

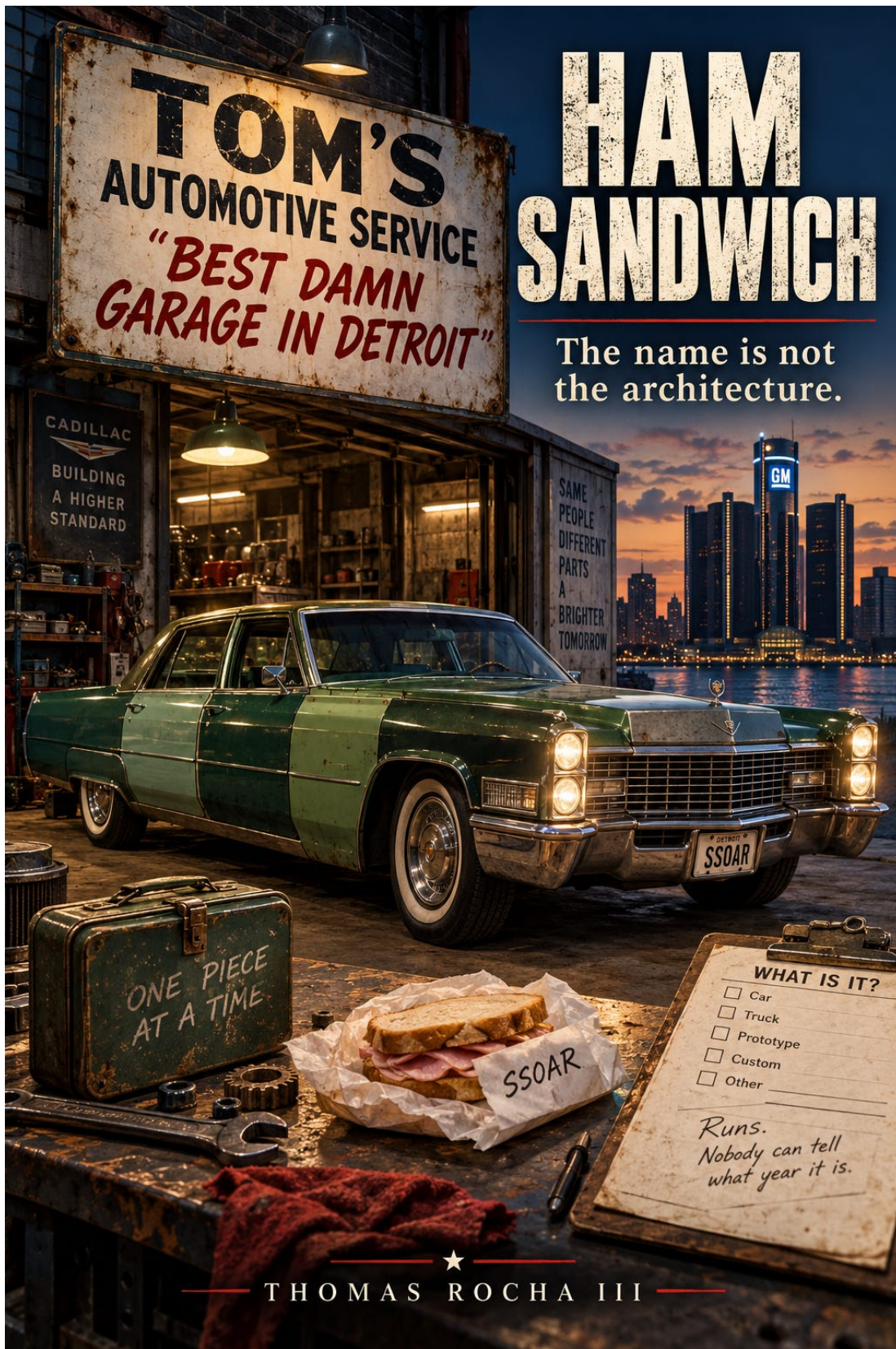
Ham Sandwich

The name is not the architecture.



THOMAS ROCHA III

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HAM SANDWICH

The name is not
the architecture.

CADILLAC
BUILDING
A HIGHER
STANDARD

SAME
PEOPLE
DIFFERENT
PARTS
A
BRIGHTER
TOMORROW

- WHAT IS IT?
- ☐ Car
 - ☐ Truck
 - ☐ Prototype
 - ☐ Custom
 - ☐ Other

*Runs.
Nobody can tell
what year it is.*

★
THOMAS ROCHA III

A man works on an assembly line in Detroit. Every night, on his way out, he takes a car part.

A fender one week. A transmission the next. A door. A quarter panel. Nobody notices because nobody is looking for a Cadillac. If they are looking at all, they are looking for a missing fender.

