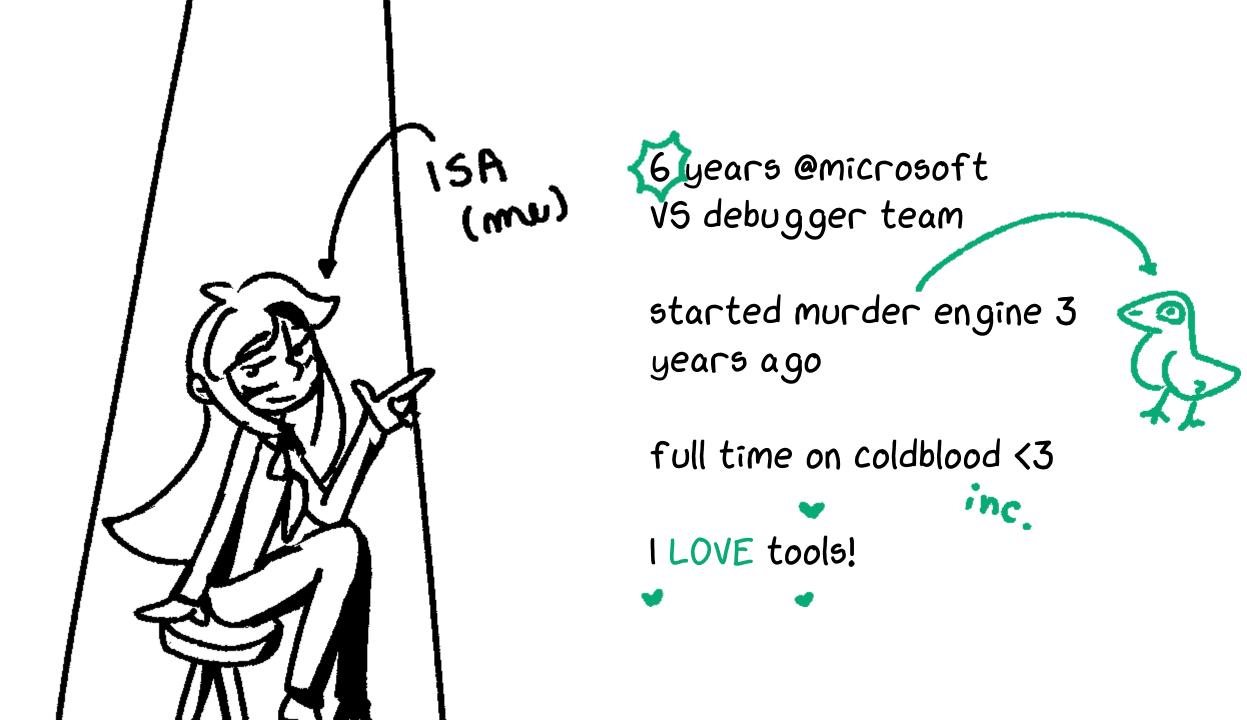
Making delightful tools

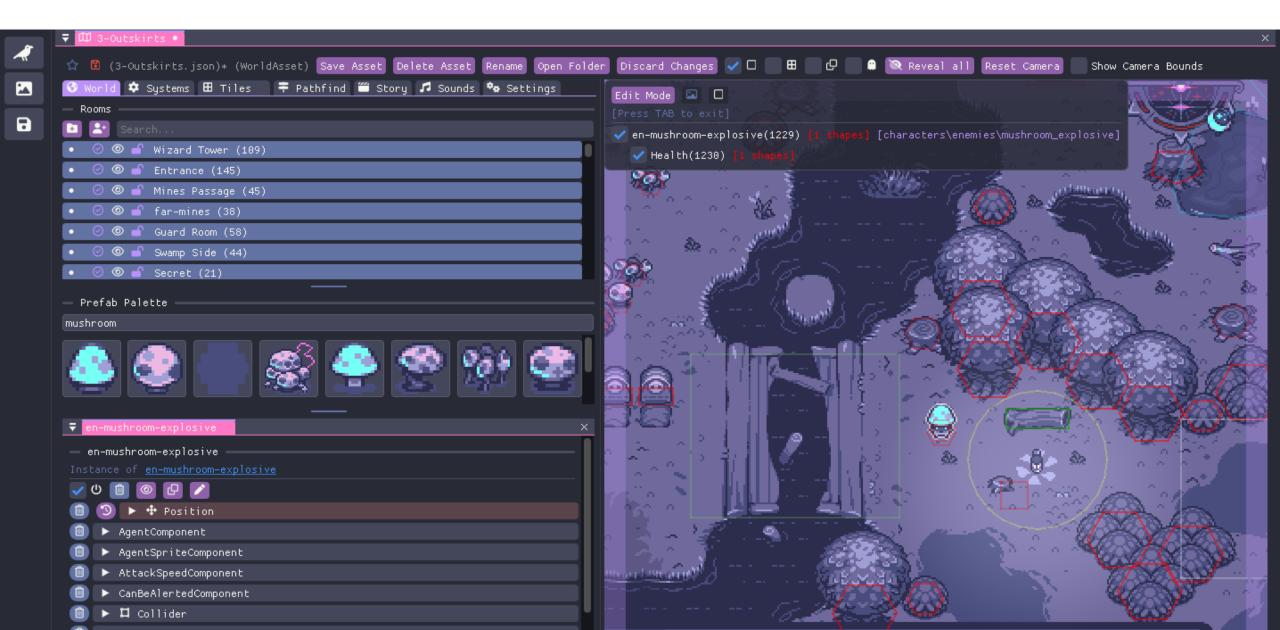
for sustainable (small-team) development





- most of these tips apply to a small team (less than 8 people)
- # HOWEVER I also learned them as a senior engineer in Visual Studio (100+ people team)
- * based on my own experience and what has helped us so far!

i'm not here to convince you to do your own engine



- my goal is to cover how to make tools...
 - tailored for the team,
 - delightful and fun to work with,
 - with a data-oriented mindset,

