

# BLOCKCHAINS IN THE PHYSICAL WORLD

## CARS, WINE AND HORSEMEAT

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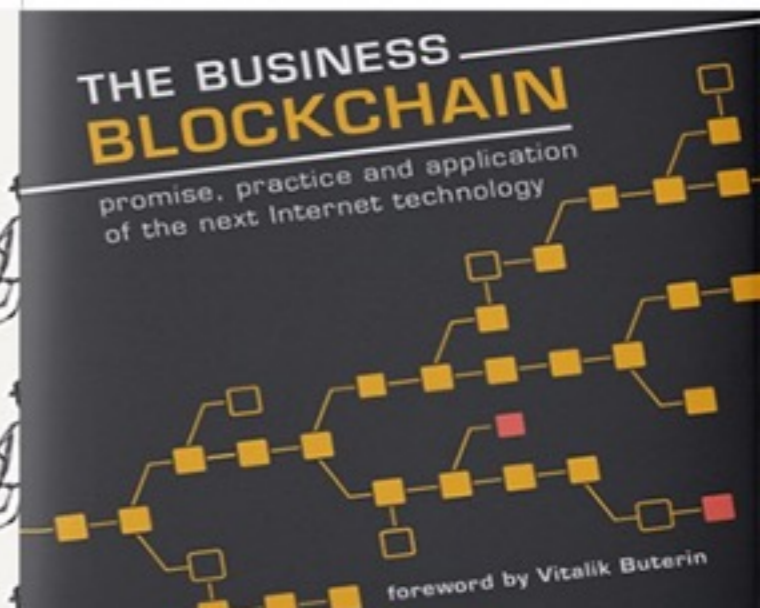
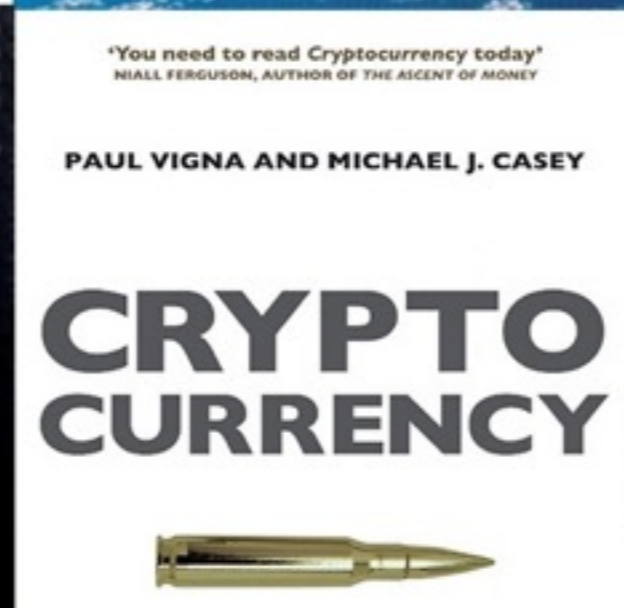
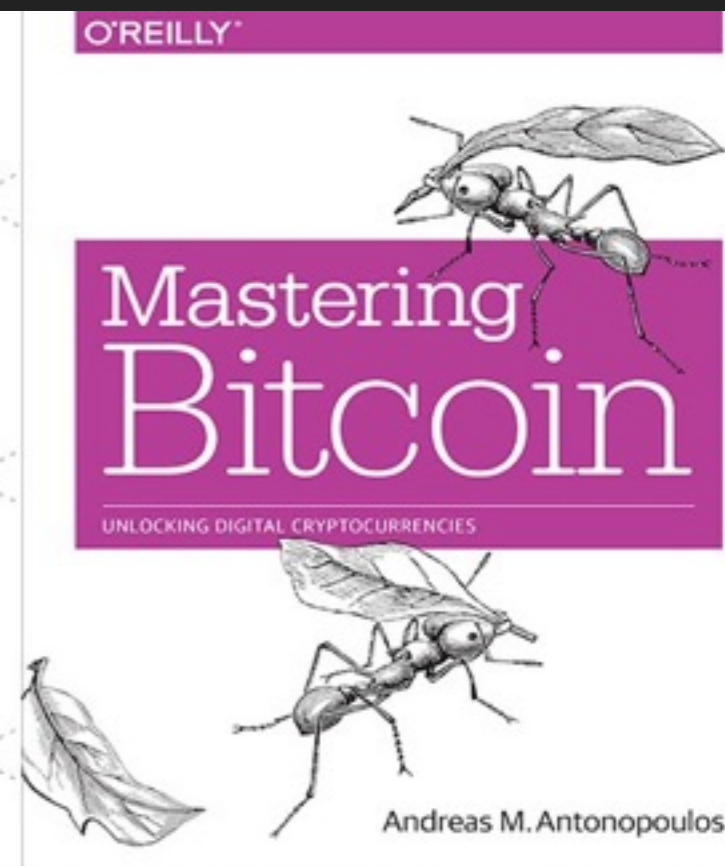
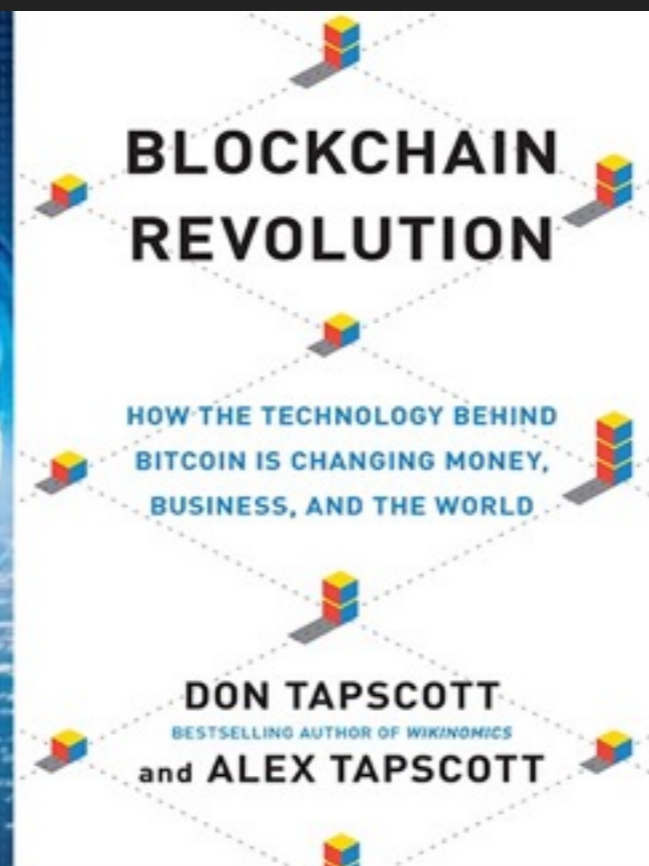
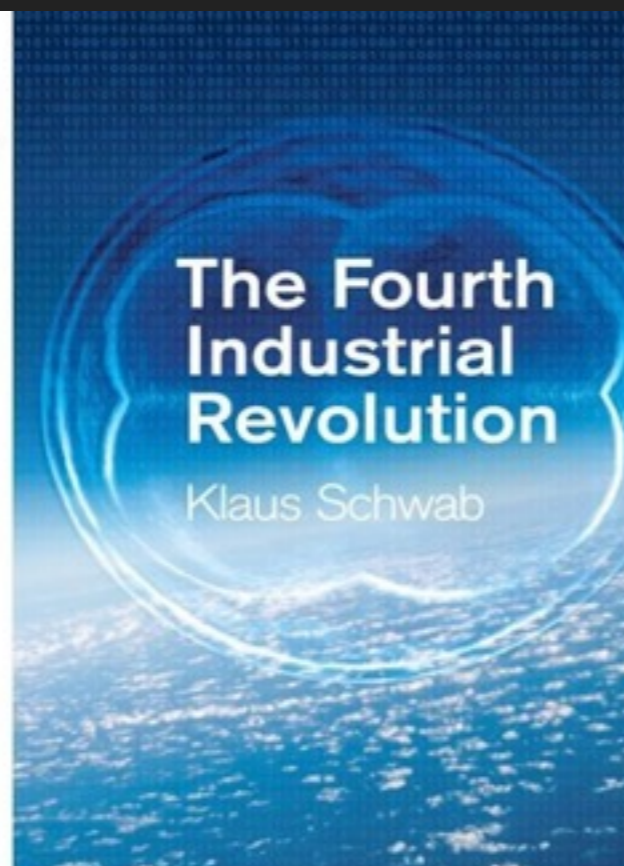
# OVERVIEW

- ▶ What is a blockchain?
- ▶ What are they good for?
- ▶ Do they have useful applications in the physical world?

# WHY IS EVERYONE SO EXCITED?



Melanie Swan





Government  
Office for Science



## Distributed Ledger Technology: beyond block chain

A report by the UK Government Chief Scientific Adviser

**‘THESE  
TECHNOLOGIES [MAY]  
REFORM OUR  
FINANCIAL MARKETS,  
SUPPLY CHAINS,  
CONSUMER AND B2B  
SERVICES’**

**UK Government Chief Scientific  
Advisor**

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WHAT ISN'T A BLOCKCHAIN?

**“EVERYTHING'S A  
\*\*\*\*\*ING BLOCKCHAIN”**

**David Birch**

<http://www.slideshare.net/15Mb/everythings-a-ing-blockchain>

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# THE BITCOIN BLOCKCHAIN?

