



Movies

Katniss is “A Wreck”: A Conversation with Suzanne Collins and Francis Lawrence

TIME talks to the writer-creator of 'The Hunger Games' and the director of 'Catching Fire' — the first in an exclusive five-part series

By Lev Grossman [@leverus](#)
Nov. 18, 2013

With *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire* opening in theaters on Friday, Nov. 22, TIME book critic Lev Grossman recently sat down for a long and wide-ranging conversation with *Hunger Games* creator-writer **Suzanne Collins** and *Catching Fire* director **Francis Lawrence**.

The interview has been divided into five parts, running Monday through Friday. This first installment starts with Collins and Lawrence describing the mental state of our favorite heroine...

Compare Katniss at the beginning of *Hunger Games* and Katniss at the beginning of this movie. How is she different now?

Francis Lawrence: Well, Katniss is different because she's been through the games. I think that was one of the things that really interested me most about the material and about this book was that we get to start to see the kind of effects that the games have on people, the effects that violence has on people.

How do you show that change?

FL: Even though she's in the place she loves in the forest, I think that there's a look to her, I would call it the thousand-yard stare. She's still disturbed by things, and can't get certain thoughts and images out of her head. And pretty quickly she has flashbacks to the games, within minutes of the opening.



Peter Hapak for TIME

Francis Lawrence, director of *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire* and Suzanne Collins, author of *The Hunger Games Trilogy*

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Suzanne Collins: She's got a lot of classic post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms. She has nightmares. She has flashbacks. And in the beginning you can see she's practicing avoidance. She's completely pushed Peeta to arm's length, you know? She's trying to stay away from him. Why? Because everything associated with him except some very early childhood memories are associated with the Games. She's conflicted to some degree about her relationship with Prim because she couldn't save Rue. So she's dealing with all that, and her method of dealing with it is to go to the woods and be alone and keep all of that as far away as possible, because there just are so many triggers in her everyday life.

But of course, what happens right at the story is it's beginning of the Victory Tour, and that means that she's going to have to go to every district and stand there and look at the families of the dead children. Some of them in some districts, like District 1, she killed both tributes. She killed both Marvel and Glimmer. So it's this nightmare waiting to happen. And then just to make it extra awful, Snow visits her with the threat, so she's something of a wreck at the beginning.

I have a daughter who's 3 who's super-obsessed with *Little Bear*, and I always think it's funny that you wrote both those and *The Hunger Games*, too. Where is the overlap between the Suzanne Collins who wrote *Little Bear*, which is so sweet and warm and cozy, and the Suzanne Collins who wrote the *Hunger Games* books?

SC: All the writing elements are the same. You need to tell a good story. Even though the Little Bears are 7-and-a-half minutes, I wanted them to be well structured. You've got good characters. You want to tell a compelling story that will reach that audience. All the elements are the same. You're just writing a different story, and sometimes you shift a little bit because the concerns of the age group that you're writing for are different. People think there's some a dramatic difference between writing *Little Bear* and the *Hunger Games*, and as a writer, for me, there isn't.

My two favorite characters from the series make their debuts in *Catching Fire*: Finnick and Johanna. Tell me about them—they're so complex, so right on the edge between unspeakably awful and incredibly appealing.

SC: They're two of my favorite characters too. Finnick and Johanna are people who have now lived the victor life. They haven't only gone through the horrors of the Hunger Games, they came out on the other side of it, which was supposed to be a life of luxury and pleasure for the rest of your life, and found out it was anything but. They've been prostituted by the Capitol. If they try and resist in any manner, they're punished by people they love being killed or tormented in some way. So they've both developed these kind of personas which are their Capitol personas, which is all Katniss has ever seen of them. But of course underneath – they're sort of onion characters, and as you peel back the layers you find more and more about what they've experienced. Haymitch is another one – all of the victor tributes are, really.

What was the casting process like? How did you find your Finnick and your Johanna?

