

<https://github.com/hbrc-fpga-class/class-material/blob/master/presentation.pdf>



Introduction to FPGAs using Homebrew Automation

Brandon Blodget, Patrick Lloyd, & Bob Smith

About This Talk



- Lots of information - $\frac{\Delta \text{slides}}{\Delta \text{time}} \propto \log(\text{time})$
- Please save questions for the end

Who are We?

- Tinkerers with a bunch of software, hardware, firmware, and gateware experience (mostly Bob and Brandon, though 😊)
- Engineers at OLogic, Inc.
- ClusterFighters!



What is an FPGA?

“ To control a processor, you program it with instructions and tell it what to **do**... ”

to control an FPGA, you describe a circuit and tell it what to **become**. ”

- Dalai Lama, probably

What is an FPGA?

- Short for **Field-Programmable Gate Array**
- One type of **Programmable Logic Device (PLD)**
 - Used to implement arbitrary digital logic equations (i.e. Boolean logic)
 - Combinational logic (gates, stateless)
 - Sequential logic (flip-flops, stateful)
 - Most are re-programmable
 - Some are non-volatile, while others require external memory to save configuration

What is an FPGA?

- Other PLD's include:
 - PLA - Programmable Logic Array
 - PAL - Programmable Array Logic
 - GAL - Generic Array Logic
 - SPLD - Simple Programmable Logic Device
 - CPLD - Complex Programmable Logic Device

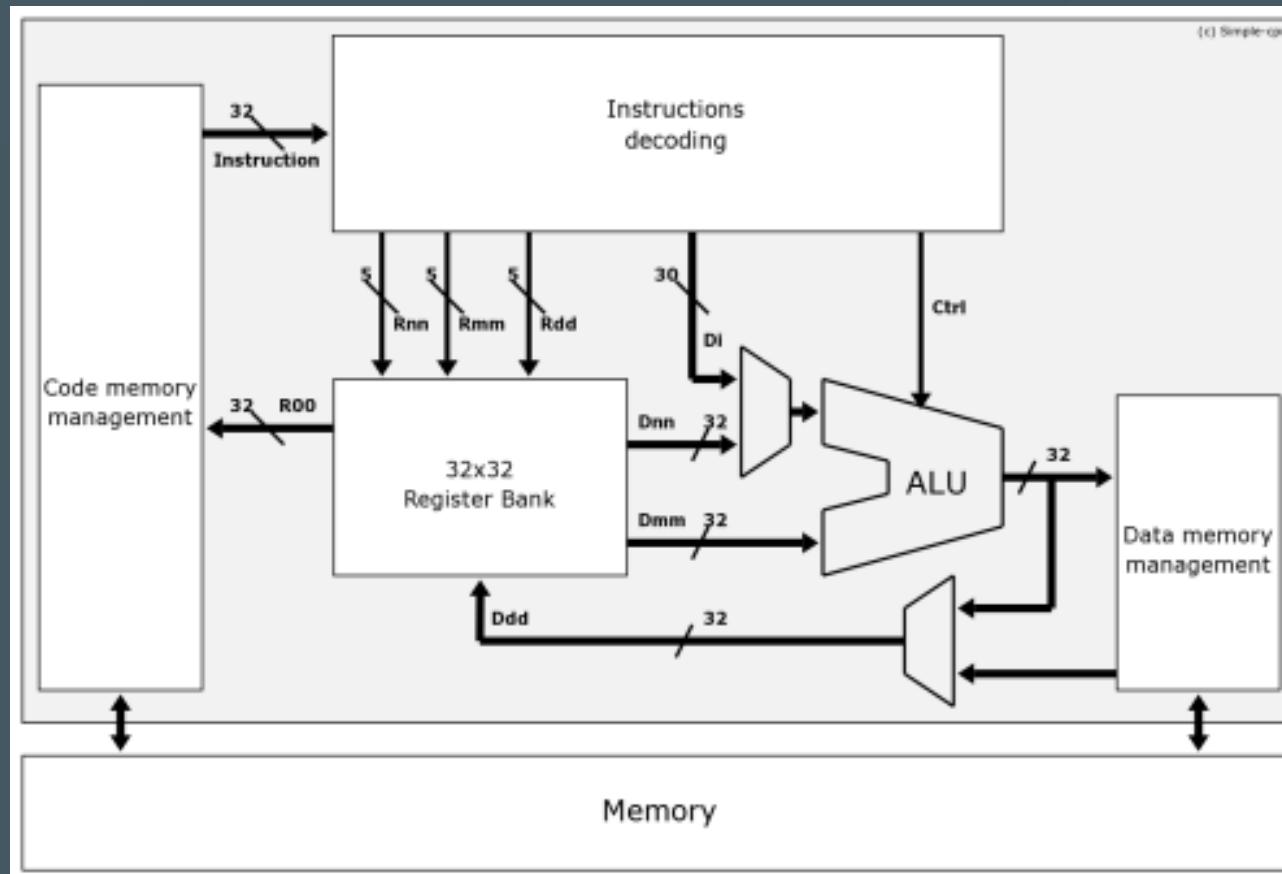
(Who names these things?)

Players

FPGA vendors by market share:

