

What's on my nightstand?

While there is a great deal of politics- local, national, and international that begs discussion, I'm pretty sure that is how to create hostility, and since this is only my second attempt at this, it is too soon to make enemies.

I once heard that were 3 topics that shouldn't be discussed on the bridge of a warship. Politics, religion, and sex. Discussing politics or religion led to arguments and discussing sex led to distractions. And neither arguments nor distractions could be tolerated on the bridge of a warship. I couldn't find the origin of that, but while looking for a source, I came across the following quote "There is a reason why it used to be that politics, religion, and sex were not topics for polite conversation. It is because our grandparents knew that while everyone is legally entitled to vote, pray, and fuck, the vast majority of people aren't competent to do any one of the three properly." — J.K. Franko. I have no idea who J. K. Franko is or was, but, I agree with the sentiment.

In that light, I'll avoid politics, at least for now.

So, what will I discuss.

October is National Book Month. Who knew? I love books all year long.

When I visit someone's home, like many curious people, I look at what books are on their shelves and tables. So, in honor of national book month I thought I'd share what I've recently finished, what I'm reading and what's in the queue.

I do read more than books. I subscribe and read everyday the electronic editions of the New York Times and the Washington Post. It is one of the joys of retirement that I have the time to do that.

Books. There are a lot, since I read with different technologies and for different purposes.

I spend a fair bit of time floating in my pool listening to recorded books (I have a waterproof MP3 player). Since I have a tendency to fall asleep during these sessions, I go for lighter reading. I pick books that if and when I fall asleep and then wake up it isn't critical to figure out how much I slept through. Right now I'm in the last volume of the Glass and Steele books by C.J. Archer. "The Goldsmith's Conspiracy" is the 13 and last book in the series, which takes place in an 1890s London, where magic is real, but, hidden. Since the series has 13 volumes it has been a while since I listened to anything else while floating or doing pool maintenance.

In print (and honestly, I don't do much in print reading since you have to remember to carry the book with you and they get heavy!) I just ordered "We of Little Faith" by Kate Cohen. I've started it as a library ebook (Hoopla through the Miami Dade Public Library System), but I want a physical copy. On October 3rd there was an excerpt in the Washington Post, and now I'm not content to read it, I want to have it.

Books I've recently finished include Georgi Gospodinov's "Time Shelter," which was recommended to me by a former student. Not only was it fascinating, but, the style and narrative structure were something very different from the usual. Also recommended by a student is Osamu Dazai's "No Longer Human." A much darker take on the universe

than I usually enjoy, but, I think it is important to expose oneself to different world views and if a former student (OK, at this point they are all former) recommends a book or a musical group I do my best to give it a shot.

I'm working my way through the Warlord Series by Bernard Cornwell. As a rule I like his historical fiction and years ago ate up the Sharpe series and more recently the Last Kingdom Series (yes I also watched both TV series).

Another series I try and keep up with is Robert Galbraith's Cormoran Strike series. Actually, there is no Robert Galbraith. It is a pen name for J. K. Rowling. She wanted to write something completely different from Harry Potter and not be judged in comparison. Hence, Robert Galbraith. The most recent one, "The Running Grave," just came out and I snapped it up and only recently finished. Now I wait for the next book! The reader is Robert Glenister, who does a great job, and whose voice I recognized from the TV show Hustle. (His voice is similar to that of his brother Philip, who starred in Life on Mars and Ashes to Ashes). And again, yes, I've watched the British TV series based on the Cormoran Strike books.

My wife and I share an audio book when we are either relaxing in the pool together or driving somewhere. Right now, we're listening to Jennifer Egan's "A visit from the Goon Squad." In our queue are the Phryne Fisher books by Kerry Greenwood. There are over 20 books in that series, so we are holding off starting. There have been TV shows and movie spin-offs, which we also try to keep up with.

So, rather than start a series that is over 140 hours, next up in our audiobook queue is "Making it So," written and read by Patrick Stewart.

One of the interesting joys in audiobooks I hadn't thought of when I used to disparage the format, was a book read by its own author. Frequently when an author reads his or her own work there are nuances in the reading that a performer wouldn't necessarily see. I'm looking forward to hearing Stewart, the Shakespearean actor, read his own words, which I will hear from Captain Picard.

