

Life Expectancy

By Dean Koontz

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BONUS: This edition contains an excerpt from Dean Koontz's *The City*.

With his bestselling blend of nail-biting intensity, daring artistry, and storytelling magic, Dean Koontz returns with an emotional roller coaster of a tale filled with enough twists, turns, shocks, and surprises for ten ordinary novels. Here is the story of five days in the life of an ordinary man born to an extraordinary legacy—a story that will challenge the way you look at good and evil, life and death, and everything in between.

Jimmy Tock comes into the world on the very night his grandfather leaves it. As a violent storm rages outside the hospital, Rudy Tock spends long hours walking the corridors between the expectant fathers' waiting room and his dying father's bedside. It's a strange vigil made all the stranger when, at the very height of the storm's fury, Josef Tock suddenly sits up in bed and speaks coherently for the frist and last time since his stroke.

What he says before he dies is that there will be five dark days in the life of his grandson—five dates whose terrible events Jimmy will have to prepare himself to face. The first is to occur in his twentieth year; the second in his twent-third year; the third in his twenty-eighth; the fourth in his twenty-ninth; the fifth in his thirtieth.

Rudy is all too ready to discount his father's last words as a dying man's delusional rambling. But then he discovers that Josef also predicted the time of his grandson's birth to the minute, as well as his *exact* height and weight, and the fact that Jimmy would be born with syndactyly—the unexplained anomal of fused digits—on his left foot. Suddenly the old man's predictions take on a chilling significance.

What terrifying events await Jimmy on these five dark days? What nightmares will he face? What challenges must he survive? As the novel unfolds, picking up Jimmy's story at each of these crisis points, the path he must follow will defy every expectation. And with each crisis he faces, he will move closer to a fate he could never have imagined. For who Jimmy Tock is and what he must accomplish on the five days when his world turns is a mystery as dangerous as it is wondrous—a struggle against an evil so dark and pervasive, only the most extraordinary of human spirits can shine through.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly
Starred Review. Of all bestselling authors, Koontz may be the most underestimated by the literary establishment. Book after book, year after year, this author climbs to the top of the charts. Why? His readers know: because he is a master storyteller *and* a daring writer, and because, in his novels, he gives readers bright hope in a dark world. His new book is an examplar of his extraordinary work. Suspense is difficult to sustain; suspense that's buoyed steadily by humor, even as it deals with the most desperate of circumstances, is nearly impossible—yet Koontz manages it here. As in last year's brilliant *Odd Thomas*, Koontz writes again in the first person, employing a cleaner, more instantly accessible line than in some of his other work (e.g., this year's *The Taking*). His narrator is Jimmy Tock, a pastry chef in a Colorado resort town. On the day he was born, Jimmy's dying grandfather predicted five future dates that would be terrible for Jimmy; he might have mentioned, but didn't, the birth day itself, which sees a mass slaying by a bitter, deranged circus clown in the hospital where Jimmy is born. The bulk of the narrative concerns the first terrible day, about 20 years later, when the vengeful son of that clown takes Jimmy and a lovely young woman, Lorrie Hicks, hostage in the local library, with an eye toward destroying the town; Jimmy and the woman live to marry, but will they and their family survive the four subsequent terrible days? Like most of Koontz's novels, this one pits good versus evil and carries a persuasive spiritual message, about the power of love and family and the miracle of existence. As such it deals with serious, perennial themes, yet with its steady drizzle of jokes and witty repartee, it does so with a lightness of touch that few other authors can match. Koontz is a true original and this novel, one of his most unusual yet, will leave readers aglow and be a major bestseller. If the literary establishment would only catch on to him, it might be an award-winner too.
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From Bookmarks Magazine
Critics found *Life Expectancy* somewhat, well, unexpected. From the master of horror, suspense, and SF comes a novel about love, family, and good versus evil, all wrapped up in a warm, fuzzy package. Sure, Koontz’s newest novel contains variations of the horror elements that define his previous works (*The Taking*, *The Face*), but his characters are so endearing that it’s hard to see how anything bad could happen to them. In fact, despite his grandfather’s prediction, Tommy’s five bad days turn out to be both a curse and a blessing. Reviewers found Koontz a great storyteller, despite a few overwritten parts, false cliffhangers, and hackneyed humor. Kudos to Koontz for taking risks in this bizarre, clever story.

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From Booklist
Starred Review On the night of August 9, 1974, Jimmy Tock's grandpa rouses from a coma to predict the exact time of Jimmy's birth and five dire dates in his future--and, oh yes, watch out for the clown. Minutes later, Jimmy is secreted away by a maternity nurse while another newborn's dad goes on a murderous rampage after his wife dies in childbirth. The enraged man is, of course, a professional circus clown. Koontz's third astonishing novel in 13 months (the others: *Odd Thomas* [BKL D 15 03] and *The Taking* [BKL My 1 04]) again shows him making a moral fable out of dark fantasy materials, for its story of a man dogged from birth by a family of evil madmen is an object lesson in the unfashionable virtues of fortitude, prudence, and a faith far firmer than with-it moderns generally tolerate. Simultaneously loaded with dialogue the likes of which haven't been rampant since the 1930s heyday of screwball comedy, *Life Expect*ancy is also an exuberant, prickly, ambivalent parody of literary and cinematic pop-fiction conventions. Narrator-hero Jimmy sounds like a cross between Kurt Vonnegut and Liberace as he recounts a life of suffocating

sweetness (he and generations of male forebears are world-class pastry chefs; he habitually overdoes Christmas; and he's hypersentimental about wife and family) punctuated by stupefying, traumatic violence, from which survivors emerge bright eyed and bushy tailed despite steel-reinforced repaired limbs and the loss of vital organs. That neither Jimmy nor any of the other characters could possibly be real doesn't prevent them from being richly sympathetic, and as with many a movie masterpiece, the story's fundamental ridiculousness doesn't prevent it from being emotionally powerful and thought-provoking. *Ray Olson*
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Scottie Hicks:

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Angela Kiefer:

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