



I Am Legend and Other Stories

Richard Matheson

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Robert Neville is the last living man on Earth...but he is not alone. Every other man, woman, and child on Earth has become a vampire, and they are all hungry for Neville's blood.

By day, he is the hunter, stalking the sleeping undead through the abandoned ruins of civilization. By night, he barricades himself in his home and prays for dawn.

How long can one man survive in a world of vampires?

I am legend --
Buried talents --
The near departed --
Prey --
Witch war --
Dance of the dead --
Dress of white silk --
Mad house --
The funeral --
From shadowed places --
Person to person.

I Am Legend and Other Stories Details

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Author : Richard Matheson

Format : Paperback 317 pages

Genre : Horror, Fiction, Science Fiction, Paranormal, Vampires, Fantasy, Short Stories

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From Reader Review I Am Legend and Other Stories for online ebook

Nichole (DirrtyH) says

There's not much to say about this story that hasn't been said about other reviews.

The premise of this story was great. It was well executed, stayed interesting, and I really liked the ending. I have only two criticisms; the first being about the story, and the second being about the edition that I read.

1. It was too short. This book would have been much better if he had taken the time to flesh out some of the ideas, stretch out the mystery (his search for the cause of vampirism), more character development (the flashbacks about his wife and daughter, and more info about Ben), etc. This could have been so much more than it was.

2. *Nowhere* on or in this edition did it say that after I Am Legend was a collection of Matheson's other short stories. The inclusion of short stories with this edition is fine; that didn't bother me. It was that I didn't *know* that half the book was short stories that irked me. I was halfway through the book when all of a sudden the story ended and I was really caught off guard. I kind of flipped through the rest of the book a couple times going, "huh?" before I realized the story was really over. Granted, there is a table of contents, but I assumed they were chapter titles. I didn't take the time to analyze the page numbers and figure out that they were short stories ahead of time. Maybe that's my fault, but it would have been nice if *somewhere* on the cover it had said "I Am Legend... and other short stories by Richard Matheson." Or something like that. Grr. I did read a couple of the stories and they're fairly entertaining but predictable horror stories. Maybe they were more cutting edge when they were written; they probably inspired a lot of the things I've seen that now make them seem less original.

In short: Great story, but be aware beforehand that it's very short (about 160 pages) and the rest of this edition is other stories!

Lou says

When i read this i was not on goodreads so a review now would not do justice, so this is up for a re-read.

Matheson is such a good writer and this tale of one man's struggle to preserve the human race and find a way to stop the spread of the hungry beings is short but legendary. There has been quite a few adaptations but most have played with the story and changed some important parts the book is much better.

I Am Legend has been adapted to a feature-length film three times (or four, if one includes the Direct to Video film I Am Omega, which does not credit Matheson as the source).

There is a 7 part in depth video interview of Matheson he talks about writing and the movies. [HERE>>](http://more2read.com/?p=2026)
<http://more2read.com/?p=2026>

BAM The Bibliomaniac says

I'm prepared to be burned in effigy for my rating. I just was not a fan of any of these stories. My only reason for faltering is the inspiration that so many modern horror masters have obviously taken from these tales. That's quite apparent. But I just wasn't entertained. Sorry guys!

Miss Kim says

Ok, So Kim didn't realize this is book of short stories. *I am Legend* was excellent. Imagine my surprise when I got to page 157, and turned the page and though 'What?! Really? It can't be over.' But it was. I felt for Robert Neville, and I didn't want it to be over so quickly.

Written in the 50's, this takes place in the future of the late 70's. Neville is the last human on earth. A plague has wiped out everyone, and those that did not die have become horrible monsters. They are vampires. Not your daughter's vampires—those with brooding eyes, and perfect hair. No. These are disgusting, zombie-like fiends. They hunt Neville nightly. He's barricaded himself in his home for three years, and in this time has been trying to find the answers to 'why', 'how', and 'what' about these creatures, and also if he could find a cure, in the hopes that he may find another human companion some day. His only sort of recreation is hunting Cortman. Cortman was his friend prior to being monster, and he seems to be on of the 'smarter' ones. Neville doesn't want to really 'kill' him, since he enjoys the game. Maybe I am sick, but I found humor in some of the scenes with Cortman. ("*Come out Neville!*" - Cortman's nightly shriek outside the house.)

This story scared me. I was anxious, nervous, hopeful, sad. I rooted for Neville. I felt his loneliness, his fear, his determination. I praise the author for making me feel these things. I am now a fan of Mr. Matheson, and look forward to gathering all of his works. Being a huge Stephen King fan, I could clearly see how he was influenced by this wonderful author.

