

INSPIRED BY THE SUMMER BLOCKBUSTER DIRECTED BY M. NIGHT SHYAMALAN

AN M. NIGHT SHYAMALAN FILM
THE LAST AIRBENDER
PREQUEL
ZUKO'S STORY



Story by
DAVE ROMAN &
ALISON WILGUS

Art by
NINA MATSUMOTO

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Based on the series *Avatar: The Last Airbender*
created by Michael Dante DiMartino and
Bryan Konietzko. Based on the screenplay
written by M. Night Shyamalan.



Ballantine Books * New York

The Last Airbender: Prequel: Zuko's Story is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the products of the authors' imaginations or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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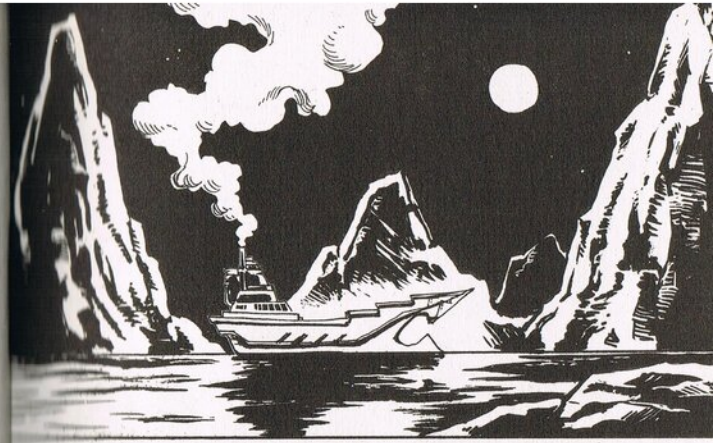
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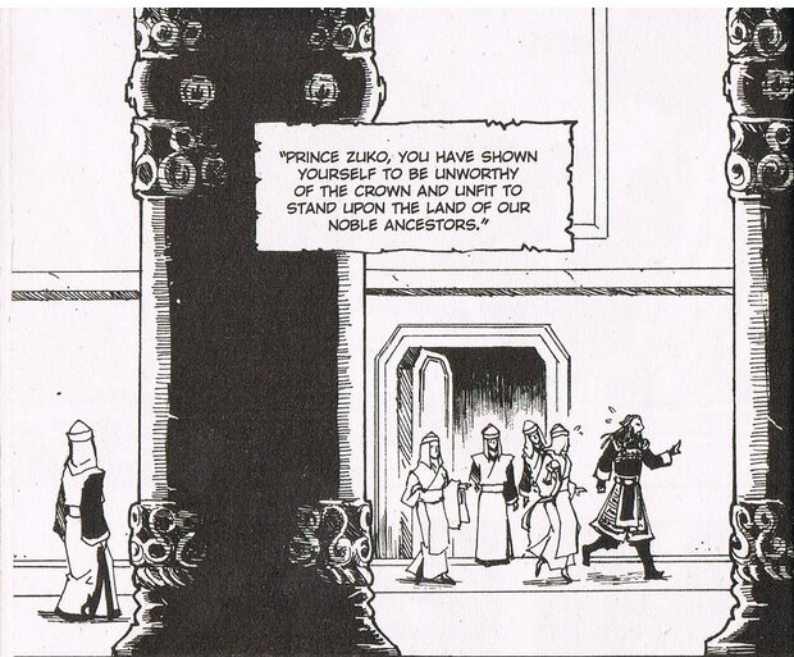
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"PRINCE ZUKO, YOU HAVE SHOWN YOURSELF TO BE UNWORTHY OF THE CROWN AND UNFIT TO STAND UPON THE LAND OF OUR NOBLE ANCESTORS."



"YOU ARE THEREFORE STRIPPED OF YOUR BIRTHRIGHT AND BANISHED FROM THE FIRE NATION UNTIL YOU CAN PROVE YOUR WORTH."



NEPHEW,
PLEASE,
YOU AREN'T
WELL--



I'LL
DECIDE IF
I'M WELL
OR NOT!



AN AGNI KI DUEL? YOU'RE SURE? BUT HE'S BARELY MORE THAN A CHILD-

THE FIRE LORD CHALLENGED HIM. HE COULDN'T VERY WELL REFUSE.

CAN YOU IMAGINE? DISOWNED AND SHAMED IN FRONT OF THE ENTIRE COURT. IT SEEMS SO CRUEL...

SHH! DON'T LET THE GUARDS HEAR YOU TALKING LIKE THAT.

HAS HE EVER EVEN BEEN OUTSIDE THE FIRE NATION? OR THE CAPITAL?

HE WON'T LAST A MONTH IN THE COLONIES.

THAT POOR BOY...

BAM!

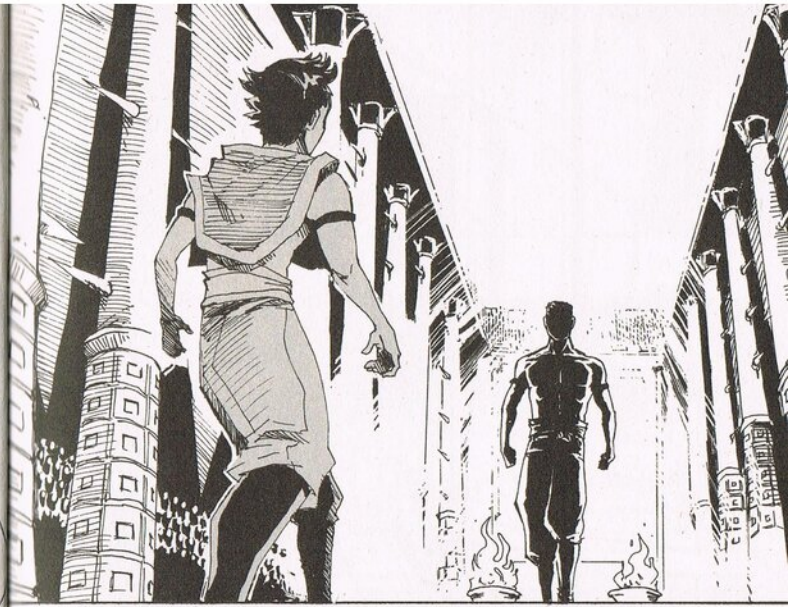


...I KNOW WE SHOULD TRUST IN THE FIRE LORD'S WISDOM...

SLAM!

...BUT HOW COULD ANYONE DO SUCH A THING TO HIS OWN SON?









THEN FATHER WILL WELCOME ME HOME.

WELL, I SUPPOSE THE AVATAR'S ONLY BEEN MISSING FOR A HUNDRED YEARS. MAYBE YOU'LL TRACK HIM DOWN IN FIFTY.



I'LL FIND HIM. YOU'LL SEE.

OF COURSE YOU WILL.

I'M SURE THAT WHEN THEY MARCH YOU DOWN TO THE DOCKS, YOU'LL BE ABLE TO BRIBE SOME FISHERMAN INTO GIVING YOU A RIDE.



MAYBE THEY'LL EVEN GIVE YOU A JOB WASHING DOWN THE DECK. I'VE HEARD THAT PEASANTS HAVE A SOFT SPOT FOR ORPHANS.

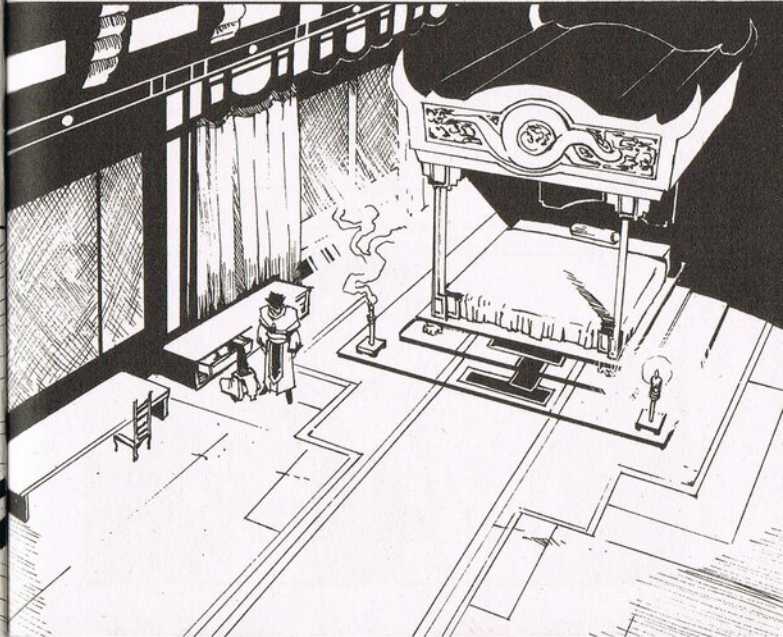


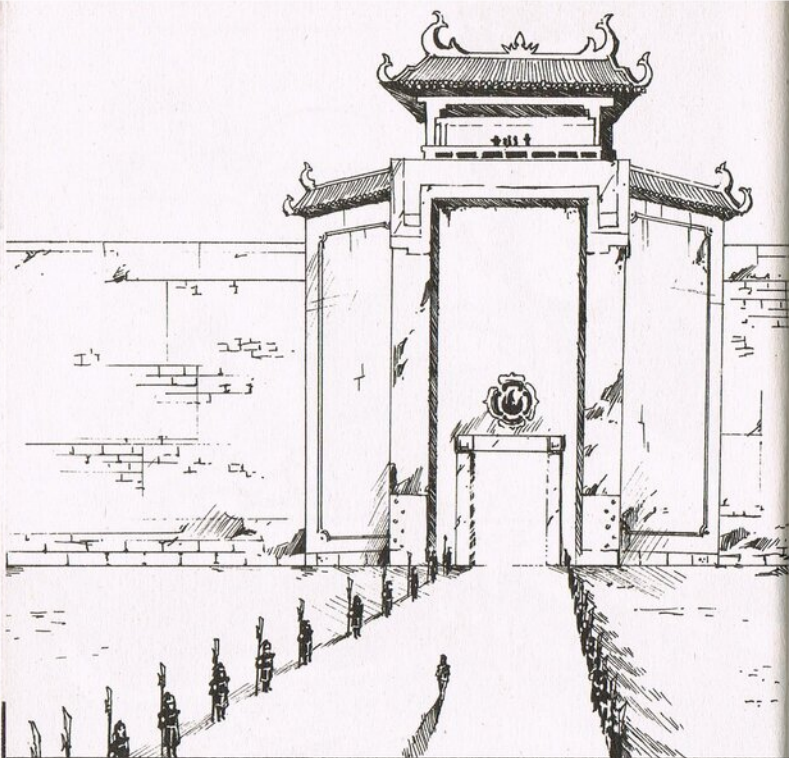
THE GUARDS WILL BE HERE TO GET YOU IN AN HOUR. BETTER FINISH PACKING.



