

I Am Legend Study Guide

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Contents

I Am Legend Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	4
Part I, Chapter 1.....	6
Part I, Chapter 2.....	8
Part I, Chapter 3.....	10
Part I, Chapter 4.....	12
Part I, Chapter 5.....	14
Part I, Chapter 6.....	15
Part II, Chapter 7.....	16
Part II, Chapter 8.....	18
Part II, Chapter 9.....	20
Part II, Chapter 10.....	21
Part II, Chapter 11.....	23
Part II, Chapter 12.....	25
Part II, Chapter 13.....	27
Part II, Chapter 14.....	28
Part III, Chapter 15.....	30
Part III, Chapter 16.....	31
Part III, Chapter 17.....	32
Part III, Chapter 18.....	34
Part III, Chapter 19.....	35
Part IV, Chapter 20.....	36
Part IV, Chapter 21.....	37
Characters.....	39



Objects/Places..... 43

Themes..... 46

Style..... 48

Quotes..... 50

Topics for Discussion..... 52



Plot Summary

In this novel, the protagonist, Robert Neville, is seemingly the only survivor of a plague that has converted the rest of humanity to vampires. Robert's mission is to destroy "the others" before they can infect him.

At the beginning of the novel, we learn of Robert's daily struggles to repel the vampires and repair the damage they do, to kill his attackers and dispose of their bodies, and to endure their nocturnal taunts, howling and rock throwing. He has boarded his house and hooked up a generator, and escapes through music, art, gallows humor, and occasional binge drinking. He has lost his wife and daughter to the dread disease that has converted the population to vampires, and his former friend and co-worker, Ben Cortman, taunts him daily.

We learn that he had fought in a war in Panama, a war which the U.S. won, but which brought in its wake dust storms, swarms of insects, and a plague which converted the entire population to vampires. Robert is immune to the disease as a result of the bite of a vampire bat which sickened him but did not kill him. One day, after a particularly vicious assault by swarms of vampires, Robert resolves to figure out how to defeat them, "or ditch the whole mess, life included." After his early experiments yield confusing results, Robert theorizes that some of the disease's effects are psychological, induced by a sort of mass hysteria gleaned from vampire legends. Robert learns how to use the microscope and is able to isolate the bacteria that causes the disease. The discovery is significant as it confirms that the belief in vampires is not based on superstition, but is a scientific fact.

One day, Robert befriends a stray dog who seems to have escaped the infection, and after finally gaining his trust and affection, the dog is infected by the vampires and dies. Two years later, Robert has once again settled into a pattern of day-to-day survival. He has killed off most of the vampires, but the survivors continue to harass him at night. Then he meets Ruth, a pretty young woman who has lost two children to the disease and her husband to a vampire killer. Robert is not sure he can trust her as she is repulsed by garlic, but says it is because she is weak from hunger and shock. She agrees to let Robert test her blood the next morning. Robert shares with her all he has learned about vampires, and they make love. Ruth allows Robert to draw her blood, but begs him not to look at it under the microscope. When he does, he sees that the germ has mutated. Ruth pounds his head with a mallet until he is unconscious and leaves him a note confessing that the mutant vampires have figured out a way to survive and sent her to spy on him and that it was Robert who killed her husband. She professes to love him, and urges him to flee while he still can.

Seven months later, Robert witnesses trained killers from the new vampire society brutally execute six vampires and then riddle Ben Cortman with bullets as he tries to crawl to safety. Next, they smash into Robert's house. He was prepared to surrender peacefully, but now he believes they are out to kill him, so he shoots them. Robert is seriously wounded in the crossfire, and is transported to a jail hospital. Ruth visits him



and announces that the new society is taking back the world with violence. She says that the people hate and fear him for killing so many of them and want him dead. She tells him that he can't fight them, there are too many of them, and gives him a packet of pills to make the end easier. Robert Neville, the last of his kind, prepares to pass into the realm of legend, thus completing the cycle.



Part I, Chapter 1

Part I, Chapter 1 Summary

In this novel, the protagonist, Robert Neville, is seemingly the only survivor of a plague that has converted the rest of humanity to vampires. Robert's mission is to destroy "the others" before they can infect him.

Part I opens in January 1976. It is a cloudy afternoon, and Robert Neville is inspecting his house for damage. He decides that it is not worth the effort to replace the mirror he has nailed to the door and that he would use garlic instead. He enters his bedroom, which has been converted into a combination bedroom and workroom. After nailing up the loosened plank, Robert walks down his street, Cimarron Street, and views the charred remains of houses on either side of his that he has burned down to "prevent them from jumping on his roof" from adjacent houses.

The protagonist, Robert Neville, is thirty-six years old, tall, blond-haired and blue-eyed. He lives alone, and part of his daily routine consists of chopping cloves of garlic and forming them into wreaths to ward off the vampires. Every few days he nails the wreaths over the windows, which he has boarded to prevent them from hurling rocks through them. He also carves quantities of wooden stakes, which need to be replaced daily. For recreation, he drinks, smokes, cooks meals that he eats alone, listens to classical music on his record player, and reads science books. He has fought in the war of Panama, where he had a tattoo of a cross engraved on his chest. The cross, he feels, may have saved his life.

Robert has fitted his house with an electric generator, installed a deadbolt and peephole for the front door, and painted a mural of an oceanside cliff on his living room wall. As he eats, one of the enemy, a man named Ben Cortman, taunts him to come out. Sometimes the women try to seduce him with vile poses. To quell the desire they arouse in him, he turns up his music and tries to concentrate on his physiology text. Enraged, he smashes a recording of a symphony called "the Year of the Plague" and goes to sleep with his ears plugged to keep out the sounds of the vampires' "bumpings" and "scraping, the howlings and snarlings and cries in the night." He briefly toys with the idea of soundproofing the house. Before retiring for the night, he sweeps a mound of sawdust from his bed. Fitfully, he sleeps and dreams about a woman named Virginia while "his fingers gripped the sheets like frenzied talons."

Part I, Chapter 1 Analysis

In the opening chapter, we are introduced to Robert and his daily routine of warding off vampires and contending with repairs to his house and nocturnal harassment by vampires. He tries to escape from loneliness by reading, listening to classical music, and viewing a painted mural. We see that the females' lewd behavior arouses a desire



in him that he tries to ignore, and that there is a woman, perhaps in his past, named Virginia. The atmosphere is bleak and depressing; the weather is cloudy, the street is deserted, and the houses on either side of Robert's have been reduced to charred remains. The reference to the generator suggests that the town is without power. His existence seems bleak as well.

We see that Robert has fought in a war in Panama, and that a tattoo of a cross that he obtained may have saved his life. This is important, as we will learn more about the war later. The reference to the cross suggests some connection to vampires. We also see that Robert has a tendency to react to frustrating situations with rage. We are introduced to two characters by name: Ben Cortman, one of the vampires, and Virginia, whose relation to Robert is unknown.



Part I, Chapter 2

Part I, Chapter 2 Summary

The next morning, Robert arises at 5:30 a.m., and observes through the peephole door the creatures moving away, "weaker ... than when they had come, [u]nless they had attacked one of their own," which often happened. Next, he prepares a list of tasks to do that day (lathe at Sears, water, check generator, doweling (?), and usual). As he leaves in his station wagon to run these errands, he observes two female corpses—one sprawled across the sidewalk, and the other concealed in the shrubbery. He retrieves the bloodless bodies, their skin "the color of fish out of water," and hurls them into a canvas tarpaulin.

After lunch, he packs a bag of stakes and heads out in his car. Along the way, we see that the city is utterly deserted. He passes a fiery field that he observes through a gas mask. The field had been "excavated into one gigantic pit" six months earlier and we learn that "[s]omewhere down there is Kathy." He hurls the two bodies he had picked up that morning into the pit. Next, Robert stops at a store where he "shops" for bottled water, surrounded by the smell of rotting food, but no one is around to take his money. He just helps himself. After shopping, he goes upstairs to look for the owners so he can kill them with his stakes. He kills one woman in a red housecoat and another one who reminds him of Kathy.

As he drives away, Robert wonders why only the wooden stakes seem to work and why he always seems to hit the heart. He remembers his father, Fritz, who had "died denying the vampire violently to the last." Next, he drives to Sears for the lathe. There he finds five vampires hiding in the store's basement, including one who is hiding in a display freezer, a sort of "enamel coffin." Robert later reflects on "what a humorless world it was when he could find humor in such a thing."

Robert thinks over various legends associated with vampires - their indoor confinement by day, their death by stakes, their dread of garlic, crosses, and mirrors. He wonders why they are repulsed by garlic and rejects the notion that they cannot see themselves in mirrors. He also rejects the belief that vampires can transform themselves into bats or wolves, although he is aware that there are vampire dogs. He then tells himself that he is not ready yet for an unspecified task. Instead, he collects 47 stakes and uses up all of them "going from house to house."

Part I, Chapter 2 Analysis

In this chapter, we see that Robert provides structure for himself by giving himself a list of chores. He apparently does not work and does not need to work, since he is free to help himself to whatever he sees in the stores. We also learn about two other people in Robert's past: a woman named Kathy, who ended up in a fiery pit, and his father, Fritz,



who denied the existence of vampires. We also learn that vampires sleep during the day and sometimes kill their own kind; this is apparently what happened to the two female vampires whom Robert hauls away in the tarp and tosses into the pit.

Robert's thoughts are usually focused on getting rid of the vampires, and his method of choice appears to be wooden stakes. Based on his experiences, Robert has evaluated legendary beliefs about vampires, and has rejected at least two of them—that vampires can turn into other creatures, although there is such a thing as a vampire wolf; and that vampires cannot see themselves in a mirror. Thus, Robert's questioning nature and willingness to set aside established beliefs when confronted with contrary evidence is established. This quality will help him in his ongoing battle with the vampires. The reference to vampire dogs establishes the possibility that the dog Robert later meets could be a vampire.



