

TRANSING THE NARRATIVE:
EXPLORING GENDERQUEER GRIEF AND COMMUNITY THROUGH COMIX

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Graduate CSMA Creative Research Project

August 25, 2024

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Context

My Creation Research project is a semi-autobiographical comic outline that addresses mental health, suicidality and interpersonal relations of young adult trans and genderqueer communities throughout Canada. I am paying closer attention to communities within Regina, Saskatchewan and Montreal, Quebec, as this narrative is based on the communities I engage with, which has inspired this comix. Notably, I center this comic on trans suicidality, as an artistic and spiritual transmutation of the grief my friends and I became a part of upon the suicide of my friend and artistic collaborator, Sam.

In approaching this issue as a researcher-artist, my research question/objective is on: **Exploring how to create a graphic novel that can help encourage more understanding and acceptance of gender-diverse people.**

Sparkling conversation and curiosity with comic narrative, I believe a way to bridge the divides of misrepresentation and under-representation of queerness is through drawing on universal experiences that allow for more vulnerable and open dialogue. I aim to use mainstream visual/narrative tools in combination with methods of independent/underground genderqueer artists to tell a personal story about genderqueer grief/community. I will consider how combining these different artistic/narrative methods can create a visual story that feels like it can be universally consumed.

OVERALL DELIVERABLES

I originally set the intention to produce a 15-page short comic alongside a mini game (roughly 30 seconds – 1 minute of playtime). I ended up solely focusing on creating a comic book project outline, because I felt I required more time to flesh out my visual aesthetics, storytelling techniques, narrative and media + cultural research.

These are the final creative products I completed for the CRP:

1. Full written script, outlining the main acts and dialogue of my comic project (14 pages).
2. Beatboard illustrations depicting the main storypoints of the comic narrative (6 pages).
3. Storyboards of prelude and chapter 1 (54 pages).
4. Media explorations (3 samples: zine design, game design, preliminary layout of first chapter).

For the sake of brevity and the time constraints of this program I did not fully explore storyboarding chapters 2-3, which would have been another +100 storyboard pages, however, have completed the narrative components of the full comic with the script and beatboards, and intend to storyboard these chapters further within the next three years. I find that when storyboarding for a comic it works best for me if I complete them in sequential order as well as iterating through adding or subtracting pages or panels that best fit different aspects of the narrative. So, it did not make sense to draft a short number of pages at this stage to portray those two chapters, since I find it would be most clear if I complete them fully before showing them to any type of assessor.

I intend for chapter 2 to be the most substantial chapter, since it has a confrontational scene, and is more visually abstract than all other chapters. While chapter 3 explores reality: Crystal grieving with community and finding personal and interpersonal forms of resolution.

The notion of “transing” embodies many aspects that I have yet to fully understand, but now I posit it requires the act of centering, honouring, and celebrating genuine transness, transgender identities (as an umbrella term), I am thus proposing “transing” as a theoretical and critical framework amongst intersectionality, queer studies, feminism, race and disability justice, and critical play.

Storyboarding Notes

The style and finished look of each page of my 54-page storyboard package varied widely, this being a more final iteration of my comic. Page 23 is the most finished page, which shows the style that I plan to render each page in Chapter 1 (metaphysical scene). I used mostly a grayscale palette for storyboarding, as that is often a standard practice in the story art industry, so that the focus to be on composition, lighting, staging and acting.

I thankfully was pushed by my supervisor (thank you Paula!) to explore more boards as part of my final project. Through the process, I found myself finding a better flow and shorthand techniques in drawing (from pages 39-49) with Toonboom Storyboard Pro, that allowed for both quickness and clarity. I used a combination of the angled and soft paintbrush as well as the pencil tool to achieve varied aesthetics. I mostly gravitated to the paintbrush, which created raster images that felt illustrative, while the pencil tool helped with creating smaller detailed images with its vector capabilities. The look of pages such as 41, 40, 48 and 49 are stylistically closest to how I want to digitally ink my comic.

Transing America with COMIX

Using the term “comix” instead of “comic(s)”, I nod to the first wave underground counter-culture comics scene of the 1960s and 1970s, which I’ve learnt about through an archived Joel Beck counterculture comic created for the 1964 student “Free Speech Movements” of UC Berkeley in the United States (*Free speech and the origins of Underground Comix*, n.d.). Underground counter-culture comics were created within

subculture communities as ways to address political and nuanced topics which were barred from being represented in the mainstream comic industry during the 1950s-1960s Comics Code ban (Nargis, J., Joseph, B., 2012).

Acknowledging that transness and queerness sits at a politicized identity in North America, this comix seems to fit comfortably within subculture or alternative spaces. However, my priority is to significantly impact mainstream 16+ audiences with this work, as there is a growing desire within queer spaces for contemporary narrative and entertainment media to earnestly explore better representation of gender and queer diversity (Helfand, 1997). Additionally, there seems to be a trend that contemporary media consumers still seek to be “entertained” or “satisfied” when learning of nuanced and deeper issues (Gelman, 2021).

Transing the Narrative: Policy, Media and Social Outcomes

There is a direct linkage between transphobic policy and its effect on mental health and suicidality within transgender groups (Price, M. et al, 2023) which justify reasons (Salway & Florence, 2022) for creating more trans-inclusive structural changes or policies (Olivier et al, 2020). Anti-trans policies result in unjust, unequal, and oppressive playing fields for non-cisgender people.

The criminalization of trans-ness (Anti-Trans Bills: Trans Legislation Tracker, 2023) is ever present; scholars and activists (Trianon, 2023) focused on trans issues and gender legislations are on high alert. On October 12, 2023, the Saskatchewan government invoked the notwithstanding clause (Simes, Global News, 2023) to enact a controversial school pronoun policy, which youth advocates such as Lisa Broda say can violate codes of ethics, privacy, and professional codes of conduct, and can further make marginalized students more vulnerable (Simes, CBC: The Canadian Press, 2023). Having been born and raised in Treaty 4 Territory (Regina SK) I feel a personal stake in this cause and am invested in working on social justice research-creation in the hopes for providing or reconfiguring frameworks that can allow for gender equity.

Literature Review – Psychological Research, theoretical and methodological approaches

Transgender Mental Health and Suicidality Outcomes

The literature overwhelmingly states that suicidality and increased mental health risks are a “significant health issue among sexual and gender minority adults (SGMA)” (Ferlatte et al., 2020), while there are often very few “tailored suicide prevention programs for these marginalized populations in Canada” (Ferallate et al.). This study presented a list of recommendations for mobilizing suicide prevention for SGMA adults, (1) Make society safer for sexual and gender minority adults, (2) Decrease barriers to mental health services, (3) Support community-based interventions, (4) Increase suicide knowledge and reduce suicide stigma, (5) Expand the knowledge base of SGMA. I find that artistic interventions can play a pivotal role within the areas of “supporting community-based interventions” and knowledge mobilizations. The research-creation practice of comics and independent games can be shared within communities via aspects of participatory design, co-creation, and digital storytelling, which through a queer and trans theory affect can invigorate knowledge mobilizations or pedagogy (Newbigging, 2018).



This cartoon, created especially for *Transgender Warriors*, is by Alison Bechdel, who draws the wildly popular lesbian cartoon series "Dykes to Watch Out For."

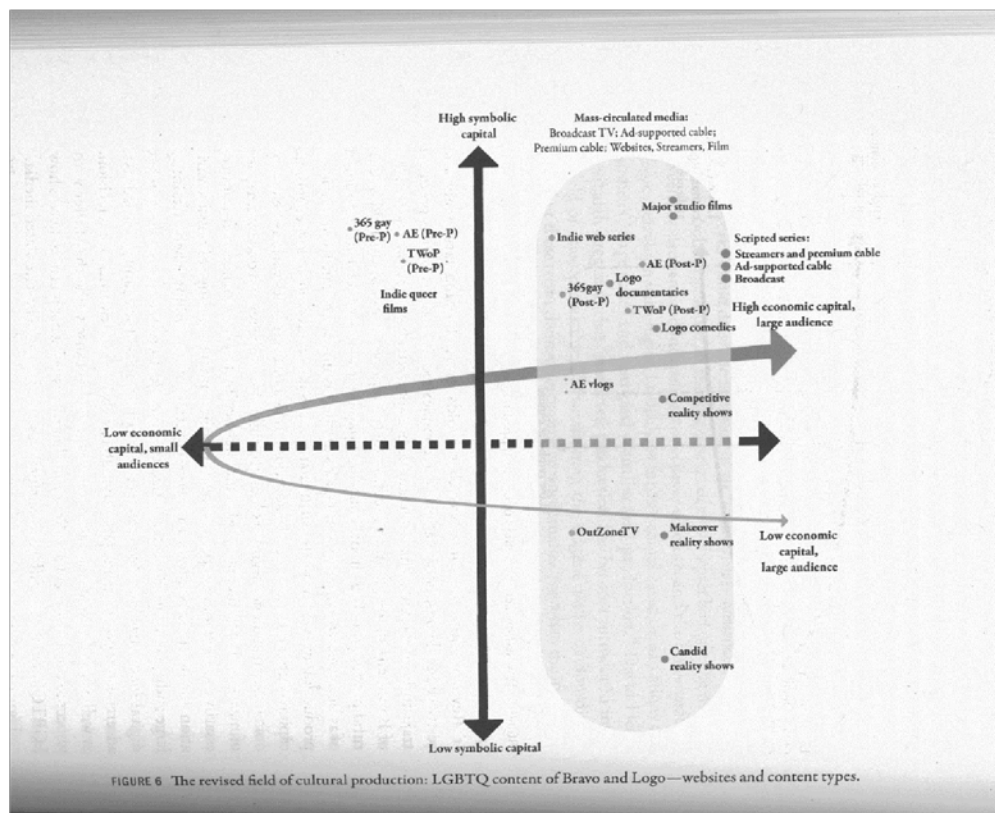
To the left: a comic created for the trans anthology book *Transgender Warriors* – an anthology written by Leslie Feinberg.

Alison Bechdel created this comic and is well known for their lesbian comic series *Dykes to Watch out For*. This comic sequence depicts an instance of solidarity between womxn and trans positionalities in a public restroom, where two friends stand up for each other from instances of transphobia. I would similarly like to explore interpersonal conversations in my comic book that may include difficult conversations.

Theoretical Approaches – Queer Media, Cultural Production

Queer Media

Queer media often is first created in subculture realms and then is churned into the forefront of dominant culture. Ng incorporates the research methods of qualitative models, graphs, and timeline trajectories that depict the emergence of different queer media cultures that become taken in by mainstream media. The question then, is whether queerness is still able to be authentic when it leaves or is extracted out of its subcultural contexts. I imagine that my comic and game falls within the category of subculture, while I see the importance for the audience of my comic to broaden into more mainstream spaces so that allies can engage with the ideas as well.



Above: Ng's graph, The revised field of cultural production, using queer mass media examples, and drawing on Pierre Bordieu's theory of cultural production (Ng, 124, 2023).

Methodological Approaches – Visual Languages & Grief Narrative, trans interactive media

Thach shares their analysis of 63 LGBTQ games as being documented as having transgender characters. They posit character as a form of representation within gaming and that it manifests “in similar ways to film and television” (Thach 19), concluding that as the politics and medical classifications of transness change so will its representation within media.

Grief narratives I will explore includes Marjane Satrapi’s feature animated film *Persepolis* (2007), Hannah Graf and Jake Graf’s short film *Stone* (2023), and the comic novel series *Maus* (1986) by Art Spiegelman. The grief experienced through loss of family and personal identity is poignant in *Persepolis*, a feminist memoir by Satrapi (2007). While *Stone* is an emotional journey taking the viewer through a daughter’s grieving process of her estranged trans parent (Graf H., Graf J., 2023). I plan to consider how grief is addressed in such films as way to allow for nuance and elements of realism for my comic. As digesting grief is a nonlinear process, I considered Spiegelman’s *Maus* as inspiration for how it incorporates mixed timelines in Spiegelman’s contemporary life at the time, 1978, with the past experiences of his father, who survived the Holocaust from 1939-1945. I will continue to study Spiegelman’s use of visual and storyline transitions for my own comic.



To the left: Panels from Marjane Satrapi’s comic novel *Persepolis*. The masterful use of shape and effects to enhance this visual narrative is compelling to read, like the kettle steam driving into the next frame.

Such mainstream works can approach difficult and transcendental topics on spirituality and the impact of weapons, from a classic animated feature film, *The Iron Giant*, (Bird, B., 1999), as well as grief and interpersonal loss in children graphic novel series, *Amulet*, (Kibuishi, K., 2008-2024), and gender politics addressed in *Persepolis 1* (2000) and *Persepolis 2* (2003), a young adult comic book (Satrapi, M., 2000 – 2003).



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To the left: Page 134 of *Amulet 5: The Prince of Elves* by Kazu Kibuishi. I am referencing Kibuishi’s colouring and illustrative style as inspiration for the scenes within my comic. I enjoy the painterly and watercolour textures that Kibuishi achieves with digital painting. I experimented with traditional (ink, paint, pencil) and digital (Photoshop and Procreate digital painting) to achieve similar textures. This mainstream comic shows exemplary craftsmanship of figure, environments and painting which I am inspired by.

The Comic Project: *When You Left Our World*

Taken from my script document, here is an outline of the comic storyline and characters. You may reference two files: the storyboard and script files to get a better feel of the sequential story.

> Start of script excerpt

Content warning: Suicidality, fear.

Synopsis: A young adult, Crystal, grapples with accepting the sudden death by suicide of their friend, Salem. Their grief pulls them into a metaphysical

encounter and conversation with their late friend. Knowing there is nothing they can do anymore to bring them back to "normality" -the life before this catastrophic moment - Crystal learns to let go of their expectations of seeing Salem again in the living world and begins to heal with their friends and community who are also grieving Salem's passing.

Themes: Processing grief and loss

Art Style: Metaphysical. Elements of warmth/light (fire, glowing lights, particles) reflect emotional states of the main character, Crystal.

Real world has coloured and textured inking to show tangibility.

Metaphysical worlds (blue, and black and white) are painterly and center the usage of light.

When You Left Our World. Characters and Setting

Settings:

1. Crystal's house.
2. Metaphysical place with shadows
3. Black and White room.
4. Real world (present world)/coloured

Characters

Crystal: young adult, nonbinary (she/they), friend of Salem. Crystal has a difficult time accepting Salem's passing and blames herself for not calling him the night he committed suicide.

Salem: young adult, genderqueer (they/them). Friend of Crystal who has passed away by suicide.

Addi: young adult, queer (he/they). Salem and Crystal's friend. Addi informs Crystal of Salem's death.

Community/friends: Funeral attendees, friends at the picnic.

The Shadows: Mystical force (mass blob of humanoid figures) that try to pull Crystal back to the living realm. Ominous. Akin to a "time-keeper" presence, which maintains the natural order of multiverses. Slimy, alike to the "Blob Men" from Hayao Miyazaki's *Howl's Moving Castle*.

Story Beats:

- Crystal learns of Salem's passing, through a phone call with their friend (coldness/blizzard symbol, "reality" coloured setting).
- Crystal has difficulty accepting this new reality. She tries to reconnect with Salem through a dream, but there are huge barriers (shadow people).
- Crystal and Salem are able to reconnect, and they have a conversation.
- Salem moves onto the spiritual realm.
- Coming back to "reality", Crystal begins to heal through the support of friends and community who she finds relief that are facing similar emotions. (Reality, coloured setting).
- Ending with a hopeful/resolved tone, of Crystal seeing light come through their window that resembles Salem in the dream.

>End of script excerpt

I first set out with intentions to research grief narratives surrounding trans, fem, or subalterned experiences, as well as interactive trans media to inform my work. My project ended up focusing solely on crafting a comic narrative.

I considered zine conventions within the “breaks” between each chapter. I experimented with this notion of intermission as a form of centering the reader to the background and contexts which I write the comic from. However, I ended up deciding to incorporate a zine in a possible supplementary project to the comic, wherein the comic is the main aspect of the CRP.

I considered independent comic artists and zinemakers to inform my work. Independent comics that I found inspiration from include Lonnie Man’s *Gaytheist* (2024) and Lucy Sullivan’s *Barking* (2020). I am also inspired by the inking and colouring techniques of graphic novel series such as *Amulet* (2008 – 2024) by Kazu Kibuishi. A zine magazine that I am inspired by was first produced by my friend Sam, titled *Brhning Magazine* (2019 – present), which heavily influences how I may approach the zine aspect of the future project. The tentative title of my comic project is *When You Left Our World*.

My comic is an exploration of four different moods and emotional states of the main character, Crystal. My first intention was for the novel to have a nonlinear storytelling aspect but should still be read from start-to-end. I ended up creating the novel in a 3-act structure, with a setup, confrontation and resolution, in addition to the prelude. I decided to use this form as it is a mainstream narrative style, that may allow another modality for audiences to feel the media is accessible to read.

This piece expands on my work with trans narrative media, in which I have created short film, animation and short comics previously based on semi-autobiographical genderqueer experiences (Chen C., 2020-2023).

Media Exploration 1: Zine Research-Creation

I am inspired by the zine project my late friend, Sam worked on for roughly three years before their passing. The zine, titled *BURNING* magazine established in 2019, was first published to showcase the recent graduate

community of NSCAD, which then later became a small but nationally reaching project that has in tandem largely showcased the works of emerging queer multimedia artists. Sam created the first publication title, “the sun and the candle flame” based off of Jalaluddin al-Rumi's poem ‘Lovers who Burn’, with the alternative title “wanting 2 posses a candle flame when u have the sun.” I carry from these metaphors of light, warmth and coldness with the metaphysical or surreal portrayal of elemnets through my comic, to portray Crystal’s inner emotional world.

Although these zine pages did not end up in the final comic project, I experimented with zine design and information sharing, to consider how I can relay factual information in a narrative form. This sample is a rough zine experiment that works with information on recent trans legislations in Canada, and includes images from my friend’s zine, as well as photographic images of protest.

As my novel works with light and warmth – or lack of warmth/coldness as visual motifs, I explored the idea of Canada “burning” as if it were entering “hell” or some sort of dystopic landscape through its regressive policies –and how they impact physical and political realities.



To the left, I explore zine making: I used images from Celeste Trianon’s anti-trans legislation website (2023) and Nolan Long’s article, “Saskatchewan’s pronoun law and Canadian anti-trans sentiment” (2024). I surround this with images symbolizing fire and place the cover page of BURNING magazine’s first publication from 2020.

I had an idea to explore the interlacing of zine pages in my comic which share information on trans news and legislation, with a focus on Canada the Canadian provinces of Saskatchewan and Quebec, as well as positive trans media/art and mental health + community resources. I am thinking these pages serve as a space for reflection and direction to sources and information, if the reader feels they or one of their loved ones may benefit from these sources. As my novel may trigger intense emotions, and likely some confusion, especially if the reader is unacquainted with the trans landscapes of Canada.

I scrapped the idea of zines as intermission for now, but may explore this as a supplementary material to my comic project.

Media Exploration 2: Game design sketch (environment)

Below is a digital I created using the procreate app on iPad pro, around January-February 2024. I created this visual design at the beginning of considering my CRP, to envision the metaphysical space that Crystal enters

when they confront their late friend and envisioned it as a foundational setting of the game prototype, which I may explore further in a later project in order to consider fully the nonlinear stages of grief processing. By exploring this in an abstract space, users may be more susceptible to consider grief as a spiritual and nonlinear process. (refer to image below, NEXT PAGE).



As per a note in my CRP proposal: “Cubes (surrounding) will portray the infinite depth of the space. Emorphous lined “blobs” are animated on loops and living throughout the space, representing different timelines and dimensions. Clicking on choices based on prompts, such as “Can we ever go back in time?” brings you in and out of different spaces in the environment.”

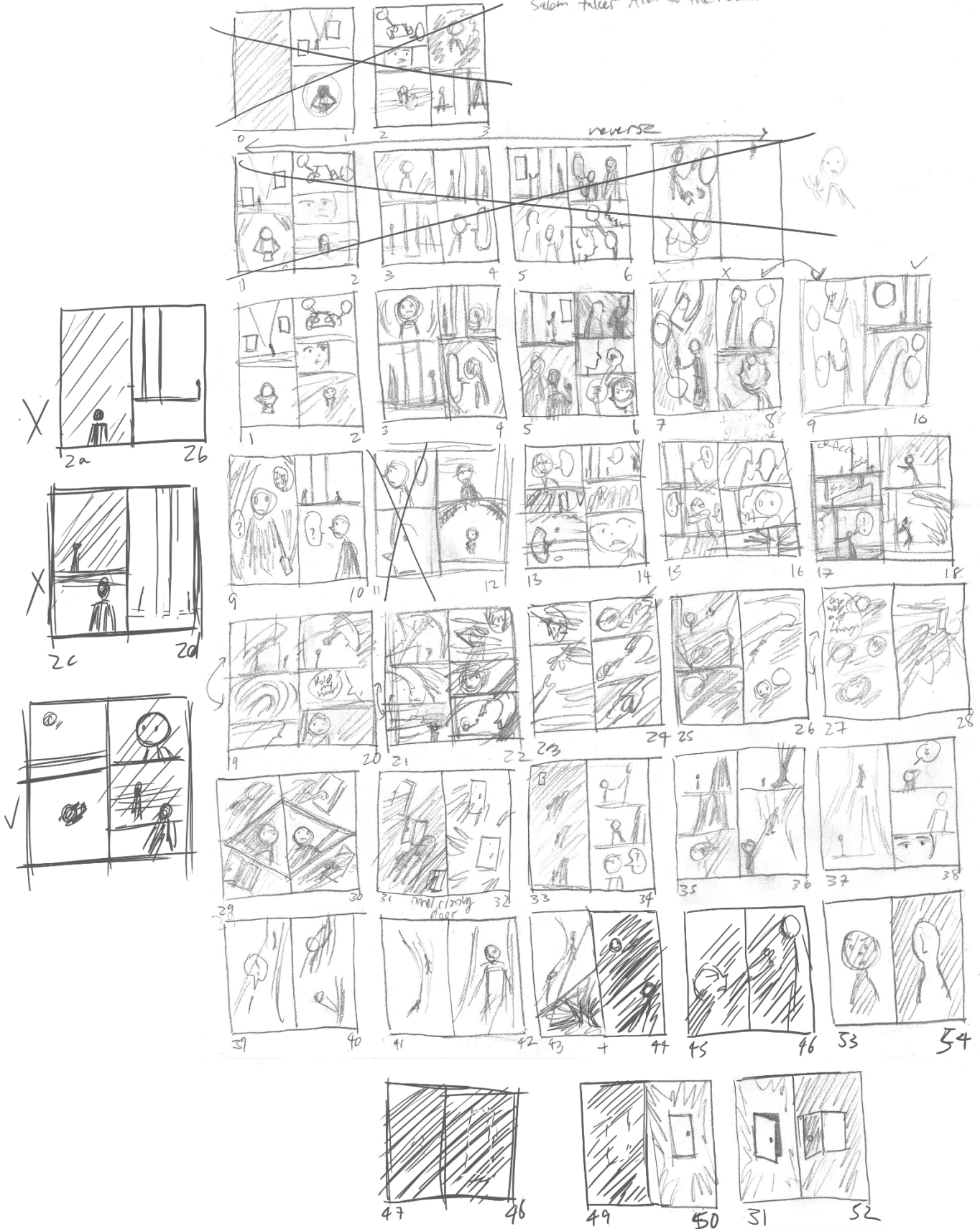
I would like to explore such a mini game as another supplementary narrative aspect of my comic project. The interactive aspect of this piece may drive more viewership and interest to the comic, while also explores grief processing in a way that is not tangible to achieve within a comic.

