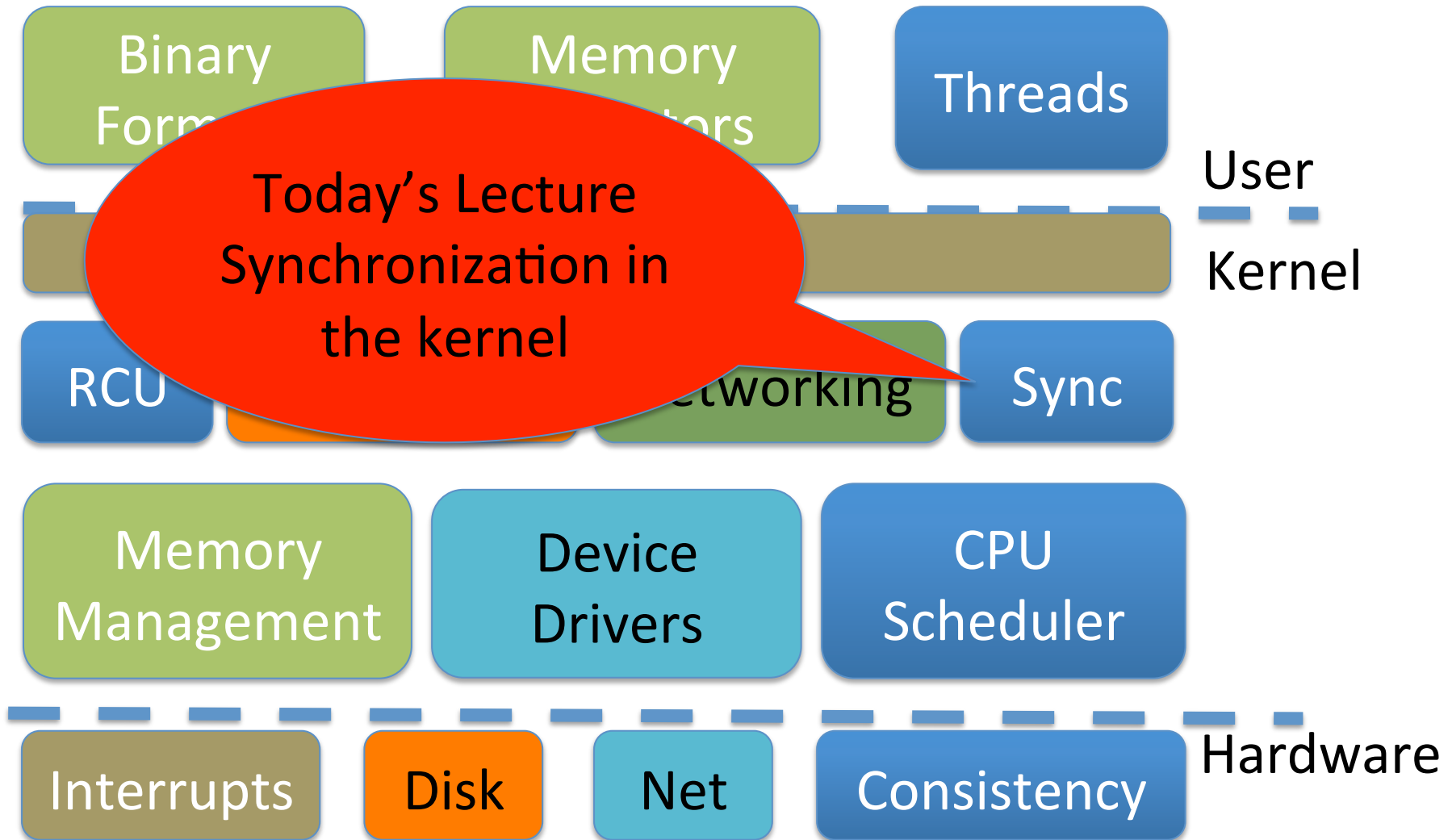


Linux kernel synchronization

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CSE 506

Logical Diagram



Warm-up

- What is synchronization?
 - Code on multiple CPUs coordinate their operations
- Examples:
 - Locking provides mutual exclusion while changing a pointer-based data structure
 - Threads might wait at a barrier for completion of a phase of computation
 - Coordinating which CPU handles an interrupt

Why Linux synchronization?

- A modern OS kernel is one of the most complicated parallel programs you can study
 - Other than perhaps a database
- Includes most common synchronization patterns
 - And a few interesting, uncommon ones

Historical perspective

- Why did OSES have to worry so much about synchronization back when most computers have only one CPU?

The old days: They didn't worry!

