



The Dead Town (Dean Koontz's Frankenstein, Book 5)

By Dean Koontz

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The war against humanity is raging. As the small town of Rainbow Falls, Montana, comes under siege, scattered survivors come together to weather the onslaught of the creatures set loose upon the world. As they ready for battle against overwhelming odds, they will learn the full scope of Victor Frankenstein's nihilistic plan to remake the future—and the terrifying reach of his shadowy, powerful supporters.

Now the good will make their last, best stand. In a climax that will shatter every expectation, their destinies and the fate of humanity hang in the balance.

Dean Koontz's enthralling Frankenstein series has redefined the classic legend of infernal ambition and harrowing retribution for a new century and a new age. Now the master of suspense delivers an unforgettable novel that is at once a thrilling adventure in itself and a mesmerizing conclusion to his saga of the modern monsters among us.

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Editorial Review

Review

“Koontz is a master of the edge-of-your-seat, paranoid thriller and perhaps the leading American practitioner of the form.”—*The Star-Ledger*

“Koontz writes first-rate suspense, scary and stylish.”—*Los Angeles Times*

“A rarity among bestselling writers, Koontz continues to pursue new ways of telling stories, never content with repeating himself. He writes of hope and love in the midst of evil in profoundly inspiring and moving ways.”—*Chicago Sun-Times*

About the Author

Dean Koontz, the author of many #1 *New York Times* bestsellers, lives in Southern California with his wife, Gerda, their golden retriever, Elsa, and the enduring spirit of their goldens, Trixie and Anna.

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chapter 1

Owl-eyed and terrified, Warren Snyder occupied an armchair in his living room. He sat stiff, erect, his hands upturned in his lap. Now and then his right hand shook. His mouth hung slightly open, and his lower lip trembled almost continuously.

On his left temple, a silvery bead gleamed. As rounded and as polished as the head of a decorative upholstery tack, it looked like a misplaced earring.

The bead was in fact packed with electronics, nanocircuitry, and was rather like the head of a nail in that it was the visible portion of a needle-thin probe that had been fired into his brain by a pistol-like device. Instantaneous chemical cauterization of flesh and bone prevented bleeding.

Warren said nothing. He had been ordered to remain silent, and he had lost the power to disobey. Except for his twitching fingers and the tremors, which were both involuntary, he did not move, not even to change position in the chair, because he had been told to be still.

His gaze shifted back and forth between two points of interest: his wives.

With a silver bead on her left temple and her eyes glazed like those of an amped-out meth junkie, Judy Snyder perched on the sofa, knees together, hands folded serenely in her lap. She didn't twitch or tremble like her husband. She seemed to be without fear, perhaps because the probe had damaged her brain in ways not intended.

The other Judy stood by one of the living-room windows that faced the street, alternately studying the snowy night and regarding her two prisoners with contempt. Their kind were the spoilers of the earth. Soon these two would be led away like a couple of sheep, to be rendered and processed. And one day, when the last

human beings were eradicated, the world would be as much of a paradise as it had ever been or ever could be.

This Judy was not a clone of the one on the sofa, nothing as disgusting as a mere meat machine, which was all that human beings were. She had been designed to pass for the original Judy, but the illusion would not hold up if her internal structure and the nature of her flesh were to be studied by physicians. She had been created in a couple of months, programmed and extruded—"born"—as an adult in the Hive, deep underground, with no tao other than her program, with no illusion that she possessed free will, with no obligation whatsoever to any higher power other than Victor Leben, whose true last name was Frankenstein, and with no life after this one to which she needed to aspire.

Through the parted draperies, she watched a tall man crossing the snow- mantled street, hands in his coat pockets, face turned to the sky as if delighting in the weather. He approached the house on the front walkway, playfully kicking up little clouds of snow. Judy couldn't see his face, but she assumed he must be Andrew Snyder, the nineteen-year- old son of the family. His parents expected him to return home from work about this time.

She let the draperies fall into place and stepped out of the living room, into the foyer. When she heard Andrew's footsteps on the porch, she opened the door.

"Andy," she said, "I was so worried."

Shucking off his boots to leave them on the porch, Andrew smiled and shook his head. "You worry too much, Mom. I'm not late."

"No, you're not, but terrible things have been happening in town tonight."

"What terrible things?"

As Andrew stepped into the foyer in his stocking feet, the Judy replicant closed the door, turned to him, and began to unbutton his peacoat. In the best imitation of motherly concern that she could manage, she said, "You'll catch your death in this weather."

Pulling a scarf from around his neck, he asked again, "What terrible things?" He frowned with confusion and annoyance, as if her fussing with his coat must be out of character for her.

As she opened the buttons, she maneuvered him until the doorway to the study lay beyond even his peripheral vision.

"All the killings," she said, "it's horrible."