FL: We saw loads of people for both. It was a really tricky casting process, but Sam, who plays Finnick – he was one of the first people I saw. And we kept seeing more and more and more people, and I ended up choosing Sam in the end more for what we know about Finnick as the story progresses rather than just what we think of him in that first scene. Sam can be very charming and very flirtatious and he's handsome and in great shape, so I knew he could do that. But what I really liked was the real emotional side of him.

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SC: They had him read both scenes – scenes from the entrance and scenes later when he’s broken down.

FL: Exactly. And then I was seeing a bunch of girls for Johanna, and there was a bunch of these girls who were just coming in and acting bitchy. And I didn’t buy them. Johanna is supposed to be, or feel, a bit unhinged and unpredictable. You can’t really act that; you kind of have to just be it. I knew Jena Malone was coming in and I knew some of her work before, though I never met her. She walked into the room in character. Her eyes were red, she was mad about something – I mean, she intimidated me when she walked into the room. And then she did the scenes and it was unbelievable. She just owned the character in a way that nobody else had come close to. And she got the role really pretty quickly after that.

Suzanne, you work on the script and you see some of the casting, the auditions. Are you on set?

SC: I visit on set, but I feel like –I go to visit and to watch, but there’s nothing really for me to do in terms of work. It’s like, you get to the set and everybody has a job but you. I feel very comfortable about whatever’s transpiring on the set whether I’m there or not, which is nice.

Hawaii though, right? It must have been tempting.

FL: We tried to get her down there.

SC: I get sun poisoning in three seconds.

In the second part of the interview, running tomorrow, Lawrence explains what drew him to the project.

TIME.com Part 1: <http://entertainment.time.com/2013/11/18/catching-up-with-catching-fire-a-conversation-with-suzanne-collins-and-francis-lawrence/>

-Part 2 of 5 continued-

Writing ‘War-Appropriate’ Stories for Kids:

A Conversation With Suzanne Collins and Francis Lawrence

TIME talks to the writer-creator of "The Hunger Games" and the director of "Catching Fire" — the second in an exclusive five-part series

By Lev Grossman [@leverus](#)
Nov. 19, 2013

With *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire* opening in theaters on Friday, Nov. 22, TIME book critic Lev Grossman recently sat down for a long and wide-ranging conversation with *Hunger Games* creator-writer **Suzanne Collins** and *Catching Fire* director **Francis Lawrence**.

This is the second in a five-part series:

TIME: Francis, what sold you on *Catching Fire*? What made you want to make this movie?

Francis Lawrence: The stories in general I loved. The theme and the idea of the consequence of war and what that does to people and how people are affected by war and by violence. I just thought that there’s not many of these YA stories that really come from a real idea and a strong, topical, relatable idea. Then I had the opportunity with *Catching Fire* to sort of open the world up. Part of what I love to do is creation, and there was a bunch of world creation done in the first one, but there was more opportunity — we were going to see more of the Capitol, more of 12, lots of other districts. There was a brand-new arena that had nothing to do with the first arena. So there was a lot visually for me to sink my teeth into.

Did you feel as though you wanted to keep to the same kind of visual style and visual vocabulary that [*Hunger Games* director] Gary [Ross] had established?

FL: I think it would have been a little bit of a mistake to entirely throw out an approach to a movie when it’s a franchise. I would never do that to a franchise. But in saying that, I thought there were some opportunities to open up the scope in terms of the costumes and the visual effects and just geography in general. I liked Gary’s naturalistic approach. I have my own version of it, my own style. I don’t shoot the way he does, I choose different kinds of lenses, and part of that is to feel more intimate with characters while still maintaining a sense of place. So I have a different approach, but I kept the same production designer on, because he designed the Capitol, and those aesthetics should carry through. And even the other districts, there should still be aesthetic unity all the way through that I wanted to make sure we maintained.

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To step back a bit: Suzanne, why write a book like this? Why write a book about war and violence for teenagers? Why is it important that they know about that?

Suzanne Collins: *The Hunger Games* is part of a larger goal I have, which is to write a war-appropriate story for every age of kids, which I sort of completed in September when I had a picture book come out called *Year of the Jungle*. It's an autobiographical piece about the year my father was in Vietnam and it's a home-front story. That's me, that's my family, those are the postcards he sent, the imagery from it — it's very nonfiction.

