



# 'Ender's Game' a must-see sci-fi film

By [Justin Craig](#)

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Intricately designed and packed with intelligent, impactful ideas, “Ender’s Game” is both a lofty science fiction adventure and an excellent anti-bullying parable. Unlike the YA films preceding “Ender’s Game,” director and screenwriter Gavin Hood strips most emotion from the story until the final moments, therefore creating one of the coldest, starkest and most mature science fiction films for young adults.

Though the film is great, “Ender’s Game” isn’t without its controversy. The book’s author Orson Scott Card’s frequent homophobic hate-speech has sparked incredible backlash and calls for boycotts against the film, which is ironic on Card’s part since the book is a wonderful anti-bullying and acceptance campaign. Both the cast and crew, including Harrison Ford, have distanced themselves from Card’s personal views and have requested that audiences focus on the film at hand and not on the author. With that in mind, despite the Card controversy, “Ender’s Game,” the film, is excellent and is one of the rare cases where the movie adaptation is better than the book.

The maturity within Gavin Hood’s first-rate script is most surprising, especially compared to many recent science fiction epics. Ender Wiggin (Asa Butterfield) is a highly intelligent wunderkind who is recruited by General Graff (Harrison Ford) to an elite military regime to fight an alien race called the Formics (or Buggers as they are called in the book), who

attacked Earth 50 years earlier. Joining groups of other children, Ender undergoes rigorous training through games of logic, combat and survival, all in order to become elite killers and annihilate the Formics before they annihilate the humans. As the smartest student in school and then the most intelligent recruit in the training program, Ender is a prime target for bullies. He must successfully and safely outsmart and out-manuever his attackers, but the biggest bully is yet to come: his ultimate mission. Guided by Graff, and knowing he is exceptional, Ender quickly climbs the ranks to become commander of the child-army, but at what cost?

The horrors of bullying, war and morally-complex adult situations are made more powerful by being represented through kids, a similar tactic in the classic “Lord of the Flies.” Hood delves into the price of using children as soldiers, the collective moral obligation of the human race and ultimately, acceptance, all under the guise of a kinetic space adventure.

For the most part, “Ender’s Game” is your typical archetypal hero story, until Hood pulls the rug from underneath. The film is broken up into training sequences, each more complex and dangerous than the last. The executions of these scenes are masterful, blending realistic CGI with fun, brain-teasing puzzles for Ender and his team. This all culminates in a well-executed, very suspenseful finale that many won’t see coming (unless you’ve read the book).

Asa Butterfield is excellently cast as Ender Wiggin. Whether Ender is using ice cold logic to out-manuever his opponents or letting his vulnerable inner-child make an appearance, Butterfield’s delivery is top-notch. He was sublime as Martin Scorsese’s “Hugo” and he follows that performance with an equally smart one as Ender.

Joining Butterfield is Hailee Steinfeld as Petra, the only female cadet in the program. She’s smart and ballsy and Hood offers just the slightest hint of an attraction between Ender and Petra, but thankfully never comes close to turning the film into a cheesy teen soap like “The Hunger Games.” Abigail Breslin makes a brief appearance as Ender’s sister, who back on Earth, manages to keep her brother’s humanity intact.

Harrison Ford does an adequate job as the stern, no-nonsense General Graff who heads the training regiments. There’s little for the character to do other than bark orders and keep anyone from interfering with the prodigal Ender’s rise to leadership, but Harrison Ford in anything is always welcome. Joining him are Viola Davis as the only compassionate adult in the film and Sir Ben Kingsley donning a Maori tattoo as a legendary soldier who gives Ender his final piece of training.

Visually, “Ender’s Game” can be a sibling of “Tron: Legacy.” Bright white lights softly glow, contrasting with the glassy sheen of iPod black. Everything looks cold and sterile, but has an incredible pop courtesy Donald McAlpine’s cinematography and Sean Haworth and Ben Procter’s fantastic production design.

Despite the unfortunate controversy surrounding the book’s author, the cast and crew of “Ender’s Game” collectively make this a late-year surprise and a damn good science fiction film.

*Summit Entertainment. MPAA Rating: PG-13. Running time: 1 hour and 54 minutes.*