

Ender's Game



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ORSON SCOTT CARD

Orson Scott Card was born in Washington, and grew up in various states, including California, Arizona, and Utah. His family was devoutly Mormon, and he studied the Book of Mormon from an early age. As a young man, he worked as a Mormon missionary in Brazil. Afterwards, he studied at Brigham Young University and the University of Utah, where he majored in English. He also spent a year as a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Notre Dame, but dropped out to found a theater company, the Utah Valley Repertory Theater Company. For most of the late 70s and early 80s, Card presided over his theater company while also working at the BYU press. It was during this time that Card published the short story “Ender’s Game,” which he would turn into a novel in 1985. *Ender’s Game* was a great commercial and critical success, and won Card the coveted Nebula Award, the highest honor for American science fiction writers. The following year, Card published a sequel to *Ender’s Game*, *Speaker for the Dead*, which also won the Nebula, making Card one of the few writers to win this award twice. During the 80s and 90s, Card wrote several other successful novels, and in recent years he’s continued to write prolifically. Card has also founded several successful outlets for aspiring writers, including Strong Verse, a website that specializes in submissions from unpublished authors.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Like much of the best science fiction, *Ender’s Game* doesn’t overtly discuss many historical events and yet reflects the political climate during which it was written. In the imaginary future of the book, there is still an uneasy rivalry between the United States and Russia, the latter of which controls a number of satellite states in Eastern Europe. This reflects Card’s experiences living through the Cold War: the long conflict between the U.S. and Russia, or the Soviet Union, that lasted from the late 1940s to 1991, when the Soviet Union collapsed from economic instability. During this time, the U.S. was the world’s dominant superpower, while Russia wielded a huge amount of global power due to its alliance, via the Warsaw Pact of 1955, with Eastern European states like Ukraine and East Germany. Russia and the U.S. cooperated in some matters, but in many other ways they plotted to weaken one another: in particular, both countries financed wars in other countries in an effort to ensure that their rival’s ideology (U.S. democracy, Soviet communism) wouldn’t spread across the world. In Card’s alternate future, the Cold War is still going on, and the U.S. and Russia continue to plot for global control, while an atmosphere

of paranoia and fear presides over all things political. Another important allusion to historical events appears in the “Locke and Demosthenes” chapter. Peter Wiggin takes the pseudonym Locke, after John Locke, the English Enlightenment thinker whose two Treatises on Government are considered important influences on the rhetoric and philosophy of the American Revolution of 1776. Locke supported a commonwealth in which a group of landowners band together to decide the affairs of the state, and reserve the right to overthrow leaders who betray the interests of their group. Peter, who aspires to run the world, wants to create a balanced, equitable world government, much like the one Locke proposed. Valentine, for her part, writes under the pseudonym Demosthenes, a clear allusion to the Ancient Greek thinker and writer of the same name. Demosthenes’ rhetoric played a key role in organizing a revolt in Athens against Philip II of Macedon and later his son, Alexander the Great, in the 4th century B.C.E. Demosthenes used arguments of Greek racial superiority to claim that the Athenians should oppose Philip and Alexander at all costs. Though Demosthenes’ rhetoric ultimately failed (Alexander conquered Athens and almost everywhere else in the Mediterranean), Demosthenes remains synonymous with anger, rhetorical skill, and a touch of hate—all qualities that Valentine aspires to recreate in her online persona.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Ender’s Game doesn’t explicitly mention many other books, but it’s still possible to detect the influence of a few important texts. To begin with, Orson Scott Card—an avid reader of science fiction since a young age—is indebted to the cerebral writings of Arthur C. Clarke, often regarded as one of the greatest science fiction writers of all time. Clarke’s books, including *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *Rendezvous with Rama*, and *Childhood’s End*, are full of thoughtful, highly intelligent characters, and Clarke doesn’t shy away from narrating their thought processes. In much the same way, long stretches of *Ender’s Game* have no real “action” at all: they simply describe what’s going on in Ender’s brilliant mind. Another important science fiction influence on Card is Joe Haldeman, whose 1977 novel *The Forever War*—a scathing critique of the war in Vietnam disguised as a sci-fi adventure—won the Nebula shortly before Card. Like Card, Haldeman writes about a war between humans and aliens, in which the humans win—only to realize that the aliens never really wanted to fight in the first place. One final, non-sci-fi influence on Card is the Book of Mormon. Card, a devout Mormon, has noted that the end of *Ender’s Game*, in which Ender goes off on a long search for a new land where the hive-queen can live safely, was inspired by the “missionary ethic” of Mormonism, according to which

young Mormons (including Card himself, in the late 1960s) must develop a relationship with God and righteousness by going off to explore new places and spread Mormonism there.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Ender's Game
- **Where Written:** North Carolina / Utah
- **When Published:** January 15, 1985
- **Literary Period:** Cold War science fiction
- **Genre:** Science Fiction Novel, Military Fiction
- **Setting:** Greensboro, North Carolina / the Battle School space station / the planet Eros
- **Climax:** Ender defeats the Buggers using the Dr. Device
- **Antagonist:** While there are many potential antagonists in the book, including Stilson, Peter Wiggin, Bonzo Madrid, and the Buggers, Card suggests that none of these characters are truly enemies—Ender has the capacity to understand them and sympathize with them.
- **Point of View:** Mostly third person and limited to Ender Wiggin's perspective, with occasional passages and chapters told from the perspectives of Valentine Wiggin and Colonel Graff.

EXTRA CREDIT

North Carolina for life: Although Orson Scott Card grew up in California, Arizona, and Utah, he's lived in Greensboro, North Carolina, for most of his adult life. Readers of *Ender's Game* will recognize Greensboro as the city where Valentine and Peter Wiggin spend most of their adolescence—in fact, Card mentions Greensboro in many of his other novels, almost always alluding to the city's natural beauty.

Family ties: Card has made no secret of the fact that he's a devout Mormon—in fact, he's a great-great-grandson of Brigham Young, the second president of the Mormon Church and the leader of the Mormons during their famous "long migration" from the eastern United States to Utah.



PLOT SUMMARY

Some time in the near future, Earth faces an existential threat from the Buggers, an alien race that has already killed millions of humans. In the previous Bugger invasion (70 years before *Ender's Game* takes place), the Buggers destroyed large chunks of China—they were only stopped from destroying the planet altogether because of Mazer Rackham, the legendary pilot who led a fleet of spaceships to destroy the Bugger fleet. In order to ensure that humanity wins the next encounter with the Buggers, the International Fleet (IF)—the most powerful military group on Earth—monitors young children around the

world, hoping to find signs of military genius. The brightest children are recruited for Battle School, where they're trained in combat.

At the beginning of the story, Ender Wiggin is a 6-year-old child. He is the third child of his parents—his older brother is Peter Wiggin and his older sister is Valentine Wiggin. One day at school, Ender is bullied by a boy named Stilson. Instead of accepting Stilson's insults, Ender savagely kicks him again and again. Ender then goes home, where Peter bullies him. Peter resents Ender, while his sister, Valentine, loves him.

The day after Ender's fight with Stilson, the Wiggins are visited by Colonel Hyrum Graff, who informs Ender's parents that Ender shows signs of great military potential. Graff pressures the Wiggins into letting Ender go to Battle School, and tells Ender that he'll be trained to protect the planet from Bugger aggression. Ender agrees to fight in Battle School, even though he'll miss Valentine, whom he loves more than anyone.

Over his first months in Battle School, Ender builds up a friendship with Shen and Alai, two new students. Ender takes classes and plays many war games, including a computer simulation called the **Giant** game. Ender is soon transferred to fight in an army—at Battle School, older students are sent to different armies and made to fight one another in the **battleroom**, a zero-gravity chamber in which they can use laser guns to "freeze" their opponents. Ender is sent to the Salamander Army, where his commander, the arrogant Bonzo Madrid, immediately dislikes him. Bonzo orders Ender never to fire his gun during a battle, and Ender reluctantly agrees. Over time, however, he becomes frustrated with Bonzo's orders, and in a battle, he draws his gun and succeeds in shooting many opponents. Bonzo is furious, and slaps Ender in the face. Soon afterwards, he trades Ender to Rat Army. In the Rat Army, Ender rises to the top of the battleroom "standings" and gains a reputation as a brilliant soldier.

Back on Earth, almost two years have passed since Ender left. One day, Peter, now an early teenager, tells Valentine (10 years old) that he wants her help to change the world. He explains that the Bugger Wars are coming to an end—when this happens, there will undoubtedly be a huge war on Earth (where the U.S. and Russia are still competing superpowers). Peter wants to use writing to control politics leading up to this war. He thinks that with Valentine's help, he can rise to lead the world. In the coming months, Peter and Valentine use computers to write a series of popular articles. Peter, going by the name "Locke," argues for peace and stability, while Valentine, writing under the name "Demosthenes," promotes conflict and paranoia.

Graff plans to give Ender a series of increasingly severe challenges designed to make him the best commander possible. Ender is assigned command of an army consisting of young, mediocre students. He is tough on his soldiers, and picks on one of them, Bean. Nevertheless, Ender leads his troops to victory

in battle after battle. Graff gives Ender more battles to fight. As time goes on, Ender feels himself becoming hated: his old friends barely talk to him, and when he easily defeats Bonzo, he learns that Bonzo wants to kill him.

One day, Ender is taking a shower when he turns to discover Bonzo, joined by a gang. Ender goads Bonzo into fighting him one-on-one, and he kicks Bonzo savagely in the groin. We learn that Graff was responsible for manipulating Bonzo against Ender, and will continue to give Ender tougher and tougher challenges. On the same day that Ender hurts Bonzo, Graff gives him a battle to fight. Although Ender is able to win the battle, he has a breakdown, and screams, “The game is over!” Afterwards, he is transferred to Command School. Before his transfer, Ender is sent to Earth with Graff.

On Earth, Valentine and Peter have used their writing to rise to prominence in politics. Peter plans to use Valentine’s influence ensure himself a strong coalition of supporters. Meanwhile, Graff convinces Valentine to talk to Ender one more time. Valentine visits Ender in Florida, and discovers that the International Fleet has turned Ender into a dangerous killer. Nevertheless, she tells Ender, honestly, that she’s not afraid of him. Ender is inspired to fight: seeing Earth and Valentine again has reminded him that he must beat the Buggers.

Ender and Graff travel to Command School, on the distant planet Eros. There, Ender meets his new teacher, the legendary Mazer Rackham. Mazer tells Ender what he knows about the Buggers: they’re capable of communicating with each other by ESP, and are controlled by a queen—Mazer defeated the Buggers by killing their queen. Mazer gives Ender a series of computer-simulated battles to fight. Ender is also reunited with his old friends, including Alai, Shen, and Bean. Ender proceeds with fighting against the computer simulations.

After months of difficult battles, Ender is told that he has only one battle left to fight. In it, he’ll face a large enemy force that’s protecting a simulation of the Bugger home planet, where the queen lives. Mazer stresses that Ender will have to make the right choice about what to do. Ender proceeds with his game. He decides to end the battle as quickly as he can by “bending” the rules. He sends a deadly missile, the “Dr. Device,” toward the Bugger planet, destroying the queen and thus wiping out all other Bugger forces. As he completes his game, Ender learns the truth: the game was always real. Ever since arriving at Command School, Ender was commanding real troops and fighting real Buggers. By making the decision to destroy the Bugger planet, Ender has won the war. Ender is horrified when he learns that he’s wiped out an entire species. He realizes that he is the killer he always feared he was—a monster.

Ender is then prevented from returning to Earth, to avoid being manipulated by other countries. One day Ender finds Valentine waiting for him in his room. Valentine tells Ender that Peter, writing as Locke, is quickly rising to power. Peter had plotted to use his family connection to Ender to gain more

power—Valentine, however, blackmailed Peter into arranging for Ender to become the governor of a new colony far from Earth. Ender agrees to travel to the new colony (a former Bugger planet) with Valentine.

Ender becomes a popular governor there. One day, he goes exploring on his new planet, and is amazed to find a field containing recreated details from his childhood, as well as elements from the Giant game at Battle School. There Ender also finds a large insect **pupa**—the last surviving Bugger queen. Ender, communicating with the queen telepathically, realizes that the Buggers had no intention of attacking humans again after their first invasion. Ender also realizes that the Bugger queen has been watching him for years, and prepared this place so that Ender could help repopulate the Bugger species and atone for his crimes. Ender agrees to do this, and he and Valentine go off in search of a new world where the Buggers can live in peace.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Andrew “Ender” Wiggin – The protagonist of *Ender’s Game*, Ender Wiggin is a brilliant, compassionate child who’s summoned to study war at Battle School and defeat the alien Buggers. Ender has always felt like an outsider because he’s a Third—a third child—in a society that almost never tolerates families with more than two children. At Battle School, he continues to feel like a stranger, but learns how to use his tactical brilliance to make friends and allies and lead a successful army. Again and again, Ender is forced to fight bullies and other opponents—he wins every time, but hates himself for winning. As Ender rises through Battle School, it becomes clear that his greatest strength as a warrior is his empathy with others: he can think like his opponents, and beat them. But this empathy also makes Ender the most reluctant of warriors—he fights, but almost always in self-defense. In the end, Ender bears the responsibility for the destruction of the Bugger race. Yet he seeks to atone for his sin by searching for a new home for the surviving **Bugger queen**—proving that in the end, his love and compassion are stronger than his aptitude for fighting.

Peter Wiggin – Ender’s older brother. Peter Wiggin is a cruel, bullying child who resents Ender for being smarter and better suited for Battle School than he is. Peter’s natural impulse is to hurt and destroy, and at one point he skins a squirrel while it’s still alive. Although Peter loves to hurt others, he also has flashes of kindness and humanity, even toward Ender, and he claims that he always loved his family. Ironically, Peter, who is violent and cruel as a child, uses politics and writing to become the leader of Earth—an advocate for peace and understanding—while Ender, who is gentle and kind as a child, grows up to be the murderer of the Bugger species. Late in his

life, Peter reaches out to Ender and confesses all his secrets and weaknesses—the resulting book, written by Ender, becomes famous throughout the galaxy, ensuring that Peter will be remembered as a complicated but noble leader.

Valentine Wiggin – Ender’s older sister, Valentine Wiggin is gentle and kind—even more so than Ender himself. She’s fiercely intelligent, even if she lacks the same drive as her brothers. For years, Valentine is Ender’s protector and teacher, and as a result, they continue to love one another even after Ender is shipped off to Battle School and forbidden from communicating with his sister. Whereas Ender ultimately influences the world via his military genius, Valentine turns to writing and politics as methods of control. Writing under the pseudonym Demosthenes, she pushes world leaders toward war, deliberately allowing Peter, writing under the pseudonym Locke, to swoop in and bring about peace—ensuring Peter’s rise to power.

Mr. Wiggin / Father – Ender’s Father is a gentle, kind-hearted man who nonetheless can’t connect with his youngest child on an emotional level. He and his wife are given the chance to have a legal third child because the government suspects, correctly, that the child would be an outstanding military leader. While Father, a Catholic, is overjoyed to have more children, he secretly hates himself for breaking the rules of his faith by not having *more* children. As a result, he finds it hard to be open and loving with Ender, and after Ender is shipped to Battle School, he seems to forget about his third child.

Mrs. Wiggin / Mother – Ender’s Mother is, like her husband, a kind, gentle, and deeply religious woman. She’s given the chance to have a legal third child because the government suspects, correctly, that the child would be an outstanding military leader. In spite of her love for Ender, Mother finds it difficult to show him affection, particularly because Ender’s status as a “Third” alienates her from the other people in her community. When Ender is shipped to Battle School, Mother seems not to miss her youngest child remotely as much as Valentine does.

Bonzo Madrid – Bonzo Madrid is a young, aggressive, and highly ambitious student at the Battle School. Largely because of his strict Spanish upbringing, he’s been taught to fight at all costs and defend his honor before all else. As the commander of the Salamander Army, he’s also a tyrannical leader who hurts anyone who disobeys him. Bonzo comes to despise Ender for defeating him both in and outside of the Battle Room. In the end, he corners Ender in the shower and tries to kill him—an encounter that ends in his own death at Ender’s hands.

Mazer Rackham – The legendary military commander and pilot who is celebrated on Earth for defeating the Buggers (though exactly how he did so isn’t common knowledge) seventy years before the novel begins. Mazer Rackham travels at extremely high speeds to slow his aging process—as a result, he appears

before Ender as a middle-aged man, and serves as Ender’s teacher at Command School. Mazer pushes Ender harder than anyone else in the novel, including Colonel Graff, and seems to believe in defeating the Buggers at all costs—even if it means Ender losing his sanity. (Mazer’s first name even suggests the half-physical, half-mental challenges he places in Ender’s way.) In spite of his callous beliefs, Mazer is an intelligent and perceptive man, and his insights into Bugger psychology are invaluable in influencing Ender to first defeat the Buggers and then nurture them back into existence.

Colonel Hyrum Graff – Colonel Graff is one of the most complicated characters in the novel: a stern, callous bureaucrat who believes in the importance of defeating the Buggers at all costs, but also seemingly comes to believe that he’s pushing Ender too hard. Graff is instrumental in spotting Ender’s potential and convincing Ender to come to Battle School. In spite of his persuasive persona, Graff regularly uses manipulation and cruel deceptions, always with the stated goal of making Ender a better soldier. Ender comes to despise Graff for singling him out at Battle School and provoking the hatred of his classmates. His disgust with Graff grows after Graff convinces Valentine to persuade Ender to continue fighting against the Buggers. Graff is ultimately court-martialed for endangering Ender’s life, but he’s acquitted after he argues that his measures were justified by Ender’s growth as a warrior. At the end of the novel, he has accepted a post as the new Minister of Colonization—the agent of war and violence has become an advocate for peace.

Major Anderson – Major Anderson (later Colonel Anderson) is Colonel Graff’s immediate subordinate at the Battle School. He shares Graff’s belief that defeating the Buggers is humanity’s most important goal, but frequently objects to Graff’s harsh methods and callous manipulations of Ender. In the end, however, Anderson comes to agree—reluctantly—that Ender’s defeat of the Buggers justifies Graff’s actions.

Dap – Dap is the “mom” of the new students at the Battle School—a man who’s paid to be kind and considerate to the young students who find it hard to cope with their new environment. At times, Dap adopts a “hands off” approach to helping Ender and his peers, but in the end, he proves that he’s concerned that Graff is being too harsh with Ender, and may be putting Ender’s life in danger.

Bernard – A young soldier in Battle School, whose arm Ender breaks during their shuttle flight. Bernard is a classic bully: arrogant and mean, but also charismatic and persuasive. Bernard, who’s always been jealous of Ender’s success, is one of the students who joins with Bonzo Madrid in trying to attack Ender in the shower.

Shen – A friend of Ender’s who arrives in Battle School at the same time, Shen and Ender bond with each other after Bernard teases Shen. Ender and Shen remain friends even after Ender is sent to another army, and although they eventually grow apart,

Shen ends up serving alongside Ender in the final battles with the Buggers.

Alai – Alai is a loyal friend to Ender. He practices alongside Ender so that they can improve their maneuvers in the **battleroom**, and frequently defends Ender from others. At times, Ender thinks that Alai is his only good friend at the Battle School, but at other times, he wonders if Alai is indifferent to him, or even resents him for his successes. In the end, Ender realizes that the truth is somewhere in the middle: Alai respects Ender and thinks of him as a friend, but can't relate to Ender on an intimate level because of Ender's role in the Bugger Wars.

Petra Arkanian – A sharp, talented soldier in the Salamander Army, and later the commander of the Phoenix Army, Petra is one of the only girls in Battle School. She's often singled out for being a girl, and seems to work extra hard in the **battleroom** to prove to her male rivals that she's every bit as talented as they are. It's suggested that Petra wanted to hurt Ender after he defeated her in battle, but in the end Petra becomes a loyal follower of Ender in his final battles.

Bean – A young, brilliant soldier in Ender's Dragon army, whom Ender teases and abuses in an imitation of the way he was teased and abused when he was younger. Ender realizes he treats Bean in this way to help Bean become his best, but still feels guilty for how he is treating Bean. Bean later becomes one of Ender's most trusted commanders during "the game" against the Buggers at Command School. (Orson Scott Card has also written a number of novels in the "Ender Universe" that focus on Bean.)

MINOR CHARACTERS

Miss Pumphrey – Ender's schoolteacher immediately before he's sent to Battle School.

Stilson – A young bully whom Ender fights, defeats, and (unknowingly) kills—proving to the International Fleet that he's ready to be sent to Battle School.

Mick – A 13-year-old student at Battle School who talks to Ender on his first day and unwittingly inspires Ender to work hard—so that he doesn't end up like Mick.

Rose – The lazy, undisciplined commander of the Rat Army, Rose at first teases Ender, but eventually ignores him when Ender proves that he's far more talented than his commander.

Major Imbu – An officer at the Battle School.

Crazy Tom – A talented Battle School student who serves under Ender in the Dragon Army, and ultimately helps Ender defeat the Buggers.

Carn Carby – A Battle School student who commands the Rabbit Army, and is, Ender notes, one of the few truly decent people in Battle School.

Admiral Chamrajnagar – An important military leader, and the director of Command School (previously he had Colonel Graff's job as director of Battle School).

Dink Meeker – A talented soldier in the Rat Army, who teaches Ender about the subtleties of combat, fights alongside Ender in his final battles with the Buggers, and suggests to Ender that the Bugger War is a vast conspiracy—a suggestion which Ender ultimately rejects.

General Shimon Levy – The "Strategos"—implied to be the leader of America.

The Polemarch – The supreme leader of Russia.

General Pace – An important American general who is involved in organizing Colonel Graff's court-martial.

William Bee – Commander of the Griffin Army.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



LOVE, EMPATHY, AND DESTRUCTION

Halfway through *Ender's Game*, Ender Wiggin tells Valentine, his sister, his views on love and hate: "In the moment when I truly understand my enemy, understand him well enough to defeat him, then in that very moment I also love him." This sentence can be said to sum up the paradox of Orson Scott Card's novel: the deadliest warrior isn't a warrior at all. Ender is a good, kind child who sincerely loves his friends and family—and yet it's *because* he's a good, empathetic person that he's also capable of the most brutal and ingenious acts of violence.

At the beginning of the novel, Ender attacks a boy, Stilson, who's bullying him. He succeeds in overpowering Stilson, and contemplates walking away when he's ahead. But because Ender is capable of understanding the way his opponent's mind works, he realizes that he'd have to fight Stilson again and again if he walked away now. As a result, he decides to kick Stilson in the face, eventually killing him. The same empathy and understanding that allow Ender to form loving relationships with Valentine or with his friends also compel him to fight brutally. It is for this reason that Ender is recruited by the International Fleet and sent to Battle School.

Over his years in school, Ender echoes his fight with Stilson in conflicts with his jealous rival Bonzo Madrid, with opponents in the "**battleroom**," and eventually with the Buggers, the alien force that he's asked to kill. Each time, Ender's kindness and empathy allow him to understand others (even the Buggers, an

alien species), and each time, this understanding enables him to hurt or even kill these others. Ironically, a “meaner” child, like Ender’s brother Peter, wouldn’t be able to get inside his opponent’s head, and therefore wouldn’t be capable of the same acts of destruction.

Toward the end of the novel, it seems that the International Fleet has been right all along: the most dangerous warrior isn’t a cruel bully like Stilson or Peter—instead it’s a calm, empathetic child like Ender. And yet the book doesn’t end on such a pessimistic note. Even if Ender has the power to be a terrible warrior, he only becomes one because of the manipulations of the IF. Left to his own devices, Ender discovers that he has the power to be an agent of peace as well as war. He travels across the galaxy with Valentine, and becomes the leader of a new, peaceful colony of humans. More importantly, he discovers that the Buggers left him a single **pupa**, capable of repopulating the Bugger race. Instead of giving in to the destructive instincts the IF has worked so hard to instill in him, Ender decides to take the pupa to another world, giving the Buggers a new home. In the final chapter of the book, Scott implies that Ender finds a home for the Buggers after years of searching. Although Ender is responsible for the destruction of an entire species, he atones (in a way) for his crimes by bringing the species back from the dead. Even if love and empathy can be manipulated for violent purposes, by themselves these qualities have a much greater potential for good.



GAMES, COMPUTERS, AND VIRTUAL REALITY

Ever since Orson Scott Card published *Ender’s Game* in the 1980s, he’s been praised for his book’s descriptions of “futuristic” technology. Critics point to Card’s interest in games, computers, and virtual reality and how, in the last thirty years, these things have all become increasingly important parts of life. Children develop a taste for combat by playing violent video games, journalists express their political views to millions over the Internet, and even in the military, soldiers learn strategy by playing virtual reality games. Card essentially predicted the future.

One of the novel’s most important points about games, computers, and virtual reality is that they distance people from the “truth,” and also from each other. As preteens, Valentine and Peter Wiggin conceal their identities using the Internet (Card, writing before the Internet was at all common, calls this the “Net”), and end up using their rhetoric to control global politics. More overtly, the Battle School trains its young students by giving them combat games to play. By relying so extensively on games, the Battle School’s teachers trick students into forgetting the ugly truth: by playing fun games, these children are preparing for the murder of the Buggers. Card notes that every country on the planet encourages its

children to play war games—this gives the people of Earth an appetite for violence, while also distancing them from their natural feelings of compassion and sympathy.

Yet the structure of the Battle School reveals something else about games and virtual reality: if people play games for long enough, then the games *become* reality. The students at Battle School take their combat games in the **battleroom** very seriously. One of these students, Bonzo Madrid, treats the game so seriously that he’s willing to commit murder when he loses to Ender. Ender is unique in Battle School because he can take a game seriously while also recognizing that it’s “just” a game: in other words, he cares enough to win, but not so much that he thinks of the rules of the game as absolute. Although he’s a brilliant commander, his most impressive victories come when he breaks or bends the rules of the battleroom—for example, when he performs the customary “victory ritual” before he’s actually won—technically winning the game for his army.

Even Ender can’t escape the truth, however: the game is reality, whether he likes it or not. At the end of the book, this is literally true in the sense that Ender discovers that he’s been fighting a *real* war at Command School—what he thought were computer simulations turn out to be real ships with living beings flying them. The convergence of game and reality is also true in a symbolic sense—Ender has been playing games for the better part of his life, and will be remembered forever because of the ingenious “games” he won. The result is that Ender’s old strategies of “bending” the rules don’t work anymore. When he sends a deadly missile to blow up the Bugger home planet, Ender thinks he’s tricking a computer simulation—it’s only later that he realizes that he’s wiped out an entire species, just as his teachers were hoping he’d do. The reality of this “game” then comes back to haunt Ender for the rest of his life.