- ▶ First proposed as part of the bitcoin protocol
- ▶ Invented by 'Satoshi Nakamoto'
- ▶ Builds on other technologies:
  - ▶ Peer-to-peer network
  - ▶ Cryptographic hash functions
  - ▶ Asymmetric key cryptography

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# P2P, DISTRIBUTED, DECENTRALISED SYSTEMS

- ▶ Anyone is allowed to run a node
- ▶ All nodes follow the same protocol
- ▶ All nodes are equal
- ▶ Examples: file-sharing, the internet, the web



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# CRYPTOGRAPHIC HASH FUNCTION

- ▶ Cryptographic hash function:
  - ▶ input (any size), efficiently computes a particular output (fixed size)
  - ▶ Input can't be guessed from output
  - ▶ Can't find two distinct inputs with same output
  - ▶ All outputs are equally likely

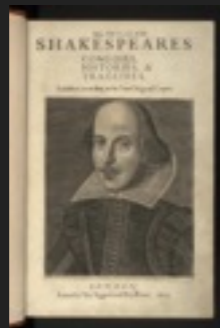
# CRYPTOGRAPHIC HASH FUNCTION

Inputs



Outputs

Cj7FHH7MwS3A



Ot20tf9R9d1s



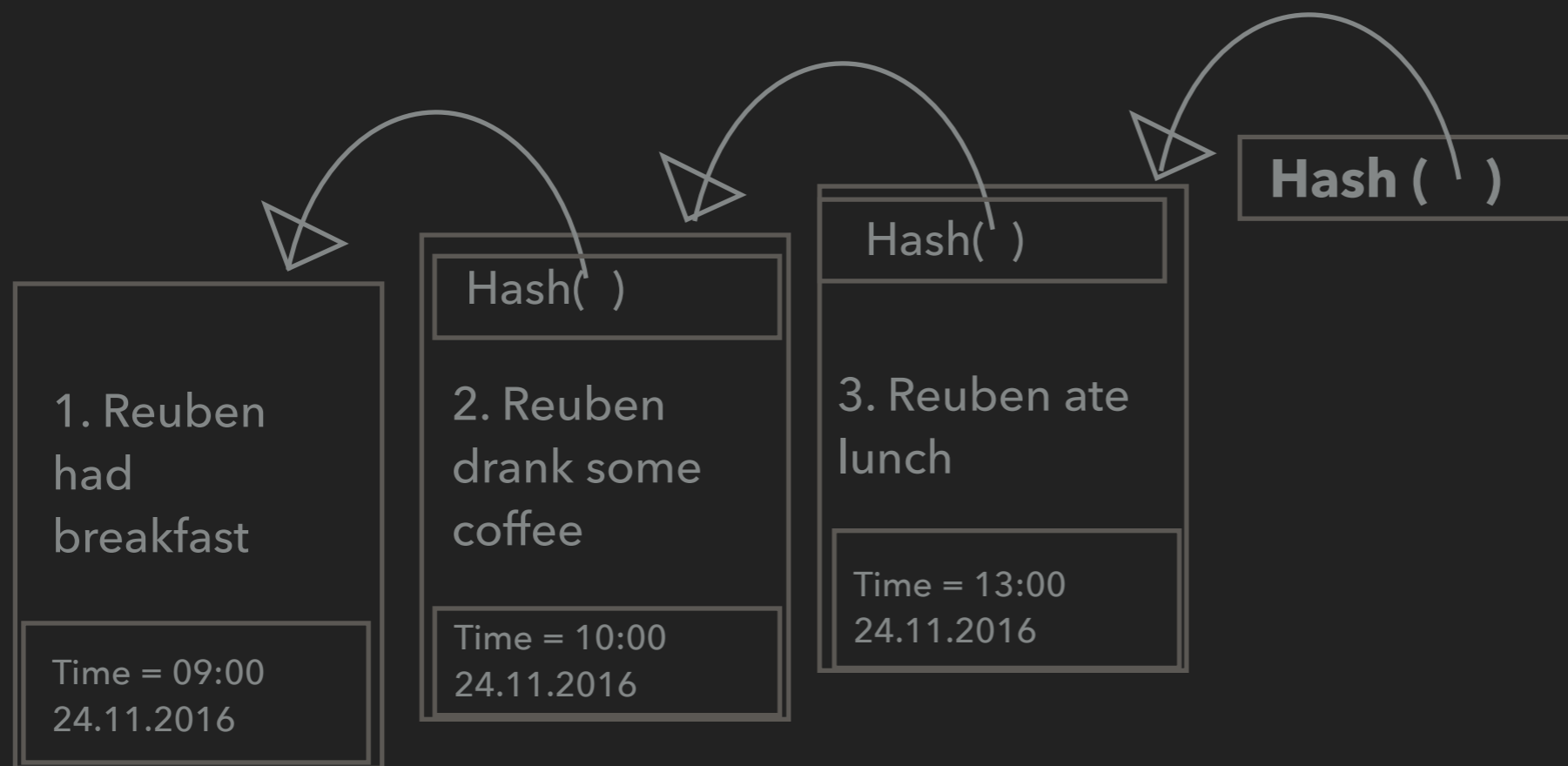
I9ZQI6DVVCAT

# HASH POINTERS

- ▶ Point to some data, and a hash of it

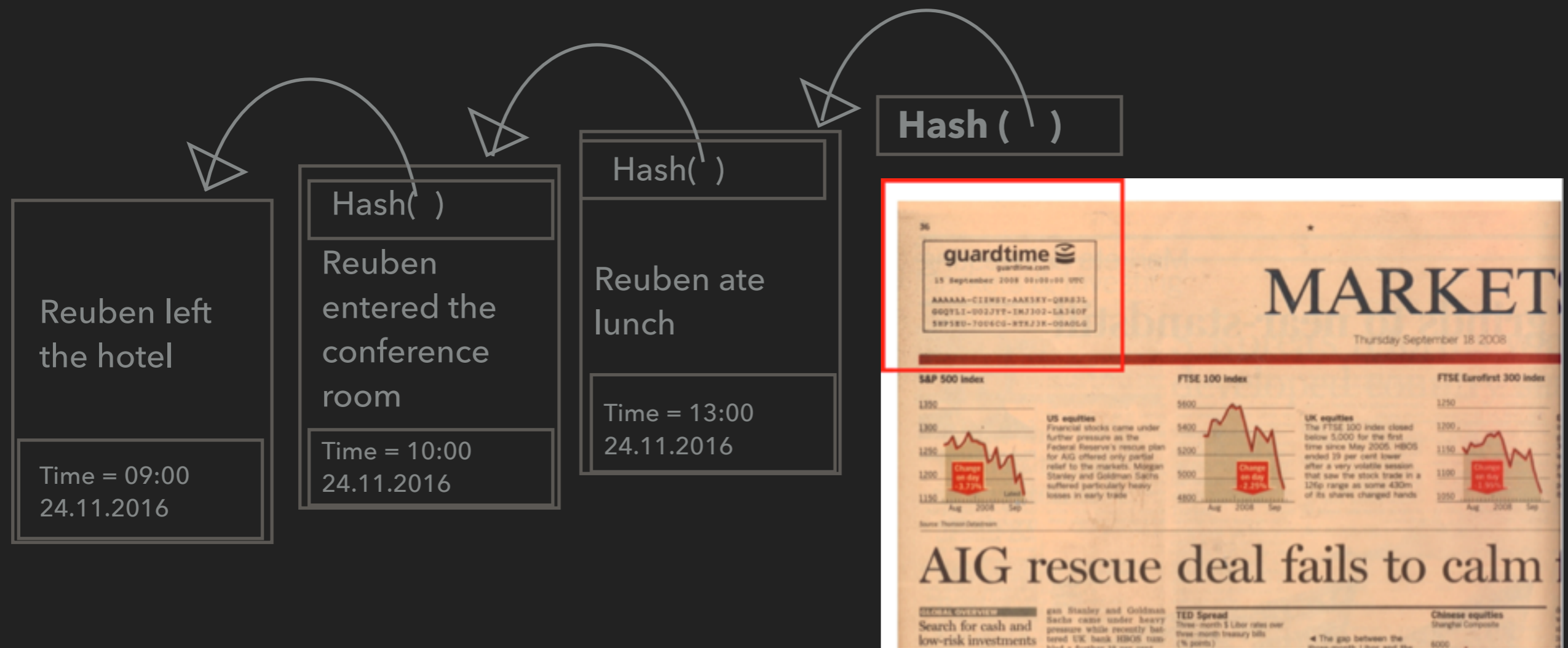


# HASH POINTER DATA STRUCTURES



# HASH POINTER DATA STRUCTURES

- ▶ Hashes can be published in multiple public places (e.g. GuardTime)



Haber, Stuart, and W. Scott Stornetta. "How to time-stamp a digital document." Conference on the Theory and Application of Cryptography. Springer Berlin Heidelberg, 1990. [https://www.anf.es/pdf/Haber\\_Stornetta.pdf](https://www.anf.es/pdf/Haber_Stornetta.pdf)

