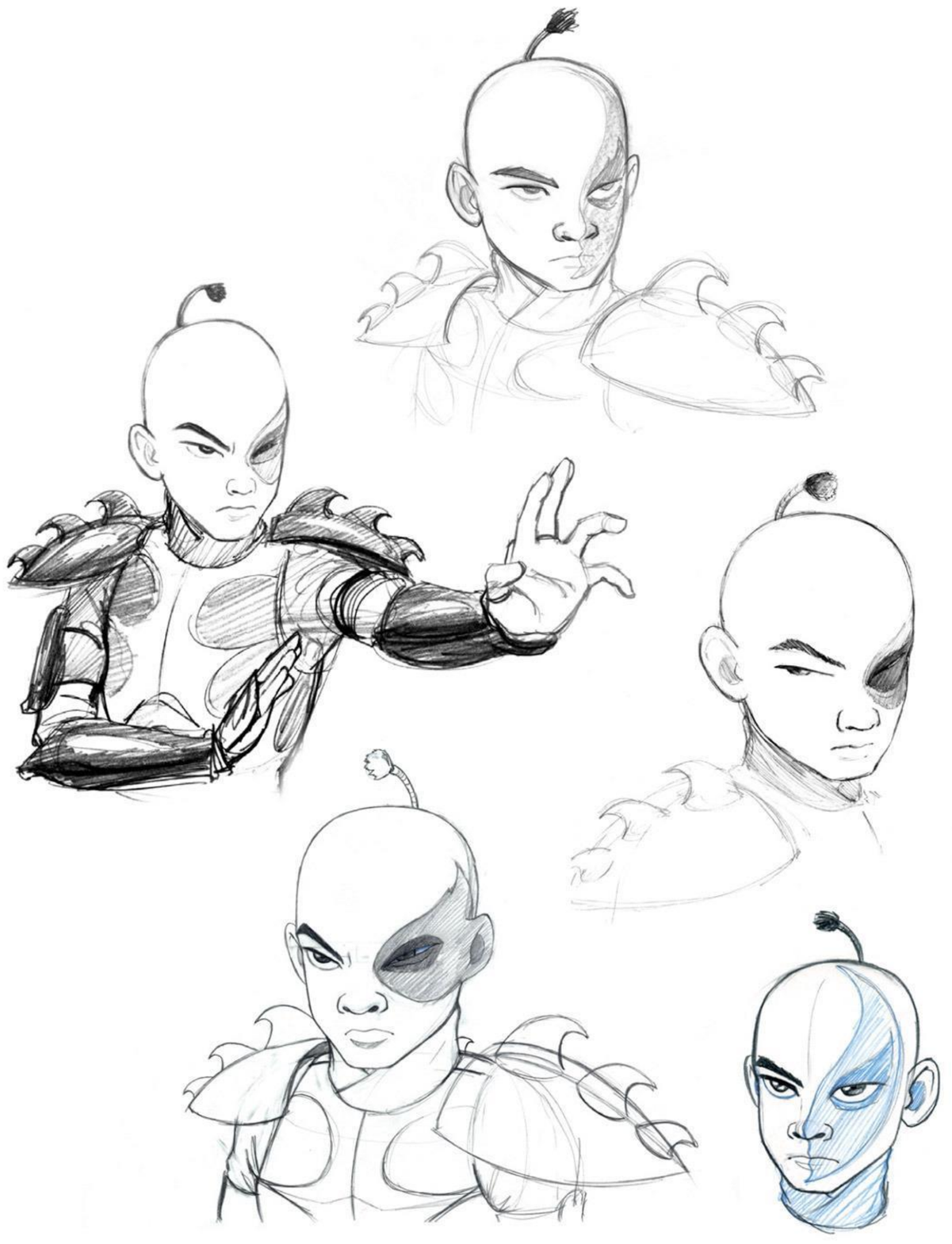


Momo has always been Bryan's favorite *Avatar* character to draw. He based many of his mannerisms and poses on his childhood cat, Buddy. Sketches by Bryan Konietzko.

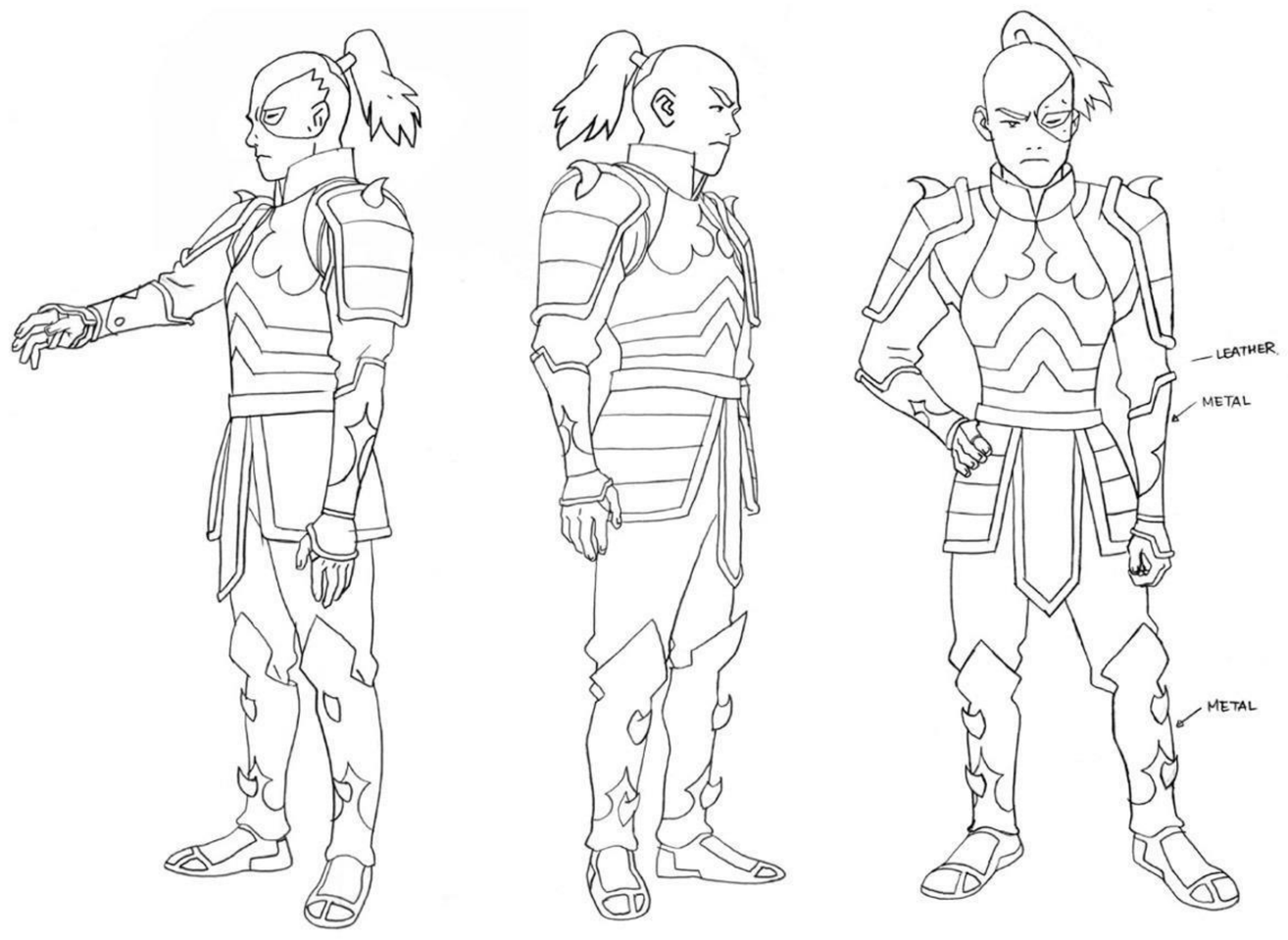
ZUKO

MIKE: Unlike Aang, Katara, and Sokka, whom we created in those first two weeks of brainstorming, Zuko came later in the development process. The only villain we had was the Fire Lord, whom we imagined leading the war from the comfort of his throne. Thankfully, Eric Coleman posed a question that gave birth to the banished prince: What if there was a young villain going after Aang in each episode? A flurry of sketches and story ideas followed. Bryan drew a scary-looking kid with a scar over one eye, and we thought, "What if his father gave him that scar?" From there, we focused on Zuko's motivation, deciding that he could restore his honor and return home only by capturing the Avatar.

Early on, we knew that Zuko would turn from Aang's opponent to his ally, but we didn't know exactly when it would happen or how. His journey and his decisions, both good and bad, made him the most complex and realistic character on the show, and one of the most popular.

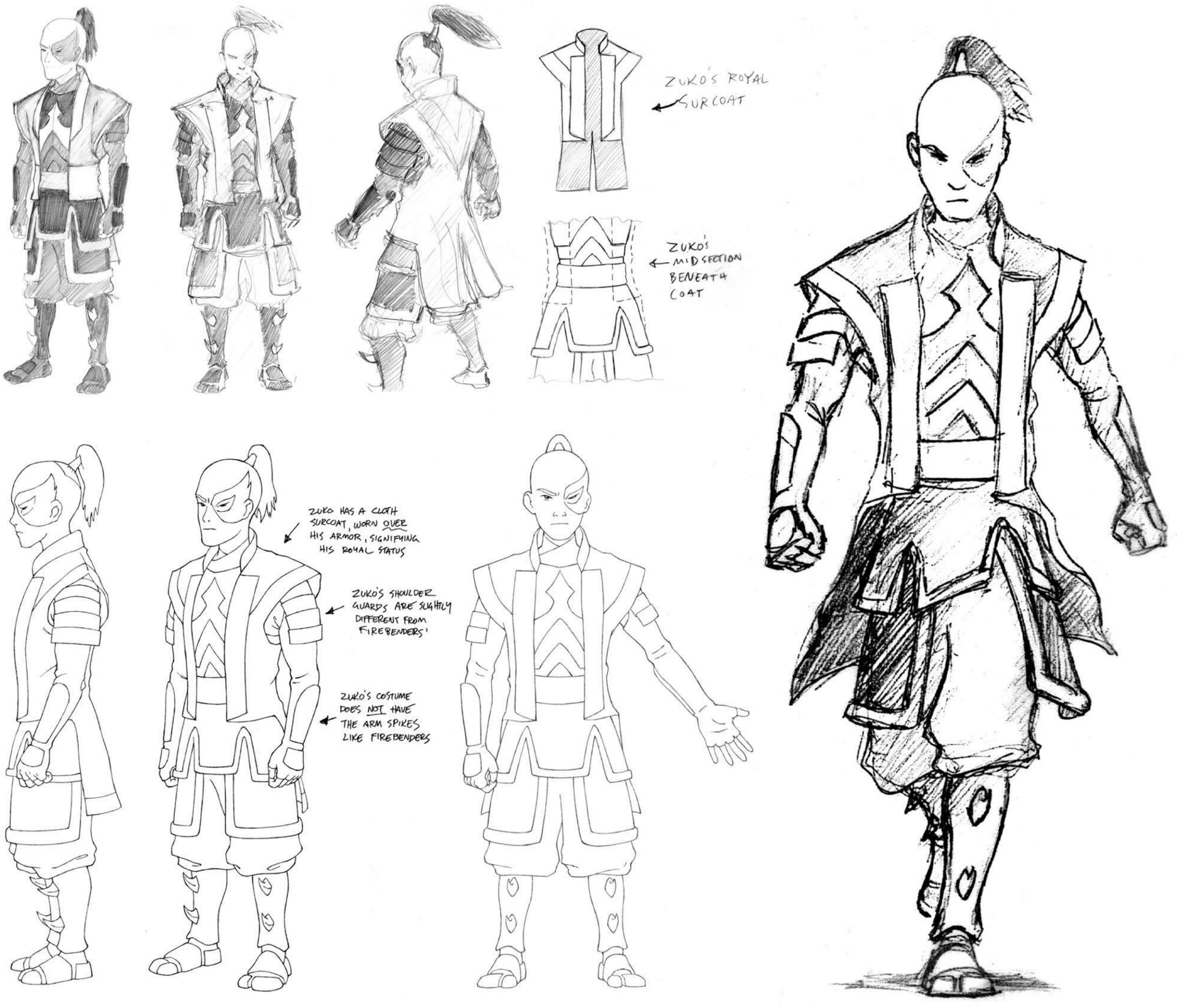


An angry young man. Zuko from the development period after the pitch. Concepts by Bryan Konietzko.



Bryan initially designed Zuko with a samurai influenced, wick-like sprig of hair, but Yoon Young Ki recommended a more flowing ponytail. We loved Young Ki's take on Zuko, but he looked a few years too old and a few pounds too heavy for what we had in mind. Bryan reworked the designs to make Zuko a bit younger and wirier. Designs by Yoon Young Ki and Bryan Konietzko.

Zuko key animation from the pilot by Yu Jae Myung.



Zuko in his most samurai-influenced design, just prior to season one. At the last minute, we went with more of a Chinese style for the Fire Nation's clothes and architecture. Designs by Bryan Konietzko.

DEVELOPING THE ART OF BENDING

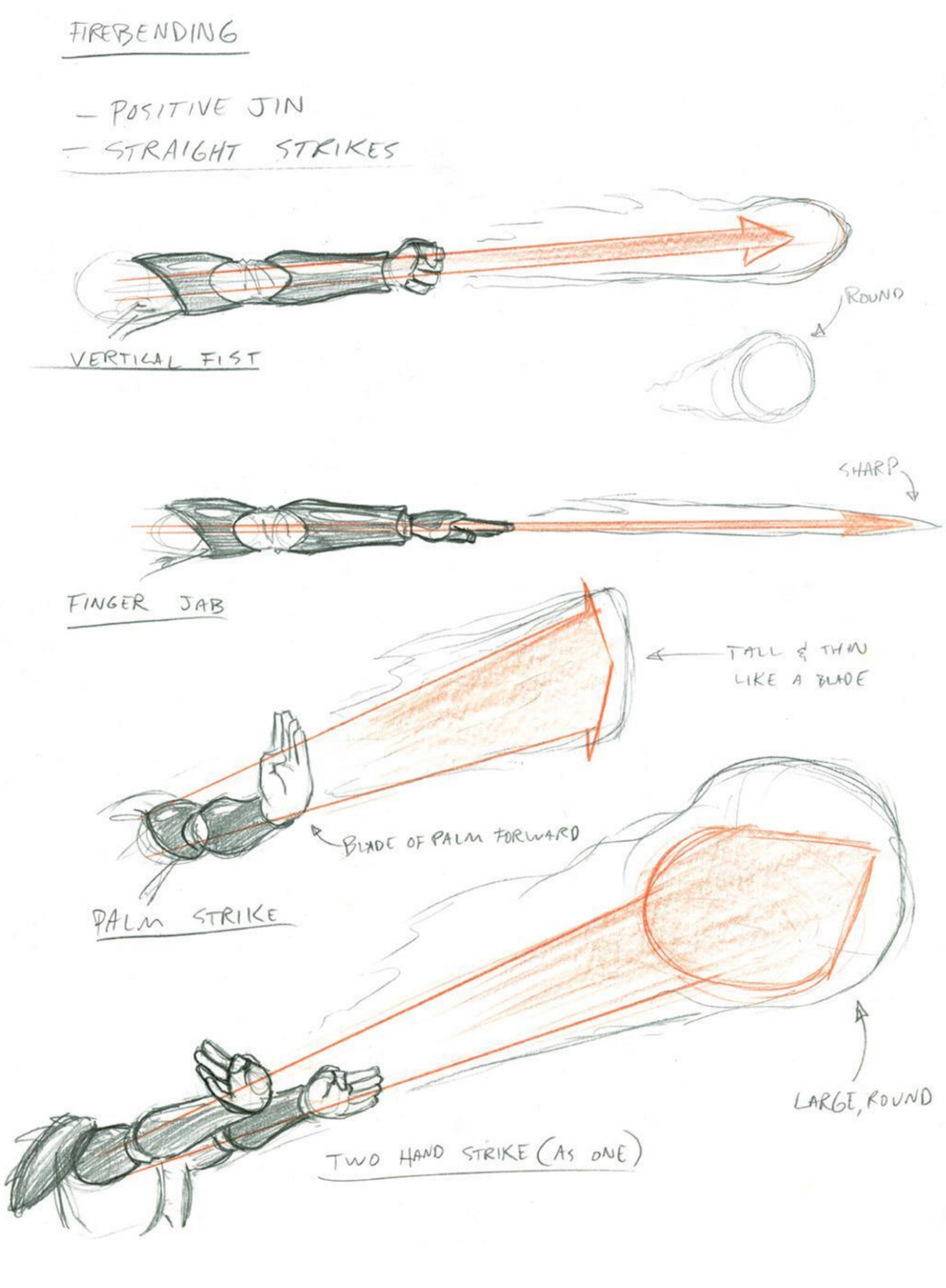
BRYAN: We had a desire to do something physical and tangible with the concept of magic, something more dynamic than the usual "magic wand" fare. As we settled into the concept of an Asian-influenced fantasy world, the idea of using traditional Chinese martial arts to manipulate the elements was the next logical step. Films like *Shaolin Soccer* helped to influence this idea, building on a tradition in Hong Kong cinema of blending supernatural powers with kung fu. Our bending concept allowed for high-energy action scenes without an emphasis on violence, since the practitioners are generally fighting element to element rather than fist on face.

People often assume the "four-element theory" (comprised of air, water, earth, and fire) we brought to bending is exclusive to ancient Greece, and that in ancient China only a "five-element theory" was used (comprised of wood, fire, earth, metal, and water). Mike and I never claim to be experts in any of these subjects, but in our research we found the four-element theory was prevalent in ancient cultures all over the world, including ancient Buddhist teachings. While the five-element theory is interesting in its own right, we were attracted to the universality of the four simple elements. It makes for an instantly understandable concept that has translated well to audiences in a number of disparate cultures, just like it did thousands of years ago.

While the bending concept was magical, we wanted the bending moves to be grounded in reality. To achieve this, I knew I would need to train in kung fu and learn as much as I could so we could inject it into the animation. I had trained in tae kwon do as a kid and was an admirer of martial arts for years, so I was personally excited to get back into it. I researched different styles of kung fu, looking for something balletic and dynamic that would translate well into the medium of TV animation (where subtlety is a difficult thing to achieve). Northern Shaolin seemed like the best fit for the animation we had in mind, so I made a list of all the teachers I could find in the Los Angeles area.

I spent a few weeks driving all over town, taking and observing classes. I was not only looking for a good teacher, but also someone who could become the show's martial-arts consultant, in the event that the series got picked up. I did not find what I was looking for until I met with Sifu Kisu. I was attracted to his no-frills, no-belt-system approach as well as his intense two-and-a-half-hour to three-hour classes. I started training with him regularly, only briefly mentioning something about "a possible animated project." As we gained each other's trust, I started mentioning our project more often. We met one weekend in the summer of 2002 so I could show him the pitch and explain the concept further. When I told him about our idea of bending the elements with kung fu, his eyes lit up and he started rattling off ideas, like wind vortices. He instantly showed the ability to approach his traditional art in fresh and creative ways. I knew he was the right man for the job.

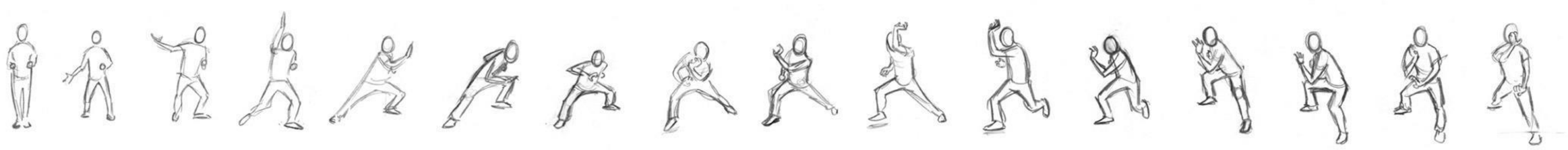
Mike and I had really only thought about using one style of kung fu for all the bending, but once I pitched the concept to Sifu Kisu, he came up with the notion of assigning a specific discipline of Chinese martial arts to each nation and element based on each style's characteristics. This evolution of the concept really helped to define the different cultures in our world.



Illustrating the nuances of Firebending and Earthbending. Concepts by Bryan Konietzko.

Bryan's thumbnail sketches analyze Sifu Kisu's movements from some of our earliest kung fu video reference sessions.

Everyone thought the concept of bending sounded really cool, but there came a time when we needed to illustrate what it would actually look like. Art by Bryan Konietzko.

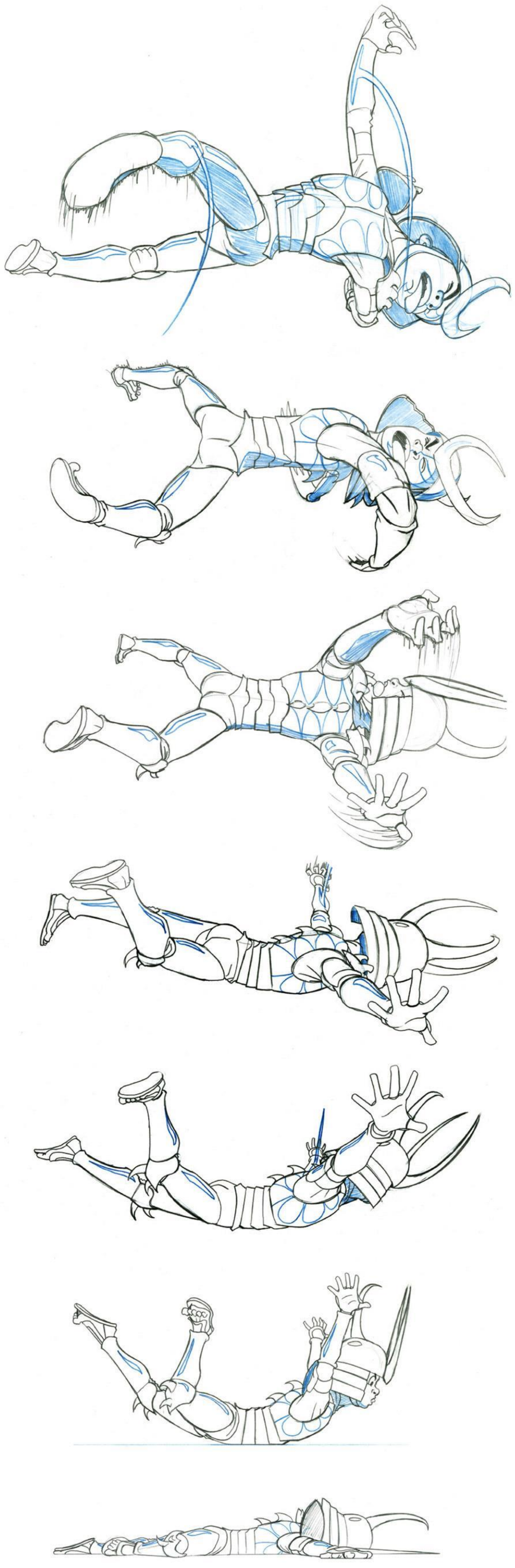


THE FIRST PENCIL TEST

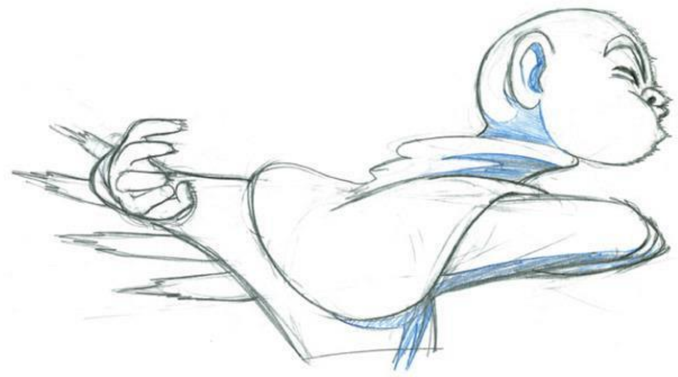
BRYAN: We self-produced a short pencil-test animation to see how well we could translate the kung fu I was learning in Sifu Kisu's class into animation. We made it in future *Avatar* director Lauren MacMullan's studio apartment, where she and several friends helped animate it. Being such a novice at kung fu, choreographing the fight felt like attempting to write an essay in a foreign language. Unfortunately, my design sense was in a horrible slump at that time, so as a result I have been reluctant to show the test to anyone. Regardless, there were some nice moments of animation in there and it led to some great partnerships.

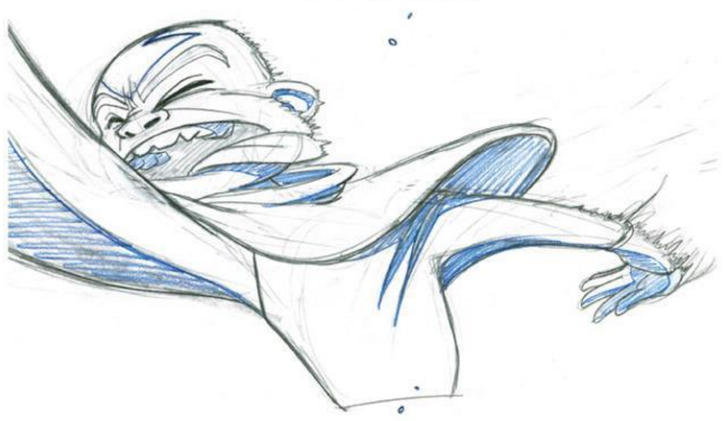
When the pencil test was finished, we turned to our friends Jeremy Zuckerman and Ben Wynn, AKA the Track Team, to do the sound effects and music, marking the beginning of their long involvement on *Avatar*. The work Ben and Jeremy did on the pencil test laid the foundation for some of the musical themes and effects processing they used through the whole series, and it showed the network that these two guys fresh out of college had the skills to do the pilot. We also used the test as a calling card when we tried to get studios interested in working with us on the pilot.

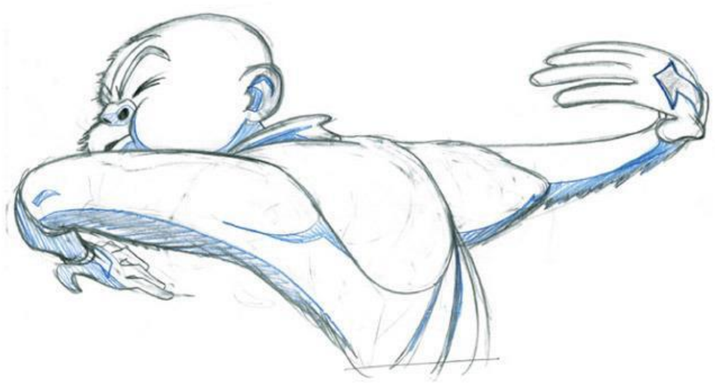
MIKE: Over the next nine months, we fleshed out the three-season story arc further, and Bryan continued visual development, trying to find just the right look for the characters. This all culminated in a sixty-five-page series bible, full of artwork, character descriptions, rules of the world, and episode ideas. We also wrote an eleven-minute pilot script. We turned all this over to Nickelodeon and waited to hear if we would be able to take the next step: making the pilot.

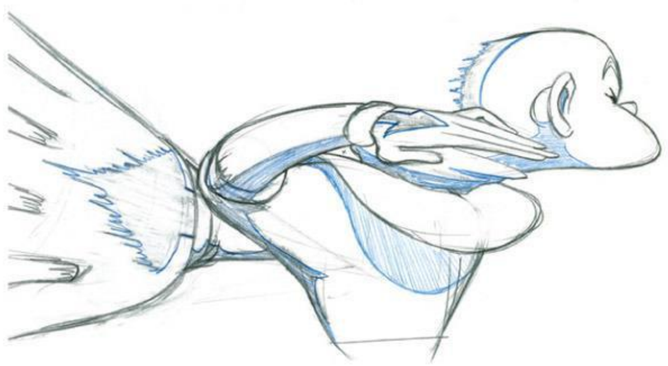


In our humble homage to *FLCL*, Zuko bounces violently, and Aang has an involuntary reaction to Zuko's stinky fire breath. Animation by Bryan Konietzko.









THE PILOT

MIKE: In early 2003, Nickelodeon picked up *Avatar* for an eleven-minute pilot. At the time, we knew that the beginning of the series' story was Katara and Sokka finding Aang in the iceberg. However, that story was too long to be told in eleven minutes, and Nickelodeon needed a standalone episode to show kids in focus-group tests. So we came up with a generic adventure for Aang and his friends, a story that set up the world conflict, the bending, and the characters, but was never intended to be part of the overall series arc.

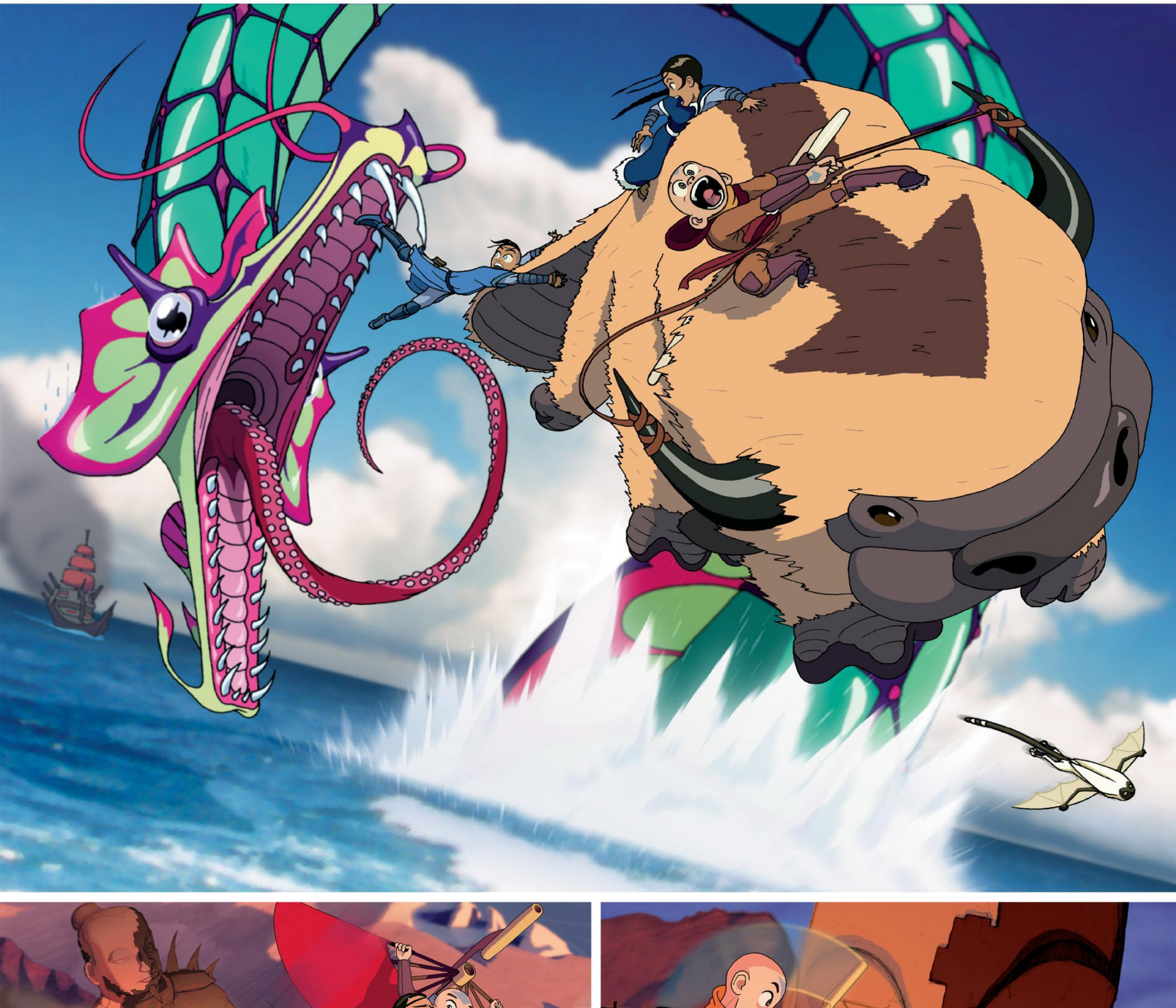
We settled into our office at Nickelodeon, and continued working diligently for the next few months—writing the script, finalizing the designs, storyboarding, and researching which overseas studio would animate the pilot. Because we were paying homage to the anime style and were such big fans of studios like Gainax, we really loved the idea of doing a coproduction with a Japanese studio. However, after many unreturned phone calls, we realized that the Japanese studios didn't love the idea of doing a coproduction with us.

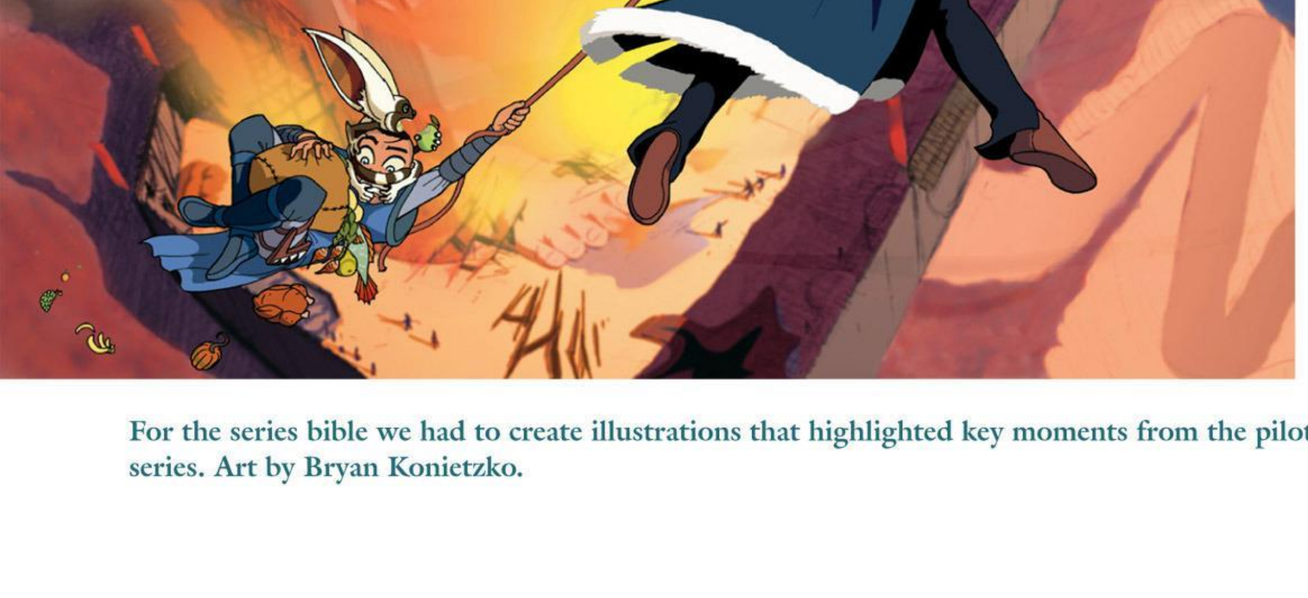
A friend of ours tipped us off to a small studio called Tin House that was the creative force behind the Korean animated feature *Wonderful Days*. Impressed with the anime-inspired look and the animation, we traveled to Seoul, South Korea, in May to meet with the artists in person. Although Tin House had never done a series for American TV before, and they had a much smaller staff than the more established studios in Seoul, we were quickly impressed by their talent, dedication, and eagerness to collaborate creatively. It was a risky maneuver, but we decided that they should be the ones to animate the pilot. Ultimately, it paid off in ways we couldn't have imagined. Not only did they animate a beautiful pilot; at Tin House we met many great friends and artists who would eventually work on the series all the way to the finale.

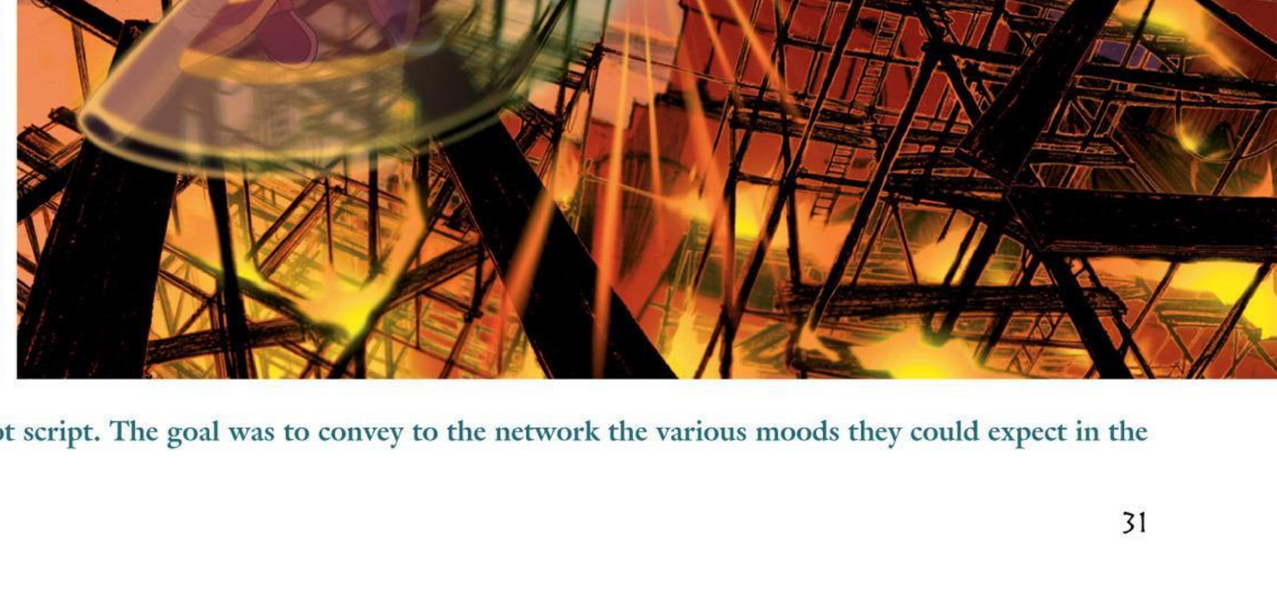
BRYAN: I ended up spending about four months working alongside the Korean animators at Tin House on the pilot, with Mike coming over for three weeks too. It was a valuable period where we gained a lot of training in the Korean animation process and formed some imperative working relationships with key animators. One of these key people was Yoon Young Ki, the animation director for the pilot (and for the film *Wonderful Days*), who did the majority of the layouts. He had some ideas about streamlining our designs, so I spent the first week or so in Seoul working on incorporating his notes into our pilot model pack.

MIKE: In February of 2004, the pilot was complete and receiving good feedback from the kids who saw it. It wasn't too long before we got the good news: a pickup for thirteen episodes of *Avatar*. Production could officially begin!

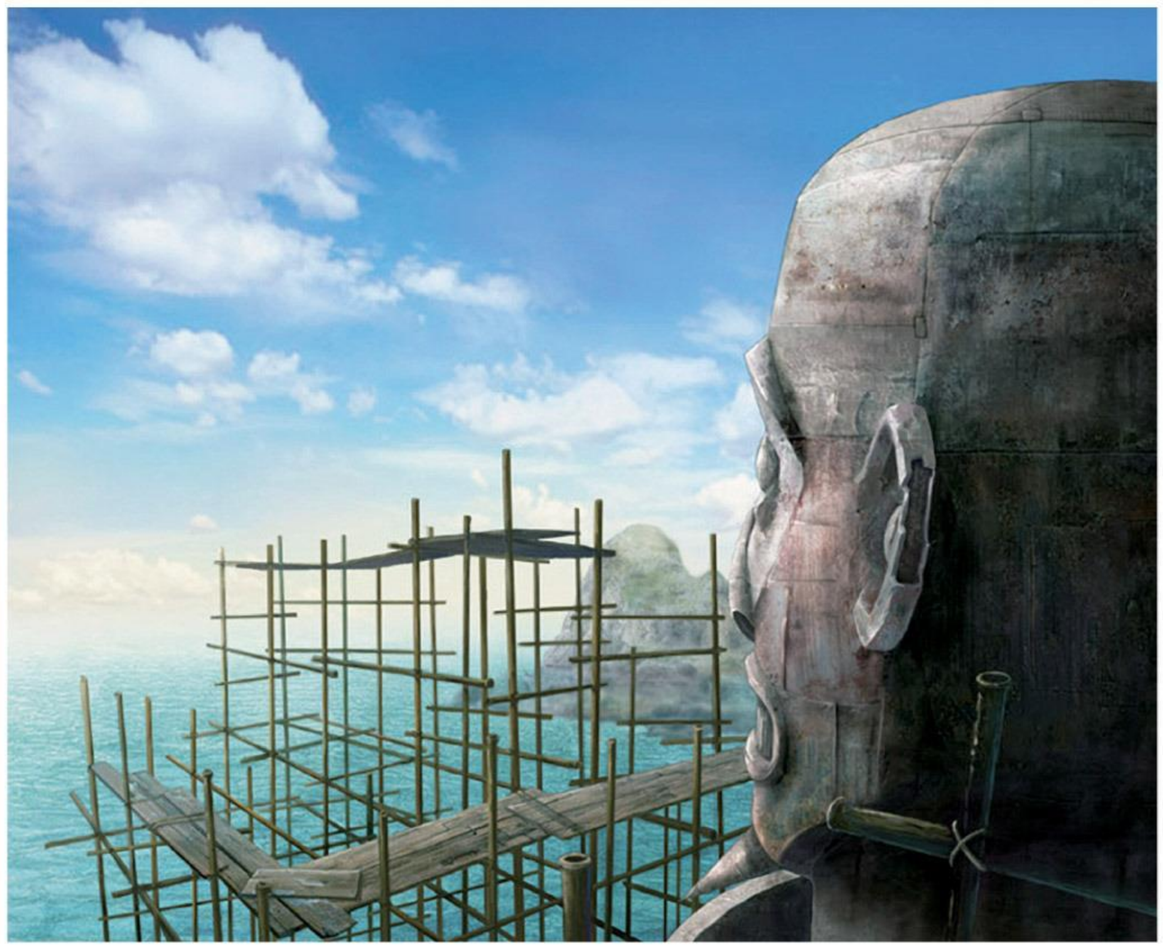
Top: Final character designs for the pilot. The Earthbender in green is an early concept for the male version of Toph that we had in mind. We had an idea about an elite group of female Firebenders hunting Aang, but unfortunately it never found its way into the series. Designs by Bryan Konietzko. Color by JM Media and Bryan Konietzko. Directly above: The top of a giant statue where the fight between Aang and Zuko occurs in the end of the pilot. Our idea was that the Fire Nation was retrofitting an ancient Earth Kingdom statue of an Avatar to look like Zuko's father, Fire Lord Ozai. Background layout by Yoon Young Ki. Painting by Jong Young Cheol.

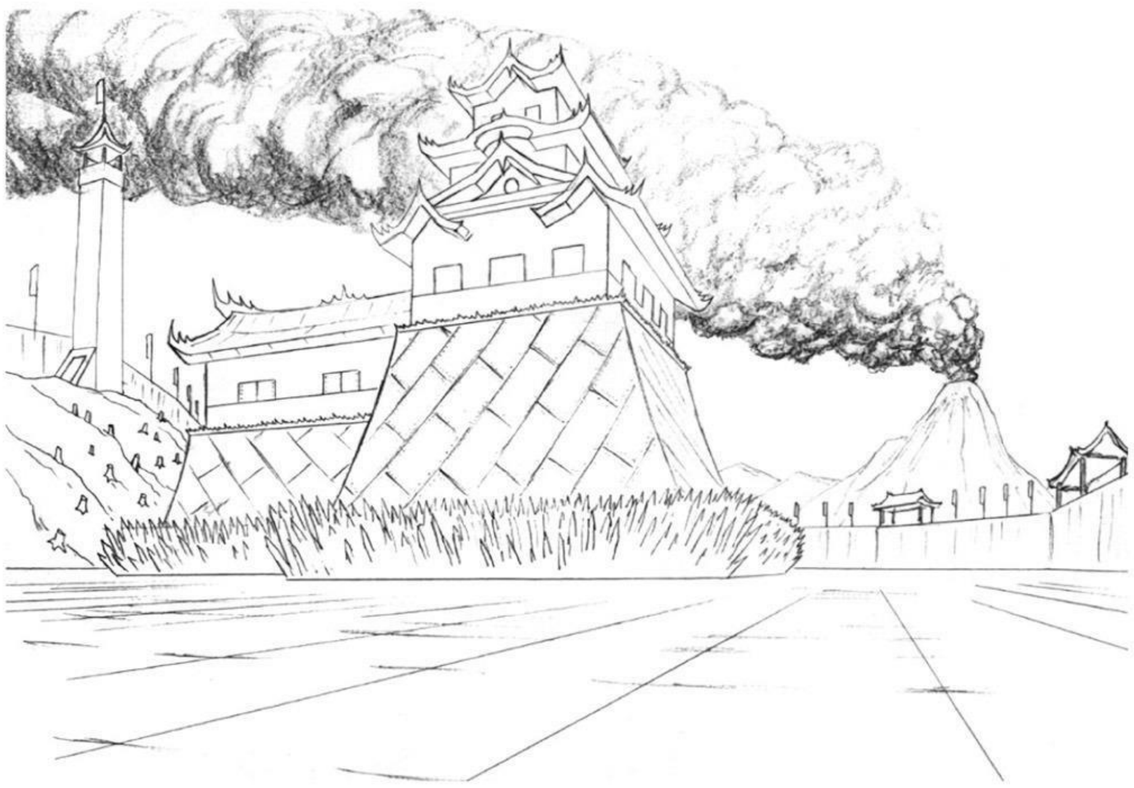


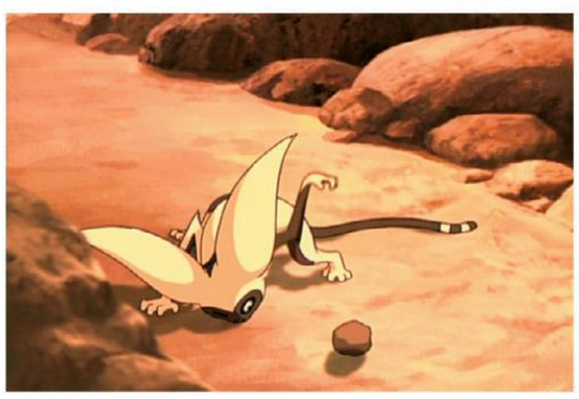




For the series bible we had to create illustrations that highlighted key moments from the pilot script. The goal was to convey to the network the various moods they could expect in the series. Art by Bryan Konietzko.







Top: Fire Nation outpost. Background layouts by Yoon Young Ki. Paintings by Jong Young Cheol. Middle of page: Background layouts for the prologue of the pilot, including an early glimpse of a lion-turtle statue. Layouts by Bryan Konietzko. Directly above: Screenshots from the finished pilot. It was a ton of hard work, but we had a blast doing layouts and animation, eating *ja jang myun*, and singing *noraebang* with our new friends at Tin House and JM Media.

Illustrations from the prologue to the pilot, which served as a rough version for the opening title sequence of the series. Art by Bryan Konietzko.

Illustrating the relationship dynamics of our main characters. Art by Bryan Konietzko. Middle of page: A big, mean sea horse. Designs by Bryan Konietzko.

SPOTLIGHT:
The South Korean Animation Studios

MIKE: Because Bryan and I had worked on various animated productions, we saw firsthand the benefits and drawbacks of working with an overseas studio. When we set out to make *Avatar*, we knew we wanted to use the Korean studio system in a different way. The goal was to put some creative control and decision making into the hands of the Korean artists, and give them the freedom to make the best animation they could.

BRYAN: Back when I was working on *Invader Zim*, I had the opportunity to travel to Seoul, South Korea, to train the animation crews in Jhonen Vasquez's idiosyncratic style. I was really impressed by the Korean artists' talent and work ethic, but I was frustrated by the general system set up by the various American animation studios. It was such a limiting and rigid system that didn't allow for the Korean animators to show their creativity and do their best work. They weren't given the time, budget, or incentive to try to augment the work delivered to them by the Americans—in fact, they were generally penalized for it.

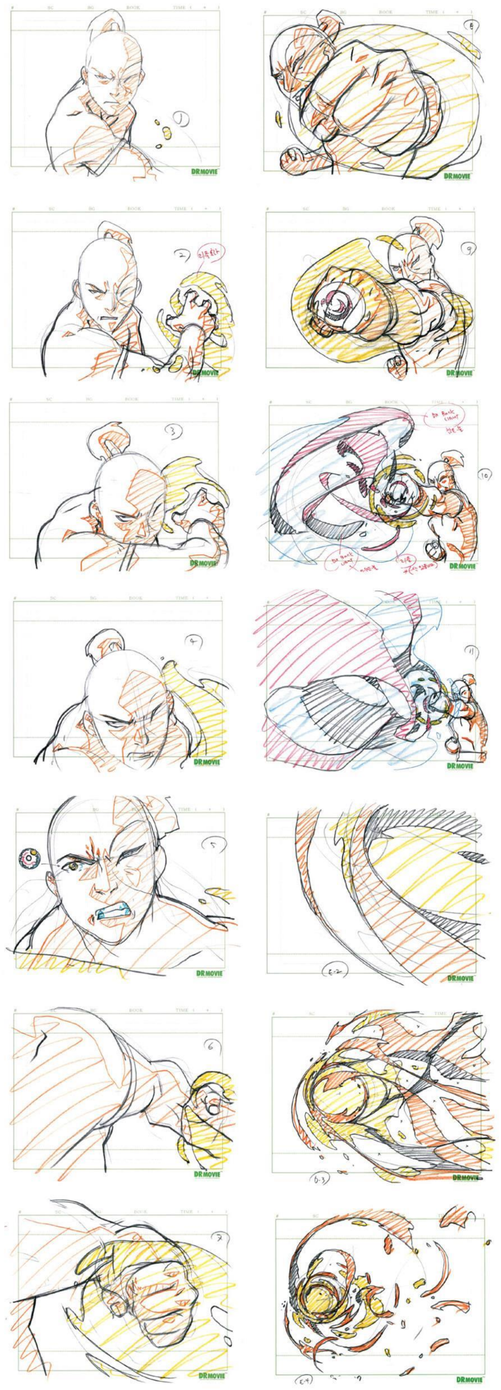
When we joined forces, Mike and I not only had a story to tell but also a passion to restructure the system so the Korean animators could be treated more as artists and encouraged to add to the show's creative process, rather than merely executing the Americans' ideas. It wasn't easy, and our ideas didn't always work, but luckily people like Mark Taylor, the general manager of Nickelodeon Animation Studios, and Miken Wong, our line producer, believed in our vision and helped us to forge a brave new system for *Avatar*'s production.

MIKE: By the time the series began, a group of the animators and the color supervisor whom we had worked with on the pilot had started a new company, called JM Animation. Even though they were a brand-new company and had never worked on an American TV show before, we believed in their tremendous dedication and talent and knew they would use their creativity to think outside the box.

However, due to the fast-paced schedule and JM Animation's size at the time, there was no way they could physically animate all thirteen episodes. So we turned to DR Movie and their sister company at the time, Moi Animation. Both companies had impressive resumes and years of experience working on both U.S. and Japanese productions.

JM Animation took on the Herculean task of animating the first two premiere episodes. After sending off all the preproduction material from the artists at Nickelodeon (including characters and background designs, storyboards, an animatic, and color models), we eagerly awaited the first pencil tests. I remember watching some QuickTime videos of JM's first pencil tests with Bryan and Dave Filoni. We were totally blown away. The beautiful quality, the emotional acting, and the dynamic action exceeded even our highest expectations. I knew then that the animation on *Avatar* was going to be something really unique and special and would complement the epic nature of the story.

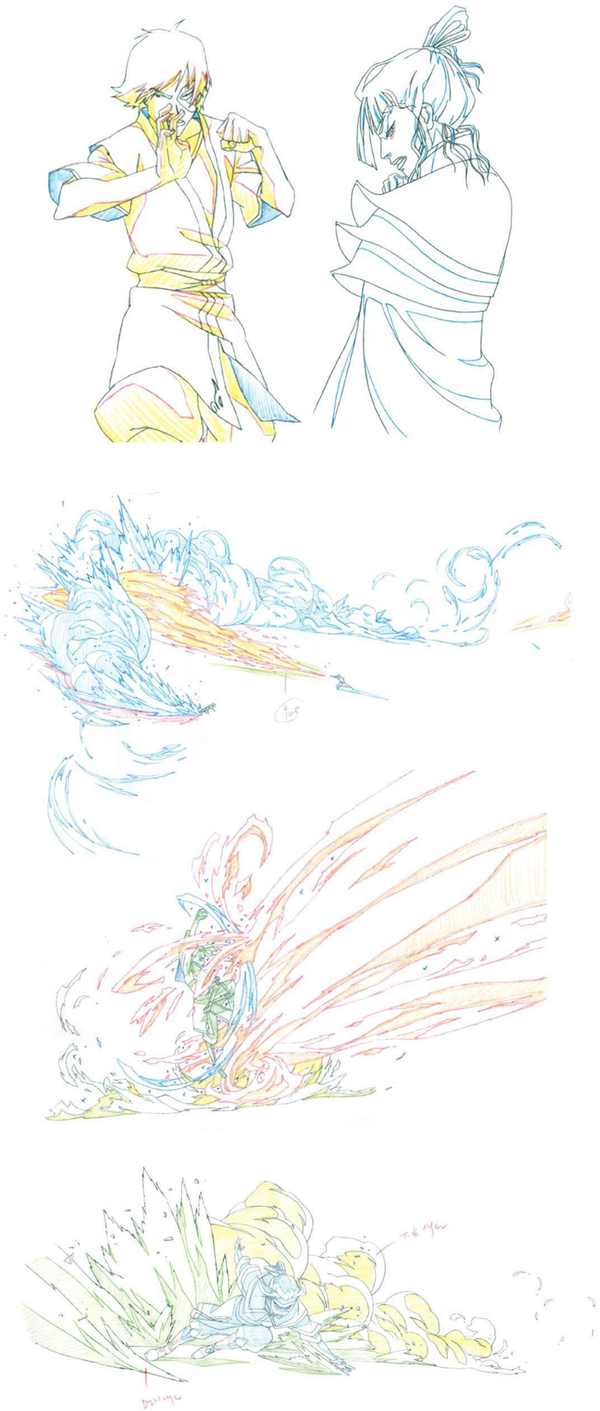
The most satisfying part of working with the Korean studios was getting to know the artists on a personal level. Over the course of the series, we took numerous trips to Seoul to work side by side with the artists. With each trip, I was even more inspired and impressed by the artists and their work. And we developed many great friendships over the years, which have lasted long after the production ended.



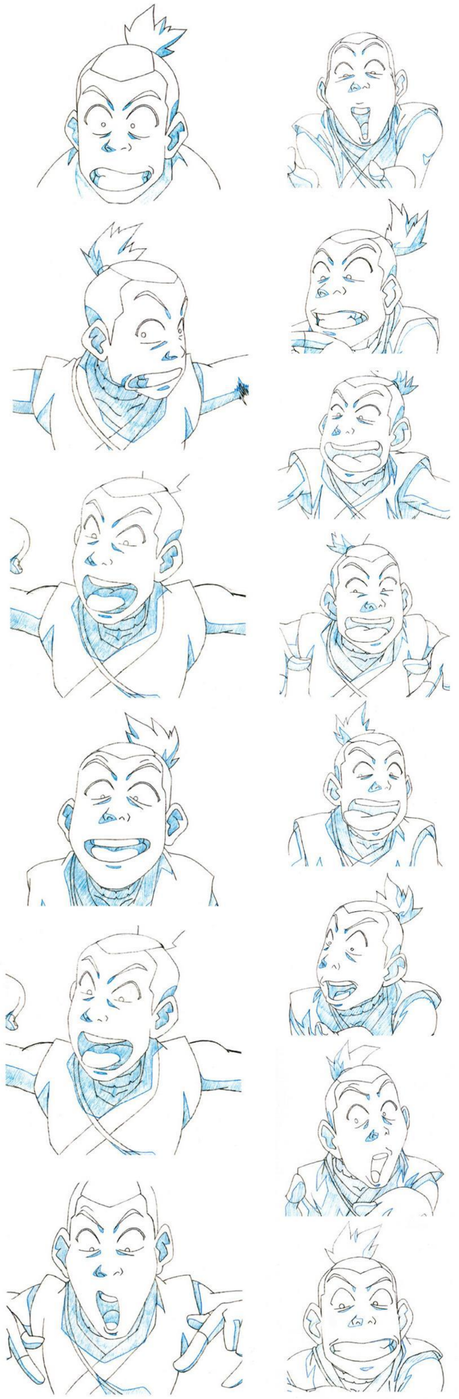
Zuko key animation by Jeong In.

Aang key animation by Ryu Ki Hyun.

Katara key animation by Ryu Ki Hyun.



Azula vs. Zuko key animation by Jung Hye Young and Yu Jae Myung.



Sokka heckling key animation by Jung Hye Young.
Sokka vs. fish key animation by Myeong Ga Young and Yu Jae Myung.

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CHAPTER TWO

Season One

WATER

The journey begins, but we still have a long way to go before the show gets on the air . . .

MIKE: It's well known in the animation industry that working on a show's first season can be hell. You have a new group of people working together, trying to draw a new style, all under incredibly tight deadlines. I had plenty of experience in this area, working on the first seasons of *King of the Hill*, *Family Guy*, and *Mission Hill*. So, going into *Avatar*'s first season, we had a pretty good idea what was in store for us workwise. The challenge was to find the best talent both in Los Angeles and Korea if we hoped to keep up and exceed the high quality of the pilot.

Following a six-episode script order from Nickelodeon, we hired a head writer, Aaron Ehasz, whom Bryan and I knew from *Mission Hill*. With Aaron on board, we began fleshing out story ideas for the beginning of season one. Meanwhile, we called up old friends and colleagues to fill director, storyboard, design, and layout positions and looked through mountainous piles of portfolios, trying to find the right artists for the job. The first artist we hired was Dave Filoni, whom I had worked with on *King of the Hill*. A couple years later, Bryan and I had both worked with Dave on *Mission Hill*, and he introduced us to the films of Hayao Miyazaki, which became a huge influence in creating *Avatar*. Because Dave understood what we were trying to achieve with the look and story, we knew he had to be involved with *Avatar*. Thankfully, he agreed, and went on to direct some of the most memorable episodes of the first season, including the season premiere and finale, as well as fan favorites "Jet" and "The Blue Spirit."

The staffing of other key artists and directors quickly followed, and before we knew it, *Avatar* had grown from me and Bryan developing the idea in his apartment to a crew of over thirty people working at Nickelodeon Studios. I was happy and excited. One of my goals was to be part of creating an animated show, and now I had achieved that. Well, not quite yet. We still had a lot of work to do and a long way to go before the show even got on the air.

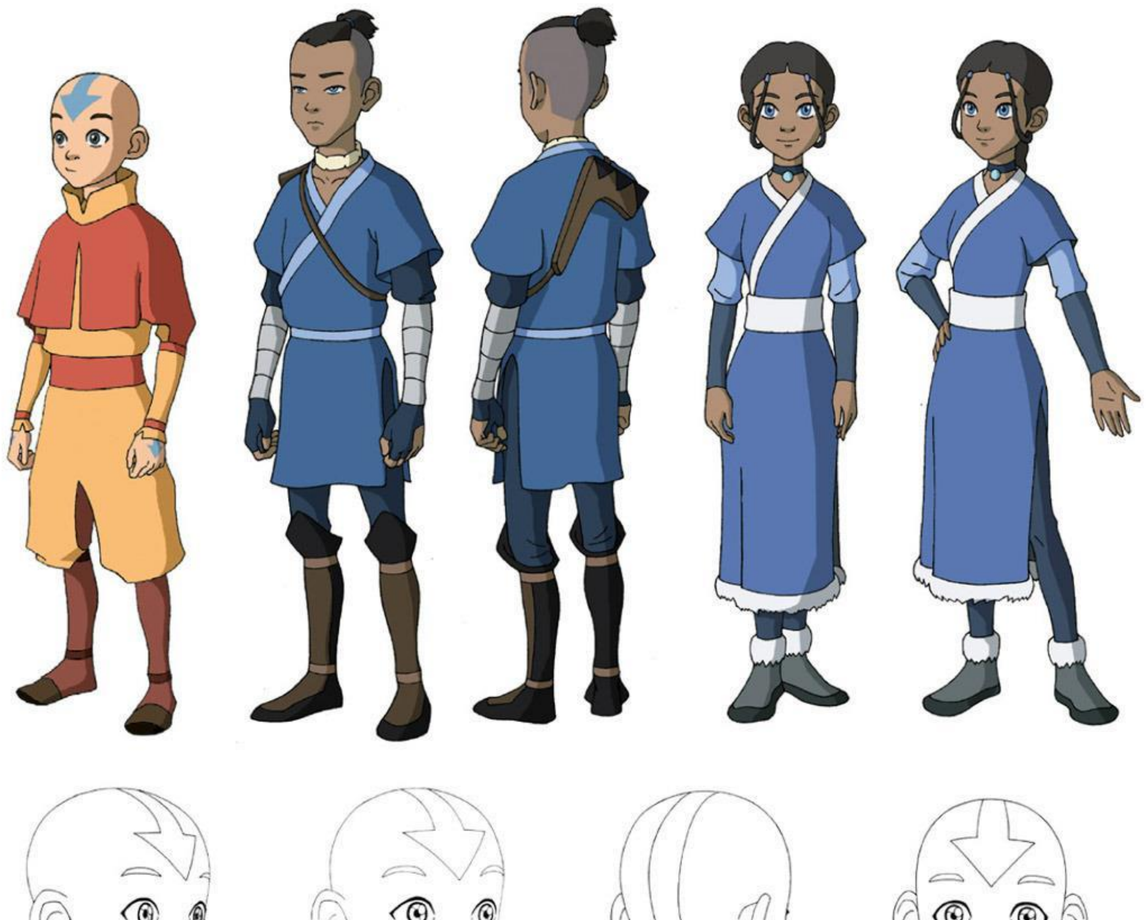
BRYAN: As the art director, my goal was to make *Avatar* as epic and cinematic as possible. This was a difficult task while working within the restraints of a kids' TV budget and schedule. It was even more difficult because most artists in the American TV animation industry had only worked on cartoony kids shows or prime-time sitcoms. If they had worked on action shows they were usually only versed in American styles, which mostly take their cues from superhero comics. Mike and I wanted to make an American show that took its stylistic cues from the sensibilities of Japanese anime. There is such a keen sense of observation in much of the animation out of Japan, in the study of movement, cloth, perspective, optics, lighting, and effects. But like most of my American colleagues, I was no expert at drawing this style either. I had struggled every day for two years to capture the essence at the heart of what I loved in designs from studios like Gainax and Studio Ghibli. I was also conscious of not wanting to merely copy one studio's or artist's style, or get too stylish with the character designs. There are some flashy sensibilities in anime that attract hardcore fans, but that can be off-putting to people who are less familiar with the aesthetic. Personally, the lizard-like nostrils and nonexistent noses in some of my favorite anime projects freak me out!

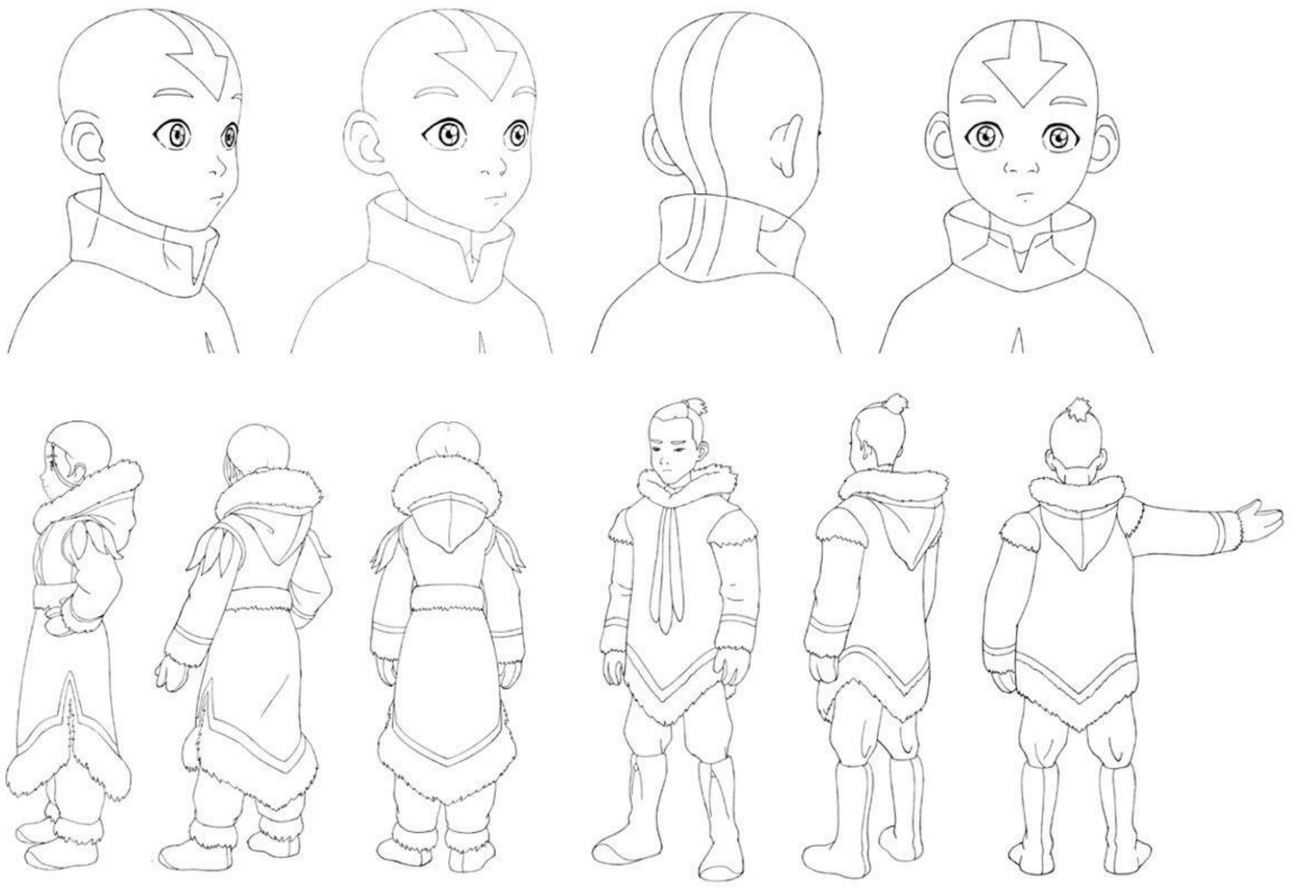
The most important thing for Mike and me was to be able to connect with our characters emotionally, and I feel sometimes the slicker the design, the harder it is to relate to a character, so I did my best to incorporate the elements that I connected with and to inject a bit of my own sensibilities in there. I was, and still remain, hyperaware of my limitations as a designer in an anime-influenced style. Regardless, I tried my best to art direct the *Avatar* world with a love for nature, and tried to incorporate that keen observation of the real world around us, particularly the rich cultures of Asia. I also made a point to let the design sense of the show evolve from episode to episode as we improved and new artists brought something to the table beyond the range of my talents and skills.

Depending on an animated show's scope and style of writing, design demands can be taxing on production. In my first job, as a character designer on *Family Guy*, I designed an average of one hundred characters per episode! Mike and I knew from experience that limiting the number of characters, props, and locations would greatly free up our energies to focus on getting quality storytelling and animation, but despite this, we ended up creating the most ridiculously ambitious show we could think of. Our heroes traveled to new, exotic locations in virtually every episode, encountered scores of new characters, and often got into fights involving water and fire (the two most notoriously difficult things to animate). More than one person told us that we simply couldn't pull it off. Luckily, we had a crew who believed in *Avatar* as much as we did, and they were dedicated to helping us try to prove the skeptics wrong.

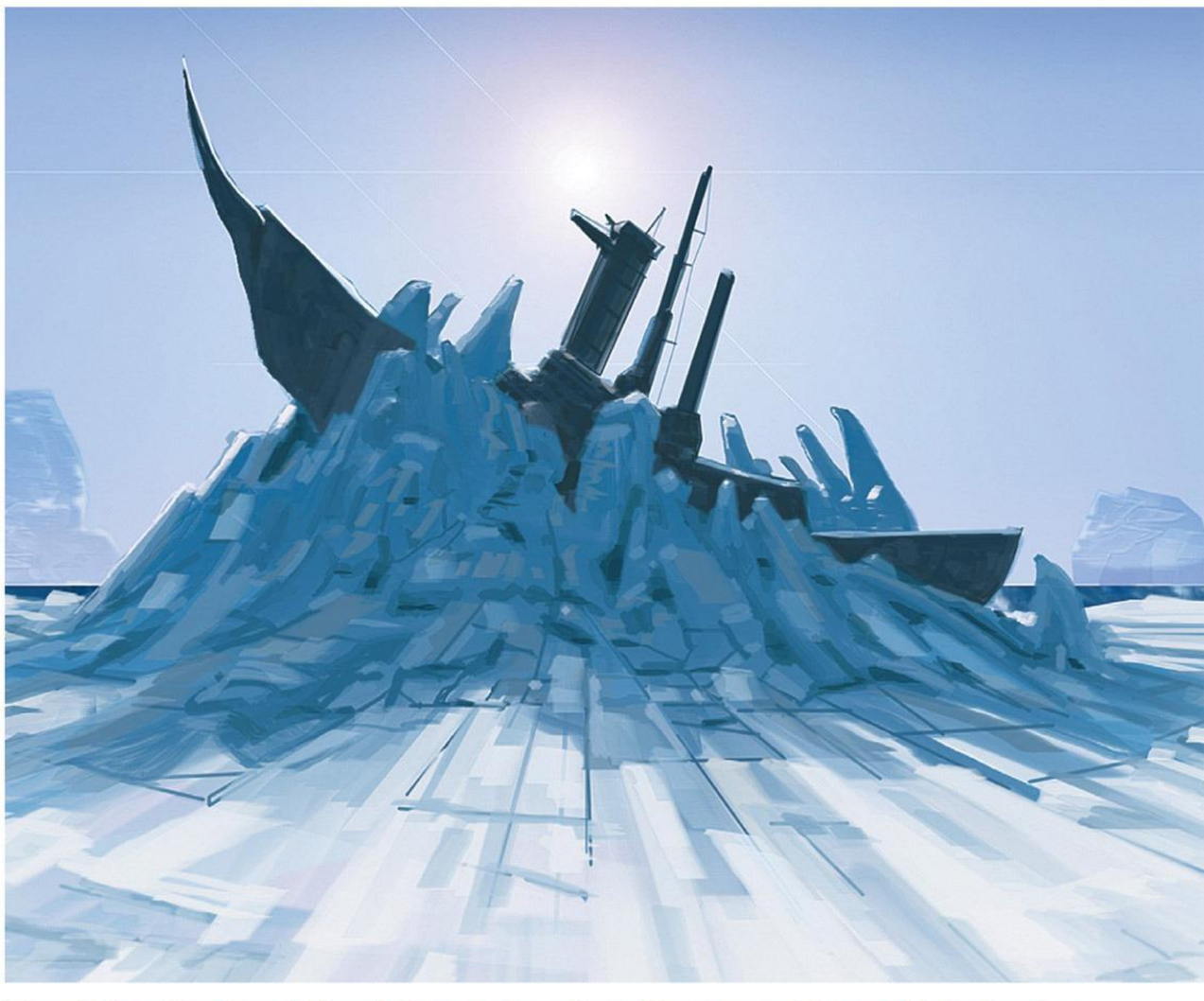
Achieving quality and consistency was a daily struggle, especially in season one where we were trying to figure out so much for the first time, and as a result some episodes fared better than others. But even our less exemplary episodes have moments that I am truly proud of, and luckily I think the whole ended up being greater than the sum of its parts, largely due to the continuous story-line and character arcs.

Facing chapter title page: Northern Water Tribe canal. Background design by Elsa Garagarza. Painting by Bryan Evans.





As we moved from pilot to series, animator Ryu Ki Hyun suggested some helpful stylistic refinements to Aang's design in order to help the animators. Designs by Bryan Konietzko. Color by Hye Jung Kim.



We never imagined that Aang and Appa were frozen solid inside the iceberg. Rather, we envisioned them floating within a hollow pocket of spiraling energy. We would have loved to show them rotating within the iceberg, but that would have been too difficult to animate. Color concepts by Will Weston.

Once a thriving nation, the Southern Water Tribe was ravaged by years of war. We were really inspired by the movie *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner*, which depicted life in a small Inuit tribe. Concepts by Will Weston.

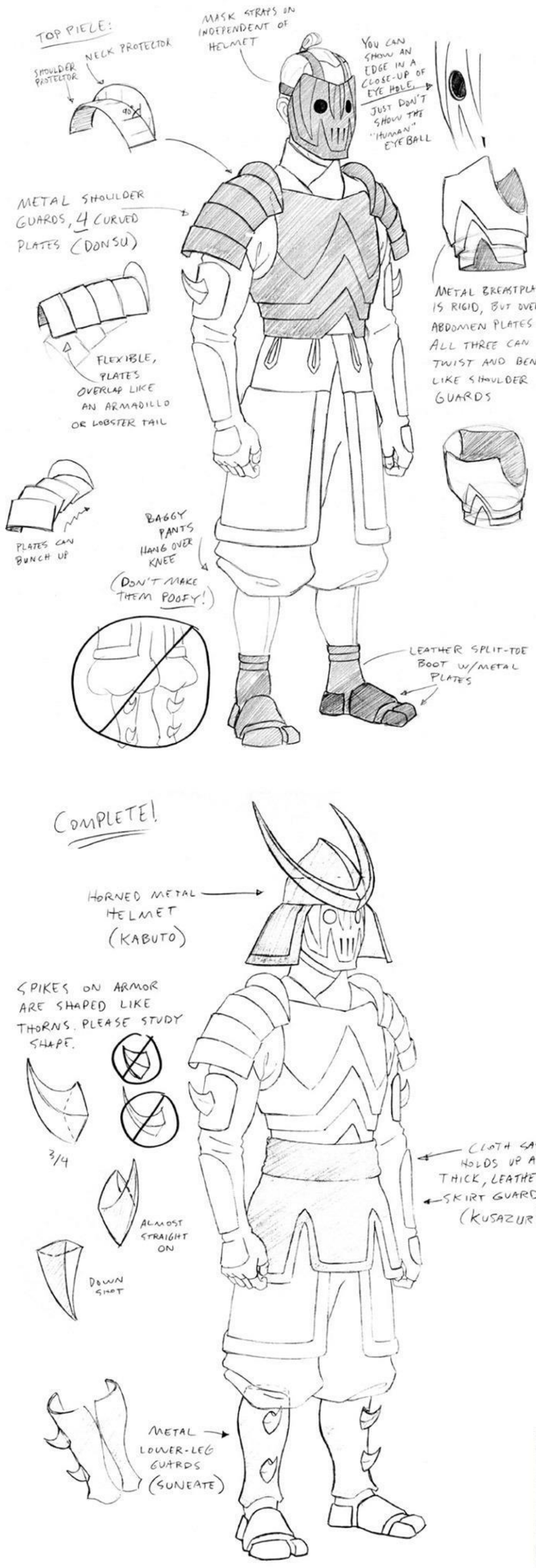
The Korean animators and the late, great actor Mako always put a lot of life and spirit into Uncle Iroh's character. His warmth and wisdom made him a favorite of many fans, young and old. Key animation poses by Jung Hye Young.

UNCLE IROH

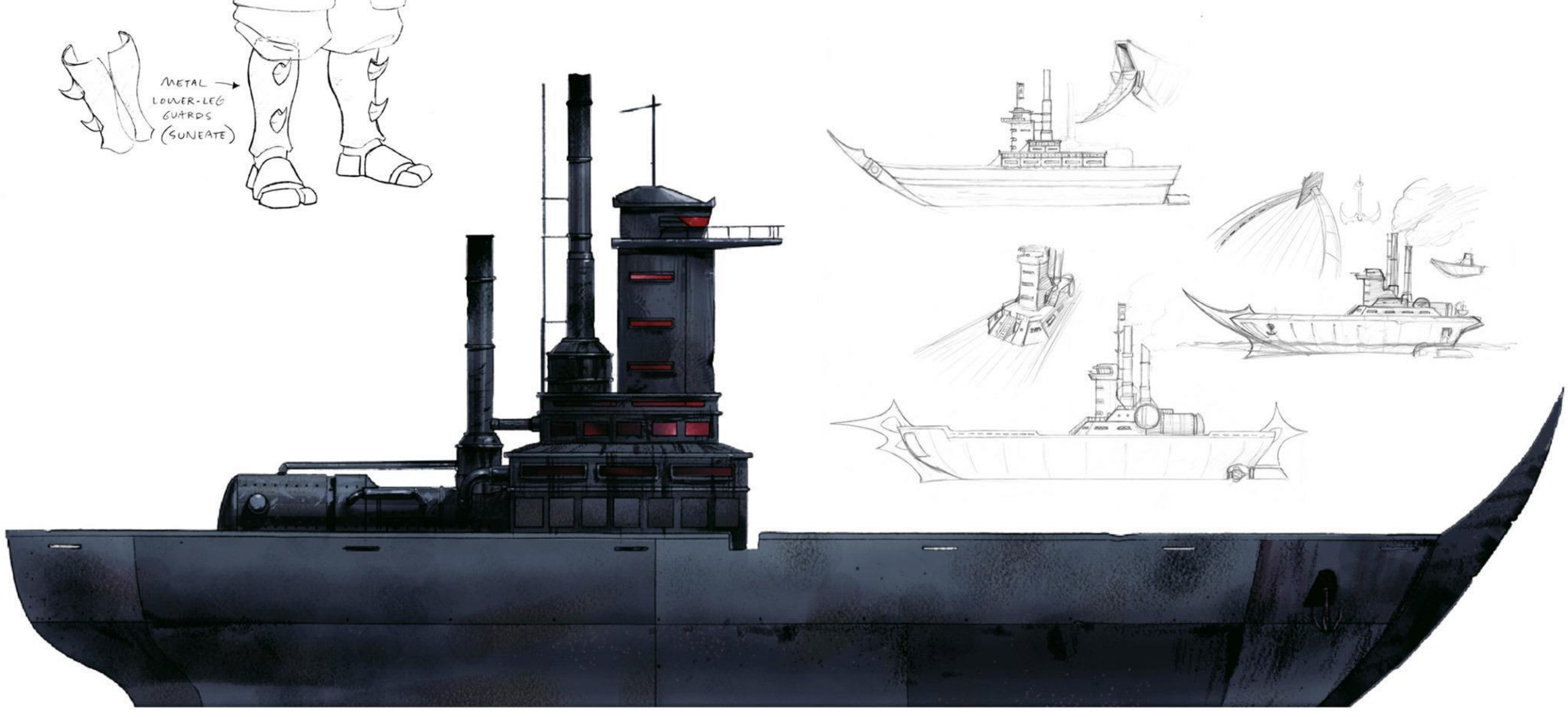
MIKE: Early on, Bryan and I had the idea that Zuko would travel with a mentor figure. For a while, we thought he was just Zuko's *sifu*, a teacher with a gruff personality who trained Zuko in Firebending.

It wasn't until we wrote the premiere episodes that we thought the story would be more interesting if Zuko's *sifu* was actually his uncle, though his personality didn't evolve much. It was Aaron Ehasz who brought a softer side to the writing of Uncle's character. In one of our first meetings, Aaron had described Uncle as a guy who is trying to enjoy his retirement, but gets stuck watching over his nephew. We loved the idea. And later, when we cast Mako as Uncle's voice, he added another layer of wisdom, compassion, and some unexpected humor that made Uncle one of the most beloved characters on the show.

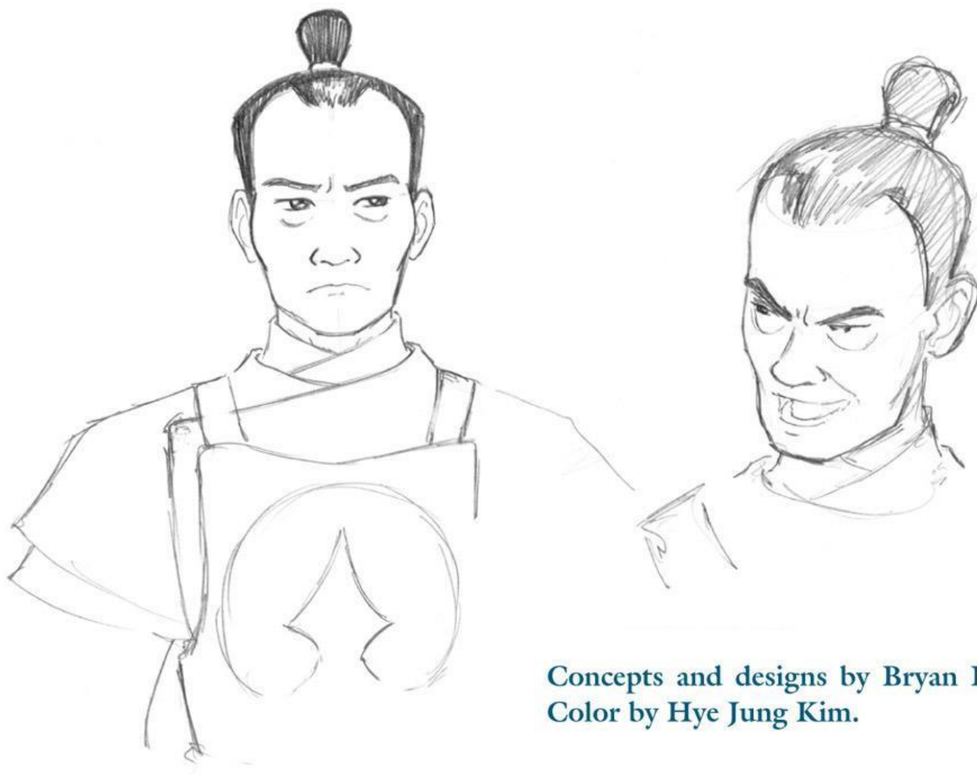
Li Hong's initial concepts captured Uncle's character right away, but they were too intricate for television animation. We went through several rounds to pull the designs into the simpler, more streamlined style of our show. First two concepts by Li Hong. Second two by Bryan Konietzko. Middle of page: Uncle Iroh body concept by Bryan Konietzko. Head concepts by Aaron Alexovich and Bryan Konietzko.



Designing the Firebenders was a long and varied quest to create a force of soldiers that looked intimidating and scary. They needed cool-looking armor that could be easily drawn, since we would see so many of these guys. Early versions of the Firebenders' helmets had horns inspired by rhinoceros beetles. Their face masks ultimately resembled graphic skulls with dead, empty eye sockets. Concepts and designs by Bryan Konietzko. Color by Hye Jung Kim.



Firebender helmets inspired the blade-shaped bow of Zuko's ship. Concepts and design by Paul Briggs. Painting by Will Weston.



Concepts and designs by Bryan Konietzko.
Color by Hye Jung Kim.

Zuko's ship was meant to be an old clunker from the early days of the Fire Nation's war. Our idea was that when the Fire Lord banished Zuko, he made him take a small, out-of-date craft to search for the Avatar. Zhao's much bigger ship represents the newer, more advanced fleet. Color concept by Will Weston.

COMMANDER ZHAO

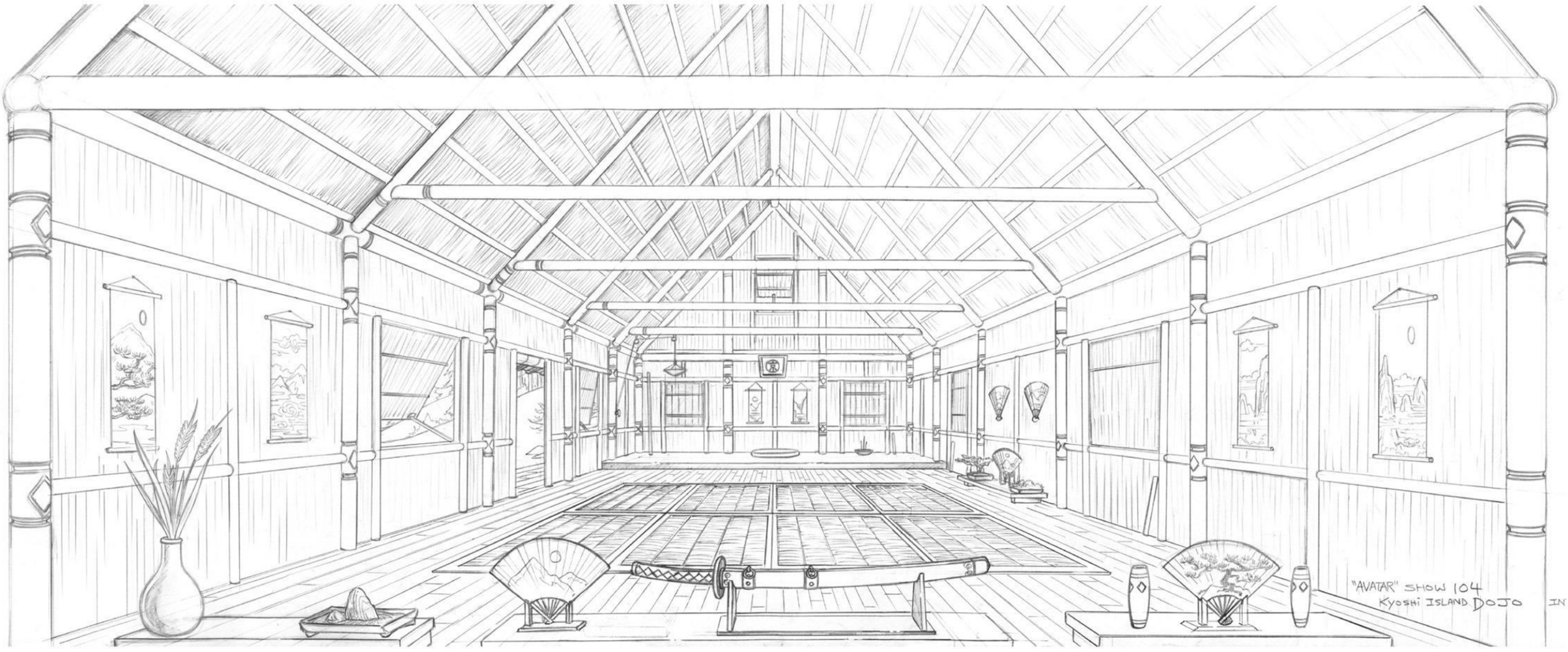
MIKE: The power-hungry and arrogant Zhao was created to give Zuko a rival to contend with in his pursuit for the Avatar. We wanted to have an antagonist that wasn't too over the top like most animated evildoers. When I wrote the character, I was really inspired by Jason Isaacs's villainous performances as the British colonel in *The Patriot* and Lucius Malfoy in the Harry Potter movies. When it came time to cast Zhao, I used Jason Isaacs as an example of the kind of actor I'd like to get. The casting director said, "What if I can actually get you Jason Isaacs?" Jason agreed to do the role and added his wonderfully cunning, evil vibe to Zhao.

Commander Zhao's design came from an amalgamation of several of Li Hong's early concepts. Zhao looked a little too tough in these sketches, so we revised him to have the feeling of a sleazy politician or an overambitious corporate climber. Concepts by Li Hong.

MONK GYATSO

MIKE: Since the Air Nomads were wiped out by the time of our story, Monk Gyatso provided a glimpse into their lost culture. We wanted Monk Gyatso to look wise and learned, but also warm and playful. He was a wise sage who knew how to enjoy the simple pleasures in life.

The Air Nomads traveled the world, herding their flying bison, but they had four cultural and spiritual centers where they held ceremonies and festivals, and trained the apprentice monks. Being a reclusive, monastic society, they built their Air Temples at high altitudes, in very remote locations. Gyatso concepts and statue by Bryan Konietzko. Background design by Will Weston and Tom Dankiewicz. Painting by Will Weston.

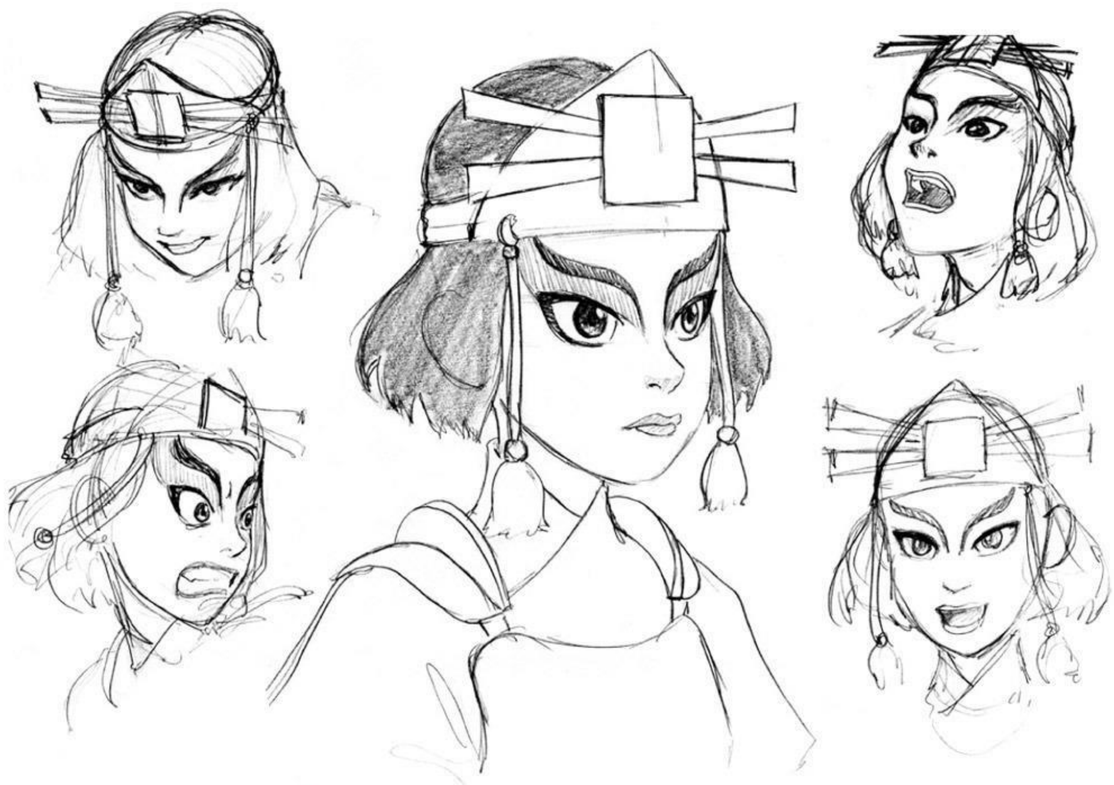


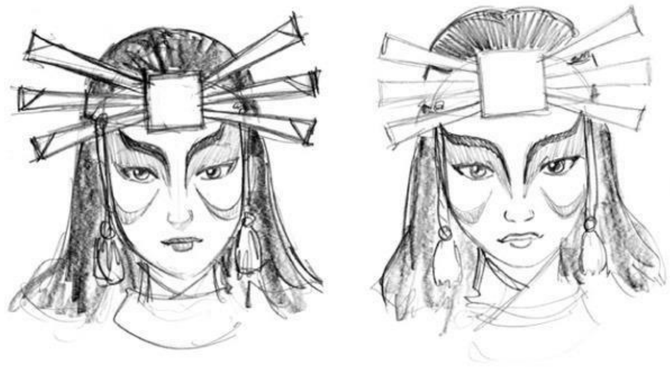
Kyoshi Warrior dojo. Background design by Tom Dankiewicz.

SUKI

BRYAN: Early in development, Mike had an idea about an isolationist society of warriors who had stayed out of the war between the nations. Writer Nick Malis pitched a similar idea for a story premise, featuring a group of female Japanese-inspired warriors. The character of Suki emerged when we needed a leader for this band of skilled fighters.

Suki and the Kyoshi Warriors were originally meant to be part of a one-off story, but they caught the imagination of the artists and writers on our crew (not to mention the fans), and we soon found ourselves planning to bring them back. I think as soon as Sokka and Suki kissed, we all wanted to see where that might lead. Mike and I have an affinity for strong female characters, so it is only natural that Suki earned her way into the main stable of Team Avatar.



