Fail-Slow at Scale

Evidence of Hardware Performance Faults in Large Production Systems

Haryadi S. Gunawi[1], Riza O. Suminto[1], Russell Sears[2], Casey Golliher[2], Swaminathan Sundararaman[3], Xing Lin[4], Tim Emami[4], Weiguang Sheng[5], Nematollah Bidokhti[5], Caitie McCaffrey[6], Gary Grider[7], Parks M. Fields[7], Kevin Harms[8], Robert B. Ross[8], Andree Jacobson[9], Robert Ricci[10], Kirk Webb[10], Peter Alvaro[11], H. Birali Runesha[12], Mingzhe Hao[1], Huaicheng Li[1]

1 THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
2 PURESTORAGE
3 Parallel
4 NetApp
5 HUAWEI
6 twitter
7 Los Alamos NATIONAL LABORATORY EST. 1943
8 Argonne NATIONAL LABORATORY
9 New Mexico CONSORTIUM
10 THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH
11 UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SANTA CRUZ
12 THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO Research Computing Center

1st anecdote

~~fail-stop~~
~~fail-partial~~
~~fail-transient~~

Slow hardware!

*"…a 1Gb **NIC card** on a machine that suddenly only transmits at 1 kbps,*

this slow machine caused a chain reaction upstream

*in such a way that the **100 node cluster** began to crawl at a snail's pace."*

Cascading impact!

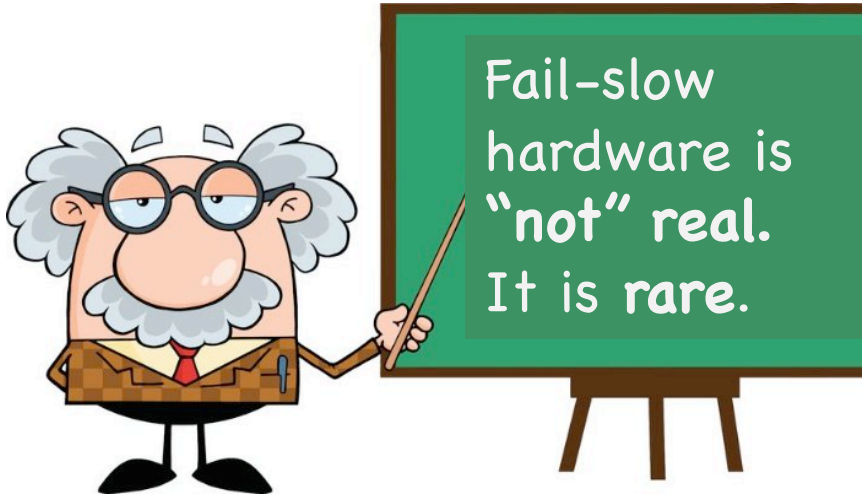
More anecdotes? **All** hardware?

- **Disk** throughput dropped to 100 KB/s due to vibration
- **SSDs** stalled for seconds due to firmware bugs
- **Memory cards** degraded to 25% speed due to a loose NVDIMM connection
- **CPUs** ran in 50% speed due to lack of power

Fail-slow Hardware

- *Hardware that is still running and functional but in a degraded mode, significantly slower than its expected performance*
- In existing literature:
  - "fail-stutter" [Arpaci-Dusseau(s), HotOS '11]
  - "gray failure" [Huang et al. @ HotOS '17]
  - "limp mode" [Do et al. @ SoCC '13, Gunawi et al. @ SoCC '14, Kasick et al. @ FAST '10]
  - (But only 8 stories per paper on avg. and mixed with SW issues)

Believe it?


Fail-slow hardware is "not" real. It is rare.


Let's write a paper together
Yes, it's real!

Evidences from …

Institution	#Nodes
Company 1	>10,000
Company 2	150
Company 3	100
Company 4	>1,000
Company 5	>10,000

Institution	#Nodes
Univ. A	300
Univ. B	>100
Univ. C	>1,000
Univ. D	500
Nat'l Labs X	>1,000
Nat'l Labs Y	>10,000
Nat'l Labs Z	>10,000

Table 2: **Operational scale.**

Fail-slow at **scale**

Data and Methodology

- **101 reports**
  - Unformatted text
  - Written by engineers and operators (who still remember the incidents)
  - 2000-2017 (mostly after 2010)
  - Limitations and challenges:
    - No hardware-level performance logs [in formatted text]
    - No large-scale statistical analysis

- Methodology
  - An institution reports a *unique* set of root causes
    - "A corrupt buffer that slows down the networking card (causing packet loss and retransmission)"
    - Counted as 1 report from the institution (although might have happened many times)