I only read a few of the other stories, however, I lost interest at this time because I was still thinking about Neville, and I couldn't concentrate on them. I do plan to go back and finish them all. I recommend this for all fans of horror. Pick up *I Am Legend* today!

Lyn says

This is technically a collection of short stories, but *I am Legend* is the centerpiece, masterpiece, main event, etc. *I am Legend* truly is a great story, deserving of all the accolades and an inspired source of all the horror genre influence over the past 60 years, including Stephen King. It's about vampires the same way *Castaway*, the Tom Hanks film, is about the South Pacific. It's about a man dealing with stress, nightmarish circumstances and his will to not just live, but to survive. Matheson tells a tale of isolation, desperation, perseverance and ultimately, absolution.

The other stories are not even close, many just sketches, some are comical. By far the best is "Prey" and I remember watching the short film in the early 70s and being scared as a child. "Mad House" comes closest to evoking the same degree of anger and isolation as I am Legend, very dark and with an almost Kafka-esque absurdist twist at the end.

Most notable about my reading the title story, though, was a growing understanding about the vampire / zombie fascination over the past few years. Matheson summed up that whole sub-genre here: it's all about de-humanization and isolation, a literary Edvard Munch screaming about who we are amidst an outside that we cannot understand nor be a part.

Michael says

Before vampires were brooding, sparkly and sexy, Bram Stoker and Richard Matheson made them scary. They were creatures of the night, meant to be feared and avoided at all costs.

If it was Stoker that introduced us to the world of the undead blood suckers, it was Matheson who took the genre the next step forward, exploring how the tropes of vampire mythology could be true based on scientific principles of the time.

But to categorize "I Am Legend" as just as vampire story is a huge mistake. As with all of the best Matheson stories, the supernatural element is the gateway to exploring something deeper about human beings. In this case, it's an exploration of loneliness and the depths it can drive a person to.

Robert Neville is the last survivor of the vampire apocalypse, started when China and Russia unleashed germ warfare as part of a border war. The germ proved too effective, quickly spreading across the globe and wiping out large chunks of humanity. Neville is immune to the disease thanks to a vampire bat bite he got while serving in Central America years before. Neville faces not only the horror of being tormented each night by a hoard of vampires led by his old friend, Ben Cortman, but he also has to live with the guilt that he had to kill his wife and daughter when they were resurrected as vampires by the virus.

As the story begins, Neville is eking out a day to day existence in which his only concerns are ensuring his house is safe from the vampire hoards each night and trying to deal with the oppressive loneliness he feels every waking minute of the day. It's been a long time since Neville had any company of any kind and the hope of female companionship is just one of the lures the vampires try to use each evening to draw Neville out in a moment of weakness.

Neville's essential isolation is underlined by his attempts to connect to anything that could possibly be a link to a normal life. Neville feels hopes when he sees an uninfected dog roaming the neighborhood and spends weeks trying to get the animal to trust him. Later he sees what appears to be an unaffected woman and he chases her down like a madman, trying to keep her from fleeing. Of course, what Neville doesn't realize is that the vampires are evolving and creating their own society. And that to them, he's become the monster and stuff of nightmares--an unchanged human with no regard to the fact that there are two different types of vampires now--some who are mindless killing machines and others who are evolving into something more.

Neville is typical Matheson hero--the everyman facing extraordinary circumstances and trying not only to

come to grips with them but to survive. Unlike many of the movie adaptations (when will Hollywood get this story right?!?), Neville doesn't start out as scientist but becomes one over the course of the story. Circumstances force him to begin a process of learning and studying to see if a cure is possible and why certain elements of the vampire lore might be true. Matheson's idea may or may not be scientifically credible in the real world, but they work within the confines of the story and make the entire novella that much richer for it.

One of the good things about "I Am Legend" is that the vampires in it are scary monsters, something to be feared and protected against. But Matheson also shows not only the evolution of Neville, but the evolution of the vampires as well. Early on, the vampires try to tempt Neville with the women pulling up their dresses and Cortland telling him to surrender and leave his safehouse. But as the novel goes along, the vampires become less aggressive in their attack, setting up a devious trap that eventually leads to Neville's downfall. It's a fascinating arc to consider and one has to wonder what the vampire society being created might be like once the final page of the story is turned.

"I Am Legend" is a great portal to exploring the literary world of Matheson. Most editions of "Legend" will include a few short stories to give you a bit more of a taste of how good Matheson can be. In many ways, he's one of the most prolific and influential writers that most people haven't heard of. Stephen King often cites him as one of his biggest influences and the more you read of both, the more you'll see the connection.

