Halt and Don't Catch Fire

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Who Cares?

Startups

Small organisations

Newly formed “sysadms”* teams

Solo systems engineers

* ops/systems/admin/cluster/SRE/<insert more>

Technical Debt

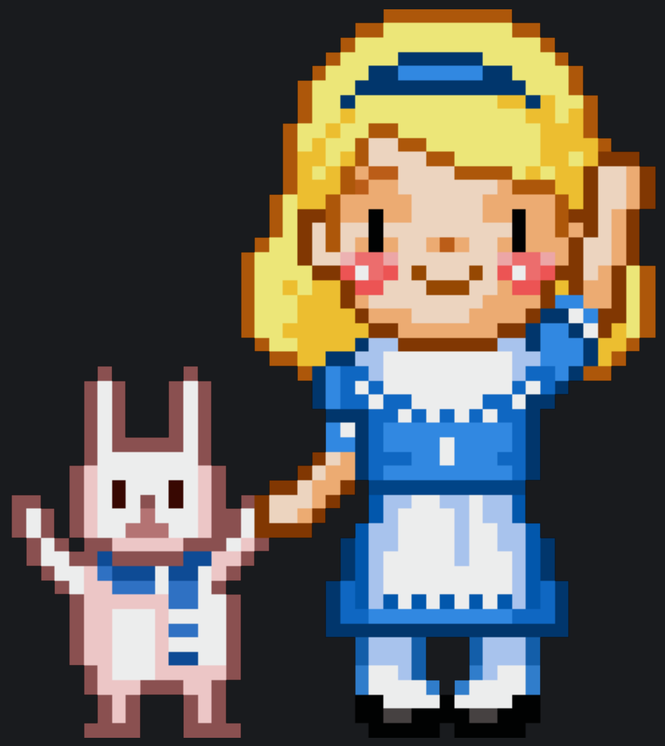
- Lack processes and experience
- Early adoption of new tech
- Re-inventing the wheel, and cargo cult
- Frequent change of requirements
- Overestimation and Time



How we got here?

Startups

- Short term planning
- Duct tape and bubblegum
- Early adopters :)
- No documentation
- No processes
- No boundaries
- No backups



How we got here?

!Startups

- Duct tape and bubblegum :)
- Lack of original information
- *Some* documentation
- *Some* backups
- Lack of original information
- Waiting for a(nother) hero
- Communication issues
- “Don’t touch this” systems



Challenges of new teams

- Who are you?
- Who are they?
- Unknown infrastructure
- Finding information
- Unaware of what's coming



The 5 Stages of Technical Debt

- Denial
- Anger
- Bargaining
- Depression
- Acceptance



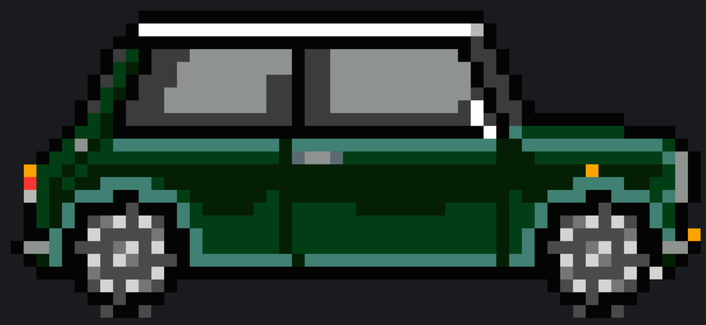
Take a breath

- Ask the right questions
- Go through the backlog (if any)
- Write down everything
- Create a complete dashboard
- Prioritise
- DON'T SKIP weekly/biweekly meetings
- Build relationships
- Rinse and repeat



Slowing it down

- Take care of repetitive tasks
- Choose software wisely
- Know your current limits
- Keep track of what's going on around you, and talk
- Break bad habits
- Be consistent and apply rules



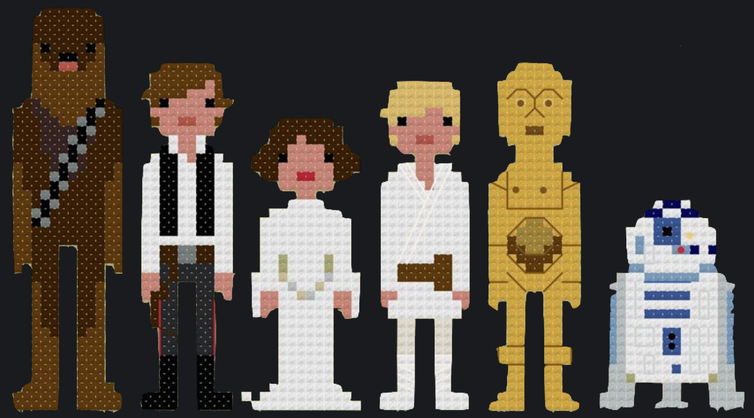
How debt can kill a team

- Burnout
- Blame game
- Tension and toxicity
- Martyrs and messiahs



Creating a culture

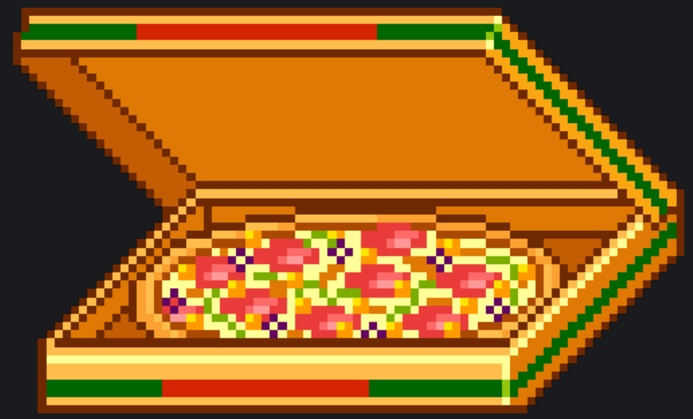
- Being a guard
- Junior engineers
- Adopt good practices
- Make mistakes, it's human
- There's no shame in asking
- Following the Golden Rule* can go a long way



* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_Rule

Takeaways

- Technical debt in small environments sucks
- Stop, ask the right questions, and breathe
- It will never be eliminated
- Identify the debt that kills you and the one that burdens you
- Our systems will never be perfect, just manageable



TL;DR



How we got here?



Ask the right questions



Try not to kill your team

Go through the stages



Document the problems



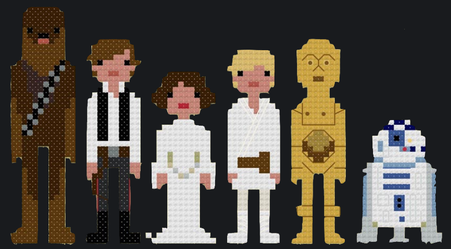
Create a sustainable culture



Thank you!





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images

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