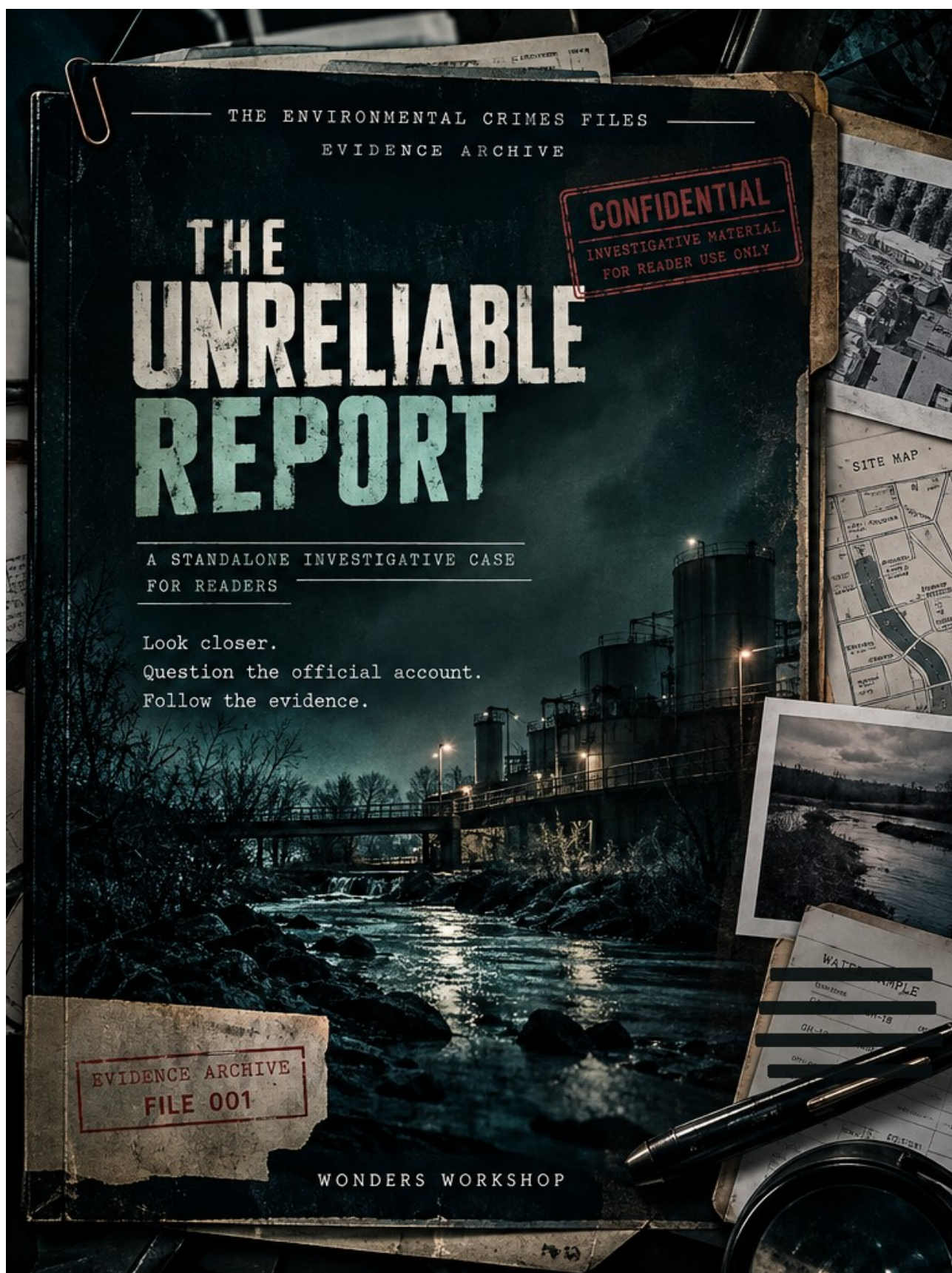




INDEPENDENT FICTIONAL INVESTIGATION • SIX EXHIBITS • NO SERIES SPOILERS

CASE BRIEF / START HERE

The Morning at Alder Run

A report reaches the city. The evidence arrives in pieces.

At 05:18 on 12 May 2026, Greyford resident Tessa Rowe saw a pale, cloudy band in Alder Run near a stormwater outlet serving Northbank Finishing, a fictional metal-surface treatment facility. She sent a photograph to the municipal reporting system two minutes later.

At 09:40, Northbank submitted a preliminary incident report. Its explanation sounded routine: pre-dawn rain had carried sediment from roadworks upstream. The report also said that nothing unusual had flowed through the facility's stormwater outlet, designated SW-2.

The city requested a limited document review. You have six exhibits, labeled A–F. You are not a police officer or an environmental regulator; your job is to evaluate the explanation against the records available.

Your three questions

1. Which important claims in the preliminary report fail when checked against the records?
2. Where does the evidence point as the most plausible source of the unusual water?
3. Who signed the operational decision involving SW-2, and what does that signature actually prove?