For most of Ender’s life, games have distanced him from the people around him: his family, his friends and opponents in Battle School, and even the Buggers. Yet in the final chapter of *Ender’s Game*, Card makes a final point about games and virtual reality—they can bring people together instead of distancing them from each other. Ender discovers that the virtual reality game he’d played at Battle School, the “**Giant** game,” actually provided a conduit for him to communicate with the Buggers, unbeknownst to the International Fleet. He realizes that the Buggers have used games and virtual reality to understand his innermost feelings, and as a result, they’ve decided that he can be trusted to repopulate the Bugger species by finding a new home for the **Bugger queen**. The final irony of *Ender’s Game* is that the “game” mentioned in the title doesn’t refer to the violent, destructive war games that Ender played in school—games that have a clear winner and loser. The game Ender has been playing with the Bugger queen has no winner or loser—instead, Ender uses games and play to understand his sworn enemy, love her, and help her.



MORALITY AND SURVIVAL

At the beginning of *Ender's Game*, Ender Wiggin faces a difficult choice. He's bullied by a schoolboy named Stilson, and one afternoon, Stilson pushes

Ender, and Ender decides that he has no choice except to fight back. Ender gains the upper hand in the fight, and knocks Stilson to the ground. Ender realizes that he can either walk away and expect to face Stilson tomorrow, or kick him while he's down, effectively winning all the "future fights." Ender makes a decision that few have the stomach for: in order to protect himself, he kicks Stilson while he's already down, inadvertently killing him. It is this act of calculated violence that ultimately wins Ender a place in Battle School.

Ender's attack on Stilson is thus both defensive and preemptive: he didn't want to fight Stilson, but when he does, he doesn't show Stilson the mercy that most people would. We might ask, then, if it's ever right to attack an enemy before the enemy has struck first—or if it's only morally acceptable to defend oneself from one's opponents. As the book goes on, Card poses a far more challenging version of this question: is it morally justifiable to attack an entire species (the Buggers) that's known to be dangerous to human beings, even if the species shows no signs of wanting to fight again?

For most of his time at the Battle School, Ender doesn't have the willpower to attack his opponents preemptively—his innate sense of right and wrong tells him that he has to wait to fight back. In the virtual reality game he plays with the **Giant**, however, Ender ultimately decides to "think outside the box" and attack the Giant. This only happens after dozens of rounds in which the Giant kills and eats him, though—Ender doesn't consider the Giant a threat until it's overwhelmingly obvious that the Giant leaves him no other way to survive. A more disturbing example of Ender's defensive instincts comes when Ender learns that Bonzo Madrid wants to kill him. Ender avoids Bonzo for as long as he can, finally fighting him in a shower when Bonzo corners him. Ender hits Bonzo defensively, then finishes the fight to ensure (preemptively) that Bonzo will never hurt him again. Ender is devastated by his own actions—he can't handle the guilt of a preemptive attack, even when there's good evidence that he'd be dead if he had waited any longer to act.

By the time Ender arrives at Command School, he's come to understand that the Bigger War itself is a problem of preemptive strategy. He learns that the Buggers have shown no signs of wanting to hurt human beings since their first invasion—there's a decent chance that they want nothing more to do with Ender's species. But Colonel Hyrum Graff argues that this simply isn't good enough: humans must attack the Buggers preemptively to *guarantee* victory. Ender can't entirely agree with Graff's point of view, even when his new teacher, Mazer Rackham, tries to teach him to attack his opponents before he even knows that they're opponents. It becomes clear

that Ender, a moral person, could never choose to preemptively murder an entire species. It's for this reason that Mazer and Graff lie to Ender about his computer games, not telling him that he's killed the Buggers until it's too late for him to change his mind. Previously, we had assumed that Graff's answer to the question of preemptive genocide was an enthusiastic "yes"—but Card shows us that even Graff doesn't have the willpower to kill so indiscriminately. This is why he gets Ender to kill for him, and gives Ender the alibi of not knowing that his computer games were real.

In the end, *Ender's Game* suggests that the answer to the question of preemptive offense isn't "yes" or "no"—it's simply too enormous a question for any human being (even a hardened soldier like Graff, let alone a child like Ender) to answer. Furthermore, Card suggests that the question itself is a false dichotomy. Ender realizes that the challenge of the Buggers isn't "kill or be killed" (just as the Giant's challenge wasn't really "drink this potion or drink the other one"), but rather, "kill or understand." Although Ender realizes his mistake too late, he gets a second chance, and resolves to devote the rest of his life to understanding Bigger society and repopulating the Bigger species.



LEADERSHIP

It's no surprise that *Ender's Game* deals extensively with the theme of a leadership. Almost all of the characters are in the military, so their very existence depends upon leading and following orders.

Early on, Card makes it clear that leadership can only be gained over time. When Ender arrives at Battle School, he has a hard time gaining his peers' attention, let alone their loyalty—on the contrary, he's bullied for his youth and because Colonel Hyrum Graff singles him out. It's only over the course of the coming months, when Ender figures out who to befriend and how to undermine those who stand in his way, that he starts to gain respect.

It takes Ender years of study and practice before he's fully ready to be a leader; that is, to command an army of his own. This implies another important thesis about leadership: leadership is a balance between tyranny and anarchy. During his early days in Battle School, Ender is traded from army to army, where he observes many commanders and learns from their mistakes. On one side of the "leadership spectrum" is Bonzo Madrid, the brutal, tyrannical, rigid commander who beats any soldiers who disobey him—even when their disobedience wins a battle. On the other side of the spectrum is Rose, the lazy, undisciplined commander of the Rat Army, who can barely convince Ender to obey any orders at all. From Bonzo and Rose, Ender learns what to do and what *not* to do. By the time he's commanding Dragon, Ender knows that he has to be strict but not too strict, and to allow his troops to be

independent, but not too independent.

A further consequence of Ender's lessons in leadership is that he becomes isolated from his troops, and even his former friends. Ender knows that he's not strong enough to win a battle all by himself, so he needs to train his "toon" leaders to think for themselves. Furthermore, he needs to build loyalty between toon leaders and their own soldiers. For this reason, Ender is severe and strict when he commands his entire army—he lets toon leaders deliver good news, and refuses to commiserate with his soldiers, even when he feels like doing so. In this way, Ender creates a balanced, well-organized army, in which everyone respects and admires Ender, but not to the point where they can't think for themselves or obey other leaders in the middle of battle. One sad result of this is that Ender becomes enormously lonely: to be the best leader possible, he has to cut himself off from his old friends.

Ender's genius as a leader is that he's not dogmatic in his thinking—he's willing to change his strategies when he's wrong, always valuing his soldiers for their good work. Even so, the tragedy of being a leader, and the ultimate tragedy of the book, is that leaders (unlike their subordinates) bear the full responsibility of the destruction they've caused. In his final battles with the Buggers, Ender takes up a punishing, sleepless schedule so that he can study and monitor his enemies at all times. As a result, every military decision he makes is his alone. Even after Graff and Rackham insist that they, not Ender, bear the real responsibility for exterminating the Buggers—Ender thought he was fighting computer simulations, after all—Ender can't help but continue to blame himself. The best leaders—like Ender—know how to pass on praise to their troops, but in the end they also accept all responsibility, both good and bad, for their followers' actions.



CHILDHOOD AND GROWING UP

In interviews, Orson Scott Card has argued that adults simply don't understand children. There was never a point in his life, he's said, during which he felt like a "child"—in other words, he never thought in the simplistic, sentimental ways that children supposedly think. It's no surprise that the author of *Ender's Game* feels this way—there's not a single child in the novel who thinks in the "simplistic terms" Card derides. Indeed, it takes us a few pages before we realize that the protagonist, Ender Wiggin, is only six years old—based on the way his mind works, he could be sixteen, or even thirty-six.

And yet in spite of Card's objections to the sentimentalized ways children are usually portrayed in literature, it's important to think about the role of childhood in his novel. Children aren't just tiny adults: to begin with, their youth allows them to be educated and trained for purposes that aren't their own. This is the point of the Battle School: rather than enlisting seasoned soldiers, the IF enrolls young children in their program. If the IF

begins its training programs early enough, then its children will grow into (or be manipulated into) soldiers whose abilities far exceed those of soldiers in previous human wars. With this in mind, the IF forces children to spend their entire waking lives studying and participating in battle.

Paradoxically, even though the IF's children are trained to enjoy the competition of fighting, the children's other great advantage over adult soldiers is that they've never been in an actual war. Using games, simulations, and propaganda, the IF teaches Ender and his peers to enjoy war, without ever exposing them to mass death, injury, or panic—in other words, the things that make experienced soldiers *despise* war. The result is an army of brilliant, highly-trained, war-loving soldiers who are nevertheless ignorant—and innocent—of war. At the end of the novel—after Ender destroys the Buggers—Mazer Rackham explains to Ender why this combination of innocence and experience is so lethal. Only a young child, ignorant of the traumas of a battle, could defeat the Buggers, because only a young child could muster the creativity and energy necessary to win such a battle. Childhood, at least according to Orson Scott Card, isn't so much a state of mind as it is an absence of adult experiences. The IF, recognizing children's potential for combat, seeks to give them the right experiences for winning a war.

But if Card defines childhood as the absence of adulthood, what does it mean to become an adult? The adults in *Ender's Game* who have been tasked with Ender's education at Battle School are largely indifferent to whether or not Ender grows into a mature, well-adjusted man. Even if they express some guilt over their actions, their overriding goal is always to push Ender into becoming a commander capable of destroying the Buggers. In the interest of doing so, they wage psychological war on Ender, distancing him from his friends and throwing him into dangerous situations.

In the end, Ender grows up, but not because of Battle School or his teachers. Instead, he becomes an adult by atoning for his destruction of the Bigger species. In order to do so, Ender must recognize that he has committed a horrible crime by killing the Buggers. He must then accept that he, more than anyone else, is qualified to understand the Buggers, and finally, he must search for a new home for the Buggers. This takes time and effort, and is just as challenging for Ender as his time in Battle School was. As the final sentence of *Ender's Game* ("He looked a long time") suggests, coming of age isn't a matter of learning a lesson: on the contrary, to grow up, a child needs to self-reflect, accept that he's capable of evil, and then try to do good.



CONTROL, MANIPULATION, AND AUTHORITY

It's clear from Chapter 1 of *Ender's Game* that

Orson Scott Card's novel takes place at a time when the governments of the world exercise harsh control over their own citizens. There seem to be three major powers in the world: America, controlled by the powerful Strategos; Russia, controlled by the equally powerful Polemarch; and the IF, supposedly controlled by both the Polemarch and Strategos, but in actuality controlled largely by administrators like Colonel Hyrum Graff. It's worth understanding how these forces maintain their power, and what Card is suggesting about the way authority works.

The great powers in Card's novel maintain control of their people for highly specific reasons. Early in the book it's explained that religious and sexual freedom in the United States has been regulated to the point where it's illegal to have more than two children. (This clashes with the teachings of religions such as Mormonism and Catholicism.) The supposed reason for these restrictions of people's freedom is population control—it's implied that there's not enough food to go around, meaning that the only way for the human race to survive is to limit human reproduction. Much the same is true of Ender's education under the IF at Battle School. Ender's freedom to communicate with his family or to make friends is taken away from him, always with the stated purpose of making Ender a superior soldier and defeating the Buggers, thereby saving the human race from destruction.

When presented as a problem of "freedom versus survival," it's hard to argue with the logic of restricting Ender's mail or limiting the legal number of children. But Scott heavily implies that there is something more sinister going on. At one point, Dink Meeker, a friend of Ender's, suggests a disturbing possibility: there *are* no more Buggers—the IF is fabricating the threat in order to maintain control of the world's children. While Dink turns out to be wrong about the Buggers themselves (they're still alive), he's half-right: in a sense, the IF is creating the Bigger threat to manipulate others. This becomes clear toward the end of the novel, when Ender realizes that the **Bigger queen** trusts Ender, and wants to cooperate with him to ensure that both Buggers and humans can live in peace. The IF wrongly assumes that the Buggers will continue to wage war on humans, and it acts accordingly. When understood in this way, the tyranny of the IF (or, for that matter, the governments of Earth) doesn't demonstrate mankind's need to survive so much as mankind's inexhaustible need to fight. Sure enough, less than 24 hours after the Buggers are defeated, war breaks out on Earth.

If there is a problem with the governments in Orson Scott Card's novel, it's their lack of understanding of people (or Buggers) who are unlike them. It's not entirely clear what Orson Scott Card would put in their place, but it's notable that his novel ends with Ender going off to found both a new world and a new religion—one that's based on a sensitive understanding of other people. Throughout Ender's life, he's

been controlled and manipulated by governments that push him to be violent and attack those unlike him. In his new world, Ender hopes to pioneer a new kind of authority that rejects the fear, violence, and strict control of Earth's rulers.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



THE GIANT

During Ender Wiggin's time at Battle School, he's encouraged to play a virtual reality in which he confronts a **Giant**, who challenges him to choose between two potions, one of which is poisonous and one of which is harmless. Ender discovers that the game is a cheat—no matter which potion he chooses, he always "dies." Ender demonstrates his genius for lateral thinking by refusing to obey the Giant's rules: instead of choosing between potions, he chooses to attack the Giant, winning an unwinnable game. Ender's attack on the Giant is one of the more overt symbols in *Ender's Game*: as Colonel Hyrum Graff and Major Anderson study Ender's game playing, they recognize that Ender's victory symbolizes his refusal to play by the rules, his ability to think outside the box, and his disturbing ability to be brutal and violent at the right time.



THE MIRROR

After defeating the **Giant**, Ender spends his virtual reality game exploring a mysterious palace in which hangs a large **mirror**. When Ender looks in the mirror, he sees many things: his own face, his brother Peter's face, and his sister Valentine's face. The mirror is a symbol of Ender's introspectiveness and need for self-knowledge. Ender is always trying to understand what kind of person he is: is he barbaric, like Peter, or gentle, like Valentine? (This reminds us that Ender was born to be a *combination* of Valentine and Peter.) In the end, Ender once again refuses to play by the rules of the virtual reality game. Just as he refuses to choose between the Giant's two potions, he refuses to choose between Peter and Valentine. Instead, he smashes the mirror and walks away—a powerful assertion of his own identity and freedom.



THE HIVE-QUEEN PUPA

Throughout *Ender's Game*, Ender acts as an agent of destruction: the IF grooms him to be a perfect commander, capable of leading soldiers to glorious victory against any enemy, no matter how deadly. This culminates in the penultimate chapter of the book, in which Ender seemingly

destroys the entire Bugger species in a large battle. In the final chapter, however, we discover that the Buggers have left behind a single **hive-queen pupa**, which they want Ender to care for. Ender, overcome with self-loathing at having exterminated an entire species, agrees to find a new home for the pupa. In a sense, the pupa—as small, smooth, and innocent as a newborn baby—symbolizes Ender’s rebirth as a force for peace, not war. Just as the Buggers will be reborn in a new planet, so Ender gets a miraculous “second chance” at being a good person.



THE BATTLEROOM

During Ender’s time in Battle School, his teachers make him fight mock-battles in a zero-gravity chamber called the **battleroom**. At first, Ender is frightened and incapable of controlling his movements in the battleroom, but over time, he learns to maneuver his body, shoot straight, and command other soldiers to impressive victories. Understood in this sense, the battleroom is an apt symbol of Ender’s growth and maturation over the course of the novel: at first, he’s “adrift” in life—a “Third” with no rights. Gradually, however, he learns to control the course of his own destiny, and gains the loyalty of those around him. But as Ender becomes more confident in the battleroom, also he comes to see it as a prison. Ender can do whatever he wants *within* the battleroom, but at the end of the day he’s a prisoner inside it, something to be directed and manipulated by his teachers and commanders.

In this early quotation, two high-ranking officials in the "International Fleet" (IF) discuss the education they're planning for Ender Wiggin. Ender is a phenomenally brilliant young boy--his intelligence and leadership potential could make him the greatest military commander the world has ever seen. Graff and Anderson's strategy for Ender's education could be summed up as "survival of the fittest." In order to ensure that Ender becomes a first-rate commander (and defeats the biggest threat to humanity, the aliens known as Buggers), they'll bombard him with hostile opponents: rival students, bullies, aggressive teachers, etc. With these teaching methods, they hope to toughen up their prized pupil.

One of the key questions of Card's novel is how people rationalize cruelty and evil to themselves. In the case of Graff and Anderson, the answer is simple: the ends justify the means. Treating a small boy so cruelly might seem harsh, but—in the officials' view—the cruelty is outweighed by the threat of the Buggers invading once again.

Chapter 2 Quotes

☝☝ Dad pointed out that the war wouldn't go away just because you hid Bugger masks and wouldn't let your kids play with make-believe laser guns. Better to play the war games, and have a better chance of surviving when the Buggers came again.

Related Characters: Peter Wiggin, Andrew “Ender” Wiggin, Mr. Wiggin / Father

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 11

Explanation and Analysis

In this quotation, Card explains why games have become so important to the world in his vision of the future. For centuries, people have learned about fighting, war, and strategy by playing games—chess, for example, has trained generals for thousands of years. In the future, Card explains, games continue to train people to fight from an early age. Parents encourage their children to play games in which they fight “Buggers,” the alien race that is (supposedly) the archenemy of humanity. By playing games of this kind, children like Ender inadvertently train themselves for a lifetime of war with the Buggers.

One of the reasons that games are so important for the generals and warriors of the future is that they're not real.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Tor edition of *Ender's Game* published in 2008.

Chapter 1 Quotes

☝☝ “So what do we do? Surround him with enemies all the time?”

“If we have to.”

“I thought you said you liked this kid.”

“If the Buggers get him, they'll make me look like his favorite uncle.”

“All right. We're saving the world, after all. Take him.”

Related Characters: Major Anderson, Colonel Hyrum Graff (speaker), Andrew “Ender” Wiggin

Related Themes:     

Page Number: 1

Explanation and Analysis

As the quotation suggests, the death and destruction is "make believe." (The real violence comes later.) By playing games that use fake violence, children gradually become desensitized to the idea of violence itself, so that when it's time for them to fight a real Bugger, they won't feel pangs of guilt or hesitation about killing it. At the end of the novel, it'll become clear how games have taught Ender to suppress his natural feelings of sympathy and compassion.

●● But he did not reach for a pillow to smother Ender. He did not have a weapon.

He whispered, "Ender, I'm sorry, I know how it feels. I'm sorry, I'm your brother. I love you."

Related Characters: Peter Wiggin (speaker), Andrew "Ender" Wiggin

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 15

Explanation and Analysis

In one of the most poignant passages in the novel, Ender's brutal older brother, Peter Wiggin, offers Ender a surprising apology. Peter has spent the entire day tormenting Ender—criticizing him for being a "Third," and even threatening to kill him—and yet here, late at night, Peter doesn't try to hurt Ender. On the contrary, he apologizes and insists that he loves Ender.

It's crucial to recognize that Peter and Ender are speaking alone. In public, or even when he's with Valentine Wiggin (the middle child), Peter has a chip on his shoulder about being inferior to Ender. In a society where the government has to grant special permission for third children to be born, Ender is living proof that Peter isn't good enough to fight the Buggers in Battle School. Although Peter doesn't like appearing weak or second-rate around other people, he's more likely to let his guard down when he's alone.

Alternatively, this scene might just be Peter manipulating Ender, similar to the way he usually does—but this time by acting unpredictably and making Ender think that he's truly compassionate, in order to make *Ender* let his guard down. We are never given an inside look at Peter's consciousness, and he remains an intriguing and frightening character throughout the book.

Chapter 3 Quotes

●● "Tell me why you kept kicking him. You had already won." "Knocking him down won the first fight. I wanted to win all the next ones, too, right then, so they'd leave me alone."

Related Characters: Andrew "Ender" Wiggin, Colonel Hyrum Graff (speaker), Stilson

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 19

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, Colonel Graff, a powerful military commander, asks Ender why he brutally kicked a bully, Stilson. Stilson was teasing Ender, and Ender responds by knocking Stilson to the floor. But instead of walking away, Ender decided to kick Stilson while he was down, brutally injuring his opponent (and, we later learn, killing him). As we learn here, Ender chose to hurt Stilson because he recognized that it was the right strategy: Ender didn't just want to avoid Stilson for a couple of days; he wanted Stilson, and all the other bullies, to leave him alone forever.

Ender's explanation for his behavior is cool, calm, and chilling—he's motivated by logic, not passion. As Graff acknowledges, Ender's eerie calmness makes him a great general: where other human beings would naturally refrain from hitting an injured opponent, Ender ignores his own sense of compassion in order to win the war, not just the battle. The paradox is that Ender's brutality *is* a form of compassion: in order to make the decision to hit Stilson, Ender has to be perceptive and understanding enough to know what kind of person Stilson is (i.e., to know that Stilson will never leave him alone). Ender's personality is a mixture of coldness and empathy that's far more dangerous than coldness could ever be by itself.

●● "They look at you and see you as a badge of pride, because they were able to circumvent the law and have a Third. But you're also a badge of cowardice, because they dare not go further and practice the noncompliance they still feel is right."

Related Characters: Colonel Hyrum Graff (speaker), Mrs. Wiggin / Mother, Mr. Wiggin / Father, Andrew "Ender" Wiggin

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 23

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Colonel Graff walks a fine line between honesty and manipulation. Graff explains to Ender that his parents—religious people forced to live in a secular society—took a great risk when they had Ender. In Ender's society, it's illegal to have more than two children. The government gave Ender's parents permission to have another baby, because their genetic "stock" was considered to be good for producing future generals. Graff claims that Ender is a badge of pride for his parents—by definition he's a very special child—but adds that he's also a source of shame for them.

Graff's logic is a little confused: he claims that by having "only" one extra child beyond the legal limit, Ender's parents are bringing themselves shame, since they secretly believe that people should have the right to have as many children as they can (particular because of their religion). It doesn't really follow that Ender should make his parents ashamed, simply because they haven't gone far enough in rebelling against a controlling government. Graff appears to be manipulating Ender in order to make Ender more likely to agree to leave his family behind and go to Battle School. Ender, for all his intelligence and leadership abilities, can't quite see through Graff's distortions of the truth.

“I won't lie now,” said Graff. “My job isn't to be friends. My job is to produce the best soldiers in the world. In the whole history of the world. We need a Napoleon. An Alexander.”

Related Characters: Colonel Hyrum Graff (speaker), Andrew “Ender” Wiggin

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 34

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Graff, the commander of Battle School, explains the scope of his assignment to Ender. Graff has been tasked with using his education program to produce the best military commander possible—a commander so brilliant that he'll be able to defeat the alien Buggers. Graff even admits that he lied and manipulated Ender before so that Ender would be more likely to attend Battle School. The fact that Graff is now being (mostly) honest with Ender signals that he has complete authority over Ender—he doesn't *need* to lie anymore.

On the surface, it's almost amusing that a grown man is waxing poetic about Napoleon and Alexander to a 6-year-old boy. Graff's quote presupposes a faith in “the system”—he's confident that his educational program can, in fact, produce great generals, and (just as importantly) predict *which* students have the greatest potential. Graff claims that he's finally being honest with Ender, but—as Card will quickly make clear—this simply isn't true. Even if Graff will tell Ender the truth at certain times, he'll still manipulate his young pupil in increasingly devious and elaborate ways.

Chapter 5 Quotes

●● He could not cry. There was no chance that he would be treated with compassion. Dap was not Mother. Any sign of weakness would tell the Stilsons and the Peters that this boy could be broken.

Related Characters: Andrew “Ender” Wiggin (speaker), Dap, Peter Wiggin, Stilson

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 45

Explanation and Analysis

In the course of Ender's time in Battle School, he trains himself to control his emotions. In this quotation, for instance, he forces himself not to cry late at night, even though Dap—the caretaker and self-described “mom” of the new recruits—is offering his support. Although Ender is lonely and misses his family, he also believes that he'll be ridiculed for his weaknesses.

By this point in the novel, Ender has learned not to trust authority of any kind. Even though Dap seems to be a kind, sympathetic man, Ender doesn't trust him. He knows that Dap and Graff are associates; in other words, if Ender exposes any weakness to Dap, Graff will use it against him. Ender's self-control is incredible, but also tragic—this is essentially a six-year-old boy learning how to dehumanize himself in order to survive.

Chapter 6 Quotes

●● He hadn't meant to kill the Giant. This was supposed to be a game. Not a choice between his own grisly death and an even worse murder. I'm a murderer, even when I play. Peter would be proud of me.

Related Characters: Andrew “Ender” Wiggin (speaker), Peter Wiggin

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 65

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, Ender plays a game called the Giant's Drink. In the game, Ender faces off against a computer-generated giant who forces him to choose between two drinks, one of which is poisoned. Ender finally wins the game by simply attacking the giant, killing him brutally. Ender feels a sudden rush of guilt after murdering the giant. He doesn't want to believe that he's a violent, brutal person—he's always tried to distance himself from Peter, his older brother (a cruel bully, as we've already seen).

The scene also provides some important foreshadowing for the climactic events of the novel. Ender finds the confidence and creativity to fight the giant so brutally *because* he thinks that this is just a game—the artificiality of the Giant's Drink allows him to be crueler and more destructive than he would be in the real world. It's also crucial to notice that Ender, in spite of his compassion and guilt, doesn't feel guilty for his actions until *after* he's finished. This is what makes Ender such a great soldier: he's smart and empathetic enough to understand his opponents, but he can also suppress his sense of compassion until after his opponents are dead.

“Listen, Wiggin, I don't want you, I'm trying to get rid of you, but don't give me any problems, or I'll paste you to the wall.”

A good commander, thought Ender, doesn't have to make stupid threats.

Related Characters: Bonzo Madrid (speaker), Andrew “Ender” Wiggin

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 86

Explanation and Analysis

During his early days in Battle School, Ender is forced to serve under a older boy, Bonzo Madrid, in the Salamander Army. Bonzo is bigger and stronger than Ender, but—as the quotation makes very clear—he's an incompetent leader.

Bonzo threatens to hurt Ender unless Ender obeys him without question. Although Ender acts like a good soldier—he usually obeys Bonzo's orders, even when they're foolish—he privately recognizes that Bonzo is incompetent.

The passage is also important because it shows that Ender is slowly teaching himself the art of leadership. Whether he serves with great commanders or bad ones, Ender always learns something. Either he learns what to do in a battle, or he learns what *not* to do. Ender's style of leadership, we can already sense, would be calm, controlled, and rational—he wouldn't threaten or hurt his soldiers unless it was what needed to be done.

“You disobeyed me,” Bonzo said. Loudly, for all to hear. “No good soldier ever disobeys.”

Even as he cried from the pain, Ender could not help but take vengeful pleasure in the murmurs he heard rising through the barracks. You fool, Bonzo. You aren't enforcing discipline, you're destroying it. They know I turned defeat into a draw. And now they see how you repay me. You made yourself look stupid in front of everybody.

Related Characters: Bonzo Madrid (speaker), Andrew “Ender” Wiggin

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 95

Explanation and Analysis

Ender disobeys Bonzo's orders in a mock-battle at Battle School: Bonzo orders him not to draw his weapon, but Ender fires his weapon, turning a defeat into a draw for the Salamander Army. Here, Bonzo abuses Ender in front of his fellow soldiers. Ender notes that Bonzo is undermining his own power among the Salamanders: by proving that he punishes good soldiers, Bonzo is chipping away at his own troops' respect for him.

