

Golden Son Study Guide

Golden Son by Pierce Brown

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Plot Summary

“Golden Son” is a dystopian science fiction novel by Pierce Brown, forming the second installment in his Red Rising Trilogy. “Golden Son” picks up two years after the events of “Red Rising”, in which the now 20-year-old Darrow trains at the Academy on Mars in the hopes of securing a fleet to command. On the surface, he has pledged loyalty to the House Augustus and Lord Nero, while secretly he labors for the Sons of Ares, a terrorist group designed to bring down the Society.

Darrow’s longstanding feud with Cassius Bellona and the Bellona family is only made worse by the longstanding rivalry between the Augustans and the Bellonans. Cassius and several members of his family brutally beat up Darrow, causing Nero great embarrassment and political frustration. He determines that Darrow’s contract must be sold to another family to bring about order and stability once more. Darrow then comes into contact with Nero’s estranged son, Adrius, “The Jackal”. The Jackal aspires to return to his father’s good graces, and to gain political power once more. For the past two years, he has sown power among the lower-Colors and among the business classes. Darrow consents to helping him, knowing it will further his cause with the Sons of Ares to bring the Gold class down.

At a gala, the ruler of the Society, the Sovereign Octavia, plans to have the Augustus family slaughtered by the Bellonas to establish greater control over Mars. However, Darrow preempts this plan by declaring his desire for a duel with Cassius. Just as Darrow is about to win the duel, the Sovereign intervenes to save Cassius’s life, declaring her word is law. This leads to arguing and then fighting amongst the families, which in turn leads to bloodshed and civil war. Darrow declares the Sovereign to be corrupt. He knows that the Golds can deal with terrorism, and has come to believe terrorism itself is wrong. But he does know the Golds fear, and will not survive an open civil war.

Darrow and the Augustans flee, bringing to their side the most loyal of their allies – including the Telemanuses. A massive invasion of Bellona-controlled cities and territories on Mars is launched, in which all the classes fight alongside one another during the battles. It helps cause Darrow to realize that not all Golds are bad, and that the war must have freedom for all rather than just freedom for some as its end goal. As Darrow comes to learn when he is captured, the leader of the Sons of Ares is his old teacher, Fitchner, a Gold, and a member of the Sovereign’s inner circle. He and Darrow escape the Sovereign. Mars is taken successfully, and dozens more families and planets rally to the cause of Nero.

Nero, however, is uncomfortable with equality among the classes. He tells Darrow that he does not believe in God, but in humanity. Humanity must survive. The Society and its classes must survive to ensure that humanity survives. During a victory gala, elite Praetorians arrive to slaughter as many people as possible, including Nero. They have been betrayed by the Jackal. Among those already killed, Darrow learns, is Fitchner. Darrow himself is taken captive.



Part I, Chapter 1 – Part II, Chapter 12

Summary

Part 1, Bow

Chapter 1 – 20-year-old Darrow trains at the Academy in order to command a fleet. He does so with the patronage of Nero au Augustus, for Darrow now serves but secretly plots against the Augustus family. Two years before, Darrow, of the Peerless Scarred, left beautiful Virginia “Mustang” au Augustus behind on Mars after winning at Mars’s Institute, where he was trained to survive and conquer. Darrow now trains for war in astral combat under the watchful eye of the Golds and Roque, a lance for House Augustus. Among those training is hard-living, drug-taking Tactus au Rath, and the beautiful but tough-as-nails Victra au Julii. They duel several children of the Bellona family, who have vowed actual revenge on Darrow for killing Julian au Bellona in the Passage on Mars.

Chapter 2 – Darrow orders his Blue commanders to tell Ripper and Talon squadrons to engage the enemy, defeating them and seemingly winning the mock trial. All those watching Darrow’s performance, including the Obsidians and the Grays, are impressed. Darrow’s personal and elderly valet, Theodora, smiles. Suddenly, an enemy destroyer under the command of Karnus Au Bellona attacks from an asteroid. Darrow’s ship is wrecked and must be evacuated. Hundreds die.

Chapter 3 – Darrow learns the war games have cost 833 actual lives. It sickens him. Darrow and his escape pod return to the Academy. Roque attempts to cheer Darrow up by reminding him he has come in second, and that the dead all gave their lives to the greater good of protecting society. While taking some time alone in the Garden, Karnus, Goliath, Cagney, Kellan, and two other members of the Bellona family confront Darrow and beat him up.

Chapter 4 – Two months pass. Darrow wonders if he is up to the secret task the Sons of Ares have given him. Darrow speaks with Nero au Augustus, Arch Governor, in his office. Pliny and Leto report on seven terrorist attacks carried which have claimed the lives of 59 Golds. The Sons of Ares are not believed to be behind these attacks because the attacks are so bloody and so indiscriminate. Darrow secretly considers how Dancer of Ares said their work was about justice, not revenge. Nero orders Red suicide bombers pretending to be Ares Sons to be used against other Reds in order to alienate the Sons of Ares from the rest of the Reds. Leto worries this could make things worse. Nero believes that the ends justify the means. In order to make peace with the other houses for political and economic purposes, Nero seeks overcome the feud between Darrow and the Bellonas by selling Darrow’s contract to another House.

Chapter 5 – Darrow is on his way to Luna, where the House Families meet for an annual summit. Darrow has three days to make himself look good, knowing he will not



survive long without the protection of Augustus. This is largely because Julia au Bellona wants him dead, his heart in a tray on her dining room table. Darrow reflects on how he turned his back on the boys and girls of the Institute who had become loyal to him, and how he turned away from Mustang to pursue war. Roque tells Darrow there is more than one path to the top, and calls Darrow his brother.

Chapter 6 – The Augustus ships land on Luna near the Citadel. Theodora remains loyal to Darrow, ensuring he has good rooms. Victra au Julii, lancer to House Augustus and half-sister to Antonia, meets with Darrow. She explains that Pliny has been speaking against Darrow since the first day. She assures Darrow she is not his enemy, and entreats him to come with her off Citadel grounds for the Lost City and a guard of twelve Grays commanded by Valentin. Some carry illegal weapons, and they are posing as mercenaries.

Chapter 7 – Darrow, Victra, and her guard wind their way into the shadiest parts of Luna where they secure an abandoned garage. A meeting is set at the Lost Wee Den with Adrius au Augustus, the brother of Mustang known as “The Jackal”. He has lost his hand, his position of prestige, has gotten into business as a Silver, and has fathered numerous children. He owns 30 percent of the communications industry, and desires to return home. He reveals that Pliny is working to keep himself in power, while Octavia au Lune has embedded herself with crime syndicates. He also reveals that he is going to help the classes rise in level, and they will kill Ares and his Sons in return.

Chapter 8 – The Jackal contends that the Sons of Ares are quietly destroying society, and this cannot be allowed. Pliny has been failing at his task to destroy Ares, so the Jackal is taking it upon himself, with Darrow as a figurehead. Destroying Ares will return the Jackal to honor and to power. The Jackal guarantees the safety of his sister if Darrow agrees to work with him. Darrow does agree. The Jackal explains that Darrow's first target is Fencor au Drusilla, who has knowledge of the Jackal's dealings with criminal syndicates. The Jackal also explains that it will be he who purchases Darrow's contract, with money being no object. A slave girl named Evey approaches the table. The Jackal orders her to have sex with Darrow as a welcoming gift. She leads Darrow away, who discovers Evey is with a group of Reds that have planted a bomb to kill the Jackal. The bomb then goes off.

Chapter 9 – Using GravBoots, Darrow barely manages to get the Jackal away from the bomb in time. Both are still injured by the blast. Darrow goes to meet the Reds. Darrow is enraged because Evey has just killed 200 people. She says she was only following orders. A member of the group and old acquaintance of Darrow's, Mickey, calls Evey a little monster. Evey says that they shut down Mickey's slaver ring and forced him into working for the Sons of Ares. Harmony then presents herself as leader of the group, as Dancer is dead. She reveals the Reds are conditioning new warriors to fight the Golds, and that the attack of the day was only one of twelve. Darrow explains he needs the Jackal alive for the time being. He contends that wanton killing isn't the answer, but digging away at the roots of society is. Harmony believes Darrow has lost his way. Darrow demands to meet Ares, or he is finished with the Reds. Harmony says this is impossible, and reveals that in three days' time, a series of hundreds of coordinated



attacks will be carried out. She plays footage for Darrow which reveals his wife was pregnant before she died.

Chapter 10 – Darrow is horrified. He tells Harmony that he will do whatever Ares wants. Back with the Jackal, Darrow learns that the Jackal believes the Sons of Ares are not behind the attack, since he does not believe they would kill innocent low-Colors. In the media, the Golds seize on the attacks as proof Society must all turn against the Reds, while the Golds are working overtime to ensure people are protected and relief is given out to those affected. Darrow meets with Roque, who warns Darrow about the Rath family, and says he will be bidding on Darrow himself. He explains the future can be better, as it now is for him and his girlfriend, Quinn. He is home with her. He urges Darrow to find his own home. Darrow then knocks Roque out with a syringe so Roque will not be killed in the attacks to come at the gala.

