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Heroines and the Heroic Journey

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**The Game**

Xenocide, *noun*, the genocide of an entire alien species. Genocide, *noun*, the deliberate systematic killing of a group of people. These words have very rarely been used in human history. The few people that did attempt this on a large scale have been condemned as time has gone by. Yet in literature, there is a character that commits complete xenocide, something even those like Hitler and Stalin couldn’t achieve, and readers don't just understand this character’s actions, but are able to sympathize with him. At the same time that the readers love him, they also hate him for his actions, for he is both heroic and villainous. Andrew Wiggin, nicknamed Ender, is both dubbed as the ‘Xenocide’ and the savior after decimating the only sentient alien race known to man, the Buggers. In *Ender’s Game*, by Orson Scott Card, the duality of the reader in both understanding and hating Ender is reflected in the duality of Ender following both Campbell's classic monomyth and the Aristotelian tragic hero.

The hero’s journey or monomyth is considered a template for all heros, however the making of a hero is not an exact science. It is extremely rare for a hero to fulfill all of the steps of the monomyth and “It is generally significant to find even half of these things in any one account (Burleson, 174).” One of the few places a hero fills every requirement from miraculous birth to resurrection and rebirth, is the tale of Jesus Christ, however Ender doesn’t only fulfill all eight stages, he meets them perfectly (Michael Collings). Beginning with Ender’s birth as a Third, as population control is in affect in this setting, “It was the government’s idea, they were the ones who authorized it,” and thus Ender’s illegal birth sets him up for greatness later on (Card 5). The meeting for the mentor and the crossing the threshold not long after with Ender first meeting Graff and attending battle school. At this point Ender is continuously tested over and over again with frequently hard and unfair scenarios, until finally he beats his final exam. During which he realizes that it was, “Real. Not a game. Ender’s mind was too tired to cope with it all...When he got to his own room he stripped off his clothes, climbed into bed, and slept (Card 297).” Thus Ender sleeps which is Ender’s figurative death, descent into the underworld and resurrection. Finally when Ender wakes up he has come to terms that he is a killer, and it takes years to find redemption. On a new colony Ender finds a Bugger egg waiting for him, and “He shatters the image of himself as a hero by writing about the Buggers,” ensuring that humans love the Buggers as much as he does (Lindberg 11-12). Thus Ender’s hero’s journey makes him both conqueror and savior of the Buggers and in this way the reader loves him. However, Ender did completely decimate an entire race and even murdered two kids before the age of 11, his first murder at six, and in this way the reader hates him. Herein lies Ender’s fatal flaw and his separation from the classic hero’s journey.

Aristotle, years before Cambell and the monomyth was even born, created the tragic hero, or a hero that tries to do the right things, but ends up doing everything wrong. Said hero fails because they have a fatal flaw, a part of them that makes them fail. Throughout Ender’s story, it becomes more and more evident that Ender’s fatal flaw stems from the fact that Ender is still a child. Not a Harry Potter child, who started his journey at 12 and beat Voldemort at 17, or Katniss Everdeen, who started killing at 16, but a *six-year-old child*. During the young years of a child’s life, children are at their most impressionable, easiest manipulated. Not only do people in Ender’s world know this, but people exploit this. In order to make Ender into the perfect soldier, the adults ensure “that no matter what happens, no adult will ever, ever step in to help him in any way (Card 202).” Not only is Ender isolated from the very start of his life, being a rare illegal third, but adults continuously place him into isolation, including at the beginning of battle school, when an adult tells all the other kids that, “There’s only one boy on this launch with any brains at all, and that’s Ender Wiggin (Card, 31-32).” In the simplest terms, Ender is manipulated into being what the adults want because they “cheat. They change the rules in the middle of the game. Adults, in short, refuse to fight fair (Day, 2).” The most evident part of this manipulation are the two times that Ender must fight other boys to defend himself. His first, Stilson, happens right after his monitor is removed. Ender fights him and eventually beats him,

“I have to win this now, and for all time, or I’ll fight it every day and it will get worse and worse.

