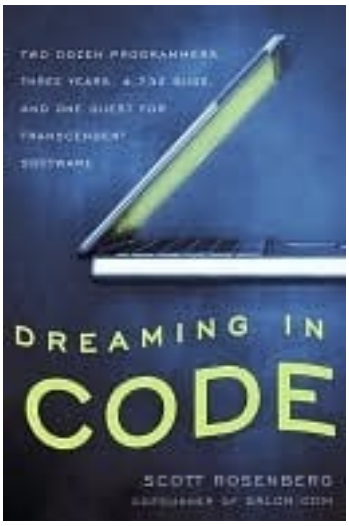
Scott Rosenberg

Dreaming in Code: Two Dozen Programmers, Three Years, 4,732 Bugs, and One Quest for Transcendent Software



Title: Dreaming in Code: Two Dozen Programmers, Three Years, 4,732 Bugs, and One Quest for Transcendent Software

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Description

Their story takes us through a maze of dead ends and exhilarating breakthroughs as they and their colleagues wrestle not only with the abstraction of code but with the unpredictability of human behavior,
especially their own. Along the way, we encounter black holes, turtles, snakes, dragons, axe-sharpening, and yak-shaving—and take a guided tour through the theories and methods, both brilliant and misguided, that litter the history of software development, from the famous “mythical man-month” to Extreme Programming. Not just for technophiles but for anyone captivated by the drama of invention, Dreaming in Code offers a window into both the information age and the workings of the human mind.

From the Hardcover edition.

Insightful reviews

Kelley: Everyone in IT has probably heard the chestnut, "You can have it good, cheap, and fast. Pick two." Scott Rosenberg tackles the assumptions behind that chestnut head on. What happens when you have a software project that has plenty of money, plenty time, and plenty of talent and experience? That project, Open Source Application Foundation's Chandler, turns out to suffer from all the problems that plague software development in spite of its wealth of resources. It's buggy. Deadlines are missed. Features get left behind. Decision-making is slow. The rise of the Web as an application platform upends the project turning Chandler into shelfware.

A lot of digital ink is spilled on the problem: why do IT projects fail so spectacularly? Itâ??s the subject of the Standish's Group Chaos report, distributed yearly since 1994. Rosenberg investigates the usual suspects fingered for IT project failure. Tackling one of the noisiest debates, Rosenberg argues that Chandler shows us just how wrong FOSS enthusiasts have been when, following Eric Raymond, they've touted FOSS because it produces less buggy software: "with enough eyeballs, all bugs are shallow." In spite of its open source status, in spite of the voluntarism, Chandler doesn't command nearly enough volunteer eyeballs to find the bugs. Most of them are found by employees instead.

Rosenberg also explodes other mythodologies (misspelling intentional) of software development. Exploring the utopian software future outlined by object oriented programming enthusiasts, Rosenberg uncovers some tough realities. The idea of building code in chunks to create interchangeable Lego parts is a great idea, but it never really works out in practice. Rosenberg isn't exactly sure why this is the case, but he explores some possible reasons. Partly, it's because OO just doesn't fit well with the temperaments of most engineers who have learned not to trust other people's. They prefer rolling their own.

He also thinks it's b/c engineers haven't really come to grips with the nature of software to begin with: it has no center. There is no core. It's endless layers of abstraction:

"Software is different; it has no core. It is onionlike, a thing of layers, each built painstakingly and precariously on the previous one, each counting on the one below not to move or change too much. Software builders like to talk about laying bricks; skeptics see a house of cards. Either way, there's a steady accumulation going on. New Layers pile on old."

Rosenberg also looks at the personalities of engineers themselves, asking: What is it with the tendency to want to start every project by first building the right tools with which to carry out the project. It's as if, in order to take the SAT exam, you first roll your own calculator. I've seen this countless times as engineers contemplate how to first build a better CMS instead of just getting down to business and coding the project at hand.

Frankly, I find it comforting to know that every single one of the problems I observe in web and software development are problems experienced by even the most well-funded project guided by big brains, great management, and deep experience. Rosenberg reminds me that another outfit with a whole lot going for it made the same mistakes I'm observing in organizations with far fewer resources and much more aggressive deadlines - organizations surely lacking in any FOSS philosophy toward software development.

For me, it's liberating to know that even if you fixed the time/talent/resources problem, things might not change. I can also see how Rosenberg's book might be depressing. It means that there is no magic bullet. Open source methodologies won't necessarily fix things. Tons of money, resources, talent, and experience may not address the problems. Profit motives just might not be the problem. We are stuck with this crazy world of IT development and the answers are probably located in something a lot more foundational: like how we think of software in the first place.

The answer, Rosenberg suggests, is in the very 'nature' of the reality we are working on. As such, tweaking software development methodologies, without questioning the ontology, is never going to be enough. We're going to have to look elsewhere for solutions. We're going to have learn to work in a world were there is no center. It's contingent foundations all the way down - like it or not. Embracing that means we have to think about software very differently. Consider one example often discussed among UNIX wizards: the metaphors we use to such as folders and files draws on a metaphor that once made sense when we had metal files and paper folders. As Rosenberg shows, though, the metaphor is limiting; it restricts our thinking.