Media Exploration 3: Comic Layout

When first drafting my comic, I moved between drawing and writing. When I got to a point where I felt I had a cohesive narrative to work with, I wrote most of my script, and then continued to work between storyboarding images with dialogue alongside writing. Drawing a brief outline of how I want images to look in my comic helped as one of my first stages in crafting the sequential narrative.

As I briefly sketched with attention to composition and action, I explored different angles that I can approach the visual narrative with, and ended up crossing out images which did not serve a compelling purpose in the first iterations. This allowed me to understand what can potentially work the best visually whether it be conveying different emotions and actions. (REFER TO NEXT PAGE).

Salom files Alex to the room.



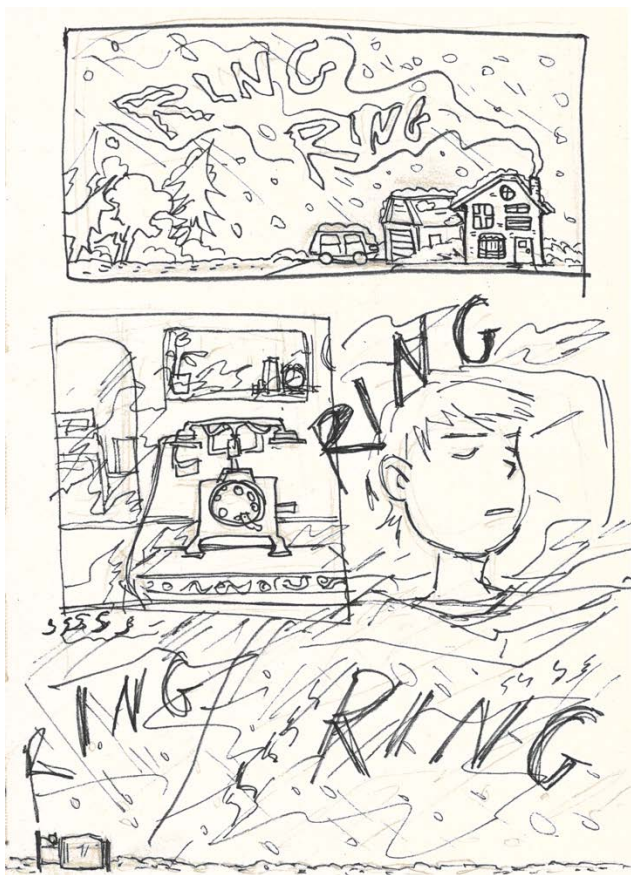
Comic process

I began with sketching the prelude scenes with pencil and pen. I aim to use pen, gouache and/or watercolor aesthetics for the scenes that sit within reality, looking like the artistic style of Kazu Kibiushi's *Amulet* comic series (2008 – 2024).

Below: iterations of prelude chapter with pen and ink. I used the A5 page size (5.8 x 8.3 inches) as a general format and size of my overall comic. I considered portraying a rotary phone to evoke the feeling of being stuck in the past. However, upon further consideration I've opted to using a smartphone throughout the real and metaphysical spaces that Crystal engages with instead, as this can allow for better continuity between spaces.

I enjoyed the look and feel of pen on paper however may not implement this style for two reasons:

1. I don't have sufficient studio space for a traditional comic making set up
2. More importantly, although I have had training in traditional media (pencil, pen, ink on paper), I am at a stage with digital media that I feel I can express myself the most seamlessly with Cintiq, photoshop and Toonboom Storyboard Pro. But, I may like to explore a traditional comic in the future.



Below: final storyboard draft of the sequence that introduces Crystal being awoken by a phone call.

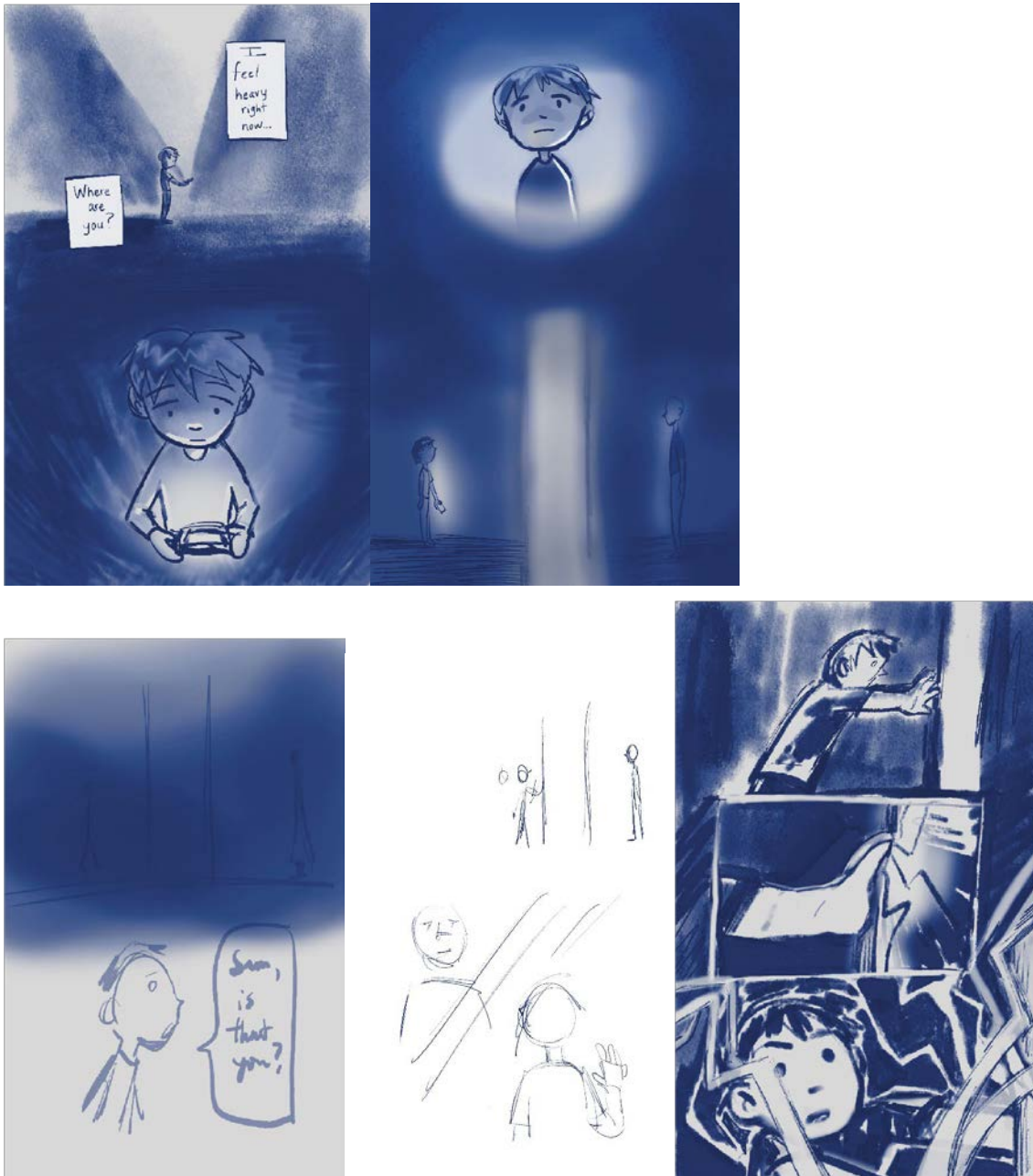


Below (NEXT PAGE): First iterations of metaphysical scene, drawn digitally with Procreate, iPad Pro pen on iPad Pro.

Pages 1-4, which were the first iterations of the metaphysical scene, follow each other quite sequentially. I have later added a few pages between 1 and 2 to allow more space to show Crystal exploring the unknown space.

Throughout iterations of the first chapter, I have added pages in between beats to allow more clarity and better timing for characters to display the emotions and actions that they are undertaking. Thus pages 3-5, as shown in the next page, are skipping a few story board beats. (REFER TO STORYBOARD TO READ THE FULL SEQUENCE).

I have skipped story beats from 4 to page 5, as I wanted to quickly explore the idea of Crystal pressing their hands against wall in attempt to break it, as the wall is the only barrier between them and their friend Salem, representing both literal and spiritual disconnection.



At first I focused on a muted blue palette as often it is common practice within storyboard and sequential art practice to stay using greytone or a muted palette, thus allowing the artist to make clear distinctions on lighting, space, composition and action without needing to concern or waste their time with colour, which is

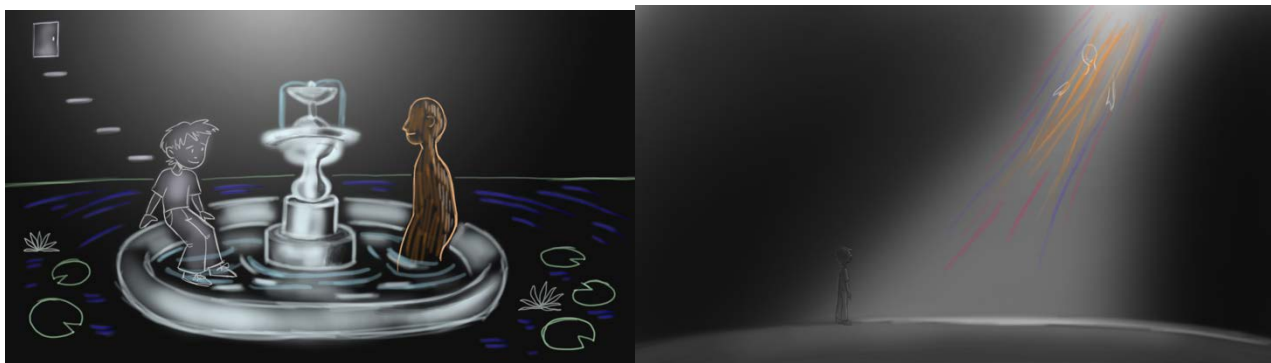
often considered a post production aspect of the pipeline. Upon further discussion with Chris Myhr my second reader, I decided to explore a complimentary and tertiary colours to blue, purple (orange, yellow) to add more depth to the space and also depict warmth more clearly, as orange is seen as a warmer colour than white.

Storytelling process: Beatboards

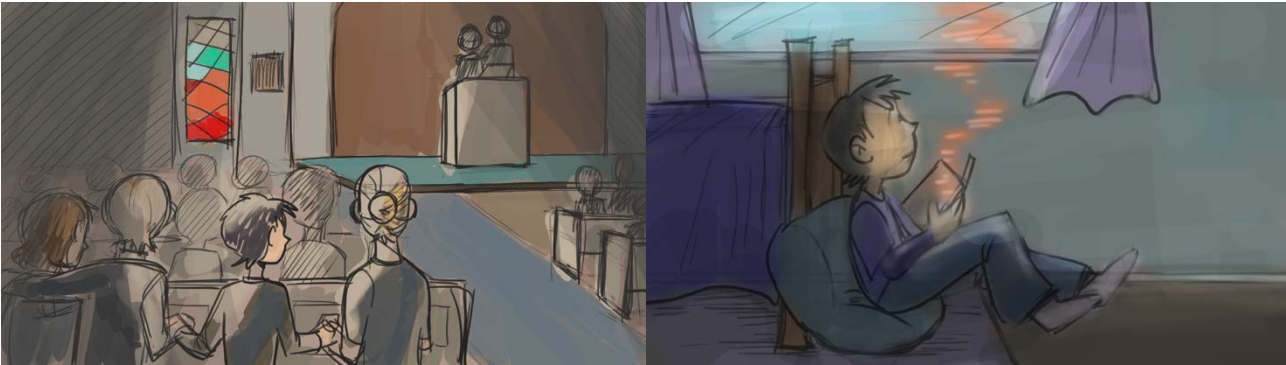
I have based my storytelling creation process based off production pipelines which I learnt in sequential storytelling courses at Sheridan college. I found my comic process became iterative and nonlinear, as I was often storyboarding and drafting pages while I was writing the script, and often went back and forth. I have also, later, decided to create story beats and six beat boards that showcase the main storytelling points of the narrative, as this practice can help to communicate the overall story arch and most important beats of my narrative.



Beatboards 1 (left) and 2 (right): Crystal enters a metaphysical realm after hearing of their friends passing, through a phone call. Crystal has difficulties connecting to their friend.



Beatboards 3 (left) and 4 (right): Crystal finds a sense of ease with their friend, as they are able to find a space where they can have a closer conversation. Salem passes onto a spiritual realm, and says their final goodbyes.



Above: Beatboards 5 (left) and 6 (right): exploring how Crystal finds healing through their friends and the wider community of Sam. Crystal feel Salem's presence when seeing light entering their window that emulates their glow in the metaphysical space.

I decided to use orange lighting fx and colours to represent Salem, as the motif can be made clear, if subtle or overt orange light enters scenes which otherwise should be more realistic (Beatboard 6). The orange light motif serves as a visual device that contributes to the metaphysical atmosphere of the overall comic.

Below (NEXT PAGE): Finalization process of one of my comic pages. I ended up making the main character look to the left-hand side, to show that they are moving backwards in time. As, with western literature we read left to right, movement is assumed to move and progress to the right of the page. (Katz, S.D., 1991).

The next few slides note the image as my fifth page, but I have sense added more pages within the sequence.

Panel example process, from sketch to final render (4 images. Final in next slide).
 Eye direction, reading Left to Right vs moving LR or RL. Progressing/regressing in movement, time, space, as a visual symbol for grief.



1. sketch



2. draft



3. Not there yet...

Final render of page 5,
When Your Left Our World



Conclusion: Art as Method

Alternative and experimental artforms, and narrative comic storytelling can be used as powerful methods of knowledge mobilization, can contribute to the shifting of individual and collective perspectives, and can allow for ways to re-imagine our worlds. Quoting Julia Chinyere Oparah (fka Julia Sudbury, 2009), who is a leading activist scholar in the prison abolitionist movement, art is “a vehicle for social change” (Oparah, 182, 2009). I believe that sincere, genuine storytelling can allow a subverting of mainstream/hegemonic perceptions of transness being that of “strange, dangerous, immoral, or unnecessary.” Representations of trans and gender-nonconforming identities in narrative media are vital as they allow a reflection into, and the expression of, the multi-faceted aspects of human expression and spirit.

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WHEN YOU LEFT OUR WORLD SCRIPT

DRAFT 3

August 4, 2024

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Content warning: Suicidality, fear.

Synopsis: A young adult, Crystal, grapples with accepting the sudden death by suicide of their friend, Salem. Their grief pulls them into a metaphysical encounter and conversation with their late friend. Knowing there is nothing they can do anymore to bring them back to "normality" -the life before this catastrophic moment - Crystal learns to let go of their expectations of seeing Salem again in the living world, and begins to heal with their friends and community who are also grieving Salem's passing.

Themes: Processing grief and loss

Art Style: Metaphysical. Elements of warmth/light (fire, glowing lights, particles) reflect emotional states of the main character, Crystal. Real world has coloured and textured ink to show tangibility. Metaphysical worlds (blue, and black and white) are painterly and center the usage of light.

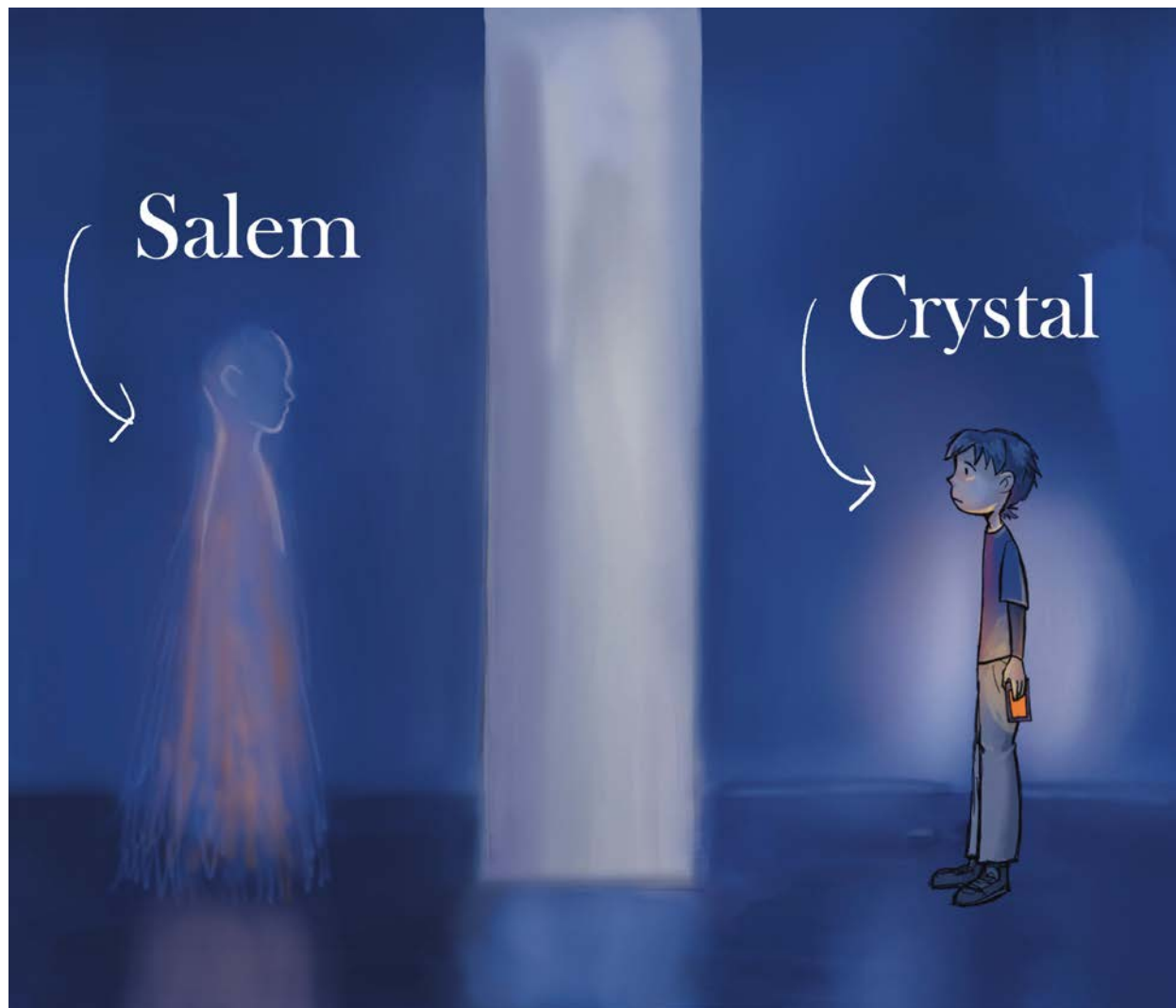
When You Left Our World. Characters and Setting

Settings:

1. Crystal's house.
2. Metaphysical place with shadows
3. Black and White room.
4. Real world (present world)/coloured0

Characters

Image below: illustrations of the 2 main characters. Salem (to the left) depicted as a translucent, human-like spirit, with an outline of a face and a cloaked body surrounded by strands of light. Crystal (to the right) is depicted as an androgynous young adult, with short black hair, pale skin, holding a smartphone, and in a relaxed outfit with a large tshirt, arm sleeves, baggy pants and sneakers.



Crystal: young adult, nonbinary (she/they), friend of Salem. Crystal has a difficult time accepting Salem's passing and blames herself for not calling him the night he committed suicide.

Salem: young adult, genderqueer (they/them). Friend of Crystal who has passed away by suicide. Depicted as a spirit and through light motif.

Addi: young adult, queer (he/they). Salem and Crystal's friend. Addi informs Crystal of Salem's death during a phonecall.

Community/friends: Funeral attendees, friends at the picnic.

The Shadows: Mystical force (mass blob of humanoid figures) that try to pull Crystal back to the living realm. Ominous. Akin to a "time-keeper" presence, which maintains the natural order of multiverses. Slimy, alike to the "Blob Men" from Hayao Miyazaki's *Howl's Moving Castle*.

Story Beats:

- Crystal learns of Salem's passing, through a phone call with their friend (coldness/blizzard symbol, "reality" coloured setting).
- Crystal has difficulty accepting this new reality. She tries to reconnect with Salem through a dream, but there are huge barriers.
- Crystal and Salem are able to reconnect, and they have a conversation.
- Salem moves onto the spiritual realm.
- Coming back to "reality", Crystal begins to heal through the support of friends and community who she finds relief that are facing similar emotions. (Reality, coloured setting).
- Ending with a hopeful/resolved tone, of Crystal seeing light come through their window that resembles Salem in the dream.

EXT. Metaphysical realm.