The first one I did was the middle-reader piece, which was *The Underland Chronicles: Gregor the Overlander* — that's maybe 9 through 14. And then *The Hunger Games* was the YA one. My father was career military. He was a veteran, he was a doctor of political science, he taught at West Point and Air Command Staff and lectured at the War College. And when he got back from Vietnam, I was probably about 6, and he, I think, felt it was his responsibility to make sure that all his children had an understanding about war, about its cost, its consequences.

So I felt like I was sort of tutored in that from somebody who was very experienced in it both as a real life and as a historical basis. And if I took the 40 years of my dad talking to me about war and battles and taking me to battlefields and distilled it down into one question, it would probably be the idea of the necessary or unnecessary war. That's very much at the heart of it.

The picture book is really just an introduction to the idea of war, because at 6 is when I figured out what it was. *The Underland Chronicles*, sort of moving along in sophistication, is about the unnecessary war. *The Underland Chronicles* is an unnecessary war for a very long time until it becomes a necessary war, because there have been all these points where people could have gotten off the train but they didn't, they just kept moving the violence forward until it's gone out of control. In *The Hunger Games*, in most people's idea, in terms of rebellion or a civil-war situation, that would meet the criteria for a necessary war. These people are oppressed, their children are being taken off and put in gladiator games. They're impoverished, they're starving, they're brutalized. It would for most people be an acceptable situation for rebellion.

And then what happens is that it turns back around on itself. If you look at the arenas as individual wars or battles, you start out in the first one and you have a very classic gladiator game. By the second one it has evolved into what is the stage for the rebellion, because the arena is the one place that all the districts that cannot communicate with each other, it's the one place they can all watch together. So it's where the rebellion blows up.

And then the third arena is the Capitol, which has now become an actual war. But in the process of becoming an actual war, in the process of becoming a rebellion, they have now replicated the original arena. So it's cyclical, and it's that cycle of violence that seems impossible for us to break out of.

In the third part of the interview, running Wednesday, Collins discusses the influences of Lord of the Flies and Greek mythology

TIME.com Part 2: <http://entertainment.time.com/2013/11/19/writing-war-appropriate-stories-for-kids-a-conversation-with-suzanne-collins-and-francis-lawrence/>

“I Was Destined to Write a Gladiator Game”:

A Conversation with Suzanne Collins and Francis Lawrence

TIME talks to the writer-creator of "The Hunger Games" and the director of "Catching Fire" — the third in an exclusive five-part series

By Lev Grossman [@leverus](#)
Nov. 20, 2013

With *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire* opening in theaters on Friday, Nov. 22, TIME book critic Lev Grossman recently sat down for a long and wide-ranging conversation with *Hunger Games* creator-writer **Suzanne Collins** and *Catching Fire* director **Francis Lawrence**.

This is the third in a five-part series:

The descriptions of combat in the arena are so visceral, so graphic – how did you know how far you could go, in terms of describing violence to a young audience?

Suzanne Collins: I think probably my own experience as a child. I had been exposed to these things very early through history, through my father. He I think knew the level that was acceptable at different ages to explore a different topic or something with this. That was probably my guideline through all nine of the books.

I think that it's very uncomfortable for people to talk to children about war. And so they don't because it's easier not to. But then you have young people at 18 who are enlisting in the army and they really don't have the slightest idea what they're getting into. I think we put our children at an enormous disadvantage by not educating them in war, by not letting them understand about it from a very early age. It's not about scaring them. The stories didn't scare me when I was a child, and in these cases they're fictionalized. *Gregor* is set in a fantasy world and *The Hunger Games* is set far in the future. I don't get the sense that the young readers are frightened by them. I think they're intrigued by them and in some ways I think they're relieved to see the topic discussed.

Francis Lawrence: Yeah, and to see you not hold back. I think that's also part of it. It's that you don't hold back; you show the consequences.

SC: It's something we should be having dialogues about a lot earlier with our children. It exists, but people get uncomfortable and they don't know how to talk about it. There are children soldiers all around the world right now who are 9, 10, carrying arms, forced to be at war and whatnot. Can our children not even read a fictional story about it? I think they can.

