**‘Hunger Games’ series comes to violent end**

**By** [**Ty Burr**](http://www.bostonglobe.com/staff/burr) Globe Staff  November 18, 2015

How death-haunted is “The Hunger Games: Mockingjay — Part 2”? The second image we see is a close-up of Philip Seymour Hoffman in his role as Plutarch Heavensbee, former government Gamemaker and current adviser to rebel leader President Coin (Julianne Moore). The much-loved actor died in February 2014 and his appearance here comes as a shock. He seems a revenant from a distant past — a living, breathing ghost in the Hollywood franchise machine.

Plutarch isn’t on hand for long, but his presence sets the tone — grim, exhausted, elegiac — of this last chapter in the futuristic action-drama series. The new movie stands as a sizable improvement on last year’s truncated “Mockingjay — Part 1,” but the reasons for bisecting the final novel in Suzanne Collins’s best-selling trilogy remain murky, more a matter of greed than narrative coherence. Whatever: If you’ve followed “The Hunger Games” this far, the fourth and final installment brings the story to a brutal but satisfying conclusion. If you’re a newcomer who has merely wandered into the wrong theater, it’ll seem like what it is: the “Saving Private Ryan” of dystopian teen flicks.

Once Plutarch and Coin get rebel icon Katniss Everdeen (Jennifer Lawrence) up and out of recovery — see, her former Hunger Games contestant and sort-of sweetie Peeta Mellark (Josh Hutcherson) got brainwashed by evil President Snow (Donald Sutherland) and tried to strangle Katniss at the end of “Mockingjay Part 1” — the revolution moves into the beleaguered Capitol for the series’ end game. Literally, since Snow has booby-trapped the rubble-strewn streets of his city with death-dealing flamethrowers, geysers of oil, and various stabby things. One of the film’s mid-point action whamaramas unfolds amid the monumental architecture of Ricardo Bofill’s Les Espaces d’Abraxas outside Paris (Terry Gilliam shot “Brazil” there, too); any visual echoes of recent attacks on that city are of your own making. Besides, this series wants you to side with the terrorists against the government.

There’s the expected torn-between-two-lovers [silliness](http://www.bostonglobe.com/arts/movies/2015/11/18/hunger/yOdMextvI1jnjV7z5PIjjK/story.html) as Katniss throws her [sympathies](http://www.bostonglobe.com/arts/movies/2015/11/18/hunger/yOdMextvI1jnjV7z5PIjjK/story.html) first to the stalwart Gale (Liam Hemsworth) and then the brain-scrambled Peeta, but the filmmakers and characters seem fed up with the indecision by now. Johanna Mason (Jena Malone), another Games contestant gone gaunt and shaven-headed with her time in Snow’s prisons, sneers at “the whole tacky romance drama,” and even Katniss looks like she’d rather be home with a good book.

Whatever wild light Lawrence brings to her other movies — such as (one hopes) the upcoming “Joy” — she keeps it well under a bushel in the “Hunger Games” films. Katniss is a Joan of Arc for a generation of reluctant warriors, and “Mockingjay — Part 2” is a war movie for those distrustful of any and all leaders, *especially* the ones trying to sell you on a future. It’s telling that the uplifting speech that caps the final scenes — the movie’s homily, as it were — comes from Plutarch Heavensbee in the form of a letter to Katniss read by Haymitch Abernathy (Woody Harrelson). The filmmakers could have just given the moment to Haymitch, but it matters, I think, that the monologue’s lightly subversive sentiments are linked to an actor whose smile always seemed to rise from underground.

Francis Lawrence has directed all the “Hunger Games” movies except the dutiful first and he doesn’t honor the books so much as their dour, agonized sense of youthful martyrdom. These are not — repeat, not — films for children under 9 or 10, not with the new movie’s underground attack by mutant “Mutts” that seems borrowed from an “Alien” spinoff, or a climactic sequence involving the massacre of innocent Capitol children. But they are experiences built to flatter the suspicions and self-absorptions of your average American adolescent. Katniss is just a girl from District 12 who becomes the Mother of Us All. And it looks like it’s killing her.

If you [step](http://www.bostonglobe.com/arts/movies/2015/11/18/hunger/yOdMextvI1jnjV7z5PIjjK/story.html) back even further, the “Hunger Games” saga replicates a struggle that matters much to its generation — the conflict between watching and doing, between acting and remaining passive, between violence organized as something to be entertained and profit by and violence as a tragic constant in the search for a better world. The series began with televised games in which kids killed kids and it ends with those now-grown children doing all they can to remain off camera. Not for nothing does Katniss flee from the bogus propaganda army squad of which she’s the “star.”