Chapter 11 – Despite his presence not being wanted, the Jackal still attends the gala. Darrow hopes that he will kill as many as 2,000 of the Gala attendees. Oddly, security is not permitted to attend with the families. Leto and the Jackal warn against this, but Nero insists they attend anyway. Among the attendees is Antonia, who had a hand in the death of Darrow's wife, Eo. Darrow then goes to speak with Karnus, an old acquaintance who has become a Lancer for House Bellona. As a matter of pride, Karnus is committed to killing Darrow for the sake of the Bellonas. Is it then that Darrow sees Mustang is now on Cassius au Bellona's arm. Darrow is heartbroken. It encourages him to want to kill as many Golds as he can. He then thinks of his dead wife, of the promise he made to rise. Golds are terrified by one thing: civil war.

Part 2, Break

Chapter 12 – Darrow interrupts the gala by jumping on the feast table of the Bellonas, declaring them to be dishonorable. He demands satisfaction from Cassius. The room is in an uproar as a dueling area is prepared outside. Darrow asks for Nero's blessing in the effort to avenge the death of Nero's son, arguing that the Bellonas will soon supplant the Augustuses. Darrow tells Nero that Nero is fit to be king of the universe. Nero consents to the blessing. Virginia the Mustang then meets with Darrow, telling him the duel is foolish and that she has her own plans by being with Cassius. Darrow refuses to listen. The duel begins. Darrow gains the upper hand and tells Imperator Bellona that Cassius will die. The Sovereign shows her favoritism for the Bellonas by suddenly changing the rules of the duel to death or yielding. Nero contests this, as do other families. The Sovereign declares her word is law. While Golds rule other Golds, to make such a declaration of rule is dangerous. Mustang intervenes, giving Cassius time to try to kill Darrow. A massive fight then breaks out between members of numerous Houses. Cagney au Bellona is killed by Tactus while Leto is killed by Karnus.

Analysis

"Golden Son" is a dystopian science fiction novel by Pierce Brown, forming the second installment in his Red Rising Trilogy. "Golden Son" picking up two years after the events



of “Red Rising”, in which the now 20-year-old Darrow trains at the Academy on Mars in the hopes of securing a fleet to command. From the very first pages, the theme of war is strong and central to the novel. The students of the Academies on all the planets in the universe train to become warriors. They are carefully selected and overseen by the Golds.

The Golds themselves are the uppermost level of Society, who rule over the classes beneath them. It is through the first pages of the novel that the dystopian world of the Society emerges. All people live in a class system organized by Colors; each Color determines what function or role individuals play in the Society, from Reds (unskilled manual laborers at the bottom of society) to Golds at the top. The lives of those in the lowest Color orders are seen as expendable for the greater good, and to be controlled and manipulated as needed. Such a casualty of such thinking is Darrow’s deceased wife and those innocents Nero seeks to target by peeling away public support from the Sons.

It is because of her and the injustice that lower-Colors suffer that Darrow wants to overthrow the Society. Through this, the themes of freedom and justice become central to the plot of the novel. Darrow is secretly working for the Sons of Ares, labeled a terrorist group by the governing Golds. However, indiscriminate attacks cause Darrow to second-guess the method the Sons are using to achieve their ends. Innocents are being killed in addition to Golds. Darrow is seeking justice, not vengeance. He is seeking freedom, not murder. Darrow lets the Sons know this in no uncertain terms, telling them that such bombings are inconsistent with the Sons’ purpose.

Likewise, the freedom that Darrow is seeking is not merely for just the low-Colors, but for all Colors because all Colors are confined to their roles. Even those that arguably enjoy greater freedom than the class beneath them still do not enjoy as much freedom as those above them. Everything in life is restricted. Even the Golds themselves are restricted in many ways. They may rule, but they are bound to duty to their class. For example, a Gold may not marry beneath themselves for any reason. Any such intermarriage is stamped out with execution.

All important in the preservation of the Society is loyalty. Loyalty will be a key theme through the novel, as loyalty exists in various forms. The strongest form of loyalty in the novel is family loyalty. Right or wrong, families remain loyal to their own nearly all the time. This is certainly true of the Bellonas. Even the Jackal, fallen out of favor, still retains the loyalty of his father, Nero.

Loyalty towards one’s ruling House is also very strong. Darrow pretends to be allied to the House Augustus as many others do, but his true loyalty is to the Sons of Ares. Darrow is playing loyal subject not only to House Augustus, but to the Jackal as well. Whether or not Darrow’s pretense at loyalty will benefit him or harm him is as of yet unknown. Whatever pretense of loyalty Darrow has to the House Augustus is temporarily made real when the duel ends in a brawl that ends in a civil war. Darrow’s own fate is now truly tied into that of the Augustuses.



Discussion Question 1

Why does Darrow pretend to be loyal to both the Jackal, and to the House Augustus? Whom is he truly serving? What end does Darrow seek?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Darrow oppose the indiscriminate bombings the Sons of Ares have been carrying out? What does Darrow support instead?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Darrow challenge Cassius to a duel? What happens as a result? Why?

Vocabulary

wayward, impetuous, pedantic, prudent, hubris, facile, indiscriminate, aegis, enigmatically, pretentious, partisan, philosophizing, odious



Part II, Chapter 13 – Part II, Chapter 24

Summary

Chapter 13 – Darrow helps the Augustus family evacuate. Darrow knows the Sovereign is in a difficult situation. She cannot use her power and wealth to wipe out an entire family, or she will face death herself. It was the reigning Sovereign, Darrow explains, who killed her own father and took his throne for doing just that. The Telemachus family quickly allies themselves with the Augustuses, but they must flee Luna. Darrow becomes the de-facto leader, organizing the group of men and women to reach the ship. As they journey, the Jackal realizes that the Sovereign herself must have planned something by refusing to allow family security into the gala. They are confronted by the Olympic Knight, Fitchner, and the Praetorian Guard. Fitchner, a native of Mars, will not be swayed. He orders everyone back to the Augustus villa, saying he is there uphold the laws of the Compact.

Chapter 14 – Darrow is brought before the Sovereign, who tells him he reminds her of her father. She demands to know why Darrow disobeyed her. Darrow explains he, and everyone, saw weakness in her favoritism, which in turn compromised her moral and legal authority. The Sovereign declares she is the law. Darrow contends she is not because Society is bound by laws, not rulers. The Sovereign then offers Darrow a position in her household. The Sovereign's 8-year-old grandson, Lysander, sees Darrow as his hero and asks him to join. Fitchner declares that Augustus is finished. The Sovereign orders her grandson to retrieve her box, over which a deal can be made. Darrow opens the box.

Chapter 15 – In the box are two creatures, part scorpion, part centipede, part pitviper, called Oracles. They detect lies. The Oracles respond to lies by fluctuations in body temperature. Questions are thrown and answered about electromagnetic weapons, military outposts, supply lines, spies, and so on. The Sovereign Octavia reveals her two greatest fears –that Lysander will be like her father, and that she herself is getting old. She asks who Ares is. Virginia arrives to explain that 73 people have died, including two entire innocent Earthborn families, and more than 200 have been injured. Darrow then asks his last question of the Sovereign, about the gala, and whether she was allowing the Bellonas to assassinate Nero. She says she was not, but the Oracle stings her wrist. She is lying.

Chapter 16 – Fitchner kills the Oracle that has stung the Sovereign. Mustang is stunned by the Sovereign's lie. The Sovereign explains she needs the Augustuses destroyed because Nero disobeys orders, delays helium-3 exports, and has much political power. The Sovereign then reveals a secret operation of massive proportions to eradicate the Sons of Ares on Venus is underway. She contends that Nero allowed the Sons to thrive. By killing Nero, she will exert greater rule over Mars to stamp out the Sons.



Chapter 17 – Darrow agrees to work for the Sovereign. He is shown to his new rooms, considering how Nero may die but good people like Roque may live. There, a young Pink female has been provided for his sexual use. A male Pink then enters the room with a holoCube, and leaves with the Pink female. The Cube delivers a message from Mustang, urging Darrow to take cover. Sevro and nine Howlers then crash through the window to effect an escape. Darrow is thrilled to learn that Mustang is truly on their side.

Chapter 18 – Darrow, Sevro, Quinn, and the other Howlers return to the Augustus villa some miles away. Many members of the staff have been massacred by the Bellonas and the Praetors. Grays and Obsidians attack. Captured, Darrow is brought before Olympic Knight Aja, who wants to know why Darrow is not in his room at the palace. She reveals the Augustans are hiding in the lagoon. The Howlers arrive with a bag. Inside is Lysander, unnerved but unharmed. Aja is told to stop the attack or face the consequences. Aja has no choice but to stand down. Mustang arrives in a spacecraft overhead. The surviving Augusteses, Nero among them, are taken to the ship. Aja then brutally beats Quinn.

