

Black Ink Books

Spec-Fic Legend Richard Matheson Dies at 87

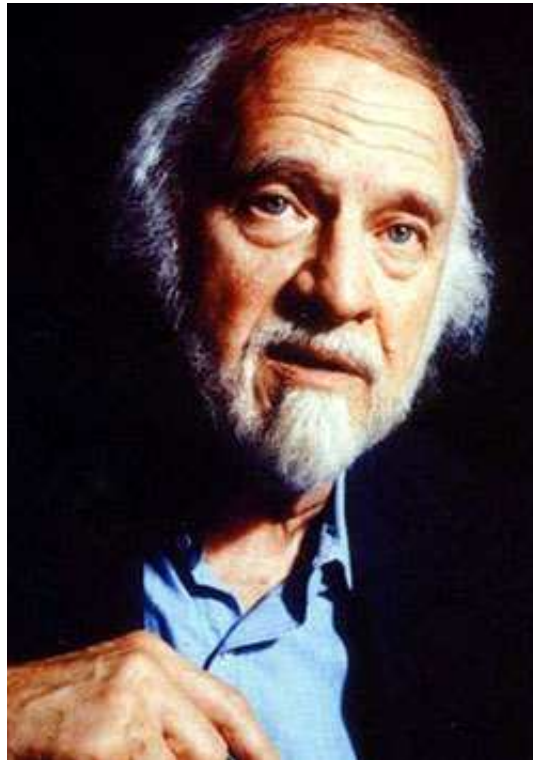
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POSTED BY [BLACKINKBOOKS](#) IN [UNCATEGORIZED](#)

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Horror and science-fiction writer Richard Matheson died

Sunday, June 23rd at the age of 87.

Matheson is one of my favourite authors of horror and science-fiction. His 1954 novella *I am Legend* treated the vampire myth with a scientific lens, where Robert Neville uses local resources to try to find a cure for the disease—his notable efforts lead him not only on a vampire-killing crusade through the suburbs, but also to his municipal library branch where he uses good old-fashioned research to best the undead. The story has been adapted for the screen numerous times (*The Last Man on Earth*, 1964; *The Omega Man*, 1971; and *I am Legend*, 2007), none of which has perfectly captured all the nuance contained within—I could write a whole paper on the ways in which the Will Smith abomination eviscerated all substance and meaning, but that’s a story for another time. “I don’t know why Hollywood keeps coming back to the book just to not do it the way I wrote it,” Matheson said in [an interview with David Brown and John Scoleri in 2001](#). “The book should have been filmed as is at the time it came out. It’s too late now... It is just the nature of Hollywood to try to ‘improve’ or reinterpret.” The novella was also the inspiration behind George A. Romero’s zombie cult classic *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), and is therefore one of the grandfathers of the modern zombie revival. In the same [interview](#), Matheson also shared his reaction to seeing *Night of the Living Dead*:

“I ran across [Romero's] film on TV one night and thought, ‘When did they make my novel into a film again?’ His series of films put the final stake into the idea of making my novel into a film. They should just stop trying. To me, vampires are totally passe anyway. They are disgusting creatures who smell bad and are revolting in every way. Turning female vampires into sexy creatures is absurd.”

Richard Matheson was also the creative genius behind one of the best-loved episodes of *The Twilight Zone*, “Nightmare at 20,000 feet,” (1963) in which a young William Shatner sees a gremlin on the wing of an airplane. The episode permeated pop culture so heavily, that even those who have never once seen an episode of *The Twilight Zone* recognize this episode.

Other notable contributions to literature include novels *Hell House* (1971), which is essentially a more violent and sexually explicit knock-off of Shirley Jackson’s brilliant *The Haunting of Hill House* (1951) but still holds its own merit, and *What Dreams May Come* (1978), in which Matheson moved away from the horror genre in favour of a metaphysical love story that shares elements with the Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. As with *I am Legend*, these tales were later adapted for film with varying success.

Last week, I attended IdeaCity in Toronto as a bookseller for the event. One of the guests was Paul Davids, a documentary filmmaker who worked with Richard Matheson on [*The Life After Death Project*](#), a film covering the quest for proof that something remains when our bodies lie dead. I regret not being able to speak with Davids in person about working with Matheson. In the film, Matheson states that he believes [mutual acquaintance and sci-fi bigwig] “Forrest J. Ackerman, who in life was a skeptic, actually has engaged in After Death Communication (ADC) with the director of this film and others.” If Mr. Matheson is correct, it is quite possible that he may be floating around as one of the spirits and ghouls he was so fond of—so break out those Ouija boards, I’m sure that a creative force such as he would never be able to resist sharing more tales from the other side.

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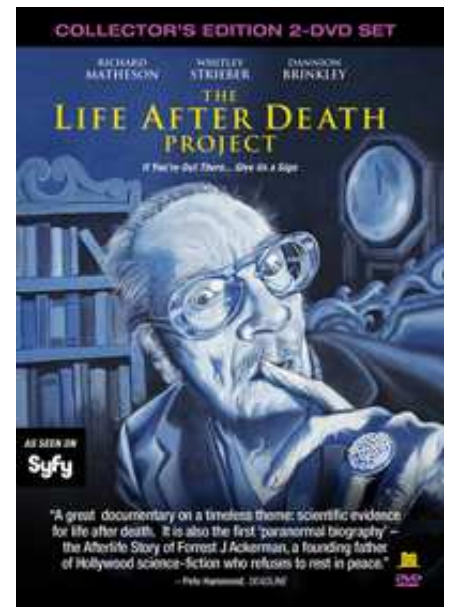
thought on “Spec-Fic Legend Richard Matheson Dies at 87”

1. *said:*[Paul Davids](#)

July 1, 2013 at 11:06 am

Thanks for the mention in your excellent article about Richard Matheson. I can be reached at starrynightmovie@aol.com

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