

# Distributed Computing III

*Murphy was an optimist*

*CSSE6400*

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May 8, 2023

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- Message not delivered
- Message delayed
- Receiver failed
- Receiver busy
- Reply not received
- Reply delayed
- Lost in transit
- Network delay or receiver overloaded, but message will be processed later
- Receiver software has crashed or node has died
- Receiver temporarily not replying (e.g. garbage collection has frozen other processes)
- Request was processed but reply lost in transit
- Reply will be received later



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- No listener on port – RST or FIN packet
  - Process crashes – Monitor report failure
  - IP address not reachable – unreachable packet
  - Query switches
  - Timeout
- Assumes node is running & reachable. OS should close or refuse connection. Error packet may be lost in transit.
  - Assumes node is running & reachable. Most reliable.
  - Router has to determine address is not reachable, which is no easier than for your application.
  - Need permissions to do this. Will only have this in your own data centre.
  - UDP reduces network transmission time guarantee – does not perform retransmission

*Question*

What to do if fault is detected?

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*Answer*

- Retry
- Restart

- How many retries? How often?
- Exponential backoff with jitter
- How long to wait to restart?
- Too long reduces responsiveness.
- Unacknowledged messages need to be sent to other nodes – reducing performance.
- Too short may prematurely declare nodes dead.
- May lead to contention – two nodes processing the same request.
- May lead to cascading failure – load is sent to other nodes, slowing them down so they are then declared dead ....



*Definition 1.* Idempotency

Repeating an operation does not change receiver's state.

- Idempotent consumer pattern
- Tag messages with an ID, so repeated messages can be ignored
- Or, redo messages that do not change state (e.g. queries)

## Byzantine Generals Problem



- $n$  generals need to agree on plan
- Can only communicate via messenger
- Messenger may be delayed or lost
- Some generals are traitors
  - Send dishonest messages
  - Pretend to have not received message

Link analogy to Byzantine faults

### *Definition 2. Byzantine Faults*

Nodes in a distributed system may ‘lie’ – send faulty or corrupted messages or responses.

- A message that causes the receiver to fail.
- Incorrect responses (e.g. they have finished processing a message but haven’t).
- Can be due to faults or malicious hosts.
- Difficult to deal with all possible variations of these faults.

*Question*

Can we design a system to be Byzantine fault tolerant?

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Can we design a system to be Byzantine fault tolerant?

*Answer*

Yes, but, it is *challenging*.

- Most systems don't attempt to
- Some need to (e.g. safety critical systems, blockchain, ...)
- Refer to CSSE3012 Safety Critical guest lecture.

## Limited Fault Tolerance

- Validate format of received messages
  - Need strategy to handle & report errors

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- Santise inputs
  - Assume any input from external sources may be malicious
- Retrieve data from multiple sources
  - If possible
  - e.g. Multiple NTP servers



### *Assumption*

If all nodes are part of our system, we may assume there are no Byzantine faults.

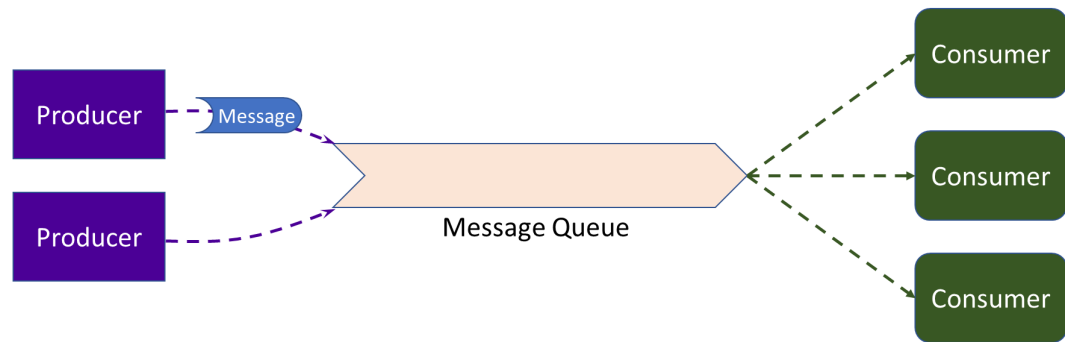
- Satisfy user input
- Byzantine faults may still arise
  - Logic defects
    - Same code is usually deployed to all replicated nodes, defeating easy fault tolerance solutions

