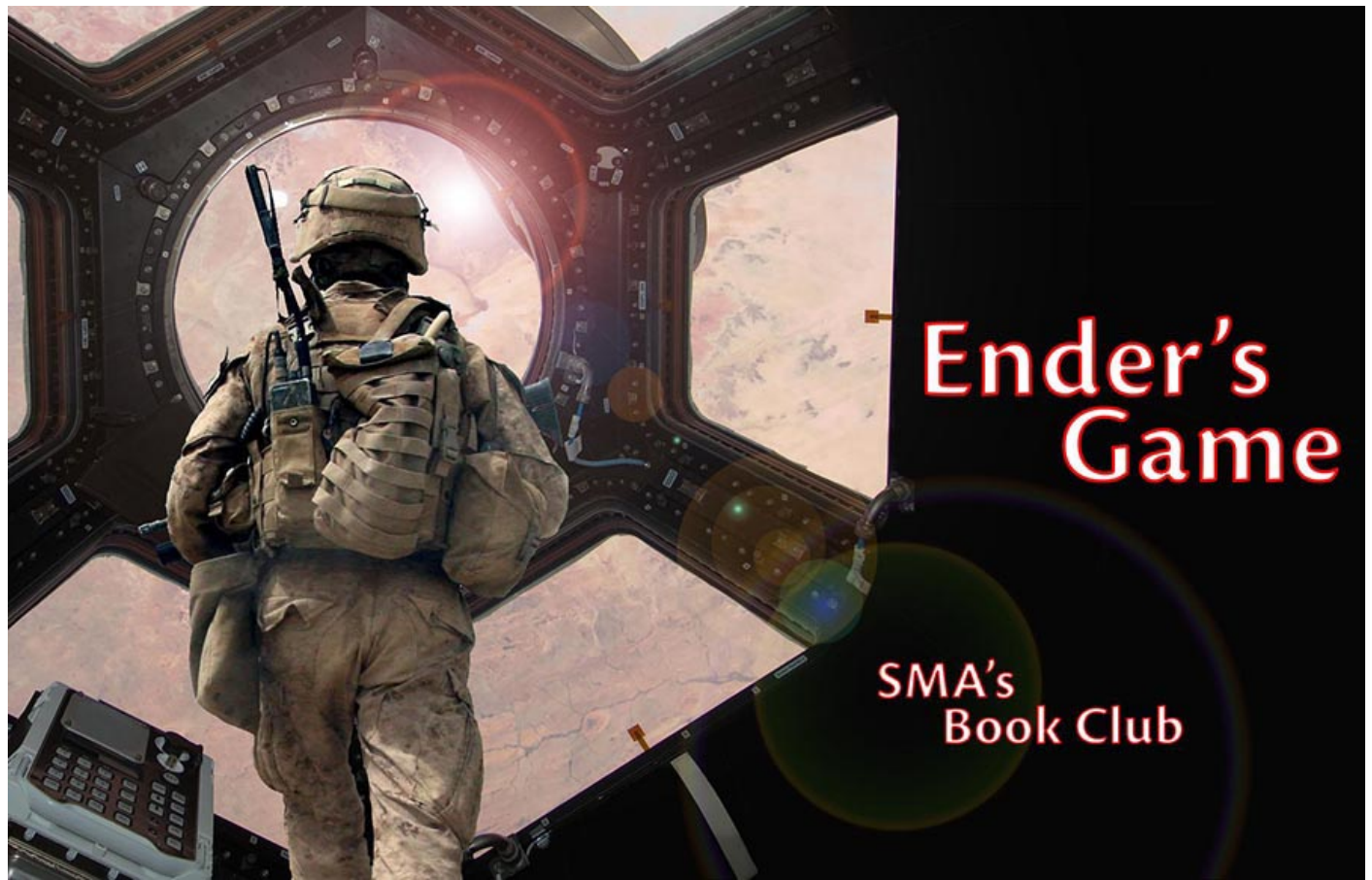


SMA Dailey's Book Club: Ender's Game

By Crystal Bradshaw
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Ender's Game (Graphic by NCO Journal)

Ender's Game by Orson Scott Card is one of several novels on Sgt. Maj. of the Army Daniel A. Dailey's book club list. Dailey selected *Ender's Game* "to stimulate intellectual learning inside the [noncommissioned officer] ranks" and to encourage NCOs to look to the civilian world for lessons and ideas.¹

"Let's get outside the box, and let's see if there's other lessons out there to be learned," SMA Dailey said.

In a society where kids grow up playing astronauts and aliens, the International Fleet searches for the superior commander to free the human race from "buggers", bug-like extraterrestrial creatures. Ender Wiggins is a third, the third child in his family, meaning he is a product of the U.S. government. He is small for his size but extremely intelligent, using his wits to stay one-step ahead of school bullies and the wrath of his sociopath brother, Peter.