Important Findings and Observations
§3.1 **Varying root causes:** Fail-slow hardware can be induced by internal causes such as firmware bugs or device errors/wear-outs as well as external factors such as configuration, environment, temperature, and power issues.
§3.2 **Faults convert from one form to another:** Fail-stop, -partial, and -transient faults can convert to fail-slow faults (*e.g.*, the overhead of frequent error masking of corrupt data can lead to performance degradation).
§3.3 **Varying symptoms:** Fail-slow behavior can exhibit a permanent slowdown, transient slowdown (up-and-down performance), partial slowdown (degradation of sub-components), and transient stop (*e.g.*, occasional reboots).
§3.4 **A long chain of root causes:** Fail-slow hardware can be induced by a long chain of causes (*e.g.*, a fan stopped working, making other fans run at maximal speeds, causing heavy vibration that degraded the disk performance).
§3.4 **Cascading impacts:** A fail-slow hardware can collapse the entire cluster performance; for example, a degraded NIC made many jobs lock task slots/containers in healthy machines, hence new jobs cannot find enough free slots.
§3.5 **Rare but deadly (long time to detect):** It can take hours to months to pinpoint and isolate a fail-slow hardware due to many reasons (*e.g.*, no full-stack visibility, environment conditions, cascading root causes and impacts).
Suggestions
§6.1 **To vendors:** When error masking becomes more frequent (*e.g.*, due to increasing internal faults), more explicit signals should be thrown, rather than running with a high overhead. Device-level performance statistics should be collected and reported (*e.g.*, via S.M.A.R.T) to facilitate further studies.
§6.2 **To operators:** 39% root causes are external factors, thus troubleshooting fail-slow hardware must be done online. Due to the cascading root causes and impacts, full-stack monitoring is needed. Fail-slow root causes and impacts exhibit some correlation, thus statistical correlation techniques may be useful (with full-stack monitoring).
§6.3 **To systems designers:** While software systems are effective in handling fail-stop (binary) model, more research is needed to tolerate fail-slow (non-binary) behavior. System architects, designers and developers can fault-inject their systems with all the root causes reported in this paper to evaluate the robustness of their systems.

Table 1: **Summary of our findings and suggestions.**

Summary of findings

① Varying root causes

- Internal causes: firmware bugs, device errors
- External causes: temperature, power, environment, and configuration

② Faults convert

- Fail-stop, -partial, -transient → fail-slow

③ Varying symptoms

- Permanent, transient, and partial slowdown, and transient stop

④ Cascading nature

- Cascading root causes
- Cascading impacts

⑤ Rare but deadly

- Long time to detect (hours to months)

① Varying root causes

	Hardware types					
Root	**SSD**	**Disk**	**Mem**	**Net**	**CPU**	**Total**
Device errors	10	8	9	10	3	40
Firmware bugs	6	3	0	9	2	20
Temperature	1	3	0	2	5	11
Power	1	0	1	0	6	8
Environment	3	5	2	4	4	18
Configuration	1	1	0	2	3	7
Unknown	0	3	1	2	2	8

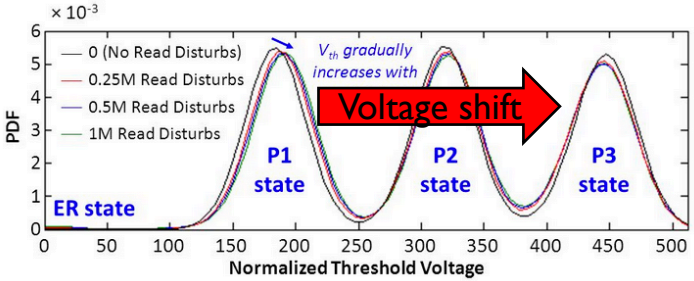
Internal root causes

External root causes

① Varying root causes

- Internal
  - Device errors/wearouts
    - Ex: SSD read disturb/retry + page reconstruction → longer latency and more load

Read Disturb Effect on V_{th} Distribution



Picture from http://slideplayer.com/slide/10095910/

```
read(page X, Vth=v1)
read(page X, Vth=v2)
read(page X, Vth=v3)
read(page X, Vth=v4)
```

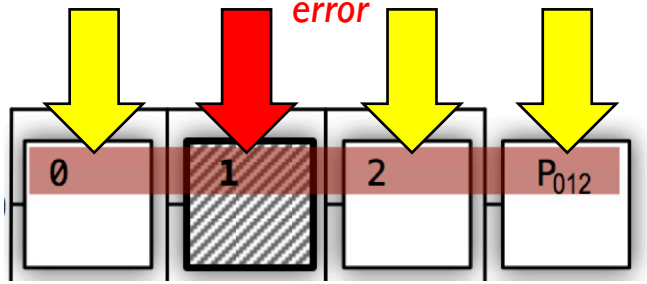
4x slower!

read retries!

