

THE HUNGRY GODS
GO DOWN THE LINE

N. Van Seters & Claude

A work of fiction. Everything institutional in it is accurate; the people are not real and neither, in the ordinary sense, are seven of them.

Set in Bitstream Charter.

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PART ONE

FRESHET

@UTILITY · 2 April

Our Sparky the Squirrel colouring pages are back for another year! Free to download, free to print, and every single one teaches your kids something about staying clear of equipment. Teachers — get in touch and we'll send you a class set.

Sparky has been keeping kids safe since 1987. 🐿

1

The submission is for one aerial device.

I am setting the reasoning down here because the file will outlast me in the role, and whoever has it next will want to know why the numbers look the way they do.

We are replacing a unit four years past its scheduled life, which is the reason, and it is a sound one. It is also the only reason the form has room for.

There were two other candidates on the regional list this year and I did not put either of them forward. One is five years past and is in Prince George, and Prince George submitted for it themselves, correctly, and I am not going to compete with a region that got there first.

The other is a flat deck that everybody agrees is finished and that nobody has been able to describe as a risk, because a flat deck that will not start is an inconvenience and the form does not have a field for inconvenience.

The template does not care that it is one unit, because it was built for a programme. It asks the same twenty-two questions of a programme and of a truck, and there is no short version, and no way to be excused from any part of it.

Section 1 is the identifying information and takes four minutes.

Section 2 asks for the sponsoring department and the accountable executive, and those are two different fields and two different people, and getting

them the wrong way round is the most common reason a submission comes back.

Section 3 wants the strategic alignment, which means naming the corporate objective the vehicle serves. There is a list of fourteen objectives to choose from, and a bucket truck serves the fourth and the ninth and arguably the seventh.

You may select up to three. You may not select four. I have never understood the reasoning behind three and I have asked twice.

Section 4 wants the risk of not proceeding, expressed as a consequence rather than as a preference. The guidance note explains that distinction over two paragraphs, and it is the only sentence in the guidance note that does any work.

A preference is that the crew would like a newer truck. A consequence is that the unit is out of service for eleven days a year and rising, and that those days fall where the failures fall, which is winter.

I have the eleven days from the maintenance system. The rising is from the mechanic.

Section 5 is the financial summary and is populated automatically from the quotation, which means it is the only section I cannot get wrong and the only one anybody checks twice.

Section 6 wants alternatives considered and rejected, of which there are two. Leasing, and doing nothing.

I have written a paragraph on each, because the validator rejects the submission if either box holds fewer than forty words. Doing nothing runs to forty-one.

Leasing runs to eighty-six, because there is more to say about leasing, and because the leasing paragraph is the one that has come back for expansion twice in previous years.

Sections 7 and 8 are the delivery schedule and the resourcing, and they are short, and they are short in a way that has never once been queried.

Section 9 wants the deliverability assessment, and I have written that the vehicle is deliverable. I believe that it is.

The fleet condition report goes in behind it as Appendix C, and it is eleven pages, and nine of them are photographs.

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I called Dave in Chilliwack about the photographs.

He said there were four fields.

I said I knew there were four fields.

He said the form would not submit with three, and that he had walked round the unit twice looking for a fourth angle, and that there is only so much you can do with corrosion.

They are good photographs, and the corrosion is the same corrosion in all of them.

He also sent the service history, which I did not ask for and which I have attached anyway, because it is nineteen pages of somebody's careful work and it took him a morning to pull.

The risk matrix is Appendix D and is a five-by-five grid with a coloured cell in it. The cell is amber. It has been amber on every submission this office has sent up in four years, because green does not get funded and red requires a different process.

The two attestations are Appendix E. One says the costing has been reviewed. The other says the first attestation is accurate.

The operational justification goes up for signature after that, and then into the capital queue, where it is ranked against everything else the region has submitted. The ranking is not published.

I know the ranking exists because things come back with a position on them, and the position is a number, and the number moves between quarters for reasons that are not given.

The Allfather signed it Tuesday. He read it, he signed it, and he handed it back, which is the extent of what the process asks of him and the extent of what he did.

He read it for six minutes. I was standing there while he did it, because there was nowhere else for me to be.

He did not weigh whether to sign it. I have watched him do this four times and there is no moment in it where the answer is in doubt and then stops being in doubt.

There is a comments box beneath the signature block, half a page of it, ruled. It has been empty on every submission I have sent up in four years,

and it was empty on this one, and I have never seen one come back from the Allfather or from anybody else with a word written in it.

I asked once what it was for.

I was told that it was for comments.

It is the difference between a signature and an opinion. He is not withholding the comment. There is no comment in him to withhold, and the submission goes on to the next stage six minutes after it arrived, and that is the service.

I rang Dave to tell him it had gone up.

He asked who signed it.

I said the Allfather.

He said good, Sikorski, then it is somebody else's problem, and asked whether he should keep the unit off the road in the meantime, and I said no, we need it.

Then there is the lead time, which is the part of this file that whoever comes next will actually need.

The manufacturer quotes sixty-two weeks from order to chassis, and the body build runs sixteen to twenty weeks after that, depending on the shop. Commissioning and inspection and licensing add another six.

There are two body shops in the province that will take this work. One is quicker by about five weeks and charges about the price of a small car for the difference.

We have used the slower one for the last three units, and nobody has ever recorded why, and I have continued to use the slower one because I do not have a reason to change and changing would require one.

The total lands somewhere in the following fiscal year, and I have now written that sentence in three consecutive submissions.

The quotation is valid for ninety days, which means that if the ranking takes longer than ninety days the quotation expires and the submission comes back to me for a refreshed price. The refreshed price has never once been lower.

Last year's refresh added four per cent. The year before added six. Nobody treats this as a cost of delay, because the cost of delay does not have a field either.

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Section 9 does not ask when the vehicle will arrive relative to when it is needed. It asks whether it will arrive, and it will.

The submission went in on the sixteenth.

With the appendices, the quotation, the fleet condition report, the risk matrix, the alternatives analysis, the two attestations and the executive summary that is required to be two pages and may not be one, it runs to sixty-one pages.

Sixty-one is not unusual. I have sent up ninety.

The thing it is asking for has four wheels and a bucket on it.

2

The window is now.

Load is down, weather is up, and everything we cannot do in December gets done between now and the end of June.

I hold forty-one outage requests.

Each one wants a date, a duration, a customer count and a switching plan. Each one is somebody's summer.

They come in on a form. The form is not the problem. The form is fine.

The problem is that everybody wants the same six weeks.

May and June are the six weeks. April is too wet on the coast and July has the fire risk and August has the holidays, and by September you are looking at weather again.

So forty-one requests land on about thirty available windows and I am the person who says which.

They go to control. Control approves or does not.

The All-Seeing has the province. He has it live and he has it forecast and he is not wrong about it, and I have stopped double-checking the ones he sends back.

I checked for the first two years. I stopped in the third.

Tuesday, 09:40. Request 22-118, the rebuild at the substation tie.

I put it up. Four hours, six hundred and forty customers, standard switching.

Control came back inside a minute.

The All-Seeing gave the condition. One element out for maintenance elsewhere in the area, and taking the tie out on top of it leaves no second path if anything falls over.

The condition is the answer. Nobody decides it and there is nothing in it to decide.

The Allfather gave the direction inside the same exchange, without a pause between the condition and the date: resubmit on the eleventh of June, the other element back in by then.

Read back, confirmed, logged. Twenty seconds of talking, most of it repeating what the other one had said.

Nobody argued. There is nothing to argue with. The system either has a second path or it does not.

I called Marek, who leads the crew.

He asked who kicked it back, Okada.

I said the All-Seeing.

He said fine, when.

I said the eleventh of June.

He said his brother-in-law is getting married on the thirteenth, in Kamloops, and that the eleventh and the thirteenth are not the same day, and that he would work it out.

He will work it out. They always do, and the working out is not recorded anywhere, and no field on the form asks about it.

The rebuild moves to the eleventh of June.

Six hundred and forty becomes seven hundred and four, because by June the units at the end of the feeder are occupied.

That is the other thing about the window. The count moves inside it.

A feeder in April is not the same feeder in June. People come back. The seasonals open. A school that is empty in March has four hundred people in it by May.

I do the counts fresh each time. The system will give me a count from last quarter if I let it.

Twenty-two of the forty-one went through first time.

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Eleven came back with conditions, which usually means a different day of the week or a different start time or somebody else's work has to finish first.

Six came back with a condition I could not meet and had to be rebuilt from the start.

Two are still sitting because the crew that submitted them has not answered my email, and I have sent the email twice, and I will send it a third time and then I will let them expire.

Notification is the part people forget.

Anything over a certain duration requires customers to be told in advance, in writing, at the address, and the notice has a form and the form has a lead time.

If the work moves, the notice is wrong.

If the notice is wrong, we re-notify, and re-notification has its own lead time, and by then you have used up the days you moved the work to get.

So a request that shifts twice usually shifts out of the window entirely.

That is not a rule anybody wrote. It is arithmetic and it happens about four times a year.

I keep a list of the ones that have shifted once. There are nine on it. I do not share the list.

At 16:20 a crew lead rang to ask whether he could have a Saturday.

I said Saturdays are available and Saturdays cost more and the cost comes off his budget and not mine.

He said he would think about it.

He rang back at 16:35 and said he had thought about it.

He took the Tuesday.

@UTILITY · 30 April

Spring is our busy season. Planned outages are how we get equipment upgraded before the weather turns, so a short one now means fewer long ones in December. Check the outage map to see if crews are working near you.

And while you're on there — have you looked at a heat pump yet? 🌱

3

The right-of-way here is thirty metres, which is the width the voltage takes.

There is a low zone and a tall zone. The low zone is the corridor itself.

Nothing in the low zone may exceed three metres at maturity, which is not the same as three metres today, and that distinction is most of my job.

Outside the corridor, in the tall zone, almost anything is fine.

A hundred-year fir is fine. It is fine until it is tall enough to reach the wire from where it stands, and then it stops being fine, and there is a calculation for that.

The calculation is height, plus lean, plus the distance from the base to the conductor, with an allowance. It is not complicated. It is done in the field on a phone.

What is complicated is that the answer is often about a metre either way, and a metre either way is the difference between a letter and a chainsaw.

I walk it in April because in April you can still see the shape of things.

I walk about six kilometres a day when I am on corridor. It takes as long as it takes.

There is a tree on the third span that I have written up three years running.

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It is a hemlock. It is outside the corridor. It is eleven metres from the conductor. It is about seventeen metres tall. It has a lean of maybe four degrees toward the line.

Seventeen plus four degrees of lean over eleven metres is a calculation that comes out at not quite. It has come out at not quite three years running.

It is also thinning at the top, and thinning is not in the calculation. I keep writing it up anyway.

I am a certified utility arborist. The certification is what lets me work inside the distances at all, and it has to be current, and there is a refresher and a practical.

Without it I am a person with a saw standing near a wire, which is a different category of person entirely and one that is not permitted to be there.

The Conscience-Keeper walked it Monday.

He walks it before the work as the regulation requires, and he walked it again this morning immediately before the work, as the regulation also requires, and the two walks were the same walk.

I have been asked whether the second one finds anything the first one missed.

Twice in four years.

I called it in before the first cut.

They asked for the crew and I said Vasquez, and they asked whether it had been walked.

I said the Conscience-Keeper walked it Monday and again this morning.

They said copy.

The permit came through after that. Assurance of no reclose.

It means that if the line trips while I am in the tree, it stays tripped. It does not come back looking for me.

I have the permit number written on the back of my hand.

The pruning today is a cottonwood over the low zone, and cottonwood is soft, and soft is worse, because soft comes apart in wind rather than bending.

Nobody plants cottonwood. Cottonwood arrives.

The Conscience-Keeper stays for the first cut and then goes on to the next site.

He started to say something to me before the second walk and stopped, and then walked it, and then did not say the thing afterwards either.

I do not know what it was. He does that. It is not that he thinks better of it, because thinking better of it would take longer than it takes him.

At the fourth house down the corridor a man came out to ask about a hedge.

He wants cedar, and he wants it four metres, and four metres is over the allowable height in the low zone, and so it is not a no. It is a referral.

The referral goes to Sandhu in properties, on a different form, and she will look at where it sits relative to the conductor and at what it does at maturity, and she will write back.

He asked how long. I told him I did not know, and that was true.

Sandhu is good and she is one person and there are eleven thousand kilometres of corridor in this province.

Last October a referral came back approved for removal on a maple at 3306.

I took it, with two of us and ninety minutes, and the owner watched from the kitchen window and did not come out at any point.

The maple was outside the corridor by about a metre and a half.

The plan Sandhu worked from is the 2011 revision and the corridor on that revision runs four metres east of where it runs on the 2019 one, and the 2011 revision is the one that comes up first in the system.

She read the plan correctly. I read the referral correctly. The tree was on the wrong side of a line that two documents disagree about, and nobody at any point did anything other than what they were supposed to do.

The owner rang. She was not shouting. She asked whether we had made a mistake and I said that we had.

That is not what I was supposed to say, because there is a form for it, and the form goes to claims, and claims decides what happened.

I said it anyway, because she was standing in her garden with a stump in it and I was the person in front of her.

The claim was settled in March for the value of a semi-mature maple, which is a figure with a schedule behind it and which was, I am told, at the upper end.

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The 2011 revision is still the one that comes up first. I have raised it. There is a ticket.

Nobody was disciplined and nobody should have been, and the file records a plan discrepancy and does not record a tree.

Two poles further along, the corridor is seeded.

Lupine, yarrow, red clover, and a sign explaining it, because there is a programme for pollinator habitat in transmission corridors and this stretch is in it.

He asked what the flowers were for.

I said bees.

He asked whether he could have cedar if he put bees in it.

The flowers are permitted and the hedge requires a form.

Referral logged at 14:20. He can ask again in March.

4

Plan for 10.

It is on the trucks and it is on the lanyards, and it was the second thing they taught us. It means three metres, and three metres is the number you will say if anybody stops you in a yard and asks what the limit of approach is.

Three metres is not the number.

The number is in a table, with voltage down one side and distance across the top. At some voltages the figure is under three metres. At others it is a good deal over.

The table is the rule. The slogan is not the rule.

They are both on the wall of the training centre, about two metres apart.

We were on site at ten to seven, and the truck is loaded the night before, to a list that is printed on a laminated card that lives in the door.

You check it anyway, and everybody checks it anyway, and the card is not the point of the card.

The tailboard is at seven and it takes about twelve minutes.

The tailboard is where the job gets said out loud before anybody touches anything: what we are doing, in what order, who is doing which part, what is energised and what is not, and what we would do if something went wrong in each of the three or four ways it could.

Everybody signs it. The sheet goes in the truck. The sheet is kept.

I have been on jobs where the tailboard took forty minutes and jobs where it took four, and the four-minute ones were the jobs everybody had done eleven times.

The Hand does the glove check at the pole, where a person standing in the yard can see him do it, rather than in the cab with the heater running.

He inflates them and rolls them and looks, and I have not seen him do it any other way, in any weather, on any job, including the ones where we were already late.

The gloves are class two. They are tested to a schedule by somebody who is not us, and they come back in a bag with a date on the bag, and the date is what you check first.

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An expired bag is not a small thing and there is no version of the day where you use them anyway.

I have seen a job stood down for it. It was not this crew and it was not this year and everybody who tells the story tells it the same way, which is a good sign about the story.

Under the gloves there are liners. Over them there are leather protectors, because rubber tears and leather does not, and a torn glove is not a glove.

Three layers in total, and the middle one is the one that matters, and the middle one is also the one you cannot see once the other two are on your hand.

Second season now. I have watched.

The job today is a service pole in a yard, fence hard on one side, retaining wall on the other.

There is no position, from the ground or the ladder or anywhere else, from which the work can be done at the distance the table gives.

Not close, and not tight, and not achievable by any arrangement of the truck or the ladder that either of us could think of.

We measured it twice, from two directions, with a stick, because measuring it once and saying it cannot be done is not the same as measuring it twice.

The fence is a good fence, and it is new, and it is on the property line, and it is entirely legal in every respect.

The retaining wall is older than the fence and holds up a bank with a shed standing on top of it.

Neither of them was there when the pole went in, and the pole has not moved, and nobody did anything wrong at any point in the sequence that produced this morning.

Which means we do not do it, unless we do it under an assurance in writing from the owner of the system, on form 30M33.

Nothing else is accepted. People have tried.

Not a memo. Not an email confirming. Not a note in the tailboard.

The form has the voltage on it, and the actual distance that will be achieved, and the reason the required distance cannot be, and the period it covers, and the signature of somebody with the authority to give it.

The period matters. It is not a permanent thing. It covers the work described and it stops when the work stops.

The Hand called it in at twenty past nine.

The woman whose yard it is came out while we were waiting and asked who was in charge of the job.

I said the Hand.

She asked which one that was, and whether I was the Hand too, and I said no, I am Mullen.

She asked how long we would be, and I said I did not know, and she said that was all right and went back in and came out twenty minutes later with two coffees that neither of us had asked for and both of us drank.

It came back at a quarter past eleven.

In between we sat in the truck with the yard in front of us and the pole standing in the yard.

I asked whether we could start setting up.

He said not until the paper arrived.

I asked what would happen if we set up and it did not come.

He said we would take the setup down.

He read it when it came, and put it in the door pocket, and we went in.

The work took an hour and forty minutes and there was nothing in it that anybody would describe afterwards.

The setup is longer than the work. It usually is.

Cones, then the ladder, then the tools laid out where they can be reached, then the covers on everything that will be anywhere near an arm, and then the second look at all of it before anybody goes up the pole.

The second look is mine to do. That is the part of the job I was given first, and I did not understand at the time that it was a real job.

So there is a table that says the distance is mandatory. There is a form that says today it is not.

The form is one page.

The table is nine.

The notice went out on the fourth, to every address within the road allowance and to nine properties adjacent to it, which is the statutory minimum, and we sent it to nineteen more besides.

The statutory minimum has never once been enough to stop the phone ringing.

Two lanes to four, a centre median from the bridge to the school, and a right-turn bay at the intersection where the collisions are.

There have been fourteen collisions at that intersection in six years and two of them were serious, and the bay is in the design because of those two, and nobody at the open house will ask about the bay.

The drawings are at a scale nobody outside the office can read. We hold the open house for that reason, and the open house is always full.

The open house is in June and it is booked already.

Booking it in April for June is not planning ahead. It is the only way to get the hall, because the hall takes bookings a year out and the school has most of them.

I have ordered the boards. There are nine of them and they cost more than people think and they are obsolete about four months after they are printed.

