9 Ways to Secure Your Graph

You’ve built, tested & deployed your graph

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What can go wrong?

Malicious actors?

Malicious actors?
Slow or failing queries?

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Manage public schema access?

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Handling deprecations safely?

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Slow or failing queries?

Manage public schema access?

Handling deprecations safely?

Well-known GraphQL exploits?

Let’s learn

a baseline for graph security

Auth

1. Authentication
2. Authorization

Reducing the attack surface area

3. Mitigating malicious queries
4. Limiting API discoverability
5. Batched requests

Operations & Governance

6. Stability
7. Managing graph access
8. Observability
9. Monitoring

Auth

Authentication

You are who you say you are

Sessions + Identity

Authorization

What are you allowed to see and do?

Permissions + Capabilities

Auth

#1. Authentication

- Maintain session for a particular user through the use of context
- Different ways to handle this
  - JWT
  - 3rd party (ex: Auth0)

```
const { ApolloServer } = require('apollo-server');

const server = new ApolloServer({
 typeDefs,
 resolvers,
 context: ({ req }) => {

   // Get the user token from the headers.
   const token = req.headers.authorization || '';

   // Try to retrieve a user with the token
   const user = getUser(token);

   // Add the user to the context
   return { user };
 },
});

server.listen().then(({ url }) => {
 console.log(`🚀 Server ready at ${url}`)
});
```

Auth

#1. Authentication

- Authenticating within GraphQL, you can then use the context object to pass session information to lower layers.

```
const resolvers = {
  ...
  me: (parent, args, context) => {
    if (!context.user) {
     return null;
    }

    return context.models.User
      .getById(context.user.id);
   }
}
```

Auth

#1. Authentication

You can also:

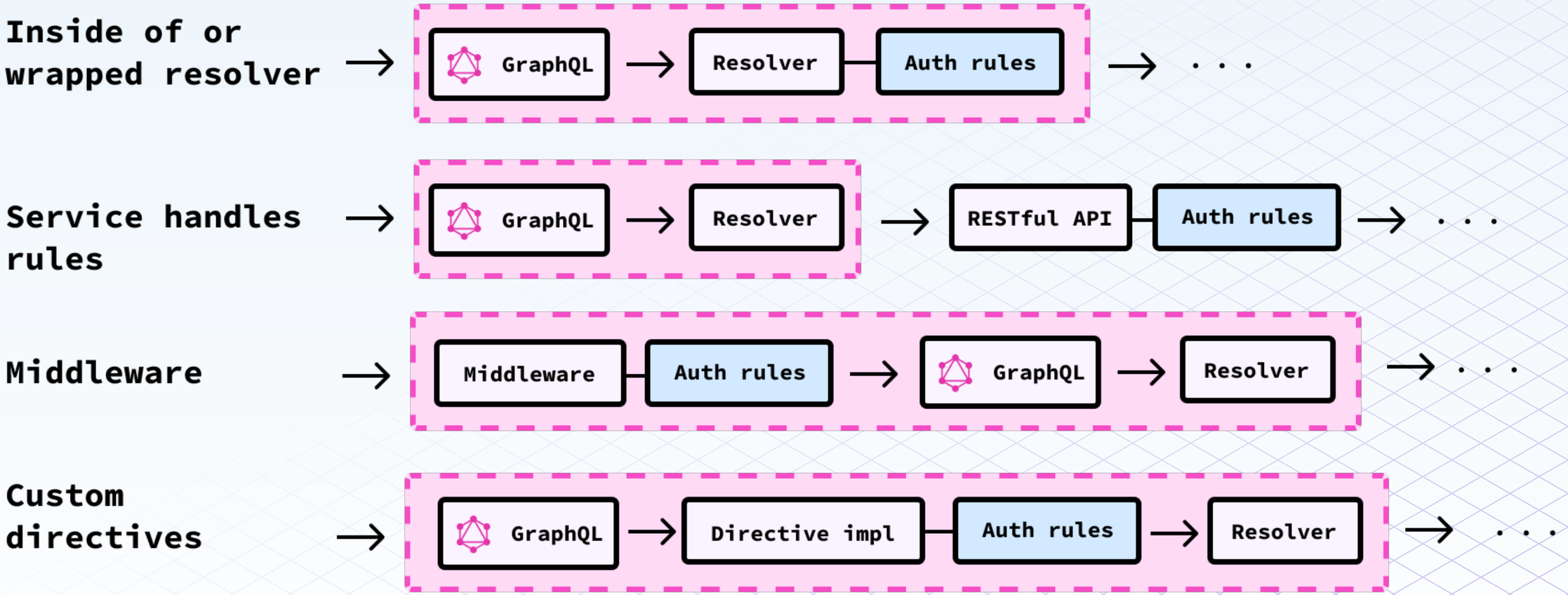
- Handle auth in data models
- Use custom directives
  - Ex: type Reviews @isAuthenticated
- Perform auth work outside of GraphQL (pass to REST endpoint)
  - Ex: Request → GraphQL → RESTful API (auth)
  - Makes sense for RESTful APIs that already have auth logic built in

Key resource
Apollo Docs “Authentication and authorization“
apollographql.com/docs/apollo-server/security/authentication/

Auth

#2. Authorization

- Do you have permission to do this?
  - Example roles:
    - `Admin`, `Editor`, `Contributor`, `Subscriber`
  - Roles have permissions/capabilities:
    - Admin → `EditPage`, `EditOthersPages`, `ReadPrivatePosts`
    - Editor → `EditPage`


Inside of or wrapped resolver
GraphQL
Resolver
Auth rules
. . .
Service handles rules
GraphQL
Resolver
RESTful API
Auth rules
. . .
Middleware
Middleware
Auth rules
GraphQL
Resolver
. . .
Custom directives
GraphQL
Directive impl
Auth rules
Resolver
. . .

Auth

#2. Authorization

- There is no single correct way to set up authorization
- Custom directives
  (e.g @auth (requires: ADMIN))
- Wrap resolver functions
- Put auth rules into middleware layer
  (e.g. graphql-shield)
- Delegate to use case/application layer

Key resources

"How to Auth: Secure a GraphQL API with Confidence" by Mandi Wise

From GraphQL Summit Worldwide 2020

"Setting Up Authentication and Authorization with Apollo Federation" by Mandi Wise

via the Apollo Blog

Rules and Capabilities in WordPress

https://wordpress.org/support/article/roles-and-capabilities/

Reducing the attack surface area

Reducing the attack surface area

#3. Mitigating malicious queries

→ *Limit query depth*

- GraphQL gives clients the ability to ask for data in a variety of different ways. Because of the various entry-points available to request data, it's possible to write exceptionally large nested queries.
- Queries like this are dangerous
  - They're expensive to compute.
  - They could crash our API and take up all available resources.

```
query {
  author(id: 42) {
      posts {
          author {
              posts {
                  author {
                      posts {
                          author {
                              # and so on...
                          }
                      }
                  }
              }
          }
      }
  }
}
```

Reducing the attack surface area

#3. Mitigating malicious queries

→ *Limit query depth*

- graphql-depth-limit
  - https://github.com/stems/graphql-depth-limit
- easily limit the maximum depth of incoming queries

```
app.use('/api', graphqlServer({
  validationRules: [depthLimit(10)]
}));
```

Reducing the attack surface area

#3. Mitigating malicious queries

→ *Paginate list fields*

- Query depth isn't the only thing to worry about. We should also be conscious of how query amount could affect the performance of our API.
- Example: If there were 100 authors, each with 100 posts, this query would attempt to return 100,000 nodes 💀 .
- Can slow (or DoS) your server.

```
query {
  authors(first: 1000) {
    name
    posts(last: 100) {
      title
      content
    }
  }
}
```

Reducing the attack surface area

#3. Mitigating malicious queries

→ *Paginate list fields*

- graphql-input-number
  - https://github.com/joonhocho/graphql-input-number
- Example: We can restrict the maximum value to 100
- We can also perform these checks in the resolver imperatively.

```
const PaginationAmount = GraphQLInputInt({
  name: 'PaginationAmount',
  min: 1,
  max: 100,
});

...


type Thread {
  messages(first: PaginationAmount,
   after: String): [Message]
}
```

Reducing the attack surface area

#3. Mitigating malicious queries

→ *Improve validation & sanitization*

- Standard web application security practices.
- When you accept data from a user,
  one should always expect that user-provided data could be malicious.
- Two especially malicious techniques in this area:
  - Data exfiltration: tricks the database into returning more data than originally intended
  - Data destruction: destroy production data

```
query User {
  user (id: "User*") {
    email
    id
  }
}
```

Reducing the attack surface area

#3. Mitigating malicious queries

→ *Improve validation & sanitization*

- Follow the usual rules for web application sanitization in addition to the **OSWAP GraphQL-specific recommendations** like:
  - Reject invalid input without giving away too many details

Key resource
OSWAP “GraphQL Cheat Sheet”
https://cheatsheetseries.owasp.org/cheatsheets/GraphQL_Cheat_Sheet.html#general-practices

Reducing the attack surface area

#3. Mitigating malicious queries

→ *Improve validation & sanitization*

- Follow the usual rules for web application sanitization in addition to the **OSWAP GraphQL-specific recommendations** like:
  - Reject invalid input without giving away too many details
  - Leverage the GraphQL schema to support validation

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Reducing the attack surface area

