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THE LEGEND OF KORRA™



BOOK THREE: CHANGE

THE ART OF THE ANIMATED SERIES

Michael Dante DiMartino *Bryan Konietzko* *Joaquim Dos Santos*





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The Art of the Animated Series

Book Three: Change

Bryan Konietzko
Michael Dante DiMartino
with Joaquim Dos Santos



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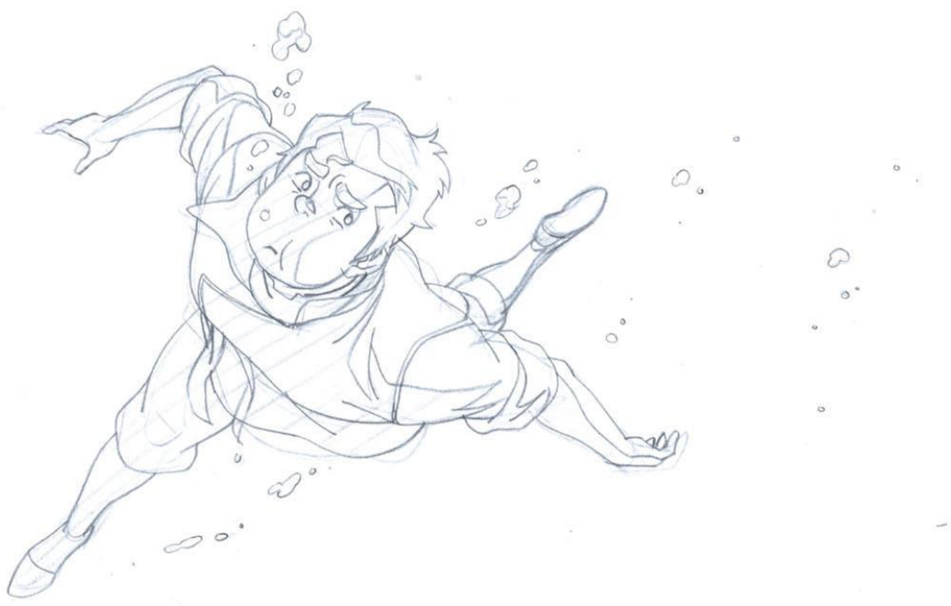
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THE LEGEND OF KORRA: THE ART OF THE ANIMATED SERIES—BOOK THREE: CHANGE
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Introductions

In coming up with the title and theme of this season, Change *seemed the most appropriate. The return of the Airbenders signaled a great shift in the world, and Korra underwent her own internal change, becoming more selfless and sacrificing herself to save a fragile new nation. This season of* Korra *was one of the most creatively satisfying to create. The writers and artists were all in the groove, and for the first time, we had a full in-house team of storyboard artists and designers. After a leave of absence, Studio Mir was back on board for the remainder of the series, and along with assistance from Studio Reve, they created episode after episode of consistently high-quality animation. Every time Bryan, Joaquim, Lauren, Ryu, and I watched a newly completed episode, we were blown away, wondering how the animation studios could keep it up. But they never faltered. I am grateful to all the incredible artists who continue to amaze me with their talent and dedication to Korra and her world; to Bryan, whose art direction helped craft our best-looking season yet; and to Joaquim, who expertly guided the directors and board artists in visualizing our ambitious scripts. At the moment I feel a little bittersweet, as the entire Burbank crew has already moved on to new projects, while Bryan and I finish up the postproduction on Book Four. As Tenzin says, "Change can be good or bad, depending on your point of view." This season brought a lot of big changes, not only in the story, but also in the talented crew that helped create it. In my opinion, they were all good changes.*

Michael Dante DiMartino
August 20, 2014

A few years ago, we were getting to a place in the production of Korra *Book Two where we could see the finish lines for several departments. We had only been picked up for the first twenty-six episodes at that point, and people would inevitably start moving on to other productions before long. It had been a tumultuous production, but we had rolled with the punches, gritted our teeth, and slogged forward. As rough as the ride had been, Mike and I had a chat one day about how we were both feeling like this series still had a lot of gas in the tank, and that it was only just then getting up to speed and on track. We believed so strongly in the wonderfully talented team we had assembled, and we still felt creatively inspired by the project itself.* Korra *still had more to say. At this point in time, Book One hadn't even premiered, but the two of us decided to lobby for another twenty-six-episode pickup to round out the series—what would be Books Three and Four. Incredibly, we got our wish. And we got Studio Mir back. And our in-house team just kept getting better and growing closer, like a family. It seemed like everything on Book Three just fell into place—though not effortlessly. In fact, it was only due to the accumulated effort of so many dedicated people that it went so smoothly, and I thank them all for that.*

Bryan Konietzko
August 25, 2014

As I sit down to write this introduction, I am reminded that it has been a little over three months since my final day of work on The Legend of Korra. *This time away has afforded me the opportunity to reflect just a bit on my experience with this amazing production, this amazing team, and the amazing* Korra *fandom. Looking back, I'm hit by a wave of emotions that I can feel my body and mind processing into warm, fuzzy, nostalgic memories. All the highs and all the lows, all the friendships that have been forged along the way, and all the amazing places and people I've been allowed to visit and meet over the course of the past four and a half years . . . All of these things combine together to create what I know will be a high point in both my personal and my professional lives. The entirety of this experience is something that I will be able to look back on in my old age and proudly say, "I was part of that."*

For my money, Book Three is the prize at the end of the very long and grueling ride that was Book Two. So many things fell into place. For one, we were reunited with our longtime partners and friends at Studio Mir, who once again managed to raise the bar above what we thought was achievable in television animation. Their skill and level of expertise are ever evolving and, on more occasions than I can count on two hands and two feet, they made the impossible happen.

Our in-house design team really seemed to work like a single giant organism, each of their individual strengths and disciplines complementing the others, as though they fit together perfectly like a puzzle. Watching their camaraderie outside of the studio translate to a singular, unified vision for the show was absolutely awe inspiring.

The writing had me on the edge of my seat with each new script that came across my desk. Zaheer and crew are such compelling characters that I oftentimes found myself rooting for them as much as I did our heroes. For animation "bad guys," they seemed to have such depth. I wanted to know more about what made them tick. And the stories teased just enough of their backstory to leave you always wanting more. I'm sure an entire book could be written about the events that brought them together, and if I know the fans like I think I do, that story is probably in the works! The sense of adventure seemed bigger, the stakes seemed higher, and yet there was still a perfect balance between comedy and drama throughout. This season managed to pave new ground and yet still feel familiar, as though the story was somehow tapping back into its Avatar: The Last Airbender *roots. Not an easy task, by any means.*

And last but not least, our in-house storyboard team, expertly led into battle by our amazing directors. Each team was tasked with the nearly impossible job of churning out feature-quality staging and truly epic action week after week, episode after episode. To keep up that schedule and continually provide a unique point of view can be both mentally and physically taxing. The long hours and time away from family and friends can and did take their toll. But rather than let it get the best of them, the adversity really seemed to galvanize the team and bring them together like a family. That sense of unity created what I consider to be the most visually compelling season of Korra *to date. I think I can speak on behalf of my two other partners in crime in producers' row, Lauren Montgomery and Ki-Hyun Ryu, when I say this was easily the most talented group of visual storytellers assembled under one roof. Period.*

Of course, none of this would be possible without two men, Michael Dante DiMartino and Bryan Konietzko. Two of the most hard-working, humble, and uniquely talented individuals I've ever had the pleasure of working with. I will be eternally thankful to them for creating this amazing universe and inviting me to play in it. They truly lead by example, and I cannot put into words how profound an effect they have had on my life. I'm honored to call them my friends and, to put it simply, they have allowed me to live a life my twelve-year-old self could have only imagined.

Joaquim Dos Santos
August 19, 2014



CHAPTER ONE

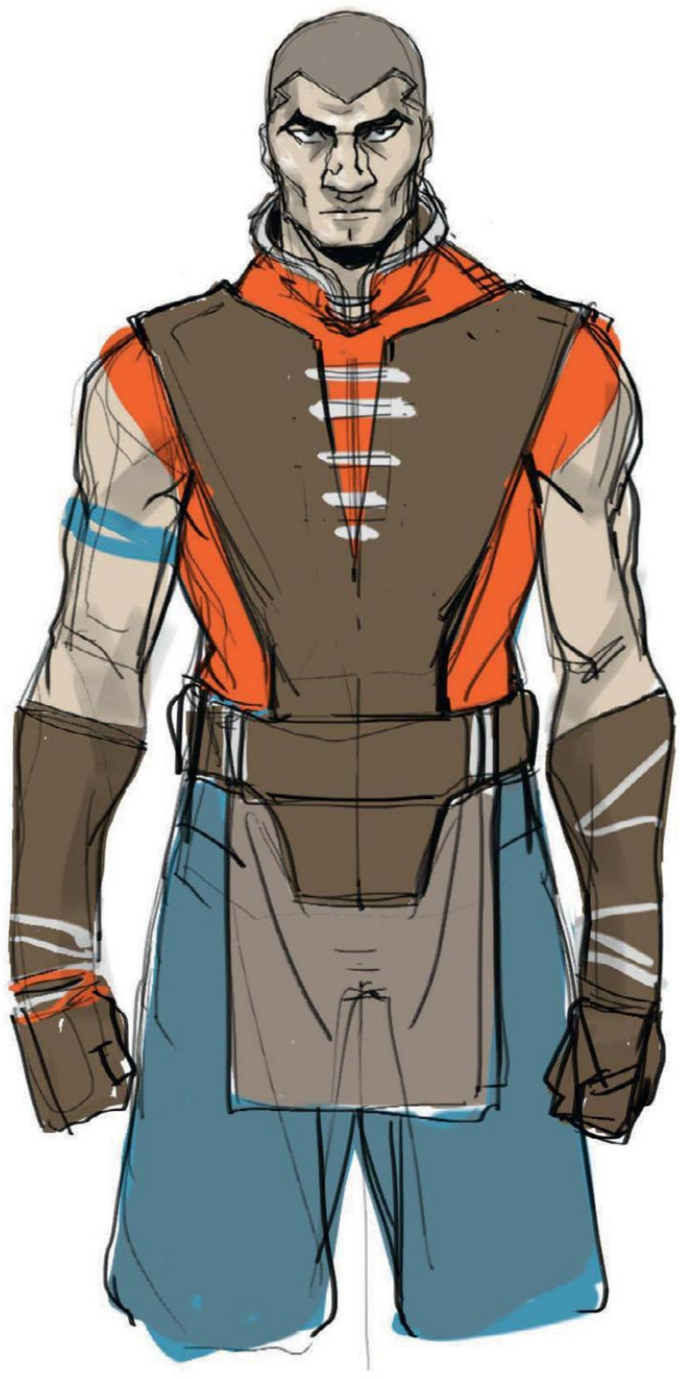
A BREATH OF FRESH AIR

ZAHEER

MD: Zaheer is one of my favorite villains we've ever created in the Avatar world. Equal parts warrior, philosopher, and poet, Zaheer is voiced by the legendary Henry Rollins. BK: All the way back to *Avatar* days, writers would pitch "evil Airbender" premises. Whether these were interesting or not, Mike and I always shot them down, saying, "Aang is the last Airbender." But when Harmonic Convergence created new Airbenders, we finally had the opportunity to explore such a character, and we loved doing so! Right: Prisoner Zaheer design by Bryan Konietzko. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.

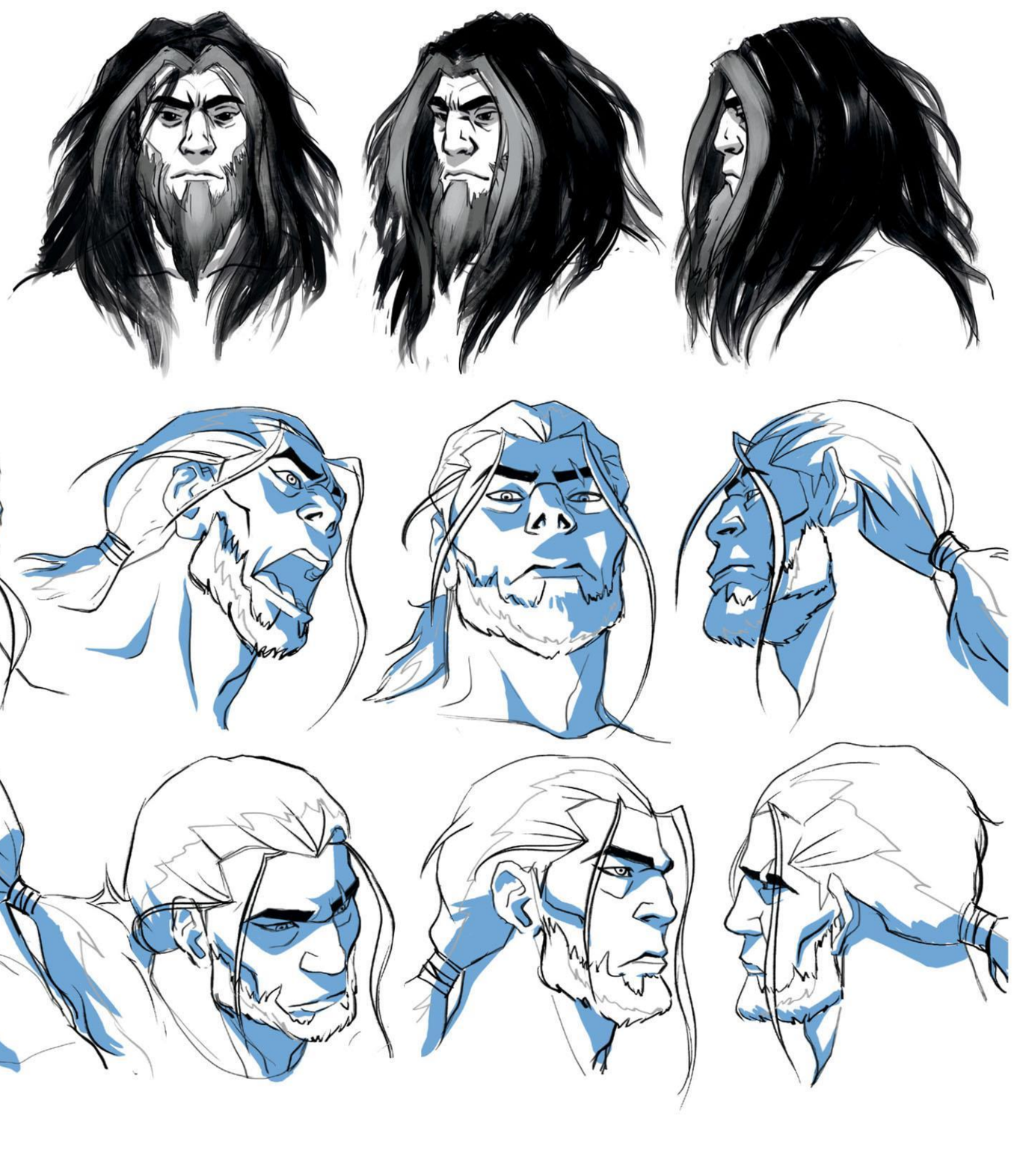
(Preceding spread) Kyoshi Bridge, Republic City. Background design by William Nanqing Niu. Painting by Frederic Stewart.







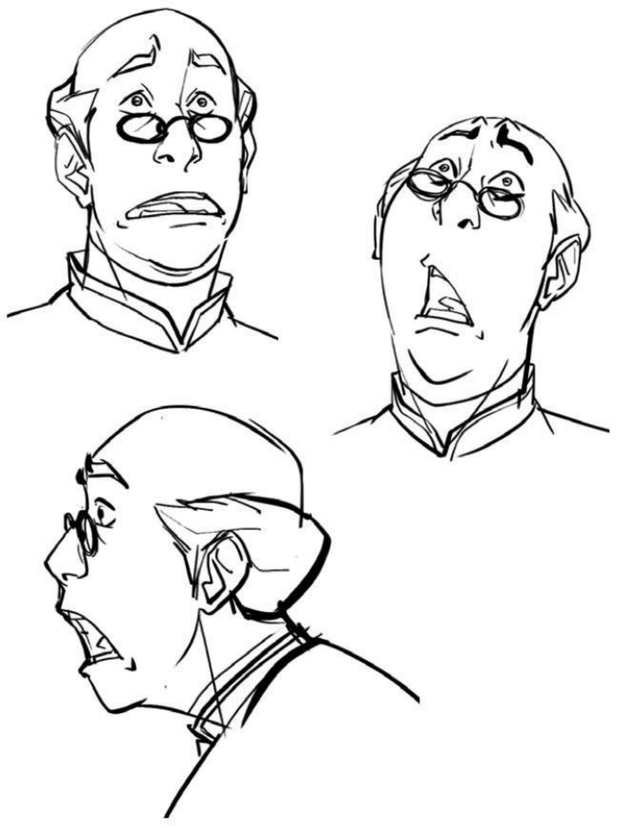
BK: Two of our previous villains, Tarrlok and Unalaq, had such similar looks that it was refreshing to work on the design of Zaheer, a distinctly different adversary. Zaheer concepts and head turns by Bryan Konietzko and Ki-Hyun Ryu.



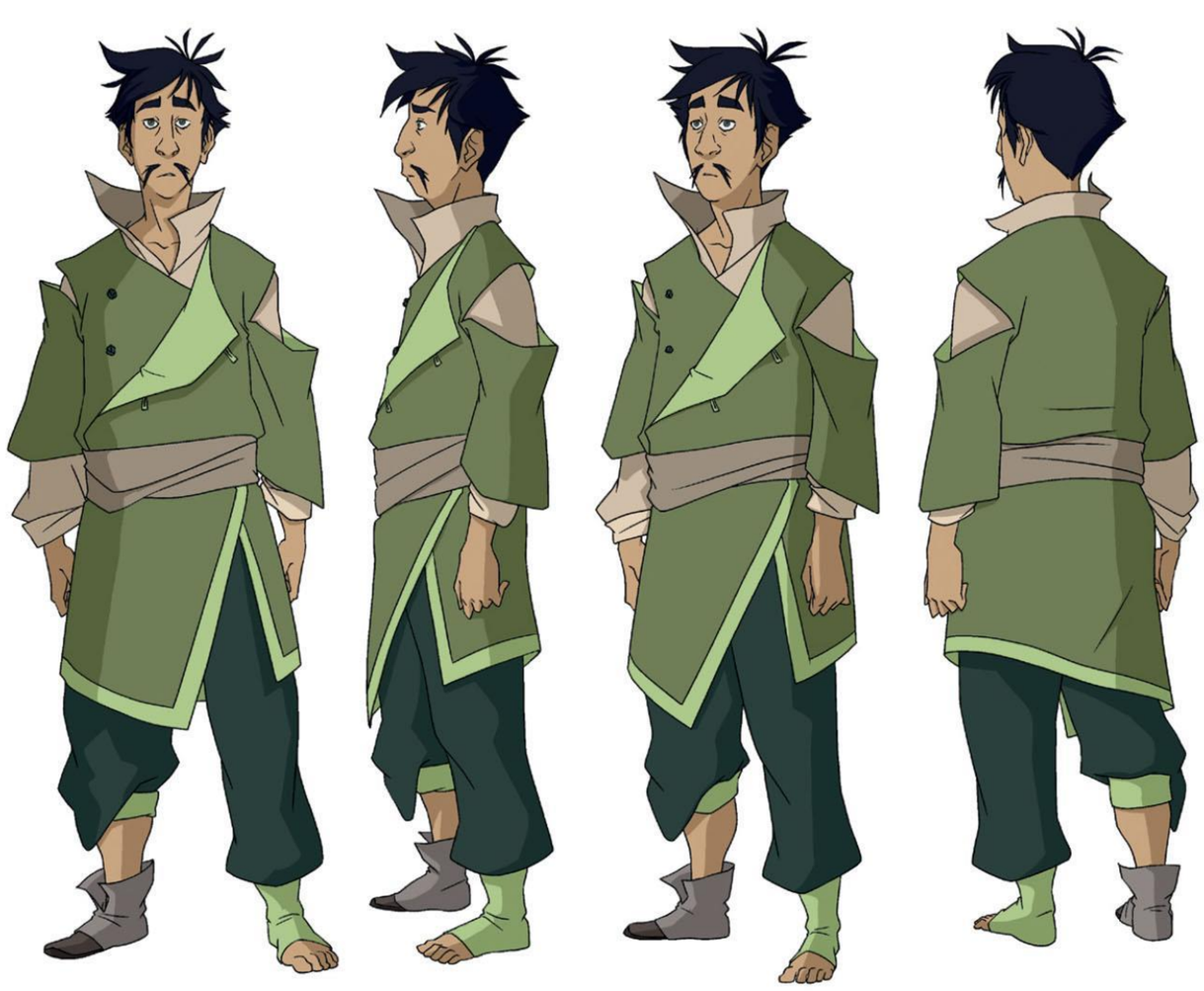


MD: Writer Tim Hedrick came up with the character of Daw, a simple shopkeeper who is reluctantly thrust into a life of excitement when he discovers he can airbend. I love how Daw's messy hair and rumpled clothes help illustrate his frazzled nerves.





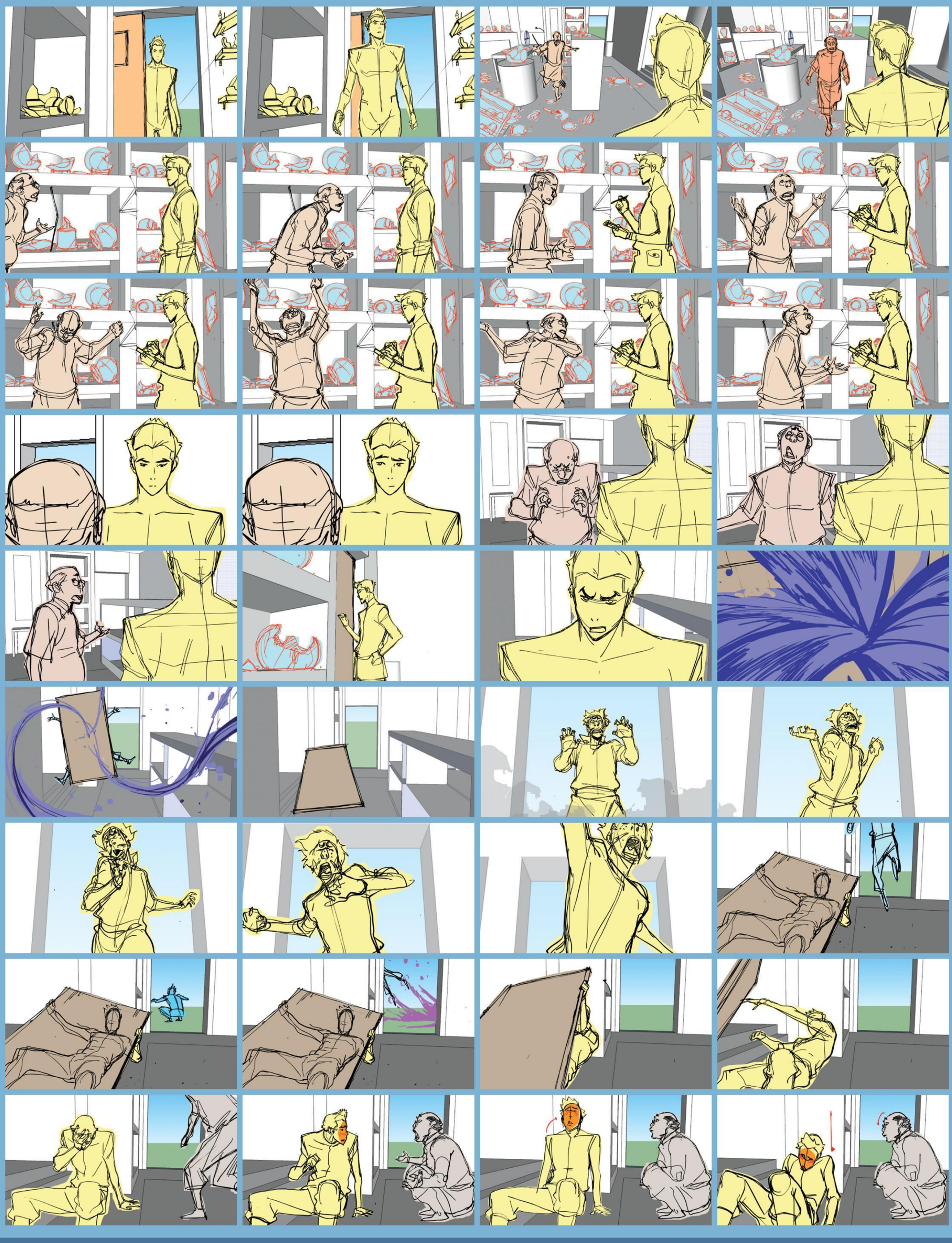
BK: Angela Song Mueller designed the delightfully dorky Daw and his bookish brother. This initial design of Daw had his hair in a disheveled state; it was only intended to look that way while he was distraught about becoming an Airbender in this episode. But everyone kept drawing him that way in later episodes, so it just became his signature look—that is, until Tenzin shaved it off.







BK: What the world needed was to see what a hedgehog crossed with a tropical fruit might look like. Now we can all sleep a little easier at night. Character concepts and designs by Angela Song Mueller. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.



MD: In this storyboard by Ki-Hyun Ryu, Mako enters the shopkeeper's store and has his first encounter with the new Airbender, Daw. One of Ryu's great talents is to be able to add personality to characters, taking even a minor character like the shopkeeper and making him come alive through dynamic poses and hilarious expressions. And Daw's arm-flailing run is priceless.



BK: Even in its trashed state, Daw's shop looks like a charming, quaint boutique. Background designs by Angela Sung. Paintings by Lauren Zurcher.

JDS: After the events of Book Two, the spirits become a somewhat regular fixture in Book Three. It's always fun to spot them floating around in the background. While some were inspired by the masterful works of Studio Ghibli, others were just a fun way for the designers to cut loose and create with a sense of whimsy.



MD: Although the spirits don't play as big a role in Book Three as they did in Book Two, we still wanted them to have a presence in the world, especially during scenes inside the spirit wilds.

BK: I think the spirits need their own spinoff series, executive produced by Christie, featuring all real kids as the voices! Let me know how that turns out. I'll be on vacation.
Vine spirit designs by Christie Tseng. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.

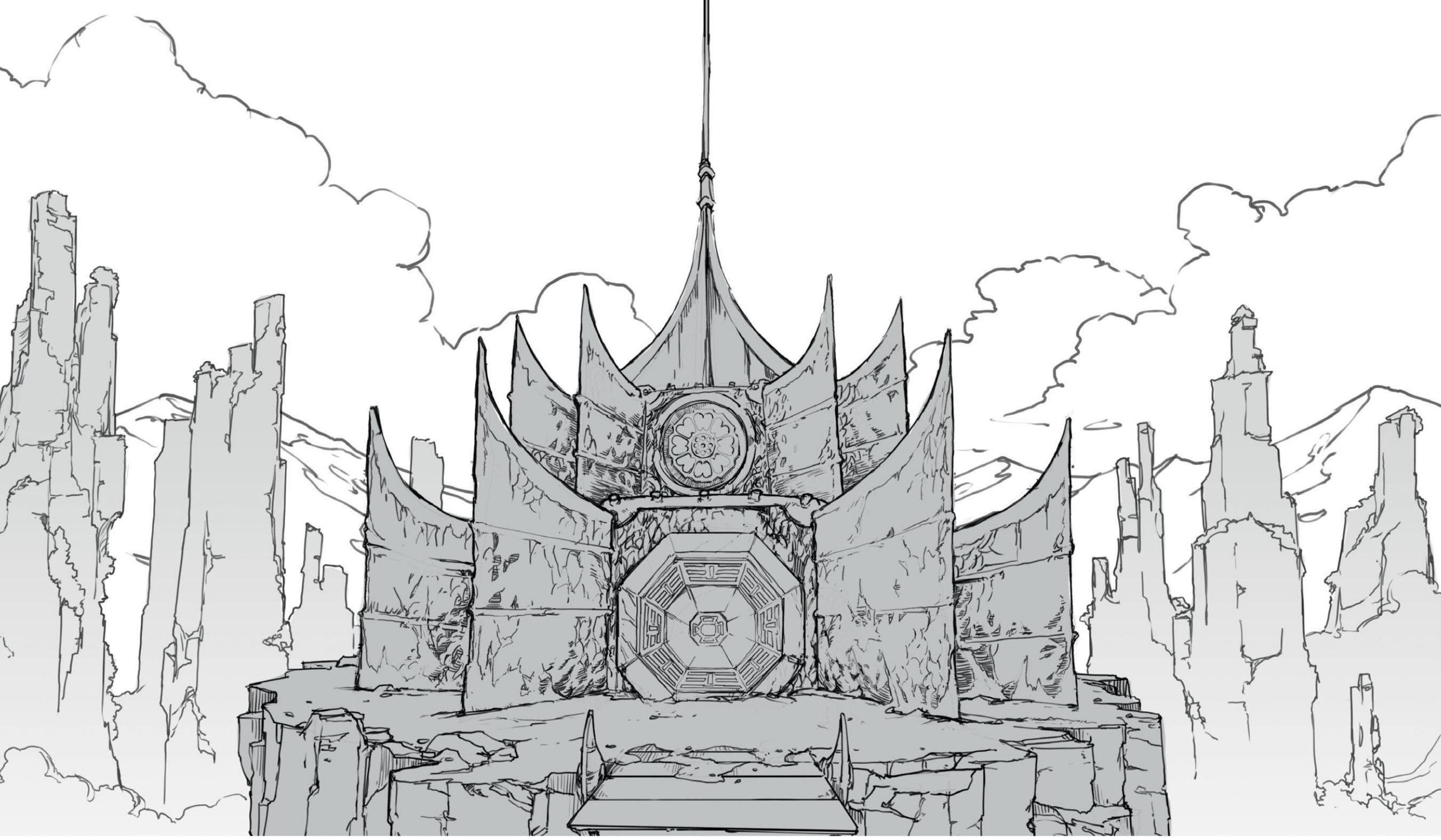
BK: At this point in the story, we didn't want the audience to realize the scene was taking place in the heart of the bustling, modern Republic City. In order to sell this mislead, we needed the spirit wilds to look like they were growing over ancient ruins. Top: Background design by Bryan Konietzko and Christine Bian. Middle and bottom: Background designs by William Nanqing Niu. Paintings by Lauren Zurcher.

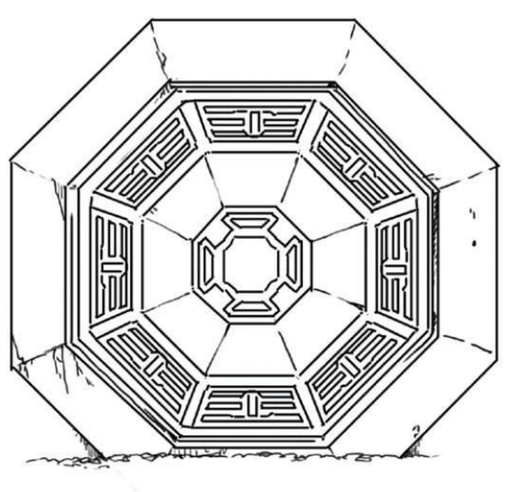


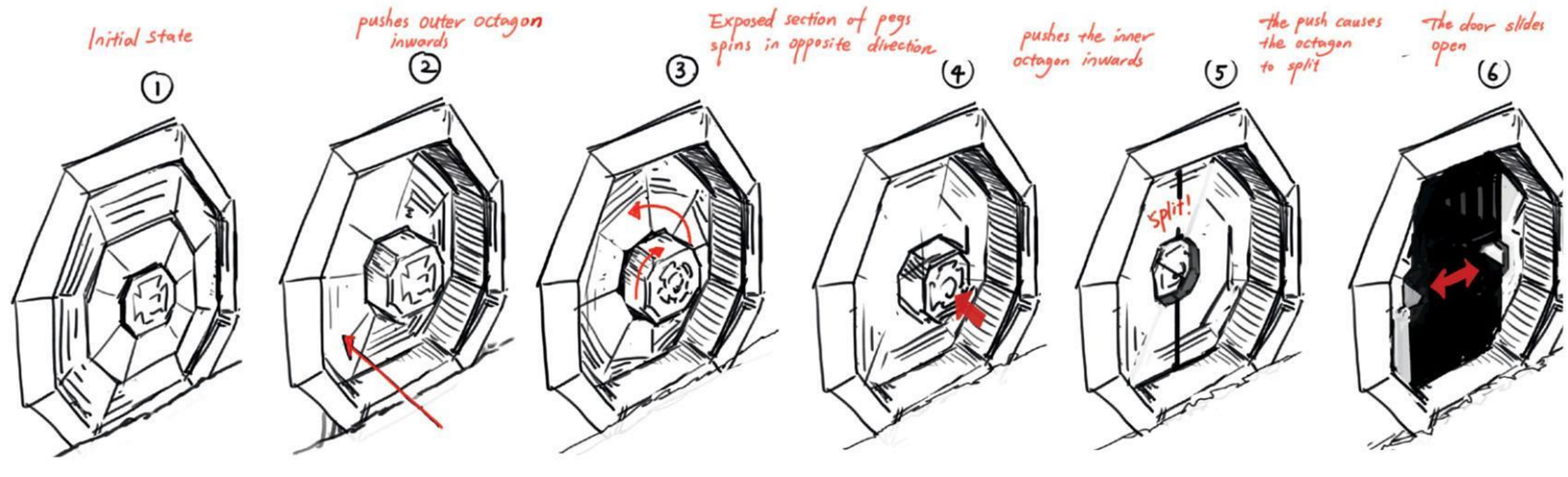
MD: The meditation gazebo at sunset looks so serene and beautiful. The gazebo is located at the back of Air Temple Island, facing away from the city, so as to minimize distractions during meditation. Background designs by Angela Sung. Top painting by Lauren Zurcher. Bottom painting by Emily Tetri.

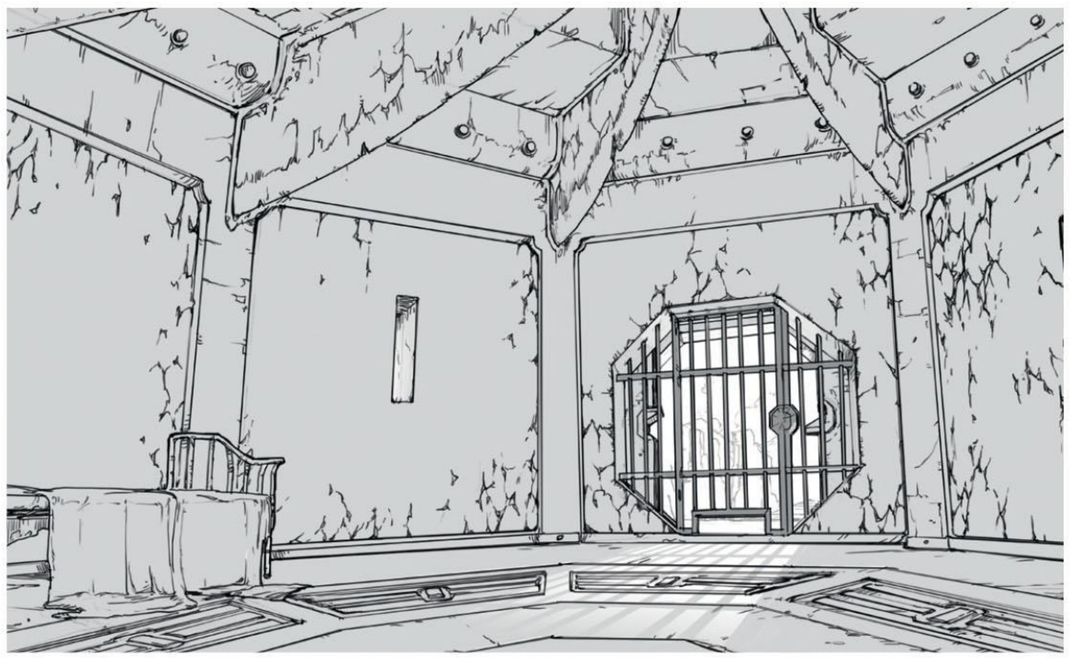


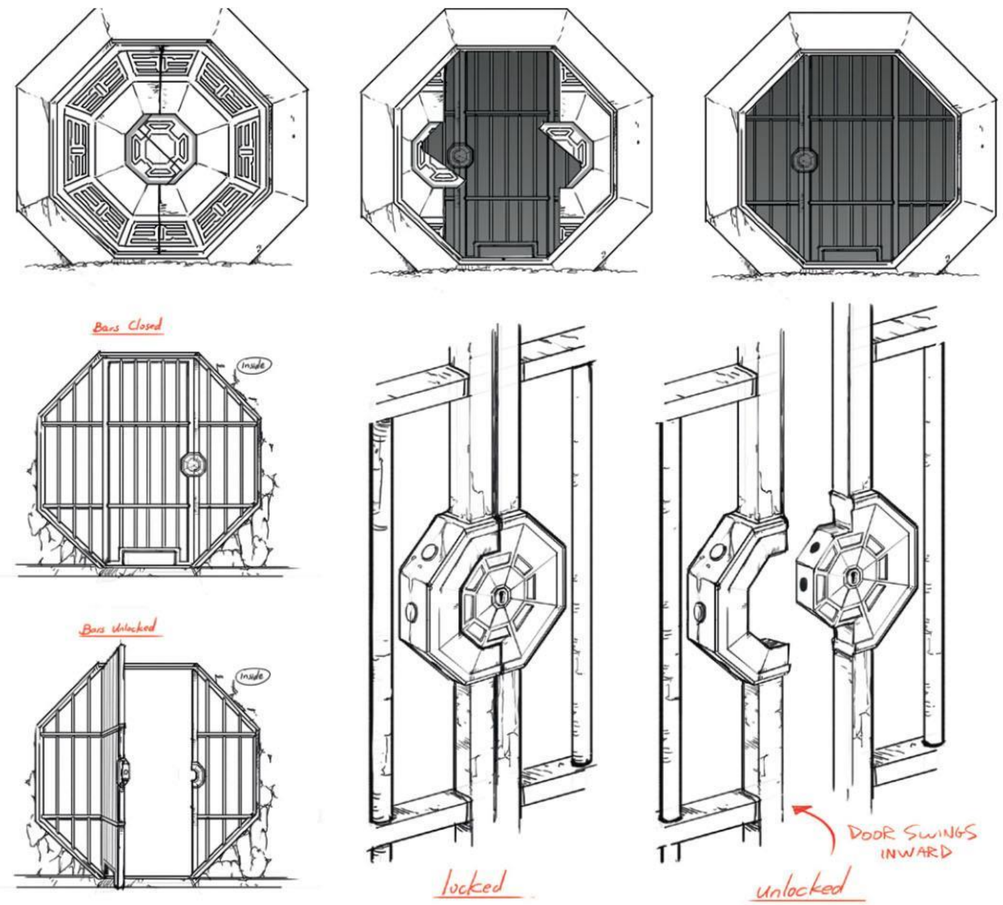
BK: William effectively conveyed the dizzying height of the apex of Kyoshi Bridge with three-point perspective. Both of these backgrounds deepen the feeling for me that Republic City is a real place with its own architectural style. Top: Background design by William Nanqing Niu and Christine Bian. Painting by Frederic Stewart. Bottom: Background design by William Nanqing Niu.











BK: William went to town figuring out how this massive earthbending vault door and metal lock mechanism worked. Many times a designer will go the extra mile to work out some detailed functions of an asset, only to have those details never see the light of day in the animation. So I was delighted when his intricate plans were showcased in their own shot. Zaheer's mountaintop prison designs by William Nanqing Niu. Paintings by Frederic Stewart.

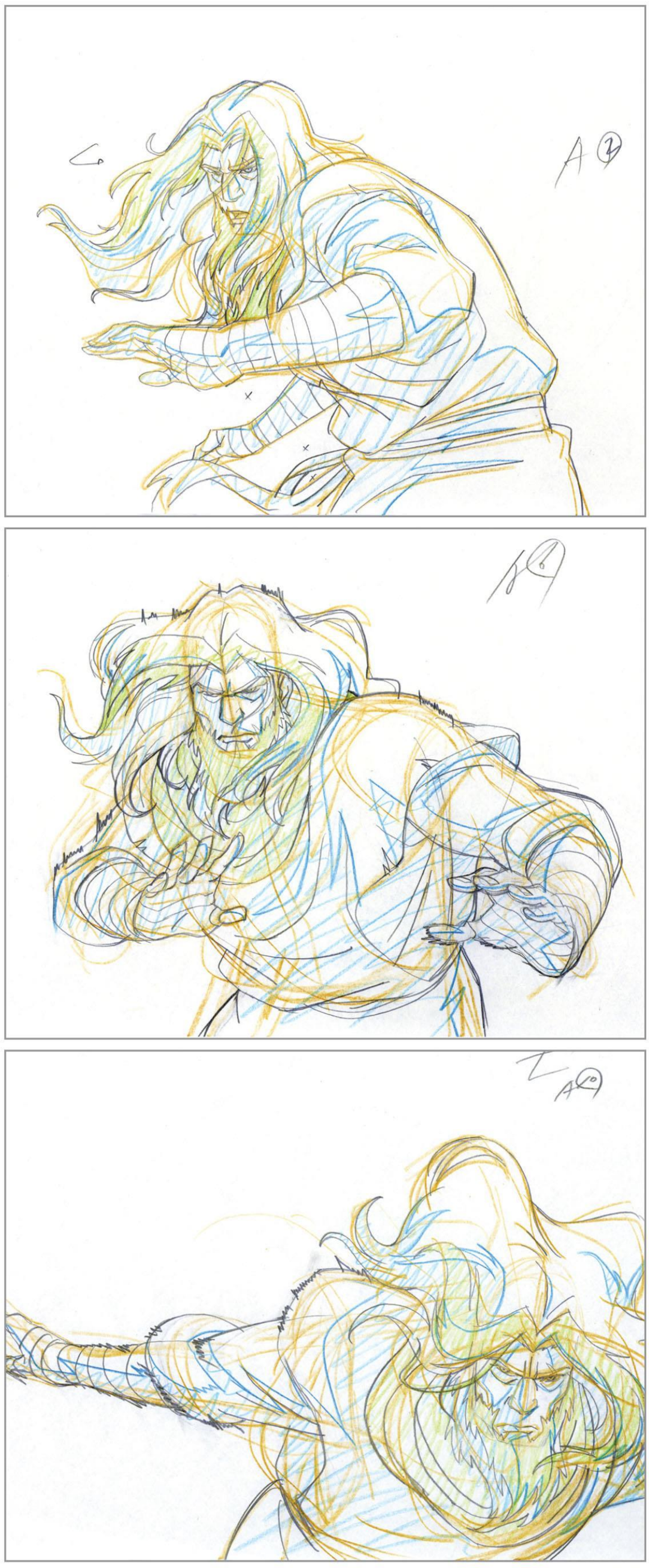


MD: Because this scene was our first introduction to Zaheer, it needed to be tense and dynamic. We imagined that Zaheer was already an expert martial artist, even as a nonbender. So by adding airbending to his list of skills, Zaheer only became more dangerous and agile. Storyboard by Lauren Montgomery, Joaquim Dos Santos, and Melchior Zwyer.



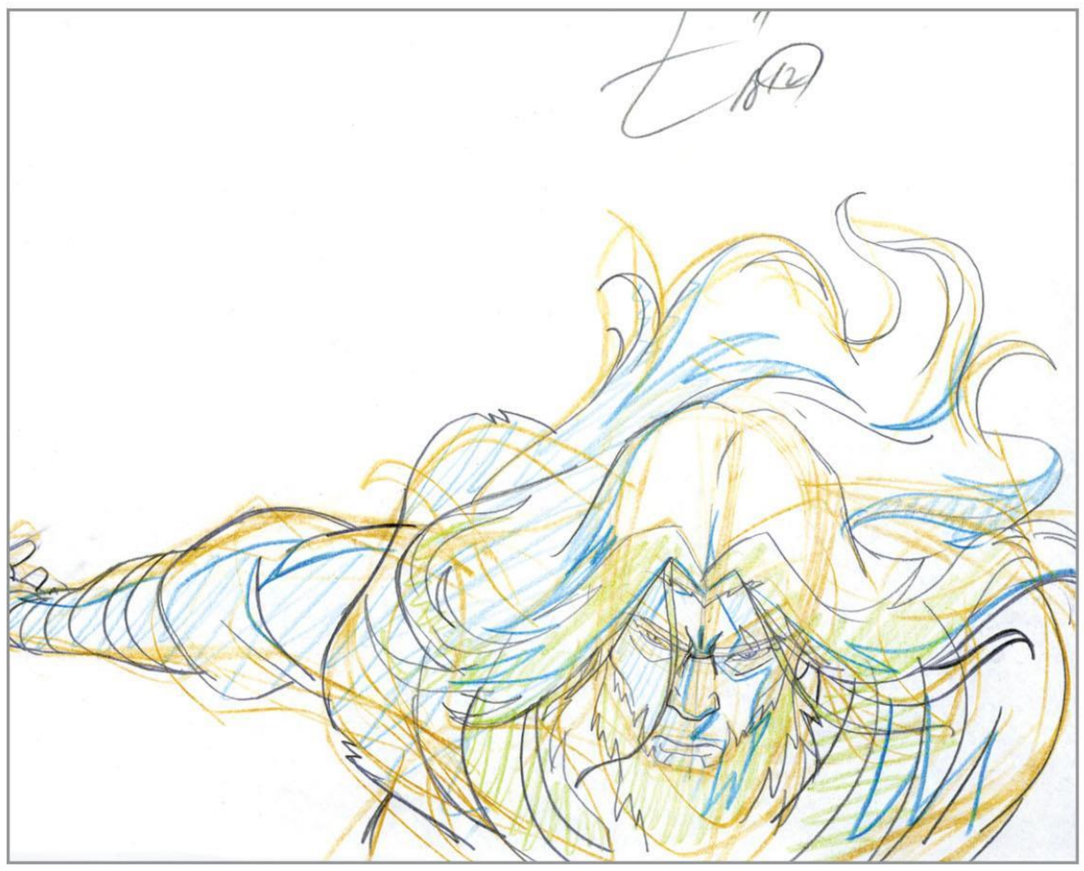
JDS: Animation is a team sport. It is rare to watch a piece and trace its credit back to just one person from start to finish. Because of the importance of this scene, we had an "all hands on deck" type of situation. Melchior provided the initial roughs with Lauren, and I stepped in to ratchet up the intensity.





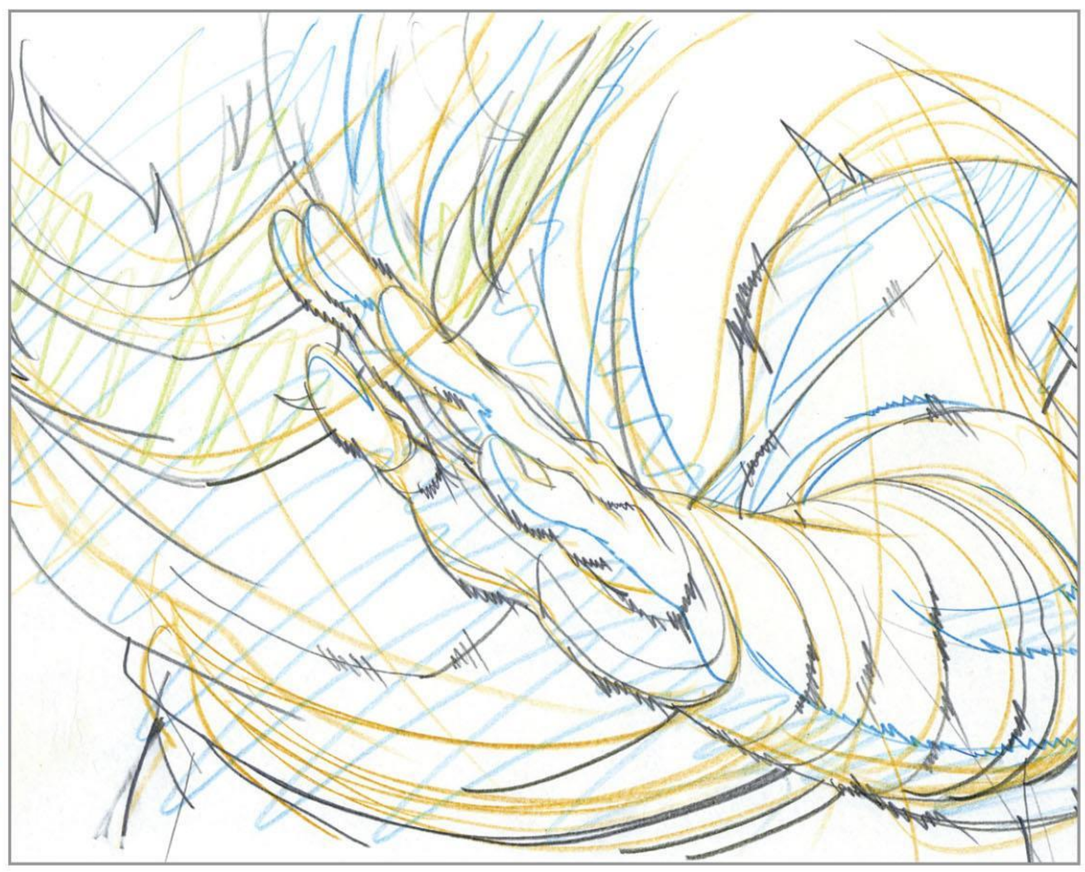
MD: Key animation from Zaheer's escape sequence. The animator closely followed Joaquim's posing in the storyboard, but added more detail and movement to the character. The flowing movement of Zaheer's hair is particularly amazing. Key animation by Studio Reve.

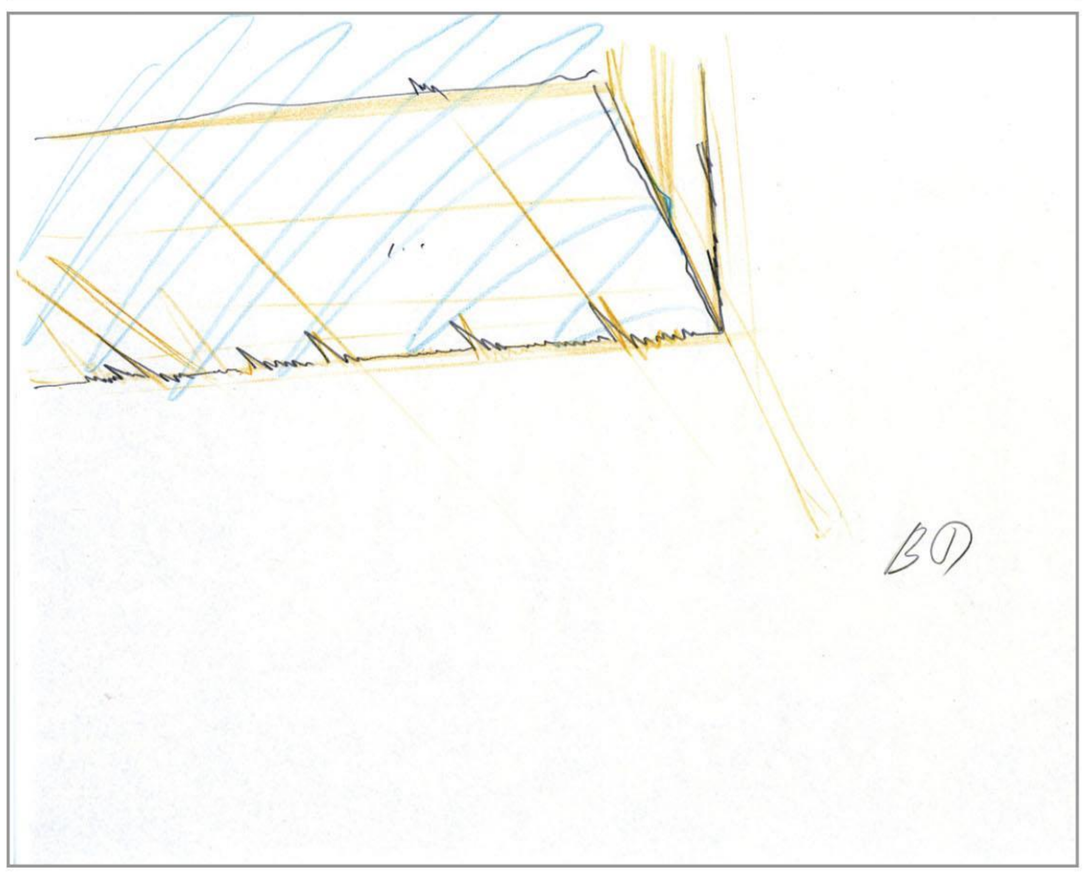
BK: When, thankfully, Studio Mir decided they were ready to come back and shoulder the heavy burden of animating Korra *again, they wisely enlisted the help of Studio Reve, a small, elite animation company run by their good friends. With the extra support of this talented crew working side by side with Mir, it was ensured that our original animation studio could see the series through all the way to the end of Book Four.*

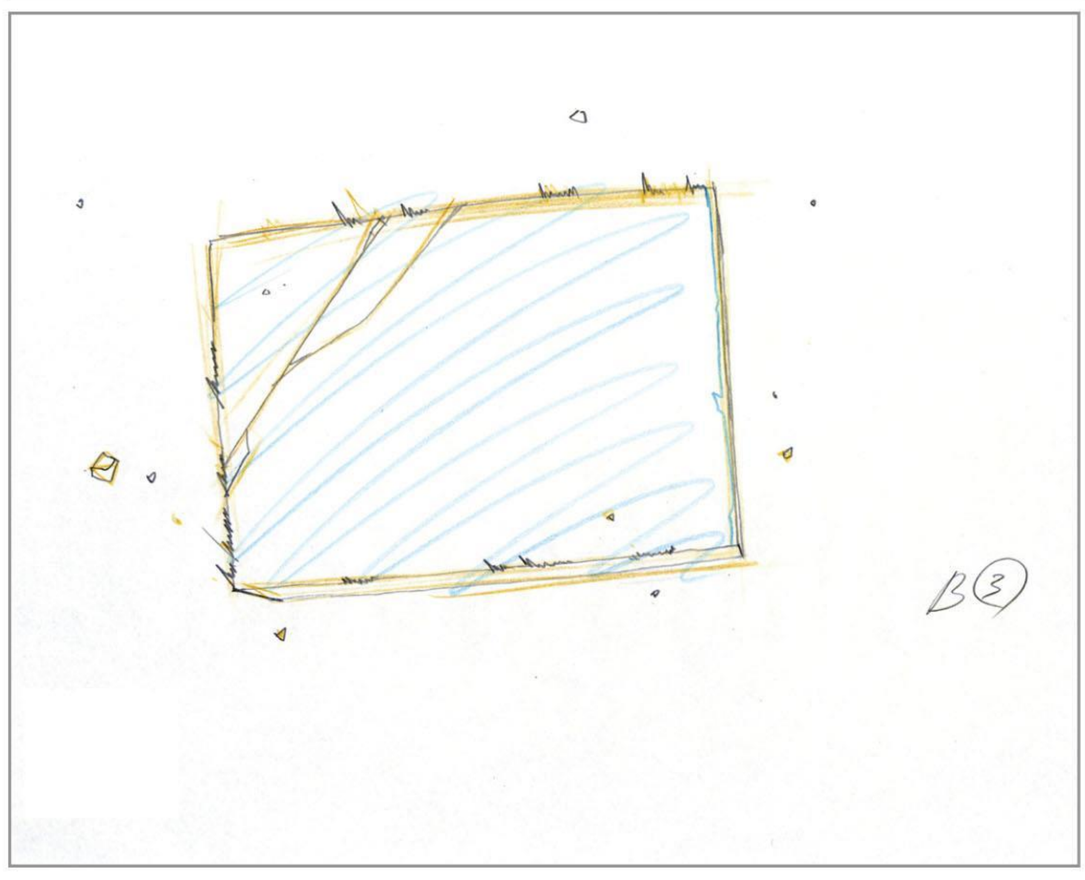














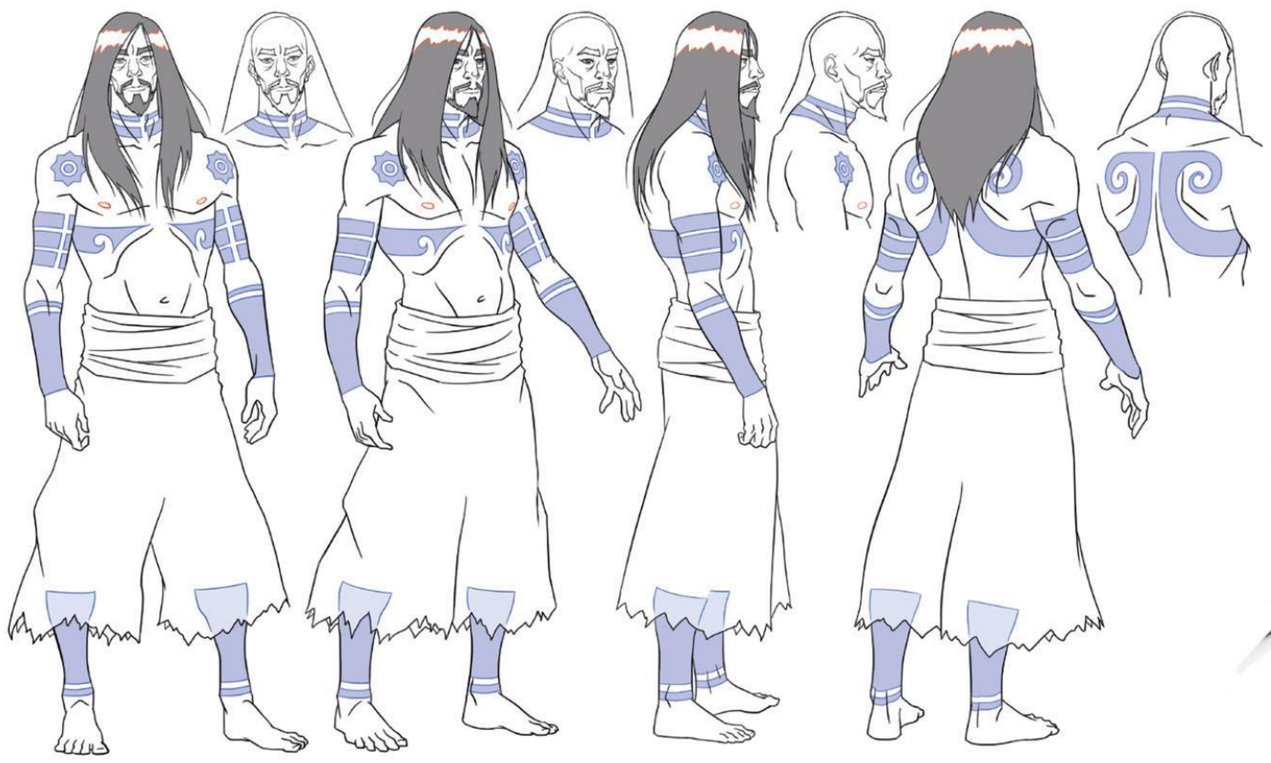
CHAPTER TWO

REBIRTH

GHAZAN

BK: Villains are always fun to create and write for, so Book Three was a blast in this regard. Mike, Tim, Josh, and I got to dream up a team of baddies who represented each of the four elements, but with rare and deadly skills. The designers and I hastily cranked out concept designs so the storyboard artists would have at least rough materials to work with at the start of the new season. Thankfully, Ghazan's basic look came together pretty smoothly for me. However, pinning down the specifics of his tattoos in the final model sheet took much more time. Luckily for the animators, we don't see them in all their glory beyond this episode. Ghazan prisoner concept and designs by Bryan Konietzko.





