

nickelodeon™

# THE LEGEND OF KORRA



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BOOK TWO: SPIRITS

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## THE ART OF THE ANIMATED SERIES

*Michael Dante DiMartino    Bryan Konietzko    Joaquim Dos Santos*











nickelodeon<sup>TM</sup>

# THE LEGEND OF KORRA<sup>TM</sup>

The Art of the Animated Series

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*Book Two: Spirits*

*Bryan Konietzko  
Michael Dante DiMartino  
with Joaquim Dos Santos*



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#### THE LEGEND OF KORRA: THE ART OF THE ANIMATED SERIES—BOOK TWO: SPIRITS

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## Introductions

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*Book Two was hard. Korra has always been and continues to be a difficult show to produce, but for a host of factors, few of them foreseen, this second batch of episodes proved to be the most challenging endeavor I have ever undertaken. To add insult to injury, Book Two also took longer to complete than any season we had produced before, and we were already some of the slowest slowpokes in the business! On a daily basis, for months on end, we just seemed to keep getting kicked while we were down.*

*Though the real-world daily toils of the Korra team could never compare to the swashbuckling, action-packed, heroic deeds of our fictional characters, there are certainly thematic parallels. We are a group of friends and colleagues working towards a common goal. We each have our special skills and attributes we bring to the equation. We try to make the best choices for the undertaking, for the good of the group, choices that reflect the fabric of who we are. And despite our best-laid plans and intentions, life always throws unexpected challenges in our path. Sometimes we react to those challenges admirably, and sometimes they knock us down a peg. But when we are tested we learn something about ourselves, and about our world. And by digging deep, sticking to our ideals, and clinging stubbornly to a vision, we can reach our goal. We just might not get there in the way we envisioned when the journey began.*

*Maybe. Mostly, I'm just glad Book Two is over! Through the struggles, we managed to produce some art and animation of which I am immensely proud. We met so many great people along the way and assembled an incredible in-house art team. I learn from and am inspired by these rare talents and their warm personalities every day, and I cherish our time together, even if much of it is spent under a suffocating ball of stress and tedium. When I have to dig deep, it is often the energy of this amazing crew that fuels me through the rough times. That and sending each other pictures of otters and red pandas. And snacks.*

*Bryan Konietzko*

*February 19, 2014*



*The world of the spirits is an aspect of the Avatar universe that has intrigued me as a writer and piqued the curiosity of many fans. Because Korra's character arc in the series is all about her becoming more in touch with her spiritual side, it made sense that Book Two was the perfect point for her story to more deeply explore her connection with the spirits. So Bryan, the writers, and I left behind the gritty urban streets of Republic City (for the most part), opened the spirit portals, and, like Korra, forged into the unknown.*

*I was excited to dive deep into the more spiritual aspects of the Avatar universe. We touched on some of those themes and ideas in Book One of Avatar: The Last Airbender, but this was our chance to flesh out those ideas further. For example, back in the early days of the original series, I had no idea that the Avatar energy which kept Aang alive in the iceberg for one hundred years was a spirit named Raava who had a story all her own.*

*Creating and writing a TV show like Avatar (or any TV show, for that matter) is like a jazz musician improvising—he knows the tempo, what key he's playing in, and the basic structure of the song, but then riffs from there. Similarly, we know the setting, the characters, and the themes of the show, but then we begin to riff on ideas, developing them from episode to episode with the goal of bringing it all together in an exciting conclusion.*

*And to continue with the jazz metaphor, the entire crew of Korra is like one big band—each individual has his or her own part to play, but when we all come together, the music (or in our case, the show) gels, and something new and beautiful is created.*

*Having been immersed in this universe for close to twelve years now, the world and its characters continue to inspire and surprise me. I've grown as an artist, storyteller, and leader in ways I never could have imagined. It's always a struggle, but in that struggle is where personal growth and evolution occur. Like Korra, I've been able to tap into my spiritual side a little bit more thanks to this world and all the amazing people who have been a part of it.*

*Bringing a fictional world into animated reality is no simple task, so I'm eternally thankful to the artists (many of whom have work in this book) for being part of this crazy Korra ensemble. Putting together these art books is a nice closure on each chapter of this journey, and culling through the vast amount of art is a reminder of how fortunate I am to work with such talented artists every day. I hope this art inspires you and gives you a deeper glimpse into some of the amazing work that goes into creating The Legend of Korra.*

*Michael Dante DiMartino*

*February 18, 2014*





CHAPTER ONE



神  
靈



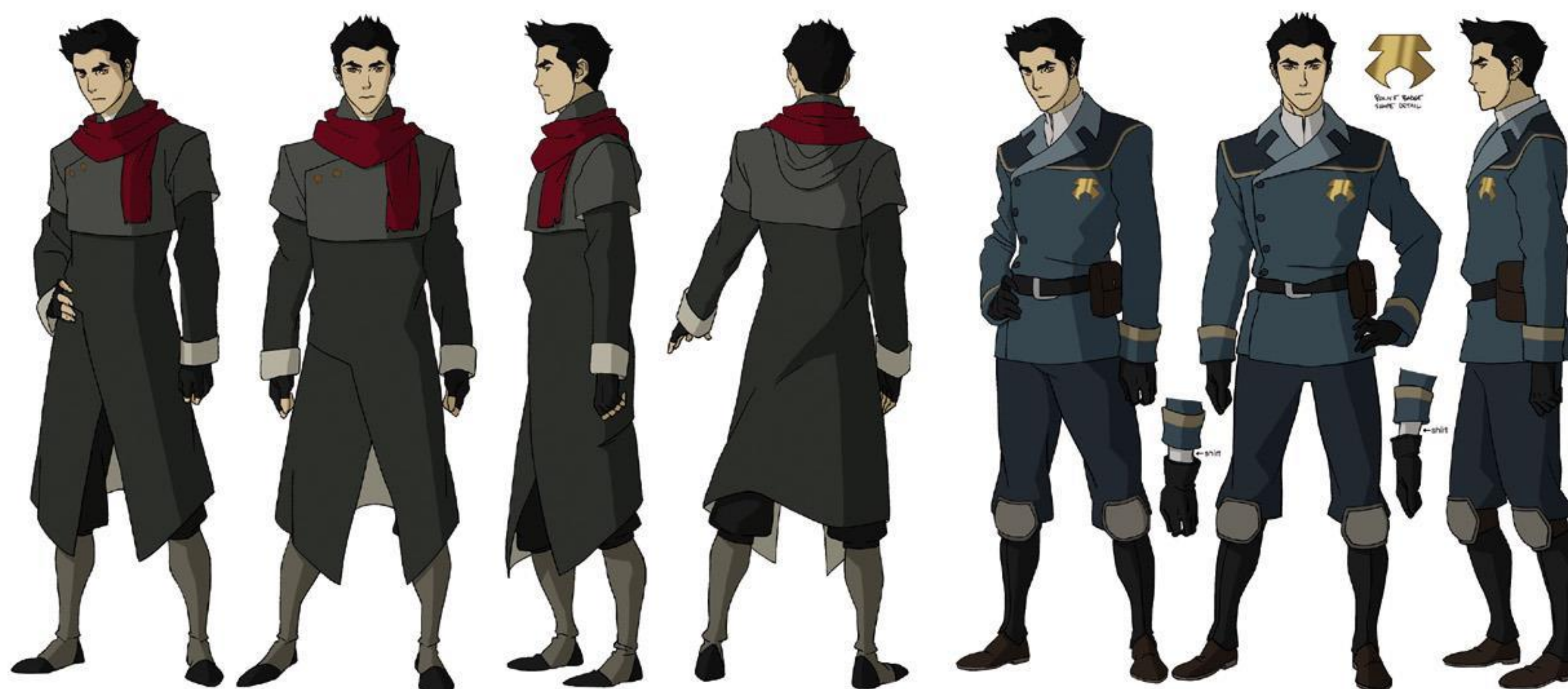
# REBEL SPIRIT



## OLD FACES AND NEW

MD: I always enjoy it when TV shows jump ahead between seasons. It makes me feel like the characters and the world have a life of their own while I'm not watching. So with Book Two, we jumped ahead six months. Mako is now a cop, Asami runs Future Industries, Bolin's trying to keep the Pro-bending dream alive, and Korra's growing more frustrated with Tenzin's airbending training. And with a new season come new outfits!

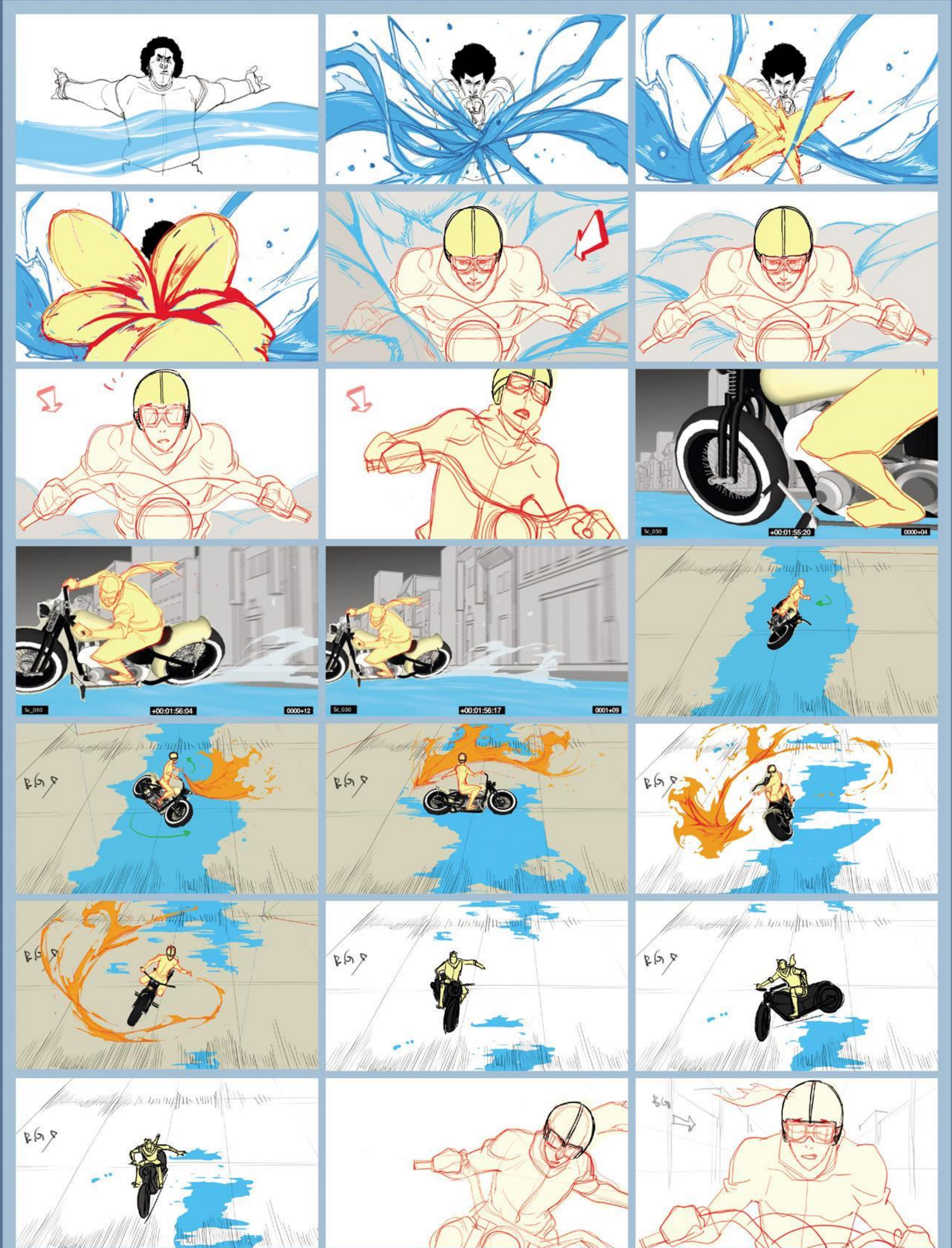
BK: Once the looks of the main characters are well established, I like to vary them with costume and hair changes where it makes sense. These variations often end up being production headaches, as we try to keep track of which outfit is supposed to be worn in each sequence. I am quite pleased with how Korra's long-sleeved outfit turned out; it was meant to be a colder-weather outfit for her time back in the Southern Water Tribe. In hindsight, I wish we had just used it for all of Book Two, but that was my bad call not to do so. Right: Korra outfit design and color by Bryan Konietzko. Below: Korra expressions by Ki-Hyun Ryu. Cleanup by Studio Pierrot. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.



JDS: Mako's police uniform went through a couple of rounds of concepts before we settled on this final design, above. Oddly enough, all the concepts had him wearing his red scarf neatly tucked into his jacket. For the record, I was all for it, but Bryan made a last-minute decision to remove it from his final design. Looking back, I suppose it would be strange if a police officer showed up at a crime scene wearing a ratty red scarf. Mako winter coat design by Bryan Konietzko. Mako police uniform design by Christie Tseng. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.

(Preceding spread) MD: Much of the action in Book Two takes place in the Southern Water Tribe, which after seventy years has become a bustling metropolis. In comparison to the Northern tribe, the South is much more modern and focused on commerce and trade. Background design by Studio Pierrot. Painting by Frederic Stewart.

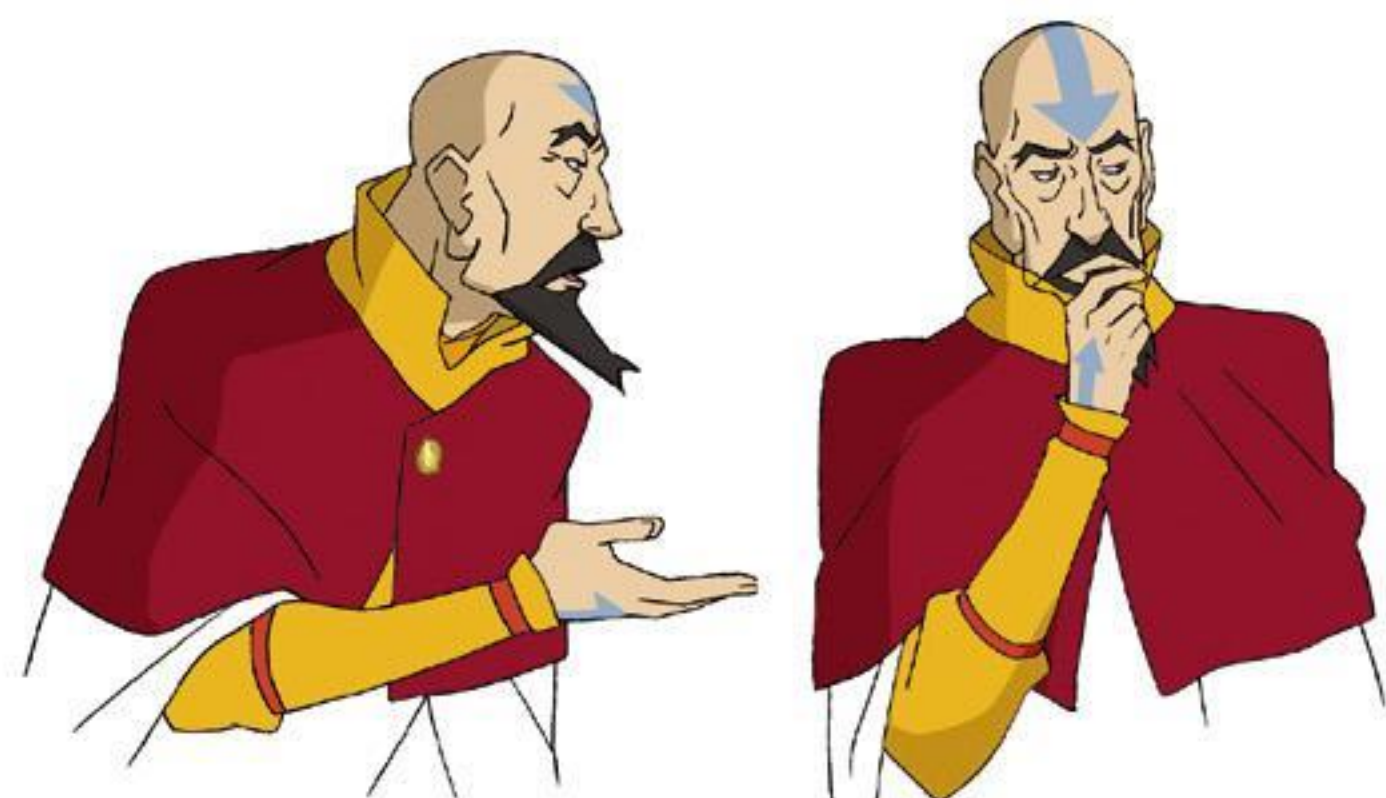
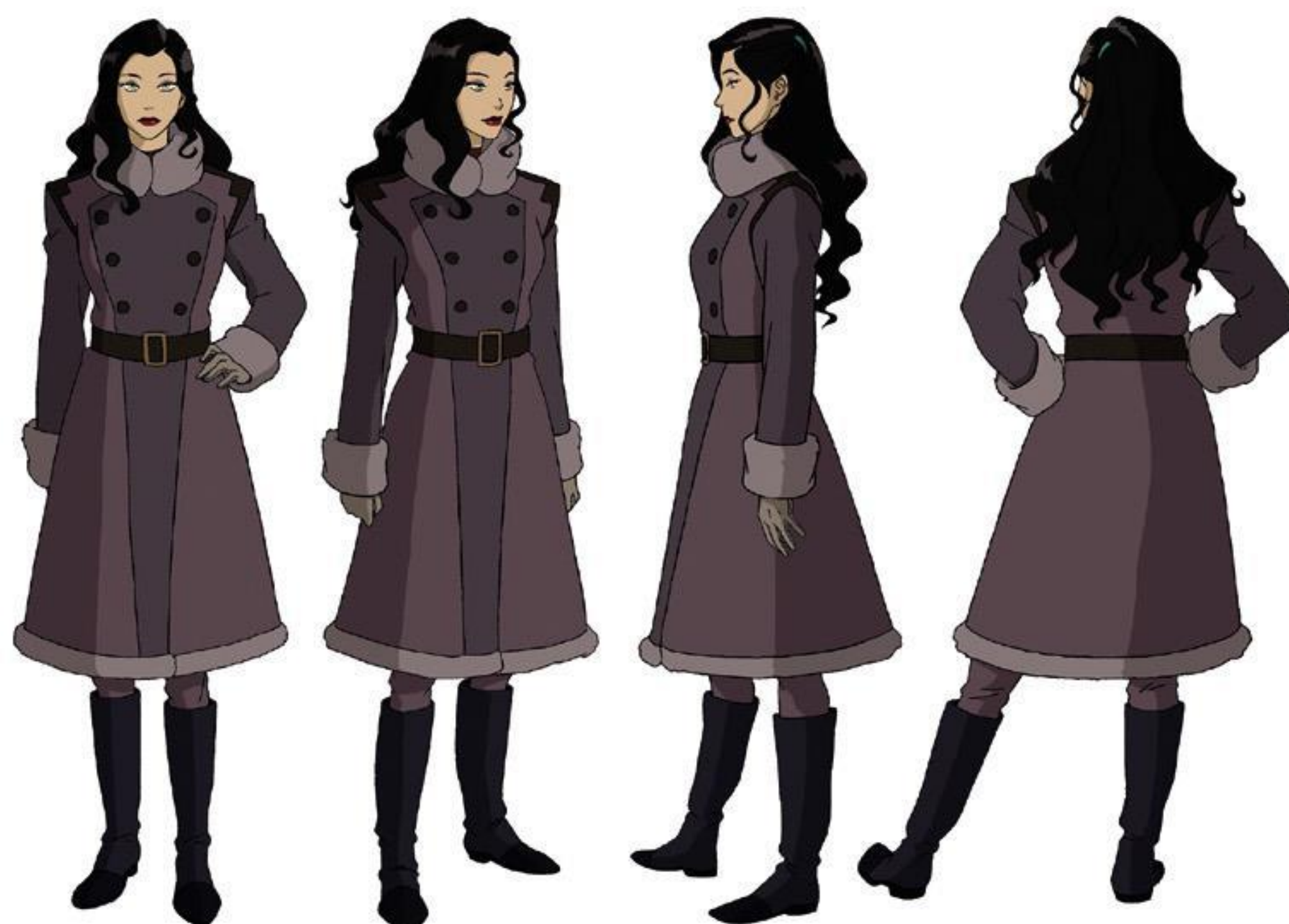
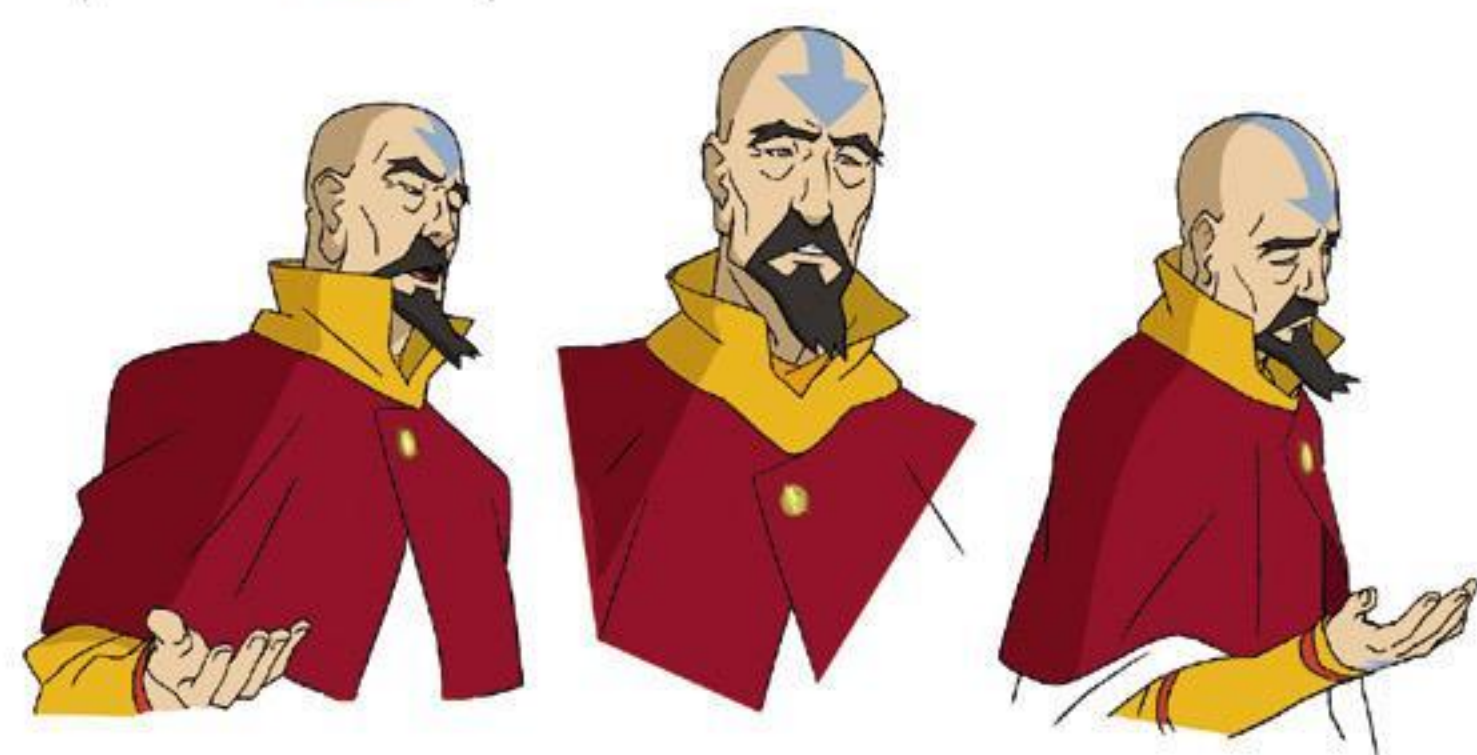
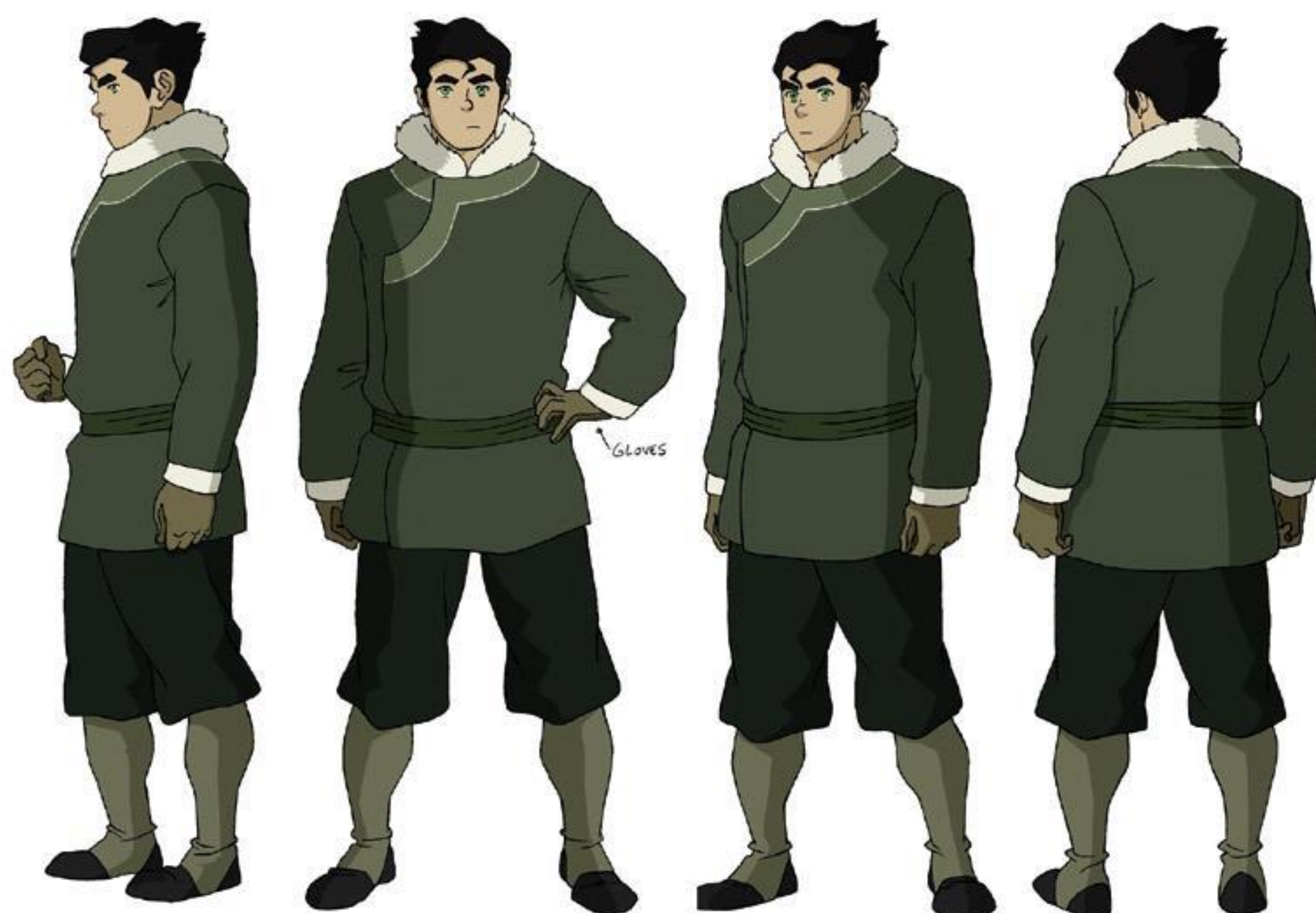




MD: Mako is in hot pursuit of some members of the Red Monsoon Triad in Ryu's dynamic storyboard sequence.



BK: Everyone needed to be winterized, so Bolin got a nice, comfy parka variation on his normal outfit. As for Asami, I based her snazzy new coat on a real one I found on some Japanese fashion website. A few women on the crew have since commented, "I want that coat!" Outfit designs by Bryan Konietzko. Cleanup by Studio Pierrot. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.



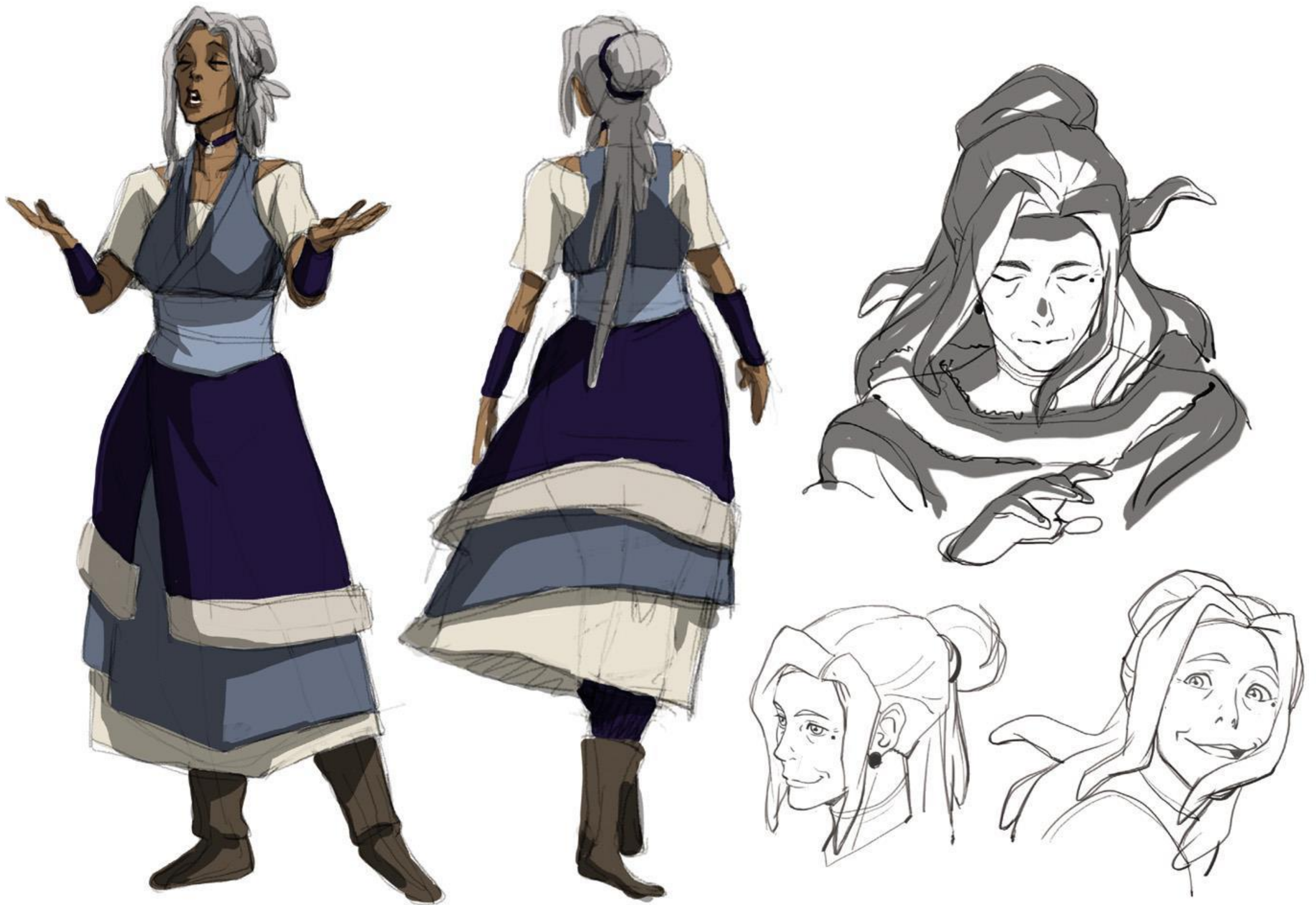
MD: The many faces of Tenzin. Tenzin's design is very realistic, and sometimes it's difficult for the artists to give him exaggerated expressions in the final animation. Expression sheets like this one are provided to the animators to help them bring the characters to life.



JDS: To this day I geek out over a well-executed expression sheet! These drawings aid not only the animators but also the storyboard crew and directors. Unfortunately, due to the schedule, we are not able to generate expression sheets for every character, but usually all the main characters are given one. Expressions by Ki-Hyun Ryu. Cleanup by Studio Pierrot. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.







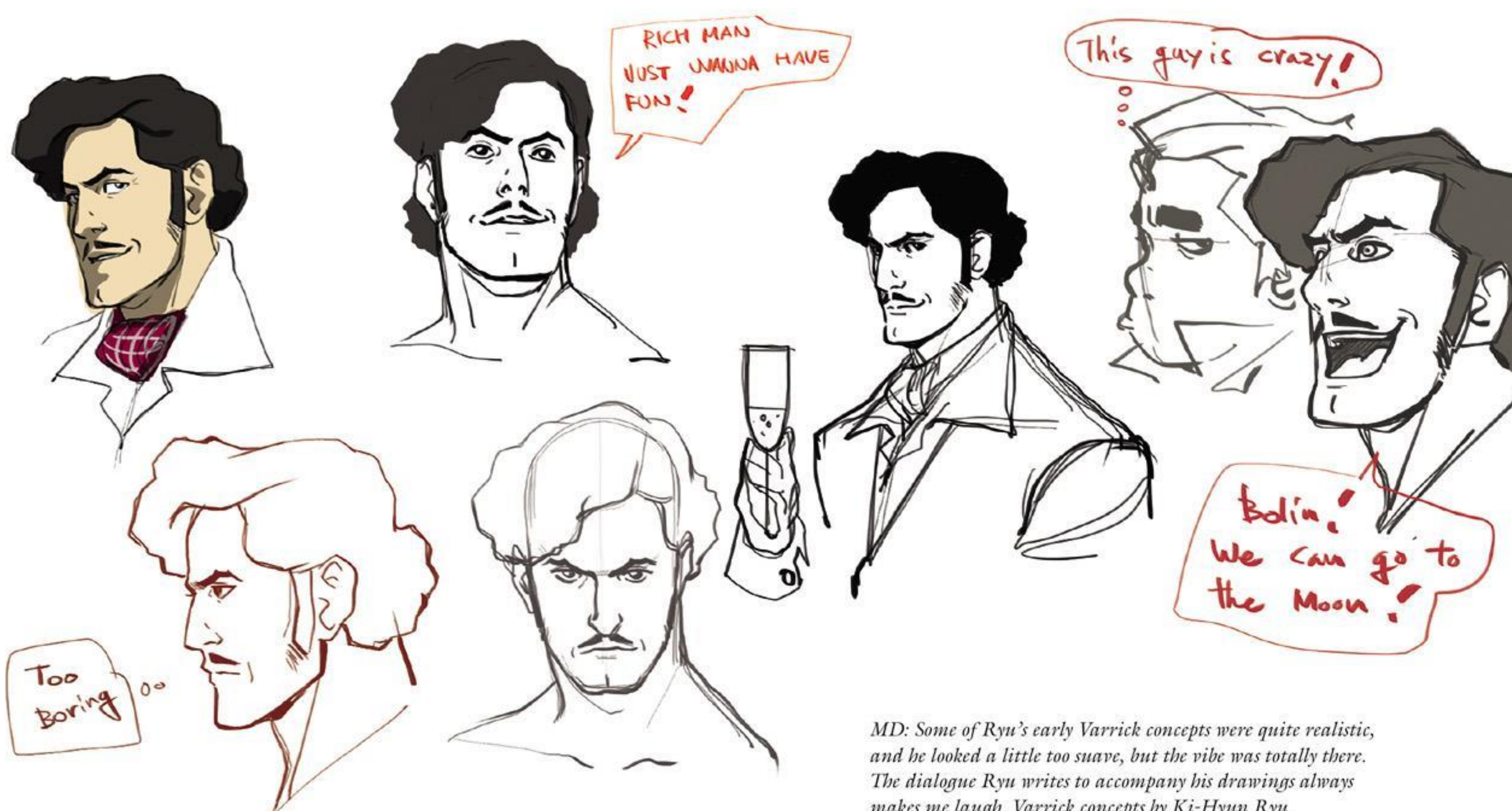
*BK: Kya's design was a fun collaboration: Lauren Montgomery did an initial concept that we all liked; Ki-Hyun Ryu took those concepts a step further and fleshed out the rough designs; and I finished up the final model sheet. As Kya is Katara's daughter, I wanted her outfit and parka both to call back to her mother's iconic outfits from the original series.*

*JDS: I absolutely loved Kya's initial concepts by Lauren. She had a wise look to her. You'll notice in the final design, her eyes were drawn a bit bigger and she looked just a bit more youthful and cute. This slight design tweak helped bolster the free-spirit aspect of Kya's personality. Kya color concepts by Lauren Montgomery. Kya rough designs by Ki-Hyun Ryu. Kya final design by Bryan Konietzko. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf and Bryan Konietzko.*





MD: Two of my favorite additions to the show were Bumi and Kya, Tenzin's brother and sister. Katara mentions them in the very first episode of Book One, so Bryan and I knew they existed, but we didn't have time to introduce them until Book Two. With the theme of family strife running through this story, their inclusion made more sense in Book Two and they provided good personal foils for Tenzin. Coming up with Bumi's tall tales was always a joy. Bumi design and expressions by Ki-Hyun Ryu. Cleanup by Studio Pierrot. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.



MD: Some of Ryu's early Varrick concepts were quite realistic, and he looked a little too suave, but the vibe was totally there. The dialogue Ryu writes to accompany his drawings always makes me laugh. Varrick concepts by Ki-Hyun Ryu.





MD: Varrick is a man who wears many hats: Inventor, shipping magnate, and “mover” producer. Although he’s a very comedic character, Varrick represents the prosperity of the Southern tribe and will do anything to turn a profit. The hilarious John Michael Higgins voiced him, bringing an amazing amount of energy and wackiness to the role. Varrick designs and expressions by Ki-Hyun Ryu. Cleanup by Studio Pierrot. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.



Left: “Mover star” and Bolin’s crush, Ginger. Right: A flapper from Varrick’s entourage. Character designs by Studio Pierrot. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.









MD: The new, but not improved, Fire Ferrets. The gag was the new players were supposed to look like Mako and Korra from behind. Character designs by Ki-Hyun Ryu and Studio Pierrot. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.



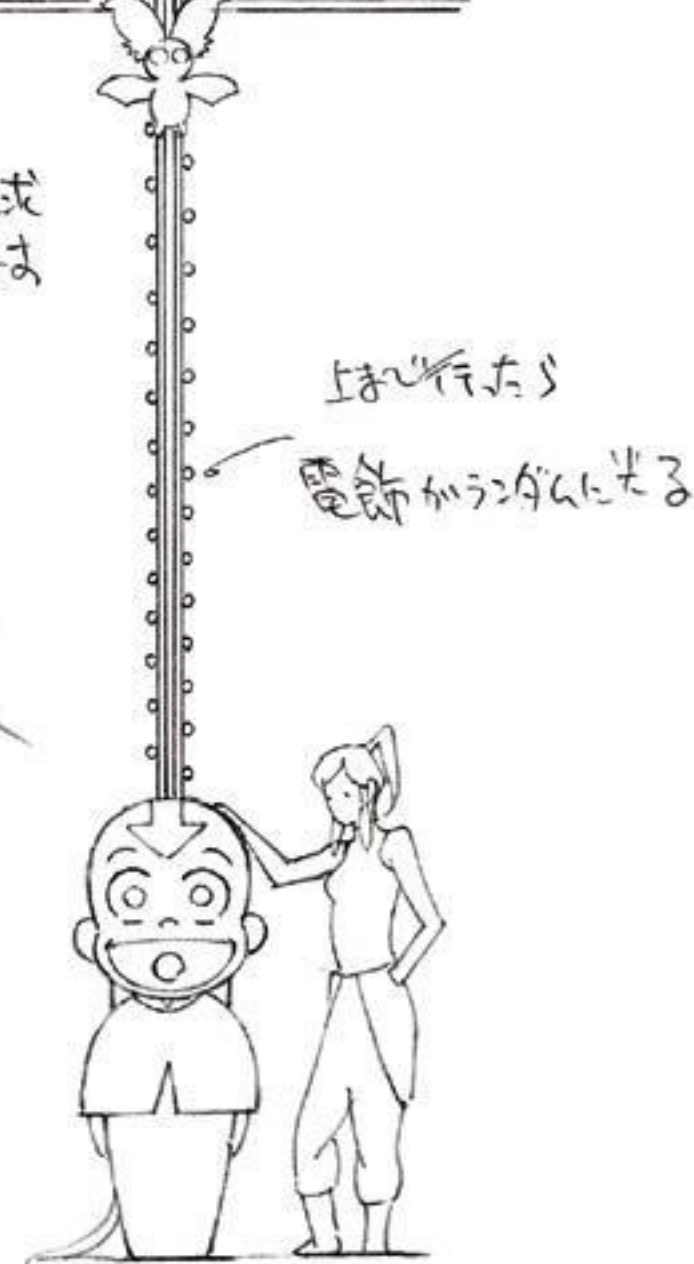
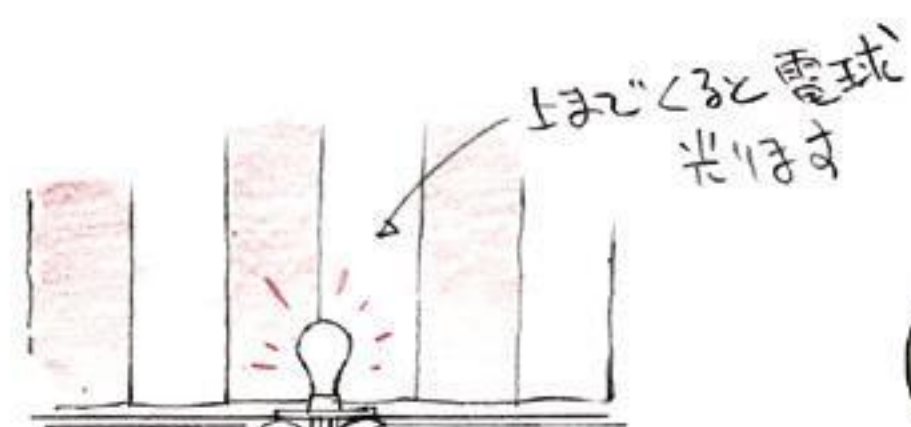
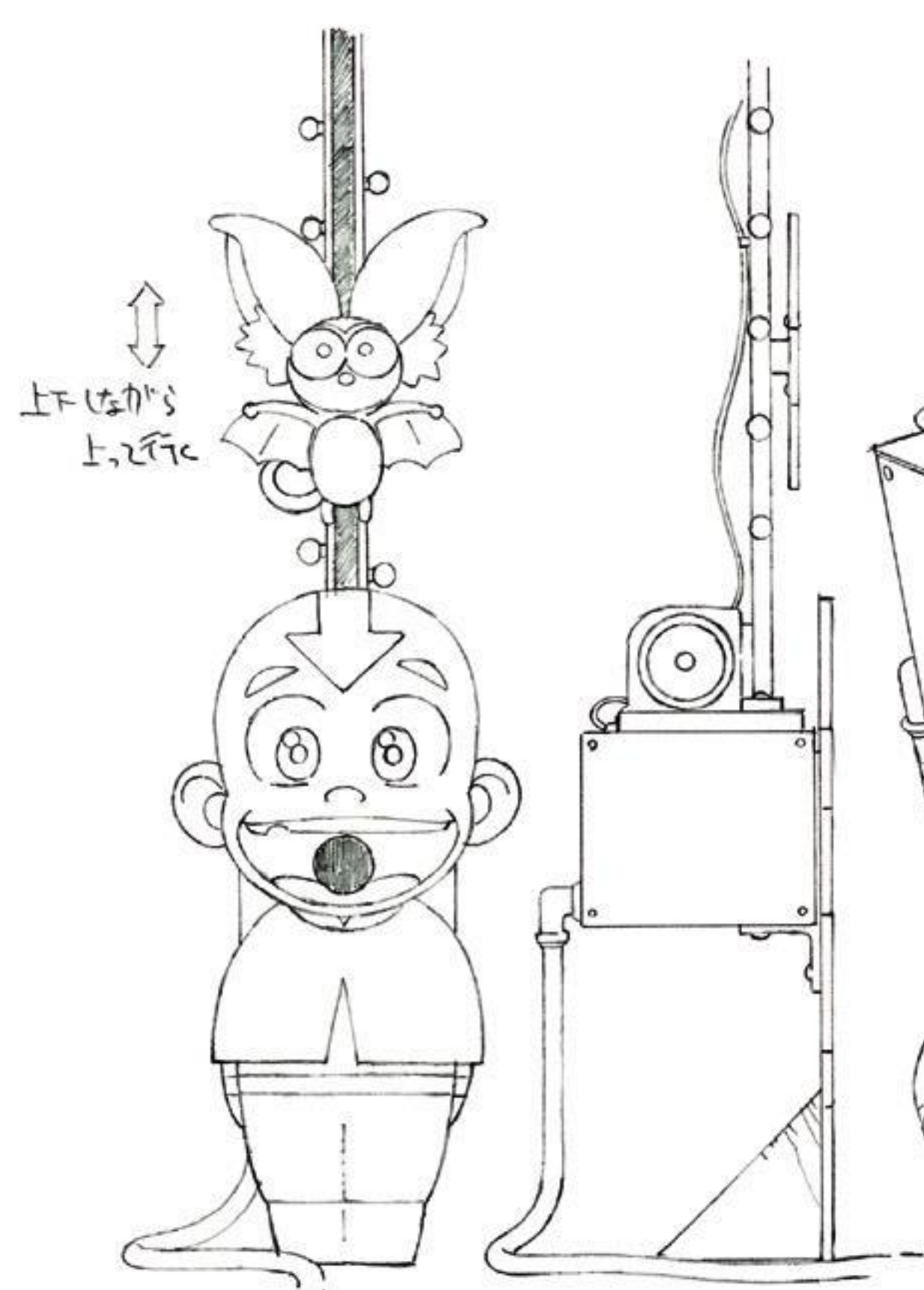
JDS: Two of Ryu's designs for the Red Monsoon Triad gang members may or may not have been inspired by a giant pro wrestler from the eighties and a James Bond henchman from the sixties. Below: Red Monsoon Triad character designs by Ki-Hyun Ryu. Cleanup by Studio Pierrot. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.







MD: The Southern Water Tribe Festival was once a solemn and meditative affair. But now it's all rides, games, and fried food on sticks. The festival was a fun way to show how Aang, Appa, and Momo are now part of popular culture in the Avatar world. Prop designs by Studio Pierrot. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf. (Below) BK: I always love seeing the characters in their chibi forms, so it was a treat to incorporate that style in the form of novelty games and mass-produced plushies. Prop designs by Studio Pierrot. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.



★電球のインセプションは撮った時にいろいろパターンを作ってたんだよ。



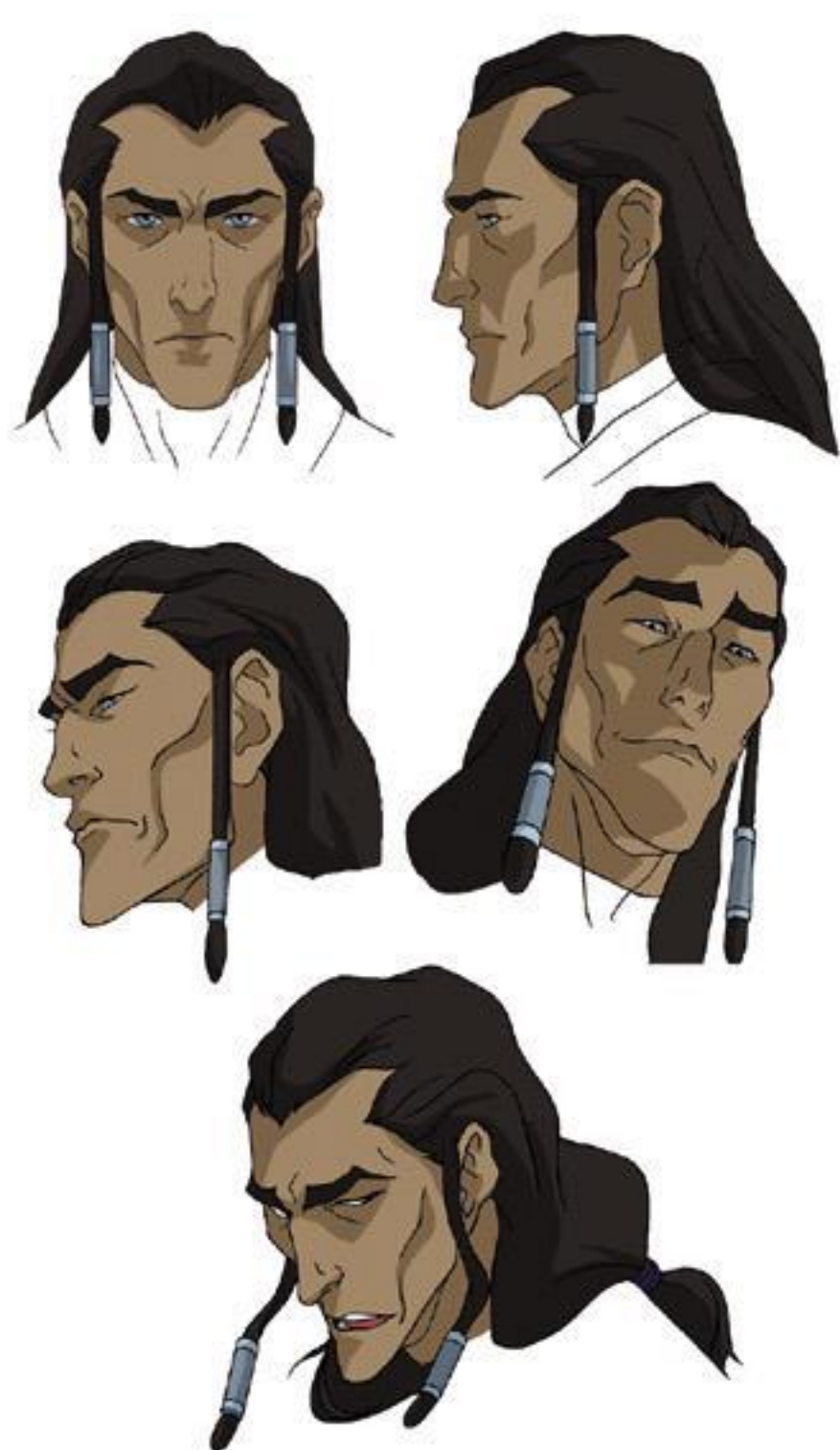


Top: Guest housing at the festival. Background designs by Studio Pierrot. Top left: Painting by Emily Tetri. Top right: Painting by Frederic Stewart.  
Middle and bottom: Early concepts of the festival by Emily Tetri.



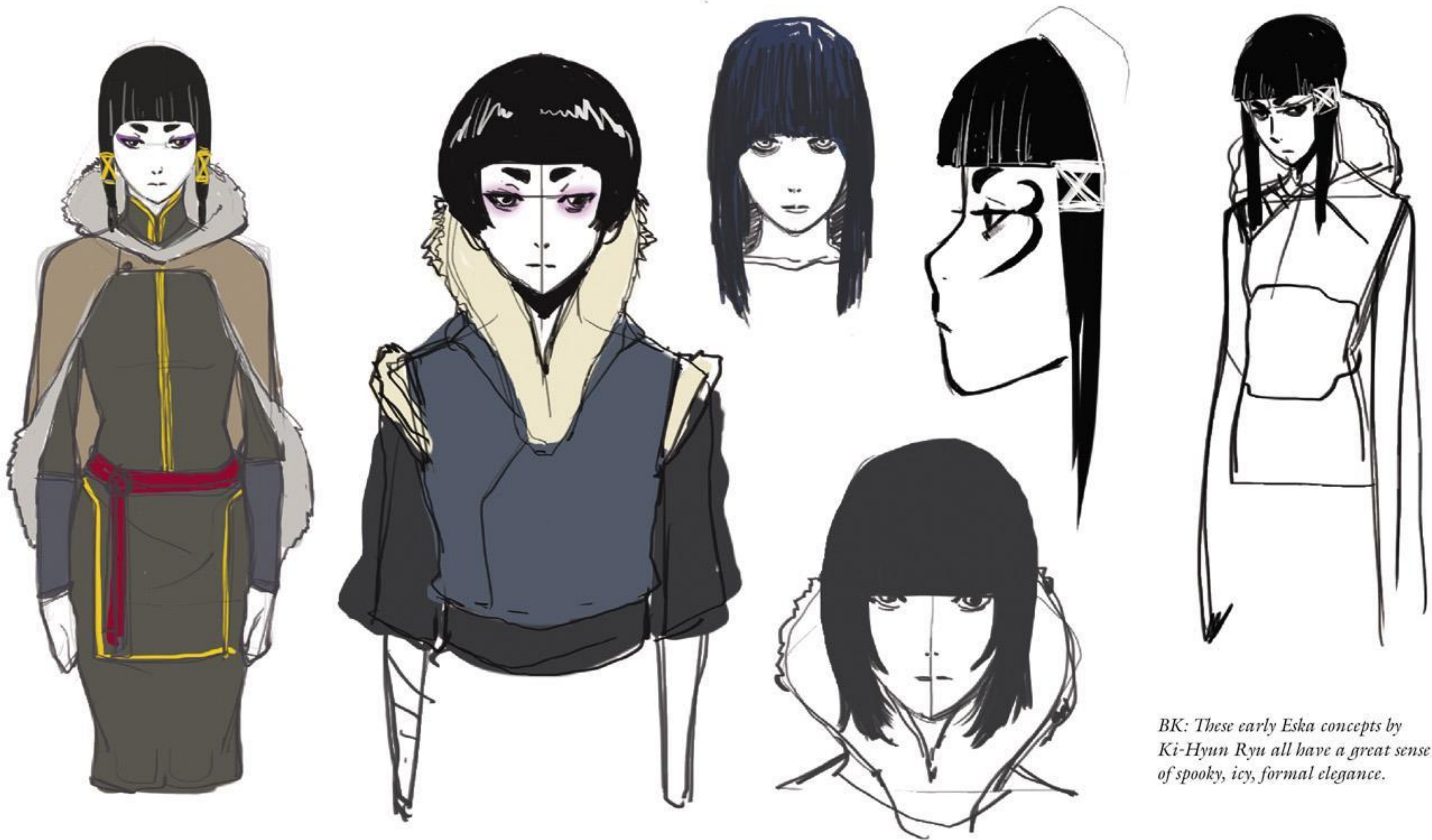


JDS: I'm kind of the default "warrior dude" designer, so I took the initial pass on Tonraq's design for Book One. By the time we got to Book Two, we knew he was playing a much bigger role and his design needed to be refined. The idea was that he's built like a barbarian and fights with a brutish, in-your-face style that contrasts with his brother's slender frame and elegant technique. Tonraq expressions by Ki-Hyun Ryu. Tonraq character design by Joaquim Dos Santos and Bryan Konietzko. Cleanup by Studio Pierrot. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.