#3. Mitigating malicious queries

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- Follow the usual rules for web application sanitization in addition to the **OSWAP GraphQL-specific recommendations** like:
  - Reject invalid input without giving away too many details
  - Leverage the GraphQL schema to support validation
  - Beware of using JSON scalars (prone to malicious queries if not properly sanitized)

Key resource
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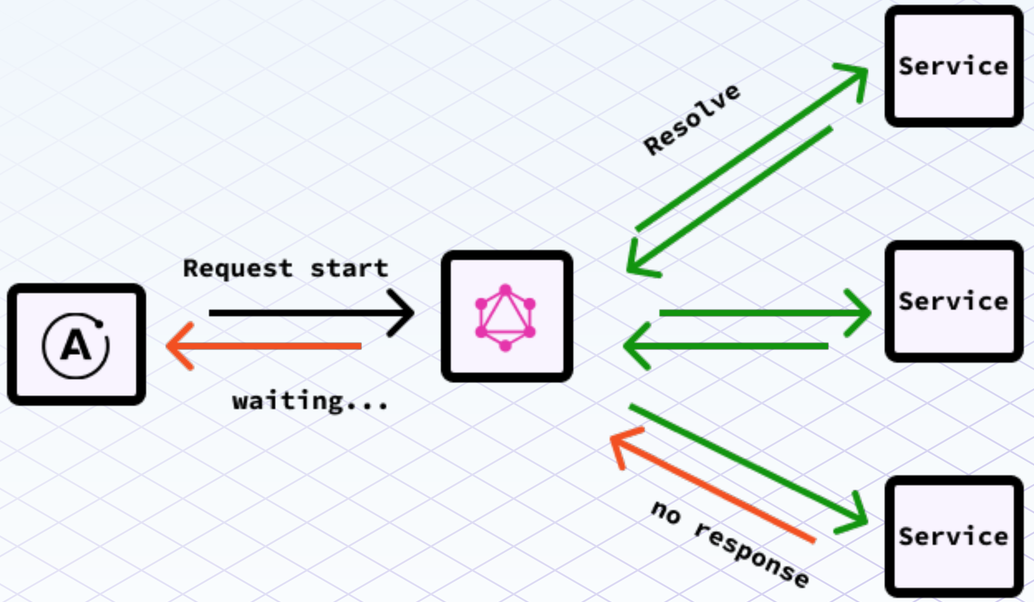
Reducing the attack surface area

#3. Mitigating malicious queries

→ *Use timeouts*

- When resolving data, there are various reasons why it may take a long time to respond.
  - Services could be down
  - Queries may be expensive
  - or something else might be going on.
- We don't want our GraphQL API to hang for too long, waiting for a response.



Reducing the attack surface area

#3. Mitigating malicious queries

→ *Use timeouts*

- Explore using timeouts in the following contexts:
  - On resolver functions (and using REST data sources)
  - [Federation] On requests to the gateway's Node HTTP server
  - [Federation] On requests to the subgraphs services

```
// Federation gateway - subgraph timeout
// example (credit Mandi Wise)
const gateway = new ApolloGateway({
  // ...
  buildService({ name, url }) {
    // Sets a 3 second timeout on requests
    // to subgraph
    const fetcher = (input, init) => {
      if (init) {
        init.timeout = 3000;
      } else {
        init = { timeout: 3000 };
      }
      return fetch(input, init);
    };
    return new RemoteGraphQLDataSource({
      url, fetcher
    });
  }
});
```

Reducing the attack surface area

#3. Mitigating malicious queries

→ *Rate limit APIs*

- Dictates how many requests a client can make per some time.
- Often used to prevent brute-forcing login details, scraping data, or denial of service attacks.

Key resources

GitHub's approach: "Resource limitations" based on maximum node limit + num requests in query
https://docs.github.com/en/graphql/overview/resource-limitations

Shopify's approach: "Query cost points" and the leaky bucket algorithm
https://shopify.dev/api/usage/rate-limits

graphql-rate-limit
npmjs.com/package/graphql-rate-limit

Reducing the attack surface area

#3. Mitigating malicious queries

→ *Query cost analysis*

- Despite our best efforts using query depth + amount limiting techniques, it's still possible to overload the server with semantically expensive queries.
- Sometimes we can't just look at the depth or potential amount of nodes.

```
query evilQuery {
  thread(id: "54887141-57a9-4386-807c") {
    messageConnection(first: 100) { ... }
    participants(first: 100) {
      threadConnection(first: 100) { ... }
      communityConnection { ... }
      channelConnection { ... }
      everything(first: 100) { ... }
    }
  }
}
```

```
import costAnalysis from
   ‘graphql-cost-analysis'

const costAnalyzer = costAnalysis({
  maximumCost: 1000,
})

...
```

```
type Query {
  # will have the default cost value
  defaultCost: Int

  # will have a cost of 2 because this field does not depend
  # on its parent fields
  customCost: Int @cost(useMultipliers: false, complexity: 2)

  # complexity should be between 1 and 10
  badComplexityArgument: Int @cost(complexity: 12)

  # the cost will depend on the `limit` parameter passed to the field
  # then the multiplier will be added to the `parent multipliers` array
  customCostWithResolver(limit: Int): Int
    @cost(multipliers: ["limit"], complexity: 4)

  # for recursive cost
  first(limit: Int): First
    @cost(multipliers: ["limit"], useMultipliers: true, complexity: 2)

  # you can override the cost setting defined directly on a type
  overrideTypeCost: TypeCost @cost(complexity: 2)
  getCostByType: TypeCost

  # You can specify several field parameters in the `multipliers` array
  # then the values of the corresponding parameters will be added together.
  # here, the cost will be `parent multipliers` *
  # (`first` + `last`) * `complexity
  severalMultipliers(first: Int, last: Int): Int
    @cost(multipliers: ["first", "last"])
}
```

Reducing the attack surface area

#3. Mitigating malicious queries

→ *Safelist operations*

- During development, front-end engineers can explore all the data available and fetch what they need for the components they're building.
- But in production, this amount of flexibility can be unnecessary and undesirable
- If we know what operations we’re going to perform, can’t we make it so that we can only perform those?

Reducing the attack surface area

#3. Mitigating malicious queries

→ *Safelist operations*

- Catchall approach: maintain a list of approved operations allowed to execute against your graph
  - **Operation safe listing**
- Setup
  - 1. Register your schema
  - 2. Register the operations from your client bundle
  - 3. Add the operation registry plugin to Apollo Server

```
const server = new ApolloServer({
  // Existing configuration
  typeDefs,
  resolvers,
  subscriptions: false,
  // ...
  // New configuration
  plugins: [
    require('apollo-server-plugin-operation-registry')({
      forbidUnregisteredOperations: true,
    }),
  ],
});
```

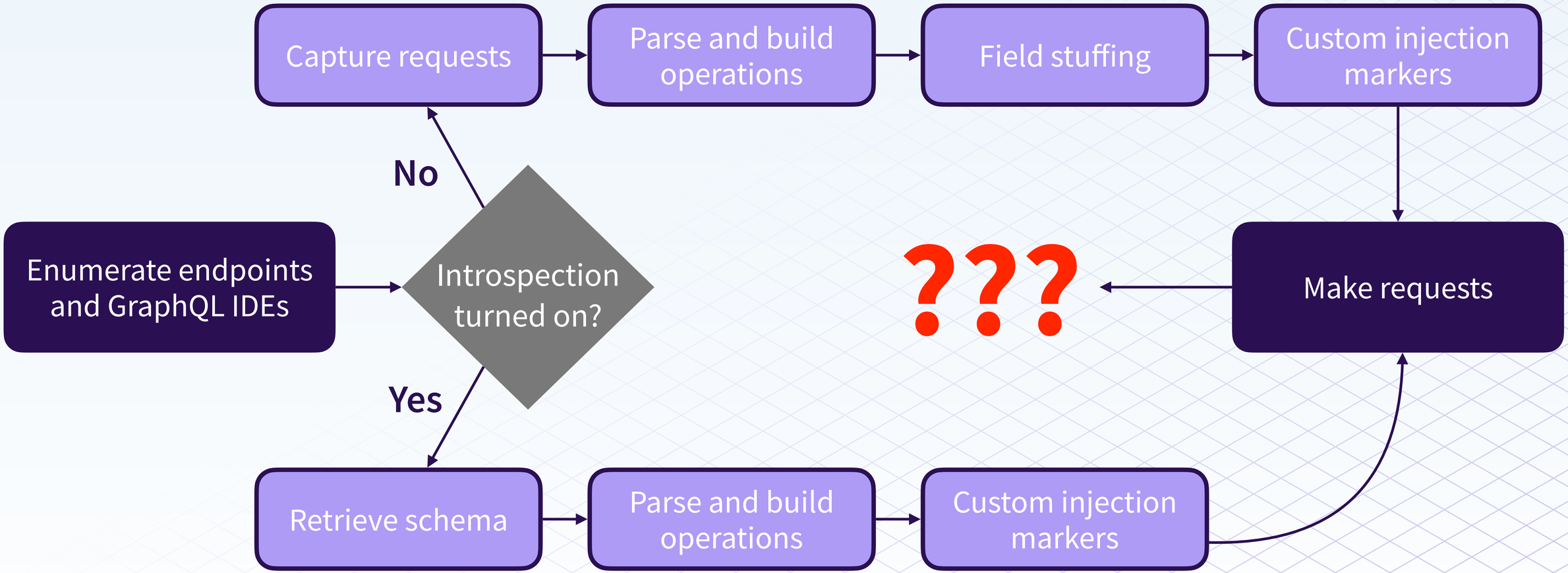
Reducing the attack surface area

#4. Limit API discoverability

→ *Turn off introspection in production*

- Introspection is for development and tooling purposes.
- Behind the scenes, GraphQL IDEs are powered by introspection queries
- With Apollo Server, introspection is on by default unless the NODE_ENV environment variable is set to production

```
const server = new ApolloServer({
  typeDefs,
  resolvers,
  introspection: process.env.NODE_ENV
    !== 'production'
});
```



Adapted from: https://youtu.be/NPDp7GHmMa0

Reducing the attack surface area

#4. Limit API discoverability

→ *Turn off introspection in production*

- With introspection disabled, how do we:
  - Enable new developers to explore the current schema and its capabilities?
  - Utilize tooling during development?
  - Query production data?

