
Measuring Leadership in *Ender's Game* and *Ender's Shadow*

Chingshun J. Sheu

ABSTRACT

Orson Scott Card's science fiction novel *Ender's Game* has often been held up as a casebook study in good leadership, but nobody has yet attempted to measure leadership in the novel using the theoretical resources of leadership studies. This article approaches leadership in *Ender's Game* and its companion novel, *Ender's Shadow*, by examining the actions and mentalities of their respective protagonists and significant supporting characters through the lens of various leadership models. In doing so, it seeks to answer two questions: How can textual interpretation outwit formal misdirection by employing different frameworks of measurement? How can a fictional fabula help us to reflect critically on the notion of measuring leadership? The second question will entail critical consideration of the following: What exactly is "good" leadership? Can it be nurtured? Is it predictive of success? And is it worth the cost(s)? The article concludes that there is no ideal leader in this story-world, and that the person who comes closest is not, as most readers think, Ender.

KEYWORDS leadership, leadership studies, minor characters, *Ender's Game*, *Ender's Shadow*

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Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game* (1985, revised 1991) has often been held up as a casebook study in good leadership.¹ It was even included in the first edition of the U.S. Marine Corps reading list for its insights into leadership and tactics (Schmitt 217-20). However, most of the existing scholarship on leadership in this novel simply assumes, without considering alternatives, that the protagonist Ender Wiggin is the best leader presented in this fabula, even though his environment is by design full of leaders in training. Even when some studies occasionally note Ender's leadership faults, they tend to eschew explicit standards.² In other words, nobody has yet tried to *measure* leadership in *Ender's Game*. One definition of leadership is "an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes and outcomes that reflect their shared purposes" (Daft 5), and the many models of and approaches to leadership developed in leadership studies seek to explore every part of this definition.³ Since there is as yet no general theory of leadership (Sorenson et al. 31), and I do not aim to propose one here, my exploration of leadership will often reflect the multifarious nature of leadership studies itself. Leadership aims for "success," a term open to different interpretations by different readers. In the context of this fabula, it is a multi-layered concept that could refer to something as small as winning followers, or to something as large as resolving the war with the Formics with a minimum loss of life—and some of these layers are mutually exclusive. To account for this, I will employ a consideration of the characters' leadership in terms of various theories of leadership as suits each character or situation and, as far as each given theory can take us, which is a dialectical methodology that in its rolling standards has the added benefit of countering the leadership literature's tendency toward posi-

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¹ Hereafter cited parenthetically as *EG*.

² Jason P. Blahuta is the only exception, and his standard is a narrow reading of Machiavelli's *The Prince*. But his conclusion that Ender is "very un-princely" (176) just begs the question of how good a leader Machiavelli's ideal prince would be. For an overview of Machiavellian leadership, see Daft 366-69.

³ The fastest way to measure leadership in the novel would ostensibly be to administer the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), but this would pose three significant problems. The MLQ has a self-assessment portion, which would be impractical in this case. More seriously, there are some concerns about the validity of this most widely administered of quantified leadership measurement instruments (Muenjohn and Armstrong 6; Díaz-Sáenz 299, 307). And the MLQ is designed to measure transformational leadership (Díaz-Sáenz 300), which is only one model of leadership out of many, with its own limitations (307-08), including the bias toward transformation rather than stability embedded in its very name.

tivism (Case, French, and Simpson 243). In addition, few studies of leadership in the so-called Enderverse consider the companion novel to *Ender's Game*, *Ender's Shadow*,⁴ which covers more or less the same ground from the perspective of Bean, a supporting character in *Ender's Game*.⁵ This lacuna is significant, first, because the parallax view of Ender grants us a different perspective, and thus new information, on his leadership; and, second, because *Ender's Shadow* offers us new examples of leaders and leadership in the forms of more fully developed minor characters from *Ender's Game* and entirely new characters in leadership roles.

That the potential leaders and instances of leadership in the novels mostly appear in the same few stable settings with the same revolving cast of characters makes the story susceptible to analysis through the lens of what Alex Woloch calls a “character-system,” a “unified narrative structure” comprising multiple “character-spaces” (14). A character-space includes both a character and his/her positioning within the narrative, such that, in addition to mere character interactions, a character-system also takes note of how characters jostle one another for narrative space and control in terms of the syuzhet (18). This applies particularly to minor characters, whose character-spaces by definition yield to others’ (38). In this sense, *Ender's Game* and *Ender's Shadow* are especially well-suited to an exploration of the “influence relationship[s] among leaders and followers” on a formal level as well.

Drawing on leadership studies, I will first reexamine against what framework(s) Ender is measured as a leader, and I will find him falling short of ideal leadership. I will then measure the leadership of other significant characters in the two novels, saving the most ideal candidate for last. In doing so, I hope to explore two questions: How can textual interpretation outwit formal misdirection by employing different frameworks of measurement—in this case, those informed by empirical research? How can a fictional fabula help us to reflect critically on the notion of measuring leadership? The first question opens up considerations of how we understand character in fiction and, by extension, in general. Jeremy Rosen argues that “it makes more sense to think of character as a shifting field,” with shifts that “gain currency” becoming canonical (177). The gaining of such currency, therefore, would seem to be the result of a decision made by readers’ collective intuition. As we will see, most understandings of

⁴ Hereafter cited parenthetically as *ES*.

