2026

CRYPTO BULL RUN

Understand the Projects, Risks & Digital Financial System



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Inside this preview

Contents: original pages 4-5.

How crypto fits digital finance: original pages 17-19.

A research worksheet excerpt: original page 131.

The excerpts are not complete chapters. Original page numbers are retained. Links to omitted pages have been removed; numbered source references belong to the complete book.

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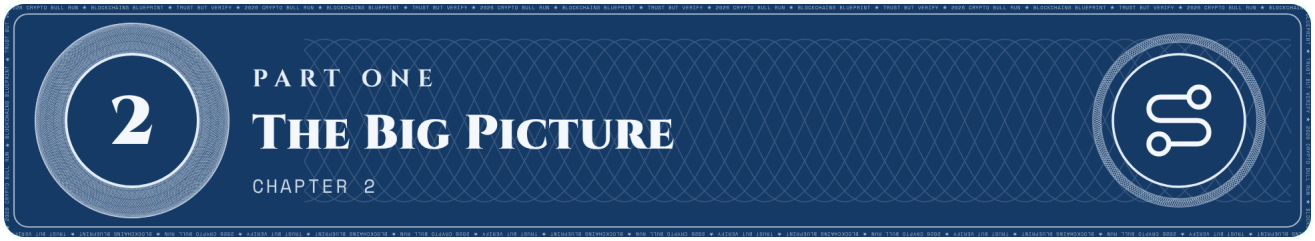
Historical market snapshot: October 3, 2026. Editorial review: October 7, 2026.

Price last verified October 12, 2026; the live product page and checkout take precedence.

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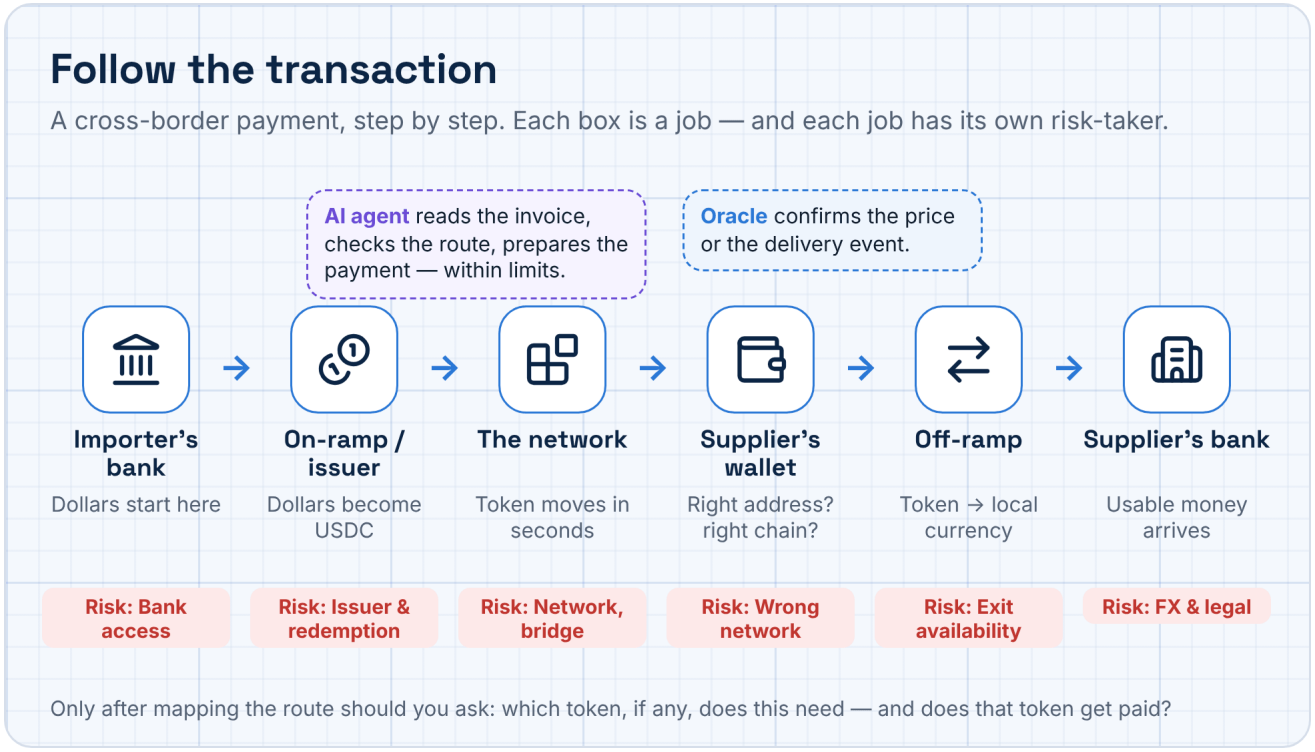
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Follow the Money: How Crypto Plugs Into Finance