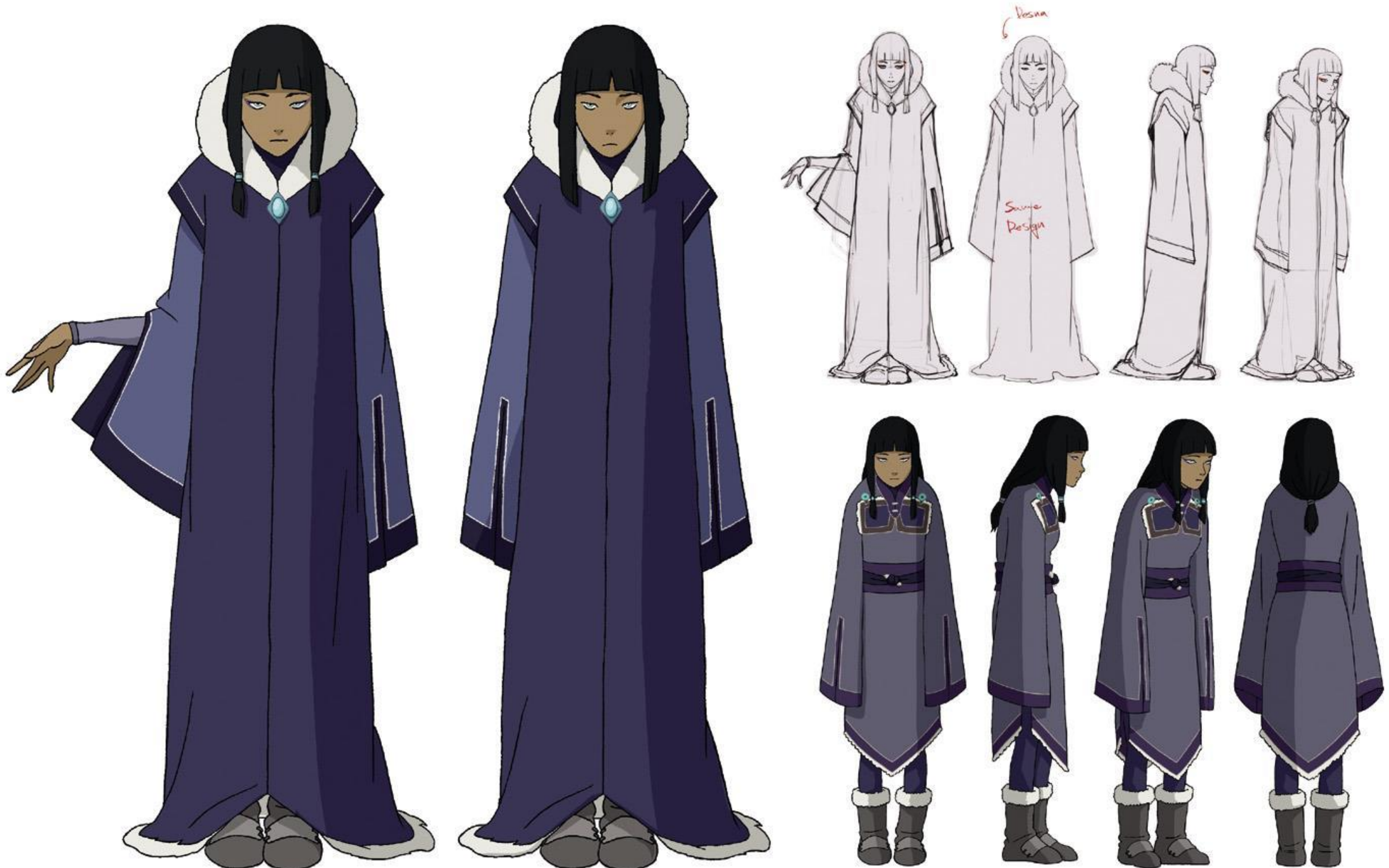


BK: In the end, I'm pleased with how Unalaq's design turned out, but in all honesty I wasn't initially crazy about the direction we went in with his look. I felt like he was practically the same design as Tarrlok, our secondary villain from the previous book. I wanted him to resemble his brother Tonraq more, but everyone was pretty insistent he should have a more professorial vibe, so I caved. Adrian LaTourelle did a fabulous job voicing Unalaq and making him rather distinct from Tarrlok, so after only a few episodes I got over the visual similarities. Unalaq expressions by Ki-Hyun Ryu. Unalaq character design by Ki-Hyun Ryu and Josh Middleton. Cleanup by Studio Pierrot. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.



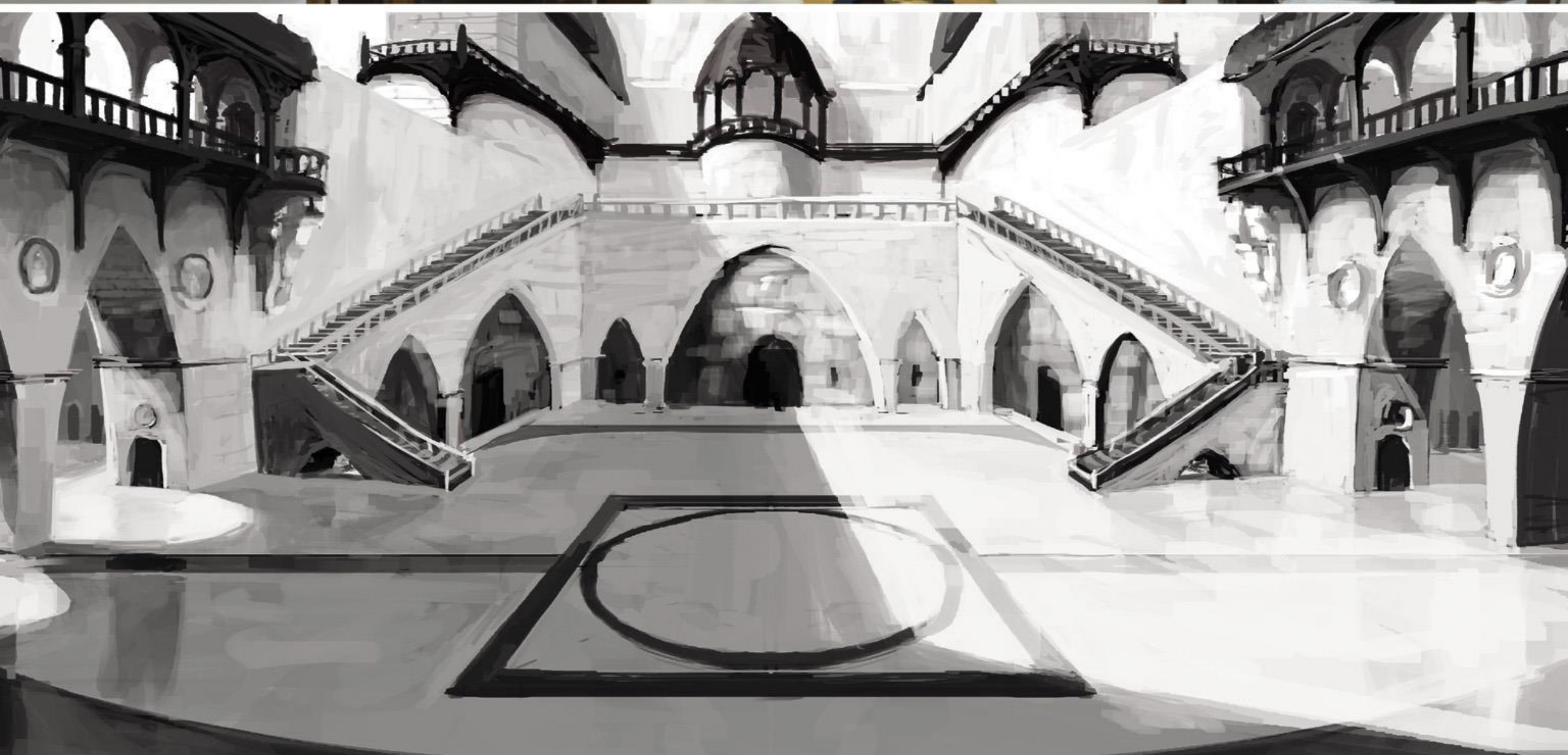


BK: These early Esha concepts by Ki-Hyun Ryu all have a great sense of spooky, icy, formal elegance.



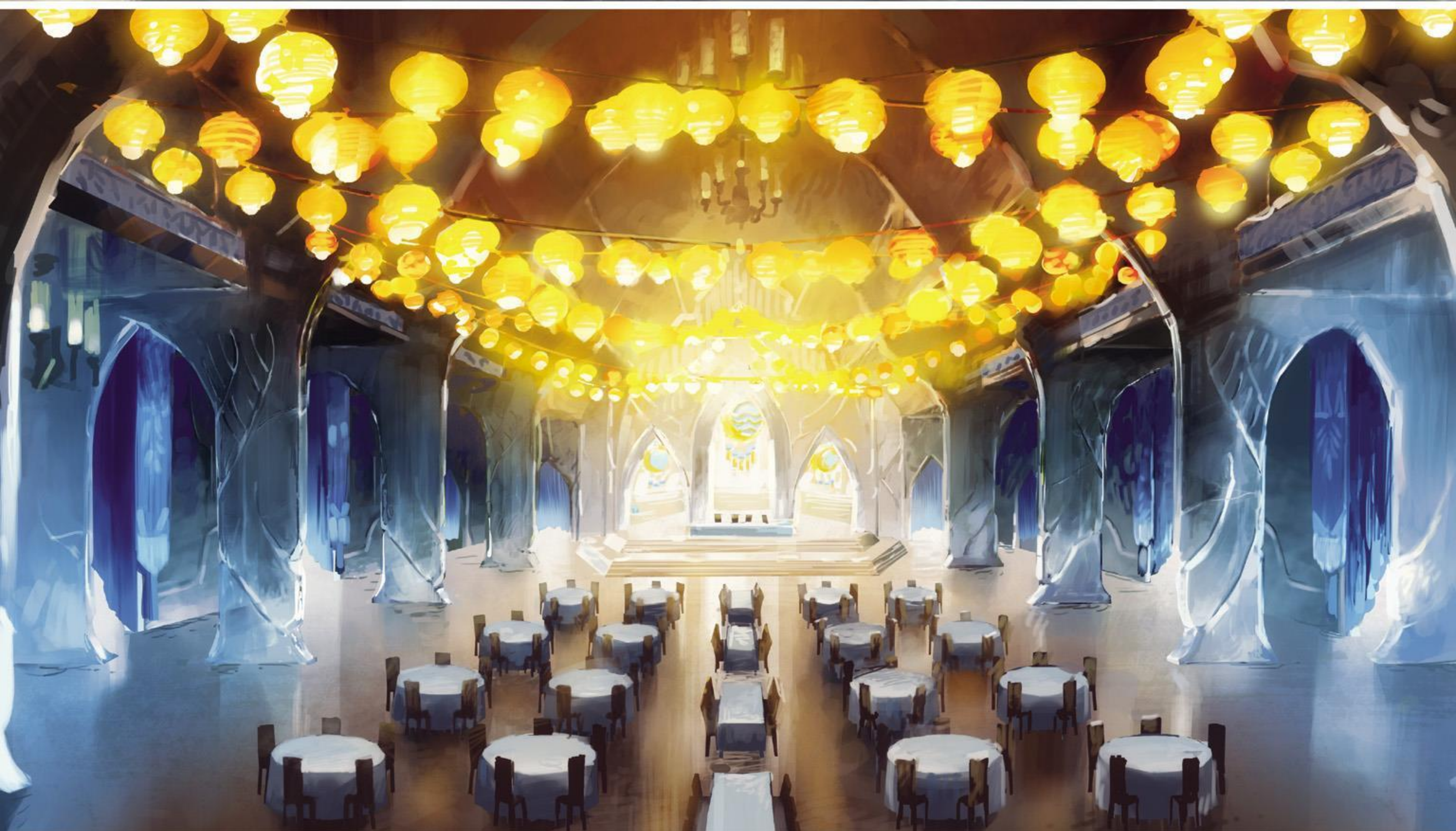
JDS: Esha and Desna are two of the more memorable characters from Book Two. Their designs were a bit tough to break. I can remember seeing earlier versions of these characters on Josh Middleton's computer for nearly a month as he struggled to pin down their look. Everyone was chipping in ideas and I believe we even went so far as to get full character turns made based on those previous takes. But they just did not feel right. It was not until Ryu took a pass and gave them their distinctive hunch and dead-eyed expression that the characters finally came to life. If I remember correctly, Josh came up with the slit in their long sleeves that allowed their arms free range of movement, which I thought was a nice touch. Esha and Desna character designs by Ki-Hyun Ryu and Josh Middleton. Cleanup by Studio Pierrot. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf and Bryan Konietzko.





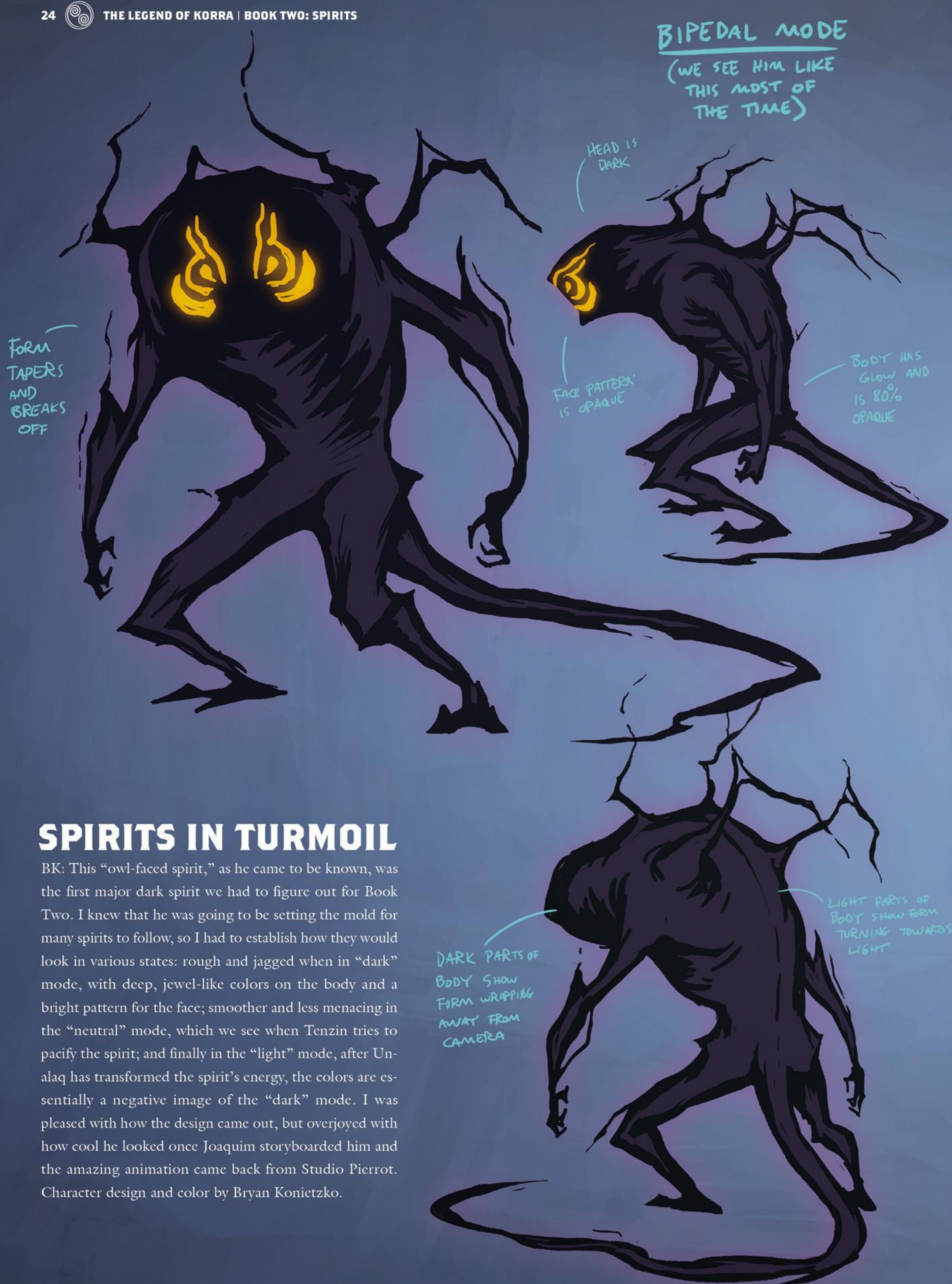
*Concepts of the exteriors and interiors of the chieftain's palace, where the dinner in honor of Unalaq took place, by Emily Tetri.*





MD: The history and political structure of the Water Tribes is something Bryan and I discussed when we first developed Korra, and it was further developed during Book Two with the writers. However, it's difficult to weave exposition into an episode without bogging it down. So here's a little Avatar history: The South had a long-established Council of Elders to help govern their tribe on a day-to-day basis, though the Northern chief ultimately ruled them. Following the Hundred Year War, the Northern tribe sent a lot of Waterbenders and resources to the South to help them rebuild. The South grew prosperous over the years, and the North wanted to share in their bounty. They felt they were owed, but the South wasn't always willing to share what they believed was rightfully theirs. So tensions grew over the years. Chief Unalaq still has some supporters in the South, but he is seen more as a figurehead nowadays. Top: The chieftain's palace. Bottom: The palace's great hall. Background designs by Studio Pierrot. Paintings by Frederic Stewart.







## QUADRUPEDAL MODE



— LIGHT FROM THE GLOWING  
FACE PATTERN TRAILS  
AND FADES OFF DURING  
REALLY FAST MOVES

## LIGHT MODE

(AFTER HIS NEGATIVE  
ENERGY IS TRANSFORMED)



## NEUTRAL MODE

— COLORS SHIFT AND  
SHAPES BECOME  
SMOOTHER AND  
SIMPLER IN  
"NEUTRAL MODE"  
(WHEN HE IS  
PASSIVE)







A10



A11



A12



A13



A14



A15



A16



A17



A18



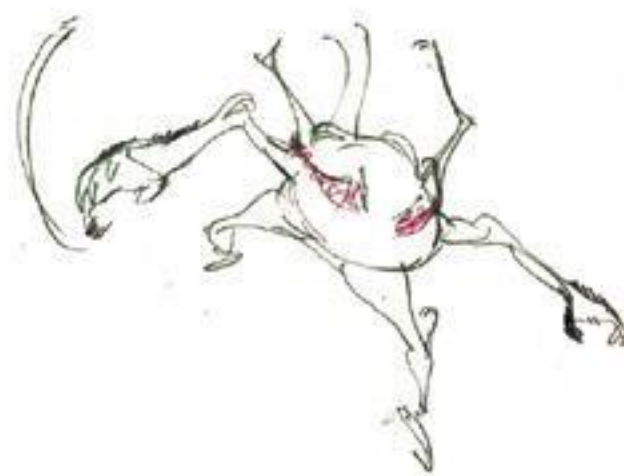
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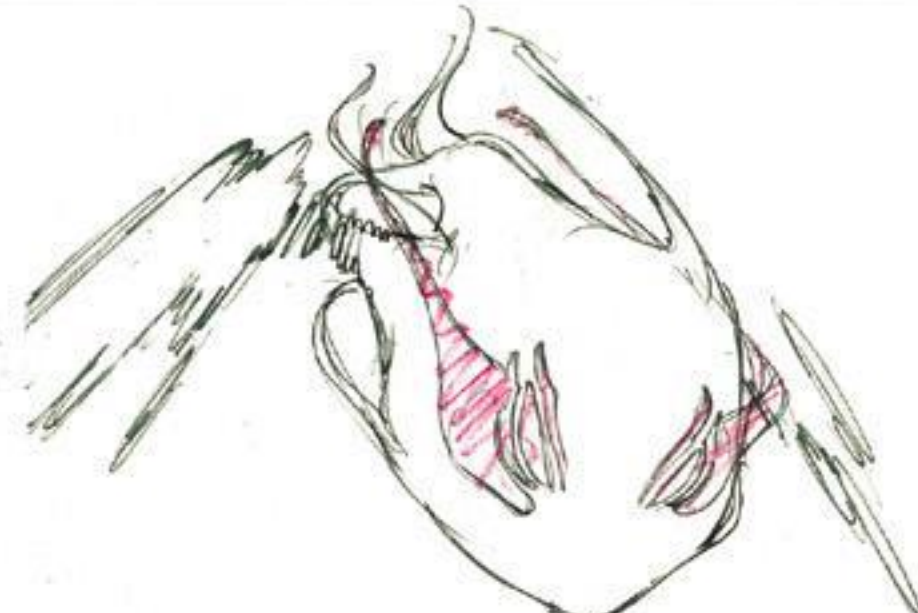
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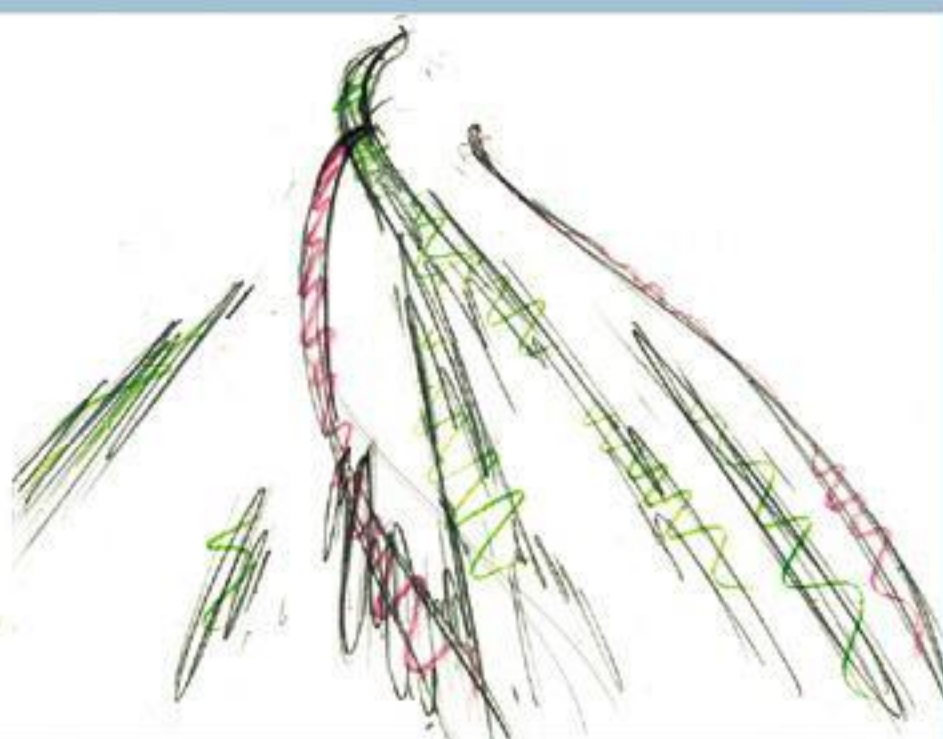
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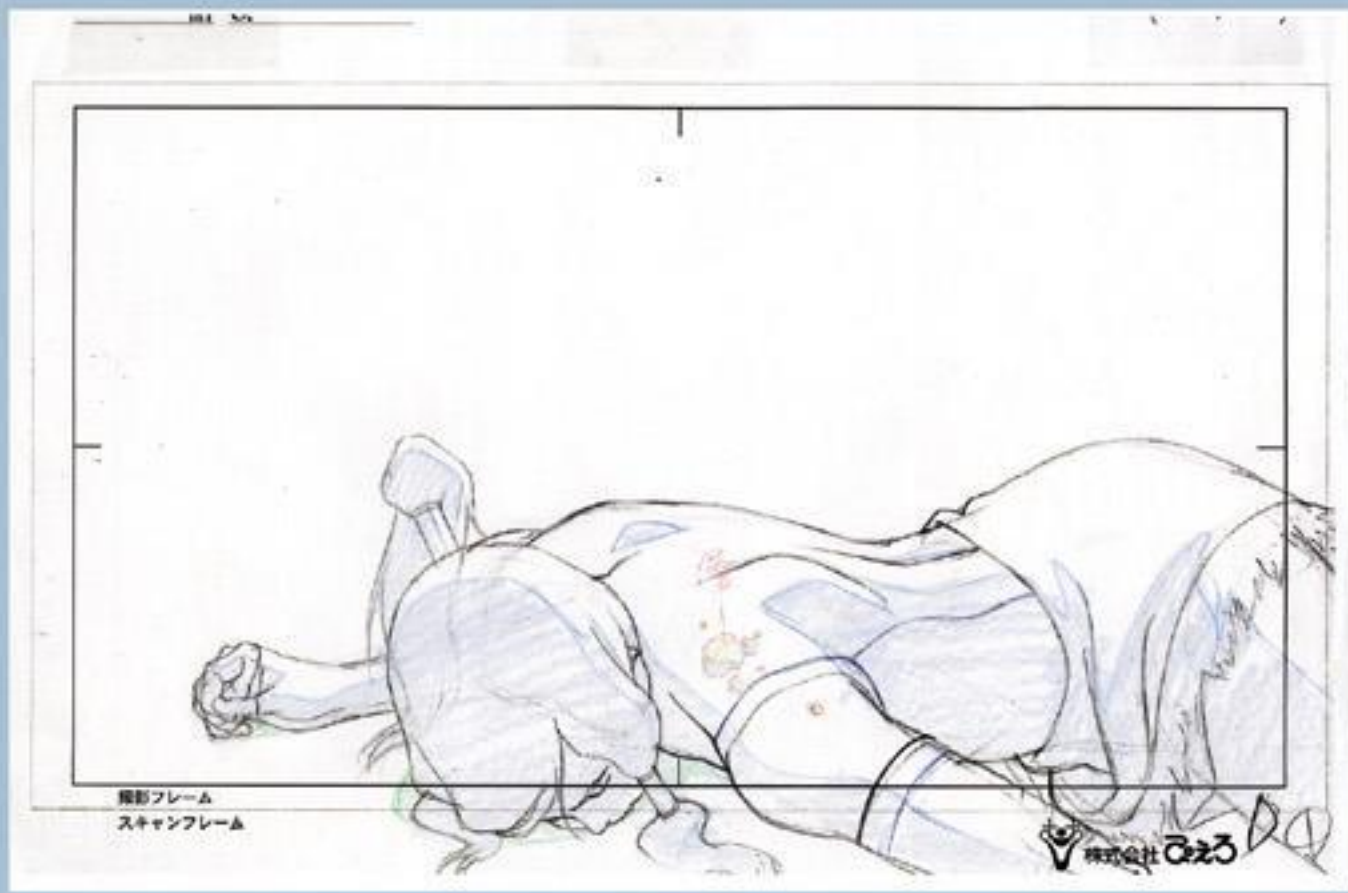
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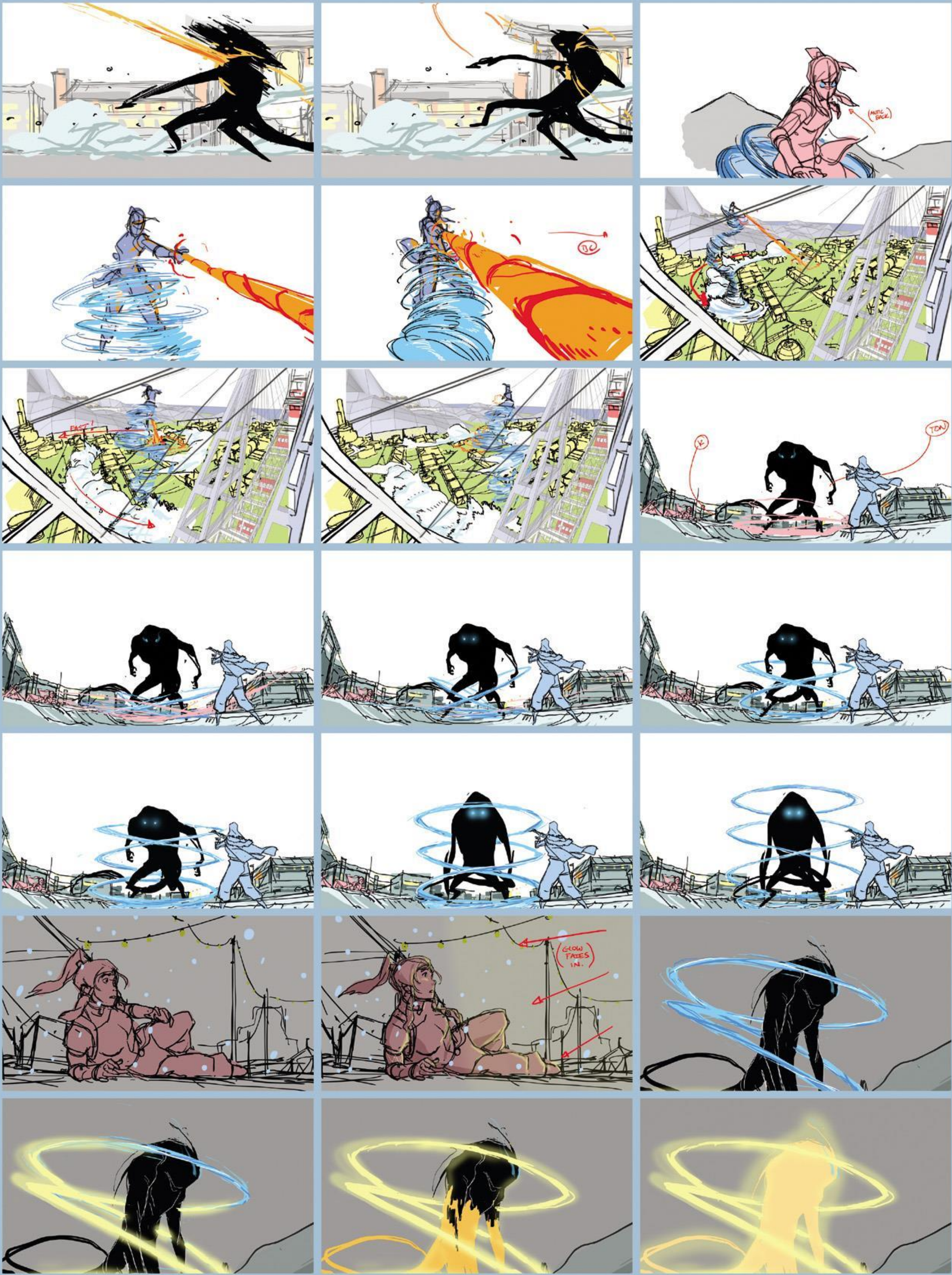
(This spread) MD: Key animation by Studio Pierrot of Korra battling the owl-faced spirit. The sequence of Korra pushing herself up is beautifully animated. You can really feel Korra's weight and effort.

(Following spread) JDS: Korra takes on the owl-faced spirit! The direction for this scene was pretty specific that the spirit needed to be fast . . . like, really fast. We were in the unique position of staging a fight with a character that was not necessarily constrained to human movements, so that just blew the doors wide open on how this creature could move. It could squash and stretch and bend into any shape to get the job done. I imagined it was two parts scorpion/cobra and one part gorilla, and I must say that the animators at Studio Pierrot really hit the ball out of the park with how they translated my squiggly drawings in the final animation. This also marks the first time we see the use of spirit bending by Unalaq. Storyboard by Joaquim Dos Santos.













CHAPTER TWO



神  
靈



THE  
SOUTHERN  
LIGHTS





Top: Tonraq was a young general in the Northern Water Tribe army. Middle left: Young Unalaq. Character designs by Christie Tseng. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf. Middle right: Tonraq and Unalaq's father, the former chief of the Northern tribe. Character design by Ki-Hyun Ryu and Christie Tseng. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf. Bottom: Northern Water Tribe soldiers. Character design by Christie Tseng. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.

(Preceding spread)  
Background design by  
Studio Pierrot. Painting  
by Frederic Stewart.







MD: With Book Two, we get out of Republic City and visit some familiar locations from Avatar: The Last Airbender. Here, we see the chief's throne room and an aerial view of the Northern Water Tribe, which haven't changed significantly in the intervening years. However, the painting style was updated from the original series to match the Korra style. Top: Background design by Dean Kelly. Painting by Angela Sung. Bottom: Background design by Studio Pierrot. Painting by Frederic Stewart.





BK: Frederic Stewart, one of our background painters, drew this evocative concept (top left) of the scene where a young Unalqa coaxes some spirits back into the sacred forest, and did this painting (bottom) of the sacred Northern forest in the aftermath of Tonraq's destruction. Josh Middleton did the two moody grayscale concepts (top right) of the Everstorm raging above the South Pole and the sacred forest found at the heart of the storm.





BK: The highly talented comic book artist Josh Middleton worked on *Korra* for a spell, helping us out with art direction and the main title sequence. We based the trees in the sacred forests on ancient bristlecone pines, some of the oldest organisms on Earth. I wish the sacred forest scenes in the animation had all come out as lovely as these concept pieces of Josh's (top and bottom right) and Frederic Stewart's (bottom left), but consistent quality is never a guarantee in TV animation.



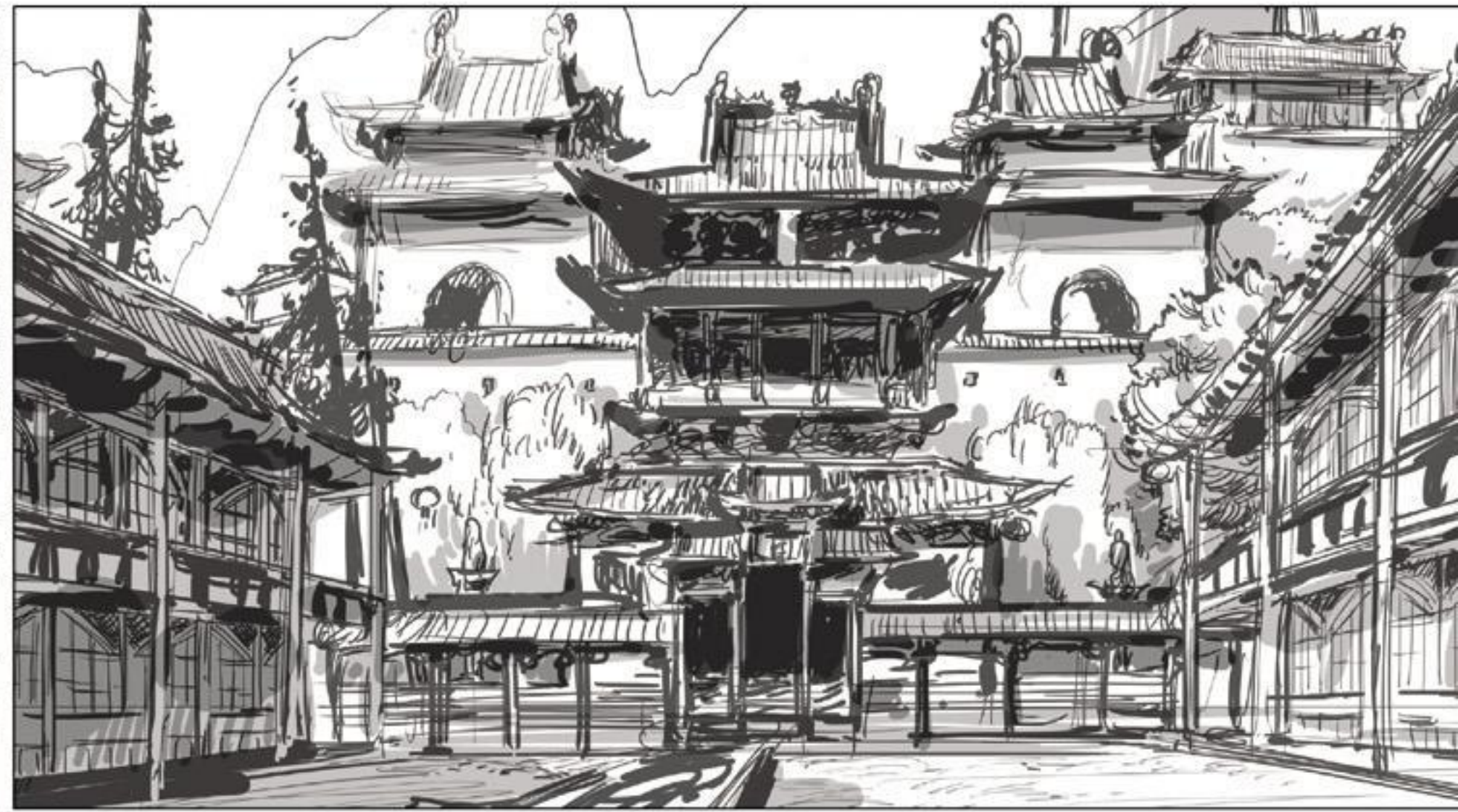
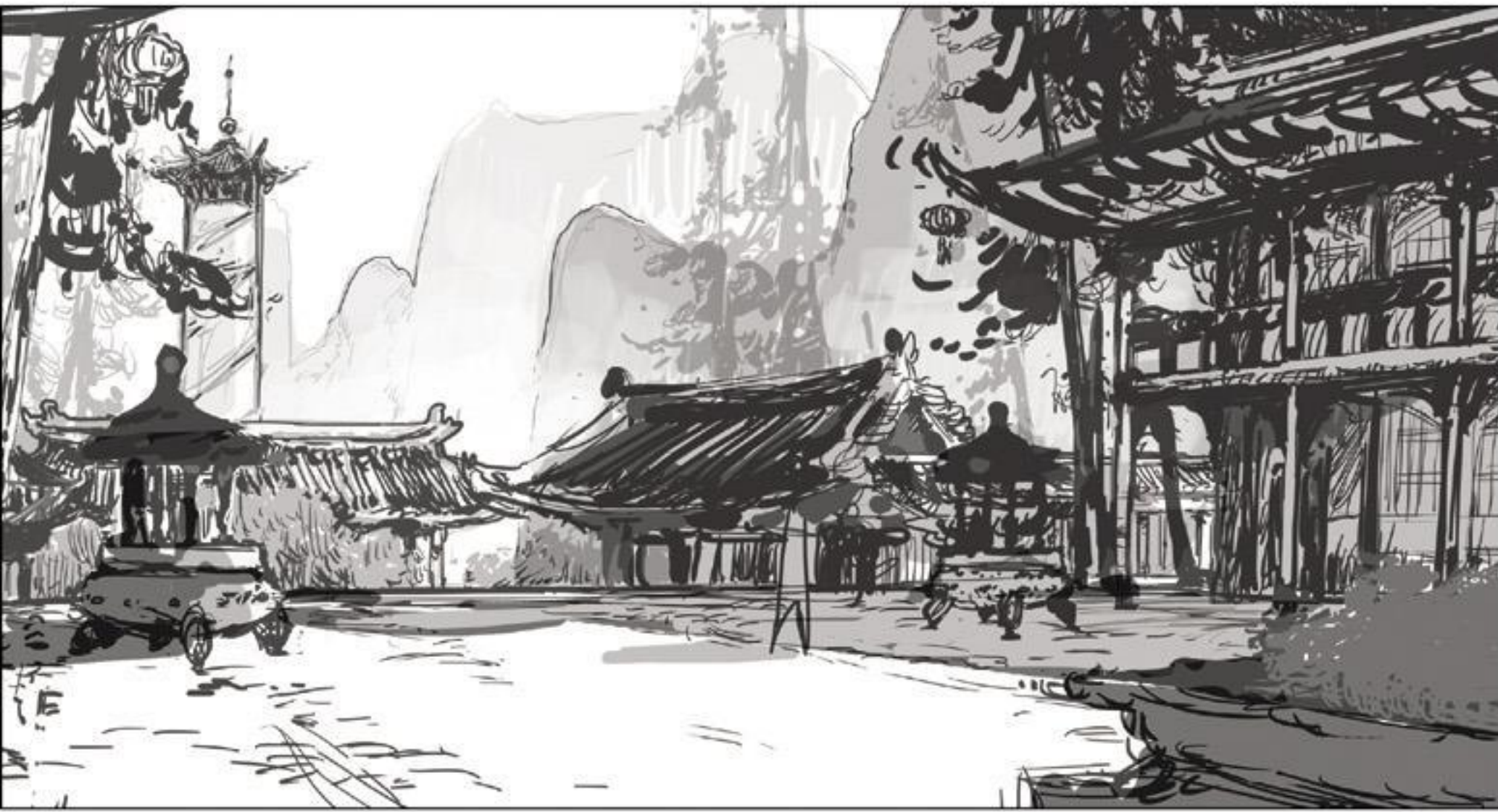
MD: Another location we revisit from the original series is the Southern Air Temple and its statue room. Both were significantly updated to reflect the style of Korra.

BK: I always like the idea of statues in the show, but the execution of them is another matter. It is hard to keep them drawn on model and painted well from various angles. To make matters worse, the spiral orientation of the Southern Air Temple statue room presents a tough challenge when trying to keep their placements consistent from shot to shot. I begged Mike to never write another scene in this location ever again!

Avatar statue designs by Christie Tseng. Paintings by Emily Tetri and Frederic Stewart. Wan and Raava statue design by Bryan Konietzko. Aang statue design by Christie Tseng. Paintings by Emily Tetri.





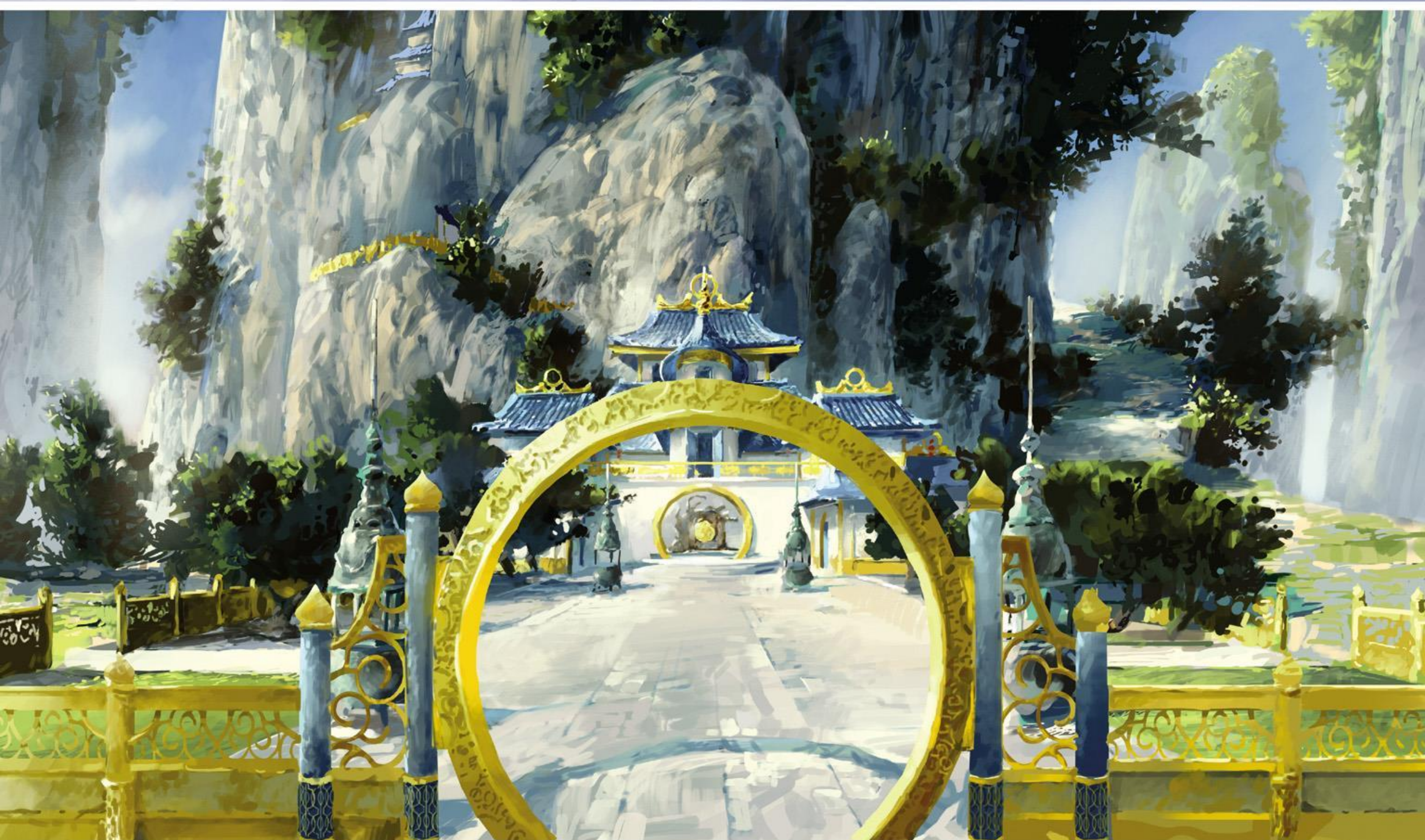


*Concepts of the Southern Air Temple by Frederic Stewart.  
(Following spread) The frozen Southern spirit portal. Background design by Studio Pierrot. Painting by Frederic Stewart.*









MD: The first stop on Tenzin's family vacation is the Southern Air Temple, where Avatar Aang grew up. Following the Hundred Year War, Aang established the Air Acolytes. Later, the Acolytes moved into the various temples and repaired them to their former states. The four Air Temples became pilgrimage sites for the Air Acolytes as they studied Air Nomad history and philosophy. Top: Concept by Josh Middleton. Bottom: Background design by Studio Pierrot. Painting by Frederic Stewart.





MD: Book Two was a chance to get to know the Airbender kids a little more, so we gave them each their own story. Meelo's revolves around getting his first pet—an adorable lemur he names Poki. Meelo's military side shows through when he trains a whole army of lemurs, much to Tenzin's dismay. Left: Background design by Studio Pierrot. Painting by Frederic Stewart. Above: Character design by Studio Pierrot and Bryan Konietzko. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.





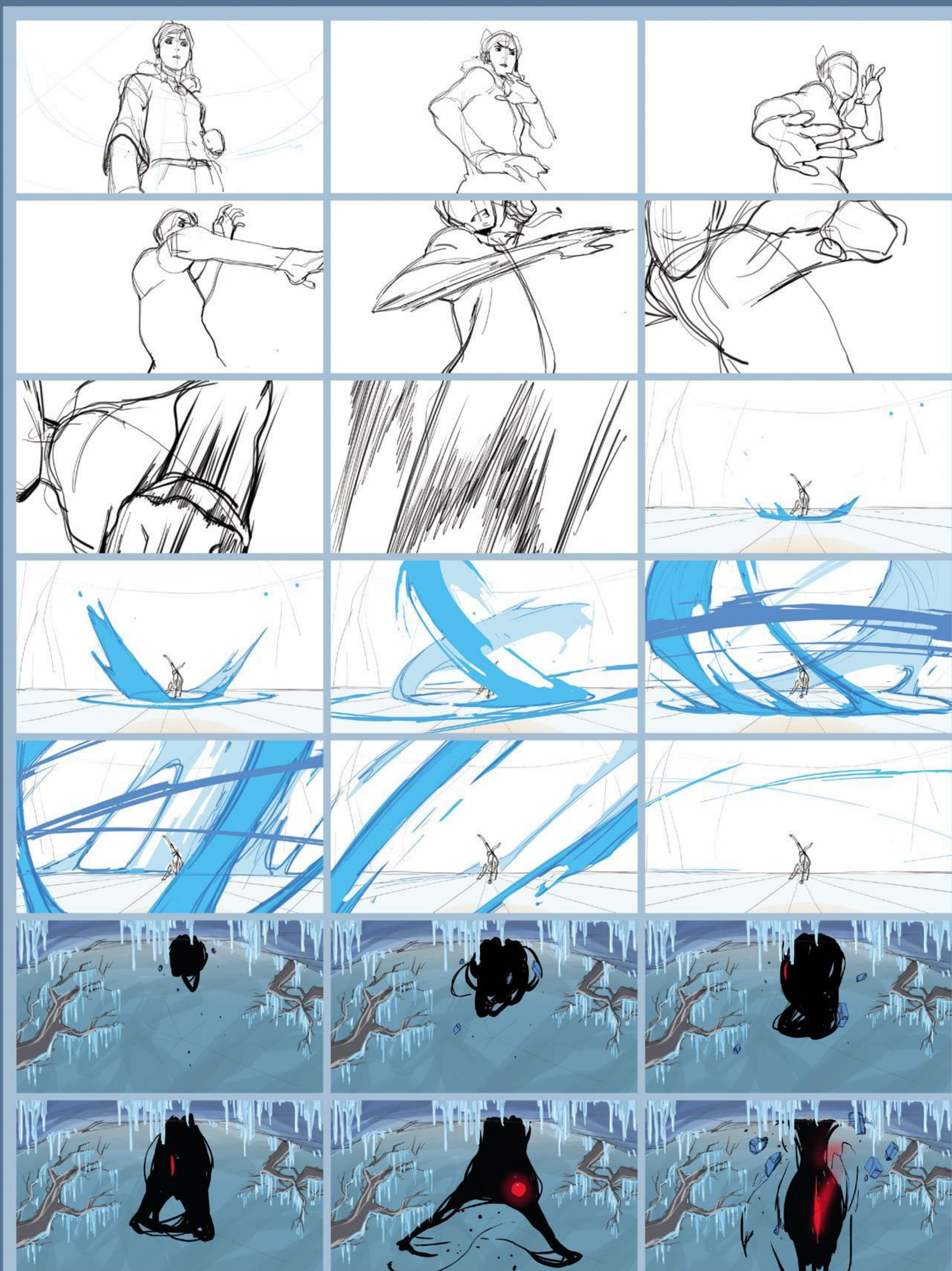
BK: As usual, Frederic Stewart did an incredible job painting these moody icescapes of the Everstorm and the sacred forest in its frozen and melted states. Background designs by Studio Pierrot.