The passage is an excellent example of how Ender instinctively thinks in strategic terms—the long-term, really—at all times. Even when Bonzo slaps him in the face, Ender thinks ahead. His thought process also signals that he's putting together a model of good leadership. As far as Ender is concerned, a good leader rewards talent and initiative, while always remaining aware of how his troops view him.

Chapter 8 Quotes

☞ “Ender Wiggin is ten times smarter and stronger than I am. What I’m doing to him will bring out his genius. If I had to go through it myself, it would crush me.”

Related Characters: Colonel Hyrum Graff (speaker), Andrew “Ender” Wiggin

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 99

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Colonel Graff tries to justify his behavior to his colleagues at the Battle School. Graff has been manipulating Ender to put him in harm's way: first turning his fellow recruits against him, then sending him to serve with Bonzo. Although Graff's actions have raised some eyebrows, Graff's justification is always the same: Ender's treatment is necessary, because it's the only way to create a first-rate general. Here, Grant offers a further elaboration: Ender will be able to withstand anything that comes in his way.

Graff's pronouncement is a clever rhetorical maneuver. By emphasizing his own weakness and foolishness, Graff creates the impression that he's a modest, cautious man while also suggesting that Ender is more than capable of surviving Bonzo's hostility. In short, Graff undercuts his own achievements and authority in order to justify his actions.

☞ “There is no war, and they’re just screwing around with us.”
“But why?”
“Because as long as people are afraid of the Buggers, the IF can stay in power.”

Related Characters: Dink Meeker, Andrew “Ender” Wiggin (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 110

Explanation and Analysis

One of Ender's superiors in his new army, Dink Meeker, tells Ender his theory. Dink believes that the International Fleet, or IF, is manufacturing rumors of a Bugger invasion in order to maintain power. The IF has a virtual monopoly on the world's greatest military leaders: it runs tests around the world to harvest the best minds and train them for years in a secure location (Battle School). The IF can always justify

the tremendous power it exerts over the world by saying that Battle School is necessary for defeating the Buggers. In short, it's in the IF's interest to manufacture a story about an impending Bugger invasion.

Although Ender dismisses Dink's theories for a number of reasons, Dink's ideas are relevant because they reinforce the notion that the IF will use deception and manipulation to get its way. As we've already seen, the IF will lie to children in order to get them to come to Battle School—it doesn't seem to be assuming too much to say that it would also lie to the people of the Earth.

Chapter 9 Quotes

☞ “When the Bugger wars are over, all that power will vanish, because it’s all built on fear of the Buggers. And suddenly we’ll look around and discover that all the old alliances are gone, dead and gone, except one, the Warsaw Pact. And it’ll be the dollar against five million lasers.”

Related Characters: Peter Wiggin (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 126

Explanation and Analysis

Peter, still a teenager, tries to convince Valentine that the Earth is facing an impending crisis. If the Buggers are defeated in battle, the nations of the Earth will begin a scramble for power. The world's great powers have only united together temporarily out of fear that they'll be wiped out by Bugger warriors. If there are no more Buggers, there's no more unity—war is inevitable.

Peter's speech—which he uses as justification for his own plan to become the leader of the world—is interesting because it sheds light on Peter's own definition of leadership. Ender, a soldier and a general, thinks of a leader as a calm, collected figure who comes up with the best strategies. Peter, on the other hand, thinks of a leader as a political figure, someone whose principle job is to maintain a delicate balance of power between many rivals. Peter's speech also presupposes that human beings are basically selfish entities—they'll do whatever it takes to gain as much power for themselves as possible. We can guess that Peter sees *himself* in exactly the same terms—he's a power-hungry young man.

☛ That's how they think of me, too. Teacher. Legendary soldier. Not one of them. Not someone that you embrace and whisper Salaam in his ear. That only lasted while Ender seemed a victim. Still seemed vulnerable. Now he was the master soldier, and he was completely, utterly alone.

Related Characters: Andrew "Ender" Wiggin (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 140

Explanation and Analysis

As Ender becomes more successful at Battle School, he gets a reputation for being a "legend." Although there are some advantages to being seen as a legend—fewer people bully him, even if more people hate him in secret—Ender finds his new life lonely and isolating. Even the people who respect him deeply can't see him as a peer or friend: they think of him as an abstract role model, someone to be emulated and respected but not befriended. Ender's transition from frightened young student to intimidating general is especially poignant because he remembers a time when he had friends in Battle School, such as Alai (the student who whispered "Salaam" in his ear).

Ender's sadness in this quotation proves that Graff has been successful: Graff's goal, after all, was to alienate Ender from his fellow troops in order to make him focus solely on strategy. As Ender becomes more successful in school, the tortures and challenges Graff puts in his way have to become more elaborate: at this point in the novel, Ender's "challenge" involves facing this deep, existential sadness.

immediately regrets his actions and wishes he could take back what he said. But Ender also knows that his priority is developing his authority over his new group of soldiers. For this reason, he doesn't apologize to Bean, but instead moves on with his speech.

Ender's behavior in the scene illustrates the contrast between his cold, calculating manner and his secret compassionate side. Ender was a sweet child, but Graff and his other teachers at Battle School have trained him to be harsh, intimidating, and impressive. Yet in spite of the training he's received, Ender continues to feel the same sense of compassion he always did: Graff hasn't stamped it out of him yet.

In the second half of the novel, Card poses a question: which part of Ender's personality is stronger, his brutality or his compassion? Based on the quote, it would seem that Ender's brutality is stronger: he yells first, then feels sorry later. At the same time, though, Ender had to *learn* brutality from Graff—his compassion is innate. The fact that Graff has yet to get rid of Ender's sense of compassion suggests that it, not Ender's brutality, is the stronger force.

☛ I made sure they all noticed you today. They'll be watching every move you make. All you have to do to earn their respect now is be perfect.

Related Characters: Andrew "Ender" Wiggin (speaker), Bean

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 166

Explanation and Analysis

Ender tries to justify his behavior to Bean, the soldier he verbally abused in front of his new group of soldiers. The justification Ender gives Bean is uncannily similar to the explanation Graff offered Ender at the beginning of the novel: like Graff, Ender is manipulating Bean's peers against him in the hopes that Bean will rise to the challenge and become a stronger, better soldier.

Ender's behavior toward Bean proves that Graff's training is working. Even though Ender hates Graff for hurting him and turning him against his friends, Ender emulates Graff's behavior reflexively—it's a classic example of "mimetic behavior" (copying someone else). Ender's actions also suggest that his definition of good leadership is changing somewhat. While he continues to aspire to kindness and compassion, he recognizes that there are times when he

Chapter 10 Quotes

☛ Ender wanted to undo his taunting of the boy, wanted to tell the others that the little one needed their help and friendship more than anyone else. But of course Ender couldn't do that. Not on the first day. On the first day even his mistakes had to look like part of a brilliant plan.

Related Characters: Bean, Andrew "Ender" Wiggin

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 161-162

Explanation and Analysis

Ender is given control of an army at Battle School. On his first day commanding the army, he verbally abuses a young soldier named Bean, making fun of him for his size. Ender

needs to be cruel and even abusive to his own troops, in order to build their loyalty. Ender has become the thing he hates most: a cruel, calculating commander.

Chapter 11 Quotes

☞ “They need us, that’s why.” Bean sat down on the floor and stared at Ender’s feet. “Because they need somebody to beat the Buggers. That’s the only thing they care about.”
 “It’s important that you know that, Bean. Because most boys in this school think the game is important for itself—but it isn’t. It’s only important because it helps them find kids who might grow up to be real commanders, in the real war. But as for the game, screw that.”

Related Characters: Andrew “Ender” Wiggin, Bean (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 196-197

Explanation and Analysis

In this quotation, Ender confides in his friend Bean—a young, ambitious soldier in the Dragon Army, whom Ender had initially mocked for his size. Ender tells Bean what he’s learned about Battle School so far: the game, he believes, is fake, while war is real. Ender claims that most students in school are so competitive that they never fully grasp that the game is “just a game”—there are always students like Bonzo who are so competitive that they’re willing to kill an opponent because of a win or loss in the Battle Room.

Ender’s speech is ironic, as we’ll soon find out, since in the end, there *is* no difference between the game and the war with the Buggers. Ender’s mistake—his tragic flaw, you could say—is that he thinks he can preserve some of his humanity and compassion during Battle School; i.e., he can be a brutal commander during a game, and a normal human being for the rest of the day. Graff, knowing full-well that Ender thinks the Battle Room is just a game, will manipulate Ender into heartlessly annihilating the Buggers by lying to him about what is and isn’t real.

☞ Only then did it occur to William Bee that not only had Dragon Army ended the game, it was possible that, under the rules, they had won it. After all, no matter what happened, you were not certified as the winner unless you had enough unfrozen soldiers to touch the corners of the gate and pass someone through into the enemy’s corridor.

Related Characters: Andrew “Ender” Wiggin, William Bee

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 218

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene—one of the few moments from the novel in which the perspective shifts away from Ender Wiggin—Card describes one of Ender’s most ingenious victories in the Battle Room. A technicality states that an army can only win by launching five soldiers through the opponent team’s side. Usually, armies interpret this rule to mean that after the battle, five soldiers must cross to the other side. Ender, knowing he’s badly outnumbered and has no chance of winning, simply launches his soldiers before the game has begun.

The shift in perspective that takes place during this scene helps convey the ingenuity of Ender’s plan. For once, we’re not privy to Ender’s decision-making process, and so Ender’s final decision becomes all the more unexpected and dazzling. The scene is also a good example of how Ender “cuts the Gordian knot” (a legendary knot that was impossible to untie, but which Alexander the Great supposedly cut open with his sword)—i.e., rethinks the rules of the game in a creative way—when he’s under pressure. Arguably his greatest talent as a leader is that he can twist the rules bit by bit. Graff knows about Ender’s talent, and uses it to trick him into killing the Buggers.

Chapter 13 Quotes

☞ He caught her wrist in his hand. His grip was very strong, even though his hands were smaller than hers and his own arms were slender and tight. For a moment he looked dangerous; then he relaxed. “Oh, yes,” he said. “You used to tickle me.”

Related Characters: Andrew “Ender” Wiggin (speaker), Valentine Wiggin

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 235

Explanation and Analysis

Ender reunites with his sister, Valentine, back on Earth. One afternoon, they go out to a boat, and Valentine tries to tickle

Ender, prompting Ender—like the good soldier he is—to adopt a defensive stance. Ender has been so well trained as a soldier that he naturally treats everyone as a threat, even his own sister. It's only a second later that Ender remembers that Valentine is his beloved big sister, the person he loves most in the world.

Ender's behavior is robotic in this scene, and the robot comparison is pretty accurate. Over the years, Graff and the other teachers at Battle School have reshaped Ender into a lethal weapon who can be manipulated and controlled whenever the need arises. Graff tries to suppress Ender's strongest quality, his compassion. Here, it's clear that Graff has failed to do so: Ender still loves his sister. But Graff has *also* made Ender a dangerous warrior—someone whom Valentine doesn't really know at all.

☝ In the moment when I truly understand my enemy, understand him well enough to defeat him, then in that very moment I also love him.

Related Characters: Andrew “Ender” Wiggin (speaker), Valentine Wiggin

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 238

Explanation and Analysis

In this quotation, Ender Wiggin tells Valentine what he's learned about the role of compassion and empathy in fighting. Ender has always been a particularly compassionate person, as well as a particularly brutal one. For the most part, Ender and the people who know him have thought of these two sides of Ender as strictly separate, even opposite. Ender, however, argues that the greatest brutality is only possible *with* compassion. Unlike a mediocre bully like Stilson or Bonzo, Ender is smart and empathetic enough to understand his opponents deeply. It's his sense of understanding that allows Ender to defeat his opponents with such ease: because he knows and loves them, he knows how to destroy them.

Ender's speech partly explains why his time in Battle School is so agonizing. Over the course of his years away from Earth, he's instructed to compete for success, hurting anyone who gets in his way. Ender tries to build friendship and collaboration between his peers, but at every turn, Graff and the other teachers turn him against his friends. Yet the passage also hints at a path to redemption for Ender. Ender is taught to hate the Buggers, but he's also capable of

boundless love for them. In the end, Ender's capacity for love leads him to protect and nurture the Buggers, atoning for his genocidal crime.

Chapter 14 Quotes

☝ “I surprised you once, Ender Wiggin, Why didn't you destroy me immediately afterward? Just because I looked peaceful? You turned your back on me. Stupid. You have learned nothing. You have never had a teacher.”

Related Characters: Mazer Rackham (speaker), Andrew “Ender” Wiggin

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 262

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, Ender meets his new mentor, Mazer Rackham, the legendary pilot who defeated a Bugger invasion years before. Mazer poses as a demented, harmless old man. He lashes out at Ender once, but before Ender can retaliate, he assumes a harmless position on the floor. Ender is too sympathetic to attack Mazer while he's sitting on the floor—his natural compassion takes over. But when Ender isn't paying attention, Mazer attacks him again—much harder—and then chastises him for being foolish enough not to hit Mazer when he had the chance.

Mazer's actions are intended as a metaphor for the Bugger invasion: the Bugger attacked humanity once, but didn't succeed in destroying it altogether. While some people doubt that it's worthwhile to attack the Buggers when they're not an immediate threat to Earth, Mazer insists otherwise: humans must exterminate the Buggers, just as Ender should have attacked Mazer when he was on the floor.

In a broader sense, Mazer's lesson for Ender signals that Ender is about to have his last drops of compassion and sympathy beaten out of him. In the past, Ender has attacked opponents when they're already hurt. But even Ender refuses to hurt a weak-looking old man—he's not a monster. Mazer will push Ender to be brutal at all costs, for the sake of humanity. Mazer's lesson also reminds Ender of what he's known all along: his teachers are his enemies, hurting him and reshaping him into a monster so that he can win their war for them.

☛ 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.

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.

And the enemy's gate was down.

Related Characters: Andrew "Ender" Wiggin (speaker), Mazer Rackham

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 293

Explanation and Analysis

In the novel's climactic scene, Ender faces an opponent (which he believes to be a computer simulation) more dangerous than any he's ever seen. Badly outnumbered, Ender isn't sure how to react. After a moment's thought, he decides to "cut the Gordian knot" once again. Ender decides to "win" the game by breaking the rules; sacrificing huge chunks of his own army in order to exterminate the Buggers at their source. Ender has the creativity to break the rules because he remembers the un-winnable battles he won in the Battle Room by breaking similar sets of rules.

The tragedy of Ender's decision is that he's willing to exterminate his opponents because he's convinced it's "just a game." In reality, though, the game is real. Thanks to Graff's deceptions, Ender has been commanding real troops against a real enemy, and by winning the battle, he's won the Bugger War forever.

Ender's "victory" in this scene proves how well his education at Battle School has taught him to think of violence as a mere simulation. Although he's a uniquely compassionate, loving boy, he never has any qualms about sending troops to their deaths or murdering millions of Bugger opponents—but this is only possible because he's convinced that the game and the real world are separate, and that he's participating in the former.

In a broader sense, though, Ender's defeat of the Buggers illustrates how completely the IF commanders control him. After decades of running tests on their prized pupil, Graff and his colleagues know exactly how Ender's mind works. They know when he'll keep pushing, and when he'll crack under pressure. Ironically, "cracking under pressure" is exactly what Graff *wants* Ender to do in this scene: Ender inadvertently exterminates the Buggers because he's sick of battlesimulations, and wants a break.

Graff lies to Ender about the reality of the game for two reasons, one kind, one selfish. Graff wants to protect Ender from the guilt of consciously choosing to murder the Buggers—a decision that no single human being could possibly make. At the same time, Graff lies to Ender because he wants to make sure that Ender completes his assignment instead of compassionately refusing to commit mass murder. It's cowardly of Graff to place the burden of genocide on Ender's shoulders, and—as we'll soon see—the fact that Ender didn't know the game was real doesn't make him feel any less responsible.

Chapter 15 Quotes

☛ "We got the judges to agree that the prosecution had to prove beyond doubt that Ender would have won the war without the training we gave him. After then it was simple. The exigencies of war."

"Anyway, Graff, it was a great relief to us. I know we quarreled, and I know the prosecution used tapes of our conversation against you. But by then I knew that you were right, and I offered to testify for you."

Related Characters: Colonel Hyrum Graff, Major Anderson (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 306

Explanation and Analysis

In the aftermath of the Bugger War, Graff is prosecuted for criminal behavior. He's accused of turning Ender Wiggin into a monster: encouraging him to hurt other children and ultimately murder an entire race of creatures. As Graff explains here, he was able to get acquitted very simply: he just argued that Ender's brutal training was necessary for winning the war against the Buggers—in other words, to be against Graff is to be against humanity.

Graff's legal victory reminds us that Ender was only ever a pawn for the IF, and remains a pawn even after the Bugger Wars. As Graff makes very clear, Ender's only purpose was to defeat the Buggers: Graff cynically crammed him with lessons in violence and brutality, never caring about (or choosing to ignore) the fact that Ender might be permanently warped by this "education." And even now, after the Bugger Wars, Graff's judges are forced to admit that the ends justify the means: Ender's prolonged torture at Battle School (he's forced to murder children, for example) is less important than humanity's victory against

the Buggers.

“Val,” he said, “I just want one thing clear. I’m not going for you. I’m not going in order to be governor, or because I’m bored here. I’m going because I know the Buggers better than any other living soul, and maybe if I go there I can understand them better. I stole their future from them; I can only begin to repay by seeing what I can learn from their past.”

Related Characters: Andrew “Ender” Wiggin (speaker), Valentine Wiggin

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 314

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Ender spells out the path he must take to atone for his war crimes. Ender has exterminated the Buggers altogether: as far as he can tell, an entire alien race has been wiped out. He feels incredibly guilty for his act of murder, and wants to do something to make up for his own actions. Ender doesn't think he can bring the Buggers back from the dead, but instead, he tries to use his intelligence and knowledge of the Buggers to respect their culture and history.

Ender's actions remind us of his greatest asset as a commander and as a human being: his military prowess and his compassion are one and the same. As Ender reminds us, he's the world's greatest living authority on the Buggers: if he wasn't, he wouldn't have been able to defeat them in battle. Because Ender understands his enemies, he knows exactly what to do to defeat them.

In the past, Ender's compassion has always been subservient to his talents as a commander: i.e., his compassion has enhanced his commanding, not the other way around. But in the final chapters of the novel, the tides turn. Ender hopes to use his compassion for good, learning about the Buggers and balancing out his past crimes.

And always Ender carried with him a dry white cocoon, looking for a world where the hive-queen could awaken and thrive in peace. He looked a long time.

Related Characters: Andrew “Ender” Wiggin

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 324

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of the novel, Ender makes a surprising discovery: a single Bigger cocoon, containing a new Queen fertile enough to repopulate the entire Bigger race. Ender learns that the Buggers have chosen him to repopulate their species—although he defeated them in battle, they've also sensed his love, compassion, and understanding. Ender goes out into outer space, looking for a place where the Buggers can live in peace.

Card doesn't describe (until later novels in the series) exactly how Ender goes about finding a new home for the Buggers. But the key sentence in the passage is, "He looked a long time." The past-tense might suggest that Ender's quest to repopulate the Bigger species eventually came to an end. But more importantly, Card makes it clear that it takes Ender a "long time" to find a home for the Buggers. Ender is atoning for his sins: punishing himself by working hard to help the Buggers. There's a kind of spiritual justice in the fact that Ender spends years carrying the cocoon: he's trying to balance out the years during which he was trained to kill the Buggers. In the end, however, Ender's good deeds (seemingly) outweigh his past sins.

Card's optimistic (and, it's sometimes suggested, highly religious) ending proves that Ender is a good man, not a monster. He has the potential to do evil—as all human beings do—but because he's also been blessed with the ability to love and work hard, he can overcome any evil he's done in the past.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1: THIRD

The chapter begins with a conversation between two unnamed people (for the purposes of this summary, we'll call them X and Y, and refer to them as "he"). X claims that he's been watching someone for many years now, and has concluded that this person is "the one." X had once thought the same thing about this person's brother—a fact that Y reminds X of. X and Y then plan to surround their subject with enemies, thereby training him to fight "the Buggers"—a much more dangerous enemy.

The narrative then cuts to an elementary school. A nurse speaks to a young boy named Ender, calling him Andrew. She explains that Ender is about to have a "monitor," a small electronic device, removed from his body, and assures him that it won't hurt at all. Ender privately thinks that the woman is lying—having the monitor removed will hurt a great deal. Ender has had the monitor imbedded in his body for a long time now. He's always been viewed as different because of the monitor—perhaps now that he's having it removed, he thinks, he'll be a normal kid, and will be able to get along with his brother, Peter. But even as Ender thinks about getting along with Peter, he realizes that nothing is going to change. Peter will still hate him—for reasons that aren't yet clear to us—and will continue to call him a "Third."

Ender goes into a doctor's office, where a doctor sits Ender down and prepares to remove the monitor from his head. As the doctor leans in, Ender feels a sudden searing pain in his head, and his entire body tenses up. The doctor screams for a nurse, and the nurse injects Ender with a needle. When Ender wakes up, the doctor is muttering about how "They" put monitors in children for three years. The doctor adds that if the nurse hadn't given Ender the proper amount of injection, she could have "switched off" Ender's brain forever.

Card begins most of his chapters the same way—with a conversation between adults discussing the fate of Ender, the young protagonist. At this point, however, this is all entirely mysterious, as the speakers are unnamed not even Ender himself is named specifically. Later we will find out that "X" and "Y" are most likely Colonel Graff and Major Anderson.



As soon as we are introduced to Ender, Card lets us know that he's not an ordinary child. He's only six years old, but he already thinks like an adult. Card has expressed scorn for the way children are usually portrayed in fiction, and we see that he clearly has high opinions of what children's minds are capable of. The monitor embedded in Ender's body already gives hints of the futuristic, controlling society in which Ender lives—ever since his birth, someone has been keeping track of him. It's revealed here that Ender's given name is "Andrew," but he always goes by "Ender" for the rest of the book.



We get the sense here that Ender isn't very well taken care of, and that as a "Third" (though it's not yet clear what this means), he's something of a second-class citizen. We also recognize that "They" (we don't know who, but can guess that it has something to do with the two speakers at the beginning of the chapter, and the government of this society) are talented at watching and analyzing people.



An hour after his operation, Ender returns to his classroom. He can barely stand, and can't remember where he sat in class. A boy named Stilson smirks and says that Ender is "washed out" now. The teacher, a woman named Miss Pumphrey, proceeds with a lesson on multiplication. Ender barely pays attention—instead he makes drawings on his "desk," an electronic surface that he's supposed to use to learn in school. Ender smiles to himself—the lesson is absurdly easy for him, even though he's only a young child. He has always been a Third, he thinks, although it's not his fault that he is. The government authorized Ender's parents to have a third child—a rarity in Ender's society.

After school, Ender leaves class and walks to the bus. Stilson yells at Ender, calling him "Third" and "bugger lover." Ender tries to ignore Stilson, but Stilson pushes Ender to the ground while Stilson's friends laugh and jeer. Ender thinks calmly, and he decides to fight back. Stilson's friends hold Ender down, but Ender fakes a laugh, and dares Stilson to fight him on his own. As soon as Stilson is ready to fight Ender, Ender kicks him, hard, in the chest. Ender is a little surprised that he's hurt Stilson so badly. But he also realizes that if he walks away now, Stilson will be back to fight him again. He walks to where Stilson is lying on the ground, moaning, and kicks him in the crotch.

Ender looks at Stilson's friends, who seem horrified. He yells, "remember what I do to people who try to hurt me." Then, he kicks Stilson in the nose, and blood spatters everywhere. With this, Ender walks away from the crowd, toward the bus. Although from a distance he seems calm, he cries and thinks to himself that deep down he's "Just like Peter."

CHAPTER 2: PETER

The chapter begins with another anonymous conversation, apparently between the same two people from the last chapter. X says that "the subject" is adjusting to his new life without a monitor, and has just beaten up the leader of a gang. X and Y agree to see what "he" does with his brother. X mutters, "I like the kid. I think we're going to screw him up." Y agrees, and points out that it's their job to "mess up" children.

Here we begin to get a sense for who Ender is and what kind of world he lives in. By nature, he's a gentle, creative child, who is extremely intelligent and thoughtful. But he's also a "Third"—a third child in a society that prevents people from having more than two children. Because of this, Ender is disliked and bullied by those like Stilson. Perhaps the most important takeaway from this passage is that Ender has been "chosen" before he was even born: the government wants him alive, though we don't yet know why.



This section introduces us to the rather brutal world Ender lives in. So far, Ender has been gentle, meek, and a victim, but here we see the dark side of his brilliant mind: when the moment is right, he doesn't hesitate to act, and to act with violence. Strangely, the same careful, calm thinking that made Ender seem like a sweet child also makes him capable of savage attacks on his peers—when that is what he deems necessary. We will learn much later that Stilson dies from this attack.



Even within the first chapter, Ender is already an agent of violence—although a reluctant one. He is still a sensitive child at heart, but apparently lives in a warlike world where he is forced to act almost sociopathically in order to survive. It's clear that his brother Peter, whom we have yet to meet, embodies this "dark side" of Ender.



This opening section echoes the themes of the first chapter's opening section, but in more overt language. The two anonymous manipulators celebrate Ender for the very thing he hates most about himself—his capacity for violence. Understandably, encouraging this capacity in Ender will have deep psychological consequences for him—a consequence that X (Graff) and Y (Anderson) callously accept and even joke about.



Ender is sitting at home with his older sister, Valentine. Valentine gently tells Ender that she's sorry. Suddenly, their brother Peter, the oldest child, walks in. Peter is a charismatic 10-year-old boy, but from Ender's perspective he's a brutal bully. Peter immediately notices that Ender's monitor has been removed. He mutters that Ender "almost made it," and adds that he lost his monitor at the age of 5, while Valentine lost hers at 3. Peter, who seems angry, proposes that he and Ender play a game, "Astronauts and Buggers." Ender is afraid of Peter, but agrees to play. Peter tells Ender to play a Bugger, even though the Buggers never win the game. Ender thinks about "the war" that's going on between humans and Buggers. Because the war is ever-present and doesn't seem to be ending anytime soon, Ender's parents have agreed that it's best to let their children play war games, thereby preparing them for the real war.

Peter and Ender begin playing Astronauts and Buggers. Ender imagines the Buggers, living on another planet, playing their own version of the game in which the Buggers always win. Peter punches Ender and pushes him to the floor. He jeers that he could kill Ender if he wanted—he could pretend that he didn't know he was killing his brother, and their parents would believe him. Valentine, who's been watching the game, says that she'd tell the truth. Peter threatens to kill her, too. Valentine calmly says that Peter could never "get elected" if his two siblings died under mysterious circumstances. She adds that she and Ender are just as clever as Peter, and cleverer in some ways. Peter lets Ender up. He seems angry for a split second, but then begins laughing hysterically at Valentine and Ender, insisting that he was only joking.

