



## Double Discourse: Two 'Hunger Games' fans versus 'The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes'

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Reviews are so one-sided. Reading one person's opinion on art can sway a viewer's first impression before they've had a chance to experience it themselves. A critic presents themselves as the expert on the piece of media that they review, but what if there were two?

We both read "The Hunger Games" more than a decade ago and saw all four films debut in theaters. More recently, Ella read "The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes," while Olivia did not. Presenting our thoughts as long-time fans, we are best equipped to give a well-rounded review that highlights our own individual perspectives.

"The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes" takes place 64 years before Katniss and Peeta's reaping into the hunger games. The story follows young President Snow's (Tom Blyth) rise to power as a mentor to District 12 tribute, Lucy Gray Baird (Rachel Zegler), the winner of the tenth annual hunger games.

Fans of "The Hunger Games" know Snow as the villain to Katniss's story, but this film shows his soft side for Lucy Gray, as he is left to grapple with his conflicting desires for love and power.

### Olivia's Review

5 out of 5 stars

"The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes" needs to live up to the hype of its predecessors, and all signs point to another resurgence of Hunger Games fandoms.

One of the most stunning parts of the film franchise is how creative and visually rich the costuming is, and the prequel doesn't disappoint.

Tigris Snow's (Hunter Schafer) snow-white eyebrows and Lucy Gray's rainbow skirt are among some of my favorite featured stylings, really demonstrating how a strong artistic team can lend to the dystopian feel.

The books and films tie together with their inclusion of music, speaking to the importance of folk songs to oppressed populations. "The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes" uses Lucy Gray's sweet melodies to illustrate the history of hurt in the districts and how important art is as a form of coping.

Devotees of the original movies will recognize references to Katniss's story; some a subtle wink and others slightly on-the-nose, but gracefully, not corny.

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The story's quick pace elegantly allows for many events to unfold while still making time to create background for characters such as Tigris Snow and Lucretius "Lucky" Flickerman (Jason Schwartzman). Symbols present in the original plot such as the arena's cornucopia, Katniss's sassy curtsy and the meadow in District 12 are "created" throughout the film, paying homage to their final forms in Katniss's world.

"The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes" is a triumph for fans who need another taste of their favorite dystopian series. This villain's origin story is so well-rounded that audiences will find themselves rooting for Snow at some points, despite knowing how he turns out.

### **Ella's Review**

3.5 out of 5 stars

If there's anything "The Hunger Games" series does well, it highlights the dangers of capitalism and criticizes fascism. If the original "Hunger Games" acted as a call to action for the criticism of government, the prequel acts as a warning.

The original books and films focus on the repercussions of a dystopian society and how a rebellion is formed against it. "The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes" makes the same point but shows the ways in which a dystopian society and power-hungry individuals like Snow rise to power.

This message is not lost between the book and the film, but it seems the filmmakers chose to swap gore for glamour.

I'm not typically an advocate for gore in film, but I think that it has a place when it's done tastefully and for good reason. "The Hunger Games" is a story of children being forced to kill each other. The games are meant to be gory and sicken the audience.

To eliminate the gore is to eliminate the message: war and fascism is ugly and uncomfortable. No capitol glamour can change this reality.

In the book, the games don't begin until the tributes have already been in the capitol for weeks, living behind bars in what once was an animal enclosure at a zoo and being starved. It's brutal, it's dehumanizing and it's a powerful statement.

In the film, the tributes arrive in the capitol and the games begin just a few days later. Things move fast and neither the viewers in the districts nor the audience see what's really happening to the tributes.

In terms of entertainment, the film shines. The plot moves quickly, and I was engaged throughout, but the message didn't leave me with that same urgent sense of purpose I felt after watching the original films.

"The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes" is great, but like so many other film adaptations, it will never be as good as the books.

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