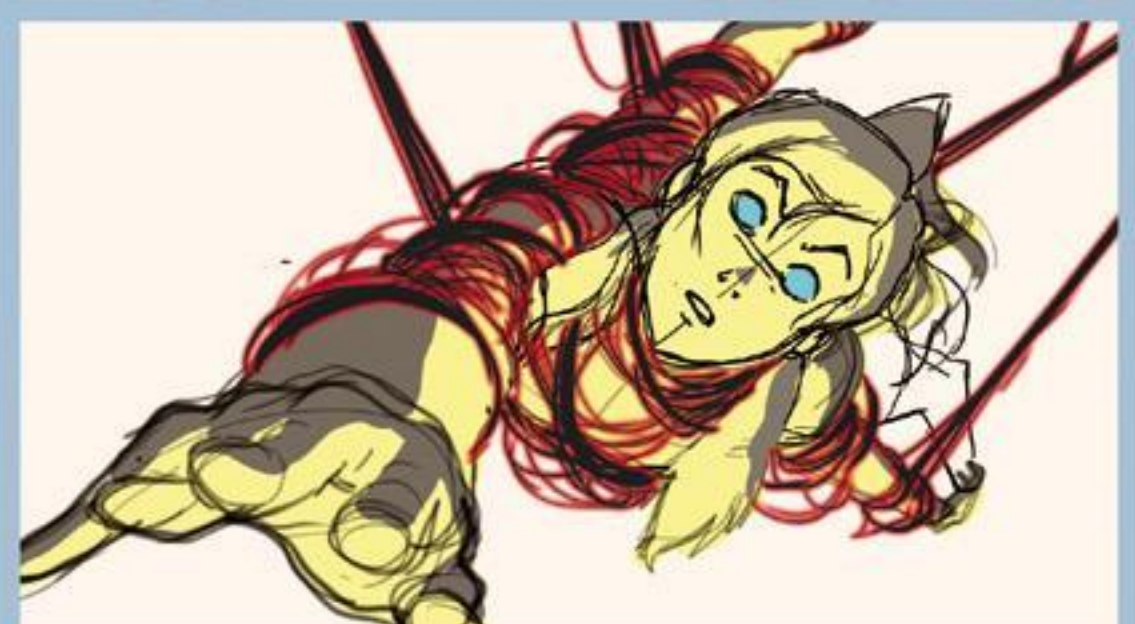
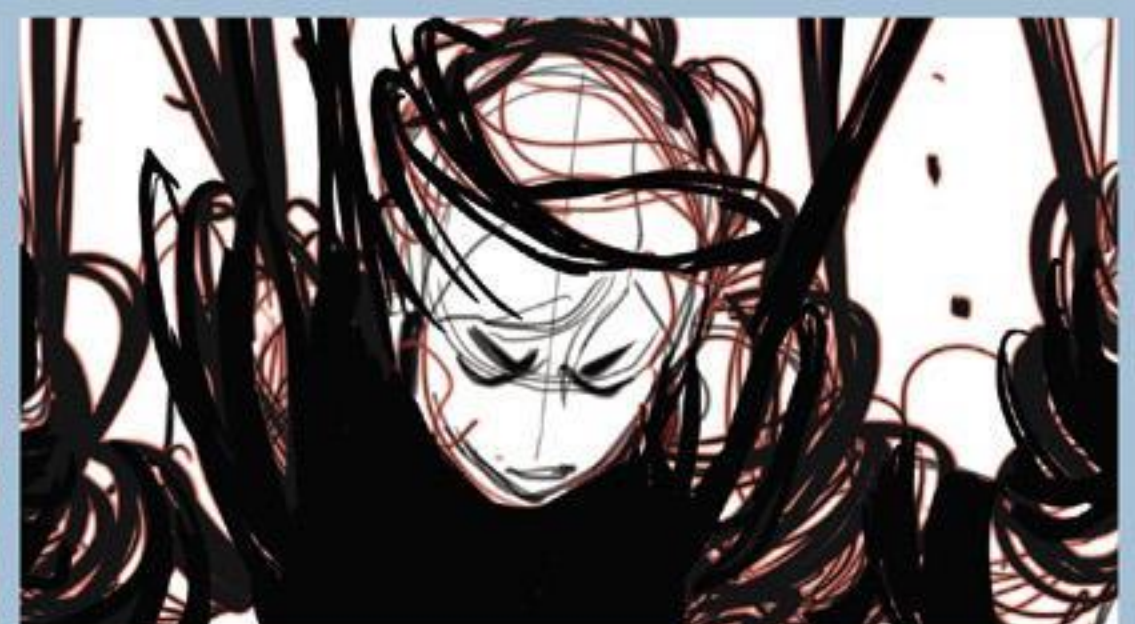
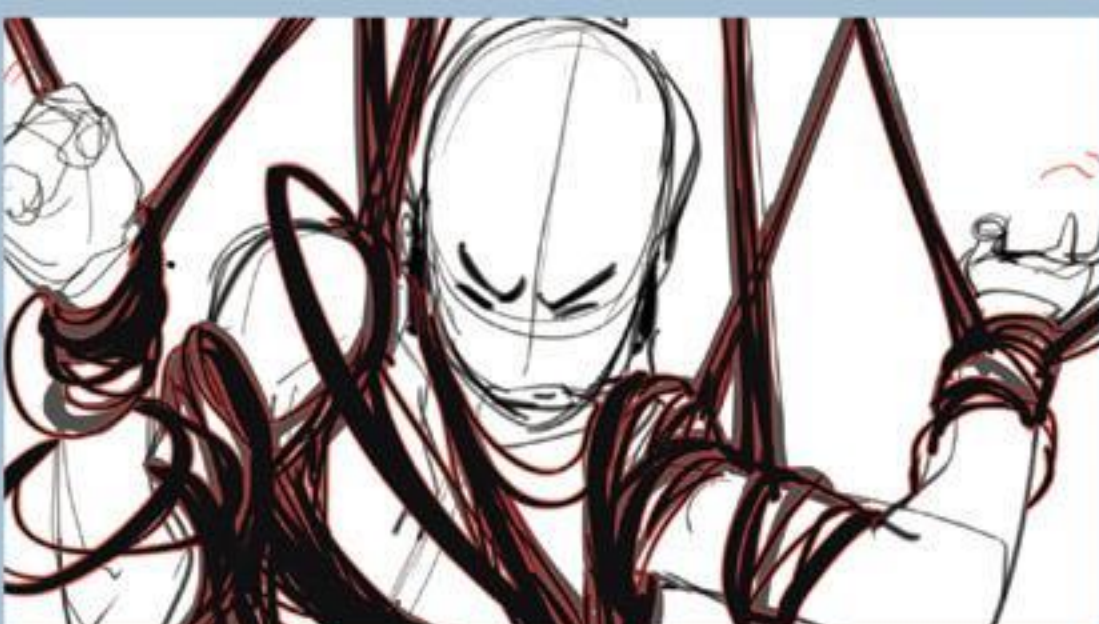
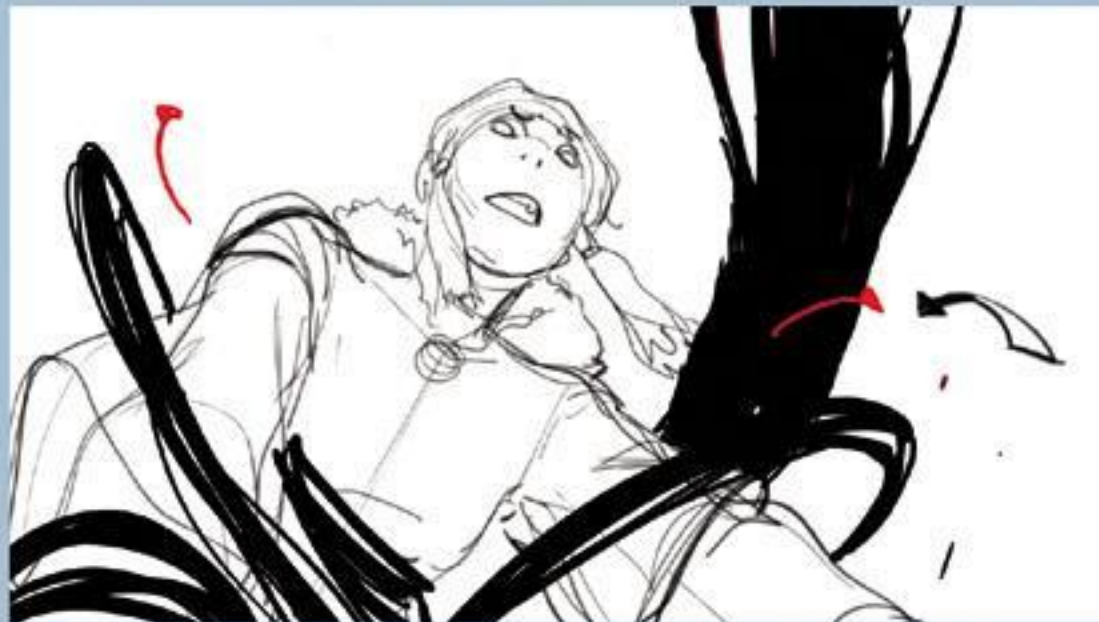
BK: Fred and Emily have been our background-painting dynamic duo from the start, but we were lucky enough to add a third in-house painter, the exceedingly talented Lauren Zurcher. She came onboard in the midst of retakes for this episode, and she picked up the style of the show very quickly while painting all of these spooky trees in ice. Background designs by Studio Pierrot and Bryan Konietzko. Paintings by Lauren Zurcher.





MD: This sequence shows Korra's attempt and ultimate success in opening the Southern portal. When I first saw Ryu's storyboard, where the dark spirits wrapped up Korra, I was amazed, but also worried that it was too complex to animate. Turned out that the animators at Studio Pierrot handled this crazy action well.





KOREA  
Blown  
back

THIS  
HAPPENS  
soon



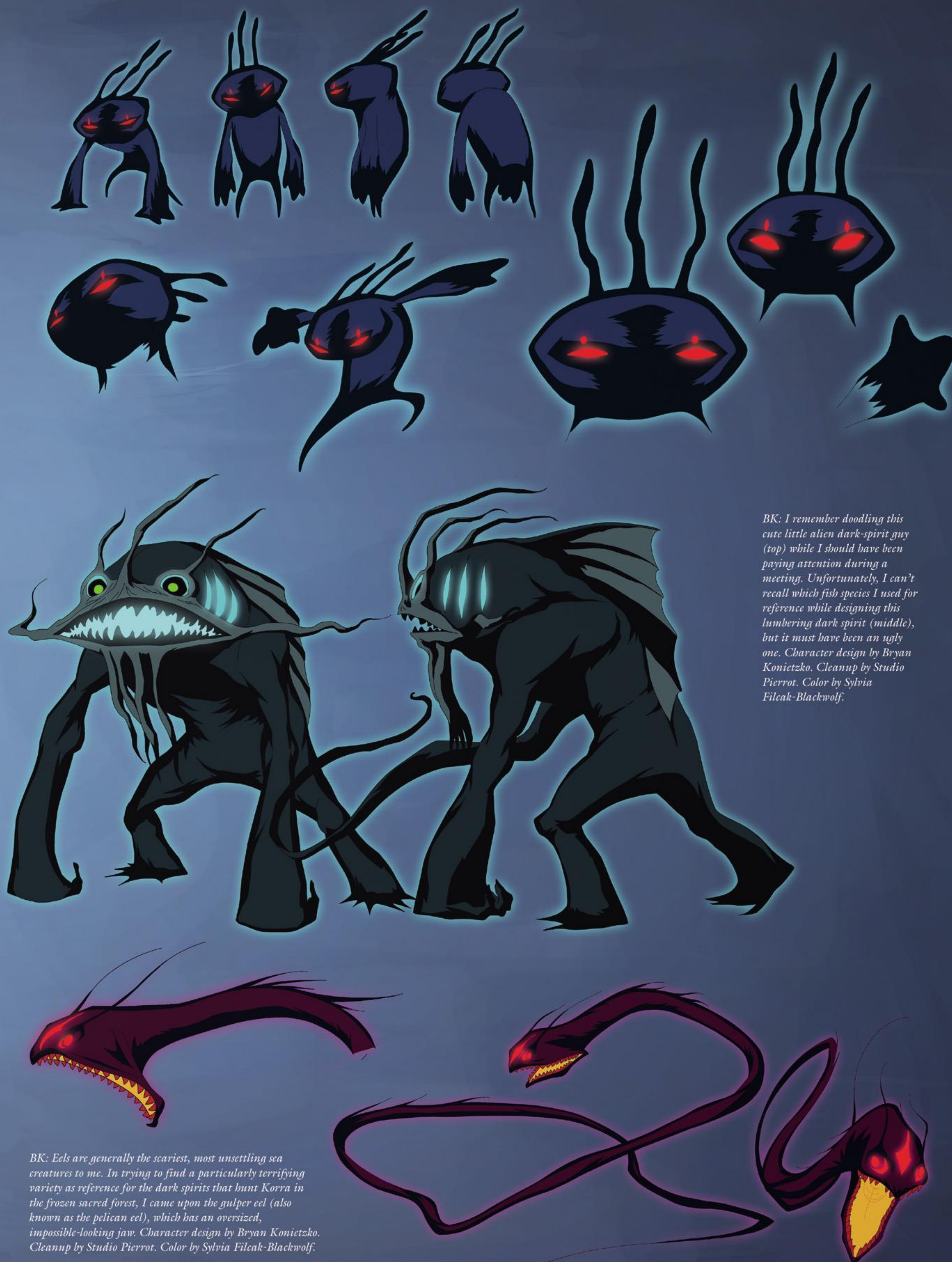


BK: These lurking spirits were loosely based on African hunting dogs, which seemed appropriate, as Korra and her friends were being stalked out in the wilderness on their journey to the South Pole. Character design by Bryan Konietzko. Cleanup by Studio Pierrot. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.

(Below) BK: In looking for inspiration for creepy dark spirits, we often turned to nature, an endless source of things scarier than anything we could come up with on our own. This hammer-faced purple spirit seems at first to not have a mouth at all, only to reveal a terrifying lamprey-like mouth with multiple rings of sharp teeth. Character design by Bryan Konietzko. Cleanup by Studio Pierrot. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.







BK: I remember doodling this cute little alien dark-spirit guy (top) while I should have been paying attention during a meeting. Unfortunately, I can't recall which fish species I used for reference while designing this lumbering dark spirit (middle), but it must have been an ugly one. Character design by Bryan Konietzko. Cleanup by Studio Pierrot. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.

BK: Eels are generally the scariest, most unsettling sea creatures to me. In trying to find a particularly terrifying variety as reference for the dark spirits that hunt Korra in the frozen sacred forest, I came upon the gulper eel (also known as the pelican eel), which has an oversized, impossible-looking jaw. Character design by Bryan Konietzko. Cleanup by Studio Pierrot. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.





CHAPTER THREE



神  
靈



# CIVIL WARS PART ONE





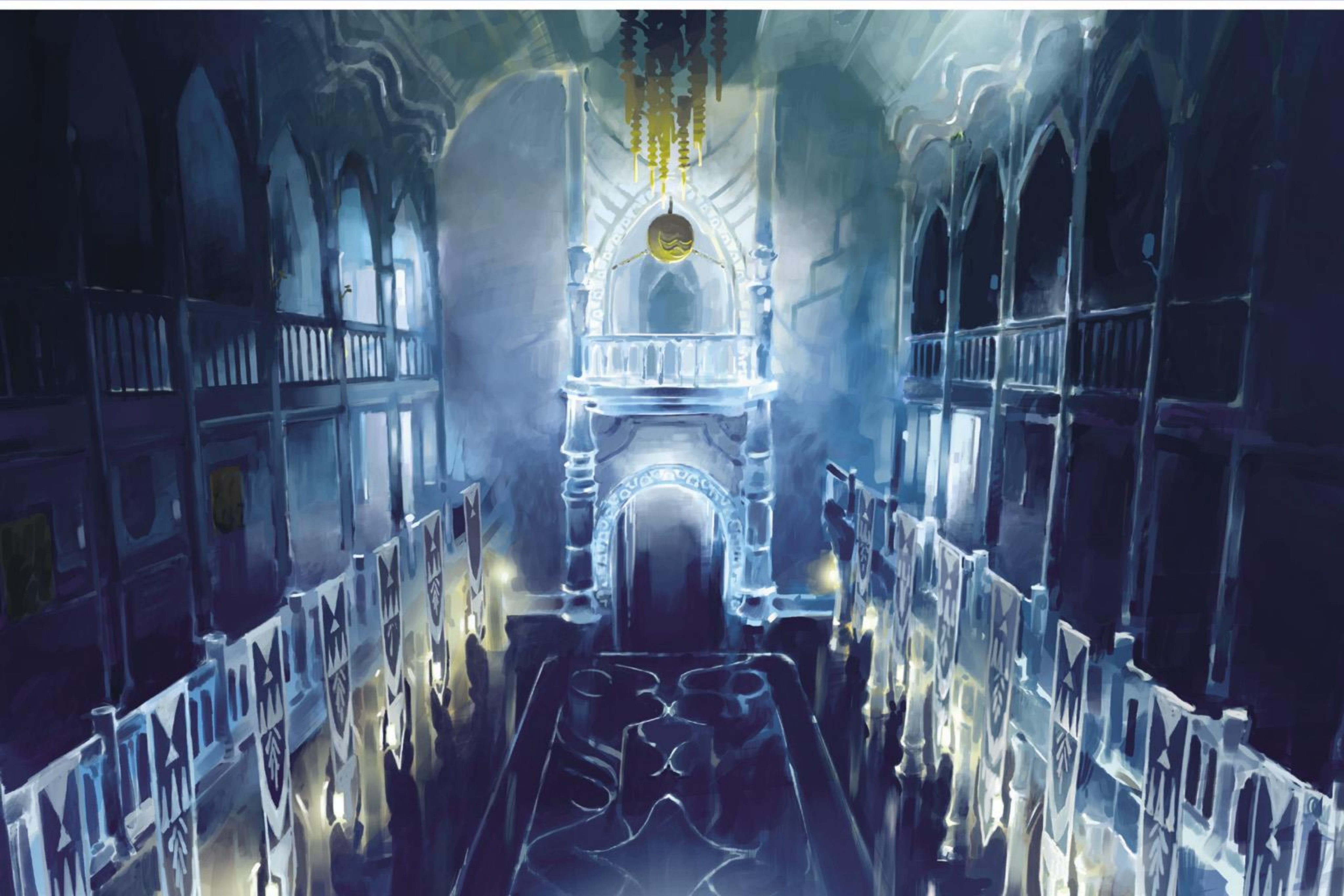
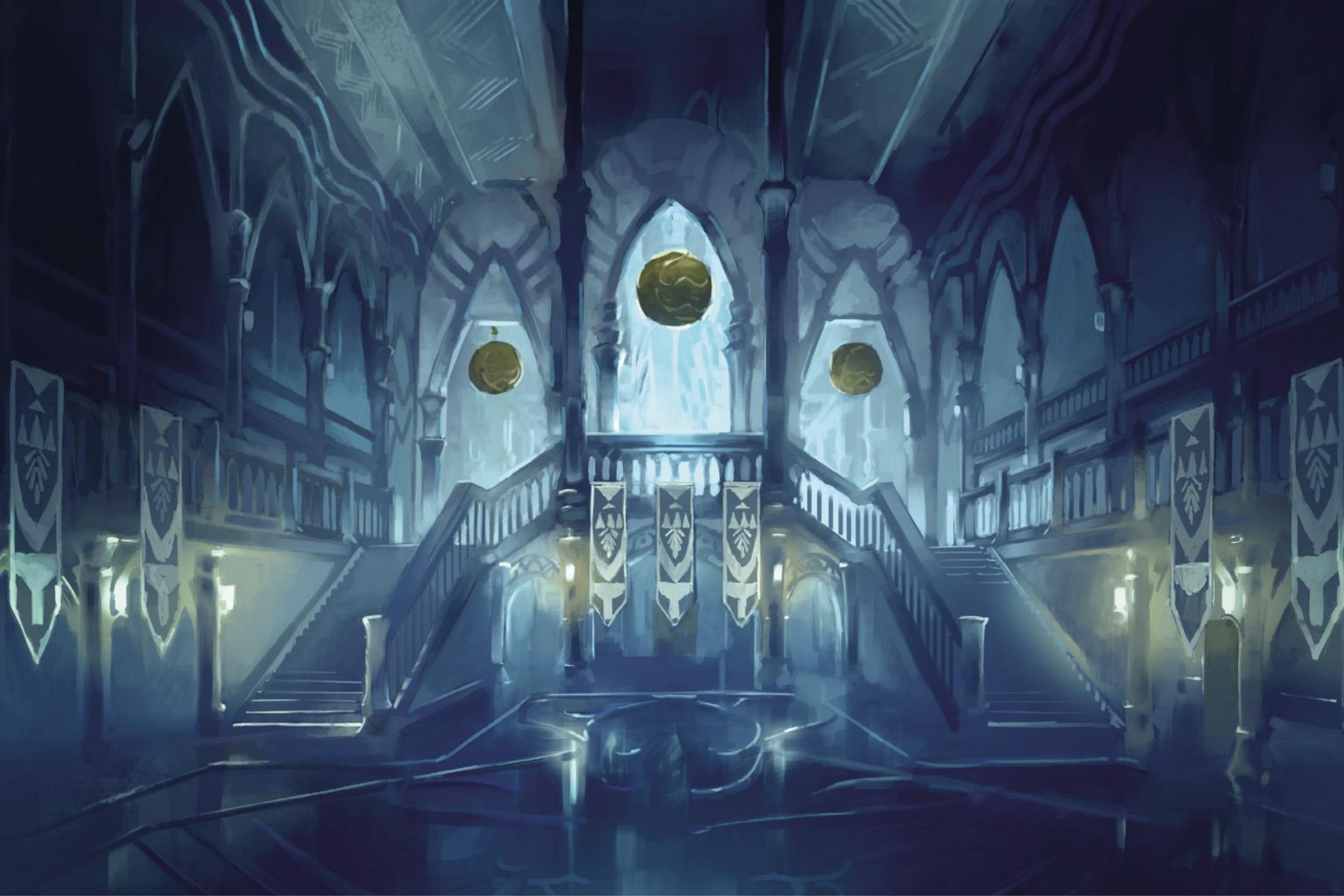
MD: One of the biggest design challenges is filling the background with a variety of interesting characters, like these Southern Water Tribe citizens. Often in the final animation, the characters are quite small in the frame and not drawn with a lot of detail. So it's always a pleasure to be able to show all these animated "extras" who often get overlooked, much like live-action extras. But without them the shots would feel quite empty. Character designs by Christie Tseng. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.

(Opposite page) BK: If you've ever wondered what the inside of an ice palace might look like at night, I think Frederic Stewart's paintings do a convincing job of depicting it. Background designs by Studio Pierrot. Paintings by Frederic Stewart.

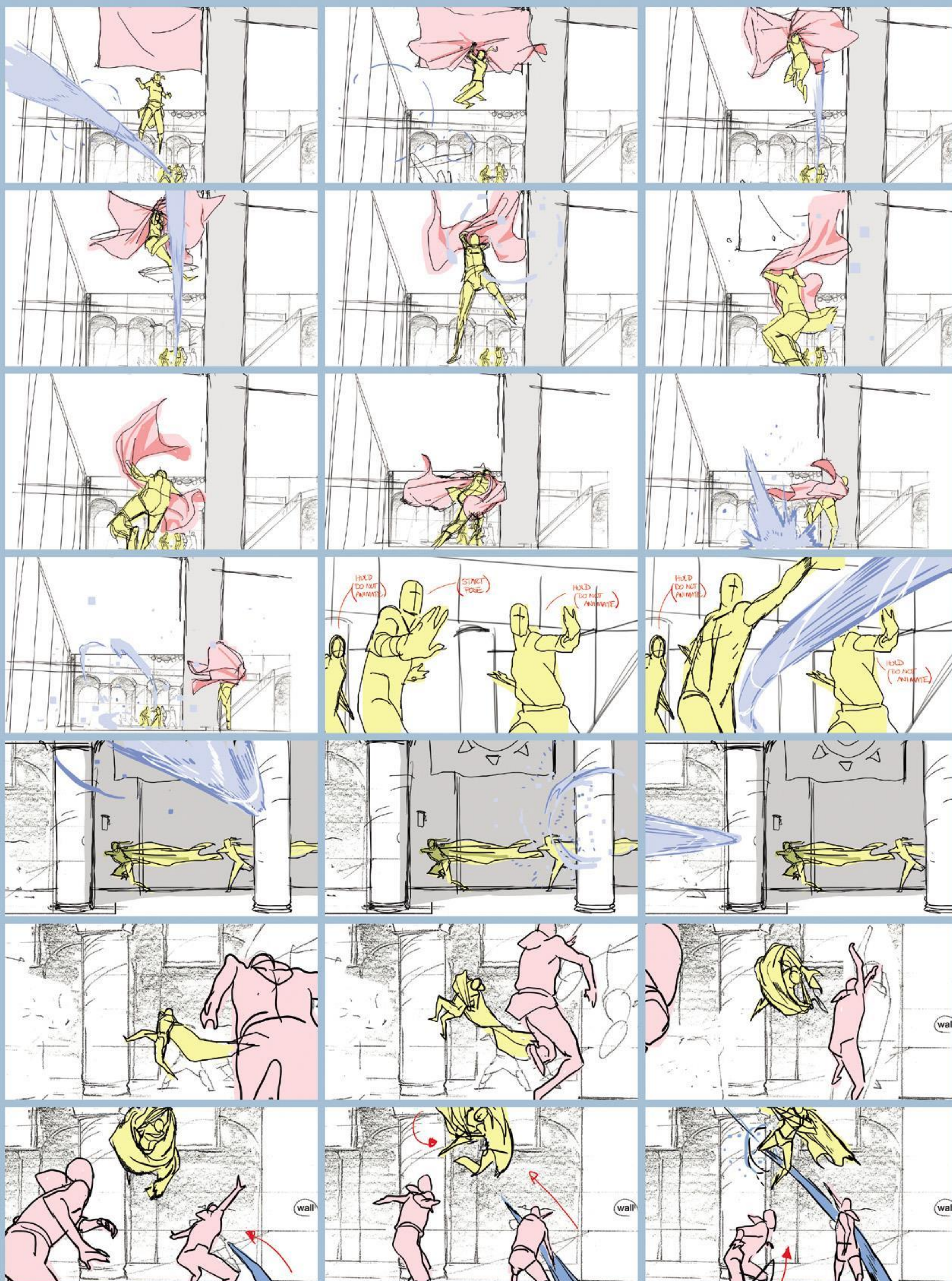
(Preceding spread) Background design by Studio Pierrot. Painting by Emily Tetri.





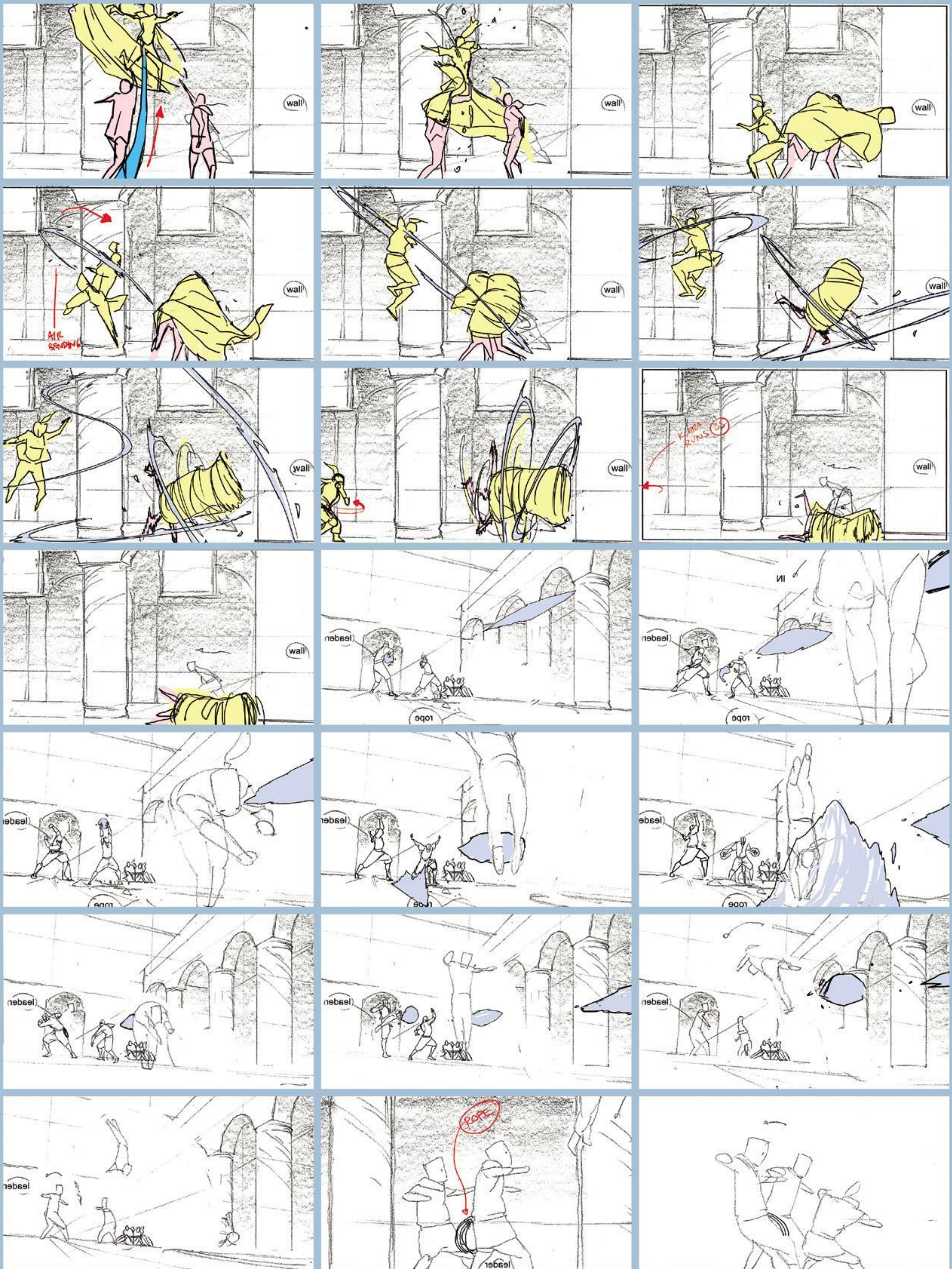






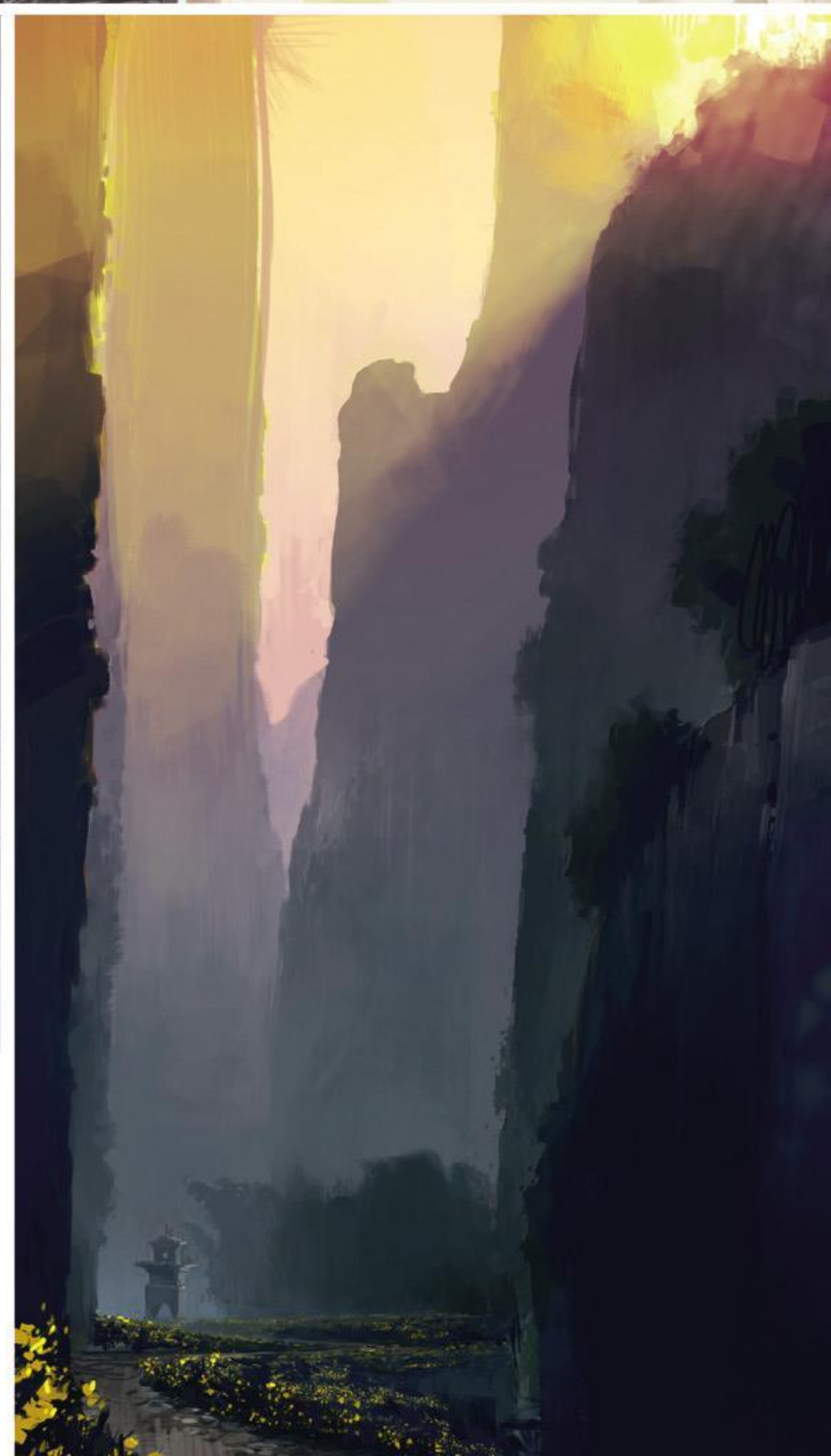
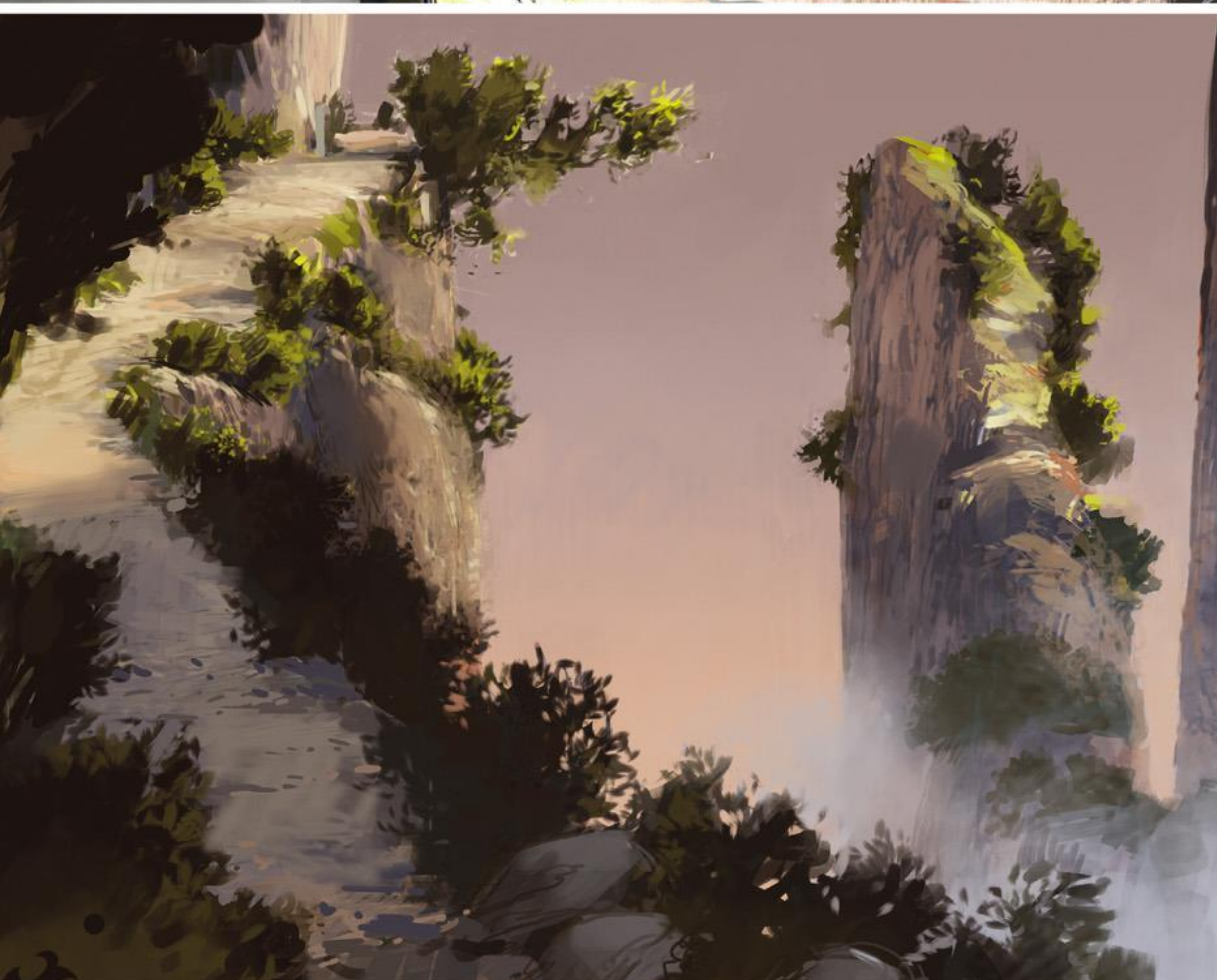
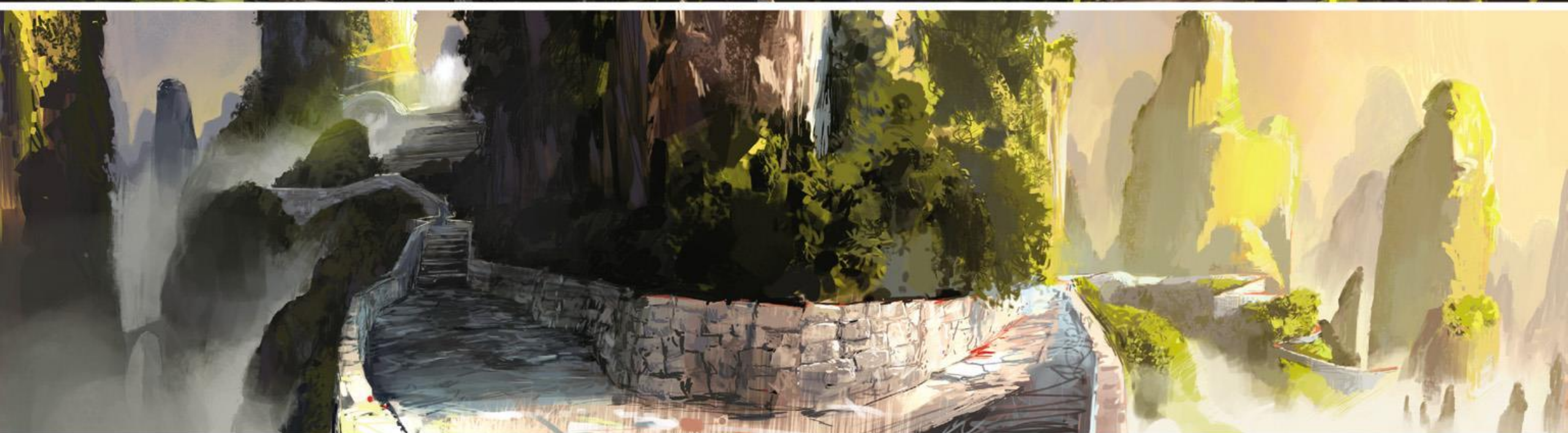
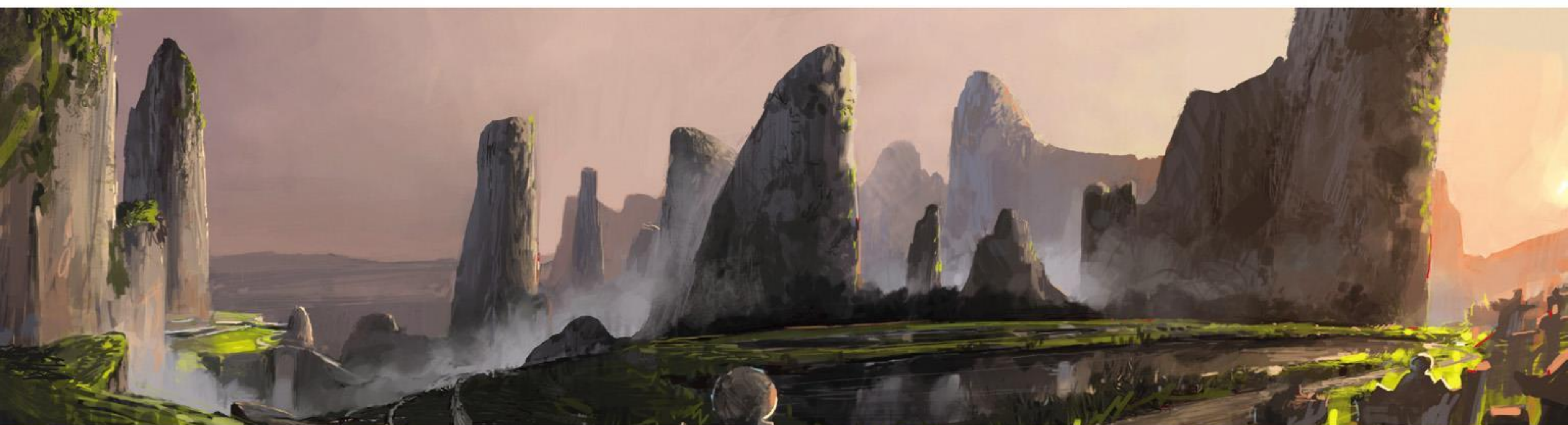
JDS: Korra does her best to neutralize her fellow tribesmen without hurting them. Here we see her pull down a nearby banner and wrap them up using airbending. Storyboards are hardly ever the work of just one person, as they are constantly being revised or added to at different points in the production line.





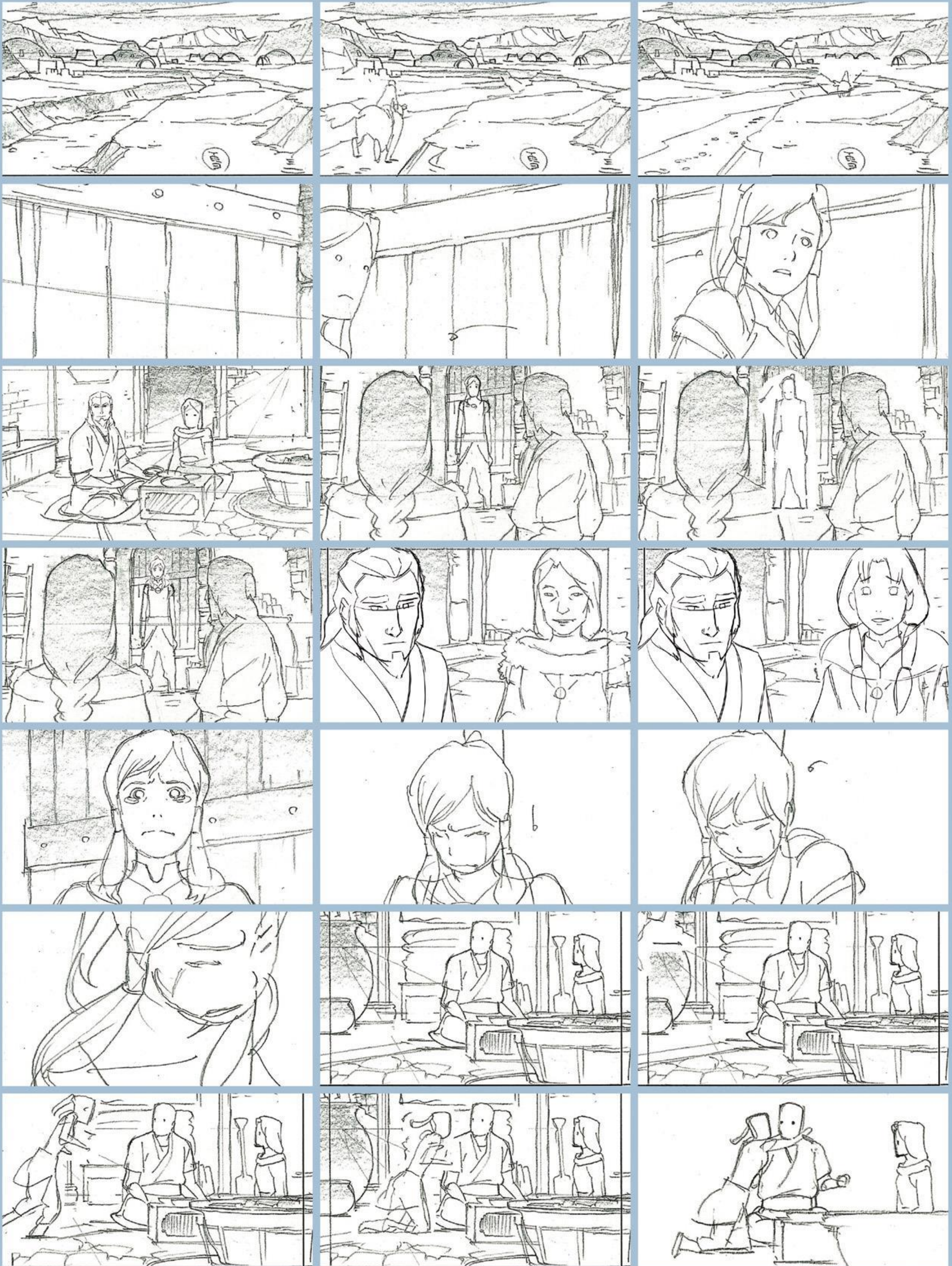
As you can see here, some of the storyboards were drawn traditionally with good, old-fashioned pencil and paper, and then revisions to some of the action staging were made digitally after the fact. Storyboard by Masami Anno. Revisions by Joaquim Dos Santos.





MD: Writing the two-part “Civil Wars” story was very special to me, mainly because of the chance to be able to explore the relationship between Tenzin, Kya, and Bumi. While Korra’s story might have higher stakes, with the threat of tribal war, family struggles are often just as rife with emotional conflict. It was important to us to show how being children of the Avatar wasn’t without its challenges. But to me, this story was less about Aang’s parenting skills and more about Tenzin, Kya, and Bumi’s issues surrounding their self-worth and issues with one another in regard to their relationships with their father. Top, middle, and bottom right: Background concepts painted by Frederic Stewart. Bottom left: Background design by Studio Pierrot. Painting by Frederic Stewart.





MD: Getting to show more of Korra's relationship with her parents was an important part of Book Two. She struggles with being an independent person, as well as being the Avatar, and sometimes that means Korra pushes her parents away. But at the end of the day, she loves them and needs them in her life. Storyboard by Masami Anno.





CHAPTER FOUR

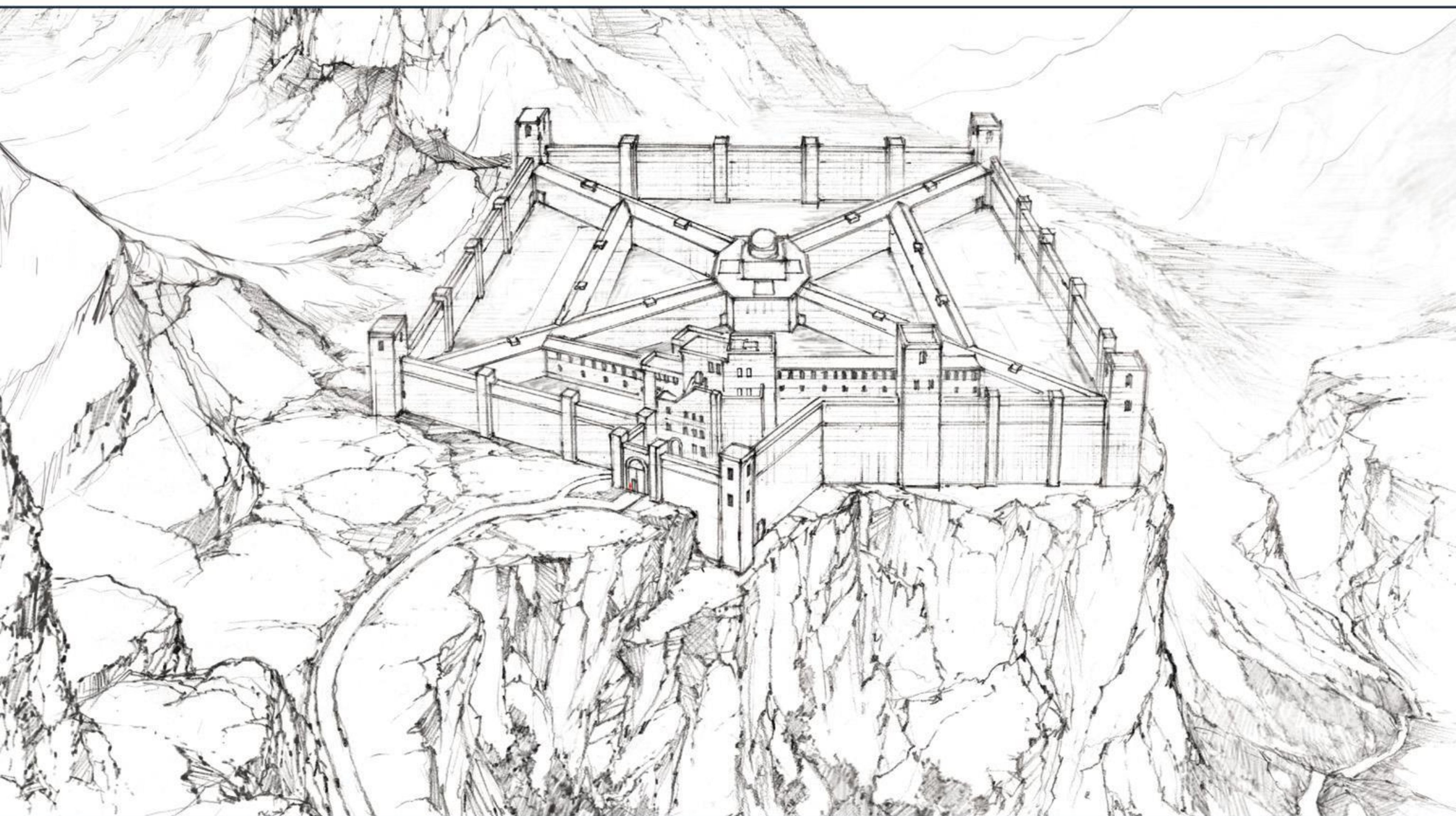


神  
靈



# CIVIL WARS PART TWO





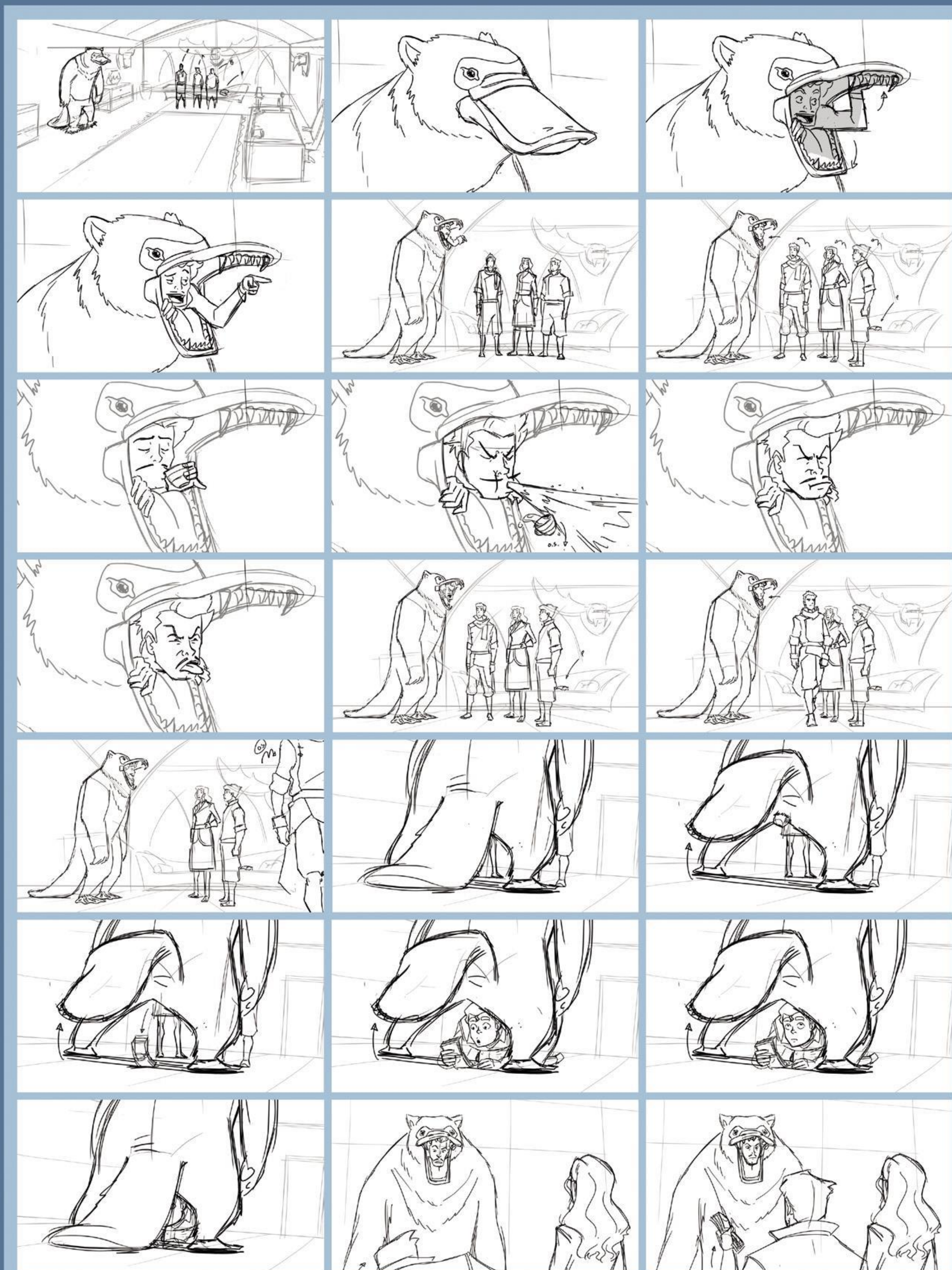
BK: Tonraq is held in this formidable mountain prison in the Southern Water Tribe, drawn in a very solid manner by Studio Pierrot and made exceptionally real by Frederic Stewart's painting. (Preceding spread) Background design by Studio Pierrot. Painting by Frederic Stewart.





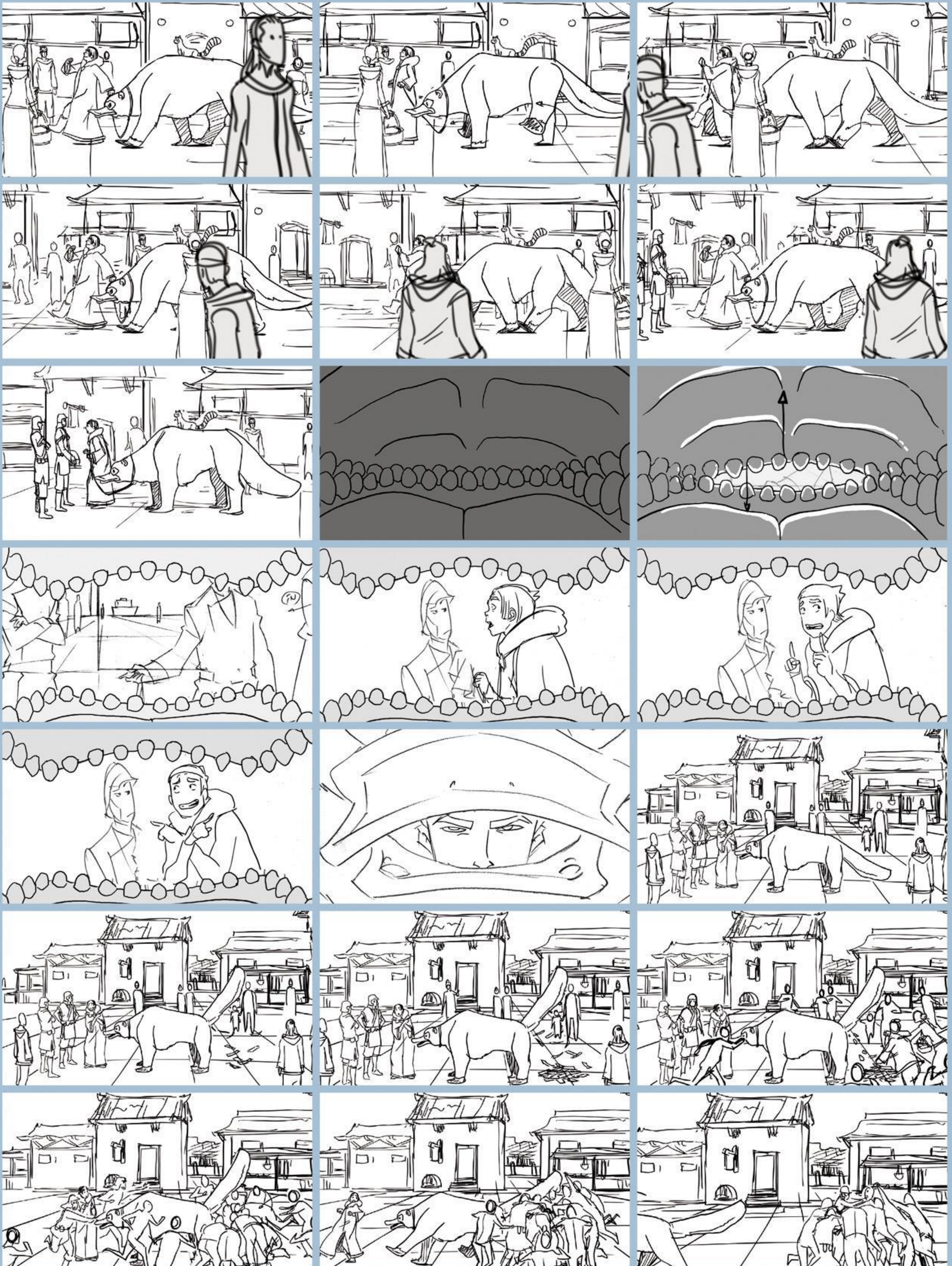
JDS: Korra interrogates the corrupt judge Hotah, who needs a little bit of convincing to come forward with the truth. Luckily Naga is there to help! Storyboard by Joaquim Dos Santos and Sung-Hoon Kim.





