

Ends and Means: Moral Compromises in Whedon's *Astonishing X-Men*

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In the four-color world of comic books, morality is often delineated by a line separating black and white, with shade of grey best left to the philosophers. However, in *Astonishing X-Men*, Joss Whedon reinforces the fact that life does not always operate that way, in the real world or otherwise. During his story arc, Whedon highlights that even the “good guys,” those who wear the white hats, can buckle under moral compromise. Professor Xavier is revealed to have ignored the pleas of emerging Artificial Intelligence in his training center, the Danger Room, to ensure that his X-Men were prepared to combat the threats of the world. He effectively enslaves one intelligence to save another. Agent Abigail Brand, head of Earth's interstellar peace-keeping organization, makes backroom deals to save the Earth, selling out the X-Men and the mutant race in the bargain. However, Whedon also shows in his run how the black hats can side with the white, using reformed villain and current X-Women Emma Frost as his exemplar. Frost employs some of the same questionable compromises as Xavier and Brand, but to different ends and more positive results. Whedon uses these three characters to explore situational ethics and morality to engage his readers to question whether the ends ever justify the means.