



I Am Legend

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 the planet has succumbed to the vampire plague, and they are hungry for Neville's blood.

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

How long can one man survive like this?

I Am Legend Details

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Author : Richard Matheson

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From Reader Review I Am Legend for online ebook

Mary ~Ravager of Tomes~ says

Hm.

Honestly, this is a tough book to review.

I did like the story, but one of the **biggest bothers** for me here was not fully understanding *why* the world has gone to shit & *why* everyone is now a vampire.

The book just drops you right in the middle of Robert Neville's situation, which is a day to day existence of killing vampires during the day & hiding in his house during the night.

I'm the kind of SF reader who likes a bit of depth to be given to the cause of disaster, and this story largely glosses over the "*Why?*"

But I'm coming at it from the angle of a reader who has **exhausted** the zombie/vampire/virus genre. For the time it was written, this probably struck readers in a much different way.

If you're basing your opinion of this book solely off your knowledge of the movie, I'd ahead and throw that idea out the window because this book is nothing like the Will Smith, good-guy-out-to-save-humanity, crying-over-his-dog, self-sacrificing version Hollywood has created.

This is much darker.

In fact, I imagine a group of important movie folks came to the conclusion that Matheson's story is "*pretty nifty, but how about we throw out all the deep, scary conclusions about human nature & amp up the action x1000 & also we need a German Shepherd in there so Smith comes off as even more relatable & wholesome.*"

Robert Neville is not necessarily squeaky clean protagonist, and that realistic quality of his character is essential to the observations Matheson is making here. By the end, you aren't 100% sure what outcome you're rooting for & for me that is one of the most powerful aspects of how the story is told.

But again, I'm not sure I'm fully on board with the **details of why & how** Neville has managed to survive for years under these conditions.

Neville has brick- & rock-proofed his home against the vampires that are constantly trying to get in with a reliable supply of garlic. He sound proofs his house, has a gas generator that he keeps running by way of a nearby gas station, and an ungodly amount of alcohol, cigarettes, and wine in his home.

I guess a scenario where all of those things exist in Neville's possession isn't **outlandish** but the story itself wasn't long enough to explore any sort of break down of these proofs, and thus it felt a bit unrealistic to me.

Even so, Matheson does well in capturing the **absolute lowest levels** of human desperation, taking us down deep into the terrifying subconscious of a secluded man on the brink of losing his ability to be compassionate & remember what it means to be human.

The pro here is, if you're curious about this story, it's short & will only take a bit of time to consume. If you don't love it, no big loss. If you do, well now you know!

Unfortunately I didn't **love it**, but I appreciate the concepts here & I definitely enjoyed the last 1/4 a lot more than the first 3/4. Worth a read!

This review and other reviews of mine can be found on Book Nest!

Mike (the Paladin) says

This is another one of those times when there are people who if they could would give this book far more than the allowed 5 while if I were rating it on "enjoyment alone" I'd be looking to give it negative stars. I realize this is one of the "classics" of science fiction (or science fantasy) and I don't care. I read it years ago and while I find the writing in places rates my recognition of its quality...I don't care for the book.

Like some of Matheson's other works there are some questions that (to me) are so glaring as to be blinding while the story simply goes along its merry way doing its best to ignore them (view spoiler)

Please don't get upset if I have dissed one of your favorite books...it happens to me here all the time. I just am really "underwhelmed" by this book, especially considering the "buzz" it always seems to get. If you enjoy it, I'm happy for you, it is however not one I like. I think 2 stars are generous.

Gabrielle says

Let me begin this review by saying that I never saw any of the movie adaptations of this book. I turned the first page of "I Am Legend" with zero knowledge of what Hollywood did to it because a friend of mine gave me an important warning. He said: "When it comes to this story, there is no movie; there is just the book".