MD: It's very rare that I do any storyboarding on the show nowadays, but this was a scene that I really wanted to work on. It's completely ridiculous that Varrick spends the whole episode in a taxidermied platypus-bear, but I had a very specific idea of how I wanted Varrick's head to look inside the bear's bill. Storyboard by Michael Dante DiMartino.





MD: Lauren Montgomery joined Korra at the start of Book Two as a supervising producer and always does an amazing job with the acting and humor in the show. We first worked with her on the original series when she was a storyboard artist on Book Three of *Avatar: The Last Airbender*. Storyboard by Lauren Montgomery.



MD: The backstory of Bolin and Pabu's goth wedding outfits is that Desna created them. In the outline of the story, I wrote a scene in which Desna tailors Bolin's wedding outfit, but it was cut. Ultimately, it was a funnier reveal to just have Bolin and Pabu show up already wearing them. Character and prop designs by Bryan Konietzko. Cleanup by Studio Pierrot. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.



BK: When it comes to creating Water Tribe costuming and culture, I often turn to a long-trusted reference, a book about the making of the incredible film *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner*. Photos in that book of beautiful, intricate ceremonial Inuit parkas inspired Judge Hotah's robe. Character design by Bryan Konietzko. Cleanup by Studio Pierrot. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.



BK: We modified Ryu's expression poses of Eska to show the patterns of her signature eye shadow makeup running down her cheeks from crying at the altar. Expressions by Ki-Hyun Ryu. Cleanup by Studio Pierrot. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.



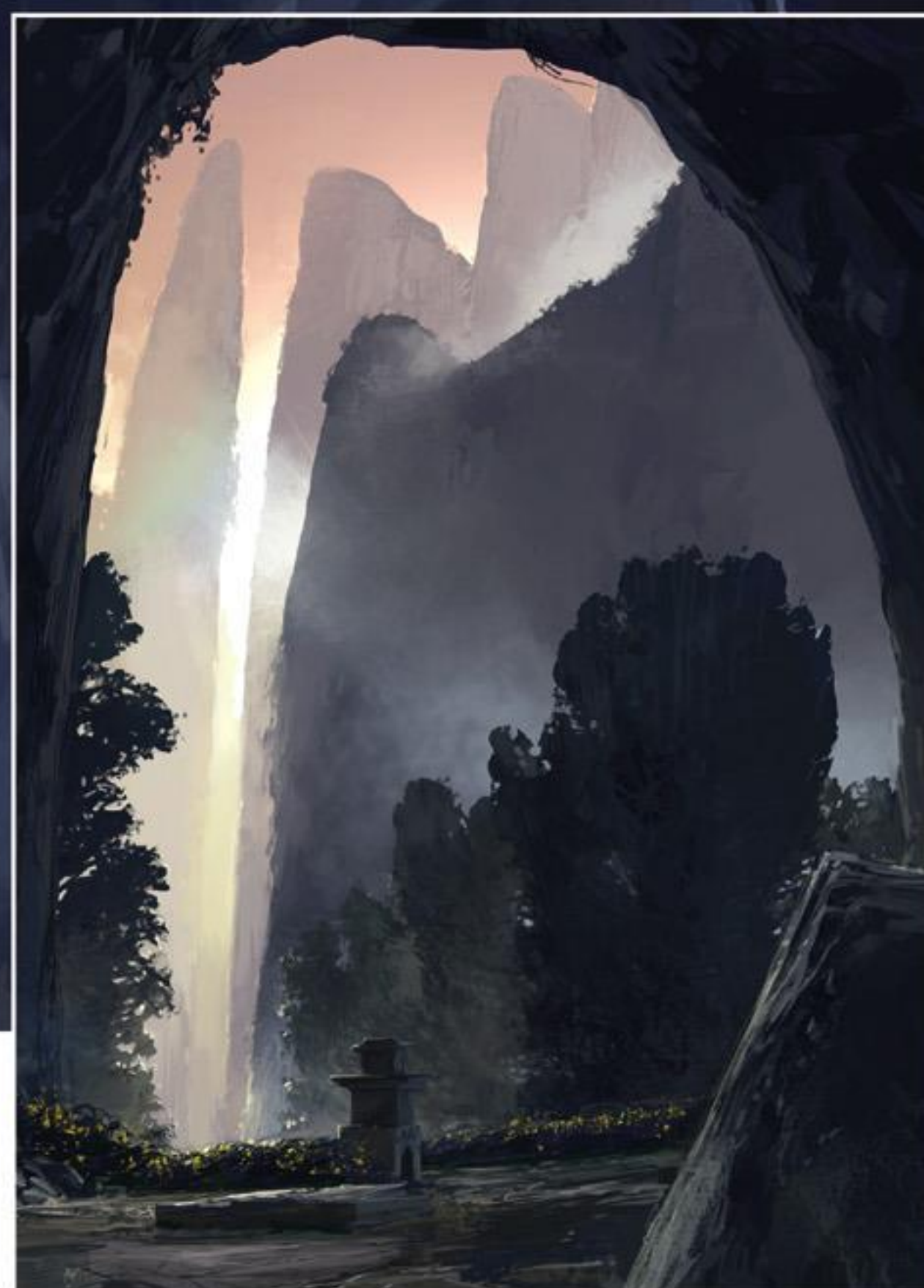


MD: Eka presents Bolin with a betrothal necklace in this storyboard sequence, which was worked on by three different artists. Often multiple people will work on one scene, depending on the revisions that are needed. Storyboard by Ki-Hyun Ryu, Ian Graham, and Dae-Woo Lee.



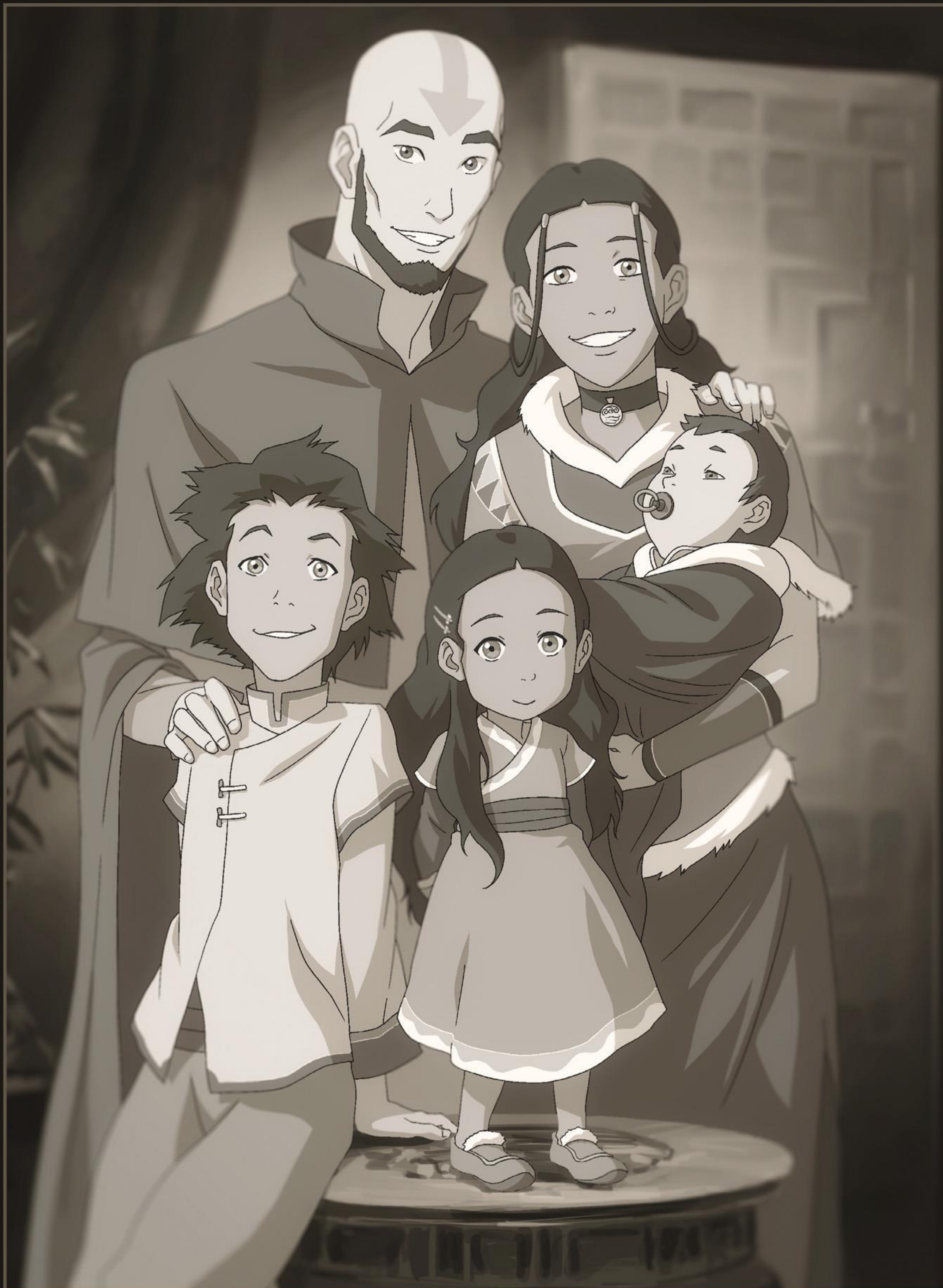


BK: (Left) Mike and writer Josh Hamilton went to town with Ikki's whimsical names for all of the baby bison. I believe this little fellow to the left is Blueberry Spicehead . . . or is it Twinkle Starchild? Character design by Studio Pierrot. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf. (Above) A concept painting by Frederic Stewart of the Southern Air Temple at sunset, when all the siblings reunite and mend their relationships.



BK: Frederic Stewart did both the concept (inset) and the finished painting (above) of the cozy cave where Tenzin and Ikki hide away from their family troubles. Background design by William Nanking Nin. Now that we have photography in the Avatar world, it is really fun to make these family photos (opposite page). Bumi looks like he was in that "awkward phase," while young Kya was ridiculously adorable. Meanwhile, Baby Tenzin was just chilling. Character art by Christie Tseng. Character tones by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf. Painting by Emily Tetri.









CHAPTER FIVE



神靈



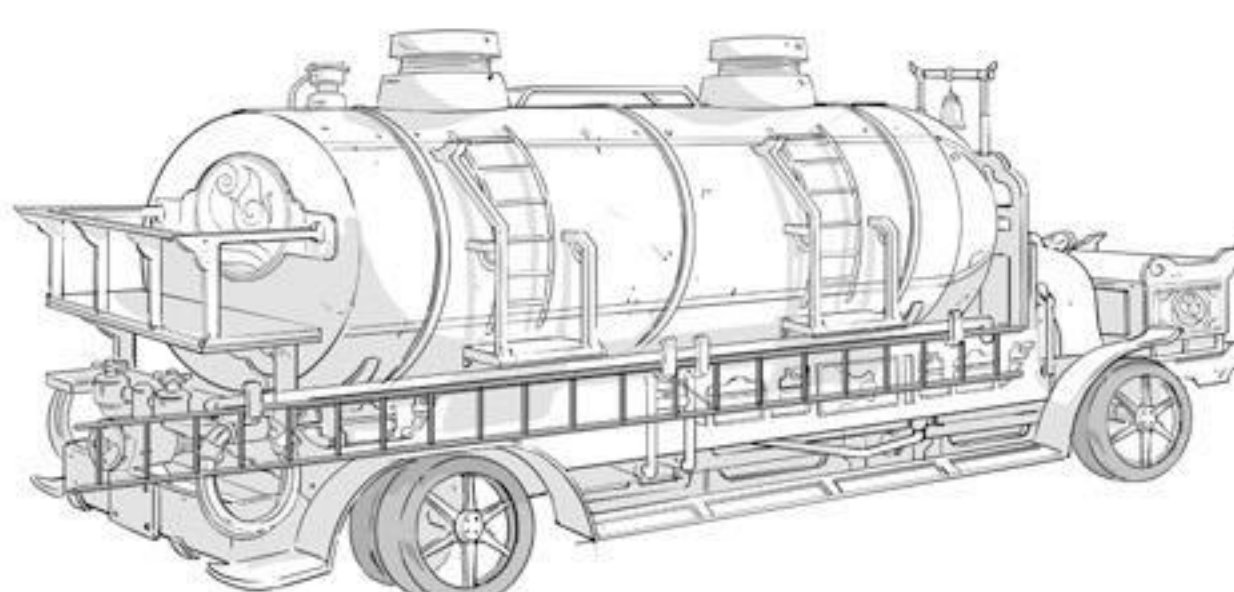
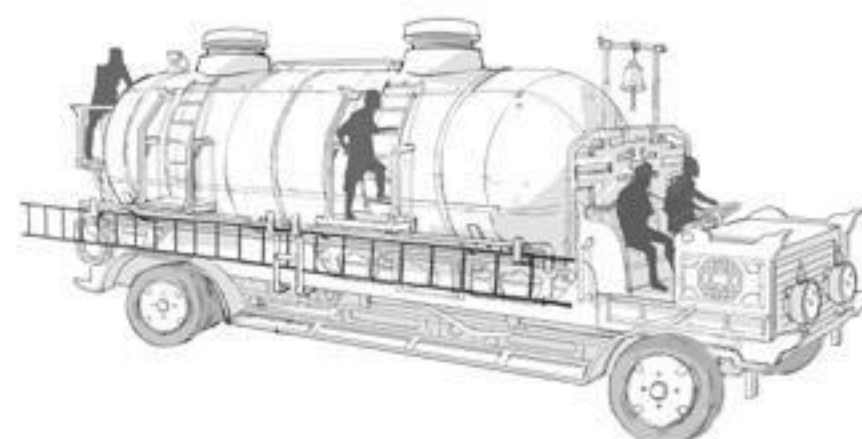
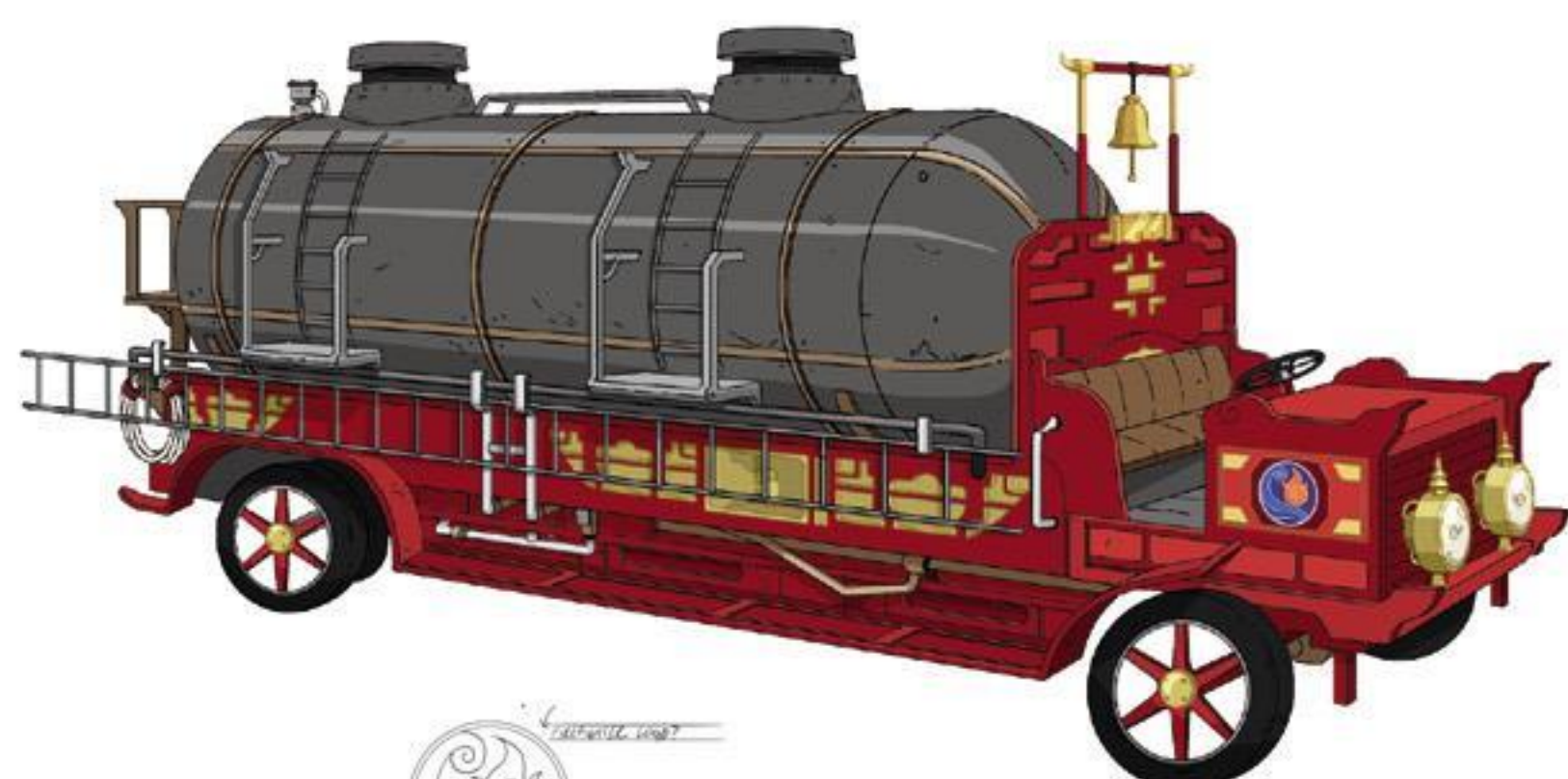
# PEACEKEEPERS





BK: Even though Varrick, the creator of the Nuktuk franchise, hails from the Southern Water Tribe, cultural integrity and authenticity are the last things on his mind for his buffoonish propaganda films. He wants to make them as broad and cartoony as possible to reach the widest common denominator of the audience. As a result, Bolin and Ginger are outfitted in these ridiculous, exploitative costumes for their roles (above). Varrick's "mover crew" is a really delightful bunch of characters, especially the foppish director. I wish we saw them clearer in the final animation. Designs by Angela Song Mueller. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.

(Preceding spread) Lin Beifong's office. Background design by Studio Pierrot. Painting by Emily Tetri.



BK: This is a great fire truck design inspired by an old concept from Book One by Jung-Su Lee. It was finished by Christine Bian, a tremendously talented artist who came from the video game industry and joined our in-house crew as a prop designer in the midst of Book Two and the start of Book Three. The Republic City firefighter outfits came out pretty cool, and I wish they were featured more prominently in the final animation. Firefighter designs by Angela Song Mueller. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.

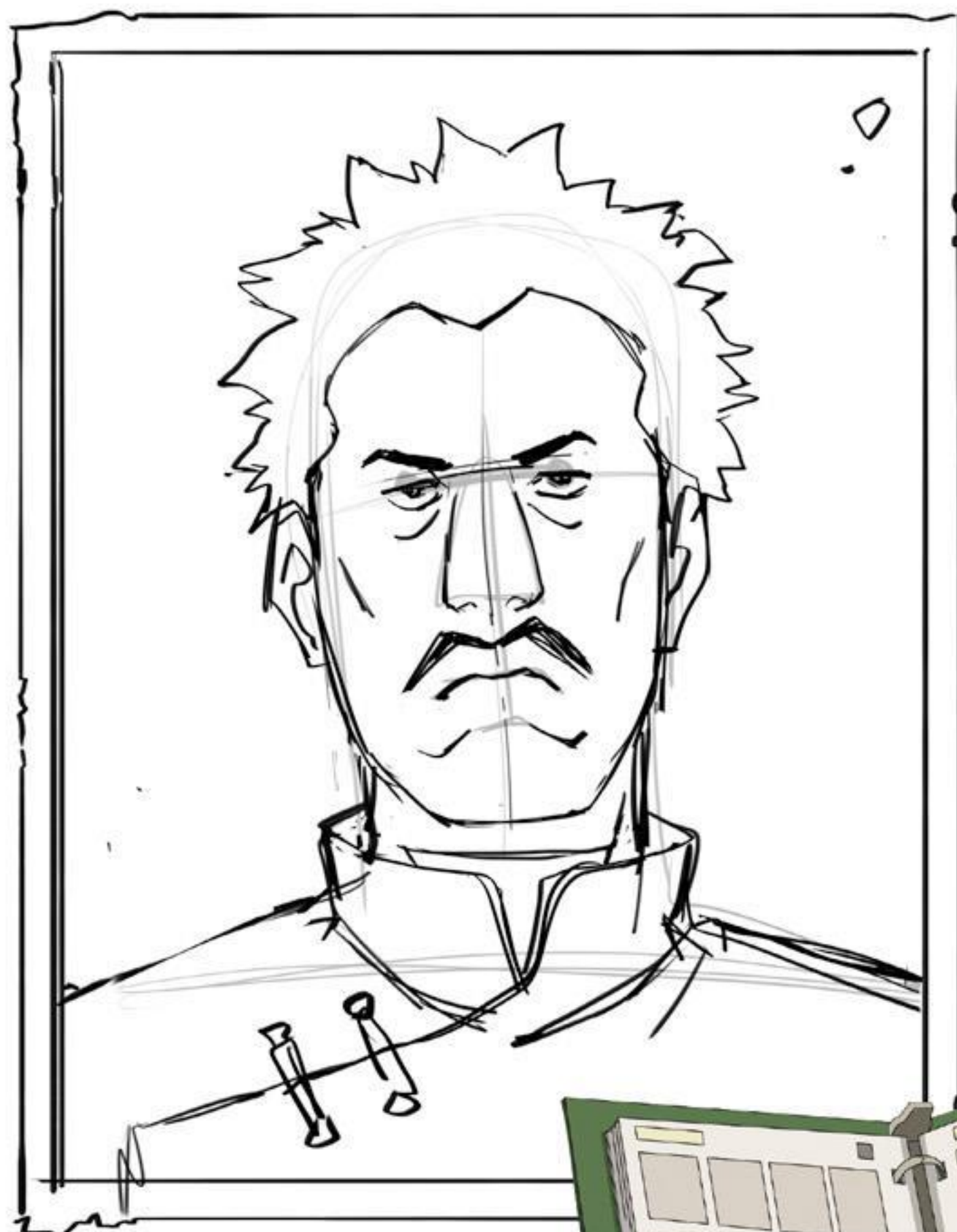




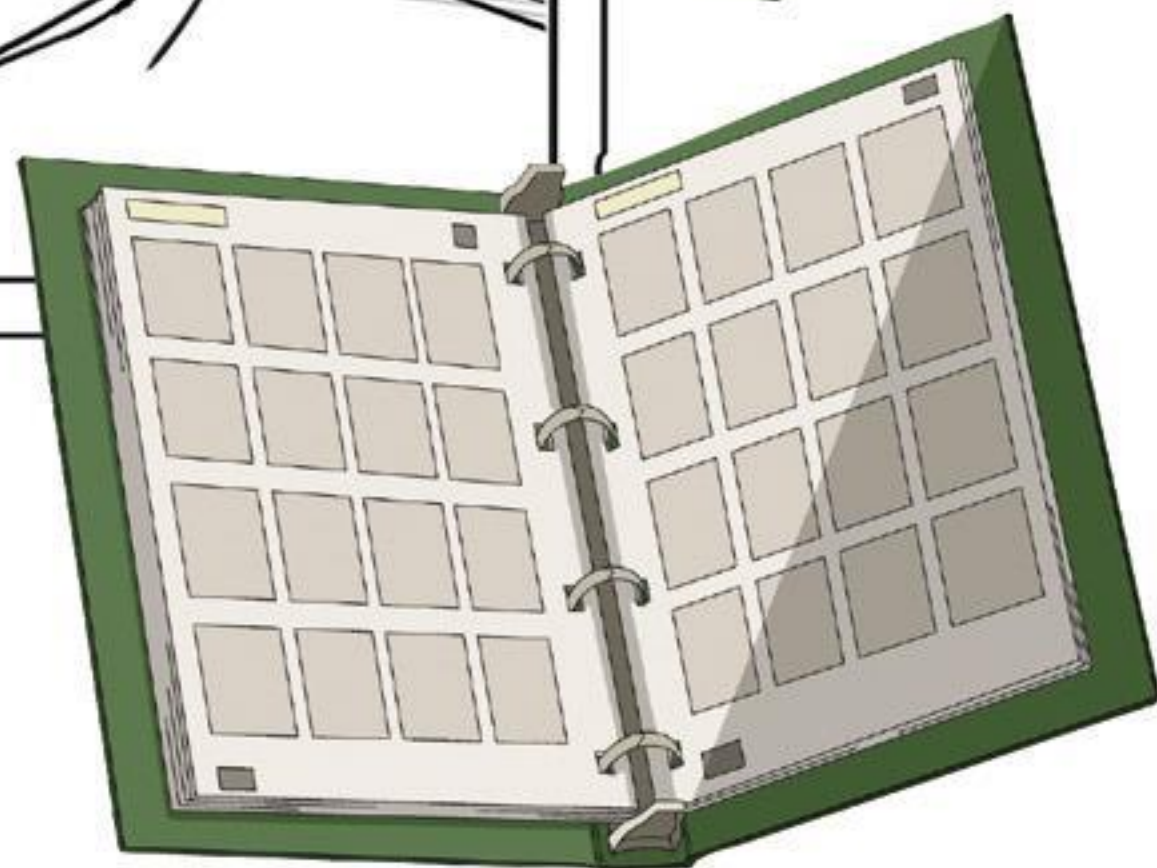
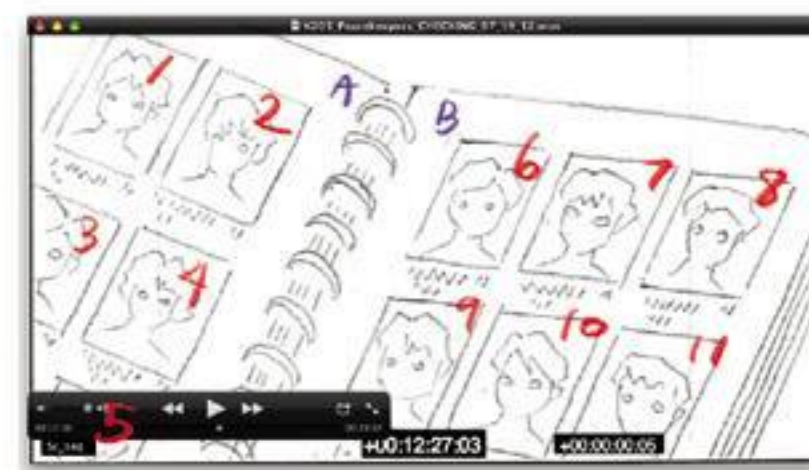


JDS: (Top) Mako and Bolin's bachelor pad was a really small room to stage scenes in, so to help out the board crew, we built a 3-D version to assist in getting those tough-to-visualize angles. Background designs by William Nanqing Niu. Paintings by Lauren Zurcher. (Bottom) The sound stage for the Nuktuk mover! I love that you can see the individual panels of the matte painting. So low budget! Background design by Studio Pierrot. Painting by Emily Tetri.

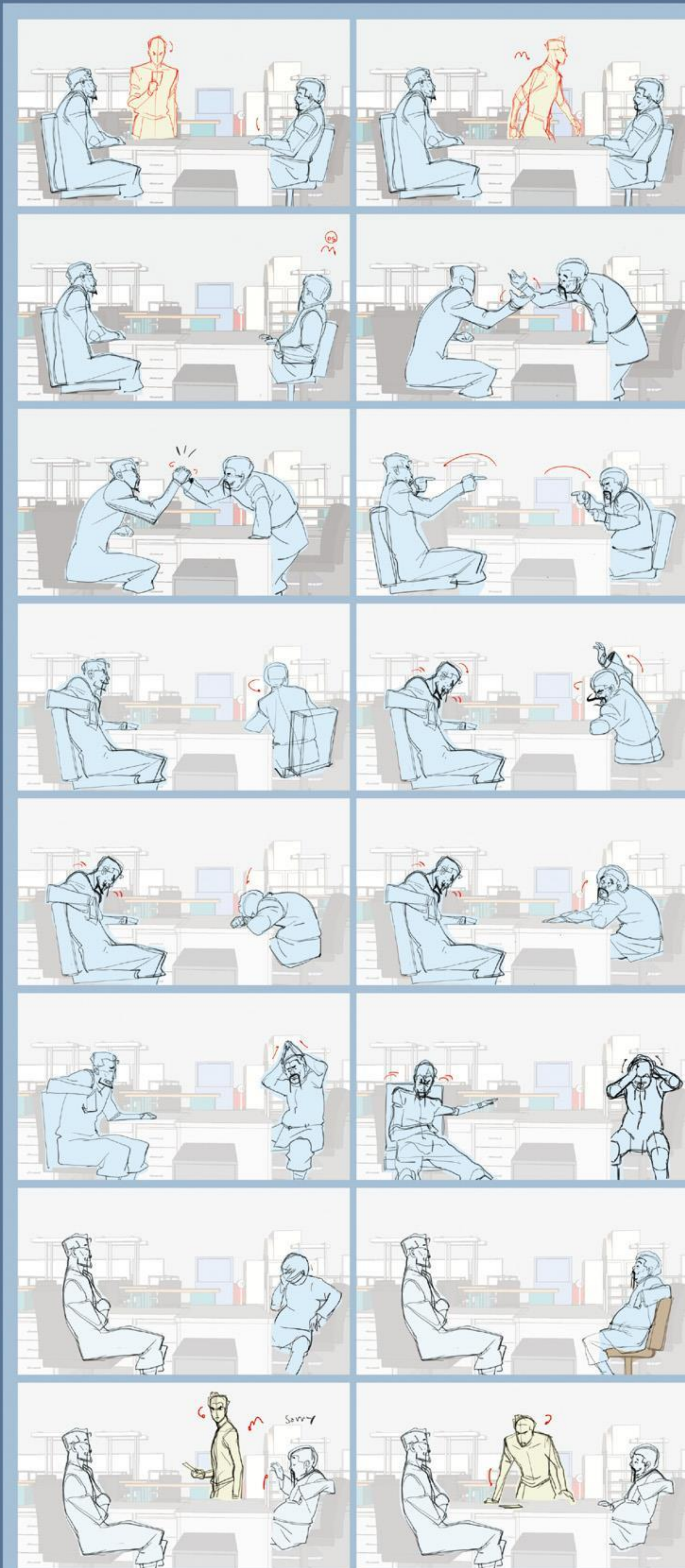




BK: The first in-house designer we brought onboard for Korra was Christie Tseng, who initially helped me out with a bunch of tasks, and ultimately ended up as a full-time character designer. She is incredibly young, but skilled and talented beyond her years. She imbued so much personality into every one of these mug shots that they feel like real moments in time caught on film (specifically, the unpleasant moment of being processed for a crime), rather than mere drawings of characters. Mug shot book design by Studio Pierrot. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.



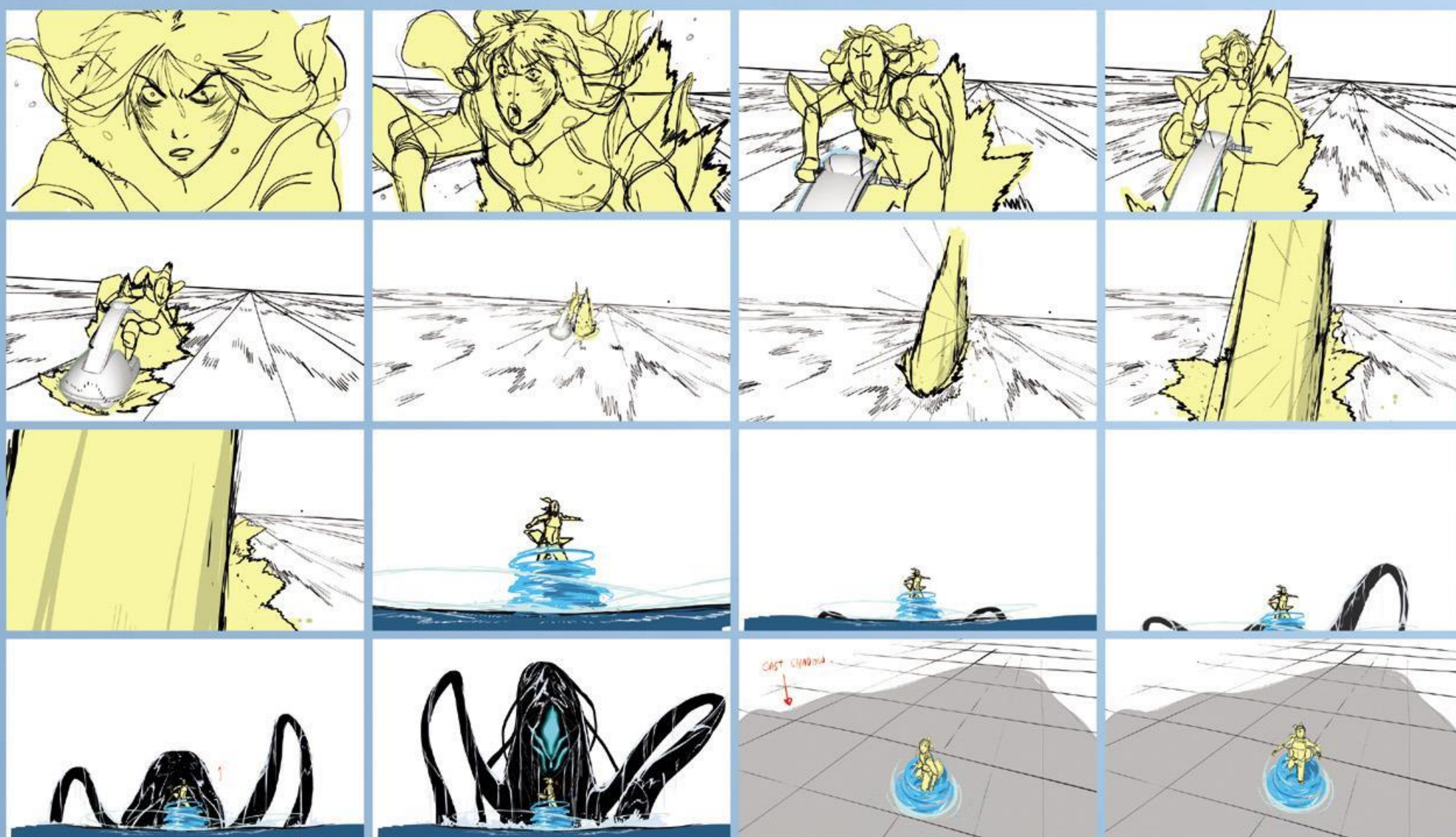




*JDS: Lu and Gang give rookie cop Mako bad advice and send him into the office of Chief Beifong, who yells him out of the room. When we all sat down to watch this animatic for the first time, we laughed for about twenty minutes at Ryu's storyboard of the two detectives having fun at the young rookie's expense. Storyboard by Ki-Hyun Ryu.*

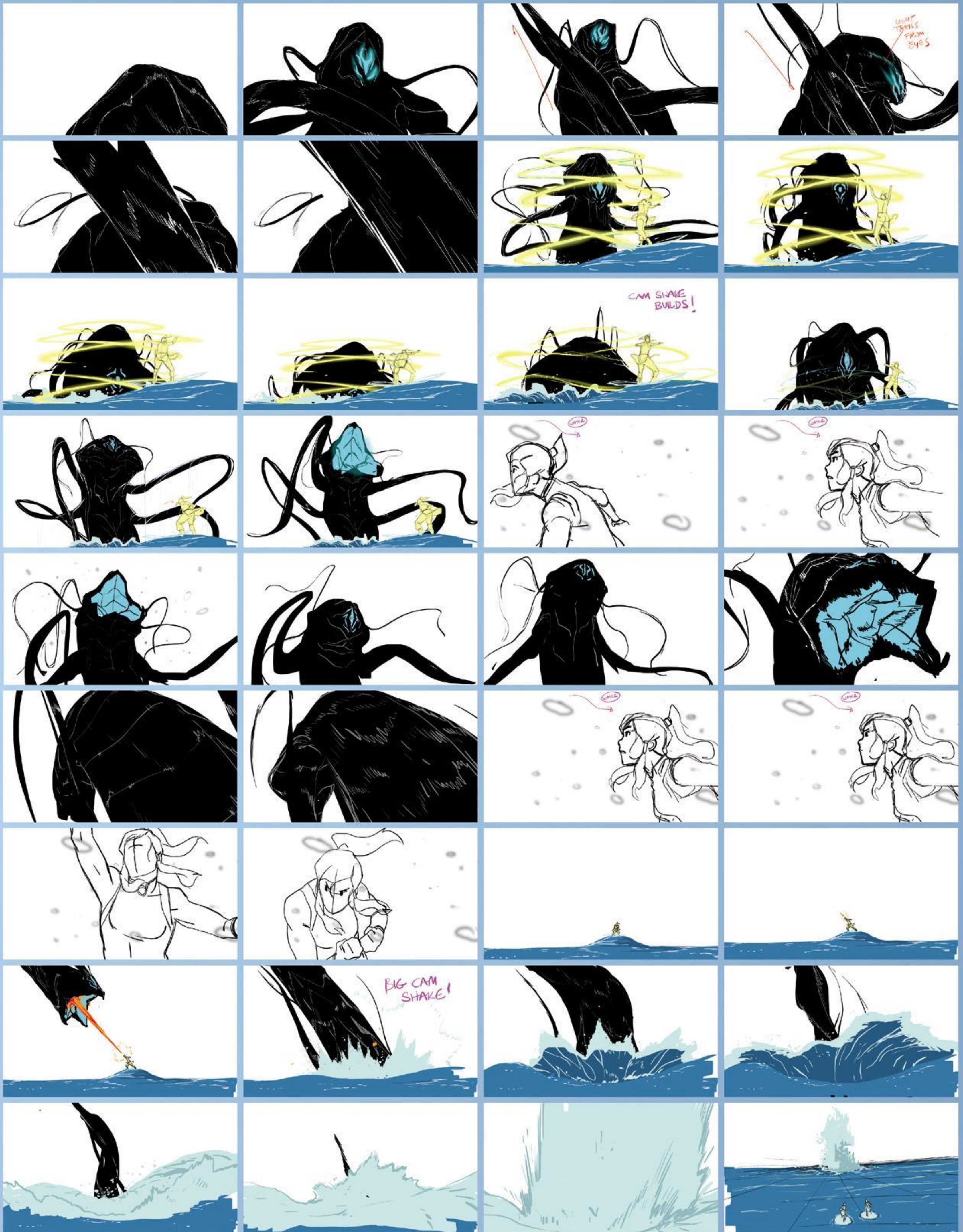
*MD: It took me all season to remember which one of these guys was which. Gang's the tall, dumber one and Lu's the short, slightly smarter one. Concepts and expressions by Ki-Hyun Ryu. Designs by Angela Song Mueller. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.*





BK: Designing the dark spirit leviathan was a challenge, as I was very concerned it would be confused with Vaatu, who at this point we knew would be our “big boss” dark spirit for the season. I worked with veteran Avatar character designer Angela Song Mueller to make the head and mouth shapes very distinct, and make its tentacles more sea creature-like than Vaatu’s ribbons. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.





*JDS: An enraged Eska chases after Korra on a jet ski! But both her and her brother back off when they see a massive dark spirit rise up from the ocean behind Korra. Korra attempts to calm the dark spirit but is unsuccessful and is swallowed up by the giant beast while her cousins watch in shock! Staging scenes with huge, fantastical monsters like this was a huge departure from Book One. Storyboard by Joaquim Dos Santos.*





CHAPTER SIX



神  
靈



# THE STING





MD: The Nuktuk mover was one of my favorite things in Book Two. Old movie serials, like 1930s Flash Gordon, inspired the writing, storyboard, and designs. Because the Nuktuk film was black and white, the fact that these guards weren't wearing pants wasn't totally clear. But now they can be seen in their full glory. Guard designs by Angela Song Mueller. Evil Unalaq design by Angela Song Mueller and Christie Tseng. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.

BK: This title card from the first Nuktuk mover does a fine job of capturing the melodrama of the old serials. Ki-Hyun Ryu did the original rough poses in the storyboard, and Christie Tseng put the characters on model and did the cleanup. I took the calligraphy by S. L. Lee, PhD, and stylized it to have that action/adventure Indiana Jones feeling. Character tones by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.

(Preceding spread) Korra washes ashore on a remote Fire Nation island, home to the Bhanti tribe. Background design by Angela Sung. Painting by Frederic Stewart.





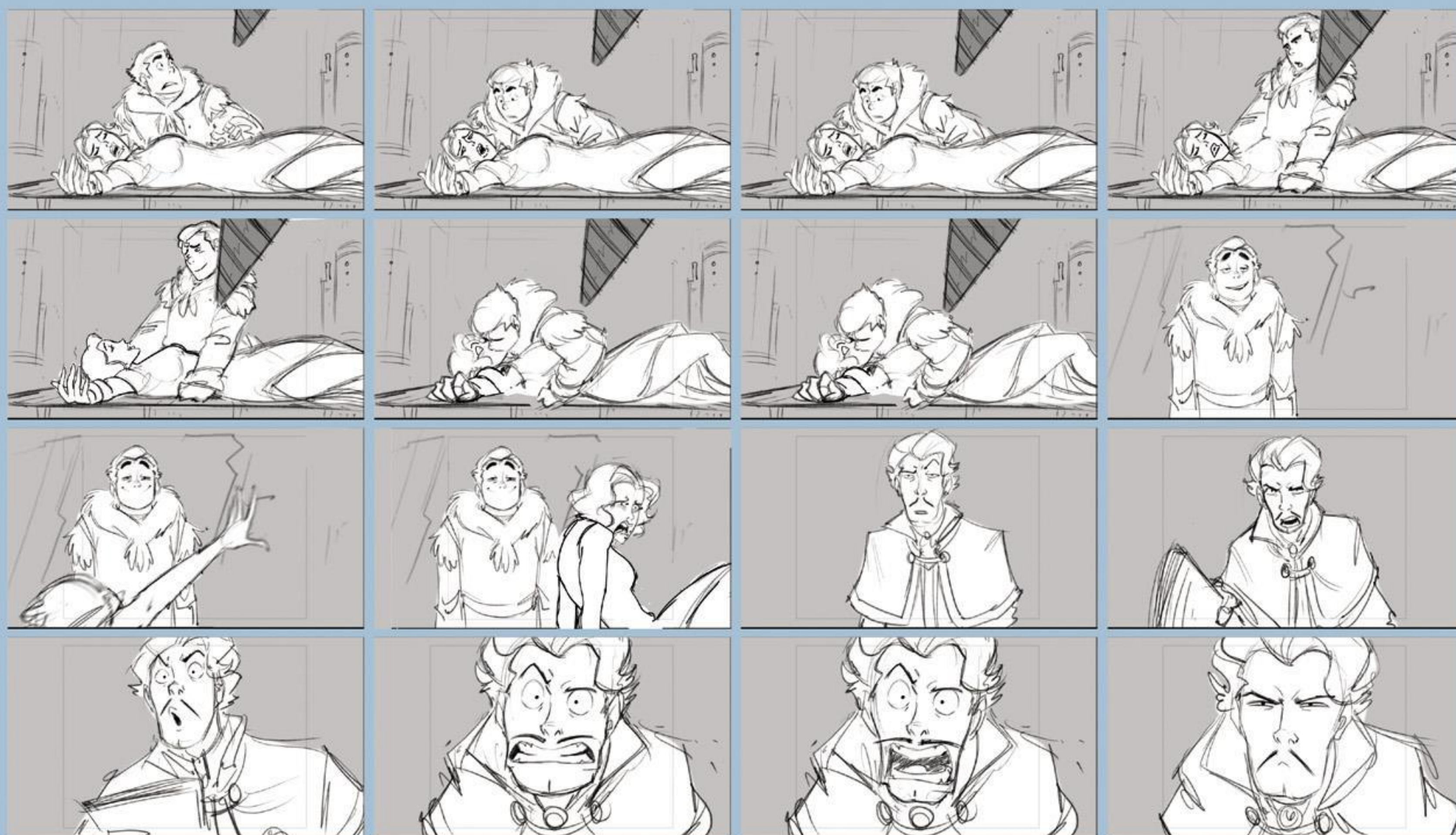
MD: (Inset) I love how the evil Unalag's lair looks like a cardboard model. There are so many great details in the designs and final animation that show how Varrick cut a lot of corners during filming. Background design by William Nanqing Niu. Painting by Seong-Min Kim. (Below) Mover set and backdrop for a dramatic Nuktuk scene. Background design by Angela Sung. Painting by Seong-Min Kim.







BK: Mike, Tim, and Josh had the idea that Nuktuk should have some trusty animal sidekicks, in the tradition of animal actors in early films like *Strongheart*, *Rin Tin Tin*, *Lassie*, *Toto*, and *Petey*. With the help of some Varri-dye, Varrick's hair and makeup department transformed Pabu and Naga into Juji and Roh-tan, a snow raccoon and an arctic panda, respectively. Designs by Christie Tseng. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.



MD: Bolin had a hard time separating his real life from Nuktuk's life, much to Ginger's dismay. Storyboard by Jobane Matte. (Opposite) Korra and Mako during happier times, posing for a photo at the Glacier Spirits Festival. Design by Christine Bian and Christie Tseng. Painting by Emily Tetri. Character tones by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.









MD: Although we didn't spend as much time in Republic City as we did in Book One, we were able to explore some cool new locations. (Top) Asami's fancy office at Future Industries headquarters. (Bottom) Interrogation observation room at the police station. Background designs by Angela Sung. Paintings by Seong-Min Kim.





BK: Mako and Asami are chased all over Yue Bay by some double-crossing Triple Threat Triad members, leading to a crash into this boathouse (top) in Republic City's harbor. Background design by William Nanqing Niu. Painting by Seong-Min Kim. After living in the attic of the Pro-bending arena and bumming around Asami's mansion and Air Temple Island for a while, Mako and Bolin finally have their first legitimate apartment (bottom). Background design by Angela Sung. Painting by Frederic Stewart.





CHAPTER SEVEN

神  
靈

# BEGINNINGS

## PART ONE



(Preceding spread) Chou palace. Background design by Yong-Ik Noh. Painting by Frederic Stewart.

BOK: To this day I get asked if I based Aang's design on Mike and his perfectly round, wonderfully smooth bald head. So when it came time to design the first Avatar, the joke was that I was going to base him on me: scrawny, lanky, with a narrow, triangular head. I never had hair as cool as Wan's, but hey, it's a fantasy. Wan concept by Bryan Konietzko. Designs by Bryan Konietzko and Christie Tseng. Cleanup by Jin-Sun Kim. Color by Bryan Konietzko and Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.

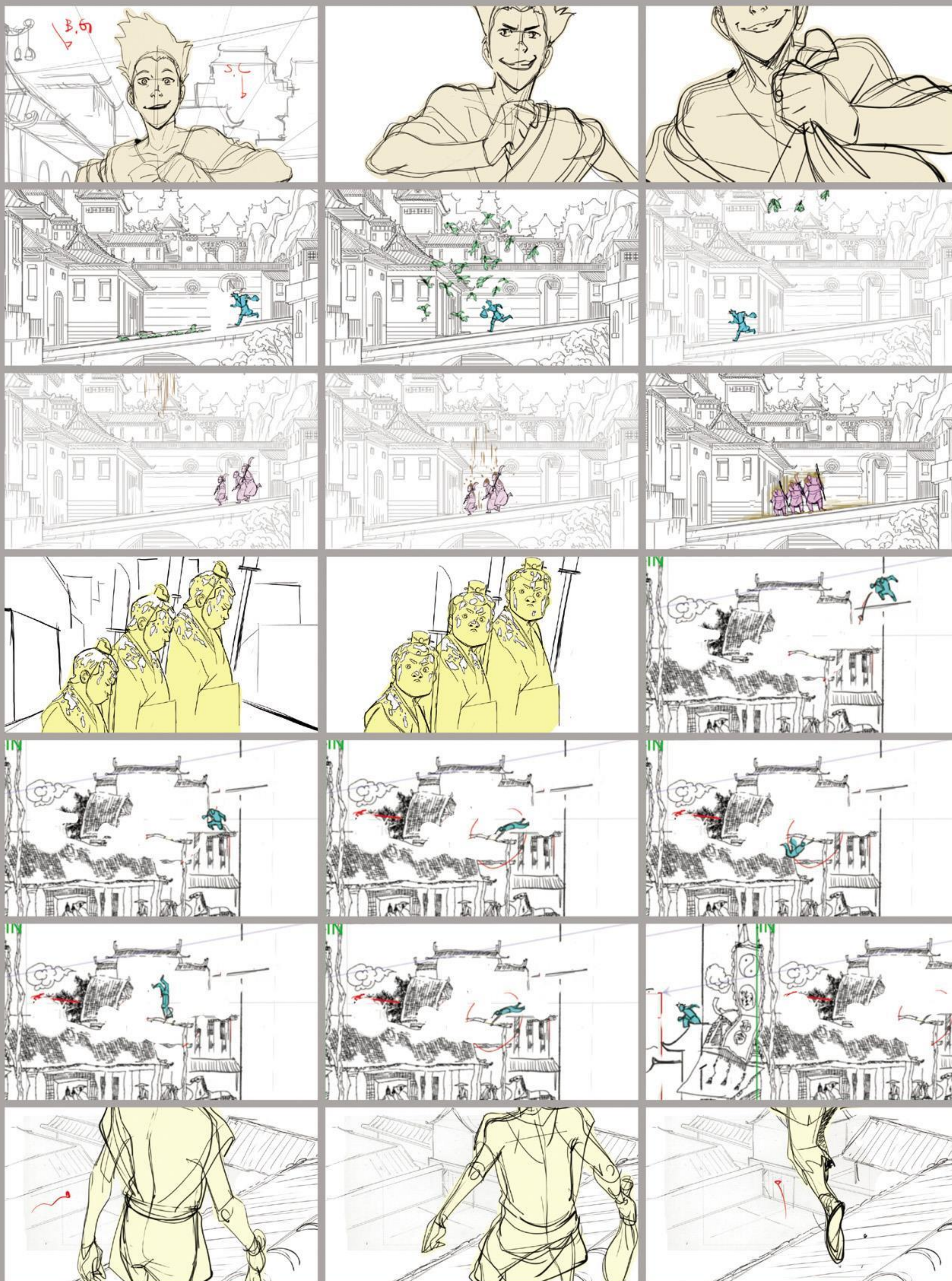


MD: For the script, I needed a spirit foil for Wan who eventually becomes an ally. So I looked through photos of odd-looking animals and came upon aye-eyes, primates with creepy eyes. Like most spirits, the aye-aye is mistrustful of humans, but Wan's selflessness changes his opinion. Designs and expressions by Christie Tseng. Cleanup by Jin-Sun Kim. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf. (Opposite) One part of the vast spirit wilds. Background design by Yong-Ik Noh and Yun-Hye Kim. Painting by Emily Tetri.









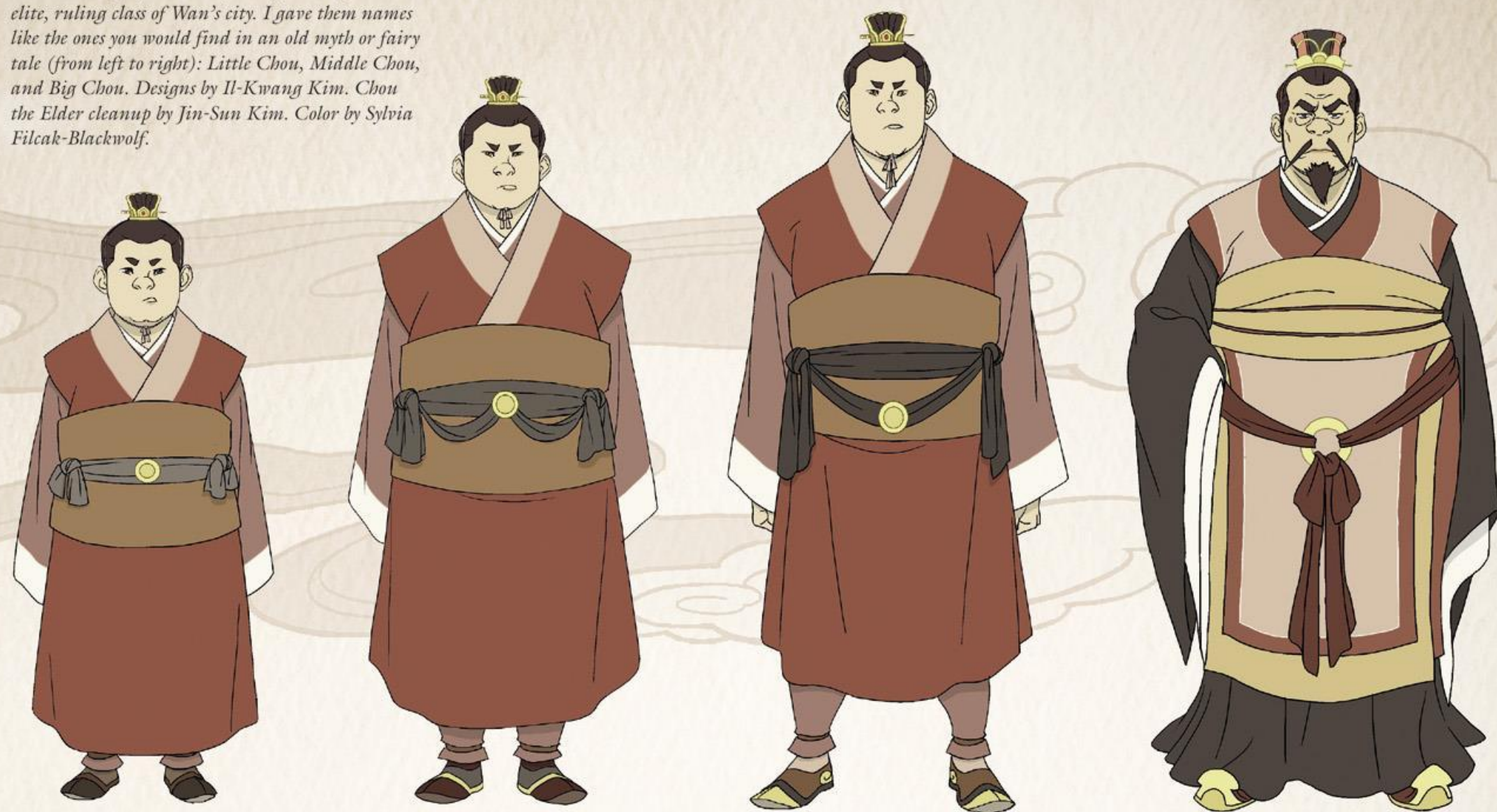
JDS: This opening scene with Wan running from the Chou brothers accomplishes a couple of things right off the bat. First, we get a sense of Wan's mischievous personality, and second, we get a small glimpse of the class struggle that will ultimately lead Wan to become the first Avatar. This storyboard also illustrates the collaborative effort that goes into staging these scenes.