Use a schema registry

> There should be a **single source of truth** for registering and tracking the graph
>
> - via principledgraphql.com

- Similarly to how your track your source code with Git, a schema registry exists to keep track of your graph and how it changes over time

- Here are two ways to register your schema to Apollo Studio

- 1. **Through schema reporting**
  - In Apollo Server set APOLLO_SCHEMA_REPORTING=true

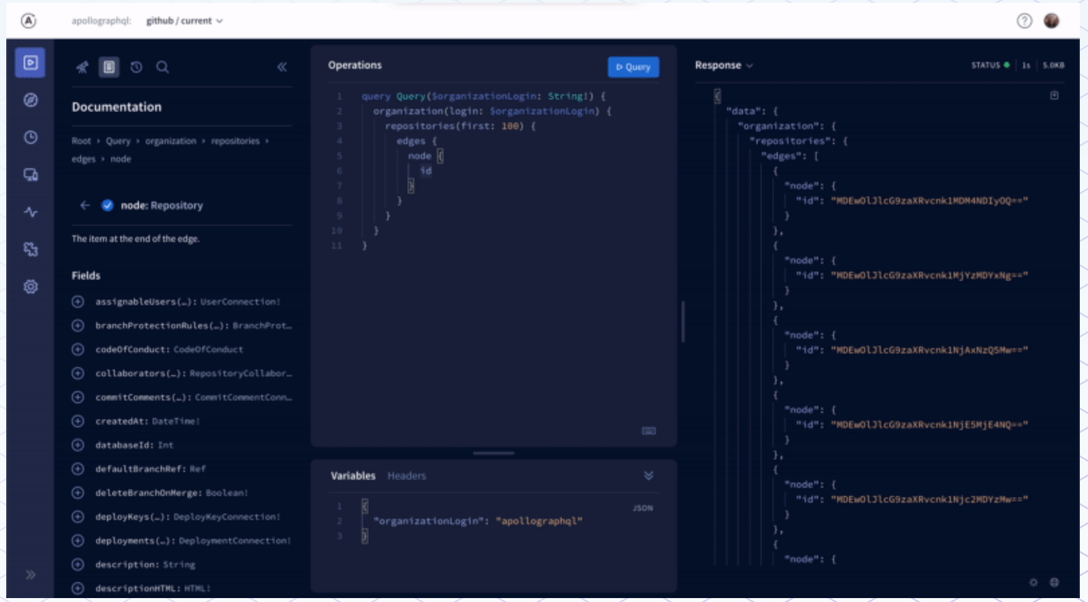
- 2. **Through the Rover CLI**
  - `rover graph publish`

Explore the schema's shape and data

Explorer — *build queries and explore data*

Schema reference — *out of the box documentation*

Graph README — *to onboard developers to the graph*



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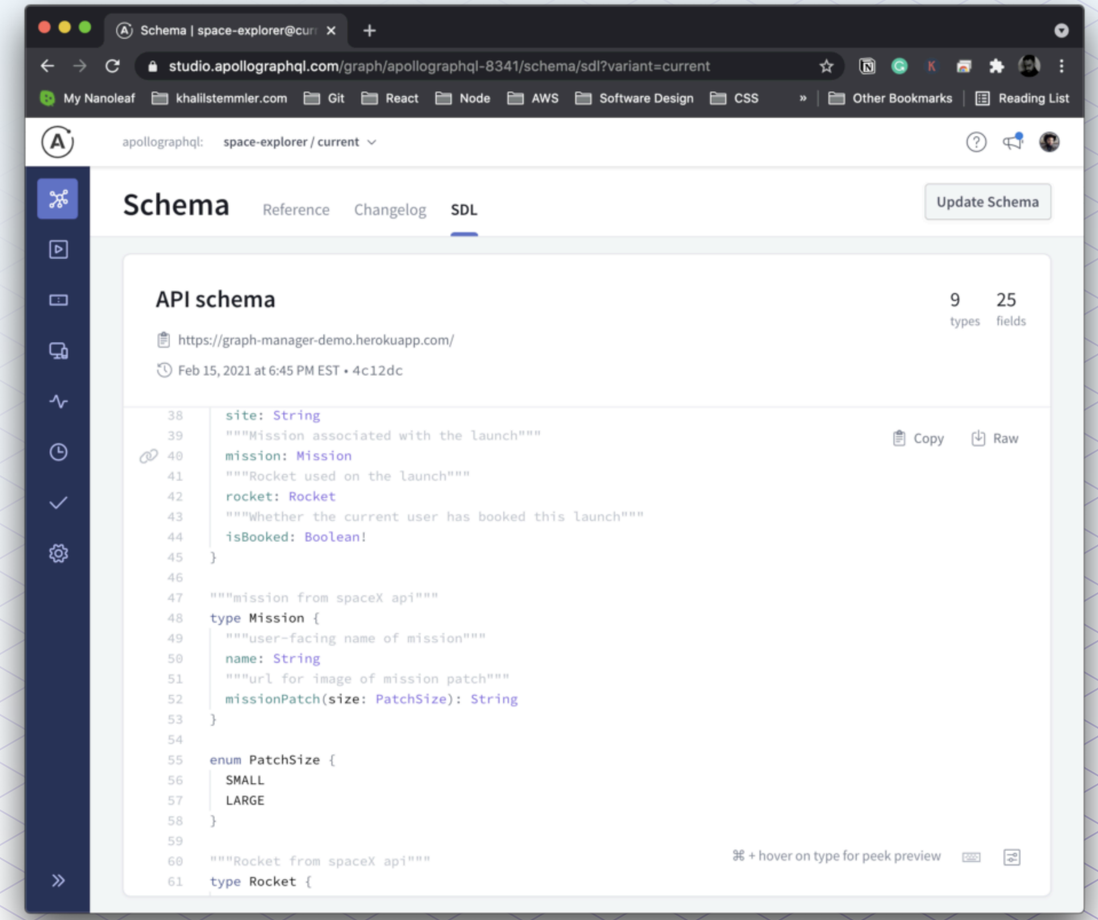

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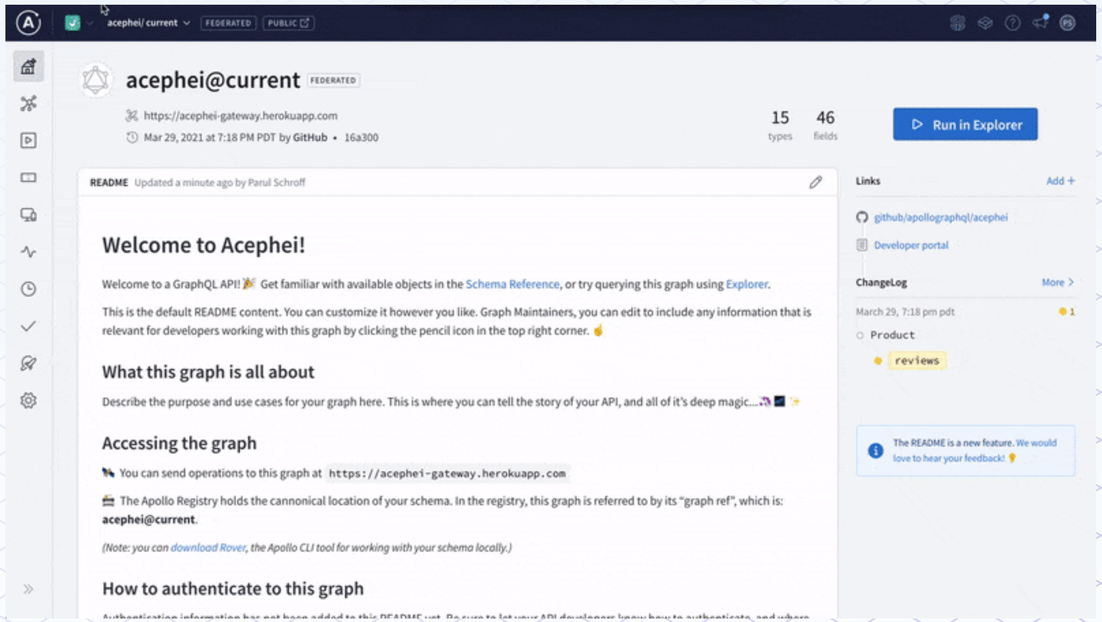

Reducing the attack surface area

#4. Limit API discoverability

→ *Mask errors in production*

- When server or downstream service errors occur, it's a good idea to withhold the exact specifics of what went wrong from the client.
- Returning *complete* error details to the client exposes the current server vulnerabilities and opens the door for more concentrated attacks.

```
{
  "data": {
    "astronaut": null
  },
  "errors": [{
    "message": "Database Error: Astronaut
      does not exist",
    "extensions": {
      "code": "INTERNAL_SERVER_ERROR",
      // ...
      "exception": {
        “stacktrace": [
          "Database Error: User does not exist",
          " at __resolveReference (../services
 /vehicles/index.js:29:13)”,
          // ...
        ],
        // …
      }
    }
  }]
}
}
```

