

THE GIRL WHO WAS ON FIRE

OTHER YA SMART POP TITLES

Demigods and Monsters

on Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson and the Olympians Series

A New Dawn

on Stephenie Meyer's Twilight Series

Secrets of the Dragon Riders

on Christopher Paolini's Inheritance Saga

Mind-Rain

on Scott Westerfeld's Uglies Series

Flirtin' with the Monster

on Ellen Hopkins' *Crank* and *Glass*

A Visitor's Guide to Mystic Falls

on *The Vampire Diaries*

Through the Wardrobe

on C.S. Lewis' Chronicles of Narnia

Nyx in the House of Night

on P.C. and Kristin Cast's House of Night series

(coming summer 2011)

**THE
GIRL WHO
WAS ON FIRE**

Edited by
LEAH WILSON

**Your Favorite Authors on
Suzanne Collins'
Hunger Games Trilogy**



An Imprint Of Benbella Books, Inc. • Dallas, Texas

THIS PUBLICATION HAS NOT BEEN PREPARED, APPROVED, OR LICENSED BY ANY ENTITY THAT CREATED OR PRODUCED THE WELL-KNOWN BOOK SERIES THE HUNGER GAMES.

“Why So Hungry for the Hunger Games?” Copyright © 2010 by Sarah Rees Brennan

“Team Katniss” Copyright © 2010 by Jennifer Lynn Barnes

“Your Heart Is a Weapon the Size of Your Fist” Copyright © 2010 by Mary Borsellino

“Smoke and Mirrors” Copyright © 2010 by Elizabeth Marraffino

“Someone to Watch Over Me” Copyright © 2010 by Lili Wilkinson

“Reality Hunger” Copyright © 2010 by Ned Vizzini

“Panem et Circenses” Copyright © 2010 by Carrie Ryan

“Not So Weird Science” Copyright © 2010 by Cara Lockwood

“Crime of Fashion” Copyright © 2010 by Terri Clark

“Bent, Shattered, and Mended” Copyright © 2010 by Blythe Woolston

“The Politics of *Mockingjay*” Copyright © 2010 by Sarah Darer Littman

“The Inevitable Decline of Decadence” Copyright © 2010 by Adrienne Kress

“Community in the Face of Tyranny” Copyright © 2010 by Bree Despain

Other materials Copyright © 2010 by BenBella Books, Inc.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews.



Smart Pop is an Imprint of BenBella Books, Inc.

10300 N. Central Expressway, Suite 400

Dallas, TX 75231

www.benbellabooks.com

www.smartpopbooks.com

Send feedback to feedback@benbellabooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available for this title.

ISBN 978-1- 935618-04-1

Copyediting by Erica Lovett and Heather Butterfield

Proofreading by Scott Cain

Cover design by Faceout Studio

Text design and composition by Neuwirth & Associates, Inc.

Printed by Bang

Distributed by Perseus Distribution

<http://www.perseusdistribution.com/>

To place orders through Perseus Distribution:

Tel: (800) 343-4499

Fax: (800) 351-5073

E-mail: orderentry@perseusbooks.com

Significant discounts for bulk sales are available. Please contact Glenn Yeffeth at glenn@benbellabooks.com or (214) 750-3628.

CONTENTS

Introduction	vii
Why So Hungry for the Hunger Games? SARAH REES BRENNAN	1
Team Katniss JENNIFER LYNN BARNES	13
Your Heart Is a Weapon the Size of Your Fist MARY BORSSELLINO	29
Smoke and Mirrors ELIZABETH M. REES	41
Someone to Watch Over Me LILI WILKINSON	67
Reality Hunger NEO VIZZINI	81
Panem et Circenses CARRIE RYAN	99

Not So Weird Science	
CARA LOCKWOOD	113
Crime of Fashion	
TERRI CLARK	127
Bent, Shattered, and Mended	
BLYTHE WOOLSTON	141
The Politics of <i>Mockingjay</i>	
SARAH DARER LITTMAN	163
The Inevitable Decline of Decadence	
ADRIENNE KRESS	179
Community in the Face of Tyranny	
BREE DESPAIN	195
Acknowledgments	211

INTRODUCTION

You could call the Hunger Games a series that is—like its heroine—on fire. But its popularity, in itself, is nothing new. We live in an era of blockbuster young adult book series: Harry Potter, Twilight, now the Hunger Games. It's more unusual these days for there *not* to be a YA series sweeping the nation.