1 = XOR (0, 2, P012)

~~read p0~~ ~~read p1~~ read p2 read P012
~~read p0~~ ~~read p2~~ ~~read P012~~
read p0 read p2 read P012

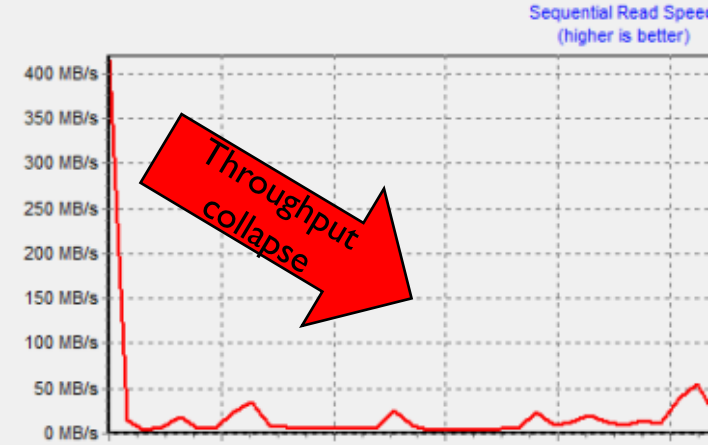
ECC error



RAIN: Redundant Array of Independent NAND

① Varying root causes

- **Internal**
  - Device errors
  - **Firmware bugs**
    - [No details, proprietary component]
    - SSD firmware bugs throttled **µs** to **ms** read performance
    - Another example: 840 EVO firmware bugs [2014]



https://www.anandtech.com/show/8550/samsung-acknowledges-the-ssd-840-evo-read-performance-bug-fix-is-on-the-way

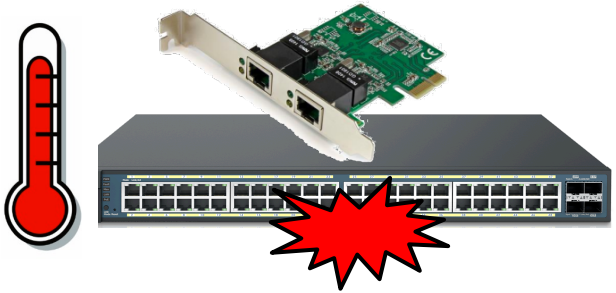
① Varying root causes

– **Internal** Device errors and firmware bugs **[More details in paper]**

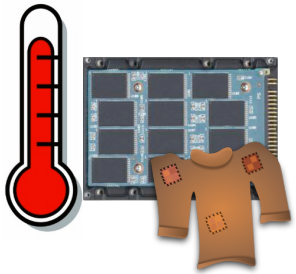
SSD	Disk	Memory	Network	Processors
Firmware bugs (us to ms read performance, internal metadata writes triggering assertion); Read retries with different voltages; RAIN/parity-based read reconstruction; Heavy GC in partially-failing SSD (not all chips are created equal); Broken parallelism by suboptimal wear-leveling; Hot temperature to wear-outs, repeated erases, and reduced space; Write amplification.	Firmware bugs (jitters, occasional timeouts, read retries, read-after-write mode); Device wearouts (disabling bad platters); Weak heads (gunk/dust accumulates between disk heads and platters); and other external factors such as temperature and vibration.	Address errors causing expensive ECC checks and repairs; Reduced space causing more cache hits; Loose NVDIMM connection; SRAM control-path errors causing recurrent reboots (transient stop).	Firmware bugs (buggy routing algorithm, multicast bad performance); NIC driver bugs; buggy switch-NIC auto-negotiation; Starving from electrons (bad design specification); bad VSCEL laser; Bitflips in device buffer; Loss packets cause TCP retries and collapse.	Buggy BIOS firmware down-clocking CPUs; Other external causes such as hot temperature and lack of power.

① Varying root causes

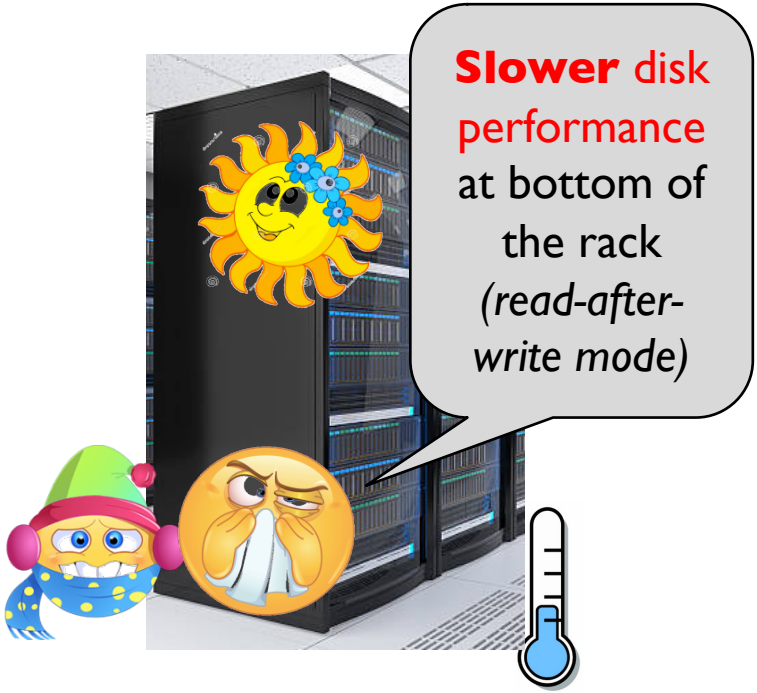
- Internal [Device errors, firmware bugs]
- **External**
  - **Temperature**