GET OUT!

FOOM!







ARE NONE OF YOU BRAVE ENOUGH TO JOIN MY SEARCH FOR THE AVATAR?



THE FIRE LORD HIMSELF SENT ME ON THIS QUEST. YOU SHOULD BE HONORED TO BE ASKED TO BE JOIN ME!



QUEST? HAH. MORE LIKE A FOOL'S ERRAND.

THE AVATAR'S LONG DEAD, KID. YOU'D BE BETTER OFF HIDING OUT IN THE COLONIES.



I AM HONOR-BOUND TO BRING THE AVATAR TO MY FATHER! I WILL NOT TURN MY BACK ON THE TASK HE'S GIVEN TO ME!



WE AREN'T HEARTLESS, SON. WE'D HELP YOU IF WE COULD. BUT IF WE SAIL WITH A BANISHED PRINCE, WE'RE AS GOOD AS BANISHED OURSELVES.

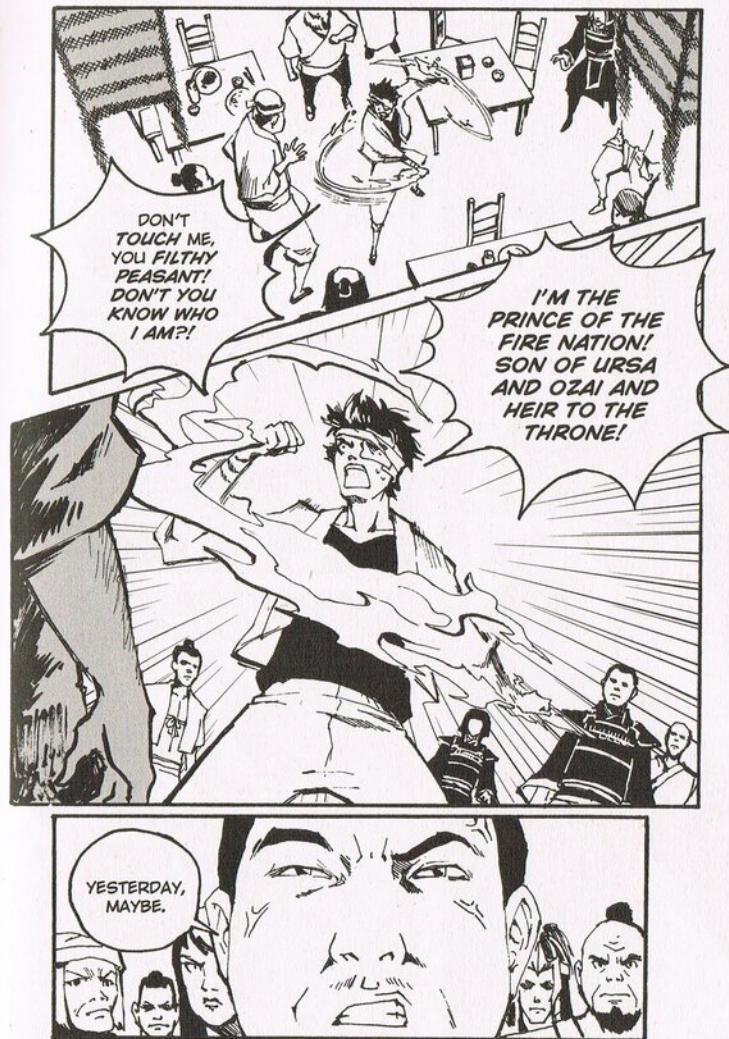


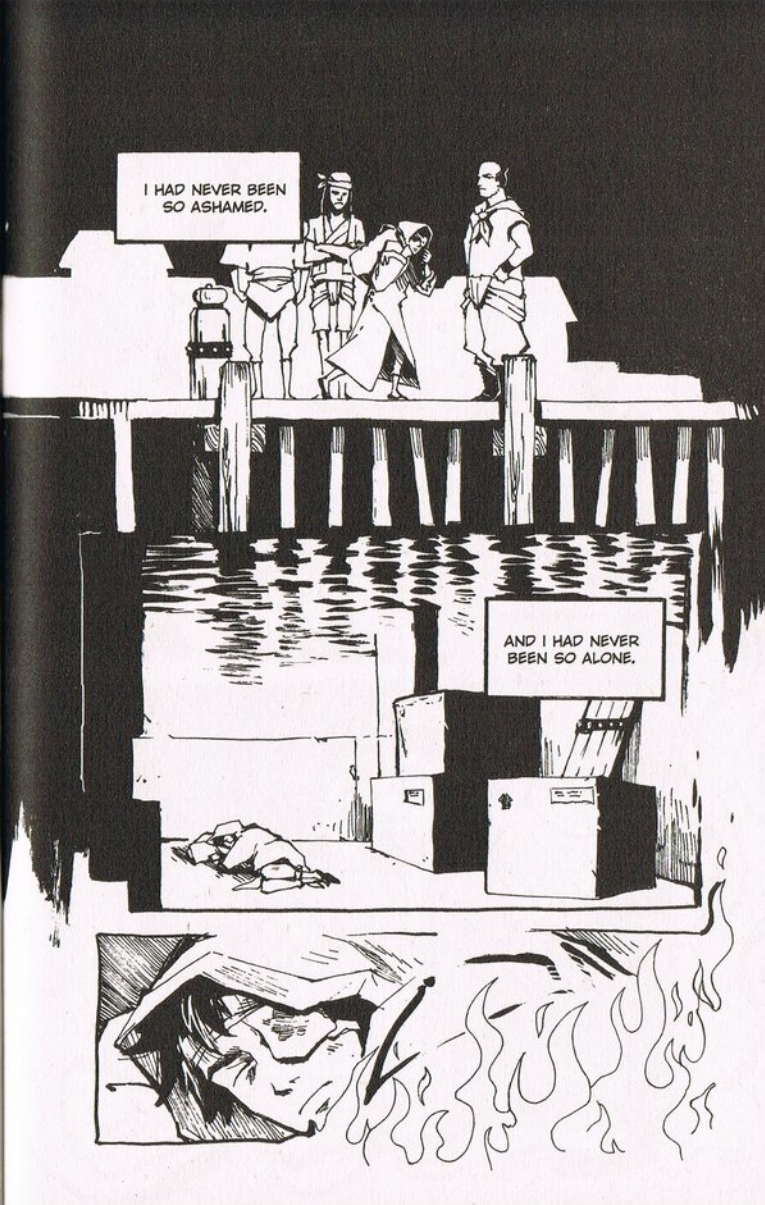
WHEN I REGAIN MY HONOR, ALL WHO HELPED ME WILL SERVE IN THE ROYAL COURT BY MY SIDE. YOUR BRAVERY WILL BE REWARDED.

NOTHING BRAVE ABOUT LYING TO YOURSELF. EVERYONE KNOWS THE AVATAR'S GONE. YOUR OWN GREAT-GRANDFATHER, SOZIN, KILLED HIM.



MAYBE OZAI'S JUST TRYING TO GET RID OF YOU.







YOU WILL LEARN RESPECT...

...AND SUFFERING WILL BE YOUR TEACHER.

NO!

PLEASE, FATHER, I BEG OF YOU.

ONLY THE WEAK BEG.

"I WILL NOT HAVE A COWARD FOR A SON."



ZUKO.



...?



YOU LOOK TERRIBLE.



I GOT YOUR MESSAGE, ALONG WITH HALF THE PALACE STAFF. HARDLY SUBTLE, TALKING TO AN IMPERIAL GUARD THAT WAY. I'M RISKING A LOT TO COME AND SPEAK TO YOU.

I WOULDN'T HAVE ASKED IF I HAD ANY CHOICE.



SO WHAT DO YOU WANT?

I CAN'T STAY IN THE CAPITAL. I HAVE TO LEAVE TO FIND THE AVATAR, BUT I DON'T HAVE A SHIP OR ANY WAY TO HIRE ONE, AND I THOUGHT...



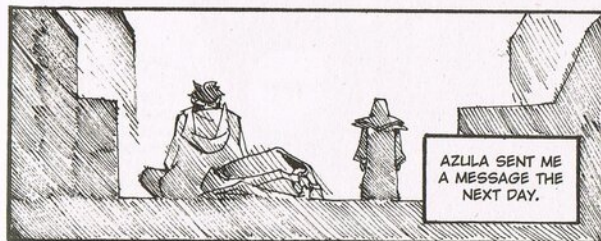
FATHER'S ALWAYS PREFERRED YOU. YOU CAN ASK FOR THINGS THAT I CAN'T.



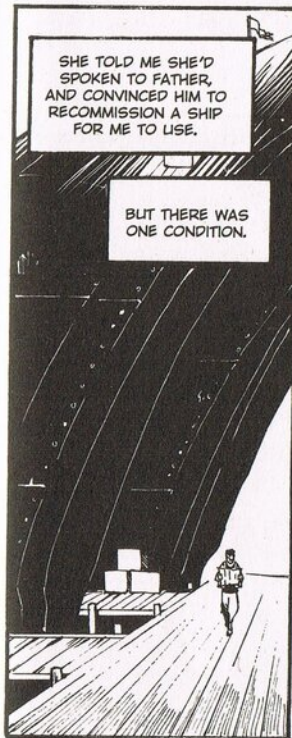
I'LL SEE WHAT I CAN DO. BUT YOU'LL HAVE TO PAY FOR ANY FAVORS.

