Excerpt from *Red Rising* by Pierce Brown

*Darrow is a Red, a member of the lowest caste in the color-coded society of the future. Like his fellow Reds, he works all day, believing he and his people are making the surface of Mars livable for future generations. However, he discovers humanity already reached the surface generations ago. Vast cities and sprawling parks spread across the planes while Reds like him are nothing more than slaves to the ruling Gold class. Inspired by a longing for justice, and driven by the memory of lost love, Darrow sacrifices everything to infiltrate the legendary Institute, a “proving” ground for the dominant Gold caste, where the next generation of humanity's overlords struggle for power. He will be forced to compete for his life and the very future of civilization against the best and most brutal of Society's ruling class. There, he will stop at nothing to bring down his enemies even if it means he has to become one of them to do so. In the following excerpt, ArchGovernor of the Golds Nero au Augustus discusses the Noble Lie prior to Golds from the best families entering the Institute.*

“Welcome, children of Aureate,” ArchGovernor Nero au Augustus says in a voice as smooth as Eo’s skin. It is preternaturally loud. “I assume you understand the gravity of your presence here. Of the thousand cities of Mars. Of all the Great Families, you are the chosen few. You are the peak of the human pyramid. Today, you will begin your campaign to join the best caste of our race. Your fellows stand like you in the Institutes of Venus, of the Eastern and Western Hemispheres of Earth, of Luna, of the Gas Giant Moons, of Europa, of the Astrodian Greek Cluster and the Astrodian Trojan Cluster, of Mercury, of Callisto, of the joint venture Enceledas and Ceres, and of the farpioneers of Hildas.”

It seems only a day ago that I knew I was a pioneer of Mars. Only a day ago that I suffered so that humanity, desperate to leave a dying Earth, could spread to the red planet. Oh, how well my rulers lied.

Behind Augustus, in the stars, there’s movement, but it is not the stars that move. Nor is it asteroids or comets. It is the Sixth and Fifth Fleets. The Armada of Mars. My breath catches in my chest. The Sixth Fleet is commanded by Cassius’ father, while the smaller Fifth Fleet is under the ArchGovernor’s direct control. Most of the ships are owned by families who owe allegiance to either Augustus or Bellona.

Augustus shows us why we, they, rule. My flesh tingles. I am so small. A billion tons of durosteel and nanosteel move through the heavens, and I have never been beyond Mar’s atmosphere. They are like specks of silver in an ocean of ink. And I am so much less. But those specks could ravage Mars. They could destroy a moon. Those specks rule the ink. An Imperator commands each fleet; a Praetor commands squadrons within that fleet. What I could do with that power…

Augustus is haughty as he gives his speech. I swallow the bile in my throat. Because of the impossible distance of my enemies, my anger was once a cold, quiet sort. Now it burns in me.

“Society has three stages: Savagery, Ascendance, Decadence. The great rise because of Savagery. They rule in Ascendance. They fall because of their own Decadence.”

He tells us how the Persians were felled, how the Romans collapsed because their rulers forgot how their parents gained them an empire. He prattles about Muslim dynasties and European effeminacy and Chinese regionalism and American self-loathing and self-neutering. All the ancient names.

“Our Savagery began when our capital, Luna, rebelled against the tyranny of Earth and freed herself from the shackles of Demokracy, from the Noble Lie—the idea that men are brothers and are created equal.”

Augustus weaves lies of his own with that golden tongue of his. He tells of the Golds’ suffering. The Masses sat on the wagon and expected the great to pull, he reminds. They sat whipping the great until we could no longer take it.

I remember a different whipping.

“Men are not created equal; we all know this. There are averages. There are outliers. There are the ugly. There are the beautiful. This would not be if we were all equal. A Red can no more command a starship than a Green can serve as a doctor!”

There’s more laughter across the square as he tells us to look at pathetic Athens, the birthplace of the cancer they call Demokracy. Look how it fell to Sparta. The Noble Lie made Athens weak. It made their citizens turn on their best general, Alcibiades, because of jealousy.

“Even the nations of Earth grew jealous of one another. The United States of America exacted this idea of equality through force. And when the nations united, the Americans were surprised to find that they were disliked! The Masses are jealous! How wonderful a dream it would be if all men were created equal! But we are not.

“It is against the Noble Lie that we fight. But as I said before, as I say to you now, there is another evil against which we war. It is a more pernicious evil. It is a subversive, slow evil. It is not a wildfire. It is a cancer. And that cancer is Decadence. Our Society has passed from Savagery to Ascendance. But like our spiritual ancestors, the Romans, we too can fall into Decadence.”

He speaks of the Pixies.

“You are the best of humanity. But you have been coddled. You have been treated like children. Were you born to a different Color, you would have calluses. You would have scars. You would know pain.”

He smiles as if he knows pain. I hate this man.

“You think you know pain. You think the Society is an inevitable force of humanity. You think Her the end of history. But many have thought that before. Many ruling classes have believed theirs to be the last, the pinnacle. They grew soft. Fat. They forgot that calluses, wounds, scars, and hardship preserve all those fine pleasure clubs you young boys love to frequent and all those fine silks and diamonds and unicorns you girls ask for on birthdays.”

“Many Aureates have not sacrificed. That is why they do not wear this.” He shows a long scar on his right cheek. Octavia au Lune has the same scar. “The Scar of a Peer. We are not the masters of the Solar System because we are born. We are the masters because we, the Peerless Scarred, the iron Golds, made is that way.”

He touches the scar on his cheek. I’d give him another if I were closer. The children around me suck down this man’s garbage like oxygen.

“Right now, the Colors who mind this planet are harder than you. They are born with calluses. Born with scars and hatred. They are tough as nanosteel. Fortunately, they are also very stupid. For instance, this *Persephone* you have no doubt heard of is nothing more than a dim girl who thought singing a song was worth a hanging.”

I bite a bloody hole in my cheek. My skin shivers from rage as I find out that my wife is part of this bastard’s speech.

“The girl did not even know the video would be leaked. Yet it is her willingness to suffer hardship that gave her power. Martyrs, you see, are like bees. Their only power comes in death. How many of you would sacrifice yourself to not kill, but merely hurt your enemy? Not one of you, I wager.”

I taste blood in my mouth. I have the knifeRing Dancer gave me. But I breathe the fury down. I am not a martyr. I am not vengeance. I am Eo’s dream. Still, doing nothing while her murderer gloats feels like a betrayal.

“In time you will receive your Scars from my sword,” Augustus closes. “But first you must earn them.”