“If we die, let it be for a cause, not a spectacle,” the heroine barks at one point. If such a statement sounds fairly insane coming from a series that has grossed (to date) $2.3 billion worldwide, “Mockingjay — Part 2” is sturdy enough to render it moot while you’re watching. After that, it’s up to you whether to swallow the irony or choke on it.

***Movie Review***

**★★★**

**THE HUNGER GAMES: MOCKINGJAY — PART 2**

Directed by Francis Lawrence. Written by Peter Craig and Danny Strong, based on the novel by Suzanne Collins. Starring Jennifer Lawrence, Liam Hemsworth, Josh Hutcherson, Donald Sutherland, Julianne Moore, Philip Seymour Hoffman, Woody Harrelson. 136 minutes. PG-13 (intense sequences of violence and action, some thematic material)

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# Jennifer Lawrence and 'The Hunger Games' deserved a better ending than 'Mockingjay -- Part 2'

[Kenneth Turan,](http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/la-bio-kenneth-turan-staff.html#nt=byline)  [Reporter](mailto:kenneth.turan@latimes.com?subject=Regarding:%20%22Jennifer%20Lawrence%20and%20%27The%20Hunger%20Games%27%20deserved%20a%20better%20ending%20than%20%27Mockingjay%20--%20Part%202%27%22)

"The Hunger Games: Mockingjay — Part 2" is exactly what you would expect from its ungainly title, and that turns out to be not quite enough.

That's a bit sad because novelist [Suzanne Collins](http://www.latimes.com/topic/arts-culture/literature/suzanne-collins-PECLB000014803-topic.html)' saga of resistance and rebellion in the totalitarian future state of Panem as led by redoubtable warrior Katniss Everdeen has been such a reliable staple of popular entertainment that it would be swell if the fourth and final film of the series ended things on a completely satisfying note.

And in truth many of the same elements of the previous films are present here. Stars [Jennifer Lawrence](http://www.latimes.com/topic/entertainment/jennifer-lawrence-PECLB0000006729-topic.html), [Josh Hutcherson](http://www.latimes.com/topic/entertainment/josh-hutcherson-PECLB0000006965-topic.html) and [Liam Hemsworth](http://www.latimes.com/topic/entertainment/liam-hemsworth-PECLB0000007511-topic.html) return for the fourth time as ace archer Everdeen and her pair of devoted swains, director [Francis Lawrence](http://www.latimes.com/topic/entertainment/francis-lawrence-PECLB0015416-topic.html) is back for his third film, and screenwriters Peter Craig and Danny Strong mark this as their second effort. Even the late [Philip Seymour Hoffman](http://www.latimes.com/topic/entertainment/movies/philip-seymour-hoffman-PECLB0017764399-topic.html), who appeared in two other films in the franchise, is seen briefly in the finale.

On the level of stunts and action, "Mockingjay — Part 2" has its share of briskly executed, efficiently done set pieces as the rebellion against that nasty President Snow ([Donald Sutherland](http://www.latimes.com/topic/entertainment/donald-sutherland-PECLB003796-topic.html)) edges closer and closer to the Capitol.

But what made the best of the "Hunger Games" movies so effective was the emotional connection its shrewd plotting created by combining a coming-of-age saga, romantic rivalry and broader concerns about violent spectacle used to manipulate public opinion.

In theory, all this should come to a head in this final film, but the aesthetically misguided idea of breaking the final book into two films, commercially remunerative though it might have been, has ended up making the dragged-out proceedings feel anti-climactic and emotionally static.

For one thing, "Part 2" has to cope, as "Part 1" did before it, with the absence of any actual Hunger Games action and the emotion those teen versus teen battles engendered is missed even more here.

More than that, key plot elements left to be determined, like Katniss' Betty or Veronica choice between longtime companion Gale Hawthorne (Hemsworth) and her Hunger Games partner, the charisma-challenged Peeta Mellark (Hutcherson), have had so much screen time devoted to them in earlier films that the resolution is too inevitable to be involving.

Similarly, the unexpected twists "Mockingjay's" story throws at us as the conclusion nears had more effect — and more surprise — on the page than they manage on the screen, where key elements have been telegraphed more than they are in print. For the die-hard fans [around the world](http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/movies/la-et-mn-hunger-games-review-20151119-column.html) who've already paid $2.3 billion at the box office to see the previous films, these quibbles will likely matter little or not at all compared with seeing the resolution they likely already know enacted by flesh-and-blood actors.

For the "Hunger Games" brain trust has clearly decided to pitch this last film to those most devoted to the franchise, with little attempt made to fill in the blanks for any late arrivals or those whose familiarity with the material is not encyclopedic.

