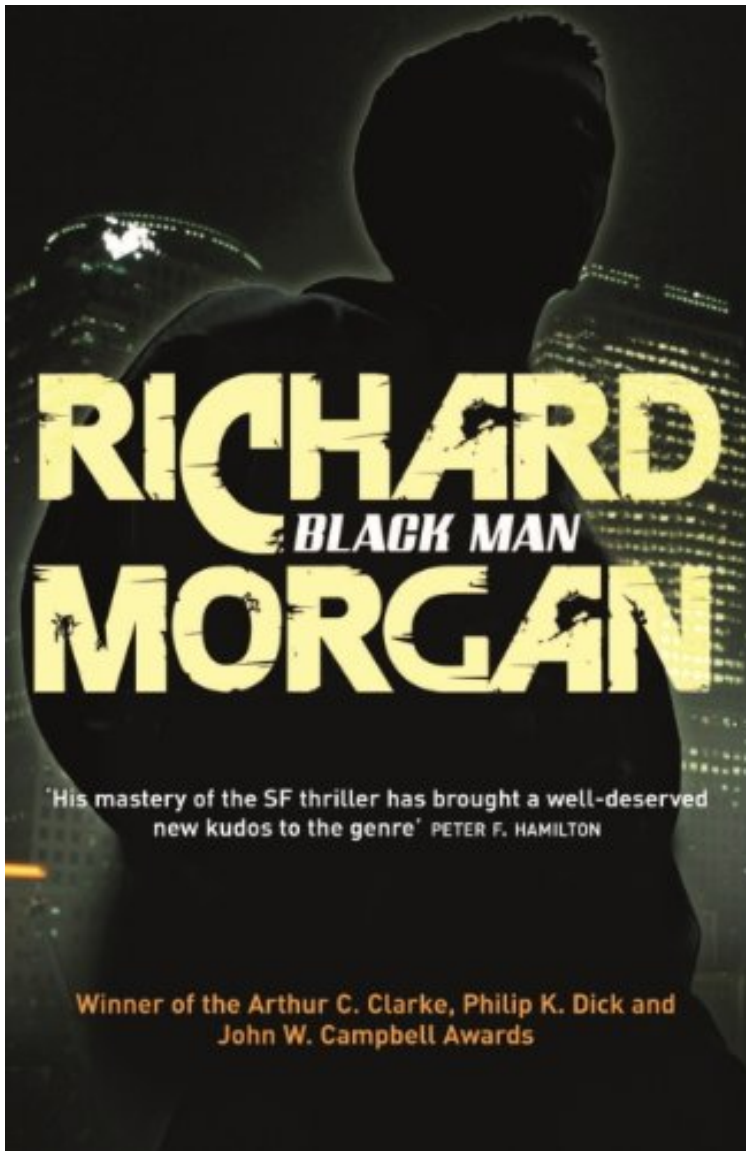


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Black Man (GOLLANCZ S.F.) (English Edition)



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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurOne hundred years from now, and against all the odds, Earth has found a new stability; the political order has reached some sort of balance, and the new colony on Mars is growing. But the fraught years of the 21st century have left an uneasy legacy ...Genetically engineered alpha males, designed to fight the century's wars have no wars to fight and are surplus to requirements. And a man bred and designed to fight is a dangerous man to have around in peacetime. Many of them have left for Mars but now one has come back and killed everyone else on the shuttle he returned in.Only one man, a genengineered ex-soldier

himself, can hunt him down and so begins a frenetic man-hunt and a battle survival. And a search for the truth about what was really done with the world's last soldiers. BLACK MAN is an unstoppable SF thriller but it is also a novel about prejudice, about the ramifications of playing with our genetic blue-print. It is about our capacity for violence but more worrying, our capacity for deceit and corruption. This is another landmark of modern SF from one of its most exciting and commercial authors. Extrait Down in Flames Above all, the hard lessons of this century have taught us that there must be consistent oversight and effective constraint, and that the policing systems thus required must operate with unimpeachable levels of integrity and support. Jacobsen Report, August 2091 He finally found Gray in a MarsPrep camp just over the Bolivian border and into Peru, hiding behind some cheap facial surgery and the name Rodriguez. It wasn't a bad cover in itself, and it probably would have stood standard scrutiny. Security checks in the prep camps were notoriously lax; the truth was that they didn't much care who you'd been before you signed up. But there were still a few obvious signs you could look for if you knew how, and Carl, with a methodical intensity that was starting to resemble desperation, had been looking for weeks. He knew that Gray was up on the altiplano somewhere, because the trail led there from Bogot, and because where else, ultimately, was a variant thirteen going to run. He knew this, and he knew it was just a matter of time before the traces showed up and someone called it in. But he also knew, with induction programs everywhere skimping and speeding up to meet increasing demand, that time was on the other man's side. Something had to give, and soon, or Gray was going to be gone and Carl wasn't going to get his bounty. So when the break came, the tiny morsel of data finally fed back from the web of contacts he'd been plying all those weeks, it was hard not to jump. Hard not to dump his painstakingly constructed cover, fire up his Agency credit and badge, and hire the fastest set of all-terrain wheels available in Copacabana. Hard not to tear across the border at Agency speed, raising road dust and rumors all the way to the camp, where Gray, of course, if he had any kind of local support, would be long gone. Carl didn't jump. Instead, he called in a couple of local favors and managed to blag a ride across the border with a military liaison unit's some superannuated patrol carrier with a Colony corporation's logo sun-bleached to fading on the armored sides. The troops were Peruvian regulars, drafted in from dirt-poor families in the coastal provinces and then seconded to corporate security duties. They'd be pulling down little more than standard conscript pay for that, but the interior of the carrier was relatively plush by military standards and it seemed