



## Thirteen

*Richard K. Morgan*

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## **Thirteen** 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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## **Thirteen Details**

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## From Reader Review Thirteen for online ebook

### Chloe says

Carl Marsalis is not a lucky man. A genetic variant, the thirteenth result of humankind's tinkering with their own DNA, Carl is engineered to be the perfect soldier. He's cold, emotionless, able to shunt away knowledge of pain and avoid human concepts like community and dependence. He and his kind were very good at what they were designed for, a little too good according to the humans they supposedly protected. So, once peace again descended on this 22nd Century globe, the Thirteens were offered the option of either relocating to the foundering penal colony of Mars or spending the remnants of their lives in high-security prisons.

These days it's Carl's job to catch Thirteens that escape their captivity and are either trying to make it to Mars or just disappear into a jungle somewhere. It's not a job that Carl particularly enjoys, even when you're bred to have no attachment to blood ties it still feels like a Judas kiss to send so many of his same models back to prison, but such are the exigencies of life- you've got to do what you can to get by. It is this theme, among the many that Morgan tries on, that resonates after finishing the book, that humans are more than the genetic wiring we have within us. An unaltered human can be just as capable (if not more so) of treachery, deceit and the vilest barbarity as a lab-created human with a penchant for violence. The Thirteens are humankind's boogiemans, the creature that goes bump in the night, yet again and again their savagery is trumped by that of the humans hunting them. There's a message there, but I'd rather Morgan beat you about the head with it rather than myself.

It's always refreshing to revisit Morgan's particularly dire futures, whether with Carl Marsalis or Takeshi Kovacs, the hero of Morgan's absolutely stellar *Altered Carbon*. While definitely skilled at depicting the grime and muck of a dirty street future, it is the politicking and intrigue of the upper crust here that grabs the reader's fancy. Negotiating the byzantine paths of power between the Colony bureaucrats, the UN and the fractured former states of America (conveniently split into the Pacific Rim States, Jesusland and the Union) is a headache that nearly requires a line graph to understand, but which delightfully reinforces humanity's unceasing love of complexity and power structures.

At times the book comes across a little clunky, there are some leaps of logic that don't make sense and some characters are really just stock filler, but it's still fun and an appealing way to kill some time at the beach.

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### Liviu Szoke says

I don't particularly enjoy the cyberpunk subgenre and I was worried when I saw that the book (the Romanian edition, at least) has more than 800 pages. But this book it is not only with cybernetworks, virtual realities and so. No, it is gritty, violent, sad, has depth, characters, commentaries (about politics, about history, about media and so on), and everything you can ask from a good book. Although the pace it is quite slow sometimes and the author forgets that this is fiction, overall the reading it's absolutely delightful. More, here: <https://fansf.wordpress.com/2015/10/2....>

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### Rachel (Kalanadi) says

A violent sci fi thriller, an enhanced super soldier on the hunt for another of his kind who is killing people. Good subject matter for a thriller, but too slow to sustain the tension or excitement. This is aimed at a certain

audience - and I'm not a member. A high body count, lots of blood and gore flying, and random sex. I didn't mind the politics or philosophizing, since that was actually more interesting to me than the killing machine dudes, but this was just too long. People started repeating themselves, the same conversation would happen over and over, and scenes would go on for ages, sucking the last emotion out until it was dry as a bone.

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### **Leo Robertson says**

Got 150 pgs in. The prose is clear and gripping but I'm not super grabbed because all the characters blurred too much. They're all vaguely angry for no reason because that's more tense or something. IDK. When I read the blurb on the back again I was like 'Oh this sounds quite interesting' but I'd already read through loads of the book's plot points and not realised, so, see ya!

Anyway! So this was published in 2007 and I guess they changed the title from the version I found in a charity shop because here's how the blurb of mine starts (and I can't find this blurb online :D)

"Carl Marsalis, is a traitor, a bringer of death, a genetic freak and an unwelcome reminder of all that is dark in the human psyche — he is, in every sense of the word, a Black Man."

WOW. What... what... what the fuck were they thinking?!

