

- A PMTALES FIELD GUIDE -

# ONCE UPON A DELIVERABLE

FAIRY TALES FOR PROJECT MANAGERS  
WHO HAVE SEEN SOME THINGS



D.B. TRENCH

PMTALES FIELD GUIDE

# Once Upon a Deliverable

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*Fairy tales for project managers who have seen some things*

*D.B. Trench*

*A PMTales book*

# Copyright

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This book is a work of satire. Names, characters, businesses, organizations, places, events, and incidents are either products of the author's imagination or are used in a fictitious, parodic manner.

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# Dedication

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For every project manager who ever whispered “It’s fine” while  
absolutely nothing was fine.

This one’s for you.

# Foreword

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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 a collection of project-management fables for professionals who know that delivery is rarely defeated by villains alone. More often it is undone by optimism without math, governance without courage, urgency without preparation, and alignment that exists only in PowerPoint.

If you have ever inherited a timeline built entirely from hope, if you have ever updated a RAID log with the weary dignity of a battlefield medic, and if you have ever sat in a meeting where the agenda item was clearly existential dread disguised as a status update, you are in the right place.

## About This Book

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This is a book of project-management fairy tales.

Not because the work is imaginary. Because the language around it often is.

Inside, familiar stories are reassembled as modern delivery life: scope expansion presented as alignment, governance performed as weather, timelines sustained by formatting, and decision-making redistributed so evenly that no one can be found near it afterward.

Some chapters are stories. Others take the form of minutes, memos, debriefs, backlog notes, and other polished records produced in the brief interval between “under control” and “please see attached.”

You can read the book in order, or open it at random and meet the system currently visiting your calendar.

The pattern rarely changes:

something ordinary enters the process,  
the process acquires language,  
the language acquires confidence,  
and the confidence is circulated before the facts are ready.

This is satire.

It just happens to be written in a dialect many workplaces already speak fluently.

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## A note before the stories

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### **Get the lost bonus tale — free.**

Once Upon a Deliverable contains several fairy tales. However, there is a long lost tale recently discovered.

*The Pied Piper and the Stakeholder Engagement Plan* is the story of outsourced clarity, rented rhythm, and the project that mistook temporary calm for adoption. It did not make the final book. It is available exclusively to PMTales subscribers.

[PMTales.com/pied-piper](https://PMTales.com/pied-piper)

Enter your email and receive the bonus tale immediately. You will also receive The Dispatch — weekly field notes from inside the same machinery these stories are about.

# ACT I - THE JUNIOR PM CHRONICLES

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**Field note: Enter carefully. The deadlines look charming from a distance.**

# 1. The Three Little PM Pigs

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Weak governance meets a stakeholder with lungs and opinions.



**I**n the Kingdom of Deliveria, the Crown launched a bold new initiative called the **Wolf-Proof Housing Program**, which sounded impressive until someone asked whether it had funding, requirements, or a decision-maker.

It had a logo.

Three project managers were assigned.

Strawson believed in speed, confidence, and the healing power of a green dashboard.

Stickley believed in collaboration, alignment, and workshops long enough to require catering.

Brickford believed in controls, contingency planning, and the radical notion that a deliverable should survive contact with reality.

Their mandate was simple: build three houses capable of withstanding one known threat.

The threat had already been identified.

He was a wolf.

Naturally, leadership decided not to get bogged down in preparation.

## **Strawson and the House of Straw**



Strawson went first because Strawson always went first.

“Speed is strategy,” he said, which is the kind of sentence people say right before a project becomes an audit exhibit.

He chose straw.

It was cheap, immediate, and highly attractive to people who would not personally be inside it during failure.

“Do we know if straw is wolf-resistant?” asked a junior analyst.

Strawson gave him the patient smile of a man who had confused confidence with expertise.

“We are not here to boil the ocean,” he said. “We are here to deliver value.”

Nobody knew what that meant, but it sounded important enough to end the meeting.

By Friday, the straw house was complete.

It leaned slightly, but the dashboard was green, which in many organizations is legally indistinguishable from structural integrity.

## Stickley and the House of Sticks



Stickley took a more thoughtful approach.

“We need stakeholder input,” he said.

This led to three workshops, two alignment sessions, one design sprint, and a whiteboard so full of arrows it looked like a conspiracy wall for people with graduate degrees.