*Definition 3. Poison Message*

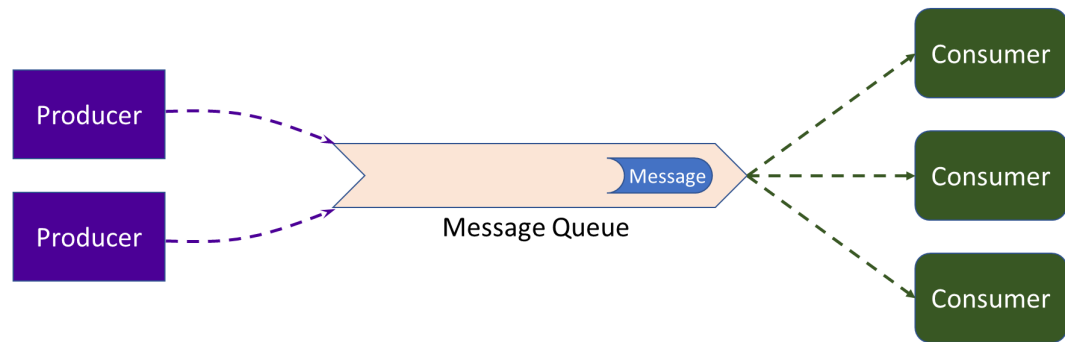
A message that causes the receiver to fail.

- Could literally cause the receiver to crash
- Often the receiver just cannot process the message and aborts processing

Normal Message Flow



- Sequence of slides with an animation of a poison message.
- First 3 slides are an example of a message being queued and processed.
- Slides 4-8 are an example of a poison message blocking the queue.
- Should comment that poison messages block processing regardless of how they're delivered.
- A message queue or service isn't the key blocking point.
- Async messages sent directly to a consumer requires it to queue them as they're processed, leading to the same blocking issue.



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## Poison Message



- Receiver can't process message.
- Always fails – Not due to transient failure.
- Failed messages are retried.
- Returned to front of queue – Preserve message order.
- Next receiver fails to process message – Infinite loop.
- Blocks sending of following messages.



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- Content is invalid
  - e.g. Invalid product id sent to purchasing service
  - Error handling doesn't cater for error case
- System state is invalid
  - e.g. Add item to shopping cart that has been deleted
  - Logic doesn't handle out of order messages
    - Insidious asynchronous faults

- Invalid content may be
  - corrupted data,
  - old version of data structure,
  - incorrect data, or
  - malicious data.
- Invalid state may be
  - events out of order (e.g. delete then update),
  - logic error making state invalid, or
  - external corruption of persistent state.

## Detecting Poison Messages

Retry counter – with limit

- Where is counter stored?
  - Memory – What if server restarts?
  - DB – Slow
- Must ensure counter is reset, regardless of how message is handled
  - e.g. Message is manually deleted



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Message service may have a timeout property

- Message removed from queue
  - Pending messages get older while waiting for poison message
  - Transient network faults may exceed timeout

## Detecting Poison Messages

### Monitoring service

- Trigger action if message stays at top of queue for too long
- Can check for queue errors
  - No messages are being processed
  - Restart message service

## Handling Poison Messages

### Discard message

- System must not require guarantee of message delivery
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### Always retry

- Requires mechanism to fix message
  - Often requires manual intervention
- Suitable when message delivery is most important
- Very long delays in processing

## Handling Poison Messages

### Dead-letter queue

- Long transient failures result in adding many messages
  - e.g. Network failure
- Requires manual monitoring and intervention
- System must not require strict ordering of messages
- Suitable when message processing speed is important

## Handling Poison Messages

### Retry queue

- Transient failures also added
- Use a previous strategy to deal with poison messages
- System must not require strict ordering of messages
- Suitable when message processing speed is very important
  - Main queue is never blocked
  - Receivers need to process from two message queues

*Definition 4.* Poison Pill Message

Special message used to notify receiver it should no longer wait for messages.

Emphasise that this is different to a poison message

*Question*

Why use a poison pill message?



*Question*

Why use a poison pill message?

*Answer*

Graceful shutdown of system.

- Implementation is challenging with multiple producers and/or consumers
- It must be the last message received by all consumers

*Question*

How to order asynchronous messages?

*Question*

How to order asynchronous messages?

*Answer*

- Timestamps?
  - Can't keep clocks in sync
  - Limited clock precision
- Trying to sync with NTP is unreliable
- Network delays during sync
- Clock drift between syncs
- Finite precision – two events may end up with the same timestamp, if they occur in quick succession

Data Issues

### *Consistency*

Eventual Consistency weak guarantee

Linearisability strong guarantee

Causal Ordering strong guarantee

### *Eventual Consistency*

- Allows stale reads
- May be appropriate for some systems
  - e.g. Social media updates<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See Distributed II slides 40 - 44.

