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KARMA

by Guillaume CANET

2026 - FRANCE - Thriller, Drama - FRENCH - 149'



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SYNOPSIS

In a village of northern Spain, Jeanne tries to rebuild her life with Daniel, who knows nothing about her troubled past. One day, Mateo, Jeanne's six-year-old godson, mysteriously disappears... In order to escape the police, who instantly suspect her, Jeanne flees to France and hides out in the community where she grew up, led by Marc. Refusing to believe that the woman he loves is guilty, Daniel will do everything in his power to find her before the police do.

INTERVIEW WITH Guillaume CANET

How did you lay the foundation for *Karma*?

For the longest time, I've had a strong urge to write a great role for Marion. After all these years of life and work together, I felt that I never offered her a part that matched her talent. It frustrated me as a film director. So one day I told her: "I will write a film for you" and I got the ball rolling. Very quickly, I wrote a first treatment.

What were the main themes that conducted this treatment?

I wanted to tell the story of a woman caught up by her past. At the beginning of the story, Jeanne is in a romantic relationship with Daniel, played by Leonardo Sbaraglia, but she struggles to love and to be loved. How moving it is to write about two lost souls that help and support each other. I also wanted to bring up themes such as control, dependency, betrayal, vengeance... About how life takes care of certain things on its own - karma. In order to incorporate all these themes, what better setting than a commune. I always wanted to make a movie in this particular setting.

The tipping point for Jeanne is triggered by her children, acting as her weakness yet also her strength...

Yes. I wanted to tell the story of a woman becoming a mother. What she endures forces her to unlock her maternal instinct.

How did you give shape to all these elements in a screenplay?

I did a full on investigative work by watching any movies or documentaries related to these types of communities. With Simon Jacquet, my writing collaborator, we sat in on a trial. I wore (was disguised with) a wig, a hat and a mask as to not be recognized. I stumbled upon an interview of a young man who escaped from a cult. His testimony was very inspiring. 5 years ago, I also met another cult survivor who exiled to Portugal. Hence why we set up our story in Spain. Meeting these people was the starting point, but in the process of writing, the focus was always on this woman's journey; she is traumatized, wounded, but determined to break the truth. Simon Jacquet helped me with the structure and character's point of view. We relished this collaboration.

How did you get together with Simon Jacquet, who co-wrote the screenplay and also acted as coproducer?

He edited two of my movies so I highly regard his vision. During a diner (one time), I pitched him the premise and how it evolves. He immediately got it and told me that the story was there. We were bouncing ideas back and forth, reacting to any suggestions. What better person could help me write this movie? I offered him to collaborate with me and we engaged in a wonderful joint effort.



Do you feel that you become a better director with every project that you do?

I've learned a lot from my last projects. For the longest time, I would fine tune the story on set and in the editing room, but for *Karma*, with Simon's help, I really got involved in the writing - no notes on scattered bits of paper. I also relied more than ever on my crew in preproduction and on set, feeding off all my collaborators' raw talent. I think you can feel it on screen.

How did the preparation go?

We built the commune from scratch. Most of the actors were initially cast as extras but I required that they give much more - they needed to perfectly know everyone in this closed commune, as if their world only revolved around blood related peers. I created a family tree and collectively we invented stories for everyone. We also crafted each relationship every character would have with Jeanne. Therefore, when she sits at the table with these extras, their gaze, whether it is compassionate or with contempt, really takes on a meaning, as each of them act their story.

Does your job as an actor feed off your work as a director?

Yes, it always has. Working as an actor helped me finance my directorial debut in 35 mm. The pleasure of acting came later on. In observing film crews on set, seeing what works and what doesn't, witnessing time being wasted as an actor... All of these experiences have been valuable lessons. As a director, I learned a lot from being an actor myself, particularly with what to expect from my actors, that I myself didn't necessarily provide at the beginning of my career.

Why didn't you wanna act in *Karma*?

No desire. I really wanted to make a movie for Marion and just focus on all the other actors on set.

What are your qualities on set?

I feel that I'm respectful to the people I work with, I'm generous and appreciative. I'm hard working and expect a lot from myself. Crews work hard on set and it's important that the director sets the tone. A happy passionate director who shares dailies and values everyone's hard work... wins.