Reducing the attack surface area

#4. Limit API discoverability

→ *Mask errors in production*

- To prevent this issue, swallow errors before they get to the client.
- You can use the formatError API in Apollo Server to implement this.

```
const server = new ApolloServer({
  typeDefs,
  resolvers,
  formatError: (err) => {
    // Don't give the specific errors to
    // the client
    if (err.message.startsWith('Database Error:')) {
      return new Error(
       'Internal server error’
      );
    }
    // Otherwise return the original error
    return err;
  },
});
```

Reducing the attack surface area

#4. Limit API discoverability

→ Mask errors in production

- Errors vs. Exceptions
- Errors → Expected and application-specific
  - UserAlreadyExists, UserDoesntExist, InvalidPermissions
- Exceptions → Unexpected and infrastructural
  - Database, source code, or network connectivity problems

```
# Application-specific errors with
# GraphQL unions
union UpvotePost = UpvotePostSuccess
  | MemberNotFound
  | PostNotFound
  | AlreadyUpvoted
```

Reducing the attack surface area

#4. Limit API discoverability

→ *Mask errors in production*

- Errors vs. Exceptions
- Errors → Expected and application-specific
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- Exceptions → Unexpected and infrastructural
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Key resources

Unions and interfaces

via the Apollo Docs

200 OK! Error Handling in GraphQL by Sasha Solomon

via GraphQL Summit Worldwide 2020

Reducing the attack surface area

#4. Limit API discoverability

→ *Avoid schema autogeneration*

- Some tools can autogenerate a GraphQL schema based on database tables, etc.
- While these tools tend to speed you up in the short run, used as your public graph, it becomes very easy to guess fields on the root operation types based on CRUD patterns.
- Prefer a demand-oriented schema

> The schema should be **built incrementally** based on actual requirements and **evolve smoothly** over time
>
> - via principledgraphql.com

Reducing the attack surface area

#5. Batched requests

→ *Limit query breadth*

- Clients can use aliases to write batch queries like the following:
- Someone may write a query like this to purposefully disrupt performance, scrape as much data as fast as possible, or attempt to mitigate rate-limiting.

```
query MaliciousQuery {
  alias1: fieldName { subField1 subField2 ...}
  alias2: fieldName { subField1 subField2 ...}
  ...
  alias10: fieldName { subField1 subField2 ...}
  ...
  alias100: fieldName { subField1 subField2 ...
  ...
  alias1000: fieldName { subField1 subField2 ...}
  ...
}
```

```graphql
query Mutation (
  $input1: LoginInput,
  $input2: LoginInput,
  $input3: LoginInput
  # ... And more
) {
  first: login (input: $input1) {
    token
  }

  second: login (input: $input2) {
    token
  }

  third: login (input: $input3) {
    token
  }

  # .. And so on
}
```

Brute-force attempt

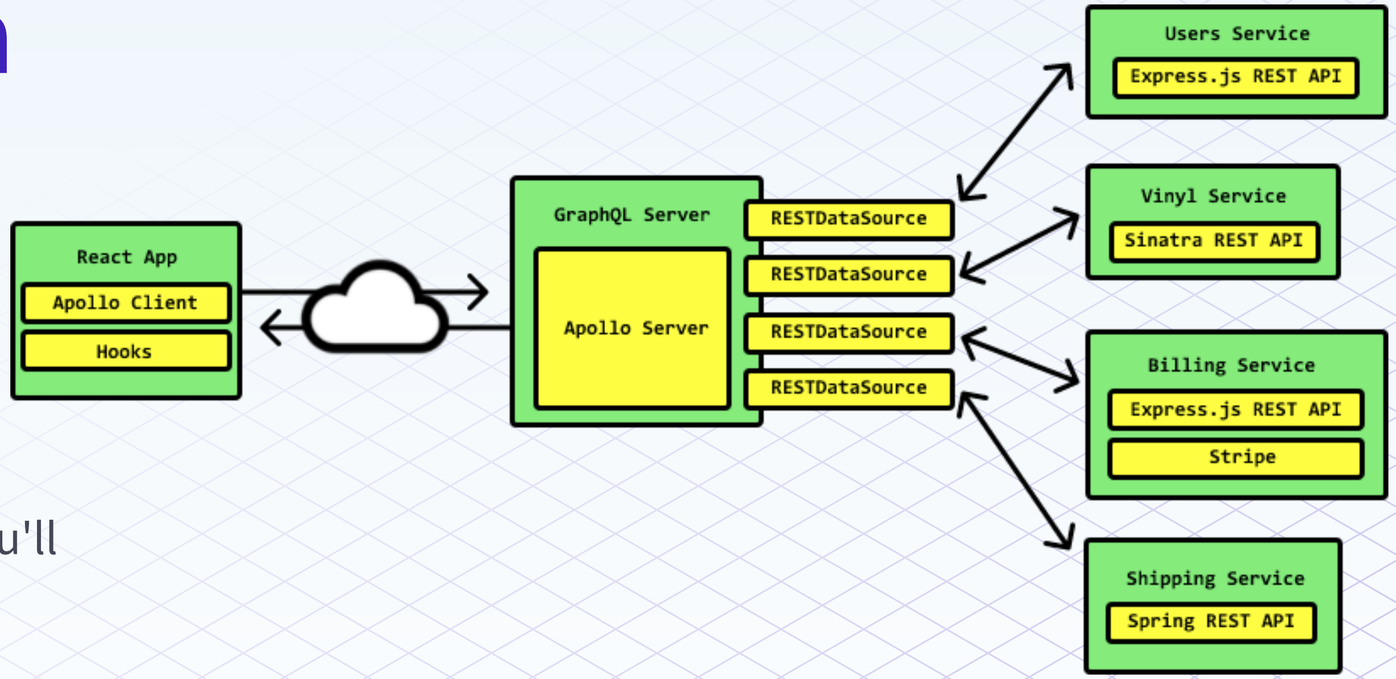
Solution: Use a combination of rate-limiting and query complexity analysis.

Reducing the attack surface area

#5. Batched requests

→ *Use data loaders to prevent DoS-ing yourself*

- If you're resolving data from backing data sources (like a REST API or a subgraph), you'll want to make efficient use of the network to prevent DoS-ing yourself.



Reducing the attack surface area

#5. Batched requests

→ *Use data loaders to prevent DoS-ing yourself*

- A great technique is to use data loaders to minimize the number of requests to backing data sources from resolvers
- Also, consider caching as an approach to mitigating the number of necessary requests. You can implement caching at various levels:
  - Client, gateway, data source, subgraph, etc

Key resources

DataLoader
https://github.com/graphql/dataloader

How Apollo REST Data Source Deduplicates and Caches API calls
https://khalilstemmler.com/blogs/graphql/how-apollo-rest-data-source-caches-api-calls/