Before you ask "will this coin go up?", ask "what job does it do, who pays for that job, and does the token get any of the money?"

Crypto Twitter talks about coins. Banks talk about workflows. The people who make money over full cycles learn to translate between the two. This chapter gives you the translation key: one story, four diagrams and five questions you can ask of any project in this book or any other.



The method: **name the job, then name the parts.** Ask where the money begins, what changes hands, whose records prove ownership and how the recipient ends up with something usable. Only then ask which token is needed, and whether success creates a lasting reason to hold it. Here's the method applied to one ordinary payment.

An importer pays a supplier

A small importer needs to pay a supplier overseas. The invoice is in dollars. The importer's money sits in a local bank, the supplier wants a different currency, and the shipment is waiting on a document. An AI assistant reads the invoice and checks the delivery record. A payments service offers several routes. Someone still has to confirm the recipient is legitimate, the exchange rate is fair and the payment is authorized.

A blockchain might help with *part* of that job. A stablecoin could carry dollar value between providers. A smart contract could release funds after a verified event. An agent could compare routes and prepare the instruction. A regulated firm could handle the conversion into local money. None of these pieces alone settles every question about the goods, the parties or the law. (This example is hypothetical, but it's a useful lens for reading real announcements.)

The six layers of digital finance

Every project in this book does one or more jobs in a six-layer stack. Mapping a coin to its layer is the fastest way to stop comparing apples with oranges.

The six layers of digital finance

Read from the asset held to the authority making the decision.

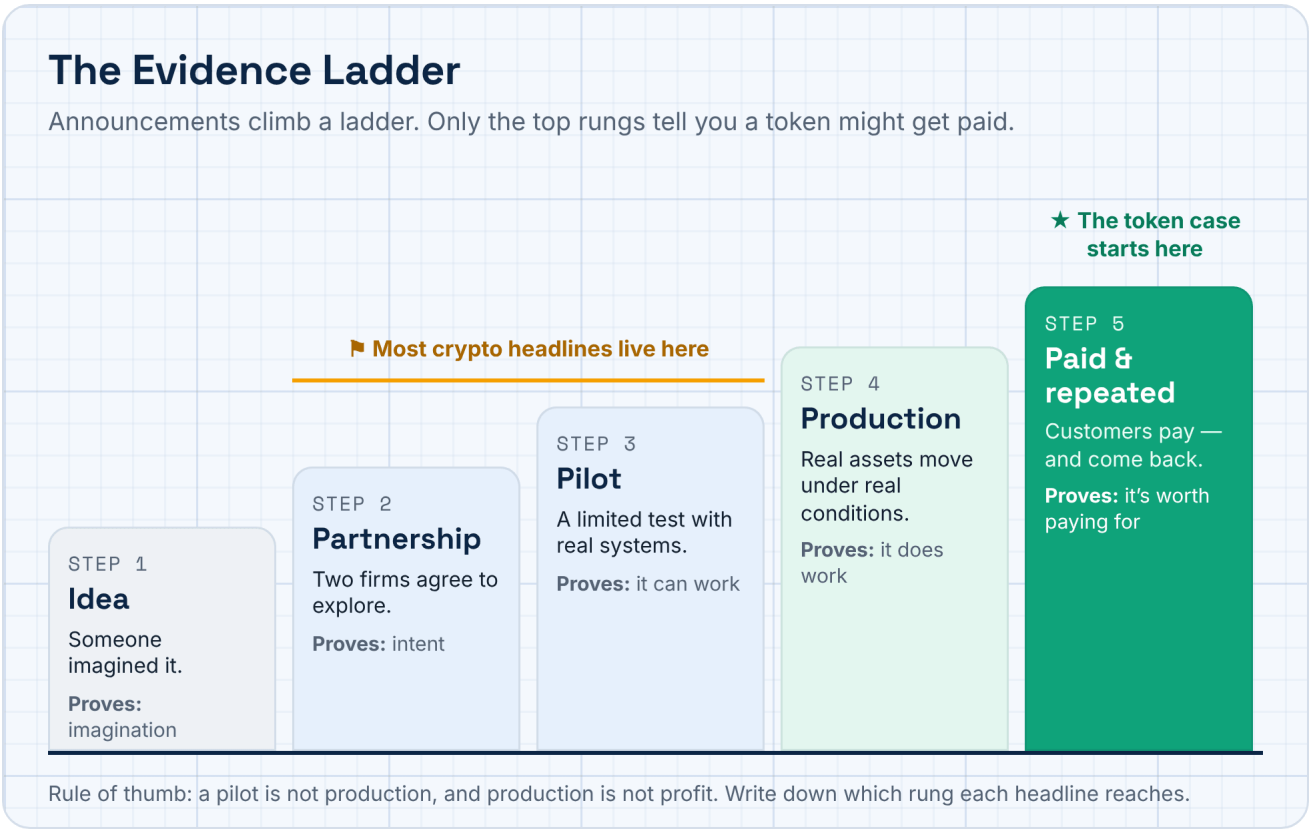
LAYER	COMPONENT	QUESTION
1 Claim	Native asset or legal claim	What is held, and any right to redeem
2 Custody	Wallet or custodian	Who can sign, recover or freeze access
3 Execution	Blockchain or shared ledger	Where instructions run and records settle
4 Services	Exchange, credit and savings	What financial service is delivered
5 Coordination	Data feeds and messaging	How applications receive external information
6 Decisions	People and AI agents	Who chooses the action within approved limits

