

## From the Sci-Fi Shelves

By Laura Stoll, Assistant to the Director

On a recent trip to visit my parents' house, I was delighted to have a chance to take a peek at the big bookshelf in their study. It contains family photos, mementos, and of course, lots of books. Some of the books are the same ones they had there when I was little, which was a nice trip down memory lane.

When I took a closer look, it was pretty easy to tell which shelves belonged to my mom and which were my dad's. My mom and I have similar tastes in books (new, popular fiction) while my dad reads primarily science fiction. In honor of my dad, here are a few books from his shelf that piqued my interest.

"Termination Shock" by Neil Stephenson. I actually bought this for my dad for Christmas last year because I know he's a fan of all of Stephenson's books. Indeed, he told me as soon as he finished reading it that he really enjoyed it. According to the publisher, the novel is "a prescient new thriller that transports readers to a near-future world in which the greenhouse effect has inexorably resulted in a whirling-dervish troposphere of superstorms, rising sea levels, global flooding, merciless heat waves, and virulent, deadly pandemics." Although it's shelved as science fiction, it seems frighteningly real!

In contrast to that new hardcover, one of the oldest-looking books on my dad's shelf is "I, Robot" by Isaac Asimov. The book is a compilation of short stories that form a larger narrative about robots, humanity, and questions of existence. In addition to being a prolific author of more than 500 books, Asimov worked as a biochemistry professor at Boston University, which happens to be my alma mater.

The author that takes up the most real estate on my dad's shelf is Orson Scott Card. Card is the only author to win the Hugo and Nebula Awards back-to-back for "Enders Game" and "Speaker for the Dead." Card has written more than 50 books over the course of his career, which spans from the late 1970s to 2022, which explains my dad's large collection.

Another book on my dad's shelf that I gave him as a gift is "What If?" by Randall Munroe. This book claims to provide serious scientific answers to absurdly hypothetical questions like, "How dangerous is it, really, to be in a pool during a thunderstorm?" This book seems like a great idea for dads, in particular, who often find themselves having to answer complex questions from curious children. For example, as family legend goes, my brother once asked our parents where electricity came from as we were driving through Newark airport trying to pick someone up from a trip. It was a great question but maybe not the most convenient time to ask it!

Finally, ever since he started his career working on computer systems in a large corporation, my dad has been a fan of Dilbert, the comic created by Scott Adams. On his

desk sits a page-a-day Dilbert calendar, a plush figure rests above his computer, and “The Dilbert Principle” is on his bookshelf. What makes the Dilbert character so funny is his relatability; according to Adams, many of his comics came directly from memos and quotes from his own workplace. As I flipped through the book, I saw that although I assumed Dilbert would be dated to the corporate world of the 1990s, the jokes are just as funny and relevant today.

The best part of exploring my dad’s bookshelves dawned on me as I was putting the finishing touches on this column. As I was looking at the Asimov book, I realized it was nearby Orson Scott Card, and Neal Stephenson was much further to the right and on a lower shelf. It only took a second for this librarian to realize that her father has his bookshelves alphabetized by author! I always knew where my love of books came from; now I know where I got my love of keeping them organized.