Part I, Chapter 3

Part I, Chapter 3 Summary

It is evening, and Robert is sitting in his house, reading Bram Stoker's "Dracula" and quickly getting drunk. He has not completed his day's chores, and he is angry and frustrated. He smashes his glass in frustration, and cuts his hand on the broken glass. He is struck with a quotation from the book: "The strength of the vampire is that no one will believe in him." Robert reflects that until recently vampires have been regarded with skepticism, but now they are a scientific fact. He wonders if he is the only normal human being left, and knows his chances of meeting a fellow survivor are slim.

Robert then reflects that vampires, until recently the minority, were much maligned, but their conduct is no worse than that of venal politicians, manufacturers of guns and bombs, unscrupulous distillers who sell diluted grain, or publishers who sell literature promoting violence. He concludes, almost sympathetically, that it is no wonder vampires "seek out a predatory nocturnal existence," but reminds himself he would never let his sister marry one. Through his drunken musings, he can hear the vampires taunting him to come outside, and he visualizes the women tempting him by flaunting their naked flesh to him. The smell of garlic is everywhere. Aroused, he fends off the urge to succumb by massaging his flesh against the doorjamb and then pounding his fist into the door. As he stumbles into bed, he mutters to himself "How long? How long?"

Part I, Chapter 3 Analysis

In Chapter 3, many of the characteristics we saw in Robert are again in evidence. He likes to drink; here he is drinking himself into oblivion. When he feels frustrated, he can fly into a violent rage. Here, he smashes the glass that has held his drink. The female vampires continue their lewd behavior, which is having an effect on Robert. He is aroused but remains in the house and relieves himself rather than succumb to his desires. We also learn that he is the only known normal human being on earth.

Two events are especially significant: Robert's reading "Dracula," and cutting his hand on the broken glass. Van Helsing is a character in Bram Stoker's classic novel, "Dracula," which is the source of much of our present knowledge of vampires. Van Helsing is a relentless vampire hunter, who fights Dracula with garlic, the cross, and the stake. This character will inspire Robert in his quest to fight vampires. Robert's musings about the nature of vampires is also interesting. He compares the harm that vampires do to many evils of human society—bribery, peddling literature promoting violence, and selling guns and bombs. He implies that men may be more deserving of condemnation, because vampires can't help their actions. He also notes that vampires were once in the minority, but now it is Robert vs. them. His observation that vampires, once a myth, are now a scientific fact, lends a note of credibility to the scene.



This chapter introduces several themes—one, the blood from the cut on Robert's hand. This is a recurring motif, and the focus of much of his later scientific investigation. Another theme is the emergence of Robert as the vampire hunter. Although some of his time seems to be spent in various forms of escape—heavy drinking, blocking out the sounds, barricading himself inside his house—Robert matter-of-factly disposes of the bodies and actively seeks more to kill during the day. Another theme is prejudice. Although Robert feels the stirrings of sympathy toward the vampires, he reminds himself that he would never let his sister marry one.



Part I, Chapter 4

Part I, Chapter 4 Summary

Robert wakes up the next morning at ten o'clock. He has not set his alarm clock, and he is hung over with a throbbing headache. He opens his door to discover the body of a dead woman on his front lawn. He hears the remains of the mirror "fall out and shatter on his front porch." The "sky is gray and dead." Two cups of coffee and a drink do not settle his stomach. He alternately feels beaten and then restless, as if he were about to explode. On an impulse, he feels the need to escape his hated surroundings and drives aimlessly away in his station wagon, rapidly accelerating to 89 miles per hour. Without having planned it, he arrives at the overgrown cemetery where Virginia is buried. He regrets that he had followed regulations and disposed of Kathy in the burning pit instead of in the cemetery near her mother. As he draws near the crypt where Virginia is buried, he notices the iron door ajar and sees a vampire sleeping in a corner. Robert flings the body violently to a grassy area outside the crypt. After discarding the flowers from his last visit a month ago, Robert lays his forehead against his wife's coffin and silently wishes he could die peacefully and join her.

On his way out, Robert nearly trips over the comatose body of the man he had moved earlier and is startled to find that he now looks and smells like someone who has been dead for years. He realizes with a shock that the sunlight has killed the vampire. He wonders if the sun's rays have somehow affected the vampire's blood, and if the other things that vampires fear (garlic, stakes, the cross, mirrors) also affect their blood. He resolves to do some research on the subject.

To test his theory, Robert snatches the body of a sleeping woman from a nearby house, flings her to the sidewalk, and watches her writhe and die. He reminds himself that she was of his race until afflicted. He smiles as he realizes that he has found a more effective method of killing the vampires than stakes. However, he cannot be sure she is dead until sunset, some three hours away. Rather than return to the spot later, he drags her body into the station wagon and looks again at his watch, which he forgot to wind. It had stopped at three o'clock.

Part I, Chapter 4 Analysis

In this chapter, we see the difficulty Robert has in sticking to a schedule, especially in his hung over state. Robert abandons his plans for the day and heads instead to the spot where Virginia is buried. We learn that Virginia is his late wife, and that he has been visiting her crypt regularly and bringing her flowers. We also learn that Kathy is his daughter, who must have died first, as her body was disposed of in the fiery pit, as required by the health authorities. Robert was so upset at the thought of his daughter being incinerated, that he buried his wife in a shallow grave in a nearby lot. Robert wishes he could join her.



Robert's accidental discovery that sunlight could kill a vampire is a turning point in the story. He has found an easier way to kill vampires than driving a stake into their heart. Now his life will be a little easier. The discovery inspires Robert to do some more research. He wonders if the sunlight has affected the vampire's blood.

At first, the watch stopping seems to be an effect of the vampire's death, but it is more likely that in his hung over condition, Robert forgot to wind his watch. At the time the book was written (1954), watches did not have batteries and had to be wound manually.



Part I, Chapter 5

Part I, Chapter 5 Summary

Robert panics as he realizes that he has been away from the house longer than he thinks, and is afraid the vampires will destroy his generator or his possessions in the garage (which he left open). Robert's worst fears are realized. As he speeds home at dusk, he is attacked by swarms of vampires, chasing him, shouting at him, and jumping onto his car. Ben Cortman claws him in the face, drawing blood. He runs them over, killing three of them, and to escape them, parks his car around the block. As he walks to his house, Ben Cortman lunges at him and attempts to bite his throat. Robert slams him into the driveway, and then returns to the car for his keys. The vampires continue to assault him as he fumbles for the house key. Finally, he runs into the house, slams the door on an arm, opens the door, releases the arm, and slams it shut.

As Robert lies on the floor in darkness, vampires howl and throw bricks and rocks at the house. Soon he gets up to pour himself some whiskey, and then investigates the sound of a crash. Through the peephole, he sees the vampires have destroyed his car with bricks and rocks and turned it on its side. Next, he realizes the vampires have destroyed his generator, cutting off all the power to his house. Enraged, he retrieves two pistols from a dresser drawer and fires into the crowd from the porch until all his ammunition is used up. As vampires rise up from the shots and attack him, he fends them off with his fists. He heads back to the house, slamming the door and locking it. Once inside, he leans against the wall, tearing the plaster, sobbing and calling out to his dead wife.

Part I, Chapter 5 Analysis

It is unclear how long Robert's watch has been stopped, but it cannot have been for long, because it is still daylight when Robert leaves the store. That is enough time, however, for the vampires to inflict great damage to his house and vehicle. For the second time in the novel, Robert bleeds, this time due to being scratched by a vampire. The scratch seems to have no effect on Robert. Mysteriously, the gunshots do not seem to affect the vampires either, as several have survived the shooting. The attack seems to be the worst yet, ironically brought on by a slight delay in Robert's homecoming, and has reduced Robert to a state of despair.



Part I, Chapter 6

Part I, Chapter 6 Summary

It is two months later, March 1976, and the house has been made livable again. Robert has repaired the generator and soundproofed the house. He has replaced his car with a similar model by driving to a dealership in a borrowed car from the neighborhood. He is relieved he has saved his supply of frozen food because all electricity in the city has been destroyed. He has cleaned up the spilled gasoline and debris from the garage. Inside the house, he has repaired the cracked plaster and put up another wall mural, this one a scene of a Canadian woods, "heavy with the silence of manless nature." During these labors, his drinking has decreased to a nightcap or two in the evenings. He is ready to begin his investigation into the nature of vampires.

He begins by recalling the past. There has been a war, which the United States won, but the bombings have caused recurring dust storms and swarms of mosquitoes, flies, and sand fleas. Robert had erected a tent around Kathy's bed to shelter her from the dust, and he talked about adding mosquito netting. Much of the country was afflicted with a mysterious illness that left its victims pale, weak, and unable to eat or sleep. Robert recalls a time when Virginia first became ill. After a dust storm that coated the house with a thick layer of dust and disturbed their sleep, Virginia was too weak to fix breakfast and had no appetite, so she sat at the table resting while her husband ate. Robert remarked that the insects had become immune to bug spray and mentions a strain of giant grasshoppers found in Colorado, evidence that the insects seemed to be mutating. They briefly discussed sending Kathy to Virginia's mother in the east, or keeping Kathy home from school, but decided against it, as long as the health authorities allowed the schools to remain open. Outside a horn honked. It was his neighbor, Ben Cortman, arriving to drive him to work at the plant.

Part I, Chapter 6 Analysis

Robert seems to have recovered from the massive assault with new resolve. He has repaired the damage done by the vampires and added some improvements: soundproofing, and another mural. The mural provides an escape from Robert's forced confinement, but it reinforces Robert's isolation with its "manless" silence.

Robert's flashback provides us a glimpse of his past, when Virginia, Kathy and Ben were still alive. We see Virginia in the early stages of the disease that killed her, and we learn that Ben is a neighbor and co-worker. We also learn that a destructive war has been waged, and that the bombings have brought in their wake dust storms and hordes of insects. The insects seem to have mutated, as they have developed an immunity to insect spray and giant grasshoppers have been reported in Colorado, both facts which Robert mentions. This is a foreshadowing of the mutation which later takes place in the vampires' bloodstreams.



