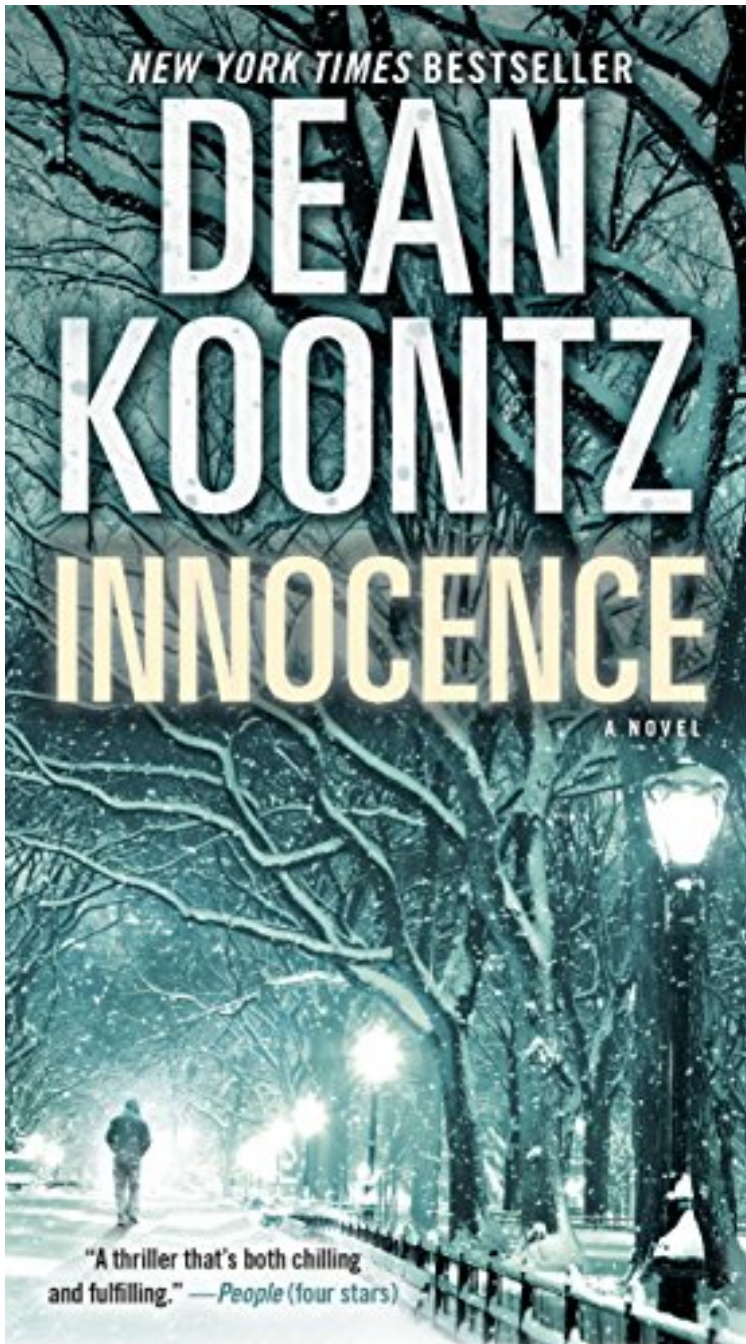


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# Innocence (with bonus short story Wilderness): A Novel



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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurNEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER Includes Dean Koontzs short story