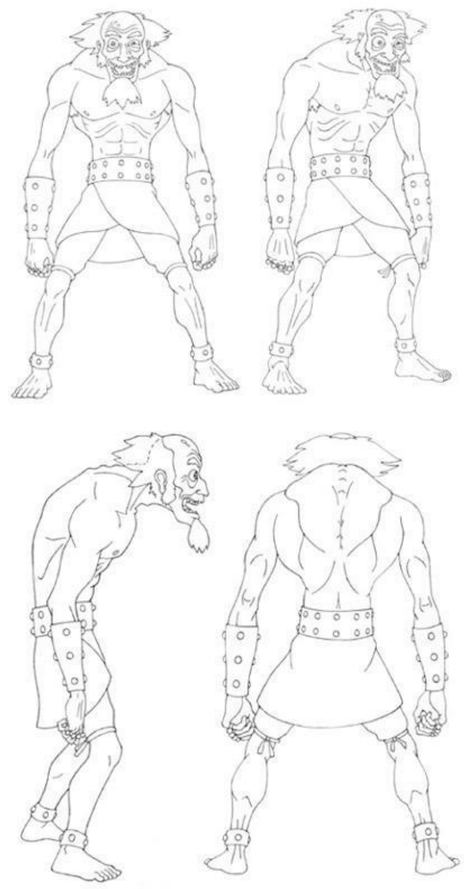


We are big admirers of traditional Japanese clothing. Suki's and the Kyoshi Warriors' designs provided a great opportunity to pay homage to that rich aesthetic. We imagined the island of Kyoshi was an important fishing port, so there were often unruly sailors wandering their quaint streets and causing trouble. Avatar Kyoshi established the Kyoshi Warriors in her image as a formidable female police force to protect the island's inhabitants. Concepts and designs by Bryan Konietzko. Color by Hye Jung Kim.

KING BUMI

BRYAN: I remember drawing King Bumi's concept in the international-departure lounge at LAX while waiting to fly to Seoul, South Korea, to visit the animation studios. King Bumi, when he was dressed as a king, was hiding his age-defying physique. Once revealed, I wanted him to have the creepy, long-limbed, hunched posture of Gainax's Evangelions.

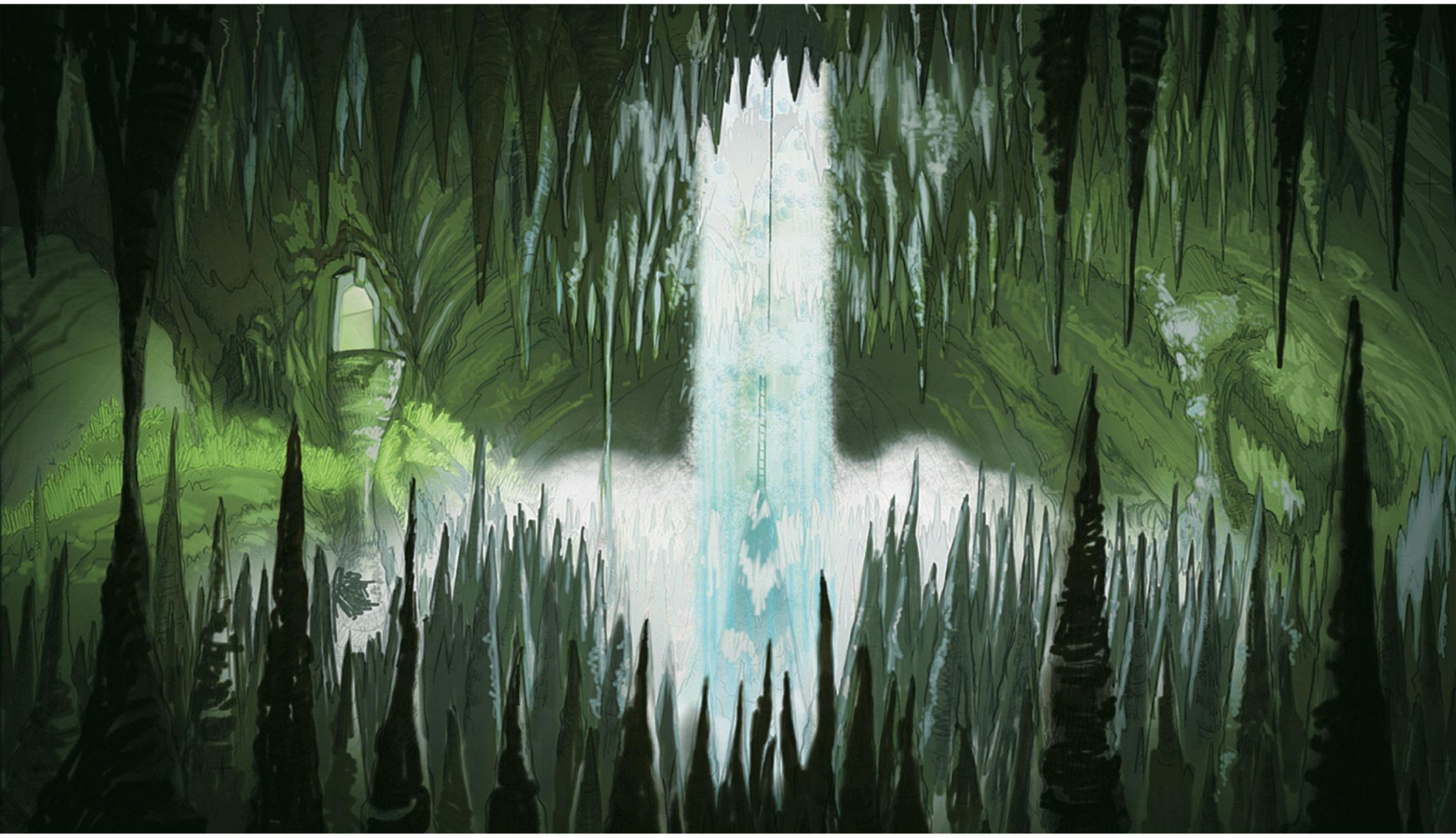
MIKE: I had an idea that since Aang was in the iceberg for one hundred years, it was conceivable that a friend from his youth could still be alive. This combined with John O'Bryan's idea of a crazy old king who put Aang through a series of tests to become the episode "The King of Omashu." Although the finished episode exposed our first-season growing pains, King Bumi became one of my favorite characters.



King Bumi. Concepts and designs by Bryan Konietzko. Color by Hye Jung Kim.

The Cabbage Merchant became an unlikely recurring character, due to the writers' affinity for the running gag and his popularity with fans. We thought it was a little silly at first, having him conveniently appear wherever Aang and the gang happened to be. But we always loved the three old guys who kept popping up on various planets in one of our favorite series, *Cowboy Bebop*, so we got used the idea. Designs by Aaron Alexovich. Cart prop by Aldina Dias. Color by Hye Jung Kim.

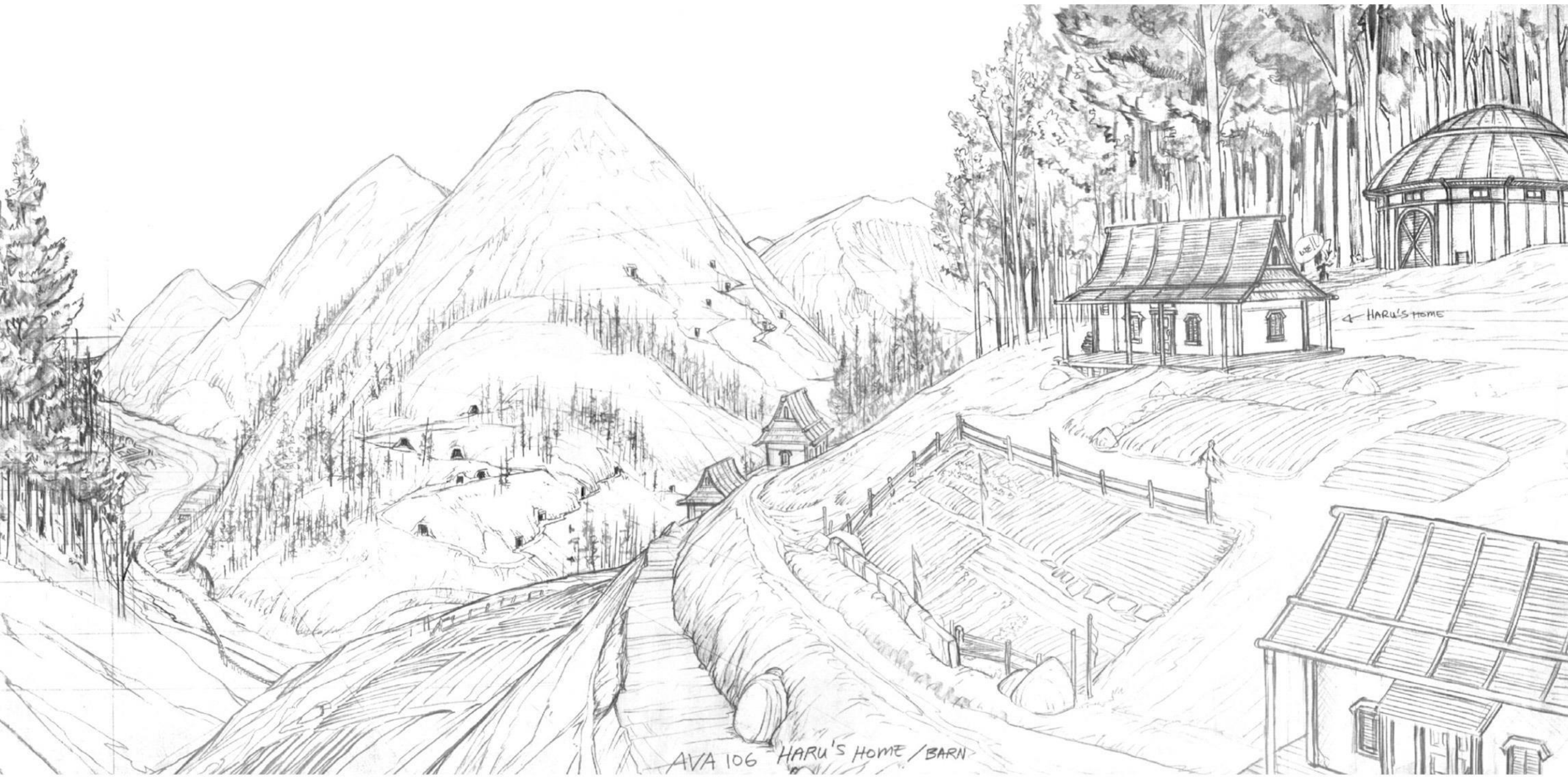
Flopsie is a combination of a goat and a gorilla, which proved to be one of the more challenging hybrid animals to design. Flopsie concepts and designs by Bryan Konietzko. Lop-eared rabbit, AKA "Fake Flopsie," designs by Aaron Alexovich. Color by Hye Jung Kim.



King Bumi's waterfall cavern. Background design by Tom Dankiewicz. Painting by Will Weston.

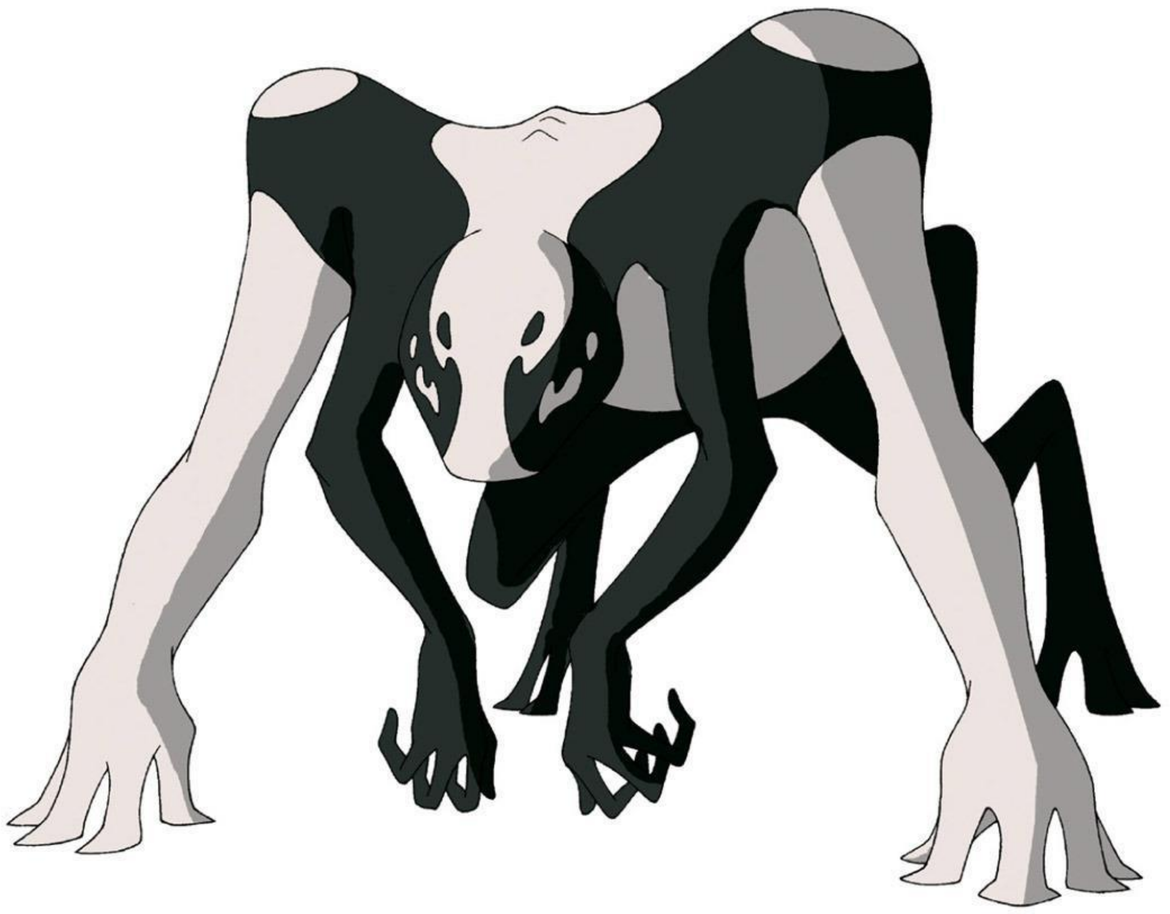
Background design by Dave Filoni.
Painting by Will Weston.

The Fire Nation prison was inspired by modern-day oil rigs. Located in the middle of the ocean, the prison is made entirely from metal, so Earthbenders are unable to bend there. The Fire Nation put them to work, forging their giant metal ships. Background design by Dave Filoni and Tom Dankiewicz.

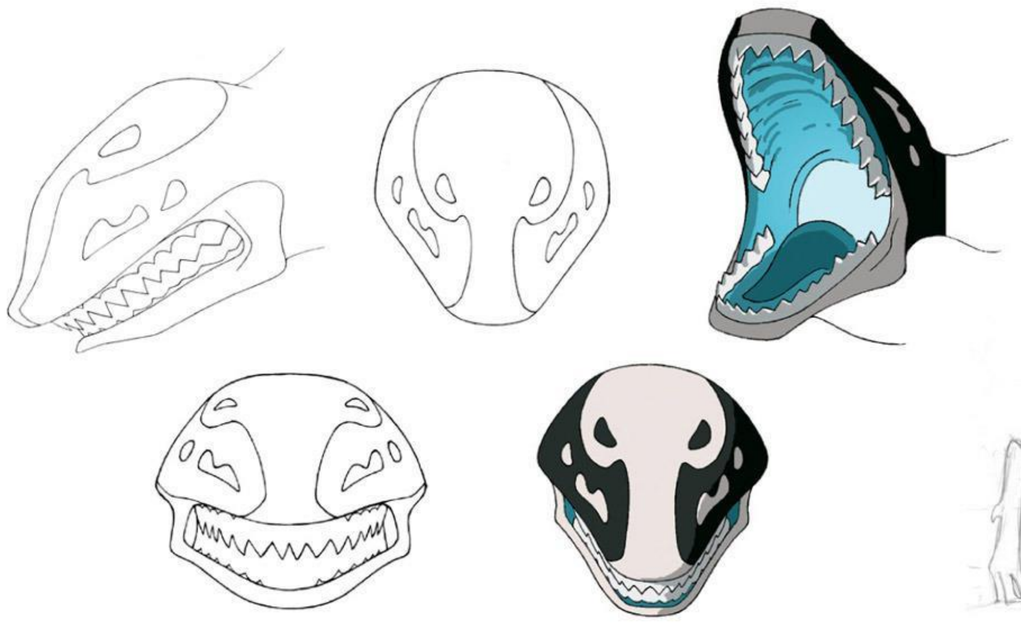


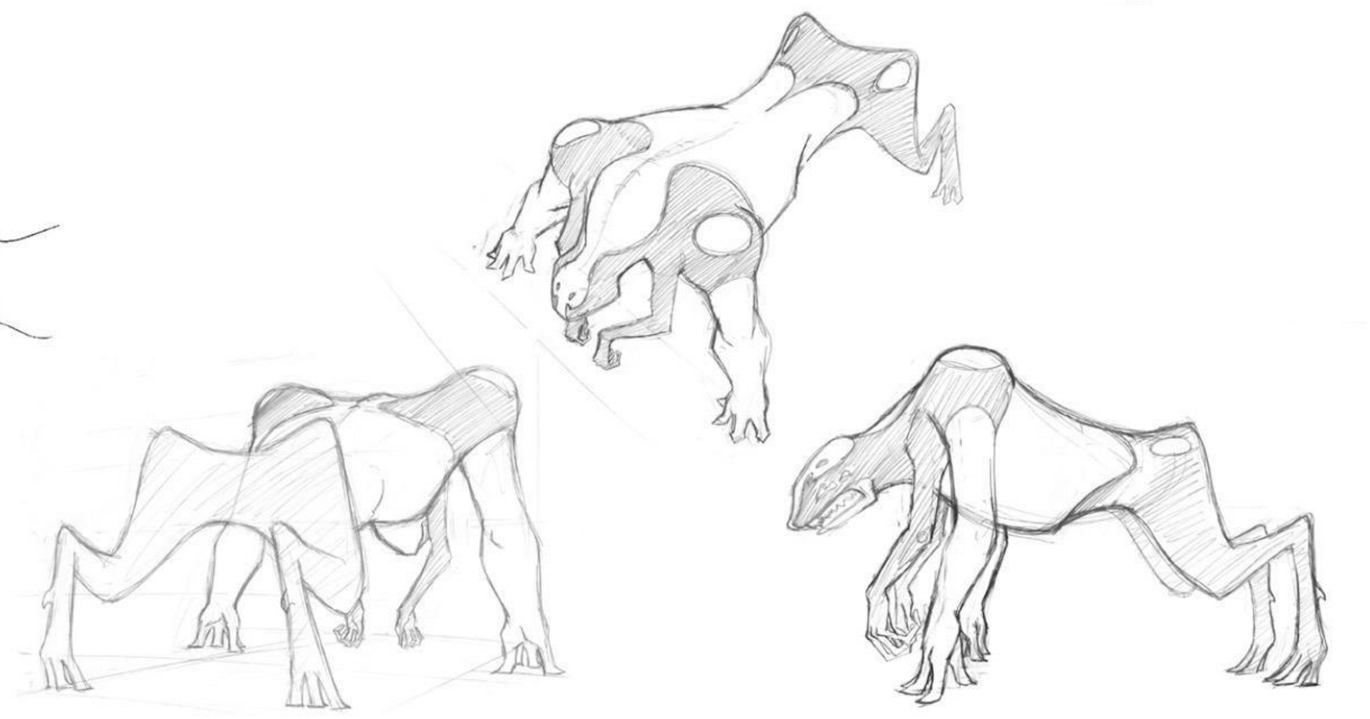
Haru's family farm. Background design by Tom Dankiewicz.

Aang meets Hei Bai. Concept by Ethan Spaulding.



Hei Bai's design was inspired by the Angels in Gainax's *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. Concepts and designs by Bryan Konietzko. Color by Hye Jung Kim.





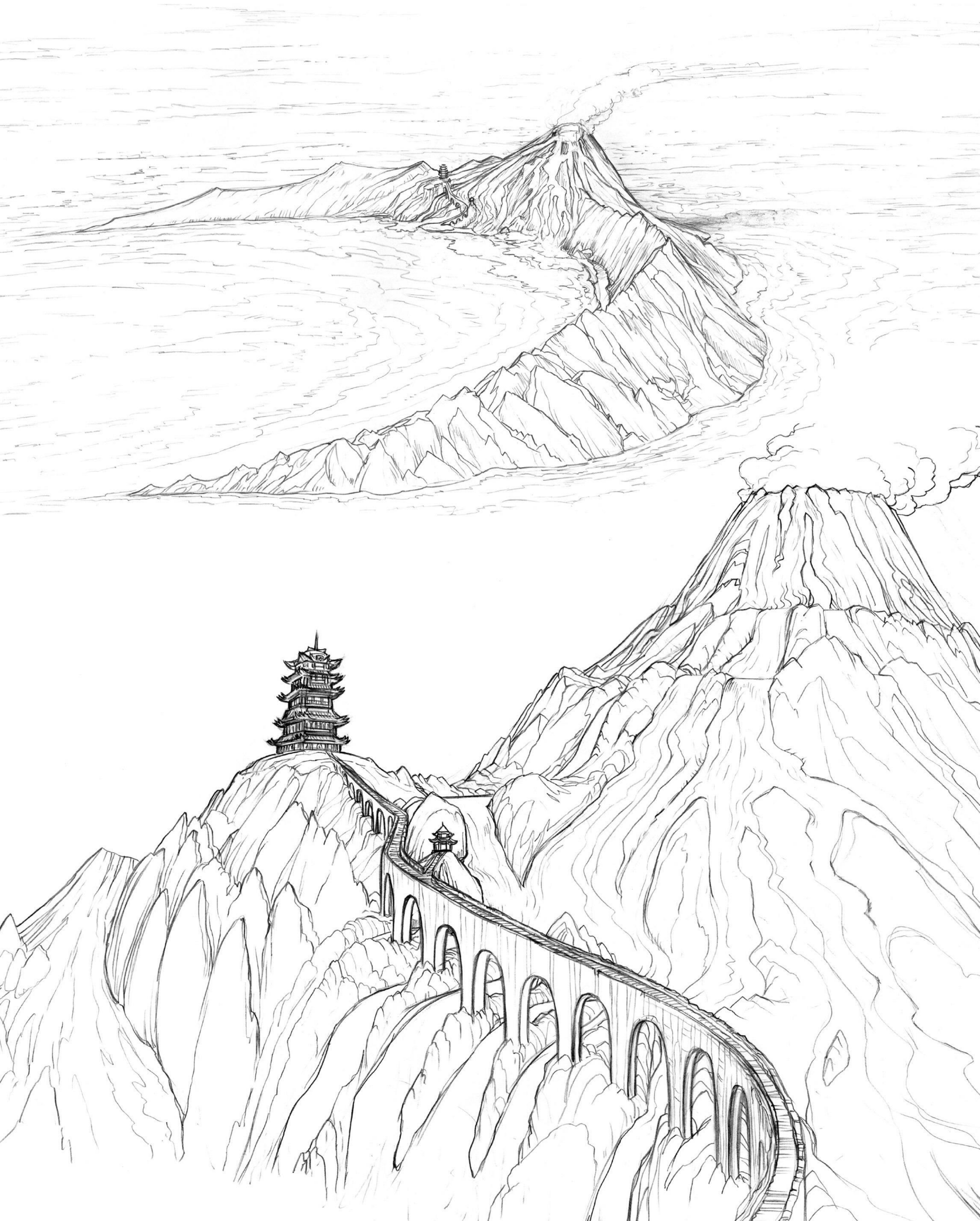
An ancient shrine to the docile Panda Spirit. When the Fire Nation burned down the forest, the spirit became enraged and took the form of the vengeful Hei Bai. Background design by Tom Dankiewicz. Painting by Will Weston.

Avatar Roku served as a mentor figure for Aang throughout the series. Because Aang's previous incarnation was from the Fire Nation, it was a good opportunity to show a kinder side to their culture. Head concept by Li Hong. Designs by Bryan Konietzko. Color by Hye Jung Kim.

Sanctuary doors. Designs by Aldina Dias. Painting by Will Weston.

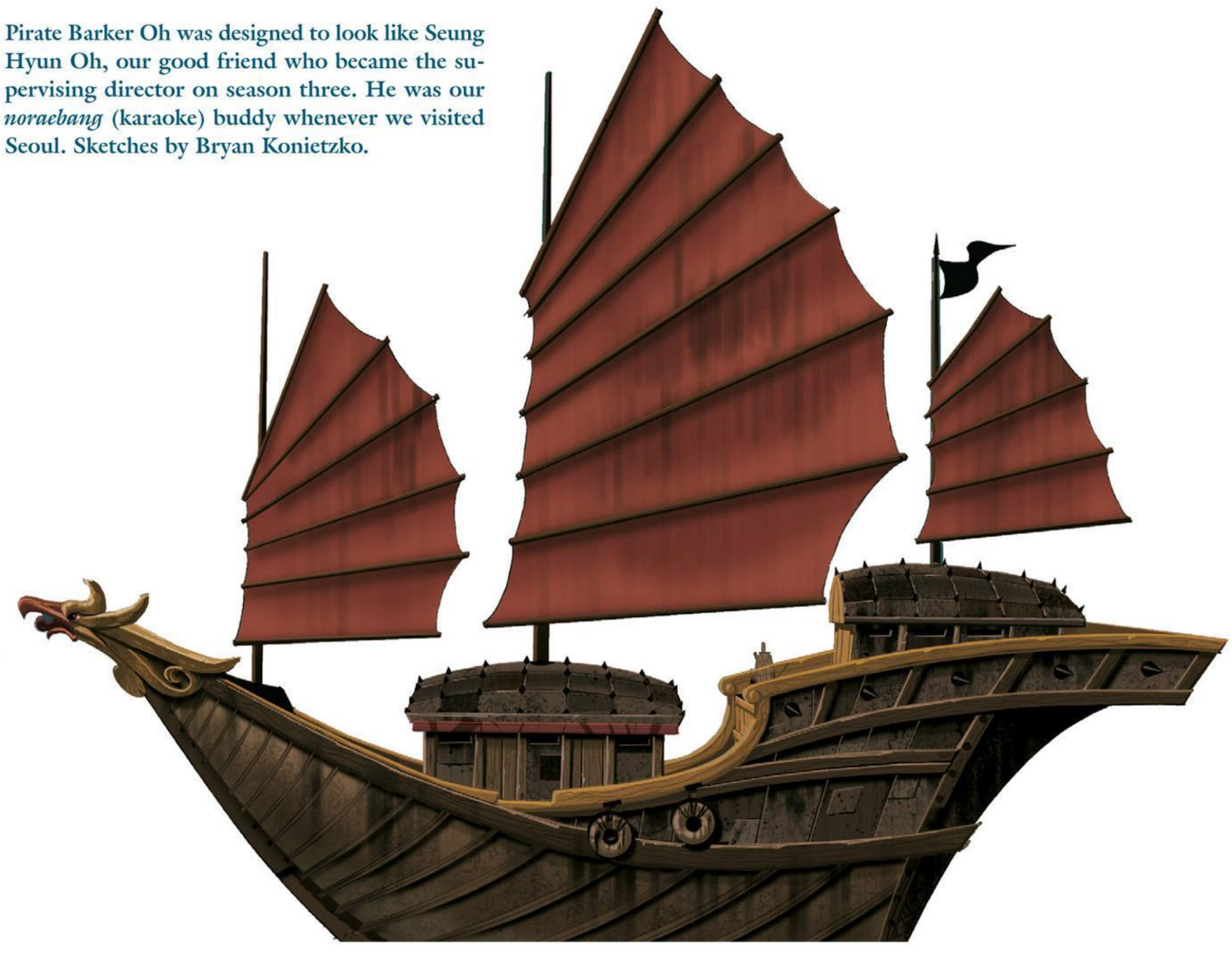
When we came across pictures of the Yellow Crane Tower, we thought that the curling, flame-like rooftop corners were a perfect motif for Fire Nation architecture. The Fire Sage's temple was the first place we exhibited these design elements. Temple and altar background designs by Tom Dankiewicz. Paintings by Will Weston.

Opposite page: The Fire Sage's temple is located on Crescent Island, which is the outermost tip of the Fire Nation archipelago. Background designs by Tom Dankiewicz.



The pirate captain was inspired by one of Li Hong's concepts. The rest of the pirates were modeled after our friends and colleagues at JM Animation. Head concepts by Woo Sung Gu. Designs by Bryan Konietzko and Woo Sung Gu. Color by Hye Jung Kim.

Pirate Barker Oh was designed to look like Seung Hyun Oh, our good friend who became the supervising director on season three. He was our *noraebang* (karaoke) buddy whenever we visited Seoul. Sketches by Bryan Konietzko.



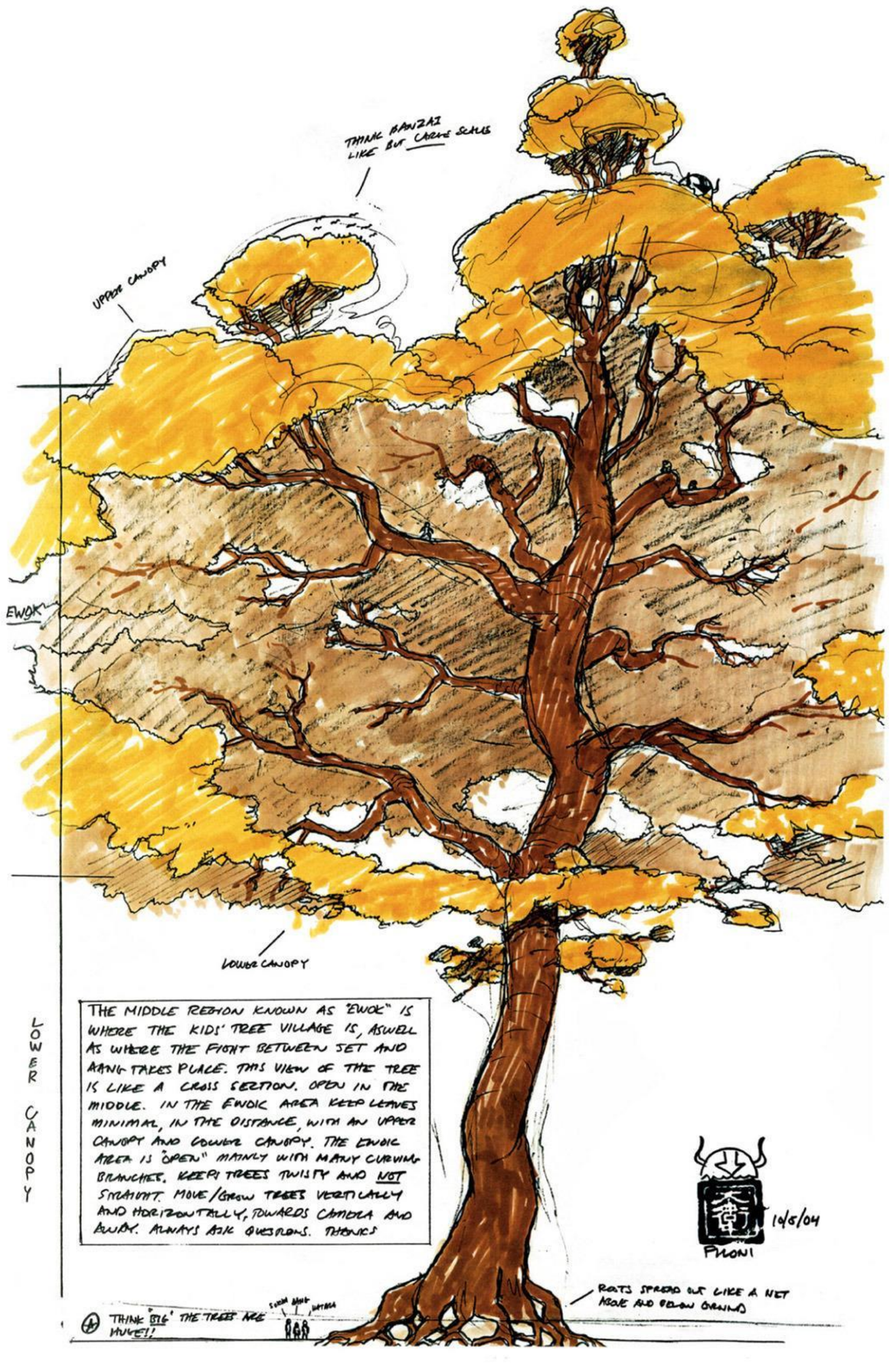
Design by Aldina Dias. Painting by Will Weston.

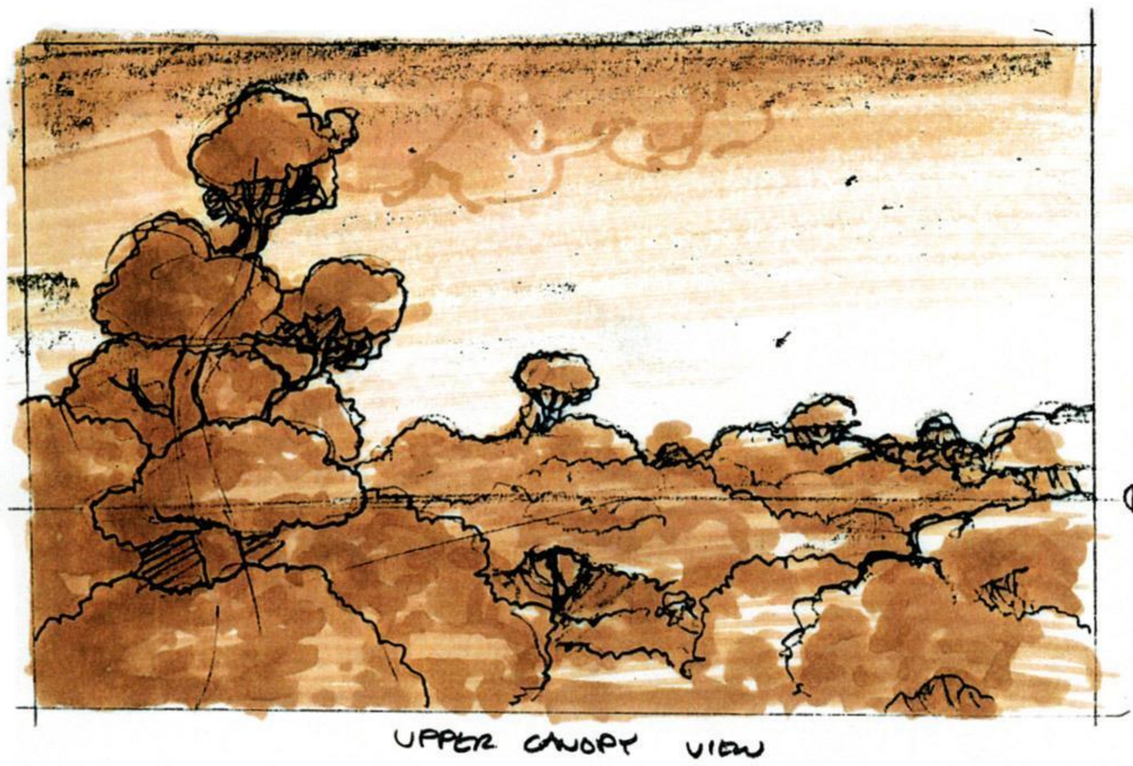
Jet's design pays homage to Spike from *Cowboy Bebop*. Even though this ragtag group of orphans is from the Earth Kingdom, they wear a mix of scavenged garments and stolen armor from the various nations. Concept by Ryu Ki Hyun.

JET AND HIS GANG

MIKE: Jet's design is a good example of how the art and writing influenced each other. In the first draft of the "Jet" script, Jet's gang wasn't very defined. We wanted to give them a lot more personality and individuality. We hired Ryu Ki Hyun (an animator at JM Animation) to draw some concepts for Jet and his gang, proving that the overseas studios were great at creating preproduction art as well as animation. Immediately, Ki Hyun's designs gave us a picture of who made up this motley crew. The writers pitched on possible names, and came up with Sneers, Longshot, the Duke, Pipsqueak, and Smellerbee. The character personalities and designs were so great we brought Jet, Longshot, and Smellerbee back in season two, where Jet unfortunately met his tragic demise.

From left to right: Longshot, Sneers, Smellerbee, Jet, the Duke, and Pipsqueak. Early color concept by Ryu Ki Hyun.


THINK BANZAI
LIKE BUT CARVE SCALE
UPPER CANOPY
EWOK
LOWER CANOPY
THE MIDDLE REGION KNOWN AS "EWOK" IS WHERE THE KIDS' TREE VILLAGE IS, ASWELL AS WHERE THE FIGHT BETWEEN SET AND AANG TAKES PLACE. THIS VIEW OF THE TREE IS LIKE A CROSS SECTION. OPEN IN THE MIDDLE. IN THE EWOK AREA KEEP LEAVES MINIMAL, IN THE DISTANCE, WITH AN UPPER CANOPY AND LOWER CANOPY. THE EWOK AREA IS "OPEN" MAINLY WITH MANY CURVING BRANCHES. KEEP TREES TWISTY AND NOT STRAIGHT. MOVE/GROW TREES VERTICALLY AND HORIZONTALLY, TOWARDS CAMERA AND AWAY. ALWAYS ASK QUESTIONS. THANKS
LOWER CANOPY
10/5/04
PHONI
ROOTS SPREAD OUT LIKE A NET MORE AND BELOW GROUND
THINK 'BIG' THE TREES ARE HUGE!!

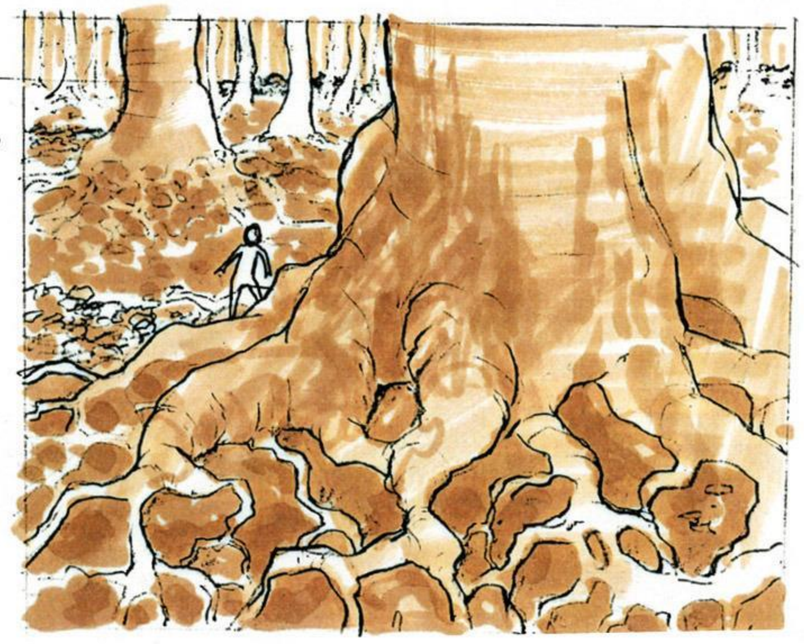


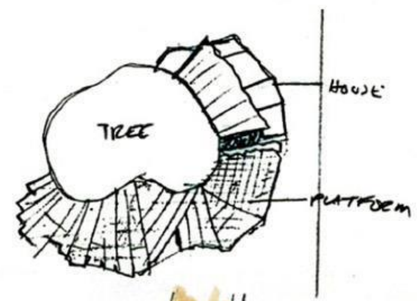
UPPER CANOPY VIEW

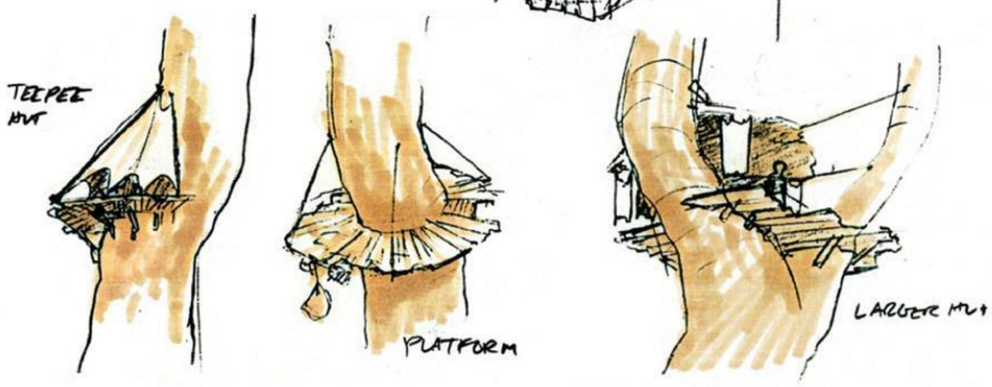
WHEN DRAWING THE UPPER CANOPY KEEP TREE SHAPES INTERESTING: BOT NOT POODLE-LIKE. THERE ARE NO MOUNTAINS VISIBLE IN THIS EPISODE. THE LAND IS NOT FLAT, AND THERE IS A VALLEY BUT NO DISTANT MOUNTAINS!!

TREE SHAPES, LIKE CLOUDS CONNECTED BY BRANCHES

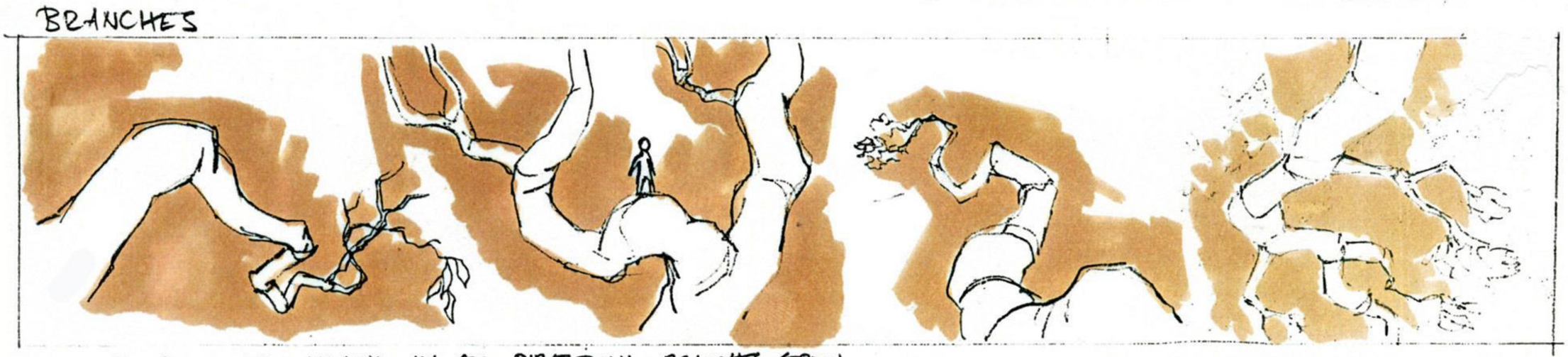
THE FOREST FLOOR IS VERY "ROOTY" WITH LOTS OF LEAVES PILED UP ON THE GROUND. THERE IS NOT MUCH SHRUBBERY EXCEPT IN THE DISTANCE AND WHEN WE REACH A CLEARING, LIKE IN THE FIRE NATION CAMP, OR CLIFF SIDE CLEARING LOOKING OVER THE DAM.



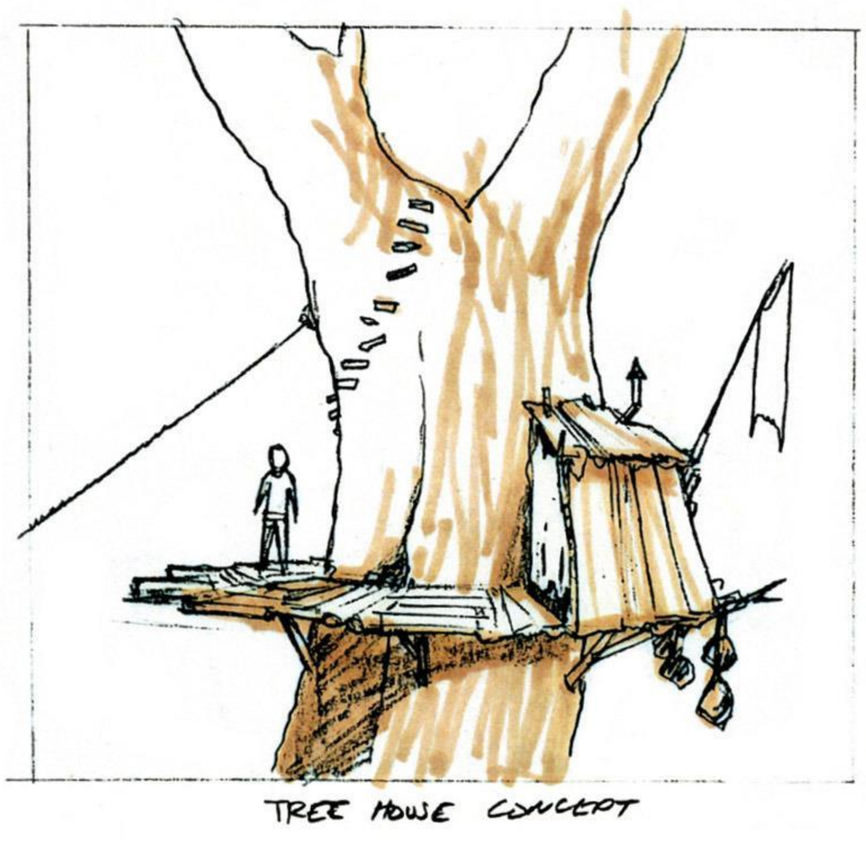




BRANCHES



BENDY TWISTY MOVING IN ALL DIRECTIONS, BRANCHES GROW.

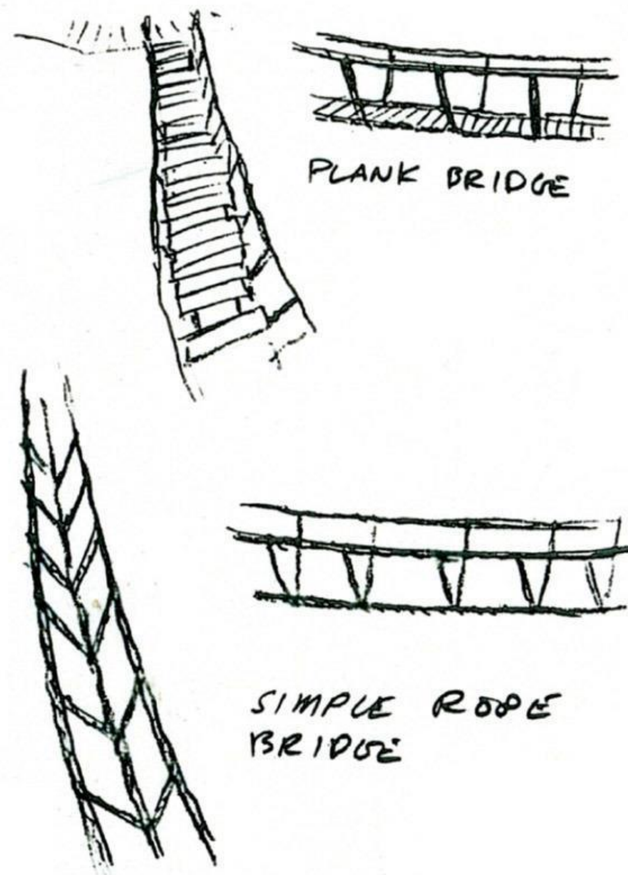


TREE HOUSE CONCEPT

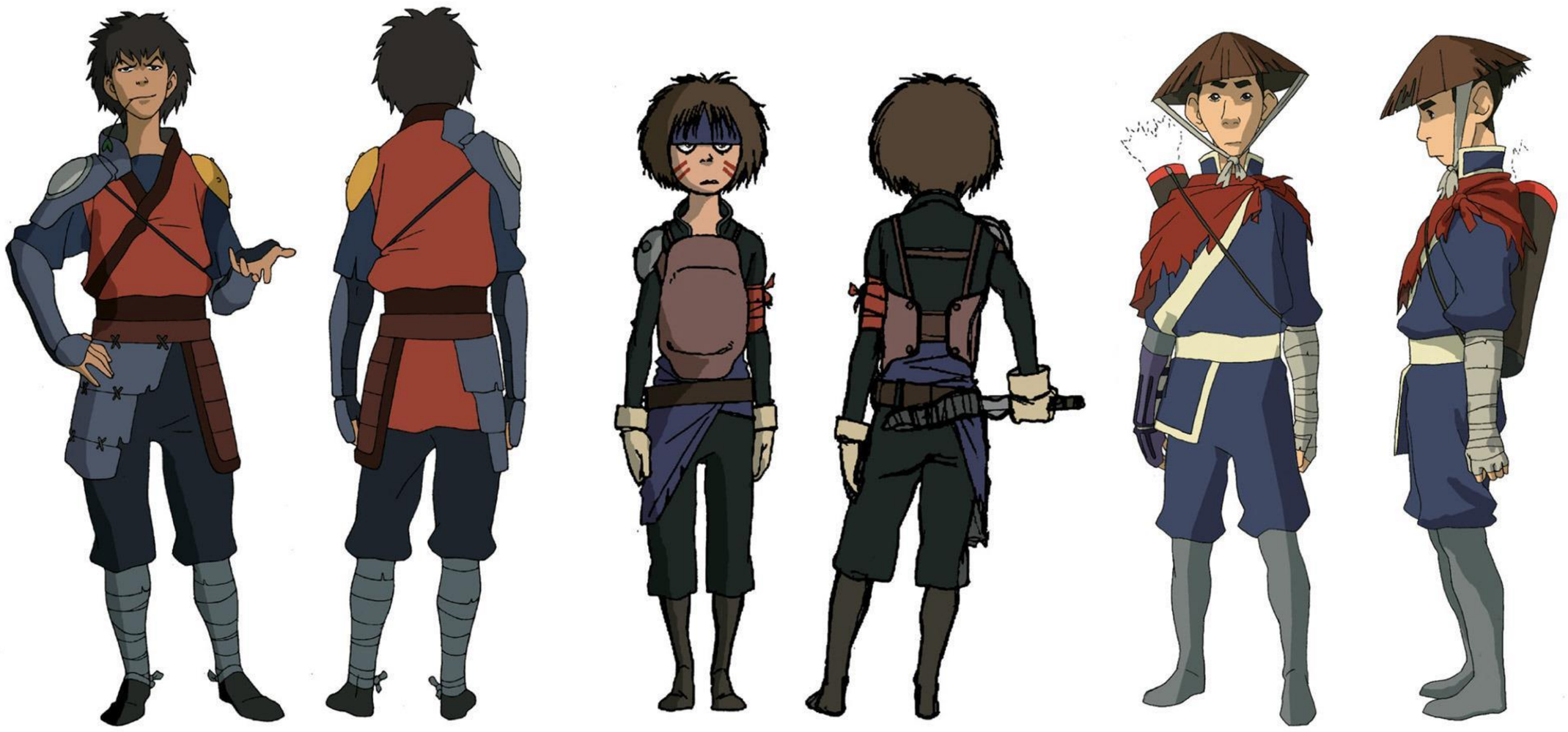
THE TREE HOUSES OF JET'S GANG ARE VERY DISORDERLY. THEY SHOULD LOOK "KID MADE" AND VERY JUMBLED TOGETHER. BOARDS OF DIFFERENT SIZES. ODD SHAPED HOUSES WITH ONE WALL BEING THE TREE ITSELF. THE HOUSES ARE MADE OF STOLEN PARTS AND PIECES. DON'T FORGET ZIP LINES

10/5/04 TREES

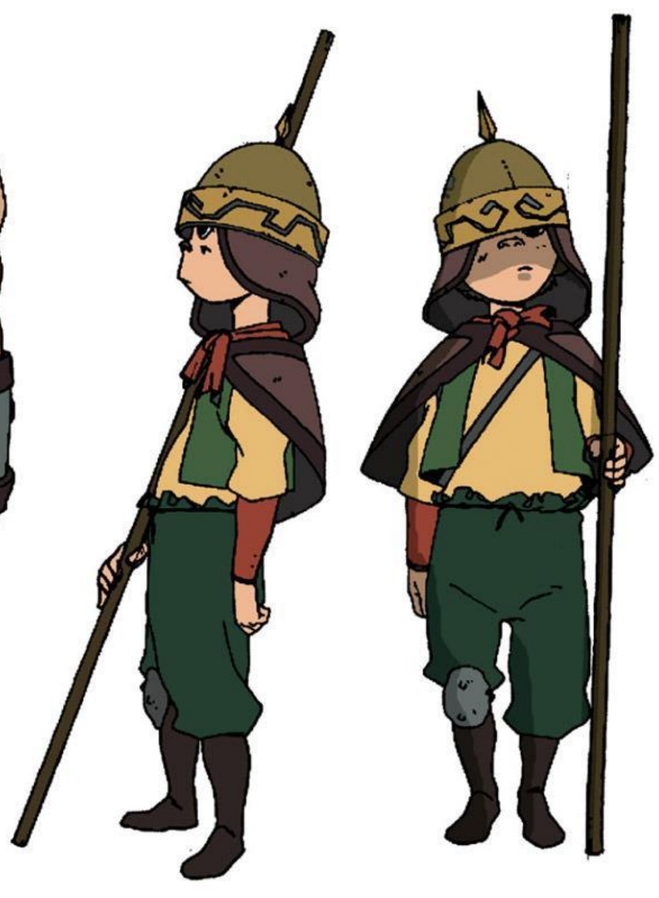
FILONI



Opposite page, top and bottom left: Jet's forest hideout. Background designs by Dave Filoni and Tom Dankiewicz. Paintings by Will Weston and Bryan Konietzko. Opposite page, bottom right, and above: Dave Filoni always had an imaginative and comprehensive approach to conceptualizing each episode he directed. These sketches were a valuable resource for the storyboard artists and designers. He is also a huge *Star Wars* fan and would try to slip in little references wherever he could. Forest and hideout concepts by Dave Filoni.



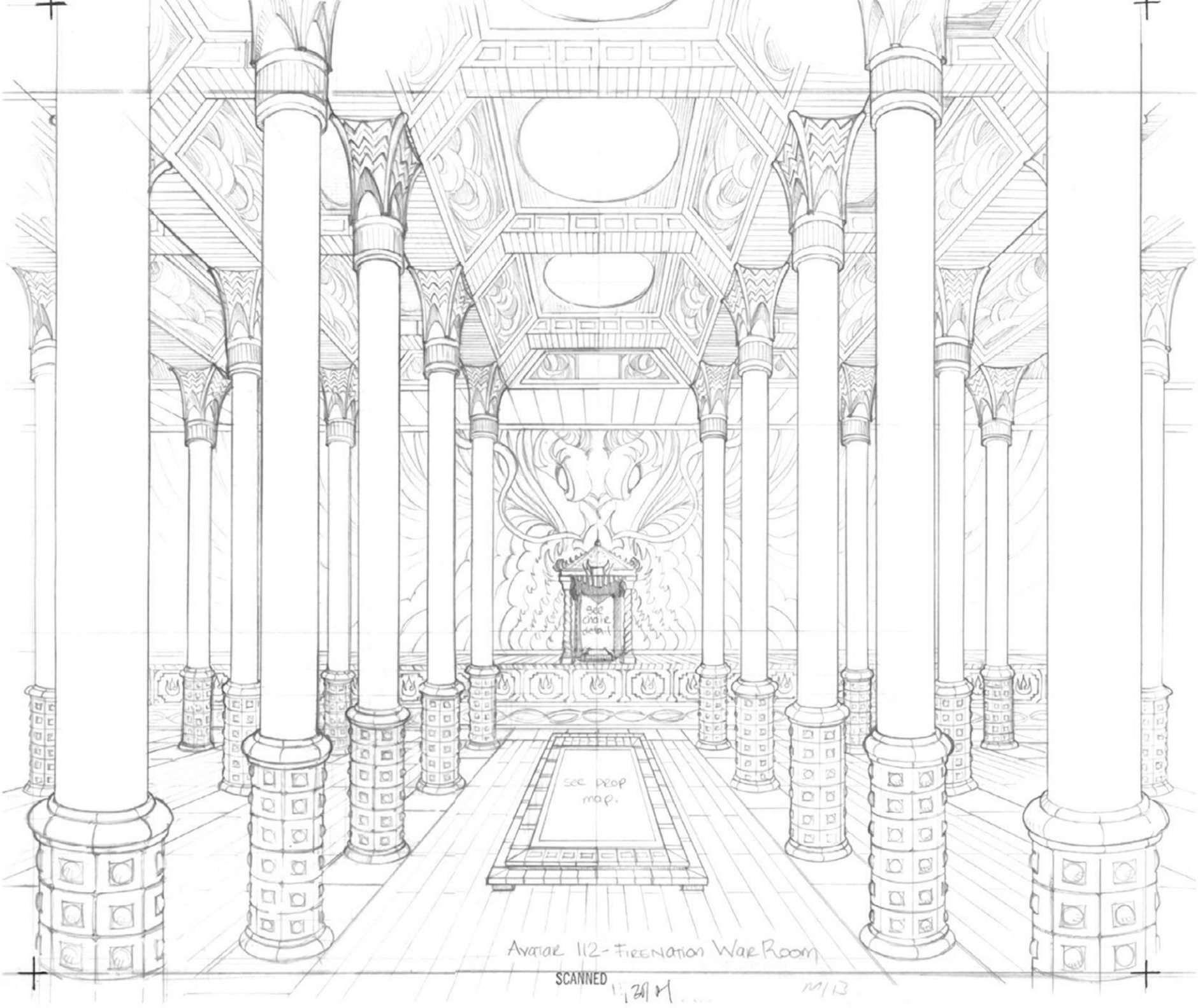
Ryu Ki Hyun's designs are full of so much spirit and life they seem to jump off the page. Designs and color concepts by Ryu Ki Hyun. Color by Hye Jung Kim.

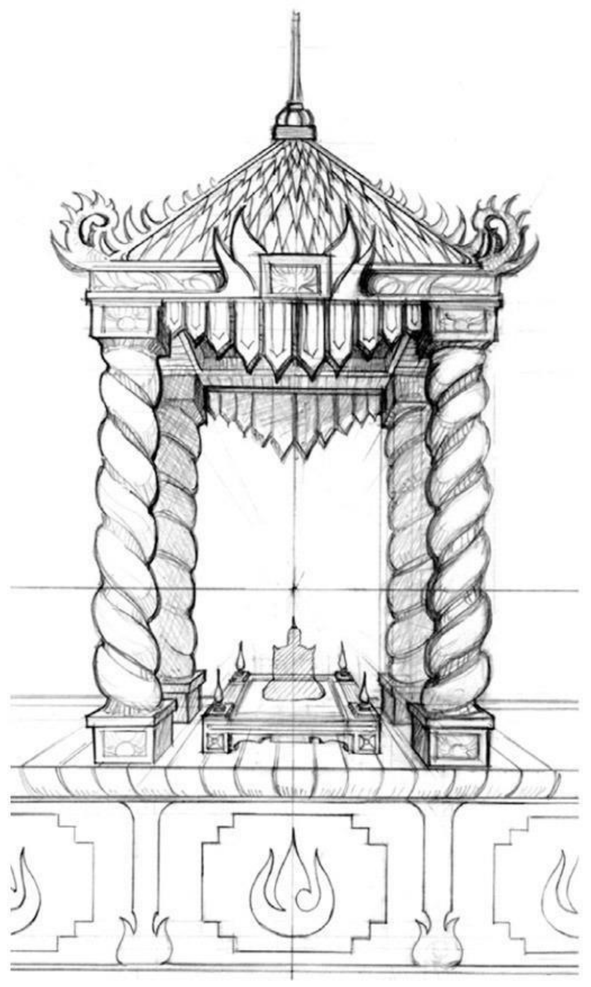


Often, character designs would need to be tweaked to fit the style of the show. But we loved these designs so much, we decided to let them be a stylistic departure.

The Great Divide. Background design by Tom Dankiewicz.

When the writers came up with the idea of crocodile-spiders that infested the canyon, we threw our hands up, unable to imagine such a bizarre combination. But Ethan Spaulding and Jerry Langford came to the rescue and visualized this terrifying beast. Concept by Ethan Spaulding. Designs by Bryan Konietzko. Color by Hye Jung Kim.





Elsa Garagarza joined the crew straight out of architecture school. For her first assignment, the Fire Lord's throne room, she was given three words: Egyptian, Chinese, scary. She passed the test. Background designs by Elsa Garagarza.

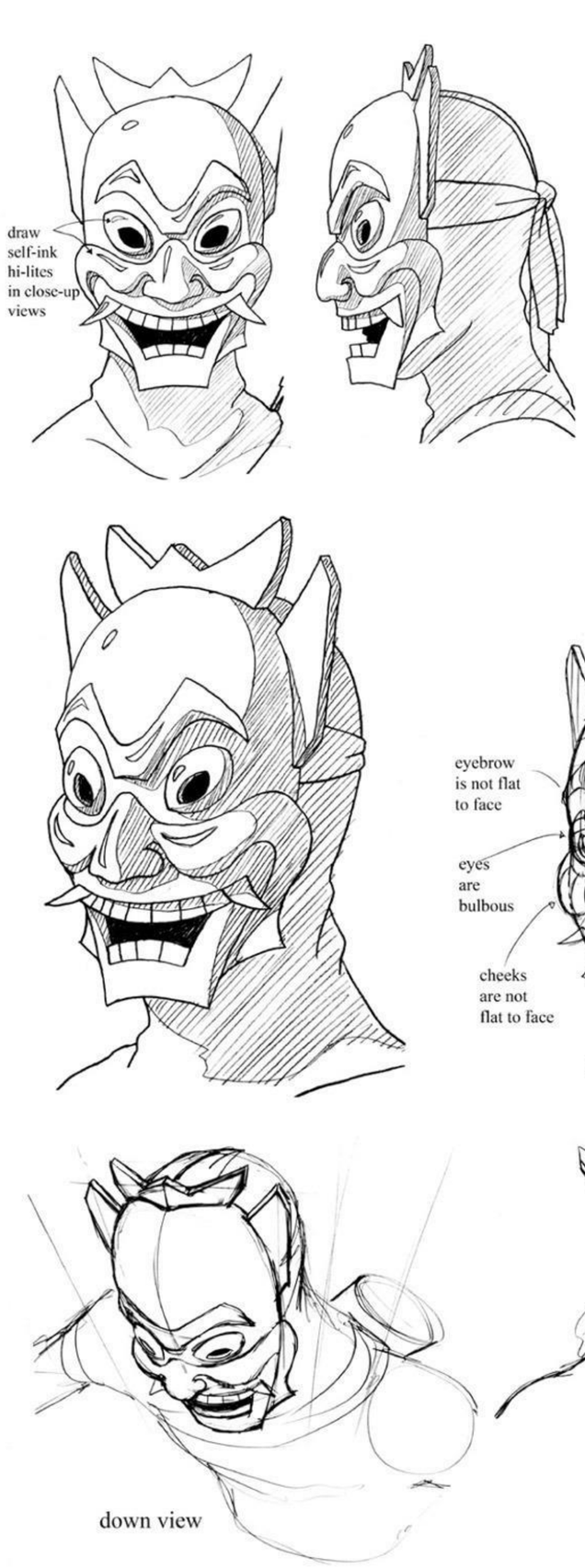
Palace hallway. Background design by Tom Dankiewicz. Painting by Will Weston.

THE BLUE SPIRIT

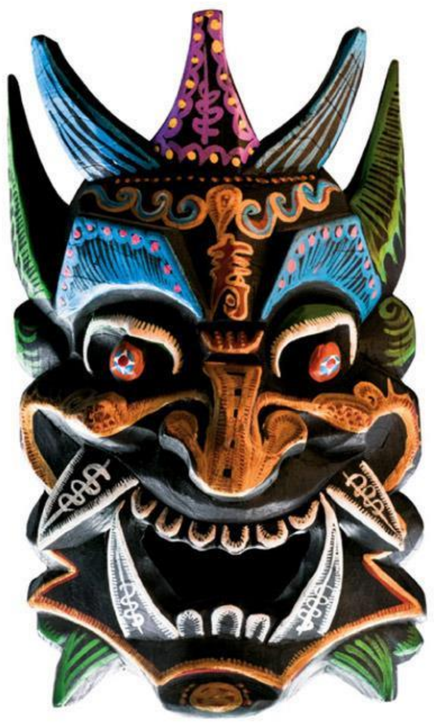
BRYAN: Because our initial pickup from Nickelodeon was only for thirteen episodes, there was a chance that the thirteenth episode would be our last. Mike and I knew we needed something really exciting, on the level of a series finale. Since Mike had created such a compelling antagonist for Zuko in Commander Zhao, we thought, "If Zhao captured Aang, no one would be more motivated to rescue him than Zuko."

The idea for Zuko's disguise and the plot for "The Blue Spirit" came to us very quickly after that, but initially in the writers' room we thought of him as the Red Spirit. I researched scores of masks from various Asian cultures and filled up a sketchbook with concepts for what he could look like. He needed to seem creepy and a little supernatural. Unfortunately, with the red mask he was looking a bit like an ancient Korean version of Spider-Man. Anthony Lioi, one of our directors at the time, thought the red mask would seem to be associated with the Fire Nation, thereby giving away Zuko's identity to the audience too easily. We changed him to the Blue Spirit and that was the shift I needed to finalize the design. I found a mask of the character Dragon King Nuo from Chinese drama. He was definitely spooky and his smile added a menacing playfulness that seemed to be the missing ingredient. The decorative paint on the mask was far too elaborate to work for TV animation, so I streamlined the shapes while trying to retain the graphic power of the visage.

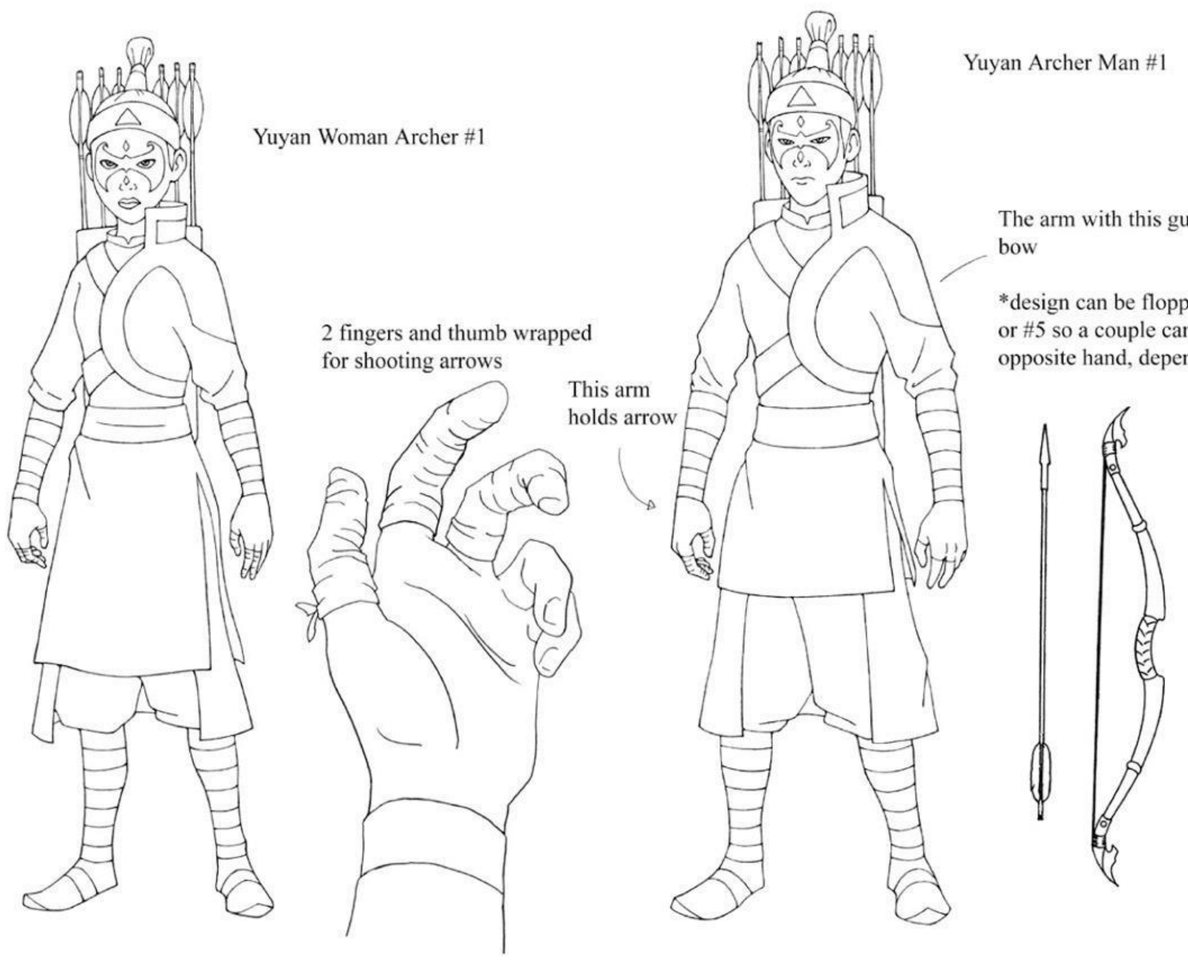
Zuko was already my favorite character, and the Blue Spirit added a whole new level to his appeal. The disguise evolved into something of an alter ego for Zuko, one that seemed to be free of the burden of his fall from grace.



Designs by Bryan Konietzko. Color by Hye Jung Kim.



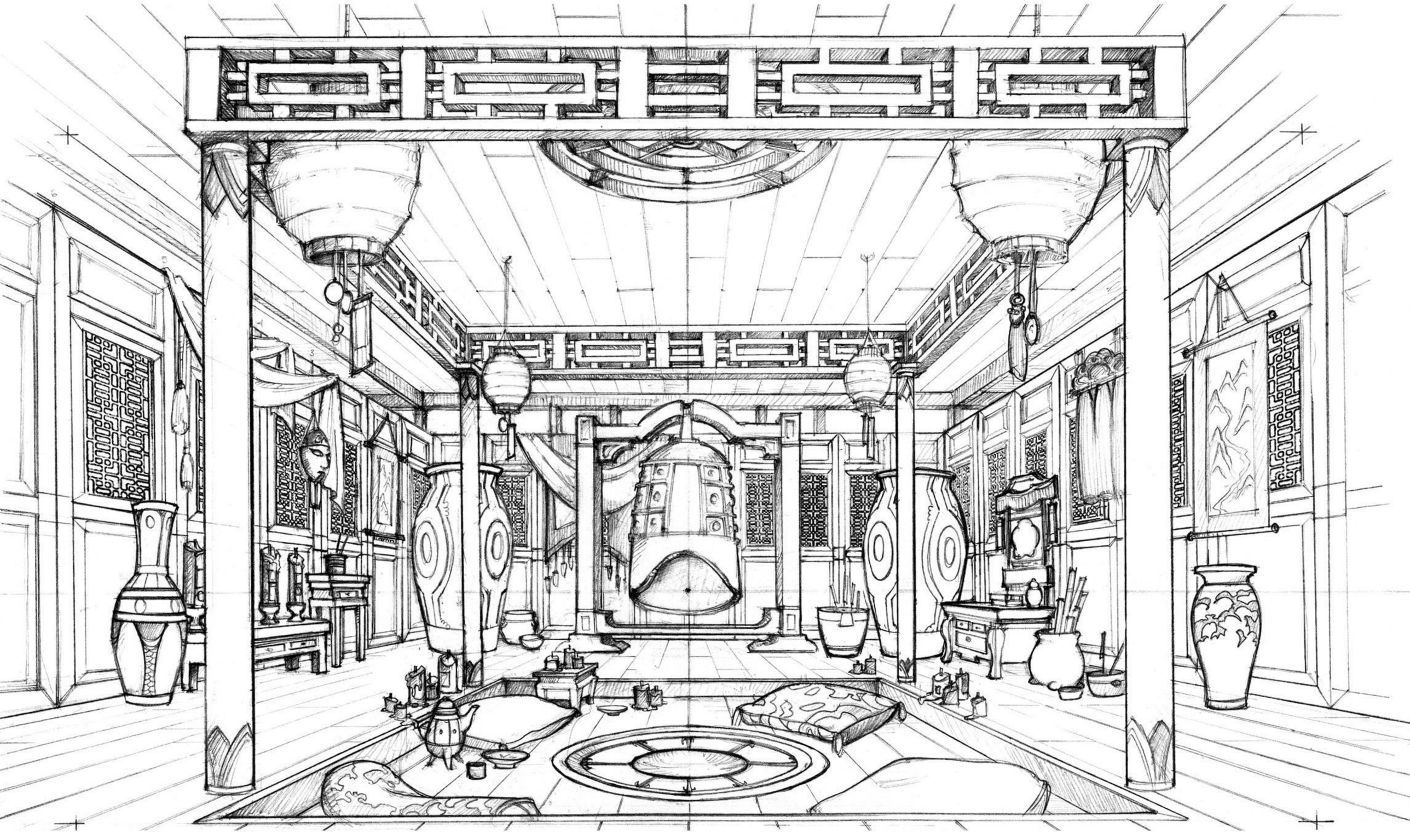
Concept sketch and photo of Dragon King Nuo mask by Bryan Konietzko. Top: Early Blue Spirit concepts from when we called him "the Red Spirit." Sketches by Bryan Konietzko.



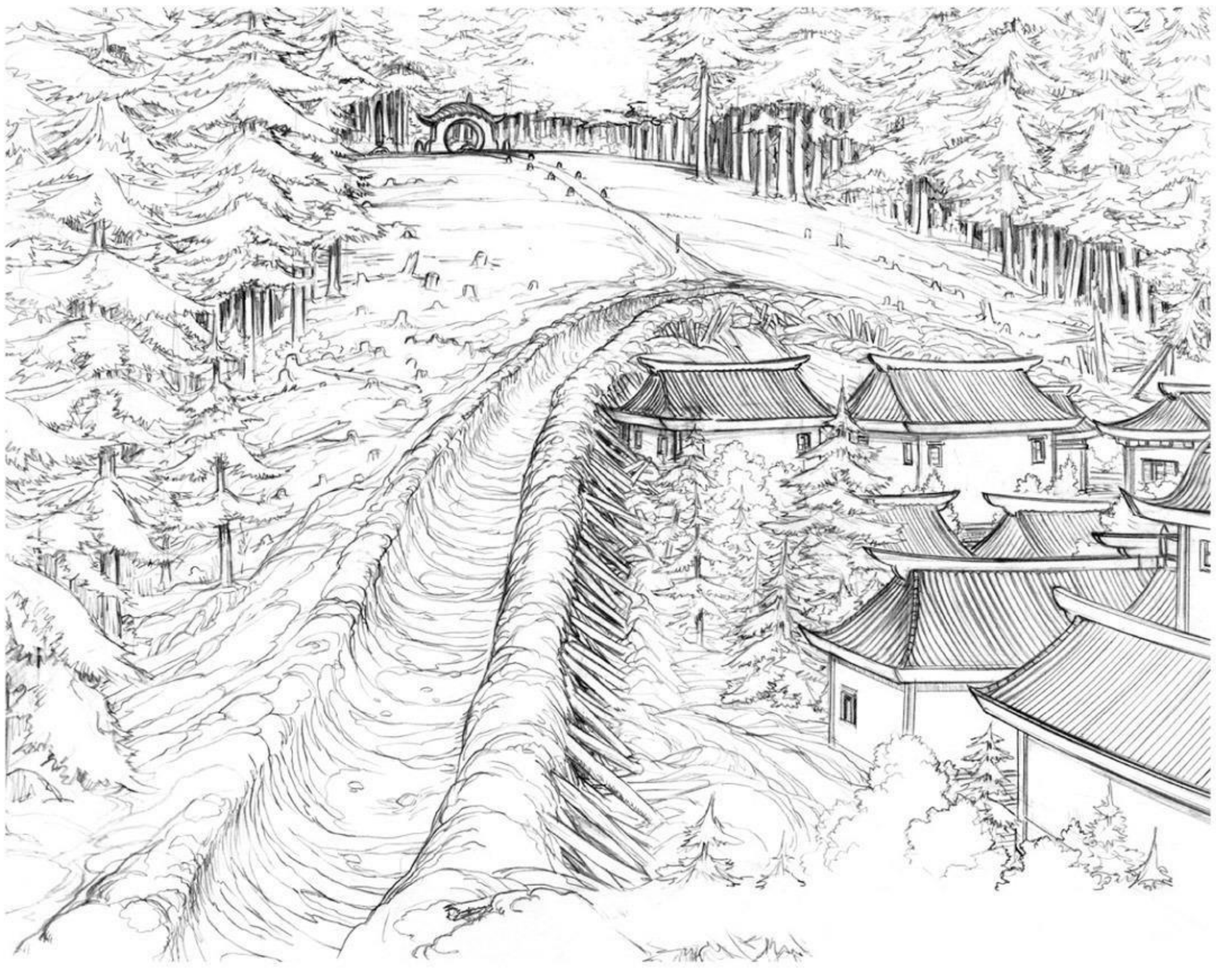
The Yuyan archers. Designs by Bryan Konietzko. Props by Aldina Dias. Left: Fire Nation fortress. Background designs by Tom Dankiewicz. Paintings by Will Weston.

The adorable Meng was Aunt Wu's assistant. She was voiced by equally adorable Jessie Flower, who later returned to the series as the voice of Toph. Designs by Angela Mueller, based on concepts by Dave Filoni. Color by Hye Jung Kim.

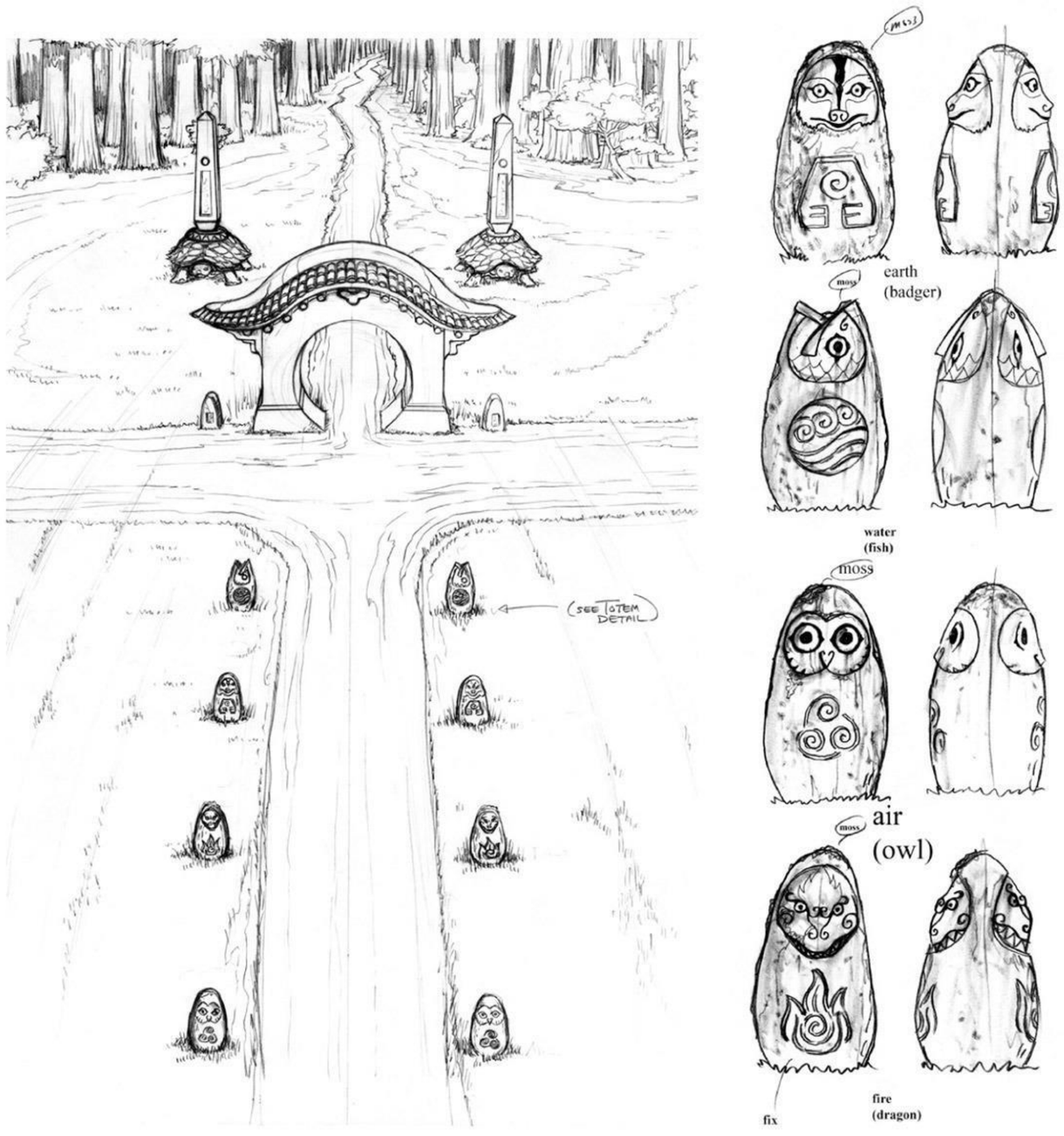
Aunt Wu. Designs by Angela Mueller.
Color by Hye Jung Kim.



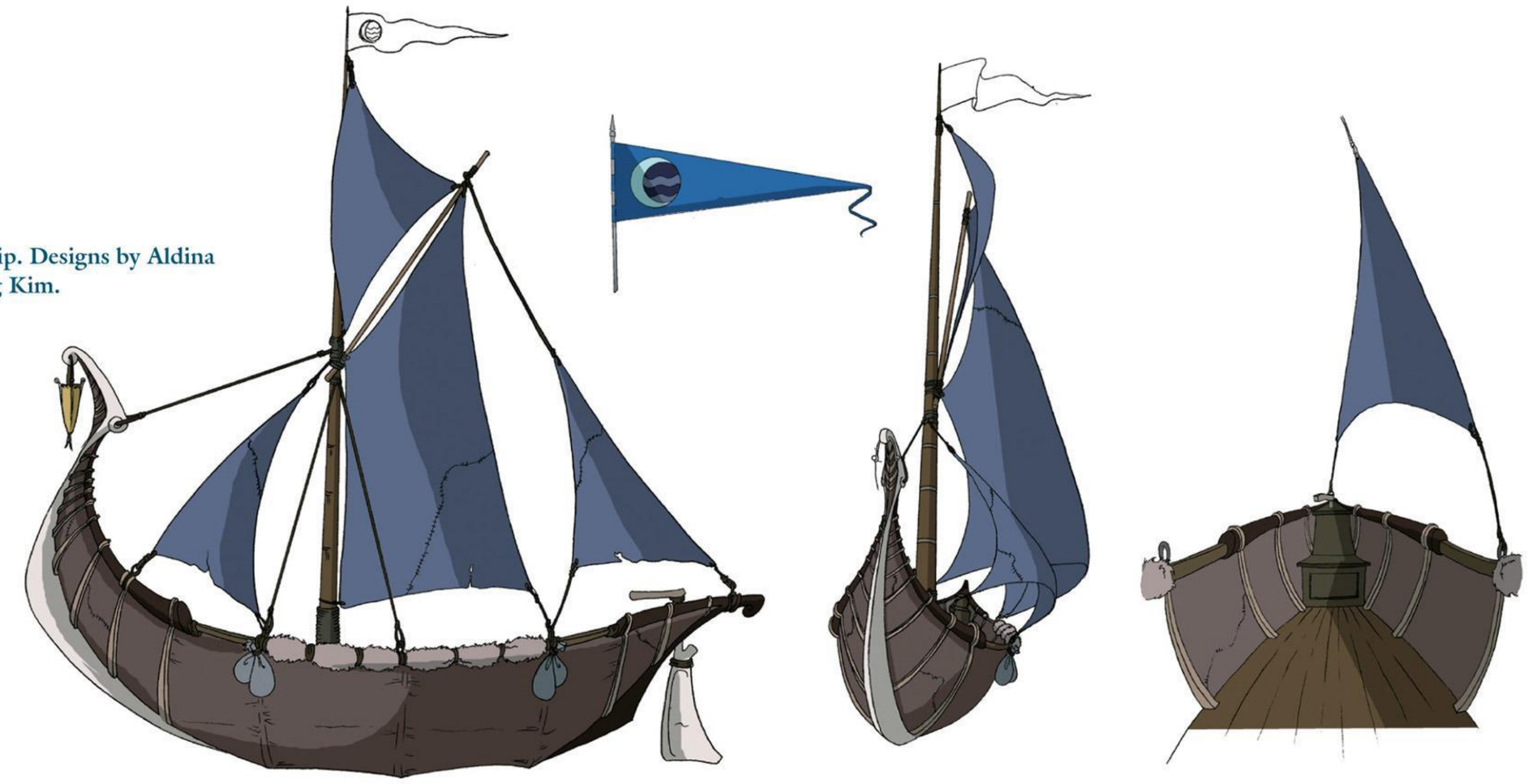
Fortunetelling salon. Aunt Wu's fortunetelling method of choice is osteomancy, the practice of divining the future by throwing a bone in a fire and reading its cracks. Background design by Elsa Garagarza, based on a concept by Dave Filoni.



This design depicts the trench that the townsfolk created to protect the village from the erupting volcano's lava flow. Background design by Tom Dankiewicz. Top right: Mt. Makapu and village. Background design by Tom Dankiewicz. Painting by Hye Jung Kim and Ron Brown.



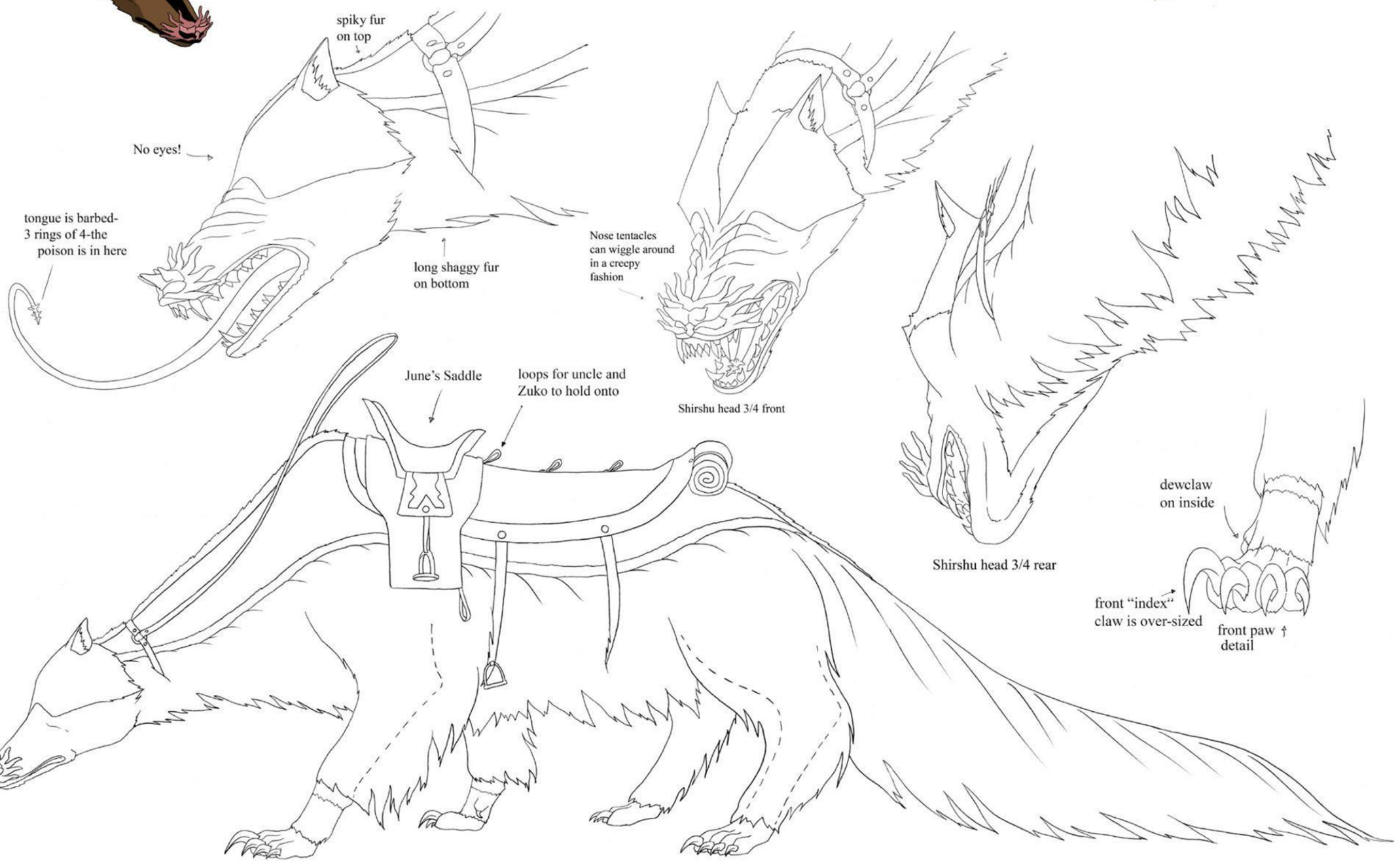
Animal totems line a path leading to Mt. Makapu. The turtle statues were based on statues we saw during our visits to South Korea. Background design by Tom Dankiewicz. Totems by Dave Filoni. Bottom right: Aang and Katara come up with the idea to combine Airbending and Waterbending to move the clouds. Concept by Dave Filoni.



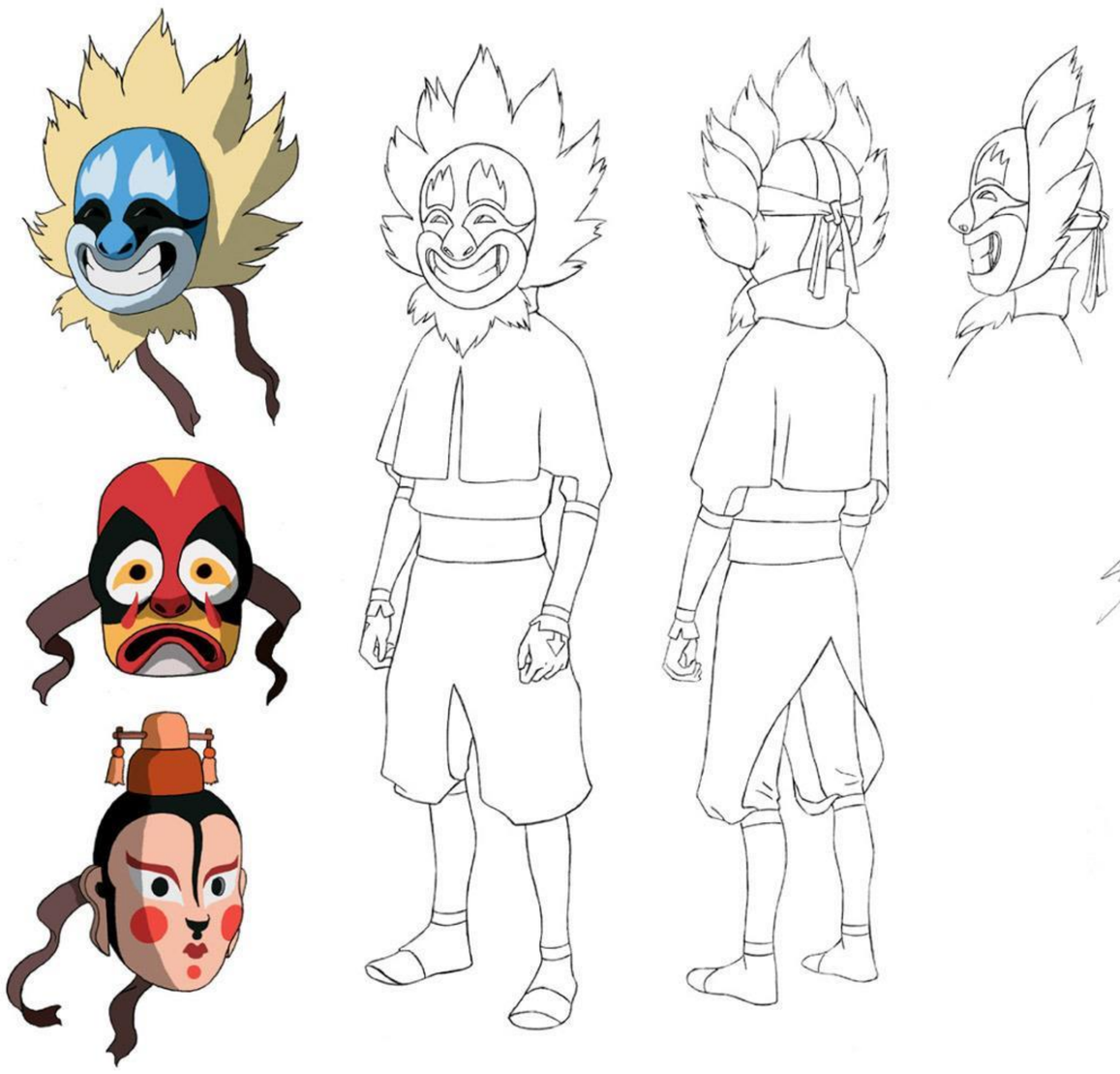
Southern Water Tribe ship. Designs by Aldina Dias. Color by Hye Jung Kim.