How did you create this cohesion on this closed set, as you all spent two months in one location?

I'm used to working this way on my movies. It's important that actors and the technical crew gradually get to know each other to create this necessary bond, particularly for *Karma*, as the story takes place in a commune closed off from the rest of the world. I also wanted everyone to soak in the wonderful set we had.

What music did you play on set?

We started working on the score with Yodelice aka Maxime Nucci during the writing process, as I always do. Writing with the score helps me visualize the rhythm and the mood of each scene to determine how I will shoot it. I set up my shot lists while I write. As we were brainstorming, Maxime composed the music on the spot, a raw creative and genius moment that I once experienced with Matthieu Chedid on "*Tell no one*".

How did you proceed with the editing?

Simon introduced me to Laure Gardette, who took the movie to an unexpected level of storytelling. I had full confidence in

her work and we spent wonderful moments together. I found someone more detail-oriented than me, which gave me a break. I hope to collaborate with her on my next projects. She has a beautiful vision and understanding of the characters.

The movie is divided into two different locations, languages, and lighting... How did you manage to stitch up these two environments together?

I wanted to start with a warm, soft and tender light before jumping into a cold blue light once we get to the commune. This directing choice intentionally accompanies Jeanne's departure, from Daniel's love to Marc's domination. This dichotomy purposely applies to lighting and set decoration, between Spain and the commune. This back-and-forth between hot and cold was important to me, hence why we shot between winter and spring.

***Karma* is your last movie with Marion as a couple. What tone does it bring for its release?**

It's a project that brings together two individuals who shared a wonderful long lasting story, and undeniably love(d) each other, yet made this mutual decision to evolve separately while still remaining close partners. This movie is a celebration that we gifted to one another. I as a director and her as an actress, both wanted to create something beautiful.

What are Marion's biggest qualities as an actress?

Marion is one of the greatest international actresses. The character she plays offers an infinite range of strength, intelligence, and generosity... She gradually puts work into fully understanding the character. She read an early

draft of the script while working on other projects. And one day, she just told me “let’s do this” and she went all in. The rigor, professionalism, and strength that she put into the character really impressed me.

Other incredible actors share the screen with her: Denis Menochet and Leonardo Sbaraglia...

Indeed, they are prodigious actors. Denis Menochet is monumental with great sensitivity and accuracy. I’ve been wanting to work with him for the longest time. As for Daniel’s character, I was looking for an alpha type until I realized that this was not his character at all. When I met Leonardo, it was evident. He had this natural sensitivity and fragility that Jeanne could feed off.

How did you proceed with the rest of the casting?

Street casting brought us a lot of the actors. I really enjoyed this process, which is crucial to my job as a director.

How did you work with child actors?

I must have seen over 250 children as I wanted them to know how to act but also somehow look alike as they’re supposed to be blood related. (, and most importantly know how to act). Acting coach Amour Rawyler, known for her work on the movie “Custody”, did a phenomenal job prepping the kids before production started. She managed to ingrain in each of them a sense of situation, way beyond just knowing their lines. As a result, I had a bunch of method actors on set.

Do you see any elements of *Karma* in the news?

The strong desire of pulling out of a community that one fears seems evident. That’s why the general public is so fascinated with cults. I’m pretty obsessed with control, dependency, and narcissism. These traits are clearly found in organized religion but also in secular settings. I strongly wanted to bring this up.

Sexual abuse, notably toward children, stem from these issues and are well brought up in the story...

It’s simply revolting. I happen to know people who have experienced these types of traumas. I’ve seen how damaging it is. I had already brought it up in “Tell no one” but it was necessary to show it in *Karma*, as sexual abuse and incest are frequent in these communes.

The commune in *Karma* is deliberately presented as a denomination with no specific religion. How did this come along?

During my research, I noticed that many communes have their own religion, with their own regulations that most of all favor its leaders. To this matter, a Jacques Brel quote always followed me while writing and directing this project: “God is men and one day they’ll find out.”



INTERVIEW WITH Marion COTILLARD

Do you recall the first time Guillaume touched on what turned into *Karma*?