Part II, Chapter 7

Part II, Chapter 7 Summary

Not satisfied that the epidemic that created the vampires was caused by viruses or mosquitoes, Robert continues his investigation of vampires by reading about garlic. He wants to find out what substance in garlic drives vampires away, and whether another substance would work as well. He learns that garlic is in a genus that includes leeks, onions, shallots and chives, and that its characteristic odor and flavor is due to substances called allyl sulphide and allyl isocythionate. He is discouraged to learn that allyl sulphide is prepared by heating mustard oil and potassium sulphide to 100 degrees: where is he going to find these substances and the equipment to heat them? Midway through pouring himself a drink, he determines that he will not continue to muddle through life, struggling to survive; he will either figure out how to defeat the vampires, or "ditch[] the whole mess, life included."

So resolved, Robert manufactures allyl sulphide and injects some into a sleeping female vampire, but nothing happens. He returns home to hang a garland of onions outside his home, to see if that would have any effect. Next, he holds out a cross to a sleeping woman to find out why the cross drives vampires away. In a pang of conscience, Robert berates himself for confining his experiments to women. He answers himself that he simply chose the first subject he could find. The question still bothers him, though, and he defends his behavior by observing that "[m]orality, after all, had fallen with society" and that he "was his own ethic." He binds the woman to a chair and as he putters around the garage, he thinks of her torn black dress and exposed flesh.

At 6:30 that evening the vampire's eyes jerk open, but her body twists away as she spies the cross dangling from the ceiling. Robert asks her several times why she is afraid of the cross, but she only whines and snarls in return, straining to free herself from the chair. Finally, after she bites him in the shoulder, drawing blood, Robert slaps her on the cheek and flings her out the door. He rubs his wound with alcohol, "enjoying fiercely the burning pain in his flesh."

Part II, Chapter 7 Analysis

In this chapter, Robert is determined to rise above the day-to-day struggle for survival, and the answer seems to lie in scientific investigation. He observes that the germ theory of vampires is inadequate to explain the effects of garlic, crosses and stakes on vampires, and he continues to seek a scientific explanation for this, but he cannot find any answers. He again expresses a muted death wish, but instead of wishing he could join his dead wife, Robert expresses the desire to die only if he does not succeed in his battle to overcome the vampires with knowledge.



This is the second time a vampire has drawn blood from Robert, and the third time he has bled. Robert also expresses guilt from seeming to be drawn to vampire women, who continue to tempt him with torn clothing and exposed flesh. Robert then observes that in his lone state, there is no morality; he is free to follow his own desires. The perverse pleasure he takes in his pain may be seen as a form of guilt in his forbidden feelings of lust, or perhaps a heightened sense of being alive brought about by his decision to fight the vampires, in contrast to past attempts to numb his feelings.



Part II, Chapter 8

Part II, Chapter 8 Summary

Robert continues his investigation by wondering how many vampires actually sleep in soil, signifying a return from the dead. He cannot answer that question, nor can he answer whether the fear of the cross is common to all vampires and whether Mohammedan vampires are similarly affected. His inability to gain insight into the nature of vampires causes him to laugh like a "sick hound." He wonders why he goes on living and doesn't just end it all; he is unable to think of "any real reason" and concludes he is "probably too dumb to end it all."

Robert continues his investigation by seeing whether vampires are affected by water. He sets a hose in a water trough and begins soaking the lawn. He goes back inside to shower and remove the bandage from his hand. It has healed nicely and Robert realizes he is somehow immune from infection. As Ben Cortman taunts him to come out, Robert recalls the times when they had been friends and co-workers, talking about sports, politics, and how their families were doing when the epidemic struck. He reflects that "the return of corpses has become trivial in import" and that "one accepts the incredible if only one sees it enough."

Robert observes three vampires on the lawn warily circling one another in silence as they stalk their prey (him). Later he watches Ben jump over the water trough and back. Thereupon, Robert retrieves his pistol from the bedroom and shoots Ben in the left shoulder. A second bullet misses him, and the third bullet strikes him in the chest. A woman blocks Robert's view of Cortman and begins pulling up her dress. Robert slams the door over the peephole, refusing to be drawn in. It now occurs to him that, with his newly grown mustache, Ben reminds him of Oliver Hardy, the roly-poly comedian who is constantly getting buffeted around. He imagines Ben always getting "ripped by bullets, punctured by knives, flattened by cars, smashed under collapsing chimneys and boats" and "returning, patient and bruised." This thought fills him with uncontrollable laughter that causes him to drop his glass and spill his drink, and later turns to cries.

Later, as Robert pounds stakes into the vampires until they bleed to death, he recalls one woman who did not bleed, but rather dissolved into a pile of salt and pepper-like ashes. The sight had shocked and sickened him, and afterwards he sat in his car drinking for an hour. He recalled a co-worker telling him of corpses at the mortuary who remained unchanged while preserved in drawers, but who decomposed rapidly into "a row of salt and pepper" when the drawer was opened, exposing the corpse to air. He concluded that the woman had been dead for many years when he stabbed her. For days afterwards, he imagined opening the crypt where Virginia lay, and wondered what he would find.



Part II, Chapter 8 Analysis

Once again, Robert thinks about death, this time acknowledging a sort of passive and unthinking refusal to take steps to end it all. He has become inured to the daily sight of returning corpses. Robert's curiosity into the puzzling questions of vampires seems to keep him going. He wonders whether non-Christians fear the cross, and why some vampires bleed to death, while others dissolve into ashes. He thinks the answer may have something to do with exposure to air, and he wonders what would happen if he opened Virginia's crypt. He also confronts Ben, shooting him in the shoulder and chest.

The strain that he is under causes Robert to react by laughing at his own stupidity, and later at the sight of Ben reeling from his gunshot wounds, like a "roly-poly Oliver Hardy," dodging bullets and taking pratfalls. It is Robert's way of escaping from the pain of battling an old friend.



Part II, Chapter 9

Part II, Chapter 9 Summary

Robert recalls the day Virginia had died. She sat motionless in bed, her skin pale white, her heart stopped. At first he was paralyzed, unable to feel despair, but soon his body began trembling violently, a state that lasted for an hour. As he drank himself into a stupor, he kept calling out her name. He recalled the moment when the men in canvas and masks came to take Kathy away to bury her in the fiery pit. He had screamed and run after them, and had to be dragged away. He resolved not to let Virginia be buried the same way Kathy was, even if it meant being put to death for disobeying the authorities.

Later, Robert had stumbled over to Ben's house to borrow his car. The doorbell chimes played "How Dry I Am" repeatedly. Getting no answer, he burst in and headed upstairs where Ben and his wife Freda were lying on the beds in their "daytime comas." Freda had a wound on her neck with dried blood that had crusted over. As he drove Ben's car to his place, he thought it didn't matter what did; "Life would be equally purposeless no matter what his decision was." The few remaining funeral parlors were closed down; all bodies were required by law to be incinerated to prevent the spread of bacteria that caused the plague. Robert furtively wrapped Virginia's body in a blanket sewn shut and buried her in a nearby deserted lot. A neighbor watched him load the body into the car and begged him to let him take his mother. Robert replied that he wasn't going there, and the man retorted, "But it's the law!" Two days after Robert buried Virginia in a shallow grave, he kept thinking of the number two—two deaths, two graves, two days—and answered a knock at the door. He was greeted by his dead wife.

Part II, Chapter 9 Analysis

In this chapter, we learn the details of Kathy and Virginia's death, and the risks Robert took by defying the law and burying Virginia underground. We learn that Virginia came back from the dead and apparently was buried a second time. We are introduced to the mystique of the number two. Robert has lost two loved ones, and Virginia returned from the grave two days after being buried. The number two is significant throughout the book, as Robert eventually learns there are two kinds of vampires, and he briefly meets two companions who may or may not be vampires. Vampires' behavior is different during the day and at night.



Part II, Chapter 10

Part II, Chapter 10 Summary

Robert realizes that his isolated experiments are useless and that he needs to study the problem scientifically. He, the "last man on earth," visits the deserted Los Angeles public library to read all the medical books he can about blood. He dislikes the deathly still atmosphere of the library's interior and its stone gray exterior. He stares at the books that had "no power to save men from perishing." He imagines the chairs in the reading room were arranged precisely around the table by a maiden librarian who had never known the joys of loving and being loved in return, a "tragedy more terrible than becoming a vampire." He observes the clock that has stopped running at 4:37 and wonders whether it had stopped at a.m. or p.m. and on what date. He is annoyed at himself for being consumed by nostalgia for the past. He leaves the locked building the same way he came, through a broken window. As he returns to the car, he notices he is parked the wrong way on a one-way street. He calls out "Oh, policeman," several times, laughing hysterically, although he knows it isn't that funny.

After reading how the body defends itself from germs through the lymphatic system, Robert comes to accept the germ theory as plausible. The buildup of waste materials in the blood would explain the vampires' musty odor. The transmission of the disease through flies and mosquitoes would explain its rapid spread. The indoor coma would be the vampire's method of protection against germ-destroying sunlight. His momentary excitement turns to panic when he realizes that the germ theory cannot explain death by stakes, or the strange way the woman's body had decomposed, nor can it explain the vampire's horror of mirrors, running water, garlic, or the cross. He takes a drink and forces himself to calm down. The germ theory cannot explain everything, but it gives him hope that he may be able to find a way out of his Robinson Crusoe-like existence. As he plans to procure a microscope, he "feels an almost painful craving to plunge directly into investigation without any priming." He awakens at three a.m. amidst a dust storm and suddenly he sees the connection.

Part II, Chapter 10 Analysis

We learn that Robert lives in a suburb of Los Angeles. The library's gray exterior, its locked doors and broken windows, its dusty stacks and empty reading rooms reinforce his desolation, and he responds initially by dwelling on details of the past that cannot aid him in his quest. However, he quickly moves past his "nostalgia for the past" to gain insight into the present.

Robert's investigation has progressed from experiments, which are inadequate to explain the nature of vampires to serious reading to gain medical knowledge. His excitement about validating the germ theory changes to frustration when he realizes he still cannot explain why vampires react to garlic, stakes, and crosses. He plans to get a

microscope and will resist the temptation to delve into research without adequate background. Robert suddenly sees a connection between dust storms and vampires, but we will not find out what this connection is until later.