Two of the nine will be the same two boards we used last time, because the context does not change and the aerial photograph does not change and nobody has ever complained about an aerial photograph.

Seven of them will be wrong by the autumn and we will print them again. The reprint is in the budget. The first print was in last year's budget, for a June that did not happen.

I pulled the title work myself, because pulling it myself takes an afternoon and asking for it takes a fortnight.

The road allowance was dedicated as highway in 1875, and no road was ever constructed on it.

The dedication has been there ever since, doing nothing, on land that has been a ditch and a hedgerow and for about thirty years an orchard.

There is a plan number on it and the plan is on file and the plan is drawn in ink at a scale that does not convert cleanly into anything we use.

I had it scanned, and the scan is not admissible for anything, and I had it scanned anyway because the original lives in a box in a building that I have to book time in.

The surveyor who drew it signed it in the corner. His signature is legible, which mine is not.

There are two pencil annotations on it in a different hand and neither of them is dated and neither of them is explained anywhere in the file.

One of them is a small cross about where the orchard was.

The orchard is in the assessment records until 1961 and is not in them after that, and there is no note anywhere saying what happened to it.

Somebody at the city looked for me, unasked, and found a photograph in their archive that shows trees in rows on land that is now a hedgerow and a ditch.

She sent it through with a note saying she thought I would want it, and I did want it, and it has no bearing on the relocation or the cost or the schedule.

It is on the file. I put it there. Nobody will ever open the file that far back.

The distribution plant crosses it and has done since well before 1980, which is the date that matters, and the effect of the date is that we are the party initiating the change and the relocation is therefore ours to fund.

That settles who pays, and it does not settle what, and the estimate that came back at four hundred and ten thousand is an opening number rather than a bill.

It is what they start from and what we argue about, and the arguing is done by people who do it full time, on both sides, over months.

It will come down some, and it will not come down much, and nobody in the room has ever seen one come down much.

The last one I was involved in came down eleven per cent, and everybody treated that as a good outcome, and I could not tell you what a bad one looks like.

The design has to be sealed before any of the permits can be applied for.

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Sealed means that an engineer puts a stamp on it and takes personal responsibility for it. That is not a formality. The engineer will not do it early for anybody.

Nothing downstream of the seal can be applied for until the seal exists. The permits, the notification, the paving window, the traffic management plan. All of it waits on one signature that will not be given early.

I have a bar chart of it, and the bar chart has been wrong four times, and I have reissued it four times.

The fifth version has no dates on it at all after September, which took me two years to have the nerve to do and which nobody has commented on since.

Then the calls start, and Rina on the front desk takes them first.

She asked whether this one was for the Companion, and then she said, Pereira, there are two more holding.

I said they are all for the Companion.

The project line rings at her desk after that, and she has the schedule in front of her, and the schedule is a range rather than a date, and the range is late in the year.

That is what there is.

Late in the year, subject to the relocation, subject to weather, subject to a paving window that closes in October and does not open again until April, and subject to a permit that cannot be applied for until the design is sealed.

There are four things in that sentence and any one of them can move the other three, and there is no version of it that fits on a notice.

Kowalchuk, who runs the tire shop at the corner, does not ask when.

He asked whether the median goes in before or after the turning bay, because one of those means his customers can still get in from the north and the other means they cannot, and he has seven weeks of tire changeover in October and November and he needs to know which.

She told him she would find out, and she did find out, and she rang him back the same afternoon with the sequence, which is median first and bay second and no access from the north from August.

He said that was not the answer he wanted but that it was an answer, which is more than most people get on a first call.

He has since sent us his October schedule unprompted, and it is on the file, and nobody asked for it and nobody will use it.

There was a third caller on the Tuesday who wanted to know whether the trees were coming out.

Some of them are. Four alders and a birch, on the east side, all of them inside the widened footprint.

She asked whether they could be moved rather than removed, and the Companion said she would ask, and asked, and the answer was that a birch of that size does not survive being moved.

She rang back to tell her that, and she did not have to, because the question had been answered in an email to me and could have stayed there.

It took six minutes. I was at her desk waiting to ask her something else and I heard all of it.

The woman thanked her and said that she had planted the birch, which was not in any of the previous conversations and did not change anything.

In October the woman rang again about something else entirely, and she asked after the birch by name, and told her which week the crew would be on that side of the road.

There is no note. I have looked. There is a call log with a date and a duration on it and there is nothing in the free-text field.

Mrs Aitken at 4400 has called four times, and she is not angry, and she does not raise her voice.

She is not, so far as I can tell, calling because she has forgotten what she was told the time before.

She is calling because the answer might have changed.

She tells her late in the year, the same way each time and at the same length, without shortening it and without the small flattening that comes into a voice on the fourth telling of the same thing.

She knows it is the fourth. She said so at the start of it — that this would be the fourth time and that the answer had not moved since March, and then she gave the answer anyway, at the same length as the first one.

I have listened to two of those calls from the next desk and the difference between them is that in the fourth one she knew what had been said in the other three.

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Yesterday Mrs Aitken asked whether that meant before Christmas, and there was a pause on the line of the sort that people fill in for themselves.

Late in the year, the Companion said. I could not tell you which month.

Mrs Aitken said that was all right, and that she would leave it a while before ringing again, and thanked her for her time, and rang off.

@UTILITY · 12 May

Reminder: if you're planning any digging this spring — fence posts, decks, trees, anything — call before you dig. It's free, it takes three business days, and it is very much cheaper than the alternative.

Every year somebody finds out the hard way. Please don't be them. 🚧

6

There were nineteen of us in the intake and there are seventeen now.

The two who left both left in the first ten days. Neither of them left because of the pole yard.

One had a job offer that would not wait and took it. The other did not say and did not have to.

Level 1 is four weeks at the training centre.

You do not get in without English 12, Math 11 and Physics 11, or the equivalents, and a Class 5 with air brakes, and you will need a Class 3 before the apprenticeship starts, and about half the intake gets the Class 3 in the two months before they arrive.

I did mine in February in the rain in a yard in Abbotsford.

There were twelve of us on that course and five were doing it for this, and the other seven were doing it for gravel trucks.

The instructor did not distinguish between us, which I appreciated at the time and appreciate more now.

Half of Level 1 is a classroom and the classroom is worse than the yard, and everybody says so, and the classroom is where the failures happen.

Nobody has ever been put back for climbing badly in the first week. People get put back for the test.

The test is written and it is on the Friday of the third week and the pass mark is seventy.

At sixty-nine you sit it again. At sixty-nine twice you go to the next intake, which is four months, and four months is a long time when you have given up a job to be here.

Nobody in this room believes seventy is a meaningful number and everybody in this room studies for it as though it were.

The material is not hard. There is a lot of it.

Series and parallel. Transformer ratios. Sag and tension. The tables, which are the part everybody underestimates, because the tables are not something you understand, they are something you know.

Four of us study together in the evenings in a room with a kettle in it.

THE HUNGRY GODS GO DOWN THE LINE

Novak runs those sessions. Nobody asked him to and nobody has worked out how to stop him.

He is better at explaining the tables than one of the instructors, which he knows, and which he has said, and which is the sort of thing you can be right about and still not want said in a room this size.

The yard is behind the building and it has thirty-one poles in it in rows, and they are real poles at real heights and they are set in a way that means the top sixth of them is a bit soft, which is deliberate.

You climb with hooks and a belt. That is the first two weeks.

There is a way to fall that everybody does once, which is called cutting out, and it is when the hook comes free and you go down the pole on your belt and your chest and your chin.

I cut out on the fourth day, about two metres up.

The instructor did not say anything about it. He wrote it down.

It costs you the front of your shirt and about ten centimetres of skin and it is almost entirely embarrassment.

Everybody in the yard has heard it happen behind them and nobody in the yard turns round, which took me a week to understand and which I now think is the single most instructive thing about the place.

The third week is framing. The fourth week is framing with the clock running.

The thing about the yard is that you are not measured against the other first-years. You are measured against a standard that was set somewhere else by somebody who is not here.

Which brings me to the Hand.

He comes through the yard twice in the four weeks, on the Wednesday of the second week and the Wednesday of the fourth.

He does not teach. There are instructors for the teaching and they are good and they are patient and two of them are funnier than they need to be.

He is what the standard was set from.

The instructor describes the movement. He does the movement. They are not always the same movement, and nobody resolves that, and I have watched two instructors watch him and say nothing.

He climbed on the Wednesday of the second week to about four metres, made a belt transition, came down, and went to the next thing on the timetable.

A belt transition is going round an obstacle without ever being unattached. It is on the syllabus in week three.

Watching it done is not the same as being taught it and it did not make any of us better at it that afternoon.

The boots and the belt are fitted on the Tuesday of the first week and the fitting takes a morning for nineteen people.

The belt has to be right. A belt that is wrong is not uncomfortable, it is dangerous, and the man who does the fitting has been doing it for a long time and will not be hurried by anybody including the schedule.

He asked me twice whether it felt right and I said yes both times, and the second time he loosened it anyway.

Delaronde, he said, if you tell me it is right and it is not right, I will find out about it and so will you.

On the Wednesday of the fourth week somebody asked the Hand a question.

It was Novak, who is older than the rest of us and has done other things first, and who asks questions in the tone of a man who expects the answer to be worth what it cost him to get here.

He asked how long it had taken him to be able to do it.

There was a pause, and the pause was not a considering pause, it was the pause of somebody working out what had been asked.

He said four hundred and ten days.

Novak said no, he meant properly, and he said four hundred and ten days.

Novak said that could not be right. Nobody agreed with him out loud and nobody disagreed either.

Somebody behind me said something about the apprenticeship being four years and the Hand said that was the apprenticeship.

Nobody followed it up. The class went back to framing.

He was answering the question.

THE HUNGRY GODS GO DOWN THE LINE

The Friday test was on the twenty-second. Fifteen of the seventeen passed it first time, and both of the others passed it on the Monday.

Four hundred and ten days is not four years and it is not four weeks, and what it is is about fourteen months.

Fourteen months is a number somebody counted at the time, day by day, without knowing yet whether it was going to be worth counting.

Nobody else in that yard is counting anything. I have started.

PART TWO

THE DRY

The fault is on a lateral behind the townhouses on Delbrook.

It went out at ten past two on Sunday morning, and by half past two everybody was back on, because there is a second path and control put them on it.

So the cable is dead and nobody is waiting.

There is no truck outside anybody's house and there is no estimate. There is a work order with a low priority code and a van parked on a service road.

The code is a four. A one is a wire down in a street. A four is a piece of cable in the ground that has failed and that nobody is standing next to.

Fours get done in daylight, in order, by whoever is free.

That is the first thing to understand about underground work and it is the thing that surprises people who have only seen the overhead side.

I called control before I put anything on it.

I asked who was on.

They said the All-Seeing, and asked whether Nagy was on the trace or on the walk.

He confirmed the section isolated at both ends and issued the guarantee, and I took it, and I read it back, and he read it back after me.

Both ends matters. A cable fed from one direction is still a cable somebody can feed from the other by accident, and the accident is a switching error.

There are three points on this section and all three were named in the exchange. I wrote the three down. The three are on the form.

The guarantee is mine until I give it back. Nobody else can give it back for me and nobody else can be given it while I hold it.

That is the part that cannot be skipped, and it is also the part that takes the longest and involves the least.

The Seeker was already there when I got there. He had the covers off.

Two kiosks, one at each end of the section, both open, both with a mat down in front of them because the ground was wet.

The van has the instrument, a generator, two spools of test lead, and a folding table that is the most argued-about item in the inventory.

The instrument sends a pulse down the cable. Fifty volts, low energy, thousands of times a second.

It comes back when the impedance changes. Whatever it hits, it returns from, and the returning is the measurement.

The trace draws on the screen as a line with features in it.

It is not a picture of the cable. It is a graph of time against amplitude, and the time is converted to distance using a velocity figure that depends on what the cable is made of.

Get the velocity wrong and every distance on the screen is wrong by the same proportion. That kind of error is invisible until somebody digs.

You learn to read the features. A splice makes one shape. A tap makes another. A place where water has got into the insulation makes a third, and the third is the one you hope not to see, because water means the run is old all the way along.

The Seeker reads it without saying anything.

He has the cable records open before the instrument is out of the van. That order is the thing: the trace is the question and the records are the knowing.

Without them it is a line with bumps in it, and he will not read a line with bumps in it.

I have asked him to, and he does not refuse. He names the drawing he would need first.

The records for this section go back to 1978 and are good. Somebody kept them properly for forty years. That person is not identified anywhere on them.

He gave me the sheet number, the revision, the date of the revision and the issuing office, in that order, without being asked and without looking it up.

He does not tell you what is under the road. He tells you which document says what is under the road, and then you both go and look.

There are sections in this district where the records are a scan of a hand-drawn sketch with a road name on it and nothing else.

We work those too. They take twice as long and the tolerance comes out wider.

THE HUNGRY GODS GO DOWN THE LINE

There are faults the instrument cannot see.

If the fault is a break, the trace shows it. If the fault is a leak, and the leak is above a certain resistance, the trace shows nothing, and the cable appears sound.

There is a phrase for that kind of fault. There is not a method for it on the first pass.

You would move to a different technique. A bridge measurement, or a burn, and a burn is what it sounds like and is not something anybody reaches for early.

Sheath faults are their own category again. A sheath fault does not interrupt anything, will not show at low voltage, and will end the cable in about two years if it is left.

This one is a break, which is the best thing it could have been.

The other thing is that you do not put a high voltage on it to confirm anything before you locate it, and the manual says so twice.

Doing that changes what you are looking for. Whatever the fault was, it is now something else, and the something else is harder.

The Seeker has never done it and I have never seen anybody do it.

I have heard of it being done, in the way that everybody in a trade has heard of the thing you do not do, and the story has no names in it.

The number comes back at four hundred and thirty-eight feet.

It comes back with a tolerance, and the tolerance is not optional, and the number is not a number without it. Plus or minus ten feet.

That is nine hundred feet of cable reduced to twenty.

It is not enough to dig. Nobody digs on a trace.

It is enough that a person walking with a receiver has twenty feet to walk instead of nine hundred.

I wrote it in the log at 15:40. Four hundred and thirty-eight, plus or minus ten, from the north termination.

I also logged the velocity figure I used, the make of the cable, the two kiosk numbers, and the time the guarantee was received and returned.

Whoever walks it will start there. It will not be me and it will not be this week, because the walking crew is in Squamish until the eleventh.

This is the Ridgmont job, not the Delbrook one. Delbrook was traced in June and dug in June by a crew out of the other yard, and I have not seen the joint.

The ticket went in on the Tuesday, which gives everybody three business days, and everybody uses them.

Three business days is not three days. A ticket submitted on the Thursday before a long weekend is a ticket that clears on the Wednesday, and nobody who has not done this for a while believes that until it happens to them once.

Five utilities responded and four of them sent drawings. The fifth sent a man with paint, who marked the asphalt himself and left before anybody could ask him anything.

The colours mean what is under there. They do not mean how deep it is, and they do not mean the line runs where the paint runs, and every year somebody has to be told that again.

Nothing mechanical goes near any of it until the thing has been seen. We expose by hand, or we bring the hydrovac in and wash the soil off it with water and suck it up.

That takes a morning and it is the cheapest morning in the job.

There is a photograph in the safety room of a gas line that a machine found first, and nobody was hurt, and everybody in this building has looked at it.

It has been on that wall since before I started and nobody has ever suggested taking it down.

The excavation permit came through from the city with three conditions attached. No work before seven. No work after six. Written notice to the elementary school four days ahead, which we gave, in August, when the school was shut.

The permit also carries a restoration bond, which is money the city holds until it is satisfied with the surface, and which it holds for two full years.

Two years is longer than the asphalt takes to settle, and that is the reason for two years, and nobody at the city has had to explain it to me twice.

THE HUNGRY GODS GO DOWN THE LINE

The bond is released by a person walking out and looking at the surface, which is the least automated part of the process and the only part that has never gone wrong.

We are looking for a fault at six hundred and two feet, plus or minus fourteen, which the trace gave us three weeks ago and which is as close as a trace gets.

Bezdan asked who was walking it, Charbonneau, or whether he was doing that himself as well.

I said the Seeker.

He said good. He walked the last one himself and his knees have not forgiven him.

So the Seeker has the receiver and Bezdan has the surge unit in the van.

The receiver is a box with a coil in it, a pair of headphones and a needle, and you listen and you watch the needle at the same time.

The needle is more honest than the ears are, particularly after the third hour, and particularly on a road with buses on it.

The surge unit puts a charge into the cable, and at the fault the charge flashes over, and the flashing over makes a noise that a person can hear at the surface if the conditions are right.

It is not a bang. It is closer to a knock, coming up through a metre of fill and a lift of asphalt, and on a good day it is the clearest thing you will hear all week.

On a bad day it is a bus.

The conditions are not always right. Wet ground is better than dry, and traffic is worse than no traffic, and Ridgemont Road carries buses every eleven minutes until seven.

There is a limit on the voltage we are allowed to use, which came in as a work instruction years ago, and the reason for it is set out in the instruction.

Every surge puts stress into the insulation between the fault and the far end, and the insulation ages under it, and cable that has been located repeatedly is cable that has been worked.

So we get a number of shots and we do not get an unlimited number of them, and Bezdan counts them out loud so that everybody hears the count.

Twelve is the working figure on a section of this age. Twelve is not in any document. Twelve is what the crews have settled on between themselves.

At twelve you stop and think about it, and thinking about it usually means moving the receiver rather than turning the unit up.

The Seeker walked it four times.

First pass, nothing, and second pass, nothing, and a bus. On the third pass he stopped twice at the same place and did not say why, and on the fourth pass he put the flag down.

Nine shots in total, which is three under the working figure, and which is the sort of number a crew mentions to another crew and to nobody else.

The flag is a piece of wire with a plastic tag on it, and it goes into the grass at the edge, and the crew who dig work from it and from nothing else.

If the flag is wrong, the hole is wrong, and the hole being wrong costs about a day and a half and a second permit.

Six hundred and eleven feet. Nine feet outside the trace, which is inside the tolerance, which is what the tolerance is for.

We dug it at seven the next morning, with the hydrovac first and the machine afterwards, and the hole open by nine.

The splice took the better part of the day, because a wet splice is not a splice and the tent has to go up first, and the tent is more work than the joint.

The tent is a frame, a skin and a heater. It has to be dry inside and it has to stay dry for as long as the joint takes to make, and the joint takes about three hours if nothing goes wrong.

