



# Impostor Syndrome in Tech

# Agenda

- **Background**
- **Thinking**
- **Risks**
- **Mechanisms**
- **Solutions**



# Background

# What?

- **Psychological pattern**
- **Personality disfunction**
- **Competence doubt**
- **Constant fear**





# Science

## The Impostor Phenomenon in High Achieving Women: Dynamics and Therapeutic Intervention

Pauline Rose Clance & Suzanne Imes

Georgia State University  
University Plaza  
Atlanta, Georgia 30303

**Abstract:** *The term impostor phenomenon is used to designate an internal experience of intellectual phonies, which appears to be particularly prevalent and intense among a select sample of high achieving women. Certain early family dynamics and later introjection of societal sex-role stereotyping appear to contribute significantly to the development of the impostor phenomenon. Despite outstanding academic and professional accomplishments, women who experience the impostor phenomenon persists in believing that they are really not bright and have fooled anyone who thinks otherwise. Numerous achievements, which one might expect to provide ample object evidence of superior intellectual functioning, do not appear to affect the impostor belief. Four factors, which contribute to the maintenance of impostor feelings over time, are explored. Therapeutic approaches found to be effective in helping women change the impostor self-concept are described.*

In the past five years we have worked in individual psychotherapy, theme-centered international groups, and college classes with over 150 highly successful women -- women who have earned PhDs in various specialties, who are respected professionals in their fields, or who are students recognized for their academic excellence. However, despite their earned degrees, scholastic honors, high achievement on standardized tests, praise and professional recognition from colleagues and respected authorities, these women do not experience an internal sense of success. They consider themselves to be "impostors." Women who experience the impostor phenomenon maintain a strong belief that they are not intelligent; in fact they are convinced that they have fooled anyone who thinks otherwise. For example, students often fantasize that they were mistakenly admitted to graduate school because of an error by the admissions committee. Numerous women graduate students state the their high examination scores are due to luck, to misgrading, or to the faulty judgment of professors. Women professionals in our sample feel over evaluated by colleagues and administrators. One women professor said, "I'm not good enough to be on the faculty here. Some mistake was made in the selection process." Another, the chairperson of her department, said, "Obviously I'm in this position because my abilities have been overestimated." Another women with two master's degrees, a PhD., and numerous publications to her credit considered herself unqualified to teach remedial college classes in her field. In other words, these women find innumerable means of negating any external evidence that contradicts their belief that they are, in reality, unintelligent.\*

\*The question has been raised as to whether or not men experience this phenomenon. In our clinical experience, we have found that the phenomenon occurs with much less frequency in men and that when it does occur, it is with much less intensity. We have received mixed opinions from male colleagues with whom we have consulted. The attribution research findings, summarized later, imply that the impostor phenomenon would be found less frequently in men than in women. We have noticed the phenomenon in men who appear to be more in touch with their "feminine" qualities. This clinical observation needs to be researched.

# Who?

- **50 - 80%**
- **Any point of career**
- **High achieving**
- **Intelligence**
- **Perfectionism**
- **Neuroticism**



# NOT

- **Actual fraud**
- **Momentary doubt**
- **Mental illness**
- **Humbleness**
- **Specific to women**





*„I felt like there had been some **mistake**, that I wasn't smart enough to be in this company, and that **every time** I opened my mouth I would have to **prove** that I wasn't just a dumb actress.”*

