

Concurrency: Threads

CSE 333 Fall 2023

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Relevant Course Information

- ❖ Exercise 11 due tonight (11/27) by 10pm
- ❖ Exercise 12 released tomorrow
- ❖ Homework 4 due next Wednesday (12/6)
 - Submissions accepted until Friday (12/8) at 10pm
- ❖ Next lecture: Concurrency via multiprocessing
- ❖ Bonus lectures: *Writing highly performant C++? Intro to Rust?*

Threads

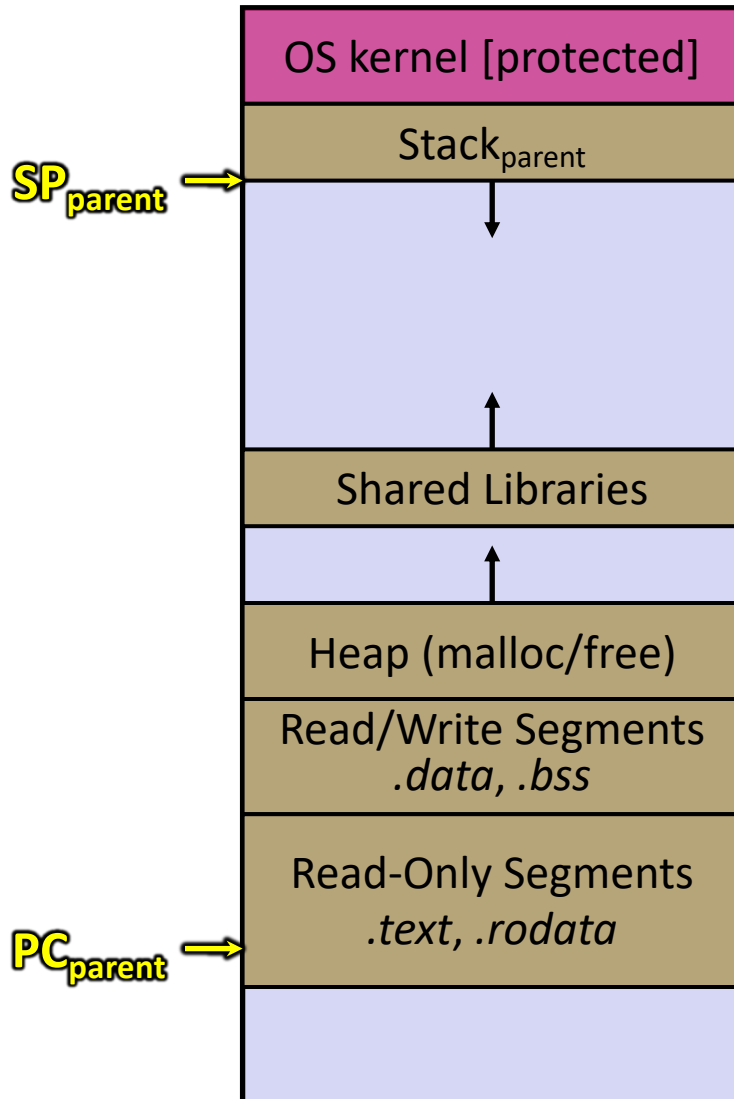
- ❖ Threads are like lightweight processes
 - They execute concurrently like processes
 - Multiple threads can run simultaneously on multiple CPUs/cores
 - Unlike processes, threads cohabit the same address space
 - Threads within a process see the same heap and globals and can communicate with each other through variables and memory
 - But, they can interfere with each other – need synchronization for shared resources
 - Each thread has its own stack

