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By Pierce Brown

Red Rising

Golden Son

Morning Star

Iron Gold

About the author

Though Pierce Brown was born in Denver, Colorado, his origins are a little more diverse, having called seven states home. These days he splits his time between Seattle and Los Angeles.

Before becoming a full-time writer, Pierce Brown spent his time working as an executive aide on a U.S. Senate Campaign, a script runner at ABC, a freelance web producer, and eventually an NBC Page. His degree from Pepperdine University is in Economics and Political Science. *Iron Gold* is his fourth novel, and is a brand new tale of revolution and betrayal among the stars of the Red Rising universe.

IRON GOLD

PIERCE BROWN


HODDER

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Alone in his armor, waiting to fall from the sky, he remembers the girl who began it all. He remembers how her Red hair fell over her eyes. How her mouth danced with laughter. How she breathed as she lay atop him, so warm and fragile in a world far too cold. She has been dead longer than she was ever alive. And now that her dream has spread, he wonders if she would recognize it. And he wonders too if he were to die today, would he recognize the echo of his own life? What sort of man would his son become in this world he has made? He thinks of his son's face and how soon he will become a man. And he thinks of his Golden wife. How she stood on the landing pad, looking up at him, wondering if he'd ever return home again.

More than anything, he wants this to end.

Then the machine takes hold.

He feels the tug on his body. The pounding of his heart. The mad cackling of the Goblin and the howls of his friends as they try to forget their children, their loves, and be brave. Nausea in his gut rises as the magnetic rails charge behind him. With a shudder of metal, they fire him forward through the launch tube out into silent space at six times the speed of sound.

Men call him father, liberator, warlord, Slave King, Reaper. But he feels a boy as he falls toward the war-torn planet, his armor red, his army vast, his heart heavy.

It is the tenth year of war and the thirty-third of his life.

PART I

WIND

*There is a poor, blind Samson in this land,
Shorn of his strength and bound in bonds of steel,
Who may, in some grim revel, raise his hand,
And shake the pillars of this Commonweal,
Till the vast Temple of our liberties
A shapeless mass of wreck and rubbish lies.*

—HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

DARROW

Hero of the Republic

WEARY, I WALK UPON FLOWERS at the head of an army. Petals carpet the last of the stone road before me. Thrown by children from windows, they twirl lazily down from the steel towers that grow to either side of the Luna boulevard. In the sky, the sun dies its slow, weeklong death, staining the tattered clouds and gathered crowd in bloody hues. Waves of humanity lap against security barricades, pressing inward on our parade as Hyperion City Watchmen in gray uniforms and cyan berets guard the route, shoving drunken revelers back into the crowd. Behind them, antiterrorism units prowl up and down the pavement, their fly-eyed goggles scanning irises, hands resting on energy weapons.

My own eyes rove the crowd.

After ten years of war, I no longer believe in moments of peace.

It's a sea of Colors that line the twelve-kilometer Via Triumphia. Built by my people, the Red slaves of the Golds, hundreds of years ago, the Triumphia is the avenue by which the Conquerors who tamed Earth held their own processions as they claimed continent after continent. Iron-spined murderers with eyes of gold and haughty

menace once consecrated these same stones. Now, nearly a millennium later, we sully the Triumphia's sacred white marble by honoring Liberators with eyes of jet and ash and rust and soil.

Once, this would have filled me with pride. Jubilant crowds celebrating the Free Legions returned from vanquishing yet another threat to our fledgling Republic. But today I see holosigns of my head with a bloody crown atop it, hear the jeers from the Vox Populi as they wave banners emblazoned with their upside-down pyramid, and feel nothing but the weight of an endless war and a desperate longing to be once again in the embrace of my family. It has been a year since I've seen my wife and son. After the long voyage back from Mercury, all I want is to be with them, to fall into a bed, and to sleep for a dreamless month.

The last of my journey home lies before me. As the Triumphia widens and abuts the stairs that lead up to the New Forum, I face one final summit.