I KNOW.

YOU SHOULD CHANGE THOSE BANDAGES MORE OFTEN. YOU'LL LOSE THAT EYE OTHERWISE.

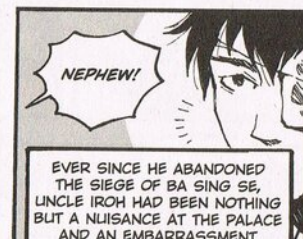


AZULA SENT ME A MESSAGE THE NEXT DAY.



SHE TOLD ME SHE'D SPOKEN TO FATHER, AND CONVINCED HIM TO RECOMMISSION A SHIP FOR ME TO USE.

BUT THERE WAS ONE CONDITION.



NEPHEW!

EVER SINCE HE ABANDONED THE SIEGE OF BA SING SE, UNCLE IROH HAD BEEN NOTHING BUT A NUISANCE AT THE PALACE AND AN EMBARRASSMENT TO THE COURT.

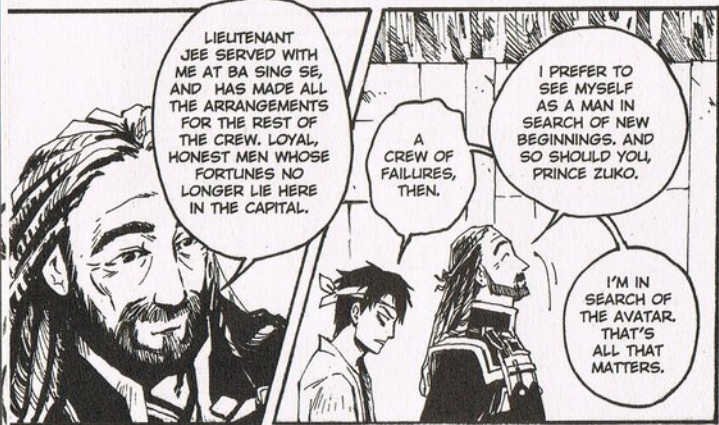
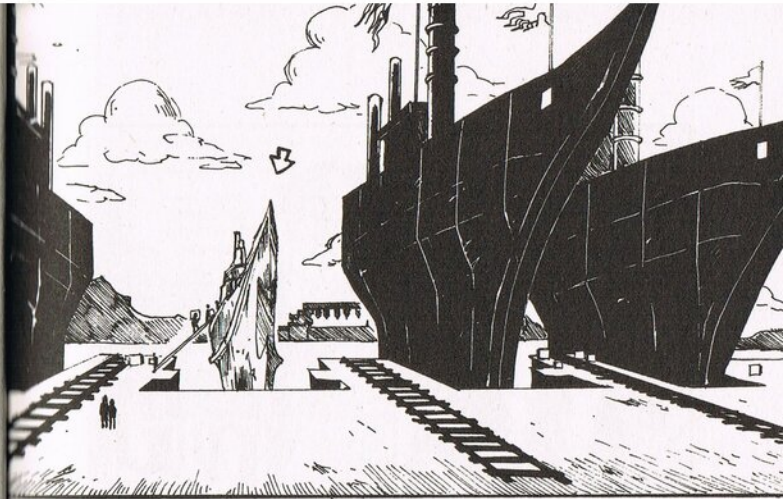
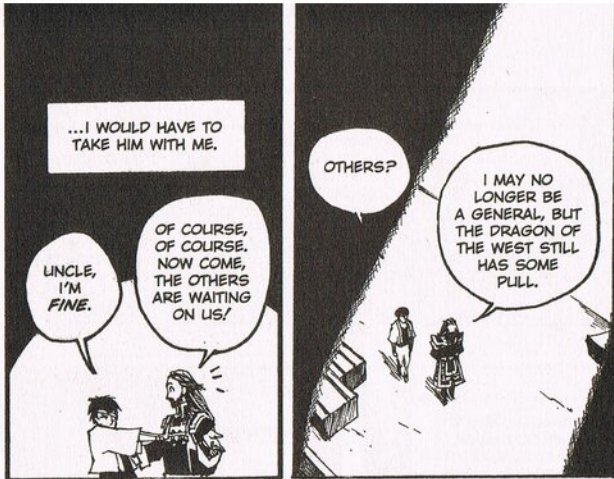


I WAS THE ONLY ONE IN OUR FAMILY WHO STILL SPOKE TO HIM.

IT IS GOOD TO SEE YOU AGAIN. I WAS WORRIED!

WOF!

AND NOW, TO EARN THIS FAVOR FROM MY FATHER...



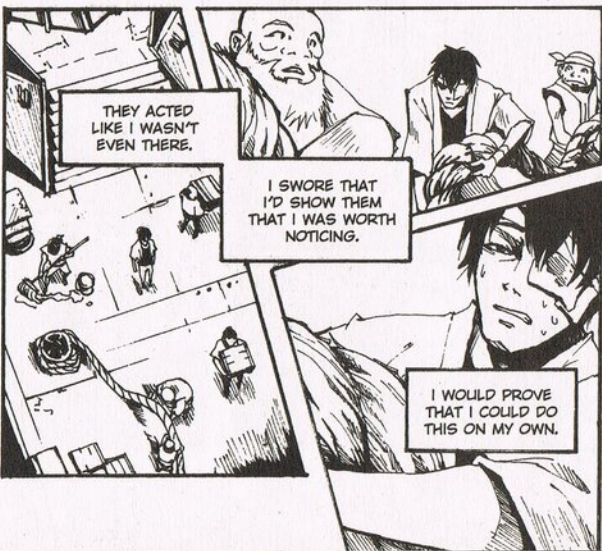


I KNOW I SHOULD HAVE BEEN GRATEFUL. I COULD NEVER HAVE PUT A CREW TOGETHER ON MY OWN.

BUT I HATED HOW BADLY I'D NEEDED HIS HELP.



MY FATHER CALLED UNCLE A "DODDERING OLD FAILURE," BUT JEE AND HIS MEN TREATED HIM LIKE A HERO.



THEY ACTED LIKE I WASN'T EVEN THERE.

I SWORE THAT I'D SHOW THEM THAT I WAS WORTH NOTICING.

I WOULD PROVE THAT I COULD DO THIS ON MY OWN.



MY SHIP DEPARTED WITH LITTLE FANFARE.

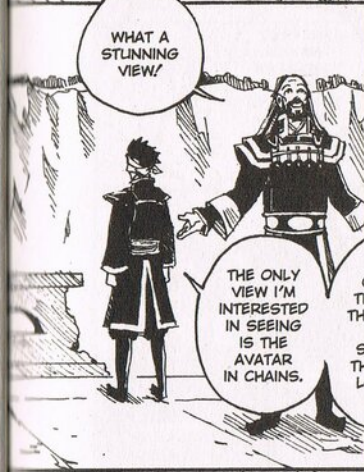
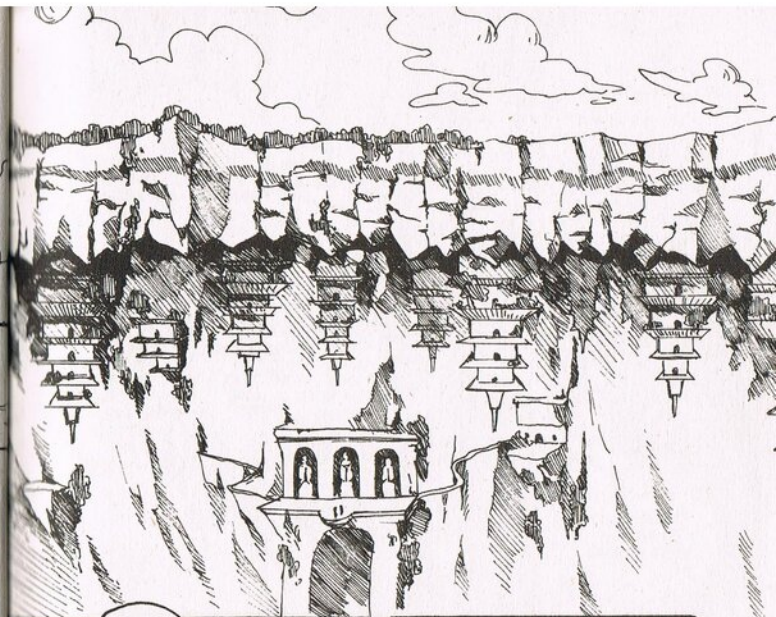
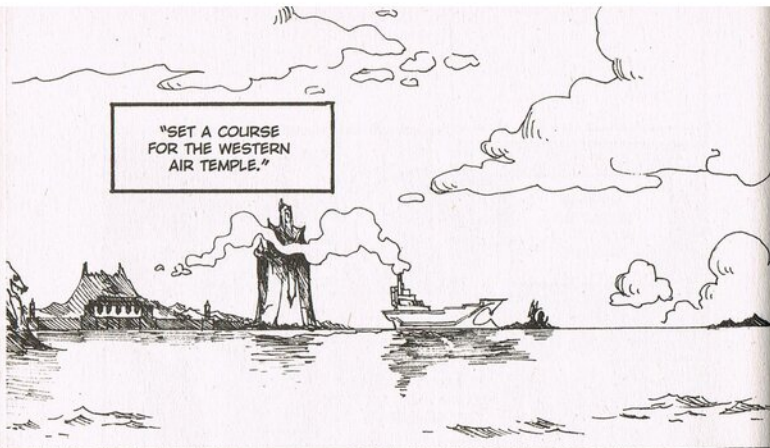
AND AS WE PASSED THE GREAT GATES OF AZULON AND LEFT THE CITY BEHIND US...

...I TRIED NOT TO THINK ABOUT HOW LONG IT WOULD BE BEFORE I SAW IT AGAIN...



...OR IF I EVER WOULD.

LIEUTENANT!





