

Moving On in ‘The Hunger Games: Mockingjay – Part 1’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on November 20, 2014 - 11:50pm

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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – The über popular “The Hunger Games” series is back, splitting the final novel into two movie parts, Harry Potter style. Subtitled “Mockingjay - Part 1,” this is the beginning of the end of the story, setting up rather than knocking down.

But “The Hunger Games” has its own distinct feel and source, plus a once-in-a-lifetime cast that deliver the rather soap operish ramifications with a seriousness that edges on parody – there are parts of the film where it wouldn’t be surprising if the actors burst out in laughter. The battle against the evil district of Panem is Dystopia 101, but there is a style to it, and a sly wit, that gives this series an edge in the teenager-fighting-the-man-in-the-future genre of books and films. Jennifer Lawrence as the heroine Katniss adds a depth of feeling that maintains a rooting interest, and old pros like the late Philip Seymour Hoffman drive their characters in different directions than expected.

Katniss (Jennifer Lawrence) awakes in District 13, after she had literally broken The Hunger Games depicted in the previous chapter of the story. Left behind in the avenging district of Panem is her lover, Peeta (Josh Hutcherson), and he is being used as a propaganda agent by President Snow (Donald Sutherland) against the uprising. The opposing revolution is led by President Coin (Julianne Moore), and is aided by Plutarch Heavensbee (Philip Seymour Hoffman).



Katniss (Jennifer Lawrence) Navigates Her World in 'The Hunger Games: Mockingjay - Part 1'

Photo credit: Lionsgate

Katniss is recruited to represent the revolution, as the Mockingjay, a symbol and poster child to inspire the troops. She is supported in this effort by old friend Gale (Liam Hemsworth), Haymitch (Woody Harrelson) and Effie (Elizabeth Banks). In leading a revolution, the inner Joan of Arc in Katniss is being disrupted by visions of Peeta. Will love throw a wrench in the overthrow?

Although filled with expository explanations, the situations are defiantly evolving towards an endgame in the fight against Panem. The rebels are well-crafted, and obviously well funded, with an array of gadgets that are miles away from District 12, where Katniss began as a hungry woman-child. The politics of District 13 is based on overthrow, but they might want to consider using their technology on something besides war. Maybe an economic summit with Panem?

Getting high level actors to do the comic book parts elevates the simple story, and gives it a bit more gumption than it may deserve. Philip Seymour Hoffman is a highlight, and it is a blessing to see his last role in a high profile film, so in essence the most people will experience his artistry. His Plutarch Heavensbee is jokey, backstabbing, observant and heroic, and he's having fun. RIP, big guy.

It's fairly wild to see Jennifer Lawrence back in her Katniss skin after last year's more adult role in "American Hustle." Her performance is very protective of the character, making sure that it rises above the easy Joan of Arc cookie cutter. Her dreams, reactions and push back to her role as Savior has a depth of purpose, and is even a little edgy, considering the predictable machinations of the story.



Heavensbee (Philip Seymour Hoffman) and President Coin (Julianne Moore) in 'The Hunger Games: Mockingjay - Part 1'

Photo credit: Lionsgate

"The Hunger Games" is 90% reliant on the broadly drawn characters that source author Suzanne Collins originally created, and they are definitely the joy within the stoic overtones of the revolt. What is missing – especially in the high tech ease of District 13 – is the notion of "hunger" from the title. Starvation was a necessary motivator in the definition of the Games, and without that human desire, there is less life-and-death in this chapter. This film serves as the set-up for the climax, but wait until next year.

Woody Harrelson, as the squirrely and reluctantly recovering Haymitch character, does an epic "slow clap" as he reintroduces himself in "Mockingjay," and that may sum up this chapter, the slow clap leading to the ovation anticipated for the final solution.

"The Hunger Games: Mockingjay - Part 1" opens everywhere on November 21st. Featuring Jennifer Lawrence, Josh Hutcherson, Liam Hemsworth, Woody Harrelson, Donald Sutherland, Philip Seymour Hoffman, Julianne Moore, Elizabeth Banks, Jeffrey Wright and Stanley Tucci. Screenplay adapted by Danny Strong and Peter Craig, from the novel "Mockingjay" by Suzanne Collins. Directed by Francis Lawrence. Rated "PG-13"



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