**At last, he drafted the core requirement:**

As a pig, I want a house that can survive aggressive wolf-related disruption so that I may continue living indoors.

“Excellent,” said everyone, because bullet points have been tricking adults into false confidence for decades.

Stickley chose sticks.

Not because they were strong, but because they supported an agile construction philosophy: start light, learn fast, and hope the wolf appreciated iterative delivery.

The stick house looked respectable from a distance.

Up close, it had the energy of a startup with a great mission and six weeks of runway.

Still, morale was high. The stand-ups were upbeat. Someone used the phrase scalable model.

This should have terrified everyone.

## **Brickford and the House of Brick**



**Brickford did something widely considered toxic in project environments:**

He read the risk register like it mattered.

Then he read it again.

Then he built a mitigation plan using complete sentences and basic self-respect.

He chose brick.

Brick cost more. Brick took longer. Brick required labor, planning, and the deeply unpopular discipline of not lying to oneself.

The sponsor objected immediately.

“Do we really need all this?” the sponsor asked, waving at the foundation, the reinforced chimney, the heavier walls, and the general concept of remaining alive.

“Yes,” said Brickford.

“Can we value-engineer it?”

“Not and still call it shelter.”

“Can we phase the safety measures?”

Brickford looked at him for a long moment.

“The wolf is not arriving in phases.”

The sponsor left in search of a cheaper opinion, which is how many organizations begin their descent.

## The Wolf Arrives Ahead of Schedule



The wolf arrived before final sign-off, because risks rarely honor governance calendars.

He was large, confident, and wearing the expression of a senior executive about to say, “I’m just asking the obvious question.”

He stopped outside Strawson’s house and looked it over.

“Is this finished,” he asked, “or is this one of those launches where the email went out before the product existed?”

Strawson straightened his jacket.

“We’re substantially complete.”

That is project language for please do not touch anything.

The wolf inhaled.

Strawson raised a hoof. “Let’s not overreact.”

The wolf exhaled.

The house exploded like a strategy deck after first contact with physics.

Strawson stood in the debris holding half a status report and the last known remains of his confidence.

## **Emergency Response and Shared Delusion**



Strawson sprinted to Stickley's house.

"Emergency!" he yelled.

Stickley opened the window, took one look, and became the first person in the program to correctly identify a dependency.

Inside, the two pigs launched an urgent joint response effort, which mostly involved speaking faster.

"We need triage."

"We need escalation."

"We need executive visibility."

"We need a wall," said Strawson.

Papers flew. Priorities shifted. Someone said all hands on deck, despite the complete absence of both hands and deck.

For six glorious minutes, they felt extremely aligned.

Then the wolf arrived.

## The Stick House Encounters Reality



The wolf studied the stick house with professional interest.

“I see what happened here,” he said.

Stickley brightened. “You do?”

“Yes,” said the wolf. “You mistook facilitation for engineering.”

Then he huffed.

He puffed.

He delivered what the incident report would later classify as a high-intensity external stress event.

The house collapsed so completely it looked like it had been acquired by private equity.

Strawson and Stickley ran for their lives, which, to be fair, was the fastest either had moved all quarter.

As they fled, Stickley shouted, “We should have escalated this sooner!”

**Strawson shouted back, “To whom?”**

This was an excellent question and, like most excellent questions in project work, arrived much too late.

### **Brickford Enters the Chat**



The two pigs reached Brickford's house and pounded on the door.

Brickford opened it, took in the wreckage behind them, and nodded once.

"I assume this is now my problem," he said.

"Yes," they said together.

"Of course it is."

He let them in.

Moments later, the wolf arrived outside the brick house and prepared to finish the initiative.

He huffed.

Nothing happened.

He puffed.

Still nothing.

He reset, re-engaged, and came back with the emotional intensity of a vice president discovering the deadline in public.

The house did not move.

Brickford leaned toward the window.

"You may want to revisit your assumptions," he said. "The current approach appears non-viable."

The wolf huffed harder.

Brickford checked his notes.

"This is actually validating the design."

Inside, Strawson and Stickley stared at the walls the way underprepared teams stare at competence when seeing it for the first time.

## Controlled Stakeholder De-Escalation



Eventually the wolf ran out of breath, outrage, and usable tactics.

Brickford opened the door slightly and stepped out with a cup of tea.

The wolf blinked.