Moisture in a joint is a fault in two years, and you do not find out whether you did it properly for two years.

That is the one part of this work that nobody enjoys.

Backfill, then compaction, and then the surface, and the surface is where the city comes back into it with a second set of conditions.

We restore to municipal standard. That means a saw-cut edge, a defined depth, and a lift of asphalt that has to cure before anybody paints a line on it.

THE HUNGRY GODS GO DOWN THE LINE

The saw-cut is not cosmetic. A ragged edge lets water in, and water is what ends a patch, and a patch that ends is a pothole that somebody claims for.

There is a temporary lift and then there is the permanent one, and they are two different crews on two different schedules working out of two different budgets.

The temporary lift went down on the Friday and the permanent one is booked for the eleventh of September, which is in the next quarter, and therefore a different budget.

By then this crew will be in Squamish and somebody else will do it.

9

We booked the community hall for seven until nine and put out ninety chairs, with boards on easels around three walls, a plan-view on the fourth, a table of route options, and coffee in an urn that somebody has to remember to turn on at half past five.

I have done thirty of these, and the urn is the thing I check twice.

The chairs are ninety because ninety is what the hall has. If more than ninety come, people stand at the back, and people who stand at the back speak later and at greater length than people who sit.

I have never established why that is true and I have stopped disbelieving it.

There are two doors. One is the door people come in by. The other is the door the boards are carried in through, and if you get those the wrong way round the boards are in the way for two hours.

The project is a transmission connection into the west side, between four and a half and seven kilometres depending on which of the three routes is selected, and it is steel poles for most of the run with one section that goes under the lake. The estimate for completion is 2033.

That figure is on board four and it is the figure people photograph.

The reason for the project is that sixty thousand people are currently supplied down one line from a long way away, and that a single line is a single line regardless of how well it has behaved for forty years.

Board two says that. Board two is the board nobody stands in front of.

The Chaos-Weaver came over from operations to answer the technical questions, which is standard, because I can tell a room what a project is and I cannot tell them what a conductor weighs in a wind loading of that class.

The scheduler who set it up had put Chaos on the room booking, one word, in the field where the name goes.

A man near the front asked who he was. Somebody two seats along said that the woman was Iyer and had been at the last one too.

I said the Chaos-Weaver, from operations.

He said, and what is it you do.

He said he takes the calls when things go wrong.

The man said that must be busy, and a woman two rows back said something to the person next to her, and we started at four minutes past.

Sixty-one people signed in and fourteen of them spoke.

Signing in is voluntary. We ask for it so that we can send the summary to people who want the summary, about a third of the sheet is illegible, and one line every time is a joke name.

The sheet is kept for the record of the consultation, which is a real record with a real purpose, and which will be filed with the application and read by somebody at the Commission in about four years.

The first was a woman called Lam, who has lived on the ridge for thirty-one years and who has the manner of somebody who has read the material twice, and she asked why the line could not be put underground.

I gave the two figures, which are that underground construction runs ten to fifteen times the cost per kilometre, and that when an underground line fails it stays out considerably longer, because you cannot see where it failed.

She said that she understood both of those, and then asked why it could not be put underground.

I want to be careful how I put this, because she was not being unreasonable and she was not being obtuse.

THE HUNGRY GODS GO DOWN THE LINE

She had understood both figures. She repeated one of them back to me accurately. And then she asked the question again, in the same words.

The second speaker asked why it could not be put underground, and the third was Verhoeven, a retired electrician who did in fact know what a conductor weighs, and he asked why it could not be put underground.

The fourth speaker asked about property values, which is a different question entirely and one I have a different answer for, and the answer is that we hold no data of a kind that would satisfy her.

The fifth speaker asked why it could not be put underground.

The sixth was a man with a folder who had been to the last three of these on three different projects, and who asked, reasonably, whether anybody had ever changed a route because of a room like this one.

I said yes, twice, in fifteen years, and that both times it was archaeology.

He wrote that down, and he was the only person in that room who wrote anything down all evening, and a folder is not the same thing as being listened to, and he had worked that out a long time before I did.

Board four stayed up until the end, because the boards are always taken down in the same order and board four is always last, on the grounds that board four has the date on it.

Five people photographed board four. I counted, because counting is what a person does while standing next to an urn.

The urn was empty by twenty past eight. It always is. I have asked for a second urn on four separate occasions.

I gave the two figures each time, in the same words, because I have given them at thirty of these and the words are the words.

What came back at me was a list, and the list was accurate in every particular.

Wind brings trees down on overhead lines, and lightning strikes overhead lines, and ice loads them until the conductors gallop, and cars hit poles, and the poles stand at the edge of the road because that is where the corridor runs and the corridor runs there because it always has.

A woman in the third row said that she had lost power four times in the previous winter and that on one of those occasions it had been out for two

days, and that she has a well and a well needs a pump and a pump needs electricity.

That is true and it is the strongest thing anybody said, and it is not an argument about undergrounding, and she did not present it as one.

Somebody added that vegetation management costs money every year, for ever, and that nobody in the history of this utility has ever proposed a year in which it would not.

A man near the coffee said that his brother-in-law in Ontario has everything underground and has not had an outage in nine years, and I did not ask him which part of Ontario, because there is no version of that exchange that ends well in a room of ninety people at twenty past eight in the evening.

Every item on that list is true and I disputed none of it, because none of it is in dispute and never has been.

At twenty to nine a woman near the middle asked, without any particular heat, what would happen if the community simply said no to the project.

That is the best question anybody asked all night and I answered it properly. The route selection is ours. The land is not all ours. The Commission decides whether it proceeds, and the Commission will read the record of this meeting.

She asked whether that meant that no was possible, and I said that it meant the record was real, which is a smaller answer than the one she wanted and is the largest one I am able to give.

At ten past nine a man at the back said that he had a question which was not about undergrounding, and twenty-odd people applauded him, and he then asked a question about undergrounding.

Ninety chairs. Sixty-one signatures. Fourteen speakers.

Thirteen questions about burying the line, and one about parking at the substation.

We took the boards down at half past nine while about a dozen people stood in twos near the urn, which is where the actual conversation happens at every one of these and where nothing is recorded.

Verhoeven waited until last and asked me, quietly, what I personally thought, and I told him what the figures are, and he said that he had not asked me that.

THE HUNGRY GODS GO DOWN THE LINE

The room was booked until nine and we were out of it at twenty to ten.

@UTILITY · 4 August

We're going to say this again because we keep having to.

That transmission tower is not a photo opportunity. Neither is the spillway. Neither is the fence around either of them. There is nothing on the far side of that fence that will make your video better and several things that will end it.

The gate is locked for you, not for us. We already have a key.

10

Trespass on the reservoir sites is up two hundred per cent over five years.

That is the figure we publish. The Conscience-Keeper signs the annual return it goes into. It covers climbing towers. It covers swimming in restricted water, and standing below the spillway face to be photographed.

A reporter rang in June, asked for Doucet, and asked me for the rest of them.

She was writing a summer safety piece, she wanted numbers, and she was entitled to the numbers.

I gave her the survey. About fifteen per cent of adults will admit to having taken a risk outdoors for a photograph. Around eighty thousand have hurt themselves doing it.

She asked how we knew.

I told her we asked eight hundred people over three days in May, and that is what eight hundred people said.

She said that was less impressive than it sounded, and I said it was, and she printed it anyway.

She printed it accurately. She said eight hundred people over three days in May and she put the margin in, which almost nobody does, and I wrote to her editor to say so.

I have never had a reply to a letter of that kind and I keep writing them.

One file from last year. A man on the penstocks at the dam, twice, filming both times, with a following. He was not caught either time. He was identified from the footage afterwards.

The footage is the thing. Nobody used to be identified, because nobody used to be filming.

Now the reason a person is there is the same reason we can find out who they were, and that has not reduced the number of people who go.

In July a production company applied to film at the spillway.

They applied properly. There is a form for it. They found the form and filled it in, and attached a location plan and a certificate of insurance and a shot list.

Most people do not find the form. Most people arrive with a drone and an opinion about public land.

The insurance was for five million, was in order, and had our name on it correctly, which takes somebody two phone calls to get right.

The shot list had eleven items on it. Four of them were below the face.

I wrote back that the answer was no, and that the answer would have been no for any of the eleven, and that the certificate was very good.

The refusal is mine to draft and not mine to give. Access to a restricted site is refused under the standing instruction, and the standing instruction is held by the Conscience-Keeper, and I put the draft in front of him on the Thursday.

He read the shot list. He read the location plan. He asked whether the four items below the face could be shot from the public side of the fence, and I said two of them could.

Then he signed the refusal for all eleven, because the application was for eleven.

There is no penalty attached to it and no letter of warning and nothing goes on a file about the company. The eleven items are simply not going to happen. That is what the decision consists of.

THE HUNGRY GODS GO DOWN THE LINE

The location manager rang to ask what would change it.

I said nothing would change it.

He asked whether there was a version of the shot list that would work, and I said there was, and that it was the seven items which were neither below the face nor inside the fence, and that he could have those on a Tuesday in October with a safety escort at his own cost.

He asked how much the escort was. I told him. There was a pause.

He asked whether that was a policy or a person, and I said a policy, and he said that in his experience those were the same thing, and thanked me, and rang off.

They shot it in Squamish. I saw it in February. It is a good advertisement for a bank.

The sirens are the part I care about.

There are sirens and there are strobe lights, and they mean one thing, which is that the water level is about to change.

They are not a warning that something has gone wrong. They are a warning that something is about to work correctly.

They have been there since before the recreation area was a recreation area.

There are eleven of them on that site. Four are on poles and the rest are on the structure. They are tested on the first Wednesday of the month at ten in the morning and the test is announced on a board at the gate.

People still ring about the test. Not many. Four or five a year, and every one of them is somebody who read the board and wanted to be sure.

I inspect the signage on a schedule. Thirty-one sites, four visits a year, and the schedule does not adjust for whether anybody has read anything.

The signs fade. The pictograms fade faster than the text, which is the reverse of what you would expect.

The pigment in a red pictogram goes first. Red goes to pink and pink goes to nothing. The sign still says the words and no longer shows the picture, and the picture is the part that works on somebody who does not read English.

There is a specification for the substrate and there is a specification for the ink. There is no specification for how long either has to look like anything.

Trent does the interior sites and I do the coastal ones, and we swap every second year so that neither of us stops seeing them.

The swap is not my idea and it is not Trent's. It is in the inspection procedure, at 3.4, and the Conscience-Keeper put it there after an audit in 2019 found four consecutive returns on one site signed by the same inspector with the same three words in the comment field.

The three words were no change noted.

He came back from the swap in April with six photographs of a sign I had looked at four times and not seen. A cedar had come up in front of it. It had been coming up for six years.

I had walked past it four times and ticked the line four times. The line says signage present and legible. The signage was present.

We took the cedar out in May. It was a good cedar in the wrong place, which is most of the trees I have ever had removed.

The signs at the boat launch were replaced in May. They will be replaced again in three years whether or not they need it, because the schedule is a schedule.

Last inspection at the spillway viewpoint was the fourteenth of June.

Trent asked me in April who actually reads the returns.

I said Conscience reads the returns.

He said he had assumed nobody read the returns, and I said that was the assumption the procedure at 3.4 exists to correct.

That is fifty-two days.

@UTILITY · 2 September

Storm season starts sooner than you think. Now is a great time to put together a kit: flashlight, batteries, a radio, a phone that charges off something other than the wall, and enough water for three days.

Do it in September and you'll never think about it again. Do it in November and you'll be doing it in the dark. ⚡

11

Everybody comes in before the season.

They come in with a list and they leave with most of it. What they do not leave with, they get told about.

I have four thousand line items. I know where about six hundred of them are without looking.

I finish on the twenty-second of December. Thirty-one years, twenty-six of them in this building.

Nobody has asked me to write any of it down and there is no process that would receive it if I did.

The six hundred are the ones that move.

The rest move once a year or never. About two hundred will never move again. They cannot be written off. Nobody will sign it.

There is a bin of connectors upstairs for a pole type we stopped installing in 1996. Fourteen of them. I have asked twice.

Whoever comes will not know about the bin. It is on the system and the system does not say that the pole type is gone.

Gloves. Sleeves. Blankets. Hose. Grips. Slings. Bolts by the box and by the each.

Gloves are the busiest line in the building. They come back for test and they go out again and they come back and one day they do not pass, and the ones that do not pass are cut before they go in the bin.

Cut so nobody takes them out of the bin.

That is not a rule. That is a thing I do.

We moved the small-parts shelving in March. The system has the old bay numbers.

Updating them is a job. It is a real job with a form and it is three days of somebody's time and it has been on the list since March.

In the meantime I know where things are. Anybody who comes in when I am off goes and looks.

The pre-season draw runs from about the middle of September.

Nine crews in eleven days.

Two sent one person with three lists. That is efficient. It produces the most errors.

A first-year called Ostrowski came in for a connector.

He did not have the number. He had a description of it instead.

He said the small brass one with the two holes.

I gave him the small brass one with the two holes.

He came back at half past four.

He said it was the wrong one, Pruden.

I said it was the one he had described to me.

He said he knew, and he had gone and looked, and there are four of them, and they are all small and brass and have two holes.

He was not annoyed about it. He wanted to know how I was supposed to have known.

I told him I was not supposed to have known. I was supposed to have been given a number.

The one he wanted has a number and the one he got has a number, and both of those numbers are correct, and only one of them is his.

That is not a complaint about Ostrowski. Nobody is born knowing four thousand line items.

The Hand came in at ten for a set of blankets and signed for them and went.

Six blankets, one roll of hose, and a bag of clips he did not need to sign for and signed for anyway.

He was in the building for about ninety seconds.

Ostrowski asked afterwards whether that was the Hands or just the Hand.

I said just the Hand.

He said right, and wrote that on his arm too.

The Hand knows the numbers and has always known the numbers.

Ostrowski is writing them on the back of his hand now, which is what everybody does, and which works until it rains.

He will have two hundred inside a year.

Nobody will teach him any of it. I have eleven weeks left and he is on a crew that comes in twice a season.

THE HUNGRY GODS GO DOWN THE LINE

There is a printed list. It is nineteen pages and it is correct and no first-year has ever read it.

I have started a second list, which is not printed and is not official, and which says where things actually are and which of the four thousand have two numbers.

It is nine pages. I do not know who to give it to and I have not asked, because asking would make it a thing that has to be approved.

I will leave it in the drawer under the counter. That is not a plan. It is where it is.

I put the description in the notes field on the issue.

Small brass one with two holes.

There are four.

@UTILITY · 22 September

Fun fact: some of our crews work on lines that are still energised. It takes years of training, specialised equipment, and a lot of paperwork — and it means we can do the job without turning your power off.

Not a party trick. Just a Tuesday. ⚡

12

This is the file note for the barehand work on the Kentwood tie on the ninth and tenth of September, written up while the paperwork is still on the desk, because whoever audits this in two years will want the sequence and not my recollection of it.

The job was a conductor change on a circuit that could not be taken out.

What it feeds cannot be taken out. That is the reason the technique exists at all and it is the first line of the justification.

The alternative was an outage of eleven hours affecting, among other things, a hospital, and the comparison between the two was done on a form and the form is Appendix B.

The form asks for the duration of the alternative outage, the customers affected, the critical loads among them, and whether a temporary supply is available.

It does not ask whether the alternative is acceptable. That is a judgement and the judgement is made further up than this desk.

I have filled that form in seven times and it has come back the same way each time, which either means the form works or means nobody reads it, and I have no way of establishing which.

The permit is what makes the work lawful.

It is called a Live Line Permit and it authorises specified work on specified apparatus at a specified voltage for a specified period, and it is held by a person and not by a crew.

The person holding it can hand it back. Nobody can take it off them while the work is in progress.

That distinction is the most important sentence in the operating order and it is written in the plainest language of anything in that document.

The technique is called barehand, or equipotential, and both terms are in the training material.

The worker is bonded to the conductor. A bonding lead is attached and the worker is brought to the same potential as the line, and once he is at the same potential there is no difference across him, and with no difference across him there is nothing to flow.

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That is the physical basis of it and it fits in a sentence.

The approach is the part that takes the time. The bonding lead goes on before contact and comes off after, in that order, and every part of the sequence has a name and a place on the form.

The suit is conductive mesh. It is not insulation and it is not armour and it does not protect anybody from anything by being thick.

It works by being a better conductor than the person inside it.

It is tested to a schedule by a laboratory that is not us, and it is washed to a schedule, and the wash is logged, and the log lives with the suit and not with the crew.

A suit that has been washed with the wrong detergent is a suit that goes back to the laboratory.

There is a written complaint on file about the fit of the medium, it is two years old, and it has been acknowledged twice and actioned once.

The action was a note to the supplier. The supplier replied that the garment conforms to the specification, which it does, and which was not what the complaint said.

The complaint is not frivolous and I have read it. A suit that is loose at the wrist is a suit somebody adjusts at height, and adjusting anything at height is the thing this procedure exists to avoid.

The Allfather signed the permit at 06:40 on the ninth, which is early, and which is what the job required, and which is not recorded as a courtesy anywhere on the form.

He read it. He signed it. He did not attend and was not expected to attend, and there is no field on the permit for whether the authorising person attended.

I asked once whether he ever comes out for these.

He said the permit is the same on site as it is on the desk.

Ferland on the crew asked me at the tailboard who had signed it.

I said the Allfather, at twenty to seven.

He said right, and went back to the checklist, which is the correct amount of interest to take in a signature.

The crew were on site from 07:10. Six people. Two in the bucket at any time, two on the ground, one on the truck, and the fifth on the radio with the log.

Time in contact with the conductor, across two days, was thirty-one minutes.

Time on site was eleven hours and forty minutes.

Time spent on the tailboard, the pre-job checks, the bonding checks, the test certificates, the sign-ons and the sign-offs was, by the log, three hours and ten minutes.

Nobody has ever asked me for that ratio and I work it out every time, and I have now worked it out for seven of these, and it has never once come out the other way round.

The rest of it is positioning, and waiting for the bucket, and waiting for the wind, and a period on the second morning of about forty minutes when everybody sat in the trucks with the engines off.

One of them read. Two of them slept. The fifth wrote up the previous day. That log is better than most of them.

The limit is a number and the number is written on the permit, and when the anemometer says the number the work stops.

It stopped at 09:20 on the second morning and it restarted at ten, and nobody discussed either of those decisions with anybody, because there is nothing in a number to discuss.

The file carries one photograph, from the second afternoon. It is in the file because the form requires evidence of the completed configuration and not because anybody wanted a photograph.

