

I AM LEGEND

Title:

I Am Legend, by Richard Matheson

Genre:

Horror

POV Specification:

Robert Neville

Estimated Length of Book/Number of Sparks:

50,000 words/3 story sparks

High-Concept Blurb:

Robert Neville is the last man on Earth. A terrible plague has either killed mankind or transformed them into vampires ... and all they want is Robert's blood.

BEGINNING STORY SPARK:

For the past eight months, since the plague infected the population—a plague he is immune to—Robert has been struggling to survive while trying to get rid of as many of the vampires (who, along with insects and dust storms, caused the rapid spread of the disease) as he can during daylight. By day, he tries to repair the damage done to his property during the nightly attacks; he strings together garlic necklaces and places them on all the windows to drive away the creatures; he makes wooden stakes to drive into the hearts of the vampires he encounters during his trips for supplies; and he disposes of their bodies in the gigantic fire pit (created by those who initially tried to control the spread of the plague) that always burns in an excavated field. He lives by his watch because as soon as the sun sets, he must be behind the locked doors and boarded windows of his home, where the vampires are drawn, howling, snarling, and trying to break through the barriers he's erected. They want his blood; they want to make him as they are. He understands little about them beyond that they stay inside by day, avoid garlic, can be killed by a stake through the heart, fear crosses, and dread mirrors. The creatures are white-fanged and powerful—their need for blood is their only motivation.

Identifying the Main Character:

Robert Neville

Character Introductions:

- Robert:** Believing himself to be the last man on earth, he fights to survive when everyone he loves has died or been taken by the plague. With so many things to do, he wonders if he'll get around to figuring out the real problem—how to destroy these things once and for all.

Description (Outside POV):

- Robert:** A tall, blond man born of English-German stock, his features are undistinguished save for a long, determined mouth, and bright blue eyes. His face is gaunt and bearded; he looks older than his thirty-six years.

Description (Self POV):

- Robert:** I'm a man who's had to get used to unnatural things, like the stink of garlic that overwhelms everything from my clothes to the taste of all food to my very flesh. I struggle with trying to convince myself I'm doing the right thing in killing the deadly creatures who, by day, are in an all-but-comatose state and look just like me. I consider myself the "blind-man" type—only accepting the truth a blind man can see when there's no other possibility.

Occupational Skills:

- Robert:** Before the vampires took over, he worked at a plant.

Enhancement/Contrast:

- Robert:** Early in his life, his mother taught him to appreciate music. Now music, along with reading, helps him fill the terrible void of hours.

Symbolic Element:

- Robert:** None.

Setting Descriptions:

- Robert's home:** His boarded-up house is on Cimarron Street, "proofed" to keep out the vampires. He burned the neighboring houses to prevent the vampires from using them to jump on his roof. He has a giant freezer run by a generator, since there is no electricity anymore, and in what was once his daughter's bedroom is a pantry filled with food. In the backyard, there's a water tank and a hothouse for the garlic he collects.

Character Conflicts (Internal):

His wife, Virginia, and daughter, Kathy, died from the plague. Kathy's body had been thrown in the fire pit. He hadn't allowed them to do that to his wife—he'd tried to bury her, but she came back, and then he had to kill her as he had the others. The face of every child vampire he destroys is Kathy's; the women creatures, Virginia. Virginia is in a crypt, sealed in her casket, in the cemetery, where the creatures can't get at her.

He isn't sure how much longer he can do what he's been doing—little by little trying to reduce their unholy numbers. He wants to die; if only he knew for sure he would be with his wife then.

Evolving Goals and Motivations:

The only sure way to be free of the creatures would be to go out at night, become one of them. The only thing that has prevented him thus far is the possibility that there are others who survived the plague and that they might be looking for their own kind. But how will he ever find them if they're not within a day's drive of his house, which is the only place he's safe at night?

He has no time to slow down and think, because his struggle is never-ending. Nevertheless, the hours of the relentless, nightly attacks are taking their toll on his sense of purpose. He smokes too much and drinks too much. His health is waning and the endless stress is getting to him, preventing him from doing things the way they should be done, the way his father taught him: analytically and scientifically.

Plot Conflicts (External):

Robert discovers that in addition to wooden stakes, sunlight also kills the vampires. He realizes that infrared and ultraviolet rays of the sun do something to the creatures' blood. To test the theory, he drags a second vampire out into the daylight and it dies instantly, just as the first. Realizing he's put off the research he needs to do to find the answer, he rushes toward home only to become aware that he can't be certain the creature really is dead. What if it comes back at sunset? He turns the car around and goes back to get the body to bring home with him. Only then does he look at his watch ... and realize that, in his grief remembering his lost family this day, he forgot to wind it ... and it's stopped.

