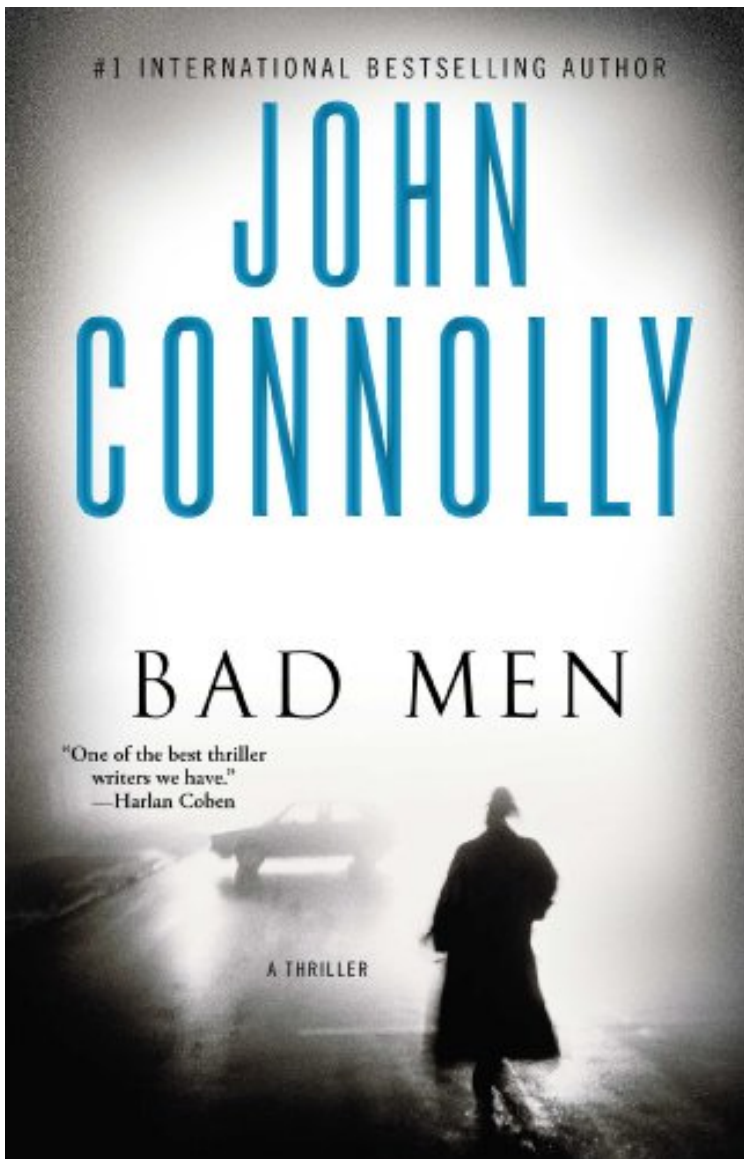


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# Bad Men: A Thriller (English Edition)



*Par John Connolly*  
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**Par John Connolly : Bad Men: A Thriller (English Edition)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Bad Men: A Thriller (English Edition):

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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurNew York Times bestselling author John Connolly masterfully intertwines mystery, emotion, violence, and the supernatural in this raw and gripping thriller.He has been told the girls last words, and he feels unaccountably afraid. The dead ones. They were dead, but they had lights. Why do the dead need light? Three hundred years ago, the settlers on the small Maine island of Sanctuary were betrayed to their enemies and slaughtered. Since then, the island has known peace. Until now. A gang of four men are descending on Sanctuary, intent on committing a brutal and relentless massacre. All that stands in their way are rookie police officer Sharon Macie and the strange, troubled officer Joe Dupree. But Joe is no ordinary policeman. He knows the island has been steeped in blood once and that it will never again tolerate the

shedding of innocent blood. The band of killers who are set to desecrate Sanctuary will unleash the fury of its ghosts upon themselves and all who stand by them. On Sanctuary, all hell is about to break loose...ExtraitBad Men PROLOGUE . . . they are not towers but giants. They stand in the well from the navel down; and stationed round its bank they mount guard on the final pit of Hell. Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, canto 31 Moloch dreams. In the darkness of a Virginia prison cell, he stirs like an old demon goaded by memories of its lost humanity. The dream presses upon him once more, the First Dream, for in it lies his beginning, and his end. In the dream, he is standing on the verge of a dense forest and a smell clings to his clothing, the scent of animal fat and saltwater. There is a weight at his right hand, a musket, its rough leather strap hanging almost to the ground. On his belt there is a knife, and a powder horn, and a bag of shot. The crossing was difficult, for the sea was wild and the waves broke upon them with the force of a great hand. They lost a man on the journey to the island, drowned when one of the bark canoes capsized, and a pair of muskets and a leather bag filled with powder and shot descended with him beneath the waves. They cannot afford to lose weapons. They are hunted men, even as they are become hunters themselves this night. It is the year of our Lord 1693. Moloch, twisting on his bunk three centuries after the time of his dream, drifts between sleeping and wakefulness for an instant before he is drawn back into this world of images once again, slowly submerging, sinking deeper and deeper, like a man drowning in recollection, for the dream is not new, and its coming is by now expected when he lays his head upon the pillow and at last surrenders himself to its hold, his heartbeat loud in his ears, blood pumping. And blood flowing. He is aware, in the brief moment that he breaks the surface of his uneasy rest, that he has killed before, and will kill again. A conflation of reverie and reality occurs, for Moloch has slain in both dream and wakefulness, although now the distinction between the two realms has grown indistinct. This is a dream. This is not a dream. This is.

This was. There is sand beneath his feet. Behind him, the canoes have been drawn up onto the shore and there are men around him, awaiting his command to move. They are twelve in total. He raises a hand to them and the whites follow him into the woods, the Indians breaking off and sprinting ahead of them. One of them glances back at him, and he sees that the natives face is pitted and scarred, one ear missing, a consequence of mutilation at the hands of his own people. Wabanaki. A Wabanaki mercenary, an outcast. The Indian wears his skins with the hair turned inward, in accordance with the demands of the winter season. Tanto, says the native, speaking the name of the god of ill will. The foul weather, the drowning, perhaps even the fact that he is here