Chapter 19 – On board the ship, Yellows are sent for to check Quinn's condition. Her brain is swelling. The Jackal and Pebble, a Yellow, get to work treating Quinn. Roque is devastated and desperate for her to survive. Quinn must be taken to a medBay. Nero congratulates Darrow on his efforts to save them all. Nero is surprised to learn that Sevro is Fitchner's boy, but loyalty does not depend on family to Sevro. Nero assures Lysander that no harm will come to him unnecessarily. Pliny councils peace and amends with the Sovereign, but Nero counters that only war is possible now. It is then learned that Tactus has fled the ship with Lysander.

Chapter 20 – Escape now seems impossible. Darrow considers what can be done. Nero instructs his family to die nobly like Golds should it come to that. Darrow, Sevro, and others are loaded into starShells to be fired at the pursuing enemy ships for the purposes of attack and boarding.

Chapter 21 – Darrow and the others explode into the bridge of the enemy ship. There, they battle Obsidians, Grays, and Golds. Much of the rest of the crew surrenders. However, in the rest of the ship, troops are being organized to take back the bridge. Darrow gets on the intercom and announces the ship has been claimed as a spoil of war. He tells the Grays, Obsidians, Blues, and all others that he and the Augustans do not believe their lives are worthless, and to overthrow the Gold commanders who lead them. Some non-Golds obey, knowing they will die anyways once it is learned what has happened to the ship. Other non-Golds remain with their Gold commanders. However, a massive Stained named Ragnar Volarus wipes out the remaining Golds and their loyal troops. Intended as a gift for the Julii for their betrayal of Augustus, Ragnar is willing to exchange stains for Ragnar's loyalty. Ragnar explains his kind are essentially slaves, to be traded at will among families. Darrow implores Ragnar to save his friends.

Chapter 22 – Orion xe Aquarii, a female Blue pilot in her forties, vies among others for command of the ship and a place in the new order under Augustus. Orion pledges her loyalty and vows to cause minimal enemy casualties as she takes the ship toward the



Augustan fleet. Darrow then broadcasts a message across space, declaring the Sovereign has violated the Compact, that the Augustus family must be defended, and that he and his Household need help. The Jackal is thrilled with this turn of events. Meanwhile, it is sadly learned that Quinn has died.

Chapter 23 –Sevro secretly confides to Darrow that he was sent by Ares. Sevro carries a whisper gem with a message for Darrow from Ares, in which Ares reveals Harmony has betrayed him and is using the Sons for her own ends. Ares implores Darrow not to give up on the mission. Sevro is prepared for war against the Golds. Nero assigns Darrow the best rooms on the spaceship, for it is thanks to Darrow it was captured in the first place. Unable to sleep that night, Darrow wanders the ship until he comes across Mustang in the mess hall.

Chapter 24 – Mustang cannot sleep either. She thinks of the way Society is, and how people who have dared to love across classes are killed. She explains her decision to be with Cassius was due to the hurt and betrayal she felt at losing Darrow. She warns him about getting too close to the Jackal, saying he can't be trusted. Darrow then meets with the Jackal, who says that Pliny will want them both dead, but that the war offers them new possibilities. Darrow asks Jackal what his network can tell him about the shipyards of Ganymede.

Analysis

For the time being, if Darrow is to survive at all, his loyalty to the House Augustus must indeed be true rather than a matter of pretense. Darrow is realizing that not all Golds are bad – with Mustang and Roque being examples of good Golds – and that simply toppling the Gold class will not necessarily end or fix the Society in and of itself. An even worse dystopian future may be in store for the universe and its people, besides which. Good Golds like Mustang and Roque deserve true loyalty, while clearly bad Golds like the Sovereign deserve to be opposed. Even the Golds themselves will twist the laws against their own when it suits them – such as the Sovereign twisting the laws of duels to save Cassius's life. Yet she overreaches even her own authority by declaring not that she upholds the laws, but is the law. This is a gross injustice.

Darrow has no taste for terrorism, but does believe wholly in honor. The honorable way to bring about change through violence is through a legitimate war. The bad Golds can survive terrorist bombings, but they may not be able to survive a civil war. A civil war has the reach, extent, and power to truly transform the Society because it will involve so many people, and will incur such a great cost in finances and lives. Such an approach is true justice. Justice continues to be central to the efforts of Darrow as he seeks to change everything. He is not looking for revenge at all. Even the memory of his wife is beset by the complication that she did not want vengeance for her death, but transformative, positive change as a result. In other words, she wanted real justice so that her death could have real meaning.



Through the civil war, the theme of war emerges front and center. For the remainder of the novel, the House Augustus, its military forces led by Darrow, will be in a near-constant state of war. Everything they do will be geared at first toward survival, and then toward victory. Loyalty is a huge matter of the war. Most families and planets line up with the Sovereign immediately, while those planets, families, and organizations loyal to Augustus are hesitant to jump into the war just yet. So far, only the Telemanuses have declared for Augustus. They will be of immense help in the coming days. Loyalty also proves to be the single determining factor in Ragnar's life. Bred purely for the purposes of destruction, Ragnar pledges himself to Darrow on board the enemy flagship.

Loyalty also wavers in many situations. Sevro, son of Fitchner, allies himself with House Augustus even though his father allies himself with the Sovereign. Part of Ragnar's reasoning for his newly acquired loyalty to Darrow is Darrow's interruption of Ragnar being traded between families as a gift for betrayal. Ragnar, who lives his life for loyalty and service, cannot abide having his loyalty traded like a commodity. To Ragnar, loyalty is a much more serious, and far deeper thing. It is a good lesson for Darrow, who comes to see how important real loyalty is. He is coming to realize slowly that betrayal of the Augustans will not be an easy thing – and might not even be the right thing to do in the end. The reader should bear this in mind, because it will influence Darrow's ultimate plan.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Darrow decide civil war rather than terrorism is the way to go about change? What does he hope to accomplish through the war?

Discussion Question 2

Why does the Sovereign declare herself the law? What effect does this have on the Gold Houses at the duel? Why?

Discussion Question 3

What is loyalty to Ragnar? Why does he so quickly, willingly, and totally pledge his loyalty to Darrow?

Vocabulary

golems, nostalgic, condescension, exploited, fluctuations, inevitability, precondition, petulance, flummoxed, bartered, retinue, diminutive, aplomb, paradigm, erudite, vocation, prerogative, pedantic, placidly, warbles, inaudible



Part III, Chapter 25 – Part III, Chapter 36

Summary

Part III, Conquer

Chapter 25 – Nero reports that most of the Golds have sided against him and with the Sovereign in the month since leaving Luna. Help is far away, and the path back to Mars is blocked by the Sovereign's fleet. Darrow realizes there is too much caution in the people who surround Nero. Pliny argues that they should keep running, causing Octavia delay. Kavax disagrees, saying he will take a thousand men to compel those who did not answer Nero's summons for help. The Telemanses argue that they should indeed pay a visit to their own subjects to remind them of their loyalty. The Golds only respect power, says Darrow. To rally Saturn, the Galileans, and others, power must be demonstrated. The ships of Ganymede must all be taken.

Chapter 26 – Pliny disagrees with this plan, saying it will lead to all-out war. Kavax and Daxo argue war is already underway. Darrow reveals that not only will they steal all the ships of Ganymede, but will take captive and ransom all of the military students of each of the Academies on each of the planets, from Earth to Saturn and beyond. A victory is needed, Mustang agrees, over which peace can be brokered. Nero agrees. Pliny's objections are overruled. Nero decides that he himself will lead a small fleet to the Gas Giants and Ganymede, while Praetor Licenus will steer the flagship and its fleet away to distract the Sovereign's forces. Nero wishes to be king. Privately, Nero urges Darrow to remain a warrior, and to steer clear of politics. Nero wants to give Darrow power, and asks him to bring Lorn au Arcos, a Gold former Rage Knight and head of the Arcos family, into the fold.

Chapter 27 – Daxo au Telemanus and his household are happy to be allied with the House of Augustus and Darrow, because they have a common enemy in the Bellonas and in Karnus especially. Darrow sets a course for Europa. He tries to apologize to Roque for what happened before the gala, but Roque understands what was done. He is still not happy about it, and heartbroken over Quinn.

Chapter 28 – Darrow meets with Lorn and asks for help in freeing the parts of Mars held by the Bellonas. With them gone, the Moon Lords and the Arch Governors of the Rim will join the fight against the Core and the Sovereign. Darrow promises Lorn that his grandson, Lysander, can be returned to him. Lorn detests war and backstabbing politics, having been a part of the series of events that led to Octavia killing her father to take the throne of the Sovereign. Lorn then reveals that Aja au Grimmus arrived days before with a squad of Praetorians, set to capture Darrow. But Lorn will let Darrow escape so Lorn can simply fade away in life in peace. Darrow says this will not be possible, and that Lorn must join the war whether he likes it or not.



