BY PIERCE BROWN

Red Rising

Golden Son

Morning Star

Iron Gold

GOLDEN SON

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Pierce Brown



Del Rey
New York

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Published in the United States by Del Rey, an imprint of Random House, a division of Random House LLC, a Penguin Random House Company, New York.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Brown, Pierce
Golden son / Pierce Brown.
p. cm.—(The Red Rising trilogy ; bk. 2)
ISBN 978-0-345-53981-6 (hardback) — ISBN 978-0-345-53982-3 (ebook)
1. Government, Resistance to—Fiction. I. Title.
PS3602.R7226G65 2015
813'.6—dc23 2014031015

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper

www.delreybooks.com

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Book design by Caroline Cunningham

To mother,

who taught me to speak



GOLD
The fiercely intelligent rulers of humanity.



SILVER
Innovators, financiers, and businessmen.



WHITE
Priests and priestesses who oversee the ritual functions of Society.



COPPER
Administrators, lawyers, and bureaucrats.



BLUE
Pilots and astronavigators bred to crew starships.



YELLOW
Experts in human and natural sciences. Doctors, psychologists, and scientists.



GREEN
The programmers and developers of technology.



VIOLET
The creative class of artists, musicians, and performers.



ORANGE
Provide systems support upon star ships and all manner of mechanical enterprises.



GRAY
Police and military personnel.



BROWN
Servants in homes, businesses, and social institutions.



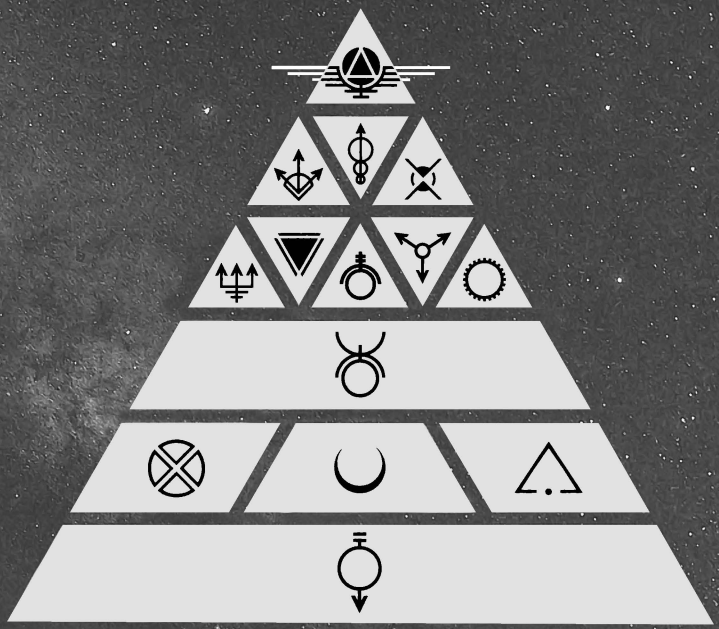
OBSIDIAN
A monstrous race bred only for war.



PINK
Unparalleled in beauty, they are bred and trained for the physical arts of pleasure.



RED
Unskilled manual laborers conditioned to brutal environs.



ON THE FOUNDATION OF THE COLORS

When the first colonists ventured forth from Earth to make their home on the moon, they created a hierarchy for labor. In time, they improved this hierarchy through genetic and surgical manipulation of their fellow man. The result was a color-coded Society of perfect efficiency, one dominated by a superior breed of humanity, the Golds.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

House Augustus and Allies

NERO AU AUGUSTUS ArchGovernor of Mars, head of House Augustus, father to Virginia and Adrius

VIRGINIA AU AUGUSTUS/MUSTANG daughter of Nero, twin sister to Adrius

ADRIUS AU AUGUSTUS/JACKAL son of ArchGovernor, heir to House Augustus, twin brother to Virginia

PLINY AU VELOCITOR chief Politico of House Augustus

DARROW AU ANDROMEDUS/REAPER ArchPrimus of the Institute of Mars, lancer of House Augustus

TACTUS AU RATH lancer of House Augustus

ROQUE AU FABII lancer of House Augustus

VICTRA AU JULII lancer of House Augustus, half sister to Antonia, daughter of Agrippina

KAVAX AU TELEMANUS head of House Telemanus, ally of House Augustus, father to Daxo and Pax

DAXO AU TELEMANU heir and son of Kavax, brother to Pax

House Bellona

TIBERIUS AU BELLONA head of House Bellona

CASSIUS AU BELLONA heir to House Bellona, son of Tiberius, lancer of House Bellona

KARNUS AU BELLONA son of Tiberius, elder brother of Cassius, lancer of House Bellona