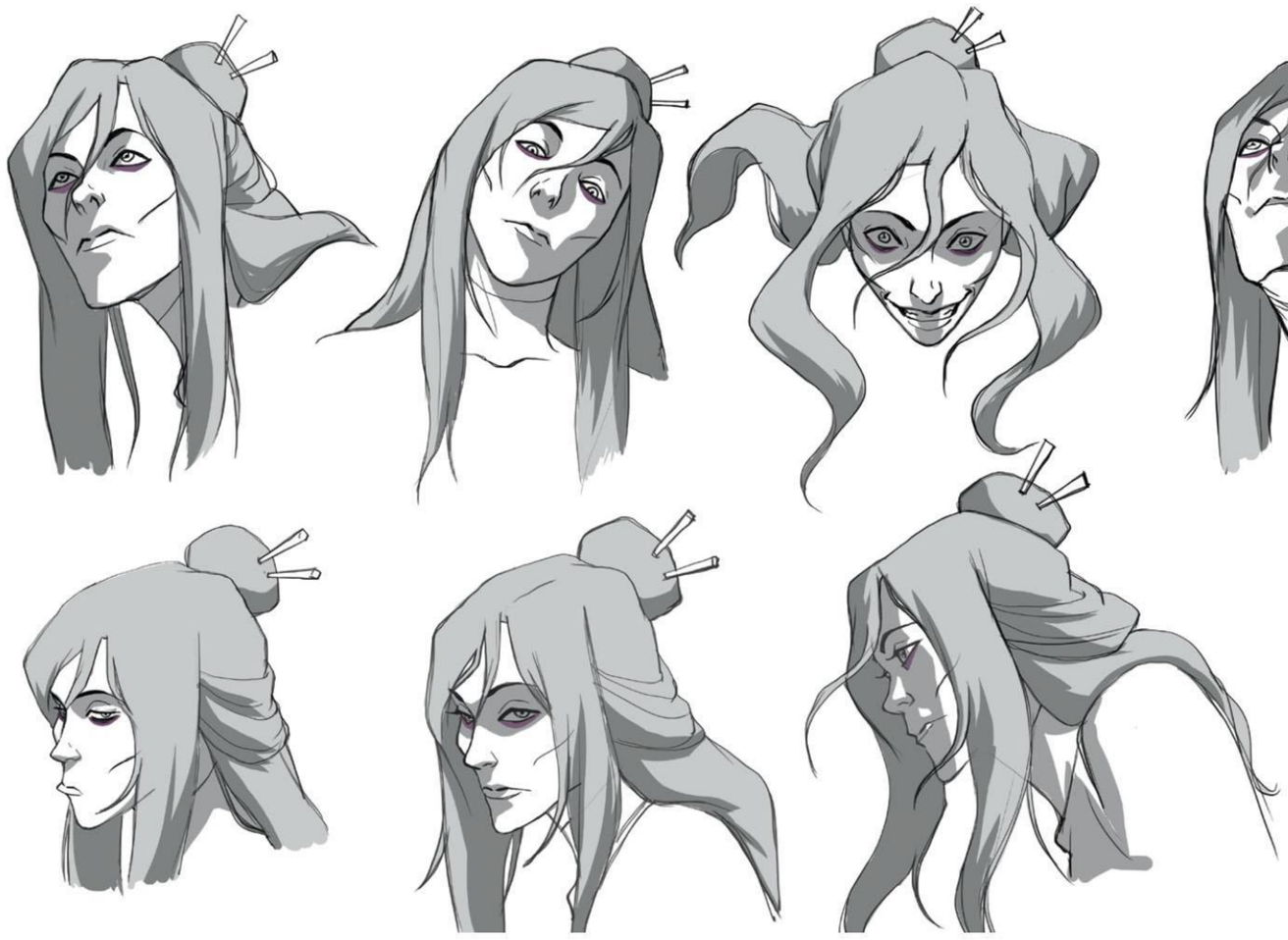


BK: Even when I did have the chance to complete a character design, I would often hand it over to Ryu for the expressions. He brings them to life so vibrantly. Ghazan designs by Bryan Konietzko. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf. Ghazan expressions by Ki-Hyun Ryu. *(Preceding spread) Ming-Hua's volcanic prison. Background design by Angela Sung. Painting by Lauren Zurcher.*

MING-HUA

BK: Ming-Hua's origins came from a grim joke pitch Mike and I had about Amon somehow surviving the explosion on the boat, but needing to bend water in place of his missing limbs. While we never took that grisly idea too seriously, it led to the creation of a Waterbender born without arms, who nevertheless could bend liquid arms that were far more effective in many ways. We had shown Katara bending water in a similar fashion, but with Ming-Hua we could explore the techniques much further. I based Ming-Hua's face and petite build on my friend Michi. She has arms, though, and they are covered in cool tattoos.







Ming-Hua designs by Bryan Konietzko. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf. Ming-Hua expressions by Ki-Hyun Ryu.



MD: Ming-Hua's water arms have so many practical uses. She can make them into hands to grab things or people, create tendrils and swing like an acrobat, or make deadly ice hooks and spears. And if she gets thirsty, she's got plenty of water within reach!



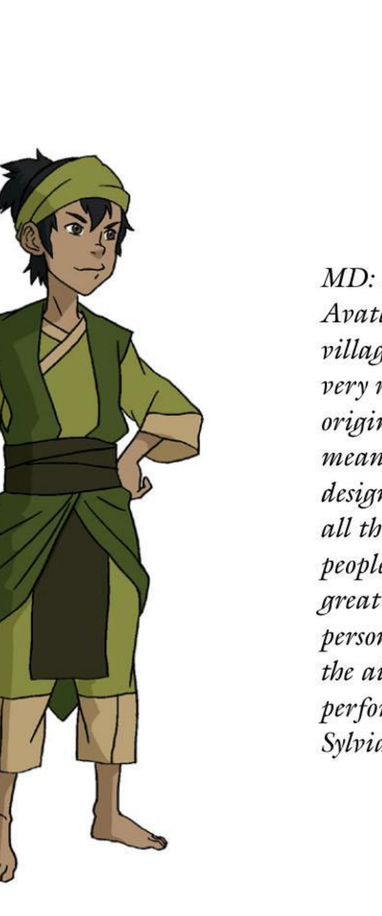














MD: In this episode, Team Avatar traveled from village to village, which was very reminiscent of the original series. But that also meant our character designer needed to populate all those villages with people! Christie Tseng did a great job of giving unique personalities to these folks at the airbending street performance. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.



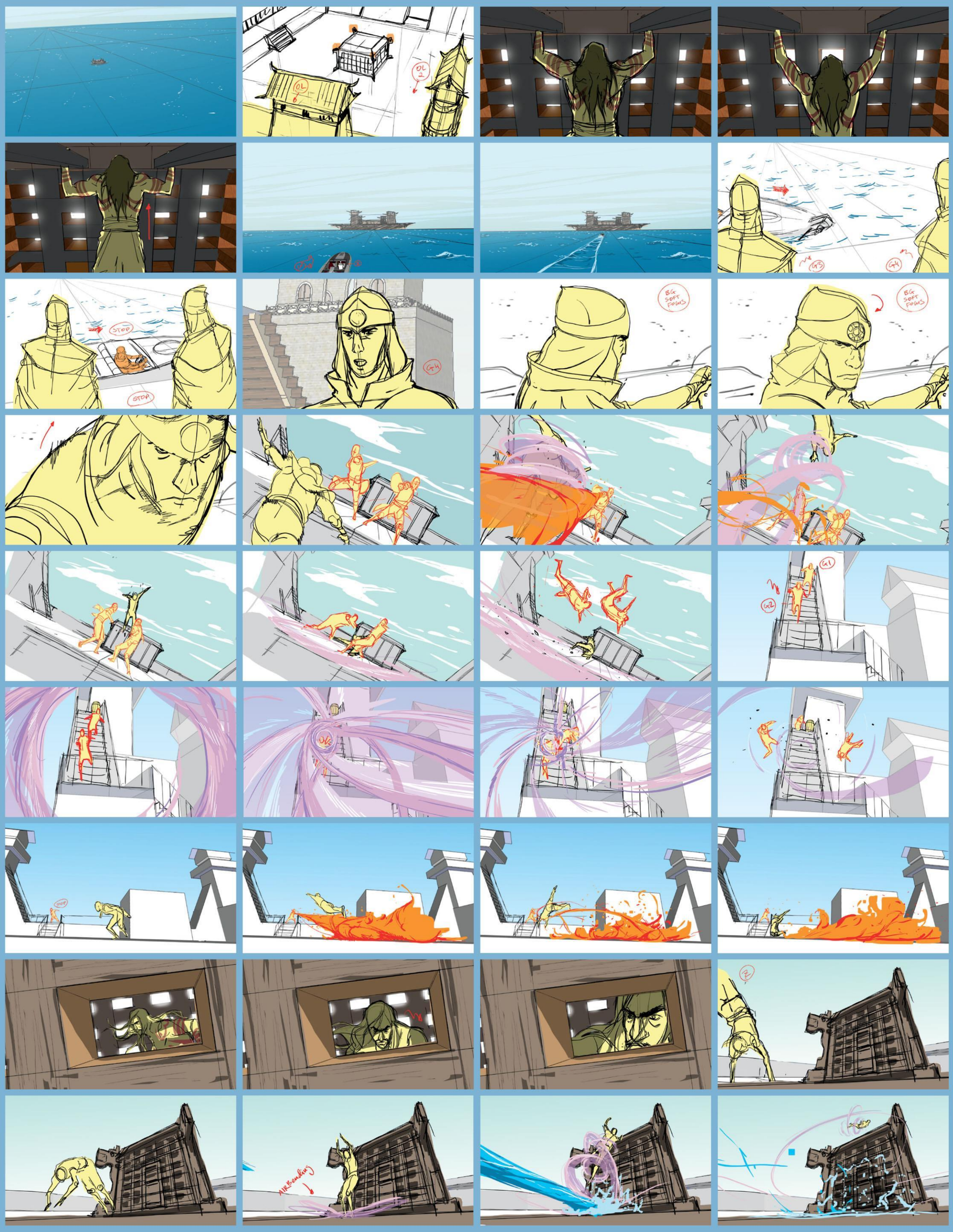
MD: Kai was a fun addition to the Team Avatar lineup. Writer Josh Hamilton named him after his son. And his personality and voice reminded us of Aang. Concept and head turns by Ki-Hyun Ryu. Designs by Angela Song Mueller and Ki-Hyun Ryu. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.

MD: New Airbender and farmer extraordinaire Kuon, along with his wife and children. Designs by Angela Song Mueller. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.

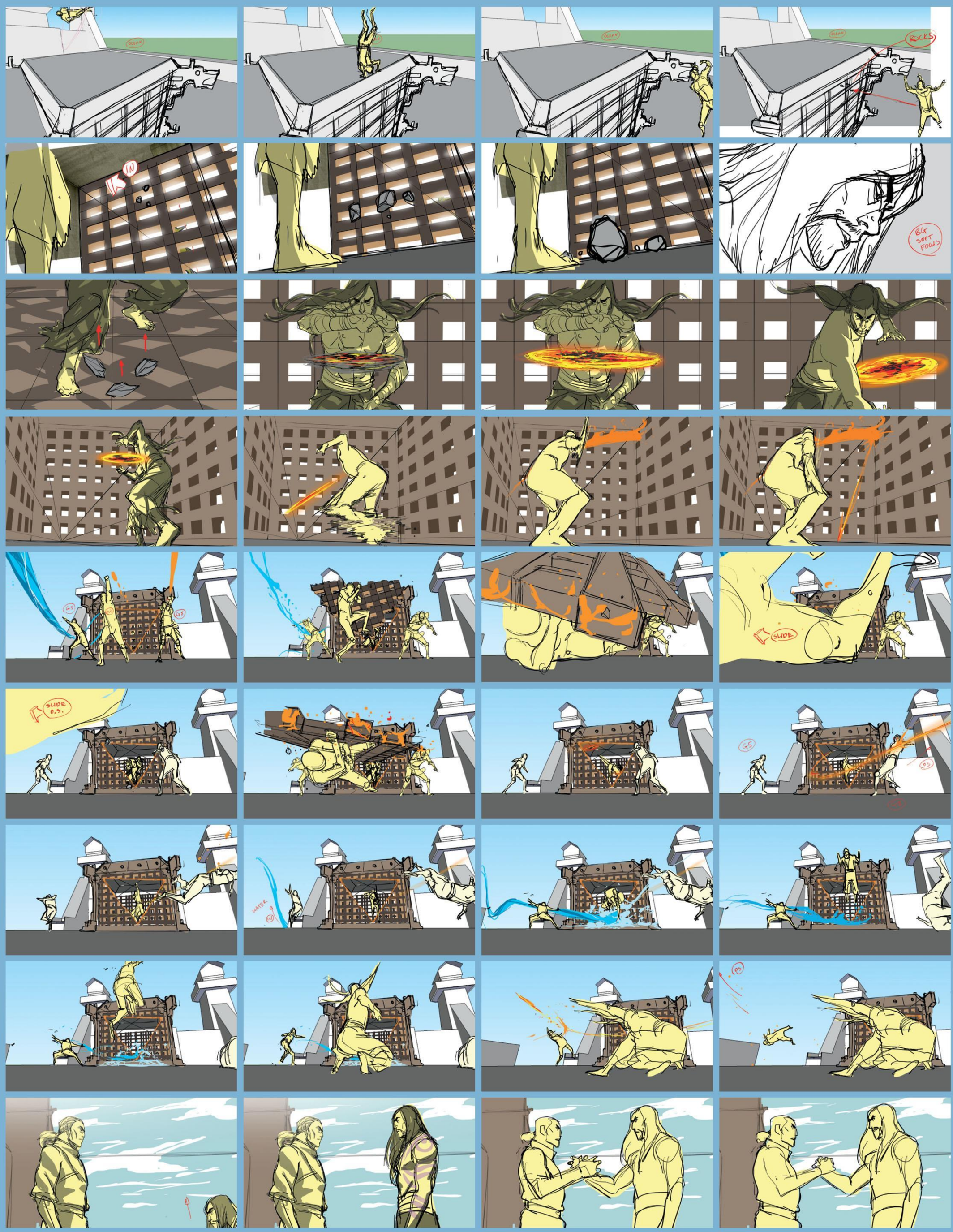




JDS: We were extremely lucky to have story artists from all corners of the animation industry on Book Three. Each brought their respective strengths to the table (pun intended), as evidenced here in this super-charming storyboard sequence by Natasha Wicke. Top: Background design by William Nanqing Niu. Painting by Lauren Zurcher.



JDS: Book Three had so many opportunities for awesome villain introductions. I love the idea that Zaheer was already a martial arts master but practiced a more freeform, parkour style. The gift of airbending only accentuated what he brought to the table naturally. You can feel the excitement as Ghazan tries to get a view of what's going on outside. Three small stones is all it took to create his awesome lava glaive and break him free of his massive wooden prison barge! Storyboard by Ki-Hyun Ryu and Joaquim Dos Santos.


OCEAN
ROCKS
IN
BG SOFT FOCUS
SLIDE
SLIDE 0.3.
WATER





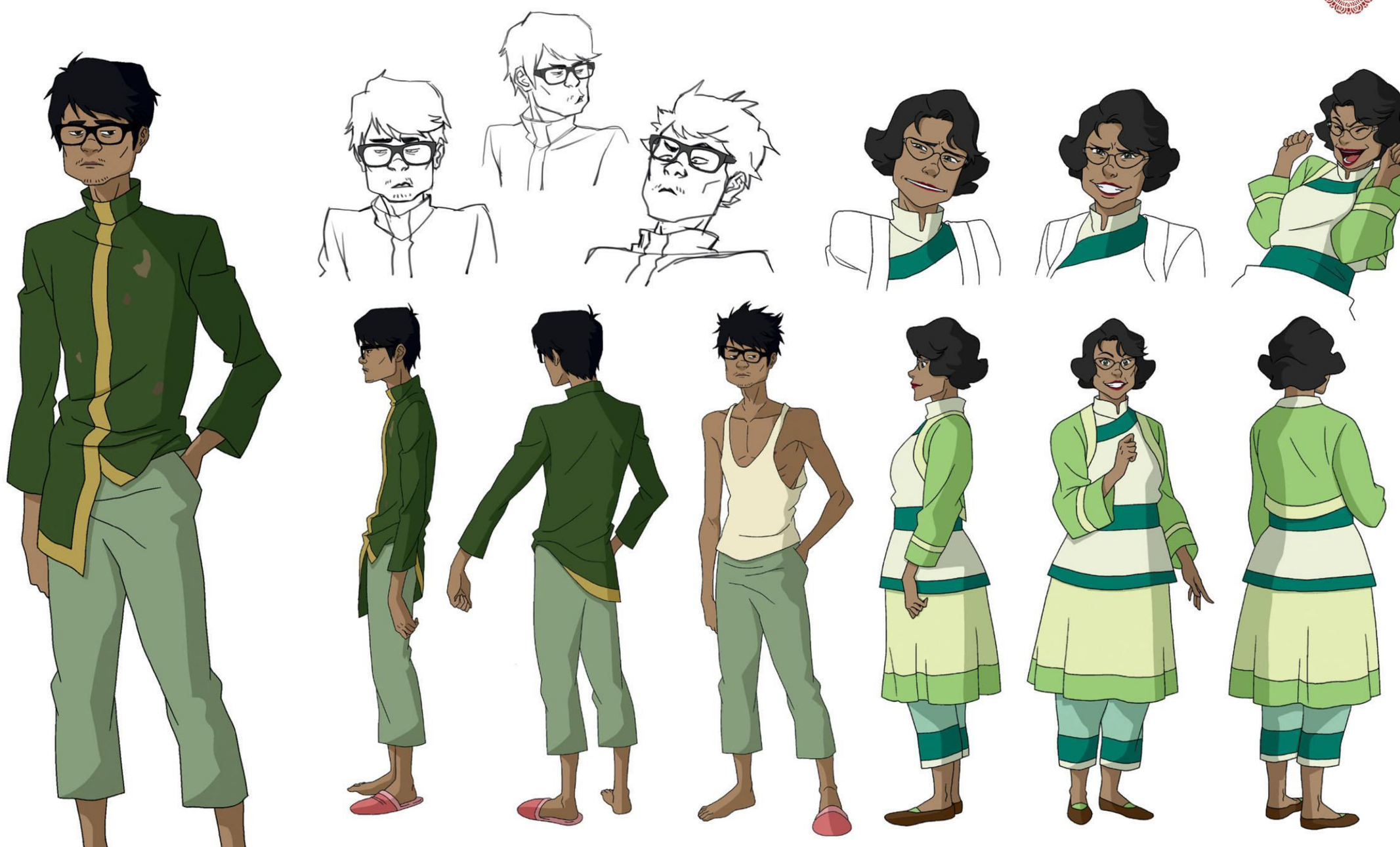
BK: It is always a precarious procedure when designing the adult, or in this case, senior, versions of our beloved characters. Angie took the first stab at updating Zuko, influenced by Joaquim's Old Friends poster and mixing in some attributes from Avatar Roku and Uncle Iroh. I jumped in to refine the design, trying to tie it back to Zuko's original model sheet a bit more by giving him a more angular look. Lord Zuko designs by Angela Song Mueller and Bryan Konietzko. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.



BK: Ming-Hua's bone-dry prison cell is suspended inside a volcanic vent. Background design by Angela Sung. Painting by Lauren Zurcher.



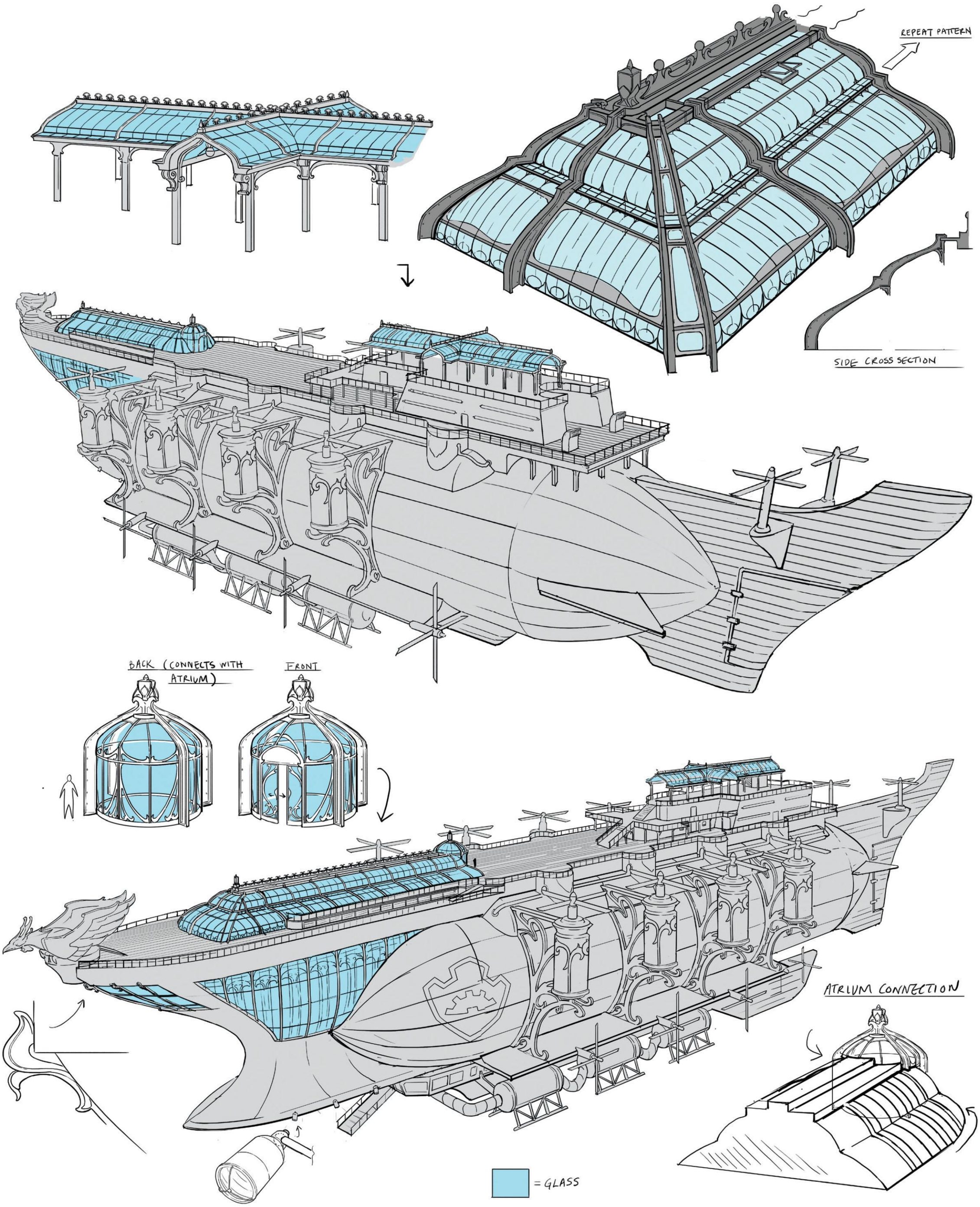
MD: Zuko's dragon, Druk, is a descendant of Ran and Shaw from the original series. Designs by Angela Song Mueller. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.



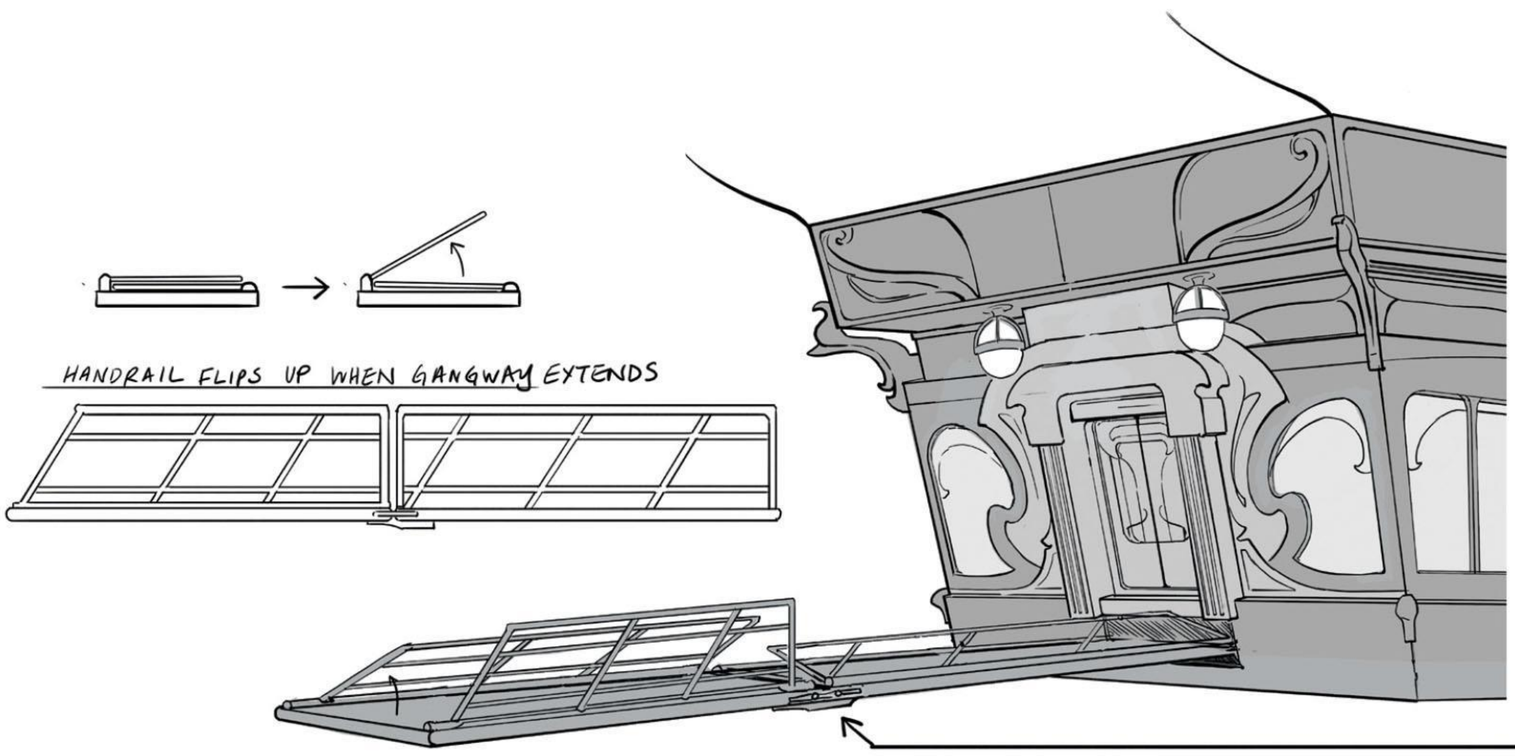
BK: As you can see in the "Ancillary Art" chapter in this book, Ryu loves caricaturing anyone and everyone, particularly the members of the Korra *crew. If I recall correctly, I read Josh Hamilton's outline and pitched the idea to the writers to make the recalcitrant new Airbender a caricature of Ryu, in name and likeness. Good, clean, fun revenge. Ryu designs by Bryan Konietzko and Christie Tseng. Ryu's mom design by Christie Tseng. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.*

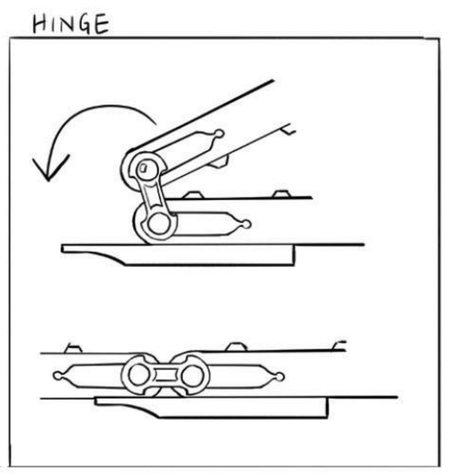


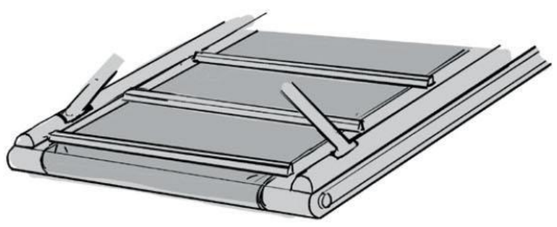
MD: The combination of William Nanqing Niu's background design and Emily Tetri's painting makes Ryu's house feel like a real place. I love the muted, atmospheric perspective on the outside gate and trees.

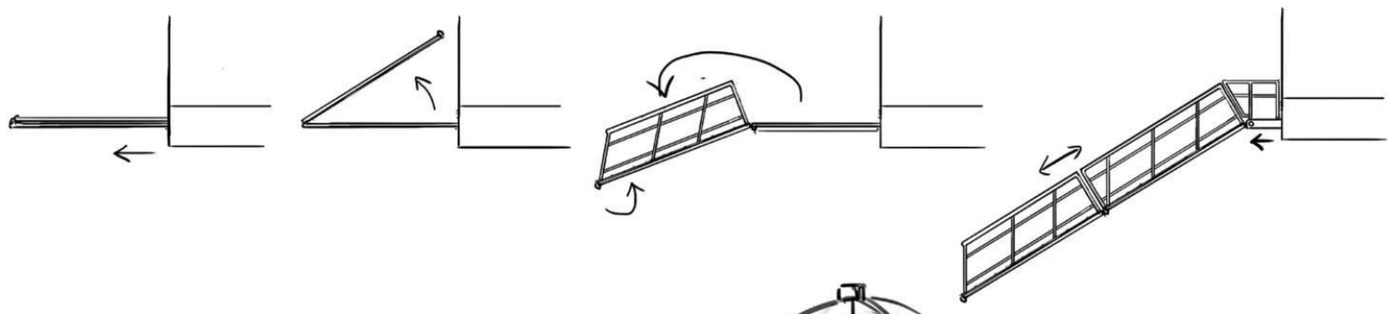


BK: Asami's prototype for the flagship Future Industries dirigible was a challenging and intricate design task, but our prop designer Christine's enthusiasm made it a fun process. I knew the upcoming Metal Clan city and vehicles were going to be steeped in an Art Deco style, so I gave Christine the direction to make this an Art Nouveau airship. She came up with this striking silhouette and developed it beautifully. Designs by Christine Bian.

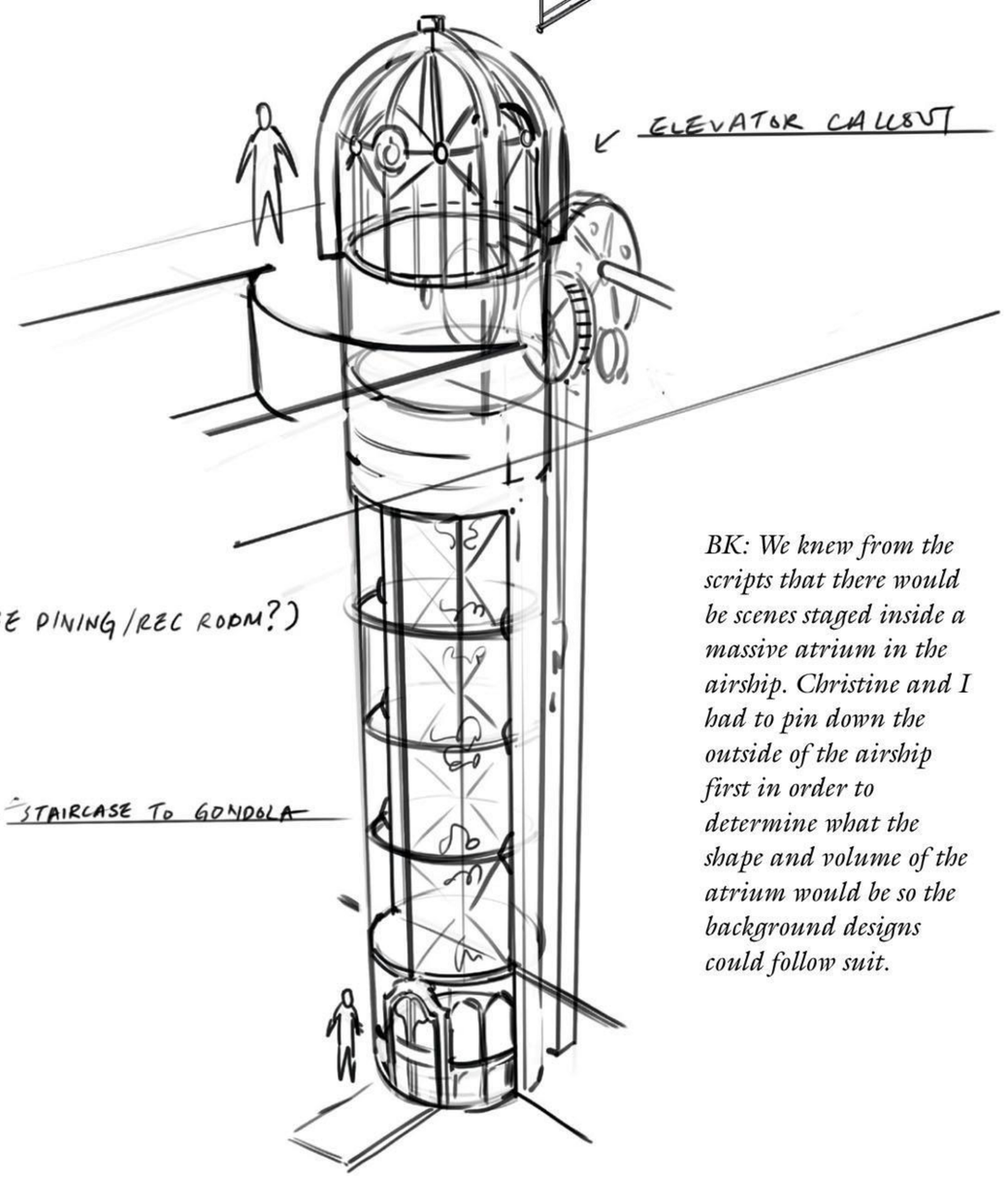


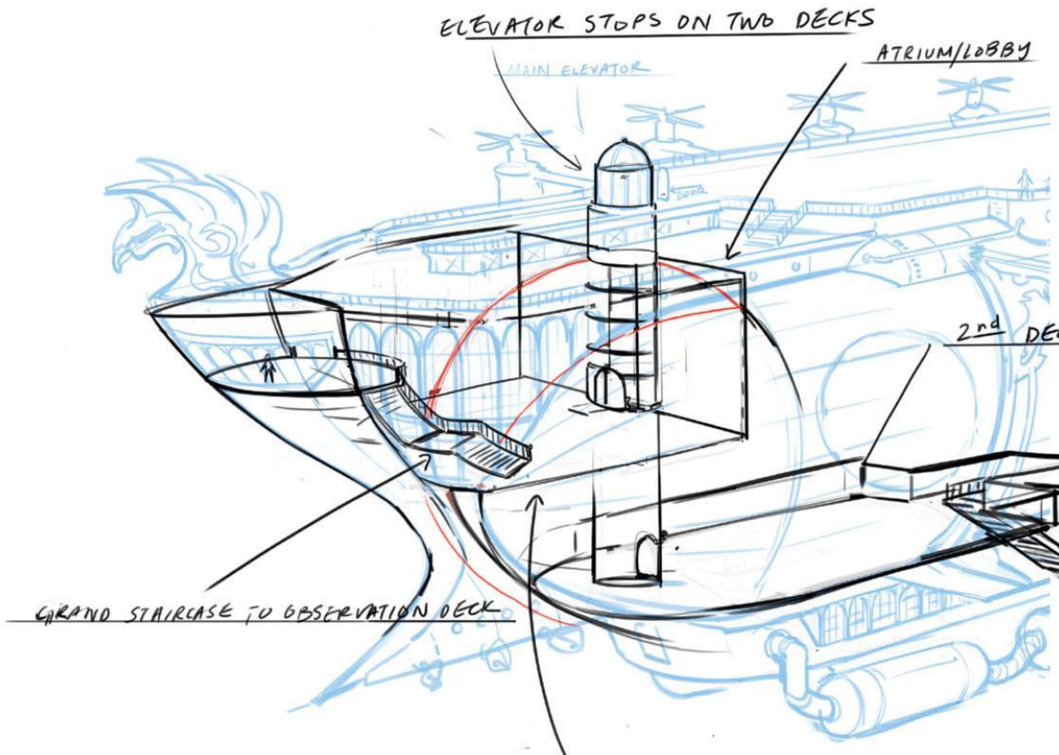




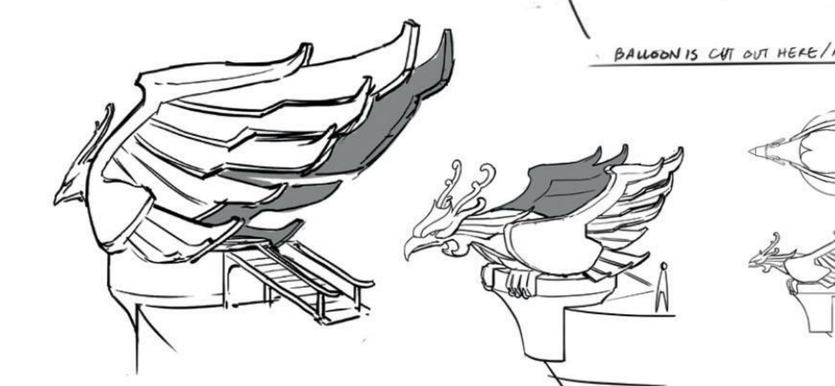


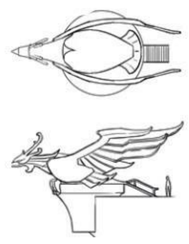
BK: Any props being designed for CG require a higher level of detail and specificity in the model sheets. Christine is skilled at not only making a prop look attractive but also figuring out how it functions, as you can see in these details.

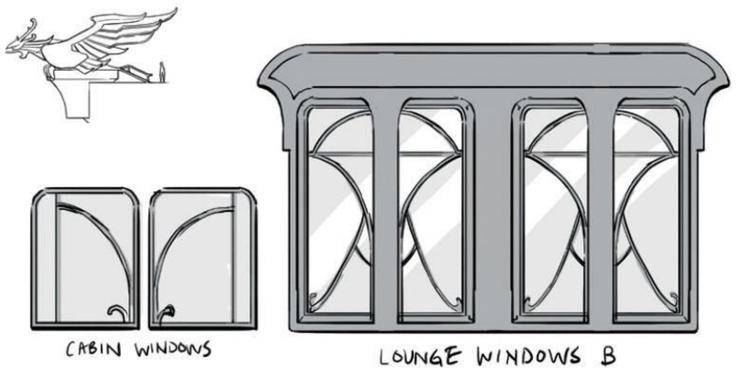


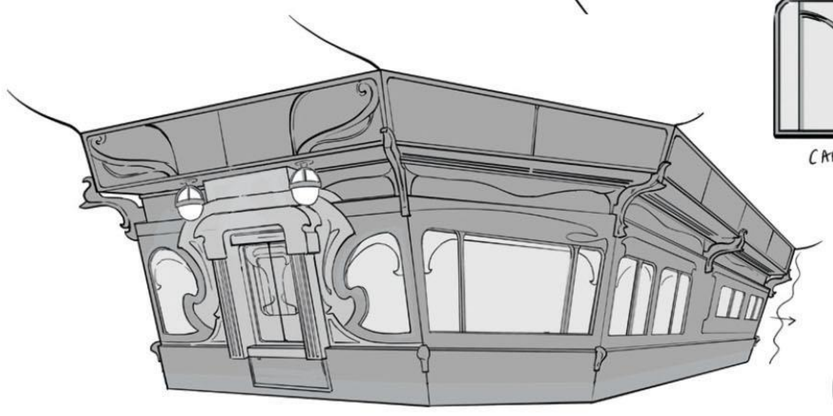


BK: We knew from the scripts that there would be scenes staged inside a massive atrium in the airship. Christine and I had to pin down the outside of the airship first in order to determine what the shape and volume of the atrium would be so the background designs could follow suit.

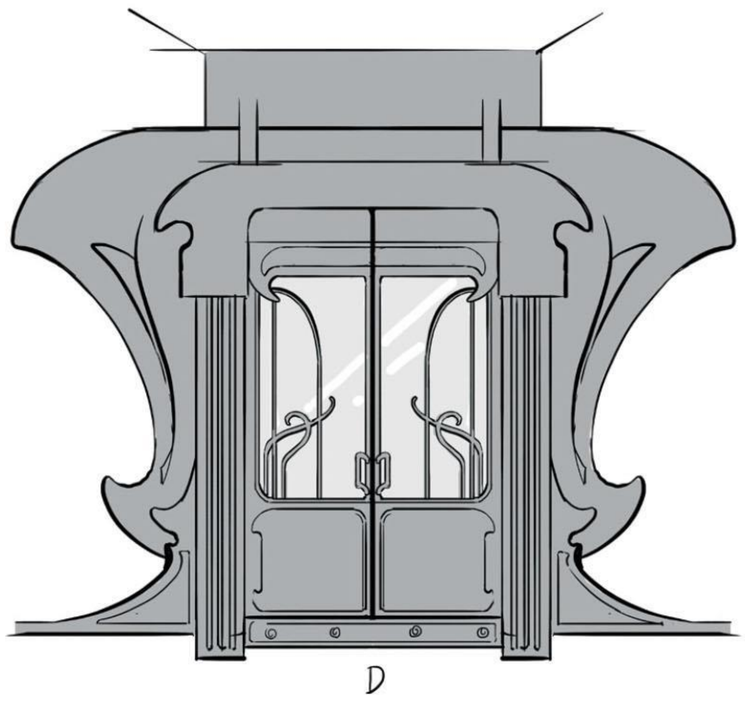


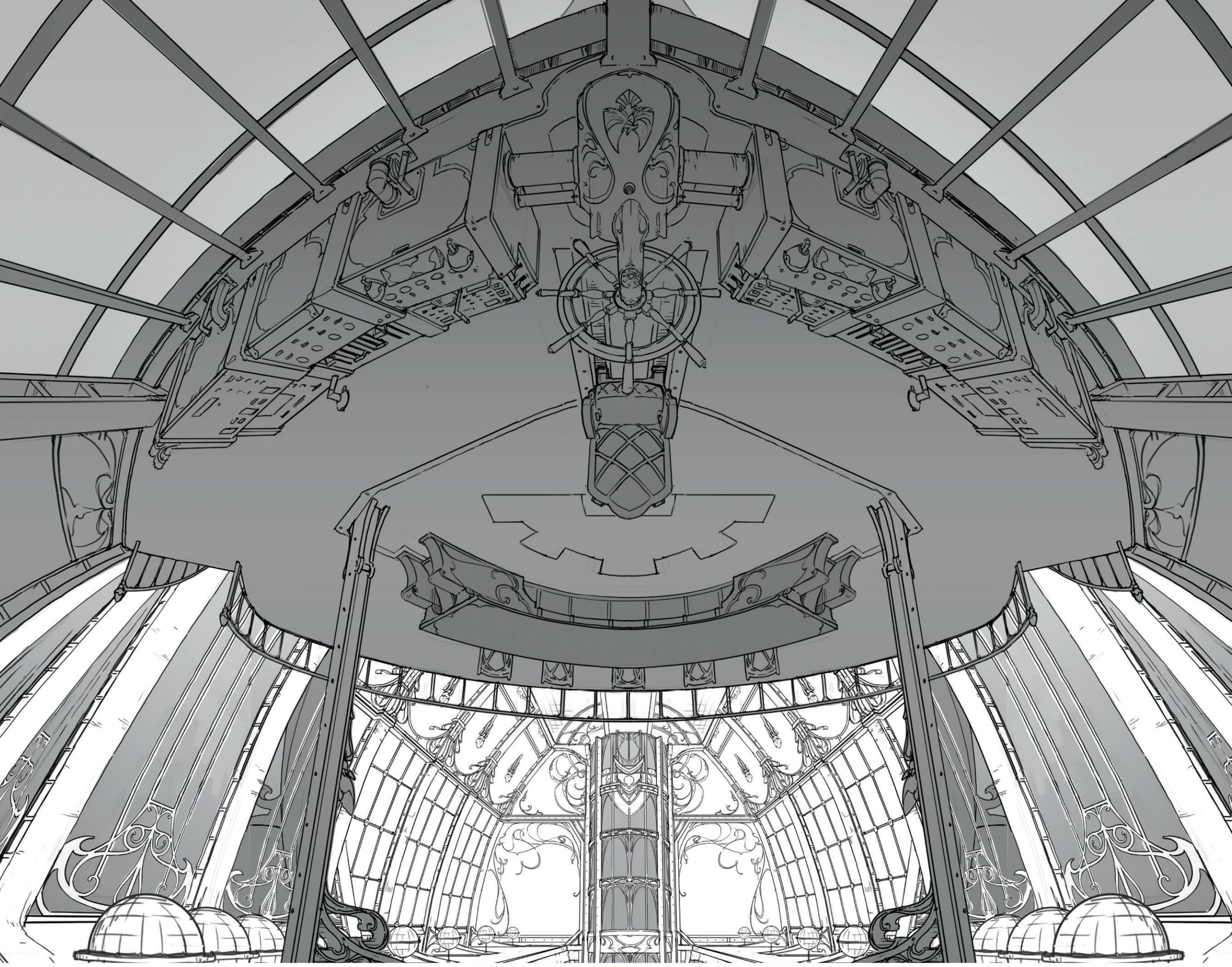


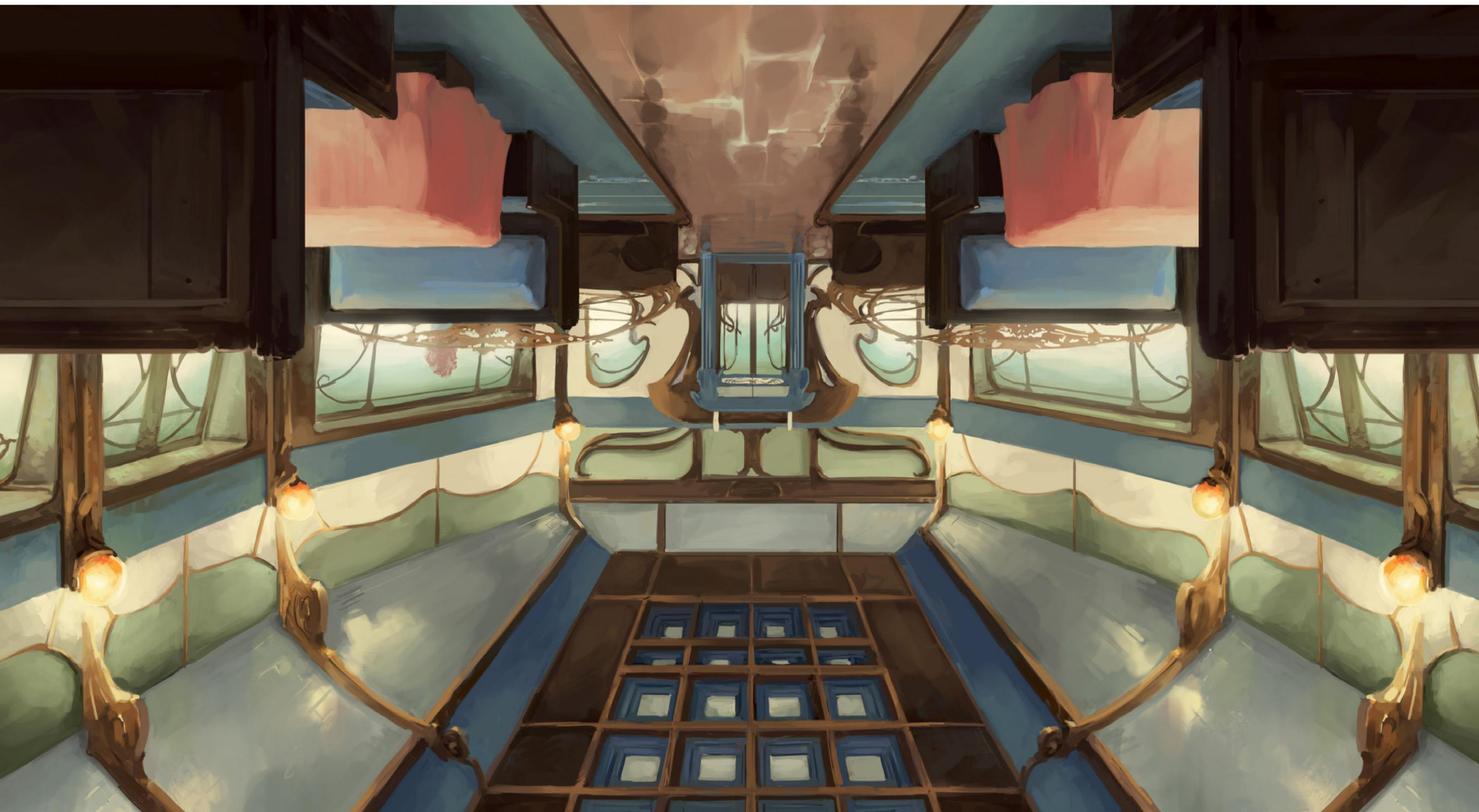




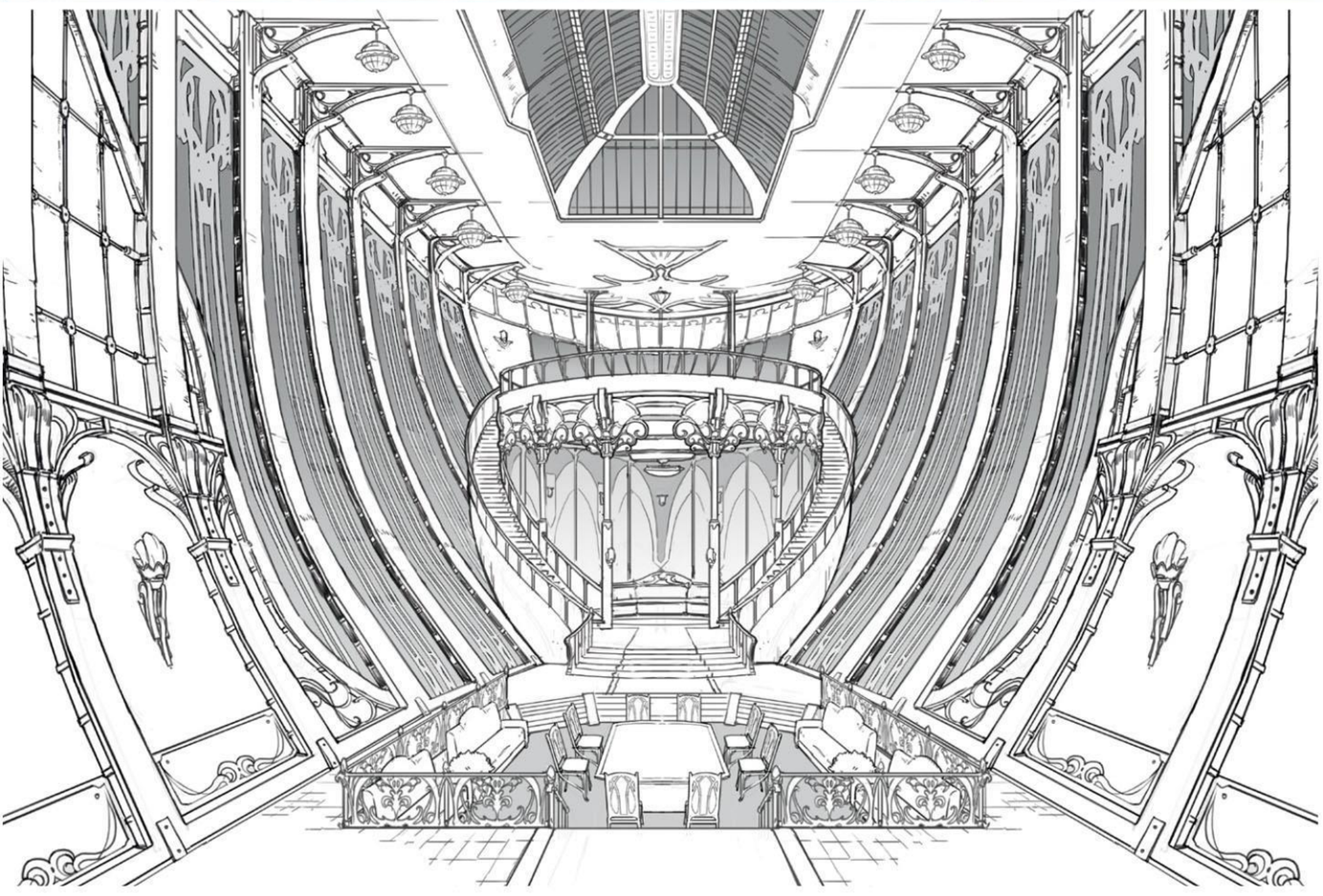
BK: Another interior location that required the outside to be designed first was the lounge that served as the passenger entrance and exit for the airship. Designs by Christine Bian.

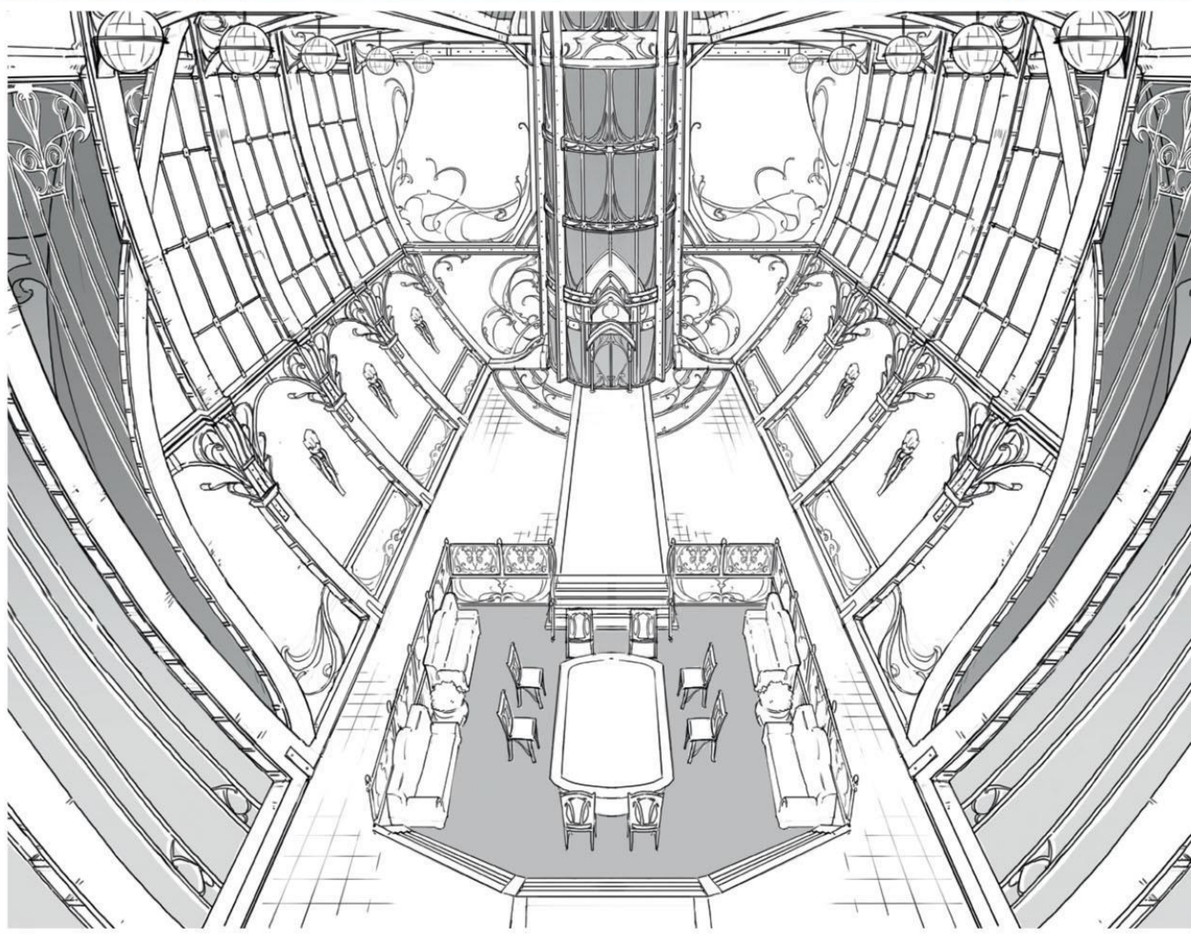




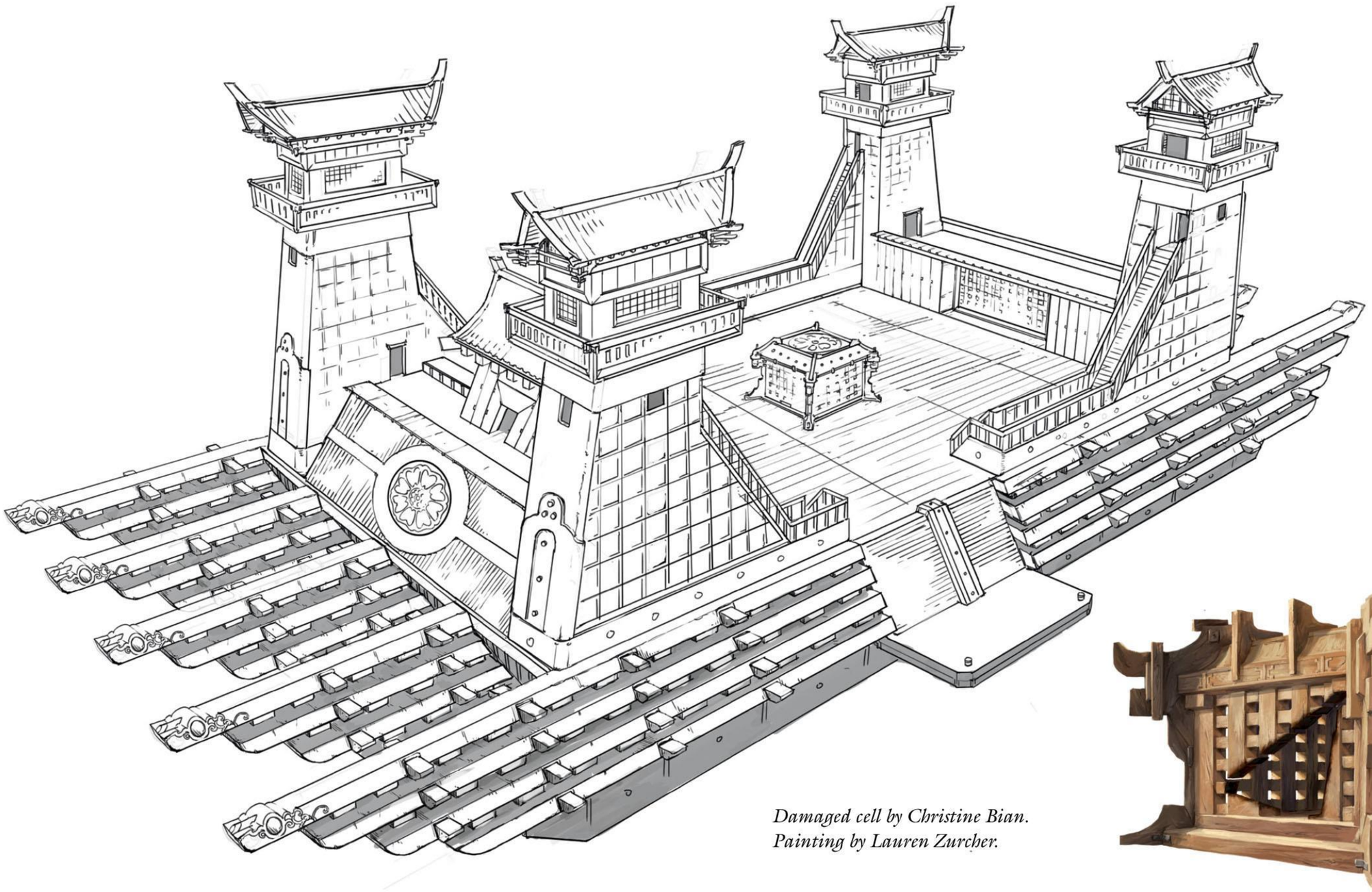








BK: William had the daunting task of designing the elaborate Art Nouveau atrium and cockpit within the parameters of the bizarre volumes dictated by the exterior design of the airship. The CG team helped us out by providing a rough model of the inside space, including the curvilinear window frames—not easy things to draw in perspective! William executed these designs stupendously, resulting in one of my favorite locations of the season. Background designs by William Nanqing Niu. Painting by Frederic Stewart. (Opposite) Top: Background design by Angela Sung. Painting by Emily Tetri. Bottom: Background design by William Nanqing Niu.

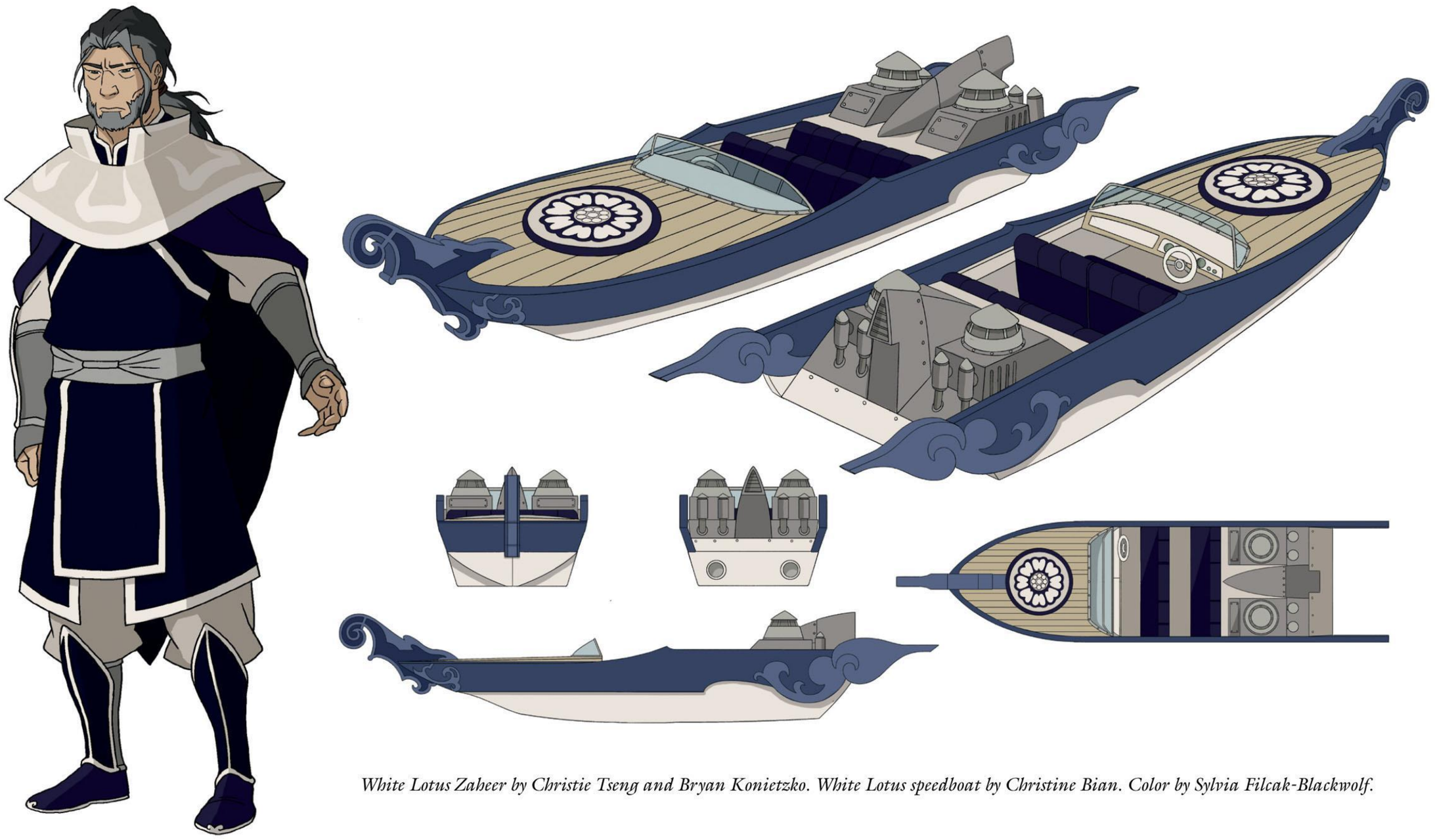


Damaged cell by Christine Bian.
Painting by Lauren Zurcher.





