

The Hunger Games Prequels: Were They Both Necessary?

When I was in high school, I was introduced to the original Hunger Games trilogy by Susanne Collins. At the end of the final book, I thought the story was over, there was nothing left to tell. However, several years later there came a new addition to the series: the first prequel, *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*.

I thoroughly enjoyed *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*. Even though I thought it was overly long, it gave me and the rest of the fandom important background information and insights on the world of these novels. Then, just when The Hunger Games had begun to fade from my mind once again, there came another prequel: *Sunrise on the Reaping*. Again, I thoroughly enjoyed it. It didn't feel as long to me as *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* did.

In the aftermath of the release of *Sunrise on the Reaping*, presumably because it told a story more people were interested in, some in The Hunger Games fandom wondered if The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes was simply a “cash grab”. Couldn't we have had *Sunrise on the Reaping* without *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*? Does this prequel contain essential elements necessary to understand the series?

[*The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*](#) takes place 64 years before Katniss Everdeen's era and follows a young Coriolanus Snow as a mentor in the 10th Hunger Games. Its main purposes, as far as I can tell, were to lay out the origin of the games and of Snow's regime. It also tells the story of the first District 12 victor. I must admit, in all the excitement of the trilogy, I had forgotten there was another District 12 victor besides Haymitch.

We are also given what some might see in hindsight as valuable information on the workings of [President Snow's mind](#) and the possible reasons behind some of the acts he would later commit. (Chapters 11 to 13, 21 to 23 and 28 to 30.) We see his sense of [entitlement to power](#), his [disillusionment with life in the districts](#), his [growing paranoia about rebel activities](#), and his growing resentment of anything he cannot control. These are traits we see in him in the original trilogy, and in this prequel, we see the events which

planted them. We see the reasons they stay with him for the rest of his life. How could we have gotten these incredibly valuable insights without this prequel.

Now we come to my favorite part of *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*: the [origin story](#) of the *Hanging Tree* song. This song is arguably the biggest and most important song in the entire series, and its story is most effectively told in *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*. In the original trilogy, we receive Katniss's history with the song and her perspective of it. However, in *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* (chapters 22 and 23,) we are given its actual origin, that is, the story of how it came to be and an alternate perspective (that of President Snow) on the meaning of the lyrics. These new elements gave the song a deeper meaning and allow the reader to understand it better.

Sunrise on the Reaping tells the story of young Haymitch Abernathy during the 50th Hunger Games. Perhaps because this book told a story more fans were interested in or because it had a protagonist for whom it was easier to feel empathy, or because it related more directly to characters in the original trilogy, its debut week sales [broke franchise records](#). It seemed people were falling over themselves to find out more about this intriguing character and the deeper reasons behind his decisions.

Despite the enthralling and critically important aspects of *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*, following the release of *Sunrise on the Reaping*, some readers wondered if *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* was necessary to the overall narrative or if it was just a “cash grab.”

When reading fan reactions to both prequels, there is a clear division between those who enjoyed *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* and those who simply saw it as a “cash grab.” For example, in an [article](#) on gamesreader.com, one fan said the story “delivered” for them. On the other hand, some are disappointed with this prequel and feel it is “cheap compared to the emotional turmoil the Hunger Games trilogy provided.”

Understandably, there are people who say a person's preferred prequel depends on the experience they want from their reading. One [Reddit](#) user posted, “Ballad changed up the

formula ... Sunrise sticks closer to the originals ... I liked them both, *Ballad* more for its world-building and Sunrise more for its first-person narration.”

In short, it appears most in the fandom preferred Sunrise on the Reaping over *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* or at least regard it as more accessible and aligned with the original trilogy’s tone. This preference can clearly be seen in that *Sunrise on the Reaping* sold [1.5 million copies](#) in its first week on store shelves. However, some (including me) believe *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* was a pleasant surprise in that it diverged from expectations and enriched the lore of the original trilogy.

For my part, I'm not sure which of the prequels I prefer. I think I would be more likely to go back to the *Sunrise on the Reaping* when choosing one to re-read. Some might interpret this as an assertion that I prefer *Sunrise on the Reaping* over *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*. In fact, I don't believe I prefer one over the other. The way I see it is, while I stand by my belief that *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* adds essential lore to the series and *Sunrise on the Reaping* wouldn't be possible without it, I prefer to return to the story of a character I can understand and relate to rather than to an irredeemable villain.

While there's no exact number available to the public which shows the percentage of fans who believe *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* was a cash grab, evidence from fan discussion boards shows roughly one third to one half of fans who participate in this discussion hold this view. Some factors contributing to this perception might be the long gap between this prequel and the original trilogy, the heavy use of legacy or nostalgia and dissatisfaction with the character focus. Now that I'm seeing these reasons presented in discussions among fans, I can appreciate the perception that *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* was simply a cash grab even though I don't agree with it.

As previously stated, *Sunrise on the Reaping* would not have been possible without *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*. For one thing, *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* lays out foundational context: the evolution of the Hunger Games, the moral descent of Snow, the transformation of Panem's power structures. All this context greatly enriches the story of Haymitch as told in *Sunrise on the Reaping*. The lack of this context would leave *Sunrise on the Reaping* feeling isolated and less consequential in the overall narrative arc of the series.

To conclude, most discussions in the fandom seem to return to the idea that *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* strengthens the narrative arc of the series in a way that enhances *Sunrise on the Reaping*, which means my view that the earlier prequel does in fact contain elements essential to the overall narrative aligns with the view of the majority of the fandom.

While some believe it is possible for *Sunrise on the Reaping* to exist without *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*, others (including me) believe *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* is essential to the lore of the series and that it enhances the depth and the impact of *Sunrise on the Reaping*. It is a critical piece of franchise architecture. The counterclaim of it being a “cash grab” reminds us that even well-crafted prequels balance creative ambition with commercial expectation.

It seems fitting to end our analysis of these prequels with this truth that might be difficult for some to acknowledge: your preference of one prequel over the other does not or at least should not indicate your credibility as a “Hunger Games fan.” It merely indicates personal preference. whether you prefer a story with a protagonist you can relate to or one in which the main character's motives are harder to dissect or empathize with, your opinion is valued and demonstrates your investment in this series.