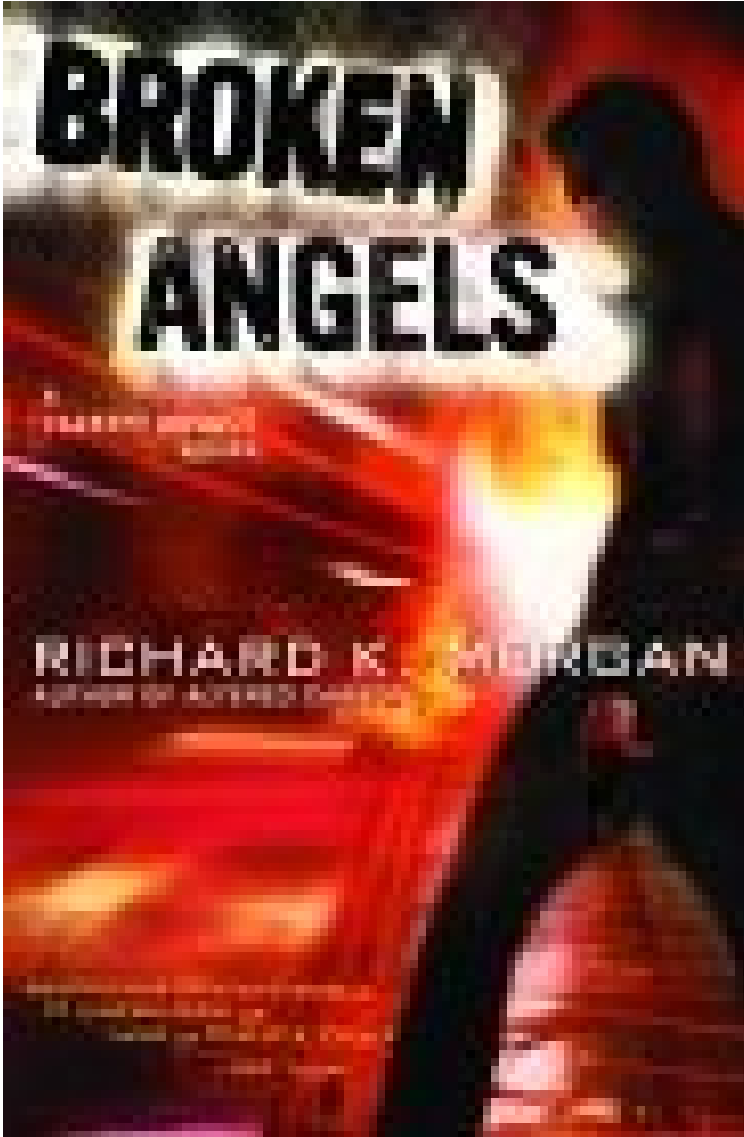


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# Broken Angels



*Par Richard K. Morgan  
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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurWelcome back to the brash, brutal new world of the twenty-fifth century: where global politics isnt just for planet Earth anymore; and where death is just a break in the action, thanks to the techno-miracle that can preserve human consciousness and download it into one new body after another. Cynical, quick-on-the-trigger Takeshi Kovacs, the ex-U.N. envoy turned private eye, has changed careers, and bodies, once more . . . trading sleuthing for soldiering as a warrior-for-hire, and helping a far-flung planets government put down a bloody revolution.But when it comes to taking sides, the only one Kovacs is ever really on is his own. So when a rogue pilot and a sleazy corporate fat cat offer him a lucrative role in a treacherous treasure hunt, hes only too happy to go AWOL with a band of resurrected soldiers of fortune. All that stands between them and the ancient alien spacecraft they mean to salvage are a massacred city

