



PRESENTS

A NETFLIX ORIGINAL SERIES

CREATED BY LAETA KALOGRIDIS

BASED ON THE GROUNDBREAKING CYBERPUNK NOVEL BY RICHARD K. MORGAN

**ALTERED CARBON**

Takeshi Kovacs (Joel Kinnaman) is a man out of time. A 22<sup>nd</sup> century mercenary and rebel, he's returned to life 300 years in the future and forced to find a killer. Piecing together the clues that have put a shadow of a doubt on the way the victim died, Kovacs' first stop: interview the victim himself.

In the world of *Altered Carbon*, death is not inevitable. After three centuries, humans can store their consciousness on downloadable disks and then be "spun up" into a new body, or "sleeve." But the ultra-rich, living in a city in the clouds, have their sleeves designer-enhanced, or made into clones of themselves. Laurens Bancroft (James Purefoy) is not Earth's wealthiest man. He is one of the wealthiest men in the Settled Worlds. This is what he has been doing for centuries – until someone killed him and vaporized his cortical stack. As Kovacs moves through the violent Earth locale known as Bay City, he discovers more questions than answers. Whose body was he placed into? What's become of the woman he loved long ago? Why is Lt. Kristin Ortega (Martha Higareda) so invested in Kovacs? And can Kovacs trust the former military officer Elliott (Ato Essandoh) and the AI entity known as Poe (Chris Conner), who inhabits the rundown Raven hotel?

Boasting revolutionary visuals, extraordinary action, and an intense landscape filled with cutting-edge themes, *Altered Carbon* takes off from the acclaimed cyberpunk novel by Richard K. Morgan. Created by Laeta Kalogridis (*Alita: Battle Angel*, *Shutter Island*) and produced by Skydance Television for Netflix.

Netflix presents **ALTERED CARBON: SEASON ONE** Created by Laeta Kalogridis Based on the novel by Richard K. Morgan. Directed by Uta Briesewitz, Peter Hoar, Nick Hurran, Andy Goddard, Alex Graves, Miguel Sapochnik. Written by Brian Nelson, Steve Blackman, Laeta Kalogridis, David H. Goodman, Nevin Densham, Russel Friend, Garrett Lerner and Casey Fisher. Produced by John G. Lenic, Brad Fischer, James Vanderbilt. Co-Produced by Allen Marshall Palmer. Associate Producer, Adam Banks. Executive Produced by Steve Blackman, Nick Hurran, Laeta Kalogridis, James Middleton, Mike Medavoy, Arnold Messer, Ralph Winter. Co-Executive Producer, Brian Nelson. Directors of Photography, Martin Ahlgren, Neville Kidd. Edited by Barry Alexander Brown, Julian Clarke, Jonathan Chibnall, Amy Fleming, Bryon Smith, Monty Degraff, Glenn Garland. Production Design by Carey Meyer. Art Direction by Chris Beach, Harrison Yurkiw. Costumes by Christine Wada (ep.1) and Ann Foley (eps 1 through 10). Props by Nevin Swain. VFX Supervisor: Everett Burrell, Stunt Coordinators: Larnell Stovall, Larry Lam

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#### **INTRODUCTION:**

##### **A TWISTED MYSTERY IN A NEW REALITY**

“There is no safety this side of the grave.”

**Robert A. Heinlein, “*Stranger in a Strange Land*” (1961)**

“...Pull on new flesh like borrowed gloves,  
and burn your fingers once again....”

**Richard K. Morgan, “*Altered Carbon*” (2002)**

Who we were, who we are, what we can accomplish, and what we destroy, all depend on endings and beginnings. ***Altered Carbon*** takes place in a world where those lines are blurred: A neon-filled, dangerously sleek, tech-addicted but morally hollow future hundreds of years from now, in which people are able to have their minds stored on discs in their necks called “cortical stacks”, the data comprising the human mind, called Digital Human Freight or DHF, can be transmitted to the stacks of different bodies.

In the amount of time it takes to back up one’s mental data in a satellite cloud, a person is ready to live life again – one day later, one week later, or centuries later. The technology springs

from alien advancements, was perfected by a 21st-century revolutionary, and, in the 24th century, is taken to violent and disturbing extremes.

Yet it also helps a warrior from another era solve a murder. More specifically, the murder of Earth's wealthiest man ... who is still alive.

The keys to this trippy mystery lie with a wealthy ruling class called "Meths" who live high above the gritty, decaying world in skyscrapers in the clouds, called the Aerium, where each person's consciousness, saved every 48 hours, can be put into "designer" sleeves or into clones of their former bodies – which allows them to literally live forever. Those who aren't as privileged are called "Grounders" and live a hand-to-mouth existence on Earth's grimy, dangerous streets; some have their consciousness awakened to find they're in a sleeve that's been leased or assigned to a position of servitude – bodyguard, for example, or prostitute, or some other being answerable to the UN Protectorate, which oversees interplanetary law.

Others find their minds placed inside bodies that are older or in damaged condition, the only ones available to at their economic level. Children wake up in elderly sleeves; people see their loved ones in different gender or races. This multi-connected world is filled with people "spun up" into new bodies several times over, which runs the risk of the person having a psychotic break. But when life itself is a commodity, it has a different value than anything humanity has ever dealt with before.