WHAT ELSE WOULD I EXPECT TO HEAR FROM THE LAZIEST MAN IN THE FIRE NATION?



THE ONLY WAY TO REGAIN MY HONOR IS TO FIND THE AVATAR.

SO I WILL.



I WOULD NOT PRESUME TO TELL YOU HOW TO CONDUCT YOUR SEARCH, NEPHEW. BUT YOU WERE TOLD VERY LITTLE ABOUT THE AVATAR WHEN YOU WERE A BOY.

THE PREVIOUS AVATAR, ROKU, LIVED AT THE FIRE TEMPLE ON CRESCENT ISLAND FOR SEVERAL YEARS. THE SAGES THERE KNOW MORE ABOUT HIM THAN ANYONE ELSE IN THE WORLD.

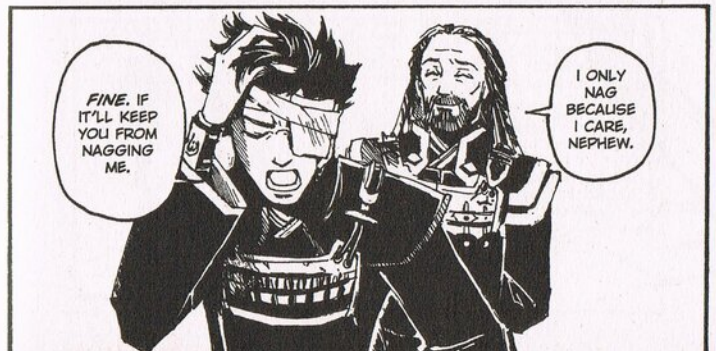
PERHAPS IF YOU KNEW MORE ABOUT THE LIVES HE HAS ALREADY LED, YOU WOULD HAVE A CLEARER PICTURE OF WHAT YOU ARE SEARCHING FOR.

HOW MANY HUNDRED-YEAR-OLD AIRBENDERS DO YOU THINK THERE ARE? I KNOW ENOUGH.

THAT ISLAND IS WEEKS OFF-COURSE!



BUT GOING MAY SAVE YOU YEARS OF FRUITLESS EFFORT. IT CANNOT HURT TO ASK.



FINE. IF IT'LL KEEP YOU FROM NAGGING ME.

I ONLY NAG BECAUSE I CARE, NEPHEW.



MY NAME IS SHYLI.

I'M SORRY THAT THE GREAT SAGE WASN'T ABLE TO GREET YOU HIMSELF, BUT I WOULD BE HONORED TO HELP YOU LEARN ABOUT THE AVATAR.

MY OWN GRANDFATHER, KAJA, WAS THE FIRE SAGE WHO TAUGHT AVATAR ROKU DURING HIS STAY IN THIS TEMPLE.

HE KEPT CAREFUL RECORDS OF ROKU'S LIFE AND WORK, FROM THE DAY HE WAS ANNOUNCED TO THE DAY HE DIED.



IT WAS ONCE A DUTY OF THE FIRE SAGES TO PRESERVE THE HISTORY OF THE AVATAR CYCLE. THE SCROLLS IN OUR ARCHIVES GO BACK THOUSANDS OF YEARS.

I SPEND AS MUCH TIME AS I CAN SPARE IN THIS LIBRARY, RECOPYING THE SCROLLS AS THEY DETERIORATE SO THAT THE KNOWLEDGE WITHIN THEM WILL SURVIVE.



YOU CAN USE MY DESK WHILE YOU'RE HERE.



WE HAVEN'T HAD AN AVATAR SCHOLAR VISIT IN DECADES, AT LEAST!

IT WASN'T A COMPLETE WASTE OF TIME.

SOME OF WHAT I FOUND IN THAT LIBRARY COULD EVEN BE CALLED USEFUL.

AVATAR YANGCHEN BUILT A HERMITAGE NEAR THE EASTERN AIR TEMPLE, AND SPENT HER LATER YEARS THERE IN SECLUSION. AVATAR KYOSHI LIVED FOR TWO-HUNDRED AND THIRTY YEARS - MUCH OLDER THAN THE CURRENT AVATAR WOULD BE.

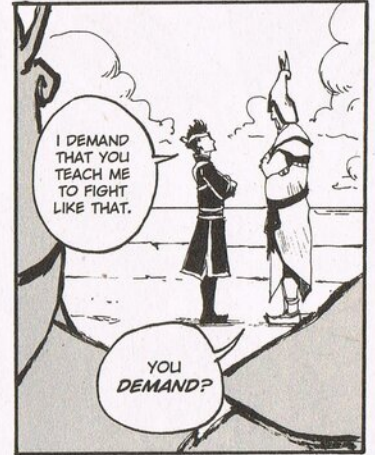
MOST VALUABLE OF ALL WERE THE TESTS - WAYS YOU COULD TELL FOR SURE IF SOMEONE WAS THE AVATAR OR NOT.

BUT THE MAJORITY OF IT WAS DRY, DUSTY KNOWLEDGE ABOUT PEOPLES WHO HAD DIED HUNDREDS OF YEARS AGO; WARS AND TREATIES BETWEEN KINGDOMS THAT NO LONGER EXISTED; ENDLESS LISTS OF BIRTHS AND DEATHS AND MARRIAGES.

THE REST WAS OUTDATED PHILOSOPHY, ABOUT KEEPING THE NATIONS IN BALANCE AND MAINTAINING A CONNECTION WITH THE SPIRIT WORLD - DULL AT BEST AND OUTRIGHT TRAITOROUS AT WORST.

MY MIND WANDERED.







GRAAAAH!

SHOOOOO



fsshhhhh...



I WAS TIRED OF PITY AND TIRED OF BEING TAKEN CARE OF.



RRR RRAH!

TIRED OF LIVING IN THE SHADOW OF MY SISTER.



SSSHHH!

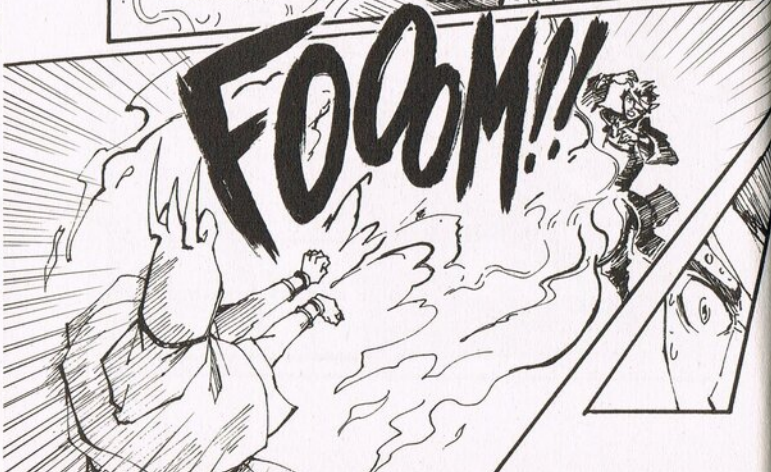


SSSHHH!

TIRED OF BEING A DISAPPOINTMENT TO MY FATHER.



I WANTED SO BADLY TO BE STRONG.



NEPHEW, I AM SORRY TO INTERRUPT, BUT I BELIEVE FIRE SAGE SHYLI IS LOOKING FOR YOU.

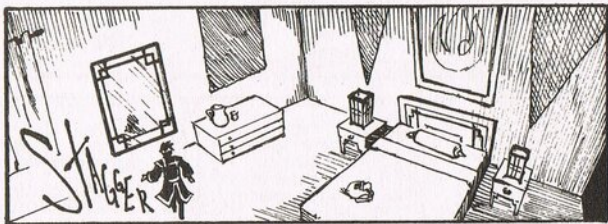


YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO DO THAT? I WOULD'VE BEEN FINE!

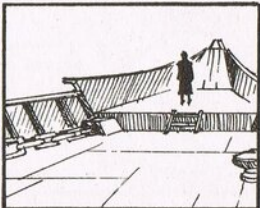
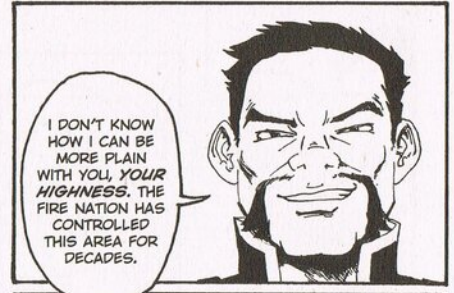
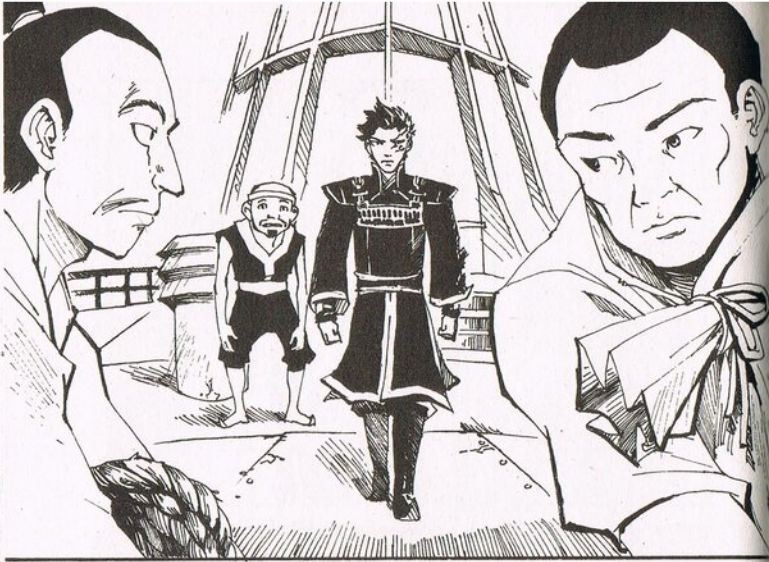
YOUR WOUNDS HAVE NOT ENTIRELY HEALED. NOW IS NOT THE TIME TO PUSH YOURSELF IN THIS WAY.