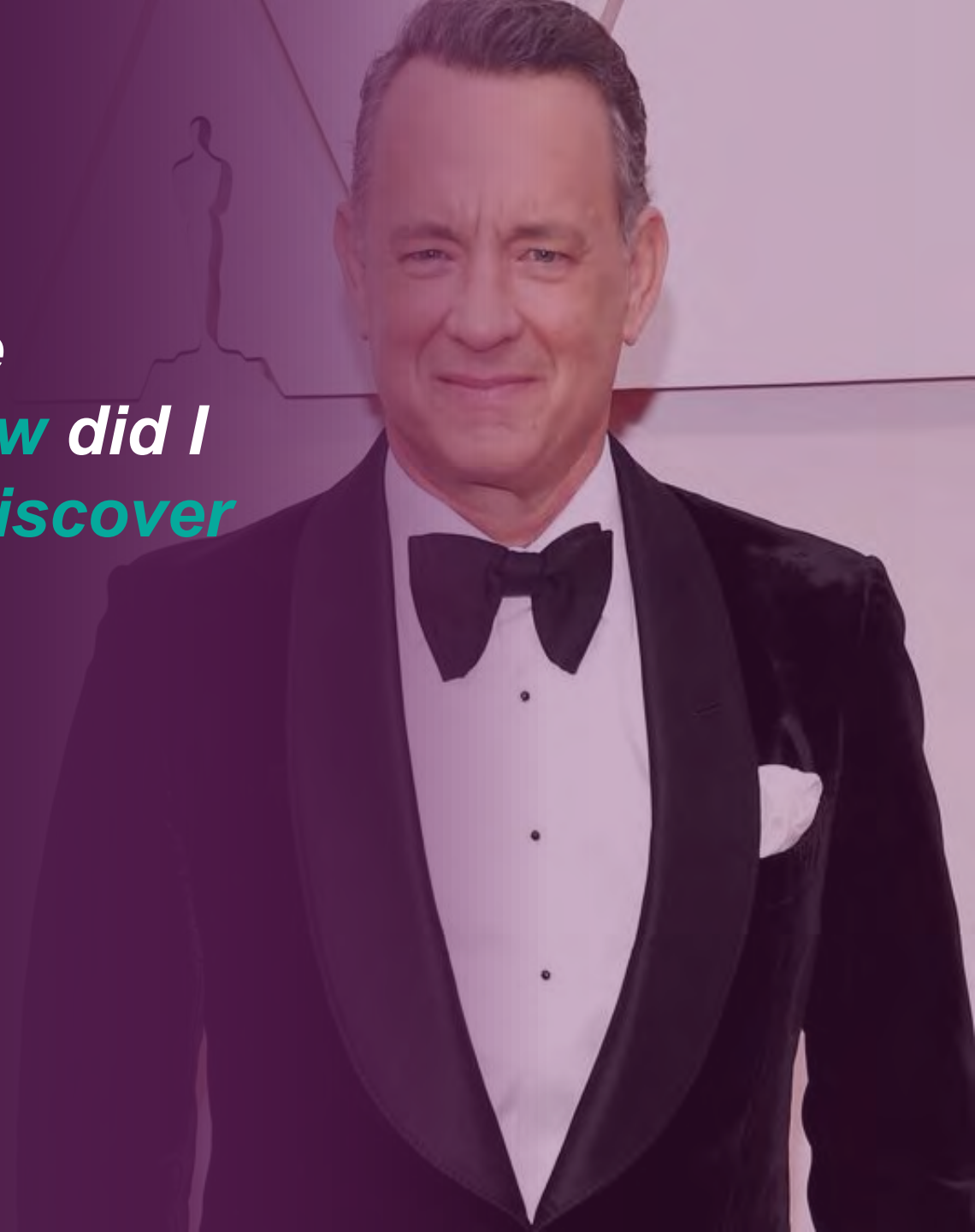
**Natalie Portman**






*„**No matter** what we've done, there comes a point where you think, '**How** did I get here? When are they going to **discover** that I am, in fact, a **fraud** and take everything **away** from me?'"*

**Tom Hanks**



A close-up portrait of Emma Watson with long, wavy brown hair and freckles. She is wearing orange lipstick and looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The image has a purple overlay on the left side where the text is located.

*”It’s almost like the better I do, the more my feeling of **inadequacy** actually increases, because I’m just going, ‘Any moment, someone’s going to **find out** I’m a total **fraud**, and that I don’t deserve any of what I’ve achieved,’”*

**Emma Watson**

# Thinking



# Success = External factors

- **Luck**
- **Circumstances**
- **Deceit**
- **Misjudgement**
- **Connections**



...or  
**Overwork**





# Belief Filter





0 and 1



# Tech:

- **Smart people**
- **Intangibility**
- **Growth**
- **Fake it till...**



# Risks



- **Exhaustion**
- **Anxiety**
- **Burnout**
- **Depression**



- **Balance**
- **Relationships**
- **Procrastination**
- **Priorities**
- **Change**