⁵ There are minor differences between the fabulas of the two novels, as Card admits (*Ender's World* 124–25). When a difference arises, I follow *Ender's Shadow*, which is supposedly more definitive for having been published more recently. On the relation between the two “parallel novels,” see Lee.

leadership, including the understanding of the U.S. Marines, are also intuitive. But the research disproves many of these intuitions. In terms of how our lived experiences are guided by narrative, then, fiction can appear to be an adequate guide, or at least a source of suggestive paradigms. When we need to extend beyond mere (sense of) understanding into empirical impact, though, these narratives will often need to be critically reexamined. A character can be a subpar leader and still dominate a narrative's character-system. Reading *Ender's Game* and *Ender's Shadow* through the lens of leadership studies can help us see more clearly what we are intuitively responding to when we say that Ender is an ideal leader, and the blind spots of that response. As for the second question, the aforementioned limitations of the current trajectory of mainstream leadership studies will provoke some critical reflections as our reading of the novels moves from one theory of leadership to another: What exactly is "good" leadership? Can it be nurtured? Is it predictive of success? And is it worth the cost(s)? I hope to show how our understandings of characterization and leadership inform each other dialectically as the fabula unfolds.⁶

Ender

Ender's story seems tailored to a discussion of leadership. Humanity has become united after barely fending off two attacks from an alien species known as the Formics.⁷ The spacefaring International Fleet, tasked with preparing for the Third Invasion, tests every child on Earth extensively, recruits at the age of six those who score high enough, and sends them off to Battle School in space, where they learn space warfare and military leadership and are then streamed into various command programs upon graduation. Battle School is a socially and physically isolated environment geared entirely toward leadership development, and the novel brings us into its fascinating subculture, at once military and pedagogical, training and play. But the Fleet takes Battle School seriously indeed. Recruitment involves a battery of tests that covers every conceivably quantifiable

⁶ For a study that crosses disciplinary boundaries in a similar fashion, see Phillips and Zyglidopoulos's study of Isaac Asimov's *Foundation* trilogy (1951-53) from the perspective of organization studies.

⁷ The aliens are also called the "buggers," which is a slur against gay men; the "official" name is changed to "Formics" in *Ender's Shadow* as a "euphemism" (ES 48) because "*Buggers* is a bad word" (ES 33), but "bugger" is still retained as a colloquial name. This is especially problematic because Card is a devout Mormon who has consistently held that non-heterosexuality is immoral. I am vehemently against homophobic views, including Card's. At the same time, Nicolas Michaud and Jessica Watkins have argued for a queer reading of *Ender's Game* (Michaud and Watkins 91-94), and James Campbell has argued that the novel is "potentially, though latently, perhaps even allegorically, anti-homophobic" (Campbell 501). In any case, there is much worth discussing in the two novels, despite their author's moral worldview.

developmental metric (*ES* 79), and when successful candidates arrive at Battle School, they find an environment in which almost every personal data point is tracked (*ES* 89-90), and in which every word and deed is recorded and analyzed (*EG* 28). The Fleet's leadership development system follows the same paradigm as is dominant in leadership studies today: empirical observation to identify, predict, and/or foster successful leaders(hip) (Daft 24).

What the Fleet is looking for specifically is a supreme commander, a military genius who can lead a successful attack on the Formics—unbeknownst to most, the Third Invasion is a human counter-invasion. Their best hope is six-year-old Ender. As humanity's last, best hope, Ender's training regimen is grueling. He is constantly advanced before he is mentally prepared; his battles in the all-important Battle Room, which hosts engagements akin to zero-gravity laser tag between "armies" of forty-one people, are wildly unfair; and he is exposed to a physical fight in Earth gravity without guardrails or adult intervention. When he finally makes it through Battle School, he is sent to Command School (inside the asteroid Eros), where his training takes the form of giving orders to sub-commanders, who in turn order around space fighters displayed on a holographic simulator. Only after he passes his final exam by disintegrating the Formic homeworld is he informed that all of the simulator engagements have been real, and that he has actually wiped out the species. Needless to say, he is traumatized, and he spends the rest of his life seeking solace and atonement.