- ❖ Analogy: restaurant kitchen

- Kitchen is process
- Chefs are threads



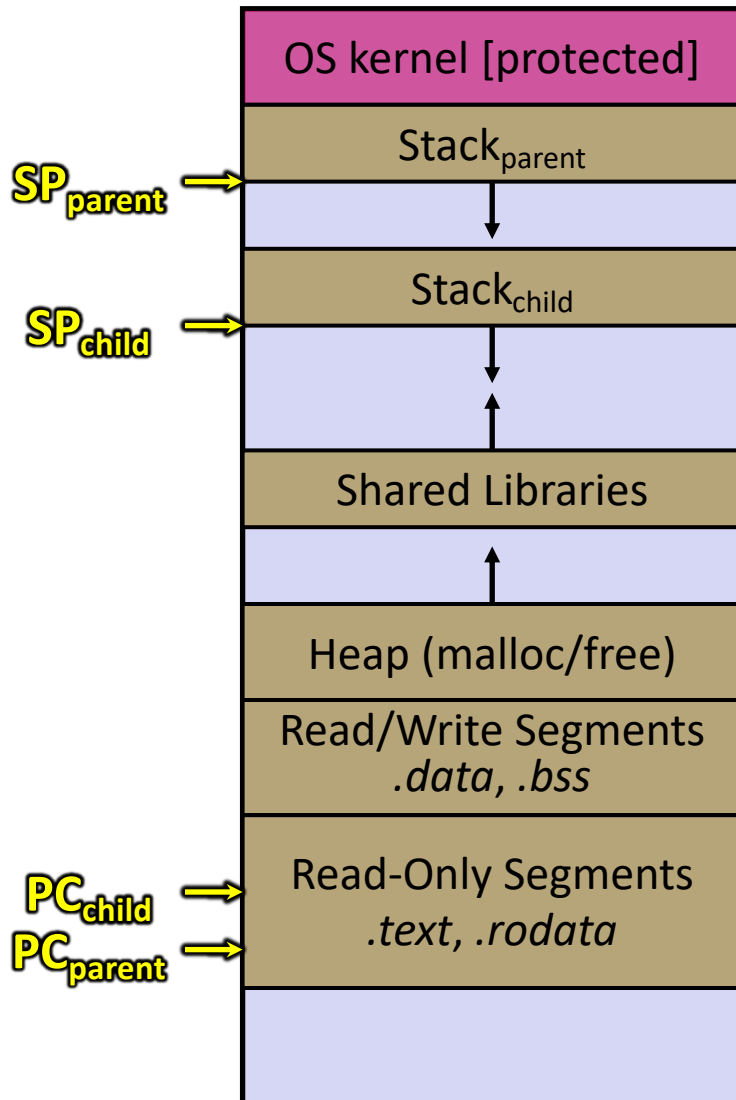
Single-Threaded Address Spaces



❖ Before creating a thread

- One thread of execution running in the address space
 - One PC, stack, SP
- That main thread invokes a function to create a new thread
 - Typically `pthread_create()`

Multi-threaded Address Spaces



❖ After creating a thread

- Two threads of execution running in the address space
 - Original thread (parent) and new thread (child)
 - New stack created for child thread
 - Child thread has its own *values* of the PC and SP
- Both threads share the other segments (code, heap, globals)
 - They can cooperatively modify shared data

POSIX Threads (pthreads)

- ❖ The POSIX APIs for dealing with threads
 - Declared in `pthread.h`
 - Not part of the C/C++ language (*cf.*, Java)
 - To enable support for multithreading, must include `-pthread` flag when compiling and linking with `gcc` command
 - `gcc -g -Wall -std=c17 -pthread -o main main.c`

Creating and Terminating Threads

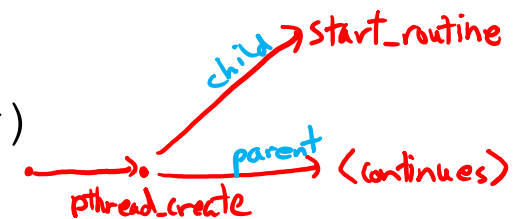
```
❖ int pthread_create (
    pthread_t* thread,
    const pthread_attr_t* attr,
    void* (*start_routine) (void*),
    void* arg);
```

output parameter

function pointer!
(notice 1 arg, pointer
return value)

generalized for C

- Creates a new thread into `*thread`, with attributes `*attr` (`NULL` means default attributes) "thread descriptor"
- Returns `0` on success and an error number on error (can check against error constants)
- The new thread runs `start_routine` (`arg`)



```
❖ void pthread_exit (void* retval);
```

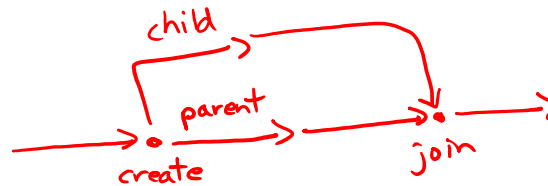
- Equivalent of `exit (retval);` for a thread instead of a process
- The thread will automatically exit once it returns from `start_routine ()`

What To Do After Forking Threads?