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  - Single-leader replication
    - Read from leader
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  - Multi-leader replication can't be linearised
  - Leaderless replication
    - Lock value on quorum before writing
- Abstraction over replicated database
  - Used when uniqueness needs to be guaranteed
  - e.g. Multiple withdrawals from an account
  - SLR – defeats most performance benefits
  - Leaderless – similar performance cost to SLR

### *Causal Order*

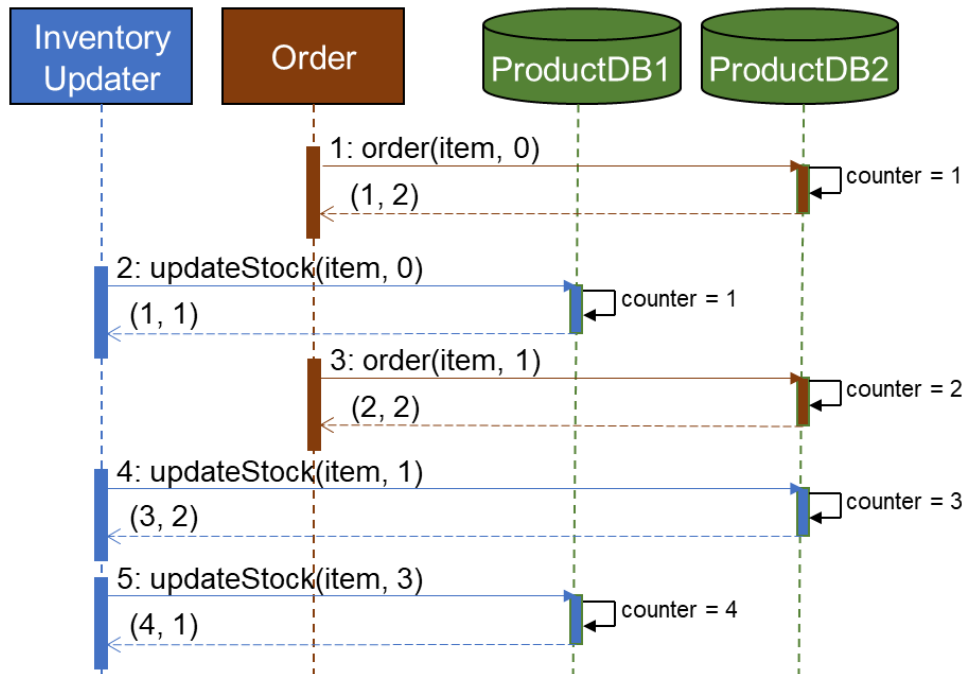
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    - What event needs to happen before another
    - Allows concurrent events
  - Single-leader replication
    - Record sequence number of writes in log
    - Followers read log to execute writes
  - Lamport timestamps
- Linearisation defines a total order
  - Causal ordering defines a partial order
  - e.g. Git repo history with branching as causal order
  - Not as strict as linearisability, so less performance cost



*Definition 5.* Consensus

A set of nodes in the system agree on some aspect of the system's state.

Abstraction to make it easier to reason about system state.

### *Consensus Properties*

**Uniform Agreement** All nodes must agree on the decision

**Integrity** Nodes can only vote once

**Validity** Result must have been proposed by a node

**Termination** Every node that doesn't crash must decide

- Uniform agreement and integrity are key
- Validity avoids nonsensical solutions (e.g. always agreeing to a null decision)
- Termination enforces fault tolerance, it requires that progress is made towards a solution



*Definition 6. Atomic Commit*

All nodes participating in a distributed transaction need to form consensus to complete the transaction.

Based on transaction atomicity from ACID.

### *Two-Phase Commit*

**Prepare** Confirm nodes can commit transaction

**Commit** Finalise commit once consensus is reached

- Abort if consensus can't be reached



- Transaction ID used to track writes
- Prepare does all steps of a commit, aside from confirming it
  - It cannot be revoked by participant
- Commit intent is recorded in log before sending to participants
- Even if a participant fails, commit can proceed when it recovers
- Comment on performance costs

## Distributed Systems Timing Assumptions

- Synchronous System
  - Not realistic due to faults above
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  - Error handling to catch faults

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- Partially Synchronous System
  - Assumes important message order is preserved
  - Assumes most faults are rare & transient
  - Error handling to catch faults
- Asynchronous System
  - No timing assumptions
  - Important message order managed by application
  - Difficult & limited design

# Distributed Systems Node Failure Assumptions

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- Crash Stop
    - Node fails and never restarts
  - Crash Recovery
    - Node fails and restarts
      - Requires persistent memory to recover to close to prior state
  - Arbitrary Failure
    - Nodes may perform spurious or malicious actions
      - Byzantine faults
- Crash Stop – Cloud-based system that kills crashed nodes.
  - Crash Recovery – Any system that allows nodes to be restarted.
  - Crash Recovery – May lose some steps in memory for non-critical tasks.
  - Arbitrary Failure – Nodes may send faulty or malicious messages.

- Distributed systems are hard to build
- Large systems have to be distributed
  - Monoliths can't scale to millions of users
- Use environments, tools & libraries
  - Leverage others' experience