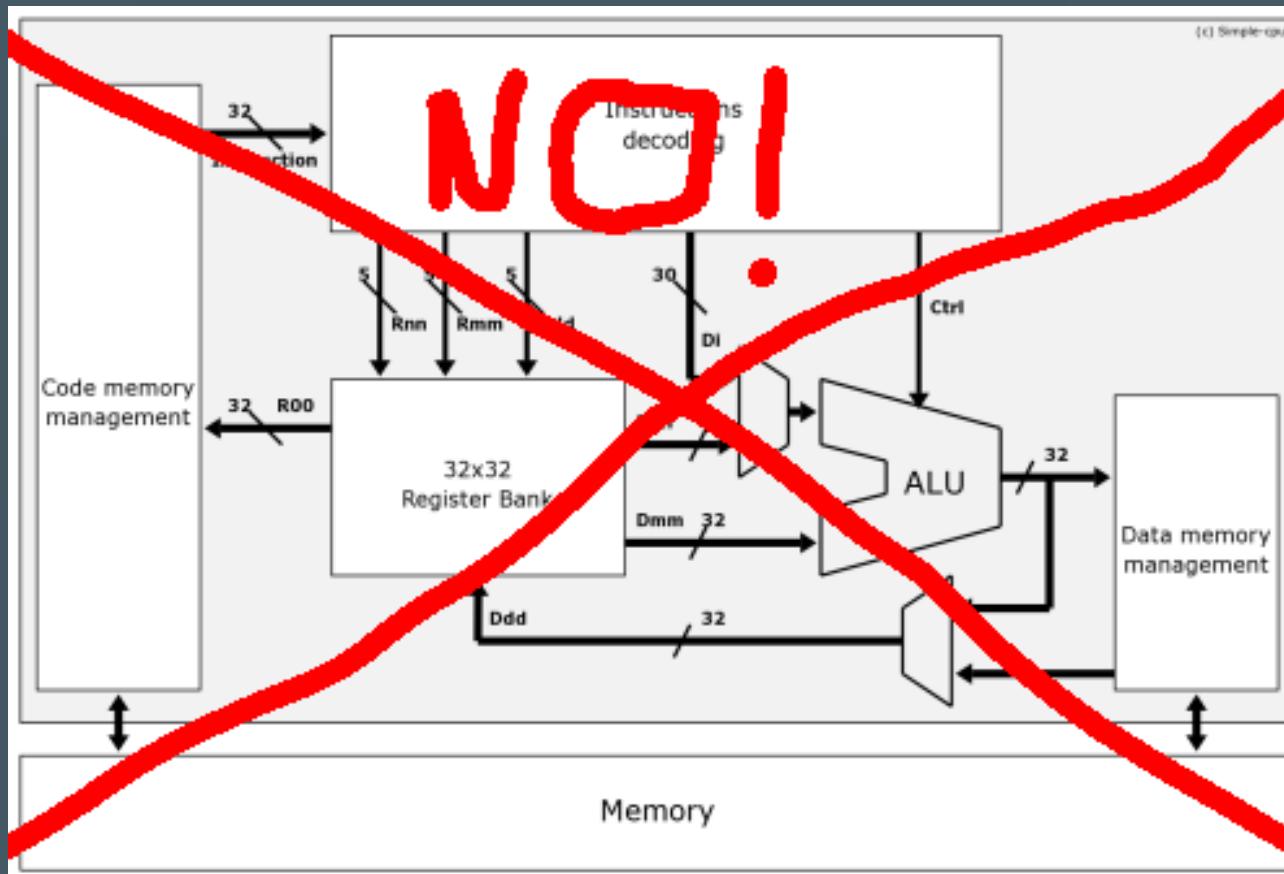
- **Xilinx** - ~50%
- **Intel (Altera)** - ~40%
- **Lattice** - >5%
- **Microchip (Microsemi (Actel))** - <5%
- Everyone else (QuickLogic, Gowin, etc.) - ~1%

What's *Inside* an FPGA?



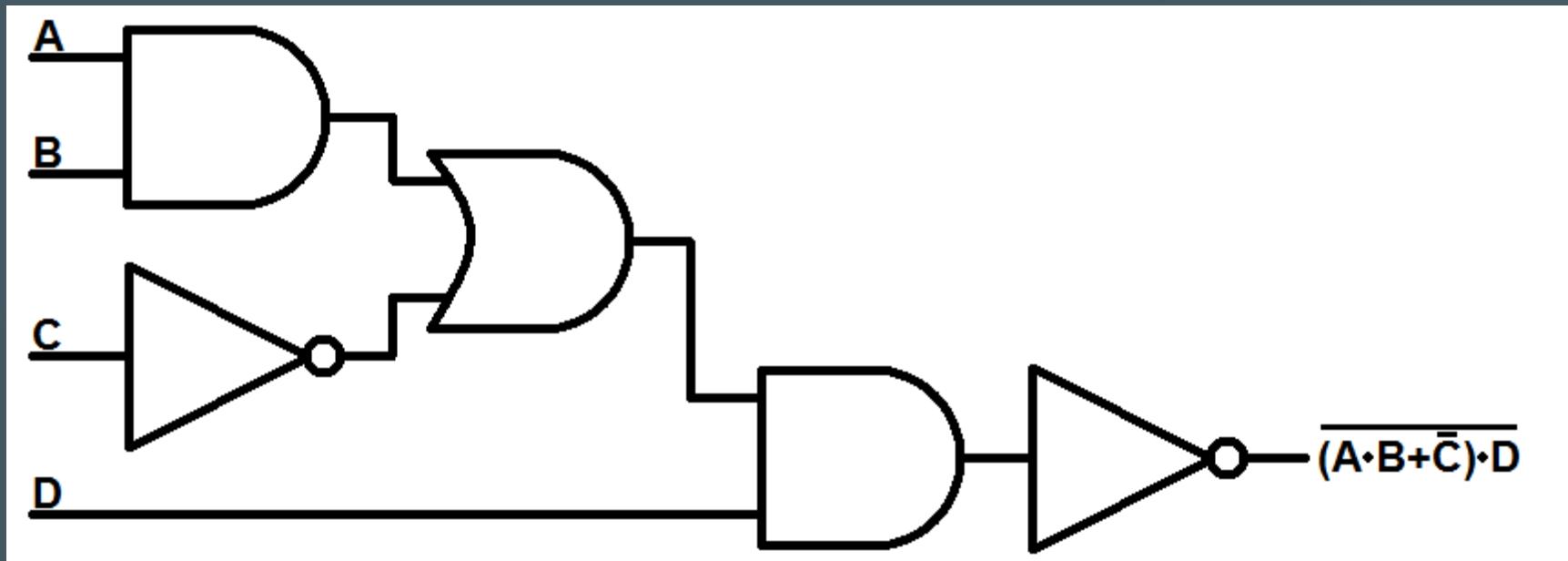
- Is it a special type processor?

What's *Inside* an FPGA?



- But an FPGA can be used to *implement* CPUs (known as "soft cores")

What's *Inside* an FPGA?



