

CELESTIAL HUMOUR

Writing comics is like making movies

A Singaporean artist has created a new long-running comic set in the tumultuous Warring States Era

By **TEE HUN CHING**

DRAWING comics is like shooting a movie to Mr Wee Tian Beng.

"The storyline has to be developed, characters have to be created, costumes have to be designed, scenes have to be crafted and atmosphere has to be controlled," he says. The artist also has to craft his work from all angles.

"You have to be the protagonist, the director, the martial arts instructor, the costume designer, the lighting guy and the cinematographer.

"On top of that, you have to avoid being influenced by

others and put across your own ideas."

The veteran comics artist, 33, who published his first work, *The New Frontier*, a decade ago, launched his first long-running original series, *The Celestial Zone*, last Saturday.

"I'm very happy because this is completely my own work and there is more room for manifesting my potential," he says.

The series is published bi-monthly by Asiapac Books in both Chinese at \$6.80 per copy and English at \$8.50 per copy.

According to the publishing firm, the Chinese version



Comic book heroes from Wee Tian Beng's *The Celestial Zone*.

is cheaper because more copies are produced.

Set during the tumultuous Warring States Era, the period epic tells of the exploits of a group of characters who battle the evil forces with their extraordinary powers.

Mr Wee says he derives inspiration from the events around him, the books he reads and the celluloid fare he consumes.

Although he is a full-time

comics artist, he has no formal training in the art.

He was the first Singaporean to penetrate the overseas comics market successfully, first with *Astronautics* in Taiwan in 1993 and *Adventures Of Wisely* in Hongkong a year later.

His adaptation of Louis Cha's *Return Of The Condor Heroes*, which took three years to complete from 1995 to 1998, was a big hit both here and in the global comics

market. It has sold 1.5 million copies, which Ms Lim Li Kok, managing director of Asiapac Books, says is a record for a homegrown comics series.

The translation rights for the work were also sold to Hongkong, Taiwan, Indonesia, Thailand and Korea.

The artist, who won the Prestigious Award in the 1997 Asian Comics Conference held in Korea, has eight comics titles under his belt.

Story comics, a mainstay of his childhood literary diet, sparked off his interest in the art of what some call "paper movies".

The infinite possibilities for ideas the genre allows also fascinate Mr Wee, who holds a diploma in advertising art.

"Things that cannot happen in real life can, however, take place in comics. As such, the challenge is truly immense, but so is the satisfaction," he says.

Ms Lim reveals that there are plans to produce a line of memorabilia, such as animation and computer games for *The Celestial Zone*.

"We definitely want to develop the product more than just as a book.

"We'll explore other avenues when the time is mature.

"We see this as a long-term project that will last a few years," she says.