An Analysis of Ender's Game Primarily Through the Eyes of the Cold War's Effect on Media

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The book *Ender's Game* has been critically acclaimed winning many awards such as the 1986 Hugo Award, 1986 Nebula Award, And the 1986 Science Fiction Chronicle Reader Award. These awards were given for good reason. The worldbuilding is simple yet unique and thought provoking. Like many other sci-fi books *Ender's Game* was written during the Cold War, and heavily influenced by the Cold War. Almost every single part of Ender's *Game* has an extremely distinct imprint left on it by the Cold War and that, in tandem with great point of view characters makes it very different from other sci-fi books in a good way.

Ender's Game was written near the end of the Cold War in 1985. It was originally written as a short story. It received enough praise to make Orson Scott Card turn it into a full book that would get even higher praise and several sequels that seem to be much worse then the original, "If there's one consistent with the Ender's series, it's that the longer the series goes the more likely diminishing returns are to be expected." (rocknjazzblog, 3/8/2017). Most of the sequels do follow different ideas and characters so it may be a case of the audience being misplaced not all the books being bad per se.

Ender's Game primarily follows Ender, a young genius, throughout the early years of his life starting at the age of six. After several bloody wars against an alien race called the buggers, Earth enjoys an unnatural peace with the world. The world was still united under the International Fleet to protect Earth if the buggers come again. While everyone believes that the I.F. is building a defense fleet, in truth they have sent every ship built to counterattack the buggers, "'So we're not waiting for the Third Invasion.' 'We *are* the Third Invasion.'" (Card

274). The I.F. formed to protect the solar system, expended its resources outwards to foreign threats like how the US spends hundreds of billions in military spending, but almost all of that money goes to oversea bases and capabilities so the US can keep a global presence like no other country does. The I.F. has one problem, the ships are arriving too early and they need a new general to lead them. Ender is the top candidate and is manipulated, stretched, and tested throughout his training to the point of nearly breaking in order to make the perfect commander.

In the end Ender is successful, having been tricked into thinking the real battle was all a game with no lives attached, "There were no games, the battles were real, and the only enemy you fought was the buggers." (Card 327). Ender managed to defeat the odds. Shortly after his *victory* Earth plunged into an internal war the Warsaw Pact had been planning. The war was cut short due to a truce pioneered by Enders siblings who had been acting on their own to manipulate the masses via the media. Ender and his sister Valentine then found a colony on the buggers home world, found the final queen egg, and traveled from planet to planet jumping dozens of years due to relativity, "Wherever they stopped, he was always Andrew Wiggin, Itinerant Speaker for the dead…" (Card 357). Together they preserved the story of the buggers and all the others who died for centuries to come and maybe re-establish the alien species in a far future.

The worldbuilding in *Ender's Game* is similar to the Cold War. Two wars against the buggers happened causing much death and technological progress just like WWI and WWII. WWI started due to a complicated chain reaction and miscommunication, "...why war erupted is actually much more complicated than a simple list of causes." (Indiana Department of Education). Nevermind however it started the war ended up a slugfest with millions of casualties and little ground gained from either side. The first bugger invasion was also started by

miscommunication and caused insane casualties. It started from a large scout ship arriving and killing a human ship thinking it was merely a worker class ship, "They probably thought they were routinely shutting down our communications by turning off the workers running the tug." (Card 297). They thought the humans on board did not have individual consciousness. This misunderstanding ended up causing a bloody war across the Milky Way and the humans had to scrounge together what little resources they had to launch a counterattack led by genius commander Mazer Rackham to destroy the scoutship. This invasion however did force many countries to work closer together to be more prepared for a possible second invasion.