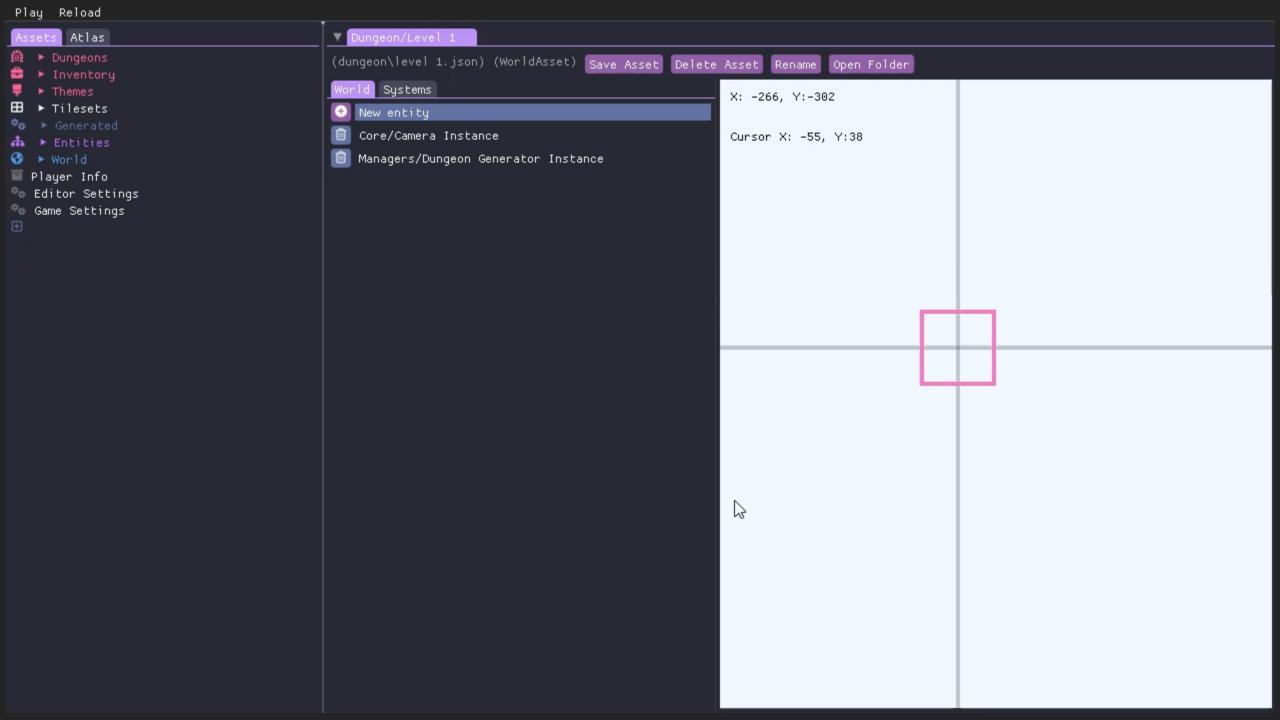


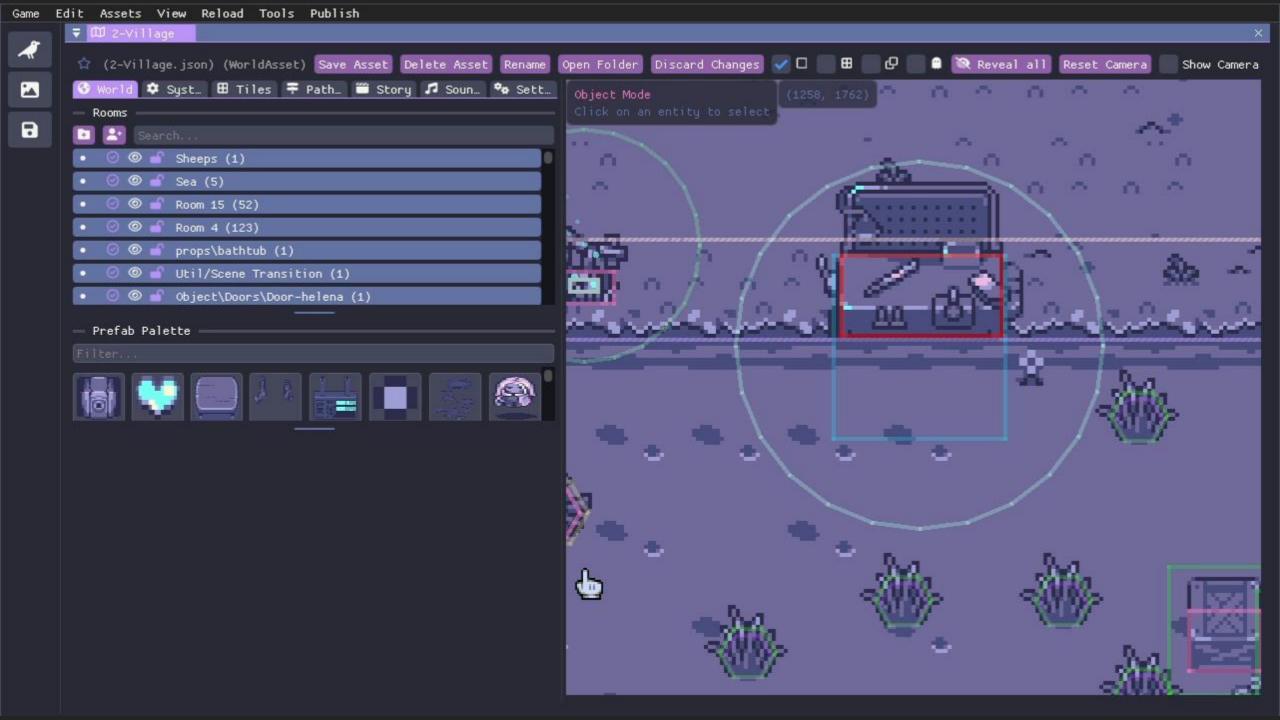
...and balance between tools, engine and gameplay development with 9 tips!

1 The game always comes first

start with whatever unblocks you and build from there!





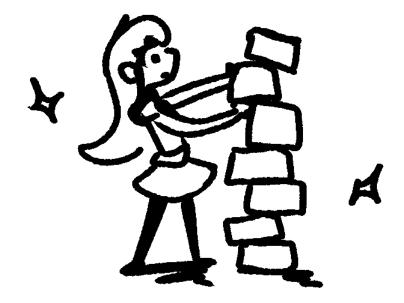




think of it as "little gifts" for your future—self it can be an extremely rewarding experience!

instead of comparing yourself to others, compare yourself with your own progress

I MADE IT THIS FAR...



AND I DESERVE TO KEEP GOING do use other engines and see what you like about them

2 Stick to your goals



first goal: use our engine in a game jam



Results

Final results

Overall: 1st (4.667 average from 50 ratings)

Fun: **9**th (4.469 average from 50 ratings)

Innovation: 5th (4.573 average from 50 ratings)

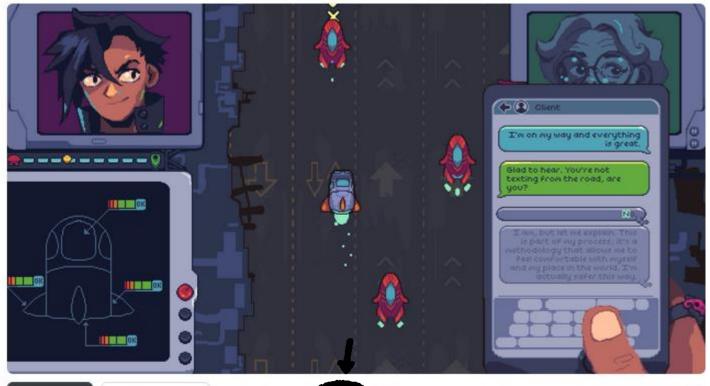
Theme: **1**st (4.771 average from 50 ratings)

Graphics: **1**st (4.917 average from 50 ratings)

Audio: 7th (4.585 average from 49 ratings)

Humor: **7**th (4.649 average from 49 ratings)

Game jam game of the month















Source: GitHub Game Bytes - June 2023

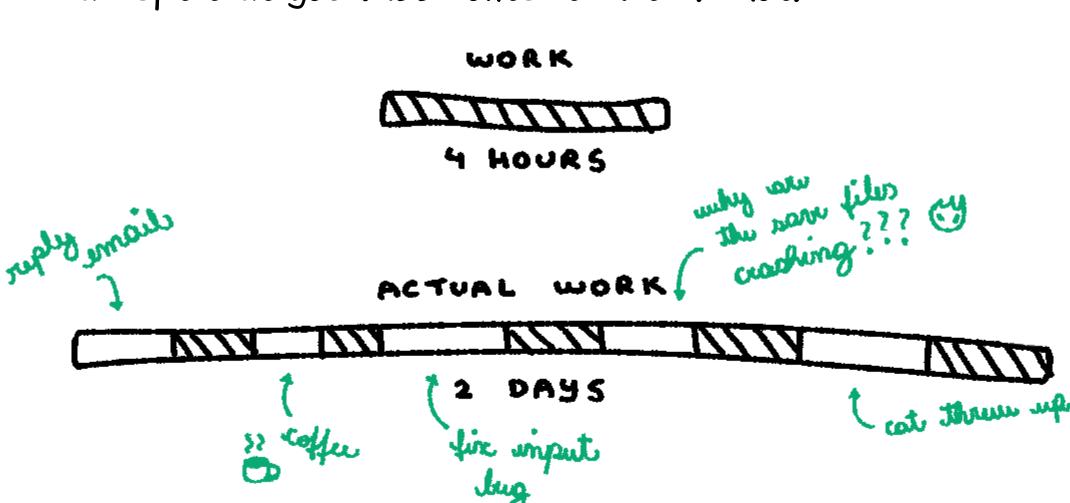


new goal: ship a commercial game

- # your time is your most valuable resource
- goals can help you choose what to prioritize



- # get good at estimating feature costs!
 - → make mistakes
 - accept that you WILL context switch. A lot.