in this place, surrounded by hated white men, all are ascribable to the actions of the bad god. The Wabanaki is called Crow by the other men. They do not know his tribal name, although it is said that he was once a great man among his people, the son of a chief, a sagamore, and that he would have become chief himself had he not been exiled by them. Moloch does not reply, and the native follows his fellow scouts into the woods without another word. Later, when he awakes, Moloch will wonder once more at how he knows these things (for the dream has been coming more frequently in recent months, and in ever greater detail). He knows that he does not trust the Indians. There are three of them, the Wabanaki and two Mikmaq with a price on their heads back at Fort Anne, vicious men who have pledged themselves to him in return for alcohol and weapons and the promise of rape. They are useful for now, but he feels uneasy around them. They are despised by their own people, and they are intelligent enough to realize that the men to whom they have attached themselves despise them too. In his dream, Moloch decides that they will have to be killed after their work here is done. From the trees ahead comes the sound of a brief scuffle, and moments later the Wabanaki mercenary emerges. There is a boy in his arms, no more than fifteen years of age. He is struggling against his captors grasp, his cries stifled by the natives large hand. His feet kick impotently at the air. One of the Mikmaq follows, holding the boys musket. He has been apprehended before he can fire off a warning shot. Moloch approaches, and the boy stops kicking as he recognizes the face before him. He shakes his head, and tries to utter words. The native releases his hand from the boys mouth but keeps a knife pressed to his throat so that he does not cry out. His tongue freed, the boy finds that he has nothing to say, for there is nothing that can be said. No words can prevent what is about to occur. Instead, his breath plumes whitely in the cold night air, as if his essence were already departing his body, his soul fleeing the pain of what his physical being is about to endure. Moloch reaches out and grips the boys face in his hands. Robert Littlejohn, he says. Did they tell you to keep watch for me? Robert Littlejohn does not respond. Moloch can feel him trembling beneath his hand. He is surprised that they have maintained even this level of vigilance for so long. After all, it has been many months since his enforced departure. It strikes Moloch that they must fear him a great deal. Still, they must think themselves safe if they leave only a child to watch the western approaches to Sanctuary. He eases his grip on the boys skin, and caresses it gently with his fingertips. You

are a brave boy, Robert. He stands and nods at the Indian, and the Wabanaki draws the knife across the boys throat, gripping him by the hair to pull his head back so that the blade will have easier passage. Moloch steps back to avoid the arterial spray, but continues to stare into the boys eyes as the life leaves them. In his dream, Moloch is disappointed by the nature of the boys passing. There is no fear in his eyes, although the boy must surely have been terrified during his last seconds on this earth. Instead, Moloch sees only a promise, unspoken and yet to be fulfilled. When the boy is dead, the Wabanaki carries him to the rocks above the beach and casts him into the sea. His body sinks from view. We move on, says Moloch. They ascend to the forest, their footfalls carefully placed, avoiding fallen branches that might snap loudly and alert the dogs. It is bitterly cold, and snow begins to fall, driven into their faces by the harsh wind, but Moloch knows this place, even without the scouts to guide him. Ahead of them, a Mikmaq raises his hand and the party halts. Of the other natives, there is no sign. Silently, Moloch creeps up to the guides side. He points straight ahead. Moloch can see nothing for a time, until the tobacco glows briefly red as the sentry takes a long draw. A shadow grows behind him, and the mans body arcs against the hilt of the knife. The pipe falls to the ground, shedding red ash on the dirt and dying with a hiss upon the newly fallen snow. Suddenly the barking begins and one of the settlers beasts, more