The second world war started not from miscommunication, but instead from vivacious aggression. The tactics used were focused and as harsh as their leaders' ideas. The war saw a crazy amount of advancement in technology and strategy combined, a great example being tanks which were used to help skip the slow brutal trench warfare that was all too prevalent in WWI. (Hoffman). The second bugger invasion was caused by the main bugger fleet arriving after their scout ship was destroyed. This time the bugs went in swinging and with overwhelming force. The I.F. offered some meaningful resistance however the buggers were slowly overwhelming them. That was until Mazer noticed how the ships seemed to move around a center, "...all the movement focused on, radiated from a center point." (Card 295). and after shooting the ship in said center the entire invasion fleet "...just went stupid." (Card 295). The ship shot was their queen. This has a decent parallel with the enigma cracking of WWII where cracking the code to a enemies communication would allow you to have unbridled access to their strategy After the second bugger invasion the humans reverse engineered the buggers tech creating interstellar engines and with a new understanding of science created the D.R. Device which is able to

destroy entire planets in a single hit. The D.R. Device is very clearly an analogy to nuclear

bombs which were created at the end of the WWII with power unlike anything ever seen before.

The buggers did not want to invade a third time. Their queen had started a more peaceful

civilisation with many queens to share ideas, "If only we could have talked to you, the

hive-queen said in Ender's words… we ask only this: that you remember us, not as enemies, but

as tragic sisters, changed into a foul shape by Fate or God or Evolution." (Card 355). When they

originally attacked they did not know they were killing independent beings and once one of their

queens was killed they realized the gravity of the situation and stopped. The queens merely

thought of the war beforehand like how the USA and USSR would wage proxy wars. Proxy wars

display and contrast the power of nations involved without having to fall into a larger bloody

direct conflict. (Mumford). The killing of a bugger queen is like directly attacking convoys and

commanders from the USSR or US and would be seen as a possible trigger for nuclear war or

atleast escalating the situation.

The reason the queens did not strike back is they pieced two and two together and

realized every person they killed was a real person not a drone like their warriors and hoped to

not escalate the situation any further. The bugger queen is similar to the late leader of the USSR

Gorbachev who tried to bring limited reform and peace, "...Gorbachev is engaged in an effort to

address those obstacles through a fundamental redefinition of the relationship of state and

society." (Lapidus). Despite their efforts Gorbachev ultimately was unable to establish true

peace between the USA and Russian states and in their failed attempts accidently doomed their

own nation just like how the bugger queen doomed hers to destruction.

Not only does the conflict and history of the buggers and humans represent the Cold War,

but each the I.F. and buggers represent democracy and communism respectfully The buggers are

a clear comparison to communism and a common one too. Large swarming idiotic enemies are an extremely common trope from bugs in *Ender's Game*, and *Starship Troopers*. Fantasy books often have orcs and goblins too, A more down to Earth version is massive human empires seen in almost all media. Out of all of them, bugs are the closest to communism all working together for a similar goal mindlessly droning on under the command of a select few. Bugs are also easy to kill but hard to defeat. This is reminiscent of the proxy wars, especially Vietnam. The US military was better armed then the Vietnamese but the Vietnamese would use guerrilla tactics and could strike at any time. The US took massive counter measures to try and reduce the cover of the forest and ran a massive bombing campaign called rolling thunder to lower enemy morale, raise allied morale and disrupt north Vietnam's supply lines. (US Department of State). Bugs in Ender's Game pilot ships fluidly and killing them does not help because there is always more. If it was not for the weakness that queens are to buggers the I.F. would have had to glass every planet the buggers landed on to have any hope of defeating them.

Why is so much media from the mid to late nineteen-hundreds so influenced by the cold? The Cold War was *the* thing happening for several decades. Everything was about the Cold War, especially in the US. Nuclear drills in schools, drafts for wars and many movements in different positions about the Cold War all over the place. The ideological clash between communism and capitalism was felt everywhere the capitalistic governments were constantly in fear of communist uprisings and endangered their own democracy creating laws like the communist Control Act to "prohibit members of Communist organizations from serving in certain representative capacities, and for other purposes." (Public Law No. 83-637, 1954). People under communism were not generally taught to fear capitalistic uprising, but felt the squeeze from their own government and were overloaded with patriotic messages to fight the dirty capitalists. No

matter where you lived it was impossible to not feel that pressure. The two ideologies felt so threatened by each other that many conflicts, however far removed from world affairs, would be assimilated into a proxy war often causing much more casualties than necessary.

