Amazon Hopes Utopia Will Offer Covid-19 Distraction—Even Though It's About a Pandemic



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Key insight:

- Consumers have already embraced pandemic-themed content during Covid-19.

HBO's upcoming Coastal Elites is the first scripted series entirely shot and set during Covid-19—but it won't be the only scripted show this fall that centers around a pandemic.

Amazon Prime Video's upcoming conspiracy thriller Utopia—which, yes, features a spreading global pandemic as a major plot point—will premiere as Covid-19 continues wreaking havoc around the world.

"It was kind of disturbing and surreal to see it come so closely to life with the pandemic," John Cusack, who stars in

the upcoming series, said today at CTAM's virtual press tour, which is a partial replacement for the annual Television Critics Association's summer press tour that was canceled this year due to the pandemic.

Utopia, which has been adapted from the British television series of the same name, follows a group of comic fans (played by Ashleigh LaThrop, Dan Byrd, Jessica Rothe, Desmin Borges and Javon Walton) who have bonded over their shared obsession of a seemingly fictional comic called Utopia, which could hold the key to stopping a pandemic that is starting to spread across the country. The series had wrapped production on Season 1 prior to the emergence of Covid-19 earlier this year.

Gone Girl and Sharp Objects author and screenwriter Gillian Flynn, who wrote Utopia and is serving as its showrunner and executive producer, said the themes she grapples with in the series have a universal resonance, but have found new relevance due to Covid-19.

"What is truth, what's reality, how spin affects these things, how much we believe in institutions—those were all in play as I started writing it," Flynn said.

The cast is hopeful that the show's fantastical, straight-from-a-comic-book elements will let viewers feel like they are escaping the barrage of bleak Covid-related news that has continued seemingly unabated.

"This is by no means a docudrama reality we're living in," said Byrd. "This is very much a comic book frequency that the pandemic is playing out in. I don't see people watching this and feeling like this is watching the news—or that it is hitting close to home. It's really about this adventure that this group is going on. The backdrop of these stories happens to be a pandemic, but it's in a completely different context than what we're experiencing right now."

That's not to say that viewers don't like pandemic-related

content. In fact, they've shown they love it: When much of the country shut down in March due to the virus, pandemic-related shows and movies such as Outbreak and Pandemic spiked on Netflix's Top 10 lists.

Utopia is one of several shows that the e-commerce giant and streamer has planned for fall. Seven-episode series Pan y Circo, which translates to Bread and Circus, features show creator and actor Diego Luna sitting down around meals prepared by renowned Mexican chefs and moderating a conversation with politicians, activists and other notable figures about a variety of topics, including Covid-19, climate change and racism.

The first three episodes of Pan y Circo will premiere on Aug. 7, and two additional episodes will be released weekly.

Amazon also paneled the second season of the popular superhero action comedy The Boys, based on the comic by Garth Ennis and Darick Robertson. At the end of the session, the streamer shared a video featuring several cast members—including Karl Urban, Jack Quaid, Laz Alonso, Tomer Capon and Karen Fukuhara—with a virus-related PSA for viewers: "They're not going to let us shoot Season 3 unless we get these numbers down, so wear your fucking mask."

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