

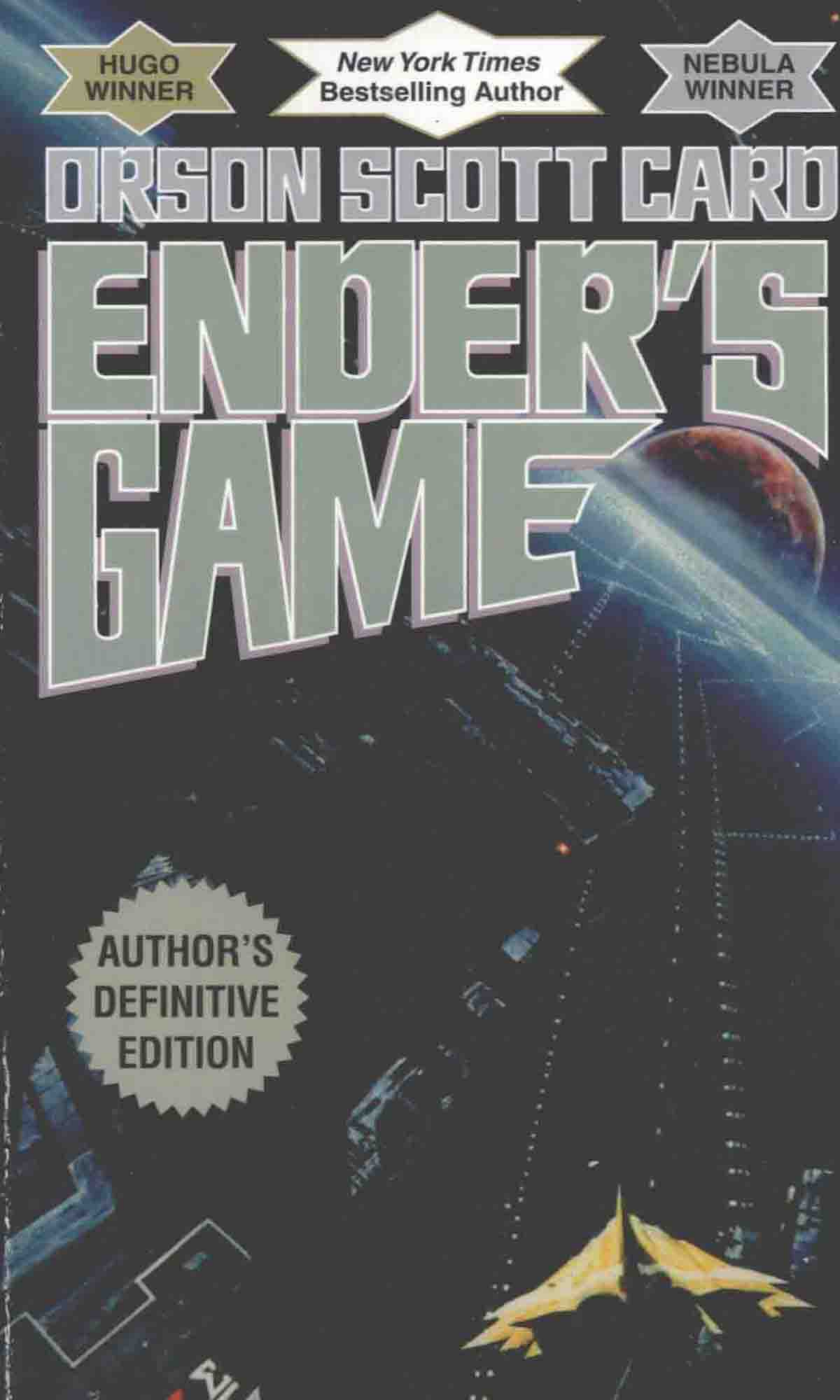
**HUGO
WINNER**

New York Times
Bestselling Author

**NEBULA
WINNER**

ORSON SCOTT CARD

ENDER'S GAME

The background of the cover is a dark, starry space. A large, reddish-brown planet is visible in the upper right. A bright blue and white streak, possibly a comet or a ship's wake, cuts across the middle. In the lower right, there are two yellow, angular shapes that look like alien ships or debris. The overall tone is futuristic and dramatic.