- Early/simple OSes (like JOS, pre-lab4): No need for synchronization
 - All kernel requests wait until completion – even disk requests
 - Heavily restrict when interrupts can be delivered (all traps use an interrupt gate)
 - No possibility for two CPUs to touch same data

Slightly more recently

- Optimize kernel performance by blocking inside the kernel
- Example: Rather than wait on expensive disk I/O, block and schedule another process until it completes
 - Cost: A bit of implementation complexity
 - Need a lock to protect against concurrent update to pages/inodes/etc. involved in the I/O
 - Could be accomplished with relatively coarse locks
 - Like the Big Kernel Lock (BKL)
 - Benefit: Better CPU utilization

A slippery slope

- We can enable interrupts during system calls
 - More complexity, lower latency
- We can block in more places that make sense
 - Better CPU usage, more complexity
- Concurrency was an optimization for really fancy OSes, until...

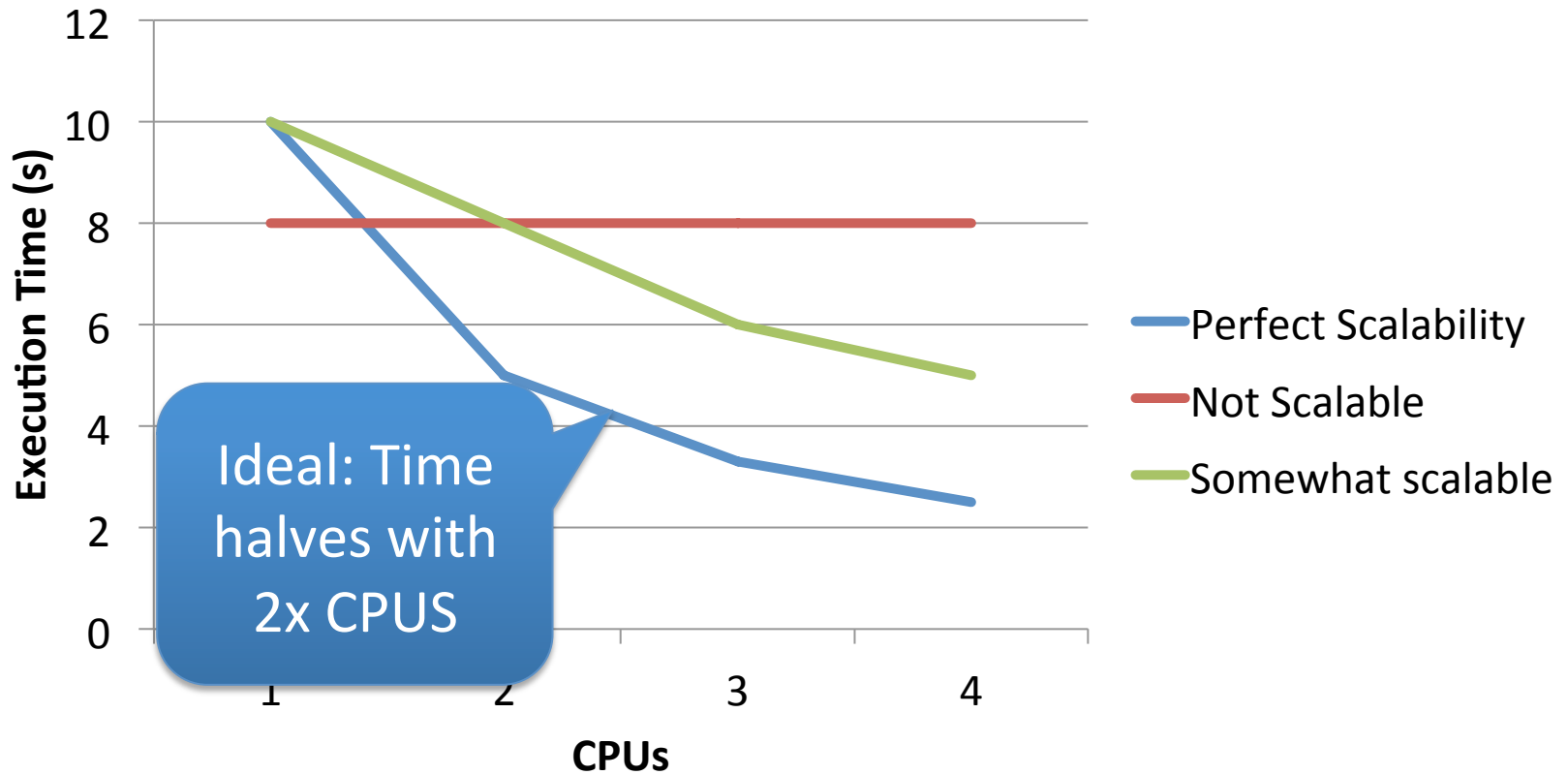
The forcing function

- Multi-processing
 - CPUs aren't getting faster, just smaller
 - So you can put more cores on a chip
- The only way software (including kernels) will get faster is to do more things at the same time