❖ `int pthread_join(pthread_t thread, void** retval);`

- Waits for the thread specified by `thread` to terminate
- The thread equivalent of `waitpid()`
- The exit status of the terminated thread is placed in `**retval`

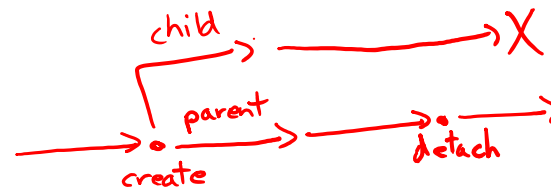
parent waits for child to finish and then receives its return value and cleans up



❖ `int pthread_detach(pthread_t thread);`

- Mark thread specified by `thread` as detached – it will clean up its resources as soon as it terminates

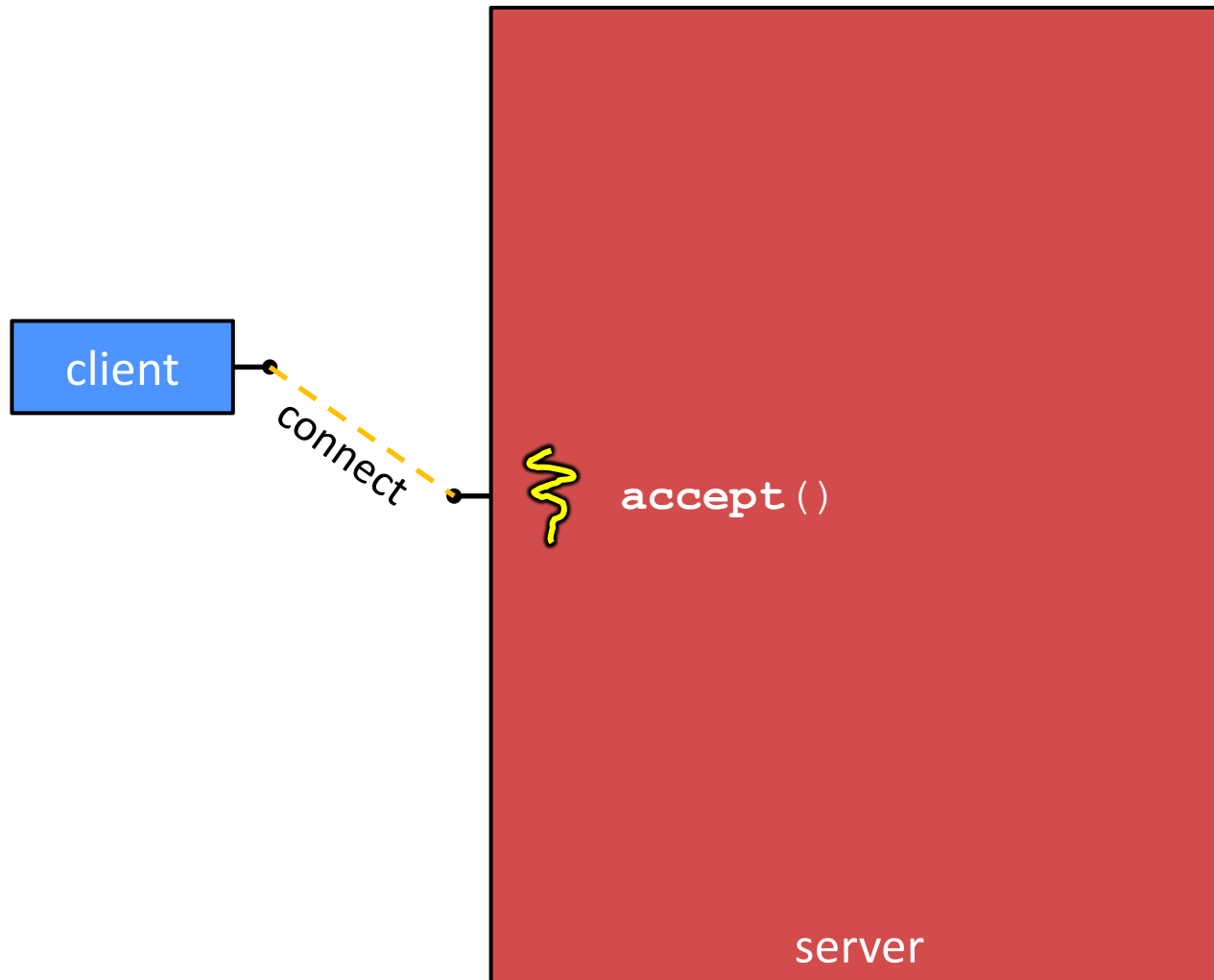
*detach child from parent
↳ child cleans up after it finishes*



