

Ender's Game

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Putative Observations – Foils

Consider that the Formics might be a foil for Humanity. Just as hive-queens marshal their drones, our institutions engender and limit our behavior. Card seems to consider this directly: “I understood at levels deeper than speech, how a great military leader imposes his will on his enemy, and makes his own army a willing extension of himself.”¹

Consider that Peter might be a foil for Ender. When Graff states “We need a Napoleon or Alexander.” it is Peter who looks like Alexander and later becomes Hegemon, just as Alexander was crowned Hegemon after uniting the Hellenic city-states.² Throughout, Ender typically deploys tactics which break the rules of the game, while Peter just does not play the games handed him.

Also, consider that Peter may have only been acting like a psychopath. Given the well-known defeat of the Second Invasion, Peter does not need to enter the IF – i.e. since other people have demonstrated the ability to clean up the Formics, let them. He fakes the sadism which allows him to first avoid IF conscription and then later leverage Val. However, when the IF asks for a Third from the Wiggins, he realizes that he overestimated Humanity, and that his life will be difficult because he needs to adequately prepare³ Ender while also maintaining the act. It's only when the cameras are off – no monitoring – that Peter can drop his act and tell Ender that he is his brother and that he loves him.⁴

Putative Observations – Communication

Contact is itself a form of communication. What does it say of a species that instead of observing at a remove, immediately colonizes whole worlds? Similarly, what does it say of a person that their first move is to bully or physically harm someone?

Implications – *ius in bello*

If someone's default way of greeting a stranger is to initiate a strike, then Ender sums his personal cost of all future consequences of not dissuading the antagonist. For him, this large cost justifies all retaliations.

However, Ender fails to discriminate between future antagonists: the ‘good’ one that abandons the first-strike mentality, and the ‘evil’ one that continues it. When Ender discovers that he has killed, he is torn and seems unable to determine whether the collateral damage was acceptable or not. Yet he continues with his calculus – instead of refusing to play IF's wargame after killing Bonzo, he seeks to compel them to end it.

To summarize, in Ender's personal calculus of *ius in bello*, the antagonist's willingness to strike first justifies any and all retaliations, and Ender is not required to weigh the possible futures.

Applying this calculus to species, discrimination of combatant and non-combatant is no longer apposite due to Formic-Human foil equivalence – i.e. we are complicit hive-members of the world's institutions. It matters not that we disagree, when we allow a game to be played that has an outcome of ‘terraform worlds with abandon’.

As for proportionality, Ender's summation-calculus can also be applied retrospectively – the colonizing species has done this countless times before and that the only consequences have been those which accrued to the other injured parties. For example, assume that the hive-queen was not lying when she said “We thought we were the only thinking beings in the universe, until we met you, but never did we dream that thought could arise from the lonely animals who cannot dream each other's dreams.”

Since it took a reginacide for the Formics to even take notice of Humans, how many other intelligent species did they plow under without realizing it? Given Ender's calculus, Xenocide then becomes a just response.

¹ Ender's Game and Philosophy, edited by Kevin S. Decker, published in 2013 as ISBN 978-1-118-38657-6; quote referenced in the section by Jeffery L. Nicholas – Of Gods and Buggers

² Alexander then goes on to defeat the Persians at Issus and Gaugamela, with the latter resembling the Second Invasion: Darius' command & control seems hive-queen-like, and Alexander's decapitative strike seems Rackham-like.

³ Much as Bean surreptitiously helps Ender later on.

”They used to take pleasure in building things that would stand up even when a lot of the obvious supports had been removed. Peter, in turn, liked to remove a block here or there, so the structure would be fragile enough that the next person to touch it would knock it down. Peter was an ass, but he did provide some focus to their childhood.”

⁴ Why does Peter apologize that night before Ender is inducted into Battle School? Is it for the past, or for the future where most of the outcomes for Ender are not good?

As Ender does not appreciate the guilt implicit in the hive-queen's statement, consider that by playing the Giant's Drink game, Ender's mind has been wormed and is now slaved to the hive-queen. "I've spent my life as someone's pawn."

Implications – ius post bellum

While Ender is an exemplary tactician who has been subverted by playing the wrong games, Peter is an exemplary strategist who becomes a modern Bismarck by avoiding the traps that games can be. This difference in outcomes belies their differences in post-conflict expectations.

Throughout, Ender never contemplates a *pax inter 'pares'*. For example, what paths were there for Bonzo after Ender had humiliated him? Either Bonzo would resort to violence, or some other means of getting even. While Ender broke other rules in the game, the one rule he never broke was that there can only be one child at the top of the pyramid of Graff's kids.

Clausewitz's "War is politics by other means" is a constant admonishment to keep the future in mind when waging war – i.e. violence should always serve a greater political purpose, and we should always be preparing for a future that we can live with.

Given this, the Formics have a real political⁵ problem: a) their rampant colonial activity nearly killed off Humanity, and b) as described, the Formics have the ceaseless rapacity of the alien from Alien combined with the psionic powers of a Stephen King fright-fest.

Accidentally or not, the Formics trigger Humans' 'Burn with Fire!' response. Any *post bellum pax* that both species survive to enjoy requires that the initially injured party have at least power parity so as to dissuade another first strike. Good luck establishing that parity with psionic faster-than-light weapons on the loose.

Implications - Culture → War

That said, Human culture could also be described as a psionic weapon – e.g. shared military schooling helps officers coordinate faster. And some cultures have exercised their first-strike capabilities – e.g. United States' 'Manifest Destiny', Stalinist Socialism, Spanish Inquisition's forced conversions, Islam's wars of expansion, several religions' requirement of conversion before marriage. By Ender's calculus, each of these cultures could be destroyed for its past sins, while Peter would rather constantly prune them to preclude any further aggression.

Without Peters, we get Enders.

de memoriae

What I enjoyed most about Ender's Game was that it mirrored childhood – i.e. your long-term memory starts working, and while you don't understand most of what's happening, you still remember it. Later on in life you can look back, and only then do you understand.

⁵ What does queen warfare look like? Or does the book depict it – with one queen using Ender? – since Formics have no written history, there is nothing to corroborate the queen's story.