

LET THE *GAMES* BEGIN!



Those mourning the passing of the *Harry Potter* cycle and dreading the looming end of the *Twilight* saga, Suzanne Collins has come to the rescue with her spellbinding trilogy of novels, *The Hunger Games*, *Catching Fire*, and *Mockingjay*. The first comes to movie theaters on March 23. The post-apocalyptic drama takes place in Panem, a North American country that is divided into 12 districts. Every year children between the ages of 12 and 18 must enter their names in a lottery known as "the reaping." Each district selects a boy and a girl to compete with the representatives of the other districts in a televised fight to the death. The final victor wins a life free from want. Collins got the idea for the

books from watching footage of the Iraq war and reality television. Adapted for the screen by writer-director Gary Ross (*Seabiscuit*), the films are positioned to be Hollywood's next big teen franchise. "My kids turned me on to it, and I went nuts," says Ross, adding, "You rarely get a tentpole that has this much emotional depth, this much character to dive into." Jennifer Lawrence, who received an Oscar nomination last year for her performance in *Winter's Bone*, is Katniss, the heroine, who, when her younger sister gets picked in the reaping, volunteers to take her place. "Katniss is an incredible character: she's a hunter but not a killer, a 16-year-old who's being forced into the arena," says Lawrence. "These kids are killing one

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another only because if they don't they'll die. It's heartbreaking." Josh Hutcherson (*The Kids Are All Right*) plays Peeta, who has loved Katniss since childhood and who is also chosen in the reaping. "I literally read all three books over the course of five days," he says. "My mind was blown by how much I felt I was like Peeta. We shot in the forest near Asheville, North Carolina—a lot of fight scenes, very physically demanding. Jennifer and I totally hit it off. We're both crazy people—we don't hold anything back." Ross concludes, "My responsibility was to Suzanne and the readers, to give them the same experience they had when they read the book. I was just so lucky that I had the cast I had."

—KRISTA SMITH

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SLIDE SHOW: EXTRA IMAGES FROM OUR HUNGER GAMES PHOTO SHOOT. GO TO VF.COM/HUNGERGAMES.

The cast of *The Hunger Games* in Concord, North Carolina. From left: Isabelle Fuhrman, Jack Quaid, Jacqueline Emerson, Dayo Okeniyi, Leven Rambin, Alexander Ludwig, Amanda Stenberg, Josh Hutcherson, Jennifer Lawrence, and Liam Hemsworth.

FUHRMAN: RALPH LAUREN BLUE LABEL SHIRT, DIESEL JEANS. QU Aid: CALVIN KLEIN JEANS SHIRT, BRUNELLO CUCINELLI PANTS, FRYE BOOTS. EMERSON: ALBERTA FERRETTI SWEATER, PHILOSOPHY DJ ALBERTA FERRETTI DRESS, JACK PURCELL SHOES. OKENIYI: DIESEL SHIRT, DENIM & SUPPLY RALPH LAUREN PANTS. RAMBIN: CALVIN KLEIN UNDERWEAR SHIRT, DENIM & SUPPLY RALPH LAUREN JEANS, CONVERSE SHOES. LUDWIG: 7 FOR ALL MANKIND SHIRT, TOMMY HILFINGER JEANS. STENBERG: RALPH LAUREN BLUE LABEL SWEATER, CREWCUTS SHORTS AND BOOTS. HUTCHERSON: CALVIN KLEIN UNDERWEAR SHIRT, DOCKERS PANTS, COLE HAAN BOOTS. LAWRENCE: DENIM & SUPPLY RALPH LAUREN SHIRT AND PANTS, CONVERSE SHOES. HEMSWORTH: BURBERRY BRIT SHIRT.