

The Hunger Games by Suzanne Collins. Katniss lives in Panem, a dystopian world where she must fight for her survival in The Hunger Games. In this extract she is fighting for her survival with her friend Rue.

1 My eyes follow the line of her finger up into the foliage above me. At first, I have no idea what she's pointing to,
2 but then, about five metres up, I make out the vague shape in the dimming light. But of... of what? Some sort of animal? It
3 looks about the size of a raccoon, but it hangs from the bottom of a branch, swaying ever so slightly. There's something
4 else. Among the familiar evening sounds of the woods, my ears register a low hum. Then I know. It's a wasp's nest.

5 Fear shoots through me, but I have enough sense to keep still. After all, I don't know what kind of wasp lives
6 there. It could be your ordinary leave-us-alone-and-and-we'll-leave-you-alone type. But these are the Hunger Games, and
7 ordinary isn't the norm. More likely they will be one of the Capitol's mutations, tracker jackers. Like the jabberjays, these
8 killer wasps were spawned in a lab and strategicallyⁱ placed, like landmines, around the districts during the war. Larger
9 than regular wasps, they have a distinctiveⁱⁱ solid gold body and a sting that raises a lump the size of a plum on contact.
10 Most people can't tolerate more than a few stings. Some die at once. If you live, the hallucinationsⁱⁱⁱ brought on by the
11 venom have actually drive people to madness. And there's another thing: these wasps will hunt down anyone that
12 disturbs their nest and attempt to kill him or her. That's where the tracker part of the name comes from.

13 After the war, the Capitol destroyed all the nests surrounding their city, but the ones near the districts were left
14 untouched. Another reminder of our weakness, I suppose, just like the Hunger Games. Another reason to keep inside the
15 fence of District 12. When Gale and I come across a tracker-jacker nest, we immediately head in the opposite direction.

16 So is that what hangs above me? I look back at Rue for help, but she's melted into her tree.

17 Given my circumstances, I guess it doesn't matter what kind of wasps nest it is. I'm wounded and trapped.
18 Darkness has given me a brief reprieve, but by the time the sun rises, the Careers will have formulated a plan to kill me.
19 There's no way they could do otherwise after I've made them look so stupid. That nest may be the sole option I have left.
20 If I can drop it down on them, I may be able to escape. But I'll risk my life in the process.

21 Of course, I'll never be able to get in close enough to the actual nest to cut it free. I'll have to saw off the branch
22 at the trunk and send the whole thing down. The serrated portion of my knife should be able to manage that. But can my
23 hands? And will the vibration from the sawing raise the swarm? And what if the Careers figure out what I'm doing and
24 move their camp? That would defeat the whole purpose.

25 I realize that the best chance I'll have to do the sawing without drawing notice will be during the anthem. That
26 could begin any time. I drag myself out of my bag, make sure my 186 knife is secured in my belt, and begin to make my
27 way up the tree. This in itself is dangerous since the branches are becoming precariously thin even for me, but I persevere.
28 When I reach the limb that supports the nest, the humming becomes more distinctive. But it's still oddly subdued if these
29 are tracker jackers. It's the smoke, I think. It's sedated them. This was the one defense the rebels found to battle the
30 wasps. The seal of the Capitol shines above me and the anthem blares out. It's now or never, I think, and begin to saw.
31 Blisters burst on my right hand as I awkwardly drag the knife back and forth. Once I've got a groove, the work requires less
32 effort but is almost more than I can handle. I grit my teeth and saw away occasionally glancing at the sky to register that
33 there were no deaths today. That's all right. The audience will be sated seeing me injured and treed and the pack below
34 me. But the anthem's running out and I'm only three quarters of the way through the wood when the music ends, the sky
35 goes dark, and I'm forced to stop.

36 Now what? I could probably finish off the job by sense of feel but that may not be the smartest plan. If the wasps
37 are too groggy, if the nest catches on its way down, if I try to escape, this could all be a deadly waste of time. Better, I
38 think, to sneak up here at dawn and send the nest into my enemies.

ⁱ Strategically – purposefully, thoughtfully

ⁱⁱ Distinctive – a stand out feature

ⁱⁱⁱ Hallucinations – something imagined that seems real