

BROTHERTON: The astronomers find an asteroid that's going to hit us. And that enables us to save the world. Astronomy will pay for itself a million times over. But there's a lot of things that we do. I study quasars halfway across the entire universe. They're not relevant to our existence. They're not likely to be relevant to our existence.

But I think a society that values knowledge, that values a basic understanding of the universe and our place in it, I think that's an incredibly valuable thing. And that's what I value about our civilization, and one of the reasons I'm a scientist. I don't want to just get up in the morning, go to work, make some money, go home, watch TV, go to bed. And I don't think average people want to do that, either. They want to be engaged in the whole process.

Their tax dollars go toward astronomy, other basic science. They should get a return. They should be able to look up in the sky. Instead of feeling, gee, I'm so small, they should feel like, wow. We're a great species that has figured out how big the universe is, how old the universe is. And that doesn't make us small. That makes us large.

Ideally with something like science fiction and writing for students, or trying to communicate with students, you want to do the same kind of things, entertaining and educating. You still need to communicate some difficult concepts sometimes. And one technique is to relate things to the everyday experience. So if you can find an example.

If you're talking about some abstract thing about the evolution of stars, nobody has every day experience with the evolution of stars. So you find some analogy. You draw some parallel with something that they may encounter every day. And this works for general audiences, whether for entertainment or for education. So that's one example.