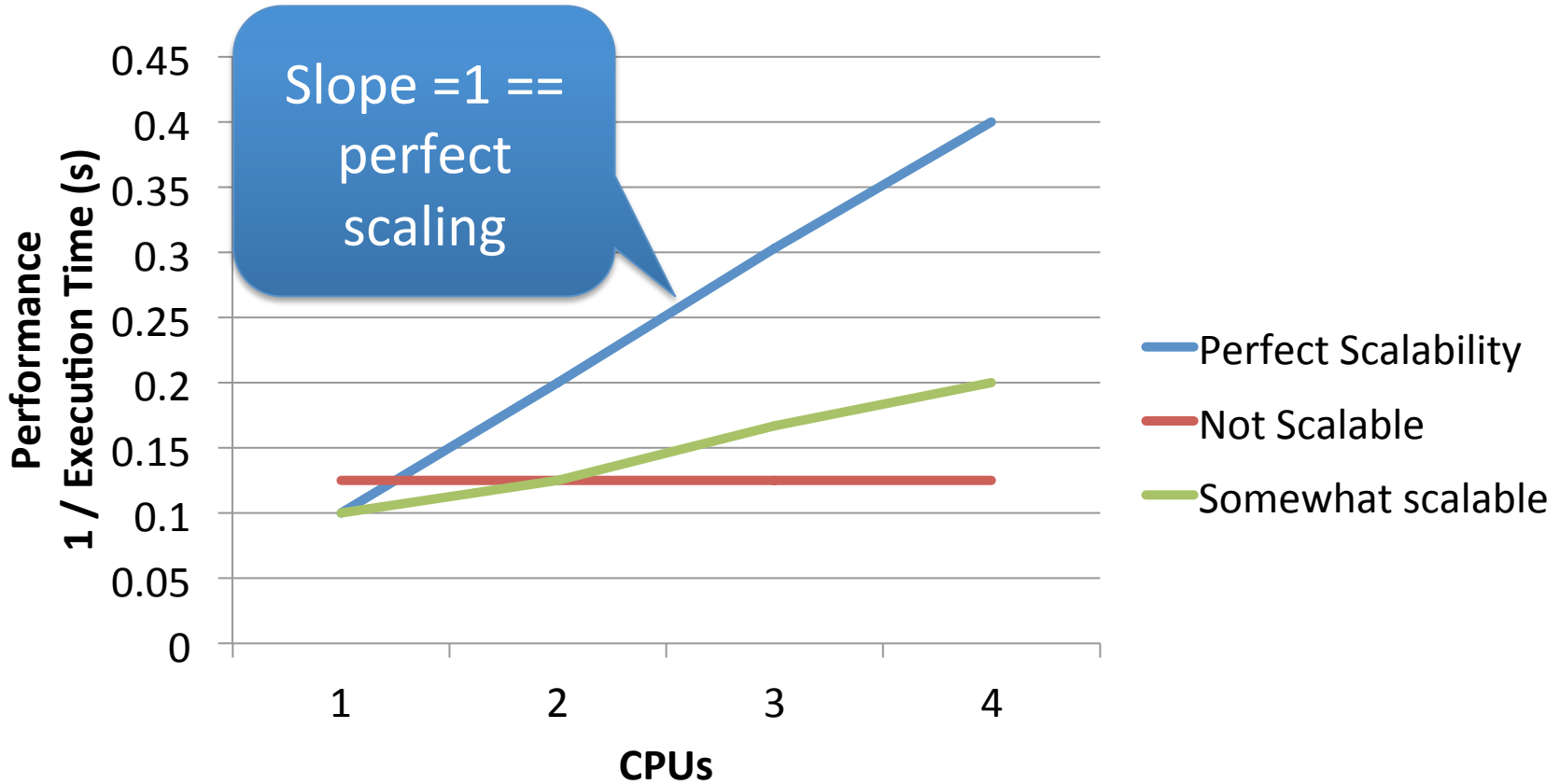
Performance Scalability

- How much more work can this software complete in a unit of time if I give it another CPU?
 - Same: No scalability---extra CPU is wasted
 - 1 -> 2 CPUs doubles the work: Perfect scalability
- Most software isn't scalable
- Most scalable software isn't perfectly scalable

