

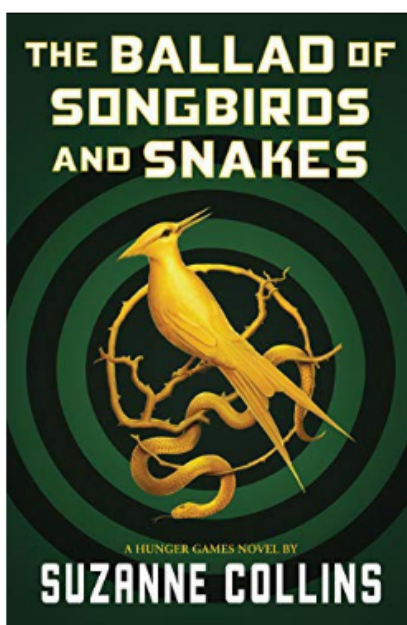


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Book Review: The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes by Suzanne Collins

Posted on August 29, 2020 by Casey Lewis

Suzanne Collins' prequel to her critically acclaimed trilogy, "The Hunger Games," is first and foremost the backstory of the trilogy's antagonist, President Coriolanus (Coryo) Snow. Collins does a wonderful job of weaving the influences of family, upbringing, and the state of Panem into Snow's character development from start to finish. We learn how these influences affect the personality, character traits and ideologies of both young Coryo and the older President Snow, and experience the gradual degradation and eventual breakdown of the moral inclinations of a young man stuck on the edge of humanity and sociopathy. Additionally, Collins transforms The Games into a character itself as opposed to a setting in which characters interact. She utilizes literary tools and minor character arcs to breathe a real life into The Games that is so much more raw and vulnerable than it was in the trilogy. It's quite beautiful.



I do have a few struggles with this story. First, Collins includes a female lead that is too similar to Katniss Everdeen without drawing any tangible connections to Katniss herself. At a certain point into the story I began to audibly groan whenever Collins would introduce a new similarity, because it felt like she was forcing some sort of psychological explanation for Snow's irregular fixation on Katniss later on in the trilogy.

Second, Collins leaves too many minor doors open and too many questions unanswered. She leaves a couple of significant plot points unresolved, and has a habit of introducing intriguing little tidbits about minor characters without ever flushing them out or providing more context. Finally, Collins provides a very narrow history of the Panem struggle and how it birthed The Games themselves, delivered through Snow's perspective instead of the third person omniscient narrator's. I'd hoped she would use this opportunity to take us on a deeper dive into the history of how North America devolved into Panem in the first place, but alas, I was left disappointed.

The last I'll say is this: given the state of current affairs in North America, this particular dystopia, and the potential for something similar to become a reality, is not so far-fetched. I'd say this is a must-read for anyone who lives in the good 'ole U.S. of A in 2020.

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