

Asian, Asian-American heroes to power Marvel comics series

By Terry Tang
The Associated Press

Asian superheroes — assemble. Marvel Comics is giving ink to an unprecedented team-up of its mightiest Asian and Asian-American heroes, also known as the *New Agents of Atlas*. Established icons such as martial-arts master Shang-Chi and newbies like Wave, the newest Filipino superhero, will team up in a stand-alone, five-part comic book series starting this summer, the publishing giant has told The Associated Press.

The roster of 10 super-powered pan-Asian champions made their debut as a team in May in *The War of the Realms: New Agents of Atlas*. That comic book is one piece of an ongoing saga involving several different groups across the Marvel universe, including the Avengers, doing battle with a fire goddess. But the exclusively Asian limited series is set to roll out in August.

The man leading the heroic charge is veteran comic book writer Greg Pak. Pak is credited with ushering in a new era of Asian characters in co-creating Amadeus Cho, a Korean-American genius teen. The character first appeared in 2005. A decade later, he absorbed the Hulk's powers and started going by Brawn.

"It's always been my dream to do a team book using a bunch of Asian and Asian-American heroes," said Pak, who thinks there's more appetite for representation with the success of the movie *Crazy Rich Asians*. "There's literally never been a better time in my memory with more opportunities for doing work that specifically includes Asian and Asian-American characters."

The decades-old character of Agent Jimmy Woo (portrayed by Randall Park in last year's *Ant-Man and the Wasp* movie) leads the pack as head of the revived secret protection society Atlas. Others getting in on the action include Brawn and Cindy Moon, who is the Korean-American web-shooter Silk.

Other recruits have only previously been seen in Marvel video games or web comics available exclusively in Asian countries. Among them is Korea-born Luna Snow a.k.a. Seol Hee, a K-pop star who can manipulate frozen elements. There's also Aero and Sword Master, the products of creatives in China. Besides crime-fighting, the group will spend time doing things like eating dim sum or singing karaoke.

"That kind of diversity within diversity is amazing," said Pak, who is half Korean and half white. "No one character here has to represent all Asian-ness or Asian-American-ness. That's a ridiculous demand for any character."

The rest of the "Atlas" creative team includes writer Jeff Parker and artists Nico Leon and Carlo Pagulayan. In the series, the do-gooders find that someone has flipped a switch and created a "cross-Asian portal city" called Pan. In Pan, Asian neighborhoods get geographically scrambled and then stitched together into one city. So, the streets of Tokyo could be next to neighborhoods from Honolulu, Manila, and some of Marvel's fictitious Asian countries.

Filipino-American blogger Loren Javier, 50, discusses Marvel comics on his "Castles, Capes & Clones" podcast and blog. There were few Asian characters in the lexicon he could look up to as a child, and many were often stereotypical mystics or man-servants.

"I love Marvel but I didn't necessarily see myself in the comics," said Javier, who recalls being teased by a classmate who called him "the enemy."

"Now, finally, I think about kids who are reading this new generation of comics and heroes and getting to see themselves a little bit more," Javier said. "It's very



TWO-DOZEN TRIUMPH. Nepalese veteran Sherpa guide Kami Rita, 49, is welcomed by his wife at the airport in Kathmandu, Nepal, on May 25, 2019. The Sherpa mountaineer extended his record for successful climbs of Mount Everest with his 24th ascent of the world's highest peak. (AP Photo/Niranjan Shrestha)

Nepal's record-setting Everest guide returns a hero

KATHMANDU, Nepal (AP) — Family, friends, and supporters welcomed a veteran Sherpa guide upon his return to Nepal's capital days after his 24th climb of Mount Everest extended his record.

After flying back from Everest to Kathmandu, Kami Rita was greeted by the waiting crowd at the airport. His wife hugged him and the crowd covered him with a cream-colored scarf and offered him yogurt.

The brief celebration at the airport parking area with traditional drums was followed by Rita riding on a truck waving to supporters as they drove out of the airport.

He told reporters he was very happy but exhausted.

Rita reached the summit of Everest's 29,035-foot peak for the second time, having reached the top of the world's highest peak a week earlier, on May 15. He returned to base camp after the first climb then headed back up.

The climbs bring Rita, 49, closer to his target of 25 ascents of Everest before he retires from high mountain climbing. His two closest peers have climbed Everest 21 times each, but both of them have retired from mountain climbing.

There are 41 teams with a total of 378 climbers permitted to scale Everest during the spring climbing season. An equal number of Nepalese guides are helping them get to the summit.

Eleven climbers have died this climbing season, most of them while descending from the summit during only a few windows of good weather. Most are believed to have suffered from altitude sickness, which is caused by low amounts of oxygen at high elevation and can cause headaches, vomiting, shortness of breath, and mental confusion.

Among the fatalities was British climber Robin Haynes Fisher, 44.

Murari Sharma, managing director of Everest Parivar Expedition Pvt Ltd, said Fisher and his Sherpa guide reached the summit at around 8:30am on May 25 and had descended 490 feet when he fell unconscious. A group of Sherpas changed his oxygen bottle and tried to give him some water but he could not be revived, he said.

Rita first scaled Everest in 1994 and has been making the trip nearly every year since.

His father was among the first Sherpa guides employed to help climbers reach the summit. Rita followed in his footsteps and then some. In addition to his two dozen summits of Everest, Rita has scaled some of the other highest mountains, including K-2, Cho-Oyu, Manaslu, and Lhotse.

Sherpa tribespeople were mostly yak herders and traders living deep within the Himalayas until Nepal opened its borders in the 1950s. Their stamina and familiarity with the mountains quickly made them sought-after guides and porters.



AMAZING ASIANS. This image provided by Marvel shows the cover of the first issue in *New Agents of Atlas*, Marvel Comics' five-part standalone comic-book series set to roll out in August 2019. The series features established icons such as martial-arts master Shang-Chi and newbies like Wave, the newest Filipino superhero. (Jung-Geun Yoon/Marvel via AP)

powerful." Charlie Kiriara, who is half Japanese and half white, was thrilled by *New Agents of Atlas* and tweeted at Pak and Marvel pleading for more content.

Kiriara, 26, said it was a welcome change to see characters who represented Asian and American cultures in *The War of the Realms*.

"I read through the book and realized that was the first time I've read a comic book that was all these Asian characters and that wasn't manga written in Japan," Kiriara said, referring to a genre of comics or graphic novels. "I want to see it have legs beyond this storyline."

That's Pak's wish as well. But it depends on how Marvel finds the fan response.

"If people buy the heck out of it, I'm happy to keep writing them," Pak said.



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