

Text LAVINIA NG
Illustrations WEE IAN BENG

MANGA CREATOR OF THE CELESTIAL ZONE

From a young age, *manga* (Japanese comics) creator **Wee Tian Beng** has always loved reading comics. Even when he entered the advertising world, he still drew comics part-time.



EVENTUALLY, his work was spotted by a Taiwanese publisher and in 1993, he left his advertising job and drew comics full-time.

Tian Beng clearly enjoys what he does. "It doesn't seem to be work for me," he said. "In fact, I have fun everyday. I don't have to send my work up for approval by bosses. I draw whatever I like. I guess I'm lucky in that sense."

Comics have always held a certain attraction for him. "For me, it's easier to digest and understand than books. Besides, the pictures are gorgeous."

Tian Beng is the author and lead illustrator of the period epic comic series *The Celestial Zone*. His other works include the science fiction-based *Dream Allegory*, *Escapist Choice*, *Astronautics*, *The New Frontier*, *The Adventures of Wisely* and the *Return of the Condor Heroes*.

In 1993, with his *Astronautics* comics, Tian Beng became the first full-time Singaporean manga artist to break into the Taiwanese and Hong Kong manga markets.

BEHIND THE PASSION



In 1994, Tian Beng was invited to portray the novels of famous writers like Ni Kuang and Jing Yong through manga with *The Adventures of Wisely* and *The Return of the Condor Heroes* respectively.

In 1997, he received "The Asian Comics Prestigious Award" in Seoul, South Korea, at the Asian Comics Conference for the *Return of the Condor Heroes*.

In 1997, Tian Beng began his most important work in his manga artist career by creating *The Celestial Zone* series and other supplementary works. With this work, editions in both Chinese and English were published and distributed to various places including Europe, the US, Canada and Australia.

In 2001, he started his own company, TCZ Studio.

In 2003, Tian Beng published a pioneering work in the field of digital manga with the first local full-colour series manga *The Celestial Zone II*, with a total number of 40 volumes. In the same year, he was also invited to be a guest speaker by the Shanghai Pearl Tower's First International Manga Art Festival.

In 2005, he was invited for Sichuan Television's Sichuan Television and Animation Festival for a speaking engagement as well as an exhibition of about 100 artworks by Tian Beng at the Manga Master's Centre.

In April 2006, the French edition of Tian Beng's manga *The Celestial Zone* was released in Paris, France. This September would see the launch of the Spanish edition.

Tian Beng is not resting on his laurels. By the end of this year, he will be launching *The Celestial Zone Mobile Games*, followed by *The Celestial Zone 21 Mobile Comics*, wallpaper and mobile games in China and Europe. TCZ Studios will also have its own WAP site that allows users to download these contents with their handphones. Currently, talks are underway with various animation companies, both local and overseas, for the possibility of creating a *Celestial Zone* animation. **AGEO**

PRODUCTION PROCESS

Tian Beng explained how he would go about creating manga. He first sets the theme and determines how many years the story series would run. After setting a basic beginning and conclusion to the story, he fills in the details such as a character's weaknesses and strengths. The dialogues and screen layout come next. The artwork is then passed to another illustrator who completes the inking process such as the clothes, weapons and fighting sequences. The background artist takes over and completes the last stage of the drawing process. When all the line work has been completed, the artwork is passed to the graphic artists in charge of colouring. One artist is in charge of colouring the background, controlling the 'feel' of the comics while the other two artists are in charge of colouring the characters and the overall colour management. Tian Beng then inspects every box and page of the comics to ensure that the colours are well-coordinated. The pages of the coloured artwork will be passed to a layout artist who will arrange the dialogue in their respective bubbles.



THE COMIC SERIES HAS MAINTAINED ITS POPULARITY AMONG READERS BECAUSE OF ITS ENGAGING STORYLINE SET DURING THE WARRING STATES ERA IN CHINA. DURING THAT PERIOD, IT WAS A TIME OF MAYHEM WROUGHT BY RIVAL DUKES IN THEIR STRUGGLE FOR POWER. IN A REALM KNOWN AS THE CELESTIAL ZONE, THERE LIVED TWO GROUPS OF PEOPLE WITH EXTRAORDINARY SKILLS, ONE GOOD AND ONE EVIL. FEEDING UPON THE CHAOS, THE EVIL REALM GRADUALLY GREW IN STRENGTH AND WREAKED HAVOC ON EARTH. A GROUP OF UPRIGHT YOUTHS EMERGED FROM THE CELESTIAL ZONE AND SOUGHT TO WIPE OUT THE PREVAILING EVIL.

