



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on November 25, 2013

“Catching Fire”: Best Action Movie So Far This Year

Catching Fire is a high-quality science fiction/action film that burned up the box office in its opening weekend, and — unusually for a sci-fi film — drew a majority female audience. The film grossed an estimated [\\$161.1 million in North America](#) and [\\$307.7 million globally](#) in its first weekend.

Led by the breakout star Jennifer Lawrence in a return role as Katniss Everdeen, this second film based on the award-winning *Hunger Games* book trilogy by author Suzanne Collins is already guaranteed to exceed the first film’s gross. It is well-acted, and features dazzling special effects that bring the book to life on film. It’s a triumph for Director Francis Lawrence (*Water for Elephants*).



The dystopian plot revolves around Katniss, who begins the film having just survived the “Hunger Games.” What are these games? They’re a sadistic ritual of the tyrannical future North American government that pits one girl and one boy from each of the 12 “districts” in a death match from which only one of the 24 teens is supposed to emerge alive. The death match is put on annually as a show of force by the government, called “Panem,” from the Capitol district to keep the other districts subservient.

But Katniss Everdeen had threatened the unquestioned rule of the Capitol with her performance in the 74th “Hunger Games” (explained in the first book/movie) by plotting to kill herself by eating poisonous berries with fellow District 12 “tribute” Peeta Mellark (Josh Hutcherson). Capitol game-organizers — faced with the embarrassing prospect of not having their one “champion” of the year, as the nationally-televised games are supposed to have — allow Katniss and Peeta to live as co-champions.

Katniss’ nationally-televised challenge to Capitol domination has drawn the wrath of the creepy President Snow (Donald Sutherland), who stops by her home after the games to tell her: “Katniss Everdeen, the girl who was on fire, you have provided a spark, that left unattended, may grow into an inferno that destroys Panem.” Snow, like all tyrants, possesses great power but nevertheless stands in a precarious position. “[Panem] must be very fragile,” Katniss observes, “if a handful of berries can bring it down.”



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President Snow presides over a government that obliterated a district with nuclear weapons 75 years earlier, and the government rules only by stoking fear of war in any act of rebellion. “You fought very hard in the Games, Miss Everdeen,” he warns. “But they were games. Would you like to be in a real war? Thousands of your people dead. Your loved ones — gone?”

Snow lives in fear of hope. He explains in the original *Hunger Games* book and movie: “Hope. It is the only thing stronger than fear. A little hope is effective. A lot of hope is dangerous.”

The president is afraid to kill Katniss outright, since the *Hunger Games* television show broadcast to the nation made her (though recalcitrant) a national celebrity. So he devises a plan to eliminate her by reinaugurating the “Quarter-Quell” — a twist in the *Hunger Games* every 25 years — in which he will pit all the past “champions” from each district against each other and orders his game-maker to ensure Katniss doesn’t survive the games. Snow announces to the nation that “On the 75th anniversary, as a reminder to the rebels that even the strongest among them cannot overcome the power of the Capitol, the male and female tributes will be reaped from their existing pool of victors.”

Katniss reasons in the book that “They, or I should say we, are the very embodiment of hope where there is no hope. And now twenty-three of us will be killed to show how even that hope was an illusion.”

Katniss Everdeen has many qualities Americans love: independence, the ability to provide for her family through hunting, and a family-oriented point of view. And she is a natural rebel against insane government regulations when she trades her poached game on the black market. The film also features a love triangle between Katniss and Peeta Mellark and her childhood friend Gale Hawthorne (Liam Hemsworth). And that’s one area where *Catching Fire* refreshingly diverges from standard Hollywood fare: It is a tastefully-made movie that has some gruesome violence for its PG-13 rating, but no sex or nudity (though nudity is implied in one scene). The film — while devoid of any religious content — does feature some important moral issues, and generally portrays them properly.

The people in Panem tolerate the loss of freedom out of fear, but eventually find their courage — a positive message for post-9/11 America. “Remember who the real enemy is” is a mantra throughout the movie. And the real enemy is the government.

The people of Panem are inspired by Katniss, who — though just a small person on her own — by her example of resistance to tyranny creates a force that leads to revolution. The film reminds people that even an outwardly powerless person can change the world by courage and example.

Catching Fire is worth seeing in the theaters, and is arguably the best action movie so far this year.



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