Intent upon her to an extent he had not been until now, Andrew said, "Killings? What killings?"

As he spoke, his replicant glided silently out of the study, directly to him, and pulled the trigger instantly upon pressing the muzzle of the brain-probe pistol to Andrew's left temple.

The young man's face wrenched with pain but for only a moment. Then his eyes widened with terror even as his face relaxed into an expression that was hardly more readable than that of someone in a coma.

"Come with me," said the replicant Andrew, and led his namesake into the living room. "Sit on the sofa."

Silvery bead shimmering like a drop of mercury on his temple, Andrew Snyder did as he was told.

If the replicant Andrew had chosen to sit opposite the real one and squeeze the trigger again, the pistol wouldn't have fired another skull-piercing dart. The second shot would have been a telemetric command initiating transmission from the embedded needle to a data- storage module in the replicant's inorganic brain. In ninety minutes or less, the essence of the young man's life experience-acquired knowledge, memories, faces, torrents of sights and sounds-would be downloaded to his impersonator.

The replicant had no need, however, to pass for Andrew Snyder in more than appearance. By this time the night after next, all the citizens of Rainbow Falls would have been killed, rendered, and processed; no one who had known the real Andrew would remain alive to be deceived by his laboratory-bred double.

Ninety minutes devoted to memory downloading would be, in this instance, a waste of time. Replicants despised waste and distraction. Focus and efficiency were important principles. The only morality was efficiency, and the only immorality was inefficiency.

The Community, as creatures born in the Hive called their new civilization, would soon possess a secret base from which to move outward relentlessly across the continent and then swiftly across the world. Communitarians were the embodiment of progress, the end of history, the end of all the repulsive messiness of human delusions and random events, the beginning of a planned future that, according to a precise timetable, would lead one day to the absolute perfection of all things.

The Communitarian Andrew Snyder, already dressed for the winter night, left the living room to join the Communitarian Warren Snyder, who waited for him in the Ford Explorer that was parked in the garage. The real Warren, paralyzed in the living-room armchair, was the general manager and the program director of KBOW, the only radio station in town.

Early in every violent revolution, those who would overthrow the current order must seize control of all means of communication in order to deny the enemy a command structure that might facilitate resistance. Everyone working the evening shift at KBOW must be controlled and then conveyed to one of the centers where the people of Rainbow Falls were being vigorously processed.

The replicant Judy remained behind with the Judy whom she had replaced and with the two males sitting docilely in the living room. Her assignment was to wait here until a transport arrived to collect the brain-pierced trio and take them to their destruction.

Even if the members of the Snyder family had been in control of their faculties, they would not have been acceptable company. Human beings were, after all, not merely base animals like any creatures of the fields and woods; they were by far the worst of all species in the world, so vain as to claim exceptional status among all living things, so utterly deranged as to believe that they were born with souls and were meant to live with meaning so as to fulfill a cosmic destiny, when in fact they were a cancer in the bosom of Nature.

In spite of their pretensions, they were meat. Just meat. Blood and bone and meat. And insane. Mad. They were mad meat and nothing more.

Communitarian Judy despised them. She loathed the way they lived, too, with no concern for the numerous imperfections of their surroundings.

The living-room carpet was only the most immediate example of their inferiority in this regard. Lint. She counted six bits of lint just in the area bordered by the two armchairs and the coffee table in front of the sofa. And not merely specks of lint. Cat hairs, as well. The cat had fled through a pet flap in the kitchen door, but its hairs were everywhere.

Order was an important principle, no less important than focus and efficiency. Indeed, efficiency was not achievable in a state of disorder. Order must be imposed before perfect efficiency could be achieved. This was a truth deeply programmed into her.

Waiting for the transport that would haul away the Snyders was not an efficient use of time. As Judy paced back and forth across the filthy carpet, stopping now and then to part the poorly hung draperies and search the street for a sign of the scheduled truck, she was acutely aware that progress waited to be made on countless fronts, that there was a world to be conquered and changed, and that she was at the moment contributing nothing to the heroic efforts of the Community.

She felt somewhat better when she got the vacuum cleaner out of the closet and swept all the exposed areas of carpet until she could see no lint, no stray thread, no single cat hair. But then, through the glass top of the coffee table, she glimpsed what might have been a peanut that had been dropped by one of the Snyders and had rolled under the furniture.

Agitated, she dragged the coffee table away from the sofa where two of her prisoners obediently waited, and she exposed the carpet under it for closer inspection. In addition to the peanut, she found a dead fly. The insect appeared to be dry, brittle, as if it had been under the table for days and would crumble to flakes and dust upon being touched.

The peanut and the fly were not the sum of it. There were cat hairs, too, and a crumb of something that she could not identify.

"Lift your feet! Lift them!" she ordered Andrew and his mother, and with no change of expression in their slack faces, they obeyed, raising their knees high and their feet off the floor.