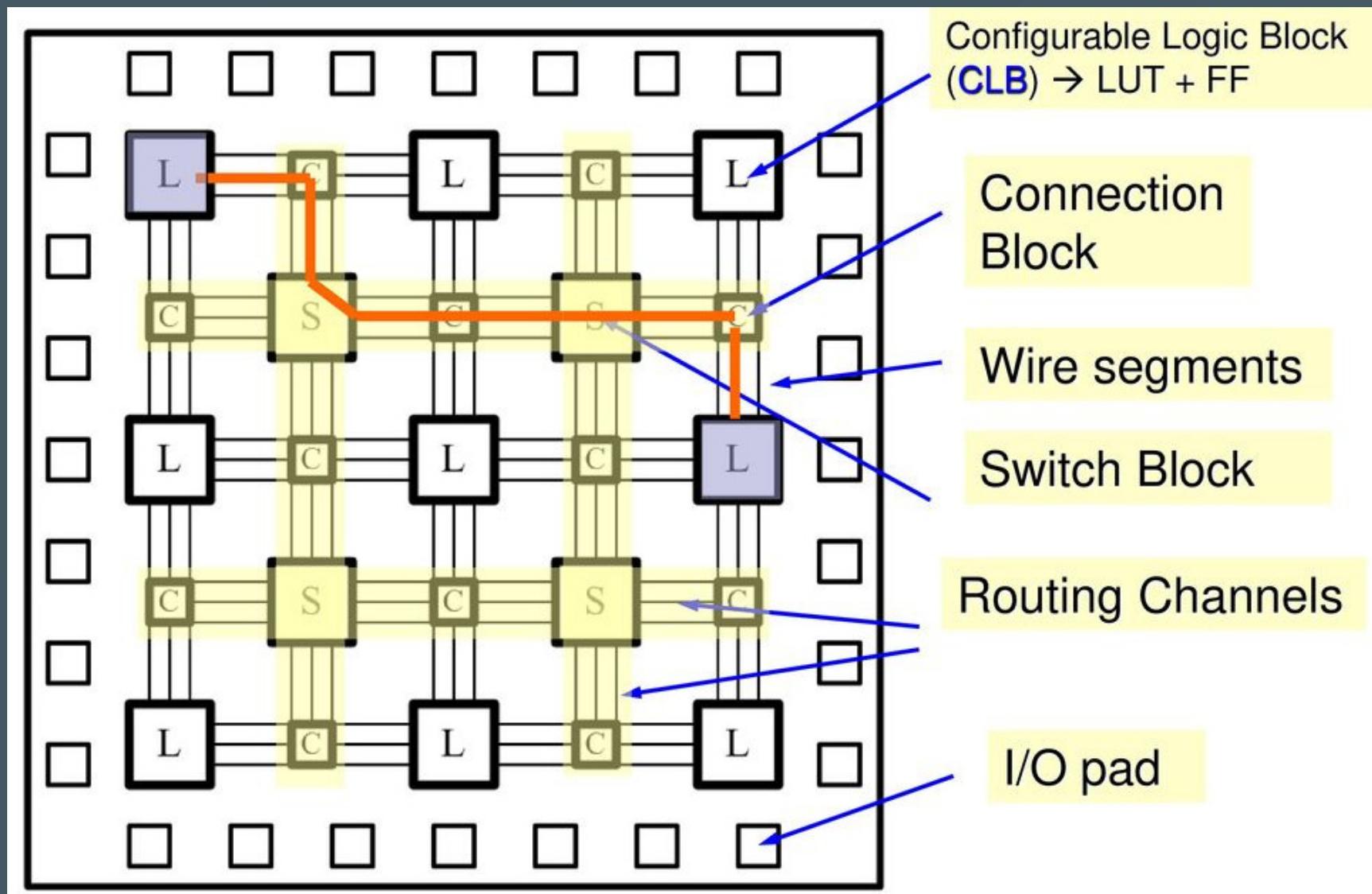
- Is it a big collection of AND / OR / NOT / NOR / NAND / NOR gates? Perhaps even a *gate array* of sorts?

What's *Inside* an FPGA?

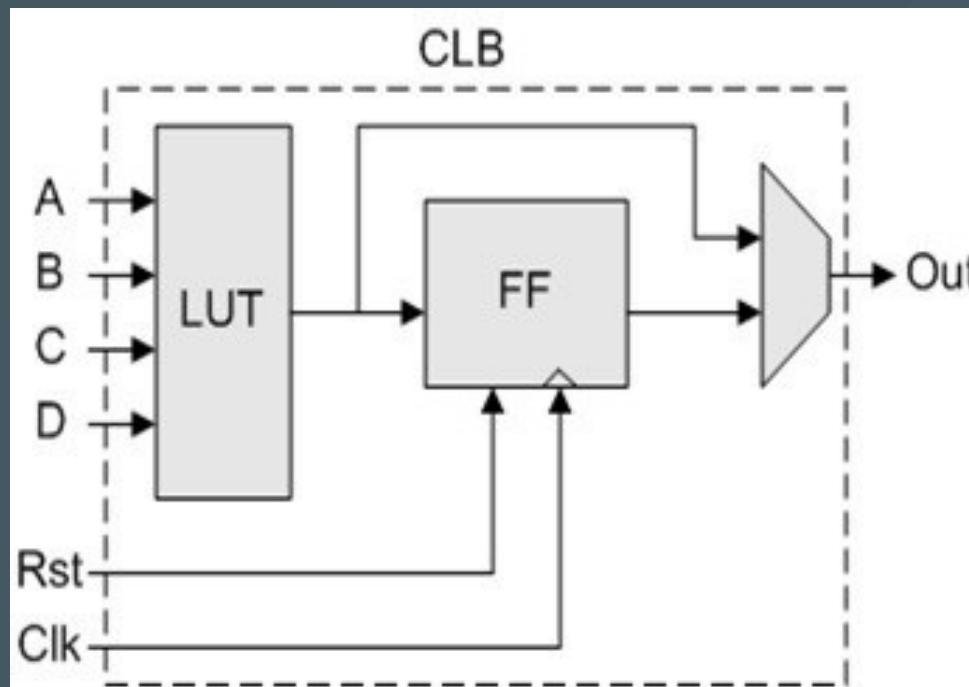


- But an FPGA can be used to *implement* arbitrary logic equations

What's Inside an FPGA?



