

## **Michael Koryta Interviews Dean Koontz**

**MICHAEL:** In the new novel, ODD APOCALYPSE, you write that "between birth and burial, we find ourselves in a comedy of mysteries." That statement could be a guiding light for the ODD series, and perhaps even your work in general of late. Was allowing the laughs to join the darkness a conscious decision?

**DEAN:** Humor began to enter my work as far back as WATCHERS (1987), and by LIGHTNING (1988), my agent and publisher at that time became alarmed and counseled me that suspense and humor never mix. They were not able to offer a cogent explanation of why the two never mix. One of my favorite films of all time is NORTH BY NORTHWEST, which is tense and funny; so I just kept doing what I was doing. By the time I moved to Bantam Books with FEAR NOTHING (1998), humor became the binding glue in all of my books except for THE TAKING, VELOCITY, THE HUSBAND, and YOUR HEART BELONGS TO ME.

Odd Thomas is speaking for me when he says, "Humanity is a parade of fools, and I'm right up front with a baton." Odd is a spiritual guy, and in my experience, genuinely spiritual people--as opposed to those for whom faith is either a crutch or a bludgeon--have a great sense of humor. They recognize that our fallen world is not just tragic but also absurd, often hilariously absurd, and that laughing at humanity's hubris and reckless transgressive behavior is a potent way to deny legitimacy to that hubris. Besides, if a character is able to make you laugh out loud, a bond is formed that ensures you will worry more for him when he finds himself in jeopardy. And I will always remember that it wasn't my looks or my sartorial splendor or macho toughness--ha!--That won Gerda; she says that she laughed so much on our first date, her stomach hurt the next day. That was better than being told, as I expected, that her stomach hurt because, after I took her home, she spent the night throwing up.

**MICHAEL:** A three-part short novel titled ODD INTERLUDE was released in ebook-only form this summer. Tell us a little about the way this was conceived and written. Did you have that planned before the new novel or did it come to you later in Odd's journey?

**DEAN:** I had written a 32,000-word ebook novella, THE MOONLIT MIND, to intrigue readers about a forthcoming novel, 77 SHADOW STREET. The novella sold very well and drew strong reader response. In fact, I'm pretty sure a lot of people liked MOONLIT better than 77 SHADOW STREET! So as I was finishing ODD APOCALYPSE, my publisher asked me to write a 60,000- to 70,000-word short novel in three parts to reintroduce readers to Odd. It was outside the seven-book arc of the series, and I had great fun with it. By the way, those readers who don't do ebooks tend to get exercised about a piece appearing only digitally. In order to avoid being whacked by an irate reader while waiting at the counter for my Big Mac, I am happy to tell you that ODD INTERLUDE will be published in paperback within a few months.

**MICHAEL:** Rumor has it a movie of ODD THOMAS is on the way, and that you're pleased with it, which is anything but the rule when it comes to adaptations. What can you tell us about the film version and why you are so pleased with Stephen Sommers' take?

**DEAN:** I have a glowing review of the film at [deankoontz.com](http://deankoontz.com) and on my official Facebook page. Anton Yelchin and Addison Timlin give wonderfully nuanced and affecting performances. Steve's sense of pace and his writing are even better than his previous best, and his scene transitions are amazing, something really new and highly effective. The picture drops much from the book, but at the same time it's absolutely true to the book, to its characters and its themes.

Steve is also a great guy and a family man. When he'd send me long emails about progress on the picture, he'd write also about his daughters and family things. After one such email, I wrote him back to say that he was so normal, compared to most of my Hollywood experiences, that I was getting suspicious. I said I was steeling myself to wake up one morning and discover that he'd been arrested with Charlie Sheen, crossing the border from Mexico in a school bus loaded with drugs and explosives. About a month later, I received a supposedly sincere email saying that he'd been arrested with Charlie Sheen, crossing the border in a school bus loaded with drugs and explosives, that attorneys were going to be able to deal with the situation, but there would be bad PR related to the fact that he and Sheen were wearing lingerie from Victoria's Secret. Now that isn't the conventional mind of the usual Hollywood director.

**MICHAEL:** I know that *THE MOONLIT MIND* came to you as an interruption, the first sentence catching in your mind and drawing you in. *ODD THOMAS*, the whole series run, traces back to a similar experience. How often in your writing life has that been the case, in which the story knocks on your door, and not the other way around? Do you find your best work is the result of those sorts of moments?

**DEAN:** More often than I've written about, novels begin when a most peculiar line or even a paragraph enters my head, intriguing but mystifying. It comes out of nowhere and seems to have no connection to anything I'm doing at the time. If I'm working on a novel, I write down the intrusive words so as not to forget them, and I return to them when the current book is finished. This is one of the things that I love most about writing fiction, this sense of tapping into some deeper part of yourself that you can't consciously explore – or possibly being connected to some greater source of creativity than yourself, because these moments definitely feel supernatural.

**MICHAEL:** Over the course of more than 80 novels, you've only rarely --Odd Thomas, Christopher Snow, some guy named Frankenstein--returned to work with the same characters. Who would you like to catch up with again? Is any character from the past still knocking on the door?

**DEAN:** I want to return to Christopher Snow for a third and final volume, and of course I will finish the sixth and seventh Odd Thomases. I'm working on *DEEPLY ODD* right now. But beyond that I doubt I'll ever turn a past stand-alone into the first of a series. I get mail every week asking if I'll write a sequel to *WATCHERS*, and though that is tempting, I doubt I will. I might create a new series character. I have one in mind. But if I do, I want to have the second book finished before the first is in print, so no gap develops between volumes. I don't want irate readers circling while I'm eating my Big Mac and drinking my Cabernet Sauvignon shake.