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### **Hazel says**

Two hundred pages in and great fun. This is intelligent science fiction, a look at social and cultural change and geopolitics, all interwoven with 21st century genetics and artificial intelligence. It would make a good movie, just the kind my husband would love, lots of action, great visuals and clever plotting. Why haven't I read Morgan before?

Well, I'm almost finished this and I have a problem. I think there are two books here. One is an intriguing proper sci-fi novel about an outsider negotiating a possible near-future. Like the best sci-fi, it considers how advances in the physical sciences (genetic modification, space exploration, virtual reality systems) would dovetail with social changes (repressive legislation, the political fracture of the US, a more powerful UN-type organisation etc) to shape our lives. And, like the best sci-fi, it's relevant to where we are now. It's not hard to see how we could get from here to there. I'd love to read that story. Morgan has laid its background, (sometimes clumsily, with characters giving each other lectures in history or sociology), but hasn't fleshed it out.

The second book is an action story with lots of posturing tough guys, and two-dimensional female characters, cool weapons systems and gratuitous sex. It reads like it's meant to be a comic (sorry, graphic novel) or a Hollywood screenplay. There's a huge body count, a photogenic cast, predictable villains, and it even ends with an opening for a sequel, or a spin-off story. That novel would be fun too, but would only need half the word count of *Black Man*. What we have instead is a not-too-thrilling thriller.

I feel disappointed. I would have preferred the sci-fi story, but I wish he had just written one or the other.

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## Judd Karlman says

**Prelude:** Carl Marsalis, the protagonist of this novel, should be played by Idris Elba. He would rock the shit out of this role.

Nature vs. Nurture, Black vs. White, Blue State vs. Red State and Faith vs. Reason collide with lots of sex and violence in this modern Blade Runner. If you are upset by the graphic sex but not upset by the vicious violence that counter-balances it, I don't know what to tell ya other than Morgan isn't the writer for you.

My only complaint about this book is that it was named Thirteen on the cover, a ball-less and eggless move on the part of the U.S. publisher, rather than calling it Black Man, its U.K. title and a far better way to refer to the book.

I loved it. I think it is Richard K. Morgan's best thing yet. Despite being another hard-ass soldier who is weary of the machine he has killed for in the past, Carl Marsalis is a breath of fresh air.

That said, I feel like this archetype is cooked. Morgan has commented on the world through the eyes of a veteran bad-ass now in every novel but Market Forces. I'd like to think Marsalis is the last of them and see new moves in the coming books.

The book does what science fiction novels are supposed to do. It comments on our own society in a way that made me vaguely uncomfortable while entertaining me and educating me.

There are twists and turns like in a good noir whodunnit and while it is relentless in its critique of certain political parties of the U.S. of A., it does not simplify the matter and vilify the red states for an easy villain, far from it.

**P.S.** I listened to the majority of the book on my iPod via Audible and found the narration really solid. I got impatient with the last hour and broke out the book so I could read it and be done with it.

Games to check out if you liked this:  
Shock: Social Science Fiction

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## Mike says

2 stars for me, despite what I admit is some good writing in places. The premise of this book is that we have killed off all the disruptive, aggressive “hunters” in society since we invented agriculture and became civilized. The “thirteens” are the results of the effort to reinvigorate our gene pool through genetic modification, developing a strain of feral soldiers and law enforcement not found in the societies of the near future. What a bunch of crap! Ya think UBL thought in those last few seconds left to him that those warriors storming up the stairs are just a bunch of “cudlips”, Morgan’s derogatory term for regular folks. Nothing about Thirteen stood out as surprising or earth-shattering, no moments when you could say that is a really cool concept. As others have pointed out, all the action takes place in the last 50 pages, everything before that is wandering around the globe almost aimlessly. None of the characters are remotely sympathetic or even interesting. And get real, the UN is a globally effective policing organization among the nations? Right. There is one area where Morgan has his writing down to a sharp focus. One group is singled out for special attention. If you are a member of this group or even sympathetic with it, this book will not be an enjoyable