It shows a man in a grey suit sitting on a conductor with his legs either side of it, four hundred and something thousand volts running through him and past him, doing something small with both hands about six inches from his own chest.

I have looked at it twice and it is not a good photograph, because the light is behind him and the mesh does not read at that distance as anything except a grey coverall on a wire.

The file for the ninth and tenth of September now contains the permit, the two test certificates for the suit, the bonding lead certificate, the tail-

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board sheets for both days, the anemometer log, the switching order for the isolation that was not required, the completed configuration photograph, and the justification with Appendix B.

Twenty-two pages, of which four are the permit itself and eighteen are the reason the permit was allowed to exist.

It goes in a binder in a cupboard on the second floor.

The cupboard has a key and the key is in the door of the cupboard. The binder has seven of these in it now, going back to 2019, and they are in order.

I put them in order. Nobody asked me to.

Nobody will open it unless something has gone wrong, and nothing has gone wrong in any of them, so nobody has opened it.

The output of two days is a signed page in a binder and a garment with a wash log.

PART THREE

READINESS

The application came in from the Ravine Park Neighbourhood Association, signed by their secretary, a woman called Gagnon who has now sent me twenty-six emails.

They want to wrap the pad-mount transformer at the corner of the playing field.

There are about eight thousand of these boxes in the district and four of them have wraps on them.

I have been asked twice why the number is four. The number is four because four groups have got to the end of the agreement, and the agreement is nine pages.

It is the one everybody in that neighbourhood has an opinion about, because it sits between the parking lot and the path and there is nothing else to look at.

I sent her the guidance and the form and the agreement.

The guidance is six pages and the form is two, and the agreement is nine pages, and the nine are the ones people read last and should read first.

She rang the next morning to ask why there was an agreement.

The agreement runs ten years. The association pays for the wrap, and the association maintains the wrap, and if the wrap is tagged, the association replaces it.

We do not pay for any of that. We own the box and we do not own the picture.

The box is an asset on a register, and the picture is not on any register and cannot be, because there is no category anywhere in the system for a picture.

That sounds like a joke and it is the reason the agreement is nine pages.

She said that seemed like a lot for a sticker.

I said it is not a sticker, it is a printed vinyl to a specified grade, and the grade is the graffiti-resistant one, and that is most of the cost.

The vinyl has a rating. The rating means solvent comes off it and paint comes off it and a wire brush does not go through it, and it is tested by somebody in a laboratory with a bottle of acetone.

It is also the only material we will accept, which means one supplier in the province and one price.

She asked what happens if they cannot afford to replace it in year seven.

I said we take it off.

She went quiet, and then said that was fair, and then asked whether we could put it back on if the money came later.

I said yes. That is also in the agreement, at 4.2, and nobody has ever asked me about 4.2 before.

The applications come through the Chaos-Weaver first. Everything that arrives from the public without a fault number on it lands at his desk and is given a category before it goes anywhere else.

He gave this one a category and sent it to me with nothing else attached.

Gagnon rang once to ask who had her file before I did, and to check that Bianchi was spelled with a c.

I said the Chaos-Weaver.

She said she had wondered about that, and asked whether he would be seeing the heron design, and I said no, and she said that was a shame, and carried on about the heron.

On the form, in the field for the officer handling the file, Gagnon had written Chaos Weaver, two words, no hyphen, as though it were a surname.

Nobody corrected it and it is on the file that way.

Then there is the design.

The design cannot resemble a traffic sign. Not the shape, not the colours, not anything that reads as instruction from a moving vehicle at dusk.

There is a schedule of prohibited combinations: red on white, yellow diamonds, anything octagonal, and a downward triangle of any colour at all.

The schedule was written by somebody at the ministry and not by us and we apply it because the road is theirs.

The design cannot be distracting, which is a judgement rather than a rule, and which is made by somebody who is not in this conversation.

I have had one design refused on that ground in four years. It was a very good design, a heron taking off, at about two metres, in white on the green.

The reason given was that it would be read as movement by a driver at the corner. I have never been able to decide whether that is right.

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And the design cannot be too camouflaged.

That one takes the longest to explain and I have stopped trying to explain it in writing.

If the box disappears into the hedge behind it, a maintenance truck reverses into the box.

That has happened. It happened in 2018 in another district, and it is the reason the clause exists, and the clause itself does not say why it exists.

I know why it exists because somebody told me. It is not written down anywhere a community group would find it.

Gagnon's association submitted three designs.

The first was a heron in reeds, green on green, at the exact height of the surrounding cedar.

The second was a red and white geometric pattern that a driver coming down the hill would read as a hazard marker for about a second and a half.

The third was children's handprints, which was approved in seven minutes.

Seven minutes is not a boast, because handprints have never been refused anywhere, and there is a version of this programme in every utility in the country and handprints are approved in all of them.

Then there is the clearance, which is the part that has nothing to do with art.

Three metres clear in front of the doors. One metre on the other three sides. Those distances are so that a person can open it, work in it, and get away from it.

The landscape plan the city approved for that lot in 2019 shows a cedar hedge on three sides of the box.

The hedge went in. The developer was required to plant it and did plant it and was signed off on it.

Our crew removed it in the spring of 2021, on a Tuesday, with a chainsaw, because the doors would not open.

Nobody rang first. There is no requirement to ring first and there is a good reason for that, which is that the crew who found the doors blocked were there because something had failed.

The strata rang us. We explained. They wrote to the city. The city wrote back to say that the landscape plan had been approved in accordance with the bylaw, which was true, and which answered a question nobody had asked.

The city was not consulted and did not need to be, and the association is now proposing to paint a picture on the object at the centre of all of that.

The box itself is green.

It is a specific green, and it has a number, and the number was settled by a committee decades ago, and the reason it was settled on is written down and the reason is that green blends into foliage.

It does not blend into foliage.

It is an industrial coating that does not fade, and it has therefore stayed exactly the colour it was, which is a colour no plant has ever been, in front of several thousand plants.

That is the object we are being asked to hide.

We have been hiding it since 1974 by painting it the colour of a bush.

@UTILITY · 14 October

*Community groups: our Decorative Wrap Program is open!
Turn a plain green box into something your neighbourhood is
proud of. We've seen herons, orcas, salmon runs and one very
good raccoon.*

Applications take about ten minutes. Link below. 🦊

This file was opened on the twelfth of August and I am recording the sequence here in the order in which it occurred, because the report will require it in that order and because the recollection of anybody involved will be worse in thirty days than it is today.

At 14:52 on the twelfth of August a worker named Novak sustained a serious injury at the substation works, and the nature of the injury is described in the medical annex and is not restated in this section.

The medical annex is held separately and is accessible to three people, of whom I am not one, and that arrangement is correct and I record it here so that whoever reads this does not go looking.

The notification went to the regulator at 15:06, which is fourteen minutes, and the requirement is immediately, and fourteen minutes is what immediately looks like when a person has to find the number.

The number is on a card in every truck and on a laminated sheet in every site office and in the front of the operating manual, and it took fourteen minutes.

I am not being critical of anybody. It took fourteen minutes because the two people who knew the number best were the two people who were with Novak, which is where they should have been.

Fourteen minutes has been recorded and has not been queried and I do not expect it to be.

The scene was not disturbed, except to reach Novak, which is the exception the Act provides and the only one it provides.

Two items were moved in the course of reaching him and both were photographed where they came to rest and both are itemised at Appendix C with the name of the person who moved them.

Nobody has ever been criticised in this organisation for moving something to reach a person and the file should say so plainly, so I am saying so here.

Work at that location stopped at 14:53 and had not restarted at the time of writing, and the authority to stop it and the authority to restart it are held by the Conscience-Keeper, who was on site within the hour.

Nobody asked him to attend and nobody would have needed to.

He was there at 15:41, which is on the gate log, and he did not speak to anybody for the first eleven minutes, which is not on any log and which I remember.

He walked the area first. That is what the procedure says to do and it is also, I am told, what he did at the two previous ones.

The walk is not an inspection and is not recorded as one, and the procedure gives it no output and no form and no time limit, which means it is the only part of this entire process that produces nothing a person could later be held to.

The preliminary investigation began the same afternoon with the persons required by the regulation, which is to say persons knowledgeable in the type of work, with participation from both an employer representative and a worker representative, and the composition of that group is itself recorded in the file at Appendix A.

I took the notes. Fenwick, J., is the name in the field at the foot of every page of them.

There is a field for the note-taker because a note-taker is a person and a person can be asked about their notes years later.

Mine have been asked about once, in 2022, in a matter that had nothing to do with the incident they were taken at.

The Hand was interviewed at 17:20 on the twelfth of August in the site office with the door open, which is the practice, and the interview lasted fifty-one minutes.

He was a witness. He was not engaged in the task and was not directing it and was approximately seven metres away with his back partly turned.

Seven metres is from the site measurement and not from his recollection. His recollection was about ten and the two are recorded side by side, which is standard, and which is not a comment on him.

Everybody's distance is wrong afterwards. The measurement exists because everybody's distance is wrong afterwards.

The site measurement was taken on the thirteenth by two people with a wheel and a laser, working from the position of the two moved items and the position of the tools, and it is the single most reliable document in the file and it took forty minutes to produce.

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The questions are not mine. They come off a form and they are asked in the order printed on the form, and where an answer does not fit the field, the answer is recorded in the field anyway and the excess goes into the continuation sheet.

He answered every question that was asked of him and did not answer any that were not.

The interview has forty-one numbered questions and thirty-four of them applied. Seven were marked not applicable and initialled by both of us.

He did not volunteer anything. That is not obstruction and the form has no field for volunteering.

When the form asked what he had observed, he described what he had observed. When the form asked what he had heard, he described what he had heard, and when the form asked whether he had formed a view as to cause, he said that the question was for the investigation.

That is the correct answer and it is also the answer that makes the transcript useless as anything except a record of position and time.

Which is what a transcript is for. The cause is established by the group, from the measurements and the equipment and the sequence, and not by asking a witness what he thinks happened.

I have read investigation files from other organisations in which somebody's opinion of the cause was recorded in an interview and then quoted for years afterwards as though it were a finding.

The transcript is Exhibit 4 and runs to nine pages.

At one point somebody outside the door asked the site clerk whether Conscience was still in with him, and the site clerk said yes, and that is on the recording because the door was open.

Later the same clerk asked me directly whether the Conscience-Keeper had set a date for the thirty-day report, and I said that the Act sets the date and he does not.

The recording runs for fifty-one minutes and thirty seconds and is held with the transcript.

The door being open is a requirement. It is at 6.3 and the reason given at 6.3 is that a closed door changes what is said in a room, which is the only sentence in the procedure that reads as though a person wrote it.

The preliminary report was submitted at 11:41 on the thirteenth of August, inside the forty-eight hours, containing the sequence, the persons present, the immediate corrective actions and the date by which each will be complete.

It does not contain a cause. It is not permitted to contain a cause at that stage and it does not attempt one.

It contains four immediate corrective actions, all of them physical, all of them completed inside a week: a barrier, two labels, a change to where a set of keys is kept, and the removal of a step that nobody had used in the way it was being used.

None of those four is a cause. Three of them will appear again in the thirty-day report and one will not.

The one that will not is the step, because the step was removed in the first week and there is nothing left to recommend about a thing that no longer exists, and the report does not have a field for something that was fixed before anybody asked for it.

The barrier is the one that will read as trivial to anybody outside this and which the group spent the longest on, because a barrier that is in the wrong place is worse than no barrier, and there was a version of it proposed on the second day which would have put a person's back to the thing the barrier was for.

The thirty-day report is due on the tenth of September and a third party has separately been retained, on a schedule the file does not record, for reasons the file does not record either.

Novak's condition is the subject of a separate note which is not held in this file.

I have not seen it. I have been told that it is held that way on purpose and I have no reason to doubt that.

This file is a document about a substation. That is what it is for.

Submitted at 11:41.

15

There are two poles on the boulevard at the north end and there have been since October, and my job for the next while is to explain that to people.

I have a form of words for it. I did not write the form of words and I have not improved on it in four years, which is either a compliment to whoever wrote it or a comment on how often it works.

There are eleven poles in this district in the same condition and I can tell you the address of every one of them without looking, which is not a skill anybody hoped to develop.

Four have been like it for under a year. Three for between one and two years. Two for four years. Two I have inherited from somebody who left and I do not know how long those have been standing.

The new one carries the power, and the old one carries the telephone and the cable and a municipal traffic camera that nobody at the city has yet agreed is theirs.

The old one is cut through at the base and bolted to the new one, which sounds alarming and is not, and which I have now described over the phone about thirty times.

Two brackets and four bolts, and the stub is carrying nothing at all except the communications lines and its own weight.

People hear cut through and stop listening after that, which is fair. The form of words puts bolted before cut for that reason.

The stub is inspected on the same cycle as a live pole, which surprises people who assume that a thing nobody owns is a thing nobody looks at.

It has a number. It is on the register. Somebody will climb it if the communications company asks us to, and they have asked twice, and we have charged them twice.

The section of the pole that carries the communications lines is twenty-four inches deep. That is the space, and it is managed by the telephone company, and they issue the permits for anybody else who wants to attach anything inside it.

Twenty-four inches is a real measurement out of a real agreement and it has not changed since the agreement was made.

Inside those twenty-four inches at the moment there are three separate attachments, and ours is none of them.

The permits are theirs to issue and I have never seen one and would not know what one looks like.

I have asked, once, whether I could see one, mostly out of curiosity, and was told without any unpleasantness that it was not something they were able to share.

That is probably correct and I did not press it. It is also the reason I cannot tell a caller who is attached to the pole outside their house.

We own the pole jointly and they own the twenty-four inches. Those are two separate sentences, sitting in two separate agreements signed decades apart.

The joint ownership is expressed as a percentage and the percentage sits in a schedule. Nobody I have spoken to in this district can tell me what it is without looking, and I have looked, and I am not going to put it in this account because it changes by pole class.

When people ask why we do not simply take the old pole down, that is the answer, and it is not a satisfying answer, and I give it anyway.

The unsatisfying part is not the ownership. People accept ownership. The unsatisfying part is that there is no date, and a person who has been given a reason without a date has been given half of something.

The other half arrives in a batch. I explain batches on about a third of these calls and it lands as an excuse every single time, and it is not an excuse, and I have not found a way of saying it that stops it landing as one.

I have started saying that out loud on the calls. It does not help but it is true and it stops the conversation going round again.

The regulator has a view about the twenty-four inches and no view at all about the pole.

That is not an oversight either, because the regulator's remit is telecommunications, and the twenty-four inches is telecommunications, and a wooden pole standing in a boulevard is not.

Everybody involved has read the remit and nobody involved is confused, and there is simply nobody anywhere whose job it is to make a pole come down on a particular Tuesday.

Halvorsen has the landscaping contract for the strata behind the boulevard.

He has thirty-one metres of bed to finish, and the beds run right up to where the old pole is, and he cannot finish because there is a pole in the middle of his drawing that is not on his drawing.

The drawing is from March and shows one pole, and there are two poles, and he is not wrong about the drawing.

He has bought the plants. That is the part he mentioned three times and the part I have written into the file, because plants in a yard have a shelf life and a landscaper who has bought plants is on a clock nobody else in this arrangement is on.

I put a note on the file recommending that we prioritise the batch on those grounds. I have no authority to prioritise a batch and the note has no addressee and will be read by nobody, and I put it on the file anyway, because a file that does not contain the reason is a file that looks like nothing happened.

He rang on Monday, and he rang again on Wednesday, and he rang this morning before eight. He asked for Whitecross by name, which means somebody in this building has given him the directory.

The Companion takes those calls now. They come in on the project line, and she is better at them than I am.

She asked him what he actually needed, which is not the same as what he was asking for, and he said he needed a date so that he could book the crew and the plants.

She said she did not have a date.

He said give me the month.

She said she did not have the month either, and that the transfer is scheduled by the telephone company and not by us, and that she would give him the number for the person who does have it.

She gave him the number and he rang it, and he rang us back afterwards to say that the number was correct, and that the person who answered it had been perfectly pleasant, and had also not had a date.

The person who answered it will not have had a date, because there is no date to have.

The transfer goes into a batch, and batches are built when there are enough of them in an area to be worth sending a crew for, and the number in this area is currently four, and four is not enough.

There is no deadline in law for the transfer. Some places have ninety days written into the rules. Here there is no number at all, and the pole comes down when the last company takes the last wire off it.

I looked the ninety days up once, out of curiosity, and it is real and it is somewhere else and it does not apply here and I have never mentioned it to a caller.

There would be no purpose in it. A person waiting on a pole does not need to know that somewhere else there is a rule.

Halvorsen asked her whose fault that was.

The Companion said it was not a fault, it was an arrangement.

He said that was worse.

Twelve days after the second call the transfer date came back as the third week of February, provisional, subject to the batch, which is the most anybody has been able to say about this pole since the fourteenth of October.

I rang Halvorsen with it and told him it was provisional twice in the same sentence, and he wrote it down anyway, and I could hear him writing it down.

Halvorsen has thirty-one metres of bed and a pole standing in the middle of it, and he has now spoken to four organisations about it in nine days, and every one of them told him the truth.

We own the pole and they own the twenty-four inches, and nobody at all owns the last wire on it.

Sokolowski registered as an intervener on the nineteenth of November, in his own name, at his own expense, with no counsel and no organisation behind him, and his registration was in order.

People assume these registrations get refused. They do not. The threshold is standing, and he has standing on the straightforward ground that he lives on the road in question.

He rang the week after to check that he had used the right form.

I said he had, and that almost nobody does.

I want to record what that call was actually like, because the shape of the file will not show it and the shape of the file is what survives.

He had the form in front of him and he had numbered his own questions before ringing, and there were six of them, and he asked all six in order and did not stray from them once.

He asked whether the covering letter counted towards the page limit, and I said there was no page limit, and he said that in that case he would be taking rather longer than he had planned.

That was the fourth of his six, and the fifth was whether the Commission would send him the filing or whether he was expected to find it, and the answer is that it is on the public register and he had already found it.

The sixth was whether anybody at this end would be annoyed with him. I said no, and it was true when I said it.

Interveners are not a nuisance. The register exists so that people can do exactly what he has done, and it would be worth nothing if the answer to that question were yes.

I have been in three proceedings where the intervener was a company with counsel and one where it was a municipality, and in all four the effect on my working week was larger than this one has been.

The filing he is intervening in went in on the sixth of November, in the form the Commission requires, which is one electronic copy, one paper copy, and a covering letter that repeats the contents of the electronic copy in case anybody is reading only the letter.