Configurable Logic Blocks



- Lookup table (LUT)
- D-Type Flip-Flop (D-FF)
- Multiplexer (MUX)

Open-Source Applications

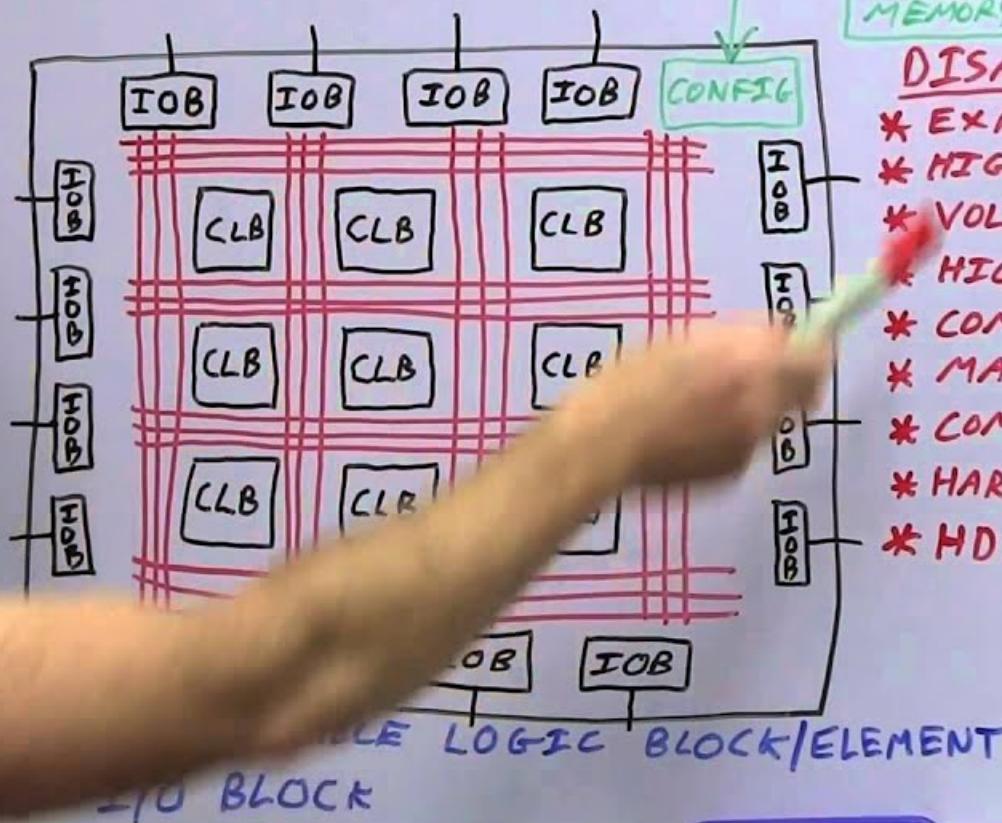
- ASIC prototyping [\[RISC-V\]](#)
- Chip emulation [\[MiSTer\]](#)
- DSP - filters, transforms, convolution, decimation, digital synthesis, etc.
 - Software-defined radio [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#)
 - Audio Synthesizers [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#)

Open-Source Applications

- Accelerator cores
 - Cryptography - [\[MD5\]](#) [\[AES\]](#)
 - Video encode / decode [\[H.264\]](#)
 - Very high speed networking [\[Intel 100G NIC\]](#)
- In general, FPGAs are great at applications that can leverage fixed-point math, high memory bandwidth, pipelining, & parallelism

It can't be all good, right?

FIELD PROGAMMABLE GATE ARRAYS (FPGAs)



DISADVANTAGES

- * EXPENSIVE
- * HIGH POWER
- * VOLATILE / BOOT TIME
- * HIGH PIN COUNT / BGA
- * COMPLICATED
- * MANY TRAPS
- * COMPLEX TOOLS
- * HARD TO CHOOSE / COMPARE
- * HDL NOT EASY / INTUITIVE

Disadvantages

FPGAs are ill-suited for certain tasks:

- Floating point operations
- Protocol handling
- Complex rulesets
- P-complete problems that are sequential & not easily parallelized (think "Conway's Game of Life")
- Developing solutions quickly (maybe)

The Case for Robotics

- Access to *tons* of flexible, reconfigurable I/O pins
- Timers & counters are trivial to implement
 - PWM for motor control (brushed, BLDC, servos)
 - Pulse decoding (encoders, IR remotes, RC controllers, SONAR)
- Swappable, on-demand peripherals like UART, SPI, I2C, 1-wire, etc.

The Case for Robotics

- PID controllers
 - Very fast execution and consistent timing
 - Fixed point
- Finite state machines
 - Line following
 - Obstacle avoidance

FPGA Workflow

1. Design entry
2. Simulation
3. Synthesis
4. Technology mapping
5. Placement & Routing
6. Bitstream generation
7. Flashing device