In the military setting of the novel, nearly everyone Ender meets either already has a leadership position of some sort or is actively being developed as a future leader, or both. Much of the existing literature on leadership in *Ender's Game* follows the traditional approach of focusing on a successful leader's personal traits, commonly known as the "Great Man" approach. Indeed, the novel itself adheres to this logic.⁸ In a world of strict population control laws, Ender is a Third whose conception is specifically requested by the International Fleet because the Wiggins' first child, Peter, is too violent and cruel, and their second, Valentine, too kind—though both are intellectually brilliant. The Fleet hopes that Ender will be equally brilliant while possessing a suitable mixture of these two traits, and he ostensibly does. Ender's "empathy" (Blackmore 138; Doyle 314; Doyle and Stewart 201; Gross 125; Schmitt 220; Zimmerman Jones 57), "sympathy" (Wittkower 183), "compassion" (Suderman 125), or "humanity" (Ruby 192) is a refrain in the literature. The other half of the equation, destruc-

⁸ For this reason, textual affordances prevent me from discussing leadership theories that focus more on situation and environment, such as contingency theories.

tiveness, has also been noted as a desirable trait for a leader in Ender's position (Blackmore 135; Blahuta 174).⁹ But this simplistic view of empathy and violence in isolation from each other fails to explain, for instance, why putting Peter and Valentine in charge together would not have yielded the same results—I will return to this point below. Ender's empathy and violence must be considered together. Ender understands himself well; he says to Valentine, "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. . . . And then . . . I destroy them" (*EG* 168). He understands his opponents' perspective by empathizing with them, and then uses that knowledge to utterly defeat them. In this sense, perhaps rather than mixing empathy and violence suitably, he "vacillates between the two extremes" as needed (Lee 193).

Various other desirable leadership traits are attributed to Ender. Jeff Ewing lists Ender's "disposition to respond with the minimum force necessary to prevent future attacks," "adaptability to new situations," and "disregard of rules and hierarchies" (38). Tim Blackmore notes his "ability to calculate probabilities" (133). Christine Doyle observes in him "decency" (308); "creativity" (309); and a "capacity for pondering life, death, and the fate of the world," which, following Howard Gardner, she calls "existential intelligence" (307). Jason P. Blahuta credits him for being "young, cunning, audacious, and flexible" (174). David Lubar admires his "powers of reasoning" (Lubar and Myers 105). For Matt Nix, his "greatest skill" is "his ability to learn from his torment" at the hands of others (276). And Janis Ian emphasizes the benefits of his small size compared with his peers (140). While these are mostly good traits to have, the entire approach tends to distill leadership into isolated traits—"decontextualized, ahistorical and, at best, only correlated with, rather than determinants of, success," as Keith Grint puts it (9)—so it should not be surprising that, statistically speaking, the list of traits confirmed by the literature to independently contribute to good leadership is rather short: general intelligence; three of the Big Five personality traits, namely extroversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness; and the need for affiliation (i.e., sense of community) and for achievement (Antonakis 277, 278, 279; Steinmann, Ötting, and Maier 1972).

Ender's selection for Battle School argues for his intelligence; moreover, he realizes with his first experience of zero gravity that it changes the Earthbound understanding of directions such as "up" and "down" (*EG* 31), a level of intelli-

⁹ Melissa Gross is more neutral, describing Ender's violence toward his opponents as "closely in line" with "how dictators in reaction to their abusive childhoods are motivated to extremely destructive measures in an effort to ensure for themselves, [sic] that they will never be victimized in that way again" (122).

gence that few other Battle School students ever attain. From Ender's initial shuttle launch to Battle School, the school administrator Colonel Hyrum Graff deliberately isolates Ender from his peers in an effort to develop his self-reliance and need for achievement (EG 167). This isolation distorts our view of the more social aspects of his personality. For instance, though we cannot say that Ender is clearly extroverted, he displays little of the social awkwardness characteristic of introverts. The same can be said of how he expresses his natural agreeableness, seen in his empathy and in his desire to be left alone (EG 19). He only enters into conflict when left with no choice, and to win for him is to preempt future conflicts, to win "for all time" (EG 7). Ender's need for affiliation is an outgrowth of his agreeableness, catalyzed by isolation from his peers. He notices that his shuttle launch cohort is dominated by a bully, Bernard, but without a group of his own, Ender can only take small individual steps to chip away at his dominance. When his launch group is introduced to the Battle Room, the radically new environment affords Ender an opportunity to rearrange the hierarchy, and he successfully births a new group led by Alai, one of Bernard's more independent-minded friends. Alai is later elected their official class leader—Ender has manipulated the character-spaces around his own to build a group that encompasses them all (EG 61-62). Lastly, Tom Ruby speaks of Ender's conscientiousness when he notes that his "desire for betterment and his ability to accurately assess his performance" are "his greatest leadership skills" (Ruby 194). He is a master of induction, observing and exploiting patterns. He deals with another bully by exploiting the regularity with which he hits him (EG 33). He wins an arcade game against an older student on only the second time he plays it because he has carefully observed the game mechanics and strategy beforehand (EG 45-47). And he figures out the mechanics of the Battle Room the first time he encounters it based purely on trial and error and rapid course corrections, immediately applying what he observes (EG 56-60). This power of accurate self-assessment and self-improvement is what puts Ender atop the ranking of all the Battle School students; by the time he is given his own army, "he had topped the standings almost continuously for three years, [and] no one else was remotely close to him" (EG 155). As a commander, he spends a disproportionate amount of time individualizing his training plans and helping his weaker soldiers (EG 168, 164).