The injured Bato was very homesick, so he re-created the feel of a Southern Water Tribe home in his quarters at the nunnery. Background design by Tom Dankiewicz. Painting by Bryan Evans. Middle of page: Background design by Tom Dankiewicz.

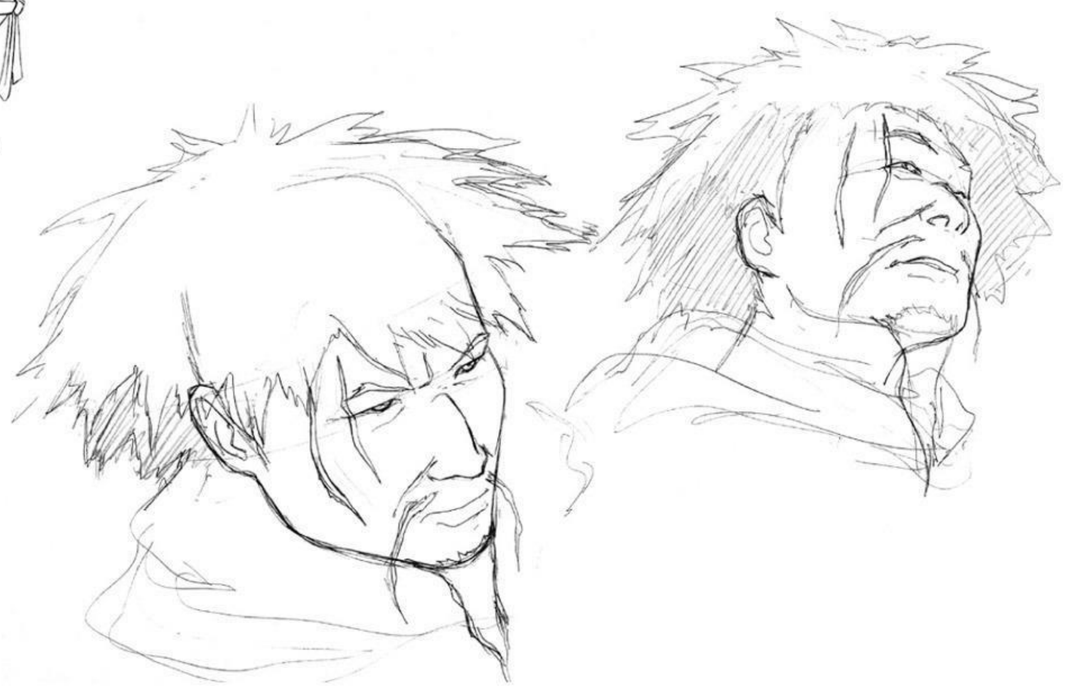
Bounty hunter June was modeled to look like our friend and postproduction supervisor, Lisa Yang. We even named the shirshu after her dog, Nyla. Concepts and designs by Bryan Konietzko. Color by Hye Jung Kim.



The shirshu is actually a combination of three animals: a wolf, a mole, and a giant anteater. Designs by Bryan Konietzko. Color by Hye Jung Kim.

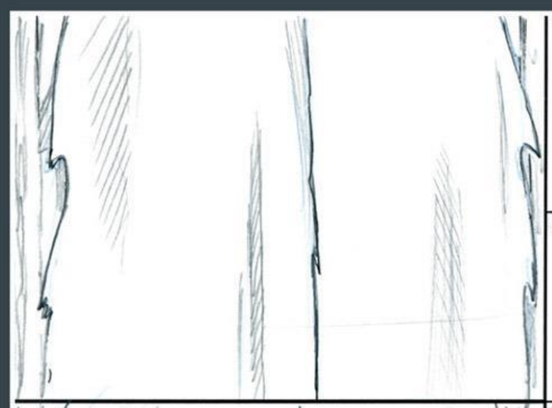


For the Fire Festival, we wanted to show the Fire Nation had a rich cultural heritage and wasn't solely a militaristic society. Mask designs by Aldina Dias, based on concepts by Lauren MacMullan.



The character of Jeong Jeong was based on the president of DR Movie, one of the South Korean animation studios that worked on the series. We always enjoyed going to dinner with him. We thought he looked like a Bond villain, so we wanted to include him in the show. Concept sketches by Bryan Konietzko.

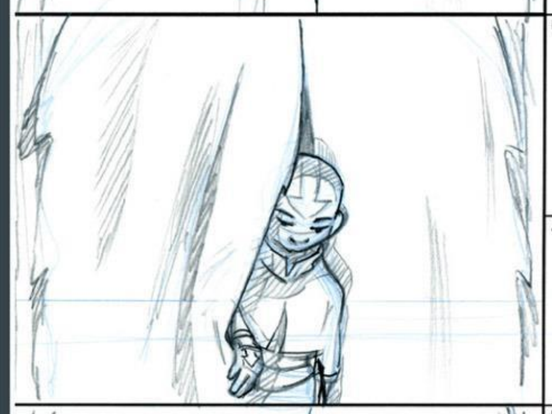
Above left: Fire Nation colonial village. The idea was that the Fire Nation modified existing Earth Nation architecture, hence the contrasting roof styles between the temple and its surrounding buildings. Background design by Tom Dankiewicz. Painting by Hye Jung Kim. Above right: Jeong Jeong's hut. Background design by Elsa Garagarza. Painting by Bryan Evans. Directly above: Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* provided inspiration for the story and jungle setting of this episode. Background design by Elsa Garagarza. Painting by Bryan Evans.



DIAL:

ACTION:

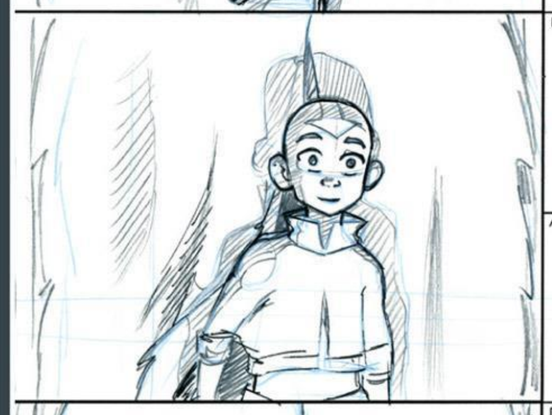
HANGING SKINS IN JEONG JEONG'S DOORWAY



DIAL:

ACTION:

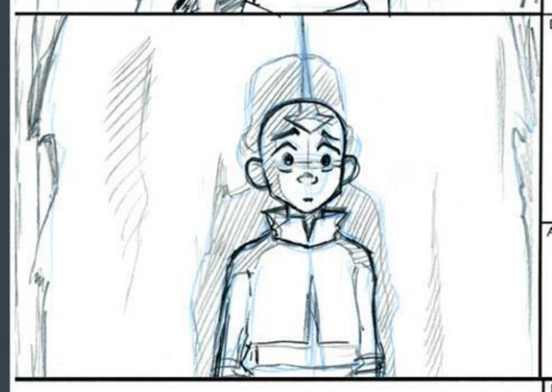
AANG ENTERS JEONG JEONG'S HUT THROUGH THE SKIN FLAPS



DIAL:

ACTION:

AANG LOOKS UP HOPEFULLY



DIAL:

BLINK TO SNAKEN LOOK

ACTION:

DIAL:

JEONG JEONG!
"GET OUT."

JEONG JEONG SITS ON THE DIRT FLOOR WITH HIS BACK TO AANG

ACTION:

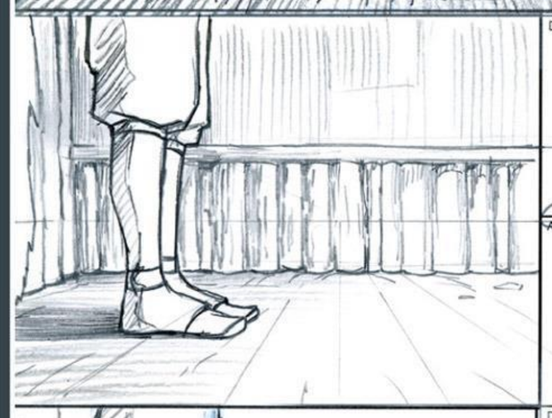
TREE GROWING THRU WALL OF HUT / LEAVES ON FLOOR

Sc169

TRUCK-IN

PLEASE BOT-LITE CANDLE FLAME THRU-OUT SEQ.

CUT



DIAL:

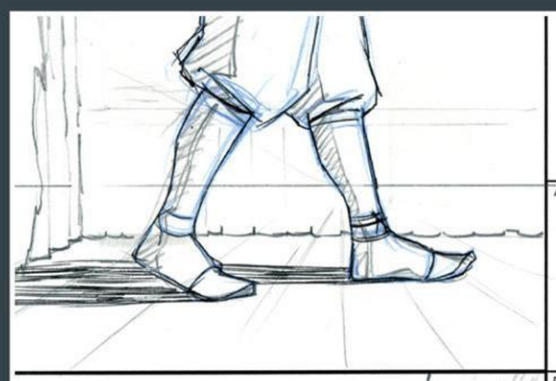
ACTION:

START ON AANG'S FEET

DIAL:

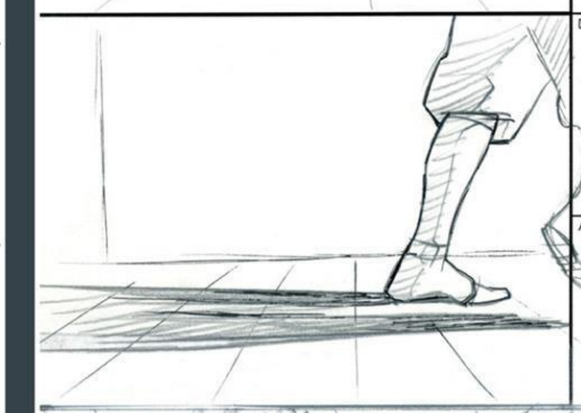
ACTION:

TENTATIVE HALF STEP



(VO AANG)
"MAS-

ACTION:

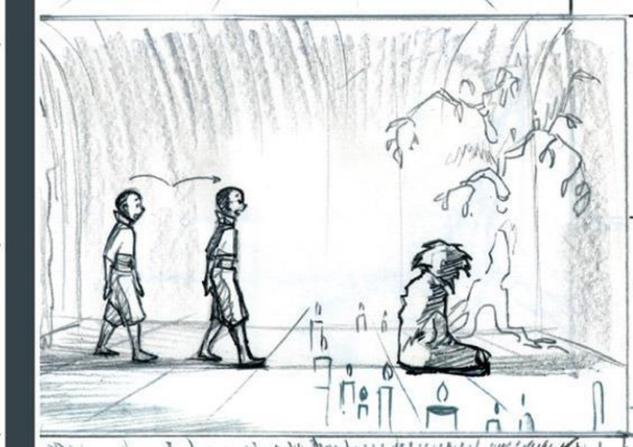


DIAL:

AANG CONT
—TER"

ACTION:

CUT



NO SHADOW FLICKER EFX THIS SEQ UNLESS NOTED

(AANG CONTD)
-"I NEED TO LEARN

DRIFT

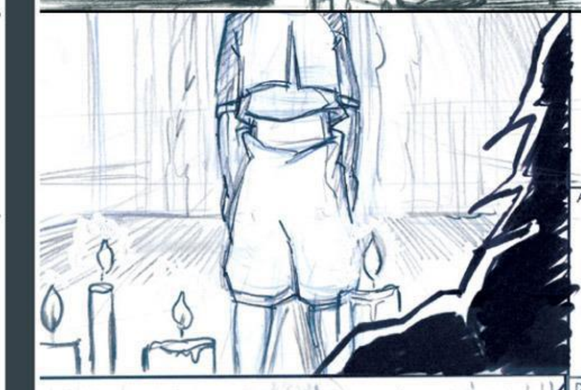
JEONG JEONG'S FACE IN BLACK SHADOWS

(AANG)
-"FIREBENDING."

(JEONG JEONG)
"ONLY A FOOL SEEKS HIS
- OWN DESTRUCTION."

- AANG BOWS HEAD

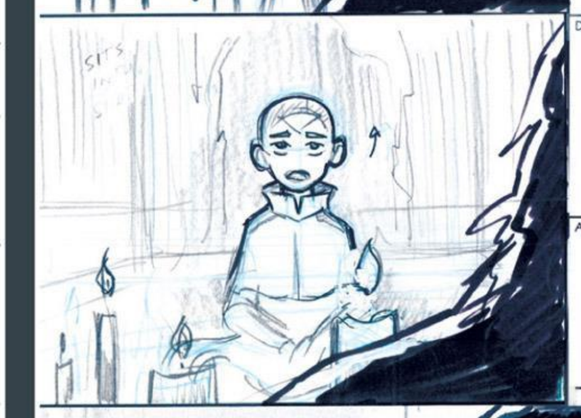
DRIFT



START POSE

ACTION:

BLACK SHADOWS ON JEONG JEONG

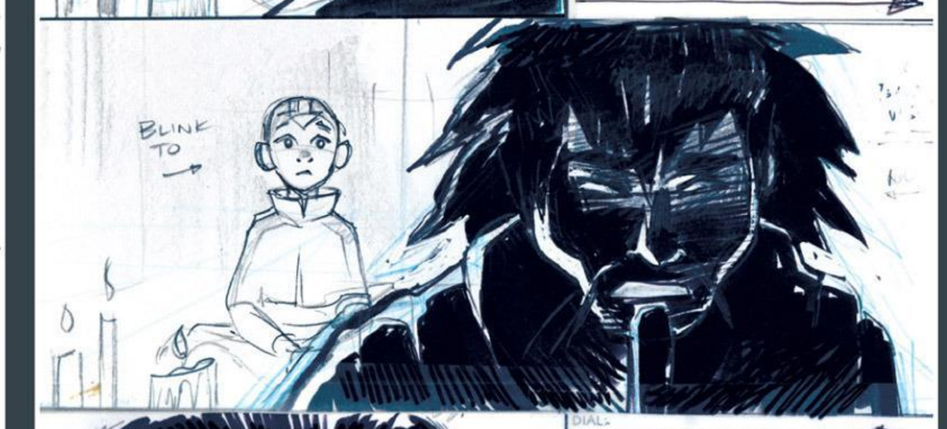


DIAL:

AANG
"I'M THE AVATAR. ITS MY DESTINY TO -"

ACTION:

AANG SITS INTO FRAME



BLINK TO

DIAL:

F.G. JJ SLIDES

SLOW PAN

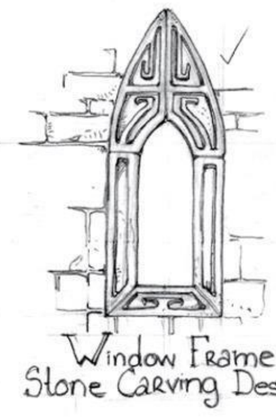
JJ "DESTINY?" WHAT WOULD A BOY KNOW OF DESTINY? IF A FISH LIVES ITS WHOLE LIFE IN THIS RIVER

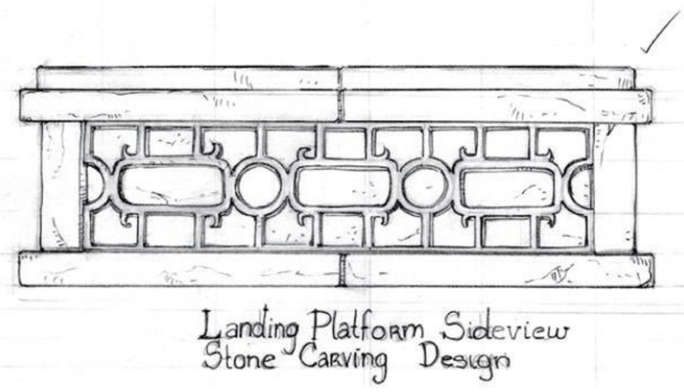
ACTION:

"DOES HE KNOW THE RIVER'S DESTINY?"

(PAN CONTINUES OVER WHOLE SHOT)

For her storyboard work in this episode (which she also directed), Lauren MacMullan won an Annie Award in 2005 for Storyboarding in an Animated Television Production.



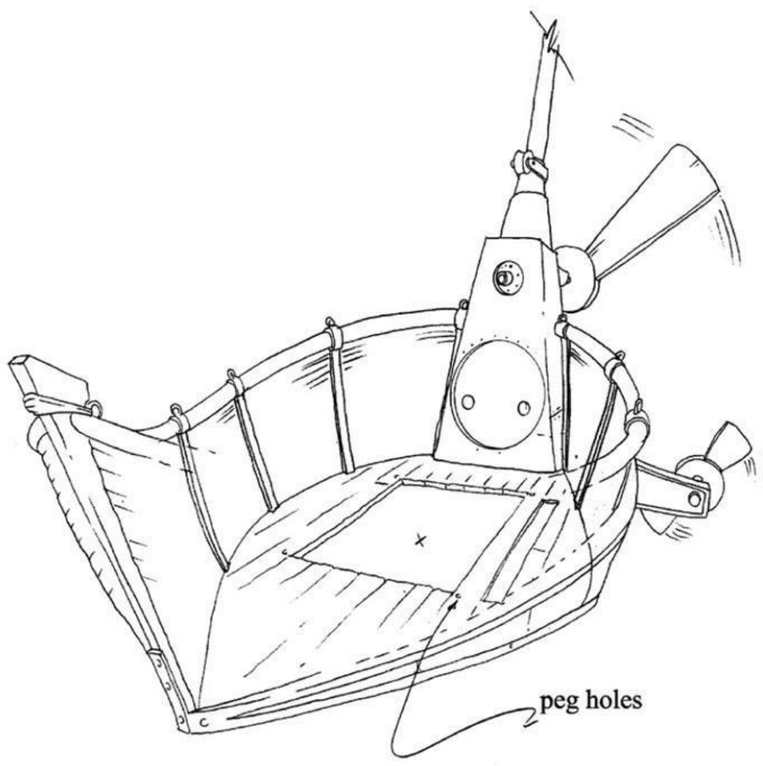


Architectural details and sculptures by Elsa Garagarza.

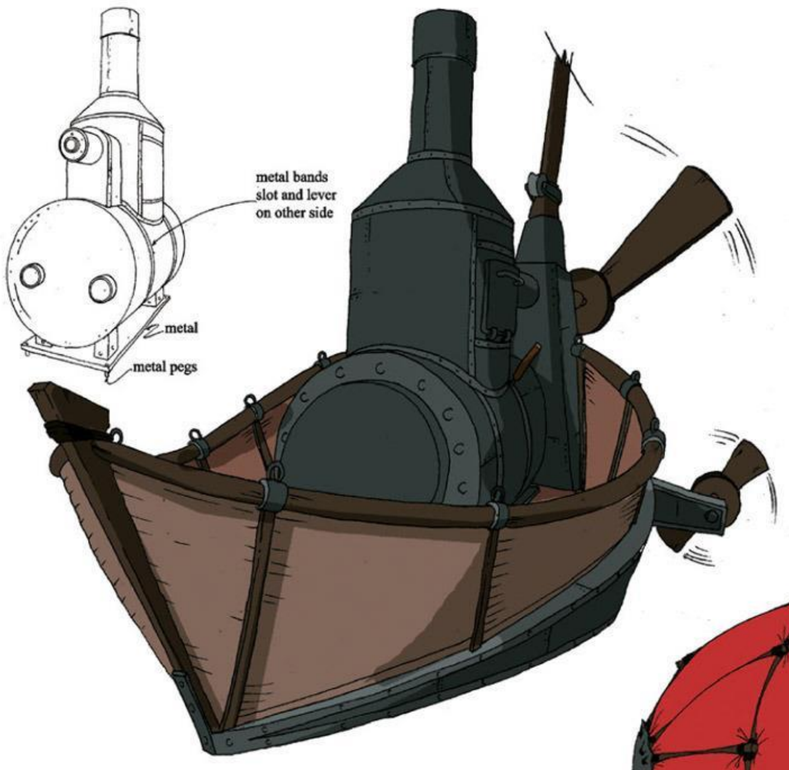
Left: Photos Bryan took on a snowboarding trip to Whistler Blackcomb inspired the high-contrast look of the snow against black rock. Background design by Ricardo Delgado.

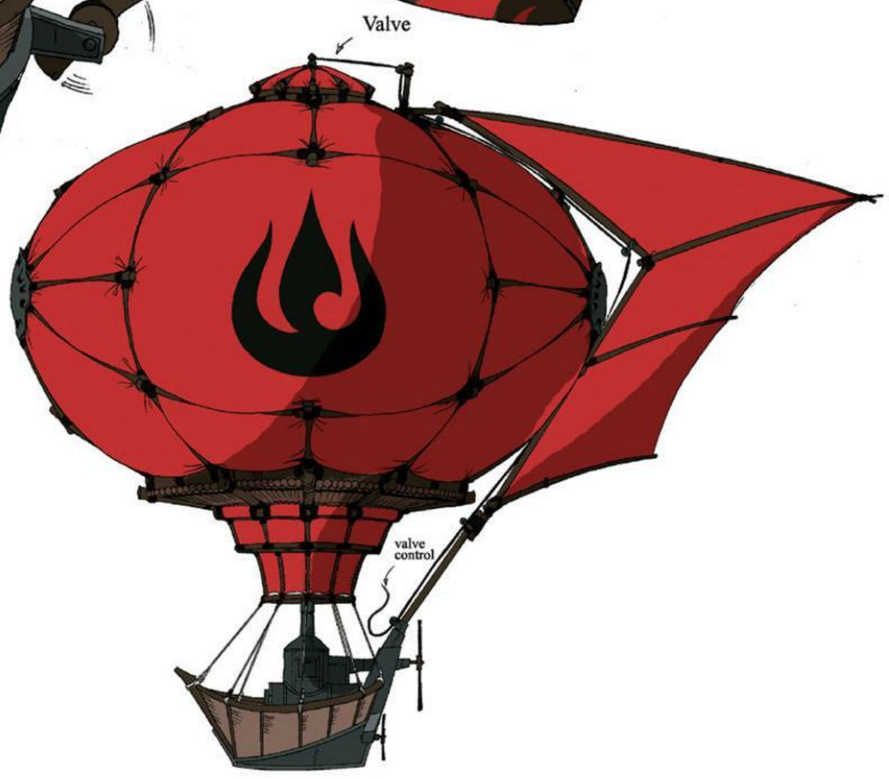
Opposite page: An impressive collection of vehicles and props by Aldina Dias. Color by Hye Jung Kim.

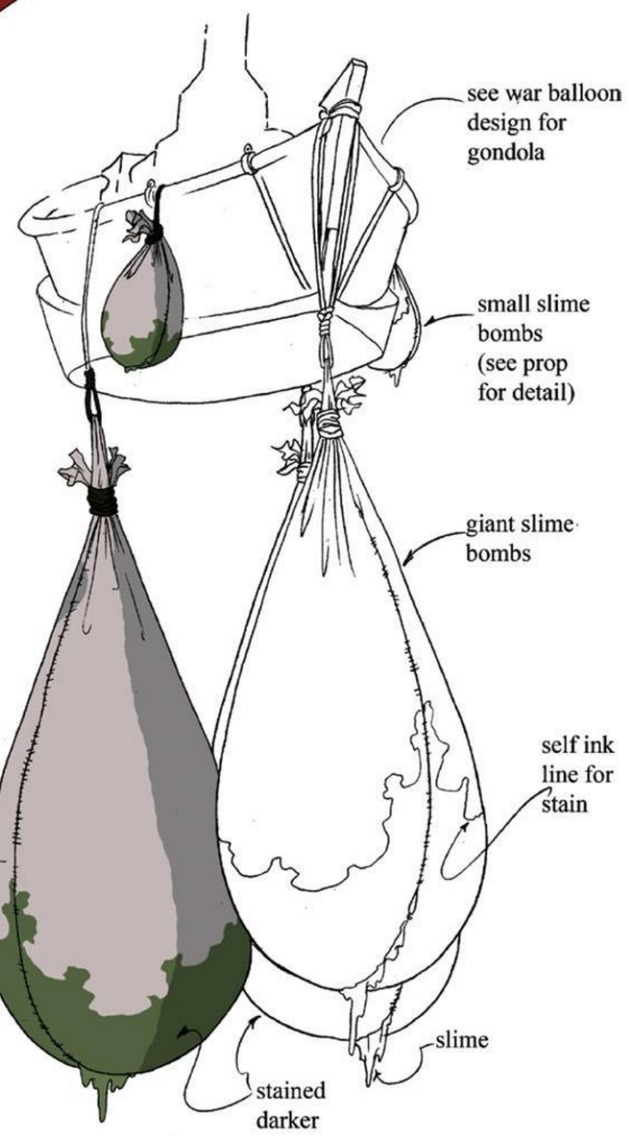
We were never totally satisfied with the look of the Southern Air Temple, but luckily we had an opportunity to improve on it when the story took us to the Northern Air Temple. The designs and vistas turned out much more dramatic and impressive. Background designs by Elsa Garagarza. Paintings by Bryan Evans.

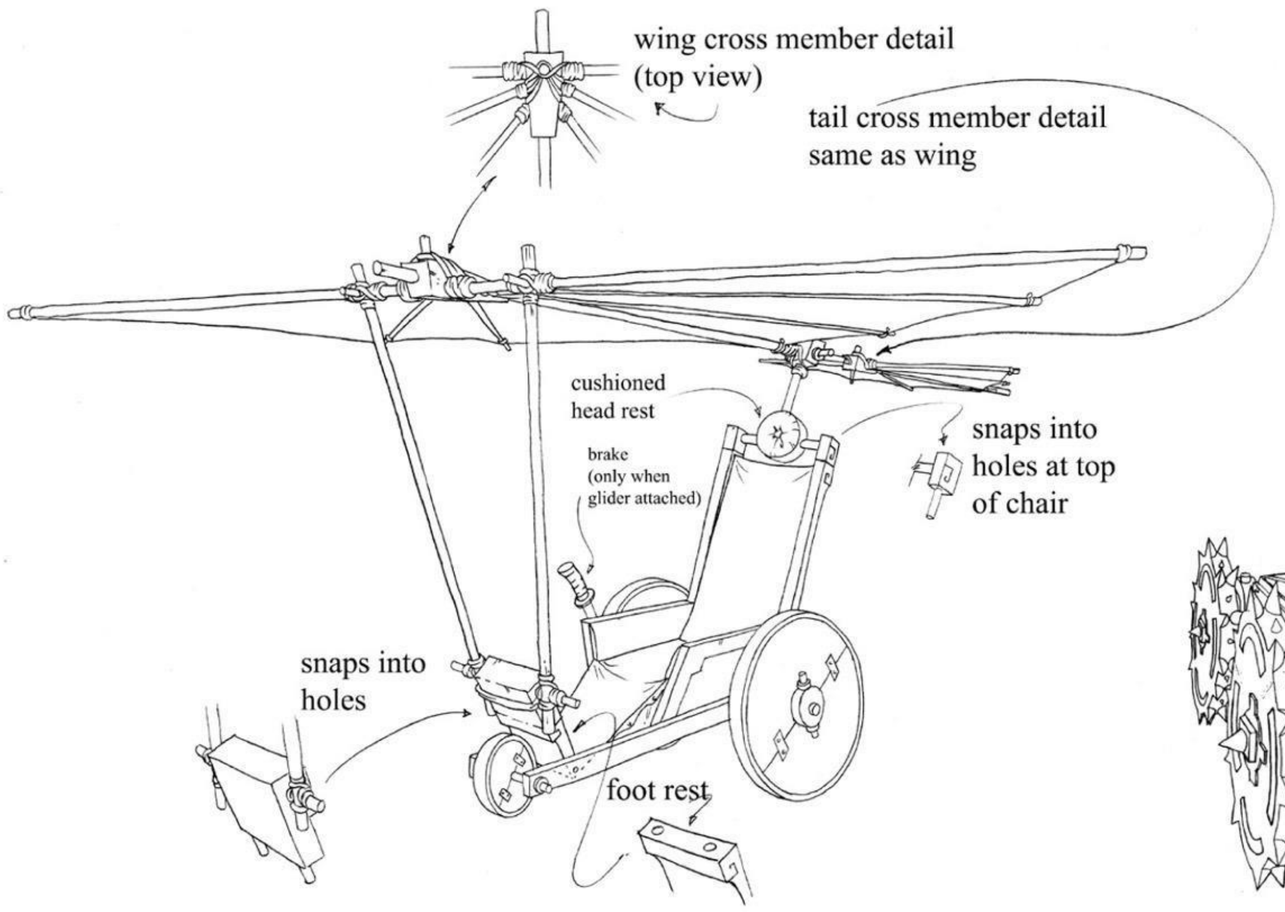


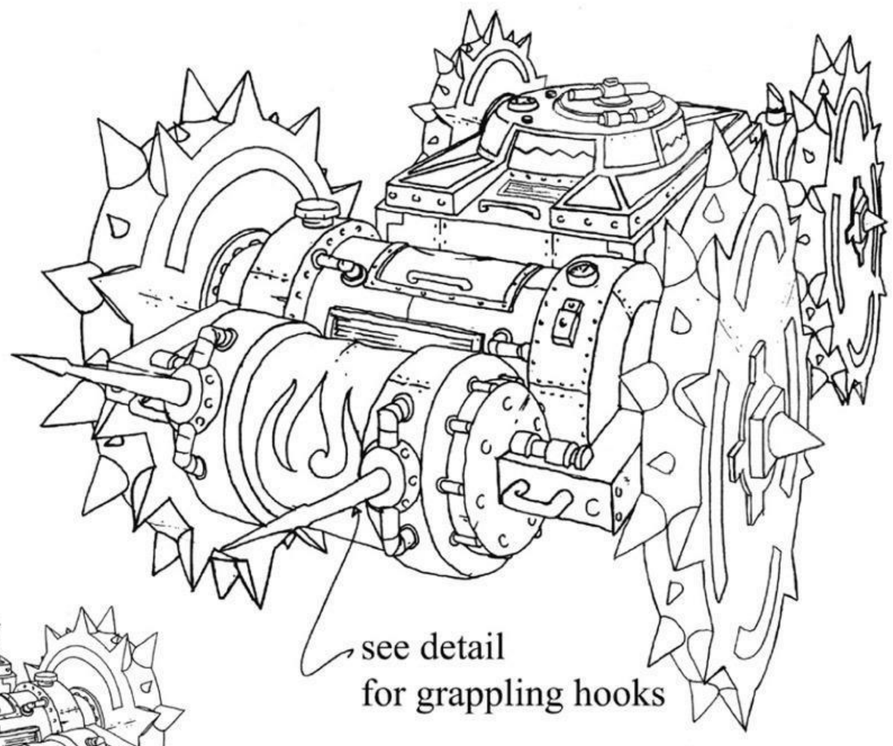
Gondola Interior without Engine/Furnace

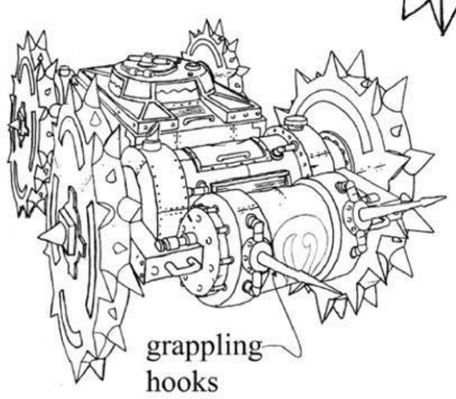




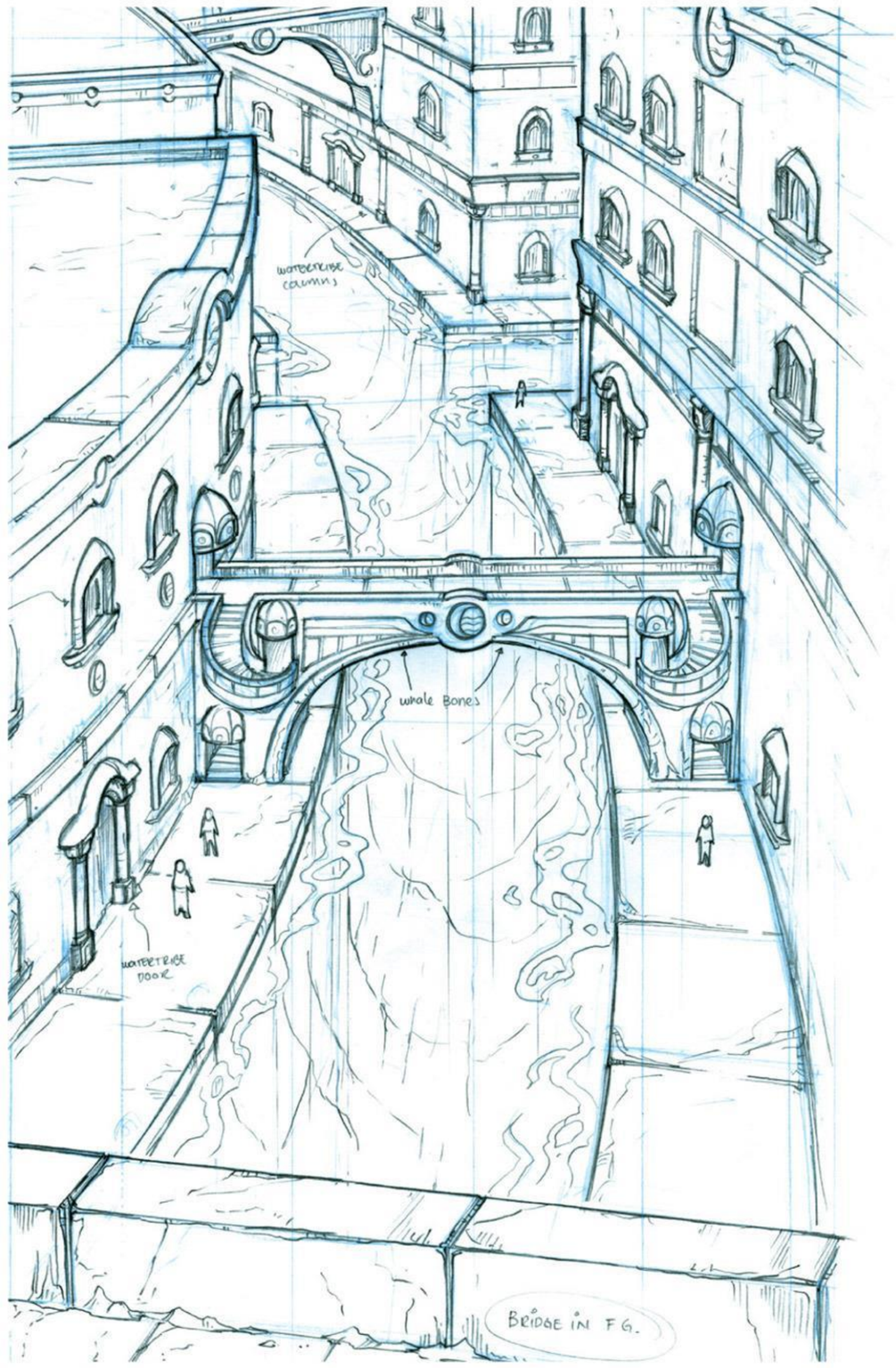








In designing the Northern Water Tribe, we wanted to show how the people were a little fancy and cosmopolitan, in contrast to Katara and Sokka's more rugged tribe in the South. Designs by Angela Mueller. Color by Hye Jung Kim. Top: Pakku was first designed for the main titles. He is the Waterbender seen in silhouette at the opening of every episode. In our opinion, Pakku is one of the best marriages of a character's voice and design in the series. Pakku designs by Bryan Konietzko. Princess Yue designs by Angela Mueller. Color by Hye Jung Kim.



Since *Avatar* is a traveling road show, we rarely spent more than one episode in any given place. Being in the Northern Water Tribe for three episodes gave us the opportunity to further develop a complex location and explore it from many different angles. Background designs by Elsa Garagarza. Paintings by Bryan Evans.

Katara's duel with Master Pakku is one of our favorite action scenes from the series. Key animation by Hong Kyung Pyo. Following spread, top: The walls of the Northern Water Tribe. Background design by Elsa Garagarza. Painting by Bryan Evans. Following spread, bottom: The chief's temple. Background design by Bryan Konietzko. Painting by Bryan Evans.

see water nation flag prop

RESERVE

LOCK

RESERVE

BARRACKS

CANAL

TOTEM

6-UNIT TOTEMS FACING OCEAN (see prop)

(CLOUDS)

(OASIS)

(CLOUDS)

(WATER)

(ICE)

(WATER)

(WATER)

HL

(ICE)

(MIST)

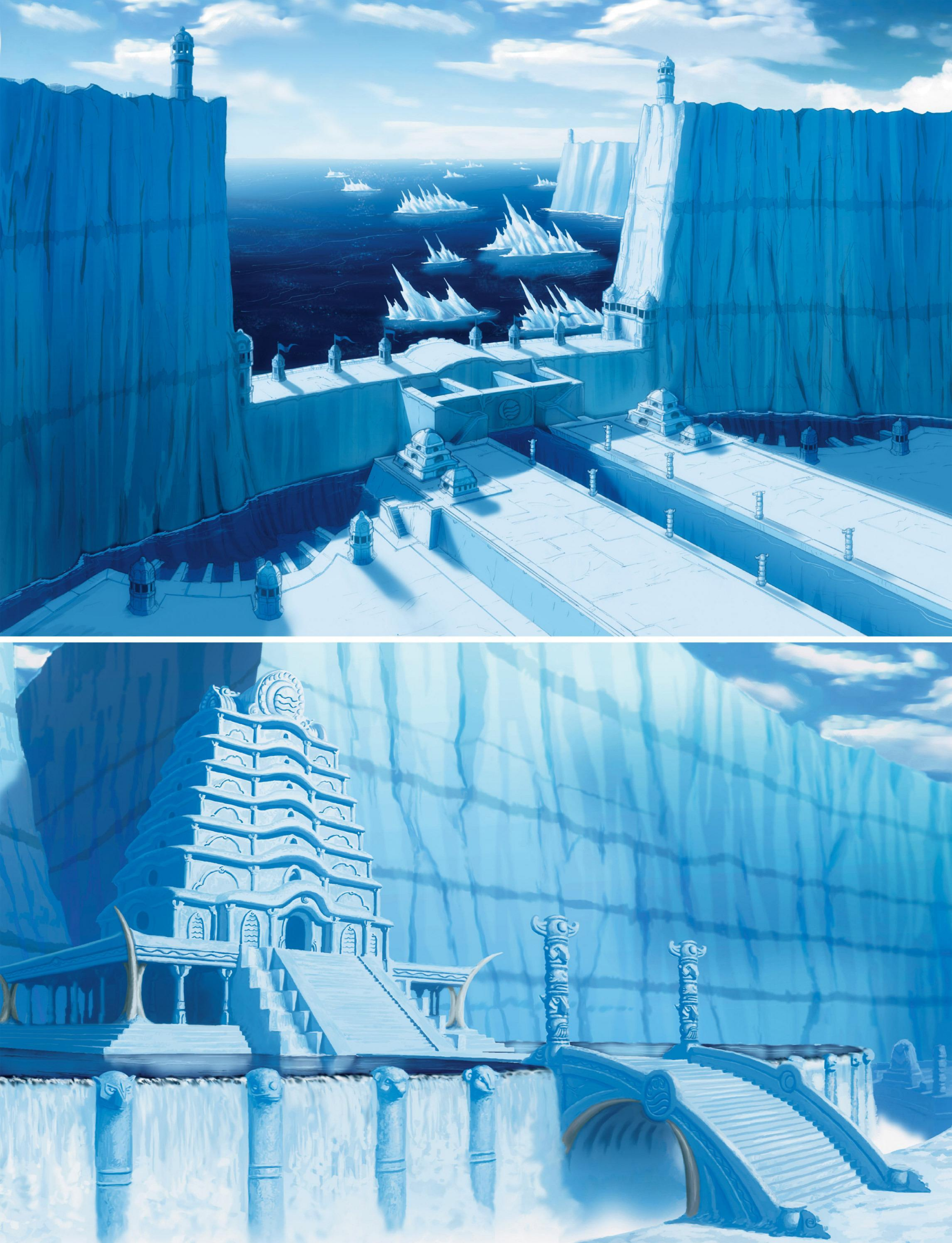
(ICE)

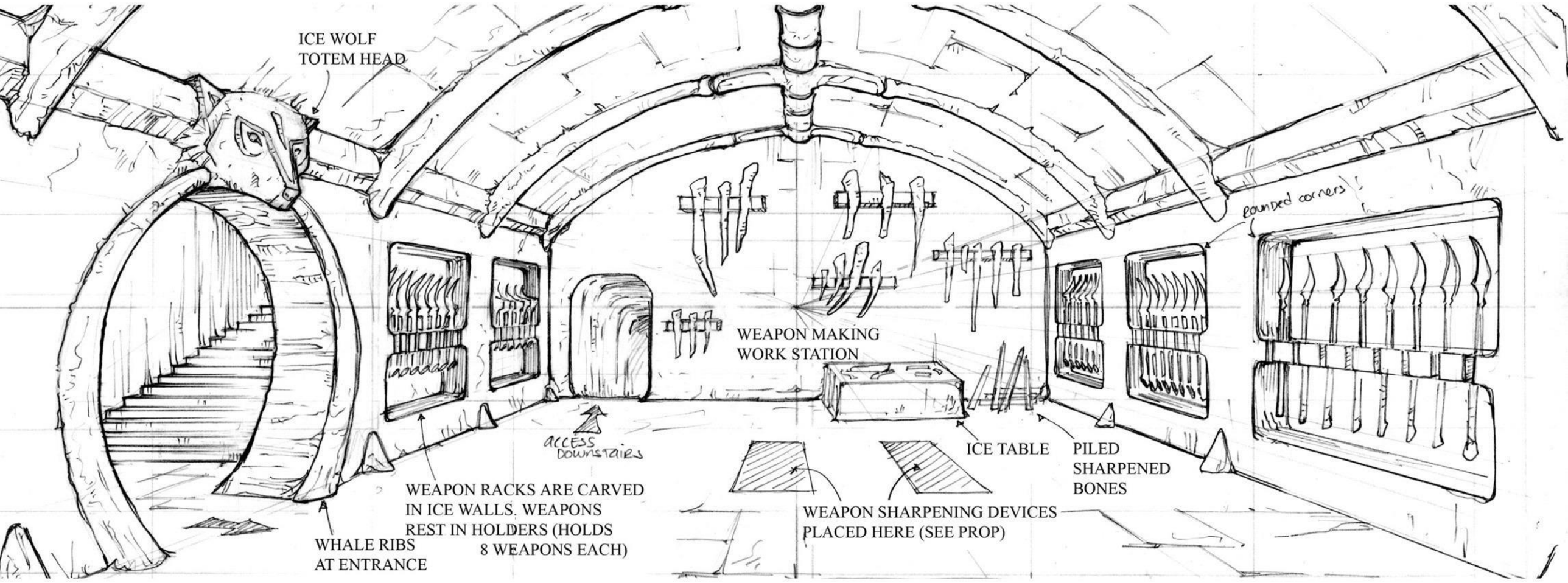
(WATER)

(WHALE BONE)

(ICE)

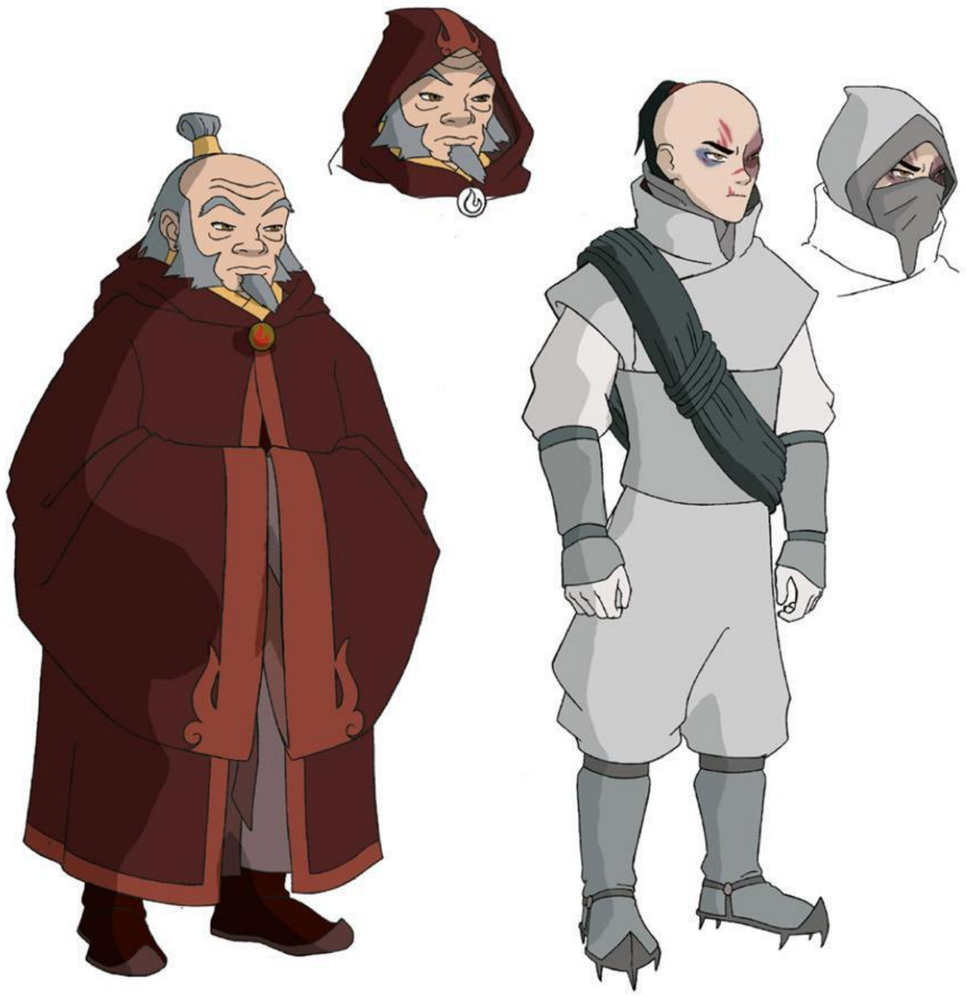
(MIST)



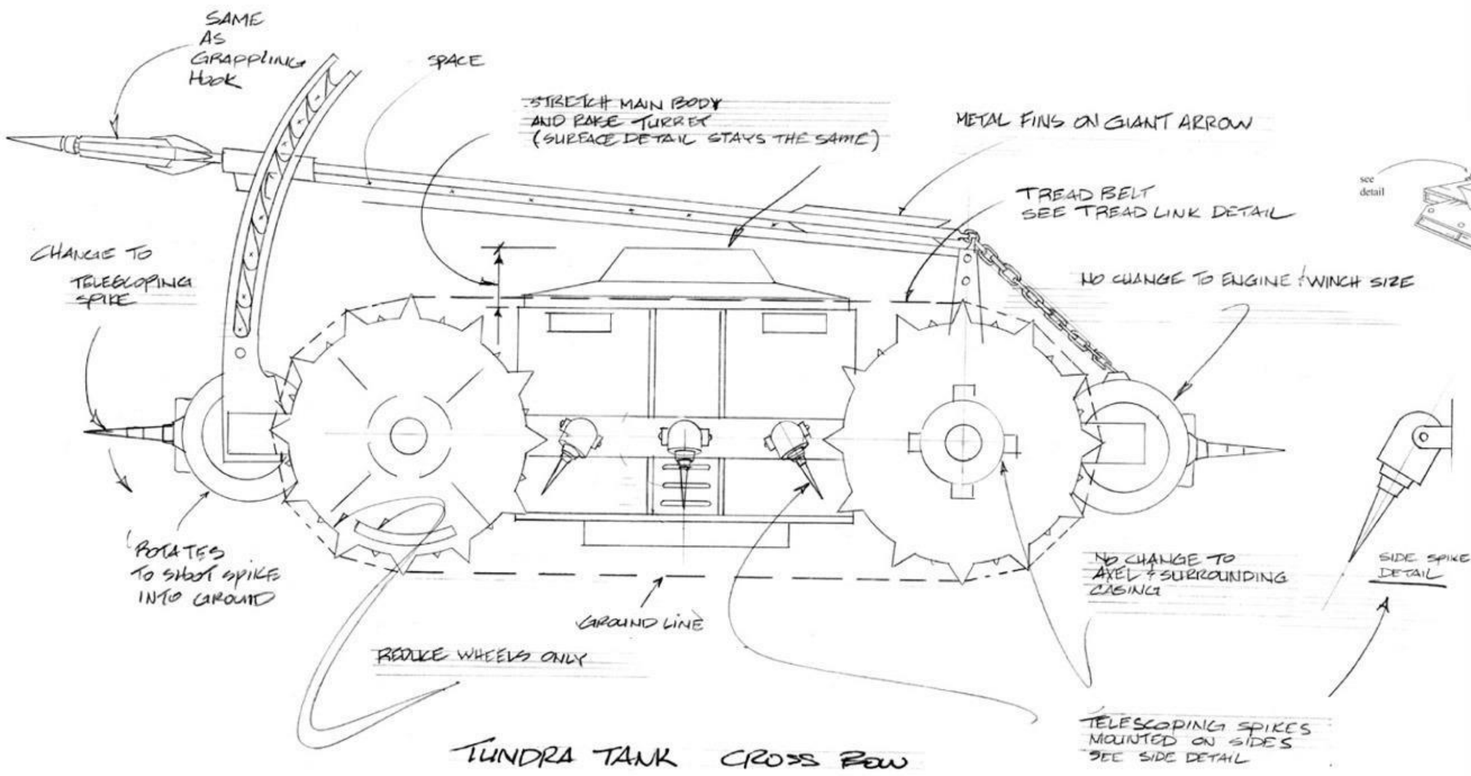


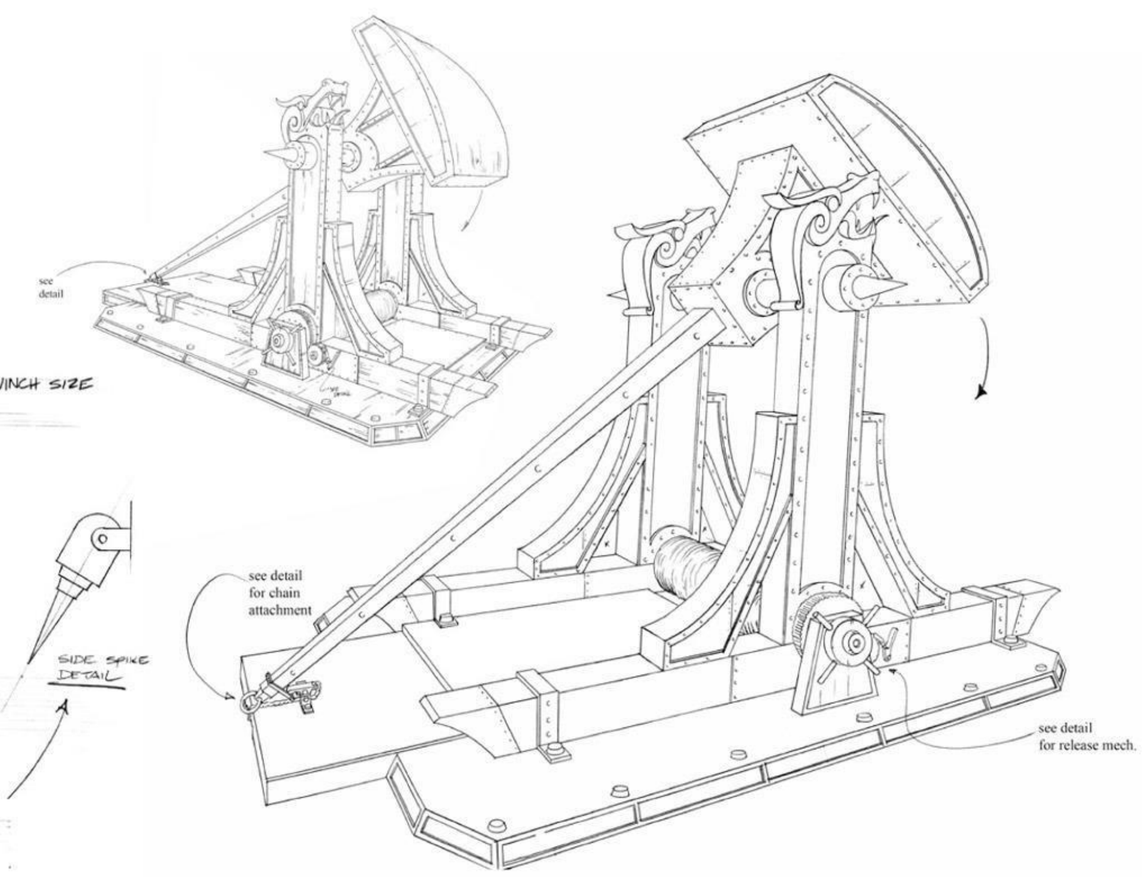
Much consideration was given to what materials the Water Tribe would use in their architecture, due to their limited resources. In many places throughout the city, the structural supports were fashioned from whale bones, while Waterbenders formed the ice into beautiful buildings, bridges, and sculptures. Background designs by Elsa Garagarza (above) and Mike Van Cleave (below left).

Rear view of temple design by Bryan Konietzko. Turtle-seal cave design by Tom Dankiewicz. Paintings by Bryan Evans.

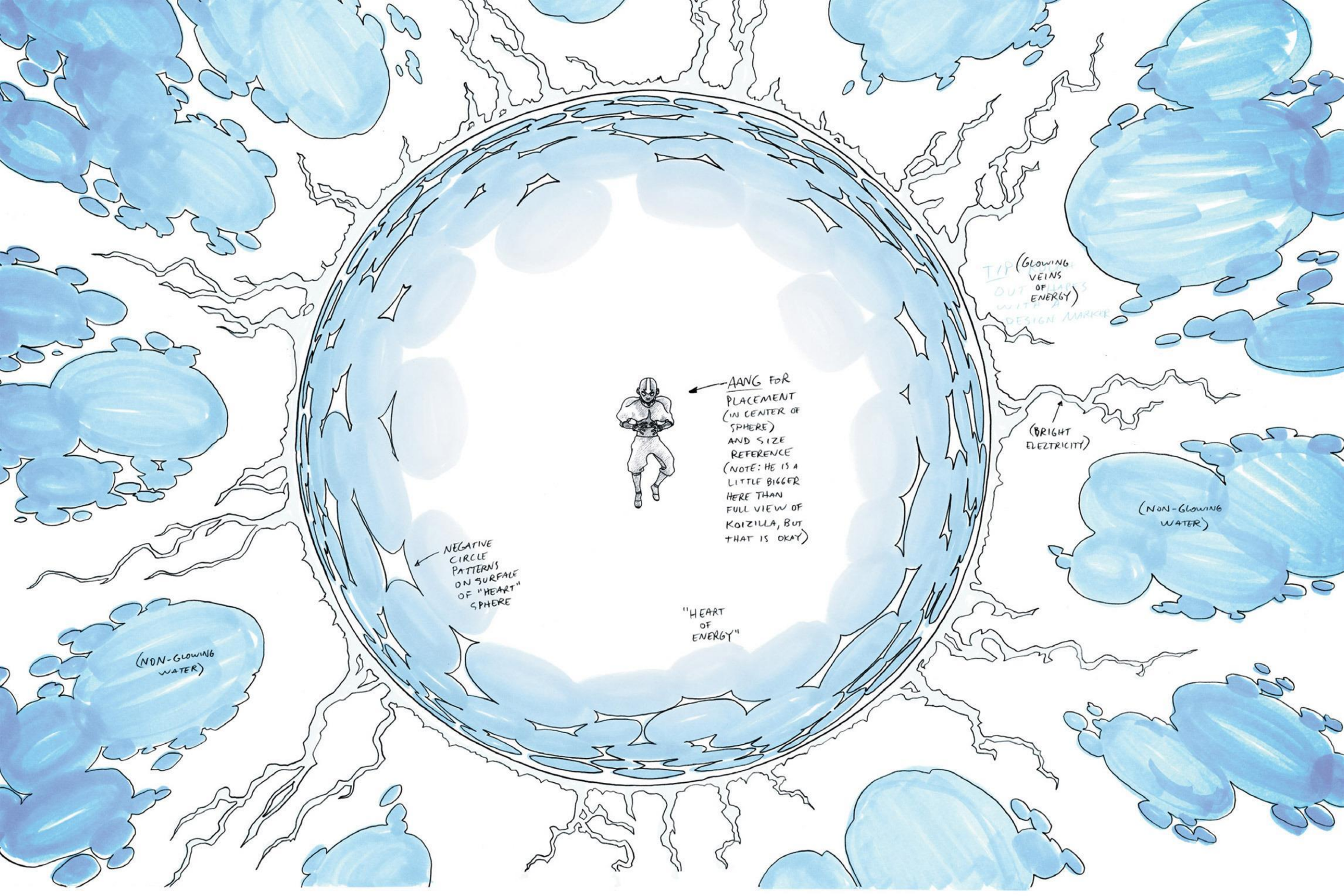


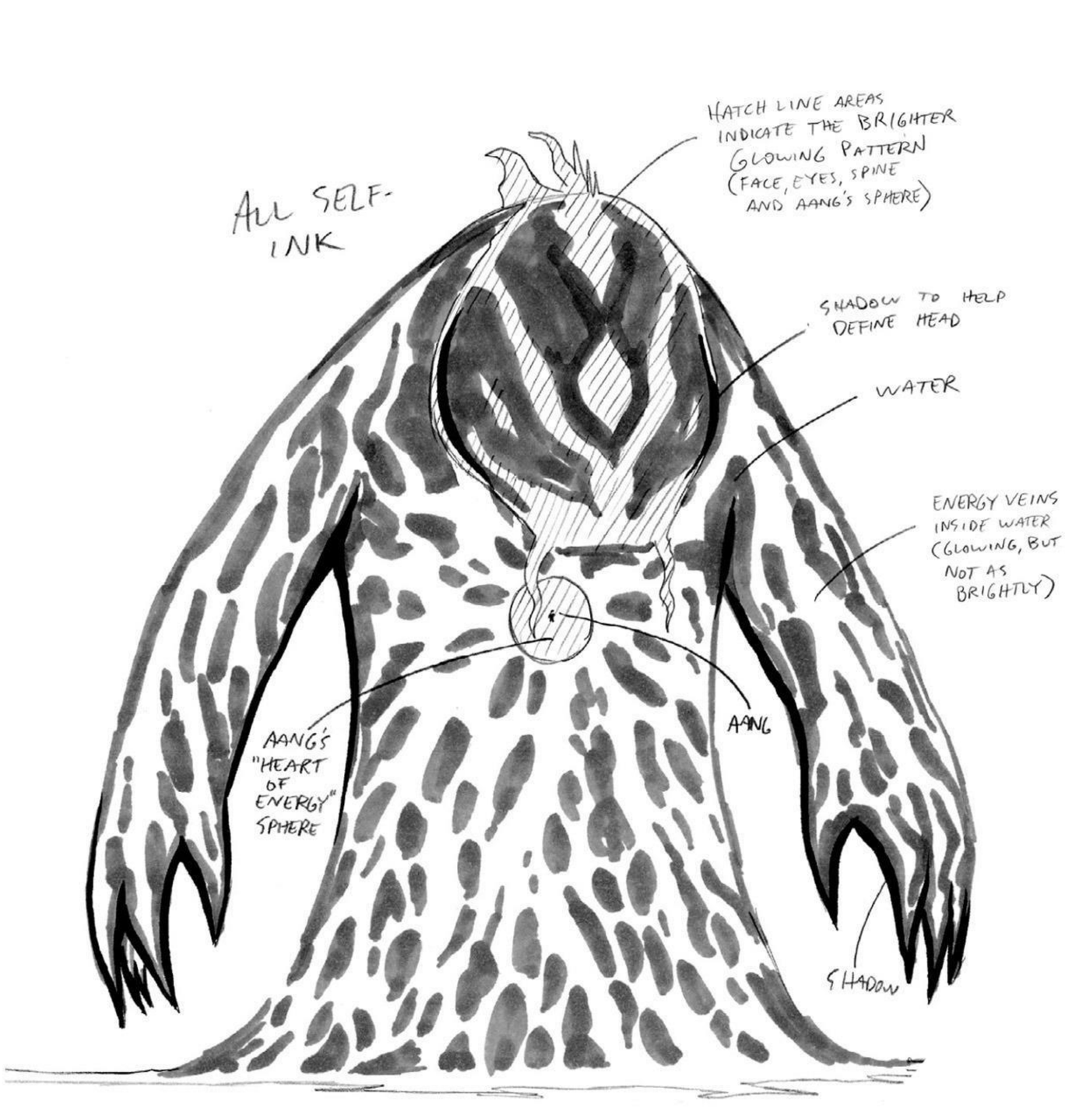
We imagined the massive, towering trebuchet operators were mercenaries hired by the Fire Nation for the invasion of the North. Designs by Bryan Konietzko. Color by Hye Jung Kim. Left: Uncle Iroh and Zuko in their polar gear. Designs by Angela Mueller. Color by Hye Jung Kim. Below: The Fire Nation's arsenal included tanks wielding giant crossbows and trebuchets that launched fireballs. Designs by Aldina Dias.

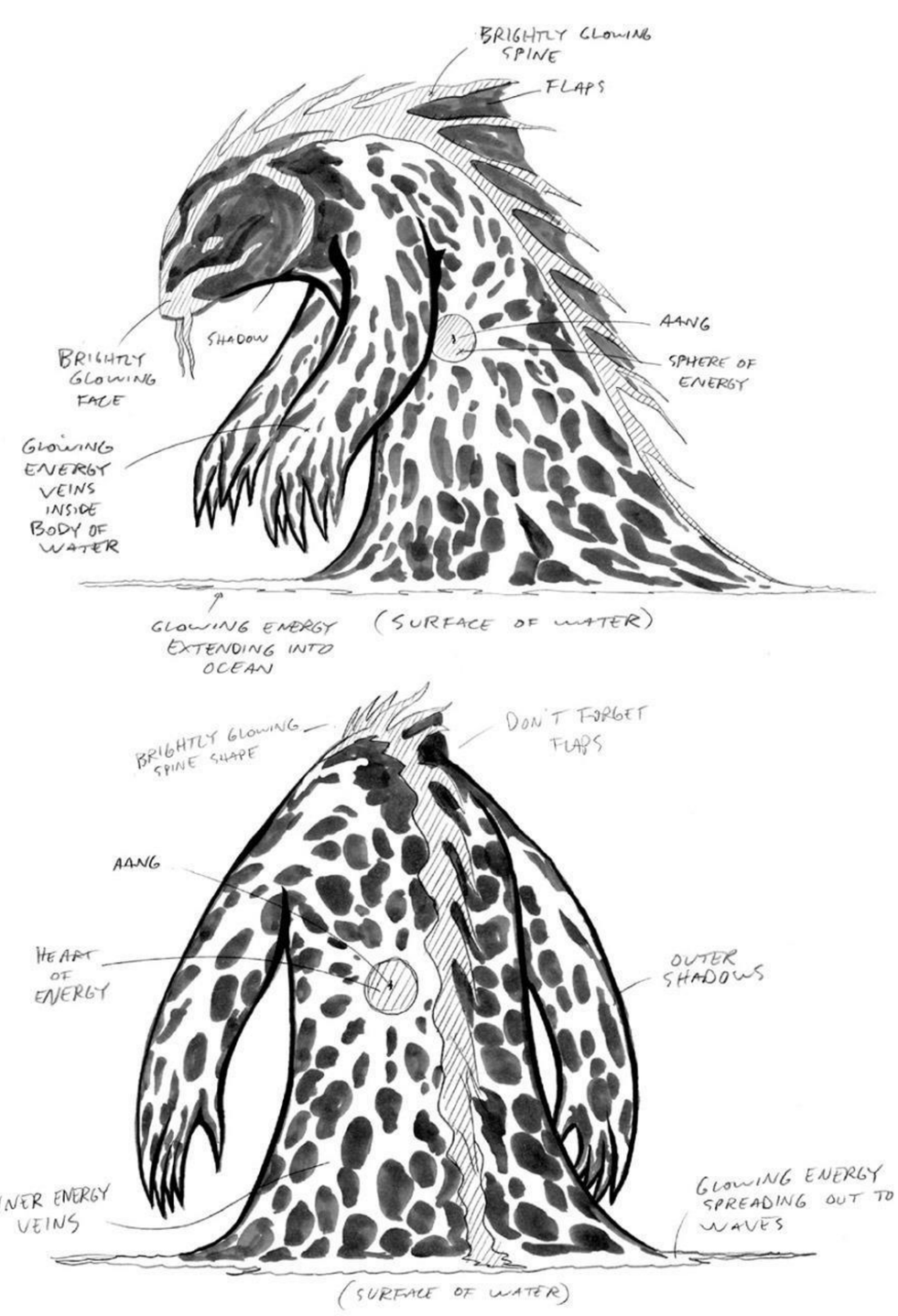




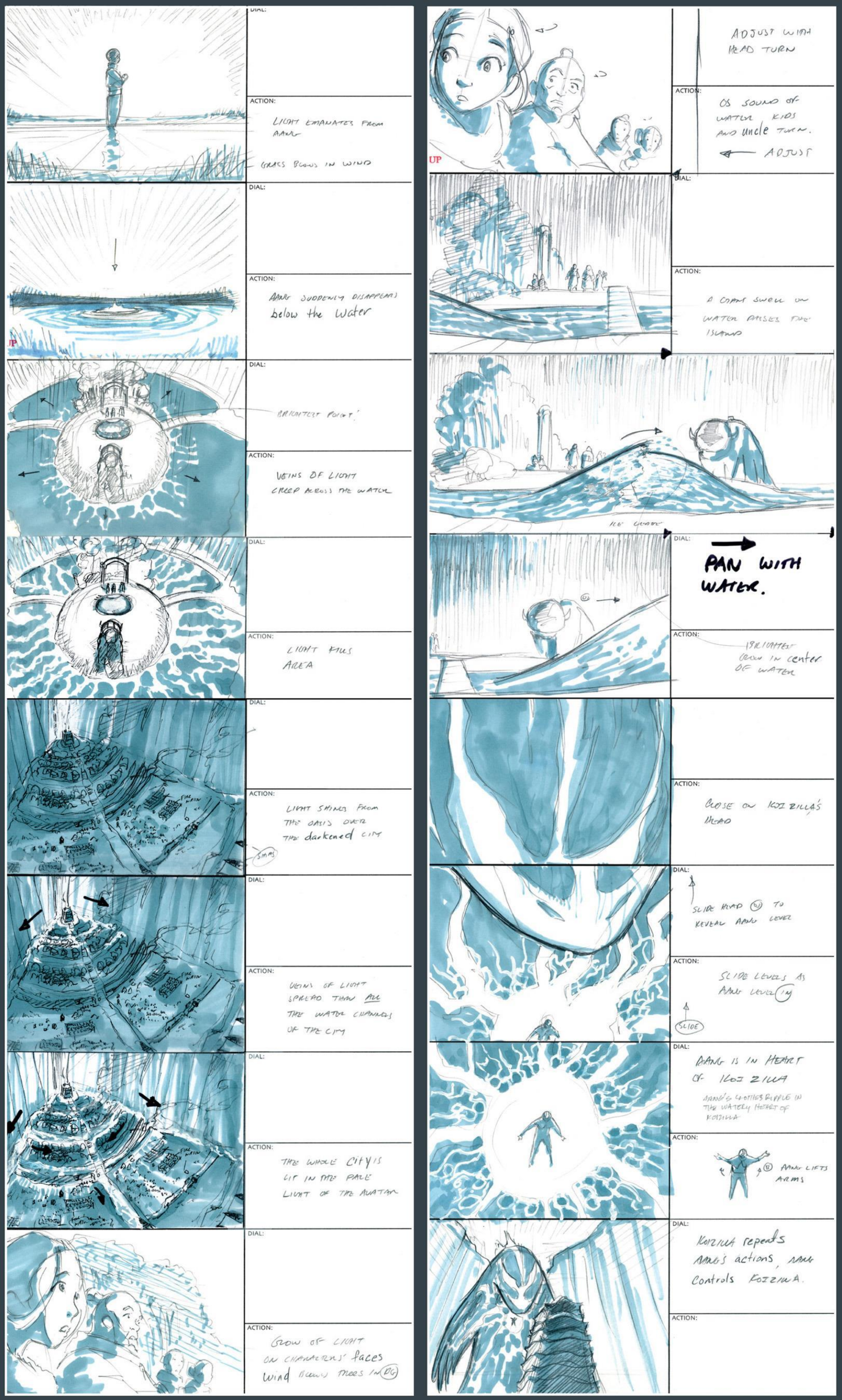
Aang's visit to the Spirit World provided a chance for visual variety and a warm-toned break from all the blue snow and ice in the Northern Water Tribe. Background design by Ricardo Delgado. Painting by Bryan Evans.







The Spirit of the Ocean, whom we affectionately referred to as "Koizilla." Like when Aang was trapped in the iceberg, we imagined that he wasn't submerged in water, but floated in a ball of energy at the heart of the koi monster. Concepts by Bryan Konietzko.

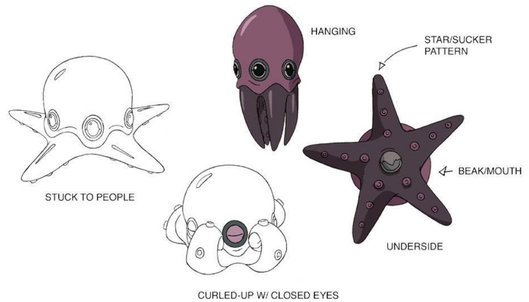


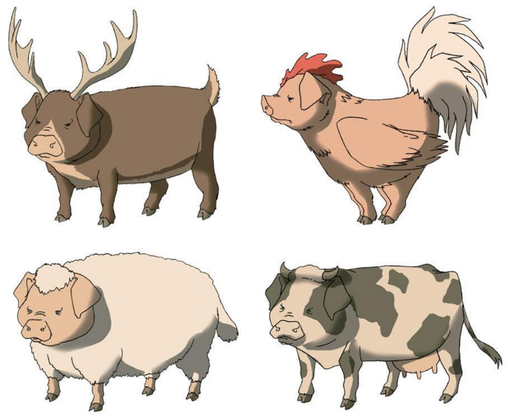
This storyboard by Dave Filoni unfortunately marked the end of his directorial run on *Avatar*. After completing the finale, Dave left to become the supervising director of *The Clone Wars*. We were sorry to see him go, but because he's probably the world's biggest *Star Wars* fan, we knew we couldn't keep him from his true destiny.

SPOTLIGHT:
The Hybrid Animals

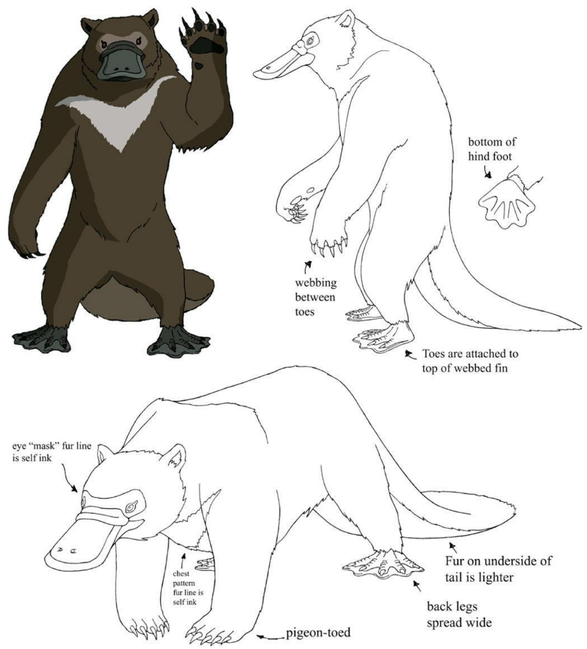
BRYAN: When I was a kid I loved doing drawings of imaginary hybrid animals. Looking back, I think this was inspired by my love for Berkeley Breathed's character Opus the Penguin. Was he a penguin? A puffin? I didn't know, but I loved the idea that you could create whatever sort of animal you wanted. Years later, when Mike and I set out to create our own fantasy world, I resumed the practice of creating fantasy animal hybrids without even consciously thinking of it.

Even though Appa and Momo were conceived as hybrid animals, I never really planned on calling them a "bison-manatee" or a "lemur-bat." To me, this is just how bisons and lemurs appeared in our fantasy world. However, the writers really grabbed hold of the whole hybrid-animal concept and ran with it. Every episode, they tried to outdo themselves with the weirdest combinations possible, or made jokes within the episodes about the phenomena. Personally, I think it got out of hand (particularly in the case of the pig hybrids)! I just wanted some cool, unique-looking creatures based on real-world animals, but the writers and fans seemed to be having too much fun with the concept to spoil it.

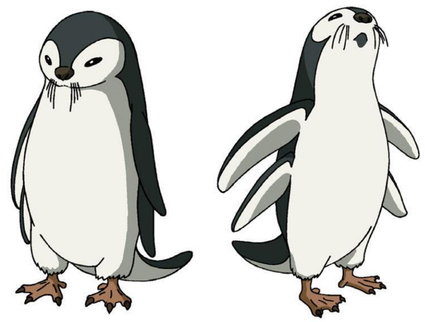


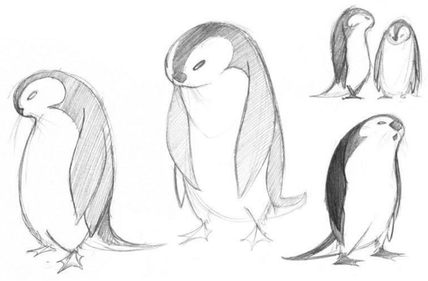


All manner of pig-hybrid animals: pig-deer, pigster, wooly-pig, and moo-sow. Designs by Angela Mueller. Color by Hye Jung Kim. Above: Purple pentapus. Designs by Angela Mueller. Color by Hye Jung Kim.

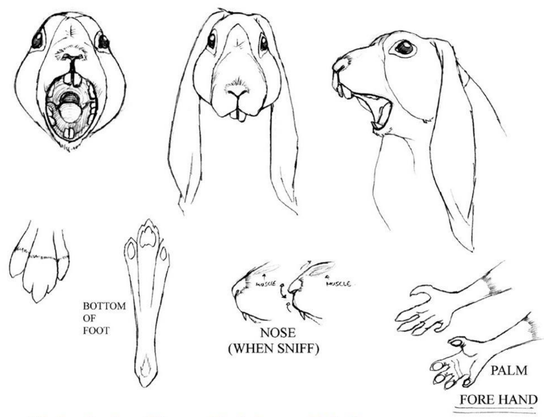


Baby and adult platypus-bears.
Designs by Bryan Konietzko. Color by Hye Jung Kim.

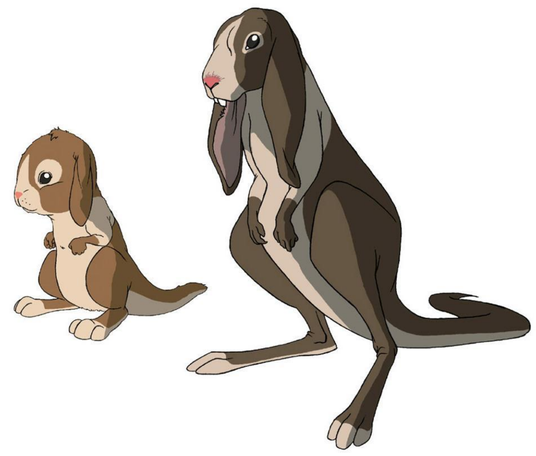


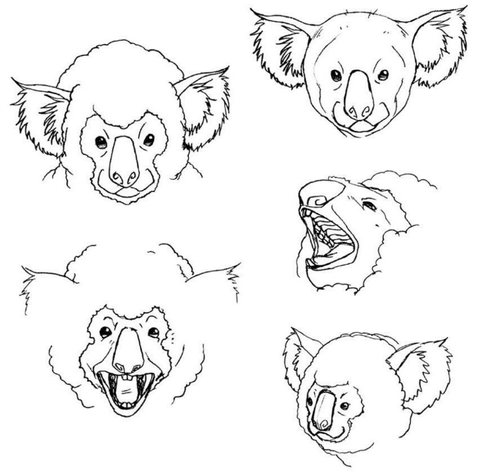


Otter-penguins are native to the South Pole.
Concepts and designs by Bryan Konietzko. Color by Hye Jung Kim.

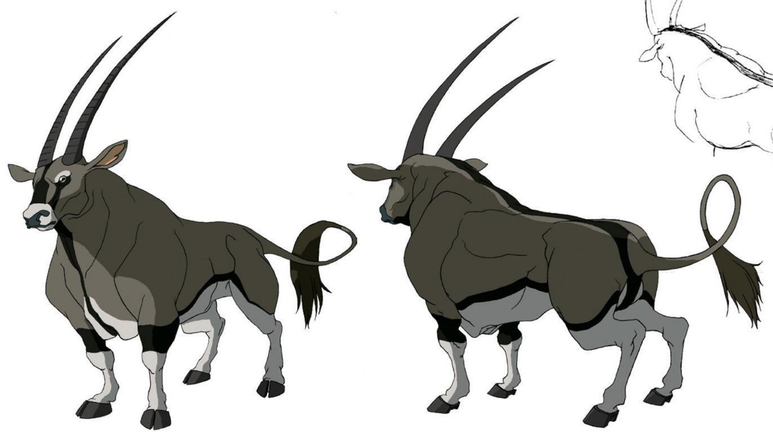


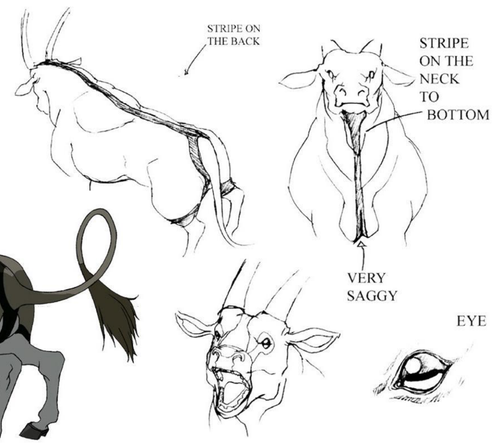
We thought the rabbiroo and its baby were kind of cute, but designer Jae Woo Kim was freaked out by it, and was happy to get it off his desk. Designs by Jae Woo Kim. Color by Hye Jung Kim.



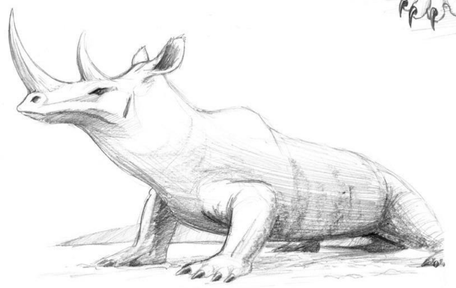


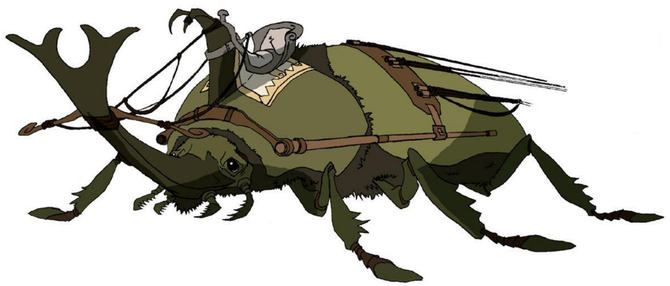
Koala-sheep. Designs by Jae Woo Kim. Color by Hye Jung Kim.
Below: Gemsbok-bull. Designs by Jae Woo Kim. Color by Hye Jung Kim.





Komodo-rhinos. Although the head in the final design is that of a rhinoceros, the horn configuration is actually based on rhinoceros beetles. Concepts and designs by Bryan Konietzko.

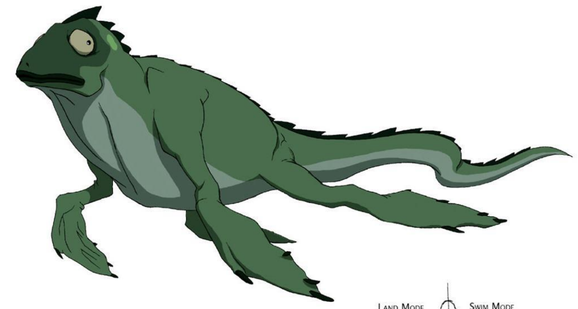


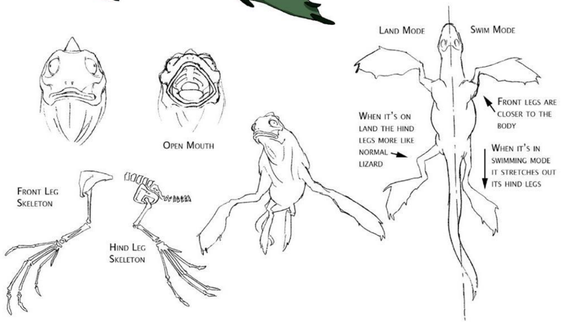


There were plenty of nonhybrid animals in the *Avatar* world, but sometimes they were much larger than in real life, like this giant rhinoceros beetle. Design by Jae Woo Kim. Color by Hye Jung Kim.

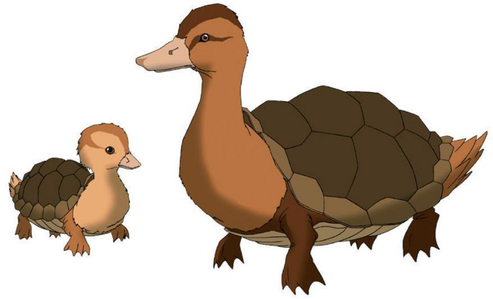
Left: Camelephant, also the name of a popular, prewar Fire Nation dance. Design by Angela Mueller.

The wolf-bat, based in part on the scary-looking wrinkle-faced bat, gives Mike nightmares to this day. Designs by Angela Mueller. Color by Hye Jung Kim.



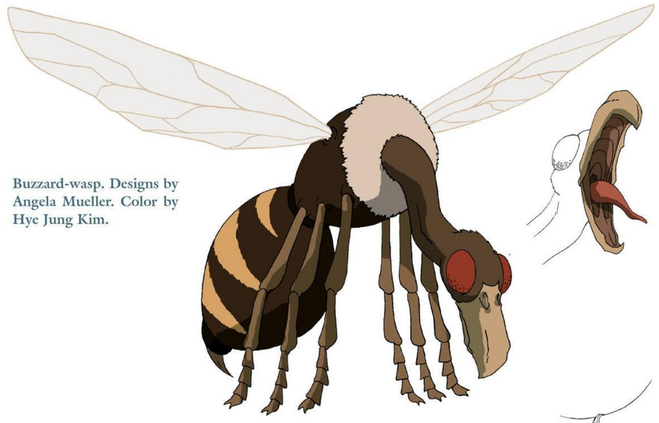


One of Bryan's favorites, the iguana-seal. Designs and sketches by Jae Woo Kim. Color by Hye Jung Kim.

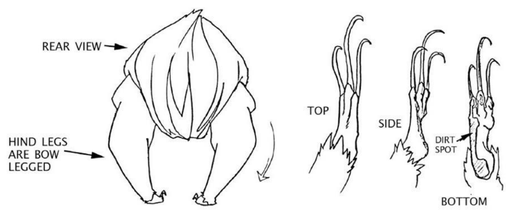


Turtle-ducks. Designs by Angela Mueller, based on concepts by Lauren MacMullan. Color by Hye Jung Kim.

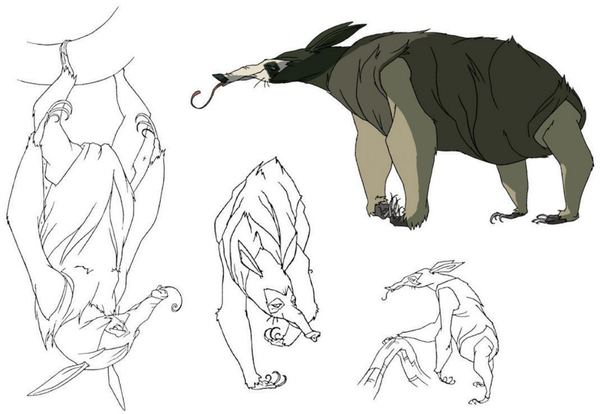
Turtle-seal and tiger-seal. Seals and turtles were popular choices when it came to creating our hybrid animals. Designs by Bryan Konietzko. Color by Hye Jung Kim.

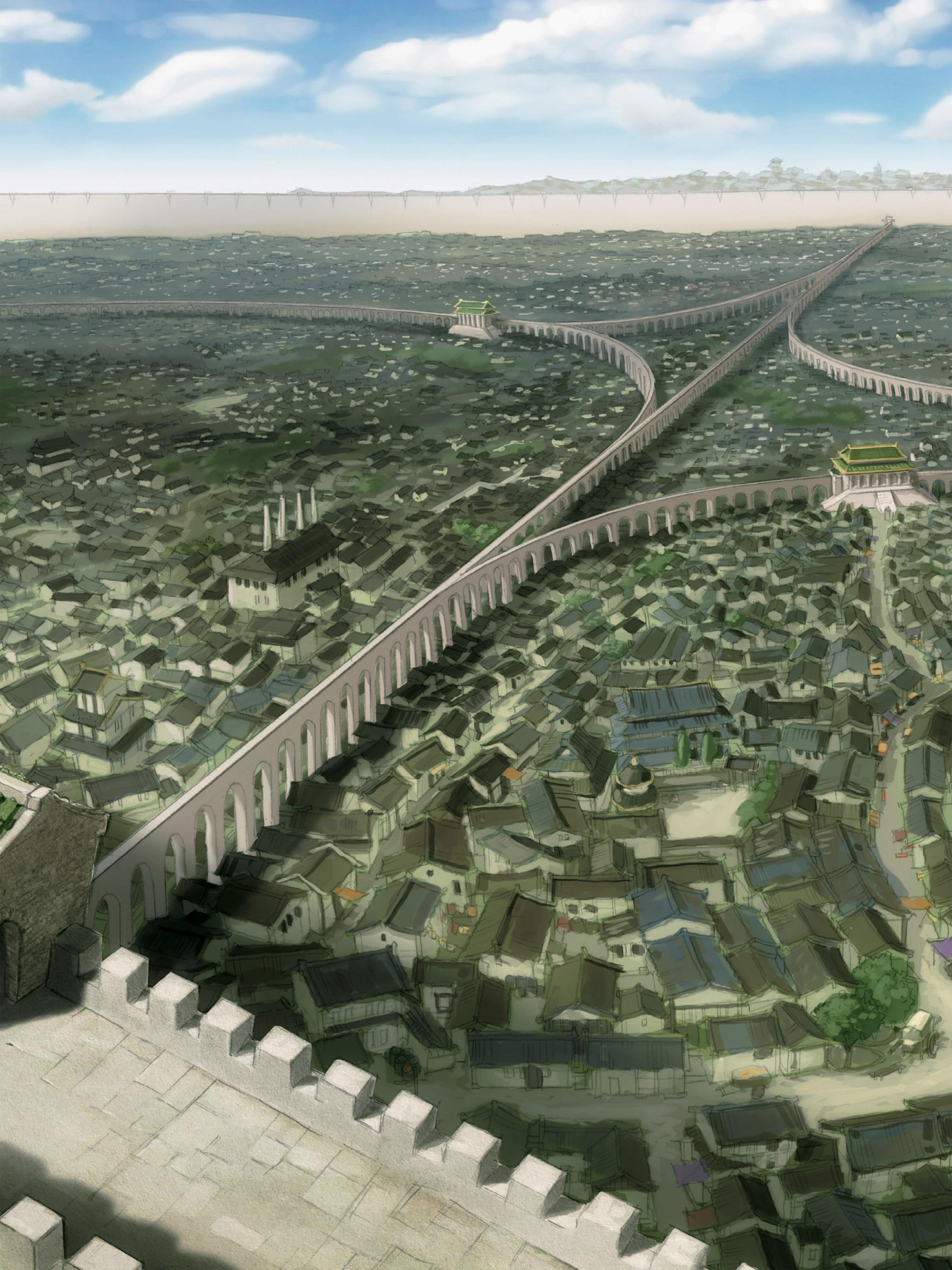


Buzzard-wasp. Designs by Angela Mueller. Color by Hye Jung Kim.



Aardvark-sloth. Designs by Jae Woo Kim. Color by Hye Jung Kim.





土強

CHAPTER THREE

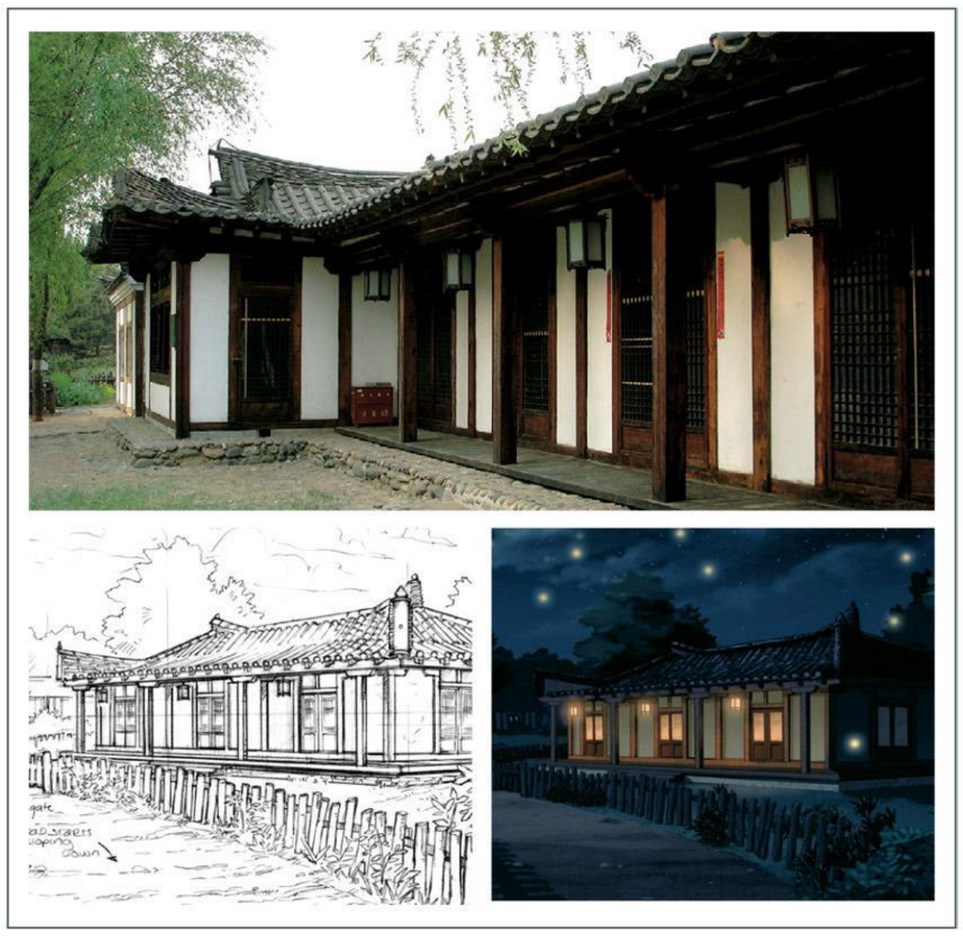
Season Two

EARTH

We've survived season one, and use what we've learned to make season two even better . . .