"I Am Legend" is a classic of multiple genres and worthy of a read or even a re-read. I've read it several times now and enjoyed it each time. If you've not read it, put it on the to be read list. If you have read it, maybe it's time to visit it again and sit back in wonder of how good Matheson can be.

And Hollywood--it's about damn time you got the movie version of this book right.

Stephen says

Like **Lucy**, this rating is gonna take some **splainin**. Unfortunately, I don't have a slide show or any multi-colored pie charts to provide visual assistance on this one, so I will try to **splain** it as clearly as I can, but I will be using quite a few "i.e." and "e.g." to provide supporting clarification for my commentary given I am performing this review without the **safety net** of visual aids. Please, do not try this at home.

Oh, I've also decided to throw in the occasional word in Spanish...why you ask?....because I just watched some old *I Love Lucy* re-runs and am getting in touch with my inner Ricky Ricardo.

Okay, from the standpoint of pure **smile-spreading** enjoyment (e.g., while reading, I look down and notice my toes tapping involuntarily to the smooth, jazzy, melodic flow of the narrative), I would probably rate this 3 to 3.5 stars (i.e., there was no visible toe tapping, but I did have the occasional feeling of warmth move through my tummy....*though that could've just been the tacos*). Richard Matheson is a terrific writer and this story, like his others, is a quality product and I have zero complaints about the prose or the technical choices he made took in constructing the narrative.

My issue was really with the main character, Robert Neville. He just wasn't very compelling or interesting. He certainly wasn't the most engaging character I have ever come across. This is a bit of a problem since the entire book is spent **lollygagging** around with Robby as he provides ~~running~~ ~~jogging~~ sauntering commentary about the world around him. This was a negative for me and detracted from the number of **happy units** I was able to mine from the reading experience.

So why the 4.0 to 4.5 stars?

I shall **splain** as there are several reasons that are **mucho importante** (Oh, yeah...that's right, I just turned this into my first bilingual review). How cosmopolitan.

First (Primero) is the plot. This book, written in 1954, was the genesis for EVERY **zombie** book that follows and provides the basic framework for most of the post-apocalyptic undead fiction being produced today. Amazingly, it is also one of the best of these stories despite being the first.

Here is the basic plot or **argumento**: Robert Neville is the sole survivor of a pandemic that struck the world and caused the infected to exhibit all the outward signs of vampirism (vampirismo). He spends his days gathering supplies, fortifying his house and killing the sleeping “vampires” and spends his nights barricaded in his house and fending off attacks from the walking dead. Sound familiar? Well this is the book that started it all and I felt that deserved some serious recognition for both its originality and Matheson's being a trailblazer (**pionero**) of the zombie sub-genre.

Second (Segundo), is the world-building/back-story and Matheson's explanation of both the plague and the “vampires” which I thought was nothing short of EXCELENTE (i.e., magnifico). While certainly not good science in the sense that it can be analyzed objectively, the explanations given are compelling and superb theater. I actually wish more time had been spent on this aspect of the book because I thought it was just fantástico (i.e....if you need a translation of this, please stop reading and go put the crash helmet back on).

Third (Tercero), is the end of the book which, in my opinion, is worthy of 5 HUGE stars all by itself. I would say that goes double for the very last line of the book (*which I think makes it a 10 MEGANORMOUS star ending if my math is correct*). Thus, Matheson being the superb writer that he is, not only invents a sub-genre but then, over 50 years after the fact, can still claim to have written one of the best, most original examples of it. That is pretty especial, no?

Thus for all of the above reasons (motivos), I am giving the book a rating of 4.0 to 4.5 stars despite not always “enjoying” the book as much as I would have liked. However, if you haven't read this, I would highly recommend it as I think it has a lot going for it.

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED!!

Danielle The Book Huntress (Back to the Books) says

It was really good. Neville is a very interesting protagonist. You really want to root for him that he will survive. I don't want to spoil you, but the ending will definitely hit you like a one-two punch. I definitely wanted a different one. Nevertheless it was one of the best short stories I have ever read. I finished I am Legend more than a year ago. It had such an effect on my psyche that I had to put the book down. Let me tell

you a secret. I am a bit of a whimp when it comes to horror. Yet like the worst masochist, I adore horror. I love being scared and that feeling of unsettledness that settles in your stomach like a heavy meal. Anyway, I felt like I wanted to finish it, because I really liked Matheson's writing. And I paid a lot of money for the book ;)

I pulled it out the summer I moved back to TX and read some more. There were some excellently written stories, all deeply disturbing. One of the most effecting is one where a henpecked young woman under her mother's thumb buys a Zuni doll for her boyfriend that her mother has forced her to break up with. The Zuni warrior comes to life and tries to kill her. She manages to survive but her mind is possessed by the Zuni doll and she calls her mother over to visit. The story ends with her jabbing a knife into the floor in the same motion the Zuni doll uses. The end is particularly disconcerting because you know that a horrendous fate awaits her mother.