“What is this?” he asked.

“Stakeholder management,” said Brickford.

The wolf took the tea.

He was exhausted. Brickford was annoyingly correct. The power had shifted.

For the first time all day, nobody was pretending the cheap option had been strategic.

They stood there in silence for a moment, which in project terms counts as breakthrough alignment.

Then the wolf said, “Brick was the right call.”

Brickford nodded once.

“I know.”

He did not smile, which somehow made it meaner.

## Closing



By sunset, the three pigs stood outside the brick house: alive, humbled, and significantly less impressed by accelerated delivery.

The program had missed its original milestone, blown through its starting budget, and invalidated every fake metric that had looked so beautiful in the steering deck.

But the final house was still standing.

**Which meant the project had achieved something rare:**

it had survived contact with both reality and leadership.

Strawson learned that speed is not a control.

Stickley learned that alignment is not lumber.

Brickford learned nothing new, which made him unbearable in a way that was, frankly, deserved.

The wolf finished his tea, said very little, and wandered off in search of weaker governance.

No one called the initiative a success.

But no one got eaten.

In Deliveria, that usually qualified as exemplary delivery.

## **PM Moral of the Story**

A green dashboard is not a load-bearing wall.

Workshops do not stop wolves.

The expensive mitigation is always cheaper than getting devoured.

Brickford still submitted the closure report early, mostly to make the point.

## About the Author

D.B. Trench writes from the project front lines, where every dashboard is calm, every deadline is fictional until proven otherwise, and every meeting is one sentence away from becoming folklore.

As the voice behind PMTales, he turns the messy human side of delivery - scope drift, status theatre, stakeholder fog, governance performance, and executive optimism with insufficient evidence - into sharp stories, field notes, books, tools, and training for project managers who still have to survive the next meeting.

His work is written for the PMs, coordinators, delivery leads, analysts, and quiet realists who know the official version is rarely the whole version.

Find more books, field tools, training, and weekly Dispatches at [PMTales.com](http://PMTales.com).

## Continue the Journey

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If this felt familiar, that is unfortunately the point. PMTales is where project-management absurdity becomes story, recognition, and eventually survival gear.

### **The lost chapter.**

*The Pied Piper and the Stakeholder Engagement Plan* — the tale that did not make the book. A fairy tale about outsourced clarity, rented rhythm, and the project that mistook temporary calm for adoption.

Free for subscribers. [PMTales.com/pied-piper](https://PMTales.com/pied-piper)

**For the tools.** The PMTales Armory contains paid field instruments for the conditions in these stories — for when you need something to use in the room, not just a name for what is happening. [PMTales.com/armory](https://PMTales.com/armory)

**For the training.** The PMTales Academy offers structured courses for PMs and delivery leads. [PMTales.com/academy](https://PMTales.com/academy)

### **Also in the PMTales library.**

*Fluent in Nonsense* — 67 phrases translated from official meaning to operational reality. The language these characters are speaking.

*Tales from the Trenches* — narrative field notes from inside the same conditions. Without the wolves, mostly.

*Scope Creep* — for when the story started rewriting itself and nobody stopped it.

*Everything Is on Fire (But We're Proceeding)* — doctrine for organisations that remain publicly calm while developing original ideas about gravity.

For the weekly field notes, join The Dispatch at [PMTales.com](https://PMTales.com).

See you in the trenches.

*PMTales*

## Fairy tales were never this operational.

In every project kingdom, the dashboard is green, the deadline is sacred, and someone with authority has just described the impossible as 'straightforward.'

*Once Upon a Deliverable* reimagines familiar fairy tales as modern project-management disasters: three little PM pigs facing weak governance, Snow White managing seven subcontractors, Jack trading a tiny budget for executive fantasy, Red Riding Hood carrying a basket full of scope creep, and other legends from the enchanted forest of delivery chaos.

These are stories for project managers, delivery leads, coordinators, analysts, and quiet realists who have learned that the real monsters rarely arrive breathing fire.

They arrive as:

*"Just a small change."*

*"We're aligned."*

*"Can we take this offline?"*

*"Everything is still on track."*

Written with PMTales' signature mix of satire, field wisdom, and professional exhaustion, this book is for anyone who has ever watched a project wander into the woods and thought:

*Someone should really update the risk register.*

Enter carefully.  
The deadline looks charming from a distance.

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