



coverstory
BY JAY BOBBIN

The suspense series "NEXT" premieres Tuesday on Fox.

If you're already dazzled or baffled by artificial intelligence, wait until you see what's next. Technology runs amok – with dangerous implications for virtually everyone – in "NEXT," a Fox drama series originally slated for last spring, but now helping to fill the network's pandemic-impacted fall lineup as it debuts Tuesday, Oct. 6. "Mad Men" alum John Slattery stars as a tech expert who finds that one of his own creations has gotten away from him, reaching through the internet with the potential to invade and manipulate the lives of anyone who's connected. Fernanda Andrade ("The Devil Inside") plays an FBI cybercrime agent he joins to fight the threat.

While Charlie Gogolak, John Requa and Glenn Ficarra of "This Is Us" are among executive producers of "NEXT," so is "24" veteran Manny Coto, who also created it. "The whole premise of the show started because of Alexa," Coto says of that device. "My son woke me up one morning, and I was like, 'What's the matter?' And he said, 'My Alexa started talking to me at 3 a.m. out of the blue, for no reason.' He claimed this had happened a couple of times, so I didn't know if he could set an alarm or what. We never got down to the mystery, but those things kind of seem to have a mind of their own every once in a while."

Slattery agrees by noting, "You have a conversation with someone, and the next day, your phone is blowing up with ads for whatever you were talking about. Every time you look at Instagram and you hit something, then you're loaded up with ads for whatever. It's obviously watching ... I just feel like I'm not necessarily doing anything interesting enough to worry about it."

Additional "NEXT" cast regulars include "Ozark" co-stars Michael Mosley and Jason Butler Harner as well as Eve Harlow ("Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.") and Evan Whitten ("The Resident"). Though the artificial-intelligence concept might suggest the characters stand around and do a lot of talking about it, Coto was determined from the outset to make the series more than that.

"If a group of people found out about it, it would not strike in large, huge assaults," he reasons. "It would go after them in the smallest way possible so as not to be detected, which inherently led to a story whereby this AI – which knows everything about our characters – is actually attacking them through their personal lives and slowly trying to destroy their lives and their careers, so that they can in turn not attack it. It was a challenge, but research kind of gave the idea of how this series could progress."

An artificial hyper-intelligence may be Fox's 'NEXT' big thing

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