bathed in deadly radiation, unleashed nanotechnology with a million ways to kill, and whatever surprises the highly advanced Martian race may have in store. But armed with his genetically engineered instincts, and his trusty twin Kalashnikovs, Takeshi is ready to take on anything and let the devil take whoever's left behind. From the Trade Paperback edition. .com Critics have compared Richard Morgan's first novel, *Altered Carbon*, to the classic hardboiled fiction of Raymond Chandler. The comparison doesn't accurately describe Morgan's second novel, *Broken Angels*. Morgan's prose never approaches Chandler's metaphoric excess, and Morgan's antihero, Takeshi Kovacs, doesn't wisecrack nearly as often as Chandler's hero, Philip Marlowe. Also, Kovacs's far-future universe is considerably darker than Marlowe's noir world. In Kovacs's universe, high-tech implants called "stacks" record memory and personality; this means soldiers can be sent to their deaths, have their stacks implanted in new bodies, and be sent to their deaths again, and again, and again. Generals needn't quibble about wasting lives in massacres or nuclear explosions. The slaughtered soldiers will soon be back in action--unless their stacks aren't recovered. Then their consciousness will go mad, isolated in an indestructible, inescapable virtual reality. The proper term for the Takeshi Kovacs novels isn't "hardboiled." It's "brutal." The Martians disappeared long ago, but they left behind their star gates, which have allowed humanity to spread across the galaxy--and bring warfare to the stars. As *Broken Angels* opens,

Takeshi Kovacs is a lieutenant in humankind's most feared mercenary company, but rumors of an astonishing archaeological discovery inspire his desertion. Humans have never found a Martian starship until, perhaps, now. If the rumors are true, and the ruthless Kovacs can take possession of the unprecedented relic, he will make his fortune. But if he fails in his quest, he may find himself imprisoned in high-tech hell for eternity. --Cynthia Ward

Extrait

CHAPTER ONE

I first met Jan Schneider in a Protectorate orbital hospital, three hundred kilometers above the ragged clouds of Sanction IV and in a lot of pain. Technically there wasn't supposed to be a Protectorate presence anywhere in the Sanction system what was left of planetary government was insisting loudly from its bunkers that this was an internal matter, and local corporate interests had tacitly agreed to sign along that particular dotted line for the time being. Accordingly, the Protectorate vessels that had been hanging around the system since Joshua Kemp raised his revolutionary standard in Indigo City had had their recognition codes altered, in effect being bought out on long-term lease by various of the corporations involved, and then reloaned to the embattled government as part of the tax deductible local development fund. Those that were not pulled out of the sky by Kemp's unexpectedly efficient secondhand marauder bombs would be sold back to the Protectorate, lease unexpired, and any net losses once again written off to tax. Clean hands all around. In the meantime, any senior personnel injured fighting against Kemp's forces got shuttled out of harm's way, and this had been my major consideration when choosing sides. It had the look of a messy war. The shuttle off-loaded us directly onto the hospital's hangar deck, using a device not unlike a massive ammunition feed belt to dump the dozens of capsule stretchers with what felt like unceremonious haste. I could hear the shrill whine of the ship's engines still dying away as we rattled and clanked our way out over the wing and down onto the deck, and when they cracked open my capsule the air in the hangar burned my lungs with the chill of recently evacuated hard space. An instant layer of ice crystals formed on everything, including my face. You! It was a woman's voice, harsh with stress. Are you in pain? I blinked some of the ice out of my eyes and looked down at my blood-caked battle dress. Take a wild guess, I croaked. Medic! Endorphin boost and GP antiviral here. She bent over me again and I felt gloved fingers touch my head at the same time as the cold stab of the hypospray into my neck. The pain ebbed drastically. Are you from the Evenfall front? No, I managed weakly. Northern Rim assault. Why? What happened at Evenfall? Some fucking terminal buttonhead just called in a tactical nuclear strike. There was a cold rage chained in the doctor's voice. Her hands moved down my body, assessing damage. No radiation trauma, then. What about chemicals? I tilted my head fractionally at my lapel.

Exposure meter. Should tell you. That. It's gone, she snapped. Along with most of that shoulder. Oh. I mustered words. Think I'm clean. Can't you do a cell scan? Not here, no. The cellular-level scanners are built into the ward decks. Maybe when we can clear some space for you all up there, we'll get around to it. The hands left me. Where's your bar code? Left temple. Someone wiped blood away from the designated area and I vaguely felt the sweep of the laser scan across my face. A machine chirped approval, and I was left alone.