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Why write it as science fiction? Why not write a realist novel about an actual war that took place?

SC: I think because there are sort of allegorical elements to it. The arena's very allegorical. It's the symbol – we're going to watch it transform. And I need to be able to create that, manipulate it, as I need it to work out. There's a basis for the war, historically, in the *Hunger Games*, which would be the third servile war, which was Spartacus' war, where you have a man who is a slave who is then turned into a gladiator who broke out of the gladiator school and led a rebellion and then became the face of the war. So there is a historical precedent for that arc for a character. But I think I needed the freedom to create elements that I wasn't going to neatly find in history.

Francis, did you think about where the line was, in terms of showing graphic violence?

FL: Well, I remember when I was reading the book *The Hunger Games* the first time, even though I wasn't involved in that one at all, I was thinking this is going to be really tricky, just because I've had ratings issues with other movies that I've done in the past. I'm thinking, *Gosh, child endangerment is a tricky thing with the ratings board, and showing kids killing other kids is tricky.* I on the other hand had a different experience, because there's far fewer children in *Catching Fire* than in the *Hunger Games*. You're now dealing with an arena full of victors, so now we have an 80-year-old woman, and Katniss and Peeta, I think, are the youngest ones.

SC: They're the only two that are still technically minors. They're 17, and the next youngest is probably Johanna and she's 21.

FL: And there's also far less human-on-human violence in this movie. The arena itself becomes much deadlier. So I was really far less worried than I would have been had I been making the first film.

People always mention *Lord of the Flies* in connection with *The Hunger Games*. Was that an influence on you?

SC: *Lord of the Flies* is one of my favorite books. That was a big influence on me as a teenager; I still read it every couple of years.

That's definitely a book where I read it as a teenager and thought, I'm not being lied to. No one's papering over the cracks. This is what people are like and how it would play out. What else was an influence?

SC: In terms of the initial impulse for the story, I was a Greek mythology fanatic as a child, so you'll definitely see elements of that, from Theseus and the minotaur and the oppression of Crete by Athens, the lottery and the calling of the youths and the maidens to be thrown into the labyrinth in Crete. Also *Spartacus* – when I was a child I was fascinated with the gladiator movies, so there was *Spartacus* and *Demetrius and the Gladiators*, but *Spartacus* is the top of the line, so that would have to be an influence.

But that was also a real part of history to me, because my father would tell me the historical context, and he would go get his copy of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* and read me the part about Spartacus from it, so it was all integrated in another way as well. So I think I was destined at some point to write a gladiator game.

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Favorite books besides *Lord of the Flies*? I have so many. That directly influenced this? Probably *1984* and *Brave New World*, because of the dystopian aspects. There were a lot of books I loved that had YA protagonists when I was growing up. I loved *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*. I read it later as an adult, but I loved *We Have Always Lived in a Castle*. And that brings you around to “The Lottery.” You can’t pretend — it’s a lottery in which you draw a name and people die. That’s a short story, but it’s such an incredible short story.

In the third part of the interview, running tomorrow, Collins talks about the origins of Katniss

TIME.com Part 3: <http://entertainment.time.com/2013/11/20/i-was-destined-to-write-a-gladiator-game-a-conversation-with-suzanne-collins-and-francis-lawrence/>

-Part 4 of 5 continued-

I'm More Like Plutarch than Katniss:

A Conversation with Suzanne Collins and Francis Lawrence

TIME talks to the writer-creator of "The Hunger Games" and the director of "Catching Fire" — the fourth in an exclusive five-part series

By Lev Grossman [@leverus](#)
Nov. 21, 2013

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This is the fourth in a five-part series:

TIME: Where did Katniss come from?

Suzanne Collins: Katniss arrived almost fully formed. That she was an archer, that she was the sole support of her family, that she was a very admirable character but also a deeply flawed character at the same time, because it was going to take that to survive what she was going to have to survive. She was one of those kids who had had great responsibility thrust on them too early in age, and it had formed her in certain ways. So there's some ways in which she's very mature, and some ways in which she's extremely immature for her age.

