

'Mockingjay' closes trilogy with a flourish

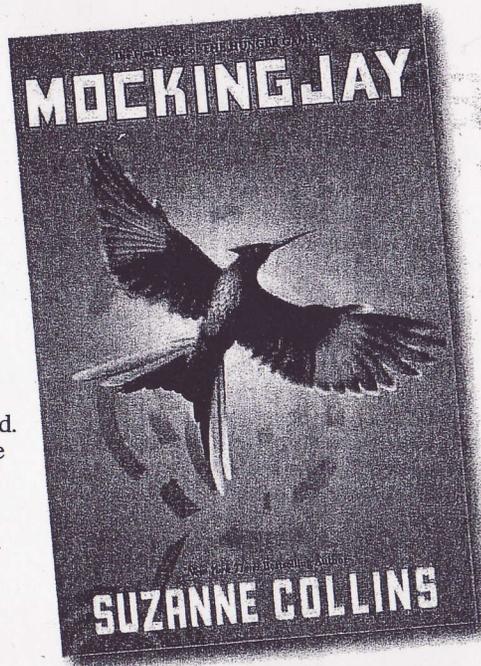
"MOCKINGJAY." By Suzanne Collins. Scholastic. \$17.99.

Almost two years after Suzanne Collins first burst onto bestseller lists with her dystopian young-adult thriller in which 24 children are dressed up in costumes and forced to compete to the death before a television audience, "Mockingjay," the final act of the "Hunger Games" trilogy, has arrived, bringing a wrenching conclusion to the tale of a country in chaos and the 17-year-old protagonist who caused it.

Fans aren't likely to be disappointed.

Difficult as it would seem to top the ingenuity and action-packed, edge-of-your-seat storyline of "The Hunger Games," or the continued, in-the-ring thrill ride of its follow-up, "Catching Fire," "Mockingjay" leaves the government's kid-on-kid hunting grounds and heads into the destitute reality of the districts, which have come under heavy fire from the Capitol for rising up against its superficial and oppressive leadership.

Opening with the dreary aftermath of "Catching Fire's" concluding line, "Mockingjay" begins with Katniss Everdeen wandering through the wreckage of her district 12 hometown, tripping over skulls and breathing in the ashes of the incinerated bodies that used to be her neighbors. More than 90 percent of those neighbors are dead; the rest have been relocated to district 13, an area that was thought to be



abandoned but is very much alive. Forced underground 75 years earlier in an era known as the Dark Days — an era that led to the annual children's bloodletting known as the Hunger Games



Collins

— district 13's residents have spurred the present uprising, and they're looking to Katniss to rile up the rest of the districts and overthrow the pale-skinned President Snow, who's made no secret of his dislike for Katniss and her rebellious unpredictability.

Snow has captured Peeta — the boy Katniss didn't kill in the first Hunger Games, and with whom Katniss is in love. Or is she? Like the first two books in the series, "Mockingjay" continues the love triangle between Katniss, a headstrong nihilist forced to save her country from self-inflicted annihilation; Peeta, the fresh-faced and sweet-hearted boy whom she kissed in front of the omnipresent cameras; and Gale, the hunting partner with whom she grew up who could easily become something more. It takes a while, but "Mockingjay" finally settles the question of Katniss' true affections.

And it takes some truly surprising twists and turns to get there. Unfolding in Collins' engaging, intelligent prose and assembled into chapters that end with didn't-see-that-coming cliffhangers, this finale is every bit the pressure cooker of its forebears. Where "The Hunger Games" set the stage for the unusual post-apocalyptic world in which Katniss first rose up from her inconsequential and impoverished life as an ace archer to win fame as a killer with a heart (and to become an unpredictable antihero for the masses), and "Catching Fire" uses that same stage to prime the pump for a brewing

rebellion, "Mockingjay" takes readers into new territories and an even more brutal and confusing world: one where it's unclear what sides the characters are on, where presumed loyalties are repeatedly stood on their head.