Processed. For a while I just lay there, content to let the endorphin booster relieve me of both pain and consciousness, all with the suave alacrity of a butler taking a hat and coat. A small part of me was wondering whether the body I was wearing was going to be salvageable, or if I'd have to be resleeved. I knew that Carreras Wedge maintained a handful of small clone banks for its so-called indispensable staff, and as one of only five ex-Envoys soldiering for Carreras, I definitely numbered among that particular elite. Unfortunately,

indispensability is a double-edged sword. On the one hand it gets you elite medical treatment, up to and including total body replacement. On the downside, the only purpose of said treatment is to throw you back into the fray at the earliest possible opportunity. A plankton-standard grunt whose body was damaged beyond repair would just get his cortical stack excised from its snug little housing at the top of the spinal column, then slung into a storage canister, where it would probably stay until the whole war was over. Not an ideal exit, and despite the Wedges reputation for looking after their own, there was no actual guarantee of resleeving, but at times in the screaming chaos of the last few months that step into stored oblivion had seemed almost infinitely desirable.

Colonel. Hey, Colonel. I wasn't sure if the Envoy conditioning was keeping me awake, or if the voice at my side had nagged me back to consciousness again. I rolled my head sluggishly to see who was speaking. It seemed we were still in the hangar. Lying on the stretcher beside me was a muscular-looking young man with a shock of wiry black hair and a shrewd intelligence in his features that even the dazed expression of the endorphin hit could not mask. He was wearing a Wedge battledress like mine, but it didn't fit him very well and the holes in it didn't seem to correspond with the holes in him. At his left temple, where the bar code should have been, there was a convenient blaster burn.

You talking to me? Yes sir. He propped himself up on one elbow. They must have dosed him with a lot less than me. Looks like we've really got Kemp on the run down there, doesn't it? That's an interesting point of view. Visions of 391 platoon being cut to shreds around me cascaded briefly through my head. Where do you think he's going to run to? Bearing in mind this is his planet, I mean. Uh, I thought I wouldn't advise that, soldier. Didn't you read your terms of enlistment? Now, shut up and save your breath. You're going to need it. Uh, yes sir. He was gaping a little, and from the sound of heads turning on nearby stretchers he wasn't the only one surprised to hear a Carreras Wedge officer talking this way. Sanction IV, in common with most wars, had stirred up some heavy-duty feelings. And another thing. Colonel? This is a lieutenant's uniform. And Wedge Command has no rank of colonel. Try to remember that.

Then a freak wave of pain swept in from some mutilated part of my body, dodged through the grasp of the endorphin bouncers posted at the door of my brain, and started hysterically shrilling its damage report to anyone who'd listen. The smile I had pinned to my face melted away the way the cityscape must have done at Evenfall, and I abruptly lost interest in anything except screaming. Water was lapping gently somewhere just below me when I next woke up, and gentle sunlight warmed my face and arms. Someone must have removed the shrapnel-shredded remains of my combat jacket and left me with the sleeveless Wedge T-shirt. I moved one hand and my fingertips brushed age-smoothed wooden boards, also warm. The sunlight made dancing patterns on the insides of my eyelids. There was no pain. I sat up, feeling better than I had in months. I was stretched out on a small, simply made jetty that extended a dozen meters or so out into what appeared to be a fjord or sea loch. Low, rounded mountains bounded the water on either side and fluffy white clouds scudded unconcernedly overhead. Farther out in the loch a family of seals poked their heads above the water and regarded me gravely. My body was the same Afro-Caribbean combat sleeve I'd been wearing on the Northern Rim assault, undamaged and unscarred. So. Footsteps scraped on the boards behind me. I jerked my head sideways, hands lifting reflexively into an embryonic guard. Way behind the reflex came the confirming thought that in the real world no one could have gotten that close without my sleeves' proximity sense kicking in.

