

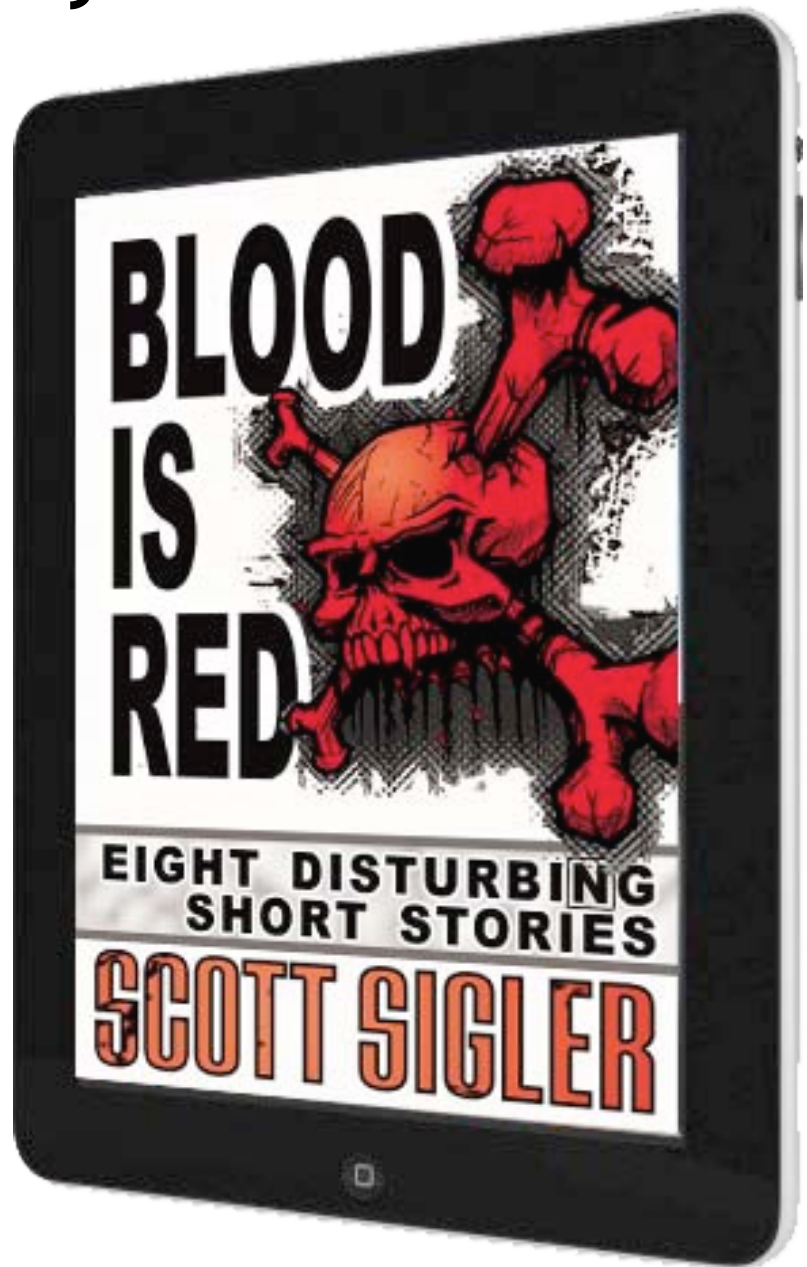
# ***Free*** PDF of the award-winning short story **RED MAN**

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# Introduction

You, the reader, yeah *you* ... I know who you are.

You like fiction.

You understand what trips your trigger, and don't need a critic to tell you what you should and should not enjoy.

You like to be entertained.

You know that F-bombs happen.

You don't mind if things get a little ... messy.

*Welcome home.*

If this is your first tumble in the hay with me, I write hard-science horror/thrillers. My novels INFECTED, CONTAGIOUS and ANCESTOR are available in hardcover, paperback, audiobook and eBook. I also write an intense Young Adult series about a space-faring pro football league corrupted by organized crime. Those books, THE ROOKIE, THE STARTER and THE ALL-PRO, are available in all eBook stores or in hardcover from Amazon.com or my website.

Seven of the stories in BLOOD IS RED were released as free audiobooks at my website, scottsigler.com. As the eBook revolution continues to explode, we thought it would be cool to collect these tales and put them in a sweet little electronic format.

After each story, I dish some background about the inspiration behind it. If you like to ask, "where do you get your ideas," I've got you covered.

I still release free, author-read, audio fiction every Sunday at scottsigler.com. There is a stellar fan community waiting for you there. Who knows, after reading this, you might also become a "Junkie." Enjoy these stories, and we hope to see you at the site.