MD: The White Lotus imprisoned the Earthbender Ghazan on a wooden barge, miles away from land. Background designs by William Nanqing Niu. Painting by Emily Tetri.

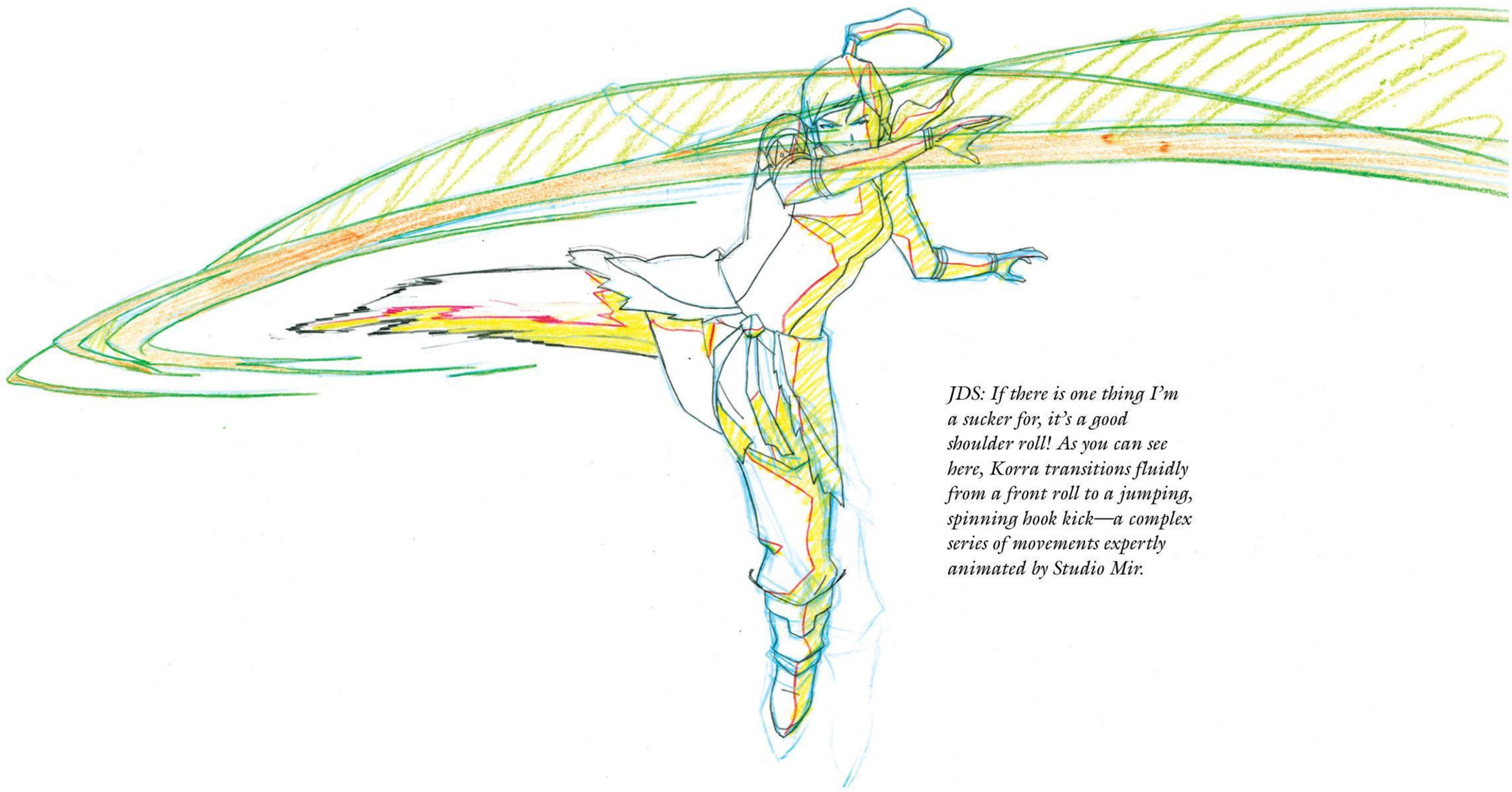


White Lotus Zaheer by Christie Tseng and Bryan Konietzko. White Lotus speedboat by Christine Bian. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.



BK: Tenzin and Korra, still full of hope and optimism at this point, arrive in this idyllic Earth Kingdom farming village to meet a potential airbending recruit. I often encourage the background painters to try to capture a specific, naturalistic time of day and sense of weather. Fred did that wonderfully here with this moody, misty sunset. Background design by William Nanqing Niu. Painting by Frederic Stewart.

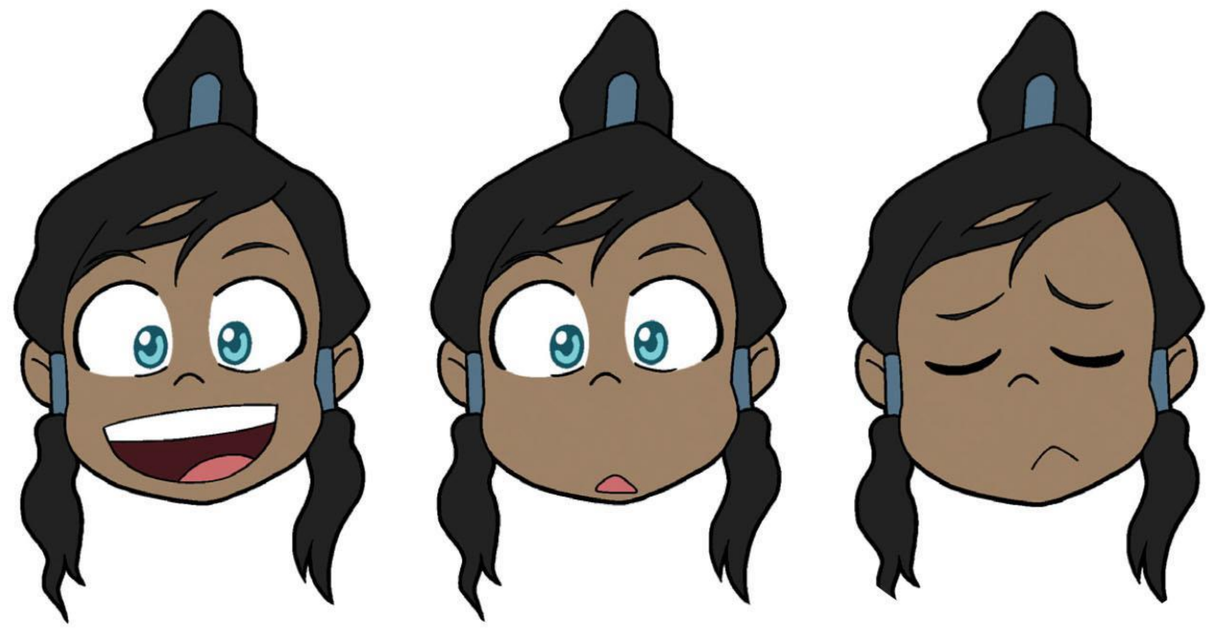


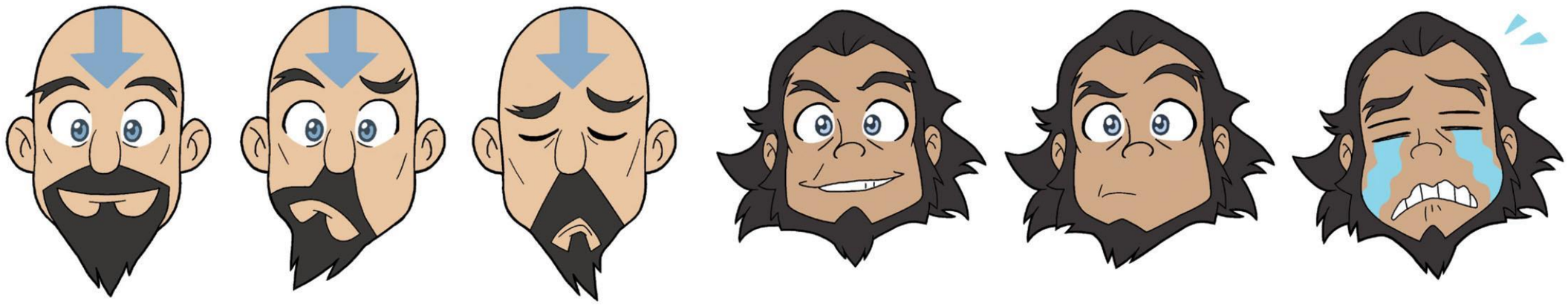


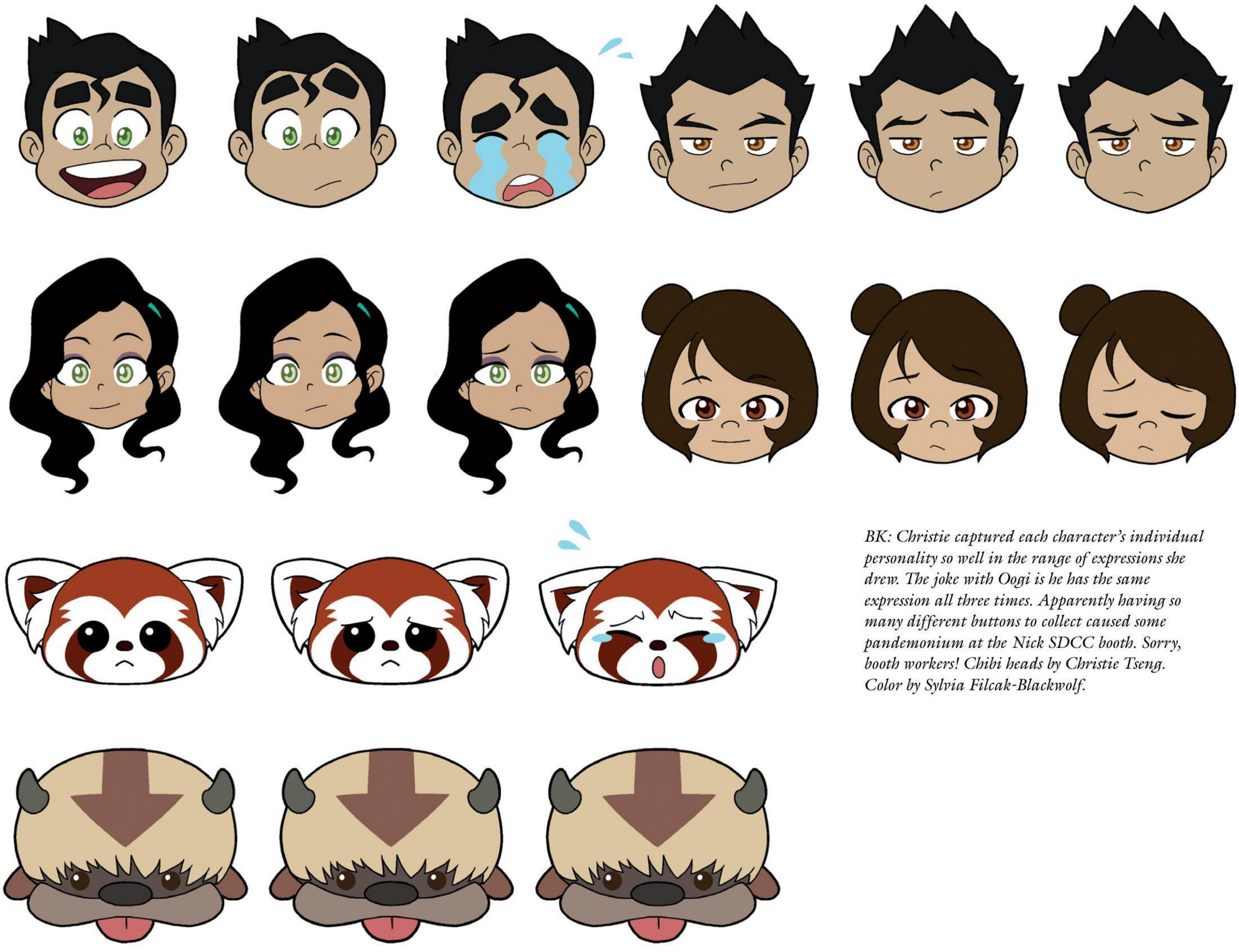
JDS: If there is one thing I'm a sucker for, it's a good shoulder roll! As you can see here, Korra transitions fluidly from a front roll to a jumping, spinning hook kick—a complex series of movements expertly animated by Studio Mir.

CHIBI TIME!

MD: As we pitched out the story for this episode, Bryan, the writers, and I thought it would be fun to show Team Avatar's search for new Airbenders in a montage with chibi heads of the characters showing the voyage from town to town. We used a bunch of different expressions to show Team Avatar's transition from being super excited to dismayed over their inability to recruit new Airbenders. And since we had so many great, funny expressions, Bryan and Christie turned them into buttons for the 2013 San Diego Comic-Con. I wonder if anyone collected them all?







BK: Christie captured each character's individual personality so well in the range of expressions she drew. The joke with Oogi is he has the same expression all three times. Apparently having so many different buttons to collect caused some pandemonium at the Nick SDCC booth. Sorry, booth workers! Chibi heads by Christie Tseng. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.



CHAPTER THREE

THE EARTH QUEEN

Top: Mako and Bolin's family. Designs by Angela Song Mueller. Cleanup by Evon Freeman. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf. Bottom: Chow and Tu designs by Christie Tseng. Grandma Yin design by Angela Song Mueller. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.

(Preceding spread) After seventy years, Ba Sing Se's Lower Ring has become even more crowded and overpopulated. Background design by William Nanqing Niu. Painting by Lauren Zurcher.

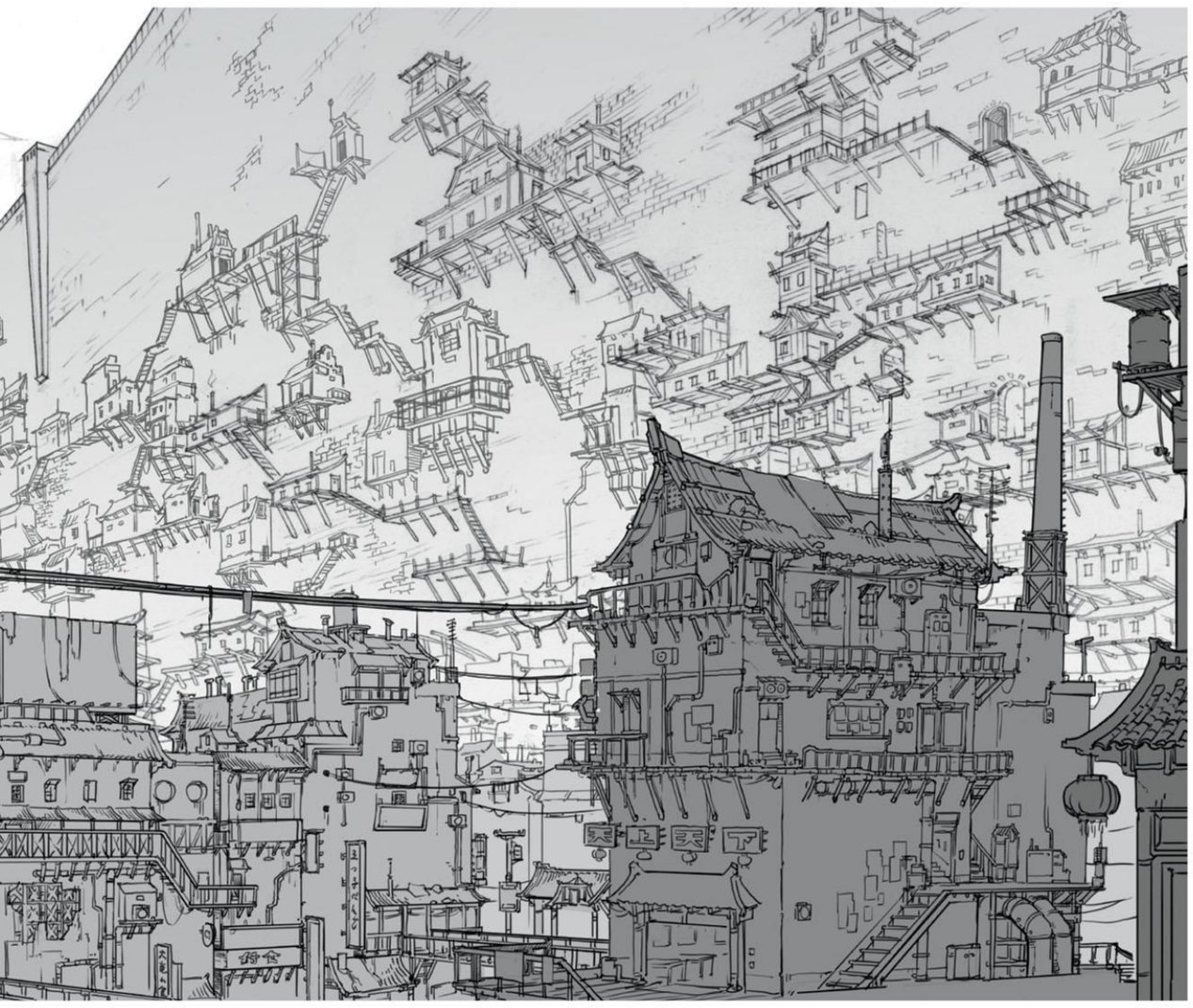


BK: Here we have a touching family portrait of Bolin and Mako as little boys, along with our first and only glimpse of their parents, the bequeathers of their signature eyebrows. Our team always did a fabulous job of creating these old-fashioned posed photos. Original storyboard sketch by Chris Palmer. Finished design by Christie Tseng. Character tones by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf. Background painting by Emily Tetri.





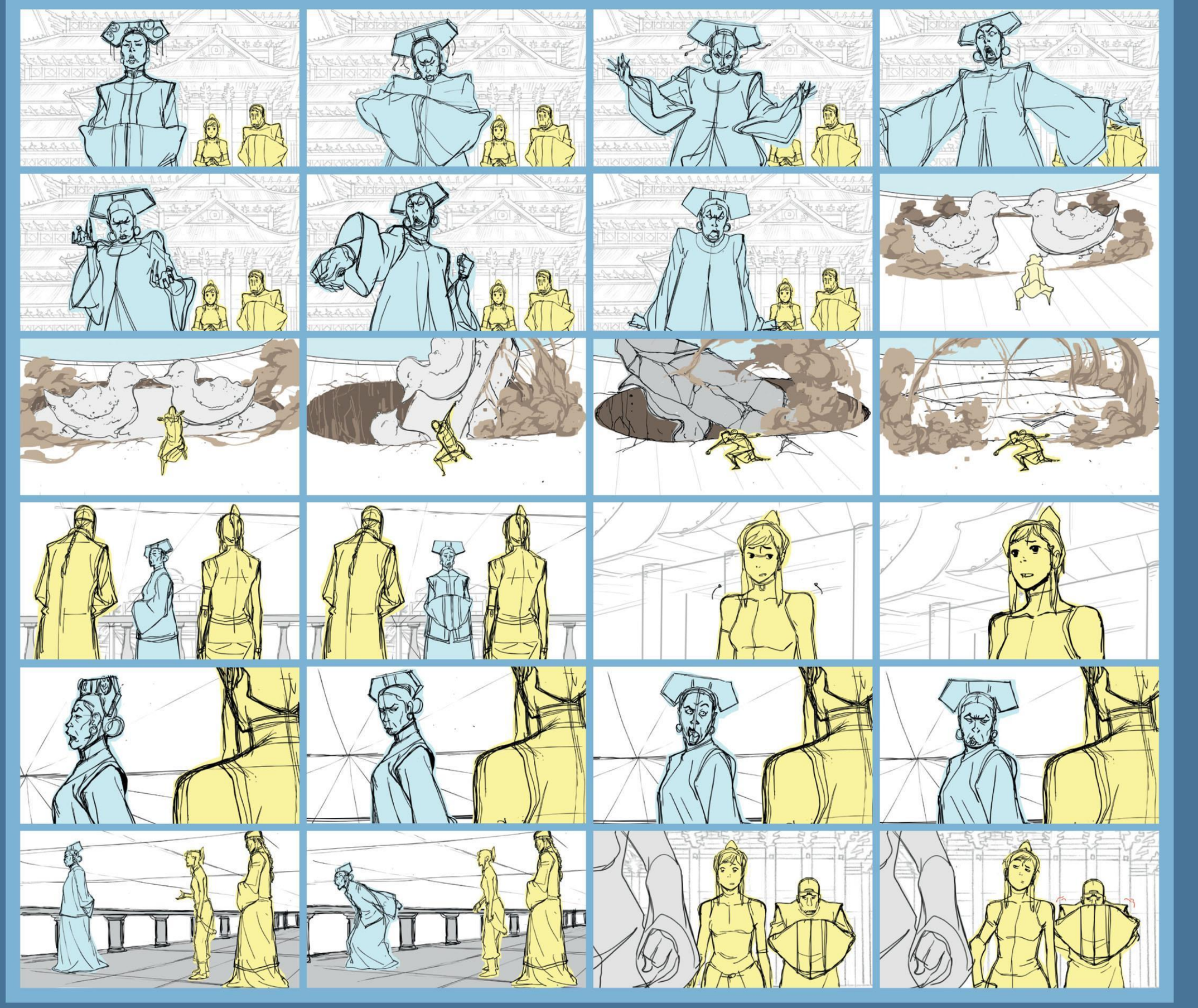






MD: Although we reused a lot of the background designs of Ba Sing Se from the original series, we needed more updated versions of the Lower Ring. The aesthetic was inspired by Kowloon, a densely populated settlement in Hong Kong. We wanted the Lower Ring to look like people kept building on top of what was originally there to give it the feeling of being very cramped. Background designs by William Nanqing Niu. Top, middle right, and opposite page: Paintings by Frederic Stewart. Bottom right: Painting by Emily Tetri.





Top: Grand Secretariat Gun designs by Angela Song Mueller and Ki-Hyun Ryu. Queen Hou-Ting designs by Angela Song Mueller. Portrait by Christie Tseng. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf. Bottom: Storyboard by Ki-Hyun Ryu and Chris Palmer. Opposite page: A beautiful canal in the Upper Ring, near the palace. Background design by Angela Sung. Painting by Emily Tetri.



THE BARBARIANS

JDS: I sometimes have the fun and easy job of coming up with concept art and then leaving the hard work of making sense of my scribbles to people far more talented than I. Gombo here is the perfect example of that. Bryan knew of my love for all things *Mad Max* and asked if I'd be interested in coming up with an idea for the leader of this gang. The sketch you see here was done on my iPad, and Christie Tseng did all the legwork of making him real, as well as designing the rest of the gang members. I am always amazed at how much personality she is able to add to each model. Gombo concepts by Joaquim Dos Santos. Design by Christie Tseng. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.









BK: Joaquim's initial concept featured red-dyed streaks in Gombo's hair, but I changed them to green to go with the Earth Kingdom theme. This ended up pushing his design over the edge into full-blown Eighties-movie territory, a place where Joaquim feels right at home.

MD: Writer Tim Hedrick takes every opportunity to try to work barbarians into his scripts. What I like about these particular barbarians is that even though they are a gang of rabble-rousers, they are just looking out for the common man and don't believe the queen is doing what is best for her citizens. This page and opposite: Barbarian designs by Christie Tseng. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.





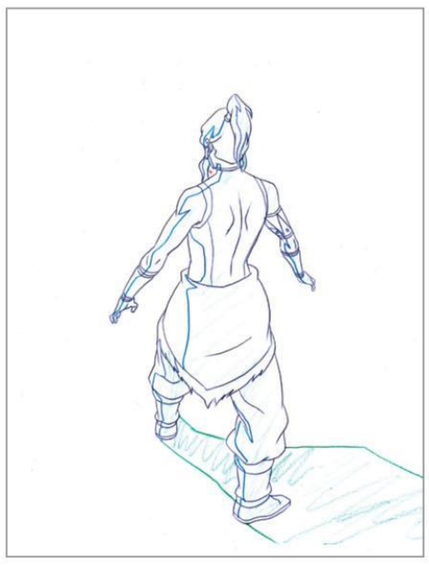
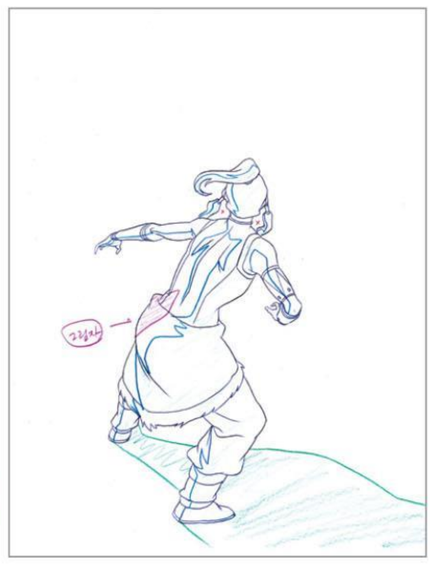






MD: Asami and Korra collect the queen's tax money from this bank in a rundown Earth Kingdom town. Background design by William Nanqing Niu. Painting by Frederic Stewart.





그림자

다리강화






G12

G13

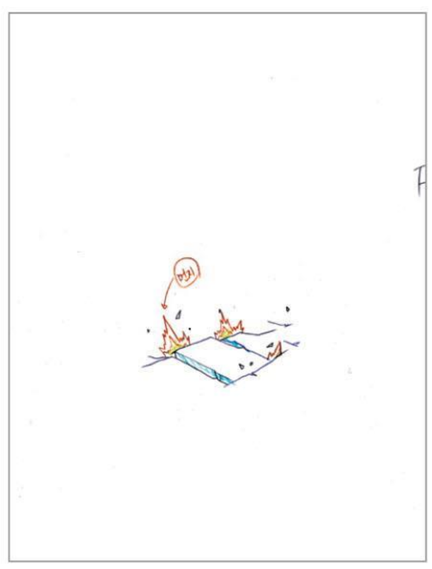
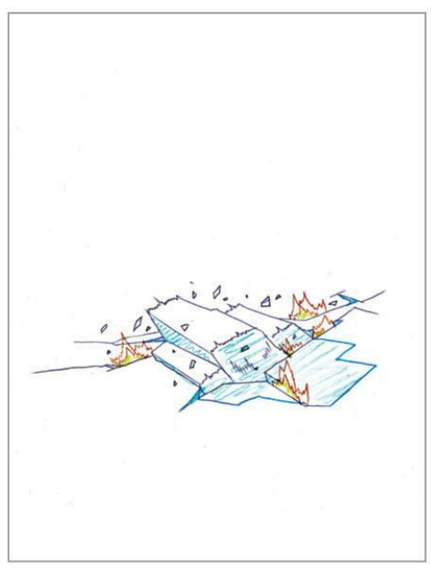
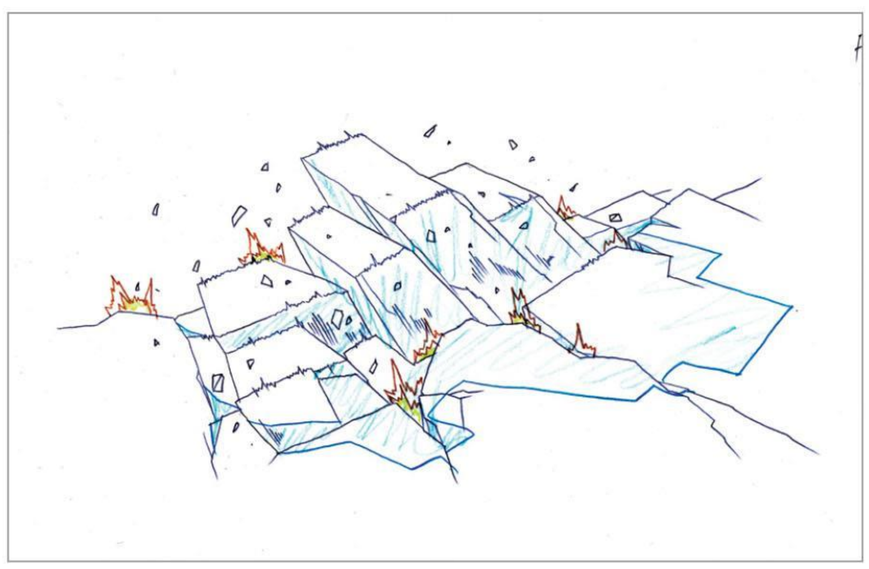
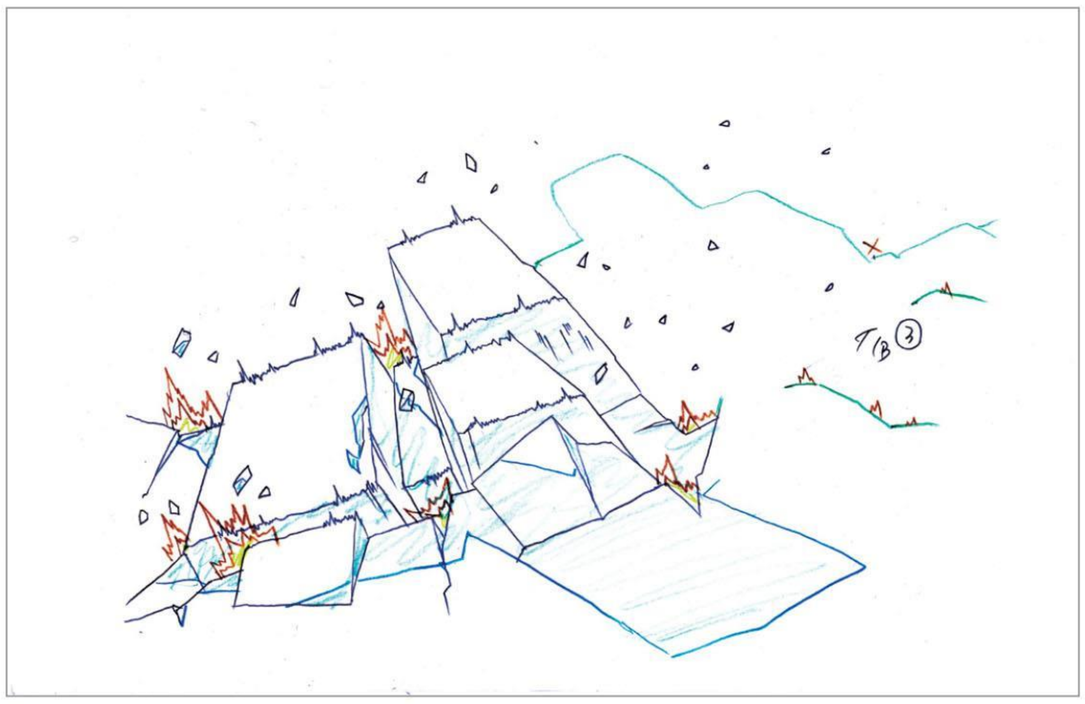
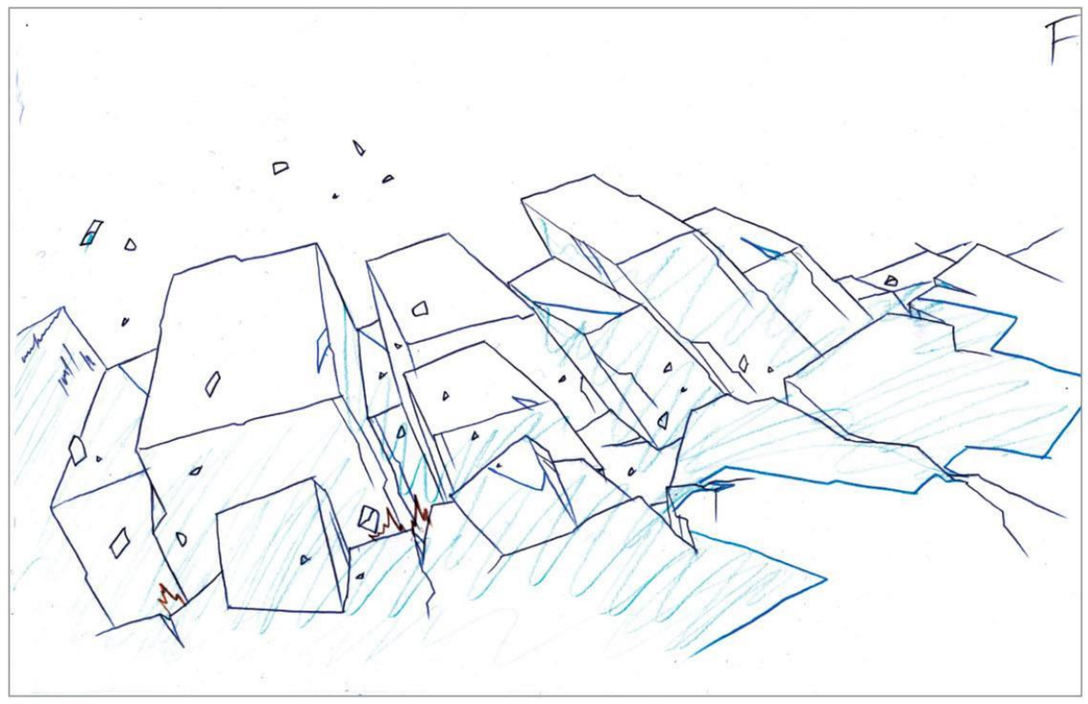
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G16

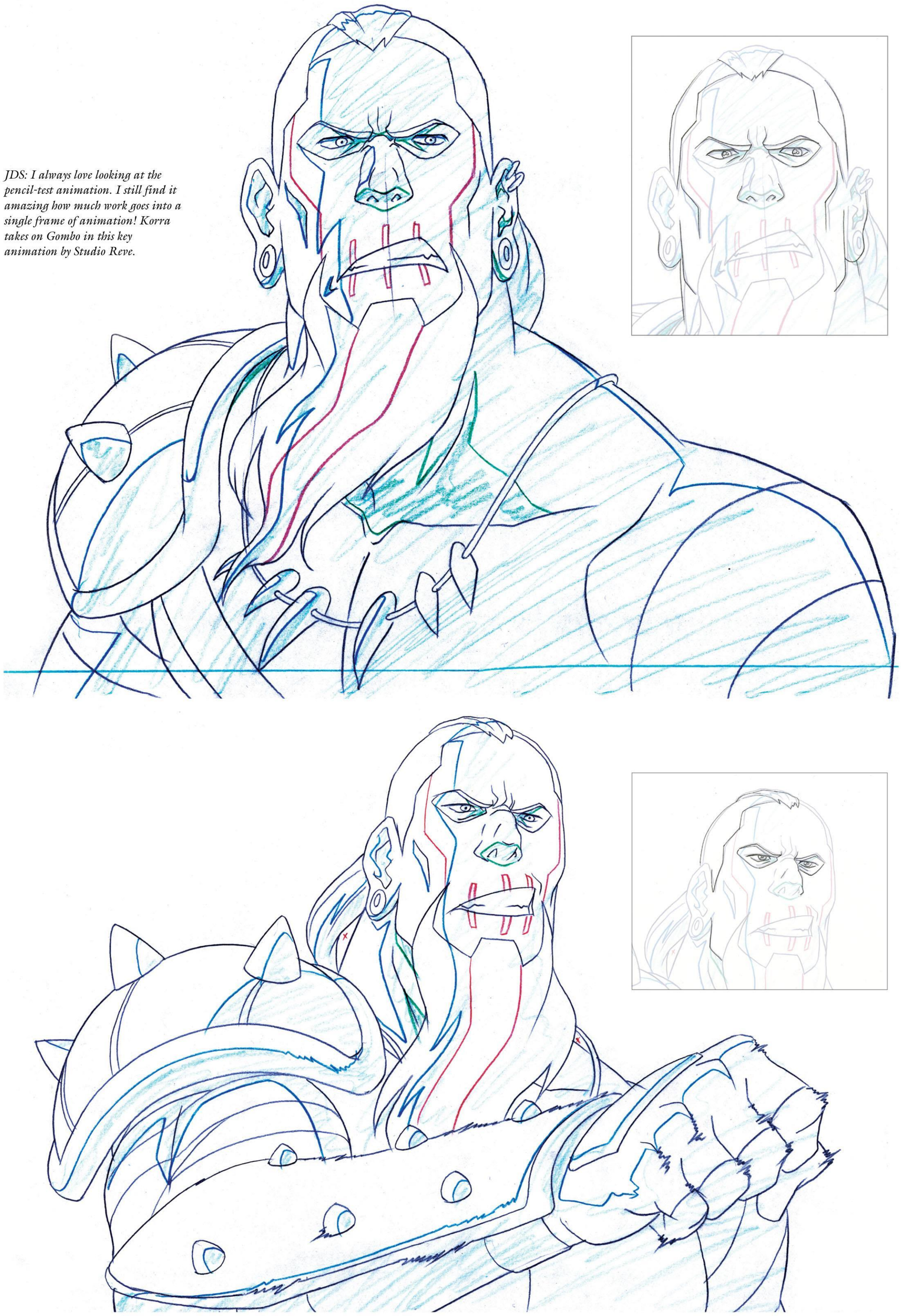
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G23






JDS: I always love looking at the pencil-test animation. I still find it amazing how much work goes into a single frame of animation! Korra takes on Gombo in this key animation by Studio Reve.





CHAPTER FOUR

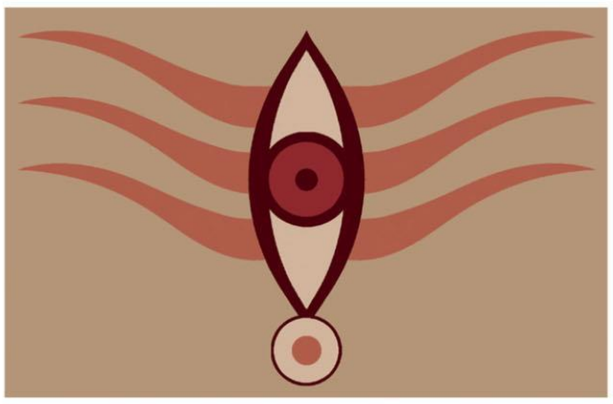
IN HARM'S WAY

P'LI

BK: The final of the four main villains we needed to design was P'Li, the towering telekinetic Firebender, seen here bundled up in ratty prison garb. I wanted to break the stereotype of having the females be the smallest and shortest in the group, so I researched some exceptionally tall female athletes for inspiration.
MD: We only touch on P'Li's backstory briefly in "Enter the Void." As a young girl, she showed signs of being a combustion bender. A vicious warlord kidnapped her shortly thereafter and trained her to become his own personal assassin. Zaheer rescued her from the warlord sometime in her teens. They fell in love and together they sought a life free from oppressive leaders.

(Preceding spread) P'Li's prison exterior. Background design by William Nanqing Niu. Painting by Frederic Stewart.





BK: P'Li's third-eye tattoo design is slightly different than Combustion Man's (our original combustion bender from Avatar*), but I derived both from various ancient depictions of the third eye of Shiva, the Hindu god. P'Li designs by Bryan Konietzko and Angela Song Mueller. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf and Bryan Konietzko.*

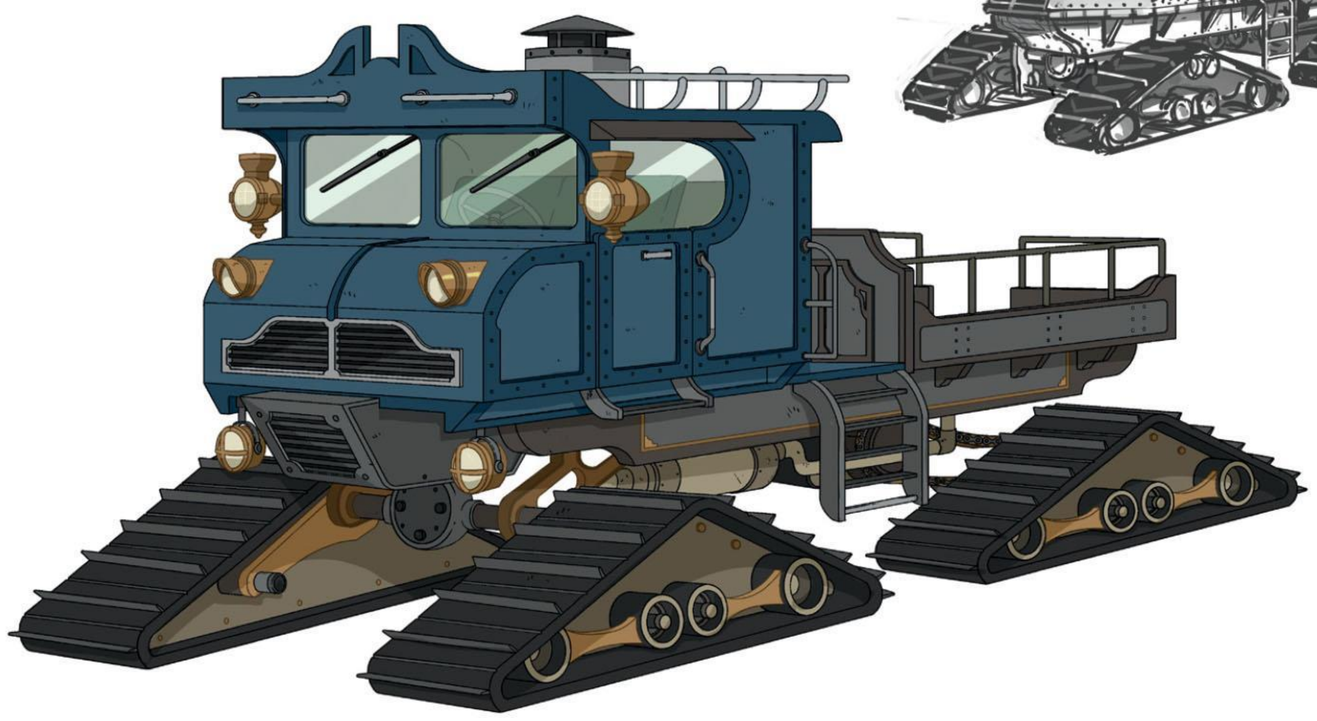


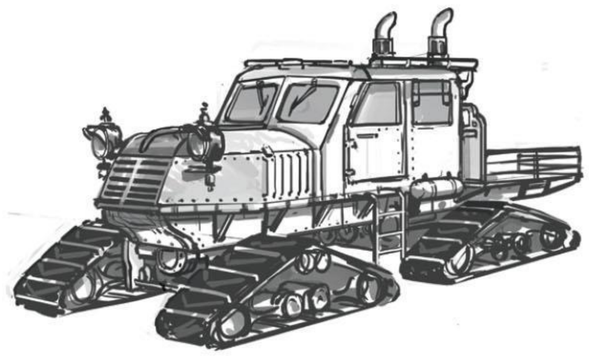


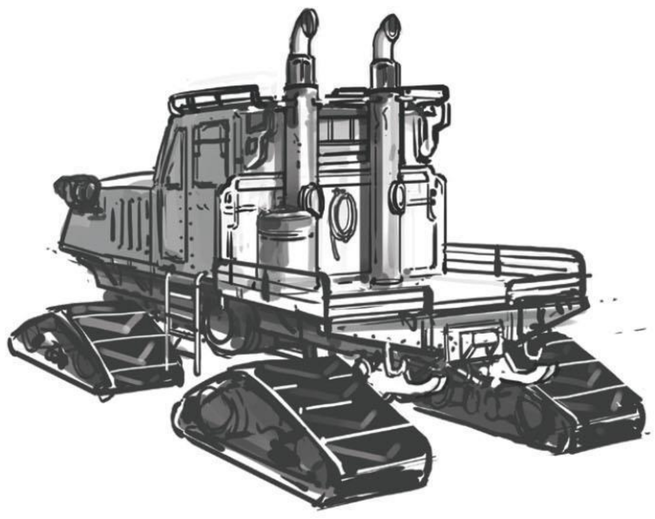


MD: The villains look all warm and cozy in their winter garb. Ming-Hua design by Bryan Konietzko and Christie Tseng. Ghazan design by Bryan Konietzko, Christie Tseng, and Ki-Hyun Ryu. Zaheer design by Angela Song Mueller. Cleanup by Evon Freeman. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.

MD: Ghazan drives this snowcat during the prison break in the South Pole. Concepts and design by Christine Bian. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.









Snowcat interior design by Angela Sung. Painting by Lauren Zurcher.







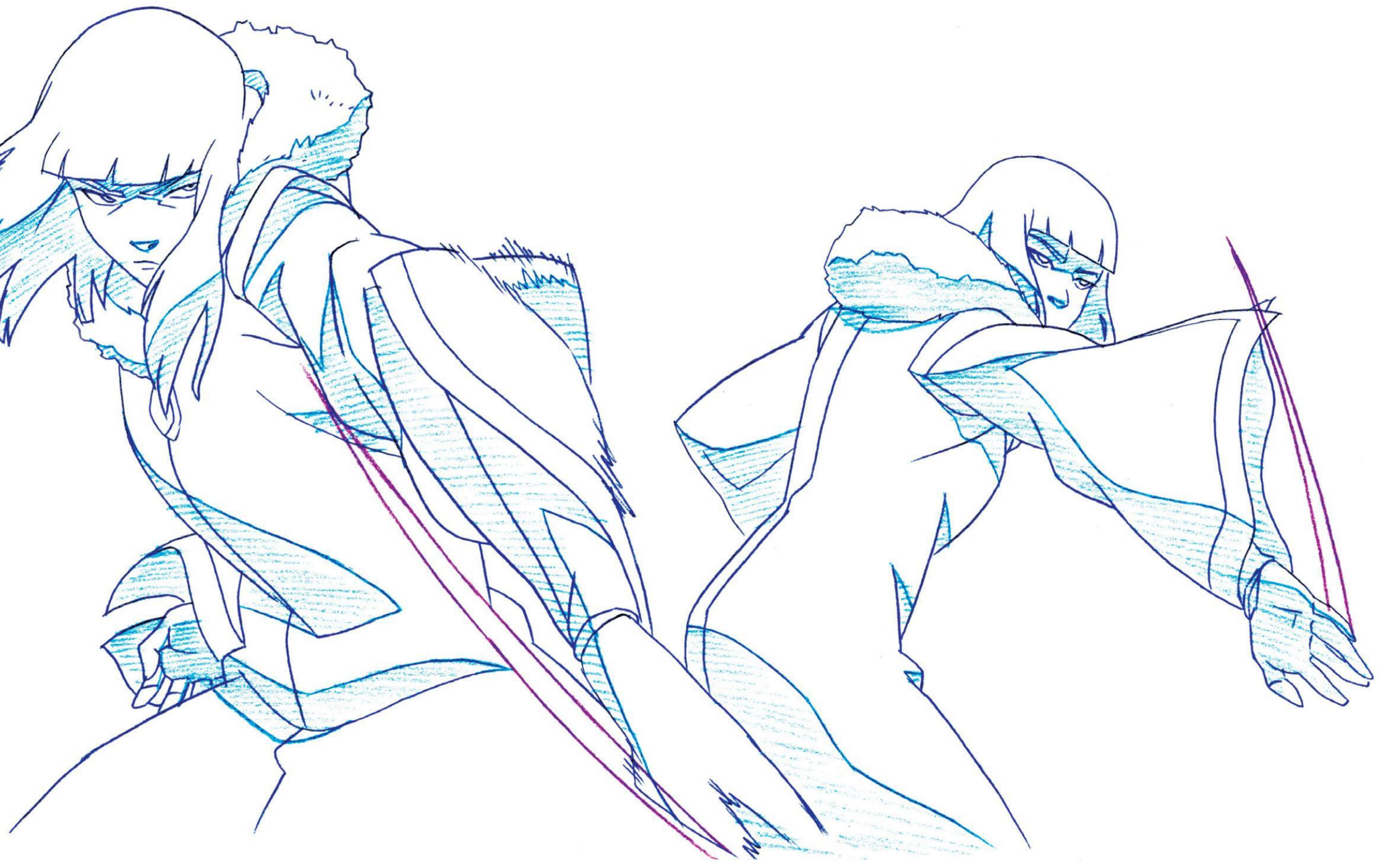
BK: The Dai Li agents are still up to no good in their eerie, crystal-lit, subterranean chambers and corridors. Background designs by William Nanqing Niu. Middle left and bottom painting by Frederic Stewart. Middle right painting by Lauren Zurcher.



MD: This was the first time we saw the elder Zuko in fighting mode. He's still got plenty of pep and some serious bending skills! Key animation by Studio Mir.



JDS: It's always cool to see Eska and Desna in action! Their movements are always so precise and exacting, like a razor blade cutting through the air. Key animation by Studio Mir.





MD: The wealth disparity between the rich and the poor in Ba Sing Se has become much worse since Aang first visited the city. Episodes like this one are very taxing for the entire design team, as there are many different locations and so many background characters that need to be fleshed out to make Ba Sing Se feel like a real, lived-in city. BK: Seeing all of these Lower Ring character designs imbued with so much personality makes me wish that every one of them somehow could have a spotlight moment on-screen. At least they get their page in the book! Lower Ring residents by Christie Tseng. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.

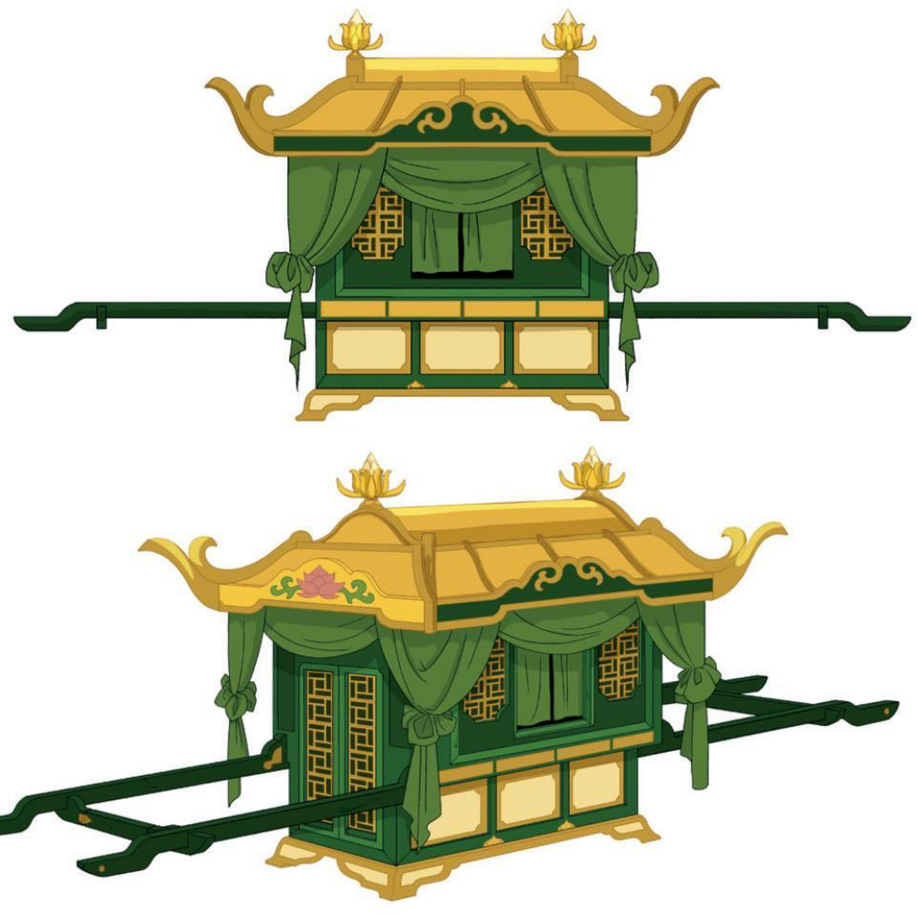


BK: You can see by these designs the Middle Ring denizens are privileged to have more fortunate, less back-breaking lives than those in the severely oppressed Lower Ring. Middle Ring residents by Angela Song Mueller. Cleanup by Evon Freeman. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.

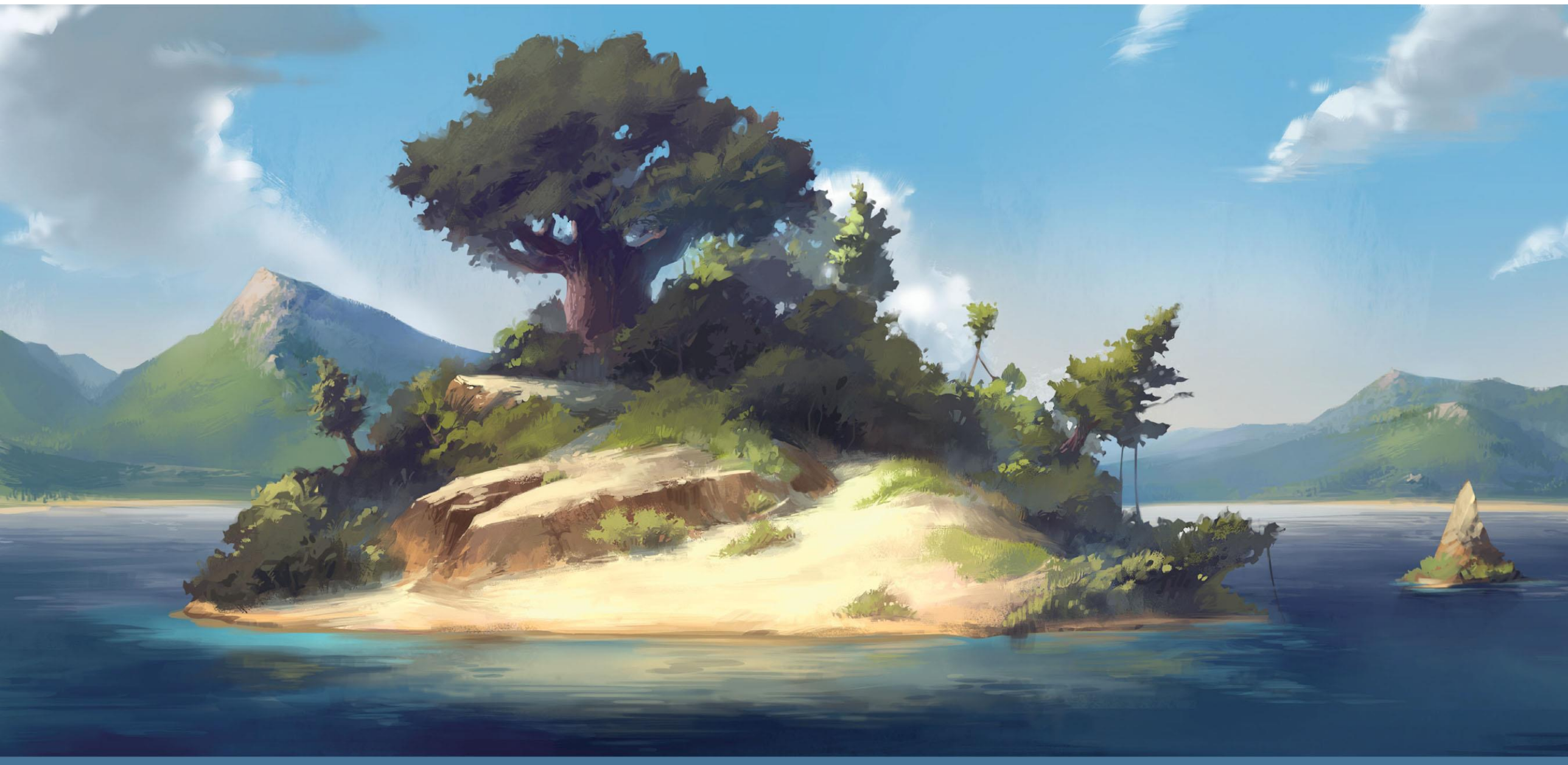


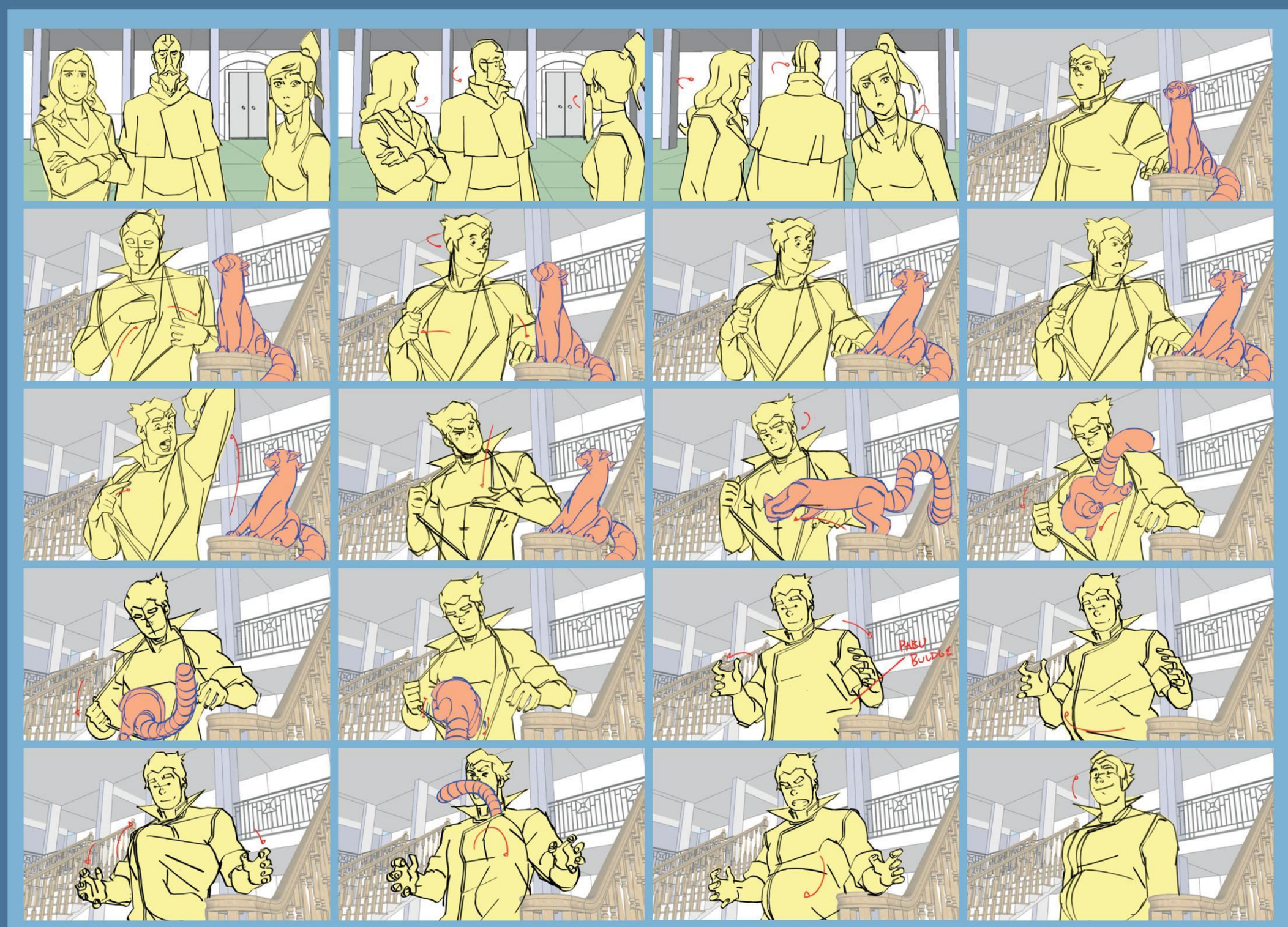
BK: Finally, we have the elite Upper Ring citizens, people descended from families that have been wealthy for so long very few of them know what it means to actually do a day's worth of honest work. Upper Ring residents designed by Angela Song Mueller. Cleanup by Evon Freeman. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.





