# Proofgold: Blockchain for Formal Methods


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## Abstract

Proofgold is a peer to peer cryptocurrency making use of formal logic. Users can publish theories and then develop a theory by publishing documents with definitions, conjectures and proofs. The blockchain records the theories and their state of development (e.g., which theorems have been proven and when). Two of the main theories are a form of classical set theory (for formalizing mathematics) and an intuitionistic theory of higher-order abstract syntax (for reasoning about syntax with binders). We have also significantly modified the open source Proofgold Core client software to create a faster, more stable and more efficient client, Proofgold Lava. Two important changes are the cryptography code and the database code, and we discuss these improvements. We also discuss how the Proofgold network can be used to support large formalization efforts.



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## 1 Introduction

Proofgold is a cryptocurrency network with support for formal logic and mathematics. An initial version of the Proofgold Core software was anonymously announced on June 8, 2020, via a memo.cash account.[1] The software and a discussion forum was available at proofgold.org until December 2021, at which time proofgold.org became unreachable.[2] During these first 18 months of Proofgold's existence the authors of the present paper experimented with the system, including publishing a number of formal theories and developments into Proofgold's blockchain. In the course of these experiments it became clear that the Proofgold Core software was slow and unstable. As a consequence the authors have created an alternative client.[3] Since Proofgold is relatively new and not well known we will need to describe Proofgold in general in order to put our work into an understandable context. We will make explicit what is our work and what is preexisting work.

[1] `https://memo.cash/profile/1NzEUQWpb5Mze9REfkVAZ8wDcxzqpZFNJ8`
[2] An archive of proofgold.org from December 2021, including the last release of the Proofgold Core software, is available at `https://prfgld.github.io/`.
[3] `http://proofgold.net/`



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We give an introduction of Proofgold in Section 2. We present the intuitionistic higher-order logic at the kernel of Proofgold in Section 3. Several Proofgold theories are described in Section 4, all but the first of which was published into the Proofgold chain by one of the present authors. We describe the Proofgold Lava Client in Section 5, a significantly faster and more stable client primarily developed by one of the present authors. A HOL4 interface developed by one of the present authors for proving theorems with bounties is described in Section 6. A description of the bounty system, current bounties and possible future use of bounties is explored in Section 7. We conclude by considering related work in Section 8.

## 2 Introduction to Proofgold

At the core of Proofgold is a proof checker for intuitionistic higher-order logic with functional extensionality. On top of this framework users can publish *theories*. A theory consists of a finite number of primitive constants along with their types and a finite number of sentences as axioms. A theory is uniquely identified by its 256-bit identifier given by the Merkle root of the theory (seen as a tree). After a theory has been published, *documents* can be published in the theory. Documents can define new objects (using primitives or previously defined objects), prove new theorems and make new conjectures. When a theory is published, the axioms are associated with public keys which are marked as the *owners* of the propositions. Likewise, when a document proves a theorem within a theory, a public key (associated with the publisher of the document) is associated with the proven proposition. These are the only ways propositions can have declared owners. As a consequence, it is possible to determine if a proposition is known (either as an axiom or as a previously proven theorem) by checking if it has an owner. Ownership of propositions also gives a way of redeeming bounties by proving conjectures. A bounty can be placed on an unproven proposition where this bounty can only be spent by the owner of a proposition (or the owner of the negated proposition). By publishing a document resolving the conjecture, the bounty proposition (or its negation) will become owned by public keys associated with the publisher of the document. After this the bounty can be claimed. In order to prevent network participants from frontrunning proofs (i.e., "stealing" proofs from unconfirmed documents to unfairly claim bounties), a document can only be published (at which point proofs in the document are revealed) after a commitment has been published and sufficiently confirmed. All of the concepts above (theories, documents, owners, bounties and commitments) are inherited from the Qeditas code base and are described either in the Qeditas white paper [25] or Qeditas technical documentation [6].[4]

A major difference between Proofgold and Qeditas is the consensus mechanism. Qeditas had planned to be proof-of-stake, with the initial stake determined by a snapshot of the Bitcoin blockchain (i.e., an "airdrop"). Proofgold is a combination of proof-of-stake and proof-of-burn, where the proof-of-burn element involves burning small amounts of Litecoin. During the initial month of Proofgold (mostly in June 2020) before any participant had a stake, blocks could be created using proof-of-burn alone. Proofgold nodes must be run in combination with Litecoin nodes in order to verify proofs-of-burn. The Litecoin burn transactions also contain data committing to the previous Litecoin burn transaction and the id of new Proofgold block. Due to this, an outline of the Proofgold blockchain can be viewed from Litecoin. A benefit of this combination is that Proofgold's security model is able to

[4] A large part of Proofgold's code was inherited from the open source Qeditas project. More information about Qeditas is at `https://qeditas.org`. Qeditas appears to have never launched.

reuse the proof-of-work used to secure Litecoin. In particular, Litecoin's proof-of-work (as reflected by the block ids of Litecoin blocks) is used to determine the next staking modifier for a Proofgold block. The staking modifier is a large unpredictable number that is used to determine when the next opportunity each qualified Proofgold asset will have to stake. The connection with Litecoin reduces the risk of some well-known problems with proof-of-stake consensus mechanisms [17].

Another difference from Qeditas is that the first 5000 Proofgold blocks automatically put half the block reward as a bounty on pseudorandom propositions. This has the effect that as new people with low stake (very few Proofgold bars [5]) enter the system, they can quickly obtain a higher stake by taking the time to prove theorems with these bounties. The automatic placement of bounties has since ended, so that each block generates only a block reward of 25 bars to the staker of the block and all bounties are placed intentionally by a network participant.

The primary logical difference between Qeditas and Proofgold is that the logic underlying Qeditas included type variables, where the logic underlying Proofgold does not.