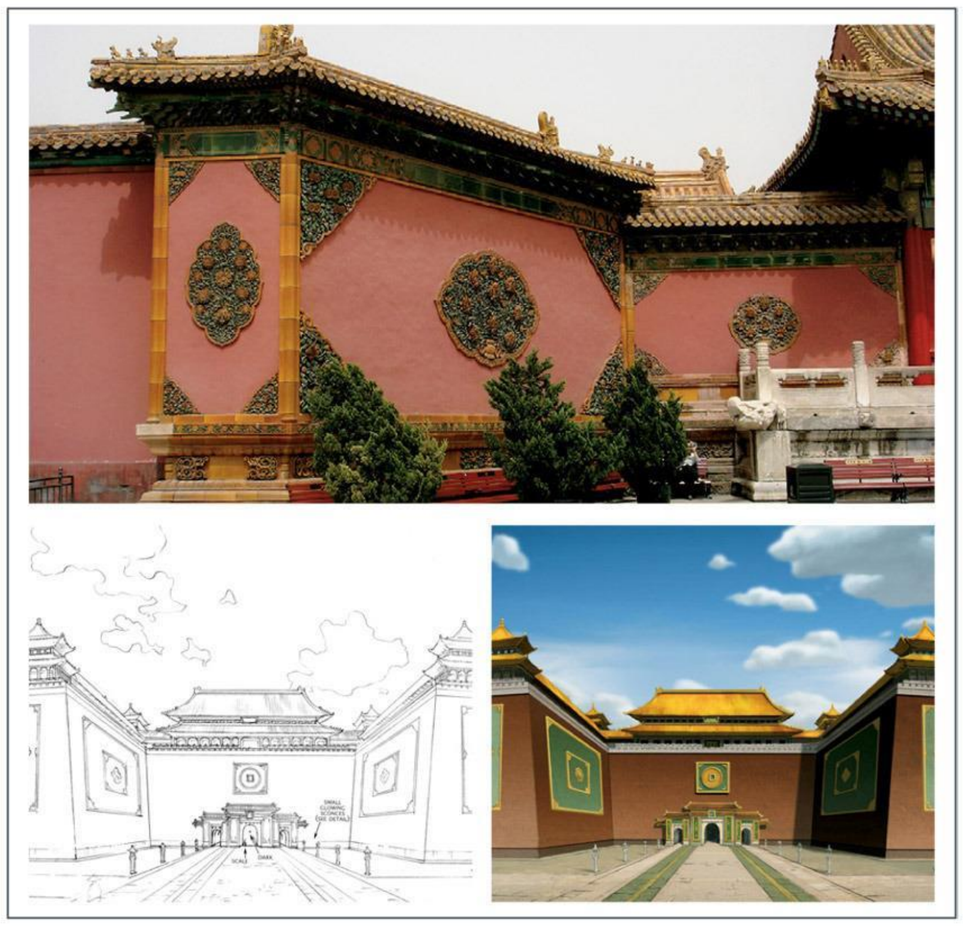
MIKE: After getting through the challenges and schedule of season one, we barely had time to catch our breath before Nickelodeon picked up a second season. My first thought was, "That's awesome!" My second thought was, "Oh man, how are we going to make twenty more episodes?!"

Creatively, I was excited to delve into the vast Earth Kingdom, both for the rich story and epic visual possibilities. Although Aang and his friends had visited some spots in the world's largest nation in season one, there were countless other places to explore—dangerous caves, mysterious swamps, harsh deserts, and the megacity known as Ba Sing Se. Once again, the artists rose to the challenge, creating unique environments, characters, and animation for every episode.



In anticipation of the design needs of season two, Bryan and I took a short trip to Beijing, China, in the spring of 2005. Our two main destinations were the Great Wall and the Forbidden City, whose size and scale we used as the inspiration for the designs of Ba Sing Se. But we also made a very lucky find when our tour guide brought us to an architecture park, where dozens of historical Chinese building styles from various eras and ethnicities were on display. We knew we had just stumbled upon an inspirational gold mine that we wouldn't find in any book. The problem was, the park was closing in an hour and we were leaving the next morning. So Bryan and I split up and took as many pictures of the buildings as we could before the sun set. Back in the U.S., the background designers used some of these photos for ideas in creating the varied architectural looks of the Earth Kingdom.

BRYAN: The crew survived season one, and we in the design department now had the benefit of seeing what worked and what didn't when our designs were translated into finished animation. We used what we learned to make the season two designs even better, and everyone was getting more confident working in the developing *Avatar* style. Two artists really rose to the challenge, and I promoted each to the supervisor of her department: Hye Jung Kim became the color supervisor, and Elsa Garagarza became the background design supervisor. We also hired some great additional designers to help with the huge demand of realizing the Earth Kingdom. Elsa and Hye Jung made sure the art was up to a certain level before I saw it, which greatly freed up a lot of my time and energy for my numerous responsibilities. This system and their hard work and talent really allowed *Avatar* to continually increase in quality, and I am indebted to them both.



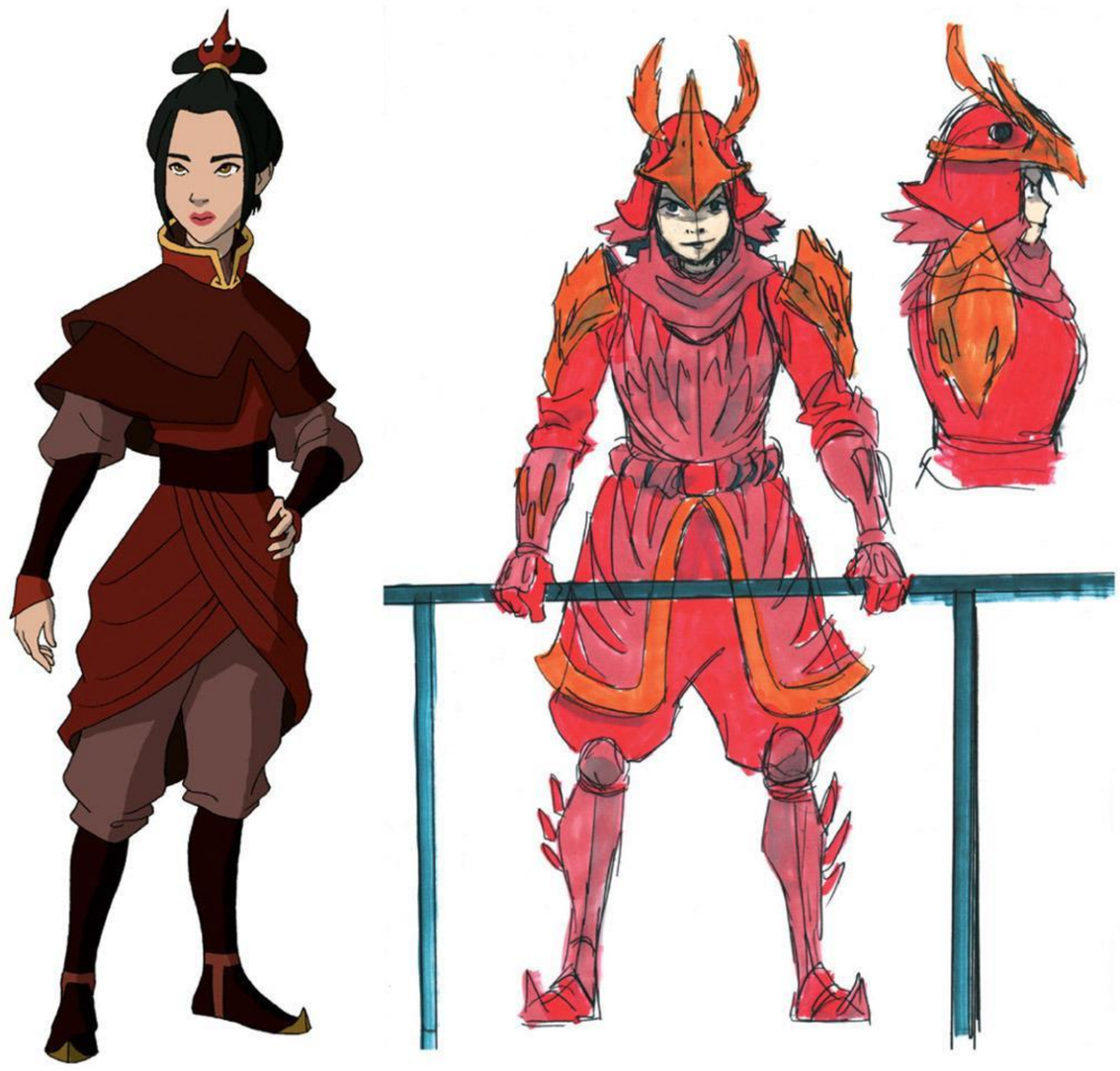
Facing chapter title page: Ba Sing Se's Lower Ring. Background design by Jevon Bue. Painting by Bryan Evans.

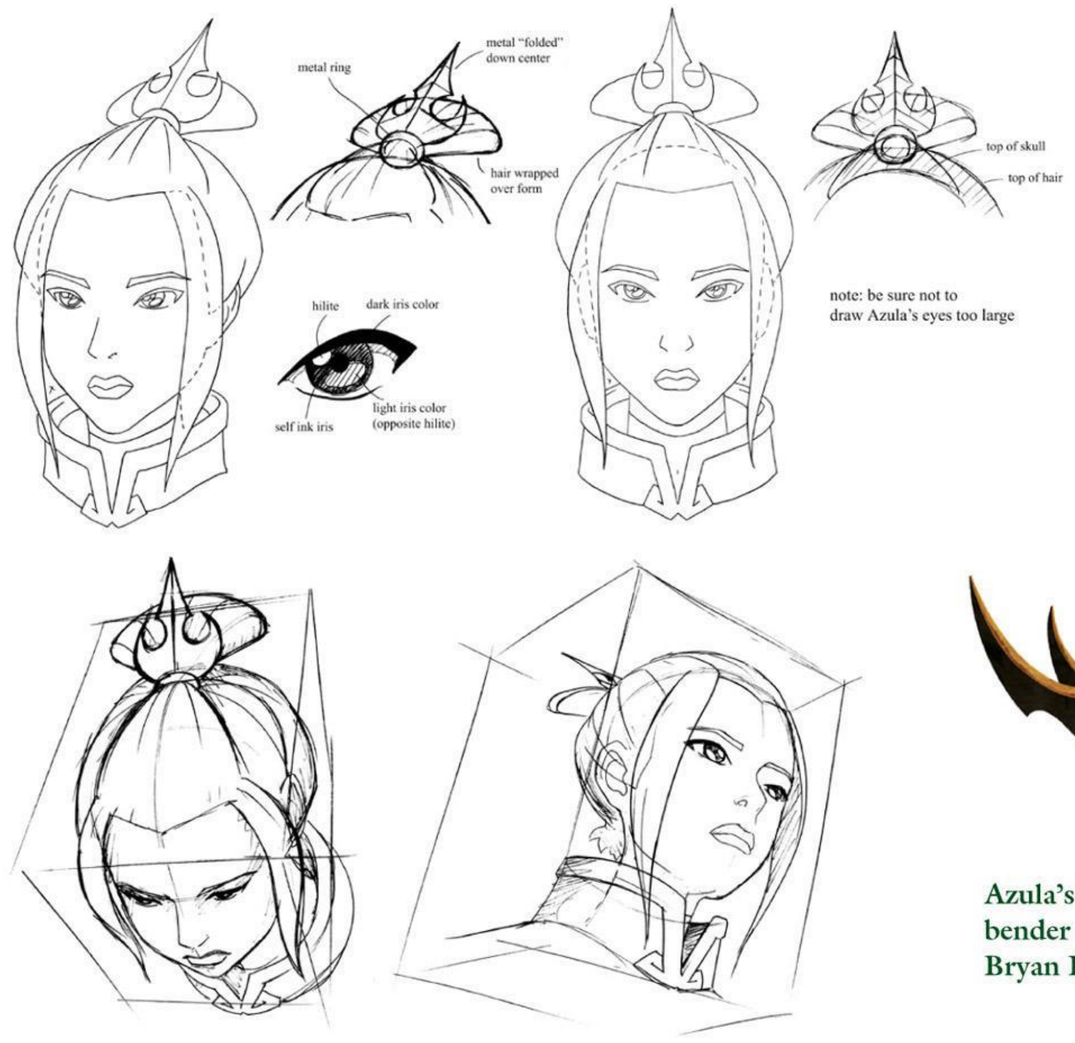
Right: Photos by Bryan Konietzko and Michael Dante DiMartino. Background designs by Elsa Garagarza (top) and Jevon Bue (middle, bottom). Paintings by Hye Jung Kim (top) and Bryan Evans (middle, bottom).

AZULA

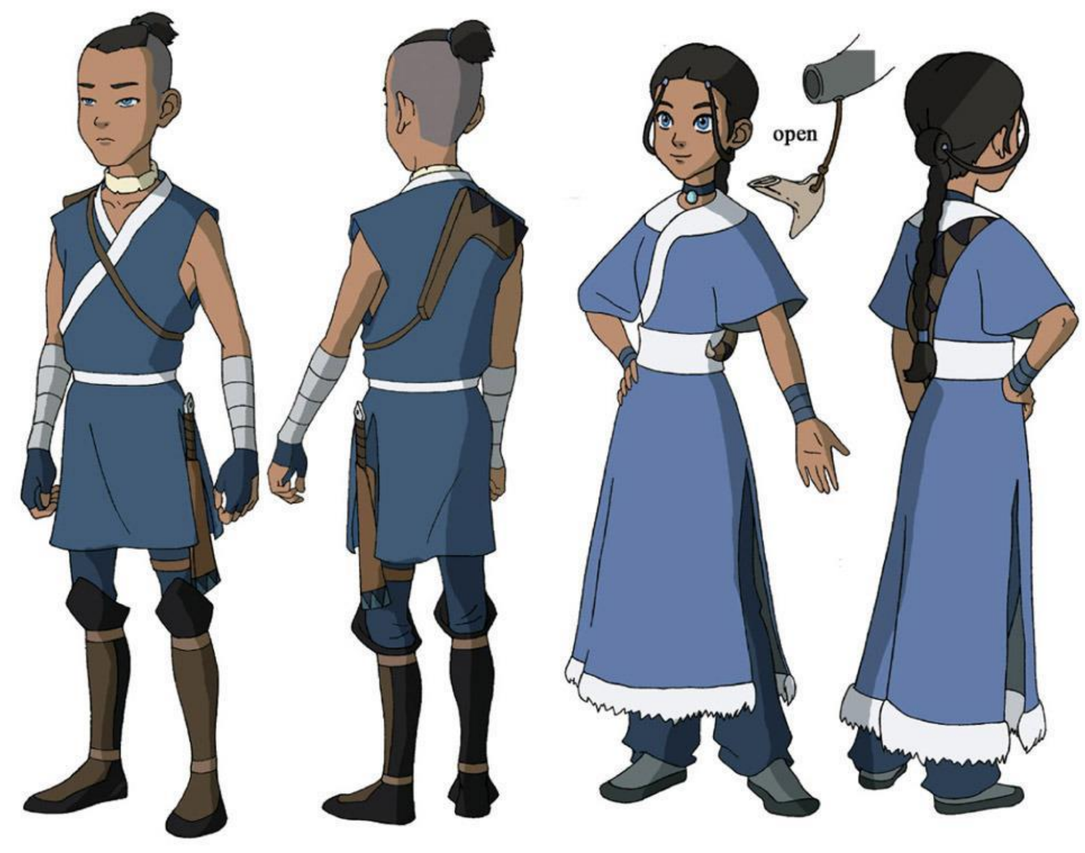
MIKE: The manipulative and fearsome Princess Azula was briefly introduced at the end of season one as someone that both the Avatar and her brother, Zuko, would have to contend with in season two. She quickly became my favorite villain in the series. To symbolize that Azula was a Firebending prodigy and more skilled than her brother, her Firebending effects were colored blue. Practically, the blue fire also helped distinguish her attacks from Zuko's red Firebending during their epic battles.

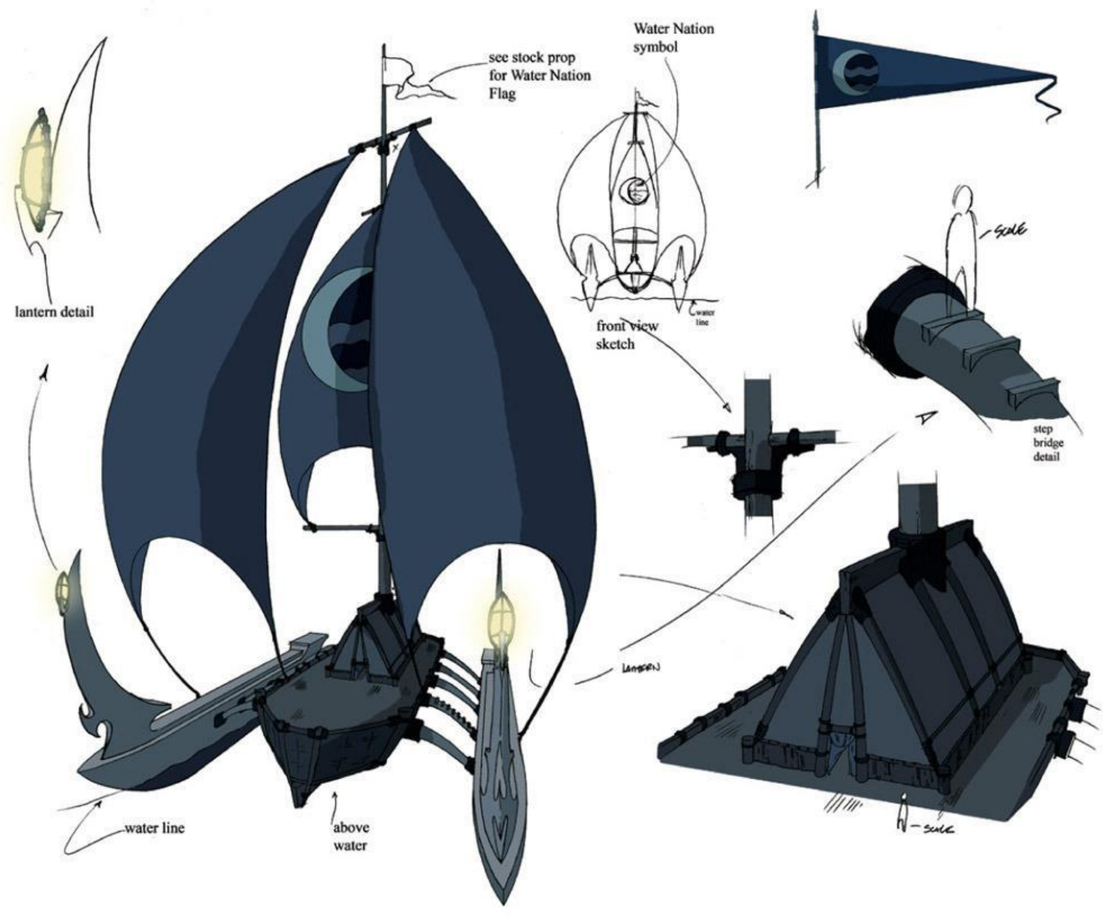
BRYAN: Azula's design came together relatively quickly, compared to other main characters in *Avatar*. Aaron Ehasz and the writers were really great at making her cunning and sadistically manipulative, and Grey DeLisle played her brilliantly. As a result, I think she was by far the most complex, interesting, and dangerous villain in the series.



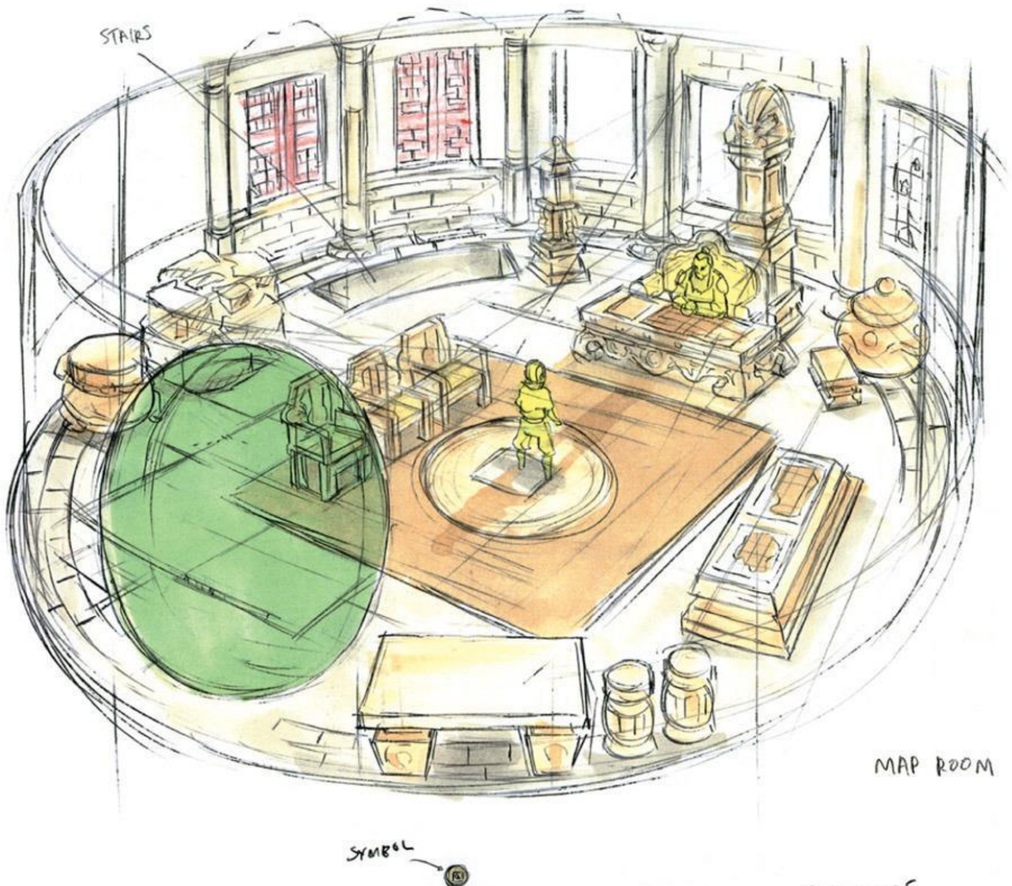


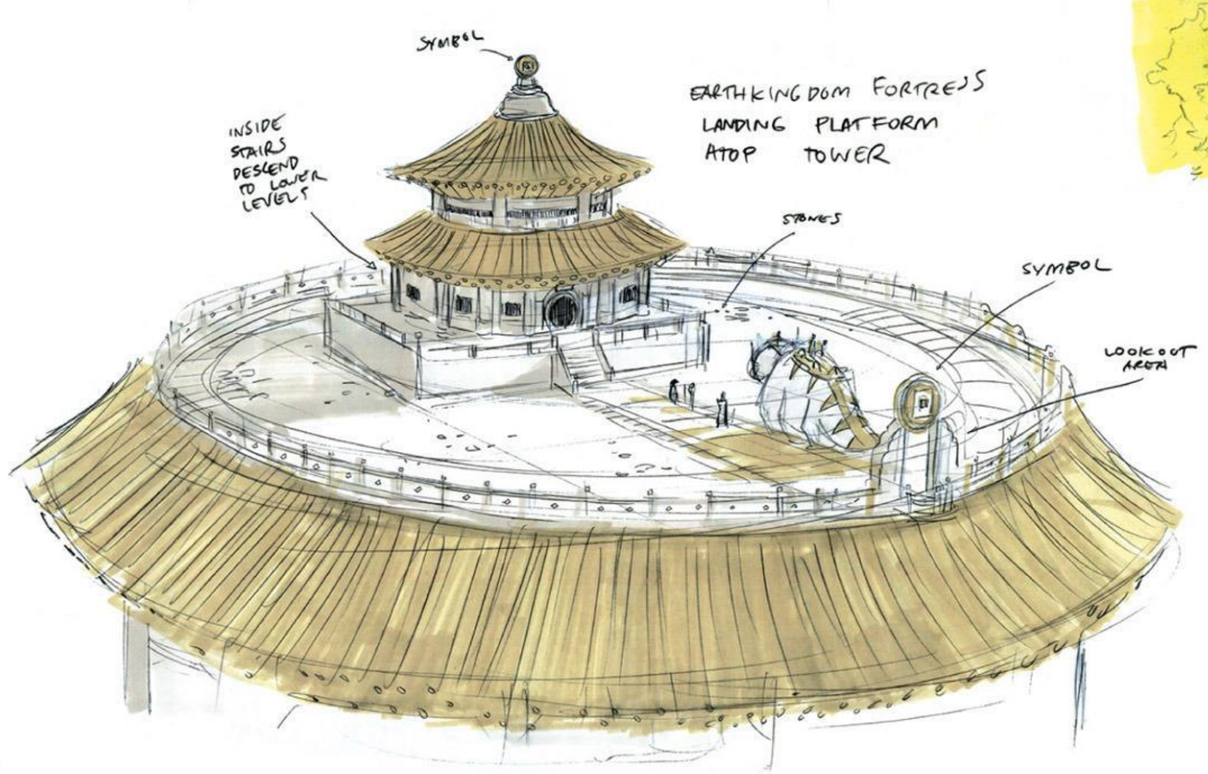
Azula's ship. Designs by Aldina Dias. Paintings by Hye Jung Kim. Left and above: Azula is the Firebender seen in the opening titles, so she was designed very early in the production. Azula designs by Bryan Konietzko. Color by Hye Jung Kim. Azula phoenix-armor concepts by Ethan Spaulding.





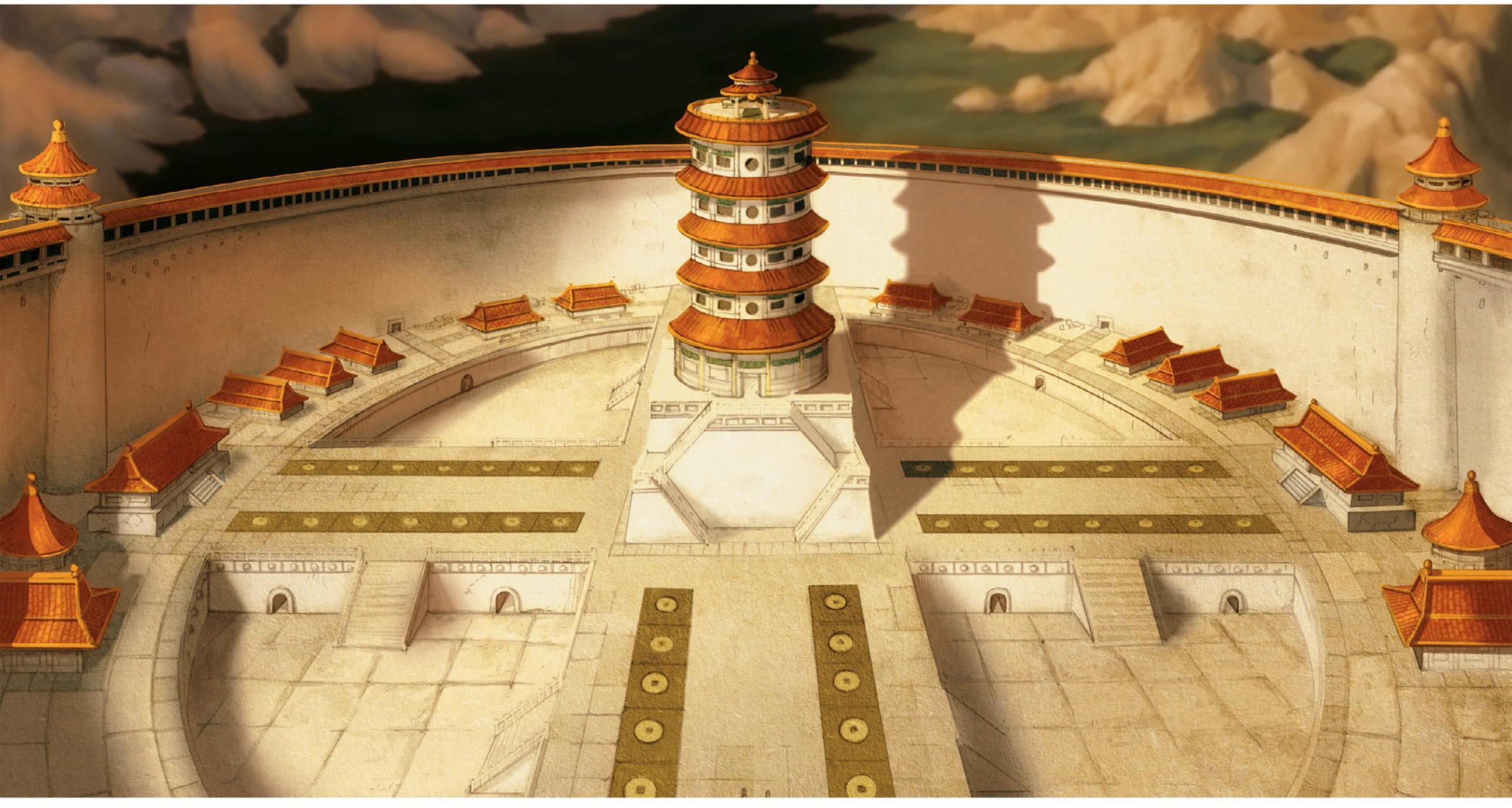
Sokka and Katara got updated, warm-weather outfits for season two. Designs by Bryan Konietzko. Water Tribe catamaran. Designs by Aldina Dias. Colors by Hye Jung Kim.



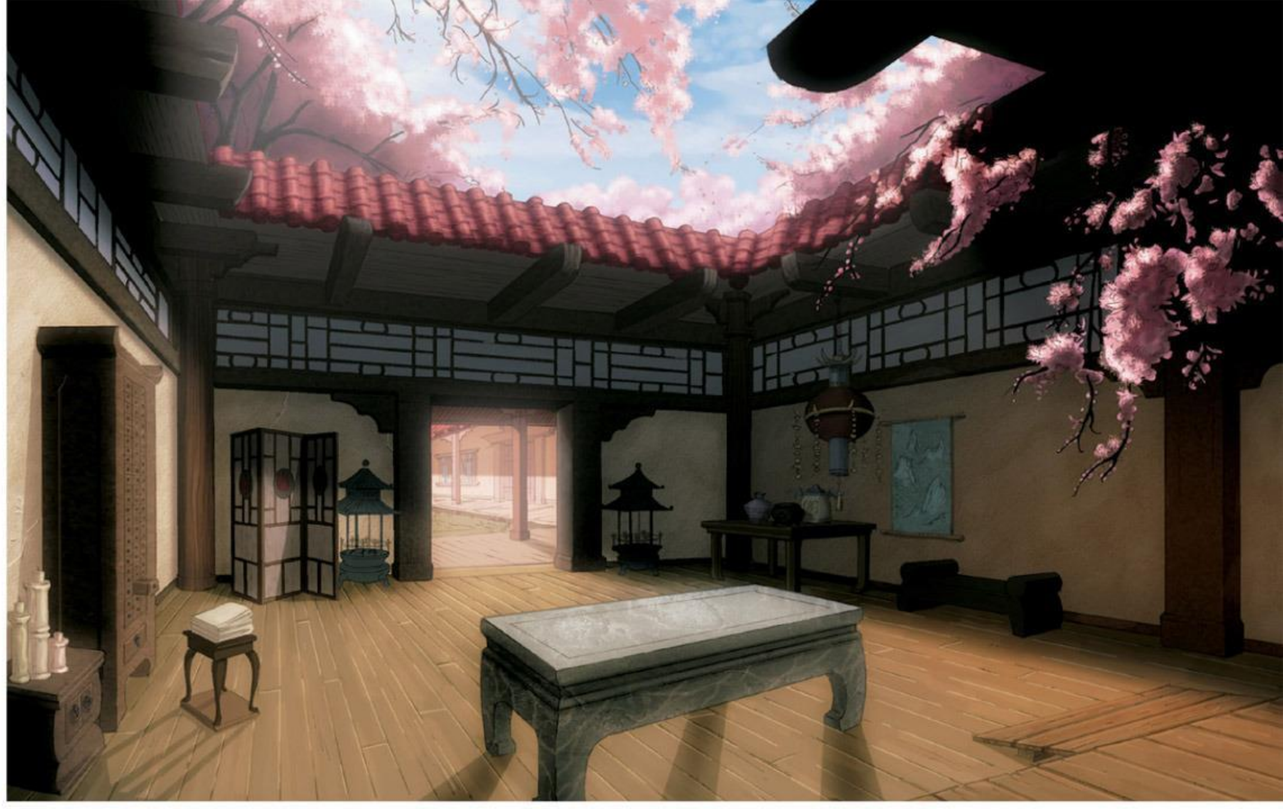


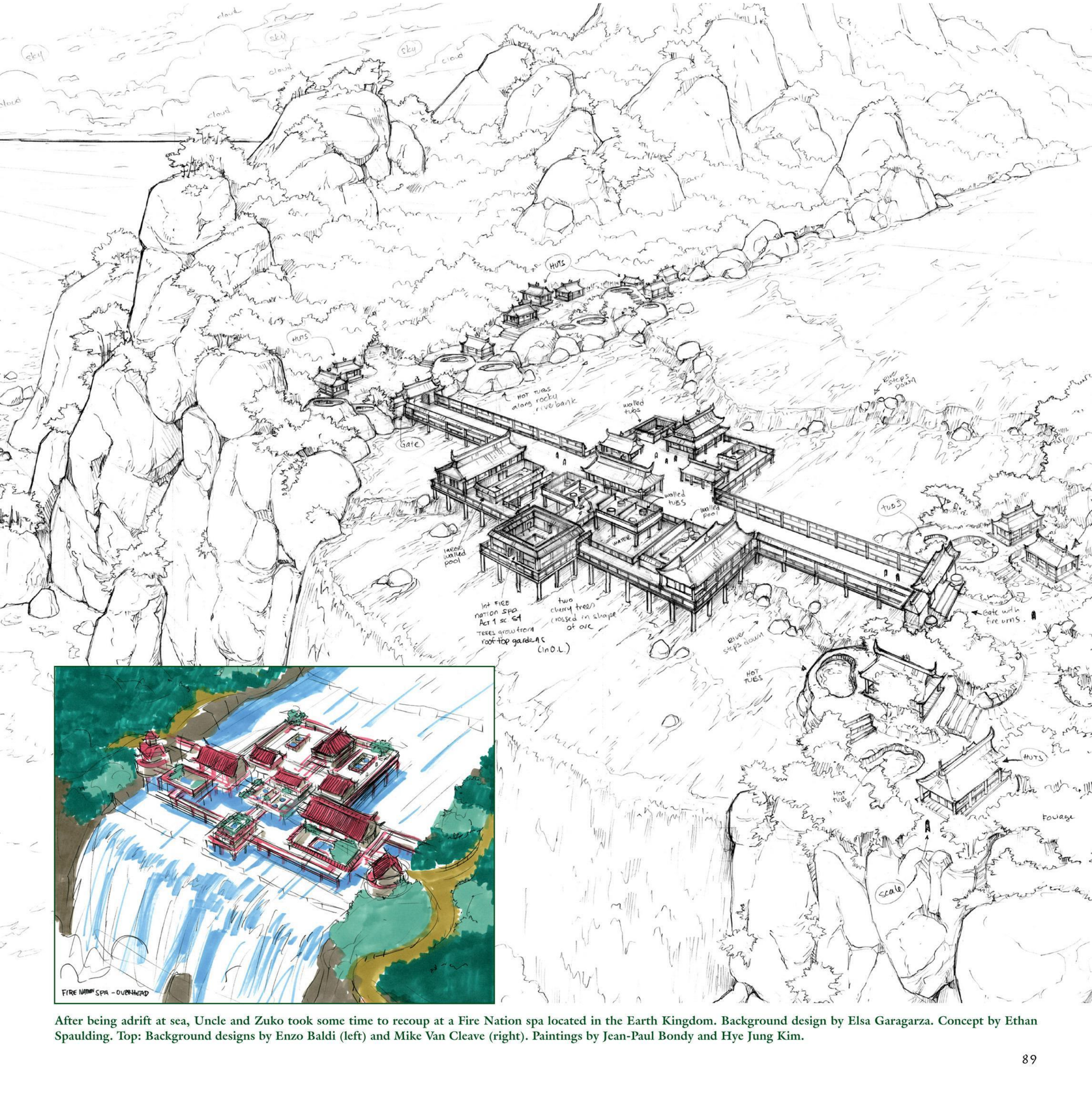
We had a bit of lead time before production started, so some artists worked on developing concepts for the first episode. This was an ideal situation, where we could explore different options for the locations and different looks for the characters as the script was being written. The artists generated a lot of great concepts, which became the basis for the designs in "The Avatar State." Unfortunately, the luxury of extra time soon ended. As soon as production kicked in, the designers were back to a breakneck schedule, where designs were sometimes not done until after the storyboards were drawn.

General Fong's fortress. Concepts by Dean Kelly (top left, top right) and Ethan Spaulding (left).



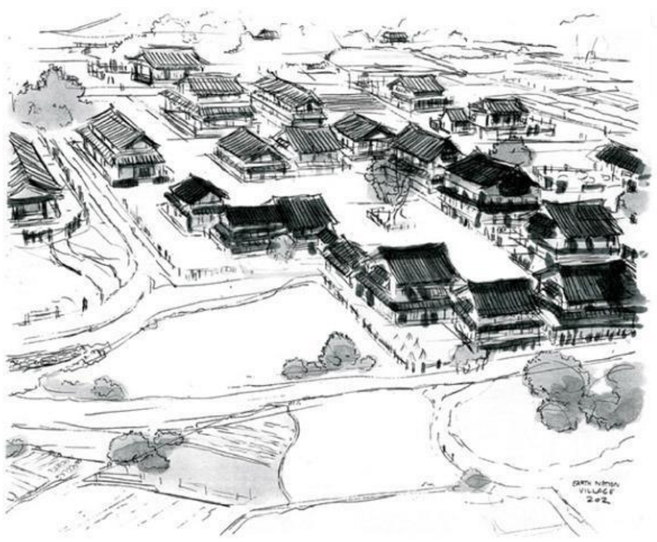
General Fong's fortress. Background design by Elsa Garagarza. Painting by Bryan Evans.

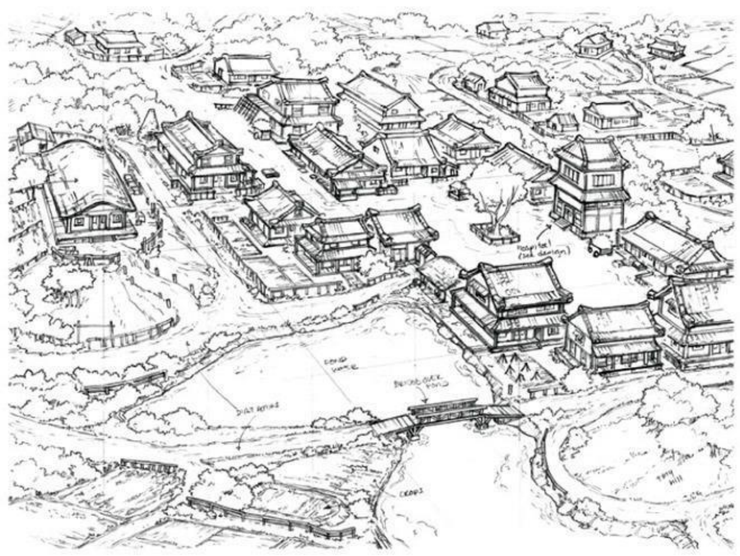


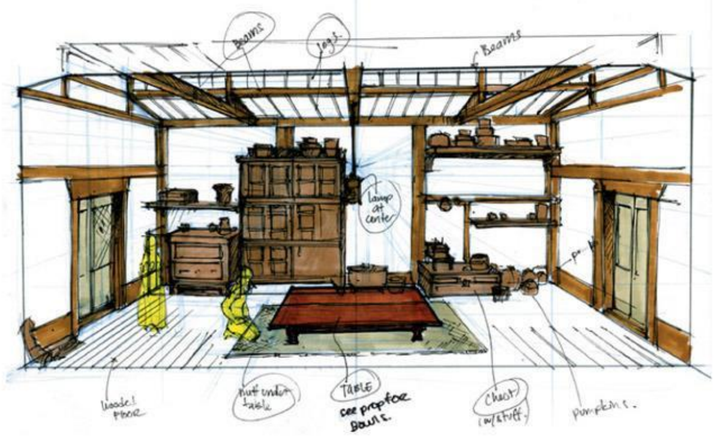


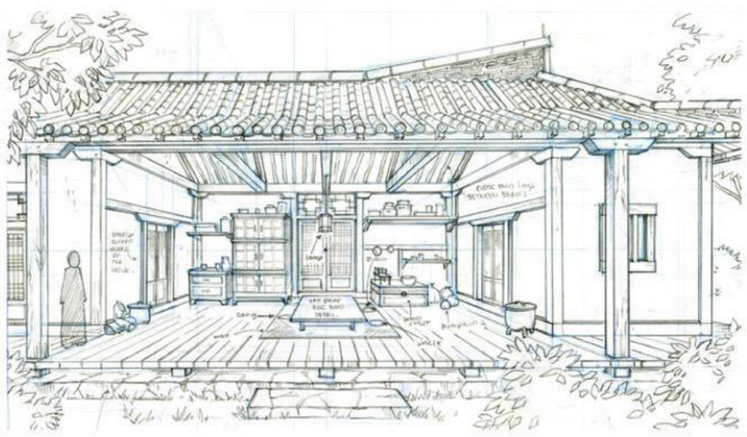
After being adrift at sea, Uncle and Zuko took some time to recoup at a Fire Nation spa located in the Earth Kingdom. Background design by Elsa Garagarza. Concept by Ethan Spaulding. Top: Background designs by Enzo Baldi (left) and Mike Van Cleave (right). Paintings by Jean-Paul Bondy and Hye Jung Kim.

The badger-mole was the original Earthbender. Designs by Bryan Konietzko and Angela Mueller. Color by Hye Jung Kim. Top: Chong and Moku were our ancient-Asian version of hippies. When doing acting reference of Chong for the animators, Bryan donned a large manila envelope for a hat and played his Irish bouzouki. Concepts by Bryan Konietzko.

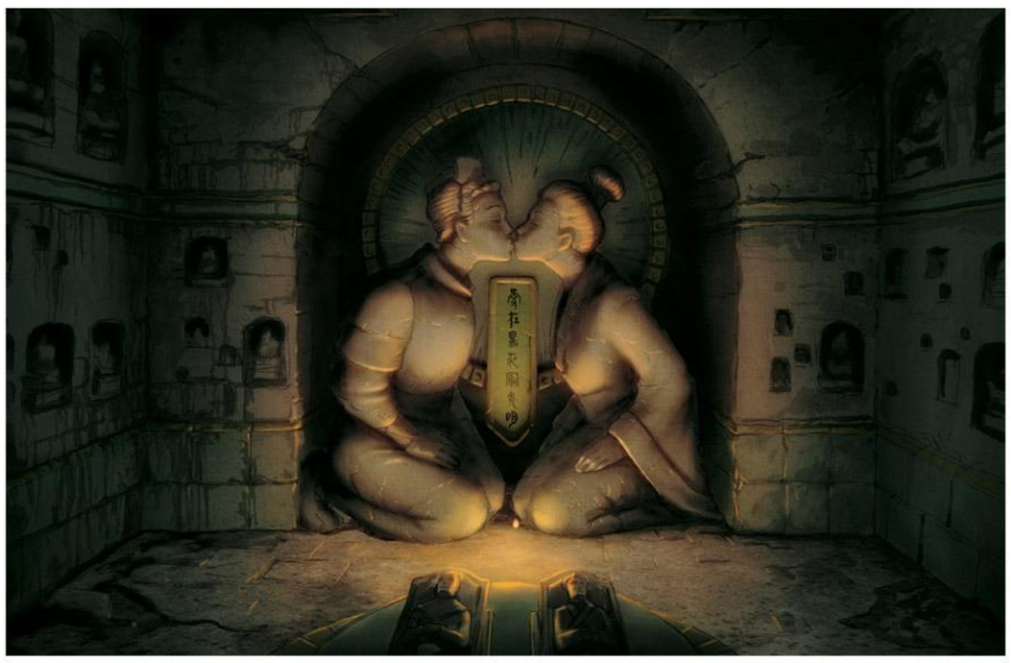




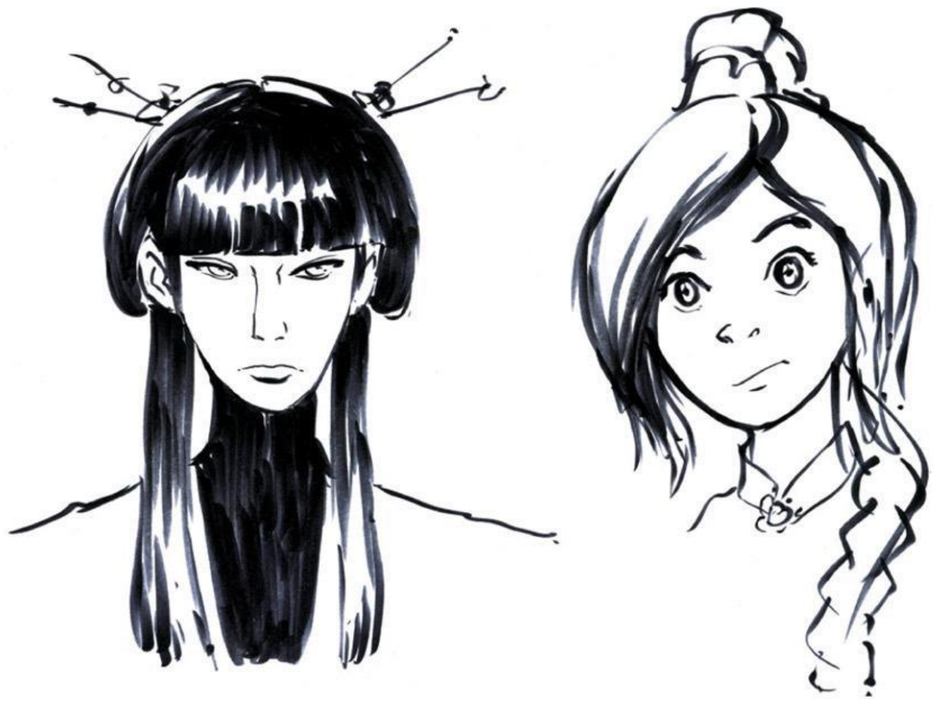




The evolution of a background design, from concept to completion. Concepts by Ethan Spaulding and Elsa Garagarza. Background designs by Elsa Garagarza (top, bottom) and Enzo Baldi (middle). Paintings by Bryan Evans, Jean-Paul Bondy, and Hye Jung Kim.

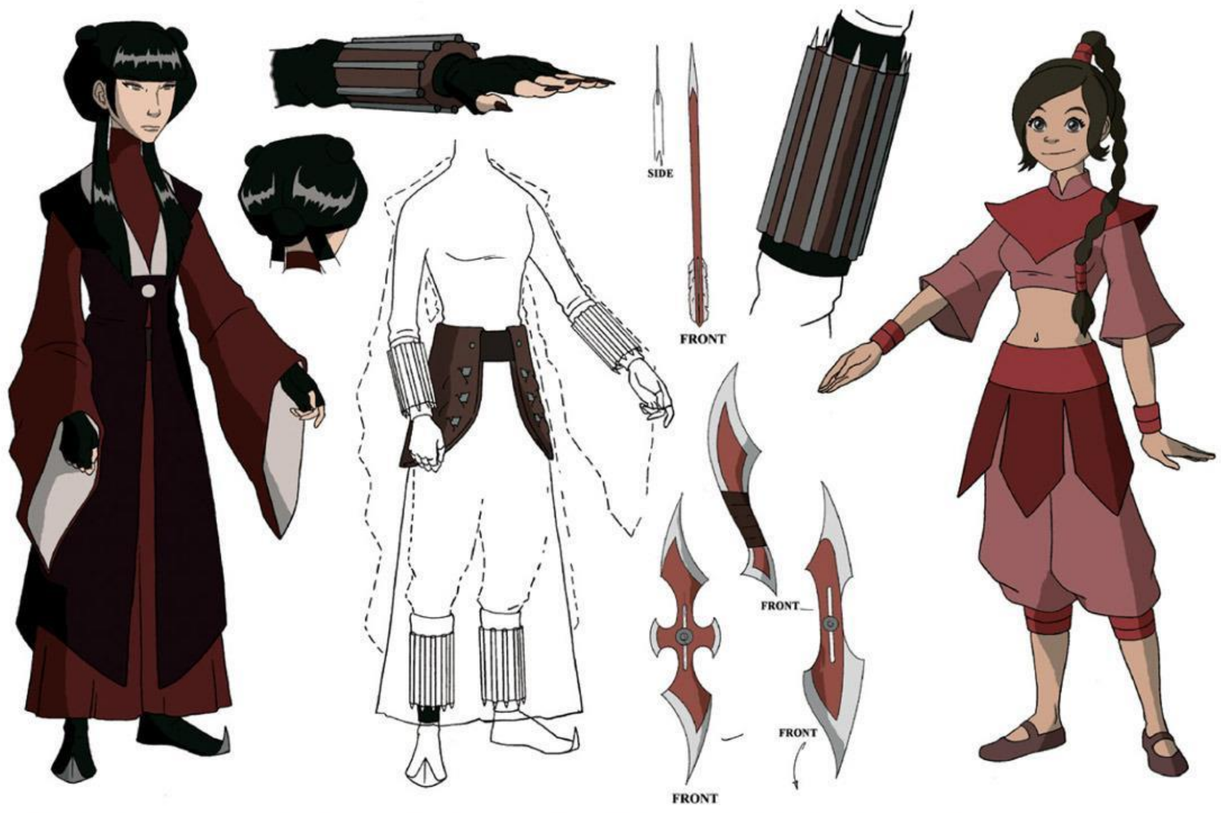


Wolf-bat statue concept by Ethan Spaulding. Left, top: The Tomb of Two Lovers. Background design by Lauren MacMullan and Enzo Baldi. Painting by Bryan Evans. Translation and calligraphy by S. L. Lee. Left, bottom: Wrathful wolf-bat statues guard the entrance of the cave. Background design by Elsa Garagarza. Painting by Bryan Evans.

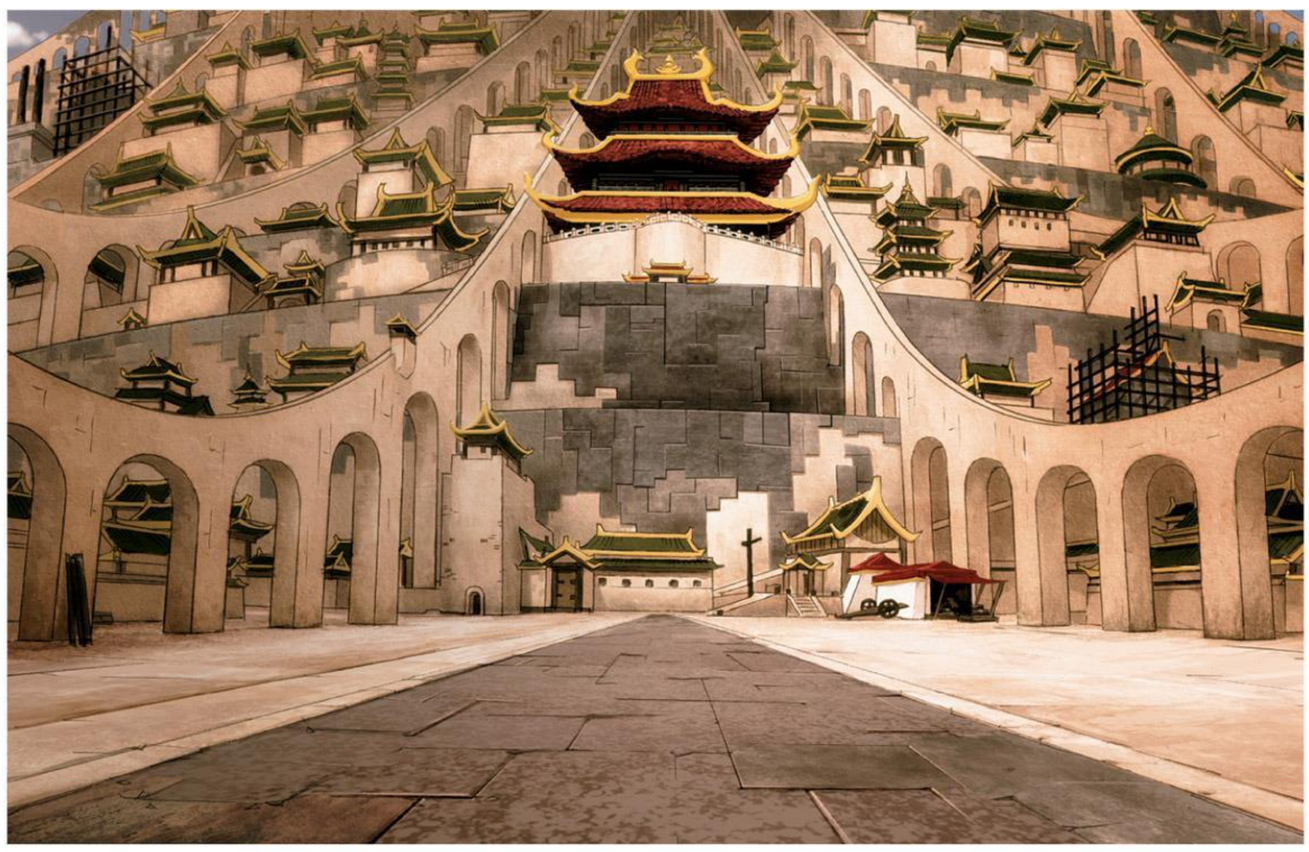


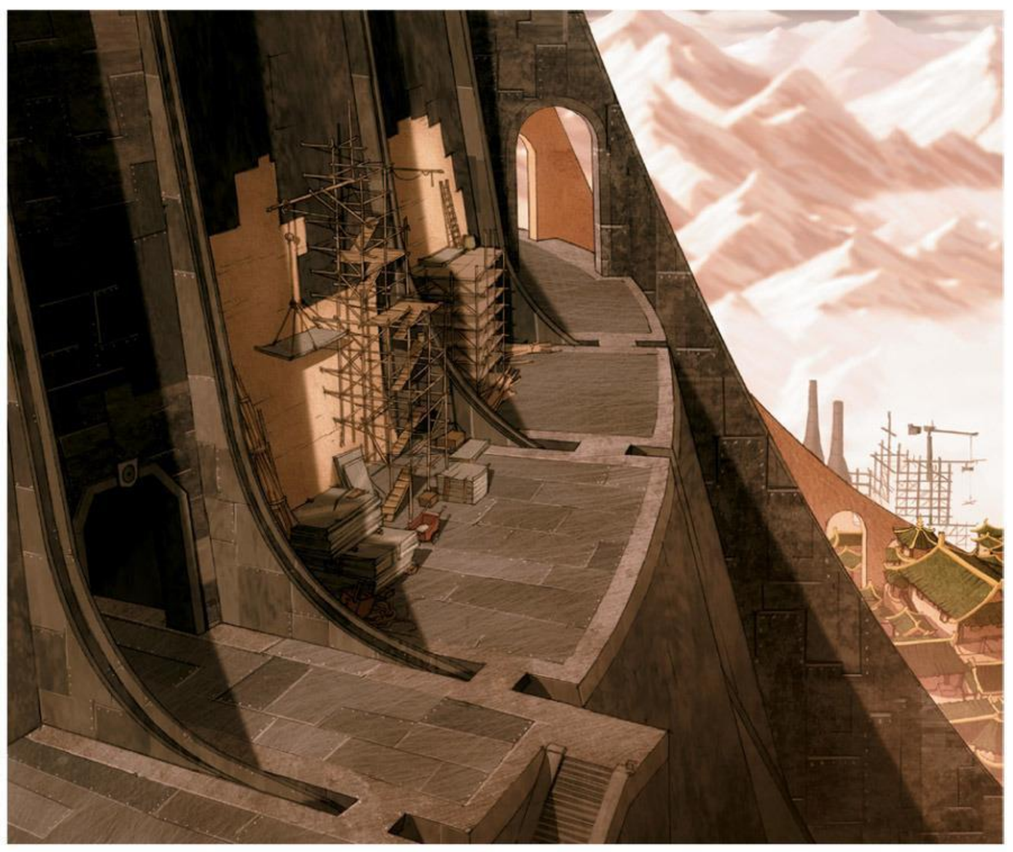
MAI AND TY LEE

The blade-throwing Mai and the acrobatic, chi-blocking Ty Lee were Azula's childhood friends who became her lethal companions. Mai's dark robes complemented her morose personality, while Ty Lee's cute, pink acrobatic outfit symbolized her bubbly demeanor and optimistic outlook on life.



Top left: Concepts by Bryan Konietzko. Top right and middle of page: Expressions and designs by Angela Mueller. Props by Aldina Dias. Below: Background designs by Jevon Bue. Paintings by Bryan Evans.

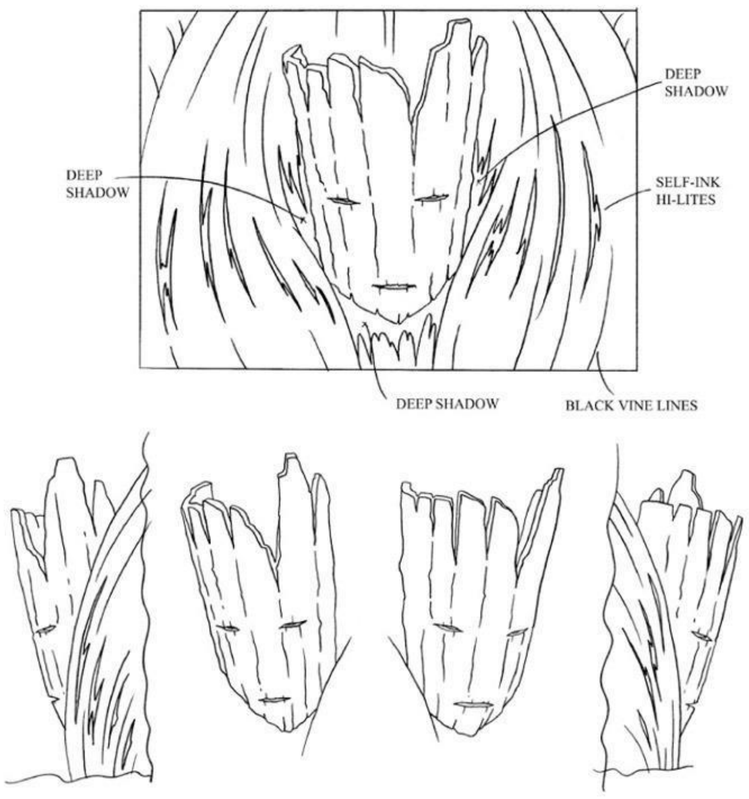


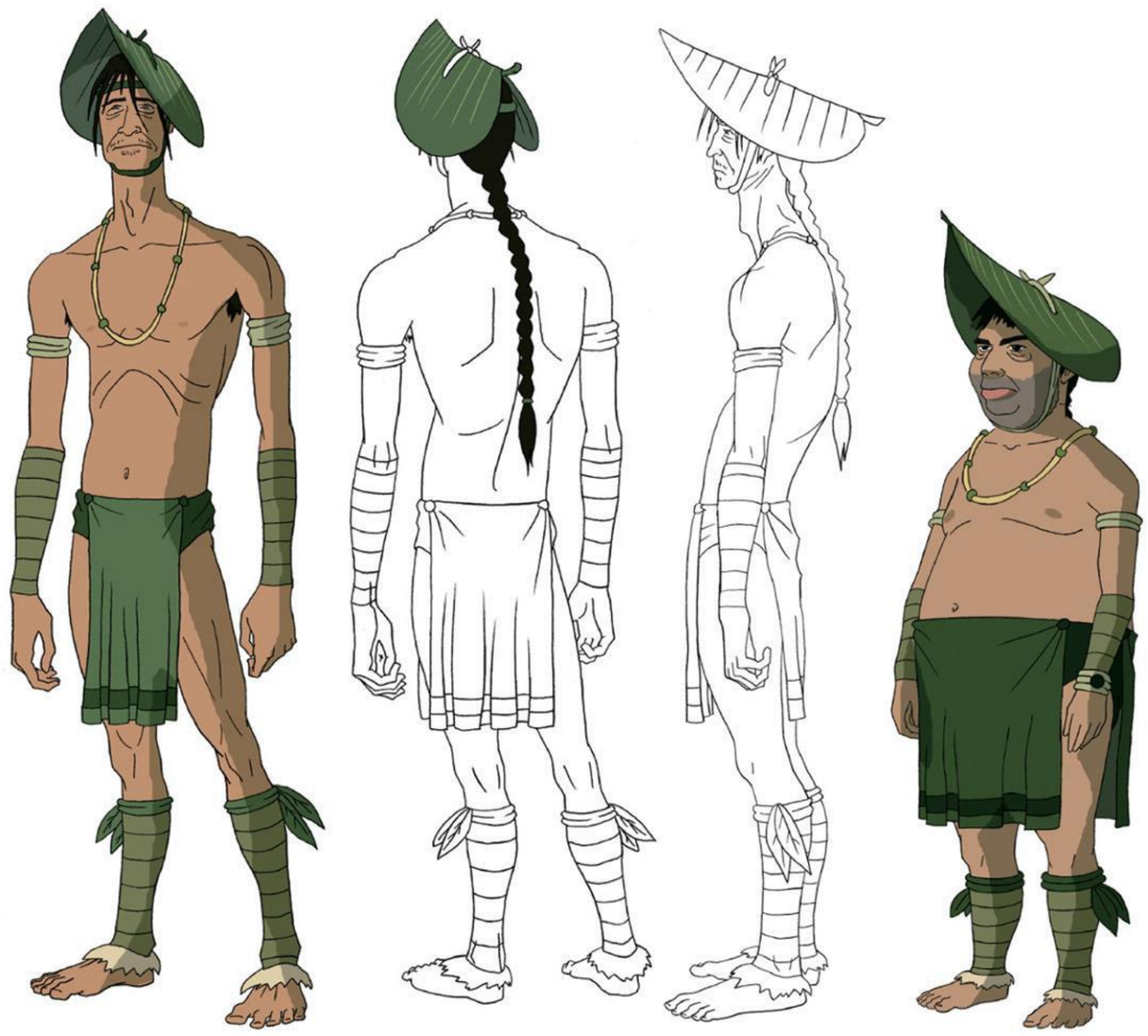


When Aang returned to Omashu, he was shocked to discover that the Fire Nation had taken over and retrofitted King Bumi's city. Top left: Background design by Tom Dankiewicz. Banners by Aldina Dias. Painting by Bryan Evans. Top right: Background design by Jevon Bue. Below: Concepts by Ethan Spaulding.

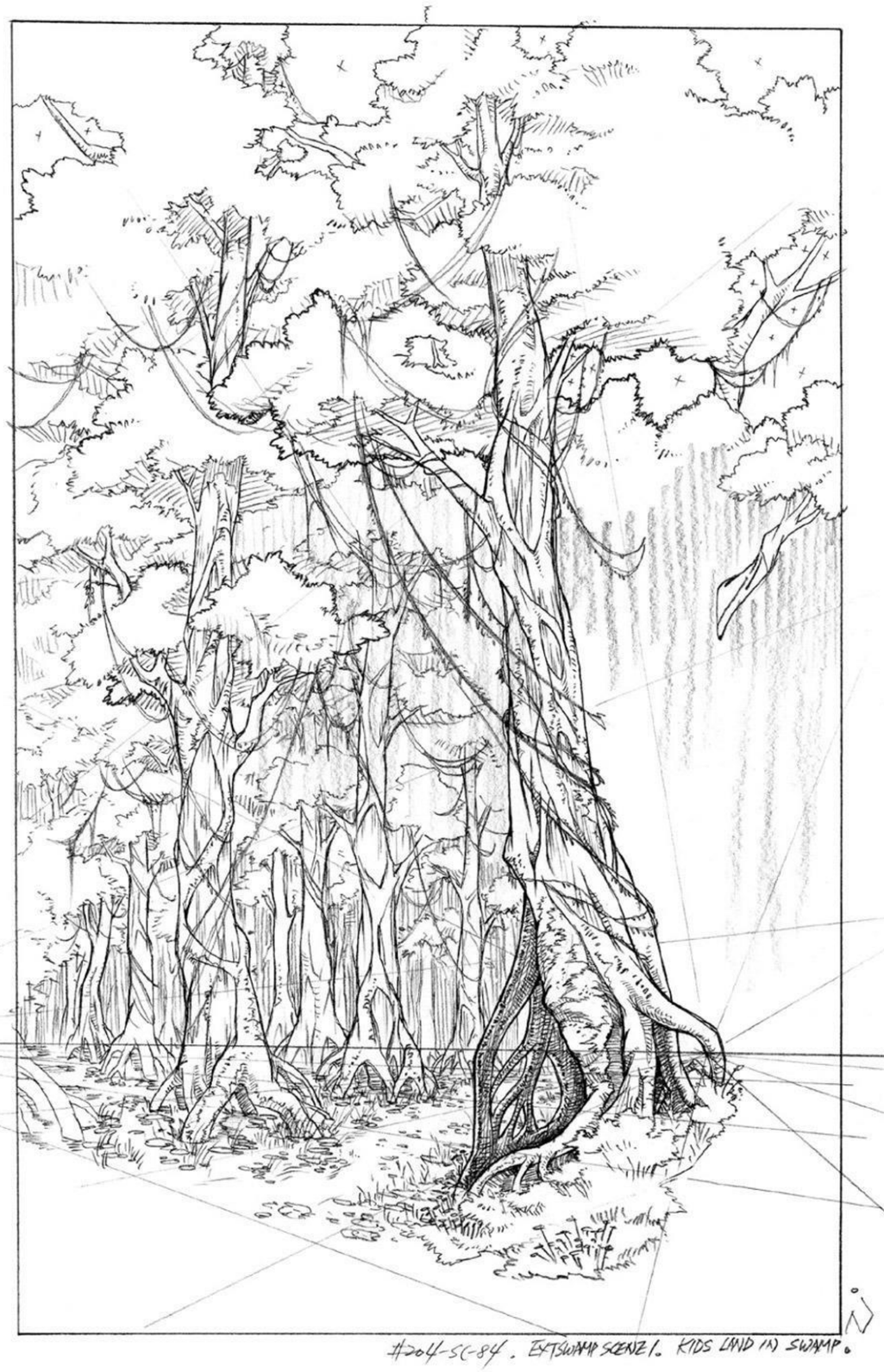
THE SWAMPBENDERS

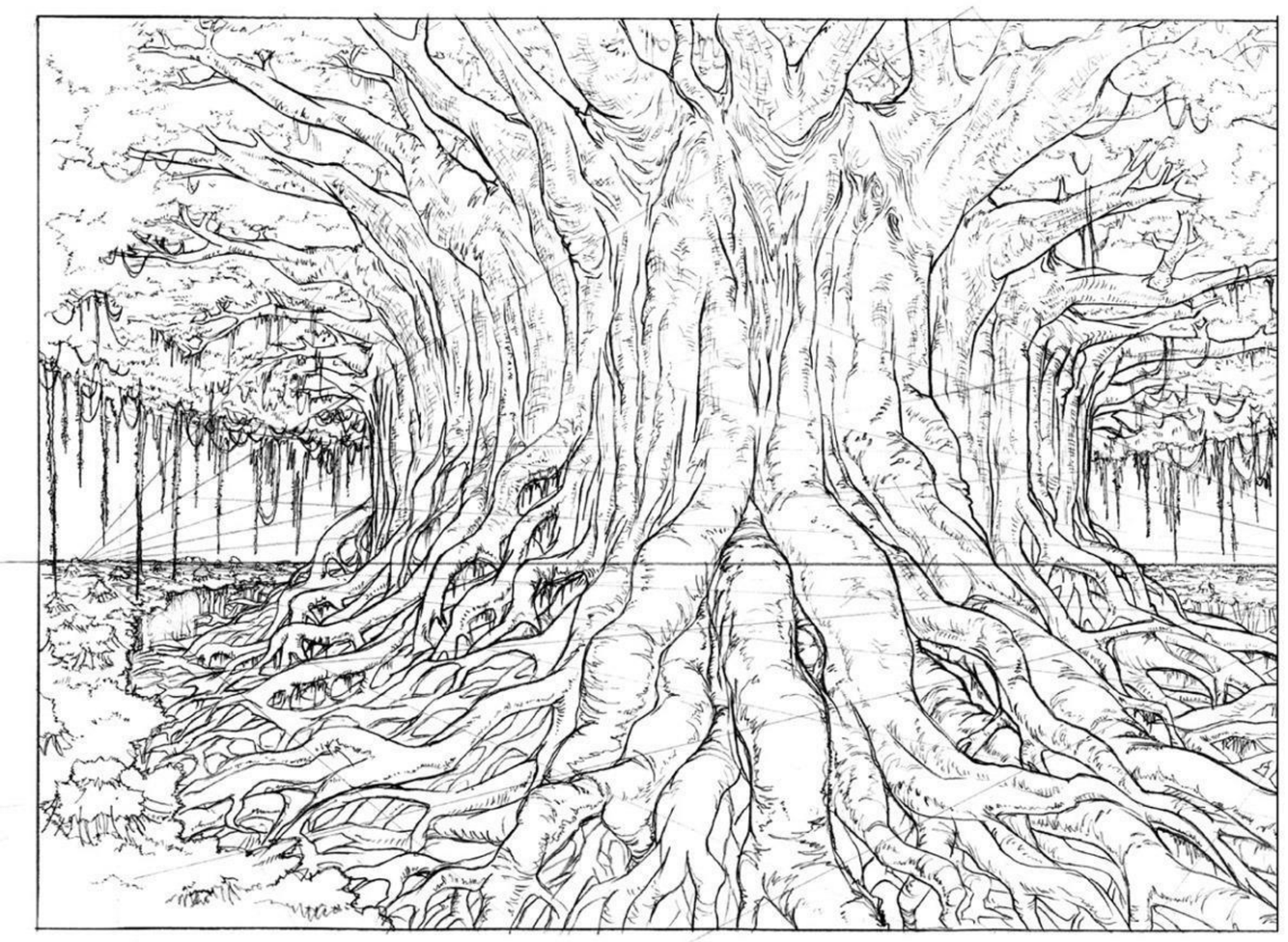
Distant relatives of the Water Tribes, the Swampbenders and the Swamp Monster appeared threatening at first, but once the kids got to know them, they became valuable allies.



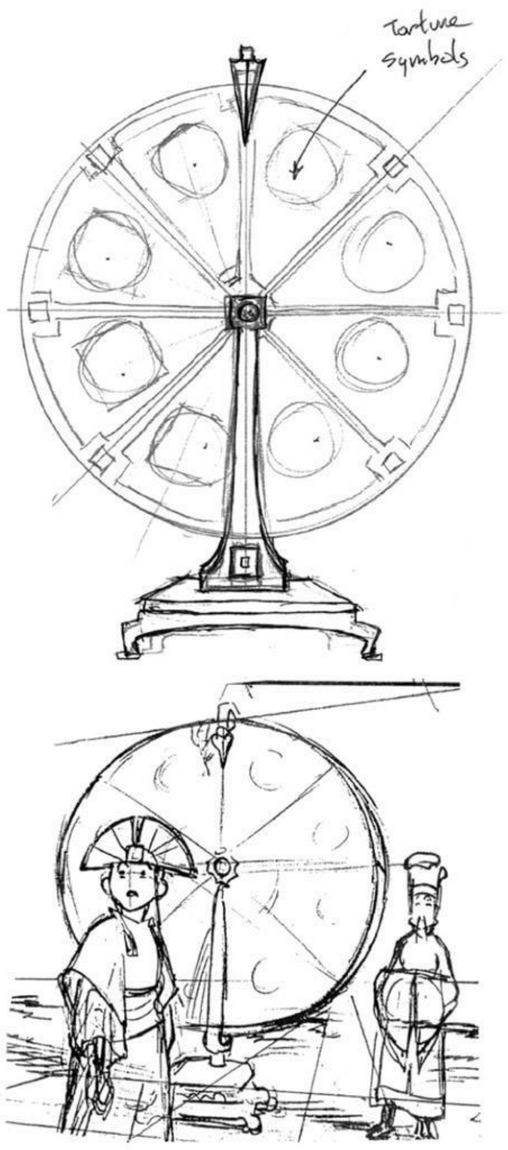


We modeled Due and Tho after fellow Nickelodeon show creators Doug TenNapel (*Catscratch*) and Carlos Ramos (*The X's*). This followed a bitter caricature war between Carlos and some of the *Avatar* crew. If the design of Carlos seems unflattering, you should have seen the drawings he did of us! Swamp Monster and Swampbender concepts and designs by Bryan Konietzko. Color by Hye Jung Kim.



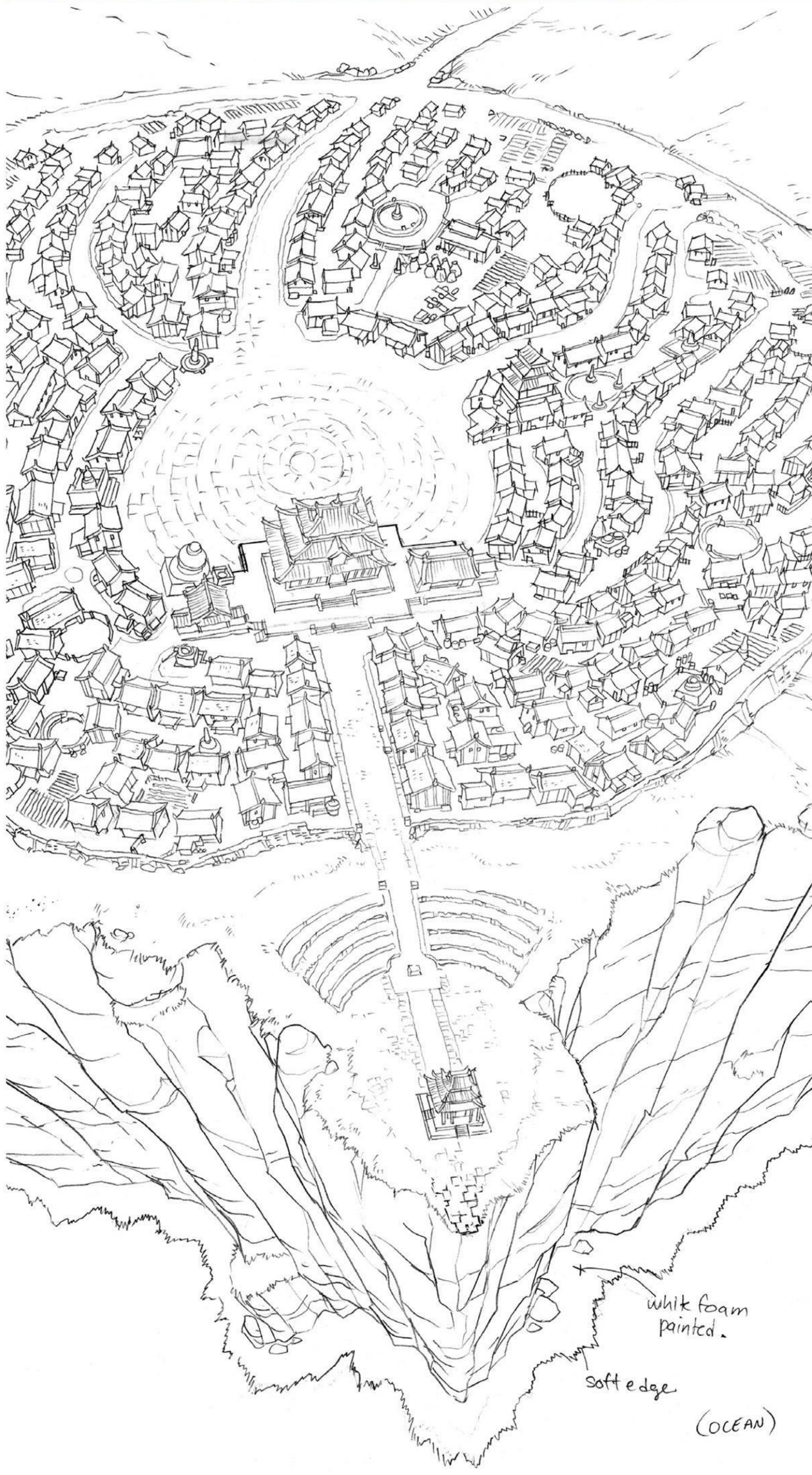


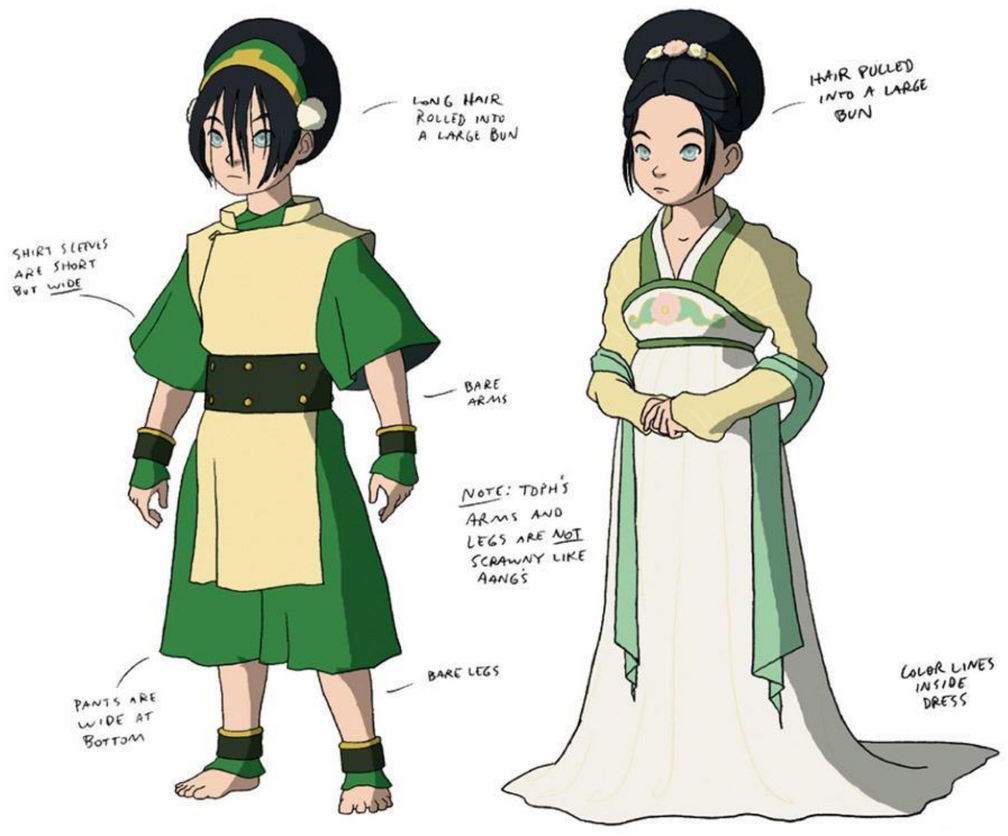
The swamp was a visually rich and dense location, which required tons of detail in the drawings and paintings. Background designs by Seung Hyun Oh. Paintings by Bryan Evans.



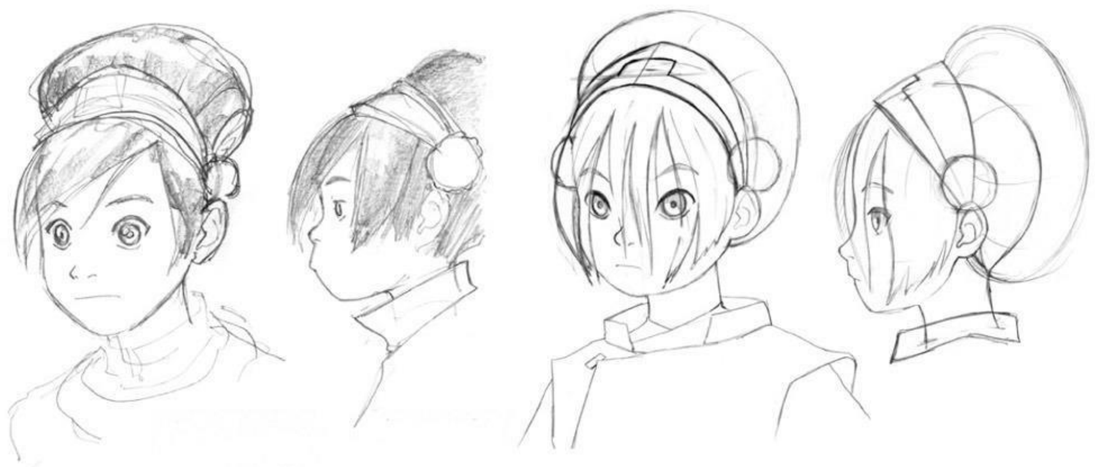
There are many ways for the guilty to meet their doom on the Wheel of Punishment: bed of nails, whipping post, boiled in oil, eaten by shark, razor pit, mauled by bear, burned at the stake, and community service. Icons by Bryan Konietzko. Prop by Aldina Dias. Storyboard by Lauren MacMullan.

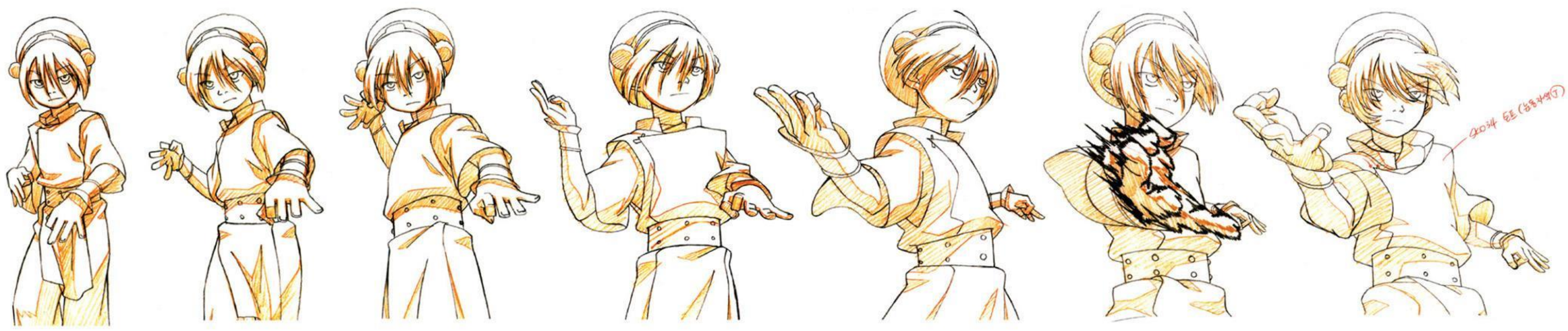
Mayor Tong. Design and expressions by Angela Mueller, based on concepts by Lauren MacMullan. Top right: Background design by Jevon Bue. Painting by Jean-Paul Bondy and Hye Jung Kim. Bottom right: Chin Village. Background design by Lauren MacMullan and Jevon Bue.





Toph's regular series outfit was the one she wore as her alter ego, the Blind Bandit. Her fancy dress was modeled after Tang-dynasty clothing. Concepts and designs by Bryan Konietzko. Color by Hye Jung Kim.





Since Toph was written to be the best Earthbender in the world, we wanted her fighting style to be unique. Sifu Kisu called on his friend, Sifu Manuel Rodriguez, who is a master of the rare Southern Praying Mantis style. During a consultation, Sifu Manny told us the origins of the style. To our surprise, legend has it that the style was started by a blind woman! Key animation by Myeong Ga Young.

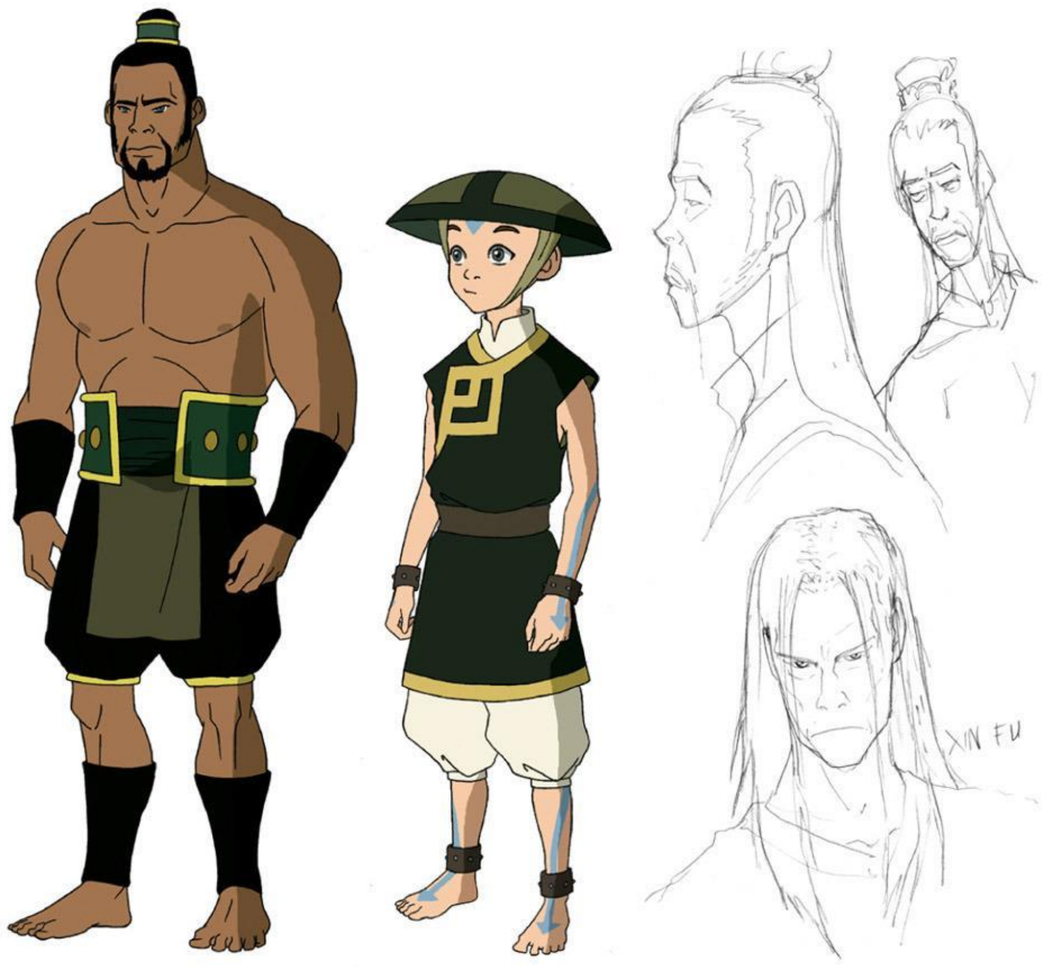
TOPH

MIKE: During the bible development, Bryan and I conceived of Toph as a tough, brash, blind teenage boy who would become Aang's Earthbending teacher. As we began the writing for season two, Aaron Ehasz suggested making Toph a girl. Bryan and I resisted the idea at first, but the more we talked about it, the more we loved the idea of taking all of Toph's original personality traits and putting them in the body of an adorable twelve-year-old girl. Now, I can't imagine Toph any other way.

BRYAN: Jessie Flower charmed us in her voicing of season-one character Meng so much that we half jokingly talked about making Meng a recurring presence in the show. Once Aaron thankfully won the pivotal argument to make Toph a girl, we knew bringing Jessie back to play her would satisfy our desire for more of her great personality and acting.

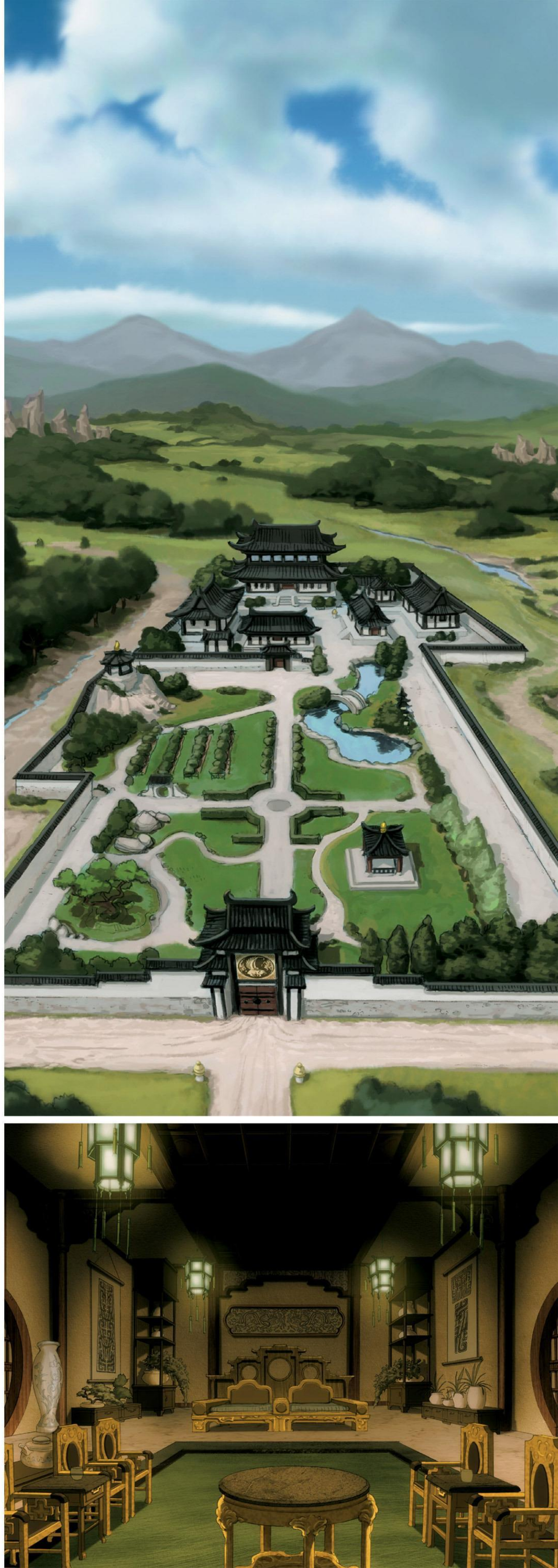
Despite people's doubts early on in development, Mike and I always thought the show would connect with a female audience, and we felt pleasantly vindicated when the first season did just that. The thing that surprised us about the second season was how many tough-looking teenage boys told us their favorite character was Toph! Sometimes it feels as good or better to be wrong as it does to be right.

