

Ravenous scrutiny greets 'Hunger Games' movie

Fans keeping watch over their beloved fantasy story

By Bryan Alexander
USA TODAY

Moments after 20-year-old Jennifer Lawrence was announced as the lead in the movie adaption of *The Hunger Games*, the Twitter-sphere burst to life. Many rejoiced. But others insisted she was too old for the part of the teenage heroine.

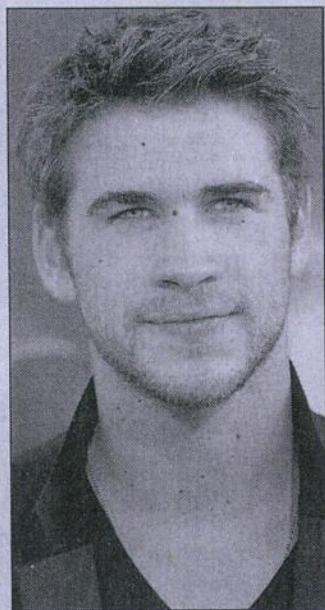
Or that her eyes weren't gray and that her hair was the wrong color.

Welcome to the world of Suzanne Collins' beloved best-selling novel and its army of devotees who are watching Hollywood's every move as the cameras prepare to roll on the film, slated for a March 2012 release.

Like their *Twilight* predecessors, *The Hunger Games'* filmmakers walk a fine line between encouraging the devotion and not falling prisoner to it.

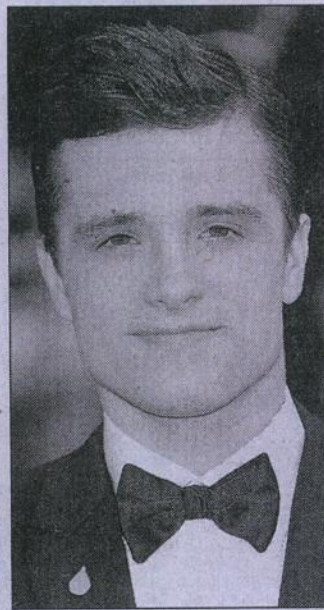
"Every decision is being so closely watched," says producer Nina Jacobson. "I understand the fierce and intense feeling the fans have for this movie."

Given *The Hunger Games'* plot about a futuristic society whose



By Dan Steinberg, AP

Hemsworth: Will play the protective Gale.



By John Shearer, Getty Images

Hutcherson: Earned role of the kindhearted Peeta.



By Frazer Harrison, Getty Images

Lawrence: Got the plum part of Katniss Everdeen.



By Matt Sayles, AP

Tucci: He'll play the host of the titular fighting game.

youth must battle in a state-enforced tradition, it's fitting that the preparation be viewed through the lens of a survival guide:

► **Form key alliances.** Collins' active involvement in every step of the film sends a clear message to the faithful: The book will not stray.

► **Find the chosen one.** Finding a star for the book's central character, Katniss Everdeen, was the casting competition of 2011. Chloe Moretz, Abigail

"Every decision is being so closely watched. I understand the fierce and intense feeling the fans have for this movie."

— Producer Nina Jacobson

Breslin and Hailee Steinfeld were just a few of the "it girls" in the running. "We left no stone unturned," Jacobson says. But Lawrence's gritty performance in 2010's *Winter's Bone* — as a character moved to violence to protect her family, much like

Katniss — gave her a leg up. "It was a lucky break to see her in that role," Jacobson says.

It was her audition, where she says goodbye to her family before leaving for the Games, that sealed the part and left onlookers in tears. Jacobson says the

► **Find your supporting studs.** Like *Twilight*, *The Hunger Games* has a complicated love triangle with two very eligible men vying for Katniss' affections.

The soulful Josh Hutcherson (breakthrough role: *The Kids Are All Right*) nabbed the spot of the kindhearted Peeta. Liam Hemsworth (brother of *Thor's* Chris Hemsworth) took the role of protective Gale.

► **Recruit the crafty veterans.** Stanley Tucci casting announcements don't usually rock the Internet, but that changed when he signed as *The Hunger Games'* quirky TV host.

"This is a wonderfully eccentric character, and I think Stanley is going to make a perfect Caesar Flickerman," director Gary Ross says.

Woody Harrelson also came on board Tuesday in the role of Katniss' drunken mentor

► **Train hard.** Lawrence is undertaking everything from agility training to archery work for her character. "She's getting extensive training in all the skills Katniss possesses," Jacobson says.

► **Prepare for other battles.** Lionsgate studios has the rights to Collins' *Hunger* trilogy. In the likely event that the movie is a success, expect to see a lot of Katniss Everdeen.

As Jacobson says, "We're in this for the long haul."



MARKETPLACE TODAY

