

SUN TZU AWARD

(Complete and submit to your respective Platoon Commander upon finishing a book on the Commandant's Reading List)

United States Marine Corps Commandant's Professional Reading List Discussion Guide Updated 14 DEC 2012

This guide is intended to help Marines think about and discuss the books they read. All answers or responses should be embraced as *relevant*; there is no single right answer. All Sun Tzu Award submissions will be reviewed and boarded at the end of each month.

Date: 20140914

Rank: [REDACTED]

Name: [REDACTED]

Platoon/Section: [REDACTED]

Book: Ender's Game

Author: Orison Scott Card

1. In as few words as possible, what is this book about?

Personal demons, duty, small unit leadership and sacrifice

2. What made you want to read it?

I first read Ender's Game in middle school well over a decade ago. The cover has a space ship, which was pretty cool to twelve year old me. I pick it up at least once a year now, however, because every time I read this book I get something different and meaningful from it. I have found something different to relate to in every stage of my life thus far. I've read it dozens of times at this point.

3. Did it live up to your expectations? Why? Why not?

Absolutely. It has everything. In terms of Science Fiction, there are aliens, space travel at relativistic speeds, and instant communication across the boundary of light speed. Politically, it has Machiavellian evilness and a realist world view (in International Relations terms) in Peter, shrewd playing of interests and competing loyalties in Ender's sister, and complete obliviousness to a rising world changing influence in the established elite. Militarily, you see the clear differences in leadership styles, the value of flexibility and devolution of authority, the importance of respect for authority (and the need to earn that respect), and the ultimate reality that while one can shape one's life in the military, at the end of the day you still belong to your superiors and your country.

4. Did you learn anything new? If so, what?

Yes, every single time I read it. Most recently, reading the book as a Marine, I focus on Ender's development as shown in the battle toon and ultimately at what he believes to be Command School. As a Launchie/Boot, Ender faces the harsh reality that he is just another cog in the machine. The only way to escape that status is to use it to his advantage. He watches, learns and excels. He bids his time learning from the mistakes of Bonzo Madrid, his superior, and seeks to improve what he can of himself on the side. He stands out by working hard and by being the best. All of this can be applied to life as a junior enlisted warrior in the Corps. As he gains responsibility, he learns about the

loneliness of leadership and the burdens of constantly keeping his people motivated even when he himself is not. He leads by respect, not fiat. He devolves power when he knows someone can do the job better than he can and builds his team around the strengths of everyone. He wins and wins convincingly. In command Ender discovers what happens when you push people too far. They break. He has to adapt and find a new path forward. He harshly learns that success in battle comes at a price physically, psychologically and emotionally.

Every bit of this process has informed the way I approach my role in the Marine Corps. I am junior enlisted, for now, and while here I have to learn everything I can, push myself when others can't and stay motivated. When trusted with the opportunity to lead, I must praise in public, scold in private and let subordinates be the bearers of good news. I must always keep learning, especially about the enemy, because the better I know him, the better I can destroy him.

5. Which part of the book did you find most interesting?

In high school, I focused on the dual themes of overcoming a messed up home environment by creating an independent identity (for Ender it was different than it is for me and my father) and the politics of taking over the world.

Later as an IR and International Development major in college, I focused on the idea of understanding the enemy on such a fundamental level that you can then destroy them. That level of understanding the "other" is fundamental to effective and sustainable international development projects, though the goal is obviously the opposite of destruction.

At the moment, I most enthusiastically read two parts of the book: those in which leadership, good and bad, take center stage and those in which Ender struggles with reconciling his feeling of duty, responsibility and having a higher calling with his desire to stop destroying and hurting and to just be left alone.

6. Did this book inspire you to want to do more research on the subject? Why? Why not?

Ultimately I read many follow up books on this one, but none impacted me as profoundly as the original. I have continued to read books on leadership.

7. Would you recommend it to a friend or another Marine? Why? Why not?

As I mentioned above, Ender's Game has something different for everyone. There is meaning to be found in the book no matter where one is in life. I recommend it regularly.

8. Does the subject of this book affect your life? If so, how? If no, why not?

As mentioned, I have struggled to break free of the influence my father has had on me, am a huge politics nerd, and am directly impacted by leadership from the small unit level on up to the Commander in Chief. This book is completely relevant to me.

9. What evidence does the author use to support their ideas?

As a work of fiction, I'm sure this applies. Orson Scott Card does pretty convincingly lead egotistical leaders into complete and total failure, however.

10. Are the issues raised in the book controversial? Why?

The book covers political insurrection, the genocide of an entire species of life, the use of child soldiers, and murder via self-defense. Any one of those issues would be controversial. The single most controversial topic in my mind, though, is whether the treatment of Ender Wiggin was just. Do the ends justify the means? Should he have known the consequences of the actions, both in human lives and those of his enemy at the time? If he had known, would he, could he and should he have acted differently?

11. Does the author offer solutions to the problems raised in the book? How probable is their success? Can you think of additional solutions?

None. That is the beauty of fiction. He doesn't have to.

12. If you were to talk with the author, what would you ask him or her?

Whether Peter truly did love Ender, and whether he believes humans are inherently good, evil or otherwise.

13. Have you read the author's other books? Can you discern a similarity (in theme, writing style, structure, etc.) between them, or are they completely different?

The Shadow Series and the other follow on series in the Ender Universe have many of the same characters, but they seem to lack the heart of the original. Ender is broken after the first book and he, his struggles and his abilities are the main force behind the story.

14. After reading this book, have your views on the subject changed? Why? Why not?

I am still opposed to the destruction of the human race by giant cockroach-like aliens, though I am not confident in the use of child soldiers or pre-emptive genocide to eliminate future threat.

15. Why should Marines read this book?

Space Marines, aliens, leadership, political philosophy and epic battle scenes. Those should work if everything above didn't.