The elements of Proofgold described above are the work of Proofgold Core developers who were previously accessible via the proofgold.org forum, with some of the present authors sometimes giving feedback via the forum.

## 3 Intuitionistic Higher Order Logic

We briefly describe a formulation of intuitionistic higher order logic (IHOL). We begin with a set $\mathcal{T}$ of *simple types*. One base type $o$ is the type of propositions. In general Proofgold allows finitely many other base types, but we will only consider cases with one other base type $\iota$. All other types are $\alpha\beta$, meaning the type of functions from $\alpha$ to $\beta$. Some authors write this as $\beta\alpha$ (following Church [4]) or $\alpha \to \beta$ (especially in the presence of other type constructors).

We next define a family of simply typed terms. For each type $\alpha \in \mathcal{T}$, let $\mathcal{V}_\alpha$ be a countably infinite set of variables of type $\alpha$. Let $\mathcal{C}$ be a finite set of typed constants. We define a set $\Lambda_\alpha$ of *terms of type* $\alpha$ as follows: For each variable $x$ of type $\alpha$, $x \in \Lambda_\alpha$. For each constant $c$ of type $\alpha$, $c \in \Lambda_\alpha$. If $s \in \Lambda_{\alpha\beta}$ and $t \in \Lambda_\alpha$, then $(s\ t) \in \Lambda_\beta$. If $x$ is a variable of type $\alpha$ and $s \in \Lambda_\beta$, then $(\lambda x.s) \in \Lambda_{\alpha\beta}$. If $s, t \in \Lambda_o$, then $(s \to t) \in \Lambda_o$. If $x$ is a variable of type $\alpha$ and $s \in \Lambda_o$, then $(\forall x.s) \in \Lambda_o$. Note that $\Lambda_\alpha$ also depends on the set $\mathcal{C}$, but this set will be fixed in each theory.

We use common conventions to omit parentheses. We sometimes include annotations on $\lambda$ and $\forall$ bound variables (e.g., $\lambda x : \alpha.s$ and $\forall y : \beta.s$) to indicate the type of the variable. We define $\mathcal{F}s$ to be the free variables of $s$ and for sets $A$ of terms we define $\mathcal{F}A$ to be $\bigcup_{s \in A} \mathcal{F}s$. We assume a capture avoiding substitution $s^x_t$ is defined. Terms of type $o$ are called *propositions*. A *sentence* is a proposition with no free variables.

The only built-in logical connective is implication ($\to$) and the only built-in quantifier is the universal quantifier ($\forall$). In the context of higher-order logic it is well-known how to define the remaining logical constructs in a way that respects their intuitionistic meaning. In each case we use an impredicative definition that traces its roots to Russell [20] and Prawitz [18]. We define $\bot$ to be the proposition $\forall p : o.p$ where $x$ is a variable of type $o$. We write $\neg s$ for $s \to \bot$. We define $\wedge$ to be $\lambda qr : o.\forall p : o.(q \to r \to p) \to p$ and write $s \wedge t$ for $(\wedge s)t$. We

[5] The common Proofgold currency token is called "bars" which are made up of 100 billion Proofgold "atoms."

$$\frac{}{\Gamma \vdash s}\, s \in \mathcal{A} \qquad \frac{}{\Gamma \vdash s}\, s \in \Gamma \qquad \frac{\Gamma \vdash s}{\Gamma \vdash t}\, s{\approx}t \qquad \frac{\Gamma, s \vdash t}{\Gamma \vdash s \to t} \qquad \frac{\Gamma \vdash s \to t \qquad \Gamma \vdash s}{\Gamma \vdash t}$$

$$\frac{\Gamma \vdash s}{\Gamma \vdash \forall x.s}\, x \in \mathcal{V}_\alpha \setminus \mathcal{F}\Gamma \qquad \frac{\Gamma \vdash \forall x.s}{\Gamma \vdash s^x_t}\, x \in \mathcal{V}_\alpha, t \in \Lambda_\alpha$$

$$\frac{\Gamma \vdash sx = tx}{\Gamma \vdash s = t}\, x \in \mathcal{V}_\alpha \setminus (\mathcal{F}\Gamma \cup \mathcal{F}s \cup \mathcal{F}t) \text{ AND } s, t \in \Lambda_{\alpha\beta}$$

**Figure 1** Proof Calculus for Intuitionistic HOL.

define $\vee$ to be $\lambda qr : o.\forall p : o.(q \to p) \to (r \to p) \to p$ and write $s \vee t$ for $(\vee s)t$. For each type $\alpha$ we use $\exists x : \alpha.s$ as notation for $\forall p : o.(\forall x : \alpha.s \to p) \to p$ where $p$ is not $x$ and is not free in $s$. For equality we write $s = t$ (where $s$ and $t$ are type $\alpha$) as notation for $\forall p : \alpha\alpha o.pst \to pts$ where $p$ is neither free in $s$ nor $t$. This is a modification of Leibniz equality which we will call *symmetric Leibniz equality*.[6] We write $s \neq t$ to mean $(s = t) \to \bot$. The $\beta\eta$-conversion relation $s{\approx}t$ is defined in the usual way.

Let $\mathcal{A}$ be a set of sentences intended to be axioms of a theory. A natural deduction system for intuitionistic higher-order logic with functional extensionality and axioms $\mathcal{A}$ is given by Figure 1. In particular the rules define when $\Gamma \vdash s$ holds where $\Gamma$ is a finite set of propositions and $s$ is a proposition. Aside from the treatment of functional extensionality, this is the same as the natural deduction calculus described in [3].