to have air-con. And anyway, they were tough and young, a sort of young you didn't see so much in the Western world anymore, innocently pleased with their hard-drilled physical competence and cheap khaki prestige. They all had wide grins for him, and bad teeth, and none was older than twenty. Carl figured the good cheer for ignorance. It was a safe bet these kids didn't know the subcontract rate their high command was extracting from its corporate clients for their services. Sealed inside the jolting, sweat-smelling belly of the vehicle, brooding on his chances against Gray, Carl would really have preferred to stay silent altogether. He didn't like to talk, never had. Felt in fact that it was a much-overrated pastime. But there was a limit to how taciturn you could be when you were getting a free ride. So he mustered some lightweight chat about next week's Argentina-Brazil play-off and threw as little of it into the conversational mix as he thought he could get away with. Some comments about Patricia Mocatta, and the advisability of female captains for teams that were still predominantly male. Player name checks. Tactical comparisons. It all seemed to go down fine. Eres Marciano? one of them asked him, finally, inevitably. He shook his head. In fact, he had been a Martian once, but it was a long, complicated story he didn't feel like telling. Soy contable, he told them, because that was sometimes what he felt like. Contable de biotecnologia. They all grinned. He wasn't sure if it was because they didn't think he looked like a biotech accountant, or because they just didn't believe him. Either way they didn't push the point. They were used to men with stories that didn't match their faces. Habla bien el español, someone complimented him. His Spanish was good, though for the last two weeks it was Quechua he'd been speaking mostly, Mars-accented but still tight up against the Peruvian original that had spawned it. It was what the bulk of the altiplano dwellers used, and they in turn made up most of the grunt labor force in the prep camps, just as they still did on Mars. Notwithstanding which fact, the language of enforcement up here was still Spanish. Aside from a smattering of web-gleaned Amanglic, these guys from the coast spoke nothing else. Not an ideal state of affairs from the corporate point of view, but the Lima government had been adamant when the COLIN contracts were signed. Handing over control to the gringo corporations was one thing, had oligarchy-endorsed historical precedent on its side in fact. But allowing the altiplano dwellers to shake themselves culturally loose from the grip of coastal rule, well, that would be simply unacceptable. There was just too much bad history in the balance. The original Incas six hundred years ago and their stubborn thirty-year refusal to behave as a conquered people should, the bloody

reprise by Tpac Amaru in 1780, the Sendero Luminoso Maoists a bare century back, and more recently still the upheavals of the familias andinas. The lessons had been learned, the word went out. Never again. Spanish-speaking uniforms and bureaucrats drove home the point. The patrol carrier pulled up with a jerk, and the rear door hinged weightily outward. Harsh, high-altitude sunlight spilled in, and with it came the sound and smell of the camp. Now he heard Quechua, the familiar un-Spanish cadences of it, shouted back and forth above the noise of machinery in motion. An imported robot voice trampled it down, blared vehicle reversing, vehicle reversing in Amanglic. There was music from somewhere, huayno vocals remixed to a bloodbeat dance rhythm. Pervasive under the scent of engine oil and plastics, the dark meat odor of someone grilling antecuchos over a charcoal fire. Carl thought he could make