Disembodied Text (mimicking conversation):

1. It's always my biggest fear...
2. that I'd say something that might harm you.
3. So I pull back...
4. -Because I'm scared of how honest you are.
5. If you weren't so busy, would you have called me?

INT. image of Crystal working at their desk, late at night. They look at their phone. Then goes back to working.

Transition to reality.

ELS EXT. Apartment, covered in snow during a blizzard.

Phone:
RING, RING, RING!

INT. Crystal's bedroom. The ringing phone has just awoken them.

Crystal:
6. "Ugh"

Crystal gets up, and answers the phone begrudgingly, having not expected to be awoken so early. The caller ID says "Addi." Crystal's face lights up a bit seeing Addi's name.

Crystal:
7. "What's up, A?"

Addi:
8. "Hi Crys, is this a good time to talk? I have something important to share... I thought calling was the best option."

Crystal:
9. "Of course, what happened?"

Addi, voice breaking:
10. "It's about Salem... Their father called me last night.

11. Th-They.. Passed away."

Crystal is in shock.

Crystal:

12. "What... Was it--"

INT. Metaphysical reality is introduced through window cracking, and blizzard pouring into the room, engulfing Crystal in coldness.

Addi:

13. "-yeah, suicide.

Crystal:

14. "How...?"

Addi:

15. "... they hung themselves.

16. Just last night."

INT. Crystal becomes hunched over in a pile of snow.

Crystal:

17. "*I ... don't know what to say. I'm sorry.*"

Crystal (thought):

18. It's so cold.

EXT. LS. Snowy landscape, representing Crystal's feelings of loneliness. Window is floating above Crystal, the only aspect that reinstates Crystal's reality.

Addi:

19. "The funeral is probably soon.
In 2 or 3 days."

Crystal:

20. "I'll be there. I'm flying into Hamilton tomorrow. I'll take the train to you all. Please message me the details."

Addi:

21. "Of course."

Crystal:

22. "Thanks so much for reaching out to me. Take care of yourself."

Addi:
23. "You too."

INT. Back to Crystal's room. DS phone on their nightstand.

SFX:
24. *Beep*

EXT. Metaphysical space. Disembodied text representing conversations between Crystal and Salem.

25. "Salem."
26. "Yeah?"
27. "You know you're a good friend,
right?"

EXT. transition to blue.

CHAPTER 1: CRYSTAL

EXT: LS. Metaphysical space, blue and orange palette.

Crystal:
28. "I feel heavy right now."
29. "Where are you?"

EXT. MS. Crystal crouched over their phone, light emitting from its screen.

Salem:
30. "Hey! I'm here..."
31. "Just look up."

Crystal lifts their head up, no longer preoccupied with the phone. They start to look around their surroundings.

Salem:
32. "Over here!"

Salem's voice, from SL, beckons Crystal to an orange light source and the wall, which appears both permeable, like it is made of marble, and impermeable, as if it is made of its own light. Crystal approaches the wall.

Crystal:

33. "Salem, is that really you?"

Crystal puts her hand against the wall, thinking:

34. *Why is there a wall between us?*

Crystal gives a good look at the mystical figure.

Crystal:

35. "You look so... different."

Salem:

36. "Yeah, I'm sorry... I should have said goodbye..."

Crystal frowns.

Salem:

37. "I've changed completely now.
But it's still me."

38. "I'm glad we got to meet again.
Because it's almost time for me to go."

Crystal tensely grips their phone.

Salem:

39. "I don't think we'll see
each other for a very long time."

Crystal, firmly:

40. "No!"

41. "Why did you bring me here?!"

Crystal presses their head and hands against the wall.

Crystal:

42. "I just wanted to say goodbye."

43. "And the way you look... scares
me."

Crystal, looking around fervently:

Crystal:

44. "What even is this place?!"

45. "Auugh"

CU: Crystal's hands balled. CU DS of Crystal's phone.

Crystal:

46. "I should have called you last night."

47. "This is all my fault!"

Salem, matter of factly:

48. "Stop, Crystal."

49. "We don't have much time."

50. "We'll never know if that call would've helped anyways..."

Crystal stares into the wall.

Salem:

51. "If I can, I have to say something that might frighten you."

Crystal:

52. *Sniffles*

Salem:

53. "You're actually..."

54. "Not supposed to be here."

Crystal:

55. "Huh?"

56. "What's going to happen?"

Salem:

57. "Behind you."

Crystal:

58. "What do you mean by that?"

Salem:

59. "Be careful..."

60. "Of what's behind you."

EXT. ELS. Crystal looks behind them. Crystal sees The Shadows looming in the distance.

Crystal:

61. *Gasp*

62. "What am I supposed to do?"

Salem:

63. "They are here to take you back.

EXT. CU TO LS Salem.

Salem:

64. But if you want to stay a bit
longer, you must escape them..

65. Because they just got me.

66. I think you have to break this
wall..."

Crystal glances back fearfully at The Shadows.

CU of Shadows.

Crystal runs to the wall and tries to push at it with their
palms.

Crystal:

67. "This is impossible!"

Salem smiles slightly.

Salem:

68. "Don't worry, this is possible.

69. Very possible.

70. Haha"

EXT. LS. Shadows get a hold of Crystal's left arm.

Crystal:

71. "Ah!"

72. "This isn't a time to be joking,
Salem!

73. I'm terrified!"

Salem:

74. "Hmmm..."

75. "It wouldn't be so difficult, if
you knew it can be done."

76. "You can break this wall.

77. It's a lot easier than you
think.

78. Because you made all of this."

Crystal tears their arm away.

Crystal:

79. "Ugh!"

SFX, The Shadows:
80. *Snap!*

Crystal quickly presses their palms against the wall.

EXT. Funnel of light emits from what was formerly the wall.

Crystal looks at the light in awe.

Most of the shadows have scattered away.

Salem transforms into a large bird-like spirit.

Crystal:
81. Woah

Salem:
82. Crystal,
83. Hold my hand.

SFX, The Shadows:
84. *WWwooooosshhh*

Salem takes Crystal's hand and leads them through the door.

CHAPTER 2: THE BORDER

EXT: Other side of door.

SFX, Door opening
85. *Creaakk!*

Salem and Crystal float down to what looks like a part fountain and a pond.

Crystal:
86. Haha!

Salem and Crystal show relief as they find themselves at ease, away from the Shadows, and start to interact playfully with the abstract space.

Salem:
87. *Wooooohh!*

Crystal dips their feet into the pond water, making large ripples.

Salem, smiling, sits at the edge of the fountain, making a different and less pronounced effect on the water.

Crystal is reminded of how perturbing this situation is.

Crystal:
88. Salem...

Salem senses the mood shift.

89. Did you really kill yourself?

Salem:
90. ... yeah.

Crystal looks away, with their head down. Multiple ripples show on the pond around her, as if it is raining slightly.

Crystal:
91. Why did you leave me?

Salem frowns.

Salem:
92. ...I have never left you.

Crystal:
93. But you gave up.

Salem:
94. I don't know...
95. It... became too much.

Crystal swishes their hand in the water, creating larger ripples.

Salem:
96. I kind of... regret it.

The ripples start to become larger, integrating themselves into the scene like wave particles, akin to a sandstorm.

Crystal retreats behind a water lily.

Salem:

97. But I don't feel pain anymore.

Crystal hides from the storm.

Salem:

98. It's time for me to go...

99. To the next place.

100. I can't take you with me.

101. But... thank you for this...

Crystal looks too upset to face Salem, until a beam of light emits from the sky, settling the storm.

Salem starts to float towards the light.

Colours of objects of what once were the pond merge themselves into a magical aurora borealis.

Salem:

102. I know why you're struggling so much about my passing...

Crystal furrows their brows.

Salem:

103. You want to be where I am too.

Crystal runs out of the water lily.

Crystal:

104. Salem!

Salem:

105. Look for me, and I'll be there...

Salem just leaves at that moment, with a peaceful smile on their face.

Light engulfs the whole scene.

CHAPTER 3: LIGHT

EXT ELS. Daylight, synagogue.

INT LS. Funeral service.

Crystal sits in the pew with their friends, holding their hands as the ceremony progresses.

Cut to scene: Crystal seeing news report on transphobic violence occurring in Montreal.

End with Crystal, friends and family showing mourning at the funeral.

Cut to: park. Crystal and friends having a picnic.

Crystal and friends sharing laughter, mourning, thoughts, ideas, food.

Crystal is having a conversation with a mutual friend as they are lying next to each other on the grass, facing the sky.

Friend:

106.The odds seem stacked against me.

107.Like, I actually really like being alive.

108.Despite everything that's been happening, since... forever.

109.I just... love my life.

Crystal looks surprised, as if they've never considered that mindset before, or have long forgotten it.

Crystal:

110.I've been thinking about this for a while, I hope it's okay to say...

111.... Maybe it's just parts of myself, or something inside of me... that I want to kill.

112.You know, as I grow into myself... I'll feel the need to shed... I guess.

113. Maybe it doesn't have to be everything...

Friend smiles, in a similar way to Salem.

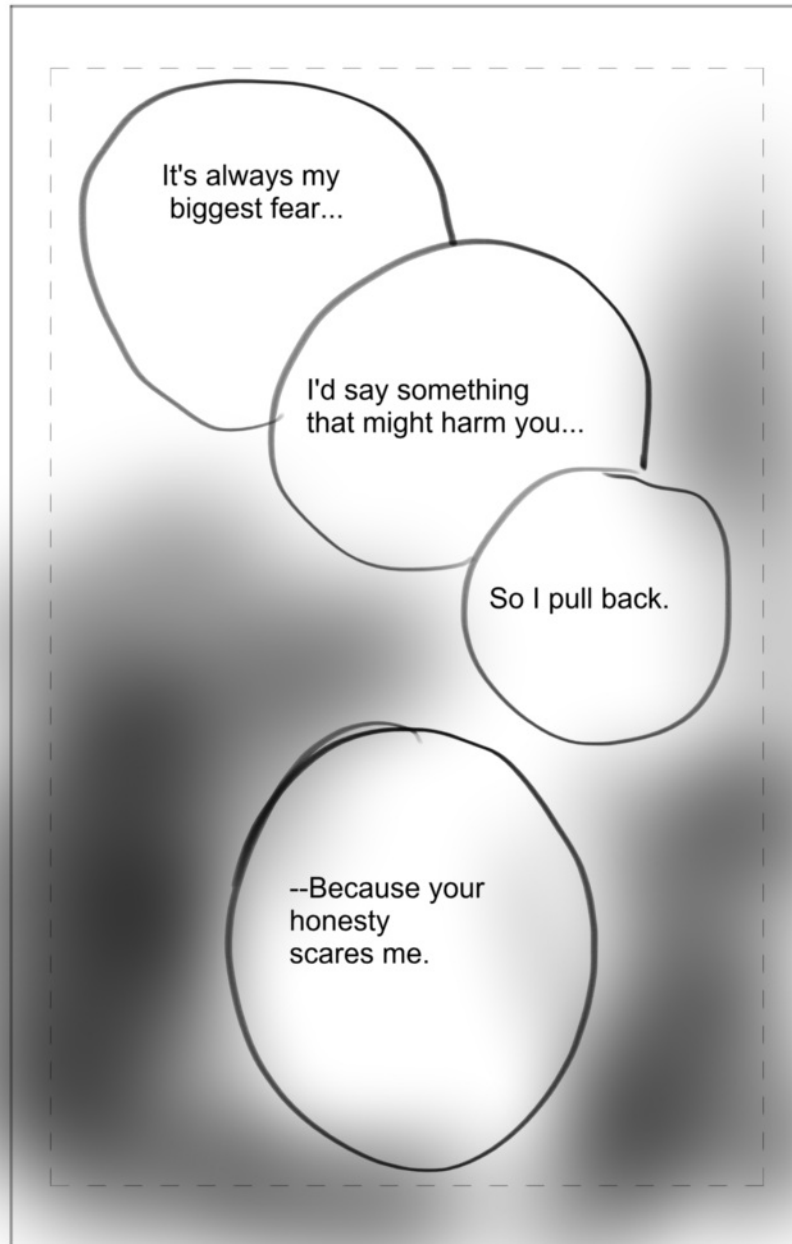
Camera pan up to sky.

INT: Cut to present moment

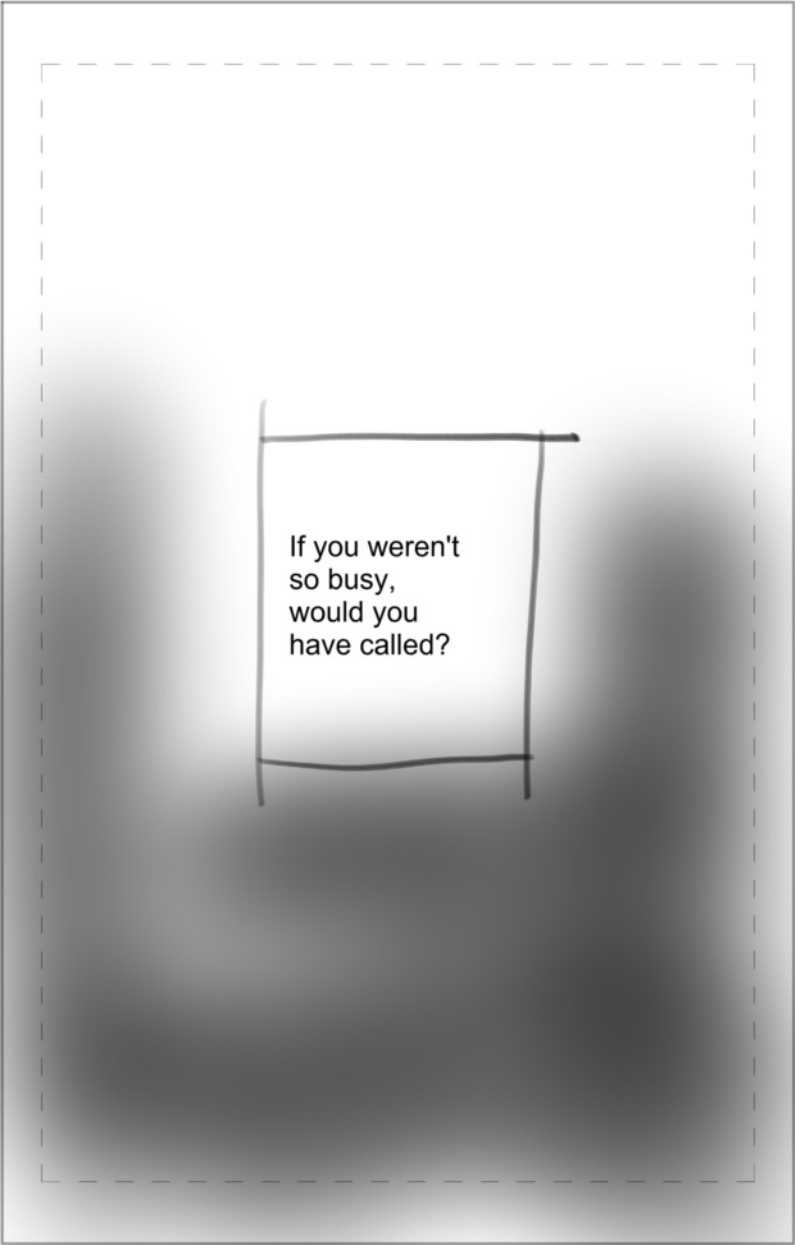
Crystal reading a book of poetry beside their bedroom window.

They see light emulating from the window that is similar to Salem's light in the metaphysical space.

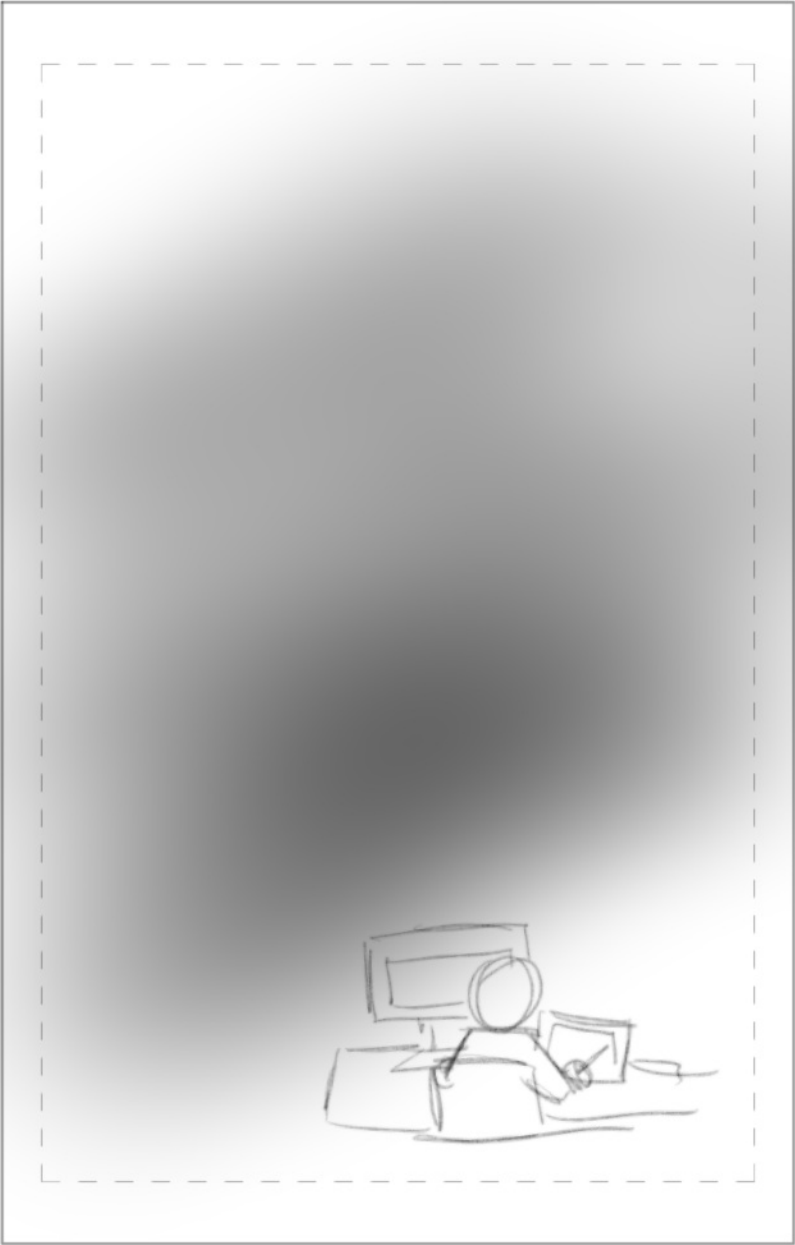
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Scene	Duration	Panel	Duration
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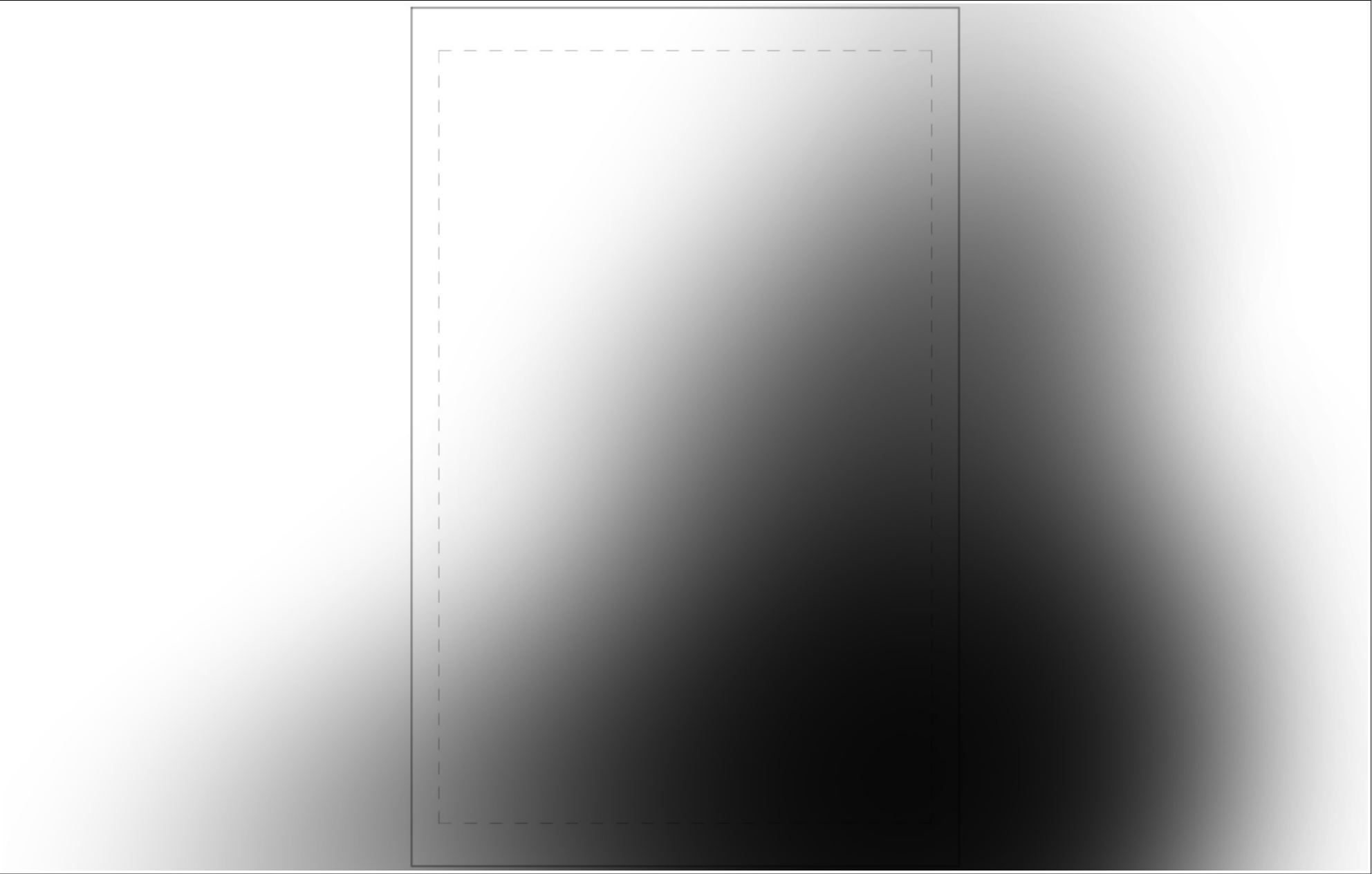