Chapter 29 – As it turns out, Darrow's own ships have set a trap for Aja's. Lorn realizes the fox has played the hare. He is enraged but powerless to do anything. Aja arrives, demanding to know what is going on. Lorn says he is not on either side. Aja says Lorn must choose. Tactus also appears. A battle unfolds between the forces of the Sovereign, and the men under Darrow's command. Tactus seeks to kill all of Lorn's family. Darrow attempts to convince Tactus that the Sovereign is evil. Tactus will hear none of it. He is severely injured by a bomb. Darrow offers him peace and life if he rejoins the side of good. Tactus consents. He apologizes for what he has done over and over again. Aja and her forces lose and scatter.

Chapter 30 – Lorn's fleet joins Darrow's fleet. For their loyalty in the operation, the Telemanses are given thirty percent of the captured enemy fleet. The Mustang's ship then appears on the horizon.

Chapter 31 – Mustang reports that her father has been captured in a trap. Lorn acknowledges Mustang's thought that they need Lorn's help now more than ever. They realize that enemy forces will be tracking Mustang to find Darrow. Cyther, a Luna citizen and pilot mechanic, offers to deactivate the tracking devices on Mustang's ship. Darrow agrees, promising to bring his family to the safety of Mars if Cyther is successful.

Chapter 32 – Mustang goes to see Tactus, who is in the medBay under watch by Roque. Roque is saddened by everything that has happened. A war room council is convened. It is revealed that Nero fought until captured, for the ships at Ganymede were full of elite troops rather than just pilot crews. It is believed that perhaps Victra's mother, Agrippina, had something to do with it. As a result, Victra cannot be trusted. Roque contends that she can be trusted, for she has been loyal to Darrow since the Academy. He vows to leave if Victra is expelled. Mustang relates how Pliny himself also betrayed Nero in order to get his own House. He is meeting with all the leaders of Mars to restructure control of the planet between himself, the Julii, and the Bellona. The agreement will be sealed in blood by way of Nero's execution. Nero must be rescued.

Chapter 33 – That night after bathing, Mustang comes to see Darrow, and the two end up practicing sparring. She asks about whether or not Darrow trusts Victra, and asks about Eo. Darrow doesn't want to talk about Eo. Mustang worries that Darrow may become like her father. She asks him to ask her to stay the night. Darrow says nothing. Mustang leaves.

Chapter 34 – Darrow, Roque, Victra, Sevro, the Howlers, the Telemanses, Lorn, Mustang, and Ragnar hijack and hide in a supply camel vessel headed for Pliny's fleet. Darrow converses with Ragnar about the idea and purpose of freedom. Ragnar cannot conceive of such a thing as freedom, for it has been pounded in this head and his ancestors that they are merely to serve until death.

Chapter 35 – The camel ship arrives at Hildas Station, where the Invictus, Nero's flagship under the control of Pliny, is located with dozens of others. Darrow and his followers fan out through the ship. They free the Jackal and break into the meeting Pliny is conducting of all the lords and leaders of Mars. They are stunned to see Lorn and



stunned to see Darrow alive, having been told he was dead. Pliny is enraged. Darrow denounces him as a traitor. Pliny is then abandoned by everyone.

Chapter 36 – The loyal forces of Mars begin to gather in strength. Darrow has come to realize that not all Golds are truly evil, and that even those who are bad can be turned to good and made to feel empathy. Darrow knows that when Mars is fully reclaimed, other planets will ally themselves with Augustus. Golds who surrender or ally with Nero are to be treated well; those who resist are to be killed. The low-Colors are to be protected. The planet is to be taken alive and vibrant, not dead and destroyed. It is hoped that Nero can be saved, still. Lorn makes Darrow promise to be a better man in the future. Final preparations for war are made.

Analysis

War and loyalty remain central themes in this section of the novel. The sniveling Pliny presses for reconciliation and peace, but Nero and Darrow know that war has already begun. There can be no going back. The war must be seen through to the end. Mustang contends that any negotiations that occur must occur from a place of strength. At the same time, it is clear that the Sovereign holds most of the cards in her hand. She has the throne, the majority of the families and planets behind her, the best funding, and the larger number of troops and ships. It appears as if the rebellion will be short lived, and the war very quick to end.

The Telemachus family remains unconditionally loyal to the House Augustus despite these odds. For the Telemachus, loyalty and justice are hallmarks in their defense of House Augustus. While many other families are loyal to the Augustans, and while many other planets would likely side with the Augustans, the Sovereign and the Bellonans wield too much power at present. Only through insistence or coercion – such as Darrow leaning heavily on Lorn – do many families reluctantly commit to the Augustans. It is believed that many more families will rally to the cause of the Augustans once the Augustans demonstrate their power. To this end, an invasion of Bellona-held areas on Mars is planned. If the Augustans can win a victory over the Sovereign and the Bellonans, they can draw entire planets to their war against the Sovereign.

Just as things seem to be coming together, Pliny makes his move. His loyalty, fickle and unsure, is exposed: Pliny is a traitor who seeks to elevate himself to House status by giving up Nero to the Sovereign, and by organizing the Martian families on the false news that Darrow is dead. Pliny's scheming is utterly unjust and disloyal, resulting ultimately in the return of Darrow and Pliny's removal. His betrayal is stunning. However, all those families that allied themselves with Pliny only did so because they believed the war to have already been lost. Knowing that Darrow lives, that Lorn is on their side, and knowing that Nero may still be rescued, they recommit themselves to war.

Lorn provides an interesting counterpoint to everything going on. While Pliny opposes war as a matter of politics and cowardice, Lorn opposes war because he has lived his



life in war, and is tired of backstabbing politics and slipshod loyalties. He wants to live out the rest of his life in peace. But even he reluctantly comes to realize he is needed, and that even old warriors must return to the field when called upon to do so. Through the House Augustus and through Darrow, Lorn has a chance to serve a truly loyal and courageous cause the likes of which he never had to serve as a younger man.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Lorn ultimately decide to fight alongside the Augustans, and to help them in their efforts in the civil war?

Discussion Question 2

How do Darrow and the active members of the House Augustus plan to bring other allies to their side? Why have these allies not yet joined? Why does Darrow believe they will join in the end?

Discussion Question 3

What is Darrow's plan to open the civil war? What are the goals of his forces? What are the reasons behind these goals? Do you believe Darrow's plan is sound? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

aquiline, melodically, maxims, fealty, precedent, immoral, autonomous, stagnant, propitious, derelict, consigned, collusion, adamant, futilely, gesticulating



Part III, Chapter 37 – Part IV, Chapter 45

Summary

Part III, Conquer

Chapter 37 – The forces loyal to Nero that array themselves for battle wear the signs and sigils of wolves and slingBlades – symbols belonging to Darrow. He knows he has the loyalty of the armed forces before him. The Bellonan forces array before them. Tiberius, Head of House Bellona, will command their fleets, while Cassius and Karnus are in command of ground forces in Agea. The order to attack is given.

Chapter 38 – Battle is joined. Millions of men are landed in Bellona-controlled Mars to take the massive cities. Darrow's, Mustang's, and Sevro's forces land in the mountains and fight their way down. Roque excitedly lets everyone know by radio the Sovereign herself is trapped in Agea.

Chapter 39 – Darrow already knows the Sovereign is in Agea, having tracked Aja's ship back to the Sovereign, and then having tracked the Sovereign to Mars. Darrow lets his personal command know this. Everyone is thrilled. The new target is the Sovereign. The City of Agea is to be spared as much as possible. But a trap of bombs has been laid for Darrow and his forces.

Part IV, Ruin

Chapter 40 – The bombs are EMPs, which ruin all of the electronics that Darrow and his men carry or ride on. Many are killed as their devices fail and they plummet to the ground. Darrow, Ragnar, and the survivors fight on and overcome their attackers. Sevro is stunned by the numbers lost, but vows to fight on.

Chapter 41 – As the attack continues, Thistle, a Gold, is stunned at how much power Ragnar has been given, especially as he helps to arm Obsidians waiting to join the attack. Darrow contends it is a new day and a new beginning. The forces of Darrow move into the city and into the commercial district. They breach the Citadel of the city, where the Sovereign's personal ship and three escort decoys wait. Darrow races ahead for the Sovereign's ship, rushing inside as it takes off.

Chapter 42 – Aja, Karnus, Fitchner, and six Praetorians now surround Darrow. Darrow is stunned to see the Sovereign also present. He holds up a grenade. The Sovereign commands Fitchner to kill his old student, Darrow. Karnus then suddenly attacks Darrow, who kills Karnus as Karnus cuts through his collarbone. Fitchner is commanded to cut off Darrow's head. Darrow realizes that he is about to die, but will die knowing that victory on Mars is assured, and that the war will continue. Fitchner calls Darrow a fool, saying he himself had everything under control. It is then that everyone realizes Fitchner is Ares. The Sovereign declares him a traitor as Fitchner grabs Darrow and flies away from the ship.



Chapter 43 – Mustang watches over Darrow as he recovers. She reveals her father is alive and well, that Roque captured eighty percent of the Bellona fleet, and that she will now be Darrow's political advisor and confidante. The Julii, through Victra's sudden interest in Lorn, has united the House of Julii to Augustus. Darrow breaks down and cries. He and Mustang kiss. She begs him to let her in. He gives way to her.