It concerns the relocation on the north road, and the question in it is not whether the plant moves, because the plant is moving, but who bears the cost of moving it.

Four hundred and ten thousand at the April estimate, which is an opening number and is now three hundred and sixty-four after two rounds of it, and which will be argued about once more before detailed design.

None of those figures is in dispute between the parties either. What is in dispute is the sentence that explains why the figures exist.

The figures were built by two appraisers and an engineer and were argued down over two rounds by people who could each show their working.

Nobody has to show their working to argue about a sentence.

That turns on which party initiated the change, and the party that initiated the change is the municipality, which has been aware of the position since the estimate came back in April.

The supporting position is statutory and is not novel: facilities lawfully operating before a date in 1980 may continue to operate, and the plant on that road predates the date by a comfortable margin, and none of that is in dispute between the parties.

I have filed the same statutory position eleven times in six years and it has never once been challenged on the law.

It is challenged on the framing in perhaps one filing out of three, which is what is happening here, and the framing is the part where a lawyer or a person like Sokolowski goes looking.

The dedication is Exhibit 11, and it shows a road allowance dedicated as highway in 1875 on which no road was ever constructed, and it is in the filing because the Commission asked for the chain of title and the chain of title begins there.

It is six pages including the covering index. That makes it the shortest exhibit in the filing by about ninety pages.

Exhibit 3 is the longest at two hundred and nine, and Exhibit 3 is a set of drawings, and nobody at the Commission will open Exhibit 3 unless something goes badly wrong.

Exhibits are filed because the rules require the chain, not because anybody expects them to be read. That is not cynicism. A chain that is only assembled when somebody asks for it is a chain with gaps in it.

The chain for this parcel is complete from 1875 to the current title and it took an afternoon to assemble because somebody had assembled most of it in 2016 for something else and had left it in the right place.

I have written to that person's successor to say so. That is the second letter of that kind I have written this year and neither has been answered.

Sokolowski's submission runs to fourteen pages, it is well organised, and it is better written than two of the appendices in our own filing.

He addresses me by name in every one of his numbered paragraphs, which is more than the Commission has ever done.

The Commission addresses the Applicant. That is correct and it is how it should be, and it does mean that the only person in this proceeding who writes to me as a person is the person on the other side of it.

His paragraphs are also, in the technical sense, extremely well made. Each one contains a single proposition, a reference to the page it comes from, and what he says should replace it, in that order, every time, for forty-one of them.

Two of the four proceedings I mentioned were worse than this in the drafting, and both of those had counsel.

He is not asking about the cable. He is asking why the filing describes the relocation as necessitated by the road project, when the road project was described in 2019 as being necessitated by the growth, and the growth was approved by the same municipality that is now the initiating party.

He wants that sentence changed, and he has set out in three separate places what he would like it changed to.

His three versions are not the same as each other, and I do not think that is carelessness, and I think he wrote them on three different evenings and did not go back over the earlier ones.

The second of the three is the best of them and is arguably more accurate than the sentence we filed.

He is right that the sentence is doing work. He has correctly identified the only sentence in ninety-four pages that a person would argue about, and

he found it without counsel, in a document nobody outside this proceeding will ever open.

None of that has any bearing on the response.

The response is governed by the direction, and the direction requires each numbered paragraph to be addressed in the order given, and there is no mechanism in the format for agreeing with one.

There is no field for partially, and there is no field for he is right about this and it does not change the outcome, and the paragraph is addressed and the position is either maintained or it is not.

The Commission directed a response by the fourth of December, in the same form as the filing, addressing each of his numbered paragraphs in the order he numbered them, and he numbered them to forty-one.

I have drafted paragraphs one through nine, which took a day and a half, and which say, in the Commission's required format, that the sentence is accurate.

It is accurate. That is the thing I keep arriving back at, because the sentence describes the relocation as necessitated by the road project, and the relocation is necessitated by the road project.

What Sokolowski has identified is that the road project was necessitated by something else, and that the something else was approved by the party which is now the initiating party, and that both of those facts are true and neither of them is in our filing because neither of them bears on cost allocation.

Paragraph nine is where I say that, in the format, in four sentences, and it took most of a morning to get to four.

The remaining thirty-two paragraphs are due on the fourth of December and I have blocked out the last week of November for them, which will not be enough, and which I have blocked out anyway so that the calendar shows somebody tried.

He rang again on Friday to ask whether he should number his reply the same way.

I said that would be helpful.

THE HUNGRY GODS GO DOWN THE LINE

He also asked whether the twelfth of March was a firm date, and I said that hearing dates move, and he asked how often, and I said about half the time.

Ninety-four pages, forty-one paragraphs, twelve exhibits.

Hearing set for the twelfth of March, which is in the next fiscal year.

@UTILITY · 21 November

Look at this. 🍷

Students from the elementary school on the west side spent three weeks designing a wrap for the box outside their gym. Salmon, an eagle, and what the artists have confirmed is a very large bee.

It went on Tuesday. Come and see it.

17

I inspect works in the road allowance on behalf of the municipality and I was on the north road on the twenty-second for the conductor transfer.

That is all of my involvement in it. I do not decide when work happens and I do not decide what it consists of.

What I do is stand where I can see it, fill in a form afterwards, and sign the form.

The form is the municipal inspection record. It has nine fields and the ninth is a signature.

Field seven asks whether the works were carried out in accordance with the approved drawing, and field eight asks whether any deviation was authorised, and if you tick yes at eight you attach the authorisation.

I have ticked yes at eight four times in six years and three of those were the same contractor.

The crew requested the clearance at 07:40 and control gave it at 07:46.

Six minutes is quick, and six minutes means the request was clean and the switching was already where it needed to be and nobody had to ring anybody about it.

I have stood in a boulevard for fifty minutes on a clearance before now, and the fifty minutes was not anybody's fault either.

You do not stand there doing nothing. You do the tailboard again, and you check the covers, and then you count the covers.

Then you stand there.

The foreman asked whether the municipality had sent Pereira again, which they had.

I asked him who was on at control.

He said the All-Seeing, and then said that he is always on, which is not true but is the kind of thing people say about that desk.

The exchange took a minute, and everything said in it was said twice, once by each of them, and the second saying is the point of the exercise.

Isolation confirmed, points identified, guarantee issued and received and held.

Three points on this one, of which two are in a kiosk about two hundred metres north and the third is at the pole, and the crew had eyes on the third before the request went in.

That is not required anywhere in the procedure. It is simply what they do.

Then it is the Hand up the pole for two hours and forty minutes with almost nothing to look at.

I watched about forty minutes of it from the footpath because I had a form to fill in that required me to be there and did not require me to be doing anything.

The form does not require me to be doing anything. It requires me to have been there.

The conductors come across one at a time, the neutral first and then the phases. He does the same movement at each of them. The movement does not get faster between the first one and the last one.

THE HUNGRY GODS GO DOWN THE LINE

There is a sequence, and the sequence is not negotiable, and the reason for the sequence is that the neutral is the reference for everything else on the pole.

A person watching from a footpath cannot tell which conductor is which and I could not tell you now which one he moved when. I could tell you that he moved them in an order, and that the order was written down somewhere before anybody left the yard.

At about the ninety-minute mark a woman with a pram stopped on the far footpath and watched for maybe two minutes.

She did not take a photograph, and she was the only person all day who watched any of it for longer than a few seconds.

The street light comes across after that, and the street light is where the work order becomes precise.

A two-thousand-four-hundred-millimetre arm. A hundred and fourteen watt fixture. Three thousand kelvin, which is the warm one, and which the municipality specified in a bylaw in 2019 after a public consultation about the colour of light.

There is a page of that consultation in my file. There are forty pages of it somewhere.

Three thousand kelvin is warmer light. It is what people asked for when they were asked, and what they asked for is what the bylaw says, and the bylaw is why this fixture costs what it costs.

Four residents wrote in during the consultation. Two of them wrote about the colour. Two wrote about whether there needed to be a street light there at all.

Both of those two were told that there does, because there is a school, and it is in the standard.

At 14:20 the old pole was cut.

It was cut about a metre above grade and the top section was bolted to the new pole with two brackets, which is what is done everywhere and which is called cut and kick by everybody in the trade and by no document anywhere.

The document calls it retention of the communications section pending transfer, in those words, at 4.11.

The crew called it cut and kick before they did it, while they were doing it, and once afterwards on the radio.

So it is still standing. It is standing four metres from the new one, with the telephone lines and the cable lines still on it, because those lines are not ours and the pole is not entirely ours either.

I signed field nine at 15:10 and lodged the record the same afternoon.

Field seven, yes. Field eight, no deviation. Fields one through six are dates, times, a drawing number and two names.

The record does not have a field for what is not finished, because the record is about what was done and it was done.

It is a good form. I have said that to two people and neither of them knew what I meant.

The nine fields took somebody a long time to arrive at, and I have looked at the previous version, which had fourteen, and five of those fourteen asked the same thing in different words.

Somebody removed five fields from a form, at some point, deliberately, and nothing anywhere records who it was or why they were allowed to.

The work order for the twenty-second has fourteen items on it, and thirteen of them are about arms, brackets, torques and colour temperature, and the fourteenth is the last line.

Leave pole for Telus.

@UTILITY · 28 November

Every year we work with hundreds of property owners across the province on rights of way for new equipment. Most of it never makes the news, and that is the way everybody prefers it.

If you have a green box, a pole or a corridor on your land and you have questions about it, our property team would genuinely rather hear from you than not. 🌲

This is the acquisition note for the three parcels on the north road, written for whoever handles the compensation determination, because that person will not be me and will not have met anybody involved.

Parcel one and parcel two are municipal, and both were dealt with by an exchange of letters over nine days in September.

Parcel three is 4426 and is not municipal, and everything from here to the end of this note concerns parcel three.

The registered owner is Mrs A. Tokarczuk, sole owner since 1991, previously joint with her husband from 1968.

The interest required is a statutory right of way over a strip four metres wide and thirty-one metres long along the eastern boundary, comprising two hundred and eleven square metres of a parcel of one thousand and forty.

That strip is currently lawn, a shed on a concrete pad, and eleven metres of cedar hedge planted at some point after 1991 and not shown on any plan.

The first thing I did was the title search, which is the part of this job that is actually mine and the part of it I am best at after eleven years.

Title is clean, with one mortgage discharged in 2004 and one easement registered in 1954 as Instrument 8811F.

Instrument 8811F is in favour of a company that no longer exists.

It grants a right of way for the purpose of drainage over a strip running east to west across the middle of the parcel, and there is no drain, and there has been no drain within living memory, and the strip as described runs directly under the house.

Everybody has complied with 8811F for seventy years by accident.

I raised it because it has to be raised and because it will appear on any search that anybody runs from now until the parcel ceases to exist.

The Seeker went back through the parent parcels for me and came out with the subdivision plan the instrument derives from, which took him an afternoon and which I would not have found.

I asked him afterwards how far back he had gone and he said as far as it went, which in that district means 1888 and a plan drawn on cloth.

A clerk in the registry office rang me two days later to ask who had been in the parent parcels, because somebody had ordered four historical plans in one afternoon and the office had noticed.

I said the Seeker.

She said she had assumed it was a law firm and that in that case she would send the fourth one through without the fee, which she did, and which I have recorded here because somebody ought to know it was done.

The company was a private drainage undertaking that operated in that area between 1949 and 1961 and was wound up. Nobody succeeded to its interests. The instrument is unenforceable and unremovable.

It does not affect the acquisition in any way at all. It affects only the number of pages in the file and the number of hours it took to establish that it affects nothing.

The valuation came back at eleven thousand four hundred, prepared by an accredited appraiser, based on three comparables within two kilometres and a partial-taking analysis.

I do not think that number is wrong. I have seen twenty of these and this is a competently prepared one.

The offer went out on the fourth of October with the valuation attached, a plan showing the strip, a description of the works, and the standard letter.

The standard letter is four pages and the fourth page is the one that says what happens if the offer is not accepted.

She rang on the ninth of October at about four in the afternoon and stayed on the line for twenty-six minutes.

She asked whether I had read the file or whether I had been given a summary.

I said I had read the file.

She asked what year the shed was built and I said 1974, from the building permit.

She said that was right, and that her husband had built it, and asked whether the shed had to go.

The shed does not have to go, because the strip runs east of it by about a metre and a half, and I told her that and she said good, and then said no.

Not to the shed. To the right of way itself, and to all of it.

THE HUNGRY GODS GO DOWN THE LINE

She has not asked for more money at any point, and that is the first thing whoever reads this file needs to know, because the file will show a refusal, and a refusal in a file looks exactly like the opening of a negotiation.

She said the land is hers and that she does not want a right of way on it and that she is aware she is going to lose.

I said that was a fair summary of the position and that I was not going to pretend otherwise to her at this stage of it.

What happens next is the statutory process, which does not require her agreement.

The authority to acquire exists independently of consent. The plan is deposited, the interest vests, and the compensation is determined rather than agreed.

Determined means that if she does not accept a figure, the figure is set by a tribunal, and the tribunal costs her nothing to attend and may give her more than eleven thousand four hundred, and about a third of the time it does.

The third of the time is my own count across the files I have handled and it is not a published statistic and I would not put it in a letter.

Where the tribunal goes higher it is usually because the appraisal has understated the effect of a partial taking on the part that is left, which is the hardest thing in a valuation to argue and the easiest thing in the world to feel.

I told her that. It is in the letter and I told her anyway.

She said she understood the difference between how much and whether, and that nobody at any point had been talking to her about whether.

The offer stays open. That is the part that is hardest to explain and the part I have had to explain three times.

It does not expire on refusal. It does not reduce. It sits at eleven thousand four hundred while the process runs and she may accept it on the day before the tribunal sits.

She asked why it stays open if it makes no difference. I said because withdrawing it would look like pressure.

She said that leaving it there also looks like pressure.

She said it without any edge and she was not scoring a point, and she went on to ask about the timing of the works, which is the question a person asks when they have finished with the other question.

I have written that down because I could not think of an answer to it, and because it should be in front of the person who determines the compensation.

She has a right to be heard and she has been heard. There is a record of the ninth of October and a record of the second call on the sixteenth and a written submission of two pages received on the thirtieth.

The submission does not raise a legal ground. It says that she has lived there since 1968 and that the hedge was planted by her after her husband died and that she would like it noted.

It is noted, which is what the word means in this context, and is all that the word means.

The submission is two pages and is handwritten on both sides and has been photocopied into the file, and the original has been returned to her by post with a covering letter confirming receipt, which is the procedure and which I have never before had cause to be glad of.

Notice of intention was served on the eighth of November.

The hedge will be removed by our crew before construction. Eleven metres of cedar, planted after 1991, not compensable as a structure and compensable as a garden improvement, which is a category with a schedule and a rate.

The rate is per metre, and I have put the rate into the file rather than the total, because the total will change when the hedge is measured properly and the rate will not change at all.

Plan deposited: the twenty-second of November. Instrument number pending registration.

Construction on the strip is programmed for late February, subject to the same paving window everybody else on this road is subject to, which means it will be March.

I will not be the person who tells her that. By then the file will have moved and the person holding it will introduce themselves by letter, and the letter is three paragraphs and I have seen it before.

THE HUNGRY GODS GO DOWN THE LINE

Construction will be inspected by somebody from this office. It will not be me either.

File to compensation determination, with 8811F attached at Appendix D for completeness, and with the note about the offer at page four.

PART FOUR

THE STORM

@UTILITY · 11 December, 4:40 pm

Crews are responding to outages across the coast tonight. Wind is forecast to peak between 9 pm and 2 am. If your power goes out, report it on the map or call us — and stay well back from any downed line.

Thanks for your patience.

19

It came in off the water at nine and by ten it was doing what it does.

I was on nights. I am always on nights in December, which suits me and suited nobody I have ever lived with.

At 22:14 the count was six thousand. At 23:40 it was thirty-one thousand.

At 01:10 it was ninety-four. At 03:00 it was two hundred and twelve.

The count is not a measurement. It is a count of customers on feeders that are open, which is a different thing, and on a night like that it lags.

By two in the morning I had stopped reading the number as a number and started reading it as a shape.

Nothing gets fixed before it gets looked at, and that is the first thing anybody learns on this desk.

Crews go out to look, and they tell us what they found, and then we decide.

There were nineteen crews out by two. Fourteen of ours and five from a contractor.

The contractor crews go where they are put. They do not know this network and they are not expected to.

Somebody has to go with them. That is a decision I make at three in the morning about people I have never met.

People think we know where the damage is. We know where the customers are, which is a different piece of information collected for a different purpose.

The difference between those two things is what the night is made of.

A feeder can be open for one span down at the far end. Four hundred customers, one crew, an hour.

A feeder can be open for a tree across three phases at the head of it. Four hundred customers, three crews, most of a day.

The count says four hundred both times.

Nothing on my screen tells me which is which. Nobody has built the thing that would.

What we have instead is the assessment, which is a person standing under it with a radio.

The Allfather sets the order.

Hospitals first, then anything that feeds one, then the big feeders in order of how many customers hang off them.

He does not do it once. He does it every forty minutes, and the numbers move underneath him all night, and the order moves with them.

Every forty minutes is not a rule. Nobody wrote forty minutes.

It is what it takes to get round the areas and back to the first one.

The order is a list of feeders. It is not a list of streets and it is not a list of names.

I have never seen a street name on it. There is no reason for one to be on it.

At 03:12 he and control had the exchange about the tie.

Both elements out, no second path, nothing to switch to and nowhere to put the load if there had been anything to switch to.

The All-Seeing gave the condition. The Allfather gave the direction.

Read back. Confirmed. Logged. Forty seconds.

I have not once heard either of them raise their voice on that channel and I have been on nights for six years.

The channel is recorded. Everybody knows the channel is recorded. That is probably most of it.

The recording is kept for two years. Nobody listens to it.

It is listened to after an incident, which is why it is kept, which is why it is never listened to.

THE HUNGRY GODS GO DOWN THE LINE

I have heard that exchange nine hundred times and it has never once had a word in it that was not required.

Marek rang at four.

He said he had three spans down and a pole leaning, and he asked whether the Allfather had done the six o'clock order yet, and then he asked where he was in it.

I said I could not tell him that.

He said he knew, and asked anyway, and I said I knew he knew.

He said fine, and went back out.

I logged the call. There is a field for crew queries and I put the time and his crew number in it.

There is no field for what he asked.

I have wanted that field twice. Both times were this week.

You would not use it for much. You would use it to show that a crew lead rang at four in the morning and did not shout.

We do not tell people where they are in the order, and it is not secret, and there is no policy anywhere that says it is secret.

