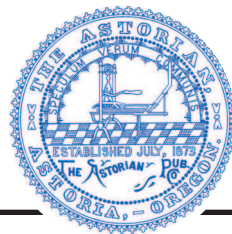


# OPINION



# THE DAILY ASTORIAN

editor@dailyastorian.com

Founded in 1873

**KARI BORGEN**  
Publisher

**JIM VAN NOSTRAND**  
Editor

**JEREMY FELDMAN**  
Circulation Manager

**JOHN D. BRUIJN**  
Production Manager

**CARL EARL**  
Systems Manager

## SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

# Sober thoughts for a new year

Aldous Huxley's 1932 novel "Brave New World" is back and more relevant than ever. The title alone is a meme for our genetically engineered, social media besotted society, where individuals speak as "avatars" and conversations between family members take place on a touch-screen keypad.



R.J.  
MARX

Ursula K. Le Guin, who knew her way around dystopia, writes in the essay "Huxley's Bad Trip" that "Huxley was brilliant in his paradoxical depiction of a perfect heaven which is a perfect hell."

Like another futuristic fable of the time — Herman Hesse's "Steppenwolf," in which citizens strive to stop the inexorable flow of technology by aiming pistols at drivers of automobiles — Huxley brings a mix of highbrow humor, stunning wordplay and science-fiction narrative decades before the term science fiction was even coined.

The term "Brave New World" is probably as abused as any cliché in modern language. Take a look at today's headlines — not just news, but sports and entertainment.

These are actual headlines from news sites around the world:

Forbes: "A brave new world of brand alignment."

USA Today: "Welcome to the brave new world of spirit-free drinks."

And my favorite, from the Herald in Everett, Washington: "It's a brave new world for the Seahawks minus Earl Thomas."

There are pages and pages more.

To be sure, many do take over from Huxley's theme of genetics ("China's Brave New World of Editing Human DNA," as headlined in the Washington Post) and gene editing ("Brave New World of Editing Human DNA Starts in China," Bloomberg News). All is geared for what Le Guin described as the planned and organized delivery of programmed, uniformed children living in a materialistic paradise, where nothing is lacking except "imagination, spontaneity and freedom."

In Huxley's brave new world, pregnancy and birth are mechanized and women are designed to provide the eggs for the next generation. Babies are "decanted" through the "Bokanovsky process" in bottling-rooms, assigned to ranks from the elite Alpha-Plus to the nearly subhuman Gamma-Minus.

Time is measured from the introduction of Henry Ford's first Model-T, inspiring the supreme being known as "Ford." Techniques to ensure uniformity of caste are gruesome precursors of the most selective genetic engineering. Unorthodoxy "strikes at Society itself." (capitalization is Huxley's).

Techniques like infant conditioning and narco-hypnosis are used, Huxley writes, as "instruments of government." Control is maintained by "suggesting" people into loving their servitude, a technique as effective as "flogging them and kicking them into obedience."

As an Alpha-plus, Huxley's protagonist Bernard Marx (the name threw me for a loop) is predestined to a life of pleasure and privilege.

But he yearns to experience a world outside of the strictures of his world, "where every man, woman and child" is compelled to consume so much a year in the interests of industry.

"One of these days," he is warned, "you'll get into trouble."

To overcome his angst, friends urge him to take a "gramme of soma," a sedative that quickly submerges those who take it into a pleasant "holiday from reality, and come back without so much as a headache or a mythology."

But the character's stubborn quest — or is it simple curiosity? — takes him to the "reservation" in New Mexico where he encounters a "savage" named John living a pre-civilization lifestyle, isolated in the desert outside the purview of the new world and its cookie-cutter genetics. John is recruited for a debut in the Brave New World, cast as a side-show freak.

In that realm the savage is something of a media idol — shades of Andy



Associated Press

**Aldous Huxley, 61-year-old British novelist, and his bride of eight days, Laura Archera, 40-year-old Italian concert violinist, at their Hollywood home in 1956.**



Associated Press

**Aldous Huxley in 1938.**

Warhol's "15 minutes" — sought after by the new world's elite as a relic of a time go. Once inside the civilized

world, there is no retreat — culminating in a violent orgy of frenzied crowd-lust as insidiously violent as the simmer-

ing mob in Shirley Jackson's short story, "The Lottery."

Le Guin, the Cannon Beach resident who died in 2017 and left a legacy of work thematically linked to the concept of freedom versus societal groupthink, wrote that Huxley was speaking of his novel not only as a cautionary tale, "but as describing nascent reality."

Huxley's vision predates brainwashing, operant conditioning, subliminal seduction, verbal cues and repetitions by decades — now all part of our daily world as we turn on the television or radio, along with the use of psychotropic drugs and narcotics from Prozac to Zoloft. "A masterpiece in the age of anxiety," Le Guin concludes.

Writing his retrospective "Brave New World Revisited," an extended essay published in 1958, Huxley gives this reflection: "At this point we find ourselves confronted by a very disquieting question. Do we really wish to act upon our knowledge? Does a majority of the population think it worthwhile to take a great deal of trouble, in order to halt, and if possible, reverse the current drift toward totalitarian control?"

The Columbia Journalism Review recently warned of a "brave new world" of the rich and powerful who can afford to "bankroll their own personal Pravdas."

Sober thoughts for a new year as we stand at a national launchpad of uncertainty.

Huxley's own prescriptive offers promise. "We can be educated for freedom. Much better than we are educated at present."

R.J. Marx is editor of the Seaside Signal and Cannon Beach Gazette, and covers South County for The Daily Astorian.

**WHEN WE SAY 'BRAVE NEW WORLD,'  
WHAT DO WE MEAN?**