Chapter 44 – The forces of Mars are in good spirits after their victory. Darrow takes the opportunity to apologize to Roque for everything, and to set their friendship right. Roque hopes their friendship may be set right over time. Sevro brings word that some of Darrow's friends have been captured by the Jackal.

Chapter 45 – Darrow travels to the mountain city of Attica to meet with the Jackal. Victra and Harmony are also present. The Jackal reports that the Sovereign's coalition is stressed. A fake attack by the Sons of Ares is made, which Darrow pretends to defeat. This fake attack allows the rescue of the Sons that the Jackal has taken prisoner. Darrow pretends to vow revenge on the Sons of Ares, while the Jackal vows revenge on the Sovereign.

Analysis

As the novel continues, actual open warfare commences on a scale as of yet unseen in the novel. Millions upon millions of troops fight for and against the House Augustus, while thousands of ships battle one another in space over Mars. The reader should note, interestingly, that the troops that fight for House Augustus do not do so under the banner of the House Augustus, but under Darrow's own sigil. It is a demonstration of utter loyalty and faith in Darrow, and is the kind of loyalty and faith that Nero himself has never been able to command. Nero himself even knows this, and this will have important consequences as the novel ends.

Darrow himself leads the attack on the main Citadel in the Bellona stronghold. He does so not only in the effort to free Nero, but to find and capture the Sovereign herself. The strategy has changed from merely freeing Nero and earning a victory against the Sovereign, to cutting off the head of the snake itself. Darrow is nearly killed for his efforts when he manages to board the Sovereign's ship at the very last possible second. It is quite clear at this point that Darrow's loyalty to the House Augustus is indeed genuine. As the attack proceeds, the reader will recall how Darrow broke protocol and the Compact to arm Obsidians to fight alongside Golds. The Golds, while not thrilled with the incident, nevertheless were glad to have more allies fighting alongside them. It reinforces the idea in Darrow's mind that not all Golds are evil, and that all classes have something at stake in the war.

Loyalty becomes central to the plot once more with Darrow's capture and near-death at the hands of Karnus. Fitchner, Darrow's old teacher, is ordered to kill Darrow. Rather than killing Darrow, Fitchner escapes with him, revealing that he is Ares, the leader of the Sons of Ares. Fitchner has been pretending to be loyal to the Sovereign all along, when in reality, he has been loyal to those arrayed against her. That the entire planet of



Mars should now align itself behind House Augustus, which is aligned against the Sovereign, against whom the Sons of Ares are also aligned, means there may be a shift in loyalty and just who is regarded as the enemy. It is possible the Sons of Ares may work with the House Augustus; yet it is also possible that Augustus will attempt stamp out the Sons before turning its focus back to the war at hand.

Despite the victory on Mars, the loyalties of Roque and the Jackal remain in question. Darrow himself is to blame for the disruption of friendship between himself and Roque, with Roque explaining that friendships take a long time to repair. Darrow hopes that this may happen. However, the Jackal is another story. He has been returned to favor in his father's eyes at least nominally, having gone through the first battle of the war with everyone. However, whether or not the Jackal will remain loyal to his father, or seek to undo his father is unknown.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Darrow attempt to capture the Sovereign? What does he hope will be gained by doing so?

Discussion Question 2

How do the battles for the cities on Mars go? What happens as a result?

Discussion Question 3

Who is revealed to be Ares? How does this revelation come about? Is it better or worse for Ares that this occurs? Why?

Vocabulary

perfunctory, behemoths, projectile, lithe, triumvirate, tranquil, plaintively, animalistic



Part IV, Chapter 46 – Part IV, Chapter 51

Summary

Part IV, Ruin

Chapter 46 –Dancer is among those freed during the rescue. He is very happy to see Darrow. Darrow is thrilled to see him. He reveals that Darrow's family is alive and well, though still in the mines. Dancer isn't bothered at all by the fact that Fitchner is a Gold, because Dancer has truly come to see past all Colors. Fitchner explains that while he was overseeing a construction project that ended in disaster, he fell in love with a Red girl named Bryn. Bryn had her fallopian tubes modified to conceive a child –Sevro. Bryn was found out, and killed at the tender age of 22. As a result, Fitchner began the Sons. In the present time, Fitchner wants Darrow to position himself as Nero's heir, during which time the entire universe can be reordered. It is believed that Nero will adopt Darrow, and Mustang can become Darrow's wife. But Darrow will not do this without her full consent of what is going on.

Chapter 47 – Darrow visits his old home, now abandoned and used for partying by Grays. It makes him sad. He remembers Eo, and knows he must move past the past.

Chapter 48 – Darrow meets with MineMagistrate Timothy cu Podginus. Darrow orders Podginus to treat his miners with care and respect. He consents to doing so, including throwing them a feast. Darrow watches the feast unfold, having been friends with most of those now celebrating. Mustang joins Darrow, telling him everything will be reformed. He then explains he has something to tell her.

Chapter 49 – Darrow visits his Mother. She is thrilled to see him, and fills him in on his family. His sister is married with kids. His brother's wife died in childbirth a few months before. Eo's family is dead. She wants to know Darrow's entire story. Darrow says he will tell her, and promises her that the Mine will always be safe from harm. One of Darrow's young nieces wakes up from sleep and walks into the room, amazed that her Uncle Darrow is not dead as she has been told.

Chapter 50 – Darrow reveals to Mustang the truth of his Red origins, and his body modifications to make him appear otherwise. He explains the war isn't about one class of Colors against another. But Mustang does not take it well. She worries millions – including her own family – will die at the hands of low-Colors seeking revenge for centuries of cruelty and slavery. Ragnar appears, worried about Darrow's safety. He speaks of living for more than just death. He will not harm Mustang, even though the way he has been brought up tells him to do so.

Chapter 51 – A Triumph is held for Darrow and his feats of victory. Tens of thousands of people turn out to cheer. Darrow meets privately with Darrow over Darrow's decision to give razors to Obsidians, breaking the laws of class in doing so. Darrow explains that



the Obsidians could do things he could not. Nero reveals he does not believe in God, but only in men. He believes the race of men must always continue, and that the only way of doing that is to ensure the survival of the Society. Everything he does, he explains, has been for the greater good. His promises of Reform are only to get the Reformers on his side. He wants Darrow to marry Mustang and rule after he is gone, for he considers his son a parasite. Darrow pretends to go along with it all. Mustang, however, cannot be found anywhere. At the Triumph gala, the Jackal makes his move. Roque uses a needle to knock out Darrow while the Jackal's friends attack. Lorn is killed by the Jackal. Victra is wounded. Suddenly, Aja and the Praetorians arrive. The Jackal reveals it was he who killed Nero's son, Claudius. Nero tells the Jackal that the Jackal is no longer his son. The Jackal then shoots Nero in the head. As Darrow falls into unconsciousness, he sees a box with Fitchner's head in it. He knows they have been betrayed.

Analysis

Nero knows how much loyalty and faith Darrow commands among the troops and families. It makes him a prime choice for Heir to the House of Augustus. Nero can read the writing on the wall. While he may be in command, Darrow has real power. The knowledge draws on the history of ancient wars in the Roman Empire, in which generals often had greater power than families and elected leaders. Nero recognizes that the Jackal will never have that kind of loyalty, but Darrow will. Darrow is the fitting choice to be named Heir. It will ensure Darrow's loyalty to Nero, and will ensure the loyalty of the armed forces and families to Nero through Darrow.

The dystopian Society seems to continue unabated. The reader will reflect on how, even before Nero's death, Nero wanted Society to continue as it was – but merely with him in command instead of the Sovereign Octavia. This is a letdown for Darrow, though from what he has learned of justice, freedom, and war, he hopes Nero may in time change his mind. At that point, Nero and the civil war are the best chance that Darrow has for justice and freedom. He is willing to work with Nero, who in turn would take Darrow over his own son. Darrow recognizes that himself will be able to bring about change if he commands the House Augustus, even if it may take many more years to bring about that change. Indeed, his visit to the Mines and to his mother's house remind him of everything he has left behind, and everything he is fighting for. Instead of changing Society from the bottom up, he will have the chance to change it from the top down.

As if sensing that things are arrayed against him, the Jackal makes a deal with the Devil. He signs on with the Sovereign, and those allied with him along with the Praetorians brutally massacre Lorn and many others at the gala. The Jackal's treachery is disgusting. It results not only in the deaths of political enemies, but innocent people as well. Darrow is most stunned by the fact that so many innocents – including Golds – now have to die because of the Jackal's heinous betrayal. It is an injustice which demands accounting for.