Shortly after the game of Astronauts and Buggers, Ender's parents come home from work. Ender's mother, whom he simply calls Mother, tells Ender that she's sorry about his pain. Father points out that it was an honor that the government allowed their family to have three children—proof of their children's vast intelligence.

Later in the night, Ender goes to bed. Peter, who sleeps in the bunk above Ender's bed, walks into the room, and stops by Ender's bed. To Ender's great surprise, Peter doesn't try to attack Ender. Instead, he whispers to Ender that he's sorry for Ender's pain and fear, and adds that he loves Ender. With this, Peter climbs into his bunk and falls asleep. Ender stays up for a long time, crying to himself.

Card gives us a sense for the family dynamic between Peter, Ender, and Valentine. All the children are super-intelligent, and apparently have been monitored by the government since birth. Peter, the oldest, is violent and cruel, which means that he wants "Them" to choose him after watching his monitor. The fact that "They" clearly haven't chosen him, then, makes Peter despise Ender. It's also important to note that games are important in the family's life. The children play games with each other to prepare for the massive war that seems to dominate life on earth: an ongoing war between the alien "Buggers" and the humans. By conditioning children to enjoy fighting, adults can look forward to a future in which their children grow up to be willing warriors.



On the surface, this exchange is grotesquely comic—a ten-year-old boy is worrying about his future "electability." But this only drives home the point that Peter, Ender, and Valentine aren't children at all—they're basically intelligent adults who happen to be very young. We get the sense that Valentine is Ender's protector against Peter, while Ender, for his part, seems like a mixture of Peter and Valentine: like Valentine, he seems gentle and peaceful, but like Peter, he's willing to fight or manipulate others. It's also important to note that Ender is already trying to see things from the Bugger's point of view—he's good at putting himself in his enemy's shoes.



Compared with their brilliant, lively children, Mother and Father seem curiously bland. This is deliberate on Card's part. The "children" in his books have complex inner lives and face fascinating moral dilemmas, while the adults, by and large, are ordinary and rather simple.



This comes as a surprise, especially after we've seen Peter torture Ender physically and psychologically. We sense that Peter, in spite of his capacity for evil, also wants to be loved, and can experience regret for his actions. This is precisely what makes Ender cry: Ender recognizes that he really is like Peter, not only in the sense that he's capable of great harm, but also because he wants to be good.



CHAPTER 3: GRAFF

The chapter begins with another anonymous conversation, apparently between X and Y. X points out that “the sister” is the weak link, since “the subject” loves her. Y agrees, but says that he’ll be able to convince the subject to leave his sister behind. Y’s first strategy will be to lie to the subject—and if that fails, he’ll tell the truth.

The chapter resumes the morning after the events of the previous chapter. Ender is sitting at breakfast, wondering if he’ll have a tough day at school. Peter enters the room and teases Ender for being “slimy.” As Peter, Ender, Mother, and Father bicker, there is a ring at their front door. Father answers the door and finds a man wearing the military uniform of the International Fleet—“the only military uniform that meant anything anymore.” Father speaks quietly with the man for a few moments. While they talk, Peter whispers that Ender is being taken to jail—as a Third, he has no rights at all. Valentine walks into the room, and notices the military man standing in the hallway. Instinctively, she looks at Ender, not Peter, as she’s always thought that Ender will be recruited for the military one day. Peter notices Valentine’s eye contact—his feelings have clearly been hurt.

Father calls Ender to talk to the military man. Mother and Father tell Ender what the man has just told them—Ender seriously hurt Stilson, sending him to the hospital. The man in the uniform tells Ender, very sternly, that he could be severely punished for his act of violence. He demands to know what Ender was thinking. Shyly, Ender admits the truth: he hit Stilson once to win their fight—he kept hitting Stilson to win “all the next fights, too.” The man seems to find this interesting. He introduces himself as Colonel Hyrum Graff, the director of primary training at the Battle School. He explains that he’s come to invite Ender to go to Battle School. Mother and Father find this information horrifying—it’s as if Ender is being rewarded for his brutality. Graff explains that Ender has shown great leadership potential, and as a result, he is now the property of the IF (International Fleet). Mother and Father begin to weep. They point out that it was cruel of the government to remove the monitor, allowing them to think that Ender had failed his tests of military prowess, only to take Ender away in the end.

X and Y are mostly amoral and indifferent to the truth: they have one goal (use Ender to fight the Buggers), and they’re willing to use any means to achieve it. Here, they decide to separate Ender from Valentine, the person he loves most—all as a kind of “training.”



After Peter’s declaration of love and sympathy the night before, he is now back to tormenting and belittling Ender. This segues quickly to a description of the society in which Ender and his family live: a society in which Ender, as a “Third,” has no rights to speak of. It’s telling that Valentine assumes that the International Fleet (IF) man is there to recruit Ender for combat—not Peter. It’s equally telling that Peter is sincerely hurt by Valentine’s assumption. Clearly he wanted to be recruited by the IF, but was found lacking (we learn that this is because of his cruel tendencies). The IF is the only military that “matters,” because it is what fights the Buggers, the supposed enemies of all humanity.



It’s difficult to gauge what to believe and what not to believe in this section, particularly because at the beginning of the chapter, we were told that X and Y (one of whom is Graff, we can now assume) said he’d use both truth and lies to try and recruit Ender. We sense that Graff is blackmailing Ender’s family into giving up their son by threatening to send Ender to prison for his crime instead. Graff has no qualms about reminding Mother and Father of the sad truth: Ender was only allowed to be born in the first place because the IF needed him, and now it’s time for the IF to take him away. This is an agonizing decision for Mother and Father, as it is partly an honor for Ender to be taken away—it means he is the best of the best—but it also means losing their son.



Graff turns his attention to Ender, and tells him that Ender has the choice to attend the school or not—a statement that Mother and Father find absurd. Undeterred, Graff tells Ender that he'll be a great soldier at Battle School, and he'll become a great commander one day. Ender is reluctant to agree to fight. He's always hated those like Peter and Stilson who enjoy violence and conflict. Graff proposes that he and Ender speak privately, and adds that there's nothing Mother and Father can do to stop him.

Ender and Graff speak privately outside Ender's house. Graff explains the truth: if Ender goes to Battle School, he'll be far from home for at least six years, and probably more. When he returns to Earth, his family will be different—even his beloved sister, Valentine. Graff adds that he knows Ender very well—in other words, he knows that Ender will miss Valentine, but won't miss Mother and Father. Graff explains that Father was born Catholic, and had eight siblings—something that Ender finds appalling. At this time, the government was trying to use economic sanctions to compel people to have fewer children. Because Father wasn't the oldest child in his family, he wasn't given a good education. As an adult, he vowed to never have more than the legal two children, as he didn't want his offspring to go through the same shame and persecution that he experienced growing up. Graff adds that Mother, who was raised in a large Mormon family, has similarly mixed feelings about Ender. Mother and Father love Ender, but feel ashamed of having more than two children—even though they only had a third child at the government's request. In this way, Mother and Father, both of whom are still deeply religious, are proud of their Third, but also secretly want him out of the house.

Ender and Graff continue talking. Graff explains that Valentine loves Ender with all her heart. He also explains that Ender will be exposed to new information at Battle School: strategy, military history, etc. He'll play war games in a structure called the **battleroom**. Most of the students at Battle School are boys, with a handful of exceptions. Graff explains that Peter was in serious consideration for Battle School, but ultimately, the IF decided that he was too brutal and sadistic. The same was true of Valentine, except that the IF ultimately rejected her for being too kind and peaceful.

Graff never comes right out and says that Ender is required to come to Battle School, but he also strongly implies that the IF has total control over his life. Ender's first instinct is to refuse Battle School, since he despises violence of any kind—but as in the fight with Stilson, we also know that Ender is willing to use violence, as long as it seems logical and effective.



In this long, important section, we get a good sense for what life in the future might be like, according to Card. It's implied that the world's governments have put strong controls on population growth because they're worried about food shortages. This enforced birth control clashes with the tenets of certain religions, such as Catholicism (and, in some ways, Mormonism). Card, himself a Mormon, recognizes that the government's aims and those of different religious communities aren't always in harmony. It's not clear, however, if what Graff says about Father and Mother is true, or if Graff is making it up to convince Ender to go to Battle School. It's this type of ambiguity in Graff's argument that makes him such an untrustworthy character: he's hell-bent on making Ender a great soldier (even if it's for the "greater good" of all humanity), and he seems willing to use any means necessary to achieve this.



It seems that Graff is telling the truth here: Valentine is the greatest love of Ender's life, while Peter is his greatest rival. It is then an important aspect of the novel that these seemingly ordinary relationships between young siblings will actually be played out on a global stage, as all three of the children use their intelligence and skill to affect millions of lives. Graff is also honest about his manipulations when it comes to Peter, and why Peter failed to be recruited—he's brilliant, and could have been a talented commander at Battle School, but his cruelty would have been made those he commanded less loyal to him. We get the sense, once again, that Ender is an "average" of his two older siblings: he has Peter's drive and potential for violence, but with Valentine's calmness and empathy.



Ender and Graff continue talking. Graff tells Ender that the human race needs another military commander who's capable of destroying the Buggers once and for all. Ender thinks about the footage of Bigger invasions he's seen in history classes. The Buggers invaded Earth years ago, destroying large chunks of the world's population. It was only because of the brilliant Mazer Rackham, Ender has been told, that humans were able to destroy the Buggers' powerful enemy ships. As Ender thinks about all this, he whispers to Graff, "I'll go with you."

In this expository section, Card fills in some of the pieces of his futuristic vision. An alien race called the Buggers has previously invaded Earth, causing enormous damage. Earth was saved thanks to the brilliance of a commander named Mazer Rackham, who was able to command a fleet of ships that defeated the much larger Bigger fleet, at least for the time being. In the end, it seems to be the fear of another Bigger invasion that convinces Ender to go to Battle School—as much as he loves Valentine, the fate of humanity (of which she is a part, after all) is more important.



Ender walks back into the house and says a quick goodbye to his family. He hugs his Father and Mother (who cries), and shakes hands with Peter. Valentine cries and kisses Ender. With this, Graff takes Ender to his car, and drives him away. As they drive away, Ender looks at his house. He sees Valentine run out and shout, "I love you forever!"

Here we're reminded of the strong connection between Ender and Valentine—in other words, how difficult it must have been for Ender to agree to go with Graff. The siblings' love for each other will now be tested by both separation and the manipulations of global politics.



CHAPTER 4: LAUNCH

The chapter begins with another anonymous conversation, apparently between X and Y again. Now talking explicitly about Ender, they agree that they'll need to educate Ender very carefully if he's to become the next Mazer Rackham. The most important step, X suggests, will be "purging" Ender of his kindness and sweetness.

We had already sensed that Ender was very special, even by the standards of Battle School—that's why the government wanted Ender's parents to have another child. But in order for Ender to become the ultimate commander that Graff and the government want, he'll need to be willing to use violence without hesitation—and this will require a brutal training program in Battle School.



Ender is sitting in a space shuttle, preparing to be sent to Battle School. There are 19 other boys in his shuttle. He notices that they laugh and talk very loudly, which makes him feel lonely and sad. Ender thinks that somewhere, people are watching him. Ender thinks about trying to laugh along with his peers, but finds that he can't. He remembers walking to the shuttle and being filmed by a cameraman. He'd considered trying to wave to Valentine. The narrator notes that if he'd done so, the footage would have been censored, since the government wants students to seem strong and determined.

So far, the story has been told entirely from Ender's perspective, or from the perspective of X and Y (one of whom is Graff). In this quick aside, though, the narrator tells us that, unbeknownst to Ender, the footage of children going to Battle School is carefully censored. We begin to realize just how repressive and tyrannical the governments of the future really are: they manipulate their citizens through lies and propaganda—just as Graff lies to and manipulates Ender.



As Ender sits in his shuttle seat, he notices that the wall above him is carpeted, like a floor. He realizes that he might as well be walking on a wall—pretty soon he'll be in a place with no gravity, after all. He imagines the shuttle "dangling" at the bottom of the Earth, about to "fall" away into space. As Ender thinks, he hears a voice—it's Graff, greeting him. Graff smiles and jokes, and Ender feels at ease—he'll have a friend.

We get a sense for why Ender's calmness and quietness might be assets to him in Battle School. While the other children laugh and talk, Ender thinks about the space he's in—he reorients himself, refusing to think in terms of up and down, as someone on Earth naturally would. It's sad to see that Ender thinks of Graff as his friend, as we already know that Graff is nothing of the sort.



The launch proceeds quickly, and before long, Ender finds himself floating in space, “no gravity anywhere.” Because Ender has already been thinking about the arbitrariness of gravity, he’s unsurprised when he sees Graff walking “upside down” through the shuttle. He notices the other boys gagging and vomiting—being in “null gravity” is highly disorienting. Ender smiles, thinking about Graff walking upside down, to the side, etc.—in zero gravity, Ender can imagine Graff walking whatever way he wants.

Graff yells at Ender and asks why Ender is smiling. Ender is surprised that Graff is being so angry with him. Ender explains some of his thoughts on zero gravity. Surprisingly, Graff nods and says that Ender is exactly right to have reoriented himself—indeed, Ender is probably the only smart kid on the shuttle. With this, Graff climbs back into his private room, leaving Ender alone with his new peers.

Ender hears a boy behind him, muttering that Ender “has it made here.” The boy pokes Ender, and Ender wonders why none of the adults are keeping order. Then he realizes the truth—Ender is being tested for combat. He decides to fight back—when the boy pokes him again, Ender pulls the boy’s hand down. To Ender’s surprise, the boy shoots out of his seat, toward a nearby wall. The boy screams—he’s broken his arm. Graff emerges from his room, sedates the boy and sends him to a medical facility. He yells to the other boys not to mess with Ender Wiggin.

The rest of the flight proceeds uneventfully. The shuttle lands at Battle School, and the boys are sent to disembark (the narrator doesn’t give many details about what Battle School looks like, or what the docking process consists of). As he climbs off the shuttle, Ender sees Graff, and asks him why Graff tried to manipulate the other children into fighting. Graff tells Ender that it’s his job to make Ender a good soldier. The stakes of Battle School—the extermination of the Buggers—are so high that Graff will do everything in his power to make Ender strong enough to protect the human race. Graff dismisses Ender.

Ender continues exploring the possibilities of zero gravity. There are long sections of the novel which consist entirely of Card’s descriptions of Ender’s thoughts—but these are interesting and even exciting to read, because of Ender’s portrayal as a genius. Ender is always separate from the rest of the children—this is because he is smarter and more resourceful, but it also means that he lives in perpetual isolation, and without any real friends or experience of fun.



It seems that Graff has already begun his harsh “tests” for Ender by singling Ender out, and then leaving him alone in a shuttle with the resentful other boys. In a way, Graff has been doing this for as long as Ender has been alive: by equipping him with a monitor and isolating him from Peter and his classmates.



For the second time in the novel, we see Ender fighting defensively—but then going beyond merely defending himself, and severely hurting his opponent when it seems expedient. This tension between self-defense and preemptive attack is essentially a symbol for the larger conflict in the war between the humans and Buggers. As we will learn, the Buggers have made no moves to attack Earth again since their defeat 70 years ago, but commanders like Graff still feel that the best way to ensure there are no more attacks is by preemptively striking out at and destroying the Buggers—just as Ender hurt Stilson excessively to not only defend himself, but also to prevent “all future fights.”



Graff is an interesting character because he is essentially an embodiment of the conflict between morality and survival—the question of when a preemptive attack is justified, or when the ends justify the means. Graff truly believes he is doing the right thing and saving millions of human lives, but to do this he must endanger and psychologically damage a child, as well as destroy an entire species that might not even be a real threat.



As Ender walks away, Graff turns and talks to a teacher named Anderson, who's been watching the conversation. Graff tells Anderson that Ender is wrong—Graff is the best friend Ender has. Graff adds that Ender is a “good” kid. Anderson warns Graff that while Ender has great potential, the Buggers might defeat humans before Ender is ready to fight.

Card closes the chapter with a conversation, consisting entirely of dialogue, between Graff and Anderson. This echoes the openings of previous chapters, and seems like a confirmation that X and Y are Anderson and Graff: Graff the eager (even gleeful) manipulator, and Anderson his reluctant accomplice.



CHAPTER 5: GAMES

The chapter begins with a conversation between X and Y (who, we can now guess, are Graff and Anderson, respectively). Anderson congratulates Graff for “masterfully” manipulating Ender into fighting his fellow students. Anderson also proposes that Ender can't be allowed to feel anything but a strong sense of isolation: if he develops strong friendships, then he'll “take the easy way out” and refuse to become a truly great commander.

The implication of Graff's argument is that isolation and opposition make great commanders. Once again there is a tension here regarding what makes a great leader, and it connects to the “Peter vs. Valentine” aspects of Ender—he must be isolated and not have any close friends, or he might act irrationally regarding them, but he also must be likeable and empathetic enough to inspire loyalty and to understand both his troops and his enemies.



Now Ender is in a soldier's barracks, immediately after the events of the previous chapter. Because he spoke to Graff, he's the last student to choose a bed, and has been given the worst bed in the barracks—the low bunk next to the front door. Ender looks at his bunk, and finds that he's been issued a set of jumpsuits, a small desk, and a small pistol.

From the beginning of his time in Battle School, Ender is alone and isolated from his peers—he's given the worst bed in the barracks. The immediate introduction of a pistol also emphasizes the cutthroat nature of life here.



A man enters the barracks and orders the students to pay attention. He introduces himself as Dap, the new students' “mom” and counselor, and explains a few things about Battle School. The school consists of a centrifugal machine that spins quickly, creating a strong outward “push.” In this way, the Battle School simulates the feeling of gravity. Dap also explains the concept of “icing”—if students flunk their classes or bully others excessively, they'll be iced, or dismissed from school. As Dap says this, Ender notices the boy whose arm he broke, who seems to have made a quick recovery. The boy has already assembled a gang, much as Stilson did back at school.

Dap claims to be a “mom” figure, but it's clear that there is no real compassion or comfort behind the word, as he immediately moves on to describing how easily students can be kicked out. The Battle School is a centrifugal structure, with the outward force substituting for gravity (this is an interesting connection between the work of Card and his idol, Arthur C. Clark, who introduced the concept of a centrifugal space station in 2001: A Space Odyssey). It's also important that Ender compares Stilson and the boy whose arm he broke: Ender seems to face an endless array of similar, bullying antagonists.



At dinner, Ender eats alone. He thinks about his home, and about Valentine. He also notices the other students in the dining hall, who are much older than he is. The older students have been assigned into teams with names like Scorpion and Flame, and wear uniforms that correspond to their team name. There's a large billboard in the dining hall, which shows the results of war games between the various teams.

In these games the students naturally compete and seek to improve at fighting and commanding, having “fun” minus the stakes of combat. In other words, by playing games, students get all the learning experience (and potential for excitement) of war without the reality of death and blood.



As Ender eats alone, a boy—who looks about 13—sits down next to him and introduces himself as Mick. Mick explains to Ender that the teachers like to isolate students, just as they've isolated Ender. Mick is a mediocre student by Battle School standards, he explains to Ender—he'll probably be sent to a second-rate military program after finishing Battle School. Mick says that Ender is too young and stupid to understand what Mick is saying. Privately, Ender vows never to end up like Mick—an older boy who's too untalented to be a success.

That night, Ender finds it hard to sleep. He cries and thinks about his family. He tries—somewhat successfully—to stifle his tears by relaxing and counting high numbers in his head. As he listens to the loud sounds of his peers weeping, he realizes that living with Peter has trained him to suppress embarrassing emotions.

Ender and his peers proceed with Battle School. Every day, he goes to classes on mathematics, history, and other subjects relevant to the military. One day early on, Dap shows the new students how to play battle games. Most battle games are simple arcade games. Ender goes to the arcade area, where older boys play these strategy games, and observes them for a few hours. After some time, Ender realizes that he understands how to play. He challenges a much older boy to play the game. At first, the boy is dismissive, but eventually he agrees. Ender loses the first game, but convinces the boy to play 2 out of 3. Ender wins the next two games. The boy and his gang of friends walks away without congratulating Ender for his victory. Ender is secretly proud of himself.

In the coming weeks, Ender notices that the boy whose arm he broke—a French boy named Bernard—has assembled a gang of followers. The gang begins harassing Ender in small ways—pushing him, jostling his lunch tray, etc. Ender doesn't get overtly angry at these small acts of bullying. Instead, he studies Bernard's group carefully, probing for weaknesses. He notices a boy named Shen whom Bernard bullies for being small and wiggling his butt when he walks. One day, Ender uses his electronic desk to send an anonymous message to the students: "COVER YOUR BUTT. BERNARD IS WATCHING." Ender sends other messages, this time labeling them, "Bernard." Bernard is furious, and yells for Dap to help him. Dap looks at the messages and finds them amusing. He tells Bernard that he knows who hacked onto the message system, but refuses to say. After this incident, Bernard becomes a figure of ridicule, and his gang of followers is broken.

Although Ender is a gentle person, and seems to prefer to not fight at all, he's also highly ambitious (and he recognizes his own abilities). When he sees Mick, he resolves to be successful at Battle School—and this will require him to be violent.



Ender doesn't cry about being isolated from his family—in this respect, he seems stronger and more put-together than his parents. We see that Ender's experiences with Peter and other enemies have trained him to appear calm even in times of great sadness—a tragic suppression of natural emotion, but also a skill that is useful in Ender's harsh world.



Ender is ambitious, and already senses that he can be the best in Battle School—there's no Peter here to compete with him. Notably, Card doesn't linger on descriptions of Ender's classes, reminding us that all his education here is in the purpose of one thing: warfare. There are many forms of war games in the Battle School, as every aspect of life is somehow militarized—even when it's just children having fun. On the whole, Battle School shows how warfare "progresses" in a more technologically advanced society—it is not more moral or humane, but instead one's enemies are more detached and dehumanized (we can see this today in drone warfare—basically playing a video game to kill real people).



Ender is insightful and shrewd in the way he deals with Bernard. First, he tries to understand Bernard: Bernard is charismatic, bullying, and cruel, but also clearly insecure. Ender then attacks his weakness. Like most bullies, Bernard is particularly upset by other people's teasing, so when Ender sends this simple message, Bernard is immediately furious. We get the sense that Dap (who seemed like a kindly person) isn't really there to make the children feel better—he's actually been instructed to allow the children to fight among themselves, in the hope that the fighting will reveal a new commander.



The next week, Shen and Ender sit together at lunch. Ender doesn't admit that he was the one who sent the fake messages, but Shen laughs and says that he knows Ender was. Shen and Ender become friends, bonding over Bernard's embarrassment.

The chapter ends on a note of optimism—Ender finally has a friend—but we also sense that this friend will be taken away soon enough, all in the service of the “greater good.”



CHAPTER 6: THE GIANT'S DRINK

The chapter begins with another anonymous conversation, apparently between Graff and one of his military superiors. The superior points out that Ender seems “Stuck in the **Giant's Drink**.” (We don't yet know what this means.) Graff proposes that the IF “speed up” Ender's education in the event that the Buggers try another invasion. The superior disagrees, saying that speeding up Ender's education will make him unstable.

We realize that Graff isn't the supreme authority in the Battle School: his plans for speeding up Ender's education aren't the only point of view on the matter. In a sense, Graff's priority is defeating the Buggers with Ender and Ender alone, while his superiors' priority is keeping the Battle School strong and well-functioning, in the hopes that many good commanders will graduate from it. It's unclear why Graff is given so much leeway and authority, then. The “Giant's Drink” is a reference to the symbolic virtual reality game Ender plays on his desk.



The chapter opens with Ender being sent, along with the other new students, to the **battleroom**—a place with zero gravity where the students play war games. Everyone wears a jumpsuit, which makes movement very difficult, and carries a laser pistol. Ender notices that he can move in his suit, and doesn't get hurt when he crashes into a wall. He and Shen also discover that they can use the laser guns to “freeze” other people: if they shoot, the gun will make a portion of the victim's suit hard and rigid, so that movement is impossible.

The battleroom is another kind of game, where the students learn how to fight and develop a fondness for combat. It's also an opportunity for the students to form bonds of friendship with each other—though the constant presence of competition and fighting makes such bonds tenuous. The battleroom will ultimately be symbolic of Ender's growth and maturation as a commander, but for now, he starts out isolated and adrift (literally).



As Ender and Shen float through the **battleroom**, they notice Bernard's best friend, a boy named Alai. Ender collides with Alai, and the two laugh. They decide to experiment with movement in zero gravity, and Alai has the bright idea of “pushing off” of Ender at the same time that Ender does the same thing with him. In this way, both Ender and Alai can move in zero gravity. Ender and Alai begin to become friends, and they make a few jokes at Bernard's expense. Ender proposes that he, Alai, Shen, and Bernard freeze everyone else in the room. It only takes twenty minutes before everyone else is frozen—and Bernard, Shen, Ender, and Alai now seem to have become friends. Ender realizes what he's done—he's created a new “friend group,” with Alai as the leader.

In this section, Ender learns how to maneuver in zero gravity at the same time that he maneuver between friends and friend groups. By the end of the section, Ender has handled his rivalry with Bernard in a seemingly perfect way: he's created a new friend group with Alai as the leader and himself as the “second in command.” It's important to recognize that Ender was modest throughout this process—he didn't try to make himself the new leader, and this is why his plan worked. He and Bernard can be friends, at least for now, because they're both friendly with Alai.



One day shortly after his first experience in the **battleroom**, Ender is sitting in his bed, fooling around on his desk. He decides to play a popular virtual reality game. In the game, he travels through a fantasyland full of castles and lakes. In the game, Ender always comes to a **Giant** who kills Ender in brutal ways. This time, the Giant tells Ender to choose between two magical potions, one of which is poison and the other of which is not. Instead of playing along, Ender attacks the Giant, digging his fingers into the Giant's eyes. As the Giant collapses, Ender finds that he's arrived in "Fairyland." Instead of exploring his new terrain, however, Ender signs out of the game, thinking that he's every bit as brutal as Peter.

For not the first time in the book, Ender wins an impossible game (something like the unwinnable simulation of the Kobayashi-Maru test from Star Trek, of which Card is a huge fan) by breaking the rules altogether. Instead of choosing between two drinks, Ender "chooses" to attack his challenger head-on. This scene is remarkably similar to the scene in which Ender "breaks the rules" and kicks Stilson—the similarity is underscored by the fact that this chapter, just like the Stilson chapter, ends with Ender realizing that he and Peter are alike.



