

Rating the Rebels: The Merit and Morality of Different Factions of the Star Wars Resistance

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For simplicity's sake, we're going to mostly focus on war crimes as the most black and white ethical transgressions, and mostly during the Rebellion era, since it's the most well-documented.

While reality and the fictional Star Wars galaxy don't necessarily have the exact same policies about war crimes, they probably use have similar concepts and terms which are generally associated with war crimes, like "shocks to the conscience" or "atrocities."

In the Star Wars universe, there are at least two treaties regarding humane warfare, the Ruusan Armistice and the Alderaan Convention. Very little detail about them is known, but since they are obviously patterned on the real-world Geneva Convention we'll use that for the Star Wars universe as well.

Some of the main rules of the Geneva Convention include:

- No intentional **killing of civilians** or humanitarian groups
- No **torture** or experiments on people
- No **civilians as shields**
- No **removal of the rule of law for civilians (including assassination)**
- No **hostages**
- No **killing of prisoners**
- No declaring that **you will give no quarter**
- No **weapons that cause unnecessary injury or suffering**, no gas or poison, etc.
- No **soldiers under 15**
- No **genocide**
- No degrading or humiliating treatment
- No intentionally destroying civilian property
- No forcing a prisoner of war to fight for you
- No misuse of a flag of truce
- No attacking religious, art, science, medical, etc. buildings
- No use of sex as a weapon
- No starvation
- No deportation or replacement of populations

Let's get the obvious, near-universal problem out of the way first:
Child Soldiers!

Jyn Erso: joined Saw Gerrera at 11, was his “best soldier” when he finally abandoned her at the age of 16

Ezra: joined Spectre Squadron at 13

Anakin: apprenticed at 9

Padme: a 14-year old queen along with her equally-young Handmaiden team of sometime-warriors

Omega: joined the Bad Batch in her early teens

Grogu: 50+, but mentally a child

Mart Mattin: led Iron Squadron (*Rebels*), “sounds like a kid”

Vulaada Klam: apprentice to Dr. Aphra, presumably a tween or early teen

Padawans in general, taken from their parents as infants and trained for combat by their early teens

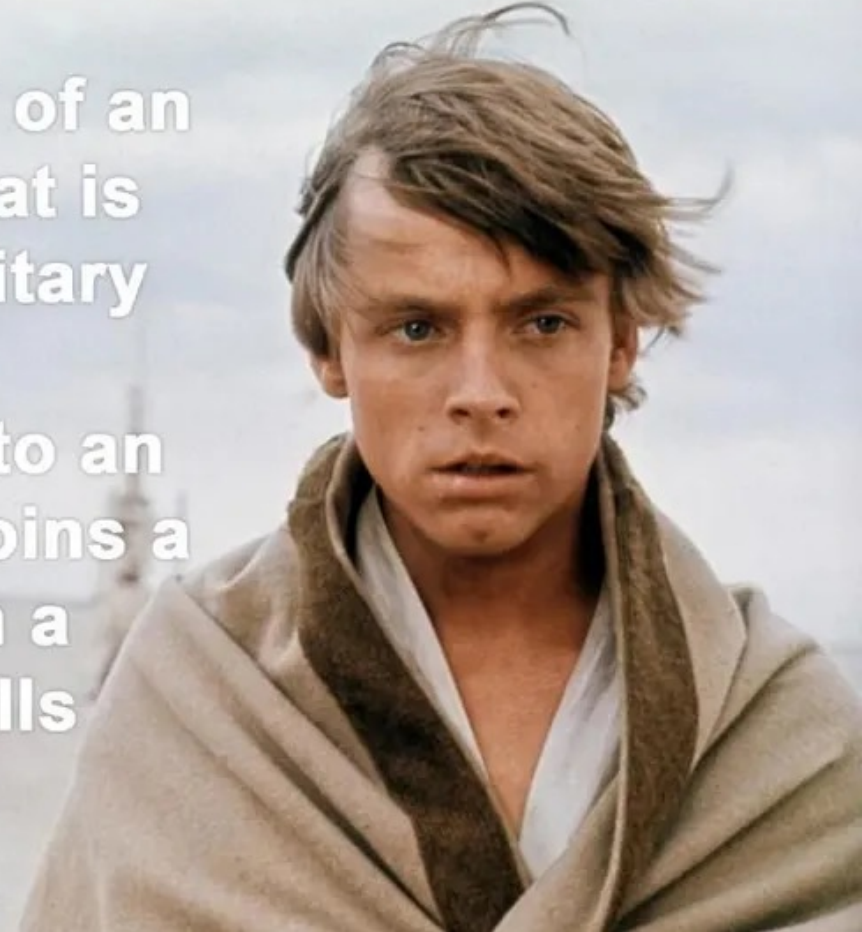
Even the standard New Hope-era Rebels weren't above a little mass murder.