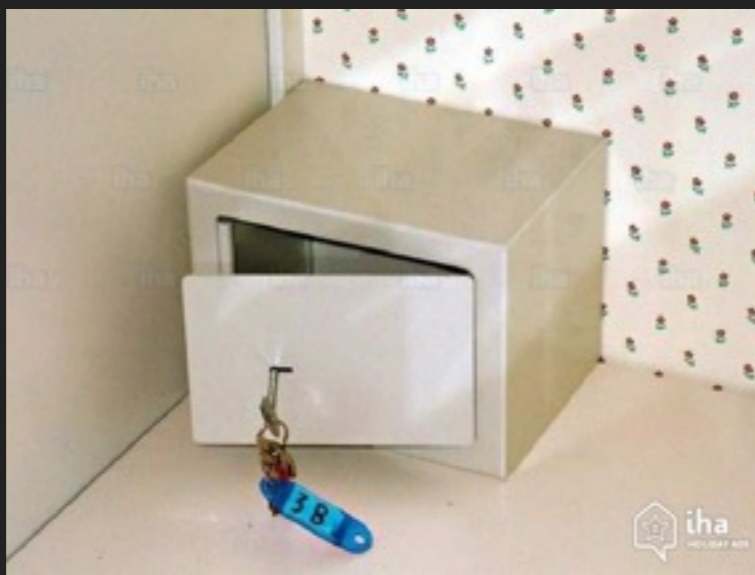
# DIGITAL SIGNATURES

- ▶ Only you can make your signature
- ▶ Anyone who looks at it can see it is valid
- ▶ Each signature is only valid for the document it signs



# DIGITAL SIGNATURE SCHEME

- ▶ Generate a secret key and a public key
- ▶ Your secret key allows you to put your signature on a document
- ▶ Anyone can verify the signature on a document belongs to you, using your public key



Diffie, Whitfield, and Martin Hellman. "New directions in cryptography." IEEE transactions on Information Theory 22.6 (1976): 644-654.

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# HOW TO BUILD A DECENTRALISED DIGITAL CURRENCY

- ▶ The blockchain relies on P2P, hash functions and PKI to create a secure decentralised digital currency

# DIGITAL CURRENCY

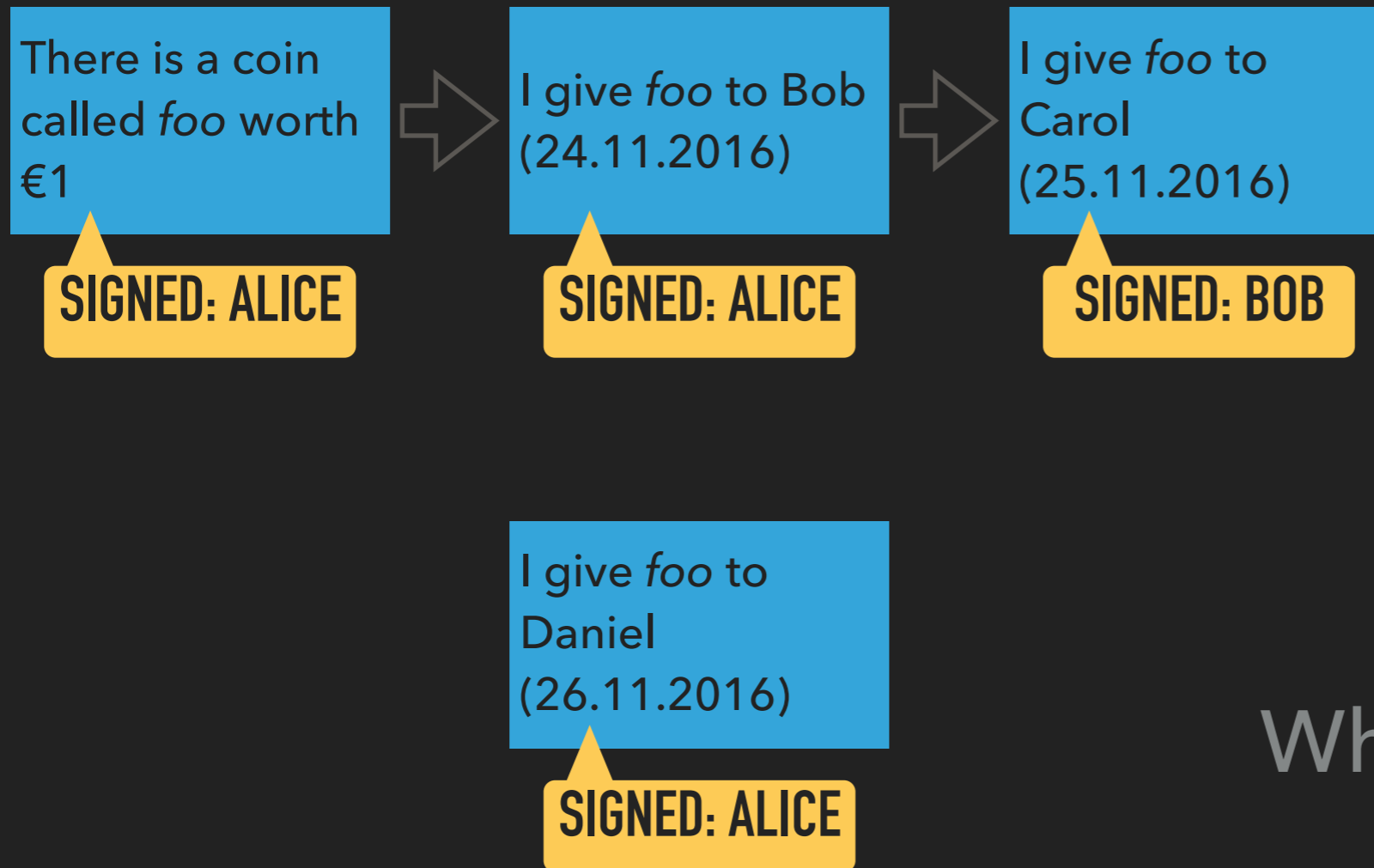
- ▶ Cash is a promise with a signature from someone we trust



# DIGITAL CURRENCY



# DIGITAL CURRENCY: DOUBLE SPEND ATTACK!



Who owns *foo* now?

# DIGITAL CURRENCY: CENTRALISED



# DIGITAL CURRENCY: DECENTRALISED

There is a coin  
called *foo* worth  
€1

**SIGNED: ALICE**



I give *foo* to Bob  
(24.11.2016)

**SIGNED: ALICE**



I give *foo* to  
Carol  
(25.11.2016)

**SIGNED: BOB**

~~I give *foo* to  
Daniel  
(26.11.2016)~~

~~**SIGNED: ALICE**~~

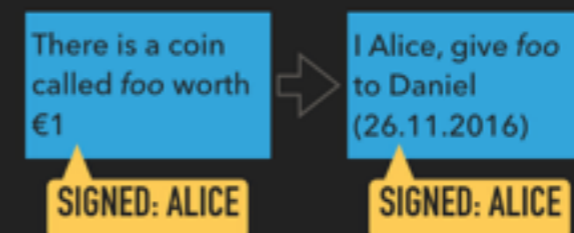


We all agree, *foo*  
belongs to Carol

# DIGITAL CURRENCY: DECENTRALISED SOLUTION



“Looks to me like *foo* belongs to Carol”



“I disagree: *foo* belongs to Daniel”

# DIGITAL CURRENCY: DECENTRALISED SOLUTION

We need to settle on one version of the truth

How? Nodes *race against each other* to solve computationally expensive puzzles. The winner gets to propose their version of the truth!



# DIGITAL CURRENCY: DECENTRALISED SOLUTION

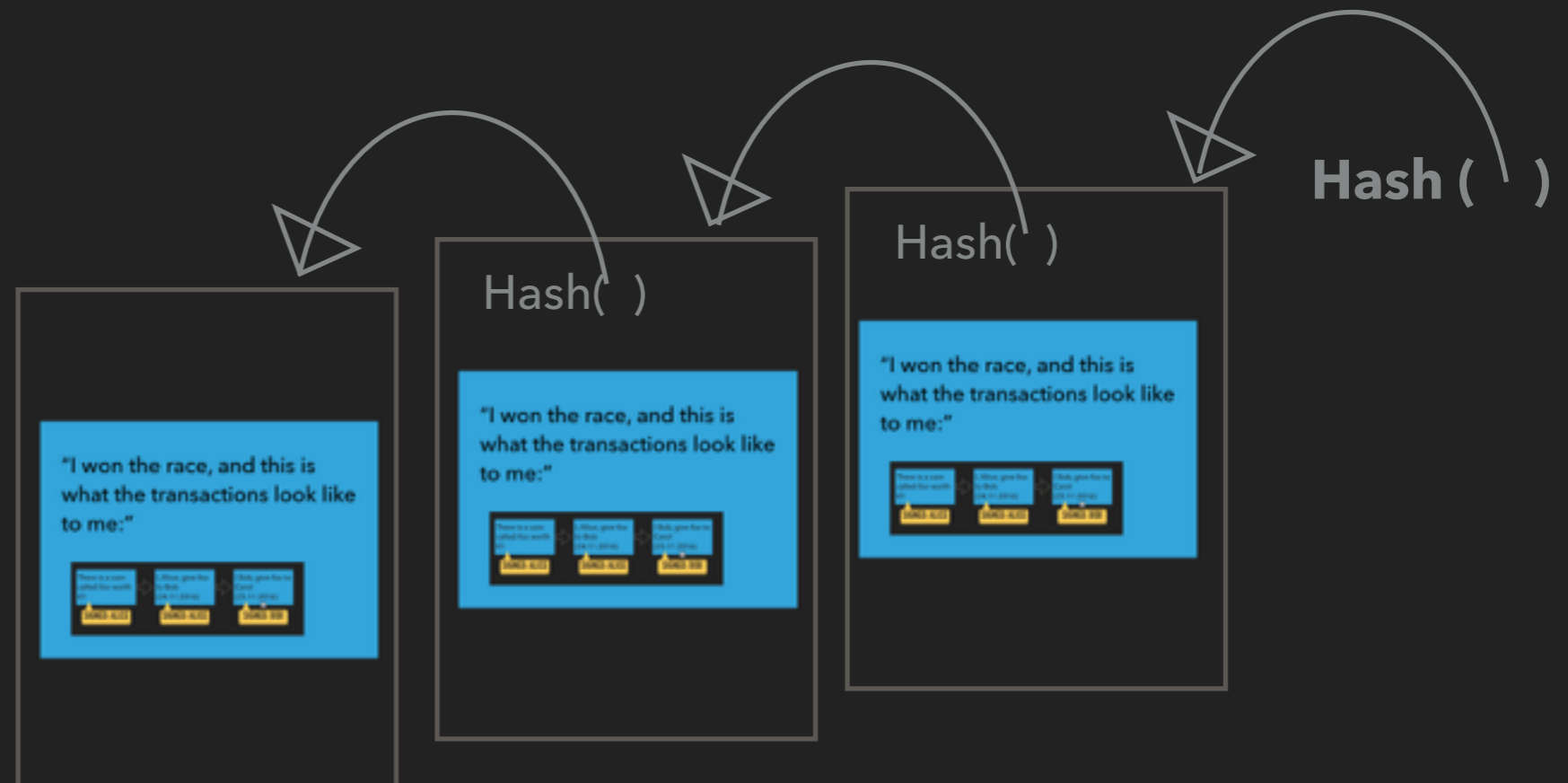
"I won the race, and this is what the transactions look like to me:"