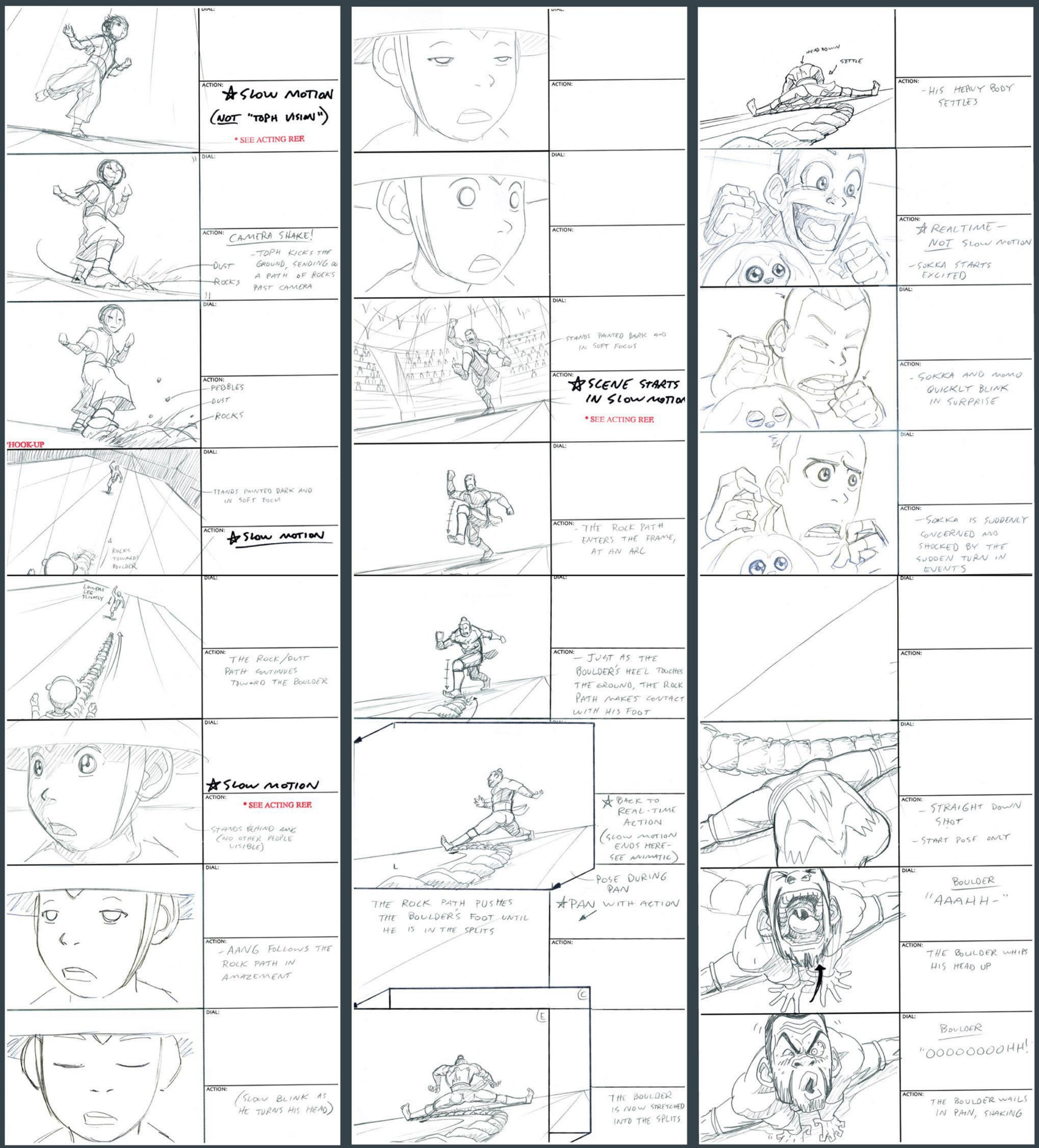
We never ceased to be surprised by Ethan Spaulding's tireless imagination, as seen here in these concepts of the Earth Rumble contenders.



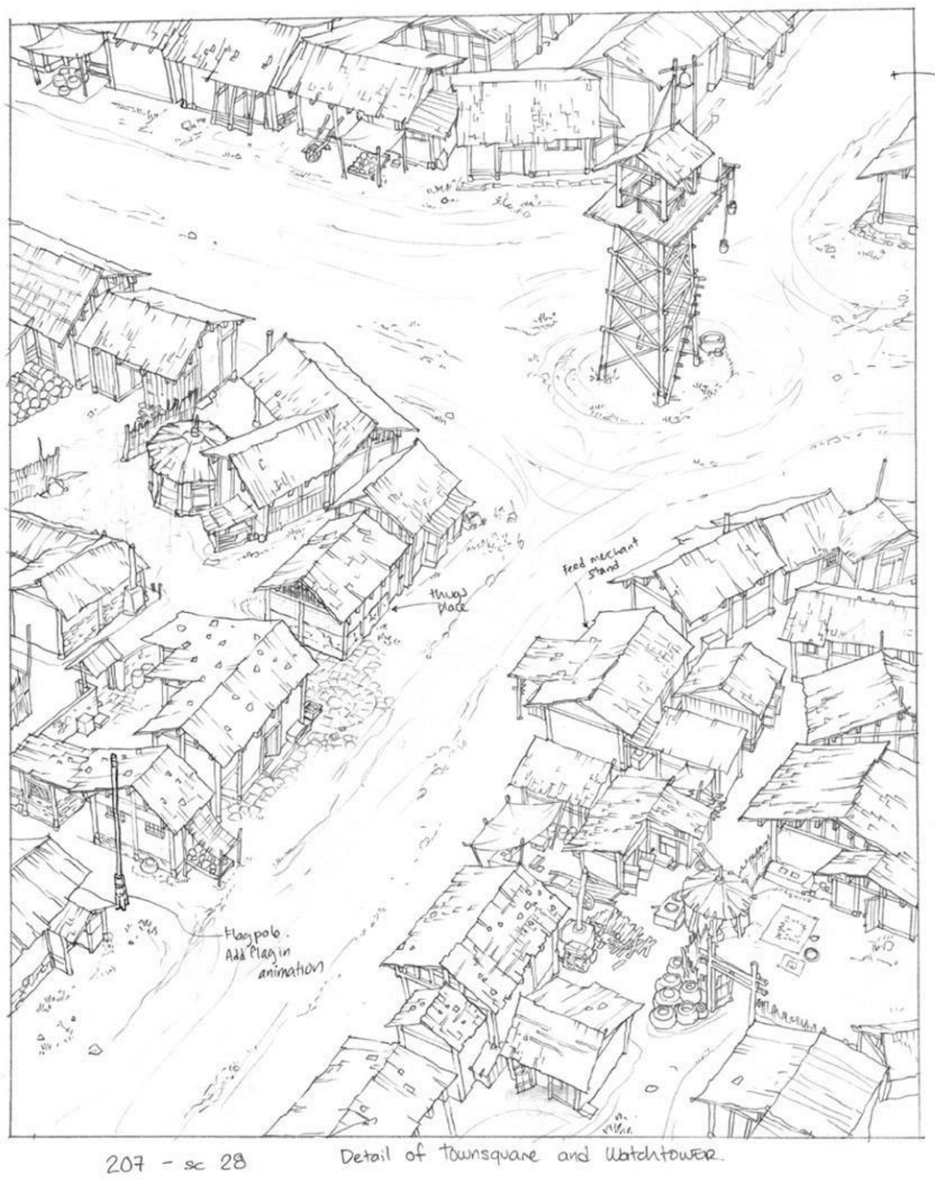
The Boulder was named after the legendary wrestler, and Mike's personal hero, the Rock. We were really excited when wrestler Mick Foley (AKA Mankind) signed on to do the voice. The sleazy fight promoter Xin Fu and the greedy, upper-class Master Yu became a humorous Earthbending "odd couple," constantly bickering as they tracked down Aang and Toph. Concepts and designs by Bryan Konietzko. Color by Hye Jung Kim.

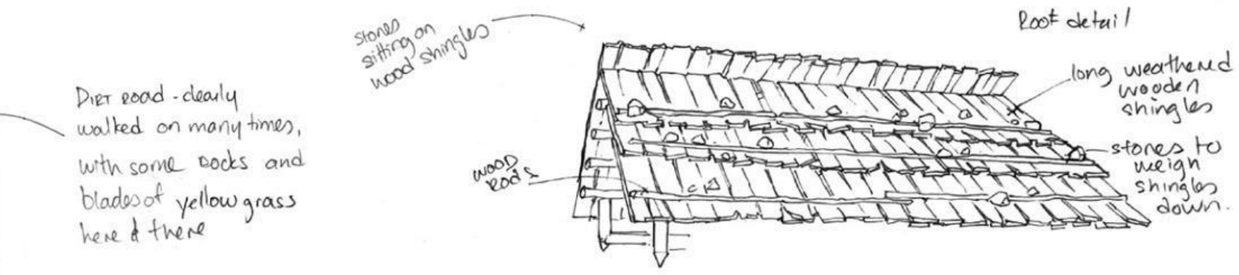
Right: The Beifong estate. Background designs by Jevon Bue. Paintings by Bryan Evans (top) and Jean-Paul Bondy (bottom).

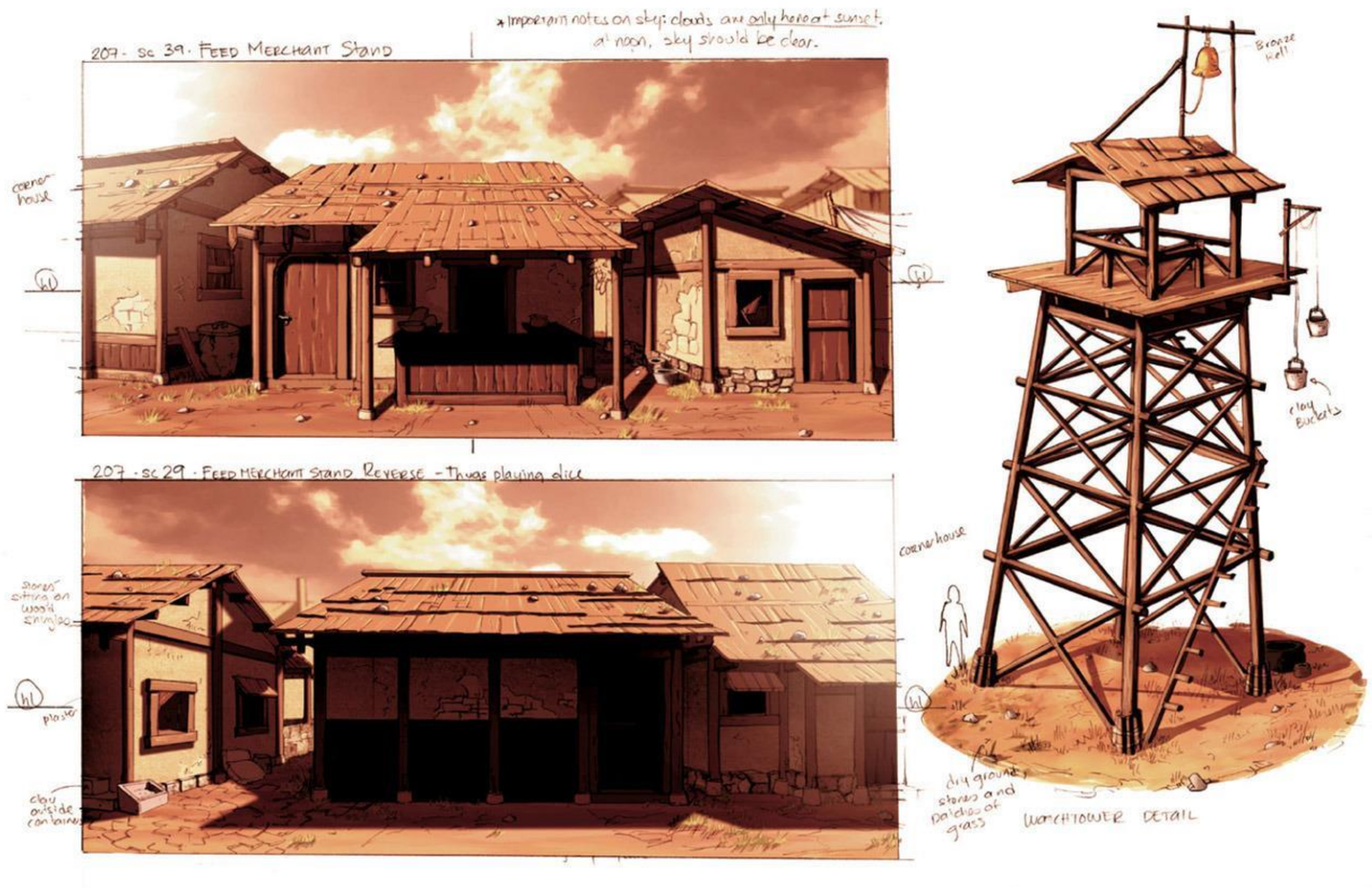




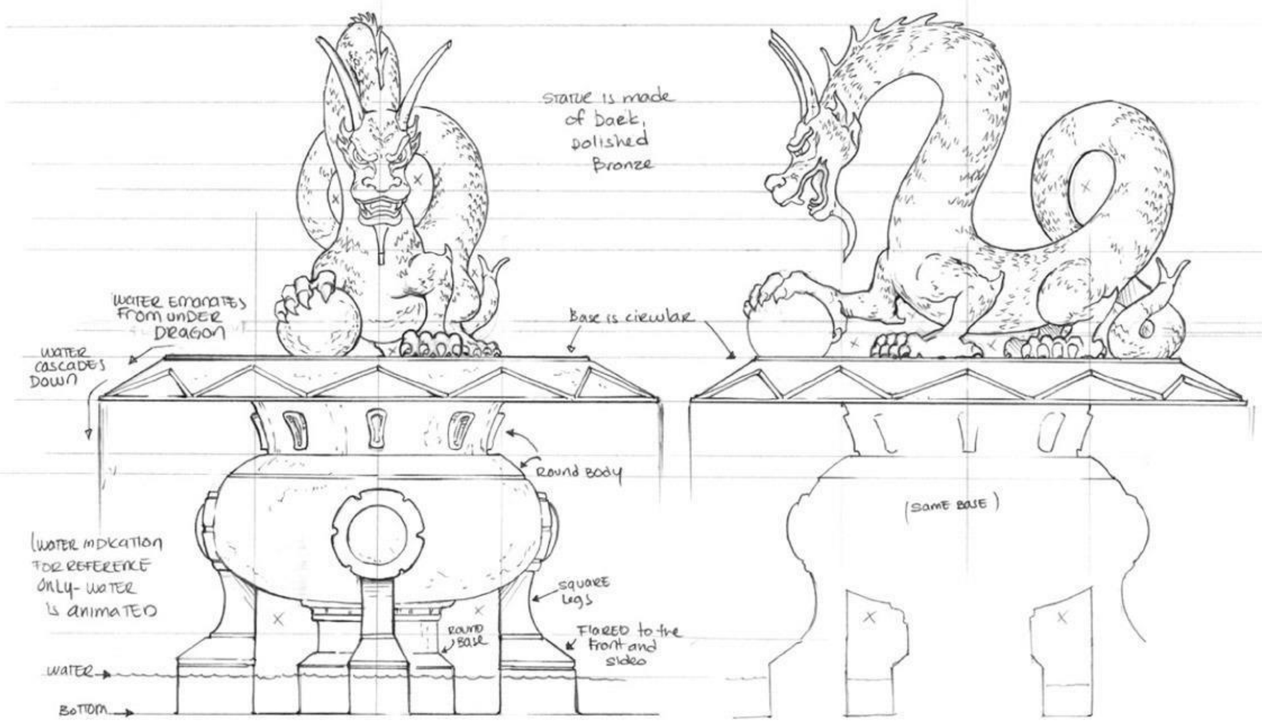
We began our animation career as storyboard artists, and love that part of the animation process. We were usually busy overseeing production, but once in a while, if there was a particular sequence that was really important to us, such as the introduction of Toph's character, we'd somehow find the time to draw it. Storyboard by Bryan Konietzko.



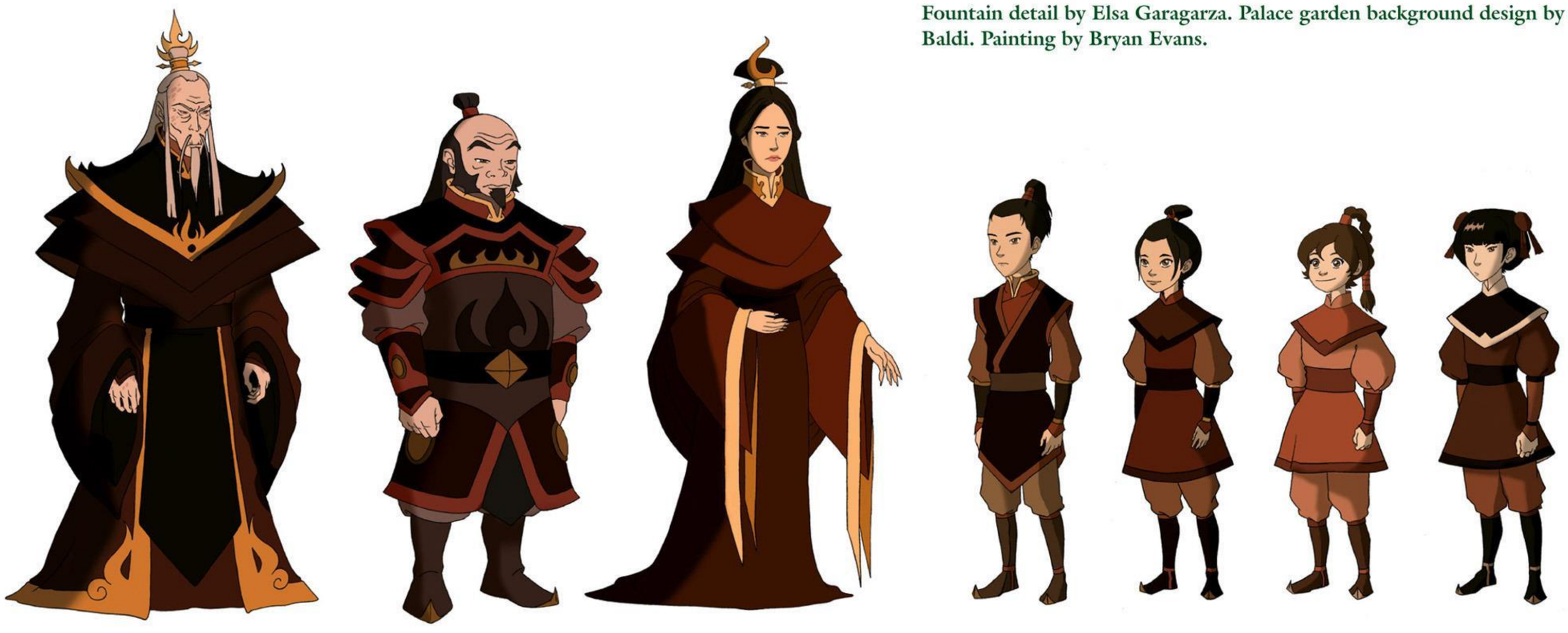




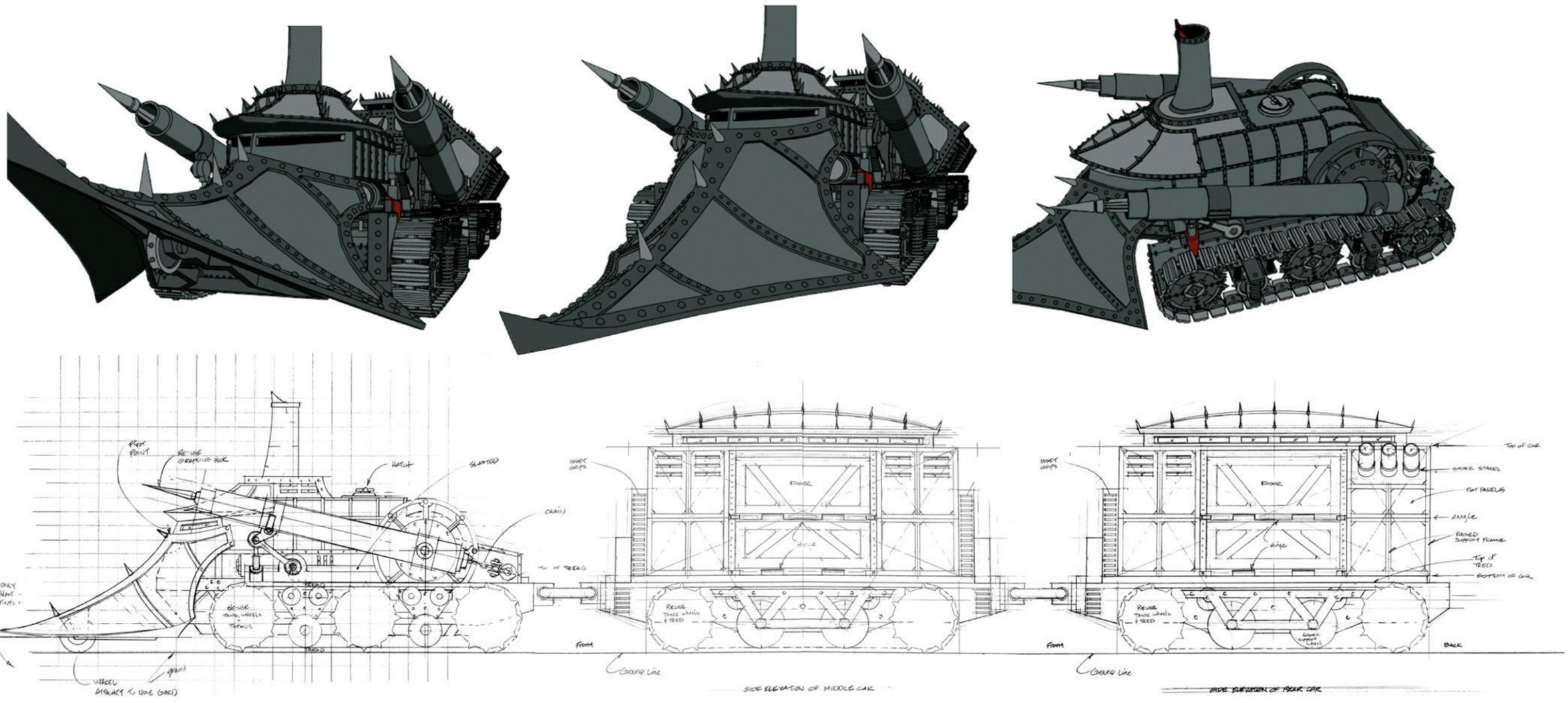
This Earth Kingdom town was inspired by western movies like *Shane*. Background designs by Elsa Garagarza. Paintings by Jean-Paul Bondy.



Fountain detail by Elsa Garagarza. Palace garden background design by Enzo Baldi. Painting by Bryan Evans.

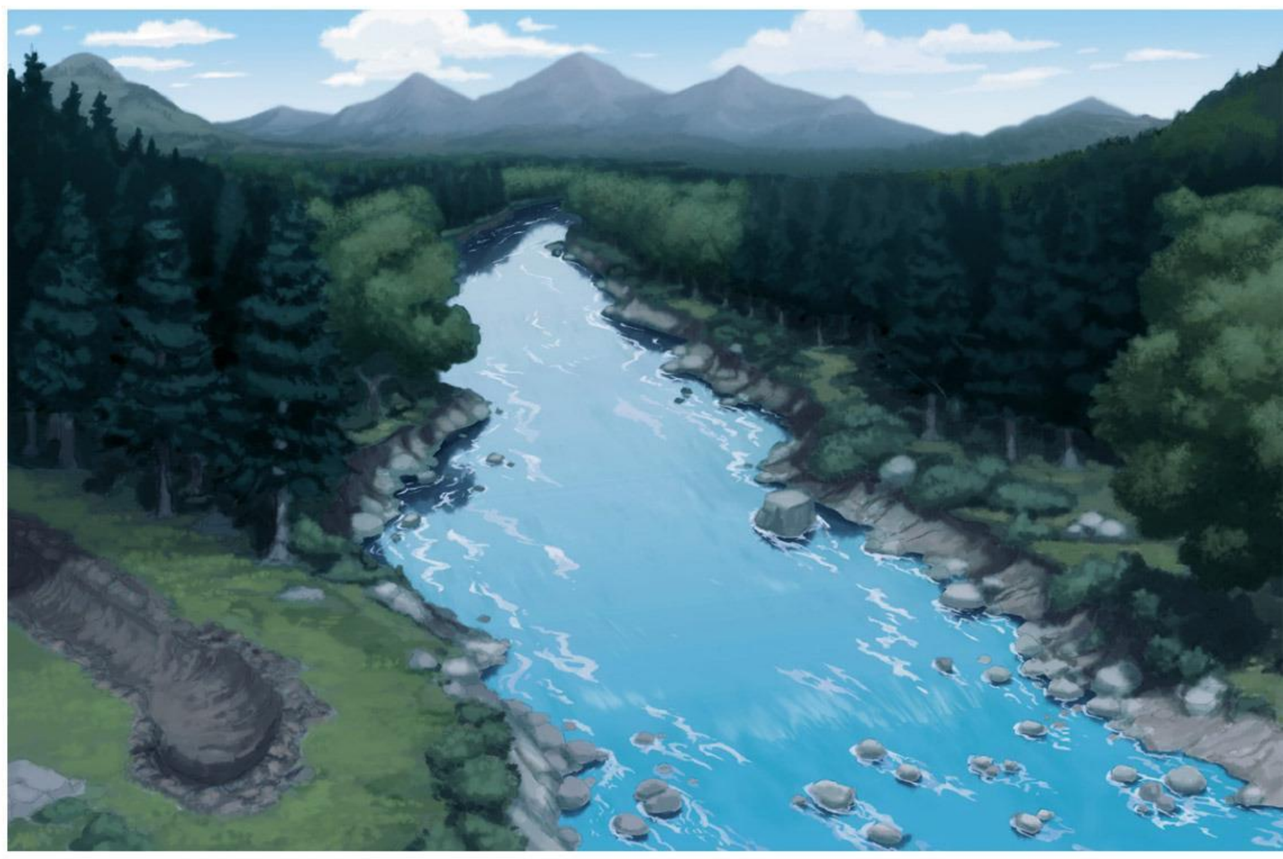


This episode was unique in that we didn't show Aang and our main heroes at all. Rather, we focused on our supposed "bad guy" character, Zuko, and explored his backstory in depth, discovering more about why he was such a tormented soul. This also marked the first time Zuko's mother, Ursa, was introduced. Designs by Bryan Konietzko and Angela Mueller. Color by Hye Jung Kim.

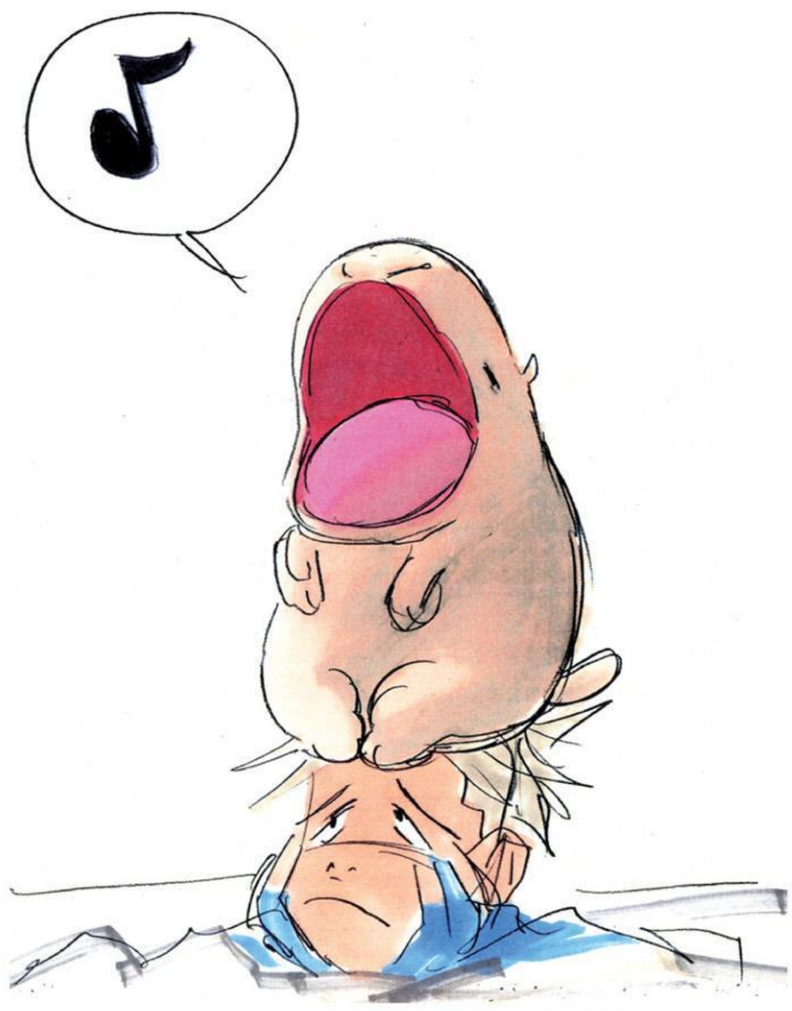


Azula was so favored by her father that he always gave her the sleekest ships and the fastest tanks. Although we never showed it, we always joked that Lo and Li were the ones piloting the tank-train. Designs by Aldina Dias. CG models by Steve Ziolkowski.

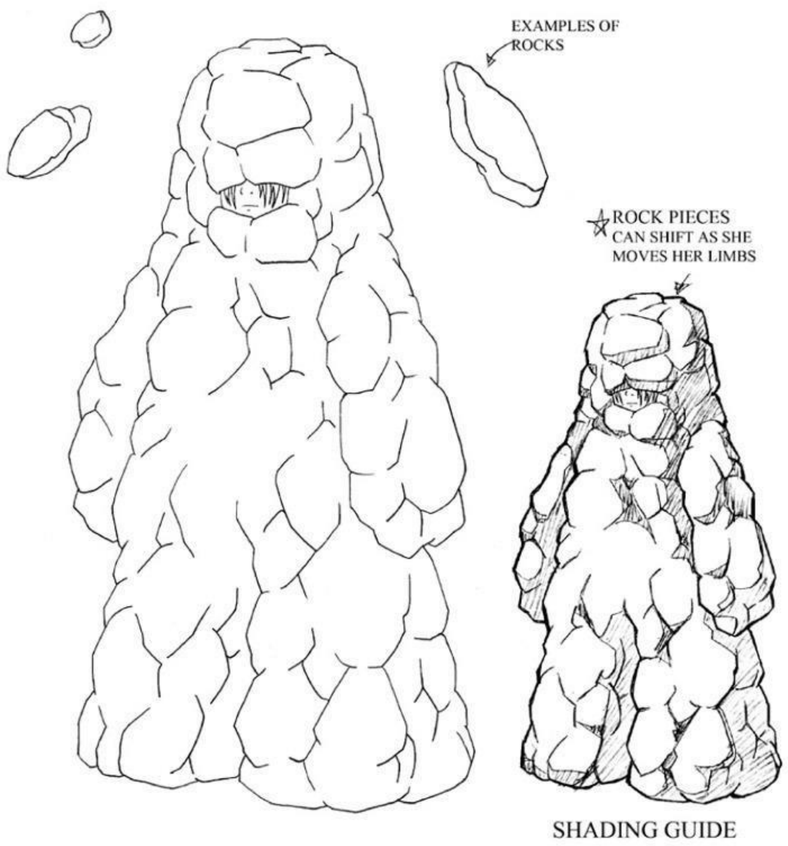
Mongoose-lizard. Designs by Angela Mueller. Color by Hye Jung Kim.



Background designs by Enzo Baldi (left) and Elsa Garagarza (right). Paintings by Bryan Evans.



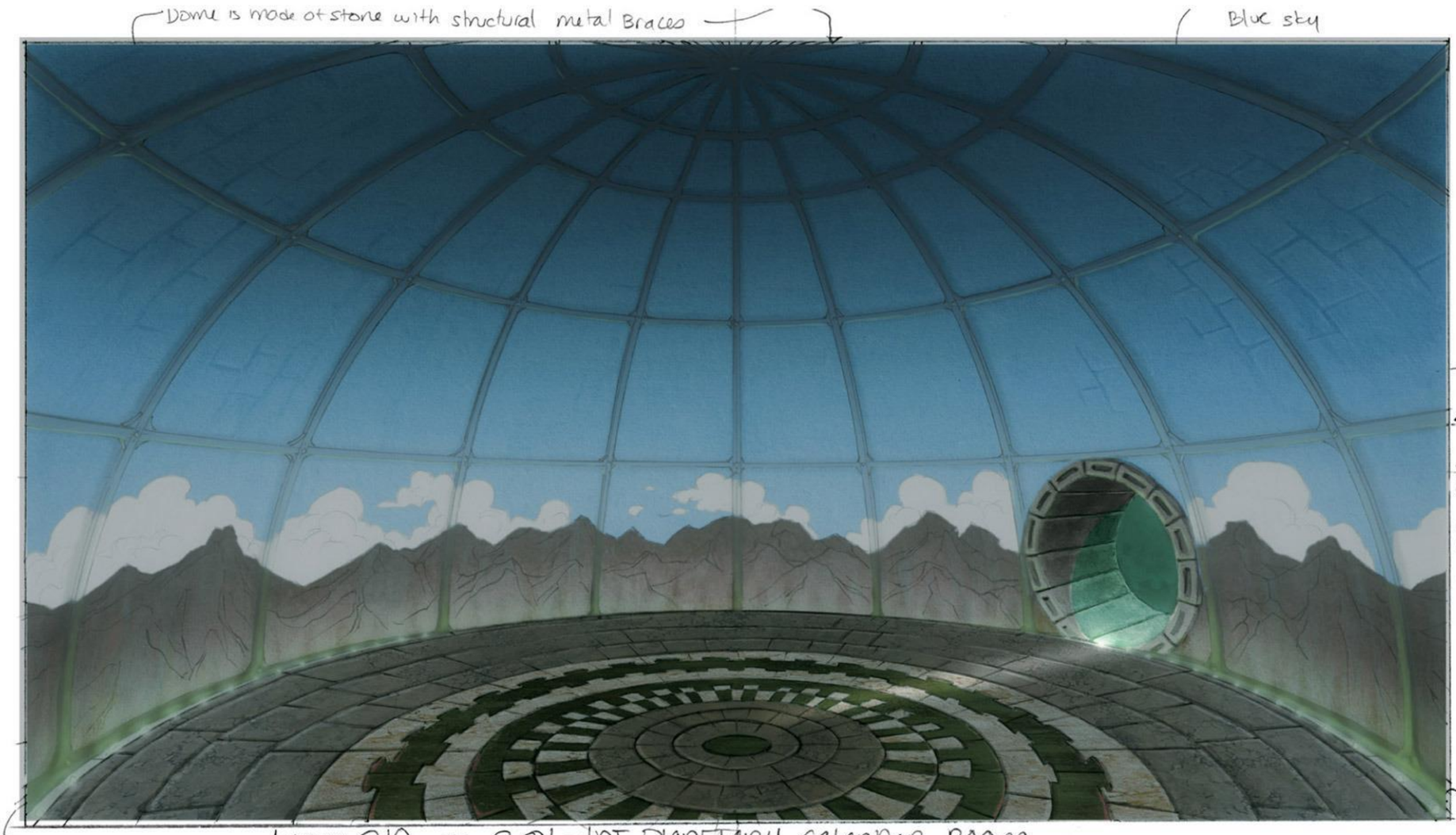
Sokka's karma catches up with him when he hunts the adorable Foo-Foo Cuddly Poops. The image of him getting stuck in the hole was inspired by Tom Hanks in *The Money Pit*. Concept by Ethan Spaulding. Designs by Angela Mueller. Color by Hye Jung Kim.



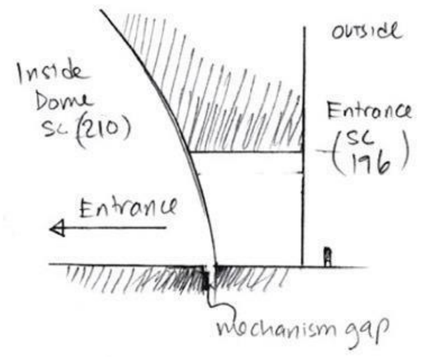
In this design, consideration was given to the fact that Toph is blind, so she would only need a breathing hole in the rock suit. However, the animation was drawn so that the hole appeared over her eyes. Unfortunately, that mistake slipped right by us when we were doing retakes and ended up in the final animation! Designs by Angela Mueller.

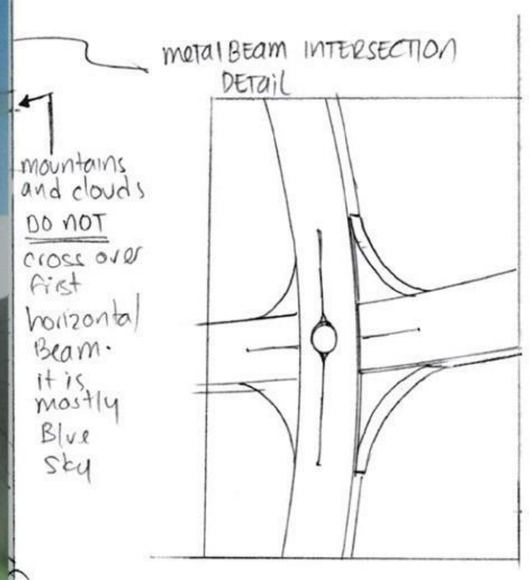
Right: Moose-lioness. Concept by Ethan Spaulding.

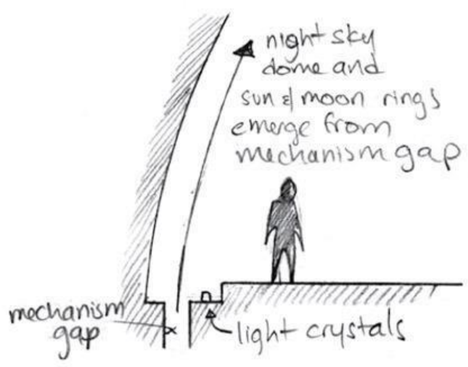
Wan Shi Tong's library. Background designs by Enzo Baldi (top) and Jevon Bue (bottom). Paintings by Jean-Paul Bondy and Hye Jung Kim. "Fire" calligraphy by S. L. Lee.

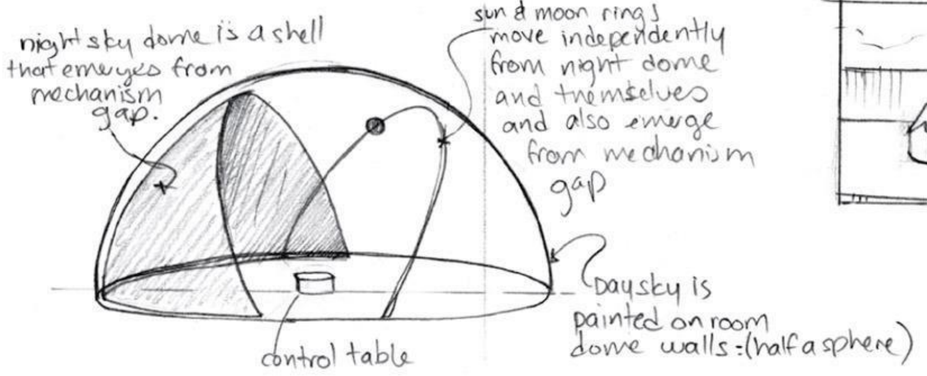


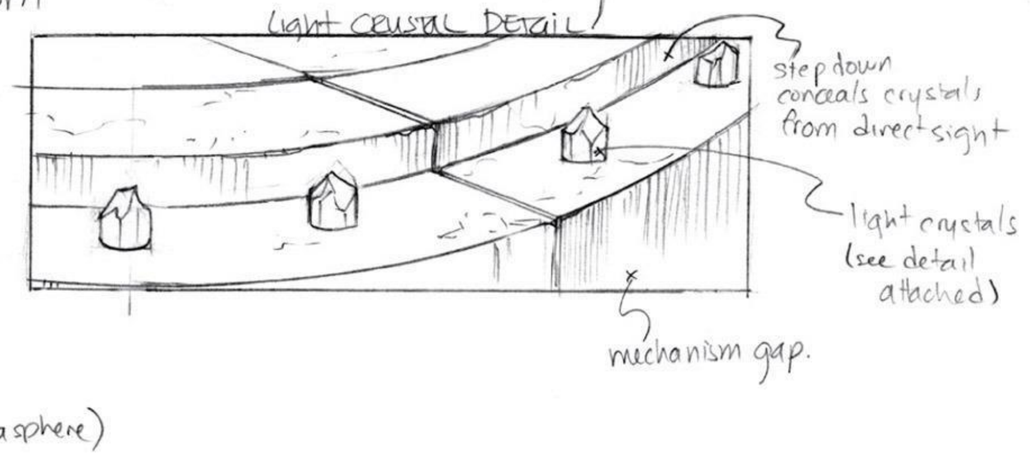
Avatar 210 sc 201 - INT PLANETARY CALENDAR ROOM





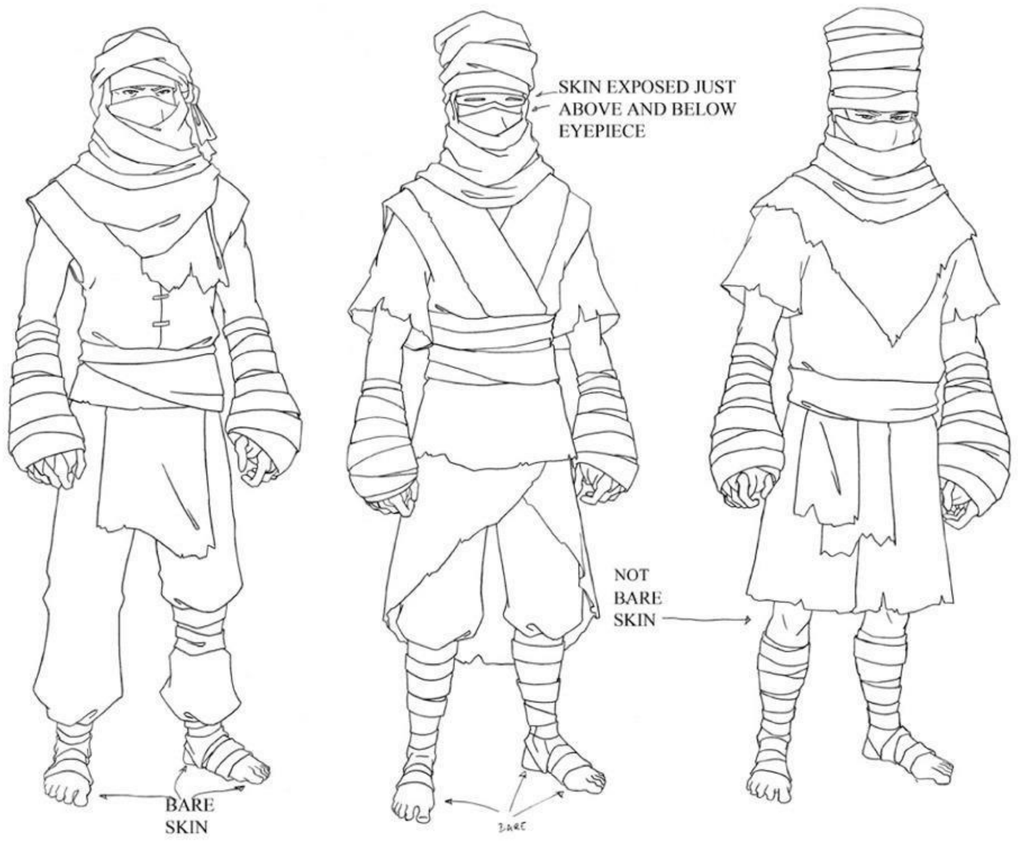




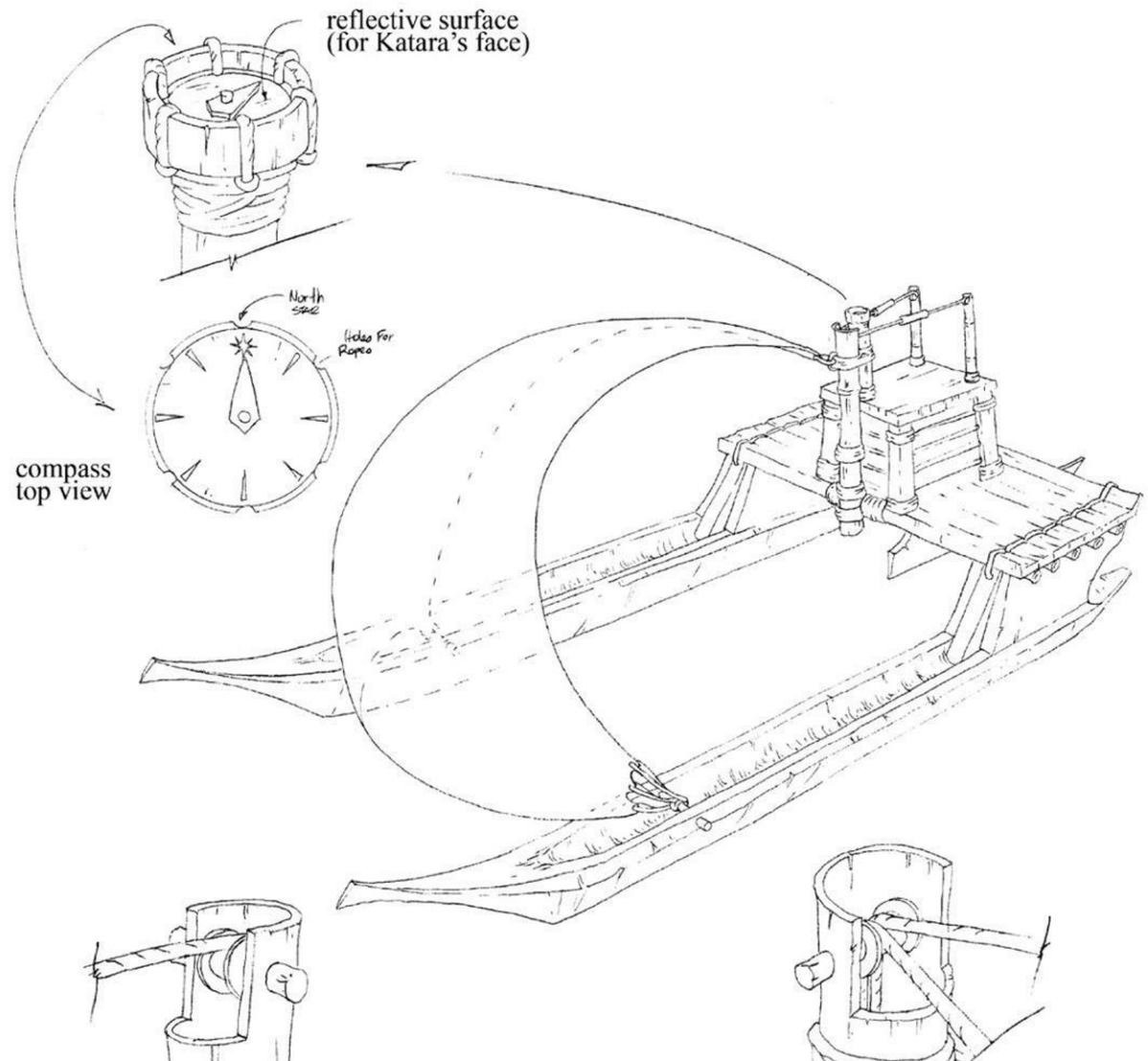


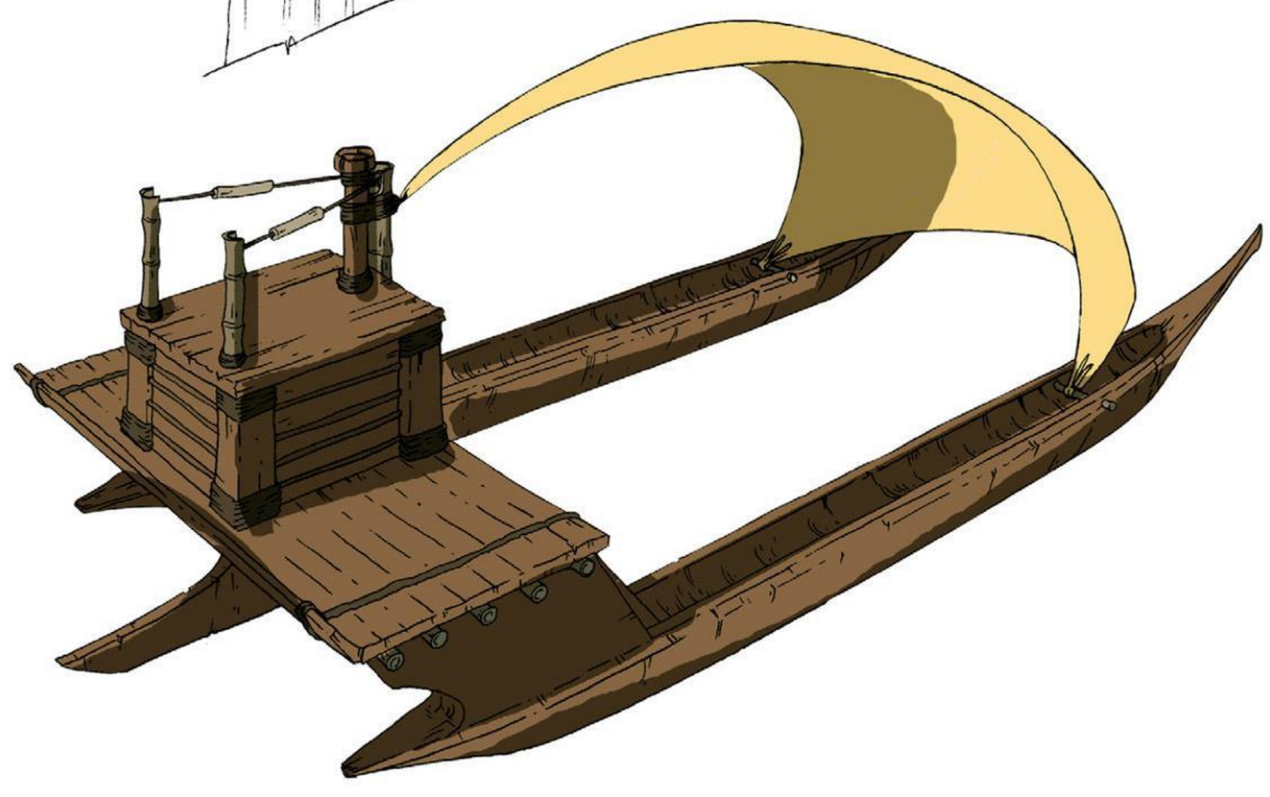
The planetarium room and calendar where Sokka learns about the impending eclipse was one of the most difficult locations to conceptualize and execute. Background designs by Elsa Garagarza. Painting by Bryan Evans.

Wan Shi Tong, the knowledgeable owl spirit. Concepts by Bryan Konietzko.



It was always fun when we had the opportunity to create specialized benders, like the Sandbenders, who adapted Earthbending to their harsh desert environment. Concepts by Giancarlo Volpe. Designs by Angela Mueller.

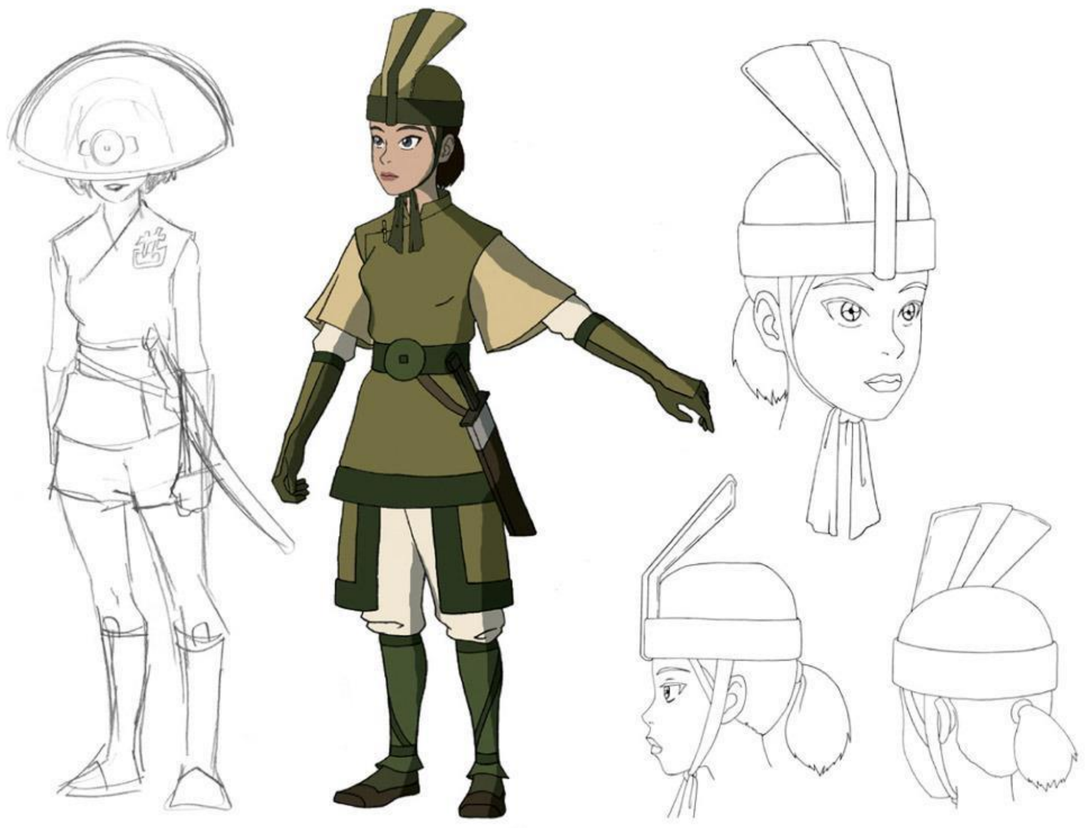




Sand-sailor. Design by Aldina Dias. Color by Hye Jung Kim. Below: Misty Palms Oasis cantina and buzzard-wasp hive. Background designs by Jevon Bue. Paintings by Bryan Evans.

With this episode, all the designers really started hitting their stride and the environments started to feel like real, tactile locations. Top: The deadly Serpent's Pass. Bottom: Refugee processing center in Full Moon Bay. Background designs by Seong Hyun Oh. Paintings by Bryan Evans.

A collection of fake Avatars. The guy second from left was modeled after Mike, dressed in his Aang Halloween costume. Designs by Angela Mueller. Color by Hye Jung Kim.

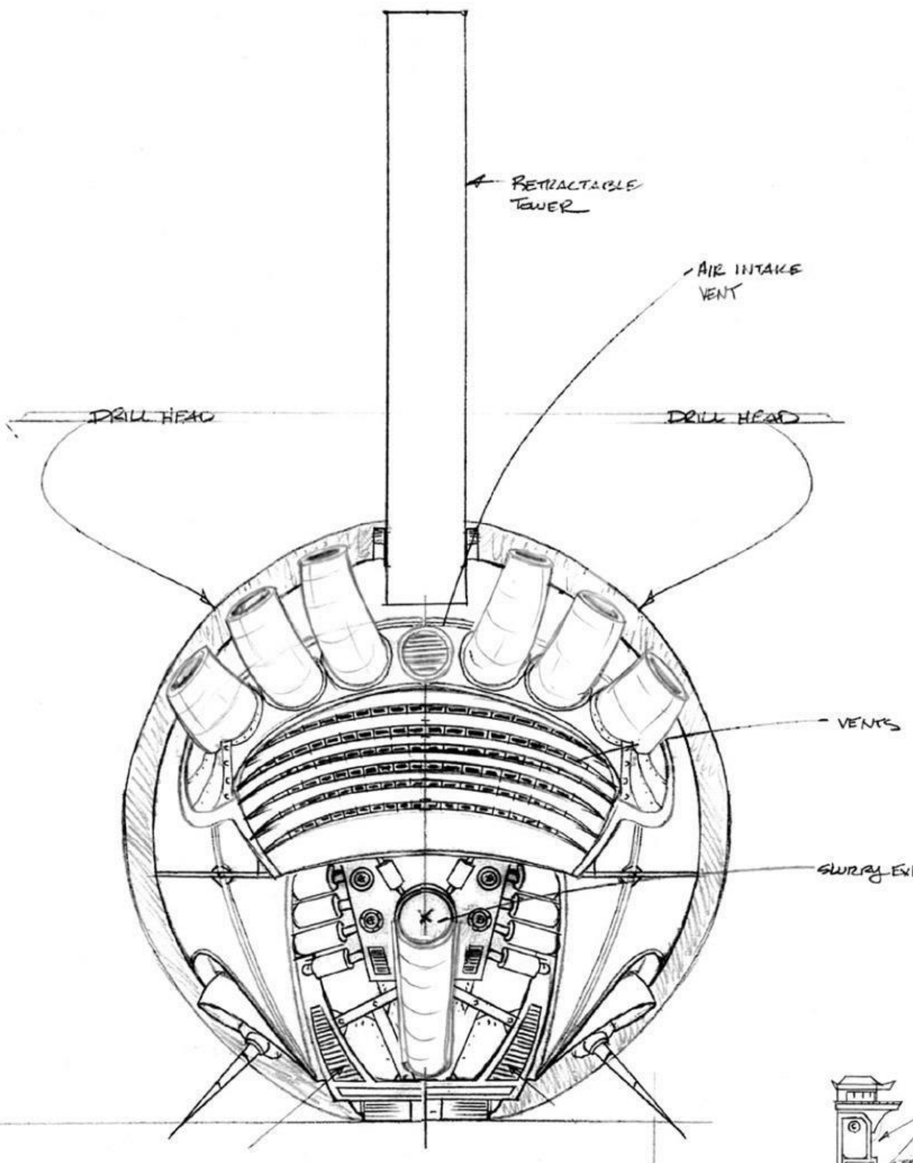


Suki returned to the series as an Earth Kingdom security escort. Concept by Ethan Spaulding. Designs by Angela Mueller and Bryan Konietzko. Color by Hye Jung Kim.

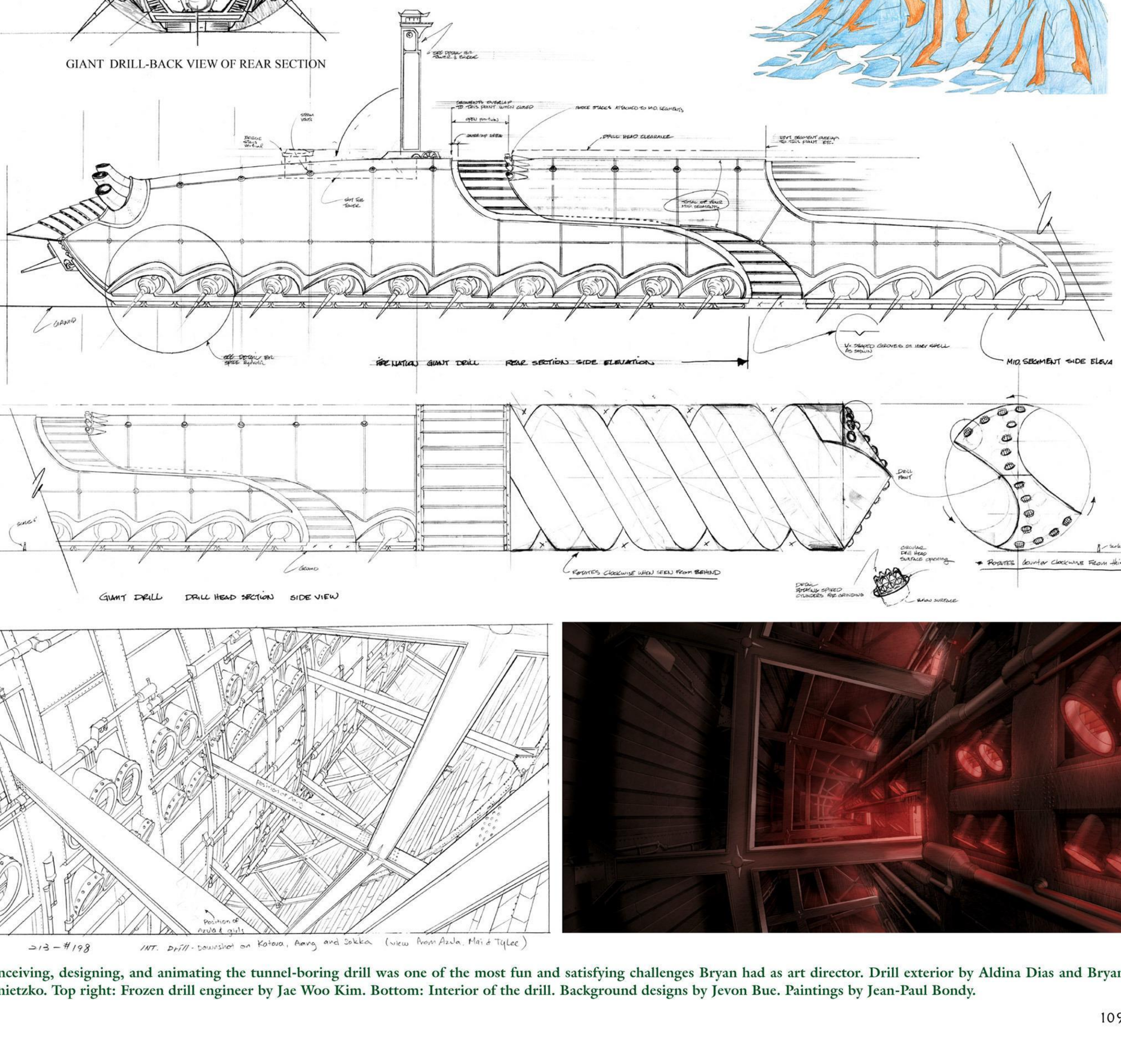
The serpent first appeared in the unaired pilot episode. We were waiting for the right moment to bring him into the series. Designs and color by Bryan Konietzko.

Left: Background designs by Seung Hyun Oh. Paintings by Bryan Evans. "Serpent's Pass" translation and calligraphy by S. L. Lee.

In ancient times, the soldiers who protected the Great Wall of China also lived there. This inspired the design of the military barracks clinging to the side of Ba Sing Se's massive outer wall. Background designs by Jevon Bue. Paintings by Bryan Evans.



GIANT DRILL-BACK VIEW OF REAR SECTION



Conceiving, designing, and animating the tunnel-boring drill was one of the most fun and satisfying challenges Bryan had as art director. Drill exterior by Aldina Dias and Bryan Konietzko. Top right: Frozen drill engineer by Jae Woo Kim. Bottom: Interior of the drill. Background designs by Jevon Bue. Paintings by Jean-Paul Bondy.

BA SING SE

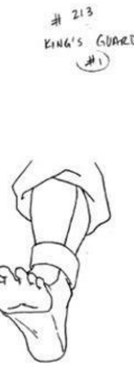
MIKE: Ba Sing Se held a lot of symbolic meaning for the characters. It was a location that was briefly mentioned in season one by Uncle Iroh. For him, Ba Sing Se represented a place of devastating loss—it was here that he lost the hundred-day military siege of Ba Sing Se, as well as his son. For our heroes, it represented a place of hope, where Aang would find his lost flying bison, and Sokka would find support from the Earth King for his Fire Nation invasion plan. For Azula and the Fire Lord, it represented the last Earth Kingdom stronghold—if Ba Sing Se fell, the Fire Nation would win the war.

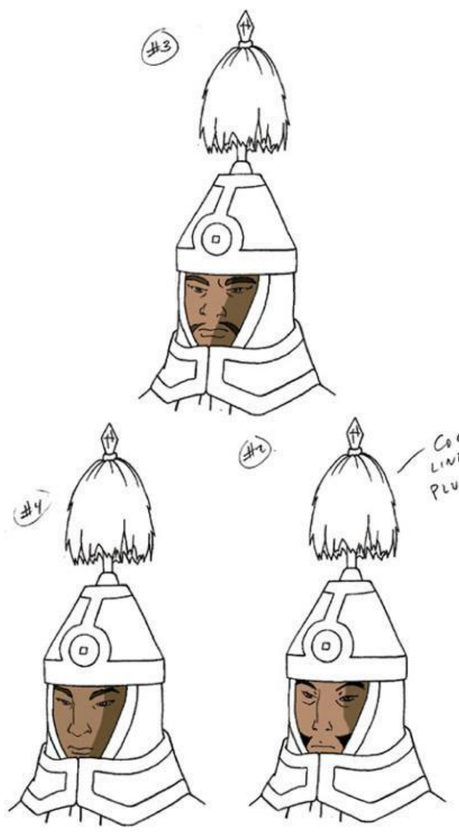
BRYAN: Ba Sing Se was a real challenge to design, due to its sheer size and complexity. Luckily, the powerhouse background designer Jevon Bue joined our team for season two, cranking out high-quality drawings in alarming quantities. He lived up to his nickname, "The Machine."

At the season-two writers' retreat we had the idea that the city would be divided into socioeconomic tiers. From an art direction standpoint, it was a pleasure giving each of the "rings" its individual flavor. Our visit to Beijing provided endless inspiration for the architecture in our world's biggest metropolis. I am incredibly proud of our design team's work from this period of the series. When I look at the background paintings, I feel like I can step inside the frame and actually wander the cobbled streets. And Angela Mueller's "upper ring" characters in their fancy Tang dynasty–influenced dress seem like they actually populate the city.

Joo Dee's design and personality was based on our infinitely chipper line producer, Miken Wong. Corncob Guy was a gag Chris Graham drew in the storyboard in homage to a similar joke from *Invader Zim*, a series he and Bryan worked on together. Designs by Angela Mueller. Color by Hye Jung Kim.

Right, top to bottom: Lower Ring and train station, interior train station, Team Avatar's Upper Ring apartment, entrance to the king's palace. Background designs by Jevon Bue and Elsa Garagarza. Paintings by Bryan Evans.





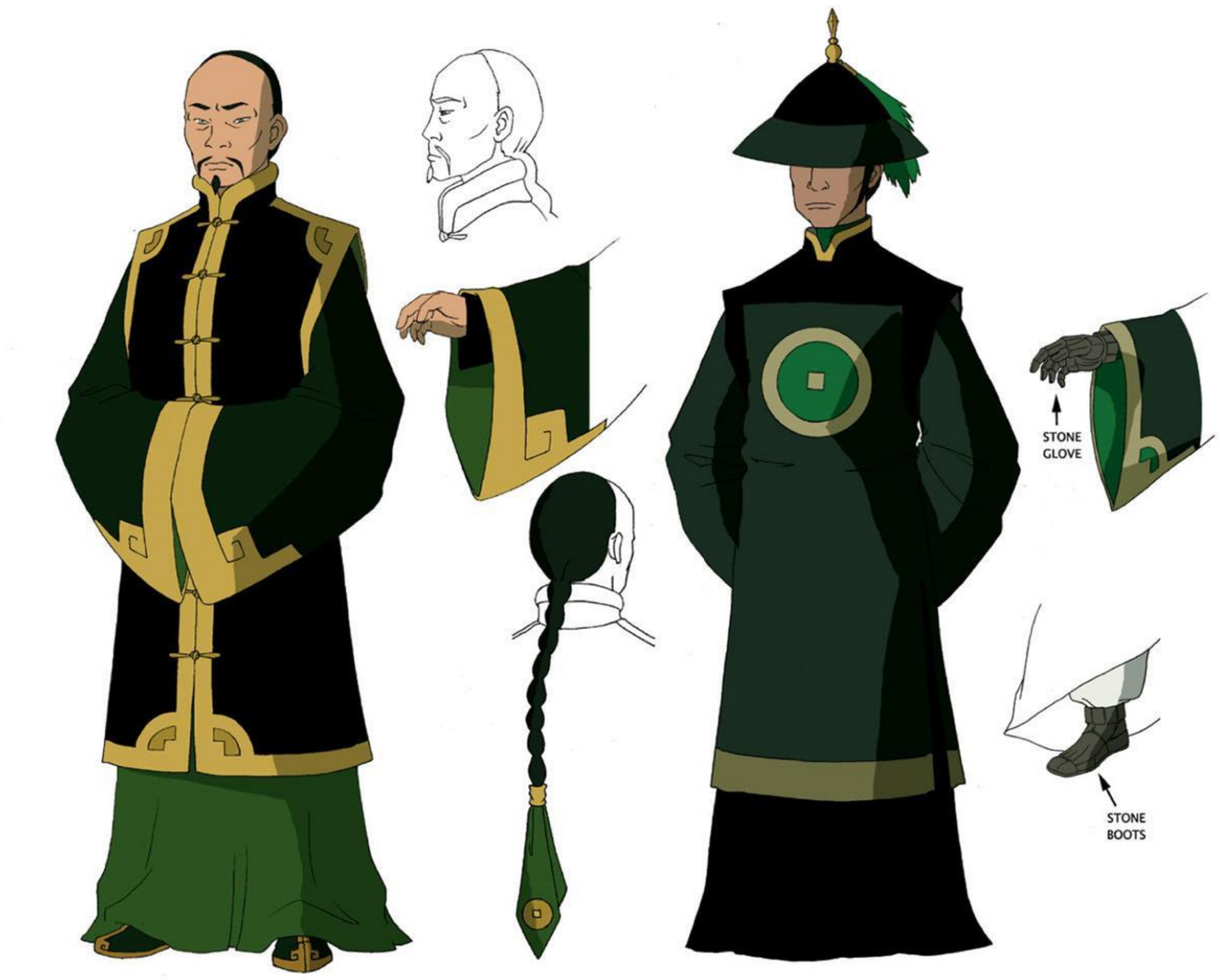
The armor for the Earth King's royal guards makes them look much more ceremonial than the other Earthbenders in Ba Sing Se. We imagined that they didn't often see action and thus wore more regal attire. Left: Uncle Iroh and Zuko don Earth Kingdom attire in order to blend in. Designs by Angela Mueller. Color by Hye Jung Kim.

It was fun to get our main characters out of their usual costumes and into something much fancier. And the costumes on Ba Sing Se's upper class were some of our favorite Angela Mueller designs in the series. Designs by Angela Mueller. Color by Hye Jung Kim.

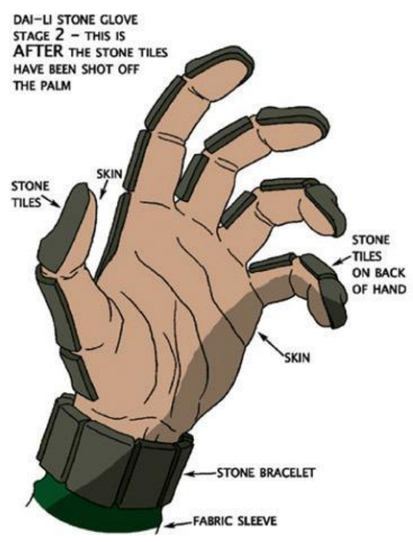
LONG FENG

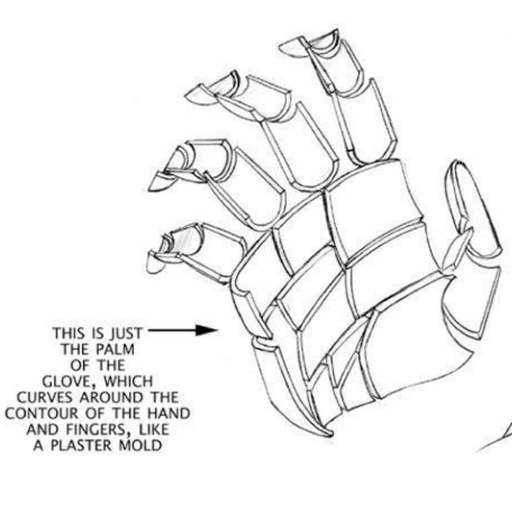
MIKE: Aang and his friends quickly discovered that Ba Sing Se was far from the utopian metropolis they imagined. Rather, it was a labyrinthine and mysterious city, home to a naive king who had never left its walls and a government that was being controlled by the nefarious Long Feng and his deadly Dai Li soldiers.

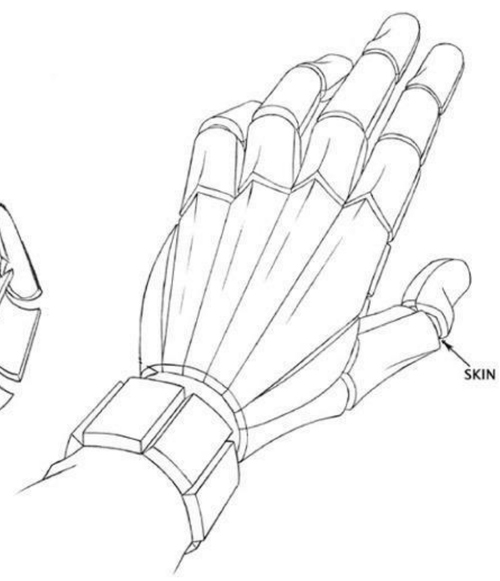
BRYAN: My second-favorite season-two villain behind Azula is definitely Long Feng. Once again, the writers' complex portrayal, coupled with brilliant voice acting, this time from Clancy Brown, made him so much more interesting to me than the typical "bad guy." I think the design matched the writing and voice beautifully (a difficult thing to achieve sometimes), and JM Animation and Moi Animation did a great job animating the character. Looking back, I think Long Feng ended up being much deeper and more nefarious than our main villain, the Fire Lord.



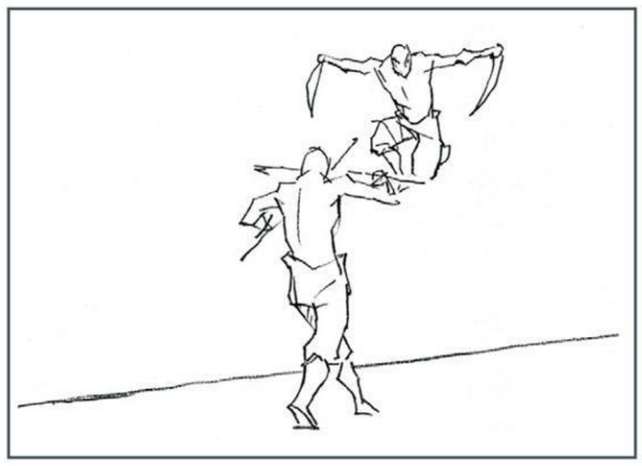
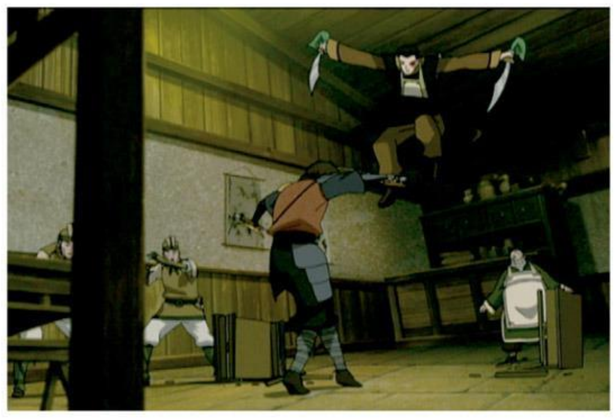
The stealthy Dai Li possess the specialized Earthbending skill of using tiled rock gloves. This allows them to fire the tiles like bullets, shoot the glove and grab an opponent from a distance, or shape the gloves into shackles. Designs by Bryan Konietzko and Angela Mueller. Color by Hye Jung Kim.

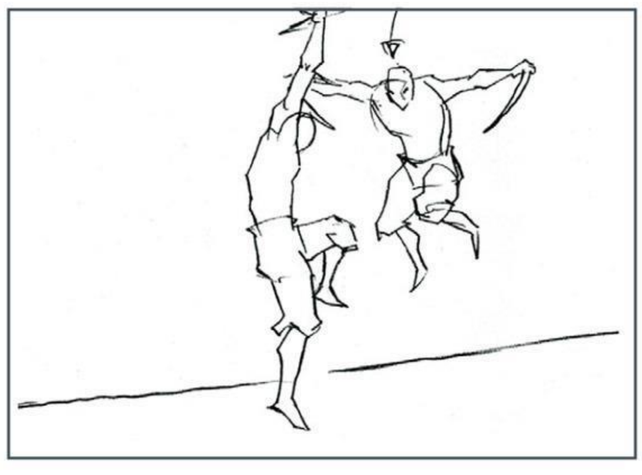
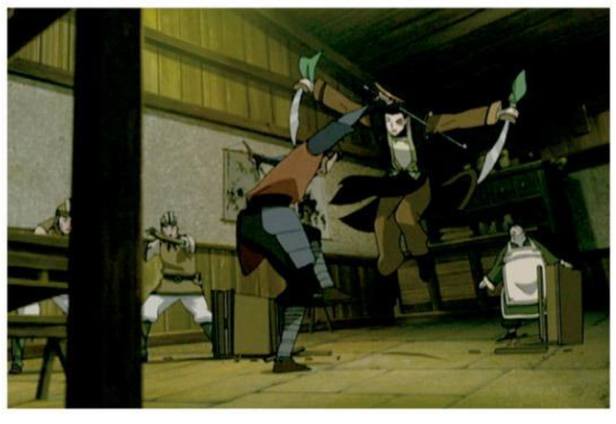
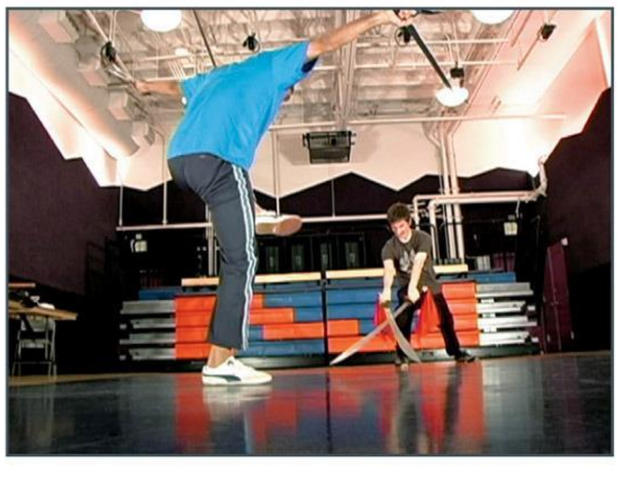
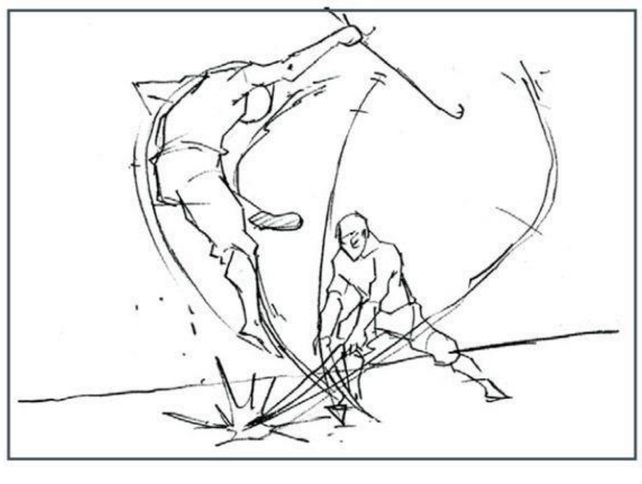


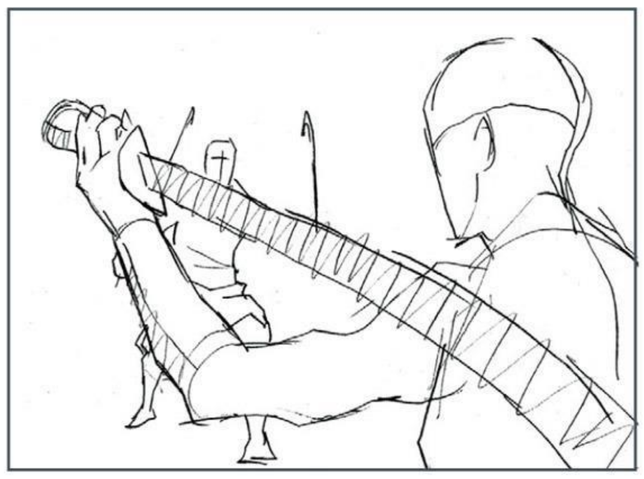


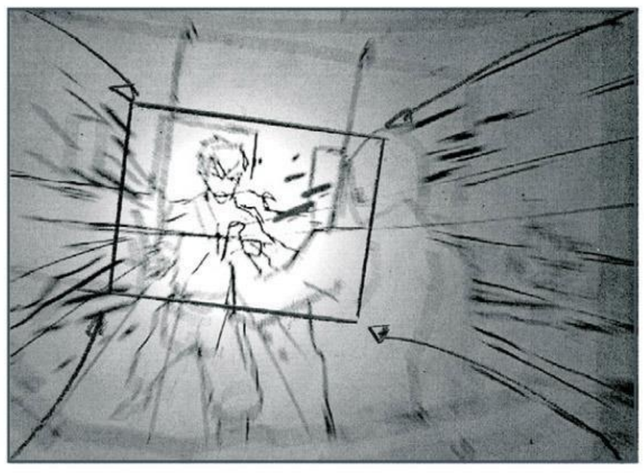


From the moment Bryan Evans joined the crew, he became a keystone of the art department. Although he created countless beautiful paintings, Long Feng's dramatically lit library is one of our favorites. Background design by Jevon Bue. Painting by Bryan Evans.

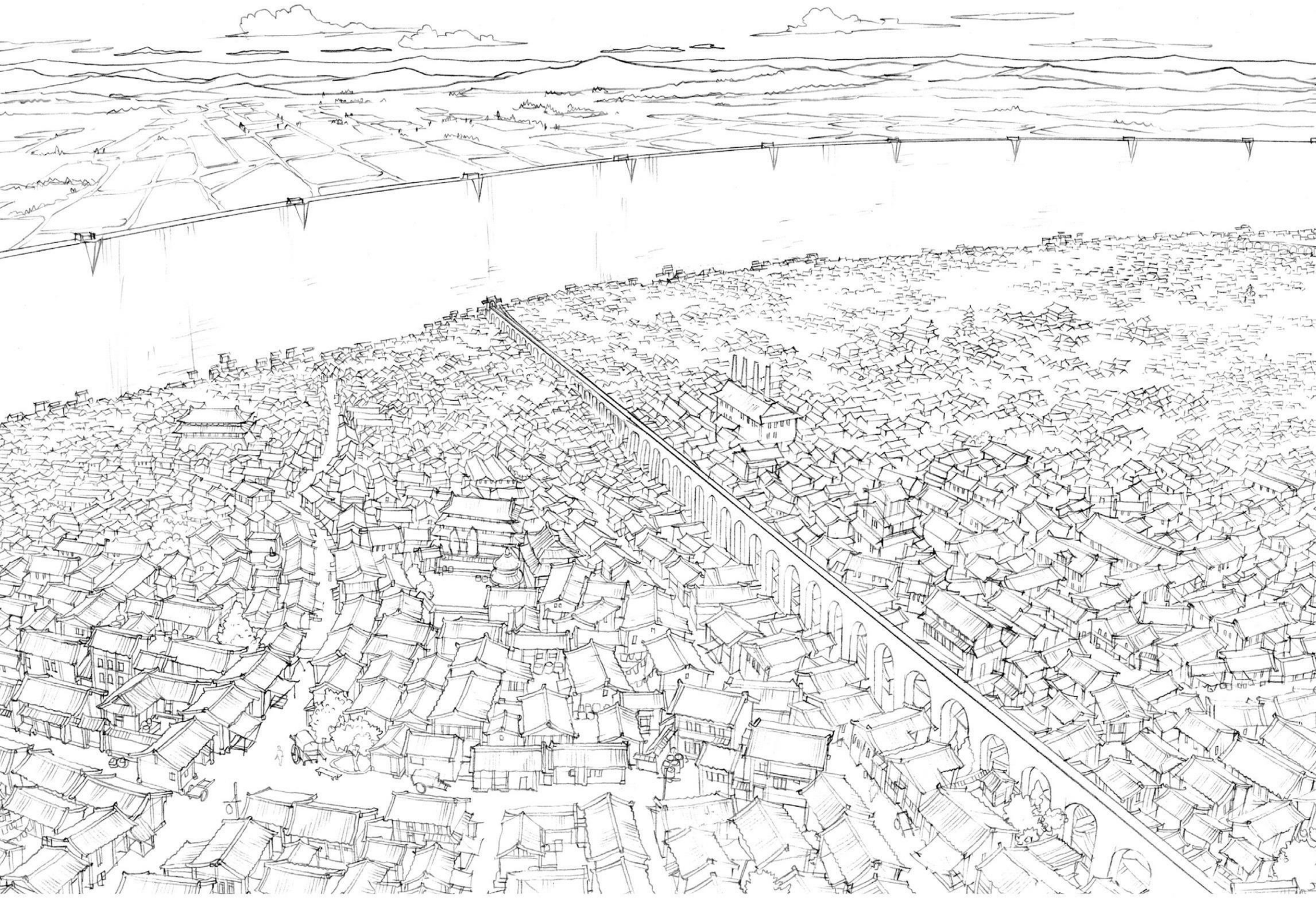



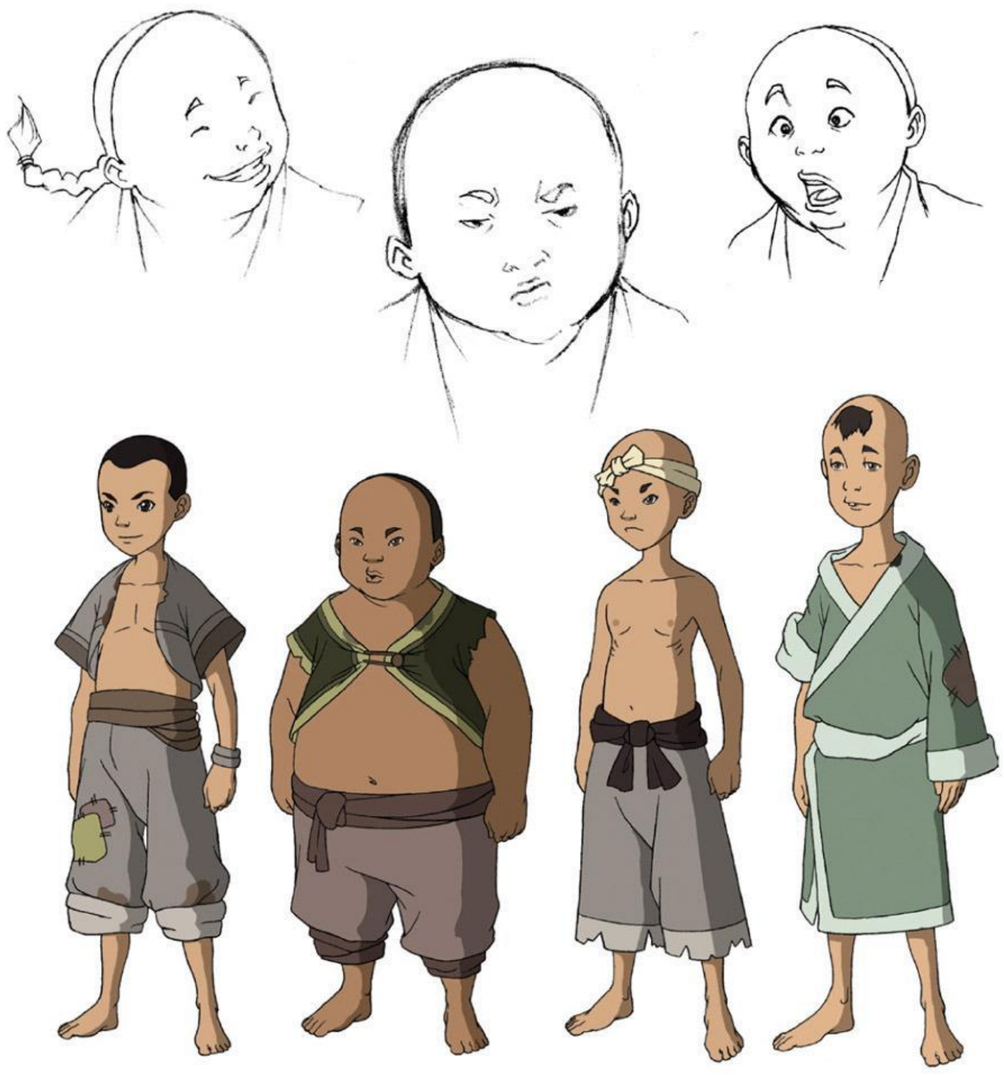




Sifu Kisu choreographs a fight sequence with Bryan Konietzko. For every bending and martial-arts movement in the show, video reference was created, then used by the storyboard artists and animators to bring a sense of realism to the fights. This showdown between Jet and Zuko was one of our favorites. Video by Lisa Wahlander. Storyboards by Dean Kelly. Final animation by JM Animation.



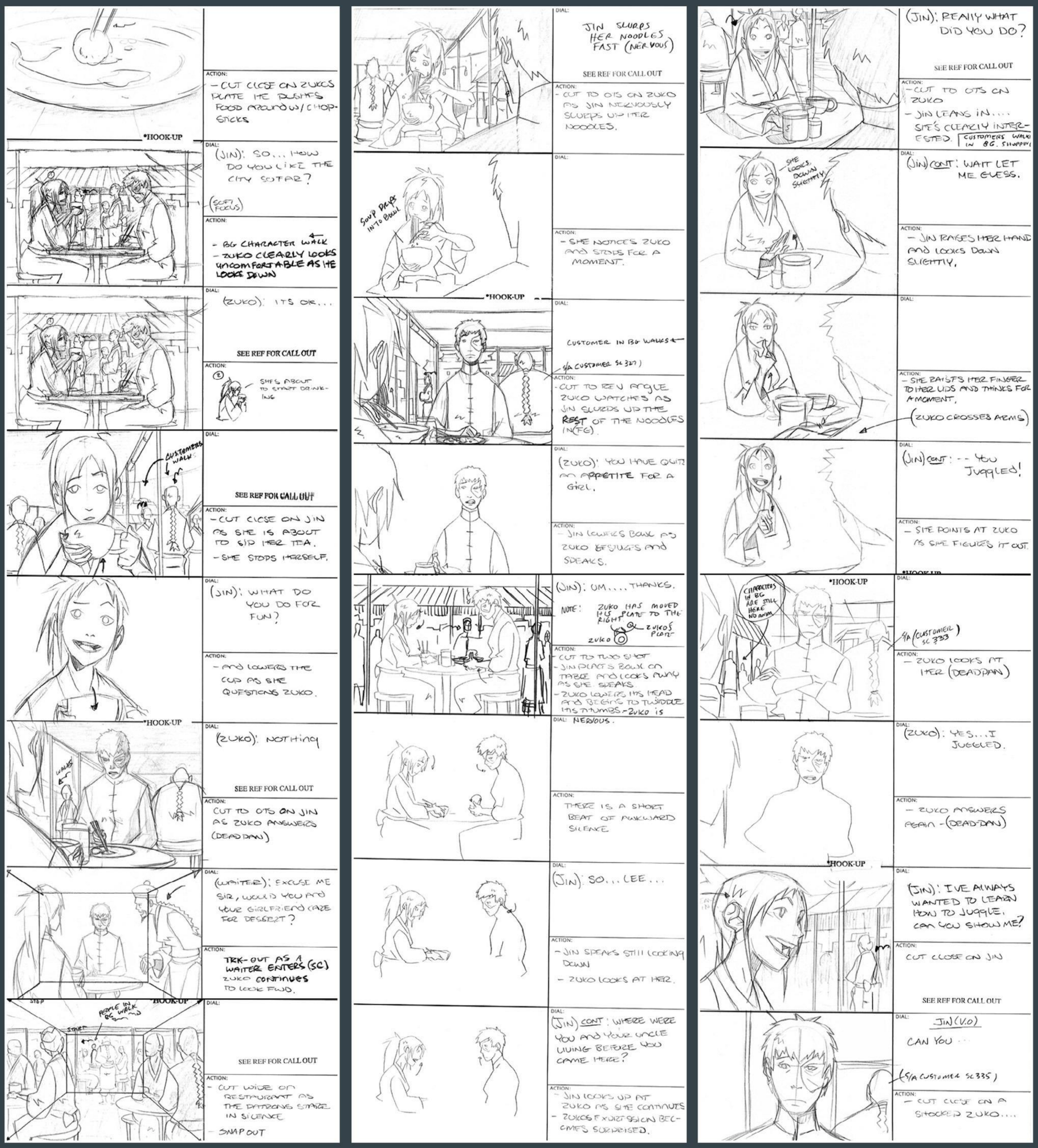
Designing a sprawling metropolis like Ba Sing Se was no easy task. But Jevon Bue constantly amazed us with his meticulous, epic background designs. Painting by Bryan Evans.



Aaron Ehasz had the idea to do a special episode full of short stories conceived and written by artists and production staff on the show. This format gave us a chance to take a break from our heavy, epic story line and create little "slice of life" vignettes for our characters.

Street kid and mean girl designs and sketches by Jae Woo Kim. Poetry club member designs by Angela Mueller. Color by Hye Jung Kim.