out the sound of rotors lifting somewhere in the distance. The soldiers boiled out, dragging packs and weapons after. Carl let them go, stepped down last and looked around, using their boisterous crowding as cover. The carrier had stopped on an evercrete apron opposite a couple of dusty, parked coaches with destination boards for Cuzco and Arequipa. There was a girdered shell of a terminal building, and behind it Garrod Horkan 9 camp stretched away up the hill, all single-story prefab shacks and sterile rectilinear street plan. Corporate flags fluttered whitely on poles every few blocks, an entwined g and h ringed by stars. Through the unglazed windows of the terminal, Carl spotted figures wearing coveralls with the same logo emblazoned front and back. Fucking company towns. He dumped his pack in a locker block inside the terminal, asked directions of a coveralled cleaner, and stepped back out into the sun on the upward-sloping street. Down the hill, Lake Titicaca glimmered painfully bright and blue. He slipped on the Cebe smart lenses, settled his battered leather Peruvian Stetson on his head, and started up the slope, tracking the music. The masking was more local cover than necessity his skin was dark and leathered enough not to worry about the sun, but the lenses and hat would also partially obscure his features. Black faces weren't that common in the altiplano camps, and unlikely though it was, Gray might have someone watching the terminal. The less Carl stood out, the better. A couple of blocks up the street, he found what he was looking for. A prefab twice the size of the units around it, leaking the bloodbeat and huayno remix through shuttered windows and a double door wedged back. The walls were stickered with peeling publicity for local bands, and the open door space was bracketed by two loopview panels showing some Lima ad agencies idea of Caribbean nightlife. White sand beach and palm trees by night, party lights strung. Bikini-clad criolla girls gripped beer bottles knowingly and pumped their hips to an unheard rhythm alongside similarly European-looking consorts. Outside of the bandjet-muscled and cavorting gaily in the background, well away from the women no one had skin any darker than a glass of blended Scotch and water. Carl shook his head bemusedly and went inside. The bloodbeat was louder once he got in, but not unbearable. The roof tented at second-story height, nothing but space between the plastic rafters, and the music got sucked up there. At a corner table, three men and a woman were playing a card game that required calls, apparently without any trouble tracking one another's voices. Conversation at other tables was a constant murmur you could hear. Sunlight fell in through the doorway and shutters. It made hard bars and blocks on the floor but didn't reach far, and if you looked there directly then looked away, the rest of the room seemed dimly lit by comparison. At the far end of the room, a boomerang-angled bar made from riveted tin sections held up half a dozen drinkers. It was set far enough back from the windows that the beer coolers on the wall behind glowed softly in the gloom. There was a door set in the wall and propped open on an equally dimly lit kitchen space, apparently empty and not in use. The only visible staff took the form of a dumpy indigena waitress slouching about between the tables, collecting bottles and glasses on a tray. Carl watched her intently for a moment, then followed her as she headed back toward the bar. He caught up with her just as she put down her tray on the bartop. Bottle of Red Stripe, he said, in Quechua. No glass. She ducked under the hinged access section without comment and opened a cooler cabinet on the floor. Hooked out the bottle and straightened