BE PATIENT, PRINCE ZLIKO. WHEN YOU ARE READY, I WILL TEACH YOU THE MORE ADVANCED FIREBENDING FORMS MYSELF.









THE FIRE FESTIVAL BEGINS TONIGHT. WHY DON'T YOU AMUSE YOURSELVES THERE INSTEAD OF WASTING YOUR TIME WITH GHOSTS?



THE CELEBRATIONS HERE IN THE COLONIES ARE VERY DIFFERENT THAN WHAT YOU ARE USED TO, PRINCE ZUKO.

THE FIRE FLAKES AREN'T QUITE AS GOOD, BUT THERE'S DANCING! AND I THINK YOU MIGHT ENJOY-

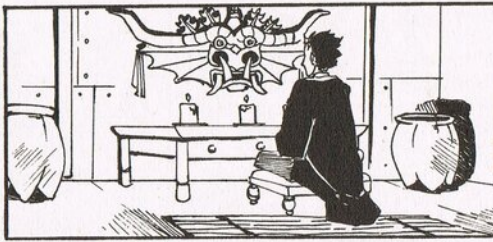


GO BY YOURSELF! I DON'T HAVE TIME FOR STUPID PEASANT HOLIDAYS!



KLANG!

PAF



hooooo...



whssssh...



KLANG...

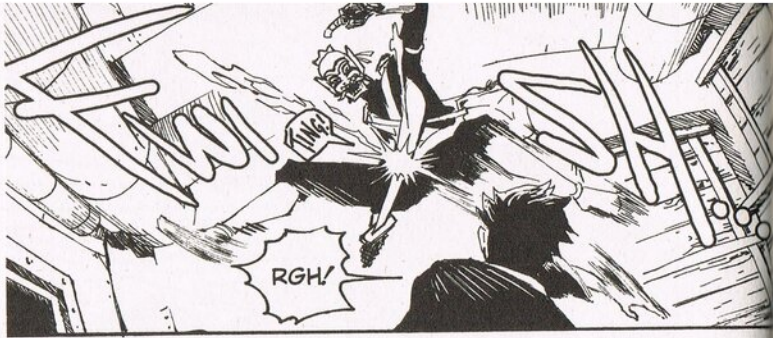


click...
click



click







I'M LOOKING FOR A MAN IN A RED MASK.

SON, THIS IS THE FIRE FESTIVAL. I'VE SEEN A LOT OF MEN LIKE THAT TODAY.



HE'D BE CARRYING A BAG... HE FIGHTS WITH TWO SWOR-

AH! YOU MEAN THE RED SPIRIT!



THE WHAT?

HE'S SOMETHING OF A LEGEND AROUND HERE. I PROBABLY SHOULDN'T BE SAYING THIS TO AN OUT-OF-TOWNER BUT...



COMMANDER KANKU DOESN'T ALWAYS MAKE THINGS EASY FOR US. HE HOARDS ALL THE FOOD AND MEDICINE FOR HIS SOLDIERS, FORCES OUR BOYS INTO UNIFORM, AND SENDS THEM OFF TO THE FRONT...

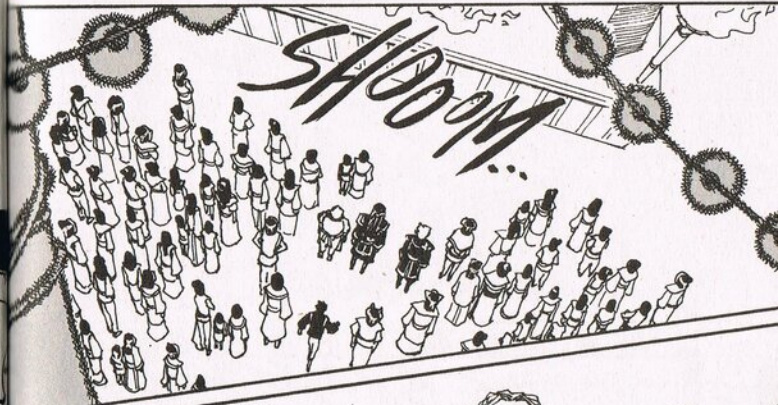
BUT THE RED SPIRIT HELPS MAKE IT ALL BEARABLE. HE STEALS SUPPLIES AND LEAVES THEM ON OUR DOORSTEPS, HE HASSLES THE SOLDIERS WHO TRY TO COME TO TAKE OUR CHILDREN AWAY...

JUST LITTLE THINGS, REALLY. BUT IT'S GOOD TO KNOW THE SPIRITS ARE WATCHING OUT FOR US.



HE'S NOT A SPIRIT! HE'S JUST A THIEF IN A MASK!

I SUPPOSE WE CAN'T EXPECT OUTSIDERS TO UNDERSTAND.



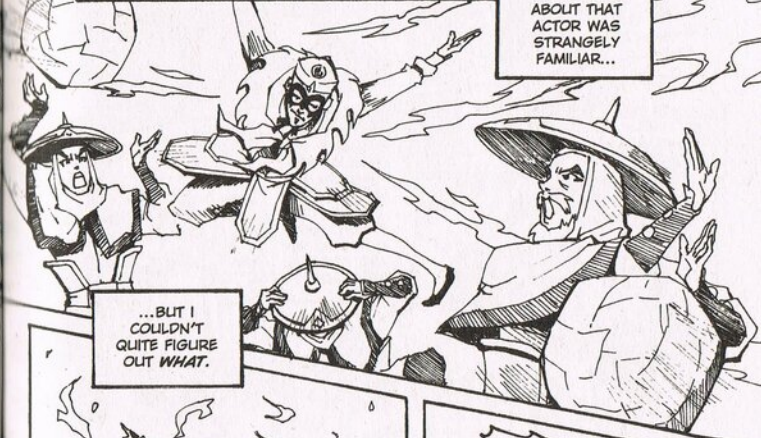
UNCLE, I NEED TO TALK TO-

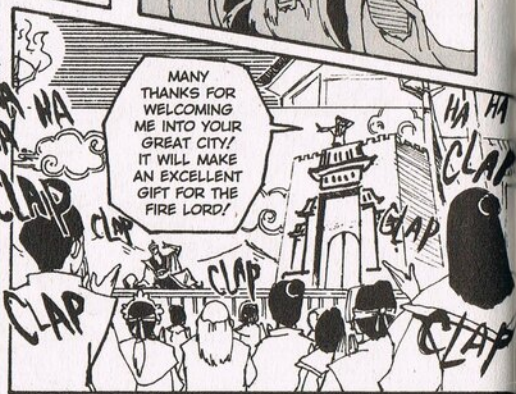
SHHH.

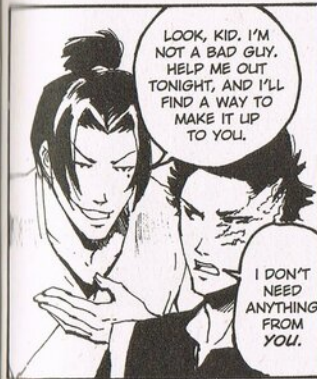
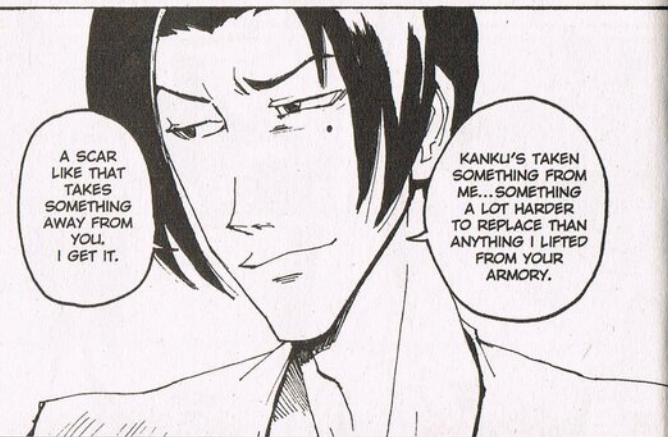
IT IS JUST GETTING TO THE GOOD PART!

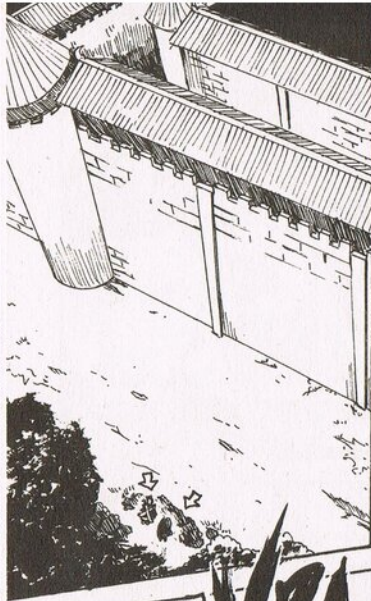


SOMETHING
ABOUT THAT
ACTOR WAS
STRANGELY
FAMILIAR...









I CAN'T BELIEVE I'M DOING THIS. THOSE ARE MY EXPLOSIVES!

YOU CAN BE THE ONE TO LIGHT THEM IF IT MAKES YOU FEEL BETTER.



AN EXPLOSION! NEAR THE SOUTHEAST CORNER!

TAP TAP TAP TAP TAP

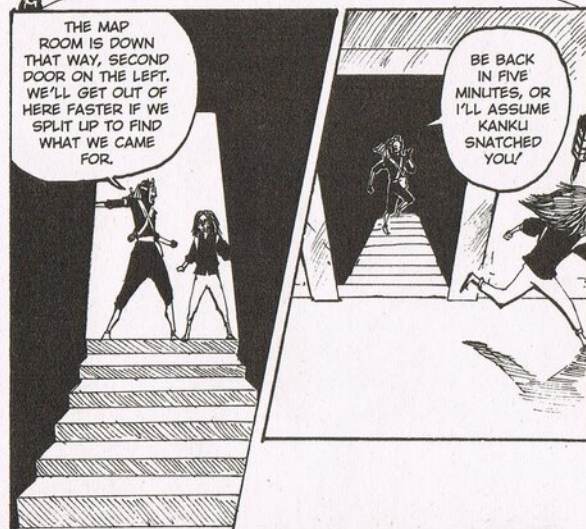
SIR! IT'S THE RED SPIRIT!