A good bit of books were clearly impacted by the Cold War like *Ender's Game, Starship Troopers,* and *Animal farm.* Dystopian books got new life breathed into their genre by the ever present and increasing surveillance from both sides of the wall. A good example of this is *1984* which is not about the Cold War directly but as an "explicit warning on the nature of state power at that time." (Hassan). The antiwar movement and hippies would have a smaller impact on literature at first but until this day we still see it influencing literature from the background. Recently a movement and genre called Solar Punk came into the picture which promotes a future utopia where humans live in peace with nature while integrating tech but more personally. An example of this genre is a book called *A Psalm for the Wild*.

Sci-fi is often formulaic with main characters that rebel against a larger system or work within it. Shows like *Dune* or *Star Wars* show young figures rebelling against a larger empire and were pretty much born for it. Other sci-fi like *Starship Troopers* show people working within the systems to showcase the world and commentate on systems of government more personally. *Ender's Game* is special with the main character Ender not being a real chosen one but a victim of a system he could not beat. Ender was thought of as Earth's best chance against the buggers however it does seem as if he was not the only one who could beat them. He was just naive enough to be controlled by the I.F. His sister was kicked out for being too caring and his brother considered too psychopathic. Those two however were shown to be smart enough to massively move in the other direction and at some points Valentine may have been more ruthless than Peter. The I.F. is also not infallible even they knew that, "We've just got to face the fact that we're

second rate. With the fate of humanity in our hands. Gives you a delicious feeling of power,

doesn't it?" (Card 39). The possibility they made a mistake is very much real.

Valentine and Peter were not the only two to have a lot of character development we got

to watch as Ender was manipulated throughout ten-ish years of his life and it felt every bit

believable seeing him slowly be ripped apart and keep moving forward while wanting to just

stop and live a slower life. According to a questionnaire made by Carla Ra the most common

gripe with sci-fi is far and away its bland characters and having overly complex worldbuilding.

(Ra). Other forum-esque communities like Reddit seem to agree with Carla's conclusions. In

contrast to this precedent Ender's Game keeps its worldbuilding simple and puts the effort into

the characters and their interactions. The people training Ender knew they were doing a bad

thing, "...my eagerness to sacrifice little children in order to save mankind is weathering thin."

(Card 190). Furthermore, the opening of every chapter shows the people training Ender arguing

about how to best continue forward with training him. The buggers society was so different on a

foundational level it took two wars for the big queen to realize what was happening and when

she did she was horrified and morally pressured into backing down.

Ender's Game was not meant to be a sprawling space opera with a thousand races but

instead a more down to Earth exploration of what changes people and the complex breakdown in

relationship that happens when effective communication is impossible. Ender grows apart from

both Peter and Valentine over the course of the book. Throughout the book Valentine begins to

become more and more like Peter and vice versa, "Maybe he and Peter and I are all the same,

and have been all along" (Card 258). Valentine decided to influence Ender for what she believes

as the greater good, stopping him from withdrawing from the system. Everything comes together

to create an interconnected social web with no one really wanting to have to hurt each other, not the buggers, Ender, Ender's teachers, or siblings, however the worldly situation forced them too.

Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game* was heavily influenced in almost all aspects by the Cold War. Despite drawing from the current attitude around the world, Card managed to add something new to the book to set it apart from the rest. *Ender's Game* is great, believable, and thought worthy due to its great characterization, character development, and simple but still strong worldbuilding. I have not read a book that hits quite the same way *Ender's Game* does and I don't know if I ever will.

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