

CINEMATIC LUXE INDIE SHOWCASE

OFFICIAL PRESS FEATURE

“Karma”

Best Actress Award Recipient

Directed by: Stéphane Fort

Festival Edition: Winterfest '26

Award Recognition: Best Actress Award

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Feature Overview

Karma explores the psychological weight of grief, revenge, and unresolved trauma through a tightly controlled narrative driven by performance and atmosphere.

At the center of the film is a character who exists between composure and collapse, someone shaped by loss and fueled by long-held pain. Rather than presenting a traditional antagonist, the story reframes its lead as a deeply human figure whose actions are rooted in emotional consequence.



Cinematic Luxe Insight

With a **Cinematic Insights (Formerly Known as Narrative Insights Review Co.) Score of 7.6/10**, *Karma* reflects a strong balance of visual tone, performance-driven storytelling, and audience engagement. The film’s strength lies in its ability to maintain tension through performance rather than spectacle.

Actress

Mélanie Marchal brings a rare authenticity to the screen rooted in her real-life work as an educator and shaped by a deep sense of empathy and humanity. Her journey into independent cinema has been marked by passion, discipline, and a drive to take on emotionally complex roles.

Her performance in *Karma* marks a defining moment in her career, earning recognition across international festival circuits and solidifying her presence as a powerful voice in indie film.



“For me, the character represents what happens when grief and anger are left unresolved for too long.”

— **Mélanie Marchal**

Director



Stéphane Fort is a multi-disciplinary filmmaker whose work spans writing, music, cinematography, and sound design giving him a unique command over every layer of storytelling.

From building a successful YouTube series with millions of views to earning festival acclaim with his short films, Fort continues to push forward with *Karma*, assembling a larger creative team while maintaining his signature hands-on approach.

“When actors feel safe and trusted, they stop being afraid of mistakes and that’s when the most powerful moments happen.”

— **Stéphane Fort**

A Creative Dialogue: Director & Lead Actress

The following conversation is presented as part of Cinematic Luxe's official winners feature spotlight.

The Story & Emotional Core

First off, congratulations. When you first read the script, when did you realize this story was special?

Mélanie: Thank you! When I first read the script, what struck me immediately was the emotional intensity of the story. It's not just about revenge it's about grief, trauma, and the consequences of past actions.

There was a moment where I realized the character wasn't simply a villain. She's someone who has been carrying pain and anger for years. That complexity made the story feel very powerful and very human.

Character & Performance



For the Actress: What part of this character challenged you the most?

Mélanie: The most challenging part was balancing the character's cold control with the deep emotional pain underneath. On the surface, she's very composed, elegant, and almost calm. But inside, she's driven by years of grief after losing her brother.

During filming, I tried to focus on that internal conflict playing someone who appears in control while emotionally she's actually completely broken.

Casting & Vision

For the director: What did you see in the actress that made you feel she was the perfect person to bring this role to life?

Stéphane: I've seen Mélanie in one of her previous roles. I was already drawn to her charisma and her voice, and I felt her profile would perfectly match the gang leader character bringing that edgy, 'rock-and-roll,' sexy gothic vibe. I contacted her and told her about the project, and she was immediately motivated. She sent me a self-tape for a specific part of the script. She prepared it so thoroughly that the performance was really compelling. That's when I was definitively convinced that Mélanie was the only one who should play this role.



Production Challenges & Adaptation

Indie filmmaking often requires creativity beyond the script. Was there a moment on set where the two of you had to improvise, adapt, or trust your instincts to make a scene work?

Mélanie: Not really. I mostly followed the script and trusted my instincts while playing the character. Strangely enough, it was fairly easy for me to step into her shoes. Stéphane, the director, guided me really well throughout the process, and his trust in me only reinforced my own confidence in taking on this role.

Stéphane: When I first scouted the warehouse location, I felt a huge potential for the visuals. There were several challenges: no electricity, no heating, and massive glass surfaces. But I just knew it was THE right place to film "Karma". So, we had to adapt. We put up tarps to maintain continuity and diffuse the light. We also brought blankets, hand heaters, hot drinks and EcoFlow power stations. Looking at the final result, I'm so glad I followed my gut feeling.



