Comments

Nothing can be quite so helpful as a well-placed comment. Nothing can clutter up a module more than frivolous dogmatic comments. Nothing can be quite so damaging as an old crufty comment that propagates lies and misinformation. Comments are not like Schindler's List. They are not "pure good." Indeed, comments are, at best, a necessary evil. If our programming languages were expressive enough, or if we had the talent to subtly wield those languages to express our intent, we would not need comments very much—perhaps not at all. The proper use of comments is to compensate for our failure to express ourself in code. Note that I used the word failure. I meant it. Comments are always failures. We must have them because we cannot always figure out how to express ourselves without them, but their use is not a cause for celebration. So when you find yourself in a position where you need to write a comment, think it through and see whether there isn't some way to turn the tables and express yourself in code. Every time you express yourself in code, you should pat yourself on the back. Every time you write a comment, you should grimace and feel the failure of your ability of expression. Why am I so down on comments? Because they lie. Not always, and not intentionally, but too often. The older a comment is, and the farther away it is from the code it describes, the more likely it is to be just plain wrong. The reason is simple. Programmers can't realistically maintain them

Code changes and evolves. Chunks of it move from here to there. Those chunks bifurcate and reproduce and come together again to form chimeras. Unfortunately the comments don't always follow them— can't always follow them. And all too often the comments get separated from the code they describe and become orphaned blurbs of everdecreasing accuracy

It is possible to make the point that programmers should be disciplined enough to keep the comments in a high state of repair, relevance, and accuracy. I agree, they should. But I would rather that energy go toward making the code so clear and expressive that it does not need the comments in the first place. Inaccurate comments are far worse than no comments at all. They delude and mislead. They set expectations that will never be fulfilled. They lay down old rules that need not, or should not, be followed any longer. Truth can only be found in one place: the code. Only the code can truly tell you what it does. It is the only source of truly accurate information. Therefore, though comments are sometimes necessary, we will expend significant energy to minimize them.