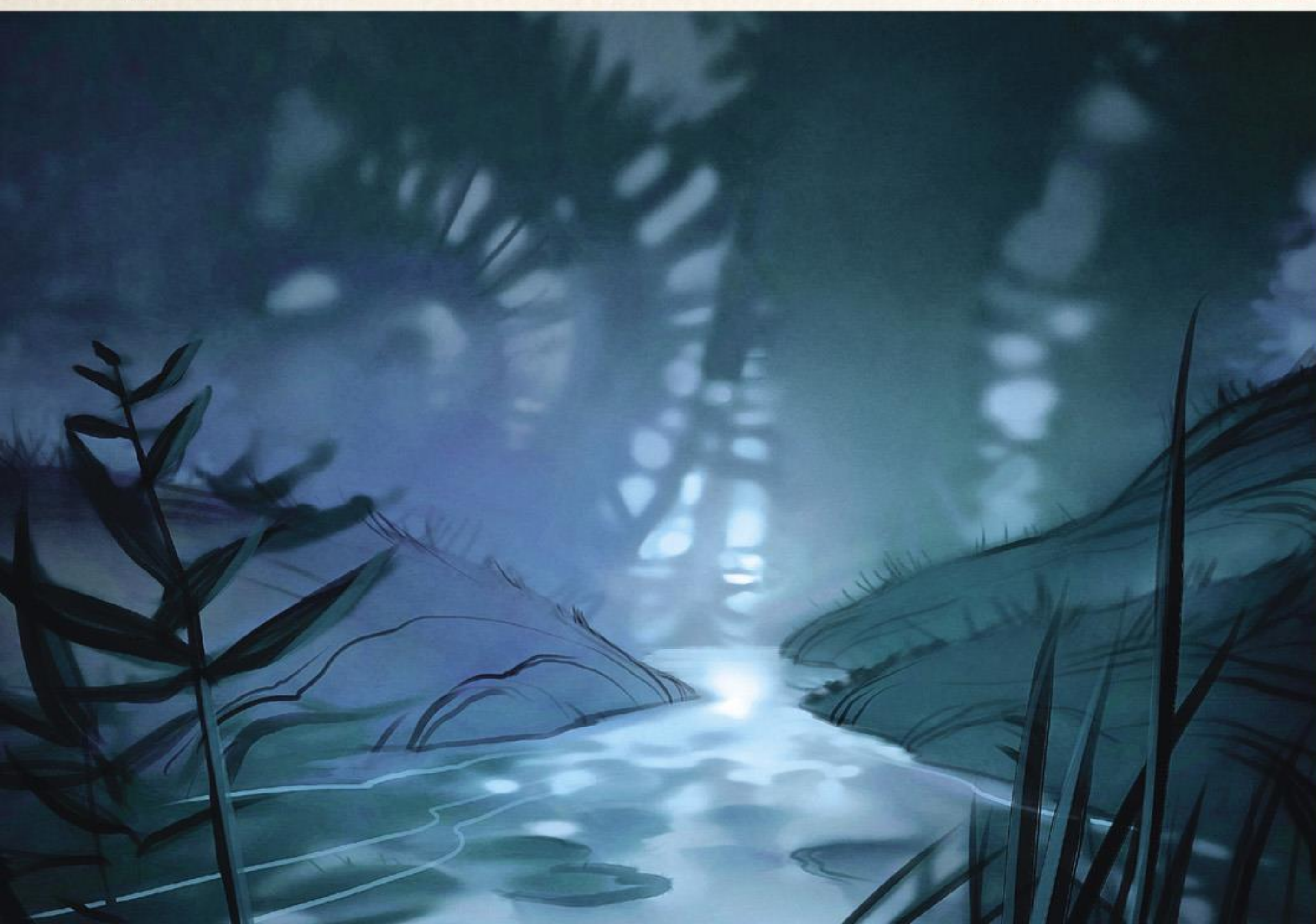
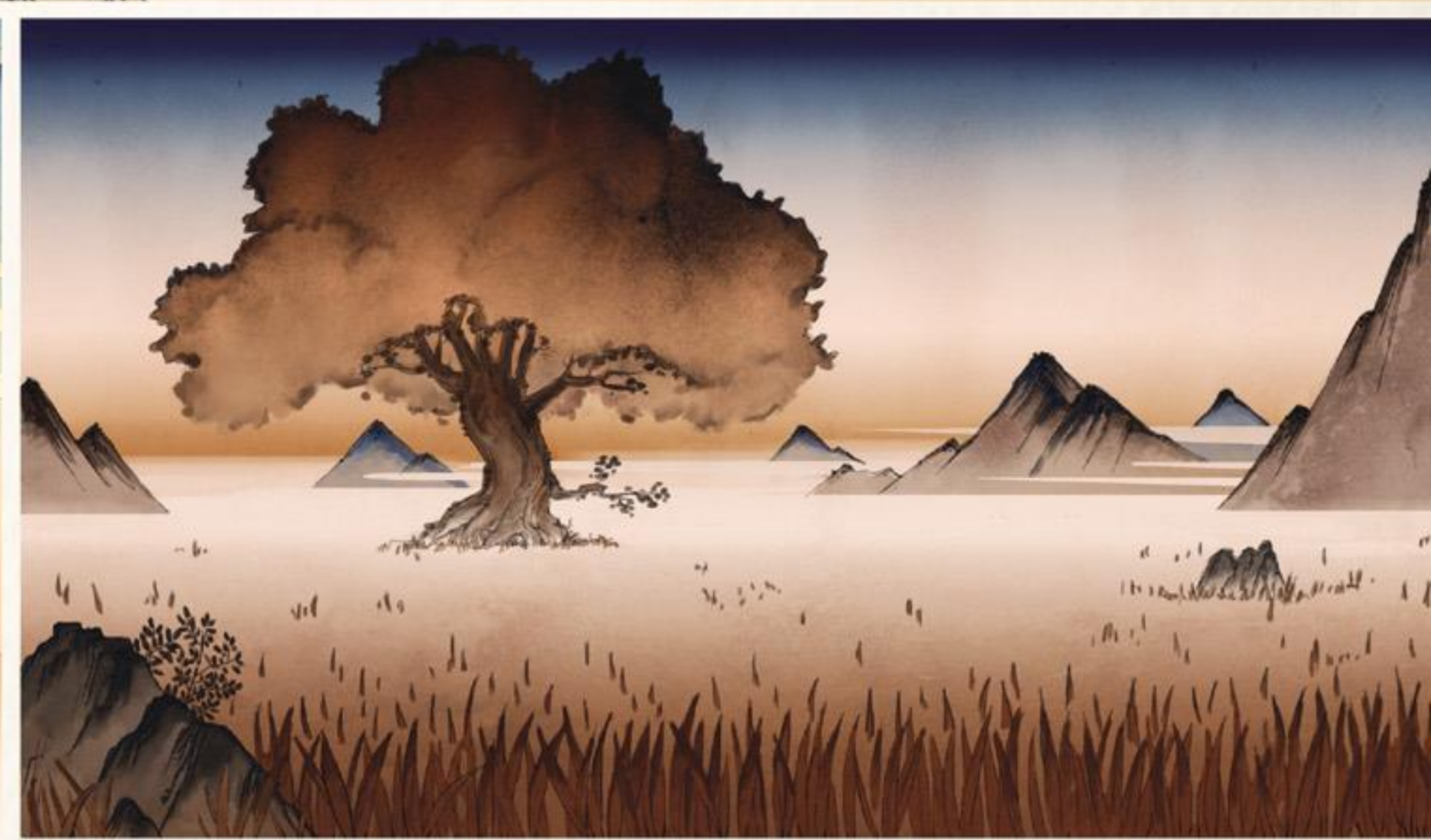


MD: A lineup of the Chou family, who represent the elite, ruling class of Wan's city. I gave them names like the ones you would find in an old myth or fairy tale (from left to right): Little Chou, Middle Chou, and Big Chou. Designs by Il-Kwang Kim. Chou the Elder cleanup by Jin-Sun Kim. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.



BK: Studio Mir designers Il-Kwang Kim and Jin-Sun Kim worked on all of Korra Book One, so it was great to have them back populating Wan's world with these incredibly charming background characters. Townspeople designs by Il-Kwang Kim. Cleanup by Jin-Sun Kim. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.



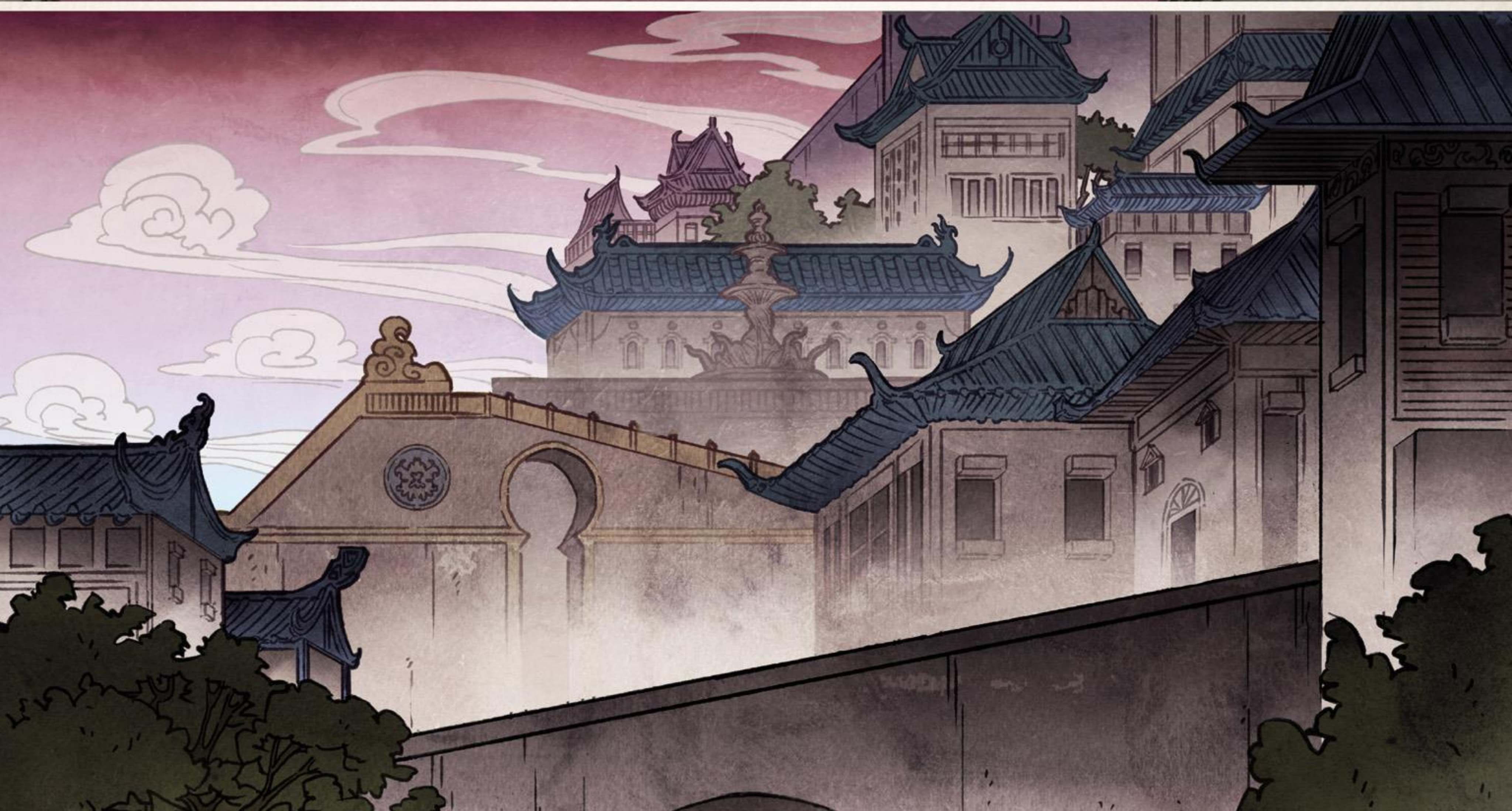


BK: The origin story of the first Avatar was something Mike and I had kicked around for years, since about the middle of production on the original Avatar series. Once Mike and the writers figured out a way to fit it into the middle of this season, we knew we wanted to establish a distinct art-direction style for this mythic tale, something that would help place it ten thousand years in the past from Korra's time.

One of my favorite parts of the Book Two production was developing the look of these backgrounds (which are inspired by ancient Chinese ink wash paintings and Japanese woodblock printing), along with our talented artists at Studio Mir and at Nickelodeon.

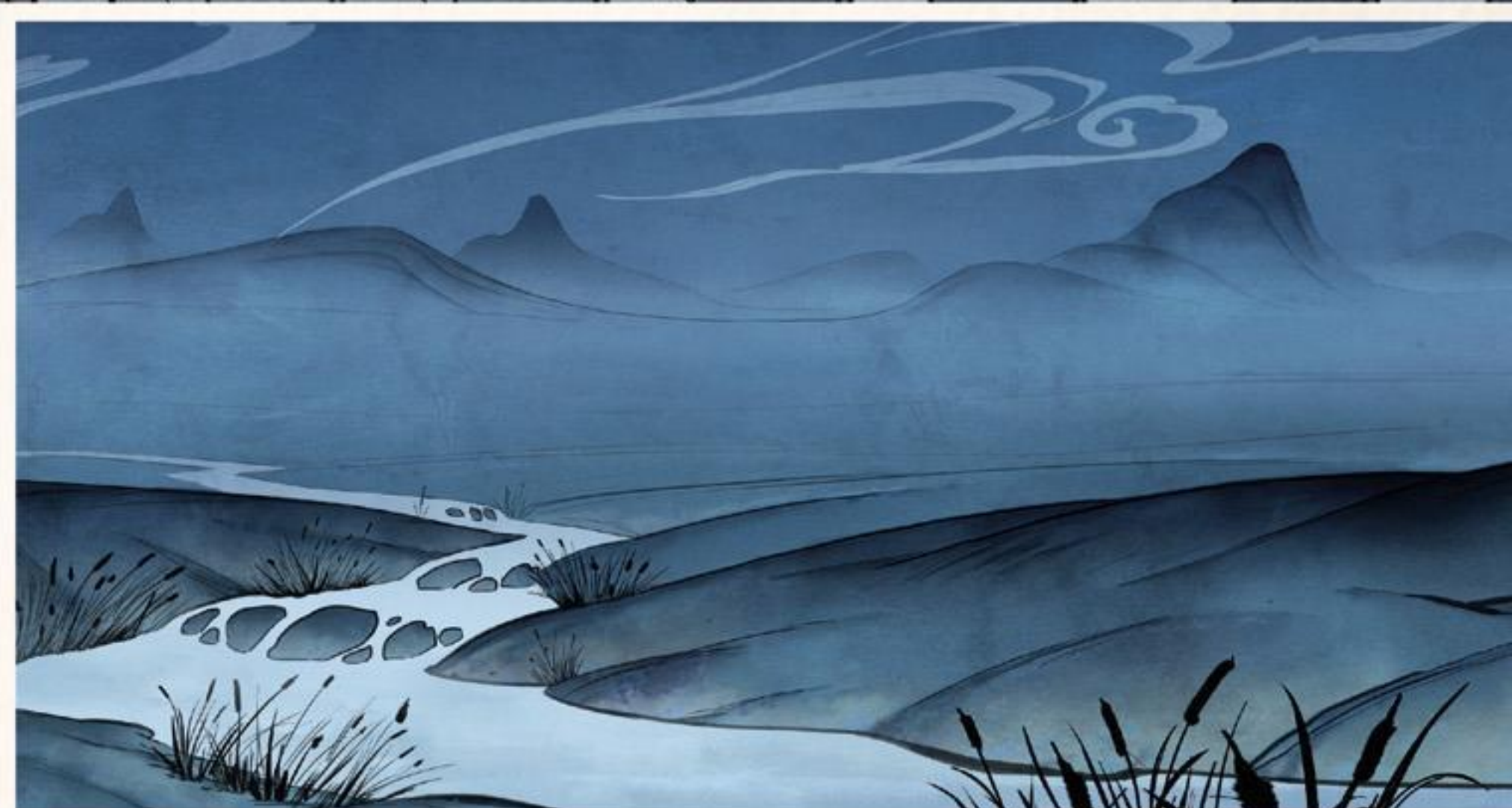
(Top) Spirit wilds oasis. Background design by Yong-Ik Noh and Yun-Hye Choi. Painting by Frederic Stewart. (Middle left) Spirit wilds jungle. Background design by Yong-Ik Noh. Painting by Frederic Stewart. (Middle right) Spirit wilds field. Background design by Yun-Hye Choi. Painting by Emily Tetri. (Bottom) Early background style concept by Josh Middleton.





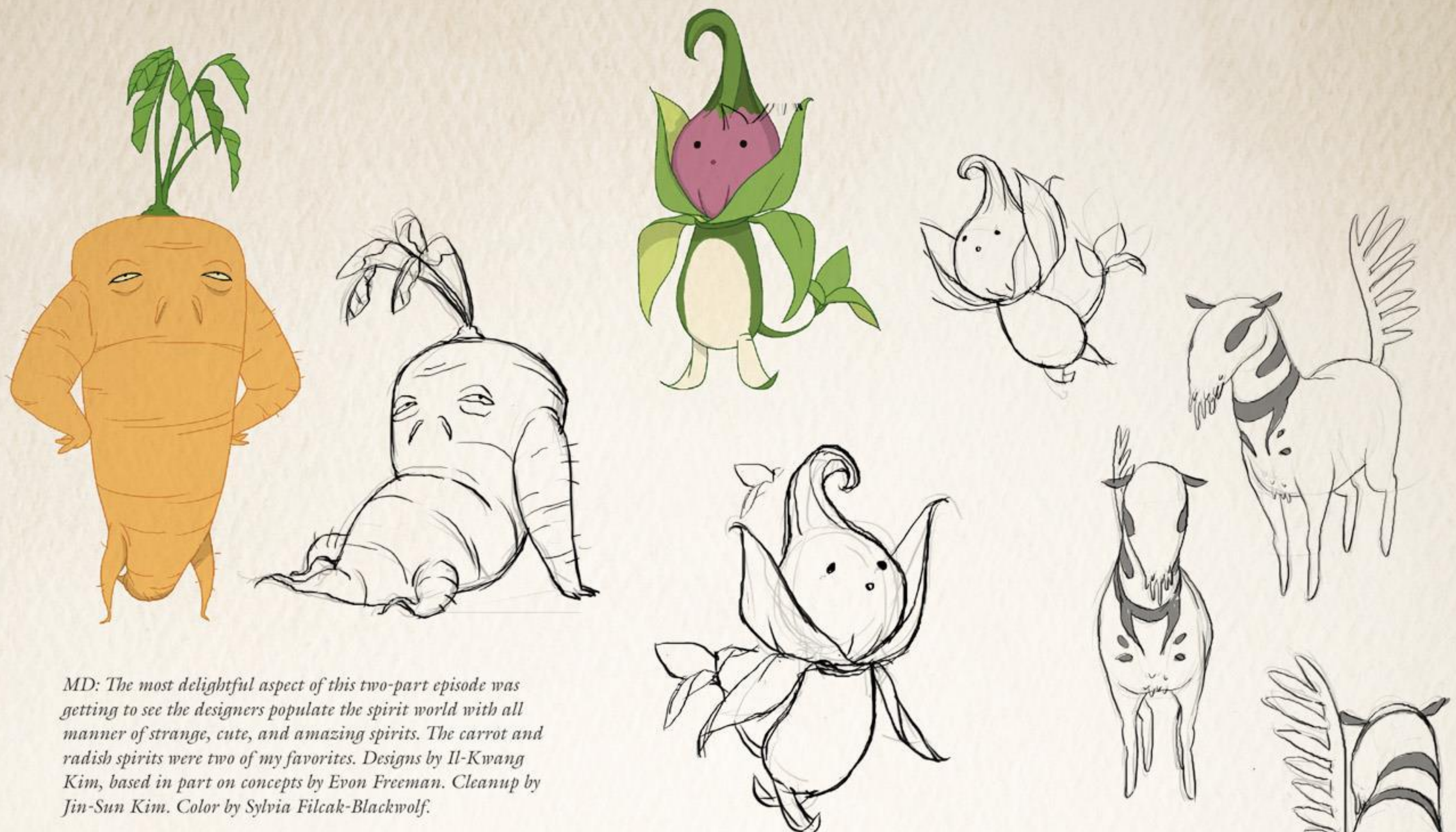
BK: Once we got into a groove with the flashback background style, I started wishing we had chosen this style back on Avatar! Not to say these were easy to generate, but they are certainly easier than the normal Avatar and Korra backgrounds, while they look no less lovely. (Top) Edge of the spirit wilds, with the lion-turtle city visible in the distance. Background design by Yong-Ik Noh and Yun-Hye Choi. Painting by Emily Tetri. Bottom: Wan's city. Background design by Yong-Ik Noh. Painting by Emily Tetri.



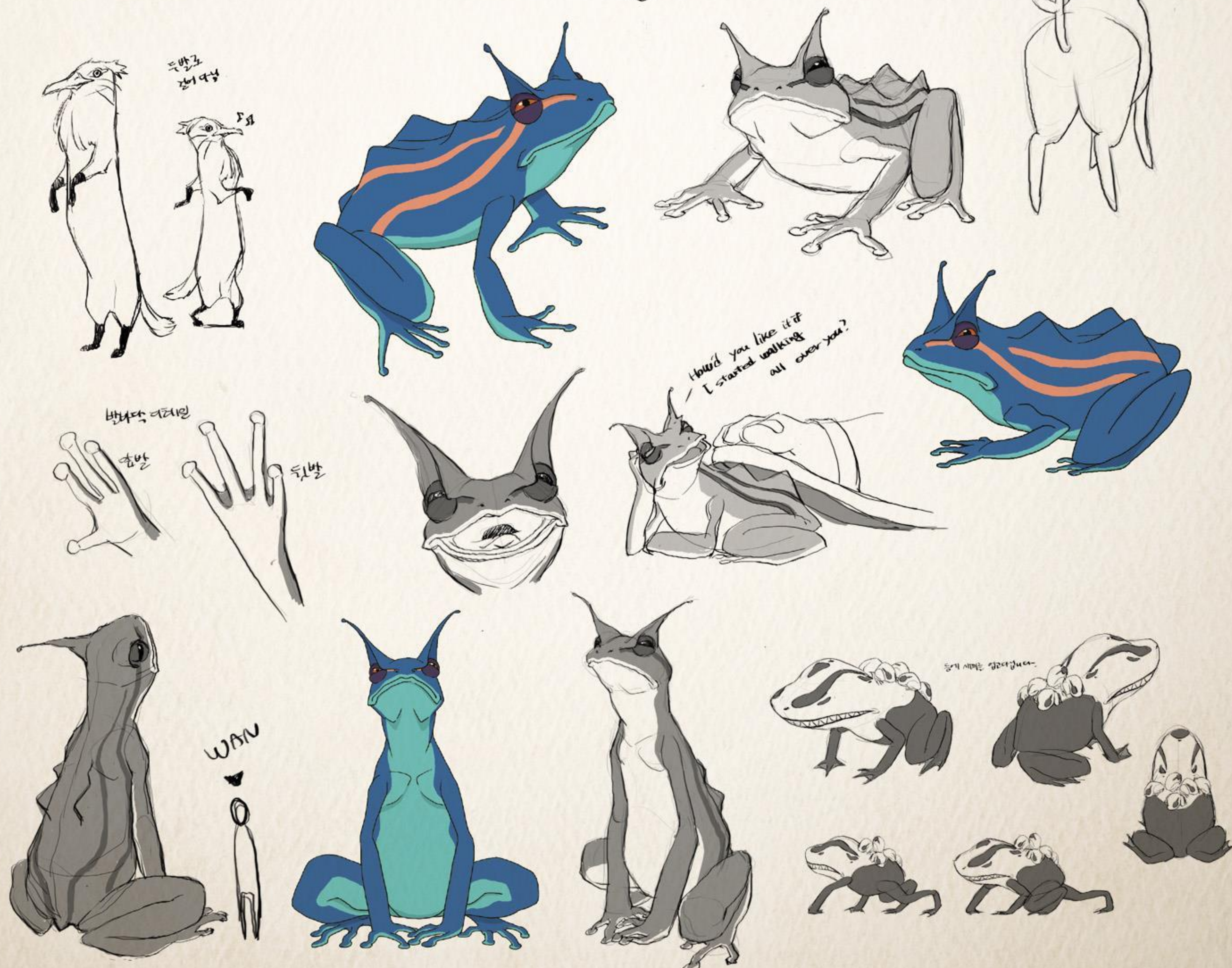


*(Top) Balcony of Chou palace. (Middle right) Spirit wilds meadow. Background designs by Sang-Hyuck Bang. Paintings by Emily Tetri. (Middle left) Spirit wilds stream. (Bottom) Chou palace gate. Background designs by Yong-Ik Noh. Paintings by Frederic Stewart.*

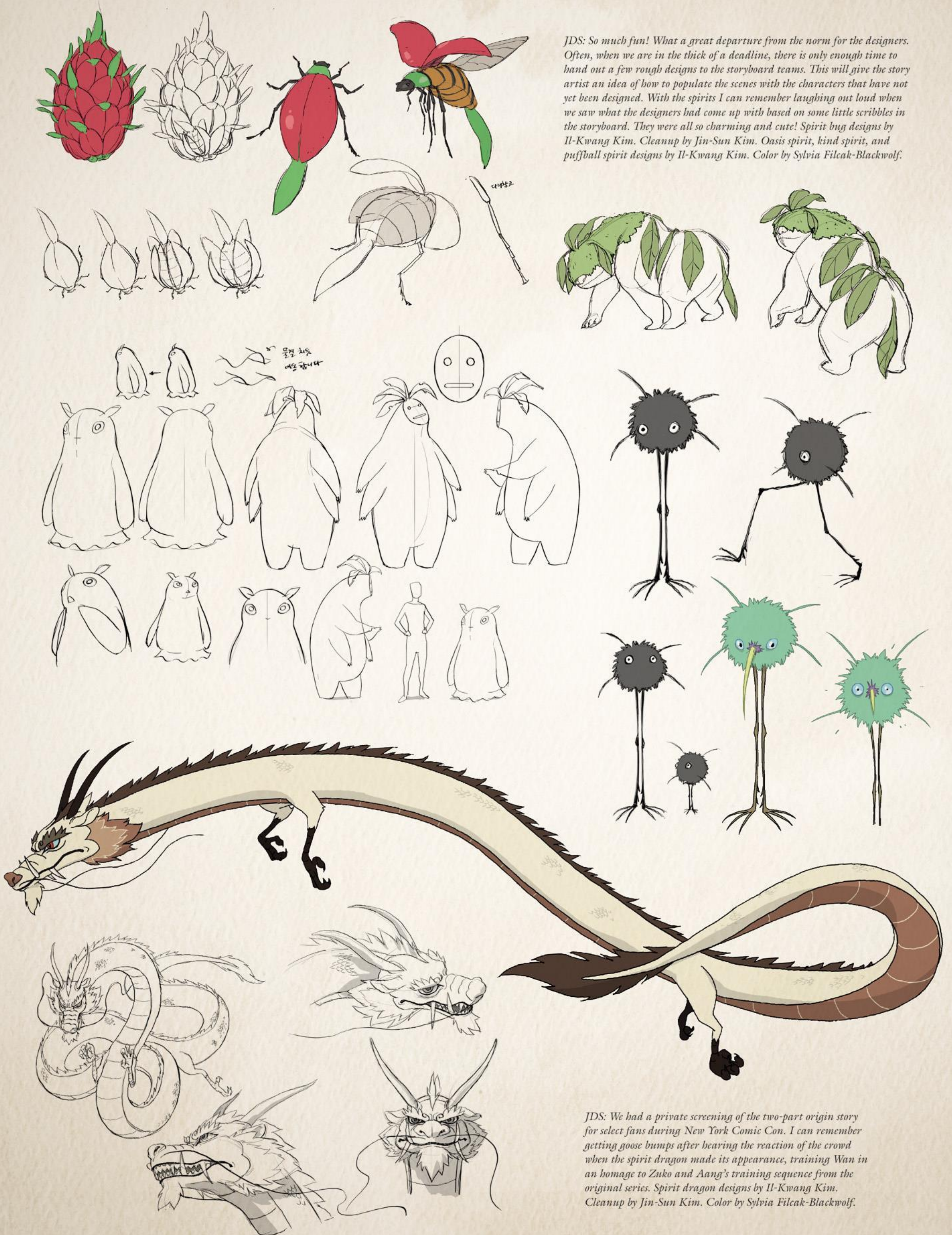




*MD: The most delightful aspect of this two-part episode was getting to see the designers populate the spirit world with all manner of strange, cute, and amazing spirits. The carrot and radish spirits were two of my favorites. Designs by Il-Kwang Kim, based in part on concepts by Evon Freeman. Cleanup by Jin-Sun Kim. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.*







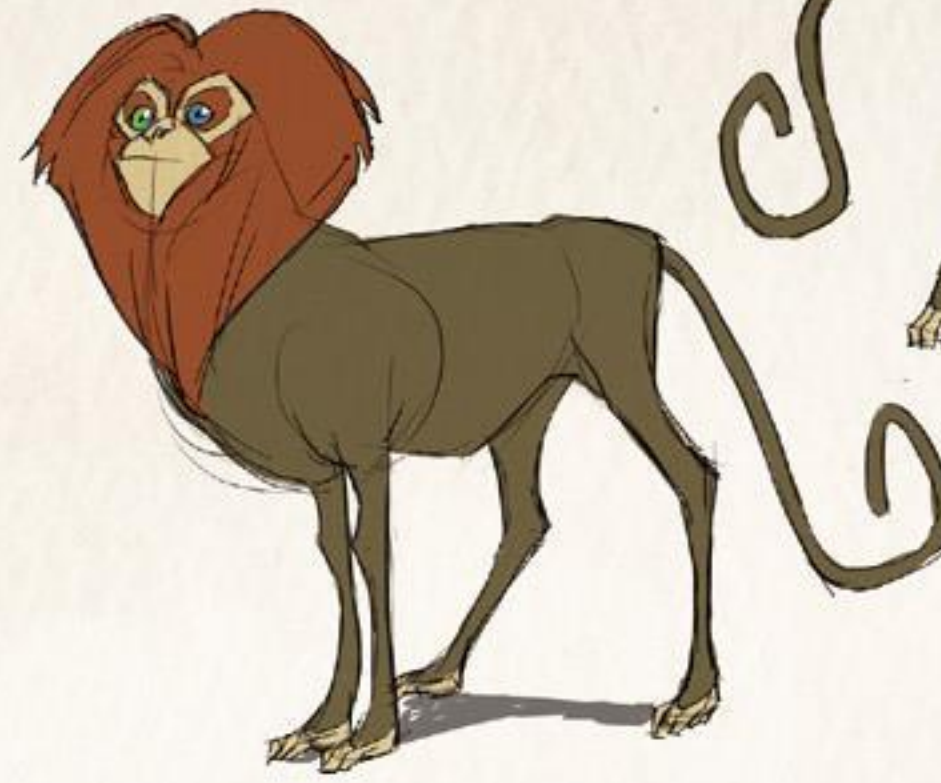
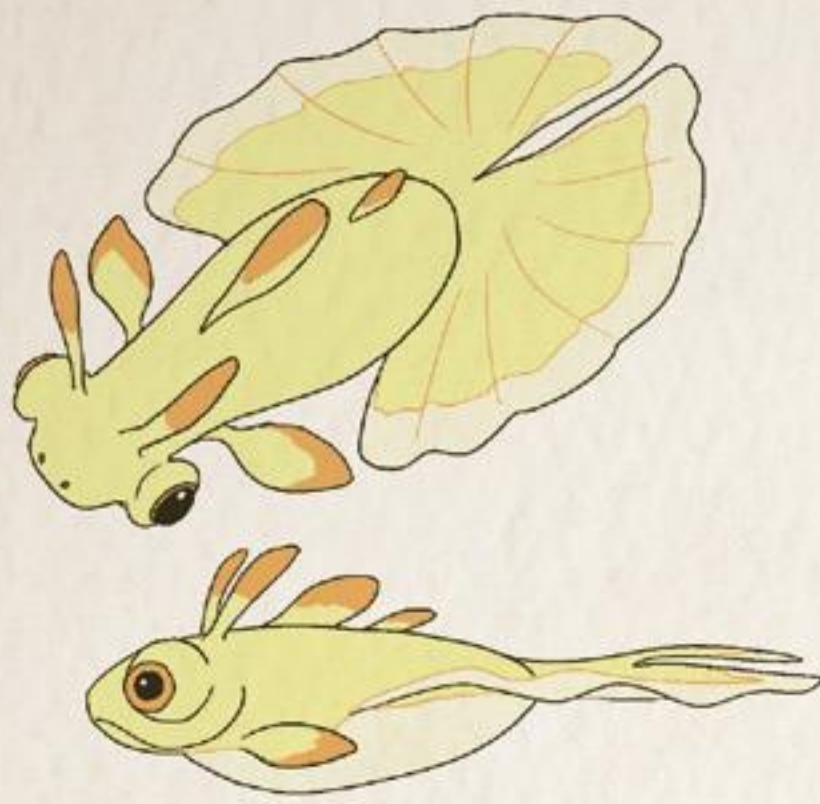
JDS: So much fun! What a great departure from the norm for the designers. Often, when we are in the thick of a deadline, there is only enough time to hand out a few rough designs to the storyboard teams. This will give the story artist an idea of how to populate the scenes with the characters that have not yet been designed. With the spirits I can remember laughing out loud when we saw what the designers had come up with based on some little scribbles in the storyboard. They were all so charming and cute! Spirit bug designs by Il-Kwang Kim. Cleanup by Jin-Sun Kim. Oasis spirit, kind spirit, and puffball spirit designs by Il-Kwang Kim. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.

JDS: We had a private screening of the two-part origin story for select fans during New York Comic Con. I can remember getting goose bumps after hearing the reaction of the crowd when the spirit dragon made its appearance, training Wan in an homage to Zuko and Aang's training sequence from the original series. Spirit dragon designs by Il-Kwang Kim. Cleanup by Jin-Sun Kim. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.



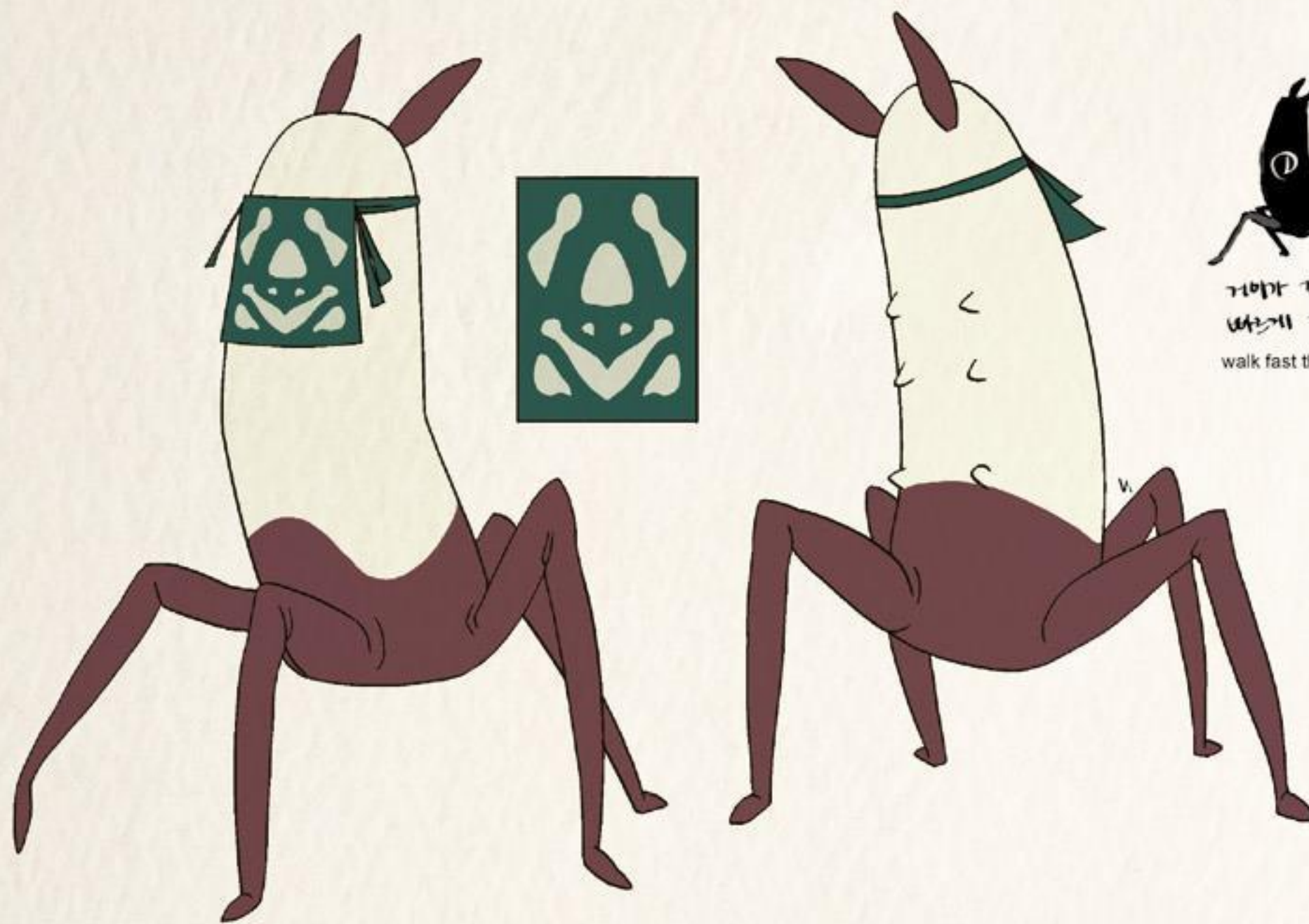




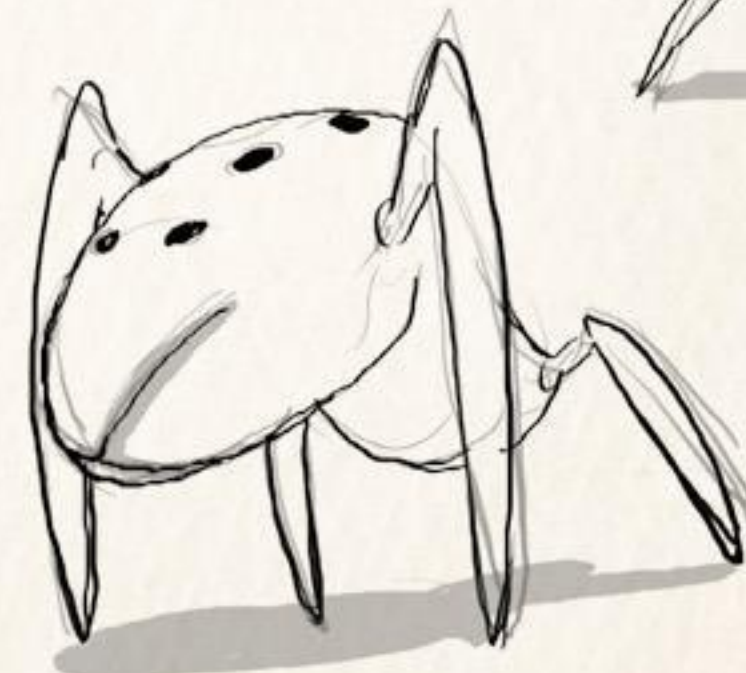
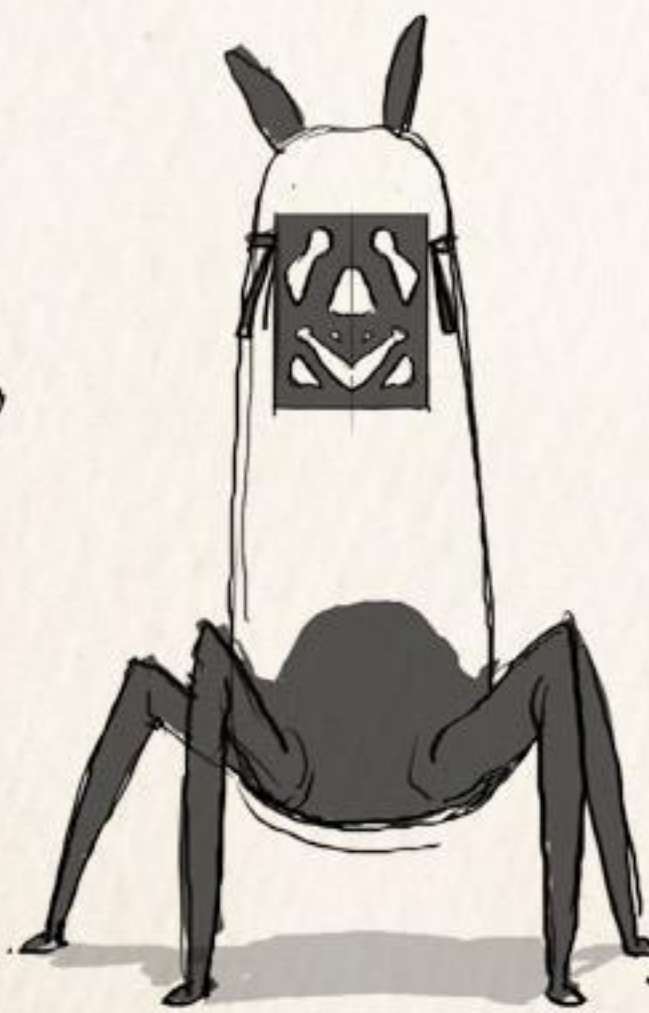
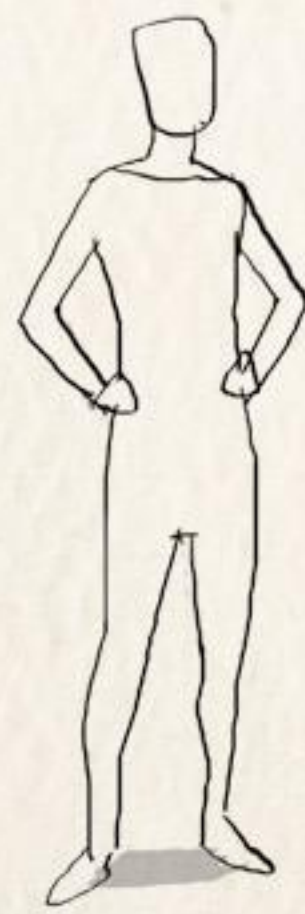
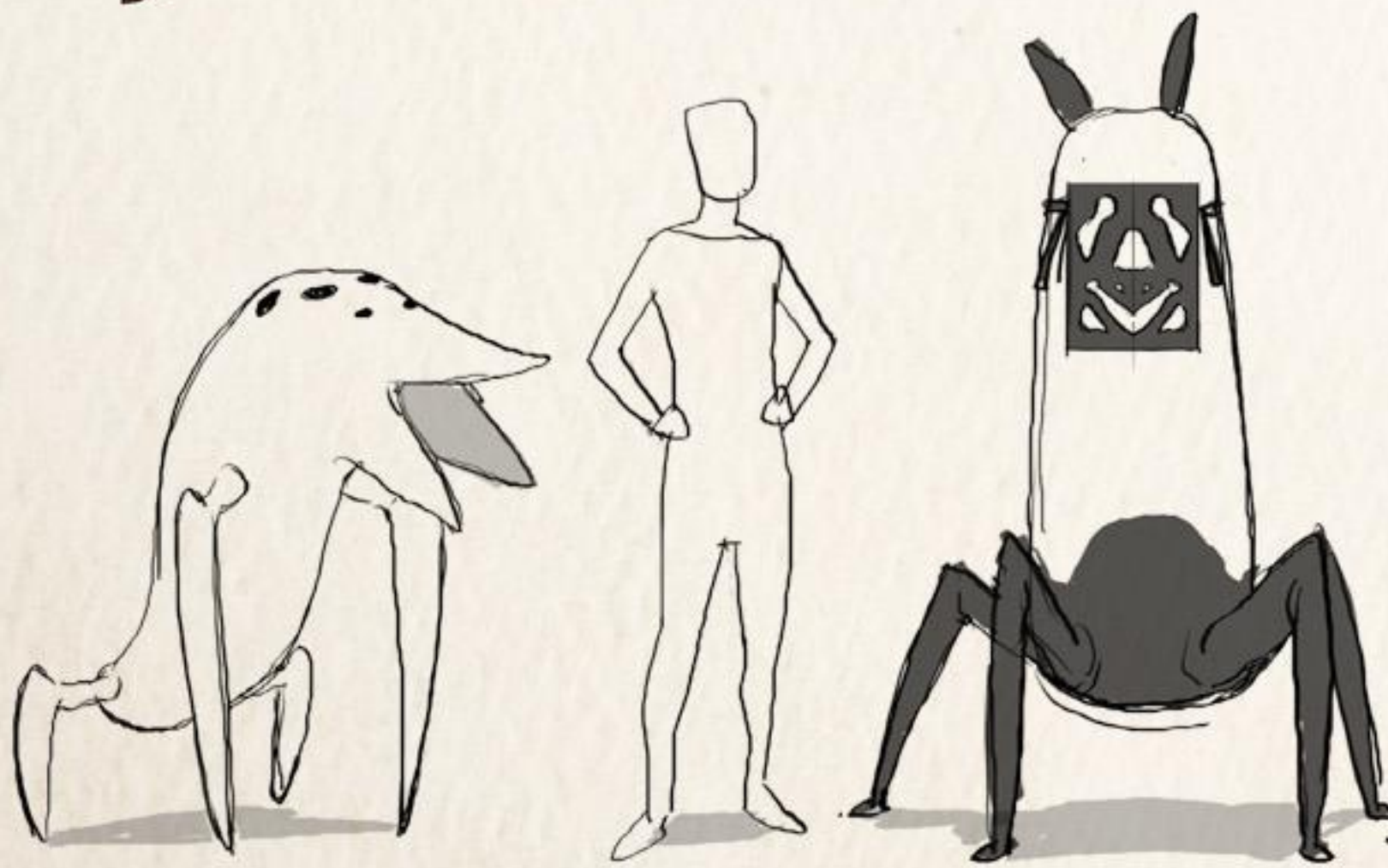
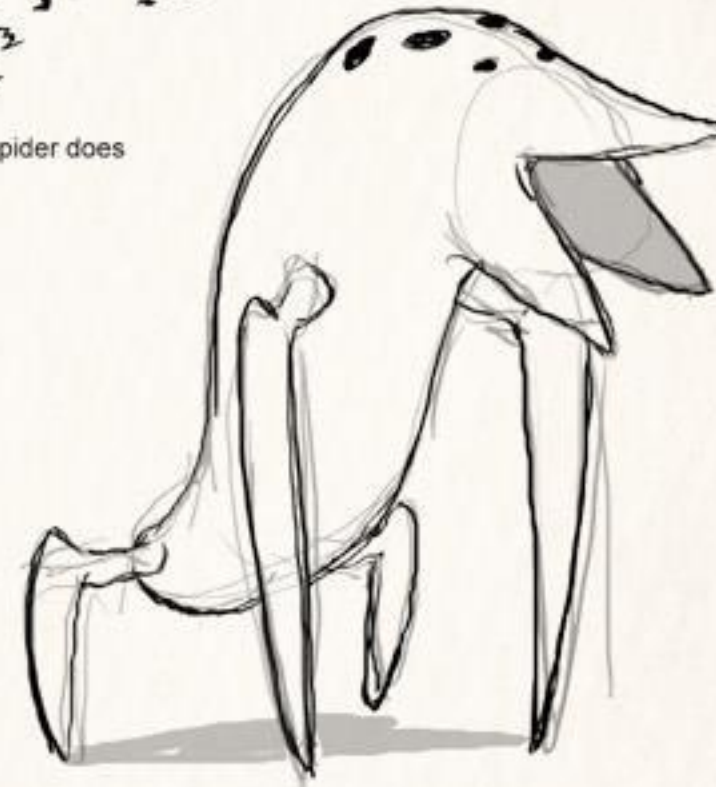


MD: It's no secret that Bryan and I love Hayao Miyazaki's films. Spirited Away is one of my favorites. The marching spirit parade in the show is our homage to Miyazaki. Spirit designs by Il-Kwang Kim, Yong-Ik Noh, Jin-Sun Kim, Jeong-Hoon Kim, and Evon Freeman. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.

BK: The animators at Studio Mir breathed so much life into all of these whimsical spirits throughout the Wan flashback episodes. You don't often see that kind of attention to detail in the animation of side characters in TV productions, so we are very grateful for all the extra effort and care they put into it.



거미가 걷는 방식으로  
빠르게 걷습니다  
walk fast the way a spider does







BK: Evon Freeman painted this charming concept of Wan in the spirit wilds (top), inspired by the Nightwalker from Princess Mononoke. Josh Middleton had a big hand in helping to shape the style and color palette of the flashback backgrounds, particularly with these two concept pieces of Wan and Mula on their journey (bottom and inset).





*MD: Yao's character was created to show how spirits could adversely affect humans, setting up Wan and Raava's fusing in the next episode. Many years ago, Yao visited the spirit wilds and was attacked by an ancient spirit who turned part of him into a tree. Design by Il-Kwang Kim. Cleanup by Jin-Sun Kim. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.*

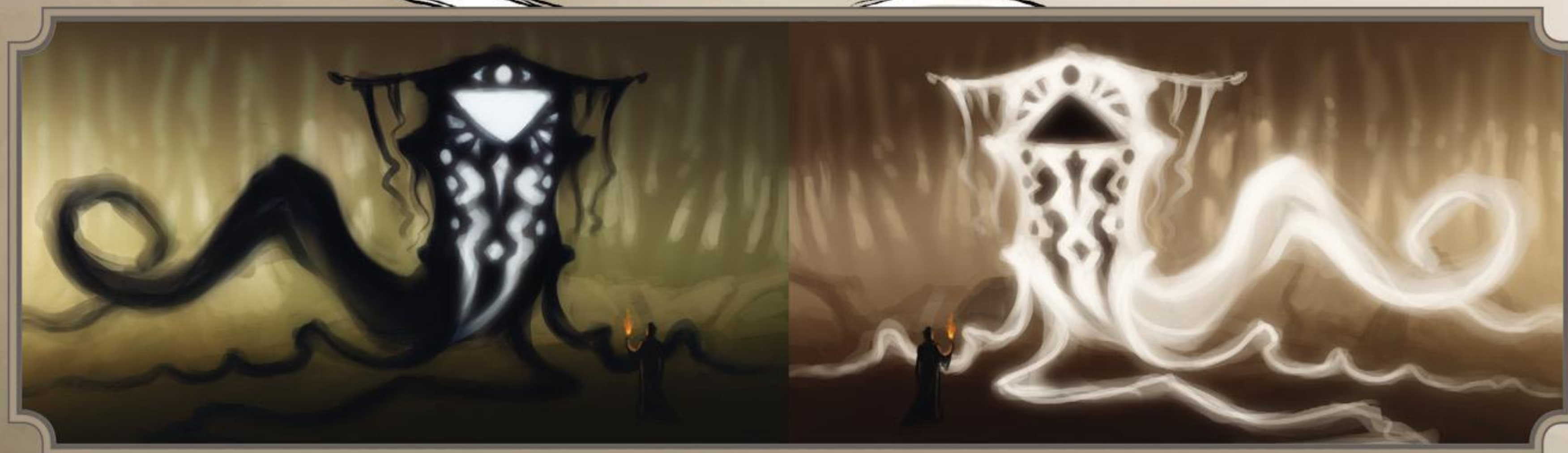
*BK: Josh Middleton painted this beautiful background concept (inset), which Emily Tetri finished (left) for the final animation once the style had been established.*





## RAAVA <sup>AND</sup> VAATU

MD: Visualizing two of the most ancient spirits in the world is no easy task, but as soon as we started talking about the spirits of light and dark in the writers' room, Bryan sketched two kite-like spirits on index cards. It took longer to figure out their names. We wanted a pair of names that alluded to yin and yang, the Taoist philosophy of complementary but opposing forces. After looking at some Sanskrit names and tossing ideas around with Bryan and the writers, we settled on Raava and Vaatu. The double *aa* provided the symmetry we were looking for. This page and opposite: Concepts and designs by Bryan Konietzko.



BK: From an early stage we knew we didn't want the light and dark spirits to be humanoid. I had a vision of them as these squid-like kites, with intricate patterns, and no faces. While their silhouettes aren't referenced from anything specific, I wanted their shapes to hark back to Chinese rooflines, as if perhaps ancient architects in the Avatar world had drawn inspiration from them. For their patterns, I looked at all sorts of patterns in nature, such as the graphic shells of goliath beetles, but I was worried that would be too hard for the animators to replicate. I considered basing their patterns on the archaic Chinese characters for light and dark, as if the Avatar world's written language might have spawned from the spirits. In the end, I found a rubbing in a book of ancient Chinese architectural details that seemed to tie all of my ideas together. It had a skeletal, horseshoe crab-like look to it that to me struck a balance between creepy, natural, and handmade, so I tailored it to work with the design. In the end, it was still pretty difficult for the animators to draw. Sorry, guys!