The story is Robert Neville's, the last man on Earth after a strange plague has turned every other human being into a vampire. He lives in a carefully barricaded house, stuffed with canned and frozen food, books and records, as well as a hothouse full of garlic. He spends his days in the same monotonous way: making stakes and roping up garlic cloves on every possible entrance to his refuge. When he's not doing that, he's using up all his stakes to kill the sleeping vampires in their dens. His nights are spent listening to the vampires crawling around his house, fighting among each other and trying to lure him out. He's kind of on the edge of going insane when the book begins: this has been going on for 5 months, and he's fraying at the seams.

He manages to hang on to sanity when he decides to approach the vampire situation from a scientific point of view: catch one of them, get some of their blood, study it, try to find some sort of vaccine or antibiotic to cure the disease that took away everyone he loved. This goal carries him forward, until the day he finds himself face to face with someone else who can walk in the day time.

I was pleasantly surprised by the quality of the prose: Matheson is succinct, but also very elegant, and he does build dramatic ramp ups of tension when you least expect it. "I Am Legend" is not the scariest book I've ever read, but it did make me turn the pages frantically because I had to know what was going to happen. He

also conveys Neville's emotions very well: his paranoia, his heartbreak, his frustration...

I won't spoil anything, but there's an obvious lesson in this book: to the "monsters", the "good guy" is a murderer. But more than the simple morals message, the thing that really stuck with me was the atmosphere of decay, paranoia and white-knuckle resistance to madness. It would be so easy for Neville to give up: all he has to do is walk out of his house after sundown and his struggle is over. But he resists, he holes up, he fights back. The so-called twist can have more than one meaning: the importance of perspective, sure, but also the futility of fighting something so big it can never, ever be defeated. It made me think of all those atrocious zombie TV shows (yes, "Walking Dead", I mean you!) where it gets to a point where you just want the dumb characters to get caught and bitten already, because they have committed so many atrocities to stay alive that they can't really be referred to as protagonists anymore.

I also loved the way this book is a very self-aware vampire story. Neville gets to wondering what the deal is with the stakes and the garlic, and can't find any rational reason for their effectiveness. This little wink to the absurdity of the legends was a really nice touch of dark humor in what could have otherwise been a way too serious and depressing book.

If you like vampire stories, this is a classic that you shouldn't miss! A quick, but riveting read with a great ending.

(I still haven't watched any of the movies, and frankly, I don't intend to.)

F says

I loved this book! Was very creepy to read.
I thought it was brilliant from beginning to end.

One of my favourite books of all time ever!
That ending! WOW

Duane says

Richard Matheson may be the most underrated genre writer ever. When you look at a list of his books- I Am Legend, Somewhere In Time, Hell House, Duel: Terror Stories, What Dreams May Come- just to name a few, you realize how unique and diverse his talent was.

This novel, I Am Legend, a perfect little bricolage of apocalyptic, dystopian, sci-fi, horror, vampire, zombie, is probably his best known work, although I'm partial to Somewhere in Time (Bid Time Return) being such a romantic sentimentalist.

I haven't seen the movie which I understand is nothing like the book, which is too bad because I think the story is worthy of a good film.

4 stars.

Morgue Anne says

I just finished reading this book. Completely different from the movie (The 2007 version), I wish they would have gone with this story instead. The reader spends the whole story (Which is really only 170 pages) following the last man on earth as he fights for his survival against vampires (and yes, they are vampires). He boards up his house, stocks up on canned goods, and researches a way to combat this disease. He is not a doctor or a scientist, just a regular man stuck in an irregular situation. But, as Matheson so beautifully states, "Man can get used to anything", and so he does - burning corpses left on his doorstep by his vampire "friends", gathering fresh garlic, and fixing up his house for them to come back each night and try to drag him out.

Robert, the main character, spends years in this manner. He breaks into a nearby library and gathers an armload of books on anything and everything he thinks will be useful. In this way, Richard Matheson gives us the first realistic look at vampires from a scientific standpoint. Some vampires are afraid of crosses because of experiences in their pre-infected life. None can stand garlic - but it must be fresh and strongly scented. The reason they turn to dust? Well, read and find out. Learning the few ways there are to destroy them, Robert makes an attempt to kill a handful each day.

