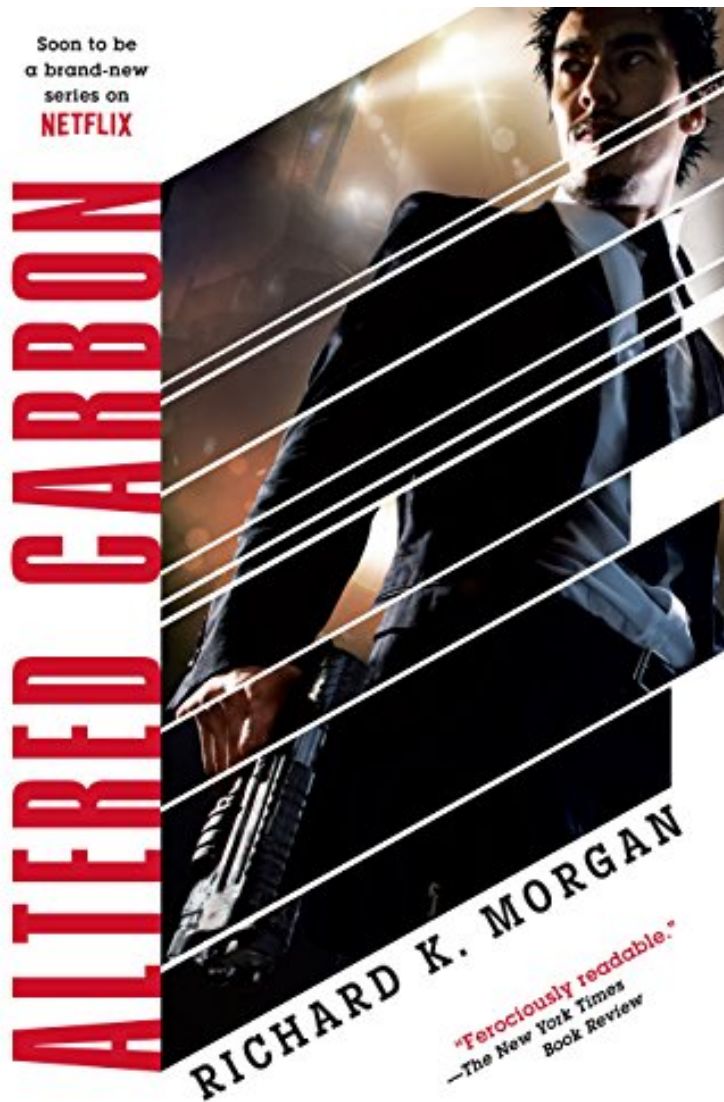


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Altered Carbon



*Par Richard K. Morgan
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Description : Description du produitIn the twenty-fifth century, humankind has spread throughout the galaxy, monitored by the watchful eye of the U.N. While divisions in race, religion, and class still exist, advances in technology have redefined life itself. Now, assuming one can afford the expensive procedure, a persons consciousness can be stored in a cortical stack at the base of the brain and easily downloaded into a new body (or sleeve) making death nothing more than a minor blip on a screen.Ex-U.N. envoy Takeshi Kovacs has been killed before, but his last death was particularly painful. Dispatched one hundred eighty light-years from home, re-sleeved into a body in Bay City (formerly San Francisco, now with a rusted, dilapidated Golden Gate Bridge), Kovacs is thrown into the dark heart of a shady, far-reaching conspiracy that is vicious even by the standards of a society that treats existence as something that can be bought and sold. For Kovacs, the shell that blew a hole in his chest was only the beginning. . . .From the Trade Paperback edition.

Prsentation de l'diteurSOON TO BE A BRAND-NEW SERIES ON NETFLIXIn the twenty-fifth century, humankind has spread throughout the galaxy, monitored by the watchful eye of the U.N. While divisions in race, religion, and class still exist, advances in technology have redefined life itself. Now, assuming one can afford the expensive procedure, a persons consciousness can be stored in a cortical stack at the base of the brain and easily downloaded into a new body (or sleeve) making death nothing more than a minor blip on a screen. Ex-U.N. envoy Takeshi Kovacs has been killed before, but his last death was particularly painful.

