

of a garbage can lid; then violence erupts and Buddy's mother is forced to use the shield for real to protect them from bricks being thrown around. Religion too is both humorous and not-so-humorous. Buddy and his sister (Protestants) discuss what names are Catholic and what are Protestant (Liam is Catholic, William is Protestant), and how confession works. But the violence between (some) Catholics and (some) Protestants is very real. Buddy's family likes familiar movies and television programs from the United States, such as HIGH NOON and STAR TREK. In fact, after a brief aerial shot of Belfast in color, the film reverts to black and white except for the movies and television shows, which are in super-saturated color. Jude Hill is excellent as Buddy, and the production design is stunning.

Released theatrically 11/12/21; available on various streaming services. Rating: low +2 (-4 to +4), or 7/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt12789558/reference>

What others are saying: <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/belfast>

MUNICH--THE EDGE OF WAR: MUNICH--THE EDGE OF WAR is not science fiction, but as a historical drama it veers toward alternate history. It is based on the novel by Robert Harris, who is best known (to me, anyway) as the author of FATHERLAND, which is definitely an alternate history. In MUNICH--THE EDGE OF WAR, the biggest change is in Neville Chamberlain, who is portrayed, not as being taken in by Hitler, but rather working a longer plan to prepare Britain (and America) for the war that he knows is inevitably coming. The rest is fairly accurate, if at times a bit hard to follow, but obviously of interest to those who like historical dramas.

Released 01/21/22 on Netflix streaming.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt7475578/reference>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/munich_the_edge_of_war

[-mrl/ecl]

MOTHERLAND: FORT SALEM (two seasons of ten episodes/for pay on Amazon) (television review by Dale Skran):

It's not that easy to see MOTHERLAND. It is only "free" on something called Freeform (this seems like an online version of ABC/Disney and is an update of the old ABC Family channel, but to some degree defies easy characterization), and you can also pay for it on Amazon prime. As a result, this pretty amazing series will get only a small audience, and will probably never win any awards simply because the SF viewing public does not know it exists, just like the fantastic COUNTERPART is essentially unknown, or the nearly as excellent THE ROOK. And so on. All people are watching what is on Disney, Netflix, and Amazon prime. Some of this--like THE WITCHER and CRACOW MONSTERS--are pretty good, but a lot of it, e.g., THE WHEEL OF TIME, SHADOW AND BONE, etc. is of a lesser quality.

Imagine STARSHIP TROOPERS with witches instead of powered suits, and you have a pretty good one sentence description of MOTHERLAND. The "military cadet" story so commonplace in the 20th century has fallen out of favor as the military has declined in popularity. In this genre, a young person [almost always a man] joins the military, and goes through basic training with a few friends. There is always one friend who is the son of a big-shot general, another from the tough streets or rural byways, and finally one who is gung-ho to fight, but soon discovers the reality of war. As the story proceeds, the protagonist and his friends get pressed into battles before they are fully trained, encounter clever spies and saboteurs, and eventually rise in the ranks with distinction.

Well, that is what MOTHERLAND is all about with one itsy-bitsy difference. A long time ago in Salem a powerful witch, Sarah Alder, made a deal with the US government: Witches would fight the wars of the United States, as long as they were allowed, in this context, to be free to be witches. Fast forward to modern times, and we find a world upside-down from our own. Everyone knows women are tougher, braver, and stronger than men. Civilians both fear and depend on the witch soldiers. The witches have used magic for centuries to mate with many men, and to create the best possible offspring. Their power, while not unlimited, makes them superhuman.

The witch army is not organized in platoons, but in groups of three. It appears that one of the group is a "fixer" who can heal wounds, one has the "sight", and the third is a weather witch. But they all possess varying degrees of certain "canon" powers, namely:

- A shield that can shatter a spear, and presumably stop bullets
- A kinetic hammer that can punch through steel. A group of witches can create a hammer/shield so strong that it protects them from a truck loaded with explosives (mostly).
- To put someone to sleep by touch, and for the more powerful witches, a roomful of people w/o touch
- A magical chemical patch, which when applied to the skin, allows the witch to fly for a limited period of time. Thus, the troops apply the patch and jump out of aircraft to attack, but they can also fly up to an aircraft as well. The patch is risky to use since it only lasts for a limited period of time.

The fixers can heal most military wounds so that the witch army is relatively less impacted by injury than our real-world armies. At one point a senior witch slits the throat of a trainee to create a wound to practice healing. It is fairly obvious that without magic the wound would be fatal. The "weather witches" have powers similar to "Storm" of the X-men, with varying degrees of strength. The "sight" can be used to detect hidden dangers, both physical and magical.

