

## Film Feature: Seven Things We Want From ‘The Hunger Games’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on February 27, 2012 - 4:40pm

- [Elizabeth Banks](#) [2]
- [Film Feature](#) [3]
- [Gary Ross](#) [4]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [5]
- [Jennifer Lawrence](#) [6]
- [Josh Hutcherson](#) [7]
- [Lenny Kravitz](#) [8]
- [Liam Hemsworth](#) [9]
- [List](#) [10]
- [The Hunger Games](#) [11]
- [Tom Burns](#) [12]
- [Woody Harrelson](#) [13]

CHICAGO – There are two big questions floating around Hollywood at the moment – “How hard is “John Carter” going to flop?” and “How big is “The Hunger Games” going to be?” Because director Gary Ross’ adaptation of Suzanne Collins’ uber-popular dystopian young adult novel has some incredible buzz surrounding its March 23 release.



Hunger Games  
Photo credit: Lionsgate

How incredible? Well, 2012 will witness the release of “The Avengers”, “The Amazing Spider-Man”, Ridley Scott’s “Prometheus”, “Men in Black 3”, Peter Jackson’s “The Hobbit”, the final “Twilight” movie, and a new Quentin Tarantino film, among other noteworthy releases, and yet there are pundits out there who are predicting that “The Hunger Games” has a chance at being the highest-grossing movie of the year. Even if that’s not true, the fact that it’s inspiring those kinds of conversations this early in the year speaks to just how anticipated “The Hunger Games” really is.

Is it surprising that so many people are getting so amped up about seeing “The Hunger Games” on the big screen? The three books in the trilogy – “The Hunger Games”, “Catching Fire”, and “Mockingjay” – were a publishing phenomenon, spending a combined total of HUNDREDS of weeks on the New York Times Bestseller list. But we’ve seen other hot, best-selling YA properties that were supposed to be the “next” “Harry Potter” or “Twilight” fall by the wayside before – “Percy Jackson”, “The Seeker: The Dark Is Rising”, “The Golden Compass”, “Beastly”, “I Am Number Four”, etc. There just seems to be something about the story of young Katniss Everdeen venturing into the Hunger Games for the love of her sister that has really connected with audiences around the globe, and there’s also a perceived confidence in the team that’s been assembled to bring “The Hunger Games” movie to life that’s unlike anything we’ve seen in a long while. (The scrutiny given to “The Hunger Games” casting process was intense, to say the least, as was the collective sigh of relief after fans got a glimpse of the first trailer for Gary Ross’ adaptation.)

And we’re giving into the hype too. Like the rest of the world, we want this movie to work. So, as we try and decide on whether we’ll be attending the premiere dressed as Haymitch or Peeta, here are our picks for the seven things we really, really want from “The Hunger Games” movie.

## 1. Keep It Centered on Katniss



Hunger Games

*Photo credit: Lionsgate*

While we totally understand that “The Hunger Games” is being groomed as the “next big franchise,” we desperately hope that the filmmakers don’t get caught up in world-building and ignore one of the most intimate aspects of the books – namely, that EVERYTHING we encounter is shown through the eyes of young Miss Katniss Everdeen. It was a brave decision by Suzanne Collins to tell the story of “The Hunger Games” (and its subsequent sequels) completely through Katniss’ point-of-view, but the result was a fantastically intimate narrative where we spent the bulk of the story right in Katniss’ muddy, battle-worn shoes. We’re right there in Katniss’ head as she tries to piece together what’s happening, as she worries about her family, as she stresses about her feelings for the men in her life, and as she hopes and prays that her decisions will guide her safely through the gauntlet of the Hunger Games competition. We don’t learn anything as readers until Katniss learns it herself. Hopefully, Gary Ross, Suzanne Collins, and their co-scripter Billy Ray (“Shattered Glass”, “State of Play”) have found a way to replicate that experience on screen because Katniss’ sensitive, world-weary perspective was one of the major reasons we fell in love with the novels in the first place.