wolf than hound, breaks through a patch of scrub and bears down upon a figure to Molochs left. It leaps, and then there is a gunshot and the dog bucks and twists in midair, dying with a yelp and falling on a patch of stony ground. Now the men are emerging from the cover of the woods and there are voices calling and women shouting and children crying. Moloch raises his musket at a settler who appears as a silhouette in the doorway of one of the cabins, the dying embers of the fire within making him an easy target. It is Alden Stanley, a fisherman like the savior he so adores. Moloch pulls the trigger and Alden Stanley is briefly lost in a cloud of sparks and smoke. When it clears, Moloch glimpses Stanleys feet twitching in the open doorway until finally they grow still. He sees more knives appear, and short-handled axes are drawn as his men move in for close-quarters combat, but there is little fight in these people. They have been caught unawares, convinced of their safety in this remote place, content with only a single sleepy guard and a boy on a rock, and the men are upon them before they even have a chance to load their weapons. The settlers outnumber their attackers by three to one, but that will make no difference to the outcome. Already, they are beaten. Soon, his men will pick their victims from among the surviving women and young girls, before they too are dispatched. Moloch sees one man, Barone, already in pursuit of a little girl of five or six, with pretty blond hair. She is wearing a loose ivory gown; its folds hang like wings from her raised arms. Moloch knows her name. As he watches, Barone catches her by the hair and pulls her to him. Even in his dream, Moloch feels no urge to intervene. A woman is running, making for the interior, and he moves off in pursuit of her. She is easy to track, her progress noisy, until the stones and roots begin to take their toll on her bare feet, tearing at her soles and heels and slowing her down. He moves ahead of her and cuts into her path, so that she is still looking back toward the slaughter when he emerges from his cover, the pale light filtering through the branches casting his shadow across her features. And when she sees him, her fear increases, but he recognizes the anger there too, and the hatred. You, she says. You brought them here. His right hand lashes out, catching her across the face and sending her sprawling on the ground. There is blood on her mouth as she tries to rise. Then he is on top of her, pushing her nightdress up over her thighs and belly. She strikes at him with her fists, but he throws aside his gun and holds her arms over her head with his left hand. His right hand fumbles at his belt, and she hears the sound of steel upon leather as the knife is unsheathed. I told you Id return, he whispers. I told you Id be back. Then he leans in closer to her, his mouth almost touching her lips. Know me, wife. In the moonlight the blade flashes, and in his dream Moloch begins his work. So Moloch sleeps, believing that he dreams; and far to the north, on the island of his visions, Sylvie Lauter opens her eyes. It is January, centuries after the events of which Moloch dreams, and the world is skewed. It rests at an angle, as if the physical reality has somehow come to resemble her own perception of it. It has always appeared canted to her, in a way, always off-kilter. She has never quite fit into it. At school, she has found a place with the other outcasts, the ones with the dyed hair and downcast eyes. They give her some sense of belonging, even as they reject the concept of belonging as somehow unsound. None of them belongs. The world will not have them. But now that world is altered. Trees grow diagonally, and a doorway has opened to reveal the night sky. She reaches out to touch it, but her view is obscured by a spiders web. She tries to focus and sees the starburst shatter in the glass. She blinks. There is blood on her fingers, and blood on her face. And then the pain comes. There is a great pressure on her legs, and a terrible ache in her chest. To breathe is to be constricted by nails. She attempts to swallow and tastes copper on her tongue. With her right hand she wipes the blood from her eyes and clears