Guillaume had been talking about the fact that he wanted to write a movie for me, a part that could shake me up as an actress. He brought up a few ideas that were springing up in his mind. And one day, after reading an article, he mentioned a woman caught up by her past. He was so invested in this idea. Soon after, this character he was painting started to develop internally. He started to write immediately.

Was this unusual for you to be involved at the beginning of the writing process?

It's the first time a director writes a "tailored" role for me, quite a moving gesture. Having collaborated with Guillaume on many movies in the past, I was lucky to witness his creative process from the start. It's fascinating. He is fully invested. I immensely admire his artistry and fully trust him.

Once the script was written, how did the preparation come about?

The first step was to focus on Jeanne's inner character, an important and vital step as I built her character internally, but also her relationship with others. Guillaume works the same way. In preproduction, he spent time with all the actors, even the ones who have less screen time, in order to build this commune and create legit bonds between everyone. The first day off on set, it felt like we all knew each

other very well. This bond was well secured for the rest of the shoot. You can see it on screen. Despite that, it didn't prevent unexpected moments from happening... Indeed, it creates a solid partnership that gives room to let go, to unpredicted moments, and of course magic. The deep understanding of your character and its hidden dark side allows for total freedom on set. We know her strengths, her weaknesses, her relationships with others... It's magical to see the unexpected stem from a well tended soil.

How did you construct the character of Jeanne?

She's a complex and mysterious woman, who evolves along the story while reconnecting with elements of her past life she was forced to suppress in order to survive. When I prepare a role, I like to dive into the character's past life to create everything you don't see on paper. I invent unwritten scenes from her youth and adolescence, which are in my opinion the foundation of our existence... I apply this method to every role. It's essential.

Is it obviously a solitary ride?

For me, yes it is. I have a notebook in which I write the character's story. I imagine her taste, joys, fears, sometimes the music she listens to... I write some sort of parallel story filled with life elements not mentioned in the movie, but which will cater to feelings and emotions in every scene. It's an important enriching process. So indeed a lonely journey, but always in talk with the character early on.



How did you approach the physical transformation of Jeanne?

Jeanne has been mistreated since her childhood. It shows in her body language, the way she breathes and of course the way she talks. All these elements that I have crafted need to be integrated in the character. This is my creative process. Jeanne takes us to tough places, as an actress...

How did you manage to protect yourself on set, knowing the implication was emotionally intense?

Guillaume knows for a fact that I love a challenging character that involves an emotional ride. Even though Jeanne is a fictional character, portraying her was emotionally taxing for me as an actress. When shooting difficult scenes, you are thrown into an energy drain. After we shot certain scenes, Guillaume, the makeup artist, the hair stylist and the intimacy coordinator were all very supportive in greeting me with a harm hug to sooth agitated emotions and help me evacuate all the violence out of my mind and body.

How did you develop relationships with Denis Menochet and Leonardo Sbaraglia?

Guillaume had summoned us during preparation to work on physical training for stunts or challenging shots. We also participated in readings, where we were able to share our take on certain scenes, character choices, and bonds that bring(s) us together.

How did you work on the particular relationship with the character of Denis Menochet?

Given their relationship in the story, my wish was to remain distant to one another, even though we've known each other

for a long time and have shared great times and laughter together. I insisted on not crossing paths with him outside the set. He fully respected my request and mostly agreed with it. Guillaume facilitated this decision and made sure we wouldn't arrive on set through the same entrance and at the same time. This non-existing connection with Denis catered to the singular relationship between Jeanne and Marc.

What about the other actors?

I also chose to avoid being too close to actors who portray characters antagonist to Jeanne. Therefore, I never spoke, nor did I have contact with some members of the commune. Guillaume Canet is very detail oriented.

How does he show it on set?

Guillaume knows how details can bring a certain depth and richness to a scene. He's very precise and leaves nothing unanswered. In the score, the costumes, the lighting, every shot, every camera movement enhances the story. His passion for subtle details foster a full hard working creative energy.

Can you talk about the costumes?