BK: Seeing a palanquin design gives me flashbacks to working on Avatar. *Please tell me it isn't still 2006! Queen's palanquin by Christine Bian. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.*





MD: (Top) A quiet island in the middle of Lake Laogai. Background design by Angela Sung. Painting by Lauren Zurcher. (Bottom) Thinking the Earth Queen's at the door, Bolin tries to stash Pabu in his shirt. Storyboard by Owen Sullivan.

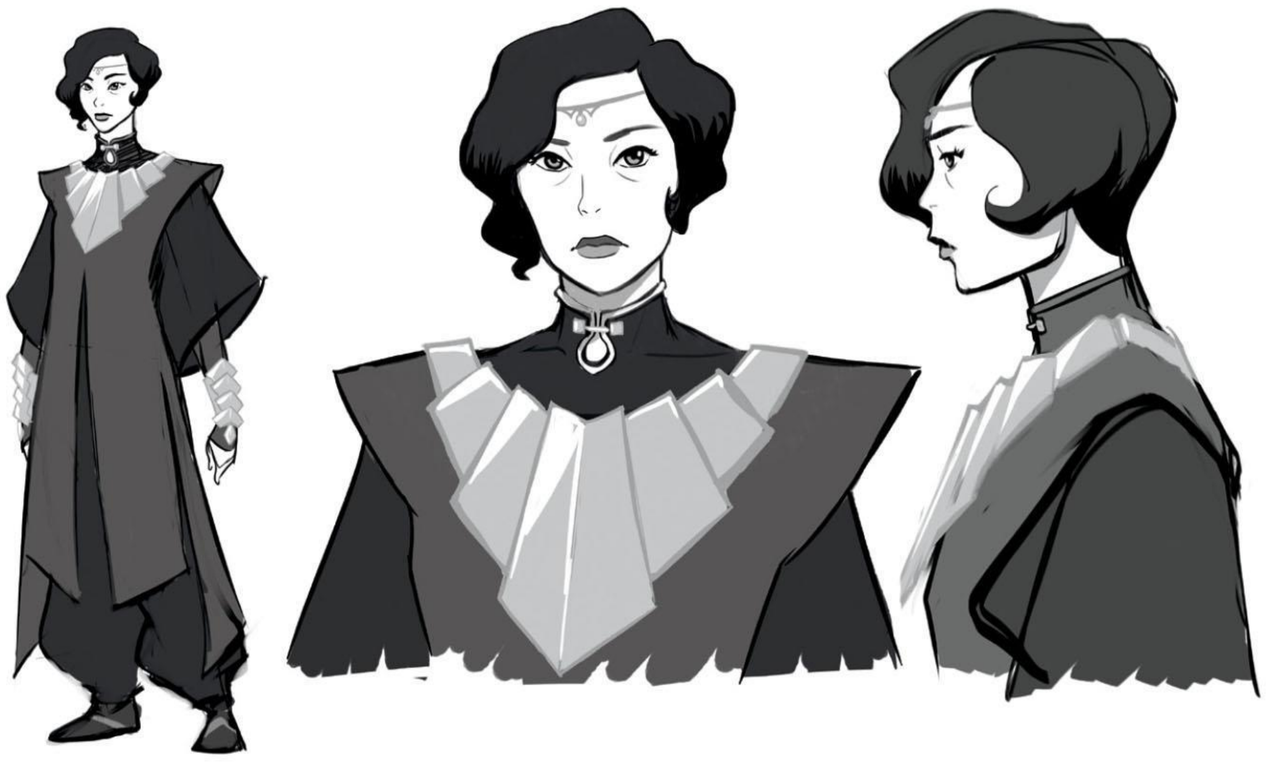


CHAPTER FIVE

THE METAL CLAN

THE BEIFONG FAMILY

MD: One of the best parts about creating Book Three was developing Su Beifong and her family. In the early development of *Korra*, Bryan and I had the idea of an elite Metal Clan, which evolved into Su's family. We wanted Su to be very different from her half-sister, Lin, so we gave her a more outgoing personality and five children. In order to tie the Beifongs to the main story line of rebuilding the Air Nation, we decided that Su's daughter, Opal, should be one of the new Airbenders. Su concepts by Bryan Konietzko. Su designs by Bryan Konietzko and Christie Tseng. Cleanup by Evon Freeman. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.

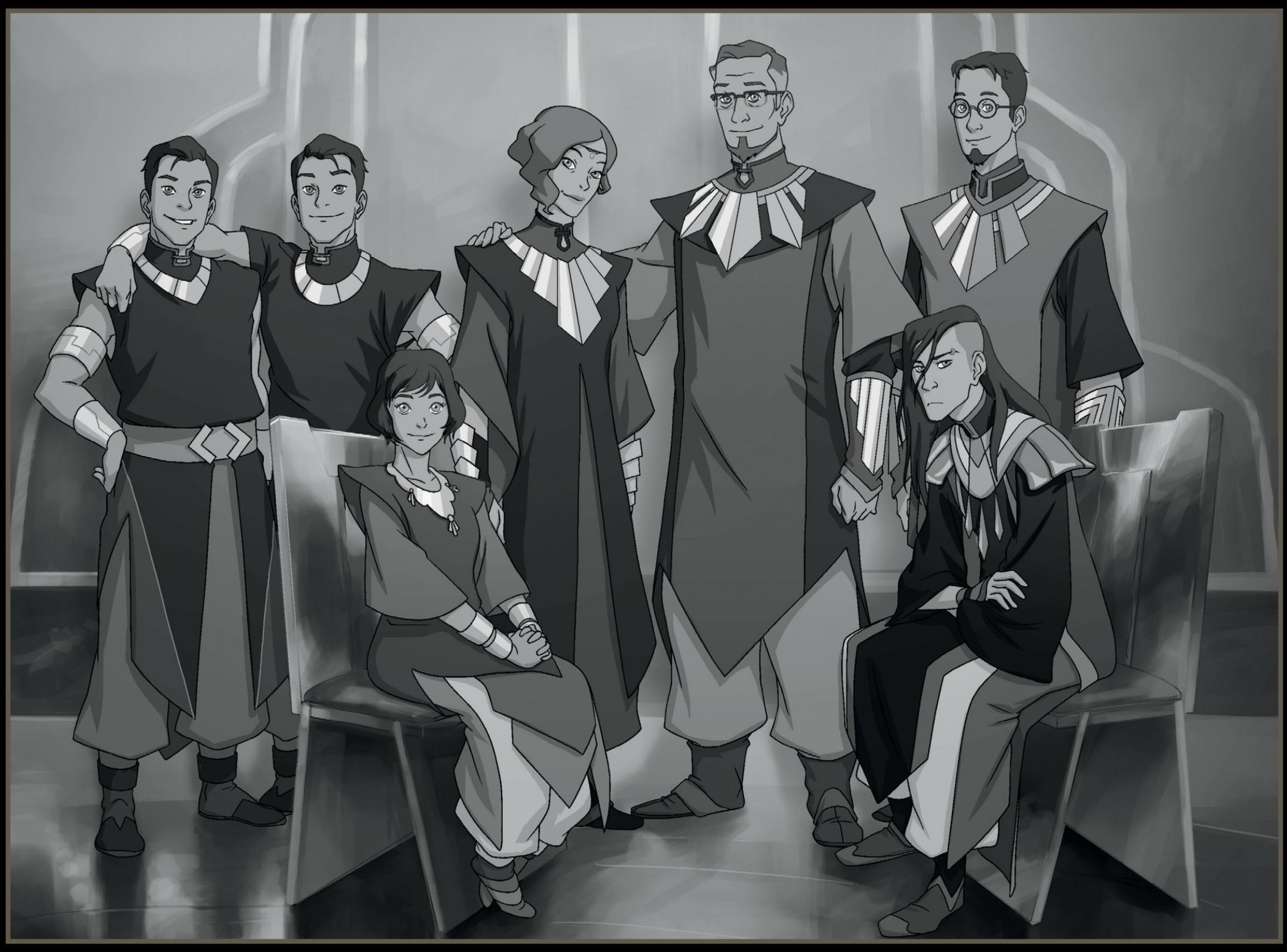


(Preceding spread) MD: Zaofu is nestled in a valley, protected by mountains on all sides. Background design by William Nanqing Niu. Painting by Frederic Stewart.

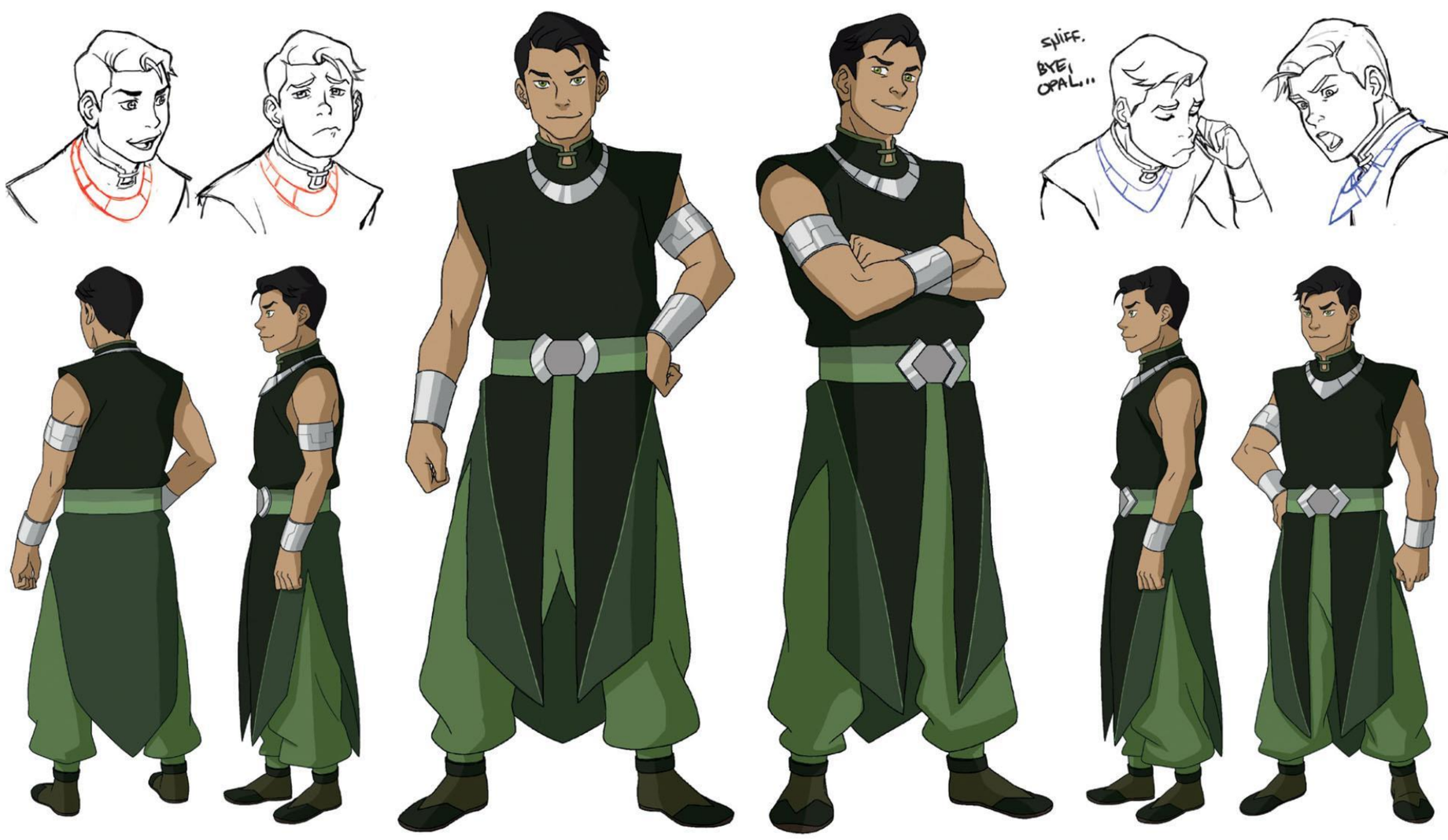




Left to right: Baatar Sr. and Baatar Jr. designs and expressions by Angela Song Mueller. Opal designs and expressions by Bryan Konietzko and Angela Song Mueller. Huan designs and expressions by Christie Tseng. Cleanup by Evon Freeman. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.



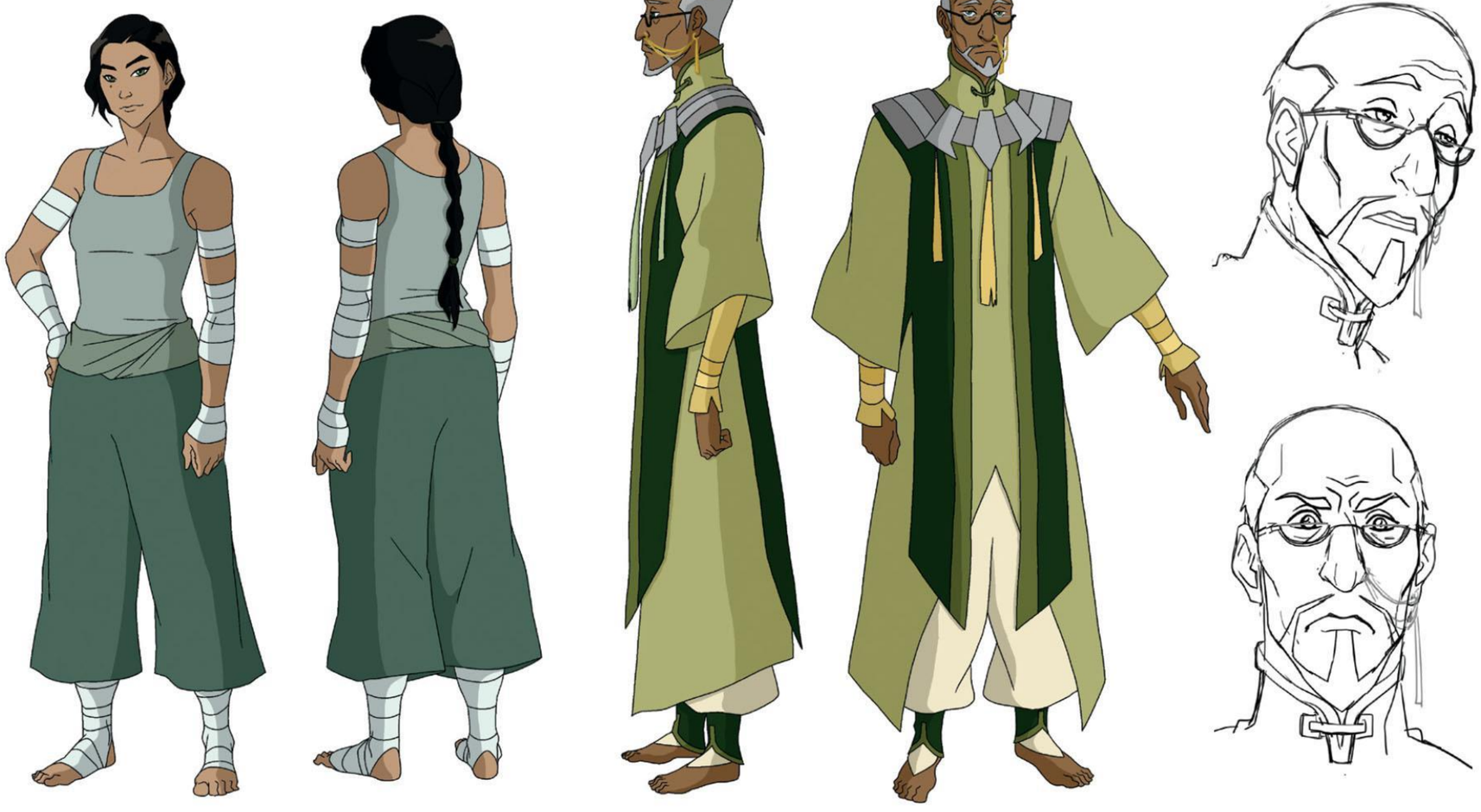
BK: Another wonderfully crafted family photo that conveys so much about the individual characters: Wing and Wei as their own unit; Opal looking eager to please; Su radiating confidence and a hint of mischief; Baatar Sr. leaning on the strength of his wife; Huan enveloped in ennui; and Baatar Jr. standing in the shadow of his father. Original storyboard sketch by William Ruzicka. Finished design by Angela Song Mueller. Character tones by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf. Background painting by Emily Tetri.



MD: Twins seems to be an ongoing theme for us in the Avatar *world. We had the elderly Lo and Li in the original series, fraternal twins Eska and Desna in Book Two, and now we have identical twins Wing and Wei, the jocks of the Beifong family. Designs and expressions by Christie Tseng. Cleanup by Evon Freeman. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.*



MD: This episode marks the first appearance of Kuvira (left), who is part of Suyin's dance troupe. Design by Bryan Konietzko and Angela Song Mueller. Aiwei (right) design and expressions by Christie Tseng. Cleanup by Evon Freeman. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.





Varrick and Zhu Li in Zaofu garb, and chef designs by Christie Tseng. Plates and food designed by Christine Bian. Cleanup by Evon Freeman. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.

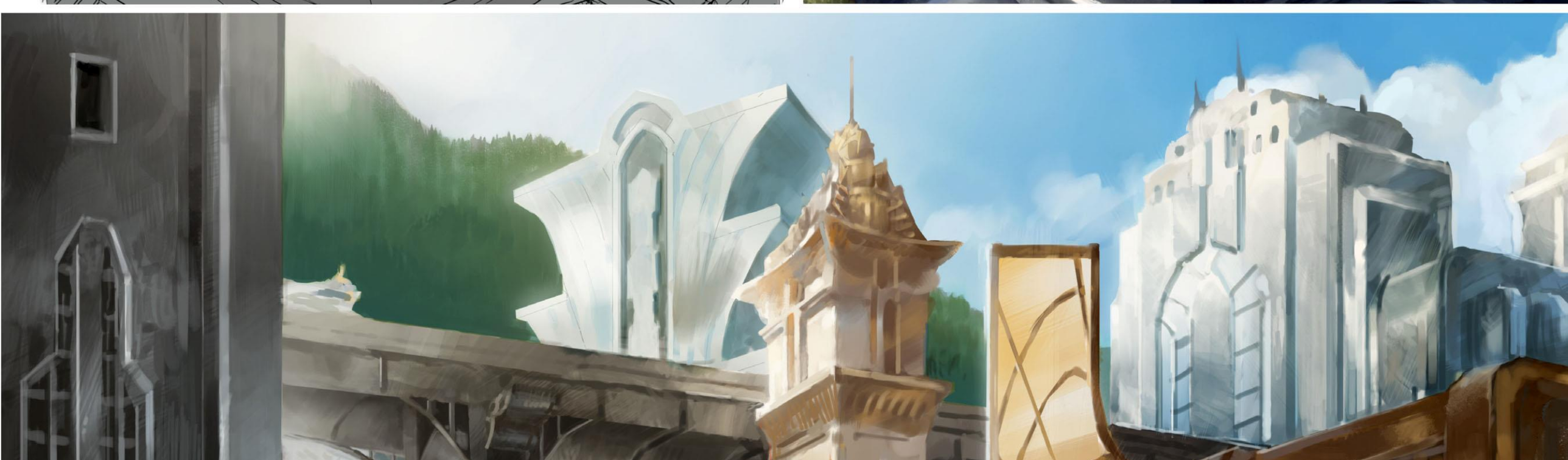




MD: Every character and prop is created and designed to support the main story line. Su's chef was once a pirate and is now a culinary master, showing Su's philosophy that people are capable of bettering themselves. The details of the dinner plates and cutlery reflect the Art Deco aesthetic of Zaofu, and the food looks delicious!





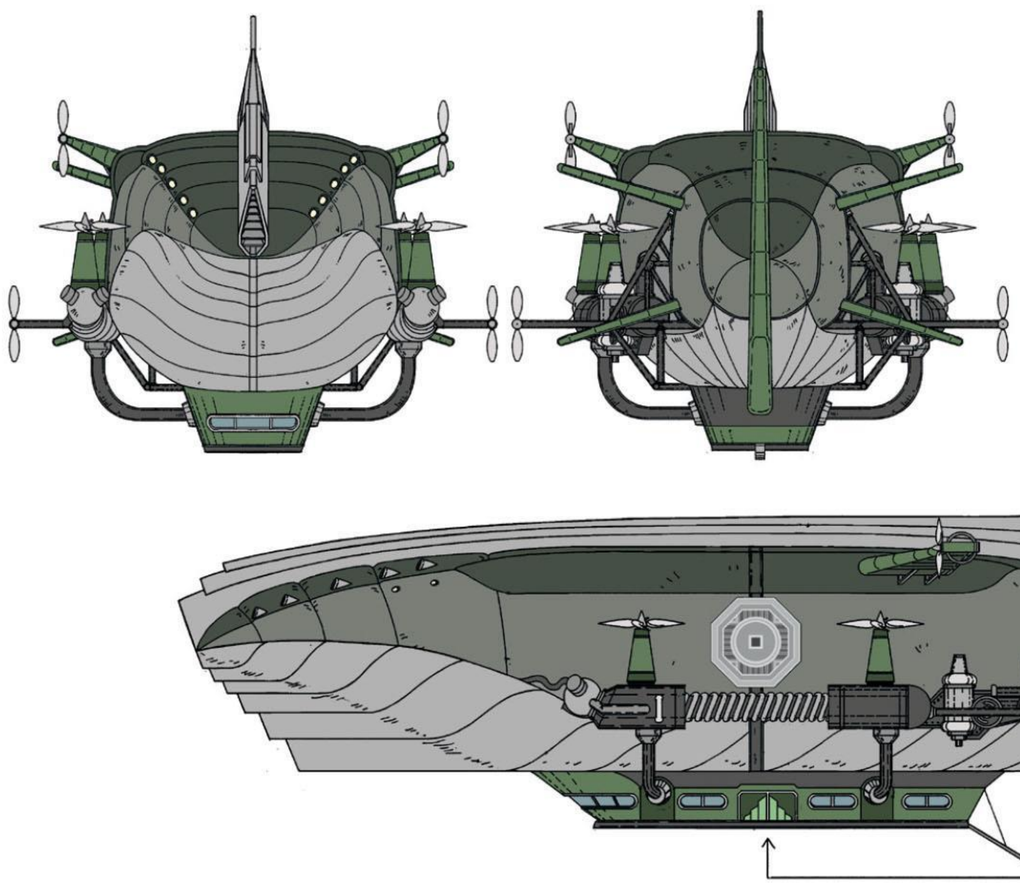




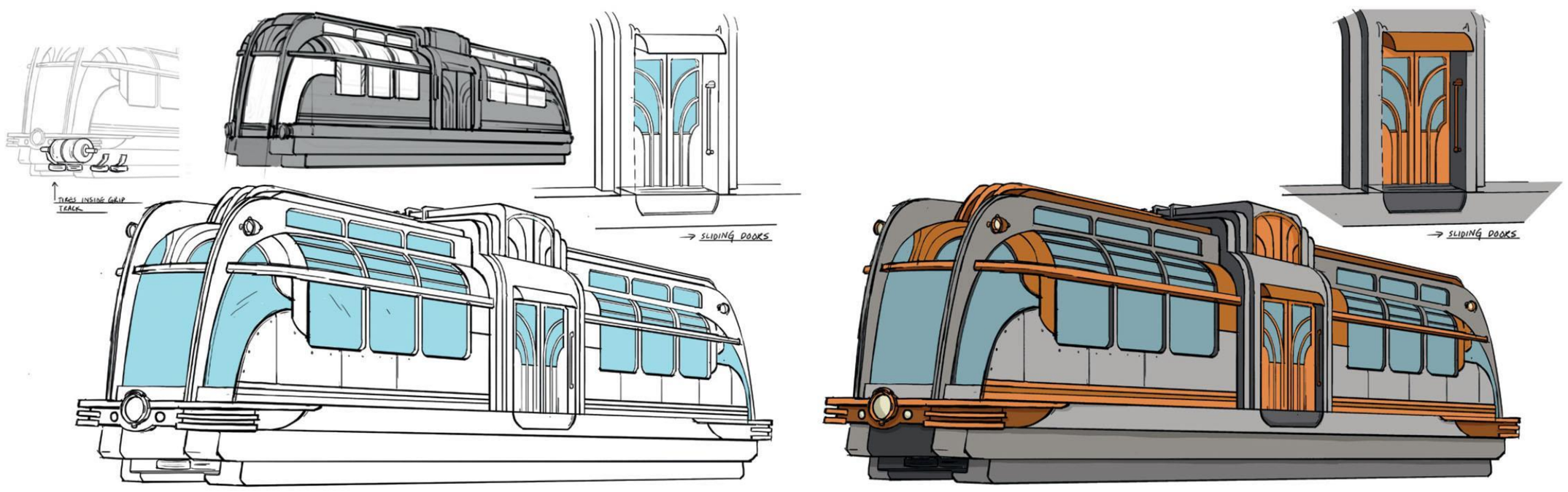


BK: Zaofu was an inspiring location for me to art direct. I gathered Art Deco photo reference of architecture, interior design, furniture, sculpture, lighting fixtures, clothing, jewelry, etc. When it came time for the designers to start generating concepts for this episode, I went through the reference folder with each of them, pointing out the design elements I liked best, and how I wanted them to think about streamlining the complex aesthetic down to its essentials so it could be reproduced repeatedly for animation. My dream design team rose to the challenge remarkably! Background designs by William Nanqing Niu. Beifong estate painting by Lauren Zurcher. Downtown Zaofu paintings by Frederic Stewart. Snack cart design by Christine Bian.

BK: In order to save money in our CG budget, we gave Amon's airship an Art Deco makeover to transform it into a Zaofu vehicle. For the city's emblem, I updated the traditional Earth Kingdom coin symbol into a more modern, metalbending-themed Art Deco pattern. Zaofu airship by Christine Bian and Bryan Konietzko. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.



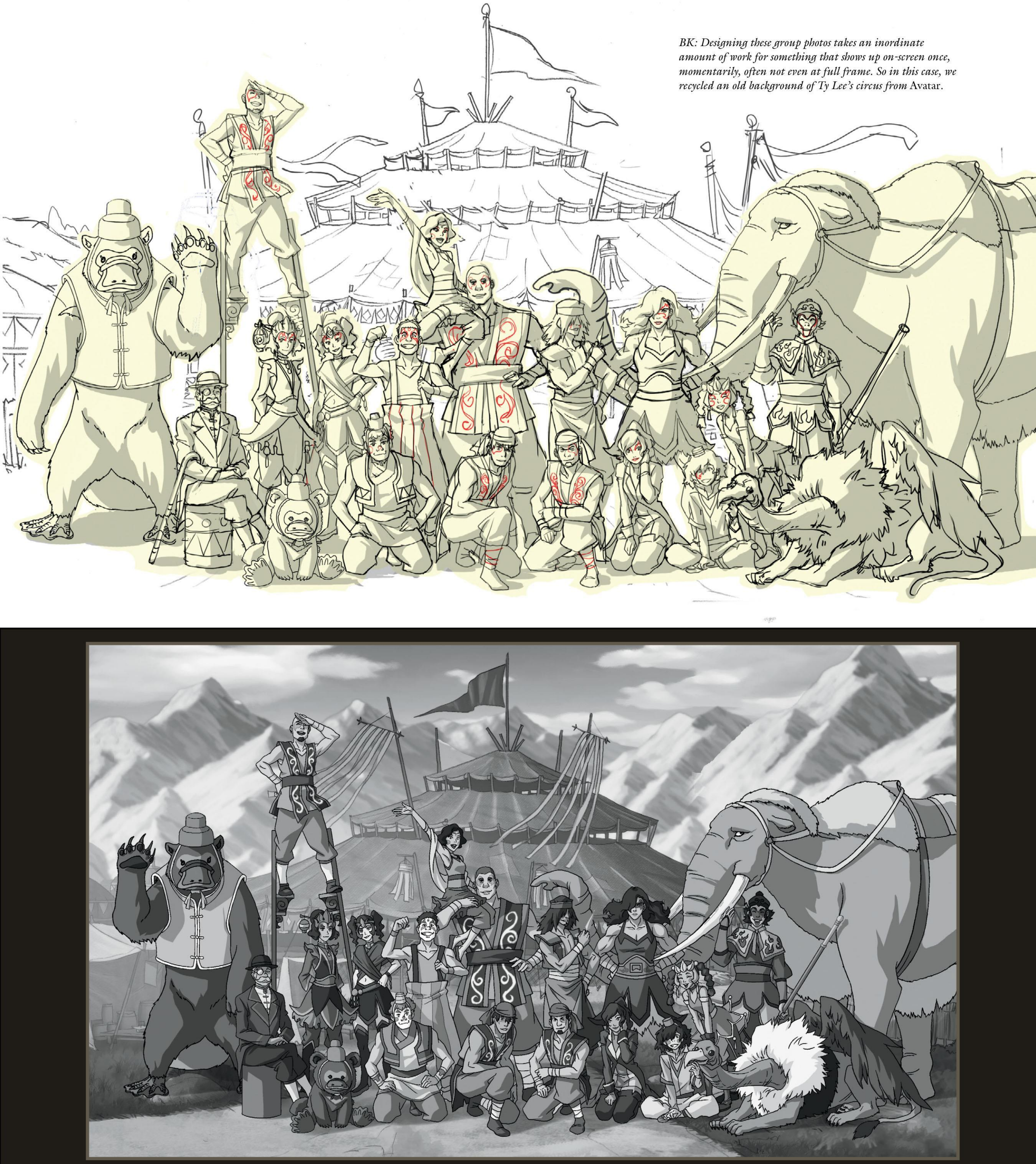
BK: Baatar Sr. and Baatar Jr. designed an efficient, state-of-the-art monorail system to transport Zaofu's citizens between and within the five domes. No Satomobiles in this town! Zaofu tram by Christine Bian. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.



BK: I wanted Zaofu to feel like a 1920s version of a utopian "City of the Future," which, for me, immediately conjured images of citizens wearing robes and wandering around clean-lined plazas, seemingly without much to do other than wax philosophic. I designed Su's rather simple attire first, and this served as a springboard for dozens of variations on the theme done by Christie, Angie, and me. More than a uniform, it is a fashion statement, a modern update on traditional Earth Kingdom garb. I imagine the citizens don their clothing proudly, thinking, "Hey, check me out. I'm from Zaofu." Zaofu citizens by Christie Tseng. Cleanup by Evon Freeman. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.



BK: Designing these group photos takes an inordinate amount of work for something that shows up on-screen once, momentarily, often not even at full frame. So in this case, we recycled an old background of Ty Lee's circus from Avatar.

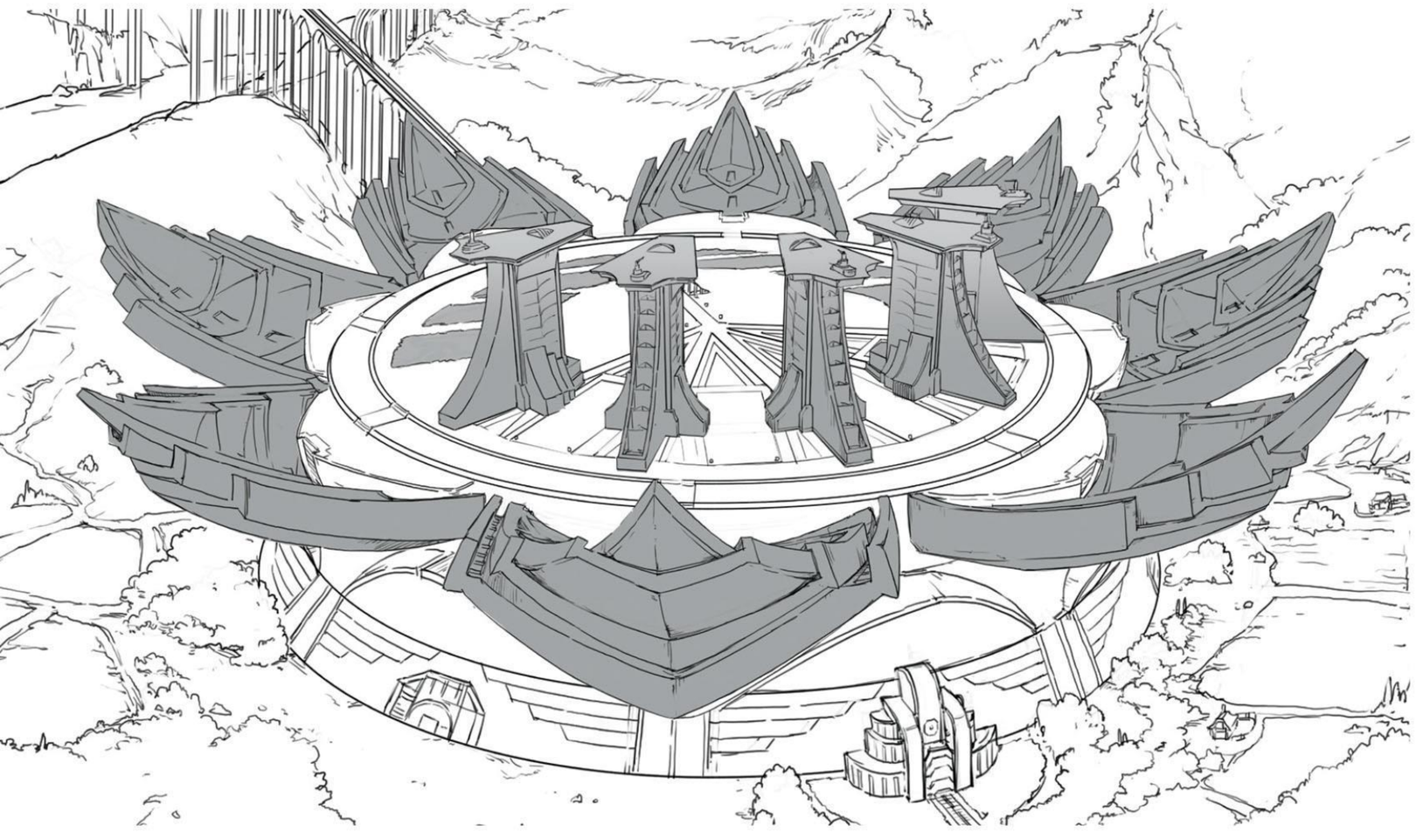


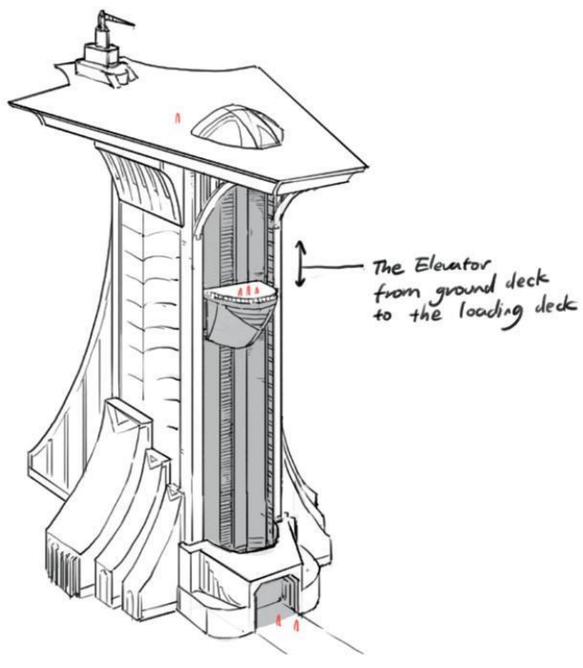
MD: After we showed this photo at San Diego Comic-Con, there was some speculation that Zaheer is the one in the photo holding Su. It's an interesting theory, but that was never our intent. Su's circus background was part of her eclectic history, showing how she was trying to find herself before she built Zaofu. BK: Besides, that guy holding Su is about a foot taller than Zaheer! Circus photo design by Christie Tseng. Character tones by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.









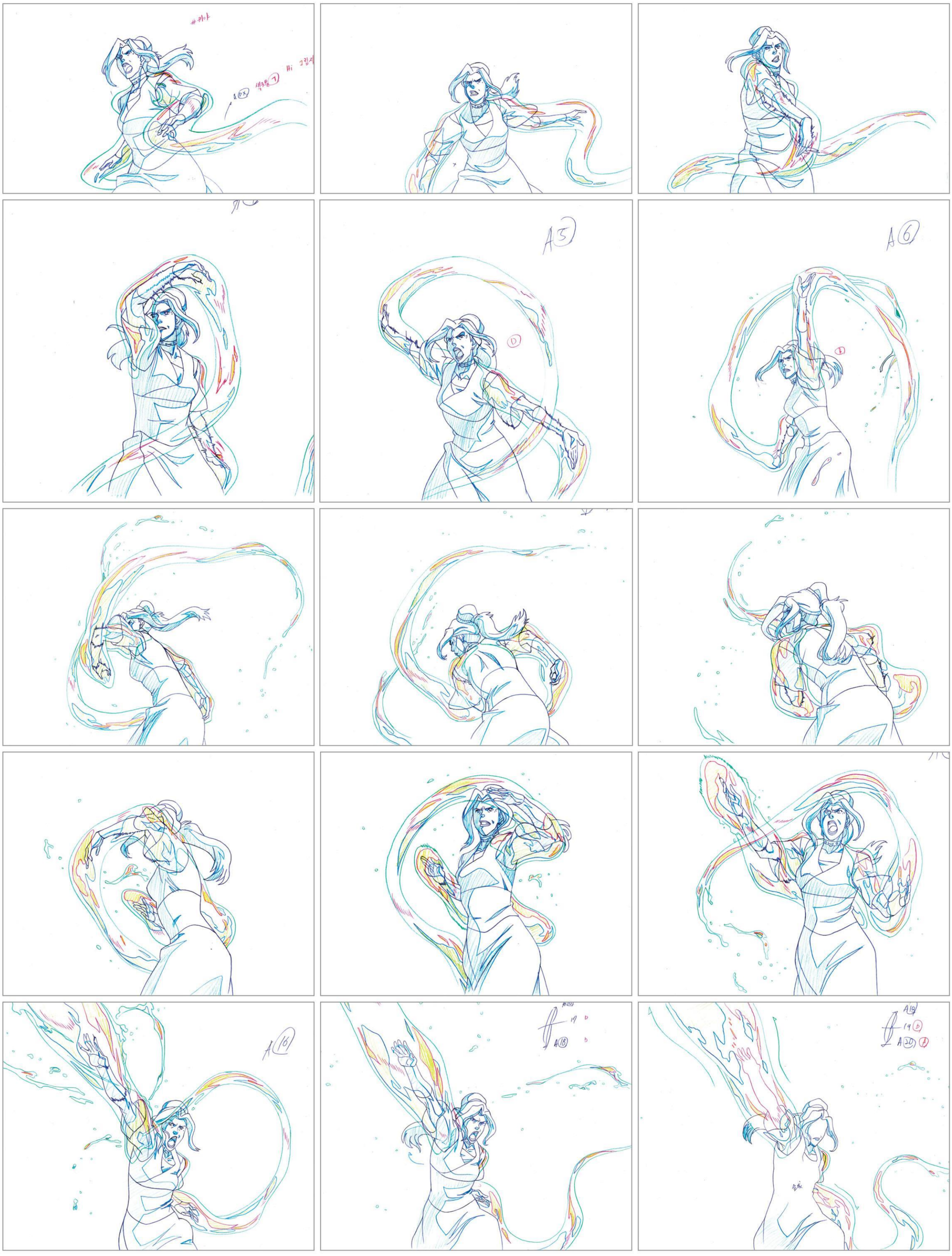


Top: A Maxfield Parrish–inspired waterfall at the Beifong estate. Background design by Angela Sung. Painting by Emily Tetri. Middle: Zaofu, with its security domes both closed and open. Bottom: Zaofu airship docks. Background designs by William Nanqing Niu. Paintings by Frederic Stewart.

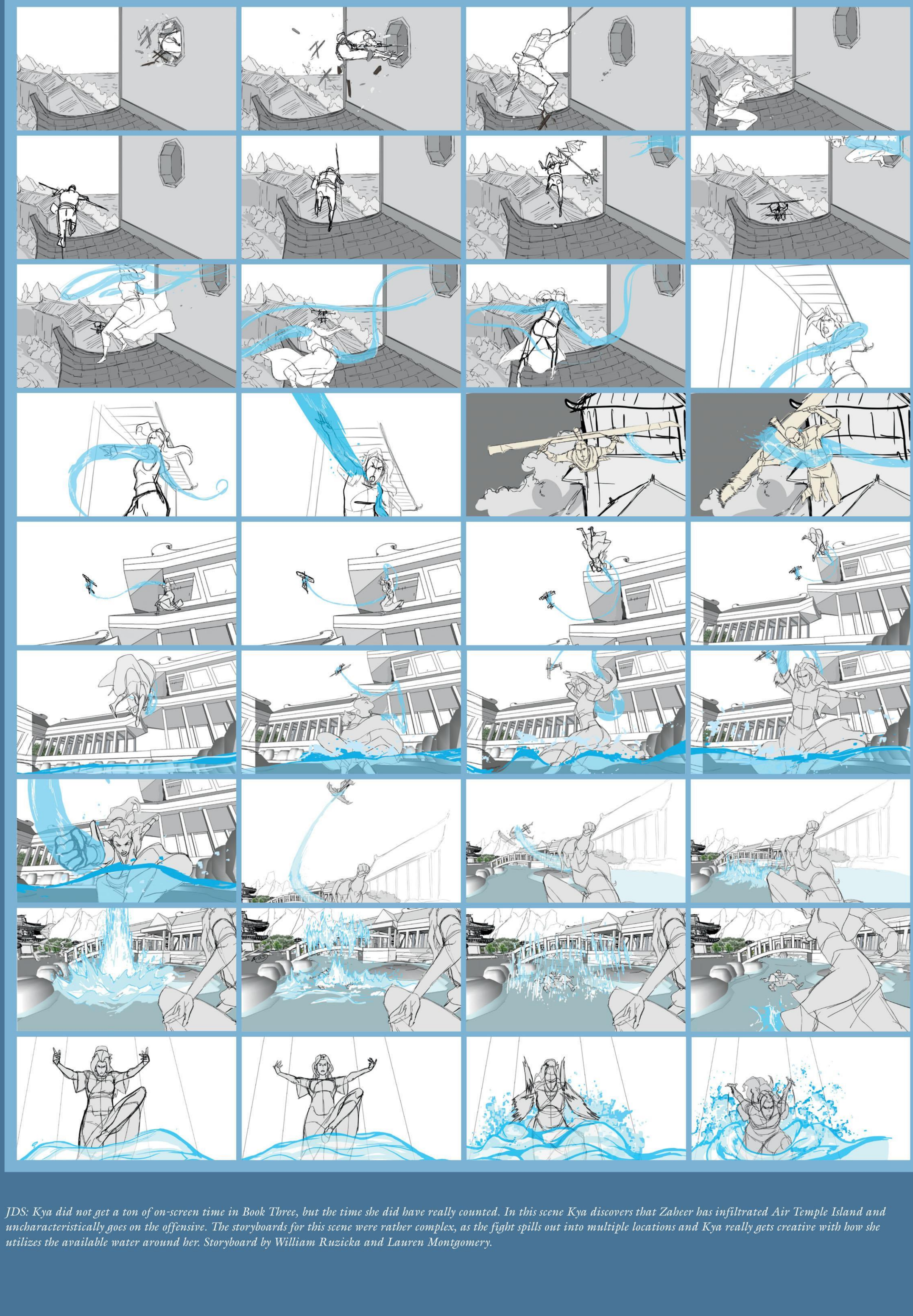


BK: In contrast to Lin's no-frills lifestyle, Su lives in a palatial estate, using her Beifong inheritance to the fullest. It reminds you just how different these sisters are! Top: Tram stop at the Beifong estate. Background design by William Nanqing Niu. Bottom: Power disc court. Background design by Angela Sung. Paintings by Lauren Zurcher.

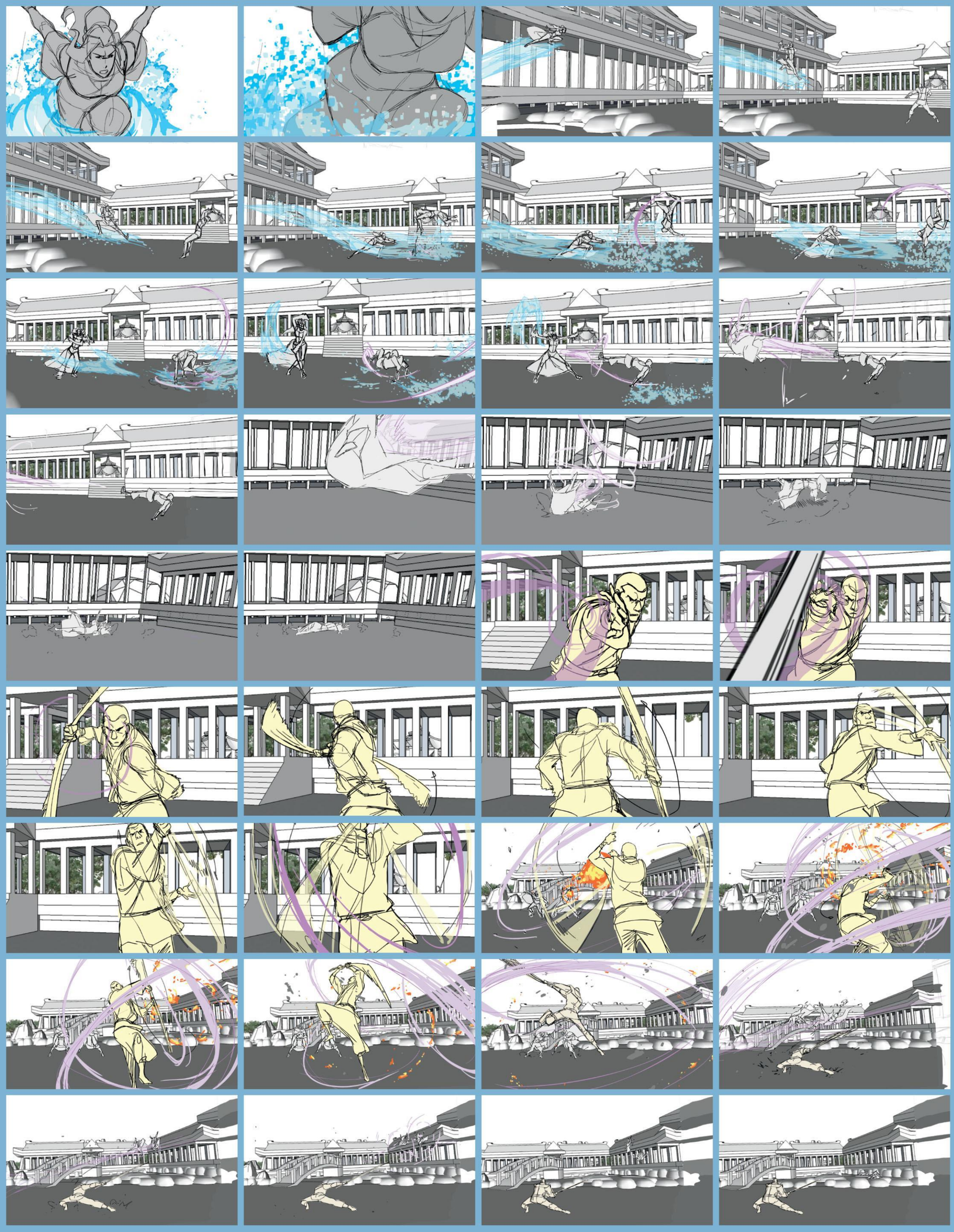
MD: Toph's presence looms large in downtown Zaofu. Su had this statue built to honor her mother, the first Metalbender. Without Toph, Zaofu never would have been possible. Although Toph visits Su and her family from time to time, she never made Zaofu her permanent home, and they haven't seen her in many years. Background designs by William Nanqing Niu. Painting by Emily Tetri.



JDS: This is the first time we really get to see Kya cut loose and demonstrate exactly how powerful a Waterbender she really is. Water-effects animation such as this can be a very complex and time-consuming process. In shows like Korra *and* Avatar, *that complexity is compounded by the fact that the water now acts as an extension of the bender's movements. It takes an extremely talented group of animators to pull off a sequence such as this. Key animation by Studio Reve.*



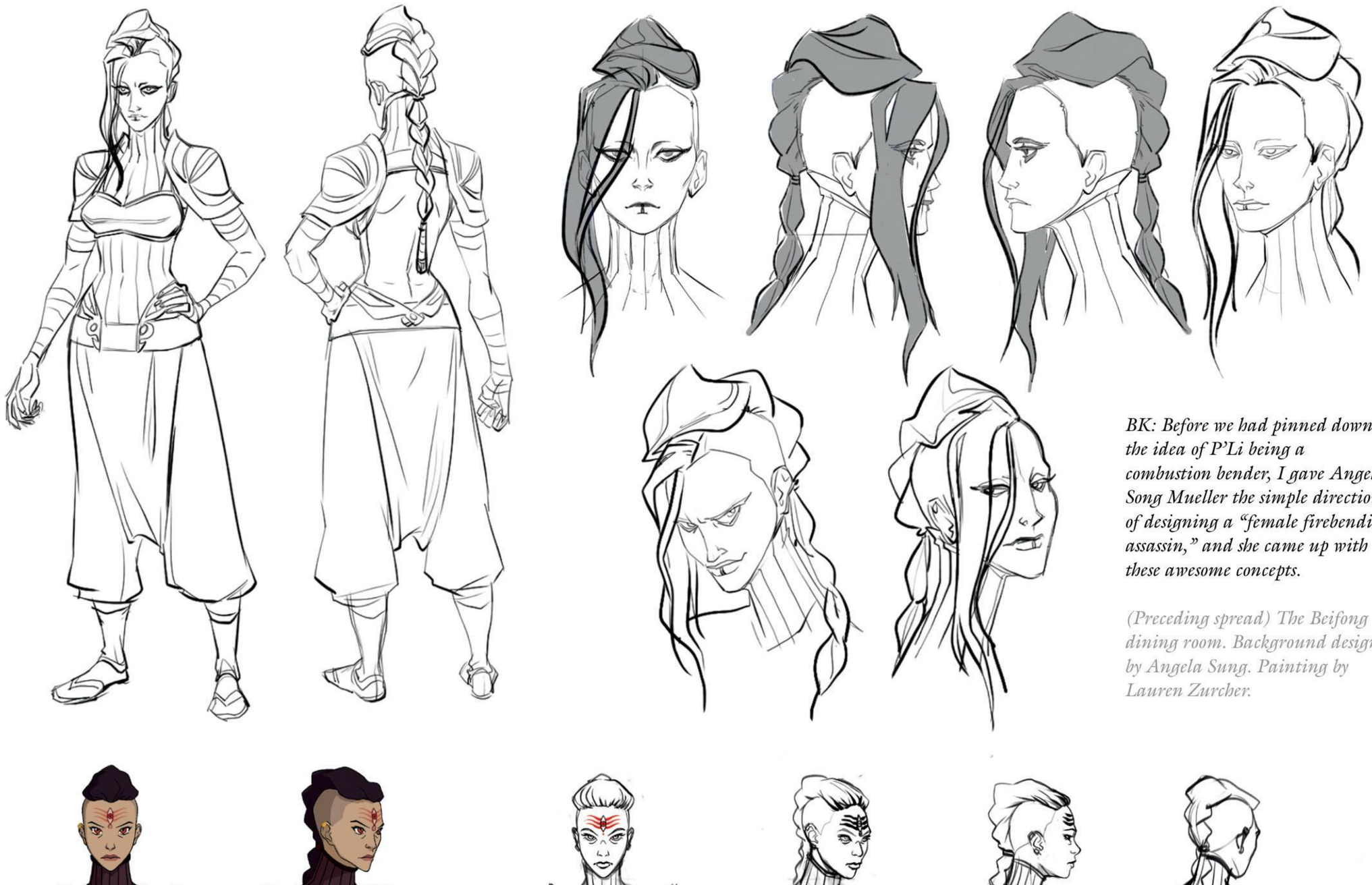
JDS: Kya did not get a ton of on-screen time in Book Three, but the time she did have really counted. In this scene Kya discovers that Zaheer has infiltrated Air Temple Island and uncharacteristically goes on the offensive. The storyboards for this scene were rather complex, as the fight spills out into multiple locations and Kya really gets creative with how she utilizes the available water around her. Storyboard by William Ruzicka and Lauren Montgomery.





CHAPTER SIX

OLD WOUNDS



BK: Before we had pinned down the idea of P'Li being a combustion bender, I gave Angela Song Mueller the simple direction of designing a "female firebending assassin," and she came up with these awesome concepts.

(Preceding spread) The Beifong dining room. Background design by Angela Sung. Painting by Lauren Zurcher.



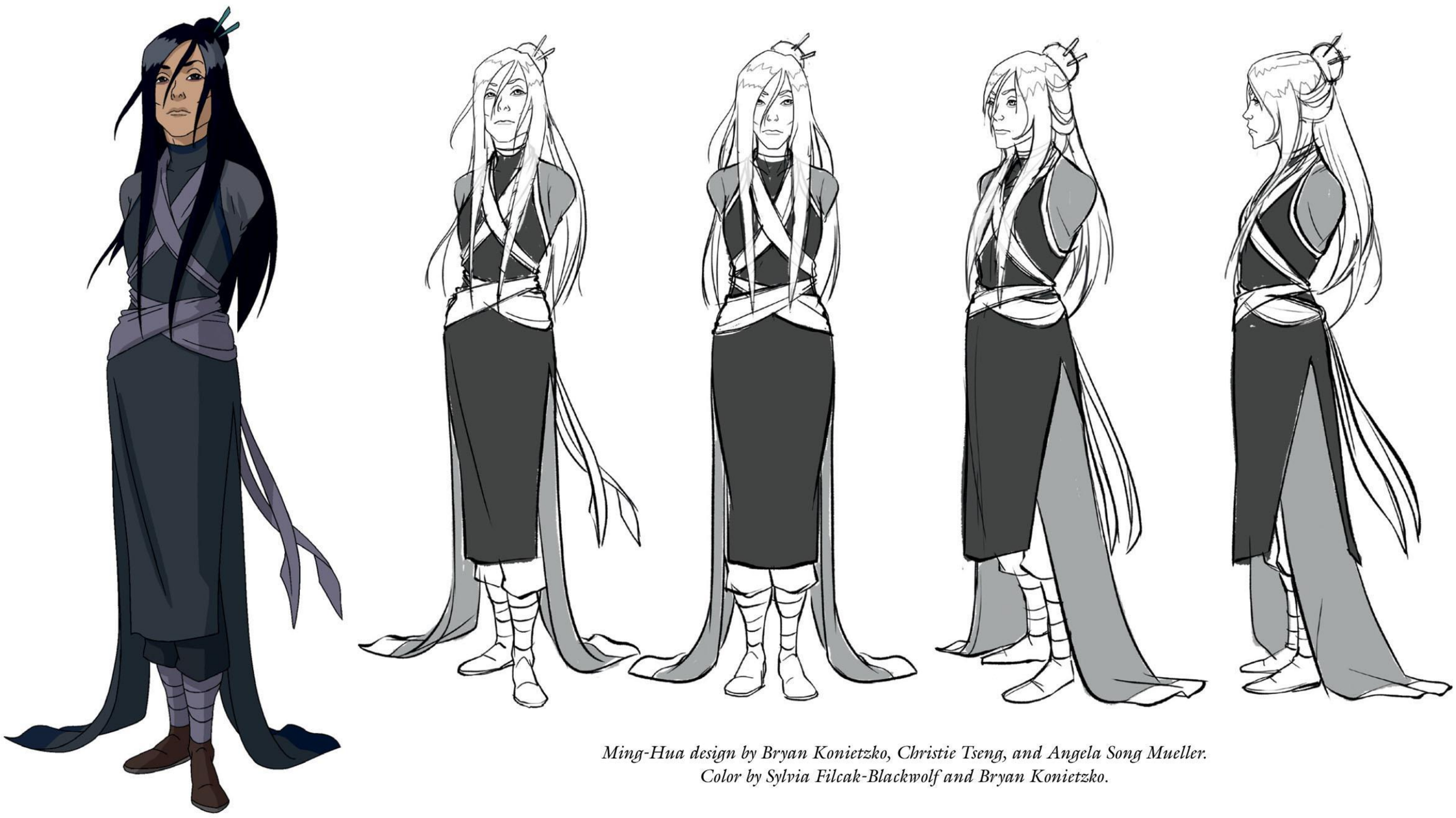
BK: I loved Angie's initial concept, particularly the outfit and the punk hairstyle. I worked off of those ideas to finalize P'Li's post-prison-garb design and head turnarounds. As usual, Ryu pitched in with some awesome expressions. Designs by Bryan Konietzko and Angela Song Mueller. P'Li heads by Bryan Konietzko and Ki-Hyun Ryu. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf and Bryan Konietzko.







MD: After wearing various outfits early on, the villains settled into their normal outfits for the remainder of the episodes. Zaheer disguised himself in simple monk garb in order to infiltrate Air Temple Island. Design by Bryan Konietzko, Ki-Hyun Ryu, and Christie Tseng. Ghazan design by Bryan Konietzko and Christie Tseng. Cleanup by Steve Hirt. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf and Bryan Konietzko.



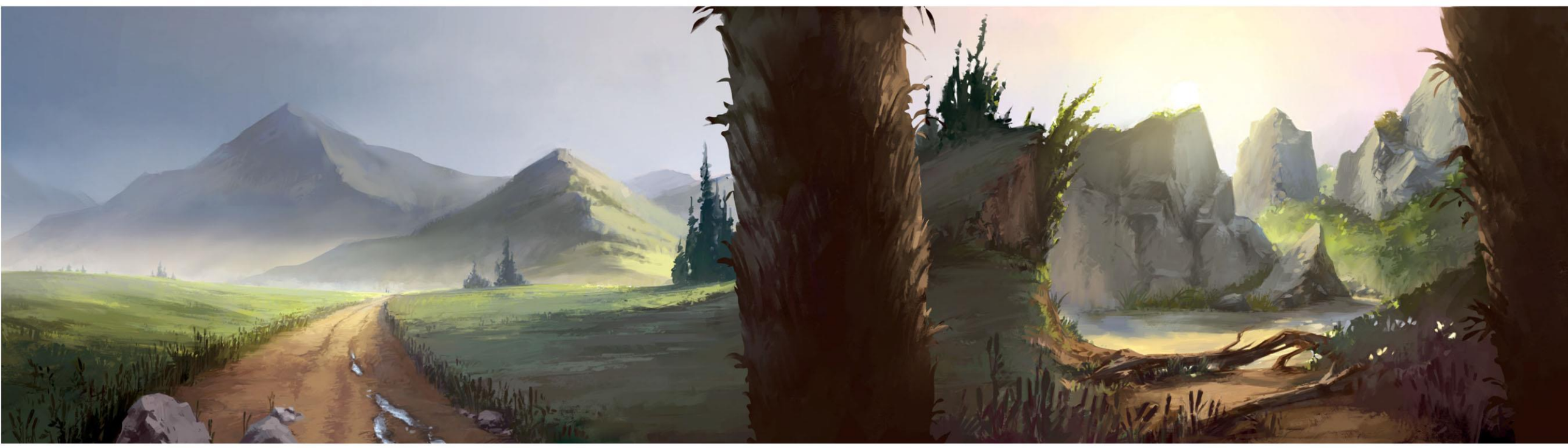
Ming-Hua design by Bryan Konietzko, Christie Tseng, and Angela Song Mueller.
Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf and Bryan Konietzko.



MD: (Top) I love the reflected light off the metal in Emily Tetri's painting of the Beifong gym. I'm guessing Wing and Wei spend a lot of time in there. Background design by William Nanqing Niu. (Bottom) Su Beifong's study. Background design by Angela Sung. Painting by Emily Tetri.