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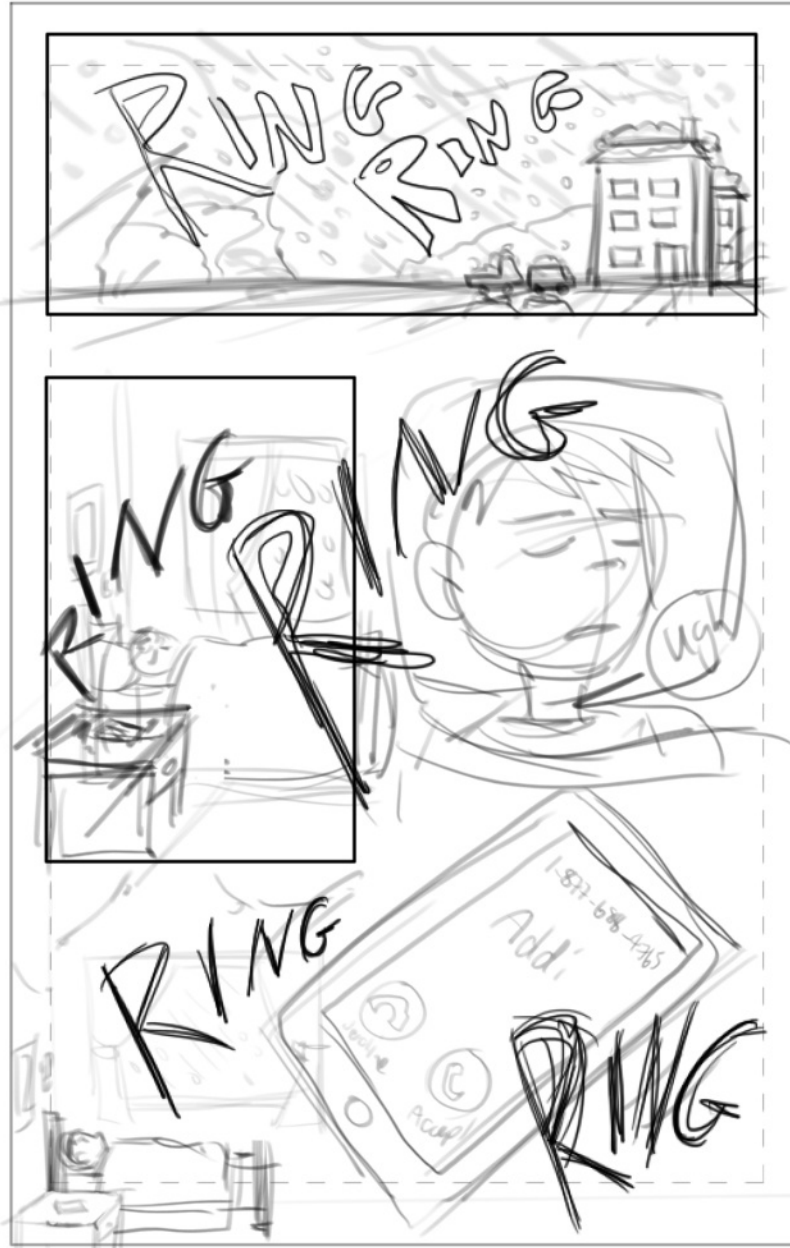




