NBC marks Peacock “soft launch” with striking teaser for Brave New World

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Alden Ehrenreich stars as antihero John the Savage in NBC Peacock’s forthcoming series *Brave New World*, an adaptation of Aldous Huxley’s seminal dystopian novel.
NBC’s Peacock streaming service marked this week’s “soft launch” with a short teaser trailer for one of its original programs: *Brave New World*, an adaptation of the ultimate dystopian science fiction novel by Aldous Huxley. The teaser is short on details but visually striking, so while Peacock is relatively late to the streaming scene, the series looks like it could be a winner for the fledgling service.

Brave New World (the novel) was inspired by H.G. Wells’ optimistic utopian novels. Huxley set out to write a parody of them but eventually “got caught up in the excitement” of creating his own “negative utopia.” He also cited D.H. Lawrence as an influence, although George Orwell noted strong similarities to a 1921 Russian science fiction novel, *We*, by Yevgeny Zamyatin. (Huxley was openly accused of plagiarism by Polish author Mieczyslaw Smolarski, who believed the similarities to two of his novels were too strong to be “accidental analogy.”) The fact that Huxley wrote *Brave New*

World as the Great Depression spread from the US to the UK influenced its theme of achieving stability, even at the cost of individual freedoms.

Brave New World is set in the year 2540, in the World State city of London, where people are born in artificial wombs and indoctrinated through "sleep-learning" to fit into their assigned predetermined caste. Citizens regularly consume a drug called soma (part anti-depressant, part hallucinogen) to keep them docile and conform to the strict social laws. Promiscuity is encouraged, but pregnancy (for women) is a cause for shame. Needless to say, both art and science (albeit to a lesser extent) are viewed with suspicion. "Every discovery in pure science is potentially subversive," Resident World Controller of Western Europe Mustapha Mond tells the novel's antihero protagonist, John the Savage. "Science is dangerous; we have to keep it most carefully chained and muzzled."

John is the illegitimate son of a high-level government official, born and raised on the Savage Reservation, where people still give birth, age naturally, and generally represent the opposite of the World State's carefully controlled ideals. His only education has been the complete works of Shakespeare. (The novel's title references a line by Miranda in *The Tempest*.) When John and his mother, Linda, find their way back to the World State, he initially becomes a cause célèbre but struggles to adapt to the new social mores.

Specifically, he falls in love with a young woman named Lenina Crowne but can't deal with her promiscuity and sexual forwardness. He ultimately isolates himself from society in hopes of purging himself of "sin." Things don't end well for John, and they don't end particularly well for Lenina, either, although the novel never explicitly reveals her fate.

- Welcome to New London, purportedly a utopian society.

- Promiscuity is not only tolerated, it’s encouraged. But pregnancy is taboo.
  YouTube/Peacock
- Regular doses of the drug soma keep citizens docile and compliant.
  YouTube/Peacock
- Jessica Brown Findlay plays the young and beautiful Lenina Crowne.
  YouTube/Peacock
- The Savagelands are the antithesis of New London
  YouTube/Peacock
- Things are a bit less shiny here.
  YouTube/Peacock
- John the Savage (Alden Ehrenreich) is the illegitimate son of a prominent New London official.
  YouTube/Peacock
- John’s mother Linda (Demi Moore) finds a way to get them both back to “utopia.”
  YouTube/Peacock
- Conformity is rigorously enforced.
  YouTube/Peacock
- Nina Sosanya plays a gender-swapped Mustafa Mond.
  YouTube/Peacock
- John falls in love with Lenina
  YouTube/Peacock
- If only his views on women weren’t so… Shakespearean.
- What is this, I can’t even…
  YouTube/Peacock
- Running toward happiness or despair?
  YouTube/Peacock

There have been prior TV film adaptations of *Brave New World*, in 1980 and 1998, respectively, as well as numerous radio broadcasts and a 2015 theater production. At one point, Ridley Scott was contemplating his own adaptation but eventually scrapped the project. He has suggested that the novel’s revolutionary ideas were perhaps better suited to its own

time, telling Collider in 2012, “When you re-analyze it, maybe it should stay as a book.” SyFy took up the challenge of updating the novel for the 21st century as a TV series in 2015, and the project moved to the USA Network before finally settling at Peacock over the last few years.

“Welcome to New London. You are an essential part of a perfect social body. Everybody in their place. Everybody happy now,” a voice assures us as the trailer opens, giving us a panoramic view of prosperous privilege. We meet Alpha-Plus Lenina (Jessica Brown Findlay), dropping a tab of soma and partying with various potential sexual partners, as occasional paramour Bernard Marx (Henry Lloyd) looks on with jealousy. One assumes it is to him Lenina says, “Everyone belongs to everyone else.”

Cut to Savageland, as Linda (Demi Moore) urges her son John (Alden Ehrenreich) to return with her to New London. “There’s no pain there, John, no fear. I want that for you.” But John isn’t particularly enthralled with New London, despite his longing for Lenina.

We also see an authoritarian Mustapha Mond (Nina Sosanya) lecturing a group of confirming acolytes about the danger of asking questions or welcoming new ideas: “A virus enters a cell. That’s how it begins.” Mond is one of two notable gender-swapped roles in the TV adaptation, the other being Bernard’s friend Helmholtz Watson, a professor at the College of Emotional Engineering. Here, the character is Wilhelmina “Helm” Watson, played by Hannah John-Kamen.

Brave New World doesn’t have an official release date yet, but Peacock officially launches broadly on July 15, 2020.

Listing image by YouTube/Peacock

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