

## Mockingjay Part 2

### Film Reviews from Rolling Stone, The Atlantic, New York Times

#### Rolling Stone Peter Travers

Jennifer Lawrence shoots her last arrow and brings a snoozing film franchise back to life.

Audiences got pissy about last year's *Mockingjay – Part 1*, the third film in the *Hunger Games* franchise. They rightly felt gamed by a blatant cash grab that took the last book in Suzanne Collins' bestselling young-adult trilogy and carved out two movies when a single would have done. *Part 1* was so padded and puffed up that the exciting parts got lost in the stuffing.

The good news is that [Mockingjay – Part 2](#), the big finale, has quit the ass-dragging in favor of what made the book a page-turner. There's the visual fireworks, for sure. But there's also the darkness of the theme about how power can corrupt heroes as well as villains. Director Francis Lawrence returns with screenwriters Peter Craig and Danny Strong, and they behave like workhorses with the bridles off. Will this new energy reverse the series' diminishing box office? *Mockingjay – Part 1* fell more than \$70 million short of the original's wowza \$408 million gross. If *Mockingjay – Part 2* rides into boffo nirvana, thank the actress in the saddle. Jennifer Lawrence has won an Oscar (*Silver Linings Playbook*) and global stardom since she first played the role of Katniss Everdeen, in 2012. Lawrence, 25, took Katniss from a shy teen enslaved in poverty to become the "girl on fire," the rebel freedom fighter armed only with bow and arrow and a spirit to bring down the Capitol, run by the despotic President Snow (Donald Sutherland). Lawrence is the kind of star you'd follow anywhere, which makes her the perfect Katniss. Even when the *Hunger Games* series gets winded pimping old tricks, Lawrence is the oxygen that brings it back to life. Katniss seizes her role as the Mockingjay, the symbol of hope for the movement to end Snow's reign of terror. The movie gives her other obstacles. Frankly, I don't give a damn whether Katniss ends up with dull Gale (Liam Hemsworth) or puckish Peeta (Josh Hutcherson), who's brainwashed by Snow, but not enough to give him a personality.

The juice comes outside the love story. Sutherland is a sneering delight as Snow. Julianne Moore excels as Alma Coin, the rebel leader Katniss trusts at her peril. Elizabeth Banks is a marvel as shallow Effie Trinket, the fashion eccentric (think Gaga unleashed) who becomes a Katniss ally. Philip Seymour Hoffman didn't live to finish his role as gamemaster Plutarch. But we hear the character's final words in a letter movingly read by Woody Harrelson's Haymitch.

Though Katniss is tracked by Cressida (Natalie Dormer), a videographer tasked with propagandizing the *Mockingjay* as a reality star, Lawrence makes sure we see Katniss coming into her own. Even with the rush of action – firebombs, land mines, underground mutants, a near-drowning in black oil – Katniss finds her moral center. That gravity is a risk in a Hollywood aimed at short attention spans. But it sets *Mockingjay – Part 2* above the herd and lets *The Hunger Games* go out in style. Sweet.

## **The Atlantic**

### **Christopher Orr**

#### Mockingjay—Part 2: A Dull Slog to the Bitter End

Following two excellent installments, the Hunger Games franchise stumbles to its grim, claustrophobic conclusion.

Perhaps the greatest surprise of the Hunger Games franchise to date had been the degree to which the films reversed the quality trajectory of the books. The first novel in Suzanne Collins's trilogy was the best, with the second moderately worse and the third considerably so. The movies, however, got better and better from first to second to third. (The final book was split into two installments, as is the fashion post-Harry Potter.)

Alas, that trend has now been arrested. The Hunger Games: Mockingjay—Part 2 is the least enjoyable of the films by a considerable margin, a dull, grim, slow-moving slog. The plot, for those unfamiliar with it, involves the final assault on the repressive Capitol by Katniss Everdeen (Jennifer Lawrence) and her rebel companions. Katniss and her squad are sent by the rebel leader Alma Coin (Julianne Moore) on what's supposed to be a relatively safe propaganda mission in areas of the Capitol already pacified by rebel troops. But Katniss's nemesis, President Snow (Donald Sutherland) has seeded the city with deadly "pods," containing everything from machine guns to flamethrowers to a tidal wave of oily goo—effectively turning the Capitol itself into another iteration of the "Hunger Games." "Our gamekeepers," he cackles, "will make them pay for every inch with blood."

This storyline, lifted straight from the novel—the apparent idea having been that each volume of the trilogy must have its own Hunger Games of one sort or another—is decidedly ridiculous, and I'm not sure how it could have been rescued without wholesale re-writing. (Obviously, not an option.) But the director Frank Lawrence (no relation to Jennifer) and the screenwriters Peter Craig and Danny Strong do themselves few favors in this outing.