reading experience. Like few I have ever run across, Morgan brings contempt dripping with disdain, condescension beyond scorn, hatred suffused with poison for this group. If you live in “flyover country” between the east and west coasts of the US, if you have any religious affinity but especially if you are Christian, if you are Republican or conservative, this author sneers at you. Everyone in “Jesusland” is stupid, irrational, gullible and/or criminal. Everyone outside “Jesusland” is wise, intelligent, etc. I don’t mind if someone lets current political views creep into the story line if it supports the plot. Both conservative and liberal authors do it but this guy Morgan has a special hatred for Americans in his targeted group. It didn’t support the story much because little action occurred there. But at every turn, he found a way to insult this targeted group just because he could.

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## Justin says

Richard K. Morgan is kind of hot shit in the sci-fi world these days, but this book does not demonstrate why. At 550 pages, it's a ridiculously long thriller wrapped in a shroud of William Gibson-esque cyperepunk. Morgan has a lot of interesting ideas about human genetic modification in the future, and how it all ties into the political intrigue of the time, but his actual plot, at least in this book, is an overly complicated murder mystery that fails to pay off in any way whatsoever. The main character, a modified "thirteen" with incredible killing powers, is cool enough at first, but becomes quickly unlikable as he proceeds to slaughter human after human, both good and bad. The book is a stylized, tough, crime thriller in a sci-fi setting, which would have been cool had it had any likable characters, or a story that didn't completely bore me. Even at close to 600 pages Morgan can't find a way to explain what is going on until the last 50 pages, when major characters sit in a room and engage in agonizing dialog that serves no other function than revealing backstory. The rest of the book is spent watching the main character and his crime-bustin' allies wander from one part of the world to another, figuring out very little and occasionally participating in fairly cool action scenes. Morgan seems smart enough, but this book is incredibly, unnecessarily indulgent, with the most egregious example being the THREE-PAGE scene describing the Thirteen titty-humping his love interest in a back alley. I'm all for a good titty-hump, don't get me wrong, but a Hustler-style recap of one isn't a good way to legitimize a sci-fi novel that otherwise takes itself very, very seriously.

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## Wealthew says

Carl Marsalis seems like a lucky man. Thirty-odd years ago the US and UK created genetically modified soldiers, called "Thirteens", but when public horror shut the project down, the Thirteens were put into camps or shipped off to Mars. Carl is one of the few permitted to roam free--on the condition that he hunt down other Thirteens, who have left their reservations without permission. His latest mission is to stop Merrin, a Thirteen who tortured, ate, and mutilated the corpses of his fellow passengers on a flight from Mars.

Despite the thriller plot, the majority of this book was actually a slow slog for me. The characters (especially, but not only, Carl) communicate mostly in several-page rants whose main points seem to be how tough the speaker is, how hard they've had it, and how terribly unfair the world is. And it is a terrible world! Morgan is master at creating dystopias and the hard-bitten noir types who survive in them. But I can only read so many monologues per chapter, and each of the characters is so disheartened, jaded and unhappy that reading their thoughts was a drag. The other problem is that the first 400+ pages are just Carl and his various police and COLIN partners taking suborb flights all over the world to try to intimidate and threaten various underworld types (most of whom get monologues of their own). It seems very pointless. Now, all that time bumbling around does actually have a point, because all the while Morgan is dropping hints and clues to a worldwide

conspiracy. In the final few chapters, all of it comes tumbling together into a beautiful solution that makes sense of everything, even bits I didn't realize had confused me before.

I really was impressed by the mystery/thriller writing--it's some of the best I've seen. But it couldn't make up for how unpleasant I found hyper-masculine Carl, nor how bored I was by the sentence fragments that make up the narration.