In this chapter, we observe the long, arduous route to scientific discoveries. Science may provide answers to some questions, but often leaves other questions unanswered or raises new ones, making the researcher doubt whether he or she is on the right track. Robert berates himself for dwelling on details of the past, yet this very attention to detail will aid him in his investigation. We also see that although Robert is devastated by the loss of his wife, he believes it would be worse never to have known love.

There is profound irony in Robert's observation that a whole library of books, the knowledge of generations, was inadequate to save mankind from perishing. By contrast, there is almost absurd humor in Robert's ability to park the wrong way on a one-way street and avoid detection by a cop. These musings reinforce the enormity of Robert's losses. He is without human companionship, without the support of the scientific community, without law and order. Nevertheless, his curiosity and access to knowledge has given him the urge to find answers.



Part II, Chapter 11

Part II, Chapter 11 Summary

Robert finds he cannot use the microscope he got; it is of inferior quality and he doesn't understand how to use it. He carefully looks for a better instrument and spends three days reading about microscopes and preparing to use them. He organizes his workshop so that he can use the paraphernalia efficiently, without allowing a particle buildup from the twice-weekly dust storms. He finds that he enjoys being orderly, a trait he attributes to his father's blood.

In a few days, after 37 attempts, Robert's patience is rewarded. He "turn[s] on the spotlight, adjust[s] the draw tube and mirror, rack[s] down and adjust[s] the diaphragm and condenser," and views a cylindrical-shaped germ within a drop of blood of a vampire woman. He observes the germ propel itself through the blood with "tiny threads that projected from the cell envelope." In that triumphant moment, "All the centuries of fearful superstition had been felled." At the same time, Robert is overcome with despair that his discovery is too late to save anyone. In hopes of finding a cure for those still living, Robert resolves to learn more about bacteria.

He learns that certain kinds of bacilli adapt when conditions become unfavorable for living by creating a spore with an impervious outer covering. These spores detach themselves from the bacillus and wait for more favorable conditions to reproduce. Robert felt this process—sporulation—explained the vampire's coma, but he could not explain how the vampire's body knew when blood was available.

Robert next hypothesizes that when not properly fed, the vampire germ creates bacteria-destroying cells called bacteriophages. He further hypothesizes that during these times spores harbored by vampire bodies would be freed and blown about by dust storms, lodge in the skin of victims, reproduce, and eventually enter their blood stream. Robert now thinks that the bubonic plague as well as the Black Plague was actually caused by vampires. The germ was the villain that "hid behind obscuring veils of legend and superstition."

Robert realizes that there must be two kinds of vampires. There are those who are alive, and those who are dead. This explains why not everyone he has fought has died. He wonders whether "the same germ that killed the living" would provide "energy for the dead." He also wonders why only a few vampires come to his house at night.

Robert is so excited by his findings that the dinner that he cooks for himself tastes good to him. He has not had a drink that day, nor wanted one. He realizes that alcohol serves as "emotional solace" to him. He spends the rest of the evening listening to classical music, sipping wine, and almost forgetting about vampires. Still, he cannot resist peeking at the slide once more. He thinks to himself, "You dirty little bastard."



Part II, Chapter 11 Analysis

Robert becomes increasingly methodical in his experiments, and his patience is rewarded. His discovery is significant; by isolating the vampire germ, Robert has conclusively moved vampires from the realm of superstition to science. Again, there is tragic irony in the fact that his discovery comes too late to save humankind. However, Robert may still be able to find some answers for the surviving vampires.

Robert has also made significant findings into the nature of vampires, and has figured out why there seem to be two kinds of vampires. There are actually two types - those who have died from the disease and come back from the dead, and those who have not yet succumbed to the disease. It is these victims whom Robert hopes to help. Robert now believes that past epidemics of the bubonic plague and the Black Death were actually caused by the vampire germ. For the first time, he does not feel the need to drink to go on. His discoveries have given him new hope of finding a cure.

There is a second reference to Robert's father here. This time, he feels a kinship with his father's penchant for orderliness. The use of the word "blood" to refer to his familial traits parallels his focus on blood as the center of his research.



Part II, Chapter 12

Part II, Chapter 12 Summary

Robert continues his experimentation by exposing the germ of a living vampire to sunlight and to allyl sulphide, the essence of garlic. Sunlight kills the germ, but the chemical does not. He next tests the effect of the chemical on the blood of a non-living vampire, with the same results. Frustrated that he cannot explain the effects of garlic and stakes on vampires, Robert kicks the microscope to the floor. He feels useless and angry with himself for falling apart every time he cannot find answers. Methodically, Robert lists characteristics of vampires and classifies them under one of two causes: Bacillus and Unknown. When he finishes his list, all but a few items are in the unknown column.

Robert embarks on a binge of drinking and destruction, guzzling one drink after another and smashing his empty glasses. He thinks of drinking himself to death, "like Clarence in his malmsey." He slashes the mural with a piece of broken glass and watches big drops of blood from his cut finger fall to the ground. Robert announces that the world has fallen to the supernatural, and he renames various products such as Harper's Bizarre and Smith Brothers Coffin Drops.

On the third day of his drinking binge, Robert steps outside and sees a scrawny dog on his front lawn. He calls out to him, but the dog runs away, scared. Robert runs after the dog for hours, but then gives up and leaves out hamburger and milk. He wonders how the dog could be exposed to the germ and yet survives both the nightly attacks and the sunlight. He worries that putting a ring of garlic around the food will keep the dog away. He also worries that if he lures the dog back with food, the vampires will kill it.

Robert shudders as he contemplates his prospects over the next forty years, with no companion and no prospect of improvement. Although he has not taken proper care of himself, he has not killed himself. It has been ten months since his wife has died, nine months after he last spoke with another human being, the last victim. He wonders about the potency of the life force which has prevented him from killing himself and driven him to modify his house and amass not only food but books, music and art, and concludes that there are no answers. He restores the mural but can't concentrate on his research because of thoughts of the dog. Uncharacteristically, he prays for the dog's safety. He needs the dog to continue living.

Part II, Chapter 12 Analysis

In this chapter, Robert plunges from the high hopes of his initial discovery to despair from not being able to find answers. He returns to binge drinking, "like Clarence in his malmsey," a reference to the Duke of Clarence, a character in Shakespeare's play *Richard III* who drowned in a vat of malmsey wine. Once again, he cuts his finger on a



piece of glass, drawing blood. He also uses verbal humor to help him get through a difficult stage. When he contemplates his long-term prospects, he cannot face life without some type of normal companionship. The dog is his only hope.

The quandary Robert finds himself in with the dog foreshadows the similar dilemma he will face with Ruth: is the dog a vampire or normal? If the dog is awake during the day, he must be normal, but how could he have survived exposure to the germ, and is he at risk of being attacked by the vampires?

Once again, Robert's instinct for survival overcomes his despair and he looks forward to living, hopefully with the dog as his companion. His drinking and cutting are not suicide attempts, but expressions of rage turned upon himself. His prayer for the dog is also a prayer for himself.



Part II, Chapter 13

Part II, Chapter 13 Summary

Robert is overjoyed the next morning to find the hamburger and milk bowls empty and the ring of garlic intact. He is more excited about the dog than he was with the discovery of germs. As Robert goes about his daily chores and stops at a store for dog food and supplies, he wonders why the vampires are clever enough to fight him, but have not thought to burn his house down. Later that day, Robert watches the dog through the peephole eat the food he has left out, but restrains himself from following him. He thinks the dog may have survived the plague by hiding. This gives Robert hope that there may be human survivors.

The dog continues to return for food but flees when Robert appears. Robert ponders that perhaps dogs would have a better chance of survival than humans with their smaller size and sharper senses and instincts. He daydreams about meeting another human survivor, for the sake of companionship more than for sex.

For the next several days, Robert gradually wins over the trust of the dog. Soon, the dog is returning regularly for meals while Robert talks to him. Then one day, he doesn't come. Robert searches frantically, worried that the vampires have killed him. The dog returns after three days, weak and trembling, and when Robert speaks to him, the dog snarls. Robert fears the dog has been infected.

The next day, the dog returns but doesn't eat and then leaves. Robert follows him to his hideaway and carries him back to the house. The dog barks and tries to leave, but Robert won't let him. He sets out a blanket for the dog, who trembles while Robert lies on the bed helplessly, wishing he could find a cure for the dog so that he won't die.

During the night, Robert strokes the dog and talks to him reassuringly. Eventually, the dog stops trembling and Robert tells him, "You're my dog now." The dog licks him in return. Within a week, however, the dog is dead.

Part II, Chapter 13 Analysis

This chapter is a particularly poignant story of Robert and the dog developing mutual trust and affection over several days, and then the dog being taken from him after a brief period of companionship. It mirrors the losses Robert has already suffered. Robert's hope for human companionship is lost as he realizes that the dog may have had better prospects for survival than a person, with his smaller size and keener instincts.



Part II, Chapter 14

Part II, Chapter 14 Summary

When the dog dies, Robert buries him and with it, his vain hopes. Robert realizes that "intense hope was not the answer and never had been." His bigger problem is monotony. Robert has now accepted his situation and has achieved a sense of peace. He regards his recent drinking binge as the low point from which he can only go up.

Robert recalls two phenomena that had erupted during the final days of the plague: yellow journalism and revival meetings. During this period, several pseudo-scientific articles spread fear and loathing of vampires throughout the world, and Robert finds something "grotesquely amusing" in the effort to sell newspapers to a dying population, but notes that honest newspapers had died the same way.

He also recalls being literally dragged to a revival meeting by a wild-eyed preacher who characterized the plague as a curse from God and urged the people to beg for salvation from being turned into hellish creatures who would be unable to see their face in a mirror and who would fear the holy cross. This occurred shortly after burying Virginia for the second time and he could not return to the house that held so many reminders of his beloved wife and child. Robert observes that those who attended the revival meetings not only succumbed to the illness, but also died with terror in their hearts.