Using Memcached/Redis as a cache storage backend
via the Apollo docs

Operations & Governance

Operations

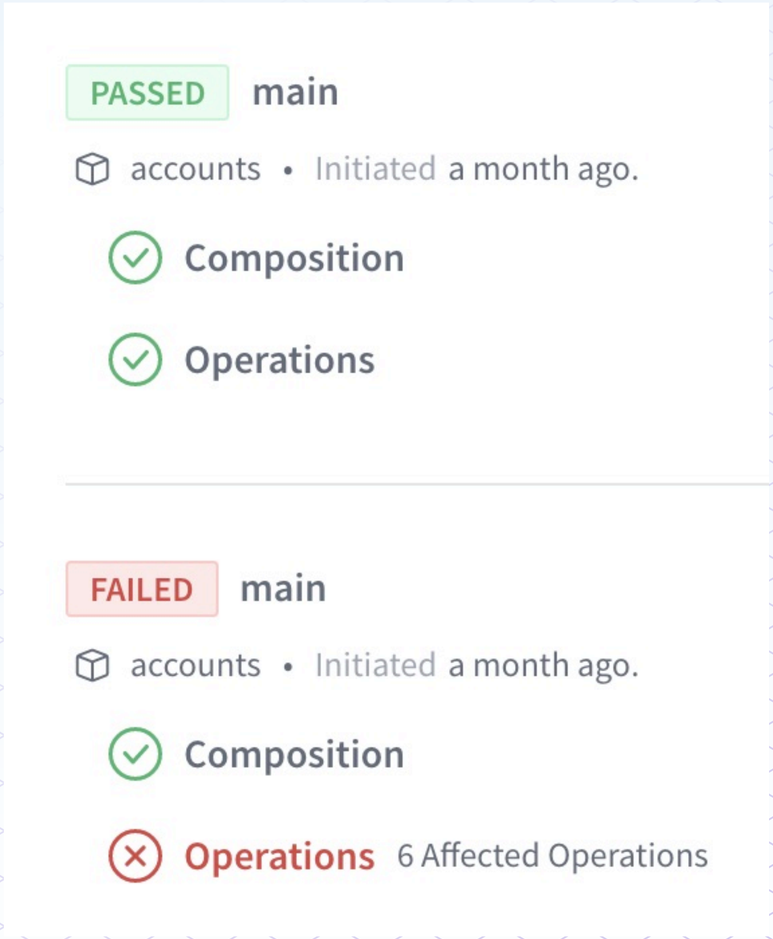
#6. Stability

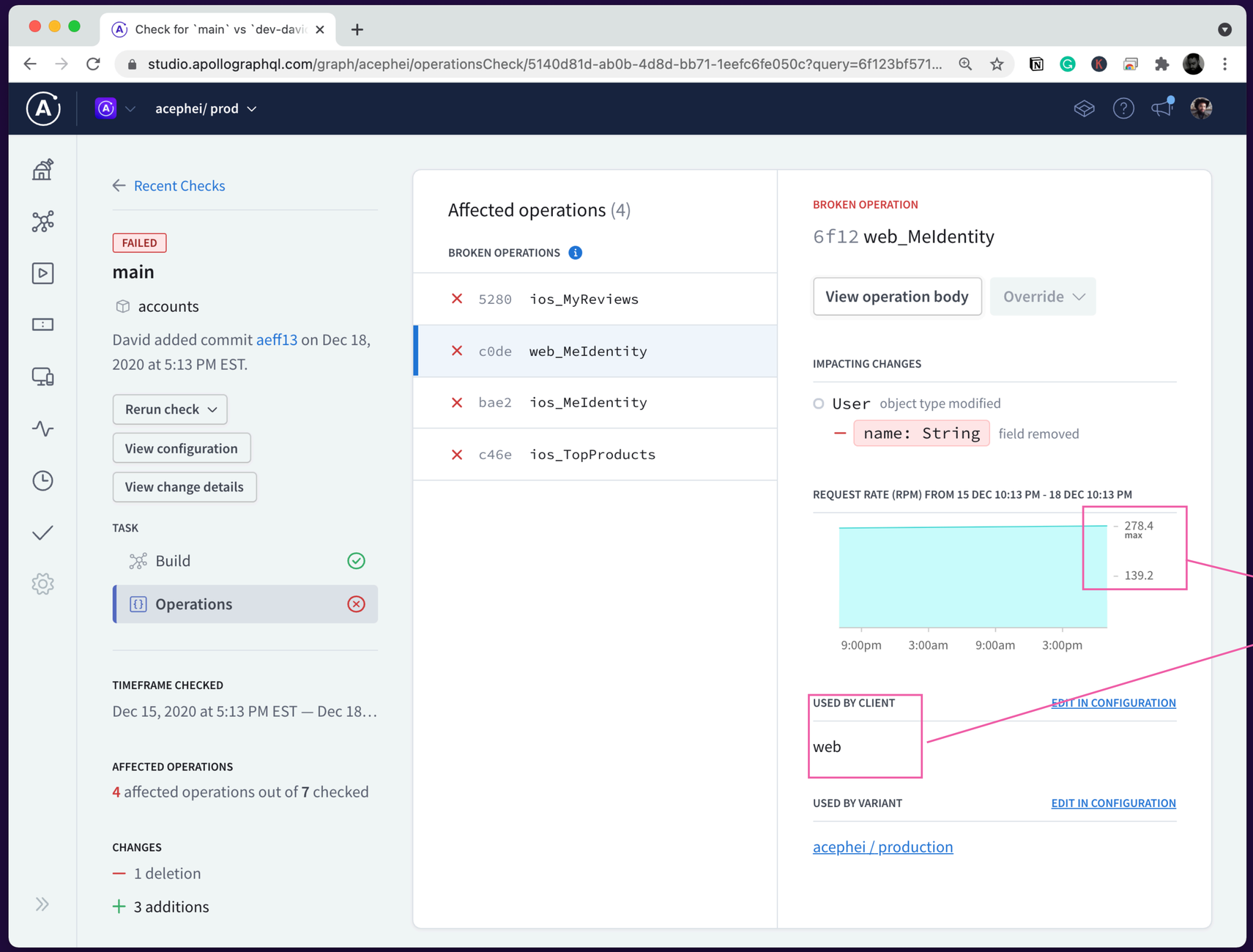
- By design, GraphQL isn’t a *versioned* API.
    - In an Agile fashion, you deprecate and evolve fields (sometimes multiple times a day).
- How can we do this safely? Won’t we break clients?

Operations

#6. Stability

- Schema checks
  - **Operations**: Will your proposed schema changes break any of your graph's active clients?
  - **Composition**: For federated graphs, will changes to a subgraph successfully compose with your *other* registered subgraph schemas.





Detecting potentially broken clients

The web client calls these operations frequently!

Operations

#6. Stability

- Recommended to use in a CI with the Rover CLI
  - Like Jenkins or CircleCI
- Define a CI job for each variant of your schema (production, staging, etc)
  - Run `rover graph check`
  - If it returns a non-zero exit code, a breaking change has been detected.

Key resources

Rover “Getting Started” docs
via Apollo docs

Schema checks
via Apollo docs

Operations

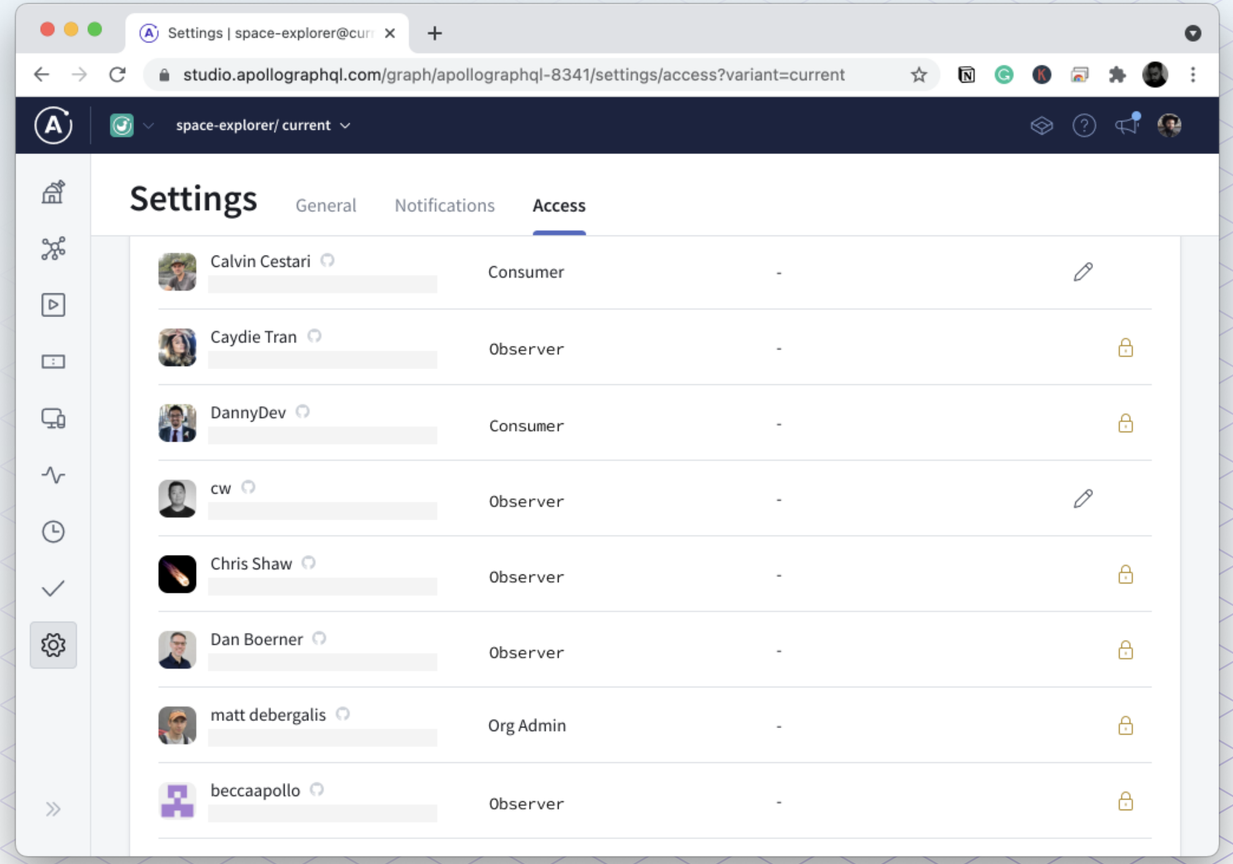
#7. Managing graph access

- As discussed earlier, we might not want our production graph to be available to everyone
  - We turn introspection off
- With introspection off, how do we safely manage graph access?
  - Teammates, non-developers, consultants, etc