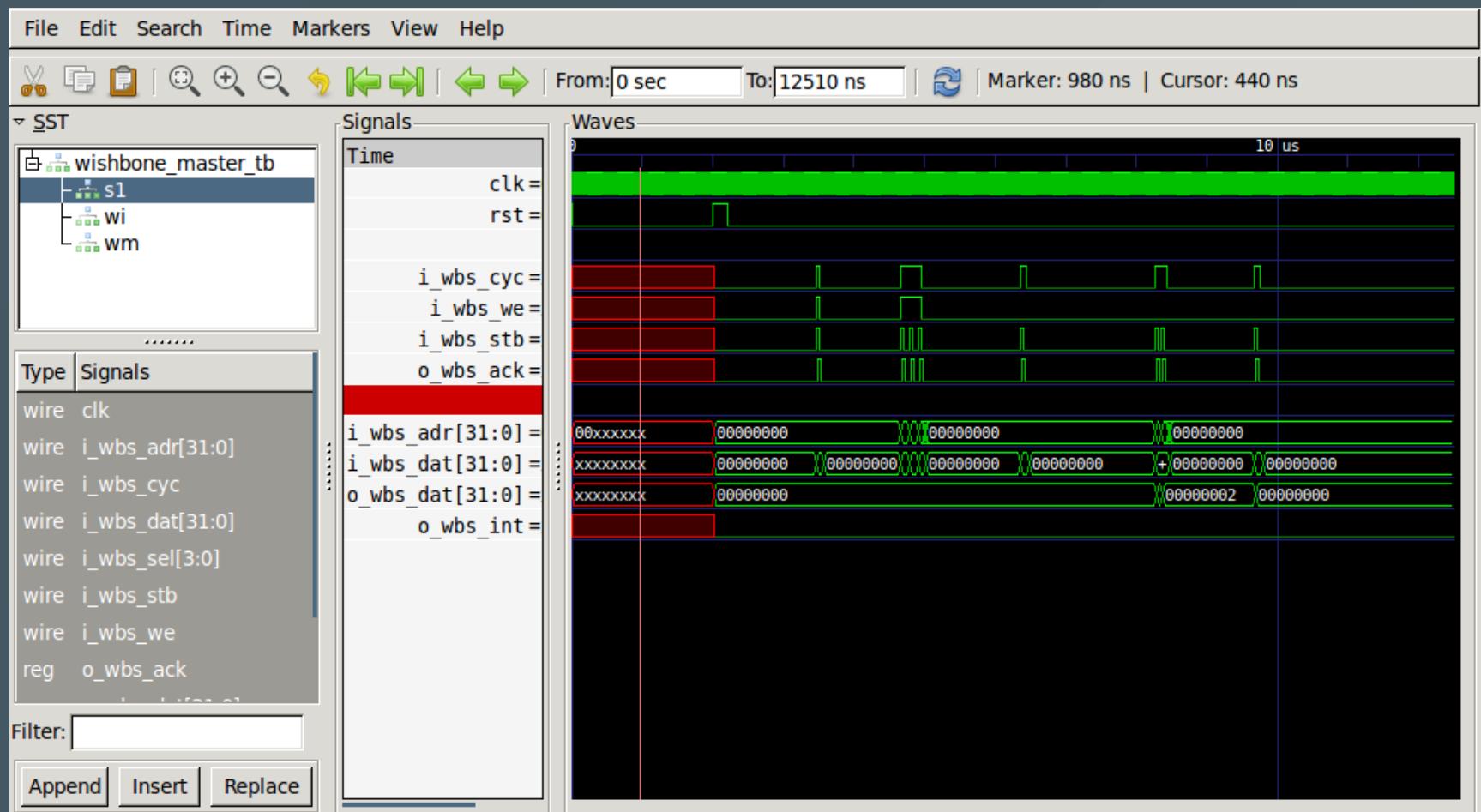
1. Design Entry

- FPGA internals are *described* using a hardware description language (HDL)
 - **Verilog** (C-like, weakly-typed)
 - Popular in open source, consumer electronics, & the west coast
 - **VHDL** (Ada-like, strongly typed)
 - Popular in defense / aerospace, academia, & the east coast
- Tools: Your favorite text editor

2. Simulation

- Allows designs to be verified as individual blocks or as a full system
- Only simulates *functionality* of a design, not the physics. This means a design can work in simulation but fail when trying to work with real hardware
- Tools:
 - Simulator - [Icarus Verilog](#), [Verilator](#)
 - Waveform Viewer - [GTKWave](#)

2. Simulation



3. Synthesis

- Translates Verilog & RTL schematics into generic logic circuits.
- Some logic optimization happens here
- Output saved as an intermediate file format not really intended for human interaction
- Tools: Yosys
 - `synth` command provides good set of defaults that can be used as basis for synthesis scripts
 - `yosys> read_verilog mydesign.v # import design`
 - `yosys> synth -top mytop # default synthesis`

4. Technology Mapping

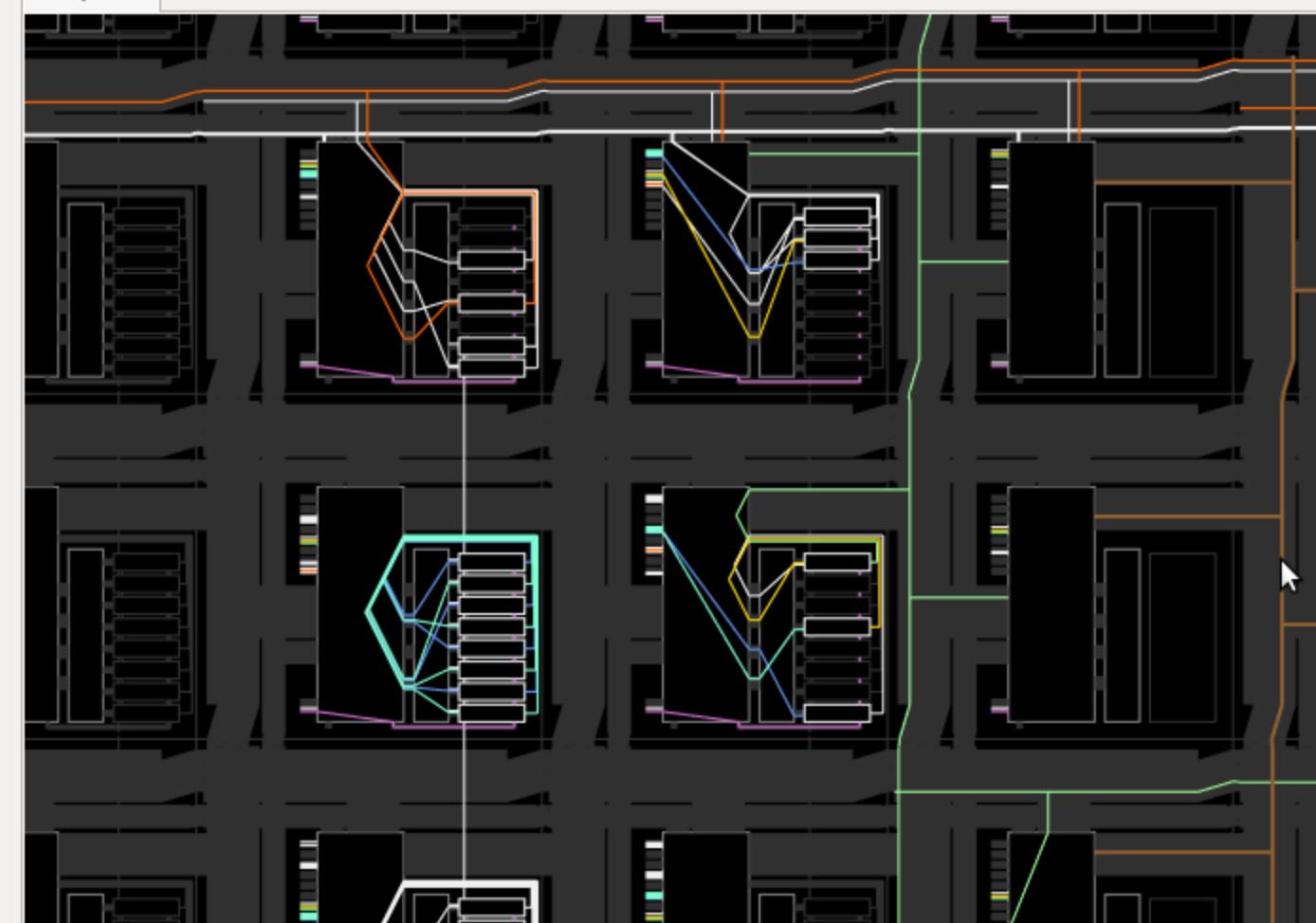
- Synthesis output needs to be mapped to the specific hardware architecture of the FPGA (i.e. CLBs, DSP, SERDES, etc.)
- Tools: Yosys
 - Multiple scripts are used to map the design
 - `yosys> dfflibmap # map flip-flops`
 - `yosys> abc # map logic`
 - Supports **extensible, custom techmaps!**
 - Returns text file to be consumed by P&R tool

5. Placement & Routing

- Tool consumes techmapped design, tries to fit it into the FPGA, and connect everything together
- NP-hard optimization problem (think "travelling FPGA salesman")
- Timing constraints factor in at this step
- Tools:
 - [Nextpnr](#) - Actively developed, still buggy, GUI
 - [Arachne-pnr](#) - No more development, works for ICE40 only (but reliably)



Graphics



Search...