Dispatched one hundred eighty light-years from home, re-sleeved into a body in Bay City (formerly San Francisco, now with a rusted, dilapidated Golden Gate Bridge), Kovacs is thrown into the dark heart of a shady, far-reaching conspiracy that is vicious even by the standards of a society that treats existence as something that can be bought and sold. For Kovacs, the shell that blew a hole in his chest was only the beginning. . . .From .co.ukRichard Morgan's debut SF thriller *Altered Carbon* isn't for the faint-hearted. Its noir private-eye investigation races through extreme violence, hideously imaginative torture and many high-tech firefights. In 2411, death is not forever. Afterward, they can read your personality from an implanted "cortical stack" and upload you into a new body--at a price. Hero Kovacs has worn many bodies on different worlds as a former member of the UN Envoy Corps, programmed killers to a man. Now the incredibly rich Bancroft brings him to Earth to investigate a killing... of Bancroft himself, restored from his digital backup and rejecting the police theory of suicide. Half the vice-lords of 25th-century San Francisco are soon chasing Kovacs with futuristic surveillance, drugs and weaponry. Virtual-reality interrogation means they can torture you to death, and then start again. There's a bleak slave trade in rented or confiscated bodies--and Kovacs finds his current borrowed face is all too well known to both police and underworld. Ultraviolet set-pieces follow, sprinkled with philosophical asides such as this reflection on a stungun: "It was the single forgiving phrase in the syntax of weaponry I had strapped around me. The rest were unequivocal sentences of death."

There are some James-Bondian implausibilities, such as Kovacs's final confrontation with the villain he's sworn to kill: rather than shooting and leaving fast, he discusses the plot for 10 pages until... but that would be telling. This is high-tension SF action, hard to put down--though squeamish readers may shut their eyes rather frequently. --David LangfordExtraitPrologueTwo hours before dawn I sat in the peeling kitchen and smoked one of Sarah's cigarettes, listening to the maelstrom and waiting. Millsport had long since put itself to bed, but out in the Reach currents were still snagging on the shoals, and the sound came ashore to prowl the empty streets. There was a fine mist drifting in from the whirlpool, falling on the city like sheets of muslin and fogging the kitchen windows. Chemically alert, I inventoried the hardware on the scarred wooden table for the fiftieth time that night. Sarah's Heckler and Koch shard pistol glinted dully at me in the low light, the butt gaping open for its clip. It was an assassin's weapon, compact and utterly silent. The magazines lay next to it. She had wrapped insulating tape around each one to distinguish the ammunition: green for sleep, black for the spider-venom load. Most of the clips were black-wrapped. Sarah had used up a lot of green on the security guards at Gemini Biosys last night. My own contributions were less subtle: the big silver Smith Wesson, and the four remaining hallucinogen grenades. The thin crimson line around each canister seemed to sparkle slightly, as if it was about to detach itself from the metal casing and float up to join the curling ribbons of smoke ribboning off my cigarette. Shift and slide of altered significants, the side effect of the tetrameth I'd scored that afternoon down at the wharf. I don't usually smoke when I'm straight, but for some reason the tet always triggers the urge. Against the distant roar of the maelstrom I heard it. The hurrying strop of rotor blades on the fabric of the night. I stubbed out the cigarette, mildly unimpressed with myself, and went through to the bedroom. Sarah was sleeping, an assembly of low-frequency sine curves beneath the single sheet. A raven sweep of hair covered her face and one long-fingered hand trailed over the side of the bed. As I stood looking at her the night outside split. One of Harlan's World's orbital guardians test-firing into the Reach. Thunder from the concussed sky rolled in to rattle the windows. The woman in the bed stirred and swept the hair out of her eyes. The liquid crystal gaze found me and locked on. "What're you looking at?" Voice husky with the residue of sleep. I smiled a little. "Don't give me that shit. Tell me what you're looking at." "Just looking. It's time to go." She lifted her head and picked up the sound of the helicopter. The sleep slid away from her face, and she sat up in bed. "Where's the 'ware?" It was a corps joke. I smiled the way you do when you see an old friend and pointed to the case in the corner of the room. "Get my gun for me." "Yes, ma'am. Black or green?" "Black. I trust these scumbags about as far as a clingfilm condom." In the kitchen, I loaded up the shard pistol, cast a glance at my own weapon and left it lying there. Instead I scooped up one of the Hgrenades and took it back in my other hand. I paused in the doorway to the bedroom and weighed the two pieces of hardware in each palm as if I was trying to decide which was the heavier. "A little something