The first Death Star had approximately 1.5 million people onboard at the time of its destruction, and they went on to destroy a second Death Star and Starkiller Base.

But the Death Stars were at least military targets, even if they also probably housed vast numbers of innocent staff and forced conscripts.

So while they possibly don't follow the law of war's concept of proportionality, they aren't necessarily a war crime.

Star Wars is the story of an orphaned farm boy that is radicalized after a military strike kills his family. He is indoctrinated into an ancient religion and joins a band of insurgents on a terrorist attack that kills 300,000 people.



Mon Mothma

Was previously a representation of ideologically purity and gentility.

Made it seem like her husband, Perrin Fertha, has gambling debts in order to cover up her financial support of the Rebellion.

But because redundancy is always good, she is also essentially potentially prostituting her 13-year-old daughter to the son of banker Davo Sculdun, via a probable arranged marriage, just in case Mon needs the extra money.

Mon has acquired her ethics from the best, as she says to Tay Kolma: "I've learned from Palpatine. I show you the stone in my hand, you miss the knife at your throat."



Mon Mothma

However, her reputation is still for being tentative and rules-based.

Saw Gerrera called her out for her insistence on finding a peaceful solution through the Senate, long after that ship sailed, saying that she's fighting on the empire's terms, not hers.

She calls him a criminal, and he says the Empire considers both of them criminals: "At least I act like one."

She says "you target civilians, kill those who surrender, break every rule of engagement. If we degrade ourselves to the Empire's level, what will we become?"

He responds: "I hope, Senator, after you've lost, and the Empire reigns over the galaxy unopposed, you will find some comfort in the knowledge that you fought according to the rules."

Luthen Rael

Murder of Captives, Civilians, and His Own Troops:

Luthen urges Andor to kill Syril Karn when he's captured and on his knees.

Luthen threatens Lonni (his double agent)'s daughter.

Luthen asks Cinta Kaz and Vel Sartha to kill Andor to keep Luthen's identity secret.

Luthen won't warn Anton Kreegyr of an Imperial attack even though Kreegyr and 30 of his men will die—Lonni is worth more than Kreegyr.

Generally Empire-like Manipulation of "the People":

Mon: "Palpatine won't hesitate."

Luthen: "Exactly! We need it. We need the fear. We need them to overreact."

...

Mon: "People will suffer!"

Luthen: "That's the plan. There will be no rules going forward. If you're not willing to risk your conscience then surrender and be done with it."

Luthen to Saw: "We need the Empire to help. We need them angry. We need them coming down hard. Oppression breeds rebellion."



Cassian Andor

Murder of Allies:

Kills his informant Tivik because Tivik had an injured arm and couldn't escape.

Creates a distraction in the Jedha marketplace by shooting a Partisan ally who has a bomb, and who falls into the crowd and kills civilians.

Andor kills Skeen with no warning.

General Dravits Draven orders Andor to kill Galen Erso. Weirdly, when Andor lies to the team about this, Baze Malbus tells Chirrut Îmwe that Andor does not have the face of a killer.

Murder or Threat of Murder of Others:

His team holds a woman and child hostage and threatens to kill them:

Vel Sartha: "We win or everyone dies....If you don't help us, your family will die. If you slow us down, if you stall, if you argue, if you play us in any way, they will die."