refactoring my serialization from reflection to source generation

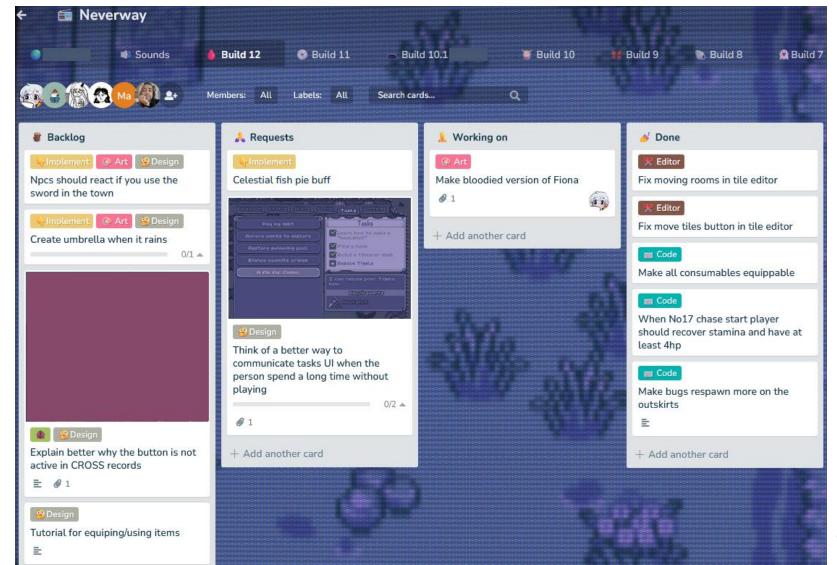
```
"that's hard" (bad)

"probably a month" (better)

15 days (actual work)
```

- * I week prototyping
- + 3 days implementing
- + 5 days fixing edge cases I missed
- * maybe add some weeks fixing edge cases here and there while working on the game again

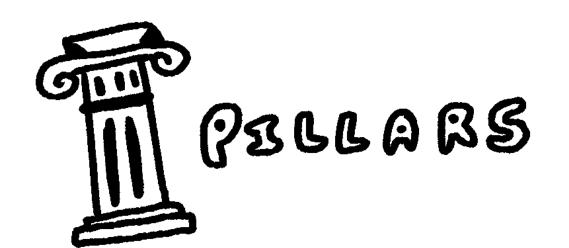
- * keep a balance between planning vs. just doing stuff
 - we have a backlog of tasks and "shop around" every cycle



Source: planka

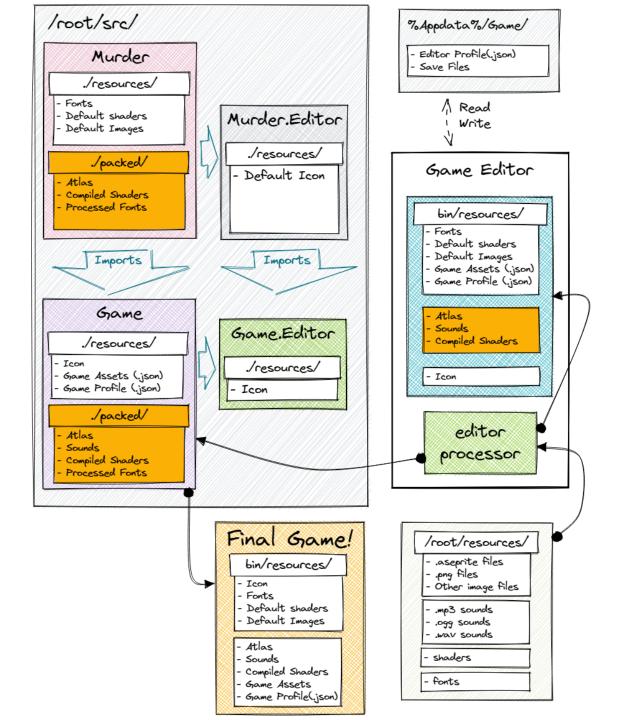
but how do you know if you're on the right path?



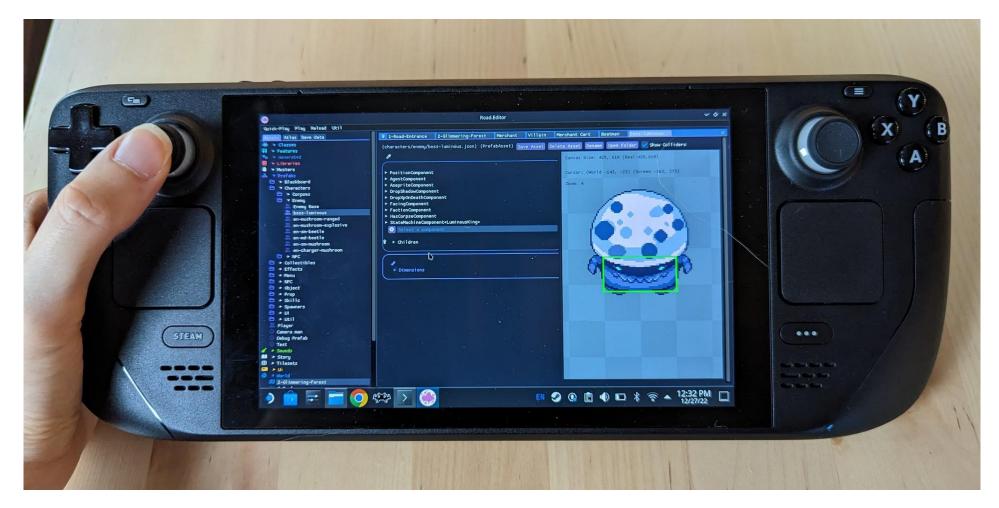


- "one click setup" regardless of 05 or device
- programming first with full control of how projects are built
- * prioritize our team's strengths









3 Never crash



you control the buttons you press

2:24 PM · Oct 24, 2019









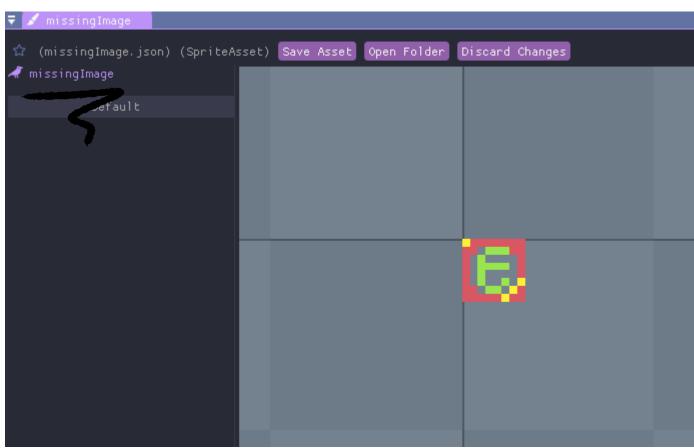


•••

make. it. deterministic.









* logs!!!





Debug. Assert

```
internal bool Tick(float dt)
{
    Debug.Assert(World is not null && Entity is not null, "Why are we ticking before starting first?");

99+ references
public static void Warning(string msg,
    [CallerMemberName] string memberName = "",
    [CallerLineNumber] int lineNumber = 0) => GetOrCreateInstance().LogWarningImpl(msg, memberName, lineNumber);

99+ references
public static void Error(
    string msg,
    [CallerMemberName] string memberName = "",
    [CallerLineNumber] int lineNumber = 0) => GetOrCreateInstance().LogErrorImpl(msg, memberName, lineNumber);
```





a compile-time warnings

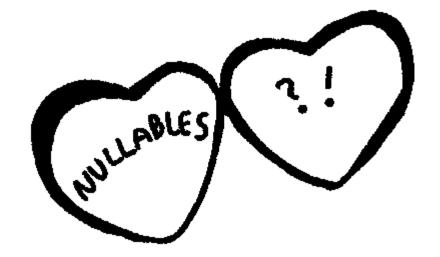
_sceneLoader.LoadContent();

(field) SceneLoader? Game._sceneLoader Initialized in Game.LoadContent().

'_sceneLoader' may be null here.

CS8602: Dereference of a possibly null reference.