****SPOILER****

What he doesn't realize is that these creatures are not mindless zombies. They have emotions and desires beyond that of fresh blood. While Robert spends his nights locked away in his home, the infected have set about creating their own society. The most heart-wrenching moment (A phrase I do not use lightly) comes when a female vampire looks at Robert and tells him "I had a husband. You killed him while he was sleeping." They are not the blood-thirsty monsters he believes them to be. In fact, in their world, **he** is the monster, and that is where the book gains its title. "I Am Legend" is like saying "I Am Boogeyman". A fantastic look at who the monsters of this world really are.

Johann (jobis89) says

"The strength of the vampire is that no one will believe in him."

Robert Neville is the last man on earth...or is he? Following the outbreak of an incurable plague that has mutated every other human on earth into bloodthirsty, nocturnal creatures, Robert Neville must scavenge for food and supplies during the day, whilst hiding in his boarded-up, vampire-proof home at night. Living a solitary life for so long is not easy, and so he is constantly on the look-out for fellow survivors...

This was a buddy-read with my bestest friend, Abbie. We chose this because she is literally a speed-demon and if we had chose a long book, I would be lagging behind for too long! Turns out, I did lag behind anyway because even though we both finished I Am Legend pretty close to each other, my edition also had a selection of short stories written by Richard Matheson. So I'm only now "finishing" the entire book.

I had watched the movie I Am Legend a number of years ago. All I can remember about it is Will Smith and a dog... and that's it. Although what I've found really weird about my reading experience is that I did not cast Will Smith as the role of Richard Neville in my head - Abbie said she did.

I really liked this book, which was surprising to me given that its basically focused on one character. Usually

I would find the lack of dialogue and conversation quite boring - although we did get some flashbacks to before the plague, which I particularly enjoyed, with some scenes being quite chilling. Similar to what Abbie said, the constant drinking and throwing whiskey around and smashing glasses did start to grate on me after a while. I understand his alcoholism - I'm pretty certain I might succumb to addiction myself if I was the lone survivor of some plague, but it just gets repetitive after a while. What was disturbing to me was his weird fascination with the female "vampires" - DUDE. What the fuck is wrong with you!!

Okay, so I feel like the last paragraph had a lot of complaining, so I'll talk about what I loved. I loved the SCIENCE. I was geeking out over Richard's thoughts about what possibly caused the plague. He was basically conducting his own research and it was like reading my day-to-day experiences in the lab - disappointment after disappointment. A theory that seems so promising quickly dispelled. Microbiology and bacteria are my forte, so his research around this area had me nodding along in agreement. So that was awesome. The "vampires" themselves were pretty damn scary. I got confused at times because I was like "Are they vampires or zombies? Or a mixture of both?" There were different types and it just wasn't explained very clearly at times.

As for the ending...WOW. I was blown away. One of the best endings I've ever read in a book. It felt completely out of left-field and left me a bit gobsmacked. AMAZING. I Am Legend was a great, quick read and I have to give it 5 stars out of 5. Matheson's writing is simply outstanding and I want to read more.

With regards to the short stories, some were great and some were not so great. Prey was a brilliant short story, it reminded me of Battleground by Stephen King. Dance of the Dead was also pretty eerie. I didn't really include the short stories when giving my rating for this book, as I simply wanted to rate I Am Legend as a standalone book.

But yes! More Richard Matheson is definitely on my radar. Now for another buddy read with Sadie, Mindi and Ashley from bookstagram - can't wait!

Graeme Rodaughan says

One guy against a world filled with vampires.

I went into this book with an expectation of action. When the story had action scenes, they were done very well, and there is a wonderfully suspenseful and thrilling chase scene in the first half of the book. However, action, suspense and thrills were absent for most of the rest of the book.

There is sad reminiscing of his past life.

There is a long drawn out sequence of attempting to befriend a stray dog.

There is lots of time spent getting drunk, listening to classical music while complaining about the vampires.

The vampires mostly lack charisma, being more dumb brutes, than anything else (view spoiler)

When I give a book three stars, it's because I know I'll never re-read it. There is not enough here for me to rate it higher.