CHAPTER 7: SALAMANDER

The chapter begins with a conversation between Graff and a colleague. Graff and the colleague discuss how Ender is capable of "the impossible"—defeating the **Giant** in the virtual reality game. They also agree that Ender handled the conflict with Bernard perfectly: he brought peace to his peers without any more fighting. Graff tells his colleague that he won't hurt Ender any more than is necessary.

In each incarnation of these conversations, Graff seems determined in his goals. He insists that he's going to hurt Ender, but always for a good reason—defeating the Buggers, thereby supposedly saving humanity. Graff has, of course, noticed how Ender maneuvered his way into becoming friends with Bernard and Alai.



As the chapter begins, Alai tells Ender that he's finally figured out how Ender hacked into the messaging system and humiliated Bernard: he added a "space" key after Bernard's name, meaning that he could send messages under a new account. Alai also notes that he can send messages with everyone's name in this way—except Ender's. Somehow, Ender has established a security system. He offers to pass on his security system to Alai.

At this time, Ender and Alai seem to be best friends—they talk all the time, and Alai is comfortable asking Ender to tell him the secret of how he hacked into the security system (and Ender is willing to oblige). The very nature of Battle School, however, means that such friendships are often broken by competition or outside manipulation.



Ender and Alai go to their barracks to set up a security system on Alai's desk. Inside, Ender finds a note on his bed, explaining that he's been transferred to the Salamander Army, effective immediately. Alai is surprised with this sudden order—he admits that Ender is clever, but he doubts that Ender is coordinated enough to join a team and play the war game so early. Ender is heartbroken: just as he was beginning to make friends, he's been isolated once again. Ender hugs Alai, and they promise that they'll always be friends. Alai kisses Ender's cheek and whispers "Salaam"—a gesture that Ender recognizes to be sacred and affectionate, even if he doesn't exactly know what it means.

Just as Ender and Alai seem poised to cement their friendship, Ender is sent to another army. This reminds us of Graff's plan to isolate Ender from any friends he might make, and to essentially take total control over his development. The kiss and whisper that Alai passes on to Ender are ambiguous—an intimate sign of cultural identity that seemingly has no place in the impersonal Battle School. Alai's friendship with Ender seems deep and sincere, but, tragically, it seems unlikely to survive Graff's manipulations.



Ender goes to the game room to wait to join up with his new Salamander teammates. To pass time, he plays the **Giant** game, picking up where he left off, with the Giant's death. He walks to a playground, where a group of children pushes him around. The children turn into wolves and attack him. No matter how hard Ender fights, he can't defend himself from the vicious animals. Suddenly, a message flashes on the screen: Ender must report to his new commander immediately—he is late. Ender rushes out of the game room to join the Salamander Army barracks.

Ender rushes to the Salamander Army barracks, where he finds a group of boys who are much older than he is—between 8 and 11 years old. As he sees this, Ender's heart sinks. He has nothing to offer these people—he has no military training, or **battleroom** training, to speak of. A tall, attractive boy approaches Ender and asks him for his name and combat experience. Ender explains that he's young and inexperienced. The boy, whose name is Bonzo Madrid, explains that he is the commander of the Salamander Army, and won't be using Ender in the teams. As Bonzo explains this, a girl—who introduces herself as Petra—makes a joke about Bonzo. Bonzo slaps Petra and orders her to be silent.

Ender walks with the other soldiers to his new barracks. Inside, he notices Petra, and joins her. Petra explains that she's a talented soldier—the finest sharpshooter in Salamander—but hasn't been given a suitable command position. Petra jokes about Bonzo, and offers to teach Ender how to be a soldier (how to shoot, maneuver in the **battleroom**, etc.). Ender grins and agrees.

For the rest of the day, Ender notices the way Bonzo runs his team. He orders everyone to wear their jumpsuits at all times, except for Petra. Ender finds this absurd, since it isolates Petra from the rest of the team. Ender also runs into a soldier named Dink who criticizes Ender for being short and weak. Another Salamander soldier tells Dink that Ender is the soldier who did well in the game room. Privately, Ender is proud of being recognized for his abilities. He plans to run an army one day—hopefully soon.

The next day, Ender proceeds with his practices with Petra, even though other soldiers have warned him that Bonzo doesn't like other soldiers associating with her. In the **battleroom**, Petra teaches Ender how to shoot straight, passing on the lessons she's learned over the years. In the coming weeks, Ender and Petra continue their practices. Ender neglects his schoolwork, recognizing that it's more important for him to learn how to fight in the battleroom.

Every time that Ender solves a new challenge (Stilson, Peter, Bernard, the Giant), he faces a new, more dangerous challenge. Thus, as soon as he defeats the Giant, Ender is forced to contend with a pack of wolves. Ender gets so invested in fighting new enemies and solving new challenges that he sometimes loses track of other responsibilities.



Bonzo Madrid is a new kind of bully, seemingly the next in line after Bernard and Stilson. Here we're also introduced to Petra, one of the few girls in the Battle School. Graff has implied that women generally don't reach Battle School because they're by nature more meek and docile. Card presents Petra as existing in opposition to this stereotype, but it's also telling that Petra is his only example of this—Card too seems to find it unlikely that many girls would be in Battle School, even in a futuristic society where physical strength has nothing to do with martial skill.



It's implied that Petra hasn't been given a good command position because she's a girl, and Bonzo (and perhaps the teachers as well) respect her less. It's probably because Ender and Petra are both outsiders that they become friends so quickly—Petra recognizes a kindred spirit in the small, lonely Ender.



Even as an isolated member of the Salamander Army, Ender is smart enough to recognize when Bonzo is and isn't being a good commander. A good commander unites his soldiers together instead of isolating them from each other. Ender also shows that he has an ego and a sense of ambition—he wants to be the best soldier in Battle School, and to prove himself to his detractors.



Ender recognizes almost right away that the battleroom is more important than Battle School—school is important, but learning how to achieve victory in direct combat is more relevant to Ender's long-term goals. Ender sacrifices his loyalty to Bonzo by training with Petra, but this investment seems to be paying off: he becomes a much better soldier.



In the evening, Ender attends a mandatory practice with the other Salamander soldiers. Although Ender isn't yet a good soldier, he notices ways that Bonzo could be a better commander. Bonzo insists on strict regimentation in all maneuvers—but this makes his soldiers bad at improvisation.

One evening, Petra leaves Ender to himself. Ender decides to return to his old barracks. There, he finds Bernard, along with Alai. He invites them to practice maneuvers in the **battleroom**. Together, Ender, Shen, Alai, and Bernard practice aiming, and Ender passes on some of the lessons that Petra taught him.

The next day, Bonzo confronts Ender about practicing with his old friends. Ender explains that the only way he'll become a better soldier is by practicing. He adds that Bonzo doesn't have the authority to control what Ender does in his free time. Bonzo is furious, but only says that Ender must obey him, "or else." He grudgingly tells Ender that he's allowed to continue practicing. Ender is privately disgusted by Bonzo because of his amateurish commanding abilities—a real commander, Ender thinks, controls his emotions instead of making foolish threats.

Four days after his run-in with Bonzo, Ender is preparing for his first battle with Salamander Army. The army is about to begin a game in the **battleroom**. They step out and notice that the room is full of large, brown boxes called "stars"—these will be important in the war games they're about to play. Bonzo pulls Ender aside and orders him not to take his gun out during the battle.

The battle begins. The Salamander Army faces a tough opponent: the Condor Army. Ender notices that the Condor soldiers are good shooters, and freeze many Salamander soldiers. He decides to minimize his visible surface area by pointing his legs at Condor soldiers—this way, he's a much smaller target. Ender sees Petra shooting many enemy soldiers. He feels himself being shot and frozen, and watches as the Condor soldiers quickly shoot the remaining Salamander soldiers. The Condor army wins the game by sending five soldiers through the Salamander army's side of the **battleroom**. Ender notes that if he'd disobeyed Bonzo and shot even one soldier, the Condor army wouldn't have been able to muster the five necessary soldiers.

Ender continues to notice Bonzo's mistakes as a leader—mirroring Ender's own self-education as a future commander. He doesn't have any subordinates of his own yet, but Ender is always learning from others and developing future plans.



Ender isn't selfish about his new training and knowledge—he tries to keep his friendships going by passing on his new information to his peers.



In this tense confrontation, it's clear enough who the real authority is. Bonzo may be bigger and older, but Ender is calmer, more clear-headed, and more rational. These qualities make Ender the deadliest of opponents—he can use his anger intelligently, rather than letting it control him, as it controls Bonzo. All the time, Ender is compiling a list of what it means to be a good leader.



Bonzo is clearly insecure, and tries to prove his authority and machismo by isolating Ender and giving him counterproductive orders. Ender seems to see the bigger picture, though, and recognizes that the battleroom isn't about winning or losing—it's about gaining skills, knowledge, and respect. One of these skills is how to be a good leader.



Ender's first real experience in the battleroom is highly educational. He sees soldiers executing complicated maneuvers, and naturally arranges himself in a strategic way. The zero-gravity battleroom is all about position, orientation, and movement, and Ender seems to excel at this kind of spatial thinking. Just as Ender observes Bonzo to learn what a commander should and shouldn't do, he observes the battleroom to learn how he should and shouldn't fight. It's clear that Bonzo is more concerned with maintaining authority than learning from others—or even winning.



After the battle, Ender expects Bonzo to tell him that it's all right for him to shoot. Instead, Bonzo says nothing to him. The other Salamander soldiers ask Ender why he didn't fire his weapon—he could have turned defeat into a draw. Ender calmly replies that he followed Bonzo's orders. A few days later, the Salamander soldiers prepare for another battle. Bonzo pulls Ender aside and gives him the same order: Ender is not to fire his weapon for any reason.

Over the coming weeks, Ender practices shooting in his free time. He turns seven, but doesn't celebrate his birthday with anyone. Soldiers don't talk about their lives at home, and certainly don't celebrate birthdays.

One day, Salamander Army faces a fight with the Leopard Army. Although the Leopard Army is new and weak, they have novel strategies, and use tactics that confuse Bonzo's overly regimented troops. As Ender watches Leopard defeat Salamander, he decides to fight. He freezes his own legs, thereby creating a protection for the rest of his body, and pushes himself outward toward Leopard's gate. Ender shoots five opponents before he's frozen himself. As a result, the game is a draw: neither side has the minimum five troops needed to win.

After the game, Salamander troops mutter about how Ender turned defeat into a draw by disobeying Bonzo's orders. The next day, Bonzo approaches Ender and tells him that he's been traded to the Rat Army. Bonzo then hits Ender, hard, and yells at him for disobeying his order. Although Ender is in pain, he's secretly happy—Bonzo has made himself look foolish by punishing a soldier for success in battle.

Ender says goodbye to Petra and thanks her for all her help. Then he leaves Salamander, is issued a new uniform, and goes to join Rat Army. He also registers for a self-defense class in his free time, so that nobody will be able to beat him up the way Bonzo did.

Ender assumes that Bonzo's highest priority is winning the battle, but this isn't the case—Bonzo is incredibly stubborn, and cares more about honor and his own pride. He can't stand to contradict himself in front of Ender, a soldier who's already disobeyed him multiple times, even when it means potentially sacrificing victory for his entire team.



Card moves the story along so quickly here that we're only dimly aware that the characters are growing older. Ender turns seven, but the date is essentially meaningless to him. His growth is no longer measured in years, but in his experiences in the battleroom.



Ender decides that by now, he's made his point by being obedient to Bonzo, and it's time to prove that Bonzo is abusing his authority. Also Ender's desire to act and his ambition for victory proves stronger than any loyalty he still might have for Bonzo. In the end, Ender's ambition pays off, but there will surely be consequences from the bullying Bonzo. As usual, Ender invents a new strategy as soon as he starts to fight.



Ender is satisfied that he's created a mood of disobedience in Salamander Army. Bonzo had maintained an atmosphere of tight control, but now, everyone can see that his control is meaningless and even damaging, since it doesn't translate into victories in the battleroom.



Ender still thinks of himself as a defensive fighter, but as was the case with Stilson and Bernard, Ender wants to learn how to not just defend himself, but also to fight back—and even intimidate.



CHAPTER 8: RAT

The chapter begins with a conversation, this time between two named characters, Anderson and Graff. Anderson objects that Graff isn't being "fair" enough with Ender, to which Graff replies that fairness "has nothing to do with war." Graff orders Anderson to devote all his time and resources to challenging Ender via the **battleroom**. Anderson points out that if it becomes too obvious that the Battle School is manipulating the games, then students won't take them seriously anymore. Anderson also threatens to report Graff to the Polemarch, the powerful leader of Russia and its satellite states. Graff calmly accepts Anderson's threat, stressing that he's doing this for Ender, and for humanity.

Ender meets his new commanding officer in the Rat Army, a boy named Rose. Rose teases Ender, implying that Ender's high rankings in the **battleroom** are a fluke. Ender thinks about all he knows about Rose: Rat Army is in second place in the battleroom standings, and has a reputation for being unbeatable. Rose tells Ender to obey him at all costs, and Ender nods. Rose also tells Ender that he's forbidden from practicing with his old friends or using his desk. Ender thinks of Rose as childish and immature, and he wonders how anyone so undisciplined could win in the battleroom.

Rose sends Ender to speak to Ender's new immediate superior, Dink Meeker. Dink seems laconic and uninterested in talking to Ender. However, he gives Ender an important piece of advice: commanders have as much authority as Ender allows them to have. He also tells Ender to expect rigorous training in **battleroom** shooting and maneuvering: despite his young age, Ender won't be treated any differently from the other battleroom soldiers.

In the following days, Ender practices with Dink Meeker and Dink's other "toon" (platoon) of soldiers. Dink trains his troops separately from the rest of the Rat Army. One day, Dink asks Ender to demonstrate the attack position that Ender used in his last battle: moving feet-first. Dink tells his toon to use Ender's position, although Ender realizes that Dink doesn't entirely understand what Ender is getting at: he doesn't understand that Ender is rethinking the orientation of zero gravity. Nevertheless, Dink tells his soldiers to follow Ender's position. This makes the soldiers dislike Ender.

In what we've come to recognize as the dynamic of every chapter prologue, Anderson and Graff argue over how best to educate Ender. Graff favors an aggressive strategy in which Ender's life is continually endangered, while Anderson is more measured in his thinking—he wants Ender to be safe, even as he's challenged to become a better leader. Graff is so sure of himself that he's willing to risk being arrested by the highest government authorities. Graff knows that the stakes are incredibly high in "Ender's game," but he truly believes he's doing the right thing for humanity.



Ender bounces between many different kinds of commanders. Bonzo was too strict and severe, while Rose seems to be not strict enough. Ender, as always, tries to learn from others' mistakes and find a balance between both extremes—much as he represents a balance between Peter's aggressiveness and Valentine's gentleness. Ender accepts Rose's authority for now, but doesn't ignore the fact that Rose is a lackluster commander.



Dink seems tough but fair—arguably the "average" of Bonzo and Rose. Dink isn't warm with Ender, but he's not a bully either. Dink seems genuinely interested in Ender growing into a competent soldier, and this seems to come from his strong sense of honesty and responsibility. He doesn't have the selfish aspects of competition that many of the students do.



Even as Ender accepts the help and mentorship of the older boys, he can't help but note the boys' intellectual limitations. Just as Bonzo was too focused on pride, Dink is too "Earth-bound" in his thinking—he still thinks in terms of gravity and "up and down." Dink also inadvertently pits his soldiers against Ender by over-praising him—much as Graff did, but (unlike Graff) completely by accident. This suggests that Dink, at the end of the day, is a second-rate commander, even if he's a good person.



In his spare time, Ender decides to continue practicing with Alai and his other friends, disobeying Rose's authority. He also uses his desk. One day, Rose confronts Ender about disobeying his orders. Ender brushes off Rose's authority, and Rose is annoyed, but can't do anything about it. Ender also tells Rose that Bonzo had ordered him never to fire his gun. This further irritates Rose, because it proves that Ender is an insubordinate soldier. He tells Ender that in the next battle, he'll be sent out into the **battleroom** by himself, to be shot immediately.

At the next battle, Rose orders Ender to launch himself through the **battleroom** alone. The order is seemingly suicidal—Rose is sacrificing Ender as a punishment. Ender launches himself through the battleroom, freezing his own legs to form a shield—so he can still shoot with his arms. Because he's protected, Ender is able to freeze several enemy soldiers before he's fully frozen. At the end of the battle, Ender finds that he's still ranked first in the standings, even though he was sent into the battle to be frozen immediately. In the following weeks, Ender's success changes battleroom strategy: soldiers move through the room immediately instead of taking half a minute to crawl ahead.

One day, Ender is practicing in his toon, led by Dink Meeker. Ender wonders aloud why Dink, a talented soldier, hasn't been promoted to command an army. Dink tells Ender that he's actually been promoted twice—and he refused both times. The IF, Dink explains, manipulates its children into fighting with each other, something that Dink finds repulsive. Nevertheless, he loves the **battleroom** too much to give up on Battle School altogether. Dink reminisces about "normal children"—children who aren't forced to command others, or worry about their standings. In Battle School, there are dozens of children who are insane by most definitions—they love fighting to the point where they want to kill their opponents. Dink ends his conversation with a disturbing possibility: it's likely that the Buggers are already dead, killed by Mazer Rackham long ago. The governments of the world then manipulate their people using fear propaganda—in this way, they maintain power. Privately, Ender disagrees: as an American, he recognizes that it would be impossible for such a major lie to last for so long. Even so, he's moved by Dink's observations about the Battle School.

Shortly after Ender's conversation with Dink, he goes to practice **battleroom** maneuvers with Alai and some other friends. Bernard isn't present—word has gotten out that any new recruits caught practicing with Ender won't be assigned to armies. In the coming days, Ender begins hearing stories of younger boys being bullied for practicing with Ender. Although Ender believes that he should call off his practices for a few days, Alai insists that they continue.

Rose turns out to be like Bonzo at heart: a spiteful, proud commander more concerned with maintaining his own pride than the good of his team. Just as Bonzo childishly insisted on Ender not firing his gun for any reason, simply so that Bonzo could prove a nonsensical point, so Rose insists on Ender sacrificing himself before the battle begins.



Much to Rose's surprise, Ender doesn't immediately get shot when he runs through the battleroom—instead, his maneuvers change the rules of the game forever. Ender isn't above feeling proud of himself for his accomplishments in the battleroom—he's ambitious, and wants to be an important soldier in the Battle School. We also see that Ender's novel ways of thinking give him a huge advantage—because he can quickly reorient himself and isn't attached to ideas of "up" or "down," he can attack feet-first, thus becoming harder to shoot.



In this important section, Dink expresses the tiredness of an experienced Battle School student who's lost all interest in fighting. Dink represents the kind of student that Ender is in danger of becoming—intelligent and talented, but also disillusioned with the way the IF and the school system works. Dink also raises the disturbing possibility that the Bugger War is a myth designed to help the IF control the world. While Ender ultimately dismisses the possibility, Dink makes a good point: the IF isn't as noble as it sometimes likes to pretend—it's made up of petty, selfish, and even cruel people who bully and manipulate children for reasons that are often unclear, or even nonexistent. In a sense, Ender is tempted to become Dink, but refuses to do so—he'll continue to allow the IF to manipulate him, as he still believes that defeating the Buggers is the ultimate good.



By this point in his time at Battle School, Ender is well-known for his performances in the battleroom, as well as his insubordination to his various commanders. As a result, he's built up a loyal group of followers who respect him too much to abandon ship when older students begin threatening him.



One day, Ender and Alai are practicing with new students. A group of older boys from other armies (including Salamander) enter the **battleroom** and see Ender practicing. They jump toward Ender's group, preparing to fight. Ender commands his students to work together—and because they've been practicing for months, this is easy. The older boys are disorganized, while Ender's students skillfully move around them. One older boy grabs Ender and tries to punch him, but this is difficult—in zero gravity, a punch propels the puncher backwards with the same force that hits his victim. A boy grabs Ender's leg, and so Ender kicks the boy in the ear, drawing blood. Two other boys try to grab Ender as he drifts toward the door of the battleroom, where the rest of his friends are waiting for him. Ender is able to kick onto the boys' helmets, again drawing blood, and then drift out of the battleroom. The next day, Ender notices that four boys have been sent to the hospital, supposedly for "accidental collision in null g." Ender is horrified with himself for hurting other boys, and with the IF for brushing off the violence as an accident.

Here Ender puts his battleroom skills to use in a "real world" situation. Thus far, Ender has seriously hurt at least two children, and here he defensively hurts several more. As always, Ender hates himself for being such a talented fighter, but by this point, it's also clear to us that Ender is starting to enjoy the thrills of Battle School—the thrills of planning maneuvers, forming rivalries, and improving as a military commander. This isn't to say that Ender doesn't secretly long for the peace and gentleness represented by his sister, Valentine—rather, it means that Ender is caught between two worlds: the world of Valentine, and the world of Peter. For the time being, the "Peter" side of his personality seems to be getting stronger. It becomes increasingly obvious that the IF has no concerns for its students' health or well-being—everything exists in service to military purposes.



A few days after his fight, Ender plays the **Giant** game again. In the game, he confronts a monster with the body of a snake and the face of his brother, Peter. Without thinking, Ender shouts, turning the heads of the other boys in the game room. After that, Ender begins having nightmares about Peter's face. He begins to realize that he's a brutal killer at heart, just like Peter.

In this final scene of the chapter, Card confirms what we'd already suspected: Ender still sees Peter as the primary antagonist of his life, and he's still afraid of him. Tellingly, Ender is also afraid that he is becoming Peter (as Battle School seems to be pushing him to).



CHAPTER 9: LOCKE AND DEMOSTHENES

Graff and one of his subordinates, Major Imbu, have a conversation about Ender's psychological development. Neither can explain how a picture of Ender's brother appeared in a video game. Imbu suggests that the game was designed to test the players' psychological weaknesses—the game has merely picked up on Ender's biggest fear. Graff wonders if Ender has been reduced to self-hatred because of his acts of violence. He also points out that the picture of Peter in the game is very recent—somebody back on Earth must have gotten a new image of Peter and sent it to the Battle School.

Graff, for once, isn't in control and doesn't seem to know what's going on. Somehow, the virtual reality game that Ender has been playing has accessed new images of Peter—images which couldn't have come from Battle School itself. It'll be more than 200 pages before we understand what's going on here—the Buggers themselves accessed the computer and sent it images of Peter's face, in hopes of influencing Ender.



Back on Earth, Valentine Wiggin celebrates Ender's eighth birthday alone. Her family has moved to Greensboro, North Carolina, and has seemingly forgotten all about Ender, even though it's only been a year and a half since he left. Valentine, however, continues to love Ender more than anyone or anything. She notes that Peter has seemingly become calmer and more mature—but Valentine has also seen evidence that Peter is secretly violent and sociopathic. She even found a live squirrel, trapped and skinned. In school, Peter flatters his teachers, though he secretly despises them.

Valentine and Peter are not just representatives of the two sides of Ender's personality—they are still major characters, and just as intelligent and skilled as Ender himself. Thus they will have an equally great affect on the plot (and on global politics) as Ender. Peter clearly displays sociopathic or psychopathic tendencies. These are usually exhibited as a lack of empathy and a willingness to manipulate others, but can also mean violence and even sadistic cruelty.



One day, Valentine is walking through the woods near her house when Peter approaches her. Peter makes an interesting point: the world is preparing for war. If the Buggers are defeated, there will be a massive struggle for power in the following years. Russia is led by the aggressive Polemarch, meaning that Russia might be the most dangerous national power. Peter has been monitoring troop movements in Russia, and has concluded that the country is ready for war at any time. Although America is still the world's dominant superpower, its old political alliances will be meaningless once the Buggers are killed.

Peter proposes to Valentine that they can use their intelligence to influence global politics and keep the world safe. Although they're only children, they write like adults. Peter reminds Valentine of the people who changed history using only their words: Demosthenes, Pericles, Thomas Paine, Lenin, etc. If he and Valentine could disguise their identities as children by writing anonymously, then they could begin consolidating power.

As they walk through the woods, Peter asks Valentine to ask Father to give his children his "citizen's access," which will enable Peter and Valentine to write anonymous articles and circulate them around the world via the Internet. As Peter talks to Valentine, his voice becomes gentle and soft. He explains that he has the power to bring peace and security to the world: a *Pax Americana*, in which free speech and human rights are respected. Although he always bullied Ender, he says he's also capable of love and affection—and he'll bring the same love and affection to government. As Valentine listens to Peter, she's amazed that he's speaking so sincerely, rather than adopting his usual sarcastic tone. She wonders if Peter is being truthful or not—it's impossible for her to tell. Valentine reminds Peter of the squirrel he tortured, and as she speaks, Peter begins to weep. Valentine is surprised—she's never seen her brother show so much weakness. She then realizes what Peter is doing: he's "saved" his weakness for years, knowing that he'll need it to be able to manipulate Valentine at the perfect time. Knowing she has no choice, Valentine agrees to help Peter.

It's intriguing that while Ender is made to focus on the specificities of combat, Peter and Valentine have the luxury of contemplating the "macro" picture of the world—they're allowed to think about the relationships between the U.S. and Russia. Card's view of geopolitics is heavily colored by the influence of the Cold War (which was still underway in 1985 when the novel was published). Anti-Russian sentiments are everywhere in Card's futuristic America, just as they were in the 80s.



In what many readers find the most implausible part of Card's novel, Peter and Valentine team up to control politics on Earth, using only their journalistic abilities. Peter notes that there were plenty of people in history who controlled politics using only their words, and so he and Valentine could do the same. As usual, the Wiggin children are portrayed as super-intelligent and complex, while the majority of adults seem rather simplistic and easily manipulated.



Naturally, Valentine objects to Peter's plans to influence politics—she knows what kind of person Peter is, and senses that he will abuse any power he's given. And yet Peter reveals a sudden sensitive side to Valentine—he clearly wants to manipulate Valentine, but it seems that he also sincerely loves Ender and is capable of love. The earlier scene in which Peter told Ender he loved him suggests that Peter (on one level) really does want to be a good man. At the same time, however, he's clearly "saving his weaknesses," as Valentine suggests—knowing that his sudden burst of sincerity will be too powerful for Valentine to refuse. Thus Peter is not wholly devoid of empathy or love, but he is able to manipulate even his own sincere emotions to serve his more sociopathic nature.



In the coming weeks, Valentine succeeds in convincing Father to give his children internet access. Peter and Valentine begin writing articles and posting them anonymously. They read the writing of famous journalists, and improve their own. After a few months, Peter and Valentine conclude that they've developed voices sophisticated enough to keep permanently. Peter instructs Valentine to write only on certain Internet websites, and to use a deliberately inflammatory style. Peter, by contrast, will be more measured and balanced in his tone. Then, Peter and Valentine plan to "debate" one another online. Very slowly, Peter and Valentine notice that their ideas and talking points are trickling into mainstream journalism. Peter names his online persona Locke, while Valentine calls hers Demosthenes.