her vision. The hood of the car is crumpled inward, wrapped around the trunk of the oak tree in a twisted embrace. Her legs are lost amid the wreckage of the dashboard and the workings of the engine. She remembers the moment when the car veered out of control on the slope. The night rewinds for her. The crash itself is a jumble of sights and noises. She recalls feeling strangely calm as the car struck a great shard of sloping concrete, the front lifting as the passenger side of the vehicle left the ground. She remembers branches and green leaves filling the windshield; the dull sound of the impact; a grunt from Wayne that reminded her of the sound he makes when he is puzzled, which is often, or when he climaxes, which is often too. Now rewind again, and she and Wayne are on the edge of the man-made slope, the former site of the old gun emplacements and army bunkers, ready to freewheel down the incline. Now she is breaking into the garage, and watching Wayne steal the car. Now she is on her back upon a mattress, and Wayne is making love to her. He makes love badly, but still he is her Wayne. Wayne. She turns to her left and calls his name, but no sound comes. She again forms the word with her lips, and manages a whisper. Wayne. Wayne is dead. His eyes are half closed, staring lazily at her. There is blood around his mouth, and the steering column is lost in his chest. Wayne. She begins to cry. When she opens her eyes, there are lights before her. Help, she thinks. Help is coming. The lights hover around the windshield and the damaged hood. The interior of the car glows with a diffused illumination as one of them passes overhead, and she wonders at how they can move in that way. Help me, she says. A single light draws closer, nearing the open window to her right, and she can at last see the form behind it. The shape is hunched, and cloaked with leaves and wood and mud and darkness. It smells of damp earth. It lifts its head to her, and in the strange half-light that filters from the lamp in its hand, Sylvie registers gray skin, and dark eyes like oil bubbles, and torn, bloodless lips, and knows that she is soon to join Wayne, that they will travel together into the world beyond this one, and that at last she will find a place where she fits into the great pattern that has remained hidden from her for so long. She is not yet frightened. She simply wants the pain to end. Please, she says to the dead woman at the windshield, but the woman retreats and Sylvie has a sense that she is afraid, that there is something here that even the dead fear. The other lights also begin to recede and Sylvie extends an imploring hand. Dont go, she says. Dont leave me alone. But she is not alone. A hissing sound comes from close by, and a figure floats beside her at the other side of the glass. It is smaller than the woman, and it holds no light in its hands. Its hair is white in the moonlight, and is so long and bedraggled that it almost entirely covers its face. It moves nearer as Sylvie feels a wave of tiredness wash over her. She hears herself moan. Her mouth opens as she tries to speak, and she no longer has the strength to close it again. The figure at the window presses itself against the car. Its hands, with their small, gray fingers, clutch the top of the glass, trying to force it farther down. Sylvies vision is dimmed once more, obscured by blood and tears, but she can see that it is a little girl who is trying to enter the car, to join her in her agony. Honey, Sylvie whispers. Sylvie tries to move and the pain surges through her with the force of a jolt of electricity. It hurts her to turn her head to the right, so she can see the girl only from the corner of her eye. Momentarily, Sylvies mind clears. If she can feel pain, then she is still alive. If she is alive, then there is hope. All else is just the imaginings of a mind driven to the edge by trauma and distress. The woman with the light was not dead. The child is not floating in the air. Sylvie feels something brush against her cheek. It hovers before her eyes and its wings make a dull clicking noise as it strikes the windows and roof of the car. It is a gray moth. There are others nearby. She senses them on her skin and in her hair. Honey, she says, haltingly, her hand striking feebly at the insects. Get help. Go get your mommy or your daddy. Tell them the lady needs