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## Brainycat says

Genre: scifi / cyberpunk

Brainycat's 5 'B's:

boobs: 4 // blood 4 // bombs 2 // bondage 1 // blasphemy 4

Currently listening to: Alien Vampires: Harshlizer CD2

Richard K. Morgan has again established himself as one of my very mostest all time favorite authors. As a reader, I've often gone through endless numbers of book descriptions online, or browsed the shelves at bookstores, and felt like nobody is writing a book *just for me*. Sure, there's more 'good' or even 'great' books out there that I'd enjoy than I'll ever have time to read. But even when I'm reading a great book that I can really get into, I still have a nagging reservation, a slight cognitive disconnect between myself and the characters in the book: "What kind of idiot are they? Why didn't they do it the other way? This guy is a hopeless fool. They're are much easier ways to accomplish that goal."

Carl Marsalis, genetically modified (I'd say enhanced) and trained in soldiering since birth, did not inspire that sort of dissonance with me. I *get* this guy. I understand his mental processes. He has to explain himself over and over to the "normal" humans around him why he does the things he does, and each time I feel his frustration. The premise of the character is that he's a "variant 13", the result of manipulating the genome to express neural structures and personality traits advantageous to a hunter/gather society, but subsequently bred out in the intervening 20000 years of agricultural domestication and raised in an off-the-record creche reminiscent of the movie *Soldier*.

Those who know me well will not be the least bit surprised to find me so attracted to Carl. I'm a big believer in the concept that we, as modern humans, have sold ourselves short. We've paid for our cushy lifestyles with domestication and the yoke of civilization, at the cost of the raw animal passion that sits at the bottom of our brainpans. Where once we fought for tribal dominance with cunning, strength and self-control, we now blithely hand the reigns of our tribe over to a succession of talking heads who make reassuring noises on cue - and in turn to the people who've inherited the keys to the graineries. Two professionals, one a highlevel bureaucrat who works with genemodified populations, the other a detective who runs across them in his work, talk about the nature of the Variant 13:

Though this is a software issue we're talking about now, rather than a hardware problem. At least to the extent that you can make that distinction when it comes to brain chemistry. Anyway, look—by all the accounts I've read, the Project Lawman originators reckoned that variant thirteens would actually have been pretty damn successful in a hunter-gatherer context. Being big, tough, and violent is an unmitigated plus in those societies. You get more meat, you get more respect, you get more women. You breed more as a result. It's only once humans settle down in agricultural communities that these guys start to be a serious problem. Why? Because they won't fucking do as they're told. They won't work in the fields and bring in the harvest for some kleptocratic old bastard with a beard. That's when they start to get bred out, because the rest of us, the wimps and conformists, band together under that self-same kleptocratic bastard's paternal holy authority, and we go out with our torches and our farming

implements, and we exterminate those poor fuckers.”

Where the other books I've read by Morgan play in the space between then and now, in the gap between what you remember, what other people remember and those intersections today, this book plays in the social space between people and their perceptions of each other in the here and now. This is not another "frozen caveman wakes up and hilarity ensues" story. This book takes the old joke "Stress is the feeling created when the mind overrides the body's desire to choke the shit out of some asshole who deserves it" and treats it with respect, thoughtfulness and integrity. Carl is not a neolithic, thoughtless killing machine. Like all of Richard's characters, he has depth and breadth that keep this character driven story moving along at a fast clip.

Nature versus nurture is the glaring subtext of this story. To this end, prejudice and bigotry play a big part in the dark future of "Thirteen". On one hand, there's the overt bigotry of "jesusland", secessionist southern states and their teaparty agenda writ large. In this context, Carl experiences bigotry because of the color of his skin. He experiences bigotry because of the years he spent on the Mars colony. He experiences legislated bigotry at the hands of various nation-states and corporate entities throughout Europe and both north and south america because of his geneprint.

Carl lifted fingertips to his face, brushed at his cheekbones. “You see this? When you’re a variant, people don’t look at this. They go right through the skin, and all they see is what’s written into your double helix.”

The Rim cop shrugged. “Perhaps you’d prefer them to stop at the skin. What I hear about the old days, we’re both the wrong color for that to be a better option. Would you really prefer it the way things were? A dose of good old-fashioned skin hate?”