Another story was a little too unsettling. It's set in the future after wars and people have barely managed to keep a semblance of normal life. A sheltered suburban girl meets a dangerous crowd in college. They go to the city to a club where there is a unique show. A woman who has become effectively a zombie from a drug that she overdosed on. That scene was really hard to read because the horror is knowing that this was a normal girl who was changed by this drug she abused. And the other element of horror rests in the fact that the young, sheltered woman is about to walk down the same path. That was not my favorite story.

Another story features a man who goes to the funeral parlor to plan his wife's service and arrangement. It ends with him going home to kill his wife. Very unsettling. As I have described, some of the stories are quite disturbing, some horrific, and some humorous.

I loved the story in the funeral parlor where a vampire wants a funeral and he invites a host of ghoulish creatures. And the witch and this other character has a fight. Of course the werewolf has to go because he is called by the moon to hunt. It was really funny.

I also loved the one where the guy has been hexed by a witch doctor in Africa and his fiance calls her anthropologist friend who studied witch doctors to save him. It was really really good-my second favorite after I am Legend. I think it be great as a movie short.

Probably the most disturbing story was the one with a man who has anger issues. His anger has possessed his house, for lack of a better description. He is a frustrated writer who cannot write and has allowed bitterness to kill him slowly. Strange things happen to him at home, rungs slip, pencils jab him, he bangs his knee everytime he sits down at the table. His wife has decided to leave him and he cannot ask her to stay, although he loves her. His friend at the university where he works who is a scientist warns him about the house but he doesn't listen. He manages to get fired by yelling at a student and goes home. His wife is there and asks him to tell her to stay, he runs her off, and the house takes his revenge. This story comes across like a Greek tragedy. You can see the path that the character is taking but you are helpless to stop it. This is the side aspect of horror. The horror lies not necessarily in the supernatural elements but the poor choices the characters make.

I can see why Matheson is cited as an influence by Stephen King. He definitely has a feel for the horrific in various forms.

Stephen says

4.0 to 4.5 stars. Okay, this rating is going to take a little explaining. Unfortunately, I don't have a slide show or any multi-colored pie charts to assist me as a visual aid on this one so I will try to be as clear as I can. **Warning:** I will probably be required to use quite a few *i.e.* and *e.g.* to provide clarification to my statements as well as some targeted use of **bold** and *italics* given that I am reviewing here without the safety net of my usual visual aids. I have also decided to throw in the occasional word in Spanish...why you ask?...why not I answer?

Okay, from a pure “enjoyment” standpoint (*e.g., Steve, while reading, looks down and notices his toes tapping involuntarily to the smooth, jazzy flow of the narrative*), I would probably go 3 to 3.5 stars (*i.e., no toe tapping, but I did have the occasional feeling of warmth in my tummy....though that could have just been the tacos*). Richard Matheson is a terrific writer and, as with most of his work, this story is very well written (*i.e., I have zero complaints about the prose or the technical choices Matheson took in constructing the narrative*).

My issue was really with the main character, Robert Neville who was not the most compelling or interesting character that I have ever come across. Since the entire book is spent lollygagging around with Robby as he provides ~~running-jogging~~ walking commentary, it subtracted a bit (for me at least) from the enjoyment of the reading experience.

So why the 4.0 to 4.5 stars? Several reasons that are mucho importante (Oh, yeah...that's right, I just turned this into my first bilingual review).

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Thus for all of the reasons (*motivos*)above, I am giving the book a rating of 4.0 to 4.5 stars despite not

always “enjoying” the book as much as I would have liked. However, if you haven’t read this, I would highly recommend it as I think it has a lot going for it.

Faisal says

I Am Legend and Other Stories

image:

I have waited for a long time to read this novel and when I finally finished reading it...I would rather watch powdery looking vampires of Omega Man (1971) to light up my horror fuse. But because of the originality of the narratives, I am rating it a five as it was first published in 1954; and it most likely gave birth to futuristic masters' of horrors.

The novel is not as horrific as I thought but more of a personal survival journey of the only man left on earth supposedly. The rest of the world has been doomed from the unknown apocalypse that had turned the rest of the public into blood sucking leeches. If I have read this book 63 years ago, I would say that I would have been hunkered down somewhere. Nine years earlier, the U.S. had just dropped atomic bombs over Japan but the exposure of the reality of Hiroshima and Nagasaki took place in the 1950s. The author Richard Matheson probably got the idea of the apocalypse from that era of atomic race with a twist of leeches. I mean, who hasn't thought about being the only person alive on earth, I have and I am curious to what it would be like.