Operations

#7. Managing graph access

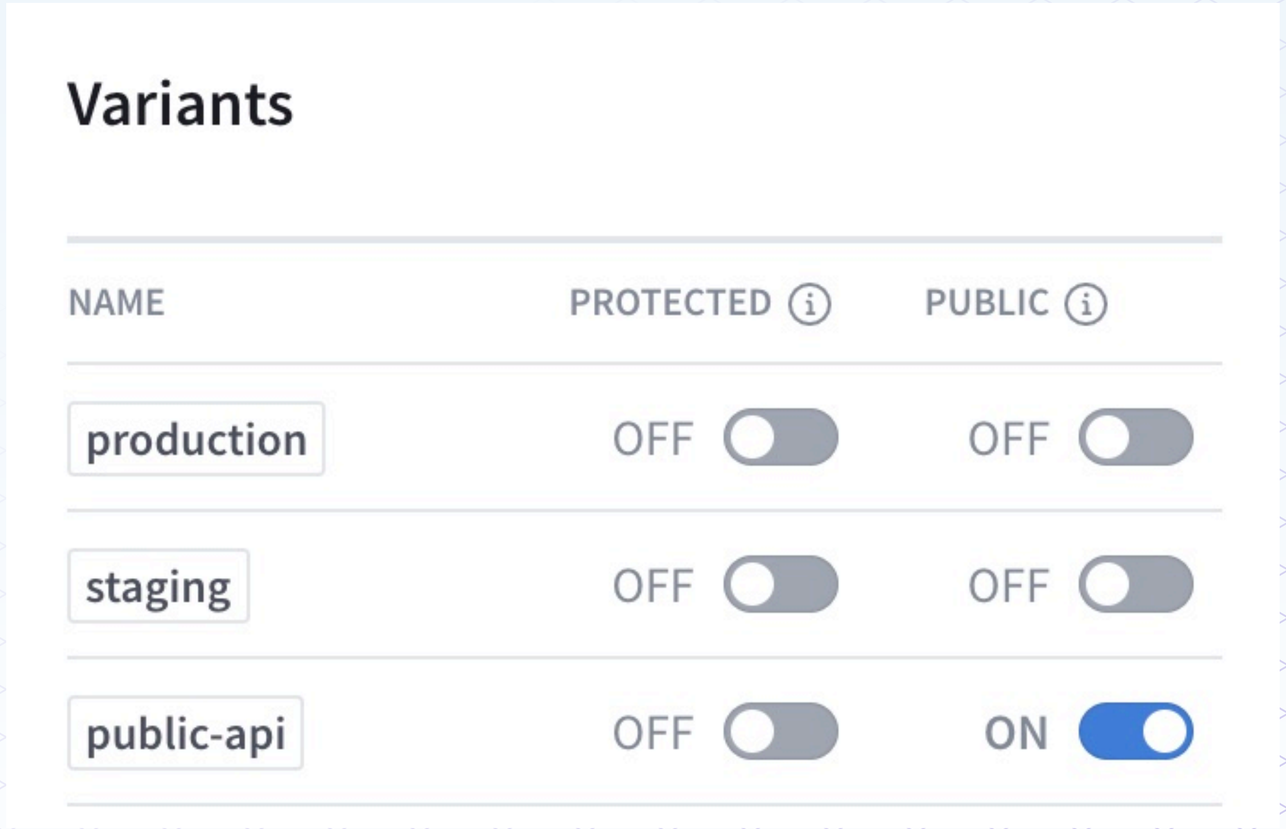
- User roles:
  - Graph admin
  - Billing manager
  - Consumer
  - Observer
  - Contributor
  - Admin
- **Org-level roles** and **graph-level roles**



Operations

#7. Managing graph access

- User roles
- Graph variants
  (public, private, protected)



Operations

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- User roles
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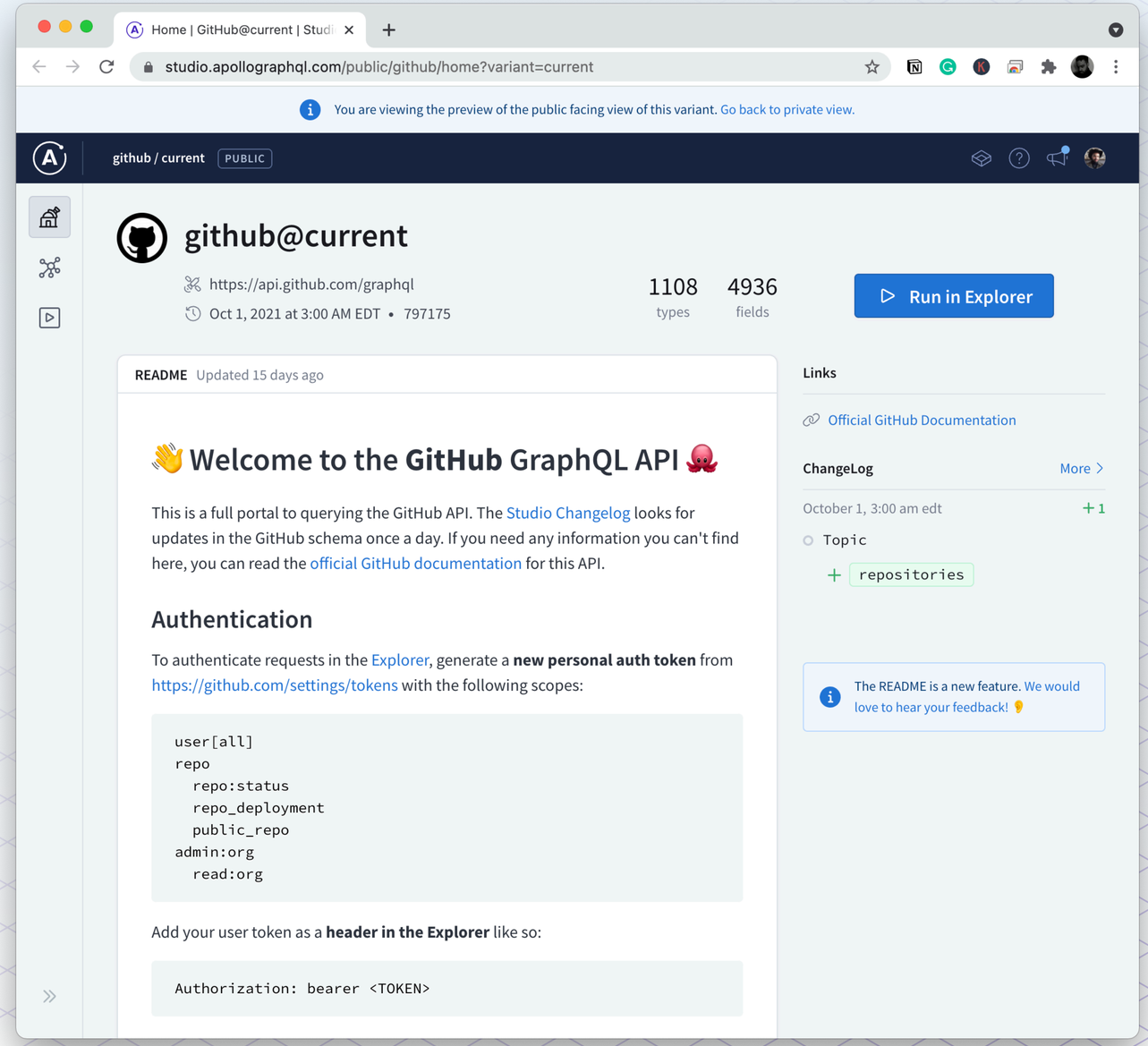
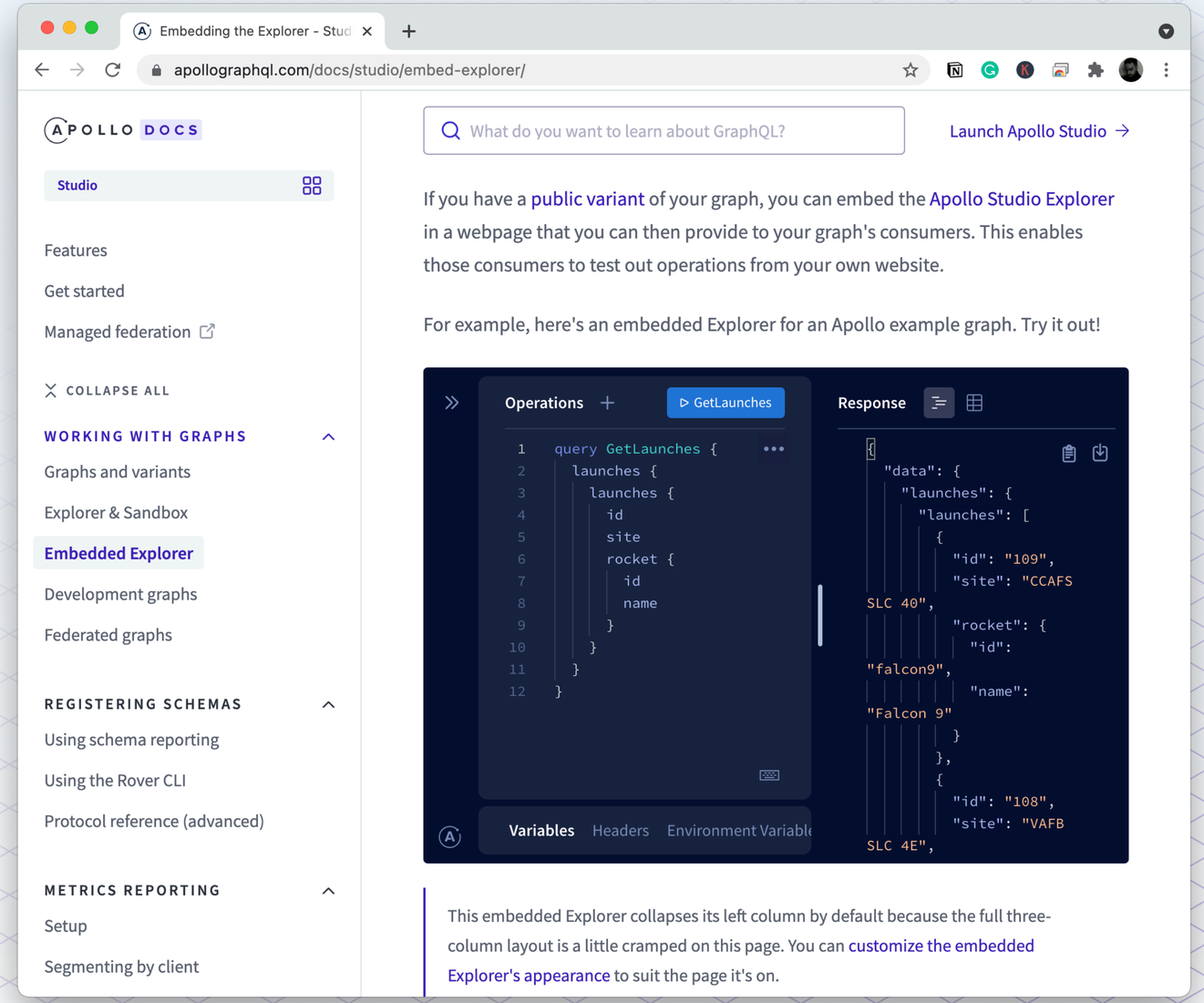
  (public, private, protected)
- Public readme page