Some in this future world choose not to live again, and submit to what's called "real death." But for the super-rich, known as "Methuselahs" – or "Meths" – death isn't permanent; by living in a succession of new bodies, they are forever in control. In this world of changing bodies and modified life, everything can either be bought or sold or corrupted, and the line between right and wrong is completely erased.

That's what a man named Takeshi Kovacs (Joel Kinnaman, "House of Cards," "The Killing," *Suicide Squad*, *Robocop*) discovers in his first weeks back on Earth nearly 250 years after he was killed. Kovacs – born on a planet settled by Japanese and Slavic workers – was an "Envoy," a resistance fighter. Now re-sleeved and haunted by a love he lost over two centuries ago, Kovacs finds he's been "leased." Then Laurens Bancroft (James Purefoy, "Hap and

Leonard,” “Rome”), the mega-wealthy Methuselah mogul who paid to have Kovacs’ consciousness and skills implanted in a new sleeve, reveals his goal: Bancroft’s previous body was killed – made to look like a suicide – and he wants Kovacs to find the person who did it. If Kovacs solves the case, he’ll earn his freedom.

Hunting the killer of the man standing in front of him could be Kovacs’ way out. With the help of Det. Kristin Ortega (Martha Higareda, “Royal Pains,” *Street Kings*), a tough cop working in the Bay City Police Department’s Organic Damage Division who has an unexpected connection to both Kovacs and Bancroft, he accepts the assignment. But what’s in Kovacs’ future and what comes out of the past is unimaginable.

### **BRINGING A NEW WORLD TO LIFE**

The stunning and richly detailed world of Richard K. Morgan’s acclaimed, influential and astonishing sci-fi cyberpunk novel *Altered Carbon* has been intriguing its readers’ desires for a potential filmed adaptation since it was published in 2002. Transporting it off the page, however, has proven elusive. It wasn’t until series creator and executive producer Laeta Kalogridis teamed with Skydance Television, and Netflix to launch *Altered Carbon* with a revolutionary, narratively expansive 10 episodes that Morgan’s epic was able to leap between mediums.

With that leap came eye-popping production values, elaborate action sequences, and an elegant structure that allows for the kind of character development the story needs. “Television was starting to make leaps into shorter seasons that were more cinematic, that had a very different kind of energy,” says Kalogridis. “And that allowed us to create a story that truly felt like an extended movie.”

Kalogridis – screenwriter of *Shutter Island*, *Terminator Genisys*, and the upcoming *Alita: Battle Angel*, and a producer of *White House Down* and James Cameron’s record-breaking blockbuster *Avatar* – says her love of Morgan’s story, which won the Philip K. Dick award for Best Novel in 2003 (and which the author expanded in two subsequent books) and its connection to elemental parts of the human experience fueled her innovative adaptation of *Altered Carbon*. Season one of the epic series is of a piece with the book, but stands alone in its own right.

“Morgan’s book is such a seminal sci-fi text,” Kalogridis says of the work that serves as the series’ blueprint. “It’s a very serious sci-fi story about a technology that allows life to be extended indefinitely. Yet in no way was the story removed from completely identifiable human emotions. It has all the bells and whistles of great sci-fi, but at its heart is a very human story. And it was noir, which I love.”

“The book also beautifully redefines human beings’ relationship to our physicality,” says Kalogridis. “In the *Altered Carbon* world, you can exist in any body. It’s a fascinating idea that humans will have evolved over millions of years to exist in tandem with our physical body.”

“~~The world in~~ Morgan’s world is so big and so amazing, we’d need 10 seasons to capture it!” says Kalogridis. “The degree to which he imagined all of the settled worlds, the alien architecture, the alien ruins, the advanced technology and mythology, is so rich and textured. I’m very happy with the bit of the surface that we’ve scratched, but there’s a lot more left that we have not even begun to explore.”

Kinnaman says that Kalogridis’ adaptation of the story gave him a lot to chew on, fight for, finesse, and embrace as he prepared to play Takeshi Kovacs.

“Working with Laeta has been an exciting experience,” says Kinnaman. “I read the book, and I sort of had one vision of Kovacs, while Laeta saw the character differently. And then when I understood her vision of it, and we sort of met halfway, it created something that I think neither of us had imagined. We joined forces and created something new.”

“Laeta has this show’s whole world in her mind,” adds Kinnaman. “You start talking about some little detail, and she’ll give you the 200-year backstory on that little detail. So you can always ask her about anything. She’s immersed in this world, and her passion for it really spread to everyone and every department. She really instilled that in everyone, because she was so immersed in it herself.”

That passion filled in every small detail on the show’s timelines and stories. An astute level of future-think that considers how we might actually get from today to tomorrow – from the

world viewers are living in, to the one *Altered Carbon* takes them to – was part of the creative scaffolding for the show, Kalogridis says.

“We were trying very consciously to make this world feel as real as we could and as grounded as we could,” explains Kalogridis. “One very consistent element in the *Altered Carbon* world is the continuation of the societal divide, and how it grows ever greater. The future here might be lovely for the people at the top, as they acquire and can do more and more, but the people below – those whose existence involves less and less – will have a much more nightmarish existence.”

“That’s especially true as the people at the top can never be removed, and can never die,” she adds. “One concentrated group of people hold onto all the resources, and hold onto the most precious resource, life itself, without ever letting go. Everything else, and everyone else, is raw material to be exploited. And because we all know that that is truly the worst of human nature, that aspect of the story feels hauntingly real.”

