Let's write a Debugger!

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Who am I?

- Final year undergraduate at Imperial College London
- Previously at Apple and Red Hat
- Mostly working on operating systems and low-level performance

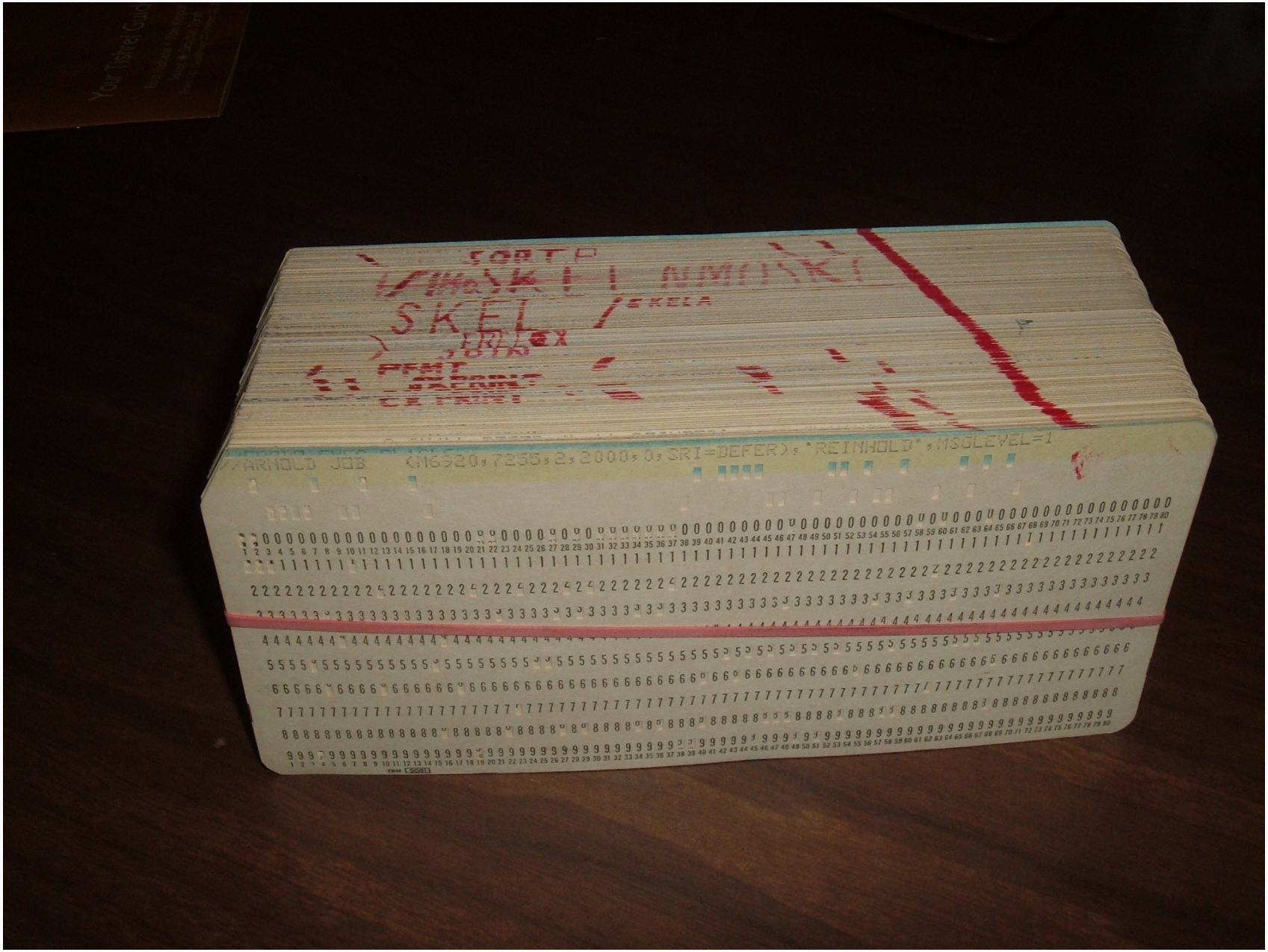
History of debuggers

Single user machines

- One of the first computers in the world
- Small application was loaded at the top of the memory
  - single step
  - examine registers
  - read/write memory

TX-0 at MIT

Batch processing machines



Batch processing machines

Debugged by putting macro call in the punch card and generating:

- Snapshots *(register dump)*
- Core dumps *(contents of memory)*

printf

Then came CTSS *(Compatible Time-Sharing System)*, one of the first time-sharing operating systems!

Debugging suddenly became interactive.

printf-debugging

```
*ptr = 1337;
printf("Did we crash at line %d?\n", __LINE__);
*((int *) 0) = 1337;
printf("Did we crash at line %d?\n", __LINE__);
```

Unix-es

- The first version of Unix had a debugger called, `DB`
- GNU had `GDB` and `LLDB`
- For Plan 9, `ADB` was created

These debuggers should be familiar!

Tracing processes

ptrace

Most debuggers heavily rely on a system call known as `ptrace`.

The prototype of `ptrace(2)`

```
#include <sys/ptrace.h>

long ptrace(enum __ptrace_request request, pid_t pid,
                    void *addr, void *data);
```

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5. Your signal handler is called (or not if it is `SIGKILL`)

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- Monitoring registers
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  - `PTRACE_SINGLESTEP`

Architectural support

Interrupting a process

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- `ud2` (machine code: `0x0F 0x0B`)
  - Triggers `#UD`
- `int $3` (machine code: `0xCC`)
  - Triggers `#BP`

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- `DR7`: Debug status
  Bitmask showing which of `DR0-DR3` triggered the `#DB`

Thanks!

Thank you for your attention!

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The LaTeX theme is available at `github.com/matze/mtheme`