The Captain and the Kid

When was the last good fight in the software industry? Bill Gates versus the government – Boring. Napster was over before it started. Capability Maturity Model® (CMM®) versus, …well no CMM? We haven't had a good intellectual mêlée since Ada Wars.

Still, the air is thick with anticipation – an old fashion donnybrook is on its way.

With the help of Elton John and the words of Bernie Taupin, slightly customized, let's explore the skirmish *(It helps if you sing the Italic sections).*

It's getting late have you seen my mates
Ma tell me when the boys get here
It's seven o'clock and I want to rock
Want to get a belly full of beer [1]

In government's corner the Process Champion – weighing in on everything – Capability Maturity Model® IntegrationSM (CMMISM).

Captain Fantastic raised and regimented, hardly a hero
Just someone his mother might know
Very clearly a case for process and models
"Two teas both with sugar please [2]

Backed by the top-down management approach of the Software Engineering Institute.

But the biggest kick I ever got
Was doing a thing called the CMM Rock
While the other kids were Coding round the clock
We were hopping and bopping to the CMM Rock

Well CMM Rocking is something shocking
When your level just can't keep still
I never knew me a better time and I guess I never will
Oh Lawdy mama those Friday nights
When SEPG wore her process tight
And the CMM Rocking was out of sight [3]

In the People's corner – the Technology Champion weighing very little – Agile Software Development (ASD).

You know you can't hold me forever
I didn't sign up with you
I'm not a process for your friend's appraisal
This boy's too young to be singing the blues [4]

Backed by a grass-roots manifesto of simplicity, communication, and courage.

So goodbye maturity road
Where the dogs of piety howl
You can't plant me in your model
I'm going back to my code

Back to the howling old owl in the woods
Writing the thorny back code
Oh I've finally decided my future lies
Beyond the maturity road [4]

You don't believe it? Check out "CTO Diaries" in the January issue of *Software Development Magazine*, Jack Ganssle's article in the December issue of *Embedded Systems Programming*, or the November/December issue of *IEEE Software*.

Don't give us none of your aggravation
We had it with your discipline
Saturday night's alright for fighting
Get a little action in [1]

In the November/December issue of *IEEE Software*, Mark Paulk claims that eXtreme Programming can work well with the CMM.

Too late to save myself from falling
I took a chance and changed your way of life
But you misread my meaning when I met you
Closed the door and left me blinded by the light

Don't let the sun go down on me
Although I search myself, it's always someone else I see
I'd just allow a fragment of your life to wander free
But losing every process is like the sun going down on me [5]

Maybe Mark has something? After all, CMM is all about managing software processes. eXtreme Programming and its agile cousins are focused on developing software. Why couldn't you use agile software development and still be a CMMI Level 5? Actually, you could tan leather and be a CMMI Level 5.

We've thrown in the towel too many times
Out for the count and when we're down
Captain Fantastic and the Brown Dirt Cowboy
From the end of the world to your town [2]

Are you kidding? We can't get along because it's not about process or technology. It's about money. Few have the financial backing to concomitantly invest in higher levels of maturity and agile software development. Even if you could, who has the intestinal fortitude to balance the complexity of CMMI with the simplicity if ASD? What takes priority, predictability or agility?

The battle is coming. As with Ada, there will be no clear winner or loser but we will learn more about our organizations, profession, and ourselves, and we will be better for it.

The Captain and the Kid stepping in the ring
From here on sonny, it's a long and lonely climb [2]

— Gary Petersen, Shim Enterprise, Inc.

1. Saturday Night's Alright, Elton John & Bernie Taupin, © 1973 Dick James Music Limited.
2. Captain Fantastic and the Brown Dirt Cowboy, Elton John & Bernie Taupin, © 1975 Big Pig Music Limited.
3. Crocodile Rock, Elton John & Bernie Taupin, © 1972 Dick James Music Limited.
4. Goodbye Yellow Brick Road, Elton John & Bernie Taupin, © 1973 Dick James Music Limited.
5. Don't Let The Sun Go Down On Me, Elton John & Bernie Taupin, © 1974 Big Pig Music Limited.