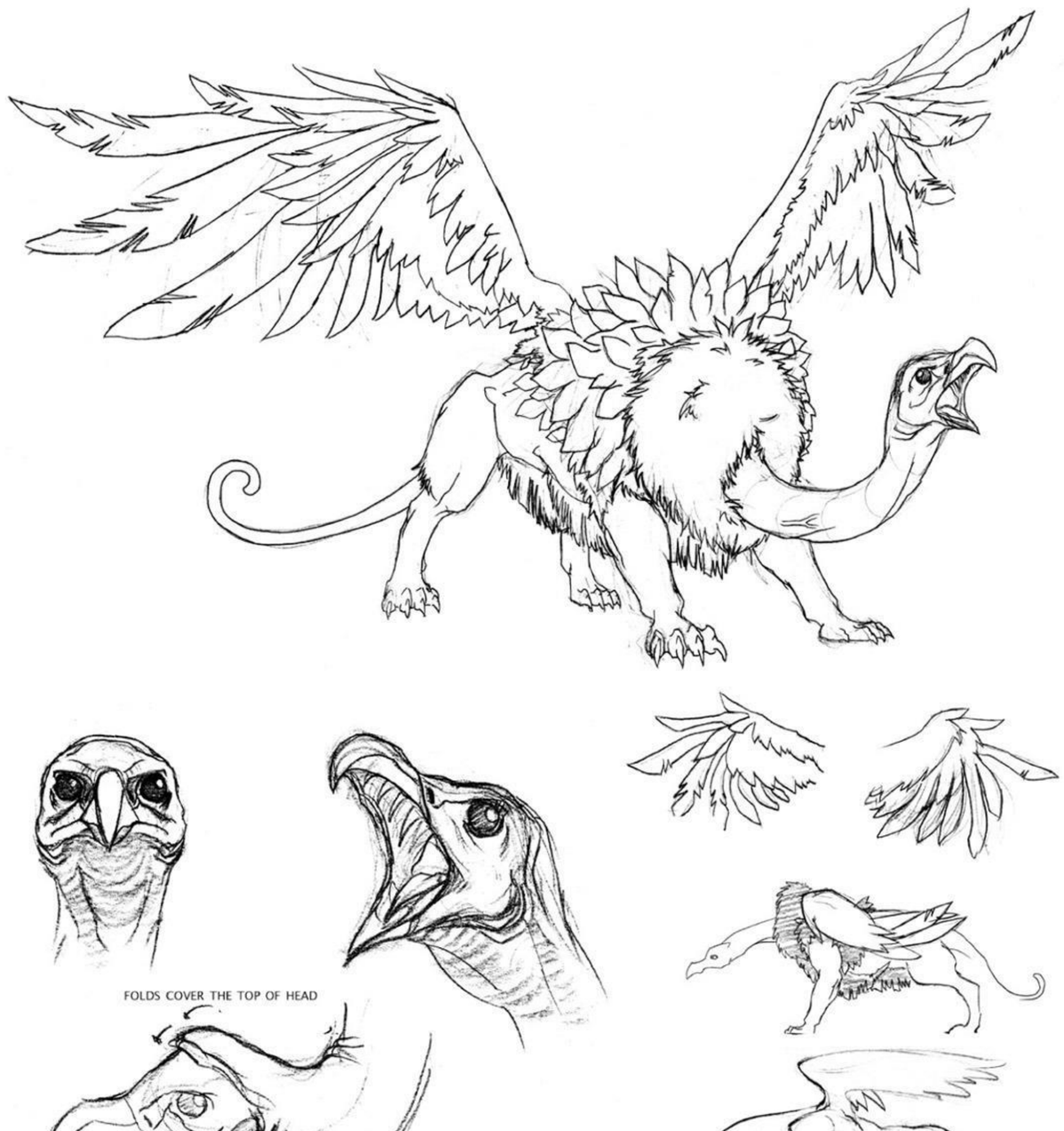
Aang created a welcoming habitat for Ba Sing Se's forgotten zoo animals. Background design by Jevon Bue. Painting by Bryan Evans.

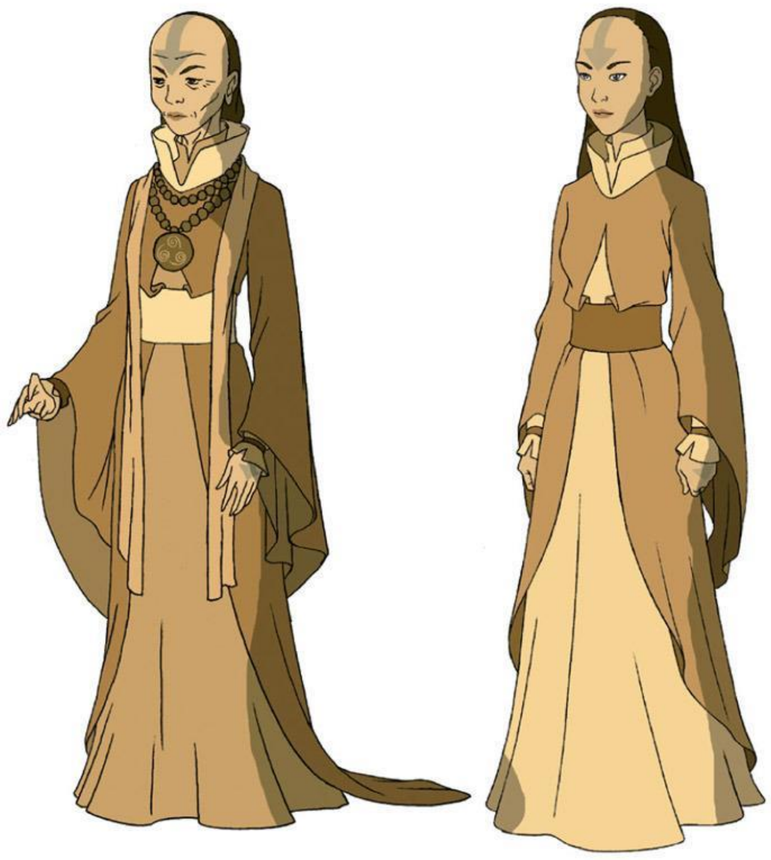


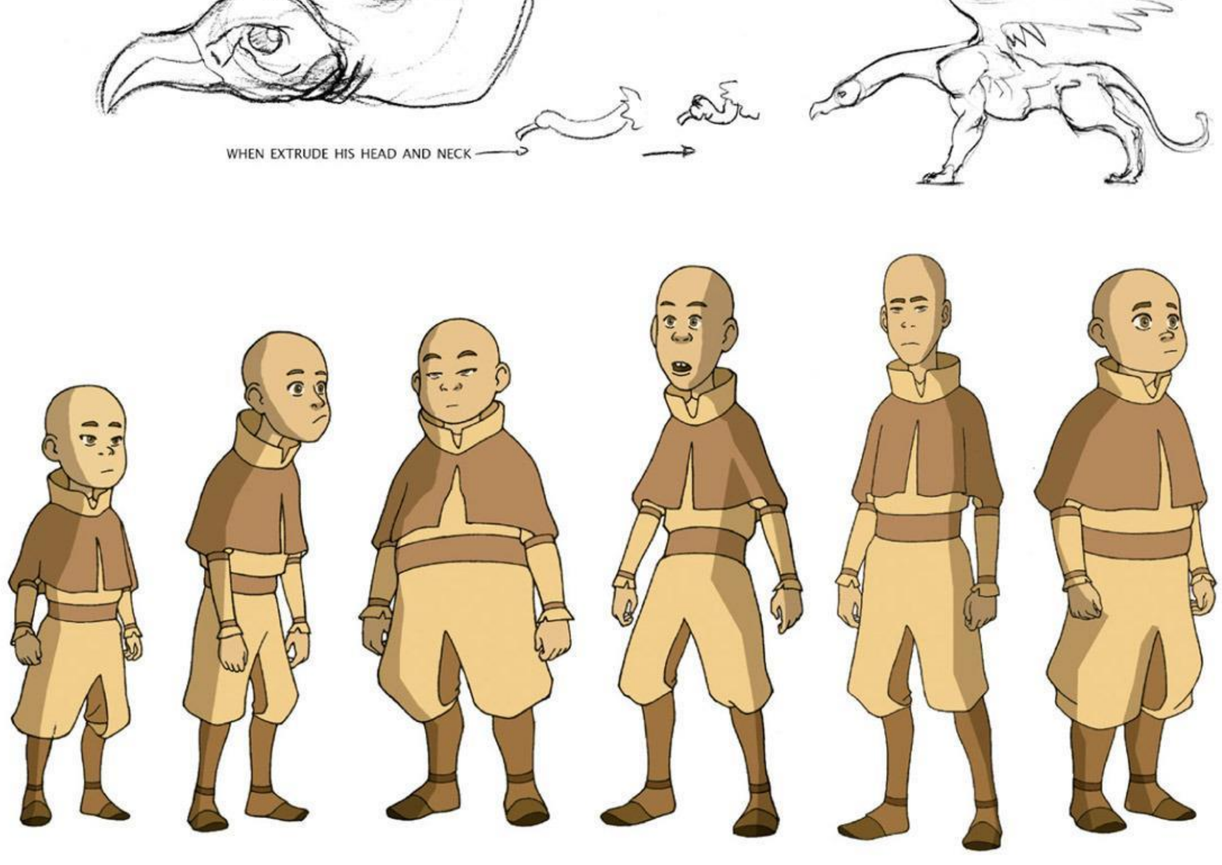
Joaquim Dos Santos joined the *Avatar* crew on this episode. Although he has built a reputation as an incredible action artist, he also has a great talent for comedy and subtle acting in his storyboard work, as exhibited here in this date scene between Zuko and Jin.

As our story grew more ambitious, the demands put on our designers grew heavier. We added Jae Woo Kim as an additional character designer to help with the burden. Jae Woo not only contributed many beautifully drawn designs, but also always went above and beyond the call of duty, creating design breakdowns for even the most minor characters in every episode. This attention to detail was always a big help to the animators.

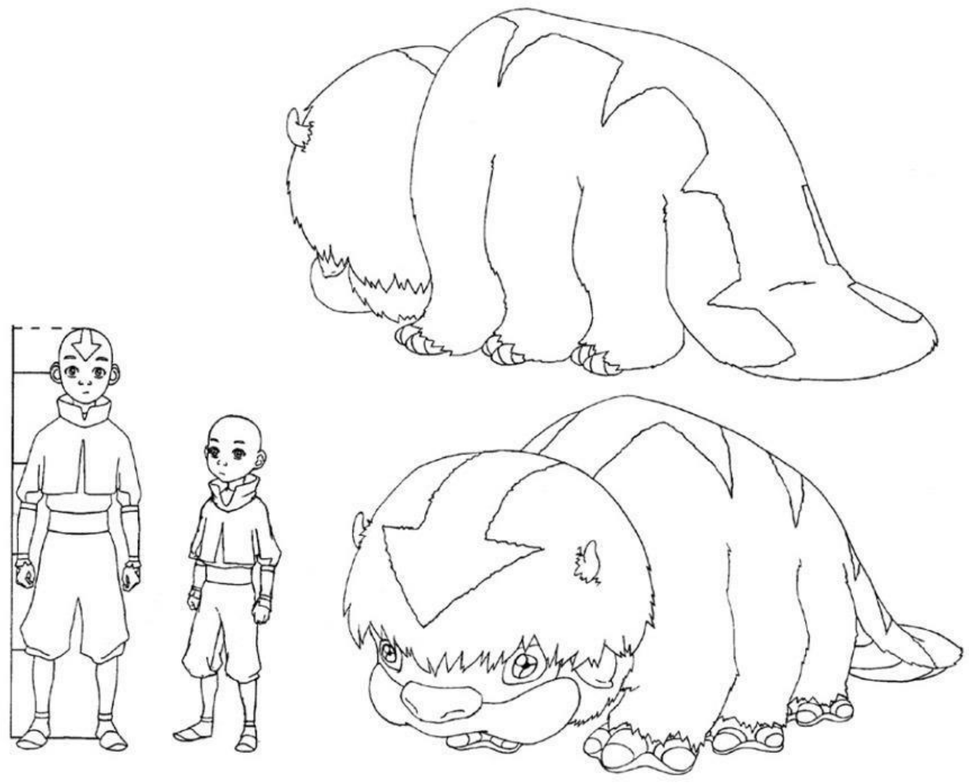
Circus trainer, lion-vulture, and adult Airbender designs by Jae Woo Kim. Apprentice Airbender designs by Angela Mueller. Color by Hye Jung Kim.







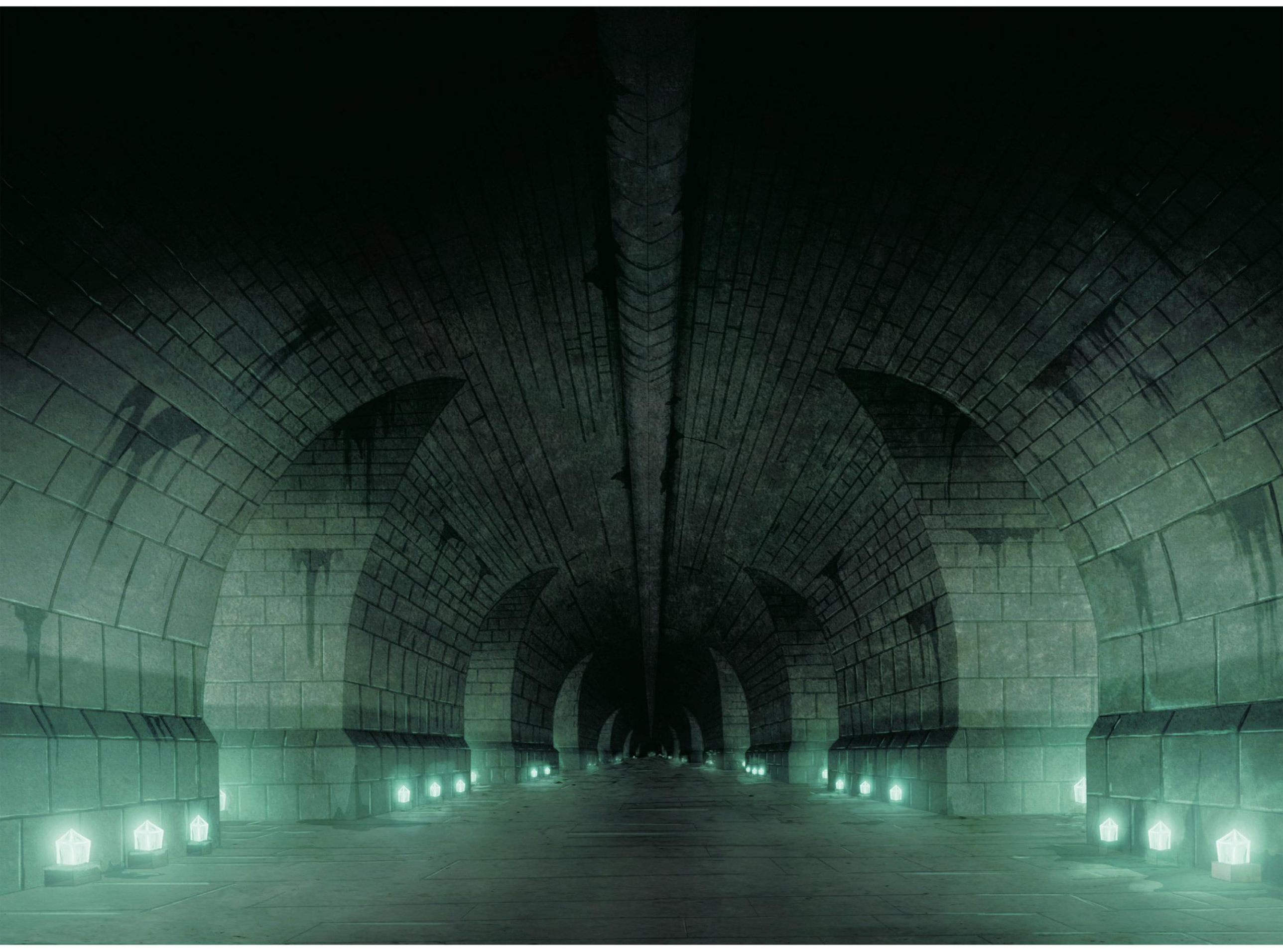
Our idea was that the Northern and Southern Air Temples were run by the monks, and the Western and Eastern Air Temples by the nuns. The Eastern Air Temple is Bryan's favorite, in its design and its clear evidence of the Fire Nation's devastating attack. Background designs by Elsa Garagarza. Paintings by Bryan Evans.



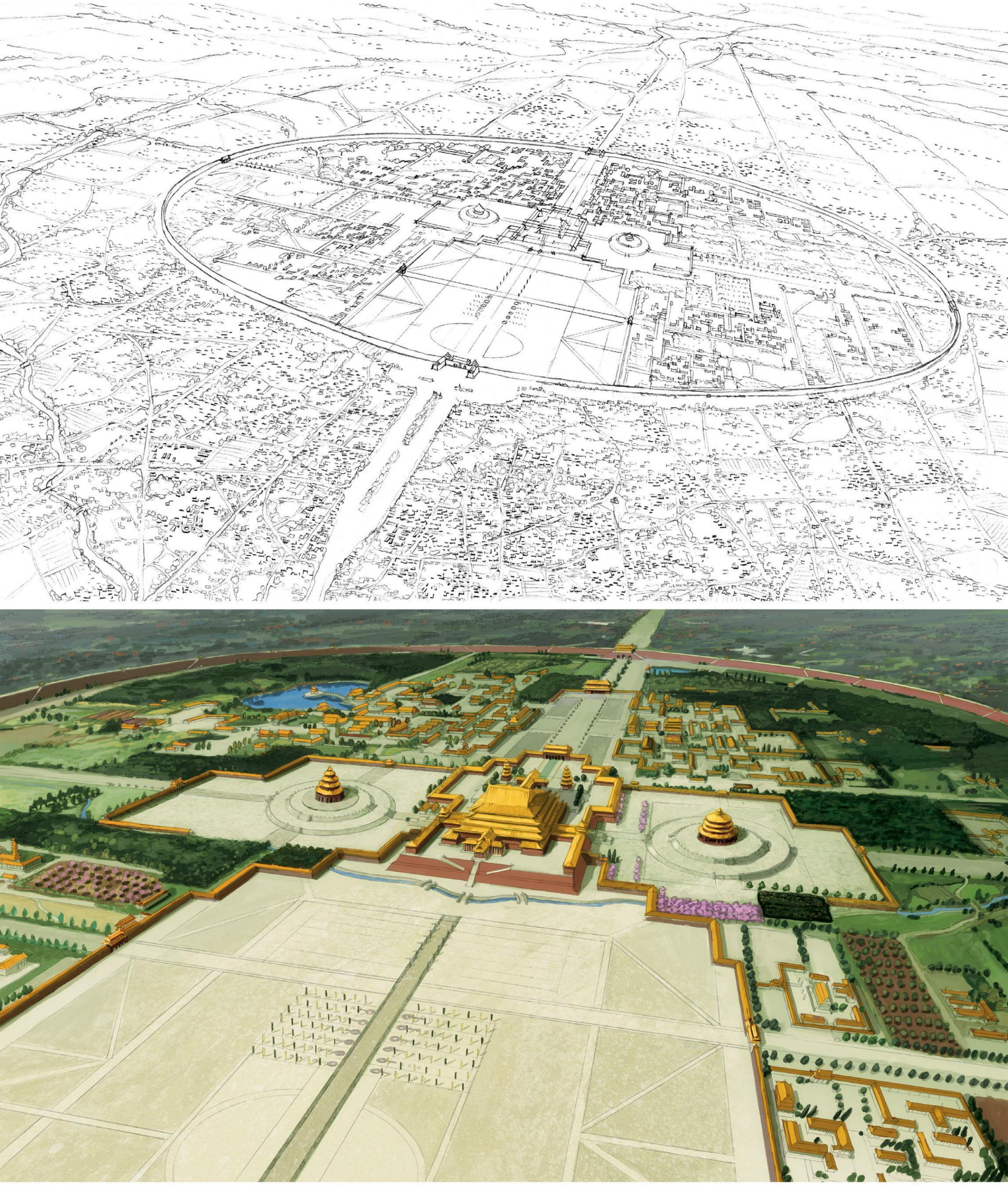
Appa as a cute toddler. Designs by Angela Mueller.

The episode "Appa's Lost Days" won a Humane Society Genesis Award for its depiction of animal cruelty in the Fire Nation circus. Boar-q-pine and Appa designs by Jae Woo Kim.

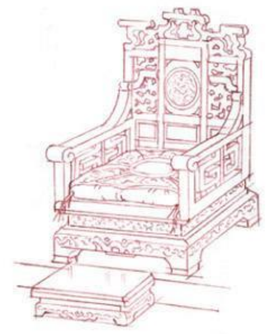
Earth Kingdom farm and circus interior. Designs by Jevon Bue. Paintings by Bryan Evans.

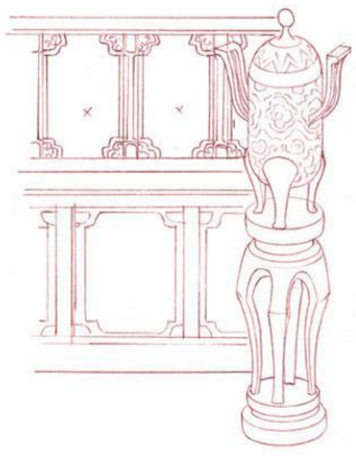


The eerie, subterranean lair of the Dai Li. Designs by Enzo Baldi. Paintings by Bryan Evans.



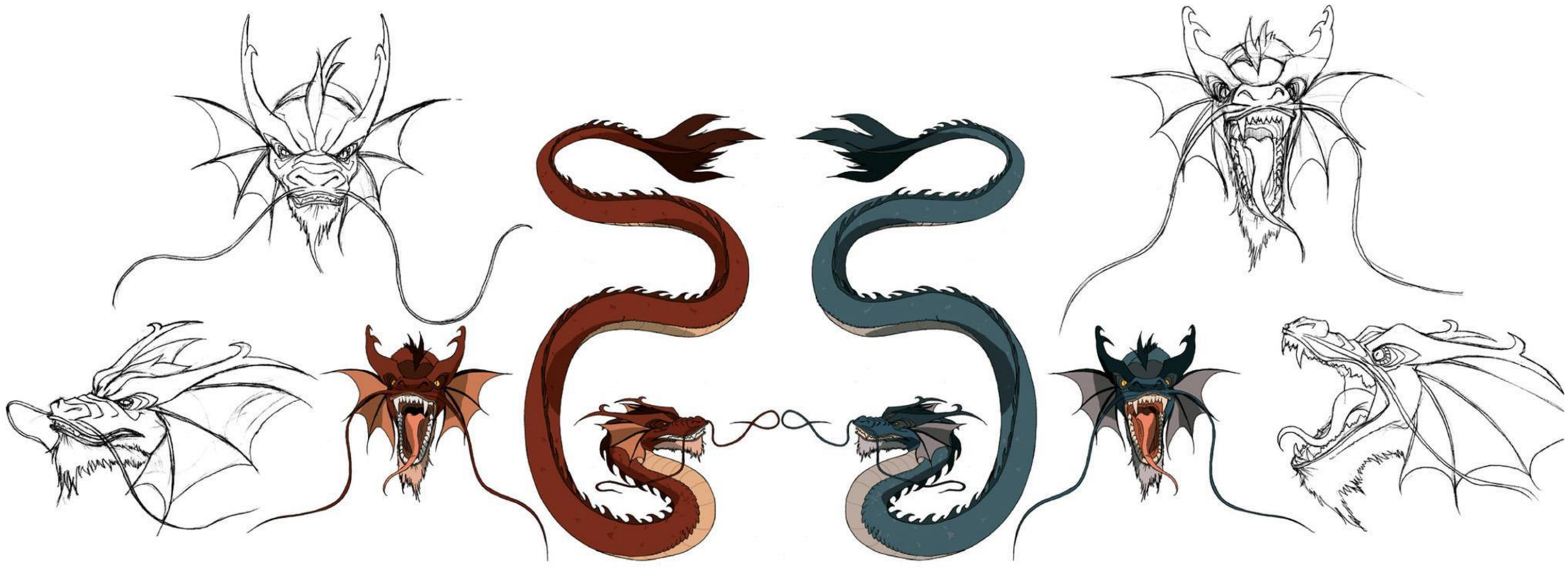
The Forbidden City–inspired palace grounds of the Earth King. Background designs by Jevon Bue. Painting by Bryan Evans.



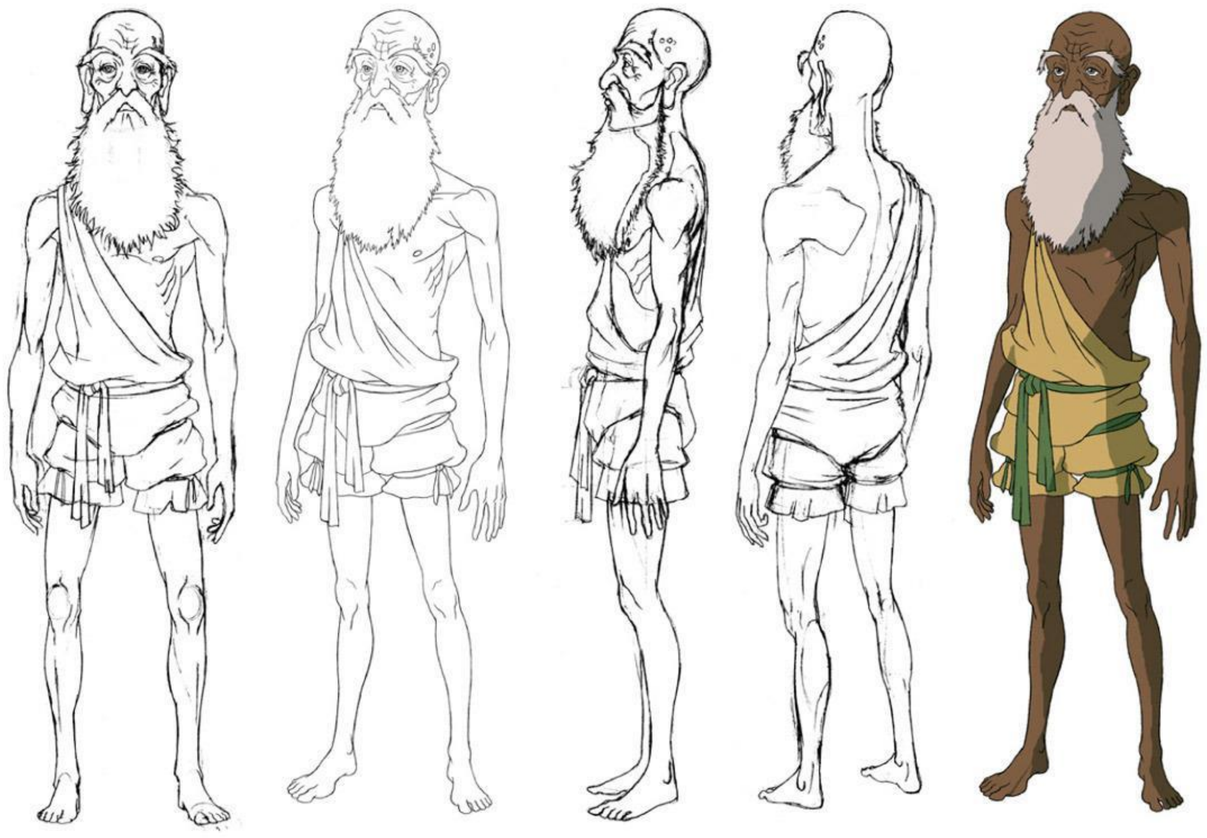


Earth Kingdom generals. Designs by Jae Woo Kim. Color by Hye Jung Kim. Right: Earth King Kuei and Bosco. Designs by Angela Mueller. Color by Hye Jung Kim.

Top: The immensity and grandeur of the Earth King's throne room were directly inspired by our visit to the palaces of Beijing. As for the king, he was just a normal guy with a normal bear. Throne-room background designs and details by Jevon Bue. Paintings by Bryan Evans.



The dragons from Zuko's nightmare represented the two halves of his tormented soul. We chose to assign Azula's voice to the blue dragon, to match her blue-colored Firebending. Designs and sketches by Jae Woo Kim. Color by Hye Jung Kim.

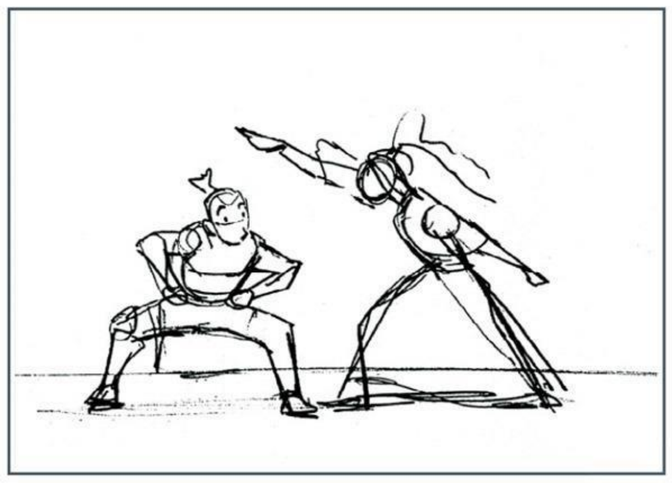


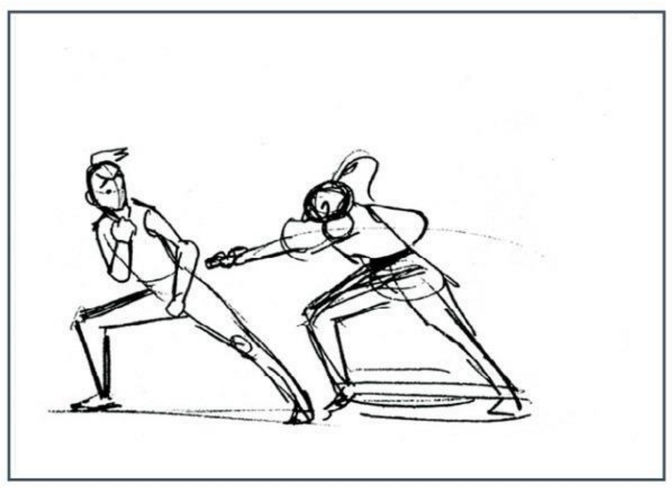
Many adult fans of the show have told us they really connected with this episode and took away a valuable spiritual lesson. It was educational for us as well, as we learned a lot about chakras in our research for the script. Guru Pathik designs and expressions by Jae Woo Kim (above) and Seung Hyun Oh (below). Color by Hye Jung Kim.

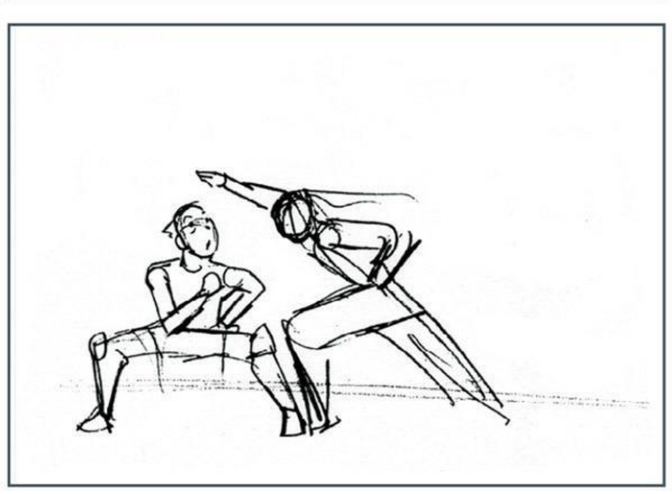
Eastern Air Temple ruins and garden. Background designs by Elsa Garagarza. Paintings by Bryan Evans. Opposite page: Guru Pathik used the cascading pools of water as an illustration of the pools of energy in the body's chakras. Background design by Elsa Garagarza. Painting by Bryan Evans.

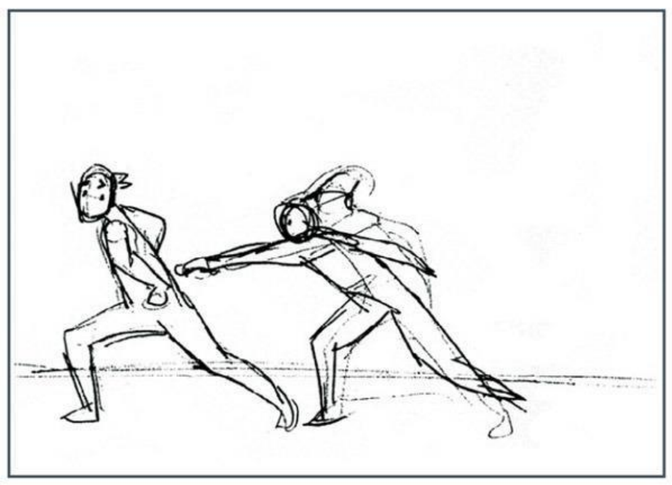
After a hundred years of the Fire Nation army unsuccessfully trying to breach Ba Sing Se's walls, Azula's cunning allowed her and her friends to walk right through the front door disguised as Kyoshi Warriors. Designs by Jae Woo Kim. Color by Hye Jung Kim.

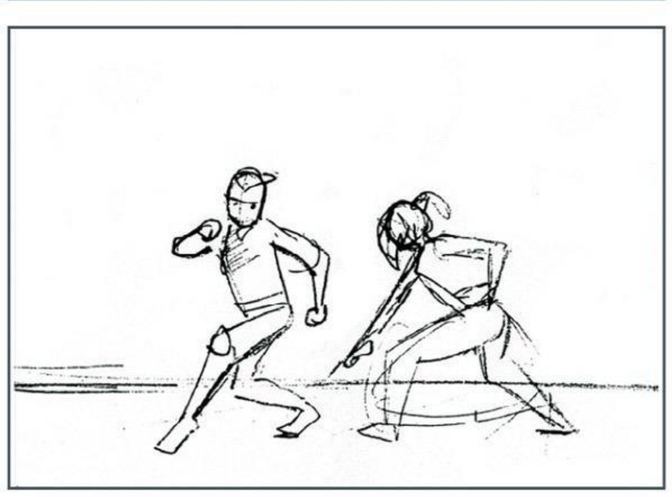
After two seasons of buildup, Sokka finally had an emotional reunion with his father, Hakoda, and the brave warriors of the Southern Water Tribe. Jae Woo Kim updated these designs, originally by Angela Mueller and Bryan Konietzko. Color by Hye Jung Kim.



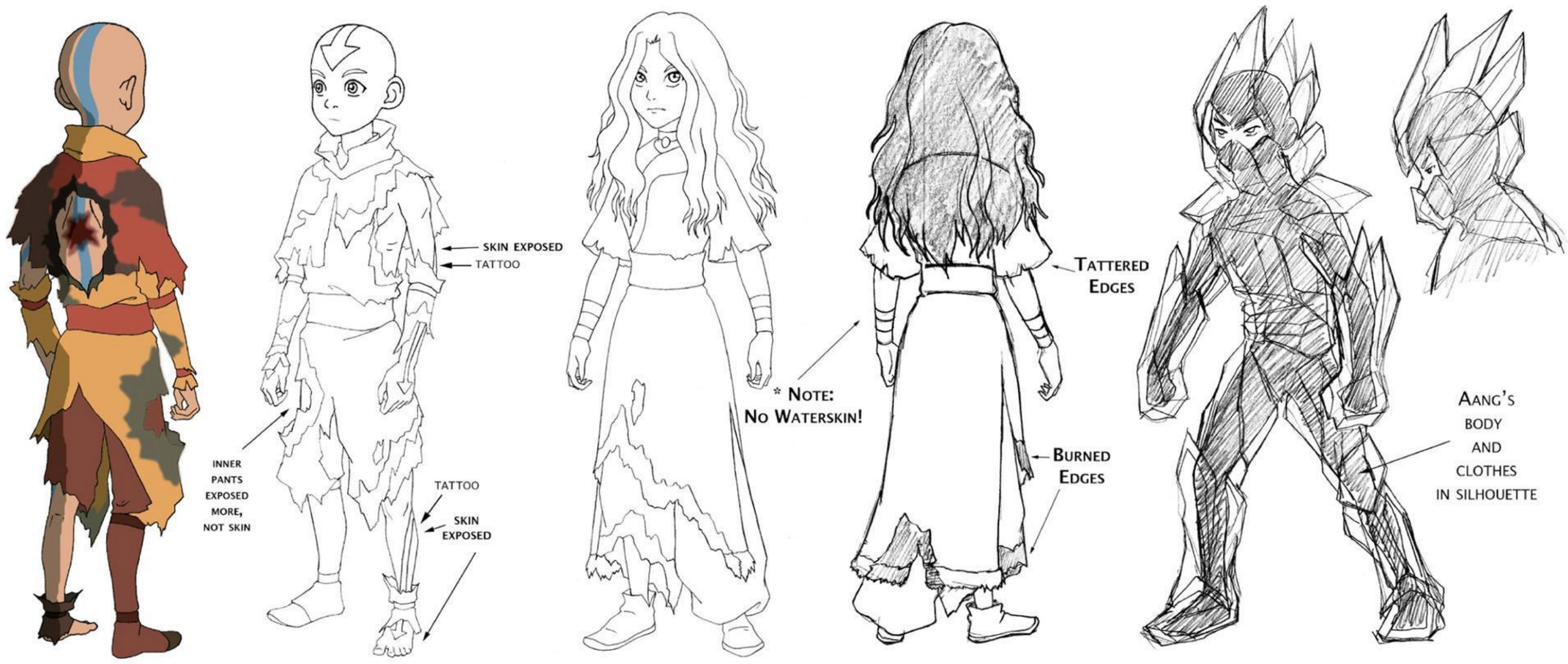




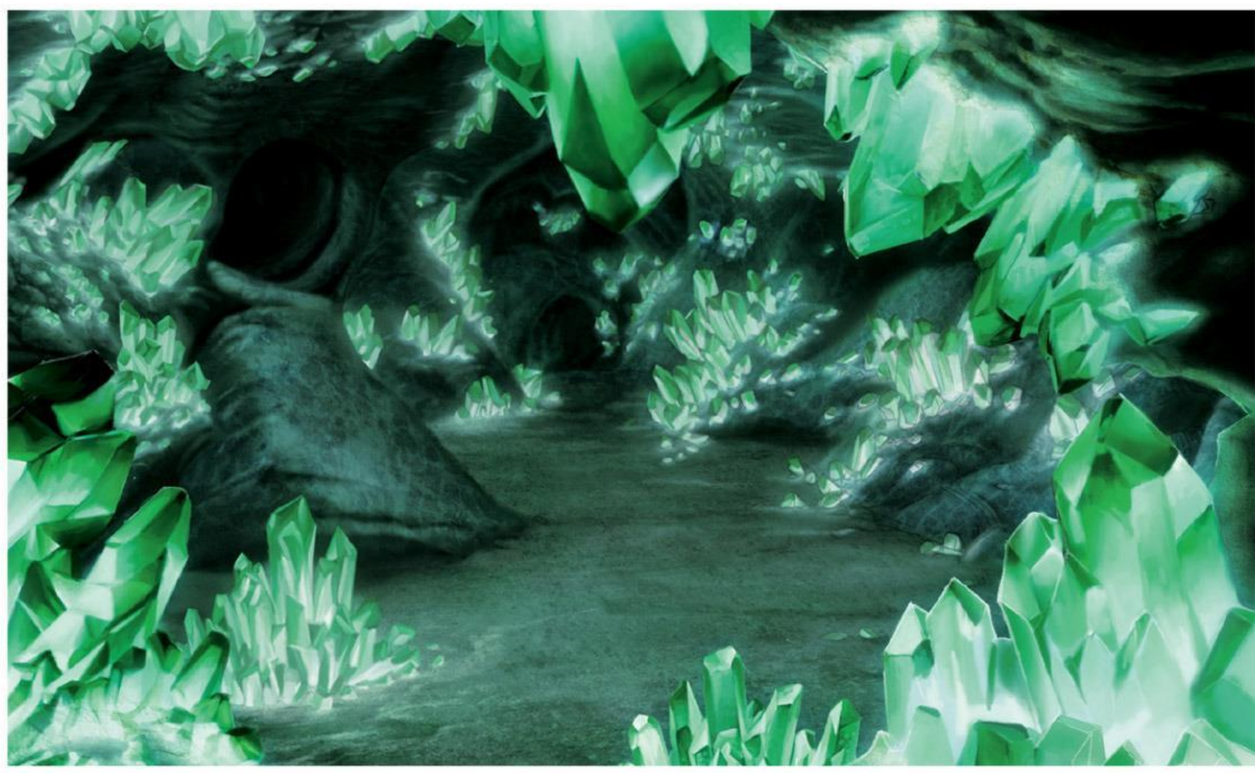


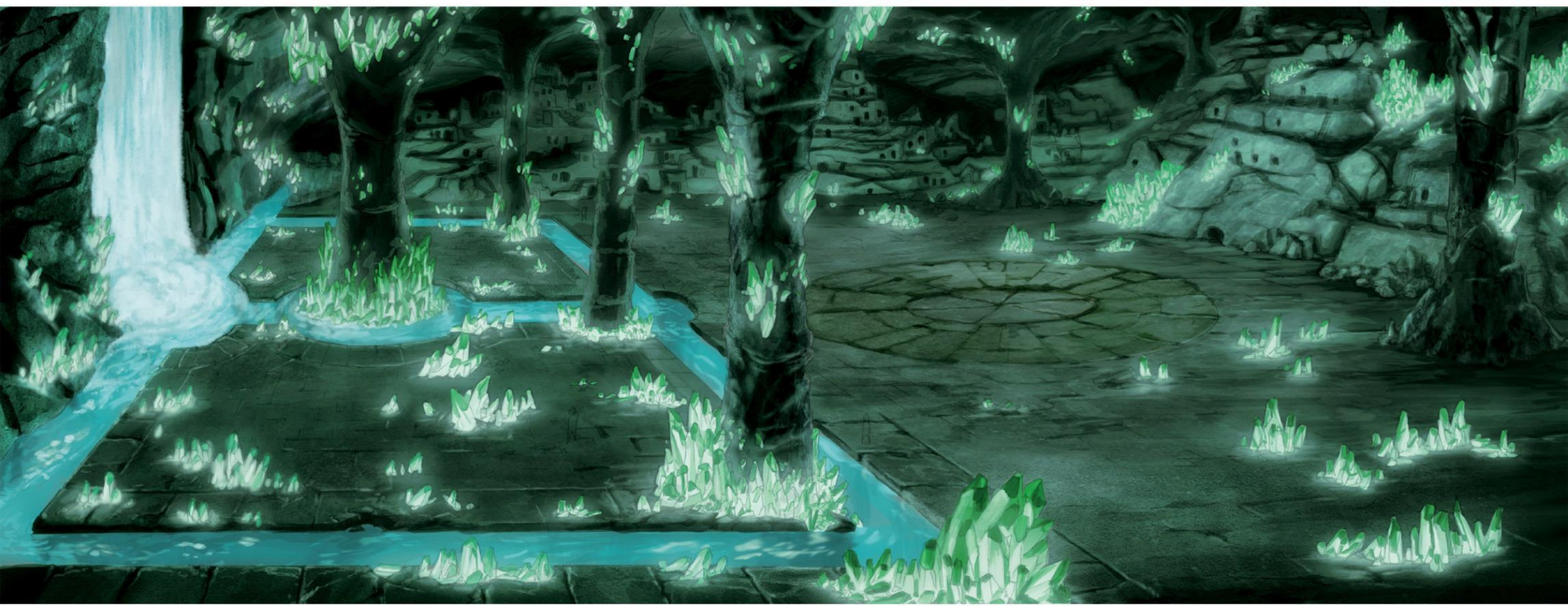


A flirtatious fight/dance between Sokka and Ty Lee. Video by Greg Rankin. Storyboard by Chris Graham. Final animation by JM Animation.



One of the main jobs of a character designer is not only drawing new characters, but also creating SPC designs, or Special Pose and Costumes, for the main characters. On *Avatar* this usually involved adding burned clothing and battle damage. One fun and complicated SPC was Aang's glowing crystal armor. Designs by Angela Mueller. Color by Hye Jung Kim. Crystal-armor concept by Bryan Konietzko.





Above left: Statue storage room. Background design by Enzo Baldi. Painting by Bryan Evans. Above right and directly above: The most unique natural resource in the Earth Kingdom is phosphorescent crystal. It only forms in the caverns beneath Ba Sing Se. These caves are the site of the original subterranean settlement that predated the aboveground, walled city. Background designs by Elsa Garagarza. Paintings by Bryan Evans.

SPOTLIGHT:

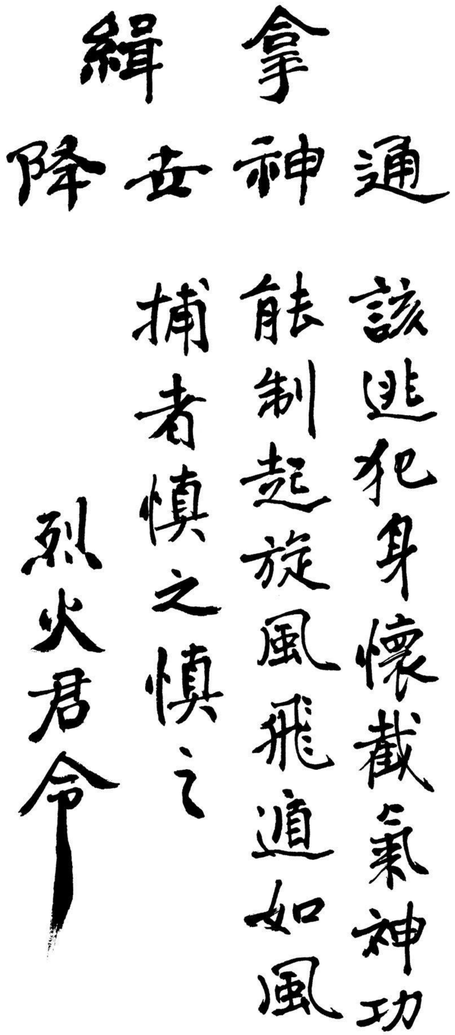
The Calligraphy of S. L. Lee

BRYAN: We decided early on that we would use Chinese for all writing and signage seen within the show. Much in the way Sifu Kisu became the martial-arts consultant, we wanted to find a Chinese calligraphy expert to handle all of the writing. An Internet search led us to the work of Dr. Siu-Leung Lee (known to us as S. L. Lee). I e-mailed him and heard back within the hour, and we have been working together ever since.

S. L. Lee handled all of the translation and calligraphy for *Avatar*, including providing the calligraphy for our logo. His vast knowledge and command of various styles of calligraphy throughout China's history added a culturally grounding component to the show.

When I would send Dr. Lee a request for a poster or a decree, he would quiz me about what unseen fictional character had done the calligraphy in the show. If it were a highly cultured royal attendant, he would use a refined, elegant style, but if it were a low-level clerk, he would use a more pedestrian handwriting style. We typically used classical Chinese for the writing, but thanks to Dr. Lee's deep knowledge, we also included archaic Chinese, particularly for ancient texts about the spirits or elements. We were truly lucky to have such a great talent contributing his beautiful work and expertise to our show.

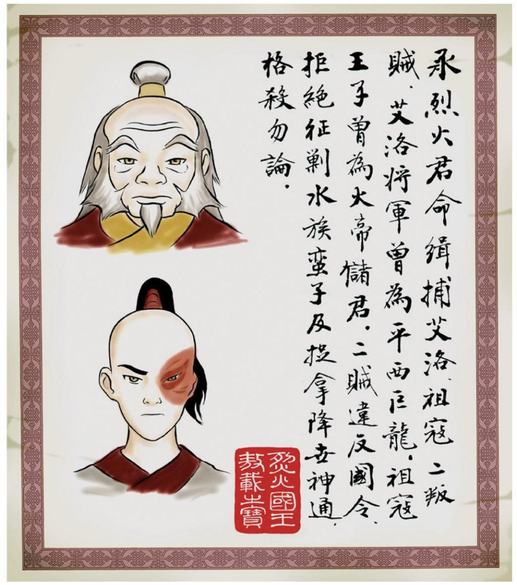
All translation and calligraphy by S. L. Lee. Illustrations by Bryan Konietzko.

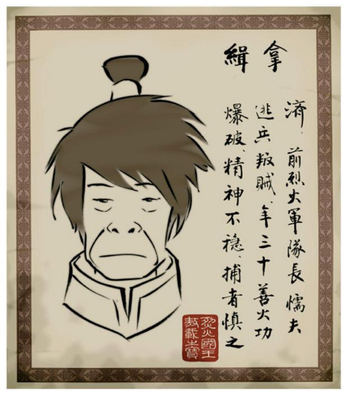


The calligraphy that appears on Aang's wanted poster.

Passports and ferry ticket. The passport on the left has the Beifong family seal. Props by Aldina Dias. Color by Hye Jung Kim.

When we designed the planetarium calendar, we had to devise a dating system for the *Avatar* world. On the outside ring we used the traditional Chinese zodiac animals to identify a cycle of twelve years. Next, S. L. Lee came up with historically based names for sixteen eras. The inner two rings have numbers for the days of the month, and then months of the year. Below the calendar are the characters for the spring equinox, summer solstice, autumn equinox, and winter solstice.





Aang wanted poster: "Wanted: The Avatar. This fugitive knows Airbending, can create whirlwinds, and flees like the wind. Hunters, be extremely cautious!"

Uncle and Zuko wanted poster: "The Fire Lord orders the arrest of Iroh and Zuko, the two rebellious traitors. General Iroh was once the Dragon of the West. Prince Zuko was Crown Prince to the Fire Lord. Both traitors violated imperial orders to exterminate the Water Tribe barbarians as well as capture the Avatar. Permission is granted to kill them on sight."

Blue Spirit wanted poster: "Wanted, by order of the Fire Lord: The so-called Blue Spirit. He is a thief, guilty of stealing the Avatar from the Fire Nation. He wears a traditional Earth Kingdom opera mask. His true identity is unknown, but disregard the rumors that he is a ghost. If you locate the Blue Spirit and attempt to apprehend him, you are advised to enlist as many forces as you can gather for the task."

Jeong Jeong wanted poster: "Wanted, by order of the Fire Lord: Jeong Jeong, former Admiral in the Fire Armada. He is a deserter, traitor, and coward. He is 61 years old, with white hair. Although he has taken the most wretched path of pacifism, he is a master Firebender and should be approached with extreme caution."

Chey wanted poster: "Wanted, by order of the Fire Lord: Chey, former Captain in the Fire Nation Army. He is a deserter, traitor, and coward. He is 30 years old and skilled with explosives. Be warned that he is mentally unstable."

Water
Virtue

Earth
Strong

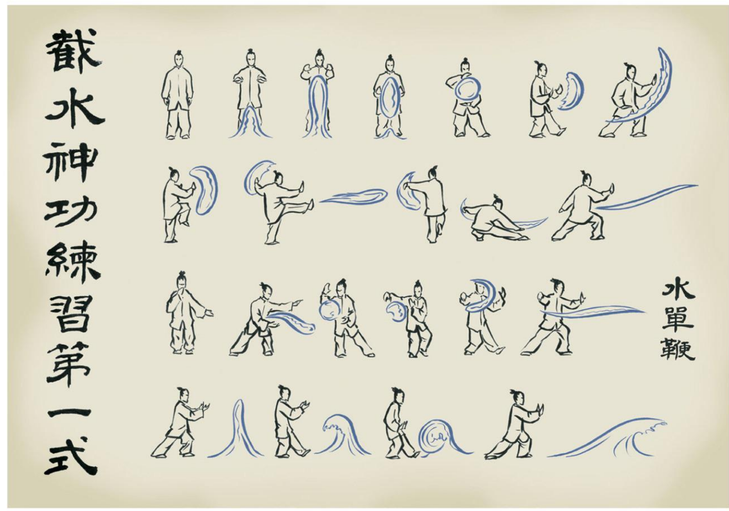
Fire
Fierce

Air
Peaceful

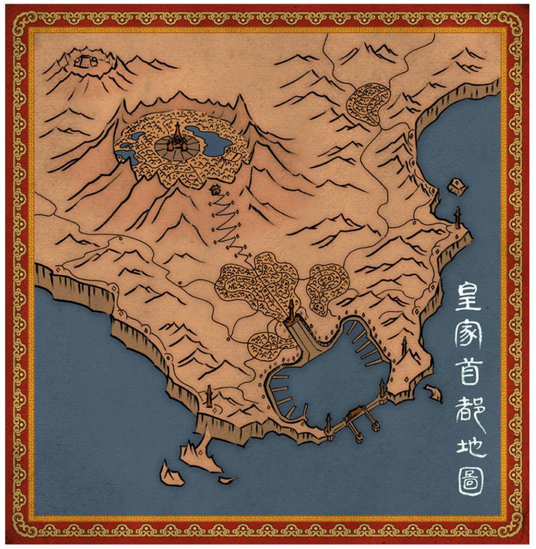
"By decree of the Fire Lord."

Four Powers (elements) Divide the World
Balanced by One

Left: Festival poster: "FIRE DAY FESTIVAL TODAY!—Featuring traditional Fire Nation food, Fire Nation cultural exhibits, jugglers, magicians, Firebending masters, puppet shows, and plenty of FIRE to make you feel like you are back home in the Fire Nation!" Right: The lost-Appa poster: "Have you seen my flying bison? His name is Appa. He has six legs and weighs ten tons. If you have any information, please contact Avatar Aang in the Upper Ring, 96th district, house #217."



"Waterbending drill first form" and "water single whip."
Right: Archaic Water Tribe calligraphy.



"Fire Nation Royal-Issue Atlas" and "Map of the Royal Capital City."

"On this day, Avatar Kyoshi splits from the mainland and creates Kyoshi Island. Let's hope our citizens' culture will be isolated from the tyranny of the world forever."

火烈

CHAPTER FOUR

Season Three

FIRE

The end is in sight, and some of the series' best artwork is about to be created . . .

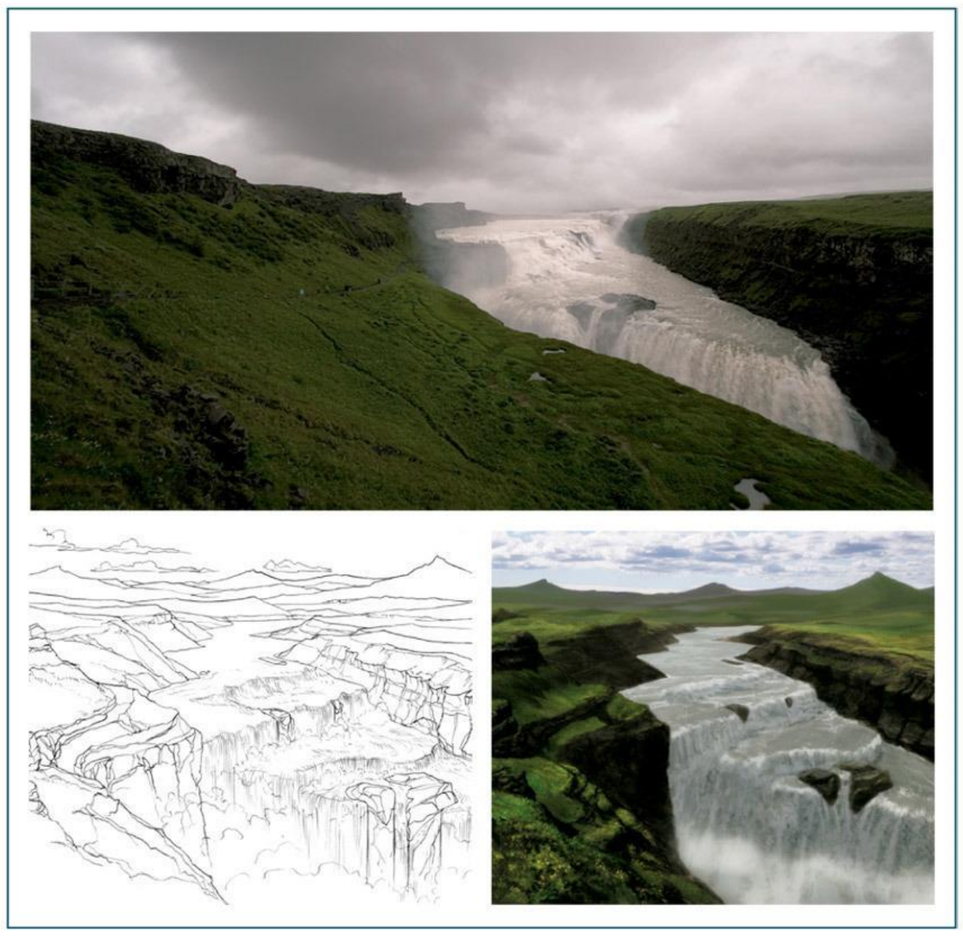
MIKE: In the series bible from 2003, Bryan and I wrote an overview of the story we wanted to tell in season three. At the time, we hadn't even been picked up for the pilot yet, so the reality of telling the dramatic end of the story seemed a very long way off. Many of the ideas we had during the development period found their way into the story line of season three, including the return of Sozin's Comet, Prince Zuko returning home and taking a stand against his father, and Zuko becoming Aang's Firebending teacher. We even had ideas for the finale: Sokka and Toph hijacking a Fire Nation airship, Zuko and Katara facing Azula at the palace, and Aang sealing himself in a sphere of stone during his battle with Fire Lord Ozai. We also wrote, "Aang does not kill Ozai. Instead, using a technique available only to the Avatar, he takes away Ozai's Firebending powers and leaves him a weak man," even though it would be over three years before we figured out what that technique was, exactly.

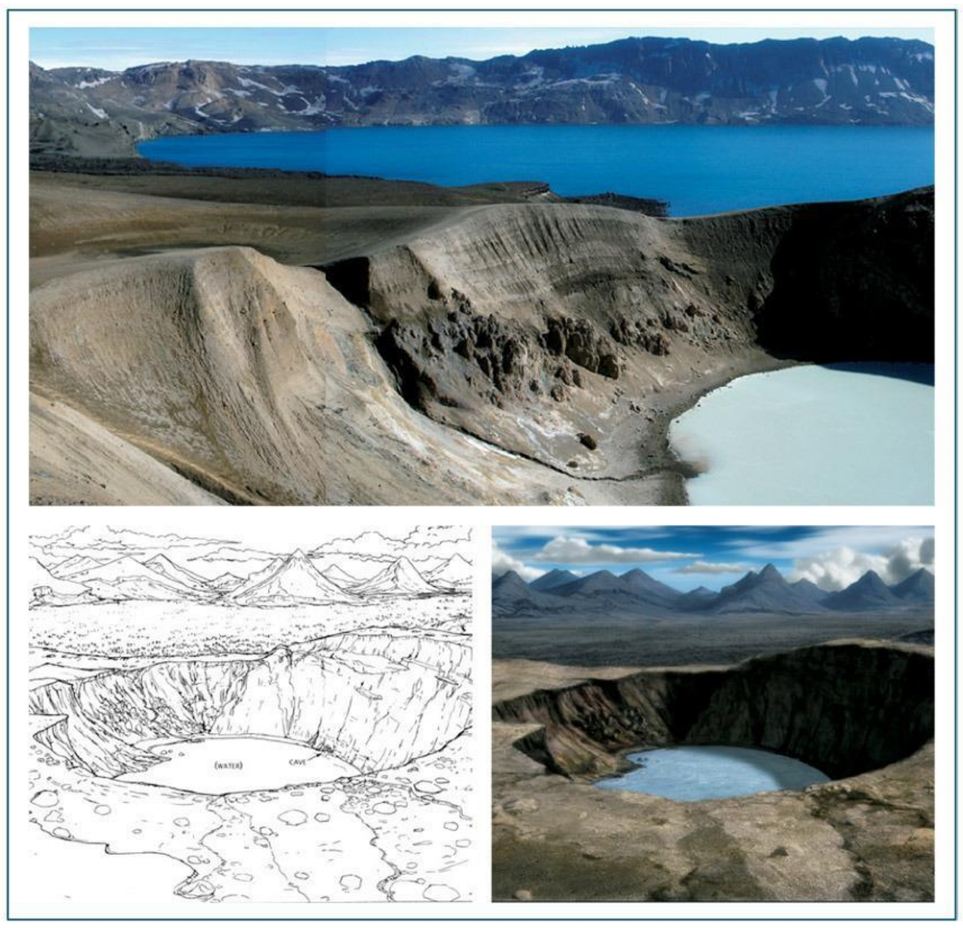
But there were many more story details to create. So in April 2006, the writers, Bryan, and I went on a three-day retreat to Santa Barbara, California, to brainstorm ideas for the final season of *Avatar*. It was during the retreat that ideas like Uncle's imprisonment, Combustion Man, Sokka finding a sword master, and Zuko redirecting Ozai's lightning attack during their confrontation were created and discussed. By the time we were done, we all had a very clear plan of how the season would unfold. The end was in sight, and some of the series' best artwork was about to be created.

BRYAN: A few months after the prolific season-three writers' retreat, I finally had some time for a few weeks of travel. I was getting back into my photography hobby, and I wanted to go somewhere that would serve as a model for designing the Fire Nation's volcanic landscape. I ended up fulfilling a lifelong dream and visited Iceland, journeying all across the desolate highlands and verdant coastlines for ten days. The landscape was raw, rugged, and violent, with a terrible beauty that perfectly encapsulated what I had in mind for Zuko's turbulent homeland. I shot thousands of photos and edited them down for the background designers and painters, even subjecting them to the dreaded "vacation slide show" presentation. All of these efforts helped us to give the Fire Nation a distinct geological flavor separate from every other locale we had seen in the *Avatar* world.

Facing chapter title page: The arrival of Sozin's Comet. Background design by Jevon Bue. Painting by Bryan Evans.

Right: Photos by Bryan Konietzko. Background designs by Jevon Bue. Paintings by Bryan Evans.





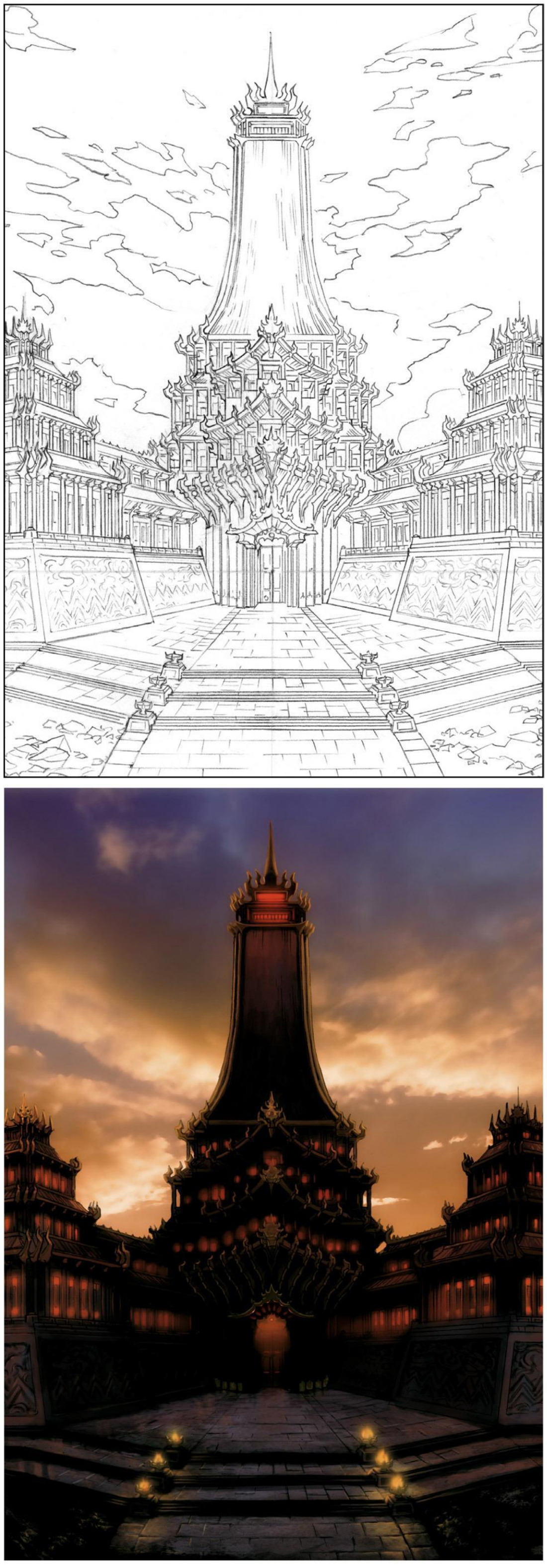
Fire Nation capital city background designs by Jevon Bue. Paintings by Bryan Evans.

FIRE LORD OZAI

MIKE: After two seasons of hiding the Fire Lord in shadows, the audience finally got to see him when Zuko returned home in "The Awakening." It's a symbolic moment where Zuko finally sees his father for who he truly is—not a mysterious, frightening figure hidden in shadow, but a flesh-and-blood man, similar in appearance to himself.

Fire Lord Ozai. Designs by Bryan Konietzko and Angela Mueller. Sketches by Jae Woo Kim. Color by Hye Jung Kim.

Aang, Azula, and Zuko got updated looks for season three. Designs by Bryan Konietzko and Angela Mueller. Color by Hye Jung Kim.



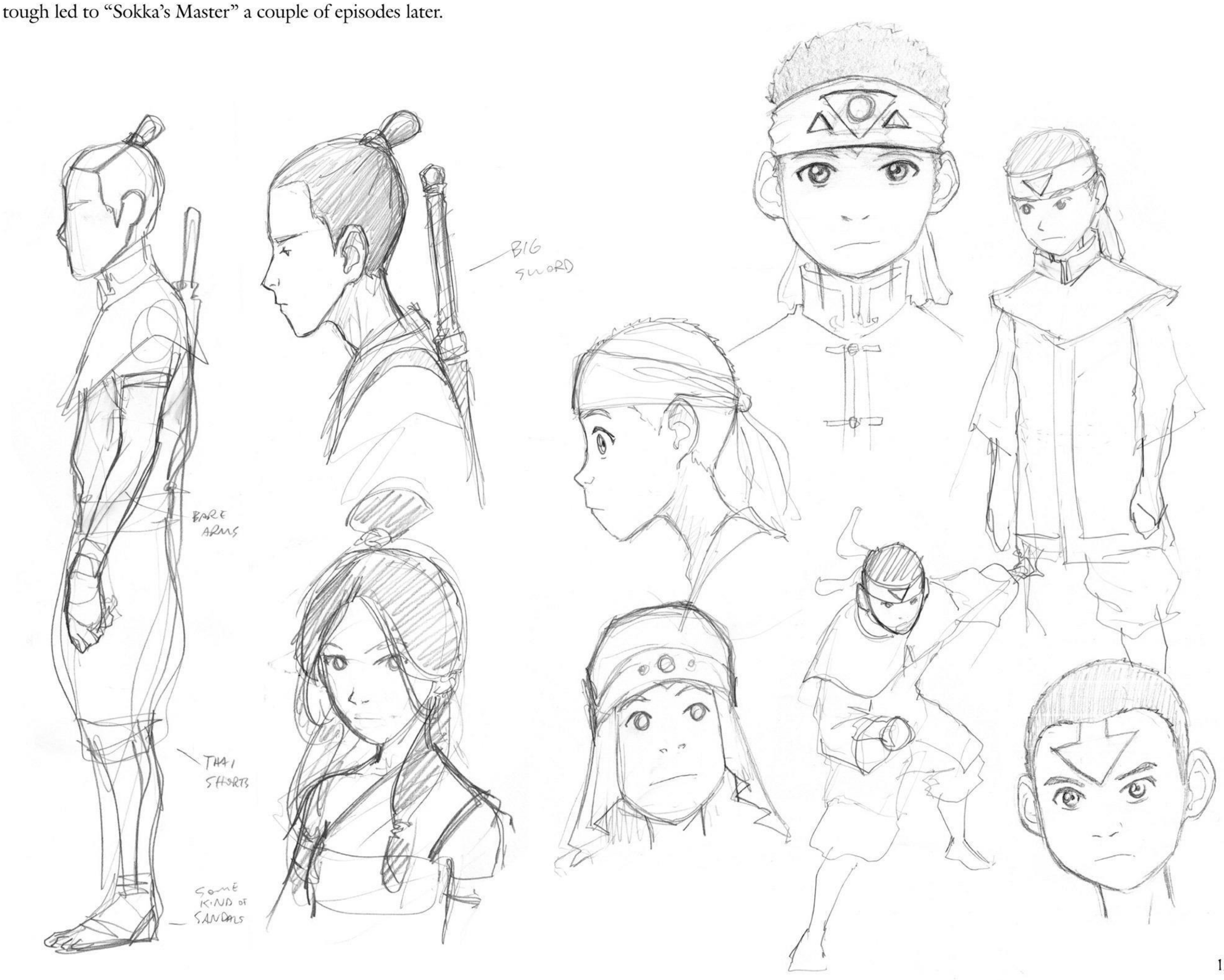
The Fire Lord's palace. Background design by Elsa Garagarza. Painting by Bryan Evans.

THE HEADBAND

BRYAN: Mike and I knew from early on that our heroes would travel into the Fire Nation for the bulk of the third season, but it was at the writers' retreat that we came up with the idea that the kids would spend some time in disguise, acting like Fire Nation citizens. From a design standpoint, this was really exciting. We had made forty episodes by this point, and frankly I was tired of Team Avatar's stock outfits. In most stories, the villains get the best clothes, but you get the best of both worlds dressing up your "good guys" like "bad guys." Who doesn't love seeing Han Solo and Luke in the stormtrooper armor?

During the retreat, I filled up a legal notepad with sketches of the kids in various costumes. By the time I made it back to Los Angeles, I had a pretty good sense of what they would all look like in disguise. I thought it was important to have each new outfit echo elements from the characters' stock attire, so their iconic identities weren't lost in the translation. We talked a lot about how Aang would conceal his arrow tattoo. Would it be a hood, a hat, or a wig? We came up with the idea of Aang's hair growing during his coma, coupled with a headband. The sketch that ensued led to the *Footloose*-inspired episode, "The Headband" (a personal favorite of mine). Another sketch of Sokka clutching a sword and looking tough led to "Sokka's Master" a couple of episodes later.

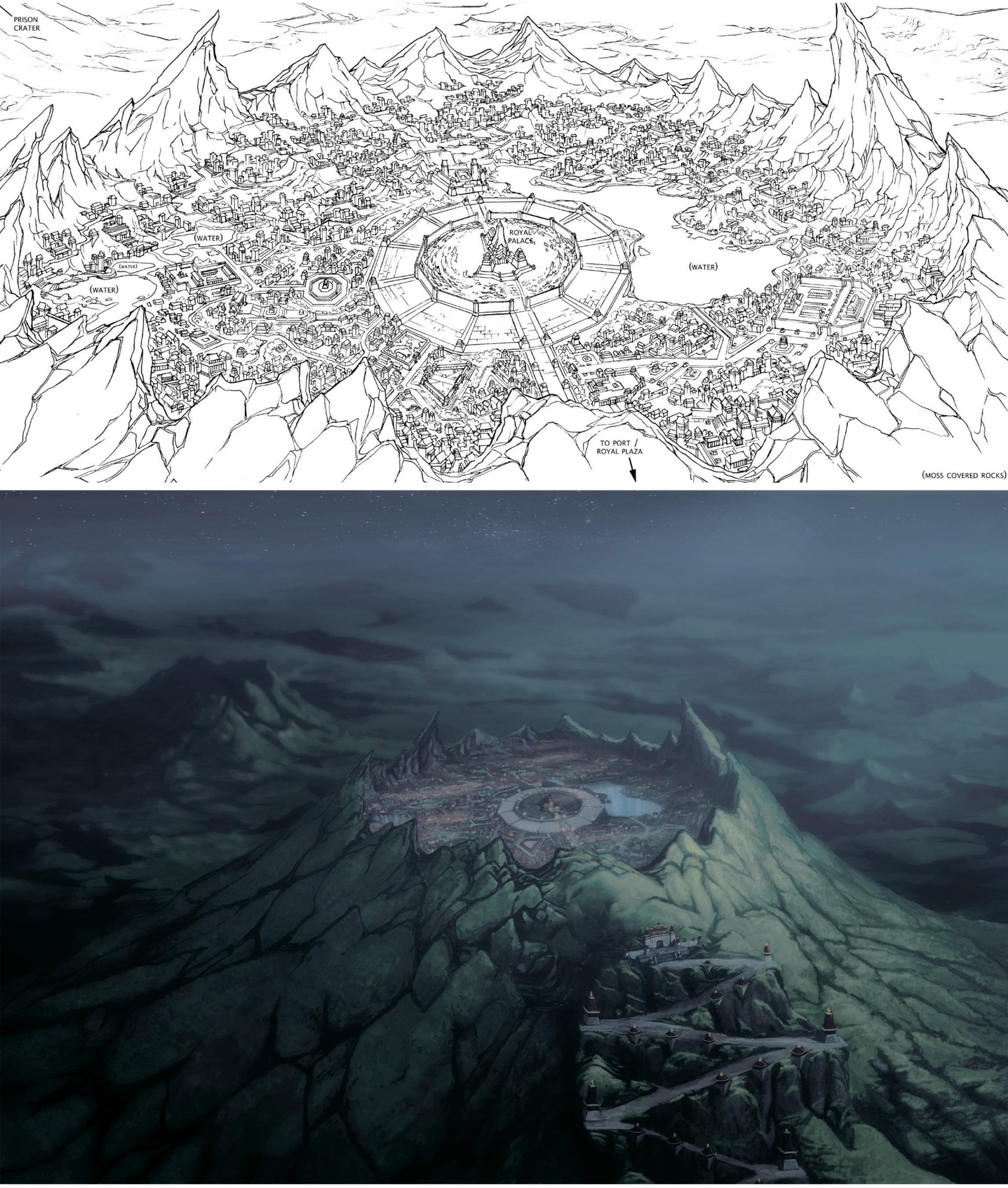
Team Avatar, incognito. Designs by Bryan Konietzko and Angela Mueller. Color by Hye Jung Kim. Below: Sketches Bryan did during the season-three writers' retreat.



The women and a small percentage of men from the Fire Nation's warrior class form the military branch known as the Domestic Forces. They have three main purposes: to defend the homeland from invasions, to train the Fire Lord's forces, and to police the Fire Nation. As a result, most of the Fire Lord's forces are trained by high-level female Firebenders. Designs by Seung Hyun Oh, Bryan Konietzko, and Angela Mueller. Props by Aldina Dias. Color by Hye Jung Kim.

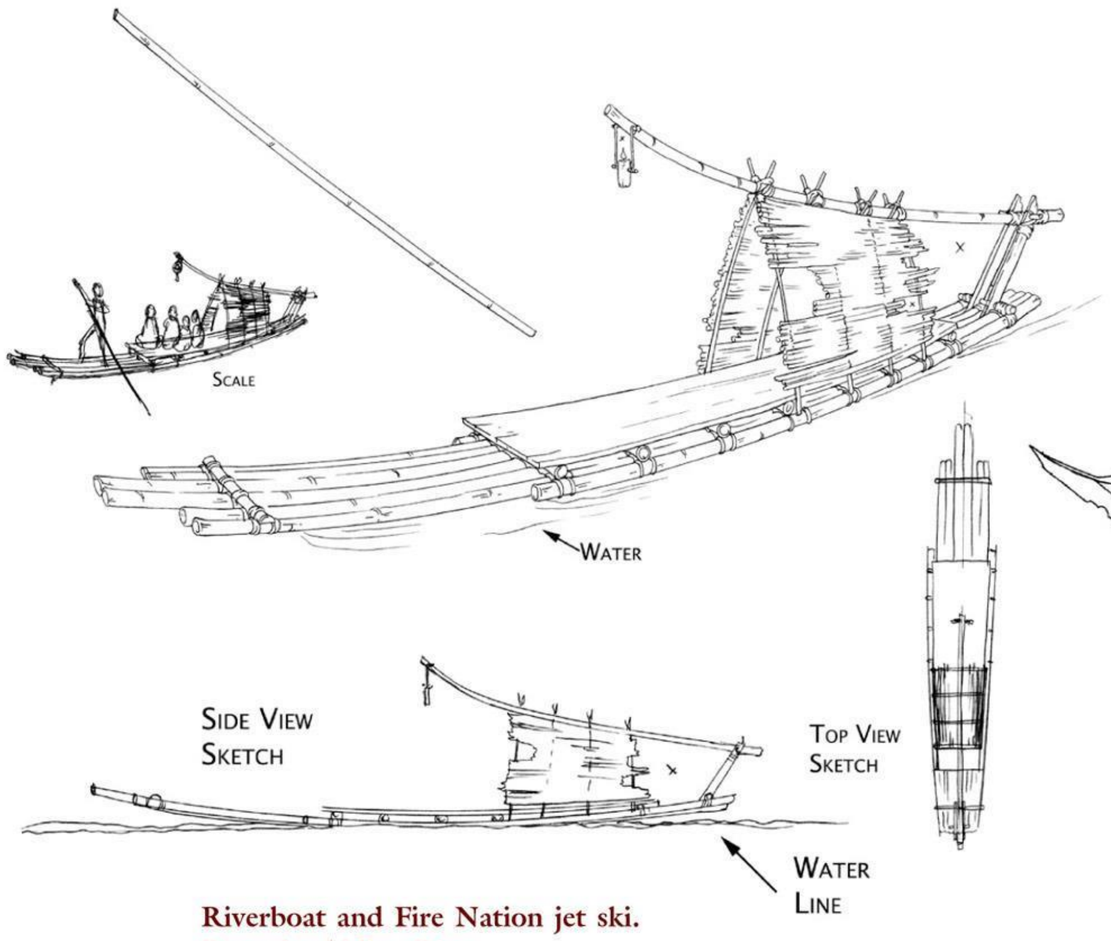
Here we see an example of the everyday citizens from different classes of the Fire Nation. Designs by Angela Mueller. Color by Hye Jung Kim.

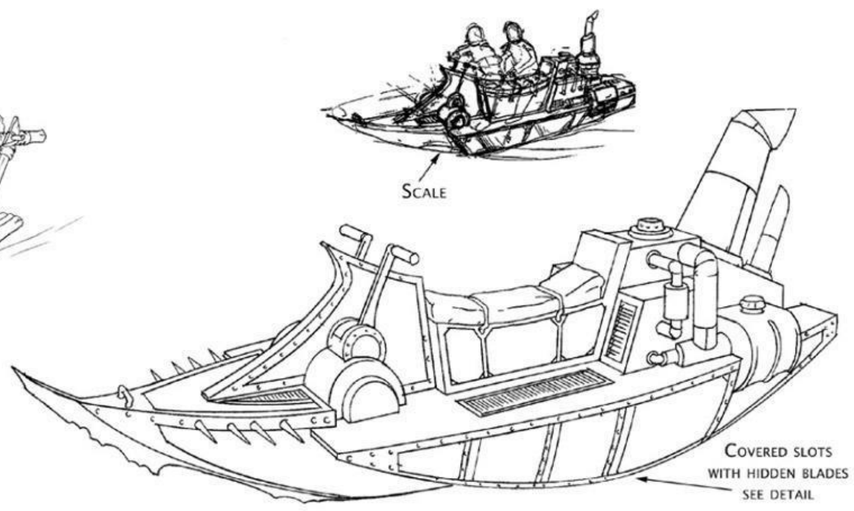
Aang's classmates are some of our favorite character designs from season three. Designs by Angela Mueller. Color by Hye Jung Kim.

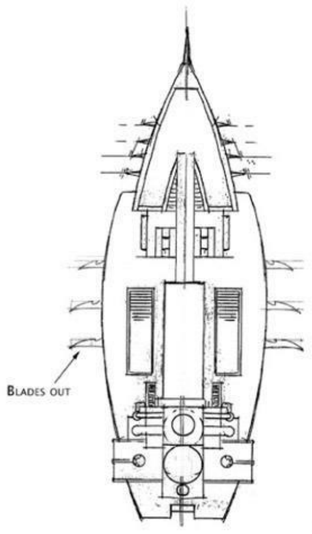


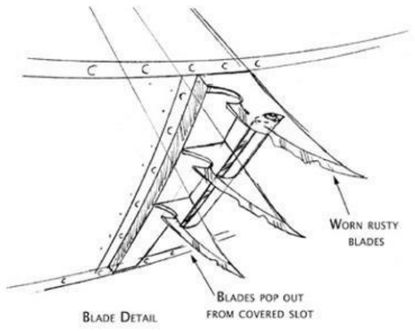
Royal Caldera City. The Fire Lord and the Fire Nation's upper class make their home in the crater of a dormant volcano. Background designs by Elsa Garagarza. Painting by Bryan Evans.

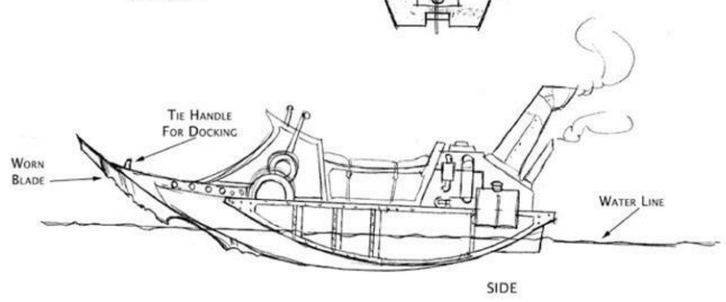
Katara assumed the guise of a local legend in order to save a struggling village. Concepts by Ethan Spaulding. Design by Jae Woo Kim. Color by Hye Jung Kim.











Riverboat and Fire Nation jet ski. Props by Aldina Dias.

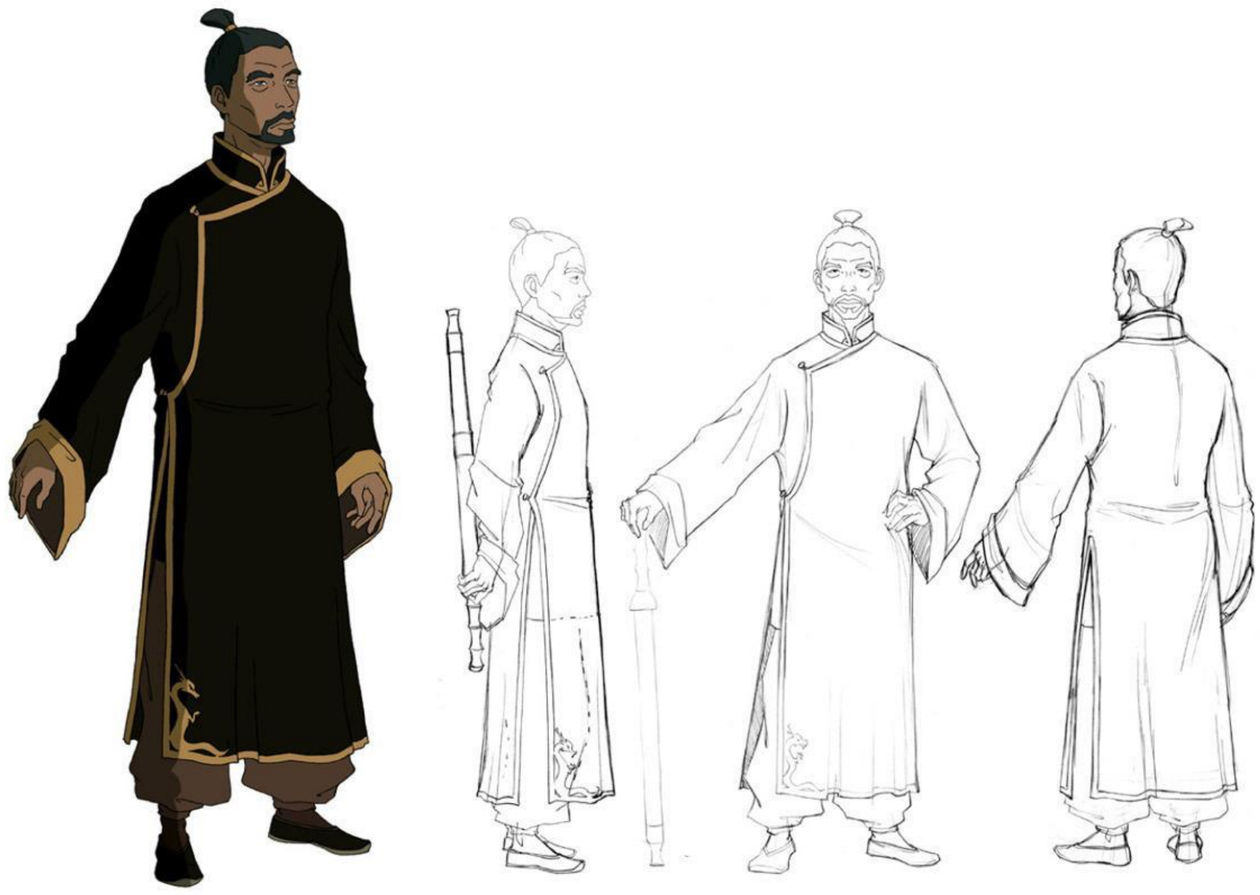
A lineup of the fishing-village denizens who suffered at the hands of the Fire Nation's polluting factory. Designs and Dock/Xu/Bushi expressions by Jae Woo Kim.

Fire Nation factory. Background designs by Enzo Baldi. Painting by Bryan Evans.
Below: Concept of river village by Ethan Spaulding.

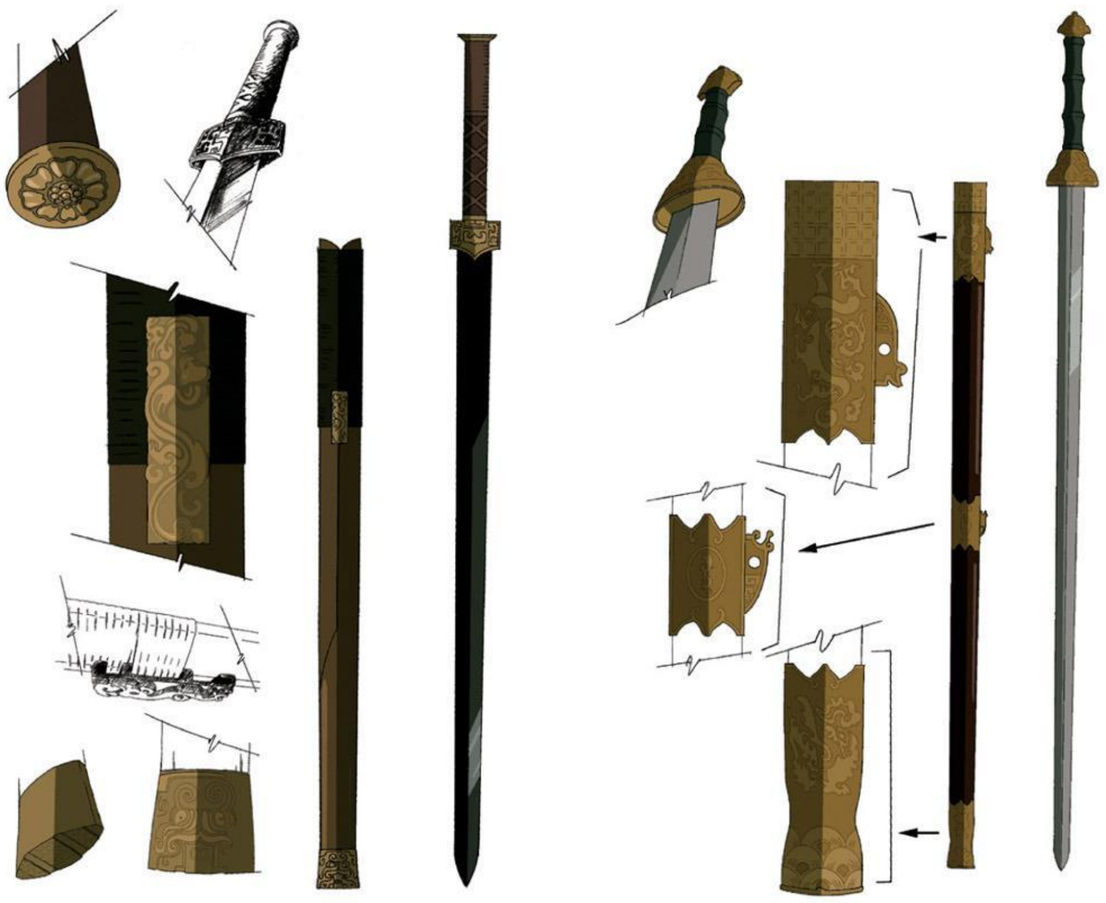
PIANDAO

MIKE: Many of our side characters, like June and the pirates, were modeled after friends we knew. We always wanted to model a character after Sifu Kisu, but it had to be just the right one. When the talented and wise swordsman Piandao was developed as a mentor for Sokka, Kisu perfectly fit the part.

BRYAN: We ended up using swords from Sifu Kisu's vast collection for the props in "Sokka's Master." They were ornate as far as TV animation props go, but I thought it was worth the extra effort to make these particular weapons look special.



Piandao is a great sword master and a secret member of the White Lotus Society. Designs by Bryan Konietzko and Angela Mueller. Color by Hye Jung Kim. Below: Sifu Kisu has such a dynamic personality that when it came to designing him, there was no shortage of inspiration. Concepts by Bryan Konietzko, Angela Mueller, and Seung Hyun Oh.



This joke and subsequent design were inspired by our frustrating experiences of working on the *Avatar* toy line and the incessant requests we received to put Aang in inappropriate armor. It also represents much of what we don't connect with in the bizarre world of anime. Aang armor and Sokka training outfit designs by Angela Mueller. Color by Hye Jung Kim.

Left: Sokka's "space sword" and Piandao's sword. Designs by Aldina Dias. Color by Hye Jung Kim.

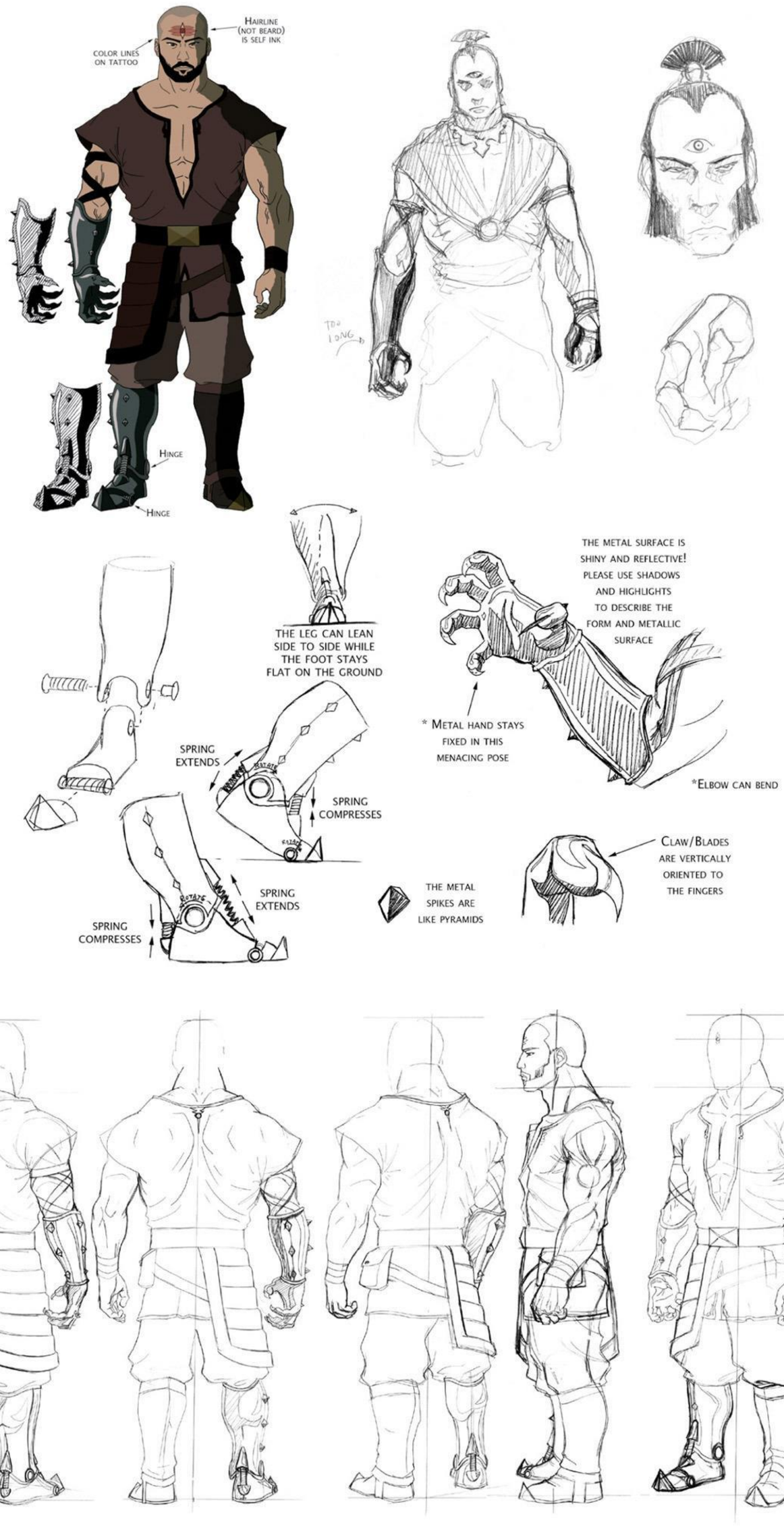
Piandao's breathtaking castle. Background design by Jevon Bue. Painting by Bryan Evans.