Performance Scalability

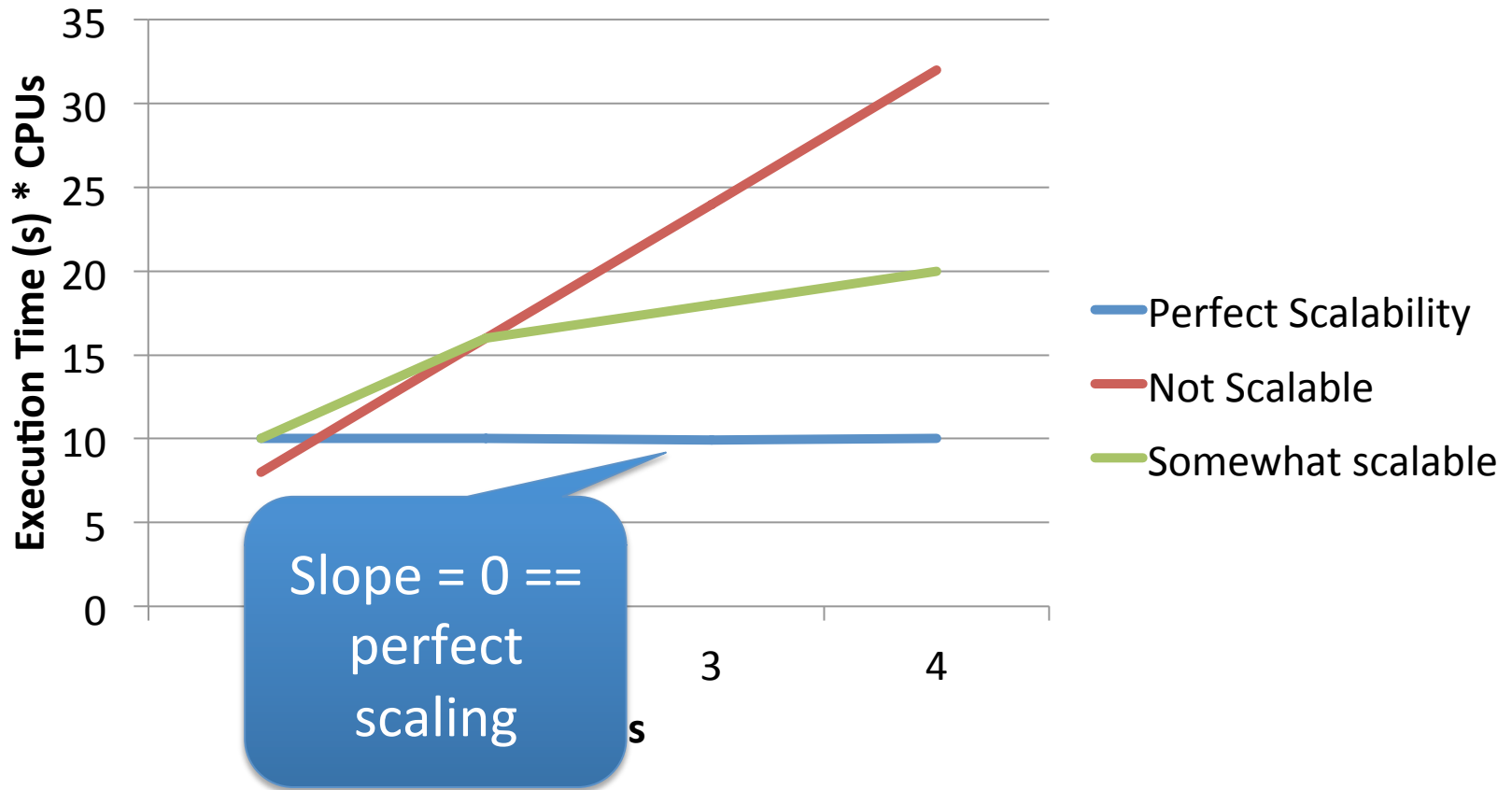


Performance Scalability (more visually intuitive)



Performance Scalability

(A 3rd visual)



