bpftrace Dynamic kernel tracing

CONCEPTS

Needs root (or CAP_BPF/ CAP_PERFMON) and a kernel with BPF. Maps you fill with @ are printed automatically when the program ends.

A program is a list of probe / filter/ { action } clauses. Docs for current releases write begin and end in lowercase and use args.field; older scripts use BEGIN/END and args→field.

Probes in a one-liner are cheap to attach, but a hot probe (every syscall, every packet) adds real overhead. Filter by pid or comm first.

RUNNING

bpftrace -e '*<program>*'
Run an inline program

bpftrace *<file.bt>*
Run a script file

bpftrace -l '*<pattern>*'
List probes, wildcards allowed

bpftrace -lv '*<probe>*'
List a probe with its arguments

bpftrace -p *<pid>* -e '*<program>*'
Attach to or filter by a PID

bpftrace -c '*<cmd>*' -e '*<program>*'
Run a command and trace it

bpftrace -f json -e '*<program>*'
Output as JSON lines

PROBES

kprobe:*<func>*
Kernel function entry

kretprobe:*<func>*
Kernel function return (retval)

tracepoint:*<cat>*:*<name>*
Static kernel tracepoint

uprobe:*<path>*:*<func>*
User function entry

begin { ... } / end { ... }
Run once at start / at exit

PROBES (cont.)

uretprobe:*<path>*:*<func>*
User function return

usdt:*<path>*:*<prov>*:*<name>*
User static tracepoint

profile:hz:*<rate>*
Sample on every CPU at a rate

interval:s:*<n>*
Fire once per interval, on one CPU

fentry:*<func>*
Typed kernel entry, args.<name> (BTF)

BUILT-INS

pid / tid
Process / thread ID

comm
Process name

arg0 ... arg5
Raw function arguments

retval
Return value in return probes

nsecs
Timestamp in nanoseconds

args.*<field>*
Tracepoint or fentry argument

MAPS AND AGGREGATION

@ = count()
Count events

@[*<key>*] = count()
Count per key (comm, pid, probe)

@[*<key>*] = sum(*<n>*)
Sum a value per key

@[*<key>*] = avg(*<n>*)
Average per key

@ = hist(*<n>*)
Power-of-2 histogram

@ = lhist(*<n>*, *<min>*, *<max>*, *<step>*)
Linear histogram

@start[tid] = nsecs
Remember a timestamp per thread

delete(@*<map>*, *<key>*)
Remove one key

MAPS AND AGGREGATION (cont.)

clear(@*<map>*)
Remove all entries

print(@*<map>*, *<n>*)
Print the top n entries

has_key(@*<map>*, *<key>*)
Does the key exist?

Maps without a clear() or delete() are dumped at exit, including temporaries such as @start. Clear them in an end block.

OUTPUT AND FUNCTIONS

printf("*<fmt>*\n", *<args>*)
Formatted output

str(*<ptr>*)
Read a C string

exit()
Stop the program

kstack(*<n>*)
Kernel stack, top n frames

LANGUAGE

probe /*<predicate>*/ { ... }
Run the action only if true

$x = *<value>*;
Scratch variable, local to the probe

(struct *<name>* *)*<ptr>*
Cast to a kernel struct

SCRIPTS AND CONFIG

#!/usr/bin/env bpftrace
Shebang for a runnable .bt file

RECIPES

Syscalls by process

```
t:raw_syscalls:sys_enter {
  @[comm] = count();
}
# Ctrl+C prints the counts
```

Files opened, live

```
t:syscalls:sys_enter_openat {
  printf("%s %s\n",
    comm, str(args.filename));
}
```