The winner collects together all the transaction claims in a *block* and broadcasts it to the other nodes...

# DIGITAL CURRENCY: DECENTRALISED SOLUTION

If winner 2 accepts winner 1's block, they will include a hash of it in their new block. If not, they will start from the previous block.



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## DIGITAL CURRENCY: DECENTRALISED SOLUTION

- ▶ If puzzle winners are honest, then they won't allow double spending or accept invalid signatures
- ▶ We are assuming that winners will generally be honest.
- ▶ But what incentive does the winning node have to be honest?

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# MINING INCENTIVES

- ▶ Miners who win the race get to award themselves 12.5 BTC per block, automatically, and to collect fees on the transactions they process
- ▶ If their block ends up being rejected by later race-winning miners, then the version of the blockchain where they get a reward is ignored

# 51% ATTACK

- ▶ A majority of the miners collude with each other to allow invalid blocks
- ▶ But once discovered, faith in the currency would collapse, and BTC's gained would be worthless



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## OTHER USES

- ▶ We've seen how the blockchain solves a core security challenge of decentralised digital currencies. It can also:
- ▶ *Set rules*: What code will be executed
- ▶ *Provenance*: tell us where a coin came from

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# SETTING RULES WITH SMART CONTRACTS

- ▶ A way for untrusting parties to agree on what code will run
- ▶ Bitcoin transactions are simple agreements:
  - ▶ e.g. 'Transfer 1 BTC from Alice to Bob'
  - ▶ Escrow - allow third-party arbitration if there is a conflict
- ▶ Once we've agreed, nobody can back out or change the terms, and they will be executed by the bitcoin network

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# SETTING RULES WITH SMART CONTRACTS

- ▶ *Ethereum* ([ethereum.org](https://ethereum.org)) is an alternative system with a smart contract language at its core
- ▶ Betting
- ▶ Loans, stocks, shares
- ▶ Subscription
- ▶ Crowdfunding

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## PROVENANCE: EVERY COIN HAS A STORY TO TELL

- ▶ Every coin (or fraction of a coin) has a unique, tamper-proof history recorded in the blockchain.
- ▶ Coloured coins: let coins represent something that can be redeemed (tokens, tickets, vouchers, passes)
- ▶ This allows the coin to change hands, but it cannot be copied

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## PROVENANCE: EVERY COIN HAS A STORY TO TELL

- ▶ Warning: the owner of the token has to trust that the token issuer will allow him/her to redeem the thing it represents (unless it can be written in a smart contract!)

# RULES AND PROVENANCE FOR THE PHYSICAL WORLD?

- ▶ Rules: how could a blockchain stop me from physically picking up property and running away with it?
- ▶ Provenance: how could a blockchain guarantee that my burger is 100% beef?
- ▶ Do we *need* a blockchain for these things?



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# SMART PROPERTY

- ▶ Physical property can be stolen and lost, and then used or sold illegitimately
- ▶ What if a seller disappears after taking your money, without delivering the goods?
- ▶ Control over property could be determined by the blockchain?

# SMART PROPERTY

- ▶ Something which requires a computer to work
- ▶ E.g. a smart car



# SMART PROPERTY

- ▶ Car won't start without the computer
- ▶ Computer is unlocked by a key fob

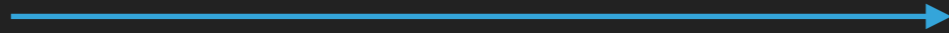


# SMART PROPERTY: AUTHENTICATION

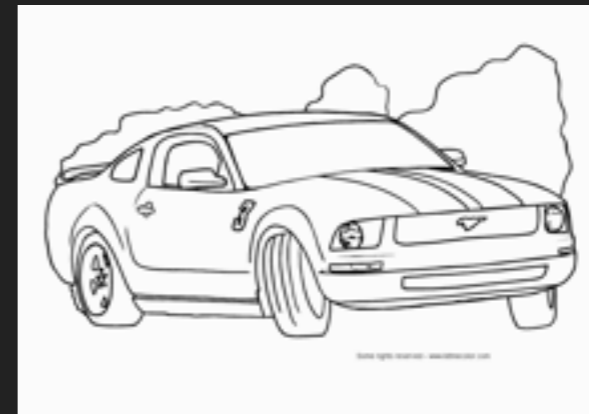
Bob



1) Open up! It's me Bob



Car A



# SMART PROPERTY: AUTHENTICATION

Bob



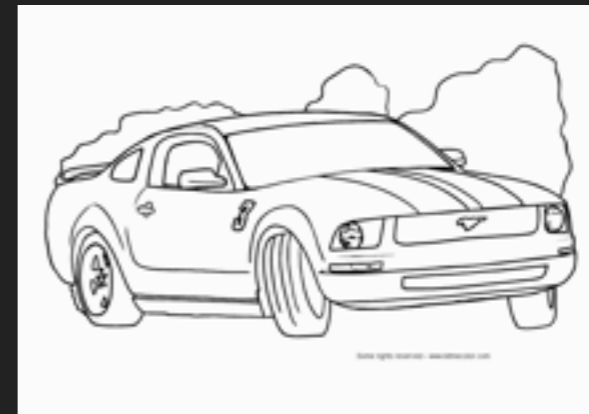
1) Open up! It's me Bob

2) Sign this nonce: N

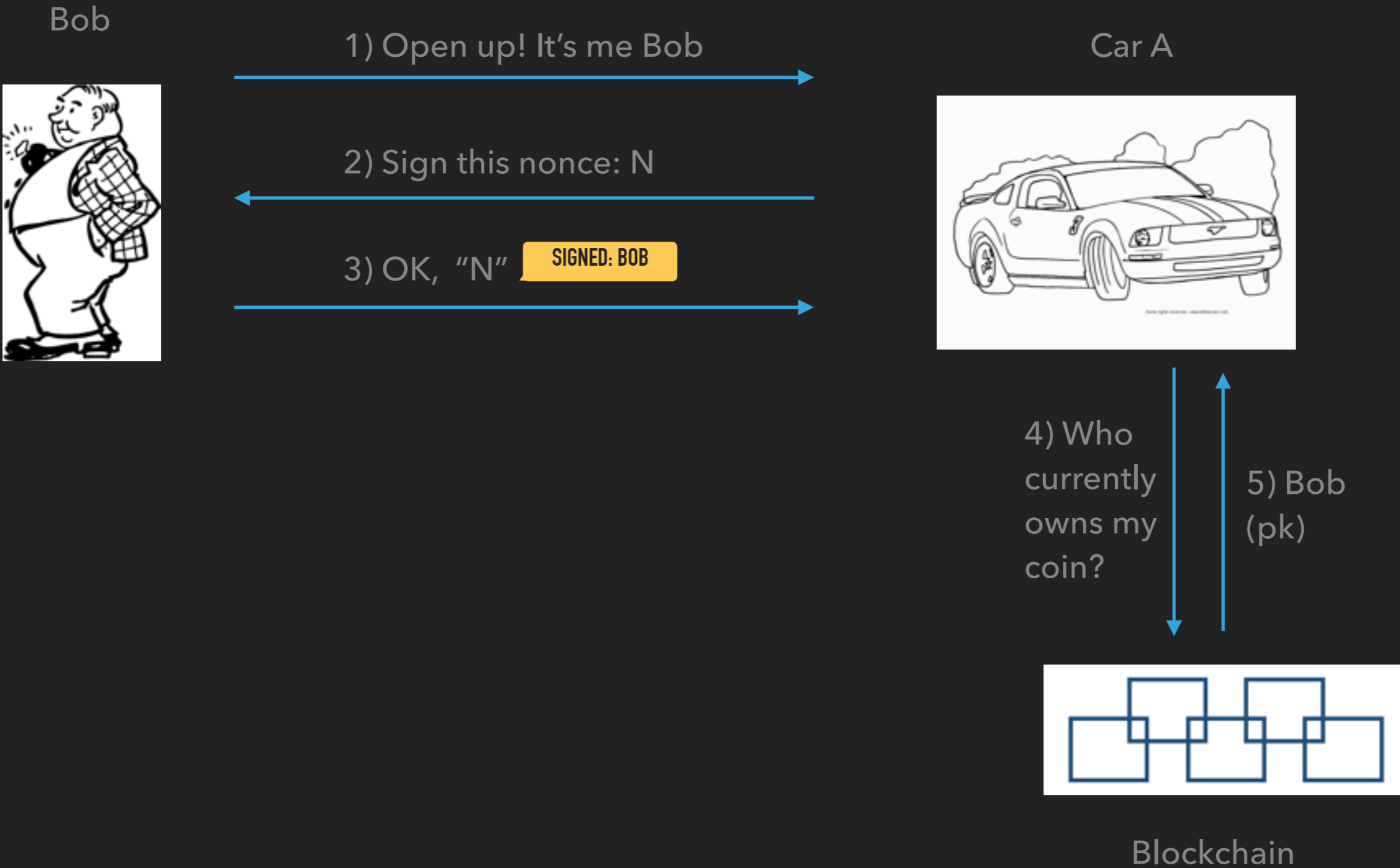
3) OK, "N"