Wilderness! This ebook edition contains a special preview of Dean Koontz's *The Silent Corner*. In *Innocence*, Dean Koontz blends mystery, suspense, and acute insight into the human soul in a masterfully told tale that will resonate with readers forever. He lives in solitude beneath the city, an exile from society, which will destroy him if he is ever seen. She dwells in seclusion, a fugitive from enemies who will do her harm if she is ever found. But the bond between them runs deeper than the tragedies that have scarred their lives. Something more than chance and nothing less than destiny has brought them together in a world whose hour of reckoning is fast approaching. Praise for *Innocence*: A thriller that's both chilling and fulfilling. People (four stars) Laced with fantastical mysticism, it's an allegory of nonviolence, acceptance and love in the face of adversity. . . . The narrative is intense, with an old-fashioned ominousness and artistically crafted descriptions. . . . An optimistic and unexpected conclusion [mirrors] his theme. Something different this way comes from Mr. Koontz's imagination. Enjoy. Kirkus sMystery and terror, the paranormal and romance all combine to make *Innocence* a challenging and emotional experience. New York Journal of Books This novel really is something special. . . . This may just be the book Dean Koontz was born to write. Thriller Books Journal Entrancing . . . as speedy a chase-thriller as any Koontz . . . has ever constructed. Written in Koontz's late mellifluous and reflective manner . . . [Innocence is] fueled by deep disgust with the world's evils [and] hope for redemption. Booklist (starred review) [An] imaginative, mystical thriller from bestseller Koontz . . . This is the most satisfying Koontz standalone in a while. Publishers Weekly Masterful storyteller Koontz delivers perhaps his most eerie and unusual tale to date. The timeline in this amazing story is compact, and readers will be swept along as they try to unravel hints and clues as to the true nature of both the protagonists and the unfolding drama. Unpredictably spine-chilling and terrifying, this is a story readers won't soon forget. RT Book s Elegant . . . Fans of Koontz's previous series will be left hoping that Addison and Gwyneth, too, will return. Library Journal Excerpt I having escaped one fire, I expected another. I didn't view with fright the flames to come. Fire was but light and heat. Throughout our lives, each of us needs warmth and seeks light. I couldn't dread what I needed and sought. For me, being set afire was merely the expectation of an inevitable conclusion. This fair world, compounded of uncountable beauties and enchantments and graces, inspired in me only one abiding fear, which was that I might live in it too long. 2 I was capable of love, but I lived in solitude after Father died. Therefore I loved only the precious dead, and books, and the moments of great beauty with which the city surprised me from time to time, as I passed through it in utmost secrecy. For instance, sometimes on clear nights, in the solemn hour when most of the population sleeps, when the cleaning crews are finished and the high-rises darkle until dawn, the stars come out. They are not as bright over this metropolis as they must be over a Kansas plain or a Colorado mountain, but they still shine as if there is a city in the sky, an enchanting place where I could walk the streets with no fear of fire, where I could find someone to love, who would love me. Here, when I was seen, my capacity for love earned me no mercy. Quite the opposite. When they saw me, men and women alike recoiled, but their fear quickly gave way to fury. I would not harm them to defend myself, and I remained therefore defenseless. 3 On certain nights, beautiful but sad music found its way into my deep windowless rooms. I didn't know from where it came, and I couldn't identify the tune. No lyrics accompanied the melody, but I remained convinced that I had once heard a smoky-voiced chanteuse sing this song. Each time the song came, my mouth moved as if forming the words, but they eluded me. The piece was not a blues number, yet it weighed on the heart as did the blues. I might call it a nocturne, although I believe that a nocturne is always an instrumental. Words existed to this melody. I was certain they did. I should have been able to follow those mellifluous strains to a vent grille or a drain, or to some other route of transmission, but every attempt to seek the source ended in failure. The music seemed to issue from the air, as if passing through a membrane from another, unseen world parallel to ours. Perhaps those who lived in the open would have found the idea of an invisible world too fanciful and would have dismissed the notion. Those of us who remain hidden from everyone else, however, know that this world is wondrous and filled with mysteries. We possess no magical perception, no psychic insight. I believe our recognition of reality's complex dimensions is a consequence of our solitude. To live in the city of crowds and traffic and constant noise, to be always striving, to be in the ceaseless competition for money and status and power, perhaps distracted the mind until it could no longer see and forgot the all that is. Or maybe, because of the pace and pressure of that life, sanity depended on blinding oneself to the manifold miracles, astonishments, wonders, and enigmas that comprised the true world. When I said those of us who remain hidden, I should instead have said I who am hidden. As far as I was aware, no other like me existed in that metropolis. I had lived alone for a long time. For twelve years, I shared this deep redoubt with Father. He died six years earlier. I loved him. I missed him every day.

I was now twenty- six, with perhaps a long, lonely life ahead of me. Before I arrived, my father lived here with his father, whom I never had the honor of meeting. Most of the furnishings and books were handed down to me from them. One day perhaps I would pass my belongings to someone who might call me Father. We were an enduring dynasty of the dispossessed, living in the secret city that the citys people never saw.