Guillaume has been working with the same costume designer Carine Sarfati since his directorial debut. She knows exactly what he's looking for. Like I said, he pours his heart and soul in every detail of his movie. Every color, fabric length, size of a costume tells a story. It's invigorating to work with people so invested in their creative choices. It really brings life to the movie. Carine Sarfati's touch is so precious.

Does being directed by someone who knows you so well, bring something more to the work of an actor?

Trust creates full freedom in surrendering to someone. Knowing that everything you give to the director will be elevated allows us to fully invest ourselves.

Were you involved once the shoot was done?

When a film I work on gets edited, I usually don't exchange with directors, aside from Guillaume. Accompanying him in this final creative process of movie making is a blessing.

Did you share Guillaume's interest in cults before making this movie?

It's quite fascinating to study how one person allows herself to be manipulated when lost, and how far this same person allows herself to be betrayed. We all strive to connect with others, be noticed and understood. What happens when a narcissist exploits our weakness to serve his harmful interests? Jeanne's story is the story of a woman who escapes this hold because others give her genuine love and attention.



INTERVIEW WITH Denis MÉNOCHET

How did the project come to you?

End of July 2024, to my great surprise, I got a call from Guillaume. We had worked together on *"The Program"* by Stephen Frears, thirteen years ago, and from time to time he would call me to congratulate me on my performance in a movie. He's a good fellow like that. So he tells me: "I wrote a script and I'd like for you to read it." As soon as I started reading it, I couldn't put it down. I read the whole thing in one sitting. I called him back immediately to inform him how much I had loved the script and that I wanted the part. Funny enough, when he answered he was under the impression that his email had never been sent, therefore that I had never received the screenplay. He was surprised. We had a good laugh. This shared enthusiasm immediately set the tone in our future collaboration.

What appealed to you in the story and the way Guillaume told it?

The writing is very intense. The film is clearly a thriller but he manages to depict with great accuracy human relationships, which is why I do this work. I was thrilled. Not to mention the fact that Marion would be my scene partner which brought extra excitement. There are not a lot of parts like Marc's character in an acting career. It makes the experience more precious.

The predatory relationship between your character and Marion Cotillard's is clearly linked to the chemistry on screen. How did you feed it?

Early on, while preparing for the role, we both agreed to stay away from each other on set, to not communicate much, and to maintain space between each other until Guillaume called "action", not for distance reasons but to serve both characters' history. When the camera was rolling and we locked eyes, we no longer saw Denis and Marion. We faced our characters. Since Jeanne and Marc share a long complex history, longer to see Jeanne in the eyes of Marion felt like resuming our story exactly where we had left it off, as if there was never any interruption. This is what fed our predatory relationship, our established intimacy, instantly charged at first glance.

What type of director is Guillaume Canet?

Guillaume is a cinema beast. On set, he sees and hears everything. He's very enthusiastic. When he's checking the monitor, he's clearly experiencing the movie while making it. I'm very happy to have met him and got to work with him, as I have always admired him. We're only four years apart. When I was studying drama, I went to see *"The Beach"* and *"Whatever You Say"* that he wrote and directed. I was impressed. Not only was he an inspiration to a whole generation of actors, directors, producers, but he also opened many doors.

How did people handle everyone's status on set, as most actors were non professionals?

On this particular set, status had no importance. What brings people together, professional or not, is the common passion, acting. And yes, sometimes, people might be impressed by "Marion Cotillard" but not just because she's famous, but because of her performance. She can easily make everyone on set forget about her celebrity status. She was attentive to everyone on set, especially the children.

Speaking of children, how did you connect with them on set?

Connecting with the children happened organically. What's striking with the work they deliver is that they're instantly true to themselves, it's the simplest way to act when you want to be in the moment. They were well accompanied by a crew dedicated to their well-being at all times. In between takes, there was a lot of casualness. We really wish they'll remember these moments as great memories. I'm sure they will.

How did you become so believable as a predatory "villain"?

My job is to dig into my character's past to find reasons on

how and why he built himself this way. A screenplay is a walk on a cobblestone street from point A to point B. The preparation for an actor - the text, research, building the character - would be to pull out every cobblestone and put them back in the right order. Once you've completed this task and you know where every stone belongs, you can walk that walk with your eyes shut, in a wind or a snow storm. That's what I love to do. It's the biggest satisfaction in my work.

