ONCE UPON A DELIVERABLE

Fairy Tales for Project Managers who have seen some things

D.B. Trench

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This book is a work of satire.
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DEDICATION

For every project manager who ever whispered "It's fine" while absolutely nothing was fine.
This one's for you.

FOREWORD

Project management has always had two realities.

The first is the one we put in reports, presentations, dashboards, and neatly aligned Gantt charts—the world where things are mostly on track, risks are "under review," and everyone appears strangely optimistic about timelines that were unrealistic from the moment someone wrote them in a boardroom.

The second reality is the one project managers actually live in.

A reality of flaming pumpkins, vanishing vendors, stakeholders who disappear until the moment the deliverable is due, subcontractors who operate on a time dimension unknown to science, and dashboards that insist everything is green while half the project is actively on fire.

This book lives entirely in that second reality.

Once Upon a Deliverable is not merely a collection of fairy tales—it's a mirror held up to the absurdity, chaos, resilience, and dark humor that define real project delivery. Through familiar characters—Red Riding Hood, Jack, Cinderella, the Big Bad Wolf, and many others—D.B. Trench has captured something rare: the truth of project management wrapped in whimsy, satire, and storytelling that only someone who's been in the trenches could write.

These stories work because they're not actually exaggerations. They're truths, disguised in fables.

Every PM will recognize themselves in Red Riding Hood's scope battles, in Cinderella's midnight go-lives, in Snow White's subcontractor catastrophes, and in the Wolf's governance nightmares. They will laugh. They will wince. They will feel seen in ways that few business books dare to portray.

Most importantly, they will remember that project management, for all its chaos, is a deeply human profession—kept alive by people who refuse to let the monster win.

If you've ever lived through a doomed initiative, navigated an impossible stakeholder landscape, or attended a meeting where the only agenda item was existential dread... welcome.
You're in the right place.

And if you've never worked on a project like that?

Don't worry.

You will.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

This is not a textbook.
This is not a methodology guide.
This is not a PMI exam prep resource.

This is a survival manual disguised as a storybook.

Each chapter reimagines a classic fairy tale through the eyes of a project manager dealing with monsters, villains, talking dashboards, self-writing contracts, magical delays, heroic PMs, and the eternal struggle against scope creep.

Every tale contains three things:

1. **A familiar project disaster**

2. **A satire-filled moral that PMs instantly recognize**

3. **A quiet wink that says: "Yes, this actually happened to me."**

Read one story or devour the entire collection.
Laugh at the absurdity.
Cry (a little).
And remember:
You're not alone in this madness.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

AUTHOR BIO

D.B. Trench is a project manager, storyteller, and creator of PMTales—the world where project management chaos meets creativity. With years spent navigating multimillion-dollar programs, conflicting stakeholders, rogue requirements, and dashboards that lie, D.B. has seen enough to fill several RAID logs and at least one enchanted storybook.

He writes to give PMs a place to laugh, learn, and feel less alone in the madness.

Find more stories, tools, and templates at **PMTales.com**.

Core Premise

ACT I — THE JUNIOR PM CHRONICLES

Where bright new project managers meet reality for the first time.

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1. The Three Little PM Pigs

Core Premise:
Three junior PMs build governance structures out of straw, sticks, and bricks.
Risk (the Big Bad Wolf) wipes out the first two instantly.
Only Brickford's overbuilt fortress survives — and becomes mandatory PMO reading.

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2. Snow White and the Seven Subcontractors

Core Premise:
Snow White must coordinate seven subcontractors, each representing a different delivery problem.
Deadlines slip, tempers flare, and alignment dissolves.
She learns that subcontractor management is less "magical" and more "continuous escalation."

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3. Jack and the Beanstalk: The Vendor Escalation

Core Premise:
Jack invests his budget in a vendor's "magic beans."
A towering escalation issue grows overnight.
Now he must climb it and renegotiate with a giant who has opinions about scope.

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4. Little Red Riding Hood: Scope Creep Survivor

Core Premise:
Red sets out with a simple deliverable.
Stakeholders add "just one more" enhancement until the basket becomes a runaway project.
The Wolf is frightening — but nowhere near as dangerous as unmanaged scope.

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5. Cinderella and the Midnight Go-Live

Core Premise:
Cinderella is responsible for a royal go-live with an impossible deadline.
At midnight, the production environment becomes a flaming pumpkin.
She discovers that miracles are not a deployment strategy.

