



NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

BOOK II OF THE
RED RISING TRILOGY

GOLDEN SON

PIERCE
BROWN

"Gripping. [Grade:] A."
—*Entertainment Weekly*

GOLDEN SON



Pierce Brown



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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.

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 Telemachus, ally of House Augustus, father to Daxo and Pax

DAXO AU TELEMANUS 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. Cruellest 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 demonDust.”

“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—”

“Karnus falls today, brother. That is the simple fact of the matter.”

“Of course. I only want to help. You know that.”

“I know.” I stifle a yawn and let my eyes sweep the bridgepits behind and below me. Blues of many shades toil there, working the systems that run my ship. They speak more slowly than any other Color save Obsidian, favoring digital communication. They are older than I, graduates of the Midnight School, all. Beyond them, near the back of the bridge, Gray marines and several Obsidians stand sentinel. I clap Roque on the shoulder. “It’s time.”

“Sailors,” I call to the Blues in the pit. “Sharpen your wits. This is the final nail in the Bellona coffin. We put this bastard into the ether and I promise the greatest gift in my power to give—a week of solid sleep. Prime?”

A few of the Grays near the back of the bridge laugh. The Blues just rap their knuckles on their instruments. I’d give half my substantial bank

account, compliments of the ArchGovernor, to see one of those pale airbrains crack a smile.

“Enough delay,” I announce. “Gunners to positions. Roque, cluster the destroyers. Victra, attend targeting. Tactus, defense deployment. We’re ending this now.” I look over at my wispy helmBlue. He stands central in the pit beneath my command platform amid fifty others. The snaking digiTats that mark the Blues’ bald heads and spidery hands glow subtle shades of cerulean and silver as they sync with the ship’s computers. Their eyes go distant as optic nerves revert to the digital world. They speak only out of courtesy to us. “Helmsman, engines to sixty percent.”

“Aye, *dominus*.” He glances at the tactical display, a globular holo floating above his head, voice like a machine. “Mind, the concentration of metal in the asteroids presents difficulty in assessing spectro readings. We’re a mite blind. A fleet could hide on the other side of the asteroids.”

“He doesn’t have a fleet. Into the breach,” I say. The ship’s engines rumble. I nod to Roque and say, “*Hic sunt leones*.” The words of our master, Nero au Augustus, ArchGovernor of Mars, thirteenth of his name. My warlords echo the phrase.

Here be lions.

2



THE BREACH

On the tactical readout, the six nimble destroyers move around my remaining man-of-war. Eerie silence from the Blue crew as the functions of war take over. On the plane through which their minds now drift, words are slower than icebergs. My lieutenants monitor my fleet. At any other time, they'd be on their personal destroyers or leading men in leechCraft, but at the moment of victory, I want my fellows near. Yet even when my lieutenants stand here at my side, I feel that separation, that deep gulf between their world and mine.

"Missile signatures," says the comBlue. The bridge does not burst into action. No warning lights panic the crew. No shouts break the stillness. Blues are icy specimens, raised from birth in communal Sects that teach them to embrace logic and enact their function with cold efficiency. It's often said they're more computers than men.

The dark space beyond my viewport blooms fresh with a thick veil of microexplosions. Our flak bursts in a great screen of dull white clouds. Incoming missiles explode as the flak bursts detonate the missiles' payloads prematurely. One gets through and a destroyer on our far wing ripples from the simulated nuclear blast. Men would pour from her. Gases would seep out. Explosions might puncture holes in the metal hull and bring burning