Ender knew the unspoken rules of manly warfare, even though he was only six. It was forbidden to strike the opponent who lay helpless on the ground; only an animal would do that.

So Ender walked to Stilson’s supine body and kicked him again, viciously, in the ribs. Stilson groaned and rolled away from him. Ender walked around him and kicked him again, in the crotch. (Card, 7).”

The second is Bonzo, right before Ender graduates battle school. This time he is nine years old and yet again Ender wins the battle decisively,

“Ender knew that at this moment he might be able to walk out of the room and end the battle...But the battle would only be fought again. Again and again until the will to fight was finished. The only way to end things completely was to hurt Bonzo enough that his fear was stronger than his hate. (Card 211)”

And in this moment Ender finishes him. Backed into a corner, “Ender responds with intense violence, dispatching his tormenter quickly and usually fatally. Ender engages in this violence impersonally, coolly, dispassionately,” each time claiming that he had no choice (Kessel). Ender proclaims multiple times that, “I didn’t want to kill them all. I didn’t want to kill anybody! I’m not a killer! (Card 297),” yet both the Stilson boy and Bonzo die from their wounds, just because “I wanted to win all the next ones, too. So they’d leave me alone (Card 19).” Of course both times the adults know that Ender is going to have these confrontations, yet they do nothing about it because Ender will “know that [the adults] saved him,” and it would ruin him (202). The adults manipulation is the thing that changes Ender into this ruthless killer. Another part of the tragic hero is the desire for good results. Both times he fights, he continues to beat them once he wins for the sole reason that he doesn’t want to fight again. Therefore he wouldn't get bullied again, but in the process killed his bullies. The good intentions and bad outcome is mostly evident his his final exam. During which Ender is faced with insane odds, with his fighters being outnumbered “a thousand to one; the simulator glowed green with them (Card 292).” However Ender had seen a battle like this before “in that final battle in Battle School, he had won by ignoring the enemy, ignoring his own losses; he had moved against the enemy’s gate,” or in this case the bugger’s homeplanet (Card, 293). Once again the adults cheat, they change the game, and Ender has finally had enough, “Forget it, Mazer. I don’t care if I pass your test, I don’t care if I follow your rules. If you can cheat, so can I. I won’t let you beat me unfairly— I’ll beat you unfairly first (Card 293).” In Ender's mind if he cheats, if he ignores the enemy, takes as many casualties as possible and just destroys the enemy’s planet then “they’ll never let me be a commander. It would be too dangerous. I’ll never have to play a game again. And that is victory (Card 293).” So Ender does just that, ignores the enemy, takes as many casualties as possible, and destroys a whole planet. Of course the greatest adult deception ever is that Ender was never fighting a simulation, but the real thing. The buggers he had killed, he actually killed. The fighters and pilots he had lost, he had actually lost. The bugger homeworld that he had destroyed, he had actually destroyed. Ender was trying to get away from the war, but ended up completing it, all because he was a child that was being manipulated by the adults. They made Ender into “a weapon, Ender. Like a gun, like the Little Doctor, functioning perfectly but not knowing what you were aimed at. We aimed you. We’re responsible. If there was something wrong, we did it (Card 289).” Ender had no idea that he was being manipulated throughout the book and the consequences of his actions are horrific to say the least, even though he had good intentions. Everything that went wrong for Ender in the book is because of Ender’s inability to escape the manipulation of adults.

Ender can be represented in two very different ways through the portrayal of his journey throughout the book. On one hand Ender committing xenocide is an unfortunate side effect of an otherwise perfect hero’s journey, especially when Ender sets out to rectify his mistake. On the other hand Ender was too young to realize what was going on around him and his good intentions were taken advantage of. The ambiguity of Ender’s hero status boils down to can unintentional murdering and xenocide be forgiven, or is he to be eternally damned?

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