Aldous Huxley was born on July 26, 1894, in Laleham near Godalming, Surrey, England, but he grew up in London. His family was well-known for its scientific and intellectual achievements: Huxley’s father, Leonard, was a renowned editor and essayist, and his highly educated mother ran her own boarding school. His grandfather and brother were top biologists, and his half-brother, Andrew Huxley, won the Nobel Prize in 1963 for his work in physiology. When he was sixteen Aldous Huxley went to England’s prestigious Eton school and was trained in medicine, the arts, and science. From 1913 to 1916 he attended Balliol College, Oxford, where he excelled academically and edited literary journals. Huxley was considered a prodigy, being exceptionally intelligent and creative.

There were many tragedies in Huxley’s life, however, from the early death of his mother from cancer when he was just fourteen to nearly losing his eyesight because of an illness as a teenager, but Huxley took these troubles in stride. Because of his failing vision, he did not fight in World War I or pursue a scientific career but focused instead on writing. He married Maria Nys in 1919, and they had one son, Matthew. To support his family, Huxley pursued writing, editing, and teaching, traveling throughout Europe India and the United States at various points.

Huxley published three books of poetry and a collection of short stories, which received a modest amount of attention from critics, before he turned to novels: *Crome Yellow* (1921), set on an estate and featuring the vain and narcissistic conversations between various artists, scientists, and members of high society; *Antic Hay* (1923) and *Those Barren Leaves* (1925), both satires of the lives of upper-class British people after World War I; and *Point Counter Point* (1928), a best-seller and complex novel of ideas featuring many characters and incorporating Huxley’s knowledge of music. As in *Brave New World*, ideas and themes dominate the style, structure, and characterization of these earlier novels.

Huxley’s next novel, *Brave New World* (1932), brought him international fame. Written just before the rise of dictators Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin the novel did
not incorporate the kind of dark and grim vision of totalitarianism later found in George Orwell’s *1984*, which was published in 1948. Huxley later commented on this omission and reconsidered the ideas and themes of *Brave New World* in a collection of essays called *Brave New World Revisited*. (1958). He wrote other novels, short stories, and collections of essays over the years which were, for the most part, popular and critically acclaimed. Despite being nearly blind all his life, he also wrote screenplays for Hollywood, most notably an adaptations of Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* and Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*.

Always fascinated by the ideas of consciousness and sanity, in the last ten years of his life Huxley experimented with mysticism, parapsychology, and, under the supervision of a physician friend, the hallucinogenic drugs mescaline and LSD. He wrote of his drug experiences in the book *The Doors of Perception* (1954). Huxley’s wife died in 1955, and in 1956 he married author and psychotherapist Laura Archera. In 1960, Huxley was diagnosed with cancer, the same disease that killed his mother and his first wife, and for the next three years his health steadily declined. He died in Los Angeles, California, where he had been living for several years, on November 22, 1963, the same day President John F. Kennedy was assassinated. Huxley’s ashes were buried in England in his parents’ grave.

ii. **Summary of the Novel**

*Brave New World* opens in the year 2495 at the Central London Hatchery and Conditioning Centre, a research facility and factory that mass-produces and then socially-conditions test-tube babies. Such a factory is a fitting place to begin the story of mass-produced characters in a techno-futurist dystopia, a world society gone mad for pleasure, order, and conformity. The date is A.F. 632, A.F.—After Ford—being a notation based on the birth year (1863) of Henry Ford, the famous automobile manufacturer and assembly line innovator who is worshipped as a god in Huxley’s fictional society.

Five genetic castes or classes inhabit this futurist dystopia. In descending order they are named for the first five letters of the Greek alphabet: Alphas, Betas, Gammas, Deltas, and Epsilons. While upper castes are bred for intellectual and managerial occupations, the lower castes, bred with less intelligence, perform manual labor. All individuals are conditioned by electric shock and hypnopædia (sleep conditioning) to reject or desire what the State dictates. For example, infants are taught to hate flowers and books, but encouraged to seek out sex, entertainment, and new products. Most importantly, they are conditioned to be happiest with their own caste and to be glad they are not a member of any other group. For instance, while eighty Beta children sleep on their cots in the Conditioning Centre, the following hypnopædic message issues from speakers placed beneath the children’s pillows:

> “Alpha children wear grey. They work much harder than we do, because they’re so frightfully clever. I’m really awfully glad I’m a Beta, because I don’t work so hard. And then we are much better than the Gammas and Deltas. Gammas are stupid. They all wear green, and Delta children wear khaki. Oh no, I don’t want to play with Delta children. And Epsilons are still worse. They’re too stupid to be able . . . .” The director pushed back the switch. The voice was silent. Only its thin ghost continued to mutter from beneath the eighty pillows.