With Communitarian fervor, Judy vacuumed the carpet in front of the sofa. When she saw that Warren, in the armchair, had raised his feet, she also swept that area.

Inevitably, she began to wonder what dust and debris might have built up on the baseboard behind the sofa and on the carpet under it. She had visions of extreme disorder.

She went to the window and parted the draperies, in which the folds had not been ironed with sufficient care to ensure that they would hang uniformly. She looked left and right along the wintry street. A patrol car cruised slowly past the house. All the police in town were already Communitarians, had been for the better part of the day, but that fact did not calm Judy in the least. Only one thing would assure her that the planned takeover of the town was proceeding in an efficient manner: the arrival of the transport and the crew that would collect the Snyder family.

Turning away from the window, she surveyed the room and judged the entire space a disaster.

Silent legions of snow marched softly through the night, laying siege to Rainbow Falls, Montana, conquering the black streets. Like clouds of battle smoke, the blizzard faded the red-brick buildings and the towering evergreens. Soon streetscapes and landscapes would be ghostly and bleak, apocalyptic visions of a dead future.

Oblivious of the cold, Deucalion roamed the snowswept town as only he, in all the world, could travel. The terrible lightning that shocked him to life in Victor's original laboratory, more than two hundred years previously, also brought him other gifts, including a profound understanding of the quantum structure of reality, an intuitive awareness of the weave in the foundation fabric of all things. He knew that the universe was immeasurably vast and yet a strangely intimate place, that distance was both a fact and an illusion, that in truth every point in the universe was next door to every other point. A Tibetan monastery on the opposite side of the world from Rainbow Falls was in another sense only one step away, if you knew how to take that step.

Deucalion knew how, and in an instant he transitioned from an alleyway behind Jim James Bakery to the roof of the Rainbow Theater. This town of fifteen thousand souls had an Old West feel because many of its buildings dated to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; they had flat roofs with parapets of the kind that bad guys and sheriffs hid behind during gunfights in old movies.

No building in town rose above four stories, and the theater ranked among the tallest structures. From this vantage point high in the falling snow, Deucalion could see east and west along Cody Street. Most businesses were closing early because of the storm, but the restaurants and bars remained brightly lighted. Only a few vehicles were parked along the curbs; and traffic had fallen to a fraction of what it had been just half an hour earlier.

The large panel truck with midnight-blue cab and white cargo section was one of only four vehicles moving along Cody Street. Other identical trucks operated elsewhere in the town. Earlier Deucalion had learned the nature of the task in which the hard-eyed, two-man crews were engaged: transporting subdued citizens of Rainbow Falls to facilities where they would be killed.

The victims had been replaced by lookalikes created in Victor's facility somewhere along State Route 311, which locals called the End Times Highway, a twenty-four-mile loop of wide two-lane blacktop that dated back to the Cold War. That road apparently served nothing along its remote wooded route except for an array of missile silos that had been decommissioned after the fall of the Soviet Union and had been in some cases abandoned and in other cases sold

off to corporations for use as low-humidity, high-security storage vaults for sensitive records. Many locals were convinced that the silos were but a small part of what lay hidden along the End Times Highway, that other secret subterranean facilities had been built deep to withstand multiple direct nuclear strikes. Finding Victor's lair this time would not be easy.

No doubt the first people to be replaced by replicants and murdered had been those in the police department and in elected offices. Victor would take control of the town from the top and work down to the last unsuspecting citizen. Deucalion had already seen captive employees of the telephone company being herded into one of the blue-and-white transports, whereafter they were taken to a warehouse for disposal.

When the truck down on Cody turned north on Russell Street, Deucalion stepped off the roof of the theater and directly, boldly, magically onto the corrugated-steel step that served the passenger door of the vehicle. Surprised, the man riding shotgun turned his head. Holding fast to an assist bar on the wall of the cab,

Deucalion wrenched open the door, which barely cleared his great bulk, reached inside with one hand, seized the passenger by the throat, crushed his windpipe, pulled him off the seat, and threw him into the snowswept street as if he weighed no more than a hollow, plastic, department-store mannequin.

"Always wear your seat belt," he muttered.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Sandra Murray:

The feeling that you get from The Dead Town (Dean Koontz's Frankenstein, Book 5) may be the more deep you digging the information that hide into the words the more you get enthusiastic about reading it. It doesn't mean that this book is hard to be aware of but The Dead Town (Dean Koontz's Frankenstein, Book 5) giving you excitement feeling of reading. The copy writer conveys their point in particular way that can be understood by means of anyone who read the item because the author of this book is well-known enough. This particular book also makes your vocabulary increase well. So it is easy to understand then can go together with you, both in printed or e-book style are available. We propose you for having this The Dead Town (Dean Koontz's Frankenstein, Book 5) instantly.

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