Not a disaster, has a neat twist at the end, has some good sequences - but, I found it a bit of a snooze fest.

Jim says

I just re-read this after watching some of the movies based on it. It's truly a chilling book. It's an apocalyptic novel. The vampire plague has destroyed our society. Much of the book focuses on our hero's loneliness. When he finds an uninfected dog, his attempts to befriend it are almost pathetic & truly heart-wrenching. It's well worth reading.

There are 3 movies that I know of that are based on this book.

The Last Man On Earth starring Vincent Price in the mid 60's. This follows the book pretty closely.

The Omega Man starring Charlton Heston in 1972 is very loosely based on the novel, but a great look at the 60's & 70's attitudes.

I Am Legend starring Will Smith in 2008 or so is the one I haven't seen yet. I caught the first 5 minutes & it bore no resemblance to the book & had really horrible CGI. Looked like a video game. I expected to see a Toon driving, not Will Smith.

Update: I did finally see this movie including both endings. It was incredibly bad. The happy ending was ridiculous.

Carol. says

There are some excellent reviews out there. I know I was complaining about squeezing and gifs recently, but I can't help but think a classic book like this could use a little modern reviewing.

Summary:

I'm a little mixed in my reading reactions to a novella that feels more like a self-conscious allegorical tale than truly innovative storytelling. The short, choppy prose suited the narrator, but gave a more limited ambiance to the setting. Given the protagonist Neville's relatively easy ability in moving around the world (seems to take a little siphoned gas and he's go to go), I felt like it was an incomplete story that left me with many questions about the world.

I do appreciate the sophisticated way Neville's personal history is blended in to the current experience, an impressive contrast to many writers who feel the need for long expository paragraphs, but I would have liked more. The limited description leaves something lacking, perhaps the extent of the devastation. Is it enough

that Neville feels isolated? Do we need the steps of how he got there? What does 'humanity' mean if you are the only human? Why try to survive? I'm not sure, and as Neville poses these questions, I found myself wondering what he had done to find other survivors, the timeline of catastrophe, the extent of the world breakdown. The spare depiction make me feel like it was more of a metaphorical tale, a study in the psychology of the individual and his coping with isolation and meaning without context of society. In this respect, the movie was more able to give the visual sense of complete loneliness and the frustration of working for a potentially futile goal.

It was also hard to have sympathy for Neville. Truly an Everyman, he drowned his emotion in alcohol as often as he attempted to control circumstance. I didn't admire or respect him; he was dogged but not creative or thoughtful. The lapses into existential questioning only reinforced the emotional distance.

The ending was a surprise; perhaps more likeable than that of the movie, but also more self-conscious and *created*. There wasn't much build to the ending; there was very little sense of the "types" of vampires through the story--I had more of a sense of Neville's drinking preferences than the vampires. Still, it is a classic, so I'm glad I took the time to read it, but it feels a little too much like reading *The Metamorphosis* for my taste.

Cross posted at <http://clsiewert.wordpress.com/2013/0...>

Tfitoby says

I Am Legend by Richard Matheson

My rating: 4 of 5 stars

Blurb: Robert Neville is the last man left alive on Earth...but he is not alone. Every other man, woman and child on the planet has become a vampire. Neville spends his days scavenging for food and supplies, and hunting down the undead in their lairs in the ruins of civilisation. At night, he becomes the hunted and barricades himself in his home, waiting and praying for the dawn.

I Am Legend was one of the first, and certainly the most brilliant, fusions of horror and science fiction. Its powerful and disturbing reworking of the vampire myth has made it a classic and enduring novel that has had a profound impact on generations of writers

Thoughts: Having seen *Omega Man* and the recent Will Smith movie adaptation and heard a few different people talking about the differences in the book I managed to put together a strange 'ideal' composite of what I imagined this novel to be, leaving me in the strange situation of having three stories going through my mind whilst reading an entirely different fourth one. Not exactly conducive to enjoying a book most of the time but in this instance failing at dampening the pleasure I got from reading Matheson's wonderful novel.

