

A 'HUNGER' FOR MORE

Lionsgate to split book series into four pix

By DAVE McNARY

In a vote of confidence for "The Hunger Games" as a potential franchise, Lionsgate revealed plans to make Suzanne Collins' futuristic trilogy into four films — and investors took a shine to the company's recent positive earnings outlook with a 4% uptick in its stock.

Lionsgate execs made the ambitious disclosure Wednesday during a conference call for Wall Street analysts with studio motion picture group prexy Joe Drake, asserting that "Games" drew strong interest when it was offered for international sales at the recent Cannes Film Market.

The minimajor, which had not previously said how many "Games" films it would make, gave no indication Wednesday as to how it would divide the stories. But the approach echoes decisions on other franchise properties — Warner Bros.' split of the seventh and final Harry Potter book into two movies, Summit's decision to make two films from the fourth and final "Twilight" book, and New Line/MGM's splicing of "Lord of the Rings" prequel "The Hobbit."

The Lionsgate announcement came a day after it reported better than expected earnings for the fourth quar-



ter ended March 31. The minimajor's stock gained 26¢ to \$6.19 in trading Wednesday on the New York Stock Exchange. That's still well off company's 52-week high of \$7.65, which it hit in October.

Lionsgate acquired feature rights to the trilogy in March 2009, with Nina Jacobson producing at her Color Force

banner with Jon Kilik. Story is set in a bleak future where North America has been divided into a dozen districts — with each forced to send a boy and a girl to compete in a televised battle to the death once a year.

"Lionsgate's showing a lot of confidence in the property," said Matthew Harrigan, an analyst with Wunderlich Securities. "They've said they negotiated a good deal for the rights because they acquired it before it got wildly popular."

First part of the novel was published in 2008 and the second installment, "Catching Fire," followed in 2009. The third, "Mockingjay," was released last August.

Lionsgate has set a March 23, 2012, release date for the first "Hunger Games." Gary Ross is directing, with Jennifer Lawrence, Josh Hutcherson and Liam Hemsworth starring.

NATO takes VOD fight beyond U.S.

By ANDREW STEWART

The National Assn. of Theater Owners took its fight against premium video-on-demand beyond U.S. borders, with NATO prexy and CEO John Fithian urging industryites at exhib confab Show-Canada to stay wary of shrinking theatrical windows.

"Early VOD releases to the home could damage the movie industry in two significant ways," Fithian said to the crowd on Wednesday. "Early releases will

reduce movie ticket sales, and will exacerbate movie theft by giving pirates an early pristine copy of movies."



Fithian

Fithian also called for the participating VOD studios — Fox, Universal, Sony and Warner Bros. — to release VOD sales stats: "How can the industry evaluate the studios' test if they continue to hide the facts?" Fithian asked.

After Canada, NATO plans to move to Europe later this month, then in August to Australia, where Fithian will hold meetings with local exhib execs. "We hope that this early VOD experiment begins and ends in the U.S.," Fithian said. "But if not, we want exhibitors everywhere to be prepared."

The org announced at the confab it has also enlisted backing for its position from Christopher Nolan, Jon Favreau, M. Night Shyamalan, Quentin Tarantino and Mark Boal.

Legendary on base with bio

By DAVE McNARY

Legendary Pictures will develop and produce a Jackie Rob-

Legendary chairman-CEO Thomas Tull is producing and chief creative officer Jon Jashni exec produces with former Disney



Taylor moves

"Transformers" star Rachael Taylor will play one of the female leads in "Loft," the ensemble thriller from Anonymous Content.

Erik Van Looy's English-language remake of his own 2008 Belgian pic follows five married friends who share a loft where each brings his mistress. Taylor will play a call girl paid to seduce one of the men, played by James Marsden. Anonymous Content's Steve Golin, Paul Green, Matt DeRoss and Adam Shulman will produce along with original "Loft" producer Hilde DeLaere of Belgian banner We Taylor is repped by WME and Ma

Trio drops in on S

Susan Sarandon, Milo Ventimiglia player Will Forte have joined the cast



Ventimiglia



Sarandon

Hate You Dad" who m Samba Meester only to with th Pic tures a

Vanilla Ice. Sarandon's daughter Eva the cast along with Blake Clark, M former ESPN anchor Dan Patrick.

Sean Anders and John Morris (laffer from a script by David Caspea Sandler is producing through his I with Jack Giarraputo and Heather Pa produces.

"I Hate You Dad" is scheduled for Ventimiglia is repped by CAA, I Jeff Frankel of Mckuin Frankel Whit

Routh plays ball v

"Superman Returns" star Brandon "Crooked Arrows," an underdog sp lacrosse.

Steve Rash ("Can't Buy Me Love from a script by Todd Baird.

Story follows a ragtag Native school lacrosse team that is forced to prep school league, which is comp trained and equipped rivals.

J. Todd Harris and Mitchell Peck while Sports Studio ("Miracle") v with a focus on authentic athletic ca phy. Reebok is the film's first athleti

Routh is repped by UTA and Ma

Lionsgate Sets Table for Four *Hunger* Pics

By Etan Vlessing

TORONTO— Convinced that it has the makings of a hit franchise, Lionsgate is planning to spin the three books in Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* trilogy into four feature films — a la the extended film adaptations of the *Twilight* trilogy and the *Harry Potter* novels.

"The property is generating tremendous buzz and excitement, and it all points to a major Lionsgate franchise in the making," CEO Jon Feltheimer said during an analysts' call Wednesday.

The Hunger Games, the first film in the series, is set in a post-apocalyptic world where teams of teens compete for their lives in an annual TV event. It started production last week in North Carolina and is slated for release March 23.

Joe Drake, Lionsgate's motion picture group

president, said the title was the studio's highest-selling film when it was offered for international sales at the recent Marche du Film in Cannes.



Drake

He added that while the *Hunger* books have sold mostly in North America, they are

starting to penetrate the international market, raising the movies' box office potential overseas.

"We have distributors who consider this as their big brand next year, the movie that can change their company," Drake said.

Although the film has attracted a high-profile cast — which includes such hot new talents as Jennifer Lawrence, Liam Hemsworth, Josh Hutcherson and Elizabeth Banks as well as established names like Donald

Sutherland and Woody Harrelson — Lionsgate said it held the line on the back-end payouts it offered to bring them on board.

"Our business affairs did an extraordinary job. Although everyone is being treated fairly, we do retain the upside in all of the pictures," Drake said.

CLARK UPPED AT UNI PICS INT'L

By Alex Ben Block

In the wake of the recent success of *Fast Five*, which set a record for the biggest international weekend gross in Universal Pictures' history, Duncan Clark has been promoted to president of distribution for Universal Pictures International.



Clark

"His knowledge of the worldwide distribution market has been invaluable in driving our strategy," UPI president David Kosse said Wednesday. "UPI's tremendous success over the past four years is a testament to his efforts, and he will be vital to our growth moving forward."

Clark has been key in the establishment of UPI as an autonomous overseas operation since the 2007 transition from distributing outside North America through United International Pictures, which was a joint venture with Paramount Pictures.

Kosse credited Clark with guiding Universal to two strong years at the international box office. In 2008, UPI's box office reached \$1.7 billion, propelled by the success of *Mamma Mia!*, which grossed more than \$460 million outside North America.

Universal's *Five* opened with a weekend gross of \$85.1 million in 58 overseas territories. It surpassed the previous weekend record

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