



## The Hunger Games Review

By Roger Ebert

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Like many science-fiction stories, “The Hunger Games” portrays a future that we're invited to read as a parable for the present. After the existing nations of North America are destroyed by catastrophe, a civilization named Panem rises from the ruins. It's ruled by a vast, wealthy Capitol inspired by the covers of countless sci-fi magazines and surrounded by 12 “districts” that are powerless satellites.

The scenes set in the Capitol and dealing with its peculiar characters have a completely different tone than the scenes of conflict in the Arena. The ruling class is painted in broad satire and bright colors. Katniss and the other tributes are seen in earth-toned realism; this character could be another manifestation, indeed, of Jennifer Lawrence's Oscar-nominated character Ree in “Winter's Bone.” The plot even explains why she's adept at bow and arrow.

One thing I missed, however, was more self-awareness on the part of the tributes. As their names are being drawn from a fish bowl (!) at the Reaping, the reactions of the chosen seem rather subdued, considering the odds are 23-to-1 that they'll end up dead. Katniss volunteers to take the place of her 12-year-old kid sister, Prim (Willow Shields), but no one explicitly discusses the fairness of deadly combat between girl children and 18-year-old men. Apparently, the jaded TV audiences of Panem have developed an appetite for barbarity. Nor do Katniss and Peeta reveal much thoughtfulness about their own peculiar position.

“The Hunger Games” is an effective entertainment, and Jennifer Lawrence is strong and convincing in the central role. But the film leapfrogs obvious questions in its path, and avoids the opportunities sci-fi provides for social criticism; compare its world with the dystopias in “Gattaca” or “The Truman Show.” Director Gary Ross and his writers (including the series' author, Suzanne Collins) obviously think their audience wants to see lots of hunting-and-survival scenes, and has no interest in people talking about how a cruel class system is using them. Well, maybe they're right. But I found the movie too long and deliberate as it negotiated the outskirts of its moral issues.