KELLAN AU BELLONA Praetor, cousin of Cassius, nephew of Tiberius

Notable Golds

OCTAVIA AU LUNE reigning Sovereign of the Society

LYSANDER AU LUNE grandson of Octavia, heir to House Lune

AJA AU GRIMMUS the Sovereign's chief bodyguard

MOIRA AU GRIMMUS the Sovereign's chief Politico

LORN AU ARCOS former Rage Knight, head of House Arcos

FITCHNER AU BARCA former Proctor Mars, father of Sevro

SEVRO AU BARCA/GOBLIN lead Howler, son of Fitchner

AGRIPPINA AU JULII head of House Julii, mother to Victra and Antonia

ANTONIA AU SEVERUS-JULII former House Mars, half sister to Victra, daughter of Agrippina

Sons of Ares

ARES Terrorist Leader, color unknown

DANCER Ares' lieutenant, a Red

HARMONY Dancer's lieutenant, a Red

MICKEY Carver, a Violet

EVEY former slave of Mickey, a Pink

Once upon a time, a man came from the sky and killed my wife. Beside him now, I walk on a mountain that floats over our world. Snow falls. Battlements of white stone and shimmering glass yawn out of the rock.

Around us swirls a chaos of greed. All the great Golds of Mars descend upon the Institute to lay claim to the best and brightest of our year. Their ships swarm the morning sky, cutting over a world of snow and smoking castles for Olympus, which I stormed only hours before.

"Take a last look," he tells me as we near his shuttle. "All that came before was but a whisper of our world. When you leave this mountain, all bonds are broken, all oaths dust. You are not prepared. No one ever is."

Across the crowd, I see Cassius with his father and siblings as they make their way to their shuttle. Their eyes burn at us over the white, and I remember the sound of his brother's heart as it beat its last. A rough hand with bony fingers lays claim to my shoulder, clutching possessively.

Augustus stares at his enemies.

"Bellonas do not forgive or forget. They are many. But they cannot harm you." His cold eyes peer down at me, his fresh prize. "For you belong to me, Darrow, and I protect what is mine."

As do I.

For seven hundred years, my people have been enslaved without voice, without hope. Now I am their sword. And I do not forgive. I do not forget. So let him lead me onto his shuttle. Let him think he owns me. Let him welcome me into his house, so I might burn it down.

But then his daughter takes my hand, and I feel all the lies fall heavy on my shoulders. They say a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand. They made no mention of the heart.

PART I

BOW

Hic sunt leones. *"Here be lions."*

—*Nero au Augustus*

1

WARLORDS

My silence thunders. I stand on the bridge of my starship, arm broken and held in a gelcast, ion burns still raw on my neck. I'm bloodydamn tired. My razor coils around my good right arm like a cold metal snake. Before me, space opens, vast and terrible. Small fragments of light prick the darkness, and primordial shadows move to block those stars on the fringes of my vision. Asteroids. They float slowly around my man-of-war, *Quietus,* as I search the blackness for my quarry.

"Win," my master told me. "Win as my children cannot, and you will bring honor to the name Augustus. Win at the Academy and you earn yourself a fleet." He likes dramatic repetition. It suits most statesmen.

He'd have me win for him, but I'd win for the Red girl with a dream bigger than she ever could be. I'd win so that he dies, and her message burns across the ages. Small order.

I am twenty. Tall and broad in the shoulders. My uniform, all sable, now wrinkled. Hair long and eyes Golden, bloodshot. Mustang once said I have a sharp face, with cheeks and nose seemingly carved from angry marble. I avoid mirrors myself. Better to forget the mask I wear,

the mask that bears the angled scar of the Golds who rule the worlds from Mercury to Pluto. I am of the Peerless Scarred. Cruelest and brightest of all humankind. But I miss the kindest of them. The one who asked me to stay as I bid her and Mars goodbye on her balcony almost a year ago. Mustang. I gave her a horse-crested gold ring as a parting gift, and she gave me a razor. Fitting.

The taste of her tears grows stale in memory. I have not heard from her since I left Mars. Worse, I have not heard from the Sons of Ares since I won at Mars's Institute more than two years ago. Dancer said he would contact me once I graduated, but I have been cast adrift among a sea of Golden faces.

This is so far from the future I imagined for myself as a boy. So far from the future I wanted to make for my people when I let the Sons carve me. I thought I would change the worlds. What young fool doesn't? Instead, I have been swallowed by the machine of this vast empire as it rumbles inexorably on.

At the Institute, they trained us to survive and conquer. Here at the Academy they taught us war. Now they test our fluency. I lead a fleet of warships against other Golds. We fight with dummy munitions and launch raiding parties from ship to ship in the way of Gold astral combat. No reason to break a ship that costs the gross yearly output of twenty cities when you can send leechCraft packed with Obsidians, Golds, and Grays to seize her vital organs and make her your prize.