CHAPTER EIGHT



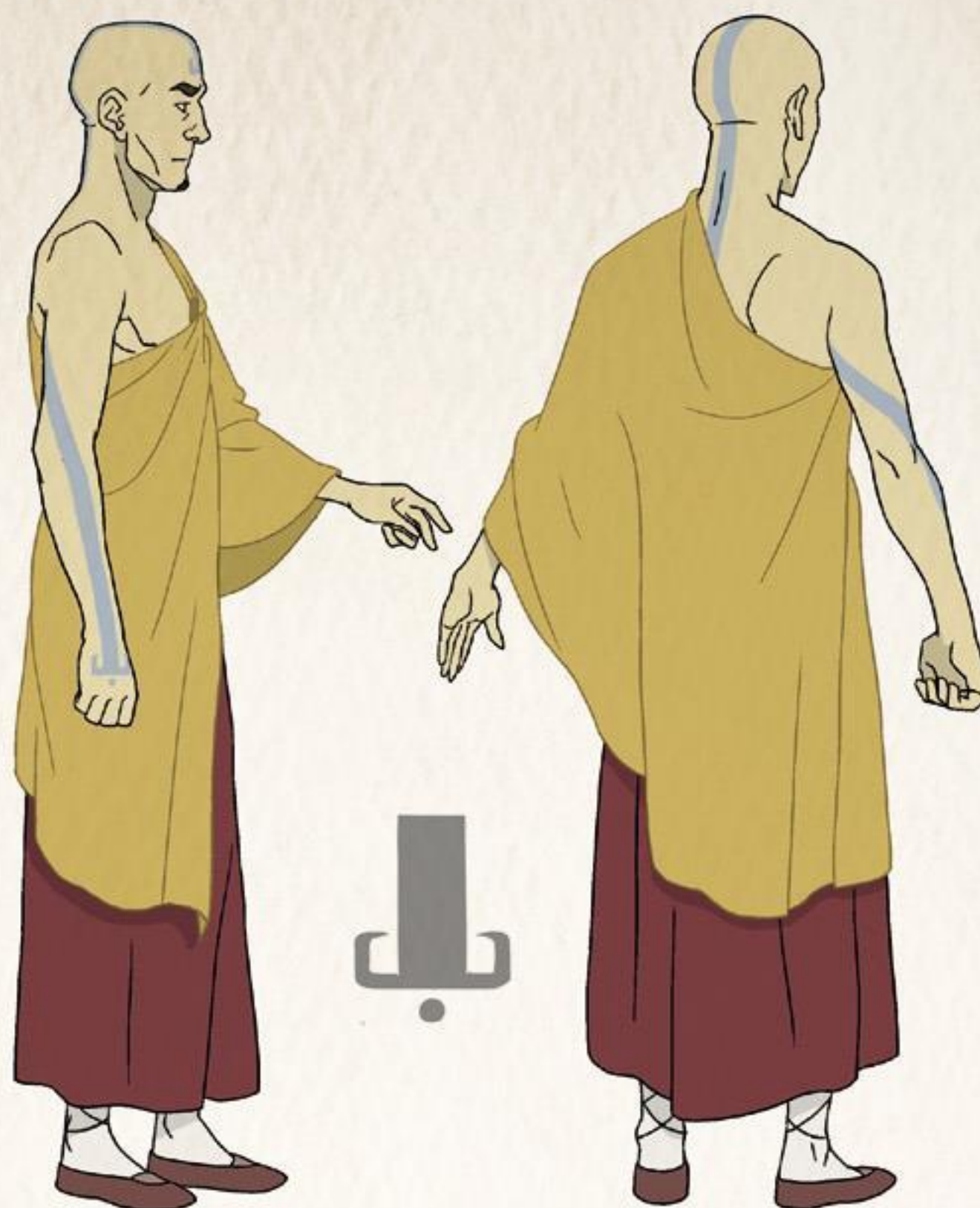
神  
靈



# BEGINNINGS

## PART TWO





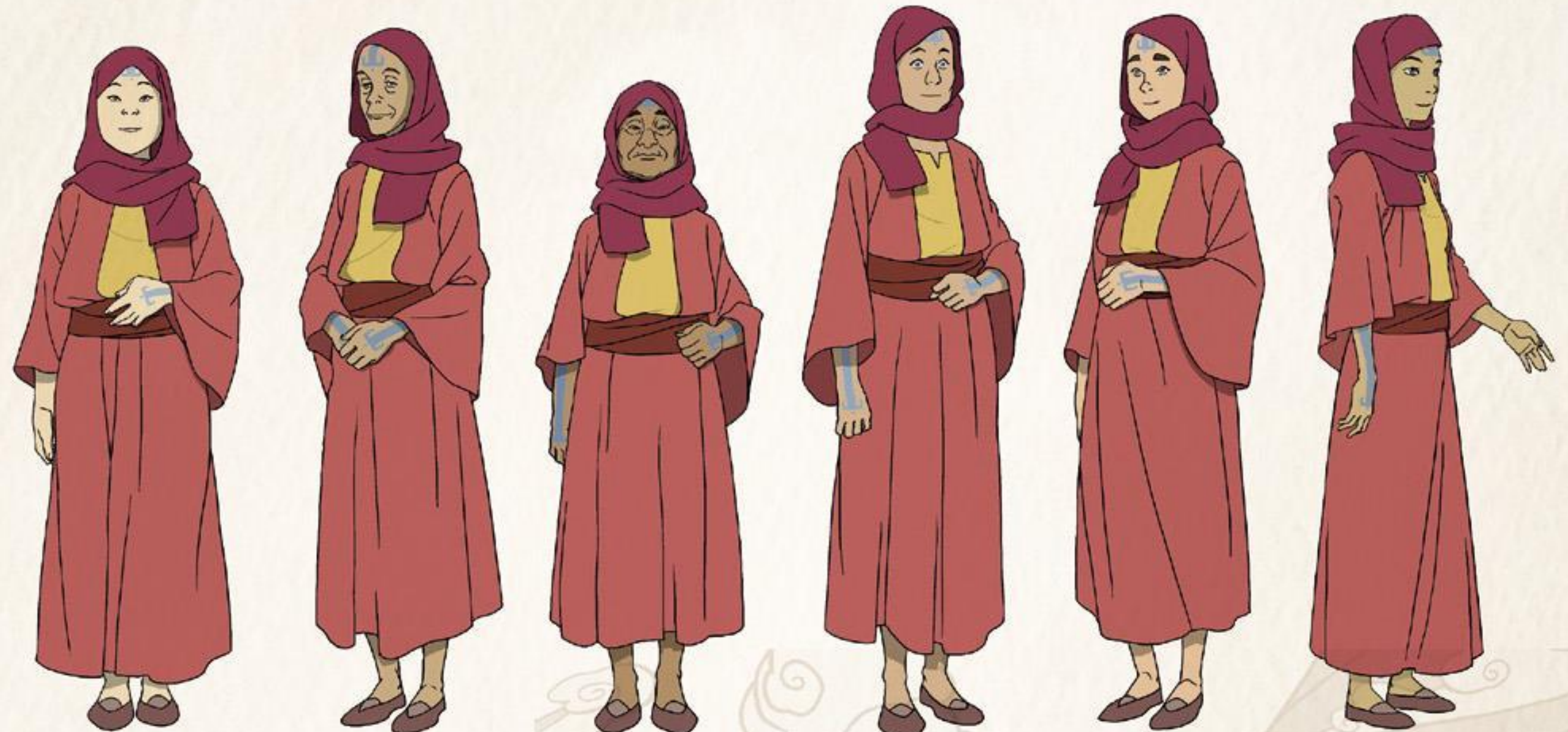
(Preceding spread) River delta background design by Sang-Hyunck Bang. Painting by Emily Tetri.

MD: After living with the spirits for a couple of years, Wan discovers predecessors to the Air Nomads—a group of spiritually connected people who can manipulate the wind. In the writing, we were careful not to call anyone a Firebender, Airbender, etc. We figured those names came later, after the different tribes of people started interacting with each other. Designs by Il-Kwang Kim. Cleanup by Jin-Sun Kim. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.





BK: It was nice to show that not all the early humans in Wan's time lived so separately from and at odds with the spirits. The proto-Airbenders were already living a harmonious existence with both the natural and the spiritual worlds. I wasn't sure what we would do for the earlier version of their tattoos, but Il-Kwang hit the nail on the head! Designs by Il-Kwang Kim. Cleanup by Jin-Sun Kim. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.



MD: The air lion-turtle city's architecture was designed to look very organic, as the predecessors to the Air Nomads lived in harmony with their natural surroundings. Background design by Yong-Ik Noh and Sang-Hyuck Bang. Painting by Frederic Stewart.



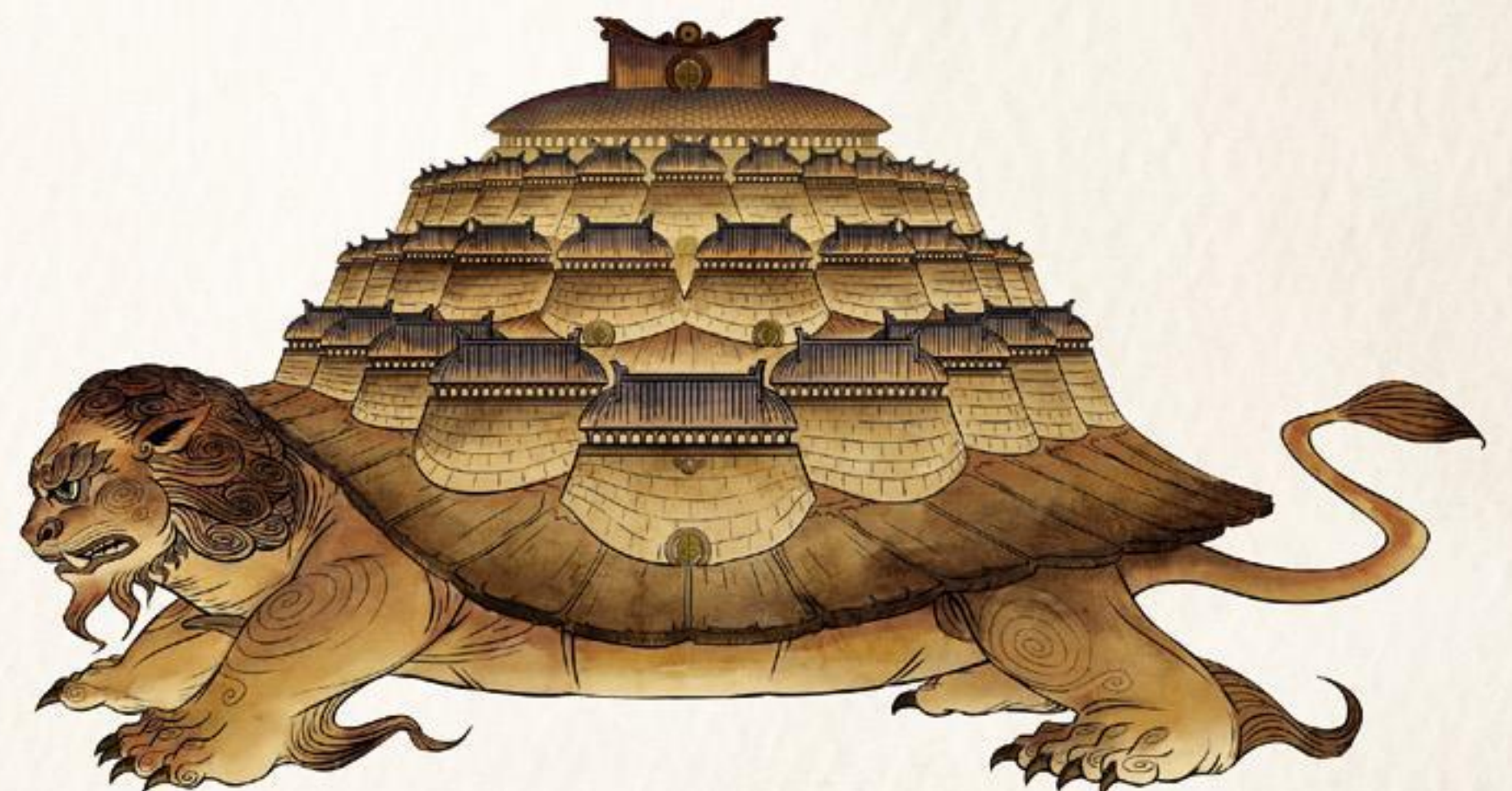
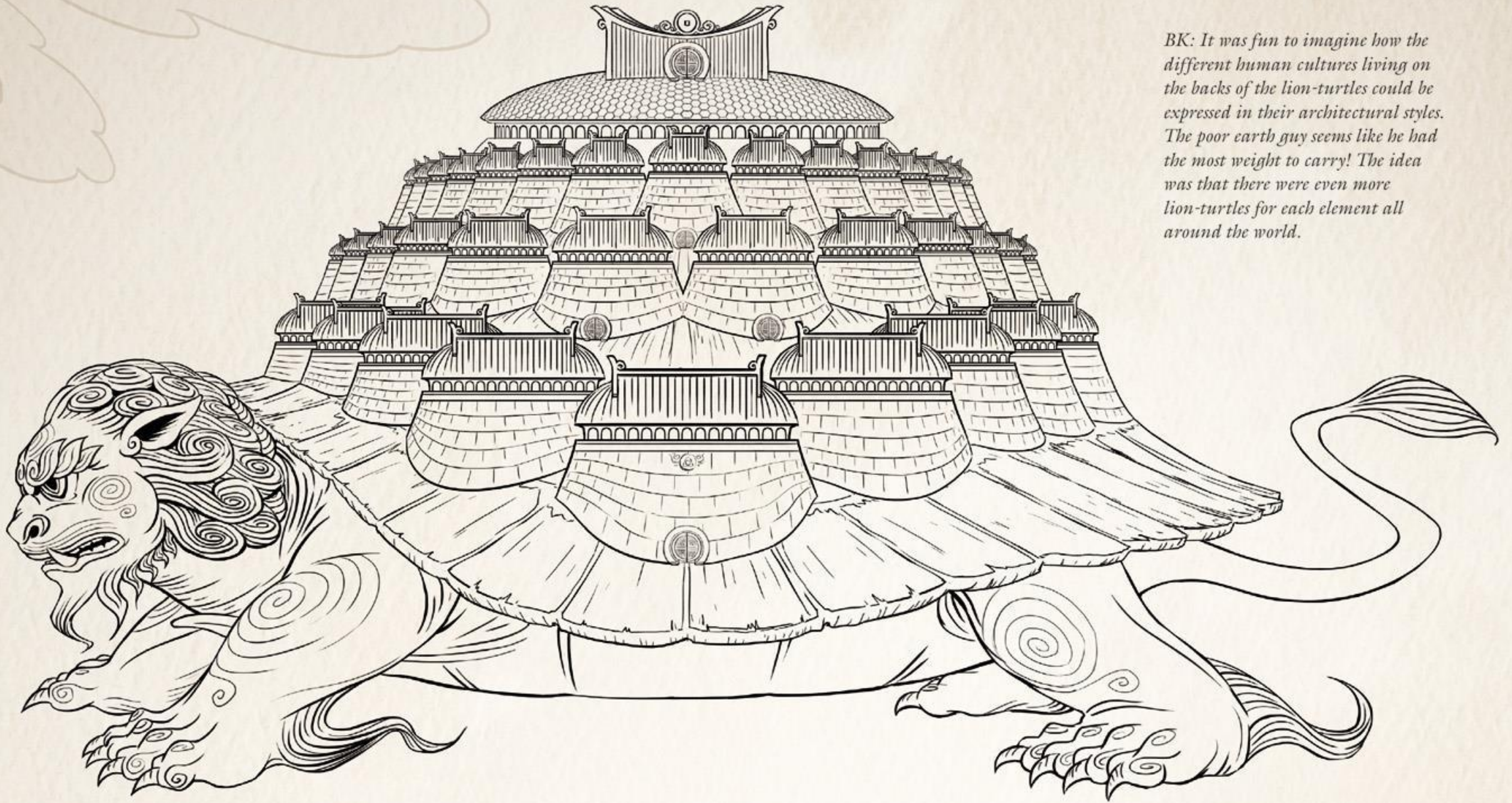


MD: We first introduced the lion-turtle concept in Avatar, but with Wan's story we had the chance to flesh out the mythology further. During Wan's time, they acted as protectors of humans and would bestow elemental powers on a temporary basis, as a protection for those traveling through the wilds.

BK: As we noted in the Avatar art book, unfortunately the animation of the lion-turtle fell short of Jae-Woo Kim's beautiful and intricate designs. So I was happy we had another chance to try to make them look better in Korra. This time around, the simplified art style of the flashbacks better suited the implementation of their designs in the final animation. They were still plenty complicated, though! (Top) Water lion-turtle. (Bottom) Air lion-turtle. Designs by Bryan Konietzko and Christie Tseng. Painting by Emily Tetri.



BK: It was fun to imagine how the different human cultures living on the backs of the lion-turtles could be expressed in their architectural styles. The poor earth guy seems like he had the most weight to carry! The idea was that there were even more lion-turtles for each element all around the world.



BK: In our early visits to South Korea, Mike and I saw a variety of wonderful turtle statues with massive engraved monoliths on their shells, which I remember were early inspirations for the lion-turtles. For their fierce heads, we referenced the traditional Chinese guardian-lion sculptures. Earth and fire lion-turtle designs by Bryan Konietzko. Painting by Emily Tetri and Frederic Stewart.





MD: Raava and Vaatu's epic battle takes place once every ten thousand years, around the spirit portals. At the center of the rocky field stands the Tree of Time, which becomes Vaatu's prison after Wan defeats him. Background designs by Yong-Ik Nob. Paintings by Emily Tetri.



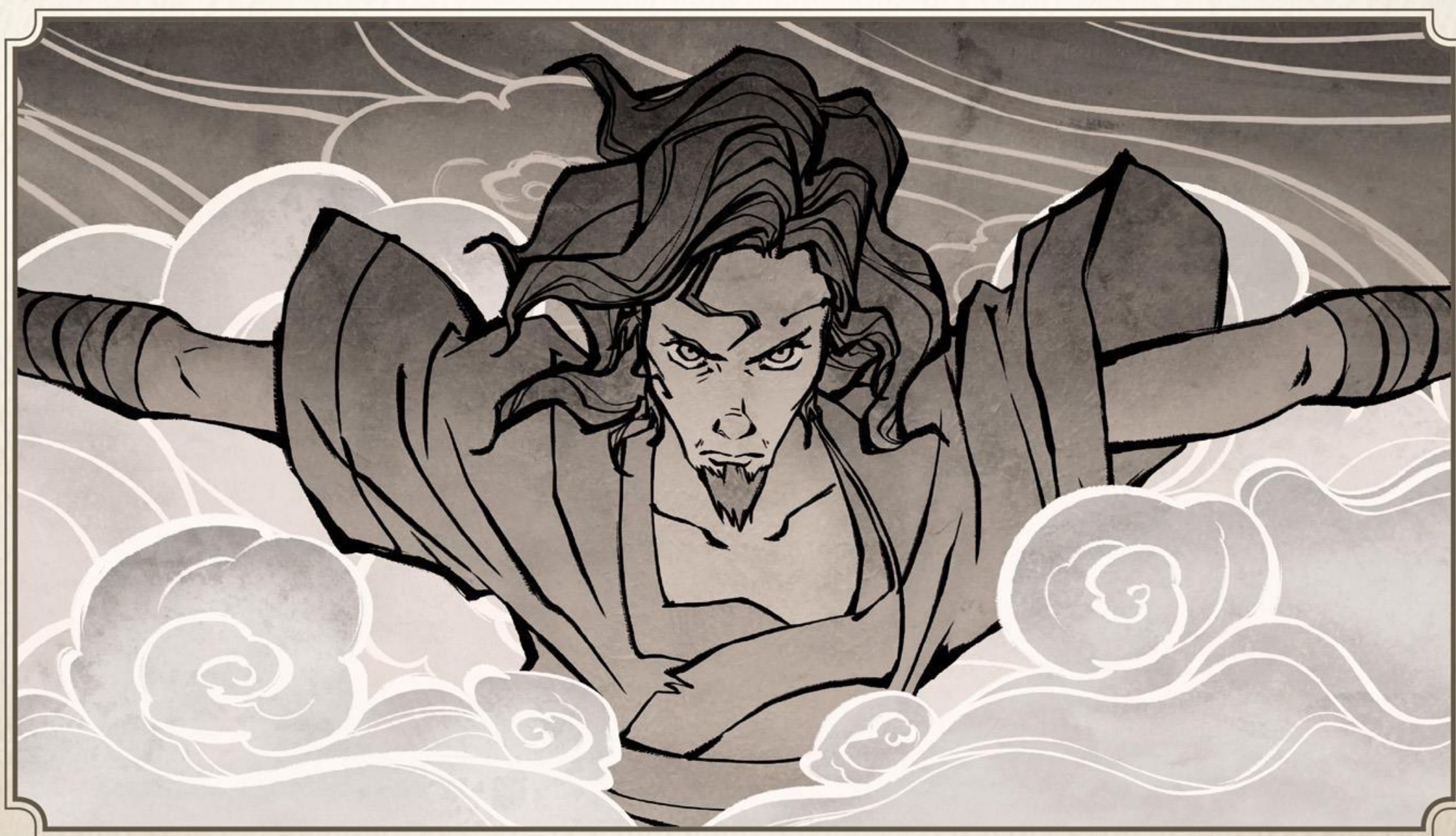


JDS: It's always awesome when you have an epic set piece to stage an epic battle. But when the environment is basically a giant circle with two spirit portals on either side that are almost identical, you really have to keep a consistent line of action from scene to scene to make sure the audience does not get disoriented. That tree became our visual anchor. Cutting wide and showing the characters' proximity to the tree allowed us to reset the scene after a complex exchange between Vaatu and Wan. Background designs by Yong-Ik Nob. Paintings by Emily Tetri.





*MD: I always get a little choked up when I watch old Wan dying on the battlefield and Raava leaving his body. I was so pleased with how the Wan episodes came out and wish we could've spent more time with the first Avatar. Wan in winter clothes design by Bryan Konietzko, Christie Tseng, and Il-Kwang Kim. Wan and Raava fusing design by Bryan Konietzko. Old Wan design by Bryan Konietzko and Il-Kwang Kim. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.*

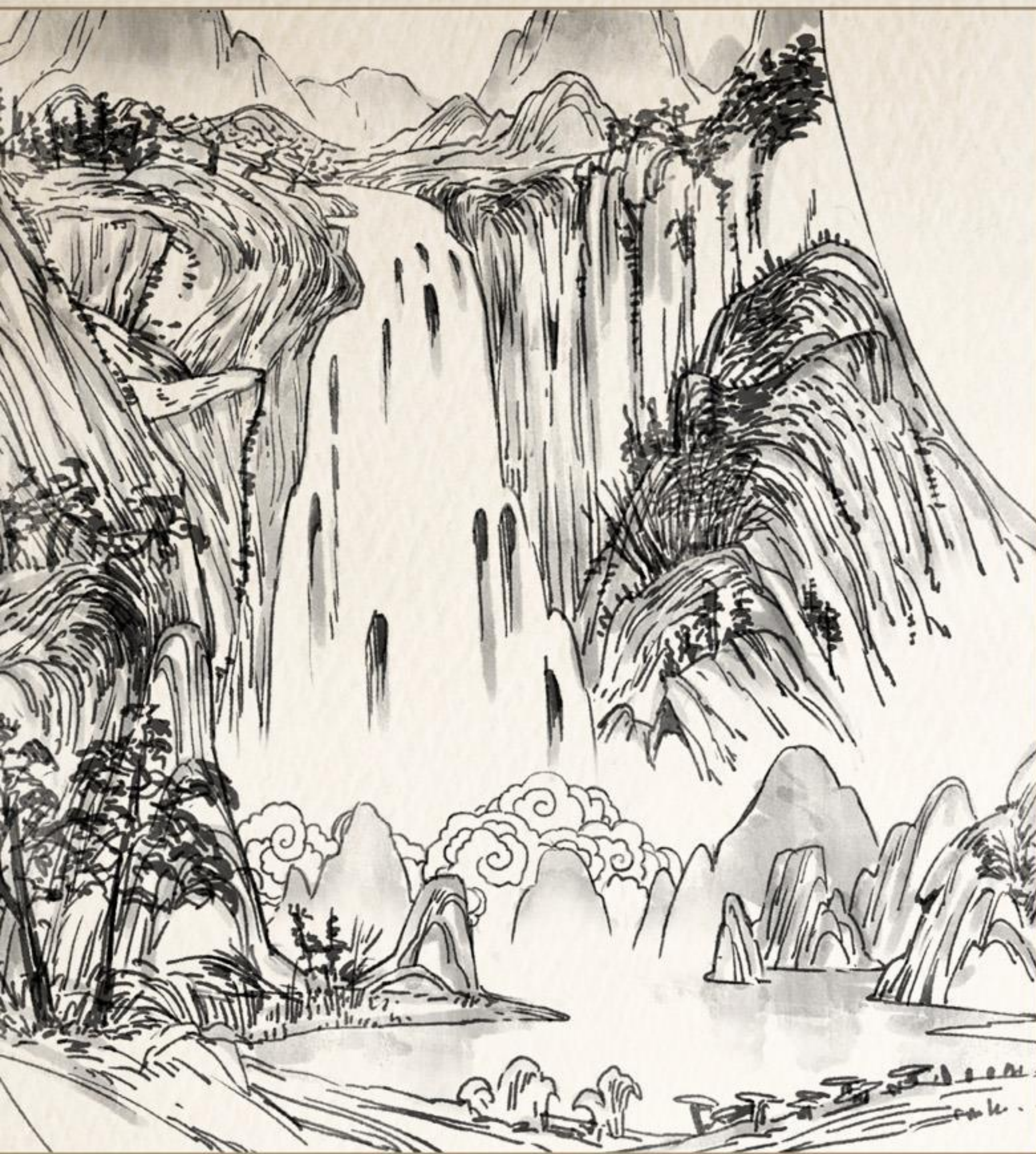


*JDS: These illustrations showing Wan's inability to stop man's warmongering ways are a beautiful collaborative effort between multiple artists across multiple art departments. (Above and opposite page) Avatar Wan illustrations by Ki-Hyun Ryu. Cleanup by Christie Tseng, Angela Song Mueller, and Christine Bian. Color by Bryan Konietzko.*



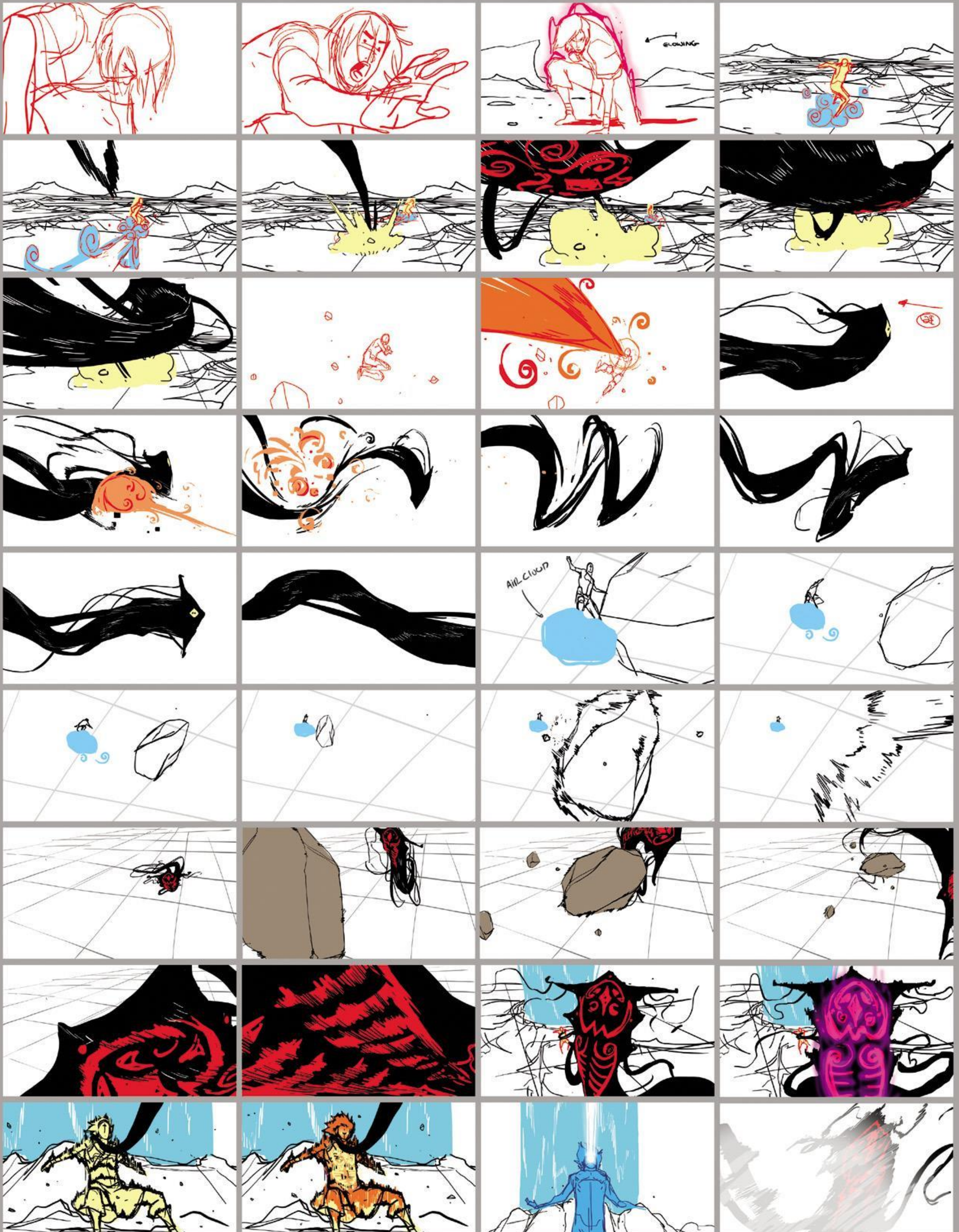






MD: (Top) Two beautiful ink wash drawings of a waterfall and a river. In an early version of the script, Wan was washed away down the waterfall before he found the Air Nomads, but we had to cut those scenes because the episode was getting too long. (Bottom) An earth coin battlefield, where Wan died. Fans of the original series may recognize it as the same field Zuko passed through in "Zuko Alone." Background designs by Yong-Ik Noh.





JDS: Wan's epic battle with Vaatu. You'd be surprised how hard it is to stage a fight between a man and what is basically a giant flying spirit kite. Conceptually this was a struggle for the storyboard artists to wrap their heads around, so the revision process was a bit lengthier than usual. The battle was basically entirely restaged twice before we found what we were looking for. Storyboard by Joaquim Dos Santos and Kwang-Il Han.





CHAPTER NINE



神  
靈



THE GUIDE



MD: (Preceding spread) An ancient sculpture carved into the cliffs of the Eastern Air Temple. Background design by Angela Sung. Painting by Emily Tetri. (This page) Bumi becomes fast friends with a mustachioed dragonfly-bunny spirit he names Bum-Ju. Design by Angela Song Mueller and Bryan Konietzko. Cleanup by Christie Tseng. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.



BK: Angie and I, cultivators of cute, had a field day working on this colony of cotton candy-like dragonfly-bunny spirits. I set up the basic look with Jinora's buddy, Furry Foot, and Angie developed the rest of the critters based on that. At first, Bumi's pal Bum-Ju looked a little bit too much like a normal rabbit, so I incorporated an insect-like graphic element on his face, more like Furry Foot. We had to find a balance with those patterns so they wouldn't override the cuteness. Making them pastel colors certainly helped. Designs by Angela Song Mueller and Bryan Konietzko. Cleanup by Christine Bian and Christie Tseng. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.





BK: I knew we were in for a challenge when Mike and the writers came up with this cloud of angry, dark spirit bats. A dynamic swarm of flying winged creatures is not the easiest thing to pull off proficiently in 2-D TV animation, even with the aid of duplicating characters in the composite stage. So we asked our friends in the Nickelodeon CORE Department to help us create these bats in 3-D. They did an amazing job translating my design, animating a wing cycle, and creating a rig that allowed the animators at Studio Pierrot to easily control hundreds of these nasty little critters. The resulting action sequence exceeded my expectations; my only regret was that we never got to see the bats clearly in a close-up shot. I am quite fond of their vertically aligned chompers. Design and color by Bryan Konietzko.



MD: In Book Two, we revisited two of the four Air Temples from the original series. The second stop on Tenzin's family vacation was the Eastern Air Temple, historically home to female Air Nomads. Nowadays, a group of Air Acolytes lives there and cares for the temple. Background design by William Nangning Niu. Painting by Lauren Zurcher.





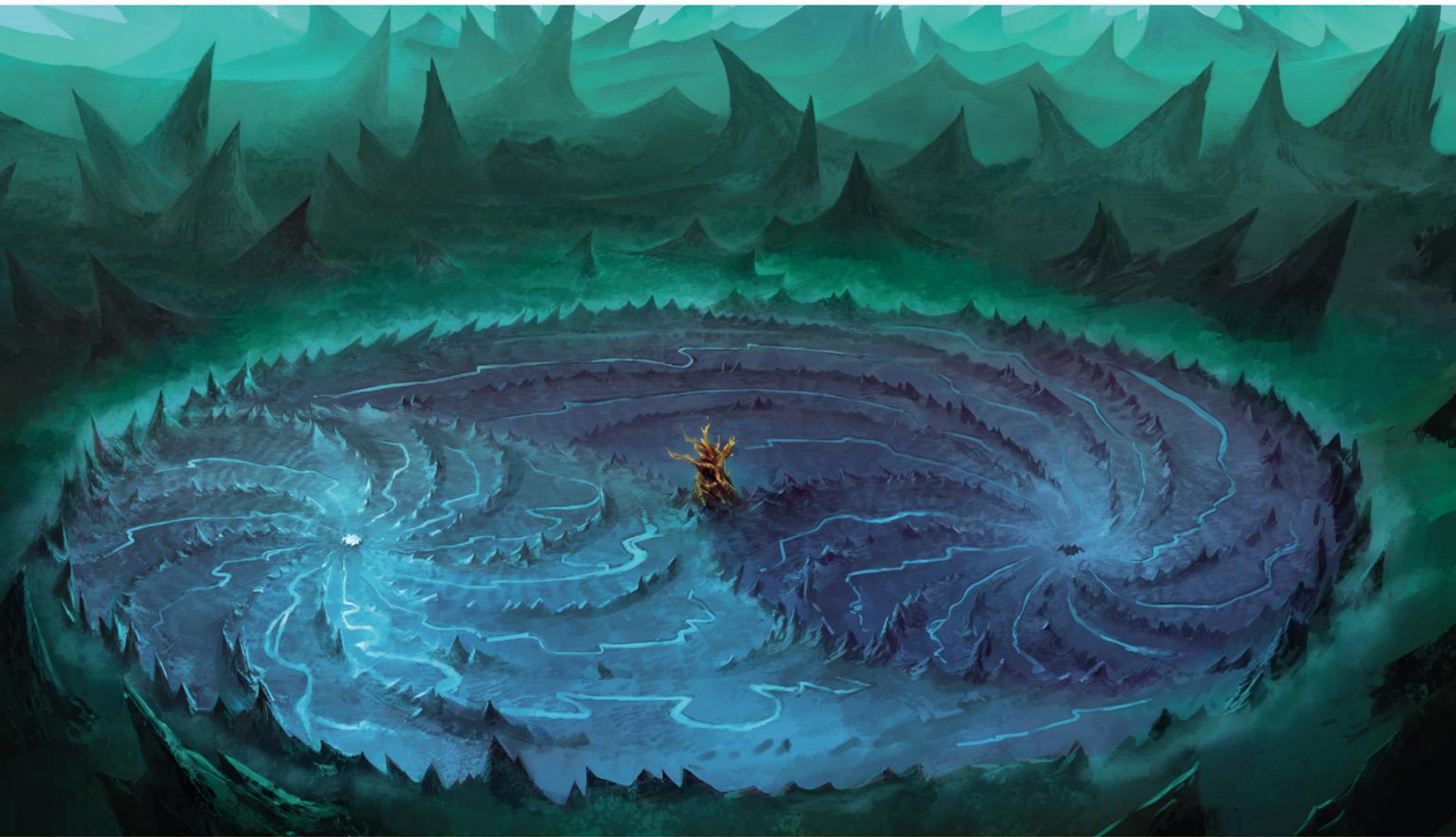
MD: This ancient Airbender spiritual site was covered with vines when Korra and Tenzin first discovered it. These paintings by Emily Tetri have a serene moodiness that really captures the sacredness of this location. Background designs by William Nanqing Niu.





BK: Emily Tetri did an extraordinary job creating these two concept paintings of the ancient Airbender site, which were used as the basis for William's designs on the previous page. It makes me wish there had been time to allow all the amazing artists to do more previsualization throughout the entire series. As it was, we were usually just playing catch-up. I hope we all get to make a movie together someday so we can give everyone the chance to do plenty of deep concept exploration. This crew would knock it out of the park!





BK: I remember working out the spirit world portal area with Mike and the writers, trying to interpret and add to their ideas visually with pen scribbles on a legal pad. We all agreed upon this yin-and-yang-shaped expanse of rock, with the earth distorted by the formation of the portals. Not only did Raava and Vaatu pierce through to the physical realm here, but I also like to imagine that those spirits originated in this location, born of energy from the primordial Tree of Time. We based the tree on a dramatic photo of an ancient bristlecone pine taken by my good friend Mac Danzig. Background designs by Angela Sung. Paintings by Frederic Stewart.







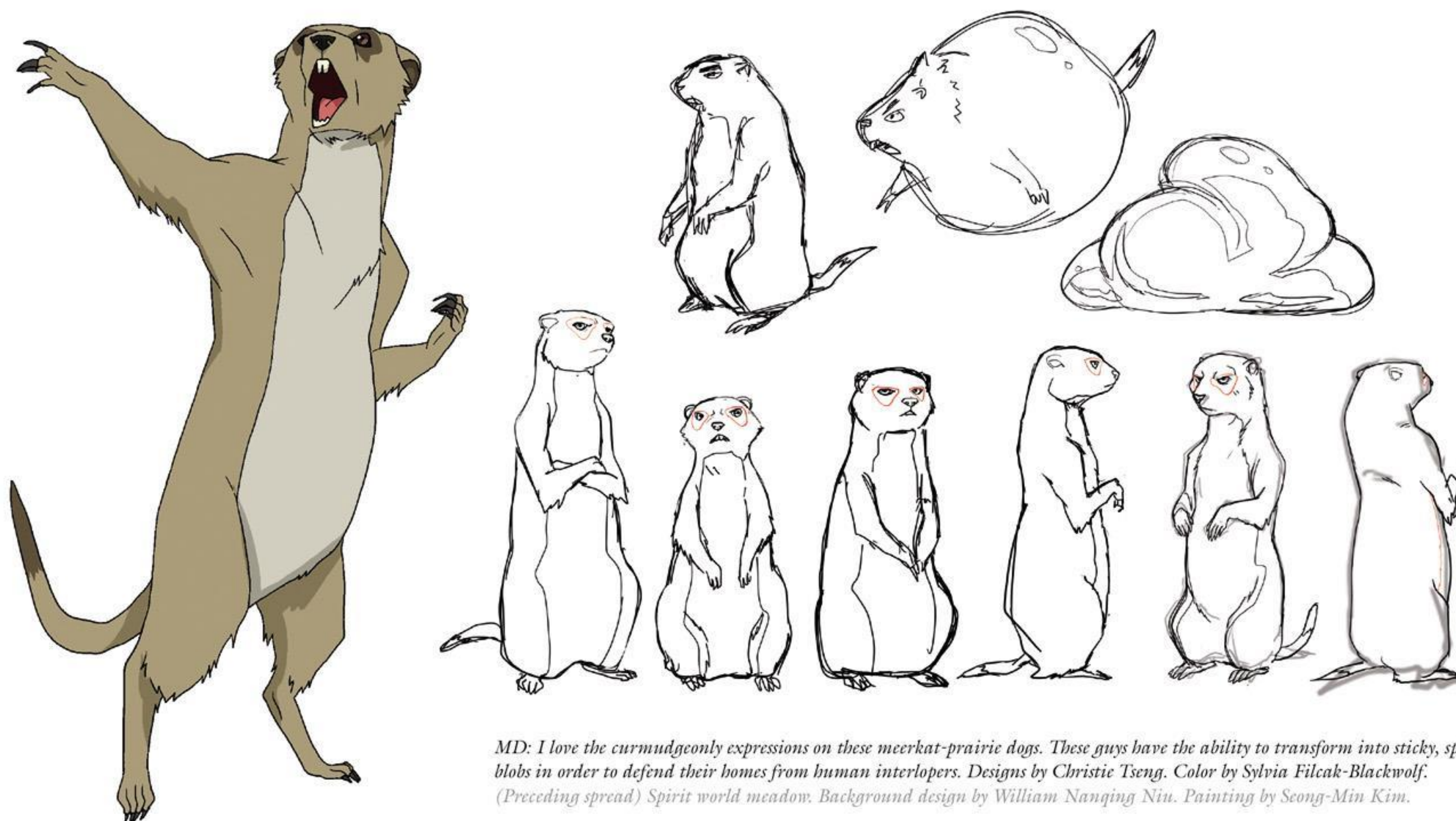


CHAPTER TEN

神  
靈

## A NEW SPIRITUAL AGE





MD: I love the curmudgeonly expressions on these meerkat-prairie dogs. These guys have the ability to transform into sticky, spirty blobs in order to defend their homes from human interlopers. Designs by Christie Tseng. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.  
(Preceding spread) Spirit world meadow. Background design by William Nanqing Niu. Painting by Seong-Min Kim.

BK: In revisiting the library from Avatar, we had a chance to revamp a couple of old character designs as well. Owls are easily one of my favorite animals, so it was a pleasure to work on Wan Shi Tong's Dracula-like cloaked appearance again. Designs by Bryan Konietzko and Christie Tseng. Flying pose cleanup by Christine Bian. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.



BK: Another Avatar design that was fun to revisit was the knowledge-seeker fox spirit. Angie handled the designs from both series, which were inspired by her gorgeous shiba inu, Sophie, albeit with much longer legs, which come in handy for reaching those high library shelves. Pretty much my only note to Angie was, "Make it look more like Sophie this time!" I wanted it to have a bit more of a spirit-like appearance for Korra, so I gave it haunting cyan eyes. Designs by Angela Song Mueller. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.





BK: We use a lot of traditional Asian art as reference in the Avatarverse, but it is often a challenge, as much of the source material is incredibly ornate, more so than we can replicate in 2-D TV animation. So the design process becomes one of attempting to distill the intricate details down to their essence and relying on a recognizable silhouette to clearly communicate the reference to the audience. For the bodies of the guardians, I drew from photos of our design coordinator Lisa Yang's stout, adorable pit bull, the Yam. Designs by Bryan Konietzko. Cleanup by Christie Tseng. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.

MD: These guardian spirits were partly inspired by animal-like guardian statues I saw at a Buddhist temple in Bangkok, Thailand, years ago. Rough color concepts by Bryan Konietzko.



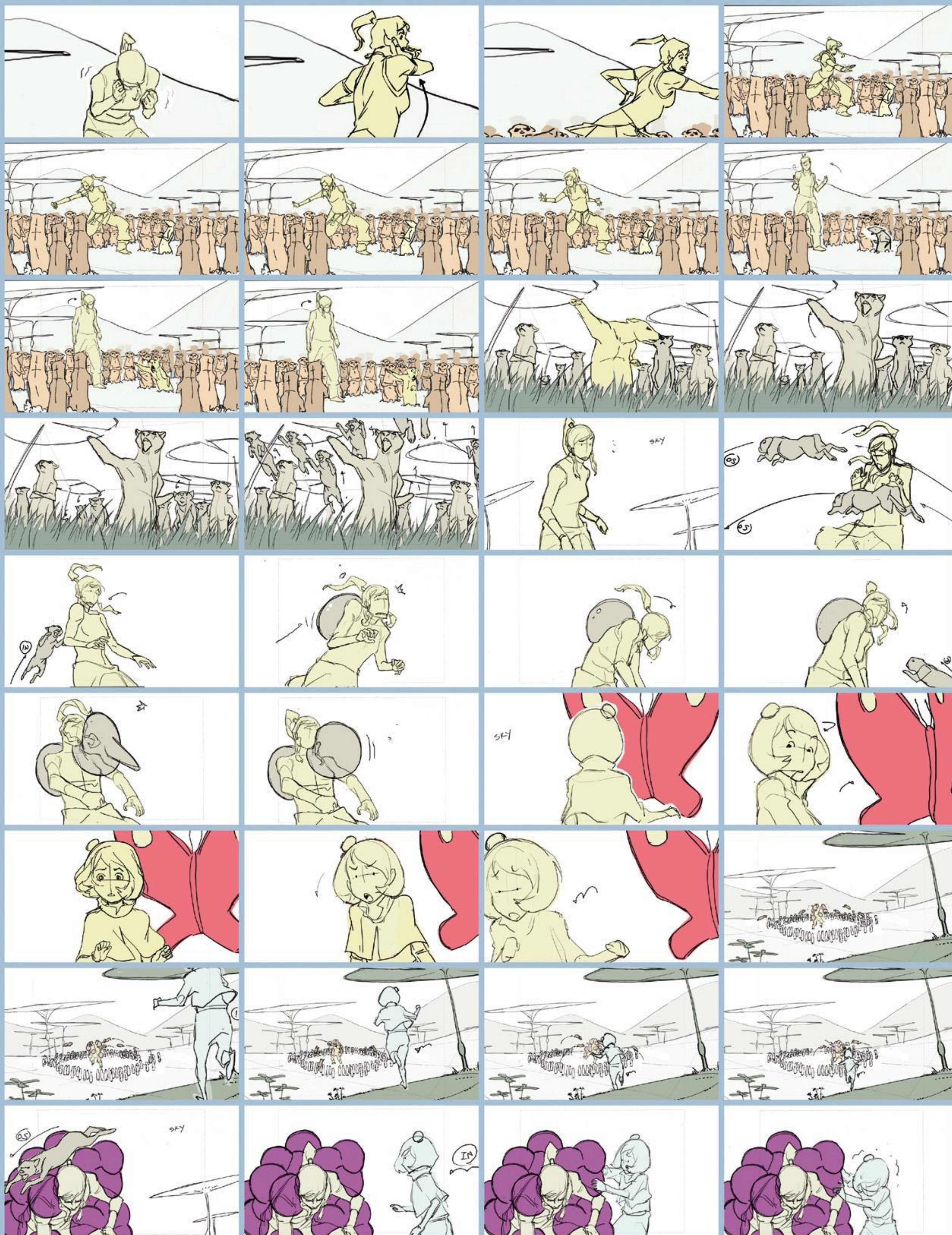
MD: This is, hands down (no pun intended), the creepiest dark spirit design in all of Book Two. Design by Frederic Stewart. Cleanup by Christie Tseng. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.



JDS: Fred is one of the kindest, most soft-spoken individuals I've ever met. Then he draws these nightmarish creatures, and I get a little freaked out. But in all seriousness, he was tasked with designing some creepy spirits and, man oh man, did he deliver! Design by Frederic Stewart. Cleanup by Christie Tseng. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.

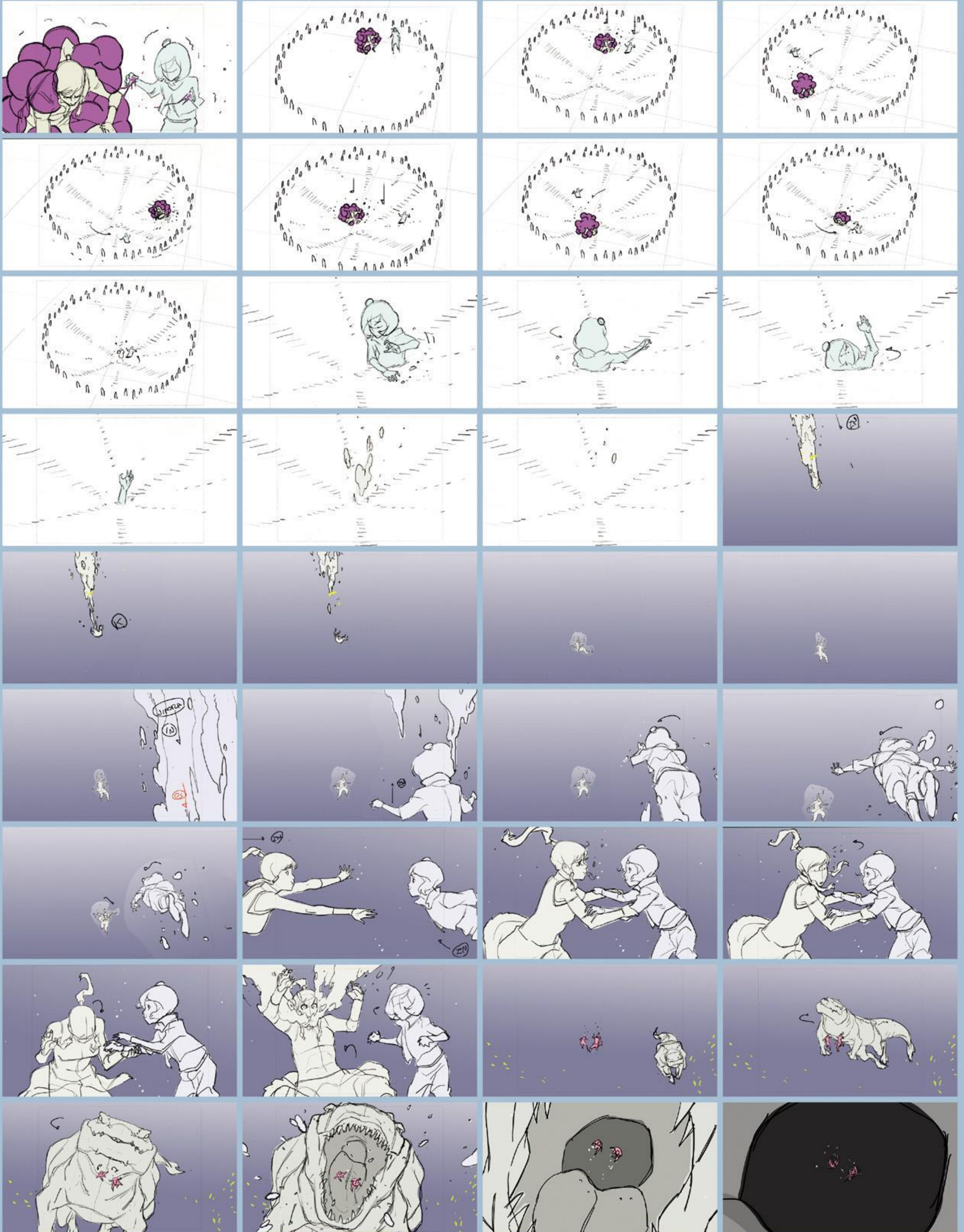
JDS: I love the prehistoric feel of this giant cat-gator design. It was based on a sequence storyboarded by the incomparable Dae-Woo Lee of Studio Mir, some of which you'll see on the following pages. Designs by Christie Tseng. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.





MD: We wanted the spirit world landscape and locations to feel amorphous and unstable. Korra and Jinora experience this instability in this storyboard sequence by Studio Mir artist Dae-Woo Lee.



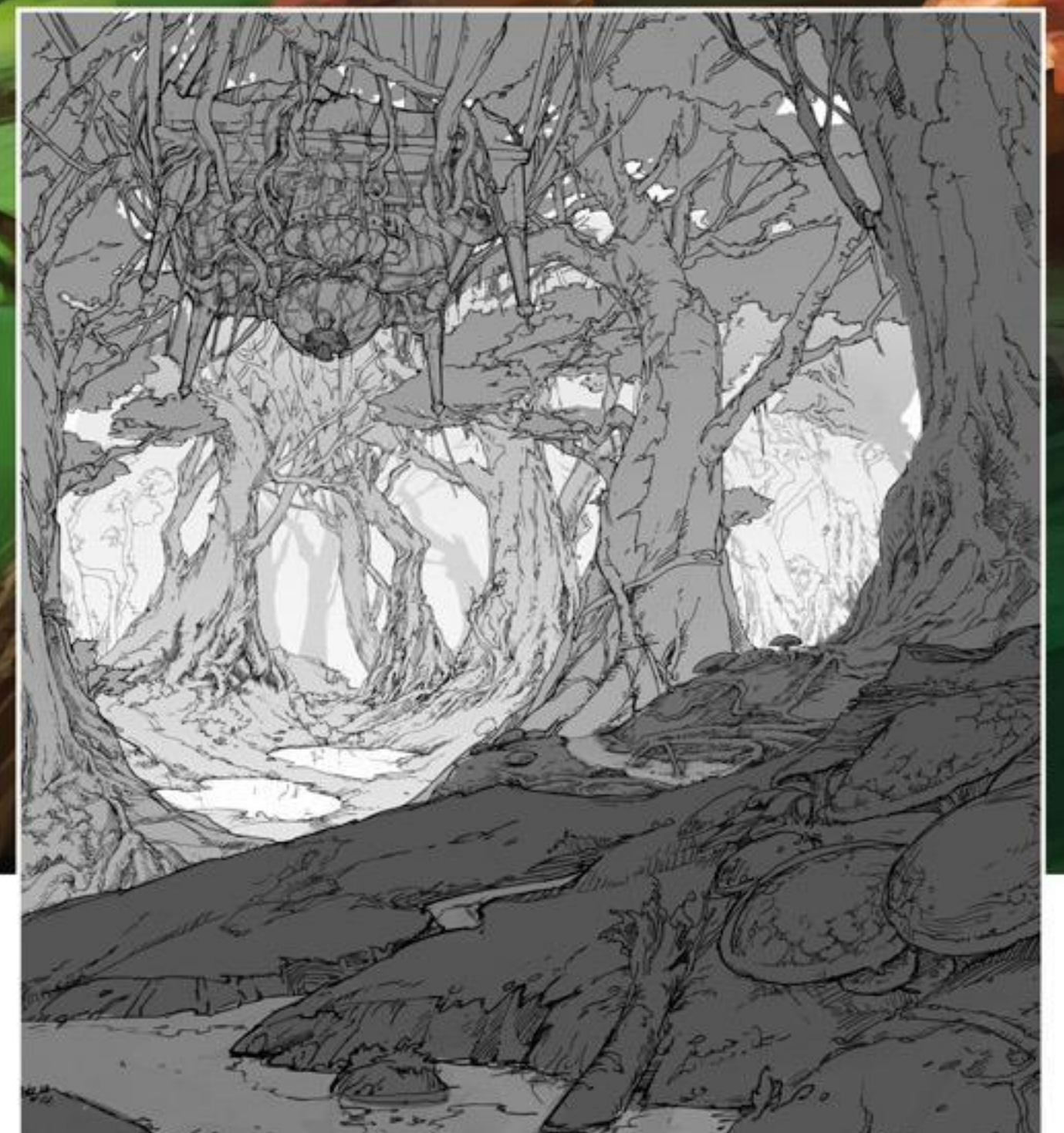






JDS: There is a scene at the base of Hai-Riyo Peak in which Korra turns away from Uncle Iroh and takes a few steps up a small grade toward the mountain. When she looks back, we see that she has traveled at least a mile. I can remember seeing this in the script and wondering if it was going to be confusing for our audience. Luckily the scene played without a hitch, due in part to all the spirit world weirdness that had already been established. Background design by Angela Sung. Painting by Frederic Stewart.