Faces drunk on jubilation and new commercial spirits gape up at me as I reach the stairs. Hands sticky with sweets wave in the air. And tongues, loose from those same commercial spirits and delights, cry out, shouting my name, or cursing it. Not the name my mother gave me, but the name my deeds have built. The name the fallen Peerless Scarred now whisper as a curse.

"Reaper, Reaper, Reaper," they cry, not in unison, but in frenzy. The clamor suffocates, squeezing with a billion-fingered hand: all the hopes, all the dreams, all the pain constricting around me. But so close to the end, I can put one foot after the other. I begin to climb the stairs.

Clunk.

My metal boots grind on stone with the weight of loss: Eo, Ragnar, Fitchner, and all the others who've fought and fallen at my side while somehow I have remained alive.

I am tall and broad. Thicker at my age of thirty-three than I was in my youth. Stronger and more brutal in my build and movement. Born Red, made Gold, I have kept what Mickey the Carver gave me. These Gold eyes and hair feel more my own than those of that boy

who lived in the mines of Lykos. That boy grew, loved, and dug the earth, but he lost so much it often feels like it happened to another soul.

Clunk. Another step.

Sometimes I fear that this war is killing that boy inside. I ache to remember him, his raw, pure heart. To forget this city moon, this Solar War, and return to the bosom of the planet that gave birth to me before the boy inside is dead forever. Before my son loses the chance to ever know him. But the worlds, it seems, have plans of their own.

Clunk.

I feel the weight of the chaos I've unleashed: famines and genocide on Mars, Obsidian piracy in the Belt, terrorism, radiation sickness and disease spreading through the lower reaches of Luna, and the two hundred million lives lost in my war.

I force a smile. Today is our fourth Liberation Day. After two years of siege, Mercury has joined the free worlds of Luna, Earth, and Mars. Bars stand open. War-weary citizens rove the streets, looking for reason to celebrate. Fireworks crackle and blaze across the sky, shot from the roofs of skyscraper and tenement complex alike.

With our victory on the first planet from the sun, the Ash Lord has been pushed back to his last bastion, the fortress planet Venus, where his battered fleet guards precious docks and the remaining loyalists. I have come home to convince the Senate to requisition ships and men of the war-impooverished Republic for one final campaign. One last push on Venus to put this bloodydamn war to rest. So I can set down the sword and go home to my family for good.

Clunk.

I take a moment to glance behind me. Waiting at the foot of the stairs is my Seventh Legion, or the remnants of it. Twenty-eight thousand men and women where once there were fifty. They stand in casual order around a fourteen-pointed ivory star with a pegasus galloping at its center—held aloft by the famous Thraxa au Telemachus. The Hammer. After losing her left arm to Atalantia au Grimmus's razor, she had it replaced by a metal prototype appendage from Sun

Industries. Wild gold hair flutters behind her head, garlanded with white feathers given to her by Obsidian admirers.

In her mid-thirties, a stout woman with thighs thick as water drums and a freckled, bluff face. She grins past the shoulders of the Obsidians and Golds around her. Blue and Red and Orange pilots wave to the crowd. Red, Gray, and Brown infantry smile and laugh as pretty young Pinks and Reds duck under barriers and rush to drape necklaces of flowers around their necks, push bottles of liquor into their hands and kisses onto their mouths. They are the only full legion in today's parade. The rest remain on Mercury with Orion and Harnassus, battling with the Ash Lord's legions stranded there when his fleet retreated.

Clunk.

"Remember, you are but mortal," Sevro's bored voice drawls in my ear as white-haired Wulfgar and the Republic Wardens descend to greet us midway up the Forum stairs. Sevro sniffs my neck and makes a noise of distaste. "By Jove. You wretch. Did you dip yourself in piss before the occasion?"

"It's cologne," I say. "Mustang bought it for me last Solstice."

He's quiet for a moment. "Is it made out of piss?"

