

Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes book review by Kaira

The Hunger Games needs as much of an introduction as *Percy Jackson* or *The Maze Runner* does. The best-selling trilogy has not only paved the path for the many dystopias published after it, but for numerous young-adult books of various genres. The series has been a staple in any young-adult's library since the first book was published in 2008. Since then award-winning films have been released, and the author, Suzanne Collins, even published a prequel to the series in 2020, which was adapted into a film in 2023. To me this novel titled, *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*, was quite a let down in comparison to her previous books.

The prequel takes place sixty-four years before the original series, and is written from the perspective of charismatic eighteen year old Coriolanus Snow, whose once powerful family is now struggling to even afford meals after the thirteen districts' revolution against the Capitol which left him orphaned. As an assignment at his school, a student is assigned to mentor each of the twenty-four tributes who are to compete to the death in the tenth annual Hunger Games. The mentor with the winning tribute earns a scholarship to the Capitol's university; this is Coriolanus's goal, but when he is assigned the girl, Lucy Gray Baird, from the poorest

district, 12, he realizes he will have to work harder than he thought to win.

I actually picked up *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* twice, the first time after just finishing The Hunger Games series, and the second after watching the film adaptation of the prequel. Although I only read the novel fully once. Finishing it made me come to the conclusion that the book is a solid 3.5 out of 5 stars.

I completed the prequel on my second attempt, because after reading the original trilogy I was expecting it to be packed with the same amount of action, which it was not. Also unlike the earlier series, the pacing of the story is very slow until around the final quarter. Watching the movie, which was phenomenal, made me want to reenter the bleak world of *The Hunger Games* through the prequel since I can only rewatch its film adaptation so many times without getting tired of it, and despite my struggles to read it there were some parts of the book that I actually really enjoyed.

Even though it took me longer than I want to admit I did eventually figure out Coriolanus is an unreliable narrator. Just like in the novel where he is described as charismatic and portrayed as a very good liar, he is even good at persuading readers to his side. The reason why I really liked this aspect of the book is because when I finally did figure this out I got to pick apart what bits of the story were true and what pieces were biased.

Unlike other fans, I actually loved the open ending. Normally I despise conclusions that do not have a clear outcome for the characters, but, surprisingly, I really like that I never will figure out what truly happens.

There are also two characters I absolutely love. Sejanus Plinth, Coriolanus's schoolmate who moved to the Capitol from District 2 was such a loyal friend to Snow, and I admire how much sympathy he had for the civilians living in the Districts; even though so many people were attempting to convince him to stop caring for them. I wonder what effect he would have had upon the world if he were born closer to the original series. The second character I admire is Lucy Gray Baird, Coriolanus's tribute from District 12. She is my favorite character from the entire Hunger games series. In the books there is not another character who acts like a teenage girl, but Lucy Gray does in the way that she loves to sing, dress nice, do makeup, and her hair. Overall, I recommend *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* to any teen who really enjoyed The Hunger Games, as long as they keep in mind that the prequel is not as thrilling. Otherwise I would say to read another one of the many young adult dystopian novels available.