All of these behaviors are described and understood through a narrative focalized through Ender himself. He is famous as the best student in Battle School, but we do not see the nuances of that fame. He is known, but *how* is he known? For one example, we can turn to *Ender's Shadow*, which is focalized through

Bean. When Bean arrives at Battle School, Ender is already famous at a young age compared with his peers, and our main interest lies in how Ender will enter the character-system of *Ender's Shadow* to form the relationship with Bean seen in *Ender's Game* (Woloch 38). Bean's unusually small stature (for which he is named) leads older students to compare the two, and this piques Bean's interest, even "obsess[ion]" (ES 151), leading him to treat Ender "as the subject of his private theology" (ES 244). Asking around, he learns that Ender is not a mere celebrity: he really is smart, resourceful, and skilled at navigating Battle School (ES 130-32). As an orphan who grew up on dystopian streets, Bean's main instinct is for survival, and he soon realizes that the best guarantor of survival in this militaristic environment is to rise through the ranks, to achieve and even exceed expectations. He concludes, "He had to become Ender Wiggin" (ES 186). When the two finally meet, it is because Bean becomes a member of Ender's newly constituted Dragon Army. From up close, he observes how Ender upends the status quo (ES 248). By the end of their first practice, the army is "flushed with the excitement of having learned stuff that they'd never heard of other soldiers doing" (ES 241). They are willing to do it all because of Ender's reputation. In this way, Ender displays the characteristics of a charismatic leader: being "an honorable hero worthy of identification and imitation," using well-articulated unconventional means to change the status quo, and wielding "personal power based on expertise and respect and admiration" (Daft 363).

Three of the problems encountered by Dragon Army are, as well, classic problems with charismatic leadership (Conger 99). When the teachers design more and more unfair battles for Dragon, Ender fails in "impression management" and starts displaying his anger; some of his defeated opponents take this as arrogance and later try to kill him out of envy (EG 194). He does no succession planning though, in fairness, both novels are at pains to emphasize that there can be only one effective supreme commander of the Fleet (EG 201; ES 432). Perhaps Ender's greatest failure is that he does not pursue other avenues of conflict resolution with the Formics.¹⁰ Despite one of his teachers suggesting that the Formics may use languageless instantaneous communication (EG 267-68), and despite the numerically superior Formics continually refusing to preemptively attack the invading human fleet, Ender never considers leveraging

¹⁰ Susan Boswell argues that Ender's leadership comes up short mainly in how he "lacks insight into his own well-being," but this is debatable. Even if he does have such insight, the limitations of his setting and of humanity's situation in general make it unlikely that he would be able to pause his training and engage in self-care. The only exception, a two-month Earthside leave after graduating from Battle School, is strategically arranged by his superiors to re-instill motivation—and is involuntary (ES 338).

his position as the only supreme commander to halt the Invasion sequence, even if he thinks that it is only a simulation. Following Gardner, Doyle sees Ender's support of other people's narrative of him as "the last best hope" of humanity as an act of leadership that feeds into his charisma (Doyle 311). It is when he feels that he "needs to embody this story of the unbeatable child hero to the end" (Doyle 312) that he falls afoul of another problem endemic to charismatic leadership: his leadership vision blinds him to "fundamental shifts in the environment" (Conger 99). Indeed, at the end of the novel, he realizes that the nightmares of being dissected by Formics that he had been suffering in the weeks of the Invasion were a form of psychological warfare—the Formics communicate by thinking, and they were thinking at him (*EG* 320-32). Ender displays exemplary leadership in pursuing his goal; it is in failing to rethink that goal given new information that he is revealed as a flawed leader.

Bean

If Ender is not the flawless leader that he is often held up to be, then is there another figure in these novels that could take his place? The immediate candidate is Bean, whom Fleet officers secretly designate as Ender's substitute in case he is incapacitated—Ender is oblivious to this intersection of character-spaces. But when Ender does seem paralyzed before the seemingly impossible final engagement, Bean refuses to take command: to him—and everyone else—only Ender can work "miracles" (*ES* 449). Throughout *Ender's Shadow*, Bean seeks to *become* a leader like Ender; what he *is* is an exemplary follower, even in the novel of which he is the protagonist and in which his character-space dominates. As a member of Dragon Army, he is able to critique Ender's training style, but he soon realizes that knowing is one thing and doing another. Before Dragon's first engagement, Bean finds himself in denial, taking a long shower to avoid the battle. "I'm a coward," he thinks (*ES* 268). The opposite of Ender, who has to learn how best to wield the "[a]uthority [that] came from him like breath" (*ES* 432), Bean sees the best strategy in every situation but needs to figure out how to get everyone to execute it.¹¹ There is only so much of leadership that can be learned from a book (Daft 23; Cook 160)—he needs to learn practical leadership. In the meantime, he vows, in turn, to help Ender "learn everything he can learn here" and win the war (*ES* 279).

