

Nutopia, A Fantasy Art Model

by Kat Avila



There are many ways to distract one's self at Comic-Con International in San Diego, North America's largest popular culture and comics convention. You can go shopping in the exhibit hall, watch film previews and anime, attend panels and workshops, or browse the art show.

Eventually, I found myself wandering around in the autograph area to see how many celebrities I could recognize. Nutopia was busy at her table signing autographs for fans and posing for photographs.

Nutopia works as a comic book and fantasy art model. She is a dynamic entrepreneur who has grown up around the world and who at one time taught both windsurfing and rock climbing. Born in Hong Kong, she and her identical twin sister spent their first few years in an orphanage before being adopted by an English couple. She's been modeling for about four years.

How many languages do you speak fluently?

I speak French, German, and English fluently, and am computer qualified in all three languages. I also speak a fair amount of Cantonese but am not fluent.

What's your educational background?

I have 12 GCSEs and 4 A-Levels, and a degree in choreography. I have computer qualifications in French, German, and English. Coincidentally, I have never held a job that utilized a single one of my qualifications!

I'm not familiar with the educational system in England. What are GCSEs and A-Levels?

GCSEs are the qualifications you leave high school with in England. One is taken in each subject, six being the minimal you can graduate with. A-Levels are the equivalent to your associate's degree over here.

I am qualified in computers through the RSA [the Royal Society of Arts] and Pitmans [Pitmans Examination Institute] examining bodies in the United Kingdom, though I do not know if they are recognized examining boards in the U.S.A. Study is based on school structure. Classes are taken supplementary to normal GCSE studies. Yes, the education system is different in the UK.

Could you share a little about your interest and training in the martial arts?

I started training about 14 years ago in Hong Kong on my father's second tour there. I initially studied Shotokan karate. I studied this for four years, continuing on my studies in the U.K. I took up Fuma Ryu ninjutsu in the U.K. mainly for its strong emphasis on the value of female training being different from the men. There is a separate respect for women in ninjutsu that is singular and rare in martial arts.

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I also explored other martial arts to enhance my ninjutsu training, kendo and jiu-jitsu mainly. Ninjutsu teaches you how to handle a lot of weapons in martial arts, which fascinated me as many mainstream martial arts offer so little training with weapons.

I further explored other areas of martial arts to become more well-rounded, and found I enjoyed ninjitsu the most and Shotokan for its strong base. I tried taekwondo and some other forms of karate, but none held my interest like ninjutsu. I have trained in England, Hong Kong, Portugal, and America over the past 14 years.

How did you get involved in modeling?

I was at a convention due to a friend whose birthday wish was to meet some actors from the *Xena* TV show. I had never been to a convention before, and I unwittingly struck up a conversation with an actress, Alexandria Tydings. (She portrays Aphrodite on the *Hercules* and *Xena* TV shows). She had some beautiful artwork on her table painted of her by Dorian Cleavenger.

I commented on how beautiful it was, and she told me I'd make a great fantasy art model. I thought she was joking, but not long after that I found myself on a plane heading out to meet with Dorian Cleavenger. I have since been painted four or five times by him, but that is how it started.

What do you do to stay fit and to keep your energy level up?

I love to ride my road bicycle - yes, bicycle - think Lance Armstrong but without the Tour de France. I've been riding for the past couple of years since watching Lance Armstrong win the Tour de France one year on a sporting channel on TV. His determination and perseverance both inspired and pushed me. If Lance can do it, so can I!

I trained with a university team for one season to better acquaint myself with the racing format, and I'm now an avid biker. I have considered taking it up as a sport and actually racing. But I find that when you crash on a bike, it is generally lots of cuts and bruises, especially as I'm usually never going less than 18 miles an hour, which means when I fall, I fall hard, which makes it hard to continually model.

When you show up at a shoot with a knee support or a wrist support and bruising up the side of your leg from your hip to the middle of your thigh, most photographers aren't happy. Generally speaking though, most artists I've worked with don't mind too much as they can cover up most injuries.

You had an opportunity to model for world-renowned fantasy artist Boris Vallejo. But you don't do nudes, so you ended up modeling for his equally talented partner, Julie Bell. Don't you lose a ton of work because you won't pose nude?

Absolutely, but it was a decision I made very early on. I'm a Christian, and I have strong beliefs in my faith. I take my job seriously, but I take my faith more seriously.

There are several reasons why I won't do nudity, the first being my faith, but there are other practical reasons. When I'm older and have a family, I don't want my kids to come up to me one day and show me a nude painting of myself. I want to set an example that other people can follow, children and adults.

I was raised very old-fashioned (as the British tend to be), so nudity is not something that my parents encouraged or supported. When asked by artists or photographers, I usually respond with the following: "I want to create art that you can hang in the family room, not just the bathroom."