All of these series have certain things in common: compelling characters; complex worlds you want to spend time exploring; a focus on family and community. But the Hunger Games is, by far, the darkest of the three. In Twilight, love conquers all; Bella ends the series bound eternally to Edward and mother to Renesmee, without having to give up her human family or Jacob in the process. In Harry Potter, though there is loss, the world is returned to familiar stability after Voldemort's defeat, and before we leave them, we see all of the main characters happily married, raising the next generation of witches and wizards. In the Hunger Games, while Katniss may conclude the series similarly married and a mother, the ending is much more bitersweet. Her sister and Gale are both lost to her in different but equally insurmountable ways. The world is better than it was, but there are hints that this improvement is only temporary—that the kind of inhumanity we saw in the districts under Capitol rule is the true status quo, and that the current peace is ephemeral, precious, something toward which Panem will always have to struggle.

In other words, the Hunger Games ends in a way that feels surprisingly *adult*—bleak, realistic, as far from wish fulfillment as one can imagine. Such a conclusion only emphasizes something YA readers have known for years: that there is serious, engaging, transformative work going on in YA literature. The Hunger Games is more than Gale versus Peeta; there's so much more at stake in this series than love (and so much more at stake *in loving*, here, as well). The series takes on themes of power and propaganda, trauma and recovery, war and compassion. It's about not just learning one's power, but learning the limits of one's power as well.

Because at its core, the Hunger Games is a coming-of-age story, and not just for Katniss—it's a coming-of-age story for Panem, and in a way, for us, its readers, as well. The series pushes us to grow up and take responsibility both personally and politically for our choices: those Capitol residents we see milling through the streets in *Mockingjay*, the same Capitol residents who so raptly watched the Hunger Games on television year after year without recognizing the suffering that made it possible, are *us*. That's a heavy message to take away from any book series, but an important one for all of us—whether we ourselves would be shelved under Young Adult or not.

The pieces you're about to read don't cover everything in the Hunger Games series (they couldn't cover everything), but they do tease out at least a few of the series' most thought-provoking ideas. Together, they provide an extended meditation on the series and its world, on Katniss and our response to her, on love and family and sacrifice and survival. But you shouldn't take this to mean the anthology is always as serious as *Mockingjay* at it heaviest. There's humor, and warmth, and hope here, too. Each of our contributors has brought his or her own particular interests and expertise to exploring the series, and topics run the

gamut from fashion to science to reality television and real-world media training.

Still, you'll find these essays tend to return to the same events and the same ideas over and over again. But each time we revisit them our perspective shifts—the same way reality in the series is constantly shifting—letting us interpret old events, old ideas, in new ways. As each writer passes the torch to the next, our contributors cover new ground while pushing our understanding of the Hunger Games as a whole further, toward a greater awareness of everything these books have to offer.

While editing this anthology, I was alternately surprised, fascinated, and moved to tears—a tribute not only to the Hunger Games series itself but also to the talented YA writers whose work is collected here. And I hope that you, too, will find something fresh to feel or think about in these pages—that *The Girl Who Was on Fire* encourages you to debate, question, and experience the Hunger Games in a whole new way.

Leah Wilson
December 2010

TEAM KATNISS



JENNIFER LYNN BARNES

Who doesn't love a good love triangle—especially one involving guys like Peeta and Gale? Finding out which boy Katniss would end up with was an important moment—and for some readers the most important moment—in the series. But, as Jennifer Lynn Barnes reminds us, amid all the talk of who Katniss would *choose*, we sometimes forgot to think about who Katniss actually *is*. Barnes looks at Katniss independent of potential love interests and provides a convincing alternative to Team Peeta and Team Gale: Team Katniss.



These days, it seems like you can't throw a fish in a bookstore without hitting a high-stakes love triangle—not that I recommend the throwing of fish in bookstores, mind you (it annoys the booksellers—not to mention the fish), but it certainly seems like more and more YA heroines are being faced with a problem of abundance when it comes to the opposite sex. While I am a total sucker for romance (not to mention quite fond of a variety of fictional boys myself), I still can't help but wonder if, as readers, we're becoming so used to romantic conflict taking center stage that we focus in on that aspect of fiction even when there are much larger issues at play.