¹¹ Blahuta argues that Bean's lack of leadership is because he "is simply too emotionally scarred from his tough years on the streets" (177), but Bean himself observes that he has displayed the same pattern of cowardly behavior on the streets as well (*ES* 269).

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Bean practices what leadership studies calls the art of “followership.” An “effective follower” is an active agent who takes the initiative to do whatever is necessary to advance the goals of the team (Daft 200-01). Bean never forgets that the ultimate goal is to win the war. In battle, he frequently contributes tactical observations and suggestions that improve the performance of his “[pla]toon.” When a toon leader questions Ender’s unconventional army structure, Bean risks insubordination to defend it and to make sure that everyone understands and supports Ender’s thinking (*ES* 248-50). When there is a physical threat to Ender’s life from envious older commanders, Bean organizes security for him and seeks to dissuade the malefactors from acting (*ES* 327-31). Moreover, in the exhausting series of “simulated” battles that constitutes the Third Invasion, he clarifies Ender’s commands garbled by fatigue while keeping tabs on the other subcommanders and drawing Ender’s attention to where it is needed (*ES* 437-38). Even when he is given command of his own army, his strategy both for his own army and in fighting other armies is geared toward preparing for the war rather than just winning Battle School engagements (*ES* 392). His dedication to the shared goal of winning the war is so complete that when he realizes midway that all the “simulated” final battles are in fact real, that *they* are leading the Third Invasion, he manages to dissuade himself of this epiphany in order to keep his cowardice and hesitation at bay (*ES* 417-19). He is the ideal follower, the titular Ender’s shadow. Exemplary followership requires some display of leadership skills (Bligh 429), yet Bean’s nascent leadership only comes into full bloom when, in the first sequel to *Ender’s Shadow*, Ender leaves the narrative and, hence, Bean’s character-space.

Lesser Leaders

We have seen how neither protagonist of the two novels is an ideal leader, in spite of the novels’ focus on their experiences and growth, and despite the fact that their character-spaces exert the most influence on their respective character-systems. The contrast between this reading and the impressionistic conclusions of the secondary literature exemplifies how an external standard of measurement can debunk the formal distortions of textual interpretation. Is there any other candidate? If we survey the other would-be leaders in Battle School, we find that each bad leader is bad in his own way.¹² These character-space in-

¹² The masculine pronoun refers here to the commanders analyzed below; nothing in Battle School prevents a girl from commanding an army, as Petra commands Phoenix (*EG* 184).

teractions mostly just serve to educate Ender, the talented but narratively “weak protagonist,” by way of (counter)example (Woloch 188).

Bernard, like most bullies, leads based on flattering the people he needs and belittling everyone else (*EG* 48-49). Most people whose character-space intersects with his are just grateful that they are not his primary victim. After replacing Bernard with Alai, Ender observes that “Alai now moved freely through the whole room, and when Bernard was crazy, Alai could joke a little and calm him down” (*EG* 61). We can therefore say that Alai leads by coalition-building and compromise. This is not bad, but it still lacks the creativity that sets Ender and Bean apart from the rest and that the Fleet depends on for effective strategies when outnumbered and outmaneuvered by the Formics (Doyle 309-11).

Ender’s first assignment is to Salamander Army, led by Bonzo Madrid, who becomes “crazy with jealousy” whenever he is bested (*ES* 362-63), and whose only leadership skill is forging cohesion through sloganeering (*EG* 76-77). He orders Ender, who is assigned to his first army early, to stay out of battle, and Ender is forced to watch them lose time and again. In fact, Bonzo is so dense that Ender must explain to him how giving him some battle experience would facilitate his transfer. Still, Ender manages to learn at least one thing. He observes in one battle that “with Salamander Army waiting abjectly for destruction, Leopard obligingly destroyed them” (*EG* 94), thereby deducing the importance of taking the initiative.

When Ender is finally transferred, it is to Rat Army, led by another incompetent, but a marginal improvement over Bonzo in that he at least recognizes competence and capitalizes on it. The real leader in this army is Dink Meeker, who generates all the strategies and victories, requests Ender’s transfer to Rat based on what he sees in the extra practice sessions Ender organizes to get some training while in Salamander, and greets him with a piece of advice that is supported by the leadership literature: “Commanders have just as much authority as you let them have” (*EG* 102); or as Ba Banutu-Gomez puts it, “followers can evaporate a leader’s mask of power merely by dis-believing [sic] in it” (qtd. in Bligh 431). The other main lesson Dink imparts is to expand Ender’s out-of-the-box thinking to encompass his allies as well as his enemies. Dink thinks that the touted impending Formic invasion is a conspiracy to maintain world peace (he is only half wrong), and though Ender disagrees, he learns to “listen more carefully to what people meant, instead of what they said” (*EG* 111). Dink is too cynical to be a good leader, determined to refuse a leadership position when offered (*EG* 108), but cynicism, too, is a point of view that a good leader should become familiar with (Daft 199).