He accidentally kills a security guard, then kills another in cold blood to keep him from reporting it.

Andor shoots a defenseless Imperial on the ground during the riot.



Saw Gerrera and the Partisans

Torture and Murder of Civilians:

Tortured his own Partisans to see if they knew who Jyn really was.

Killed Imperials, religious leaders, and civilians at the Sakoola Blossom Festival on behalf of another insurgent leader.

Saw sets the Bor Gullet on Bodhi to get the truth, even though the “unfortunate side effect is that one tends to lose one’s mind.”

Saw electro-zaps a Geonosian prisoner, Klik-Klak. Threatens to destroy its queen egg, which would be committing genocide or near-genocide.

Betrayal of Allies:

Saw agrees to burn Anton Kreegyr for the “greater good.”



Saw Gerrera and the Partisans

Relations with Others:

Ezra and Captain Rex treat him as a friend, with a clasped arm.

The Bad Batch argue that Gerrera's tactics are not as militarily successful because he kills people who could give him intel.

Agent Kallus says Saw has better intel because he has no qualms about how he gets it. Ezra agrees: "as long as he gets results."

Hera: "I've also got my issues with Saw, Ezra. But in the end he proved he's not the Empire and for now that will have to do."

Mon Mothma removed Saw from the Alliance to Restore the Republic due to his actions that were outside the Ruusan Armistice, including targeting civilians and using torture.

Post-Gerrera Partisan Activity:

Soon after Leia makes an agreement to work with the Partisans, Benthic Two Tubes mentions that "Saw Gerrera once bombarded a party of collaborating civilians with flechettes just to send a message to the imperials." Her agreement with him stands.

Two Tubes later kills multiple techs and officers who he has taken prisoner while Luke watches.

Two Tubes and the Partisans planned to destroy the planet Shu-Torun. Leia barely persuades them not to.



Enfys Nest and the Cloud Riders

Rio (*Solo*) describes Enfys Nest as “pirates, marauders.”

Beckett says about Nest: “they’re marauders, they don’t care about anybody. All they know how to do is kill.”

Nest employs Thea “Starfall” Starros (grandmother of Sana) as a sniper.

Enfys is willing to kill Beckett’s crew in *Solo* over a heist, and earlier puts Beckett in a situation where he might be killed, just to eliminate competition.

However, Nest says they’re not marauders and positions herself against Crimson Dawn and the Empire in terms of morals/tactics and being pro-“the people.”

Two Tubes started with Saw (in *Andor*), then joined the Cloud Riders (in *Solo*), and then returned to Saw (in *Rogue One* and later comics), showing a link between the Cloud Riders and Saw’s ethics



The Bad Batch

Rex says he has heard mixed things about them. “It’s not that they win, it’s how they win that worries me.”

They generally act ethically: Only Crosshair wants to obey Order 66 or work for the Empire.

When Tarkin orders them to kill a group of Partisans with children, they refuse (except Crosshair).

They later do mercenary work for the criminal Cid, which involves some pro-quid-pro ethical compromise but not war crimes.

Their first job is to get a rancor for Jabba. Later they steal spice and deliver it to the Pykes.



Spectre Squadron

Spectre Squadron works with crime lords like Vizago, Azmorigan, and Hondo all the time, although this is not necessarily a war crime.

Ezra Bridger mind-controls Imperials to kill other Imperials, which definitely is a war crime.

Ezra sympathized with Saw Gerrera and helped him against his superiors' wishes. Ezra tells Kanan that he knows it's "how we choose to fight that matters." But "maybe we're choosing the wrong way."

While aware of Maul's problems, Ezra still worked with him on multiple occasions.

Sabine Wren created a weapon of mass destruction for the Empire as a child, then later modifies it to work against the Imperials with the intent of causing suffering: "This isn't enough to kill you. It's just enough to make you suffer." Bo-Katan persuades her to stop.