_sceneLoader?.LoadContent();



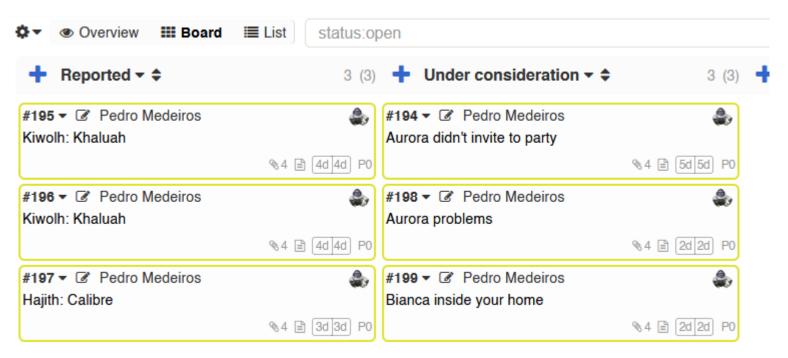


* leverage your own diagnostic analysis tools

```
0 references
internal class FrictionSystem : IFixedUpdateSystem
{
2 references
public void FixedUpdate(Context context)
{
    foreach (var e in context.Entities)
    {
        var velocity = e.GetVelocity();
        var friction = e.GetFriction();
        e.ReplaceComponent(new VelocityComponent(velocity.Velocity * (1 - friction.Amount)));
    }
}
```



support sending diagnostic data to our server
REALLY helpful for cross platform



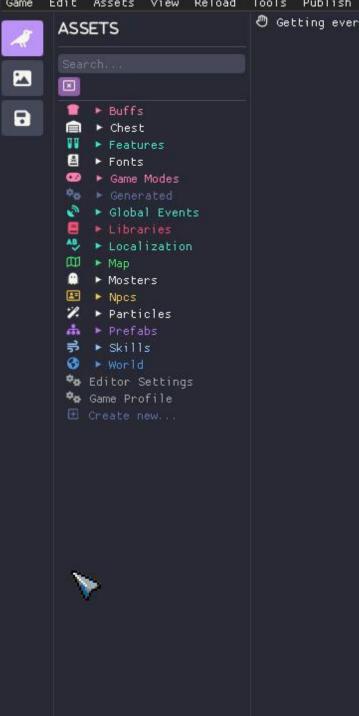
Source: kanboard

4 Make it delightful

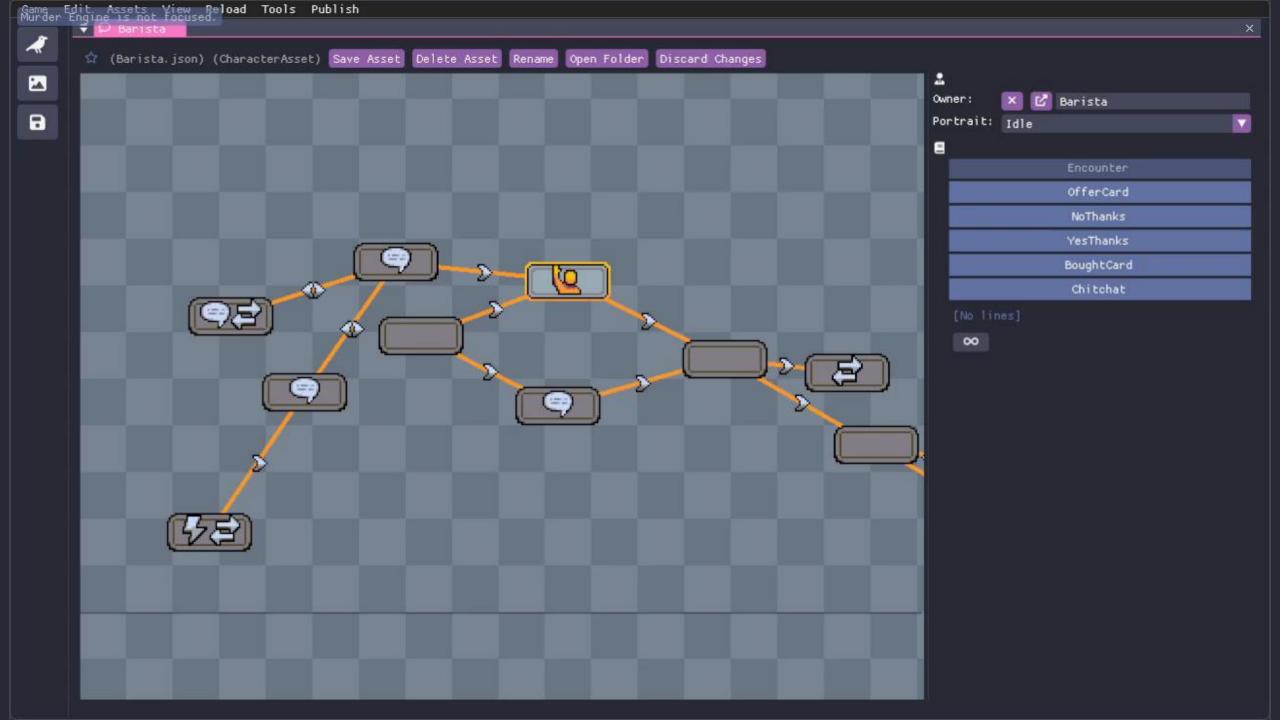
B W

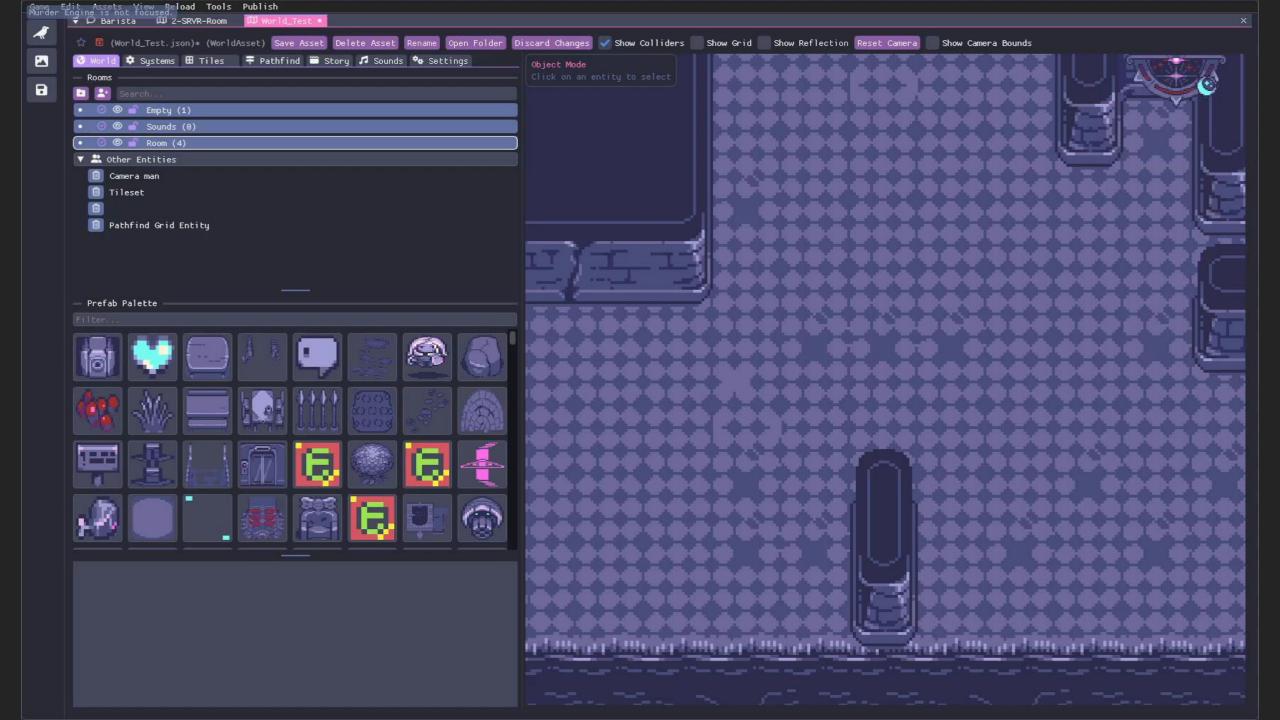
you're spending all your time here, make it enjoyable