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Scene	Duration	Panel	Duration
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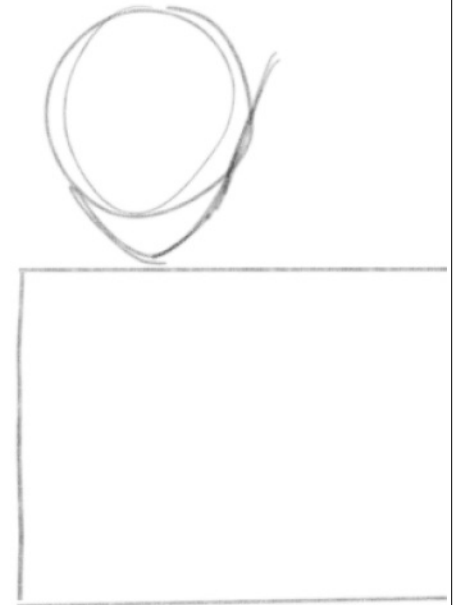
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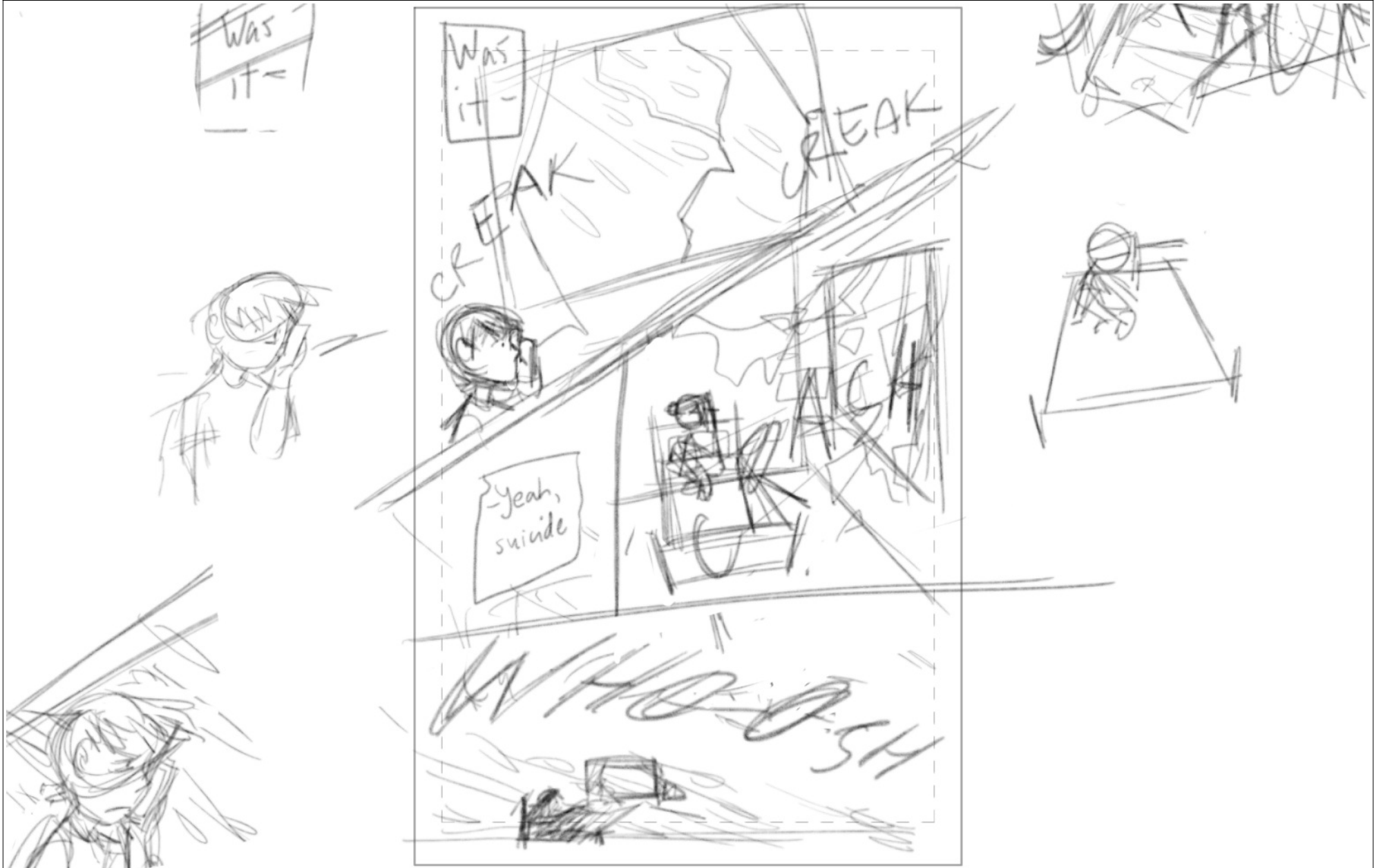
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Scene	Duration	Panel	Duration
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Scene	Duration	Panel	Duration
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Scene	Duration	Panel	Duration
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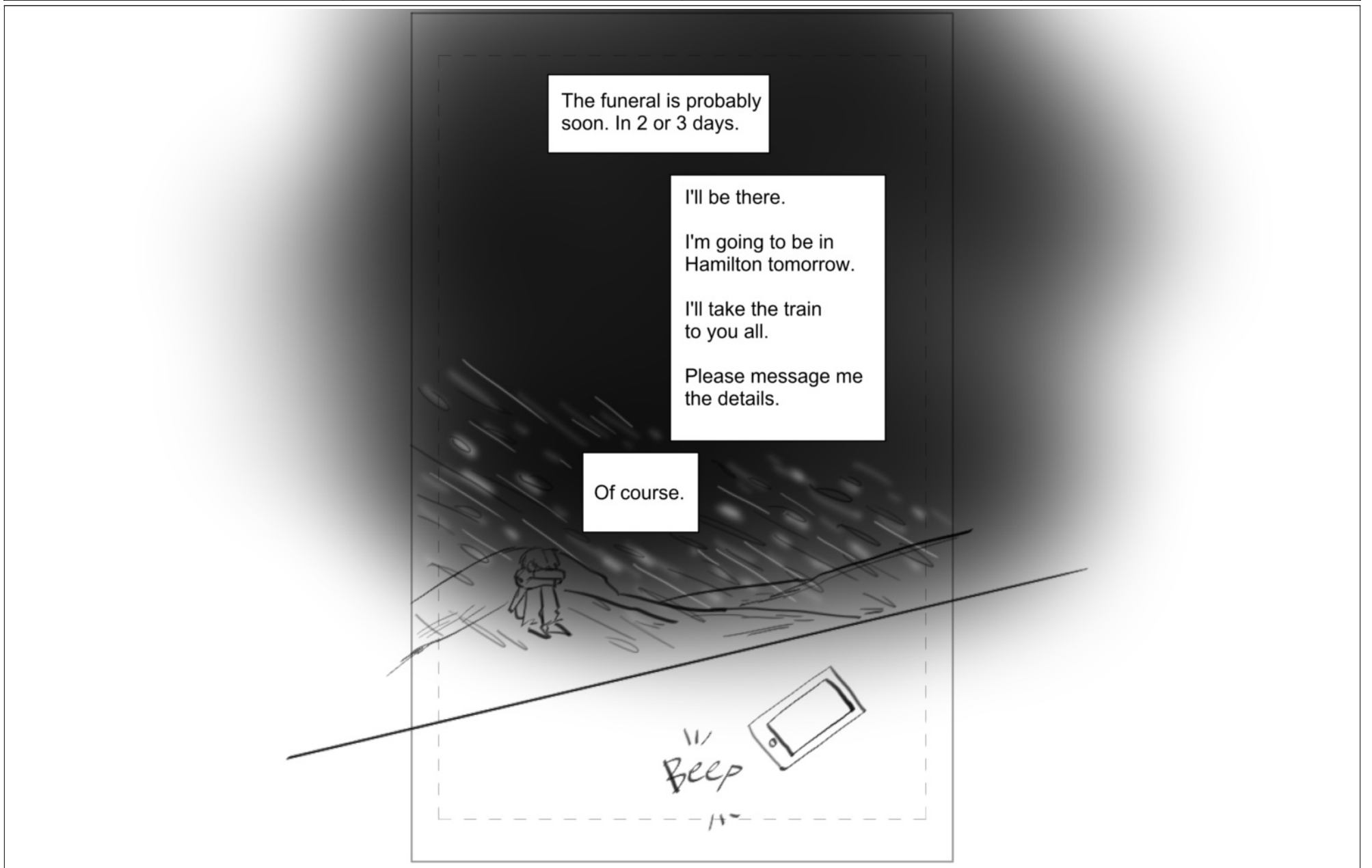
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Scene	Duration	Panel	Duration
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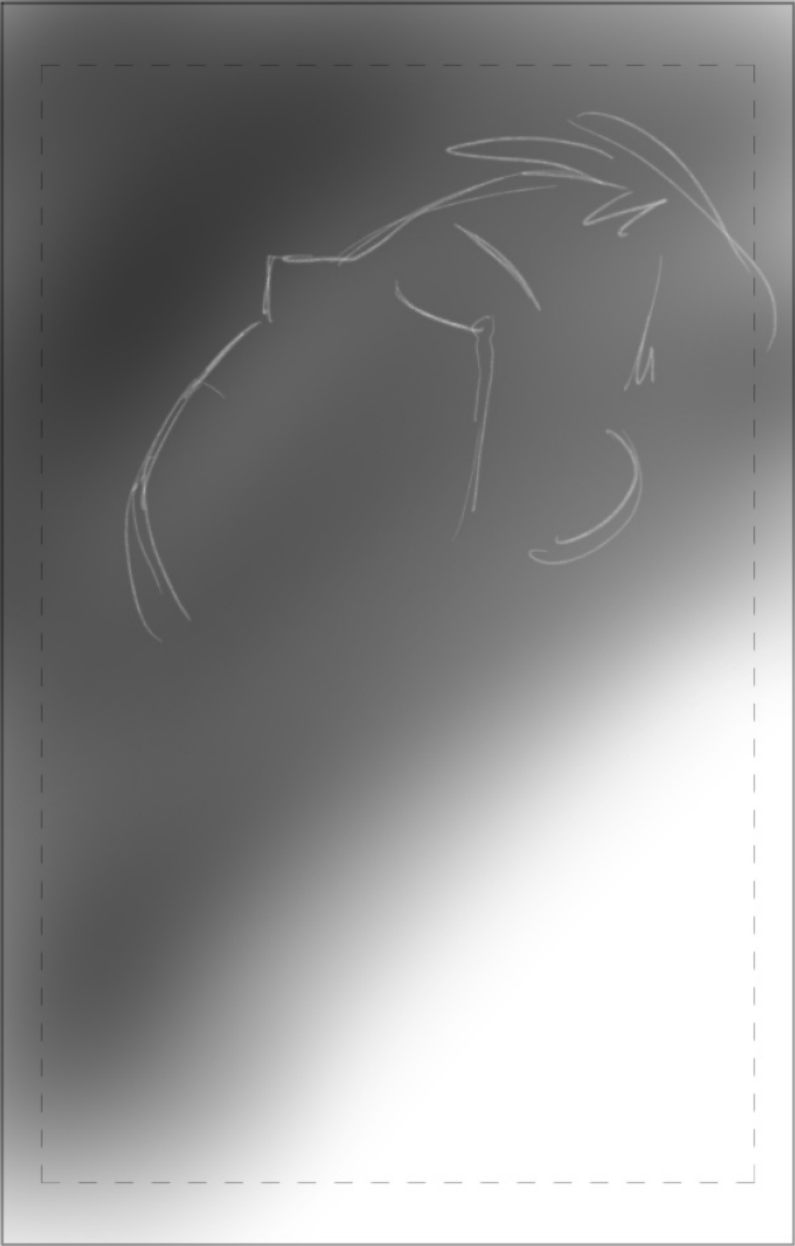
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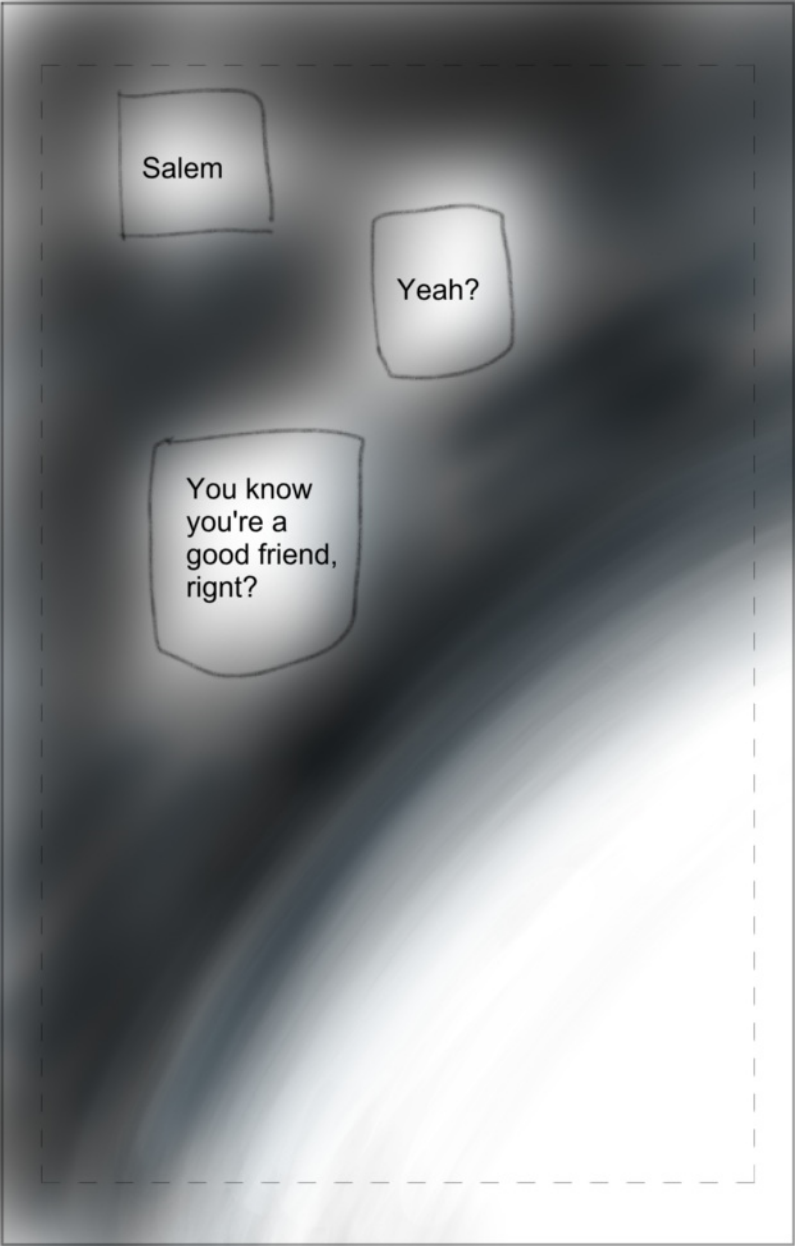
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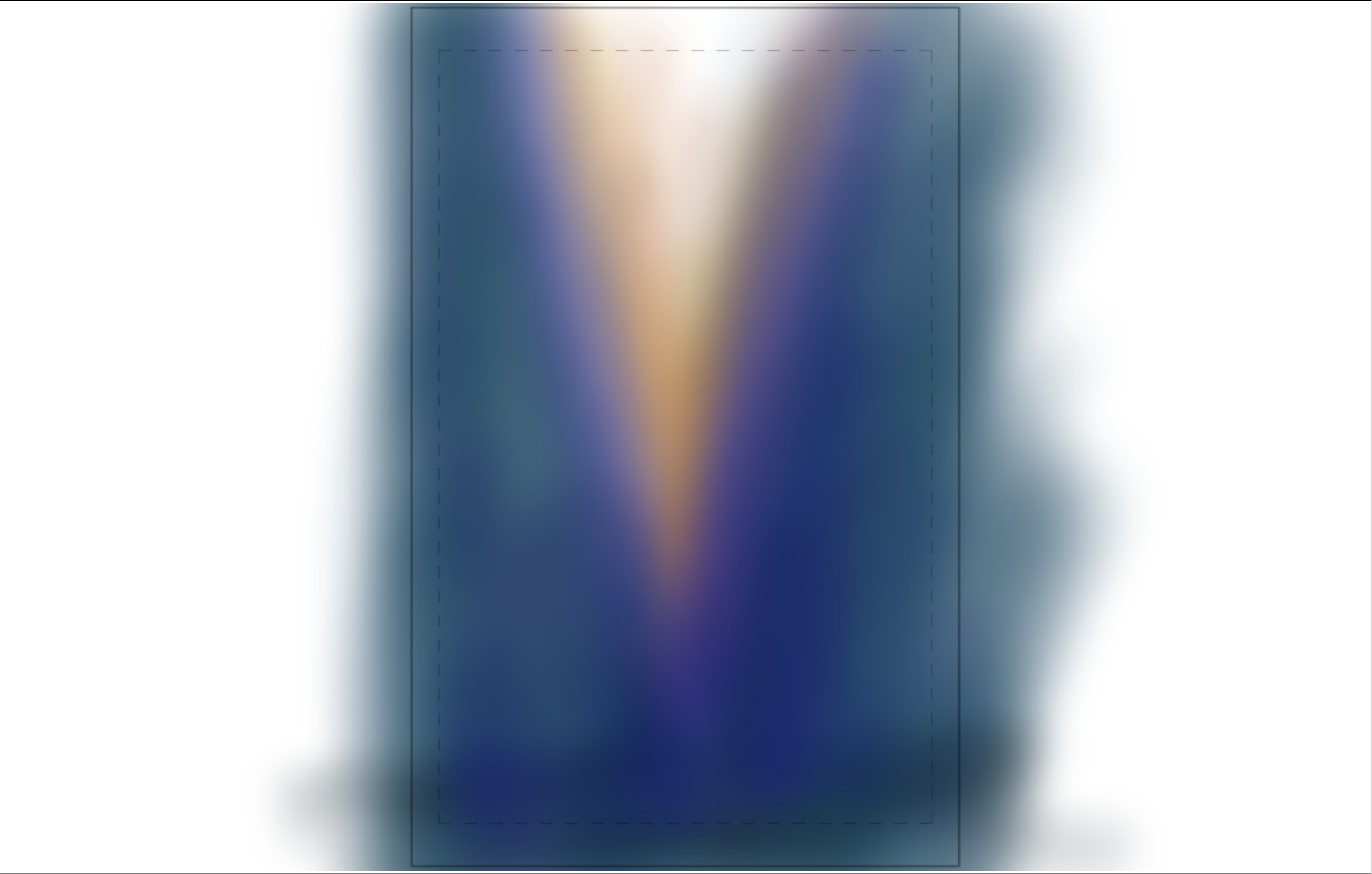
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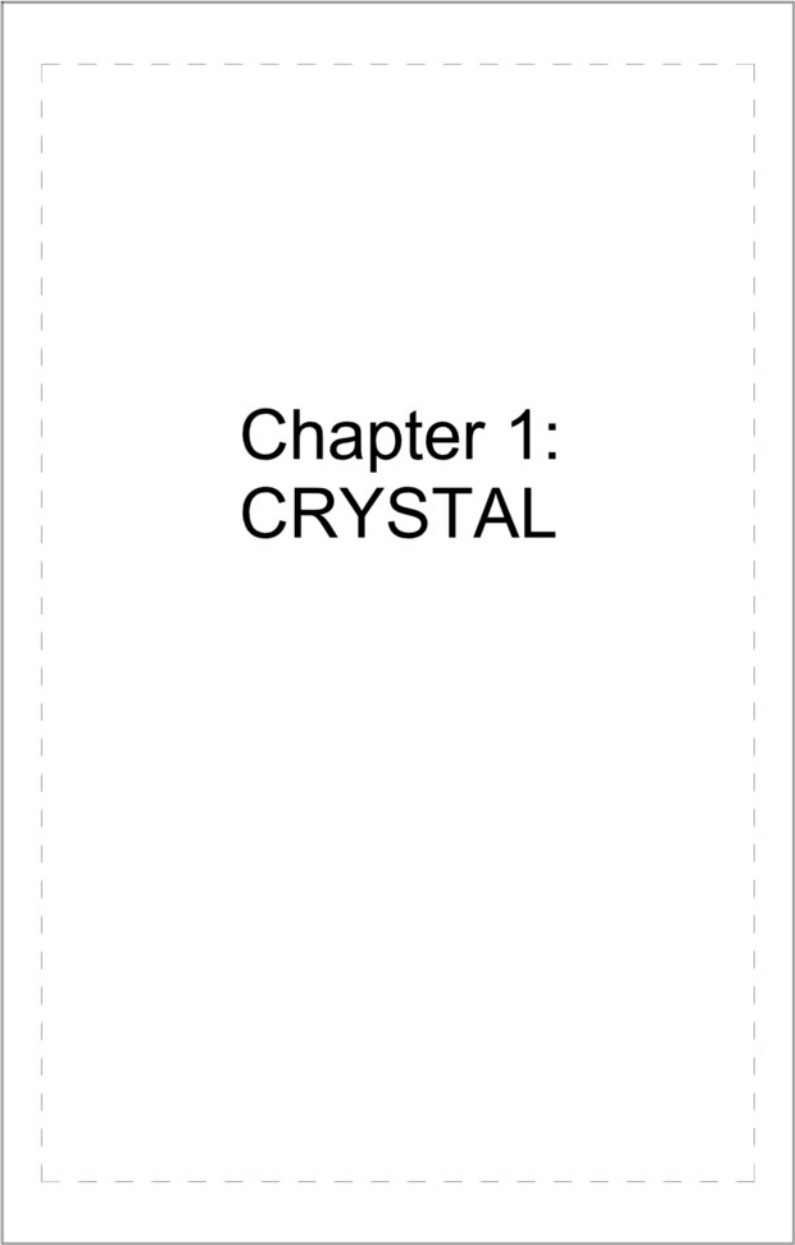
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Scene	Duration	Panel	Duration
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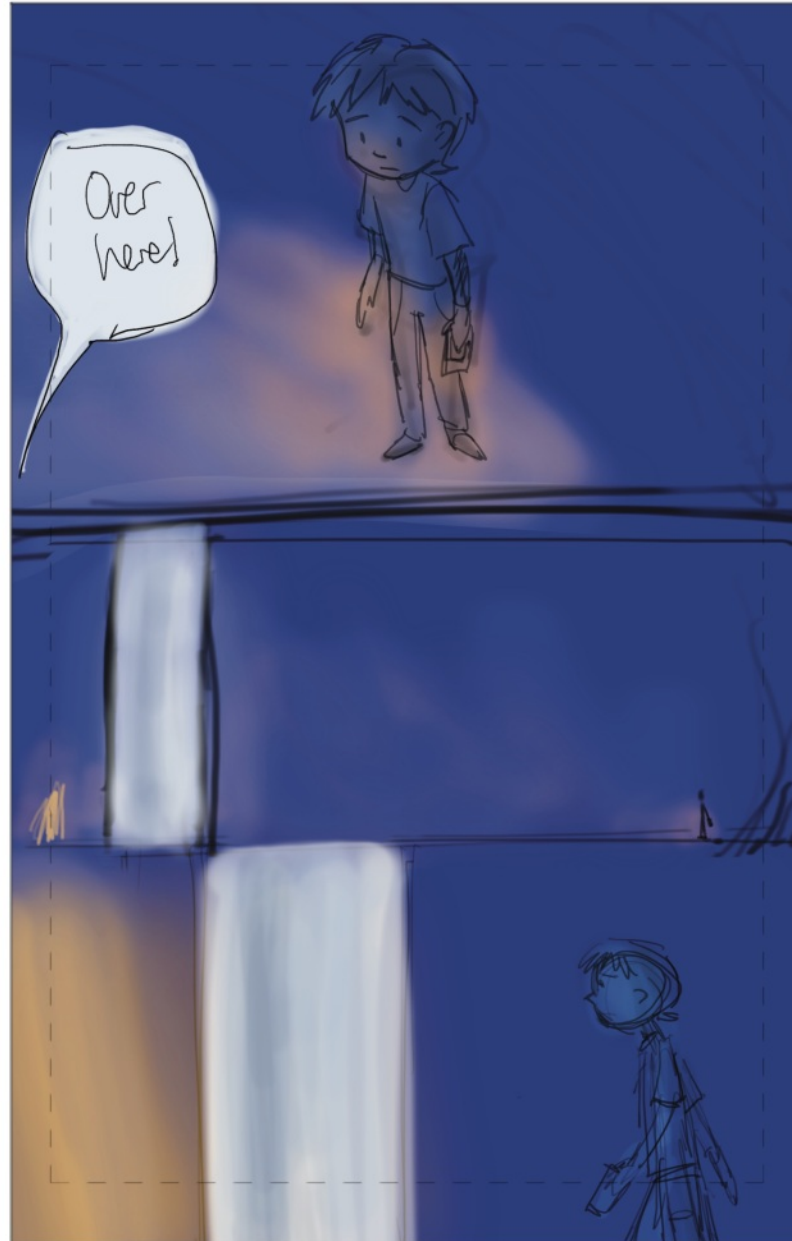
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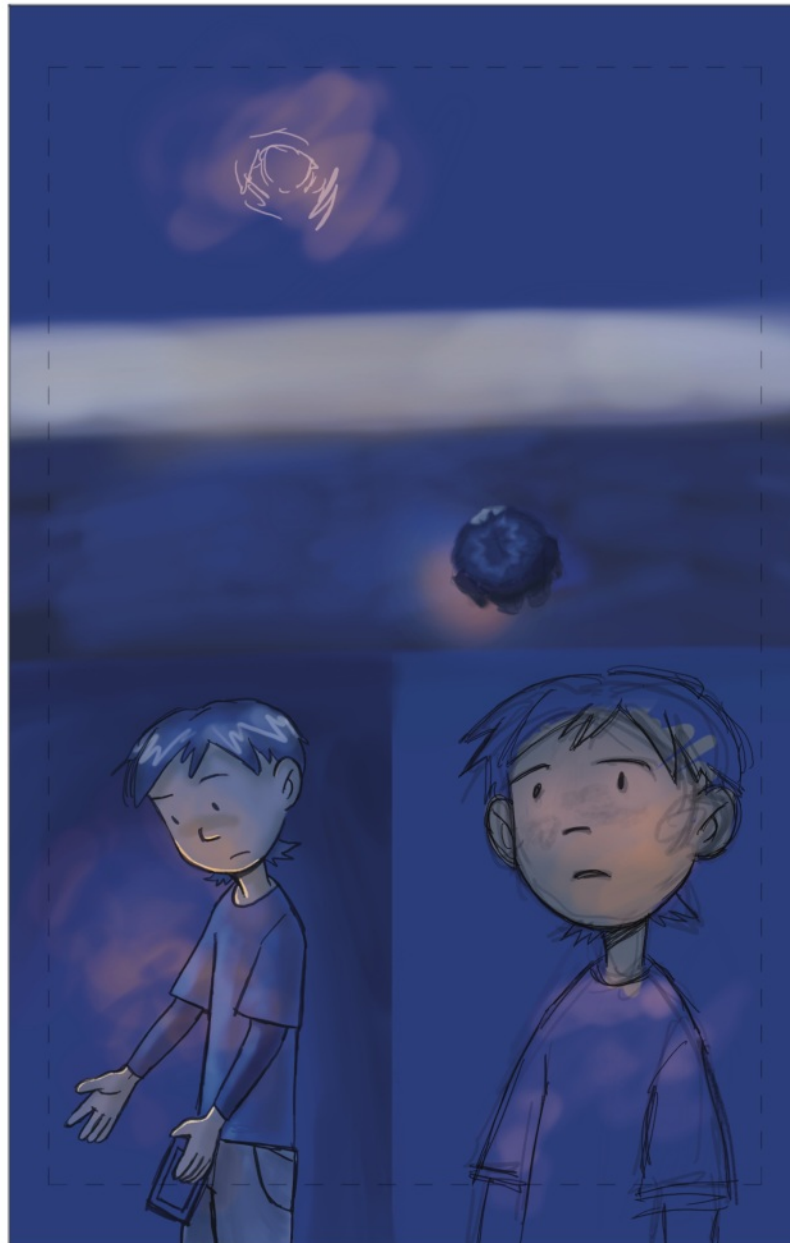
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Scene	Duration	Panel	Duration
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Scene	Duration	Panel	Duration
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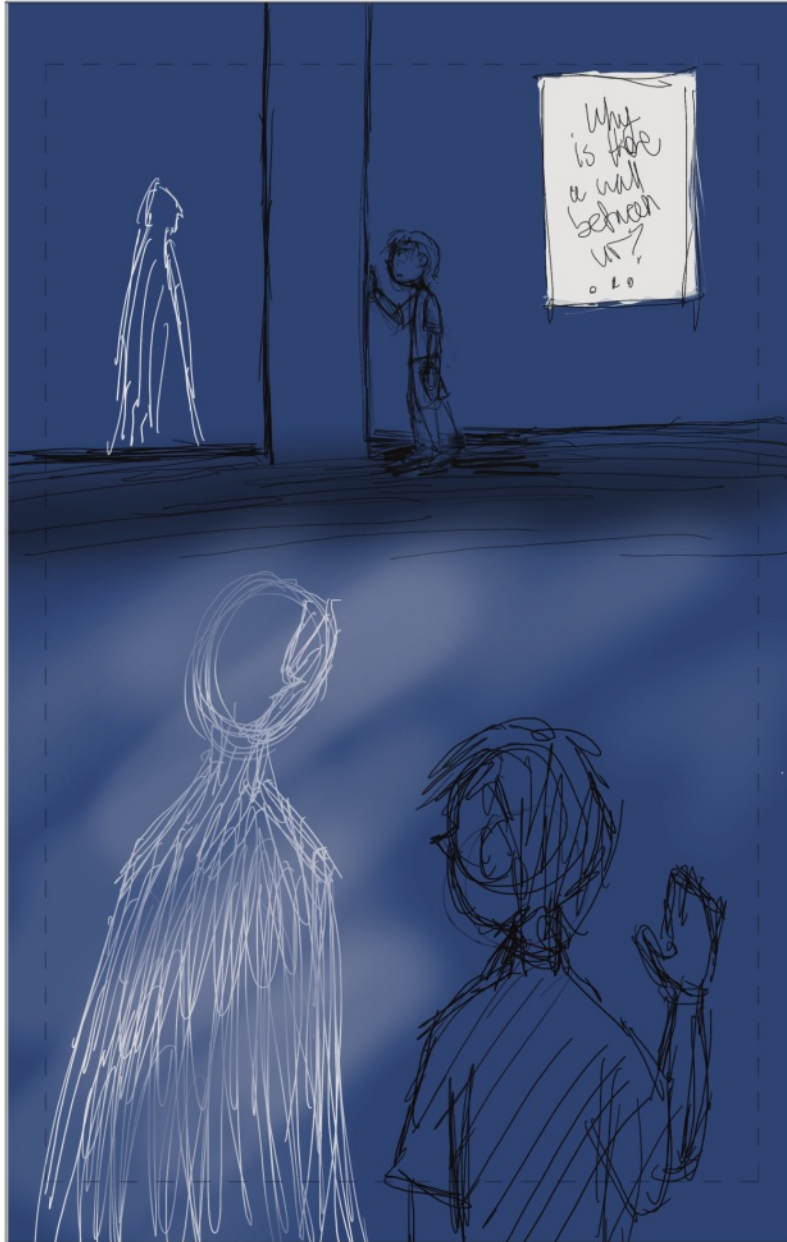
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Scene	Duration	Panel	Duration
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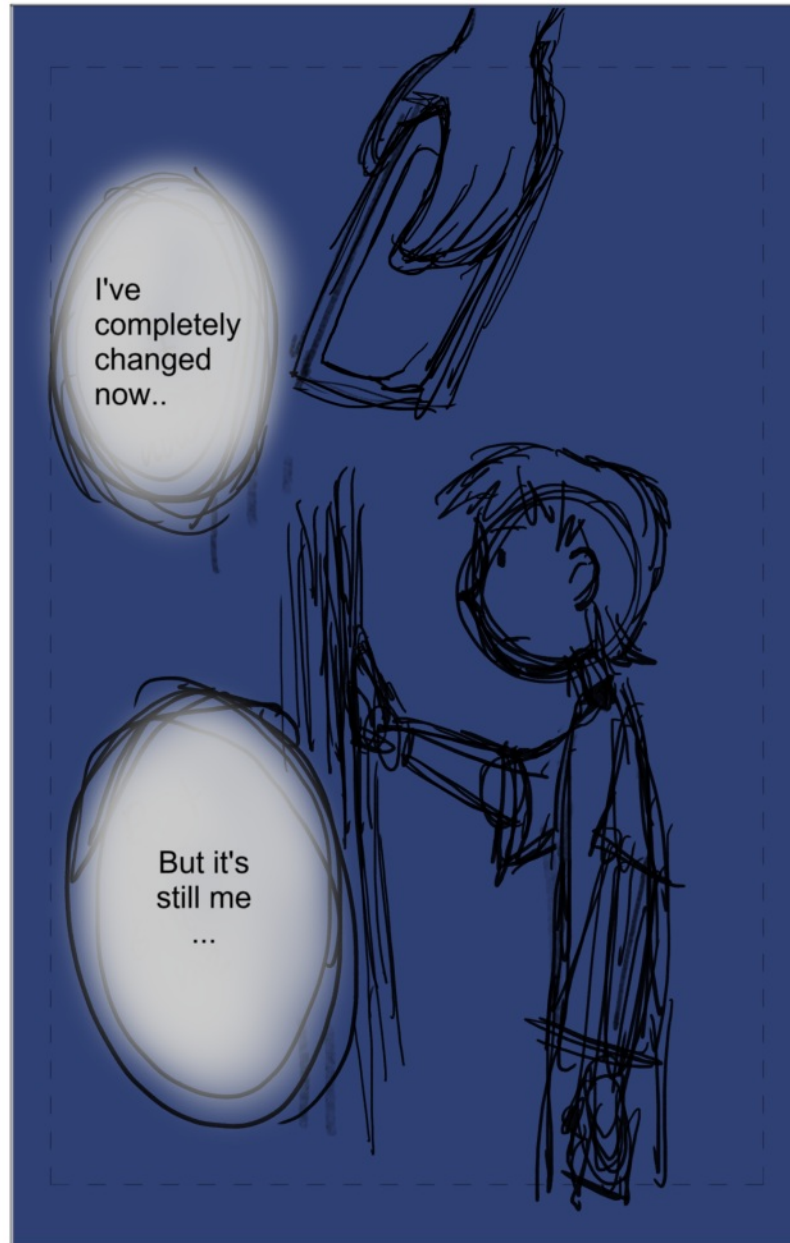
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Scene	Duration	Panel	Duration
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Scene	Duration	Panel	Duration
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Scene	Duration	Panel	Duration
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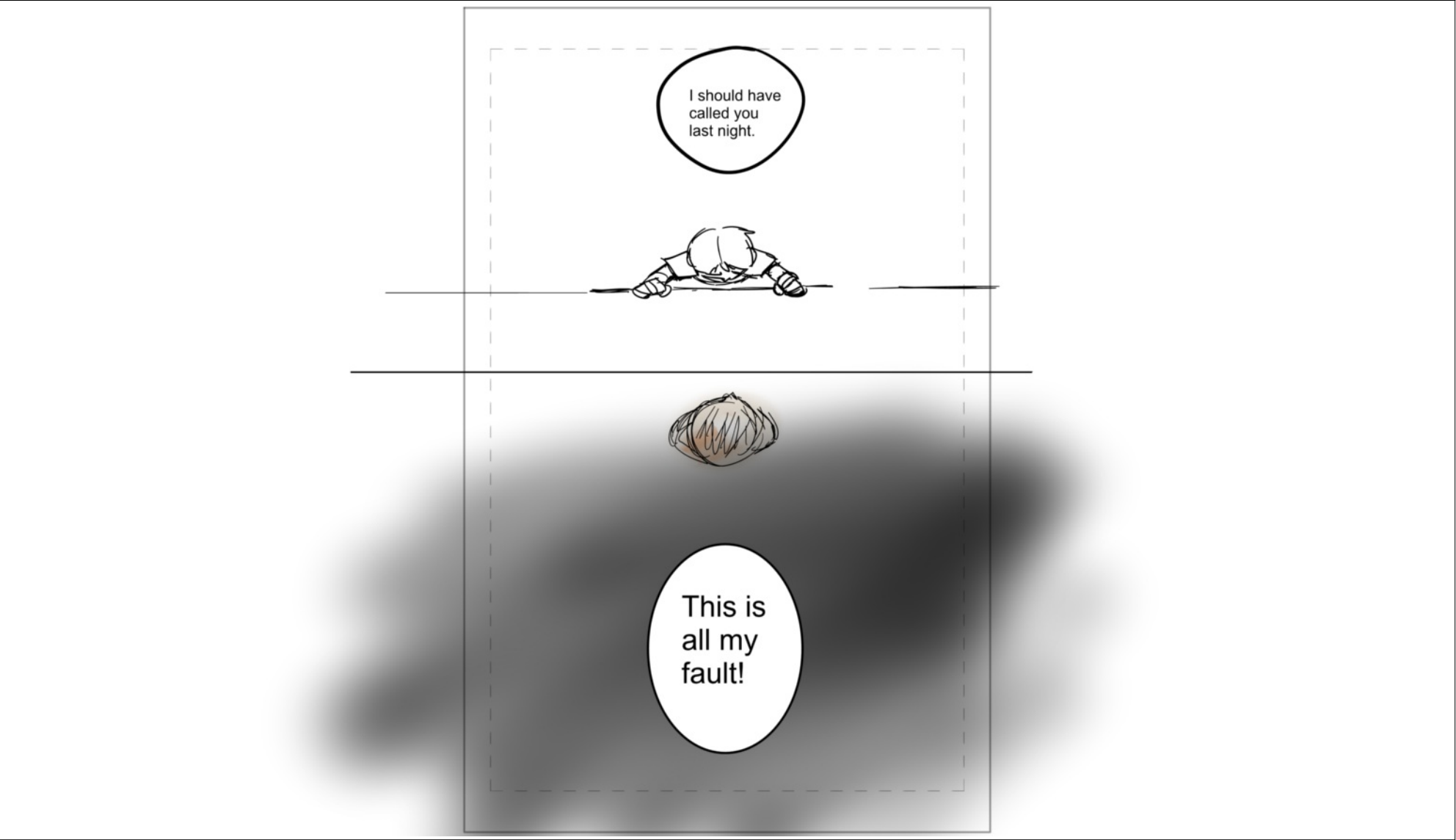
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Refer to script.

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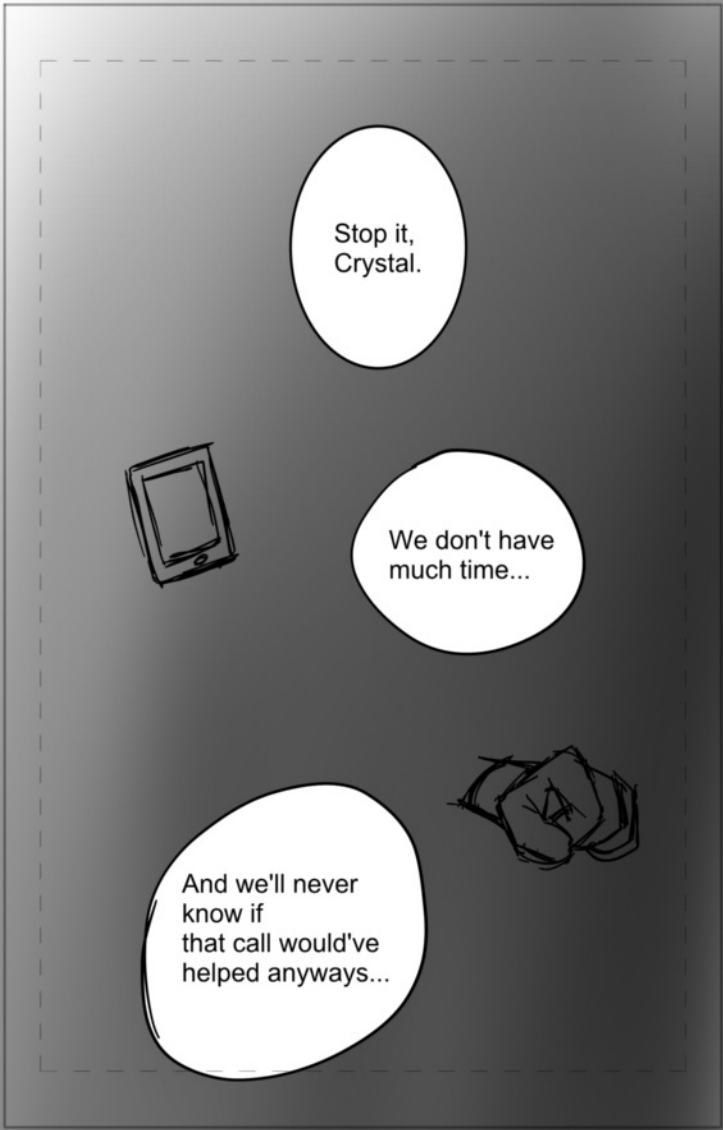
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Refer to script.

