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**CHARACTER MAP**

**Linda**
John’s mother. Was once a citizen of London but became lost in Malpais.

**Helmholtz Watson**
Intelligent writer of hypnopaedic slogans. Initially friends with Bernard but becomes better friends with John.

**Bernard Marx**

**John the ‘Savage’**
Son of Linda and DHC. Raised in Malpais. Brought back to London by Bernard. Rebels against the society.

**Lenina Crowne**
Goes to Malpais with Bernard. Falls in love with John.

**The DHC**
Man of power in London. Does not know he is John’s father until they meet.

**Henry Foster**
Dates Lenina.

**Mustapha Mond**
World Controller of Western Europe. Exiles Helmholtz and Bernard to an island.

Exiles

Go on date to Malpais

Friends

Fall in love

Dates

Friends
OVERVIEW

About the author

Aldous Leonard Huxley was born on 6 July 1894 in Surrey, England, to one of Britain’s most prestigious scientific families. His grandfather, Thomas Henry Huxley, was a famous biologist and an early champion of Charles Darwin’s Theory of Evolution, earning himself the nickname ‘Darwin’s Bulldog’. Aldous’ brother, Julian, was also a famous and successful biologist in his own right, as was his half-brother Andrew. As a teenager, Aldous suffered an illness that rendered him blind for several years, and although he would later recover most of his eyesight, he continued to struggle with this ailment throughout the rest of his life. Perhaps the most immediate effect of this illness, however, was that it steered him away from a career in the sciences that was expected of him and turned him instead towards the life of a writer.

Huxley’s interest in a literary career first flourished during his time as a student at Oxford University where he fell in with a famous assortment of radical artists, writers and intellectuals known as the Bloomsbury Group. Other members of this clique included Virginia Woolf, DH Lawrence and the philosopher Bertrand Russell, and they were known for championing what were then radical ideals of free expression and hedonism. It was here amongst the young and fervent intellectuals of England that Huxley set upon his literary aspirations in earnest. After leaving Oxford, he found intermittent employment as a teacher and literary journalist before writing his first novel, *Crome Yellow* (1921), which was a satire of these years spent amongst the young intellectual elite.

In the years that followed, Huxley travelled extensively (and seemingly endlessly) throughout Europe and around the globe, becoming a prolific writer of essays, literary journalism, poetry, travel writing, film scripts and novels. By the time *Brave New World* was published in 1932, his reputation as a unique and important public intellectual who was able to write on nearly any topic he chose was well secured.

In 1937 Huxley settled in the US where he lived until his death in 1963. In these later years of his life he became increasingly interested...
in esoteric spiritualities and parapsychology. He was also a famous advocate of the use of hallucinogenic drugs. As such, he eventually became an icon of the various ‘counter-cultural’ revolutions that took hold in America and England during the decades after the Second World War. From beatniks to hippies to punks – all of them read Aldous Huxley, especially *Brave New World*.

While his reputation as a novelist has varied over the years, today Huxley is generally regarded as one of the most brilliant and engaging thinkers of his age. Despite the fact that *Brave New World* was written as an attempt to deal with the social anxieties of the 1930s, its vision of the future still rings true today. Indeed, as Huxley wrote in *Brave New World Revisited*, a collection of essays discussing the themes of the novel, it is frightening how many of the book’s predictions seem already to have come true.

**Synopsis**

In the future year AF 632, the world is a place where human life is genetically engineered and all aspects of society are controlled. Infants are predestined to fit one of five social classes: Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta, or Epsilon. At the top of the society, the Alphas are near-perfect human beings, intelligent and physically attractive, yet behave like children in that they avoid anything at all unpleasant in preference for mindless pleasures. At the bottom end of the social spectrum the Epsilons are diminutive and stupid, kept in an infantilised state through birth engineering.