Items

X9.Y11.sp12_h_r_1.->.X9.Y...

Y13

Nets

clk

\$auto\$Salumacc.cc:474:replace_al...

counter[8]

counter[7]

\$auto\$Salumacc.cc:474:replace_al...

\$auto\$Salumacc.cc:474:replace_al...

counter[5]

\$auto\$Salumacc.cc:474:replace_al...

counter[4]

counter[3]

\$auto\$Salumacc.cc:474:replace_al...

counter[25]



Property

Value

Net

Name counter[25]

Driver

Port O

Budget 0.00

Cell \$auto\$Salumacc.cc...

Users

I2

Port I2

Budget 82793.00

Cell \$auto\$Salumacc.cc...

I0

Port I0

Budget 82793.00

Console

INFO: VISITED 75810 PIPS (0.01% revisits, 0.02% overtime revisits).

Info: final tns with respect to arc budgets: 0.000000 ns (0 nets, 0 arcs)

Info: Checksum: 0xa4786aa9

Routing design successful.

>>>

6. Bitmap Generation

- The P&R tool generates a binary file known as the **bitstream**
- Morally equivalent to an ELF or EXE
- Each bit controls the configuration state and initial conditions of every CLB and interconnect in the device
- Previously very secret sauce
- Slowly being reverse engineered by hackers *fuzzing* the vendor tools

7. Device Flashing

- Chip-specific (SPI, JTAG, or some custom protocol)
- SRAM (fast, volatile) vs. external flash (slow, non-volatile)
- Tools:
 - `iceprog` - ICE40 dev boards only
 - `openocd` - Popular tool to program & debug with
 - `flashrom` - External SPI/I2C flash

Holy cow we're done!

Just kidding! Now we can finally
start.

How to Write Less Verilog

- Code reuse has historically been challenging for FPGA designs
- How to abstract away complexity:
 - High-level synthesis tools
 - **MATLAB HDL Coder**, VivadoHLS (**C/C++**), Intel HLS Compiler (**C**), Symphony (**C**), Migen (**Python**), Litex (**Python**)
 - Configurable IP Megablocks
 - Vendor clock & PLL configuration

How to Write Less Verilog

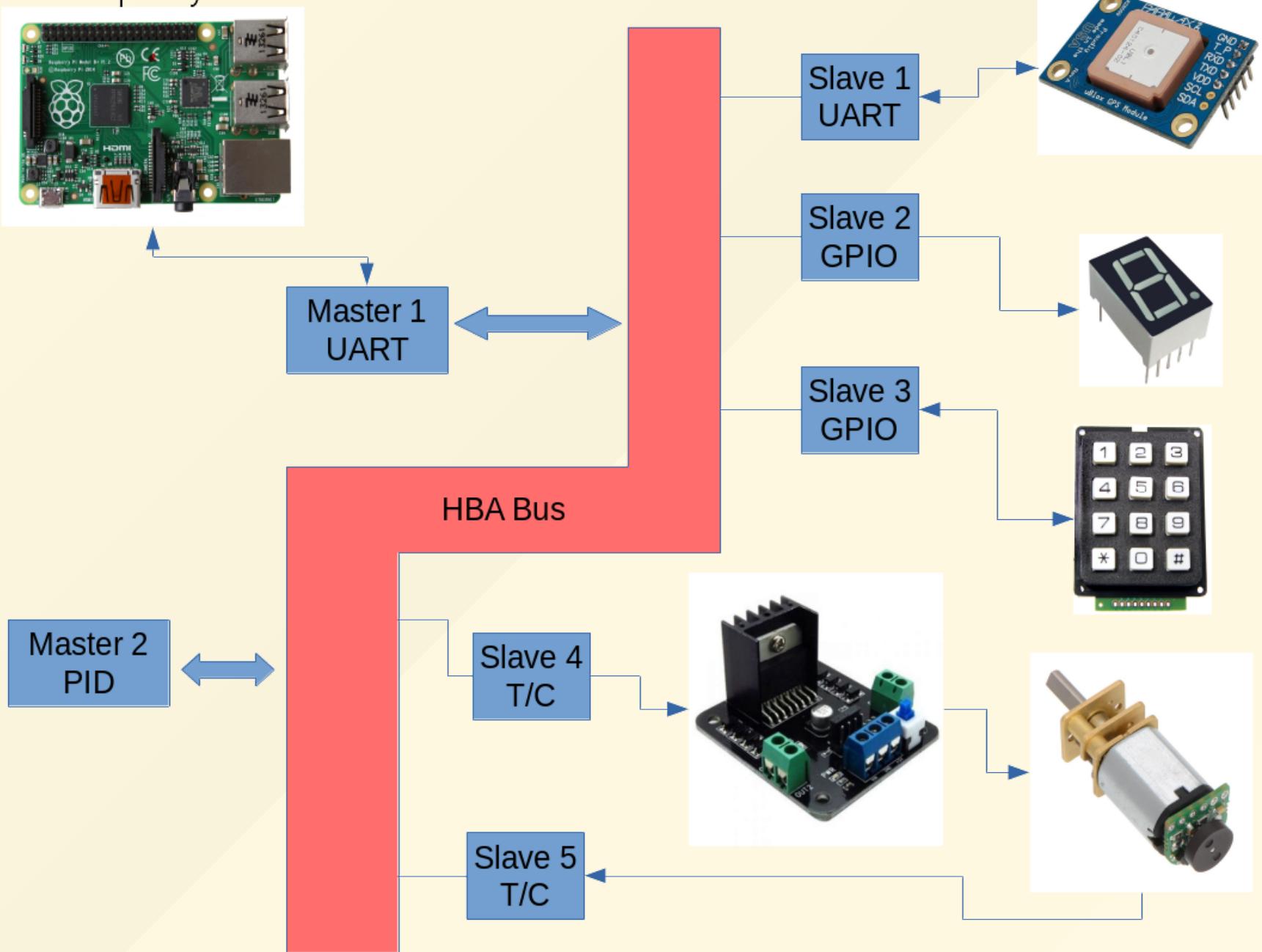
- Connect the FPGA to a Linux computer & leverage the strengths of both devices