When Lawrence signed on as director before the second installment of the franchise, he (along with his leading woman) brought a moral heft to the proceedings that had been lacking in the first film. His Hunger Games films weren't merely about a tournament in which children kill one another, they were about repression, revolution, and war on a broad scale. And while those themes are still present in Mockingjay—Part 2, they're in scarce evidence onscreen. Instead, the movie has narrowed into a tale of a single band of (mostly) young people, lurching from one danger to another. The fact that a substantial portion of it takes place underground—Katniss's team take to the urban tunnels of the Capitol to get away from the pods—only adds to the claustrophobia.

Moreover, this installment of the saga, the grimmest of the series by far, didn't need the additional solemnizing that Lawrence brought to its predecessors. Quite the contrary: It could have benefited from an infusion of levity and/or velocity—two qualities conspicuously lacking. Scene after scene is held one, two, three beats too long, in an effort to advertise its Great Moral Importance. The result is a movie that is too silly to be so somber, and too somber to be much fun.

The action sequences are muddy and confused, and the lulls between them—which consist largely of tedious speechifying and long bouts of remorse and recrimination—interminable. The love triangle between Katniss, Peeta (Josh Hutcherson), and Gale (Liam Hemsworth), downplayed in the other films, is heavy-handedly restored to center stage. (Particularly painful is a scene in which Peeta and Gale compare the varying degrees of authenticity of the kisses they've received from Katniss.) And the final 20 minutes or so suffer from acute Return-of-the-King-itis, with narrative postscript following narrative postscript following narrative postscript.

Several principal characters from the previous films—Woody Harrelson's Haymitch Abernathy, Elizabeth Banks's Effie Trinket, Stanley Tucci's Caesar Flickerman—make only token appearances in this outing. But it's the near-absence of the late Philip Seymour Hoffman, who died during filming, that is most keenly felt. His ability to ground the series with understated irony was a crucial component of the earlier films' success. (It borders on cruel that the last we hear from his character, Plutarch Heavensbee, is a letter delivered to Katniss that reads, "I wish I could have given you a proper goodbye.") Should committed fans of the franchise go see *Mockingjay—Part 2*? Of course they should (though perhaps with tempered expectations). Lawrence, as always, makes for a compelling Katniss, and this is, after all, the completion of a long journey. Which is ultimately, I suspect, part of the problem. This is a movie so busy being a final chapter that it frequently forgets to be a movie.

**New York Times**  
**MANOHLA DARGIS**

Review: 'The Hunger Games: Mockingjay Part 2,' Katniss's Final Battle

There's no risk that Katniss Everdeen, the warrior who has led the charge against oppression in "The Hunger Games" movies, can ever return to her current incarnation. Even if she and her world are rebooted back into franchise existence by a ravenous studio, her moment was now. Katniss, as played by Jennifer Lawrence over three years and four blockbusters, has evolved from a backwoods scrapper in the first movie into a battle-scarred champion and an exemplar of female power on screen and off — and the battles she's fought have extended far beyond the fictional nation of Panem.

So, yes, of course Katniss is back, just as promised by the clumsy title of her last movie, "The Hunger Games: Mockingjay Part 1." In "Part 2," she has returned as destined to finish the fight, defeat the enemy and send off a big-screen series that has had an astonishing run both in cold-cash terms and in its meaningful symbolism. She's ready. Since 2012, when the first movie landed, Katniss has grown into her role as a savior, an evolution that parallels that of Ms. Lawrence, who entered the series as a Sundance starlet and leaves it as one of the biggest stars in the world. Both have grown exponentially, rising to the demands of their loving audience.

And "The Hunger Games" has triumphed partly because it means so many different things to so many people. It's a story of war and peace, love and bullets, pegged to a girl-woman who fights for her family, her friends and the future. It's aspirational and inspirational, personal and communal, familiar and strange, and it speaks to the past as well as the present, sometimes unnervingly so. Suzanne Collins, who wrote the books, took her cues from reality television, the Iraq war, Roman gladiator games and

themyth of Theseus and the Minotaur, and then filtered her influences through a heroine who embodies the adage that it's better to die on your feet than live on your knees. The result was a great character on the page and a transcendent one on the screen, where women tend to be sidelined or trapped in the virgin-whore divide.

If Katniss escaped that old binary it's because Ms. Collins created a character who exists outside the traditional confines of the feminine-masculine split, and because the movies have stayed true to that original conception. At once a hunter and a nurturer, Katniss is tough and teary, stoic and sentimental, which give her layers that reflect her changeable inner states as well as her public and private identities as daughter, sister, lover and leader. It's instructive that she's worn her most overtly glamour-girl outfits as part of the farcical role forced on her by the totalitarian government that rules Panem, having been dolled up with makeup and smiles for the televised sideshows that accompany the murderous games of the series title. She's since graduated to basic battle black or unisex clothing that's suggestive of a Dystopian Gap.

"Part 2" more or less picks up where the last movie left off, with Katniss and the rest of the rebel forces closing in on the government and Panem's leader, President Snow (the invaluable Donald Sutherland, leading with an insouciant self-amused smile). There are no real surprises, though many familiar faces, some of whom (Jeffrey Wright and, more movingly, Philip Seymour Hoffman) flash by so quickly that they feel like guests who have popped in only to say goodbye. As with a lot of contemporary franchises, this one stocked the supporting roles with veterans who have given ballast to a largely unmemorable young cast, including the insipid twosome — Josh Hutcherson as Peeta and Liam Hemsworth as Gale — who have wanly bookended Katniss from the start.