Recalling these events while perusing a psychology text gives Robert a new perspective on the problem: what could not be explained biologically might have a psychological explanation rather than mere superstition. The sufferers may have fallen victim to "hysterical blindness," a sort of mass hypnosis, to which they were more vulnerable after the shock of returning from the dead as a vampire. This phenomenon might account for the vampires' reactions to soil, the cross, and mirrors, an explanation so obvious that only a blind man could miss it. Robert attributes the vampires' inability to cross a body of running water to the influence of traditional witches and vampire legends.

Robert now begins to look upon the living vampires who attack his house at night as not true vampires, but only "demented sufferers" whose minds were too feeble to think to burn his house. He recalls watching one of them leap off a lamp post while flapping his arms, probably believing mistakenly that he had turned into a giant bat. Vampires, then, were not invincible after all, but "highly perishable" beings that could exist only under strict conditions. He smiles as he realizes that with this breakthrough, he has the tools to defeat his enemies. He no longer needs alcohol to escape.

Part II, Chapter 14 Analysis

Robert takes the death of the dog calmly, as his brief companionship has seemed to give him the strength to resign himself to his circumstances and to continue his scientific



explorations. While recalling the mass hysteria that was rampant in the final months of the plague, it occurs to Robert that there may be a psychological explanation for some of the things that have been eluding him. The vampires in their weakened state of returning from the dead are susceptible to mass hypnotic suggestions. Robert has used inductive reasoning to arrive at his latest conclusion. The discovery gives him renewed hope of being able to defeat the vampires, because he realizes their limitations.

This is not the first time Robert has told himself he no longer needs alcohol, but each step he takes in his quest for knowledge seems to make him less dependent on alcohol for escape, because he now has improved prospects of changing his circumstances for the better.



Part III, Chapter 15

Part III, Chapter 15 Summary

It is a sunlit day in June 1978, and Robert is pursuing what has become his favorite pastime, looking for Ben Cortman. He no longer believes they are engaged in deadly combat. Rather, he looks upon their routine as a game that they both wish to keep up indefinitely. Robert has gained weight, and his hair and beard are long and shaggy.

For Robert, "Time had lost its multidimensional scope. There was only the present for Robert Neville; a present based on day-to-day survival marked by neither heights of joy nor depths of despair."

As he puffs reflectively on his pipe, he sees in the distance a woman running across the field toward him. As she gets nearer, he sees that she has red hair and tanned skin, and is wearing a torn white dress. She appears to be in her 20s. He calls out to her, and she turns and runs away. He chases after her and eventually overtakes her, promising that he will not hurt her. She claws, slaps, kicks him and tries to run away. Finally, she collapses in tears, and he tries to assure her that she has nothing to fear. He asks her to tell him his name, and she repeats it twice ("Ruth").

Part III, Chapter 15 Analysis

Two years have passed since the death of the dog. Robert has returned to his day-to-day survival mode, but has managed to maintain his peaceful mental state. For the first time, the day is described as sunlit, reflecting Robert's improved frame of mind. He and Ben Cortman have continued to seek each other out, but Robert regards their maneuvers as a game that neither wants to end. Meeting Ruth has interrupted Robert's somewhat comfortable routine. Robert's repetition of her name serves to underscore his desperate need for human companionship with a normal female.



Part III, Chapter 16

Part III, Chapter 16 Summary

After cajoling and finally dragging her off with him, Robert has brought Ruth back to the house. She seems terrified of him; she has cried and repeatedly begged him not to kill her. Now she is sleeping in his room and Ben wonders if she is infected; the dog, he recalls, had been in the sunlight even after he became infected, and some vampires looked normal but weren't. He regrets that their relationship has begun on a note of distrust, but he doesn't think he has a choice.

As Ruth sleeps, Robert notes she is wearing a tiny gold cross. Later, he learns she is from Inglewood, her husband has died a week ago, and she has been wandering ever since. Robert has learned that vampires are allergic to the odor of garlic; injecting the oil into their veins has no effect on them. To test her, he shoves a plate of mashed garlic cloves under her nostrils; the fumes make her gag and retch. At first he is convinced she is a vampire, but then concedes that after a week of not eating, the garlic might very well have made her sick.

Robert tells Ruth he thinks she might be infected because of her reaction to the garlic. She shows him the cross and reminds him that she is not in a coma. Robert says that he would like to believe her. She recounts her horrifying experience of losing two children to the plague and watching her husband being killed. Explaining that she has always had a weak stomach, she clutches her stomach in a spasm of pain before collapsing into tears. Robert has a hard time feeling compassion for her. He feels "spent" and "hollow."

When Robert asks Ruth if he may test her blood, she angrily tries to leave. He protests that the vampires outside will try to kill her. She replies that she doesn't care, that he forced her there, and she just wants to be left alone. He gives her a drink of whiskey and tells her that even if she is infected, he doesn't want her to die. She replies that she doesn't care if she dies.

Part III, Chapter 16 Analysis

In this chapter, Robert is called upon to weigh conflicting evidence to determine whether he can trust Ruth. His need for companionship has led him to drag her to his house against her will, yet his suspicion prevents him from having feelings for her. His suspicion is not groundless as she has reacted strongly to the garlic, but his inability to have feelings for her is probably a defense mechanism he has developed after losing the dog. The possibility that Ruth is infected also leads Robert to continue his search for a cure.



Part III, Chapter 17

Part III, Chapter 17 Summary

It is now 5:00 in the evening, and Robert and Ruth are discussing vampires over supper, and later sip port and listen to Schubert's Fourth Symphony. It is apparent that their numbers are diminishing. When Robert hesitates to tell Ruth more about the vampires, she accuses him of not trusting her. Ruth agrees to have her blood tested, and Robert promises Ruth that if the test reveals she is infected, he will do everything he can to cure her, although secretly he doubts if he can. She asks him to postpone the test until the next morning, because she still feels a little ill. Robert chides himself for distrusting Ruth after she had agreed to a blood test and notes that, like his father, he won't believe anything unless he sees it under a microscope ("Heredity triumphs again").

Robert also notes that although he finds Ruth attractive, his sex drive has diminished and he has no desire for her. Since he is still not entirely sure he can trust her or cure her, he is happy about his lack of desire. Ruth answers his questions about how she and her husband lived, but he feels uneasy; her answers make sense but he intuitively distrusts her. She accuses him of not believing her, which he denies, but she says that his prolonged isolation has caused him to lose his "talent for deceit." Ruth wants to learn more about vampires, which makes Robert suspicious of someone who watched her husband being killed by them.

Robert is plagued by doubts. He fears Ruth may be infected, but is even more fearful if she is not; he is reluctant to love again or to accept the responsibility of marriage and family. He thinks about murdering her, but not without adequate evidence. Robert tells her his theories on the vampires' reaction to the cross, but conceals the scientific explanation for bullets not harming a vampire.

When Robert is reluctant to open up to Ruth about himself, she offers to leave the next day. She tells him he need not feel obligated to her just because they are the only ones left. Robert relents, and shares with her his knowledge of the germ. He tells her he thinks he is immune because of being bitten by a vampire bat during the war. The bite made him terribly ill, but he did not die, and Robert killed the bat.

Next, Robert describes his experiments that explained why some vampires bleed to death, while others dissolve into ashes. Ruth thinks the process is horrible, but Robert has been living with the situation so long he is inured to its horrors.

Robert explains that the body of an infected vampire cannot fight the disease and make antibodies; therefore, no vaccine will work. The only way to fight living vampires is to kill them first so they don't die of the disease and come back to kill him. Ruth greets his explanation with silence and he asks her if she thinks he's wrong. She replies that it's not for her to say.



Part III, Chapter 17 Analysis

Robert's and Ruth's wrangling parallels Robert's winning over the trust of the dog, only Ruth is the one who is anxious to win Robert's trust. Although Robert is plagued by doubts, he readily tosses his doubts aside when she agrees to the blood test. He tells her all of the information he has learned from his research as well as his theory as to why he is immune from infection. She has been very guarded as to the information she shares with him, and professes not to know much about vampires. Clearly, Robert has disclosed more in this exchange. When Robert explains that he must kill the vampires first so they won't kill him, she does not disagree and says it's not for her to judge him. Her silence may indicate she understands his reasons for killing.

Ironically, Robert identifies with his father for "not believing anything unless it's under a microscope," when he is actually ignoring his intuition and proceeding on trust that has had less than a day to build.



Part III, Chapter 18

Part III, Chapter 18 Summary

Robert wakes up in the middle of the night shouting Virginia's name. Then he discovers Ruth, fully dressed, standing in the living room, and he asks her if she was planning to leave. She replies that she can't leave because of the vampires. Outside, he hears the vampires yelling, and Ben calling him to come out. Robert wants Ruth to stay with him. He tells her in anguish how three years earlier his wife had come back from the dead to drink his blood, and he had to kill her with a stake. Ruth asks Robert why they are being punished like this, and he draws her to him in a passionate embrace. Ruth whispers that it would be better if they were all dead. He assures her everything will be all right, although he doesn't really believe it.

After they are in each other's arms, Robert draws blood from Ruth's finger and promises again he will try to cure her if necessary. She reminds him that he said vaccines won't work and begs him not to look at the slide. He ignores her pleas and, as he whispers her name in shock, she strikes his head with a wooden mallet repeatedly, and he falls to the floor. As his hands slide off her legs some of the tan rubs off. "I told you not to!" she cries.

Part III, Chapter 18 Analysis

In this chapter, Robert wakes up unexpectedly to find Ruth fully dressed as if she were getting ready to leave. Ruth allows him to take her blood for the test but begs him not to look at the results. Her reluctance to let Robert see the test results and the fact that her tan is a fake seems to confirm Robert's suspicions. Her assault removes any doubt.



Part III, Chapter 19

Part III, Chapter 19 Summary

Robert wakes up early the next day in a daze and, at first, cannot remember what happened. He crawls to the bathroom and splashes cold water on his face and then recalls the events of the night before. Ruth has gone but has left a note, in which she admits that she is one of a small band of remaining vampires who has been sent to spy on him, that most of what she has told him is a lie, and that he, not a vampire, had killed her husband. However, she now understands that both sides have been forced into their situations.