**AUTHOR'S
DEFINITIVE
EDITION**

ORSON SCOTT CARD

ENDER'S
GAME



A TOM DOHERTY ASSOCIATES BOOK
NEW YORK

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ENDER’S GAME

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“Card understands the human condition and has things of real value to say about it. He tells the truth well—ultimately the only criterion of greatness. *Ender’s Game* will still be finding new readers when ninety-nine percent of the books published this year are completely forgotten.”

—Gene Wolf

“A gripping tale of adventure in space and a scathing indictment of the military mind. Recommended.”

—*Library Journal*

“The games are fierce and consistently exciting. The cast . . . offers memorable characters. . . . And the aliens leave an intriguing heritage to mankind.”

—*Locus*

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ENDER

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For Geoffrey,
who makes me remember
how young and how old
children can be

Acknowledgments

Portions of this book were recounted in my first published science fiction story, “Ender’s Game,” in the August 1977 *Analog*, edited by Ben Bova; his faith in me and this story are the foundation of my career.

Harriet McDougal of Tor is that rarest of editors—one who understands a story and can help the author make it exactly what he meant it to be. They don’t pay her enough. Harriet’s task was made more than a little easier, however, because of the excellent work of my resident editor, Kristine Card. I don’t pay her enough, either.

I am grateful also to Barbara Bova, who has been my friend and agent through thin and, sometimes, thick; and to Tom Doherty, my publisher, who let me talk him into doing this book at the ABA in Dallas, which shows either his superb judgment or how weary one can get at a convention.

Introduction

It makes me a little uncomfortable, writing an introduction to *Ender's Game*. After all, the book has been in print for six years now, and in all that time, nobody has ever written to me to say, "You know, *Ender's Game* was a pretty good book, but you know what it really needs? An introduction!" And yet when a novel goes back to print for a new hardcover edition, there ought to be *something* new in it to mark the occasion (something besides the minor changes as I fix the errors and internal contradictions and stylistic excesses that have bothered me ever since the novel first appeared). So be assured—the novel stands on its own, and if you skip this intro and go straight to the story, I not only won't stand in your way, I'll even *agree* with you!

The novelet "Ender's Game" was my first published science fiction. It was based on an idea—the Battle Room—that came to me when I was sixteen years old. I had just read Isaac Asimov's *Foundation* trilogy, which was (more or less) an extrapolation of the ideas in Gibbon's *Decline*

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and Fall of the Roman Empire, applied to a galaxy-wide empire in some far future time.

The novel set me, not to dreaming, but to *thinking*, which is Asimov's most extraordinary ability as a fiction writer. What *would* the future be like? How would things change? What would remain the same? The premise of *Foundation* seemed to be that even though you might change the props and the actors, the play of human history is always the same. And yet that fundamentally pessimistic premise (you mean we'll *never* change?) was tempered by Asimov's idea of a group of human beings who, not through genetic change, but through learned skills, are able to understand and heal the minds of other people.

It was an idea that rang true with me, perhaps in part because of my Mormon upbringing and beliefs: Human beings may be miserable specimens, in the main, but we *can* learn, and, through learning, become decent people.

Those were some of the ideas that played through my mind as I read *Foundation*, curled on my bed—a thin mattress on a slab of plywood, a bed my father had made for me—in my basement bedroom in our little rambler on 650 East in Orem, Utah. And then, as so many science fiction readers have done over the years, I felt a strong desire to write stories that would do for others what Asimov's story had done for me.

In other genres, that desire is usually expressed by producing thinly veiled rewrites of the great work: Tolkien's disciples far too often simply rewrite Tolkien, for example. In science fiction, however, the whole point is that the ideas are fresh and startling and intriguing; you imitate the great ones, not by rewriting *their* stories, but rather by creating stories that are just as startling and new.

But new in what way? Asimov was a scientist, and approached every field of human knowledge in a scientific manner—assimilating data, combining it in new and startling ways, thinking through the implications of each new idea. I was no scientist, and unlikely ever to be one, at least not a *real* scientist—not a physicist, not a chemist, not a

biologist, not even an engineer. I had no gift for mathematics and no great love for it, either. Though I relished the study of logic and languages, and virtually inhaled histories and biographies, it never occurred to me at the time that these were just as valid sources of science fiction stories as astronomy or quantum mechanics.

How, then, could I possibly come up with a science fiction idea? What did I actually know about anything?