Hot temperature
→ Corrupt packets
→ Heavy TCP retransmission



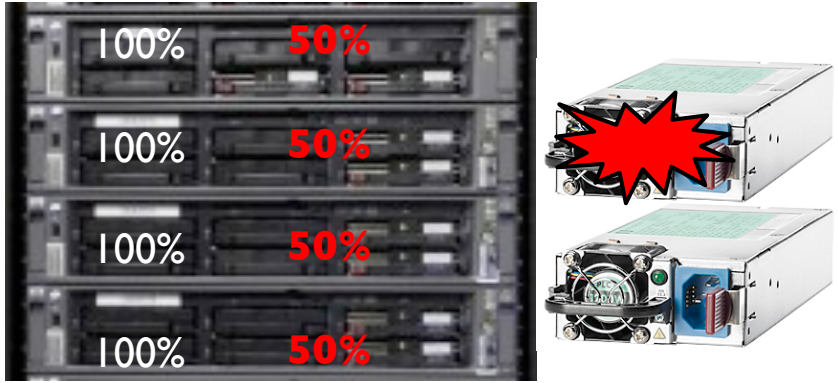
Faster SSD wearouts,
bad Vth →
more read retries



Cold-air-under-the-floor system

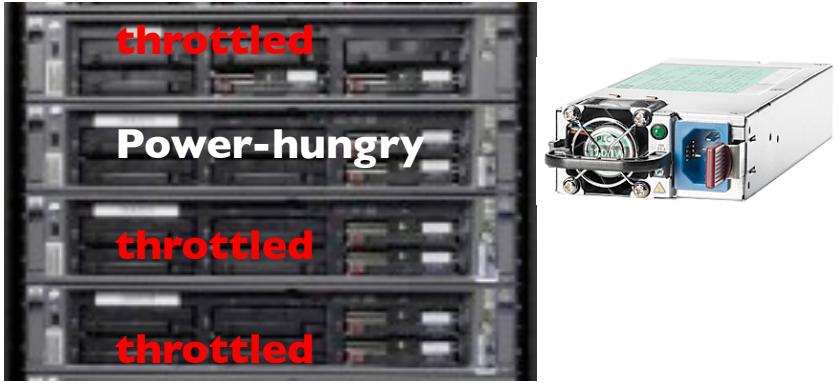
① Varying root causes

- Internal [Device errors, firmware bugs]
- **External**
  - Temperature
  - **Power**



4 machines, 2 power supplies

1 dead power → 50% CPU speed



Power-hungry applications → throttling neighboring CPUs

① Varying root causes

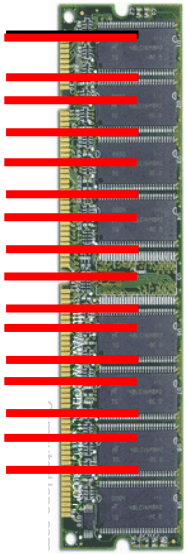
- Internal [Device errors, firmware bugs]
- **External**
  - Temperature
  - Power
  - **Environment**
    - Altitude, pinched cables, etc.
  - **Configuration**
    - A BIOS incorrectly downclocking CPUs of new machines
    - Initialization code disabled processor cache

① Varying root causes Device errors, firmware, temperature, power, environment, configuration

② Faults convert

- **Fail-transient → fail-slow**

read



Bit flips →
ECC repair
(error masking)

Okay if rare

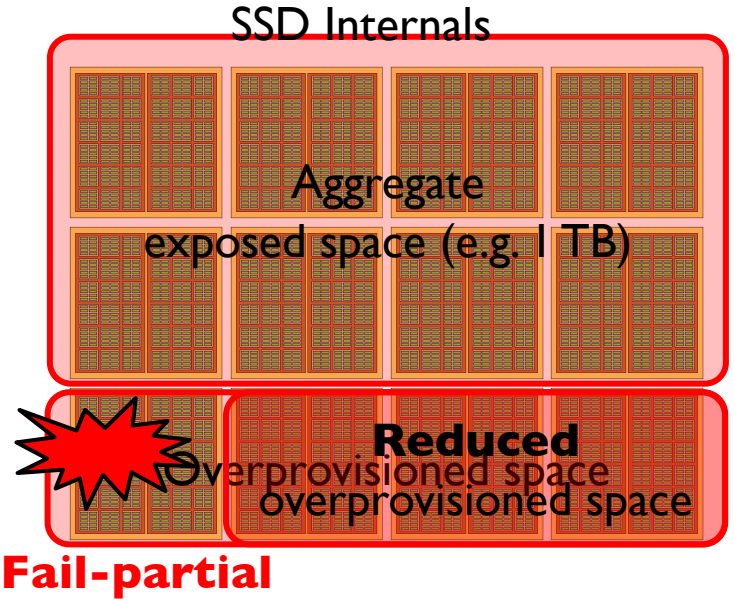
But, **frequent** errors
→ frequent error-masking/repair
→ repair latency becomes the *common* case