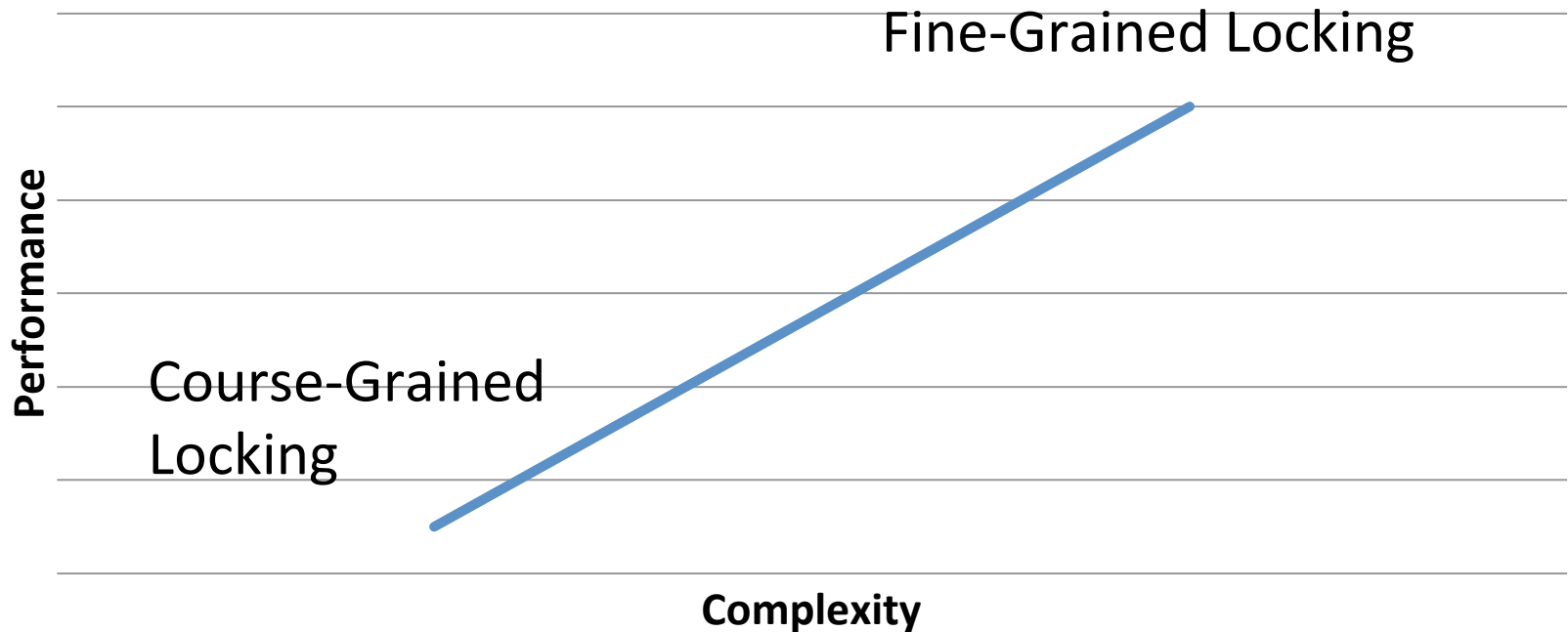
Coarse vs. Fine-grained locking

- Coarse: A single lock for everything
 - Idea: Before I touch any shared data, grab the lock
 - Problem: completely unrelated operations wait on each other
 - Adding CPUs doesn't improve performance

Fine-grained locking

- Fine-grained locking: Many “little” locks for individual data structures
 - Goal: Unrelated activities hold different locks
 - Hence, adding CPUs improves performance
 - Cost: complexity of coordinating locks

Current Reality



- ✦ Unsavory trade-off between complexity and performance scalability

How do locks work?

- Two key ingredients:
 - A hardware-provided atomic instruction
 - Determines who wins under contention
 - A waiting strategy for the loser(s)

Atomic instructions

- A “normal” instruction can span many CPU cycles
 - Example: ‘ $a = b + c$ ’ requires 2 loads and a store
 - These loads and stores can interleave with other CPUs’ memory accesses
- An atomic instruction guarantees that the entire operation is not interleaved with any other CPU
 - x86: Certain instructions can have a ‘lock’ prefix
 - Intuition: This CPU ‘locks’ all of memory
 - Expensive! Not ever used automatically by a compiler; must be explicitly used by the programmer

Atomic instruction examples

- Atomic increment/decrement ($x++$ or $x--$)
 - Used for reference counting
 - Some variants also return the value x was set to by this instruction (useful if another CPU immediately changes the value)
- Compare and swap
 - if $(x == y) x = z;$
 - Used for many lock-free data structures

Atomic instructions + locks

- Most lock implementations have some sort of counter
- Say initialized to 1
- To acquire the lock, use an atomic decrement
 - If you set the value to 0, you win! Go ahead
 - If you get < 0 , you lose. Wait ☹️
 - Atomic decrement ensures that only one CPU will decrement the value to zero
- To release, set the value back to 1

Waiting strategies

- Spinning: Just poll the atomic counter in a busy loop; when it becomes 1, try the atomic decrement again
- Blocking: Create a kernel wait queue and go to sleep, yielding the CPU to more useful work
 - Winner is responsible to wake up losers (in addition to setting lock variable to 1)
 - Create a kernel wait queue – the same thing used to wait on I/O
 - Note: Moving to a wait queue takes you out of the scheduler's run queue

Which strategy to use?

- Main consideration: Expected time waiting for the lock vs. time to do 2 context switches
 - If the lock will be held a long time (like while waiting for disk I/O), blocking makes sense
 - If the lock is only held momentarily, spinning makes sense
- Other, subtle considerations we will discuss later

Linux lock types

- Blocking: mutex, semaphore
- Non-blocking: spinlocks, seqlocks, completions

Linux spinlock (simplified)

```
1: lock; decb slp->slock // Locked decrement of lock var
    jns 3f // Jump if not set (result is zero) to 3
2: pause // Low power instruction, wakes on
    // coherence event
    cmpb $0,slp->slock // Read the lock value, compare to zero
    jle 2b // If less than or equal (to zero), goto 2
    jmp 1b // Else jump to 1 and try again
3: // We win the lock
```

