

Critique of Violence in Ender's Game

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Abstract: At heart of the film thus is the loss of innocence in Ender who is manipulated from being a child skilled in combat to a ruthless annihilator of an entire alien species. Ender resents his manipulation by the adults to turn him into a cold heartless killer and feels revulsion at himself for having killed Bonzo and Stilson out of defense but nonetheless in cold blood and feels hatred at the adults for turning him into a cold heartless killer and destroyed his childhood. It is out of such repentance of his murderous ways that Ender seeks to repopulate a planet with the Formic species. Ender's game is thus a film about the brutal ways of war and how it destroys Ender's conscience and innocence by turning him into a ruthless killer without any compassion like his brother sociopath Peter. Ender's game is thus about the childhood loss of innocence that comes with the initiation to combat and violence, Ender finds himself manipulated into turning into a heartless and brutal murderer at the end of Combat school, with the blood of Bonzo, Stilson and the Formic race on his hands.

Keywords: Violence, Orson Scott Card, Killing, Manipulation, Guilt

In the speculative future in *Ender's Game*, humanity is preparing to launch an attack on the homeworld of an alien race called the Formics who had attacked Earth and killed millions. Over the course of fifty years, gifted children are trained by the International Fleet to become commanders of a new fleet for this counter-attack.

Cadet Andrew "Ender" Wiggin draws the attention of Colonel Hyrum Graff and Major Gwen Anderson by his aptitude in simulated space combat. They order the removal of his monitor, signifying the end of the cadet program. Ender is attacked by Stilson, a student he defeated in the combat simulation, but Ender fights back and nearly kills him. Ender confesses his guilt to his older sister Valentine, but is harassed further by their older brother Peter. Graff arrives to reveal he was being tested and is still part of the program. Graff brings Ender to Battle School, placing Ender with other cadets his age, but treats him as extraordinary, ostracizing him from the others. Ender resents being singled out and isolated from his peers.

Among other studies in defence and combat training, the cadets are placed in squads and perform training games in a zero gravity "Battle Room". Ender quickly adapts to the games, devising new strategies older

students have not yet seen. Graff reassigns Ender to Salamander Army, led by Commander Bonzo Madrid. Bonzo is resentful of the new addition and prevents Ender from training. Another cadet, Petra Arkanian, takes Ender and trains him privately. In one match, Ender goes against Bonzo's orders and works with Petra to achieve a key victory for his army. Meanwhile, Ender plays a computerized "mind game" set in a fantasy world aimed to present difficult choices to the player. In one situation, Ender creates an outside the box solution to overcome a seemingly unsolvable problem. Later, he encounters a Formic in the game, and then a simulated image of Valentine entering the ruins of a castle. Inside, he finds another image of Valentine but as he nears, it turns into an image of Peter before the game ends. It is a foreshadowing of his own manipulation by the adults to turn into a ruthless killer and an annihilator of an entire alien Formic species by the end of the film. Ender turns into Peter, the sociopath that he dreads and hates. At learning he has turned into Peter Ender experiences remorse and seeks to make amends to the Formics by rescuing the incubus Queen to repopulate another planet with Formics.

Graff promotes Ender to his own squad, made from other students that have gained Ender's trust. They are put in increasingly difficult battles. In one match against two other teams including Bonzo's squad, Ender devises a novel strategy of sacrificing part of his team to achieve a goal, impressing Graff. Bonzo physically attacks Ender in the bathroom after the match, but Ender fights back and Bonzo falls during the struggle, accidentally paralyzing him. Guilty over this, Ender prepares to quit Battle School, but Graff has Valentine speak to him and

persuade him to continue. Ender has doubts about continuing because he fears he will just turn out to be another Peter, but Valentine convinces him he has to save the human race. Ender hates being turned into a cold blooded killer with the deaths of Bonzo and Stilson on his hands and the way the adults have turned him into a murderer just to advance humanity's violence against an alien species which eventually had intended them no harm.

Graff takes Ender to humanity's forward base on a former Formic planet near their homeworld. There, Ender meets Mazer Rackham, who explains how he spotted the shared-mind nature of the Formics to stop the attack fifty years prior. Ender finds that his former squad members are also here to help him train in computerized simulations of large fleet combat; Rackham puts special emphasis on the fleet's Molecular Detachment (MD) Device that is capable of disintegrating matter. Ender's training is rigorous and Anderson expresses concern they are pushing Ender too fast, but Graff notes they have run out of time to replace Ender.