At that time my older brother Bill was in the army, stationed at Fort Douglas in Salt Lake City; he was nursing a hip-to-heel cast from a bike-riding accident, however, and came home on weekends. It was then that he had met his future wife, Laura Dene Low, while attending a church meeting on the BYU campus; and it was Laura who gave me *Foundation* to read. Perhaps, then, it was natural for my thoughts to turn to things military.

To me, though, the military didn't mean the Vietnam War, which was then nearing its peak of American involvement. I had no experience of that, except for Bill's stories of the miserable life in basic training, the humiliation of officer's candidate school, and his lonely but in many ways successful life as a noncom in Korea. Far more deeply rooted in my mind was my experience, five or six years earlier, of reading Bruce Catton's three-volume *Army of the Potomac*. I remembered so well the stories of the commanders in that war—the struggle to find a Union general capable of using McClellan's magnificent army to defeat Lee and Jackson and Stuart, and then, finally, Grant, who brought death to far too many of his soldiers, but also made their deaths mean something, by grinding away at Lee, keeping him from dancing and maneuvering out of reach. It was because of Catton's history that I had stopped enjoying chess, and had to revise the rules of *Risk* in order to play it—I had come to understand something of war, and not just because of the conclusions Catton himself had reached. I found meanings of my own in that history.

I learned that history is shaped by the use of power, and that different people, leading the same army, with,

therefore, approximately the same power, applied it so differently that the army seemed to change from a pack of noble fools at Fredericksburg to panicked cowards melting away at Chancellorsville, then to the grimly determined, stubborn soldiers who held the ridges at Gettysburg, and then, finally, to the disciplined, professional army that ground Lee to dust in Grant's long campaign. It wasn't the soldiers who changed. It was the leader. And even though I could not then have articulated what I understood of military leadership, I knew that I *did* understand it. I understood, at levels deeper than speech, how a great military leader imposes his will on his enemy, and makes his own army a willing extension of himself.

So one morning, as my Dad drove me to Brigham Young High School along Carterville Road in the heavily wooded bottoms of the Provo River, I wondered: How would you train soldiers for combat in the future? I didn't bother thinking of new land-based weapons systems—what was on my mind, after *Foundation*, was space. Soldiers and commanders would have to think very differently in space, because the old ideas of up and down simply wouldn't apply anymore. I had read in Nordhoff's and Hall's history of World War I flying that it was very hard at first for new pilots to learn to look above and below them rather than merely to the right and left, to find the enemy approaching them in the air. How much worse, then, would it be to learn to think with no up and down at all?

The essence of training is to allow error without consequence. Three-dimensional warfare would need to be practiced in an enclosed space, so mistakes wouldn't send trainees flying off to Jupiter. It would need to offer a way to practice shooting without risk of injury; and yet trainees who were "hit" would need to be disabled, at least temporarily. The environment would need to be changeable, to simulate the different conditions of warfare—near a ship, in the midst of debris, near tiny asteroids. And it would need to have some of the confusion of real battle, so that the play-combat didn't evolve into something as rigid and

formal as the meaningless marching and maneuvers that still waste an astonishing amount of a trainee's precious hours in basic training in our modern military.

The result of my speculations that morning was the Battle Room, exactly as you will see it (or have already seen it) in this book. It was a good idea, and something like it will certainly be used for training if ever there is a manned military in space. (Something very much like it has already been used in various amusement halls throughout America.)

But, having thought of the Battle Room, I hadn't the faintest idea of how to go about turning the idea into a story. It occurred to me then for the first time that the *idea* of the story is nothing compared to the importance of knowing how to find a character and a story to tell around that idea. Asimov, having had the idea of paralleling *The Decline and Fall*, still had no story; his genius—and the soul of the story—came when he personalized his history, making the psychohistorian Hari Seldon the god-figure, the planmaker, the apocalyptic prophet of the story. I had no such character, and no idea of how to make one.

Years passed. I graduated from high school as a junior (just in time—Brigham Young High School was discontinued with the class of 1968) and went on to Brigham Young University. I started there as an archaeology major, but quickly discovered that doing archaeology is unspeakably boring compared to reading the books by Thor Heyerdahl (*Aku-Aku*, *Kon-Tiki*), Yigael Yadin (*Masada*), and James Michener (*The Source*) that had set me dreaming. Potsherds! Better to be a *dentist* than to spend your life trying to put together fragments of old pottery in endless desert landscapes in the Middle East.

