

BY DAVE CATER



Sandra Chang Art for Art's Sake

Sandra Chang used to be the kid who always was the last to be picked.

"Until I took up martial arts I always sucked at sports," she admits. "No one would ever pick me for their team. I couldn't do aerobics and I wasn't physically gifted."

Growing up in Kingston, N.Y., Chang was an admitted "wall flower" who dreamed of becoming an artist but knew she was destined to become an engineer like her traditional Chinese father. Although she remembers drawing from the age of three, although she won several art contests, Chang was resigned to a life predetermined at birth.

It all changed for Chang in 1992 when she brought her degree in computer science (3.5 GPA) from Columbia University to Southern California. That's when she made the decision to change the shape of her body and her life.

First came budoshin ju jitsu, which she studied for nine years. And for the last five years she's been deeply enmeshed in northern eagle claw. Chang admits she'd always been a Chinese martial arts movies buff, but growing up in a predominantly Caucasian section of New York State never allowed her to bask in her heritage.

"There were not many Asians in my neighborhood and a lot of people made fun of me because I was Asian," she relates. "I was kind of uncomfortable being Chinese in a predominantly white society. But at the same time it made me very proud of my heritage. Bruce Lee™, Jet Li and Jackie Chan were big influences on me. They were doing physically amazing things I hadn't see before."

She had no such trouble being accepted as a jiu-jitsu student. In fact, the new physicality suited Sandra just fine. Plus, the chance to move like Hong Kong's Big Three kept her hungering for more.

"Jiu-jitsu was very empowering, especially when you're small and you can still throw someone," notes the 5-foot-3, 125-pounder. "It was a cool thing to see the mat shake when they hit the ground."

Not coincidentally, the discovery of martial arts also led to a rediscovery of her artistic pursuits. "Martial arts inspired me on both a physi-

cal and artistic level," notes Chang. "I was insecure when I was young but my artwork helped give me confidence and martial arts gave me a good sense of self," explains Chang.

The more her dreams of becoming an artist took shape — she's self-taught, by the way — the more unsettled she became with her chosen martial arts discipline.

"When I started jiu-jitsu, I was thinking of movie martial arts," she says. "I liked throwing people and putting them in pain, but that was not fulfilling; that was not the type of martial art I wanted to take."

After being introduced to northern eagle claw, however, she knew she'd found martial arts nirvana. "I remember after my first class I was so tired I couldn't lift my legs to get into the car. And I was so sore I could not walk

without being hunched over. What a great workout.

Five years and a black sash later, the one nobody wanted is now in constant demand. Chang's work is seen by thousands in several sci-fi comic books, while her two-page lead illustrations are frequently featured in *Inside Kung-Fu*.

Chang maintains her study of eagle claw helps her put the perfect touches to martial arts comic action.

"If you're drawing something that involves anatomy and you don't understand how something moves, you can't do it," she insists. "When I do a fight scene in a comic book, I know what I'm doing."

Chang hopes readers appreciate her attention to detail.

"I always try to do research to make it authentic, to make it really cool," explains Chang. "I want my work to be something I would be excited to see. I really love martial arts and I hope it shows and comes through in my artwork. I want to create something that will inspire people."

Seems this wall flower has blossomed into something everyone would want to pick. 🐼



Name: Sandra Chang
Birthdate: July 10
Birthplace: Kingston, N.Y.
Current Residence: Los Angeles
Height: 5-3 **Weight:** 125
Heritage: Chinese
Education: Columbia University (3.5 GPA)
Degree: Bachelor's in Computer Science
Siblings: Older brother and younger sister
Started Martial Arts: 1993
Styles: Studied budoshin ju jitsu for nine years and northern eagle claw for five years
Instructor(s): Leo Byrd and shihan Robert Wong in jiu-jitsu; sifu Ken Edwards in northern eagle claw
Ranks: 2nd-degree black belt in jiu-jitsu and 1st sash in eagle claw kung-fu
Facts: Co-authored with Samara Simmerman a screenplay that includes kung-fu and sci-fi with a female heroine. Also has worked in comic books for 13 years, most notably *Sin Metal Sirens* and *Sheedeva* for Fantagraphics/Eros Comics.
10 Years From Now: "I hope to be an independent filmmaker and a successful artist whose work is in demand."
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