SIGNED: BOB

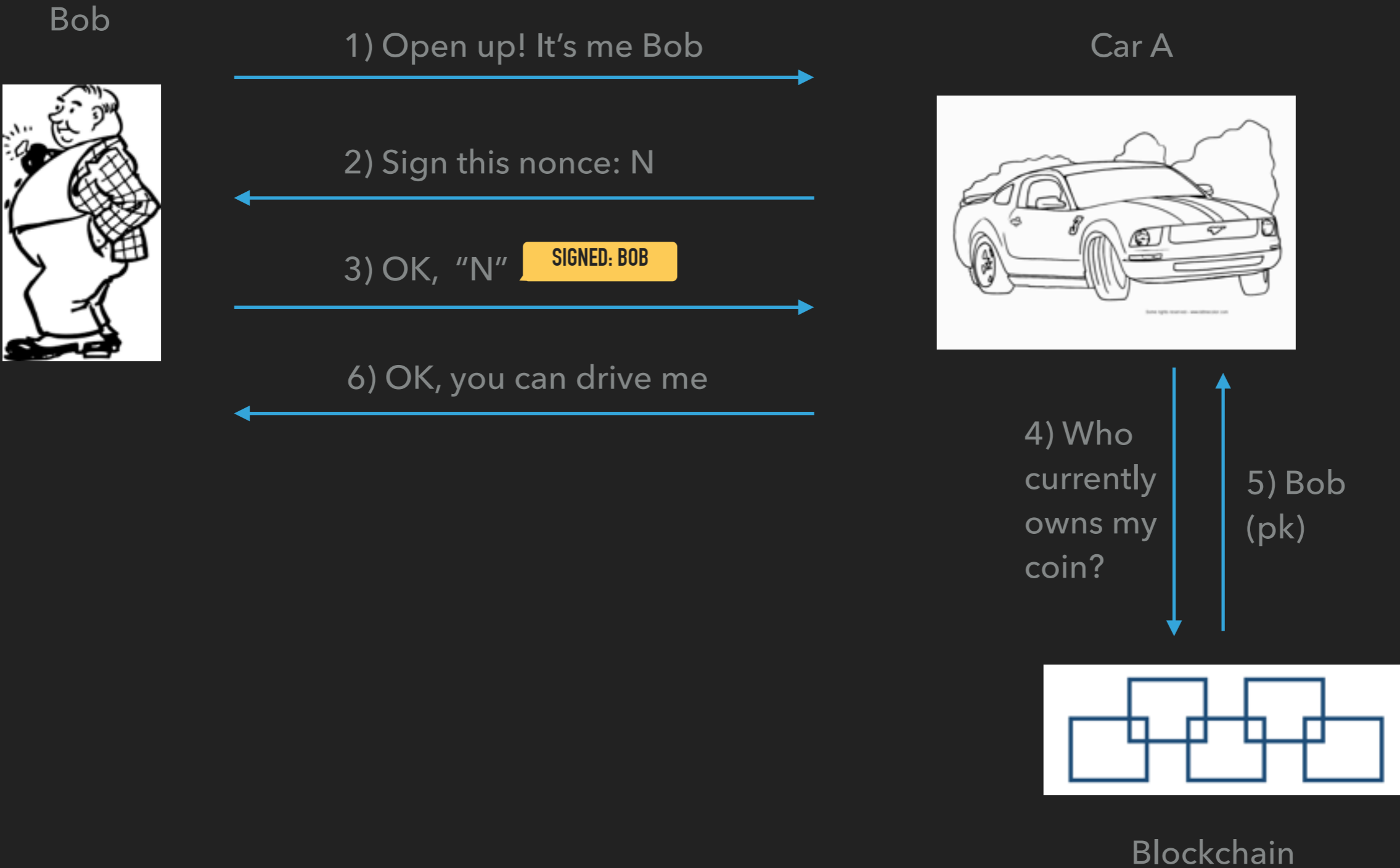
Car A



# SMART PROPERTY: AUTHENTICATION



# SMART PROPERTY: AUTHENTICATION



# SMART PROPERTY: TRANSFERRING OWNERSHIP



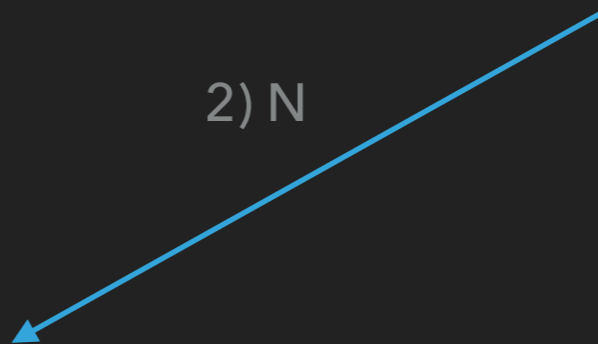
Alice (Buyer)

1) Random nonce  $N$

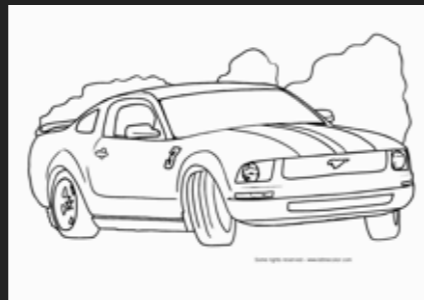


Bob (Seller)

2)  $N$



Car A

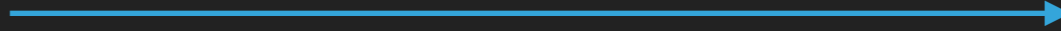


# SMART PROPERTY: TRANSFERRING OWNERSHIP



Alice (Buyer)

1) Random nonce N

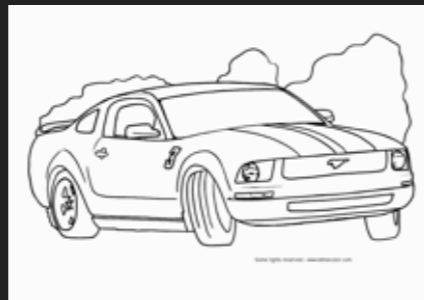


Bob (Seller)

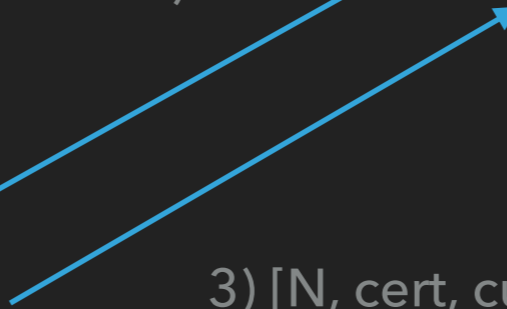
2) N



Car A



3) [N, cert, current owner, info]

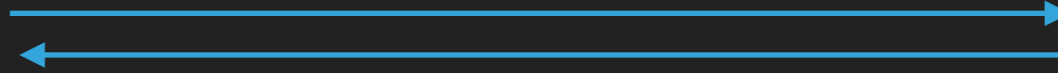


# SMART PROPERTY: TRANSFERRING OWNERSHIP



Alice (Buyer)

1) Random nonce N

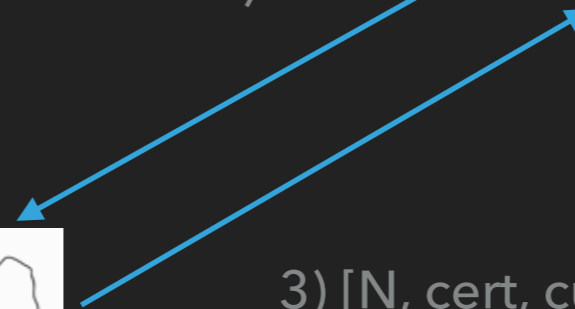


4) [N, cert, current owner, info]

