

Let the Games Begin

-Alex Stein

I had another article planned this week, but after my weekend viewing of *The Hunger Games*, I thought my views on this blockbuster series has to be addressed. I don't intend this to be a movie review but more an overall examination and I will do my best to avoid any spoilers...

I sat in the theatre late Saturday night stunned. While everyone else picked up their popcorns and jackets and exited the theatre I couldn't stand up. I didn't know why, *The Hunger Games* is just another movie based on a book, cashing in on its quick success. Suzanne Collin's blockbuster story has sky rocketed to the top of the charts and taken America by storm. It's the next *Twilight* and this year's *Harry Potter*, captivating every child and adult in its path. My first inclination to read this book was last year when my grandfather called me up raving about a book about "kids who kill each other in an arena." I nodded and dismissed it; I had better things to do and more interesting books to read. Fast forward a year and the story about "kids who kill each other in an arena" has reached the status of "the boy who lived." Still I told myself, I'll get to it at some point, I had moved beyond teen novels. Then the movie came out, and *everyone* jumped on The Hunger Games bandwagon. I'm not saying I'm a follower but then again, "it's about kids who kill each other in an arena." Regardless, I thought I'd give it a try.

I'm not one of those *Harry Potter* fanatics, but I appreciate the series and I commend J.K. Rowling for creating a world that is both different and fascinating. The wizard world was what made Harry enthralling and down right epic. *The Hunger Games* setting of Panem takes this to a very different but equally unique level. For those who have not read it, North America has been wiped out and a new nation has been established called Panem. It is here that 13 districts have been set up, ruled by a dictatorship only known as the Capitol. What makes this nation so unique is every year they have a celebration picking 24 children to battle to the death till there is one winner. This battle royale is instituted to keep the citizens from uprising and to show the power the Capitol wields over its 13 districts. As you may have realized, this isn't Wonderland.

When reading *The Hunger Games* I was not captivated by the nature of the writing but more so by the nature of the environment. I had no idea what Panem would look like. We are left to our own devices to envision it. The Hunger Games is no where as good as Harry Potter mainly because I feel like I'm reading a book written by a 5th grader. It isn't particularly well written and choppy but then again it's written for "tweens." Shortly after finishing it, I still hadn't decided if I actually liked the book. Yes, it was interesting and captivating, but not exactly fun to read. It felt more like a chore than a hobby. I finished it at a breakneck pace only because of my curiosity to find out what happens to Katniss. Then the movie comes out and my biggest question going on was "how do you illustrate Panem?" For me, this was crucial, everything else was not important.

Fast forward two and a half hours and I'm sitting in the theatre while the audience and my friends are getting ready to leave. Half my brain is telling me that this is the greatest story to ever exist while the other half is telling me this is the most overrated joke ever created.

My movie review boils down to two points:

1. Don't let Gary Ross ever direct another movie again, he is solely responsible for my latter half's brain response. I felt like I was on a tilt-a-whirl for 2 hours. Every single shot had a camera change and the handheld camera doesn't help either. No one will ever refer to *The Hunger Games* as a well paced story. What good are the action scenes if the camera angle is changing every half second?
2. Give an Oscar to the team that designed Panem. My main concern was how you illustrate Panem. The visual team did an amazing job. There were several times throughout where I sat in amazement at how everything looked. It's hard to describe and it's something that has to be seen.

So what is *The Hunger Games*? Is it the greatest story ever told or the most overrated? I'm 130 pages into its sequel, *Catching Fire* and I'm trudging through it. But for some reason I can't seem to stop. I suggest everyone read this book at some point just to bask in the world of Panem. If you just see the movie on its own, then it is what is, another action movie. But if you read the book first it's an action packed tour through Panem. Just remember to bring motion sickness pills.

The movie sequel to *The Hunger Games*, *Catching Fire* comes out in 2013. I'm waiting with hesitation because if Gary Ross is directing I won't be catching anything.

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