She then reveals that they, the last vampires, have found a drug that enables them to stay alive and with it they are planning to rebuild their society, but they may have to kill him and all others like him. She urges Robert to escape into the mountains while he can, before they become too numerous to evade. She leaves him one of her pills, which enables her to stay out in the sun for short periods. It contains a combination of defibrinated blood to feed the germ and a drug to prevent it from multiplying. She asks him to forgive her for lying to him and for hitting him, and says that when they were together in the darkness, she was loving him.

Robert has trouble taking in the meaning of her letter. "The framework of his life was collapsing and it frightened him." He concluded her declaration of love was a lie and he "crumpled up the letter and flung it away bitterly." He then berated himself for not having foreseen what he saw under the microscope, despite having read the phrase numerous times. Bacteria can mutate.

Part III, Chapter 19 Analysis

The truth about Ruth is now revealed; she is "one of them," but with a twist. She is one of a new breed of mutant vampires who have discovered a pill that enables them to seem normal. With the help of the pill, they will rebuild their society. Ruth urges Robert to flee now, while he still can. Ruth also reveals that it was Robert who killed her husband, not a vampire. Almost everything that she has told Robert is a lie, and Robert believes she was lying when she wrote that she loved him. Robert is angry with himself for not foreseeing the possibility that the bacteria could mutate, as the insects had. Robert has gone from having doubts but believing her anyway to not believing anything she says.



Part IV, Chapter 20

Part IV, Chapter 20 Summary

It is a night in January 1979, and through the peephole Robert watches as several men in dark suits and carrying spotlights emerge from dark cars and brutally kill seven vampires with guns, pick axes, and pikes. He surmises the killers are members of the new society. He has decided not to fight them when they come for him. Robert feels more sympathy toward the vampires than he does toward their killers, and he is worried that the new vampires may hunt down and kill Ben Cortman. He looks at the house across the street and as he watches Ben crawling on a roof to escape the gunfire, Ben's body is riddled with bullets from a machine gun. Robert's eyes fill with tears as he witnesses "the end of Oliver Hardy" and "the death of all comedy and all laughter." Ben's body rolls forward and his executioners spear it with their pikes.

Even though he hates the new breed of vampire and their unnecessarily brutal way of banishing the enemy, Robert has resolved not to fight them, but to surrender. However, instead of calling out to him, they smash his doors with their axes and shoot at the locks. Then Robert realizes that they do not intend to bring him to justice, but to execute him. He goes to his bedroom to get his guns, but hesitates; he isn't sure of their intentions. He wishes he had listened to Ruth and left while he could.

Two men shine their spotlight on him and when they see he is armed they spray bullets at him. Robert fires his trigger and one of the men cries out in pain. Robert is then clubbed across the chest and collapses. A heavy boot stomps on his hand and breaks it. He is pulled up by the armpits and as he waits for more bullets, he silently calls out to Virginia that he will soon be joining her. The men drag his lifeless body away.

Part IV, Chapter 20 Analysis

It has been seven months since Ruth has completed her spying mission, and the new society has developed a gangland style of killing. Unfortunately, the slaughter has included Robert's old friend, Ben Cortman. Robert's scientific habit of withholding action until all the evidence is in has caused him to spare Ruth and to delay firing at the mutants. Too late, Robert wishes he had listened to Ruth and escaped while he could. His situation is critical. Robert's final thoughts are of his departed wife that he will soon be joining her. Robert's thwarted decision to surrender to the mutants presages his final surrender.



Part IV, Chapter 21

Part IV, Chapter 21 Summary

Robert awakes with a blinding pain in his chest and a rumbling sound in his ears. He is lying in a bed and his chest is bound in a blood-soaked bandage. He looks up to see barred windows. He realizes that he is going to die but he cannot comprehend it. He hears footsteps but he cannot move. Finally, a woman enters the room, offers him water, and wipes his brow. It is Ruth. They have a halting conversation. She asks him why he didn't heed her warning and leave. He tells her he started to pack but he didn't want to leave the house he was used to. She then asks him why he fought his captors; they had orders to bring him back unharmed.

Robert thinks to himself that Ruth has changed. He asks her whether the men who came to get him were the council of justice of their new society. She responds that "[n]ew societies are always primitive," and that they are something of a "revolutionary group" reclaiming society by violence, something which she expects him to understand because he has killed many times. He responds that he killed to survive and she says that they do too, that the dead and the living cannot co-exist. He hopes the end will come soon; the pain is unbearable and though he doesn't understand death, he doesn't fear it either.

Robert protests that their killers performed their job with expressions of pure joy on their faces. Ruth quickly points out that he looked the same way when he was killing her husband or chasing her. She acknowledges that the young men probably did enjoy the killings, but adds that they were just doing their job as "legal killers," and that they are respected and admired for doing it. She tells him that this is an old story.

Ruth addresses him as "Robert Neville...the last of the old race," soon to be executed; she tells him the people fear him and hate him and want his life. In his last moments, she tenderly holds his hand and tells him she had planned to warn him that the men were being sent to his house, but she thought that nothing would make him leave if he had not left by then. Nor could she help him escape after they brought him in, since he had been shot. She tells him she is a ranking officer of the new society and commends him for his bravery. He begs her not to let the killings get too brutal. She pulls out a tiny packet of pills, "to make it easier," and urges him to "take them soon." She tells him, "You just can't fight so many, Robert." Then she kisses him and tells him he will soon be with his wife.

With difficulty, Robert walks over to the barred window and looks down at the crowd below. They are milling about, buzzing with conversation and staring at him in fear and horror. He realizes he is "the abnormal one now" who was responsible for killing off their loved ones. He understands their feelings and does not hate them. With a "coughlike chuckle," he leans against the wall and swallows the pills. As he does so, Robert



reflects that the cycle has come full circle, as "a new superstition" enters "the unassailable forces of forever" and he passes into the realm of legend.

Part IV, Chapter 21 Analysis

In the final chapter, Robert is bleeding to death, and Ruth is explaining all the reasons for Robert to surrender, the main one being that he is outnumbered. Of course, this was always true, but by using science as a tool to fight the vampires, Robert was winning. Now that he is dealing with a breed of mutants, he realizes his science cannot help him.

Robert accepts his death nobly; his dying thoughts are of understanding the mutants and their feelings toward him, without hatred. Unfortunately, Ruth's words were correct; the living and the non-living cannot co-exist. However, even though Ruth has changed by embracing a creed of militant violence, the tenderness she displays toward Robert in his last moments reveals that her feelings for him are genuine.

The closing chapter abounds with tragic ironies. The men were under orders to bring Robert back alive, but their overzealous approach to breaking into his house resulted in bloodshed. Ruth was going to warn him, but realized it would be futile as he ignored her earlier warning. Robert meant to surrender peacefully, but responded in self-defense to their forceful entrance. Even then, he drew his weapons but hesitated to shoot first, since he was unsure of their intentions. Robert, who studied the blood of vampires for so long, is now bleeding to death. The vampires, who were once the stuff of legends, have become the norm, and he, the last of his kind, is about to become a legend. To have survived for so long, and to die like this, is indeed a tragedy.



Characters

Robert Neville

The protagonist is Robert Neville, a 36-year-old blond-haired, blue-eyed man who is the sole survivor of a plague that has killed or transformed the rest of humanity to vampires. He has lost his wife and only child to the disease, and he has responded by barricading himself in his house and escaping through art, classical music, reading, drinking, and gallows humor. It is not clear what profession Robert was in, but he seems to be well educated and well rounded; he enjoys the arts, is a capable medical researcher as well as a carpenter and all around handyman.

Robert spends his days repairing the damage to his house inflicted by the vampires, preparing garlands of garlic to keep the vampires away, and quantities of wooden stakes to kill them. He must also dispose of the bodies after being killed by him or by one of their own kind. At night, he dodges their taunting, snarlings, and rock throwing. As the novel opens, Robert is living in a day-to-day struggle to survive, but as time goes on, he is determined to conquer them through medical knowledge. Using a combination of observation, scientific experimentation, and inductive reasoning,

Robert gains insight into the medical and psychological components of the disease. He is alternately frustrated, angry, excited, peaceful, logical, distrustful, and compassionate. He is immune to the bacteria that has infected the rest of the human race because of a bite he has received from a vampire bat, which sickened him, but did not kill him. His love for his wife has persisted despite the fact that he had to kill her because she came back from the dead to attack him. Robert Neville can be seen as a tragic hero, but to the vampires whose people he has killed, he is feared and detested.

Ben Cortman

Ben Cortman, once Robert's neighbor, friend, and co-worker, has been transformed by the vampire bacterium into a vampire who reminds Robert of a "roly poly Oliver Hardy" who has survived shootings, knifings, rock throwing, and other assaults. He is now Robert's chief nemesis and the only vampire (except for Ruth) who is named in the book. During the day, Ben sleeps in a coma, but at night, he stands outside Robert's house and dares him to come out. On the day that Robert is assaulted en masse, he shoots Ben three times, but Ben survives the attacks. After a while, Ben and Robert settle into a kind of routine in which each keeps up the chase as a kind of game that goes on indefinitely, and Robert never tries to kill him again. Witnessing Ben's brutal slaughter by the mutant vampires is traumatic for Robert, who breaks into tears; he regards Ben's death as "the death of all comedy and all laughter."



The Dog

The dog is a scrawny creature who apparently has escaped the scourge of the vampires by hiding. Robert befriends the dog by feeding him and gradually approaching him. Robert also has to gain trust in the dog, because it is possible that the dog is a vampire who will turn on him. Robert concludes that the dog is normal, and this discovery gives him hope that there may be human survivors. However, as Robert observes the dog's habits, he changes his mind and reflects that a dog's chances of survival may be superior to a human's because of the dog's smaller size and keener instincts.