And then what's funny – when I sat down to write the book I intended it to be like *The Underland Chronicles*, third-person past tense. And I started writing and it came out first-person present tense. It was like she was insisting on telling the story, so I went with that. She was fully in my head very quickly.

What do you think people find to identify with her? Obviously her experience is very different from people who actually read the books. Or I hope it is.

SC: Well I think one of the things that people identify with is that she is a flawed character. You know on the first page, for instance, that she tried to drown a kitten. Now if you think about it, there's a lot of other things you could have done with a kitten. You could have put it outside, she could have asked the neighbors if they wanted it, she could have let it run around there and get mice. But she takes it and tries to drown it in a bucket while her little sister's wailing, and she relents because it's Prim, but you're on page one, and you don't have to worry about this character feeling morally superior to you for three volumes. Right away you know, okay, she's not perfect.

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But very quickly, within a couple chapters, she's going to do this remarkable thing, which is that she's going to volunteer for Prim in the Reaping. So now you have a complex character, already. And you're not sure – it's also that her moral compass shifts. It isn't always pointing north. It isn't always pointing to the right and moral choice. She deep down has a good heart, but you know that she's capable of making the choices that nobody should have to make.

Francis Lawrence: I think too that people can really relate to her and believe the choices that she makes. She's not a superhero in any way. She's a very real person who wants very real things and is very reluctant to take on any kind of super responsibility. I think any of us, male or female, can imagine being thrust into the situation, and you can identify with the choices that she makes. She's heroic but she's not a superhero, and I think that's a huge thing.

How are you with a bow and arrow? Did you pick up a bow and arrow in the name of research?

SC: In high school for a couple years we did archery. Nothing to report there.

You choose your weapon by the kind of war. In this one I needed a weapon that it would be believable that she could use. Not magically use but really use. She couldn't have had really any weapon, but you could have built a bow out of things you found in the woods if you knew how, and her father built the bows. You could realistically have snuck out and used the bow and become very good. In fact, you'd have to be very good to feed your family with it, so her talent with the bow is hard won. It's not something that magically happens when someone zaps her.

But I also needed a weapon that when it shifted from the arena into more of a war zone, it's a weapon that could be militarized. So that's the bow. The bow can actually be used in combat.

But that wouldn't be your weapon of choice, probably.

SC: When I was young I was trained in stage fighting and rapier and dagger, for several years.

FL: You like to take people out up close.

SC: It's all choreographed. It's more like dance, really.

Is Katniss the character that you identify with most?

SC: She's the one that's hardest to distinguish from myself in my mind, but when I step back and look at the series, she's not the character that I would identify most with.

Who would be?

SC: This is such an unflattering thing to say about yourself, but it would be Plutarch Heavensbee.

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Really?

SC: Yes, because he's the head game maker. Plutarch is creating the story and he's creating the arena and he's manipulating the characters – a writer isn't far from a game maker. And Plutarch masterminds the rebellion, so he's thinking in many ways about the story and how the story is unfolding in the same way I am as an author when I'm telling it. I'm not for creating arenas or something, but if you look at it from a creative perspective, we're really doing the same job.

You've taken up this funny position as somebody who has created this huge sort of pan-media phenomenon which is also highly critical of the media. Is that a balancing act?

SC: It's ironic on a level, but I hope it's an irony that the audience is aware of as well. It's one of the reasons I'm just so thrilled about the marketing campaign. It's just brilliant, because it's using the same images to promote the movie to our audience that the Capitol is using to promote the quarter quell to the audience in the Capitol. That right there, that dualism, is very much what the book is about. It becomes more so as you move along, as you get into *Mockingjay*: the propaganda war, the image of real or not real and whether or not you can believe what you're witnessing on a screen, how much you're being manipulated, how much the image is being manipulated, how much you're being lied to.

With your dramatic background, were you tempted to make a cameo?

SC: Not at all.

Not in the slightest? Francis?

FL: I would have put her in there had she wanted to be in there. In the party scene or something.

