

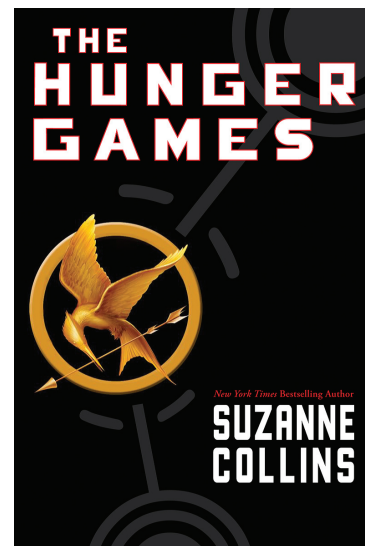
Let the games *begin*

The world, as we know it, has ended. Rising phoenix-like from the ashes is a state named Panem, in the area that was once North America. Panem — consisting of 12 districts — is ruled with an iron fist, by the president and authorities of its prosperous capital, simply called the Capitol. There was once a 13th district, but it lies in ruins after it led a rebellion against the Capitol. As a reminder of this uprising, every year, two children — a boy and a girl — between the ages of 12 and 18 are picked by a lottery system from each of the 12 districts to compete in the Hunger Games. These 24 contestants are thrown into a specially designed arena, where they fight each other till only one emerges as the victor... where only one remains alive.

Pitted against the worst odds in a world where only odds can determine whether you live or die, the series' protagonist and narrator Katniss Everdeen isn't your typical 16-year-old girl. Forced to poach from the government's lands, she hunts with her best friend Gale, selling the meat in the black market to keep her little sister and mother alive. Resourceful though she may be, the odds are not in her favour as her life is thrown into complete disarray when she ends up as the female tribute in the 74th Hunger Games.

While *The Hunger Games* and its subsequent books, *Catching Fire* and *Mockingjay*, are categorised as Young Adult, they can be enjoyed by readers of all ages. Fast-paced, simply written, and incredibly gripping, once you dive into the world of Katniss Everdeen, you will not want to resurface until you've turned the last page. Thankfully, Suzanne Collins has not shied away from the true nature of the Games, bringing to life violent and gory scenes and the ruthless nature of the Games' many players — both the lucky and the unlucky.

Reviewed by Freyan Patel



THE HUNGER GAMES

Author: Suzanne Collins

Publisher: Scholastic

Price: ₹295

Let the *light* in

When 9/11 occurred, Americans were looking for a sign that would give them hope and help them come to terms with the unfathomable. At that time, Bruce Springsteen released *The Rising* to provide an inconsolable nation just that. Today, over a decade later, when America faces its worst economic crisis, a below-par employment ratio, and very low morale, Springsteen has released *Wrecking Ball* (his angriest and most confrontational album till date), which portrays a reflection of ordinary citizens' lives — a growing discontent with government reforms, an alarming sense of economic injustice, and social depression.

The 13-track rock 'n' roll album presents us with unexpected overtones and textures drawn occasionally from Irish folk, gospel, and hip-hop, letting listeners hear something very Springsteen and, at the same time, something uniquely new. Throughout the album, there lurks a sense of something omnipresent and universal, where people display courage and raging anger, yet everyone is ready to get on with their lives and never quit. The characters are in search of self-reverence and meaning; they may have lost their identities but still have their pride intact.

The title track, 'We Take Care of Our Own', probably serves as the album's moral breath and goes on to string it together. Hear 'Jack of All Trades' and you feel the emotion of ordinary individuals. 'Death to My Hometown', with its Celtic blend of rhythmic pounding, shows Springsteen at his gung-ho and evocative best. 'Shackled and Drawn' is the working man's anthem on this album that prepares you for a new revolution.

Critics argue that Springsteen has made a living by exploiting the working man's woes, but at a time when most musicians sing only about love, sex, parties, and money — now, more than ever — The Boss's voice is needed, as it depicts the struggles endured by many of us.

Reviewed by Aaron Rodrigues



WRECKING BALL

Artist: Bruce Springsteen

Label: Columbia

Wrecking Ball is available for purchase on Amazon.com and Flipkart.com