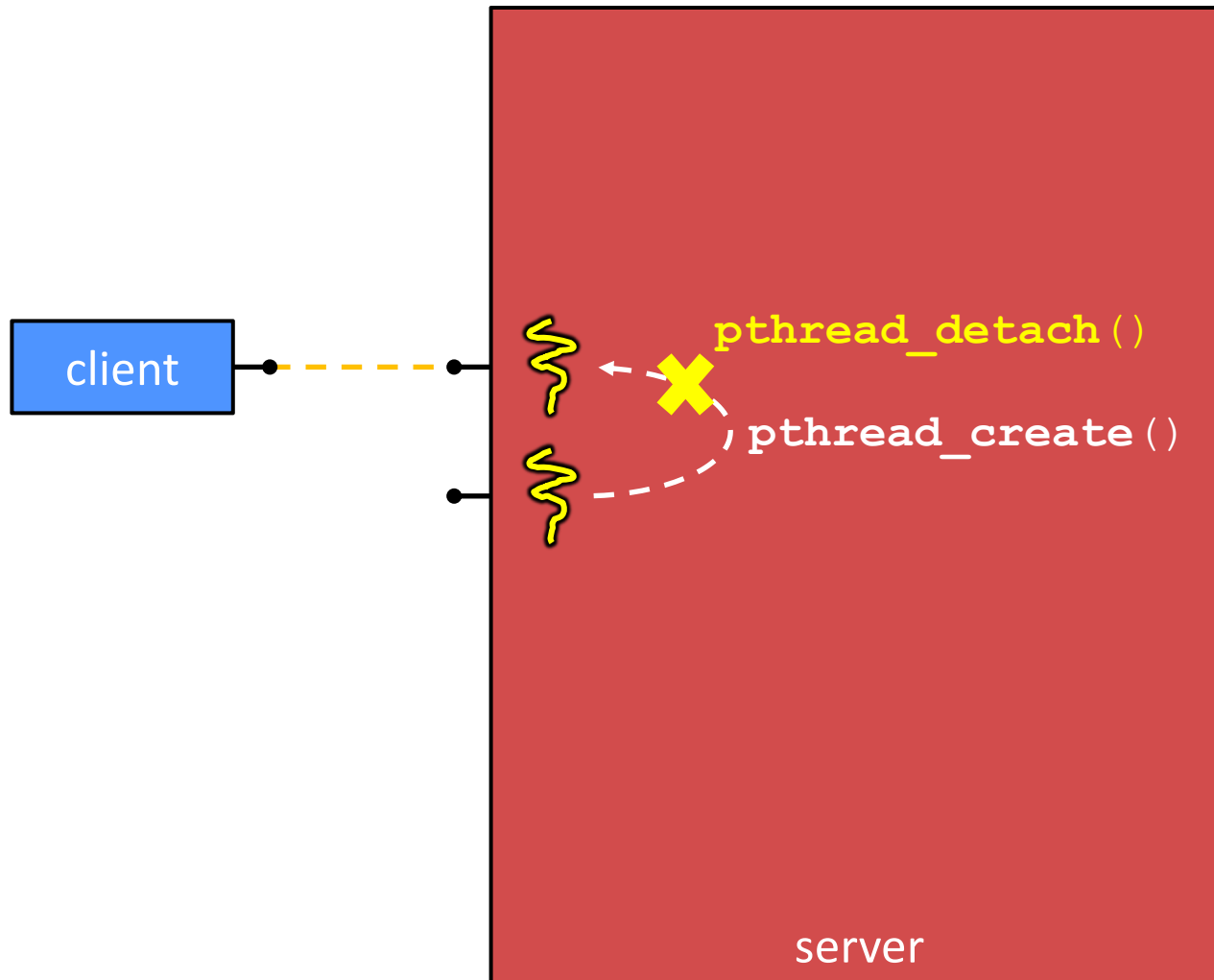
Concurrent Server with Threads

- ❖ A single *process* handles all of the connections, but a parent *thread* dispatches (creates) a new thread to handle each connection
 - The child thread handles the new connection and then exits when the connection terminates
- ❖ See `searchserver_threads/` for code if curious