up, gripping it not unlike the criollas in the ad panels outside. Then she cracked it deftly open with a rust-spotted key that hung off her belt, and set it on the bar. Five soles. The only currency he had on him was Bolivian. He dug out a COLIN wafer and held it up between two fingers. Swipe okay? She gave him a long-suffering look and went to get the machine. He checked the time display in the upper left corner of the Cebe lenses, then took them off. They'd cycled for low light anyway, but he wanted clear eye contact for what was coming. He dumped his hat on the bartop and propped himself next to it, facing the room. Did his best to look like someone who didn't want anything, like someone fitting in. In theory, he should have checked in with the GH site manager on arrival. It was procedure, written into the Charter. Extensive previous experience, some of it sticky with his own blood, had taught him not to bother. There was a whole shifting topography of dislike out there for what Carl Marsalis

was, and it touched on pretty much every level of human wiring. At the high cognitive end, you had sophisticated dinner-party politics that condemned his professional existence as amoral. At a more emotive level there was the generalized social revulsion that comes with the label turncoat. And lower still, riding the arid terminology of the Jacobsen Report but swooping into the hormonal murk of instinct, you could find a rarely admitted but nonetheless giddy terror that he was, despite everything, still one of them. And worse than all of this, in the eyes of the Colony corporations, Carl was bad press walking. Bad press and a guaranteed hole in finances. By the time someone like Gray was ready for shipping out, Garrod Horkan could expect to have plowed several tens of thousands of dollars into him in varied training and mesh biotech. Not the sort of investment you want bleeding out into the altiplano dust under the headline insufficient security at colin camp! Four years previously, he'd announced himself to the site manager at a camp south of La Paz, and his target had mysteriously vanished while Carl was still filling out forms in the administration building. There was a bowl of soup still steaming on the kitchen table when he walked into the prefab, a spoon still in the soup. The back door was open, and so was an emptied trunk at the foot of the bed in the next room. The man never surfaced again, and Carl had to conclude, to himself and to the Agency, that he was now, in all probability, on Mars. No one at COLIN was going to confirm that one way or the other, so he didn't bother asking. Six months after that, Carl announced himself late one evening to another site manager, declined to fill in the forms until later, and was set upon by five men with baseball bats as he exited the admin office. Fortunately, they weren't professionals, and in the dark they got in one another's way. But by the time he'd wrested one of the bats free for himself and driven his attackers off, the whole camp was awake. The street was lit up with flashlights and the news was spreading at speed; there was a new black face, an outsider, down at the admin building, causing trouble. Carl didn't even bother braving the streets and streets of stares to check on the camp address he had for his target. He already knew what he'd find. That left the fallout from the fight, which was equally predictable. Despite numerous passersby and even one or two blatant spectators, there were suddenly no useful witnesses. The man Carl had managed to hurt badly enough that he couldn't run away remained steadfastly silent about his reasons for the assault. The site manager refused to let Carl question him alone, and cut short even the supervised interrogation on medical grounds.