with your phallic substitute, ma'am?" Sarah looked up from beneath the hanging sickle of black hair over her forehead. She was in the midst of pulling a pair of long woolen socks up over the sheen of her thighs. "Yours is the one with the long barrel, Tak." "Size isn't--" We both heard it at the same time. A metallic double clack from the corridor outside. Our eyes met across the room, and for a quarter second I saw my own shock mirrored there. Then I was tossing the loaded shardgun to her. She put up one long-fingered hand and took it out of the air just as the whole of the bed-room wall caved in in thunder. The blast knocked me back into a corner and onto the floor. They must have located us in the apartment with body-heat sensors, then mined the whole wall with limpets. Taking no chances this time. The commando who came through the ruined wall was stocky and insect-eyed in full gas attack rig, hefting a snub-barreled Kalashnikov in gloved hands. Ears ringing, still on the floor, I flung the H grenade up at him. It was un-fused, useless in any case against the gas mask, but he didn't have time to identify the device as it spun at him. He batted it off the breech of his Kalashnikov and stumbled back, eyes wide behind the glass panels of the mask. "Fire in the hole." Sarah was down on the floor beside the bed, arms wrapped around her head and sheltered from the blast. She heard the shout, and in the second the bluff had bought us she popped up again, shardgun outflung. Beyond the wall I could see figures huddled against the expected grenade blast. I heard the mosquito whine of monomolecular splinters across the room as she put three shots into the lead commando. They shredded invisibly through the attack suit and into the flesh beneath. He made a noise like someone straining to lift something heavy as the spider venom sank its claws into his nervous system. I grinned and started to get up. Sarah was turning her aim on the figures beyond the wall when the second commando of the night appeared braced in the kitchen doorway and hosed her away with his assault rifle. Still on my knees, I watched her die with chemical clarity. It all went so slowly it was like a video playback on frame advance. The commando kept his aim low, holding the Kalashnikov down against the hyper-rapid-fire recoil it was famous for. The bed went first, erupting into gouts of white goose down and ripped cloth, then Sarah, caught in the storm as she turned. I saw one leg turned to pulp below the knee, and then the body hit, bloody fistfuls of tissue torn out of her pale flanks as she fell through the curtain of fire. I reeled to my feet as the assault rifle stammered to a halt. Sarah had rolled over on her face, as if to hide the damage the shells had done to her, but I saw it all through veils of red anyway. I came out of the corner without conscious thought, and the commando was too late to bring the Kalashnikov around. I slammed into him at waist height, blocked the gun, and knocked him back into the kitchen. The barrel of the rifle caught on the doorjamb, and he lost his grip. I heard the weapon clatter to the ground behind me as we hit the kitchen floor. With the speed and strength of the tetrameth, I scrambled astride him, batted aside one flailing arm, and seized his head in both hands. Then I smashed it against the tiles like a coconut. Under the mask, his eyes went suddenly unfocused. I lifted the head again and smashed it down again, feeling the skull give soggily with the impact. I ground down against the crunch, lifted and smashed again. There was a roaring in my ears like the maelstrom, and somewhere I could hear my own voice screaming obscenities. I was going for a fourth or fifth blow when something kicked me between the shoulder blades and splinters jumped magically out of the table leg in front of me. I felt the sting as two of them found homes in my face. For some reason the rage puddled abruptly out of me. I let go of the commando's head almost gently and was lifting one puzzled hand to the pain of the splinters in my cheek when I realized I had been shot, and that the bullet must have torn all the way through my chest and into the table leg. I looked down, dumbfounded, and saw the dark red stain inking its way out over my shirt. No doubt about it. An exit hole big enough to take a golf ball. With the realization came the pain. It felt as if someone had run a steel wool pipe cleaner briskly through my chest cavity. Almost thoughtfully, I reached up, found the hole, and plugged it with my two middle fingers. The fingertips scraped over the roughness of torn bone in the wound, and I felt something membranous throb against one of them. The bullet had missed my heart. I grunted and attempted to rise, but the grunt turned into a cough and I tasted blood on my tongue. "Don't you move, motherfucker." The yell came out of a young throat, badly distorted with shock. I hunched forward over my wound and looked back over my shoulder. Behind me in the doorway, a young man in a police uniform had both hands clasped around the pistol he had just shot me with. He was trembling visibly. I coughed again and turned back to the table. The Smith Wesson was on eye level, gleaming silver, still where I had left it less than two minutes ago. Perhaps it was that, the scant shavings of time that had been planed off since Sarah was alive and all was well, that drove me. Less than two minutes ago I could have picked up the gun; I'd even thought about it, so why not now? I gritted my teeth, pressed my fingers harder into the hole in my chest, and staggered upright. Blood spattered warmly against the back of my throat. I braced myself on the edge of the table with my free hand and looked back at

the cop. I could feel my lips peeling back from the clenched teeth in something that was more a grin than a grimace. "Don't make me do it, Kovacs." I got myself a step closer to the table and leaned against it with my thighs, breath whistling through my teeth and bubbling in my throat. The Smith West-son gleamed like fool's gold on the scarred wood. Out in the Reach power lashed down from an orbital and lit the kitchen in tones of blue. I could hear the maelstrom calling. "I said don't--" I closed my eyes and clawed the gun off the table.