Doctor Aphra

Working for Vader and Triple-Zero:

- Said she's Vader's biggest fan
- Helped Vader track down Luke
- Went to rescue Vader after he crashed
- Built Vader a droid army
- Stole money to finance Vader
- Helps Vader look for the rebel base
- Her team destroys a settlement for Triple-Zero

Pro-Rebel Activity:

- Hides the location of the Rebel base on Hoth
- Helps Luke and the Rebels in various small skirmishes
- Provides access to Imperial weapons data
- Agrees to help assassinate the Emperor

Anti-Rebel Activity:

- Captures and trades Hera to Imperials
- Extorts Rebels for access to that Imperial weapons data
- Actually ends up saving the Emperor

And yet, knowing this, Leia attempted to recruit her, and the Rebels worked with her on multiple occasions:



Doctor Aphra

Murder and Torture:

Reanimated two psychotic droids as her allies that engaged in extensive mass murder.

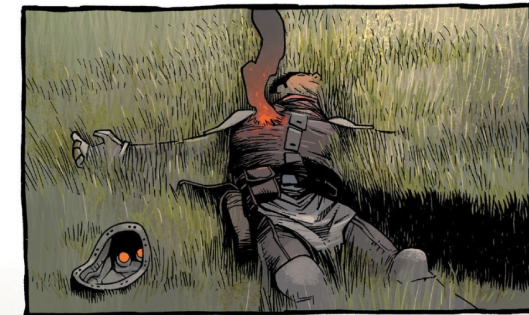
Ordered one of those droids to torture to death Commodore Than, a supporter of Padmé.

Felt pride over shooting a fellow archaeologist in the back.

Manipulated multiple allies into actions that led to their deaths.

Killed everyone in her work squad in prison, and then another hundred convicts through decompression, to escape.

And many more!



Doctor Aphra

Philosophy:

