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Battle School: An *Ender's Game* Adaptation

In today's media, an author of an original text only contributes to a portion of its discussion. The majority of a text's influence comes from the ways in which its audience interprets it. Modern audiences often become authors themselves, presenting discussions found in original works of literature as new adaptations while analyzing the way in which it was first conveyed. In creating this "New Media," many of the themes that the original world was built upon become translated into our present-day society, offering a commentary on the current state of humanity. Orson Scott Card's science fiction novel *Ender's Game*, which explores the various social issues present in a futuristic, martial world, is an excellent example of how a fictional world can be connected to real life. I have chosen to create a New Media adaptation of *Ender's Game* in the form of a mobile game. This game connects the issues of *Ender's Game* to their counterparts in today's society, adding to the original narrative while offering an interactive experience for its audience to share and enjoy.

Ender's Game is centered around Ender Wiggin, an eleven-year-old in a dystopian future where the government trains children to fight a supposedly malicious alien species known as the Formics (Card 1985). Ender is a creative, intelligent boy who knows how to gain the upper hand in a fight, often violently turning the tables on those who attempt to bully or belittle him. Those in power see his potential as a commander and send him to "Battle School," a space station where he is run through a series of rigorous mental and psychological exercises that challenge

his resolve and leadership skills. These tests include virtual "games" that test his decision-making abilities and his ability to work under pressure. Battle School students are sorted into multiple opposing armies that battle against one another regularly, both virtually and in real life, as part of their training. Ender's teachers allow Ender to settle his own disputes, which leads to the death of a rival student. As a final "test," Ender is sent to Command School to battle a massive virtual army of the Formics. Alongside his Battle School partners and Mazer Rackham, a highly celebrated commander, Ender wins the battle. Afterwards, however, Ender discovers that the battle was not simulated and that he has eradicated an entire species. Deeply sickened by his actions, he joins a colonization mission and discovers a single, unhatched Formic pupa on a new planet. Ender takes it upon himself to search for a suitable location to rebuild the Formic species.

My New Media adaptation is a mobile adventure game titled "Battle School." This game brings the concept of the virtual "mind games" the Battle School students played to the audience of *Ender's Game*, allowing them to step into Ender's shoes and test their decision-making skills in an interactive environment. This game will be a text-based battle simulation that allows the player to select an army and run through an array of challenges that test their mental faculties. The game will pull information about the player's thoughts and mindset by communicating with a neural receiver (Figure 1). This receiver, designed to look like an inconspicuous charging cable, analyzes why those who play the game make certain decisions. Every choice counts - the players are constantly being monitored to determine if they have what it takes to be the next great commander.

The game begins by asking the player to connect their neural receiver to their device (Figure 3). This is not optional; the game will not launch if the receiver is not used. Once

connected, users will be prompted with a screen asking them to select an army with which they will train; Dragon, Phoenix, Rabbit, Rat, or Salamander. Each army has carefully selected qualities designed to attract specific personality types, with the neural receiver confirming this compatibility. The Dragon Army is for those with sharp minds and a burning desire to come out on top in any situation. The Phoenix Army is for the creative thinkers, those who come up with unorthodox solutions to difficult challenges. The Rabbit Army is for those who are more compassionate. The Rat Army is for those who lack confidence yet still show signs of promise. Lastly, the Salamander Army - green by no coincidence - is for those with little experience but big aspirations.

While the player may believe they have a choice in which army they join, this is actually an illusion. Upon selecting an army, the neural receiver will scan their thoughts and experiences to determine if their personality is a match for the army they have selected. If they are not compatible, the game will tell them that their selected army is full and force them to select again. Once chosen, there's no turning back; the player's "decision" is final. The player will then be tasked with completing a series of challenges designed to test their mental strength and reasoning skills. These can range from battle smarts (Figure 6) to creative design and other concepts. Later challenges are designed to be unsolvable to test the player's anger response; a good commander remains resolute and resourceful in a stressful environment. Once all challenges are complete, their results will be processed and they will be told if they have what it takes to be a commander or if they fell short of the mark. If a player shows promise, the collected data is uploaded to the Battle School and the player is reviewed for potential recruitment (Figure 7).