Will rethinking the reality of software change things? I don't know. But, to me, that is the adventure and what makes life worth living.

Al Swanson: For any programmer, especially any programmer who has worked in a large team, this will ring true. For managers of programmers, even more so!

The story, still ongoing, of a programming team attempting to write an 'ultimate' piece of software. Not like some sci-fi book, tho. Not some software to control the world or be the next killer app - just scheduling, notes, tasks... something 'simple'.

As the book points out, even with no constraints from others, building software from scratch is a daunting task - and I know. With my team, I created a whole new class of software for my company. No one oversaw or dictated the need for us. We saw the need, we designed the solution and we delivered the software. It soon became absolutely essential to the running of the business.

For me, there were many parallels to my experiences in this story. The writing is true, crisp, funny and delves deeply into things outside the story itself.

Another book well worth the time spent reading it.

kat: An interesting read, half the story of a typical start-up trainwreck and half a philosophical meditation on why, exactly, "software is hard". Rosenberg takes the time to explain quite a lot about coding and programmer culture in layman's terms -- which is redundant for most programmers, while still being technical enough that I'm not sure, say, my parents would be able to get through it. I think the ideal audience is entrepreneurs and those who find themselves in the position of needing to manage programmers; it would also be a good book to assign undergraduate CS students, since it includes both a readable primer of software engineering methods and a sense of what it means to choose programming as a career.

Five years old as of now (it was published in 2007), so it's charmingly dated in some respects. The book ended on a positive note, but the software project that formed the center of the narrative seems to have quietly vanished off the face of the earth; from a purely literary perspective, I wish someone had written a blog post or some kind of wrap-up to serve as an epilogue.

Abhi Yerra: one of many issues the writer will get into is that Kappor's staff didn't have the following: - a feeling of urgency. many of the staff got here from Netscape the place they have been attempting to push demanding to construct the product due to Microsoft, festival and an absence of money. - didn't have a base codebase which they can iterate over. They have been searching for definitely the right resolution with no making a choice on a MVP and iterating on it. - there has been additionally a pitfall in that they have been attempting to construct with the belief that because the undertaking used to be open resource that folks will are available in hoards to assist construct it yet that did not happen.In the tip the writer is going over what gave the look of a customary software program venture and the way it took goodbye to discover a approach to follow. after all the ethical of the e-book is software program is hard, most likely one of many toughest of human endeavors and due to that there has no longer been a superior method which are attributed to being the right kind means of doing software.

Rogier: regrettably this publication is sort of boring. i've got no concept why it sells so well. it really is too fluffy for the technical reader who may be heavily drawn to the issues, and it kind of feels too heavy for the informal reader. So who is examining it? Well, i suppose I am, as a result of many of the press it has gotten. Overblown if you happen to ask me.OK, for a few cause i have learn extra desktop technological know-how than the common Ph. D. and i have truly controlled a few machine tasks in an period (1980's) whilst my corporation was once nonetheless simply migrating from waterfall improvement into based methods, a few of which I

helped introduce. In these days I additionally did an interview with Prof. Edsger W. Dijkstra, who's quoted in short during this ebook because the father of based programming. In correspondence later he referred to as it the simplest interview of his life, which i assume was once logical, for i used to be relatively suffering in genuine existence with all of the matters he wrote about.Back to this book, i'll admit that it prompted me to obtain Chandler (version 7.5), and that i also will admit that Chandler used to be as unimpressive because the book. It didn't look in any respect intuitive, or maybe inviting to me. it is imagined to manage to combine with Google calendar. That regimen blew up, and so they did repair it after I complained. it truly is nonetheless a hog, similar to defined within the book.One optimistic factor I received from the ebook used to be the connection with Tom Simpsons' Masterpiece Engineering essay from the 1969 Nato convention at the software program engineering concern in Rome, which isn't to be missed. Even greater is the mea culpa approximately excising it from the unique convention reports, you could locate here: Brian Randell's 1996 mea culpa on excising the "Masterpiece Engineering" spoof from 1968/69 Nato convention on software program engineeringThat piece alone, up to the context within which it happens sums up the problem.The ebook can be important examining to many folks who've might be by no means regarded within the programming kitchen, performed any function in it, or needed to fight with those concerns themselves. might be these are the folks who're studying it, and for whom it's a solid introduction, for the ebook definitely touches on all very important issues. To me it simply is still intellectually unsatisfying, since it doesn't elevate the standard of the dialog.

Jeff Goldenberg: This e-book is more or less like books in one. the vast majority of the ebook specializes in chronicling the 1st three-or-so years of the Chandler Project, a more-or-less whole failure to create the final word own details administration application. It describes intimately what occurs should you prepare a bunch of *formerly* winning builders and take a look at to get them to do whatever thoroughly revolutionary. are you able to say anchored down through previous methods of thinking? This a part of the ebook isn't all that useful. the second one a part of the booklet i discovered to be extra useful. the writer has researched and handily compiled many nuggets approximately every thing that's unsuitable with the traditional methods to software program development. the fundamental line of pondering is that software program is art, no longer an engineering discipline.

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