No book has ever made me ponder this question as much as Suzanne Collins' *Hunger Games* trilogy—in part because it seems like everyone I know has very strong feelings about which boy is the best fit for Katniss, but also because the books themselves contain a commentary on the way audiences latch onto romance, even (and maybe especially) when lives are at stake. To survive her first *Hunger Games*, Katniss has to give the privileged viewers in the Capitol exactly what they want—a high-stakes romance featuring star-crossed lovers and unthinkable choices. Given that readers of the *Hunger Games* trilogy are granted insider access to Katniss' mind, life, and obligations, it seems somewhat ironic that in the days leading up to the release of *Mockingjay*, the series was often viewed the same way—with readers on “Team Peeta” and “Team Gale” focusing on Katniss' love life, sometimes to the exclusion of everything else.

But Katniss Everdeen—like a variety of her literary predecessors—is far more than a vertex on some love triangle. She is

interesting and flawed and completely three-dimensional all on her own. She's a sister, a daughter, a friend, a hero, and—above all—a *survivor*. She's defined by her compassion, her loyalty, and her perseverance, and those are all traits she has independent of the boys.

I'm not Team Gale or Team Peeta. I'm Team Katniss, and in the next few pages, we're going to take a closer look at her character and explore the idea that the core story in the Hunger Games trilogy has less to do with who Katniss ends up with and more to do with who she *is*—because sometimes, in books and in life, it's not about the romance.

Sometimes, it's about the girl.

Meet Katniss Everdeen

Ask anyone who's ever met her—Katniss Everdeen is a hard person to know. She has one of the most recognizable faces in her entire world, but the vast majority of Panem knows very little about the *real* Katniss. To the viewers of the Games, she's the object of Peeta's affection and then a star-crossed lover herself. Later, she's the Mockingjay, the face of the rebellion, and ultimately, as far as the outside world is concerned, a broken shell of a girl pushed to the edge of insanity and beyond. Sometimes Katniss dons these masks willingly; sometimes they are thrust upon her. But one thing is certain—unlike the Careers, the flighty members of her prep team, or many of the Capitol's citizens, Katniss has no desire to be famous.

She has no desire to be known.

Whether it's with the viewers of the Games, the revolutionaries, or the townspeople in District 12, Katniss is the type to

keep her distance, a fact she readily admits to in the first chapter of book one, saying that over time, she has learned to “hold [her] tongue and to turn [her] features into an indifferent mask so that no one could ever read [her] thoughts.” Katniss keeps her private thoughts private and keeps most of the world at least an arm’s length away. Next to Gale, Katniss’ closest friend before the reaping is a girl she barely speaks to. In fact, when describing her friendship with Madge, Katniss suggests that the two of them get along primarily because they both just keep to themselves.

Clearly, this pre-reaping Katniss identifies as a loner, never getting too close to other people, never expecting too much of them so that she is never disappointed. Similarly, the people in District 12 seem content to let Katniss keep them at bay. Other than her family, Gale, and in his own adore-her-from-afar way, Peeta, there don’t appear to be people lining up to know Katniss Everdeen. Even the family cat keeps his distance when she feeds him—to the point that Katniss remarks that “entrails” and “no hissing” are the closest she and Buttercup can come to love. The same could be said of Katniss’ relationship with everyone from the baker to the Peacemakers who buy her contraband prey—right up until the moment she takes Prim’s place at the reaping.

Standing up on the stage after she takes Prim’s place, Katniss notes that it is as if a switch has been flipped, and all of a sudden, she has “become someone precious” to people who have never seemed to care about her one way or another, people who don’t really know her, except through that one selfless act. As she realizes this, Katniss—in typical Katniss fashion—schools her face to be devoid of emotion, refusing to let the rest of the world see her tears, and this reluctance to give the Games’ viewers anything real continues throughout the series. Our heroine’s initial reaction to Haymitch telling her to make the audience feel like

PANEM ET CIRCENSES



The Myth of the Real in Reality TV

CARRIE RYAN

We've tuned in to a lot of reality shows in the last decade or so, from the relatively harmless (*Dancing with the Stars*, *The Amazing Race*) to the somewhat more shameful (*Temptation Island*, *Jersey Shore*). We've watched, rapt, as contestants struggled to succeed and as relationships formed and fell apart. We've hung on every success, failure, and humiliation. But all of that is still a far cry from the Hunger Games . . . right? Carrie Ryan makes some troubling connections between reality television and the Hunger Games, and highlights just how fine the line between reality and fiction really is.