Like the best sci-fi, *Altered Carbon* maps out moral or sociological issues for audiences to consider. It’s something the genre can do in a way that engages our hopes, our dears, our dreams, and our expectations of what’s to come.

“In *Altered Carbon*, the stack is the key to how human civilization has developed from our time forward,” says executive producer James Middleton. “The stack is a piece of technology that’s placed at the base of the skull that allows the mind to be stored, so that if the body ever dies, the mind can continue in another body. Each person gets this stack when they’re one year old, and it has changed everything, to the point where a body is seen as disposable.

“The division in the show between rich and poor echoes the disparity we’re seeing today,” says Higareda. “In the *Altered Carbon* world, there’s only a rare group of people who have a lot of money, and then most everyone else are just Grounders, who feel it’s unfair that only the rich can get clones and hence can live forever. Grounders can get a chance at another body only if something happens like they get run over, or it was an injustice – then they can get a new sleeve, but they don’t get to choose the body.”

“The core idea of this futuristic story is essentially that human beings have become like gods – and, not only that, but gods who are insanely flawed,” says Kalogridis. “Their concerns are selfish: What will I get? What will I keep? What will I have in the future, forever?”

These themes and motifs will have universal appeal, Purefoy believes.

“I think any story is where themes like this are being discussed – love, loss, hope, tragedy, death, mourning, sorrow, any of these things that we all feel no – will resonate,” says Purefoy. “It doesn’t really matter if it’s set 500 years ago or 1,000 years ago or 500 years in the future. As long as those things are being carefully looked at by the actors and the producers and the directors and the writers, and there are stories that are elemental and fascinating and interesting, they’ll succeed.”

“The mythology of *Altered Carbon* is complex, but also very grounded in what we know,” says Kalogridis. “We forget how much technology has transformed things just in our lifetime. Things that 15 years ago we would not have considered as being normative now are things we take things for granted.”

“That actually makes it really challenging to create a fictional world where there’s a whole new technology that’s up-ended, much the way the Internet upended everything,” continues Kalogridis. “That’s probably the most challenging part of the show – we’re world-building around an idea that even though it’s simple at its heart, it brings with it a great deal of diverse elements in terms of how it’s used, and the ethics it involves.”

Middleton notes the intoxicating, noir-tinged duality of the story is part of its allure – including the link Kovacs has with the women in both his past and present life.

“*Altered Carbon* at its core is a murder mystery, but it’s also a love story,” says Middleton. “What we see with Takeshi Kovacs is a character who carries the love of his life through hundreds of years into the future, into our present-day story. That resounding echo of love is something that a lot of audiences can relate to, even in a sci-fi setting.”

All of these elements are synthesized in a main figure who’s both retro and ultramodern.

“The core of *Altered Carbon* is the character of Takeshi Kovacs and his profound damage,” says Kalogridis. “He’s a man who wants to believe that he is something of a sociopath, but he isn’t at all. He wants to believe that he cares about nothing, but that’s not remotely true. Kovacs is someone who is displaced out of his life and thrown into a world that he did not want to be part of. He has a very tenuous connection to being alive.”

“Kovacs is a veteran of a failed rebellion that occurred centuries earlier, and a man at war with himself,” Kalogridis continues. “He was a kind-of Black-Ops assassin when he was younger. Then, as elements of society fought against the wealthy and powerful re-sleeving themselves for eternity – maintaining and increasing their power – there was an Uprising, during which he was trained by a woman he fell in love with.”

“After the Uprising failed, he became a mercenary, and everything was stripped away from him. Kovacs is pushed and pulled between the person that he was and the person he became. Now, as he’s been re-sleeved into a different moment in time, the revolutionary who wanted to change things keeps coming through.”

Kinnaman sees Kovacs as a man whose hunger to fight against injustice in society literally spans millennia, planets, and corporeal casings.

“I think Kovacs has a very strong moral compass,” says Kinnaman. “He’s far from perfect, but he knows right from wrong. When he’s re-sleeved, it’s a second chance. So, after he chooses to take this case and go on this journey, he finds a will to live, because of the reality that he faces and the people that he meets in this new world.”

### **DIVING DEEP INTO ALTERED CARBON**

The challenges of making visionary art are numerous. But one of the most unique hurdles *Altered Carbon* faced was a mosaic of fascinatingly intricate fictional history, deep backstories, unique terminology, and universal rules of that establish its extraordinary world.

In the world of *Altered Carbon*, Takeshi Kovacs has two identities: The one he was born with on Harlan’s World 250 years before the start of the show, and the one he is re-sleeved into

in episode one. The totalitarian government known as the Protectorate has long held interplanetary influence, and Harlan's World was populated by Japanese and Slavic work from Earth (thus, Kovacs' multicultural heritage). The "birth Kovacs" and his younger sister, Reileen, survived an abusive father. When, as a young boy, Takeshi showed uncommon bravery and fighting ability, he was recruited to be a Black Ops fighter, while his sister loses touch with him as she's brought to an orphanage – something that will have a domino effect on her personality.

