



SUZANNE COLLINS

Go ahead—just try to put *The Hunger Games* down. Can't, can you?

MOVE OVER, Bella: There's a new girl in town, and her name is Katniss Everdeen, the savvy, gutsy, bow-and-arrow-wielding heroine of the best-selling *Hunger Games* trilogy (*The Hunger Games*, *Catching Fire*, and *Mockingjay*). Katniss is the brainchild of Suzanne Collins, 48, the children's-book author who dreamed up *Games* a few years ago while channel surfing, when images of reality TV and the Iraq war melded in her head. From that flash of inspiration, Collins fashioned the dystopian world of the Hunger Games, where an authoritarian Capitol forces its districts to hand over

two "tributes" each year—teens who must fight to the death in an outdoor arena while the country watches on TV. If that sounds graphic, it is, and Collins has been criticized by some for the kid-on-kid violence. But the privacy-loving author, who granted EW a rare interview, believes the books pack a powerful anti-war message. "My dad was career Air Force, a Vietnam vet, and a doctor of political science," she explains. "He felt very strongly about educating his children about war. And in turn, I feel drawn to creating stories for kids that might help them understand it."



All three books have burned up the charts. *The Hunger Games* alone has more than 2.9 million copies in print and spent over 100 consecutive weeks on the *New York Times* best-seller list. Now that the series is finished (Collins says, definitively, that Katniss' story "was concluded in *Mockingjay*"), all eyes are on the upcoming movies. Lionsgate optioned *The Hunger Games*, and

Collins, a seasoned scriptwriter with several kids' shows under her belt, wrote the first draft of the screenplay. "Adapting a book into a two-hour viewing experience is a challenge," she says. "You want to preserve the essence while making the film stand on its own." With the script completed, fans are arguing feverishly over who should play Katniss—but the film, tentatively scheduled for 2012, hasn't been

cast. And though Collins has yet to meet *Games'* director, Gary Ross, "we've spoken twice on the phone, and I think he's going to be terrific. He's full of genuine excitement; when he talks about a scene, you can't help visualizing it. I can't wait to see his vision come to life on the screen." —Tina Jordan