This game acts as commentary on the variety of possible New Media interpretations of *Ender's Game*. Ender's futuristic, arguably dystopian world raises many questions about the

beliefs and mindset of his society. Were Ender's various "real-world" fights justifiable acts of self-defense? Or would they have been seen as brutal, emotionless murders? The way in which users perceive the choices they make in this game answers this question. When faced with an alien threat, they can choose either to kill only when necessary or to decimate their opposition to prevent future conflicts. By analyzing their own decisions and discovering their nature, players can gain a greater understanding of Ender's situation. The potential for failure in this game also leads to the question of why Ender's teachers put him through such difficult exercises. Did they truly believe he would excel as a commander, or did they simply use him as a means of fighting their battles while keeping their hands clean? When Ender passed his trials and made a lasting impression while under surveillance, the government effectively reshaped his entire childhood. Ender's teachers needed to probe Ender's thoughts to determine his strength, similar to how this game functions. A mobile game such as this could potentially impact the way someone thinks, leading its audience to wonder if changing a person's life in this way should be considered acceptable.

Other questionable aspects of the society in *Ender's Game* are considered in this interactive adaptation. War and conflict in the novel revolves around the use of children in combat, drawing emphasis on a child's innocence and predisposition to follow orders. A mobile game such as this would be targeted towards a younger audience, as the majority of smartphone gamers are children and teenagers. This game's challenging, mind-bending scenarios combined with its young demographic propose an interesting social question: are children capable of making choices that adults cannot? What qualities of a child's personality makes him or her different from an adult? This concept was hinted at in *Ender's Game*, and in this adaptation this same consideration is digitally redirected to a young audience.

This game also comments on the present-day socio-cultural connections found in *Ender's Game*. When people play this game, they are immediately separated into armies based upon their personality types, forming an artificial society where people who don't share the same ideals are forced to turn against one another. While this society is fictional, there are real government constructs in today's world who treat their citizens in much the same way. How should societies treat newcomers or those who are dissimilar? This game also touches on fears of surveillance and the idea of manipulation. The game is built around an agenda set by those running Battle School, which is essentially reading the minds of young children. A core aspect of the game's design is to alter the thought processes of students who play. Many foreigners or those who are uneducated in today's world are similarly manipulated by propaganda created by governments that wish to impose their will upon their citizens.

The rise of New Media has given the collective audience of the world's authors and creators a voice of its own. The worlds to which readers escape are no longer conceived by a single individual; the largest works of literature we know only remain relevant because their audiences have the ability to keep their stories fresh and present in various forms. The best New Media adaptations will add something in an attempt to freshen the story, to connect it to issues modern readers understand and care about. "Battle School" is such an adaptation, adding insight to areas of *Ender's Game* Card purposefully left open to interpretation while offering a unique experience to a large audience. The game touches upon the social constructs seen in Ender's world and their similarities to the social landscape today, even hinting about the possibilities our future may hold. Without such adaptations, these socio-cultural references could potentially be lost in the future. The creative process begins with authors, but it's up to the technology-

empowered audience to determine what path they take, both in our current social environment and in years to come.

Works Cited

Card, Orson Scott. *Ender's Game*. New York, NY: T. Doherty Associates, 1985. Print.

Application artwork generated using Android Studio.

<https://developer.android.com/studio/index.html>

Concept Art



Figure 1. The Battle School neural receiver.



Figure 2. Game splash screen, featuring the “battle star” insignia. Battle stars were obstacles students had to learn to maneuver around during their Zero-G training.



Figure 3. The neural receiver must be connected in order to play the game.