Your free story "Red Man" is on the next page. I hope you enjoy it.

-Scott-

# Red Man

*by Scott Sigler*

The woman at the corner booth is staring at me.

She's older, about forty-five, or perhaps a hard life made her look that way. Many people in this place lead hard lives. The restaurant *is* in Hunters Point, after all.

Her hair is brown and stringy, and she's still bundled in a ratty yellow overcoat even though it's quite warm inside the diner. The place is full of the clinks and scrapes and slurps and conversational drone of the working class, a group I used to belong to, but none of it seems to involve her. It's as if she's tuned out everything but me. I'm a focus for hatred born from protective, aggressive fear for her child.

Her little red-haired kid is oblivious to the stare. He's got dirt smears on his face. He's making yummy noises and devouring a bowl of Cocoa Puffs. He must get the red hair from his dad. I wonder if the bitch even knows who the boy's father is?

Most people stare only a little, or out of the corner of their eye. When I look up, they look away. Not this woman. She's staring a hole right through my head. I've already looked at her twice, once with a smile and once with the best indignant look I could muster – but the latter only lasted a few seconds before I had to look away. Her hateful gaze never flinched. At least she stayed to finish her meal; the only other lady in the diner with a child up and left the second I sat down at the counter. She left a twenty to pay for

the coffee and bagel and just vamoosed. That only leaves about two dollars for the waitress. Isn't much of a tip, but then again I don't really think the woman stopped to consider the waitress' feelings.

There are some other patrons in the diner, and I think some of them know who I am. Those who do, they know my face from all those news broadcasts five years ago. Some of them know I was wrongly convicted, know that I'm not a child molester. But that collective memory seems to be fading from the public's consciousness. More and more I just get the stares, or I get people leaving a half-eaten bagel and dragging their five-year-old out of the diner by a cream-cheese smeared sleeve.

I flip through the menu, watching pictures of various dishes scroll past on the countertop. An ad for Roloids flashes on the bottom edge of the counter, while sports scores and stock quotes scroll along the top. My Giants dropped their fifth and sixth straight, losing both games of a double-header with Oakland. Some things never change. GenTel is up 2 and 3/8. I wonder what the staring woman would say if she knew I'd just made another hundred thou from that little price jump? She'd never believe me, even if I told her, and I doubt she wants to make small talk.

No one wants to talk to a Red Man.

I can vaguely see my reflection in the countertop's scratched glass. My face provides a counterpoint to the food/news/sports images that scroll by underneath. The country fried steak looks good, even though the screen is slightly out-of-focus and missing a few pixels. I keep scrolling, focusing more on my reflection than on the dishes.

I see the stripes on my skin – the red color shows I'm a sex offender, the raccoon rings around my eyes shows I'm a rapist, and the thick, ragged zebra stripe running from cheek to cheek and across my nose shows I'm a child molester. I'm trying to look at the chili dog combo plate, but all I can focus on is my reflection. In that way, I guess I'm just like the staring woman – I can't look away either.

I always find it amazing that in the brief eight years since the government adopted Abigail Duersson's Marker Virus for identifying convicted felons, everyone has the color and pattern codes memorized to the point where only small children need to ask what the strange marks mean. That knowledge is as ingrained in the collective American psyche as

the colors of the flag or the stance of the Statue of Liberty – and yet no one remembers that my markings are a mistake.

That bitch is *still* staring. It's a public place. I have as much a right to eat here as anyone else, yet I can't take it anymore. I stand and leave, not able to look at the woman, but I feel her stare drill into me all the way to the door. I step out into the cold January rain. As the diner door slowly swings itself shut, I hear a smattering of applause and a few low-key hoots of victory from inside. I close my eyes tight and ignore it until the door shuts, then all I hear are the honks of angry taxi drivers, the grinding acceleration of aircars and the constant hiss of airbrakes. If I close my eyes tight enough and listen, I can almost pretend things are normal, almost pretend that people across the street aren't already staring at me and moving away.

•••

Things are always better inside Elvis. Elvis is my pride and joy: a vintage '19 Cadillac Roadster, the last of the road-only luxury cars. I've had it retrofitted, of course, and now it does sixty-five miles per hour at two hundred feet just like anything else in the luxury class. The windows are tinted solid black; I can see out of them just fine, but all anyone outside can see is the dark, smoky reflection of their cars and their own normal faces.