In the Hunger Games trilogy, Suzanne Collins takes our obsession with Reality TV and extends it to the most horrifying ends: a society that views kids killing kids as entertainment. It's easy to find this an uncomfortable premise—to turn our noses up and say that while we may enjoy *Survivor* or *Big Brother* every now and again, we'd never let society slip to such levels. However, there's also a deeper, more difficult message in the Hunger Games series: the extent to which media can be manipulated as a means of controlling the populace and how we as viewers have abdicated any agency in the process.

This then leads to an even more troubling aspect of the trilogy: our complicity in said message. But for the viewers' participation, the Hunger Games would not exist in the same way that, but for our tuning in, Reality TV wouldn't exist. By watching, we increase the ratings, and as our interest wanes the shows must become “more” to recapture our attention—more compelling, more extreme, more dangerous. And the only difference between us and the viewers in the Capitol is that we have agency to turn off the television at any time; we just choose not to. As Suzanne Collins shows us, the obsession with ratings, which is driven by our desire for more and more compelling narratives, can turn ugly when such a lens is applied to news reporting—especially that of war—rather than so-called Reality TV.

Ratings, Not Reality

With any television show, what matters are the ratings; getting enough people to tune in to make it economically

worthwhile for the sponsors to pay for advertisements, which in turn feeds the ability of the show to keep filming. Reality TV is no exception. After 51.69 million viewers tuned in to watch the finale of the first season of *Survivor* in August 2000, the television industry realized that Reality TV could bring in ratings and turn a profit for a fraction of the cost of a fully scripted television show filled with professional actors. This started a trend that turned into a landslide, making the first decade of the twenty-first century one dominated by Reality TV. By the 2009–2010 television season, nine of the top twenty shows among young viewers were Reality shows.

For all its marketing advantages, though, Reality TV has to comply with some of the other basic rules of entertainment: to hold on to these viewers, the producers have to make each season fresh and new. In the absence of a script or predetermined plot, viewers would quickly get bored with simply watching a new group of people (or, in some cases, the same group of people) tossed into the same situation over and over again. Dealing with this problem largely translates into a perpetual upping of the ante, a constant raise of the stakes so viewers won't get bored.

Survivor is a key example. In the earlier seasons of the show, contestants brought a selection of clothes to the filming location, and the producers then chose what they could ultimately wear (camera-friendly colors, variety so not everyone wore the same thing, no logos). They were also sometimes allowed to bring a luxury item (such as when Colby brought a large Texas flag that he later used to help build a shelter), and the show provided necessities such as clean water, rice, and tools to build a fire.

Compare that to later seasons, where contestants were sent into the game wearing the clothes on their backs (whether that was a business suit or a sundress), weren't allowed any luxury items, had to hunt for their own water, and weren't provided

food or any tools to make fire (though there were opportunities for teams to win these items at challenges—effectively inserting another level of competition for the base level resources that used to be a given). As the show grew and struggled to retain its dominance among the viewership, it became less about watching people live and scheme in a difficult environment and instead became about actual survival—the struggle of finding food, shelter, and water. In essence, the show became more brutal, and the driving force behind it all was the viewers—us.

The Hunger Games function the same way. Year after year, the Gamemakers struggle to make the Games appear fresh and new, crafting new arenas and devising new, increasingly sadistic challenges. What might one year be dense forests could in another be a vast arctic wasteland or a picturesque landscape filled with carnivorous squirrels or a dam that bursts, drowning half the tributes. The only criterion is that each year's arena has to outdo the one from the year before.

Ostensibly these machinations are intended to prove the power of the Capitol; however, a single, simple gladiatorial arena would have been sufficient to accomplish that. But while the Hunger Games are viewed as a punishment to those living in the Districts, in the Capitol they are entertainment and, as with any other reality show, the Capitol is concerned with ratings. Not for dollars, as in our world, but for something far more important: societal domination. The Games are symbolic of the Capitol's power and dominance: a boring game means the Capitol may appear weak and shy of resources in the eyes of its own citizens, who might then start to reconsider their allegiance to the Capitol they perceive as all-powerful.