ACT II — THE VILLAINS' POINT OF VIEW

Five tales where the "bad guys" finally explain themselves… and somehow make valid project points.

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6. The Big Bad Wolf's Project Debrief

Core Premise:
The Wolf argues he isn't a monster — he's a misunderstood risk trigger.
His debrief reveals the pigs ignored every warning sign.
This is the first Lessons Learned where the villain might be right.

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7. The Evil Queen's Steering-Committee Minutes

Core Premise:
The Evil Queen runs a steering committee with absolute authority and zero patience.
Her mirror serves as the analytics dashboard from hell.
The minutes show the kingdom's real problem: no one understands resource capacity.

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8. Magic Beans Ltd — Q2 Investor Update

Core Premise:
The vendor behind Jack's disaster proudly reports "strong innovation momentum" despite catastrophic delivery.
Their Q2 update reframes every failure as a "strategic win."
It's vendor spin at its most magical — and most dangerous.

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9. Red Riding Hood: The Big Bad Stakeholder's Backlog Grooming Notes

Core Premise:
From the Wolf's perspective, he wasn't creeping — he was contributing.
His backlog notes show Red frustrated him with vague requirements and unclear acceptance criteria.
Turns out even predators want better user stories.

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10. The Wicked Stepmother's Leadership Memo

Core Premise:
The Stepmother defends her leadership style in a kingdom-wide memo.
Her directives are ruthless, confusing, and technically compliant.
It's a masterclass in toxic executive communication disguised as empowerment.

ACT III — SENIOR PM NIGHTMARES

Where experienced project managers face the horrors only years in the trenches prepare you for.

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11. Rumpelstiltskin: The Consultant Who Charged by the Syllable

Core Premise:
A senior PM hires a consultant whose billing model charges for every deliverable — and every syllable *within* those deliverables.
Suddenly, scope inflation becomes a financial apocalypse.
This is where procurement meets despair.

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12. The Emperor's New Methodology

Core Premise:
Two "thought leaders" sell the Emperor an invisible methodology no one dares admit they can't see.
Executives praise it, teams panic, and governance evaporates.
A kingdom marches proudly into chaos with no actual process in place.

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13. Goldilocks and the Three RAID Logs

Core Premise:
Goldilocks is brought in to audit a "simple" project.
She finds three cursed RAID logs: one outdated, one overwritten, and one actively dangerous.
Naturally, she breaks into the Project Bears' PM office to investigate.

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14. Pinocchio: The Lying Status Report

Core Premise:
Pinocchio cannot stop lying during status updates.
Each deception makes his dashboard stretch further into fiction.
Eventually, the report collapses under its own wooden
dishonesty.

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15. Tower of Babel: The Alignment Initiative

Core Premise:
The kingdom attempts a massive alignment initiative requiring
everyone to "speak the same language."
It collapses immediately into miscommunication, culture wars,
and linguistic disaster.
Babel learns that alignment is easy — until stakeholders start
talking.

ACT IV — THE FINAL INITIATIVE

Where heroes, villains, subcontractors, wolves, giants, and exhausted PMs unite for the kingdom's last and most impossible project.

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16. The Final Initiative — A PMTales Multiverse Crossover

Core Premise:
A catastrophic Portfolio Monster forms from every abandoned deliverable, outdated RAID log, and half-finished initiative in the kingdom.

All PMs and villains — Red, Jack, Snow White, Cinderella, the Wolf, the Queen, the Giant, and even Magic Beans Ltd — are forced into one desperate alliance.
The only way to defeat the monster?
Deliver the one artifact no project has ever truly had: **a clear requirement everyone agrees on**.

The Three Little PM Pigs

The Royal Kickoff

In the Kingdom of Deliveria, the Crown had barely announced the "Wolf-Proof Housing Initiative" before three project managers strutted into the royal courtyard like they'd already updated the dashboard to **Green**.

Strawson, newly certified and aggressively optimistic, clutching a project plan he absolutely copy and pasted **on the way over**.

Stickley, the Agile purist who refuses to commit to anything longer than a two-week sprint — including brunch.

Brickford, the senior PM who has survived three restructurings, one ERP go-live, and zero patience for magical thinking. He's already holding a contingency plan because he knows how wolves — and sponsors — behave.

This was the project team chosen to deliver houses that *wouldn't* get blown over by a carnivorous stakeholder with chronic lung power.

What could possibly go wrong?

Strawson Builds the Straw House (Fast, Cheap, Wrong)

Strawson sprinted ahead, thrilled to lead Phase 1. His plan was simple:
Go fast. Use straw. Hope for the best.

