

# I am legend: a post-apocalyptic story

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## **There can only be one**

Post-apocalyptic stories are very big in society. From blowing up the earth and starting fresh with a new governmental system, to a new species coming to destroy human existence. These concepts are what make great sellers in entertainment because they show what society believes will happen and can explain what society is like at the time of publication. The novel “ I Am Legend” by Richard Matheson is about a man, Robert Neville, who lives in post-apocalyptic Los Angeles trying to survive from infected humans. This one novel was so amazing it was made into a movie many years later with a few changes in the updated version. Were these changes just to make the story more interesting, or were they purposefully made to paint a different picture of society and the way things have changed over time? Although there are many similarities to the book and novel such as the main concept, which is fight for survival, the differences weigh out the similarities. The setting, the character, and the monster’s form, are the biggest differences between the two that explain the change in society. However, the biggest explanation of society’s morality and initial “ game plan” comes from the fact that both stories show no two species can live together in harmony for one will always reign to be more superior to the other.

In the novel and movie, the story takes place in the biggest cities of the U. S. The book takes place in Los Angeles where the movie is in New York. The book was written in 1954 but is set in 1976 and the movie was made in 2007 and set in 2012 where the virus started in 2009. Both versions are set in the future. The thing that separates them is the time they were both produced.

When the book was published, it was post World War II and the Cold War was just beginning. Technology became more advanced and the discovery of science became more known to the public. As we know around the 1950s, racism was at its peak and the “whites” were the prominent race. Los Angeles was a progressive city to be living in. John Niemore, an African-American newspaperman, urged his people to “leave the poverty of sharecropping in the South to take advantage of greater opportunities for land ownership and independence in California” (Springer. com). The city was filling with African-Americans along with other cultures and became more diverse. We know that Neville had a house in Compton which was the nicer place back then but now is known as the “ghetto.” As African-Americans moved into these American cities, the Whites started to move away and into suburbs which was known as the “Great White Flight.” With this also came redlining which is “[the] denying [of] goods and services to people in certain neighborhoods” (wisegeek. org). Compton became ghetto because society was racist to blacks and decided to cut all resources from them. Matheson decides to make this the setting to go against society and show that Compton was the best place to live and probably the safest. After all Robert Neville survived for many years through the apocalypse.

In the movie, Neville is in New York, the city that never sleeps. Well it definitely did not sleep in the movie. While Neville would sleep, the zombies would awake and roam the city taunting him with all their moans. These night crawlers or as Anna referred to them in the movie as “Dark Seekers” were just like the youth of the world. You would not necessarily see them in the day since they are stuck in their jobs and schools. So they choose the

night to roam the streets where they bother others with their cries of laughter and screams of joy.

Since this was around the time of the end of WWII and the start of the Cold War, the setting of a dead city was brilliant. The Cold War was not really a war but just a stalemate meaning it was a deadlock, no advancement was possible. This was great to explain Los Angeles in the book since Neville was in a stalemate himself. There was not much he could do to make an advancement in society since he was the last man on Earth. With all this said, the movie's setting rings very differently. Aside from the people and monsters, the time and place were very symbolic in the novel and movie. Since it was New York 2007, it was post 9/11. This was when the twin towers had been attacked and destroyed. Francis Lawrence chose New York as a setting to give us a time to remember what had happened. Knowing it was a post-apocalyptic setting, the dead silence of the city during the day reigned to be a symbol of our mourning to the twin towers. The similarity between the two is the fact that they were after great tragedies in our society; however the difference is what the two cities represented and the time gap brought different morals.

A big difference between the two versions was Robert Neville's character. In the book Neville was a white man due to the time of publication but in the movie, Neville was black which was pretty much a big spit in Matheson's face. Lawrence chose Robert Neville to be black because racial diversity was more acceptable in this time than Richard Matheson's time. Back in Matheson's time, segregation was big so he chose Neville to be white

because blacks were not as accepted in society yet. An article states that “Racism is a pervading and permanent part of American society” (springerlink. com). Racism was huge back then, but it still exists today as we see the riots in Baltimore due to police brutality against blacks even though we know police are not just “ attacking” the blacks. Other races are victims of police brutality but are not shown on social media. But let us save this argument for another time. In addition to the racial difference came his personality.

In the novel, Neville worked a blue-collared job at a power plant and was a drunkard where in the movie Neville was a survivalist and always kept in shape. Since the 1950s were Post WWII and beginning of Cold War, everything was destroyed. People lost all hope in society and had no meaning to live for something greater. Richard Mattheson depicts Neville always drinking. He wakes up having his “ midmorning drink” (Matheson 3). Yet sometimes he gets a little fancy of how he comes across drinking. He says “ Let the jagged edge of sobriety be now dulled...Let the crumbly balance of clear vision be expunged” (20). In other words he is saying he wants to be drunk. Neville knows he is the last man on Earth surrounded by these infected humans waiting to kill him. He knows there is nothing going for him and there is not much he can do to fix his situation so he uses alcohol to show his loss in hope. The movie Neville would be ashamed of novel Neville. In the movie, Robert is a soldier, a “ savior” as shown on a magazine attached to his refrigerator. From a flashback we see that Neville tells his wife he is not leaving the city until he finds a cure for the virus. He has hope that he can cure these zombies, which he does, and the other

Neville just loses hope not caring for helping these monsters out. To sum it up each character are very different. They are depicted in ways where any other human might try and live within these respected time frames.