# Missed

- **Knowledge**
- **Promotions**
- **Raises**
- **Ideas**



# Mechanisms

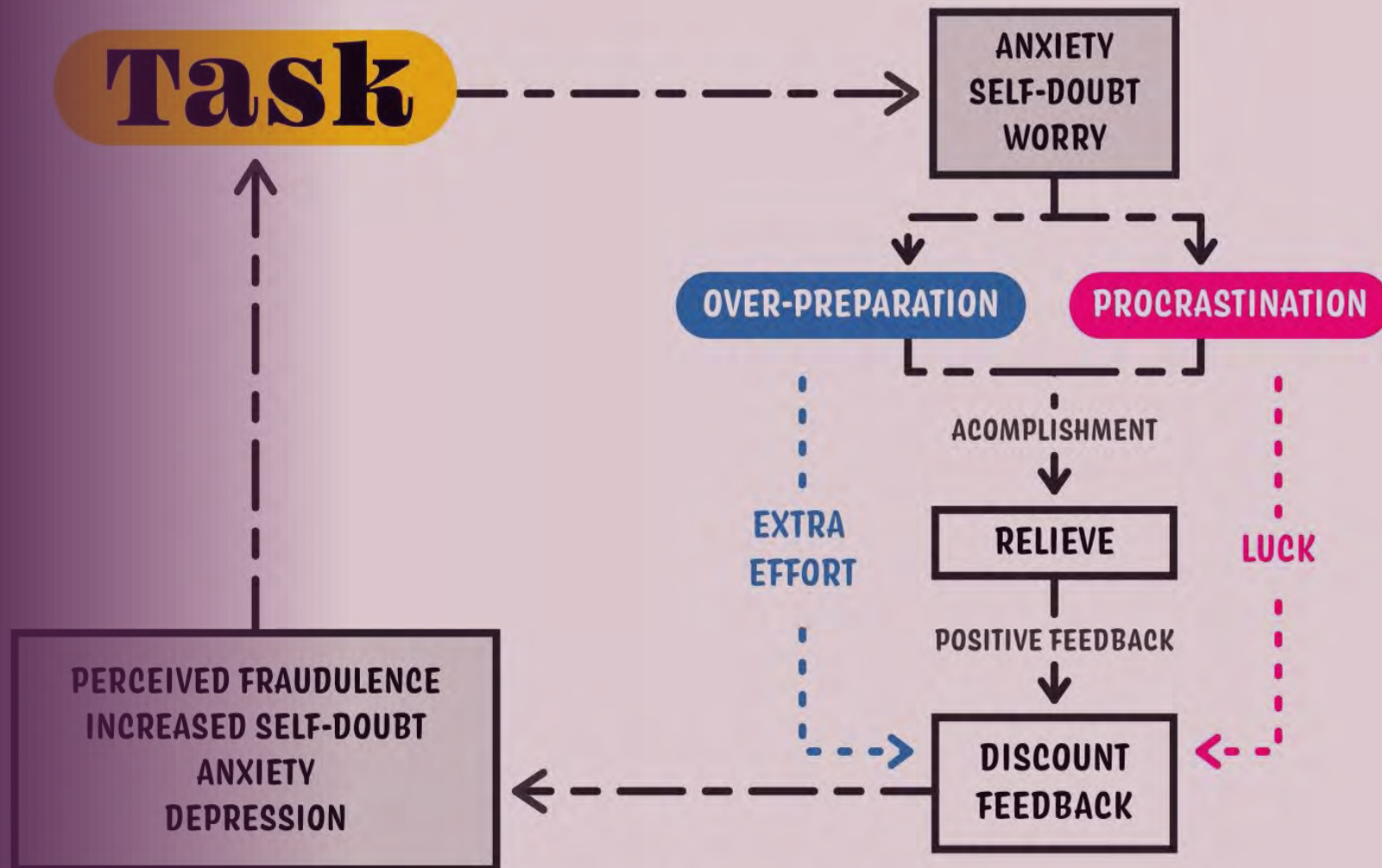
# Realisations

- Present
- Common
- Solvable

YOU CAN'T GET RID OF YOUR FEARS...  
BUT YOU CAN LEARN TO LIVE WITH THEM



# Impostor Cycle





# Perception of Knowledge

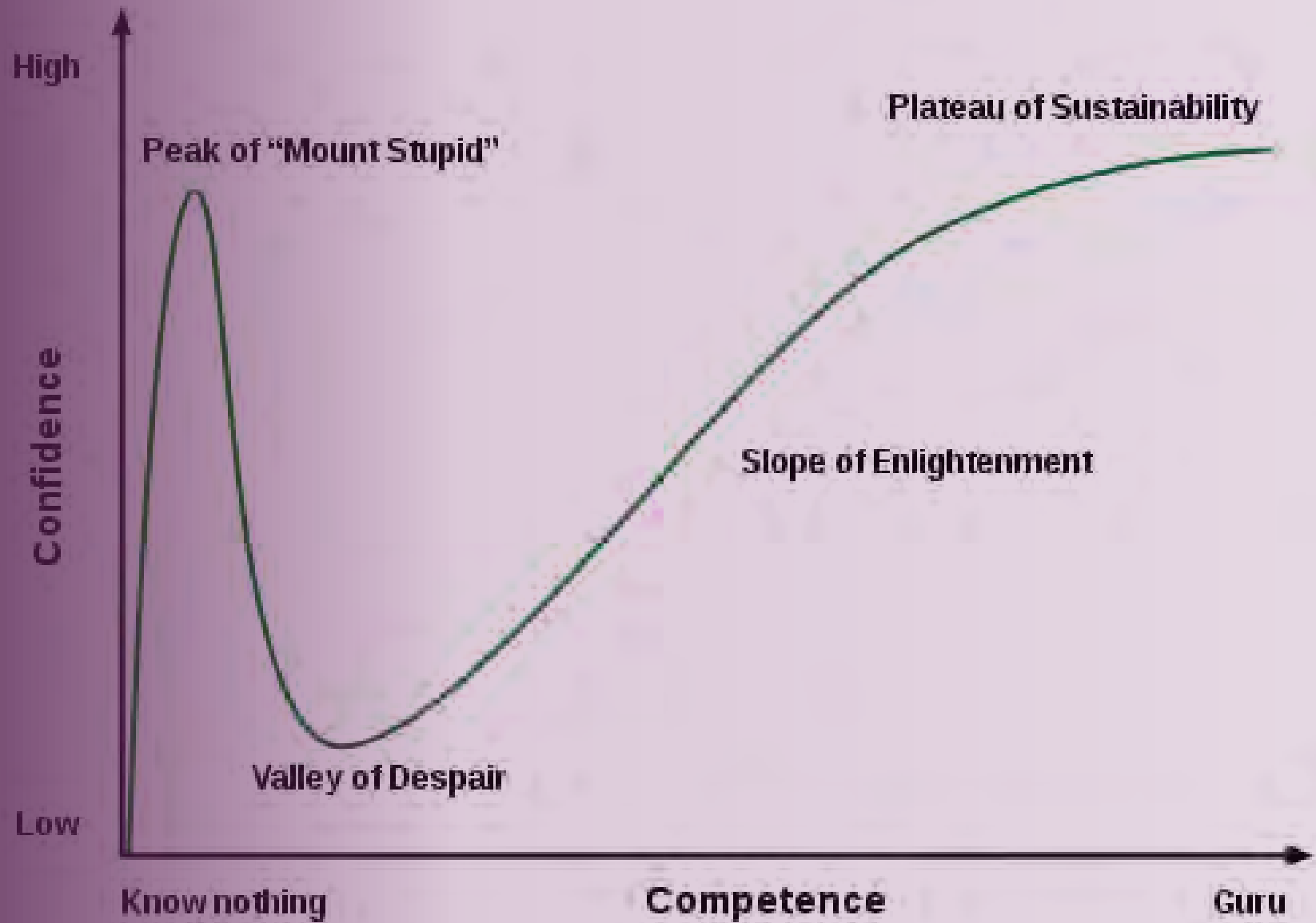
## IMPOSTOR SYNDROME



## REALITY



# Dunning-Kruger Effect



# Spotlight Effect







# Curse of Knowledge

You're Not the Only One  
Cursed With Knowledge

# Solutions



**Optimistic Foucauldian** @otfrom · Feb 25, 2017

Hi, my name is Bruce. I've been coding clojure for 7 years now and I always copy and paste namespace declarations and then change them.

...



**Magnar Sveen** 🌻 @magnars · Feb 23, 2017

Hi, my name is Magnar. I've been doing ops work for years, and I always have to google how to redirect stderr to stdout.

...



**Krzysztof Urban** @krzyurb · Feb 21, 2017

Replying to @dhh

over five years of writing ruby here and I still need to look up syntax for switch/case `_every single_`

...