It's nice cruising at two hundred feet. Nice to be above the congestion of the wagons, taxis and mid-sized cars fifty feet below and – God forbid I should ever have to drive there again – the snarl of small and economy-class cars duking it out at a hundred feet above the street. What a nightmare that is. Takes almost forty minutes to get from Sacramento to San Francisco. Things are much faster when you can afford a luxury license – the same trip usually takes me all of twenty minutes, as long as I avoid the five o'clock rush that brings out all the tech-workers.

I hear a honk from my right. A brand-new '42 Lincoln Town Car. Driver is honking and waving, giving me the thumbs-up sign. I get that a lot. People love Elvis. It's rare enough to see an actual roadster in once piece, let alone one that's retrofitted for altitude cruising. People who see my car know the driver is not only rich, but darn cool as well. Elvis has style. I honk my horn and wave back. I know the Lincoln driver can't see

me, but it feels nice to relate to someone, feels nice to see a smile directed my way.

I spend a lot of time driving.

Cost a fortune for Elvis's retrofit. Money I've got. In spades. My lawyer made sure of that after he overturned my conviction. The lawsuit made headlines all over the world. They'd used the Marker Virus on hundreds of dangerous criminals, that was nothing new. What was new was they'd permanently changed my skin pigmentation to forever mark me as a violent sex offender, and it turned out I didn't do it. The jury took one look at the evidence – then one look at my face – and the case was closed. I pocketed around \$400 million in various damages. Like I said, money I've got.

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Don't get me wrong. It's not that I don't understand the felon-marking program, because I do. People have a right to know when their neighbors or even co-workers are convicted felons. Especially sex offenders. Stats show the recidivist rate at seventy-two percent for serious sex offenders. Damn right people should know who's done what. People have a right to be safe, a right to protect their families, protect themselves.

It's a great system. Strap the guy to a table, apply the proper marking template, and cover the exposed area with the paste. The paste is just an agar medium that carries the retrovirus. It's easy, doesn't even sting. Only takes two hours. You don't see the full effects for about a week, but from there you're marked for life.

The virus seeks out chemical receptors in the pigment cells of the epidermis and inserts a single strand of RNA. Inside the cells, the reverse transcriptase enzyme converts the RNA into DNA, which becomes part of the cell's genome. Each time the cell splits, the new DNA is in both daughter cells. That piece of new DNA codes for – you guessed it – epidermal pigmentation.

Colors tell the public what the convict did, and therefore is likely to do again. Red for sex offender, green for theft or fraud, bright orange for violent crimes. Stripes and patterns within each color show the nature of the crime. The public has a right to know, as they say. Apparently they don't have a right to know I'm innocent.

Once your skin cells pick up the new DNA, you're marked. Works the same on any skin: black, white, yellow or brown. If you try to cut it off you get scar tissue – the

same color as the damaged skin. A well-done skin graft can eliminate the color, but facial skin grafts are very complicated and even the best ones leave horrible patchwork scars. And if your doctor fucks up, even a little, you wind up looking like Frankenstein. The plastic surgeons don't get a lot of practice, either, as it's illegal to alter skin affected by the Marker Virus. Few surgeons are willing to risk their license and probable jail terms – not to mention they'd wind up with green markings of their own – to build up experience.

Duersson used amphibian genes for the coloration. The green comes from the common green tree frog, the orange from the long tailed salamander and the red from the poison arrow frog. Amphibian DNA is easy to work with and very robust as an inserted medium. At least that's what I read. I read a lot about the procedure, everything there is to read, really. If your face screamed *child molester*, I bet you'd be one well-read motherfucker, too.

I've been thinking more and more about a skin graft procedure, but I'd like to wind up with my old face *and* my old skin again, not a set of scars that makes me look like Elvis's superconductor drive conked and I fell two hundred feet to tumble face-first through the windshield. I'm holding out for someone to invent a cure for the altered pigmentation. Things don't look good on that front, either. So far I'm the only one with a legal right to eliminate the markings – one man doesn't exactly make a market worthy of an expensive R&D program.

I've spent a considerable amount of my fortune trying to remove these stripes. You'd think they could just do a similar process, create a virus that would snip out the part coding for red and insert a normal shade. Trouble is, Duersson somehow strengthened the inserted piece of genetic coding – so far no one can dislodge the modified piece of DNA.

I want these things gone, but I'm not willing to experiment with my face. I've seen shows on the rich ex-cons who've tried unproven methods. They wind up looking like leprosy victims from centuries past. I'd rather be a Red Man than have a face full of open, oozing, rotting sores. I guess Duersson didn't want anybody escaping their mark of shame; their ubiquitous warning to the public.