The combination of all these abilities creates a formidable combat unit, but in some cases, witches find themselves unable to use their powers, and for these situations they carry the "scourge"--a whip with a metal weight on the end. The weighted chain is said to be the

martial arts weapon that is the hardest to learn, the most dangerous to the practitioner, and the most effective in combat. The "scourge" is in effect a weighted chain with the weakness that you can cut it. Each witch is trained extensively in combat with the "scourge" and when they settle matters of honor amongst themselves, it is with the scourge. Additionally, they are trained extensively in hand-to-hand combat and knife fighting.

Although our heroines are a girly bunch, they are the heirs to a harsh tradition, trained by tough drill sergeants, and pitted against the most ruthless and clever foes. Having said the above, you might think MOTHERLAND is mostly about tactical combat like a David Drake novel, but it is much more character driven. Our plucky three heroines are:

- Abigail Bellweather, a weather witch whose mother is the General in charge of Intelligence, and who comes from a long line of decorated weather witches.
- Raelle Collar, a "fixer" who hails from the "Cession" a "free" land along the Mississippi where Native Americans and witches live in harmony, and "dodgers"--witches who are avoiding the draft--hide out. She is cynical and expects to die soon as her mother before her died in the Liberia campaign. She goes "off-canon" now and then in how she "fixes" people.
- Tally Craven, a gung-ho idealist, enlists in spite of the opposition of her parents. She is gifted with very powerful "sight".

As you might suspect, at first, they do not get along, but over two seasons, a lot of arguments, and quite a number of life and death battles they become loyal friends and a deadly combat team. This is a richly imagined world. The witches have their own traditions and practices which seem odd to the civilians. There are male witches, but only female witches "breed true"--the sons/daughters of a witch are always witches. A male witch who marries a normal may or may not have witch children.

A major foe is the "Spree"--a global terrorist group of witches [clearly modeled on Al Qaeda] who believe that no witch should be forced to serve in the Army, and are engaged in terrorist acts targeting civilians. The Spree use "off-canon" magic, such as inducing victims to kill themselves. The Spree are also masters of disguise, and can take on the appearance of anyone via magic. Behind the scenes [spoiler] operate the Camarilla, an ancient organization of witch hunters who in their modern operations use science to duplicate magic to attack witches. They are clever, organized, ruthless, determined, and appear to have a vast army of fanatic followers.

An interesting aspect of MOTHERLAND is that "witchcraft" operates via sound, especially harmonious tones at particular frequencies, rather than incantations. This means that the witch army does a lot of voice training, and sets a clear path for the Camarilla to duplicate their powers. Although this is clearly fantasy, it bounces right up to being SF. The "what if" is "suppose certain combinations of sounds affected the universe in ways we don't currently understand?" Is this "magic" or just a science we have yet to discover? A lot of the plot in MOTHERLAND revolves around efforts to find new "harmonics" that unleash different magical effects, and the ethics of using those effects as weapons.

MOTHERLAND is violent and sometimes dips into horror, with Camarilla scientists attempting to kill a witch who cannot be killed, and Spree terrorists trying to use sympathetic magic to kill Sarah Alder. Did I mention Alder is centuries old and still runs the US Army? You need to watch the show for the vast tapestry of imaginative detail.

The tale of persecution [with witches/mutants standing in for Jews, gays, or whatever group is currently being persecuted] is fundamentally a lot more scary than mere monsters. Highly recommended for those who like military SF, or SF fantasy. Some might find MOTHERLAND's depiction of a female dominant society of interest. Best to stick to those over 14 due to violence and sexual situations of various kinds, including lesbian relationships and group marriages straight out of Heinlein.

Additionally, MOTHERLAND is very military friendly. There is no question that the witches are justified in using deadly force most of the time [although ethical dilemmas are a big part of the plot], and a pacifist tribe of witches is driven to using violence in order to fight the Camarilla. This is also a mature meditation on the limits of terrorism in achieving your goals, and the fact that sometimes, you just have to kill those who need killing.

MOTHERLAND has been deeply influenced by Heinlein's STARSHIP TROOPERS. I'd love to see the MOTHERLAND creative team do a reboot of STARSHIP TROOPERS the right way! Heinlein would have greatly enjoyed MOTHERLAND: FORT SALEM. A third and final season is being filmed now, and I'm excited to see it. [-dls]

THE KAIJU PRESERVATION SOCIETY by **John Scalzi** (copyright 2022, Audible Studios, 8 hours and 2 minutes, ASIN: B098G79B1Q, narrated by Wil Wheaton) (audio book review by Joe Karpierz):

The pandemic did lots of weird things to lots of people, especially authors. Some authors were not able to read or write, some were able to do one or the other, and most were not interested in writing a novel that was set in the world of COVID-19 (nor did a lot of people want to be reminded of COVID-19 in their entertainment). John Scalzi, in the throes of not being able to write the dark, brooding novel that he had planned and indeed started writing--and one that I think I would have personally welcomed as a change of pace for him--decided to write a novel that began in the early days of the pandemic. It was only a jumping-off point, but instead of it being a grim novel, THE KAIJU PRESERVATION society is a light, fun novel that still has its messages to deliver while causing the reader to laugh out loud throughout. (Well, I did, anyway. Your mileage may vary, of course).