**Artem Sapegin** @iamsapegin · Feb 26, 2017

Replying to @matchboxhero10

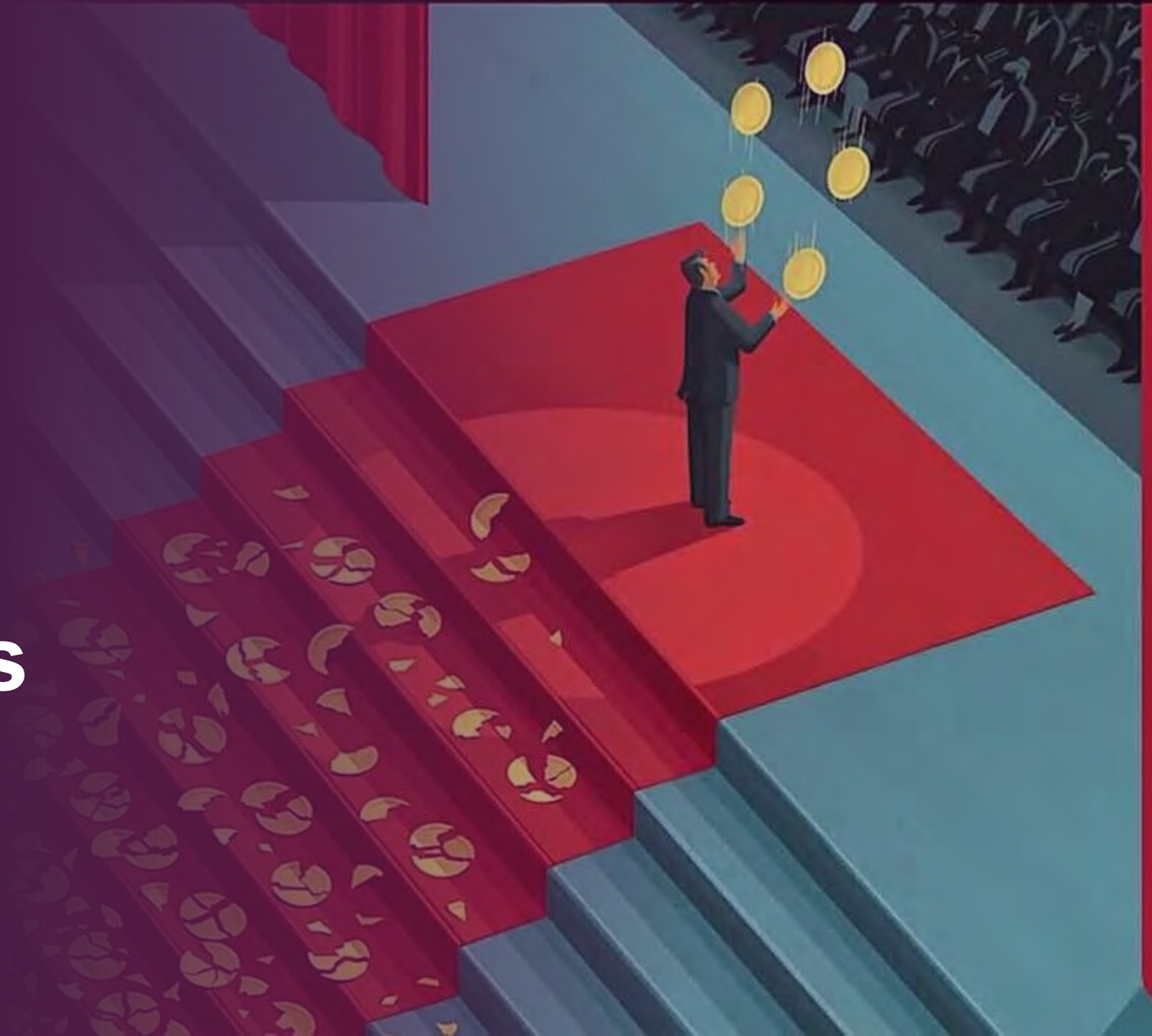
Hi, I'm Artem, doing frontend since 2006. Every time I need encoding tag I copy it from my site. @tdierks @WalterStephanie

...

# Confessions



# Comparisons



# Imperfections





# Achievements Tracking

	SUMMARY	RECENT
	<b>CO-OP ELITE KILLS (50)</b> Kill 50 elite monsters (champions, rares or uniques) while playing cooperatively.	11/22/11 <b>50</b>
	<b>JAR OF SOULS (CO-OP)</b> Complete the Jar of Souls event in a cooperative game.	11/22/11 <b>10</b>
	<b>THE MATRIACH'S BONES (CO-OP)</b> Complete The Matriach's Bones event in a cooperative game.	11/22/11 <b>10</b>
	<b>THE LEGACY OF CAIN (CO-OP)</b> Discover the fate of Deckard Cain in a cooperative game.	11/22/11 <b>10</b>
	<b>BETAMAXED</b> Complete all the maximum level class achievements.	11/23/11 <b>10</b>
	<b>MAXED OUT (MONK)</b> Level a Monk to the maximum level in Beta (level 13).	11/21/11 <b>10</b>

# Social Media Filtering





**Job Ads**



# Reptile Brain



# Talent Trap





# Recruitment





**Talk**



# Distance and Vulnerability



**Appreciation**





# Therapy

Actually, I'm fine. I just like to have a place where I'm allowed on the couch.





# Measure

- Clance IP Scale
- PsychTest



# Questions?



HowToTrainYourJava.com



@gvaireth