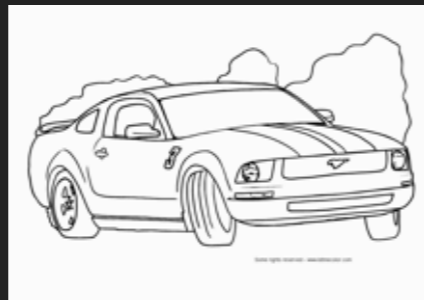


Bob (Seller)

2) N

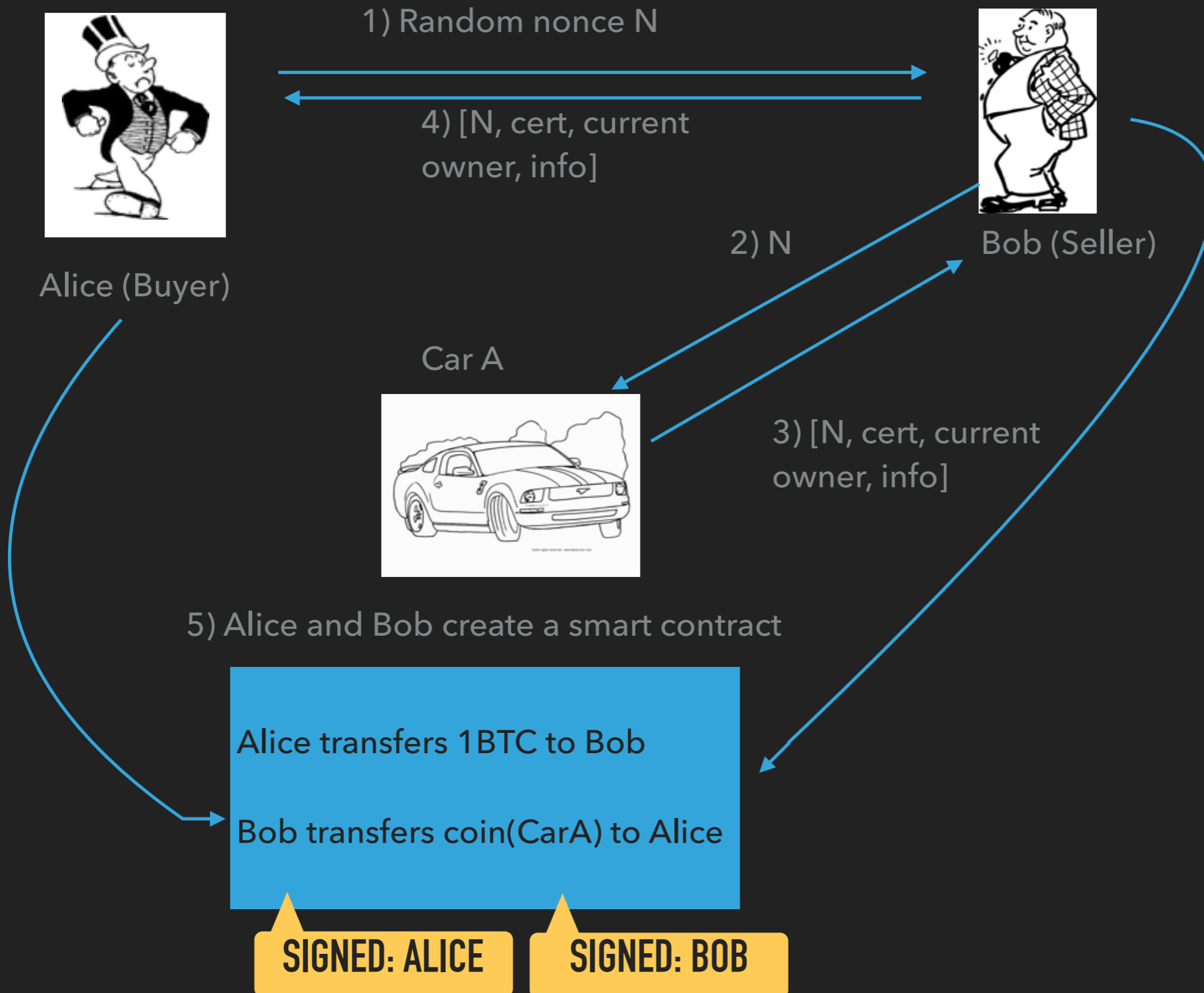


Car A

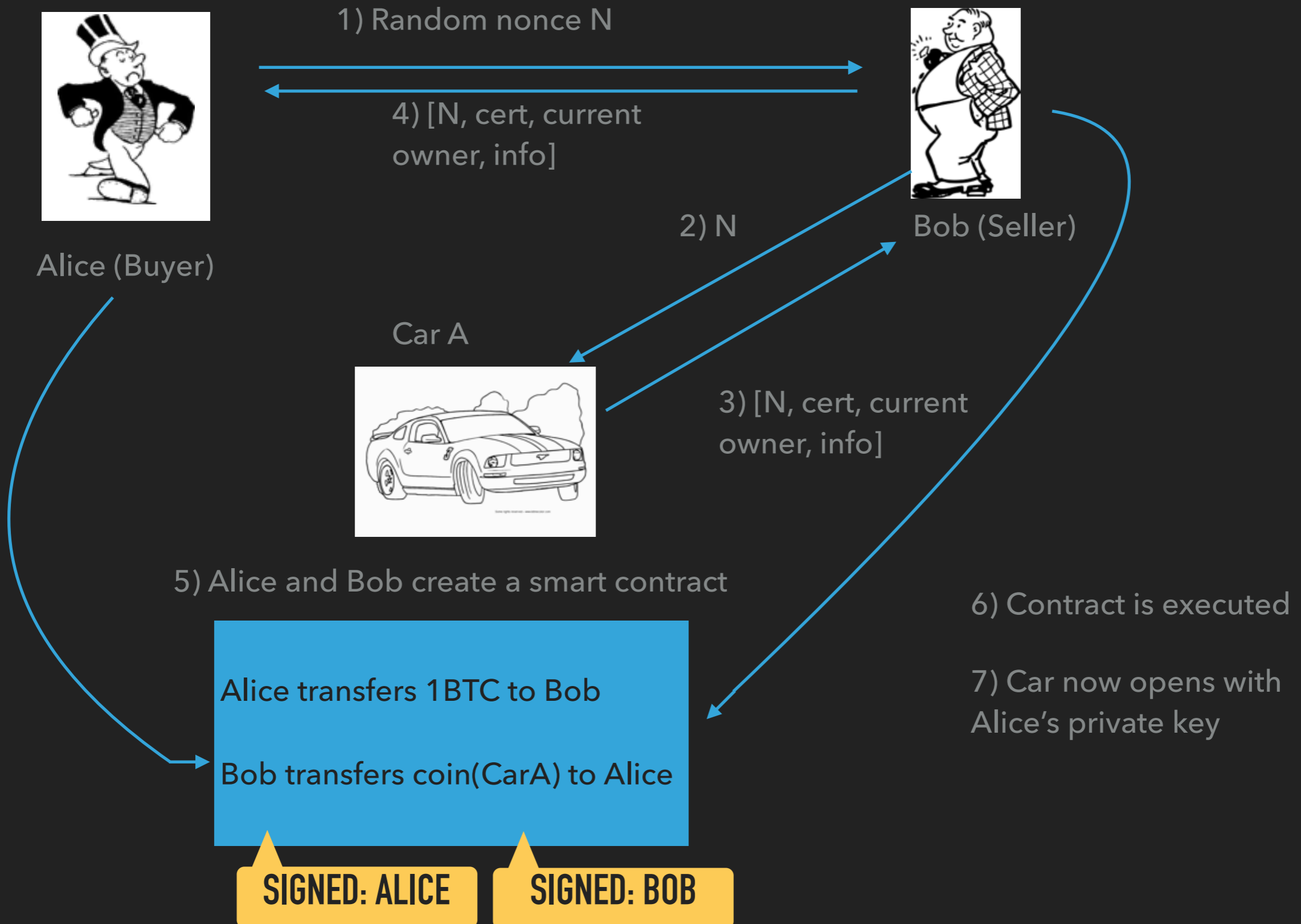


3) [N, cert, current owner, info]

# SMART PROPERTY: TRANSFERRING OWNERSHIP



# SMART PROPERTY: TRANSFERRING OWNERSHIP



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## SMART PROPERTY: ADVANTAGES

- ▶ Neither party can cheat the other
- ▶ Smart property can be used as collateral in a smart contract
- ▶ No need for centralised intermediary to track ownership

# SMART PROPERTY: PROBLEMS

- ▶ Only works for things that rely on computers
- ▶ You need to trust the original manufacturer
- ▶ Requires trusted computing
- ▶ Makes everything easily re-possessable
- ▶ Smart property transactions are worth more than normal BTC transactions: pollutes miner's incentives



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# PROVENANCE OF PHYSICAL OBJECTS?

- ▶ The blockchain provides provenance of coins
- ▶ Could it also provide provenance of physical stuff? Prove that it came from a certain place?

Is this wine really a 1985 Ponsot Burgundy?











Is this clothing 100% organic cotton?