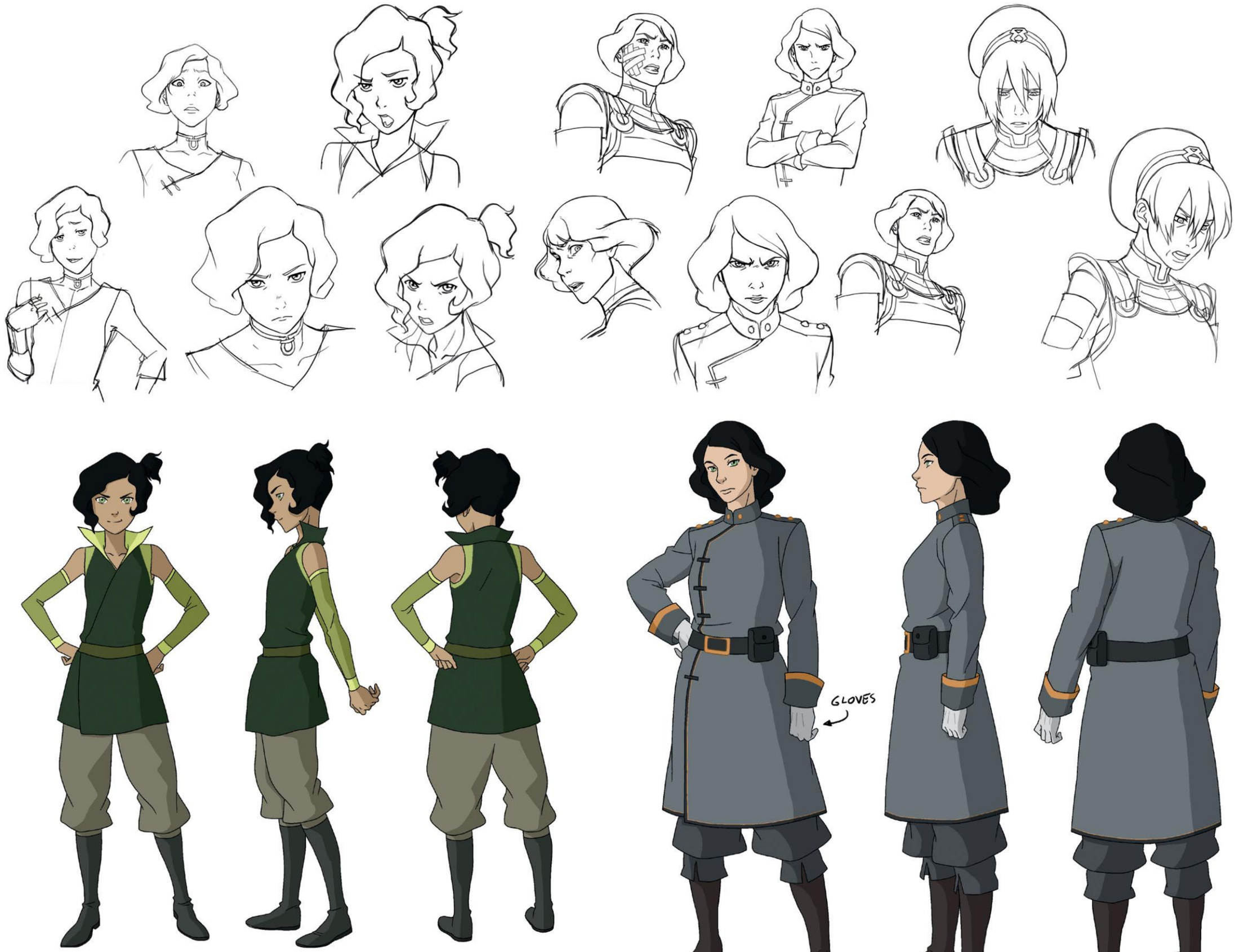




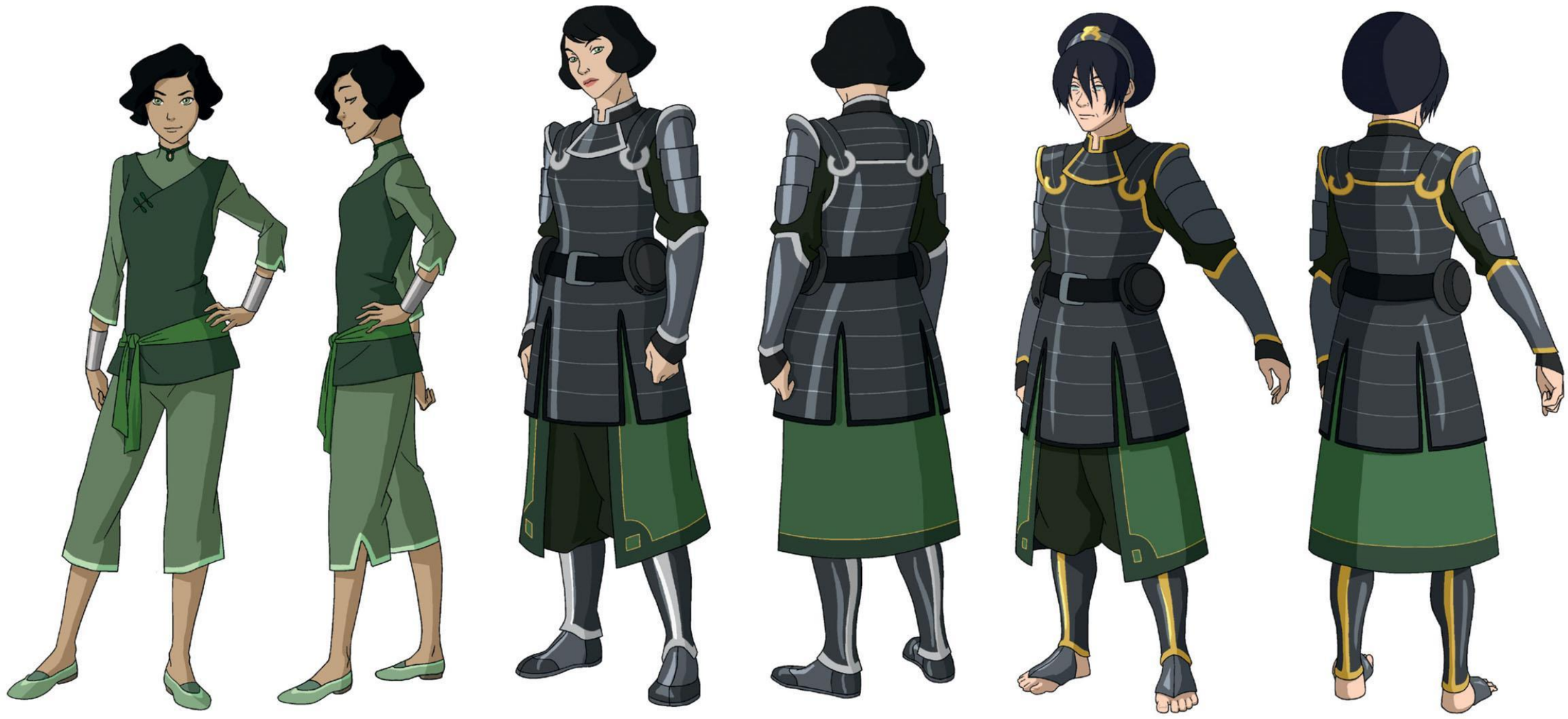




MD: (Top and middle) Acupuncturist's office and Red Lotus campsite. Background designs by William Nanqing Niu. Paintings by Lauren Zurcher. (Bottom) After arriving in Republic City, the Red Lotus hide out in this abandoned apartment in the spirit wilds. Background design by Bryan Konietzko and Angela Sung. Painting by Frederic Stewart.



Twelve-year-old Su by Christie Tseng. Cleanup by Evon Freeman. Eighteen-year-old Lin by Christie Tseng. Cleanup by Steve Hirt. Expressions by Christie Tseng and Ki-Hyun Ryu. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.



BK: Christie did such a fantastic job of designing these young, sassy versions of Su, and Studio Mir followed suit with brilliant, on-model animation of her. Sixteen-year-old Su by Christie Tseng and Ki-Hyun Ryu. Twenty-two-year-old Lin by Christie Tseng. Cleanup by Steve Hirt. Fifty-three-year-old Toph by Jin-Sun Kim and Christie Tseng. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.



MD: I always love a good flashback episode, and Lin's was no exception. Here, we see the backstory behind Lin's scar. We wanted it to be an accident on Su's part. She didn't intend to scar her sister, but their relationship had reached a breaking point, illustrated by Lin's cable pulled taut between them. Storyboard by Young-Ki Yoon and Ki-Hyun Ryu.



BK: Angela Sung designed these cool views into Republic City's past for the flashback chase sequence through a crowded market. Chase scenes require a lot of backgrounds, which usually just whiz by in the blink of an eye.

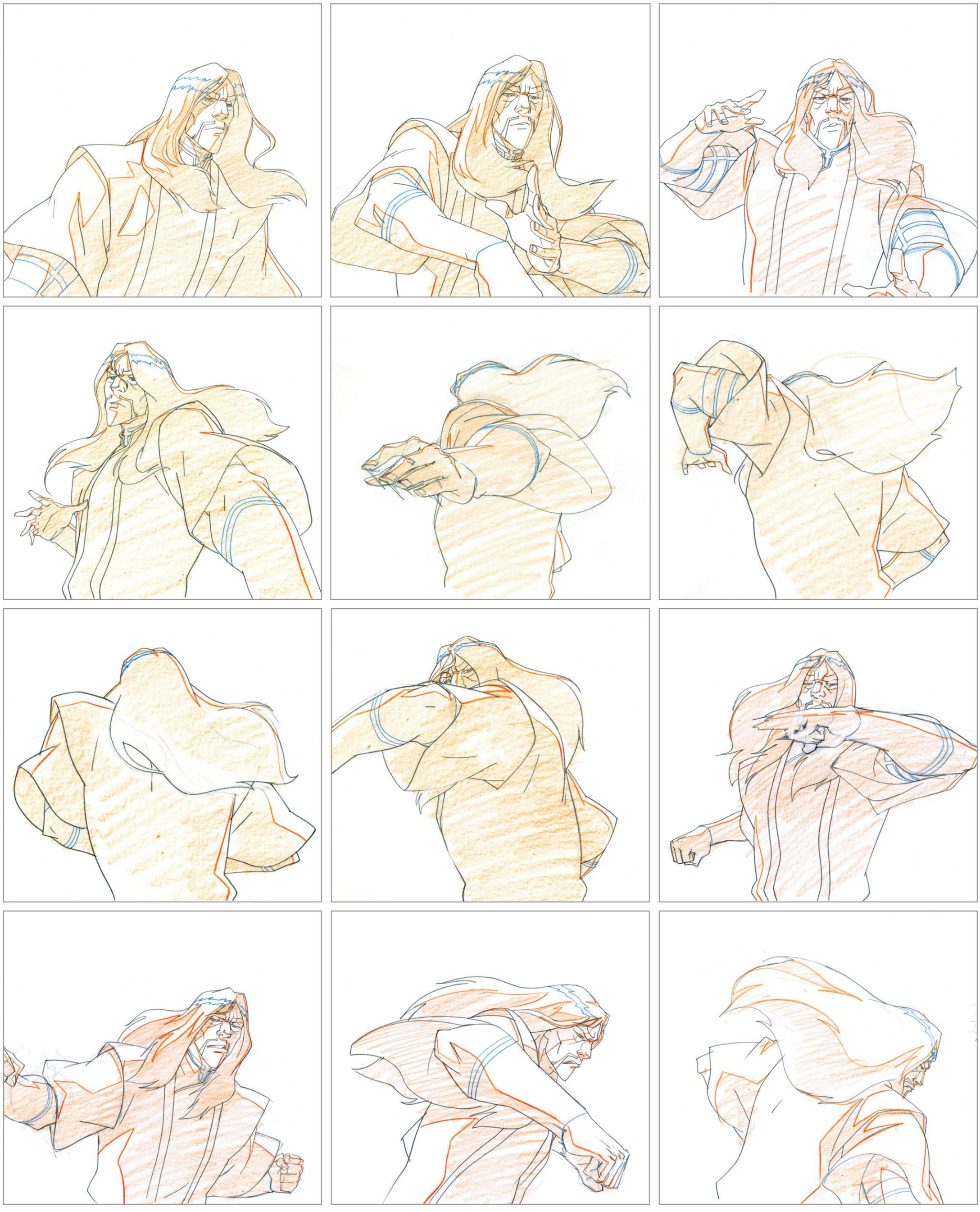


BK: These paintings by Emily Tetri show the looser style we employed for locations that weren't vital or only appeared briefly. Our in-house painters quickly established the color and lighting in what we called "rough color comps," then the highly skilled painting team at Studio Mir fleshed out the details.





BK: Toph Beifong has to be the Avatar *character most represented in statue form in the* Korra *series. In addition to the towering Art Deco statue overlooking Zaofu's downtown plaza, Su had this more naturalistic metal sculpture of her mother placed in a quiet corner of her family garden. Its presence helps Su and Lin reconnect after their long-repressed issues with each other come to a head violently. Luckily it wasn't damaged in the fight like Huan's sculpture! Statue design by Ki-Hyun Ryu and Christine Bian. Painting by Frederic Stewart.*



JDS: Ghazan's specific brand of lavabending is loosely based on Bajiquan. Especially when fighting in short range or in close quarters, he uses shorter, more explosive elbow and knee strikes. Please note that I used the term "loosely based" when describing how we came up with Ghazan's style, because obviously there are times, especially later in the series, when he is required to perform much bigger moves that open up huge lava pits or bring down entire temples. Also, I'm not sure this was specifically talked about in a meeting, but I'd like to think each of Book Three's villains used more of a vagabond form of combat, picking up moves and concepts as they traveled around the globe on various adventures and adapting those techniques to their own personal style.

CHAPTER SEVEN

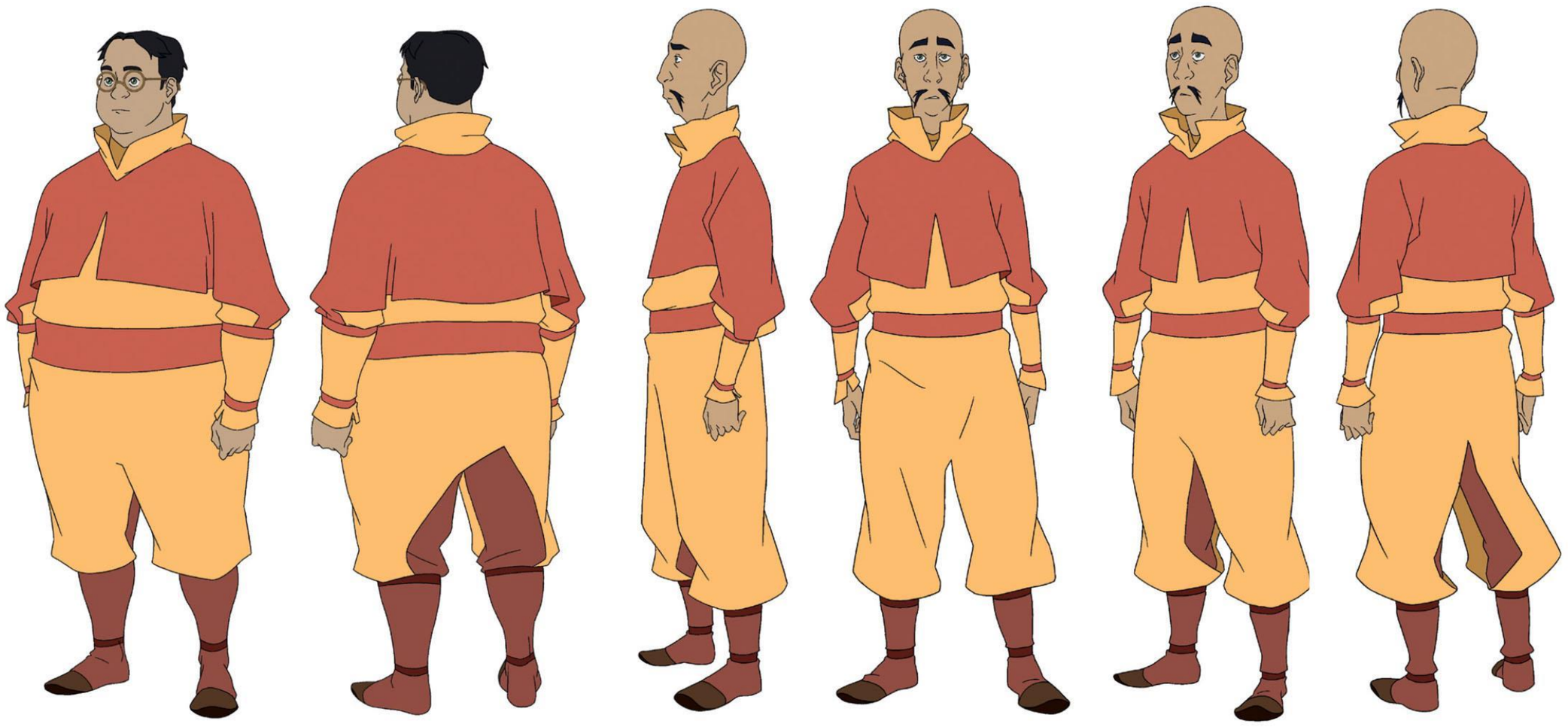
ORIGINAL AIRBENDERS

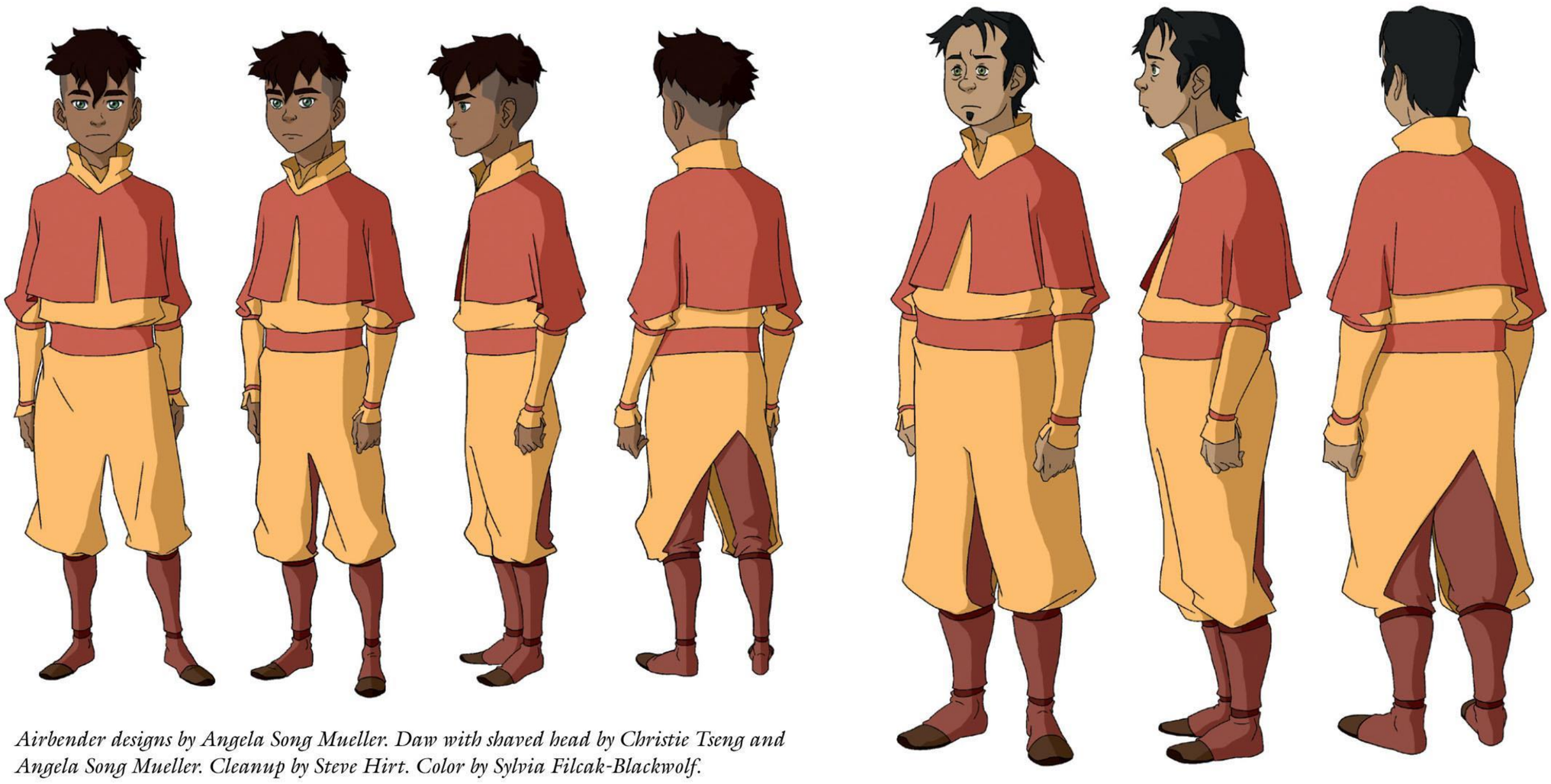
THE NEW AIRBENDERS

MD: The Airbenders are back! As the writers and I pitched out potential stories for the season, we left a slot open for a story specifically focused on the new Airbenders. We hadn't really dealt with how Bumi felt about having new powers and also wanted to explore the dynamic of this ragtag group of new recruits, many of whom weren't natural-born fighters. Otaku (middle left) was a character we added to help show that at least one Air Acolyte became a full-fledged Airbender.

(Preceding spread) Tenzin and Pema's quarters in the Northern Air Temple. Background design by Angela Sung. Painting by Emily Tetri.







Airbender designs by Angela Song Mueller. Daw with shaved head by Christie Tseng and Angela Song Mueller. Cleanup by Steve Hirt. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.



BK: Keeping characters' relative heights consistent in a fairly realistic show like Korra *is a significant challenge. Dozens of storyboard artists and animators all take turns drawing the same characters, and their interpretations can vary widely. And we just don't have the time, money, or energy to have every inconsistency corrected in retakes. The best thing to do is try to prevent this with size-comparison sheets like this one, which Christie Tseng put together to try to keep track of all the new Airbenders.*



BK: Here we have eight of the motley background Airbenders whom we don't get a chance to know very well in the show. They all seem like pleasant folks, though! Airbender designs by Angela Song Mueller. Cleanup by Steve Hirt. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.

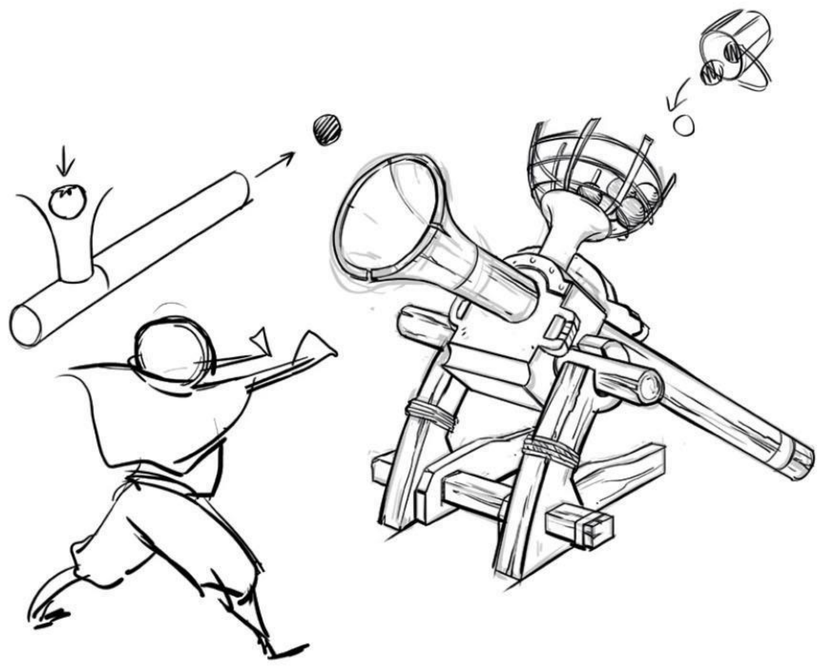
BK: It was a heady experience to be revisiting and updating these locations at the Northern Air Temple from the seventeenth episode of Avatar. *It made me feel like my life was going in a big, inescapable circle! Background designs by Angela Sung. Paintings by Emily Tetri.*

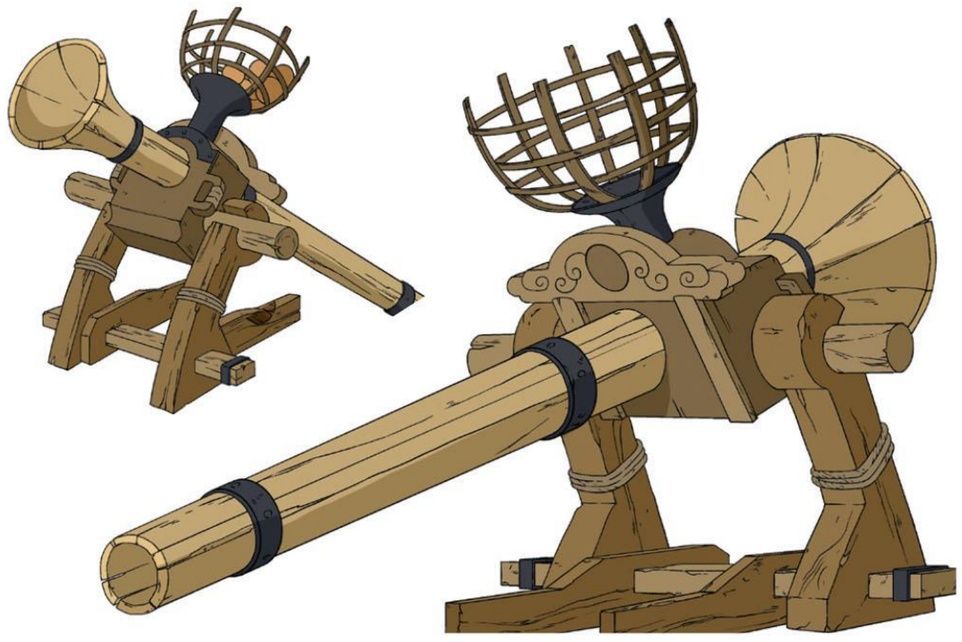


MD: A humorous moment between Bumi and Tenzin. I love the fraternal rivalry and playful antagonism between these two characters. Storyboard by Shaun O'Neil.



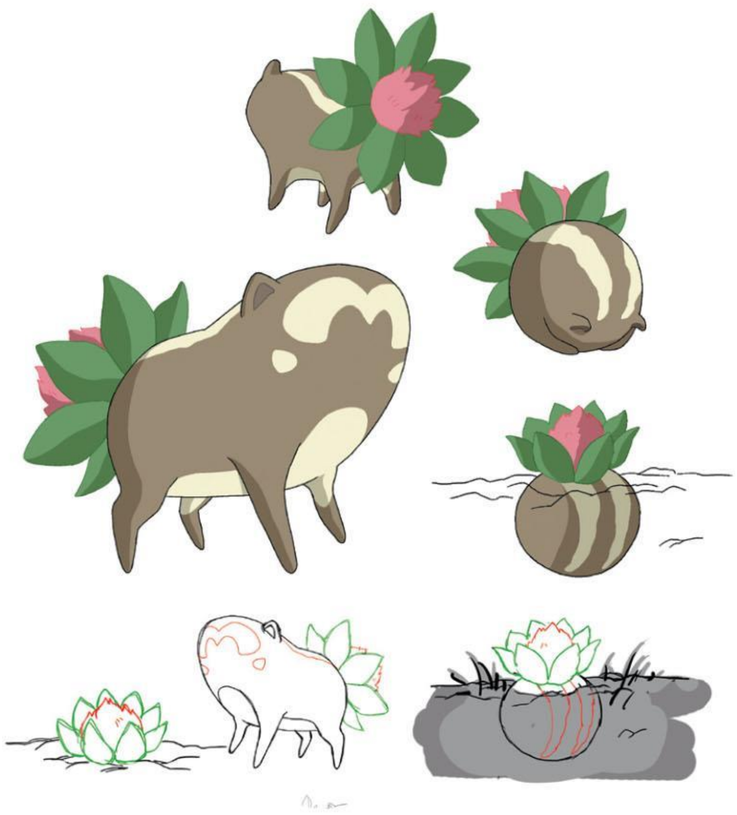
Previous page: The Northern Air Temple, with the holes from the explosion that happened in the original series now filled in with new buildings. Background design by Angela Sung and Ricardo Delgado. Painting by Frederic Stewart. Top: Airbender obstacle course design by William Nanqing Niu and Christine Bian. Airbending cannon by Christine Bian. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.







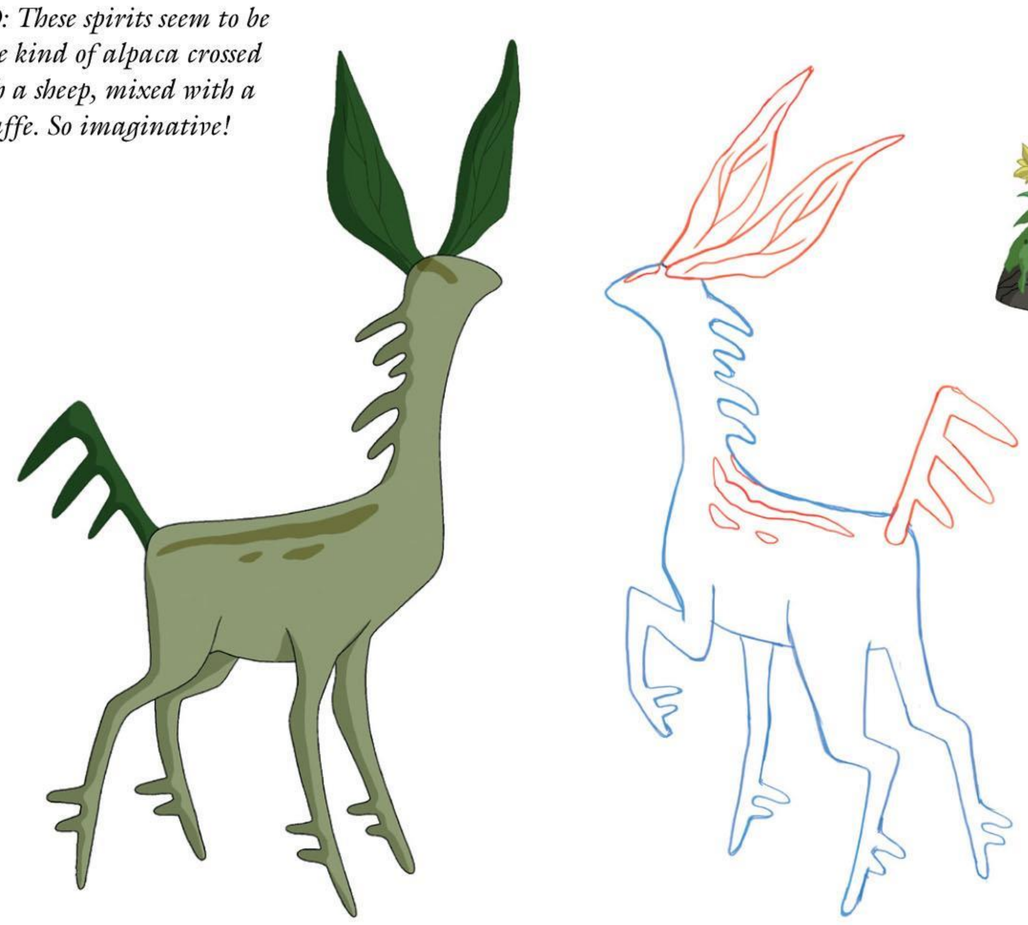






Valley spirit designs by Christie Tseng. Cleanup by Steve Hirt. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.

MD: These spirits seem to be some kind of alpaca crossed with a sheep, mixed with a giraffe. So imaginative!



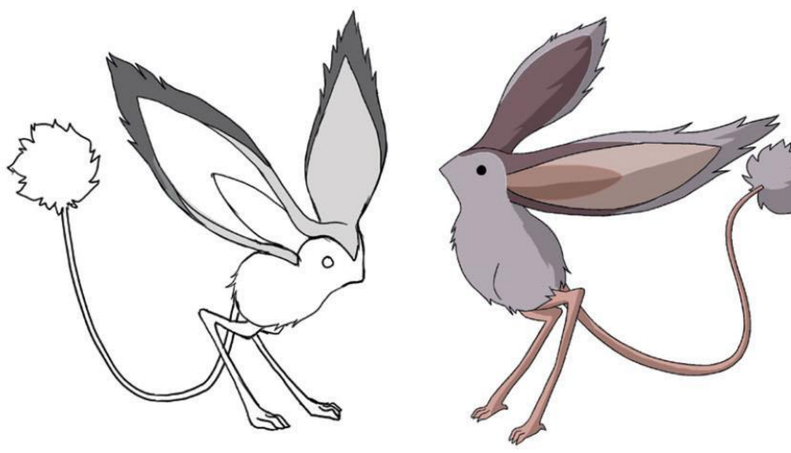






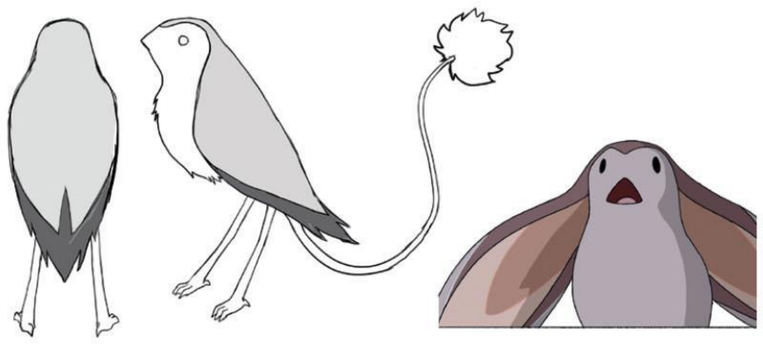


BK: Christie Tseng has a seemingly endless supply of cute, creative spirit ideas in her head. I wonder just how many of them she designed for Korra.











MD: (Opposite, top) Laghima's Peak, which becomes an important location in "Enter the Void," makes its first appearance when Tenzin forces the Airbenders to take an early morning hike. (Opposite, bottom) The gorgeous valley which surrounds the Northern Air Temple has now become home to many spirits.



JDS: I know this location holds a special place in Bryan's and Mike's hearts, and I'm sure they could speak volumes on it. I just have to say that this background and set piece in general is probably my favorite in all of my time on Korra. *So many opportunities to stage compelling action on a set that has such deep roots in the mythology of this world . . . So cool. Background designs by William Nanqing Niu. Paintings by Lauren Zurcher.*

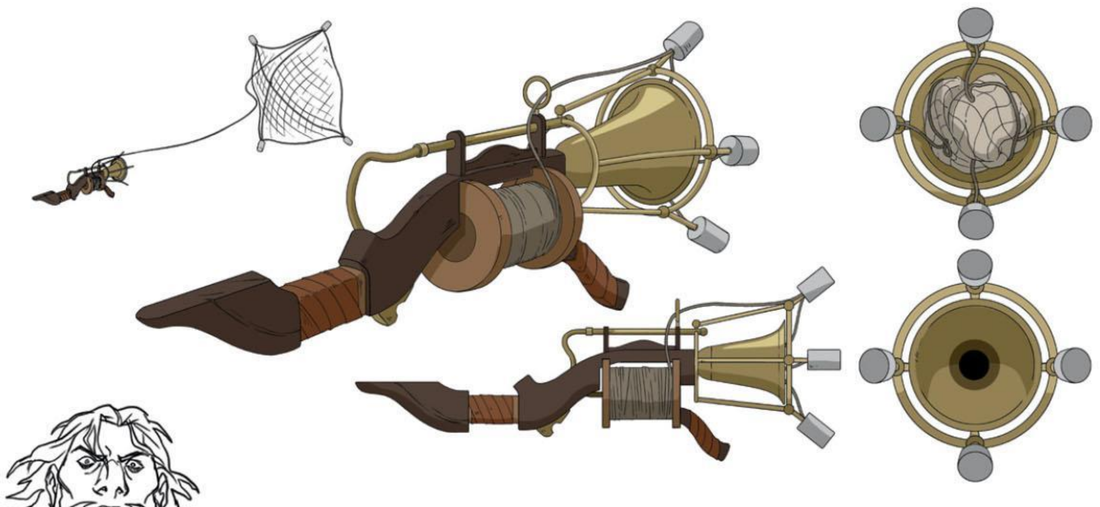




MD: The leader of the bison rustlers, Ganbat, wears a bison pelt, proving just how nasty and despicable he is. JDS: I was so disturbed by this design that I actually felt guilty drawing him in the storyboard! Design by Christie Tseng. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.







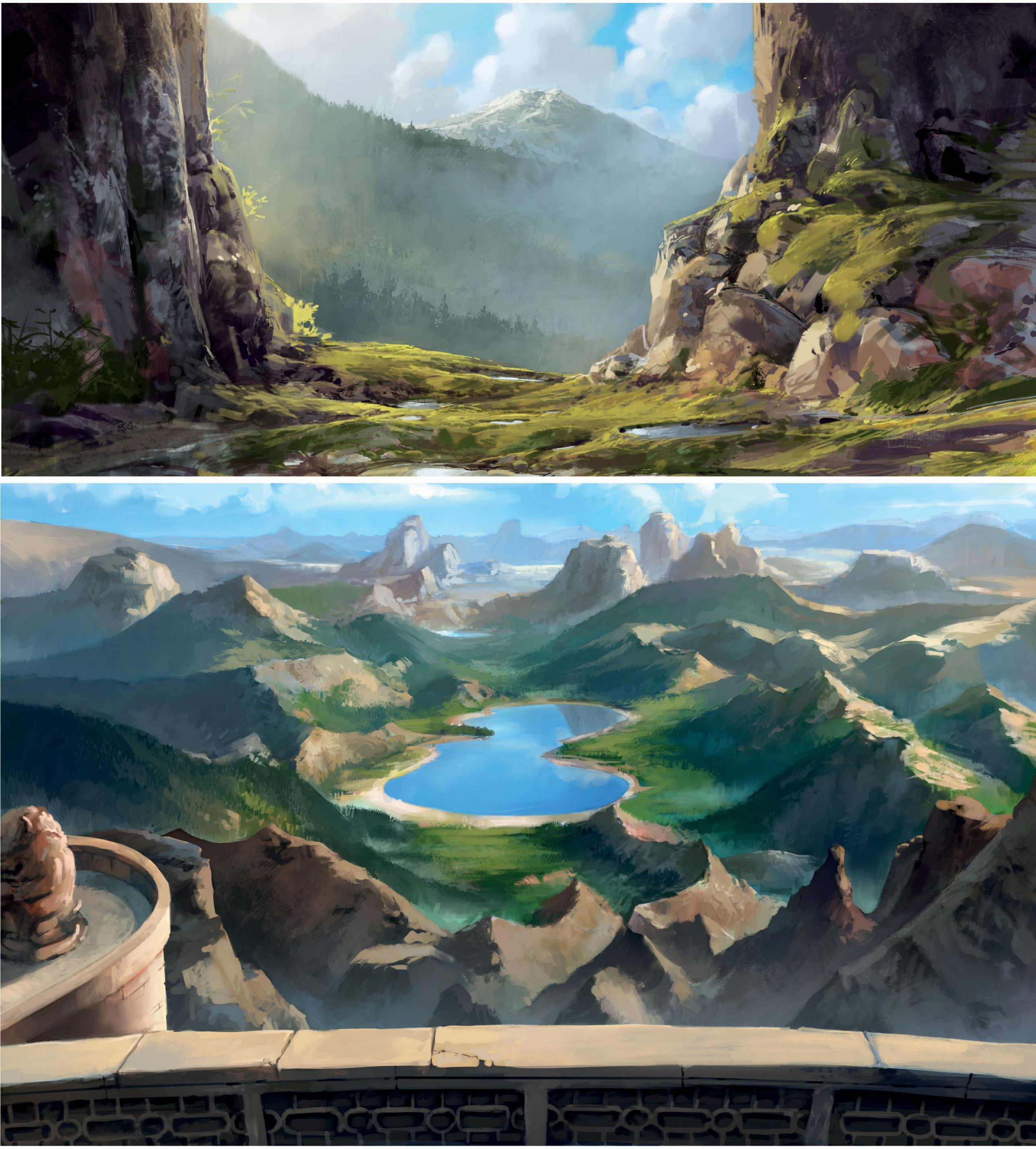


Net gun and knife by Christine Bian. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.





BK: As adept as Christie is at designing innumerable cute spirits, she is just as proficient when it comes to designing nasty scoundrels. I didn't want these guys to be sympathetic in the least, so I was happy she made them a seedy, surly lot from the get-go. Sylvia followed up with a subdued Earth Kingdom color palette to seal the deal. As with Zaheer's winter outfit, we gave a couple of these rustlers clothes with black fur trim for that villainous flair. Bison rustlers by Christie Tseng. Cleanup by Steve Hirt. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.

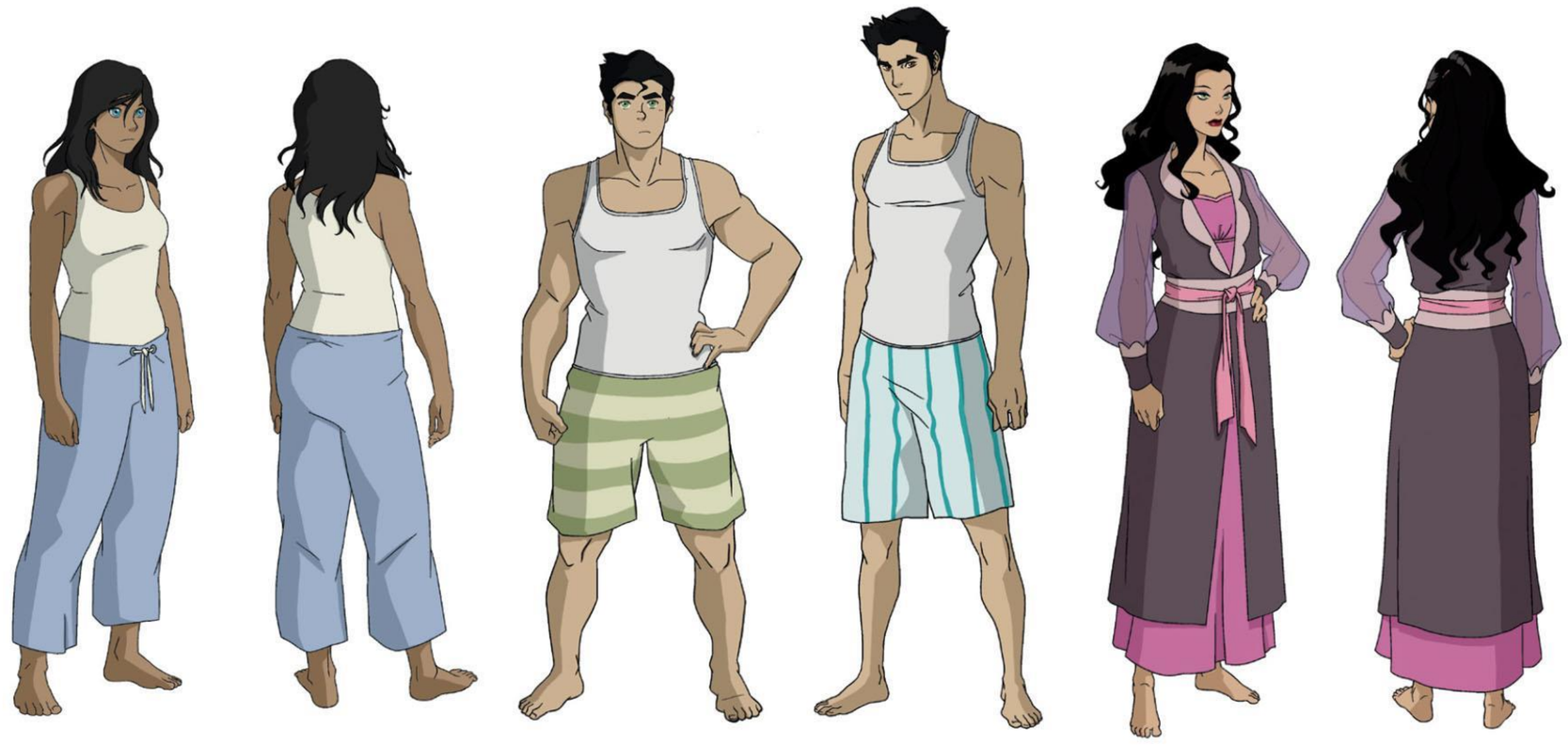


MD: I love these views of the Northern Air Temple's surrounding valley and landscape. When I see paintings like these from the show, it really makes me wish I could enter the Avatar *world and walk through these environments. Background designs by William Nanqing Niu. Top painting by Frederic Stewart. Bottom painting by Lauren Zurcher.*



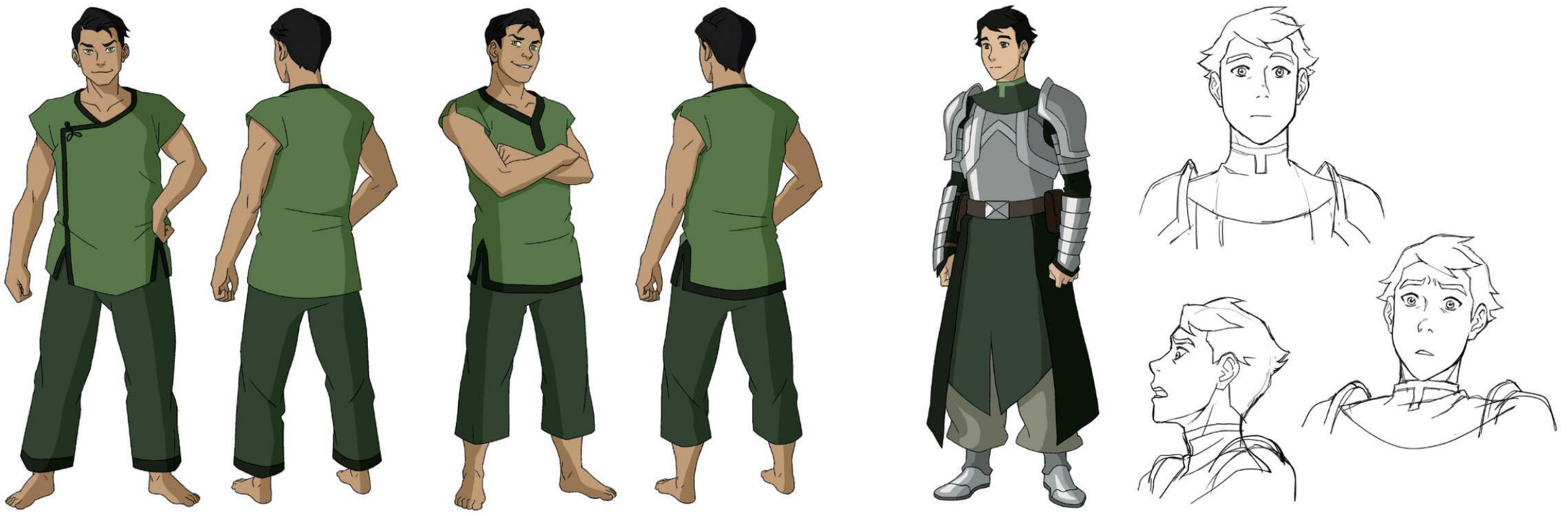
CHAPTER EIGHT

THE TERROR WITHIN



BK: The harrowing kidnapping attempt and subsequent nail-biting action sequence was made all the more tense because our good guys were caught unaware, in their pajamas. Korra in pajamas by Bryan Konietzko and Angela Song Mueller. Bolin, Mako, Asami, Wing, and Wei in pajamas by Angela Song Mueller. Hong Li by Christie Tseng. Cleanup by Steve Hirt. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.

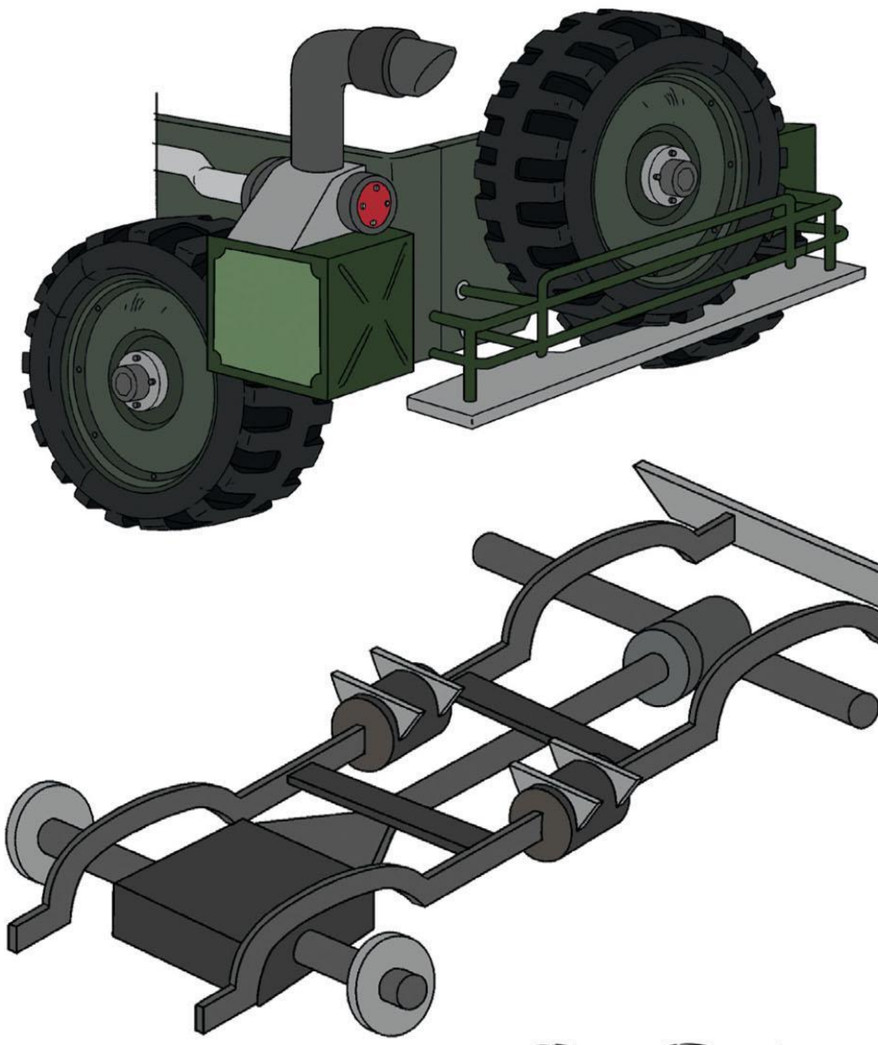
(Preceding spread) Beifong estate grounds. Background design by William Nanqing Niu. Painting by Frederic Stewart.

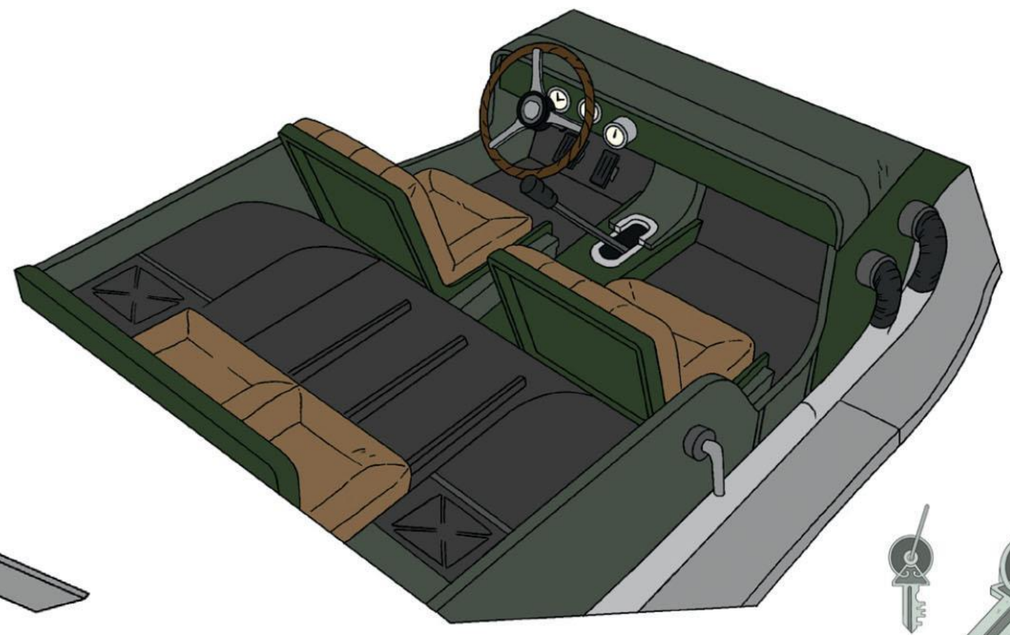


MD: Mako and Bolin were peacefully snoozing in this guesthouse at the Beifong estate before getting a terrible wake-up call from Pabu, alerting them to Korra's abduction. Background design by William Nanqing Niu.

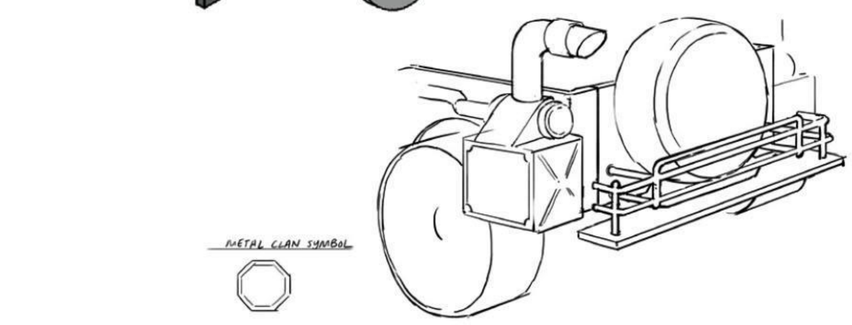


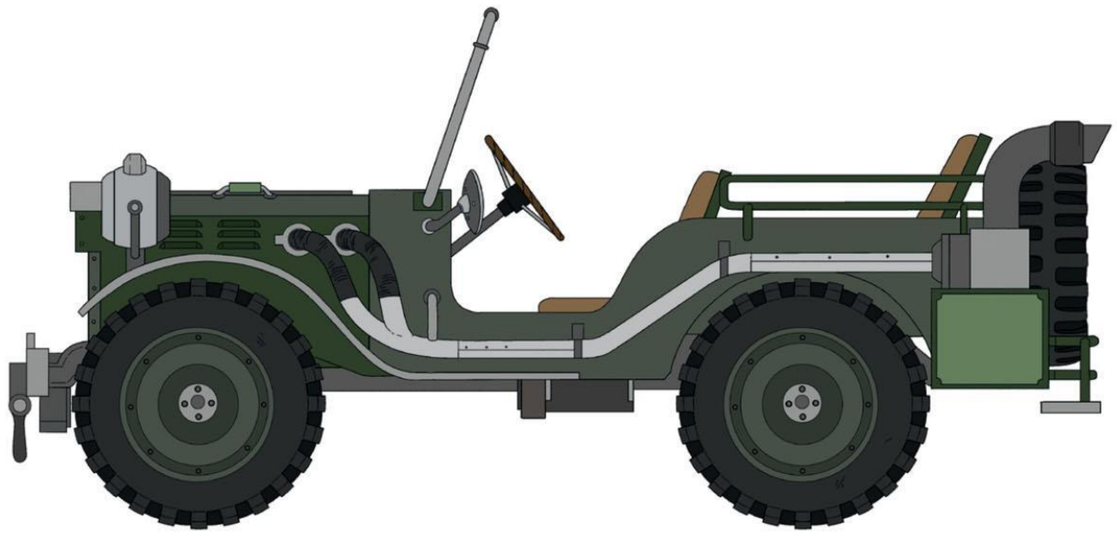
BK: William did a stellar job of creating the layout of the palatial Beifong estate grounds, and Lauren's paintings, with their subtle recessed lights and brushed-metal surfaces, imbue the scenes with the perfect unsettling mood. Background designs by William Nanqing Niu. Paintings by Lauren Zurcher.