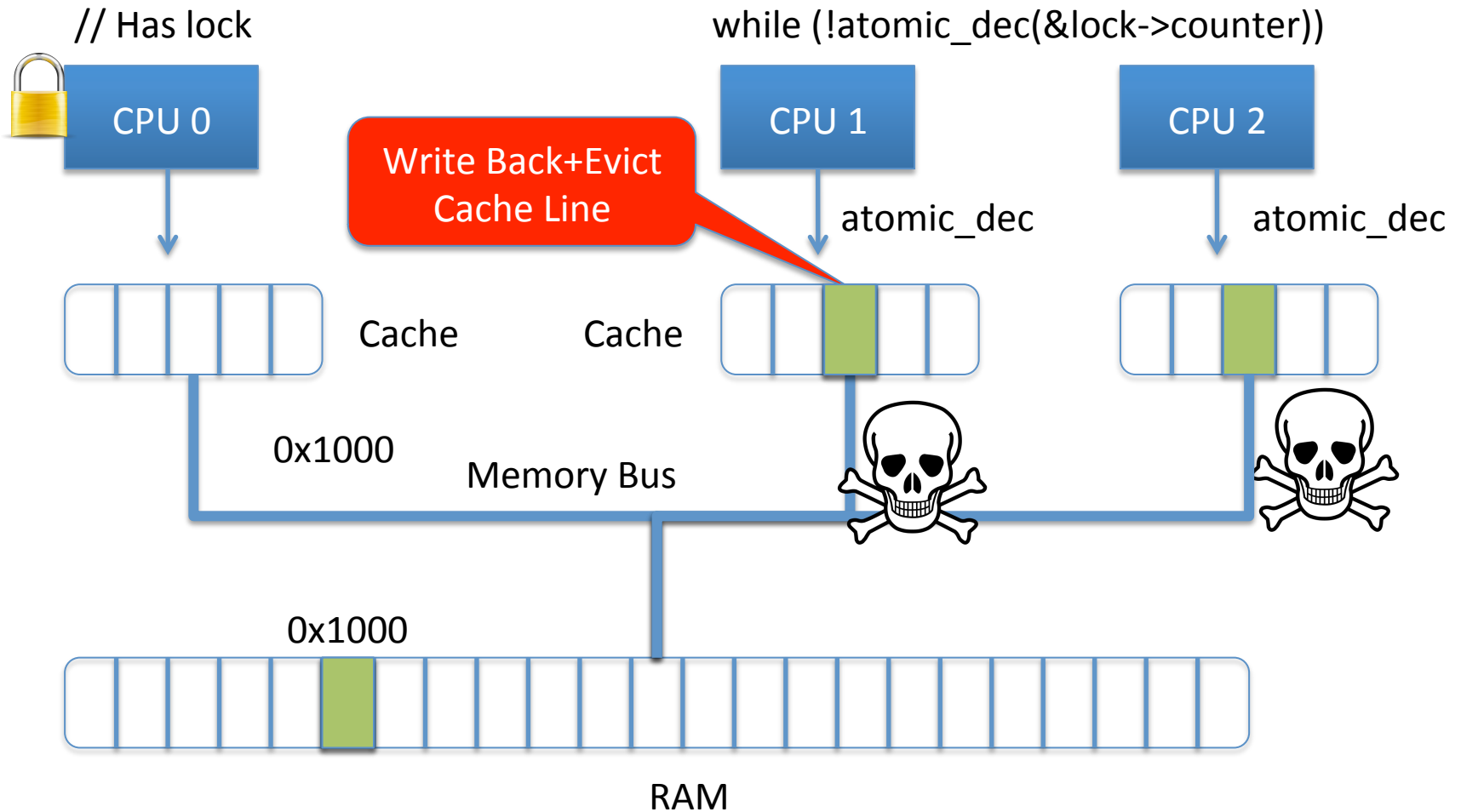

Rough C equivalent

```
while (0 != atomic_dec(&lock->counter)) {  
    do {  
        // Pause the CPU until some coherence  
        // traffic (a prerequisite for the counter  
        // changing) saving power  
  
    } while (lock->counter <= 0);  
}
```

Why 2 loops?