How did this occur for Marc?

As soon as I gave my approval to Guillaume, the work instantly started. In the nine months span before the shoot, we exchanged a lot over the phone or by email. We also saw each other a few times to discuss my character. We both speak the same language and share a great passion for cinema. We work the same way and understand each other very well. In helping him build the commune, I offered Guillaume to host an acting workshop with the whole cast, which he accepted. During a few days, collectively, we built every character's story and relationship with Marc. It bonded everyone together and set the tone for the remaining of the shoot.

How do you build a character so disagreeable, while understanding where he's coming from, without necessarily forgiving him?

We can't judge a character we play. Marc is just a product of his environment which he didn't create. In order to be truthful and accurate, it was necessary to unders-

tand how he became that "Monster". He was born in this commune. Like all of its members, he strongly believes that the outside world is just pure chaos and everyone living in it is doomed to burn in hell. Most importantly, he's dedicated to one mission: protect and guide his peers. It gives ground for violence. These men who believe they're serving righteousness often show brutality, because if violence brings them to paradise, Marc abides by it.

How did you find out in your research that these spirals are universal?

Aside from reading books and watching documentaries Guillaume recommended, I also did my own research, focusing on the way these communes function, the relationships with their (its) leader, the mechanisms of compliance and control. I also read testimonies of survivors that managed to escape these cults, there are a lot of them. In carefully analyzing them, I was able to detect human behavior. That's how I build my character's truth. I was mesmerized to discover that families form an alliance over generations just to protect themselves from hell. You quickly realize these practices take place all over the world. The real tragedies are the children born in these communes. They didn't choose this life.

A movie set is almost like a family. Did you feel this sense of community while shooting took place? Can you also talk about the sets that are like a character on its own?

It's more of a studios camp feel than a family. Every

morning, we were all dropped off in front of this big portal. It felt like waiting outside of school. It was nice. The sets played a big part: an old building in a village of the Lot region that used to be a monastery, then became a school for boys. You could feel a strong energy inside and all around it. Every weekend, I'd rehearse in the chapel. The location was so uniquely intense, it was ready to be filmed way before we set up camp.

What do you think the viewer will gain when he/she walks out of the movie theater?

Feeling overwhelmed, that's it. Guillaume created great cinema, and great cinema travels inside you. It stays with you. That's what we were trying to accomplish, collectively, from the first day of shooting to the last day in post-production. And I emphasize on working collectively. Making a movie is a group effort of motivated and invested talents that go that extra mile. This collective energy participated in creating the movie, the same energy Guillaume set the tone with. I can see it, I can feel it. I hope the audience will feel it too.



CAST

Jeanne Langevin

Marc

Daniel

Vasquez

Anna

Luc

Benoît

Dominique

Thomas

Joséphine

Mateo

Marion Cotillard

Denis Ménochet

Leonardo Sbaraglia

Luis Zahera

Marta Etura

David Talbot

Mathieu Lourdel

Brigitte Catillon

Hugo Trophardy

Lucile Roussel-Orphelin

Aron Ramo

CREW

A film by
Screenplay by
Based on an original idea by
Original Score by
Produced by
Director of Photography
Editor
Production Designer by
Costume Designer by
Sound by

Executive Producer
Post-Production Supervisor
First Assistant Director
Makeup Artist
Hair Stylist
Co-produced by

With the participation of
With the participation of
In association with
With the support of
In partnership with

Distribution
International Sales

Guillaume CANET
Guillaume CANET and Simon JACQUET
Guillaume CANET
YODELICE
Iconoclast, Caneo, Simon JACQUET
Benoit DEBIE
Laure GARDETTE
Mathieu JUNOT
Carine SARFATI
Rémi DARU, Vincent MONTROBERT,
Jean GOUDIER, Gurwal COÏC GALLAS, Jean-Paul HURIER
Bruno VATIN
Cyril BORDESOUILLE
Juliette CRÉTÉ
Stéphanie GUILLON
Agathe DUPUIS
Pathé, Logical
Content Ventures, M6 Films, Mid March Media
Netflix
M6 et W9
Sofitvciné 13
La Région Occitanie
le Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée

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