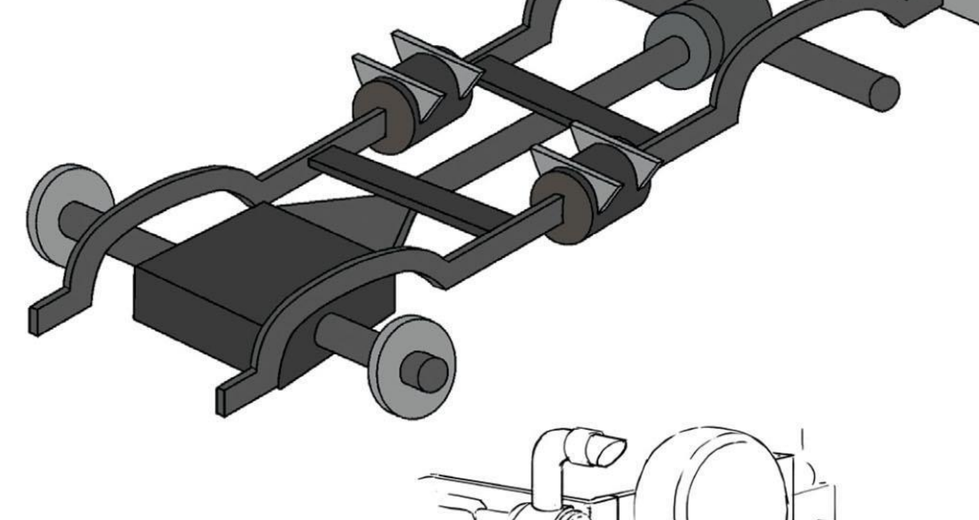


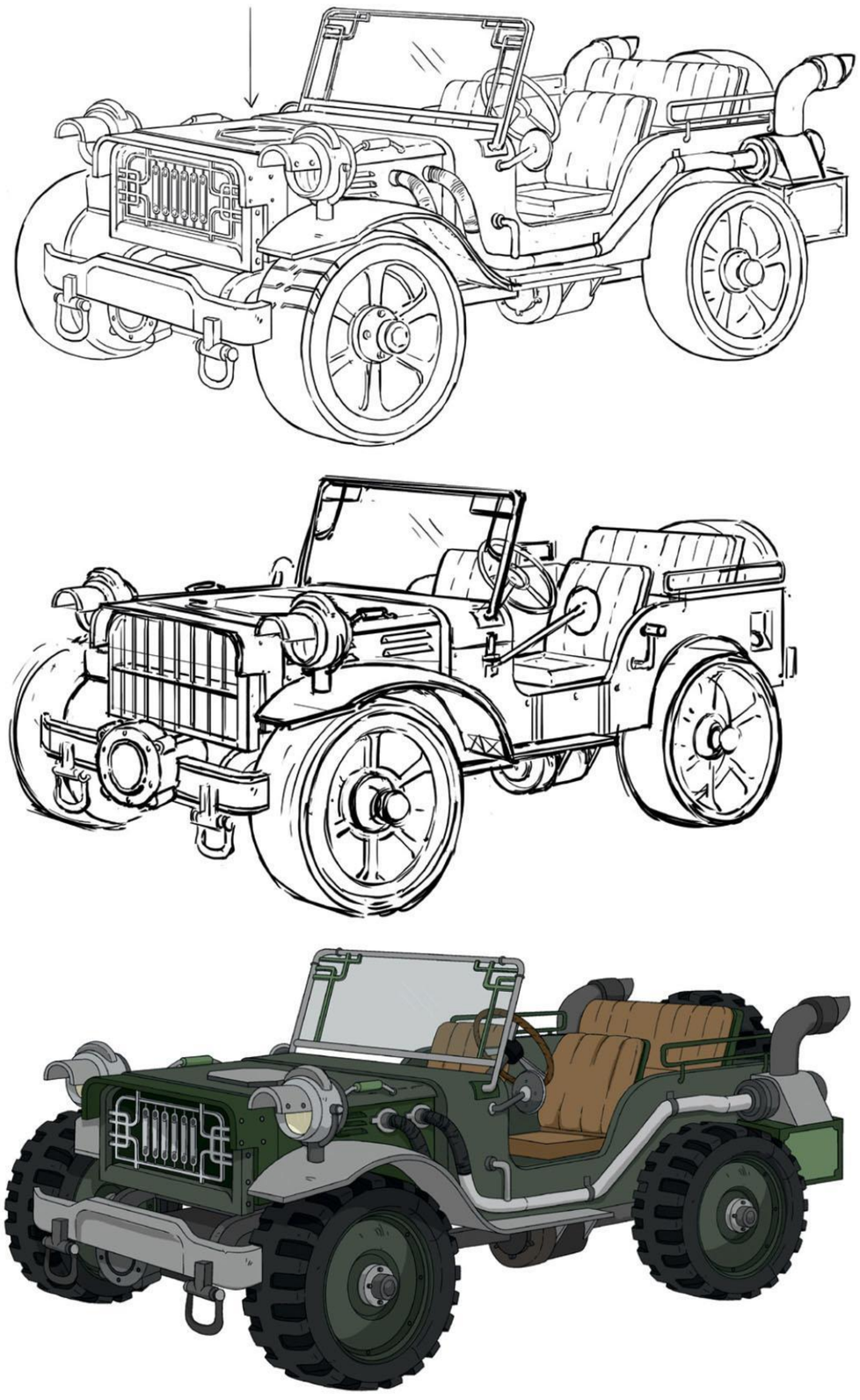


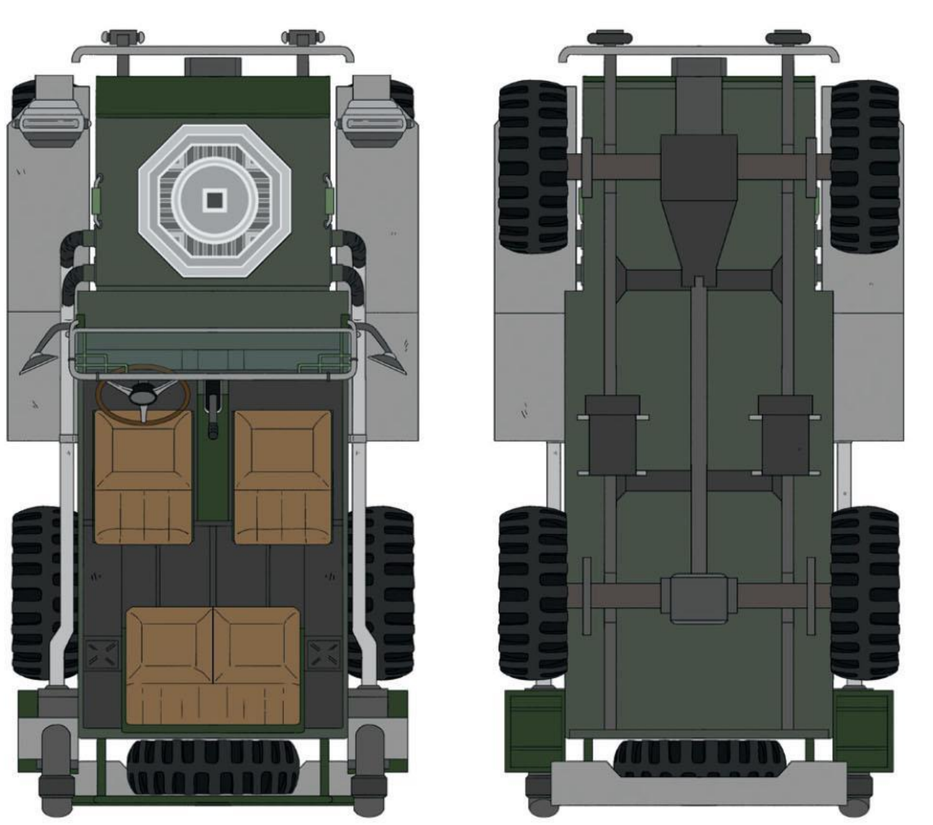


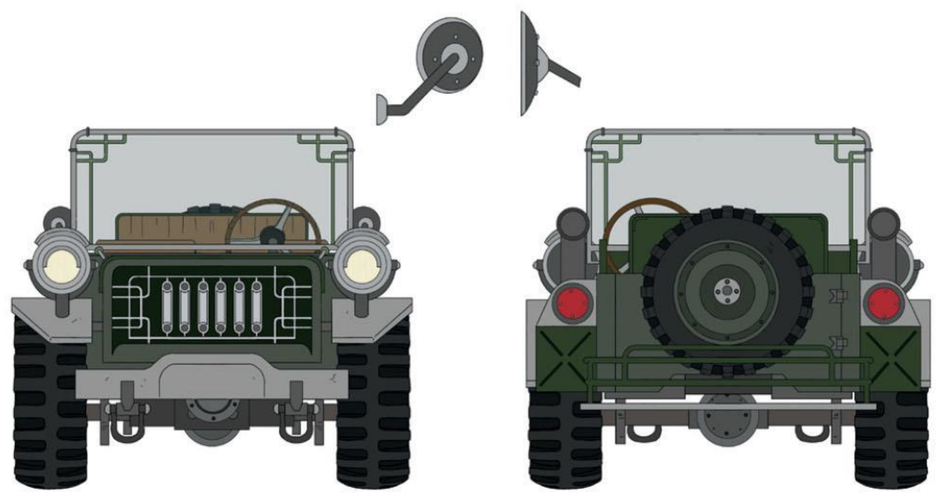










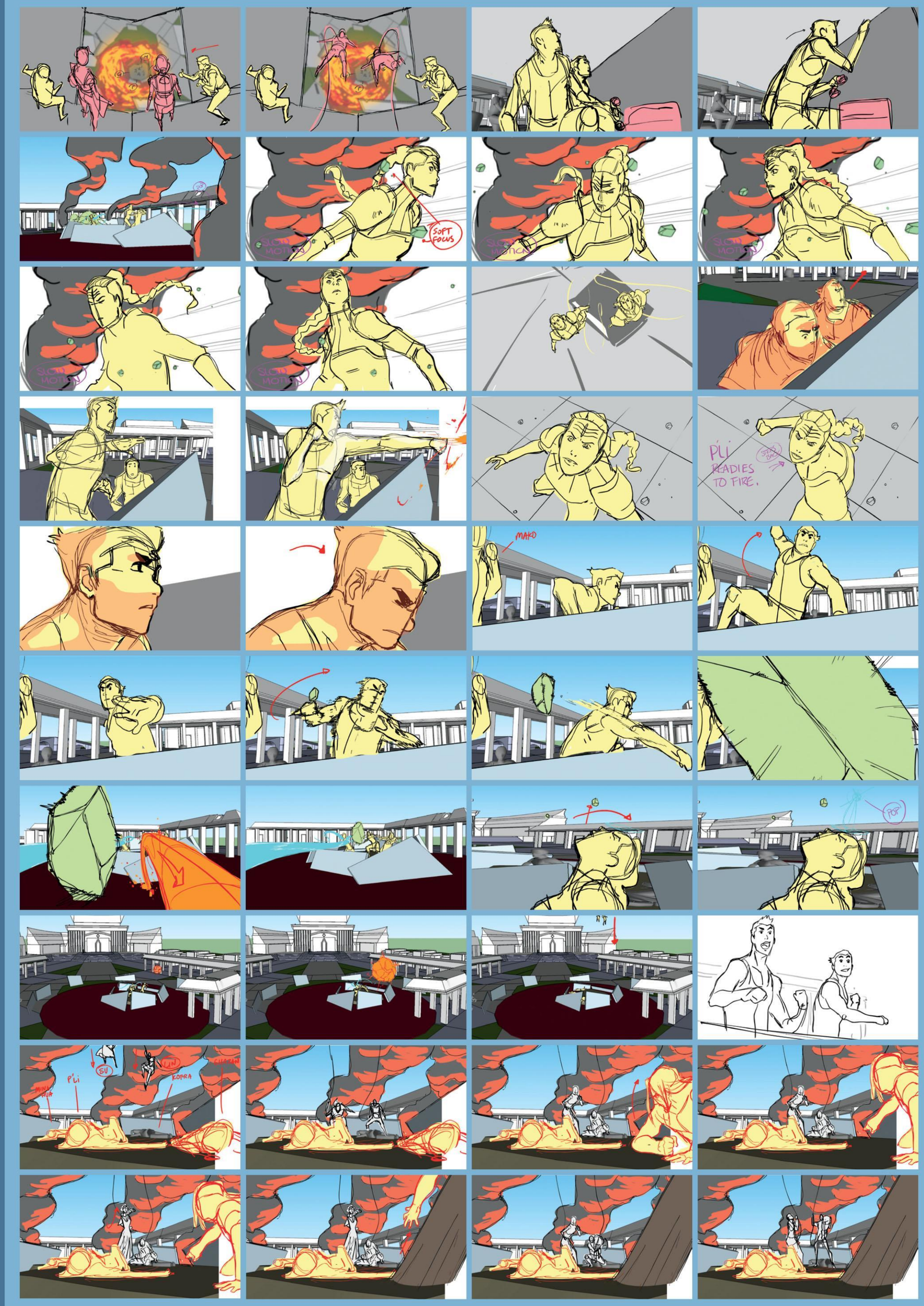


BK: When designing a prop to be modeled in CG, the artist typically creates "orthos," short for orthographic projections, that depict the object in flat views without any optical distortion. This allows the CG modeler to follow the designs much more closely. Zaofu jeep by Christine Bian. Cleanup by Steve Hirt. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.





MD: Team Avatar investigates suspect Hong Li's apartment, searching for his connection to the Red Lotus. BK: Man, this eighteen-year-old guy has a much more stylish and tidy apartment than I did as a freshman art student! Come to think of it, it is twenty years later and I'm still not that tidy. I love seeing all the shining examples of how thorough our design team was with my Art Deco mandate, not only with grandiose locations, but also humble interiors, like this one. Great work, Angela! Background designs by Angela Sung. Paintings by Lauren Zurcher.



JDS: This scene was a doozy to board. First we have our villains completely pinned down and defending their position, then we introduce Su and Lin descending from the dome above, distracting P'Li while Bolin takes aim with a small pebble for a precision shot on her third eye! So many moving pieces! Storyboard by Joaquim Dos Santos.



MD: The Beifong estate grounds, before and after the battle with the Red Lotus members. This episode was a big challenge, due to all the crazy action. Background designs by William Nanqing Niu. Top painting by Lauren Zurcher. Bottom painting by Frederic Stewart.



CHAPTER NINE

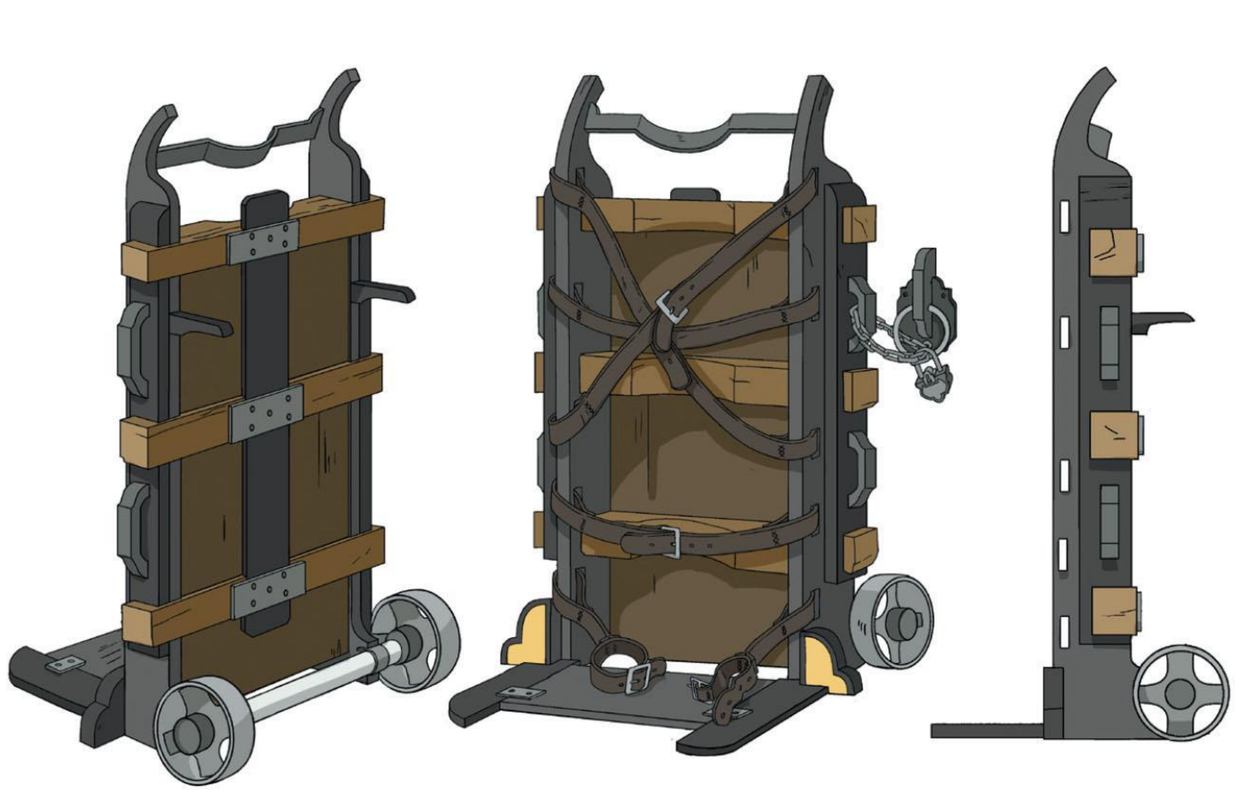
THE STAKEOUT





Innkeeper and tavern owner by Angela Song Mueller. Mako and Bolin in disguise and Korra in straitjacket by Christie Tseng. Prison cart by Christine Bian. Cleanup by Steve Hirt. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.

(Preceding spread) Misty Palms marketplace. Background design by Angela Sung and Christine Bian. Painting by Frederic Stewart.







Team Avatar wanted posters. Translation: "By Royal Decree of the Earth Queen: Wanted by Her Majesty, the Earth Queen, for crimes against the Kingdom. You will be rewarded handsomely for information leading to this criminal's capture." Designs by Christie Tseng and Christine Bian. Cleanup by Steve Hirt. Translation and calligraphy by S. L. Lee, PhD. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf. Opposite page: The Misty Palms Inn seen during the afternoon, at sunset, and at night. Background designs by Angela Sung and Christine Bian. Paintings by Emily Tetri.









BK: Just prior to the startup meeting for this episode, a friend forwarded me a picture of an adorable Bolin doll made by luvliX3 on deviantART. When the crew asked what the Nuktuk doll should look like, I pulled up the photo on the Internet and said, "Like this!" Nuktuk fans by Angela Song Mueller. Nuktuk doll by Christine Bian. Cleanup by Steve Hirt. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.



BK: I want to be clear that we never intended these Nuktuk fans to be any sort of a negative commentary on the actual, wonderful, real-life Avatar/Korra *fans! The thought hadn't even occurred to us until our network executive voiced a concern upon seeing the final animation. I think we were all just having fun with the broad notion of a muscular pair who were mistaken as scary bounty hunters, only to be revealed as scary stalkers. Obviously some "con culture" tropes seeped in there though, for humor's sake.*



MD: After fleeing Zaofu, Aiwei takes refuge in this room at the Misty Palms Inn. Not the most luxurious accommodations, but when you're a fugitive on the run, you can't get too picky. Background designs by Angela Sung. Paintings by Lauren Zurcher.



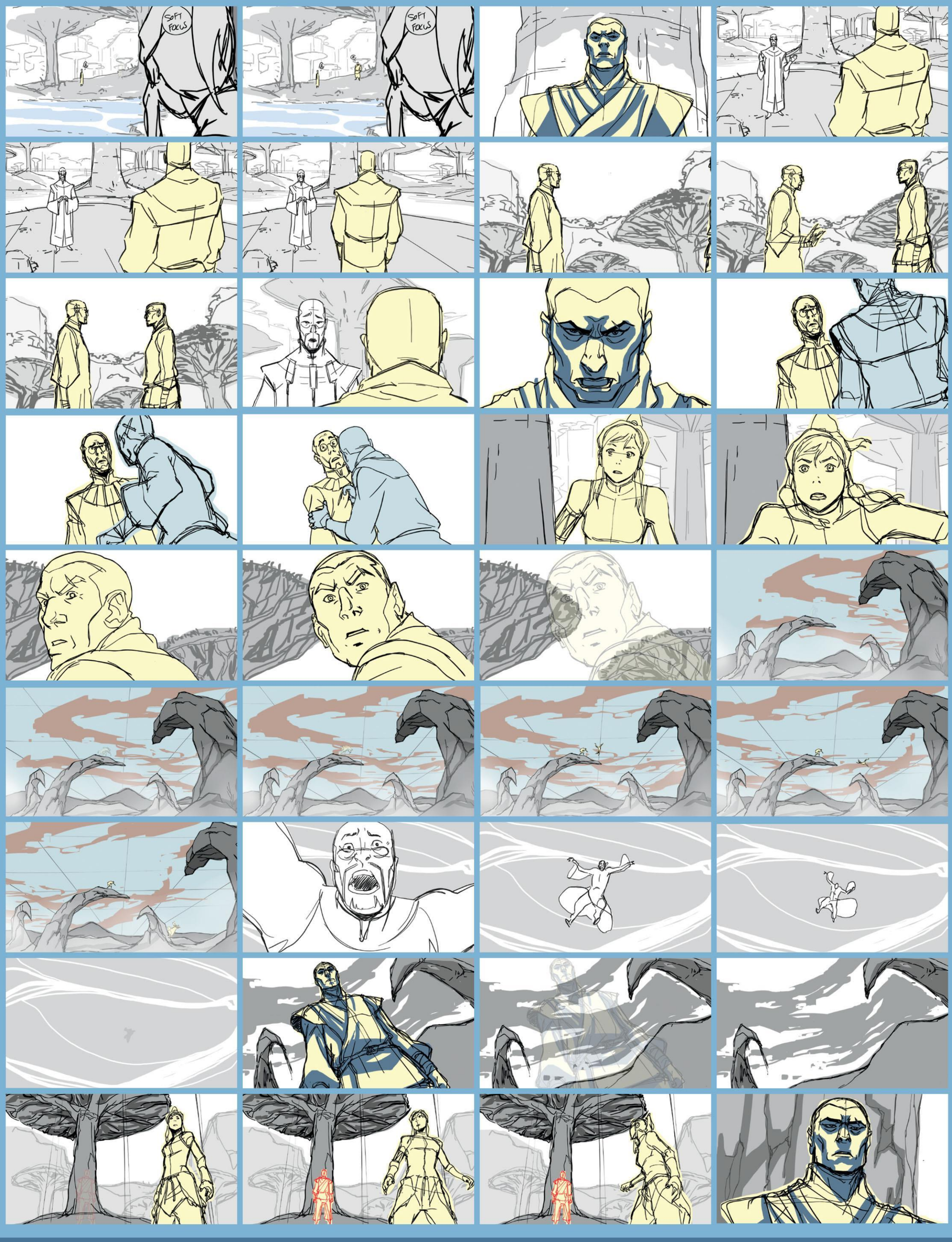
MD: Another eclectic and beautifully designed bunch of citizens, this time to fill out the population of Misty Palms Oasis. Designs by Christie Tseng and Angela Song Mueller. Cleanup by Steve Hirt. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.



MD: Misty Palms Oasis has undergone a resurgence since the original series, though it still has a seedy side. It's now a popular tourist spot and refuge for weary travelers. And ever since Harmonic Convergence, it has also become home to a variety of spirits. Background design by Bryan Konietzko and William Nanqing Niu. Painting by Lauren Zurcher.



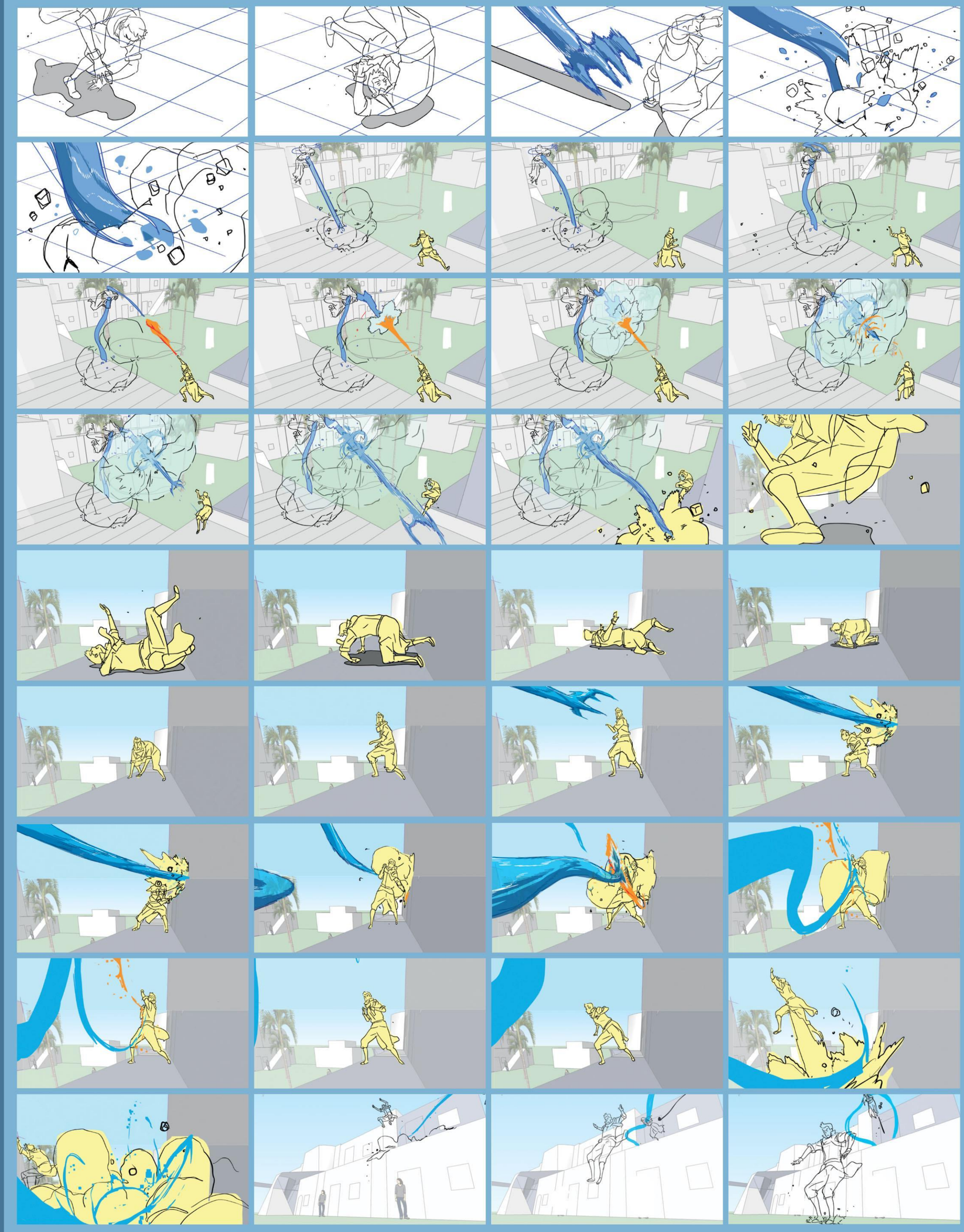
BK: Yet another revisited location, but this time the updates were significant enough that I didn't feel like I was reliving my past toils. I am still mystified (no pun intended—seriously, I'm not into puns) by the idea of this geological anomaly of an ice chunk perpetually jutting out of the desert floor. Each day it pokes out a little farther, and each day an equal amount melts into mist. There must be some spiritual properties to it, attracting not only benign spirits, but also Aiwei for his nefarious meditation. Misty Palms Oasis market design by Christine Bian. Painting by Emily Tetri.



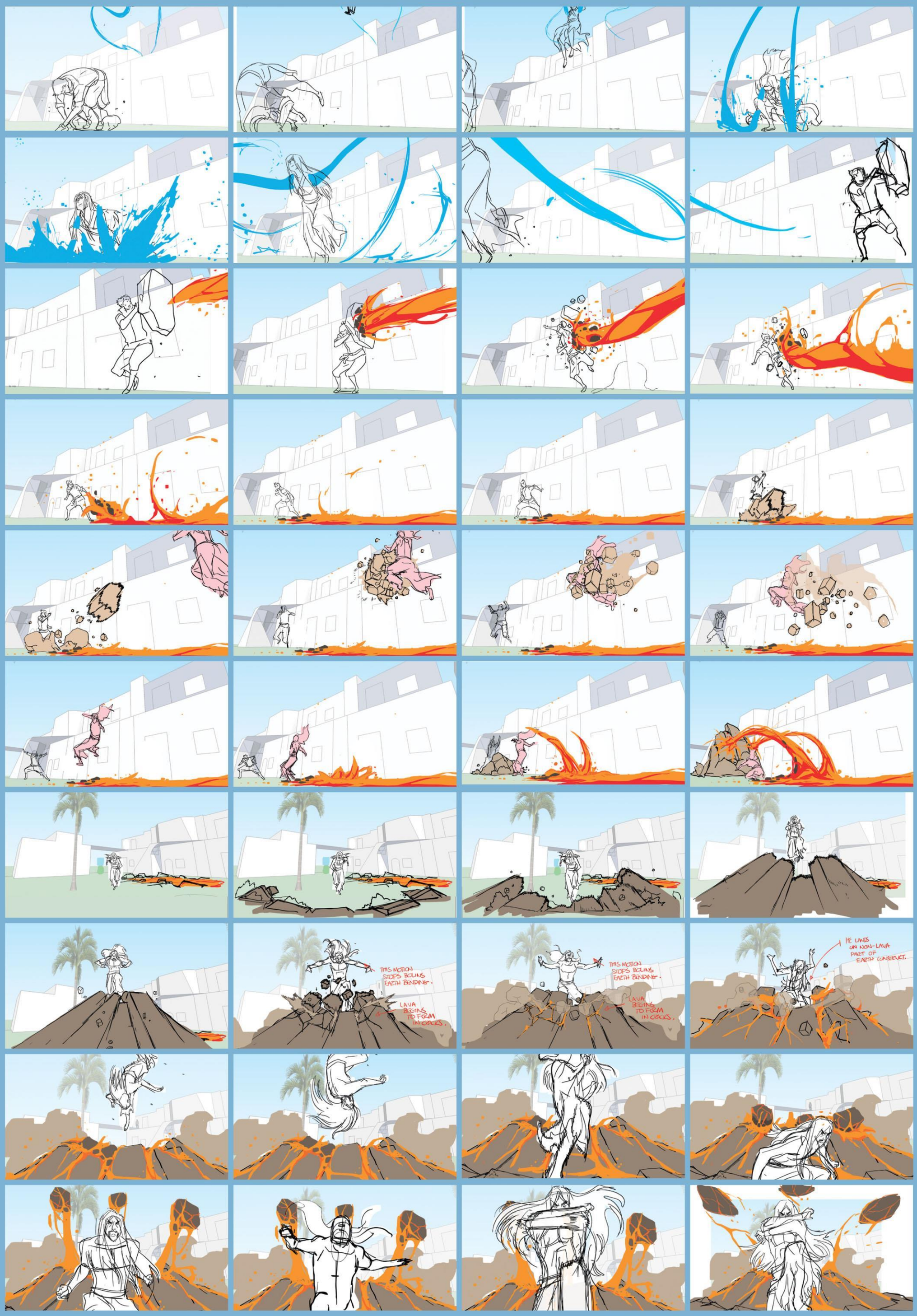
MD: Zaheer confronts Aiwei, then throws him in the Fog of Lost Souls for eternity. JDS: This is the first time we see just how ruthless Zaheer can be in the name of his cause. Storyboard by Chris Palmer, Ki-Hyun Ryu, and Lauren Montgomery.

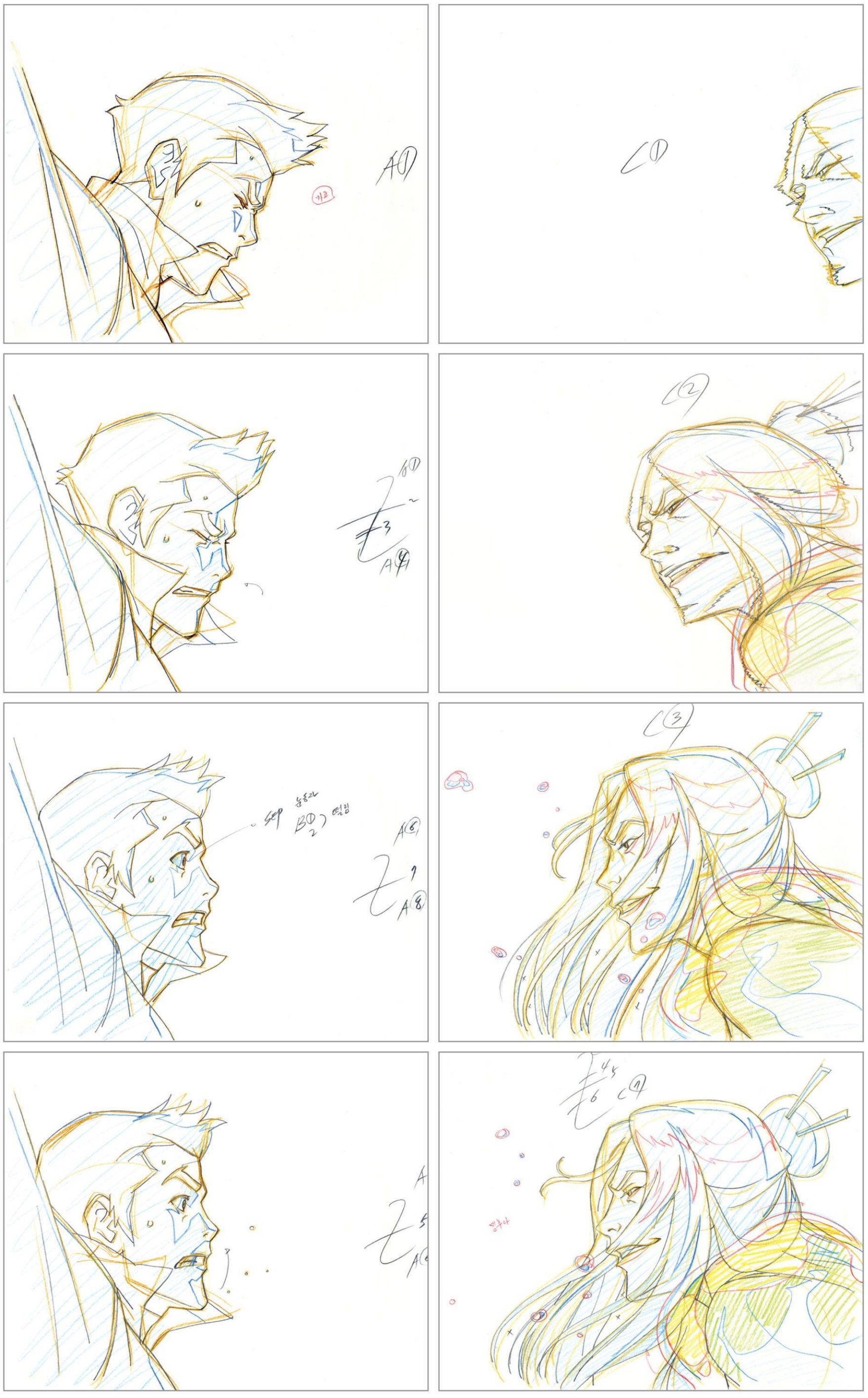


BK: I keep a folder of stunning landscapes and flora from around the world for inspiration. I came across an amazing photo of Dracaena cinnabari, *commonly known as the dragon blood tree, while we were working on Book Three. I knew this had to be used in the spirit world for Xai Bau's grove. I've said it before and I'll say it again: when you want to go weird and creepy, you can't beat Mother Nature. Top: Xai Bau's grove. Background design by Bryan Konietzko and Jonard Soriano. Painting by Frederic Stewart. Bottom: Background design by William Nanqing Niu. Painting by Lauren Zurcher.*



MD: Bryan and I first worked with Young-Ki Yoon at Tin House Studios, where he was the animation director for the original pilot of Avatar. *Years later, he moved to Los Angeles, and we were lucky to work with him again on Book Three. His animation skills are very evident in the fight sequence between Ming-Hua and Mako. Storyboard by Young-Ki Yoon and Joaquim Dos Santos.*


THIS MOTION STOPS BOLIN'S EARTH BINDING.
LAVA BEGINS TO FORM IN CRACKS.
THIS MOTION STOPS BOLIN'S EARTH BINDING.
LAVA BEGINS TO FORM IN CRACKS.
HE LANDS ON NON-LAVA PART OF EARTH CONSTRUCT.



MD: Mako's first showdown with Ming-Hua doesn't go so well for him. It was fun writing this poolside action scene, and I love how great the final animation looks. Key animation by Studio Reve.



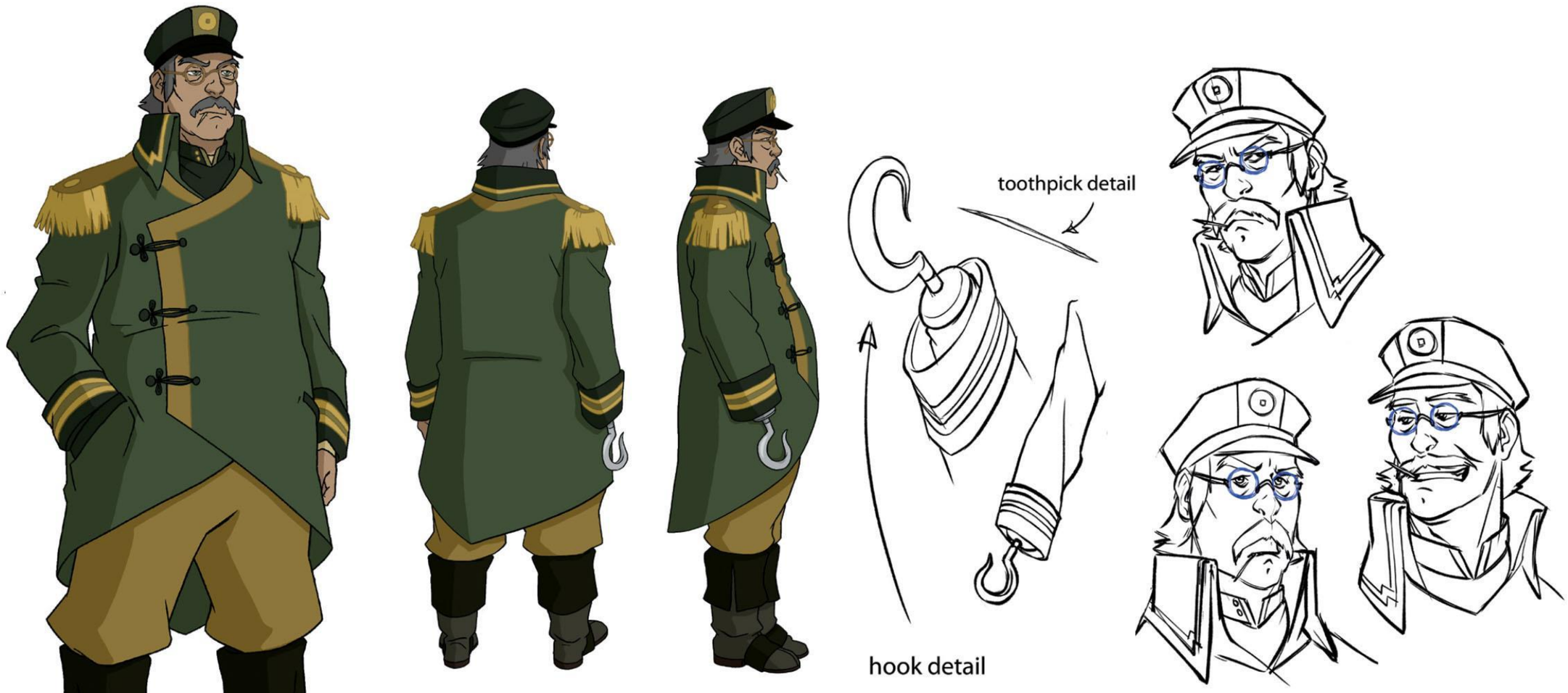
JDS: Bolin dives into the safety of the nearby swimming pool to avoid Ghazan's lavabending onslaught! The tension of this scene is momentarily broken by the hilarious expression on his face. Key animation by Studio Reve.





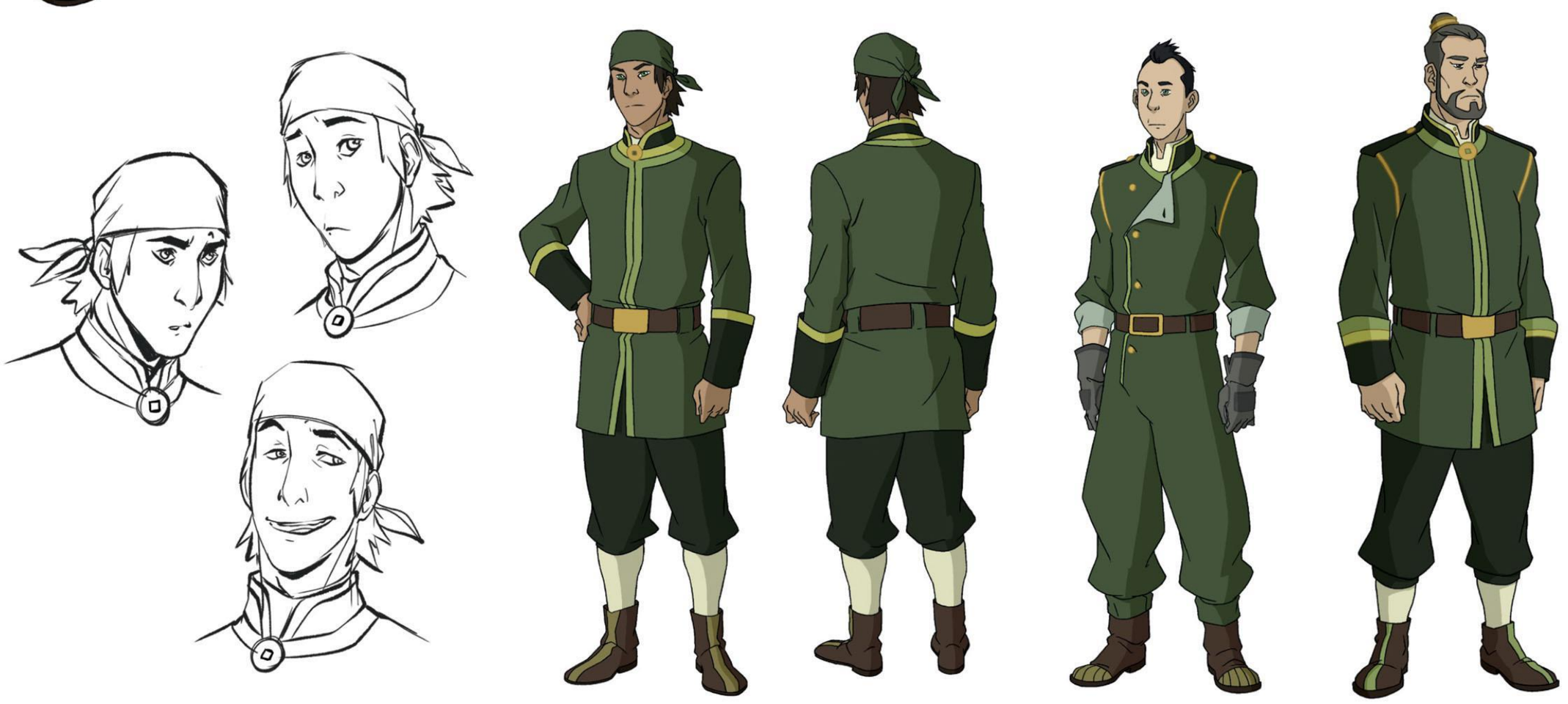
CHAPTER TEN

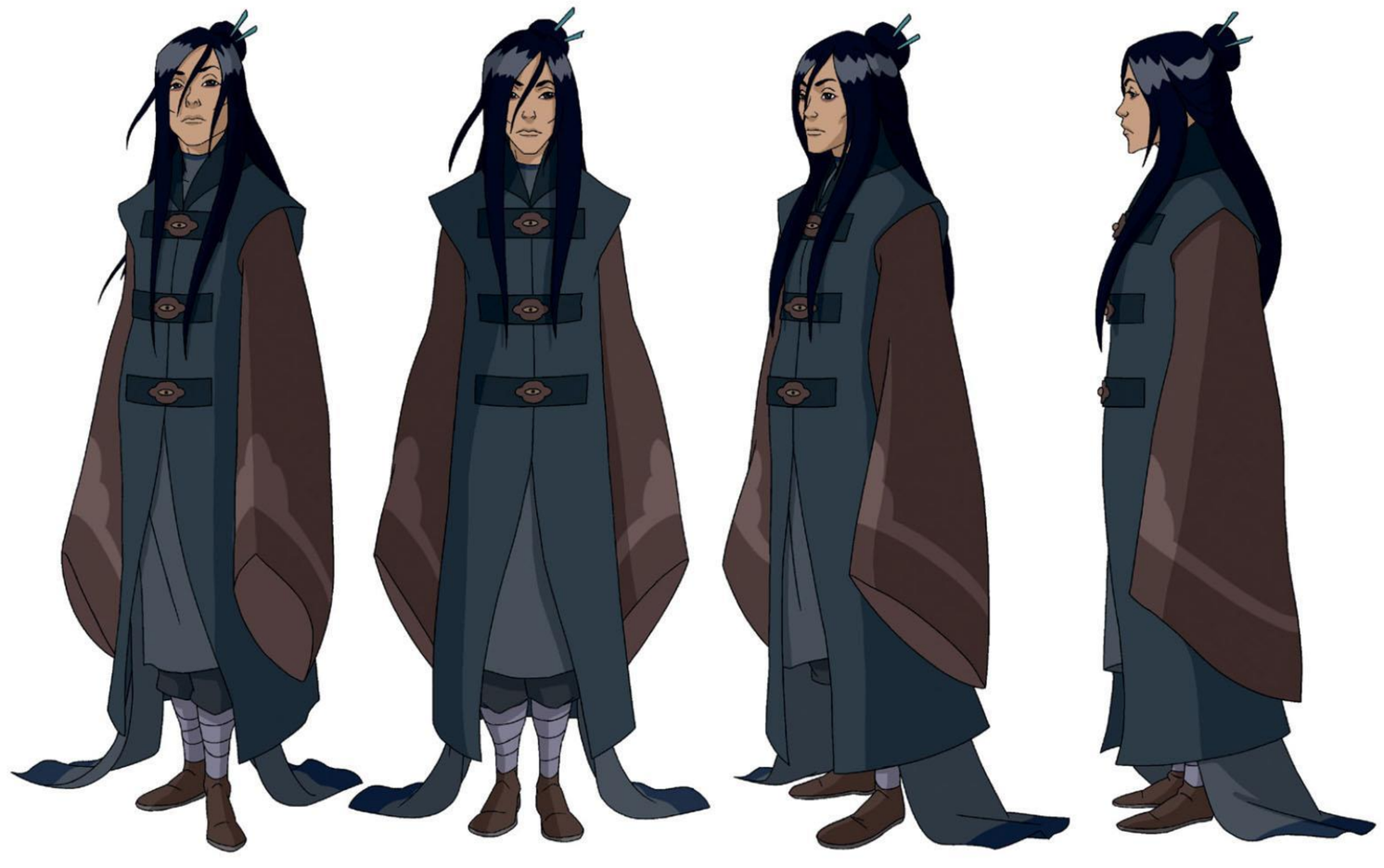
LONG LIVE THE QUEEN



Earth Kingdom captain by Angela Song Mueller. Cleanup by Steve Hirt. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.

(Preceding spread) Ghazan brought down this wall between Ba Sing Se's Lower and Middle Rings. Background design by William Nanqing Niu. Painting by Frederic Stewart.

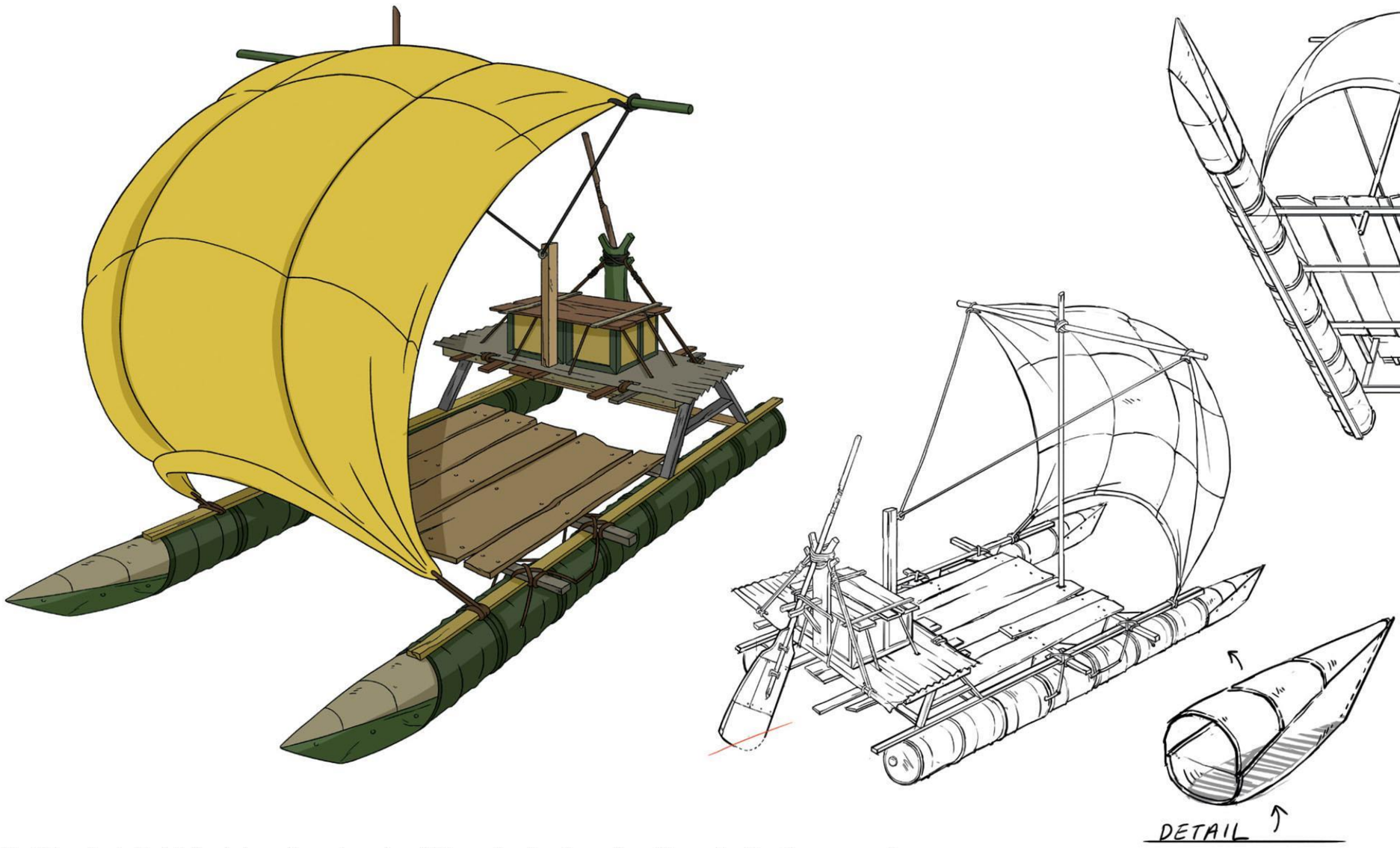




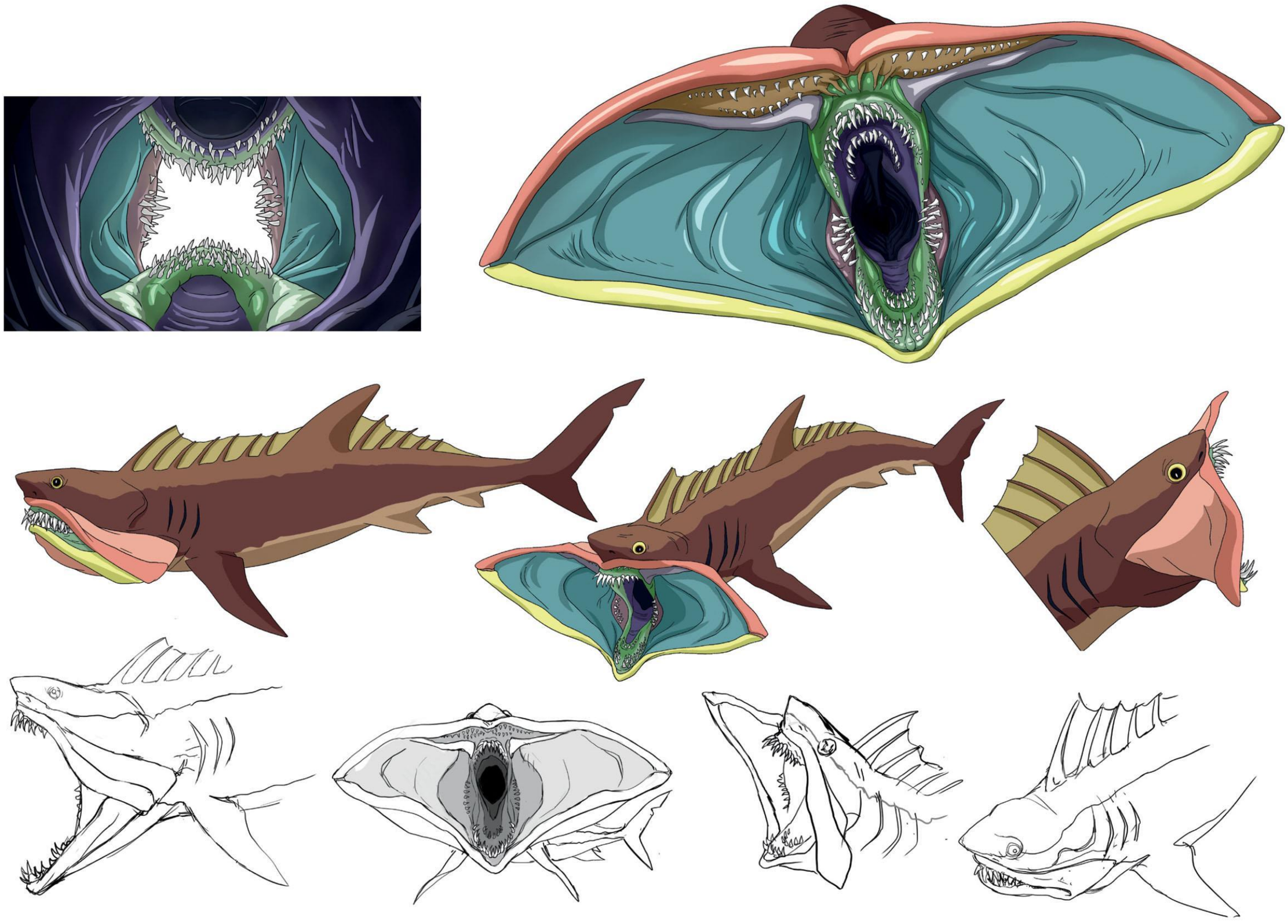
BK: When Ming-Hua goes into the Earth Queen's palace, she wants to have a large source of water on her person in the event that a fight might break out, which ultimately happens, of course. She carries this water supply within leather skins concealed inside long, baggy sleeves, which she can bend to move like natural arms if need be. The unsuspecting Dai Li agents are unaware until it is too late! Arik, Kong, and copilot designs by Angela Song Mueller. Ming-Hua with leather sleeves design by Bryan Konietzko and Angela Song Mueller. Cleanup by Steve Hirt. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf and Bryan Konietzko.



MD: Yet another location we revisit from the original series is the harsh and unforgiving Si Wong Desert. Top: Background design by Angela Sung. Painting by Lauren Zurcher. Bottom: Fort Bosco, an older Earth Kingdom outpost, named in honor of King Kuei's loyal pet and companion. Background design by William Nanqing Niu. Painting by Emily Tetri.



MD: This episode highlighted Asami's engineering skills, as she pieced together this sand sailer from parts of the destroyed airship. Design by Christine Bian. Cleanup by Steve Hirt. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.



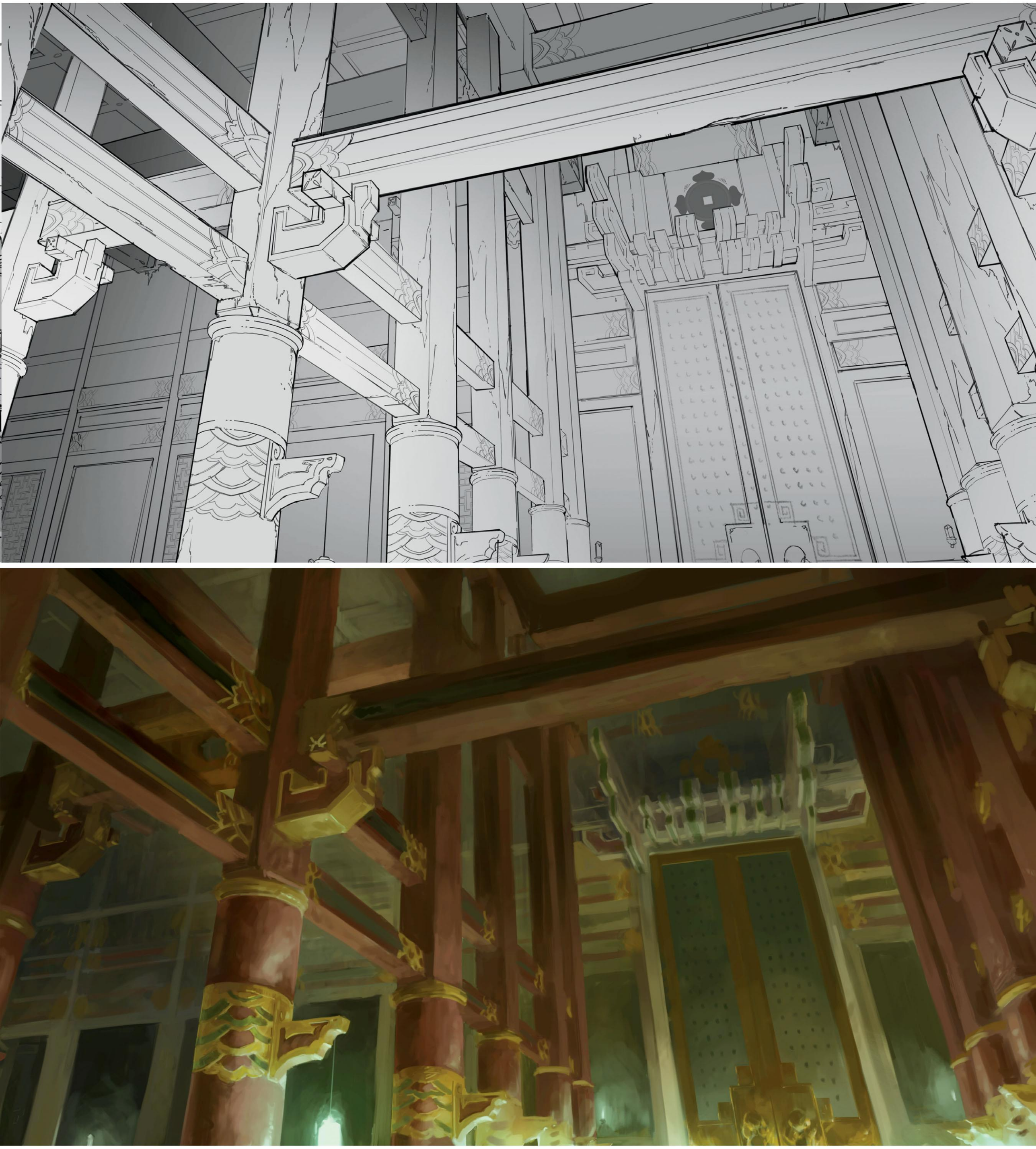
BK: My original concept sketch in the startup meeting for this episode was some sort of hammerhead-shark monster. Shortly thereafter, I learned about the bizarre sarcastic fringehead fish and its multicolored, tent-like mouth. I quickly changed course with the art direction of this creature, and Christine and Christie wonderfully brought it and its nightmarish maw into the Avatarverse. Sand shark by Christie Tseng. Mouth details by Christine Bian. Cleanup by Steve Hirt. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf and Bryan Konietzko.



BK: Emily did these two exquisite paintings of stone walls in the Earth Kingdom. I told her the bottom one would be used as the final shot of the episode, so she should take the time to put a little extra love into it. I was, and still am, very happy with the results of her labor! Top: Outer wall of Ba Sing Se. Background design by William Nanqing Niu. Bottom: Misty Palms Oasis at sundown. Background design by Christine Bian. Paintings by Emily Tetri.



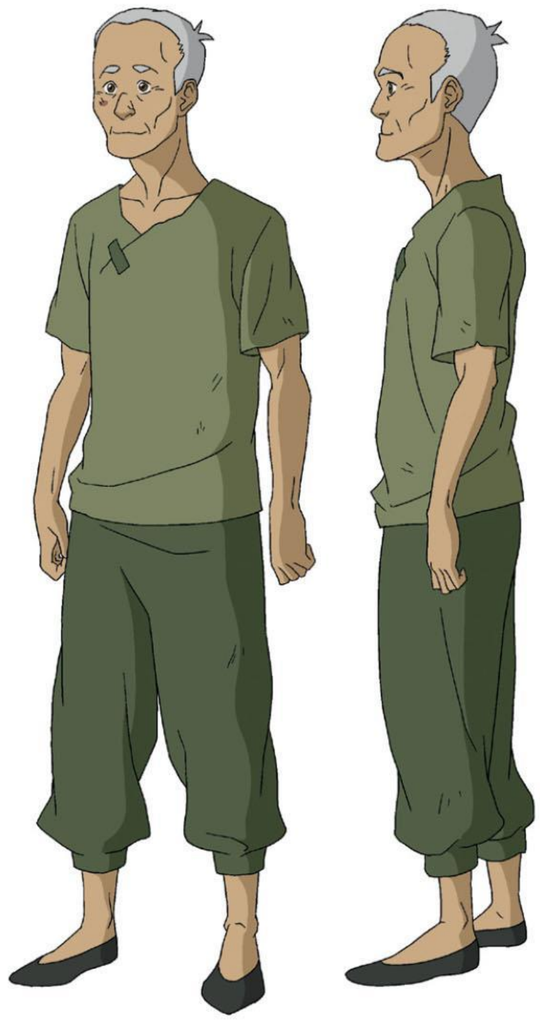
MD: (Top) An amazingly detailed look at the Lower Ring marketplace. Background design by Christine Bian. (Bottom) The area of the Middle Ring where Ghazan tears down the wall. I love the moody, stormy skies in this sequence. Background design by William Nanqing Niu. Paintings by Lauren Zurcher.



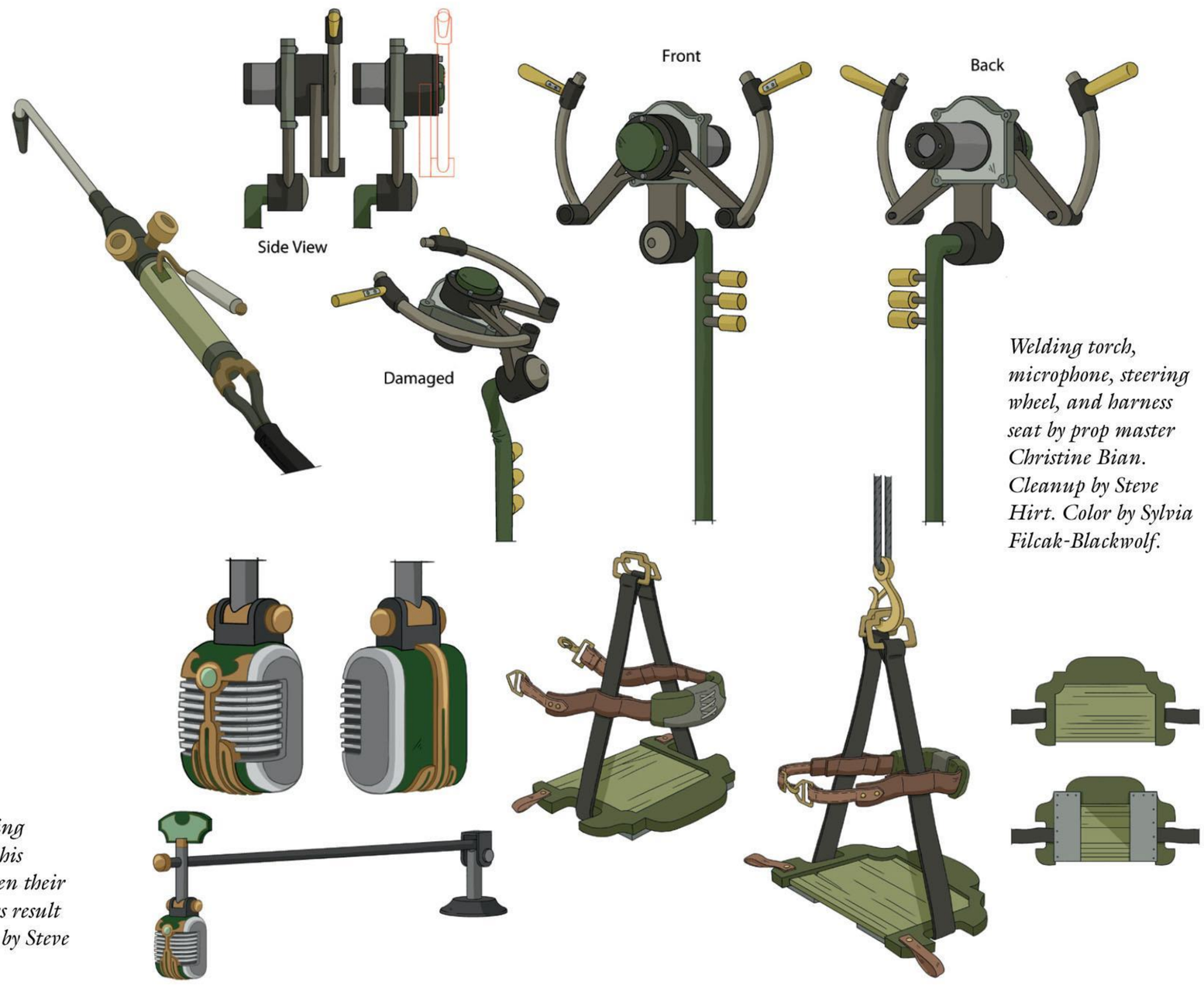
MD: Zaheer hides in the rafters of the queen's throne room, where he overhears that the Avatar escaped. Even though we had some background designs of the throne room from the original series, new angles such as this one were needed, and new details were added. Background design by Angela Sung. Painting by Emily Tetri.



BK: Angela and Lauren made this all-metal prison feel like such a realistic location. You get the feeling in the episode that the inmates were all incarcerated for completely innocuous reasons, thanks to the draconian Earth Queen and her Dai Li cronies. Palace prison design by Angela Sung. Paintings by Lauren Zurcher.



BK: I love this charming codger, but his mole kept getting drawn on the wrong side of his face in the reflection of his handy mirror he used to talk to Mako and Bolin between their cells. Mirrors in hand-drawn animation almost always result in retakes! Prisoner design by Christie Tseng. Cleanup by Steve Hirt. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.



Welding torch, microphone, steering wheel, and harness seat by prop master Christine Bian. Cleanup by Steve Hirt. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.