At the best of times, he occupies a legal grey area; he's able to avoid incarceration or being sent back to Mars because he works as a bounty hunter, licensed to track and capture or kill other 13s who escape from their holding areas. The other characters in the story, each of which are extraordinarily well developed, also deal with their own prejudices towards Carl as well their own lives as the object of other people's prejudices.

As I've come to expect from Richard K. Morgan, non-white, non-male and non-straight characters are very well represented in this story. It is positively refreshing to see capital-s Speculative Fiction finally write stories that actually feature the people who are likely to populate the world of the future. As these characters deal with their relationship to Carl, each other and themselves they each explore the difference between how they believe they should relate to Carl, the world and themselves, and ultimately have to discover for themselves where the line between limbic imperative and imprinted behavior lies. Carl has postcoital conversation with a colleague who inherited a geneset called "bonobo", designed to make women more overtly sexual:

“You know what it feels like, Marsalis? Constantly testing your actions against some theory of how you think you might be supposed to behave. Wondering, every day at work, every time you make a compromise, every time you back up one of your male colleagues on reflex, wondering whether that’s you or the gene code talking.” A sour smile in Carl’s direction.

“Every time you fuck, the guy you chose to fuck with, even the way you fuck him, all the things you do, the things you want to do, the things you want done to you. You know what it feels like to question all of that, all the time?”

He nodded. “Of course I do. You just pretty much described where I live.”

Watching each character deal with these identity issues was the real crux of the book for me; it resonated deeply in my own experiences with alcoholism.

This is Science Fiction at it's absolute finest. It uses the latest information added to the corpus of knowledge we've accumulated, extrapolates the interesting bits, hurls it full force into geopolitics and wraps it all up in a thrilling story that had me staying up late and foregoing other obligations to read. I was utterly engrossed in this book. This book shows that Richard is continuing to develop himself as both a writer and a social critic (read "artist") even after the phenomenal achievement of the Takeshi Kovacs series. Earlier this year I said about Altered Carbon "...if you read only one scifi book this year, make sure it's Altered Carbon," but I'm going to have to rescind that statement. Thirteen is one of those Important Achievements that needs to be read by anyone who has an interest in the human condition, the ability of people to grow and change, and ultimately decide their own fates with whatever cards chance - and bioengineering - have handed them.

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## **Stephen says**

6.0 stars. IMHO, second only to Market Forces as Morgan's best book and he is one of my favorite authors.

Winner: Arthur C. Clarke Award for Best Science Fiction Novel

Nominee: British Science Fiction Award for Best Science Fiction Novel

Nominee: Locus Award for Best Science Fiction Novel

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## **Mike (the Paladin) says**

Well, I made several discoveries here. First I discovered I'm deeply grateful that I got this from the library and didn't purchase it. Second I discovered that I probably won't be seeking out any other of Mr. Morgan's work.

Thirdly? I've discovered that the four letter "f" word that ends in k (f\*\*k) is apparently Richard K. Morgan's favorite word in the entire English language. He uses it as a noun, a verb, an adjective, an adverb... a participle...sometimes a dangling participle. It just depends on whether he uses the four letter word unadorned or maybe he changes it by adding an "s", or an "ed", or an "er" or maybe an "ing". Of course sometimes he just adds a second word such as "face" or "head" then it becomes a prefix. I'm not sure it was ever a suffix, but I wouldn't bet against it. Now while I give credit to Mr. Morgan for his versatility with the word in question I think he might profit from expanding his "use vocabulary". Just a thought.

There's also several other things about the book that bugged me...constantly. But rather than go into all my peeves pet and otherwise I'll simply mention how the plot and the story continues to get lost in all the political and other cometary that makes up the brave new world of the book. Every time I got involved in the novel it wandered off on some tangent.

I'm sure this is a book some will like as each of us has our own taste and I see good ratings for it. Still not something I could get into. The idea is a good one and the plot is an excellent idea. There were parts that drew me right in. The arrival of the ship the 13 stowed away on was very well done. It was horrific and set things in motion, but then we wandered off and got a few thousand more words on the world and what everyone thinks of everyone else before we actually get back to the plot.

