

'The Hunger Games: Mockingjay Part 2'

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Makes it across the finish line with a few stumbles

Rating: «« out of 4 Stars

Running Time: 137 min.

If you're a fan of *The Hunger Games* series, you will undoubtedly go to see the latest chapter regardless of what anyone thinks. And based on the reaction at the preview this reviewer attended, you're likely to love it as well. However, it's difficult not to note something of a change from what's come before.

The first two films had a faster pace, an immediate sense of danger and enough subtext to make it all feel fresh. By comparison, the third title came across as slow, ponderous and obvious in its themes. And so *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay - Part 2* falls somewhere in the middle... the film is better than most teen lit adaptations you're likely to see, and yet it still has its fair share of faults. This is a passable (but far from exceptional) finale.

Anyone expecting to witness epic scenes of revolt or a full scale battle should immediately temper their expectations. As the movie begins, Katniss Everdeen (Jennifer Lawrence) is officially the poster child of the revolution, meaning that her leader Coin (Julianne Moore) wants her nowhere near the conflict. Angry, Katniss sneaks into the rebel base, determined to find and kill President Snow (Donald Sutherland) on her own.

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However, she's found immediately and teamed up with boyfriend Gale (Liam Hemsworth), a mentally damaged Peeta (Josh Hutcherson), and a propaganda camera crew for the purpose of shooting more promo footage for the masses. This means that they see none of the main conflict - instead, they merely follow through the wreckage left behind and attempt to sort through a personal love triangle. At least a couple of elaborate booby traps make it clear that someone doesn't want Katniss to survive long enough to reach Snow.

There can be little doubt that the filmmakers felt compelled to follow the source material closely; the pacing is still a little sluggish. As the series has opened up from its original arena confines, it has expanded its world considerably. Many characters have been introduced over the course of three movies, meaning several are forced into the plot so fans can see them all, even if for the briefest of moments. But the frequent introductions, re-introductions and goodbyes slow things down considerably. At least all of the performances are excellent. Had the casting not been as strong, it would be painful to watch the details of Katniss's social life unfold as they do.

The movie also doesn't feel as grand as expected (in some respects it comes across as smaller than previous installments) and there's a minimal amount of pulse-pounding thrills for the finale of an action film franchise. Only two major sequences are notable within the nearly two hours and twenty minute running time; one is an elaborate trap involving an oil slick and another involves a chase through the city's sewers.

These bits are well put together and exciting, but they can't help but feel minor in scale. As a viewer unfamiliar with the source material, it was also odd to see a monstrous element added to the latter sequence. It's difficult to recall seeing characters this supernatural appearing in any previous installments. While the dust-up is enjoyable to watch in the moment, the creatures still seem oddly out of place within this fantasy world.

In the end, *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay - Part 2* has a couple of strong action beats and brings up some interesting issues about the motivations of persons in positions of power as well as those seeking to assume it. However, the effort to give every character their due and please its obsessive young viewers results in an awkwardly plotted tale. It makes it across the finish line, but stumbles a bit along the way.