It was and is very difficult to analyse this without comparing it to the movies, it's possible for example that if I had been unaware of the storyline this might have received a 5 star review, but as it is it may take additional readings for me to make that distinction.

For now I will simply tell you that aside from being a powerful insight into human loneliness and an intriguing premise of the last man standing amongst a spreading bacteria it is also a science fiction novel of the highest quality (whether the science used is correct or not it matters little to me, it is the presentation of the ideas that carries all the greats of the genre in my mind) and contains passages of prose that will leave you breathless in empathy and anticipation.

I know little of the vampire legends and myths, I don't generally read books about vampires or vampirism, but Matheson gives you a strong grounding in it and then attempts to poke and prod the silliness of them; his assuredness that crosses will only work on Christian vampires and Mohammedan vampires would simply drink your blood when faced with a crucifix was a particular favourite revelation of mine. And the way the novel ends left me near certain that this has been integral to a lot of the more interesting developments in vampire novels/movies of recent times such as Sergei Lukyanenko's *Nightwatch* trilogy and *Blade*.

All in all I can't recommend this novel highly enough.

Originally posted at [blahblahblahgay](#)

7jane says

Los Angeles, about 22 years into the future (Jan. 1976 - Jan. 1979 in this book; copyright 1954, which really shows in some of the book's views). After the 'plague' finished in 1975, Robert Neville seems to be the only human left immune and alive. He's not anywhere like Will Smith, lookwise, English-German man in late 30s with blue eyes, blond going bald (and later with a beard). When we meet him he's been living at his present place for 5 months. Trying to survive, and wondering what caused everyone to change and/or die - which sets him on the road of research and a big surprise (view spoiler).

The views of the time when the book was published show in the writing: his lust-problem with vampire women (no masturbation, really?), listening to classical music, seeing the alcohol as a problem but not the smoking? But at no point was I irritated by this old-fashioned edge, which stayed just (barely) from feeling a bit sexist.

I don't think Matheson searched for what the meaning of the names were for this story, but I did think that naming (view spoiler)

The book's story is in at least some ways different from the movie besides Robert's looks - like the dog (view spoiler) Reading was sometimes hard to continue, but that was just me being nervous - the story flowed nicely and without extra padding.

And the way it ends is both (view spoiler) There is still hope left in the box, even for this kind of world.

Matt says

I'm not much of what you might call a "vampire guy." By which I mean both that I am not a vampire, or a guy who likes vampires or vampire-themed endeavors. Thus it stands to reason that I never would have read Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend* had not the wildcard of my book club chosen it as this month's selection.

Frankly, I was a little underwhelmed by the choice. The critical “blurbs” did not help matters along. Dean Koontz said it was the “most riveting vampire novel since *Dracula*,” which is great, except my last – and only – vampire novel was *Dracula*. Another blurb called it one of the “ten all-time best novels of vampirism.” If I loved vampires, this would be meaningful. But really, I’m vampire-neutral. Maybe even slightly vampire-negative. (I mean, with the whole *Twilight* thing). I wholly support zombies, however.

But really, *I Am Legend* isn’t strictly a vampire book. (At 170 pages, it barely achieves book status at all. It’s really closer to a novella). Instead, it straddles genres, stubbornly refusing to be one thing or another. Perhaps this is the reason people keep trying to turn it into a satisfying film. It is a potent canvas ripe for many different kinds of tales.

The main storyline is pure apocalyptic fiction. The novel opens with our protagonist Robert Neville as the putative last man on Earth. It is 1976, which stands in for the future since this book was first published in 1954. There has been some sort of war/disease combo that is elliptically alluded to in a short flashback. The human race is either dead or turned into vampires (Or both? Are vampires undead? I suppose I could look this up...). The exception, of course, is Robert.