So if "Part 1" ended on Page 177 of the book, with a brainwashed and delusional Peeta attempting to throttle Katniss (oh, the horror …), "Part 2" begins on the very next page, with Katniss trying to cope with her injuries. Even Saturday matinee cliffhanger serials, of which these films are in a sense the modern version, worked harder to bring generalists up to speed.

Once Katniss regains her [health](http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/movies/la-et-mn-hunger-games-review-20151119-column.html), she becomes focused on infiltrating the Capitol and speedily ending the life of President Snow, whose nefarious plan it was to turn Peeta against her.

But rival President Coin (Julianne Moore), the canny head of the opposition rebels, has other plans for the by-now-famous Mockingjay, the symbol of resistance to tyranny, and they do not include risking her neck in combat situations.

But Katniss being Katniss finds a way around that reluctance, if only a partial one. She, Gale, Finnick (Sam Claflin), the recovering but still unreliable Peeta and other folks form a kind of celebrity attack squad that is supposed to be used mainly for propaganda purposes.

Things don't go exactly as planned, however, and Katniss and company face numerous daunting obstacles, including booby traps created by the Capitol's games makers and a savage attack by genetically mutated lizard men who don't have a friendly bone in their body.

While the other "Hunger Games" films had their static moments, they could always count on Lawrence's palpable passion for the part to energize the proceedings, a passion that is not conveyed as strongly this time around.

Because the two parts of "Mockingjay" were filmed back to back in a massive 152-day period, the film's overall lassitude may well be due to exhaustion as much as anything else. Whatever the cause, it's one of the reasons "Mockingjay — Part 2," earnest and acceptable though it is, doesn't end on the kind of high note it deserves.

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# The Hunger Games: Mockingjay, Part 2

age 13+ Finale is a faithful, fitting end to Girl on Fire's journey.

Parents need to know that The Hunger Games: Mockingjay, Part 2 is the fourth and final installment in the adaptation of [Suzanne Collins' critically and commercially acclaimed trilogy](https://www.commonsensemedia.org/lists/the-hunger-games-books-movies-music-and-more). Like most final films in a book-based franchise, expect even fans who didn't catch the first [Mockingjay](https://www.commonsensemedia.org/movie-reviews/the-hunger-games-mockingjay-part-1) to want to see how the filmmakers wrap up the story. Be prepared for intense and upsetting violence revolving around Katniss ([Jennifer Lawrence](https://www.commonsensemedia.org/search/Jennifer%20Lawrence)) and company's revolution against the Capitol, including explosions, shoot-outs, several emotional death scenes, and one extremely tense sequence/jump-scare involving the scary creatures known as Mutts. Amid all the action and violence are a few moments of tenderness and romance, but nothing beyond a couple of sweet kisses. As with the first Mockingjay, this film is also full of potential conversation starters about the role of media during conflict, the role of revolutionaries as symbols (rather than actual people), and how extremes on either side of a political spectrum can be equally dangerous. User reviews

Thanks to director [Francis Lawrence](https://www.commonsensemedia.org/search/Francis%20Lawrence) and, above all, star Jennifer Lawrence, this final film is a fitting tribute to Suzanne Collins' unforgettable heroine. It even improves on some of the book's weaker elements; Lawrence the director knows how to use Lawrence the actor's vulnerability to explore what a messy thing indeed it is to be a hero -- to be the Chosen One, to know you're somehow more useful as a martyr to the cause than as a very real, confused, emotional girl. The Katniss of Mockingjay isn't as singularly focused as the one in the Arena. This Katniss is sure of very little other than that Snow must go, and Lawrence beautifully captures the excruciating pain of Katniss' journey, of her loneliness and heartbreak and fierce devotion to those she loves.

Very few book series have received such a faithful, fabulously performed, and visually appealing set of cinematic adaptations. That's not to say that the film is perfect: It fast-forwards a few dramatic elements that some book fans will no doubt miss, like the blossoming friendship between Katniss and Johanna ([Jena Malone](https://www.commonsensemedia.org/search/Jena%20Malone)) that gets compressed into a couple of conversations, or the strength of Katniss' platonic feelings for fellow Hunger Games victor Finnick, whose marriage to Annie (Stef Dawson) is similarly glossed over in one quick scene. But otherwise, the director and screenwriter keep the pace brisk, even as it seems like one long, deadly obstacle course to Katniss' inevitable showdown with Snow. At one point, Katniss asks someone why he's helping her, and he replies that she's earned a long and peaceful life. After four films of Lawrence playing Katniss, who wouldn't agree?