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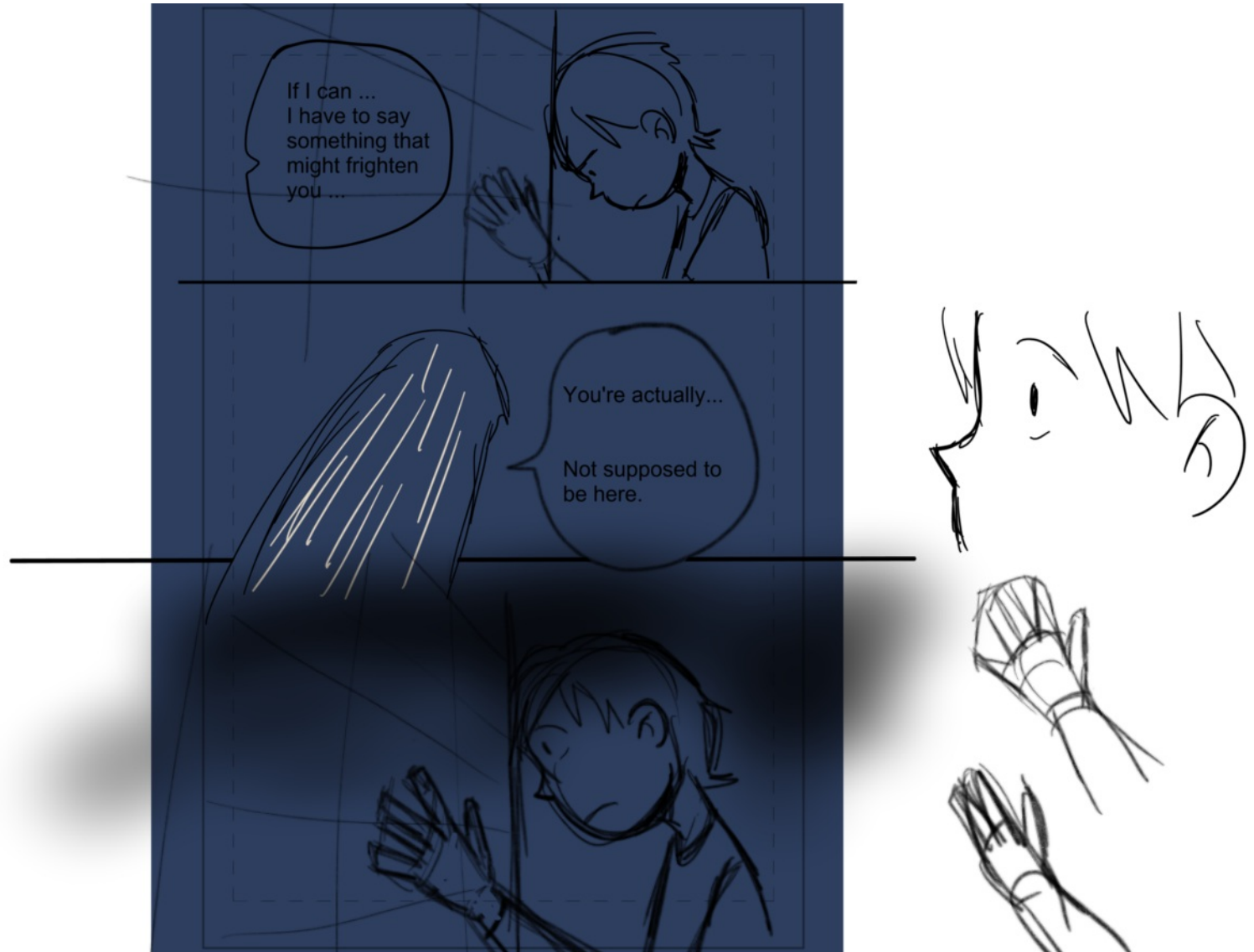
Notes
Refer to script.

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Notes
Refer to script.

Scene	Duration	Panel	Duration
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Notes
Refer to script.

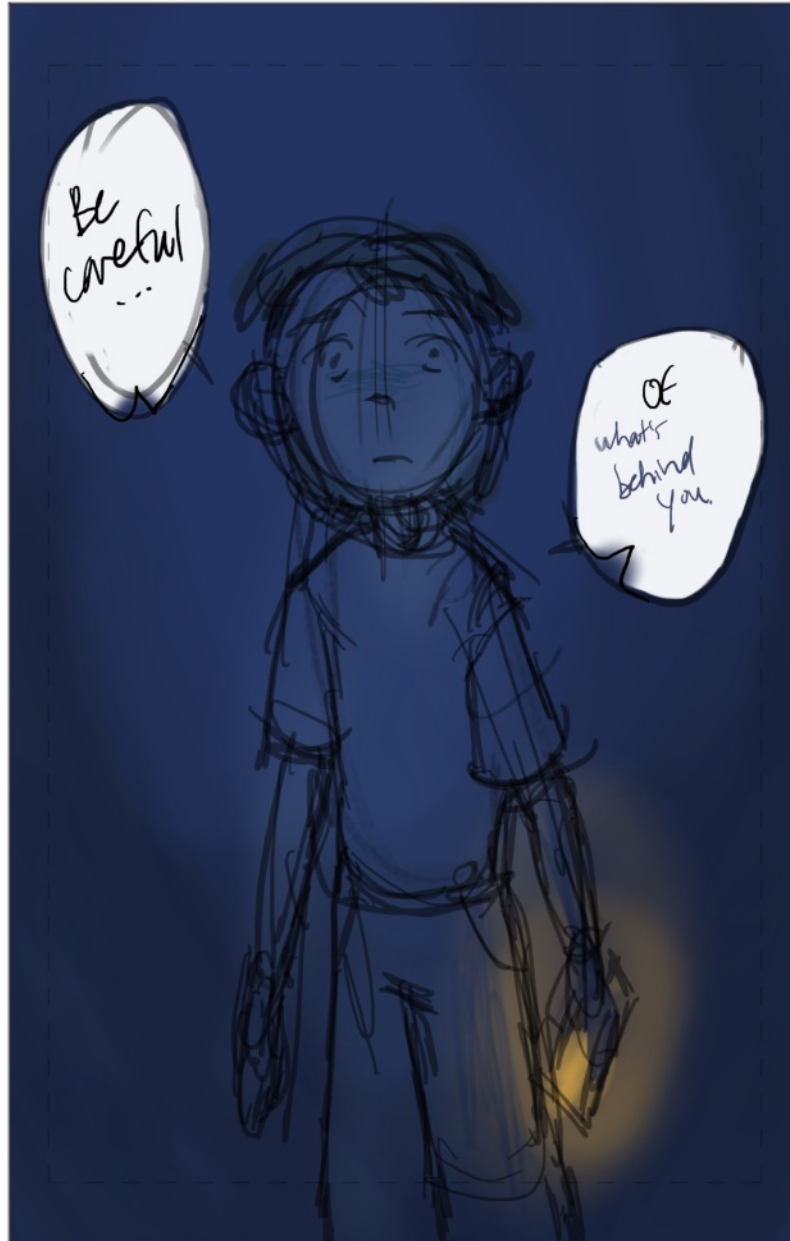
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Scene	Duration	Panel	Duration
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Scene	Duration	Panel	Duration
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Scene	Duration	Panel	Duration
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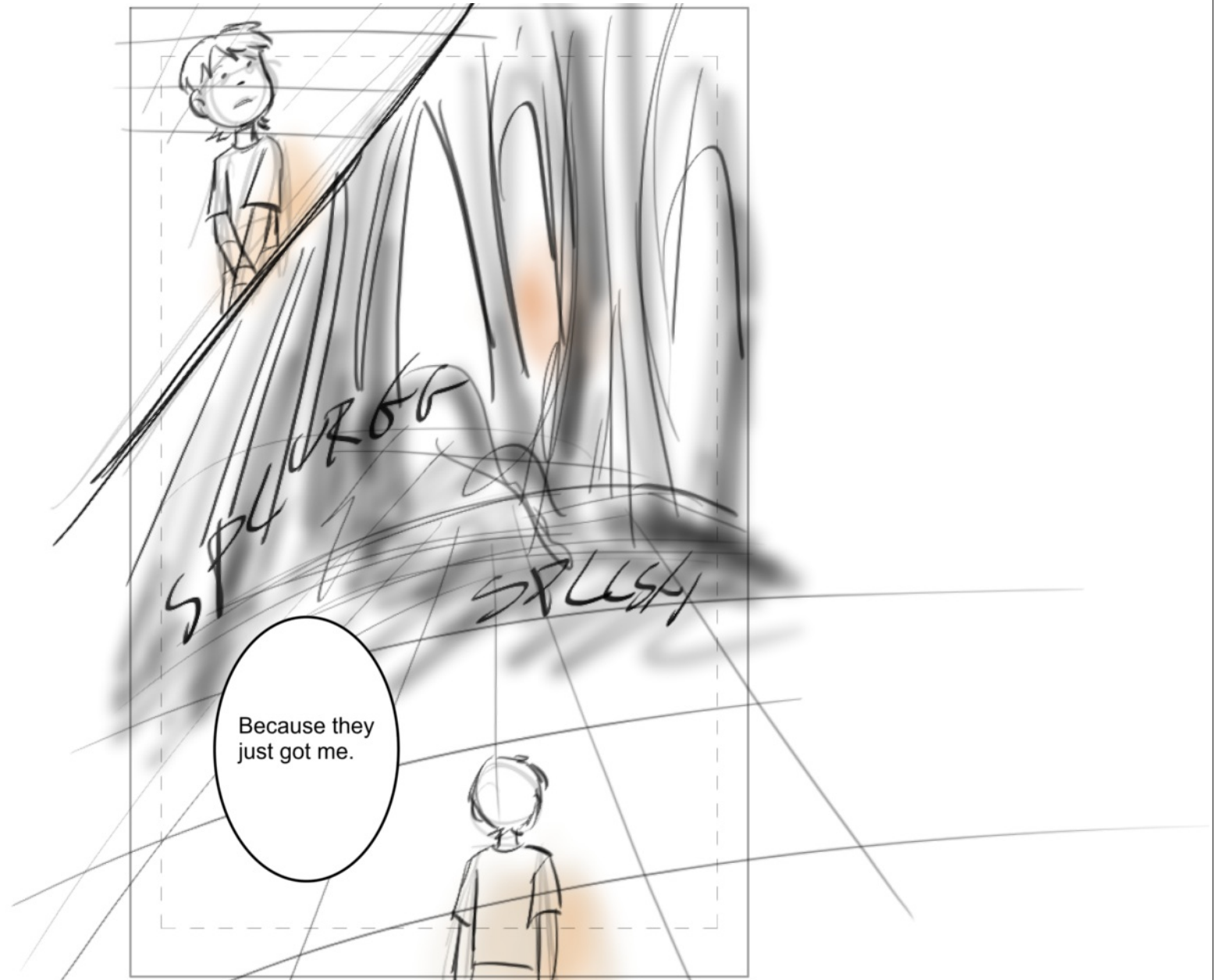
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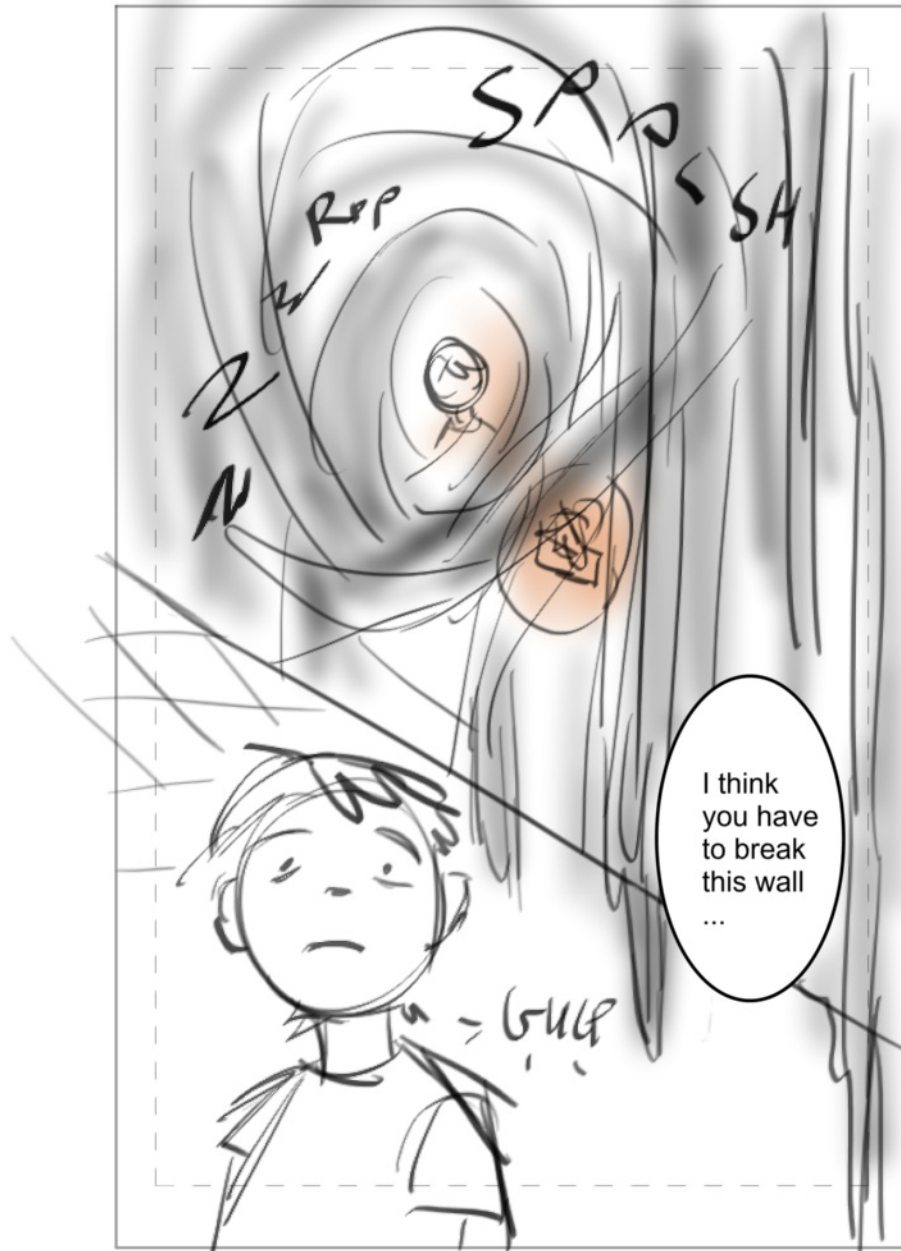
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Scene	Duration	Panel	Duration
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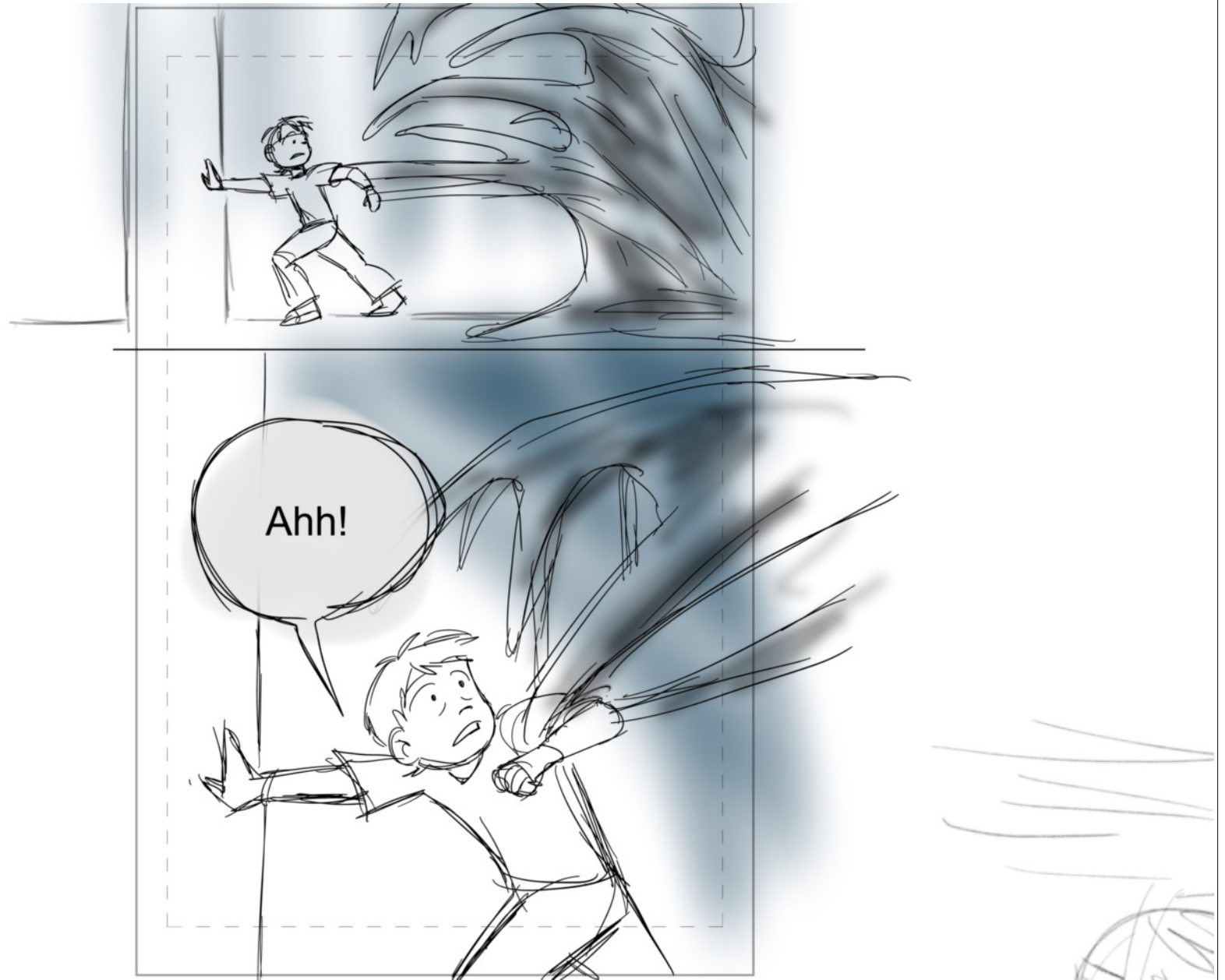
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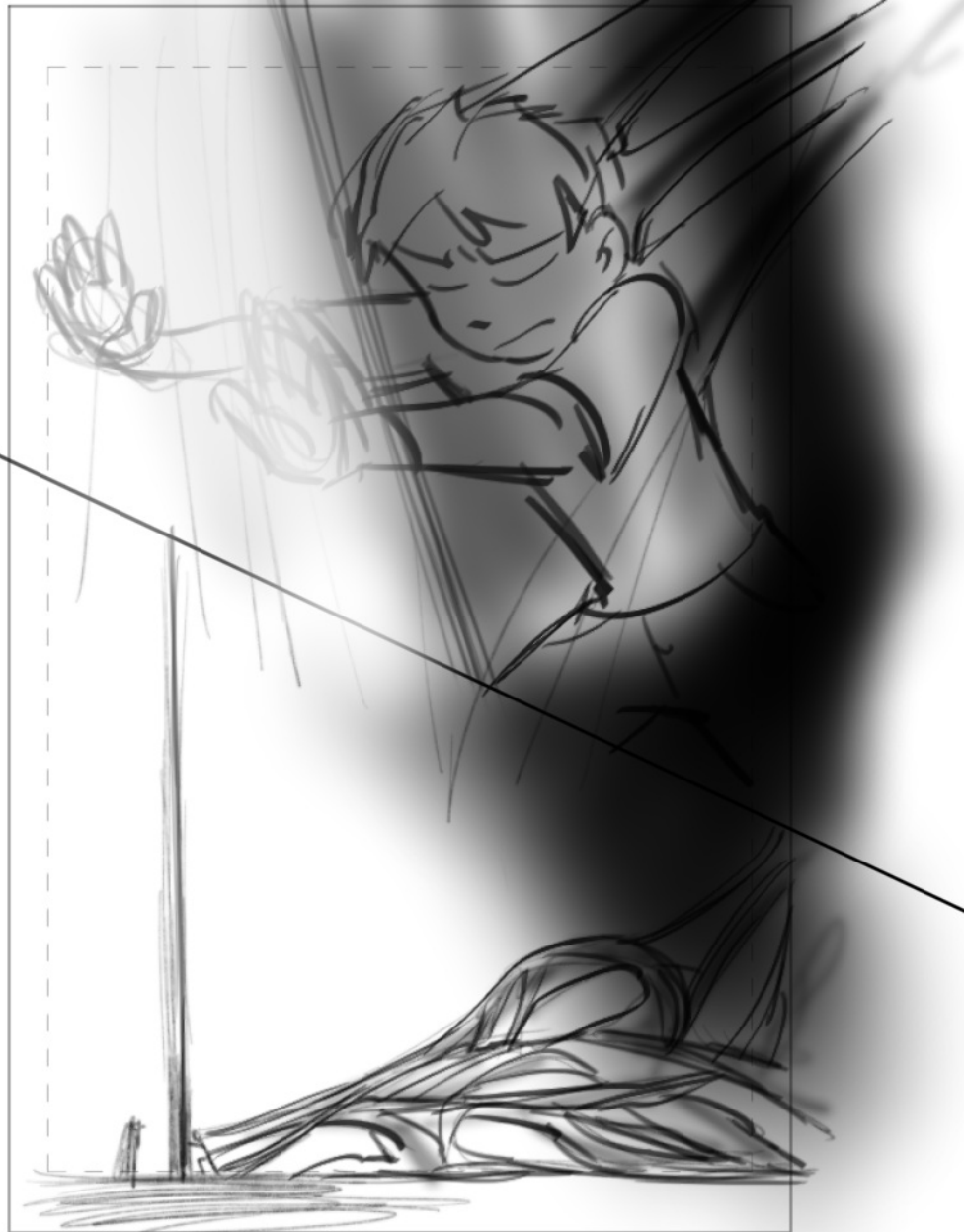
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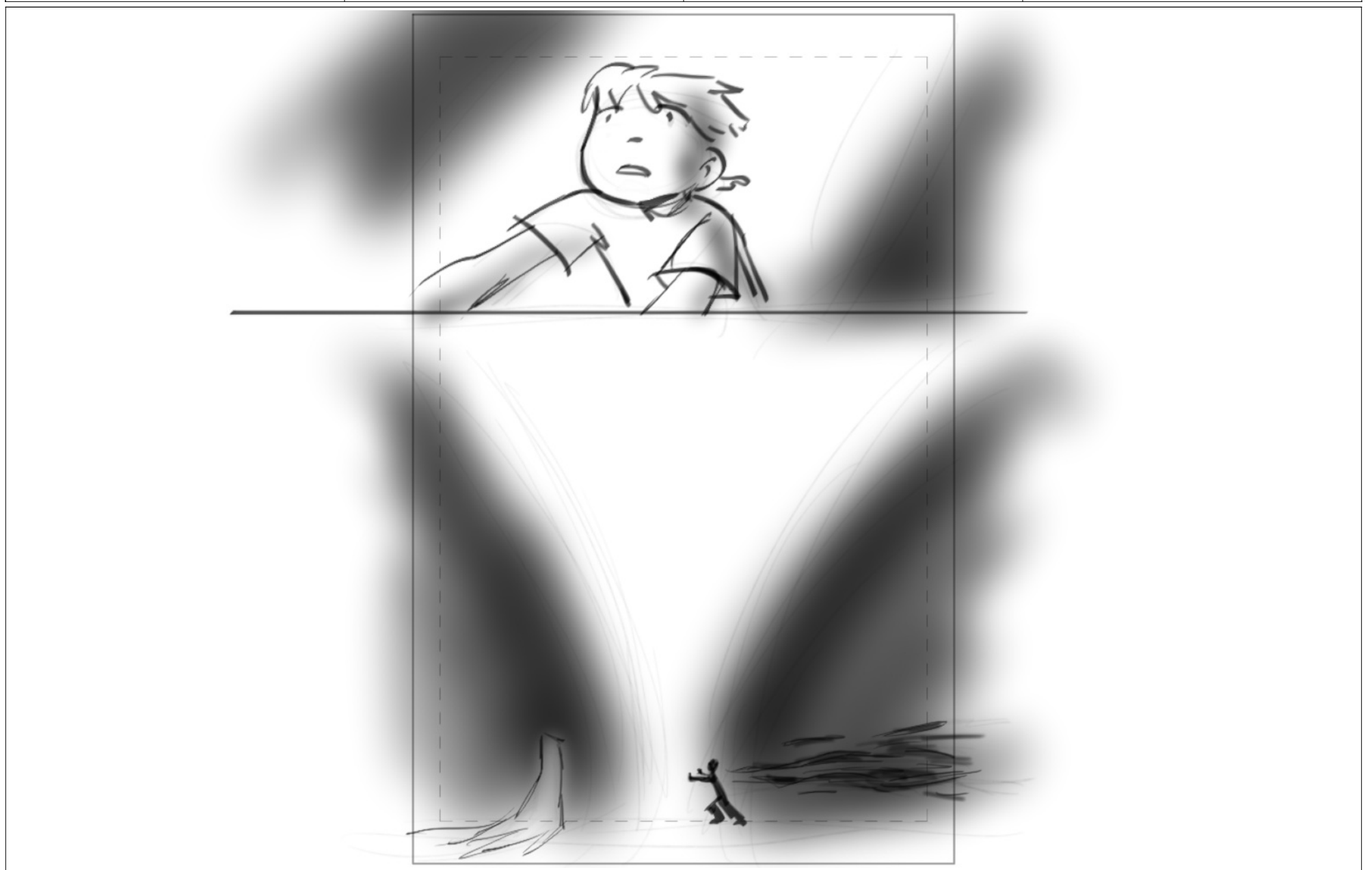
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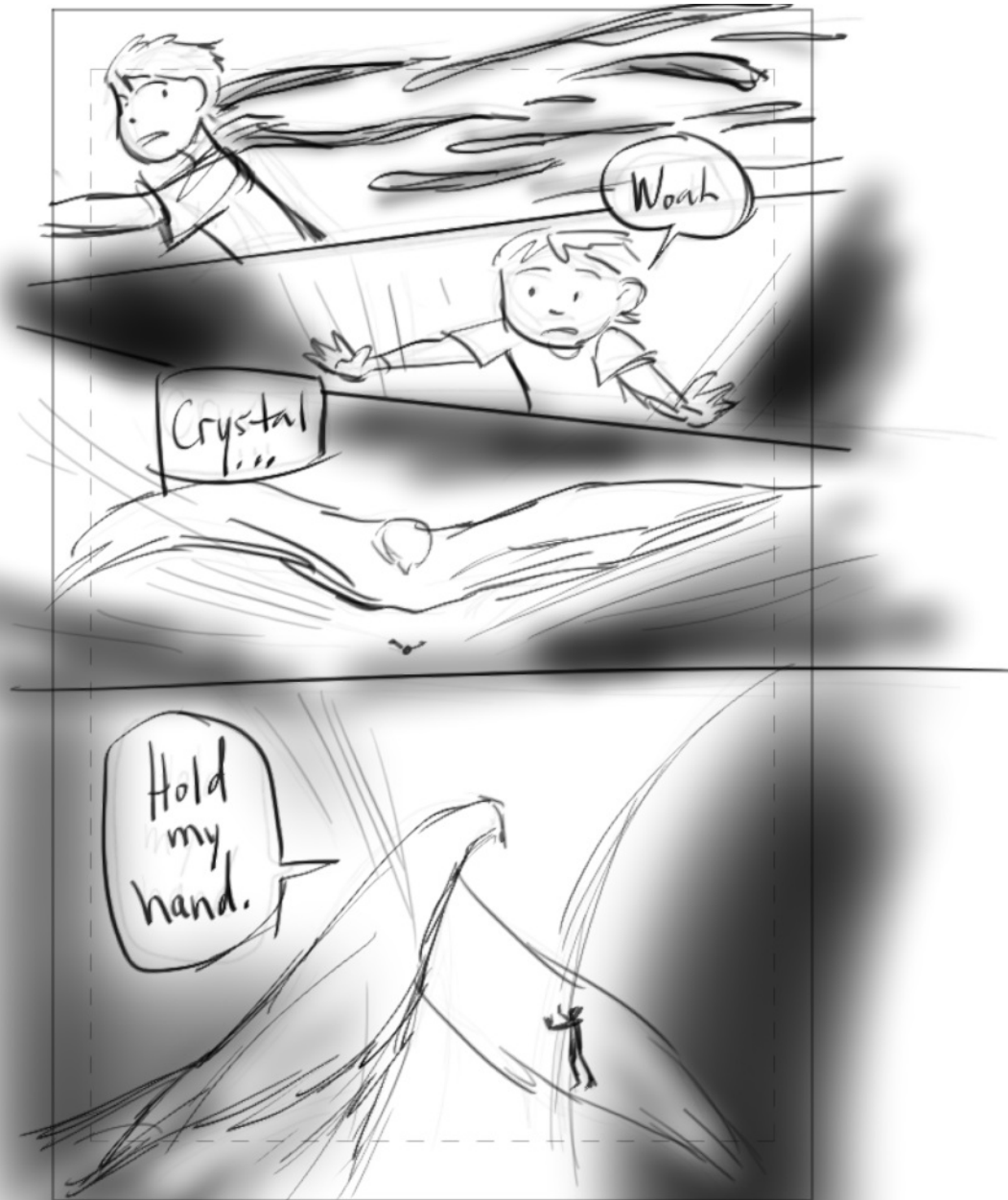
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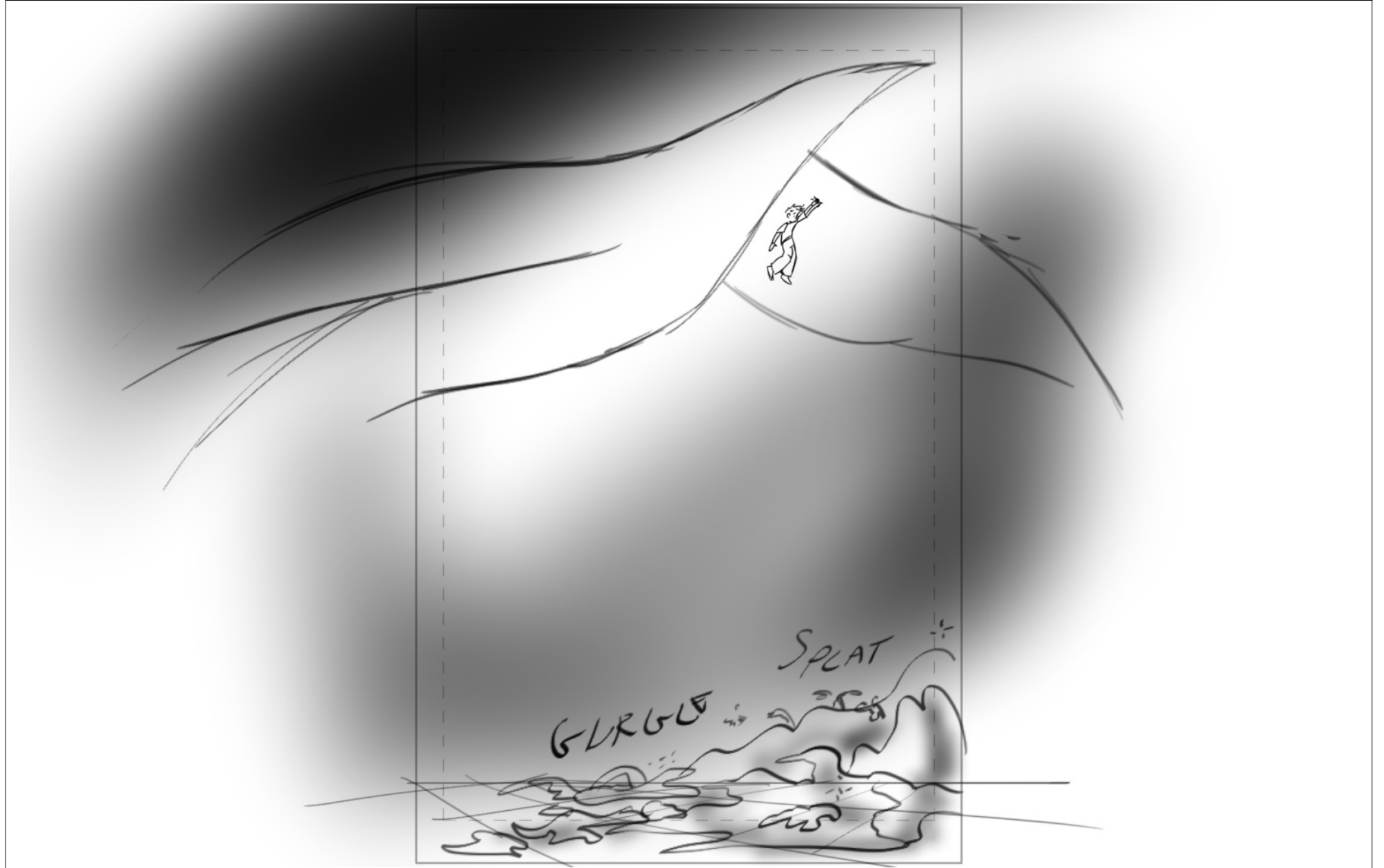
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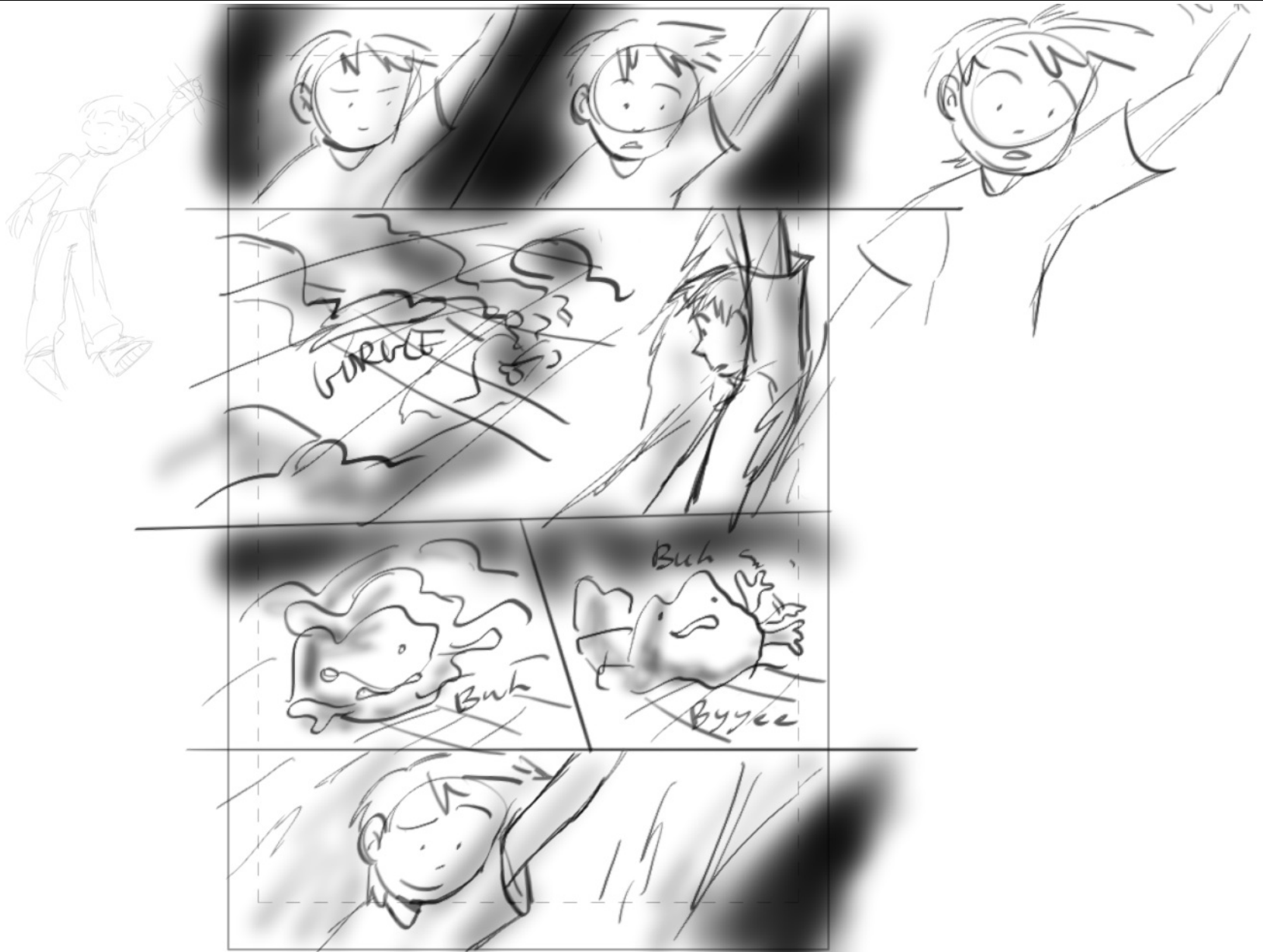
Notes

