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Pierce Brown , Rik Hoskin , Eli Powell

Red Rising: Sons of Ares

United States (2018)

TAGS: Aeneas Aeneid Ancient Slavery Ares Carthage Diana Gods Greek Art Latin (Language) Mars Phoenix (Bird) Poseidon Punic Wars Roman History Rome Sparta Zeus





We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	Red Rising: Sons of Ares
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	United States of America, United Kingdom, Canada
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2018
First Edition Details	Pierce Brown, *Pierce Brown's Red Rising: Sons of Ares*. New York: Dynamite Comics, 2018.
ISBN	9781524104924
Genre	Graphic novels
Target Audience	Young adults (and teens)
Author of the Entry	Sonya Nevin, University of Roehampton, sonya.nevin@roehampton.ac.uk
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Creators



Pierce Brown by Gage Skidmore. Retrieved from Wikipedia, licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0 (accessed: January 4, 2022).

Pierce Brown , b. 1988 (Author)

Pierce Brown is a USA-based science-fiction author. He graduated from Pepperdine University in 2010 before working in a range of industries, as a social media manager, and as a political campaign aide. He became a professional writer and is the creator of the *Red Rising* series of novels of which the work in this entry is a prequel off-shoot.

Sources:

Official website (accessed: October 21, 2019)

Profile at Twitter (accessed: October 21, 2019)

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Rik Hoskin (Scriptwriter)

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Eli Powell (Illustrator)

Eli Powell is a comic book artist and writer from Seattle, Washington, in the USA. He graduated from the School of Visual Arts in 2015. He co-created Yakuza Demon Killers, a series published with IDW Publishing.

Sources:

Official website (accessed: October 21, 2019).

Bio prepared by Sonya Nevin, University of Roehampton: sonya.nevin@roehampton.ac.uk

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Additional information

Summary

Red Rising: Sons of Ares is the graphic novel prequel to the novels of the hugely popular *Red Rising* science-fiction series. The series imagines a rigidly hierarchical interplanetary society which takes much of its form from ancient Greek myths of the ages of humans and from ancient Roman culture. While the main series witnesses an uprising by the Sons of Ares, a terrorist group who fight against oppression, *Red Rising: Sons of Ares* takes readers back to the origins of the rebellion.

The story opens with a brief history of the colonisation of the solar system. Changes to the human form were carried out to suit colonists to different environments and forms of work. At the lowest end of the social scale are the labouring Reds, above them Pinks, Blues, Yellows, Greens, and above them Whites, Silvers and the ruling class of Golds. The narrative then begins with a man being kidnapped from the street by a masked gang. A flashback reveals the gang-leader's origins as a malformed Gold infant who survived rites of exposure only to endure a childhood of bullying at the hands of other Golds. He survived further ordeals and was accepted into an elite military unit. Back in the present, the kidnappers are interrupted; they kill their hostage and flee through lawless back-streets. A further flash-back relates the progress of the gang-leader, Fitchner au Barca, through further rites of passage, followed by his rejection by his best friend Arturius – carried out by Arturius to please his socially conservative mother. In real time, Barca kills a host of assailants before recalling that even a 'monster' like himself can fall in love.

The scene moves to the moon, Triton, in the grip of an industrial terraforming process. Chronologically this is before the main narrative. Barca is arriving to take up his first professional post. He astonishes the Red workforce by attempting to save endangered workers during an industrial accident. The Reds return the favour by rescuing Barca. Following this incident, Barca gets to know some of the Reds and forms a relationship with a young woman, Bryn of Cryssos. They marry, but must keep their illegal relationship a secret. Barca is moved from Triton to Mars; with trepidation he takes Bryn and her sister with him. Bryn and Barca begin fertility treatment to make their genomes compatible; a secret child, Sevro, is born. We learn that in the present the family's happiness has been shattered. Arturius has progressed to a position of power and holds Bryn and the

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child in a state laboratory. Arturius threatens to have the baby 'carved' open if Bryn will not confirm who the father is. Barca's gang blast their way into the lab. There is a short-lived reunion, but ultimately Barca is forced to choose whether to save Bryn or his son, Sevro. He chooses Sevro, leaving Bryn as Arturius' captive. The novel ends with an epilogue. Barca is seated behind a desk in a dark room, masked. Another masked gang-member – Bryn's sister – brings in a young visitor. Barca introduces himself: "My name is Ares". The narrator calls it "the beginning".

Analysis

The classical allusions within *Red Rising: Sons of Ares* are rich and varied. Much of the classical feeling stems from the use of superficial naming and language devices. Fitchner au Barca's name reflects that of Hannibal Barca, chief antagonist of Rome. Other names include 'Varus', a Roman name, as well as classical-style names such as 'Anicetus', 'Gaianna', 'Irenia', 'Licenus', 'Anthousa', 'Fenix' (Phoenix); Barca's former friend is the grandly-named 'Arcturius, Primus of the House Jupiter'. Other Gold houses include House Mars, House Diana, 'Archgovernor Augustus' presides over Mars, home to the 'Olympic Mons' and 'Hadrian Park'. 'Theron au Aktler's' name is reminiscent of Theron of Akragas, tyrant on Sicily in the late fifth century BCE. Barca's low-class wife and sister-in-law have names from a contrasting tradition, with the Welsh 'Bryn' and 'Ryanna' (from *Rhiannon* which appears in Welsh myth in *The Mabinogion*) placed in opposition to the Greco-Roman names. Some of the names are classical, some are like classical names, and together this creates a milieu of a society that is believable yet different from our own.