"Speed to market!" he declared proudly.
"Happy stakeholders! MVP! Minimum viable protection!"

He stacked straw like a caffeinated intern building a prototype.
The Queen adored the early forecast: "On time AND under budget?"
Strawson updated the highlight report to **green pastel** because it matched the vibe.

He celebrated with drinks.

Stickley Builds the Stick House (Agile Chaos)

Stickley, meanwhile, insisted on running a *proper Agile project*.
"No building until we have user stories," he proclaimed.

The story was simple:
**As a Pig, I want a house that doesn't collapse when
huffed at, so that I don't get eaten.**

By Sprint 4, the stick house was… **adequate.**
Velocity was stable.
The burn-down looked acceptable enough for social media.
The Queen sent a thumbs-up emoji.

Stickley posed proudly with the team under their "Definition of
Done" poster, completely unaware of how wrong that definition
was.

Brickford Builds the Brick Fortress (Reality-Based PMO Discipline)

Brickford took one look at the requirements, sighed like a guy who's opened too many RAID logs, and built a fortress.

His risk log was titled: **Mr. Wolf – Impact: Death.**

Mitigation: Bricks, mortar, reinforced door.
Contingency: Anti-huff chimney system.
Fallback: Two-factor pig authentication.

The sponsor shrieked at the timeline and budget.
Brickford calmly replied,

"That's not a budget increase. That's the cost of not becoming lunch." Deliverable: A house with an **actual chance** of surviving reality.

The Wolf Arrives Early (Because of Course He Does)

Strawson's highlight report **still said Green** when the Big Bad Wolf arrived ahead of schedule, following his own Agile calendar.

The wolf inspected the straw house, inhaled deeply, and delivered a Level-3 Sponsor Huff™.

The house lasted **0.7 seconds**.

Strawson's post-mortem was short but honest:
"We de-scoped wind-load testing to hit the deadline."

Strawson Runs to Stickley (Emergency Cross-Functional Collaboration)

Strawson sprinted, screaming, to Stickley's stick house.
"WE NEED TO MOVE TO PRODUCTION NOW!"

Stickley opened the window, delighted:
"Great retrospective opportunity!"

They attempted emergency sprint planning while the wolf circled outside like a dissatisfied executive reviewing a budget request.

Scope creep arrived in the form of survival instincts.

Stick House Collapse (Daily Stand-Up, Literally)

Stickley tried to negotiate reinforcement.

"We'll need sponsor sign-off," he said.
Strawson yelled,
"HE'S EATING THE DOOR — THAT'S SIGN-OFF!"

They were mid-daily-stand-up when the wolf huffed once, puffed twice, and the stick house folded like a poorly structured Gantt chart.

Sticky notes drifted through the air as both pigs ran for their lives.

The Brick House Siege (Risk Response in Action)

The wolf arrived at Brickford's brick fortress, huffing like a VP who just discovered the final invoice.

Brickford opened Microsoft Teams, put the wolf on mute, and said:

"As you can see in slide 17, your huffing velocity is well within acceptable tolerance"

"You're welcome to continue, but I have a lessons-learned session in ten minutes and you're not on the attendee list."

Three risk responses triggered.
One change request denied.
The house did not move.

Wolf Fatigue & Tea Service

Eventually, the wolf gave up — exhausted, wheezing, and reconsidering his life choices.

He asked, defeated,
"...do you have Wi-Fi?"

Brickford, consummate professional, offered him tea.

Because even when stakeholders try to eat you, hospitality matters.

Final Lessons & Brickford Victory Lap

The pigs gathered outside Brickford's fortress, smiling with the kind of relief normally reserved for projects that survive UAT.

The wolf stood beside them sipping tea — humbled, calm, and no longer a threat to structural integrity.

They lived safely.
On time (Brickford time).
Slightly over budget.
But very much alive.

PM Moral of the Story

- Fast + Cheap = Lunch.

- An MVP works only if the Minimum isn't "Gets You Eaten."

- User stories are lovely until the user is a predator.

- A risk log is not bureaucracy — it's life insurance.

- And when the wolf comes early, the only thing that saves you is the house you had the courage to **over-engineer**.

Brickford still scheduled the retrospective for next week.
Because closure matters.

"And somewhere, in a quiet corner of Deliveria, Strawson is still updating the RAID log to say 'Wolf risk – closed – mitigated by tea.'"