① Varying root causes

Device errors, firmware, temperature, power, environment, configuration

② Faults convert

- Fail-transient → fail-slow
- **Fail-partial → fail-slow**



"Not all chips are created equal"
(some chips die faster)

→ Reduced overprovisioned space
→ *More frequent GCs* → **Slow** SSD

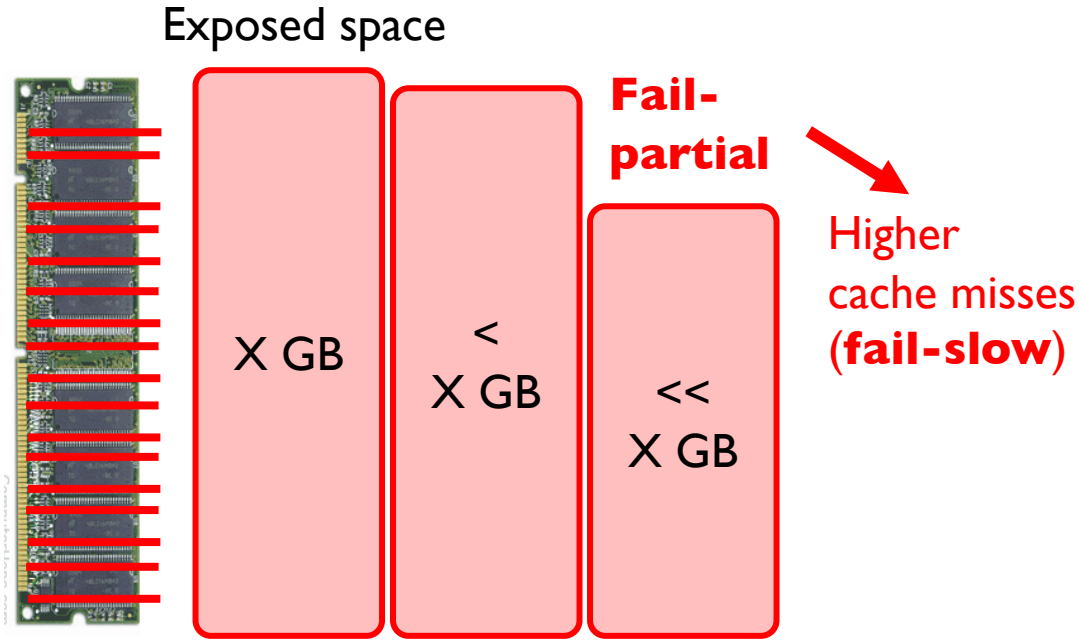
Picture from https://flashdba.com/2014/06/20/understanding-flash-blocks-pages-and-program-erases/

① Varying root causes Device errors, firmware, temperature, power, environment, configuration

② Faults convert

- Fail-transient → fail-slow
- **Fail-partial → fail-slow**

Custom memory chips that mask (hide) bad addresses

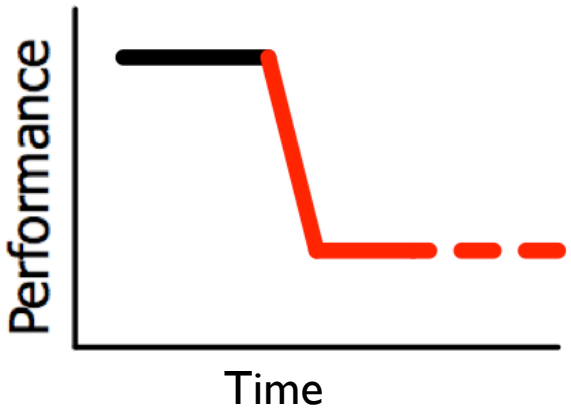


① Varying root causes Device errors, firmware, temperature, power, environment, configuration