Adding Curry-Howard style checkable proof terms to such a calculus is well-understood and we do not dwell on this here [22]. Proofs published in Proofgold documents are given by such proof terms. There are two practical restrictions Proofgold places on proofs. One restriction is that proofs cannot be too big. A proof is part of a document, a document is published in a transaction and a transaction is published in a block. Proofgold has a block size limit of 500KB, so that proofs larger than 500KB (measured in Proofgold's binary format) cannot be published. If one has a proof larger than 500KB, then either one must find a smaller proof or separate the result into lemmas with smaller proofs published in separate documents (in separate blocks). Another restriction is that checking a proof is not allowed to be too hard. In an extreme case, checking a proof could require $\beta$-normalizing a term of size $m$ to obtain a term of size $2^{2^{2^m}}$ (or even much larger). The Proofgold Core checker avoids such "poison proofs" by maintaining a counter that increments while a document is being checked. Each step of the computation increments the counter. For example, substituting $t$ for a de Bruijn index $x$ in a term $r\ x\ x$ increments the counter at least 5 times since there are two applications, two occurrences of $x$ and one occurrence of $r$. Depending on the structure of $r$ the counter may be incremented more. Also, in practice the substitution may be beneath a binder so that de Bruijn indices in $t$ may need to be shifted. Such shifting increments the counter in a similar way. If the counter reaches a certain bound (150 million), then an exception is raised and the document is considered to be incorrect.

[6] This variant of equality was the choice of the initial Proofgold developers.

## 4 Proofgold Theories

A theory is determined by a finite number of typed primitives and axioms. Each theory is isolated from other theories. A drawback of this approach is there is no way to directly use results from one theory in another. A benefit is that if one theory turns out to be inconsistent, this will have no affect on other theories. Below we describe a number of Proofgold theories, where the authors are responsible for all but the first.

### 4.1 HF Theory

Proofgold has one built-in theory: a theory of hereditarily finite sets (HF). This theory was included by the initial Proofgold developers in order to have a language for generating potentially meaningful pseudorandom propositions for bounties given as half the block reward. There are many primitive constants, but only six do not have a defining equation: $\varepsilon : (\iota o)\iota$ (a "choice" operator), $\in: \iota\iota o$ (set membership), $\emptyset : \iota$ (the empty set, also the ordinal 0), $\bigcup : \iota\iota$ (the union operator), $\wp : \iota\iota$ (the power set operator) and $\mathsf{r} : \iota(\iota\iota)\iota$ (the replacement operator). For each of the above constants, there is at least one axiom giving a property the constant must satisfy. Additional axioms are a classical principle ($\forall p.\neg\neg p \to p$), set extensionality, an $\in$-induction principle and an induction principle implying all sets are hereditarily finite.

The theory additionally includes 97 constants with axioms giving a definitional equation for each constant. Examples include a constant indicating a set has exactly 5 elements, a constant indicating that an algebraic structure is a loop and a constant indicating that two untyped combinators (represented as sets) are equivalent under conversion. The HF theory was used to generate pseudorandom bounties for the first 5000 Proofgold blocks. These extra constants make it possible to easily generate sentences targeting certain classes.[7] The last of the pseudorandom bounties was automatically placed in December 2020. As of May 2022, 38% of the conjectures have been resolved and the bounties collected. The fact that 62% are still outstanding after 17 months is an indication of the difficulty of the problems.

### 4.2 Two HOTG Theories

There are two theories axiomatizing higher-order Tarski Grothendieck set theory (HOTG). These were both published into the Proofgold blockchain by the first author. The two theories follow the two formulations described in [3]. One is based on the Mizar formulation[8] and the other is based on the Egal formulation. Both theories are classical via the Diaconescu proof of excluded middle from choice (at $\iota$) and set extensionality [19]. Most of the documents published into the Proofgold blockchain have been published in the HOTG-Egal theory. These documents target formalization of mathematics. A highlight is the construction of the real numbers via a representation of Conway's surreal numbers [5].

### 4.3 A Theory for HOAS

A different kind of theory published into the Proofgold blockchain is a theory for reasoning about syntax. Unlike the theories above, this theory does not imply classical principles. This theory was also published into the Proofgold blockchain by the first author. We describe it in

[7] More information can be found in `http://grid01.ciirc.cvut.cz/~chad/pfghf.pdf`.
[8] More information about the Mizar formulation of HOTG can be found in `http://grid01.ciirc.cvut.cz/~chad/pfgmizar.pdf`.

more detail here in order to make it clear Proofgold can be used for more than formalization of mathematics. In particular, Proofgold can be used to prove properties of programs with bound variables.

For our theory of syntax, we include one base type $\iota$, two primitive constants $\mathsf{P} : \iota\iota\iota$ and $\mathsf{B} : (\iota\iota)\iota$ and four axioms:

- Pairing is injective: $\forall xyzw : \iota.\mathsf{P}xy = \mathsf{P}zw \to x = z \wedge y = w$.
- Binding is injective: $\forall fg : \iota\iota.\mathsf{B}f = \mathsf{B}g \to f = g$.
- Binding and pairing give distinct values: $\forall xy : \iota.\forall f : \iota\iota.\mathsf{P}xy \neq \mathsf{B}f$.
- Propositional extensionality: $\forall pq : o.(p \to q) \to (q \to p) \to p = q$.

The constant $\mathsf{P}$ is a generic pairing operation on syntax and $\mathsf{B}$ is a generic binding operation, allowing representation by higher-order abstract syntax (HOAS) [16].

We can embed many syntactic constructs into the theory by building on top of the basic pairing and binding operators. For example, we could embed untyped $\lambda$-calculus by taking $\mathsf{P}$ to represent application and $\mathsf{B}$ to represent $\lambda$-abstraction. Instead of adopting this simple approach, we will use tagged pairs when representing application and $\lambda$-abstraction, so that there will still be infinitely many pieces of syntax that do not represent untyped $\lambda$-terms. To do this we will need one tag, so let us define $\mathsf{nil}$ to be $\mathsf{B}(\lambda x.x)$. Now we can define $\mathsf{A} : \iota\iota\iota$ to be $\lambda xy : \iota.\mathsf{P}\ \mathsf{nil}\ (\mathsf{P}\ x\ y)$ and define $\mathsf{L} : (\iota\iota)\iota$ to be $\lambda f : \iota\iota.\mathsf{P}\ \mathsf{nil}\ (\mathsf{B}\ f)$. It is easy to prove $\mathsf{A}$ and $\mathsf{L}$ are both injective and give distinct values.

