



Deciphering Season Two of HBO's 'Westworld'

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Considering the spoiler warning at the beginning of HBO's Westworld panel at the Tribeca Film Festival in New York City Thursday night, you might have assumed there would be some definitive answers after this 17-month hiatus. But following a screening of the second-season premiere, which opens on HBO this Sunday, Thandie Newton, who plays Maeve Millay, one of the first hosts to question her reality after a series of flashbacks, admitted that even the actors themselves don't have a clue.

"We don't know what is going to happen episode to episode," said Newton. "Even through I saw that whole first season, I was probably as surprised as everyone that Maeve turned around and stayed at the park to search for her daughter. She responded to the betrayal of what happened to her in such a profound way."

"I remember going to work that first day and thinking I had absolutely no idea who my character was and what I was supposed to do," said Evan Rachel Wood, who marvels at the unexpected task of beginning as kindly Dolores, the oldest host still working at the park, and morphing into mysterious villain Wyatt. "Now I have a new character to tackle and a whole new set of questions of who exactly this person is."

"Sometimes I think we all go to work not even know what episode we are shooting," she added. "You can't really decipher what is happening and what is next, there is just no pattern. So we focus on the task at hand and we actually laugh a lot when we shoot it. You would never know that from watching it."

Set at a technologically advanced Wild West theme park owned by corporate entity Delos, Westworld is populated with human-like androids where guests are encouraged to indulge their fantasies and desires. The accolades for Westworld were endless in season one, including 22 Emmy Award nominations. With a reported 12 million viewers across all platforms, according to Nielsen, Westworld is now the most watched - and perhaps most debated - of any first season of any original HBO series.Â

Given HBO's reputation for groundbreaking original scripted content, Westworld is the latest in a roster of memorable storytelling. But the Warner Bros. Television drama is actually not the first series based on the now classic 1973 theatrical. The first, family- friendly Beyond Westworld, came and quickly went on CBS in March 1980. This latest incarnation, however, is not for the faint at heart.

Featured at the panel following the season-two premiere screening were co-creators, showrunners and directors Jonathan Nolan and Lisa Joy, and cast members Evan Rachel Wood, Thandie Newton, Jeffrey Wright and James Marsden. First up, not surprisingly, was a discussion of what to potentially expect in this upcoming sophomore season.

"The fact that the first season ended in revolution was a natural progression for the Westworld," said Joy. "And I think it is safe to describe season two as more open-ended. I think it will definitely be harder for audiences to know where we are going, which only adds to the mystery of the storytelling."

"We set up the structure in season one and there is a deeper level to the game at Westworld this season," added Nolan. "In the midst of this chaos and development, we will concentrate more on the war between the hosts and park employees. And we will delve more into the personal foundation of the characters and the interaction between them."

While nothing is simple in this fictional civilization, the premiere begins with the aftermath of the uprising at Delos, a flashback to the violent massacre, and what happens as Dolores, Maeve and the rest of the hosts deal with the violent rampage. Get ready to stay glued to Reddit all season long.

[Images courtesy of John P. Johnson/HBO]

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