Woven into the end-of-days context is an old fashioned cast-away story, akin to *Robinson Crusoe* or *The Swiss Family Robinson*. *I Am Legend* begins well into the vampire apocalypse, introducing Robert as a man who has learned to survive. It takes us through a typical day: waking up; eating breakfast; making repairs to the house; leaving the house to kill sleeping vampires or pick up supplies; returning home; making dinner; listening to music; getting drunk; trying to ignore the vampires outside your house who are taunting you both verbally and – in the case of the female vampires – sexually. (Because anything having to do with vampires has to touch on the repression of sexual urges in some manner).

I Am Legend is also, and most fascinatingly, a grim kind of character study. Matheson makes a rather daring literary choice in not giving Robert anyone or anything to play off of. There is not another human to talk to. There is no pet. There is not even an inanimate object like *Cast Away*’s Wilson to act as a sort of muse. There is only Robert. He is an angry, bitter man, which is altogether understandable. He is also a high-functioning alcoholic. Also understandable. The novel’s high points are a couple powerful sequences in which this hard, down-to-basics shell is peeled away to surprisingly moving effect. (If that ambiguous sentence leaves you scratching your head, I have succeeded).

One thing I found entirely missing, other than people, is any semblance of lightness or joy. Robert – who lives in the LA-area – never has any fun with his sanctified status as last living avatar of the human race. He doesn’t go into a museum, take all the famous artwork, and then use it to decorate his bedroom. He never goes to an adult bookstore and takes all the porn. I suppose this is closer to a realistic response to losing your family, friends, and the rest of the world. Still, we can all use a laugh now and then, right?

Matheson tells this story in the third-person limited. The point of view is strictly confined to Robert and what he is seeing, feeling, thinking. The result is a constricted, almost claustrophobic atmosphere. Robert’s world is as small as it is empty. Matheson makes you feel the cramped confines of Robert’s fortress-house. He is also good at suggesting the creeping madness that comes along with that confinement.

I can’t say much more without venturing into spoiler territory, and I don’t want to do that. So instead of dancing around themes or vaguely hinting at plot-points for another 1,000 words (which is actually my first inclination), I’ll just wrap this up. This is a quick, surprising little novel with a slammer of an ending.

Emma says

This was creepy and sad too. I don't think I would have lasted long as the last person alive. I would have just given up and let myself get caught! The vampires of this story are quite zombie like, I thought. How events turn out in the end surprised me.

Kat Hooper says

ORIGINALLY POSTED AT Fantasy Literature.

I don't like vampire novels much, so I wasn't planning to read Richard Matheson's classic vampire story *I am Legend* which was published in 1954, is also known by the title *The Omega Man*, and is, of course, the basis for the movie *I am Legend*.

But then I recently read and was enthralled by two other books by Matheson: *The Incredible Shrinking Man* and *Steel and Other Stories*. I realized that *The Incredible Shrinking Man* wasn't really so much about a man who was losing his height as it was about a man who was losing his manhood. Likewise, the novella "Steel," the titular piece of *Steel and Other Stories* and the premise for the movie *Real Steel*, isn't so much about a fighting robot as it is about a man who, similar to the shrinking man, is fighting to keep his position in life. The psychological aspects of these stories fascinated me and I began to wonder if perhaps *I am Legend* wasn't really about vampires after all.

As I suspected, it's not. Well, on the surface it is. Robert Neville is the last human being on Earth. Everyone else has been infected with a virus that causes vampirism, but for some reason, Robert is immune. He spends his daytime hours securing his house, staking vampires, and trying to discover a cure for the virus. At night he hides indoors while the vampires, some who are his former acquaintances, try to break in. During the story there are flashbacks which show the gradual loss of Robert's family and friends to vampirism.

I was fascinated by Robert's preparations and daytime activities, and his studies to find the cause and cure for the virus. The thought, for example, of having free access to anything you want, including cars, jewelry, clothes, houses, art, scientific equipment, and every book in every bookstore and library in the world is exhilarating... until you realize that there's nobody to share it with. All those things are almost meaningless outside of their social context.