We can now impredicatively define the set of untyped $\lambda$-terms relative to a set $\mathcal{G}$ (intended to be the set of possible free variables) as follows. Let us write $(\mathcal{G}, x)$ for the term $\lambda y : \iota.\mathcal{G}\ y \vee y = x$. Here $\mathcal{G}$ has type $\iota o$ while $x$ and $y$ have type $\iota$ (and are different). We will define $\mathsf{Ter} : (\iota o)\iota o$ so that $\mathsf{Ter}$ is the least relation satisfying three conditions:

- $\forall \mathcal{G} : \iota o.\forall y : \iota.\mathcal{G}y \to \mathsf{Ter}\ \mathcal{G}\ y$,
- $\forall \mathcal{G} : \iota o.\forall f : \iota\iota.(\forall x : \iota.\mathsf{Ter}\ (\mathcal{G}, x)\ (fx)) \to \mathsf{Ter}\ \mathcal{G}\ (\mathsf{L}\ f)$ and
- $\forall \mathcal{G} : \iota o.\forall yz : \iota.\mathsf{Ter}\ \mathcal{G}\ y \to \mathsf{Ter}\ \mathcal{G}\ z \to \mathsf{Ter}\ \mathcal{G}\ (\mathsf{A}\ y\ z)$.

Technically, the impredicative definition of $\mathsf{Ter}$ is given as

$$\begin{aligned}\mathsf{Ter} \quad := \quad & \lambda \mathcal{G} : \iota o.\lambda x : \iota.\forall p : (\iota o)\iota o.(\forall \mathcal{G} : \iota o.\forall y : \iota.\mathcal{G}y \to p\ \mathcal{G}\ y) \\ & \to (\forall \mathcal{G} : \iota o.\forall f : \iota\iota.(\forall x : \iota.p\ (\mathcal{G}, x)\ (fx)) \to p\ \mathcal{G}\ (\mathsf{L}\ f)) \\ & \to (\forall \mathcal{G} : \iota o.\forall yz : \iota.p\ \mathcal{G}\ y \to p\ \mathcal{G}\ z \to p\ \mathcal{G}\ (\mathsf{A}\ y\ z)) \to p\ \mathcal{G}\ x.\end{aligned}$$

We can similarly define one-step $\beta$-reduction (relative to a set of variables) as follows:

$$\begin{aligned}\mathsf{Beta}_1 \quad := \quad & \lambda \mathcal{G} : \iota o.\lambda xy : \iota.\forall r : (\iota o)\iota\iota o. \\ & (\forall \mathcal{G} : \iota o.\forall f : \iota\iota.\forall z.(\forall x.\mathsf{Ter}\ (\mathcal{G}, x)\ (fx)) \to \mathsf{Ter}\ \mathcal{G}z \to r\ \mathcal{G}\ (\mathsf{A}\ (\mathsf{L}\ f)\ z)\ (fz)) \\ & \to (\forall \mathcal{G} : \iota o.\forall fg : \iota\iota.(\forall z.r\ (\mathcal{G}, z)\ (fz)(gz)) \to r\ \mathcal{G}\ (\mathsf{L}\ f)\ (\mathsf{L}\ g)) \\ & \to (\forall \mathcal{G} : \iota o.\forall xyz.r\ \mathcal{G}\ x\ z \to \mathsf{Ter}\ \mathcal{G}y \to r\ \mathcal{G}\ (\mathsf{A}\ x\ y)\ (\mathsf{A}\ z\ y)) \\ & \to (\forall \mathcal{G} : \iota o.\forall xyz.r\ \mathcal{G}\ y\ z \to \mathsf{Ter}\ \mathcal{G}x \to r\ \mathcal{G}\ (\mathsf{A}\ x\ y)\ (\mathsf{A}\ x\ z)) \to r\ \mathcal{G}\ x\ y.\end{aligned}$$

We can then define $\mathsf{BetaE}\ \mathcal{G}$ to be the least equivalence relation (relative to the domain $\mathsf{Ter}\ \mathcal{G}$) containing $\mathsf{Beta}_1\ \mathcal{G}$. We omit the details here.

These definitions give us sufficient material to make conjectures that ask for certain kinds of untyped $\lambda$-terms. Let $\emptyset$ be notation for the term $\lambda x : \iota.\bot$ (representing the empty set of variables). Consider the following sentences:

$$\exists F : \iota.\mathsf{Ter}\ \emptyset\ F \quad \wedge \quad \forall x : \iota.\mathsf{BetaE}\ (\emptyset, x)\ (\mathsf{A}\ F\ x)\ x \tag{1}$$

$$\exists Y : \iota.\mathsf{Ter}\ \emptyset\ Y \quad \wedge \quad \forall f : \iota.\mathsf{BetaE}\ (\emptyset, f)\ (\mathsf{A}\ Y\ f)\ (\mathsf{A}\ f\ (\mathsf{A}\ Y\ f)) \tag{2}$$

Sentence (1) asserts the existence of an identity combinator while sentence (2) asserts the existence of a fixed point combinator. In order to prove each sentence a combinator with the right property must be given as a witness and then be proven to have the property.[9]

As a demonstration, these sentences were published as conjectures (with bounties) in documents published into the Proofgold blockchain. The solutions were then published as two theorems (with proofs). The solutions contain the witnesses: $\mathsf{L}(\lambda x.x)$ for (1) and the famous $Y$-combinator $\mathsf{L}(\lambda f.\mathsf{A}(\mathsf{L}(\lambda x.\mathsf{A}\ f\ (\mathsf{A}\ x\ x)))(\mathsf{L}(\lambda x.\mathsf{A}\ f\ (\mathsf{A}\ x\ x))))$ for (2).

