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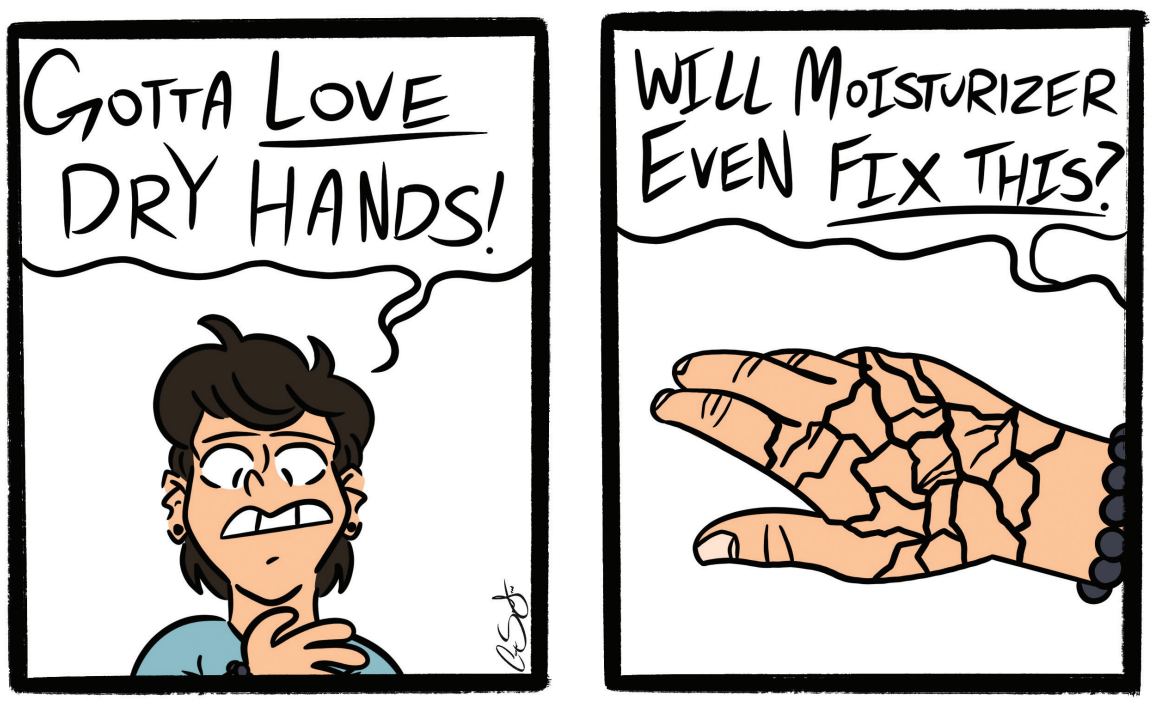
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COMIC BY CONNOR SZREJNA, STAFF ARTIST/THE DAILY CAMPUS

Daily OPINION

HAVE WE LOST THE PLOT?

THE HUNGER GAMES AND THE COMMODIFICATION OF ANTI-CAPITALIST MEDIA

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"Get ready with me for the 'Sunrise on the Reaping' premiere," prattles a lavishly clad influencer on my phone screen. The apartment behind her is luxurious, the dress options magnificent, handpicked (of course) by her stylist, the shoe collection bountiful. And the disconnect? Palpable.

"Sunrise on the Reaping" (SOTR), the highly anticipated fifth installment of the "Hunger Games" franchise, comes out this Friday and you would be hard-pressed to find someone who hasn't heard about it. The marketing rollout has been nothing short of extravagant: a spectacle of press tours, premieres and social media campaigns not a far cry from the splendor of the source material's Capitol. The dystopian world crafted by Suzanne Collins in 2008 doesn't seem so dystopian right now, and it seems that somewhere along the way — amidst the glitz and glamour of the film's publicity — we have lost sight of her book's core messages.

Collins' series has a clear anti-capitalist subtext, commentary on society's descent into consumerism, widening class inequality and extreme mass media. She pictured a world where inane reality TV and the death of children on screen are treated as one and the same; a world where the privileged consume human suffering for their amusement and entertainment.

Ironically, when watching the films, we do just that — enjoying them for the same reason the Capitol does. The thrill and drama of watching children thrown into an arena to fight to the death is not a sentiment isolated to the fictional world of Panem. Parts of the films are shot in the very style of the broadcast described in the books. The viewing experience invites the audience of the film to be the audience of the games themselves, to become citizens of the Capitol and soak in the sensationalism of violence.

Viewing the film this way could inspire viewers to think more critically about their desensitization to horrors around the world, holding a mirror up to society. One could argue that the lavish press tour of SOTR is attempting to do just that. However, when unaccompanied by meaningful discourse about the current real-life political climate, such as the tens of thousands of children killed in Palestine, the peacekeeper-esque violence of ICE agents in America and so much more, the extravagance of the rollout feels tasteless and grossly ironic.

While thousands were injured in protests in Paris earlier this month, the "Elegance Is Authority: The Story, Style and Power of Panem" preview night and dinner was hosted on those very same streets at the very same time. The event celebrated the upcoming release of SOTR and the fashion of the previous films. The dinner featured exquisite food and Panem-inspired cocktails. Among the guests were influencers who filmed and posted the luxurious event, having been pruned and prepped in the same manner as citizens of the Capitol. It's hard not to draw parallels between those in attendance and the people of Capitol, who bathe in luxury while the less fortunate struggle and starve in the districts. The whole affair came across as out of touch, tone-deaf and the antithesis of the books' messages.



Sunrise on The Reaping actress Mckenna Grace wears a Monique Lhuillier gown inspired by Katniss Everdeen's wedding dress at the Musée Rodin in Paris on Oct. 6. Grace later wore a Mockingjay dress, reminiscent of what the wedding dress transforms into: a symbol of rebellion and hope in the film.

PHOTO COURTESY OF @MCKENNAGRACEFUL ON INSTAGRAM

Actress Mckenna Grace, who stars in the film, wore Katniss's wedding dress to the dinner, a look praised by fans. But it seems that the meaning of the dress— used as a powerplay to make Katniss appear docile and complaint to the capitol amongst growing rebellion — flew over everyone's heads, seen only as a fun homage and fashion moment by most. Later, Grace wore a Mockingjay dress reminiscent of what the wedding dress transforms into, a symbol of rebellion and hope in the film. However, without the implications the dress carries when worn by Katniss, and used simply as a spectacle of glamor, the fashion choices fall flat.

SOTR isn't the first instance of ironic marketing in the franchise. "Capitol Couture," an in-world fashion magazine, was a fictional fashion publication set in Panem, used for the promotion of all four original "Hunger Games" films. It featured propaganda-style coverage of the Games as a marketing tool. The commercialization of the films seems to have grown as they went along. As part of "Mockingjay's" release in 2014, "The Hanging Tree," a dark song about oppression and rebellion, was released as a pop remix. The song was a massive hit, played in clubs, on the radio and in stores. Ironic, considering its message.

As the franchise has grown, so has the spectacle of the rollout and the disconnect between the books' messages and the films' promotion. The press tour could have been an opportunity to raise awareness and confront the pressing issues facing today's society, but the mark has been missed entirely.



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