Homebrew Automation

HBA Gateware (FPGA)

- Based on TinyFPGA BX (Lattice ICE40)
- Consists of small, modular peripherals
- Provides standardized interface to a simple bus
- Up to four master peripherals
 - E.g. Raspberry Pi interface or PID controller
- Up to sixteen slave peripherals
 - e.g. timer/counter, SPI, UART

Raspberry Pi



HBA Software (Linux)

- UNIX-like interface design - everything is ASCII
- Interface presented as command and data resources for each peripheral (think I2C registers)
- Only a few basic commands:
 - `hbaloado <plug-in.so>`
 - `hbaget <name|ID#> <resource_name>`
 - `hbaset <name|ID#> <resource_name> <value>`
 - `hbacat <name|ID#> <resource_name>`
 - `hbalist [name]`

HBA Software (Linux)

Motor controller example:

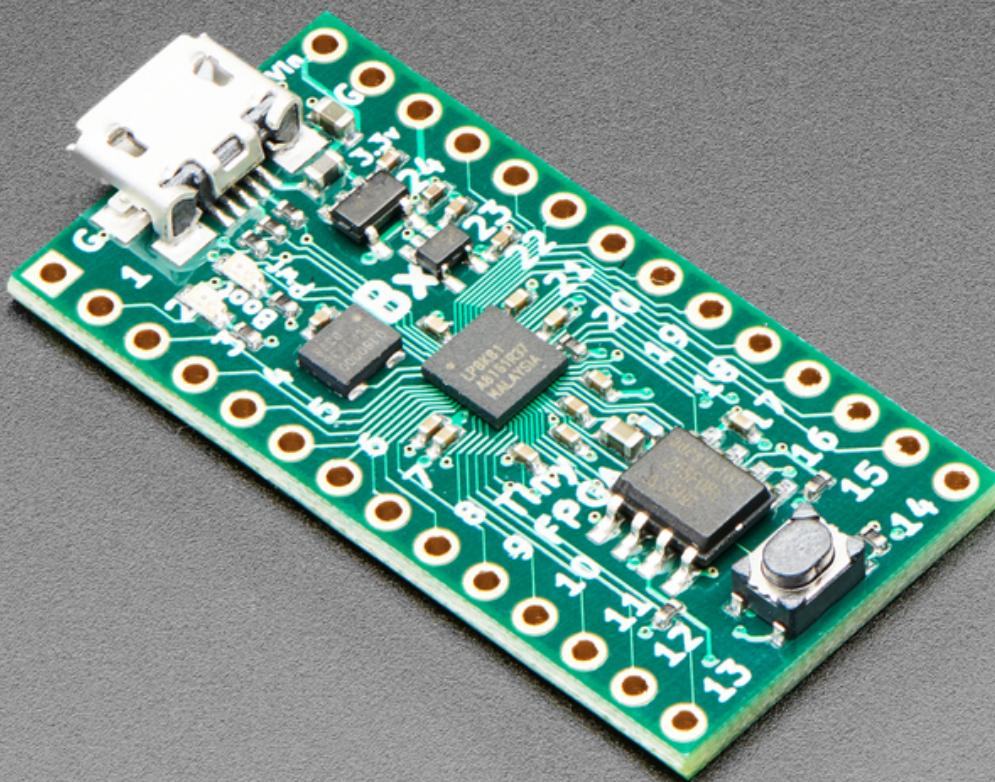
- `mode`: a character in (B)rake, (F)oward, re(V)erse, or (R)otate
- `speed`: the desired speed in ticks/second or meters/second
- `direction`: 0 to 100 with 0=hard left, 50=straight, 100=hard right
- `watchdog`: Brake if no mode, speed, or dir command in this many milliseconds

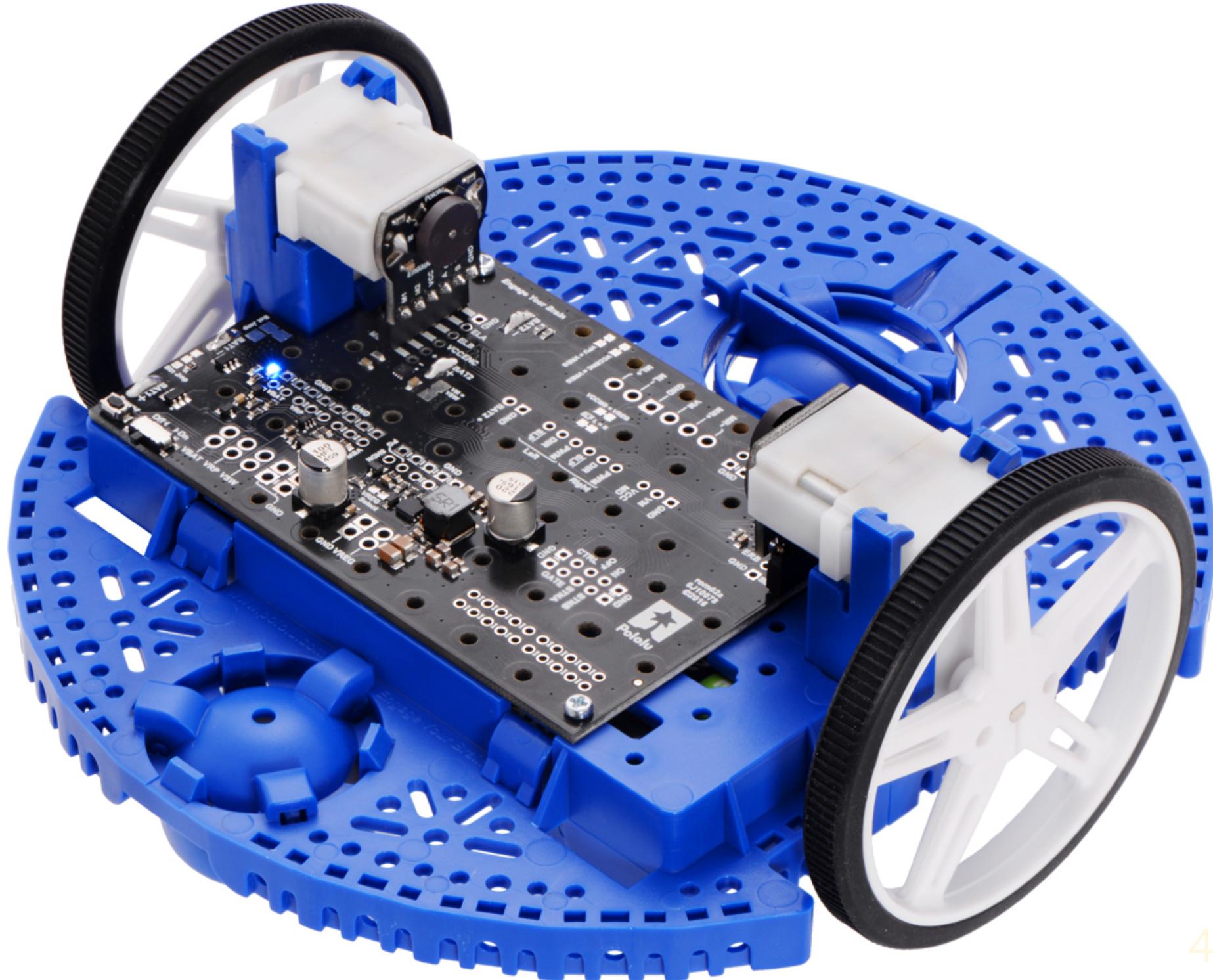
HBA Software (Linux)