Within this society everyone is conditioned to believe what the World Controllers want them to believe. In place of a god they worship Henry Ford (the initials AF stand for After Ford) and to avoid pain and negative emotions they all take a drug called *soma*. Everyone is constantly happy and has no need to feel pain or sadness. Families no longer exist – people are conditioned to find the idea of ‘family’ abhorrent, and mandatory birth control stops families from occurring. The society is founded on the belief that social stability is more important than individuality, and a person who thinks for themselves is seen as dangerous.
This seemingly ‘perfect’ society does have some cracks, however. Physically shorter than the other Alphas, Bernard Marx is an outsider who is self-conscious about his diminutive stature. He is unhappy with doing what is expected of him and raises the suspicion of his superiors with his unorthodox behaviour. We also meet Helmholtz Watson, a writer dissatisfied with the simple party slogans he is forced to produce, and Lenina Crowne, an employee at the Embryo Store who is bored with her present existence.

In an attempt to appear brave and daring, Bernard takes Lenina Crowne on a trip to a ‘Savage Reservation’ at Malpais, New Mexico. Here amongst the indigenous people they meet John, whose parents were originally citizens of London. Bernard soon realises that John is the secret son of the Director of Hatcheries and Conditioning, a man of great authority in London, and so formulates a plan to bring him back with him in order to shame the DHC out of his job.

Upon his arrival in London, John indeed causes quite a stir. The DHC resigns in shame and people grow equally scared and fascinated by John’s ‘strange’ beliefs. John uses ‘smutty’ words like mother and father, and believes that people should be free to think and do what they want, including being unhappy. Lenina, despite everything she has learnt about the dangers of deep feelings, falls in love with him.

The longer John spends in London, the unhappier he grows. He violently refuses Lenina’s advances and won’t let himself enjoy life for fear of endorsing this society he hates. Eventually his mother Linda dies (possibly from an overdose of *soma*) and this sends him over the edge: he seizes a box of the drugs and throws them out a window.

When Helmholtz and Bernard are exiled to an island for their involvement with the riot, John runs away to an isolated lighthouse outside of London. Eventually his location is discovered by tourists who come to gawk at him as though he were a strange beast. Distraught and caught in a confused moral torment, John commits suicide.
Character list

John the ‘Savage’: the son of Linda and the Director and raised in Malpais, New Mexico; believes in freedom and individuality and is obsessed with the works of William Shakespeare; falls in love with Lenina but won’t let himself follow his desires.

Bernard Marx: employee at the Bureau of Psychology, self-conscious about being unusually short for an Alpha; pretends to be brave and different but is really just petty, jealous and cowardly.

Lenina Crowne: attractive and cheerful employee at the Embryo Store; slightly bored with her life; falls in love with John.

Helmholtz Watson: incredibly intelligent and attractive Alpha; writer of ‘feelies’ and hypnopaedic slogans but wants to produce something more important; initially friends with Bernard but becomes better friends with John.

Mustapha Mond: the Resident World Controller for Western Europe; powerful and confident; was once an individual like Helmholtz but chose leadership over freedom.

The Director / DHC: man of power within London; does not know he has a son until John arrives in London.

Linda: mother of John; was once a citizen of London but became lost on a trip to Malpais; longs to return to the pleasures of civilisation.

Henry Foster: sometime sex-partner of Lenina; intelligent but happy to conform.

Benito Hoover: an always-cheery co-worker of Bernard.

Fanny Crowne: friend of Lenina, they have the same surname but aren’t related.

Popé: indigenous inhabitant of Malpais; rapes and abuses Linda; much hated by John.

Darwin Bonaparte: a big-game photographer and filmmaker who works for the Feelie Corporation.
BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

Social change, technology and anxiety

England in the 1930s was a changing and tumultuous place. Still dealing with the effects of World War I, it also had to negotiate the difficulties of the worst economic depression to strike the modern world, which like the Great War was tellingly known as the ‘Great’ Depression. These two major catastrophes caused many to begin to question the way they had been living. If the world seemed to be falling apart, perhaps they’d been doing something wrong? Perhaps the old world that had seemed so set-in-stone had cracks in it after all? Or perhaps the new changes brought about by the modern world were leading humanity down the wrong path?