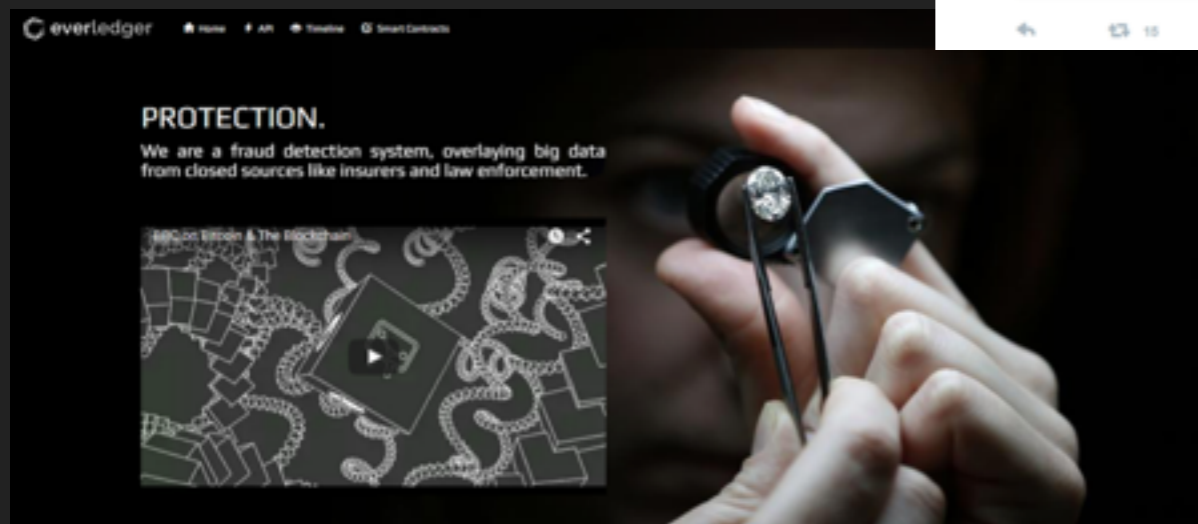
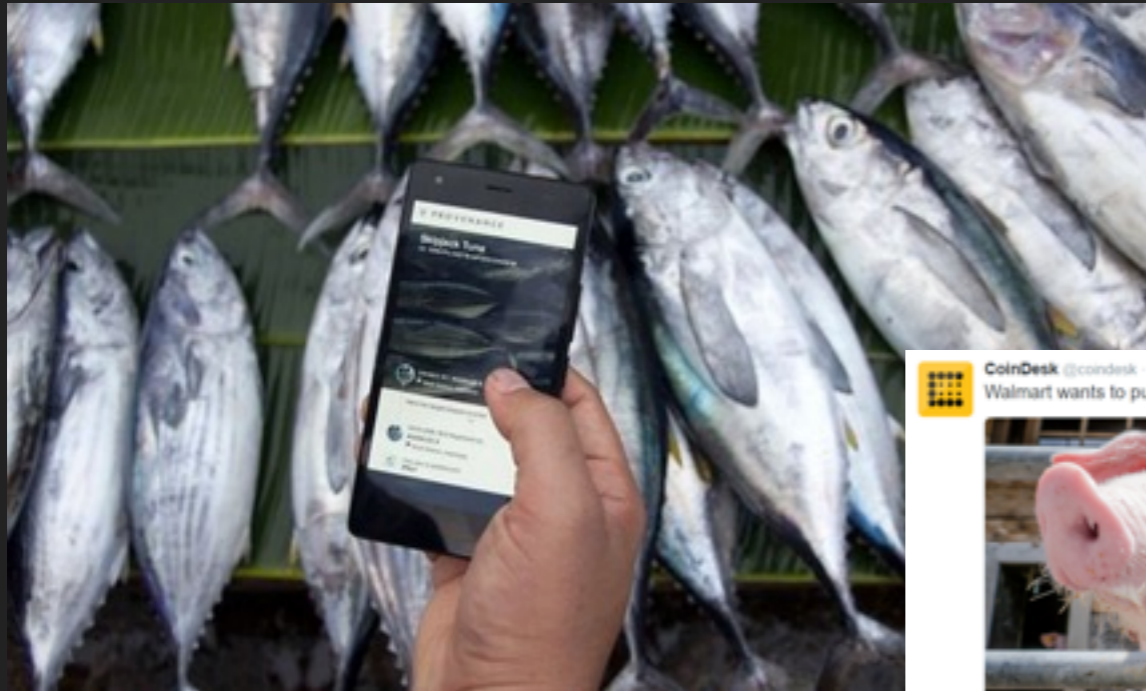
Is this burger 100% beef?



Is this burger 100% beef?



# BLOCKCHAIN FOR PROVENANCE OF PHYSICAL OBJECTS?



**“Every physical product [will] come with a digital ‘passport’ that proves authenticity (Is this product what it claims to be?) and origin (Where does this product come from?), creating an auditable record of the journey behind all physical products”**

**[provenance.org](https://provenance.org)**

# LIFE IS TOO SHORT TO DRINK FAKE WINE



Ponsot

Bottle #1 is represented by coin *burgundy1*

**SIGNED: PONSOT**



Rudy pays Ponsot

Ponsot transfers *burgundy1* to Rudy.

**SIGNED: PONSOT**



Rudy



Rudy transfers *burgundy1* to Bill

**SIGNED: RUDY**

Bill pays Rudy



Bill

# LIFE IS TOO SHORT TO DRINK FAKE WINE



Ponsot

Bottle #1 is represented by coin *burgundy1*

**SIGNED: PONSOT**

Rudy pays Ponsot

Ponsot transfers *burgundy1* to Rudy.

**SIGNED: PONSOT**



Rudy

~~Rudy transfers *burgundy1* to Bob~~

~~**SIGNED: RUDY**~~

Rudy transfers *burgundy1* to Bill

**SIGNED: RUDY**



Bill

Bill pays Rudy

## PROBLEM 1: CAN YOU TRUST THE PRODUCER?

- ▶ Bill has to trust that Ponsot is not malicious or incompetent
- ▶ Even if Bill trusts Ponsot, what if Rudy has created a fake Ponsot key, and burgundy1 was not created by the real Ponsot? How does Bill find out what Ponsot's real public key is?
- ▶ One solution is to check some external trustworthy look-up service which lists public keys and their owners (e.g. a key server or certificate authority)

# LIFE IS TOO SHORT TO DRINK FAKE WINE



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Bottle #1 is represented by coin *burgundy1*

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Ponsot transfers burgundy1 to Rudy.

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Rudy



~~Rudy transfers burgundy1 to Bob~~

~~**SIGNED: RUDY**~~



Rudy transfers burgundy1 to Bill

**SIGNED: RUDY**

Bill pays Rudy

Bill checks the chain all the way back to Ponsot's original sig, verifies against public keys from a trusted third party



Bill

PONSOT@BURGUNDY.COM: AI70XOHX  
RUDY@RUDY.COM: SHAXAE2A  
BILL@KOCH.COM: AHK8KIEZ

Trusted Third Party

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## PROBLEM 2: DOUBLE SELLING

- ▶ How does Bill know that *burgundy1* really represents the bottle Rudy is trying to sell?
- ▶ Rudy could have drunk the contents of the real bottle, or sold it
- ▶ Problem is particularly bad if many customers would still be willing to buy the good without a blockchain passport
  - ▶ Meat, raw materials, precious stones and metals, gold?

# TAMPER-PROOF SEALS

- ▶ RFID / EMV chips inside the seal (e.g. [blockverify.io](https://blockverify.io))
- ▶ Breaking the seal destroys the chip
- ▶ Java Card: a microcontroller that contains the object's private key, and responds to cryptographic challenges: "I am burgundy1"



# TAMPER-PROOF SEALS

- ▶ Problems:
- ▶ Private key kept on the chip, so vulnerable to cloning
- ▶ NFC chips can't do ECDSA
- ▶ Do you trust the chip manufacturer?
- ▶ Can only be opened once: not useful for things that need to be unboxed along the way: meat, cotton, rare metals or stones



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## HOW DECENTRALISED IS THIS?