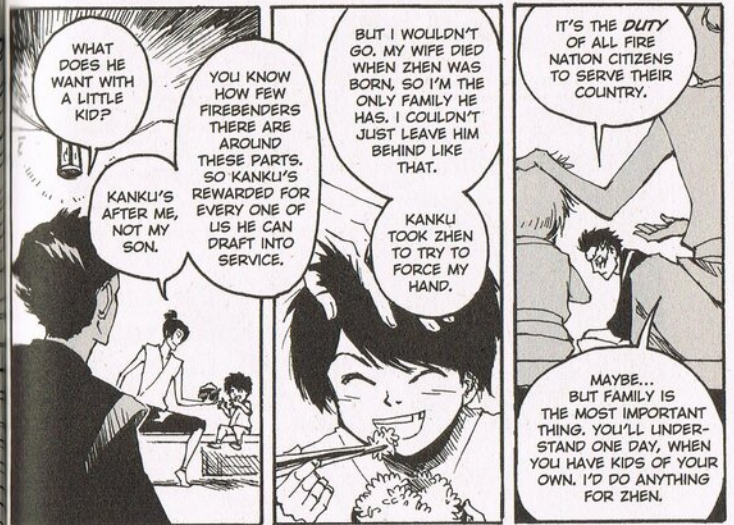
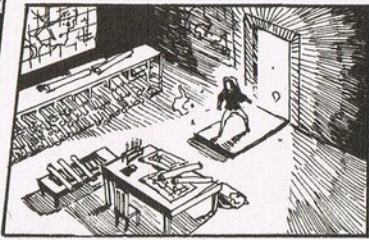
AND ANOTHER ...A BLUE ONE!

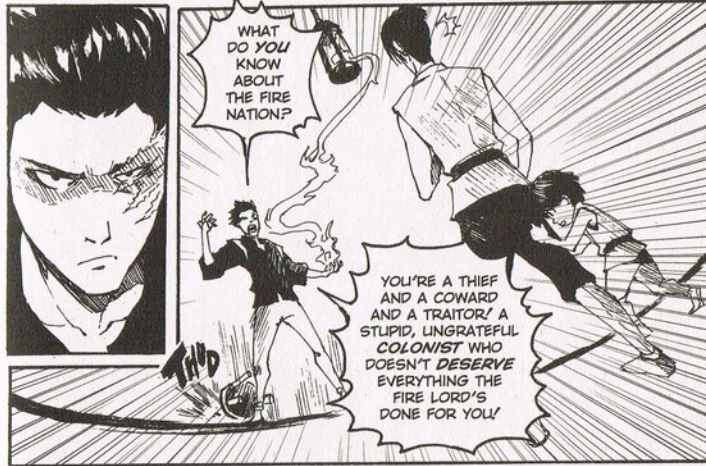
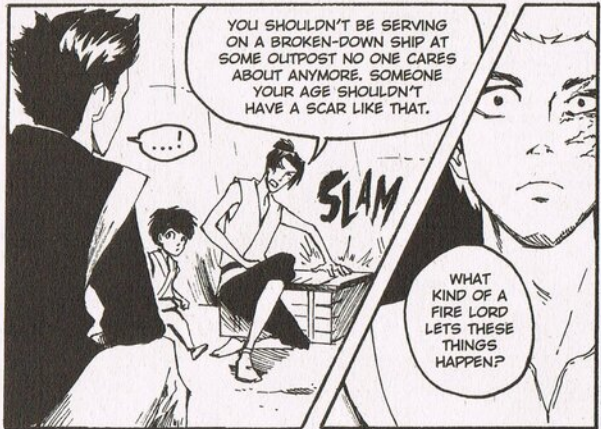
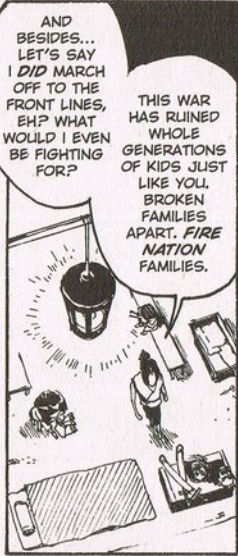
WHAT ARE YOU? CHILDREN?

STOP THEM BOTH!









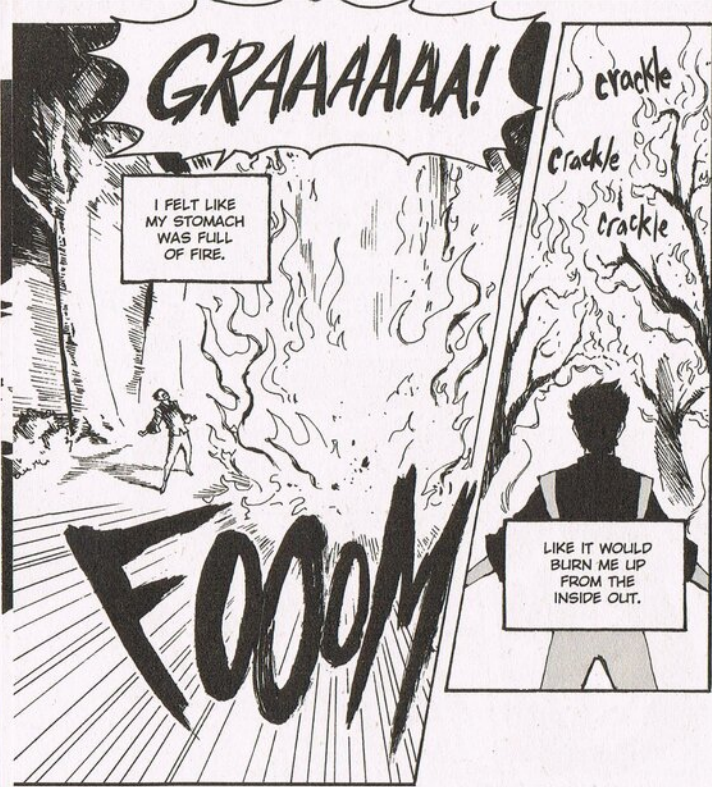


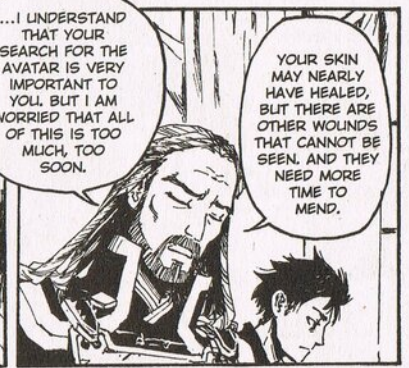
I COULDN'T BELIEVE WHAT I'D ALMOST DONE.

WHAT I WOULD HAVE DONE IF I'D STAYED THERE ANY LONGER.

I HAD WANTED TO HURT HIM FOR SAYING THOSE THINGS.

I HAD WANTED TO SCORCH THAT SMILE FROM HIS FACE.





PRINCE ZUKO...

...I UNDERSTAND THAT YOUR SEARCH FOR THE AVATAR IS VERY IMPORTANT TO YOU. BUT I AM WORRIED THAT ALL OF THIS IS TOO MUCH, TOO SOON.

YOUR SKIN MAY NEARLY HAVE HEALED, BUT THERE ARE OTHER WOUNDS THAT CANNOT BE SEEN. AND THEY NEED MORE TIME TO MEND.

RIGHT NOW, YOU ARE A DANGER TO YOURSELF, YOUR CREW, AND EVERYONE AROUND YOU.

I UNDERSTAND THAT THIS IS NOT THE LIFE YOU WANTED FOR YOURSELF. BUT IT IS STILL YOUR LIFE.

PLEASE, NEPHEW. DO NOT THROW IT AWAY.



HOW CAN YOU SIT THERE AND SAY THIS STUFF TO ME?

YOU'RE THE DRAGON OF THE WEST! YOUR ARMY WAS THE FIRST TO BREAK THROUGH THE WALLS OF BA SING SE!

AND YOU THREW IT ALL AWAY FOR WHAT? I WAS JUST A KID THEN, BUT I KNOW WHAT HAPPENED! THE EARTHBENDERS KILLED YOUR SON, LU TEN, AND YOU COULDN'T HANDLE IT. YOU JUST GAVE UP AND CAME HOME AND HID IN THE PALACE LIKE A COWARDLY OLD FOOL!

YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO BE FIRE LORD, BUT MY FATHER WAS STRONGER AND MY GRANDFATHER KNEW IT. SO THEY TOOK THAT AWAY FROM YOU, TOO, AND YOU LET THEM!



YOU GAVE UP ON YOUR DUTY AND YOUR THRONE, SO WHY SHOULD I LISTEN TO ANYTHING YOU SAY?

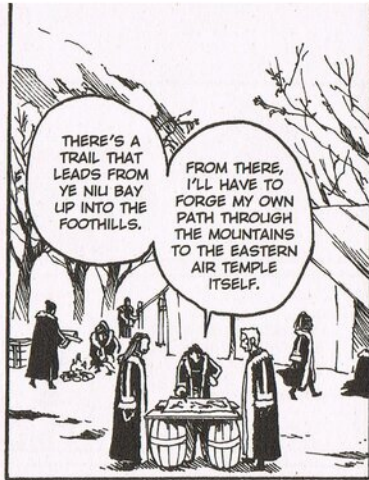


YOU KEEP TELLING ME YOU WANT TO HELP, BUT THAT'S NOT TRUE, IS IT? YOU DON'T WANT ME TO FIND THE AVATAR! YOU DON'T WANT ME TO GET MY HONOR BACK! YOU BLEW YOUR OWN CHANCES, AND NOW YOU WANT ME TO BE A FAILURE, TOO!

WELL I'M NOT GIVING UP!







THERE'S A TRAIL THAT LEADS FROM YE NILI BAY UP INTO THE FOOTHILLS.

