
Industry Treatment

"He got 43 votes. Now he's measuring what they buried."

QUICK FACTS

Genre: Slow-burn forensic thriller with dark comedy (a procedural that turns ordinary architecture into danger).

Tone: *The Holdovers* (sincere comedy) meets *Dark Waters* (document-driven dread) with the obsession texture of *Zodiac*.

Setting: Aguaverde, New Mexico — a small town where the wind follows the baseline of the mountains and the past doesn't stay buried.

Runtime: ~120 minutes.

Budget target: \$500K–\$1.5M (New Mexico incentive eligible).

LOGLINE

When the sitting mayor dies and nobody else files to run, a grief-stricken Downwinder's son wins a tiny New Mexico election by forty-three votes — then discovers those numbers are tied to something worse than politics: a neighborhood built on fill sand from settling ponds that collected fallout from Trinity, and a system that can erase one person on paper to keep catastrophe statistically invisible.

SYNOPSIS

GIL PADILLA lives in a trailer outside Aguaverde. His home is part office, part chapel: a corkboard wall of invoices, permits, maps, and the cracked photograph of his mother, ROSA. Rosa was a Downwinder. She grew up near Trinity, got cancer, and died after years of denials while trying to prove her life counted on a federal form. Gil has been living with a second inheritance: numbers. They show up everywhere. They organize his grief into something he can hold onto.

On a shelf below his wall: Rosa's old Civil Defense Geiger counter. Yellowed plastic. A strip of tape reading ROSA. A relic of her suspicion — that the ground itself was poisoned. She could never prove it. Nobody would test. Nobody would look.

When the mayor drops dead and nobody else files, Gil runs — almost by accident — and wins a special election by forty-three votes. To the town, he's a harmless eccentric. To the clerk,

DOLORES, he's a problem waiting to happen. To his daughter DESTINY, he's a man who can't stop chasing ghosts.

Gil takes office and discovers the town is quietly cracked: a rash of "earthquake" foundation failures on Oak Street, unexplained illnesses, and a groundwater crisis being handled like a public-relations problem. The initial evidence points to injection wells and falsified reporting — familiar corporate malice. But Gil's method isn't a hunch. It's measurement. It's documentation. And the documents keep pointing him back to the same words: LIFE SAFETY. CERTIFICATION. FOUNDATION FILL.

ACT ONE — THE PATTERN

Gil's days start small: he reads the charter like scripture, watches the council like a courtroom, and notices code violations the way other people notice weather. His attention is procedural—until it becomes prophetic.

A repeated visual motif begins: the baseline of the mountains in the distance and the wind pushing grit along it like a river. Gil marks pins on maps. He measures distances. He writes numbers on index cards. The baseline becomes a character — a delivery system.

In a folder in the mayor's welcome packet, Gil finds invoices that don't make sense and a yellowed MATERIAL REQUISITION tied to Oak Street's development: 1,638 cubic yards of "reclaimed" foundation fill. No certification on file. It's a small irregularity, the kind that gets waved through in a small town — until it's the first crack in the lie.

Gil asks questions. The council president, WADE SUTTER, responds with procedure and contempt. ELENA, a town engineer and one of the few competent adults left in Aguaverde, humors Gil — then starts to get worried when his questions are the right ones.

ACT TWO — VISIBLE / INVISIBLE

A quake hits. Foundations split. Oak Street becomes a line of basements and drywall dust. Residents blame the earth. Gil suspects the paperwork.

Gil and Elena go door to door collecting water samples — then, quietly, dust scraped from foundation cracks. Gil carries Rosa's Geiger counter. At first it's just a prop of grief. Then it clicks.

After the Desert Freeze, Gil follows Destiny outside and stops at the steps of First State Bank: a wide staircase with no center handrail. Gil measures it in broad daylight. Destiny thinks he's losing it. But Gil understands the logic: "If they'll cheat in daylight — imagine what they'll bury under a slab."

Tommy leads Gil to a storage unit of old documents — oilfield logs, pressure data, photos, and the thing that shouldn't be there: Oak Street subdivision paperwork showing the source of the foundation fill. A folded government map plots a plume line along the mountain baseline. Someone knew exactly where the wind would deliver its burden.

