

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 chooses to 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 International Fleet (IF) – i.e. since other people have demonstrated the ability to clean up the Formics, let them. He then fakes the troubling traits which allow him to avoid IF conscription.³ However, when the IF asks for a Third from the Wiggins, he realizes that he overestimated Humanity and he needs to maintain his act⁴ because otherwise IF would have already stopped him from wrecking their precious Third. It's only when the monitoring is off that Peter can drop his act and tell Ender that he is his brother and that he loves him.⁵

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.”

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 Peter's choice to win by deception mirrors the hive-queen's later psy-ops against Ender.

⁴ 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.”

⁵ 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?

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.

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.⁶ 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 political⁷ 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. Such a peace seems untenable given the lack of defenses against psionic warfare.⁸

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 philosophies of 'jus ad/in bello' are simple sophistry⁹ that only perpetuates war.

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, etc... 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.

⁶ Peter can also be seen to be stuck: he has the guilt that he feels regarding his mis-judgement of the need for a Rackham replacement – i.e. no matter how smart you are, there will be mis-steps....

⁷ 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.

⁸ How many other human minds has the hive-queen wormed?

⁹ Given an alien mind which is a priori unknown, is there any defense of one's actions?