The only one who could probably figure out a cure is the good doctor herself, and she's not talking. She's dead. She killed herself shortly after the Marker Virus became part of the legal system's standard procedures. You should have seen the ACLU go ape-shit when the Supreme Court ruled the process constitutional.

Dr. Duersson, you see, lost her only child, a seven-year-old girl, to a paroled repeat sex offender. Lived right down the street, if you can imagine that. No one knew his record. It only came out after he raped, sodomized and murdered seven-year-old Cassie. Duersson got her revenge in a way, made certain no family would ever have to fall prey to the same stupid mistake. There's no mistaking an ex-con now, that's for Goddamned sure. After Duersson perfected the Marker Virus and saw it implemented, I guess she figured she didn't have much to live for. Sometimes I truly understand the logic that drove her to that final, creative use of her scalpel. Lately I understand that logic more and more.

More and more.

I'm hungry. I really want a nice diner burger, some greasy fries and a cup of coffee. I want to sit and watch the Warriors highlights on the countertop. I want to hear people wonder if it will be another century before the Niners win an NFL Championship. I want to suffuse myself in the muted conversations and rhythmic clinks of cheap silverware on cheaper dishes. I want to be normal. But as much as I want that, I don't think I'm up for another stare-down.

Looks like I'll head home.

Domino's delivers yet again.

## Author's note for "Red Man"

I'd love to tell you that "Red Man" is a sociopolitical commentary on our culture's relative inability to forgive criminals, juxtaposed against the need to protect our children against people who are biologically hard-wired to be pedophiles ... but telling you that would make me sound all pretentious and stuff. Instead, how about I pop a brew and say something like, "Dang, wouldn't it suck *balls* to be convicted of a crime you didn't commit and never be able to escape the stigma?"

Wait, "stigma" is also a fancy word. Well, screw it.

In 1997, I started a campaign to write and finish a short story every week, just to get used to the format and learn how to discipline myself for regular weekly output. I lasted fifteen or sixteen weeks, I don't remember. "Red Man" was the first tale created in this initiative, and remains one of my favorites.

At the time I wrote the story, sex offender registries were a hot topic. Don't we have a right to know if there's a predator in our midst? Living near a school, perhaps? Well, yeah. But at the same time, if someone has been convicted by a jury of their peers and then served the state's assigned sentence, doesn't that someone have the right to go on with his or her life? A chance to once again become a contributing member of society? Well, also ... yeah.

These two concepts don't go together like chocolate and peanut butter. You can't have both. The sex offender registry was an effort to make sure no man (or woman) could put his (or her) past behind them, to assign a permanent brand letting everyone know of their heinous actions. I felt then, and still feel, that this is one of those situations where both sides are in the right. There is no easy answer.

Developing a marking system was a simple extension of the registry, a way to make the complex situation even more visceral. It's also one of the few Sigler Stories where someone doesn't get shot, blown up, turned into something nasty or have their fucking *face* eaten, so it's got that going for it.

Which is nice.

"Red Man" was rejected eight times, by the way. From 1997 to 2002, I submitted it to The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction, Talebones, Tales From the Internet, Aboriginal Science Fiction, Altair Publishing, Terra Incognita, Deep Outside SFFH: Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror and finally MOTA.

I podcast "Red Man" in 2008. It won a Parsec Award for *Best Short Story*.

## Other stories in BLOOD IS RED

### Number One with a Bullet

In the high-stakes world of the National Football League, a wasted draft choice can cost careers and damage a franchise for years to come. The investigators of NFL security dig into the past of potential draft picks. When they investigate sure-fire number-one pick Eugene Patterson, however, they find far more than they want to know.

### Wolf

In the time before man, one social animal ruled the Americas. The wolf. Wolf packs roamed the continent, hunting and killing and breeding. They were the dominant species: a full wolf pack could back down any predator, even the great grizzly bears. But before any wolf ever saw the death that would walk on two legs, there came another danger ...

### The Great Snipe Hunt

Nature abhors a vacuum. One such vacuum exists in the “urban ecologies” of our cities. From bacteria to insects, from rodents to hawks, from feral cats to the mass numbers of pigeons, plants and animals weave together a web of life that goes mostly unnoticed by humans. What is missing from this mosaic? The role of the dominant predator. Four college students set out to find this mythical creature, the “Snipe,” and learn that a vacuum isn’t the only thing nature abhors.

### Iowa Typhoon

Come on, come visit Fender’s Pointe, IA. We’d love to have you stop by, see the trees, smell the flowers, and relax with our Midwestern hospitality. Only, you should try to schedule around the rainy season. If you’re here when the typhoons hit, we’ll be happy to welcome you as a permanent resident.