It doesn't mean I think any less of anyone who does choose to do nudity. I actually have several friends within the industry that do choose to do nudity. It's simply a personal choice for my own life, and I've made my choice and I'm going to stand by that.



A lot of artists and photographers make an automatic assumption that I will change my mind at some point, but to tell you the truth, I think that the only reason they keep asking is because I keep saying "no." People are fascinated with boundaries and often attempt to push past them. When someone says you can't have something, people want it all the more. It's in our nature as human beings.

Having worked with a number of wonderful artists and photographers, what observations can you share about their creative process? Do they all work the same way?

No two artists work the same way! I thoroughly enjoy the creative process, mainly because I am so involved in it. I don't work with every artist who approaches me. I tend to pick less rather than more. I work with artists that I admire, respect, and whom I want to work with, which is rare as most models take whatever work comes down the pipeline.

But modeling is not my main source of income, so I don't depend upon it like a full-time model would. It allows me the freedom to work with whom I want to work with and to also choose my projects based on its appeal to me rather than the paycheck. I generally have the idea for the piece of artwork and discuss it in detail with the artist first. Sometimes it's the other way around, but always it's a mutual decision.

Every artist I work with I consider it a collaboration, a meeting of two creative minds. I'm often asked for my input and feedback, and I have friendships with the artists that I work with, which adds a dimension to the process because I know they have my best interests in mind, as much as I have theirs in mind when picking poses and ideas.

In issue 31 of Stars Wars Empire, the first Asian bounty hunter Esser Mat was introduced. She was based on your likeness. Does being of Asian ethnicity make you a more valuable commodity because you stand out?

Normally speaking, it makes it harder. There aren't as many Asian characters to represent in the mainstream comic book market. I actually find that it helps me in the fantasy art pin-up community because diversity is both welcomed and celebrated. But for comic books, it's like acting; there aren't that many roles for us.

I am lucky in the sense that there are a lot of roots in the comic book industry (mainly manga, and anime) that are directly Asian, and these roots have a strong foundation and influence in the comic book industry, so I find that I have a lot more doors open to me than if I were acting and trying to find jobs.

Why do you live in Ohio? Do you hate L.A. and New York that much?

"Hate" is a strong word. It's not that I hate either place. I've actually spent time living in both cities. I spent four years living in New York and adored it, but living in New York can be lonely. I remember reading somewhere that New York is the only city where you can walk across the street naked and no one will see you. And it's very much true. Life can swallow you up there, and the pace can be so frenetic sometimes that I forget why I'm doing what I'm doing.

I hate losing touch with myself like that. Whenever that happens, I like to retreat and strengthen my values before it swallows me up. L.A. I found to be quite the opposite. You can spend days not seeing a single soul in L.A. without even trying. I know for some people they welcome that, especially actors or people with any amount of fame who are in the public eye a lot, but I don't enjoy that. That's not to say I wouldn't enjoy it if I had a family or close friends to share it with, but if you're alone in L.A., it can be awfully lonely.

I do have a lot of friends in L.A. who encourage me to move out there, but I'm still holding off on that until I feel ready. I enjoy living in Ohio mainly because it's quiet, but not too quiet. It's clean (not nearly as much smog as L.A. or N.Y.), and a lot of my friends live there. Not to mention a large majority of the artists I work with in the comic book and fantasy art industry are located in Ohio or close by (Kentucky, Pennsylvania, Michigan, New York). So it makes it easier for me to be centrally located to where my work is.

One of your current projects is a comic book. How involved are you? Are you working with someone else on it?

I'm very involved in the comic book project. I've been developing it for the past three years, and am creating and writing the book myself. I have hired the artists to draw the project, and I oversee every aspect of the comic book creation, which is a lot harder and a lot more complex than I anticipated it to be, but it helps me to understand what goes into putting out a comic book.

The creative process is something that I've always enjoyed. Learning to create a comic book is very much like learning to take photos when I work with a photographer. It helps me to do my job better as a model in front of the camera when I know what the person behind the camera requires.

It's the same with comic book modeling. It helps me to know what an artist is looking for when I model for them knowing what I am looking for in my own comic book. I've had a lot of encouragement and advice from people I've worked with in the industry, which helps incredibly, but at this time I am still helming this project solo.

Where can JADE readers find you this year for a photo and autograph?

I am not actually planning any more convention appearances this year other than the Mid-Ohio Comic Con in Columbus, Ohio, which is where I reside currently. But if I do plan appearances, I can be found through my web site events listing page www.Nutopiaproductions.com/events

We would like to hear from you! If you have any comments or questions, please send an e-mail to: writeus@jademagazine.com or click here [Write Us!](#)

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