Aside from Robert Neville's character we see that the monsters are different and a little more advanced than most depictions of monsters. In the novel, the monsters are vampires and the movie they are more like zombies. We see that the vampires are more evolved and can even be mightier than the human. They have some sort of sub-conscience since his own neighbor, Ben Cortman, now a vampire, yells "Come out, Neville" (11). They are able to speak. They also have some means of motives knowing what they are going after as shown when the "zombies stood like silent soldiers on duty" (11). In the movie, Robert Neville claims that the zombies have shown complete devolution when one comes out into the sun trying to save one of his own from being captured by Neville. He says "they rejected their own basic means of survival." But this zombie did not just burn up like the others. He was singed a little and roared in anger after Neville had captured one of them. So did they really devolve or is this a sense of evolution? This zombie cared for the captive enough to attack Neville's house and reclaim her. Both species have become highly evolved from their human forms though. In addition we know both were humans who had died and come back to life. In society, this is something most religious people believe would come true. The Bible states "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed" (knowing-jesus.com). Both producers used these monsters as an "oracle" of what humans believe is to come.

To change ideas, both versions seem to have a leader that they follow. At the end of the novel it is a female vampire who leads her pack into Neville's death. This is complete rejection of the whole gender role during the time the book was published. These vampires were able to find a way to stay alive without being cured. They found a way to live in sunlight with science which shows that these monsters were more evolved and more advanced than most depictions of vampires are. "It was the discovery of this pill that saved [them] from dying" (Matheson 144). In addition to the vampires, the zombies were starting to evolve. They followed a leader but a male leader which is predictable. It depicts the fact that society is going back into their old values where the man is always the dominant one. On the side from that, Neville had found a cure by the end of the movie to help the zombies become human again yet they reject it. When the zombies start attacking his lab he tries explaining to them that he can cure them. They can start all over but the boss did not want to change from how far they came. We hear him scream "no" right before his final attack. This shows that these zombies have become so evolved that they can speak and make decisions for themselves to stay the way they are.

In both versions of this story we see that there are monsters and then there is Robert Neville who are all fighting for their lives to become the superior one. All three species are fighting for the same thing. We depict the zombie and vampire as monsters because they kill humans. But isn't Neville doing the exact same thing? Ruth, the leader of the vampires, claims "You've killed... Only to...to survive... That's exactly why we're killing" (155). Both are fighting to stay alive. This explains the fact that society cannot live in

harmony with different species, or races, for one will claim to be more superior to the other. In an article by Jake Bajada, he states “ We cannot afford to have anyone other than the best ruling our country” (thelogiccentre. com). What I mean here is there always has to be one higher than the other. It has happened in history multiple times. Hitler tried to kill off the Jewish community because he believed that Germans were more superior to them. Aside from an actual species being extinct, superiority lies within racism too. In history we see that the Americans reign superior to the African-Americans making them their slaves. In Neville’s position, he shows his superiority by capturing the zombies and committing trials on them to find a cure, killing off so many of them during his experiments. It is hard to live with one who has so many differences you do not agree with. This is why Neville is killing them off in both versions but we see a change in the novel. Neville cannot repopulate his species since he is the last man on earth but the vampires have enough of them to start a whole society of their own and rule over his world. Ruth states that “ we’re going to stay alive...we’re going to set up society again” (Matheson 143). At the end of the novel, the zombies kill off Robert Neville to show that the dominant species is no longer us humans but the vampires for they have become more evolved than a normal human. Matheson uses the vampires and zombies to show that society fears of a more superior species than us humans.

I Am Legend is so dynamic of a novel that it was later made into a movie. With this said, the movie turned out to be a lot different than the original story. Francis Lawrence, director of the movie, decided to make these changes on purpose. The monsters, character, setting are all different. The



way both of these were produced were not just for our own entertainment but to explain society and give subtle hints of what we think. Richard Matheson, originator of I am Legend, creates a drunk, hopeless man who fights monsters but ends up becoming the true monster in the end. Francis Lawrence, director of the movie, changes up the story by having a black soldier as the character to show how our society has changed and become a little more accepting towards racial groups. But this is not the real case. The similarity of both versions is the fact that no two groups are able to live side by side. History showed us racial groups could not do it and the story, these two species were not able to do it. In our minds, we will always seem to be more superior to another group or person. We will always find a way to diminish the inferior and even find a way to drive them to complete extinction. Society can never live in a utopian world because humans cannot see past their differences. The big picture that both Matheson and Lawrence depict is that with superiority in society, there can only be one.