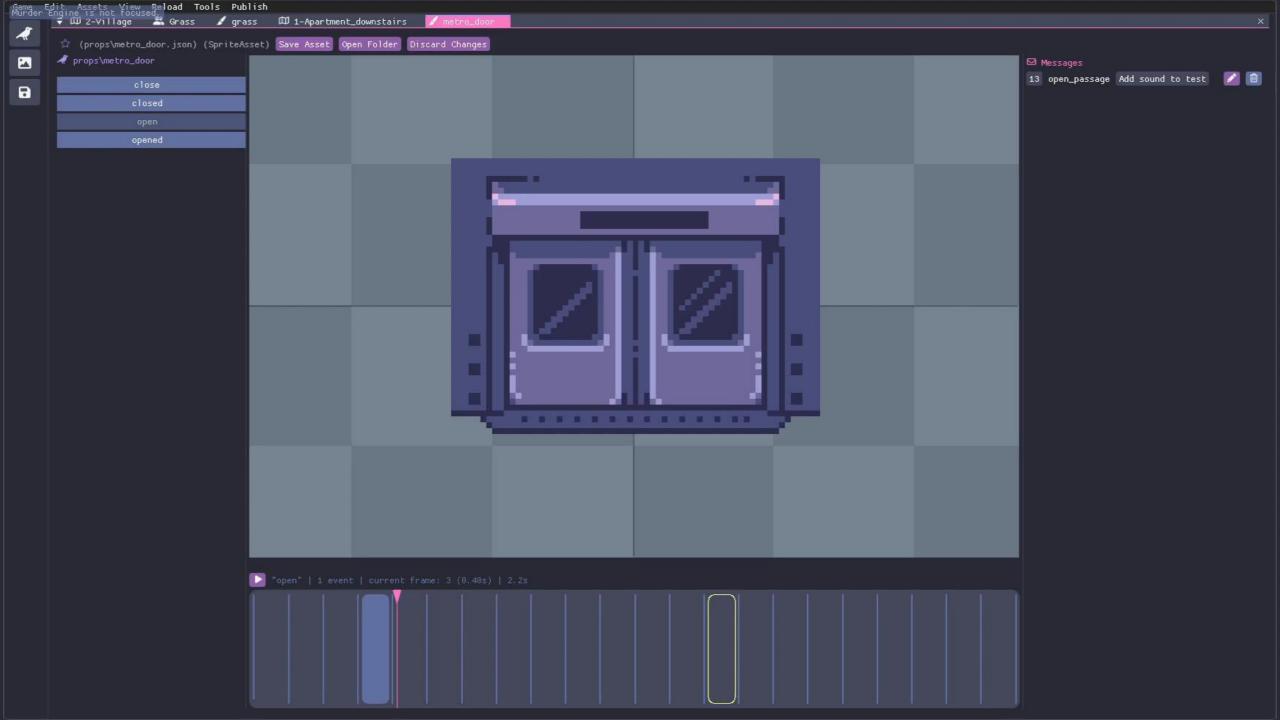




D Getting everything ready...



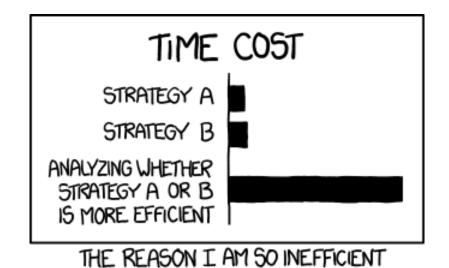






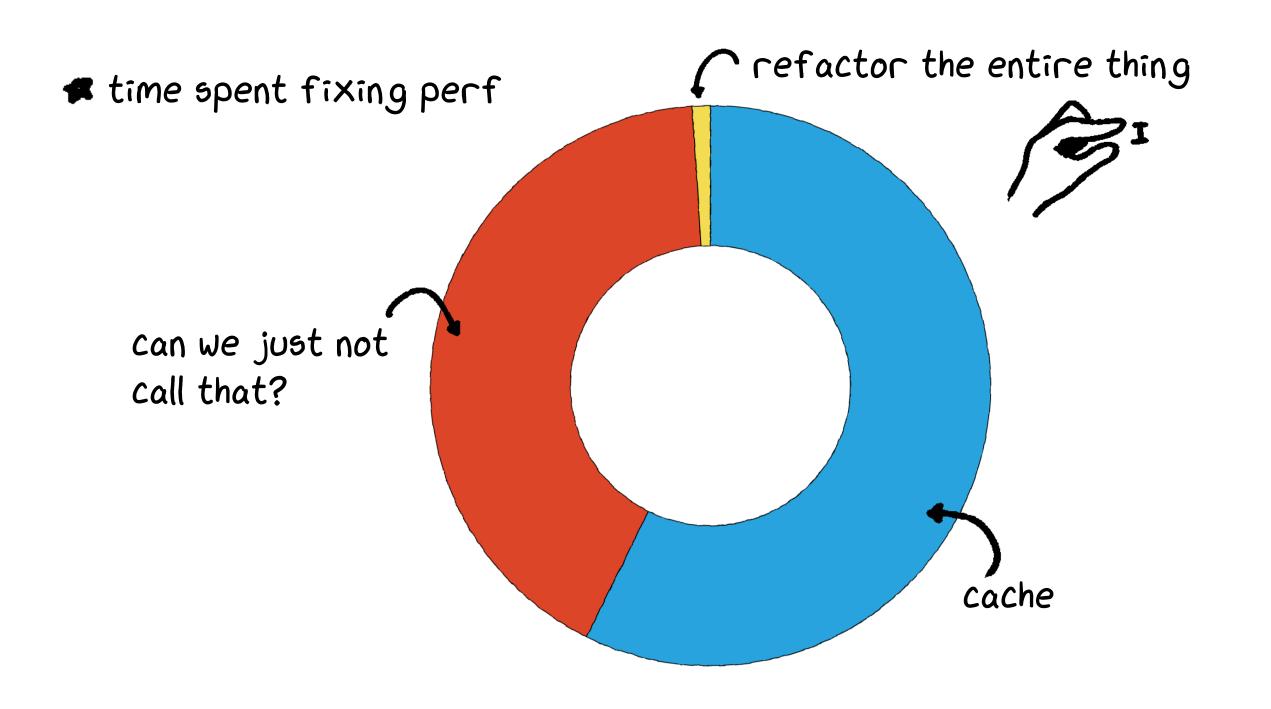
5 Only do it once it's a bottleneck

do not overthink performance. use a profiler! the fix is almost always very boring!



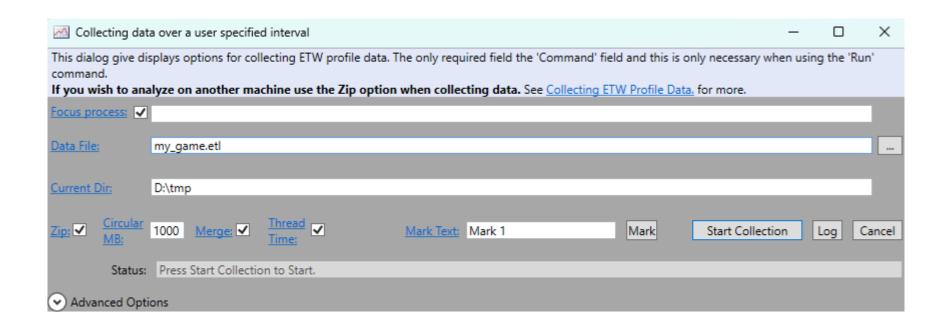
Source: xkcd







Perfview!!!!



Thread Time (with StartStop Activities) Stacks(339,782 metric) my_game.etl.zip in tmp (D:\tmp\my_game.etl.zip)			
File View Diff Regression Preset Help Stack View Help (F1) Understanding Perf Data Starting an Analysis			
Update Back Forward Totals Metric: 339,781.6 Count: 90,246.0 First: 64.668 Last: 6,554.719 Last-First: 6,490.051 Metric/Interval: 52.35 TimeBucket: 204.9 TotalProcs 16			
Start: 0.000			
GroupPats: " Fold%: " FoldPats: " FoldPats: " IncPats: Proce	ess% Road	Editor (48	700)
By Name ? Caller-Callee ? CallTree ? Callers ? Callers ? Callees ? Flame Graph ? Notes ?			
Name ?	Inc % ?	Inc ?	Inc Ct ?
☑ ROOT	100.0	339,781.6	90,246
+☑ Process64 Road.Editor (48700) Args:	100.0	339,781.6	90,246
+☑ (Non-Activities)	100.0	339,781.6	90,246
+ ☑ Threads	100.0	339,781.6	-
+☑Thread (11004) CPU=5078ms	1.9		19,777
+	1.6		16,371
+	1.6		
+ road.editor!?	1.6		_
+ ✓ hostfxr!?	1.6	_	_
+ hostpolicy!?	1.6	-1	_
+	1.6		
+ Road.Editor!Road.Editor.Program.Main()	1.6		_
+ FNA!Microsoft.Xna.Framework.Game.Run()	1.6		16,369
+ FNA!Microsoft.Xna.Framework.Game.RunLoop()	1.6		_
+ FNA!Microsoft.Xna.Framework.Game.Tick() + Murder Editor!Murder Editor Architect.Update(class Microsoft Xna.Framework GameTime)	1.6	-	
	0.8		9,393
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	0.3		
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Entracemental dense rices in hysicise rices confidential and across confedence and a margencore confedence in the confidence in the confid	1 011	302.3	050





optimization also applies to your workflow!