Seven months after Peter and Valentine begin writing as Locke and Demosthenes, "Demosthenes" has received an invitation from a major publication to write full-time. Peter instructs Valentine to accept, on the condition that her identity is kept anonymous. With a new writing gig, Valentine begins writing more inflammatory pieces about the menace that the Russians pose to world peace. She calls for all nations to uncover their hidden intelligence, creating a free flow of information. Peter is pleased that Demosthenes is calling for conflict and even war—when the moment is right, he plans to have Demosthenes change his tone and call for compromise.

Valentine notices that her parents have begun reading Demosthenes' column, and even quote it at diner. Shortly afterwards, "Locke" is asked to write a weekly column for another major news network. Peter plans to write intelligent, measured responses to Demosthenes' columns, creating an atmosphere of uncertainty in the world of politics.

The chapter then cuts back to the Battle School. Ender has been the leading soldier in the **battleroom** for many months. He's nine years old, and a toon leader in the Phoenix Army, which is led by Petra Arkanian. He's respected and admired by nearly everyone in Battle School—but this sometimes frustrates him. While he continues to practice with his old friends, Shen and Alai, he's noticed that they think of him as a different "kind" of person than they are. He's a celebrity in Battle School—never just a kid.

It takes an improbably short amount of time for Peter and Valentine to perfect their writing voices. Evidently, Peter wants Valentine to be radical and angry-sounding because he wants to bill himself as the "voice of reason," but the danger of this arrangement is that anger and vitriol are always more entertaining to read. Peter's mention of Locke suggests the famous English Enlightenment thinker John Locke, while Valentine's mention of Demosthenes suggests a link with the legendary opponent of Alexander the Great (see Background Info for more about these historical allusions).



Valentine is essential a "sleeper agent" for the radical Russia-haters in America. By organizing other xenophobes around her writings, Valentine can gain their loyalty, while also ensuring that the moderates become more politically and rhetorically active. Then, at the right time, Valentine will "betray" her followers by coming out in support of Locke, thereby ensuring Peter's rise to power with a broad coalition of political support. Even considering the children's intelligence, however, it seems unlikely that two people could plan ahead to achieve such influence, all while keeping their identities secret.



Peter has the huge of advantage of knowing what Demosthenes is going to write next (since he tells Demosthenes what to say). In this way, he can always adapt his arguments to the new political climate, and stay relevant.



Time passes quickly in Card's novel, especially in the sweeping events he relates regarding Valentine and Peter. Ender is now nine years old, and we see a growing distance between him and his friends. Just as Graff seems to have planned, Ender's fame and prestige isolates him from his former peers: even if they like or respect him, they never consider him "one of them."



In his free time, Ender plays the **Giant** game. He journeys to a strange place called the End of the World. There, he sees a big public square lined with heavy stones. He pulls away one of the stones, and finds himself drowning in water. He also notices a **mirror**, in which he can see Peter's face.

Ender seems to have reached a dead-end. He knows that he is talented, but can't make himself any more of a warrior for fear that he'll become Peter—the brutal bully who caused Ender so much pain as a child. The psychological manipulations of the Giant game seem far out of the hands of the IF by now, as Ender struggles with some personal demons in virtual reality form.



Back on Earth, more than a year after beginning her career as an incognito journalist, Valentine is walking to school. She notices a group of IF soldiers standing outside the building, and wonders if they're here to give her news about Ender. Then it occurs to her that they could be coming to arrest her for her writings as Demosthenes. In recent months, she's become both acclaimed and hated for her radical views on politics.

For Valentine, thoughts of Ender's potential death are more urgent than the possibility that the IF may be coming to arrest her for her role as Demosthenes. Perhaps this is meant to suggest that Valentine prioritizes Ender above everything else in her life.



Valentine goes to class, where she finds a message telling her to go to the principle's office immediately. She does so, and finds Colonel Graff waiting for her. Graff reminds Valentine that they met years ago (on the day Graff convinced Ender to leave Earth). Graff greets Valentine, and immediately tells her that Ender is doing fine. This relieves Valentine, because she assumed Graff was there to tell her about her brother. Graff invites Valentine to walk outside and talk.

Graff decided long ago that Valentine's compassion and mercy disqualified her from Battle School—but he also knows how much of an influence she has over Ender. Because of Graff's essentially manipulative nature, it seems clear that he is here to use Valentine to influence Ender.



Outside, Graff tells Valentine why he's here: Ender is doing brilliantly at Battle School, but he's been slumping lately, and needs something to inspire him. He describes the **Giant** game that Ender plays, and mentions the images of Peter that Ender repeatedly sees. Valentine points out that Ender and Peter are polar opposites—Peter is a hateful, violent boy, while Ender is peaceful. As Valentine explains herself, she thinks of how she's allied herself with Peter, the very person she hates. In spite of herself, she begins to cry.

We see here that Valentine isn't as adept at controlling her emotions as Ender is—she allows her feelings for other people to control her, an admirable quality in a human being, but also the quality that made Graff reject her years ago. Valentine insists that Ender and Peter are different, but at the same time she recognizes that she herself is also becoming more like Peter.



Graff watches Valentine crying, and tries to calm her by agreeing with her: he claims he doesn't think Ender is like Peter at all. He asks Valentine to help Ender by writing him a letter in which she assures him that he's a good person. Graff reveals the truth: while Valentine has sent Ender dozens of letters, Ender was never allowed to read them. Graff bids farewell to Valentine, leaving it unclear whether she'll write the letter or not.

Graff is brutal in his treatment of Ender—he never lets Ender read any of the dozens of letters that Valentine sent him over the years. Despite all this (or perhaps because of it), Valentine agrees to help Graff by sending one more letter. She's so desperate to talk to her brother that she's willing to cooperate with people she despises—or else she recognizes that any resistance would be useless.



The narrative cuts back to Ender at Battle School. He receives a letter from Valentine. In the letter, Valentine tells Ender she's tried to write him hundreds of times before this. She adds that Ender is a good person—unlike “you know who.” She makes an inside joke about paddling a “canoe,” and misspells “psychoanalyze.” Ender considers the letter. Although it's clearly written by the real Valentine (hence the misspellings and inside jokes), it's not “real,” since the IF clearly made her write it. Ender feels his body fill with sadness, and he realizes that he has no true control over his own life.

Frustrated by Valentine's letter, Ender goes to play the **Giant** game. He returns to the End of the World, and sees Peter's face in the **mirror**. Then it occurs to him that the IF has forced Valentine to write the letter because they already know about his fear of Peter. Instead of signing off, Ender continues to play the game. He sees a large snake slithering on the ground, and tries to attack it. Then he changes his mind and kisses the snake. The snake transforms into Valentine, and Valentine kisses him on the cheek. Together, they walk toward the mirror, which no longer shows Peter's face. With a gentle touch, Ender breaks the mirror, revealing a long stairway, through which he's free to walk. Ender has finally broken through the End of the World.

Shortly after meeting with Graff, Valentine receives a letter from General Shimon Levy, the Strategos (who is implied to be the leader of America). The letter informs her that her “operation” has been a complete success, and she has been awarded the highest military award granted to civilians. Valentine realizes what she's done: she's “sold her brother and been paid for it.” That night, Valentine, as Demosthenes, writes a long critique of the government's population laws. She concludes with the line, “The most noble title any child can have is Third,” which amuses Peter greatly.

CHAPTER 10: DRAGON

Anderson and Graff discuss how to teach Ender. For some time now, Ender has been optimistic and happy, spurred on by his letter from Valentine. Graff now plots how to challenge Ender in new ways. Anderson objects that it's barbaric to heal a small child of his psychological issues, only to bombard him with new ones. Graff doesn't disagree, but suggests that Anderson is just as eager as he is to see how Ender weathers his new challenges. Graff concludes, “I hope you had a nice, nice time being happy, Ender. It might be the last time in your life.”

Ender's mastery of his own emotions is both impressive and heartbreaking to see—he doesn't give himself the option of feeling a strong sense of love for Valentine, because he knows that he's being manipulated by Graff. Valentine's letter actually makes Ender furious—furious that Graff is manipulating his own beloved sister against him. Perhaps this is what Graff wanted—to “show his hand,” but in doing so to make Ender recognize the fact that he cannot avoid manipulation.



Ender finally finds a way to defeat the mirror, which represents his “Peter-self.” Instead of fighting his enemies, he shows them love and affection. This reminds us that Ender's innate sense of violence is disturbingly close to his sense of compassion: Ender is a deadly warrior because he uses empathy to understand his opponents and get inside their heads—then he can destroy them. Ender has defeated his latest challenge, but he does so at a price. By moving past the aggressive, Peter-influenced parts of his personality, he turns himself into a newer, deadlier kind of warrior—a Valentine who is also a snake, as the game symbolically portrays.



In short passages like this one, we get a sense of the huge amount of censorship and state control in Valentine's life: she's given a medal, but isn't allowed to tell anyone about it (including, it would seem, Peter). Peter still seems to be jealous of Valentine's love and friendship with Ender, but pretends to be amused instead. Peter continues to hate Ender for being better than him—we can imagine that this is partly why he wants to run the world.



Anderson expresses his hesitation about pushing Ender to his breaking point, but Graff seems to have no reservations about doing precisely this. He's the ultimate “ends justify the means” thinker, and yet there also seems to be a strong sadistic streak in Graff's plots—a streak that goes far beyond his cold logic. The way he teases Ender for his happiness suggests cruelty for its own sake, not for any greater good.



Ender has been on top of the standings for the last three years, and he's been promoted to command an army—even though he's only nine years old. Ender is assigned to Dragon Army, an army whose name was previously discontinued because of rumors that Dragon never won more than a third of its games. Graff informs Ender that his soldiers consist entirely of younger soldiers who've been promoted to army earlier than usual. Ender is forbidden from trading any of them.

Ender is given an army—moreover, he's forced to make do with this army, rather than trading its members to other teams (just as he was traded). This poses a challenge to Ender's leadership abilities—if he doesn't get along with a soldier, he's still forced to continue working with that soldier. Clearly Graff and the superiors consider Ender as separate from other students, as they give him separate rules and challenges.



Ender arrives in his barracks, and surveys his new army. Most of the soldiers are tiny—as tiny as Ender was when he arrived at Battle School. Some of the older soldiers have been in many armies, and while most of them respect Ender deeply, many of them also resent him for his success. Ender immediately takes charge by shouting that new soldiers will bunk in the front of the barracks. This is the opposite of the norm for an army. Ender then orders his soldiers to suit up and run to the **battleroom**. When some of them don't dress fast enough, he orders them to run through the halls naked, humiliating them.

Ender's strategy on his first day with his troops is to humiliate them—just as Ender himself was humiliated and singled out, again and again, when he started out at Battle School. As much as Ender despised Graff and others for treating him this way, he seems to acknowledge its effectiveness, as he immediately imitates Graff's style of leadership. Thus even Card seems to suggest that humiliation and suffering are important aspects of military training. It is worth noting that Ender's Game is suggested reading in many military organizations to this day.



Ender and his soldiers arrive in the **battleroom**, some of them still frantically pulling on their jumpsuits. Ender orders his troops to assemble facing the enemy's side of the room. The troops do so, facing the enemy side head on. Ender criticizes his troops for standing the same way they stood in the halls of Battle School—directions make no difference in zero gravity. He also berates his new soldiers for being sloppy and dressing too slowly. As a test, he orders them to launch themselves toward the “ceiling,” the direction that would be North to someone coming from the halls. Ender notices that one particularly small soldier immediately launches in the right direction, while most of the soldiers instinctively go the wrong way.

Ender reiterates one of the first lessons he taught himself about fighting: forget old orientations. His arguments about zero gravity's lack of an “up and down” are intuitive, but still difficult to grasp right away—as evidenced by the troops' inability to move to the ceiling right away. This kind of spatial thinking is easier for certain types of intellect, of which Ender is a star example. Ender now tests his own soldiers, just as calmly and calculatingly as Graff tested him for years before.



When everyone is assembled near the ceiling, Ender calls out the small soldier who was first to launch in the right direction. The soldier says his name is Bean, and Ender responds by teasing him about his name. He then proceeds with his first lesson: move fast when coming from the hall, so as to avoid blocking one's fellow troops. He quizzes Bean about the subtleties of this point, and Bean answers his questions without hesitation. Ender praises Bean excessively, and notices the other soldiers beginning to resent Bean. Mentally, Ender hates himself for making a soldier into a target for no particular reason.

Ender singles out Bean and both bullies and praises him, just as Graff did when Ender first arrived at the Battle School. Even if Ender seems to be confident in his abuses of Bean, we know from Card's narration that Ender hates himself for these kinds of actions—he doesn't want to be a bully, even as he acts the part. This is Ender's first real taste of authority, and it's clearly tempting to be corrupted by newly-conferred power (as Bonzo has shown).



Ender continues with his lesson. He demonstrates to his troops that it's much harder to be hit when one rotates ninety degrees, feet facing the enemy. He gives a new attack position: legs doubled in front, firing forward. He also teaches his soldiers how to push off walls with one's legs frozen. All the time, Ender singles out Bean, praising him for his correct answers while also bullying him for his size. Eventually Ender assigns his soldiers to practice at their own pace. He's fairly pleased: his soldiers aren't all brilliant, but he can work with them.

After practice, Ender stays late to help some of the most inexperienced soldiers. At the edge of the **battleroom**, he notices Bean waiting for him, and goes to talk. Bean begins, "I know what you're doing, Ender, sir, and I'm warning you ... don't play games with me." Bean demands a toon for himself, arguing that he could be the best soldier in the army as long as Ender doesn't belittle him. Ender grins and tells Bean that he's helping Bean—by singling Bean out, Ender gave Bean a chance to shine. Bean smirks and challenges Ender's expertise as a commander, mentioning that Bonzo Madrid still calls Ender a "pinprick." This infuriates Ender, and he grabs Bean and pushes him into a wall. Bean continues to smirk, and Ender walks away, angry with himself for being a bully.

After practice, Ender tries to understand why he was hard on Bean. He realizes that Graff used the same strategy on him before he'd even arrived in Battle School—by singling out Ender on the shuttle, he forced Ender to fend for himself, and ultimately made Ender a better soldier. While he recognizes that Graff made him tougher, Ender decides that he can't end up like Graff—cynical and manipulative. He spends the rest of his afternoon writing down his impressions of each new soldier in Dragon and thinking about ways to improve their abilities.

After writing his thoughts, Ender goes to free practice in the **battleroom**, as usual. There, he finds Major Anderson, who informs him that from now on, he's only allowed to practice with people in his own army. Ender protests that he needs time and friends to practice with if he's to make his new troops any good, but Anderson scoffs at this, and tells Ender to start "acting like a commander."

Once again, Ender basically validates Graff's treatment of him (though Ender doesn't recognize this yet) by repeating Graff's methods on Bean—who is immediately portrayed as a younger version of Ender himself. Ender has observed the different kinds of leaders he's had (Graff, Bonzo, Rose, Dink) and can pick and choose among which of their methods he found most effective.



Unlike Ender when he spoke to Graff after the shuttle ride, Bean seems not to have any illusions about what Ender is doing, or why he's doing it. Ender justifies his behavior by saying that he's giving Bean an opportunity to shine, but then ruins the effect of his confidence by making a childish threat and shoving Bean into the wall—much as Bonzo shoved him years ago. Ender realizes that he is becoming the thing he hates—a bullying commander. As much as Ender aspires to be a good person, his training virtually forces him to be unkind, and even cruel.



It takes Ender some time to realize what we've already recognized: he's imitating Graff. It's as if Ender acts out of instinct (instinct that's been instilled in him over three years at Battle School), and only later realizes that he was wrong to behave this way. Ender still has the capacity to do the right thing, but it takes him longer to arrive at such a conclusion than it would have a few years ago.



At the same time that Ender tries to move past his new bullying tendencies, Anderson cuts him off from his friends. It's as if the IF knows exactly what's going through Ender's head, and refuses to let him turn to others for help. Once again he is isolated, and forced to find solutions and strength for himself.



Ender goes to the game room, where he finds Alai waiting for him. Alai tells Ender he'd planned on practicing with him, only to find Major Anderson announcing the new rules. Alai and Ender try to joke with each other—Ender jokes that he taught Alai everything Alai knows, and Alai boasts playfully about being ready for anything. Suddenly, Ender feels a wave of sadness, and he remembers how Alai kissed him and whispered, “Salaam” years ago. He says this word now, and Alai replies, “it is not to be.” Alai explains that “Salaam” means peace. With this, he walks out.

In this moving short scene, Alai tells Ender that peace and friendship are not part of either boy's destiny. Both the meaning of the word “Salaam” and the sincere sentiment with which it was delivered have now been lost—crushed by the manipulations of Battle School, and the competitive natures of both Alai and Ender. They are still friendly, but Ender is once again isolated from any real intimacy or human connection. He is to be a commander, not anyone's peer.



The next day, Ender and Alai greet each other in the halls. They're still friendly and open with each other, but they both know that there's a wall between them now. Ender fears that Alai is secretly glad to be separated from Ender. He thinks about how IF has manipulated his closest friends and family against him: first Valentine, now Alai. This makes him quietly furious. Ender decides that he can use this fury to fight, and to defeat his enemies.

Once again, Ender turns his rage into ambition. It's hard to tell if the IF knows that Ender is thinking this way, or if it's merely trying to focus Ender on winning, and doesn't care if he's angry or not. In either case the result is the same, and perhaps this is the point: Graff wants Ender to win whether he hates the IF or not—defeating the Buggers is the only thing that matters.



CHAPTER 11: VENI VIDI VICI

Anderson and Graff argue about the battle schedule Graff has planned for Ender. Anderson objects that the schedule is too challenging: Ender faces a new battle almost every day. Graff insists that the new schedule will toughen Ender and make him a stronger commander. He adds that “computer simulations” have predicted that Ender will reach his full potential soon. Anderson wonders aloud if humans—who are clearly capable of torturing young children—are worthy of winning the war with the Buggers. Then he laughs and calls this “black humor.”

Anderson continues to be the voice of (relative) moderation and restraint, while Graff is the voice of toughness, manipulation, and constant pressure. Anderson “jokes” about something that becomes a very real issue—what makes humans inherently more worthy than the Buggers? So far we know almost nothing about the Buggers, except that they have been endlessly demonized—so much so that a preemptive attack on them is considered justified.



Ender has been a commander for a few weeks now. He barely sleeps, and spends long hours making plans of attack for the **battleroom**. His troops have grown into capable, intelligent soldiers, and Ender trusts them to improvise strategies and tactics on the spot. This gives them a huge advantage over other armies, who are trained by their commanders to obey orders at all costs. As Ender sits in his room and thinks about all this, he sees a piece of paper slipped under his door. Without reading the paper he knows what it says: his army will have a battle today.

Ender is so used to being surprised by sudden changes in scheduling that he doesn't even need to read the letter that's slipped under his door to know there's a battle. He's now accustomed to the IF reading his emotions and manipulating them, so he knows that the IF will present him with whatever he wants least. And yet Ender's competitive, ambitious nature makes him keep striving to keep up with each new challenge.



Ender goes to meet his army at 6 am, and informs them that they have a battle with Rabbit Army. To Ender's surprise, the troops accept this order grudgingly but maturely—clearly Ender has trained his troops to be loyal and disciplined. After an hour of light practice, the troops go to the **battleroom**. As the battle is about to begin, Ender reminds his soldiers of their signature attack position: “the enemy's gate is down.”

The battle begins. Right away, Ender notices that there are “stars” scattered through the **battleroom**. He directs his toons to shoot through the room and improvise their strategies once they've secured a position. Ender notes with pleasure that his toons are arranging themselves so that they break up the Rabbit Army into small, weak parts. One of his toon leaders, Crazy Tom, has the bright idea of ordering his troops to flash their own legs, making them nearly invisible in the low light of the battleroom. Ender makes a mental note to praise Tom for this decision later on.

The battle proceeds very quickly—Ender's organized yet free-thinking troops easily overpower the Rabbit Army's plodding forces. Ender assembles five troops and sends them through the enemy's gate, winning the battle. After the battle, Carn Carby, the leader of Rabbit Army, approaches Ender and commends him for his good performance.

It's still early in the morning when Ender's troops have left the **battleroom**. He orders them to the mess hall for breakfast, and then to the battleroom for their usual practice. Ender himself doesn't eat any breakfast—he's too busy thinking about his next move. He's just won a major victory with an inexperienced, barely-trained group of soldiers, and he now expects to see the other armies imitating his methods—dividing armies into small toons that use improvisational strategies. At practice, Ender doesn't linger on praising his troops. He gives everyone strict instructions for how to improve their performances. By this point, the soldiers are used to Ender's calm yet severe style of leadership: they know that he's stern but also very patient with them.

After practice, Ender goes to the commander's mess hall, and notices his old toon leader Dink Meeker sitting there. Dink greets Ender cheerfully, and compliments him for his good showing in the **battleroom**. After a few moments, however, Ender realizes that Dink isn't as friendly as he seems—in fact, Dink finishes his conversation with Ender quickly and goes to sit at a different table. After Dink leaves, Carn Carby sits down with Ender and praises him once again. Ender is impressed: Carn seems sincere, even if he's a lackluster commander. That night, Ender sleeps better than he has in months.

Over the past weeks, Ender has built loyalty and respect in his troops, to the point where they obey him even when he gives out an unpopular order. As always, he urges his troops to think for themselves and to think outside the box. “The enemy's gate is down” becomes a symbolic phrase for this kind of thinking—circumventing the usual rules and striking at an opponent's weakest point.



Ender is a good commander, and this means that he gives credit where credit is due. It's hard to imagine Rose or Bonzo praising Crazy Tom for his ingenuity—they'd either take credit for the idea themselves, or punish Tom for disobeying them. Ender can't help but take pride in his accomplishments as a leader—like it or not, he's starting to enjoy the battleroom.



Ender emphasizes improvisation and individual agency in his troops. Thus, when they fight against a highly organized, centralized force like the Rabbit Army, it's easy for them to surprise the enemy and defeat them.



Ender gives praise where it's due, but he doesn't give in to his temptation to reward his troops with rest and relaxation (and in this, he once again echoes Graff's methods). In order to lead in this way, it's important that Ender establish early on that he's tough but fair—he needs his troops' respect, but not their friendship. One consequence of this arrangement is that Ender is very lonely—he can't make friends with anyone in his army because to do so would mean that he has a soldier who can't fully accept his authority.



Ender's isolation from his peers is confirmed by his behavior in this scene. Dink, his old mentor, seems angry with Ender, even if he hides his anger and resentment behind a cheerful exterior. Competition is at the heart of every aspect of Battle School, so when someone is clearly the best at something, everyone else is naturally jealous of them. At the same time, Carby's pleasant behavior is a welcome relief from the usual dynamic between Ender and others.



The next day, Ender wakes up to find that he has another battle scheduled, this time with Petra Arkanian's army, Phoenix. He's disturbed to see that he's already late: the battle is scheduled in only half an hour. Quickly, he runs to his troops' barracks and tells them about the battle. They're surprised—having two battles in two days is unheard of. Nevertheless, the troops perform well against Petra. (Card gives almost no details about the battle.) At the conclusion, Petra is visibly angry with Ender for beating her. Ender hopes that they'll be friends again at some point.

By the end of the week, Dragon Army has fought seven battles, and won all of them. Ender has acquired a reputation among commanders for being cocky and arrogant, especially because he's younger than the average commander by more than a year. Other commanders bully him, pushing him aside in the halls.

Ender focuses his attention on learning new strategies for the **battleroom**. He researches old propaganda videos of Mazer Rackham defeating the Buggers. As he watches in more detail, it becomes increasingly clear that the humans should never have defeated the Buggers in the first place. Human ships were slow and difficult to navigate, while the Bugger ships, by contrast, moved quickly and skillfully. He notices that the Buggers have only one big strategy: send as many ships as possible to the greatest point of enemy concentration. He also notices that there's almost no footage of Rackham's true victory—only a few shots of Rackham firing at one large ship.

One day, Ender receives a visit from Anderson and Graff. They ask him how his army has been doing, and ask him why he doesn't play the **Giant's** game anymore. Ender, who's been frustrated with Graff for months now, fires back that his troops are exceptional, and capable of beating any army in Battle School. He adds that he doesn't play the Giant game anymore because he already won. Graff tells Ender that he wants him to be as happy as possible, but also wants him to improve as a commander. He gives Ender a slip of paper with his new battle assignment: he's fighting the Salamander Army, still commanded by Bonzo Madrid.

It's clear that the IF is manipulating Ender so that he antagonizes his former friends—first Dink, now Petra. Card doesn't give many details about their battle but the point is that Ender defeats his old, loyal friend, and she doesn't take the loss well. In the end, the battleroom makes enemies of everyone. Ender was friends with Petra when he was still a powerless victim—now that he is a threat, she finds him less sympathetic.



In stark contrast to the IF leaders, who justify everything they do by arguing that the Buggers must be defeated, the students at Battle School seem preoccupied with their own power struggles and to forget that the Buggers are the real enemy—they can't see the forest for all the trees. In this way, they bully Ender for beating them when they should actually be supporting him for trying to save their lives.



Ender's far-reaching ambitions are aptly symbolized by his studies of Mazer Rackham—who is portrayed as the ultimate military commander. It seems that Ender knows what he's destined for, and he's ready to command a large, dangerous fleet against the Buggers. The absence of useful footage of Rackham's attack reminds us that the governments of Earth practice strict censorship, and make us wonder if they're hiding something about the Buggers from their people.



In previous battles, Ender has been forced to antagonize Petra and Dink, his former friends. Now, Ender is being forced to antagonize his old enemy, Bonzo Madrid. As usual, it's impossible to read Graff's emotions in this scene. He's so committed to pushing Ender to the extreme that we can't tell if there's any joy in doing so for him, or if he's pained by his duties. Everything now seems to be leading up to a confrontation between Ender and Bonzo.



Ender goes to his troops and tells them about their new battle. Thinking quickly, he devises a novel strategy: he assembles the larger boys and freezes their legs. Then, he lets the smaller boys sit on top of the larger boys, creating a strong defensive position from which the smaller boys can fire without being hit in return. The battle proceeds quickly, and Ender's troops overpower Bonzo's in less than a minute. (Again, Card gives few details.)

After the battle, Major Anderson enters the **battleroom**, approaches Ender, and congratulates him on his victory. Ender is furious, however, and insists that he should have been paired against a competent army. He asks Bean what he would have done as Salamander commander, and Bean points out that Bonzo should never have kept his troops in one place. Ender leaves the battleroom quickly, still angry with the teachers for pitting him against an incompetent army. As he emerges, he realizes the truth: Bonzo will despise Ender for beating him.

The chapter cuts to Bean's point of view. Bean is sitting in his barracks room when he receives a message from Ender. He goes to Ender's room, where Ender asks him how he's been doing in the battles. Bean knows that Ender knows the answer to his own question, but he plays along: he explains that he's completed every assignment he's ever been given, and always has an impressive number of hits. Ender asks Bean why the teachers made him a soldier at such a young age. Bean replies that the IF needs commanders as soon as possible. Ender sighs and tells Bean the truth: he's tired of commanding and tired of fighting. Bean realizes that Ender is no longer bullying him—he's confiding in him.