help. Her eyes flutter closed. Sylvie is fading now. She is dying. She was mistaken. There is no hope. But the child does not leave. Instead, she leans into the car, forcing her body through the narrow gap between the window and the door, head first, then shoulders. The hissing grows louder. Sylvie feels a coldness at her brow, brushing across her cheeks, coming at last to rest upon her lips. There are more moths now, the sound of them louder and louder in her ears, like a scattering of applause. The child is bringing them. They are somehow a part of her. The coldness against her mouth grows in intensity. Sylvie opens her eyes and the childs face is near her own, her hand stroking Sylvies forehead. No And then fingers begin to probe at her lips, pushing against her teeth, and she can feel old skin crumbling like dust against her tongue. Sylvie thinks instinctively of the moths, of how one of the insects might feel in her mouth. The fingers are deep inside her, touching, probing, gripping, trying desperately to get at the warmth of her, the life within. She struggles against them and tries to scream, but the thin hand muffles her voice. The childs face is close to her own now, but there is still no detail. It is a blur, a painting left out in the rain, the shades running, blending into one another. Only the eyes remain clear, black and hungry, jealous of life. The hand withdraws, and now the childs mouth is against her own,

forcing it open with her tongue and teeth, and Sylvie tastes earth and dead leaves and dark, filthy water. She tries to push the child away and feels the old bones beneath the cloak of vegetation and rough, rotted clothing. Now it is as if her last energies are being drawn from her by the phantom child; a dying girl, being preyed upon by a dead girl. A Gray Girl. The child is hungry, so very hungry. Sylvie digs her hands into the child's scalp and her nails rake across her hair and skin. She tries to force her away, but the child is gripping her neck, holding her mouth against her own. She sees other vague shapes crowding behind, their lights gathering, drawn by the intensity of the Gray Girls hunger, although they do not share her appetites and are still kept back by their fear of her. Then, suddenly, the child's mouth is no longer against hers, and the feel of the bones is gone. The lights are departing, and other lights are replacing them, these harsher than before, shedding true illumination. A man approaches her, and she thinks that she recognizes him from somewhere. He speaks her name: Sylvie? Sylvie? She hears sirens approaching. Stay, she whispers. She takes hold of his arm and draws him to her. Stay, she repeats. They'll come back. Who? he says. The dead ones, she says. The little girl. She tries to spit the taste of the child from her mouth, and dust and blood dribble onto her chin. She begins to shake, and the man tries to hold her and comfort her, but she will not be comforted. They were dead, she says, but they had lights. Why do the dead need light? And the world turns to darkness, and she is finally given the answer that she seeks. The waves break on the shores of the island. Most of the houses are dark. No cars move on Island Avenue, the community's main street. Later, when morning comes, the postmaster, Larry Amerling, will be at his desk, waiting for the mail boat to bring the first delivery of the day. Sam Tucker will open the Casco Bay Market and lay out the day's baking of doughnuts and croissants and pastries. He will fill the coffee urns and greet by name those who drop in to fill up their travel cups before they take the ferry into Portland. Later, Nancy and Linda Tooker will open up the Dutch Diner for its traditional seven hours of business—seven until two, seven days a week—and those who can afford a more leisurely approach to life will wander down for breakfast and a little gossip, eating scrambled eggs and bacon as they look out of the windows and onto the little landing where Archie Thorson's ferry arrives and departs with reasonable regularity and slightly less reasonable punctuality. As midday comes, Jeb Burris will transfer his attentions from the Black Duck Motel to the Rudder Bar, although in winter neither business places great demands upon his time. Thursday to Saturday, Good Eats, the island's