FROM THERE, I'LL HAVE TO FORGE MY OWN PATH THROUGH THE MOUNTAINS TO THE EASTERN AIR TEMPLE ITSELF.



I'LL GO ALONE. TAKING THE CREW ALONG WOULD JUST SLOW ME DOWN.



PERHAPS I COULD JOIN YOU, PRINCE ZUKO? THE LANDSCAPE HERE IS RENOWNED FOR ITS BEAUTY.



FINE.

BUT I WON'T WAIT UP IF YOU CAN'T KEEP PACE.



WE SET OUT AT SUNRISE EVERY MORNING, AND WHEN THE MOON WAS OUT WE WALKED LATE INTO THE NIGHT.



IF YOU KEEP STOPPING TO LOOK AT EVERY PLANT ON THE MOUNTAIN WE'LL BE OUT HERE ALL WINTER!



MAYBE A PART OF ME WAS GLAD THAT UNCLE KEPT SLOWING US DOWN.



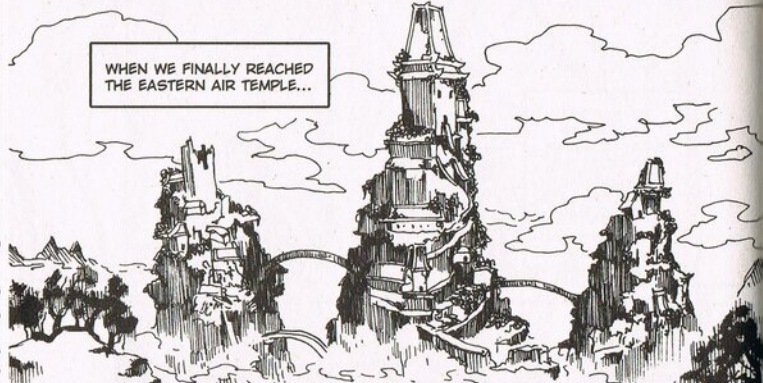
I COULD NOT MISS A CHANCE AT SUCH EXQUISITE JASMINE BLOSSOMS, NEPHEW. THEY WILL MAKE AN EXCELLENT TEA!



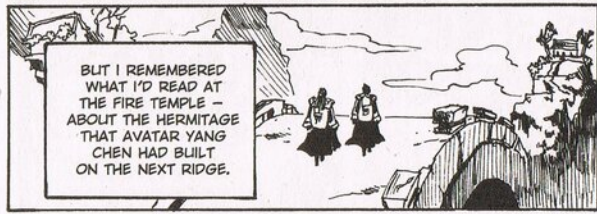
THE AIR WAS TOO THIN FOR ME TO CATCH MY BREATH. EVERY JOINT AND MUSCLE IN MY BODY ACHED. I'D NEVER BEEN SO COLD OR SO TIRED IN MY LIFE.



WHEN WE FINALLY REACHED
THE EASTERN AIR TEMPLE...



IT WAS
COMPLETELY
ABANDONED.



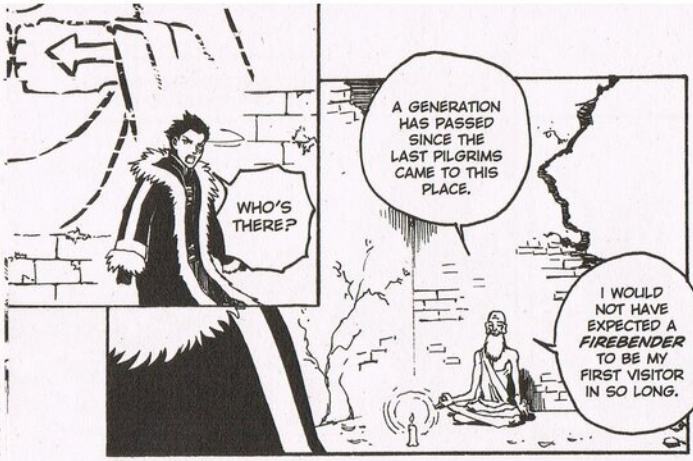
BUT I REMEMBERED
WHAT I'D READ AT
THE FIRE TEMPLE -
ABOUT THE HERMITAGE
THAT AVATAR YANG
CHEN HAD BUILT
ON THE NEXT RIDGE.



I'D COME TOO
FAR ALREADY TO
LEAVE WITHOUT
SEARCHING THERE
AS WELL.



HMM...



A GENERATION HAS PASSED SINCE THE LAST PILGRIMS CAME TO THIS PLACE.

I WOULD NOT HAVE EXPECTED A FIREBENDER TO BE MY FIRST VISITOR IN SO LONG.



WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?



THE AIR NOMADS AND I WERE SPIRITUAL BROTHERS. WE HAVE ALWAYS SHARED CLOSE TIES.



AIR NOMADS? YOU *KNEW* THEM?

OF COURSE. AND I KNOW THEM STILL.



YOUR FOREFATHERS MAY HAVE TAKEN THEIR BODIES FROM THIS WORLD, BUT SOMETHING OF THEIR SPIRIT REMAINS.

THESE WALLS ECHO WITH THE MEMORY OF WHAT HAS PASSED.



IN THAT MOMENT, IT ALL MADE SENSE.

HE WAS THE RIGHT AGE. HE WAS LIVING IN THE RUINS OF AN AIR NOMAD'S HERMITAGE, ON AN ISLAND THE REST OF THE WORLD HAD FORGOTTEN.

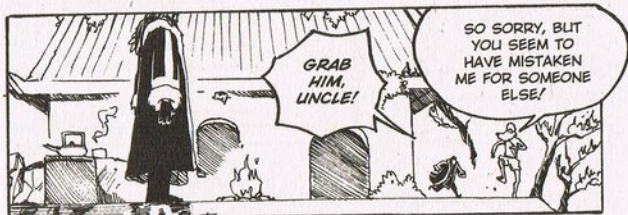


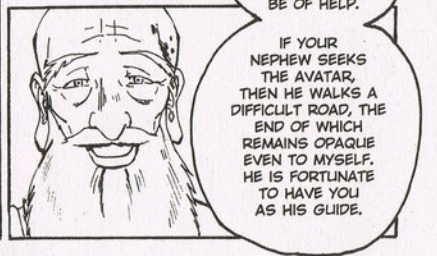
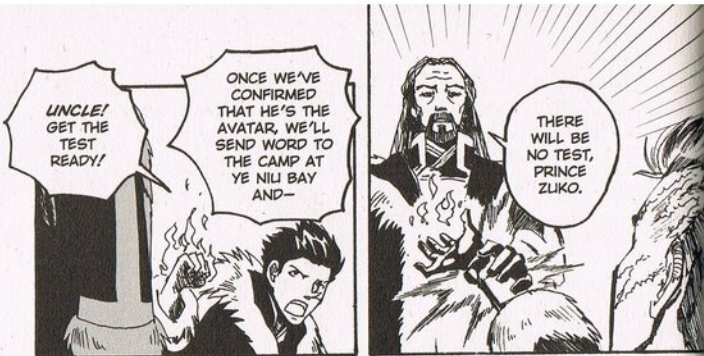
HE COULD'VE HIDDEN HERE FOR A *CENTURY* WITHOUT ANYONE EVER FINDING HIM. I LOOKED AT HIM AND SAW MY WAY BACK HOME AGAIN.



MY NAME IS PATHIK. I AM—

THE AVATAR!







...IF IT ISN'T HIM, THEN...

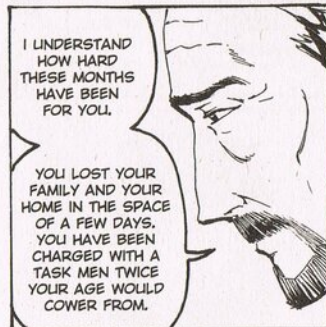


UNCLE, I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHERE TO LOOK ANYMORE. THE WORLD'S JUST SO BIG, AND I...



HE KNEW THE AIRBENDERS, AND NOT EVEN HE CAN TELL ME WHERE THE AVATAR WENT.

ZUKO...



I UNDERSTAND HOW HARD THESE MONTHS HAVE BEEN FOR YOU.

YOU LOST YOUR FAMILY AND YOUR HOME IN THE SPACE OF A FEW DAYS. YOU HAVE BEEN CHARGED WITH A TASK MEN TWICE YOUR AGE WOULD COWER FROM.



I AM SORRY THAT I COULD NOT STAND IN THE FACE OF THESE THINGS. I WISH THAT I COULD HAVE GIVEN YOU MORE THAN A CREW AND AN OLD MAN'S COMPANIONSHIP.

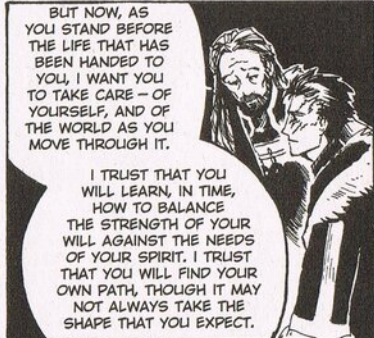


WHEN LU TEN DIED, I FELT AS IF MY OWN LIFE HAD ENDED. IT TOOK ALL THE STRENGTH I HAD TO WAKE UP EACH MORNING...

...TO GET OUT OF BED AND GO OUT INTO A WORLD IN WHICH MY SON NO LONGER LIVED.



YOU ARE STRONGER THAN I HAVE EVER BEEN, PRINCE ZUKO. YOU HAVE STRUGGLED FOR ALL THE THINGS THAT WERE GIVEN TO ME. I LAY DOWN BEFORE MY OWN GRIEF, BUT YOU FOUGHT THROUGH A WILDERNESS UNLIKE ANY I HAVE EVER HAD TO FACE.



BUT NOW, AS YOU STAND BEFORE THE LIFE THAT HAS BEEN HANDED TO YOU, I WANT YOU TO TAKE CARE - OF YOURSELF, AND OF THE WORLD AS YOU MOVE THROUGH IT.