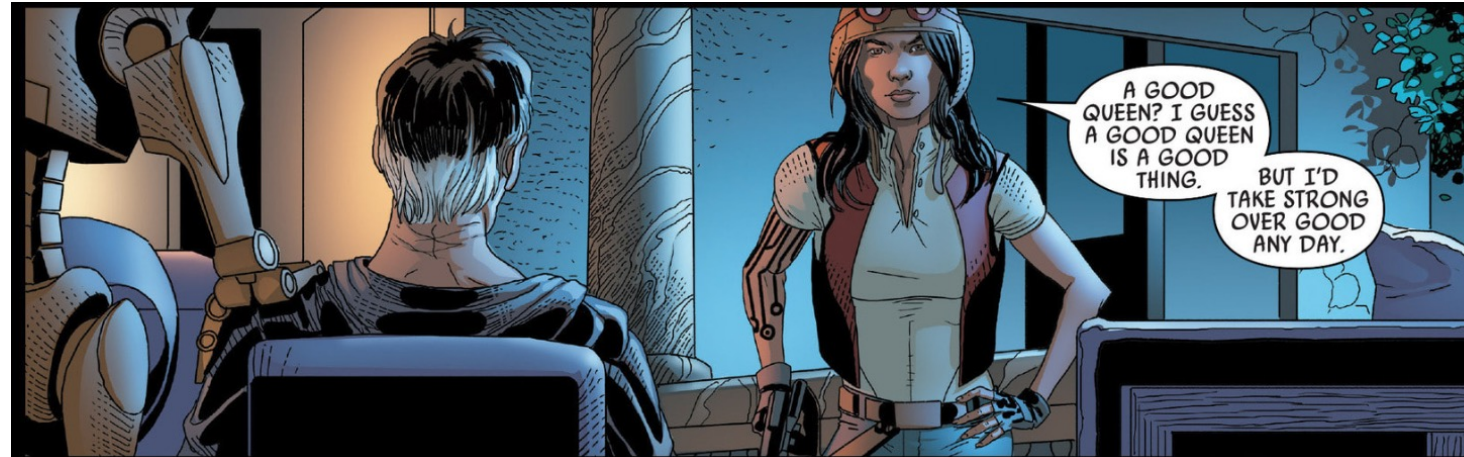
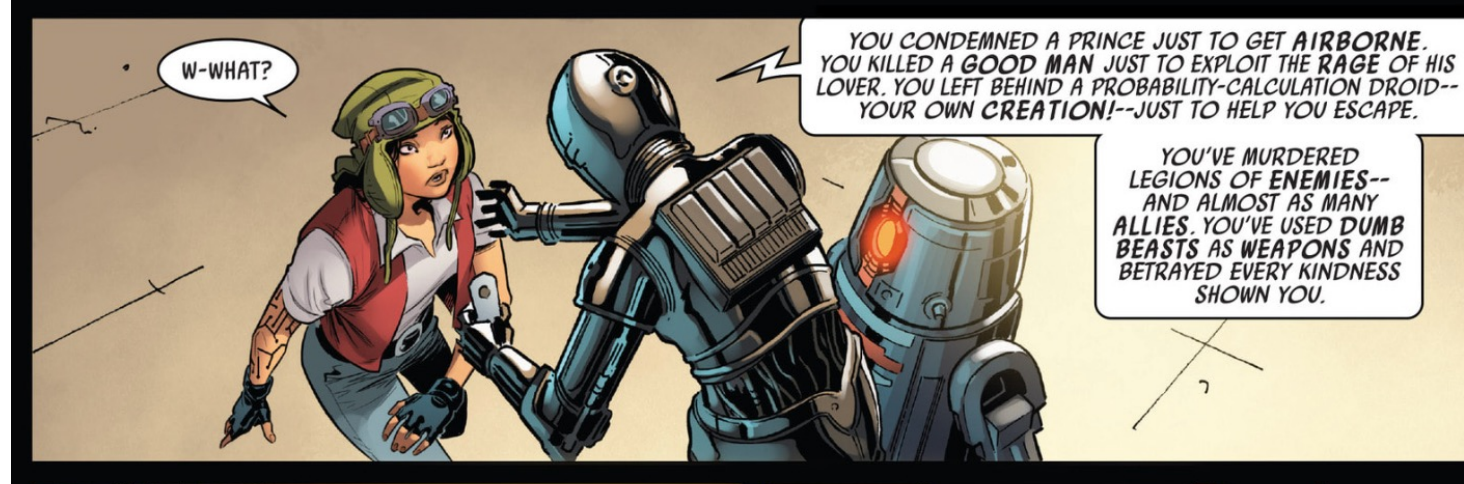
"My mom was killed in the chaos around the clone wars. The Empire isn't perfect, but it keeps people safe."

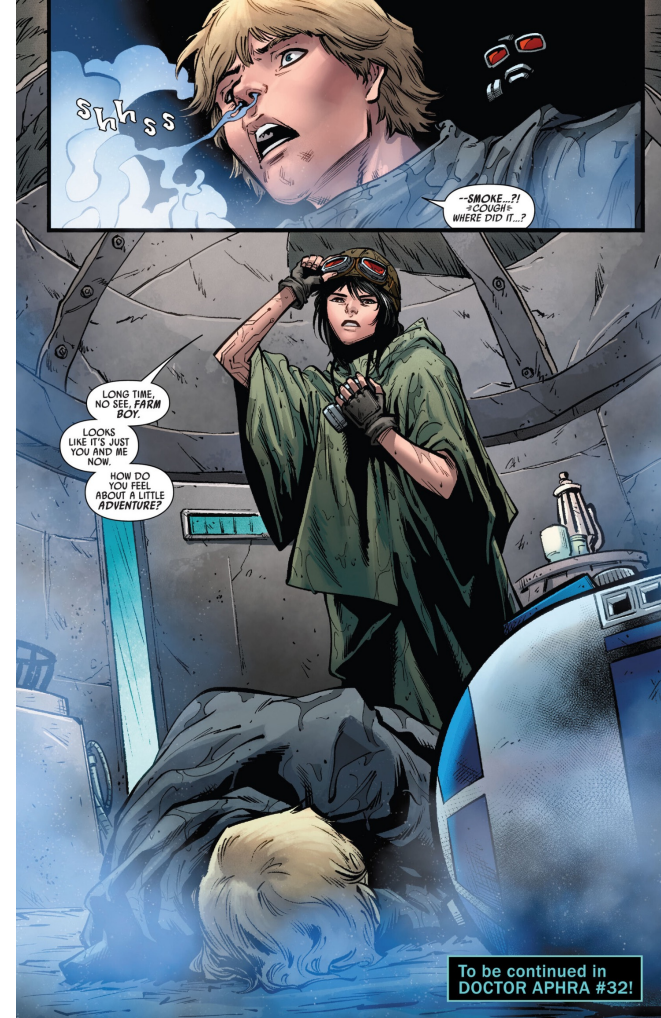
"For normal people? For them, pretty much any peace is better than war."