Ender asks Bean for his help. He needs Bean to think of "crazy ideas" to help the Dragon Army win in the coming weeks. The teachers will continue to challenge Ender by giving him tighter schedules and increasingly unfair odds, but if Bean is on his side, then Ender might be able to weather the new challenges. Bean agrees. By the time Bean returns to his barracks, he's already thought of half a dozen ideas: "Ender would be pleased—every one of them was stupid."

Ender defeats Bonzo in a humiliatingly short period of time—Card's lack of description of the battle is a surefire clue that it was a blowout. Clearly, Ender's close observation of Bonzo has paid off: Ender learned exactly what Bonzo was doing wrong with his army, and took the opposite approach with his own Dragon forces.



Whether Ender realizes it or not, he's further humiliating Bonzo by having Bean, his smallest and least intimidating soldier, call out a superior strategy that Bonzo could have used. It takes Ender a surprisingly long time to realize that Bonzo will surely seek revenge for this loss. Ender has long ago moved beyond the realm of boys like Bonzo—he is focusing on the Buggers, while Bonzo is still concerned with his personal pride and machismo.



In the past, Ender took out his anger and aggression on Bean, partly because Ender saw Bean as another version of himself—smart, shy, and eager to prove himself. Here, Ender chooses to confide in Bean for the same reason—because he thinks Bean will understand what he's going through. The two boys don't become especially close here, but Bean does have some useful observations—it's clear enough that Ender is being pushed because the IF thinks he's valuable, and because the Buggers are nearby.



Time and time again in this novel, Ender turns to new friends for help and understanding—and each time, the IF finds a way to distance Ender from these friends. Graff has already established that for Ender to become a great leader he must be likeable, but still fundamentally isolated from his peers. This is a valid point, perhaps, but the problem is the psychological toll it takes on Ender himself—he is still just a boy, and he feels totally alone in the world.



CHAPTER 12: BONZO

The chapter begins with a conversation between General Pace, an important American officer, and Colonel Graff. Pace has learned from Dap that Graff is intentionally putting Ender's life in danger. Pace warns Graff that if Bonzo Madrid and his friends attack Ender, then Ender could be severely injured. He adds that Graff could easily be court-martialed for endangering a child's life by manipulating Bonzo against Ender. Graff seems to accept this possibility—but he adds that if his methods pay off, he's going to “get a few dozen medals.”

As the chapter begins, Ender and Bean are practicing with their troops. Bean has found a “new toy”—a deadline (long, thin wire), used for construction in space. Bean realizes that he can use the wire to change directions in zero gravity. Ender and the troops are excited with this discovery—they imagine using the deadline in future battles to confuse and outmaneuver their opponents.

After practice, Ender and his troops walk through the halls, and notice that there are too many Salamander soldiers nearby. Suddenly, Ender hears someone calling his name. It's Petra, asking if she could talk to Ender. Ender is reluctant to stop, so he keeps walking, forcing Petra to follow him. Petra rushes toward Ender, and tells him the truth: there are some older boys who want to kill Ender. Ender nods, and coolly asks Petra if she noticed the Salamander soldiers walking behind him—if he'd stopped to talk to her, they could have attacked him easily. Petra flushes and denies that she was trying to hurt him. She walks away from him quickly.

In the barracks, Crazy Tom informs Ender that toons will now walk with Ender at all times. Ender accepts this protection—he realizes he'd be a fool not to. He also finds a message on his desk from Dink, telling him not to be alone. Ender finds this strangely reassuring, as it proves Dink is still his friend.

Ender's next battle is against the Badger Army. In the battle, Badger troops don't stay frozen permanently—instead, they unfreeze after five minutes. Ender manages to win the battle, but it's very close. Afterwards, he is so exhausted that he orders his army to get some sleep instead of going to practice as usual.

Graff clearly pitted Ender and Bonzo against one another because he knew that Bonzo would be furious in defeat. Clearly, Bonzo is planning to hurt Ender, and Graff knows this full-well—he just sees it as another part of Ender's training. Graff always offers the same defense—everything is in the service of helping Ender defeat the Buggers. Graff doesn't take random chance or accident into account, however, so there is still suspense regarding Ender's fate.



Ender seems to be turning to “toys”—like deadline—because he doesn't want to think about all the soldiers who despise him, or the commander (Bonzo) who wants him dead. Seen from another angle, however, this is Ender still being endlessly inventive and resourceful, no matter how much pressure is put on him.



In one of the most ambiguous sections in the novel, Petra seems to be trying to protect Ender, but also might be luring Ender into a place where it's easy for the Salamander Army to attack him. While Card doesn't explain Petra's motives here, in one sequel to the novel, Ender's Shadow, he shows that Petra was trying to look out for Ender—she thought that if she could fight off some of the Salamander soldiers who would inevitably try to attack Ender, she would be able to scare the rest of them into leaving Ender alone.



Ender's situation at the Battle School is so grim that he's forced to find happiness and friendship in unlikely places. Dink warning Ender that his life is in danger isn't exactly a peace offering, but from Ender's point of view it's proof of friendship.



Ender is finally breaking under the pressure of leadership. It's telling that the first sign of this is that Ender goes easy on his troops—it suggests that Ender wants to go easy on himself as well.



Ender uses his free time to work out at the Battle School gym, and to take a shower. While he's showering, he notices that he's all alone. Suddenly, he hears the sound of boys entering the showers. Even before he turns around, he knows that Bonzo is there. Bonzo is accompanied by a gang of other boys, including Ender's old rival, Bernard. Bonzo insists that he's going to "graduate" Ender today. Ender teases Bonzo for needing a gang to beat up one weaker boy, whispering, "Your father would be proud of you." Ender's tactic works, and Bonzo takes off his jumpsuit and pushes his friends aside: he'll fight Ender one-on-one.

Ender prepares to fight Bonzo in the showers. He can see right away that Bonzo is an experienced fighter, and he imagines that Bonzo will aim to damage Ender's most important asset: his brain. Ender turns on all the showers, making his body slipperier and more difficult for Bonzo to hold. Suddenly, Dink Meeker runs into the bathroom, and Bonzo's gang grabs him. Dink yells for Bonzo to stop—Ender is the human race's only chance of defeating the Buggers. Ender realizes that this is exactly what Bonzo doesn't want to hear: he can't stand thinking that Ender is better than he is.

Bonzo turns to Ender and lunges at him. He tries to grab Ender, but Ender's body is too slippery for him to get a good hold. Ender is able to break free of the hold and jump up, smashing Bonzo's nose with his head. Ender realizes that he could run out of the bathroom in this instant—but if he did this, then Bonzo would come back later, angrier than ever. Ender's best option, then, is to stay and fight. Ender turns to Bonzo and kicks him in the chest and crotch. Bonzo falls backward and doesn't get up.

Ender staggers away from Bonzo's unmoving body, followed by Dink. Bonzo's friends make no attempt to stop them—they're too shocked by the sight of Bonzo. Ender realizes what's happened: the IF has manipulated him into fighting Bonzo, and has refused to intervene. Dink mutters that the IF will expel Bonzo from Battle School immediately. Ender begins to cry—he says, "I didn't want to hurt him! Why didn't he just leave me alone!"

Ender is lying alone in his room, hours after his fight with Bonzo. Suddenly, he hears a noise—a note has been slipped under his door. The note says that Ender's army will be fighting two other armies that day.

It's a nasty surprise that Ender's former friend (and former former enemy) has reverted to being his enemy. Bernard seemed to getting along with Ender while they were both friends with Alai—but now his true nature as a bully is plain. Ender, always resourceful under pressure, is able to convince Bonzo to fight him one-on-one, just as he convinced Stilson to do the same years ago. Ender uses Bonzo's pride and family values against him, greatly increasing his chances.



Unwittingly, Dink seals Ender's fate by trying to save his life. Bonzo despises Ender for being better than him—he wants to believe that Ender is replaceable, and that he's not the best military commander in the Battle School. Bonzo is then the ultimate example of narrow-minded arrogance and insecurity—he places his own pride above the lives of millions of others.



Ender uses Bonzo's weight against him—an apt metaphor for how Ender plays to his strengths. Ender is always the underdog in these situations, and he has to use his intelligence to win. Just as was the case with Stilson, Ender refuses to run away before his job is done—even though he's already hurt Bonzo, he chooses to hurt Bonzo again, ensuring that there will be no second fight.



Ender realizes what's going on—but a little too late. This fight is very real and visceral, but in the larger scheme of things (for the IF at least), it's another kind of "virtual reality" preparing Ender to fight the Buggers. Ender has (unknowingly) killed another boy, but his reaction shows that he still does have some innocence and compassion left—the IF has not destroyed his sense of guilt at least.



The IF knows no mercy. Any other authority would give Ender some time to himself, but Graff insists on challenging Ender on the very day that he's had this horrible fight.



Ender brings his army to the **battleroom**. He's dismayed to find that the two enemy armies have already taken their positions within the battleroom: they're ready to shoot the Dragon soldiers at a moment's notice. Ender consults Bean on how best to proceed. Bean is reluctant to continue at all—it's an unfair fight, and any sane general would bring his army to retreat in such a dire situation.

The chapter cuts to the perspective of William Bee, the commander of Griffin Army. Bee witnesses the Dragon soldiers shooting through the **battleroom**. He orders his troops to fire. His soldiers shoot many of the Dragon soldiers, and it seems that the Dragon Army is about to lose. Then, suddenly, the lights turn on and the game ends. Bee realizes what's just happened: Ender has sent five soldiers to the enemy's gate, performing the standard "victory ritual" that ends the game. Even though Ender's army had sustained heavy casualties and was badly outnumbered, it was able to "win" by technicality.

We return to Ender's perspective. He just won, ingeniously, by bending the rules of the **battleroom**. Overjoyed, Crazy Tom congratulates Ender and asks him when the next practice will be. Ender mutters that there will be no more practices, and screams, "The game is over!"

Ender is sitting in his room when he hears a knock. It's Bean. Bean has just been transferred to command the Rabbit Army, he tells Ender. Bean seems proud of Dragon's victory in the battle, but Ender can't share his enthusiasm. He tells Bean about how he hit Bonzo, seriously injuring him. Bean nods but insists that Bonzo "had it coming."

Suddenly, Colonel Graff enters Ender's room. Ignoring Bean, he informs Ender that he's been transferred to Command School. Bean protests that no one is sent to Command School before the age of 16—Ender is barely 10. Ender realizes that the Bigger war must be dire: the IF is accelerating student training, in preparation for a massive battle. Graff sends Bean back to his room, and there, Bean cries—he's never going to see Ender again.

Twice in one day, Ender finds himself in the middle of a seemingly unwinnable fight. He's already won one, but can't think of a way to "even the odds" here, as he did with Bonzo in the shower. After the life-threatening fight with Bonzo, it seems like the stakes are lower here, but Card still creates a mood of suspense as Ender seeks yet another creative solution.



Ender wins his battle by breaking the rules of the Battle School. He's technically won the game, but only because of the arbitrary way that the School defines winning. It's a blatant sign of disrespect to the teachers at Battle School—and this is just what Ender intends. One of Ender's greatest strengths is that he's willing to think outside the box. As with the Giant's game, he doesn't choose between "two potions," so to speak—instead, he goes directly for the throat. This shows him taking back at least a little agency, in a situation where he is usually being totally manipulated.



Ender seems to have reached a breaking point, even as he's just proved he's the unbeatable champion of the battleroom. It's not clear what's going to happen next, but clearly Ender needs a break of some kind if he's to continue functioning.



At the end of the day, it seems that Bean cares most about winning, while Ender cares about compassion for his enemies. Ender can no longer care about meaningless games—Bean, on the other hand, is still too young and indoctrinated in Battle School competitiveness to see how pointless and cruel the "game" has become.



Once again Ender is distanced from a friend, and in this moment Bean proves just how close he felt to Ender—he cries at their separation. We get the sense that Graff is continuing his strategy of isolating Ender, but that there are also larger forces at work—the Buggers may be approaching, meaning that the novel is slowly drawing to a close and Ender is nearing a climactic encounter with his enemies.



The next day, Ender prepares to leave Battle School, accompanied by Anderson and Graff. Anderson has been promoted from Major to Colonel in the IF. Graff says that Ender has been granted a short military leave on Earth. Ender travels to Earth with Graff. They fly to Florida, and Ender realizes that he no longer feels at home on Earth—Battle School has become his home, the “only place in the universe where he belonged.”

There is then a conversation between Major Imbu and Colonel Anderson. They discuss the recent death that’s occurred in Battle School: Bonzo Madrid’s death in the showers. Anderson tells Imbu that Graff has been summoned by the Polemarch, possibly to be court-martialed for endangering Ender’s life. Anderson also reveals that Bonzo is the second person Ender has murdered: Ender killed Stilson, years ago. Nevertheless, Ender has no idea he’s a murderer. Imbu speculates that one day, video footage of Ender’s murders will be used against him.

CHAPTER 13: VALENTINE

The chapter begins with a conversation between two unnamed government officials. The two officials note that Valentine and Peter Wiggin are Demosthenes and Locke, two highly influential journalists. The officials note that Valentine, ironically the more peaceful and calm of the children, writes as Demosthenes, the inflammatory, hawkish journalist, while Peter writes as Locke in spite of his violent tendencies. The officials toy with the idea of exposing Locke and Demosthenes’ identities, but instead they decide that this isn’t worth it: for now, Peter and Valentine have influence but not power.

Valentine has been writing as Demosthenes for more than two years now. Her column is reprinted in dozens of “newsnets” (essentially, Internet websites) and she’s beginning to amass a large salary from her writings. Sometimes, she and “Locke” fund political candidates, and they’re often invited to speak on political panels, though they’re always forced to turn down the invitations in order to keep their identities secret. Peter is worried that Demosthenes is becoming more influential than Locke—exactly the opposite of what he’d wanted. But Valentine assures Peter that anti-Russian sentiment (Demosthenes’s trademark) is simply more fun to read than level-headed wisdom—in the long run, however, Locke will be more powerful.

It seems that Graff is finally going easy on Ender in giving him a military leave so that he can enjoy his time on Earth. This is surely calculated carefully, though (to allow Ender to rest after his near-breakdown), and it also becomes clear that Ender isn’t really going home at all. Battle School has seemingly robbed him of everything except military strategy—his only home is the battleroom now.



In this dramatically ironic section, we learn that Ender is a double murderer. Ender himself has no idea that this is the case—we can imagine that he would give up in despair if he knew how dangerous he’d become. The IF is focused on keeping Ender ignorant of the extent of his crimes, allowing him to maintain a strange innocence. This “innocence,” will be an important weapon for the IF in the future as well.



It’s not clear why the IF decides to keep Locke and Demosthenes’ identities hidden—just because they’re not immediate opponents of the IF right now doesn’t mean that they couldn’t one day be dangerous to them. It may that the IF still underestimates the Wiggin children because of their age, or they simply want to have some secret information ready to use against Peter and Valentine should the need arise.



Card was writing at a time when the Internet wasn’t yet widely available (it had only appeared at CERN in Switzerland and on a few college campuses). He’s remarkably prophetic, then, in suggesting that electronic communications will one day allow people to publish their ideas anonymously. We’re also reminded of Peter’s dilemma—he wants to be the moderate, but it’s more fun to be the radical. While Valentine is in danger of outshining Peter on the national stage, she assures him that this is strictly short-term: even if radicals are good at swaying emotion in the moment, the moderates win long-term.



One day Valentine finds Graff waiting for her at school. He explains that Valentine must come with him to visit Ender, since he's on leave. Graff explains that Ender cares for Valentine, far more than he cares for the rest of his family. As a result, he'll only visit with her, not Father, Mother, or Peter. Valentine agrees to come with Graff. In the car, Graff tells Valentine the truth: he knows that she's Demosthenes. Graff assures Valentine that the IF has no intention of revealing her identity: it's in their interest to use Locke and Demosthenes—together—to promote stability and balance.

Valentine and Graff arrive in Florida, where Graff takes Valentine to a beautiful lake. Valentine runs down to the shores of the lake, and finds Ender paddling in a small boat. He greets Valentine calmly, and mentions that he enjoys swimming since he misses weightlessness. Valentine playfully tickles Ender's knee, as she did when he was a child. Ender reflexively grabs Valentine's wrist—a lesson he's learned from combat class. This dismays Valentine, and she realizes that the IF has turned Ender into an agent of war.

Valentine tells Ender why she's here—undoubtedly she's supposed to convince Ender to continue with Battle School, just as she did before. Ender nods, and insists that Valentine not mention Peter. Ender mentions that he's been watching videos of Buzzer invasions, and he's noticed that there's almost no footage of individual buzzers. Valentine finds this very telling: Ender is concerned about understanding his enemies, even when he's trying to wipe them out. Ender agrees, explaining, "In the moment when I truly understand my enemy, understand him well enough to defeat him, then in that very moment I also love him." He whispers to Valentine that he's afraid of losing her love. Valentine touches Ender very gently, and tells him that she's not afraid. Ender believes her, but mutters, "You should be."

Valentine can't help but tell Ender about Peter. She tells him that Peter is writing under an alias, and wants to run the world, beginning with his words. Ender is impressed, and surprised that Peter has become so tactical and methodical in his thinking. Valentine also tells Ender that Peter has "changed"—he has ambitions of running the world and imposing a new global hegemony. While Peter isn't a kind man, he's a good politician, and he knows how to balance power—ironically, Peter, who tortured Ender and Valentine for years, could be the calmest and most level-headed leader of Earth.

Here, we come to realize the real reason why the IF isn't exposing Valentine and Peter's identities. They know that Valentine and Peter want the same things the IF wants: peace and stability. It's also suggested that Graff is keeping Valentine's identity a secret so that she's more likely to cooperate with him and help Ender fight the Buggers. Revealing that he knows about Demosthenes is a savvy way for Graff to pressure Valentine into obeying him.



In this sad scene, we're reminded of how Ender doesn't really feel at home on Earth anymore—this is why he spends his time in a pool, where he's weightless, just like in the battleroom. Ender proves that he's been truly trained to be a warrior when he reflexively grabs Valentine's wrist—his training in battle overpowering his memories of love and affection.



Here Ender sums up his philosophy as a leader and a warrior. He's an empathetic person, and this very empathy makes him deadly in battle. He can think like his opponents—to do so is a way of "loving" his opponents. In the end, Ender can use his knowledge of his opponents to defeat them—the more he "loves" them, the closer he can come to defeating them. Ender is still uncomfortable with his role as a killer, though—he is afraid of what he's done to Bonzo, and what he's capable of doing in a war with the Buggers. Even Valentine can't reassure Ender that he's not a killer—this simply isn't true anymore.



Here Card lets the irony of leadership sink in. Although we think of statesmen as being peaceful people and of warriors being violent, the truth is often the reverse: there's a kind of violence in maintaining constant order over a country. On the other hand, the best warriors, like Ender, are often adept at feeling compassion and empathy for others—this is what makes them such superior fighters. It's darkly amusing that Ender isn't more surprised that his older brother is plotting world domination—apparently he'd always suspected that Peter would do something of this kind.



Ender confesses his deepest secret to Valentine: he can't beat the Buggers. Even after years of military training, he has no idea how to defeat them. In other words, he's become a killer, but not a savior. As a result, he'll always feel weaker than Peter. Valentine tells Ender that the only way he'll be able to outshine Peter is by defeating the Buggers. Ender shakes his head: he doesn't want to "beat Peter"—he wants Peter to love him. Valentine doesn't know what to say, as she doubts Peter loves anyone.

Ender and Valentine lie by the lake for hours, silently. After some time, Valentine sits up and tells Ender that she loves him, "more than ever." With this she walks away, and travels back to Greensboro. Ender leaves the lake, and finds Graff waiting for him. He accuses Graff of using Valentine to manipulate him into returning to Battle School. Graff nods and admits that Ender is right: by exposing Ender to Valentine, Graff has reminded Ender that the world is worth fighting for. Graff explains that he's been reassigned to stay with Ender at all times: Ender is the future of the human race, and thus of the utmost importance.

Ender and Graff leave the Earth after Ender has been there for three months. Graff informs Ender that he's headed for an interplanetary satellite, and then to the ISL—the IF Command School. Command School is located on a small planet called Eros. At the interplanetary satellite, Graff finds a pilot and orders him to take them to Eros immediately. Once the pilot has begun the journey, Graff reveals that the pilot will have to spend the foreseeable future living on Eros, since the planet's location is classified for as long as the Bigger war is going on.

For the next three months, Ender and Graff travel to Eros on their ship. They spend long chunks of time talking about the Buggers and military strategy. Ender is particularly interested in learning about the Buggers themselves. The Buggers, Graff tells him, are similarly to human beings in many ways: their bodies contain DNA, and they have the same type of vision. It appears that the Buggers can communicate with each other from any distance, instantaneously. The humans have imitated Bigger biology to develop instantaneous communication methods of their own, which they now use for war.

Even Valentine fails to understand what Ender wants, as she assumes that Ender's relationship with Peter is based only on competition. Ender, however, claims that what he really wants is for Peter to love him. This sounds so heavily idealized that it can't possibly be true, but Ender seems perfectly sincere.



Although Valentine hasn't really convinced Ender of anything, the experience was important for Ender merely because it was an experience with someone he loved here on the Earth. This was Graff's whole plan—Graff wanted Ender to fall in love with the Earth once again, and to remember that he has people who love him and need to be protected from the Buggers. Ender no longer has any illusions about being manipulated, and so Graff is (relatively) open about his methods and goals.



It's ironic that Ender is being taken to a planet whose name is Greek for "love" in order to better learn how to kill an entire species. This fits, however, with the idea that empathy and compassion may be the best weapons available against one's enemies. We're given another example of Graff's manipulative nature here—he seems to take a sadistic pleasure in telling the pilot that he won't be allowed to leave Eros for years.



It's intriguing to finally hear everything that humans know about the Buggers, but it's also fascinating that Ender hasn't asked, or been given a chance to ask, these kinds of questions before. It's only now that Ender is truly considered a "commander" that he is allowed to study the nature of his enemies. Perhaps Graff was also afraid that if Ender came to understand the Buggers too well (before being properly trained), he wouldn't want to kill them—or perhaps the IF is hiding more information about the Buggers.



Ender asks Graff other questions about the Buggers. He wants to know if the Buggers are sending a new fleet to destroy human beings. Graff admits that he doesn't know: all he knows is that human beings are sending a fleet of their own to eliminate the Buggers. Ender points out the obvious: maybe the Buggers have decided not to attack humans anymore. Graff argues that it's not worth it to assume that the Buggers have moved on—humanity's best chance is to attack the Buggers. For seventy years, humans have been sending fleets of ships to the Bigger home planet, each fleet more advanced than the last. He adds that the fleets need a commander who can lead them to victory against the Buggers. That commander is Ender.

For the last 200 pages, we haven't really been told anything about the Bigger invasion that's supposedly coming for Earth—and now, we learn that it may not be coming at all. It's entirely possible, then, that the humans are building a fleet to destroy an alien race that doesn't want to fight anymore. This is one of the central moral dilemmas of the novel, and an echo (on a much vaster scale) of many of Ender's fights—when is excessive force or a preemptive attack justified? This revelation of the state of things also hints at Dink's earlier theory. The Buggers might not all be dead as he claimed, but they have been emphasized as a common threat for seventy years, partly as a tool for government manipulation.



Ender asks Graff, point-blank, why humans are fighting the Buggers. Graff offers various reasons: because the Buggers need new worlds to colonize, because the Buggers have a strange religion, because they don't regard human beings as intelligent life forms, because they don't want other intelligent life forms in the universe, etc. He finds it odd that Ender is so interested in his enemies. Ender tells Graff, "I'm in favor of surviving."

While Ender is still very much on the side of the humans in all this (he only sees the Buggers as enemies) he still wants to know more about his opponents. This reminds us that Ender has always been fascinated with seeing the world from his enemies' points of view, and empathizing with them in order to defeat them. Even as a child, he tried to imagine the Bigger children playing a game of their own in which humans were the enemy.



CHAPTER 14: ENDER'S TEACHER

The chapter opens with Graff—just arrived at Eros—talking to the director of Command School, Admiral Chamrajnagar. Graff tells the Admiral that he's planning a new course of study for Ender, incorporating the latest weapons technology. Chamrajnagar mentions that he used to have Graff's job, supervising students at Battle School.

By this point in the book, the short conversations about Ender that begin each chapter are a matter of course. Here Graff is preparing a challenging new syllabus for Ender. It's as if Card is eager to get the point, and wants to waste as little time as possible.



Ender has been living on Eros for a few weeks. He hates it from the first second he sees it—Eros is too small, with low gravity, depressingly bleak planes, and long, shadowy tunnels in which humans live. There is a large group of students at the Command School on Eros, but Ender barely sees them. He's not on Eros to go to class—he receives private lessons from the school's professors. He eats with Colonel Graff, and has no other contacts. He decides to devote his free time to studying topics like mathematics and military history, which might be useful to him during combat. He also practices tactics by playing a fighter game in which he directs ships into combat.

As before, Ender is almost entirely cut off from his peers—and at Eros, he basically has no peers. He eats and lives alone, except for Graff—a man he mostly despises. It's telling that Ender chooses to devote his free time (the time that, theoretically, could be used for relaxing or sleeping) to studying more military history. As we saw in his last visit to Earth, Ender has been training with the Battle School for so long that he can't imagine any other kind of life. He recognizes that he is being honed as a perfect weapon, and so he gives up on any aspect of life that distracts from this purpose.



One day, Ender awakes to find an old man sitting in his room. Ender asks the old man his name, but the man doesn't reply. Instead, the man stares ahead, blankly, at the wall. Ender wonders if the man is an invalid, or if he's mentally ill. Ender decides to do his daily exercises until Graff arrives in his quarters. This is a mistake: while Ender is doing pushups, the old man grabs his legs. Irritably, Ender pulls away and goes back to his bed. As he leans over, he feels the old man pull him back and push him to the floor. The old man speaks—he asks Ender why he didn't attack him, even after Ender know he was a threat. With this, the man releases Ender, and gets up to leave. As he opens the door, he tells Ender that from now on, he will be programming Ender's military exercises. Ender asks the man if he has a name, and the man replies, "Mazer Rackham."

In the coming weeks, Ender spends his days learning strategy from Mazer. Every day Mazer programs battles for Ender on a simulation computer. Ender asks Mazer how he came to be living on Eros, and, more importantly, how he's still alive: his victory over the Buggers happened more than 70 years ago, and Mazer looks no older than 60. Mazer explains that he's been traveling at near light-speed for many years, thereby slowing down his aging. From his perspective, only about 20 years have gone by since the end of the Bugger War.