COMBUSTION MAN

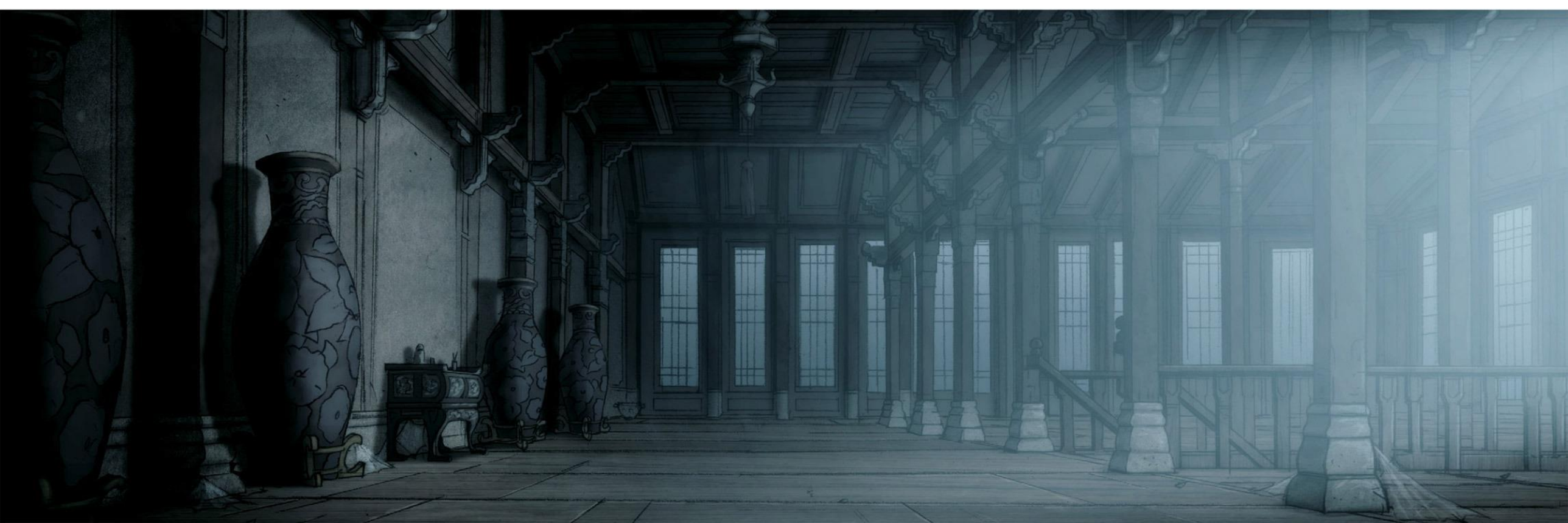
BRYAN: At the season-three writers' retreat, John O'Bryan pitched an idea about Firebenders combining their concentrated mental power to create nuclear explosions. My knee-jerk reaction was to say, "That's ridiculous!" Half a second later it led to another idea . . .

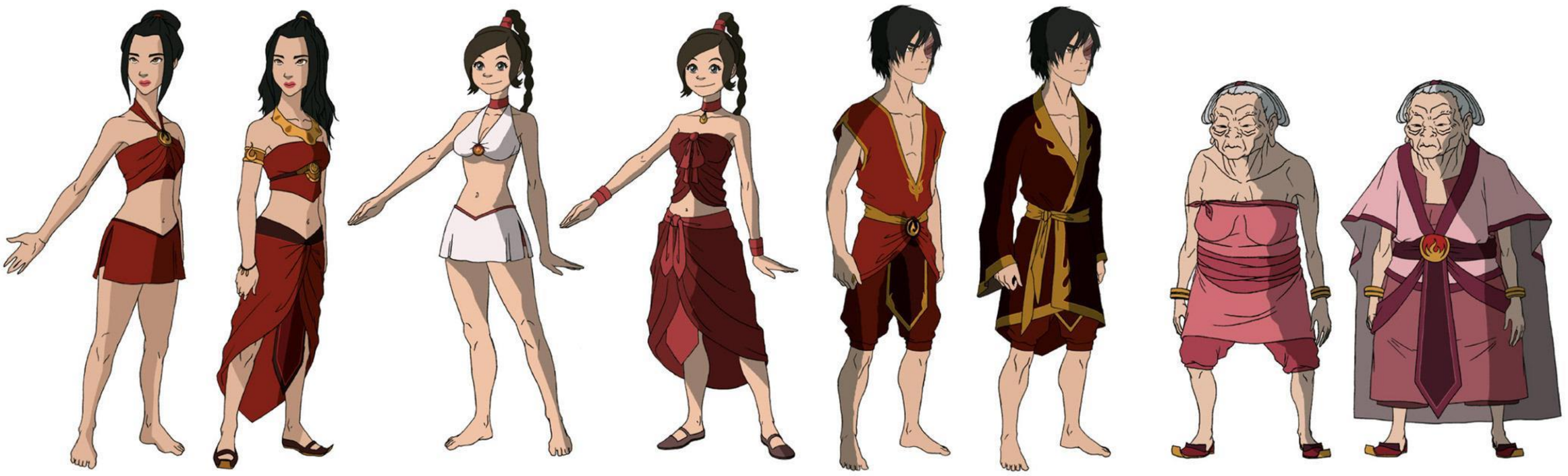
MIKE: ". . . A Firebender who blows things up with his mind!" Bryan's idea for an assassin that Zuko hires to kill Aang became a really cool villain in season three. My favorite detail in his design is the metal arm and leg, evidence that Combustion Man had a few setbacks while learning to master his unique Firebending abilities.

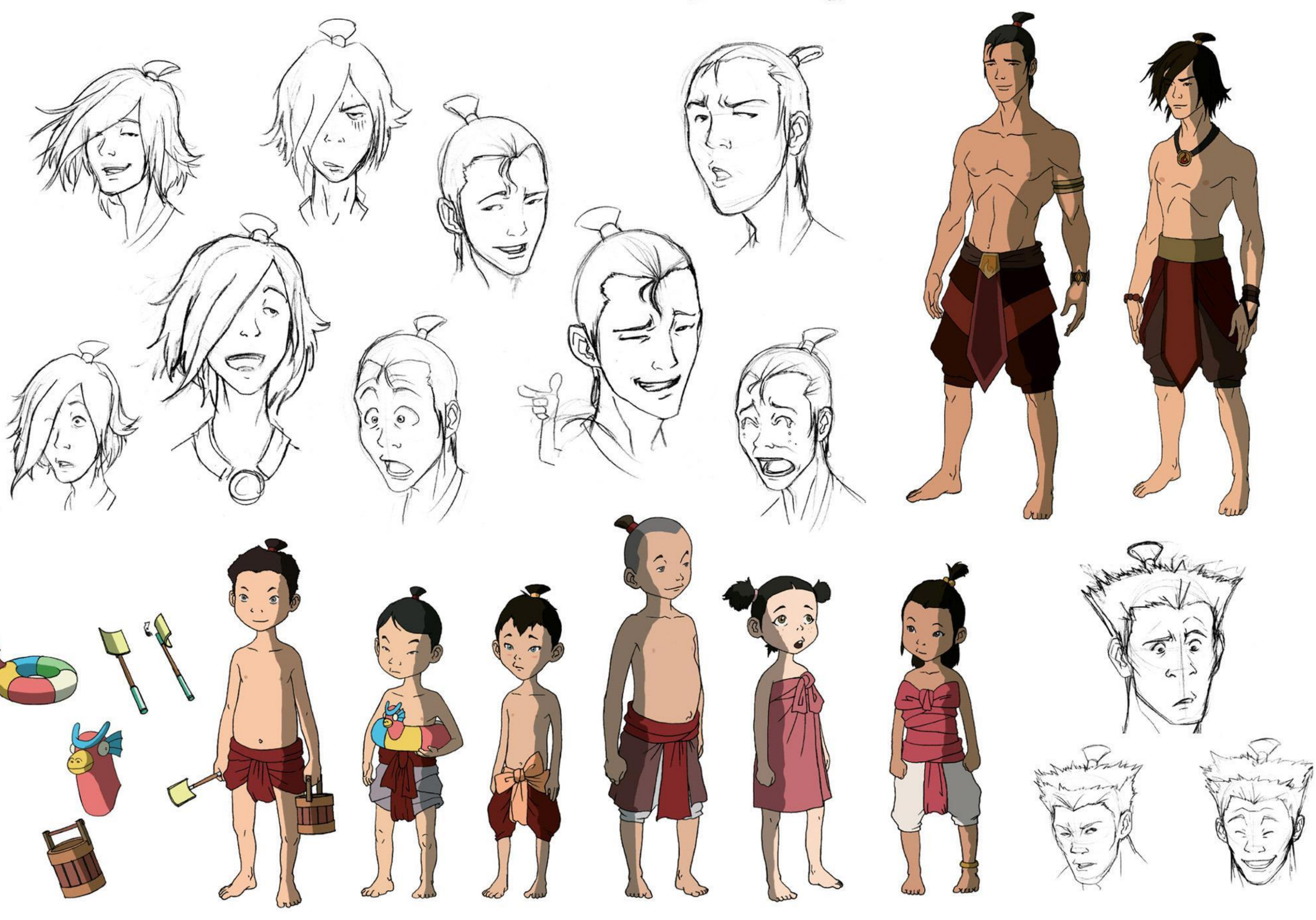
BRYAN: Combustion Man was a fun design, albeit a difficult one. I'm pretty scrawny, so my default is to design lots of scrawny people. I wanted Combustion Man to be the physical opposite of little, scrawny Aang: a towering, bulky, and imposing brute. I scoured the Internet for images of bodybuilders and shot reference photos of some of the bigger guys on the crew. Our director, Joaquim Dos Santos, was the hand model for the signature claw-like, prosthetic hand, and I used Rohner Segnitz from the post department as a head model. With the bald dome and tattoo (based on the Hindu god Shiva's destructive third eye), the assassin became something like the ultimate anti-Aang.



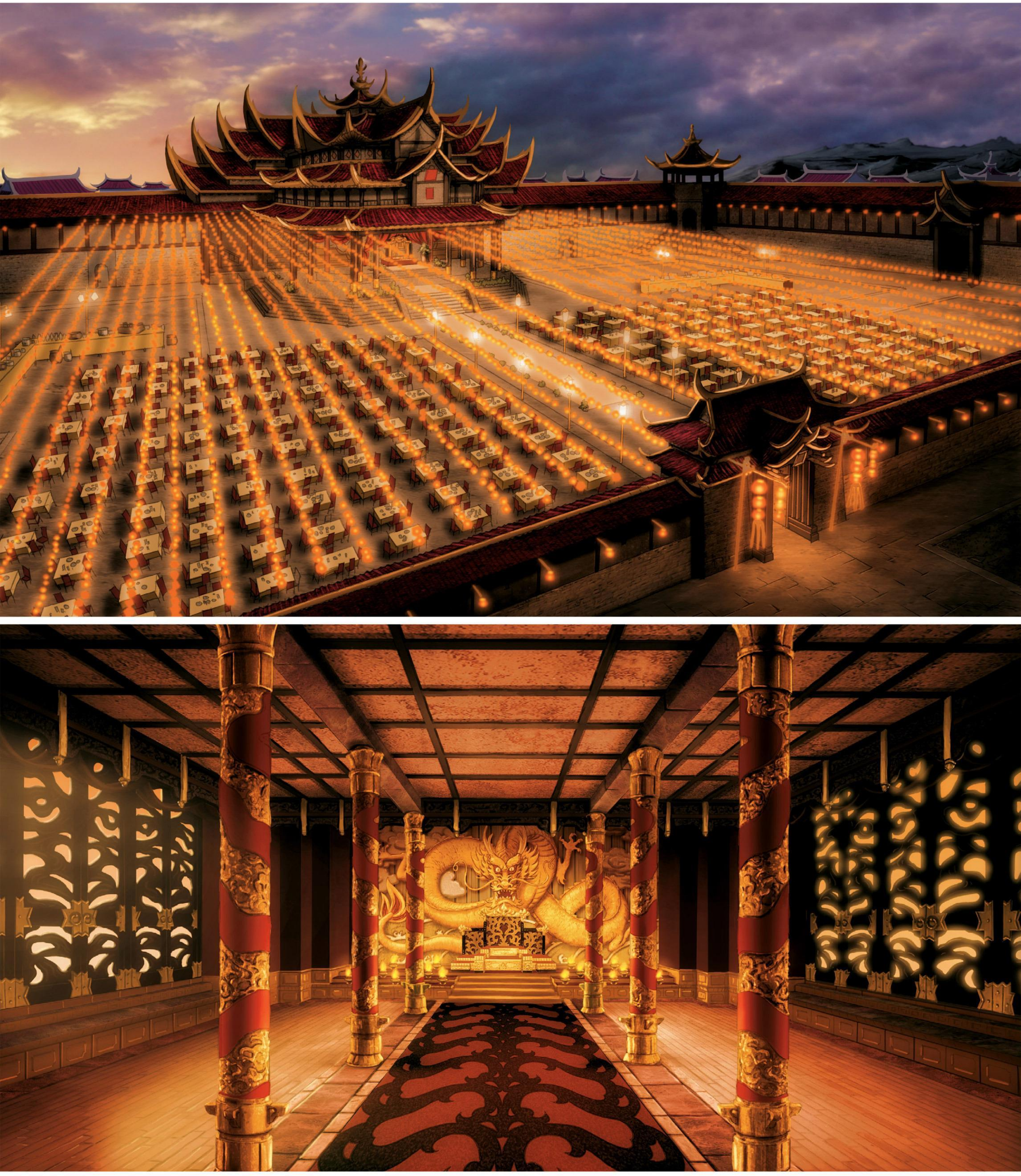
Combustion Man experienced many trials and errors when he discovered his unique style of Firebending (thus the prosthetic limbs). But once he mastered it, he gained a formidable reputation as an Agni Kai dueler. Designs and concepts by Bryan Konietzko. Color by Hye Jung Kim. Below: The subtle and moody interior hallway of the Fire Lord's summer home is one of our favorite paintings by Jean-Paul Bondy. Background design by Enzo Baldi.



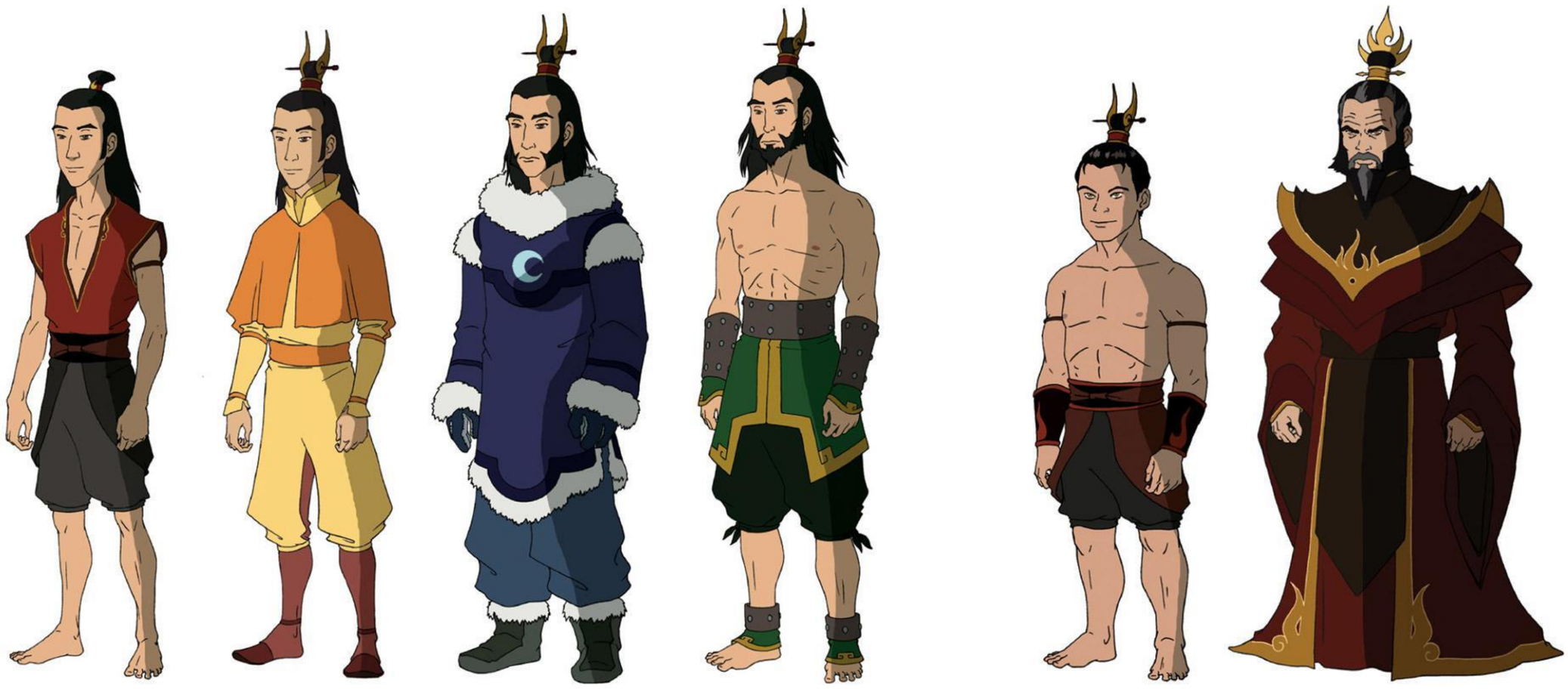




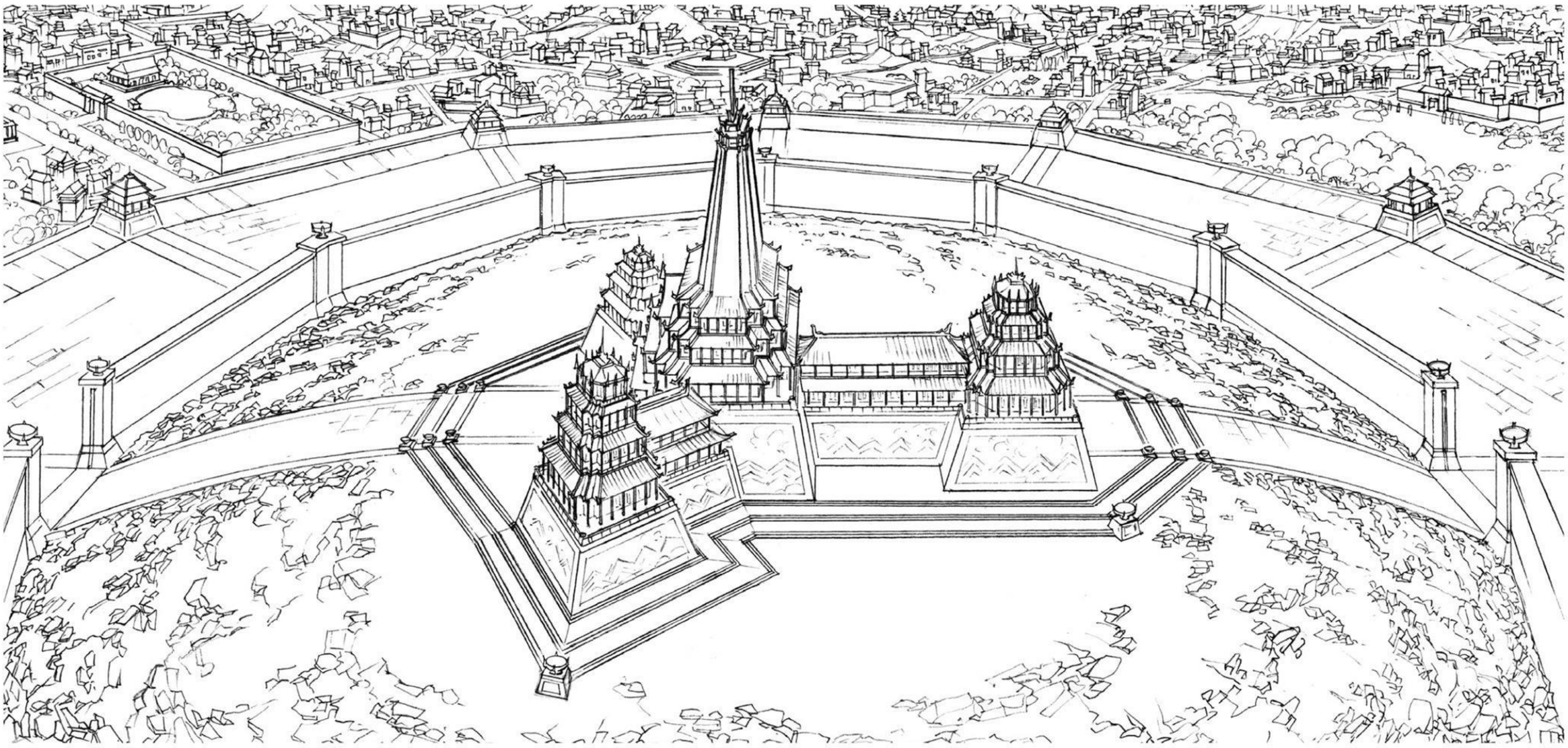
This episode was a chance for our Fire Nation characters to reveal themselves emotionally—and physically! Designs and expressions by Jae Woo Kim. Color by Hye Jung Kim. Below: The Fire Lord's summer home, the one place where Zuko had happy memories of his father. Background design by Bryan Konietzko and Elsa Garagarza. Painting by Bryan Evans.



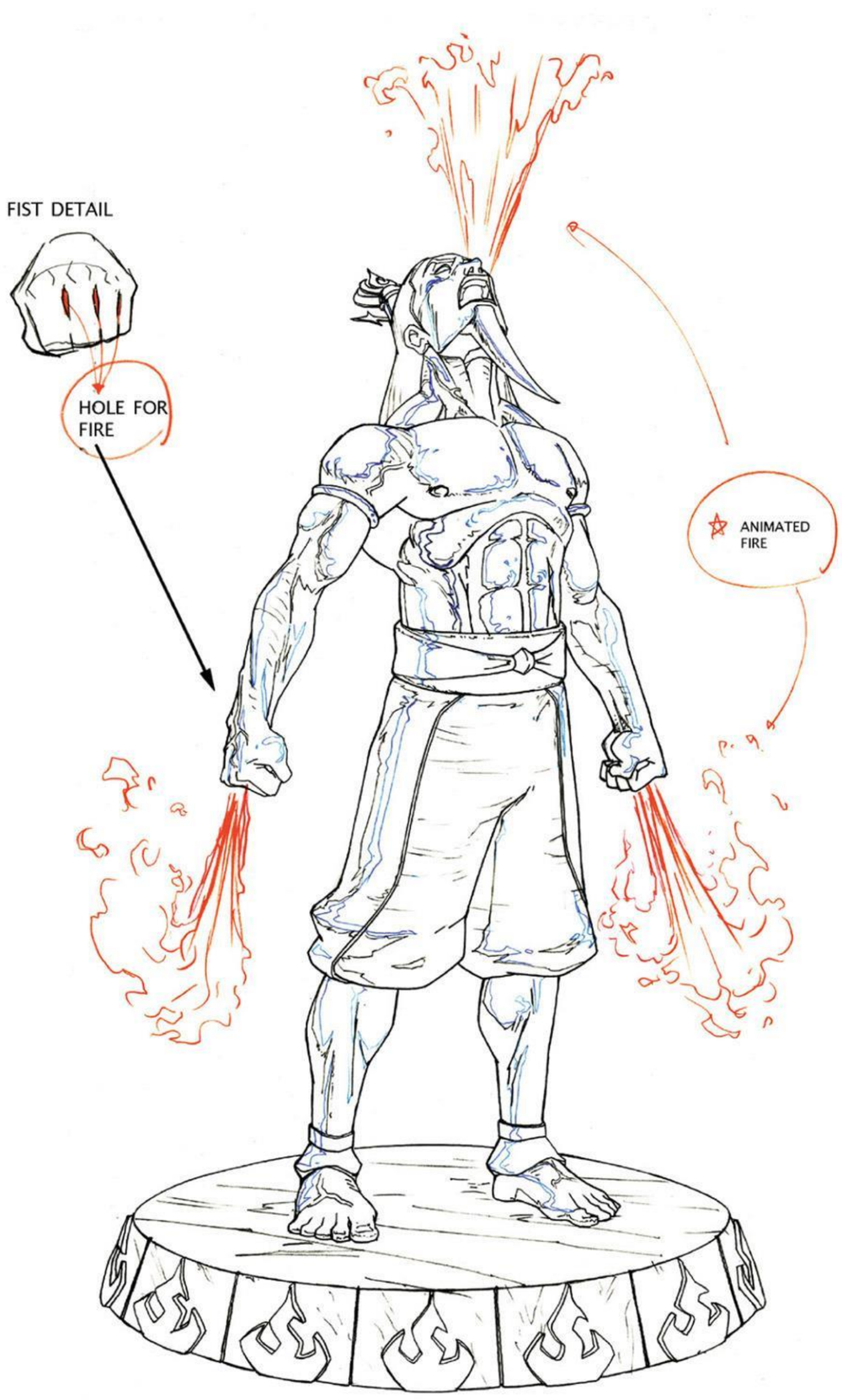
This episode was one of the most complex of the series. It had by far the most background designs of any episode. This ancient version of the throne room was a much more welcoming, light-filled space, as opposed to the dark and imposing place Sozin replaced it with. Wedding courtyard design by Jevon Bue. Fire Lord Sozin's throne room design by Elsa Garagarza. Paintings by Bryan Evans and Hye Jung Kim.



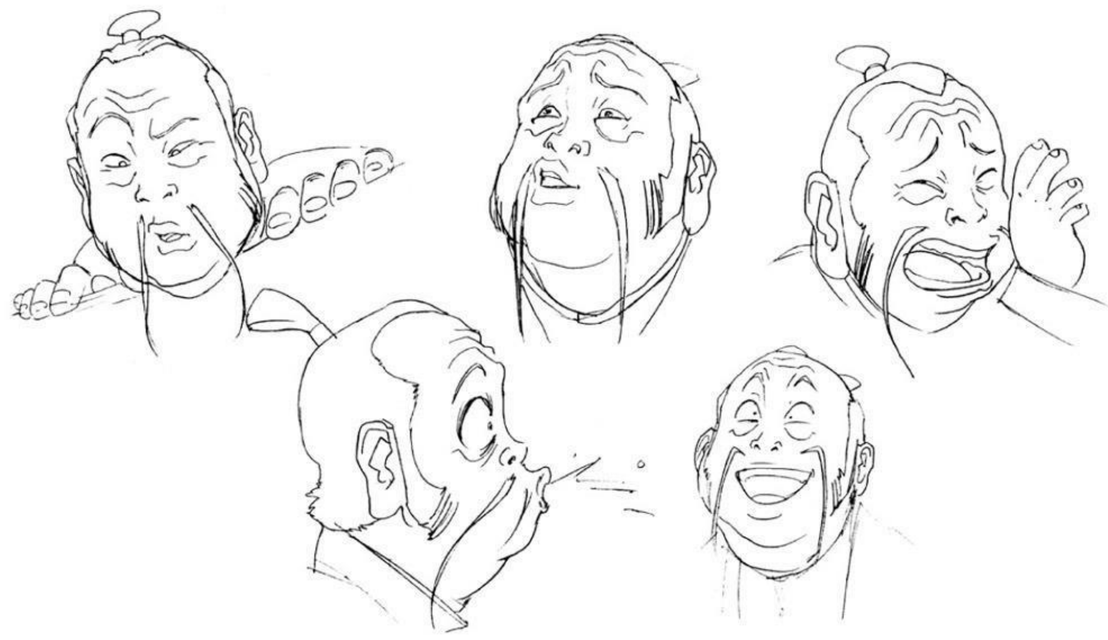
Another design challenge was depicting various characters at many different stages of their lives. Storywise, it was tremendously difficult to tell Roku's epic life story and Sozin's ultimate betrayal of him in twenty-two minutes. It was not the usual fare for kids' animated TV. Designs by Angela Mueller. Color by Hye Jung Kim.



These paintings, which depict the succession of the last five Fire Lords, hung in the palace hall. Since the first two weren't prominently featured, we never figured out names for them. The last three are Sozin, Azulon, and Ozai. Illustrations by Jae Woo Kim. Color by Hye Jung Kim and Jae Woo Kim. Middle of page: The Fire Lord's palace. Design by Elsa Garagarza.

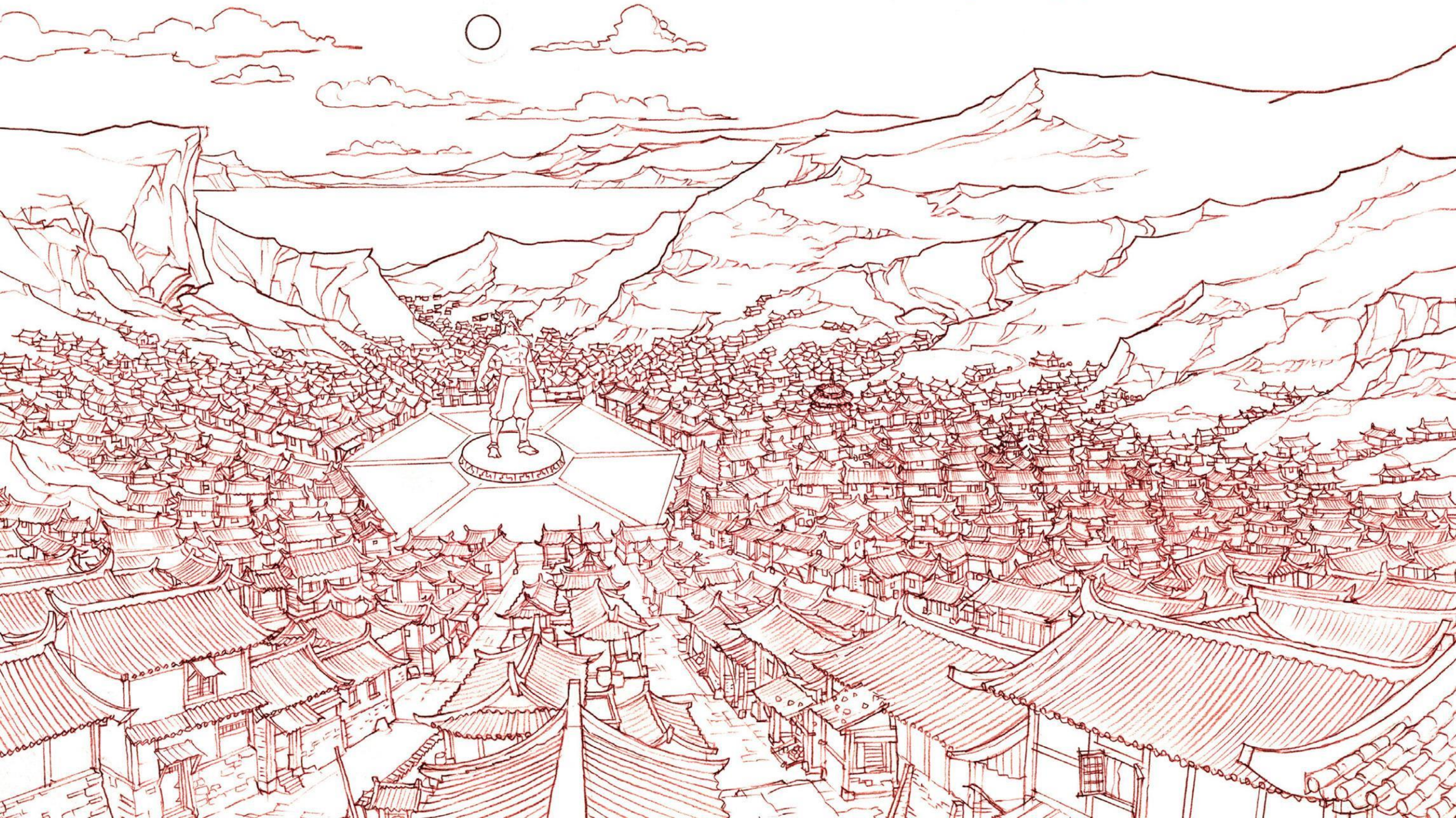


Above left: "MESSENGER BIRD TRAINING—Meet at the post office at sunrise. Three copper pieces per session." Above middle: An advertisement for the popular play *Love amongst the Dragons*, which Zuko's mother took him to see several times. Above right: "WANTED: THE RUNAWAY—Authorities are looking for information leading to the arrest of a twelve-year-old girl who pretends to be blind in order to take advantage of people and their money. Despite her small stature, this fugitive is considered VERY DANGEROUS. Reward for her capture: 1,000 gold pieces." Illustrations by Bryan Konietzko. Translation and calligraphy by S. L. Lee.



A prime example of Jae Woo Kim's design overkill. This character, known only as "Town Authority," had very little screen time, but these lively expression studies make him seem very interesting! Left: Fire fountain of Ozai in the center of an industrial town. Design by Seung Hyun Oh.

Below: Background design by Jevon Bue.



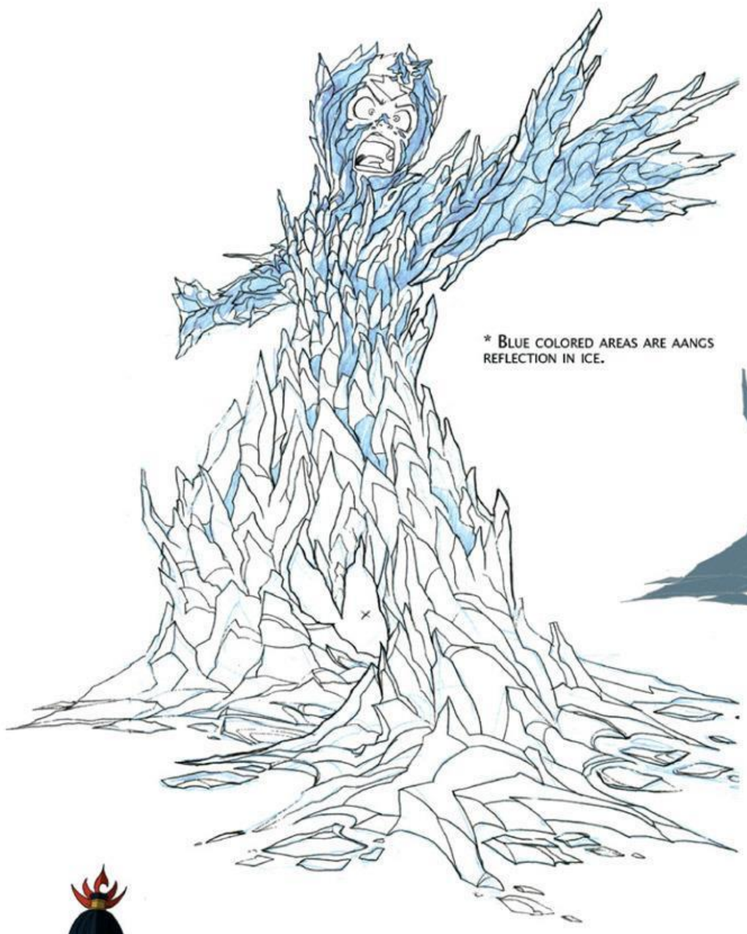
In the series bible, we wrote that the highest level of Waterbending is the ability to control the water in another person's body to move them like a puppet. It wasn't until this episode, however, that the writers found the perfect opportunity to explore this dark side of Waterbending, which they coined "Bloodbending."

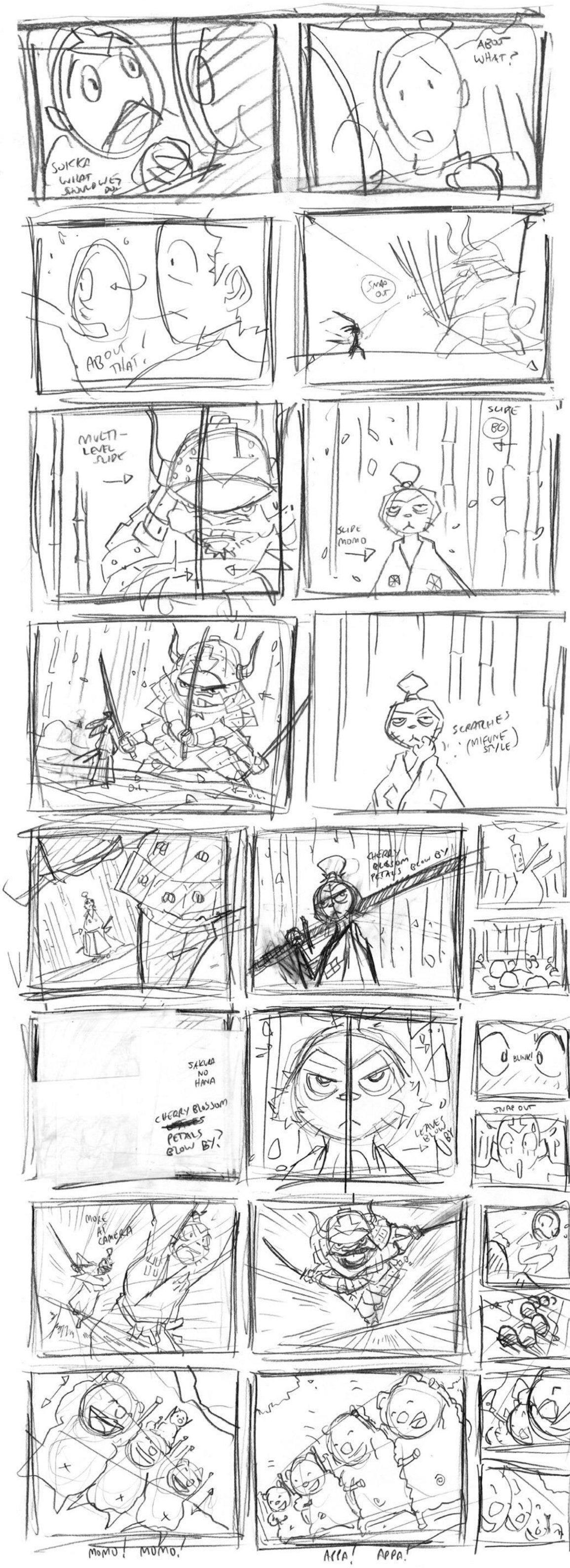
After having so many villains from the Fire Nation, it was fun to change it up and have one from the Water Tribe. The fact that Hama was once friends with Katara's grandmother, Kanna, illustrated a core philosophy of the series: people aren't good or evil, but are either in balance or out of balance. Concepts by Seung Hyun Oh, Ian Graham, and Angela Mueller.

Old and young Hama and young Kanna designs by Angela Mueller. Color by Hye Jung Kim.

The eerie mountain above Hama's village was based on Iceland's "Queen Mountain," Herðubreið. Background design by Jevon Bue. Painting by Bryan Evans.

As much as we always loved Ethan Spaulding's crazy ideas, sadly we sometimes had to rein them in to fit the style of the show. But with this episode, we had the chance to let his wild imagination run free. Nightmare Aang and Ozai concepts and designs by Ethan Spaulding. Cleanup, turnarounds, and "Aang in ice" by Jae Woo Kim. Color by Hye Jung Kim.





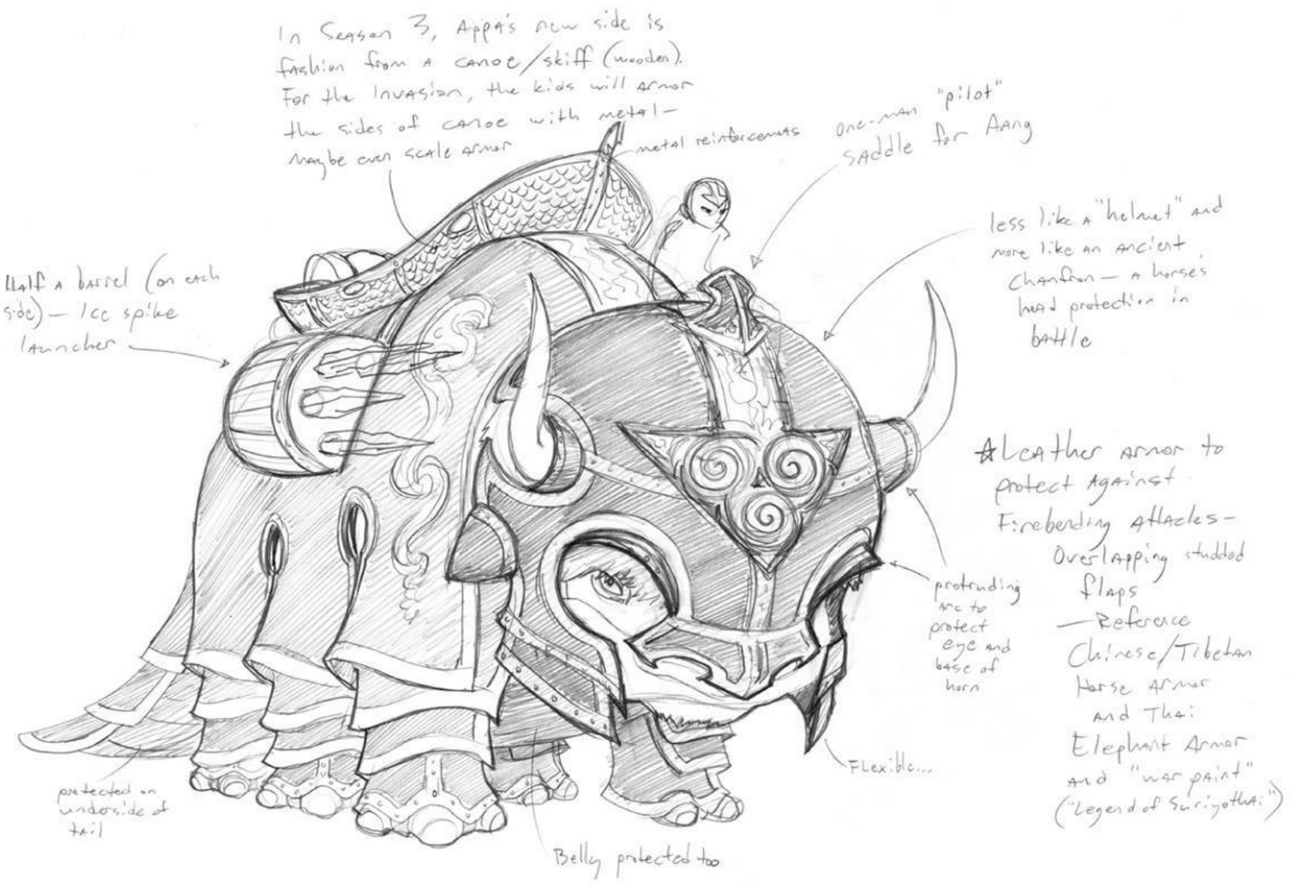
Momo Yojimbo. Ethan (our resident anime and manga expert) used the comic-book character Miyamoto Usagi as the inspiration for these Momo concepts. Concepts by Ethan Spaulding. Design by Jae Woo Kim. Color by Hye Jung Kim.

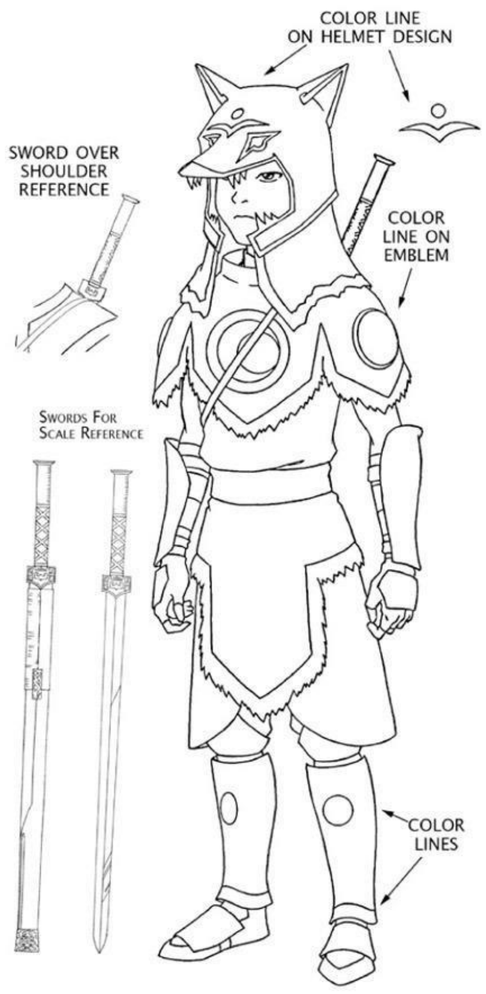
Left: Momo and Appa square off in a dramatic samurai battle. Storyboard thumbnail drawings by Ethan Spaulding.

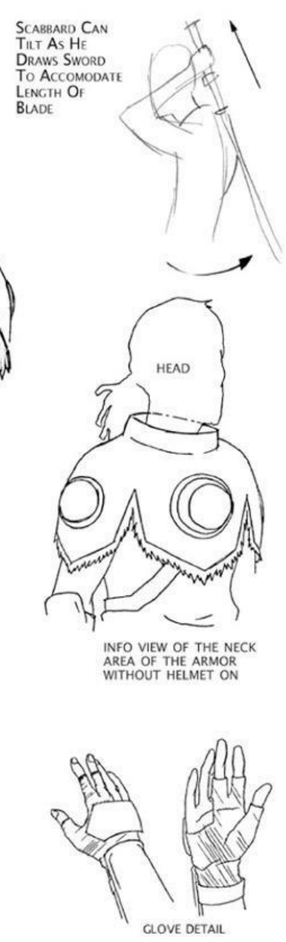
Dee Bradley Baker used his amazing vocal skills to breathe life into Appa and Momo throughout the series. When it came to voicing them with actual dialogue in this surreal sequence, Dee translated Momo's chitters and Appa's groans into humorous human voices. Designs by Jae Woo Kim, based on concepts by Ethan Spaulding. Color by Hye Jung Kim.

THE DAY OF BLACK SUN

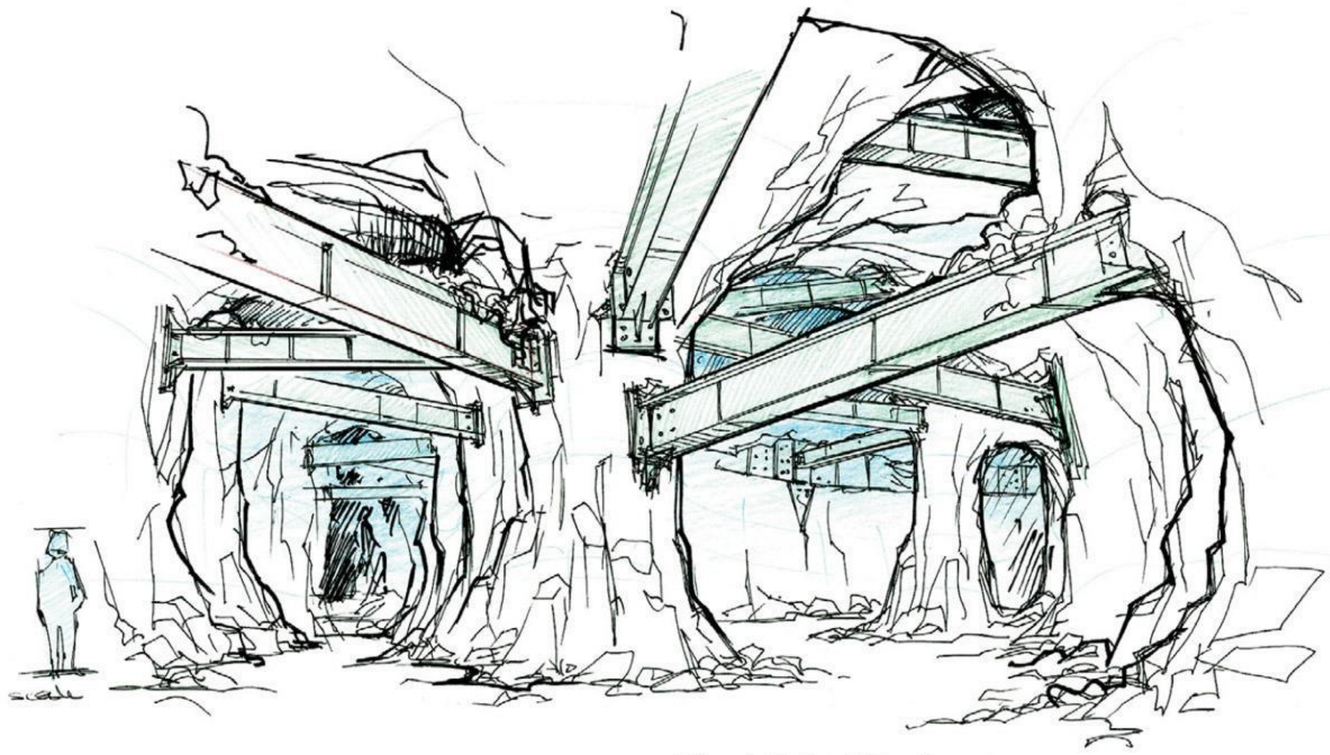
BRYAN: In the middle of the season, the kids come out of hiding and lead a daring invasion. This gave us the opportunity to return them to their iconic looks while updating them with a heroic flair. The armor for Appa and Sokka and the Water Tribe men came from unused toy-idea submissions I did for the consumer products department. Aang's asymmetrical outfit for the end of the series was inspired by Shaolin monk garb. I wanted him to look like a simple, humble warrior-monk like the great performers in *Shaolin: Wheel of Life*—vulnerable but strong.





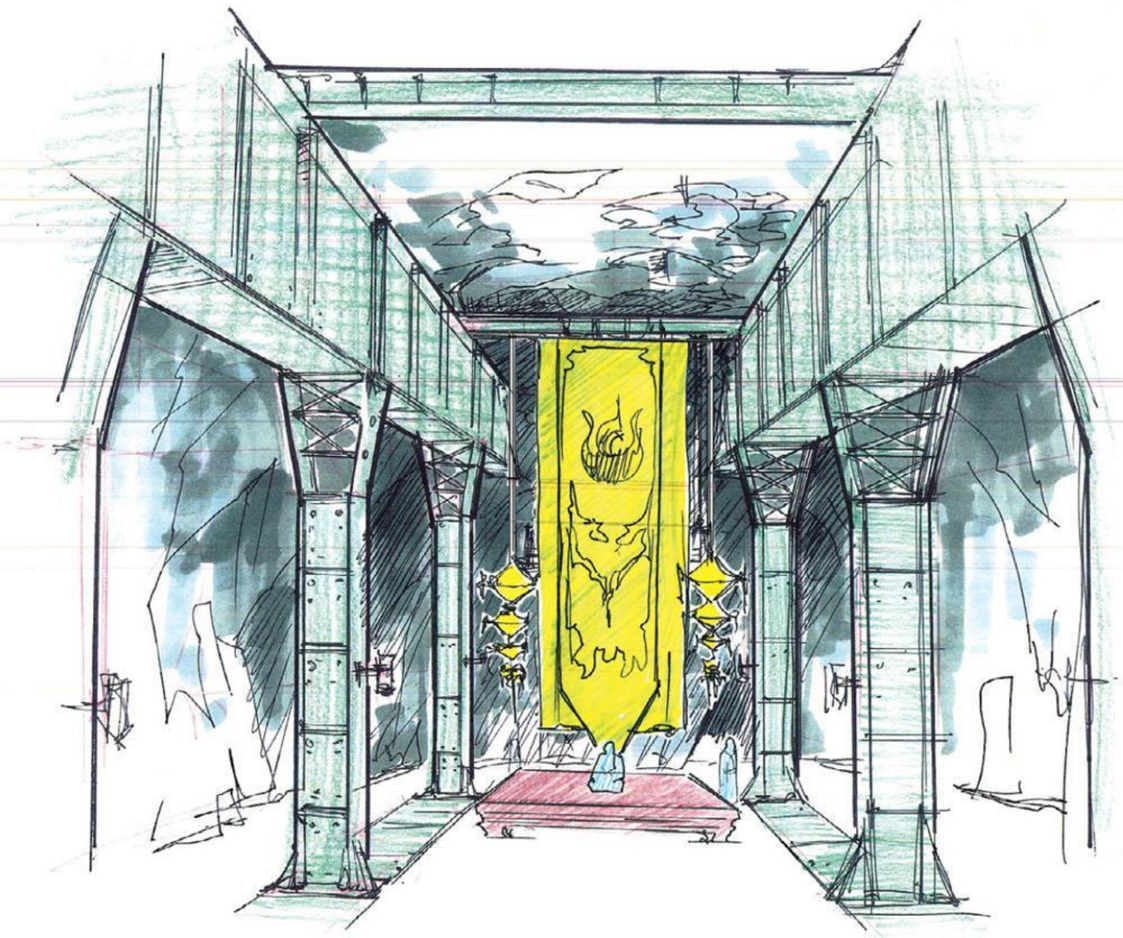


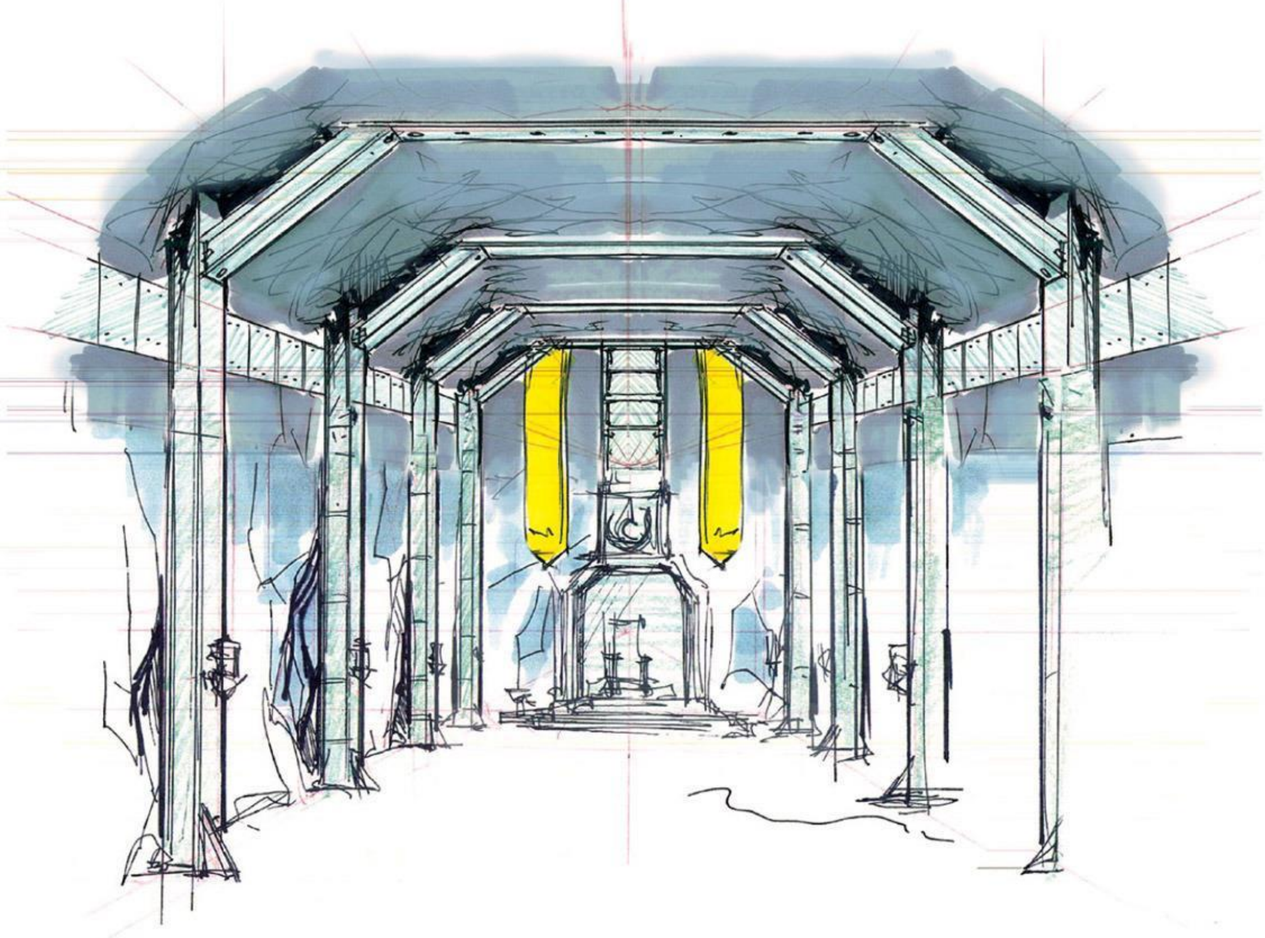
Concepts by Bryan Konietzko. Designs by Angela Mueller and Jae Woo Kim. Color by Hye Jung Kim.

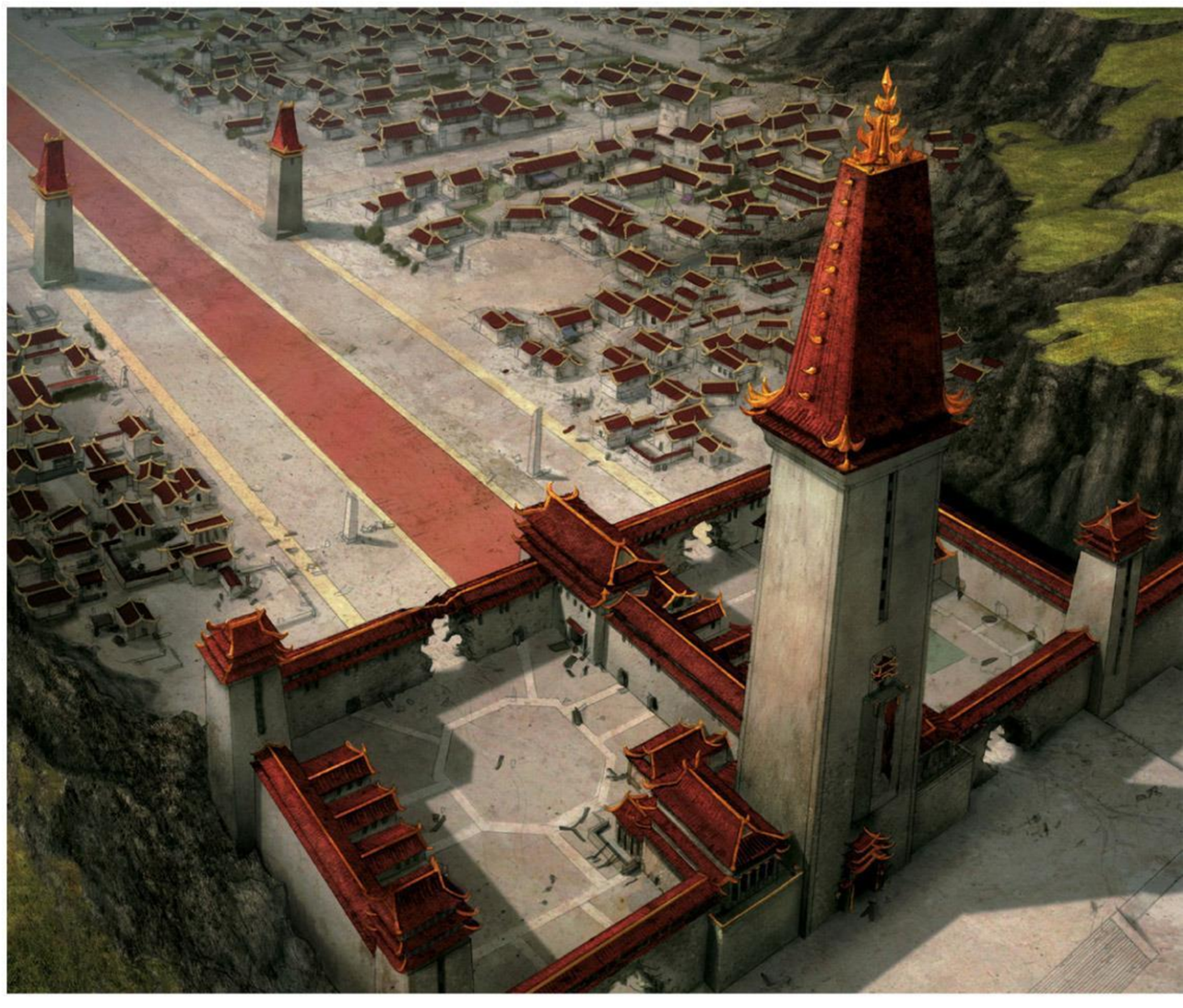


311- INT BUNKER Passageways

311 - INT BUNKER Passageway







Top and middle of page: Fire Lord's hidden bunker deep within dormant lava tubes. Concepts by Elsa Garagarza. Directly above, left: Background design by Jevon Bue. Banner by Aldina Dias. Painting by Hye Jung Kim and Ann Kim. Directly above, right: Capital City gateway. Background design by Jevon Bue. Painting by Bryan Evans.

Top: The Fire Nation created their fleet airships after finding the Mechanist's war balloon in "The Northern Air Temple." We had the idea for the airships during bible development. Middle of page: Waterbending-powered submarines. Directly above: The Earthbender-powered tanks were inspired by one of Leonardo da Vinci's tank designs. All designs by Aldina Dias and Bryan Konietzko.

DIAL:

ACTION:
HE PULLS HIMSELF UP.

DIAL:

ACTION:
AND LOOKS UP IN SURPRISE AS...

DIAL:

ACTION:
OTS SOKKA AS AZULA IS LAUNCHED DIRECTLY TWD HIM.

DIAL:

ACTION:
SOKKA REACTS BACK AS AZULA GROWS CLOSER.

DIAL:

ACTION:
(SLOW MOTION)
PROFILE AS SOKKA DODGES BACK INTO (SU)

DIAL:

ACTION:
AZULA PASSES OVERHEAD. SHE SMILES DOWN TWD SOKKA JUST INCHES AWAY.

DIAL:

ACTION:
SOKKA WATCHES AS SHE PASSES OVERHEAD.

DIAL:

ACTION:
CUT WIDE OPPOSITE SIDE OF ROCK WALL.

DIAL:

ACTION:
- SHE ROLLS (OS)

DIAL:

ACTION:
- CUT CLOSER ON AZULA AS SHE ROLLS AWAY FROM CAM.

DIAL:

ACTION:
- COMES OUT OF TUMBLE/ROLL

DIAL:
DX DUST

ACTION:
RISES TO HER FEET

DIAL:

ACTION:
— AND SPRINTS AWAY FROM CAM.

DIAL:

ACTION:
(CONT) -

H.U.

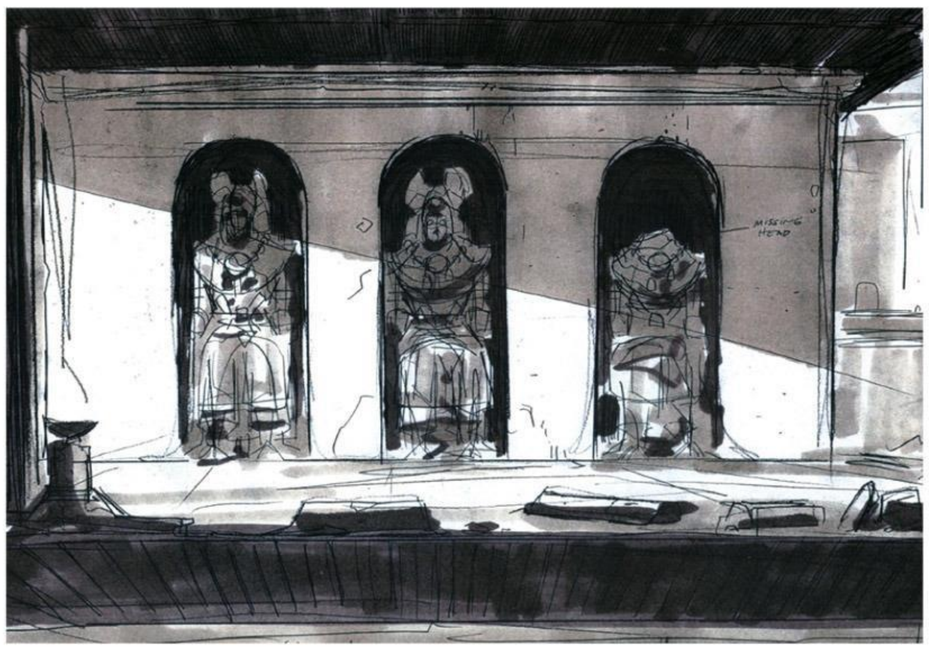
DIAL:
H.U.

ACTION:
OTS ON SOKKA AS HE LOOKS ON

DIAL:

ACTION:
BEGINS TO CLIMB DOWN.

Parkour! Storyboard by Joaquim Dos Santos.

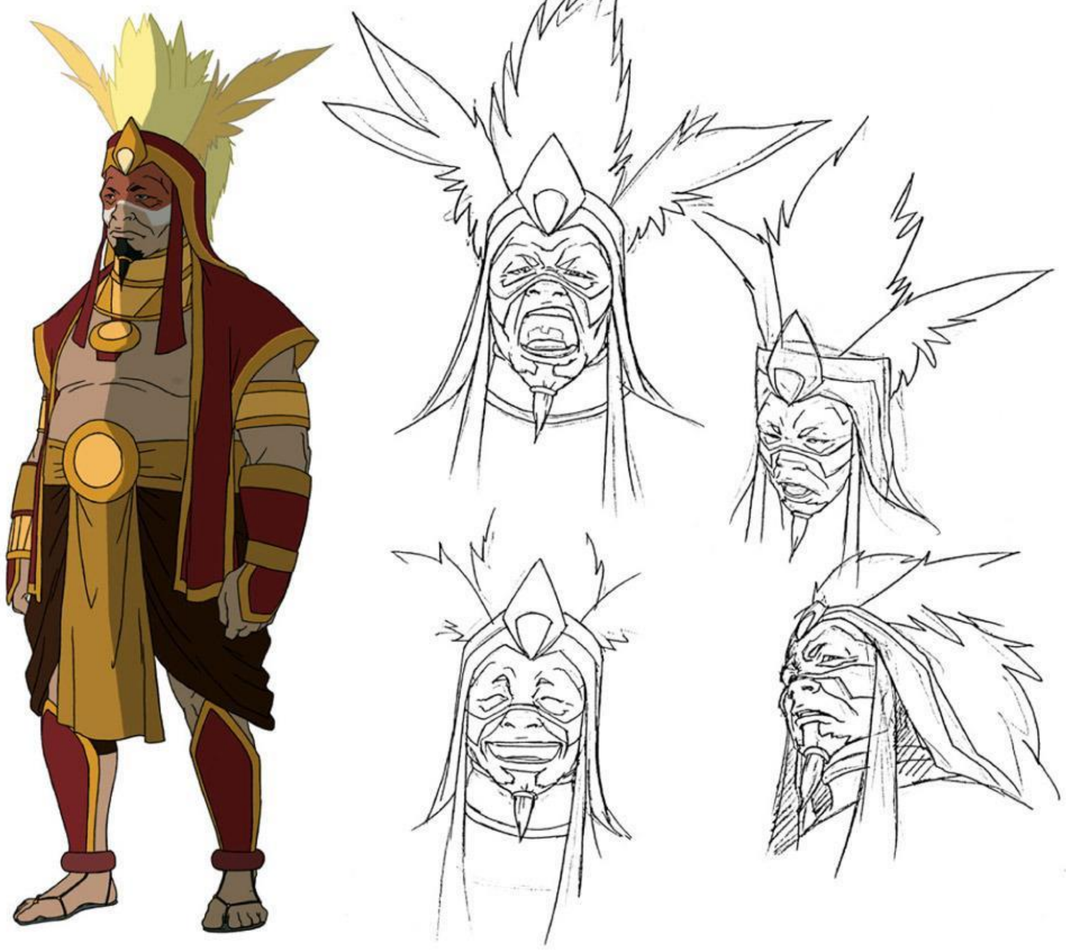


Ruins of Airbender nun statues. Concept by Ethan Spaulding.

Flying bison mural. Design by Elsa Garagarza. Painting by Bryan Evans.

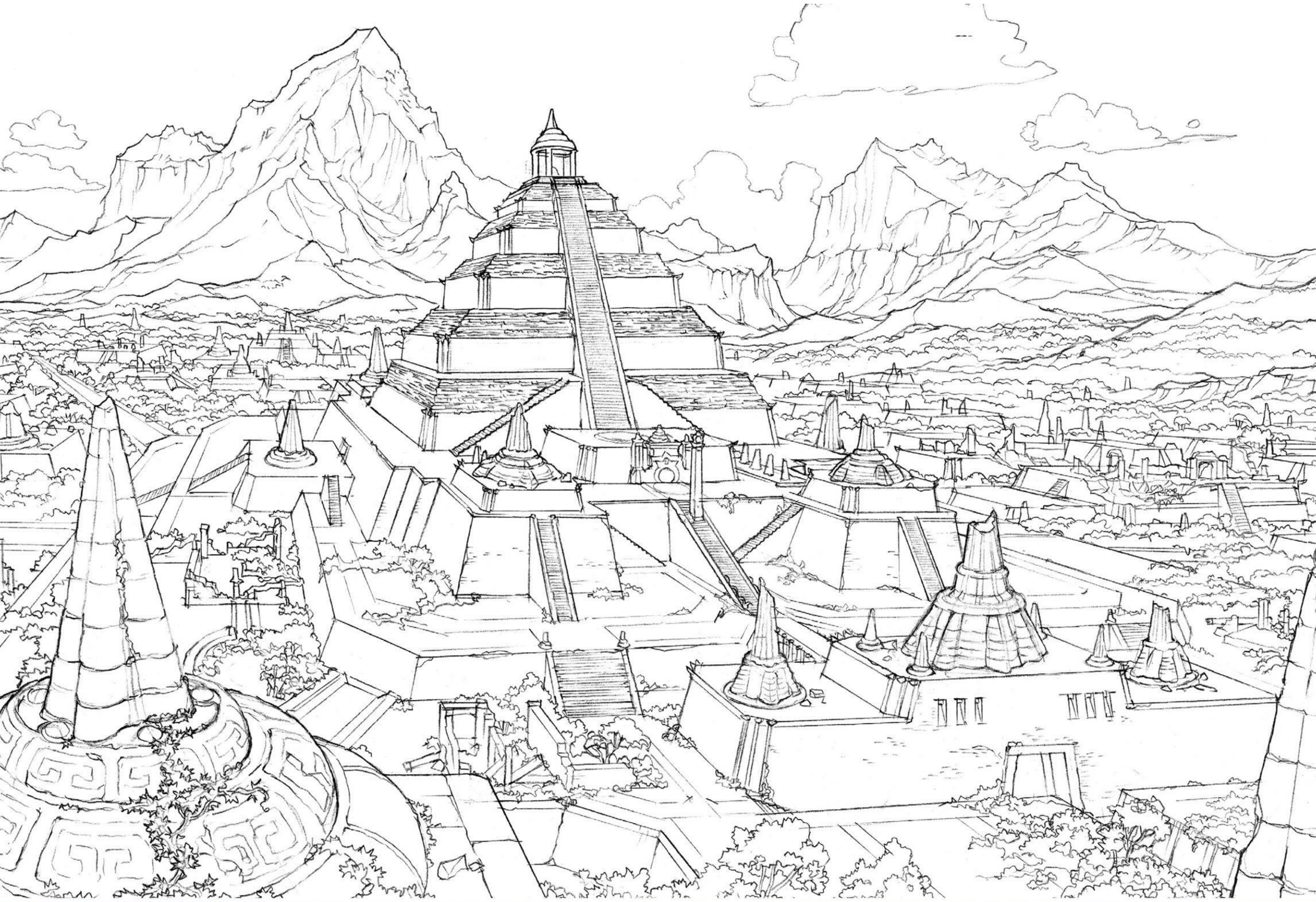
For the Western Air Temple, the designers referenced the roof styles of Bhutanese monasteries. In order to make this Air Temple location unique from the others, but equally as difficult to access, Bryan had the idea that the temples hung upside down from the cliffs. Background designs by Hyun Cheol Jung. Paintings by Kang Seung Chan.

Dragons were the original Firebenders, but after being hunted by Firebenders for years, Ran and Shaw are the last two left in the world. Designs by Jae Woo Kim. Color by Hye Jung Kim.

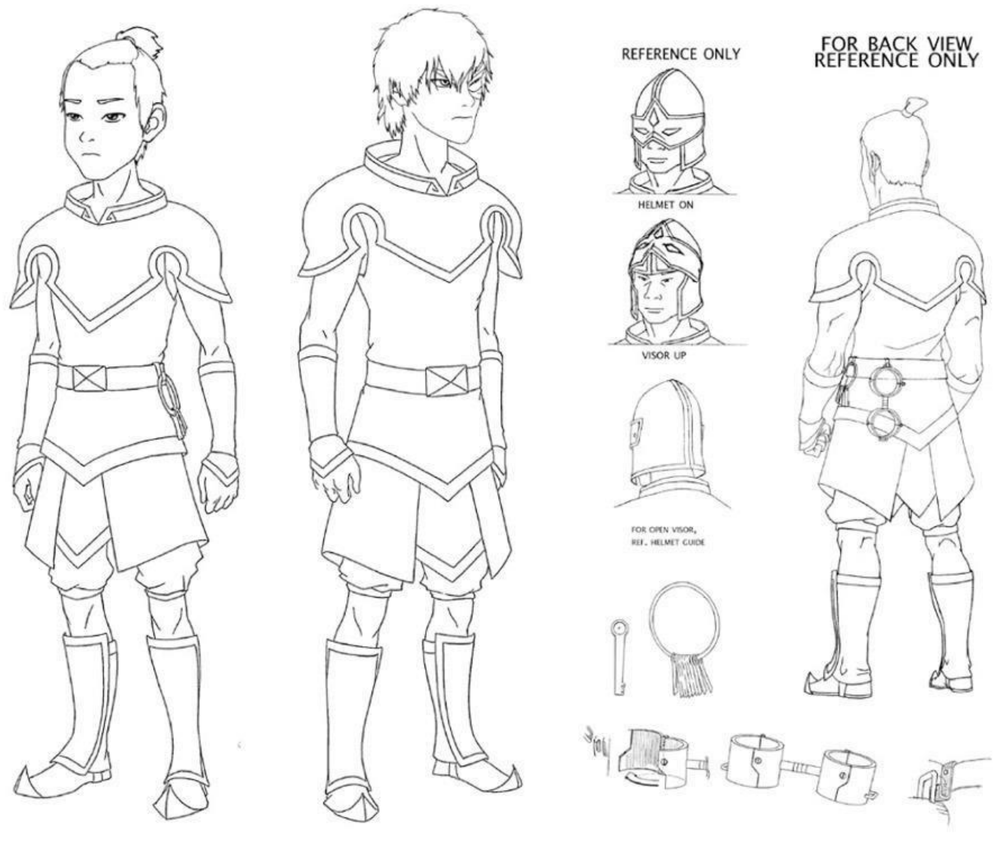


Sun Warrior Chief. Design and expressions by Jae Woo Kim. Color by Hye Jung Kim.

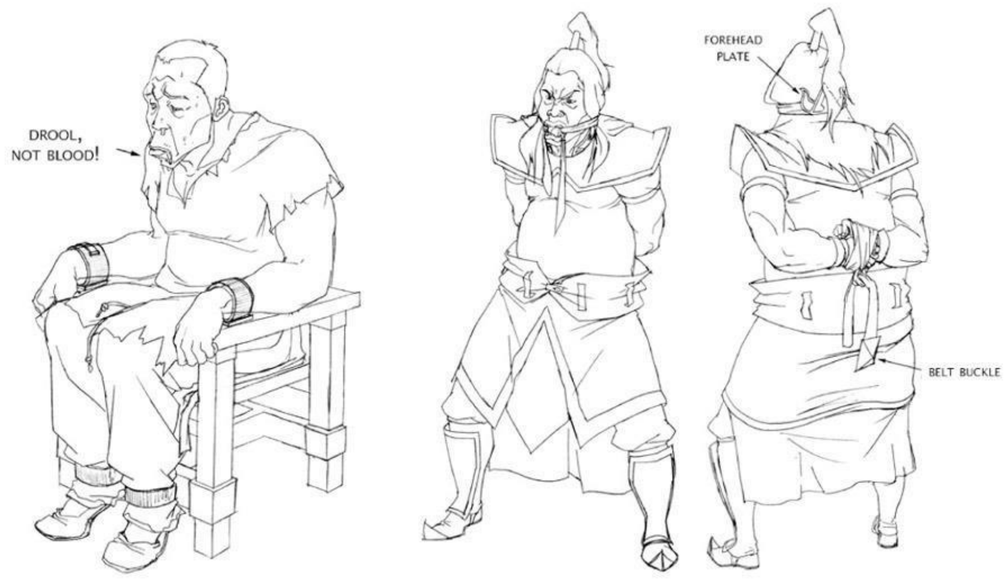
The altar of the Firebending masters. Background designs by Enzo Baldi. Paintings by Bryan Evans. Middle of page: Sun Warrior relief sculpture. Background design by Jevon Bue. Painting by Bryan Evans.



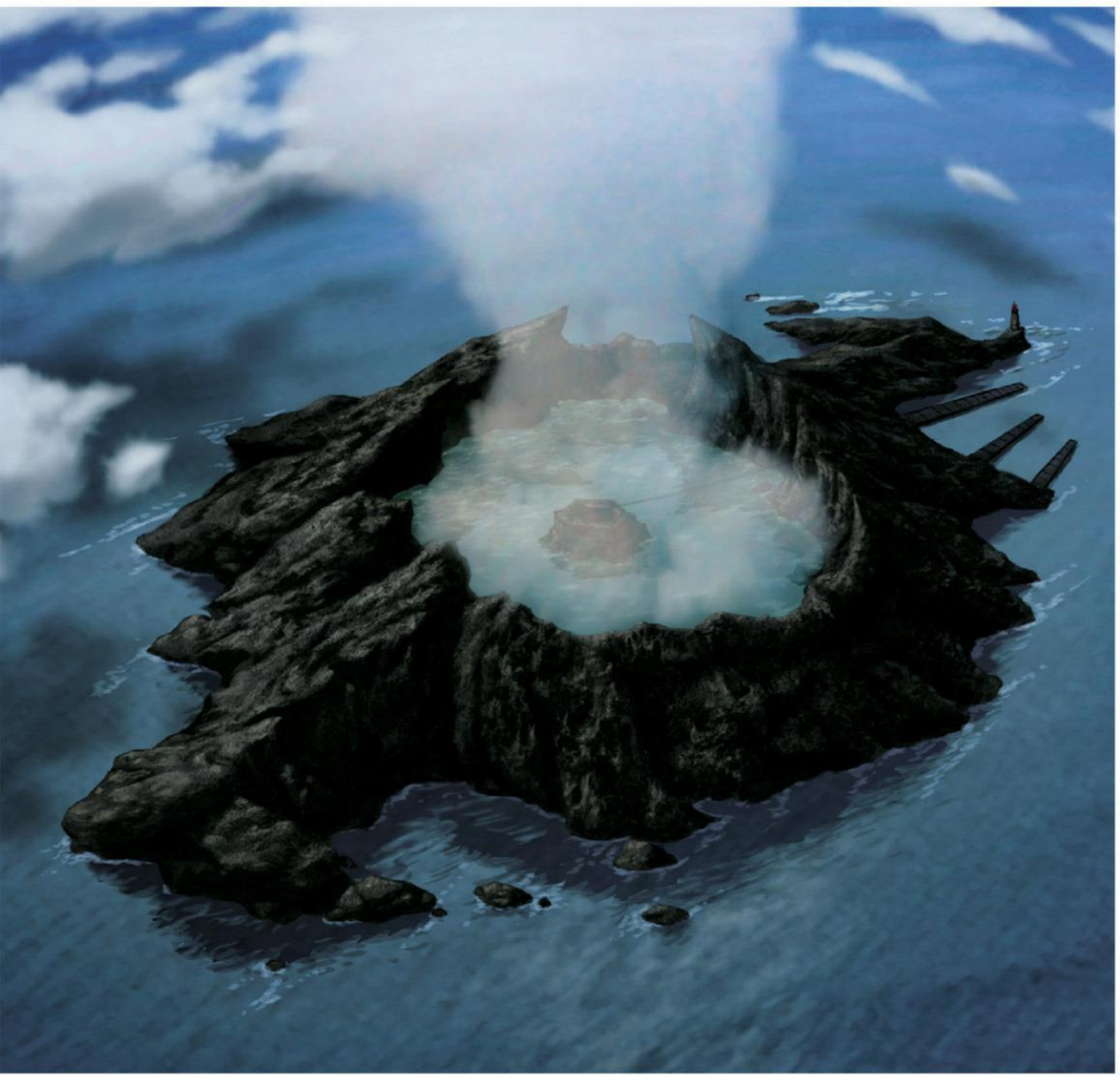
The Sun Warriors were descendants of the most ancient Firebending culture. The designers looked at Mayan ruins for inspiration. Background designs by Jevon Bue (top) and Elsa Garagarza (bottom). Painting by Bryan Evans.



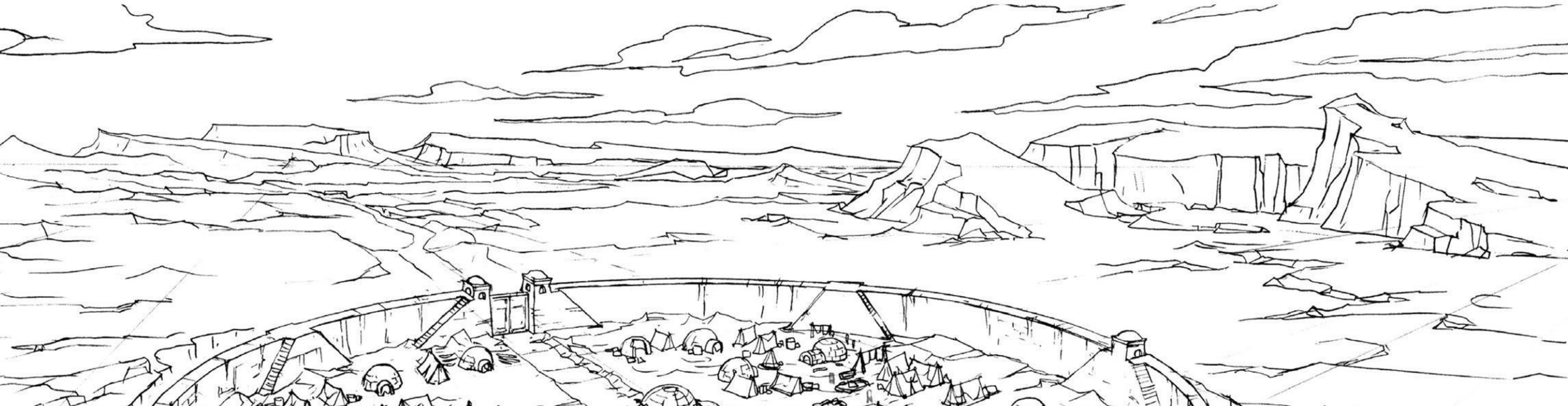
Sokka and Zuko don prison-guard outfits to infiltrate the Boiling Rock. This really reminded us of Han and Luke disguised in stormtrooper outfits. Designs by Jae Woo Kim.



Seung Hyun Oh and Jae Myung Yu make another cameo appearance, this time as the warden of the Boiling Rock and prisoner Chit Sang, respectively. Designs and expressions by Jae Woo Kim. Color by Hye Jung Kim.



The Alcatraz-inspired Boiling Rock sits within a steaming volcanic vent. Background designs by Hong Seung Hyun (left) and Kim Tae Il (right). Paintings by Bryan Evans.

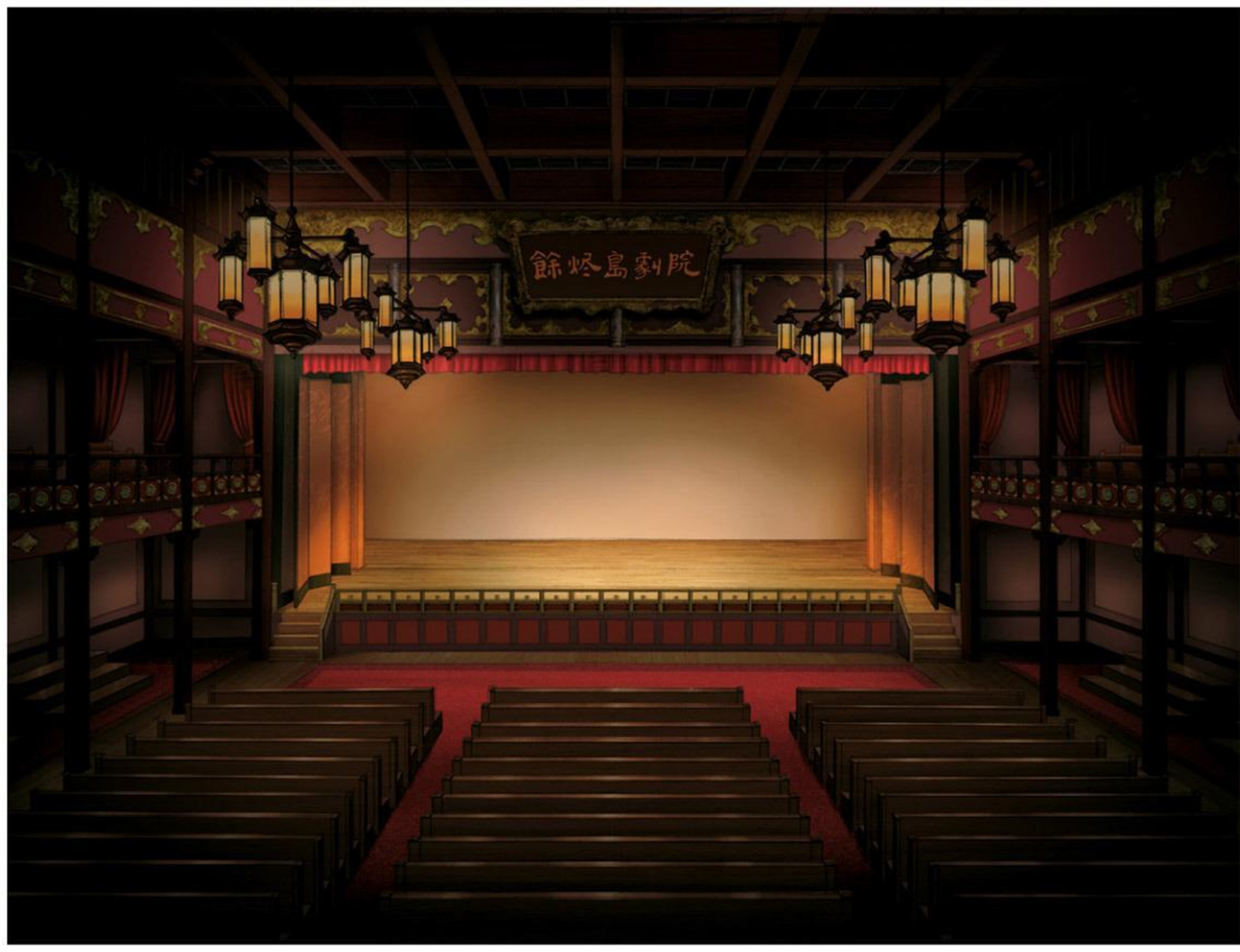


Katara and Sokka's village, before it was leveled by Fire Nation raids. Background design by Elsa Garagarza. Top: As we reached the end of the series, we really wanted to deal with Katara's feelings about the death of her mother at the hands of the Fire Nation. This was one of our darkest and most serious episodes. Character designs by Jae Woo Kim. Color by Hye Jung Kim.

Even though Katara didn't fully trust Zuko at this point, her dark, vengeful mission brought them closer together. Designs by Jae Woo Kim. Color by Hye Jung Kim.

After he retired from the Southern Raiders, the once-powerful Yon Rha was reduced to a pathetic human being, mostly due to the time he spent with his horrible mother. Designs by Jae Woo Kim. Color by Hye Jung Kim.

Right: The turbulent weather and moody lighting mirrored Katara's emotional state. Background designs by Elsa Garagarza (top) and Jevon Bue (bottom). Paintings by Bryan Evans.



THE EMBER ISLAND PLAYERS

MIKE: Early in season three, writer Tim Hedrick pitched the idea of our heroes encountering a caravan of traveling actors who put on a play about the Avatar and his adventures. At the time, we thought the idea sounded too goofy. Later, as we neared the end of the series, we wanted to do a lighter, more comedic episode before the epic, serious finale. So we revisited Tim's idea as a way to do our own take on '80s-sitcom "recap" episodes. Having Aang and the kids watch a play about their successes and shortcomings was a great device to reflect on where their journey began and how far they'd come. Plus, it gave us a chance to poke fun at ourselves before anyone else had the opportunity! We had an actress play Aang, as a nod to the fact that adult women often voice the boy characters in animated shows. We made Toph a big, buff dude as a joke on our original intention to make Toph a male character. And the Aang actress in the "Koizilla" costume was our homage to the *kaiju* tradition of Japanese monster movies.

The play's poster reads:

"THE BOY IN THE ICEBERG—A new production from acclaimed Earth Kingdom playwright Pu-on Tim, who scoured the globe gathering information on the Avatar, from the icy South Pole to the heart of the Earth Kingdom capital. His sources include singing nomads, pirates, prisoners of war, and a surprisingly knowledgeable merchant of cabbage! Brought to you by the Ember Island Players." Illustration by Bryan Konietzko. Translation and calligraphy by S. L. Lee.

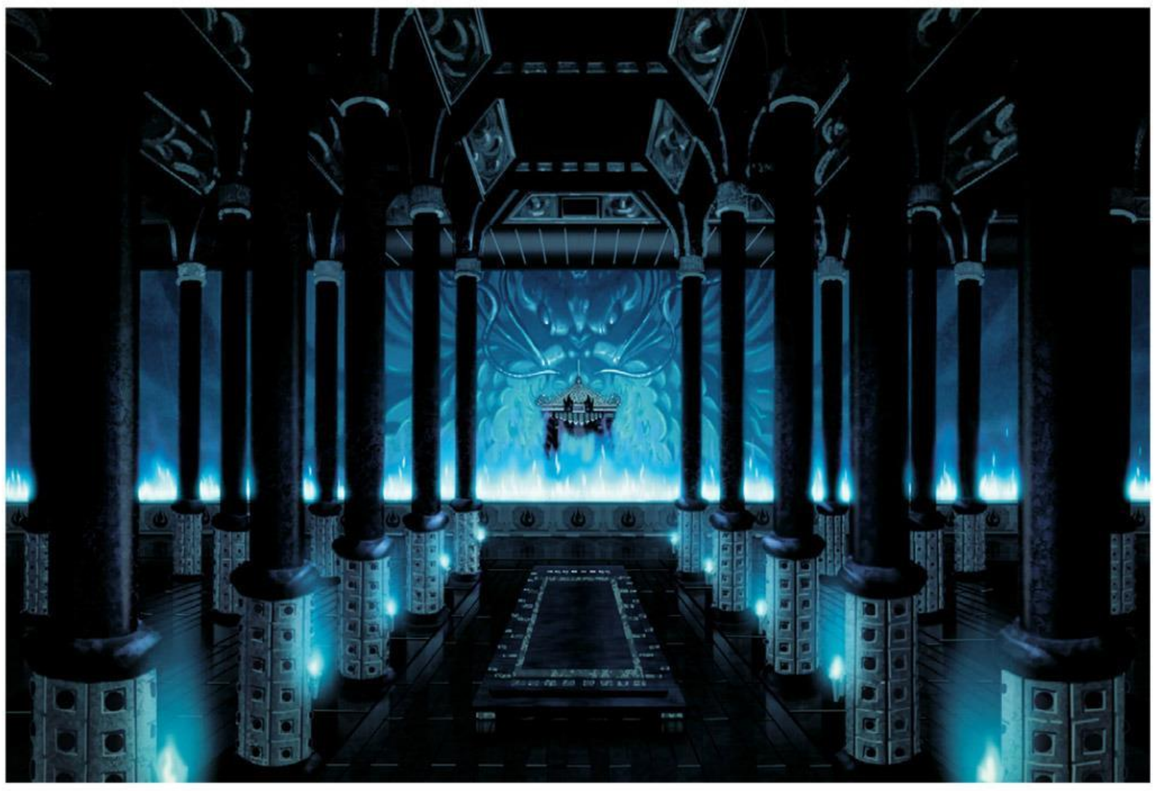
The cast of the Ember Island Players' *The Boy in the Iceberg*. Designs by Angela Mueller and Bryan Konietzko. Color by Hye Jung Kim.