The culture in which Huxley wrote his novel was also extremely anxious about the paths that both science and technology were taking. It was a common concern that advances in fields such as genetics and the biological sciences stood to corrupt human nature and lead to things like the genetic manipulation and biological social stratification we see in Brave New World. At the time Huxley was writing, people first began to witness the simultaneously magical and terrifying powers technology could invest them with: at the same time as people were able to talk to others across the globe courtesy of the telephone, they were also vulnerable to mass destruction at the hands of machine guns and agents of chemical warfare. Riding high on its achievements, humankind also felt it was teetering on the brink of self-destruction.

Like many others of its time, Huxley’s novel seeks to address these anxieties about the course humankind was steering. That Brave New World is set in the future is crucial to this purpose. The exaggerated potentials of its world serve as a prophecy of what might come if things are left untended, while providing people with a way to debate the moral and ethical underpinnings of their society.
Utopias and dystopias

*Brave New World* is considered an example of utopian fiction. A *utopia* is a place ‘where all is well’, a land or society of peace and harmony, but the term was originally conceived as a pun on such a definition: the word utopia literally means *no-place*, a place that cannot exist. The idea first appeared in literature in 1516 in a work by Thomas More that referred to a fictitious island known as Utopia, governed by peaceful communal policies. While More’s is arguably the first example to find its way into literary discourse, it has many philosophical antecedents, perhaps most famously Plato’s *Republic*. The ‘heavens’ of various religions can also be seen as examples of utopias, being places where peace and happiness abound.

To dream of utopia and a better life indeed seems a fundamental aspect of humanity. But while it works well in fiction, in reality it can be much more problematic – hence More’s joke about it being an impossible no-place, a world that can never really exist. A *dystopia* (sometimes called a negative or anti-utopia) is the opposite of a utopia, a place where all is not well. Dystopian societies are often governed in strict adherence to a particular principle or belief that their rulers think will create the best society, but that in reality oppresses and disenfranchises its citizens. Because of this they are generally defined as having harsh and intransigent governments that subjugate and exploit citizens, allowing them no liberty or freedom. Unlike utopias, we unfortunately have had several real-world examples of dystopias: Stalinist Russia and Nazi Germany to name two.

The interesting thing about dystopias is that they are often simply utopias viewed from the outside or from another perspective. So while a place like London in *Brave New World* might be thought by its inhabitants to be a utopia, to John the Savage it is a dystopia. Often dystopias are simply utopias gone wrong, the other side of the dream of harmony and happiness, and in them we can see the potential dangers in utopian ways of thinking. A true utopia requires its inhabitants to desire exactly the same thing. In this respect it must also be extremely intolerant of difference and individuality, as is the case in *Brave New World*. If a
society is good for some, it seems inevitable that it will also be bad for just as many.

**Further reading**

Other examples of utopian and dystopian fictions include HG Wells’ *A Modern Utopia*, BF Skinner’s *Walden Two*, Eugene Zamiatan’s *We*, Alan Moore’s graphic novel *Watchmen*, and perhaps most famously, George Orwell’s *1984* (which is discussed in more detail below).

**Industrialisation and Henry Ford**

The ‘Ford’ praised in place of God in *Brave New World* refers to the industrialist Henry Ford, the inventor of the first motor car and pioneer of industrial process. The ‘T’ shape that stands in place of the Christian crucifix refers to the Model T Ford, the first mass-produced automobile and a symbol of the birth of the modern industrial state. The year that the Model T Ford first appeared was chosen ‘as the opening date of the new era’ (p.52), and so we can work out that the year in which the novel is set, AF 632, is equivalent to AD 2540.

Ford was famous for developing the ‘assembly line’ style of mass-production and his industrial practices definitely inform the workings of *Brave New World*’s Central London where people are assembled like machines. At one stage the Bokanovsky Process is even celebrated as ‘the principle of mass production at last applied to biology’ (p.7). Ford’s industrial example is thus in many ways the inspiration for the society, the principle upon which it is built.

Huxley seems both fascinated and appalled by the Fordian potentials of modern technology. He describes the ‘assembly line’ in great detail (especially in Chapters One and Two), which suggests that for him these technologies and industrial processes possess an almost otherworldly, magical power. But the fact that they are responsible for breeding such a rigid and lifeless humanity, and that machines effectively become people’s ‘parents’, also implies his anxiety about the way technology can penetrate and control our lives.