

# Review: 'The Hunger Games: Mockingjay, Part 1'

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The third "Hunger Games" movie, starring Jennifer Lawrence and Josh Hutcherson among many other big name actors, does well as a pop culture phenomenon movie.

NOVEMBER 19, 2014, 10:03 AM

**I**n honor of the title we'll break this part of the sentence with a colon, and then use a portentous dash:

"The Hunger Games: Mockingjay — Part 1" is a worthy third movie in the Suzanne Collins franchise — destined to satisfy the legions of filmgoers willing to swing with a lot of scheming and skulking in an underground bunker resembling the world's most frightening Marriott, in order to get to the revolution.

The third book in Collins' dystopian-literature juggernaut has been halved. As such, following the lucrative blueprint of the "Harry Potter" and the "Twilight" film series, this pentultimate "Hunger Games" chapter has what all such films have, namely, a few stretch marks and an ending that goes beyond "cliffhanger."

And it works. The film works. The scale of these "Hunger Games" dys-lit film adaptations is large but not misjudged, and there's always a new post-apocalyptic district to explore in detail. From the first, they got the casting so very right with this ongoing project, from Jennifer Lawrence (a crier, but also a fighter, and a fiercely talented performer) on down.

In the second "Hunger Games" movie, directed (as is this new one) with a gravely absorbing air by Francis Lawrence, the fashion-runway frou-frou and hooraw dominated the action to the point of smothering it. All that's gone. Katniss Everdeen, whose defiance of the dictatorial President Snow has ignited the masses across all the impoverished districts, has become the symbol of the rebellion. "Mockingjay" charts her entry into war, her initially reluctant usefulness as an propaganda tool and her glower of destiny, egged on by close-ups of Donald Sutherland and those evilly arched eyebrows.

"We have a bigger issue than wardrobe," says Philip Seymour Hoffman's Plutarch, onetime gamemaker working for the state, now a fellow revolutionary and a kind of image consultant for Katniss. That line, delivered by the late Hoffman (he died during filming of the final "Mockingjay" film) sounds suspiciously like a dig at the flamboyance of the second picture. Now, in the bowels of District 13, all is olive-green and gun-metal grey. Julianne Moore, new to the series, is ramping up the revolution as President Coin, the good president. The underground lair doesn't do much for the former Hunger Games fashion maven Effie, again played by Elizabeth Banks. She returns to a role that wasn't originally in the "Mockingjay" novel, and it's fun to see her at odds with her newfound, inelegant surroundings. "I'm condemned to this life of jumpsuits," she cracks at one point.

In addition to the casting, another, more elusive component put the "Hunger Games" series on solid ground from the start. Even though "Mockingjay" contains scenes of mass graves and mass slaughter on the battlefield, this isn't a movie, or a set of characters, built on bloodlust or the enjoyment of anonymous kills. Katniss remains a marvelous shot with a bow and arrow but she's just a young woman trying to keep what's left of her family together, and rescue the baker boy Peeta (Josh Hutcherson) from the clutches of Snow. Much of the film is pitched at a conversational hush, so it's doubly striking when Katniss and Peeta reunite and the results ... well, spoiler, so ... I'll shut up.

Not everything in "Mockingjay" is dynamic or remarkable. Director Lawrence, working from Peter Craig and Danny Strong's screenplay, occasionally mistakes somnambulance for solemnity. But having come through the "Twilight" movies more or less in one piece (not all of them stank, for the record), it's easy to appreciate how Collins' world (a bit thin on the page, but irresistible to millions) has been realized on screen. In "Mockingjay," Plutarch turns our heroine into a movie-style action heroine for the purposes of his revolution marketing campaign, and it's as if the movie is making fun of its own image in the popular culture. First Katniss was a feral woodland creature; then, in the second movie, she swanned into legend as a flaming fashion star. Now she's a warrior both for fake and for real, and that double-headed assignment gives Lawrence and company a lot to activate. The series wraps up with the release of "Mockingjay 2" in November 2015. As the old Ira Gershwin lyric put it: Comes the revolution, all is Jake / Comes the revolution, we'll be eating cake.

**"The Hunger Games: Mockingjay, Part 1" - 3 stars**

**MPAA rating:** PG-13 (for intense sequences of violence and action, some disturbing images and thematic material)

**Running time:** 2:03

**Opens:** Thursday evening