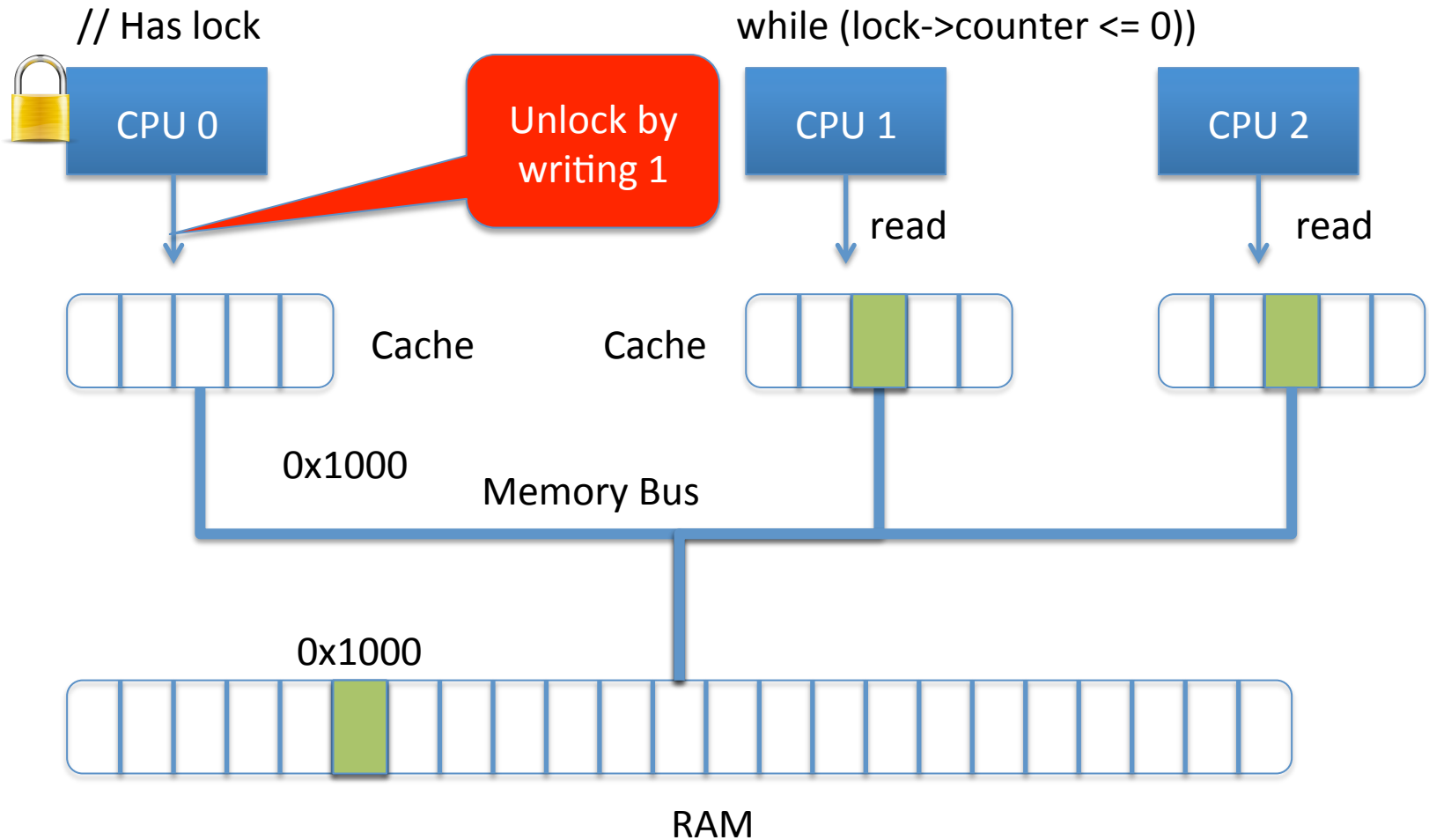
- Functionally, the outer loop is sufficient
- Problem: Attempts to write this variable invalidate it in all other caches
 - If many CPUs are waiting on this lock, the cache line will bounce between CPUs that are polling its value
 - This is VERY expensive and slows down EVERYTHING on the system
 - The inner loop read-shares this cache line, allowing all polling in parallel
- This pattern called a Test&Test&Set lock (vs. Test&Set)

Test & Set Lock



Cache Line “ping-pongs” back and forth

Test & Test & Set Lock



Line shared in read mode until unlocked

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Reader/writer locks

- Simple optimization: If I am just reading, we can let other readers access the data at the same time
 - Just no writers
- Writers require mutual exclusion

Linux RW-Spinlocks

- Low 24 bits count active readers
 - Unlocked: 0x01000000
 - To read lock: `atomic_dec_unless(count, 0)`
 - 1 reader: 0x:00ffffff
 - 2 readers: 0x00fffffe
 - Etc.
 - Readers limited to 2^{24} . That is a lot of CPUs!
- 25th bit for writer
 - Write lock – CAS 0x01000000 -> 0
 - Readers will fail to acquire the lock until we add 0x1000000

Subtle issue

- What if we have a constant stream of readers and a waiting writer?
 - The writer will starve
- We may want to prioritize writers over readers
 - For instance, when readers are polling for the write
 - How to do this?

Seqlocks

- Explicitly favor writers, potentially starve readers
- Idea:
 - An explicit write lock (one writer at a time)
 - Plus a version number – each writer increments at beginning and end of critical section
- Readers: Check version number, read data, check again
 - If version changed, try again in a loop
 - If version hasn't changed and is even, neither has data

Seqlock Example

70

% Time for
CSE 506

30

% Time for
All Else

Invariant:
Must add up to
100%

0

Version
Lock

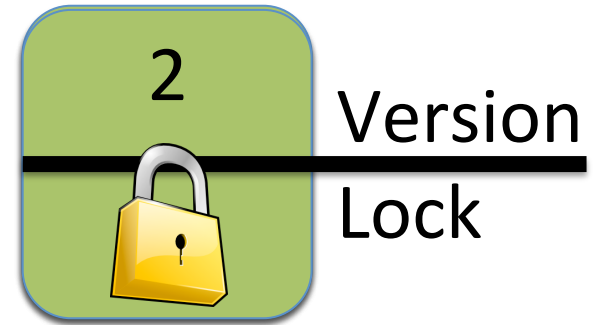
Seqlock Example

80

% Time for
CSE 506

20

% Time for
All Else



What if reader
executed now?

