

CINEMA CORNER

‘Mockingjay’ weakest of ‘Games’



By
Roger Thomas
Film Critic

Before the original “Hunger Games” movie arrived in theaters, I had read the first novel upon which the film was based.

I liked the book overall but I have never been a big fan of stories written in the first person point of view. I actually thought the first film benefitted greatly by having scenes where Katniss was not present. What President Snow and others were thinking was very revealing to the overall story.

When the second film arrived, I had not read the next novel, but I went into the theater a little underwhelmed by the fact Katniss and Peeta were returning to the arena of the games. Could the author not come up with something more creative than a replay of the first story? It turned out that I was pleasantly surprised. The second film is almost as good as the first, and in some ways even surpasses it.

And now we have the third, “Mockingjay.” This one is based on the first half of the third novel, with the



Photo courtesy of Lionsgate

Liam Hemsworth and Jennifer Lawrence go over the damage to District 8 during a secret visit.

other half arriving in the summer of 2015.

My immediate reaction to the third film can be summed up in two sentences. First, this film drops you right into the story with not one moment of reflection of what has already passed. I would not recommend this film to anyone who has not seen the first two. Personally, I wish I had gone back and watched the others one more time before going to see this one.

My second immediate reaction is that the film takes some time, a full 40 minutes, before there is any-

thing on the screen that is actually moving and emotional. There is a lot of talk, which can be slightly confusing; there is a journey to District 12 that is very uneventful and then more discussions. Again, I found none of this compelling.

There is a reunion of most of the characters from the previous films. Gale (Liam Hemsworth) finally gets to do something. Peeta is seen mostly in a broadcast from the Capital. President Snow is as smarmy as ever. Haymitch is now sober (a point the other characters keep repeating.)

Julianne Moore is the

president of the rebels in District 13, a brilliant actress who I hope has a juicier role in the next film. Mahershala Ali’s new character of Boggs is an interesting addition.

Overall, the characters are all here to affect the life of Katniss. If you enjoyed them before, you should expect much of the same.

Then finally, as the second third of the movie begins, there is a very powerful scene in a refugee hospital. Some of this has been playing in the trailer for months, but it still works remarkably well. All that happens in that outing

lifts the film to a height it has not achieved prior to these moments. However, I did find myself wondering why President Snow had security cameras in this district but not in District 12, the home of Katniss.

Following the scene at the hospital and the events that came next, the film has some good moments and others that slow things down considerably. The overall film is a mixed bag of highs and lows, with the low points more numerous, but the high points – like the climax – almost rescue the film completely.

This is the weakest of the three “Hunger Games” films, but there is still enough to recommend it slightly. Besides, one probably needs to see the film to understand the finale, and that alone is reason enough to view this one.

I certainly hope that “Mockingjay Part 2” is closer to the first two films. And ultimately may the series be greater as a whole than this third chapter is alone.

Roger Thomas is a member of the North Carolina Film Critics Association. He reviews films for The Stanly News & Press.

COMING THIS WEEK



HORRIBLE BOSSES 2

Dale, Kurt and Nick decide to start their own business but things don't go as planned because of a slick investor, prompting the trio to pull off a harebrained and misguided kidnapping scheme.



PENGUINS OF MADAGASCAR

Skipper, Kowalski, Rico and Private join forces with undercover organization The North Wind to stop the villainous Dr. Octavius Brine from destroying the world.

ALSO COMING
• The Imitation Game
• Before I Disappear*
* – Limited release

DVD review: ‘What If’ it had not been made?

BY ROGER THOMAS
Film Critic

“What If.” What if this film had never been made?

For quite a few film fans, at least those who are not snobs that refuse to see films with special effects, all of us have watched Daniel Radcliffe grow up in films, physically and professionally through the eight “Harry Potter” films.

I, like many others, love those films and applaud Radcliffe’s performances. In fact, it is our affection for those films that shoves us toward the hope that his career will continue to be as successful as the early years. May he follow the example of Harrison Ford rather than that of Mark Hamill.

Excluding Potter, Radcliffe has done several films in recent years. He did “December Boys” between the fifth and sixth Potter films – “Order of Phoenix” and “Half-Blood Prince” for you diehard fans. “December Boys” is not a great film, but it has strong moments.