Emotional Impact

Was there a scene that stayed with you long after filming?

Mélanie: Yes, it's the final confrontation in the hangar, where she very sadistically forces the son to choose between his mother's death and his father's. It's an atrocious and difficult scene to play because it's extremely heavy emotionally, yet she must maintain an appearance of calm throughout. Even after filming wrapped, this scene stayed with me, showing how far grief and revenge can push someone.



Creative Evolution

For the director: Looking back at the finished film, how did this actress's performance influence the way you saw the story as a director?

Stéphane: Regarding the performance, I had a very specific vision in mind for Mélanie. As a director, I guided her to reach exactly the result I was looking for. However, the gang leader originally had a different look; she was supposed to wear a suit and have a fairly sophisticated style. Once I reached the casting stage and saw Mélanie's profile, my vision for the character evolved into what you ultimately see in the film.

Collaboration & Teamwork



Indie filmmaking is all about teamwork. How did working with the rest of the cast and the production crew shape the performance and bring the film's most climactic moments to life?

Mélanie: Absolutely, it's truly a team effort. The atmosphere on set was very positive; everyone was down-to-earth, motivated, and eager to work. What also helped build our confidence were the rehearsals held before shooting. They gave us the time to get to know the entire crew and the other actors, especially the lead actor I shared many scenes with. For me, that's extremely important, as it allows you to feel confident and comfortable enough to fully let go and embody the character during filming.

Stéphane: For me, the key is kindness. When actors feel good and trust the entire team, they aren't afraid of making mistakes anymore. It's this sense of safety that allowed them to give it their all during the film's most powerful scenes.

Audience Reflection

What do you hope audiences feel when watching this character?

Mélanie: I hope audiences feel conflicted.

Of course her actions are terrible, but at the same time I hope viewers can understand where her pain comes from.

For me, the character represents what happens when grief and anger are left unresolved for too long. I hope it makes people reflect on the consequences of revenge and how it ultimately destroys everyone involved.

Motivation & Creative Drive

For both of you: Indie films are often passion projects. What kept you motivated and grounded during the making of this film?

Mélanie: What really brought us together from the start was the script it spoke to me deeply. On top of that, the opportunity to take on this role was a real challenge: the lead character, a complex and layered person. I love diving into roles like this, and that alone was incredibly motivating. Beyond that, the connections we built within the team were just as inspiring. Stéphane, the director, and Sylvia, the



assistant director, are truly wonderful people with remarkable qualities, and I'm so grateful for the trust they placed in me for this role. Their support kept me grounded and excited throughout the entire process.

Stéphane: We went through a lot of struggles on 'Karma', but having a dedicated core team made all the difference. I've always been determined to finish what I start, no matter the obstacles. It was a tough road, but seeing the film's success on the festival circuit is incredibly rewarding.

Looking Ahead

How does winning this award influence your creative approach?

Mélanie: Receiving this award is incredibly meaningful and encouraging. It reminds me why I love acting the opportunity to explore complex human emotions and tell stories that resonate with people. It motivates me to keep choosing roles that challenge me emotionally and creatively, especially in independent films where artists have the freedom to take risks and tell bold stories.

Stéphane: This award is an honor that validates my journey as a filmmaker. It's proof that trust and meticulous collaboration result in a story that resonates. The feedback from the Cinematic Luxe Indie Showcase has also been incredibly valuable, understanding the audience's reaction is the key. Thank you for those insights! For my next films, I'm sure of one thing: they will continue to tell powerful and visual stories that deliver a strong message and truly move the audience.

A Final Note

“Mélanie Marchal emerges as a commanding presence within the film, delivering a performance that feels both grounded and fully lived-in. Each moment carries a sense of authenticity, allowing her character to exist naturally within the world of the story.”

— Team Luxe

Recognition

Karma was awarded **Best Actress** at the Cinematic Luxe Indie Showcase Winterfest '26, recognized for its emotionally layered performance, grounded storytelling, and its ability to present a complex character through restraint and intensity.

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