## 2. Give Us Some Great Gary Ross Dialogue



Hunger Games

*Photo credit: Lionsgate*

While, yes, we think Gary Ross was a fantastic choice as a director for “The Hunger Games” movie, we’re almost more excited for the prospect of seeing what Gary Ross, as a co-screenwriter, contributed to “The Hunger Games” script. Because, while he is a formidable director, you might be forgetting that Ross has written (or co-written) a few movies with some really spectacular story structure and dialogue on display – namely, Tom Hanks’ “Big”, Ivan Reitman’s “Dave”, the vastly underrated “Pleasantville”, and “Seabiscuit”, to name a few. Each of those movies show off fantastic character work and cracker-jack verbal exchanges – “Dave” is easily Reitman’s most re-watchable



movie since “Ghostbusters” – and we’re particularly excited to see the writer/director who brought such insight and vision to the teenage experience in “Pleasantville” hopefully bringing that same depth of vision to the teenage nightmare that is “The Hunger Games.”

### 3. Make Woody Harrelson’s Haymitch a Total Bad-Ass



Hunger Games

Photo credit: Lionsgate

Have you noticed that, so far, “The Hunger Games” trailers have been suspiciously devoid of much footage of Woody Harrelson as Katniss’ Hunger Games mentor Haymitch Abernathy? Now there could be many reasons for that. The trailers may have needed to focus exclusively on Jennifer Lawrence’s Katniss due to time constraints. Haymitch’s role may have been, regrettably, lessened in the scripting process. OR, and this is what we’re hoping, the filmmakers have PURPOSELY been holding back on Haymitch footage, because he’s the movie’s secret weapon. Haymitch doesn’t have the most active role in the first “Hunger Games” book – he spends much of the book stone-drunk until he becomes Katniss’ coach and conspirator right before the actual games – but he definitely makes a huge impression. He’s a big, wounded Falstaffian antihero, a guy who used to have ideals until years of oppression and heartbreak sent him spiraling into the bottom of a whiskey bottle. Throughout the story, he’s tough, funny, inappropriate, a jerk, a pitiable cautionary tale, an inspiring mentor figure – his character is so lived in and three-dimensional that he’s almost four-dimensional. Harrelson was an inspired casting choice for the role and, even with the lack of Haymitch footage so far, we’re really hoping that Gary Ross has been holding back with the Haymitch scenes because they have so much potential to be such epic memorable moments. Seriously, if done right, Harrelson’s Haymitch could be the Burgess Meredith to Jennifer Lawrence’s Rocky Balboa. Let’s hope that the best of Haymitch makes the final cut.

### 4. Don’t “Twilight” Up the Teen Romance Aspect



Hunger Games

Photo credit: Lionsgate

We’re not jaded enough fanboys to suggest that a “Hunger Games” movie should ignore any aspect of romance. That wouldn’t be true to the original book. Throughout the series, particularly in the first book, Katniss spends a LOT of time trying to work out her feelings about her Hunger Games partner Peeta Mellark (Josh Hutcherson) and her back-home hunting partner Gale (Liam Hemsworth). For the sake of the media attention surrounding the Games, Katniss has to pretend that she and Peeta are deeply in love and, while keeping up appearances,



Katniss can’t ignore that she’s definitely developing feelings for Peeta. However, unlike Bella in the “Twilight” movies, Katniss doesn’t spend 90% of her time worrying about her boyfriend prospects. Katniss’ romantic worries add depth and substance to her character, but they definitely should NOT be driving the story. Katniss is in the Hunger Games to survive and save her family – everything else is secondary. While, yes, Katniss’ relationship with Peeta is a cornerstone of the “Hunger Games” story, we’re really hoping that the filmmakers won’t ignore Katniss’ more pressing motivations to give the tweeners some fabricated “Are you Team Peeta or Team Gale?” nonsense.

## 5. Make It a Standalone Experience



Hunger Games

*Photo credit: Lionsgate*

This is a hard one because it’s almost a foregone conclusion that there are going to be more “Hunger Games” movies after this one, but we think this has to be said. One of the major, MAJOR problems with most movies that are aching to kick off the next big “Harry Potter” or “Twilight”-esque franchise is that they’re more concerned with establishing the world of the franchise rather than delivering an amazing and complete motion picture experience. So many franchise-hungry flicks, ranging from “The Golden Compass” to “Lemony Snicket’s Series of Unfortunate Events”, spent so much time and energy keeping the story open for future chapters and laying the foundation for potential sequels that they dropped the ball when it came to creating a solid, totally engaging standalone movie that would so delight audiences that they’d practically demand sequels. “The Golden Compass” didn’t even write an ending. It just trailed off, hoping for another chapter to finish telling the story. That’s absurd. No movie should EVER operate on the assumption that they’re going to have more sequels to finish telling their story UNLESS they already have a massively successful first chapter already under their belts. George Lucas was able to make the ultimate cliffhanger movie, “The Empire Strikes Back”, only because he did such an amazing job making “Star Wars” into an enormous standalone hit. (There are a few open threads at the end of “Star Wars,” but, even if there had never been another film, that ending still would’ve been hugely satisfying.) While, yes, we can’t imagine that “The Hunger Games” won’t do well enough at the box office to warrant a sequel, we really hope that Gary Ross is making “The Hunger Games” like he thinks this is going to be his only shot at telling this story. Because we want “The Hunger Games” to, first and foremost, be a satisfying, memorable film that we can watch for years to come, rather than just being an extended trailer for “Catching Fire.”