We do not tell them because it changes.

If I tell Marek he is fourth and he is second by six o'clock, I have made a promise on behalf of a storm.

The other reason is that he would tell his crew. His crew would tell somebody. By eight it would be on a community page as a restoration time.

That has happened. Not with Marek.

It happened in 2016 and the page had eleven hundred people on it and the time was wrong by six hours.

We did not correct it. There is a rule about correcting other people's pages and the rule is that we do not.

At 05:50 the order came out for the day shift. Fourteen crews, two of them from out of the region, and a helicopter at first light if the ceiling lifted.

The first truck moved at 06:04.

I logged that too. There is a field for it.

The field is called first movement and it has been on the form since before this district had a form.

I went home at seven and slept until two and came back at six.

The count at six was one hundred and eighty-eight thousand. It had come down thirty-two in a day, which on paper looks poor, and which was three hundred and ten spans of wire.

Thirty-two thousand customers and three hundred and ten spans is not a ratio anybody publishes.

It is the ratio I look at. A day that clears a lot of customers is often a day with very little wire in it.

The wire days come later. The wire days are the ones where the count barely moves and everybody is working.

@UTILITY · 12 December, 6:15 am

Overnight winds have caused significant damage. Around 340,000 customers are currently without power across the South Coast.

Crews are out now. Assessment comes first — we can't give restoration times until we've seen the damage. We'll update as we know more.

@UTILITY · 12 December, 8:00 am

❄ Cold snap tip! Setting your heat pump to a steady temperature is more efficient than turning it up and down. Small changes, big savings.

Find more winter energy tips at the link.

@UTILITY · 12 December, 11:20 am

Correction to our 9:40 update: the figure for the North Shore was 14,000, not 4,000. The lower number was ours, not the crews'. Apologies — we know people are working out what to do with their day off that number.

Updated figures are on the map and the map is right.

20

Two hundred and ninety calls between six and seven.

Sixteen of us on the desks. Normally there are four.

I take about a hundred and forty an hour. On a normal Tuesday it is eleven.

Every call becomes a trouble call, which is a work order, and it has a number.

The number is the point. The story is not the point.

There are five codes.

Five is not a shortage of codes. Five is a decision somebody made.

Somebody decided that a crew needs to know one of five things before it leaves the yard, and that is all a crew needs.

Downed wire. Tree contact. Equipment failure. Vehicle contact. Unknown.

That is what I have. That is what everybody has.

Not one of the five is a description. All five of them are instructions.

Downed wire means go now. Tree contact means bring a saw with you.

A woman on Ridgeway had a tree through her fence and a wire in the tree.

She was calm about it. Most people are calm about it.

The angry ones ring on the second day.

On day one they want it reported. On day two they want it explained.

We do not do explained. There is no code on the form for it.

Tree contact.

A man in the valley heard a bang and saw a blue light and his lights went out.

Equipment failure.

A caller reported a car into a pole outside a bakery and would not stop describing the bakery, which has been there since 1974.

I let him. There is no rush code for a person who needs to describe a bakery.

He got to it eventually. The pole was leaning, and the pole was the point of the call.

Vehicle contact.

At 07:20 a man rang about something in the lines over the highway.

He said it was large.

I asked what it was.

He said he did not want to say on the phone.

I asked him to say it on the phone anyway.

He said it was an inflatable. Off a dealership roof. Green, he thought. Possibly a dinosaur.

I coded it. Unknown.

Unknown is not a failure code. It means send somebody out to look at it.

About one call in nine came back Unknown that day. On a normal week it is one in thirty.

Unknown goes up in wind, because people hear a thing they cannot see.

Half of the Unknowns that day were a bang and nothing else.

A crew went. The crew took it down. The crew put it in the back of the truck.

No customers were affected. Nobody lost anything. It was on the internet by nine.

Somebody two desks over had it on a phone by half past nine.

Nobody showed him. He was on the desk.

At 07:41 a bird went into a transformer at the top of a feeder.

Four thousand six hundred and thirty-six customers.

Equipment failure.

That is the same code the bakery got.

THE HUNGRY GODS GO DOWN THE LINE

The bakery took out nothing at all. The bird took a whole feeder.

The form has no way of ranking one against the other.

The Chaos-Weaver was on the desk beside me for fourteen hours and coded about a thousand of them.

The Chaos-Weaver does not sort them into interesting and not interesting, and there is no field on the form for that.

Beaulieu, somebody said at about noon, has Chaos had a break.

Somebody else said Chaos Weaver does not take breaks, which is not true, he had one at half two.

At about four somebody from the second row asked me straight out whether the Chaos-Weaver was always this quiet.

I said he was.

He ate at the desk. Most of us ate at the desk.

There is a rule about breaks, and the rule was not kept, and nobody has written that down anywhere except in this account.

I took nine minutes at half two and he took about the same.

Neither of us logged it, and there is a field for it.

Both of them go into the December summary because both of them are in the codes. What happens to them after that is not this desk.

Here is the day.

One inflatable dinosaur: no customers.

One bird: four thousand six hundred and thirty-six.

Same code. Same form. Same field.

The bird did not make the internet.

21

The lateral runs behind the houses on the low side. You cannot get a bucket in there, so it is climbing, and it was raining the way it rains in December, which is not hard but does not stop.

Four spans down between the pole at the corner and the one behind the school, and the school had been out since nine, and by then it was well after nine.

We came off a job in the valley to get there and the drive was forty minutes on a road with three trees across it that somebody else had already cut through.

You can tell which cuts are ours. Ours are square.

A homeowner with a chainsaw cuts a tree off a wire from underneath, which is the only place a person on the ground can stand, and which is the wrong place.

We have not lost anybody to that in this district, and other districts have, and everybody here knows which.

The Hand went up first, the way the Hand goes up first, without anybody discussing it.

He does the glove check at the bottom of the pole, in the rain, at the same speed he does it in April.

Two pairs come out of the bag. He does both. He does not do the second one faster because the first one was fine.

The second pair is for whoever goes up after him, and at that point he does not yet know who that is going to be.

On that job it was me, at about two in the morning, for six or seven minutes, to get a tie in that he could not reach.

Everybody says everybody does it. I have worked with men who do it sitting in the truck with the heater on.

Second season and I have not seen him skip it, and I have watched, because when you are an apprentice, watching is most of the job.

There is a difference between watching and being watched and in the first season it is entirely the second one.

THE HUNGRY GODS GO DOWN THE LINE

By the second season you notice that nobody is watching you as much as you thought, and that this is not a promotion.

What replaces it is that you are watching yourself, which is worse for about six months and then is the job.

Under sixty you can take Self-Protection.

That means you isolate it yourself. Nobody hands it to you. There is no guarantee coming down from control and no clearance and no permit and no read-back — you open it, and you tag it, and the tag is yours.

Which sounds like less than a clearance and is not less. It is the same protection arrived at by a shorter route.

The reason it is available under sixty is that under sixty the isolation is a thing one person can see all of. Above sixty it is not, and above sixty you do not get to decide anything by yourself.

I have not worked above sixty and will not for another two years, because the apprenticeship puts it in the fourth block.

I asked him once what changes at sixty, and he said the arithmetic.

The tags are card. Red border. They say DO NOT OPERATE and underneath that they say SELF PROTECTION, and then there is a blank line, and on the blank line you write your name.

He wrote his on the tailgate with the light on. Two seconds. He has done it more often than he has done anything else on a form.

The pen lives in the box with the tags. If the pen is not in the box, somebody has taken it and you use whatever is in the truck.

That night it was in the box.

He hung it. We went up.

It took four hours and there was nothing in any of it you would tell anybody about afterwards. We pulled the broken span and we framed it and we sagged it and we tied it in, and twice I got sent down the pole for something, which is fine, because that is what the ladder is for.

The rain came off the crossarm in a line and down the back of my collar for four hours.

The gaiters help until they do not. Everything on a person is dry at the start of a night shift and there is no version of it where anything is dry at the end.

There is a bag in the truck with a dry pair of socks in it. Everybody has one. Nobody uses it, because you would have to stop.

I used mine once, in October, on a night that finished early enough for it to be worth doing.

He did not say much, and he does not, and when he did it was about the step we were on.

Twice he said my name first and then the thing, which is how you get somebody's attention at height without startling them.

Once he said nothing and put a hand out, which was for the sag.

Sag is the thing you cannot be taught from the ground. A conductor at the right tension looks wrong and a conductor at the wrong tension looks fine.

There is a chart and the chart is for the office, and on the pole it is somebody putting a hand out.

The step we were on was the step before it, done the same way.

Somewhere down the hill a generator was running and had been running all night and would be running for another two days, and you could hear it whenever the wind dropped.

There were three of them going in that street. You can hear the difference between a good one and a hire one.

A hire one is louder and it is what you get on the second day, because by the second day the good ones are gone from every shop in the region.

Somebody in that street had one running for a fish tank. I know that because he came out and told us, at half past one in the morning, unprompted, and stood in the rain to tell us.

He was not complaining about anything. He wanted somebody official to know about the fish.

At the end he came down and took the tag off, because the person who hangs it takes it off, and there is no version of it where anybody else does.

The tag had been in the rain for four hours and it had gone soft, and the border had run a bit, and his name had run with it.

It was still legible, and it did not matter whether it was legible, because it was coming off the pole either way.

You cannot use it again. That is the point of them.

THE HUNGRY GODS GO DOWN THE LINE

You could argue that a laminated one with a wipe-clean line would do the same job for a decade.

Somebody has argued that. The answer is that a tag has to be unmistakably new, and that a wipe-clean line is a line that has had something else on it.

I think that is the right answer. It is also about ninety dollars a year of card and everybody knows it is about ninety dollars a year of card.

So the isolation, and the tagging, and the part where you are not allowed to get it wrong, comes down at the end to a piece of wet card with a name on it, going into the bin at the depot with the coffee cups.

Mullen, he said, when we were packing up. Box of tags.

A lad from the second truck asked me afterwards whether that had been the Hand up there all night, and I said it had.

The box in the truck holds fifty.

We reorder at ten.

@UTILITY · 12 December, 2:30 pm

We know food loss is difficult and expensive. Our Electric Tariff sets out what we can and cannot cover, and losses from weather-related outages — including wind, trees and wildlife — aren't covered.

Full details at the link. We're sorry, and we know that isn't the answer anyone wants.

22

An estimate does not exist until somebody has stood in front of the damage.

Before that the map says assessing, and assessing is accurate, and assessing is the word people screenshot and send to each other with a question mark after it.

There are six statuses and assessing is the second of them. The first is reported. The third is crew assigned, the fourth is crew on site, the fifth is suspended and the sixth is restored.

Restored is the only one nobody argues with.

Suspended is the one that causes the trouble. Suspended means the crew that went looked at it and needed something they did not have, and it is the most honest word on the map and reads as abandonment.

We changed it once. For about eleven months it said awaiting materials, which was accurate for perhaps a third of the cases and actively wrong for the rest, and which generated more calls than suspended ever has.

It went back to suspended in the spring and nobody has proposed a third version since.

There is a version of this problem that has no solution and this is one of them. Every honest word for a stopped job sounds like an abandoned job, and every word that does not sound abandoned is less honest.

The map has six statuses because six is the number of distinguishable things that can be true about a job, and not because six is a good number for a member of the public to hold in their head.

I sit at the notifications desk, which means I push the button, and the Companion sits at the one beside it and decides what the button pushes.

There are two of us and one button. That is not an economy. Two people on one button is the arrangement because the button goes to nine thousand people at once.

Somebody reads it and somebody sends it and the somebodies are not the same person, and that has been the arrangement since 2019 and I know what happened in 2019.

I am not going to set out what happened in 2019, because it is in a different file and because the arrangement is the part that matters and the arrangement is what I am describing.

What I will say is that it involved one person, one button, and a figure that was wrong by a factor rather than by a margin.

She does not talk to anybody either. That surprises people who assume the estimate is a conversation, and it has never been a conversation.

The calls go to a different room with a different manager and a different script and I could not tell you what is on that script.

What comes back to us from that room is a count of how many people rang about a particular area, and the count is a real input, and an area that rings often gets looked at again sooner.

That is not a queue-jump and I want to be careful about it. A high call volume from an area means the area is populated and awake, and it is used as a check on the assessment and not as a substitute for one.

It has changed a restoration order twice in three years and both times the assessment had been logged against the wrong feeder.

The first figures went out at 09:20 for six areas, by which time the crews had been on the ground for three hours and there was finally something on the assessment forms to convert into a clock reading.

The wording is fixed and we are not permitted to write it fresh, which is the single most sensible rule in this building.

I did not write it and I would not be permitted to change a word of it, and both of those facts are a relief on the second day.

The version before it was fixed is in a folder somewhere and I have read it once.

The nine words are nine words in every language we publish in, which took somebody a considerable amount of work and is not something anybody outside this desk has ever mentioned.

There are four languages. The Punjabi version was checked by three people because the first two disagreed about the tense.

I do not read any of them except the English. I send all four.

The four are chosen from the census and are reviewed every five years. The review has never removed one and has twice added one.

There is a fifth that is discussed at every review and has not been added, and the reason is a supply problem and not a policy one, which is to say there is nobody available at four in the morning.

Estimated restoration, then a time, then the sentence about estimates being subject to change as crews complete their assessment.

The Companion issued eleven of them that morning and every one was the same nine words with a different number in the middle of it.

At 11:40 she asked control whether the two o'clock figures were going to hold.

The All-Seeing said no.

He did not say it unkindly, and there is no kind or unkind way to say a number, and he told her that the crews on the south feeders had found a second break behind the first, which is common in wind and is never in the first assessment.

He gives us the figures at ten past and twenty to, and I have never known him be more than about four per cent out on a twelve-hour horizon, and on that particular night four per cent was nine thousand houses.

He also tells us which areas he is least sure about, which is not in any procedure and which is the single most useful thing that crosses this desk.

There were three of those on the second morning and all three of them moved.

He does not phrase it as a warning. He says the name of the area and then a number and then, in the same tone, that he is less sure about that one.

I have started writing those down separately. Nobody asked me to and nobody has commented on it.

She revised six areas at 11:52. The revision goes out looking exactly like the thing it replaces, in the same nine words and the same font, with the same absence of confidence expressed as confidence.

There is no way to mark a revision as a revision. The field takes a time and the notification is generated from the field.

A person who has had three of them has had the same message three times with three different numbers in it and has not been told that any of them replaced anything.

THE HUNGRY GODS GO DOWN THE LINE

We know what that is like because we tested it. Somebody sat in a room and received the sequence on their own phone and reported back on what it felt like.

The report is two pages and the phrase that stayed with everybody is that the third one made them stop believing the first two rather than the third.

Nothing was changed as a result. There is nothing in the field to change.

She revised four of those six again at a quarter past three.

There is no way to issue an estimate that says this is the third one and it is worse than the other two. The field takes a time. It takes nothing else.

Somebody wrote in during the afternoon to ask whether anybody was reading these.

Neither of us sees those. The account sees those, and the account has its own desk, and its own rules, and a person on it who has been there since five.

We passed one along on the second morning because it was not a complaint. It was a woman with a freezer and an insulin question and it went to the room with the script inside four minutes, which is the fastest anything moved that week.

There is a route for that and the route works and it is the one thing in this account that I would describe as working.

Nobody on this desk had to decide anything. The word insulin is in a list and the list does the deciding.

The last figures of the day went out at 16:40, and four of the communities on that list were not given a time at all.

For those four the field carries a different sentence, which is short, and which is the truest thing this desk published all day.

There is a separate approval for that sentence. It cannot be issued from this desk alone and it has to be countersigned, and the reason is that it is the one sentence in the set that ends the day for the people who read it.

She had it countersigned at 16:31.

The countersignature is a name in a field and takes nine seconds and exists so that two people have looked at the worst sentence of the day before nine thousand people read it.

I have watched her get it countersigned four times in three years and she has never once queued behind anything to do it.

The countersignature that night was the duty manager, who was two rooms away, and who read it and said yes and did not ask her anything about it.

That is the correct amount of asking. He has seen the sentence before and there is only one version of it.

Customers in these areas should prepare to be without power overnight.

The Companion sent it to nine thousand people, of whom fewer than four hundred had a device with any charge left in it.

@UTILITY · 12 December, 5:05 pm

If you see a downed line, assume it is live. Stay back 10 metres.

Keep pets and children away. Call 911, then call us.

This is not a precaution. Please do it.

@UTILITY · 12 December, 7:20 pm

Thank you to BC Ferries for getting eight crews and their trucks across on short notice today, and for holding a sailing when we asked.

We'll say it again in the morning when we've slept. 🛖

23

The room is not dramatic. It is a room with eight desks in it, and four screens, and a whiteboard with one number on it.

Four of the desks are ours. Two are emergency management. Two are empty and were empty all week.

THE HUNGRY GODS GO DOWN THE LINE

The empty two are for the people who come in if it goes on past a certain point. It did not go on past that point.

The counts come to us from control and they come already rounded, and not because anybody is hiding anything.

They come rounded because the fourth digit is wrong by the time you have finished typing it.

We publish to the nearest thousand above ten thousand and to the nearest hundred below it.

Somebody wrote that down in 2016. It is the only style rule I have never seen argued about.

There are forty style rules. Thirty-nine of them get argued about roughly annually.

The one about numbers holds because a number is either right or it is not.

Somebody wrote the peak on the whiteboard at half past five this morning and nobody has touched it since.

We do not publish a peak while it is still a peak. We publish it afterwards, once it has stopped being a thing that could get worse.

So it sits there in blue marker. Everything else in the room is on a screen. It will stay up there until somebody needs the board.

Nobody has needed the board. It has been eleven days.

Somebody will need it. It is a whiteboard in a room with eight desks.

When they need it they will photograph it first, because that is what people do now, and the photograph will be worse than the board.

I have thought about photographing it and have not, because a photograph of a whiteboard is the sort of thing that ends up in a deck.

The All-Seeing gives us the numbers, and he does not give us the words, and he has never once been asked to.

He would give us words if we asked. That is not the point.

The point is that the numbers come from one place and the words come from another and nobody in this building has ever wanted those to be the same place.

Lindgren, somebody said this morning, what is the All-Seeing calling it.

I said he is not calling it anything, he is counting it, and that we are the ones who have to call it something.

We called it a significant weather event in the first release and a storm in the second and by the fourth nobody was calling it anything.

By the fourth you do not need a noun. Everybody reading it is in it.

The first release is the one that gets read by people who are not affected. Everything after is read by people who are.

That is not a distinction anybody taught me. It is in the numbers on the link clicks and I worked it out in my second year.