*MD: In the original series, Wan Shi Tong sinks the spirit library into the desert. Here, we see its final resting place—upside down, tangled in spirit vines. But once Jinora enters, everything is right side up, illustrating the topsy-turvy nature of the spirit world. Background design by William Nanqing Niu. Painting by Emily Tetri.*



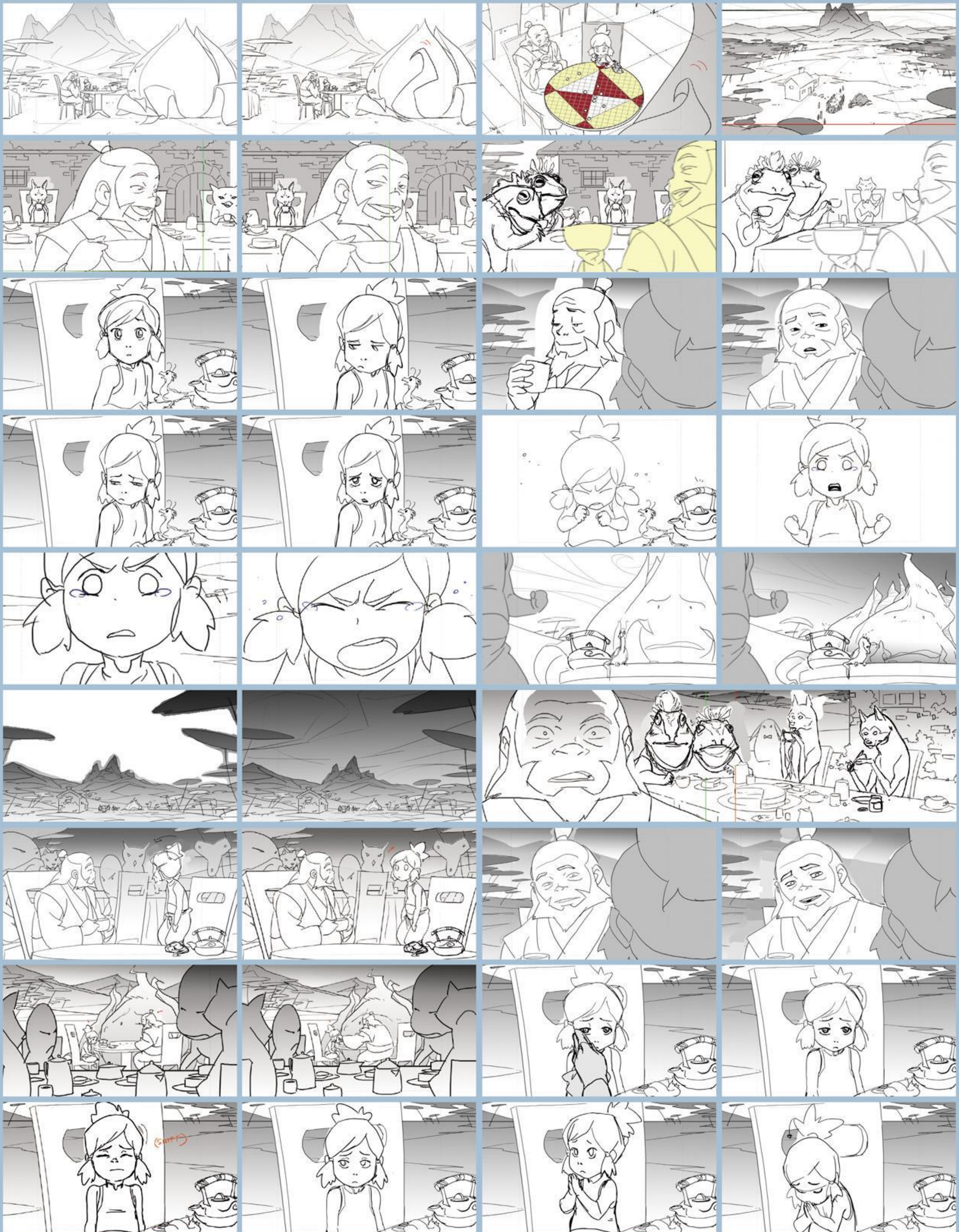


MD: It was so great to have an opportunity to bring back Uncle Iroh and listen to some of his insightful wisdom. Iroh may be a spirit now, but his love of tea and pai sho hasn't diminished one bit. Iroh and lotus spirit designs by Bryan Konietzko and Angela Song Mueller. May-Jim spirit frog design by Bryan Konietzko and Christie Tseng. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.



JDS: What I love so much about this episode is that along with the creepy stuff, we also get to see a ton of the fun and playful elements of the spirit world. My personal favorite is the giant radish-lotus spirit. His face is so realistic. Spirit creature designs by Angela Song Mueller. Large dragon-bird concepts by Bryan Konietzko. Baby dragon-bird designs by Christie Tseng. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.





MD: Young Korra appeared in the very first scene of Book One, and we always loved her design and attitude. As we developed this story, the writers and I realized we could bring her back in a unique way by having Korra transform into her younger self, as a representation of Korra's spiritual immaturity. Storyboard by Sung-Hoon Kim and Lauren Montgomery.

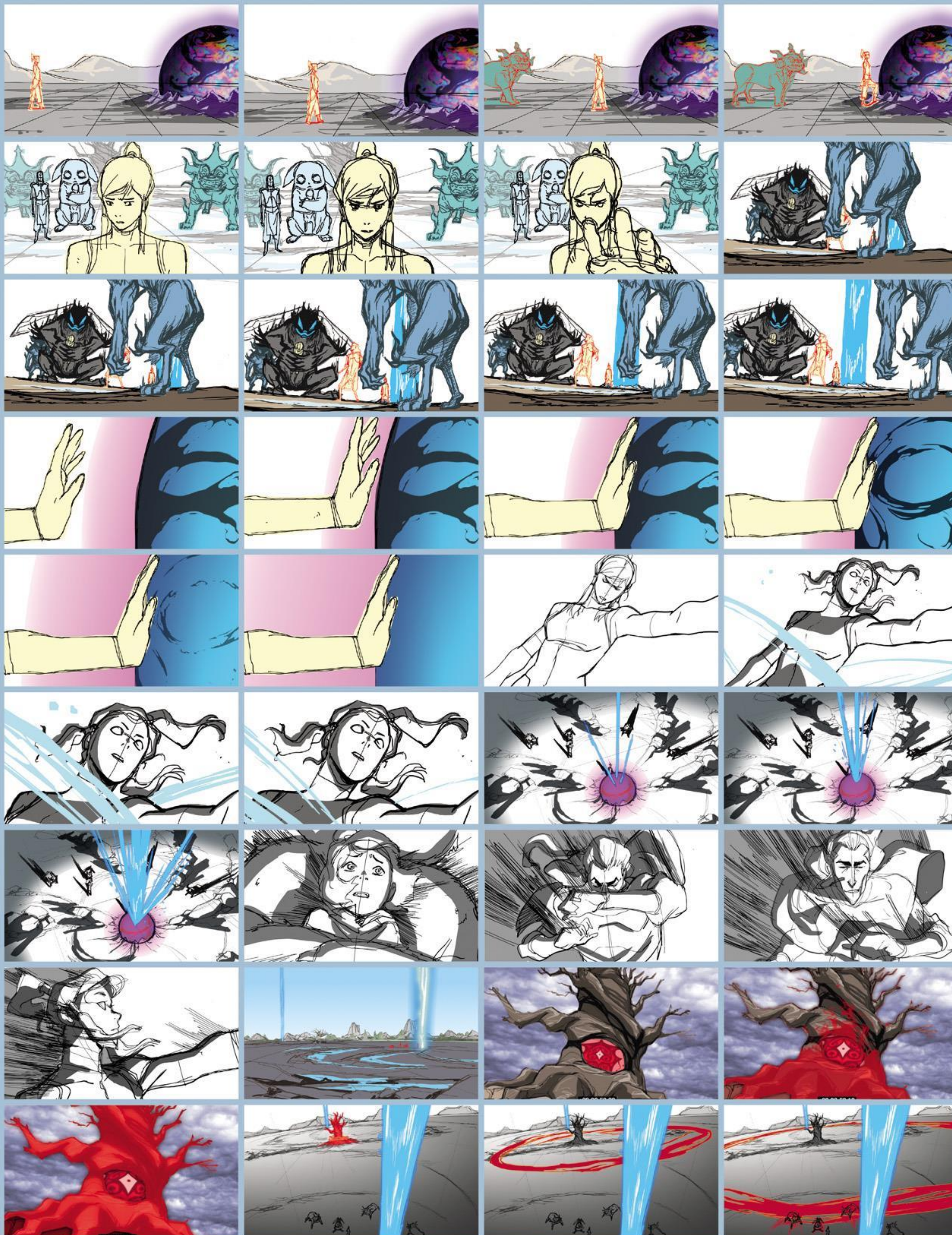






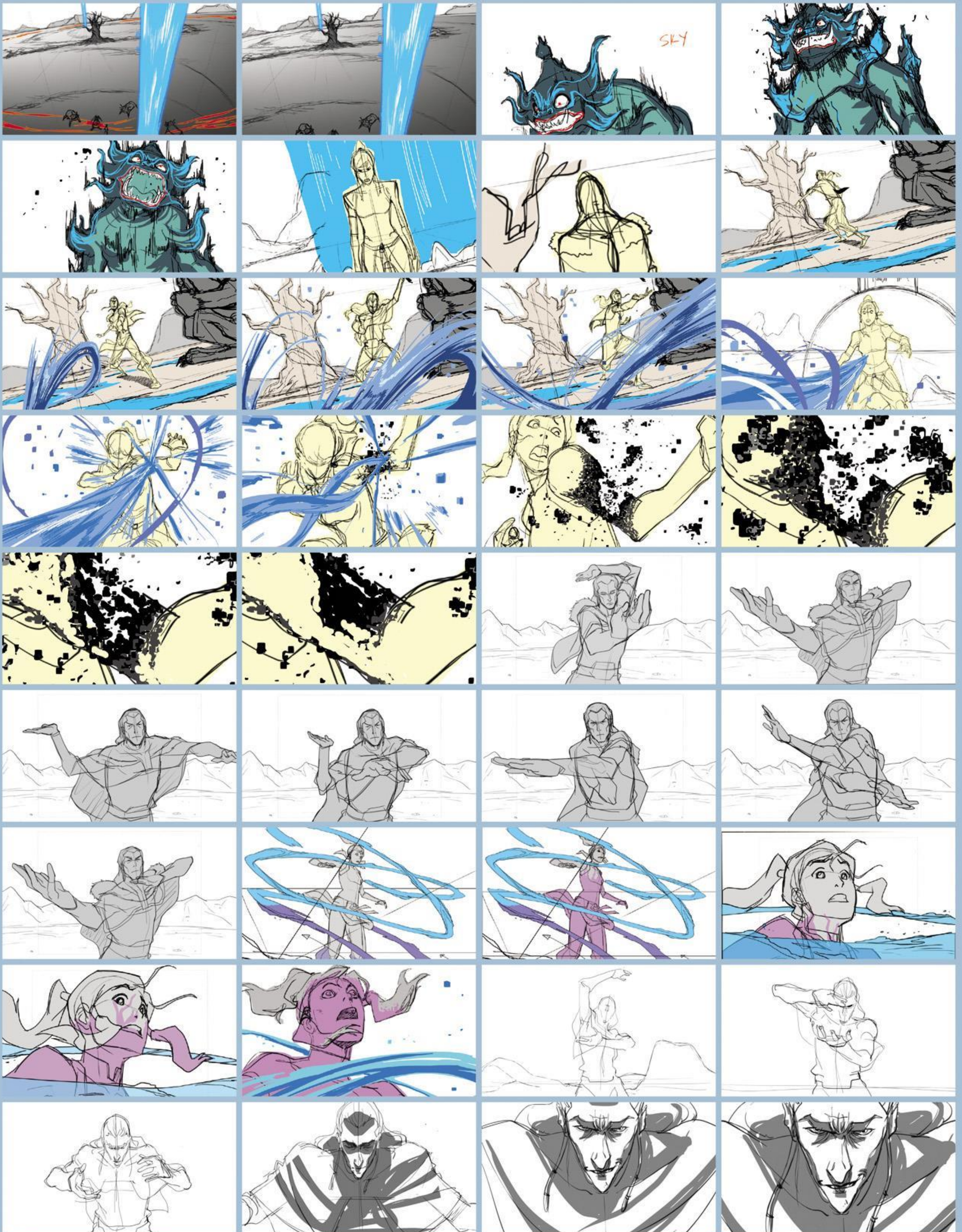






JDS: Giant ornate spirit dog-lions? Check. Giant, evil bunny holding little girl hostage? Check. Giant spirit tree containing the embodiment of evil (which also happens to look like a kite)? Check. Evil villain who waterbends, turning anything he touches into spirit pixels? Check . . . Only on Korra. Storyboard by So-Young Park and Ki-Hyun Ryu.









CHAPTER ELEVEN



神  
靈



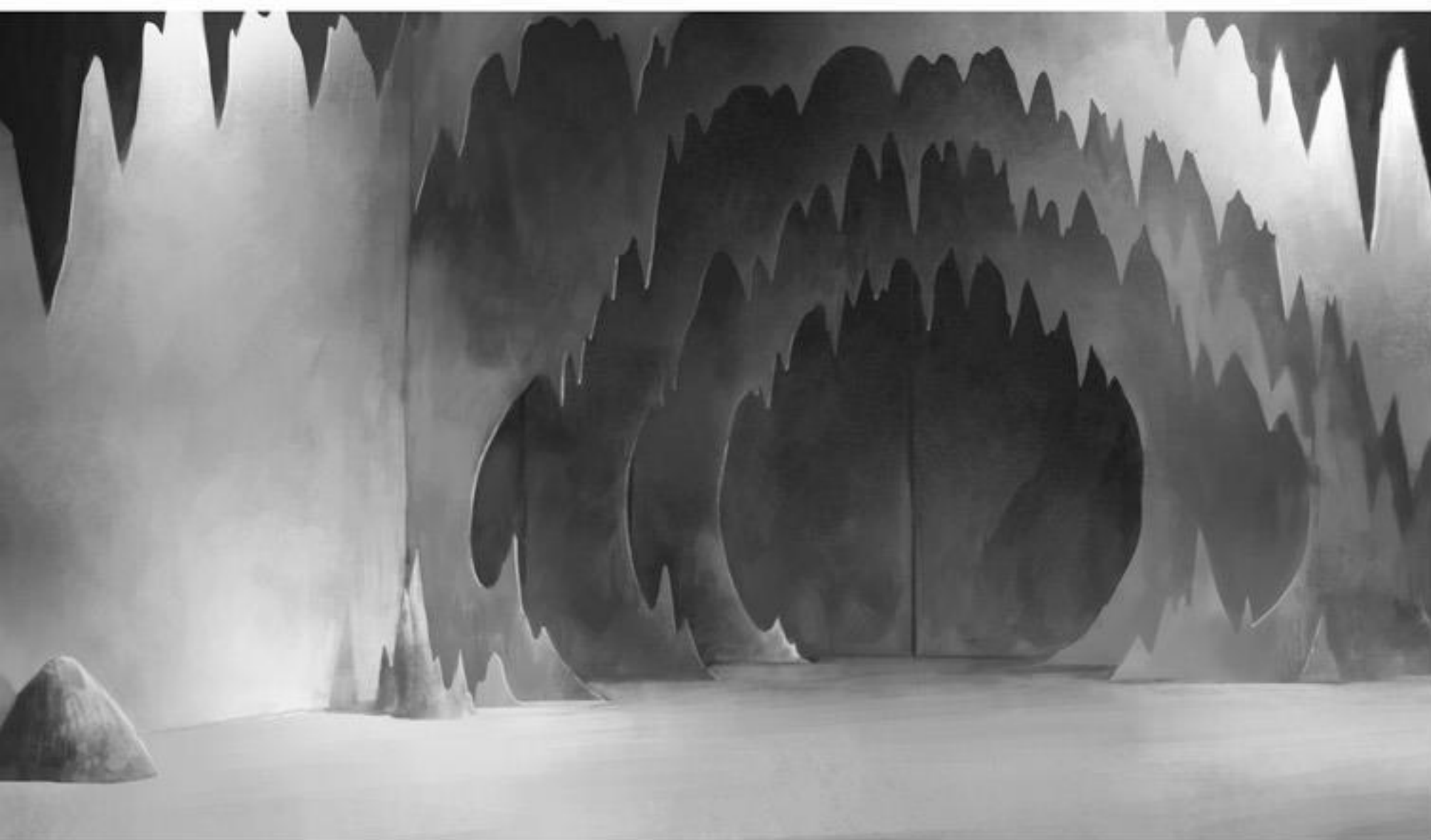
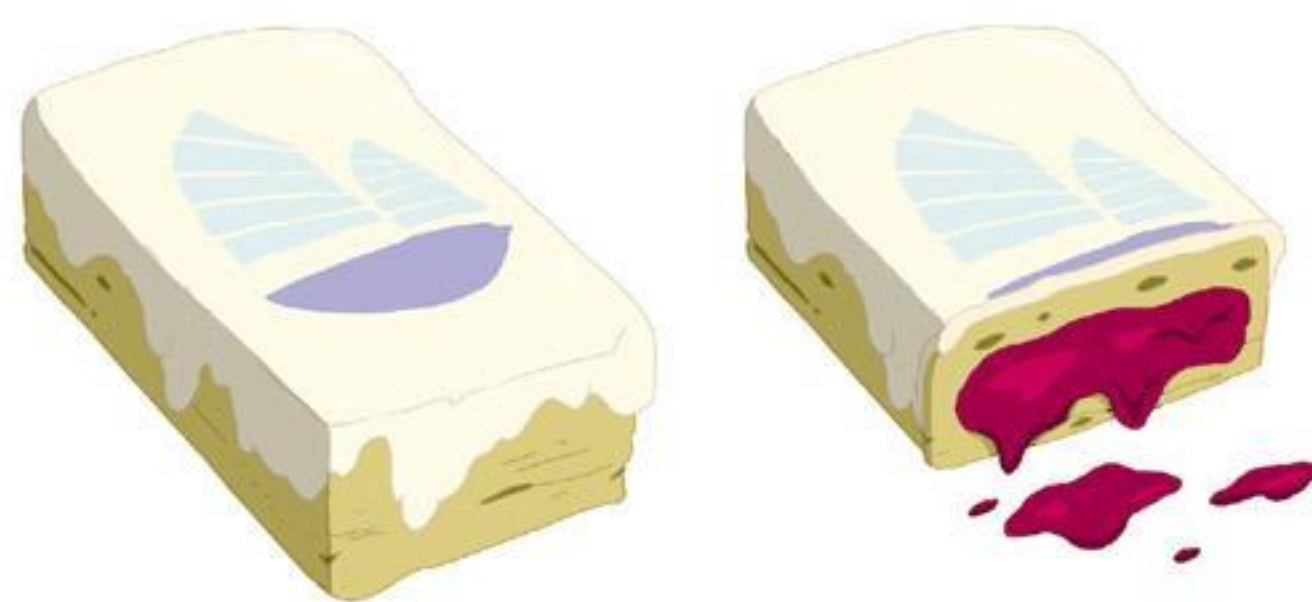
**NIGHT <sup>OF</sup>  
A THOUSAND  
STARS**





(Preceding spread) Southern Water Tribe street. Background design by Studio Pierrot. Painting by Lauren Zurcher and Emily Tetri.

JDS: Nuktuk! Hero of the South! You would be amazed how hard it is to make animation look like bad, low-budget filmmaking from the 1930s and '40s. Lauren Montgomery staged the majority of the pulpy goodness you see onscreen, and I'd say she made Ed Wood proud! Varri-cake designs by Jung-Su Lee. Bolin banner designs by Bryan Konietzko. Calligraphy by S. L. Lee, PhD. Bolin and President Raiko designs by Christie Tseng. Cleanup and Buttercup Raiko design by Angela Song Mueller. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.



MD: Varrick would like you to believe he spared no expense in making his Nuktuk epic, but in actuality, he cut a lot of corners, as evidenced by these low-budget backdrops for the mover. I love how the skyline of Republic City looks like a tiny, cardboard diorama. Background designs by Jung-Su Lee. Cave set painting by Frederic Stewart. City miniature painting by Emily Tetri. (Opposite page) When Colin Heck found out he was directing this episode, he enthusiastically set to work creating a rough version of a Nuktuk mover poster, which became the basis for the final version seen here. Design by Christie Tseng. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf. Calligraphy by S. L. Lee, PhD, stylized by Bryan Konietzko.



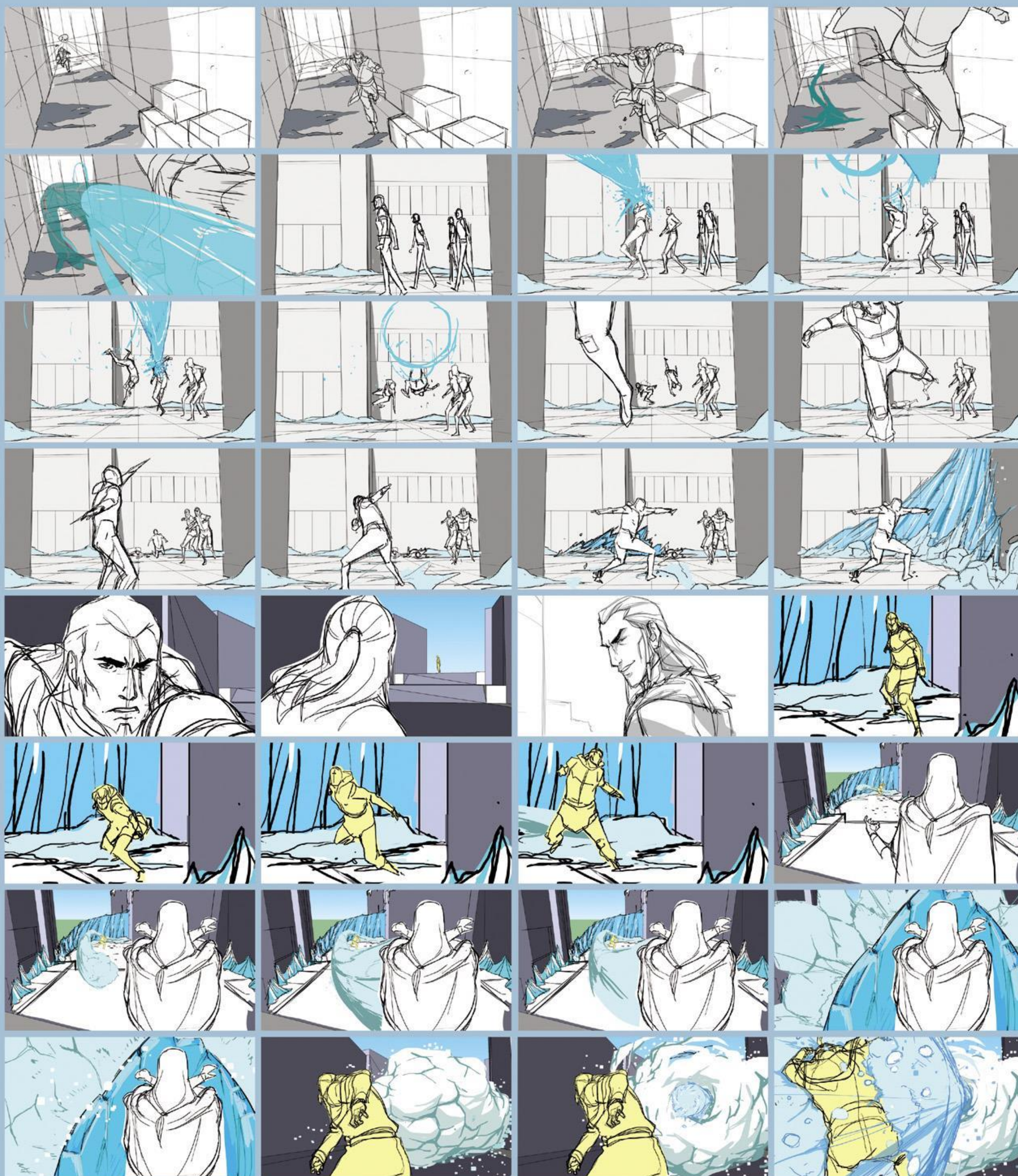
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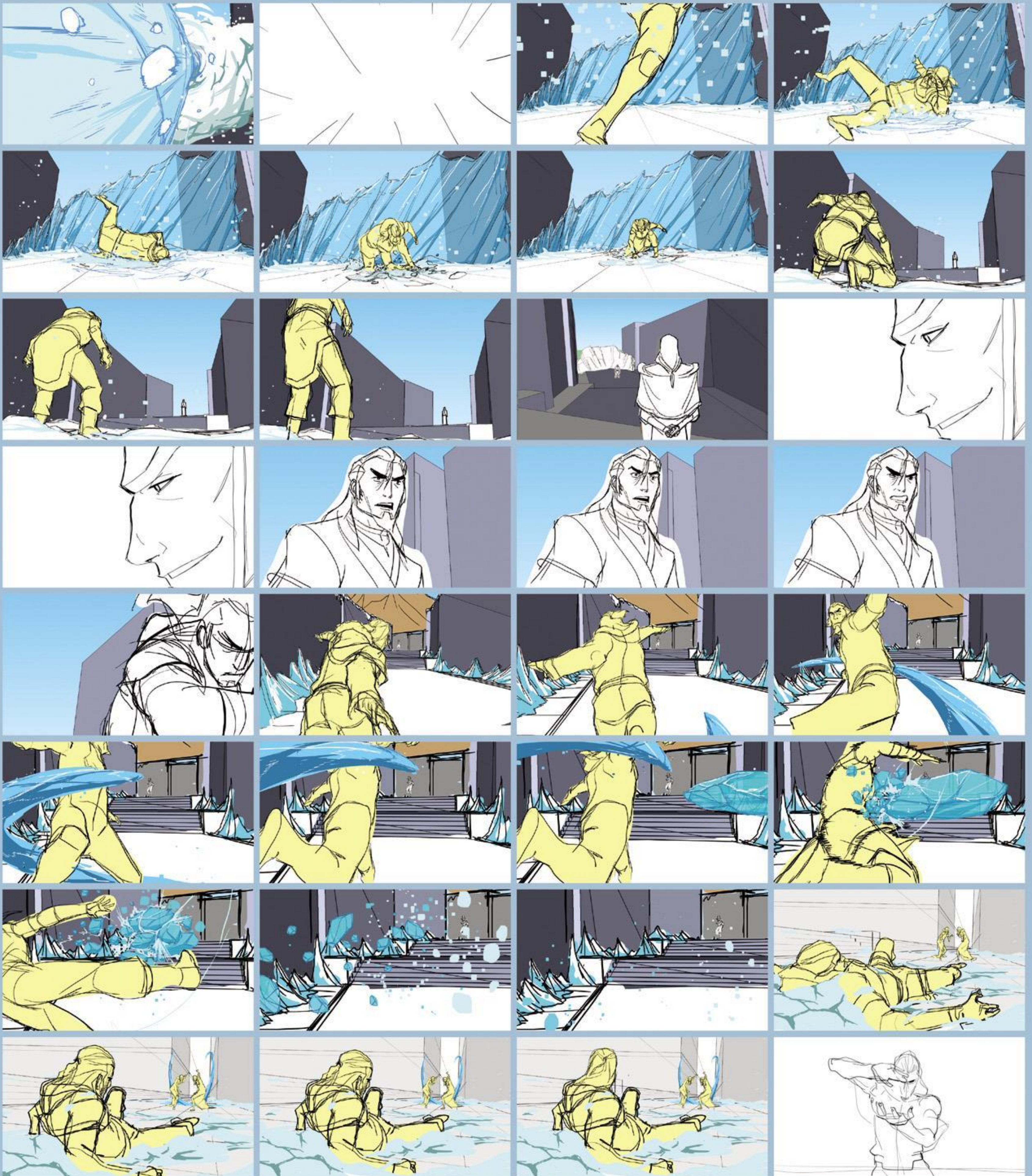






JDS: The big showdown between Tonraq and Unalaq. This one was written as a quick takedown by Unalaq, who takes advantage of the fact that his brother has already exhausted a good portion of his strength in the earlier battle with the dark spirits. It quickly evolved into something bigger. We staged four versions of this fight, and this final version is a collaborative effort between Colin and myself. Storyboard by Colin Heck and Joaquim Dos Santos.









BK: A menagerie of Unalaq's dark spirit minions. Christie is a really sweet, young artist who, on the surface, does not seem like she would have such nightmarish creatures lurking about in her brain. Designs by Christie Tseng. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.







*(Top) The snowy mountains on the outskirts of the Southern Water Tribe. Background design by Jung-Su Lee. Painting by Frederic Stewart. (Bottom) A moody night view of the Southern Water Tribe capital city, which Unalaq and his troops occupied during the civil war. Background design by Angela Sung. Painting by Lauren Zurcher.*





CHAPTER TWELVE



神  
靈



# HARMONIC CONVERGENCE





"FLOATING SPIRIT"  
(FIGHTS BUMI)

JAGGED  
EDGES

DARK MODE



SIDE  
VIEW

flats

NEUTRAL  
MODE

SMOOTH  
EDGES



BK: I wish I had one of these floating spirits as a sparring partner. We could knock each other around the ring, and then rock out and dance to some music. Rough color designs by Bryan Konietzko. MD: (Top left) Bolin found this shiny rain slicker on Varrick's battleship. (Top right) Tonraq's final showdown with his brother left him battered and bruised. Designs by Angela Song Mueller. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf. (Preceding spread) South Pole sacred forest. Background design by William Nanqing Niu. Painting by Frederic Stewart.





MD: The last few episodes of a season are notoriously the most difficult, as all the different story lines come together and the plot heads toward the final battle. And when there is more action, the higher the chances that characters' hair and clothes are going to get messed up! Designs by Bryan Konietzko and Angela Song Mueller. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.

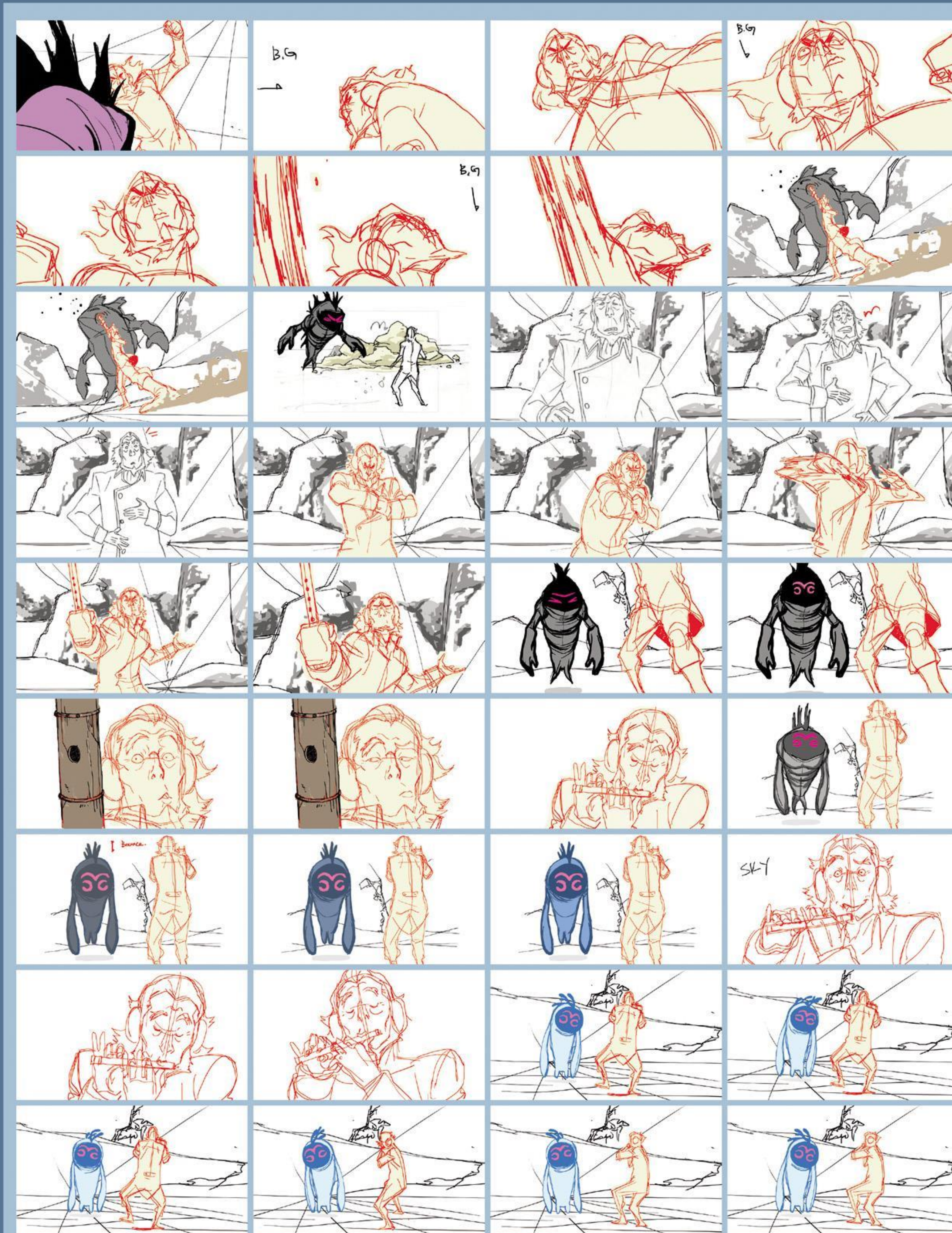
MD: (Below) Korra lets off some steam by sparring with a training dummy, while Bolin gives Mako a taste of his own medicine in the form of some dating advice. Storyboard by Ki-Hyun Ryu.











*BK: I'm usually a sucker for melodramatic scenes of self-sacrifice. The sequence of Bumi versus the floating spirit in the snowy tundra is one that resulted from an act of (perhaps foolish) self-sacrifice, but the way it plays out is pure action-comedy. Despite its monumental silliness, it beat out all the melodrama to become my favorite bit in all of Book Two. It was just so perfectly suited to Ryu's humorous sensibilities, and Studio Mir executed the whole thing brilliantly. Storyboard by Ki-Hyun Ryu.*





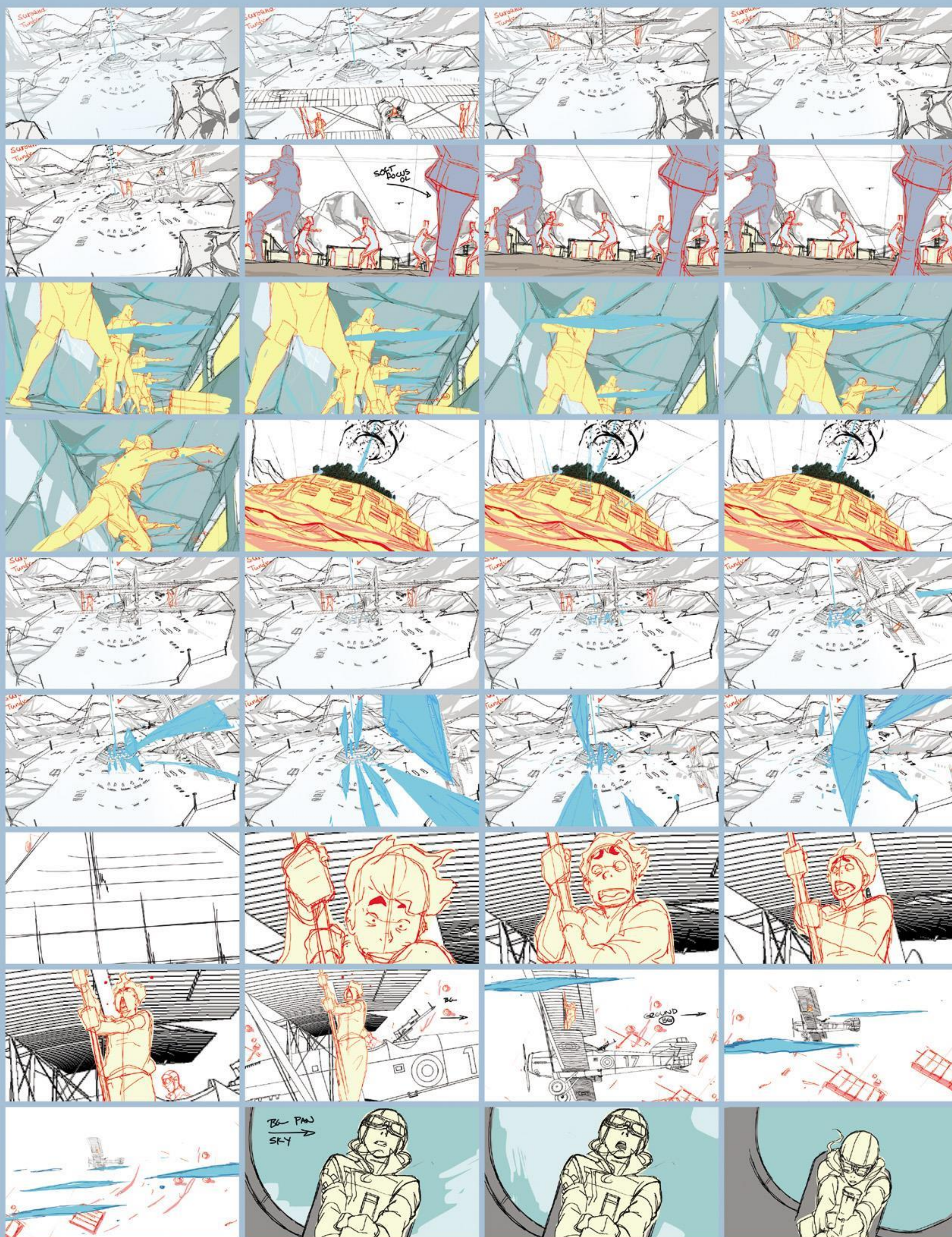
(Top) Northern Water Tribe encampment around the Southern spirit portal. Background design by William Nangning Niu. (Bottom) Unalaq's command tent. Background design by Christine Bian. Paintings by Frederic Stewart.





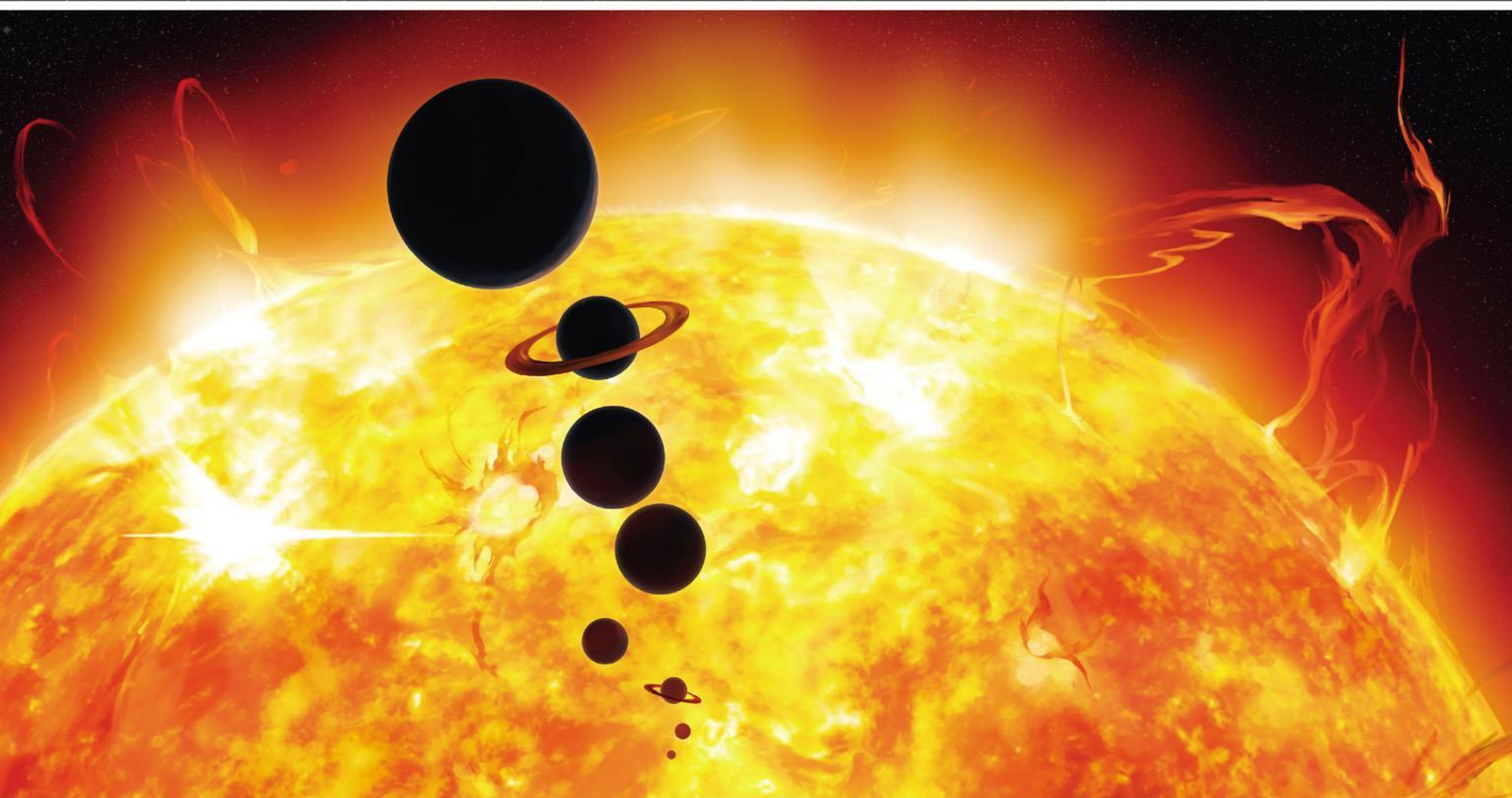
BK: Ice fortifications around the Southern portal. If you want a painting to be icy and moody, you can't go wrong assigning it to Fred! Background design by William Nanqing Niu. Painting by Frederic Stewart.





*JDS: Often with sequences like these, it comes down to the little things in the final animation to give a scene a true sense of scale and depth: The handheld-camera feeling, as though we are being buffeted by the wind when we are on the plane. Or the slow, lumbering pace of the spirits as they eerily surround the portal in the distance. It's this attention to detail that makes an over-the-top scene like this feel real and is a true testament to the high level of animation Studio Mir produces on a regular basis! Storyboards by Ki-Hyun Ryu and Joaquim Dos Santos.*





*MD: Since the last few episodes took place during the celestial event known as Harmonic Convergence, it was necessary to get some views from space. Emily Tetri, who has a fondness for cosmic scenes, painted these two epic views of the planet and the sun. Background designs by Angela Sung.*





CHAPTER THIRTEEN



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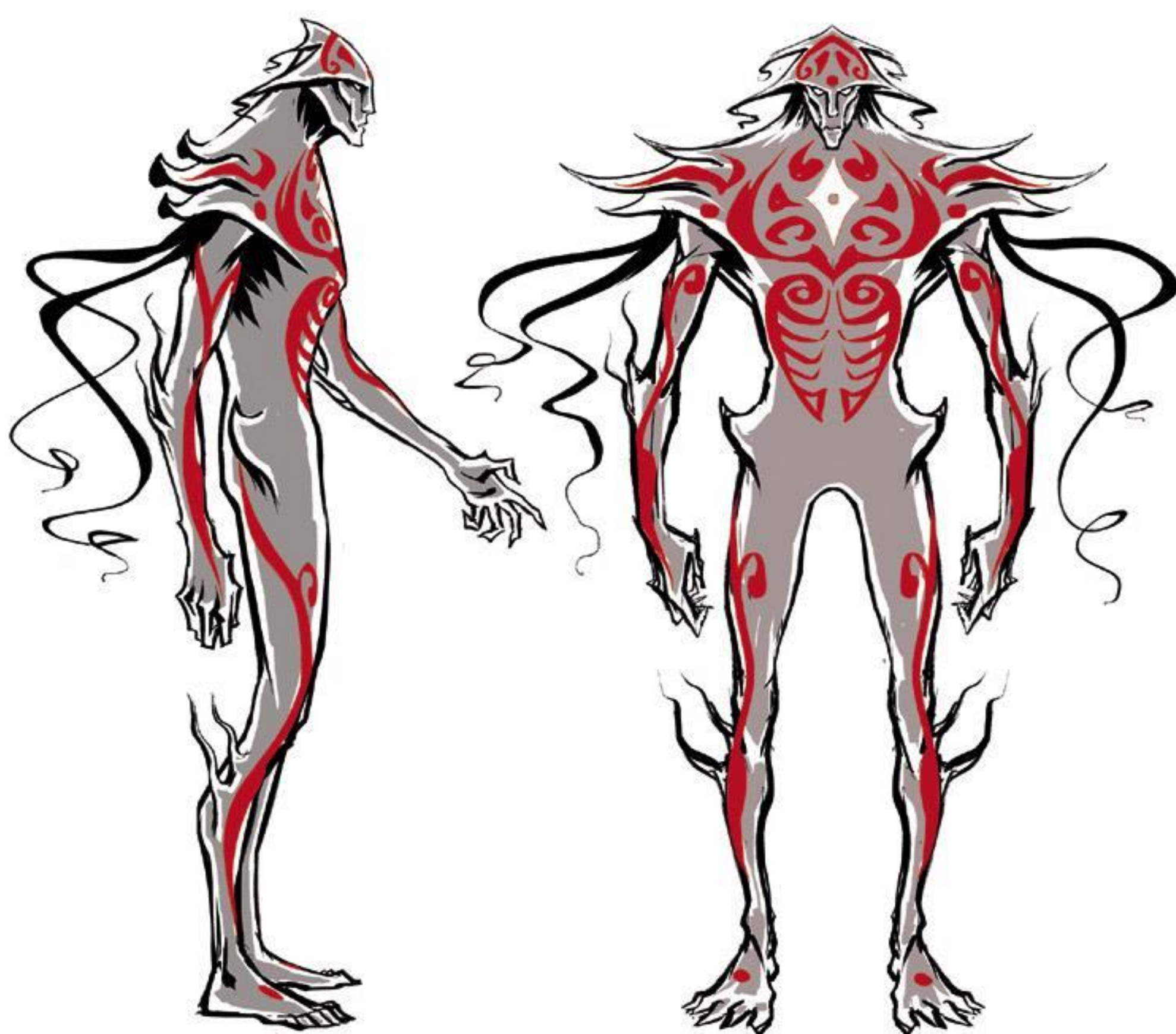
# DARKNESS FALLS



# UNAVAATU

MD: We always try to outdo ourselves with *Avatar* finale episodes. And Book Two was no exception. In a season that was all about Korra getting in touch with her spiritual side, we thought the most exciting way to end it was with a battle between two giant spirits, one representing light, the other darkness. UnaVaatu was obviously playing on the side of eternal darkness. Bryan did a great job combining elements from Unalaq and Vaatu's designs to come up with this horrifying combo.

MD: (Preceding spread) *The Fog of Lost Souls*. For Jinora's spirit prison, we wanted to create a different kind of spirit from the dark spirits we'd shown throughout the season. So the writers and I came up with this mysterious fog that makes you lose your mind the longer you're in it. Not a place I'm eager to visit. Background design by Angela Sung. Painting by Frederic Stewart.



BK: I did some rough concepts of the giant UnaVaatu very early in the course of Book Two. This was probably my favorite design to work on in the entire season. I was so excited to finally get to the finale so I could finalize the designs, and moreover to see the epic spirit battle in the final animation. Designs and color by Bryan Konietzko.



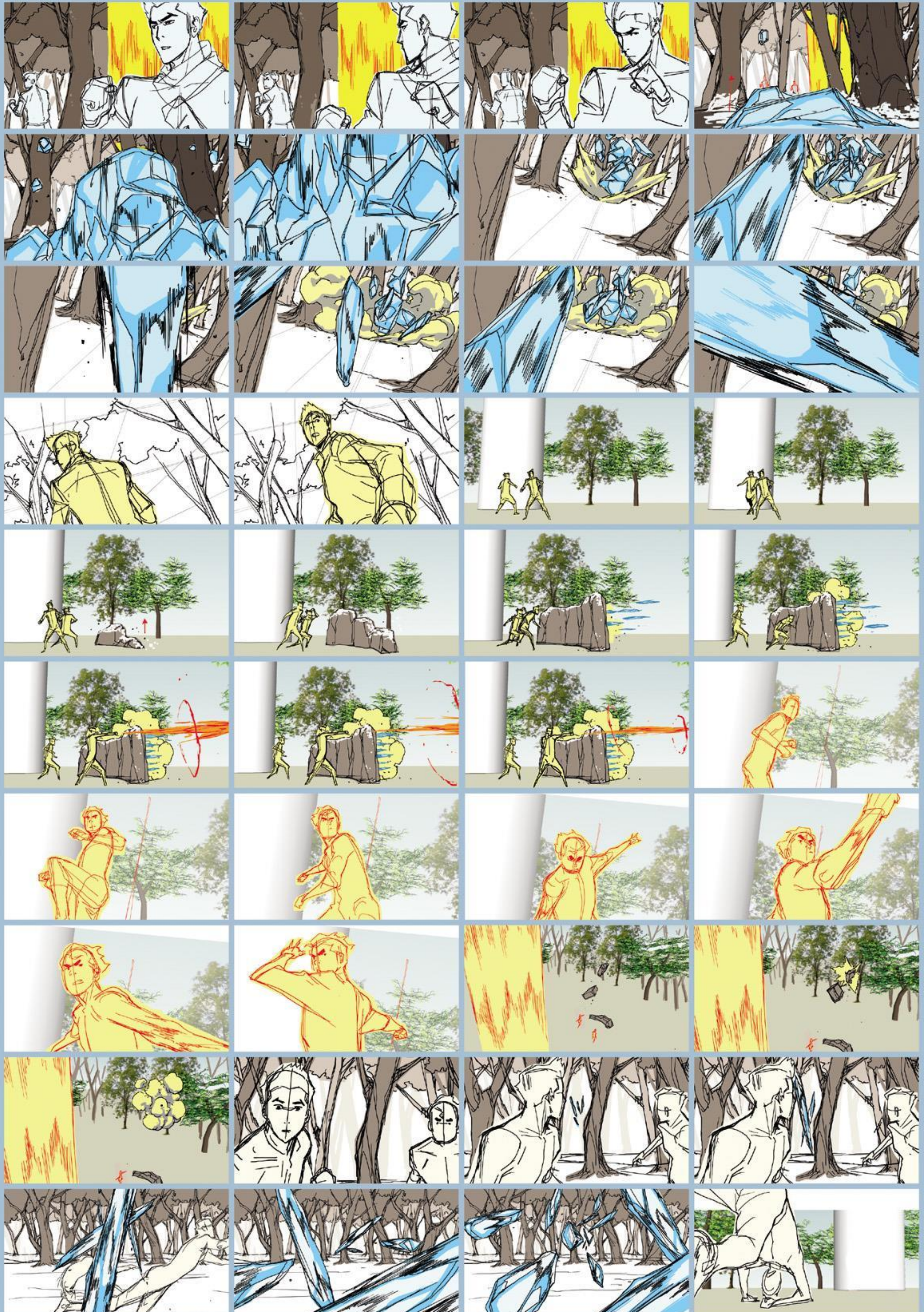


MD: After we developed the idea of the Fog of Lost Souls, we talked about who might be in there—and of course Zhao was the first name on our list. After being dragged into the sea by the ocean spirit, Zhao was cast into the fog, where he will likely spend eternity futilely hunting the Avatar. Designs by Angela Song Mueller. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.



BK: This is the second version of my first concept of UnaVaatu, repurposing one of my favorite background paintings by Frederic Stewart. I imagine those Northern Water Tribe troops at the bottom are questioning their loyalty to their chief in this moment.