I/we have enjoyed many books read by their author. As examples "If I Understood You, Would I have this look on my face" and "Things I overheard while talking to myself" by Alan Alda, Denis Leary's "Why We Suck", and Al Franken's "Giant of the Senate." "Born a Crime" by Trevor Noah opens up a whole world. Before he died, Anthony Bourdain wrote and read "Kitchen Confidential." Ta-Nehisi Coates read "Between the World and Me" which he wrote as a letter to his son. It still echoes in my brain. "You're Never Weird on the Internet" by Felicia Day was a delight. More on her later.

Alternatively, when a book is read by a great reader, who gives the characters life, the audiobook can be more than the print version. For example, James Marsters, who played Spike on Buffy the Vampire Slayer (don't judge me) reads most if not all of the Jim Butcher Dresden books, and Kobna Holdbrook-Smith reads the Rivers of London books by Ben Aaronovitch. In both cases, I can't imagine them in any other voices. Having read ebook novellas and stories from these series that weren't available as audiobooks, I hear them in my own head in the voices of their audiobook readers. Yes, sometimes when I read I hear voices in my head. Yes, I know there is medication for that. However, I'm happy with my voices. My wife says they are OK.

If I were somehow teaching a course on the format, I might require my students to read, in print, one of the Harry Potter books, and then listen to the same book. There are two audio book versions, one read by Jim Dale and one by Stephen Fry. Jim Dale is an award winning actor who imbues the story with over 100 distinct voices. The books available in the US are almost always his versions. Stephen Fry is also a British actor, and, is the narrator of the versions available in the United Kingdom. He has a different voice for every character. Personally, I prefer the Stephen Fry versions, but it is a close call.

On the other hand, some narrators aren't very good and I quickly move that book from the audiobook queue to the ebook or print queue.

While I'm on the subject, there is also something called a full cast recording where a cast of actors reads, or more accurately performs, a book. This is closest in execution to the old time radio dramas (I am old, but , not that old-they are old-time even to me!). In my queue is one by Felicia Day called "Third Eye." Besides Ms. Day, it includes in the cast Sean Astin, Neil Gaiman, LilyPichu, London Hughes, and Wil Wheaton. This was written to be heard as an audiobook and I'm not even sure if you can get it in print or ebook formats.

If you've never heard of Felicia Day, she is a famous nerd, responsible for a role in Buffy (remember this is a judgement free zone), Eureka, Supernatural and the internet musical Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog. She also created and starred in The Guild, a web series, that spawned some music videos you may have seen in class, and if not, could look up on YouTube (Do You Wanna Date My Avatar, Game On, and I'm the One That's Cool spring to mind). Not sure how I got to music videos from books, but, back to words at least originally written on a page.

I'm also queuing up "Swamp Story" by Dave Barry. Anything by Dave Barry is worth my time. James Comey's "Central Park West" is on my list out of curiosity as to the writing style of a former director of the FBI.

Then there are "100 Places to See After You Die" by Ken Jennings of Jeopardy fame, "I've Been Thinking" by Daniel Dennett, the philosopher and a short piece by John Cleese, of Monty Python fame, called "Creativity, A short and Cheerful Guide." Also awaiting their turn are Ken Follett's 5th book in the Kingsbridge series, "The Armor of Light." I was wowed by the first couple of books in that series and continue because while I am no longer as wowed, I am a glutton for completion.

I get many of my books from the library and some electronically (ebook or audiobook) via an app called Hoopla. I've enjoyed "A Tall History of Sugar" by Cordelia Forbes and "Can't we talk about something more pleasant?" by Chast Roz from the library. Both were recommended by my sister. Reading runs in the family.

I started "Lessons in Chemistry" by Bonnie Garmus, (I know there is a TV series, but, haven't seen that yet). "Lessons" got bumped in the line by "We of Little Faith." Whenever I see the title in the app book list I tell it I'll be back (And yes, in my head I do it in Arnold's voice).

Ignoring print books scattered on coffee, night, and end tables, or in my car, my phone has, as I write this, over 100 books in either ebook or audiobook versions. I use my

phone as my audiobook player and e-reader. And, as I said, I take books out of the library via Hoopla which stores its books inside the app on my phone, but they are on a separate list. Any time not otherwise occupied is occupied by a book.

So, while this is pretty long list, it only represents a fraction of what I've read recently or what I plan on reading. What about you? Any recommendations? Let me know via email, (drq.atm@gmail.com), the feedback link or the comments box. The feedback link doesn't collect emails, so personal response is problematic, and the comments box is for public discussion and doesn't lend itself to replies. I do try and respond to emails, but, really, I'm retired, so while I'll get to you, it may not be as fast as it once was.

I'm sure I've mispronounced some of the names of authors. I apologize. And again, no one has compensated me for anything in this blog/podcast/vlog.