Only by tricking the animalistic creatures is he able to return to his home. Repairing the damage over the next few days gives him something to lose his fury in, and then he can begin his investigation. This forces him to remember his last days with his wife and daughter in an effort to find the answers to the plague and the coming of the vampires in the past. He tests several theories but all end in failure. The only thing he's sure of is that having the blood taken from them kills the creatures. With a microscope, he begins testing the blood of a vampire and finally isolates a germ—the cause of vampirism. Sunlight kills the germ. It's too late to cure those who have already been infected, but, if there are others like him, how can he cure them?

MIDDLE STORY SPARK:

Robert finds a dog—initially uninfected—roving on his lawn.

Character Conflicts (Internal):

After being completely alone for ten months, after believing that his investigation into how to destroy the vampires is worthless and that he has no reason for staying alive, the possibility of a *life* other than his own, a companion, renews his determination to keep fighting. He's clung to the idea all this time that a human being not infected will come, that he isn't the last person on Earth, and the dog returns to him the ray of hope he's almost lost.

Evolving Goals and Motivations:

The wounded canine is frightened of him after somehow surviving the nightly attacks just as Robert has—by finding a hiding place. Robert wants to heal the dog, get its trust and affection, and he finally succeeds in getting the animal, now infected yet still able to roam in daylight, into his house.

Plot Conflicts (External):

Just a week after he rescues the dog, it dies and leaves him completely alone again.

END STORY SPARK:

Three years of survival pass, and Robert meets a young woman—Ruth. Alive. In the daylight.

Character Conflicts (Internal):

The possibility of gaining a companion proves to be more than he can resist and, in desperation, he brings her to his safe house, despite the fact that Robert is afraid that she's infected. After all, the dog had been infected and still went about in daylight.

He's never discovered how or why, but he knows now that the germ sets up a symbiosis with the host. The vampire feeds it fresh blood, and the bacteria provides the energy so the creature can get more fresh blood—if indeed there are any more people left to infect. Stakes work to kill the vampire because they allow air into the

body. In that environment, the germ becomes virulently parasitic—symbiotic—and eats the host. Treatments don't work because the vampire body can't fight germs and make antibodies at the same time.

The fact that Ruth is awake in daylight and not in a coma like the others confuses him. He shoves garlic under her nose, but she only draws back from the stink and becomes ill. *How can he trust after all the disappointment, all the time alone?* He feels hollow and without feeling, unable to believe anything remarkable can happen in this lost world. If she's infected, he'll have to try to cure her, but he knows eventually she'll die and his life will return to the way it had been before she came. But if she's not infected, if she stays, if they establish a relationship ... that possibility is even more terrifying to him. He's afraid to make sacrifices, to accept responsibility for more than himself, and, most of all, to give his heart again.

Evolving Goals and Motivations:

Robert asks to check Ruth's blood, and she agrees to allow it in the morning. He tells her he'll try to cure her if she is infected because she's not like the others. He begins to wonder again if others survived and are immune to the plague.

Having Ruth there—alive, destroying his adjustment to the isolation, as well as his sense of security and peace—brings him back from the edge. It's just the two of them together, survivors of a black terror, and they've found each other. And he wants to help her. He'll cure her if she's infected, somehow ... or he'll die himself.

Plot Conflicts (External):

When Robert tests Ruth's blood in the morning, he discovers she is infected. She slams a wooden mallet down on his head over and over, knocking him unconscious. When he wakes, she's gone, but she's left him a note. She was spying on him, and everything she told him was a lie, save one truth—she had a husband, and Robert killed him. She and others like her are infected, and they want to stay alive now that they're able to live in the sun for short periods. They've found a way to survive—in the form of a pill. With it, the blood feeds the germ and the drug prevents its multiplication. They'll be the new world order, and that means killing the wretched creatures the germ has taken. And there are those, like Robert, who won't allow them to survive, and they must be done away with. But Ruth wants to save him by telling those like her that he's too well armed to attack. Robert must get away and go into the mountains to save himself. Before long, those like Ruth will be too well organized, and she won't be able to stop them from killing him.

Those infected but not overtaken because of the pill come for him, but Robert has vowed not to fight. He'll surrender because he believes these new humans will allow him to live, and living has become a habit he won't give up easily. But he quickly realizes that's not the case; they fear and hate him for killing their loved ones. He's the abnormal one now, worse than the disease they've come to live with, a terror that must be destroyed. They shoot him and drag him out into the night, into a world that is theirs, no longer his. He's Robert Neville, the last of the old race, a legend.