

Dad gives his kids the world — in this case, Spectraland

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Writing a sci-fi novel became a family project for Brian Tashima and his son, Torin.

You love your kids. You'd give them the world if you could. But would you, could you, create a world just for them?

Brian Tashima isn't quite sure what spurred the question, and, truth be told, he wasn't quite sure what to say when his then 11-year-old son, Torin, asked if he would write a book for him — a book just like the sci-fi and fantasy novels they both loved.

“My first reaction was, ‘Uh, no,’” Tashima recalled with a chuckle. “But actually I had wanted to do something like that my whole life, I just never had the right inspiration or motivation. So I thought maybe this is the time. It could be a cool project for him and me.”

Tashima, who grew up in Hawaii and now lives in Vancouver, Wash., is no stranger to

the creative impulse. A financial analyst by day, he moonlights as the lead singer and lead guitarist of Second Player Score, a band that also features Hawaii-born bassist Daniel Downs. In the 1990s he fronted the local rock band Tone Deaf Teens and operated his own label, Crash the Luau Records.

Still, writing a full-blown novel was uncharted territory for the Leilehua graduate. He joined writing groups, studied crafting fiction and relied on instincts finely honed by a lifetime of reading within the genre. He also solicited input from Torin, who wanted the protagonist to have special powers, and daughter Melody, who requested “cute animals.”

But Tashima's vision for the project had an added dimension, so to speak.

Tashima wanted to create a world in which someone very much like Torin — a bright, talented kid who just happens to have Asperger's syndrome — could excel because of, not in spite of, his condition.

Thus was born Joel Suzuki, would-be teen rock star and unwitting champion of faraway Spectraland.

“In Spectraland, Asperger's becomes the source of Joel's power,” Tashima explains. “For him, Asperger's is not a handicap or an obstacle, it's what allows him to save the day.”

What started as a family project eventually morphed into something larger.

“Secret of the Songshell” was published in 2012 to warm reviews and much appreciation from people with autism and their families and friends. “Mystery of the Moonfire,” the second installment of the seven-part Spectraland Saga, was just released.

Tashima said he hopes the books will help to erase the stigma of being on the autism spectrum and inspire others to learn more about the condition and those who live with it. To that end he's participated in numerous Skype chats with schools in the U.S. and abroad and has donated a generous portion of the books' proceeds to Washington-based Autism Empowerment.

“It's become a real-life quest for Torin and me,” Tashima said.

To learn more about Tashima's work, visit 808ne.ws/1o0yOBB.