The protagonist Robert Neville is a vampire hunter in the daytime while barricading himself up at night. The usual vampire stuff like burning up in the daylight, refusal of garlic and onions, stake to the heart and scared of crosses. Neville is also an alcoholic and he is depressed most of the time because there are no women around, only slutty vampires that he must learn to hate or kill. Thus this gave him the purpose of doing scientific research about vamps. I was surprised, Matheson put that much knowledge of real scientific and theoretical process in his novel.

I believe the most disturbing moments is the story is of a stray dog that Neville encounters. The emotional attachment and friendly companion perhaps was too much. Not mentioning as what happened to his wife that is another story...yet I can see governments imposing laws and quarantine people during chaotic times. I see Mr. Neville is a drunken comedian as well. While during research on vamps, he knew vamps would be scared of crosses; but what would happen if the vampire was a Muslim or Jew and how would they react when faced with the cross, perhaps he/she would still come after you.

This novel also has some short stories as well by Matheson. Dress of White Silk and Mad House, I considered to be superb. Others are okay to just bizarre. I recommend to read the book at least once.

image:

Amanda says

Two points I want to make: A) the movie was crap, especially when compared to the book, and B) this is so

much more than just a vampire novel.

First, the whole movie thing. In both, Robert Neville is the last human on Earth--and that is where all similarities end. If you've seen the movie, it won't ruin the book for you as the two are nothing alike. The setting is different, the protagonist is different (except for a shared name), the creatures are different (vampires in the book and nocturnal zombie-like creatures in the movie), and the plot points--don't even get me started on the plot points. I can understand why diehard fans of the novel were upset by the movie. This is a case of film ruining a superior narrative. Robert Neville's pain, perfectly captured by Matheson, just doesn't translate to the screen.

Second, sure it can be classified as a vampire book, but the vampires are somewhat in the background. What takes center stage in the book is Robert Neville's aching loneliness as he confronts the reality that he is destined to live the rest of his life without the hope of human contact or companionship--what's outside his door at night isn't nearly as terrifying as that prospect. The portrayal of his progression through the stages of acceptance is heartbreaking (the dog chapter was almost more than I could bear). Moral issues abound: what's the point in trying to survive if you know you're the last of your kind? Does it matter if you live to see another day? There are no easy answers, especially as his situation is given complexity by human nature's innate tenacity and stubbornness. There's a lot to think about here, which makes it more satisfying than your run of the mill horror novel.

Cross posted at [This Insignificant Cinder](#)

***TANYA* says**

Great book.

Petertpc says

Questions arising out of my reading of this book:

1. Why have I never read Richard Matheson before?
2. Why did no one ever tell me what an amazing storyteller Matheson is?
3. How does someone channel such elegant prose, and such profound imagination, into a story with so much humanity?
4. Why was I unaware of how incredibly influential Matheson's story has been on multiple genres, from post apocalypse tales, to zombie plagues and vampire fiction?
5. Why did Will Smith and the Hollywood "brain trust" so completely alter the plot and ruin the spirit of the original?
6. Why did no one get punched for the travesty mentioned in 5 above?

7. Will I ever forget the haunting final words of this incredible story? (I think I know the answer to this one.)

Paul Bryant says

Richard Matheson (1926-2013) In Memoriam.

Such is the low profile of some great writers that it's only now I discovered that this early sf favourite of mine died five months ago. I discovered sf in my teens (as you know, the answer to the question "when was the golden age of science fiction?" is "14") and *I Am Legend* was the first novel I read all in one without a break because I couldn't do anything except read it, I was as hypnotised as a rabbit in the headlights of a big van being driven straight at my head. Man, what a trip. Those were the great days of reading when every page was like an explosion. This short novel, if I remember right, is frighteningly bleak, there's not the slightest chance of any kind of happy ending. It was the first apocalypse story I read. Now they're as common as traffic cones. How many times have you seen the Statue of Liberty's arm poking up out of a heap of rubble/the engulfing waters/a pile of corpses. Very surprisingly, the latest movie version of *I am Legend* was pretty good, I thought, except for the usual audience-tested fake ending. I usually mentally discount the last scene of every big budget movie these days, it's the next-to-last scene which is the real ending. It's a convention, they have to do it. I did enjoy the head of the Statue being hurled into the street in *Cloverfield* which was a great little apocalypse movie, and one I could imagine Richard Matheson writing. I gave that scene my "Best use of the Statue of Liberty in an SF Movie" award for that year. The wonderful tv series *The Walking Dead* is son-of-I Am Legend and I hope RM enjoyed the first couple of series before he died and didn't come back again.