The prisoner has rights, she iterated slowly, as if Carl weren't very bright. You've already hurt him badly. Carl, still oozing blood from a split cheek and guessing at least one of his fingers was broken, just looked at her. These days, he notified the site managers after the event. Looking for an old friend, he told the waitress when she got back with the machine. He gave her the COLIN wafer and waited until she'd swiped it. Name of Rodriguez. It's very important that I find him. Her fingers hovered over the punch pad. She shrugged. Rodriguez is a common name. Carl took out one of the hardcopy downloads from the Bogot clinic and slid it across the bartop at her. It was a vanity shot, system-generated to show clients what they'd look like when the swelling went down. In real time, that soon after surgery that cheap, Gray's new face probably wouldn't have looked amiss on a Jesusland lynching victim, but the man smiling up out of the clinic print looked uninjured and pleasantly unremarkable. Broad cheekbones, wide mouth, an off-the-rack Amerind makeover. Carl, eternally paranoid about these things, had Matthew go back into the clinic dataflow that night just to make sure they weren't trying to fob him off with an image from stock. Matthew grumbled, but he did it, in the end probably just to prove he could. There was no doubt. Gray looked like this now. The waitress glanced incuriously down at the print for a moment, then punched up an amount on the wafer that certainly wasn't five soles. She nodded up the bar to where a bulky fair-haired male leaned at the other end, staring into a shot glass as if he hated it. Ask him. Carl's hand whipped out, mesh-swift. He'd dosed up that morning. He hooked her index finger before it could hit the transaction key. He twisted slightly, just enough to take the slack out of the knuckle joints. He felt the finger bones lock tight. I'm asking you, he said mildly. And I'm telling you. If she was afraid, it didn't show. I know this face. He's in here drinking with Rubio over there, two, maybe three times a week. That's all I know. Now, you going to give me my finger back, or do I have to draw some attention to you? Maybe notify camp security? No. What you have to do is introduce me to Rubio. Well. She gave him a withering look. You only needed to ask. He let go of her and waited while she completed the transaction. She handed back the wafer, beckoned, and walked casually along her side of the bar until she was facing the blond and his shot glass. He tipped a glance at her, then sideways at Carl as he joined them, then back to her. Spoke English. Hey Gaby. Hey Rubio. See this guy here? She'd switched to English, too, heavily accented but fluent. He's looking for Rodriguez. Says he's a friend. That so? Rubio shifted his weight a little to look directly at Carl. You a friend of Rodriguez? Yeah, we. And the knife came out. Later, when he had time, Carl worked out the trick. The weapon had a cling-pad

on the hilt, and the blond guy had probably pressed it up against the bar within easy reach as soon as he saw the waitress talking to the stranger. Carl's careless approach a friend of Rodriguez, yeah right just closed the circuit. These two were Gray's friends. They knew he'd have no others. So Rubio grabbed the knife loose and stabbed Carl in the same blunt rush. The blade winked once in the low light as it came clear of the bar top shadow, ripped low through Carl's jacket, and slugged to a halt in the webbing beneath. Gene-tweaked spiderweb mail, expensive stuff. But there was too much rage and hate behind the thrust to stop easily, and it was likely a monofilament edge. Carl felt the tip get through and slice into him. Because it wasn't really unexpected, he was already moving, and the webbing gave him the luxury of not having to cover. He hit Rubio with a tanido move palm heel, twice, short, stabbing strikes, broke the man's nose, crushed his temple, sent him sprawling away from the bar to the floor. The knife tugged loose again nasty, grainy intimacy of metal in flesh and he grunted as it came out. Rubio twitched and rolled on the floor, possibly already on his way to dead. Carl kicked him in the head to make sure. Everything stopped. People stared. Beneath the webbing, he felt blood trickle down his belly from the wound the knife had left. Behind him, Gaby was gone through the kitchen doorway. Also pretty much expected: his source had said she and Gray were close. Carl scrambled over the bar's savage flash of pain from the newly acquired wound and went after her. Through the kitchen cramped, grimy space, gas ranges with blackened pans left to sit and a door to the outside still swinging wide with Gaby's passage. Carl caught a couple of pan handles as he shimmed the narrow clearance, left clatter