Ender asks Mazer the question he's been considering for years: he wants to know how, exactly, Mazer defeated the Buggers. Mazer smiles and explains that this secret has been tightly guarded for decades. During his combat days, he tells Ender, he noticed that the Bugger ships moved as if they were being controlled (instantaneously) by a single powerful being. He intuited that the Buggers themselves were being "moved" by a single "queen," to whom each individual Bugger was only a small, insignificant thing. By killing the queen, Rackham was able to kill all the Buggers in the same instant. Rackham admits that if he hadn't killed the Bugger queen, humans probably would have lost the war.

Mazer explains his new military strategies to Ender. The humans have invented a new weapon: the so-called "Dr. Device," which is capable of destroying any molecular structure in the universe. If the IF can find the location of the Bugger queen, then it will be able to use the Dr. Device to destroy not only the queen but the Bugger planet, and the war will be over.

In this strange section, Mazer teaches by example. As aggressive as Ender can be, he's thus far always resorted to fighting defensively. He didn't go out and try to hurt Bonzo—he had to wait for Bonzo to fight him. This scene is a memorable way of reminding us (and Ender) that the old, defensive strategies aren't part of the IF's current plan. Ender has to seize every advantage he has, even if it means hurting people who haven't hurt him yet. In essence, he's being taught to "shoot first and ask questions later." The revelation of Mazer is also a surprise, as he has so far been a mysterious and legendary figure, and someone presumably long dead.



Here Card shows that relativity plays an important role in the technology of his "Ender universe." It's theoretically possible for people to live long lives, provided that they travel at near-light speed, as time flows slower for objects moving quickly. It's clear that Mazer, like Ender, is seen as a powerful weapon—something to be preserved and used for as long as possible.



Here Mazer gives Ender the final piece of the puzzle of the Buggers. The Buggers don't really understand the concept of the individual (although as we'll see later, they understand it in some limited ways, like caring for children). Instead, the Buggers are controlled by a single, powerful queen. The implications of this—which Ender seems unwilling to consider for now—are staggering. Perhaps the queen didn't realize that she was "killing" humans, as the concept of taking an individual life just isn't relevant to the queen's existence. Ender, so indoctrinated in Battle School teachings, doesn't seem to realize all this right now.



Mazer implies that if Ender gets a chance to use the Dr. Device to destroy the queen, he should do so, since this will essentially end the war in one fell swoop. Ender seems to avoid considering the fact that he'd be murdering an entire species, and also that the "war" might well be one-sided now. He's been trained in military ways for so long that he can't see the forest for the trees.



Ender proceeds with his military training. Every day he conducts fake military exercises in which he controls ships and sends them to fight with a computerized version of the Bugger fleet. After some weeks of this, he discovers that he's been prepared to command an elite group of commanders, including his old friends Alai, Bean, Dink, Shen, Crazy Tom, and many of his other loyal commanders from Dragon. Ender relays orders to this group of talented commanders, and they improvise with their assigned portions of the IF fleet. With Mazer's direction, Ender learns to use his subordinates like a Bugger queen using her drones: whenever he gives an order, it passes efficiently to the fleet.

Every day, Ender and his commanders begin a new military exercise against a computerized enemy programmed by Mazer Rackham, and every day the enemy is more challenging. Rackham warns Ender that he's going to grind Ender "into dust." Ender replies that Mazer won't succeed, because he's stronger and smarter than Mazer.

One day, Ender and his commanders participate in a training exercise that seems fairly easy. The enemy fleet is big and grouped close together, giving Ender the opportunity to use the Dr. Device. Ender instructs his forces to be careful—he doesn't want to lose a single ship. He tasks Alai with luring the enemy into a large clump that will be especially vulnerable to the device. Alai successfully causes the Bugger fleet to group tightly together, and when this is the case, Ender launches the device, instantly wiping out a huge chunk of the Bugger fleet.

The training exercises in the days following Ender's first use of the Dr. Device are more difficult than the previous ones. Ender realizes that he has a bad habit of trying to save every single ship in his fleet: he never tries anything brilliant because he's afraid of even the smallest losses. Mazer encourages Ender to try bolder strategies that involve sacrificing larger numbers of ships.

Gradually, the commanders under Ender develop a good, smooth relationship with him. Strangely, Ender's friendship with his commanders weakens during this period: Alai, Petra, and Bean respect Ender and become excellent at understanding his commands, but they cease to think of him as a friend in any way. At night, Ender worries about his friends, and dreams about the **Giant**. Sometimes in his dreams he sees wolves with the faces of children—Stilson, Bonzo, and Peter, but also Alai, Dink, and Valentine. Once in his dream Ender attacks Valentine and drowns her in a river. He wakes up crying.

Whereas before Ender was being cut off from his friends, here he's united with some of his oldest comrades, including Bean, Shen, and Alai—but as subordinates, not friends. This is exactly the kind of relationship Graff was trying to foster—these soldiers like and respect Ender, but don't see him as a peer. Ender tries to imitate the Bugger queen's strategy by making sure that his orders pass smoothly from his mouth to the simulation ships that his commanders control. Once again, we see Ender "loving" his enemy, learning from her, and using that knowledge to wage war.



Ender's relationship with Mazer reiterates the proximity of love and hate: although the two seem to be rivals, and talk about being each other's enemies, there is also clearly a deep mutual respect in their relationship. Mazer isn't given as much character development as someone like Graff—this final part of the novel is mostly devoted to Ender's almost hallucinatory state of constant warfare.



The first time Ender uses the Dr. Device, it's devastating—clearly his computer-simulated opponent isn't ready for it. It's unclear at what point the "simulations" become real, but at some point (as we learn later) Ender is fighting real Bugger ships, and is simply kept ignorant of the real destruction he is inflicting. It is only because he thinks that he is still playing games that Ender is able to remain sane.



Ender must now purge himself of his last protective instincts—he has to master the military concept of "acceptable losses." It's interesting that Ender has managed to make it this far without learning to sacrifice his own people. His loyalty to his followers (and also, perhaps, his confidence) is so strong that it's always hard for him to make such sacrifices.



Although Ender is improving as a commander, he still struggles with the same problems he's always faced. He has nightmares in which it becomes clear that he hasn't forgiven himself for his fights with Bonzo and Stilson. Worst of all, Ender comes to realize that he's been trained to be an indiscriminate killer: he could even kill Valentine, if given the order. He's terrified that the IF is turning him into a monster—but his ability to still cry and feel such pain proves that his humanity hasn't been totally crushed.



One day, Ender commands a battle in which he sustains horrible losses. Petra overextends her fleets, and ends up losing all but two ships. Ender calls on Crazy Tom and Shen to help Petra, and in the end Ender is able to win the battle, but with huge losses. Petra bursts into tears, and Ender hears her through his microphone, whispering, “Tell Ender I’m sorry.” After this near-fiasco, Ender is careful not to push his commanders too far. As a result, he pushes himself even farther. One night Mazer wakes him up, and he notices that he’s been gnawing on his own hand. He begins to eat less and less, to the point where he’ll only eat if Mazer explicitly tells him to. Then, during one battle in which he’s outnumbered three to one, Ender faints and falls on his own computer. In his delirium, he imagines being torn apart by the Buggers, and tended by Valentine. When Ender wakes up, three days have passed. Mazer informs him that he has a battle that day. Ender nods, goes to his command station, and wins the battle.

Ender enters a strange stage in which he’s neither fully awake nor fully asleep. During his battles he’s brilliant, and plays better than ever. At night, he thinks that he hears voices, some of which are kind and fatherly, and others that are harsher. He thinks he hears Graff and Mazer talking about him, with Graff arguing that Mazer should go easy on Ender. Mazer says that Ender has been playing better than ever, and suggests that Ender will be finished with Command School soon enough.

The next day, the narrator says, is Ender’s last in Command School, though he doesn’t know it. Ender wakes up and finds that Mazer isn’t waiting for him, as usual. He walks out of his bedroom and sees Mazer and Graff waiting for him, along with a group of men dressed in civilian clothes. Mazer explains that his battle for the day is his final assignment—if he wins, he’ll be the first student ever to make it so far in the IF training process. Mazer shows Ender the simulation he’ll be dealing with. There is a large Bigger planet, surrounded by Bigger ships. Mazer reminds Ender that the Buggers have never attacked a human civilian population—Ender will have to decide whether or not it’s a good “strategy” to attack a planet that’s presumably full of unarmed Buggers. Mazer adds that the simulation he’s programmed will be by far the most difficult Ender has ever faced. With this, he goes to sit, and invites Ender to take his position.

In this section, Card reminds us that Ender is always the hardest worker in his own armies. He doesn’t cut corners and expect his troops to pick up the slack—instead, he bears whatever burdens his soldiers are incapable of bearing by themselves. The result of this is that Ender begins to suffer in every way: physically, emotionally, and psychologically. Miraculously, he continues to play well, winning game after game. Eventually, though, the pressure becomes too much for him, and he cracks. But this is only a temporary setback—Mazer (now far more ruthless than Graff) pushes Ender to fight harder, even when he’s in no physical condition to fight. At this point we no longer sense Graff’s manipulations behind Ender’s life—something larger is at work.



In this strange section—half-dreamed, half-real—Ender thinks that he hears Graff defending him before Mazer. This is highly unlikely, since, as we’ve seen, Graff is always the one who insists that Ender be pushed harder and harder. We can sense that Ender’s performances in the battle simulations are uniformly excellent, however—this part of the dream is not imagined.



For one of the last times in the book, Card deviates from Ender’s perspective to inform us that today is Ender’s last day. He fights a battle for which it seems he’s meant to make a difficult decision: blow up the simulation planet, or fight around the planet, sparing Bigger “civilians.” Mazer gives Ender good reasons not to attack the Bigger planet—for example, Buggers have never attacked human civilians. And yet we’re also meant to remember Ender’s first encounter with Mazer, in which Mazer told Ender to attack preemptively—and also Ender’s past fights with bullies, in which he used excessive force to prevent future conflicts. Ultimately, this is basically placing a vast moral decision on the shoulders of a child—but enabling him to bear this burden by also convincing him that it’s all “just a game.”



Ender greets his commanders, all of whom are ready to fight. He considers what will happen if he loses this battle. He'll probably be sent back to Earth—and with this in mind, he considers losing the battle on purpose in order to return to Greensboro. Then the simulator screen turns on, and he sees that the enemy outnumbers him 1000 to 1. Ender remembers all the unequal fights he's faced: against Stilson, against Bonzo, and against two Battle School armies at once. Bean, remembering the same Battle School episode, mutters, "Remember, the enemy's gate is down." Ender laughs. It occurs to him that he's always won by breaking the rules, ignoring his own losses, and moving straight toward his opponent.

Ender whispers instructions to his commanders, and their fleets move toward the planet. The enemy ships surround the human ships, and Ender's forces sustain heavy losses. Ender's fleet gets closer and closer to the Bugger planet, but loses ships left and right. Suddenly, there are only a few human ships left—including the ship that holds the Dr. Device. As the ship falls toward the Bugger planet, the Device launches, and the planet explodes. Every object near the planet, including Ender's own fighter ships, is destroyed. The battle is over: Ender has sustained heavy casualties, but he's won.

Ender turns and sees that the group of adults watching him is cheering. He's surprised: he'd expected to be chewed out by Mazer and Graff for losing so many of his own ships and "bending" the rules of his game. Instead, Graff, who's crying, embraces Ender and says, "Thank God for you." Mazer tells Ender that he's made an impossible choice: "End them or end us." Ender is confused. Mazer explains: Ender was never playing a computer simulation programmed by Mazer, as Mazer had always claimed. Ender was commanding actual ships, fighting against actual Bugger fleets. The "game" was always real. As Ender hears this, his mind goes blank. Silently, he walks back to his room, takes off his clothes, and goes to sleep.

In this climactic scene, Ender realizes that his only chance is to do what he's always excelled at—bending the rules to his advantage—as represented by Bean's reminder that "the enemy's gate is down). The rules of battle state that a good commander tries to save his troops' lives while killing as many foes as possible. But here, Ender decides to send his troops to end the battle more simply—by blowing up the enemy's planet. Ender thinks that in doing this he's defying the rules of the Command School program, and disobeying Mazer Rackham's example.



In only a few moments, Ender has won the battle—in his mind, by "cheating." He's killed many of his own troops, but he's technically won by defeating his opponent. One thinks back to Ender's experience in the battleroom, when he technically won an unwinnable battle by twisting the rules of the game. Here, he's done the same thing on a larger scale. He doesn't yet have an idea of just how large a scale, however.



In this shocking scene, we learn the truth (if we hadn't already guessed it): the "game" has been real ever since Ender arrived at Eros—whenever he sent simulated pilots into war, he was commanding an actual battle. The horrific genius of this deception on the IF's part is that Ender treats war like a game—something with rules, to be followed or selectively broken—rather than treating it as a grim reality. Anyone who knew that the game was real would have been more cautious with sacrificing his own troops, or with attacking enemy civilians—only a child, fooled into believing that it was only a game, could have mustered the enthusiasm and creativity to think of a "solution" to the game, especially one such massive amounts of casualties.



Ender wakes up to find Graff and Mazer standing over him. Graff informs Ender that news of his victory over the Buggers has reached Earth: he's an international hero. Ender can only reply, "I killed them all, didn't I?" He screams at Graff, accusing Graff of tricking him into becoming a mass-murderer. Graff agrees: he realized long ago that the child who commanded the fleet against the Buggers would have to be extraordinarily compassionate in order to win the loyalty of his troops. But such a compassionate child could never force himself to murder so easily, so the child would have to be tricked. Mazer adds that Ender himself didn't choose to murder the Buggers—that choice lies with Mazer and Graff. "If there was something wrong, we did it."

Here Graff finally shows his hand—a hand he's been hiding from Ender for years. Graff knew long ago that the only way to ensure, to a certainty, the survival of the human race, was to murder every single Bigger. But this was an act of genocide—surely inconceivable for any decent human being. The only way to win the war was to train soldiers who wouldn't understand what they were doing when they killed the Buggers: children who were so used to playing games that they wouldn't have any problem believing that their battles with the Buggers were only computer simulations. While it's important that Graff and Mazer accept responsibility for the Bigger extermination, we should note that really they're sharing the blame with Ender. Neither Ender nor Graff is entirely guilty or innocent of the crime: Graff did the planning but not the execution, while Ender had no idea of the plan, but was responsible for the execution. The hero's nickname also becomes darkly prophetic here—he is the "ender" of the Bigger species.



Graff then gives Ender some important information: as soon as news of the victory over the Buggers reached Earth, the Earth fell into a state of war. America fears that Russia and its satellite states will start a war, and Russia fears much the same about the U.S. Every country on the planet wants to claim Ender as its own commander. Because most of the troops stationed on Eros are Russian, Ender could easily be abducted by the Russians and forced to fight against America. Ender refuses to listen to anything more, though, and he rolls over and closes his eyes. Instead of falling asleep, he listens to Mazer and Graff speak to each other. Graff tells Mazer that Mazer has pushed Ender too hard. Mazer replies, "It worked."

In this pessimistic scene, Card reminds us who Ender has been fighting for: flawed, violent human beings. It doesn't take 24 hours after Ender's victory before the people of Earth start fighting again. This suggests that the uneasy peace on Earth was only the result of a shared extraterrestrial enemy—now that this enemy is gone, the humans turn on each other. Ender seems to be entering a stage of trauma, and he can barely focus. The reality that he has murdered billions of Buggers is finally hitting him.



Ender spends the next day, or week, or month, half-asleep. He can't tell how long he's out, but at times he opens his eyes and sees a group of adults standing over him. He dreams about the **Giant**, and sees the Dr. Device destroying an entire world of Buggers. He sees Bonzo, who tells Ender, "You have no honor."

Ender is hardly free from his old demons—on the contrary, they seem stronger and more dangerous than ever before. Because this has all been a "game" to him, the war is still mostly playing out on a psychological level for Ender.



Ender wakes up to find Alai standing over him. Alai informs Ender that a war has been going on between the powers of Earth. The Polemarch has ordered Russian forces on Eros to kill Ender, but the Russian forces have refused out of respect for Ender. Bean and Petra enter the room after Alai, and explain to Ender that the war is dying down now—the countries of Earth are negotiating for peace. The terms of peace have been drafted by none other than Locke, who Ender knows (from Valentine) to be Peter.

In a cruel twist of fate, Ender's plunge into guilt—he knows that he's a killer—coincides almost exactly with Peter's rise to world prominence as an agent of peace and enlightenment. Ender has always been afraid that he's "just like Peter," but the final irony seems to be that he's actually much worse than Peter—at least in the results of his actions, if not in his intentions.



More of Ender's friends enter the room, including Dink. Ender looks at his friends and says, "I don't want to be your commander anymore." Dink insists that Ender will always be their commander, whether there's a war or not. Petra offhandedly mentions that they'll have to go back to Earth and go to school "by law." Everyone sees the humor in this, and they laugh "until tears streamed down their faces."

After all the trauma and violence they've been through, Card allows his characters one small moment of happiness together before they go their separate ways. As always, the "joke" is that Ender and his friends aren't children, even if they're young: they have always had adult minds, and adult responsibilities.



CHAPTER 15: SPEAKER FOR THE DEAD

The final chapter begins with a conversation between Graff and Anderson. Graff has recently been court-martialed for his manipulations of Ender. The court showed a jury videos of Ender killing Bonzo Madrid, suggesting that Graff is guilty of negligent homicide. Graff's defense, which eventually cleared him of all charges, was that his efforts paid off when Ender defeated the Buggers: to court-martial Graff would be tantamount to court-martialing Ender himself. Anderson congratulates Graff for his acquittal, and reminds Graff that while they disagreed in the past, he's come to agree that Graff's manipulations were justified. Graff tells Anderson that he's planning to become the new Minister of Colonization. He'll spend the rest of his life controlling humans' exploration of the universe.

In the beginning to this chapter, we learn that Graff's defense—that the ends justify the means—has paid off. More surprisingly, we find that Graff—an agent of war—has become the Minister of Colonization—an agent for growth and exploration. We must hope, then, that his new kind of "colonization" will not be of the violent and oppressive kind experienced on Earth—or that which Graff himself previously advocated in attacking the Buggers' home planet.



Graff and Anderson talk about Ender's future. Graff tells Anderson that Locke and Demosthenes have arranged for Ender never to return to Earth. Anderson asks Graff how he knows this, but Graff refuses to say. Graff maintains that Ender is safe as long as he's kept away from Earth. Back on Earth he'd be a puppet, to be controlled by corrupt politicians looking to add legitimacy to their regimes. Graff doesn't know exactly what will become of Ender.

One small, final sign of Graff's decency as a human being is that he keeps Locke and Demosthenes' identities hidden. Previously, we'd wondered if he was only using this as blackmail for Valentine because he needed her help. Now, we see that he has at least some genuine loyalty to the Wiggin family.



It has now been a year since Ender defeated the Buggers, and he still hasn't been brought back to Earth. Ender has watched videos of Graff's court-martial—this means that he saw videos of Stilson and Bonzo's deaths, of which he'd previously been unaware. One by one, Ender's friends say goodbye to him and leave Eros for Earth. Ender has no more friends on Eros, and yet Eros itself is now full of people. Earth has sent its people to colonize Eros. The new colonists worship Ender—a fact that Ender resents.

Now, as ever, Ender is isolated from his friends. They all fought together, but Ender bears responsibility for launching the Dr. Device that won the war for humanity. He hates the worship he receives from other people—both because it further alienates him from other people who might otherwise be his friends or peers, and because to him, it feels like he has done something horrible, not praiseworthy.



One day, Ender is amazed to see Valentine on Eros. Valentine tells Ender that she's planning on traveling to the Bugger galaxy to colonize new worlds. Because of relativity, it will take fifty years for her to arrive—but this period of time will only feel like two years to her. Valentine wants Ender to come with her. Valentine explains to Ender that Peter is consolidating power using his Locke persona. He's gained prestige for himself with the "Locke Treaty," and plans to control the world as a statesman. She also tells Ender, for the first time, that she is Demosthenes—she's been influencing Earth in her own ways for years.

Valentine insists that Ender can never return to Earth—if he does, then he'll be Peter's pawn. Valentine pressured Peter into arguing that Ender should be kept from returning to Earth. She convinced Peter to do this by showing him videos she'd taken of Peter torturing his brother and skinning live squirrels. As a result, Peter used his influence to ensure that Ender could become the governor of the new human colony in the Bugger world—far from Earth, and far from Peter's manipulation. Ender nods and agrees to travel with Valentine to the new colony. He claims that he's doing so because he knows the Buggers better than anyone in the world.

Valentine and Ender proceed on their journey to the new colony. The journey lasts two years (from their perspective). During this time Valentine writes her first history of the Bugger Wars, publishing it under the name Demosthenes, and sends it back to Earth. Ender earns the loyalty of the passengers on his ship, and by the time they land on their new home Ender is unquestionably their leader. In the colony, Ender learns about Bugger life. He learns that Buggers loved their children, even if they didn't understand the concept of individuality. In the coming years, Valentine writes more about the history of the Bugger Wars.

Years pass. One day, Ender travels by helicopter to explore new areas of the former Bugger planet. He is shocked to see a large, open plain, on which there's an enormous skeleton, and an old, rusty playground—details from Ender's old elementary school, as well as from the **Giant** game that Ender played at Battle School. Ender realizes the truth: the Buggers built this place for *him*, though he doesn't understand why. He wonders if the Buggers are trying to get revenge on him, or if they're merely trying to communicate. Not caring if he's in danger, Ender walks into a building near the playground—the castle that he used to explore in the Giant game.

In this reconciliation scene, Ender reunites with the one person whom he's been missing all these years, and the one person capable of loving and understanding him outside of his fame. Valentine senses that Ender can never return to Earth, as Ender has become a new kind of person, one totally divorced from the realities of life on Earth, so that the planet isn't his real "home" anymore. It's also implied that there just isn't enough space on Earth for both Ender and Peter, his brother, without there being some major conflicts.



Valentine knows that Peter is as manipulative as ever—so she wants to take Ender far away, where Peter can't get at him. Curiously, Ender agrees to stay away from Earth, but not because he's afraid of Peter. Rather, he wants to find out as much information as he can about the Buggers—the civilization he destroyed—and honor their memory. This scene echoes the earlier scene between Ender and Valentine, in which Ender claimed that he didn't want to defeat Peter—he wanted to love Peter. It's as if by killing the Buggers Ender has moved past his childhood disputes with Peter, and now wants to love and understand his "enemies," the Buggers themselves.



Ender follows through on his promise to understand the Buggers in all their complexities. There is no practical purpose in understanding something that's already long dead, but Ender does so anyway, largely to cope with his own sense of loss and guilt at having wiped out an entire civilization. Valentine, for her part, participates in a similar act of historical reconstruction and understanding, writing books that deal with the Bugger War's history.



Ender reaches this surreal, dreamlike place, and comes to realize that the Buggers have been watching him for years. When he played the Giant's game, the Buggers were watching, using their ESP (which Graff described to Ender in the previous chapter) and affecting the game itself—and thus Ender's psychology as well. This explains how the Battle School computer accessed new images of Peter Wiggin's face for the mirror in the game. We now understand that the Buggers procured these images and sent them to the Battle School computer.



Inside the castle, Ender finds the **mirror** in which he once saw Peter's face. Behind the mirror, Ender finds a large silky **pupa**. Ender intuits that this is the pupa of a queen bugger, ready to lay thousands and thousands of eggs. As he imagines this, Ender starts to see his final battle with the Buggers, but from the perspective of the queen Bugger. Ender realizes that he's communicating with the new queen, who is asleep in her pupa. The new queen greets Ender and begs him to help her colonize a new world of Buggers. Ender is frightened—he knows that if he helps the queen grow again, then the humans will only kill the Buggers for a second time.

In the coming days, Ender takes care of the **pupa**. He also writes a book, collaborating with the Bugger queen herself. The book describes the Bugger War from the Buggers' perspective: how the Buggers never intended to hurt the humans, and how they tried and failed to make peace with the human race. As he finishes his book, Ender signs it, "Speaker for the dead." He sends his book to Earth, and soon after it's published, it becomes extremely popular and beloved. Slowly, over time, a new religion rises up: the religion of the Speaker for the Dead. Whenever a new human dies, a speaker is elected to talk about the life of the deceased—to talk honestly and openly.

More time passes. Ender and Valentine are in their early twenties, but back on Earth, Peter—now the leader of the Earth—is 77 years old, and dying of heart disease. He sends Valentine a message: "I know who wrote it. If he can speak for the Buggers, surely he can speak for me." Ender agrees to write the story of Peter's life, in exquisite, honest detail. Together, Ender's books are known as *The Hive-Queen* and *The Hegemon*. They become "holy writ."

Ender and Valentine decide to leave their new home, confident that it will be peaceful and stable for years to come. Ender and Valentine travel to new planets, where Ender always introduces himself as Andrew Wiggin, speak for the dead. Throughout their journeys, Ender carries his **pupa** and looks for a new home where the hive-queen can live in peace. The book ends, "He looked a long time."

Ender's understanding and empathy make him ideally suited to communicate with this hive-queen—supposedly his sworn enemy. It's thus ultimately suggested that the original Bugger queen knew Ender would be the one to destroy her people, and so she influenced him through the Giant game so that he would also be a figure suited to help rebuild the Bugger race. Ender comes to realize that humans were deeply wrong to destroy the Buggers—who had indeed stopped thinking of humans as enemies. It's also important that Ender has these realizations as he cradles a pupa—it's as if Ender is being symbolically reborn in the moment when he looks back with regret for his acts of violence.



Ender now uses his influence to speak for those who are no longer alive. His notion of looking at the world grows so popular that it becomes the dominant religion of the new colonies (and "Speaker for the Dead" is the name of Card's sequel to the book as well). The ethos of the speaker for the dead is that it is valuable to try to understand those who are unlike oneself. This is the very philosophy Ender has followed his entire life, except now he uses his empathy for peace, not war.



Here, after a lifetime of hating Ender and competing with him, Peter reaches out to his brother, seemingly desperate for reconciliation. Ender, for his part, feels that he needs to reconcile with his brother, the source of so much of his anger and self-hatred. Ender has been trying to overcome his destructive tendencies ever since leaving with Valentine, and now finds that he can treat his brother's life with honesty and respect. Throughout his life, Ender has fought battles while secretly thinking he's like Peter. It's only appropriate that now, giving up battle forever, Ender comes to understand who Peter really is—both the good and the bad. Of course, all this information is explained rather quickly and vaguely here, but it will also be material for Card's multiple sequels.



In this optimistic ending, Card implies that healing isn't an event so much as it is an ongoing process. Thus, Ender can be said to "atone" for the crime of destroying the Buggers insofar as he searches for a new home for the pupa he's carrying, and seeks to give the Buggers new life as a species. Card doesn't give us any information about this search (that's a story for several more novels) but the final sentence implies that after many years of searching, Ender's quest does come to an end.





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