The rules for what we publish are three.

It has to be true. It has to be short. And it cannot be capable of being read as a promise by a person standing in a cold kitchen at six in the morning.

The third rule takes out most of the English language.

It also takes out every word that sounds like reassurance, which is most of the words a person reaches for at six in the morning after nine hours.

We have a list. The list is nineteen words long. It is on the wall above the kettle and has been since before I came.

The list came out of a December some years ago when somebody wrote hoping to have you back on shortly, and shortly turned out to mean thirty-one hours.

Shortly means whatever the person reading it needs it to mean. That is the objection, and it took an incident to arrive at it.

The nine words the notifications desk uses now were written by three people over about a fortnight and were tested on a panel of members of the public, who were asked what they thought the sentence promised.

The panel came back and said that it promised nothing, which was reported internally as a success and was in fact the specification being met.

You cannot say soon, and you cannot say shortly, and you cannot say we hope to.

You cannot say back on tonight unless it is going to be back on tonight, and by the second day nobody will sign off on tonight.

Signing off is real. Every release has a name against it.

Mine is against forty-one of them from that week and I could tell you what is wrong with about six.

THE HUNGRY GODS GO DOWN THE LINE

None of the six is wrong in a way anybody noticed. Four are a word I would not use now.

The other two are a comma that changes where the emphasis falls, and I have thought about both of them more than the word ones.

What you can say is ongoing.

Restoration is ongoing. Work is ongoing. Assessment in the affected areas is ongoing.

It is accurate. It has never once been wrong. It was agreed in a document in 2017 by a working group of six people, two of whom I have met.

The document is four pages and the four pages are about one word.

I have read it twice. It is a better document than it sounds and the second page is genuinely careful about what a person in a cold house is entitled to be told.

Ferries took eight crews across and held a sailing for us. The helicopter went up at ten and found four things nobody would have found from a road.

A man in the valley posted that the utility had abandoned him. Forty people told him it had not. Eleven of those forty were also without power.

We did not reply to him. There is a threshold for replying and he was under it, and the threshold is not about whether a thing is fair.

Two of the forty had our figures more accurately than the account did, because they had been reading the map and the account had been reading the releases.

At six this evening we were at ninety-one thousand, and at nine we were at fifty-two, and the shape of that is better than the shape of yesterday.

The overnight post is written and queued and it says that restoration is ongoing.

Everybody who reads it will know that means nobody knows.

Everybody who wrote it knows that too.

It is still the most accurate word in the building.

@UTILITY · 21 December

*All customers affected by last week's storms are back on.
Thank you for your patience, and thank you to the crews from
out of region who came and stayed.*

*Clean-up work continues in several areas into the new year.
You may see us on your street for a while yet. 🧹*

24

I am the safety watch on the Ridgeway clean-up, which is a job, and which is the job.

The contractor has an excavator on the verge and the verge is under a three-phase overhead.

The conductor is at about eight metres and the machine can reach eleven.

So the machine is inside the limit of approach whenever the boom comes up.

The limit for that voltage is on a table and I have the table on a card.

The card is laminated. Everybody has one. Almost nobody has read the second side.

The second side is the table. The first side is the slogan.

I have read both sides. That is not a virtue. It is eleven hours.

My job is to stand where I can see the boom and the wire at the same time.

That is all of it, and that is what the job consists of.

I do not operate anything. I do not direct the dig.

I have one authority and it is to stop the work.

I have no authority to start it again. That is the foreman.

Those are two different people on purpose.

I say stop and the work stops, and nobody has to agree with me about it.

Nobody can overrule it on the day, and afterwards somebody can review it.

THE HUNGRY GODS GO DOWN THE LINE

The certification is a course and a card. The card runs three years.

Mine is up in May and I have the renewal booked already.

The renewal is a day, and most of the day is other people's incidents.

There are nine of them on the slides. Two are fatal.

Nobody in the room says anything during those two. The instructor does not pause either.

The shift was eleven hours with a half-hour break I took in the truck.

In eleven hours the boom was inside the zone for about forty minutes.

Forty minutes is what I was there for. The other ten hours and twenty minutes I was also there for.

That is not a complaint. It is what standing a watch consists of.

You cannot do anything else. You cannot look at a phone.

You cannot help, and if you pick up a shovel you are not the watch.

There is a chair provided and I did not use the chair.

The chair is a contractor chair and it is there because somebody complained.

The complaint was correct. Eleven hours is eleven hours.

Sitting is permitted and I have never seen anybody do it.

At 11:20 I called a stop.

The operator was slewing with the boom higher than he needed it and the arc of the slew was going to bring the tip about a metre and a half inside the zone.

He was going to stop anyway, and I am fairly sure he was going to stop anyway.

I called it before I knew that.

The machine stopped. He put the boom down. He looked at me.

I pointed at the wire and he nodded.

We were going again in about ninety seconds.

Nobody said anything about it afterwards, not the operator and not the foreman.

That is correct, because there is nothing to say about it.

A watch who has never called a stop is a watch nobody is sure about.

A watch who calls one that was not needed has cost ninety seconds.

Those are not the same size of thing.

That sentence is what the training is. It takes a day to say it.

The rest of the day is the nine incidents.

The Conscience-Keeper came at two, which he does.

He does not check on me. He signs the daily and the daily has my name on it.

He asked whether anything had happened and I said one stop at 11:20.

He asked what it was and I told him.

He said fine and wrote it into the daily.

He did not ask whether it had been necessary. He had the question and put it down, and I watched him not ask it, which is a thing you can see somebody do.

The foreman asked me afterwards who that had been.

I said the Conscience-Keeper.

He said he had thought it might be. He has been on jobs where he came out twice in a week.

He asked whether that meant something. I said it did not.

It does not. He goes where the dailies are.

There is a field for stops called. There is not a field for whether the stop was necessary.

I have asked about that once. The answer was that a field like that would change what people do.

I think that is right.

The daily goes in at the end of the shift.

Mine had one entry in it. Most of them have none.

The contractor is billed for my day.

The rate is a day rate and it does not vary with how much of the day the boom is up.

I know what the rate is. It is more than people assume and it is less than the excavator.

The excavator is billed by the hour and I am billed by the day.

On a short day I am the expensive one. There has never been a short day.

At the end of the shift the foreman said thanks, which they mostly do.

I put the card back in the truck. The table goes in the folder.

Eleven hours on the verge. Forty minutes of it in the zone.

THE HUNGRY GODS GO DOWN THE LINE

One word, said once, at twenty past eleven.

PART FIVE

THE RECKONING

25

We publish the list in the last week of December, and we have published it every year since 2011, and it is the only thing this department does that anybody outside the province has ever read.

It is built out of the year's trouble calls, of which there were sixty-one thousand and change, and of those sixty-one thousand we will print five.

The compiling is done in the first week of December by me and by whoever from operations has been given it that year, and it takes about three days of two people's time.

Three days for five items is not a good ratio. Nobody has ever asked me to justify it, which tells you something about how the department is regarded and something about how the list is regarded.

The first day is a query against the codes, which returns everything marked Unknown and everything with a note attached, and that is about two thousand two hundred records out of the sixty-one thousand.

The second day is reading them. Most of them are somebody describing a tree in a way that is not unusual and does not mean anything, and about forty are worth a second look.

The third day is the writing and the checking and the sending upwards for approval, and the approval has never once come back with a change.

The criterion is not damage. If it were damage the list would be the same list every year, and the list would be trees.

The criterion is strangeness, and strangeness is assessed against a folder of previous years that lives on the shared drive and that nobody has ever formally owned.

There are fourteen years in the folder. The first four are worse than the ones after, in the sense that somebody was still working out what the thing was for.

The 2013 list has an item on it about a raccoon that did not cause an outage and was not funny, and reading it now you can see the exact moment somebody decided that not causing an outage was in itself the joke.

That decision has never been written down. It is in the folder and it is followed.

There are two rules I could give you that also are not written down anywhere. The first is that nothing goes on the list if anybody was hurt, which has never had to be applied in my time and which I am told was applied twice before it.

The second is that nothing goes on the list from a fatality year, meaning that if the year contains one anywhere in the province, the list is not published at all.

That has happened once. There is a gap in the folder and the gap is not labelled and everybody who compiles this knows what the gap is.

The inflatable is on it, which is to say something large and green off a dealership roof on the old highway, in the lines for about forty minutes on the twelfth of December.

It caused no outage at all, and not one customer was affected by it. A crew attended and took it down and put it in the back of a truck and carried on to the next call on the list.

Two of the crew photographed it. One of those photographs is the one that travelled and the other has not been seen by anybody outside the yard.

We did not use either. We used a stock image of a line truck, which is what we always use, because a photograph of the actual thing invites people to ask why nobody was stopped from putting it on a roof in December.

The bird is on it too, further down, in the third position, which is where a thing goes when it is interesting but not the best thing you have.

A bird into a transformer at the top of a feeder in July. Four thousand six hundred and thirty-six customers off, restored inside two hours by a crew who had been on since five.

The bird is on every version of this list I have compiled and something like it is in eleven of the fourteen years in the folder.

There is a reason for that which nobody enjoys, and the reason is that a bird large enough to bridge two phases is a bird that is not going to survive the experience, and the item is therefore always slightly about a dead bird.

We do not say that part. We say the customer count and the duration and we move to the next item.

THE HUNGRY GODS GO DOWN THE LINE

Somebody suggested in about 2019 that we say it, on the grounds that the public would find it interesting and that it would be more honest about what the item consists of.

It was not adopted, and the reason given at the time was that four thousand people had been without power and the item is about them, and I have never been able to work out whether that reason is a good one.

I have written both entries and I have written them the same length. The template gives each item the same length, and I am not going to be the one who changes the template.

Sixty words each, plus a location and a date. The template has been sixty words since 2016 and before that it was ninety, and the change to sixty is the single most effective thing anybody in this department has done in my time here.

Ninety words invites a story. Sixty words is a report of a thing that happened.

The location is the municipality and not the address, which is a change I made myself after somebody in 2018 put a street name in and a photographer went and stood in it.

The date is the date of the outage and not the date it was reported, and those are different about one time in nine, and nobody except this desk has ever noticed the difference.

The Chaos-Weaver supplies the raw material for the list, which is to say that he supplies the year, and somebody from his desk sits down and goes through the codes with me in the second week of December.

He does not put items forward and he does not have a view about which of them are funny, and I asked the Chaos-Weaver once, in my second year, whether he did.

He said the codes were the codes.

I asked him again the following year, in a different way, because I thought the first answer might have been him not wanting to be drawn.

He said the codes were the codes.

Rasmussen from generation rang me on the ninth to say that they had had a sturgeon in an intake in June and asked whether that would qualify.

I said it might, and asked how many customers had been affected.

He said none, and I said that had not stopped us before, and he sounded very pleased.

The sturgeon did not make it, and it was a good sturgeon, and it was up against something inflatable and green that half the province had already seen a photograph of.

Rasmussen rang again in January to ask, without any complaint in his voice at all, whether the sturgeon would keep for next year.

I said that things do not usually keep, because the list is about the year it is about, and he said that was a pity and that it had been a very large sturgeon.

I have put it in the folder anyway, under a heading of its own, and if I am doing this in five years I will find it.

The list went out on the twenty-ninth.

By the thirty-first it had been picked up by three national outlets, two of which have never once run anything else about this utility. One of them spelled the name of the highway wrong.

Nobody corrects the highway. There is no mechanism for correcting a national outlet about the name of a highway and there is no benefit in it, and the piece is four sentences long and the fourth sentence is a link to us.

The link produced about nine thousand visits to a page that is otherwise visited by people looking for an outage.

I do not know what any of those nine thousand people did next and there is no way of finding out that anybody has ever offered me.

Sixty-one thousand trouble calls, four hundred and ten thousand hours of field time, and two hundred and sixteen kilometres of conductor replaced over twelve months by about nine hundred people.

Five items on the list, and the one that everybody sent to everybody else did not take out a single customer.

@UTILITY · 29 December

Our most memorable outages of the year are in. Featuring: one inflatable dinosaur, one very committed crow, and a trampoline that travelled further than any of us expected.

Full list at the link. Thanks for a year of patience, everyone.



26

The thirty-day report on the Novak file was submitted on the eleventh of September at 16:20, which is inside the period the Act allows, and the file was closed for the purposes of the regulator on that date.

I am setting the contents down here in the order the form sets them out, because that is the order in which anybody coming to this file will read them, and because the thirty-day report is the document that will still exist when everything else about this has been forgotten by everybody involved.

It is not closed for any other purpose, and this section sets out what the report contains and what it does not.

The form requires four things. It requires a description of the incident, a statement of the causes, a statement of the contributing factors, and a list of the corrective actions with a completion date against each.

It requires nothing else and it permits nothing else, and the permits nothing else is the part that people outside this work find hardest to accept about it.

There is no field for context. There is no field for what the crew were like or how long they had been on or what the pressure was, and every one of those things is somewhere in the description if it belongs in the description, expressed as a time or a count.

The description runs to two pages, and is drawn from the interviews and the site measurements, and contains nothing at all that was not observed by a named person at a recorded time.

It is written in the past tense throughout and in the third person throughout, and there is no sentence in it that begins with a name, which is a convention rather than a rule and which everybody who writes these follows without ever discussing it.

The causes are stated in a single paragraph of four lines, and the four lines were arrived at over eleven days by the persons named in Appendix A, and they are not a narrative, and they will not read as one to anybody who is expecting a narrative.

Four lines took eleven days because three of the lines were agreed in the first two and the fourth was not, and the fourth is the one that says what the work was being done in a way that permitted the sequence to occur.

The disagreement was not about what happened. It was about which of two things is described as the condition and which is described as the consequence, and those two things are the same two things in either order.

I took the notes for all eleven days and the notes for day seven run to fourteen pages, which is more than the report they produced.

Nobody will ever read day seven. It is in the file because the composition of the group and the participation of the worker representative have to be demonstrable, and demonstrable means written down.

The contributing factors run to a page and a half and are the part of the document that the persons named in Appendix A argued about.

A contributing factor is not a cause and the form is explicit about that, and the explicitness exists because a contributing factor read as a cause is how a person ends up carrying something they did not do.

There are five of them here, of which two are about equipment and two are about the sequence, and the fifth is about the time of day and is the only one that could be described as being about anybody's judgement.

The fifth was argued about for two of the eleven days.

It survived in the final version in a form that two of the group were content with and one was not, and the one who was not is recorded as having a differing view at Appendix B, which is a provision I had not seen used before.

Appendix B is four sentences and is the most carefully written thing in the document.

THE HUNGRY GODS GO DOWN THE LINE

There are six corrective actions, of which four were complete before the report was submitted.

That is the ordinary pattern. The physical ones get done in the first week because they are barriers and labels and the removal of things, and nobody needs a report to authorise a barrier.

One is a change to a written procedure and has a completion date in February. One is a change to the layout of that part of the site and has a completion date of the following August.

August is eleven months from the incident and that is not a delay, because the layout change requires an outage on a substation that cannot be taken out between October and April, and the first available window is August.

Somebody will read the completion date in five years and see eleven months. The reason is at Appendix C and nobody reads Appendix C.

The Conscience-Keeper signed the report on the eleventh of September, and the authority to restart the works had been exercised on the twenty-second of August, and the works had restarted on the twenty-third.

That is nineteen days, and nineteen days is a long time for a substation and a short time for an investigation, and both of those facts are recorded in the file without comment.

The works were restarted under a written instruction of two paragraphs which sets out what may be done and what may not be done until the corrective actions at 4.2 and 6.1 are complete.

The instruction is signed by the Conscience-Keeper and countersigned by the operations manager for the area, and the countersignature is not required by anything and has been on every one of these I have seen.

The reason is not written anywhere and I have not asked. I assume it is that a person restarting works on a site where somebody was hurt would rather have two names on the instruction than one.

Vukovic asked me in October who had brought the third party in.

I said the Conscience-Keeper.

He said he had assumed it was the regulator, which is what most people assume and is how these are usually described in a newspaper.

The Conscience-Keeper retained a third party on the fourth of September and their report is expected in the spring. It is not part of this file. It will not be part of this file.

I have been asked twice by people inside this organisation what the third party is looking at, and I have given the same answer both times, which is that I do not know and that the retainer is not held by this office.

The second person did not believe me. There is nothing I can do about that and it did not seem worth pursuing.

Vukovic from the site rang the office on the twelfth to ask whether Conscience had signed it off yet, and I told him that he had, and Vukovic said good and rang off, and that call is not recorded anywhere except here.

Novak returned to duties on modified terms on the fourth of November.

I did not know that until I saw it referred to in an unrelated schedule in December, which is the correct way for me to find it out and did not feel like the correct way.

That fact is held in a different system, by a different department, under provisions that do not permit it to be restated in an investigation file, and I have restated only its existence.

That is the correct handling and I want the file to show that it was the handling and not an omission.

There is a field on the closing page for related records and I have entered the reference number and nothing else, which is what the field is for.

The report is nine pages plus appendices.

The appendices are forty-one pages. Appendix A is the group. Appendix B is the differing view. Appendix C is the outage window. Appendix D is the interview transcripts, all four of them, unedited.

Corrective action four: revise the written procedure at 4.2 to require a second person present at that stage of the work.

That is the one that will change how the work is done, and it is the only one of the six that costs anything past the first month, because a second person present is a second person paid for.

The costing was done by somebody else and is not in this file.

Three of the six will appear in a compliance return in March and the other three will not, and which three appear is decided by a rule about materiality that I have read and could not summarise for you.

Completion date: the twenty-eighth of February.

27

The old pole came down on the fourth of March, which is the sentence I have wanted to write since October.

I have put it first because I spent eleven months telling people that I did not know when it would come down, and it came down on the fourth of March, and nobody asked me about it afterwards.

It came down at about twenty past nine on a Tuesday and it took a crew of three about forty minutes including the setup, and there is a photograph of the hole.

I did not take the photograph. Somebody at the city took it for their own records and sent it to me unasked, which is the second time this year that a person at the city has sent me something unasked.

The telephone company transferred their strand on the twenty-sixth of February, and the cable company came the following Tuesday with two people and a bucket and were gone inside an hour.

The batch was built in January. Four became seven when a project in the next district released three more, and seven was enough.

Nobody told me the batch had been built. I found out because the transfer appeared in a schedule I have access to and check on Mondays.

I could ask to be notified. I have asked to be notified. There is no mechanism and the person I asked was apologetic and correct.

The traffic camera turned out to belong to the city, which took four emails and two phone calls to establish, and the city sent somebody out on the Thursday.