The year after the last Potter film, he did “The Woman in Black,” a fun horror movie which is appro-



Photo courtesy of CBS Films

Daniel Radcliffe and Zoe Kazan

priate for anyone 10 or older. Then came “Kill Your Darlings” that again had moments, but ultimately failed overall (Dane DeHaan had the stronger performance over Radcliffe). Though based on a true story, “Darlings” was all a bit too strange. Radcliffe has also done the British series, “A Young Doctor’s Notebook,” but I cannot comment on that because I have yet to see it.

And then comes “What If.” I wanted to like it, I truly did. The trailer had some good moments (most of which are the best moments in the film). The cast, in-

cluding Radcliffe, seemed witty in the bits and pieces previewed for audiences. It is the between stuff that was bothersome.

First, I never really cared if the two leads ended up together. In fact, it might have been a better film if it concluded differently. There was also very little witty dialogue that we have come to expect in romantic comedies. Where were the one-liners for the audience to quote to their other half?

Third, the two leads really did not gel. I have tried to imagine this film with two leads other than Radcliffe and Zoe Kazan. She had

more good moments than Radcliffe did, but neither truly set the screen on fire. I never believed that either was truly in love.

And then back to the between stuff. Several of the characters have interesting jobs, yet in the moments when they are working, it seems to bring the film to a sudden halt. There is an old criticism of films that they often do not depict characters as having real jobs. There will be a quick reference to one’s employment but the audience never actually sees them participating in their career.

In “What If,” the characters have jobs, and yet when they were working, I found myself wishing the film was about that occupation instead of it being yet another romantic comedy with very little passion.

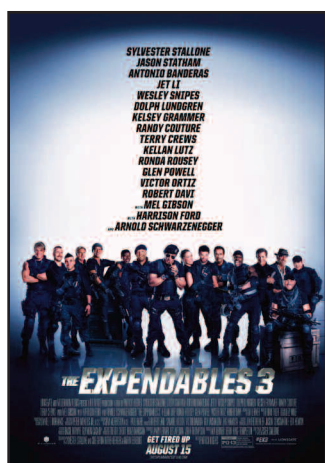
I have written this before, the best romantic comedy of the 21st century thus far is “500 Days of Summer.” No film comes close to that masterpiece. Every time I enter a theater to see a rom-com, I hope to make a discovery as brilliant and perfect as “500 Days.” Every line in that film was sharper and truer than anything in “What If.”

DVD RENTAL TOP 10

- 22 Jump Street
- The Purge: Anarchy
- Maleficent
- X-Men: Days of Future Past
- Earth to Echo
- Mr. Peabody & Sherman
- Hercules
- Sex Tape
- Neighbors
- Sin City: Dame to Kill

Source: IMDB.com

NOW OUT ON DVD AND BLU-RAY



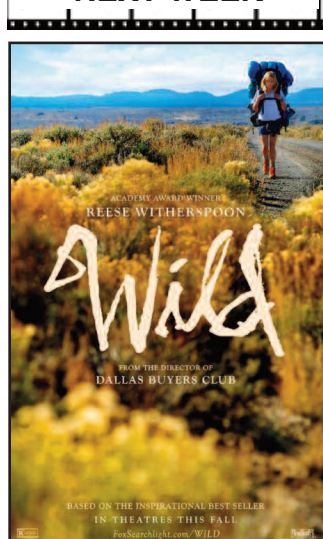
Also coming to DVD ...

- The Giver
- What If

Coming to Blu-Ray ...

- The Professional
- The Fifth Element
- Next week**
- Dawn of the Planet of the Apes
- The Hundred-Foot Journey
- As Above, So Below
- The Congress
- Jingle of All Way 2

NEXT WEEK



- Wild
- The Pyramid
- Comet
- Pioneer
- Life Partners

BOX OFFICE

Top 10 box office numbers with title, money made last weekend and total money made.

1. The Hunger Games: Mockingjay, \$122 million (\$122 million total)
2. Big Hero 6, \$20.1 million (\$136 million)
3. Interstellar, \$15.3 million (\$121 million)
4. Dumb and Dumber To, \$14.1 million (\$57.7 million)
5. Gone Girl, \$2.8 million (\$157 million)
6. Beyond the Lights, \$2.6 million (\$10.1 million)
7. St. Vincent, \$2.3 million (\$36.5 million)
8. Fury, \$1.9 million (\$75.9 million)
9. Birdman, \$1.9 million (\$14.4 million)
10. The Theory of Everything, \$1.5 million (2.8 million total)

Source: IMDB.com