These simple examples suggest how Proofgold could be used to publish conjectures for verification conditions of programs or even conjectures asking for a program satisfying a specification. This could especially be useful when those programs are smart contracts.

## 5 Proofgold Lava Client

The existing client, Proofgold Core, has already included all the functionality needed to run the blockchain. However, certain parts of the implementation did not scale well. In particular as the number of proofs already in the blockchain grew operations such as synchronizing new clients or rechecking the blockchain became too costly. For these reasons we reimplemented parts of the client software and provide it as the Proofgold Lava Client and discuss the changes in this section. Proofgold Lava is primarily the work of the third author.

### 5.1 Database Layer

The Proofgold client software uses 19 databases. In the Core software they have been stored in 19 directories, each with an index file and and a data file. Lookups in this database, including locking, became a significant overhead for all Merkle tree operations. For this reason in the Lava implementation we switched to the standard Unix DBM interface, in particular using the GDBM library by default, which in addition to the already used operations provides atomic operations.

### 5.2 Cryptography Layer

Harrison has provided an efficient library[10] of field operations in the various cryptographic fields verified in the HOL Light theorem prover [10]. The library includes the Elliptic curve used by Bitcoin and Proofgold along with a number of other elliptic curves and operations provided for them [7]. In the Lava implementation we switched from the OCaml implementation of the cryptographic primitives to instead allow a low level efficient implementation. We provide the flexibility of switching between two implementations. First, we allow the use of the Bitcoin crypto implementation. It has been tested in Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies, so it is likely to be correct. However, we also allow the use of the formally verified version (where the verified operations are the addition, multiplication, or inverse modulo in the field, but the verification of the actual additions and multiplication of points on the curve is still future work).

In addition to the much more efficient encryption and signing, we also switched to a low-level implementation of SHA256 used for hashing, including the recursive hashing of all sub-structures used in the Merkle tree. That last operation is used quite often, as all subterms used in proof terms are hashed this way.

[9] Note that in a classical calculus, it would be sufficient to prove such an existential statement by proving it is impossible for a witness not to exist.
[10] `https://github.com/awslabs/s2n-bignum`

### 5.3 Networking and Proofchecking Layers

The Lava client also includes a number of improvements to the networking layer and to proof checking. We have decided not to change the actual communication protocol between the nodes, but rather to improve the implementation. In particular, we have reduced the complexity of preparing block deltas and improved the efficiency of serialization. We have also replaced the implementation of the checker by a more efficient one. The new checker for the variant of simple type theory used in Proofgold includes perfect term sharing and preserves a number of invariants (e.g., $\beta\eta$-normal forms) is discussed elsewhere [2].

## 6 A HOL4 Interface for Mining Bounties from the HF theory

HOL4 [21] is an interactive theorem prover (ITP) for higher-order logic (HOL) that helps users to produce formal proofs and thus verify theorems. We are developing a HOL4 interface to Proofgold for two reasons. The first one is to enable people familiar with the HOL4 system to check and share their proofs in Proofgold. This way, HOL4 users would benefit from the additional features provided by Proofgold such as authorship recognition and the bounty system. The second one, which is the focus of this section, is to provide a way to manually or automatically prove bounties in HF. For this task, we chose HOL4 because it is equipped with powerful automation. The source code of this interface can be downloaded at `http://grid01.ciirc.cvut.cz/~thibault/h4pfg.tar.gz`. The HOL4 interface is primarily the work of the second author.

### 6.1 Importing the HF theory into HOL4

We import the 6 axioms and 97 definitions of the HF theory into HOL4. A translation between the two systems is straightforward since the logics of HOL4 and HF are similar and in particular the formula structures are almost identical. When reading a HF statement, the logical constants of the HF theory in Proofgold (e.g., $\wedge, \vee, \forall, \rightarrow, \ldots$) are mapped to their HOL4 native versions. For other HF constants (e.g., $\in, \subset, \mathit{exactly5}, \ldots$), new HOL4 constants are created. The same process is used to import HF bounties into HOL4.

### 6.2 Exporting HOL4 proofs to HF

To verify theorems proved in HOL4 with Proofgold, we first need to derive the HOL4 kernel rules from the IHOL rules and HF axioms. For instance, the HOL4 reflexivity rule can be derived from the IHOL rules in the following way:

$$\dfrac{\dfrac{\dfrac{\dfrac{}{ptt \vdash ptt}}{\vdash ptt \rightarrow ptt}}{\vdash \forall p.ptt \rightarrow ptt}}{\vdash t = t}$$

Every HOL4 theorem is proved by composing applications of the HOL4 kernel inference rules. Therefore, to produce a HF proof, we trace these applications during the proof process and substitute them by their corresponding derivations in HF.