I TRUST THAT YOU WILL LEARN, IN TIME, HOW TO BALANCE THE STRENGTH OF YOUR WILL AGAINST THE NEEDS OF YOUR SPIRIT. I TRUST THAT YOU WILL FIND YOUR OWN PATH, THOUGH IT MAY NOT ALWAYS TAKE THE SHAPE THAT YOU EXPECT.



I JUST...

UNCLE, WHAT IF THEY'RE RIGHT? WHAT IF THE AVATAR REALLY IS GONE? WHAT IF THIS SEARCH REALLY IS POINTLESS? WHAT IF...



WHAT IF THERE'S NO WAY FOR ME TO GO HOME AGAIN?



A JOURNEY OF SELF-DISCOVERY IS NEVER POINTLESS, PRINCE ZUKO.

HOWEVER DIM YOUR PATH MAY SEEM, AND HOWEVER FAR YOU MAY WANDER FROM IT...THE IMPORTANT THING IS THAT YOU LEARN FROM ALL OF YOUR MISTAKES ALONG THE WAY...

...AND NEVER FORGET FOR ONE MOMENT WHO YOU ARE, OR WHAT YOU ARE STRUGGLING TO BE.



SHIVER

I THINK, PERHAPS, THAT IT'S TIME I TAUGHT YOU ABOUT THE BREATH OF FIRE.

THE WHAT?

I INVENTED IT MYSELF WHEN I WAS STILL A COLONEL, SERVING MY FIRST WINTER ON THE FRONT.

IT IS BASED ON THE TEACHINGS OF THE ANCIENT SLIN WARRIORS.

THEY WERE THE ORIGINAL FIREBENDERS, FROM A TIME BEFORE WE BECAME DISCONNECTED FROM THE SOURCE OF OUR POWER.

"FIRE IS A WEAPON, BUT IT IS ALSO THE LIFE-GIVING WARMTH OF THE SUN."

"THE WARMTH THAT BURNS INSIDE EVERY HEART."

"BY CONCENTRATING ON THAT INNER FIRE, YOU CAN CONTROL IT."

"STROKE THE FLAMES AND WARM YOURSELF FROM WITHIN, CHASING AWAY ANY CHILL OF THE AIR..."

I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY TO HIM THEN, STANDING ON THAT MOUNTAINSIDE SO FAR AWAY FROM MY HOME.

BUT I KNEW THAT HE'D BEEN WRONG ABOUT ONE THING.

"...OR OF THE SPIRIT."

I STILL HAD A FAMILY.

ZZZZZZZZ

CRACK

YOU... WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?

I HAD BEEN MEDITATING THESE PAST FEW HOURS.

I HAD SENSED THAT YOU WERE BROUGHT BEFORE ME FOR A REASON, BUT I COULD NOT SEE WHAT IT WAS.

I HOPED THAT THE SPIRIT OF AVATAR YANGCHEN WOULD GUIDE MY OWN PATH BEFORE YOU HAD WANDERED TOO FAR.

I REALIZE NOW THAT YOUR DESTINY AND THE AVATAR'S ARE CLOSELY ENTWINED.

THOUGH I AM NOT YET CERTAIN HOW THIS COULD BE, IT IS NOT MY PLACE TO STAND IN THE WAY OF FATE.

THE VISION YANGCHEN GAVE ME WAS ONLY A SHADOW, AS SUCH THINGS OFTEN ARE.

BUT THE HEART OF IT WAS VERY CLEAR.

I SAW YOU AND THE AVATAR, STANDING SIDE BY SIDE BEFORE THE WORLD.

MY UNCLE HAS ASKED THAT I SHOW YOU RESPECT.

BUT I WON'T STAND HERE AND BE MOCKED.

AS YOU WISH, CHILD.

HE'S JUST A CRAZY OLD MAN. HE DOESN'T KNOW WHAT HE'S TALKING ABOUT.

I BELIEVE HIM.

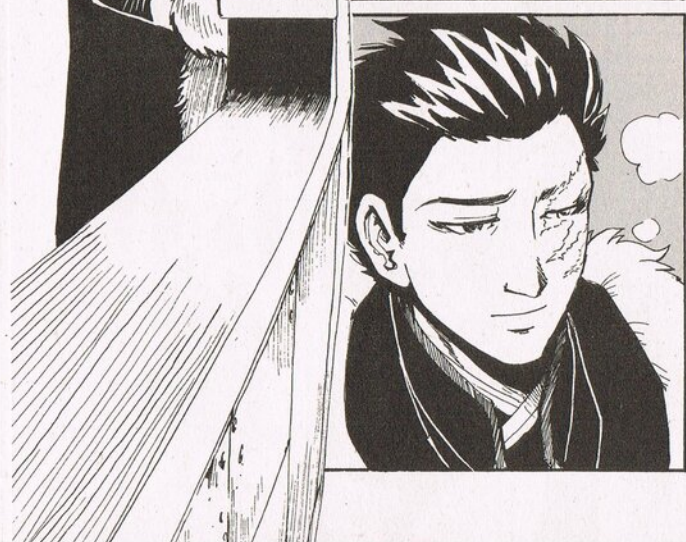
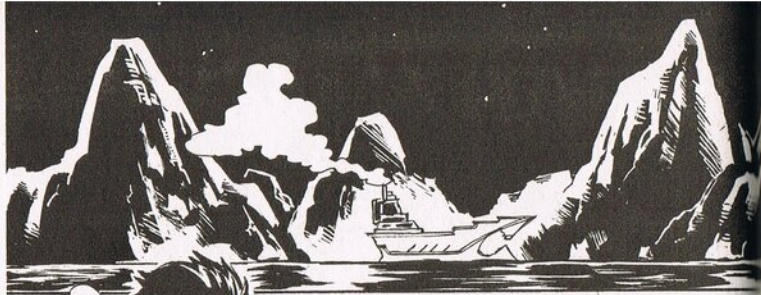
AND SO SHOULD YOU, PRINCE ZUKO.

OUR INNER FIRE IS THE SPARK OF HOPE THAT DRIVES US THROUGH EVEN THE DARKEST TIMES.

DO NOT BE SO QUICK TO DISMISS IT.

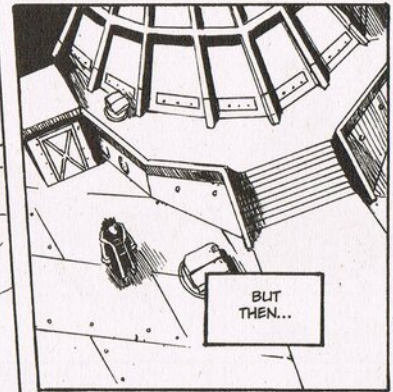
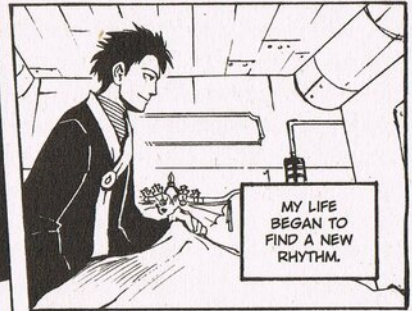
NOW WE HAVE A LONG DAY AHEAD OF US.

IT'S TIME THAT BOTH OF US GOT SOME REST.



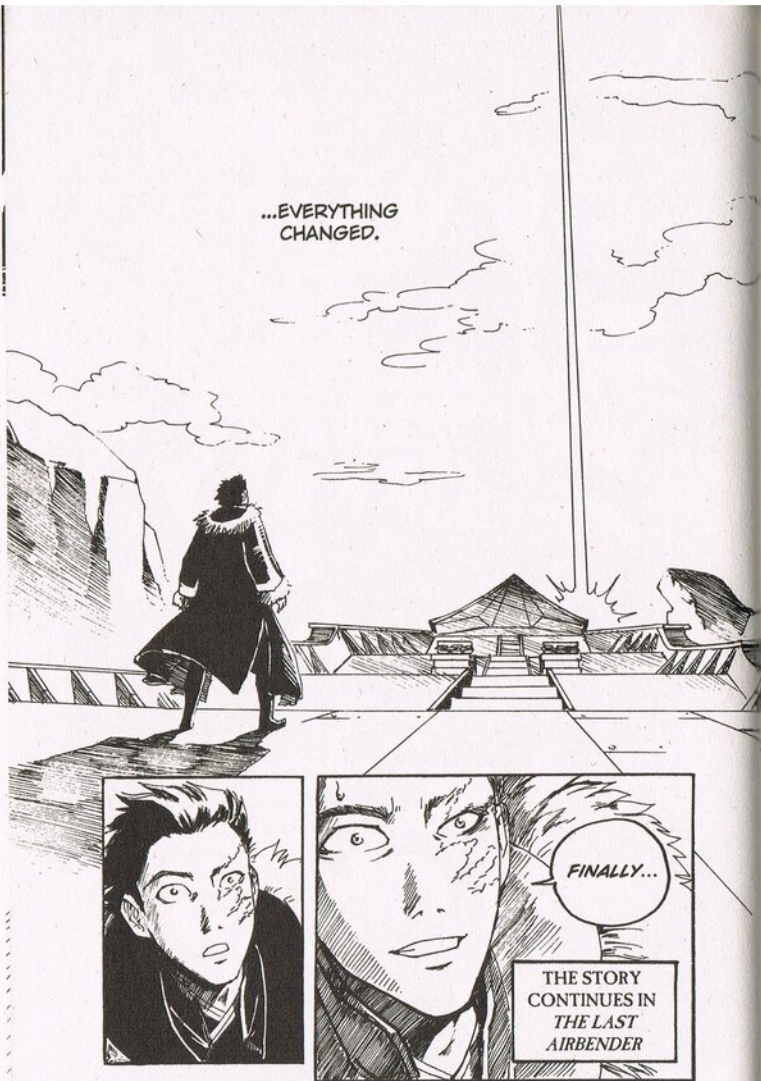
MONTHS PASSED
WITHOUT DREAMS
OF THE AGNI KI...

...OR MY
FATHER.



...AS
SUDDENLY AS
IT ALWAYS
DOES...





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