CHAPTER ONE

Coming back from the dead can be rough. In the Envoy Corps they teach you to let go before storage. Stick it in neutral and float. It's the first lesson and the trainers drill it into you from day one. Hard-eyed Virginia Vidaura, dancer's body poised inside the shapeless corps coveralls as she paced in front of us in the induction room. Don't worry about anything, she said, and you'll be ready for it. A decade later, I met her again in a holding pen at the New Kanagawa Justice Facility. She was going down for eighty to a century; excessively armed robbery and organic damage. The last thing she said to me when they walked her out of the cell was don't worry, kid, they'll store it. Then she bent her head to light a cigarette, drew the smoke hard into lungs she no longer gave a damn about, and set off down the corridor as if to a tedious briefing. From the narrow angle of vision afforded me by the cell gate, I watched the pride in that walk and I whispered the words to myself like a mantra. Don't worry, they'll store it. It was a superbly double-edged piece of street wisdom. Bleak faith in the efficiency of the penal system, and a clue to the elusive state of mind required to steer you past the rocks of psychosis. Whatever you feel, whatever you're thinking, whatever you are when they store you, that's what you'll be when you come out. With states of high anxiety, that can be a problem. So you let go. Stick it in neutral. Disengage and float. If you have time. I came thrashing up out of the tank, one hand plastered across my chest searching for the wounds, the other clutching at a nonexistent weapon. The weight hit me like a hammer, and I collapsed back into the flotation gel. I flailed with my arms, caught one elbow painfully on the side of the tank and gasped. Gobbets of gel poured into my mouth and down my throat. I snapped my mouth shut and got a hold on the hatch coaming, but the stuff was everywhere. In my eyes, burning my nose and throat, and slippery under my fingers. The weight was forcing my grip on the hatch loose, sitting on my chest like a high-g maneuver, pressing me down into the gel. My body heaved violently in the confines of the tank. Flotation gel? I was drowning. Abruptly, there was a strong grip on my arm and I was hauled coughing into an upright position. At about the same time I was working out there were no wounds in my chest someone wiped a towel roughly across my face and I could see. I decided to save that pleasure for later and concentrated on getting the contents of the tank out of my nose and throat. For about half a minute I stayed sitting, head down, coughing up the gel and trying to work out why everything weighed so much. "So much for training." It was a hard, male voice, the sort that habitually hangs around justice facilities. "What did they teach you in the Envoys anyway, Kovacs?" That was when I had it. On Harlan's World, Kovacs is quite a common name. Everyone knows how to pronounce it. This guy didn't. He was speaking a stretched form of the Amanglic they use on the World, but even allowing for that, he was mangling the name badly, and the ending came out with a hard k instead of the Slavic ch. And everything was too heavy. The realization came through my fogged perceptions like a brick through frosted plate glass. Offworld. Somewhere along the line, they'd taken Takeshi Kovacs (D.H.), and they'd frightened him. And since Harlan's World was the only habitable biosphere in the Glimmer system, that meant a stellar-range needlecast to--Where? I looked up. Harsh neon tubes set in a concrete roof. I was sitting in the opened hatch of a dull metal cylinder, looking for all the world like an ancient aviator who'd forgotten to dress before climbing aboard his biplane. The cylinder was one of a row of about twenty backed up against the wall, opposite a heavy steel door, which was closed. The walls were chilly and the walls unpainted. Give them their due, on Harlan's World at least the air-resleeving rooms are decked out in pastel colors and the attendants are pretty. After all you're supposed to have paid your debt to society. The least they can do is give you a sunny start to your new life. Sunny wasn't in the vocabulary of the figure before me. About two meters tall, he looked as if he'd made his living wrestling swamp panthers before the present career opportunity presented itself. Musculature bulged on his chest and arms like body armor, and the head above it had hair cropped close to the skull, revealing a long scar like a lightning strike down to the left ear. He was dressed in a loose black garment with epaulettes and a diskette logo on the breast. His eyes matched the garment and watched me with hardened calm. Having helped me sit up, he had stepped back out of arm's reach, as per the manual. He'd been doing this a long time. I pressed one nostril closed and snorted tank gel out of the other. "Want to tell me where I am? Itemize my rights, something like that?" "Kovacs, right now you don't have any rights." I looked up and saw that a grim smile had stitched itself across his face. I shrugged and snorted the other nostril clean. "Want to tell me where I am?" He hesitated a moment, glanced up at the neon-barred roof as if

to ascertain the information for himself before he passed it on, and then mirrored my shrug. "Sure. Why not? You're in Bay City, pal. Bay City, Earth." The grimace of a smile came back. "Home of the Human Race. Please enjoy your stay on this most ancient of civilized worlds. Ta-dada-dah." "Don't give up the day job," I told him soberly.