By the time I realized that not even the semi-science of archaeology was for someone as impatient as me, I was already immersed in my real career. At the time, of course, I misunderstood myself: I thought I was in theatre because I loved performing. And I *do* love performing, don't get me wrong. Give me an audience and I'll hold onto them as long as I can, on any subject. But I'm not a good actor, and

theatre was not to be my career. At the time, though, all I cared about was doing plays. Directing them. Building sets and making costumes and putting on makeup for them.

And, above all, *rewriting* those *lousy* scripts. I kept thinking, Why couldn't the playwright hear how dull that speech was? This scene could so easily be punched up and made far more effective.

Then I tried my hand at writing adaptations of novels for a reader's theatre class, and my fate was sealed. I was a playwright.

People came to my plays and clapped at the end. I learned—from actors and from audiences—how to shape a scene, how to build tension, and—above all—the necessity of being harsh with your own material, excising or rewriting anything that doesn't work. I learned to separate the *story* from the *writing*, probably the most important thing that any storyteller has to learn—that there are a thousand right ways to tell a story, and ten million wrong ones, and you're a lot more likely to find one of the latter than the former your first time through the tale.

My love of theatre lasted through my mission for the LDS Church. Even while I was in São Paulo, Brazil, as a missionary, I wrote a play called *Stone Tables* about the relationship between Moses and Aaron in the book of Exodus, which had standing-room-only audiences at its premiere (which I didn't attend, since I was still in Brazil!).

At the same time, though, that original impetus to write science fiction persisted.

I had taken fiction writing courses at college, for which I don't think I ever wrote science fiction. But on the side, I had started a series of stories about people with psionic powers (I had no idea this was a sci-fi cliché at the time) that eventually grew into *The Worthing Saga*. I had even sent one of the stories off to *Analog* magazine before my mission, and on my mission I wrote several long stories in the same series (as well as a couple of stabs at mainstream stories).

In all that time, the Battle Room remained an idea in the back of my mind. It wasn't until 1975, though, that I dusted it off and tried to write it. By then I had started a theatre company that managed to do reasonably well during the first summer and then collapsed under the weight of bad luck and bad management (myself) during the fall and winter. I was deeply in debt on the pathetic salary of an editor at BYU Press. Writing was the only thing I knew how to do *besides* proofreading and editing. It was time to get serious about writing something that might actually earn some money—and, plainly, playwriting wasn't going to be it.

I first rewrote and sent out "Tinker," the first Worthing story I wrote and the one that was still most effective. I got a rejection letter from Ben Bova at *Analog*, pointing out that "Tinker" simply didn't feel like science fiction—it felt like fantasy. So the Worthing stories were out for the time being.

What was left? The old Battle Room idea. It happened one spring day that a friend of mine, Tammy Mikkelson, was taking her boss's children to the circus in Salt Lake City; would I like to come along? I would. And since there was no ticket for me (and I've always detested the circus anyway—the clowns drive me up a wall), I spent the hours of the performance out on the lawn of the Salt Palace with a notebook on my lap, writing "Ender's Game" as I had written all my plays, in longhand on narrow-ruled paper. "Remember," said Ender. "The enemy's gate is *down*."

Maybe it was because of the children in the car on the way up that I decided that the trainees in the Battle Room were so young. Maybe it was because I, barely an adolescent myself, understood only childhood well enough to write about it. Or maybe it was because of something that impressed me in Catton's *Army of the Potomac*: that the soldiers were all so young and innocent. That they shot and bayoneted the enemy, and then slipped across the neutral ground between armies to trade tobacco, jokes, liquor, and food. Even though it was a deadly game, and the suffering and fear were terrible and real, it was still a game played

by children, not all that different from the wargames my brothers and I had played, firing water-filled squirt bottles at each other.

“Ender’s Game” was written and sold. I knew it was a strong story because *I* cared about it and believed in it. I had no idea that it would have the effect it had on the science fiction audience. While most people ignored it, of course, and continue to live full and happy lives without reading it or anything else by me, there was still a surprisingly large group who responded to the story with some fervency.

Ignored on the Nebula ballot, “Ender’s Game” got onto the Hugo ballot and came in second. More to the point, I was awarded the John W. Campbell Award for best new writer. Without doubt, “Ender’s Game” wasn’t just my first sale—it was the launching pad of my career.