**MICHAEL:** You turn in 60, 70 or even 80-hour work weeks. But you've said that you never see writing as a job, and that talent is "an unearned grace." Do you believe there's a responsibility that comes along with it, then? An 80-hour week suggests anything but the unearned.

**DEAN:** Talent is an unearned grace. You're born with it, so you can't rightly take pride in it. I've arrived at the conclusion that it does indeed come with an obligation to use it to the best of your ability and in a way that brings joy to others. Because I love storytelling and the deep beauty of the English language, writing is never work for me. Sometimes it's a struggle and very demanding, but so is any activity that's fun. If a thing is too easy, that is work because it isn't challenging or fulfilling. I love writing, but I dislike having written. So I keep promotion and publicity to a minimum.

I want readers to be engrossed by a book, with luck even enchanted, and I'm acutely aware that I must give them value. But there are only eight or nine people in the world whose opinion of my work greatly matters to me. I put in those long hours for me, for the delight I take in creating, and then because each book is a gift to Gerda, whose entire life has been a great gift to me. If you care too much about what people unknown to you might think of your work, you're writing for the wrong reason, for recognition and praise, which all but certainly guarantees a miserable life because you're giving total strangers the power to decide the degree of your happiness.

**MICHAEL:** I'd say – and feel free to snort derisively – that the character most closely aligned with Odd Thomas in your work is found in non-fiction, *A BIG LITTLE LIFE*, the memoir of your golden retriever, Trixie. Did some of the ideas and considerations you took from that experience feed Odd's character? Or am I insane? Feel free to consider these questions mutually exclusive.

**DEAN:** You could be right, but that doesn't vouch for your sanity. As far as I'm concerned, Michael, whether you are insane is an open question. I hadn't considered the Trixie-Odd connection. But dogs, especially goldens, are almost defined by their humility and their love of play; likewise, Odd is on a journey to absolute humility, and he finds delight in just about everything in life, even to the extent that he can find a laugh in the darkest of moments. Trixie-Odd, Odd-Trixie? Well, obviously.

**MICHAEL:** You know no limits in fiction – monsters, the undead, time travel – and yet with wine you're rigid: California Cabernet. The heck with a summer reading list, give us a summer bottle selection.

**DEAN:** I drank some white wine in my youth, but then I was an idiot in many ways when I was young. As for hearty but smooth reds, you could force a glass or two of Lafite Rothschild down my throat, but there are so many great full-bodied California Cabernets that I see no reason to go cross-Atlantic. Three of my favorite Cabernet Sauvignons are Far Niente, Caymus, and Lancaster. Opus is good. Groth. A comparatively inexpensive table wine, reliable as the sunset, is Robert Mondavi's latest-release Cabernet, which you can buy by the case for about \$17 a bottle at Costco, and if you put it aside to age, it's a better investment than any money-market fund. Plus staring at your money-market stinking-low interest rate brings you far less pleasure than Mr. Mondavi's finest.

**MICHAEL:** Your wife, Gerda, agreed to support your attempt to make a living as a writer for five years. You squeaked by – more than 450 million copies sold worldwide to date, 38 languages, more than 6,000

unique editions of the books. So the most important question: all-time favorite cover? And once you get that one out of the way--if your next writing assignment was not to create a new novel, but rather to return to an old one and rewrite it, where would we find you, and why?

**DEAN:** You jest – but actually cover art is a fascination of mine. There was a time when I wanted to be an illustrator. I didn't major in art, but in college I sold a number of my paintings. I dropped that dream when I realized I'd never be first-rate at it. My favorite cover in the U.S. is probably the jacket for the first edition of *THE DARKEST EVENING OF THE YEAR*. The Japanese do the most amazing covers, intricate and clever, and they often publish the book in two volumes, with two different covers that form one scene together. But of all the overseas editions, I think my favorite is the Italian cover for *ONE DOOR AWAY FROM HEAVEN*, which depicts Leilani Klonk, the young disabled girl who is the heart of the story, alone and eerily spotlighted in a field of waist-high grass, in a moody twilight. It has a sense of magic and peril and melancholy that is irresistible. As for rewriting--I have done it with several older books, and if I did it again, I'd take on *NIGHT CHILLS*, an early book that I flubbed in several ways. In fact, it is my intention to redo it and have Berkley reissue it one day.

**MICHAEL:** Most writers have a fan club, a fan page, something of that nature. You have a "Fancorps." I find this intimidating, and suspect you are up to something with this recruitment. Once the Koontz Fancorps ranks are of sufficient strength, what should the world expect to see?

**DEAN:** Worldwide peace, worldwide plenty, no more reality TV, the requirement that every politician running for office be sniffed and judged suitable by a panel of golden retrievers, a cure for gnarly oak fungus, and Lindsey Lohan committed to a nunnery so the gossip pages in the newspaper might have interesting people in them again.

Actually, Bantam suggested the Fancorps, and since it's a way to reward my most ardent readers, it seemed like a good idea. I've set aside a few hundred signed books – some of them limited editions – as rewards, and it should be fun. For the time being, our Fancorps members will not be issued firearms, knives, Tasers, or chemical mace, though we do have a stocked armory should we choose to arm them. That depends on whether George R. R. Martin decides finally to step aside and let someone else have a shot at the upper realm of the bestseller lists.

[For one more answer and a great story from Dean, click to see his interview of Michael.](#)