Discussion Question 1

What seems to become Darrow's plan for change and the future when Nero announces Darrow is to become his heir through marriage to Mustang?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you believe the Jackal betrays his father, the Augustan alliance, and Darrow?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Darrow refuse to enter into a marriage with Mustang unless Mustang knows the truth about himself and his past? Do you believe this is either a wise or moral thing to do? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

quelling, dissent, quarantine, triumph, infancy, immutable



Characters

Darrow

Darrow au Rath is the main character and narrator of the novel “Golden Son” by Pierce Brown. Darrow is a twenty year-old who is immensely strong, courageous, and loyal. Formerly a Red but surgically transformed into a Gold, Darrow is secretly a member of the Sons of Ares, working to overthrow the Golds and bring freedom to all Colors. For the time being, Darrow nominally serves the House Augustus, pretending to be loyal to them but harboring anger and thoughts of revenge, for it is at their hands that his wife, Eo, died in the previous novel.

In the time since, Darrow has fallen in love with Mustang, who begins to open his eyes to the idea that not all Golds are evil. As the novel moves along, Darrow comes to view terrorism as evil, and if there is to be change brought about by violence, it must be a legitimate civil war. His challenging of Cassius Bellona to a duel precipitates a civil war wherein Darrow becomes truly loyal to Augustus, knowing his survival and the chances of change rest with victory and the House. After a stunning victory on Mars, the Augustuses are betrayed by their own, Jackal, who ensures that Darrow is captured.

Mustang

Virginia “Mustang” au Augustus is the daughter of Nero Augustus, and the twin sister of the Jackal. A Gold, Mustang is strikingly beautiful, and appears to be in her late teens. She is courageous and unfailingly loyal to her House. Brokenhearted by Darrow’s departure from the Institute, she finds solaces in the arms of Cassius Bellona, though she also uses the position as a way to learn about her family’s enemies. When civil war breaks out, Mustang unhesitatingly sides with her family, and ultimately professes her love to Darrow. She is later horrified to learn not that Darrow is a Red, but that Darrow wishes to undo the structure of Society. She mysteriously goes missing at the end of the novel.

Nero

Nero au Augustus is the Head of House Augustus, and ArchGovernor of the Planet Mars. He is the father of Mustang and the Jackal, and becomes the leader of the rebellion against the Sovereign Octavia as civil war breaks out. His politics and his management of helium gas exports lead to friction between him and the Sovereign, while a feud erupts between Darroqand Cassius Bellona. When the Sovereign violates the Compact, Nero rises up in rebellion, ultimately bringing much of the Society to his banners. He is betrayed by his advisor, Pliny, and taken captive by the forces of the Core, though he is later rescued. Sensing the command of loyalty that Darrow has, Nero moves to make Darrow his heir. Nero is later betrayed by the Jackal, and killed at the hands of the forces of the Sovereign.



The Jackal

Adrius “The Jackal” au Augustus is the son of Nero Augustus, and twin brother of Virginia “Mustang” au Augustus. The Jackal, for unknown reasons in this novel of the trilogy, has fallen out of favor with his father, where he has made a name for himself in the Silver class and the criminal underworld of Luna and the galaxy. The Jackal is shifty, manipulative, and brutal, doing whatever it takes to survive. He uses Darrow’s help to return to his father’s good graces, where after he betrays his father to the Sovereign.

Roque

Roque au Fabii, of the Golden House of Fabii, is a Lancer and Loyal Member of the House Augustus. Roque is dating the beautiful Quinn, and despite his courage and bravery, prefers quiet reading to loud parties. Roque becomes Darrow’s closest friend, helping Darrow to see that not all Golds are bad. Roque is later knocked out with a needle by Darrow when Darrow originally seeks to kill 2,000 Golds so that Roque himself is not killed. This ruins the friendship between Roque and Darrow, and ultimately leads to Roque’s betrayal of the House Augustus.

The House of Telemachus

The House of Telemachus is a powerful family on the Planet Mars. Overseen by Kavax and his sons, Heir Daxo and Pax, the family is unfailingly loyal to House Augustus. When the civil war breaks out, House Telemachus is the first to join Augustus’s side.

The Sovereign Octavia

The Sovereign Octavia Au Lune is Empress of the Universe. She is cold, calculating, and murderous. Having killed her own father to take his place, she is training her grandson, Lysander, to be her heir. Power-hungry and corrupt, the Sovereign’s will begins supplanting the law by seeking to replace the Augustuses with the Bellonas by way of murder. Her plans are ruined by Darrow, however, when Darrow challenges Cassius to a duel. Octavia stops the duel to save Cassius’s life, declaring that she is the law, and causing a civil war to break out.

Fitchner

Fitchner is a Knight, protector of, and advisor to the Sovereign. A member of the Gold class whose Red wife and son were killed years before, Fitchner birthed the rebel group Sons of Ares. Fitchner ensures that Darrow escapes from the clutches of the Sovereign, though Fitchner himself is later killed and beheaded – presumably by the forces of the Sovereign.



Lorn

Lorn au Arcos is the former Rage Knight, Head of the House of Arcos, is Darrow's mentor, and is retired. Lorn has turned his back on war and politics, wanting to spend his last years in peace. However, he is called back to service through Darrow. Lorn recognizes he is needed, and recognizes that even old warriors must sometimes return to the field. He helps lead the forces of the rebellion to capture Mars, but is ultimately killed himself during Jackal's betrayal.

The House Bellona

The House Bellona, consisting of Lord Head Tiberius, his son and Heir Cassius, son and Lancer Karnus, is closely allied with the Sovereign, plotting against the Augustuses. Cassius in particular becomes a rival with Darrow after Darrow killed Julian Bellona two years before. The duel between Cassius and Darrow at the Luna gala precipitates the civil war that follows. Karnus is killed by Darrow during a struggle on the Sovereign's flagship, while the Bellonas lose eighty percent of their fleet and their control of the Planet Mars to the rebellion.



Symbols and Symbolism

Razors

Razors are sword-like weapons wielded by military members and Golds, including Darrow. They are a primary weapon, used for duels, stabbing, fighting, and killing. Razors are given to the Obsidians of Mars during the fight against the Bellonas, provoking shock from some of the Golds and Nero. The handing of Razors, a privileged weapon, to the Obsidians, is a statement of equality and defies the laws of the Compact. For Darrow, however, this is symbolic of the beginning of a new day and a new order.

holoNet

The holoNet is the future transformation of the Internet, available across the galaxy. It is used frequently throughout the novel for the purposes of communication, business, and information. The holoNet can be accessed through dataPads and other such electronic devices.

dataPad

A dataPad is a future version of iPads and tablets, and have essentially taken the place of cell phones and smartphones. DataPads are used to access the holoNet, communicate, carry out research and business, and for information. Darrow uses a dataPad's tracking device to determine the location of the Sons of Ares while on Luna.

gravBoots

gravBoots are anti-gravity rocket-propelled boots that stabilize the wearer, and allow them to fly and travel quickly over great distances. Darrow relies on gravBoots numerous times throughout the novel, including during the assault on the Martian Citadel. Sevro and the Howlers wear gravBoots when they rescue Darrow from the Sovereign's palace.

Banners

Banners are flown by the troops and allies of Houses. The banners display symbols and sigils of Houses and groups to which that unit of troops is loyal. The banners flown before the invasion of Mars all bear the standards of Darrow, wolves and slingblades. This reveals the utter loyalty the military forces of the rebellion have for Darrow.



EMP bombs

Electromagnetic Pulse bombs are wielded by the Sovereign's army against the forces of Darrow and the rebellion during the Battle of Mars. The EMPs ruin all the electronics being carried and used by Darrow and his troops, leading to them having to fight unassisted. This, however, fails to stop the advance of the rebellion.

The Compact

The Compact is essentially the laws and regulations of the Society. The Compact divides people into Color classes, determines what their roles may and may not be, and among other things determines how power is to be wielded, and by whom. When the Sovereign seeks to murder the Augustans, and then declares herself to be the law, she violates the Compact and gives rise to the civil war.

Fleets

Fleets of hundreds and thousands of spaceships are kept throughout the universe by the families and the Sovereign. These fleets are a means to war and to keeping the peace. When civil war breaks out, the Bellonan fleet engages the Augustan fleet in battle over Mars. Eighty percent of the Bellonan fleet is captured, the Bellonans thus losing the battle in space as well as on Mars itself.

Arranged marriages

Arranged marriages are carried out among various classes, especially the Golds, as a way of cementing power and loyalty above all else. They are seen more as a political tool than as an extension of love. Darrow is to be arranged with Mustang so that Darrow will become Heir to the House Augustus. However, the marriage is at least temporarily delayed by Jackal's betrayal.

Box

A box containing the severed head of Fitchner is brought along by the Praetorians when they crash the Martian gala during Jackal's betrayal. The box is deposited near the increasingly-unconscious Darrow while the Praetorians slaughter countless innocent people around him. Darrow is brokenhearted and stunned by the contents of the box before he loses consciousness completely.



Settings

Luna

Luna is the moon that serves as the center of government for the universe, and is home of the Sovereign. Luna consists of the Sovereign's palace, Citadel, Senate, and numerous other cities and lower-Color areas. Because it is a moon, the sun constantly keeps Luna in a state of light that varies from broad daylight to a glowing twilight. Luna also serves as an annual meeting place and hosts an annual gala for all the House Families of the universe. Luna is where Darrow and the House Augustus travel for the annual events, only to be targeted by the Sovereign's tyranny. From the stopped duel between Darrow and Cassius on Luna springs the civil war that follows.