David says

A landmark book which has influenced countless writers and directors.

Click here for the first part of my look at the novel and its various film adaptations: <http://bit.ly/2bf7n1q>

And here's my look at Last Man on Earth starring Vincent Price: <http://bit.ly/2cxJg3b>

Here's my look at The Omega Man starring Charlton Heston: <http://bit.ly/2dE9m00>

And, finally, here's my take on I Am Legend starring William Smith: <http://bit.ly/2gzlmSU>

Apatt says

"As he entered the silent store, the smell of rotted food filled his nostrils. Quickly he pushed a metal wagon up and down the silent, dust-thick aisles, the heavy smell of decay setting his teeth on edge, making him breathe through his mouth."

This book was adapted into a 1964 film called "The Last Man on Earth" (the first of several adaptations). I have not seen the film yet but the title is very apt, if a little on the nose, perhaps. The above quote is an

example of the feeling of loneliness that pervades throughout the narrative. Robert Neville, the protagonist, is indeed “The Last Man on Earth” (as far as he knows), the rest of the planet having turned into vampires. Halt! *I Am Legend* is not a “supernatural romance”, yet it is not a gore-fest vampire carnage novel either. I would describe it as a “sci-fi vampire novel”. The vampires are created by (view spoiler). All the classic vampire lores are either rationalized or debunked by Neville’s research.

This rather short novel (about 175 pages) basically depicts Neville’s solitary day-to-day life, from five months after the vampire apocalypse, to three years (skipping a year or two in the timeline). For most of the book, there is no dialogue to speak of, we just follow Neville around, dispatching vampires in the daytime, doing research, locking himself in and getting blotto after sundown, feeling miserable all the time. Is there a point to such an existence? Neville asks himself that from time to time and there is no obvious answer, he is simply not to suicidal type.

I Am Legend is a classic of several genres, sci-fi, horror, vampires, and post-apocalypse. I love the scientific rationalization of the classic vampire lore, the need for blood, the aversion to garlic and the cross, the stake through the heart etc. The overtly supernatural lore like transformation into bats and the lack of reflection are dismissed as superstition. Equally interesting is the contemplation of Neville’s existence and the moral issue. In a world full of vampires with only one human being who is the monster really? The narrative is well paced, without a dull moment, but it is by no means an action-packed thriller. Neville is something of an antihero, some of his actions and behavior are quite questionable and even downright reprehensible but the circumstances do make him quite a tragic and sympathetic figure. There are some dramatic plot developments which I certainly will not elaborate on, and an ending which leaves you thinking about the morality of the tale. *I Am Legend* is, of course, highly recommended.

Notes:

Talking about the various film adaptations:

Four are listed at Wikipedia:

- The Last Man on Earth (1964)
- The Omega Man (1971)
- I Am Legend (2007)
- I Am Omega (2007)

I have not seen the 1964 adaptation, I have found a copy now so I will get back to you on that. It does star Vincent Price, and the Price is always right! I have seen the Omega Man decades ago, it stars Charlton Heston, pretty entertaining as I recall. The 2007 Will Smith vehicle which actually uses the novel’s title is a total disappointment. In both the Omega Man and the Will Smith movies the vampires are replaced entirely. The 1971 movie replaced them with light-sensitive goth weirdo hipsters, while the 2007 movie replaced them with big-eared monsters. The Will Smith is particularly disappointing because it uses the novel’s title then goes off in a predictable, cliché direction. Richard Matheson’s nuanced, thought provoking ending is entirely jettisoned. At least the Heston movie is a hoot. I have never heard of “I Am Omega” (2007), probably a lot of product placements for a certain brand of Swiss luxury watches...

- I have not read the “Other Stories” mentioned in the book’s title. Don’t have this edition, sorry.

Quotes

“ There were five of them in the basement, hiding in various shadowed places. One of them Neville found inside a display freezer. When he saw the man lying there in this enamel coffin, he had to laugh; it seemed such a funny place to hide. Later, he thought of what a humorless world it was when he could find

amusement in such a thing."

"After lunch, he went from house to house and used up all his stakes. He had forty-seven stakes."

"Morality, after all, had fallen with society. He was his own ethic."

J.G. Keely says

I know there is a lot going for this book, in terms of popular opinion, influence, and originality, so you'll have to forgive me for interposing my body with the flywheel; we'll see what's left at the end.

In a discussion between Douglas Adams and Lewis Wolpert, the argument was made that the individual is unimportant in science, but is paramount in art. Walpert proposed that scientific discovery is inevitable, as the confluence of ideas will tend to produce parallel developments, such as with Newton and Leibniz, or Darwin and Wallace.

