

# MOST WANTED DAD

by Janet McGinn

In 1990 rural New Mexico, as middle-aged prison inmate Ray Scrivner is taken by guards to a hearing to meet with his pregnant daughter Janet, who plans to testify on his behalf to hopefully end his prison sentence, both Ray and Janet look back on the various tragic events of the past two decades leading up to, and during, Ray's current incarceration.

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## **Logline**

In 1990 rural New Mexico, as middle-aged prison inmate Ray Scrivner is taken by guards to a hearing to meet with his pregnant daughter Janet, who plans to testify on his behalf to hopefully end his prison sentence, both Ray and Janet look back on the various tragic events of the past two decades leading up to, and during, Ray's current incarceration.

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## **Strengths**

MOST WANTED DAD is a highly compelling true crime drama that powerfully portrays the real-life events leading up to convicted prison inmate Ray Scrivner's incarceration, and his various harrowing experiences once he's placed inside the U.S. prison system.

The script's subplot following Ray's adult daughter Janet and her struggle to help Ray end his prison sentence is quite emotionally involving, as well.

The script features a strong cast of vividly rendered, fully dimensional characters, especially the main protagonist Ray and his adult daughter Janet.

The reader feels fully invested in seeing Ray hopefully win his freedom with Janet's help, and in seeing Janet hopefully gain custody of her young son Brandon, who was unjustly yet legally taken from her by his scheming father.

The script makes effective use of its recurring flashback structure, as well, and the reader always feels fully oriented in the story as it jumps back between the past and the present (in the year 1990).

The script's dialogue is also impressively naturalistic, expressive and witty, and has a great sense of authenticity that helps fully bring the story and characters to life on the page, especially in the prison scenes, where the prison slang and terminology being used by the prisoners and guards

sounds incredibly realistic, and likely completely accurate to how people really speak within the U.S. prison system.

It's worth noting that Janet's scenes throughout the script are some of the most emotionally gripping areas of the story, as these scenes have a strong sense of simplicity, clarity and directness that helps the reader very easily track what Janet's thinking and feeling as the story progresses, and how the various tragedies in her life are emotionally impacting her.

And as the story ramps up to the climactic scenes in the courtroom as Ray and Janet valiantly fight for his freedom, the reader is kept utterly on the edge of their seat, anxiously hoping for Ray's release.

Tonally and thematically, the script feels enjoyably similar to acclaimed dramas like DEAD MAN WALKING, JUST MERCY and THE SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION, all of which grippingly depict the extremely harrowing, and often violent, experiences of inmates in the prison system, and the dedicated fight in the courtroom to set them free.

This produced film can expect to be enthusiastically received by viewers who enjoy emotionally layered, finely nuanced dramas about the unfairness of the U.S. legal and prison system, in both a theatrical and streaming release.

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### **Opportunities for Revision**

In further strengthening and refining the script, it would likely most benefit from adding even more clarity to the dialogue, which will help the reader even more easily understand the particular details of the various legal charges against Ray, along with what the characters are communicating to each other when they use prison slang and lingo, and also more legal language that can be a bit more difficult to follow.

Currently, even though the script's dialogue is indeed very impressive in how authentic and real it feels, especially when the characters use language and terminology that's found within the U.S. prison system, at times it can be slightly harder to understand for readers less familiar with the inner workings of the U.S. legal and prison system.

Thus by slightly streamlining, simplifying and clarifying the dialogue when Ray speaks with other prisoners like Inmate Putter, Jitterbug Yaya and Inkman, and with guards like Tsosie and Maxwell, it'll be even easier for the reader to understand what the characters are communicating to each other in these scenes.

Likewise, in big courtroom scenes like the climactic showdown starting on page 81, it'll be even easier for the reader to understand what Ray, the various attorneys and judge are communicating to each other, as well. And it's not necessary at all to "dumb down" the dialogue in these various scenes, or over-simplify what the characters are expressing to each other. But adding a bit more clarity, directness and streamlined simplicity to the dialogue in these scenes, the dramatic intrigue and events in the story will be even more emotionally hard-hitting, because the reader will have an even easier time following the action.

And as a general structural note, even though the flashback structure is working very well throughout the script, it would likely be helpful to show Ray and/or Janet even more clearly and actively pursuing one big central goal in the story, which would likely be to win Ray's freedom in court.

Currently, even though it's clear in the "present day" scenes in 1990 that Ray and Janet are hoping to win Ray's freedom in his upcoming hearing, it doesn't consistently feel like the story is following the characters as they actively pursue a clear goal. And as a result, the story doesn't always feel like it's strongly moving forward, and feels more like a string of loosely connected incidents and memories from Ray's past and present.

Thus if the story can feel even more like it's being driven by Ray and Janet consistently taking active steps to pursue a clearly-defined central story goal (and the script can still keep its current

flashback structure even while doing this), then the script as a whole will feel even more dramatically tense, focused and suspenseful.

Lastly, the script interestingly ends with real-life video footage of the actual Ray Scrivner talking about his experiences, which is a very unique and strong storytelling choice.

However, the end of the script also feels a bit unresolved, and ends slightly abruptly. It thus might be helpful to end the script with a scene of Ray being released from prison, or at least maybe with some on-screen text that tells the reader whether Ray was eventually released.

By letting the reader know the eventual outcome of Ray and Janet's story, especially if it eventually culminates in Ray's successful release from prison, the end of the script will feel even more dramatically satisfying, and will have an even clearer sense of closure.

With this adjustment to the end of the script, and with the other adjustments suggested above, especially by adding even more clarity to the dialogue, and by showing Ray and Janet even more consistently taking active steps to pursue their main story goals, this thoroughly gripping, suspenseful and ultimately quite moving true crime drama will be even more fully immersive and dramatically impactful overall.



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