After a lengthy period of gaining the dog's trust, Robert's worst fears are realized; the dog becomes infected by the vampires and he is helpless to save him. Robert stays up all night stroking the dog and calming him down. Finally, he tells him, "You're my dog now," and the dog licks him affectionately. Shortly afterwards, the dog dies, which Robert accepts with equanimity. Robert never gives the dog a name, which may signify a reluctance to get too attached to him in case he is taken away from him.

Ruth

Ruth is a young woman whose two children died in the vampire plague and whose husband was killed by Robert. She is one of an emerging race of mutant vampires who is sent to spy on Robert and obtain the knowledge he has gained about vampires. She tells Robert that her husband was killed by a vampire to gain his sympathy and trust. Although Robert intuitively distrusts her, Robert is genuinely misled by the fact that Ruth is not affected by sunlight, her skin is tanned, and she wears a cross around her neck. These things are explained by the fact that the mutants have devised a pill that will allow them to function briefly during the day, Ruth uses cosmetics to give her a fake tan and apparently does not fear the cross because her mind is not as easily taken in as the earlier breed of vampires. She does, however, become ill when Robert shoves garlic under her nose, which Ruth attributes to a weak stomach and not eating for a week. After completing her spy mission, Ruth and Robert make love, and afterwards she tells Robert she loves him and that he should leave his house. Robert doesn't believe her when she says that she loves him.

During the course of the next two years, the mutant vampires rebuild their population and Ruth is made a ranking officer. She defends the new society's brutal, gangland style killings of the other vampires, adopting the group's line that it is necessary to take back society with violence. However, in Robert's final hours, Ruth nurses him tenderly and gives him pills to make the end easier. Even though she has changed by embracing a creed of militant violence, her feelings for Robert seem genuine.



Virginia

Virginia is Robert's wife who died of the vampire plague. Rather than have her thrown in the fiery pit with the other victims, Robert defies the health regulations and buries her in a crypt in a grassy area enclosed by a fence. Two days later, she returned from the dead and attacked Robert, so he had to kill her and bury her again. Despite these occurrences, Robert loves her dearly. He visits her crypt often and brings her flowers. He longs for the day when he can join her in death. In flashback scenes revealing conversations between her and Robert during her illness, Virginia, or "Verge," as he sometimes calls her, is revealed to be a devoted wife. Though ill, she offered to make his breakfast. Robert thinks of her often.

Kathy

Kathy is Robert's only child who has died in the vampire plague. Robert was devastated when the authorities removed her body to dispose of her in the fiery pit, and he resolved that Virginia's body would not meet the same end. We do not know how old Kathy was at the time of her death; we know only that she was still in school.

The Vampires

Everyone except Robert has been infected by a plague, which gives its victims the characteristics of vampires. They crave blood, their skin turns pale, they cannot stand to be in the sunlight, and they are repulsed by garlic and crosses. Their cells produce a glue-like substance that surrounds bullets as soon as they enter the body, so that bullets have no effect on them. However, wooden stakes driven into their heart will kill them. During the day, vampires sleep in a comatose state, but arise at dusk to seek more victims.

Robert later discovers that vampires exposed to the sun will die almost instantly. He also discovers that some vampires will bleed when stabbed with a stake, while others will turn into a pile of ashes. He eventually concludes that there are two types of vampires. There are those who are infected with the disease but have not yet died, and those who have died from the disease and come back from the dead. Those who have already died will turn to ashes. The others will bleed to death. Robert also learns that some of the vampire behavior is caused by a bacterium, which he has isolated, and some of their behavior is psychological, induced by a mass hysteria formed by traditional beliefs. The germ has dulled their brains, making them less able to battle Robert with their wits.

The Mutant Vampires

Robert discovers that the vampire germ eventually has mutated, resulting in a race of vampires who have overcome the psychological effects of the disease and who have



learned how to survive in the daylight for brief periods. These vampires hate and fear Robert for killing them off, and are determined to capture and kill him. They send one of their members, Ruth, to spy on Robert and learn what he has learned. Their goal is to increase their numbers and to reclaim society with violence. They also regard the non-mutants as inferior and have embarked on a campaign to execute them on sight. Although their orders are to bring Robert back alive, they break into his house with guns drawn, and Robert responds with gunfire. The mutants shoot back, and Robert is seriously wounded.

The Trained Killers

In their zeal to reclaim society with violence, the mutant vampires have trained a corps of killers who seek out and destroy all but the mutants. As Robert notes, they relish their job, and derive pure joy from brutally slaughtering their victims. They are admired by their society.

The Preacher

Shortly after Virginia dies, Robert is accosted by a wild-eyed stranger who drags him to a tent and conducts a revival-style meeting, in which members of the congregation are encouraged to pray to God to deliver them from the scourge, which is characterized as punishment from God for their wickedness. Robert later reflects that the revival movement worsened the victims' suffering, because they were not saved from the disease, and they died in mortal terror.

The Female Vampires

Throughout the story, Robert is taunted by the female vampires' lewd advances, which he ignores, although his need for female companionship tempts him at times. Much of Robert's experimentation is done on female vampires, which he feels guilty about, but justifies on the basis that they happened to be the ones he has come across.



Objects/Places

Robert's House

Robert's house in a suburb of Los Angeles has been boarded to ward off the nightly attacks of the vampires. He has installed a peephole, a hothouse and an electric generator, soundproofed the house, and painted a silent wooded scene on the living room wall. Robert further chases the vampires away with festoons of garlic, a mirror and crosses. Robert has burned the houses on either side of his to prevent the vampires from jumping on his roof from adjacent houses.

The Pit

The Fiery Pit, or "The Pit," as it was sometimes called, was the site used as a mass burial ground for those who succumbed to the vampire infection, by order of the health authorities. Ironically, it did not halt the spread of the deadly infection. Robert's young daughter Kathy is buried in the pit.

The Library

The public library, which Robert visits to conduct his medical research, is memorable for the bleak gray exterior, the broken window, the dusty interior, the stacks of books containing the wisdom of the ages which were inadequate to save mankind, and the neatly arranged reading room which Robert imagines was lovingly set up by a maiden librarian who has never known the joys of loving and being loved in return. Robert finds several useful volumes here, from which he is able to learn more about the nature of the disease which has claimed nearly all of mankind, and also learns about the methodology for continuing his investigations.

Garlic

Garlic is one substance that Robert uses to ward off vampires, along with wooden stakes and crosses. He grows plants in his hothouse, and chops fresh cloves of garlic several times a week which he weaves into garlands to hang on the outside of his house. Through experimentation, he learns that it is the aroma of garlic that repels the vampires, rather than the chemical components. Thus, injecting chemicals into the veins of vampires will have no effect, but hanging garlands of freshly chopped cloves of garlic will keep them away. Although the mutants have overcome some of the weaknesses of vampires, they are still affected by garlic.



The Mirror

Robert has placed a mirror outside his house in hopes of keeping the vampires away. However, the vampires crack it, and he decides it is too much trouble to replace the mirror. For unexplained reasons, Robert rejects the notion that vampires cannot see themselves in mirrors. Perhaps he thinks that the vampires saw themselves in the mirror and, not understanding that it was merely an image, attacked their reflection.

The Peephole

Robert views much of the action of the outside world through a peephole he has installed, especially at night. The view through the peephole is reality, in contrast to what the vampires see or not see through a mirror, and in contrast to what he sees through the microscope, enlarged.

The Microscope

The microscope is the instrument through which Robert makes his breakthrough discovery; it is also a symbol of technology. The first microscope Robert obtains is inferior, and he smashes it to pieces when he is unable to get useful results. He replaces it with a more powerful instrument and studies how to use it before continuing his research. The assorted paraphernalia that accompany the microscope that are catalogued here illustrate the precision and attention to detail with which Robert approaches his task. The poor results Robert gets with the first microscope suggest the inadequacy of science to provide all the answers.

The Murals

The murals that Robert paints on his wall provide an artificial escape for Robert during his forced confinement. Significantly, they are murals of nature and human beings are absent. The house is presumably devoid of any photographs of his wife and daughter; at least none are ever mentioned. This shows that Robert has resigned himself to his solitude, and that any photographic reminders of the family he has lost are too painful for him.

The Shops

As a result of the plague, all the shops are deserted, and Robert is free to help himself to whatever he needs. He visits Sears regularly for tools and wood for stakes, and shops for food at a grocery store, although with electricity destroyed, Robert is limited to dry food and canned goods. His freezer holds a limited amount of food which he has salvaged earlier. Robert also visits a car dealership to replace the car which the vampires have destroyed.

Prison Cell

Robert's final hours are spent in a prison hospital, where he has been brought after being seriously wounded by the mutant vampires. Here, he is visited by Ruth, who nurses him gives him some pills to make the end easier. Through the barred window, Robert can look down and see the mutants calling for his death.



Themes

Legends

A central theme, as the title suggests, is the nature of legends. Legends are often based on real persons or events, but enlarged through retelling to achieve mythic proportions. They are a blend of fact and fiction, and if well known, become a part of a cultural heritage. The legendary hero is usually set apart from his contemporaries by possessing some special qualities, such as great strength or magical abilities. In *I Am Legend*, much of what Robert knows or assumes about vampires comes from traditional or legendary lore, yet the legend has now become scientifically documented. In a study in symmetry, Robert eventually passes from a real person to a legend, the last of his kind. The symmetry is further shown in that Robert has modeled his behavior from Van Helsing, a vampire-fighter of legendary fame.

Prejudice

One theme throughout the book is the fear and loathing that most people have exhibited toward the vampires, who Robert remembers were once like him until they became afflicted. Once vampires dominate the population, however, then they are no longer in the minority, and the dynamics shift. When Robert Neville is the last of his kind, then he is outnumbered by the mutants, they would like to see him killed in retaliation for the deaths he caused to their people. Once the mutants emerge, with their stronger intellects, they treat the original vampires with cruelty. The dominant group looks down on the minority, except that Robert, when he reflects that vampires are really no worse than vice-ridden humans, reminds himself that he would not want his sister to marry a vampire.