sole restaurant, opens for dinner, and Dale Zimmer, the chef and owner, will be down at the landing negotiating prices for lobster and fish. Trucks will leave Jaffe Construction, the island's biggest employer (with a total of twenty employees), to deal with Covey Jaffe's current slate of jobs, ranging from house construction to boat repair, Covey being a man who prides himself on the flexibility of his workforce. This being early January, school is still out, so Dutch Island Elementary remains closed, and the older kids will not be taking up space on the ferry to the mainland schools. Instead, some of them will be thinking up new ways to make mischief, new places in which to smoke pot and screw, preferably far from the eyes of their parents or the police. Most will not yet know of the deaths of Wayne Cady and Sylvie Lauter, and when they learn of the accident the next morning, and its impact sinks in, there may be fears of reprisals from the adult community in the form of parental constraints and increased police vigilance. But in the first moments there will be only shock and tears; boys will remember how they lusted after Sylvie Lauter, and girls will recall with something like affection Wayne Cady's adolescent fumbblings. Bottles will be raised in secret, and young men and women will make their pilgrimages to the Cady and Lauter houses, standing in embarrassed silence as their elders hug one another in open grief. But for now, the only light that burns on Island Avenue, with the exception of the island's twelve (count 'em) street lamps, can be found in the Dutch Island Municipal Building, home to the fire department, the library, and the police department. A man sits slumped in a chair in the small office that constitutes the home of Dutch Island's police force. His name is Sherman Lockwood, and he is one of the policemen from Portland on permanent roster for island duty. He still has Sylvie Lauter's blood on his hands and his uniform, and glass from the shattered windshield of the car is caught in the treads of his boots. A cup of coffee lies cold before him. He wants to cry, but he will hold it inside until he returns to the mainland, where he will awaken his still-sleeping wife by pressing his face to her skin and holding her tightly as the sobs shudder through him. He has a daughter Sylvie Lauter's age, and his greatest nightmare is that someday he may be forced to look upon her as he looked upon Sylvie this night, the promise that her life held now given the lie by her death. He holds out his hand, and the light from the desk lamp shows up the blood still caught beneath his nails and in the wrinkles of his knuckles. He could go back to the bathroom and try to remove the last traces of her, but the porcelain sink is speckled with red and he thinks that if he looks upon those marks, he will lose control of himself. And so Sherman balls his hands into fists, eases them into the

pockets of his jacket, and tries to stop his body from trembling. Through the window, Sherman can see a great shape silhouetted against the stars. It is the figure of a man, a man perhaps eighteen inches taller than he is, a man immeasurably stronger, and immeasurably sadder, than Sherman. Sherman is not a native of Dutch Island. He was born and raised in Biddeford, a little south of Portland, and he and his wife still live there, along with their two children. The loss of Sylvie Lauter and her boyfriend, Wayne, is terrible and painful to him, but he has not watched them grow as the man beyond the window has. Sherman is not a part of this tightly knit community. He is an outsider, and it will always be this way. And yet the giant too is an outsider. His great bulk, his awkwardness, the memories of too many taunts delivered, too many whispers endured have made him one. He was born here and he will die here without ever truly believing that he belongs. Sherman decides that he will join the giant in a moment. Not just yet, though. Not just yet. The giant's head is slightly raised, as if he can still hear the sound of the Portland Fire Department boat departing, taking the bodies of Sylvie and Wayne back to the mainland for autopsy. In a couple of days time, the islanders will gather at the main cemetery to watch the coffins as they are lowered silently into the ground.