In contrast, Ender fails to fully learn the lesson on offer by Carn Carby, leader of Rabbit Army, the first army that Dragon defeats. Carn is unresentful about being beaten fair and square, and he is gracious about shaking Ender's hand after the battle and accepting his loss in front of the other commanders. "I will remember this, thought Ender, when I am defeated" (EG 180). Unfortunately, Ender fails to apply this lesson when he *wins* an unfair fight, and his temper antagonizes his envious enemies.

Turning to *Ender's Shadow*, we find that the main new example of a possible leader is Achilles, the leader of Bean's old street gang, a late arrival to Battle School, and the psychopathic serial killer who almost single-handedly drives the plot of the first two sequels to *Ender's Shadow*, which tell of the chaos on Earth after the Formics are defeated. Achilles runs his street gang by granting recognition of subordinates' acts of loyalty, and he secretly kills anyone who has ever had an advantage over him. He even kills the surgeon who fixes his bad leg because "no one has seen him more helpless than the surgeon who cuts into him as he lies there drugged to the gills" (ES 372). Achilles's leadership style is the typical historical fallback of military leaders who engender mindless obedience through fear tactics. His leadership mantra paraphrases Frederick the Great: "The soldier must fear his officers more than he fears the bullets of the enemy" (ES 376). In *Ender's Shadow*, Achilles's character-space is influential enough to compete with Bean's for narrative control of the early chapters, and he is only removed from Battle School after Bean compels a recorded confession of his crimes (390). It is in the sequels, in which Achilles betrays one benefactor nation after another, that his style of leadership finds a rebuttal: eschewing true loyalty from his subordinates, he owes them none in return. He is, in the end, a leader of one.

Graff

None of the characters explicitly portrayed as leaders of one stripe or another in the novels seems to be completely worth following. But among the rest, there is one obvious candidate for model leadership that the literature has overlooked, perhaps because of how the interactions between his character-space and Ender's position him as leading by manipulation instead of by example: Colonel Hyrum Graff, the person who designs and executes the training regimen that leads Ender and his subcommanders to win the war. As the Battle School administrator, his "autonomy is guaranteed" by his superiors in the Fleet (EG 200), so he has a less constrained arena in which to act. My measurement of his leadership should thus yield clearer results, in contrast to the above measurement of

Ender's, whose (for example) possible extroversion is muddled by his imposed social isolation.

Graff's role as head of his organization lets us view his leadership in terms of complex systems. In "Measuring Leadership Effectiveness in Complex Socio-Technical Systems," James K. Hazy offers a comprehensive and detailed model of leadership, conceived of as activities that adjust an organization's internal complexity and its external interactions with its environment (59). The key insight here, drawing on the work of Richard L. Daft and Karl E. Weick, is the opposite of the traditional focus on the traits of a singular leader:

at the system level, the self-organizing forces that are perceived by an observer from outside the system, and leadership activities *at the individual level* that are perceived by the organization's members from inside the system, are merely two sides of the same coin. The organizing activities that occur in this complex interaction are interpreted by the organization's members as *leadership*. (61)

Rather than the heroic spearhead, the leader is seen as the master craftsman, whose material is organizational behavior. But this leader is no mere manager, narrowly concerned about efficiency and uncertainty (Gabriel 396); for the leader of a complex system is, in addition, constantly accounting for the organization's external environment. Maximizing efficiency and reducing uncertainty are important, but not in themselves sufficient. Hazy's Leadership and Capabilities Model sees the leader balancing efforts toward stable efficiency with those toward change for improvement at five "points of leverage" in the organization (66). Efficiency of current organizational capabilities can be enhanced by encouraging members to devote more of their individual energies to the organization, and by redirecting unused organizational resources toward efficiency; new possibilities for improvement can be fostered by promoting cross-boundary information sharing within the organization and between the organization and its environment, and by redirecting unused resources toward developing the possibilities intuited thereby; and the fifth point of leverage is where the leader seeks to strike the right balance between efficiency and change when redirecting unused organizational resources (67).

In these terms, Colonel Graff proves to be an excellent leader. He gets more effort out of his subordinate instructors by giving them charge of promising students such as Ender and Bean, thereby granting them a personal stake in their respective students' advancement (ES 314). He enhances existing organizational

capabilities by accelerating the students' battle and promotion schedules, making better use of the slack resource of time (*ES* 318). He seeks avenues of potential change and improvement by letting the students play the "mind game," which is also known as "Free Play" and "the fantasy game" (*EG* 54, 62, 117), and which he calls "diagnostic/therapeutic" (*ES* 142). Controlled by artificial intelligence, its operations and even interpretations of data are opaque to its administrator (*ES* 308-09), and its conclusions spur Graff to funnel more resources into his daring pedagogical innovations. At one point, Graff deduces from Ender's gameplay that he has experienced "mission drift," or a gradual drift away from the original mission (Schleckser), and he recruits Ender's beloved sister Valentine to remind him of what he is fighting for (*EG* 148-49). When, at the end of Bean's only time playing the mind game, it displays a picture of Achilles (*ES* 307), Graff decides that the game's data is significant enough to warrant Achilles's recruitment into Battle School (*ES* 359). By doing so, he sets up an unintentionally life-or-death test for Bean to gauge how he handles his cowardice—a test that Bean passes by maneuvering Achilles into confessing his crimes (*ES* 390). Lastly, Graff strikes a balance between directing resources toward efficiency and toward innovation by combining the two: the accelerated training schedule that the mind game helps design has as its "highest priority" that Ender "remain[] useful after the training program" (*EG* 174).