The first two emails went to a department that does not own cameras and were forwarded, correctly, to a department that owns some cameras but not that one.

The third reached a person who knew whose it was and could not authorise anybody to touch it, and the fourth went to the person who could, and she rang me back inside the hour and apologised for the other three, which was not hers to apologise for.

That camera had been on that pole since 2016. Nobody at the city had a record of it because the record was in a project file that closed when the project closed.

Then the pole was ours and only ours, and a crew took it out in about forty minutes on a morning when it was not raining.

The stub had been carrying nothing for six days by then. Six days is what a stub carrying nothing looks like, and it looks identical to a stub carrying everything.

Two people on that street rang during those six days to ask why it was still there. I told them both that it would be down shortly, which is a word I am not permitted to use in writing and used on the telephone twice.

Before that, in January, a fault came back on the underground section about sixty feet from where the splice went in during the summer.

The Seeker came out for it. Same van, same instrument, same procedure, and the trace put it at four hundred and ninety-eight feet plus or minus ten.

That fault is not related to the summer work and I said so at the time and I have since had it confirmed by somebody who looked at the joint.

The joint is fine. The failure was about sixty feet away in a length that was laid in 1979 and has never been touched.

I mention that because the timing invited a conclusion and the conclusion was wrong, and a wrong conclusion about a joint follows a crew around.

The Seeker had the 1979 laying record out on the bonnet before he touched the receiver, and the record is why he started sixty feet north of where the fault was reported.

He walked it in the cold and put the flag down on the second pass, which is faster than August, and I said so, and he said the ground was wetter and the record was better.

Two shots. The working figure is twelve and he used two, and I have not seen that before and have not seen it since.

THE HUNGRY GODS GO DOWN THE LINE

The dig took a morning. The splice took the afternoon, and the tent went up in a wind that made it a two-person job to hold it down.

Sokolowski's neighbour came out at one point and asked which of them was the Seeker, and I pointed, and she said she had assumed it was a department.

She asked what he was looking for and I said a fault, and she asked how he would know when he had found it, and I said he would hear it.

She stayed for about ten minutes and went in when it started to rain, which is longer than most people stay.

Most people ask two questions and go in. She asked three and stayed for the answers to all of them.

She did not ask when the power would be back on, because it was on. That is the difference between this work and the storm work and it is most of why I prefer this work.

Sokolowski came out of his house while we were standing on the boulevard.

He lives at 4460, which I had known for eleven months without connecting it to anything, and it turns out he is the same Sokolowski who has been writing to the Commission since November about a sentence in our filing.

I had his address on a call log going back to the second week and I had never once looked at the surname next to it, because the call log is sorted by date and the surname is a column I do not read.

He asked whether the fault was related to the relocation.

I said it was not.

He asked it the way a person asks who has already worked out what the answer is going to be and wants to see how it is given.

He asked whether I was certain, and I said I was, and he said that he would like that in writing, and I said he could have it in writing, and he thanked me and went back in and sent an email about it that afternoon.

The email is four paragraphs and numbered. I replied to it inside three days, which is inside our standard, and my reply is one paragraph and is not numbered.

He replied to that to thank me and to correct a date I had got wrong by one day.

His hearing is on the twelfth of March. He mentioned it twice. He was not boasting about it; he mentioned it the way you mention a dental appointment.

He asked whether I would be at it. I said I would not, that the proceeding is a different department and that I have never been to one.

He said that was a shame, and I could not tell whether he meant it was a shame for the proceeding or a shame for me.

The hearing went ahead on the twelfth. I know that much because the register says so. I do not know what happened at it and I have not looked.

Halvorsen finished the boulevard in October, around the pole, with a curved bed he had not drawn and did not charge for.

He sent me a photograph of it when it was finished, which I did not ask for and which I have kept, and the curve is a good curve and reads as intentional.

When the pole came out in March it left a hole in the middle of that bed about the size of a dinner plate, and he came back and filled it, and he did not charge for that either.

I offered. There is a process for that. It exists, it works, and it would have taken about four weeks and produced a payment of something under two hundred dollars.

He said not to bother. He said it in a way that was about the four weeks and not about the money.

The record for this district is four hundred and six days, on a pole in the north end that came down in 2019, and the person who dealt with that one has left.

I looked that up on the Thursday afternoon after this one came down, which is not something anybody asked me to do.

There are two others in the district at over two hundred days as I write this, and both of them are on roads where nothing is waiting on them, which is the reason they are still up.

Two poles on a boulevard, from the fourteenth of October to the fourth of March.

A hundred and forty-two days.

@UTILITY · 6 March

*Planned outage: Thursday 12 March, 9 am–2 pm, north side.
We're replacing equipment on the distribution line as part of
the road upgrade.*

*Sorry for the interruption — a short one now saves a long one
later. Details and boundaries at the link.*

28

The aerial device did not arrive, and this section sets out why, for whoever has the file next.

There is no single reason and that is the point of writing it down. There are four, and none of them is anybody's fault, and three of them were visible in April.

I am writing this at the end of the year in which I asked for it, and it is not here, and it will not be here in this fiscal year, and the file will show somebody in due course exactly how that happened.

The chassis went into build in October, which was six weeks later than the schedule I put in Section 9, and the body shop then had a scheduling matter of its own that I have been given three explanations for.

Six weeks is inside what a manufacturer would call normal. I put a schedule in Section 9 that assumed normal and I would put the same one in again.

Delivery is now indicated for the second quarter of the next fiscal year, and indicated is the word the supplier uses, and I have started using it too.

Indicated is a good word. It means expected without meaning promised, and I have been trying to find a use for it in the outage notifications and there is not one.

That leaves the money, which is the part of this that has rules attached to it.

Capital approved in a fiscal year and not spent in that fiscal year is not carried forward. It is surrendered. That is the first rule and it has no exceptions that I have ever been shown.

Surrendered means it goes back into the pool it came from and the pool is provincial. It is not lost to the organisation. It is lost to this region.

Nobody has ever explained to me why the region is the unit that loses it, and I have stopped expecting an explanation and started planning around it.

Capital approved for a purpose may not be spent on a different purpose without a reallocation, and a reallocation requires a form, and the form requires the original justification to be attached. That is the second rule.

Both rules are binding. Both rules were written by the same office. The office is aware.

I rang them in January. The person I spoke to knew exactly what I was ringing about before I finished the sentence, which tells you how often it comes up.

She said the second rule exists so that money approved for a truck is not quietly spent on furniture. That is a good reason and it is the reason and it does not help me in February.

So on the ninth of February I began looking for something deliverable before the thirty-first of March that could reasonably be described as serving the same corporate objective as a bucket truck.

Nine February is late. It is late because I spent January expecting the body shop to give me a date and it is late because I did not want to be the person who gave up on the truck in January.

I found three candidates: a trailer-mounted generator set, a batch of insulated platforms, and a digger derrick attachment that had been sitting on a wish list in Kamloops since 2021 and that the supplier could deliver inside a fortnight.

The generator set was rejected because it needed a trailer we do not have. The platforms were rejected because they arrive in June.

That is not three candidates. That is one candidate and two things I wrote down so that the form would show three.

Nobody had asked for the attachment this year. Somebody had asked for it four years ago, which the form accepts.

THE HUNGRY GODS GO DOWN THE LINE

The 2021 request is on the system with a status of not funded and a note in the free-text field that says try again next year, and somebody has tried again next year four times.

I did not speak to that person before I did this. I have spoken to them since and they were pleased and slightly wary, which is the correct combination.

The reallocation went up on the sixteenth.

Kamloops rang on the seventeenth to ask who it was sitting with, and I said the Allfather, and they said right, then it will be back tomorrow, and it was.

That is the reputation and it is earned. Two days is the longest anything of mine has sat with that signature in four years and the two days was Christmas.

The Allfather signed it on the eighteenth.

The reallocation form is four pages. The original submission was sixty-one.

Four pages is the form. The four pages ask what the money was for, what it is now for, why the first thing did not happen, and whether the corporate objective is unchanged.

The corporate objective is unchanged. The fourth and the ninth and arguably the seventh, the same three I selected in April, because a digger derrick attachment and a bucket truck serve the same three objectives.

The original submission is attached to it, at Appendix A, in full, because the form requires the original justification to be attached and the form does not distinguish between a justification and sixty-one pages.

Nobody will read it. It has now been read once, by the Allfather, in April.

I have thought about whether to attach a covering note explaining that it is attached because the form requires it, and I have decided against, because a note explaining an attachment is a fifth page.

Deliverable before the thirty-first of March, approved on the eighteenth of February, delivered on the second of March, and in service in Kamloops on the fourth.

Two days from delivery to in service. The truck it goes on was already there and the fitter was already there and nobody had to be found.

That is what deliverable means, and nothing else in this file went the way anybody said it would.

The money was spent by the deadline and on the objective, and both rules were satisfied, and what the region has at the end of it is an attachment that four people are pleased about and a truck that is indicated.

The submission for the aerial device is still live. It goes back into the queue in April with a refreshed price and a fleet condition report that will be a year older.

Dave will photograph the same corrosion from the same four angles. It will be worse. That is the only part of next year's Appendix C I can predict.

29

I did fourteen years on distribution and I have done six on transmission and I am the wrong person to ask which is better.

People do ask. They ask at the end of a shift, usually, and usually somebody who is thinking about applying.

The difference in plain terms is that transmission moves bulk power a long way at very high voltage and distribution takes it the last part and puts it on a house.

That is the sentence I give and it is accurate.

Here is what differs.

Voltage class, obviously. Sixty and up on transmission, and the ones I work are two hundred and thirty and five hundred.

Clearances follow from that. On distribution the limit of approach is a number you can hold in your head. On transmission it is a number you look up every time.

Structures. Distribution is a pole. Transmission is a structure, and a structure is four legs and a lattice and it has a number stencilled on it and a foundation somebody poured.

Access. A distribution pole is on a street. A structure is up a hill on a right of way that somebody drove a machine along in 1974 and that has been growing back ever since.

THE HUNGRY GODS GO DOWN THE LINE

We fly. Not often and not for long, and the flying is about eleven per cent of the access time and about ninety per cent of what people ask about.

The patrols are the flying. Two people and a pilot down a line at a walking pace at a distance that would look wrong to anybody who has not done it, looking at insulators.

You find things. A cap that has gone. A damper that has slid. Woodpecker damage, which on a wood structure is a real category and has its own form.

Failure is the difference that matters and it is the one people do not ask about.

A distribution fault is a street. Four hundred customers, one crew, most of a day, and the street knows about it.

A transmission fault is not a street. It is a region, and it is nine seconds, and most of the time nobody in the region knows it happened because the system moved the load somewhere else while it was happening.

On distribution you fix the thing that broke and the people who were off come back on. On transmission you fix the thing that broke and nobody comes back on, because nobody went off.

I have met people who find that the most satisfying thing about it and people who find it the least.

The crews are different too.

Distribution is a hundred small jobs in a suburb with a dog in it. You are in somebody's yard. You are moving a car. You are explaining to a man in a dressing gown why his lights are off.

Transmission is four jobs a month and each of them is planned in February.

Distribution crews think transmission is slow. Transmission crews think distribution is rough.

Both are meant as insults. I have been on both sides of it and used both of them.

The joke each side makes about the other is the same joke, which is that the other lot could not do this.

The All-Seeing does not distinguish.

From that desk it is one system. A five hundred line and a suburban lateral are two elements with different ratings and the same question against them, which is whether the load has somewhere else to go.

I have heard him talk about a street and a corridor in the same sentence in the same tone and it is the only place in this organisation where they are the same thing.

A first-year on the patrol crew asked me in September who that was on the channel.

I said the All-Seeing.

He said he had thought it was two people.

Once a year, at the road, a distribution crew and a transmission crew work the same site.

That happens when a transmission structure needs an access road that crosses a distribution feeder, and somebody has to take the feeder out while somebody else brings a machine through.

It is two hours of work and about six weeks of arranging.

They stand around afterwards. They do not have much to say to each other and they say it anyway.

The fiscal year ends on the thirty-first.

Across the district this year: eleven thousand four hundred distribution poles inspected, four hundred and six replaced.

Two hundred and nine transmission structures climbed. Nineteen insulator strings changed.

Four hundred and eighty-one kilometres of right of way cleared, of which about ninety was done by hand because a machine could not get to it.

Two hundred and thirty-one planned outages. Six hundred and forty unplanned.

One inflatable.

The counts go in on the thirty-first and the year starts again on the first, and the structures are where they were.

@UTILITY · 24 March

Some numbers from the year: 61,000 trouble calls, 2,900 kilometres of line patrolled, and one inflatable dinosaur removed from a 25kV conductor near Nanaimo.

Thanks for a year of it. See you in April. ⚡

30

People itemise, and that is the first thing to understand about the work, and it is not a criticism, because the form asks them to itemise and they are doing what the form asks them to do.

Four hundred and ten dollars out of a chest freezer in a garage, set down line by line, with a column for what the item cost and a column for where it was bought and a third column, which we do not require and which people fill in anyway, for what the item was for.

A leg of lamb, and beside it, in that third column, in pen: for the 24th.

I read all of them. That is the job and it is not a large job in an ordinary month and in January it is most of five weeks.

The third column is where the claim stops being a schedule of goods, and about a third of people fill it in, and the ones who fill it in are not the ones who claim the most.

We had nine hundred and six claims from December, which is not a record, and the record year is not a year anybody here refers to by number.

Nine hundred and six is about four times a normal December and about a tenth of the number of households that were out, which is a ratio that has been stable for as long as anybody has measured it and which nobody has ever satisfactorily explained to me.

Of the nine hundred and six, four hundred and eleven were submitted on the form and the remainder arrived as letters, emails, or in two cases as a photograph of a freezer with a telephone number written on the back of the print.

Both of those were acknowledged and both were sent the form, and one of the two came back on the form and the other did not, and the second one is not in any file I hold.

The tariff does not guarantee a constant supply of electricity, and that is not a position we adopt in response to a claim but a sentence that exists before the claim, in a document filed with the regulator, and it has been sitting there considerably longer than most of the freezers have been in most of the garages.

What follows from it is a list, and the list is not written to be unkind, although I understand that it is not experienced that way by a person reading it in January with a bin bag open beside them.

The list was drafted by lawyers and reviewed by the regulator and has been in substantially its present form since before I was born, and none of that is a comfort to anybody and all of it is true.

I have read the version from 1971. The wording is worse and the effect is identical.

The 1971 version uses the phrase visitation of providence, which was struck out in 1988 and replaced with acts of nature, and the change was made for reasons of clarity and has been an improvement in every respect except one.

Acts of nature: storms, lightning, fallen branches or trees, birds, wildlife, and other events beyond our control.

Birds are named. They are named in the list, between trees and wildlife, in the order I have just given, and they were named there for years before December, and they will be named there next year, and the drafting of that line had nothing to do with anybody's lamb.

A woman in Delta wrote to say that she had seen the bird on the year-end list and had then found the same bird in the letter refusing her claim, and asked whether we thought that was funny.

I wrote back and said that the two documents are produced by different departments and that neither was aware of the other, which is true, and which I understand is not an answer to what she asked.

Where a claim is considered at all, and some are, we require proof of loss. That means original receipts or estimates, and not photographs of a phone showing an online order, and it means the damaged property retained.

A request for proof is not an agreement to pay. We include that sentence because, in the absence of it, a request for proof reads to almost everybody as an agreement to pay, and then the second letter is worse than the first letter would have been.

We learned that in a year I was not here for and the sentence has been in the letter since, and I have never once had it queried by a claimant, which suggests it is doing its work before anybody notices it.

About sixty of the nine hundred and six get to the proof stage. Of those sixty, perhaps twenty send what is asked for.

Of the twenty, we pay perhaps six. The six are the ones where something failed that was ours and was not weather. In a December of that kind that is a very small number of things.

The other forty are not fraudulent. They are people who threw the food away in December, which is what a person does with ruined food.

The letter tells them not to. The letter is read after the bin has gone out, because the letter follows the claim and the claim follows the freezer being opened, and by then it is a week.

The Chaos-Weaver has the intake file and puts a category against each claim before it comes to me. There are eleven categories. In four years he has not once asked for a twelfth.

The eleven were set in 2009 and cover everything that has ever arrived, which is either very good drafting or a sign that nothing new happens.

He assigns them at a rate I would not have believed before I saw it. Two hundred in a morning is normal for him and it is not fast work done carelessly, because I check them and I have found four wrong in four years.

The four were all the same error, which is a claim arriving with two separate losses in it and being categorised on the first of the two, and the fourth time I flagged it he changed how he reads the second page.

Deng, who sits opposite, asked in January whether the Chaos-Weaver ever gets any of them wrong.

I said none that I have ever found.

She said that was worse, somehow, and went back to her screen.

She has been here nine months and she is right that it is worse, and I could not tell her why, and I have not managed to put it better than she did.

What she meant, I think, is that a person who is wrong occasionally can be argued with.

There is a version of my job in which I check him and find nothing and that is the end of it, and there is a version in which I check him because it would be worse for both of us if I stopped.

The categories were settled in a year when none of these people owned any of this food.

That is not a criticism of the categories. A category that had to be renegotiated every time somebody's circumstances were unusual would not be a category, and the eleven of them between them have absorbed everything from a chest freezer in a garage to a commercial fish operation on the coast.

The claimant is right that the food is ruined, and can prove it, and in most cases did nothing at all to cause it and could not have prevented it by any action available to a person who does not own a generator.

And a person who does own a generator is a person who spent eleven hundred dollars in advance against the possibility of losing four hundred, which is a calculation almost nobody makes and which the tariff does not require anybody to make.

And the tariff is right that a bird is an act of nature. Which it is, and always was, and would be even if nobody had written it down between trees and wildlife on a list.

The alternative to a tariff of that kind is a tariff under which the cost of every freezer in the province in a bad December is carried by everybody's bill in the following year, and there is a version of this utility that works that way and it is not this one.

Nobody has ever asked me about that in a letter. I have thought it every January for four years and it is not in any of the replies.

And the instruction that resolves the two of them, which goes out in every letter, in bold, near the bottom, is that the claimant must retain the damaged property until the claim has been settled by all parties.

Keep the food.

THE HUNGRY GODS GO DOWN THE LINE

That is what the letter says, and people do write back, and what they write back to ask is where.

@UTILITY · 31 March

Our Sparky the Squirrel colouring pages are back for another year! Free to download, free to print, and every single one teaches your kids something about staying clear of equipment. Teachers — get in touch and we'll send you a class set.

Sparky has been keeping kids safe since 1987. 🐿