Ender's final test is monitored by several of the fleet commanders. As the simulation starts, Ender finds his fleet over the Formic homeworld and vastly outnumbered. He orders most of his fleet to sacrifice themselves to protect the MD long enough to fire on the homeworld. The simulation ends, and Ender believes the test is over, but the commanders restart the video screens, showing that the destruction of the Formic homeworld was real and Ender had been controlling the real fleet this time. Despite Graff's assurance he will be known as a hero, Ender is furious as he feels responsible for the annihilation and everyone will

remember him as a killer. Ender feels the adults have manipulated him to kill Stilson, Bonzo and the Formic species, he feels his training at combat school has turned him into a merciless killer like his brother Peter and the result is that he hates the adults for taking away his innocence and turning him into a ruthless killer.

Ender, now ten years old, is promoted to Command School on Eros, skipping several years of training. After some preliminary battles in the simulator, he is introduced to a former war hero, Mazer Rackham. From now on, while believing them to be simulations controlled by Mazer, Ender directs real human spacecraft against bugged fleets via an instantaneous communicator. As the skirmishes become harder, he is joined by some of his friends from the Battle School as sub-commanders. Despite this, Ender becomes depressed by the battles, his isolation, and by the way Mazer treats him.

When told that he is facing his final test, Ender finds his fleet far outnumbered by the Formics surrounding their queens' homeworld. Hoping to get himself expelled from the school for his ruthlessness, he sacrifices his entire fleet to launch a Molecular Detachment Device. The Device destroys the planet and the surrounding bugged fleet. Mazer informs Ender that he has been fighting real battles and not simulations, and that Ender has won the war. Ender becomes more depressed on learning this and of the deaths of Stilson and Bonzo.

As Ender struggles with his feelings, he recognizes one of the Formic structures nearby similar to the ruined castle from the game, and believing they were trying to communicate with him, races out towards it. He follows the path set by the game, and

encounters a dying Formic queen who has been protecting another queen egg. The Formics regret their original attack on Earth and had never intended to continue the war. The Queen acknowledges that while Ender carried out the genocide of her race, he had only wanted peace and forgives him. Ender writes in a letter to Valentine that he is heading to deep space with the egg, determined to colonize a new Formic world with it. Ender had never intended genocide or to become a cold blooded murderer of the Formic Race and feels remorse about the genocide, seeking to make amends to the Formic Race thereafter by repopulating a planet with a new Formic colony.

Ender finds that his training in Combat school increasingly isolating and depressing. At the end of Combat school he finds himself guilty of the murders of Bonzo and Stilson in a bid to defend himself and finds that Combat school has brought out the inherent violence and murderer in him and turned him into a destroyer and killer. The same feelings of guilty overwhelm him when he kills the entire Formic race on a lie to him by the adult Commanders that it was all just a simulation, he feels depressed that he has annihilated an entire species and believes that the Formic Queen had been trying to communicate with him via the computer game he had been playing.

He then resolves to take the incubus of the new Formic Queen to a new planet to recreate the Formic race. What alienates Ender is that Combat school has isolated him and turned him into a ruthless killer with only the instinct to destroy like his sociopath brother Peter. All traces of compassion seem to have been erased in him by the end of his journey which compels him to seek to revive the Formic race in

repatriation for the destruction he has caused. Ender's tale is also about the manipulation of children by ruthless adults who will sacrifice Ender's youth and innocence to achieve their aims of annihilating the Formic race who prove a threat to human civilization though Ender eventually discovers the Formics had never intended to attack them and thus resolves to make amends to the Formics by taking the incubus Formic Queen to a new planet to repopulate the planet with the Formic species.

At heart of the film thus is the loss of innocence in Ender who is manipulated from being a child skilled in combat to a ruthless annihilator of an entire alien species. Ender resents his manipulation by the adults to turn him into a cold heartless killer and feels revulsion at himself for having killed Bonzo and Stilson out of defense but nonetheless in cold blood and feels hatred at the adults for turning him into a cold heartless killer and destroyed his childhood. It is out of such repentance of his murderous ways that Ender seeks to repopulate a planet with the Formic species. Ender's game is thus a film about the brutal ways of war and how it destroys Ender's conscience and innocence by turning him into a ruthless killer without any compassion like his brother sociopath Peter. Ender himself mentions that he kills his enemy by first understanding them and knowing what will undo them then executing his deadly kill but discloses that in the moment he understands his enemies he

loves them. This explains why he feels he must make amends to the Formic species.

Ender's game is thus about the childhood loss of innocence that comes with the initiation to combat and violence, Ender finds himself manipulated into turning into a heartless and brutal murderer at the end of Combat school, with the blood of Bonzo, Stilson and the Formic race on his hands. Ender's game is thus a critique of violence and war mongering instinct in the human species, it is fear of the unknown that drives us to kill alien species before they attack us, not knowing they intend no ill or violence towards our species. The solution to conflict is communication rather than violence, as Ender's communication with the Formic Queen reveals they had not intended to kill the human race but simply to observe. Ender's game thus remains a critique of military violence and the loss of innocence that it leads to in the child Ender. Ender then resolves to replace violence and murder with peace by recovering the Formic species on another planet.

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