




## Mockingjay Part 1: The “Empire Strikes Back” of the “Hunger Games” Series

The latest and third big-screen installment  of the *Hunger Games* films, *The Mockingjay Part One*, is a well-produced and entertaining blockbuster guaranteed to make a bundle of cash at the box office, even if the ending leaves the viewer hanging in the same manner as *Star Wars’ The Empire Strikes Back*.

Well, the title does say “Part One.”

The film is engaging, full of action sequences packed with digital special effects, and competently acted by a talented cast that includes Jennifer Lawrence (one Oscar) and Julianne Moore (two Emmys).

*The Mockingjay* picks up where the second film left off, with teenaged Katniss Everdeen (Lawrence) being rescued from the lethal “Hunger Games” that were orchestrated by the cruel Capitol government and its oozingly evil President Coriolanus Snow (Donald Sutherland). In the Hunger Games, two children from each of the 12 districts in the nation of Panem are required to kill each other, with the lone survivor becoming a “Champion.”

Katniss wakes to find that “District 13” — which the Capitol has assured people had ceased to exist in a nuclear war 75 years earlier — is still active and armed, and ready to strike back against the Capitol. As a past “Champion,” Katniss is recruited to become a propaganda symbol of the revolution against the Capitol. Amidst a love triangle between Katniss, Peeta Mellark (Josh Hutcherson) and Gayle Hawthorne (Liam Hemsworth), Katniss is initially reluctant to assist in the revolution, since she does not want her involvement to jeopardize Peeta, who is still a prisoner of the Capitol and is being forced to make propaganda films for the central government.

But she does want to see her home District 12, and a trip is arranged. What she finds is desolation, as the government’s bombers have killed every living thing they could find there. Upon her return to District 13, Katniss partners with District 13’s President Alma Coin (Julianne Moore) and becomes the Mockingjay — the symbol for the revolution. But the fearless heroine wants to do more than appear in propaganda films. She eventually tells Coin:

Katniss: I want to go.

President Coin: And if you get killed?

Katniss: Just make sure you get it on camera.

The dystopian science fiction series is based upon the well-written *Hunger Games* book trilogy by Suzanne Collins, one of the few women who have hit the big time with science fiction writing. By putting women in lead roles in the series, she’s effectively lifted the sci-fi genre beyond the stereotypical teenage male. *The Mockingjay Part One* will cash a lot of tickets from young women who have become enamored with Lawrence’s “Katniss Everdeen.” For example, Collins got a share of the \$11 from my 15-year-old daughter’s ticket.

*The Mockingjay* is an unambiguously anti-statist film. The “Capitol” region and the insidiously evil President Snow are almost over-the-top nefarious, but even the friendly District 13 is run as a military



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camp, complete with Maoist-era uniforms.

Katniss' involvement, captured on film and broadcast throughout the districts, inspires the growing revolution. In addition, there's Katniss' insistence on rescuing Peeta. But don't expect closure in this film. It teases the Part Two installment that is expected to be released next year — a final installment which will probably even best the respectable estimated \$55 million grossed by *Mockingjay: Part One* on opening night.

But I was willing to tolerate Han Solo being frozen in carbonite in *The Empire Strikes Back*, so I can wait to see Katniss finish her revolution. *The Mockingjay* was the least-entertaining of Collins' three-book trilogy, but it was still pretty good. And the same goes for this film. Collins and her Hollywood collaborators want you to, as the propaganda film Katniss made for District 13 says:

Join the Mockingjay!

Join the Fight!

Okay, count me in.



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