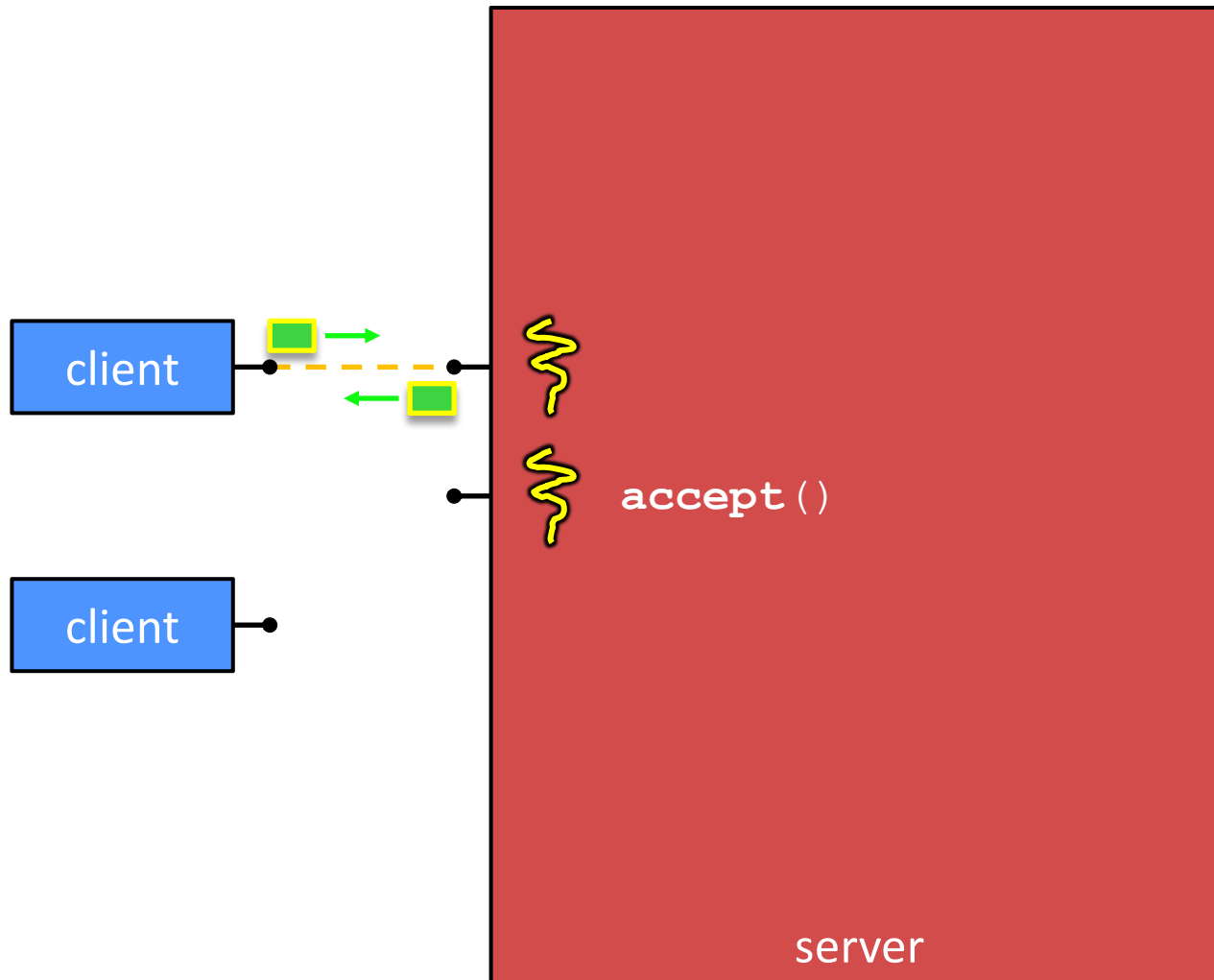
Multithreaded Server



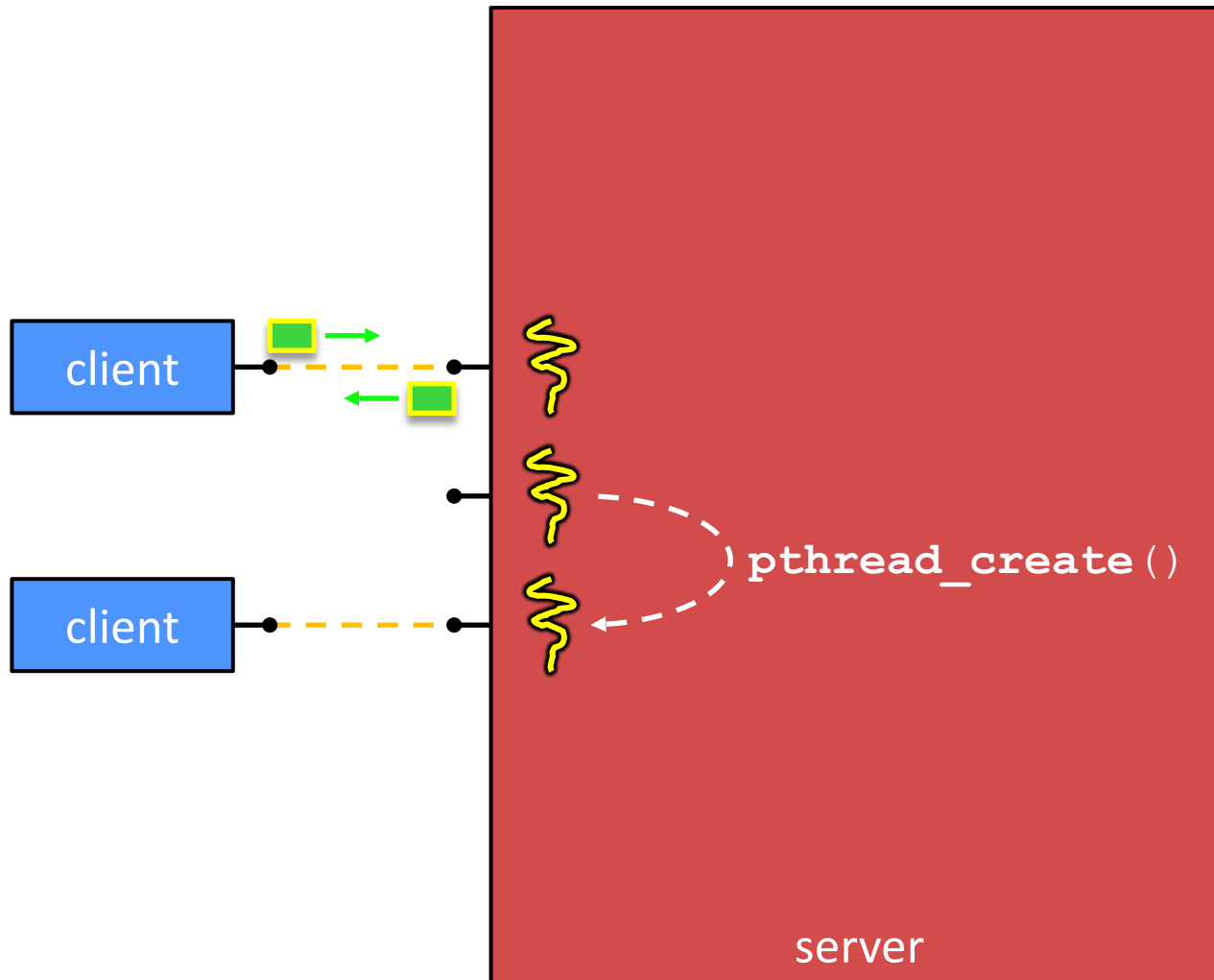
Multithreaded Server



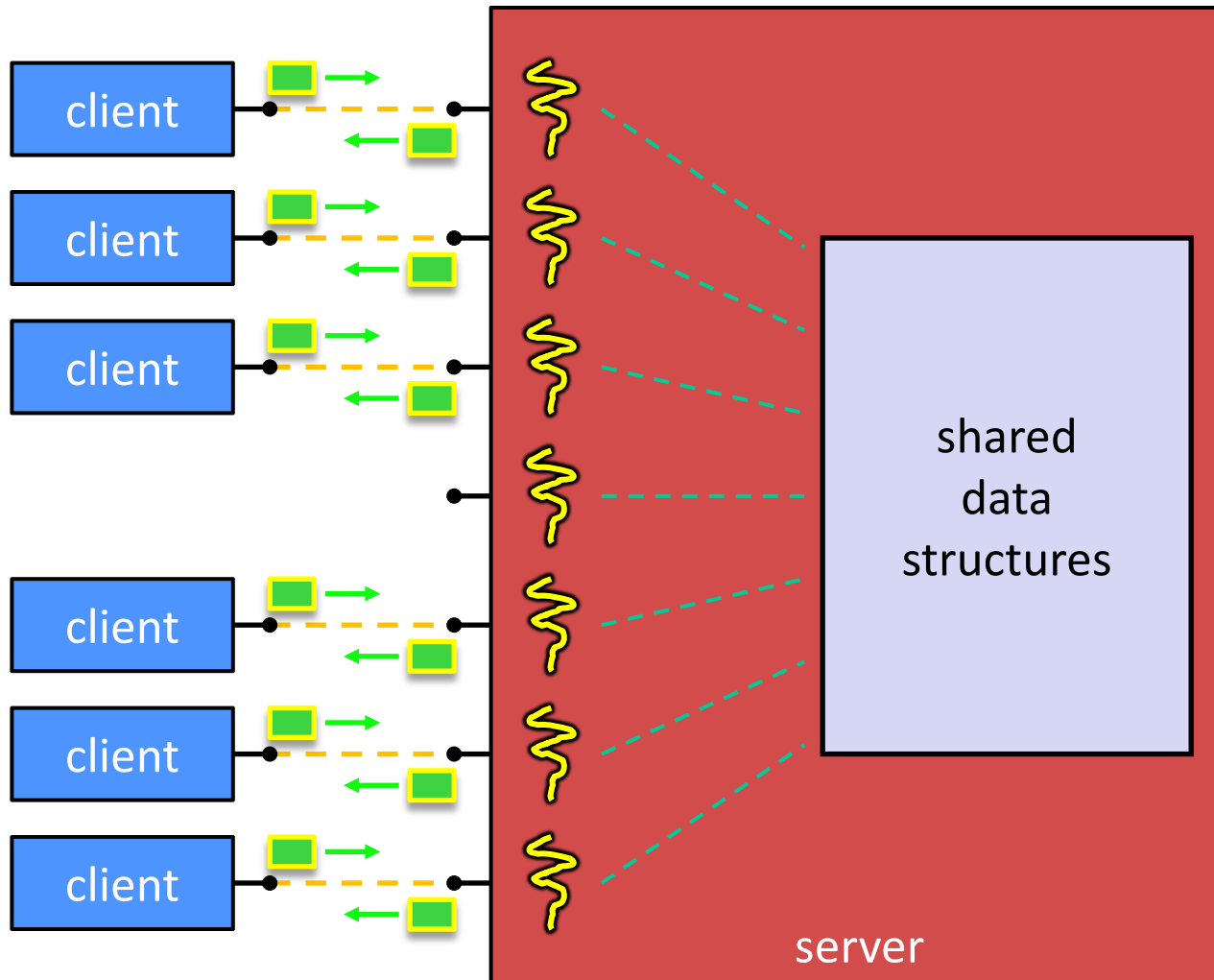
Multithreaded Server



Multithreaded Server



Multithreaded Server



Thread Examples

- ❖ See `cthreads.c`
 - How do you properly handle memory management?
 - Who allocates and deallocates memory?
 - How long do you want memory to stick around?
- ❖ See `pthread.cc`
 - More instructions per thread = higher likelihood of interleaving
- ❖ See `searchserver_threads/searchserver.cc`
 - When calling `pthread_create()`, `start_routine` points to a function that takes only one argument (a `void*`)