What Others Have to Say About Aphra:

Dr Cornelius Evazan, a "science monster" with the death sentence on twelve systems, says "I thought I was a monster. Thought I wrote the book on horror among the stars. But you? You made me see I got a lot to learn."

Hunters Windloss and Nokk: "You will never know what it is to think of someone else before you think of you."





Despite all her civilian and war crimes, Luke couldn't decide about her morality.

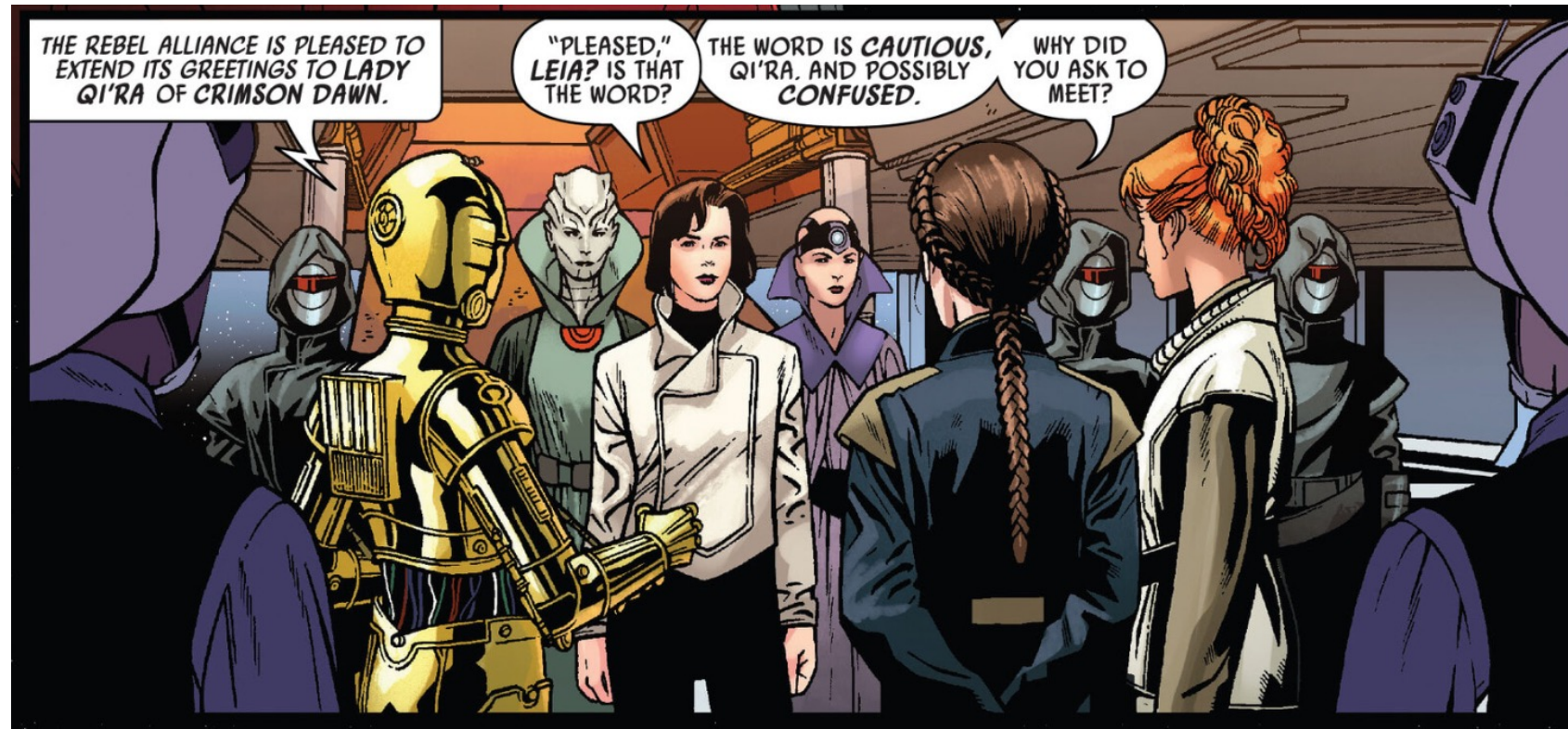
Crimson Dawn

A ruthless criminal syndicate.

Manipulated the Hutts into attacking the imperials as a fleet, killing many Hutts.

Started a war among the other syndicates.

Leia made a deal with Qi'ra, where Crimson Dawn would provide military intelligence in exchange for becoming the Alliance's supplier of fuel and goods.



Comparing Philosophies

Luthen to Lonni: “What is my sacrifice? I’m condemned to use the tools of my enemy to defeat them. I burn my decency for someone else’s future, I burn my life to make a sunrise that I know I’ll never see.”

Andor: “Some of us...most of us...we’ve done terrible things on behalf of the Rebellion. Spies, saboteurs, assassins. Everything I did, I did for the rebellion. And every time I walked away from something I wanted to forget, I told myself it was for a cause that I believed in. A cause that was worth it. Without that, we’re lost. Everything we’ve done would have been for nothing. I couldn’t face myself if I gave up now.”

Saw, Ezra, and Sabine are on an Imperial ship and find both prisoners and a weapon of mass destruction. Ezra and Sabine want to save the prisoners but Saw prioritizes the weapon, and stun-blasts Ezra and Sabine in the back.

Saw: “The difference between us...is that I will do whatever is required to be the victor.”

Ezra: “What about doing what’s right? Isn’t that what this war is about?”

Saw: “What is right? Let me ask you this. What would you do to save your world?...once you [lose yours], you see things clearly. You understand what is at stake.”