### 6.3 Proving Bounties

To reward the first users, a finite set of automatically generated bounties was included at the beginning of the Proofgold blockchain by the developers. The newer bounties proposed by developers and users are now usually based on textbook mathematical knowledge (often from

$$\dfrac{\dfrac{\dfrac{\dfrac{\dfrac{\text{Definition for } \subseteq}{\vdash (a \subseteq b) \leftrightarrow (\forall y. y \in a \to y \in b)}}{\vdash (t_0 \subseteq t_0) \leftrightarrow (\forall y. y \in t_0 \to y \in t_0)} \quad \dfrac{y \in t_0 \vdash y \in t_0}{\forall y. \vdash y \in t_0 \to y \in t_0}}{\vdash t_0 \subseteq t_0} \quad \dfrac{\dfrac{\dfrac{}{\vdash x_1 = x_1}}{\vdash q t_0 x_1 \to x_1 = x_1}}{\vdash \forall x_1. q t_0 x_1 \to x_1 = x_1}}{\vdash (t_0 \subseteq t_0) \land (\forall x_1. q t_0 x_1 \to x_1 = x_1)}}{\vdash \exists x_0. (x_0 \subseteq t_0) \land (\forall x_1. q x_0 x_1 \to x_1 = x_1)}$$

**Figure 2** A HOL4 Proof of a HF Bounty.

interactive theorem provers) and are considerably harder than the automatically generated ones (see Section 7). We now show how to prove, using the HOL4 interface, some of the first "easy" bounties manually and automatically.

### 6.3.1 Manual Proof

The following auto-generated bounty has a relatively easy proof and therefore is one of the first we could manually prove:

$$\exists x_0.x_0 \subseteq t_0 \land \forall x_1.(\forall x_2.x_2 \subseteq x_1 \to \forall x_3 x_4.(\neg c_0 x_3 x_4 \land\, c_1 x_0 \land \neg c_2 x_2) \to c_3(c_4(c_5 x_0))x_4) \to x_1 = x_1$$
where $t_0 = \wp(\wp(\wp(\wp\emptyset)))$ and $[c0, c1, c2, c3, c4, c5] = [\mathit{tuple}, \mathit{exactly5}, \mathit{atleast2}, \mathit{SNo}, \mathit{Sing}, \mathit{SNoLev}]$

The main difficulty, when manually proving such an automatically generated bounty, is to identify the relevant part of the formula. After a careful analysis, we found that the truth of this formula can be derived from this abbreviated version $\exists x_0.(x_0 \subseteq t_0) \land (\forall x_1.q x_0 x_1 \to x_1 = x_1)$ where the predicate $q$ is used to hide the irrelevant part. Our proof, shown in Figure 2, relies on the imported definition of $\subseteq$.

### 6.3.2 Automated Proof

In general, proof automation tools help speed up formalization of theorems in interactive theorem provers. As a demonstration of the possible benefits, we have developed a way to automatically prove HF bounties by relying on the automation available in HOL4.

To prove a bounty, we first call HOL(y)Hammer [8] which is one of the strongest general automation techniques available in HOL4. It tries to prove the conjecture from the 6 HF axioms and the 97 HF definitions by translating the problem to external automated theorem provers (ATPs). When an external ATP finds a proof, it also returns the axioms that are necessary to find that proof. With this information, a weaker internal prover such as Metis [12] is usually able to reconstruct a HOL4 proof. The Metis proofs however typically exceed the Proofgold block size limit of 500kb and include dependencies to HOL4 axioms that are not present (and sometimes not provable) in HF. Thus, we have developed a custom internal first-order ATP for HOL4 that produces small proofs and only relies on the HF axioms. A reduction in proof size is achieved by making definitions for large terms (e.g. irrelevant parts of the conjecture and Skolem functions, similar to the example given in Section 6.3.1) and proving auxiliary lemmas for repeated sequences of proof steps (e.g., when permuting literals in clauses). With these optimizations, the automated proof for the bounty from Section 6.3.1 is only four times as large as the manual one (16kb instead of 4kb). The manual proof for this bounty has been submitted and included in the blockchain and the bounty associated with it has been collected. In addition to that, we have so far automatically found and submitted six proofs of the HF conjectures with bounties. All these proofs were accepted by the Proofgold proof checker and the bounties were collected.

This automated system is currently limited to essentially first-order formulas. In the future, we plan to support automated proofs for higher-order formulas based on existing automated translations to first-order [15].

# 7 The Bounty System and its Applications

One of the main extra features of Proofgold beyond proof verification is the possibility for users and developers to attach bounties to propositions. Bounties can be used to reward users for finding proofs in mathematical domains of general interest or subproofs of a larger formalization.

## 7.1 Current Bounties

As mentioned in Section 4.1 for the first 5000 blocks the Proofgold consensus algorithm automatically placed a bounty of 25 Proofgold bars (half of the block reward) on a pseudorandom proposition. We say more about these pseudorandom propositions below. For the next 10000 blocks 25 Proofgold bars (half of the block reward) were placed into a "bounty fund" which was used to place larger bounties on meaningful propositions decided upon through a community forum. The propositions chosen vary from first-order problems derived from Mizar proofs, finite Ramsey properties (e.g., $R(5,7)$ is larger than the cardinality of $\wp 5$), properties of specific categories (e.g., the category of hereditarily finite sets), and numerous others. Since Block 15000 the full block reward is 25 bars and none of this goes towards the creation of bounties, and so bounties are placed by intention rather than automation.

The pseudorandom propositions from the first 5000 blocks can be classified into 8 classes. We briefly describe these here to give a concrete idea of the current bounties. The classes were determined by the initial Proofgold developers.

### Random

Conjectures in this class are generally not meaningful, but the choices made during the generation are also not uniformly random. The conjecture must start with at least two (possibly bounded) quantifiers. When a term of type $\iota$ must be generated and a bound variable is not being chosen, then half the time the binary representation of a number between 5 and 20 is used, a quarter of the time the unary representation of a number between 5 and 20 is used. In the remaining quarter of the cases, half the time a unary function is chosen (leaving the argument to be generated), a quarter of the time a binary function is chosen (leaving two arguments to be generated) and the remaining quarter some other set former is used (e.g., Sep). In case the generation seems to be running out of bits of information, then it restricts the choices available.