x402 handles payment requests; NEAR provides execution and intents infrastructure. Neither is itself an AI decision-maker.

- **The claim** is *what you own*. A BTC balance, a dollar stablecoin and a tokenized fund share are three different things. One has no issuer, one is an IOU from a company, and one is a legal stake in a fund.
- **Custody & authorization** covers *who can move it*. A private key authorizes transfers, but the legal owner might be you, a company or a custodian's customer. An AI agent can be given signing access without becoming the owner.
- **Execution & settlement** is *where it's recorded*. A network records transactions and enforces the rules. Technical finality and legal finality are related, but they are not the same thing.
- **Financial services** are *what's built on top*: trading, lending, savings and collateral. Many users never learn which chain their app runs on.
- **Coordination** is *how systems talk*. Prices, identity, messages and events must reach the right app. Oracles and bridges help, and each connection adds assumptions.
- **Decisions** are *who chooses*. People and, increasingly, AI agents decide what to do. Automation makes the lower layers easier to use, and it can also execute a bad instruction faster than any human.

The Evidence Ladder

Announcements climb a ladder. Most crypto headlines live on the middle rungs, and token prices often trade as if the top rung were already reached.





Coin Report Card (DIY)

Grade any coin in about 20 minutes, using the same five grades we used in Chapter 3. Copy these pages for every coin you own or want to own.

Start with the job, not the price chart. If you can't fill in the first row in one sentence, stop there. That *is* your answer. Data you'll need: fees and revenue from DefiLlama[3], supply and market cap from CoinGecko[2], and the project's own documents for everything else.

Step 1: The job and the transaction

Follow one transaction all the way through (Chapter 2). If you can't fill a row, write it down as an open question. Unknowns are findings too.

QUESTION	MY ANSWER
Coin and ticker	
Date graded	
The job, in one sentence	*e.g., "lets anyone settle dollar payments 24/7"*
Who uses it, and for what?	*a real customer or workflow, with a source*
Who pays, and in what?	*the fee payer and the asset they pay in*
Who gets paid?	*validators, a treasury, token holders, an issuer...*
Who's on the hook if it fails?	*issuer, custodian, oracle, bridge, governance...*

Keep the questions.

Go deeper with the full book.

Fourteen project deep dives connect the ideas, the financial roles and the risks. Use the worksheets to record what you know, what is uncertain and what you want to research next.

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This is reading material and a research workbook, not a promise of a bull market or returns. The title is not a forecast.

General education, not personalized investment advice.
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