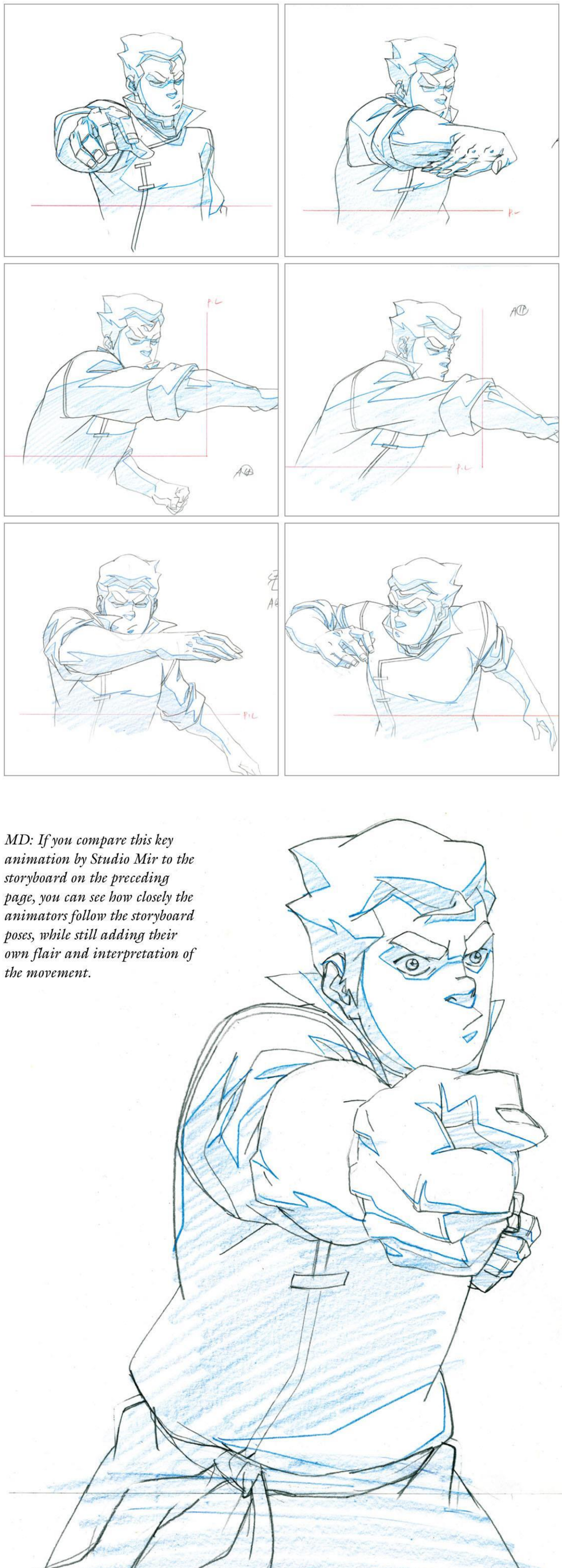


MD: One of my favorite backgrounds and paintings, the lovely studios at Radio Ba Sing Se, playing an eclectic mix of news and music. BK: I'm going to assume they also broadcast a fair share of pro-queen propaganda! Background design by Jonard Soriano. Painting by Emily Tetri.



MD: Mako rallies Bolin to metalbend the prison cells open. The prisoners go free, but it's thanks to Zaheer, not Bolin. BK: Shaun always had a knack for capturing the earnest and blissfully ignorant sides of Bolin in his hilarious acting and action poses. Storyboard by Shaun O'Neil.





MD: If you compare this key animation by Studio Mir to the storyboard on the preceding page, you can see how closely the animators follow the storyboard poses, while still adding their own flair and interpretation of the movement.



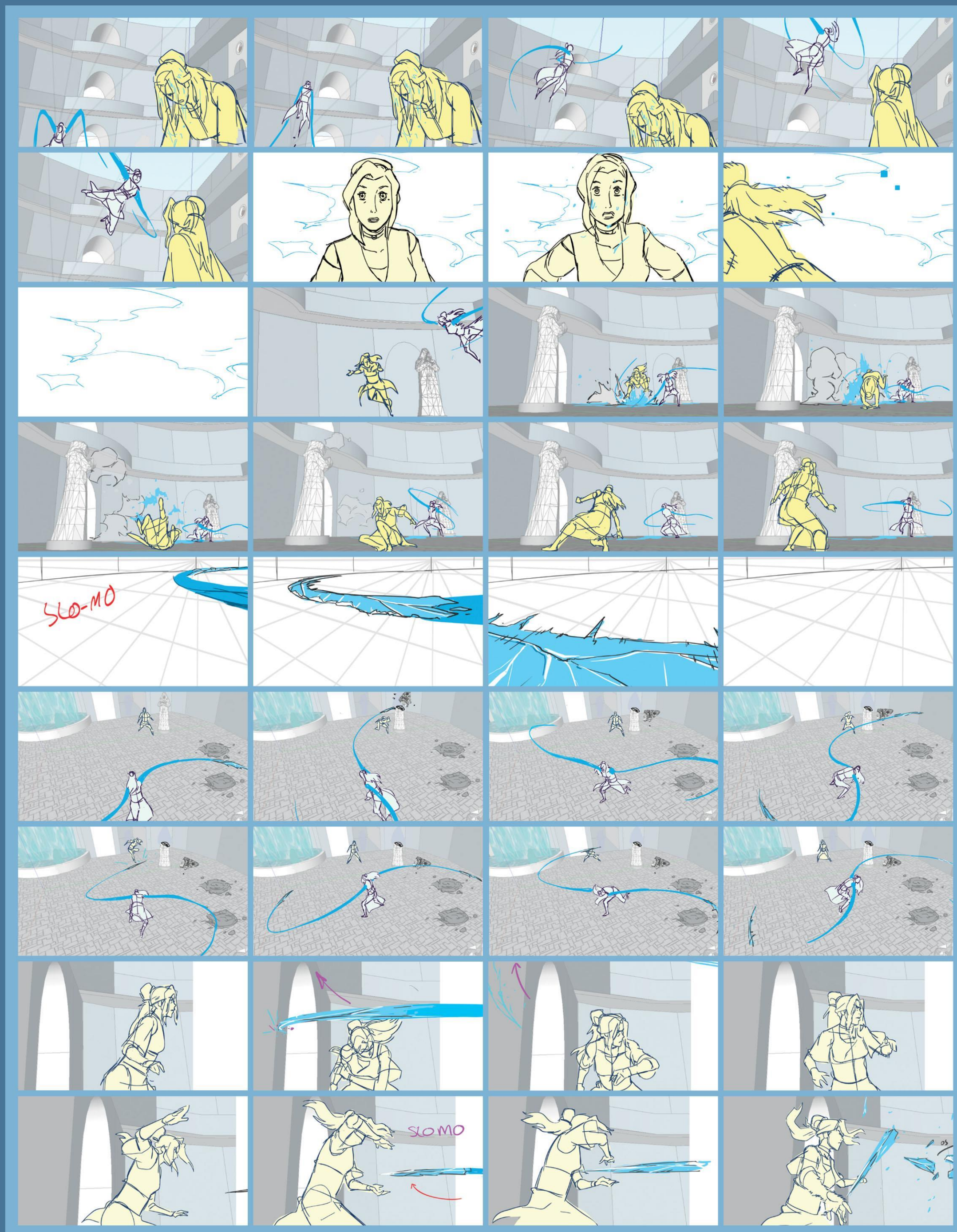



CHAPTER ELEVEN
THE
ULTIMATUM

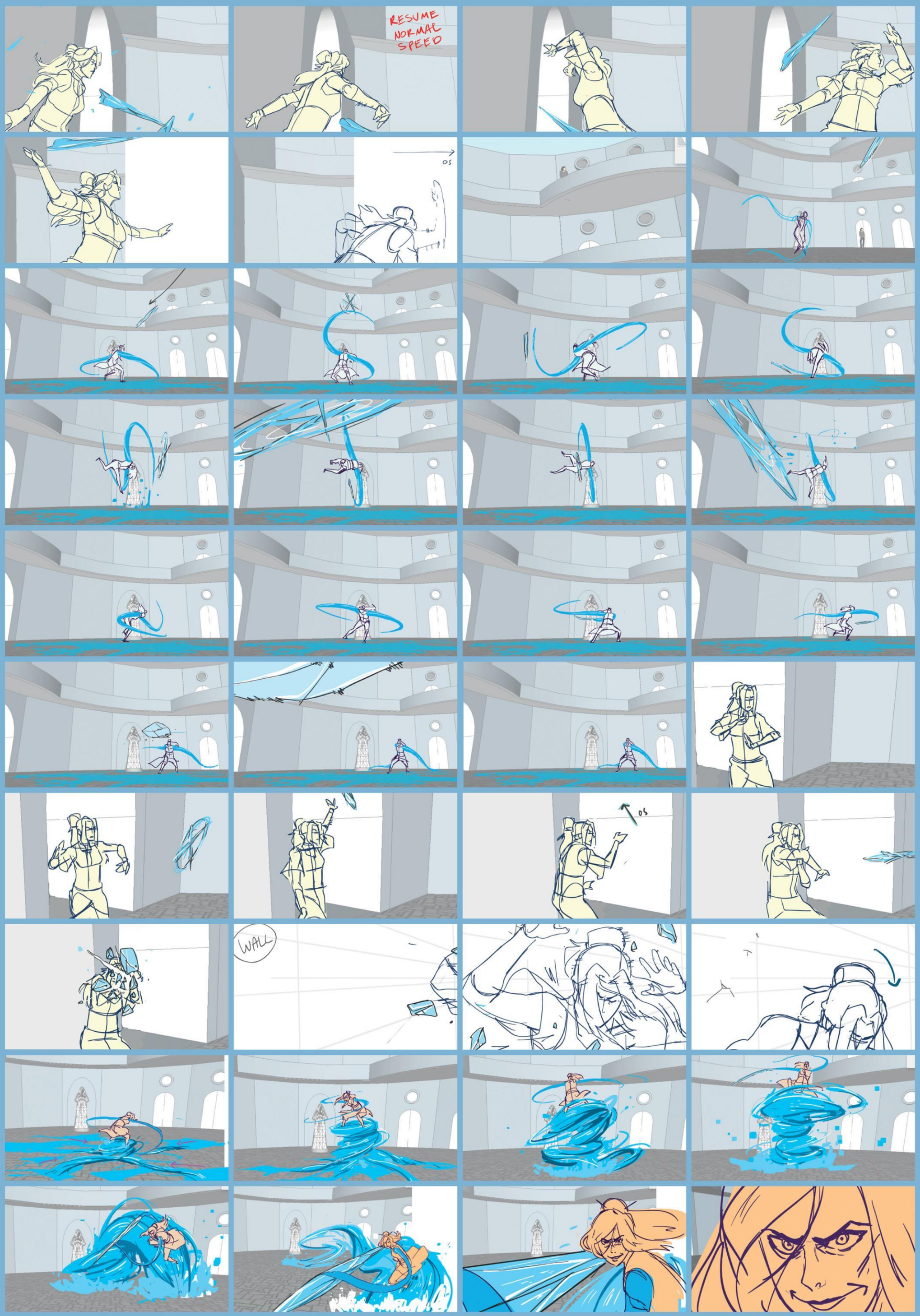
Previous page: Grandma Yin's apartment building (which was formerly also the temporary home of Iroh and Zuko) on a crowded city block in the Lower Ring. Background design by William Nanqing Niu. Top: Palace entrance. Bottom: Aerial view of the royal palace grounds. Background designs by Angela Sung. Paintings by Frederic Stewart. (Preceding spread) The Northern Air Temple. Background design by Angela Sung. Painting by Frederic Stewart.

BK: The Book Two finale episodes were probably the most colorful things I had been a part of in my art directing career. It helped to support the supernatural events in that season. To contrast that, I wanted the Book Three finale episodes' palette to support the grim events which were to unfold, so I told the designers and painters to keep the cloud cover heavy and dramatic. Top: Background design by Christine Bian. Painting by Lauren Zurcher. Bottom: Meditation hall design by William Nanqing Niu.

BK: The Northern Air Temple was on one hand a dynamic and picturesque setting, offering stunning views and interesting angles. On the other hand, it was a pain in the neck! The designers, image-board artists, background painters, and I were all pulling our hair out trying to keep the various locations and their light directions consistent. Background design by William Nanqing Niu.



MD: Kya had a couple of big action scenes this season. She first tried to stop Zaheer on Air Temple Island, and in this episode, she takes on fellow Waterbender Ming-Hua in this fantastic storyboard sequence by Eugene Lee.

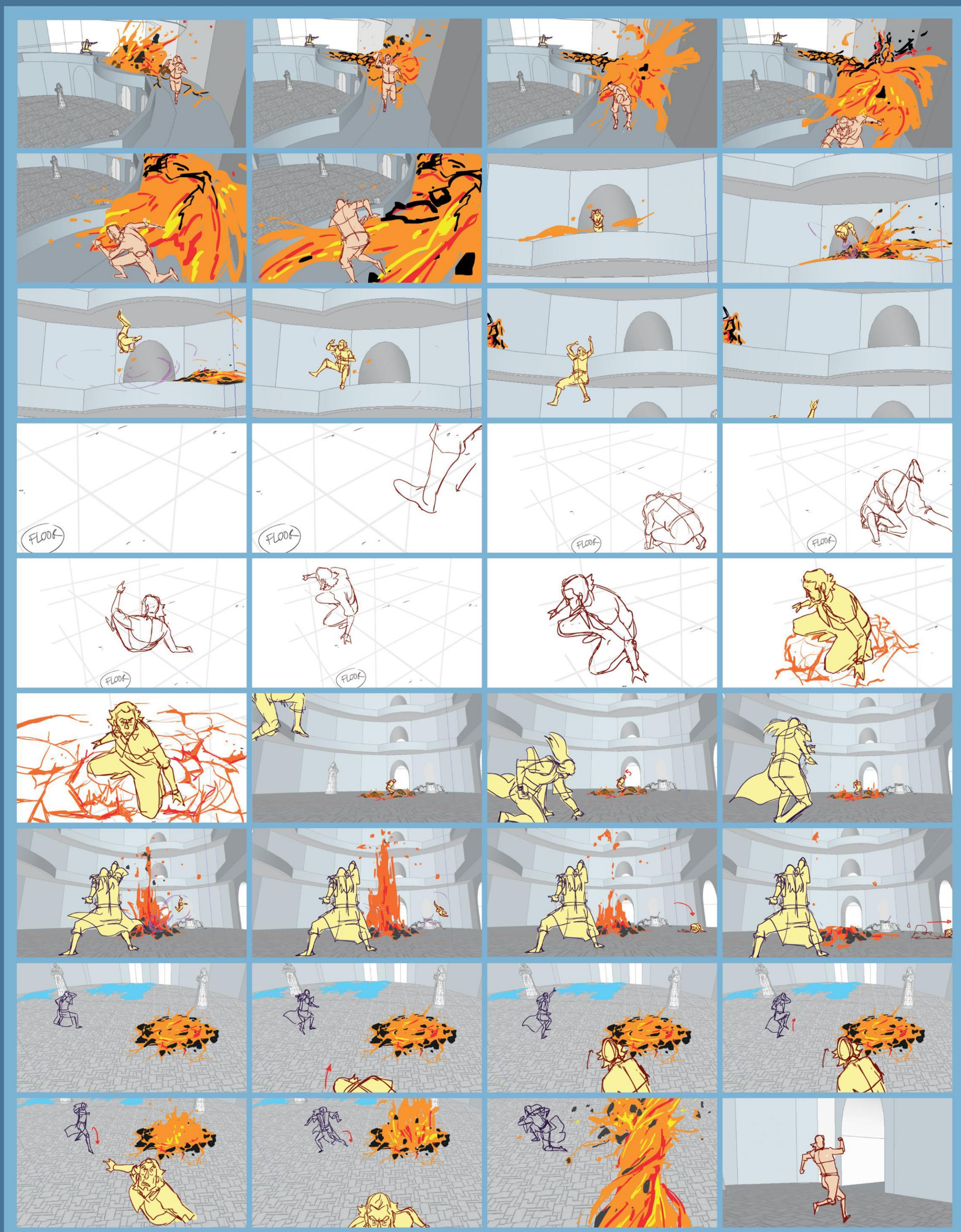

RESUME NORMAL SPEED
OS
OS
WALL



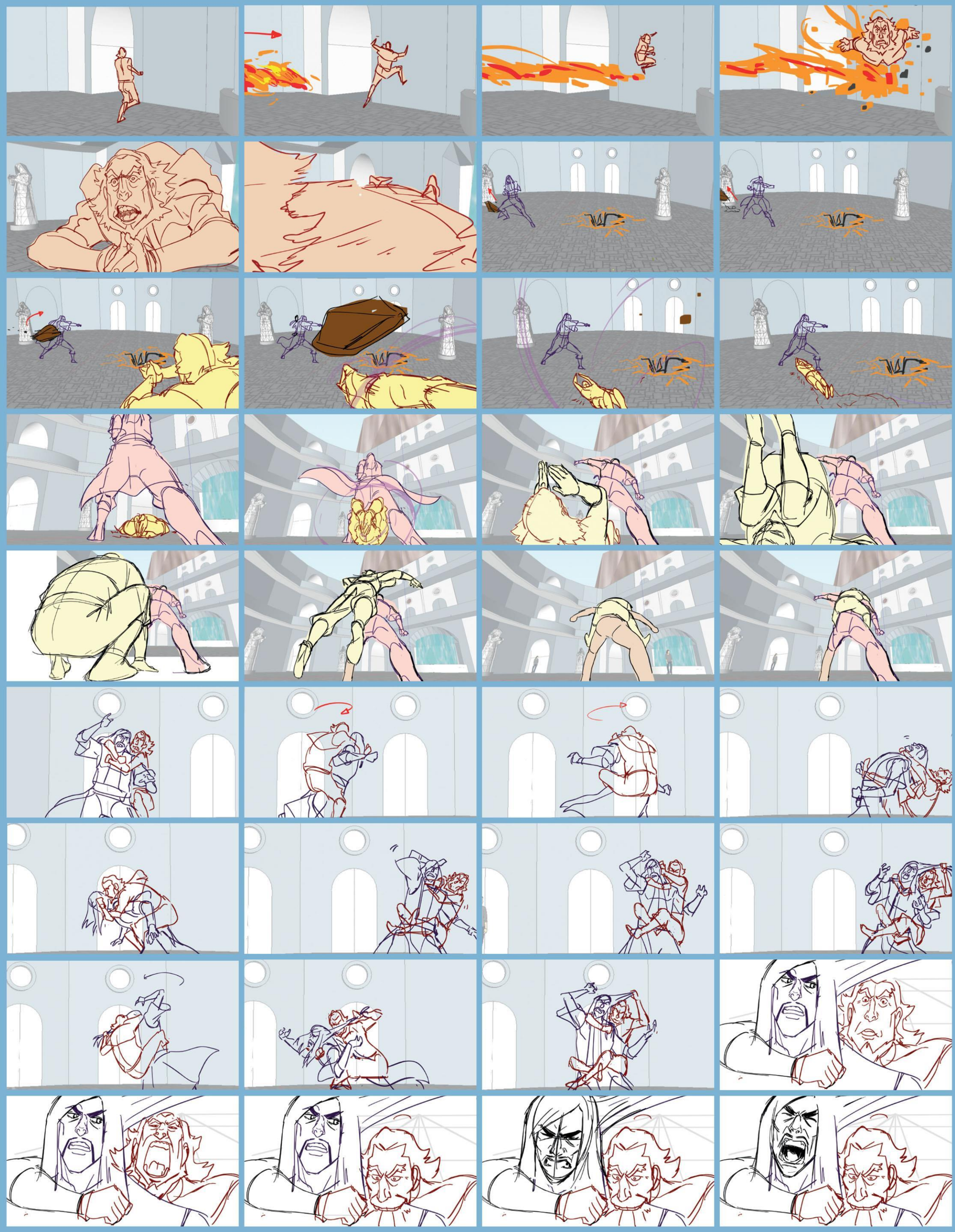
MD: (top) In the original series, Aang, Katara, and Sokka first met the Mechanist in this courtyard area of the temple. (Bottom) One of the cloisters, where Airbenders in training used to live, over a hundred years ago. Now it's home to the Air Acolytes who care for the temple. Background designs by Jonard Soriano. Paintings by Emily Tetri.



BK: Lauren had such a knack for painting sand dunes that I ended up assigning her an inordinate number of backgrounds featuring dunes throughout the season. I think this was the last one she had to paint. As the virologist Jonas Salk said, "The reward for work well done is the opportunity to do more." Background design by Angela Sung. Painting by Lauren Zurcher.



JDS: So, I think it was during this fight sequence when we began to realize that the storyboard student had transitioned into the storyboard master. When we had our first board pitch for this episode, I remember turning to Lauren and Ryu and saying, "I think we'll be working for Eugene in the very near future." Storyboard by Eugene Lee.





CHAPTER TWELVE

ENTER THE VOID



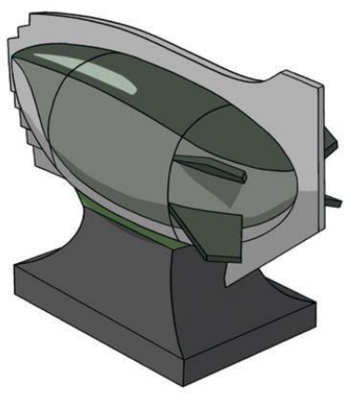


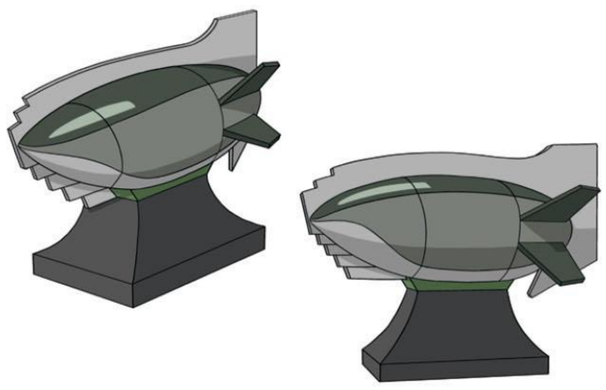
Tonraq with battle-ready water skins. Design by Angela Song Mueller. Cleanup by Steve Hirt. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf. *(Preceding spread) Air Temple radio room design by Angela Sung. Painting by Frederic Stewart.*

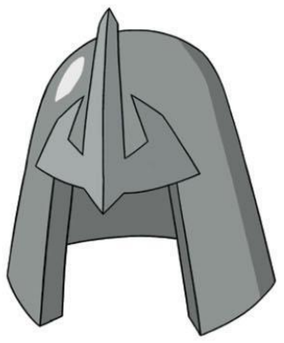




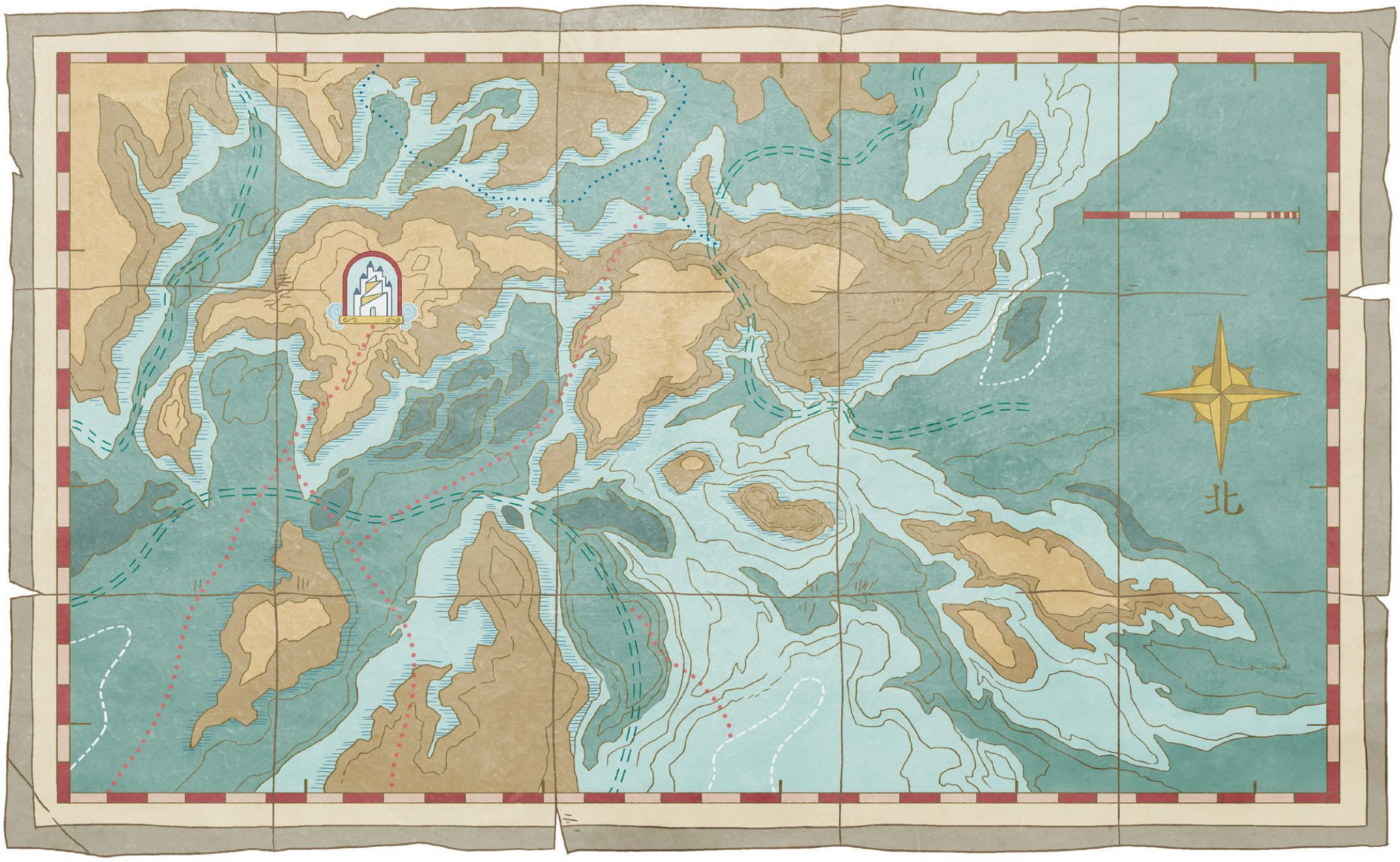
BK: In the original storyboard, in order to protect her sister, Su used the metal from her necklace and bracelets to encapsulate P'Li's head. There wasn't enough metal in her normal design to do the trick, and it made sense that she would have suited up for this battle, so we gave her some armor similar to that of Zaofu's guard. Design by Angela Song Mueller. Cleanup by Steve Hirt. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.







Map pieces by Christine Bian. Cleanup by Steve Hirt. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.



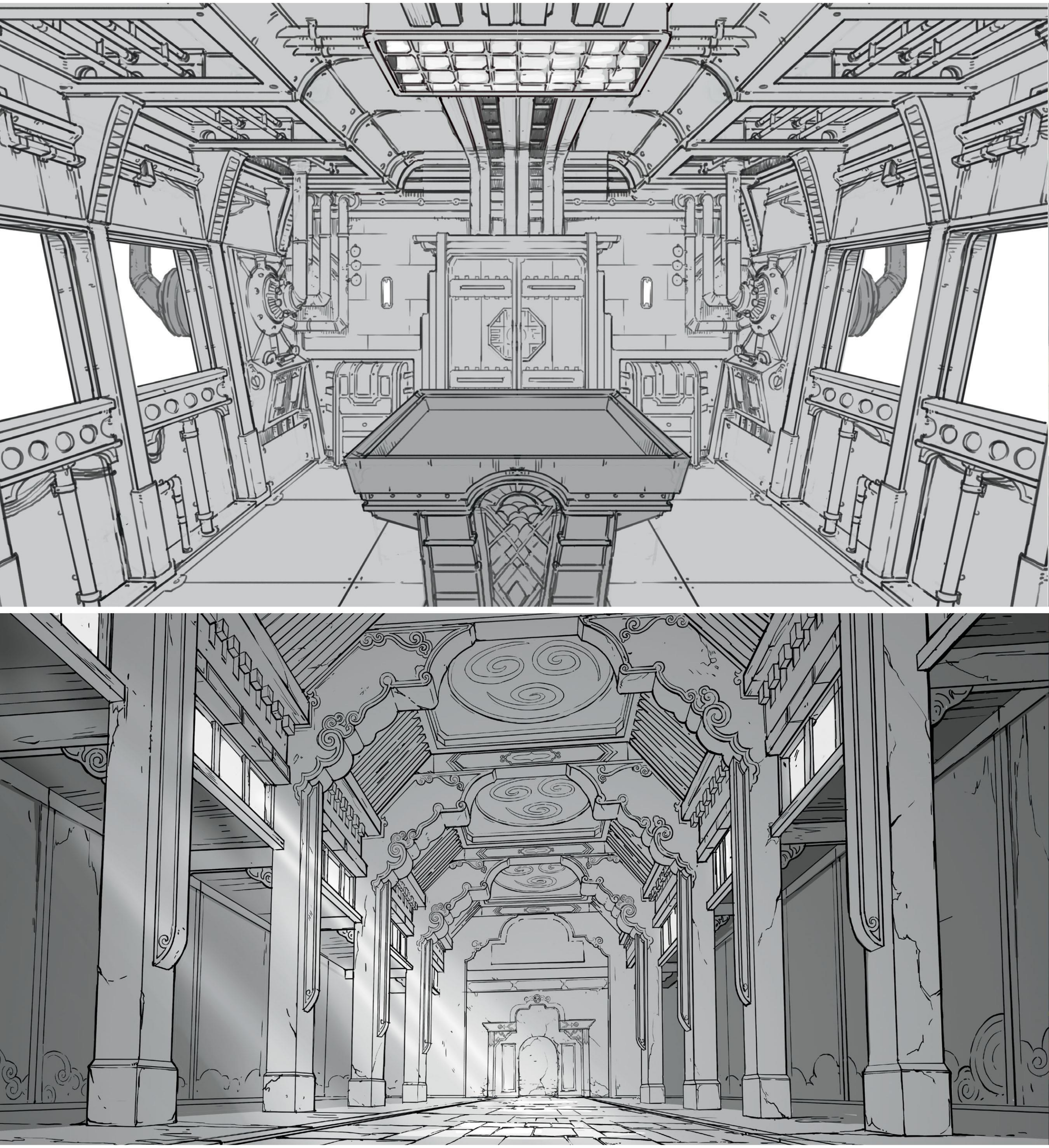
MD: In the script, I called out for this map to specifically be a topographical map. I love the way they look and figured if Team Avatar was planning an assault on the Northern Air Temple, they would need to know the heights of the mountains in the area. Christine Bian did a great job of replicating the look of an old topographical map. Cleanup by Steve Hirt. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.







BK: The top three paintings are more examples of our "rough color comps," quick-and-dirty executions that focus mainly on color, lighting, and mood, rather than refined detail. It was a necessary measure in order to stay on schedule when we were behind (and we were always behind), but I often love how much energy these expressive painted sketches convey. Top and bottom: Background designs by William Nanqing Niu. Paintings by Lauren Zurcher. Middle left: Background design by Angela Sung. Painting by Emily Tetri. Middle right: Background design by Christine Bian. Painting by Frederic Stewart.



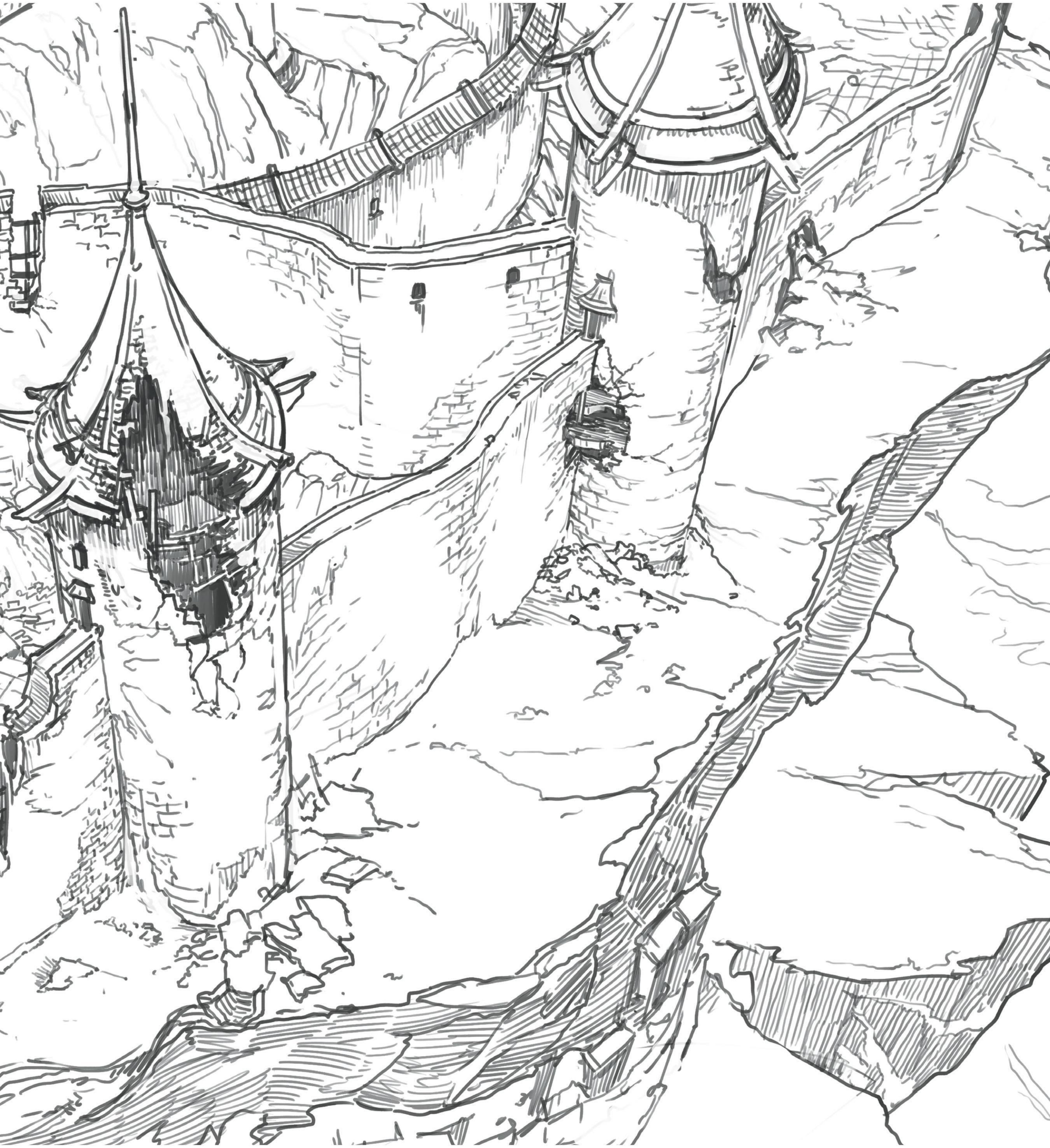
BK: As I mentioned on the previous page, we were always behind schedule in the design department. To add insult to injury, the finale episodes often require more designs than usual. Luckily Christine Bian isn't only a top-notch prop designer, but also a fantastic background designer. She was enthusiastic to help out, and I was grateful to assign the surplus of work to her! Top: Background design by William Nanqing Niu. Bottom: Background design by Christine Bian.

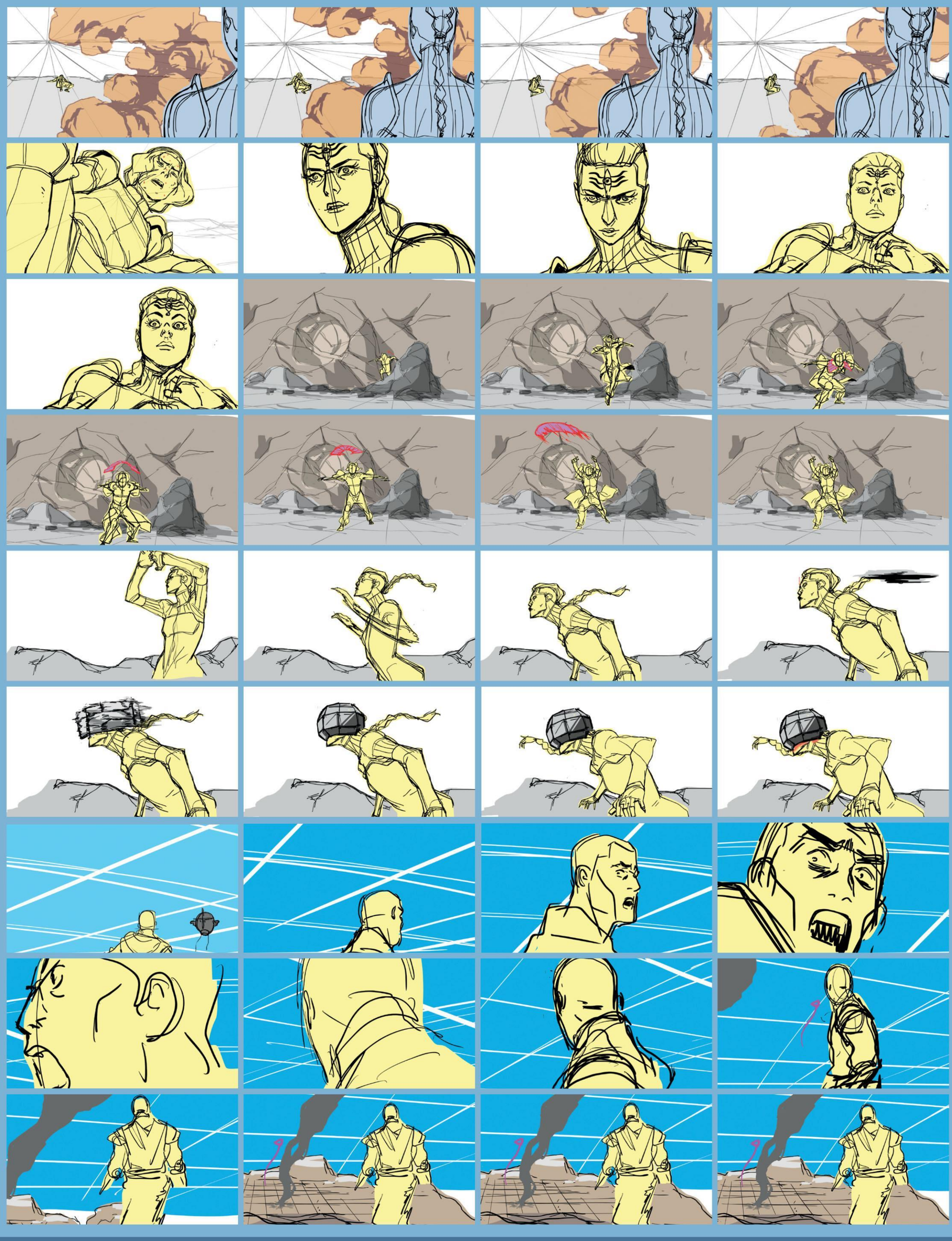


MD: This episode was one of my favorites to write since it was all about Korra being willing to sacrifice herself to save the new Airbenders. She really stepped up as a selfless Avatar and was willing to do whatever it took to help the world move toward balance. Top: Painting by Lauren Zurcher. Bottom: Painting by Frederic Stewart.



MD: The Northern Air Temple was such an important location this season, and we wanted to give it a proper send-off. Ghazan turns the earth below the temple to lava, causing the entire structure to collapse. In the episode, after Kai rescues Team Avatar from the temple, there's a shot of Tenzin looking back, sadly witnessing the towers fall. For him, it's not just the destruction of a place, but the destruction of a way of life. And with the Airbenders still missing, it's meant to foreshadow the possible elimination of the Airbenders. Background design by William Nanqing Niu.



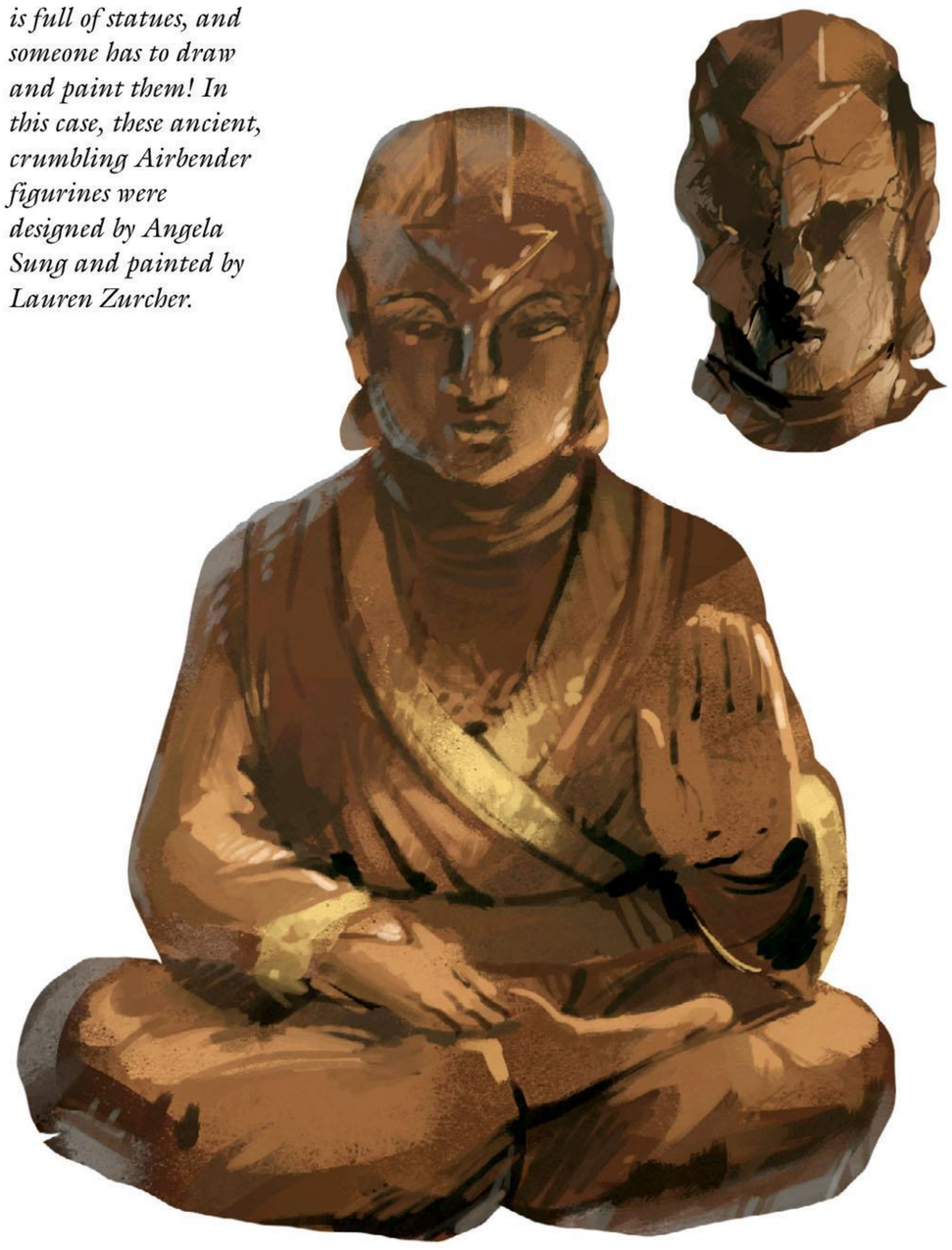


JDS: You know you've done a good job of creating a deep, sympathetic antagonist when her death scene elicits an audible gasp followed by silence in the animatic pitch. Here we see Zaheer react with a very uncharacteristic display of fear and heartbreak at hearing the sound of P'Li's final combustion blast. Storyboard by Young-Ki Yoon and Ki-Hyun Ryu.



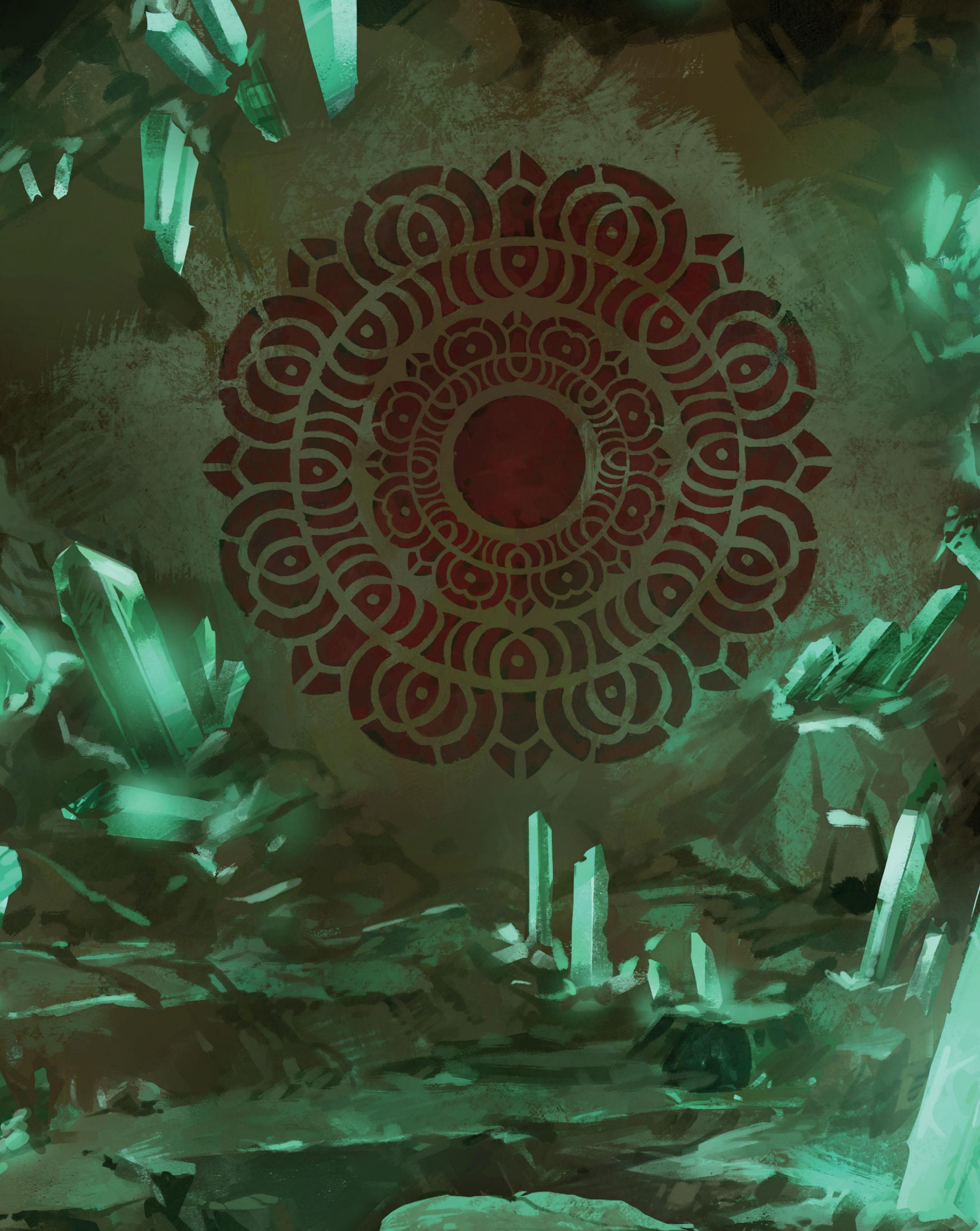
BK: We knew Kuvira, the captain of Su's guard in Zaofu, was going to be a major player in Book Four, so we wove her into a number of scenes and events throughout this season. Toward the end of this episode she gets a proper and somewhat ambiguous introduction. Storyboard by Bryan Konietzko.

BK: The Avatar *world is full of statues, and someone has to draw and paint them! In this case, these ancient, crumbling Airbender figurines were designed by Angela Sung and painted by Lauren Zurcher.*





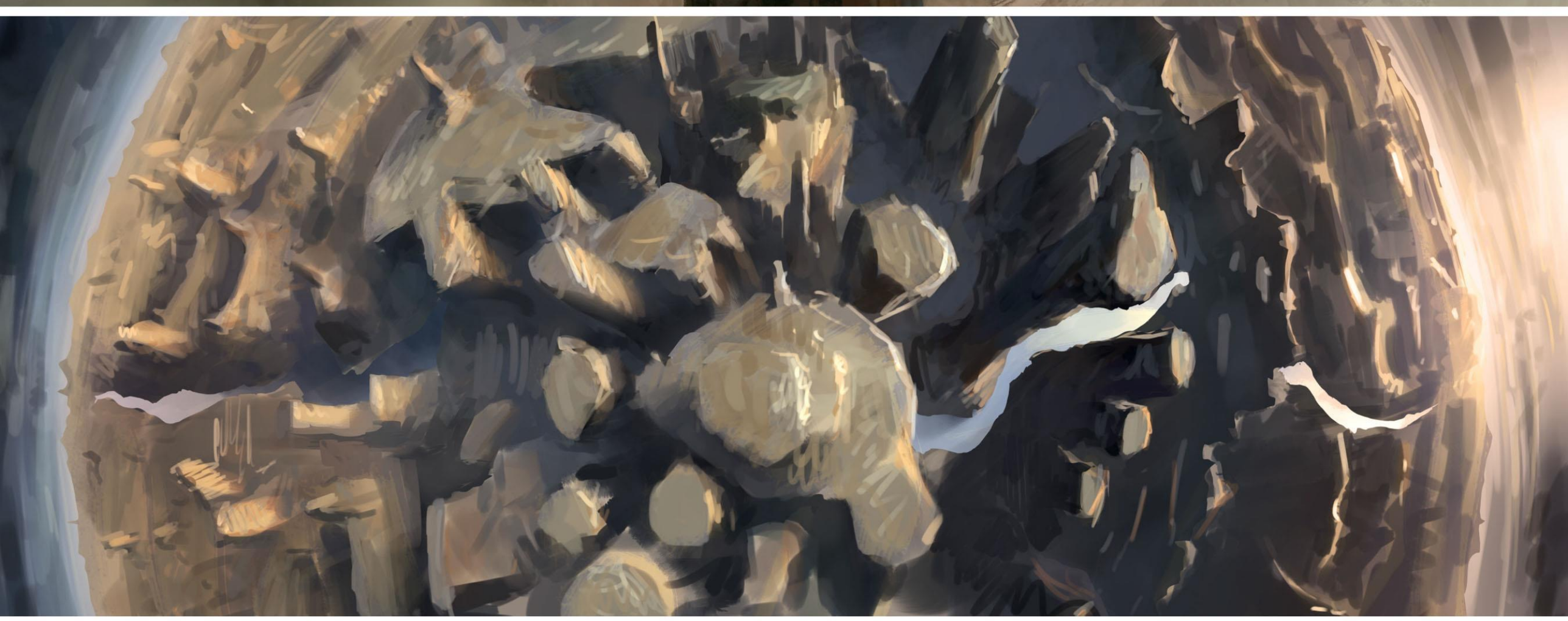
MD: Ever since visiting the Buddhist country of Bhutan in 2007, I've drawn on it for inspiration, especially for the Air Nation. In Tiger's Nest, a monastery built on a cliff wall, there was a small room dug into the rocks, which was an altar to Guru Rinpoche, the guru who brought Buddhism to Bhutan. That room served as the inspiration for this altar to Guru Laghima. I remember having to duck down when entering through the door; we added this detail when P'Li enters the room. Background design by Angela Sung. Painting by Lauren Zurcher.

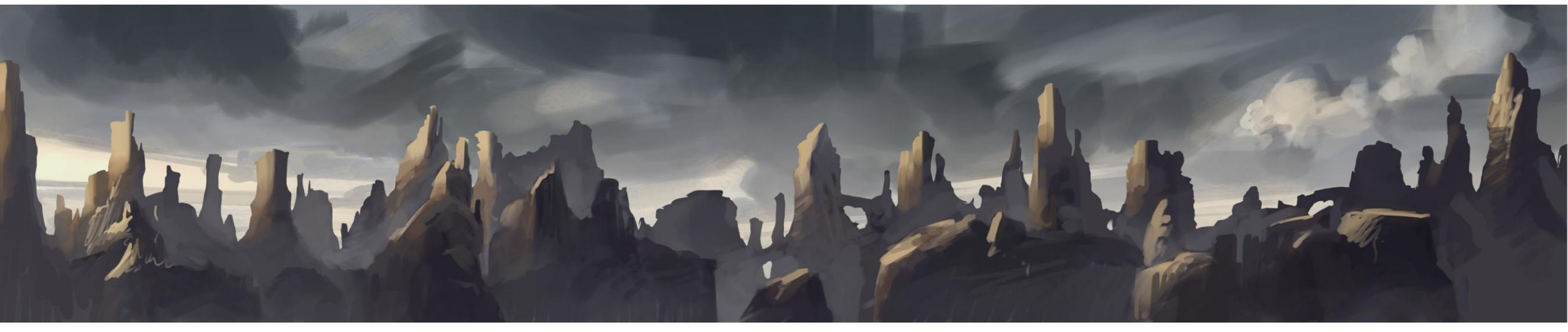


CHAPTER THIRTEEN

VENOM OF THE RED LOTUS



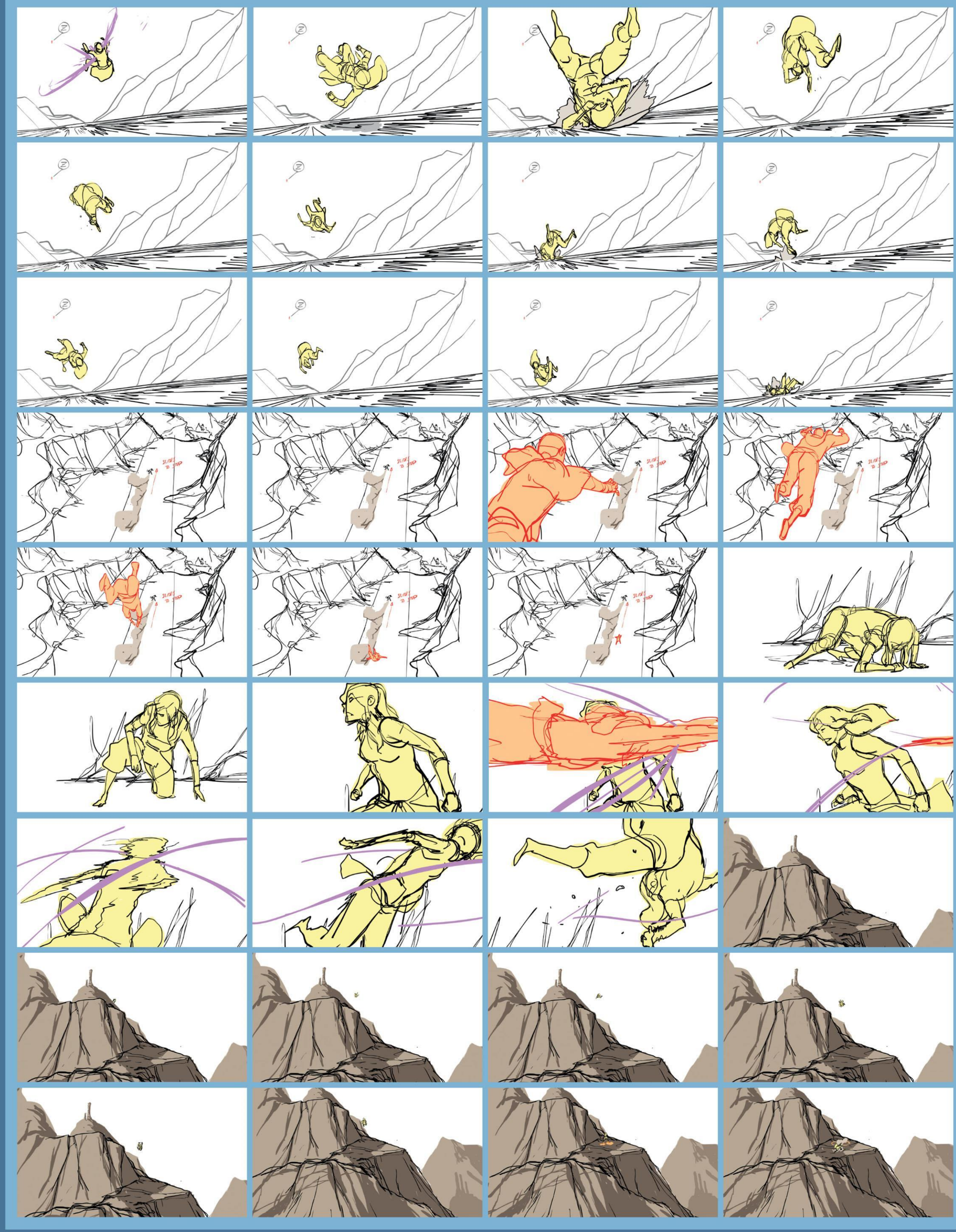




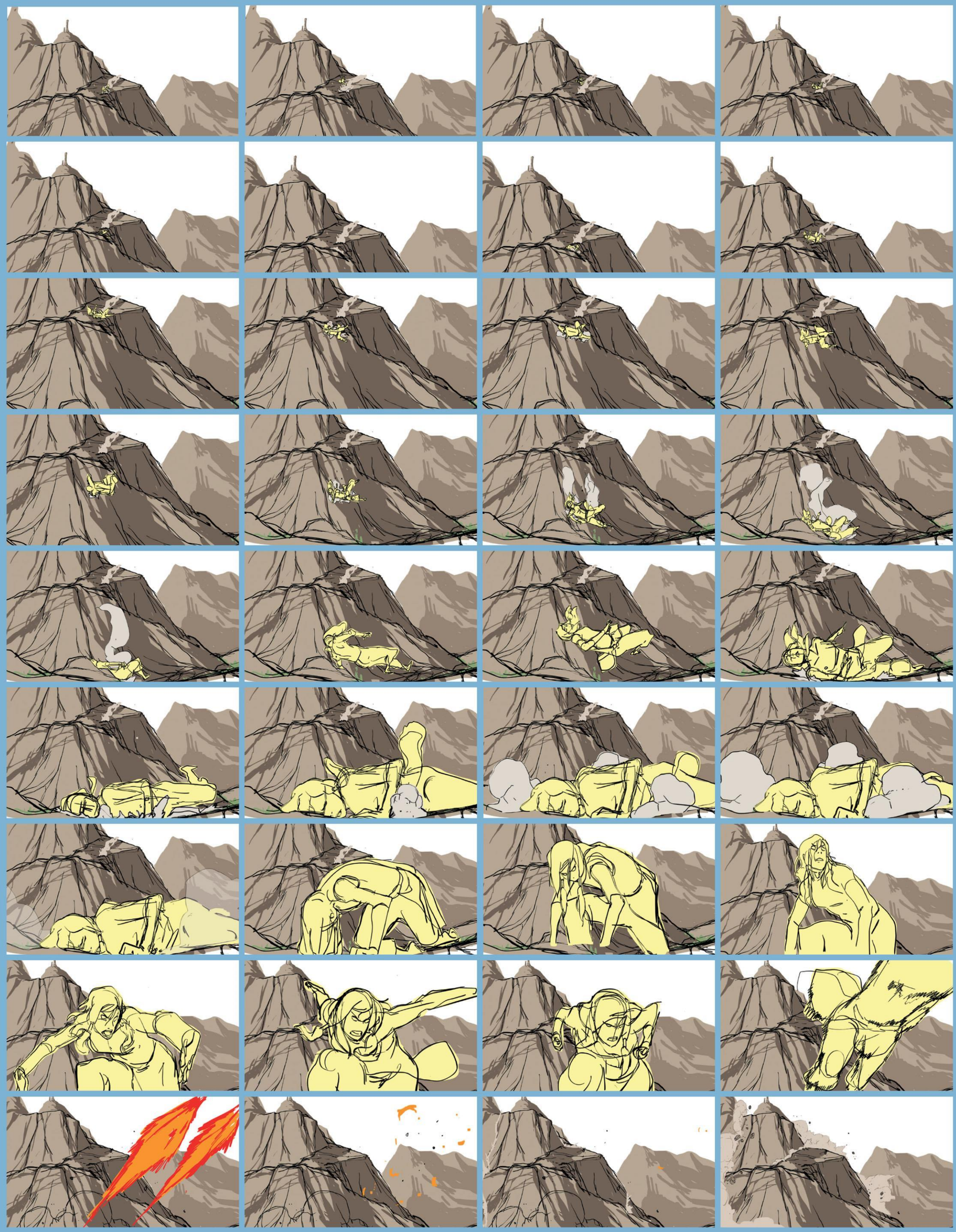
Background design by William Nanqing Niu. Painting by Lauren Zurcher. Top and middle: Background designs by Angela Sung. Top painting by Frederic Stewart. Middle rough color comp by Emily Tetri. Bottom: Background design by William Nanqing Niu. Rough color comp by Emily Tetri. Opposite: Canyons designed by William Nanqing Niu.

(Preceding spread) BK: The crystal cave, where Zaheer viciously attempts to end the Avatar cycle, was inspired by the mind-boggling Cave of the Crystals discovered in Chihuahua, Mexico, in 2000.