There are three subclasses of random conjectures. The first kind is simply a sentence constructed roughly as described above. The second kind is of the form $\forall p : \iota o. \forall f : \iota\iota. s$ where $s$ is generated as above but is allowed to use the (uninterpreted) unary predicate $p$ and unary function $f$. The third kind is of the form $\forall xyz. \forall f : \iota\iota. \forall pq : \iota o. \forall g : \iota\iota\iota. \forall r : \iota\iota o. s$ where $s$ is a generated as above though it is allowed to use $x, y, z, f, g$ to construct sets, to use $p, q, r$ to construct atomic propositions and is (mostly) disallowed from using the constants from the HF set theory.

The automated miner from Section 6 was tested on problems from this family.

### Quantified boolean formulas (QBF)

Conjectures in the QBF class are of the form $Q_1 p_1 : o. \cdots .Q_n p_n : o.s \leftrightarrow t$ where $50 \leq n \leq 55$, each $Q_i$ is $\forall$ or $\exists$ and $s$ and $t$ are propositions such that $\mathcal{F}(s) = \mathcal{F}(t) = \{p_1, \ldots, p_n\}$. The propositions $s$ and $t$ are generated using a similar process.

### Set Constraints

One of the most challenging aspects of higher-order theorem proving is instantiating set variables, i.e., variables of a type like $\iota o$ [1]. The only known complete procedure requires enumeration of $\beta\eta$-normal terms of this type.

The set constraint conjectures are of the form

$$\forall P_1 : \alpha_1.\forall P_2 : \alpha_2.\forall P_3 : \alpha_3.\forall P_4 : \alpha_4.\varphi_1^1 \to \varphi_2^1 \to \varphi_3^2 \to \varphi_4^2 \to \varphi_5^3 \to \varphi_6^3 \to \varphi_7^4 \to \varphi_8^4 \to \bot$$

where each $\alpha_i$ is a small type of the form $\beta_1 \cdots \beta_{m_i} o$ and each proposition $\varphi_j^i$ is a lower bound constraint for $P_i$ over $\{P_1, P_2, P_3, P_4\}$ if $j$ is odd and an upper bound constraint for $P_i$ over $\{P_1, P_2, P_3, P_4\}$ if $j$ is even. A lower bound constraint for a variable $P$ is a formula that implies $P$ must at least be true for certain elements. An upper bound constraint for a variable $P$ is a formula that implies $P$ cannot be true for more than some number of elements. Such constraints may also be recursive, e.g., saying if $P\ z$ holds then $P\ (f\ z)$ must hold. Recursive constraints can in principle be both lower bound and upper bound constraints.

The positive version of the conjecture states that there is no solution to this collection of set constraints. The negative version can be proven by giving a solution.

### Higher-Order Unification

Unlike first-order unification, higher-order unification is undecidable. In spite of this Huet's preunification algorithm [11] provides a reasonable method to search for solutions. A great deal of research has been done on higher-order unification and is ongoing today [24].

The generated conjectures in this class are essentially higher-order unification problems with eight flex-rigid pairs and four variables to instantiate. The problems are given in a universal form, so that the positive form states that there is no solution. The negative form could be proven by giving a solution. In general the conjectures have the form

$$\forall X_1 : \alpha_1.\forall X_2 : \alpha_2.\forall X_3 : \alpha_3.\forall X_4 : \alpha_4.\varphi_1^1 \to \varphi_2^1 \to \varphi_3^2 \to \varphi_4^2 \to \varphi_5^3 \to \varphi_6^3 \to \varphi_7^4 \to \varphi_8^4 \to \bot$$

where $\alpha_i$ is a small type not involving $o$ and $\varphi_j^i$ is a proposition corresponding to a disagreement pair of a unification problem.

### Untyped Combinator Unification

Since we are in a simply typed setting the untyped combinators are encoded as sets. The generated conjectures are in the form of eight flex-rigid pairs using four variables to be instantiated. Each conjecture is stated in a universal form that means there is no solution. Proving the negation of the conjecture will usually mean giving a solution, though given the classical setting it is also possible to provide multiple instantiations and prove one must be a solution. (This was also the case for the previous two classes of conjectures.) The conjectures have the form

$$\begin{gathered}\forall X.\mathsf{combinator}\ X \to \forall Y.\mathsf{combinator}\ Y \to \forall Z.\mathsf{combinator}\ Z \to \forall W.\mathsf{combinator}\ W \to \\ \varphi_1^X \to \varphi_2^X \to \varphi_3^Y \to \varphi_4^Y \to \varphi_5^Z \to \varphi_6^Z \to \varphi_7^W \to \varphi_8^W \to \bot\end{gathered}$$

where $\varphi_i^V$ is a proposition giving a flex-rigid pair with local variables and with $V$ as the head of the left. To be more specific each $\varphi_i^V$ has the form

$$\forall x.\mathsf{combinator}\ x \to \forall y.\mathsf{combinator}\ y \to \forall z.\mathsf{combinator}\ z \to \forall w.\mathsf{combinator}\ w \to \\ \mathsf{combinator\_equiv}\ (V\ v_1\ v_2\ v_3\ v_4\ s_1\ \ldots\ s_n)\ t$$

where each $v_i \in \{x, y, z, w\}$, $t$ is a random rigid combinator and each of $s_1, \ldots, s_n$ is a random combinator. In this context a random rigid combinator is either $K\ t_1$ or $S\ t_1$ where $t_1$ is a random combinator, or $S\ t_1\ t_2$ where $t_1$ and $t_2$ are random combinators, or $v\ t_1\ \cdots\ t_n$ where $v \in \{x, y, z, w\}$ and $t_1, \ldots, t_n$ are random combinators. A random combinator is $h\ t_1\ \cdots\ t_n$ where $h \in \{S, K, X, Y, Z, W, x, y, z, w\}$ and $t_1, \ldots, t_n$ are random combinators.

