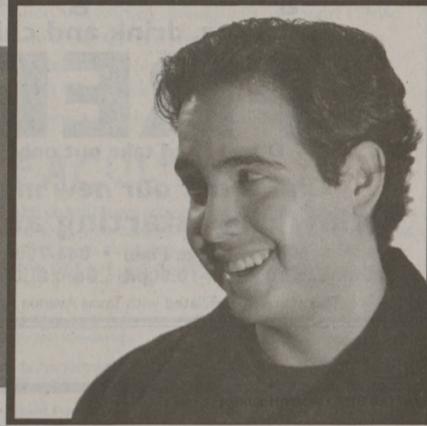
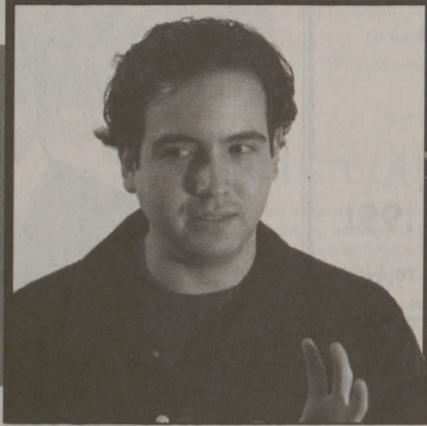
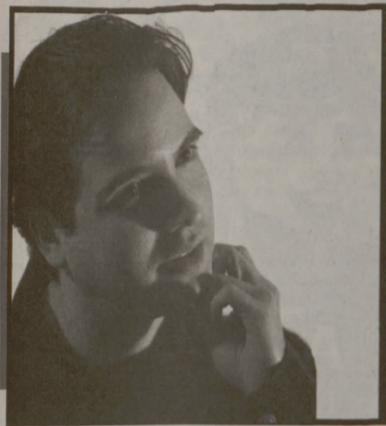


AGGIELIFE

THE BATTALION

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By Kim Katopodis
THE BATTALION

The Face behind the Fish

Ruben DeLuna strolled up to the checkout at Blockbuster and handed the clerk his card. The clerk, recognizing his name said, "Are you the guy who does (the comic) 'Fish'?" DeLuna replied, "Yeah, that's me, and I think I have some fines." With a gleam in his eye, the clerk countered, "Not anymore."

Known to his fans as simply R. DeLuna, Ruben DeLuna, a graduate student in visualization sciences, is the comic mastermind behind one of The Battalion's longest-running comics, "Fish." DeLuna has been drawing "Fish" for 11 semesters and has recently published a collection of the first 10 semesters of his comic in the book, "Fish out of Water."

Before "Fish," though, DeLuna had always drawn. "I've been drawing since I can remember. I mean, I was drawing little comic books since I was little — you know, superheroes and that kind of stuff, but I had never really drawn a comic strip."

His first comic was in high school. "There was a contest in high school and they would take comic book submissions and they would print the best submissions, so I got that they printed it," DeLuna said. "I was probably the only one that entered so ... it was super awesome or anything, and actually, the comic they printed in there was called 'Scoot and Eightball.' Scoot is a character I made up, and it's actually the same character I carried over into 'Fish.' So that's where he came from, sort of an homage to the comic that ran in high school."

The "Fish" odyssey started DeLuna's sophomore year when he started drawing "Fish" for The Battalion.

"When I first started out, my whole week would be just one story line. Now I kind of abandoned the story lines and come up with different topics everyday," DeLuna said. "A lot of times, when stuff bothers me or I'm kind of ticked off about something — police officers, PTTS, whatever — usually I take my wrath out through my comic. It's kind of a misuse of power."

Students, such as sophomore education major Jennifer Garrison, say they enjoy DeLuna's A&M social commentary.

"He came out with one comic that I just found to be so pertinent," Garrison said. "It was about the Southside Parking Garage and how people could park there on a first-come, first-serve basis and those of us who paid for a spot were just out of luck."

Garrison said her roommate also reads "Fish" everyday and that they always talk about it.

"We're always asking each other 'did you see 'Fish' today?'" she said.

DeLuna said his ideas come from a variety of sources, but a few of his characters are based on people in his life.

"Middle-aged Larry was actually based on someone in my freshman year math class," DeLuna said. "He was just a guy who was really, well, middle-aged, and he just looked like a Larry to me. He just looked out of place and how he looked is actually how the guy in the comic looks."