Amid lessons of astral combat, our teachers hammered in the maxims of their race. Only the strong survive. Only the brilliant rule. And then they left and let us fend for ourselves, jumping asteroid to asteroid, searching for supplies, bases, hunting our fellow students till only two fleets remain.

I'm still playing games. This is just the deadliest yet.

"It's a trap," Roque says from my elbow. His hair is long, like mine, and his face soft as a woman's and placid as a philosopher's. Killing in space is different from killing on land. Roque is a prodigy at it. There's poetry to it, he says. Poetry to the motion of the spheres and the ships that sail between. His face fits with the Blues who crew these vessels—airy men and women who drift like wayward spirits through the metal halls, all logic and strict order.

"But it's not so elegant a trap as Karnus might think," he continues. "He knows we're eager to end the game, so he will wait on the other side. Force us into a choke point and release his missiles. Tried and true since the dawn of time."

Roque carefully points to the space between two huge asteroids, a narrow corridor we must travel if we wish to continue following Karnus's wounded ship.

"Everything's a damn trap." Tactus au Rath, rangy and careless, yawns. He leans his dangerous frame against the viewport and shoots a stim up his nose from the ring on his finger. He tosses the spent cartridge to the floor. "Karnus knows he's lost. He's just torturing us. Leading us on a little merry chase so we can't sleep. The selfish prick."

"You're such a little Pixie, always yapping and whining," Victra au Julii sneers from her place against the viewport. Her jagged hair hangs just past ears pierced with jade. Impetuous and cruel, but neither to a fault, she disdains makeup in favor of the scars she's earned through her twenty-seven years. There are many.

Her eyes are heavy, deeply set. Her sensual mouth wide, with lips shaped to purr insults. She looks more like her famous mother than her younger half sister, Antonia; but in her capacity for general mayhem she far outstrips both.

"Traps mean nothing," she declares. "His fleet has been dashed. He has but one ship. We've seven. How about we just bust his mouth?"

"*Darrow* has seven," Roque reminds her.

"Your pardon?" she asks, annoyed at the correction.

"Seven of Darrow's ships remain. You called them ours. They are not *ours*. He is Primus."

"Pedantic poet strikes again. The point is the same, my goodman."

"That we should be rash instead of prudent?" Roque asks.

"That it is seven against one. It would be embarrassing to let this drag out any longer. So, let's squish the Bellona thug like a cockroach with our sizable boot, fly back to base, take our just rewards from old Augustus, and go *play*." She twists her heel for emphasis.

"Here, here," Tactus agrees. "My kingdom for a gram of demon-Dust."

"That your fifth stimshot today, Tactus?" Roque asks.

"Yes! Thank you for noticing, Mommy dearest! But I grow weary of this military crank. I believe I desire Pearl clubs and copious amounts of respectable drugs."

"You're going to burn out."

Tactus slaps his thigh. "Live fast. Die young. While you're a boring old raisin, I'll be a glorious memory of finer times and decadent days."

Roque shakes his head. "One day, my wayward friend, you're going to find someone you love who makes you laugh at the silly person you once were. You'll have children. You'll have an estate. And somehow you'll learn there are more important things than drugs and Pinks."

"By Jove." Tactus stares at him in utter horror. "That sounds resolutely miserable."

I peer at the tactical display, ignoring their banter.

The quarry we chase is Karnus au Bellona, the older brother of my former friend, Cassius au Bellona, and the boy I killed in the Passage, Julian au Bellona. Of that curly-haired family, Cassius is the favorite son. Julian was the kindest. And Karnus? My broken arm stands testament—he's the monster they let out of their basement to kill things.

Since the Institute, my celebrity has grown. So when news reached the Violet gossip circuit that the ArchGovernor was finally sending me to further my studies, Karnus au Bellona and a few handpicked cousins were dispatched by Cassius's mother to "study" as well. The family wants my heart on a plate. Quite literally. Only Augustus's badge holds them back. To attack me is to attack him.

In the end, I could give a bloody piss about their vendetta or my master's bloodfeud with their house. I want the fleet so I can use it for the Sons of Ares. What a mess I could cause. I've made a study of supply lines, sensor stations, battlegroups, data hubs—all the pressure points that might cause the Society to stagger.

"Darrow . . ." Roque comes closer. "*Guard your hubris. Remember Pax*. Pride kills."

"I want it to be a trap," I tell Roque. "Let Karnus turn and face us."

He tilts his head. "You've set your own trap for him."

"Now, what makes you say that?"

"You might have told us. I could have—"