Ultimately, as Plutarch points out in *Mockingjay*, the Capitol's main concern with the Hunger Games is providing *panem*

THE INEVITABLE DECLINE OF DECADENCE



ADRIENNE KRESS

Decadence is fun in theory: eating all of the ice cream you want whenever you want and having nothing to do but read and watch television and hang out with friends sounds great at first. But while you're busy indulging yourself, someone has to keep the world running smoothly. Someone has to do all that work you're avoiding, and chances are that they'd like the chance to indulge in a little decadence too. As Adrienne Kress explains, Panem is a perfect example of a society that lives to excess, as well as the perfect example of excess' inevitable result.



The goal of every culture is to decay through over-civilization; the factors of decadence—luxury, skepticism, weariness and superstition—are constant. The civilization of one epoch becomes the manure of the next.

—Cyril Connolly

The Hunger Games trilogy deals with many themes: war, rebellion, the manipulation of media. But it was its concern with societal decadence and its inevitable downfall that made the first book's release timely. The bestselling YA dystopian series came onto shelves just as the world's economy took a tumble. For years we'd been living in comfort and excess. Consumerism was rife, and shows like *Sex and the City* glorified consumption by extolling the virtues of shoes worth hundreds of dollars. Then, suddenly, the party was over, and the world became concerned with trying to save money rather than spend it. Today the idea of wasteful consumption turns our stomachs.

It isn't as if this is the first time our society has gone from a period of great decadence to a time of recession; the pattern seems to be predictable. Yet despite the fact that rampant self-indulgence never lasts, those in the moment still somehow manage to think it can. Why is it that those in power truly believe that this time, this time, decadence will win out? Probably because decadence can be so much darn fun. The problem is, in order for these few people to continue to live this kind of lifestyle, many others must sacrifice a great deal of personal

freedom. And it is the dissatisfaction of the many forced to make this sacrifice that inevitably leads to the decadent society's downfall.

First, before we look at the books themselves, a definition of decadence is in order. Most of us think of decadence as being a matter of pure indulgence. Going to the spa. Sleeping in past noon. Being fed chocolates by a handsome young man while another fans you with a large palm leaf. That kind of thing—a moment of pure selfishness, where a person's own desires are met. And truly, there isn't anything wrong with going to the spa, or sleeping in, or being fed chocolates—once in a while. It can be a huge release to take a moment to do something that has no practical purpose aside from relaxing the body and indulging the senses.

Decadence in and of itself is not necessarily a bad thing. In fact it's probably even a necessary thing, every so often, to experience a moment of indulgence, especially as so often we spend our lives working and doing things for others. A bit of selfishness can have remarkable restorative powers, allowing us to rejuvenate ourselves and carry on with the daily grind of life. It can be the reward for having to do something particularly trying. The dessert at the end of the healthy meal.

The trouble with decadence, like the trouble with most things, comes from over-indulging in it—a lack of moderation. To live a life that consists solely of decadent experiences would be to live a life that is very unproductive. Sleeping all day and then going to the spa and eating chocolates? When would you get anything practical done?

The other problem with decadence is that, after indulging, it can be difficult to go back to the regular grind of work. Why get up at seven-thirty in the morning to get chores done when

you can sleep in? Why feed yourself when hunky guys can do it for you? (Okay, the whole hunky guy argument is rather solid. But I digress.) We have to live our lives. We have to make money so that we can put food on our table. We have to cultivate and grow that food in the first place.

What happens, then, when someone wants to live a decadent lifestyle all the time? Well, it means he has to find someone else to provide all the other stuff for him. He needs to find someone else to make the products that he is indulging in. He needs to find someone else to clean his apartment. To raise his children. Self-indulgence becomes the worst kind of team effort, the many working for the benefit of the one.

What's more, spending one's life focused solely on one's own pleasure, aside from affecting one's physical well being—sleeping all day, that can't be good for muscle strength—can also have an even more dangerous effect on the psyche. When a person's purpose in life becomes indulging himself, it's tempting to start believing that anything that gets in the way of the indulgence must be stopped, and anything that helps achieve it should be promoted. And when you care only about yourself, why should you care about the people who make it possible for you to indulge? Why should you care about your "team"?

This is how a world like the one in the *Hunger Games* series can come into being. But instead of being about an individual who is interested in self-indulgence, the books are about an entire society. Such a society isn't a fictional construct. We have seen such societies in the real world, as well. Ancient Rome was known for its decadent parties, where servants were on hand to wipe spittle from the faces of wealthy citizens indulging in feasts while reclining on couches in rooms with walls painted gold. The time of Marie Antoinette was well-known for extravagance, not only in clothes and food, but also in the complete indulgence of fantasy. The queen