

GHOST OF THE HIGHWAY: PROJECT BRIEF

Format

Feature Film

Genre / Tone

Road Trip / Dark Comedy / Drama

Little Miss Sunshine meets *Planes, Trains and Automobiles*, with the wounded brotherhood of *Rain Man*.

Recognition

Semifinalist: ISA Emerging Screenwriters Competition

Honorable Mention: Finish Line Script Competition

Budget / Buyer Lane

Low to mid budget / period road dramedy

Searchlight, Focus Features, Bleecker Street, FilmNation, Roadside Attractions lane

Core Hook

Two estranged brothers have to drive their dead father's broken station wagon from Texas to California to claim an inheritance, only to discover the trip itself is the final lesson their father left behind.

One Sentence Pitch

In 1978, an anxious, debt ridden lawyer and his chaotic drifter brother are forced to haul their father's ashes across the Southwest in a dying station wagon, following a series of ridiculous final instructions that slowly force them to confront the childhood that broke them apart.

Why It's Timely

It is a funny, painful story about inheritance, debt, masculinity, family estrangement, and the way people carry childhood trauma long after they think they have outrun it.

Main Characters

Leo Bennett: An anxious public defender from Dallas who has built his life around control, appearance, and avoiding panic. His debts are catching up with him, his asthma makes fear physical, and the trip strips away every system he uses to stay composed.

Sam Bennett: Leo's younger brother, a scruffy logistics dispatcher and born road survivor. He was sent away as a kid and never forgave the family for it. He treats chaos like home because order never protected him.

Frank "The Vagabond" Bennett: Their dead trucker father. He never appears alive, but his letters, ashes, and absurd instructions control the journey. He is funny, cruel, loving, and impossible to fully forgive.

The Beast: Frank's rusted 1966 Ford Country Squire. It is less a car than a rolling family wound, carrying the brothers through every breakdown their father designed for them.

Story Snapshot

1. Leo learns his estranged father has died and reunites with Sam at the reading of the will.
2. To claim the inheritance, the brothers have to drive Frank's decrepit station wagon across the Southwest, scatter his ashes at a series of roadside stops, and make it to a storage unit in California where the real inheritance is waiting.
3. The journey becomes a disaster. Cadillac Ranch, the Wigwam Motel, Meteor Crater, and The Thing all become stages for old resentments, humiliation, and unwanted honesty.

4. After their money is stolen and the car breaks down in the Mojave, the brothers are forced to survive on foot. Leo collapses, and Sam carries him the final distance.
5. They reach the California storage unit and discover the promised inheritance: a pristine 1966 Shelby Cobra 427.

Ending / Final Image

Sam offers Leo the full proceeds from selling the Cobra so he can pay off his debts and start over. For the first time, the brothers choose each other over the money. Then they turn the key and nothing happens. They pop the hood and discover there is no engine. Their father gets the last laugh, and the real inheritance was never the car. It was the road that brought them back together.

Theme in One Line

The only inheritance that matters is the person willing to sit beside you when the engine dies.

Positioning

It's a 1978 road dramedy about two brothers chasing a dead man's joke across the Southwest and slowly realizing that the thing they were meant to find was each other.

Materials Available

One-pager and full screenplay available upon request or through the private script library.

RYAN CLARKE

Screenwriter & Playwright | Albuquerque, NM

Dark Comedy | Satire | Character Drama | Social Thriller

Ryan Clarke is an Albuquerque-based screenwriter and playwright whose work blends dark comedy, social satire, and intimate character drama. Across a slate of 20+ feature scripts, his stories often follow deeply flawed people pushed into impossible situations, finding humor, tension, and humanity in characters who are entirely in over their heads.

His screenwriting recognition includes Grand Prize Winner, 30th Annual Fade In Awards Comedy Competition (*#FightForNoah*); Semifinalist, 30th Annual Fade In Awards Comedy Competition (*The Trencherman*); 2026 Top 10 Finalist, ISA Table Read My Screenplay at Cannes (*A Walking Shadow*); 2026 Quarterfinalist, Finish Line Script Competition (*#FightForNoah*); two-time Semifinalist, ISA Emerging Screenwriters Competition (*Flashbang* and *Ghost of the Highway*); and four additional 2026 Honorable Mentions from Finish Line (*The Finalists*, *How to Be a Human: A Musical with No Songs*, *Ghost of the Highway*, and *Dead Signals*).

As a playwright, Ryan is a three-time winner of FUSION Theatre Company's short works festival, "The SEVEN", in 2024, 2025, and 2026. The stage version of *A Walking Shadow* was also selected in 2026 for The Road Theatre Company's 17th Summer Playwrights Festival.

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