Mars

Mars is one of the planets of the Society, is headed by ArchGovernor Nero and the House of Augustus, and is home to numerous powerful House families, including the Telemanses, the Arcos, and the Bellonas. Mars's principal export is helium, and therefore has a massive population of Reds and low-Colors to do the dirty work needed to extract the gas. Darrow himself is a native of the Mines of Mars. Mars is taken over by the Bellona family during the early civil war, only to be freed and restored to the control of Augustus during the Battle of Mars.

The Martian Citadel

The Martian Citadel is where the villa of the ruling Augustus family, defensive networks, and government buildings are located. It is the seat of power for Mars, located in Agea, the largest Martian city. The Sovereign attempts to direct operations during the first major battle of the war from the Martian Citadel, which has been taken over by the Bellonas. But the rebels are determined to regain control of their home, forcing the Sovereign to flee with Darrow on her heels.

Mountain estate

The Jackal's mountain estate is located near the City of Agea on the Planet Mars. Located on the side of a mountain, the Jackal's estate is jealously guarded by the Jackal and his henchmen, who seek greater power in the cities below. Darrow must visit the mountain estate toward the end of the novel to distract the Jackal while the captured Sons of Ares are freed.

The Mines of Mars

The Mines of Mars are located deep underground, and are serviced and operated by the Reds under the watchful eye of Coppers. The Mines are a dangerous place where countless Reds have lost their lives. Darrow briefly visits the Mines to remember where he and his family are from, and to instruct that the Reds of the Mines be given better working conditions, and a feast.



Themes and Motifs

Dystopianism

Dystopianism is an important theme in the novel “Golden Son” by Pierce Brown. Dystopianism involves a government, organization, association, or company, that exercises tremendous or total power and influence in the lives of everyday people, often denying their human and legal rights in the name of the greater good. Those in power will do whatever it takes to retain power, and will do whatever is necessary to secure their own ends. On the surface, those with power have the stated goal of helping the people, but in reality, they are more likely to harm people than help them.

This is certainly the case of the Sovereign, the Senate, and the Society. All of humanity, all across the universe, is divided into Color-coded classes. Each Color has a set role and function in Society, and marriage between the classes is forbidden, punishable by death. While each class enjoys more freedom than the class below it, all classes have their freedoms restricted for the greater good. Nero explains as much, saying that while he does not believe in God, he believes in humanity. Society has ensured man’s survival, so man must ensure Society’s survival. Everything that is done is done for the greater good, for the Society.

Evidence of such thinking can be found everywhere through the novel. Fitchner, a Gold, fell in love with a young Red girl many years before, during which time they were married and had the girl modified to bear children. This was found out, and the girl and her baby were murdered by the Gold authorities – all for the sake of maintaining the Compact and the Society. This in turn drove Fitchner on to begin the Sons of Ares. As Darrow learns, thousands of cases of such intermarriage have been found out, and the married individuals exterminated – all for the greater good.

Nero’s promises of reform should the House Augustus triumph in the civil war are merely lies designed to bring all forces opposed to the Sovereign to his side, all for the greater good. The Reformers and other groups themselves oppose the way the Society treats all people, especially the low-Colors. The Reds, for example, are unskilled manual laborers who face down death each day on the job. Their working conditions and living conditions are both deplorable, and reduce them to the level of expendable human capital. Each level of society is built upon the last, and supports the next. This is all done for the greater good, and it is something which Darrow seeks to change through justice and freedom.

War

War is an important theme in the novel “Golden Son” by Pierce Brown. War – essentially open combat between two or more opposing sides – consumes a large portion of the novel. The ongoing war – a civil war between the Sovereign and her allies



and the House Augustus and its allies – is a conflict for control of the universe. The Sovereign's aim is to crush the Augustan rebellion, while Nero Augustus seeks to overthrow the Sovereign Octavia.

The war arises out of the feud that has developed between the Augustuses and the Bellonans, and out of the political power-gathering of Nero at the expense of the Sovereign. The Sovereign seeks greater control over the Planet Mars, and conspires with the Bellona family to exterminate the Augustuses. However, Darrow preempts the plan by challenging Cassius to a duel, during which time the Sovereign involves herself to save Cassius's life, declaring she is the law. This is a serious violation of the Compact, and leads to open war between the House of Augustus and the Sovereign and the House of Bellona. The war draws in more and more participants as it gets underway.

Early on, it looks as if the Sovereign and the Bellonans will triumph. They take control of most of Mars, have more troops, ships, supplies, money, and loyal families and planets on their side. However, a handful of unfailingly loyal houses, such as the Telemanses, rally to House Augustus and help achieve victory during the Battle of Mars. The Sovereign is forced to flee the planet, while eighty percent of the Bellonan fleet is captured. That victory brings even more families, planets, and organizations in league with the Augustans.

Darrow knows that war is the only true answer to the justice and equality he seeks. While he knows true change can never come about while Nero is Head of Augustus, or while he may be the future Sovereign, Darrow knows that change can come about under his own future reign. Nero has selected Darrow for his heir, a process set in motion by the war that Darrow initiates by the duel. However, the war appears short-lived as the Jackal betrays the House Augustus, and all of Mars.

Loyalty

Loyalty is an important theme in the novel "Golden Son" by Pierce Brown. Loyalty is the act of being faithful and adherent toward another person, government, family, cause, and so on. Loyalty – and the lack of loyalty by way of betrayal – is utterly crucial to the novel and the development of the plot. In the novel, loyalties remain true, shift, and are pretended all for the sake of politics, sabotage, and war.

When the novel begins, Darrow pretends to be loyal to the House Augustus, though he secretly plots their downfall, and the downfall of all Golds with the Sons of Ares. It is to the Sons of Ares that Darrow is truly loyal. He goes on to pretend to be loyal to the Jackal in order to get closer to the workings of the Augustus family, and because the Jackal promises him the purchase of his contract, ensuring that Darrow will survive the coming sale. Darrow, however, remains loyal to the Sons of Ares. However, the bombings initiated by spies into the Sons leads Darrow to rail against the methods, ultimately rejecting terrorism in favor of legitimate open warfare.



The House Bellona remains loyal to the Sovereign during the civil war, for it knows it will have control of Mars should their side emerge victorious. The members of the House Bellona are themselves all unfailingly loyal to their family, no matter how bloodthirsty or cruel their members might be. The Jackal is loyal to the Augustans only as it suits him, whereas Mustang will do anything out of loyalty for her family. Meanwhile, families are ripped apart by the civil war as Sevro, son of Fitchner, sides with the House Augustus while his father, Fitchner, seemingly sides with the Sovereign.

Late in the novel it is revealed that Fitchner's true allegiance is to the Sons of Ares, not the Sovereign. Fitchner allies himself only partially with the House of Augustus, because the enemy of his enemy is temporarily his friend. Pliny's loyalty to the House Augustus fades when he believes he himself has the chance to grab power, though this does not work out. Jackal also betrays his own father when the potential for power is greatest, leading to the deaths of countless Golds and innocents, including Nero, Lorn, and Fitchner. Roque also betrays the House of Augustus over the destruction of his friendship with Darrow.

Justice

Justice is an important theme in the novel "Golden Son" by Pierce Brown. Justice, which includes rightfulness, morality, and fair conduct and moral treatment, forms the basis for why Darrow does everything that he does in the novel. His development of the idea of justice, who is owed justice, and what justice may come to look like, changes over the course of the novel as events change and different situations occur.

When the novel begins, Darrow's concept of justice is more akin to revenge against the Augustans for the murder of Eo, and the toppling of the Golds to bring about freedom to the low-Colors. Darrow's very narrow view of justice is much less justice indeed than it is about revenge and overthrowing the ruling class. However, when the Sons of Ares carry out bombings that kill even low-Colors as well as Gold targets, Darrow is shocked. He cannot abide the killing of innocents in the pursuit of justice, because that isn't justice.

Darrow's love of Mustang and his friendship with Roque ultimately cause him to realize that not all Golds are bad. Killing all Golds would not be true justice, but mere revenge. This in turn causes him to consider the idea that the Golds can wreck their own power by fighting one another in a civil war. The civil war itself would give the Sons a chance to gain power, or for the Golds to destroy themselves and a new order born in the universe in which justice is assured for all.

Darrow ultimately comes to see justice as something not just for lower and mid-Colors, but for all Colors including Golds. There are good Golds, there are Golds who can change, and there are Golds who feel constrained by even their own system. Just because the Golds rule doesn't necessarily mean they are free to do as they wish. Darrow ultimately comes to see justice as a means to freedom for all, not just some. He



also comes to see justice as a matter of moral treatment for all, without reprisal or revenge against the Golds.

Freedom

Freedom is an important theme in the novel “Golden Son” by Pierce Brown. Freedom is essentially the ability to live one’s own life as one will with responsibility toward the self and toward others. Freedom in the novel is heavily restricted by the Society and the Sovereign. In addition to justice, freedom is something which Darrow seeks and comes to have a better understanding of.