Though Ender wants nothing more but to finally find his place in society, he unknowingly carries the fate of Earth on his shoulders as the planet's last hope.

NCOs' Interest in *Ender's Game*

NCOs will find *Ender's Game* an enjoyable read as they enter the world of zero gravity battlerooms, flash suits, freeze guns, holographic battle video games, and other futuristic technologies or battlefield domains that Card described so vividly.

They will recognize Ender's traits, in the sense that he represents NCO tenets of learning new tactics and developing Soldiers. He always put others before himself and ensured the well-being of his comrades and Soldiers. He never neglected his duties and often took on the responsibilities of others. Fiercely loyal, he was "technically and tactically proficient," and provided outstanding leadership in the face of relentless foes.²

Ender's Game provides real military lessons that NCOs may find useful.

Handling Toxic Leadership

Throughout the novel, Ender dealt with toxic leaders. For example, when he rose in rank, he lacked the experience and skills for battle so his commander attempted to damage Ender's status by issuing ridiculous orders.

NCOs can learn to cope with toxic leaders by learning from Ender's approach. He did not use the same method repeatedly. Instead, he handled the toxic leaders by asking, "how can I use this?" He observed them, noted their mentalities, determined their motives, and developed ways he could tactfully resolve the issue. It is important to note that Ender always tried to solve conflicts peacefully, before resorting to aggressive methods.

Ender also gauged his next move in handling a toxic leader by observing other Soldiers' reactions.

Even as he cried from 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 everyone. What is your discipline worth now?³

Ender understood that toxic leaders' actions often led to their own demise; their toxicity and irrational decisions created opportunities for discord and questioning, resulting in a lack of support and, eventually, their removal.

NCOs' Roles in *Ender's Game*

For centuries, NCOs have carried the responsibility of ensuring Soldier readiness and training. Even in the futuristic world of *Ender's Game*, the NCO's role remains the same.

Petra Arkanian secretly taught Ender how to aim accurately. Petra was not a toon (platoon) leader, but she played the role of an NCO by taking Ender under her wing and teaching him the skills he needed to be an effective Soldier.

However, Ender realized that Petra's practices were not sufficient and that a team was essential for practicing battle maneuvers and formations, so he sought the help of his friends.⁴

"He had never heard of a soldier practicing with Launchies, but there was no rule against it. He needed someone to practice with, and in return he could help them learn some of the things he saw the older boys doing."⁵

Unknowingly, Ender stepped into an NCO role as he taught his friends how to conduct squad movements and carry out strategies, while also adding his own style and experimentation. While developing his skills, Ender provided battle training and experience to his comrades, thus ensuring Soldier readiness.

When Ender transferred, his new toon leader taught him how to navigate space battle and, in return, Ender became his second in command and taught new combat tactics.

Click here

(http://pages.erau.edu/~andrewsa/sci_fi_projects_spring_2015/Project_1/Brock_David/BrockProj1/BrockProj1/index.html)><http://pages.erau.edu/~ar> to see a layout of where NCOs fit into *Ender's Game*.

The Importance of Interpersonal Skills

From the moment Ender entered the launcher (rocket) to go to Space Battle School, the principal of SBS ostracized him from the rest of the students. Ender, who hoped he would find his place in SBS, found himself isolated and surrounded by bullies.

Ender's survival relied heavily on his ability to connect with his comrades and the allies he gained through his interpersonal skills. Additionally, he used his skills in creating cross-cultural friendships and gained a close friend of Arabic descent. Through his interpersonal skills, Ender gained allies who later became his squadron leaders.

Interpersonal skills are highly important for NCOs in and out of training. On a cultural level, interpersonal skills are a key factor in training host nation forces.

According to Command Sgt. Maj. James VanSciver, author of "Interpersonal Communication," published in *From One Leader to Another*, these skills are also important in understanding how a Soldier's upbringing and other societal influences help to shape them as individuals.⁶ They directly contribute to the leadership and competency of leads and more specifically communicates.⁷ A leader who lacks interpersonal communication skills such as tact will erode and ultimately destroy the very bedrock of trust within an organization.⁸

Ender proved interpersonal skills play a large role in being a successful NCO. It takes smarts, networking, and creative thinking to overcome new challenges that require the ability to connect with Soldiers and gain their trust.

Avoiding Burnout

In preparation of the final battle, Ender trained his squadron leaders hard, while nearly reaching his own breaking point. However when he pushed them too hard, he lost Petra, who eventually recovered, but was no longer as effective.