② Faults convert Fail-stop, -transient, -partial → fail-slow

③ **Varying symptoms**

- **Permanent slowdown**



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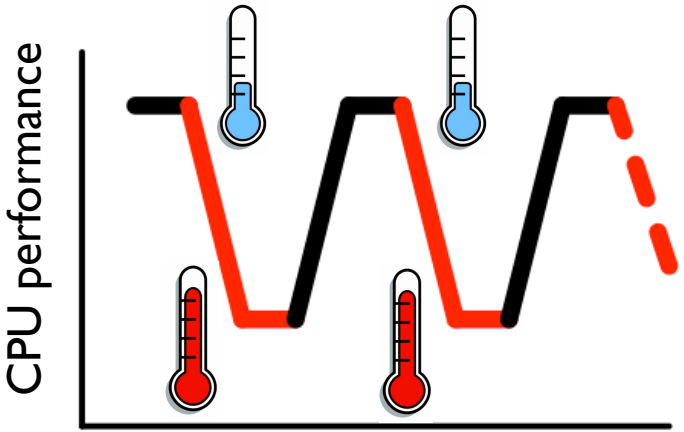
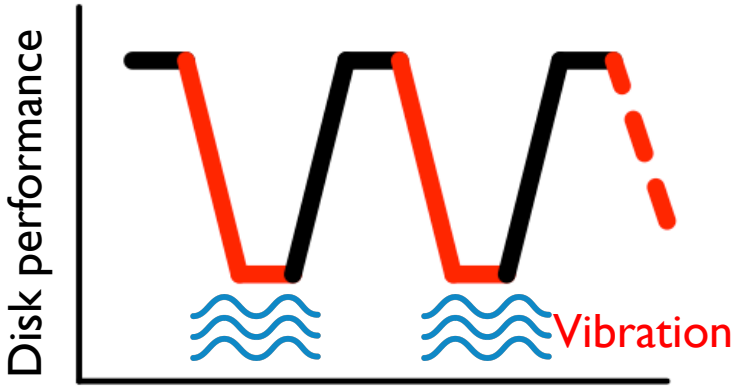
③ **Varying symptoms**

- Permanent slowdown
- **Transient slowdown**



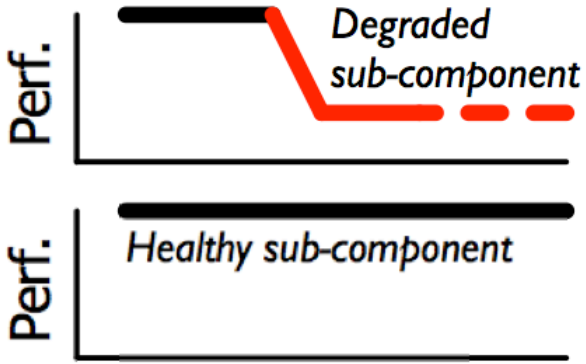


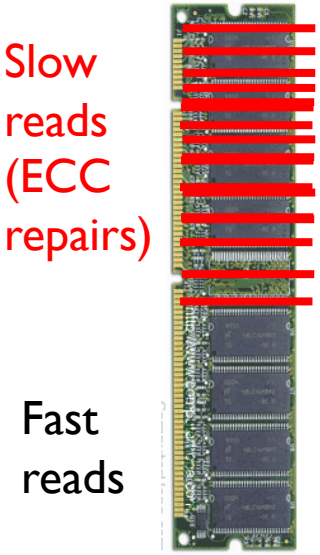
① Varying root causes Device errors, firmware, temperature, power, environment, configuration

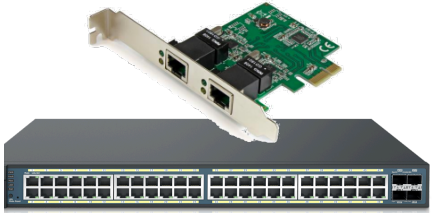
② Faults convert Fail-stop, -transient, -partial → fail-slow

③ **Varying symptoms**

- Permanent slowdown
- Transient slowdown
- **Partial slowdown**







Small packets (fast)

>1500-byte packets (very slow)

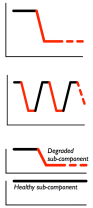
[Buggy firmware/config related to jumbo frames]

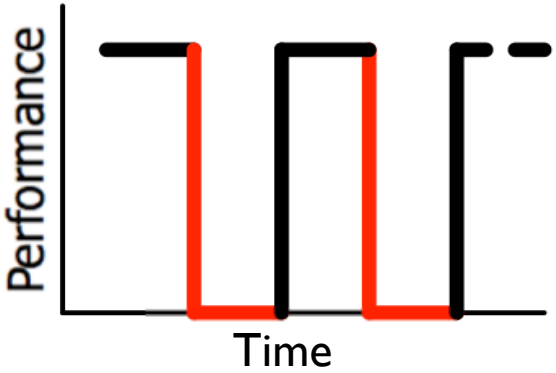
① Varying root causes
Device errors, firmware, temperature, power, environment, configuration

② Faults convert
Fail-stop, -transient, -partial → fail-slow

③ Varying symptoms

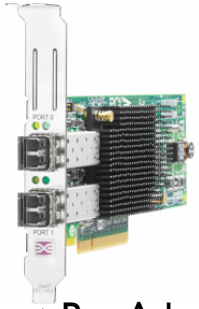
- Permanent slowdown
- Transient slowdown
- Partial slowdown
- **Transient stop**





A bad batch of SSDs "*disappeared*" and then reappeared

A firmware bug triggered hardware assertion failure



Host Bus Adapter *recurrent resets*

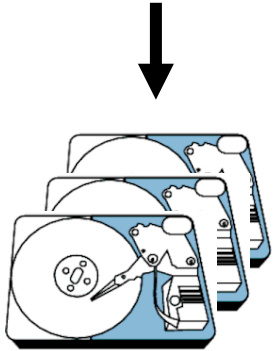
Uncorrectable bit flips in SRAM control paths

① Varying root causes Device errors, firmware, temperature, power, environment, configuration

② Faults convert Fail-stop, -transient, -partial → fail-slow

③ Varying symptoms Permanent, transient, partial slowdown and transient stop

Bad disks? No!