I scowl back at him, wrinkling my nose at the heaviness of liquor on his breath, and eye the ragged wolfcloak he wears over his ceremonial armor. He claims he hasn't washed it since the Institute. "You're really lecturing me about stench? Just shut up and behave like an Emperor," I say with a grin.

Snorting, Sevro drops back to where the legendary Obsidian, Sefi Volarus, stands in her customary silence. He feigns an air of domesticity, but next to the giant woman, he looks a little like some sort of gutter dog an alcoholic father might ill-advisedly bring home to play with the children—washed and rid of fleas, but still possessing that weird mania behind the eyes. Pinched, thin lipped, with a nose crooked as an old knifefighter's fingers. He eyes the crowd with resigned distaste.

Behind him lope the pack of mangy Howlers he brought with us to Mercury. My bodyguards, now drunk as gallants at a Lykos Lau-

reotide. Stalwart Holiday walks at their center, the snub-nosed woman doing her best to keep them in line.

There used to be more of them. So many more.

I smile as Wulfgar descends the stairs to meet me. A favorite son of the Rising, the Obsidian is a tree root of a man, gnarled and narrow, armored all in pale blue. He's in his early forties. His face angular as a raptor's, his beard braided like that of his hero, Ragnar.

One of the Obsidians to fight alongside Ragnar at the walls of Agea, Wulfgar was with the Sons of Ares that freed me from the Jackal in Attica. Now ArchWarden of the Republic, he smiles down at me from the step above, his black eyes crinkling at the corners.

"Hail libertas," I say with a smile.

"Hail libertas," he echoes.

"Wulfgar. Fancy meeting you here. You missed the Rain," I say.

"You did not wait for me to return, did you?" Wulfgar clucks his tongue. "My children will ask where I was when the Rain fell upon Mercury, and you know what I will have to tell them?" He leans forward with a conspiratorial smile. "I was making night soil, wiping my ass when I heard Barca had taken Mount Caloris." He rumbles out a laugh.

"I told you not to leave," Sevro says. "You'd miss out on all the fun, I said. You should have seen the Ashies route. Trails of piss all the way to Venus. You'd have loved it." Sevro grins at the Obsidian. It was Sevro who put a razor in his hand in the river mud of Agea. Wulfgar has his own razor now. Its hilt made from the fang of an ice dragon from Earth's South Pole.

"My blade would have sung that day were I not summoned by the Senate," he says.

Sevro sneers. "That's right. You ran home like a good little dog."

"A dog? I am a servant of the People, my friend. As are we all." His eyes find me with mild accusation and I understand the true meaning to his words. Wulfgar is a believer, like all Wardens. Not in me, but in the Republic, in the principles for which it stands, and the orders that the Senate gives. Two days before the Iron Rain over Mercury, the Senate, led by my old friend Dancer, voted against my pro-

posal. They told me to maintain the siege. To not waste men, resources, on an assault.

I disobeyed and let the Rain fall.

Now a million of my men lie in the sands of Mercury and we have our Liberation Day.

Were Wulfgar with me on Mercury, he would not have joined our Rain against the Senate's permission. In fact, he might have tried to stop me. He's one of the few men alive who might manage. For a spell at least.

He spares a nod for Sefi. "*Njar ga hae, svester.*" A rough translation is "Respect to you, sister" in *nagal*.

"*Njar ga hir, bruder,*" she replies. No love lost between them. They have different priorities.

"Your weapons." Wulfgar gestures to my razor.

Sefi and I hand his Wardens our weapons. Muttering under his breath, Sevro hands over his as well. "Did you forget your toothpick?" Wulfgar asks, looking at Sevro's left boot.

"Treasonous yeti," Sevro mutters, and pulls a wicked blade long as a baby's body from his boot. The Warden who takes it looks terrified.

"Odin's fortune with the togas, Darrow," Wulfgar says to me as he motions for us to continue upward. "You will need it."