Years later, the adult Kovacs (played by Will Yun Lee, costar of "Hawaii Five-O," *San Andreas*, and *The Wolverine*) is recruited by a group of freedom fighters called Envoys, who oppose the totalitarian rule of Meths and the Protectorate and eventually the idea of immortality itself. As the lush, forest-filled Harlan's World was taken over by the Protectorate, Kovacs trained with the Envoys' leader, a brave rebel leader and inventor named Quellcrist Falconer (Renee Elise Goldsberry, costar of "The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks" and "The Good Wife," and a Tony winner for originating the role of Angelica Schuyler in the Broadway phenomenon *Hamilton*) who Kovacs fell in love with.

As power-hungry groups of wealthy elites called Methusalahs, aka "Meths," instituted their stack-and-sleeve-based plan to live forever, the Envoys started an uprising. "That war was about keeping Meths from existing," says Kalogridis. "Quellcrist felt that eternal life would self-select for the most corrupt and worst among us. If they continued to accumulate material goods endlessly, then their power would increase. The divide between the haves and the have-nots would become a huge chasm."

When the "birth Kovacs" is killed, his stack is put on ice, a sort of virtual prison. Placed into a new sleeve more than 250 years later, Kovacs finds he's now in Bay City (formerly San Francisco) in the body of Det. Ortega's former love, a disgraced police detective whose DHF has been put on ice while he awaits trial. Ortega has chosen to never be "spun up" – so her consciousness will never be put into another body – based on her ethical and religious beliefs. She agrees to help Kovacs find Bancroft's killer for her own, soon-to-be-revealed reasons.

It becomes clear that even after Kovacs' many years on ice, Quellcrist remains part of his subconscious. "Kovacs has manifestations of his memories of her," says Kalogridis. "He hears her

voice and sees echoes of her, and she tells him cryptically there's something for him to do in this new time he's been spun up into, a time when the Envoys are remembered as terrorists."

Explains Goldsberry, "Quell very much exists in the mind of Kovacs. When he is re-sleeved, he continues to bring her to him in the most extreme moments. She becomes his intuition, the embodiment of his highest self. She becomes the person that basically saves his life, the good angel on his shoulder in a very dangerous world. We will understand the significance of her in this world, and to him."

Reileen also does not remain in Kovacs' past, and when she makes a re-appearance in his life (played by Dichen Lachman, costar of "The Last Ship," "Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.," "Shameless" and "The 100"), Kovacs is confronted by a life he thought was buried a world away.

Meanwhile, the powerful, influential Meth who approves Kovacs' mental "stack" being "spun back up" into a new body is the enigmatic Laurens Bancroft, who knows that Kovacs, as the last Envoy, has particular skills and abilities. Bancroft – whose wealth allows him to create endless clones of his birth body to be spun into – offers Kovacs a pardon for his activities as an Envoy in exchange for figuring out who murdered him and made it look like a suicide. Because while Bancroft's consciousness is backed up every 48 hours, his murder occurred during a blank space in his memory just prior to being backed up. Now in a brand-new clone of himself, Bancroft demands answers.

"Bancroft is 375 years old, but at the moment when he was killed, he's being 'needle-cast,' which means that his mind, his entire memory, and his personality is being backed up to a satellite. So the last 48 hours of his life are missing," explains Purefoy. "Bancroft is about a continual and everlasting quest for expansion of his empire. That's what he spends his time doing. And if it's not expanding his empire on earth, it is expanding his empire on new worlds."

"I think one of the themes in the show is the corrupting effect of being immortal," Purefoy adds. "If you're given the opportunity to be immortal, does that have a progressively corrupting effect on your soul? I think the answer's pretty clear to anybody who gives that moment that thought just a moment's meditation that actually yes, probably very likely it does."

“A stack holds who you are: your whole personality, your mind, your memories,” says Kalogridis. “The mind is contained as electrical impulses inside that cortical stack. So, there’s a satellite copy of Bancroft that can be re-downloaded into his new clone, only without the crucial details of who murdered him, and why.”

“One of the things I find most fascinating about Laurens Bancroft is that he should feel very familiar to us,” says Kalogridis. “He’s actually very much like us, this member of not just the top 1 percent of society, but the top .00001 percent. He comes from our time and our culture, and since the late 21<sup>st</sup> century has been cloning himself into the same body. Though he’s about 350 years old, his body is aged between 45 and 55 years old, as he feels that’s when the truest power is attained.” Bancroft’s wife, Miriam (Kristin Lehman), has also been spun up into ever-stronger and beautiful clones of her original body. The couple’s been together for 118 years.

Amongst the other characters who will impact Kovacs and Ortega’s investigation is Vernon Elliot (Ato Essandoh, “Chicago Med,” “Vinyl,” *Jason Bourne*), a former medic in the Protectorate’s military forces haunted by the imprisonment of his wife, and visions of his daughter, Lizzie, a lost soul and drug addict who, unknown to Elliott, had become a prostitute in Bay City – and then was murdered.

“Elliott’s wife was caught ‘dipping’ – briefly and illegally slipping into inside of lives of the rich and famous,” says Kalogridis. “She gets arrested for it, and her conscious is on ice for 30 years, while her body – her sleeve – is sold to a corporate negotiator.” That ends up having tragic consequences for their daughter, who Elliott is desperate to reconnect with in the virtual world.