Aphra’s mom: “Evil’s just a measure of how much your choices take away other people’s.”

Analysis

They are willing to act like the Empire in the short term to get a better world in the long term—even Leia, who reached out to Doctor Aphra, Crimson Dawn, and the Partisans.

One problem is that while most heroes are thought of as being willing to sacrifice themselves, some of these folks are willing to sacrifice **you** too.

This is contrary to their stated ideals, such as Karis Nemik's manifesto:

“Remember this: freedom is a pure idea. It occurs spontaneously and without instruction.

...

The Imperial need for control is so desperate because it is so unnatural. Tyranny requires constant effort. It breaks, it leaks. Authority is brittle, oppression is the mask of freedom.”

Questions

Most of these people made “the ends justify the means” decisions.

Is this the right choice for a movement?
For a military alliance?

Is it appropriate to make decisions that are war crimes for a certain military result?

Is it appropriate to make decisions that are unethical but not war crimes for a certain military result?

Whose judgement do you most respect?

Which were the most practically effective for the goals of the Alliance?

Are ethical/non war crimes tactics better for recruitment?

Are they better for you to practice now so you can govern ethically later?

Who is “no better than the Empire”?

Who was actually a terrorist, as the Empire called them all?

Is the Rebellion/Resistance something we should use as a metaphor for principled resistance to tyranny?

Who fulfills Aphra’s mom’s definition of evil, “Evil’s just a measure of how much your choices take away other people’s”?

Luthen Rael—sacrifices other soldiers

Mon Mothma—sacrifices her daughter’s future

Cassian Andor—frequent murderer

Ezra Bridger—mind control

Saw Gerrera—torture and murder of civilians

Doctor Aphra—frequent murder and constant manipulation

Crimson Dawn—murder, manipulation, and extortion