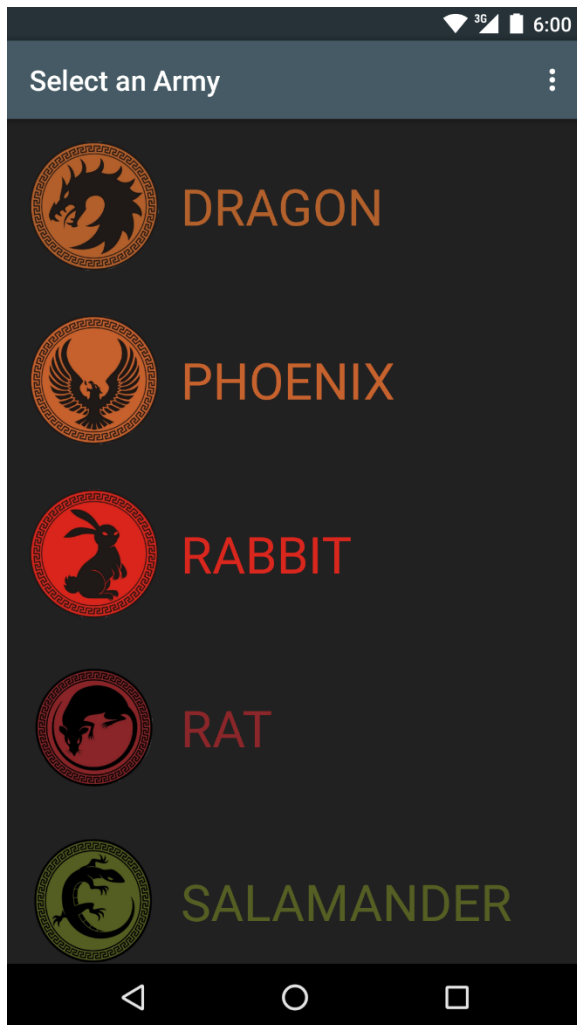


Figure 4. Selecting an army creates an illusion of choice.

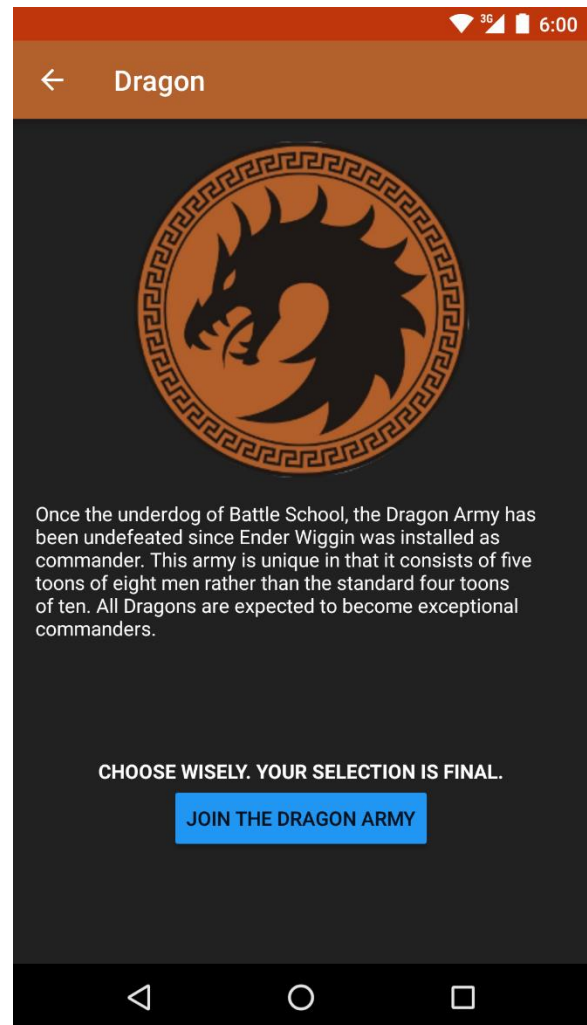


Figure 5. Once chosen, there's no turning back.