Ender knew at once that he had pushed her too hard—because of her brilliance he had called on her to play far more often and under much more demanding circumstances than all but a few of the others... Much of what had made her a good commander was lost.⁹

Ender learned the hard way that he could not rely only on his best squadron leaders but must rotate them out and use others in order to avoid burning out his best Soldiers.¹⁰

In the novel's introduction, Card includes a letter from an Army aviator stationed in Saudi Arabia, who wrote:

"The first six weeks [of flight school] almost beat me. Ender gave me courage then and many times after that. I've experienced the tiredness Ender felt, the kind that goes down deep to your soul."¹¹

NCOs should ensure the well-being, health, and readiness of their Soldiers in order to succeed. They should learn from Ender's mistakes and manage the risk of long-term burnout. Being aware of different burnout triggers between NCOs and Soldiers are important factors to consider:

NCOs: "Responsibility without appropriate decision-making input may be especially stressful. This predicament is illustrated by the comments of a squad leader who stated: 'I'm responsible for training my squad, but I have no input to the training schedule.'"¹²

"... looking after the welfare of the troops in their command, [and] responsibility for subordinates may contribute to burnout."¹³

Soldiers: "Junior enlisted personnel tend to have little autonomy in their jobs, and this lack may explain why they are more likely than officers or NCOs to develop burnout."¹⁴

SMA Dailey Book Club Discussions

As he makes troop visits, Dailey plans to hold book discussions on the novels on his book club list. The book club is voluntary, but NCOs can use it as a professional development tool and should attend book discussions and read the discussion guide (<http://cape.army.mil/library/sma-book-club/repository/enders-game-discussion-guide.pdf>).

Dailey read *Ender's Game* but did not see the film. Soldiers are encouraged to do the same in order to contribute fully to his book club. Failing to do so will hinder their ability to participate in book discussions, since the SMA will cover details not found in the film. One last note, Soldiers should seek a copy of *Ender's Game* that includes an introduction by Card. He discusses some very important observations that Soldiers can put to use in their military careers.

An additional way to support the SMA's book club is to write a book review from the Soldier's perspective. Soldiers interested in submitting a review over *Ender's Game*, or another novel on SMA Dailey's list, should read the NCO Journal's submission guidelines here (<http://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/NCO-Journal/NCO-Journal-Submission-Guidelines/>).

Click here (<http://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/NCO-Journal/Archives/2017/October/Book-Review-Start-with-Why/>) to read a review of *Start with Why* by Simon Sinek, the most current SMA book club selection, which explains the thought process of successful leaders. It will be open for discussion until December 2017.

Dailey will select one new book suggestion per quarter to place on his club page.¹⁵ To make a book suggestion go to <http://cape.army.mil/library/sma-book-club/> (<http://cape.army.mil/library/sma-book-club/>).

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"SMA picks 'Ender's Game' as the first book for his book club (<https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2016/06/02/sma-picks-ender-s-game-as-the-first-book-for-his-book-club/>)" by Michelle Tan

"SMA Dailey's Book Club: Start with Why (<http://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/NCO-Journal/Archives/2017/October/Book-Review-Start-with-Why/>)" by Crystal Bradshaw

SMA's Book Club Discussion Guide: *Ender's Game* (<http://cape.army.mil/library/sma-book-club/repository/enders-game-discussion-guide.pdf>)

"SMA's new book club kicks off (https://www.army.mil/article/169075/SMA_s_new_book_club_kicks_off/)" by C. Todd Lopez

SMA Dailey's Book Club (<http://cape.army.mil/library/sma-book-club/>) link

Endnotes

1. Michelle Tan, "SMA's book club: Soldiers submit must-read books on leadership," Army Times website, 02 January 2016, accessed 09 November 2017, <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2016/01/02/sma-s-book-club-soldiers-submit-must-read-books-on-leadership/> (<https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2016/01/02/sma-s-book-club-soldiers-submit-must-read-books-on-leadership/>); and Michelle Tan, "SMA picks 'Ender's Game' as the first book for his book club," Army Times website, 02 June 2016, accessed 09 November 2017, <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2016/06/02/sma-picks-ender-s-game-as-the-first-book-for-his-book-club/> (<https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2016/06/02/sma-picks-ender-s-game-as-the-first-book-for-his-book-club/>).
2. "Values: NCO Creed," Army Mil website, accessed 09 November 2017, <https://www.army.mil/values/nco.html> (<https://www.army.mil/values/nco.html>).
3. Orson Scott Card, *Ender's Game* (New York: Tom Doherty Associates, LLC., 1991), 68.
4. Card, 61.
5. Card, 61.
6. Command Sgt. Maj. James VanSiver, "Interpersonal Communication" in *From One Leader to Another* (Combat Studies Institute, 2012).

6. Command Sgt. Maj, James vanSciver, "Interpersonal Communication," in *From One Leader to Another* (Combat Studies Institute, 2013).
7. VanSciver, "Interpersonal Communication."
8. VanSciver, "Interpersonal Communication."
9. Card, 199.
10. Card, 199.
11. Card, xix.
12. "Burnout in Military Personnel," 39.
13. "Burnout in Military Personnel," 37.
14. "Burnout in Military Personnel," 39.
15. Tan, "SMA's book club: Soldiers submit must-read books on leadership."