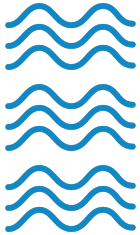
④ **Cascading nature**

– Cascading **root causes**

Fans normal speed

One died

Other fans ***maximum*** speed



Noise and vibration

Disk throughput collapses to **KB/s**

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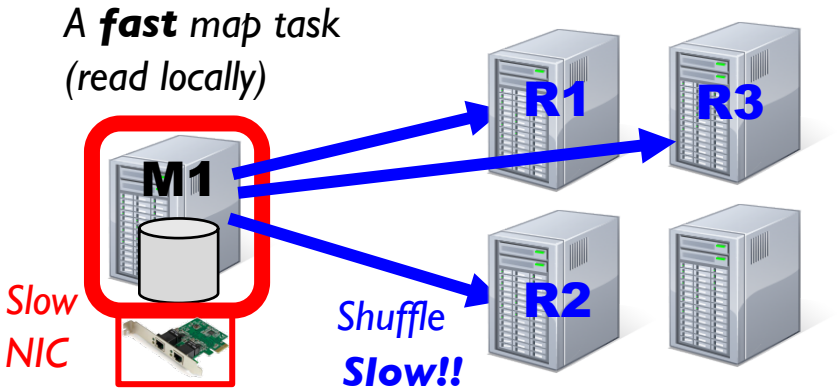
④ Cascading nature

- Cascading root causes
- Cascading **impacts** e.g. in Hadoop MapReduce



All *reducers are slow*
*("**no**" stragglers → no Speculative Execution)*

↳ *Use (lock-up) task **slots** in healthy machines for a long time*

↳ *Eventually **no free** task slots*
*→ **Cluster collapse***

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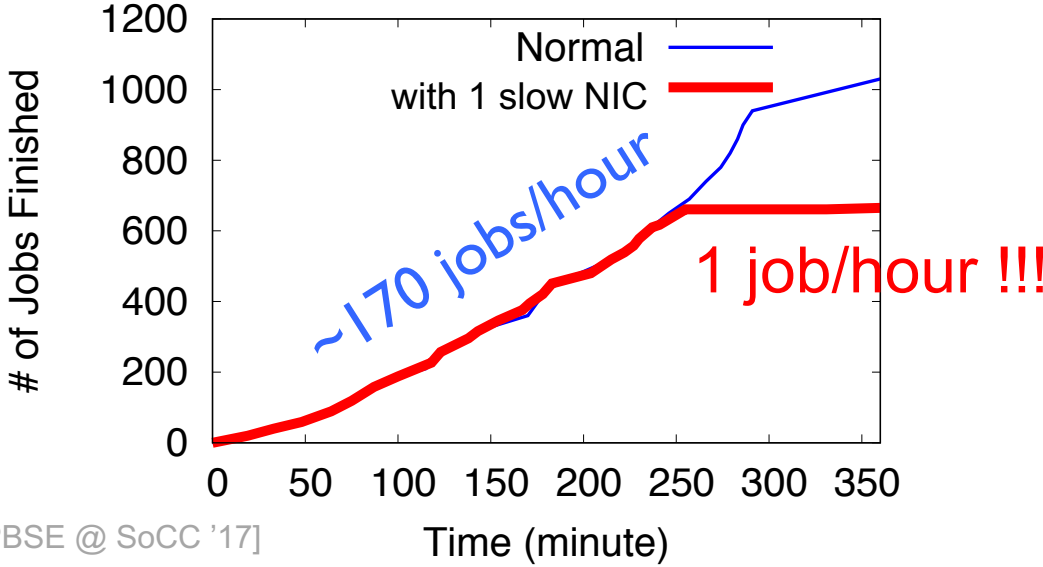
④ **Cascading nature**

- Cascading root causes
- Cascading **impacts**

Facebook Hadoop Jobs, 30 nodes



[From PBSE @ SoCC '17]

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④ Cascading nature

⑤ **Rare but deadly**

- 13% detected in hours
- 13% in days
- 11% in weeks
- 17% in months
- (50% unknown)

Why?

- External causes and cascading nature
  (vibration →slow disk); offline testing passes
- No full-stack monitoring/correlation
  hot temperature → slow CPUs → slow Hadoop → debug Hadoop logs?
- Rare? Ignore?