Like the previous two movies, "Part 2" was directed by Francis Lawrence who, like most franchise filmmakers, was not hired for the quality of his *mise-en-scène* but for one job: to not screw up an extremely valuable property. (The first was shepherded by Gary Ross, whose cinematographer, Tom Stern, alas, also departed the series.) And, so, mission accomplished, largely with a lot of conversational face-offs and regular bursts of showy violence that sometimes turn panoramic, allowing you to admire the scale of the apocalyptically dressed sets. To that instrumental end, the actors hit their marks while running and gunning amid the gray rubble and black ooze, although Mr. Lawrence does raise some nice shivers in a tunnel sequence, making the horrific most out of the dark.

"Part 2" looks much like most contemporary dystopian future worlds, one that's by turns similar enough to ours to be reassuring and different enough to be diverting. What makes the material still feel personal — other than the yearslong investment and love that transform entertainments into fan communities — is the combination of Katniss and Ms. Lawrence, who have become a perfect fit. Ms. Lawrence now inhabits the role as effortlessly as breathing, partly because, like all great stars, she seems to be playing a version of her "real" self. It's the kind of realness that can give you and the movie a jolt, as in a scene with Ms. Lawrence and a sensationally raw Jena Malone that thrusts it into that place where heroes and villains give way to something like life.

It's crucial to the conception of Katniss that most of the character's more emotionally plangent scenes have been with other women, including her family, friends and other Hunger Games combatants. Some of this can be chalked up to casting and, together with Ms. Lawrence, Ms. Malone, Natalie Dormer, Patina Miller and Michelle Forbes make one of the toughest groups of women to band together on screen since Quentin Tarantino's "Death Proof," his ode to exploitation cinema and its chicks. This series

has had its share of robust male assistance (notably from Mr. Sutherland and Woody Harrelson), but it's been distracting and at times more than a little amusing that Katniss's love interests are played by the blindingly bland brotherhood of Mr. Hutcherson and Mr. Hemsworth.

Intentional or not, their casting ensured that in the movies, just as in the books, Katniss was never going to be upstaged by a love interest. "The Hunger Games" may have shocked readers and viewers with its child-on-child violence, but even more startling and certainly far more pleasurable has been the girl-woman at its center who can lead troops like a reborn Joan of Arc, yet find time to nuzzle the downy lips of her male comrades before returning to battle. Her desire is as fluid as her gender, whether she's slipping into froufrou, shooting down enemy aircraft, kissing a boy or taking a punch. Unlike a lot of screen heroines, she has never settled into stereotype, which, despite the whole dystopian thing, makes her a lot like the contemporary girls and women watching her.

That has helped make Katniss the right heroine for these neo-feminist times, the you-go-and-fight girl who has led the empowerment charge at the box office and in the public imagination, often while slinging a bow and arrow borrowed from Diana, the Roman goddess of the hunt. It wasn't long before Katniss was making more like a latter-day Athena, the Greek goddess of war, even as this very human girl-woman was also suggesting a vibrant new take on the American Adam. You may not know the name, but you know the type: He's the hero whom the critic R. W. B. Lewis, in his 1955 study of 19th-century literature (and an "American mythology") described as being "emancipated from history, happily bereft from ancestry, untouched and undefiled by the usual inheritances of family and race."

However mythic this figure — individual, self-reliant, "fundamentally innocent" — the illusion of freedom he enjoys is meaningful, Lewis argues, because it makes for fiction capable of "profound tragic understanding" rather than hopelessness. Even inadequately, this Adam struggles because, as with his biblical namesake, "the world and history lay all before" him; by contrast, these lay all behind Katniss, who has endured history, violence and death. Yet she goes forth into her world because she too has an illusion of freedom, one which has spared us the nihilism polluting too many movies and has meant that she is neither Adam nor Eve but something else. And it is only by being this something else (not the Girl, not the Virgin or the Whore) that she has been able both to love and to fight, including against the big bad patriarch.

The success of "The Hunger Games" series has been itself, in its bottom-line fashion, a rejoinder to another intolerant regime, that of a movie industry that continues to treat women on and off the screen as a distraction, an afterthought and a problem. A few months into its run, the second installment, "Catching Fire," became the first movie with a lone female lead to top the annual domestic box office in four decades. That's astonishing because it reveals the historical depths of the industry's inequities even while it speaks to the audience's embrace of this series. There are all sorts of reasons that viewers have flocked to these movies, including the studio hard sell, but I like to think the numbers prove that, in rallying to Katniss's side, they're also backing the other liberation struggle she has come to represent.

"The Hunger Games: Mockingjay Part 2" is rated PG-13 (Parents strongly cautioned). Apocalyptic violence. Running time: 2 hours 16 minutes.