 - To pass complex arguments into the thread, create a struct to bundle the necessary data

Why Concurrent Threads? (Review)

❖ Advantages:

- Almost as simple to code as sequential
 - In fact, most of the code is identical! (but a bit more complicated to dispatch a thread)
- Concurrent execution with good CPU and network utilization
 - Some overhead, but less than processes
- Shared-memory communication is possible

❖ Disadvantages:

- Synchronization is complicated
- Shared fate within a process
 - One “rogue” thread can hurt you badly

Data Races

- ❖ Two memory accesses form a **data race** if different threads access the same location, and at least one is a write, and they occur one after another
 - Means that the result of a program can vary depending on chance (which thread ran first?)

Data Race Example

- ❖ If your fridge has no milk, then go out and buy some more
 - What could go wrong?

```
if (!milk) {  
    buy milk  
}
```

- ❖ If you live alone:



- ❖ If you live with a roommate:



Poll Everywhere

pollev.com/cse333

Does leaving a note on the fridge
fix our milk data race problem?

*only check
at beginning*

```
if (!note) {
  if (!milk) {
    leave note
    buy milk
    remove note
  }
}
```

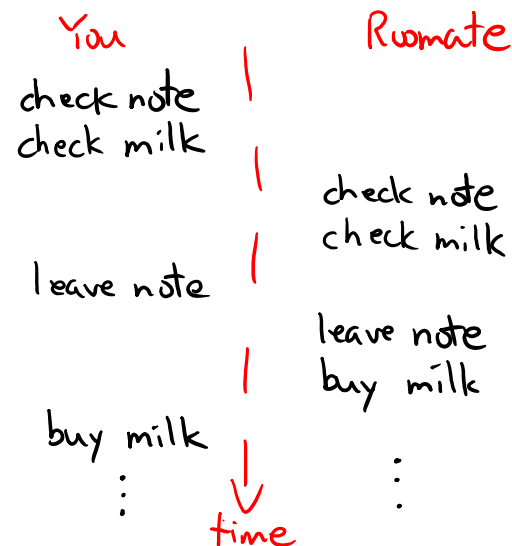
A. Yes, problem fixed

B. No, could end up with no milk

C. No, could still buy multiple milk

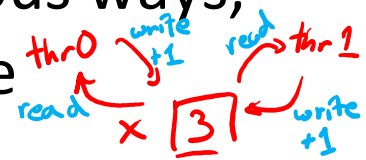
D. We're lost...