Lab results come back: radium in water, and elevated activity in foundation dust. The contamination isn't only what you drink. It's what you live on. The town's betrayal is structural.

As Gil's evidence grows, so does the pushback: Wade threatens him with procedure. State agencies stall. People begin to treat Gil the way Downwinders have always been treated — like a problem that will go away if it's ignored long enough.

ACT THREE — THE 43RD

Gil tries to make the town see itself. He hosts meetings. He shows diagrams. He asks residents to look at their own stairs, their own slabs, their own dirt. The story becomes a race: can he get the truth into the public record before it gets buried again?

Dolores finally confesses: she changed the vote count. Forty-two became forty-three with a pen stroke. Not out of whimsy — out of fear and strategy. Forty-two can be dismissed. Forty-three becomes a pattern. A trigger. A number that forces eyes to turn toward Aguaverde.

Gil's victory becomes inseparable from the town's death toll. He realizes the final cruelty: the system doesn't have to kill you to win. It only has to keep you from counting.

The Revelation: Destiny returns. In the quiet of Gil's trailer, he finally explains what's really under the foundations. Fill sand. Every foundation on Oak Street — every slab, every crawlspace — they used fill sand from the settling ponds east of town. The ponds they drained after Trinity. The wind carried fallout down the baseline for twenty years. It settled in those ponds. They drained them in the sixties, sold the sand as fill. Cheap. Nobody asked where it came from. Everything along the baseline — the school, the clinic, Oak Street. "This trailer," Gil says, looking at the floor. "We're on it right now."

The injection wells didn't create the contamination. They cracked the slabs. The cracks let it up. Rosa suspected this. Her Geiger counter. Her case number. The whole film was about finishing what she started — and the answer was under their feet the whole time.

Destiny comes home. She climbs the apartment steps she has climbed a thousand times— and stops. A hairline crack in the concrete. She cannot unsee it. The ending is not mystery; it is confirmation. Gil looks into camera and says, "Forty-three. Or forty-two. Depending on who you ask. Did you see it?" End card: hegot43votes.com — "What's under your steps?"

KEY CHARACTERS

GIL PADILLA — newly elected mayor; a sincere man whose obsession with numbers is grief turned into method.

DESTINY — Gil's adult daughter; sharp, exhausted, loving; the person most afraid Gil is disappearing into his pattern — until she inherits his perception.

ELENA — town engineer; practical; becomes Gil's reluctant ally when the evidence becomes undeniable.

DOLORES — town clerk; needlepoint and steel; the keeper of records and the one who knows how easily records lie.

WADE SUTTER — council president; stability as a weapon; procedure as violence.

TOMMY — conduit to the town's buried evidence.

SANDRA WALSH — town manager; the person who actually knows where the bodies are buried, metaphorically speaking.

DR. SARAH CHEN — State Environmental Division; calm authority; the official confirmation that still doesn't save anyone.

THEMES

- Earned distrust vs. reflexive distrust — and how systems punish people who learned not to trust them.
- Visible vs. invisible violations — the staircase you can see vs. the foundation you will never question.
- Geography as delivery system — wind and mountains as the silent map of who gets sacrificed.
- The geology of betrayal — Trinity isn't history, it's still ticking beneath their feet.
- Data manipulation — how one crossed-out number can erase a community's right to be recognized.
- Redeeming value — attention as hope: counting the erased, measuring the ignored, refusing denial.

COMMERCIAL POSITIONING

RECALL sits in the space of document-driven procedurals (*Spotlight / Dark Waters*) but shifts the action into the built environment. The investigative tool isn't a gun. It's a ruler. A code book. A lab report. A Geiger counter.

The film's 'next day' effect is designed: audiences leave noticing handrails, inspection stickers, foundations, wind patterns — and the quiet bargain they've made with the people who certified those things as safe.

The ending is unconventional but earned — not a twist for twist's sake, but a confirmation delivered gently, like wind. The crawlspace descent isn't asking "what is this?" — it's saying "here it is." The audience knows. They were told. The horror is recognition, not revelation.

Pattern Films

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