Arrayed at the top of the steps of the New Forum are the 140 Senators of the Republic. Ten per Color, all draped in white togas that flutter in the breeze. They peer down at me like a row of haughty pigeons on a wire. Red and Gold, mortal enemies in the Senate, bookend the row to either side. Dancer is missing. But I have eyes only for the lonely bird of prey that stands at the center of all the silly, vain, power-hungry little pigeons.

Her golden hair is bound tight behind her head. Her tunic is pure white, without the ribbons of their Color the others wear. And in her hand, she carries the Dawn Scepter—now a multi-hued gold baton half a meter long, with the pyramid of the Society recast into the fourteen-pointed star of the Republic at its tip. Her face is elegant and distant. A small nose, piercing eyes behind thick eyelashes, and a mischievous cat's smile growing on her face. The Sovereign of our Republic. Here at the summit of the stairs, her eyes shed the weight

from my shoulders, the fear from my heart that I would never see her again. Through war and space and this damnable parade, I have traveled to find her again, my life, my love, my home.

I bend to my knee and look up into the eyes of the mother of my child.

"'Lo, wife," I say with a smile.

"'Lo, husband. Welcome home."

DARROW

Father

SILENE MANOR, THE SOVEREIGN'S traditional Luna country retreat, is nestled five hundred kilometers north of Hyperion at the base of the Atlas Mountains on a small lake. The northern hemisphere of the moon, comprised of mountains and seas, is less populous than the belt of cities that girdle the equator. Though Mustang governs from the Palace of Light in the Citadel, Silene is the true home of my family, at least until we return to Mars. Built to resemble one of the papal villas on Earth's Lake Como, the stone house sits along the edge of a rocky cove, and spills down to the lake by means of switchbacked stairs cut into the rock.

Here the thin conifers whisper to heights four times those possible on Earth. They sway nearly two hundred meters in the air around the raised concrete landing pad where the steward of House Augustus, Cedric cu Platuu, waits with my wife's Lionguards as our shuttle lands. The small Copper greets Sevro and me with great alacrity, bowing deeply and flourishing his hand. Thraxa runs past him without even a greeting, eager to find her mother.

"ArchImperator," he gushes, plump cheeks flushing with delight. He's a short but ample man, built a bit like a plum with knobby arms

and legs added as an afterthought. A whisper of a mustache, nearly as thin as the graying copper hair upon his head, wavers in the wind. "What gladness to see you again!"

"Cedric," I say, greeting the short man warmly. "I hear you've just had a birthday."

"Yes, my lord! My seventy-first. Though I do maintain one should stop counting after sixty."

"Prime work," Sevro says. "You look positively prepubescent."

"Thank you, my lord!"

Few know the secrets of the Citadel as well as Cedric; he was one of the gems of the Sovereign's court. Mustang, having thought highly of him during her time with Octavia, saw no need to dismiss a man so knowledgeable and dedicated to his duty.

"Where's the welcoming party?" Sevro asks, looking for his wife, Victra. Mustang and Daxo remained behind in Hyperion to deal with their unruly Senate, but promised to rejoin by dinnertime.

"Oh, the children are recently returned from a three-day adventure," Cedric says. "The Lady Telemanus took them to the ruins of the USS *Davy Crockett* in the Atlas Mountains. Merrywater's own! I hear they had quite a time around that old wreck. Quite. A. Time, yes. Learned many lessons and expanded their individual initiative. As your curriculum requested, *dominu*—" Cedric's eyes nearly pop out of his head before he corrects himself. "As your curriculum requested, *sir*."

"Is my wife here yet?" Sevro asks gruffly.

"Not yet, sir. Her valet said she would be late to dinner. I believe there were labor strikes in her warehouses in Endymion and Echo City. It's all over the holoNews."

"She didn't even show to the Triumph," Sevro mutters. "I looked fabulous."

"She has missed you at your most prime, sir."

"Right. See, Darrow? Cedric agrees." What he hasn't noticed is Cedric shuffling away from the odious stench of his wolfcloak.

"Cedric, where is my son?" I ask the man.

He smiles. "I think you can guess, sir."