adjust left hand on panel one to look more like it is pressing against the wall.

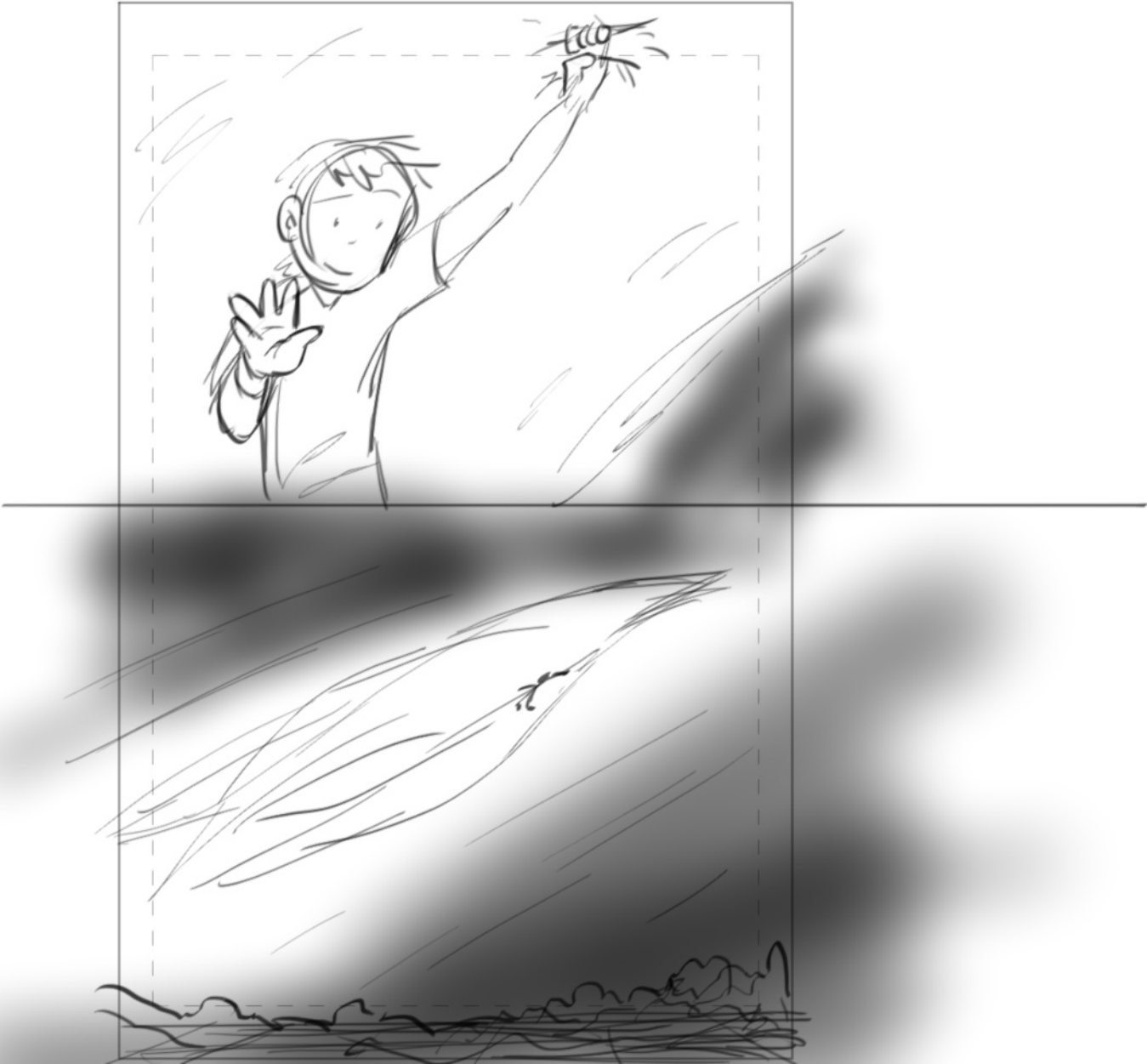
Scene	Duration	Panel	Duration
2	44:00	33	01:00



Scene	Duration	Panel	Duration
2	44:00	34	01:00



Scene	Duration	Panel	Duration
2	44:00	35	01:00



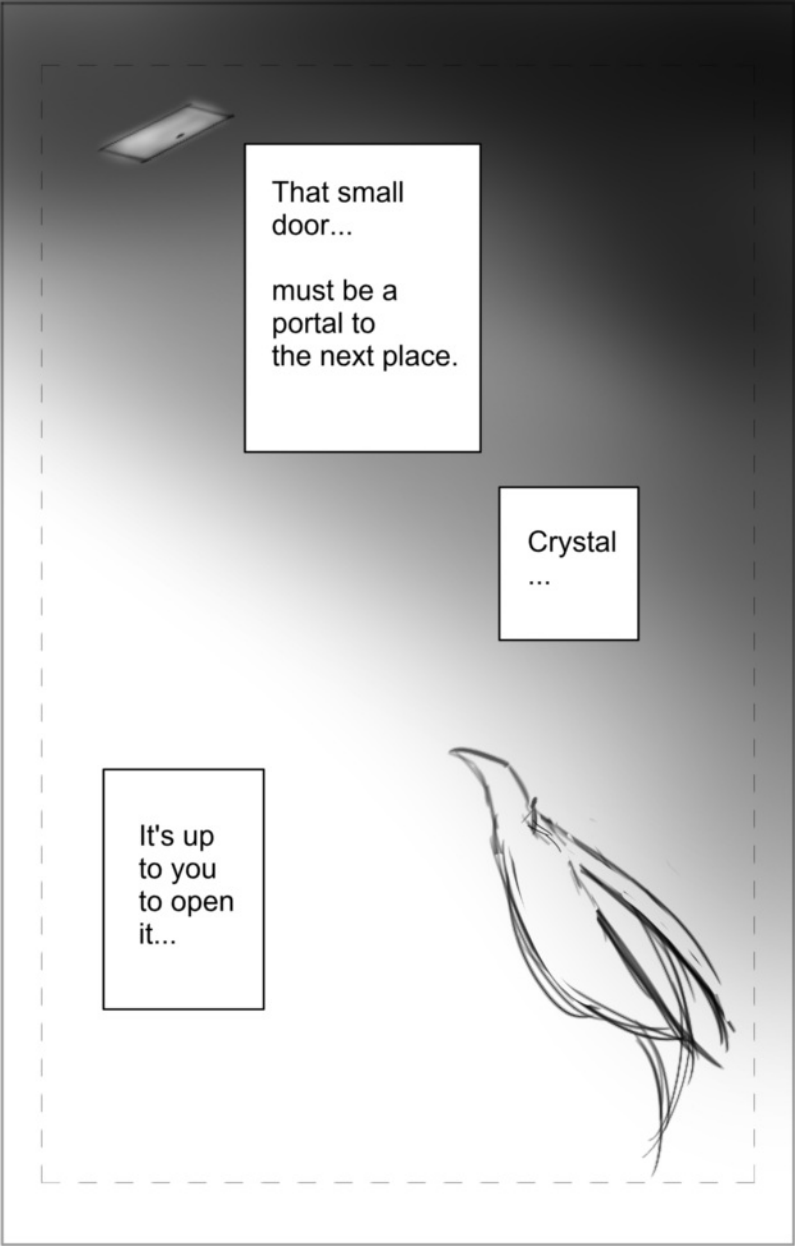
Scene	Duration	Panel	Duration
2	44:00	36	01:00