Takeshi Kovacs, said the uniformed woman standing over me, getting the soft Slavic 'ch' at the end of the name correct. Welcome to the recuperation stack. Very nice. I climbed to my feet, ignoring the offered hand. Am I still aboard the hospital? The woman shook her head and pushed long, riotous copper-colored hair back from her angular face. Your sleeve is still in intensive care, but your current consciousness has been digitally freighted to Wedge One Storage until you are ready to be physically revived. I looked around and turned my face upward to the sun again. It rains a lot on the Northern Rim. And where is Wedge One Storage? Or is that classified? I'm afraid it is. How did I guess? Your dealings with the Protectorate have doubtless acquainted you with Skip it. I was being rhetorical. I already had a pretty good idea where the virtual format was located.

Standard practice in a planetary war situation is to fling a handful of low-albedo sneak stations into crazy elliptical orbits way out and hope none of the local military traffic stumbles onto them. The odds are pretty good in favor of no one ever finding you. Space, as textbooks are given to saying, is big. What ratio are you running all this on? Real-time equivalence, the woman said promptly. Though I can speed it up if you prefer. The thought of having my no-doubt short-lived convalescence stretched out here by a factor of anything up to about three hundred was tempting, but if I was going to be dragged back to the fighting sometime soon in real time, it was probably better not to lose the edge. Added to which, I wasn't sure that Wedge Command would let me do too much stretching. A couple of months pottering around hermitlike in

this much natural beauty was bound to have a detrimental effect on ones enthusiasm for wholesale slaughter. There is accommodation, said the woman, pointing, for your use. Please request modifications if you would like them. I followed the line of her arm to where a glass-and-wood two-story structure stood beneath gull-winged eaves on the edge of the long shingle beach. Looks fine. Vague tendrils of sexual interest squirmed around in me. Are you supposed to be my interpersonal ideal? The woman shook her head again. I am an intraformat service construct for Wedge One Systems Overview, based physically on Lieutenant Colonel Lucia Mataran of Protectorate High Command. With that hair? Youre kidding me. I have latitudes of discretion. Do you wish me to generate an interpersonal ideal for you? Like the offer of a high-ratio format, it was tempting. But after six weeks in the company of the Wedges boisterous do-or-die commandos, what I wanted more than anything was to be alone for a while. Ill think about it. Is there anything else? You have a recorded briefing from Isaac Carrera. Do you wish it stored at the house? No. Play it here. Ill call you if I need anything else. As you wish. The construct inclined her head and snapped out of existence. In her place, a male figure in the Wedges black dress uniform shaded in. Close-cropped black hair seasoned with gray, a lined patrician face whose dark eyes and weathered features were somehow both hard and understanding, and beneath the uniform the body of an officer whose seniority had not removed him from the battlefield. Isaac Carrera, decorated exVacuum Command captain and subsequently founder of the most feared mercenary force in the Protectorate. An exemplary soldier, commander, and tactician. Occasionally, when he had no other choice, a competent politician. Hello, Lieutenant Kovacs. Sorry this is only a recording, but Evenfall has left us in a bad situation and there wasnt time to set up a link. The medical report says your sleeve can be repaired in about ten days, so were not going to go for a clone-bank option here. I want you back on the Northern Rim as soon as possible, but the truth is, weve been fought to a standstill there for the moment and they can live without you for a couple of weeks. Theres a status update appended to this recording, including the losses sustained in the last assault. Id like you to look it over while youre in virtual, set that famous Envoy intuition of yours to work. God knows, we need some fresh ideas up there. In a general context, acquisition of the Rim territories will provide one of the nine major objectives necessary to bring this conflict . . . I was already in motion, walking the length of the jetty and then up the sloping shore toward the nearest hills. The sky beyond was tumbled cloud but not dark enough for there to be a storm in the offing. It looked as if there would be a great view of the whole loch if I climbed high enough. Behind me, Carreras voice faded on the wind as I left the projection on the jetty, mouthing its words to the empty air and maybe the seals, always assuming they had nothing better to do than listen to it.