The same story did it again in 1985, when I rewrote it at novel length—the book, now slightly revised, that you are holding in your hands. At that point I thought of *Ender’s Game*, the novel, existing only to set up the much more powerful (I thought) story of *Speaker for the Dead*. But when I finished the novel, I knew that the story had new strength. I had learned a great deal, about life and about writing, in the decade since I wrote the novelet, and it came together for the first time in this book. Again the audience was kind to me: the Nebula and Hugo awards, foreign translations, and strong, steady sales that, for the first time in my career, actually earned out my advance and allowed me to receive royalties.

But it wasn’t just a matter of having a quiet little cult novel that brought in a steady income. There was something more to the way that people responded to *Ender’s Game*.

For one thing, the people that hated it *really* hated it. The attacks on the novel—and on me—were astonishing. Some of it I expected—I have a master’s degree in literature, and in writing *Ender’s Game* I deliberately avoided all the little literary games and gimmicks that make “fine” writing so impenetrable to the general audience. All the layers of meaning are there to be decoded, if you like to play the game of

literary criticism—but if you don't care to play that game, that's fine with me. I designed *Ender's Game* to be as clear and accessible as any story of mine could possibly be. My goal was that the reader wouldn't have to be trained in literature or even in science fiction to receive the tale in its simplest, purest form. And, since a great many writers and critics have based their entire careers on the premise that anything that the general public can understand without mediation is worthless drivel, it is not surprising that they found my little novel to be despicable. If everybody came to agree that stories should be told this clearly, the professors of literature would be out of a job, and the writers of obscure, encoded fiction would be, not honored, but pitied for their impenetrability.

For some people, however, the loathing for *Ender's Game* transcended mere artistic argument. I recall a letter to the editor of *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*, in which a woman who worked as a guidance counselor for gifted children reported that she had only picked up *Ender's Game* to read it because her son had kept telling her it was a wonderful book. She read it and loathed it. Of course, I wondered what kind of guidance counselor would hold her son's tastes up to public ridicule, but the criticism that left me most flabbergasted was her assertion that my depiction of gifted children was hopelessly unrealistic. They just don't talk like that, she said. They don't *think* like that.

And it wasn't just her. There have been others with that criticism. Thus I began to realize that, as it is, *Ender's Game* disturbs some people because it challenges their assumptions about reality. In fact, the novel's very clarity may make it *more* challenging, simply because the story's vision of the world is so relentlessly plain. It was important to her, and to others, to believe that children don't actually think or speak the way the children in *Ender's Game* think and speak.

Yet I knew—I *knew*—that this was one of the truest things about *Ender's Game*. In fact, I realized in retrospect that this may indeed be part of the reason why it was so important to me, there on the lawn in front of the Salt

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Palace, to write a story in which gifted children are trained to fight in adult wars. Because never in my entire childhood did I feel like a child. I felt like a person all along—the same person that I am today. I never felt that I spoke childishly. I never felt that my emotions and desires were somehow less real than adult emotions and desires. And in writing *Ender's Game*, I forced the audience to experience the lives of these children from that perspective—the perspective in which their feelings and decisions are just as real and important as any adult's.

The nasty side of myself wanted to answer that guidance counselor by saying, The only reason you don't think gifted children talk this way is because they know better than to talk this way in front of *you*. But the truer answer is that *Ender's Game* asserts the personhood of children, and those who are used to thinking of children in another way—especially those whose whole career is based on that—are going to find *Ender's Game* a very unpleasant place to live. Children are a perpetual, self-renewing underclass, helpless to escape from the decisions of adults until they become adults themselves. And *Ender's Game*, seen in that context, might even be a sort of revolutionary tract.

Because the book *does* ring true with the children who read it. The highest praise I ever received for a book of mine was when the school librarian at Farrer Junior High in Provo, Utah, told me, “You know, *Ender's Game* is our most-lost book.”

And then there are the letters. This one, for instance, which I received in March of 1991:

Dear Mr. Card,

I am writing to you on behalf of myself and my twelve friends and fellow students who joined me at a two-week residential program for gifted and talented students at Purdue University this summer. We attended the class, “Philosophy and Science Fiction,” instructed by Peter Robinson, and we range in age from thirteen through fifteen.