Another crucial character in *Altered Carbon* is a new incarnation of an iconic American author. Edgar A.I. Poe, just referred to as Poe (Chris Conner, costar of “The People v. O.J. Simpson: American Crime Story,”), is a highly evolved AI system operating inside of the gorgeously retro Raven Hotel, where Kovacs lives in grungy Bay City. Self-aware as an operating system, Poe nonetheless manifests as a digital avatar of the famous writer, helping Kovacs straighten out his thoughts and providing insight as the Bancroft case leads down morally murky avenues. (Though Poe, a blithe spirit fascinated with the trappings of human in another time, spends some of his downtime enjoying virtual poker games with other A.I.)

“One of the most fascinating things in the *Altered Carbon* universe is the existence of Artificial Intelligences, and how they, while created by human beings, have become independent,” says Middleton. “Poe is an independent AI who runs a hotel. He loves all things human, though he has had no guests in his hotel for decades. Kovacs is the first guest at the Raven in a long time. Poe becomes like a partner to Kovacs. He also has a nobility that any human being would be envious of, and has a great part in helping Kovacs figure things out.”

“In the *Altered Carbon* universe, A.I. are just another species, and they know it,” explains Kalogridis. “Some A.I. disdain humans. Some of them want to be like humans. Poe, for his part, very much wants to understand what human beings are, which is why he’s taken on this particular persona. Of course, part of why Poe is ideal as the A.I in this story is because *Altered Carbon* is a noir story, and the real-life Poe invented the modern detective short story in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It seemed like a perfect fit.”

The themes and motifs of *Altered Carbon* force audiences to think of not only the future but the present in ways that engender difficult interpretation.

“The usual science fiction theme of be careful what you wish for is certainly inside this work. along with human beings’ ability to create technology that almost always outstrips our capability to use it wisely,” says Kalogridis. “But I think also we’re trying to explore the idea of imbalance in resources. When too much goes to a small group and not enough to everyone else, there are terrible dangers. And any dystopian story like this is going to touch on that greatest of sci-fi questions, which is, What does it mean to be human? If you’re looking at a world where humanity is degraded and debased, what, fundamentally, does it say about us?”

The noir setting and motif also allows for a consideration of redemption, and how Kovacs’ search ultimately leads not simply to the discovery of a murder.

“Noir is never about redemption achieved for yourself – noir heroes usually know that deep inside, and in that way, Kovacs is similar to a classic protagonist and yet still unique,” says Kalogridis. “Noir heroes know that they’re likely not going to survive, that what they’re doing is ultimately for others. While they may seem nihilistic, they’re actually not. Kovacs is trying to

redeem the choices he made in the past that had consequences he didn't intend."

### **A TIMELESS TEAM**

Bringing *Altered Carbon* to life required a cast that could see the past and future of their characters, and infuse them with the knowledge that they contain multitudes. The center of the wheel for Kalogridis was Joel Kinnaman, who's provided a sinewy, intelligent toughness to films including *Suicide Squad*, *Robocop*, and *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, as well as TV's "The Killing." As Kovacs, Kinnaman is a throwback to cinema's most memorable postwar private eyes, seeking the truth because they must but following a moral code all their own.

"Joel's amazing," says Kalogridis. "He inhabits the character in a way that all of us could only have dreamed of. He completely internalized Kovacs, who the character is and what his struggles are. Joel's made it so seamless that when you're watching him, you can't imagine anybody else playing the part. Which is funny, considering that Kovacs is seen during the first season in two other sleeves, and Kovacs, the character is not who he was born as. But Joel's performance is incredible. People are going to be amazed by how intense he is in this part."

"In a novel, obviously, you can inhabit a character's interior life without experiencing it through the face," says Kalogridis. "But when you're watching an actor, you're identifying with them. You're experiencing the story through the actor. And it's somewhat disruptive when you switch the actor's face in a sci-fi story like this. So, we're having a kind of meta-textual conversation with the audience, where they have to see the characters in different bodies and stay with the story. They have to say, essentially, 'Okay, that's Kovacs, and *that's* Kovacs, and that's *still* Kovacs.' And Joel's physicality meets the character and sells it completely."

"Kovacs is death on wheels when he does battle," she says. "He's frightening when he fights! Kovacs as played by Joel is charismatic, but when he gets angry, it's *intense*."

Stunt coordinator Larnell Stovall recognized the importance of Kovacs' unique style of fighting, and Kinnaman's dedication in making it all seem real.

“I love how Kovacs adapts to this new world he’s ‘spun up’ into with this new sleeve, and is always looking over his shoulder, remembering the lessons he learned hundreds of years earlier, and recalling his training,” says Stovall. “As much as the future can influence who you are, he is in touch with his past physicality. And Joel loves trying to do all of his own action – of course, within safe parameters. He has delivered nonstop with each action sequence. He goes all out. He’s professional, learns the choreography, and always puts everything he has into it.”

As Lt. Det. Kristin Ortega, Martha Higareda, a megastar of film and TV in her native Mexico, brings a beguiling and beautiful presence, reinforcing the humanity in Kovacs’ new existence and providing both courage and conscience.

“Martha has an intensity that matches Joel’s,” says Kalogridis. “They’re both intense, committed actors, and both are great at matching their unbelievable energy. Her portrayal of Ortega is of a woman who’s very much a part of Bay City, but is also part of her own culture.”

“She’s incredibly energetic and committed,” adds Kalogridis. “And she understands Ortega in a way I think none of us actually could, because Ortega’s background is coming from a family with deep religious beliefs and so much conflict, and Martha brings her own life experience to the role, as well as a background in a different culture. She’s phenomenal.”