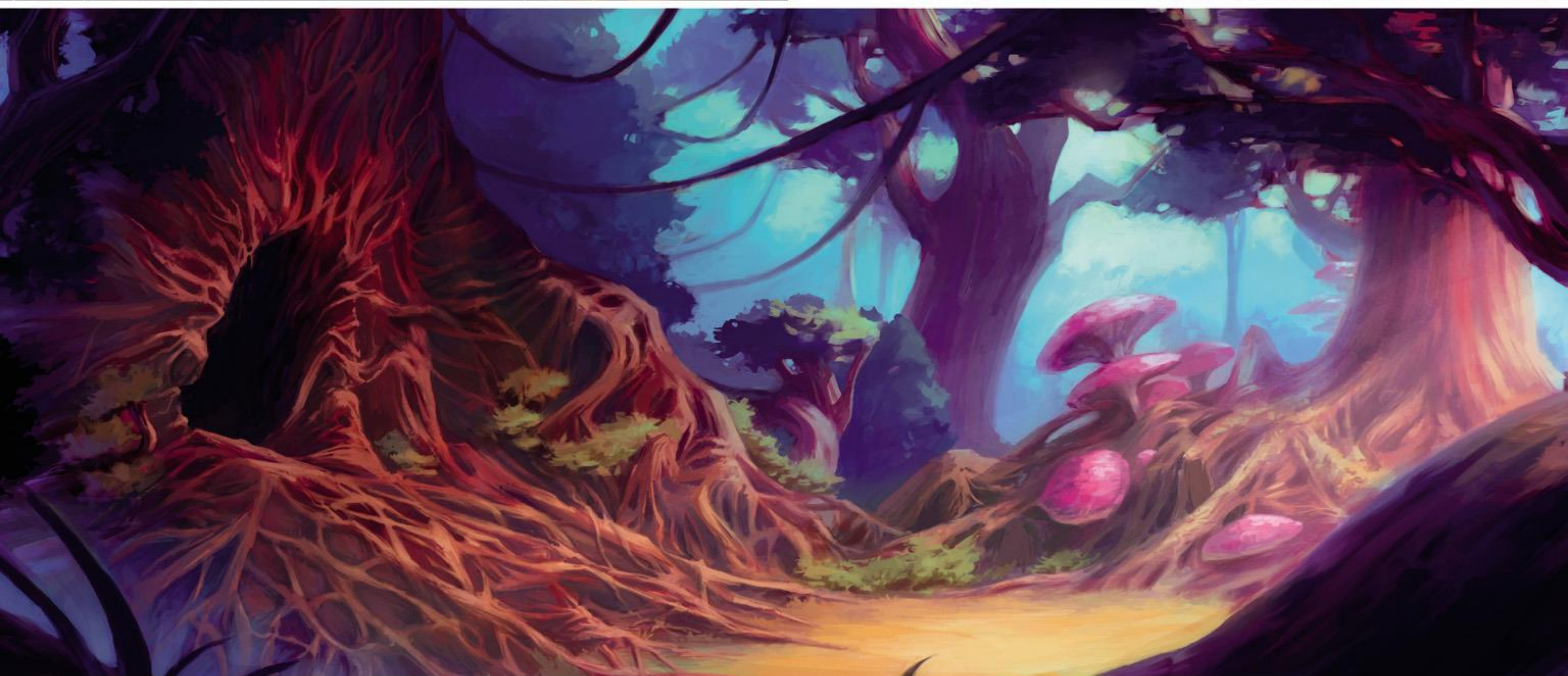
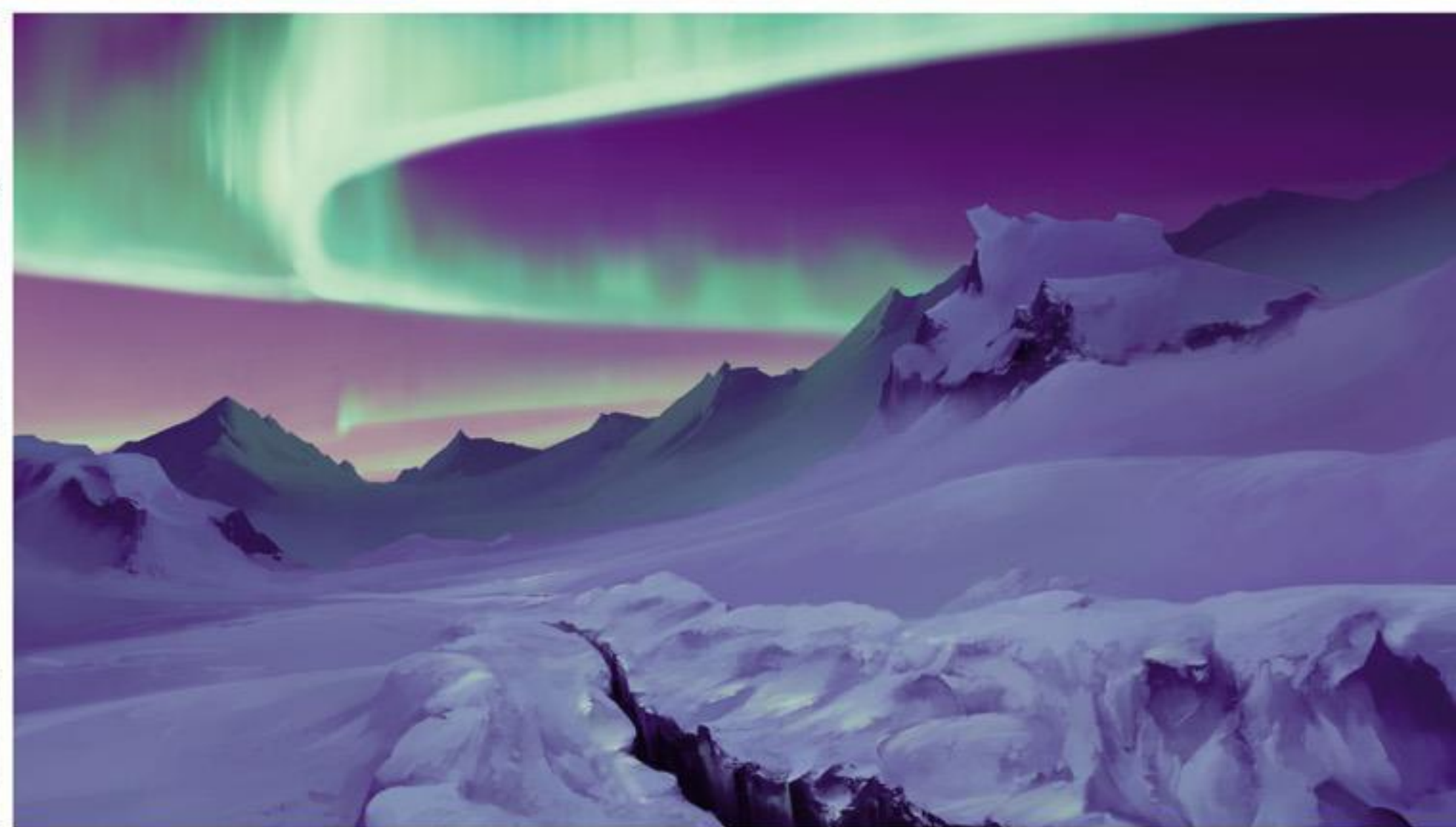










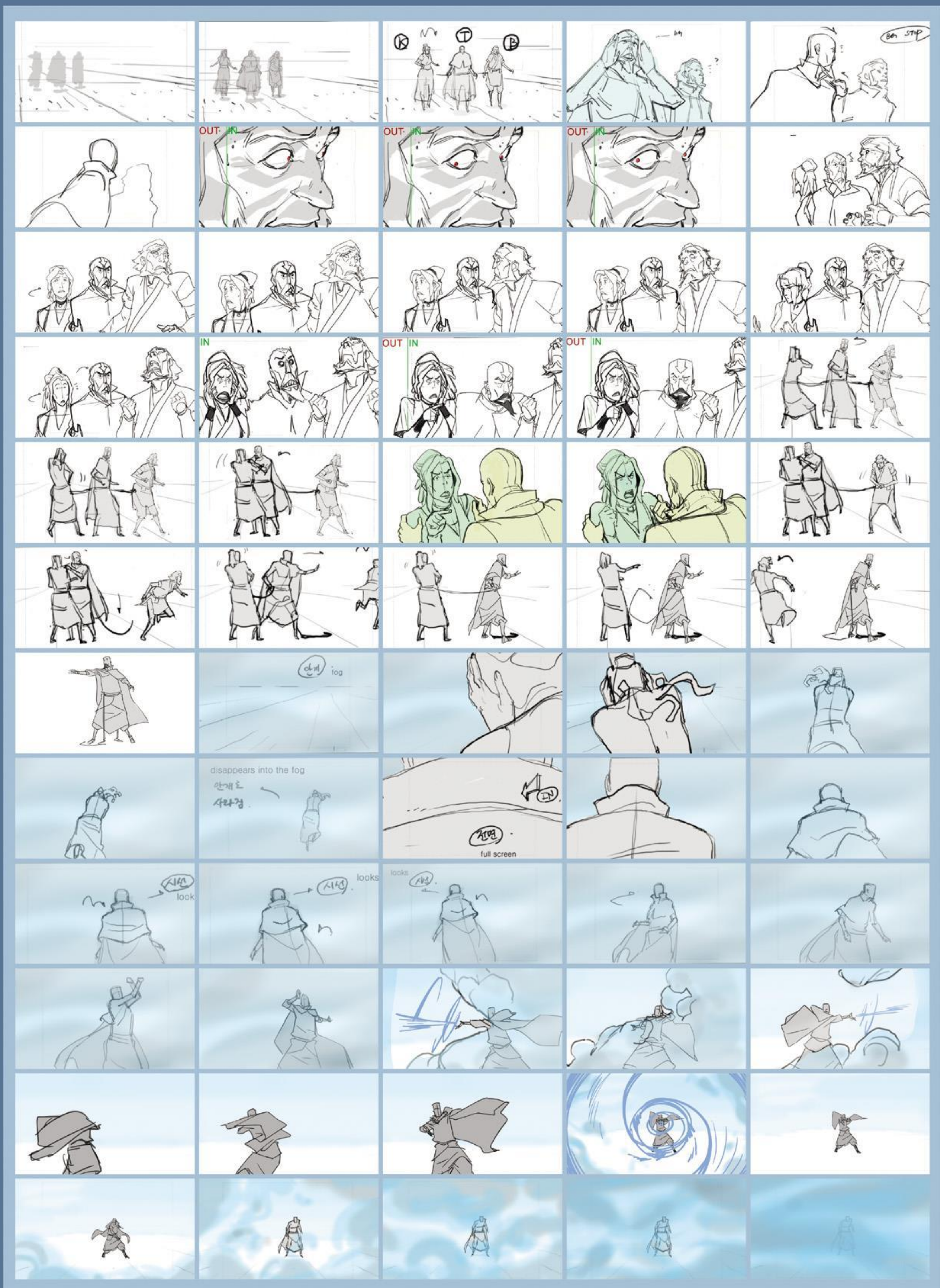


MD: (Top) The last view you might see before being thrown into the Fog of Lost Souls. Design by Angela Sung. Painting by Frederic Stewart. (Middle left) The tumultuous outer regions of space and time. Design by Angela Sung. Painting by Emily Tetri. (Middle right) Korra falls into this crevasse during her battle with Unalaq. Design by William Nangning Niu. Painting by Emily Tetri. (Bottom) The dark spider spirit's lair. Design by William Nangning Niu. Painting by Lauren Zurcher. (Opposite page) Tenzin, Bumi, and Kya wander in circles through this spirit world jungle looking for Jinora. Design by Angela Sung. Painting by Lauren Zurcher.



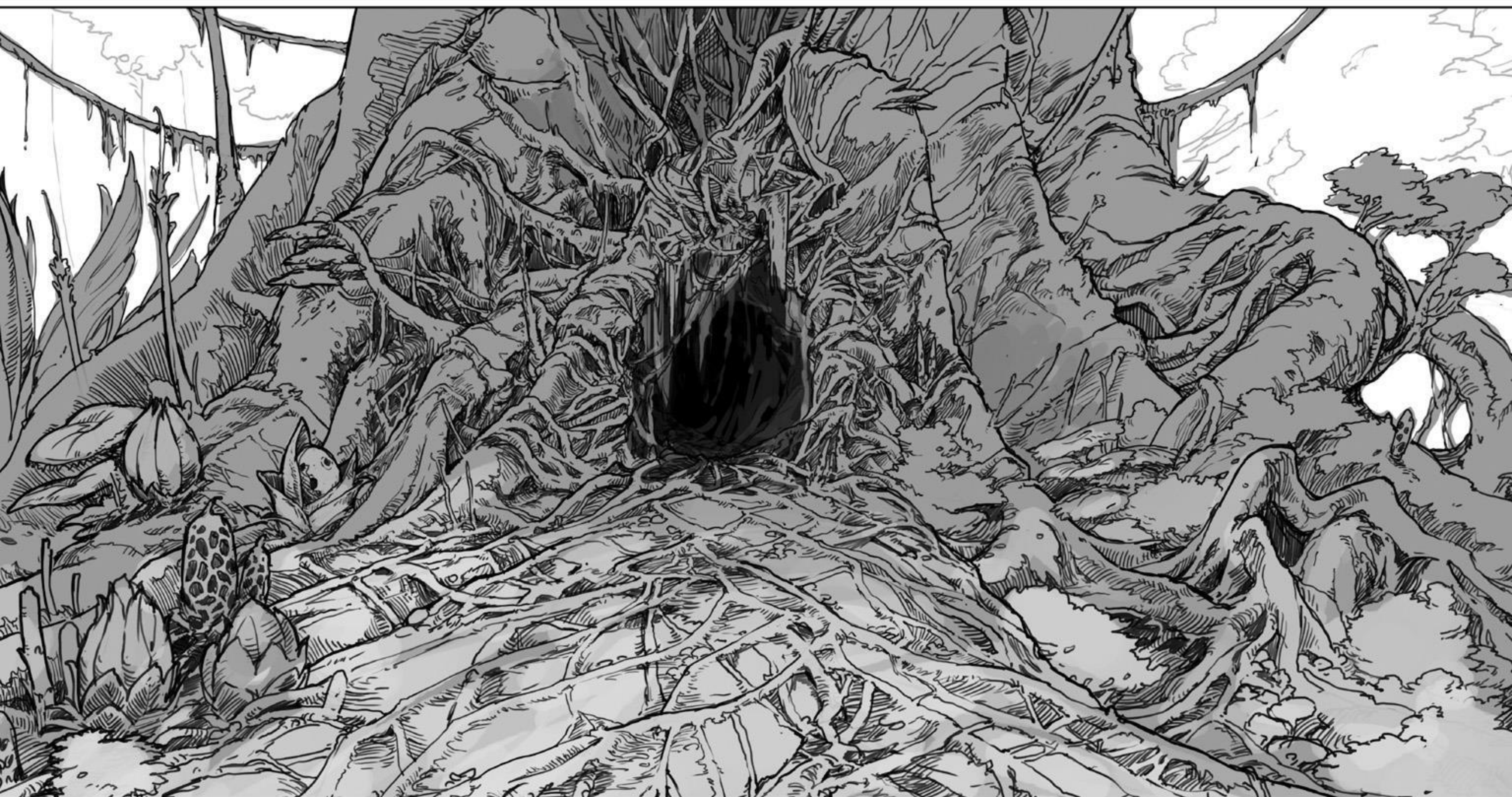






MD: Tenzin, Bumi, and Kya try to keep from losing their minds in the Fog of Lost Souls. Storyboard by Dae-Woo Lee.





MD: Two beautifully rendered spirit world background designs by William Nanging Niu.



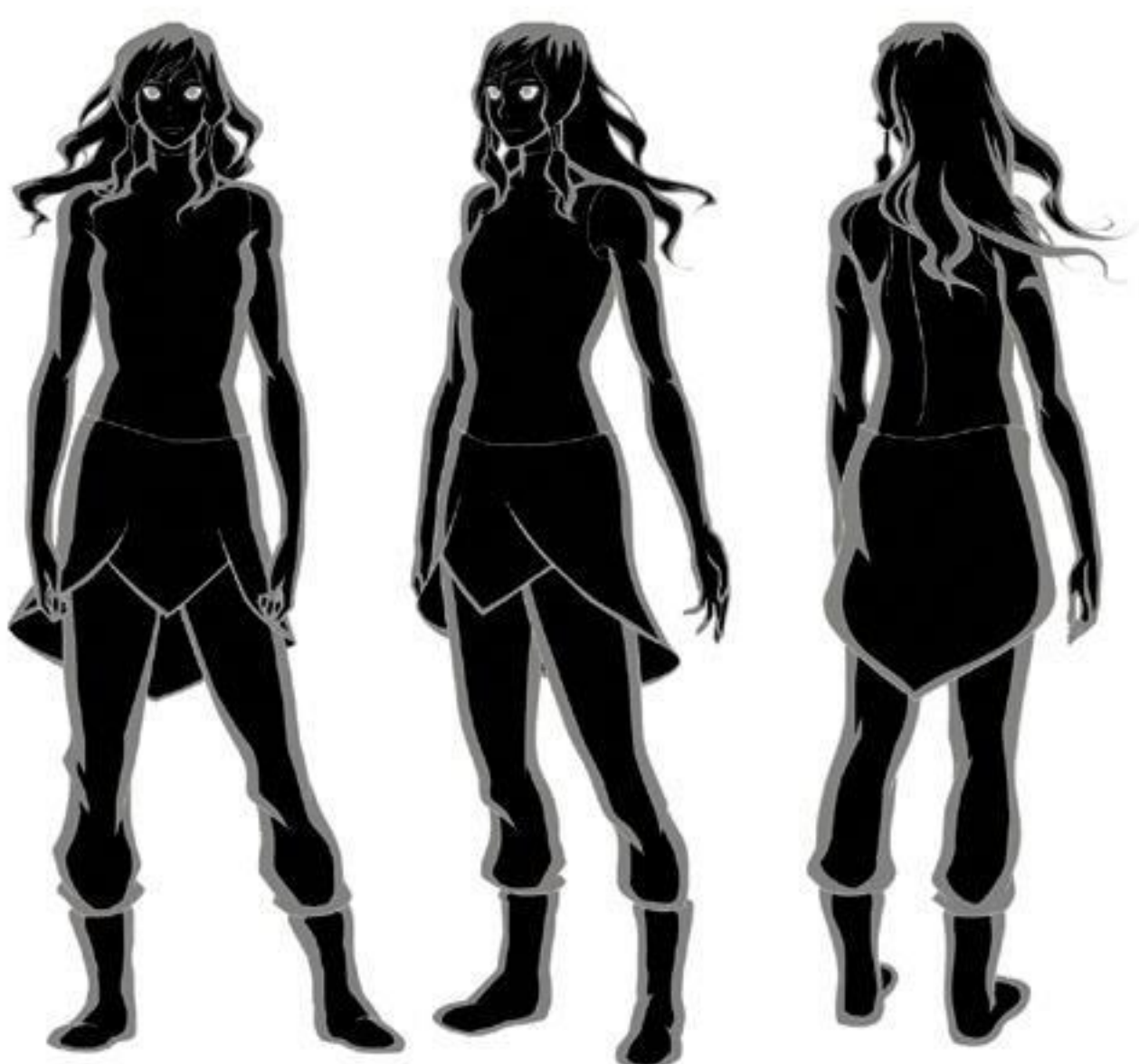
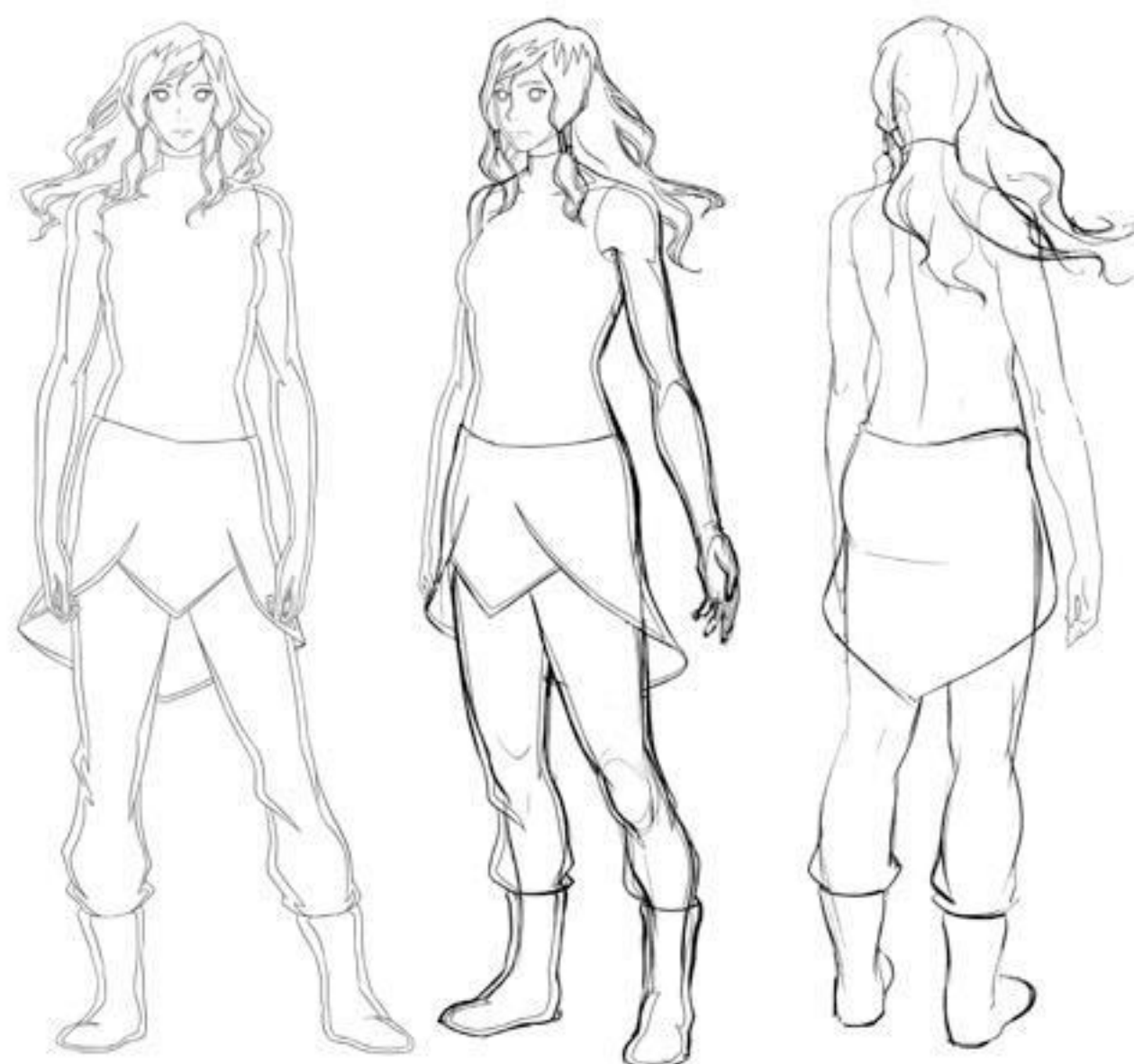


CHAPTER FOURTEEN

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**LIGHT IN  
THE DARK**





(Preceding spread) Rooftop view of Yue Bay, site of Korra's epic spirit battle with UnaVaatu. Design by Jung-Su Lee. Painting by Lauren Zurcher.

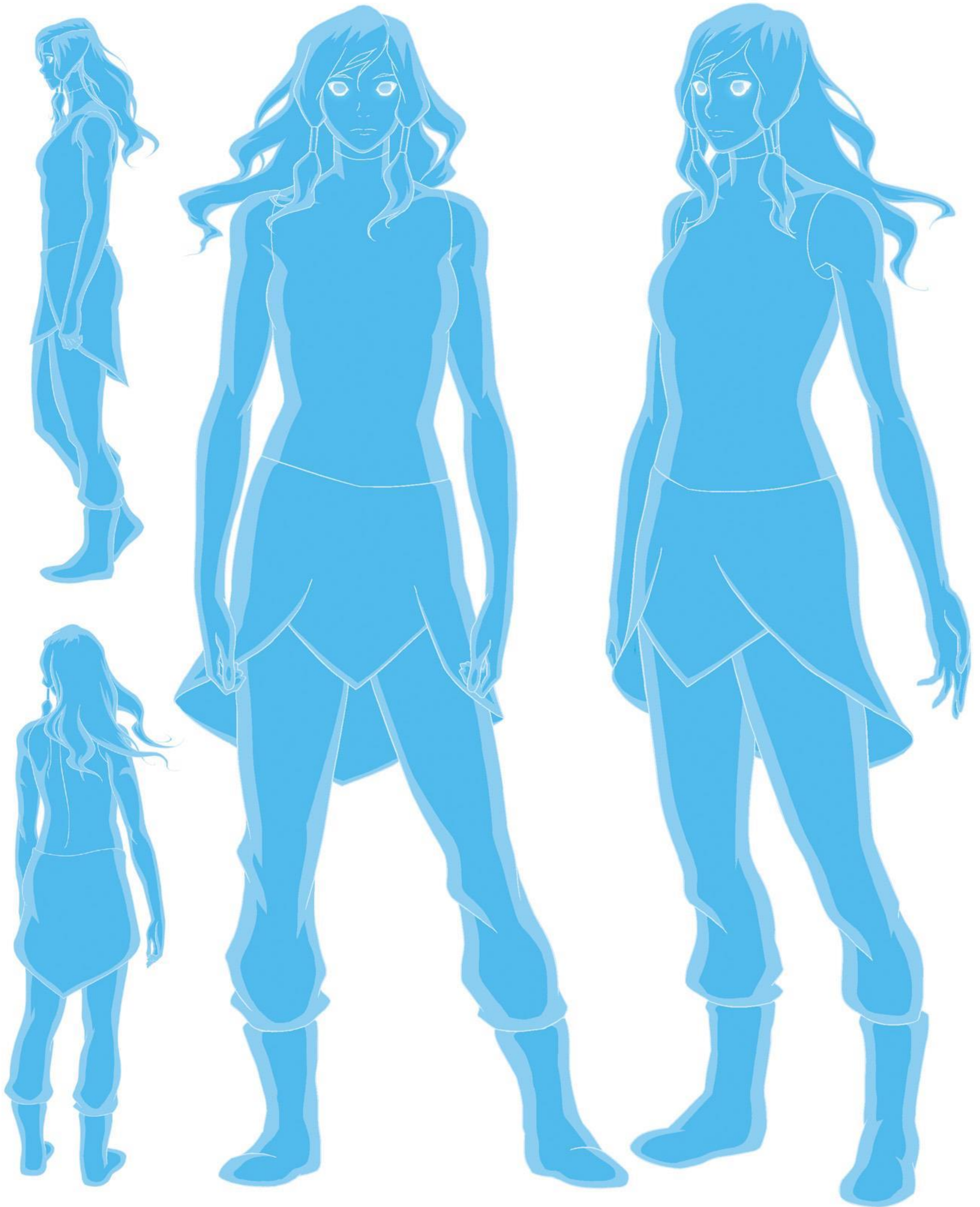
MD: Korra's story in Book Two was about humans moving beyond their ordinary abilities, and becoming something extraordinary. When she loses her connection to the past Avatars and her Avatar spirit, Korra looks deep within and forms a new connection with the cosmic version of herself. In Hindu philosophy, there is a concept called atman, which is defined as the "innermost essence of each individual" or "the supreme universal self." This is my interpretation of what Korra sees and becomes when she meditates. The giant blue cosmic Korra is a visual representation of her inner essence.

JDS: There were a couple of big animation obstacles we had to hurdle with this giant kaiju-style battle. First, the majority of the fight takes place in Yue Bay, so that means a ton of water animation, which translates to a ton more drawings for the effects animators overseas. To counter this, we tried to stage a good portion of the shots looking up with the water offscreen (this also helped convey scale). Second was the concept that in order to truly convey the massive weight of the combatants, Korra and Unalaq would have to move more slowly than if they were normal sized. This also equates to more drawings being required of the animators, as now more in-betweens need to be drawn to ensure the slow motion looks smooth. Designs by Bryan Konietzko and Angela Song Mueller. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.



Cosmic Korra and UnaVaatu face off in this early concept by Bryan Konietzko, repurposing a Book One skyline painting by Frederic Stewart.





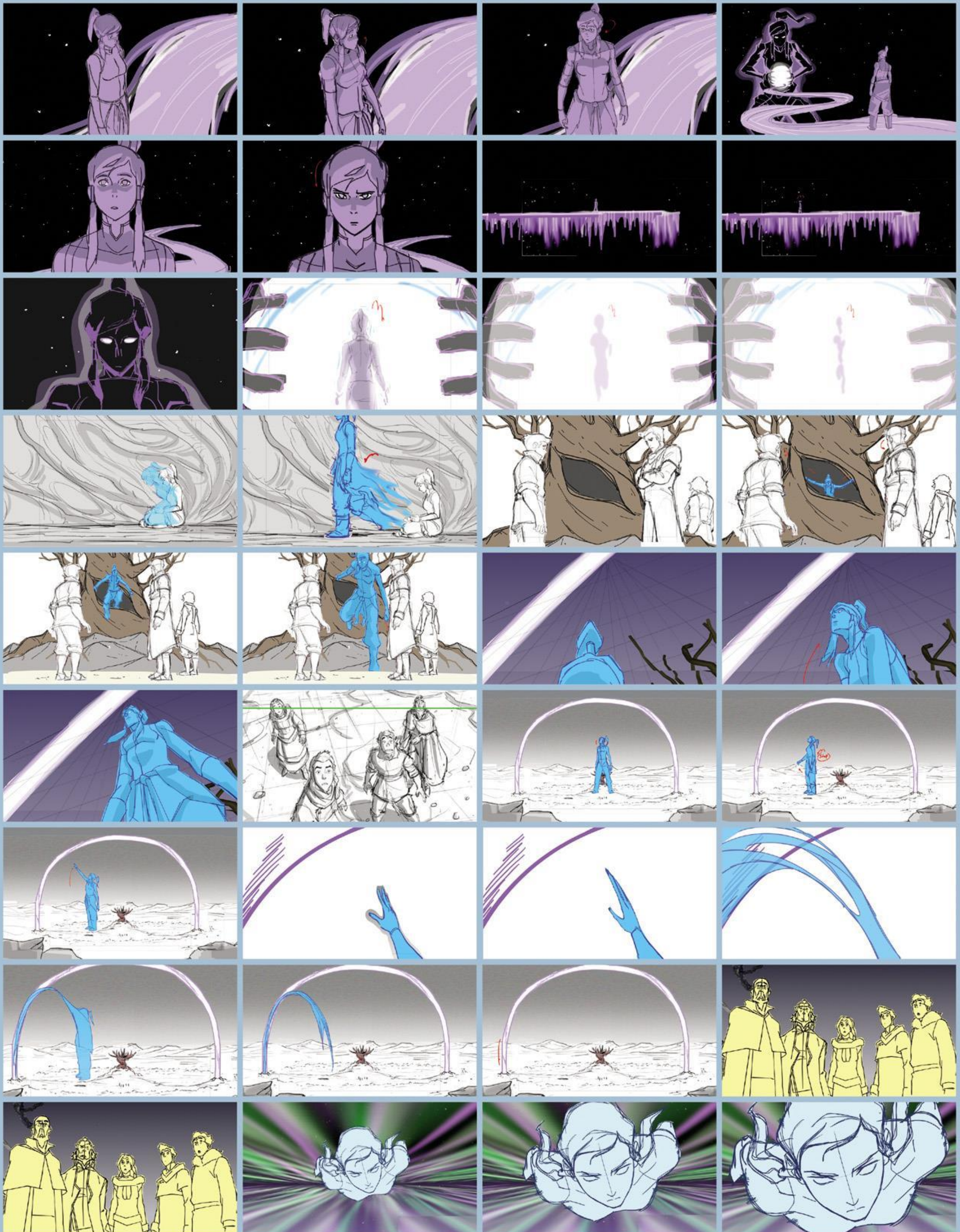
BK: When Tim Hedrick was hired as a writer on the original Avatar series, he was under the assumption for a while that when Aang went into the Avatar state he grew into a towering giant version of himself. The rest of us had a good laugh at his expense, but none of us would have thought back then that years later, that is pretty much what we would do with the next Avatar! I think Tim felt vindicated at long last. And I think he was right, as giant spirit Korra became a favorite Book Two design for me. I simplified her design and elongated her proportions to give her a more ethereal spiritual appearance. Designs and color by Bryan Konietzko.





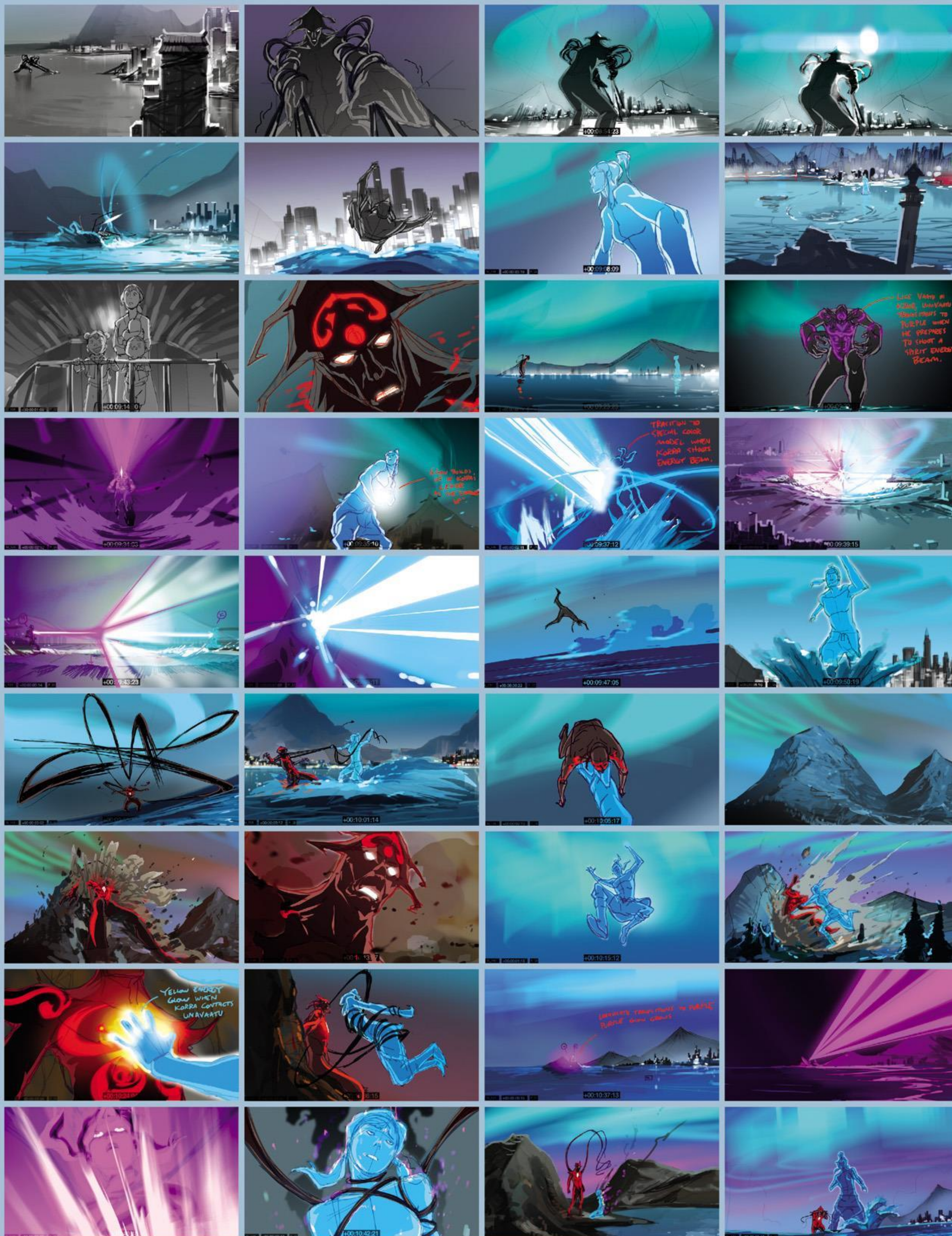
*(Top) Beifong rescues President Raiko from this airship after UnaVaatu destroys it. Background design by William Nanqing Niu. Painting by Emily Tetri. (Bottom) The aurora over Republic City. Background designs by Jung-Su Lee. Paintings by Lauren Zurcher.*





MD: This scene where Korra faces the dark, cosmic version of herself was meant to mirror a similar moment in Aang's spiritual journey, in the episode "The Guru." BK: Giant spirit Korra soaring through the aurora-filled stratosphere was a little nod to one of my favorite films, Stanley Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey. Storyboard by Johane Matte and Owen Sullivan.









BK: Most storyboards are just black-and-white line drawings, rarely including any lighting information. One major difference between the production of *Korra* versus *Avatar* is that now we've added an extra step once the storyboards are complete, where we take key board panels and add lighting, tones, and shadows in grayscale. This provides the layout artists and painters with consistent lighting direction to follow when they are planning shadows on the characters, props, and backgrounds, all in an attempt to make the final animation more cinematic. In rare cases where the art direction is especially tricky, we add color as well, as with this battle between Una Vaatu and the giant spirit Korra. There are some significant similarities between this sequence and Aang's final showdown with Ozai, another sequence that was storyboarded in color. Storyboard by Juno Lee and Ki-Hyun Ryu. Image boards by Frederic Stewart and Bryan Konietzko.





CHAPTER FIFTEEN



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# ANCILLARY ART









BK: These posters often take a village to complete! (Opposite page) New York Comic Con poster. Design by Joaquim Dos Santos. Cleanup by Christie Tseng, Angela Song Mueller, Christine Bian, and Bryan Konietzko. Color by Bryan Konietzko. (This page) San Diego Comic-Con poster. Rough concept and final design by Ki-Hyun Ryu. Color by Bryan Konietzko. Background painting by Frederic Stewart. (Preceding spread) Spirit world meadow. Background design by William Nanqing Nin. Painting by Frederic Stewart.









BK: (Opposite page) I did a really crummy rough concept for this press art, and thankfully Ryu turned it into this dramatic, stunning drawing. Press art by Ki-Hyun Ryu. Color by Bryan Konietzko. Background painting by Frederic Stewart. (This page) One of the standout Studio Pierrot scenes showed a miffed Korra slamming her fist into her palm in the season opener. We all loved the pose, which expressed a quintessential aspect of Korra's id, so when it came time to whip up a book cover we had Christie Tseng refinish it for this artwork. She added a nice, moody profile of Tonraq, and a pose of Unalaq from Ryu's amazing expression sheets. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf and Bryan Konietzko. Background painting by Frederic Stewart.



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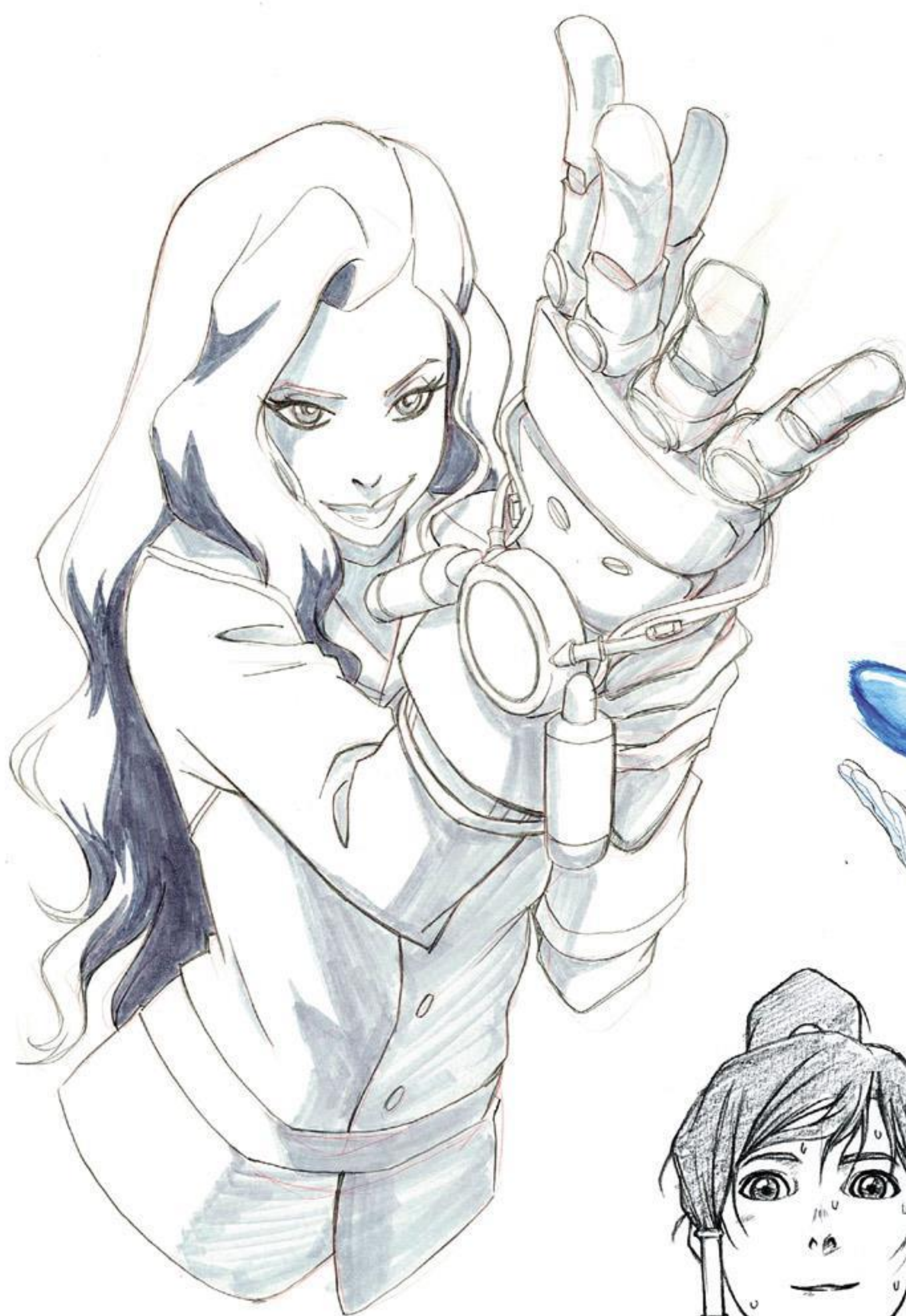
BK: (Opposite page) I already wrote the following on my blog, but it is worth repeating here: I am overwhelmingly pleased with the story of Korra and Jinora's venture into the spirit world, "Chapter Ten: A New Spiritual Age," exquisitely written by Tim Hedrick, skillfully directed by Ian Graham, and mind-bogglingly animated by Studio Mir. Lots of superlatives to throw around to everyone involved. I felt compelled to steal a little time at the end of a long week to create a little fun artwork to commemorate this favorite episode of Mike's and mine. Calligraphy by S. L. Lee, PhD.

MD: (Left) An integral part of Avatar and Korra has always been the beautiful music, composed by Jeremy Zuckerman. Finally, after many years of prodding the network and fans composing online petitions, a soundtrack for Book One was released, for which Bryan painted the cover.



BK: (Left) Bumi and Bum-Ju, the best new buddies of Book Two. Another piece I did for fun for my Tumblr blog. (Right) The network asked us to do an illustration to sell as a fine art print at Comic-Con, so I painted this rough sketch on my iPad during a flight back from Seattle. It was my humble attempt at a kid-friendly, Frank Frazetta-esque fantasy piece, which I thought was appropriate for the context of a comic convention. The network rejected it, not liking the fact that Korra's face wasn't visible, and complaining that the spirit looked too "demonic." I laughed and said to Mike, "That is pretty much straight from the first episode of the season! Wait until they get a load of UnaVaatu." We ended up throwing this sketch onto the Nick Animation Studio Tumblr instead.





MD: There's no way we could have done this show and kept up the amazing quality if it were not for co-executive producer Joaquim Dos Santos and supervising producers Lauren Montgomery and Ki-Hyun Ryu. They are at the top of their game, and their work is always an inspiration to me. Big thanks to producers' row!

BK: As much as we all enjoy the benefits of drawing digitally, it is always refreshing to see our crew members drawing analog every once in a while, putting good old-fashioned pencil lead to honest-to-goodness paper. Joaquim always panics for a bit, perhaps looking for the Undo button (though he doesn't need it). Some very lucky people won these original drawings for their very own collections, but now we get to share them in print with everyone.

JDS: These Korra Nation sketch rewards are always fun to do for the fans! Hopefully we'll have a chance to do some more! Asami and Kya by Lauren Montgomery. Mako, Bolin, and Tonraq by Joaquim Dos Santos. Korra, Unalaq, and Bumi by Ki-Hyun Ryu.

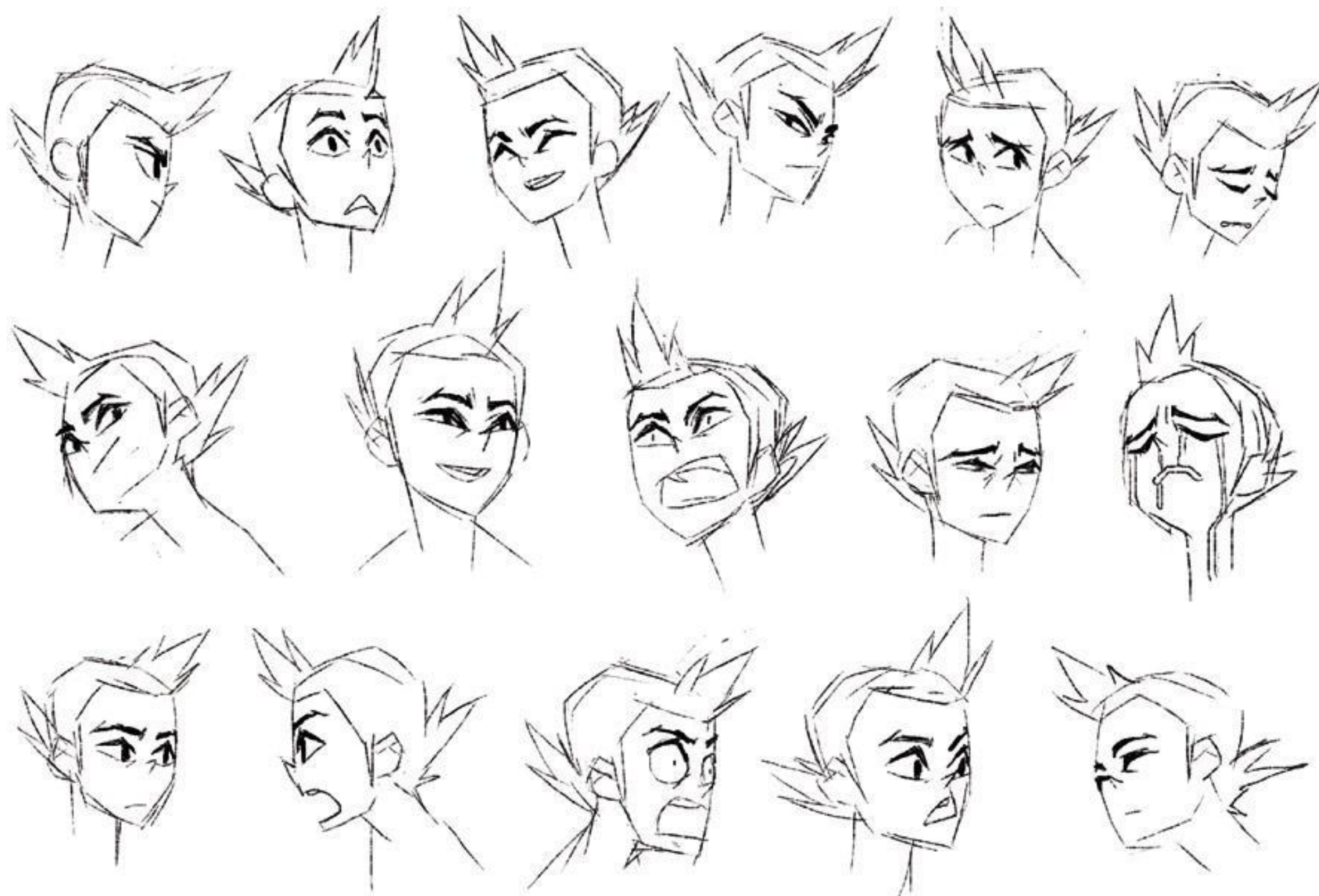
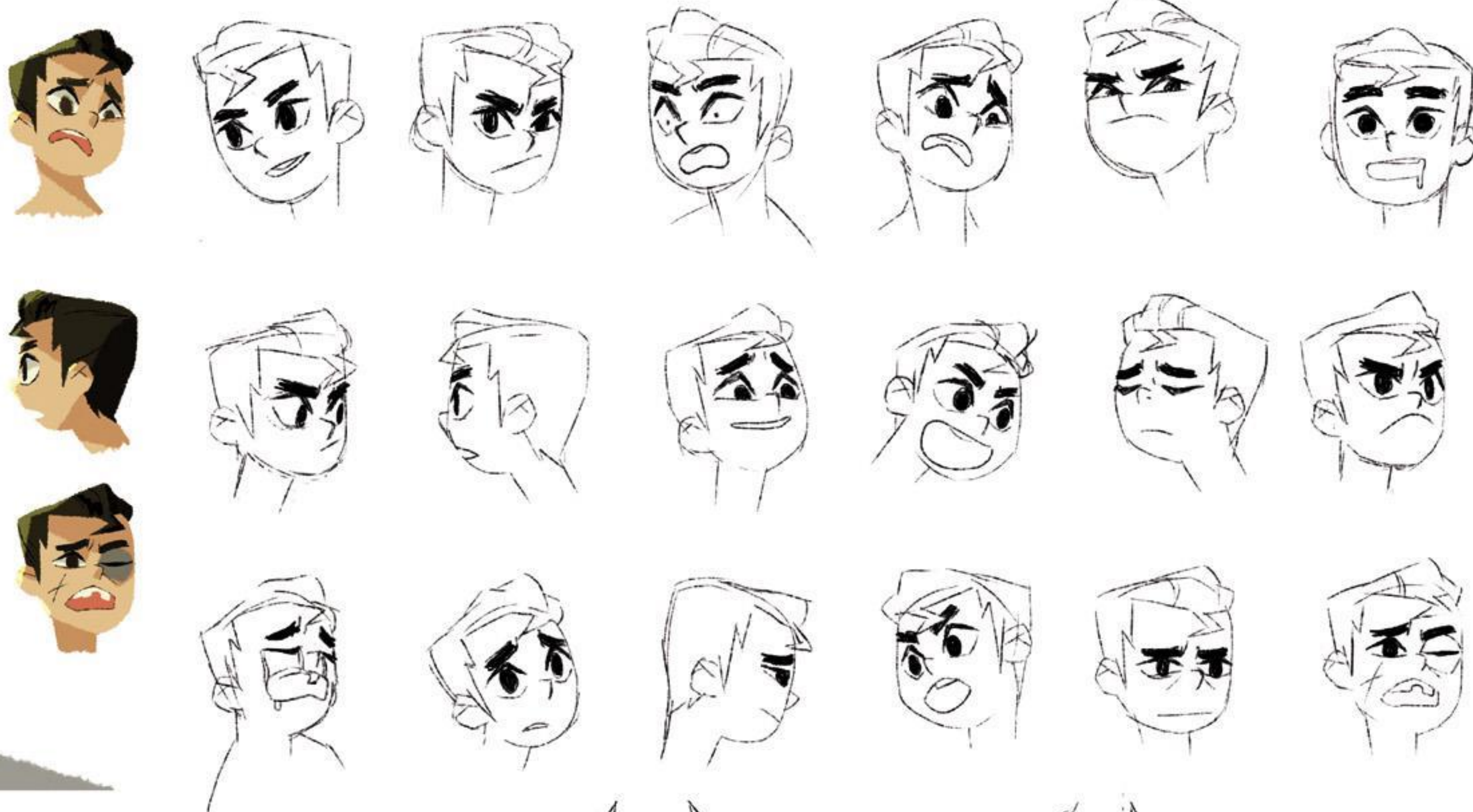






## NICK APP SHORT

MD: After the writing of Book Two was complete, Nickelodeon wanted to make three shorts in a more graphic style for their app. Writer Tim Hedrick set to work on a prequel of sorts, focusing on Mako and Bolin's life on the street, before they became Pro-benders. For the design and look of the shorts, we turned to Evon Freeman, who worked on Book One of *Korra* as part of the Nickelodeon artist fellowship program. She has a charming graphic style that was perfect for the shorts. Baby Pabu is by far my favorite! Designs and color by Evon Freeman.







BK: Evon did such stellar work on these stylized character designs, and she cranked out a massive number of expressions for each and every one of them! I still have a framed Korra and Pabu illustration sitting next to me on my desk that she did in her style. So when the network showed us some reference animation for what they had in mind for these shorts, I immediately knew Evon was the right artist for the job.



BK: Evon's style can even make the sordid miscreant Shady Shin seem charming. Not an easy feat!











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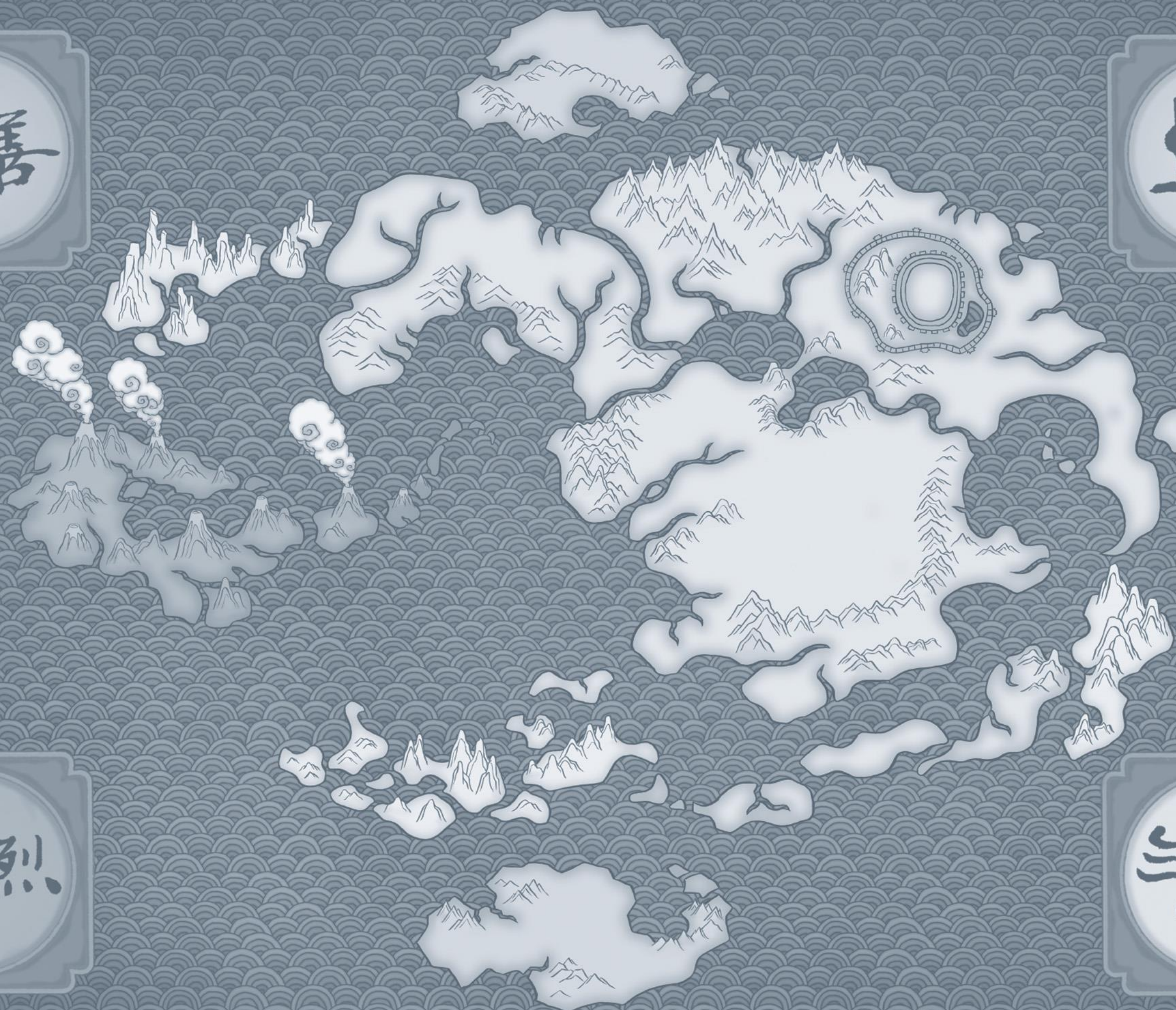
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*“Things will never be the same again.  
We’re entering a new age.”*



Go behind the scenes of the second season of the animated television series *The Legend of Korra*, created by Michael Dante DiMartino and Bryan Konietzko!

Get an in-depth look at the creative process that brings the vibrant and richly detailed world of *Korra* to life. Never-before-seen artwork, accompanied by insightful commentary by the creators, gives you a front row seat to the development of this beloved show!

*"Creators/executive producers Michael Dante DiMartino and Bryan Konietzko, like Korra, have proven they are a force to be reckoned with."*  
—Screen Rant

*"The Legend of Korra is still a beast when it comes to presentation and remains one of the best-looking animated shows out there."* —IGN

*"The animation is slick and expressive, the story is emotionally poignant and philosophically dense, and the action is incredibly dynamic, making this a chapter that delivers on every level."* —A.V. Club



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