The Ember Island Players' theater. Background design by Jevon Bue. Painting by Bryan Evans. Opposite page, top left: Background design by Enzo Baldi. Painting by Bryan Evans. Opposite page, top right: Theater-stage design by Elsa Garagarza. Painting by Hye Jung Kim and Lito Paguio. Translation and calligraphy by S. L. Lee.

SOZIN'S COMET

BRYAN: I made it a point to do my best to enjoy each part of the process over the years of making *Avatar*, which was difficult to do at times due to the insane task we set out for ourselves and the crammed production schedule. My main goal was simply to finish telling the whole story. Beyond that, I wanted to make the finale better than anything we had ever done. Mike and I and the whole crew were exhausted by the time we actually made it to the finale production, but there was an air of a real journey coming to an end. Everyone gave all they had to execute the climactic conclusion. Watching the finale in the Paramount Pictures theater with our crew, colleagues, friends, and family, and again with the fans at San Diego Comic-Con, brought an indescribable sense of closure to my mind.

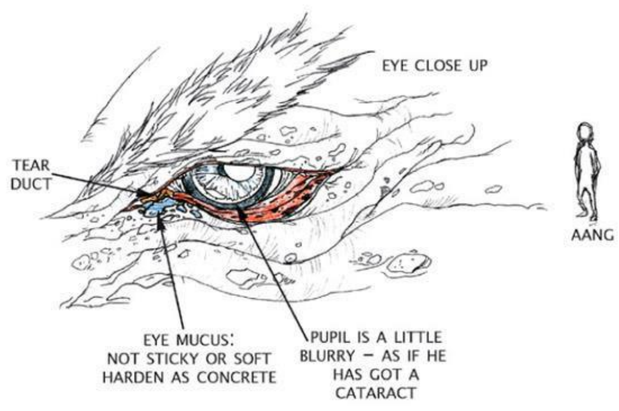
MIKE: The finale was originally written as having only three parts. But during the storyboarding process of part three, there were so many drawings that it was evident all the story and action weren't going to fit into one episode. So we made the decision in mid-production to expand part three into two. This meant more work for everyone, especially the animators at JM Animation who would now have to animate twice as many scenes. But as with every other challenge on the series, all the artists rose to the occasion and made the last two episodes of the highest quality. Once again, I was impressed and humbled by the artists' dedication to *Avatar*.

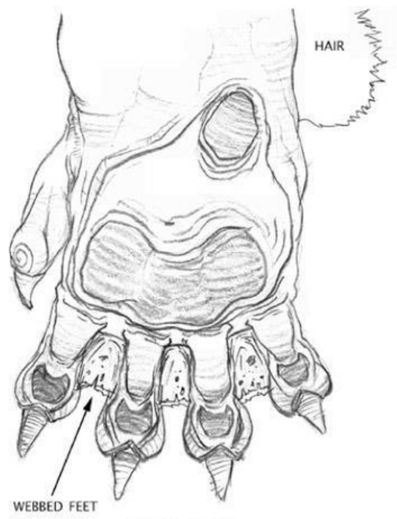


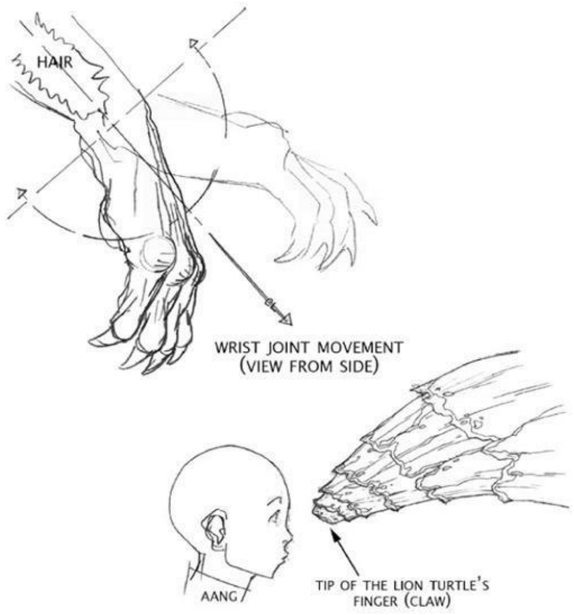
The effects of the comet, coupled with Azula's deteriorating mental state, caused all of the flames in the throne room to turn to her signature blue when she took over. We thought this would be an effective way to show the beginnings of Azula's descent into madness. Background design by Elsa Garagarza. Painting by Will Weston. Color adjustment by Hye Jung Kim.

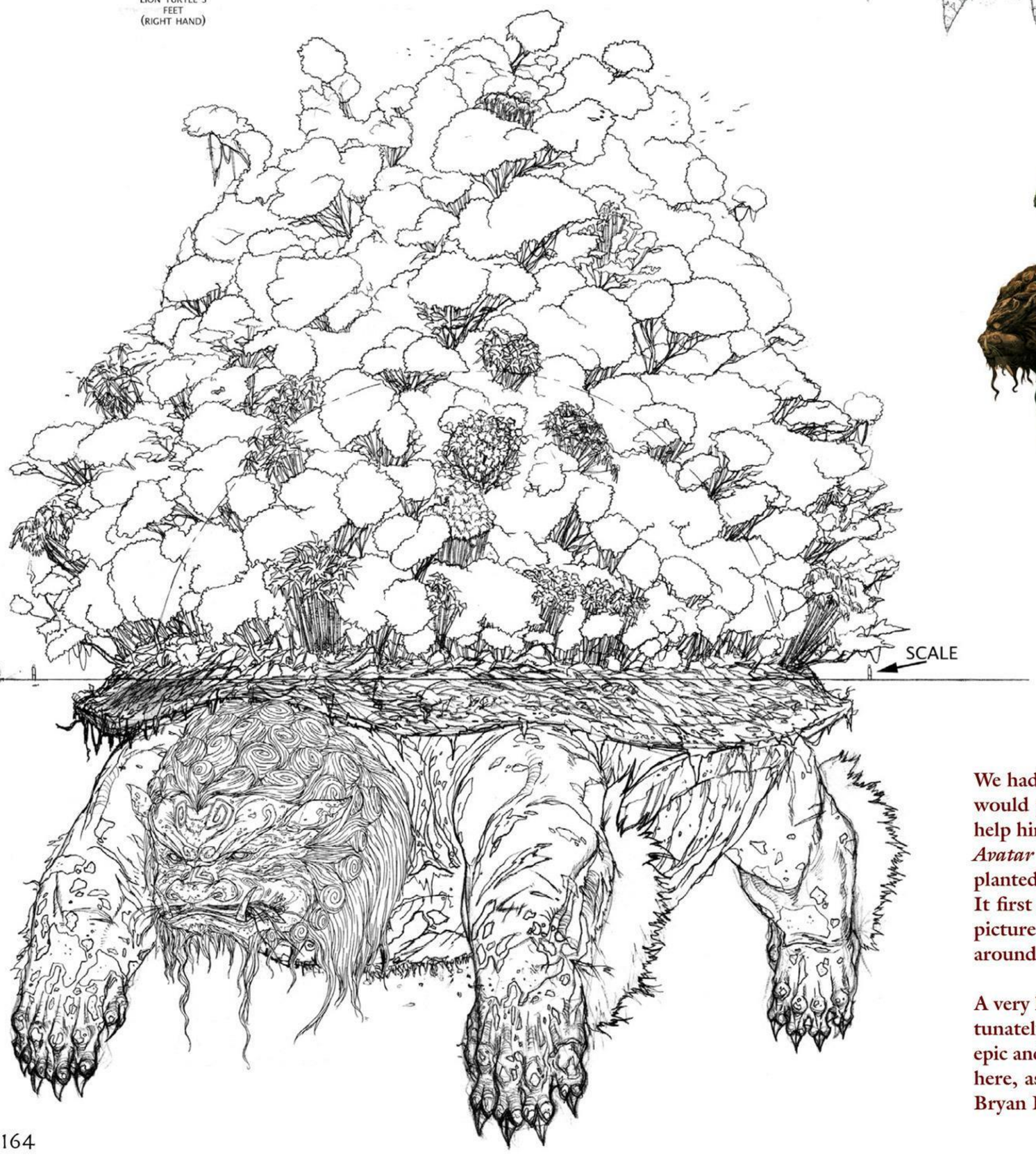
Palanquin design by Aldina Dias. Phoenix mosaic by Elsa Garagarza. Painting by Bryan Evans.

Zuko's conflict with his sister came to a head during the finale, when they fought each other in an almost-deadly Agni Kai. This emotionally charged duel was the highlight of the finale for us. When Ozai declared himself the Phoenix King, he donned new armor to represent his transformation. Designs by Angela Mueller. Banners by Aldina Dias. Color by Hye Jung Kim. Opposite page: Our idea was that Sozin's Comet skimmed the atmosphere of the planet, thus creating the red glow in the sky. Background design by Jevon Bue. Painting by Bryan Evans.







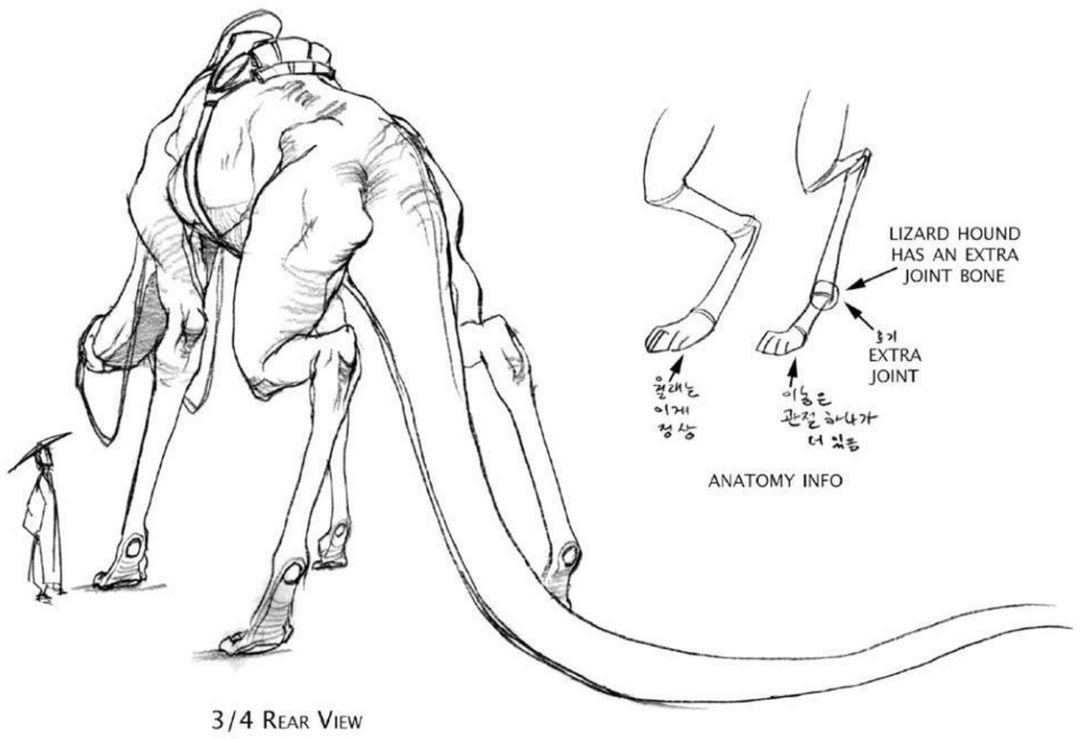


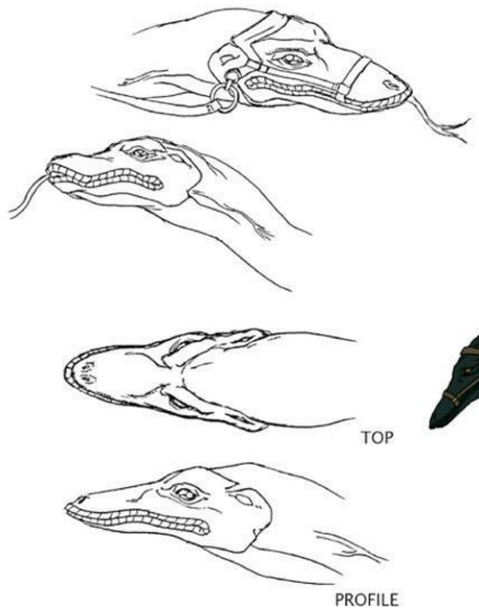
We had the idea for the lion-turtle early in the series and always knew he would play an important role in helping Aang unlock a skill that would help him defeat the Fire Lord. The lion-turtle is the oldest creature in the *Avatar* world, from a time that predates the Avatar and bending. We planted this mythic creature's image in a few places throughout the series. It first appeared in the pilot episode's main title, then later Aang saw a picture of one in "The Library," and there were also lion-turtle statues around the grounds of Piandao's castle.

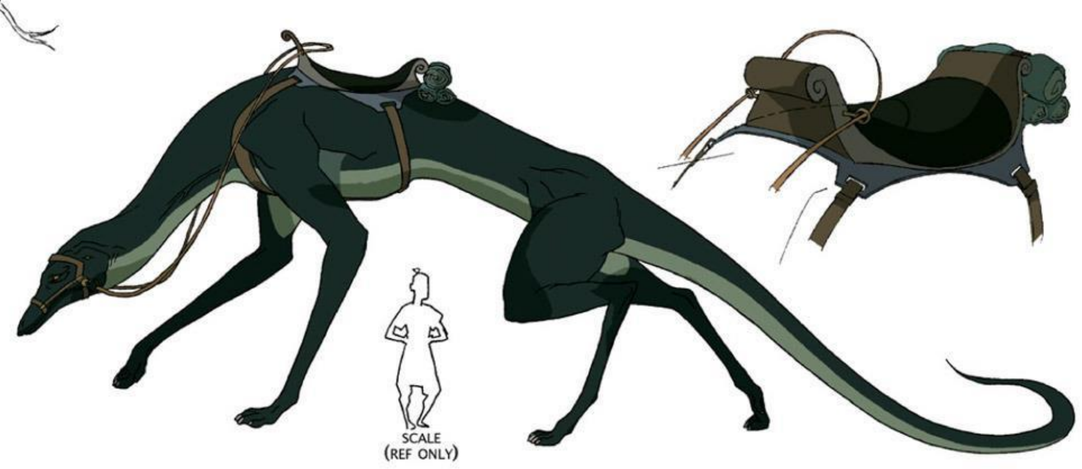
A very high level of detail went into creating this massive creature. Unfortunately, in the final animation, the lion-turtle wasn't rendered quite as epic and impressive as we'd imagined. We're happy we can show the design here, as we meant it to be seen. Designs by Jae Woo Kim. Paintings by Bryan Evans.

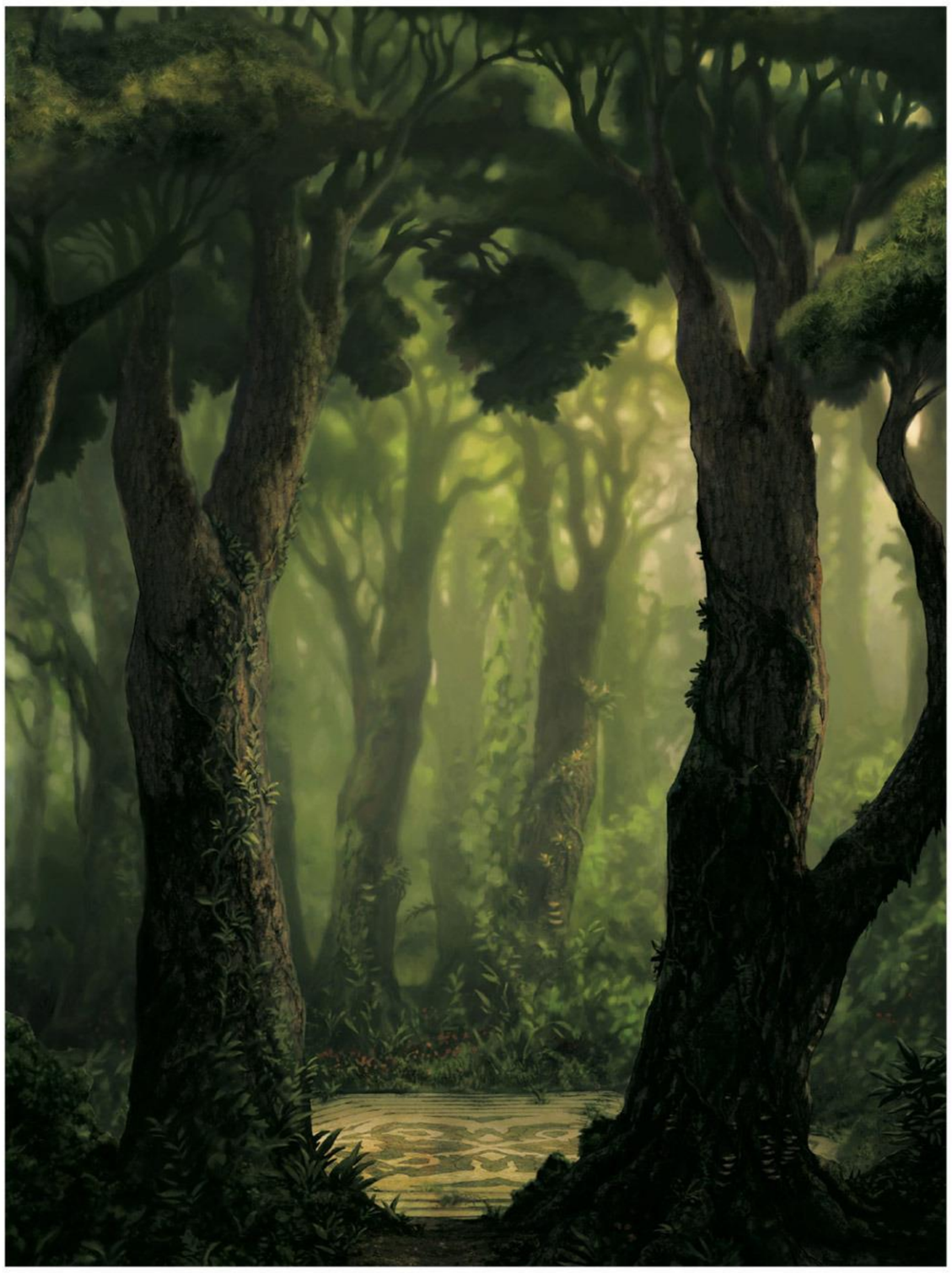
Uncle Iroh and Bumi in their White Lotus costumes. After focusing mostly on Uncle's wiser, softer side throughout the series, it was great to show the Dragon of the West's warrior side in the battle for Ba Sing Se. Designs by Jae Woo Kim. Color by Hye Jung Kim.

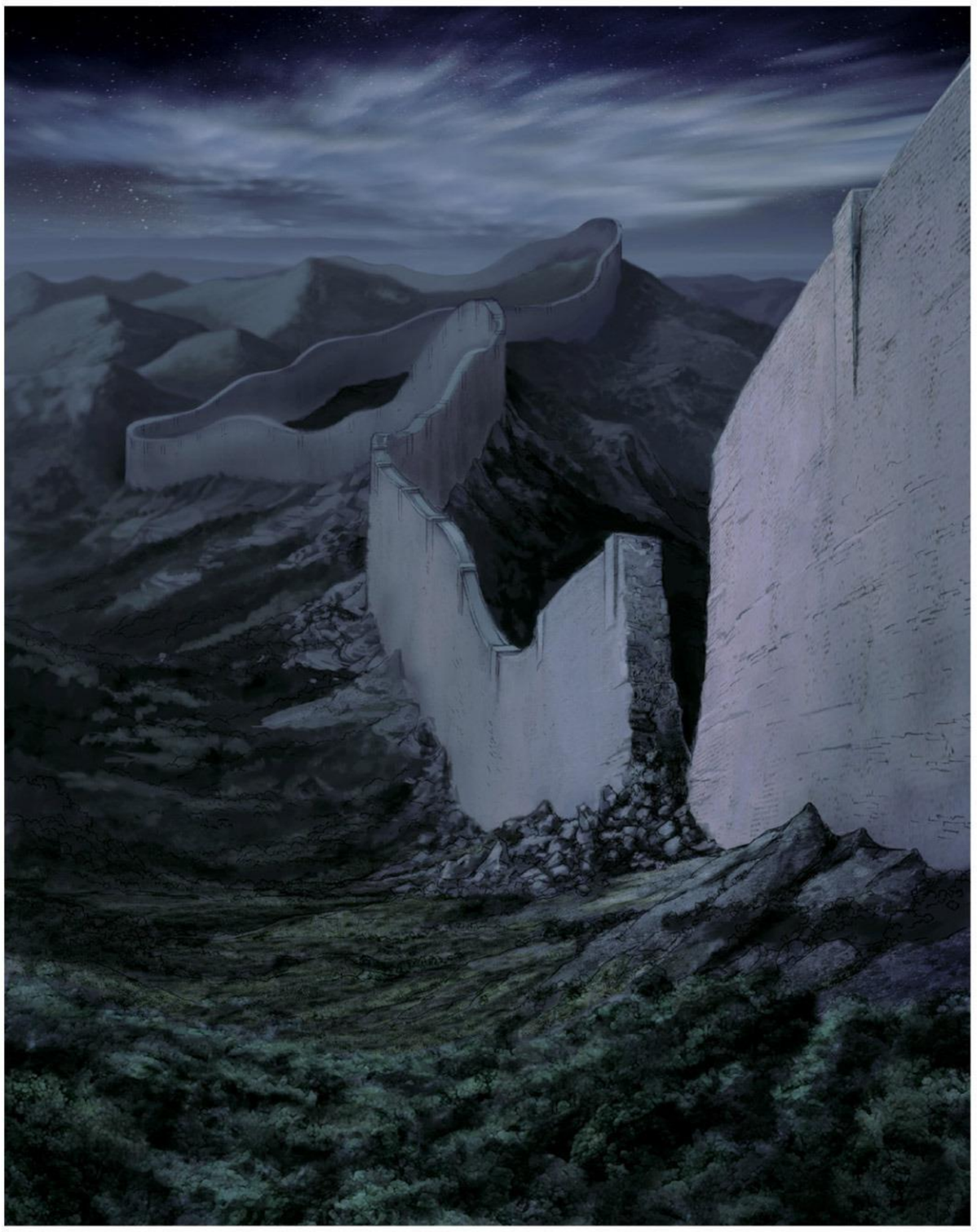
Right: The eel-hound is the fastest land creature in the *Avatar* world. Jae Woo Kim's designs are so great that we wish we could have shown the eel-hound more in the series! Color by Hye Jung Kim.





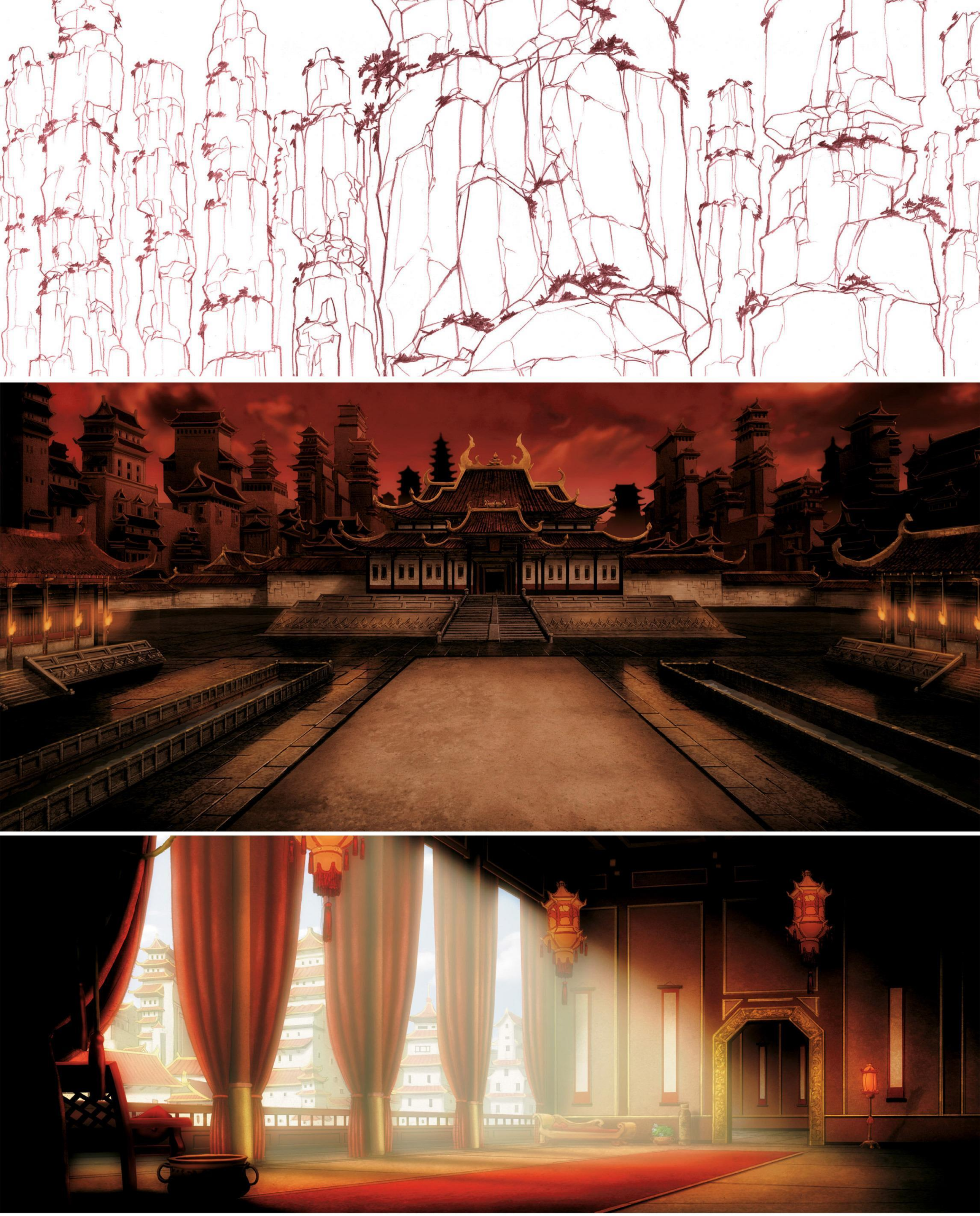




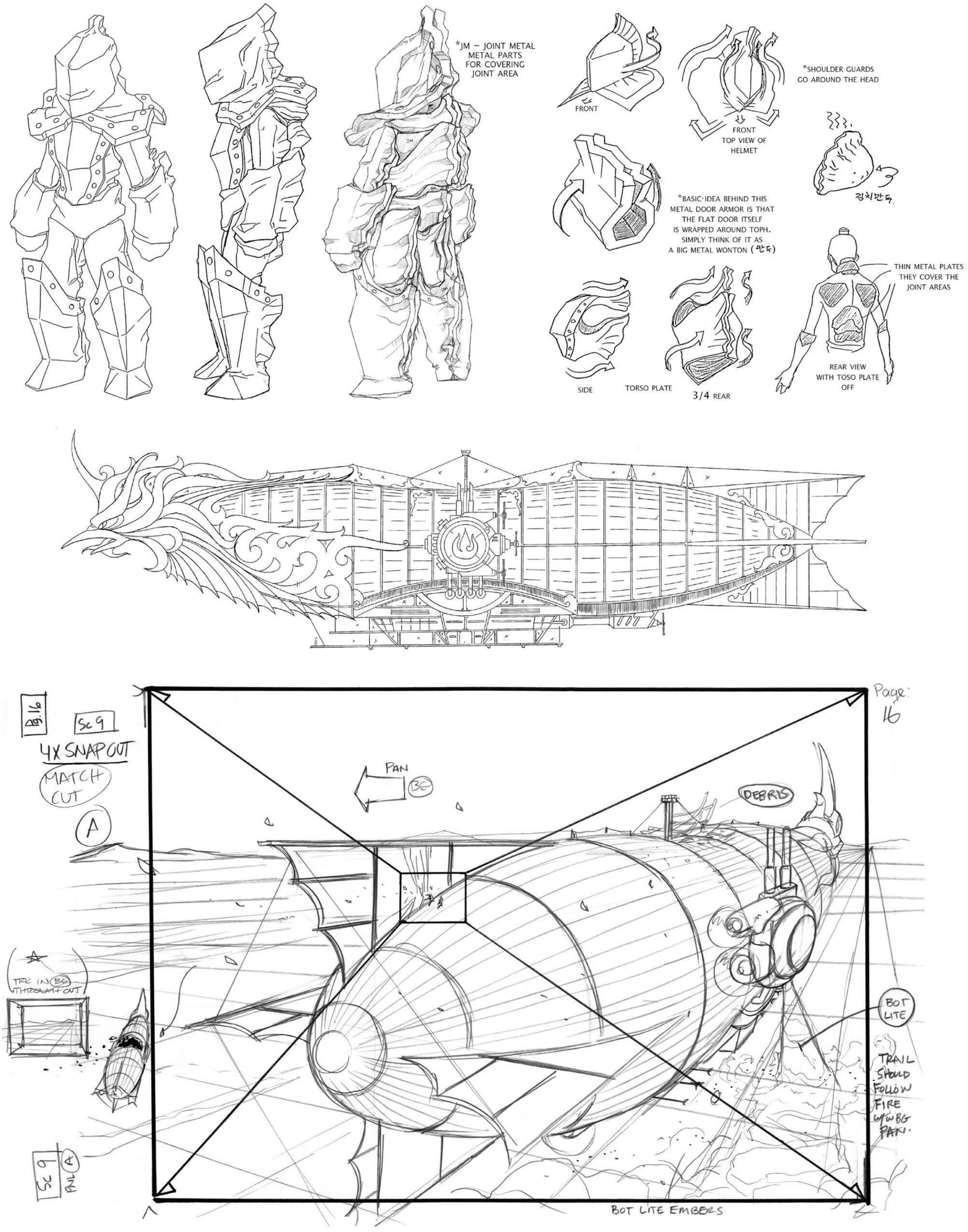


Left: Aang discovered this glade at the summit of the lion-turtle's back. Background design by Elsa Garagarza. Painting by Bryan Evans. Right: Ba Sing Se's breached outer wall. Background design by Jevon Bue. Painting by Bryan Evans.

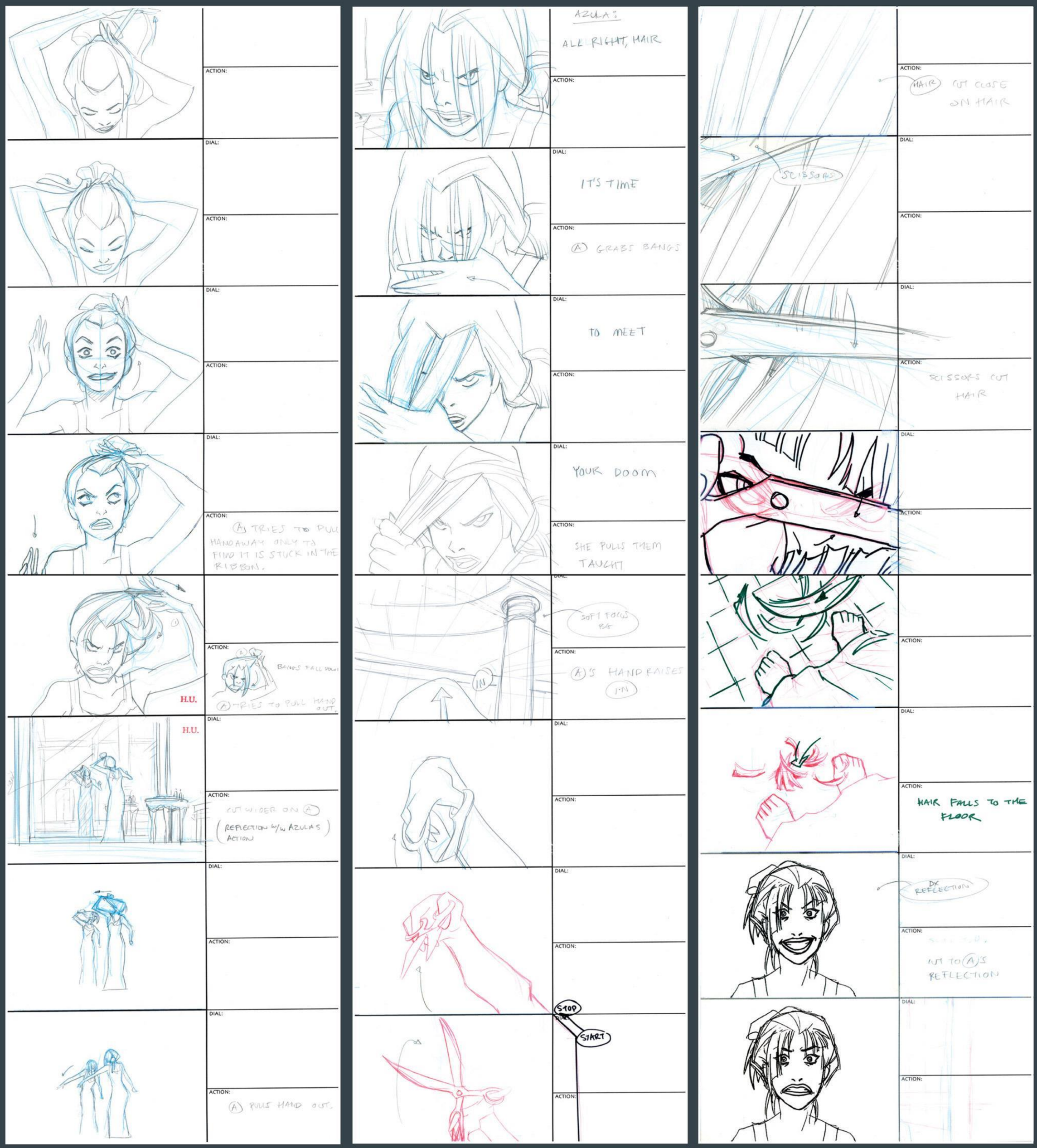
Aang and Ozai's long-awaited final showdown took place at the site of these towering lava columns. Background designs by Jevon Bue (top spread, middle) and Elsa Garagarza (bottom). Paintings by Bryan Evans.



Coronation Plaza design by Jevon Bue. Painting by Bryan Evans. Interior of Coronation Temple design by Enzo Baldi. Painting by Jean-Paul Bondy.



Toph Metalbends the rudder to steer the airship into the rest of the fleet. After storyboarding the epic airship sequence, Joaquim Dos Santos said he never wanted to draw another pointy-tipped airship again. Top: Using her unique Metalbending abilities, Toph created this suit of armor out of the floor of an airship. Design by Jae Woo Kim. Middle of page: Phoenix King Ozai's airship. Design by Aldina Dias.



Azula loses her hair and her mind. Storyboard artist Lauren Montgomery joined the crew for season three. She's an amazing artist, particularly great with the acting and posing of the female characters. And we were always impressed with her ability to render hair! For the finale, many of Lauren's sequences were beautifully animated by Jung Hye Young, making for some of our favorite Azula moments.

ACTION: TRUCK OUT

DIAL:

ACTION:

DIAL:

ACTION:

DIAL:

ACTION: *SLOWLY START CAMERA SHAKE

DIAL:

ACTION:

DIAL:

ACTION:

DIAL:

ACTION: CAMERA SHAKE INTENSE NOW

DIAL:

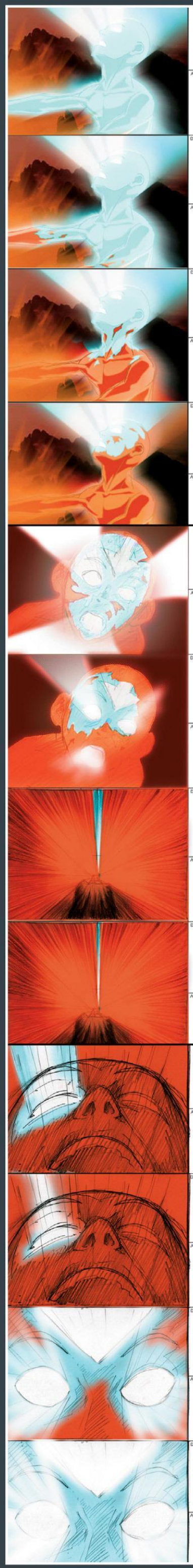
ACTION: CONTINUE CAM. SHAKE

DIAL:

ACTION:

DIAL:

ACTION: CONTINUE CAM. SHAKE



ACTION: CONTINUE CAM. SHAKE

DIAL:

ACTION:

DIAL:

ACTION:

DIAL:

ACTION:

DIAL:

ACTION:

DIAL:

ACTION: CONTINUE CAM. SHAKE

DIAL:

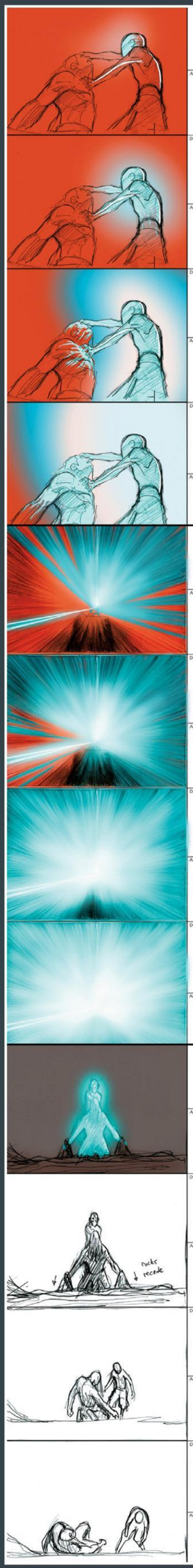
ACTION: CONTINUE CAM. SHAKE

DIAL:

ACTION: CAMERA SHAKE SLOWS DOWN...

DIAL:

ACTION: CAMERA SHAKE INTENSE AGAIN!



ACTION: CONTINUE CAMERA SHAKE

DIAL:

ACTION:

DIAL:

ACTION:

DIAL:

ACTION:

DIAL:

ACTION: CONTINUE CAMERA SHAKE

DIAL:

ACTION: INTENSE CAMERA SHAKE!

DIAL:

ACTION:

DIAL:

ACTION: CHARACTER COLOR FADES BACK TO NORMAL

DIAL:

ACTION:

DIAL:

ACTION:

Fire Lord Zuko and Avatar Aang usher in a new era of peace and harmony. These designs of our heroes in their Earth Kingdom attire were some of our favorite costumes. Their celebration at Uncle's teahouse was a wonderful way to wrap up the series. Designs by Angela Mueller. Color by Hye Jung Kim.

Sunset over Ba Sing Se. The last image of the series was also one of its most stunning. Background design by Jevon Bue. Painting by Bryan Evans.

Opposite page: BRYAN: We knew Aang was going to take Ozai's bending away in the final battle from very early on in the production; however, we didn't really know exactly how he was going to do it. While writing the finale, I pitched that Aang and Ozai's "souls would flip inside out." Mike and Aaron thought that sounded cool, but had no idea how we would visualize it. I said, "I'll take care of it!" However, when I sat down and stared at the blank storyboard page, I had no idea how to actually draw it. Finally, I realized I needed to render the sequence in color to illustrate the crazy idea in my head. I knew it was a risky and ambitious sequence to attempt as the climax, and I fully anticipated several rounds of tedious retakes to get it right in the final animation. However, once again the animators and composite artists at JM Animation surpassed my hopes and expectations, executing the whole sequence beautifully and, as I recall, without a single retake.

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CHAPTER FIVE

ANCILLARY ART

At the end of the day, there is always more art to be made . . .

BRYAN: Even though Mike and I are both artists, it was hard to find the time to actually draw while making the series. We had so many duties pulling us in various directions that the days of sitting at our desks and drawing all day—exactly what we had done to get to this point in our careers—seemed like a distant memory! (As a result, I would usually doodle on notepads during mixing sessions or on meeting-agenda printouts when I should have been looking my coworkers in the eyes. Sorry, guys!)

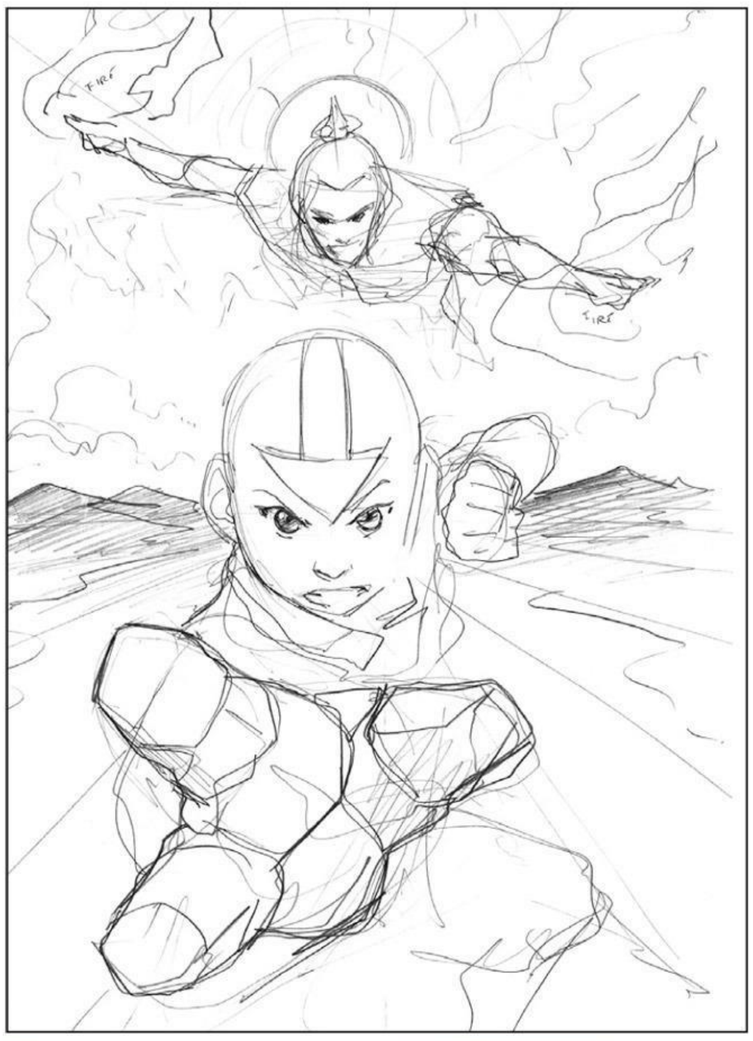
Most of our energies went into making the sixty-one episodes, but as with any show, there were times we did need to make extra art and content for use elsewhere. It was a welcome change of pace for us to work on these side projects, and sometimes these assignments gave someone on the crew an opportunity to step up and show his or her skills in writing, illustrating, or directing. Creatively, it was nice to simply have fun with our characters from time to time . . .

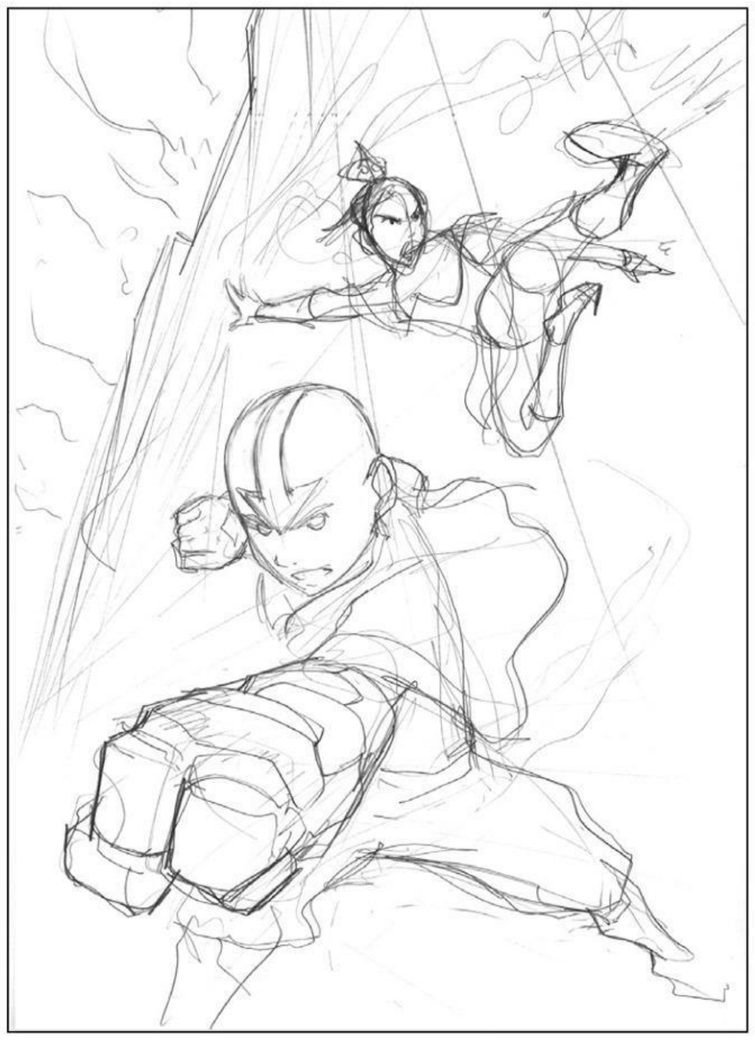
PROMOTIONAL ART

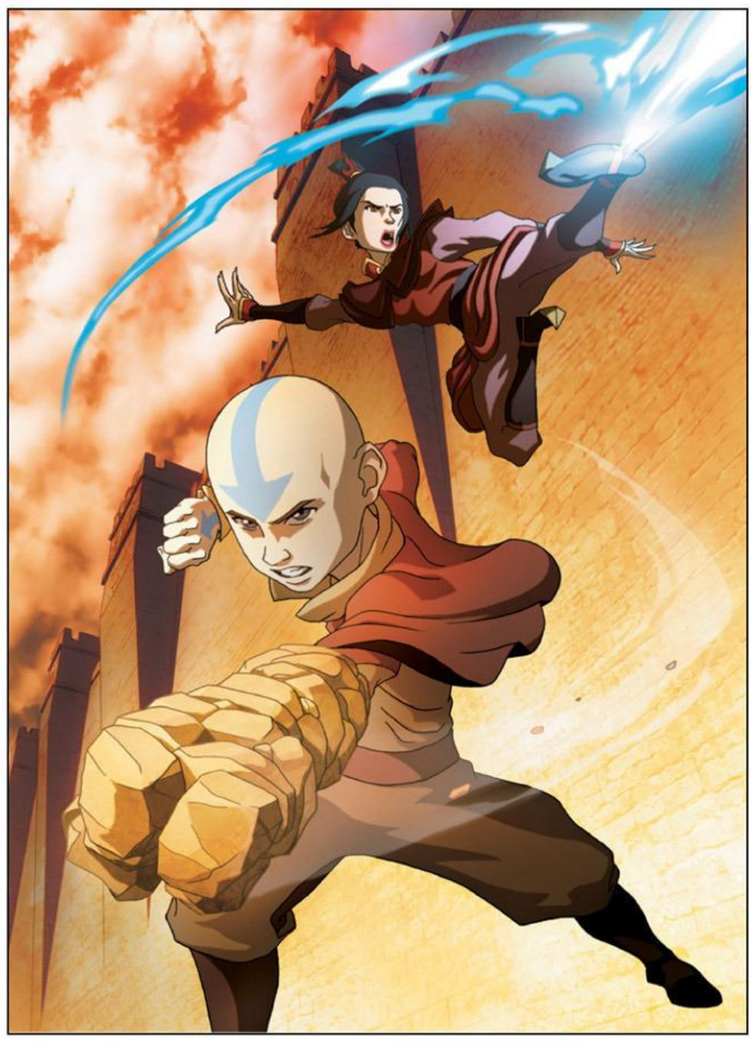
BRYAN: Whenever we had a season-premiere episode, a "tent pole" episode, or a season finale, we created some press art the network could spread around as promotional images to various publications and websites. It was fun to do these mini movie posters to build up excitement for some of our favorite episodes. After we turned in the pilot, our line producer, Miken Wong, felt strongly that if we created a poster and sent it to the network executives we might have a better chance of getting the series picked up. At the time, I thought this was ridiculous, and I was exhausted from finishing the pilot. She talked me into it, and begrudgingly I spent several days making our very first poster. In the end, we did get picked up, so now I wonder if she was right!

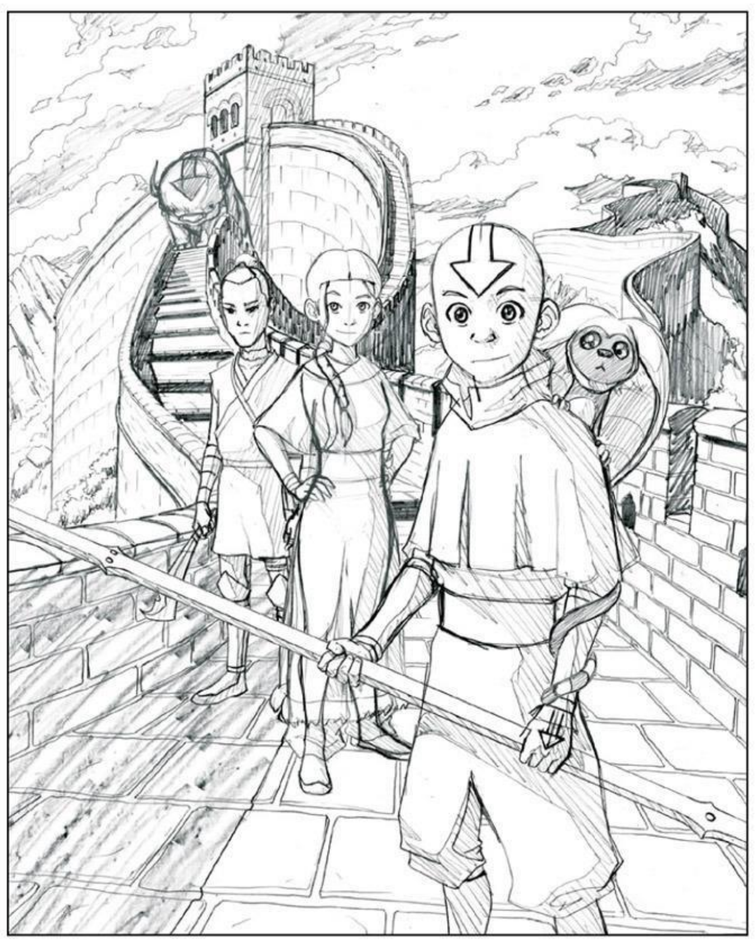
Promotional poster for pilot. Art by Bryan Konietzko.

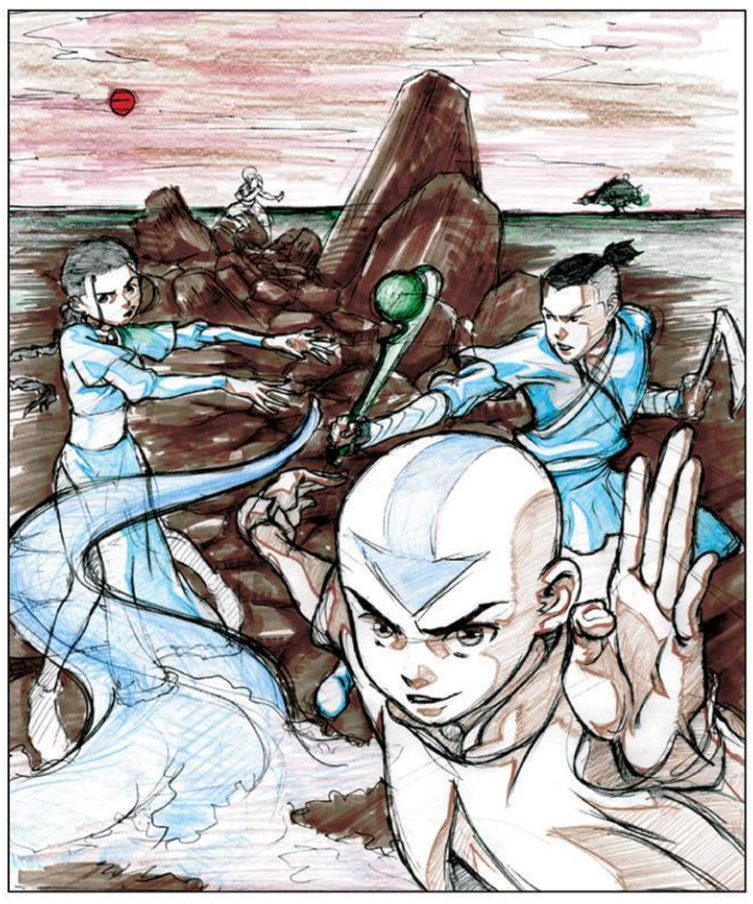
Press art from the series premiere in 2005. Art by Bryan Konietzko.

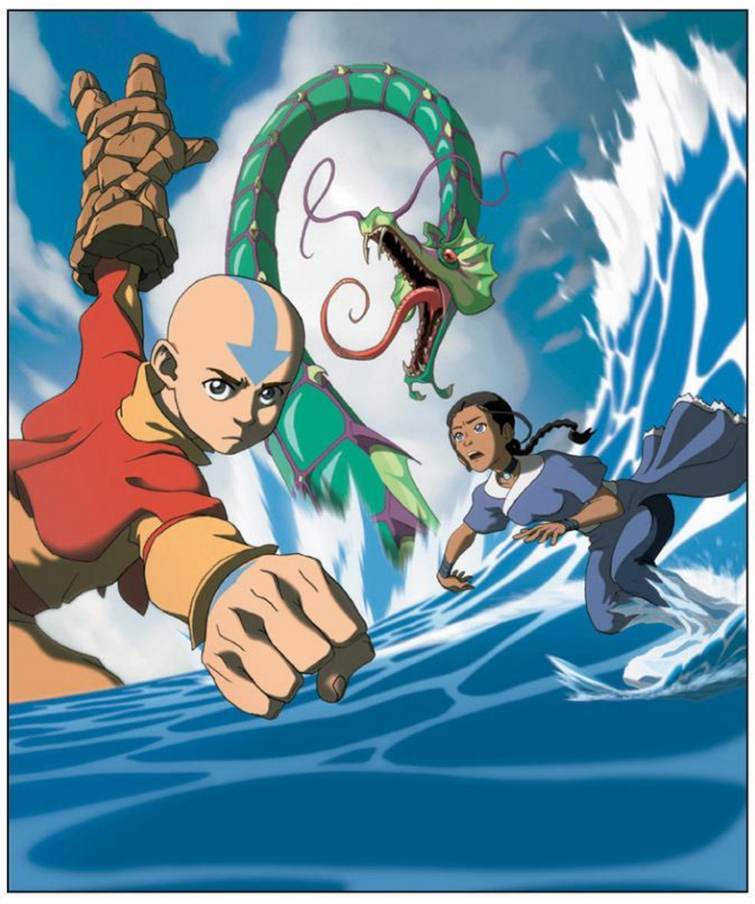


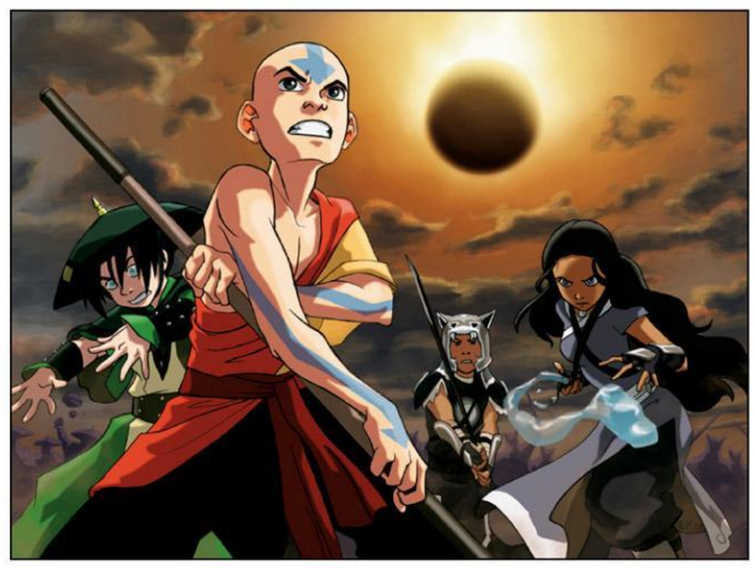












"The Invasion" press art by Lauren Montgomery.

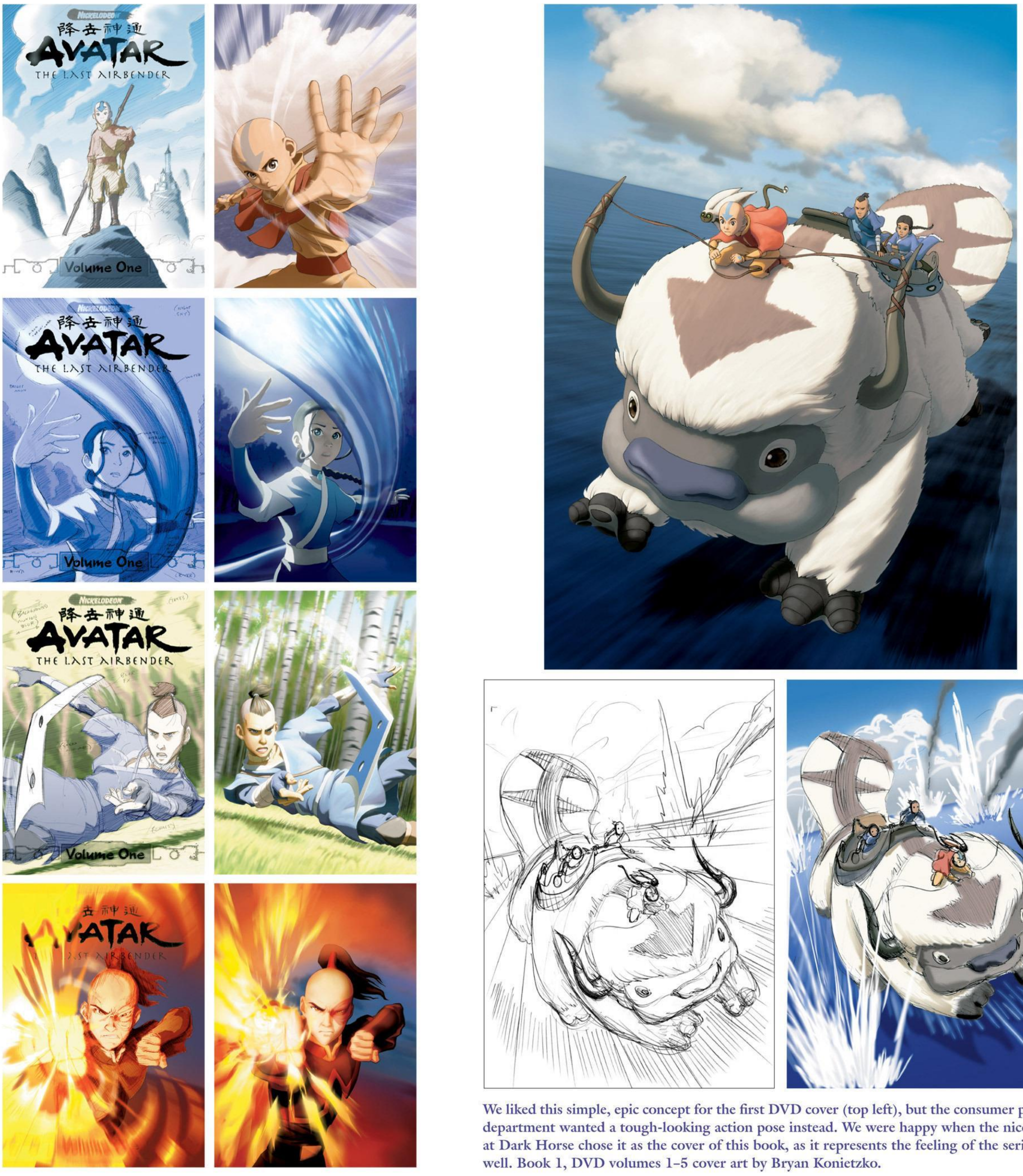
Left: This ad hung above Times Square, New York City, for over a month. Finished art by Seung Hyun Oh and Bryan Konietzko. Color by Hye Jung Kim. Painting by Bryan Evans.

Top row: Season-two tent-pole concepts and press art by Bryan Konietzko. Color by Bryan Konietzko and Hye Jung Kim. Middle row: Season-two premiere concepts and art by Bryan Konietzko. Color by Hye Jung Kim. Painting by Bryan Evans. Bottom left: Season-two tent-pole print-ad concept by Seung Hyun Oh.

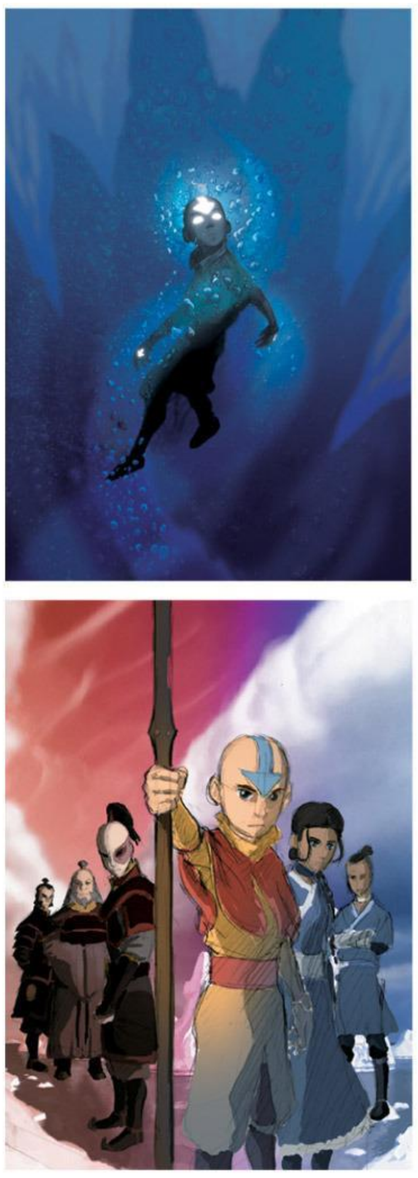
THE DVD COVERS

BRYAN: Of all the types of ancillary art produced for the show, the DVD covers were the most important to me, because the DVDs were what the fans would take home and lend to their friends and family for years to come. With this in mind, I had to ensure the cover art was truly representative of the episodes inside. On most shows, some department separate from the production staff slaps random stock poses of characters on unrelated backgrounds to create their DVD covers. This would have been my worst nightmare!

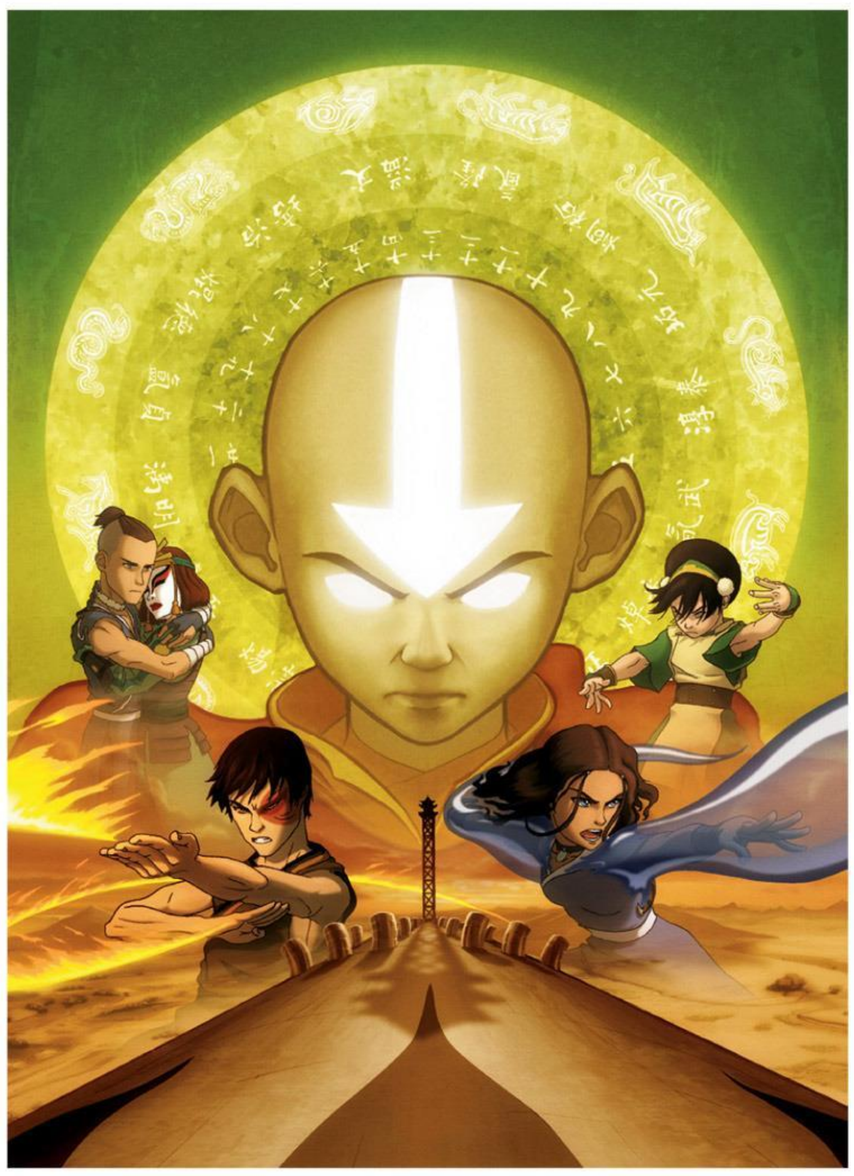
I had done various pieces of promotional art for *Family Guy* and *Invader Zim*, but these *Avatar* covers would be the highest-profile illustrations I had done at this point. As an illustration major in art school, it was crucial to me to make these covers of a high quality. Unfortunately, I had to do the bulk of them in the middle of the night after work, usually in a day or two from start to finish. And unlike on the series, where I was the art director, here I had to work under the consumer products department's art director, which of course drove a control freak like me crazy! Some I wish had come out better, some I wish I had a bit more time to execute, but all in all I am pretty proud of this collection. You may notice that the color on a few of these covers appears different here than it does on the finished DVDs. This is how I originally intended them to be presented.



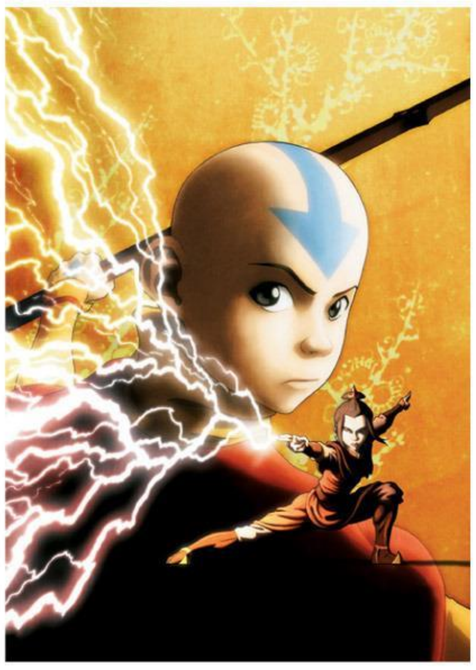
We liked this simple, epic concept for the first DVD cover (top left), but the consumer products department wanted a tough-looking action pose instead. We were happy when the nice people at Dark Horse chose it as the cover of this book, as it represents the feeling of the series quite well. Book 1, DVD volumes 1–5 cover art by Bryan Konietzko.

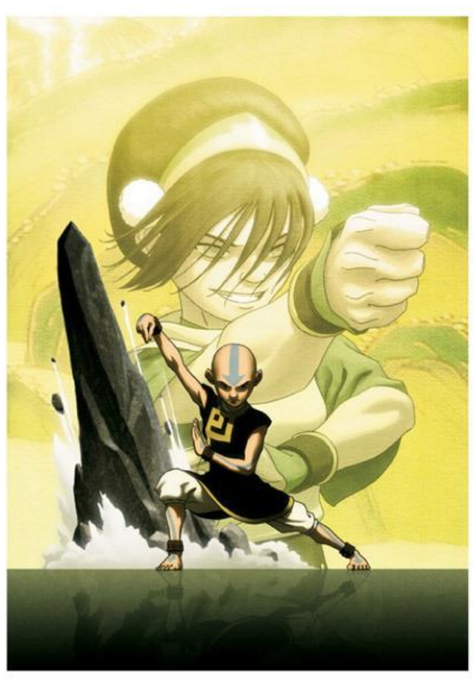


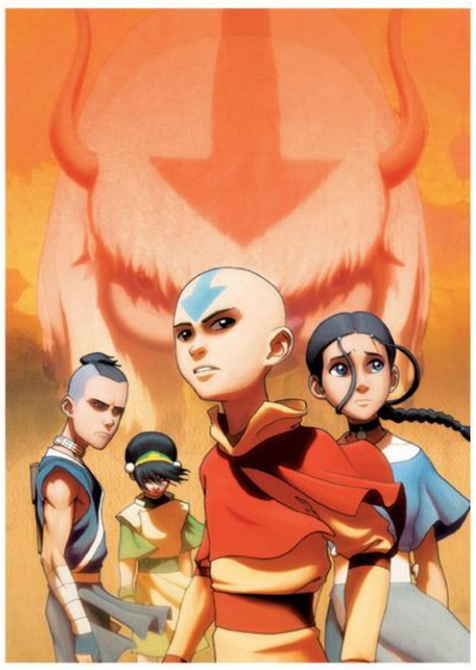
Top left: We liked this evocative concept of Aang underwater in the Avatar state, but consumer products wanted a more traditional movie poster–style image. Book 1 box set cover art by Bryan Konietzko. Fire Nation CG ships by Steve Ziolkowski.

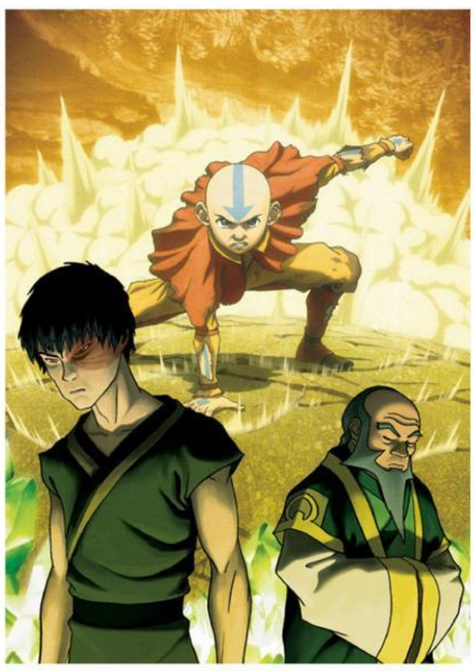


We put a lot of work into the calendar design for "The Library," but unfortunately it wasn't showcased very well in that episode. Luckily the Book 2 box set provided a great space to show off this intricate art. Character art and color by Bryan Konietzko. Translation and calligraphy by S. L. Lee. Background design by Jevon Bue. Painting by Bryan Evans.

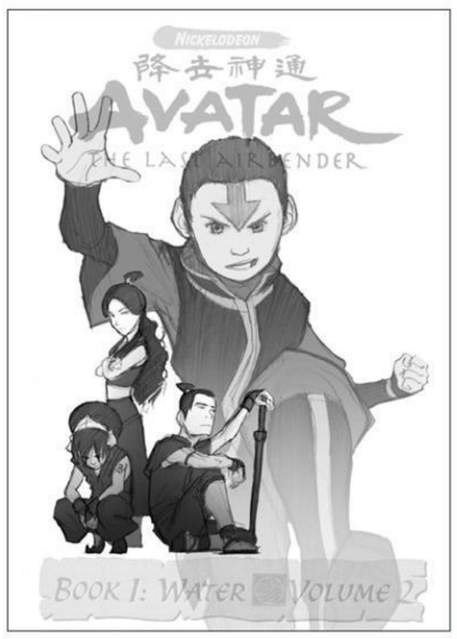


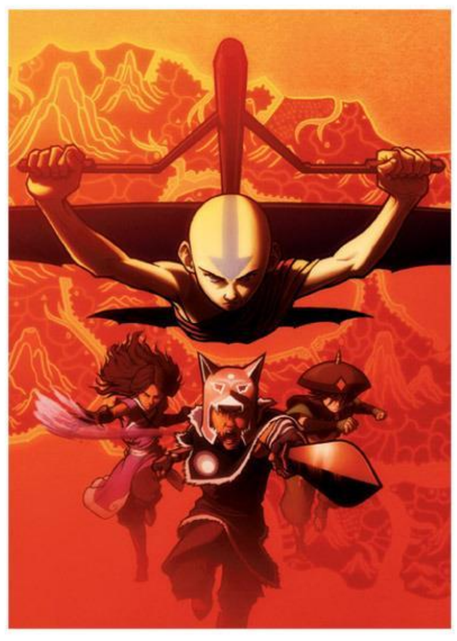


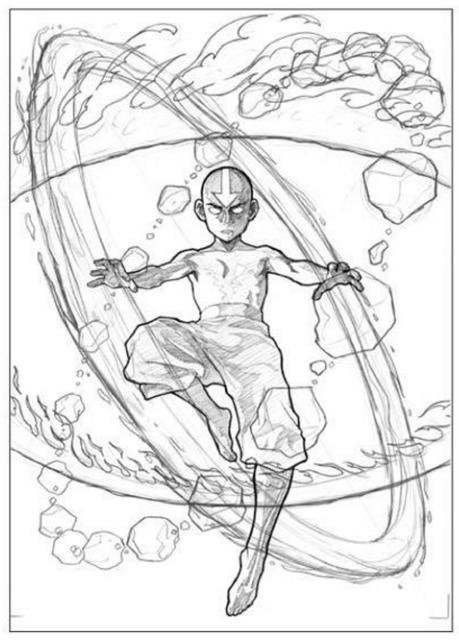


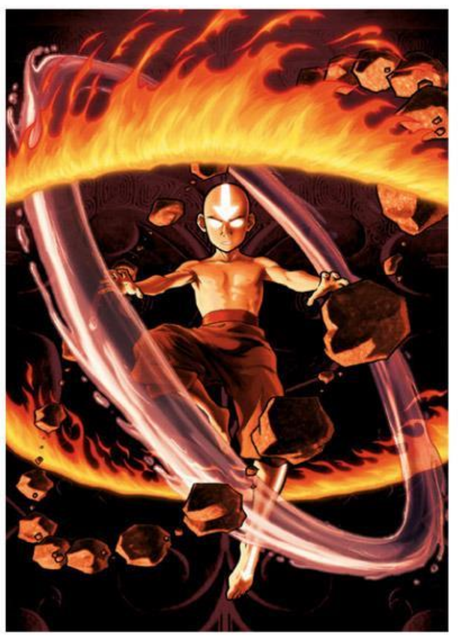


Book 2, DVD volumes 1–4 cover art by Bryan Konietzko.



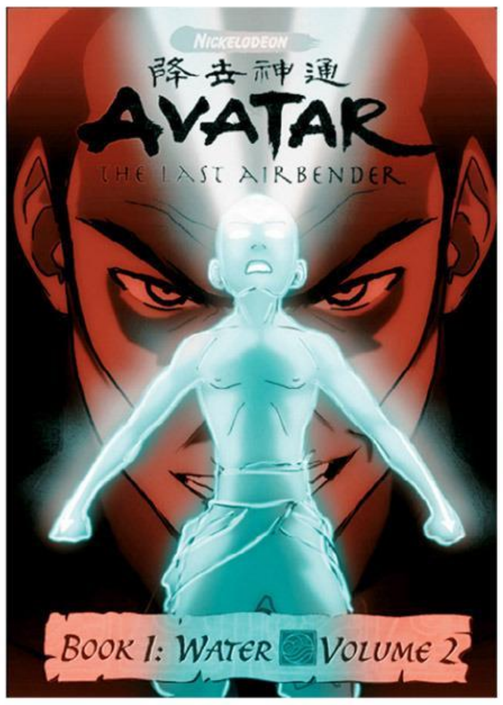






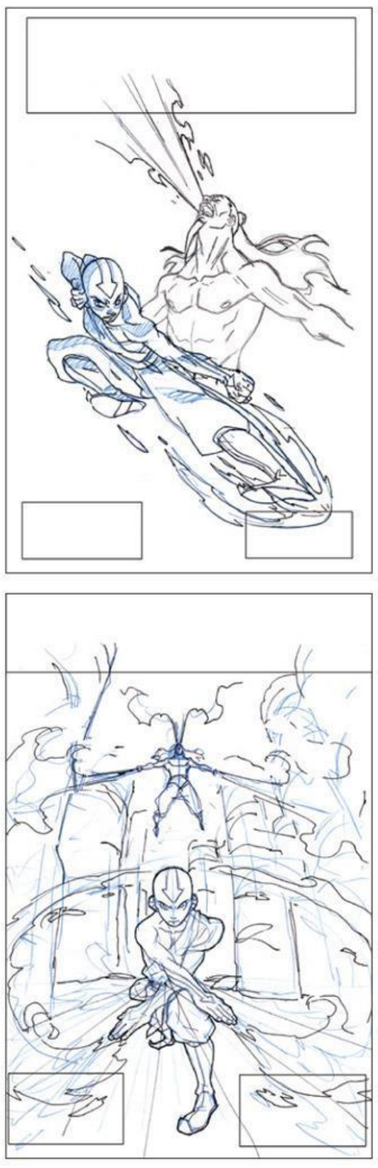
Book 3, DVD volumes 1–4 cover art by Bryan Konietzko.

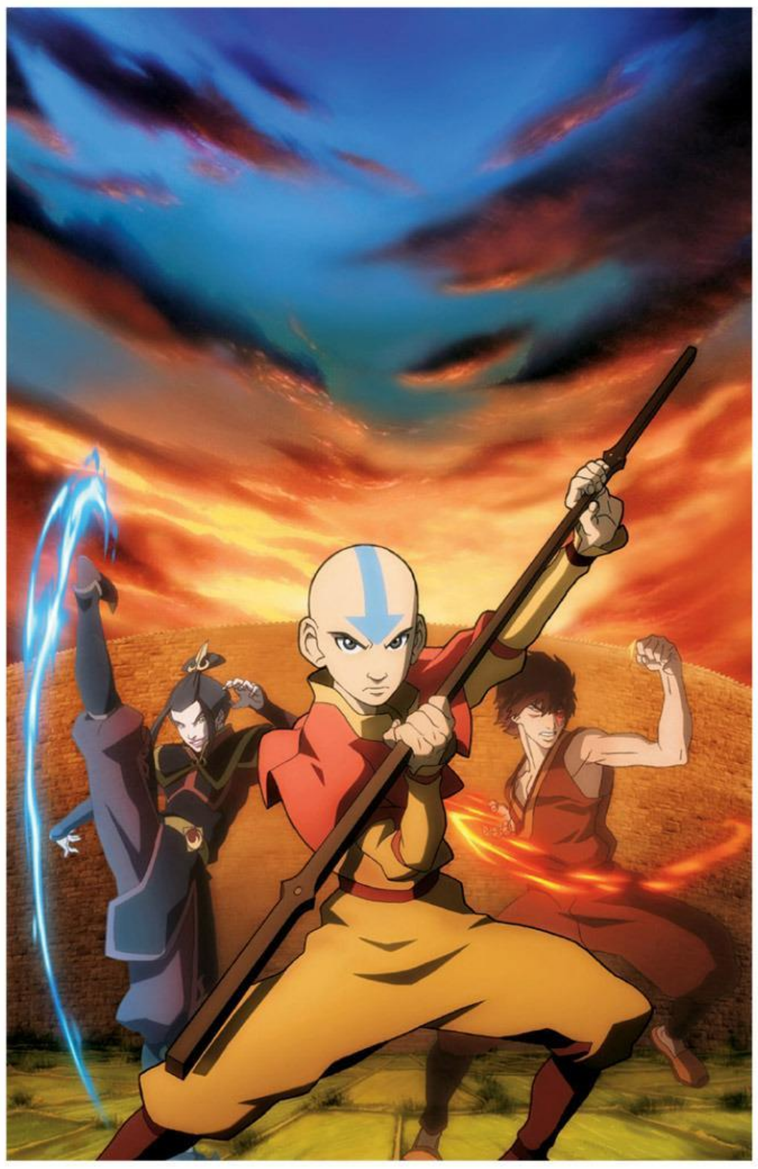
BRYAN: For all of the ups and downs of creating the DVD covers through the life of the series, I am personally really pleased with the final one. Book 3 box set cover art by Bryan Konietzko. Translation and calligraphy by S. L. Lee. Background design by Jevon Bue. Painting by Bryan Evans.



VIDEO-GAME ART

BRYAN: There were three major *Avatar* video games made by THQ during the series' production. Creating a video game takes just as much time and energy as it does to make twenty animated episodes, so unfortunately we never had much time to help out on the games. However, we did get to make the cover art!



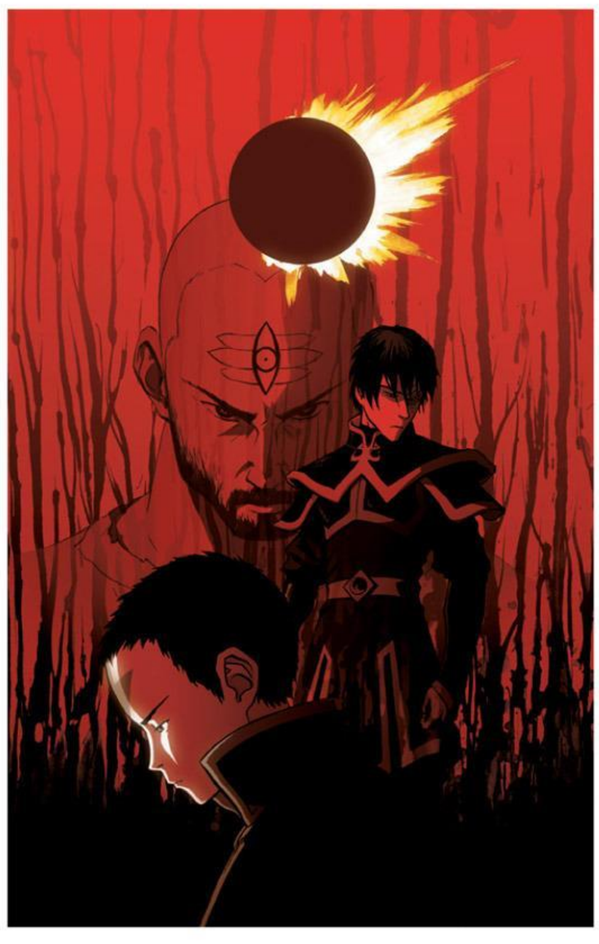


"Into the Inferno" cover art by Joaquim Dos Santos. Color by Bryan Konietzko. Background design by Elsa Garagarza. Painting by Bryan Evans. Nintendo DS–version cover by Bryan Konietzko. Right: "The Burning Earth" concepts and cover art by Joaquim Dos Santos. Color and painting by Hye Jung Kim.

COMIC-CON EXCLUSIVES

BRYAN: The San Diego Comic-Con is always an incredible experience for all of us from the *Avatar* crew. From attending our first one in 2004, where we screened the pilot to a room of about three hundred people for the first time, to a two-thousand-person panel shortly after our series finale in 2008, it has always been an emotionally overwhelming experience for us to connect with the fans of *Avatar*. We always wanted to make sure we had some cool poster or T-shirt to share with everyone who traveled near and far to see us, waiting in line for hours (sometimes in uncomfortable costumes)—to give a little something back to the fans who all continue to give us so much.

We often joked about Appa turning out to be a female in the last scene of the series, giving birth to a litter of baby flying bison—much to Aang's surprise! We never implemented the idea, but we entertained the notion that somehow the flying-bison and winged-lemur populations were restored after the events of the series. This poster, created for San Diego Comic-Con 2009, depicts a postwar Aang enjoying the return of these peaceful friends. Art by Bryan Konietzko.



Left: A season-three teaser poster, introducing the face of Combustion Man (who some fans speculated was Fire Lord Ozai). Art by Bryan Konietzko. Right: A graphic version of the Book 3 box set cover for a free T-shirt giveaway. Art by Bryan Konietzko. Translation and calligraphy by S. L. Lee.

AANG AND THE GANG GET THE SD TREATMENT

MIKE: Toward the end of production on season two, Nickelodeon asked us to create some extra content that could be used online or on DVDs. We immediately thought of doing shorts in a "super deformed" (or "SD") style, which is popular among anime fans. The style was simpler, the stories were sillier, and everyone involved had a really great time breaking away from the normal style of the show.

BRYAN: Even though we set out to make this sprawling epic, Mike and I often said to each other during the production of *Avatar* that it would be nice to make a simple, preschool kids' show. There is a refreshing lightness to projects like that, especially in the style of *My Neighbors the Yamadas*. Of course, we tried to cram way too much into each short, making them not all that simple in the end!

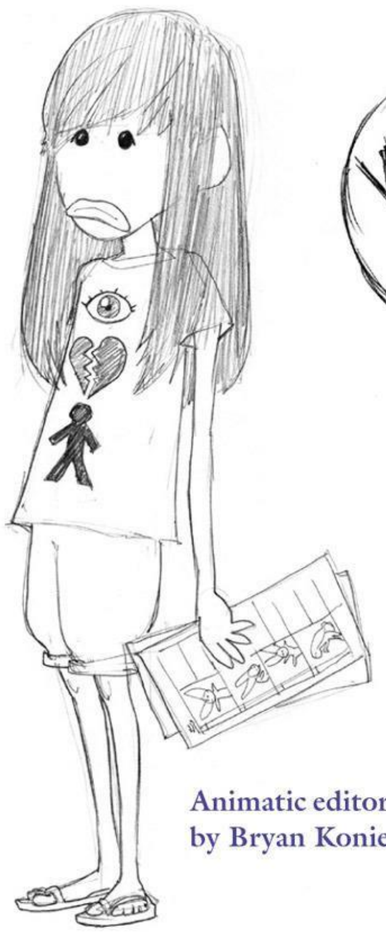
A Nickelodeon limited-edition greeting card, which was one of the earliest SD pieces of art we did of our characters. Art by Bryan Konietzko.

The main cast gets the SD treatment for a crew T-shirt. Art by Bryan Konietzko. Middle: Rough designs by Seung Hyun Oh and Bryan Konietzko.

Seung Hyun Oh did a great job directing the SD shorts and finally had a chance to let all of his zany ideas run wild. The majority of these hilarious sketches are by Seung Hyun, with a few by Bryan Konietzko.

THE MEETINGS WERE WORTH IT, BUT THEY WERE LOOONG . . .

BRYAN: During our infamously long storyboard meetings, the best way we could all keep each other sane was to doodle and do ridiculous caricatures of each other, usually with markers on Post-It notes. We would stick our favorite ones on our desks to give us a little chuckle throughout the difficult days of bringing *Avatar* to life . . .



Animatic editor Dao Le, by Bryan Konietzko.

Storyboard artist and brewer of strange herbal remedies Miyuki Hoshikawa, by Ethan Spaulding.

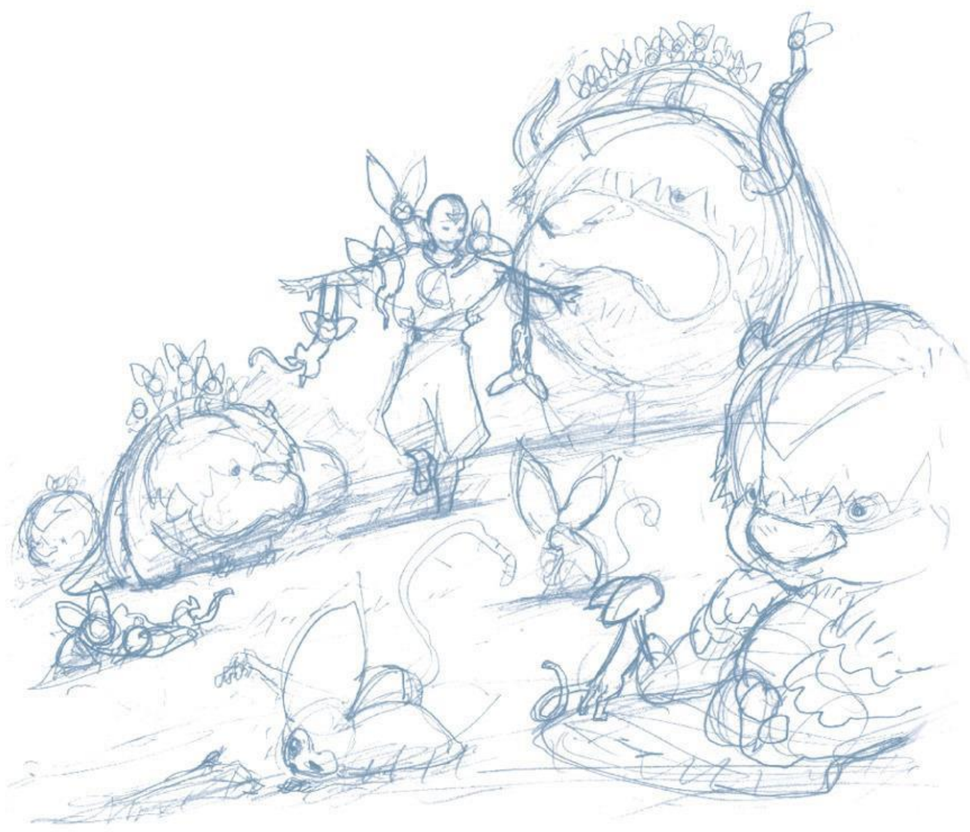
Left: Final checker Kathy Gilmore, by Bryan Konietzko.

This was a card Bryan made for a little girl who wanted us to "make Aang alive" so she could play with him.

Appa rocking ten strings at once. Doodle by Bryan Konietzko.

MMA Aang, by Joaquim Dos Santos.

Random marker illustrations by a delirious Bryan Konietzko.



If you've made it this far in this book, you've probably gained a sense of the daunting amount of work it took to make the *Avatar* series. But despite all of the blood, sweat, and tears that went into the episodes' executions, there were a lot of laughs and good times squeezed in between all the work.

Over the years we spent making *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, we made a lot of great friends in the crew, and deepened our relationships with old friends and colleagues. With the help and belief of countless people, we finished what we had set out to do over six years earlier. We poured our hearts and souls into a world, story, and characters we loved, and, luckily, a lot of people around the world loved them back. We are forever grateful.

We hope you enjoyed the ride as much as we did, and enjoyed this behind-the-scenes look at how everything came together!

—Bryan Konietzko and Michael Dante DiMartino

A stunning masterpiece of animated storytelling.

Avatar: The Last Airbender has been syndicated to more than 120 countries around the world, inspiring millions of fans and industry professionals alike and garnering numerous industry honors—including wins at the prestigious Annie, Peabody, and Primetime Emmy awards.

Join series creators Bryan Konietzko and Michael Dante DiMartino for an unprecedented behind-the-scenes look at hundreds of pieces of concept, design, and production art—most of which Nickelodeon has never before released to the public—as they take you on a guided tour through the development of this smash-hit television series. Learn how *Avatar: The Last Airbender* took shape, from the very first sketch through to the series finale, and beyond!

Featuring a foreword by M. Night Shyamalan, director of the feature film, *The Last Airbender*.

"One of the most involving TV series the animation community has seen in a long time."
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"The creators of this fresh and unique series struck cartoon gold. Coupled with fantastic storytelling, fascinating characters, and some pretty incredible story arcs it's no wonder why this series has received such critical acclaim."
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