

Hungry for success

TALENTED Canberra native Stef Dawson has been the talk of Tinseltown of late.

Not only did the 27-year-old star in *The Hunger Games* film franchise, she has another four movies coming out this year including *Nest*, which co-stars Kelsey Grammer and former *Twilight* actor Kellan Lutz.

"It's been amazing and is getting better all the time," Dawson says. "Of course, I miss Australia very much, but I've come back for work a bit lately and get to see family at the same time."

Part of that work has been to play fiery red-headed "bad ass" Ash in *Cleverman*, ABC's anticipated new fantasy drama, which is generating plenty of buzz overseas.

The series, which is part social statement and part sci-fi narrative with indigenous mythology woven in, will premiere in the US at the same time as in Australia.

"It's a platform for telling 60,000-year-old stories from the Aboriginal Dreamtime, centred around the Cleverman ... who was a person of power within a clan, a conduit between this world and the Dreaming," Dawson says.

Some of those tales have been passed from generation to generation through word of mouth.

"It's people sitting down,

She's on the cusp of mega stardom in Hollywood, but Stef Dawson was only too happy to come home for an ambitious new TV project. By **SHANNON MOLLOY**

telling stories, for thousands of years, which is really special," Dawson says.

The initial inspiration for this project came from creator Ryan Griffen's desire to invent an indigenous superhero for his young son, Dawson says. "But it's also set in a dystopian world, where these [recently discovered] creatures known as the Hairies ... are causing fear. It's the idea of 'the other' and how we treat people we don't understand."

That particular element of the show is a powerful and universal topic to discuss.

"It's clever," Dawson says. "No pun intended. But yes, it's definitely poignant and it's current, but then it's about things that have happened again and again throughout history."

Dawson is a big believer in the idea that "artists have a responsibility to hold a mirror up to society".

"It's something that resonates with me as an actress," she says. "It's why I signed up to this crazy life in the first place, to be a voice for something and perhaps help create a change."

Another theme in the story is about government power

and using fear as a strategy to win votes, sway opinion and seize greater control.

Not-so-subtle deeper meaning aside, Dawson says it's also about compelling characters, played by an all-star cast including Ryan Corr, Frances O'Connor, Deborah Mailman, Rarriwuy Hicks, Jack Charles and Iain Glen.

"Yes, it's about the potential for what humanity could become ... but at its heart, it's about family and love, strength against adversity, fighting for something, fighting for hope," she says, adding there are similarities between this world and *The Hunger Games*, which she says changed everything for her.

"In such a huge market, when eyes are upon you in such a big and beloved franchise ... people start to know you exist and want to bring you in for more things," she says.

"I had a few other projects bubbling along in the midst of *The Hunger Games*, so there's definitely been a great momentum since."

CLEVERMAN
THURSDAY, 9.30PM, ABC



NO NERVES AS CAR SHOW SHIFTS GEARS



Upbeat: Matt LeBlanc and Chris Evans.

THEY'RE fronting one of the most iconic and adored shows on TV, so are Chris Evans and Matt LeBlanc, the new hosts of UK motoring show *Top Gear*, feeling the pressure?

"We are very, very nervous," Evans says. "No. That was irony. We are not nervous at all. The show's in the can, so it's all done. There's nothing to feel worried about."

Bravado? Maybe. Last week, it was announced *Top Gear*'s popular ex-hosts – James May, Richard

Hammond and Jeremy Clarkson – would soon start filming a car show, *The Grand Tour*, for subscription TV service Amazon Prime. And it sounds an awful lot like *Top Gear*.

The new *Top Gear* has been plagued by negative publicity. Stories have circulated that Evans and LeBlanc don't get along, that Evans is an on-set bully and that the show is destined for failure.

In light of all this, do they feel that some are almost willing the show

to fail before it has even begun?

LeBlanc says comparing the old show with the new one is like comparing apples to oranges.

"You just really can't compare the two. I think the old version of the show was great, and I think the new version of the show will be different, but it will be great [as well]."

TOP GEAR
MONDAY, 8.30PM, BBC KNOWLEDGE

By Clare Rigden