and clang in his wake. He burst through the door and out into an alley at the back of the building. Sudden sunlight blasted his vision. He squinted left. Right, and caught the waitress sprinting flat out up the hill. Looked like about a thirty-meter lead. Good enough. He took off running. With the combat, the mesh had kicked in for real. It flushed him now, warm as the sun, and the pain in his side dropped to memory and a detached knowledge that he was bleeding. His field of vision sharpened on the woman running from him, peripherals smearing out with the brightness in the air. When she broke left, out of line-of-sight, he'd closed the gap by about a third. He reached the turn and hooked around, into another back alley, this one barely the width of his shoulders. Unpainted prefab walls with small, high-set windows, stacked sheets of construction plastic and alloy frames leaning at narrow angles, discarded drink cans on the dirt floor. His feet tangled momentarily in a loose wrap of polythene from one of the frames. Up ahead, Gaby had already ducked right. He didn't think she'd looked back. He reached the new corner and stopped dead, fighting down the urge to poke his head out. The right turn Gaby had taken was a main thoroughfare, paved in evercrete and loosely thronged with people. He squatted, dug out his Cebe lenses, and peeked around the corner at knee height. With the relief of not having to squint in the harsh light, he picked out Gaby's fleeing form amid the crowd almost at once. She was glancing back over her shoulder, but it was clear she hadn't seen him. There was no panic-stricken bolt, only a deep-drawn breath, and then she started to jog rapidly along the street. Carl watched her go for a few seconds, let the gap open up to a good fifty meters or more, then slid out into the street and followed, bent-kneed to keep his head low. It earned him a few strange looks, but no one spoke to him and more importantly, no one made any comment out loud. He had, he reckoned with meshed clarity, about ten minutes. That was how long it would take news of the fight in the bar to reach someone in authority, and that someone to put a chopper into the air above the rectilinear streets of Garrod Horkan 9. If he hadn't found Gray by then game over. Three blocks up, Gaby crossed the street abruptly and let herself into a single-story prefab. Carl saw her dig the matte-gray rectangle of a keycard out of her jeans and swipe it in the lock. The door opened, and she disappeared inside. Too far off to make out a number or name panel, but the place had hanging baskets of yellow-flowered cactus out front. Carl loped up to the near end of the fab, slipped into the alley between the building and its neighbor, and circled to the back. He found a bathroom window left open, levered it up, and heaved himself over the sill. Vague pain from the stab wound, sliced muscle moving against itself in a way it shouldn't. He narrowly missed stepping into the toilet bowl, hopped sideways instead and crouched by the door, grimacing. Voices came through the finger-thin wall, bassy with resonance but otherwise clear. Soundproofing on fab shells was pretty good these days, but if you wanted the same for interior partitioning, it cost. Not the sort of thing GH were going to provide at base; you'd have to buy the upgrade, and whoever lived here, Gaby or Gray, obviously hadn't. Carl heard the woman's accented English again, and then another voice he knew from filed audio playback. You stupid fucking bitch, why'd you come here? I, you, Her voice stumbled with hurt. To warn you. Yeah, and hell be right fucking behind you! A flat crack, open hand across her face. Carl caught the sudden jump of her breath through the wall, nothing more. She was tough, or used to this, or both. He eased down the door handle, cracked the door, and peered through. A big form jerked across his sliver of vision. An upthrown arm,

gesturing, there and gone too fast to see if there was a weapon in the hand or not. Carl reached under his jacket for the Haag pistol. Something weighty went over with a thump in the next room. He's probably tracking you right now, probably let you go so he could do it. You empty-headed cunt, you've now. Carl threw the door open and found himself facing the two of them across a tiny living room laid with brightly colored rugs. Gray was half turned away, looming over a flinching Gaby, who had backed up and knocked over a tall potted plant by the front door. The reddened handprint was still visible on her face where he'd slapped her. More plants around the room, cheap painted ceramics and Pachamama icons on shelves, a small statue of some saint or other on a shelf, and a Spanish prayer in a frame on one wall. They were in Gaby's house. He pitched his voice hard and