Sylvie and Wayne will be buried close by each other after a joint service out of the island's little Baptist church. Much of the entire winter population will gather, along with media and relatives and friends from the mainland. Five hundred people will walk from the church to the cemetery, and afterward there will be coffee and sandwiches at the American Legion post, with maybe something a little stronger for those who need it most. And the giant will be among the mourners, and he will grieve with them, and he will wonder. For he has been told the girls' last words, and he feels unaccountably afraid. The dead ones. They were dead, but they had lights. Why do the dead need light? But for now the island is quiet once again. It is Dutch Island on the maps, a tiny oval one-and-a-half-hours ferry ride from Portland, far out in Casco Bay on the margin of the outer ring of islands. It is Dutch Island to those who have only recently come here to live, for the island has attracted its share of new residents who no longer wish to stay, or can no longer afford to stay, on the mainland. It is Dutch Island to the reporters who will cover the funeral; Dutch Island to the legislators who will determine its future; Dutch Island to the real estate salesmen driving up property prices; and Dutch Island to the summer visitors who come to its shores each year for a day, a week, a month, without ever really understanding its true nature. But others still speak of it by its old name, the name the first settlers, the people of Moloch's dream, gave to it before they were slaughtered. They called it Sanctuary, and the island is still Sanctuary to Larry Amerling, and Sam Tucker, and old Thorson, and a handful of others, but usually only when they speak of it among themselves; and they say its name with a kind of reverence, and perhaps just a hint of fear. It is Sanctuary to the giant too, for his father told him of its history, just as his father told it to him, and similarly back and back again, far into the lost generations of the giant's family. Few outsiders know this, but the giant owns whole sections of the island, bought by his family when nobody wanted to own this land, when even the state was turning down the opportunity to buy islands in Casco Bay. Their stewardship of the land is one of the reasons the island remains unspoiled, and why its heritage is so diligently protected, its memories so carefully stored. The giant knows that the island is special and so he calls it Sanctuary, like all those who recognize their duty toward this place. And perhaps it is still Sanctuary also to the young boy who stands amid the breaking waves at Pine Cove, staring out to sea. He does not appear to heed the cold, and the force of the waves does not make him rock back on his heels when they break, nor threaten to suck his feet from their anchorage beneath the surface. His clothes are rough cotton, apart from the heavy cowhide jacket that his mother made for him, hand-stitching it by the fire while he watched patiently, day after day. The boy's face is very pale, and his eyes are dark and empty. He feels as though he has awakened from a long sleep. He brushes his fingers gently against the bruises on his face, where the grip of the man left its imprint upon him, then touches the memory of the wound on his throat left by the passage of the knife. His fingertips are heavily grooved, as if by time spent in the water. For the boy, as for the island, there is no past; there is only the eternal present. He looks behind him, and sees movement in the forest, the shapes drifting among the trees. Their wait is almost over, just as his unspoken promise is about to be fulfilled. He turns back to the sea and resumes his unblinking watch upon the waiting world beyond.

Revue de presse  
In the crowded killing fields of crime fiction, John Connolly has quickly and decisively established himself as a unique voice. With *BAD MEN* he does it again, giving us a powerful story that is dark, daring and original. This one is his best. (Michael Connelly)  
Remarkably assured and atmospheric crime novel . . . each successive Connolly novel has grown in authority and skill. . . Crime, horror and the supernatural are blended in a queasy mix that often has an almost physical impact on the

reader. (Sunday Express)Connolly spins his gruesome yarn with relish. (Mail on Sunday)