Eventually he has enough parts sitting in his garage to build a car.

He builds it.

It runs.

Nobody can name the model year.

That is not a joke about a man procuring a Cadillac one piece at a time, although it is also that. It is one of the truest things anyone has ever said about how a real invention gets made. You do not always sit down and design the whole car. You solve a problem, then another, and one day you are standing in the garage looking at something that plainly runs, built out of parts that had not fit together that way, and you realize you have to fill out a form that asks what it is.

I know a little about this.

I spent years solving specific problems. A video call that should have handled a missed message better than it did. A waiting room that let the wrong thing in. A handoff that quietly lost track of who was actually in charge. I was not building an architecture. I was fixing what was in front of me, one piece at a time, the way you do.

Then I had a garage full of parts, and they all fit together, and none of the words I already had described what they fit into.

So I named it. Session-Scoped Orthogonal Authority and Routing. SSOAR, if you're in a hurry.

It is a fine name. I stand by it. But I am not going to pretend it belongs in the same weight class as SNAFU or FUBAR. Those are the Secretariat and Man o' War of acronyms, forged in exactly the right circumstances by people with better things to do than write a name, probably uniformed members of the armed forces, which is of course why the names are perfect. Mine had a form to fill out. It shows.

And right on schedule came the objection, delivered the way objections always are, as though it were a discovery: nobody else calls it that.

Correct. Nobody else calls it that, for the extremely good reason that I made the word up. A standards body will eventually agree on a name for this, and it will probably have fourteen hyphens and a version number, or it will get announced at a keynote as though it fell out of the sky that morning. Fine. Good, even. But I have watched a system fail while everybody in the room argued about the vocabulary, and I am not inclined to wait for the committee before I say what I already know.

Americans have never been shy about this particular argument. You can call me Ray. You can call me Jay. You can call me Ray J. or R.J., although eventually even Raymond J. Johnson had to draw the line somewhere. David Allan Coe sang what may be the perfect country-and-western song and still never got called by his name. Johnny Cash sang about a man who fought his father over being named Sue, understood why the old man had done it, made peace with him, and still wanted no part of passing the name along. Country music may have a monopoly on what not to call me, what you may call me, and what happens when you never call me by my name.

So let's be honest about what's actually being asked when someone says "nobody calls it that."

They mean: does the thing exist independently of what you call it?

Yes. And that question is answered functionally, not lexically.

Strictly speaking, “nobody else calls it that” is a fair correction if I’m claiming the industry adopted my acronym. It has not. But when I say the field is converging on this, I’m making a functional claim, not a branding one. The question was never whether anyone picked up my terminology. It’s whether the invariants are showing up in what they build.

Does it begin under granted authority? Does that authority remain bounded through time? Does it govern who or what may participate, and what each may do? When the undertaking changes systems, models, modalities, or jurisdictions, is the transition evaluated before it becomes authoritative? Does it stay inside the governing authority boundary, or quietly originate a second, independent one? And can the record prove the authority before, during, and after the transition, rather than reconstructing a plausible story afterward from whatever logs survived?

If those things are present, you can call it whatever you want. Call it a session. Call it an interaction. Call it continuous authorization, or a mandate, or, honestly, call it a ham sandwich.

I mean that as precisely as I can put it. Get an AI agent to buy you a ham sandwich and watch how fast the joke turns real. Any sandwich, or the one you actually wanted? Up to what price? From which merchant? May it swap the ingredients? May it hand the order to a different agent halfway through? When it’s done, can anyone prove the sandwich that showed up is still the one you authorized, or just a sandwich that technically arrived? If your architecture can’t answer that for a five-dollar lunch, it was never going to answer it for a car, a trade, a prescription, or a fire-control command. The sandwich isn’t the point. It’s small enough that nothing can hide.

Naming it does not create the invariants. The absence of a name does not remove them. A fashionable label with nothing behind it is still an

empty box, and a battered, homemade acronym with everything behind it is still the thing that runs.

Detroit renames green every autumn. Sea Mist. Alpine Moss. Coastal Sage. Fourteen words for one color, because the color alone was never going to justify the paint surcharge. Nobody thinks the car became a different color. They just paid more to hear it described differently.

I'd rather be the guy with the Cadillac.

Parts spanning more than twenty model years, one piece at a time, out of a plant that never intended any of them to end up together. It ran. It still runs. And when the courthouse finally tried to give it a title, nobody could agree what to put on the form, because the boxes on the form assumed a car that came from one place in one year, and this one didn't.

Somebody will eventually give this a name everyone agrees on. Until they do, I already know what it is, because I built it, one piece at a time, out of the parts that were actually failing.

Call it SSOAR. Call it a session. Call it a ham sandwich.

Just don't tell me it isn't there.

Call it anything but Sue.