Each of these problems can be viewed as a first-order problem. In the first-order variant we could assume everything is a combinator (so combinator can be omitted) and use equality to play the role of combinator_equiv. It should generally be possible to mimic the equational reasoning of a first-order proof in the set theory representation by using appropriate lemmas about combinator and combinator_equiv.

Furthermore it should be possible to define a notion of reduction and prove that if two terms are equivalent via combinator_equiv, then they must have a common reduct. This would allow one to prove the positive version of the conjecture (meaning there is no solution).

## Abstract HF problems

The conjectures in the Abstract HF class are about hereditarily finite sets, but without assuming the full properties about the relevant relations, sets and functions. We fix 24 distinct variables: $r_0$, $r_1$ and $r_2$ of type $\iota\iota o$, $x_0$, $x_1$, $x_2$, $x_3$ and $x_4$ of type $\iota$, $f_0$ and $f_1$ of type $\iota\iota$, $g_0$, $g_1$ and $g_2$ of type $\iota\iota\iota$ and $p_0$, $p_1$, $p_2$, $p_3$, $p_4$, $p_5$, $p_6$, $p_7$, $p_8$, $p_9$ and $p_{10}$ of type $\iota o$. Each of these variable has an intended meaning which can be given by a substitution $\theta$. For example, $\theta(r_0) = \in$, meaning $r_0$ is intended to correspond to set membership. Each generated conjecture is of the form

$$\forall r_0 r_1 r_2 : \iota\iota o. \forall x_0 x_1 x_2 x_3 x_4. \forall f_0 f_1 : \iota\iota. \forall g_0 g_1 g_2 : \iota\iota\iota. \forall p_0 \cdots p_{10} : \iota o. \\ \varphi_1 \to \cdots \to \varphi_n \to \psi.$$

The propositions $\varphi_1, \ldots, \varphi_n, \psi$ are chosen from a set of 1229 specific propositions which hold for HF sets, but may not hold in the abstract case. The conjecture essential states that the selections of $\varphi_i$ are sufficient to infer the selected $\psi$.

## AIM Conjecture Problems

There are two kinds of AIM Conjecture [13] related problems: one using Loop_with_defs_cex1 and one using Loop_with_defs_cex2. In both cases the conjecture states that no loop exists with counterexamples of the first or second kind satisfying a number of extra equations. The two kinds of counterexamples assert that the loop has elements violating one of two identities. An AIM loop violating either of the identities would be a counterexample to the AIM Conjecture. The pseudorandom propositions do not assume the loop is AIM, but only assume some AIM-like identities hold. That is, instead of assuming all inner mappings commute, the assumption is that some inner mappings commute. Furthermore, in some cases some specific inner mappings are assumed to have a small order (which would not be true in all AIM loops).

Unfortunately there was a bug in the HF defining equation for loops (omitting that the identity element must be in the carrier). This made the negation of all of the pseudorandom propositions in this class easily provable. A Proofgold developer used this bug to collect the bounties and redistribute the bounties to the corrected versions.

### Diophantine Modulo

A Diophantine Modulo problem generates two polynomials $p$ and $q$ in variables $x$, $y$ and $z$ and a number $m$ (of up to 64 bits). The conjecture states there is no choice of (hereditarily finite) sets $x$, $y$ and $z$ such that the cardinality of $p$ plus 16 is the same as the cardinality of $q$ modulo $m$. The negation of the conjecture could be proven by giving appropriate $x$, $y$ and $z$ and proving they have the property.

### Diophantine

The final class is given by Diophantine problems (either equations or inequalities). Two polynomials $p$ and $q$ in variables $x$, $y$, $z$ are generated (as described above). Each polynomial uses 256 bits of information. The generated conjecture either states there are no (hereditarily finite) sets $x$, $y$ and $z$ such that the cardinality of $p$ plus 16 is the same as the cardinality of $q$, or that the cardinality of $p$ plus 16 is no larger than the cardinality of $q$.

## 7.2 Large Formalization Projects

Hales's Flyspeck [9] project formalizing the proof of the Kepler Conjecture has been one of the largest challenges in interactive theorem proving so far, involving several ITP communities and to some extent a centralized bounty system. It took more than 10 years to complete and combined the expertise of proof assistant users of the HOL Light, Isabelle/HOL and Coq systems. With our bounty system, the effort could have been shared with an even wider community of researchers interested in formal verification. This would involve making a plan of the steps required to prove the final theorem, splitting the formalization into multiple independent parts, and putting them as conjectures into Proofgold with bounties on them. A knowledgeable independent user of an interactive theorem prover interface capable of producing Proofgold terms, could then decide to provide a proof for a particular part. The final proof is completed when all the bounties have been collected. The reward for a particular proof may be increased if it is harder than initially thought and/or to motivate Proofgold users to solve it sooner. In the long run, an attempt at formally proving Fermat's last theorem in Proofgold could be made using this approach. An even better target to test the effectiveness of the bounty system would be the classification of finite simple groups. Its proof required the combined effort of about 100 authors for 50 years and consists of tens of thousands of pages distributed over several hundred journal articles.

# 8 Related Work

The most obvious related work is Qeditas, the project that evolved into Proofgold, as described in Section 2. The authors are also aware of two other ideas for projects for doing formal mathematics on a blockchain.

Mathcoin [23] describes high level ideas for a blockchain on which users can use their tokens to "bet" on whether or not a mathematical statement is true. This would allow mathematical knowledge to be reflected in the blockchain before a full proof is available.

Additionally a blockchain project for collaborative formalization of mathematics is described by Lim, et. al., in [14]. The focus in this case is on "recording and encouraging" collaboration between humans (and AI tools) formalizing in various different theorem proving systems. The authors describe in some detail the intended high level architecture (given as various layers) for such a system, and give examples for how collaboration would take place.

The two projects introduce some interesting ideas. However, so far as the authors are aware, neither project has corresponding software or a currently running network.

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