



I Am Legend

By Richard Matheson

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Robert Neville has witnessed the end of the world. The entire population has been obliterated by a vampire virus. Somehow, Neville survived. He must now struggle to make sense of everything that has happened and learn to protect himself against the vampires who hunt him constantly. He must, because perhaps there is nothing else human left.

I Am Legend was a major influence in horror and brought a whole new thematic concept to apocalyptic literature. Several humanistic and emotional themes in this book blend the horror genre with traditional fiction: we see Neville as an emotional person, and observe as he suffers bouts of depression, dips into alcoholism and picks up his strength again to fight the vampiric bacteria that has infected (and killed off) most of humankind. Neville soon meets a woman, Ruth, (after three years alone), who seems to be uninfected and a lone survivor. The two become close and he learns from Ruth that the infected have learned to fight the disease and can spend short amounts of time in the daylight, slowly rebuilding strength and society as it was.

The novel was adapted to film in 1964 as *The Last Man on Earth*, as *Omega Man* in 1971 and finally as *I am Legend* in 2007, starring Will Smith.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Richard Burton Matheson (born February 20, 1926) is an American author and screenwriter working primarily in the fantasy, horror, and science fiction genres. Between 1950 and 1971, Matheson produced dozens of stories, frequently combining elements from the different genres in which he works, making important contributions to the further development of modern horror. Matheson wrote fourteen episodes for the American television series *The Twilight Zone*, including the famous "Nightmare at 20,000 Feet." Notably, Steven Spielberg's first full length film (made for television) was based on the story "Duel," for which Matheson also wrote the screenplay.

Matheson's first novel, *Someone is Bleeding*, was published in 1953. His thirty novels since then include *The Shrinking Man* (filmed as *The Incredible Shrinking Man*, again adapted from Matheson's own screenplay), and a science fiction/vampire novel, *I Am Legend* (made into film as *The Last Man on Earth*,

1964, The Omega Man, 1971, and I Am Legend, 2007).

A new film based on Matheson's story "Steel," entitled Real Steel, is a major motion picture that was released in October 2011. His most recent novel, Other Kingdoms, appeared in March 2011.

According to film critic Roger Ebert, Matheson's scientific approach to the supernatural in I Am Legend and other novels from the 1950s and '60s anticipated the "pseudorealistic fantasy novels like Rosemary's Baby and The Exorcist." In 2010, Matheson was inducted into the Science Fiction Hall of Fame, and Stephen King has cited Matheson as a creative influence; his novel Cell is dedicated to Matheson along with filmmaker George A. Romero. Author Anne Rice has said that Matheson's short story, "A Dress of White Silk" was a primary early influence on her interest in vampires and fantasy fiction.

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