1. Varying root causes — Device errors, firmware, temperature, power, environment, configuration
2. Faults convert — Fail-stop, -transient, -partial → fail-slow
3. Varying symptoms — Permanent, transient, partial slowdown and transient stop
4. Cascading nature
5. Rare but deadly

+

Suggestions to vendors, operators, and systems designers

Suggestions
§6.1 **To vendors:** When error masking becomes more frequent (*e.g.*, due to increasing internal faults), more explicit signals should be thrown, rather than running with a high overhead. Device-level performance statistics should be collected and reported (*e.g.*, via S.M.A.R.T) to facilitate further studies.
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Conclusion:

Modern, advanced systems

+ Fail-slow hardware

Thank you!

Questions?

EXTRA

Suggestions

- **To vendors:**
  - Make the implicits explicit
    - Frequent error masking → hard errors
  - Record/expose device-level performance statistics
- **To operators:**
  - Online diagnosis
    - (39% root causes are external)
  - Full-stack monitoring
  - Full-stack statistical correlation
- **To systems designers:**
  - Make the implicits explicit
    - Jobs retried "infinite" time
  - Convert fail-slow to fail-stop? (challenging)
  - Fail-slow fault injections

	Symptoms			
HW Type	**Perm.**	**Trans.**	**Partial**	**Tr. Stop**
SSD	6	7	3	3
Disk	9	4	3	5
Mem	7	1	0	4
Net	21	0	5	2
CPU	10	6	1	3

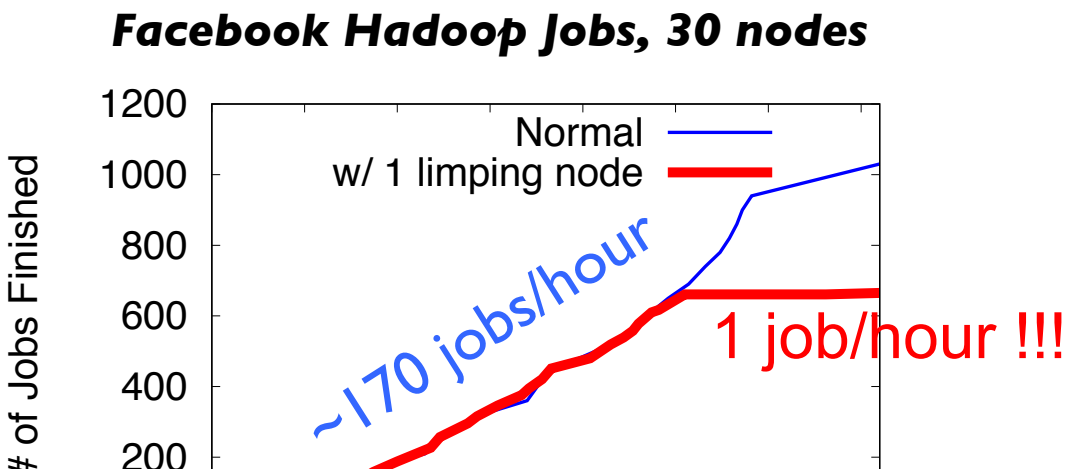
Table 4: **Fail-slow symptoms across hardware types.**

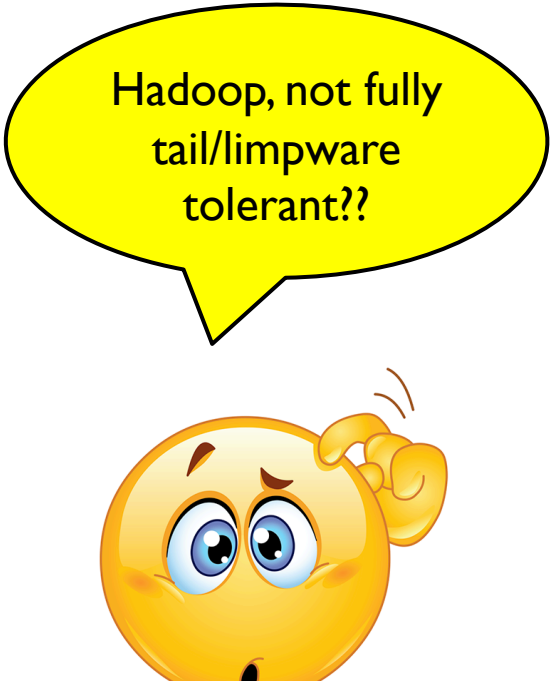
	Symptoms			
Root	**Perm.**	**Trans.**	**Partial**	**Tr. Stop**
ERR	19	8	7	6
FW	11	3	1	4
TEMP	6	2	1	2
PWR	3	2	1	2
ENV	11	3	3	1
CONF	6	1	0	0
UNK	5	1	0	2

Table 5: **Fail-slow symptoms across root causes.**

Operators

- Cannot use application bandwidth check (all are affected)





① Varying root causes Device errors, firmware, temperature, power, environment, configuration

② Faults convert

- **Fail-stop → fail-slow**
  - Fail-stop power → fail-slow CPUs
  - Fail-stop disk → fail-slow RAID