The sounds of neoPlast swords knocking together and boots on stone greet Sevro and me as we enter the dueling grotto. There, vines crawl over granite fountains and along the damp stone floor. Evergreen needles drift in cumulous shapes from the top of the trees. And in the center of the grotto, under the watching eyes of the gargoyles adorning the fountains, a young boy and girl circle each other at the center of a chalk circle. The seven other children of their pack watch on, along with two Gold women. Sevro pulls me to the side so we remain unseen and sit out of sight on the edge of a granite fountain to watch.

The boy at the center of the circle is ten, lean and proud. He laughs like his mother and broods like his father. His hair is the color of straw, his face round and flushed with youth. Rose-gold eyes burn from under long lashes. He's larger than I remember, older, and it feels so impossible that he could have come from me. That he could have thoughts of his own. That he'll love, smile, die like the rest of us.

His brow is furrowed now in concentration. Sweat pours down his face, matting his hair as his opponent strikes his knee a glancing blow.

The girl is nine and narrow-faced like a sleek hunting dog. Electra, the eldest of Sevro's three daughters, is taller than my son and twice as thin. But while Pax radiates an inner joy that makes adults' eyes twinkle, there's a deep grimness to the girl. Her eyes are dusky gold and hidden behind heavy lids. Sometimes when they look at me, I feel them judging with an aloofness that reminds me of her mother.

Sevro leans forward eagerly. "I'll wager Aja's razor against Apollonius's helm that my wee monster beats the piss out of your boy."

"I'm not going to bet on our children," I whisper in indignation.

"I'll throw Aja's Institute ring in as well."

"Have some decency, Sevro. They're our children."

"And Octavia's cape."

"I want the Falthe Ivory Tree."

Sevro gasps. "I love the Ivory Tree. Where else will I hang my trophies?"

I shrug. "No Ivory Tree, no bet."

"Bloodydamn savage," he says, sticking out a hand to shake. "You have a deal." Sevro's become quite the collector—acquiring a hoard of trophies from Gold Imperators, knights, and would-be kings. He

hangs their rings and weapons and crests from the boughs of the ivory tree he uprooted from the House Falthe compound on Earth and moved to his home on Luna.

We watch as Electra redoubles her onslaught against Pax. My son continues to back away, to sidestep, allowing her to overextend. Once she does, he twirls his plastic razor toward her rib cage. It connects lightly. "Point!" he shouts.

"I'm counting, Pax. Not you," Niobe au Telemachus says. Kavax's wife is a serene woman with a bird's nest of untamable graying hair and skin the color of cherrywood. The tribal tattoos of her Pacific Islander ancestors cover her arms. "Three to two, for Pax."

"Mind your balance, and stop overextending, Electra," says Thraxa. "You'll lose your footing if you're on an unstable surface, like a ship deck or ice." She sits on the edge of a fountain, miraculously already having found a bottle of beer.

Brow furrowed in anger, Electra rushes Pax again. They move fast for children, but since they're still shy of puberty, their movements are not yet graceful. Electra feints high, then twists her wrist to slash savagely down, hitting Pax's shoulder. "Point for Electra," Niobe says. Sevro has to stop himself from clapping. Pax tries to recover, but Electra is on him. Three more quick blows knock his razor from his hand. He falls down and Electra lifts her razor to smash him hard on the head.

Thraxa slips forward and catches the blade mid-swing with her metal hand. "Temper, temper, little lady." She pours a little beer on her head.

Electra glares up at her.

Sevro can't contain himself any longer. "My little harpy!" He lunges up off the bench and I follow through to the grotto. "Daddy's home!" A smile slashes across Electra's dour face as she turns to see her father. She runs to him and lets him scoop her up off the ground. Looks rather like he's hugging a limp fish. Some of the children flinch back when they see Sevro. And when they see me emerge from behind the vines, they stiffen and bow with perfect manners. Not one born since the fall of House Lune has the sigils implanted on their hands.

We raise them in packs of nine now, setting children of disparate