“An additional piece of the puzzle, and it’s one we hit a lot in the story is, what is love? And this is a major part of Ortega’s arc. How much of it is chemical, how much of it is physical, how much of it is the soul? The connection between Ortega and Kovacs touches on that issue.”

For Will Yun Lee, the psychological makeup of what the *Altered Carbon* production team called “Birth Kovacs” or “Original Kovacs” needed to resonate across storylines and timelines. The solution Lee decided upon came from the heart.

“I had to find the threads that an audience could follow throughout the course of the show, and, for me, it was the two relationships that were most crucial for Kovacs – with Quellcrist and with his sister, Reileen,” says Lee. “I felt like with that through-line it would give the future Kovacs something you see develop across the arc of the whole season. I felt like those two relationships were based on pure love, even as the future Kovacs has to fight to find his place.

Laeta and I spoke about how Quell was the first person that ever came back for Kovacs after he's captured by the Protectorate. So, that was the turning point, and for this man who grew up alone, the Envoys was the first family he was invited into, thanks to Quell."

The female characters' complexity, humanity, and fierceness also help *Altered Carbon* stand tall in the current pop-cultural moment.

"I love that the female characters in the show are also so powerful and so dangerous in their own ways," says Goldsberry. "I love that Quell spars with Reileen. And that Quell seems all-powerful and impervious and still falls in love, and then another woman provides her biggest challenge. There's something fragile about Quell, but she's 100 percent feminine and at the same time 100 percent a powerful hero. She's intelligent, calculating, and dangerous and the show makes no apologies for any of that."

"I think some people mistake science fiction for a man's genre – that it's just lots of gadgets or fighting or some version of interstellar war, and so there's no place for emotional drama. I would completely disagree," Goldsberry continues. "What I've always loved about sci-fi is that in the midst of all of the coolness and badass-ness, there can be deep character development. There are journeys that are going on emotionally between characters, and relationship development. This is a very dark world we're imagining, and the love between Kovacs and Quell, and even between Ortega and Kovacs, make this world more interesting, and make the story universal."

"I'm a huge sci-fi fan, but even people who don't know yet that they love sci-fi will get into this series because it's not really defined by one particular genre," Goldsberry adds. "We all like stories that are well written, and that inform the world we live in today, and *Altered Carbon* has all of those things. And it's so international. Most of all, though, it's so Netflix – it's not about just one demographic or one group of people, or one country or one language. It's bigger than that. That's the world we live in today, and Laeta is incorporating that into the art form."

Higareda agrees with the assessment of *Altered Carbon's* female characters. "Kristin Ortega is a strong woman that is always on the edge, because there's a very complex situation going on in the show for her," Higareda says. "She's strong, but at the same time she's on the

verge of breaking all the time because of the difficulty of her situation. She's very smart, and one of her most prominent values is sense of justice. That drives her forward."

Dichen Lachman notes that Reileen, Takeshi Kovacs' sister, will test an audience's allegiance, and that in itself was crucial to her understanding of the role.

"Reileen is incredibly complicated," says Lachman. "She really believes in what she's fighting for. She has a troubled past and a darkness to her, but she loves her brother Takeshi more than anything in the world. It's always a challenge when you're playing someone who does so many unthinkable things, but to bring humanity to her as well."

"Reileen is fighting for the love of her brother, and for his forgiveness, yet she's also fighting for the ability to live forever, and I don't think that she can imagine really continuing on that path without him," adds Lachman. "She's building an empire so that when she reunites with Takeshi, and he forgives her, she imagines they'll live together forever. On Harlan's World, he was everything to her. But in her spun-up life on Earth in the 24<sup>th</sup> century, she's involved in horrible business and she has done really bad things, and is very focused on money and power. It's great how every type of woman is kind of represented on this show, not just their inner lives and strengths and weaknesses, but also in terms of diversity and background."

Kalogridis knows well the classic sci-fi template for stories and films, and where to push it into new dimensions.

"The usual science fiction theme of 'Be careful what you wish for' is ingrained in the book and show, along with human beings' ability to create technology that almost always outstrips our ability to use it wisely," Kalogridis says. "But we're also exploring the idea of imbalance in resources – when too much goes to a small group and not enough to everyone else, how that impact an expanding society? And any dystopic story is going to touch on what I consider to be the greatest science-fiction question, and what I always consider the biggest theme: What does it mean to be human? If you're looking at a world where humanity is degraded and abased, what fundamentally does it mean to be a human being?"

To guide the episodes through its first hypnotic season, Kalogridis brought a formidable team of filmmakers on board to direct.

“Our directors are uniformly amazing,” says Kalogridis. “Miguel Sapochnik (“Game of Thrones,” “Iron Fist,” “House”) is a visionary. He’s brilliant, and created the tone for the whole show. It was crucial to have a strong vision, as we’re creating a mythological future on ***Altered Carbon***. Nick Hurran (“Sherlock,” “Doctor Who”), our producing director, has such amazing wit and a sharp eye, and has been such a steadfast supporter all the way through the process.”

“Each of our directors – including Uta Briesewitz, Peter Hoar, Andy Goddard, Alex Graves – is different, and each brings their version of what ***Altered Carbon*** is,” says Kalogridis. “The visionary filmmakers creating this world have made it come fully alive.”