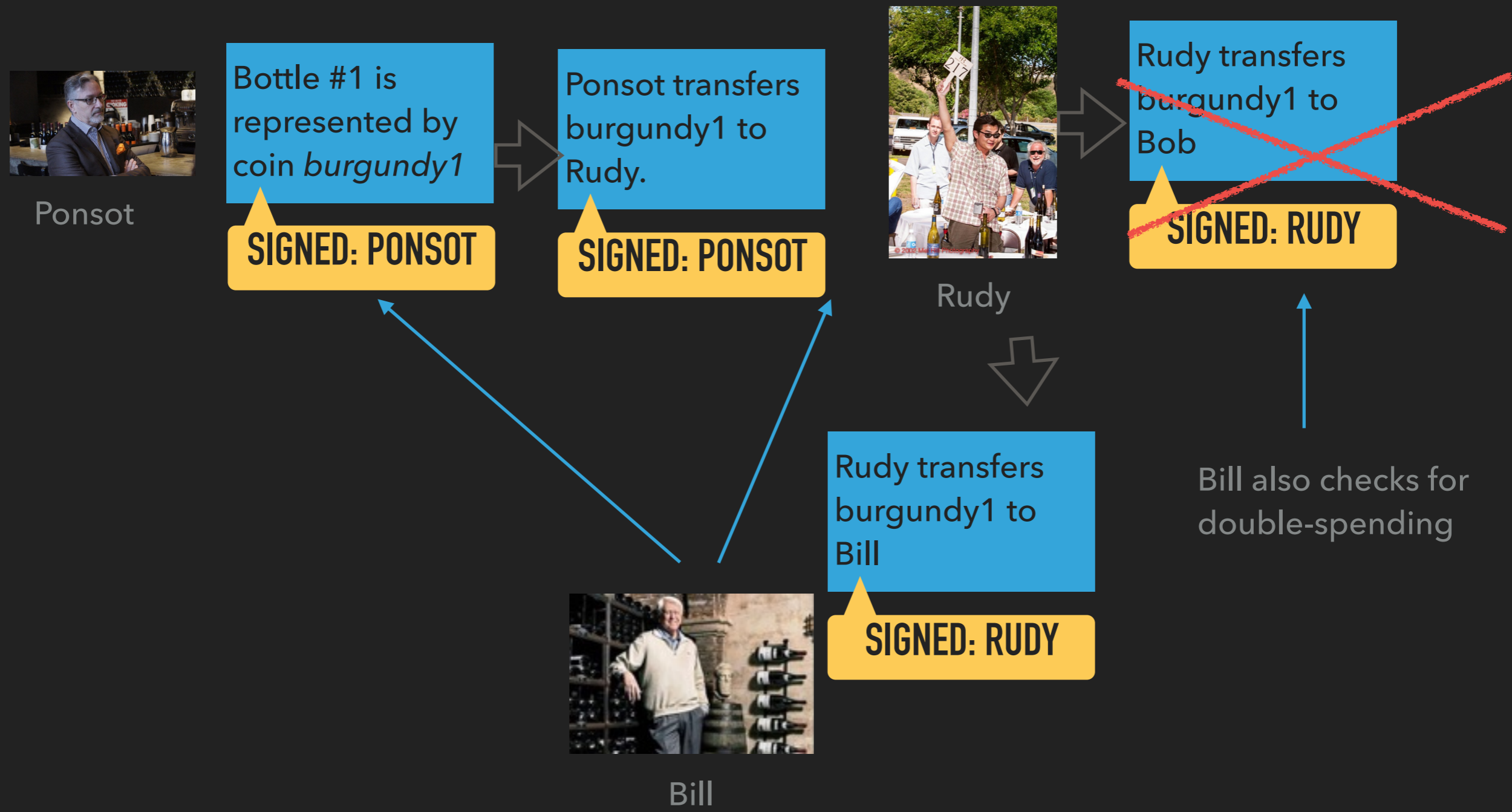
- ▶ Is this system really decentralised? Buyers have to trust:
  - ▶ Original producer and their coin minting process
  - ▶ Identity provider (probably centralised)
  - ▶ Tamper-proof chip manufacturers
- ▶ Is the distributed consensus protocol still worth it? Can we get the same level of assurance without it?

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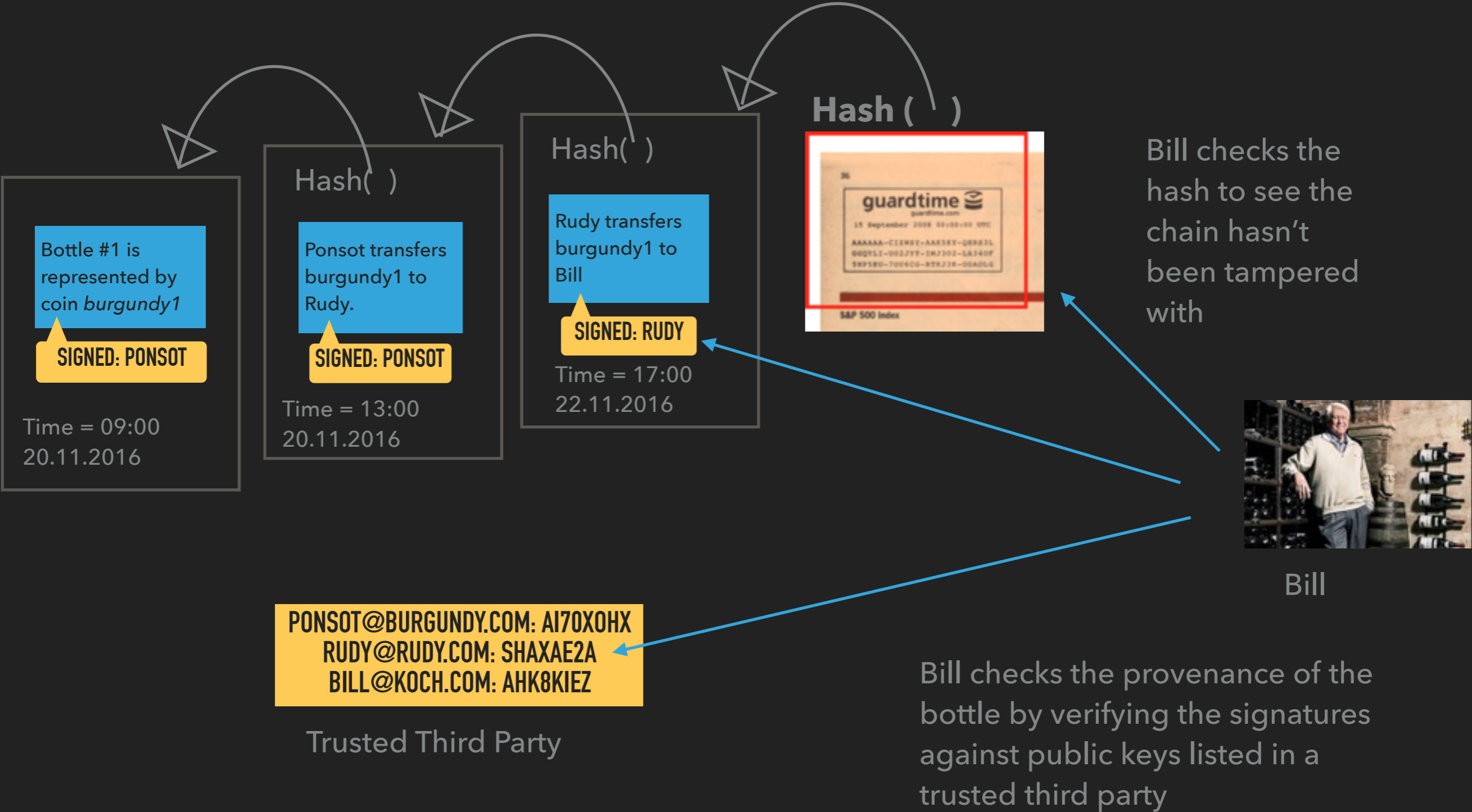
## DO WE NEED THE BLOCKCHAIN?

- ▶ Original producers and buyers already have incentives to block attempts by intermediaries to double-sell
- ▶ So they just need a record of who said what about each token, when, to whom

# DO WE NEED THE BLOCKCHAIN?



# SECURE TIME STAMPING WITH CHAINED HASH POINTERS



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## CHAINED HASH POINTERS FOR PROVENANCE

- ▶ Self-regulating: buyer can check where the object came from and check for double spending
- ▶ Any attempts to change history will break the hash pointer chain
- ▶ Bill can verify the signed messages against a trusted list of public identities:
  - ▶ Specifically, Ponsot's original message 'minting' the coin, and intermediate transactions

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# ADVANTAGES OF HASH CHAINS FOR PROVENANCE

- ▶ No need for mining pools, proof-of-work, or even a cryptocurrency
- ▶ No transaction costs or miner's rewards
- ▶ Lower computational costs
- ▶ Less environmental damage
- ▶ No 'polluting' of Bitcoin's carefully balanced miner's incentives
- ▶ Potentially resistant to quantum computing attacks (<http://eprint.iacr.org/2014/321.pdf>)

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# ADVANTAGES OF HASH CHAINS FOR PROVENANCE

- ▶ All transactions on bitcoin-style blockchains are public by default
- ▶ This is a potential privacy nightmare
- ▶ Chained hash pointers don't contain any transaction data...

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# WHEN DO YOU ACTUALLY NEED THE BLOCKCHAIN?

- ▶ The blockchain is essential to Bitcoin
- ▶ It enables us to prevent double spending of cryptocurrency using *distributed consensus*
- ▶ It's very expensive, but that's the cost of preventing double-spending in a trestles environment
- ▶ The blockchain is also essential to smart contracts: it ensures that we can make binding agreements on what code will run

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# SMART PROPERTY: YOU NEED MORE THAN A BLOCKCHAIN

- ▶ Smart property uses the blockchain
- ▶ But you still need to trust the original product manufacturer and be able to check their certificates
- ▶ You need to trust the object's computer
- ▶ Only works if the object is completely controlled by its computer
- ▶ All your smart property could become deposit / collateral
- ▶ Weird combination of trusted computing and decentralisation

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## PROVENANCE OF PHYSICAL GOODS: YOU DON'T NEED THE BLOCKCHAIN

- ▶ You don't need a full proof-of-work blockchain to track provenance of physical objects in a decentralised way
- ▶ This can be done more cheaply, with greater privacy, using simpler blockchain technology (invented in 1990!)
- ▶ Neither system works well for goods which require unpacking / repacking along the supply chain
- ▶ Either way, you also need an identity layer.

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## CONCLUSION

- ▶ Blockchains are useful for decentralised cryptocurrency, smart contracts and digital property
- ▶ They might help us create smart property, but smart property is weird
- ▶ For provenance, it's better to use chained hash pointers

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# THANK YOU / GRACIAS!

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▶ @RDBinns