When the novel begins, Darrow wants to liberate the low-Colors, who have very little freedom. Forced by upper Colors to work in the Mines and at other dangerous jobs, the low-Colors have little say in their own lives, and little say in how they die. They are often pawns in the games and politics of the upper classes, such as in the case of Eo. Darrow detests this, and seeks to topple the upper Colors, especially the Golds, to bring about greater freedom.

Darrow comes to learn that each Color – even the Golds – are denied a certain amount of freedom. Each Color class has their expected roles and functions that they must carry out without question. Intermarriage between classes is strictly forbidden under death. Even a seemingly all-powerful Gold like Fitchner could not marry the young Red girl that he wanted to, the result being her death and the death of their son. Fitchner began the Sons of Ares not just to topple bad Golds, but to bring about freedom to all.

As Darrow himself comes to understand by the end of the novel, not all Golds are bad. They themselves are worthy of freedom just as the lowest Reds are worthy of freedom. Darrow’s vision of the future comes to focus on the idea of freedom and equality for all, not freedom for some and vengeance against others. This is marked stride in his thinking, and signals a sense of maturity and a deeper understanding of the way the universe truly is, rather than the way that he thought it was.



Styles

Point of View

Pierce Brown tells his novel “Golden Son” in the first-person limited-omniscient perspective from the point of view of main character, Darrow. This is done for at least two primary reasons. The first is that the story being told is Darrow’s – his rise from Red through the ranks of the Golds to being military commander for a rebellion against the Sovereign herself. There is no one better to tell Darrow’s story than Darrow himself. Secondly, the first-person narrative allows the reader to experience things directly as Darrow experiences them, and allows readers to be privy to his innermost thoughts and feelings – something no one else is. Thus the reader learns more about Darrow, and experiences things directly as he experiences them. The limited-omniscient aspect of the narrative adds a sense of realism to things, as the reader only learns about things as Darrow experiences them. No person knows everything going on at once, and this is certainly true of Darrow. The limited-omniscient aspect also adds a sense of drama and suspense, as the reader does not know what is going to happen next.

Language and Meaning

Pierce Brown tells his novel “Golden Son” in language that is heroic but straightforward, and slightly futuristic. This is done for at least two reasons. First, the novel is meant to reflect and draw on epic stories and histories of the ancient world, from Xenophon to Virgil. The heroic nature of the language, talking about battles, deeds, and conquests, is reflective of those ancient texts and myths, specifically of the Roman Empire. Many of the names and places involved in the story – Augustus, Pliny, Nero, and so on – are directly reflective of the Roman Empire. Secondly, the use of language straightforward and familiar to contemporary readers in the 2010s, as well as language unfamiliar and futuristic (demonDust, dataPads, gorydamn, etc.) create a truly unique future world.

Structure

Pierce Brown divides his novel “Golden Son” into four primary parts, with each part further subdivided into linear, titled, numbered chapters that run from Chapter 1 to Chapter 51. Each part of the novel deals with a series of events and circumstances. For example, Part II: Break, deals with the beginning of the civil war, while Part IV: Ruin, deals with the victory on Mars but the betrayal of the Jackal. This simple and straightforward approach to the novel allows readers to easily follow the plot as it unfolds. The plot itself is fast-paced, full of action, and quickly moves from one event to the next. The simple and straightforward structure helps the reader to also keep up with events as they unfold.



Quotes

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

-- Darrow (Chapter 1 paragraph 9)

Importance: As Darrow trains at the Academy, he is doing more than merely engaging in war games in order to win command of a fleet. He is also pretending to serve the House of Augustus, so that he may in turn destroy it. It is a game that he is playing, in and of itself, where he pretends to serve the very people he has vowed to kill.

Could someone so young, someone from such a piteous family, win? Look what I did at the Institute. I broke the game... Now those prattling bastards have their answer.

-- Darrow (Chapter 2 paragraph 17)

Importance: As Darrow seemingly wins a mock battle at the Academy, he recalls his past briefly. No one ever expected him to win at the Institute because he was so young and so poor. News networks ran with the story, expecting Darrow to be defeated quickly, but he was not. Now, he is on the verge of winning once more at the Academy, confounding all his critics once more.

They are not a rat biting our heels, but a termite colony slowly gnawing our foundation as quietly as possible till they've done such work that our house crumbles around us.

-- The Jackal (Chapter 8 paragraph 3)

Importance: Pliny has been failing at his task to destroy Ares, so the Jackal is taking it upon himself, with Darrow as a figurehead. He reveals that, although he may no longer be a Gold, proper, the Jackal does not want society to be destroyed. By destroying the Sons of Ares instead, the Jackal will regain favor with his father, and be restored. His goal is ultimately to rule over a Second Golden Age.

The next three days pass in a haze, my mind on Eo and what we lost. I cannot find escape from the grief.

-- Darrow (Chapter 10 paragraph 22)

Importance: Darrow recommits to working with the Reds because he learns his wife was pregnant with their child when she was killed. The revelation is horrifying to Darrow, who cannot escape the sadness or the emotional burden it takes on him. He alternates between anger and depression, which in turn steel his resolve to bring down the Golds.

I will die. You will die. We all die and the universe will carry on without care. All that we have is that shout into the wind –how we live. How we go. And how we stand before we fall... So you see, pride is the only thing.

-- Karnus (Chapter 11 paragraph 92)

Importance: At the gala, Karnus and Darrow speak of mortality and pride. While Darrow contends that pride is only a shout into the wind – worthless – Karnus contends that



such a shout is all that people have. How they are remembered is how they lived and how they died. Karnus contends that pride is all people have because it propels them to behave how they will before they die. In many ways, this can be extrapolated for consideration of Darrow, in that Darrow's own sense of pride is formed by the death of his wife and the desire to bring down the Golds. Pride can indeed be rooted in revenge. It is not prideful revenge that Darrow must seek, but actual justice.

I've set things in motion. For once, things couldn't have gone better.
-- Darrow (Chapter 13 paragraph 4)

Importance: Darrow has decided that terrorism is no way to bring about real change. He decides instead to begin a civil war – not between classes but between the Golds themselves. His challenging of Cassius to a duel opens up old wounds and creates bloodshed between rival Houses. This in turn leads to greater fighting and chaos.

I should have known what Tactus would do.
-- Darrow (Chapter 20 paragraph 1)

Importance: As Darrow, the House Augustus, and their household attempt to leave Luna after nearly being killed, Tactus only looks out for himself. He does this by fleeing the escape ship with Lysander, grandson of the Sovereign. Darrow berates himself for not having realized that Tactus's loyalty had its limits. This puts everyone in danger and makes escape unlikely.

This is not how I thought it would go.
-- Darrow (Chapter 25 paragraph 3)

Importance: Nero reveals that much of the Gold class has sided against him and with the Sovereign in the past month since leaving Luna. Help is far away, and the path back to Mars is blocked by the Sovereign's fleet. Darrow realizes there is too much caution in the people who surround Nero, and is angry because he knows things should be going differently. Indeed, nothing is going according to plan any longer. It spells danger for Darrow and his House.

This race – what a beautiful monster. They carry all of humanity's strengths, except one. Empathy. They can change. I know that.
-- Darrow (Chapter 36 paragraph 10)

Importance: Here, Darrow reveals how gray the lines have become, how much harder it is to see the Golds as purely enemies. He knows from his experience with people like Roque and Mustang that Golds are not all evil, and even when they are bad, they can change. This includes becoming empathetic toward others. It will take time to change the Golds completely, but Darrow also realizes that the Golds are not all worthy of destruction, in and of themselves.

Man wasn't born to be any color.
-- Darrow (Chapter 38 paragraph 6)



Importance: As Darrow's forces prepare to battle the forces of the Bellona family for control of Mars, Darrow considers how things have turned out. It isn't one class of men against another, but entire collections of men against another. Golds and Reds battle alike on each side for power, for ideas, for the future. It further demonstrates the idea that no class can be considered in a generalized fashion.

Here, at the end of things, I know we will win Mars. Augustus will be freed. The war will continue. Gold will weaken. And Red will rebel. Maybe, just maybe, they will rise and find freedom.

-- Darrow (Chapter 42 paragraph 46)

Importance: As Darrow is near death before the hands of the Sovereign, he recognizes that he will probably die, but he also knows the war will continue on in victory. What he has started now cannot be stopped. He hopes that the low-Colors will rise and find freedom. Hope is a good way to die, Darrow knows.

This isn't about my people against yours. You aren't Gold. We aren't Red. We're people, Mustang. Each of us can change. Each of us can be what we like.

-- Darrow (Chapter 50 paragraph 61)

Importance: When Darrow confesses the truth of his origins to Mustang, Mustang is understandably shocked. She worries that the war Darrow is seeking will not be one of freedom, but revenge. She worries millions will die, including her own family. Darrow explains that human beings are human beings, and can change. They can choose to be loving and forgiving, or vengeful and murderous. They can choose to be anything they want to be. They don't have to be defined by class. And that is the true goal of the war.