The only point on which Graff comes up short is that he refuses to rethink his organizational goal given new information. This is similar in some ways to Ender's goal-related failure, but whereas Ender merely neglects to consider alternatives, Graff has considered them—and rejected them. He is limited by his belief in what Blackmore calls the "military paradigm," comprising "a utilitarian stance, belief in the good of the whole, [and] subordination of the individual" (127). When questioned by Ender about the Fleet's ends-justifies-means policy of recruiting children into Battle School, Graff compartmentalizes his justification: "Individual human beings are all tools, [sic] that the others use to help us all survive. . . . It's just a half truth. You can worry about the other half after we win this war" (*EG* 35). When Ender floats the idea that the Formics may no longer desire war, Graff errs on the side of caution in preparing for the worst to ensure humanity's survival (*EG* 253). Faced with the uncertain possibility of peace, he chooses "xenocide," the annihilation of an alien species. Graff may have mastered the leading of a complex organization, but he fails at one of the most important aspects of leadership: projecting a strong and worthy vision.

At this point, two possible objections might arise. The first has to do with Graff, in that he is still part of the Fleet and has to follow orders. The Fleet's mis-

sion is still his mission. However, as mentioned above, he has full autonomy in running Battle School. Even the head of military police can but make suggestions (EG 200). Even within the remit of his mission, he still has wide latitude, as seen in his habitual use of manipulative “spin” on his official reports (ES 320). If he had really wanted to, he could have engineered some bureaucratic foot-dragging in anticipation of the moment, approaching ever faster, when the Invasion fleet would begin arriving at Formic worlds (EG 226). Instead, he merely kvetches and puts on weight (EG 257). The second possible objection is that this analysis seems overdetermined. Ender, Graff, and everyone else fail to seriously consider peace with the Formics because the story needs Ender to fight that final battle and win it. While undoubtedly true, this objection would apply equally well to almost any written story, fictitious or not, in which the ending has already been laid out for the reader to discover. More important is whether the characters have the chance to change their minds along the way—and we have seen that they do.

That the ultimate determining factor of good leadership seems to be the end results implies a different, more general kind of objection to the very attempt of leadership studies to predict good leadership. The evident operating assumption (or hope) that good leadership can virtually guarantee good results overlooks the role of “moral luck,” the idea that end results are not always justified or justifiable in completely moral, rational, or procedural terms—that there is always an element of unpredictable luck involved (Williams 26). The characters in *Ender’s Game* and *Ender’s Shadow* bet against the possibility of peace with the Formics, and they lose. Is it poor leadership to be unlucky? In this case, yes. In his article exploring moral luck, Bernard Williams notes that “what one does and the sort of life one leads condition one’s later desires and judgments,” and that the person making momentous decisions today is “the product of [one’s] earlier choices” (34). In the novels, humanity has chosen the military paradigm as its guiding principle, so it should be unsurprising that humanity is guided toward war with the Formics. It seems entirely convincing given the state of humanity today that, were an alien invasion to have occurred and been repelled, we would choose a similar path. In this aggregate and long-term sense, the above questions of leadership consequentialism are valid, and that no one leader can or should shoulder all the responsibility only emphasizes the relevance of leadership studies for everyone, not just for those who are in (or aspire to) positions of leadership. It is fitting, then, that the epitome of leadership in the novels is someone who is not yet in a position of leadership but desperately aspires to be the leader of everything: Peter.

Peter

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While Ender and Bean are being put through the wringer at Battle School, Peter and Valentine preoccupy themselves at home with trying to take over the world. Peter comes up with a scheme to influence world affairs through anonymous articles on the “nets” (this was written before widespread internet use) and convinces Valentine to join him, or threatens her into it (*EG* 125). He needs a co-conspirator to help him corner both sides of every issue (*EG* 134), with whom he can create a grand coalition when he finally uses his political clout to support a specific action. That action turns out to be the peace treaty that holds the world together after the threat of alien invasion has dissipated (*EG* 303). He gives her the pseudonym “Demosthenes” and has her take populist positions, while he himself assumes the name “Locke” and defends level-headed policies. We only see him through her eyes, but their character-spaces are of roughly equal influence. Her importance for his ambitions leads him in his appeal to her to reveal a side of himself that she has never before seen: “I was cruel to you and crueler to Ender before they took him. But I didn’t hate you. I loved you both, I just had to be—had to have *control* . . .” (*EG* 131-32). He even weeps, yet Valentine is still suspicious. Her mistrust of him is well-founded, for, as he admits in this passage, he is nasty, vicious, and cruel, at least from his siblings’ perspective.¹³ She agrees to help him, ostensibly because she knows he can kill her and get away with it, but the deeper reason is that she is as ambitious as he is. Throughout the discussion of his proposal, she keeps returning to something Peter once observed, that “he could always see what other people hated most about themselves, and bully them, while Val could always see what other people liked best about themselves, and flatter them” (127). Valentine manipulates others using their self-regard in the same way that Peter manipulates them using their fears. She is not his opposite, as the Fleet believes, but his complement. She plays Bean to his Ender, and the character-system of Valentine and Peter in many respects resembles that of Bean and Ender in *Ender’s Shadow*. Ultimately, the two relationships persist for the same reason: both principal and second want the same thing. “[I]t was fun,” she thinks, plotting to take over the world (136).