## 6. Make the Arena Ending as Intense as Possible



Hunger Games

*Photo credit: Lionsgate*



One of the reasons why most people probably thought that "The Hunger Games" would make a fantastic movie is that it has a killer third-act. The 24 tributes are placed into the Arena, a massive "Truman Show"-esque island, completely outfitted with cameras, where the gamemasters can give the contestants weapons, change the weather at the push of a button, unleash deadly traps or ferocious, genetically mutated animals – it makes "The Running Man" look like ABC's "Wipeout" in comparison. There are some that feel that the true violence of the Arena's battle royale can't be done justice without an R-rating. We disagree. This is a movie based on a young adult novel and it should, as such, be PG-13. However, that being said, we really want Gary Ross to push the level of intensity as far as the PG-13 rating will let him. That's not to say that we want the movie to be gory or graphic. We don't. Much of the fighting and violence could be conveyed just as effectively by being selective with what they show the audience. BUT, rather than gore, we do want Ross to really give us an experience that shows off the panic, adrenaline, pain, and breathless anguish that Katniss has to live through to survive the Arena. So, if Ross doesn't show us all of the blood and viscera Collins described in the tracker-jacker wasp sequence, big deal. But, if he doesn't keep us on the edge of our seats and keep us in a constant state of anxiety for the welfare of young Miss Everdeen, then he's really dropped the ball.

## 7. Give Us Some Surprises



Hunger Games

Photo credit: Lionsgate

It might seem strange to ask for surprises in the film adaptation of a popular book. Most fans are just going to want to see everything they've read about in "The Hunger Games" lovingly recreated on the big screen. BUT that's a tricky thing to pull off and it forgets the most important rule of film adaptations – it must work as a movie first and as an adaptation second. While, yes, "The Hunger Games" is an achingly cinematic book with a three-act structure that would make Robert McKee drool with envy, we really hope that Gary Ross, as a filmmaker, has found a way to make it into something compelling and unexpected rather than just a slideshow of scenes from the book. Chris Columbus' first two "Harry Potter" films were the most generic and forgettable of the series because Columbus brought almost nothing to the table as a filmmaker. His Potter films are the equivalent of visual audiobooks – "And then this happened... and then this happened..." Hopefully, Ross has found a way to make the structure and storytelling of "The Hunger Games" movie into something really unique and surprising and hasn't adopted the workman-like approach of just saying, "OK, I just need to film these scenes as written and fans will be happy." Yes, Ross does need to service the needs of "The Hunger Games" fans, but, much more importantly, he also needs to deliver a compelling cinematic experience that will engage and surprise EVERYONE, fans and non-fans alike. He's definitely got the chops to deliver, so we're rooting for Ross to really knock us out of our seats with "The Hunger Games" and we're confident he can do it.

By TOM BURNS

Staff Writer

HollywoodChicago.com

[tom@hollywoodchicago.com](mailto:tom@hollywoodchicago.com) [14]

Source URL (retrieved on **Mar 28 2024 - 4:59pm**):

<http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/17592/film-feature-seven-things-we-want-from-the-hunger-games>

### Links:

[1] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/users/briantt>

[2] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/elizabeth-banks>

[3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/film-feature>

[4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/gary-ross>

[5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/hollywoodchicagodotcom-content>

[6] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/jennifer-lawrence>

[7] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/josh-hutcherson>

[8] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/lenny-kravitz>

[9] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/liam-hemsworth>

[10] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/list>

- [11] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/the-hunger-games>
- [12] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/tom-burns>
- [13] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/woody-harrelson>
- [14] <mailto:tom@hollywoodchicago.com>