Says Essandoh, “It helps round out the characters to have several directors in one season, because everybody has a different way of looking at it which gives you more data to mine. And each director has a different personality, obviously, so they have different takes on the world of the show. Richard Morgan established an incredible universe, and the book is brutal and dark and violent but with a lot of quirky, cool things in it. And what Laeta did was to take that and really grow it into something that was just completely epic.”

### **STUNNING VISUAL DESIGN, INTENSE ACTION, WILD TECHNOLOGY: A FUTURISTIC HOLY TRINITY**

Revolutionary science-fiction has always been about the interconnection of state-of-the-art aesthetics with visionary storytelling. From the films of George Méliès (1902’s *A Trip to the Moon*, 1904’s *The Impossible Voyage*) to William Cameron Menzies’ *Things to Come* (1936), George Pal’s *The Time Machine* (1960), Stanley Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), Ridley Scott’s influential *Blade Runner* (1982) and its 2017 sequel *Blade Runner 2049*, sci-fi parables have opened our eyes and minds to often startling notions of where we’re headed.

Now, *Altered Carbon* makes the next leap. As Kalogridis transposed Richard Morgan's multi-tiered 24th-century dystopian tales into the new Netflix series, the epic tapestry of the project required equally boundary-breaking work behind the scenes.

"The book had so many layers and so many challenges, there's a reason it took years to get made," says Kalogridis. "We get to explore themes that all of that complex as technological ideas, and as intellectual ideas. And we can explore it through amazing special effects: in-camera effects, prosthetics, anything to do with gunplay. Then we have visual effects played out across green screens and blue screen work, and we bring in all the elements together so that it's visually organic and stunning all the way around."

Special visual effects supervisor Everett Burrell says that creating *Altered Carbon's* world – full of shockingly sleek and recombined designs; novelistic attention to detail; and thrillingly aggressive action sequences – was so enticing, he couldn't wait to jump in.

"I met Laeta and Steve Blackman, and they explained the world and their thoughts on it," Burrell explains. "And once I saw the initial sketches, I was completely hooked."

The show's design elements are filled with provocative notions on both the macro and micro levels, says Burrell.

"In the future San Francisco – here called Bay City – there are iconic things like the Golden Gate Bridge, but we added some unique things to the environment. As you watch the show, you think, 'Why is there a giant dam around the bay? Because global warming in the future has raised the water level around San Francisco.'"

"But once on the street, much of the city is done with practical effects," adds Burrell. "We built this giant city set that has fantastic in-camera visuals. Bay City has different levels: The bottom is for the Grounders, the low-rent district for those in society's lowest rung. The middle-class reside in an area called the Twilight, higher up in the city. Above that is Aerium, where the Meths live, the .00001 percent of the population on Earth. Where the Grounders live is gritty, dirty, and smoky, with a layer of smog they can't get away from. Twilight has expensive

condos, and you see a little bit of sky. In *Aerium*, it's all Ivory Towers, skyscrapers, wealth, privilege, decadence – life in the clouds.”

*Altered Carbon* production designer Carey Meyer acknowledges the ghosts of sci-fi films past in the *Grounders*' visual overlay.

“There are many references in Morgan's book, and that, plus delving into a lot of research of different sci-fi movies, 1982's *Blade Runner* obviously being one, really was where we started,” says Meyer. “My favorite set to create was the street set. It was the first vision that I had in my mind for this project.”

“The most important thing were the textures and palette of the main streets,” says Meyer. “Our world lives much in a texture of concrete and rust and decay. That street set is the base level of Bay City, so it has water and texture and rust and cracked concrete – it's the worst place to live in Bay City. We tried to give that street the basest, most textured surfacing we could.”

“We spent a lot of time saying, how much smoke do we need here? Can we avoid using a blue screen there?” says Burrell. “Keeping the *Grounders*' world completely in-camera was a conscious decision between Laeta, Carey Meyer, myself, and all the directors of photography.”

One aspect of *Altered Carbon* that involves extreme visual spark is its action sequences – including one memorable scene involving what's called a Null G battle, short for “no gravity.”

“In that sequence, it's an endless pit where Kovacs is fighting, and if combatants were to fall outside of that zero-gravity area, they would fall to their death,” says Meyer. “So, as they're going in and out of zero gravity, they're hitting walls and fighting on the sides, then jumping back into the arena to grab weapons. It's really amazing to watch.”

The show's stunt coordinator, Larnell Stovall, had his work cut out for his in that scene.

“Each episode is so layered with multiple fight scenes, but the Null G battle truly pops out and stands apart,” says Stovall. “How do you make people float in the air safely, proper rehearsal

time, but make everybody believe it and make it intense, brutal and safe at the same time? That was a special and an exciting challenge for all of us.”

Stovall’s challenges throughout Season One of *Altered Carbon* involved finding the fighting form of the future for every character, but especially Kovacs and Ortega.

“We took each character and put together like a hybrid of different styles for each of them,” adds Stovall. “Training for all the actors was like a boot camp. We put together tactical drills for them, pistols, assault rifles. Kovacs in his previous sleeves had tons of military training, and Ortega is in the police department, so we wanted to make sure they reflected both of those things with every movement, every pistol, every time they trained their gun on somebody. We wanted to make sure they kept their individual styles throughout their fighting.”