Isolation and Survival

The story is a study in isolation, and the reader sees Robert use various coping mechanisms to help him survive the plague. He barricades his home to protect himself from the vampire attacks and shuts out their noise with his earplugs, and, at times, alcohol. He also escapes through art, classical music, and bitter humor. During the day, he actively goes looking for vampires to kill. One day after a particularly vicious attack, Robert decides to learn all he can about vampires so he can possibly find a cure or relieve suffering. After months of living this way, Robert changes his focus from survival to knowledge, as he prepares to learn all he can about psychology and pathology. He carefully sets up a series of experiments designed to test his hypotheses. Robert often experiences anger and frustration at his circumstances, and has a tendency to go on drinking binges. He is so lonely for companionship that he ignores his suspicions that Ruth may be a vampire, shares all his knowledge of vampires with her, and later makes



love to her. When the mutants emerge after three years of battling, Robert surrenders; he realizes that he cannot survive the mutants' superior strength and numbers.

Science vs. the Supernatural

One of the central conflicts in the book is that between the natural and the supernatural. For years, vampires were considered a product of superstition, but the plague has established that vampires are a fact. When Robert isolates the germ, there is now a scientific explanation for the various behaviors that vampires exhibit. However, the germ theory does not explain everything, but Robert eventually concludes that some of the behaviors (fear of crosses, for example) have a psychological explanation in the nature of mass hysteria. In a central moment of the book, when Robert isolates the germ, he declares that "all the centuries of superstition have been felled," and Robert continues his quest to use science to perhaps find a cure.

The Futility of War

This theme is reflected in a brief exchange between Virginia and Robert, in which Robert reflects "They say we won the war" and then concludes "Nobody won the war—the mosquitoes won the war." Just as the war that devastated the world left no winners, Robert's daily battles with the vampires and the mutant vampires' violent assault on the weaker vampires likewise have no winners. The constant fighting takes its toll on Robert. Even though he is winning, the population is declining. In the end, of course, he surrenders, and the mutants win the war, just as the mosquitoes had earlier.



Style

Point of View

The story is told in the third person from the point of view of Robert Neville, the protagonist. Throughout the novel, the reader sees what he sees and shares his thoughts and moods. We gradually learn how the state of affairs came to be through flashbacks that Robert recalls. There was the war that brought the plague in its wake, the insect bite he received from the vampire bat, his friendship with Ben, and the last days of his wife and daughter. When Robert meets the dog and later Ruth, he is afraid they are vampires, and we view these characters through Robert's eyes. We are given the same information Robert has, and we base our opinion on whether the character is trustworthy from that.

Sometimes, though, information that is known to Robert is initially withheld from the reader, as when he injects a vampire with a chemical derived from onions, a member of the garlic family or when he sees a connection between the dust storms and the vampire plague. Revealing the background gradually and withholding some information that is known to Robert heightens the suspense, but the most effective suspense comes from having to reconcile conflicting information, whether it concerns medical research into the nature of vampires or meeting seemingly normal creatures who may or may not be infected.

Setting

The events of the novel take place in suburban Los Angeles between January 1976 and January 1979, which at the time the novel was written, was 22 years in the future. An atomic war has left the landscape desolate, overridden with insects, and subject to frequent dust storms. Robert's house sits amid the charred remains of what once were houses on either side of him, and a huge fiery pit into which the dead bodies are buried is part of the landscape. The atmosphere is often bleak and cloudy, and many of the vampire confrontations take place at dusk, which contributes to the meaning of the story. Only occasionally does Robert venture into a sunlit day, as he does when he meets Ruth. The final confrontation with the mutants takes Robert into a prison hospital, where he is finally released from his three-year-long imprisonment.

Language and Meaning

There are several motifs throughout the book: one is blood. In his rage, Robert is prone to inflicting cuts and scrapes on himself, and at other times, he is scratched and clawed by vampires. Robert draws blood on these occasions, which are thematically linked to his investigations of the vampires' circulatory systems. The term "blood" is also used from time to time to refer to Robert's father Fritz, from whom he has inherited his scientific temperament.



Another motif is duality. At one point, Robert is struck by the number two—his wife and child, the fact that his wife had to be buried twice. This duality is echoed in the fact that there were two kinds of vampires (those who were suffering from the illness and those who died and came back). Later, as the mutant strain emerged, the new vampires declared war on the old. Eventually, Robert meets and befriends two companions whom he takes into his house: the dog and Ruth.

A third theme is the sometimes grim or self-deprecating humor that Robert resorts to help him bear his circumstances. He thinks it is funny when he finds a vampire hiding in a freezer at Sears (an enamel coffin), and he thinks that only in a humorless world would such an event be viewed as humorous. He laughs hysterically when he parks the wrong way on a one-way street, and there are no cops to issue a citation. Ben Cortman reminds him of Oliver Hardy, who was always surviving pratfalls. He renames consumer products such as Smith Brothers Coffin Drops and Harper's Bizarre to reflect the world of the supernatural and he finds it "grotesquely amusing" that the tabloids exploited the vampire scourge to sell newspapers to a dying population. These examples show the lack of humor in Robert's life. Finally, several passages of medical terms and explanations give an air of authenticity to the account.

Structure

The narrative is divided into four parts. In Part I, Robert is engaged in a day-to-day struggle for survival. In Part II, Robert embarks upon a mission to investigate the causes and effects of vampire behavior, and he befriends and loses a little dog. In Part III, Robert meets Ruth and shares his knowledge of vampires with her. Unknown to Robert, Ruth is a spy for a newly created mutant strain of vampires. In Part IV, the ruling council of the mutant group has established a violent form of maintaining order, and several of the "old" vampires are brutally executed, including Robert's old friend, Ben Cortman. Some of the gunmen go to Robert's house to bring him in for questioning. Guns are drawn, and Robert is wounded in the crossfire and taken to a jail hospital. However, rather than submit to the planned execution, Robert swallows pills that Ruth got for him. This structure shows Robert's progression from one who was engaged in a bare battle of survival, to a skilled medical researcher, to a cynic who mistrusts all he meets but is so lonely for companionship that he easily discards any objections, and back to survival, as he realizes he cannot overcome the mutants.

The conclusion of the novel brings the cycle "full circle," as the vampires have moved from legend to reality, and Robert (whose battles have been inspired by a legendary vampire fighter) ends his days by passing from the last of mankind into the realm of legend.



Quotes

"The strength of the vampire is that no one will believe in him.'...It was true. The book was a hodgepodge of superstitions and soap-opera clichés, but that line was true; no one had believed in them, and how could they fight something they couldn't even believe in?" Chapter 3, pg. 28

"The vampire may foster quickened heartbeats and levitated hair. But is he worse than the parent who gave to society a neurotic child who became a politician? Is he worse than the manufacturer who set up belated foundations with the money he made by handing bombs and guns to suicidal nationalists? Is he worse than the distiller who gave bastardized grain juice to stultify further the brains of those who, sober, were incapable of a progressive thought? ...Is he worse, then, than the publisher who filled ubiquitous racks with lust and death wishes? Really, now, search your soul, lovie—is the vampire so bad?" Chapter 3, p. 32

"The sky was gray and dead. Great! he thought. Another day stuck in this boarded up rat-hole! He slammed the door viciously, then winced, groaning, at the brain-stabbing noise. Outside, he heard the rest of the mirror fall out and shatter on the porch cement. Oh, great! His lips contorted back into a white twist of flesh." Chapter 4, p. 34

"All these books, he thought, the residue of a planet's intellect, the scrapings of futile minds, the leftovers, the potpourri of artifacts that had no power to save men from perishing." Chapter 10, p. 78

"To die, he thought, never knowing the fierce joy and attendant comfort of a loved one's embrace. To sink into that hideous coma, to sink then into death and, perhaps, return to sterile, awful wanderings. All without knowing what it was to love and be loved. That was a tragedy more terrible than becoming a vampire." Chapter 10, pp. 78-79

"All he could think was that here, on the slide, was the cause of the vampire. All the centuries of fearful superstition had been felled in the moment he had seen the germ." Chapter 11, p. 86

"To his complete astonishment, he later found himself offering up a stumbling prayer that the dog would be protected. It was a moment in which he felt a desperate need to believe in a God that shepherded his own creations. . . . Because he wanted the dog, because he needed the dog." Chapter 12, pp. 96-97.

"Rather than go on suffering, he had learned to stultify himself to introspection. Time had lost its multidimensional scope. There was only the present for Robert Neville; a present based on day-to-day survival marked by neither heights of joy nor depths of despair." Chapter 15, pp. 120-21



"The men did not shout, they did not command. They raised their rifles now and the night was torn open again with their exploding fire.

Neville almost felt the bullets in his own flesh. His body jerked with convulsive shudders as he watched Cortman's body jerk under the impact of the bullets.

Still Cortman kept crawling, and Neville saw his white face, his teeth gritted together.

The end of Oliver Hardy, he thought, the death of all comedy and all laughter. He didn't hear the continuous fusillade of shots. He didn't even feel the tears running down his cheeks. His eyes were riveted on the ungainly form of his old friend inching up the brightly lit roof." Chapter 20, pp. 159-160.

"Full circle. A new terror born in death, a new superstition entering the unassailable fortress of forever. I am legend." Chapter 21, p. 170



Topics for Discussion

1. What is the significance of the title? Would the meaning have changed if the book was called "I Am a Legend"? How did Robert Neville become a legend?
2. Are there any winners in war? Are there situations in the book in which it doesn't pay to fight?
3. Does scientific knowledge solve all problems, or does it create other problems?
4. In what ways can vampires be compared to the handicapped or physically or mentally impaired?
5. Do you think Ruth sincerely loved Robert? Why or why not?
6. Why did Ruth tell Robert in the final scene that there were too many of them to fight? Weren't there just as many of them at the beginning of the novel?
7. Is it realistic to think that one man could prevail against so many vampires for so long?
8. Why did Robert swallow the pills in the end? Is this consistent with his behavior throughout the book?
9. Did Matheson portray the vampires as good, evil or neither?
10. The scientific process includes observation, research, forming a hypothesis, testing the hypothesis, and reporting the results. Describe one discovery that Robert made scientifically and describe the steps he took to arrive at his conclusion.