No, not for me and it's turned me away from the writer's other work. Can't recommend except for you to see what you yourself think. To each.

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## Greg says

This was ok, it had some interesting ideas about what it means to be human, and an especially bleak look at our possible future, but besides that the book was very predictable, even when it was throwing in big plot curve balls. For all the convoluted twist and turns the book is essentially an action / adventure story in the vein of something like the Penetrator. A big guy who women can't keep their hands off of goes around and kills all the bad guys that get in the way between him and his righteous aims. Throw in an arsenal of toys that make him invincible, but which are confusing in their placement (spoiler? I mean if you can have a foolproof bulletproof gene clothing (seen at the end of the novel) why not wear one all the time? And why don't the agents from the very rich COLIN group have them? And why don't the other Thirteen's (variant humans, that have been genetically predisposed towards alpha alpha male behavior and violence) have this Mesh thing that seems to make the main character a cross between Daredevil and Superman? Wouldn't others be able to get this stuff, what makes the main character so special? It felt too much like in the 1960's Adam West Batman movie when the shark is holding on to Batman's leg that he happens to have a big can of something called "Bat Shark Repellent" on his utility belt, something which in all of the Pow! and Bam! fights before and after is never there getting in his way.).

The author also got under my skin towards the end of the novel by seeming to take great joy in a couple of witty lines he thought up, so much that he threw them into the mix a couple of times. The lines were witty the first time, but when they entered into dialouge the second time it just irked me in that irrational way that I get irked. I guess he thought that they were jokey and witty enough to be 'things people in the future would say for laughs, or that is was some kind of idiom, but he introduces these lines for the first time way to late in the book for that to be thought of (there were a couple of them, the one I remember is "Like a Jesusland preacher with a choirboy"))).

So anyway, the book is ok nothing really special.

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## Mohammed says

SF thrillers or just regular kind its hard to find someone who writes as good,hardcore noirish thrillers as Morgan. He stands out, his action scenes are better than most authors in the same fields. He writes about main characters like Carl Marslais who you could never in a million years call a hero and who is a violent, amoral noir protagonist. Still he makes seem him more human than you would expect. He doesnt write simple thriller stories where the good and bad guys are clear.

Something i must really give Richard Morgan credit for is that he wrote about multicultural characters who doesnt look like him. Many modern SF i have read have future worlds where it seems most humans you see are white Americans, White europeans. That seems alien in todays western world where there are many people like me. He dealt with racial issues, religious issues that had to do with his main characters in European,American settings. The Black Man title wasnt just for fun.

In this novel the main characters were a black brit, a Turkish woman and there were South American indians, Chinese people etc. I respect writers like him more for creating SF worlds that is more diverse. I dont want to read about brown,yellow aliens more often than real humans.....

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## fo jammi says

Richard Morgan doesn't conceal his source material, intellectual or stylistic. His acknowledgments at the

beginning of the book are a great jumping off point for exploring some of the themes that "Thirteen" tackles, and there are plenty of them. Stylistically he weaves a noirish blend that owes a great deal to Dick, Gibson and Chandler, and echoes cinematic sources as well as literary. The last scenes evoke "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid" in the slant of the light and the quiet punctuated by brief, seething violence. Morgan is a skilled synthesist, and more than that as well. Every two or three chapters his writing catches fire and precipitates a paragraph or more of jewel-like prose. The plot pivots and curlicues with tight precision, vectoring off into enough ideas to fill three separate books. His command of the kinesthetic seizes your gut and hauls you into the center of the dangerous world that he illuminates. He maintains suspense to the final pages. Ultimately he delivers stinging and startling perspective on what our common humanity (and inhumanity) is really made of.

He bases the story on a classic motif - the outsider bounty hunter bringing a fellow outsider to justice, in this case a genetic variant throwback to pre-civilized humanity equipped with martial adaptations. The protagonist supposedly lacks the basic empathies that make our society possible, and exposes the fundamental brutality of that same society when he fails to be the monster he was designed to be. Enjoyable as a straight-up action novel, Morgan has programmed in subtle barbs that will twist and slice for years to come.

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