“We kept in mind that Kovacs in a past life was super-trained as part of the Envoys, and thought about how that would reflect in the future, when technology and fighting styles have advanced,” adds Stovall. “So, we gave him a mixture of military combat: American and Russian styles, a little of the martial art Hapkido, a bit of judo, taekwondo and knife fighting, some kali martial arts. I looked at styles from Indonesia, such as Silat, and pieced them all together.”

The actors grabbed the grappling aspect of their jobs with gusto, Stovall reveals.

“Joel was right there with us during judo and jiu jitsu training, then when we went to choreography, he was there being tossed and flipping people,” says Stovall. “He was actually there in the grind with us, and you’ll see it in the episodes. That’s often him, not a stunt man.”

“I’ve done a lot of action before, but this was an opportunity for me to take it to the next level,” says Kinnaman. “The Null G sequence was pretty trippy. That’s one of the things that has been so exciting on this show, that we’re able to be in this large scale sci-fi world that you usually only see on big-budget movies. And then there are also some analog tricks that we did, including a lot of wire work in that Null G fight sequence, which I’d done a little bit of before, but nothing as extensive as this!”

“As for Martha, she’s really great with her hands during a fight, so we put a lot of boxing into Kristin Ortega’s fighting style,” says Stovall. “A lot of low kicks and things to cater to what a police officer may do, mixed with gun and tactical techniques. So, Ortega’s style is a hybrid of dirty street boxing mixed with a police tactical style. What I wanted to do for her was make sure what was on the page matched with her fighting. Ortega is a person of passion, with a lot of issues lurking underneath her personality, and I thought it would be great to show some of that in the fighting sequences. Ortega is a person that doesn’t give up.”

For Will Yun Lee, getting ready for the physical demands of *Altered Carbon* meant giving things up in real life.

“Laeta and I have been friends for a long time, and one day I got a random text from her that was very vague, and simply said, ‘How fast can you get in shape?’” Lee recalls. “I had just put on 25 pounds for another show. So, I gained an insane amount of weight and then I got her text. And I was literally at that moment driving to a Costco to buy this 22-inch apple pie with my wife that we had been thinking about. And, by the end of my texting with Laeta, I said to my wife, ‘I’m not sure what Laeta wants, but I know I can’t buy that apple pie!’”

“So after that, it was a lot of broccoli and stuff I hate to eat on a daily basis, along with cardio, working out with weights, and hitting the heavy bag at the gym,” says Lee.

Another aspect of the series that draws audiences into its world is the intoxicating, often-spooky technology that has helped create the caste system in 24<sup>th</sup> century society, in which death is an inconvenience and ethics, like everything, are a commodity. One viewers will want to keep an eye out for is the ONI (pronounced “Oh-nee”).

What’s an ONI? As Burrell explains, in the *Altered Carbon* universe, “It’s an ocular neural implant, but it works as an interface with its user. It’s like a contact lens that’s put in the eye. Sort of an advanced iPad in your eye that you control with your brain. It detects your thoughts and eye patterns.” Burrell believes the advanced technology may seem outlandish but “may be just around the corner for us in the real world.”

Adds the show's property master Nevin Swain, "The ONI is inserted with something called a SCLEROFIT, which is a small device you hold up to your eye, push a button, and inject a contact lens into your eye. Then the other part of the ONI is how you control it. The characters also have devices which enables them to control the ONI."

Burrell says the ONI is personalized to each character. "So, we have to give everybody on the show an individual angle on it – the same way our iPhones are personalized today, or you might put stickers on it, or use Emojis in a text. It's a similar thing with the ONI. We had to personalize it for every character. Ortega, for instance, wears a military/tactical version of an ONI that no one else has. Getting that concept developed and identifying with each character's ONI has been a challenge, and very complicated, but worth it."

Kalogridis reveals that there's a subtext to the ONI name, as well.

"An Oni is also a Japanese word for a demon or devil," she says. "We were sort of riffing and said, 'Well, nobody's going to be actually holding a device to their ear in 250 years!' So we just sort of came up with the way that we felt people would be communicating with each other that seemed the most natural.

"When we started this process, we were looking at kind of what people were saying was going to come next," says Kalogridis. "The same way we have Google Glass and optical head-mounted display going on now. We were all interested in the idea of this seamless technological interface. Though I'm sure whatever in 250 years, what will actually exist will be far beyond what we can even imagine.

"For instance, I've always enjoyed in *Blade Runner* the scene where Harrison Ford, as Rick Deckard, is in a bar and calls Sean Young, as Rachel, on a 'videophone,' which is like an old-fashioned small screen TV. That's very much in 1982 what you expected the year 2019 to look like, and look where we actually are."

Says Burrell, "I think the ONI is a really scary element of the show. I would never want that much information coming at me all the time!"

Meyer, whose production design weaves together multiple aesthetics, varied worlds, and diverse themes and motifs, says that ultimately the visuals in *Altered Carbon* were united in a thematically groundbreaking approach.

“In such a visual world like this, it’s more important to create a look and stick with it and be consistent with it and build a future aesthetic,” says Meyer. “You can’t just say, ‘We have to have a holographic monitor in this scene,’ or, ‘We need to have this high-tech element here or there.’ It’s layered. And it’s more about staying consistent, creating a memorable look, and making sure you’re creating a future that feels real and organic.”

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