Operations

#7. Managing graph access

- User roles
- Graph variants
  (public, private, protected)
- Public readme page
  - Embeddable explorer: public variants can also be embedded into your docs as an iframe



Operations

#8. Observability

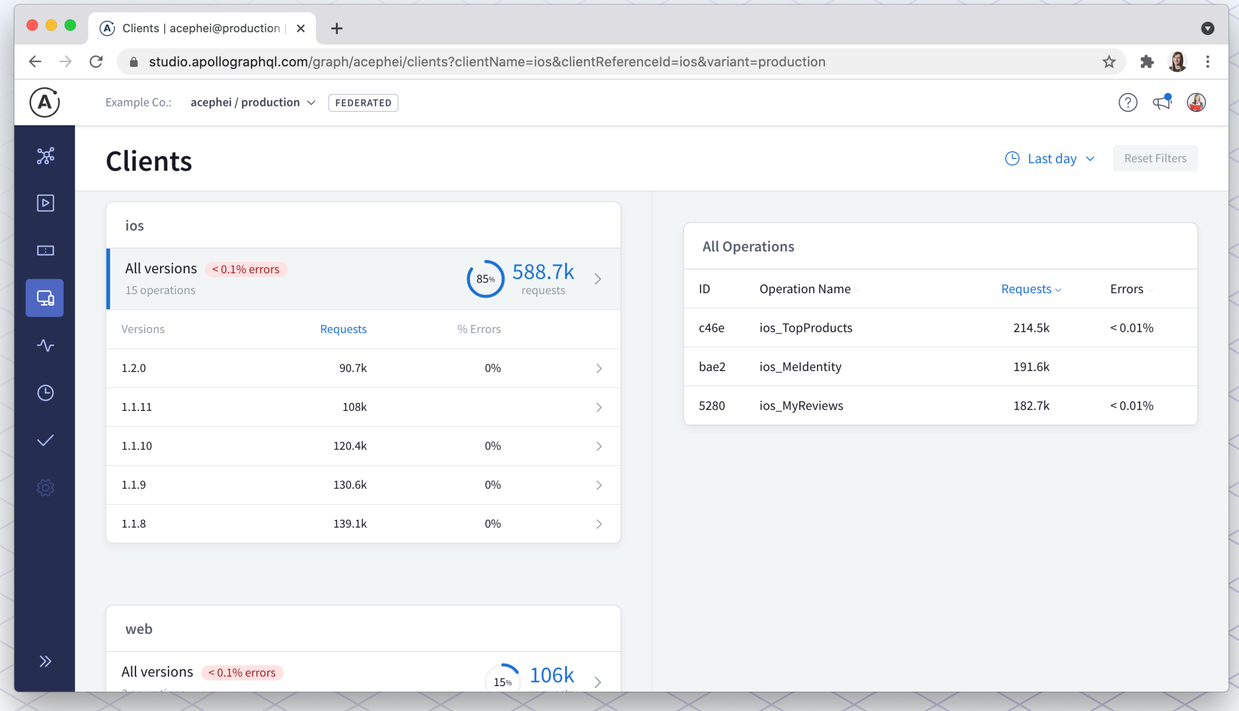
- There’s a lot going on in any production graph.
- We need a way to keep track of what’s going on.
- We can view our graph’s usage by the **org, client**, **field**, and **operation** level.

Operations

#8. Observability

→ *Client awareness*

- Know who is using your graph
    - See precisely which clients are querying your graph and what operations they're sending.
- Require clients to identify themselves and consistently name operations to enhance API usage understandability

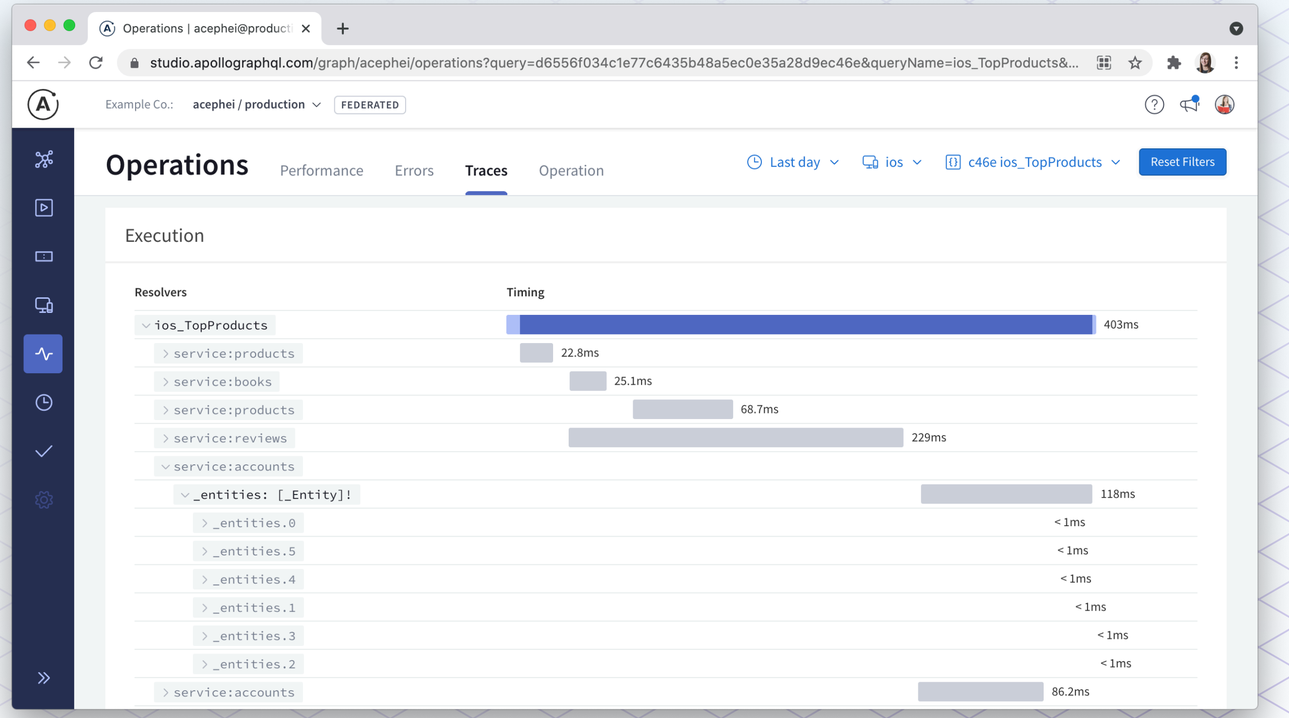


Operations

#8. Observability

→ *Field-level tracing*

- You can set up tracing as well for a detailed breakdown of the performance of your resolvers