My name is Addison. But back then we needed no names because we spoke to no one but each other. Sometimes, with a smile, Father called himself It. But that wasnt a real name. He called me Its It, or Son of It, which was our little joke. By the standards of humanity, we were exceedingly ugly in a way that excited in them abhorrence and the most terrible rage. Although we were as much human as those who lived in the open, we did not wish to offend, and so we hid ourselves away. Father told me that our kind must not be angry with other men and women merely because of the way that they treated us. They had anxieties we could never understand. He said that we of the hidden had our burdens, but those who lived in the open carried far heavier burdens than ours, which was true. We also remained hidden to avoid worse than persecution. One night, my father was caught in the open. Two frightened, enraged men shot and clubbed him to death. I did not harbor any anger toward them. I pitied them, but I loved them as best I could. We have all been brought into the world for some reason, and we must wonder why and hope to learn. My little windowless residence also served as my school, where I sought to learn, and the most important of those three small rooms was the one lined with mahogany shelves built by my fathers father. The shelves were filled with books not wanted by those who lived in the world above. Each of the deep, comfortable armchairs had a padded footstool. Beside each chair stood a simple wooden cube on which to set a drink, and a bronze floor lamp with a pleated shade of peach-colored shantung silk. A small table and two straight-backed chairs provided a place to dine. In the days when we were two, we played cards and chess at that table. These days, I occasionally played solitaire. I didnt much like the game, but sometimes, shuffling the cards or dealing them out, I saw not my hands but instead my fathers. His fingers were deformed because they had healed improperly in self-applied splints after a minister had broken them on a Sunday night, when Father was a boy. I loved those hands, which never harmed a living thing. The pale scars and arthritic knuckles were beautiful because they signified his courage and reminded me that I must never be embittered by the cruelties inflicted on us. He suffered more than I did, and yet he loved life and the world. The table and most of the other furnishings had been brought here with difficulty or had been built in place by those who came before me. For six years, I had not needed two armchairs. Most of the time, when reading, I sat in the chair that had been mine since I arrived there. Once in a while, however, I sat in Fathers chair, the better to remember him and to feel less alone. The second room, like the others, was eight feet high. The thick walls, floor, and ceiling were of steel-reinforced concrete through which vibrations sometimes traveled but never any identifiable sounds other than the aforementioned music. To each side of the doorless doorway, a hammock was suspended wall to wall. The canvas was easy to sponge clean, and my blanket was the only bedding to be laundered. When Father still lived, on nights when sleep eluded us, we would lie awake, either in the dark or in candlelight, and talk for hours. We conversed about what little of the world wed seen firsthand, about the marvels of nature that we studied in books of color photography, and about what all of it might mean. Perhaps those were among my happiest memories, although I had so many that were happy, I wasnt easily able to favor some over others. Against the back wall, between hammocks, stood a refrigerator. Fathers father had once lived without this amenity. My fatheran autodidact like metaught himself to be a fine electrician and an appliance mechanic. He dismantled the refrigerator, brought it down from the world aboveground, and reassembled it. To the left of the refrigerator stood a table holding a toaster oven, a hot plate, and a Crock-Pot. To the right were open shelves that served as my larder and tableware storage. I ate well and remained grateful that the city was a place of plenty. When Fathers father discovered this deep redoubt, electricity and a minimum of plumbing were already provided, although the rooms were unfurnished. No evidence existed to suggest that they had ever previously been occupied. Before Father found me alone and waiting to be killed, he and his father imagined many explanations for these chambers. One might think this place must be a bomb shelter, so deep beneath the street, under so many thick layers of concrete, that multiple nuclear blasts would not crack it open, reached by such a circuitous route that deadly radiation, which traveled in straight lines, could not find its way here. But when you removed the receptacles from their mounting screws in any wall outlet, the manufacturers name stamped in the metal junction box identified a company that, research proved, went out of business in 1933, long before a nuclear threat existed. Besides, a bomb shelter for only two, in a great city of millions, made no sense. The third room, a bath, also concrete all around, was not designed with the expectation that the city and its utilities would be