- # differentiate "nice to have" and "must have"
- as a rule, we only automate tools after hitting it at least times
- * or whenever we notice we didn't add something cool to the game because it was too bureaucratic



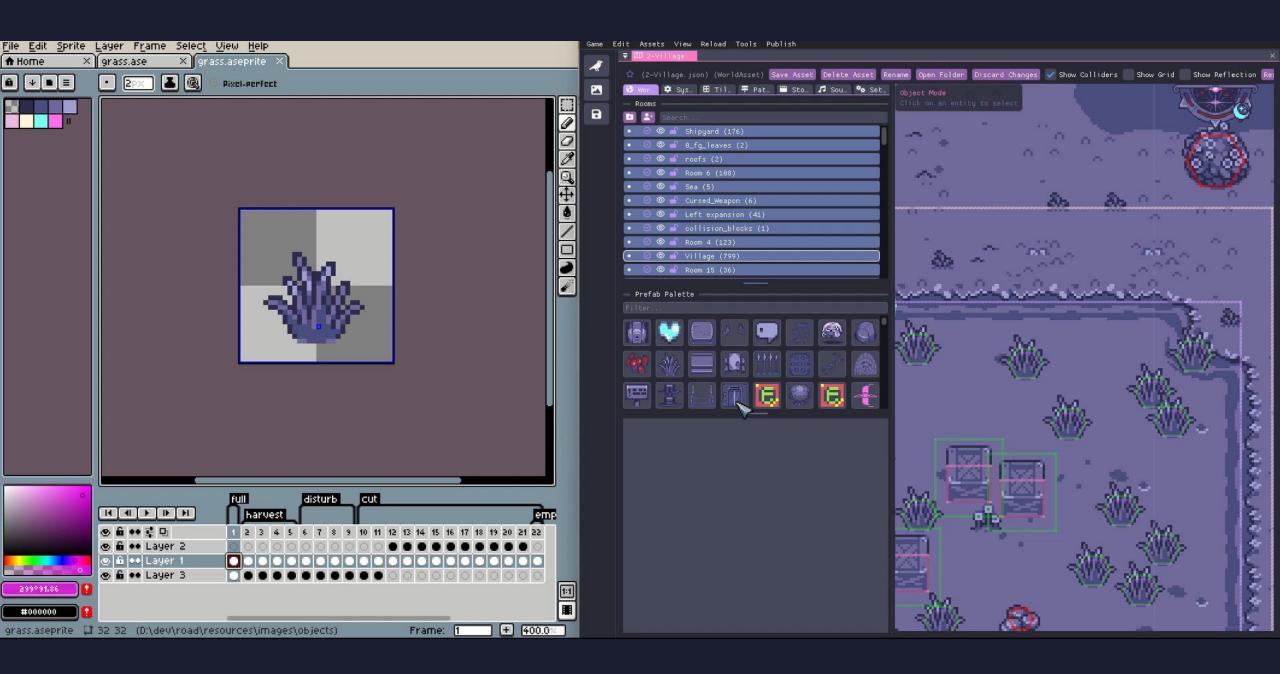


BEFORE W

- → must rebuild the whole game
- → wait 2 minutes to see changes



- → fast! Quick!
- can see right away how it looks in the game
- → more time to try new ideas!





load saves by dropping zip files

BEFORE

would procrastinate to debug repro



- super quick repro
- → fix a lot more bugs faster
- → kinda fun



BEFORE W

- → had to discard changes in the whole file
- → save a lot T_T

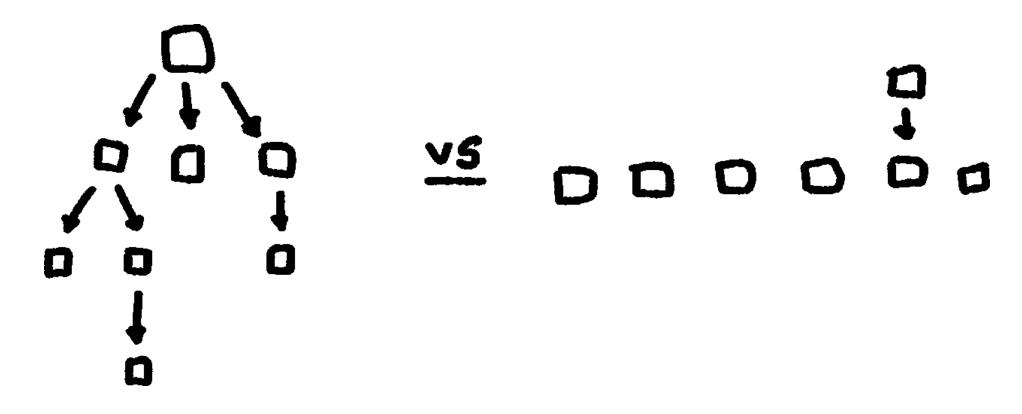


- → can quickly iterate over undo operations
- → be more creative when designing maps

6 Scale horizontally

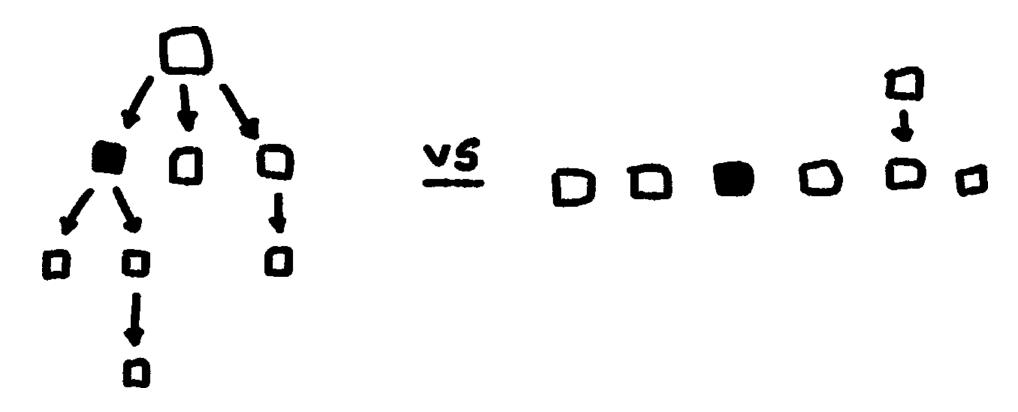
what it means to scale horizontally

- # build modular code
- * usually takes longer to start, but helps you finish whatever you're doing



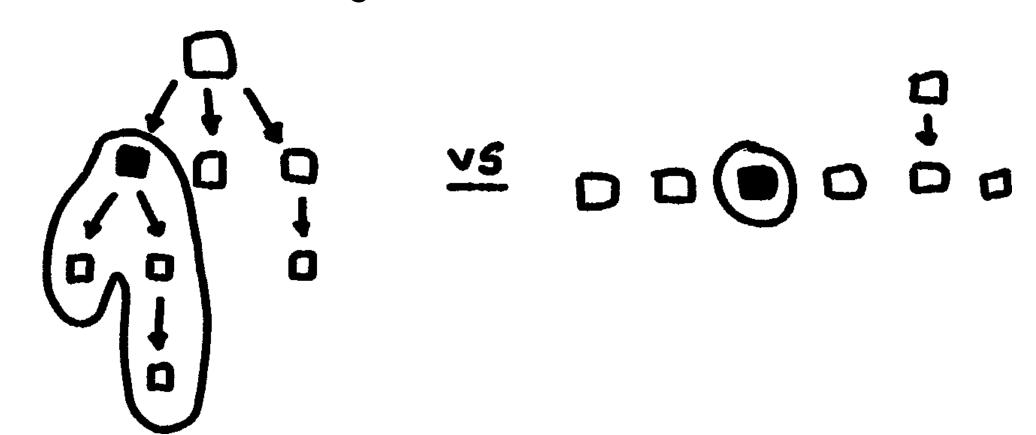
what it means to scale horizontally

- * build modular code
- * usually takes longer to start, but helps you finish whatever you're doing



what it means to scale horizontally

- # build modular code
- * usually takes longer to start, but helps you finish whatever you're doing



* generate code!

by generating code, you get a code that is ...