SC: No.

FL: We should sneak you in somewhere.

SC: I don't want to be in there.

FL: I'd say, *you won't be in the shot over there Suzanne, I swear.*

SC: I'm not comfortable around cameras. I think we saw that today.

Where do you do your writing?

SC: I wrote *The Hunger Games* in a chair, like a La-Z-Boy chair, next to my bed. I had an office but my kids sort of took it over.

FL: On a laptop?

SC: Yup.

FL: Not at a desk?

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SC: No. In fact, I have a studio now and there's no desk at it because I don't write at a desk.

You write in the La-Z-Boy?

SC: Mmmm hmm, on a laptop. And then I pace a lot.

In the fourth part of the interview, running tomorrow, Lawrence talks about the difficulties he encountered during the movie's production

TIME.com Part 4: <http://entertainment.time.com/2013/11/21/im-more-like-plutarch-than-katniss-a-conversation-with-suzanne-collins-and-francis-lawrence/>

-Part 5 of 5 continued-

“Come for the Love Story, Stay for the War”:

A Conversation with Suzanne Collins and Francis Lawrence

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By [Lev Grossman @leverus](#)

Nov. 22, 2013

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This is the fifth in a five-part series:

When I read people writing about the *Hunger Games*, there seems to be a split between people who read it as an allegory of the emotional experience of being an adolescent, and there are people who read it more literally as an exploration of the moral issues surrounding war and political oppression. Is it both? Are you comfortable with both?

Suzanne Collins: I have read so many interpretations. There's a whole Christian allegory. There's you know, I've seen people talk about it like Plato's cave, which is really fun. I've seen an indictment of big government. I've seen, you know, the 99 percent kind of thing. I think people bring a lot of themselves to the book. When *Hunger Games* first came out, I could tell people were having very different experiences. It's a war story. It's a romance. Other people are like, it's an action-adventure story.

You know, for me it was always first and foremost a war story, but whatever brings you into the story is fine with me. And then, of course, if a person interprets it as an adolescent experience or a Christian allegory, you can't tell them they didn't. That was their genuine response to it, and they're going to have it, and that's fine. You can't both write and then sit on the other side and interpret it for people.

I can tell you that for me it was a war story. But it also has so many ethical issues because you're dealing with war, and there's all these other ethical issues surrounding with, you know, there's violence, there's war, there's hunger, there's the propaganda, there's the environment's been destroyed, there's a ruthless government, misuse of power and all these other elements that come into play with it, and people may respond to ones that are most important to them, and you know other people came for the love story. That's fine. Come for the love story, stay for the war.

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Francis, do you read reactions from the fans online? Do you follow what people say on Twitter about casting and things like that?

Francis Lawrence: I do, a little bit yeah. I mean it's been really positive in my experience so far, which has been really nice. I mean, I have to say when I got the job I sort of stayed offline for about a week or two, I was just sort of nervous about...

SC: Till they were done talking about you?

FL: Yeah, whatever their feelings were, I didn't want to know. Then, I sort of started to read stuff as things would be announced. Or there would be rumors, you know. But the quality of the people that we were getting was so great. I think the biggest controversy was going to surround the Finnick choice. Everybody had their idea of what this god-like man was going to look like. You know to some, it's somebody the size of Chris Hemsworth in *Thor*; and to others, Sam Claflin is perfect. But there was always going to be a little bit of a controversial decision there.

How tough was it on the actors getting into the physical stuff? Combat, and all that stuff. It looked hard.

FL: It was hard. For people like Jen and Josh and Sam, you know, you do the Monkey Mutt fight, we're in this swampy, muddy pool of water in this rainy, muddy jungle for about a week. And Jen was getting ear infections, and Josh was threatening that she was going to get trench foot, and then of course she believed that she was going to get trench foot. So it was hard. Hawaii — I mean everybody says, *Ooh lucky, you get to go to Hawaii*. But when you're in the jungles and doing that kind of stuff, it's tricky. You're really in the elements.