calm. That's it, Frank. Game over. Gray turned slowly, deliberately and, fuck, yes, he had a weapon, a big black cannon of a handgun that seemed welded in the fist at the end of his right hand. A tiny part of Carl, a subroutine immune to the mesh and the betamyeline flooding the rest of his system, identified it as the murder weapon, the 61 Smith caseless. Better than forty years old, but they said you could lockvoid that gun in orbit, swing around, pick it back up, and it'd still kill things like it just came out of the factory. For the first time in quite a while, he was grateful for the chilly bulk of the Haag in his own hand. It didn't help when Gray smiled at him. Hello there, UN man. Carl nodded. Put the gun down, Frank. It's over. Gray frowned as if seriously considering it. Who sent you? Jesusland? Brussels. Put the gun down, Frank. But the other man didn't move at all. He could have been a holoshot on pause. Even the frown stayed on his face. Maybe deepened a little, as if Gray was trying to work out how the hell it had all come to this. I know you, don't I, he said suddenly. Marceau, right? The lottery guy? Keep him talking. Close. It's Marsalis. I like the new face. Do you? The Smith still hung loose in his grip, arm at his side. Carl wondered if Gray was meshed yet. It'd make a difference to his speed if he was, but that wasn't the real problem. The real problem was the difference it'd make to Gray's attitude. Try to fit in, you know. Deru kui wa utareru. I don't think so. No? And the slow, alarming smile Carl had hoped he wouldn't see. You were never going to get hammered down, Frank. None of us does, that's our problem. And that's an appalling Japanese accent. Want my advice, you'd be better off delivering your folk wisdom in English. I don't. The smile became a grin. He was going, sliding into the crack. Want your advice, that is. Why don't you put the gun down, Frank? You want a fucking list? Frank. Carl stayed absolutely still. Look at my hand. That's a Haag pistol. Even if you get me, I don't have to do more than scratch you on the way down. It is over. Why don't you try to salvage something? Like you have, you mean? Gray shook his head. I'm nobody's puppy, UN man. Oh grow up, Frank. The sudden snap of the anger in his own voice was a surprise. We're all somebody's puppy. You want to get dead, go right fucking ahead and make me do it. They pay me just the same. Gray tautened visibly. Yeah, I'll bet they fucking do. Carl got a grip on his own feelings. He made a slow, damping motion with his free hand. Look, look, nothing. A mirthless grin. I know my score. Three Euro-cops, couple of Jesusland state troopers. You think I don't know what that means? It's Brussels, man. They got jurisdiction. You don't have to die. They'll put you away, but yeah, they'll put me away. You ever spend time in the tract? No. But it can't be a lot worse than Mars, and you were going there anyway. Gray shook his head. Wrong. On Mars, I'll be free. That's not what it's like, Frank. Gaby ran at him, screaming. There wasn't a lot of space to cross, and she'd come more than halfway, hands up, fingers splayed like talons, when he shot her. The Haag gun made a deep cough, and the slug caught her somewhere high in the right shoulder. It spun her completely around and knocked her into Gray, who was already raising the Smith. He got off a single shot, a sprung-sounding boom in the tiny room, and the wall blew apart at Carl's left ear. Deafened, stung in the face and side of the head with impact fragments, Carl threw himself clumsily sideways and put four slugs into the other man. Gray staggered backward like a boxer taking heavy blows, hit the far wall, and thumped down into a sitting position on the floor. The Smith was still in his hand. He stared up at Carl for a moment, and Carl, moving cautiously closer, shot him twice again in the chest. Then he watched carefully, gun still leveled, until the life dimmed out of Gray's eyes. Biotech account closed. On the floor, Gaby tried to prop herself up and slipped on some of her own blood. The wound in her shoulder was leaking copiously down her arm and onto the gaily colored rug under her. Haag shells were designed to stay in the body; the wall behind Gray was pristine but they made a lot of mess going in. She looked up at him, making a tiny panicked grunting in the back of her throat over and over. He shook his head. I'll go and get some help, he said, in Quechua. He stepped past her to the front door and opened it. Then, in the flood of light from outside, he swiveled quietly and shot her once more, through the back of the head. From the Hardcover edition. From Publishers Weekly Starred. 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) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.