So, this is Matheson's gut-wrenching focus — what it means to be the last human on Earth, especially when you're fighting for your life. We all know that humans are social creatures, but none of us has actually experienced a total lack of companionship. What would it mean to rule the entire world alone? And yet, as depressing as that is, why, when there's nothing to live for, do we still cling to life so desperately? Matheson writes so powerfully about these emotions. I ached for Robert Neville and a few of Matheson's scenes had me in tears.

The story is called *I am Legend* because Robert Neville gradually comes to realize that vampires, the creatures he thought were only legend, are real. Now, Robert Neville, the elusive human being who vampires fear, has become the legend.

I listened to Blackstone Audio's version of *I am Legend* which is perfectly read by Robertson Dean. This is

one I will listen to again. By the way, *I am Legend* is not a full-length novel, so some versions include additional stories in a collection called *I am Legend* and Other Stories.

ORIGINALLY POSTED AT Fantasy Literature.

Megan Baxter says

Yet again, I've been breaking the rules. This time, it wasn't on purpose! But I went into reading *I Am Legend* knowing the ending, knowing the twist. Years ago, you see, my husband had wanted to talk about the book, probably when the most recent adaptation to movie form had come out, and I am well known for not reading horror, so it wasn't an unreasonable assumption that I would never read this.

So, wrong, in the long run, but it made reading this for the first time a very different experience than it would be for someone who was going into it cold.

Note: The rest of this review has been withdrawn due to the recent changes in Goodreads policy and enforcement. You can read why I came to this decision [here](#).

In the meantime, you can read the entire review at Smorgasbook

Nataliya says

["Full circle. A new terror born in death, a new superstition entering the u

Algernon says

I was going to rate the book a lukewarm 3 stars, but then I looked once more at the date of publication (1954) and reconsidered. A bit of historical perspective, of literary context elevates this novel to the well deserved 'genre classic' status. At the time Matheson published his science-fiction take on the gothic vampire myth, the market was a lot different from today's oversaturated landscape that has largely trivialized the subject and gave it a curious teenage romance slant. Even bringing in the scientific method of study for the phenomenon and its associated paraphernalia (the bloodsucking, the garlic, the cross, the wooden stake, the fear of light, the sleeping underground, the bullet invulnerability) was probably a novel approach to a dusty theme:

Something black and of the night had come crawling out of the Middle Ages. Something with no framework or credulity, something that had been consigned, fact and figure, to the pages of imaginative literature. Vampires were passe, Summers idylls or Stoker's melodramatics or a brief inclusion in the Britannica or grist for the pulp writer's mill or raw material for the B-film factories. A tenuous legend passed from century to century.

I didn't much care for the prose: it is concise and clear in its presentation of the main themes but I found it lackluster and unconvincing when it tried to delve deeper into emotional intensity for the main character. I

could also complain about the lack of action, but I believe this is more a novel about ideas than a high octane action thriller. To finish with the grumbling, I would have liked a more rigorous attempt with the scientific speculations. Most of the ideas are sound, but the way they are fitted together seems fishy, with some of the argumentation incomplete. Let me give you a few examples :

- vampires are destroyed by sunlight, yet when they are hidden in deep cellars and dark places during the day they are still handicapped
- the transmission is supposed to be airborne, yet two other theories are given equal importance : direct contact with open wounds and insect bites (mosquitoes)
- bullet wounds are instantly healed (didn't they have exploding ammo in 1954?) yet knife cuts are still bleeding
- the disease affects the brain, but in a curious way : speech is unimpeded yet the use of tools is lost and social interaction is lost.

The last one is the one I struggled with the most. Other reviewers noticed also that the monsters are closer in behaviour to zombies than to classic vampires. Cesar Romero cites the book as a primary source, Stephen King also makes reference to it.

