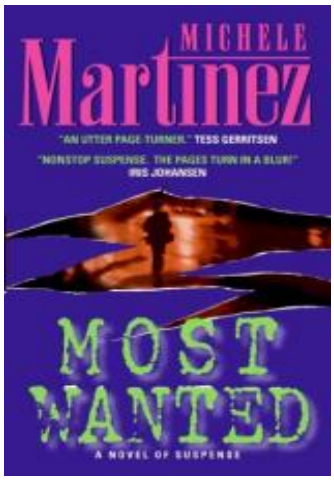
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# Most Wanted: A Novel of Suspense

by Michele Martinez




## About the Book

On a muggy summer night, prosecutor Melanie Vargas takes her baby daughter out for a stroll and stumbles across a brutal crime unfolding in her tranquil neighborhood on Manhattan's Upper East Side. Jed Benson, a wealthy, charismatic former prosecutor in her office, has been viciously murdered, his luxurious townhouse set ablaze to cover up the crime. It's just the sort of high-profile, headline-grabbing case Melanie thinks she needs -- to satisfy her demanding boss who's always on her case, and to take her mind off her husband, whom she's just thrown out after learning he was cheating on her. Melanie sends her baby home with a friend, marches into the horrific crime scene and walks out with the plum assignment.

But she quickly comes to regret her boldness. The case turns out to be far more complicated -- and dangerous -- than she'd ever imagined. Everyone around her is convinced Benson was murdered by gang members in retaliation for prosecuting their leader years earlier. But terrifying events begin to cast doubt on this theory, as witness after witness is killed. Is the truth of Benson's death wrapped up in the sordid business scandal unfolding at his prestigious, white-shoe law firm? Does it lie at the door of his beautiful, calculating widow? Or does it strike even closer to home, implicating former colleagues of Benson's who are now part of Melanie's own team?

As she races to answer these questions before more witnesses die, Melanie struggles with her own complicated personal life. She fights a powerful attraction to the handsome FBI agent she works with, who may have secrets of his own. She's haunted by her difficult childhood in a tough Puerto Rican neighborhood. And in the midst of an impending divorce, with a relentlessly demanding job, she tries to be a good mother to her daughter. But these difficulties soon give way to an even greater challenge. As she draws closer to the truth, the vicious killer ultimately trains his sights on her, and Melanie finds herself fighting to escape with her own life.

Written by a former federal prosecutor, and widely praised by critics and readers alike as one of the most notable suspense debuts of 2005, **Most Wanted**. is the gripping and thought-provoking first novel from a thrilling new writer.

## Discussion Guide

**1.** At the beginning of **Most Wanted**, Melanie Vargas ?goes for it? and gets herself assigned to the Jed Benson murder investigation despite the complicated state of her personal life. How did you react to her decision? Did you understand it? Did it influence your views of Melanie?s character in a positive or negative way?

**2.** Throughout **Most Wanted**, Melanie struggles to balance her demanding career with her responsibilities to her baby daughter Maya. What outside factors constrain her actions as she tries to find the right balance? Do her decisions and her actions comport with your own views on the relative importance of career vs. motherhood?

**3.** Certain of Melanie?s difficult childhood experiences are recounted in flashback throughout **Most Wanted**. What, if anything, did this window into Melanie?s childhood add to your understanding of her character? In what ways did you view her childhood experiences as influencing her actions in **Most Wanted**?

**4.** After Dan tells her about growing up in a cop family, Melanie reflects that she?d ?come up so far in the world that she didn?t fit in her own life.? How does Melanie?s social, economic and ethnic background affect her? How does it compare to that of Dan? Of Steve? How does it play into her relationships with the two men in her life?

**5.** What role does Melanie?s ethnic background play in her work? Does it advantage her, disadvantage her or both? Does Melanie face stereotyping in the workplace or not? Why does she react negatively when Bernadette assigns her to the Benson case in part because of her ethnic background? Do you agree that Melanie should have felt uncomfortable about that? Why or why not?

**6.** Discuss Melanie?s relationship with her boss, Bernadette DeFelice. Do Melanie and Bernadette have similar values? What about their ethics as prosecutors? How do they balance career and personal issues? What do you admire or dislike about Bernadette? Do you feel that Bernadette treats Melanie fairly?

**7.** Melanie?s views on whether to stay in her marriage are obviously influenced by her father?s abandonment of her family when she was younger. Do you think she is too influenced by this factor? Do you believe that Steve is truly contrite about his infidelity? Should Melanie give him another chance? How does her attraction to Dan O?Reilly influence her feelings about her marriage?

**8.** Which guy would you like to see Melanie end up with and why?

**9.** Throughout **Most Wanted**, there are a number of characters who might possibly be responsible for, or involved in, Jed Benson?s murder, including Slice, Rommie Ramirez, Nell Benson, Sarah van der Vere, Dolan Reed and even Dan O?Reilly. Which of these characters did you suspect? Which characters came across as the most evil? How or why were appearances deceiving? Which ?bad? characters did you have the greatest degree of sympathy for and why? Did you feel these characters got justice?

**10.** At the end of **Most Wanted**, Melanie finds herself in a situation where she herself must decide whether to resort to violence. What did you think of her actions in the climactic scenes? If you found yourself in a similar situation, do you think you would you pull the trigger?

## Author Bio

Michele Martinez, a graduate of Harvard University and Stanford Law School, was a federal prosecutor in New York City for eight years. She lives in New Hampshire with her husband and two children.

## Critical Praise

"Martinez's effervescent debut thriller comes on like a series pilot, with a winning heroine and a large cast of colorful supporting characters drawn in broad strokes and primed for future episodes."

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