However, I would venture that this is equally applicable to the arts, which respond just as readily to shared influences and social pressures. The process of an artistic movement developing is often geographically precise, and more an indication of similar origins than of proselytism.

The vast cited influence of this book, then, is less remarkable when looking at the movements and ideas surrounding it. The themes of horror always follow scientific discovery, as the Industrial Revolution brought forth Frankenstein, or the Communist scare 'alien threats'. This book draws upon the same sources and brings in the idea of apocalypse--newly popularized by the nuclear age--to create something which is not altogether as insightful as it is inevitable.

Apocalyptic literature was hardly new, whether in a modern vision like Shelley's 'Last Man' or ancient religious eschatology. The nuclear age personalized the apocalypse, so that it was no longer the result of chance or divinity, bringing it to the forefront in a way more pervasive than the religious warnings of a 'nigh end' which go unfulfilled every other year.

Yet Matheson's vision is not this new, personalized apocalypse, but a continuation of plage fiction.

For his proto-zombies, Matheson took influence from the 'Communist scare aliens' and bodysnatchers of the pulps to create a force which is mindless, anti-individualistic, and inhuman, combining it with the vampires of film. One can look at this as an early recognition of the danger (and power) of viral memetics.

These same ideas will continue to be carried on after this work, not only through the oft-mentioned zombie stories, but also through speculative fiction as represented by the Twilight Zone and Outer Limits (which Matheson wrote for). Beyond this, you may see 'I Am Legend' as prototypical of the standard 'gotcha' ending on which these series came to rely more and more heavily.

All these movements and ideas are rife with opportunity for writers looking for a paradigm shift, but I would argue that 'I Am Legend' fails to take advantage of these plentiful ideas. One might point out that it is an early example, but this alone does not save it, as we may point out earlier writings which tackle similar issues with a greater depth and sense of conceptual exploration.

There is Shelley's 'The Last Man', Bierce's 'Can Such Things Be', or the works of Mann, Hesse, and Conrad, who explored similar themes of inhumanity, hopelessness, sex, death, loneliness, and plague; and who did so much more fully and with a sense of joy and artistry.

There are many cases where pulp authors are later found to have overcome the simplicity of their genre, whether by sense of psychology, or character, or vibrancy, or theme. Shakespeare was considered a populist, and in all his fart-jokes, cliches, and story borrowing, we might compare him to 'Family Guy' or 'The Simpsons'; the latter drawing allusions from 1980's culture as he drew his from Greek Myth.

But I digress; Matheson as an author does not bear these strengths, and misses many opportunities to take advantage of the themes he explores, which may be new in their particular combination, but not without literary precedent.

Matheson often lays open his characters' psychological motivations. His every statement of action (or interaction) is followed by an explanation of the thoughts and events which have just occurred. However, his explanations do not expand our understanding of the characters. Instead, the accompanying narration is so simple that one begins to feel that Matheson is simply telling you the same thing twice; or even three times.

If our protagonist asks a question, Matheson inevitably follows with 'he asked, incredulously'. It seems the fact that the character was both clearly incredulous and asking a question did not seem self-evident enough. Then again, nothing in the book is too self-evident to prevent Matheson from painstakingly explaining it several times.

He tells us what his characters are thinking almost constantly, despite the fact that it rarely offers any further insight. One might achieve a similar effect by taking a Hemmingway story and having a high-schooler add in how the character would be expected to feel after every piece of dialogue.

Matheson doesn't have a flair for psychology, and so his characters' reactions are often either unjustified or oversimplified. Instead of writing characters who fit the story, Matheson seems to constantly change the characters or the story to try to achieve his authorial goals. But then, how would one build an entertaining story around such shallow characters?

The protagonist is fond of lecturing the reader on behalf of the author, at which point Matheson seems to recognize his own transparency, deflecting by providing the character with sudden mood shifts before slowly creeping back. Comparisons to Stephen King are apt: another author whose storytelling is jumbled and rough despite the potential of the concepts driving it.

It is not difficult to understand why this book was so influential: in the process of reading it, I was constantly thinking of things I wished the author would do with the story. Every time he overstated a point or underexplored a theme, I began to imagine how I might do it differently. I pictured Romero closing the book having already built an entire movie in his head by simply extending where Matheson faltered.

Indeed, the book often reads like a screenplay, complete with plodding character descriptions to keep the actors from getting lost. At every turn, it breaks the rule of authorship that it is better to show the reader what is happening than to tell him. Matheson's combination of ideas and influences should have been interesting, but his repetitive overexplaining mars the form of the story while his borrowed themes go unexplored for the sake of a gimmick ending.