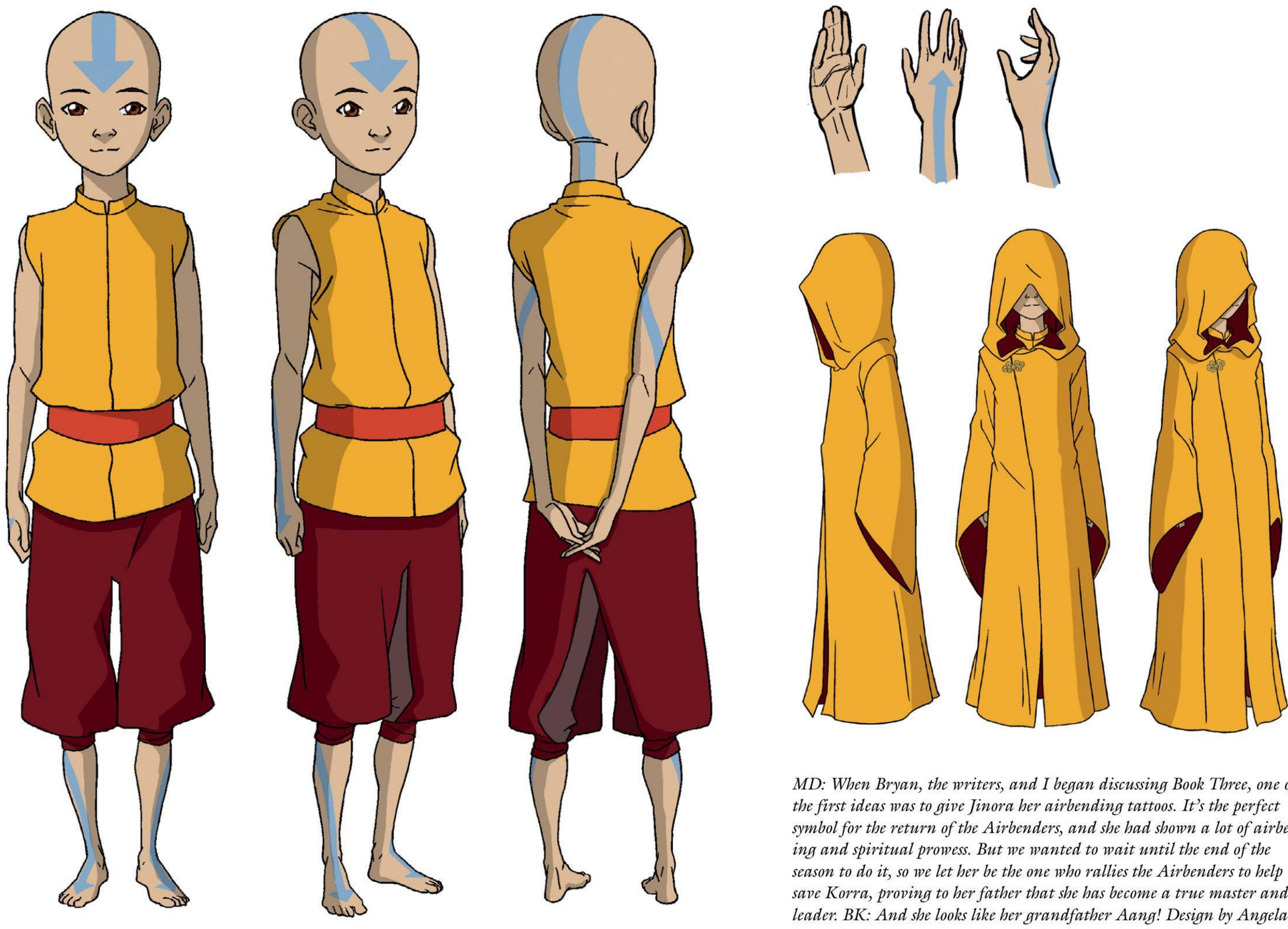




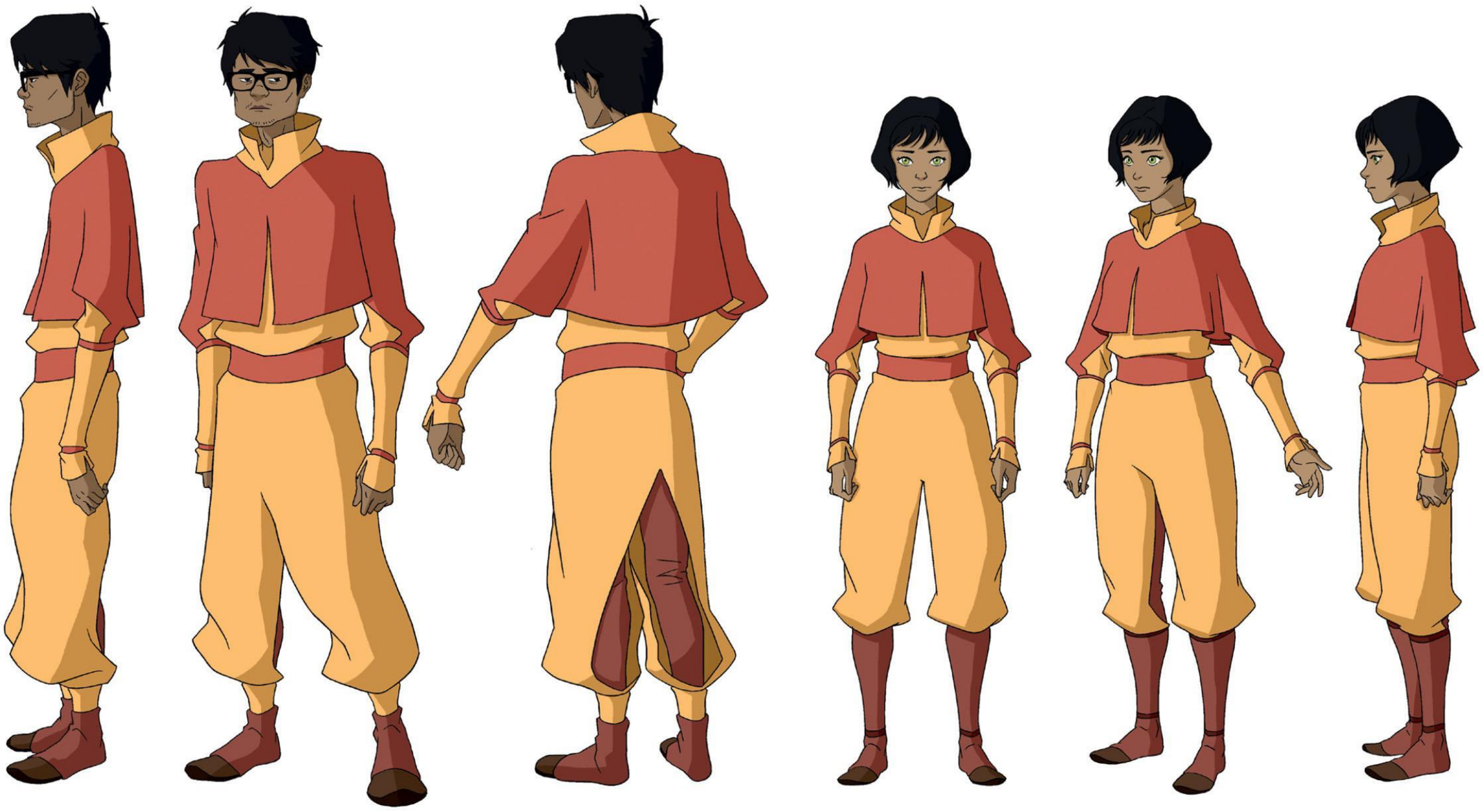
JDS: I will go on record here and say this is my favorite fight scene in all of my time on Korra. *The set piece is so epic, and Korra really pulls off some massive Avatar moves. Zaheer's newfound mastery of airbending gave the sequence a really fresh dynamic, and the final animation truly captures the giant sense of scale. This will be one to show the grandkids for sure! Storyboard by Joaquim Dos Santos.*



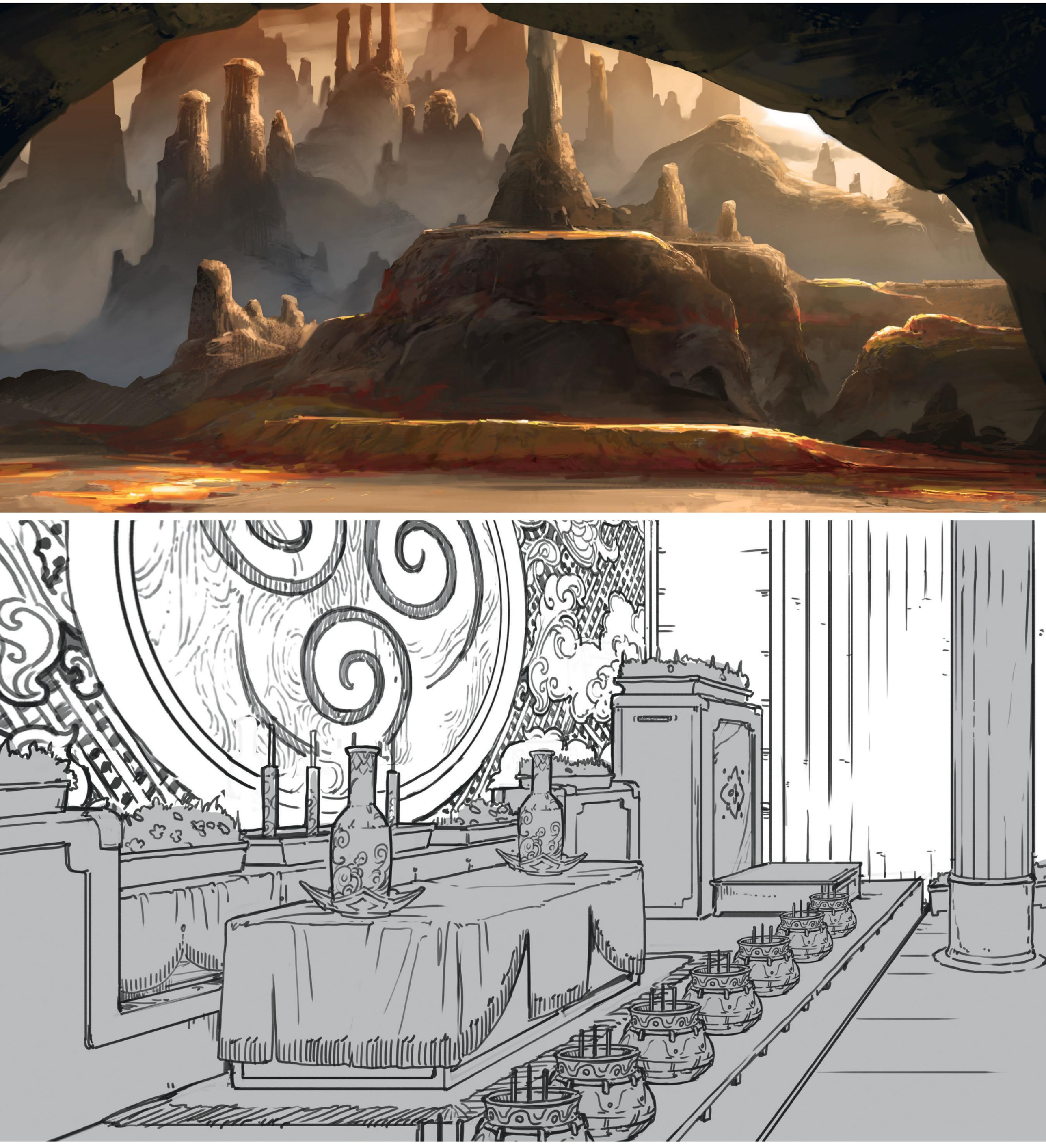
MD: Joaquim continually surprised us with his insane ability to create dynamic, exciting action sequences. He has storyboarded countless action scenes over the course of his career and somehow never repeats himself. Of particular note in this episode was the sequence immediately preceding this, which was a fluid, twenty-second shot of Korra and Zaheer flying and fighting through the skies—impressive, to say the least.



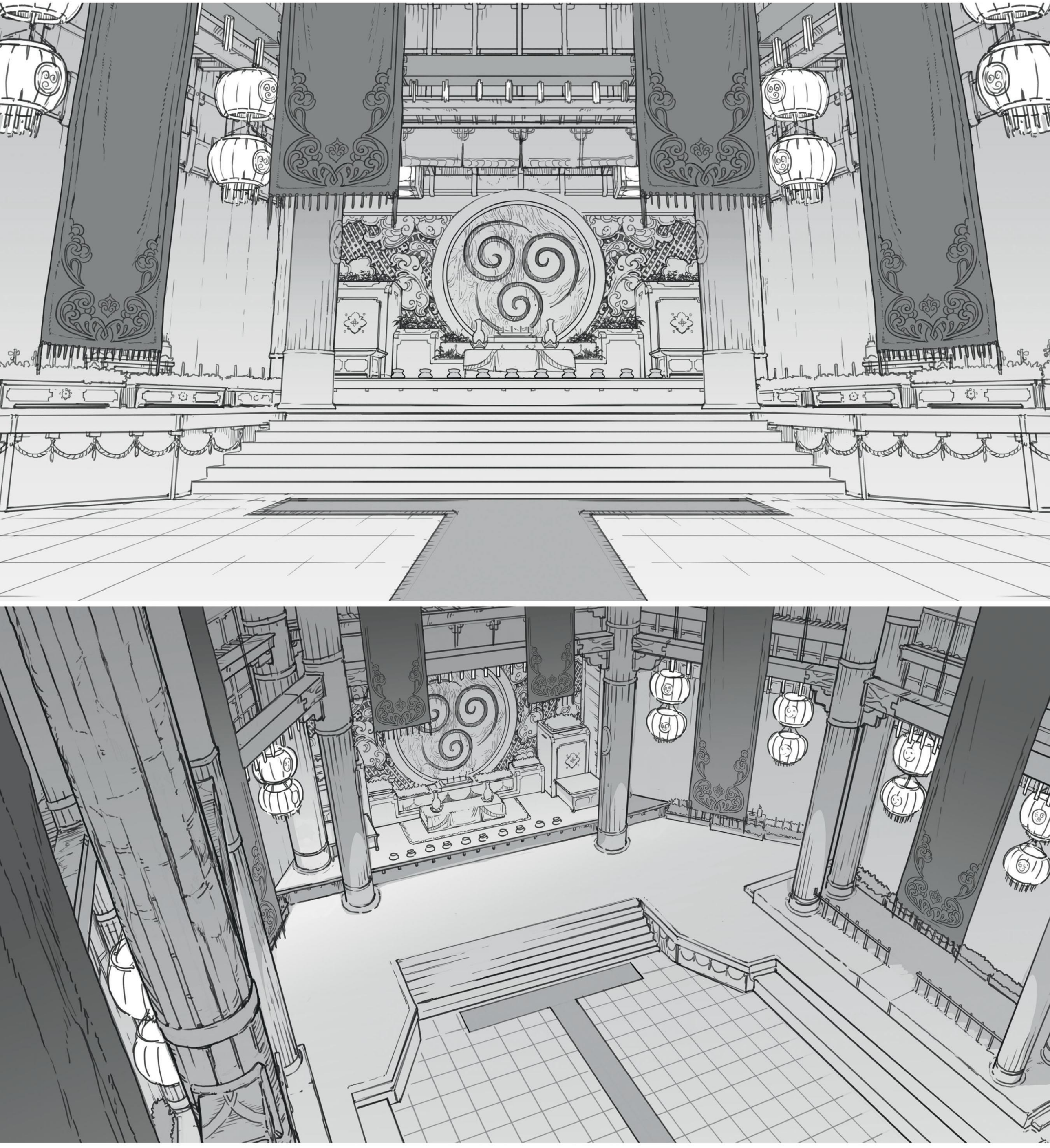
MD: When Bryan, the writers, and I began discussing Book Three, one of the first ideas was to give Jinora her airbending tattoos. It's the perfect symbol for the return of the Airbenders, and she had shown a lot of airbending and spiritual prowess. But we wanted to wait until the end of the season to do it, so we let her be the one who rallies the Airbenders to help save Korra, proving to her father that she has become a true master and leader. BK: And she looks like her grandfather Aang! Design by Angela Song Mueller. Cleanup by Steve Hirt. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.



MD: Even though Ryu initially turned down Korra's offer to join the Air Nation, after hearing what happened at the Northern Air Temple (and more pestering from his mom), he decided to embrace his new life and came to Air Temple Island in time for Jinora's ceremony. Airbender Ryu and Opal designs by Angela Song Mueller. Cleanup by Steve Hirt. Color by Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf.



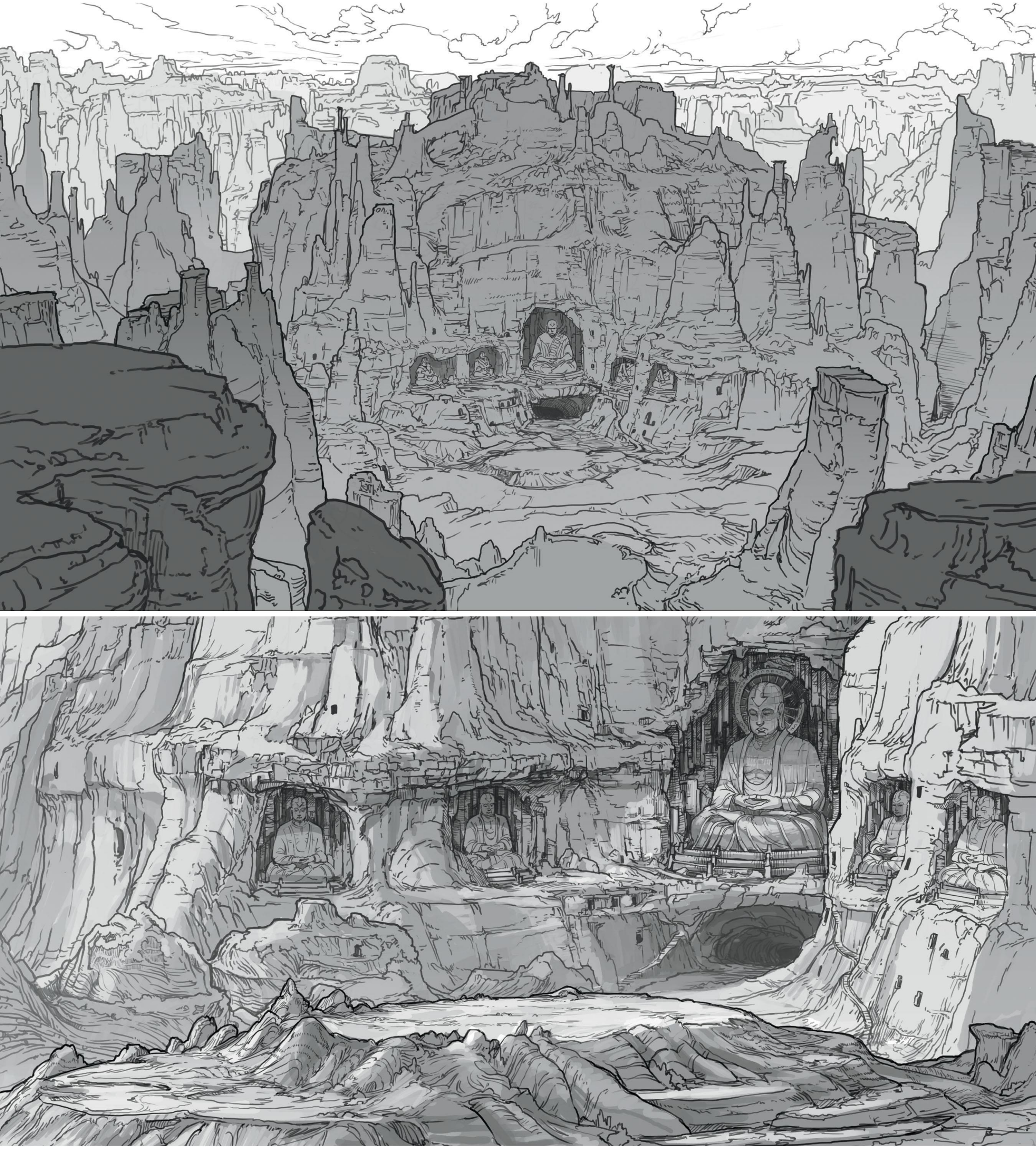
BK: Korra survives the ghastly plot of the Red Lotus, thanks to her remarkable resilience and tenacity, some Avatar-style rage, and a cyclone from her Airbender friends. Though she is succumbing to the poison, she still musters the strength to ensnare Zaheer and slam him down on this unforgiving valley floor. Top: Background design by Jonard Soriano. Painting by Emily Tetri. Bottom: Air Temple Island shrine design by William Nanqing Niu.



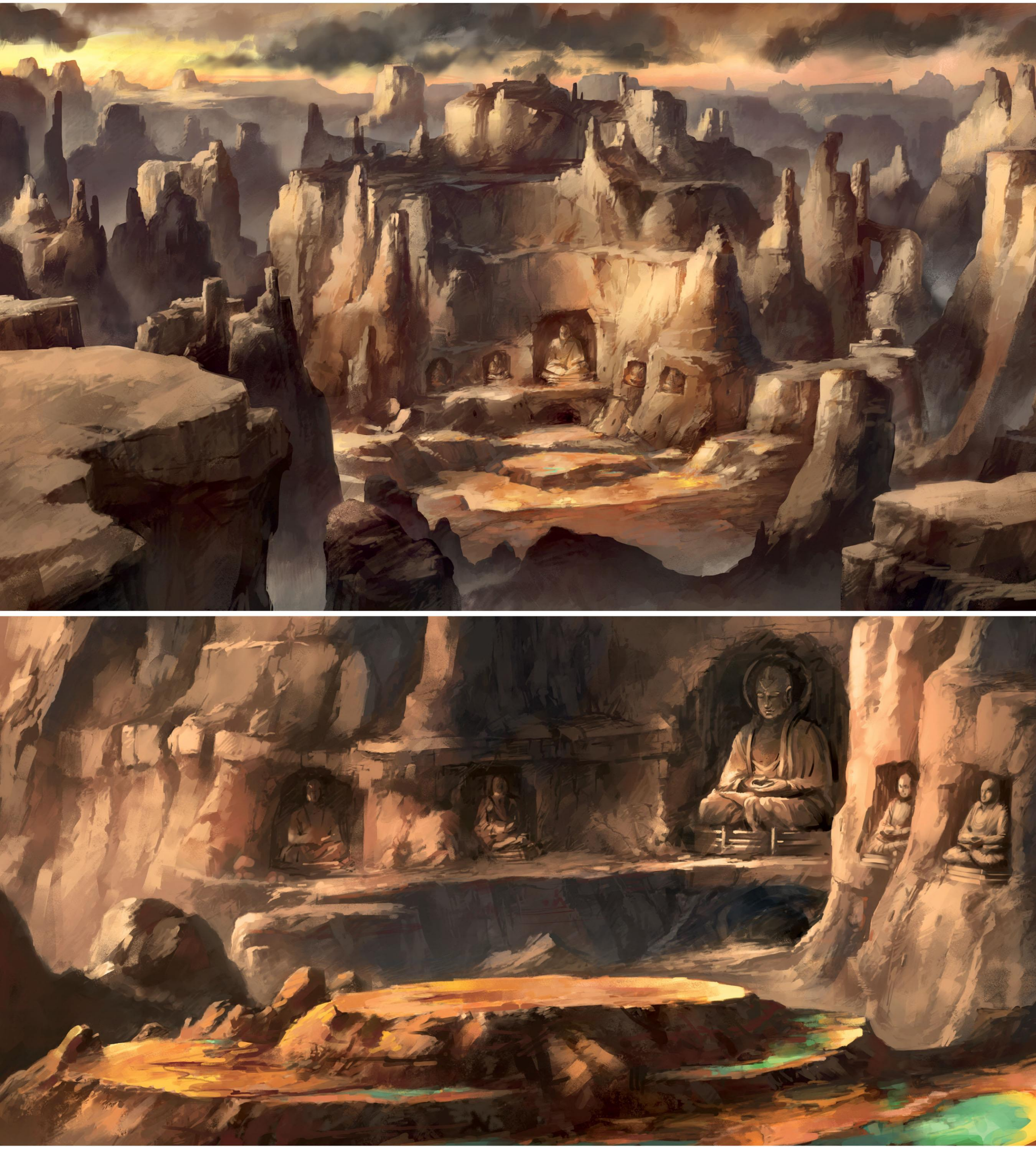
BK: We had shown the exterior of the temple on Air Temple Island dozens of times, including some upper interiors, but we had never shown the main, cavernous shrine until Jinora's airbending tattoo ceremony. William Nanqing Niu did some sensational designing with this interior. It is high-quality, well-researched work like this that helps make the Avatar *world feel like it has a rich, deep cultural history.*



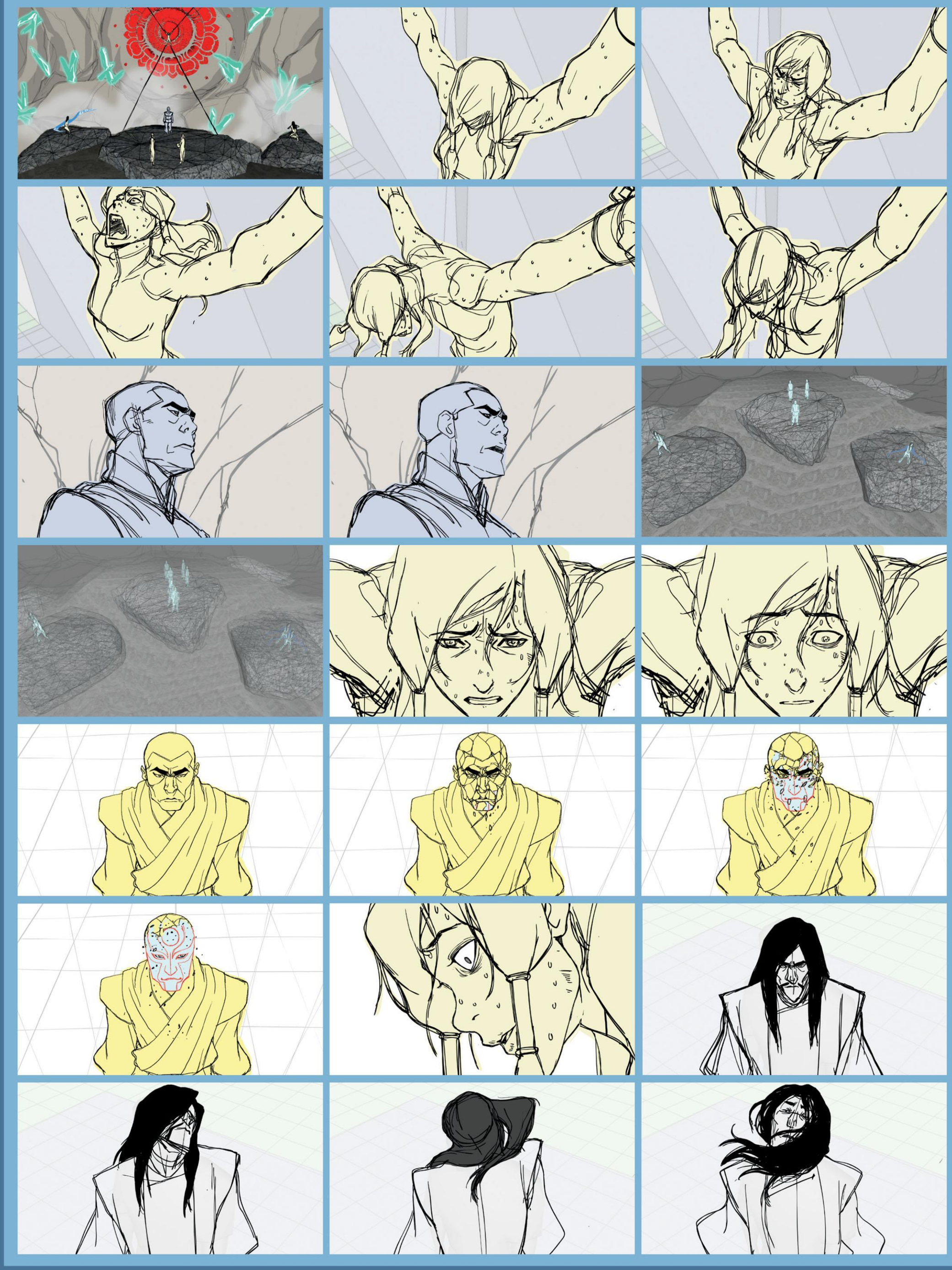
MD: I get a little choked up every time I watch the final ceremony scene. It is both uplifting to see Jinora with her tattoos and heartbreaking to see how pained Korra is. Victory came with a price, especially for the Avatar. BK: Nearly every one of our reference photos of Buddhist temple interiors were predominantly red. So Lauren had the challenge of converting the color scheme to one that would fit the Air Nomad aesthetic while still conveying the same feeling as those real-life temples. Paintings by Lauren Zurcher.



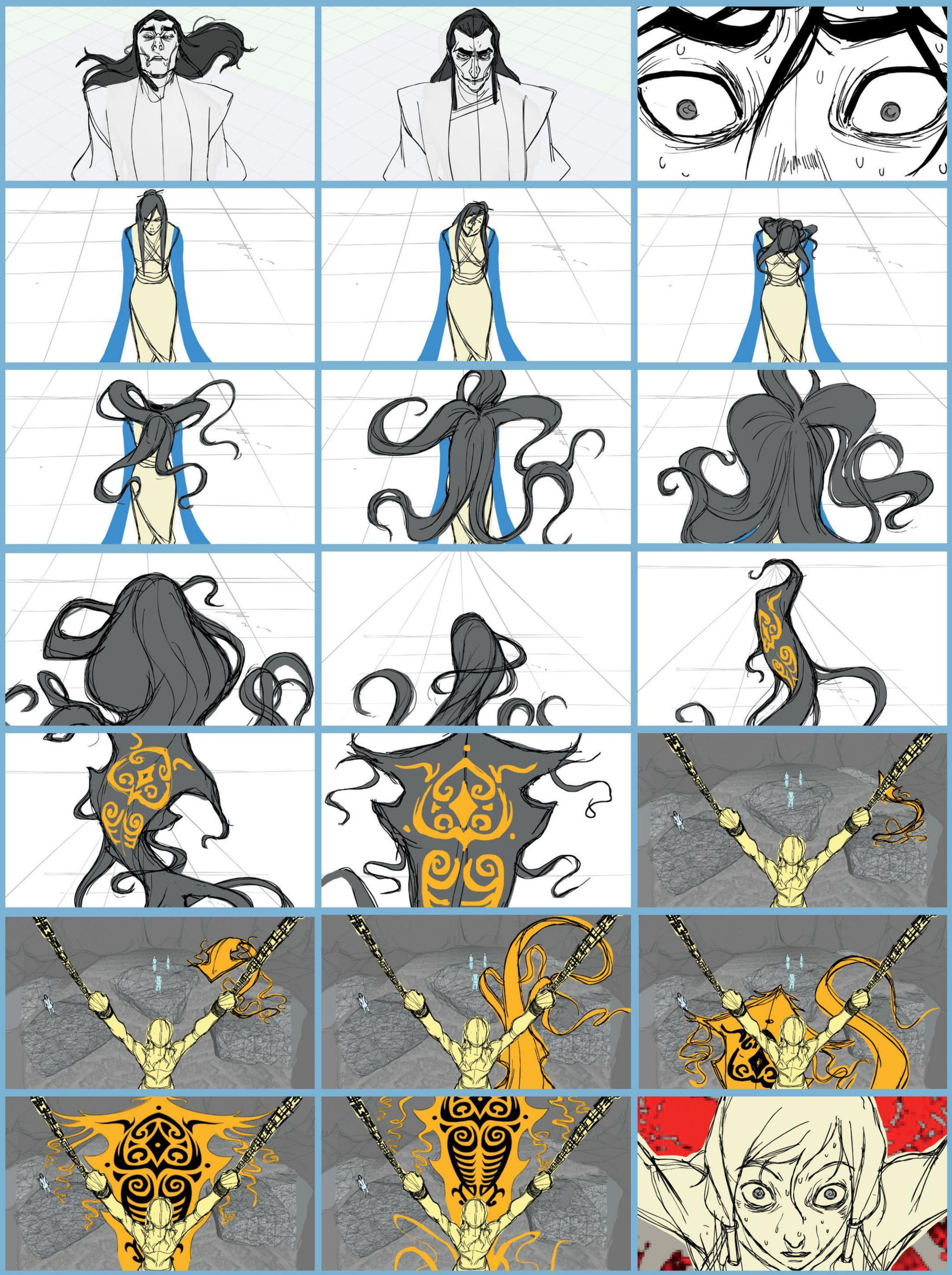
BK: I did an initial concept sketch of this desert valley with immense relief carvings of ancient Airbender gurus and cave entrances to give the storyboard crews something to work from and to show William what I had in mind. He fleshed it out and described the geology in exquisite detail, as you can see in his two final designs. Background designs by William Nanqing Niu.



MD: I've always been fascinated with ancient spiritual sites, like Machu Picchu and Easter Island. These caves were once a place where ancient Airbenders came to meditate and contemplate the mysteries of life and the universe. Paintings by Lauren Zurcher.



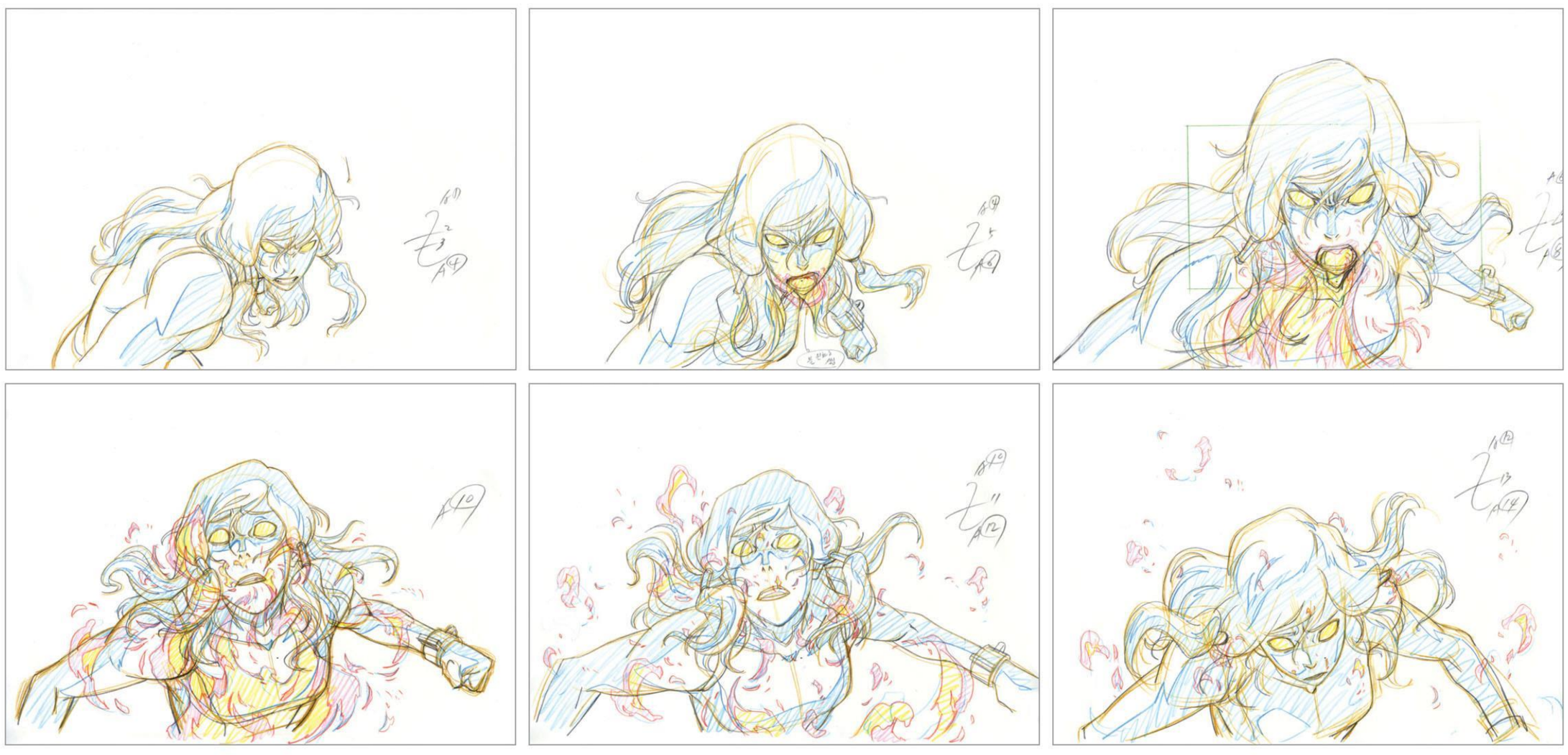
JDS: In what I think we can all agree is quite possibly the creepiest moment in all of The Legend of Korra, *Zaheer and gang look on as Korra tries to fight off the metal poison which causes her to hallucinate. Storyboard by Ki-Hyun Ryu.*



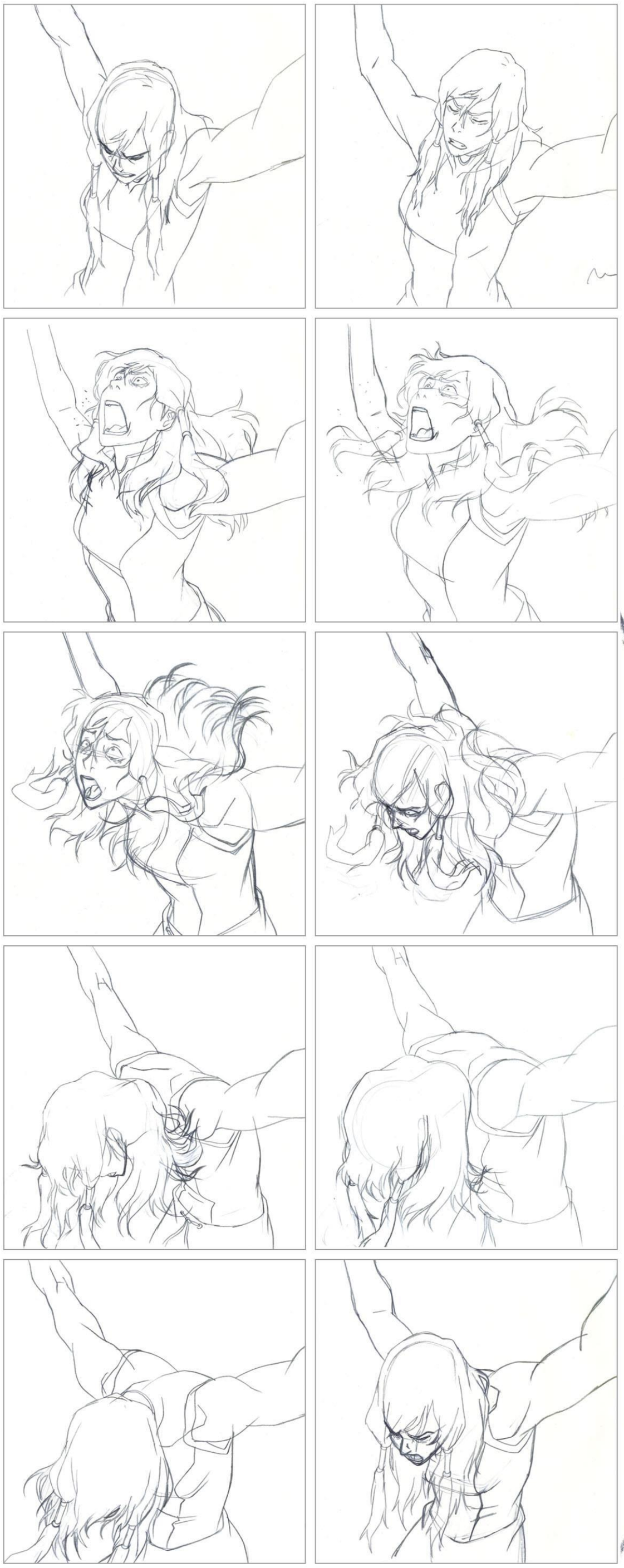
MD: In the story pitch, the writers and I really wanted to bring back Korra's past enemies for one more appearance, so we had Korra hallucinate after being poisoned. Korra's memories of her enemies will continue to haunt her into Book Four.



JDS: Some absolutely amazing animation capturing the "berserker" nature of Korra in the Avatar state. Here she earthbends an entire cliffside at Zaheer! Key animation by Studio Reve.



MD: Korra goes from being enraged and powerful to pained and weak in this gorgeous key animation by Studio Reve.



MD: Throughout Book Three, Korra had not used the Avatar state. Even when the metal poison threatens to kill her, Korra tries to fight off the Avatar state, knowing if Zaheer kills her while she's in it, the Avatar cycle will end. Keeping the Avatar state out of play for the season was done to show how much Korra had come to respect her connection with Raava. She came to understand that the power was only meant for the most extreme circumstances. This is quite a huge shift from the beginning of Book Two, when Korra used the Avatar state to win an air-scooter race against Ikki.

BK: I never really get any enjoyment from torture scenes of any kind, in any medium. However, sometimes a story calls for it, and we have to do our jobs to make the scenes effective. The only thing that makes this sequence easier for me to swallow is knowing the Red Lotus underestimated Korra and that she will be walloping them shortly. That, and how beautifully it was all executed, grim as it is. Key animation by Studio Reve.



CHAPTER FOURTEEN

ANCILLARY ART





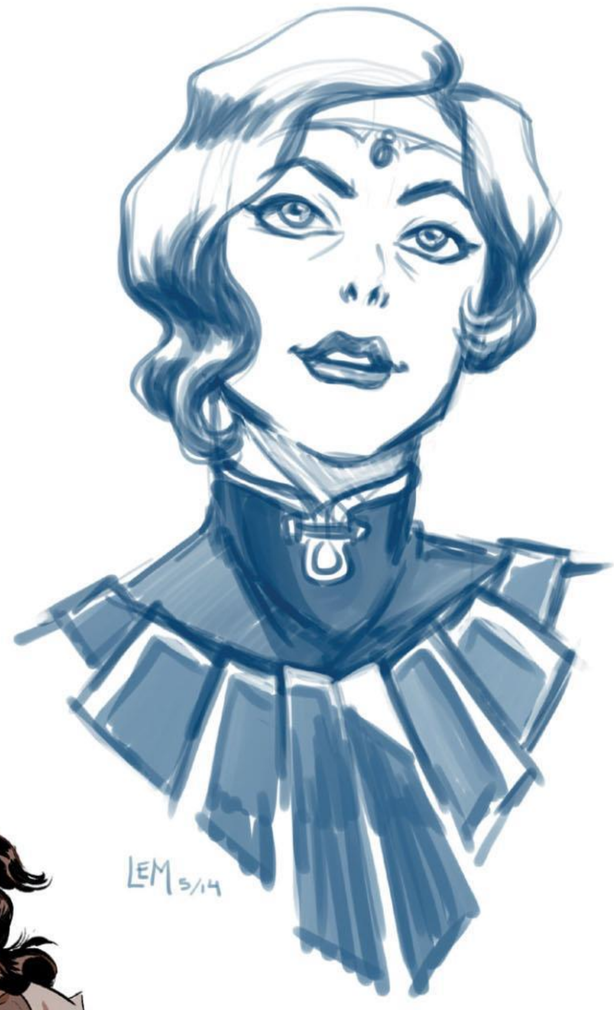


BK: I have no idea what is going on in this illustration, so your interpretation is as good as mine! Motorcycle Korra by Suk-Jin Jang.

BK: On the preceding spread is an excerpt of Korra from the rough I did for our 2014 San Diego Comic-Con poster. Along with Korra, I wanted to showcase some of the new main characters (out of the many we introduced in Book Three), so I sketched in Opal and Kai, and cobbled together some beautiful, ominous drawings of our four main Red Lotus members that Ki-Hyun Ryu had done for the production. Opposite of this page is the final version of the poster, with my three good guys redrawn by Ryu, then tweaked by me, and then all of it cleaned up by Angela Song Mueller. Sylvia Filcak-Blackwolf colored the characters, and then I did the lighting and texture treatments and gelled it all together.

BK: Eska and Desna and Suyin Beifong by our highly esteemed supervising producer, Lauren Montgomery.

MD: Christine Bian is not only an amazingly talented designer of props and backgrounds; her animal drawings are beautiful as well. This young Korra and Naga illustration is so precious and cute.







BK: A haunting Korra illustration by Cheong-Il Han. Opposite: On the top of the page is supervising producer Ki-Hyun Ryu's epic group caricature of nearly the entire Burbank-based Korra *Book Three crew. On the bottom is the crew's revenge, where we all took our turns caricaturing Ryu, artists and nonartists alike. Every one of them captures some sort of truth about our quirky, unique buddy.*


RYU DO NOT TAKE PICTURES OF ME!
RYU, CHECK THIS OUT! IT'S COOL
I HATE DOWN SHOT!
WHY DO I FEEL STRONG BOY IN MY STOMACH
RYU SAID. I'M HORRIBLE ARTIST...
CAN I BORROW YOUR GUN?
HE SAID I'M WORST WHO'S BETTER?
I'M NOT XXX STAR
MY HERO!
I'M FINE... I'M HAPPY I'M GONNA BE...
I'M NOT KEANU REEVES
THANKS TO YOU
BY
TEAM AVATAR


WILLIAM
I'm OLYMPIC PING PONG PLAYER...
CHRISTIE
AMARIS
WILL
IAN
LAYNE
OWEN
YOUNG KI
SYLVIA
LISA
PITBULLS
SHAUN
HYUNJOO
Just Do Like this
CHRISTINE
SUP.
BILL
Bill, More of a Down Shot...
EUGENE
ANGIE
I FIXED YOUR BAD DRAWING.
COLIN
JOAQUIM
MIKE
I'M RYU. YOU GOTTA DEAL WITH IT.
BENJAMIN
I hate this mean dog, but I love ping pong, and I'm so handsome. Ask me about it!
HAND SOPE
SOL
TIM
OPPA RYU STYLE!!
TIFFANY
YOU COULDN'T HANDLE IT IF I TOLD YOU YOU WERE HORRIBLE.
NATASHA
BRYAN
SEAN
MY BATAGUNI ISN'T BLACK
EMILY
LEM-IS
LAUREN
MEL
KAREN
MATT
ANG
Hey any world domination Subs?
ARIANA
KATIE
JOSH
FRED
CHRIS
YOUR PHOTOSHOP IS HORRIBLE
STEVE
고마워요 류!
-BY TEAM AVATAR-



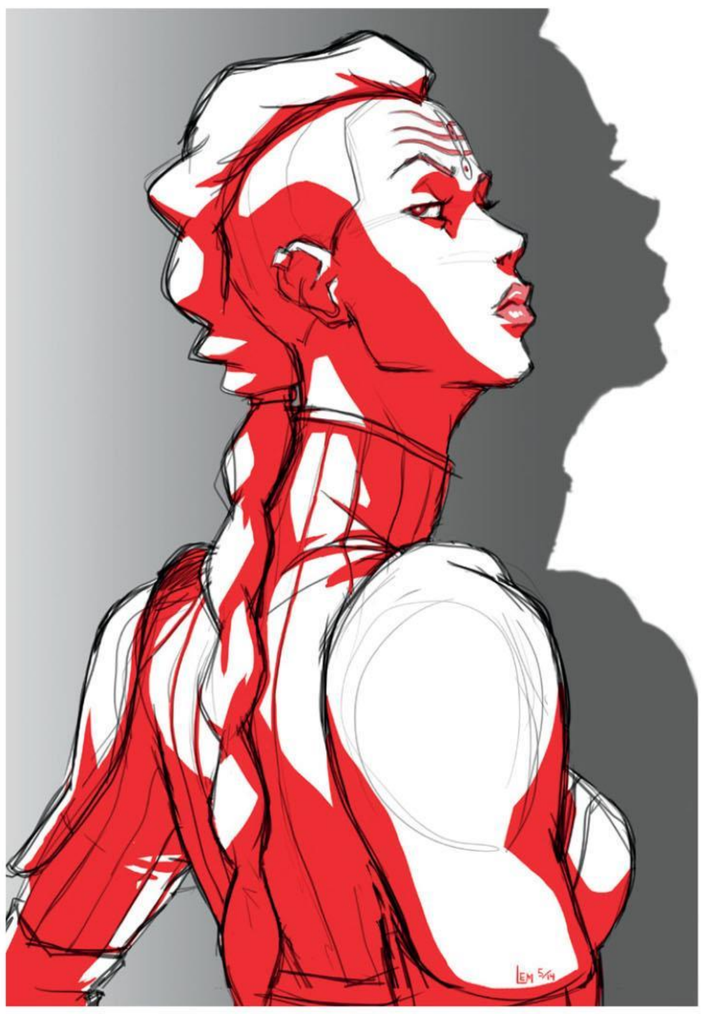
MD: Ryu's fantastic homage to Henry Rollins's punk days as part of Black Flag. I would love to rock out to the Red Lotus band! Zaheer probably sings about freedom, heartbreak, and tearing down the establishment, like most punk singers. Illustrations by Ki-Hyun Ryu.

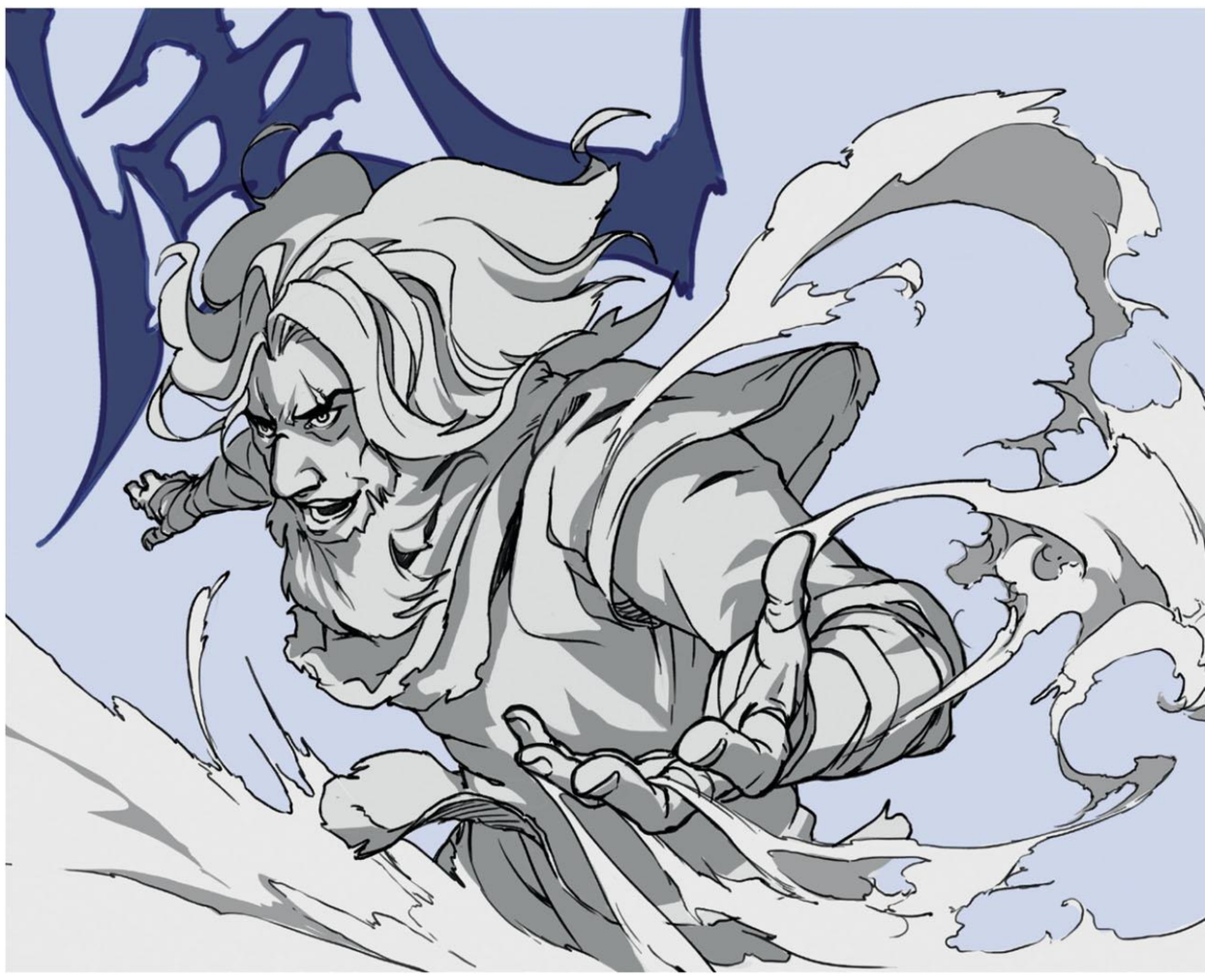


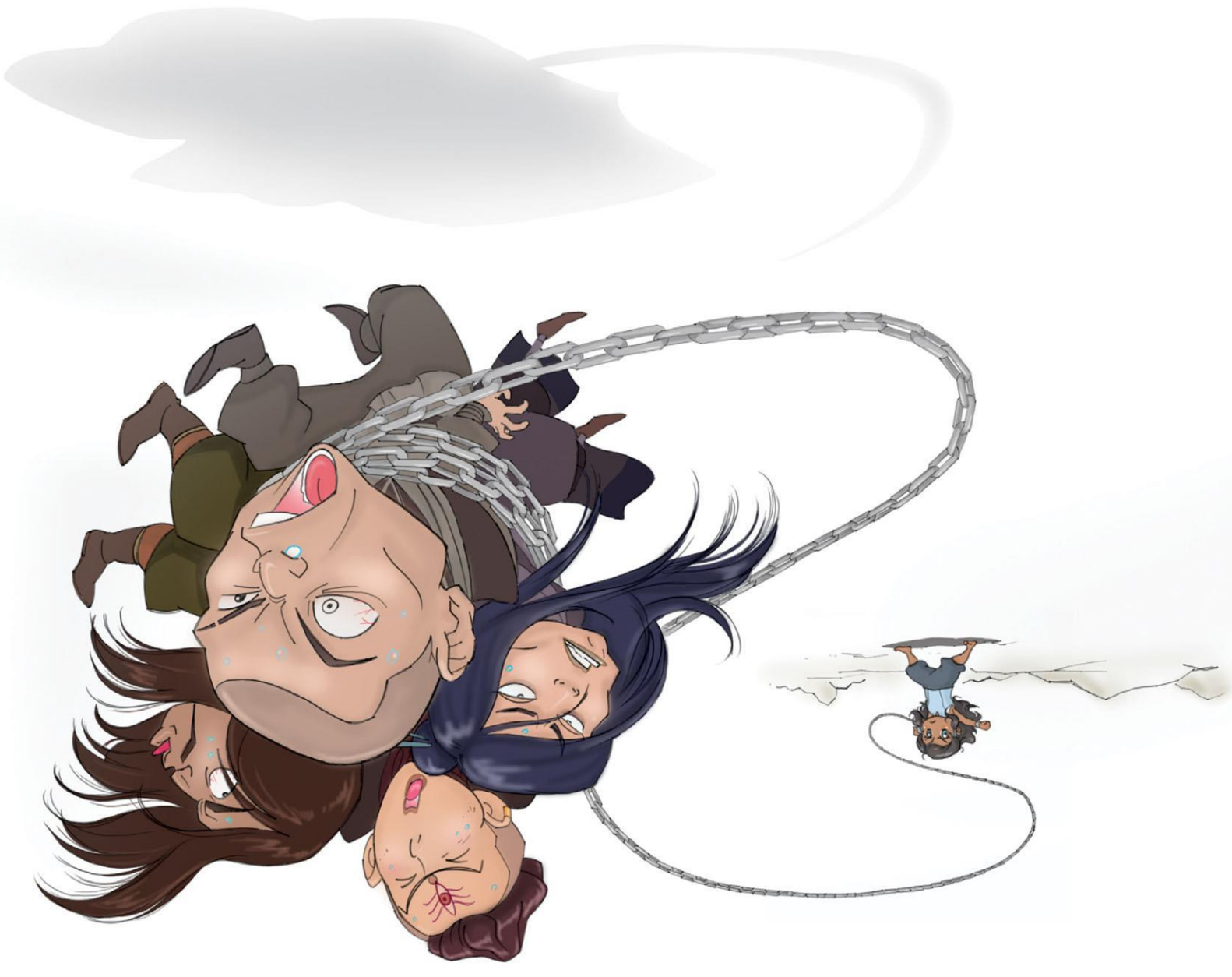
BK: As one of the primary gatekeepers of what is canon in the Avatarverse, I have to make it clear that Ming-Hua was born without arms, due to a congenital disorder. This is a cool alternate interpretation by Eugene, though! JDS: If the story did not make you somewhat sympathetic to Zaheer and his gang, then maybe this image, which captures them in an earlier time, before life's trials and tribulations have hardened them, will. Young Red Lotus members by Eugene Lee.

BK: Many artists on the crew had fun with the villains in this season, just as we did coming up with them. P'Li by Lauren Montgomery. Zaheer by William Nanqing Niu.

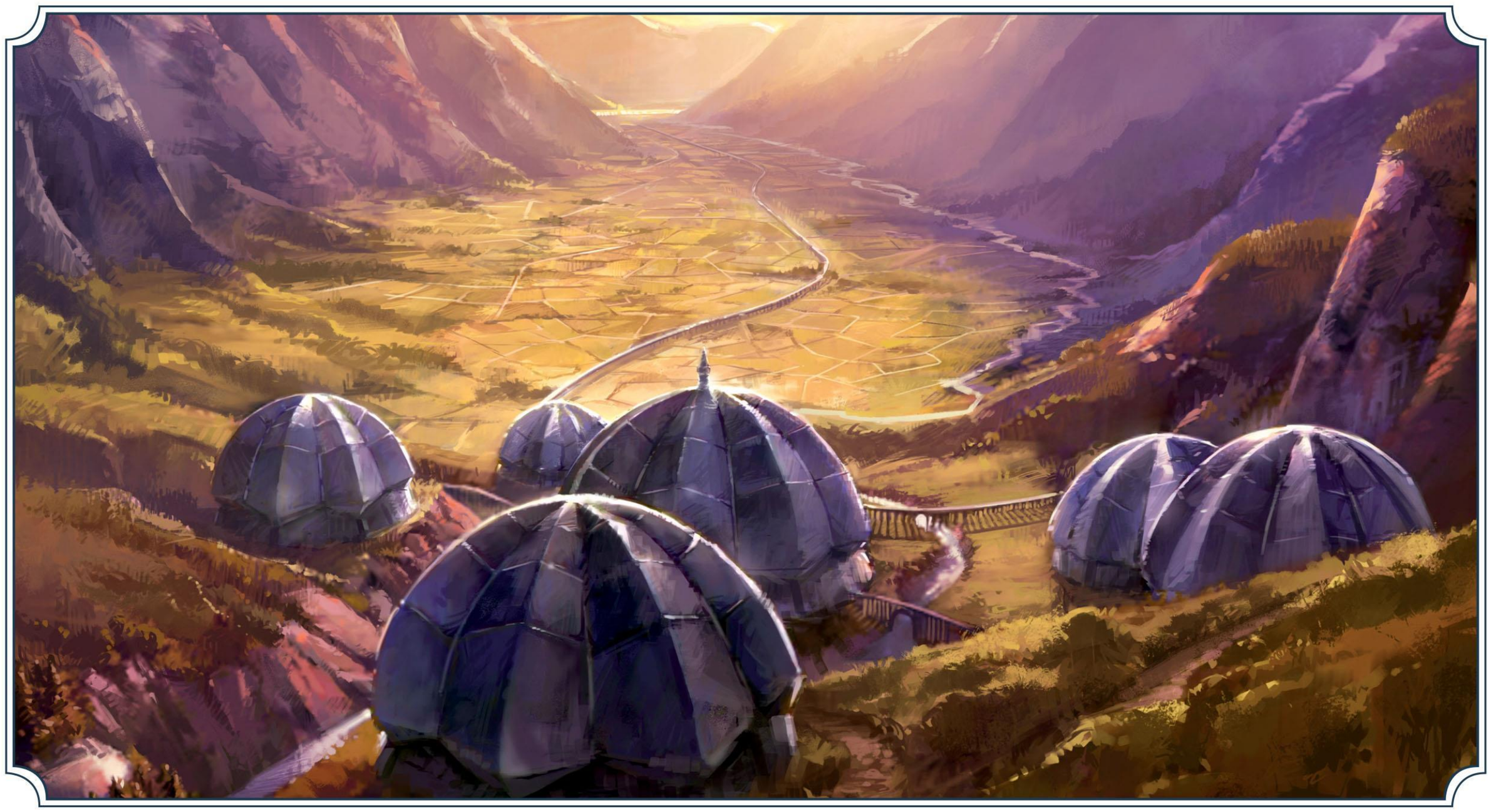
(Following page) Chibi Korra and Red Lotus villains by So-Young Park.







"It's the dawning of a new age, the end of the White Lotus, and soon, the end of the Avatar."



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"Succinct, kinetic, and threatening to the final beat. " —ScreenCrush.com

"Korra *can call itself among the best looking shows on television."*
—FanBros.com

"Spectacular action sequences, imaginative designs, smooth animation, and stories that balance character drama with larger social issues." —AVClub.com



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