



Comic creators' foray into fantasy

Clio Hui re-imagines angel and demon lore, while Scott Lee Chua puts a Filipino twist on cosmic time travel

Olivia Ho

Two emerging comic creators based in Singapore are stepping into the realm of fantasy for their debut graphic novels.

Yale-National University of Singapore (NUS) student Scott Lee Chua wrote *Doorkeeper* – which puts a Filipino twist on cosmic time travel –

with his childhood friend Ethan Chua.

Web designer Clio Hui re-imagines angel and demon lore in her trilogy *A Deal With Lucifer*, which is produced with local comics studio TCZ in English and Chinese.

The Chuas, both 19, who are from the Philippines and are not related, met in nursery school.

Before they were to part ways to head to university – Scott to Yale-NUS to study economics and Ethan to Stanford University to major in physics – they decided they wanted to fulfil their dream of writing a graphic novel together.

Fans of Neil Gaiman's fantasy series *The Sandman*, they drew on his character, Destiny of the

Endless, to conceive the *Doorkeeper*, a cosmic being who moves through time and space.

He appears at pivotal moments to people throughout Filipino history and myth – from a prehistoric monster-slayer to a nuclear scientist who could bring about the world's destruction – and presents them with the possible paths that will unspool from their decisions.

It took the Chuas more than a year to write the graphic novel, mostly over Skype. They gathered nine artists to illustrate the six-chapter book, often by going table to table at comic conventions to pitch their idea to strangers.

The *Doorkeeper's* appearance thus varies from chapter to chapter, as each artist was given leeway to design the doors that constitute his face.

For a chapter set in the 1980s, in which a musician must decide whether or not to risk her safety by playing in a politically sensitive concert, artist Gia Dominique Duran breaks template by making the *Doorkeeper's* face an owl.

"We are hoping to fill the gap in terms of Filipino comics on the world stage," says Scott, who is single. "The Art Of Charlie Chan Hock Chye (by Singaporean Sonny Liew) got there first and that was one of our inspirations."

"While there is so much talent in the comics industry of the Philippines, unless it gets recognised on the world stage, the audience will always be limited. We'd like to be the ones to make a dent in the status quo."

Hui, 34, loved anime such as *Sailor Moon* as a teenager, but began drawing comics only in 2014,

when she came across a call for submissions from local comics studio TCZ.

The Web designer wrote and illustrated the trilogy, *A Deal With Lucifer*, in which high-school student Hikari forms a contract with the fallen angel Lucifer, who appears in the book in female form.

As Hikari discovers his considerable powers as the son of the demon Lamia and her human lover, angels, demons and the human Exorcism Council all try to claim him for their side in a brewing war.

Hui, who is married with no children, was mentored by local comics veteran Wee Tian Beng, creator of the best-selling *The Celestial Zone* series and founder of TCZ Studio.

"He was strict and straightforward," she says.

"He would say, 'Your characters need to attend acting class' because they weren't expressive enough. Or 'The production fee is low here', by which he meant I was drawing the upper body well, but not bothering to show the bottom half."

Hui, who is working on the next season in the series, says: "The Singapore market is small and the older generation still views comics as just entertainment."

"If your children go to the library, you don't encourage them to borrow comics."

She hopes, however, that opinions about local comics are changing.

"I'm glad to see people who bought my first book coming back for the second and third."

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Clio Hui (above left) wrote and illustrated the trilogy, *A Deal With Lucifer*, while Scott Lee Chua (above) co-wrote *Doorkeeper*.

PHOTOS: DESMOND WEE, DON WONG FOR THE STRAITS TIMES

• *Doorkeeper* (\$15, delivery included) is available for order through tinyurl.com/yc8sqolx

• *A Deal With Lucifer* Volumes 1 to 3 (\$13.05 a book) is available at Books Kinokuniya and tczstudio.com