

Physics, art and the world of Tomorrow

UC Davis alumnus publishes second graphic novel

By ZACK FREDERICK
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Although he graduated from UC Davis in 1983 with a degree in physics, award-winning writer and cartoonist Brian Fies has found himself using his knowledge of science to make art.

Fies' second graphic novel, *Whatever Happened to the World of Tomorrow?*, will be released in mid-June. Examining the 20th century, the novel explores the bygone golden age of technology and puzzles over its disappearance.

"*WHTTWOT?* is about the era of technological utopia when people thought science and technology would make everything better instead of worse. There was time when scientists, politicians and captains of industry were good guys," Fies said. "I grew up in part of that time and I wanted to capture what it was like and what happened to it."

Fies points to his undergraduate work at UC Davis — where he studied physics, minored in English and worked as a cartoonist and

columnist for *The California Aggie* — as an important part of his development as a graphic novelist.

"Physics and science can do things for you that you wouldn't normally imagine in terms of a career. Among other things, my new book is about the space race and the

evolution of electronics, from vacuum tubes to resistors to microelectronics," he said. "All the things that I talk about in this new book are informed by my background in science. I've been able to combine science with my interest in other things like writing, art and cartooning, and

it's enriched everything I've done."

Fies' first graphic novel, *Mom's Cancer*, came as a result of his own mother being diagnosed with cancer in 2004. Unsure of what to do with the comic, Fies posted the first third of the novel online and told a few friends. He soon had thousands of visitors reading the comic online, brought by positive word of mouth.

"The fact that I had so many thousands of visitors and the attention I got allowed me to

sell the book to publishers," he said. "Without the web comic, *Mom's Cancer* probably wouldn't have been published."

Much as Fies' publishing success is a story drawn from the new digital age of blogs and online popularity, the graphic novel continues to be a medium that is just beginning to be properly explored.

"I don't see graphic novels as a substitute for prose literature," he said. "Graphic novels are about telling stories that are best told through the combination of words and pictures together. It's a unique medium with a lot of untapped potential."

Fies sees creative success as the ability to combine different areas of expertise into a unique work.

"Learn as much as you can about things other than what you're interested in. There will always be people who can write and draw better than you. You have to offer that special education, experience or interest that only you have — that's what makes your work interesting to someone else."

For more information on Fies, check out his blog at brianfies.blogspot.com.

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Brian Fies
writer