HOW TO READ / A measured value or timestamp is evidence. An explanation built from those facts is an inference. A signed authorization proves a decision was approved—not that a court has found a crime.

People in the file: Tessa Rowe, reporting witness; Ari Singh, municipal water technician; Nina Calder, Northbank operations manager.

EXHIBIT A / ISSUED 09:40

Preliminary Incident Report

Northbank Finishing • Operations Office • Submitted to Greyford municipal staff

FILE REF / NB-IR-0512 • Preliminary account, not an independent investigative finding

“The reported discoloration is consistent with runoff generated by pre-dawn rainfall and sediment disturbed at the upstream roadworks. No unusual flow was observed at the Northbank stormwater outlet SW-2 during the period under review.”

Supporting explanation supplied by Northbank

The report says that loose roadbed material may have entered the stream during overnight showers. It characterizes Northbank’s drainage system as operating normally and directs questions about any sediment to the contractor working farther upstream.

No timestamped rain-gauge extract, SW-2 flow trace, or comparison of upstream and downstream water samples accompanies this two-paragraph summary.

Approval line

Operational review: Nina Calder • Northbank Finishing • Recorded with the 09:40 submission.

READER CHECK / Underline two assertions that can be tested using records with precise times or locations. Then compare them with exhibits C, D, E, and F.

This is a company-authored preliminary report. The term “official explanation” in the case means the explanation submitted to the city, not a conclusion adopted by investigators.

EXHIBIT B / WITNESS + RECEIPT

A Photograph Before Dawn

Tessa Rowe • Resident statement • Location: bridge by the SW-2 reach

"I was crossing the small bridge on my way to work. The water looked grey just beyond the drain mouth. I could see a lighter streak spreading into the stream. It was not raining where I stood."

Tessa does not claim to know what caused the discoloration. She reports what she saw, where she stood, and approximately when she took the photograph.

RECORD	TIME / CONTENT
Observation noted	05:18 • Cloudy band visible near the outlet reach
Photo capture	05:18 • Original image timestamp
City portal receipt	05:20 • Automated acknowledgment of the uploaded image
Later statement	Tessa confirms the location and says no rain was falling at the bridge

Image record description

The photograph shows a pale band against darker stream water near the outlet. It does not identify a chemical, show a valve being opened, or establish who might have caused the event.



VISUAL RECONSTRUCTION – NOT THE ORIGINAL EVIDENCE PHOTO

READER CHECK / What does the 05:20 municipal receipt independently corroborate? What question can the photograph not answer by itself?

EXHIBIT D / LOCATION KEY

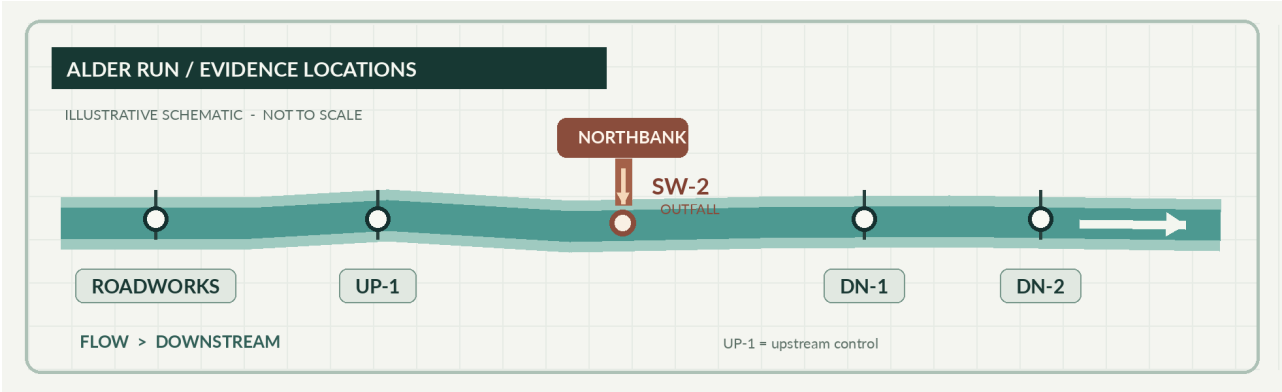
Follow the Water

Alder Run • Simplified orientation map (not to scale)

FLOW DIRECTION / The stream runs from the roadworks toward UP-1, then past SW-2, DN-1, and DN-2.

ORDER ALONG ALDER RUN	WHY THE LOCATION MATTERS
01 Roadworks	Construction activity is upstream of every sampling point.
02 UP-1	Control sample after the roadworks but before the Northbank outlet.
03 SW-2 enters stream	Northbank stormwater outlet joins Alder Run downstream of UP-1.
04 DN-1	First sample point downstream of the SW-2 junction.
05 DN-2	Second sample point farther downstream.

A simple way to visualize the route



“Upstream” and “downstream” describe the direction of the stream, not the movement of a person walking beside it. SW-2 is an outlet entering the stream, not a sampling station.