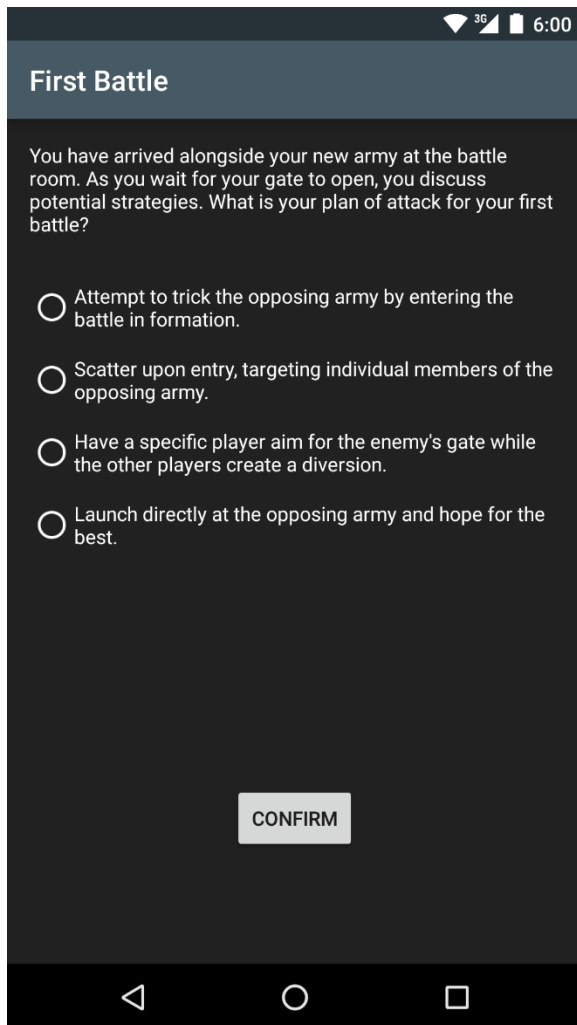


Figure 6. An example of a challenge.

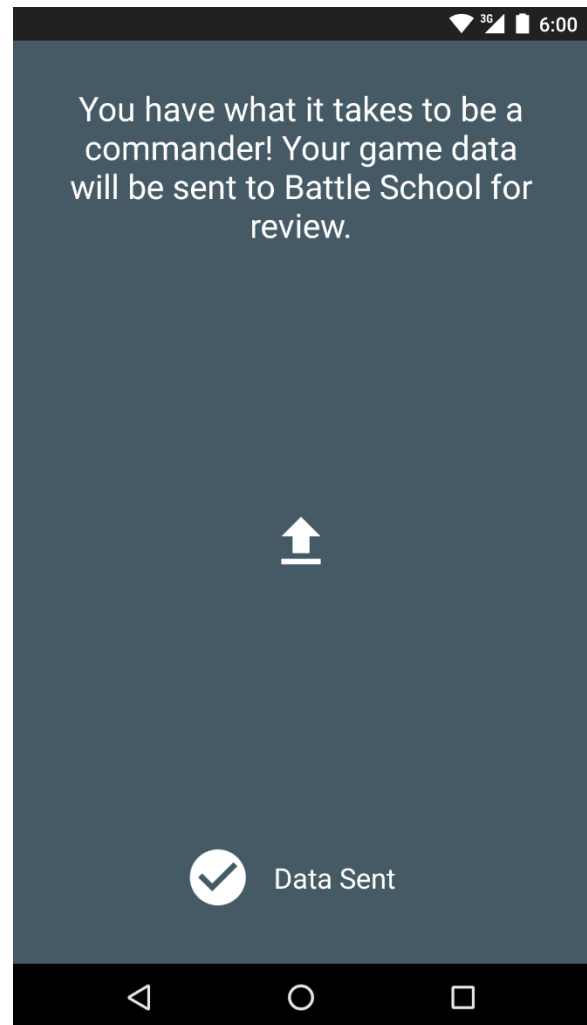


Figure 7. Data from promising individuals is sent to Battle School.