On the positive side, two aspects of the novel stand out and will probably come to define it for me in later years as the actual details of the plot will fade from memory:

- the psychological pressure of being the last man on earth : Richard Neville is utterly alone, he has nobody to turn to, has lost his wife and kid in horrible circumstances, yet he must find the resources inside himself to go on living from day to day. His heavy drinking, his episodes of paranoid depression and self destructive rage are painful to watch, as are his efforts to organize his daily routines with checklists and his obsession in hunting down his afflicted neighbours when they are incapacitated during the day. The episode of the feral dog is probably the best written part of the whole novel.
- the implications resulting from the demotion of humanity from the top of the food chain, something that I have remarked upon in another classic I read earlier this year (The Day of the Triffids). *Normalcy was a majority concept, the standard of many and not the standard of just one man.* exclaims Neville towards the end of the novel, when he realizes that the monster from the fairytales is in fact himself. The future of the human race might well be carried on by people with wings or by people who use photosynthesis instead of eating solid food or by vampires who drink blood and go out only at night.

[edit] for spelling

Justin says

1. I'd like to take this opportunity to apologize for all of the Will Smith jokes. It's going to be difficult, but I will refrain from including him in this review.
2. Stuff I liked - Matheson does an amazing job in describing the situation Neville has dealt with as the only person left in the world. The scariest parts for me were when Matheson deals with themes like isolation and loneliness. That stuff was much more terrifying than the vampires (more on them later). There were entire chapters of the book describing Neville's fruitless attempts to find companionship. Those chapters along with the glimpse into Neville's past with his family were really, really good. Being alone like that is much scarier than....
3. Stuff I didn't like - vampires. Yeah, I get it. They add another level of fear to the story, and that's fine. I

just felt like when the story was really taking off, it would hold itself back by getting too technical with what these creatures were, how to kill them, how to test their blood to see if they were infected, whatever. I wanted to hear more about Neville's family and how he is struggling to survive and less about what he was reading at the library. Also, I'm not really huge vampire fan anyway. I'm more of a ghost story, monster in the closet, things that go bump in the night kind of guy, I guess.

4. (Don't do it, Justin. You said no Will Smith jokes this time.... don't.... do.... it..... Click "Save", Justin. Get outta here.)

Vanessa J. says

I enjoy being alone. There's some kind of peace in loneliness. I'm never more happy than when I'm by myself. I've said, though, that if the loneliness is forced upon me, it's not so glorious. Robert Neville's situation is similar to this latter one.

In first instance, when I came upon this book, it reminded me of *The Last Man* by Mary Shelley. In both books, the hero is, or believes to be, the last man on Earth. The rest of humanity had died because of a plague. In TLM it was some cold, and in IAL it was vampirism.

Yes, you read that right: A plague of vampires. Vampires who had a scientific basis rather than a supernatural one, and I must say, it worked better that way, because I don't think the introduction of supernatural beings would have done good to the book, especially since it is horror **science** fiction (sigh, like my favourite book series ever).

Vampires have always been seen as monsters. As they're monsters to our eyes, there comes this question: **Are they in fact the monsters, or is it us?** In this book, something similar is addressed.

But are his needs any more shocking than the needs of other animals and men? (...) Is he worse than the manufacturer who set up belated foundations with the money he made by handing bombs and guns to suicidal nationalists? (...) Really, now, search your soul; lovie—is the vampire so bad?

All he does is drink blood.

Why, then, this unkind prejudice, this thoughtless bias? (...) He has no means of support, no measures for proper education, he has not the, voting franchise. No wonder he is compelled to seek out a predatory nocturnal existence.

Of course, in my honest opinion (I'm trying to be the less biased as I can), it worked better in *The Monstrumologist* by Rick Yancey, because the answer to that question was more developed and included things that only made the series very dark.

The hero also questioned himself why he went on living - he being the last man he knew alive, there was no

point in continuing his life, is it?

He found himself wondering again why he chose to go on living. Probably, he thought, there's no real reason. I'm just too dumb to end it all.

The book should have had a strong ending, but around 90%, something very underwhelming happened. I won't say, of course, yet... I'm still trying to process that finale because I have confused feelings - does it really make sense and is that the way everything should have ended? - so I will not speak ill about it just now. In the meanwhile, I recommend this book, and if you in fact read it, I would not complain if you came to this review to tell me your opinion about the ending.