READER CHECK / If the roadworks were the dominant source of the elevated result seen at DN-1, what would you expect to investigate at UP-1? Does the location of SW-2 give you a better alternative?

The map establishes relative position only. No distances, flow rates, or exact travel times are claimed.

EXHIBIT D / COLLECTION LOG

Three Water Samples

Ari Singh • Municipal water technician • Collection date: 12 May 2026

Following the resident alert, Ari Singh collected water at the three marked points. Each bottle was assigned an ID, sealed, and recorded for transfer to the city’s contracted laboratory. The results below were reported after collection; they were not part of Northbank’s 09:40 preliminary narrative.

SAMPLE	COLLECTED	DISSOLVED ZINC
UP-1	05:36	0.02 mg/L
DN-1	05:42	0.91 mg/L
DN-2	05:49	0.68 mg/L

Field record

Sampling order: upstream control → immediate downstream reach → farther downstream reach. The logged sampling locations match the orientation on page 5. A seal and custody entry accompanies each sample ID.

Zinc is used here as a comparative analytical marker. These fictional readings do not, by themselves, establish a legal exceedance, exposure, illness, or the chemical identity of every material in the water.

READER CHECK / Where does the marked increase first appear? Does the pattern fit a source upstream of UP-1 as neatly as it fits an input entering between UP-1 and DN-1?

A spatial pattern supports a source hypothesis. Confirmation would require more evidence, including direct sampling of the suspected outlet.

What the Instruments Recorded

Three record types; compare their timestamps

C — Greyford weather-station log

RECORD	OBSERVATION
Through 06:11	0 mm of rainfall recorded at the Greyford station
06:12	First rainfall detected at that station

E — Northbank equipment log

TIME	EVENT
04:53	Containment-tank alarm registered
05:04–05:25	Flow sensor records movement through SW-2

F — Exceptional routing authorization

SIGNED 04:58 / “Temporary passage through SW-2 during treatment-system unavailability, to avoid interruption of scheduled production.” Authorized: Nina Calder • Operations Manager.

Northbank’s site plan labels SW-2 a stormwater outlet—not a route to the internal treatment system. The authorization does not state what the transferred liquid contained or quantify the volume.

READER CHECK / Put the weather log beside the SW-2 sensor record. Which happened first? Put the signed authorization beside the 09:40 report. Can both accounts of outlet activity be correct?

The city weather station describes conditions at that gauge, not every location in the wider region. The combination with the site records is what makes the reported rain explanation weak.

Build the Sequence

12 May 2026 · Events assembled from exhibits A–F

TIME	EVENT	SOURCE
04:53	Containment alarm	E
04:58	Temporary SW-2 routing approved	F
05:04–05:25	Flow recorded at SW-2	E
05:18	Tessa sees cloudy water	B
05:20	Photo received by the city	B
05:36	UP-1 sample collected	D
05:42	DN-1 sample collected	D
05:49	DN-2 sample collected	D
06:12	First rain recorded	C
09:40	Northbank report submitted	A

Mark the two conflicts

Conflict one: _____

Conflict two: _____

FAIR-PLAY RULE / Every fact you need for the main conclusion is already on pages 3–8. Do not guess a hidden witness, an unmentioned chemical, or a secret confession.

YOUR VERDICT / PAUSE BEFORE PAGE 10

Your Conclusion

Answer from evidence, not intuition

1 Which claims in the 09:40 report are contradicted or unsupported? Name the exhibits that challenge them.

2 What is the most plausible source of the observed change in the stream, and why? Cite the sample positions and the equipment record.

3 Who approved the exceptional routing, what does the signature establish, and what remains unproven?

SPOILER BOUNDARY / Stop here. The next page contains the full case resolution.

The Rain Was Real

But it does not explain the first evidence

1 The initial report does not survive its own timeline

Tessa's 05:18 observation and the municipal 05:20 receipt (B) predate the first rain recorded at 06:12 (C). A single gauge cannot rule out all localized rain, but the report offers no timestamped weather support for its claim of pre-dawn runoff. More decisively, the 09:40 report (A) says no unusual SW-2 flow occurred, while Northbank's own log (E) records flow from 05:04 to 05:25.

2 The evidence points toward the Northbank outlet

UP-1, downstream of the roadworks but upstream of SW-2, shows 0.02 mg/L zinc. At DN-1, below the outfall, the result is 0.91 mg/L; farther downstream, DN-2 reads 0.68 mg/L (D). Together with the SW-2 flow record during dry conditions and the treatment interruption, that pattern supports an improper internal transfer as the leading explanation. It is not a complete chemical-source proof.

3 A signed decision is not a criminal verdict

Nina Calder signed the exceptional SW-2 routing authorization at 04:58 (F) and approved the later preliminary summary (A). The documents establish her authorization and an inconsistency in the company account. They do not, by themselves, prove intent, the liquid's full composition, or civil or criminal liability. Avoiding a shutdown appears to be the operational incentive, but the documents cannot establish the full motive. Those findings would require further independent investigation.

The rain was real. The explanation wasn't.

End of independent fictional case • No connection to events or revelations in the novels.