

I Am Legend (2007)

Rated PG-13 Our ratings: V-6; L-2; S/N-1. Running time: 1 hour 40 min.

*The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—
on them light has shined.
Isaiah 9:2*

*In the same way, let your light shine before others...
Matthew 5:16a*

*No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for
one's friends.
John 15:13*

Speaking of unintended consequences! A woman scientist dangerous moment.
(the uncredited Emma Thompson)
declares during a TV interview^{2007 Warner brothers}
that cancer has been cured. She
describes the new virus, "like
measles," she and her team have
created that will cure humanity
of its dreaded scourge. Then the
story jumps ahead three years.
The streets of Manhattan are
deserted, weeds growing up
through cracks in the pavement
and sidewalk, cars parked
haphazardly, in the middle of
streets, as well as at curbside.
A group of kangaroos hop in and
out around the abandoned cars
while a solitary man,

accompanied by his dog, vainly tries to draw a bead with his rifle on one of the animals. Catching a glimpse of a large deer, he begins stalking it as it wanders about nibbling on the grass. Just when it appears that he will be able to shoot, a lioness pounces on the hapless creature. A lion also appears, and Robert backs off. There will be no meat tonight.

The frustrated hunter we learn through a series of flashbacks is Robert Neville (Will Smith) a military scientist (virologist) who last saw his wife and young daughter being evacuated at the last minute from Manhattan aboard a helicopter that might, or might not, have carried them away to safety. The "cure" for cancer has turned out to be catastrophic, transforming people via the air-borne virus into raving cannibals unable to tolerate light. For some reason Robert is immune to the virus, so he has stayed behind in his house fronting on Washington Square to work in its basement laboratory to discover a cure, using his own blood as the basis for a serum. We are puzzled at first why he enters a building where the ravenous cannibals hide, especially when he lures one out into the light and captures her in a net. Then we see that she is the subject of an experiment that began on a series of animals. All of the rodents have turned into snarling, savage creatures, except for one. It is hope of replicating that cure in an infected human that he has brought the once human woman to his lab. Robert straps her to a gurney and tries the serum he has developed on her. It does not work.

Each day Robert broadcasts on all AM bands a plea to anyone who might be listening to meet him at a certain pier. Each day passes with no one showing up. Robert shows the strain of his

isolation, barely hanging on to his sanity. He watches videotapes of the newscasts made during the time of the virus plague, as well as movies. He has watched Shrek so often that he repeats the dialogue of the scene in which Donkey is trying to befriend the solitude-preferring ogre. He does snap when something terrible happens to his faithful dog Sam. He takes to his sports car and drives into the night on a mission to kill as many of the zombie-like creatures as he can before they overwhelm him. It is then that his broadcasts bear fruit, Anna (Braga) and the young son Ethan (Tahan) showing up in the nick of time to rescue and transport the injured man back to his town house. Anna the next day tells him that she and Ethan are on their way to New Hampshire where there is a colony of humans that has survived the plague.

Director Francis Lawrence, working with a script by Mark Protosevich and Akiva Goldsman, has given us a third version of Richard Matheson's classic 1954 novel. In 1964 *The Last Man on Earth* starred Vincent Price, and 1971's *The Omega Man* starred Charlton Heston as the sole survivor. Aided by terrific special effects that depict a deserted New York City with all of its bridges blown up in a futile attempt to isolate the city's infected population, I would say that Will Smith is the main justification for still another remake. Like Tom Hanks in *Cast Away*, Will Smith is able to hold our attention by himself. His face in the scene in which he must part company with Sam expresses as much anguish and regret as we are ever likely to see in a film. Although some questions about the source of the electricity and how Anna and Ethan got on and off the island will nag us after the screen goes dark, these do not spoil the effect of the film, one that despite the fate of its hero, inspires and encourages us in regard to humanity. How can it not when its last words are an invitation? "Light up the darkness."

For Reflection/Discussion

You will find some spoilers in the following, especially in the last question.

1) If you have seen either of the earlier versions of Richard Matheson's novel, how does this one compare? How does the introduction of Anna as a Christian add to it? Or the change of the infected humans from vampires to zombies?

2) What do you think of Will's rejoinder to Anna, "God didn't do this (the plague). We did" ? How does our tendency to blame God for calamities (such as "acts of God" in insurance policies) get in the way of a view of a loving God? How do you think that Anna's faith that God has sent her on a mission will keep her moving on toward her goal?

3) How is this film with its "science" like other cautionary stories and films such as Frankenstein, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Jurassic Park, or The Fly? What do these have in common with the Tower of Babel story?

4) Why do you think that the filmmakers chose the particular scene that they did from Shrek? How was Shrek at first much like Robert, the big difference being that the ogre chose his condition? How do both films show our need for companionship? (For a pertinent Scripture passage see Genesis 2:18)

5) What does the conversation about Bob Marley's add to the film? What does this reveal about Robert's character? Note that the singer's "Redemption Song" is used on the soundtrack. The lyrics are well worth checking out on the internet: just Google "Bob Marley songs," and you will find several sources for the lyrics. How does the chorus reinforce the last words you hear in the movie "Won't you help to sing, these songs of freedom Cause all I ever had, redemption songs All I ever had, redemption songs These songs of freedom, songs of freedom." 6) How do you think "the legend" of Robert Neville will grow,

becoming embellished over the years? How is his end, especially his last words “I can help. I can fix this. Let me save you. I can save you; I can save everybody” similar to what happened on Golgotha long ago? How might you respond to the invitation that concludes the film?