Writer’s Note

Karma began with two things I've always found fascinating: the idea of karma and our growing need to put numbers on almost everything. We count likes, followers, views, ratings, engagement, productivity, steps, sleep, credit scores, and many other measurements of whether we're succeeding. At some point I started wondering what would happen if karma could be measured too. Then came the more interesting question: what if somebody figured out how to game it?

The basic idea made me laugh. Do something good and earn points. Do something terrible and lose them. Help enough strangers, donate enough money, volunteer enough hours, and maybe you can build up enough positive karma to justify doing the awful thing you really want to do.

That became Jack Townsend. He's an actuary who is most comfortable when the world can be reduced to numbers, probabilities, and risk. After creating an algorithm that assigns point values to human behavior, he starts treating kindness like deposits into an account. Good deeds stop being good deeds and become transactions. Every generous act has a value because Jack is saving toward something much less generous.

I wanted Jack to make increasingly terrible choices while remaining recognizable enough that we keep following him. His obsession with measurement isn't completely arbitrary. He has spent much of his life trying to convince himself that chaos can be controlled if he understands the numbers behind it. If risk, luck, morality, and even grief can be calculated, maybe nothing truly unpredictable has to exist.

The premise also gave me a way to make fun of something that already feels familiar. We can publicly measure attention and approval in ways that weren't possible not very long ago. Charitable acts are filmed. Vulnerability can generate engagement. People can receive immediate feedback for appearing generous, compassionate, outraged, or virtuous. None of that means the kindness isn't real, but I became interested in what happens when the reward becomes inseparable from the act itself.

Jack simply takes that impulse much farther. Once goodness has a numerical value, it can be exploited. The absurdity of the system starts disappearing surprisingly quickly once everyone realizes there might be something in it for them.

Karma also surprised me while I was writing it. I'm a very detailed outliner. Before I start a screenplay, I usually know where the characters are going, why every major scene exists, and how the story ends. I had an ending planned for this one too. When I finally reached it, I realized I didn't believe it anymore and changed course.

That experience ended up fitting the story itself. I had assumed *Karma* would eventually become a story about someone learning that morality can't be reduced to a formula. What interested me more was how easily people can take a ridiculous system, recognize that it is ridiculous, and still embrace it because it benefits them.

The technology in *Karma* is intentionally exaggerated. The impulse behind it doesn't feel nearly as exaggerated to me. We already spend a remarkable amount of time measuring, ranking, displaying, and comparing ourselves. I just wondered what would happen if somebody finally put a score next to being a good person.