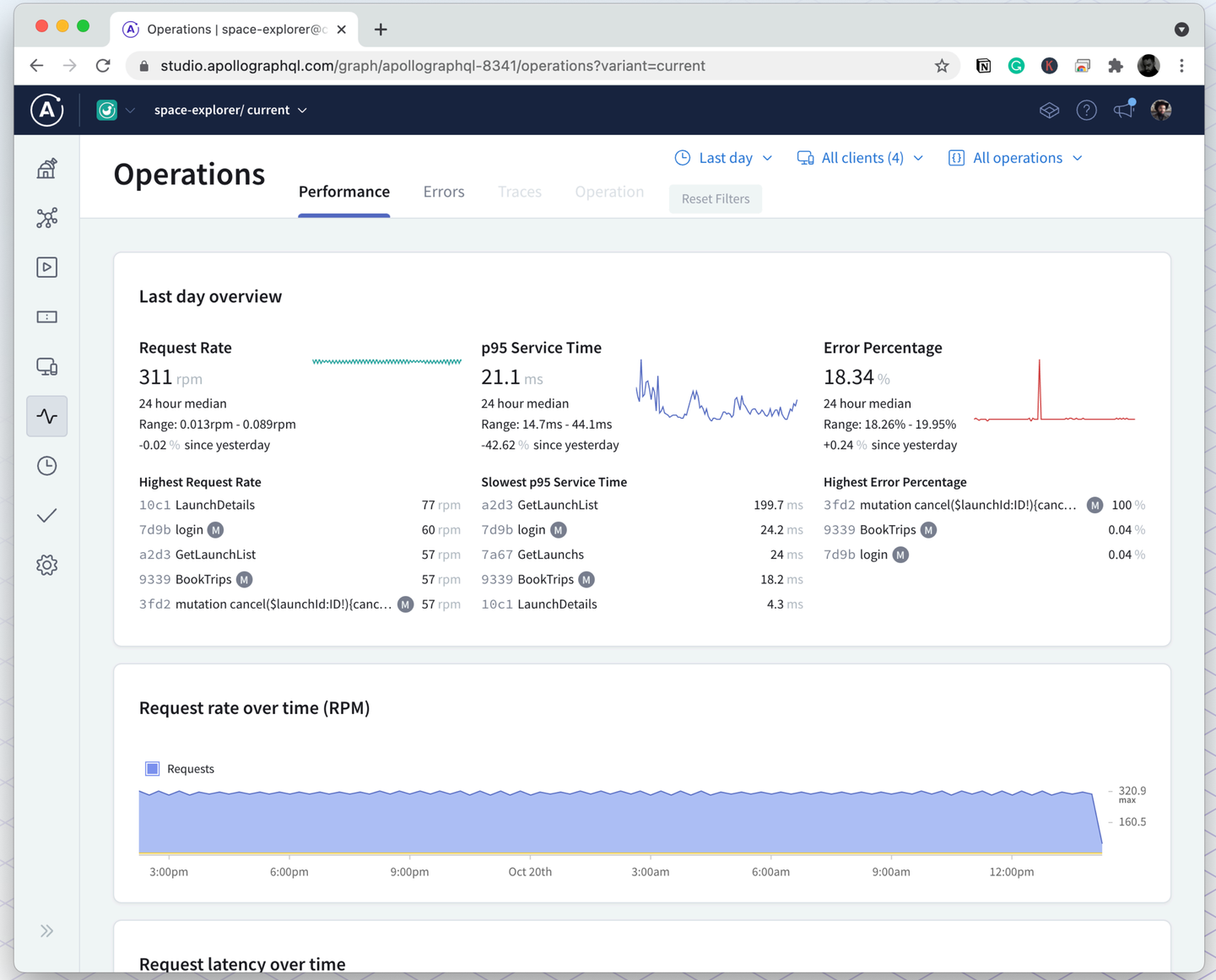


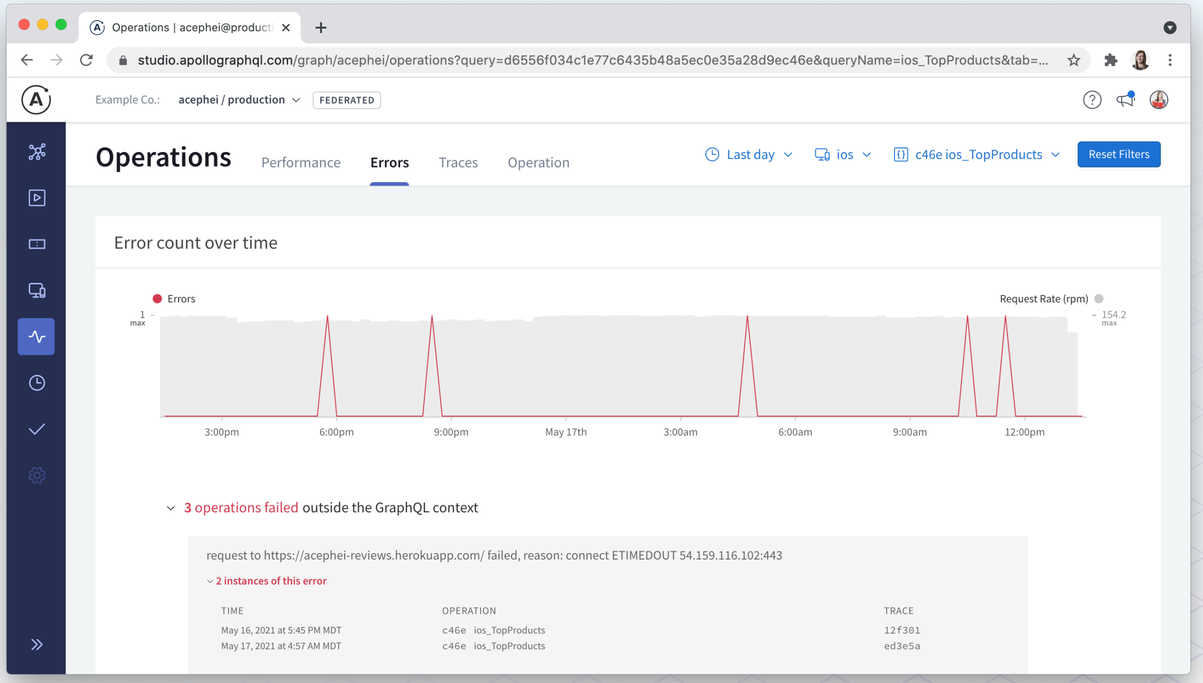
Operations

#9. Monitoring

→ *Performance alerts*

- We can also track performance degradations, and error spikes
- You can also set up alerts to be notified when something goes wrong:
  - Increase in requests per min
  - Change in p50, p95, p99 response time
  - Errors in operations





Key resources

Performance Alerts from Apollo Studio
via Apollo docs

Sending metrics to Apollo Studio
via Apollo docs

Segmenting metrics by client
via Apollo docs

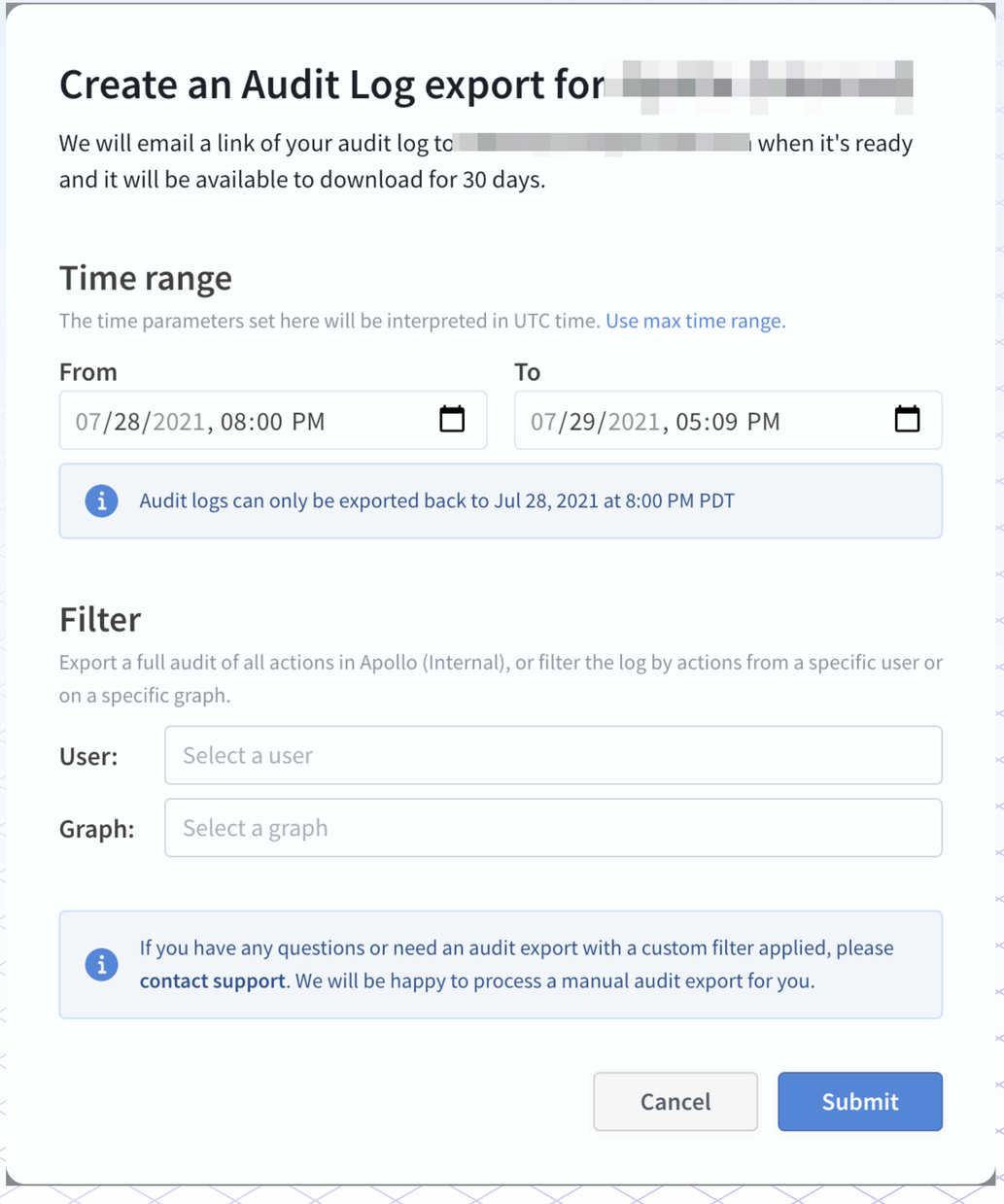
GraphQL Observability by Ashley Narcisse
GraphQL Galaxy Conference 2020

Operations

#8. Observability

→ *Audit logs*

- Export a data file with key actions taken within your organization
- Investigate an incident and see what actions lead up to that incident by exporting a log for a time period and graph
- See what actions an individual has taken within a time period
- Investigate your automated systems that are changing the graph



In conclusion

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We covered nine ways to secure your graph

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Auth

1. Authentication
2. Authorization

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Reducing the attack surface area

3. Mitigating malicious queries
4. Limiting API discoverability
5. Batched requests

In conclusion

We covered nine ways to secure your graph

Auth

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Operations & Governance

6. Stability
7. Managing graph access
8. Observability
9. Monitoring

Thanks!

Chat w/ me @stemmlerjs