one possible scenario:



Threads and Data Races

❖ Data races might interfere in painful, non-obvious ways, depending on the specifics of the data structure



❖ Example: two threads try to read from and write to the same shared memory location

- Could get “correct” answer $R_0, W_0, R_1, W_1 \rightarrow 5$
3 4 4 5
- Could accidentally read old or intermediate (i.e., invalid) value
- One thread’s work could get “lost” $R_0, R_1, W_0, W_1 \rightarrow 4$
3 3 4 4

$R_0, R_1, W_1, W_0 \rightarrow 4$
3 doesn't matter 4

❖ Example: two threads try to push an item onto the head of the linked list at the same time

- Could get “correct” answer
- Could get different ordering of items
- Could break the data structure! ☠

Synchronization

- ❖ **Synchronization** is the act of preventing two (or more) concurrently running threads from interfering with each other when operating on shared data
 - Need some mechanism to coordinate the threads
 - “Let me go first, then you can go”
 - Many different coordination mechanisms have been invented (see CSE 451)
- ❖ **Goals of synchronization:**
 - **Liveness** – ability to execute in a timely manner (informally, “something good happens”)
 - **Safety** – avoid unintended interactions with shared data structures (informally, “nothing bad happens”)

Lock Synchronization

- ❖ Use a “Lock” to grant access to a *critical section* so that only one thread can operate there at a time
 - Executed in an uninterruptible (*i.e.*, *atomic*) manner

- ❖ Lock Acquire

- Wait until the lock is free, then take it

- ❖ Lock Release

- Release the lock
- If other threads are waiting, wake exactly one up to pass lock to

- ❖ Pseudocode:

```
// non-critical code
lock.acquire();
// critical section
lock.release();
// non-critical code
```

loop/idle if locked

Milk Example – What is the Critical Section?

- ❖ What if we use a lock on the refrigerator?
 - Probably overkill – what if roommate wanted to get eggs?
- ❖ For performance reasons, only put what is necessary in the critical section
 - Only lock the milk
 - But lock *all* steps that must run uninterrupted (*i.e.*, must run as an atomic unit)

```
fridge.lock()  
if (!milk) {  
    buy milk  
}  
fridge.unlock()
```



```
milk_lock.lock()  
if (!milk) {  
    buy milk  
}  
milk_lock.unlock()
```

pthread and Locks

- ❖ Another term for a lock is a **mutex** (“mutual exclusion”)

- `pthread.h` defines datatype `pthread_mutex_t`

- ❖

```
int pthread_mutex_init(pthread_mutex_t* mutex,
                       const pthread_mutexattr_t* attr);
```

- Initializes a mutex with specified attributes

- ❖

```
int pthread_mutex_lock(pthread_mutex_t* mutex);
```

- Acquire the lock – blocks if already locked

- ❖

```
int pthread_mutex_unlock(pthread_mutex_t* mutex);
```

- Releases the lock

- ❖

```
int pthread_mutex_destroy(pthread_mutex_t* mutex);
```

- “Uninitializes” a mutex – clean up when done

pthread Mutex Examples

- ❖ See `total.cc`
 - Data race between threads
- ❖ See `total_locking.cc`
 - Adding a mutex fixes our data race
- ❖ How does this compare to sequential code?
 - Likely *slower* – only 1 thread can increment at a time, but have to deal with checking the lock and switching between threads
 - One possible fix: each thread increments a local variable and then adds its value (once!) to the shared variable at the end

Your Turn! (pthread mutex)

- ❖ Rewrite **thread_main** from `total_locking.cc`:
 - It need to be passed an `int*` with the *address* of `sum_total` and an `int` with the number of times to loop (in that order)
 - Increment a local sum variable `NUM` times, then add it to `sum_total`
 - Handle synchronization properly!

see `total_locking-better.cc`

C++11 Threads

- ❖ C++11 added threads and concurrency to its libraries
 - `<thread>` – thread objects
 - `<mutex>` – locks to handle critical sections
 - `<condition_variable>` – used to block objects until notified to resume
 - `<atomic>` – indivisible, atomic operations
 - `<future>` – asynchronous access to data
 - These might be built on top of `<pthread.h>`, but also might not be
- ❖ Definitely use in C++11 code if local conventions allow, but pthreads will be around for a long, long time
 - Use pthreads in current exercise