Jamie Gray, a relatively new employee of a food delivery startup, opens the novel heading into a meeting with his boss, Rob Sanders, for his six-month performance review. Jamie has some grand plans for growing the company. Rob has other ideas, however, and terminates Jamie's employment. Rob offers him a delivery contract instead. Jamie turns the offer down, but eventually takes the job when it becomes apparent that he can't make the rent payment and jobs are scarce due to COVID-19. One of the people Jamie delivers to is Tom Stevens, an old friend who has a position with KPS, an NGO specializing in animal rights. KPS is sending an expedition out to do some field work in very short order, and Tom needs someone for his team. He gives Jamie a business card, and tells him that

there is a position available for him if he can pass the interview. He does, and is soon on his way to an Air Force base in Greenland.

That Air Force base turns out to be a gateway to an alternate earth, where Jamie learns the meaning of KPS: the Kaiju Preservation Society. In that parallel Earth, evolution took a different path. Huge creatures, dubbed Kaiju, dominate the planet. These Kaiju are fueled by bio-nuclear reactors--yes, the Kaiju have internal nuclear reactors. The creatures were dubbed Kaiju on our Earth when they crossed over to our side because the nuclear bombs in World War II opened portals between the two worlds and the creatures came for a visit to feed on the radioactive energy. These creatures inspired Japanese film makers to make movies such as GODZILLA. The actual existence of the creatures was kept secret by the governments of the world, and the KPS was created to investigate, study, and preserve the Kaiju.

Jamie is part of a team that goes to Tanaka Base in the alternate Earth to study the Kaiju. The running joke in the book is that Jamie "lifts things". He's the only one there that doesn't have a Ph.D., so in effect he gets the grunt work. In reality, Jamie becomes--as the reader probably should expect--much more important than a guy who lifts things.

The novel spends a bunch of time exploring and explaining the world, and Scalzi keeps it light. As with any of his other novels, he tells readers just enough for them to know what's going on without going into excruciating detail. All that is setup for the main conflict, which comes in the second half of the book and deals with one of the Kaiju, Bella, becoming pregnant and eventually being Kaiju-napped (my term) and taken over to our Earth.

The KAIJU PRESERVATION SOCIETY may just be the novel the doctor ordered when it comes to having to deal with the pandemic. It asks the serious questions while at the same time keeping it light and humorous. It truly is, in my opinion, a funny book. I laughed out loud quite a bit. That may be due to the narration by Wil Wheaton. Wheaton is the perfect narrator for Scalzi's work. I can hear Scalzi's voice in Wheaton's narration, and Wheaton clearly has fun doing Scalzi's work, this one included. I'm not sure what a Scalzi book narrated by someone other than Wil Wheaton would sound like.

I can't speak for anyone else, of course, but I feel as if THE KAIJU PRESERVATION SOCIETY is the perfect book for the pandemic. It was for Scalzi, it was for me, and I think that Scalzi hopes it's the perfect pandemic book for others as well. [-jak]

Hugo Finalists Reviews (letter of comment by Joe Karpierz):

In response to [Evelyn's statement](#) in the 4/15/22 issue of the MT VOID ("I don't know if Joe Karpierz is doing the novels this year"), Joe writes:

Yes, I will be making an effort to read and review all the Best Novel Hugo finalists. I find myself being more interested in short fiction these days, and so will try to read at least all the short stories and novelettes, and some subset of the novellas. I've read and reviewed one of the novels already, PROJECT HAIL MARY, and the Martine has been on my TBR pile since it came out. There are a couple of the novel finalists that I don't think I'm interested in, so I probably won't be too upset if I don't get to them. As my eldest child Gwen says, "life's too short to read something you don't like" (I'm paraphrasing, but you get the idea). I'm starting to feel that way with many of the Best Novel Hugo finalists. [-jk]

Evelyn adds:

I agree with Gwen. [-ecl]

MOTHERLAND: FORT SALEM (letters of comment by Paul Dormer, Gary McGath, Dorothy J. Heydt, Scott Dorsey, Keith F. Lynch, and Tim Merrigan):

[Reminder: I accidentally truncated Dale Skran's review in the 04/08/22 issue; the entire review appears above in this issue. -ecl]

In response to [Dale Skran's review of MOTHERLAND: FORT SALEM](#) in the 04/15/22 issue of the MT VOID, Paul Dormer writes:

I love MOTHERLAND. In the UK, it's shown on the BBC, although the BBC channel it was first shown on went streaming only but at least the first season was repeated on a terrestrial channel.