atomized. The pedestal sink and the claw-foot tub offered two spigots each, although the hot water was never more than pleasantly warm, suggesting that whatever boiler it tapped must have been far from there. The old toilet featured an overhead tank that flushed the bowl when you pulled on a hanging chain. During construction, perhaps some official who was also a sexual predator with homicidal desires might have provided for this sanctum under one pretense or another, intending later to erase its existence from all public records, so that he could by force bring women to a private dungeon to torture and murder them, while the teeming city overhead remained unaware of the screaming far below. But neither a city engineer nor an architect of public-utility pathways seemed likely to be an insatiable serial killer. And when Fathers father discovered these cozy quarters back in the day, no gruesome stains or other evidence of murder marred the smooth concrete surfaces. Anyway, these rooms had no ominous quality about them. To those who lived in the open, the lack of windows and the bare concrete might call to mind a dungeon. But that perception was based on the assumption that their way of life was not merely superior to ours but also without a viable alternative. Every time that I left this haven, as I did for many reasons, my life was at risk. Therefore, I had developed a most keen sense of pending threat. No threat existed here. This was home. I favored a theory involving the unseen world parallel to ours that I mentioned earlier. If such a place existed, separated from us by a membrane we couldnt detect with our five senses, then perhaps at some points along the continuum, the membrane bulged around a small part of that other reality and folded it into the stuff of ours. And if both worlds, in their becoming, arose from the same loving source, I liked to believe that such secret havens as this would be provided especially for those who, like me, were outcasts by no fault of their own, reviled and hunted, and in desperate need of shelter. That was the only theory I wished to accommodate. I couldnt change what I was, couldnt become more appealing to those who would recoil from me, couldnt lead any life but the one to which my nature condemned me. My theory gave me comfort. If one less reassuring revealed itself, I would refuse to consider it. So much in my life was beautiful that I wouldnt risk pondering any darkening idea that might poison my mind and rob me of my stubborn joy. I never went into the open in daylight, nor even at dusk. With rare exception, I ascended only after midnight, when most people were asleep and others were awake but dreaming. Black walking shoes, dark jeans, and a black or navy-blue hoodie were my camouflage. I wore a scarf under the jacket, arranged so that I could pull it up to my eyes if I had to pass along an alleyway, rarely, a street where someone might see me. I acquired my clothes from thrift shops that I could enter, after hours, by the route that rats might enter if they were as born for stealth as I was. I wore such a costume on the night in December when my life changed forever. If you were a creature like me, you expected that no big change could be positive in the long run. Yet were I given a chance to turn back time and follow a different course, I would do again what I did then, regardless of the consequences. 4 I called him father because he had been the closest thing to a father that I had ever known. He was not my true father. According to my mother, my real father loved freedom more than he loved her. Two weeks before I was born, he walked out and never walked back in, off to the sea, she said, or to some far jungle, a restless man who traveled to find himself but lost himself instead. On the night that I was born, a violent wind shook the little house, shook the forest, even shook, she said, the mountain that the forest mantled. The windstorm quarreled across the roof, insisted at the windows, rattled the door as if determined to intrude into the place where I was born. When I entered the world, the twenty-year-old daughter of the midwife fled the bedroom in fright. Weeping, she took refuge in the kitchen. When the midwife tried to smother me in the birthing blanket, my mother, although weakened by a difficult labor, drew a handgun from a nightstand drawer and, with a threat, saved me from being murdered. I had seen the Fogs and Clears all of my life. I hoped one day to know for certain what they were and what they meant, although I suspected that I might never be enlightened. Or if I discovered the truth of them, there might be a high price to pay for that knowledge.

From the Hardcover edition. *Revue de presse* A thriller thats both chilling and fulfilling. People (four stars) Laced with fantastical mysticism, its an allegory of nonviolence, acceptance and love in the face of adversity. . . . The narrative is intense, with an old-fashioned ominousness and artistically crafted descriptions. . . . An optimistic and unexpected conclusion [mirrors] his theme. Something different this way comes from Mr. Koontzs imagination. Enjoy. *Kirkus s* Mystery and terror, the paranormal and romance all combine to make *Innocence* a challenging and emotional experience. *New York Journal of Books* This novel really is something special. . . . This may just be the book Dean Koontz was born to write. *Thriller Books Journal* Entrancing . . . as speedy a chase-thriller as any Koontz . . . has ever constructed. Written in Koontz late mellifluous and reflective manner . . . [*Innocence* is] fueled by deep disgust with the worlds evils [and] hope for redemption. *Booklist* (starred review) [An] imaginative, mystical thriller from bestseller Koontz . . .

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