Reader:
do {

```
v = version;
a = cse506;
b = other;
```

```
} while (v % 2 == 1 ||
         v != version);
```



Writer:

```
lock();
version++;
other = 20;
cse506 = 80;
version++;
unlock();
```

Seqlocks

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- Idea:
 - An explicit write lock (one writer at a time)
 - Plus a version number – each writer increments at beginning and end of critical section
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 - If version hasn't changed and is even, neither has data

Composing locks

- Suppose I need to touch two data structures (A and B) in the kernel, protected by two locks.
- What could go wrong?
 - Deadlock!
 - Thread 0: lock(a); lock(b)
 - Thread 1: lock(b); lock(a)
- How to solve?
 - Lock ordering

Lock Ordering

- A program code convention
- Developers get together, have lunch, plan the order of locks
- In general, nothing at compile time or run-time prevents you from violating this convention
 - Research topics on making this better:
 - Finding locking bugs
 - Automatically locking things properly
 - Transactional memory

How to order?

- What if I lock each entry in a linked list. What is a sensible ordering?
 - Lock each item in list order
 - What if the list changes order?
 - Uh-oh! This is a hard problem
- Lock-ordering usually reflects static assumptions about the structure of the data
 - When you can't make these assumptions, ordering gets hard

Linux solution

- In general, locks for dynamic data structures are ordered by kernel virtual address
 - I.e., grab locks in increasing virtual address order
- A few places where traversal path is used instead

Lock ordering in practice

From Linux: fs/dcache.c

```

void d_prune_aliases(struct inode *inode) {
    struct dentry *dentry;
    struct hlist_node *p;

restart:
    spin_lock(&inode->i_lock);
    hlist_for_each_entry(dentry, p, &inode->i_dentry, d_inode) {
        spin_lock(&dentry->d_lock);
        if (!dentry->d_count) {
            __dget_dlock(dentry);
            __d_drop(dentry);
            spin_unlock(&dentry->d_lock);
            spin_unlock(&inode->i_lock);
            dput(dentry);
            goto restart;
        }
        spin_unlock(&dentry->d_lock);
    }
    spin_unlock(&inode->i_lock);
}

```

Care taken to lock inode before each alias

Inode lock protects list; Must restart loop after modification

mm/filemap.c lock ordering

```

/*
 * Lock ordering:
 * ->i_mmap_lock                (vmtruncate)
 *   ->private_lock            (__free_pte->__set_page_dirty_buffers)
 *   ->swap_lock                (exclusive_swap_page, others)
 *   ->mapping->tree_lock
 * ->i_mutex
 *   ->i_mmap_lock                (truncate->unmap_mapping_range)
 * ->mmap_sem
 *   ->i_mmap_lock
 *   ->page_table_lock or pte_lock (various, mainly in memory.c)
 *   ->mapping->tree_lock (arch-dependent flush_dcache_mmap_lock)
 * ->mmap_sem
 *   ->lock_page                (access_process_vm)
 * ->mmap_sem
 *   ->i_mutex                    (msync)
 * ->i_mutex
 *   ->i_alloc_sem                (various)
 * ->inode_lock
 *   ->sb_lock                    (fs/fs-writeback.c)
 *   ->mapping->tree_lock        (__sync_single_inode)
 * ->i_mmap_lock
 *   ->anon_vma.lock            (vma_adjust)
 * ->anon_vma.lock
 *   ->page_table_lock or pte_lock (anon_vma_prepare and various)
 * ->page_table_lock or pte_lock
 *   ->swap_lock                (try_to_unmap_one)
 *   ->private_lock            (try_to_unmap_one)
 *   ->tree_lock                (try_to_unmap_one)
 *   ->zone.lru_lock            (follow_page->mark_page_accessed)
 *   ->zone.lru_lock            (check_pte_range->isolate_lru_page)
 *   ->private_lock            (page_remove_rmap->set_page_dirty)
 *   ->tree_lock                (page_remove_rmap->set_page_dirty)
 *   ->inode_lock                (page_remove_rmap->set_page_dirty)
 *   ->inode_lock                (zap_pte_range->set_page_dirty)
 *   ->private_lock            (zap_pte_range->__set_page_dirty_buffers)
 * ->task->proc_lock
 *   ->dcache_lock                (proc_pid_lookup)
 */

```

Semaphore

- A counter of allowed concurrent processes
 - A mutex is the special case of 1 at a time
- Plus a wait queue
- Implemented similarly to a spinlock, except spin loop replaced with placing oneself on a wait queue

Ordering blocking and spin locks

- If you are mixing blocking locks with spinlocks, be sure to acquire all blocking locks first and release blocking locks last
 - Releasing a semaphore/mutex schedules the next waiter
 - On the same CPU!
 - If we hold a spinlock, the waiter may also try to grab this lock
 - The waiter may block trying to get our spinlock and never yield the CPU
 - We never get scheduled again, we never release the lock

Summary

- Understand how to implement a spinlock/semaphore/rw-spinlock
- Understand trade-offs between:
 - Spinlocks vs. blocking lock
 - Fine vs. coarse locking
 - Favoring readers vs. writers
- Lock ordering issues