¹³ His “evil” nature leads John Brown to the observation that “despite all the awful things we see him do, one might argue that Peter is the greatest hero of this book because he struggles against greater obstacles than anyone else—his psychopathy is in his DNA” (36). However, Peter is not a complete psychopath; though he is cruel toward his siblings and even to small animals (*EG* 123, 129), we get a brief glimpse of genuine late-night tearful remorse expressed to a half-asleep Ender (*EG* 15). Though this, too, could be faked, the fact that Graff’s affection conveyed to a similarly liminal Ender is genuine (288) argues for the genuineness of Peter’s remorse as well.

That Peter can get Valentine to understand this about herself is as much a testament to his leadership as it is to her powers of self-assessment. He is a transformational leader, able to “foster[] group or organizational performance beyond expectation by virtue of [a] strong emotional attachment with his or her followers combined with [a] collective commitment to a higher moral cause” (Díaz-Sáenz 299). Valentine is his first follower, and his proposal “move[s] her” despite his history of despicable actions precisely because it recasts his cruelty toward her as an emotional bond and sketches a moral vision: “I want the world to hold together,” he says, albeit only so that he can rule over it (*EG* 131). Operating on the nets allows him to exploit two other features of transformational leadership. The nets are a civilian forum, where the effects of transformational leadership are not dampened by military hyperspecialization (Díaz-Sáenz 303); and studies have shown that the effects of transformational leadership are stronger in virtual contexts (305). Even the main drawback of transformational leadership, the tendency to idealize the leader (307), is handled cannily.¹⁴ Having Locke take the level-headed positions in contrast to Demosthenes’s populist ones lets readers view him as a lofty-minded idealist, praised as “[t]he only truly open mind in America”—and therefore seemingly with his head in the clouds, blind to the realities of *realpolitik* (*EG* 228). When the opportunity for world peace presents itself, Demosthenes’s popular support grants “the Locke Proposal” practicality (*EG* 311). Judging by the success at the end of *Ender’s Game* of Peter’s efforts to unite the world under his benevolent rule (*EG* 315), the Locke Proposal is no fluke. Perhaps his only weakness is his youthful cruelty, a record of which Valentine uses against him to keep the victorious Ender out of his reach and exploitation (*EG* 312)—but he still unites the world in the long run. It is not a critical failing in the grand scheme of things, and only Valentine, who leaves with Ender to colonize a former Formic planet, has the full record. Peter’s ultimate success leads Blahuta to proclaim in an echo of the moral luck argument that from the vantage point of “history,” it is Peter who is the ideal leader of the novels (Blahuta 178-79).

Contrary to popular intuition, then, we have seen how Ender is not, in fact, the best leader to appear in the shared fabula of *Ender’s Game* and *Ender’s Shadow*. That most people would disagree, even the U.S. Marines, is, I think, because he is the protagonist of one novel, dominating its character-system, and a charismatic influence on the other. The narrative point of view is rarely that of

¹⁴ The other possible drawback of seeking transformation when status quo stability is required does not apply to this case.

someone outside the International Fleet. But when we are offered such a perspective in passages focalized through Valentine, what we see is another great leader, one whose vision is paradoxically broadened by his straitened circumstances. It is Peter who offers the most compelling vision and who is entirely successful. However, though our paradigmatic leader is unexpected, the lingering questions remain the same: Can good leadership be nurtured? Is good leadership predictive of success? Is leadership success worth the cost? The two novels portray the development of leaders, but of the most successful, Peter and Ender are genetically gifted siblings, arguing for nature over nurture, and we do not see Graff's leadership development. Leadership studies aspires to statistically significant prediction, but each (potential) leader is its own case study, subject to the vicissitudes of moral luck. Lastly, the more successful leaders analyzed above all pay a heavy price. Ender bears the guilt of xenocide along with the killing of two of his peers (*EG* 309). Graff is court-martialed for child abuse; though acquitted, his reputation is in tatters (*EG* 305-06). And Peter suffers the ignominy of being blackmailed by his own sister for his childhood cruelties, cruelties which are severe enough to blackmail him with in the first place and which he deeply regrets. Perhaps when (or if) leadership studies arrives at a general theory of leadership, it will uphold as its ideal leader Cincinnatus, the Roman dictator with absolute power who, as soon as his mission was accomplished, relinquished everything.

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