### Sacred Cow

There is a fine line between absent-minded genius and idiot savant. Gordo Gordon keeps a foot planted firmly on either side. Father Al knows this better than anyone. Like a guardian angel, Father Al watches over Gordo and tolerates the young man’s endless --

and useless -- inventions. When Gordo creates a theory to track “prayer energy,” however, Father Al will find a religious secret that puts his faith to the test.

### **Hunter Hunterson & Sons**

Welcome to the family business. Hunter Hunterson and his kin live in Slayerville, KY, making their living chasing crack-smoking ogres, peeping-tom phantoms, bail-jumping zombie pimps and the occasional rabid unicorn. They are bounty hunters that track down the netherworld’s most wanted. When a methed-out vampire (and family friend) goes on a road-trip rampage, Hunter and his kin pack up the truck and follow the trail of corpses all the way to San Francisco.

This reality-TV style story feels like a combination of “Dog the Bounty Hunter” meets “Ghostbusters” meets “The Beverly Hillbillies.” Hunter’s “war journal” is a mix of tawdry laughs and gut-churning horror.

### **Mt. Fitzroy (first chapter)**

In 2005, Sigler released EARTHCORE as the world’s first podcast-only novel. His fans have been waiting since then for the second book in the planned trilogy. BLOOD IS RED features the first chapter of this oft-promised and long-delayed sequel. Join Patrick O’Doyle and Bertha Lybrand as they head back down below to deliver a heapin’ helpin’ of revenge.

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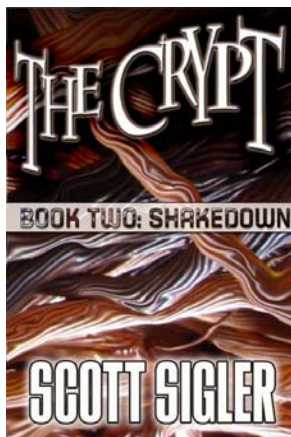
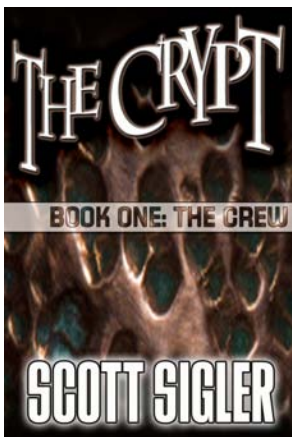
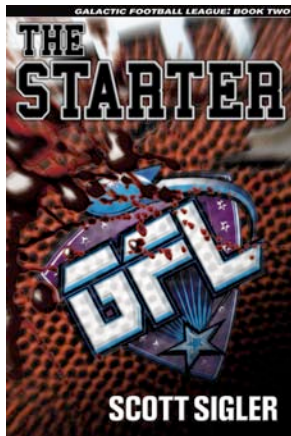
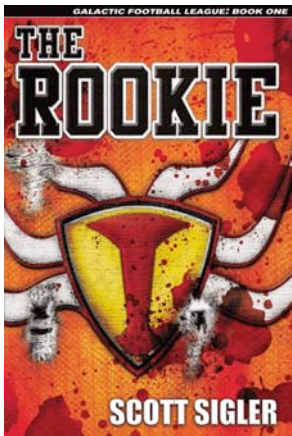
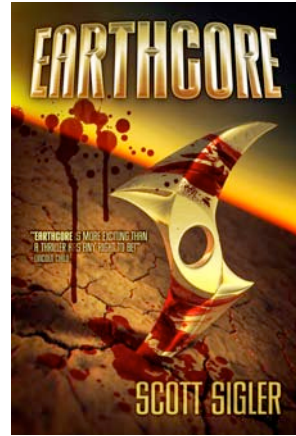
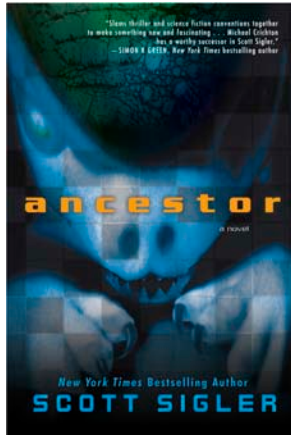
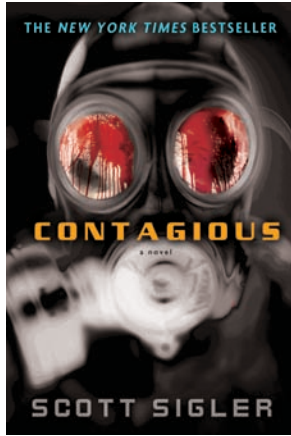
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