

Read It, March 2016



Figure 1: Word Cloud

Personal News

This will be a pretty short post. Not much has changed. I continue with my commuting arrangement. Grace and I are getting our act together, slowly, as far as house-hunting and examining relocation options. We're not very good house-hunters; the places we've seen in person have been discouraging, and the better-looking places we've tried to arrange to see have inevitably been sold before we even got a chance. It remains uncertain when and how we might be able to sell our existing house. The housing market in Saginaw, Michigan does not seem to have improved.

Work has been very busy, but just this week I tagged my firmware as version 1.0. This, assuming we find no show-stopper bugs in testing, is the version that will ship out. There are a lot of new features planned, but it is important to take a moment to acknowledge these milestones. There is the danger of just being pulled straight into more code changes, and never having really the fact of the completed and achieved milestone, and that is draining and demoralizing. In just a few days the product line I've been working on will be officially announced and released on my company web site. The products have been "real" for a long time. My co-workers have demonstrated the boxes at a trade show. There are "real" boxes lined up on shelves fully tested and ready to ship out, but officially they aren't "real" until they are in the virtual catalog and someone can click a "buy it" button.

Books Completed in the Last Week of March

- *Childhood's End* by Arthur C. Clarke
- *My Struggle: Book 2* by Karl Ove Knausgaard

I finished *Childhood's End* in part so I could finish comparing the book to the mini-series. After reading the conclusion of the book, which is thoughtful, meditative, and troubling, I am not sure that I can bring myself to watch the third part of the mini-series. In the second part, I was disappointed to see the way in which SyFy altered the character and even the appearance of the Overlord Karellen. In the book the Overlords themselves are eventually revealed to be tragic figures, stranded in an evolutionary dead-end, fated to help others enter the promised land but never enter it themselves. In the mini-series they are ominous, manipulative, and even murderous. My children are asking if I will show them part three. I suppose I will have to preview it and decide, but the answer may very well be “no, we’re going to read the book instead.” The book is scary enough without adding cheap horror movie tropes; the bogeyman in the text is the mysterious abstraction known as the Overmind, towards which the human race is inexorably moving. The SyFy version is like a horror story written by a baby in which the bad guy is the obstetrician who helps deliver her from the womb.

Knausgaard’s second volume, in the Farrar, Straus and Giroux trade paper edition, had been sitting on the shelf waiting my attention for some time. It is a relief to get through it. This volume feels a little episodic and uneven compared to the first one. There are some wonderful philosophical digressions, and moments when Knausgaard really nails the “living his life” thing. In particular, the story about the birth of his daughter is beautifully done. But the jumping back and forth in time tends to keep me from really engaging with the flow of the story for very long. At times painfully confessional, Knausgaard is literally self-lacerating, and so there is a recurring impulse to tell him to, literally, get over himself. But then I think back to the times when I have felt very sorry for myself and very attached to my problems, and I can’t really judge. If anything he gets to the core of what it is like to feel absolutely awful about oneself even when, to all outward appearances, one is living a successful and fortunate life. The specter of mental illness is always hovering over his account.

I have now started *My Struggle: Book 3*, and it feels like a relief to go back to his early childhood because it feels so very much like my early childhood. This, it seems, is Knausgaard’s real achievement in these books — by making them incredibly specific, and incredibly personal, they somehow become a way in to our own lives, at least for those of us who have been sensitive and troubled and who have the patience to engage with his project.

It is April first. Have a great April!

Saginaw and/or Ann Arbor, Michigan
April 1, 2016

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