

Thirteen

By Richard K. Morgan

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Thirteen By Richard K. Morgan

The future isn't what it used to be since Richard K. Morgan arrived on the scene. He unleashed Takeshi Kovacs–private eye, soldier of fortune, and all-purpose antihero–into the body-swapping, hard-boiled, urban jungle of tomorrow in Altered Carbon, Broken Angels, and Woken Furies, winning the Philip K. Dick Award in the process. In Market Forces, he launched corporate gladiator Chris Faulkner into the brave new business of war-for-profit. Now, in Thirteen, Morgan radically reshapes and recharges science fiction yet again, with a new and unforgettable hero in Carl Marsalis: hybrid, hired gun, and a man without a country . . . or a planet.

Marsalis is one of a new breed. Literally. Genetically engineered by the U.S. government to embody the naked aggression and primal survival skills that centuries of civilization have erased from humankind, Thirteens were intended to be the ultimate military fighting force. The project was scuttled, however, when a fearful public branded the supersoldiers dangerous mutants, dooming the Thirteens to forced exile on Earth's distant, desolate Mars colony. But Marsalis found a way to slip back–and into a lucrative living as a bounty hunter and hit man before a police sting landed him in prison–a fate worse than Mars, and much more dangerous.

Luckily, his "enhanced" life also seems to be a charmed one. A new chance at freedom beckons, courtesy of the government. All Marsalis has to do is use his superior skills to bring in another fugitive. But this one is no common criminal. He's another Thirteen–one who's already shanghaied a space shuttle, butchered its crew, and left a trail of bodies in his wake on a bloody cross-country spree. And like his pursuer, he was bred to fight to the death. Still, there's no question Marsalis will take the job. Though it will draw him deep into violence, treachery, corruption, and painful confrontation with himself, anything is better than remaining a prisoner. The real question is: can he remain sane–and alive–long enough to succeed?

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly
Starred Review. This stellar new stand-alone from Morgan, known for his compelling future noir thrillers (Altered Carbon, etc.), raises tantalizing questions about the nature of humanity. Future governments have used genetic manipulation to create subhumans twisted to fit specialized tasks. Normal people are intrigued as well as repulsed, but they instinctively dread variation thirteen, an aggressive, ruthless throwback to a time before civilization. When a thirteen escapes from exile on Mars and apparently goes on an insane killing spree, Carl Marsalis, a soul-weary freelance thirteen hit man, is hired to help track him down. Morgan goes beyond the SF cliché of the genetically enhanced superman to examine how personality is shaped by nature and experience. Marsalis is more empathetic than the normal people around him, but they can see him only as an untrustworthy killer. At the same time, surveying corrupt, fractured normal society, the novel questions whether the thirteens are just less successful at hiding their motives. Without slowing down the headlong rush of the action, the complex, looping plot suggests that all people may be less—or more—than they seem. *(July)*
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From Bookmarks Magazine
Winner of the Philip K. Dick Award for *Altered Carbon* (see below), his debut novel, and the author of successful follow-ups *Broken Angels* (**** July/Aug 2004) and *Woken Furies*, as well as the stand-alone *Market Forces* (*** May/June 2005), Richard K. Morgan and his characters are hardly strangers to violent dystopias. *Thirteen*, published simultaneously in Britain as *Black Man*, tackles some difficult issues, including race and identity. The result is perhaps less compelling than some of Morgan's previous work, and the novel could have been shorter. Still, the author can hardly be accused of simply retreading familiar ground. *Thirteen* is a solid effort for Morgan's devotees, as well as a good read for fans of military sci-fi with a twist.

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From Booklist
Starred Review Carl Marsalis, a genetically engineered soldier (a "variant thirteen"), is busted out of jail to help track down a serial murderer who escaped from the Mars colony and crash-landed a spaceship into the ocean--but not before killing and eating everyone onboard. Now the psychopath is on a rampage, slaughtering seemingly unconnected innocents with no apparent reason or pattern. Partnered up with a female Colony Initiative investigator, Carl soon learns that finding his prey will take him to places he would rather not visit and will teach him things about his own past that he would rather not know. Published in England and Canada under its original (and more appropriate) title, *Black Man*, this is another spectacular blending of noir and SF from the author of the Takeshi Kovacs series. It's set in the early years of the twenty-second century, and behind its science-fiction facade it's a keenly observed story of prejudice, of a man separated from the rest of humanity by his physical appearance and his genetic makeup. Morgan's vision of the world a century from now is rather bleak, but it seems to be a reasonable extrapolation from today's social/religious/political trends. The prose, as always, is hard-edged and often violently graphic, and the dialogue punchy and realistic. In Morgan's future, people act and talk pretty much like they do today--and they certainly curse like they do today. Similarities in tone and substance to the genre-bending works of Philip K. Dick and (to a lesser extent) William Gibson are surely not accidental, although Morgan is no imitator. He's too good for that. *David Pitt*
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

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