2019 Q3 Hyperledger Burrow

Project

https://github.com/hyperledger/burrow/

Project Health

Burrow has seen an uptick in issues on GitHub and questions on Hyperledger chat, and also the return of a prodigal contributor. The last quarter has been a bumper one for new features, see below. Burrow desperately needs to document and publicise its existing features better.

Issues

Issues on GitHub highlight the difficulty that new users have getting started with the project. Much of this comes down to a lack of documentation or stale documentation. On that latter, a cluster of new features meant to help spinning up single-machine bare metal networks made some invalidated some of the instructions in our getting started guides. In another instance two incompatible flags where used in a code snippet which made the example throw an error. None of this was very hard to fix but it's a dumb way to lose contributors and users. I have no measurement but I'm sure this hurts our 'contributor funnel'.

We can fix this by:

- Using a markdown pre-processor to include snippets and make them part of our integration testing.
- Write basic docs across our entire feature set.

Neither of these are that hard but realistically we need help/more resources to get this done. I would like to make it an aim for this quarter to get Burrow to '100% tested docs coverage' - meaning we at *least* talk about every main feature of Burrow even if the docs are rubbish/incomplete. And where we have example code and scripts we run them with our CI so they don't go stale.

To try and drum up support I plan to do the following:

- Write a summary Burrow newsletter (I'm going to call it `Burrata`, the first one will be `Burrata 1`). Given our mailing list subscription numbers I think this would be best primarily published as a blog post on Hyperledger (who should I talk to?). I'll then syndicate from Monax social media and blog channels. In the post I will sum up Burrow features, talk about new and experimental features, and beg for documentation help.

My aim is to exclusively focus on documentation contribution - which would include writing some example code. If anyone wants to get up to speed on Burrow this would be a good way to do it. We are not looking for perfect docs at all. The markdown pre-processor testing harness might be moderately interesting for other project/in itself if you are in to that sort of thing.

Any advice/help from TSC appreciated.

Releases

- **v0.27.0** - Support for WASM contracts compiled with solang
- **v0.26.2** - Fix non-deterministic block time on restart
- **v0.26.1** - Remote burrow dump, no empty blocks (massive space saving)
- **v0.26.0** - Tendermint upgrade, vent store chain_id for restore chains

Overall Activity in the Past Quarter

There has been plenty of development, the vast majority from Monax employees, including:

- Experimental WASM support
- Vent supports append only SQL log mode - supporting SQL-based event queues from EVM events
- Elective validator bonding - validators may now bond and unbond themselves as they come online (on develop)
- On-chain Ethereum ABI storage and contract metadata - EVM contracts now self-describe names, functions, signatures, types (develop)
- Massive performance improvement in merkle tree by increasing node size
- Command line tooling for forensics (why did this production validator break with quorum?)
- Command line tooling for sending transaction (without a deploy.yaml script)

Current Plans

As above we need to have a push on explaining Burrow and documenting.

Technical challenges include:

- Improving our state mechanism - we use https://github.com/tendermint/iavl but it has scaling issues with large state trees - we have a experimental replacement in the works: https://github.com/monax/trieste
- Expanding our WASM syscalls - we would like to collaborate with Transact and will consider what eWASM is defining
- State channels via ad-hoc Tendermint sub-networks (for privacy, for scaling)

- Scheduled transactions - ability to schedule transactions for a future block height and/or time - including ProposalTx

Maintainer Diversity

No new maintainers. We have 4 from Monax, 2 non-Monax

Contributor Diversity

We have 3 new non-Monax contributors.

Reviewed by

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- ☑ Christopher Ferris
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