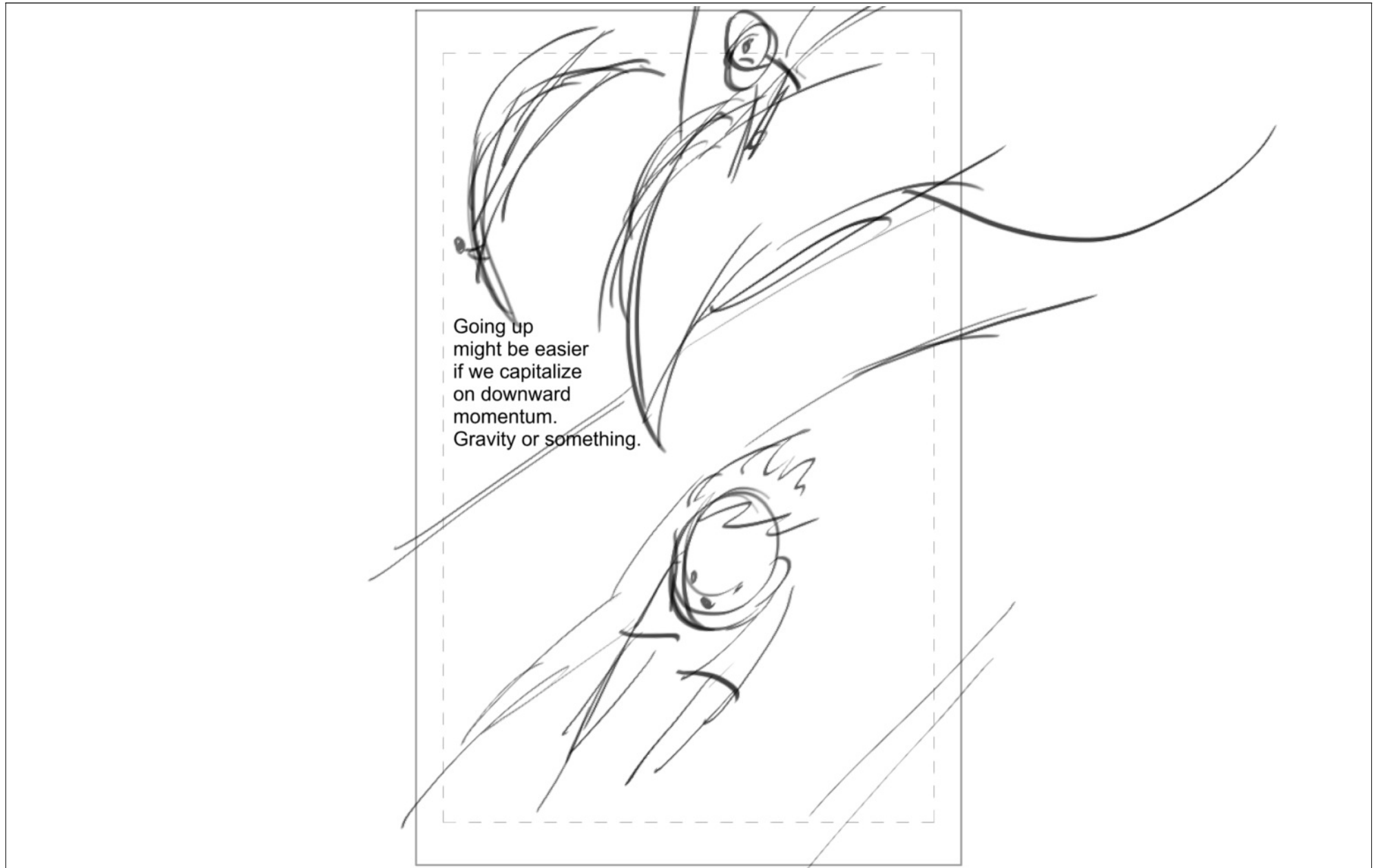
Scene	Duration	Panel	Duration
2	44:00	37	01:00



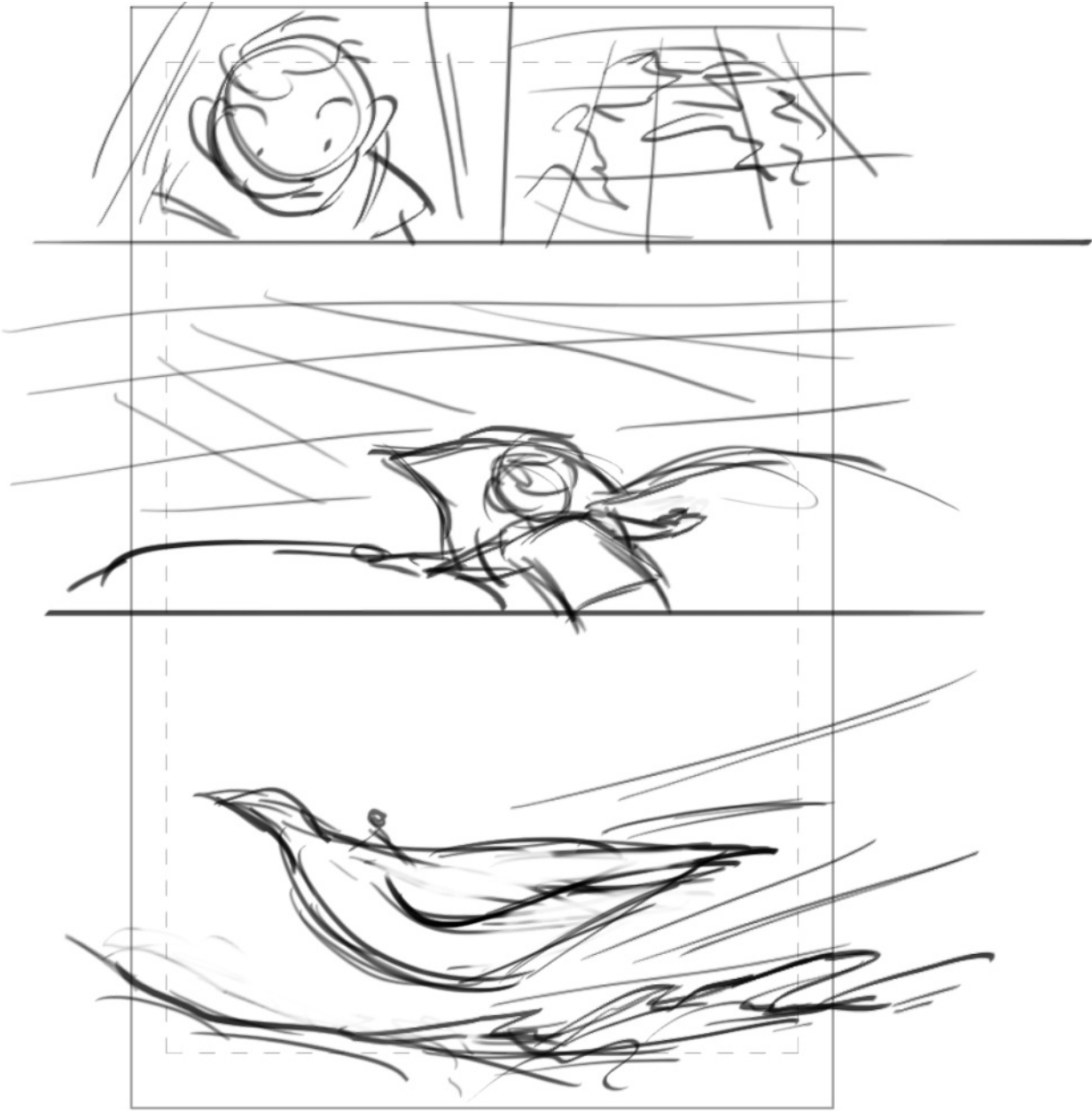
Scene	Duration	Panel	Duration
2	44:00	38	01:00



Scene	Duration	Panel	Duration
2	44:00	39	01:00



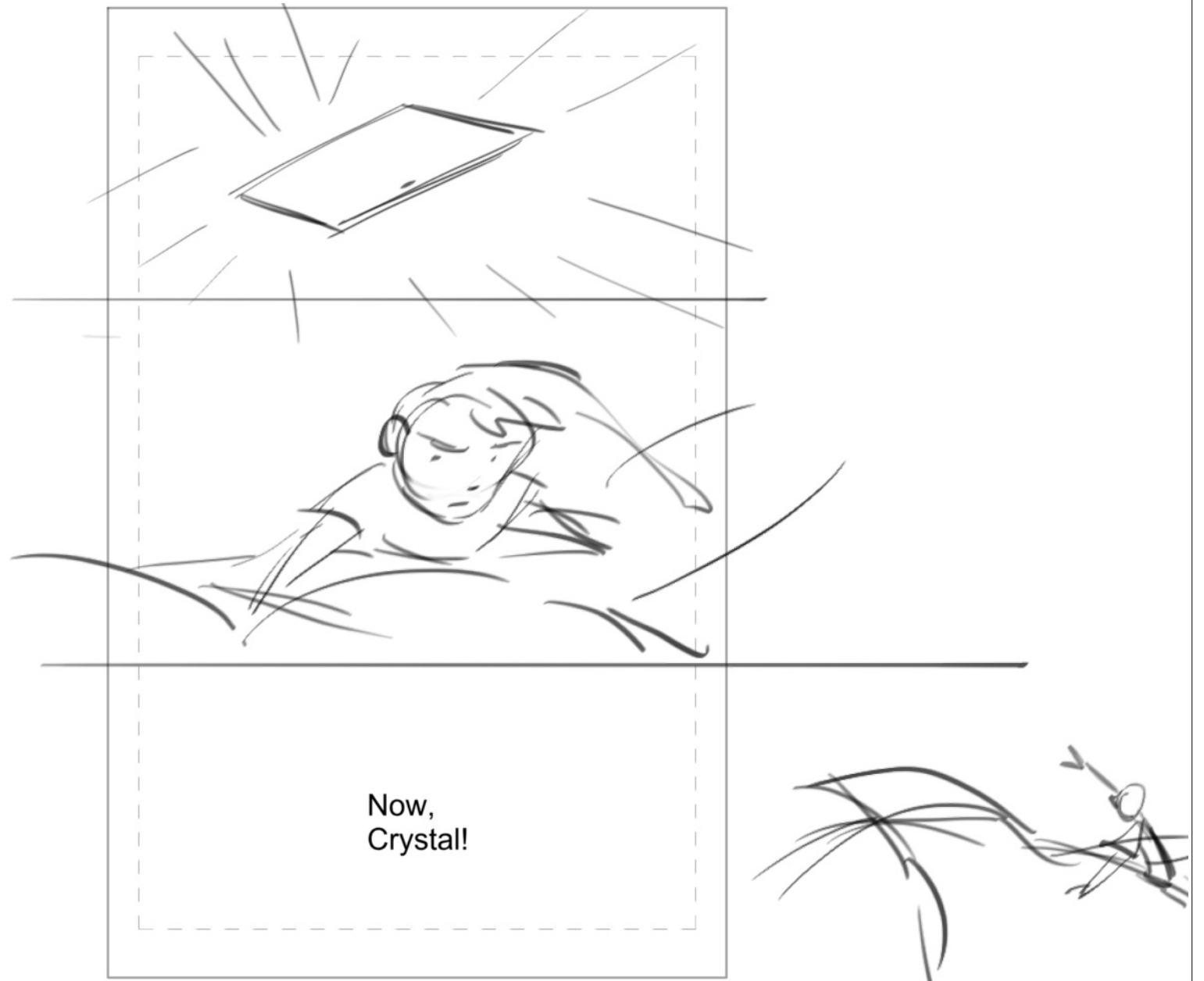
Scene	Duration	Panel	Duration
2	44:00	40	01:00



Scene	Duration	Panel	Duration
2	44:00	41	01:00



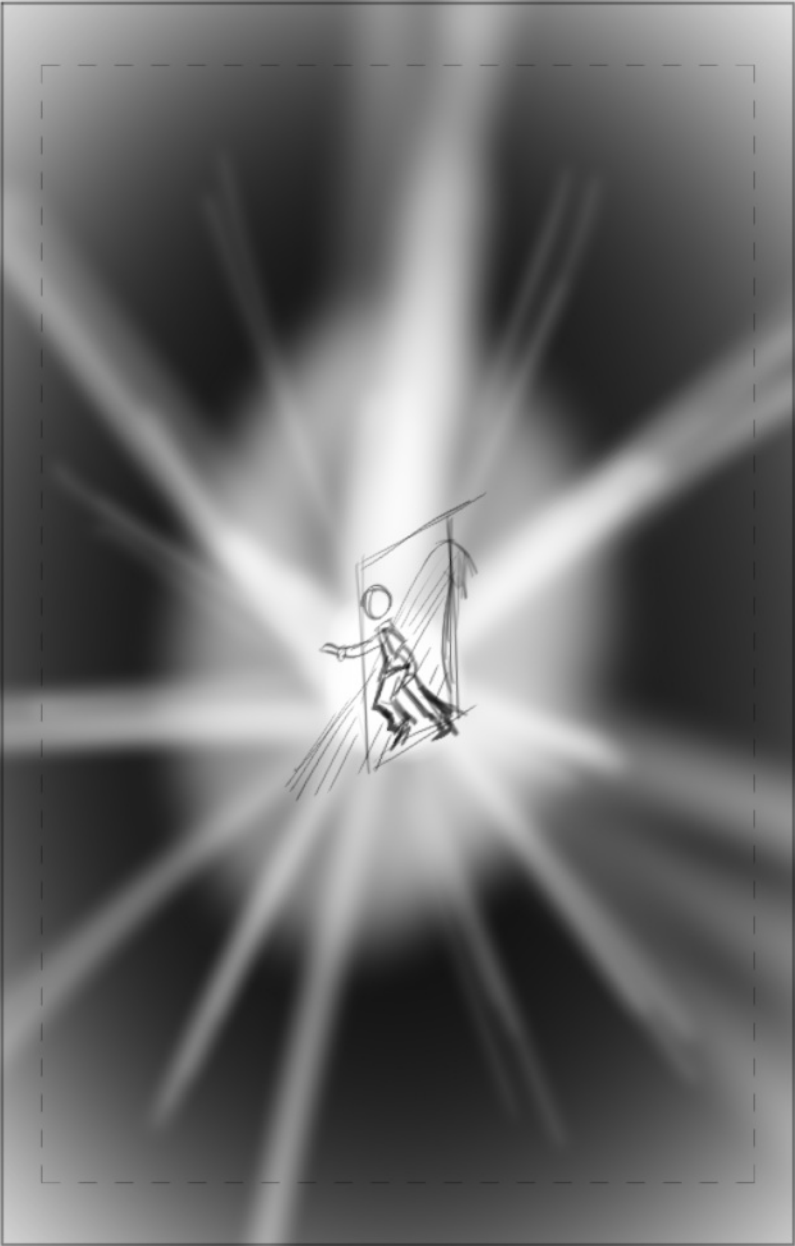
Scene	Duration	Panel	Duration
2	44:00	42	01:00



Scene	Duration	Panel	Duration
2	44:00	43	01:00



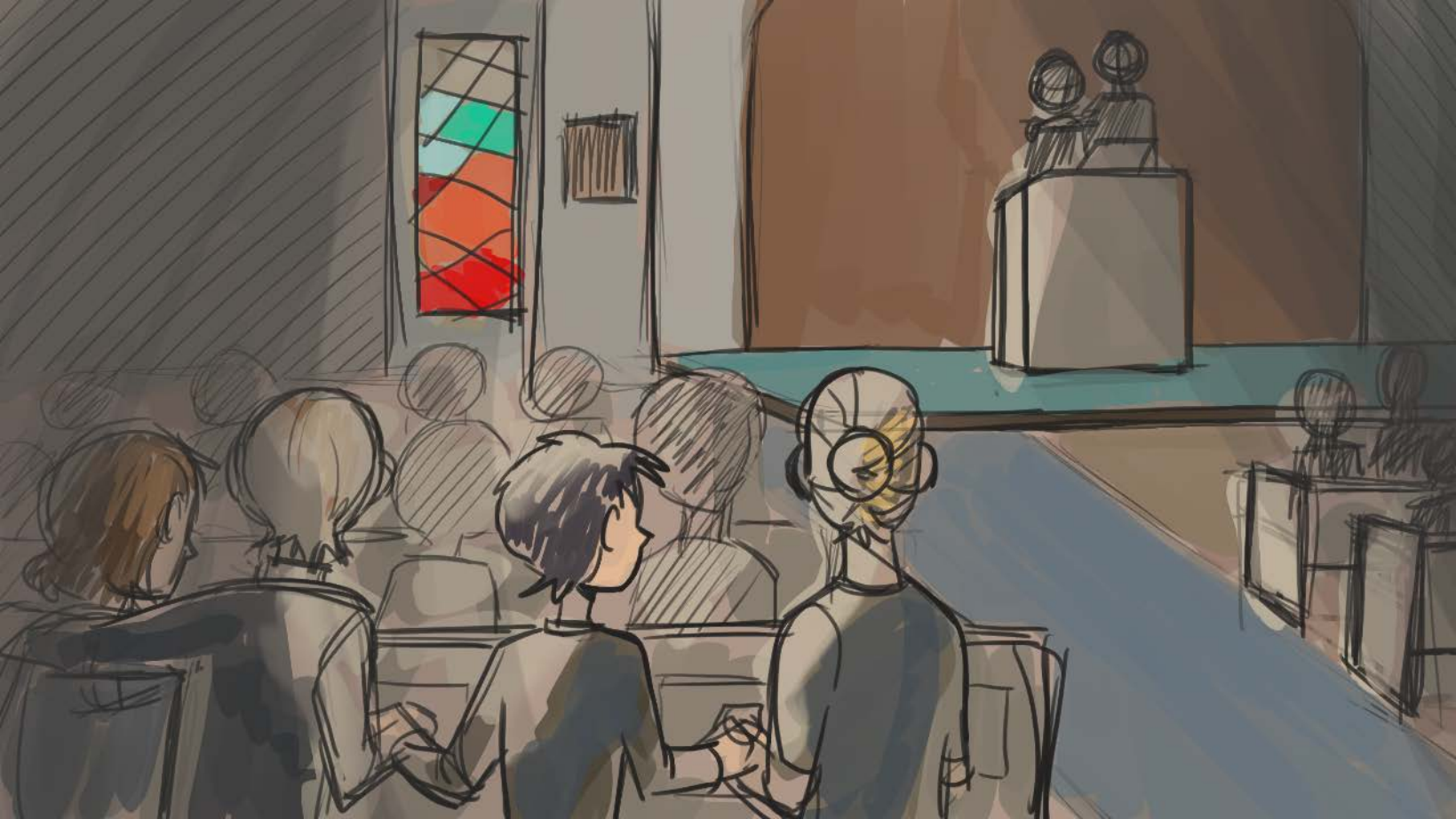
Scene	Duration	Panel	Duration
2	44:00	44	01:00













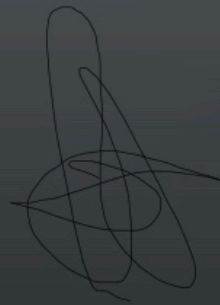
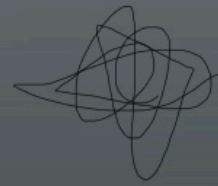
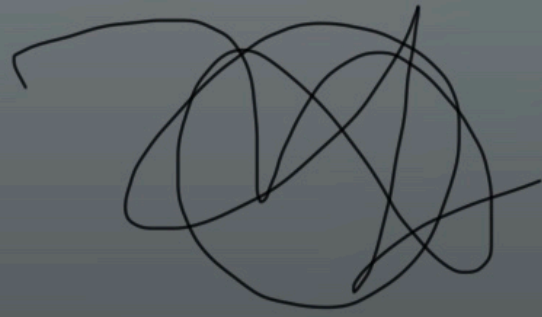
The province of Saskatchewan and New Brunswick has the most active anti-trans legislation. Ontario is considered high risk. (Trianon, 2023).

Recent legislations

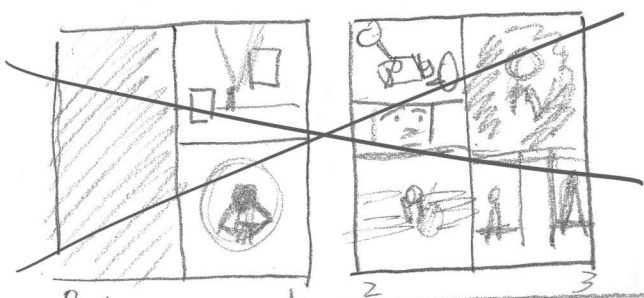
Saskatchewan's "Parents' Bill of Rights" (ie. pronoun law, Bill 137) requires students under the age of 16 to have parental consent if they want their teachers to address them by a name or set of pronouns not in their official documentation. If students come from transphobic families, they are not offered a safe space to be themselves at school. (Long N., 2024)



Can we ever go back in time?



Sabon takes Aler to the room.



reverse