I recommended it to a friend who gave up at the first season ended in too many cliff-hangers.

I see season 3 hasn't been scheduled yet in the UK. [-pd]

Gary McGath writes:

The idea of Salem with "real" witches with magic powers annoys me. Salem of the late 17th century was a center for mass hysteria leading to unfounded accusations and executions. Modern Salem has become a locus for new-agers and fortune tellers. It's a tourist trap in October that even has a statue of Samantha from BEWITCHED. I'd much rather regard it as a reminder of how deadly moral panics can be. [-gmg]

Dorothy J. Heydt observes:

But it also spawned the excellent HOCUS POCUS. [-djh]

Scott Dorsey responds:

Was it Geronimo who, when taken on a tour of Salem in the late 19th century, talked about how wise these people were to be wary of the threat of witches? [-sd]

Keith F. Lynch adds:

How long ago [was the deal made with the US government]? The historical Salem witch craze was about eighty years before the US was formed.

I agree [with Gary about the idea of Salem with "real" witches with magic powers]. There are still similar crime-related mass hysterias in the US. The only thing different about the witch-related one is that we now know that the accused were all completely innocent, since witches, in the sense they meant it, do not exist.

It's harder to recognize subsequent hysterias, since communists, drug pushers, and sex offenders really do exist.

Also, the persecutors in Salem realized that they were mistaken, and apologized, only after about five years.

Also, the hysteria wasn't in what's now called Salem anyway, but in Danvers, which was then known as Salem Village. [-kfl]

Gary replies:

They don't let you forget [when it happened]. Spend ten minutes in Salem and you'll come across some reminder.

Things got started in Salem Village, but most of the trials were held in Salem, and accused people were held in a jail there. You can find historical markers in Danvers, but you have to go looking for them. [-gmg]

Tim Merrigan adds:

I've watched MOTHERLAND: FORT SALEM (on Freeform, which used to be ABC Family). My main objection to it is that it's yet another depiction of Witches as another species. Witches are no more another species than Jews, Moslems, Christians, Hindus, or practitioners of any other religion.

Another, minor, objection is their continuity in little things, for instance the flags on the soldier's shoulders, and flying over their base, has fifty stars, but that universe's United States has thirty-eight states.

Note: The flag in the opening credits, and the ads, has thirty-eight pentacles. [-tm]

This Week's Reading (book comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

I just watched the 1961 "Play of the Week" production of WAITING FOR GODOT by Samuel Beckett with Burgess Meredith as Vladimir and Zero Mostel as Estragon. There is an exchange between them about hanging themselves and Vladimir says that Estragon should try first because Estragon is lighter than he is, and Estragon says that is why Vladimir should go first, else "Gogo light--bough not break--Gogo dead. Didi heavy--bough break--Didi alone." But in this production, anyway, it is Vladimir (Meredith) who is light and Estragon (Mostel) who is noticeably heavier. (Mostel is five inches taller than Meredith and much heavier built.) Was this an accident of casting? Did director Alan Schneider do this on purpose? In the latest version (2021) Ethan Hawke is Vladimir and John Leguizamo (who is four inches shorter than Hawke, and definitely lighter) is Estragon, so it is not a universal choice.

I suppose that the hat routine could work regardless of the comparative sizes of Vladimir's and Estragon's heads, but will clearly have a different effect depending on whether their heads are the same size or very different sizes.

At one point, Pozzo says, "I don't seem to be able to depart." Is this where Luis Bunuel got the idea for THE EXTERMINATING ANGEL? (But Pozzo does eventually manage to leave.)

Estragon (and to a lesser extent Vladimir's) inability to remember the previous day clearly or to distinguish between days, makes me think of various works such as GROUNDHOG DAY or PALM SPRINGS (where every day is the same day) or MEMENTO (where there is no memory) or any number of science fiction works in which time is fractured.

This version was videotaped for "The Play of the Week", and while it looks much like a stage production, there are cuts from one camera angle to another, and so Lucky's three-page incoherent soliloquy was not necessarily given in a single take as it would have to be on stage. The takes between cuts are long enough that it is still an impressive feat, though.

Also, "The Play of the Week" had commercial breaks, and decided to label each section between breaks as an act, so where the original play is called "a tragicomedy in two acts", this version has six acts. I saw a version without commercials, but I am distressingly reminded of Rod Serling's dictum: "It is difficult to produce a television [show] that is both incisive and probing when every twelve minutes one is interrupted by twelve dancing rabbits singing about toilet paper." (Serling was specifically talking about documentaries, but I believe that the concept can be extended to any show.) [-ecl]

Mark Leeper
mleeper@optonline.net

Quote of the Week:

The way taxes are, you might as well marry for love.
--Joe E. Lewis

Tweet

Go to [our home page](#)