While there's no doubt "Mockingjay" is fictional, with its surgically altered cast of characters and a host of Armageddon-esque settings and clever gadgets that would be equally appropriate in a James Bond film, the series' conclusion is the clearest interpretation of Collins' inspiration for the series, which was born from channel surfing between reality TV and news coverage of the Iraq war, where the lines between young people competing for money and young people fighting in an actual war blurred in the author's mind.

Much of the action takes place on a battlefield akin to Iraq — where innocent civilians are murdered to further a cause and each side resorts to unsavory tactics that could lead to a terrorist label. More maudlin than the first two books in the series, "Mockingjay" is also the most violent and bloody and, based on the actions and statements of its characters, its most overtly antiwar — though not so much that it distracts from a series conclusion that is nearly as shocking, and certainly every bit as original and thought provoking, as "The Hunger Games."

Wow.

— Susan Carpenter
Los Angeles Times

The news page
written by and for
Top of Utah teens

Standard-Examiner



Alexandra
Burton

TX.
Ogden High

Trilogy
ending
haunting,
thrilling

Midnight ... I literally dove for the box of books. People gave me looks — did I really have my own box full of “Mockingjay” books?

Of course! But they weren't all for me. I turned and the friends who had been celebrating with me all evening began grabbing their copies.

When I finally had a quiet moment I ran my hand over the beautiful cover. I cracked it open, smelled the sweet aroma of a new book, and carefully read the words on the front flap. Page by page, I slowly crept toward the first chapter, soaking in the copyright date and the dedication page along the way.

Then came the first line, those first coveted words: “I stare down at my shoes, watching as a fine layer of ash settles on the worn leather.” How long had Suzanne Collins spent agonizing over those opening words, I wondered?

“Mockingjay” is the third and final installment of “The Hunger Games” trilogy.

I began this book with high expectations. “The Hunger Games” left me thinking into the wee hours of the night. “Catching Fire” thrilled me with its clever plot twists and its cliffhanger ending. But I tried to enter this new reading adventure with an open mind, as any good ending must come with some sacrifices. I knew that in order for some of my favorite characters to win out in the end, other favorite characters would take some heavy blows.

Collins did an excellent job of propelling the suspense of this story. Almost every chapter ended with a stunning final sentence that forced me to turn the page and begin the next chapter. It was very difficult to put the book down for dinner, or my English assignment, or sleep. There were breathtaking twists, such as what the Capitol does to torture Peeta. (I'm trying

sion/Theaters

Monday, October 4, 2010 7A

Games

From 6A

hard not to give away spoilers here.) I enjoyed every word with rapture. I cheered Collins for creating a conclusion that equaled her previous works. BUT...

Ah, that ugly little word “but.” There was something about this book that made me hesitate in my reply when I was asked if I liked it. I've pinned it down to two main grievances.

First, the main characters are bitter and hateful. Katniss is quite depressing in some parts. Throughout most of the novel she is “mentally disoriented.” Her thoughts consist of killing others or killing herself or blaming herself for every death she comes upon. I understand that this is a book about a war, but I feel like Katniss changed from the last time we met her. Before she was a determined young girl thrown into cruel circumstances beyond her control. Now she is hateful and often cruel herself. And Gale is even worse. Maybe that's the point ... to show how this world has twisted the perspectives and personalities of its people.

My second and sharpest disappointment

with “Mockingjay” was the ending. Now don't get me wrong, I liked the ending. It just happened too suddenly to be believable. I felt like the author got tired of writing and jotted down a summary of the end in a few quick, snappy sentences. The ending pulls such a swift U-turn from the direction the

rest of novel was headed that it left me kind of dizzy and not quite convinced. It also left too many loose threads. What happens to ___ and ___? It's left to my own imagination I guess!

My English teacher said the other day in class that good literature should make you mad, should make you look at the world in a different way. And though “Mockingjay” would be classified as “escape literature” instead of “interpretive literature,” I believe it could be stamped into this category.

There were certainly times when I wanted to punch the book or hurl it across the room. No doubt I will reread it and be haunted and thrilled by it once again. It has forced me to consider the world, humankind, death and love.

So ... did I like it? Immensely.

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