There's a remarkable scene where Katniss, she's just heard about the Quarter Quell and she runs into the forest and just feels everything all at once. Tell me about that scene

FL: Well we shot it very, very quickly. We actually shot two days just outside of the city here in the Ramapo Mountains in New Jersey. In January, when Jen was on her tour for *Silver Linings*, you know, the Oscar campaign, we caught up with her and shot two days in the mountains. And it was about 9 degrees. It was freezing, freezing cold. Because it was so cold and because in that scene she's not wearing a coat, I could only ask her to do it three or four times, and she had done a few takes where she had been screaming out, "No, no, no, no, no." Then I asked her to do that silently, and that ended up being the take that we used.

Tell me about something else that was difficult – tougher than you expected.

FL: The Cornucopia stuff was really difficult. The way we did the arena was that we built the Cornucopia on an island, and a couple of the spokes. And the little platform they come up on, we built on this pond in Atlanta. And we couldn't shoot it until about mid-November, so the water was 40 degrees and kind of murky. It wasn't looking very good. And so just maneuvering around that water and getting people in and out of this 40-degree water was really, really difficult. We weren't even medically allowed to have Mags get into the water because it was so cold and it would raise her blood pressure up.

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SC: We were talking about *Mockingjay* once, and didn't you say, "At least there's no water."

FL: Yes. At least there's no water. Or very little.

SC: That's how he consoled himself.

Have you been surprised by what a big adult audience that book's built?

SC: Oh yes. I didn't anticipate that. I thought that I would maybe have my Gregor audience because they'd grown up into that YA audience, and then you know that handful of people who will read anything about dystopia, so it was a very pleasant surprise. I didn't anticipate it.

Did you know when you were writing it that this was something very new and big?

SC: No.

Really?

SC: No. It's just like writing everything else. I think of the early months, which was a lot of me sitting there reading survival books. None of which I can practice, but that I know academically now. And just, I worked on it just as I had worked on the *Gregor* books. I used the exact same process. And no, I didn't have any sense of it being different.

Now you've spawned an entire subgenre.

SC: I don't think I can take credit for that.

You can! Go ahead, take it.

SC: Well, I just think the dystopian stories are striking a nerve with people right now, and the *Hunger Games* contributed somewhat to that, but that can't be the whole explanation for it. It's something that's going on within the culture. I think people respond to dystopian stories because they're ways of acting out anxieties that we have and fears that we have about the future. And so much media's coming at you and so much stuff comes at you over the Internet, your brain gets overloaded, you don't know what to do with it. And one thing you can do with it is to spend a story or read a story. I mean I think of dystopian literature as being cautionary tales, and it's a way you can kind of frame it and try to make sense and kind of set it outside yourself but look at the issues involved.

Has your life changed a lot since the books came out?

SC: Not my real life. I mean, I still have the same friends and my family and my writing, and that's my real life. But the big change would be this would be the first time in my career where I've been able to work on whatever I wanted and not have financial concerns involved. You know that's how I made my living for many years, and that's a luxury I don't think anyone that's been a writer long-term would not be very grateful for or unaware of.

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Did you give yourself a present? Did you buy yourself a sports car?

SC: My studio, so that I could move from my chair, since the office was taken by the kids. We built a little studio space outside the house, just across the driveway. That was my present.

What are you working on now, now that you're free to work on things without financial concerns?

SC: Well, I probably have a few more rounds of notes on the last script, and the picture book has just come out, but it's done. I have a new piece I'm playing around with, and it's very new so I can't give you the specifics of it, and we'll just see where it goes. It may go nowhere. Right now it's extremely complicated, and it would have to be simplified a good deal to make it into a narrative. The world is complex. We'll see.

Last question. You're in the arena, the games start. Do you go for the Cornucopia, or would you run for the trees?

FL: Oh, I would be like the Morphlings. I would go run and hide until everybody else was dead. I'm a big chicken. That's what I would do. I'm with the Morphlings.

SC: I would definitely have run. And climbed a tree.

TIME.com Part 5: <http://entertainment.time.com/2013/11/22/come-for-the-love-story-stay-for-the-war-a-conversation-with-suzanne-collins-and-francis-lawrence/>

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