The character Tisdale is named after a friend

of his from high school, and the character Ryan is named after his brother.

"(Ryan) is the character I use to express my views, and if something happens to him, something similar to that probably happened to me," he said.

Ryan's girlfriend in "Fish" is based on DeLuna's real-life girlfriend Sarah Fowler, also a visualization sciences graduate student. The two met in one of their graduate classes. They dated for more than a semester before Fowler's character, Flower, appeared in DeLuna's comic.

"He didn't really ask me if he could do it, but he had been mentioning adding a girlfriend character it, so it wasn't a big surprise or anything," Fowler said. "There was actually a secret appearance of me the semester before on Valentine's Day, but the character got a different look when she became a regular."

Fowler said the one thing she doesn't like about her character is that she is too serious.

"I'm like, 'Why can't my character ever be

funny?'" and he's like, 'You are the voice of reason,' so I get characterized in that way," she said.

DeLuna said a lot of people write him by e-mail or through his Web site.

"I had a few people that e-mailed me and said, 'Hey why don't you put these all together of make a book' or 'If you ever published a book, I would be the first in line to buy it,'" DeLuna said. "So it's always been in the back of my head."

Sometimes fans get a little overzealous in their mail to DeLuna.

"There was a girl who read the comic pretty often and would write me and say that pretty much everything I ever wrote about, she was just thinking about the day before," DeLuna said. "She just thought it was really freaky that I was almost reading her mind ... She said it jokingly but she said, 'Sometimes I think we're soul mates.'"

DeLuna didn't know how to go about publishing a book, but began to look into it.

"There was actually a place online that was offering book publishing and they would print your book if you would just send it to them," he said. "I had to lay everything out myself. I laid it out and made the cover myself. It took two or three weeks. I worked on it over the Christmas break."

DeLuna's book is now available through his Web site, www.rdeluna.com, and he is in the process of talking with bookstores around town to have them sold locally.

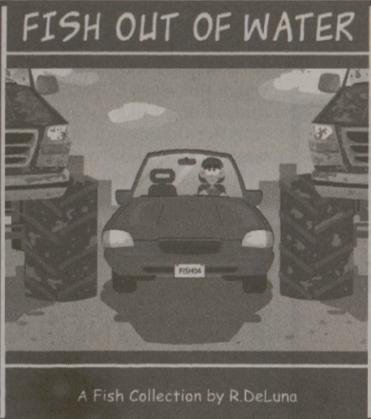
"I want to see if they would be interested in carrying it so more people will know that it's out there," DeLuna said.

With a master's degree in visualization sciences, DeLuna will have many options after graduation this spring, just not any that necessarily have to do with comic strips.

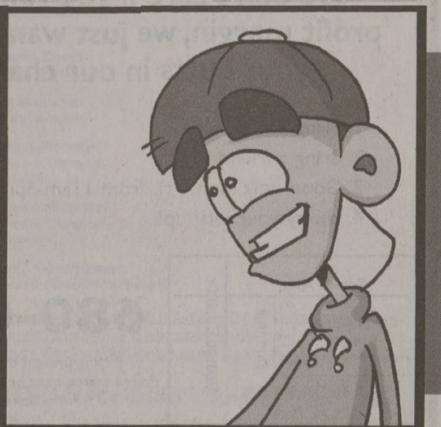
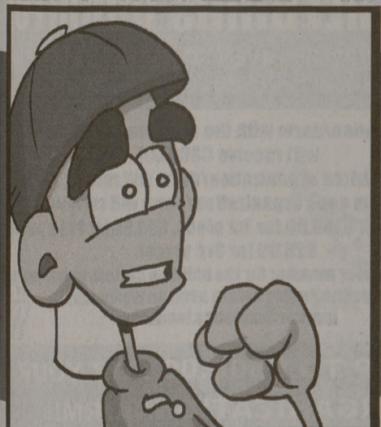
"The comic thing is kind of backup occupation number four," DeLuna said. "If it happened, that would be cool, but I'm not banking on it."

The thing that most interests DeLuna is something in the arts end of graphic design.

"The program I'm in does computer animation and graphics, so I will be working in the graphics field," DeLuna said. "With my experience working at the newspaper and my master's degree, I will be doing graphics somehow. If the opportunity presented itself, I would love to do movies. I just want something more on the art end."



Fish Out of Water
A Fish collection by R. DeLuna
Available at www.rdeluna.com



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