> “They’ll have that repeated forty or fifty times more before they wake; then again on Thursday, and again on Saturday. A hundred and twenty
times three times a week for thirty months. After which they go on to a more advanced lesson.” (Huxley, page: 21)

The story begins in the London Hatchery’s employee locker room where Lenina Crowne, a Beta worker, discusses men with another female coworker, Fanny Crowne. The subject of their conversation is Bernard Marx, an Alpha-Plus who is considered abnormally short, a defect rumored to be from an excess of alcohol added to the “blood surrogate” surrounding his developing embryo. Generally perceived as antisocial and melancholic, Bernard is unusually withdrawn and gloomy, despite the fact that social coherence and mood enhancement—especially through promiscuity and regular dosages of the drug “soma”—is State-sanctioned and encouraged. Still, despite Bernard’s oddness, Lenina finds him “cute” and wants to go out with him. After all, Lenina has been going out with the Centre’s research specialist, Henry Foster, for four months—unusually long in that society. In need of a change from the places they always go—the feelies, which are like films with the sense of touch, and dance clubs with music produced from scent and color instruments—Lenina and Bernard go on holiday to the New Mexico Savage Reservation, a “natural” area populated by “sixty thousand Indians and half-breeds” living without television, books, and hot water, still giving birth to their own children, and still worshiping an assortment of Christian and pagan gods. To prevent the “savages” from escaping, the whole reservation is surrounded by an electrified fence.

Wandering around the Reservation, Lenina is horrified by the sight of mothers nursing their own infants, elderly people who actually look their age because they have not been chemically treated, and a ritual of sacrifice in which a boy is whipped, his blood scattered on writhing snakes. After witnessing this ceremony, Lenina and Bernard meet John, who, unlike them and all they know, was not born from a test tube. His mother, Linda, gave birth to him on the Reservation. On a previous visit from civilization to the Reservation years before, Linda, while pregnant with John, was abandoned by John’s father, who returned to civilization after Linda disappeared and was thought to have died. Bernard realizes that John’s father is none other than Bernard’s archenemy, the Director of Hatching and Conditioning, the man who has tried to exile Bernard to Iceland for being a nonconformist. John’s mother, Linda, has always resented the Reservation, and John, though he wants to become a part of “savage” society, is ostracized because he is white, the son of a civilized mother, and because he reads books, especially Shakespeare’s works.

John’s status as an outcast endears him to Bernard. John, meanwhile, is becoming infatuated with Lenina, and like Linda, he is excited about going to civilization. At Bernard’s request, John and Linda go with Bernard and Lenina to, as John puts it (quoting from Shakespeare’s The Tempest), the “brave new world” of London. Bernard wonders if John might be somewhat hasty calling London a “brave new world.”

Back in London, Bernard suddenly finds himself the center of attention: he uses Linda’s impregnation and abandonment, and her son, to disgrace the Director. He then introduces the exotic John (now known as “the Savage,” or “Mr. Savage”) to Alpha society, while Linda begins to slowly die from soma abuse. John comes to hate the drug that destroys his mother, and he becomes increasingly disenchanted with this “brave new world”’s open sexuality, promiscuity, and contempt for marriage. When John finally confesses his love to Lenina, she is overjoyed and
makes overt sexual advances. Because he is appalled at the idea of sex before marriage, however, John asks Lenina to marry him. Now it is her turn to be shocked. “What a horrible idea!” she exclaims.

In the aftermath of this aborted romance, John must face another crisis. He rushes to the Park Lane Hospital in time to see his mother die, and he is shocked when a class of children comes in for their conditioning in death acceptance. Lenina’s rejection and his mother’s death finally drive John over the edge. At the hospital, he begins ranting in the hallways, and then he takes the staff’s daily soma ration and dumps it out a window. The angry soma dependent staff of 162 Deltas attacks John. Bernard’s friend, Helmholtz Watson, rushes to John’s defense as Bernard timidly watches. The police arrive in time to quell the disturbance, arrest the three nonconformists, and deliver them to the office of the Controller, Mustapha Mond. The Controller tells John he must remain in civilization as an ongoing experiment. Bernard and Helmholtz, on the other hand, are to be exiled to separate islands because, says Mond, “It would upset the whole social order if men started doing things on their own.” (Huxley, page: 161).

In the last portion of the novel, John, unable to tolerate the Controller’s judgment, flees to the countryside to live a life close to nature without incessant and artificial happiness, a life with a bit of truth, beauty, and even pain. But John is seen one day ritually whipping himself and becomes the center of overwhelming media attention. In a final welter of events, John succumbs to the temptation of the crowd’s spontaneous orgy of violence, sex, and soma.