4 fast ? clean Safe cheap

* generate code!



e.GetComponent<PositionComponent>();



e.GetPosition();



source generation for serialization!

```
RoadSourceGe...s [generated] + X
This file was generated by 'Murder.Serializer.Generator' at 2024-09-11 3:55:47 PM and cannot be edited.
                                                                                                                                                    Rerun generator
                                                                                                                                                                                 → Murder.Seria
    { jj
                                     using System.Text.Json.Serialization;
                                    namespace Murder.Serialization;

    /// <summary>

                                     /// Serialization context for all the types within Road. You may find
                                                - Components
                                     /// - State machines
                                                - Interactions
                                                 - Game assets
                 10
                                    ///
                 11
                                     /// And any private fields that these types have.
                 12
                                    /// </summary>
                 13
                                     [JsonSerializable(typeof(Murder.Assets.GameAsset))]
                 14
                                     [JsonSerializable(typeof(Bang.Components.IComponent))]
                 15
                                     [JsonSerializable(typeof(Bang.Components.IMessage))]
                 16
                 17
                                     [JsonSerializable(typeof(Bang.StateMachines.StateMachine))]
                                     [JsonSerializable(typeof(Bang.StateMachines.IStateMachineComponent))
                 18
                                     [JsonSerializable(typeof(Bang.Interactions.IInteraction))]
                 19
                                     [JsonSerializable(typeof(Bang.Interactions.IInteractiveComponent))]
                 20
                                     [JsonSerializable(typeof(Road.Components.Agents.ActionComponent))]
                 21
                                     [JsonSerializable(typeof(Road.Components.ActiveRoutineTrackerCompone
                                     [JsonSerializable(typeof(Road.Components.AffectBuildingsComponent))]
                 23
                                     [JsonSerializable(typeof(Road.Components.AiFollowerComponent))]
                 24
                 25
                                     [JsonSerializable(typeof(Road.Components.AiMasterComponent))]
                                     [JsonSerializable(typeof(Road.Components.AiRetreat))]
                 26
                                     [JsonSerializable(typeof(Road.Components.AmbienceSoundInScreenCompon
                                     [JsonSerializable(typeof(Road.Components.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.AnimatePlayerOnInteractionComponents.Animate
                 28
                                     [JsonSerializable(typeof(Road.Components.Interactions.AnimationOverle
                 29
```

See Adventures serializing absolutely everything in C#

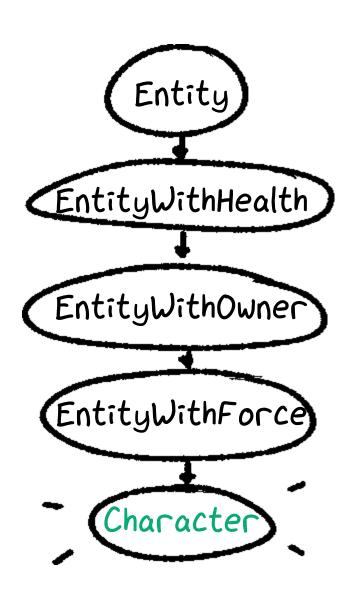


i'm biased





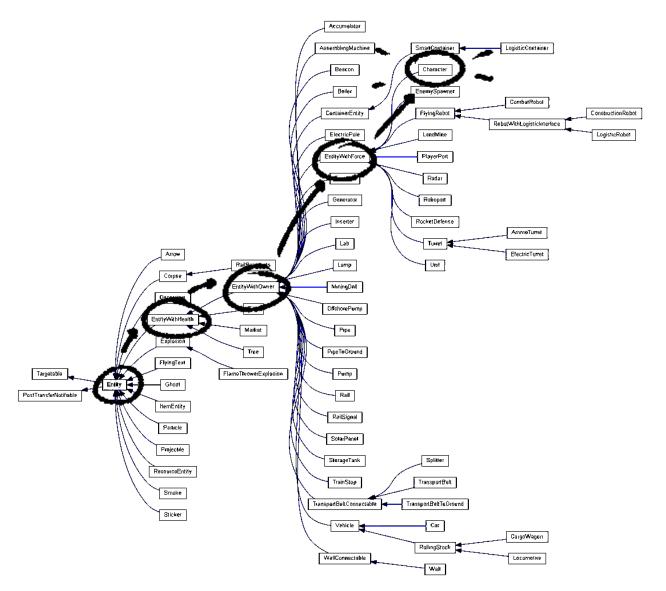




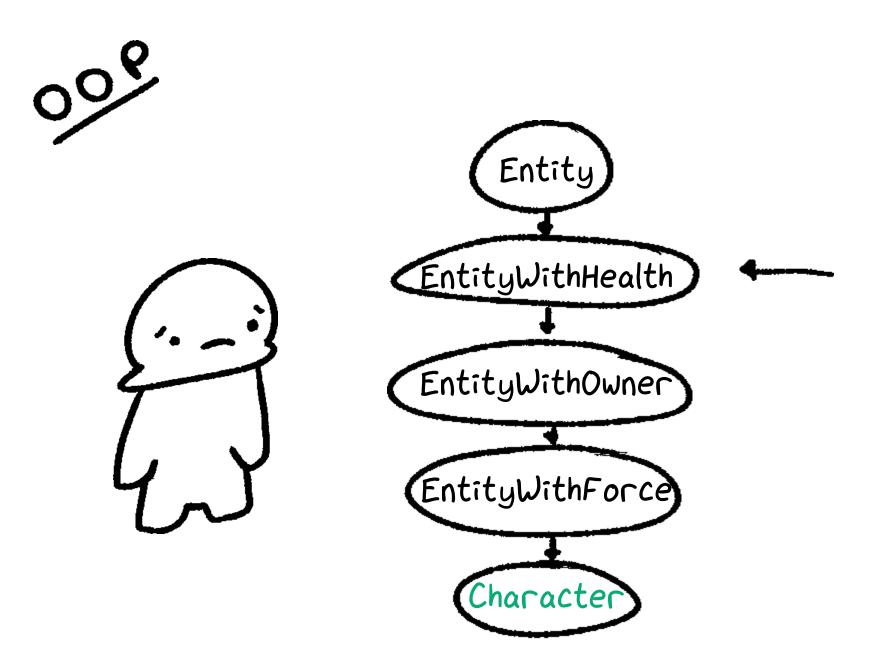
```
public class Character:
    EntityWithForce
{
    private Sprite _sprite;
    private Vector2 _position;

    override void Update() { ... }
    override void Draw() { ... }
}
```



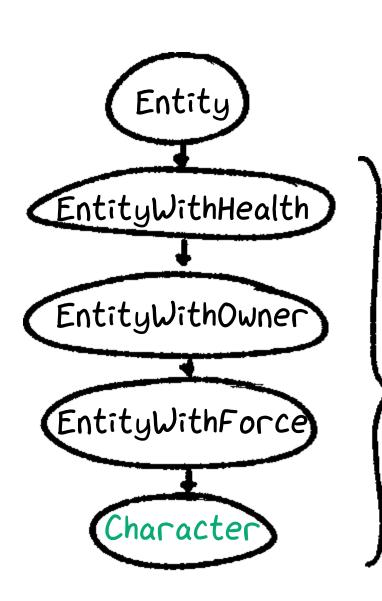


Source: Factorio Friday Facts #18



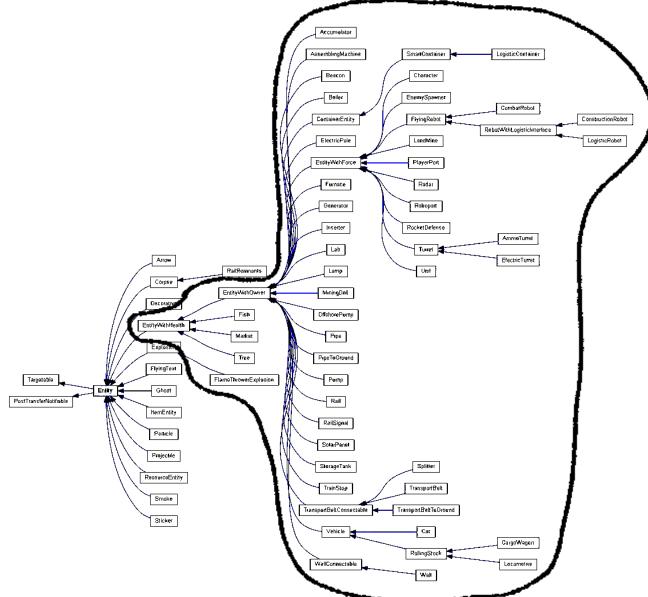






Virtual void OnDamageReceived()