I will not deny that this work exists in a certain nexus along the development of some very important and

interesting genres and works, but it is more rough draft than groundbreaking original.

It is less an inspiring work than the one which revealed that there was a lot of space for other authors to re-introduce old ideas by new means and methods. If only Matheson had been able to take up this challenge himself, instead of making the void conspicuous by inhabiting it, we might remember this book not from where it happened to be, but from what it managed to do there.

Jeff says

*Straight outta Compton, another crazy ass vampire
More punks I smoke, yo, my rep gets bigger
I'm a bad vampire killa and you know this
But the pussy ass ghouls don't show this
But I don't give a damn, I'ma make my snaps
If not from the garlic, from jackin the crops
Just like burglary, the definition is 'jackin'
And when illegally armed it's called 'packin'
Put a stake through a motherf...*

Chorus:

[City of Compton, City of Compton]

[Damn that book was dope!]

I know I've used the whole edited-lyrics-as-review before but I couldn't resist. The story takes place in Compton and I need to build my street cred so – Viola! I'm making secret gang signs at the monitor as I type this so – yo! On with the review.

There are advantages and disadvantage to being the “last man on Earth”:

Advantages

You are your own moral compass.
You can smoke in the house (or anywhere else for that matter)
You can drink yourself into a stupor anytime you want
You have plenty of time to try and work out a cure
You can park in front of fire hydrants

Disadvantages

Lonely and isolated (this book does an excellent job of depicting this)
Horny (shameless hussy vampires play on this by being provocative)
Nightly attacks by vampires some are feral, some are lucid, none sparkly.
You suddenly have to become Mr. Science Guy and MacGyver all rolled into one
All you have to listen to is classical music

There have been three films made from this story, all with similar scenarios: After apocalyptic nightmare that alters or kills the rest of humanity, hero is lone human survivor.

The Last Man on Earth – This one has Vincent Price giving his typical overwrought, fey performance. It also has the undead moving about as fast as your Grandma using her walker. It adheres to the plotline of the book more closely than the other two.

The Omega Man – Charleton Heston, during his SciFi period. Here instead of vampires, you have evil, albino mutants. Their mutant ability: being annoying.

I Am Legend – Will Smith, big budget, CGI zombies that move faster than Granma. Watching the movie will not spoil the book.

This book also contains some of Matheson's short stories. Matheson also wrote teleplays, some for The Twilight Zone, so a few of these stories do have that kind of vibe. Most notably: Buried Talents, The Near Departed, Person to Person, The Funeral.

Dance of the Dead and Witch War both take place in the distant future.

Mad House, a standout, and Dress of White Silk would be classified as horror. Mad House is set in the fifties, before the whole concept of anger management took hold.

Prey has an odd familiarity to it. It reads like something you would have seen on Rod Serling's Night Gallery ... or a very special episode of Mr. Belvedere.

From Shadowed Places is smexy*.

George Romero, Stephen King and Anne Rice have all cited Matheson as an influence. He wrote a Star Trek episode and his short stories and books have been made into a number of films including Duel, Hell House, The Incredible Shrinking Man, Stir of Echoes and Somewhere in Time. If you have an interest in horror, fantasy or scifi, you should give this a read.

*Yeah, that word again. Using Anne's made up words will hopefully give me even more street cred.

Riku Sayuj says

Bram Stoker's Dracula first popularized the word 'nosferatu' as a synonym for "vampire," supposedly gleaning it from Romanian folklore. Popular etymology has ascribed the word to the Greek nosophorus, or "plague carrier." The association of vampires to various diseases is an integral part of the vampire legend.

Matheson's was the first (?) fictional depiction of vampirism as the result of physiological disease, not supernatural forces. It thus gave an ironic twist to an old pattern: Where vampires once were believed to cause epidemics, here epidemics spawn vampires.

Andy says

Ho-hum.

That's about all I can say about this book. I was really excited to read I Am Legend and the first 70 pages were astounding, but then it just slowly got less and less enjoyable.

You can't blame Matheson, though. When this book was first published in the mid-50s it was the first of its kind. A novella that took a scientific approach to explaining a virus that turned all but Robert Neville into a vampire.

Reading the novel I kept thinking "I've heard this before" but, I realize now that Matheson was probably the first to do it, but now 50 years later others have done it...and better.

If you are interested in this genre I would definitely read the book. Maybe two stars is a little too rough, but I'm not going to mask my disappoint in how a story can start so promisingly and just taper off so terribly. The ending was totally anti-climatic and I could see it coming from a mile away.

This collection also had several short stories by Matheson and I read a few before giving up. They suffer from the same fate as I Am Legend. Matheson was the first, but over the years other people have taken his ideas and improved on them.