Many of the features of this universe reflect aspects of Roman society and, to a lesser extent, ancient Greek. The rigid colour-schemed hierarchy of the classes echoes Hesiod's eras in which the most excellent humans were Gold, replaced by later generations who were variously Silver, Bronze, then Iron, in declining quality (*Works and Days*, 110–181). This essential structure is reinforced by Roman-styled officials (arch-governor, primus, etc) while all members of the Gold class are referred to by the Latin title '*dominus*' by members of the other classes. Reds may be referred to as 'plebs'. The lowly Obsidians engage in cult worship of their *dominus*, a practice encouraged by the Golds who treat it in a manner reminiscent of imperial emperor cult. (The Obsidians actually rank lower than the Reds, and are the only

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group referred to by a material rather than a colour – gold and silver being colours as well as metals. This perhaps demonstrates a coyness about the racial insensitivity of effectively naming the lowest group, the superstitious industrial slaves, the Black group). People swear 'By Hades' and 'By Jove', evoking classical antiquity, although they also use more Christian-orientated language and wish people 'to hell' or refer to the condemned as 'sacrificial lambs'.

The story's focus on class segregation and slavery explores some of the social anxieties that have concerned social commentators since antiquity. The rise of the rebellion has particular resonance with the events of the Spartacus revolt, in which slaves across Italy joined a revolution started by gladiators. This space-age Spartacus carries the name of that other 'rebel' Hannibal Barca, but he takes the name of 'Ares', suggesting his groups' commitment to violent struggle. The rebels are thereby glorified as the 'sons of Ares', the lowest of society re-inventing themselves as the children of a god. 'Ares' was perhaps chosen over the more Roman 'Mars' to avoid confusing Mars the god and Mars the planet, which features heavily in the series. Barca/Ares' chosen look, however, is that of Zeus/Poseidon. He wears a mask based on the face of the Artemision Zeus/Poseidon, a bronze statue from antiquity discovered in the 1920s (now in the National Archaeological Museum in Athens). This mask is the central image of the front cover and it recurs throughout the graphic novel. Its impassive appearance often forms a striking contrast with the acts of violence being carried out. At one point Barca removes his mask when he is confronted with his true identity and he assumes it again to strike. Another character even refers to this as a 'dramatic performance', highlighting the dramatic element of the mask play. Readers may not realise that Barca wears a mask more likely to be Zeus or Poseidon than Ares, but they may well recognise that this is a classical face, a god even, and that Barca is beginning his adoption of his Ares persona. In a classical-ised world, Barca is being subversive by using the classical in a rebellion that purports to be the rise of the lowest against the high; however, his adoption of the god persona may also express a saviour complex, with Barca flaunting his class-superiority over his gang as a method of asserting his right to rule them.

The rites-of-passage in *Red Rising: Sons of Ares* have a Greco-Roman atmosphere. The infant exposure practiced by the Gold's 'Board of Quality Control' echoes the Spartan rite of exposure (a practice also carried out elsewhere in antiquity) which was made more famous

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recently through Frank Miller's *300* (graphic novel 1998; film 2006). The image of heavily ritualised activity at an altar surrounded by men in long hooded robes forms an unsettling contrast with the deliberately clinical name of the board administering the rite. The Golds' military youth training scheme draws on the Spartan *agoge*, and its members graduate by surviving a brutal one-on-one fight between naked competitors which has a similarly Spartan feel. That Barca passes by using *too much* violence then suggests values of moderation more familiar from Athenian philosophy; he misses the middle way and in doing so confirms that he is not quite like the others of his class. Nonetheless, Barca does graduate and joins his class in chanting the Latin motto: Per Aspera Ad Astera ('To the stars through hardship', a real Latin phrase, also similar to 'Per ardua ad astra' the motto of the British Royal Airforce amongst others) – the motto will be repeated later between Golds as a form of bonding. The young soldiers are marked with scars across their cheek-bones as a sign of their distinction. This reflects rites-of-passages in many cultures but is arguably channelling the Prussian bestowal of duelling scars, a badge of honour, as a form of association with the militarism of that culture.

German culture features again when Barca must attend the opera. Although it is not stated, nor the words translated, the performance is that of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, as revealed through the lines, "Mir Erkoren, mir verloren, hehr und heil" ('destined for me, lost to me dear and holy'). Barca's witness of the opera is shown to coincide with his wife and sister-in-law being stopped and strip-searched in the street. The juxtaposition urges the reader to note the contrast between the romanticised love shown in the opera and the reality of life for cross-class couples and the lack of bodily autonomy suffered by the lowest classes. Bryn will soon be 'lost to' Barca; like Aeneas, the founder of Rome, Barca will form a new era with his son, not his wife (Virgil, *Aeneid*, book 2).

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts

Aeneas Aeneid Ancient Slavery Ares Carthage Diana Gods Greek Art Latin (Language) Mars Phoenix (Bird) Poseidon Punic Wars Roman History Rome Sparta Zeus

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Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Abandonment Adolescence Adventure Adversity Authority Boys Character traits Child, children Coming of age Conflict Disobedience Freedom Friendship Identity Justice Loss Names Oppression Orphans Parents (and children) Past Peers Political changes Rejection Relationships Resilience Revenge Self Social class Society Values Violence
Further Reading	Rogers, B. M. and Eldon B. Stevenson, eds., *Classical Traditions in Science Fiction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

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