Source: Factorio Friday Facts #18





```
HealthComponent SpriteComponent ColliderComponent

VelocityComponent PositionComponent
```

```
public readonly struct PositionComponent
{
    public readonly Vector2 Vector;
    public
    public
```

```
public readonly struct SpriteComponent
{
    public readonly Guid Sprite;
    public readonly string Animation;
}
```





```
[Filter(typeof(PositionComponent), typeof(SpriteComponent))
public class RenderSprite: RenderSystem
  override void Draw(World world, Entity[] entities)
     foreach (Entity e in entities)
        Vector2 position = e.GetPosition().Vector;
        ...
```



HealthComponent OwnerldComponent ColliderComponent

VelocityComponent PositionComponent

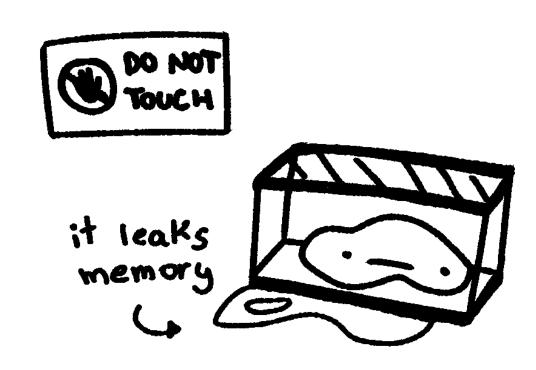
ECS

```
public readonly struct HealthComponent: Icomponent
    public readonly int Health { get; init; }
   public readonly int MaxHealth { get; init; }
HealthComponent OwnerldComponent ColliderComponent
        VelocityComponent PositionComponent
```



```
[Filter(typeof(HealthComponent))]
   public class DamageSystem: MessagerSystem
    public void OnMessage(
     World world,
     Entity e,
     DamageReceivedMessage message) { ... }
HealthComponent OwnerldComponent ColliderComponent
        VelocityComponent PositionComponent
```

- all about flexibility: give yourself room to be creative
- a quarantine your weird code!





CORE ENGINE: NEW DATA-ORIENTED GAME OBJECT MODEL

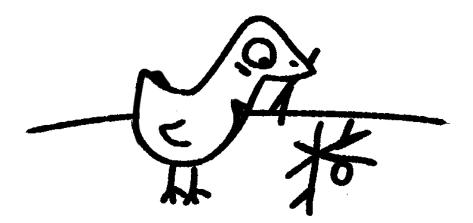
Northlight switched to a completely new data-oriented game object framework during the development of Alan Wake 2. The new entity component system (ECS) based model enables memory-efficient storage and makes parallel execution efficient and safe. This means that the engine can support a varying number of target hardware cores efficiently, enabling bigger, more dynamic and fuller worlds. ECS also played a supporting role for our tools development, simplifying the building of the new Scattering tool for mass-authoring vegetation - ECS allowed us to simply have a lot more entities without the need to invent any custom solution for scattering objects in the world.

The ECS framework also made it to our gameplay programmers' "favorite tech" list as it helped implement the Case Board - Saga's visual storyboard for gathering evidence. ECS meant that iteration was quick because adding new or modifying existing systems or game objects was easy, and performance gains were clear when saving and loading the Case Board.

Source: How Northlight makes Alan Wake 2 shine

You don't have to do everything vourself

remember your goals!



are you implementing it because it's fun or to prove you can do it?

if it's for fun...

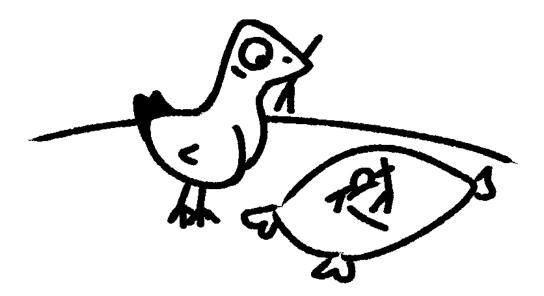
- can you afford the time?
- → does it get you closer to your goal?

if it's to prove you can ...

- → was it proven before?
- → is there anything unique that you can do?

is the learning valuable?

- make decisions by budgeting your time
- * do consider the trade-offs when "offloading" the responsibility to a library



Runtime

ECS

PHYSICS

Assets

SERIALIZATION

LEVEL EDITOR

DIALOGUE

Graphics

RENDER

EDITOR UI

0.5.

SOUN D

TUPUT

Runtime

Entitas |

| B0x2D | |

Assets

III, ODIN'

LD+K

THKLE

Graphics

IFNA |

| Im Gui

0.5.

Fmod | | |

| | SDL| | |

Runtime

OURS

OURS

Assets

OURS

OURS

OURS

Graphics

FNA

Im Gui,

0.5.

Fmod | | |

| | SpL | | |

8 Prototype, implement, refactor



- invest time studying the best industry approaches
- prototype in a hello world project!

 (...or wherever is cheaper, really)

don't overthink the design, 90% of the time your idea might fail:

- not fun
- technical blocker



study industry approaches (can skip)

prototype and try it out. does it break everything? if so, does it simplify things?

decide to implement or not

implement!

???

think of something else

fix edge cases (you will overlook something...), simplify and abstract



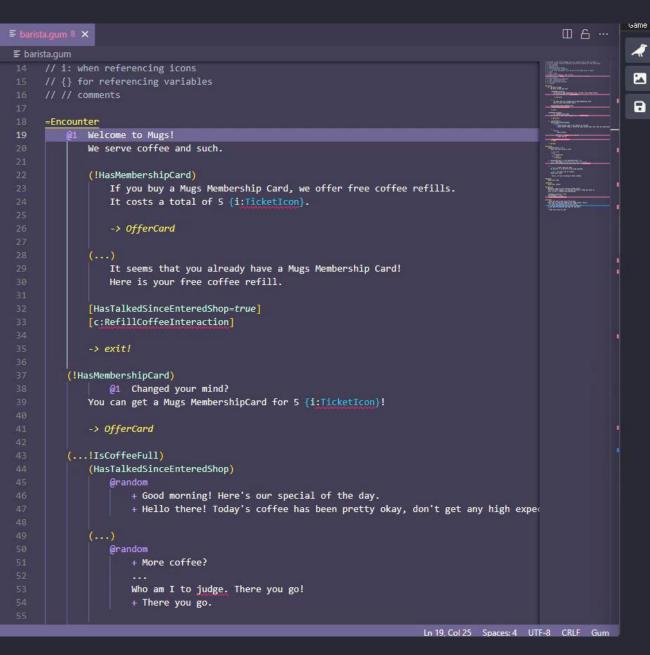
creating my custom dialogue language

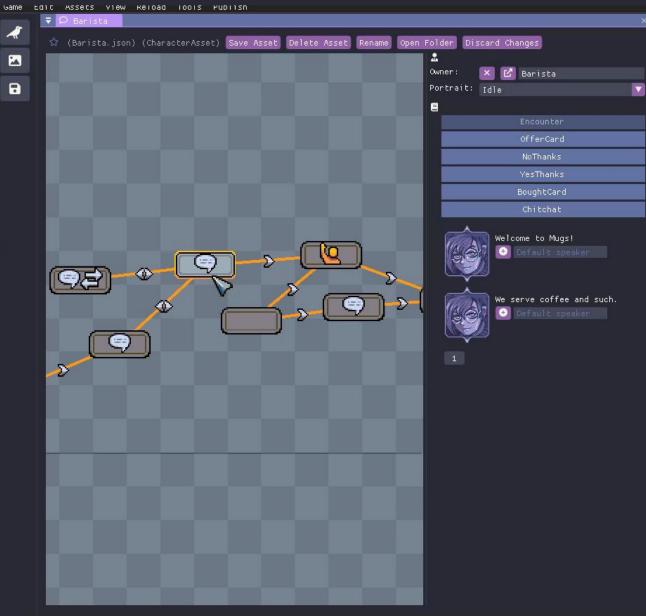
I week just studying several approaches: blackboards...

I week asking around, using inkle, seeing what I like

2 weeks implementing the language

cefine it forever





9 Trust yourself!

- most people giving advice on the internet didn't ship a game
- even advice coming from experienced devs might not apply to you, so it's okay to disagree!
- * selectively ignoring advice is how you innovate

it's all about the journey!





- 1. Game always comes first
- 2. Stick to your goals
- 3. Never crash
- 4. Make it delightful
- 5. Only do it once it's a bottleneck

- 6. Scale horizontally
- 7. Don't have to do everything yourself
- 8. Prototype, implement, refactor
- 9. Trust yourself!

Questions?

CO SUBSCRIBE TO

- coldbloodinc.studio
- # @isadora.codes
- a github.com/isadorasophia/murder