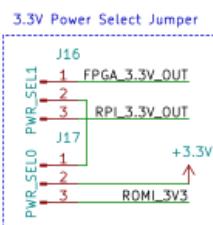
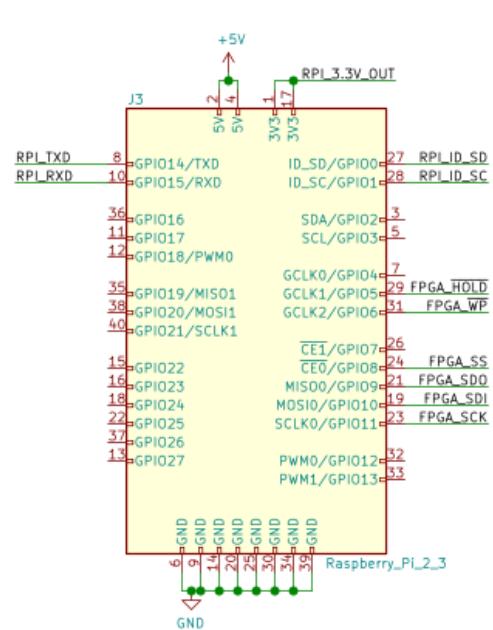
```
hbaset motors mode b      # brake
hbaset motors speed 50
hbaset motors dir 50
hbaset motors mode f      # and off we go...
while true
do
    sleep 2
    hbaset motors dir 100
    sleep 0.75
    hbaset motors dir 50
done
```

HBA Hardware

- Raspberry Pi 3 Model B+ - \$45 (incl. extras)
- TinyFPGA BX - \$40
- Pololu Romi Chassis Kit - \$30
- Pololu Romi Encoder Pair Kit - \$10
- Pololu Motor Driver and PDB - \$20
- 2x HC-SR04 SONAR sensors - \$10
- 2x Pololu QTR IR reflectance sensors - \$5
- Custom PCB (power supply & interconnect) - \$10?



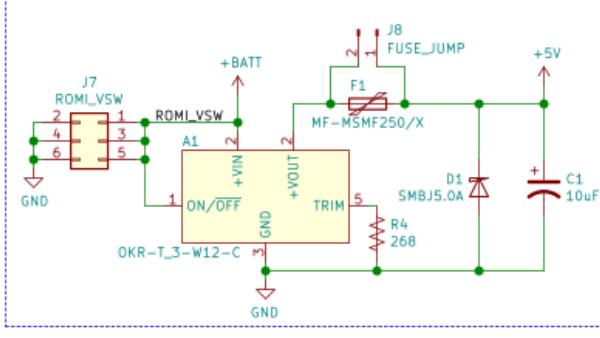




5V Regulator Powered by Romi VSW

The Murata OKR-T/3
J8 can be used to connect an external fuse or bypass fusing entirely.

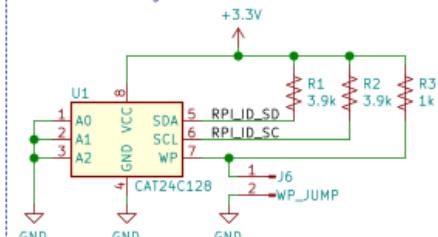
TRIM resistor of 268 ohms sets VOUT to 5V



128Kb Configuration EEPROM

This EEPROM is for storing Linux Device Tree (DT) configuration. It connects to the dedicated I2C bus that the Raspberry Pi provides. The I2C EEPROM is part of the official HAT spec but likely won't be populated for the class.

J6 must be installed in order to pull down the WP line and write the configuration to the EEPROM.



Romi Motor I/O

J9: ROMI_MOTOR_DRIVE

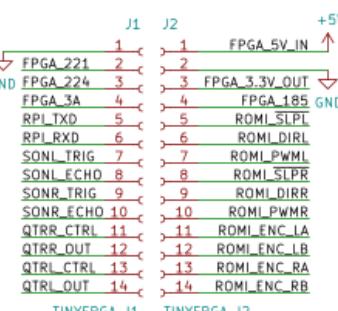
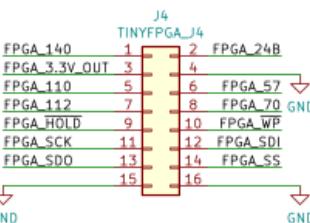
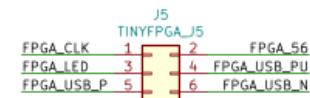
- 1 ROMI_SLP1
- 2 ROMI_DIRL
- 3 ROMI_PWM1
- 4 ROMI_SLP1R
- 5 ROMI_DIRR
- 6 ROMI_PWM1R

J10: ROMI_ENC_LEFT

- 1 ROMI_ENC_LA
- 2 ROMI_ENC_LB
- 3 GND

J11: ROMI_ENC_RIGHT

- 1 ROMI_ENC_RA
- 2 ROMI_ENC_RB
- 3 GND



Sheet: /
File: tinyfpga-raspi-romi-board.sch

Title:

Size: A4 Date:
KiCad E.D.A. kicad 5.1.2

Rev:
Id: 1/1

Class Details

- Where: **Hacker Dojo**
- When: **Wednesday, June 19, 2019 - 7:00pm**
- Cost - **\$200** (we'll refund you if materials end up being less)



Questions?

All HBA material is on GitHub:

- <https://github.com/hbrc-fpga-class/class-material/blob/master/presentation.pdf>

