

AN ALL-NEW TALE



# THE END OF HISTORY

**A**ntron didn't know much about starfighters, but he felt strongly that a wing should be attached to its vessel, not scattered in sizzling fragments across the blue scrub plains of a nameless moon. As he beat away clouds of smoke, cursing his age and protruding gut, he decided that the pilot of this particular starfighter—which had fallen blazing past the mesa Antron called home barely an hour before—was likely to agree.

He hoped it wouldn't be the *only* thing he and the pilot agreed upon, since he doubted he had the charm or the muscle to keep an irate pirate or murderous fugitive in check. But he reassured himself as best he could: "Jedi Master Vonkhel managed to befriend the Sith Lord of Gairm," he muttered. "All *you* have to do is not admit anything stupid."

As Antron approached the starfighter's cockpit, the viewplate jumped, shuddered, then rose steadily. A flight-

suited figure coated in soot, grease, and dried blood climbed out from the vessel and staggered onto the ground.

The figure's voice was sharp and strained. "I need to find Antron Bach."

Antron froze a moment, then hurried forward and saw beneath the grime a woman young enough to be his granddaughter. "I *am* Antron Bach," he said, before he noticed her hand was touching the blaster at her hip. So much, he thought, for not admitting anything stupid.

"Miru Nadrinakar," the woman said, "of the Corellian Resistance. We need to run."

Antron started to ask a question, but as he sorted through the half-dozen that came to mind he caught sight of something through the smoke—a trio of lights in the sky, winking and following a jagged path among the stars.

"TIE fighters," Miru explained. She hobbled forward and wrapped one arm around Antron's shoulders for support.



MIRU GRIPPED ANTRON HARDER AS THEY WALKED. "THE EMPIRE'S PLANNING A PURGE OF RESISTANCE CELLS. I'VE GOT A DAY TO GET TO CORELLIA AND WARN THEM."

BY ALEXANDER FREED  
WITH ART BY CHRIS SCALF

She stank of sweat, and he flinched at her unexpected nearness. "Their frigate is on the other side of the system," she added, and smiled grimly. "I took out its engines. Give it three hours to get here."

Antron stumbled as Miru urged him away from the wreckage, then quickly found a rhythm as he led her across the scrub plains toward the mesa. She was limping on her right leg, and though Antron searched for a glib comment to distract her from her pain, he thought better of it when he saw the concentration in her eyes.

The winking lights overhead were growing brighter. "I've hidden from Imperial patrols before," he said, trying to sound encouraging. "We'll batten down the hatches, make them think you're wandering the wilds—"

Miru interrupted, quick and harsh. "No hiding," she said. "I need weapons and transport ASAP."  
"You what?" Antron asked.

Miru gripped Antron harder as they walked. "The Empire's planning a purge of resistance cells. I've got a day to get to Corellia and warn them."

Antron's voice dropped an octave. "Let's find shelter," he said.

When they reached the shadow of the mesa and Antron turned at an angle toward the cliffside, they heard the sound of thunder. Antron hadn't seen a storm in all his years on the moon, and when Miru said "They're bombing the crash site," he nodded and searched for courage.

He reminded himself: Jedi Master Va Zhurro had spent six months caring for refugees in a basement during the Clone Wars. Antron could survive a day or two of bombardment.

At the base of the mesa, where the scrawny and twisted bushes of the scrub plains failed to scabble up the steep sides, Antron guided Miru through a crevice barely wider than his shoulders. The crevice, in turn, led to a great steel door embedded in the stone, nearly camouflaged by dust.

With a groan, Antron climbed atop a boulder. The door's rusting keypad was over two meters above the ground, and he strained to tap in the code. "Geonosians colonized this place centuries ago," he said as the door hummed open, "and left it not much later. The mesa's riddled with warrens. Only problem is, most Geonosians *fly*, and I'm not a tall man."

Miru said nothing as Antron returned to her side. He sighed and led her down a tunnel and into the vault.

In a great cavern supported by bare metal beams stood rack after rack of winking, glowing data cartridges that brought a sparkle to the dusty air. In-between the racks were long tables piled with curious artifacts: handwritten parchments and sets of silverware shared equal prominence with delicately etched crystalline cubes and a six-fingered cybernetic hand. Some of the objects had been well-preserved and polished, while others were spotted with rust or stains Antron had failed to prevent.

"What is all this?" Miru asked.

"This," Antron said, with a soft smile and a flick of his hand, "is what's left of the Jedi of the Old Republic."

Miru shook her head, then stepped forward, walking unsteadily around the racks.

Antron went on. "You're looking at generations of history: journals and temple archives and philosophy tracts. Broken lightsabers and thises and thats. Proof of a better world. Everything the Empire wants us to forget."

Miru turned back to Antron, her eyes wide. "Are you..?"

Antron peered back at her, then realized what she was asking and laughed. "I'm not a Jedi, no. I sold *antiques* before the dark times. I made Jedi friends because you get better prices when you drink with your clients... even if you're only drinking tea."

For an instant, Antron remembered the good days, laughing with smugglers or academics or archaeologists in a Coruscant cantina; appraising trinkets or swapping tales with Padawans. He missed drinking. He missed *talking*.

He ran a hand through what was left of his hair. "When it all went south, and Master Uvell asked me to help..." He smiled wryly. "You know he called me a huckster once? Wasn't nice about it, either, but he gave me a ship, loaded up all the artifacts we could find and told me about this place."



He must have been desperate.”

Miru didn't say anything. Antron found himself compelled to fill the silence. "I've been here ever since. Not a smart call on my part, but I didn't much like the look of the Empire and I didn't have the heart to say 'no' to a war hero like Uvell—"

"Your name and coordinates were in an old resistance file. Your Jedi must have passed them along," Miru said.

She lifted a charred fragment of metal from one table and turned it over in her hands—the last of the Chronicles of Med'eeth, salvaged from the ruins of Ossus before Antron had been born.

"I don't know much about them," she said. "I was a kid when they died."

"That's why I'm here," Antron said, his voice softening. "When the Empire finally

falls—a hundred or a thousand years from now—the galaxy will have a lot to relearn. The Jedi were the best of us, and I want their stories preserved."

Miru rubbed her thumb against the charred metal.

"People deserve a history and heroes they can look up to," Antron continued. "That's why I can't help you race off to Corellia. If the Imperials see a ship launch—"

"They'll know there's a base here. The Empire will find you and burn everything."

"Yes," Antron said.

Miru tossed the metal fragment back to the table and the sound rang through the cavern. She straightened, winced at the noise or her injuries, and looked at Antron. "Then I'm sorry," she said. "I'm not here to jeopardize your mission.

But the resistance takes priority over—" She waved

**BREATH-MASKED  
RESIDENTS SCURRIED FOR COVER  
AS THE GUNSHIP RACED OVER  
GLASS-LITTERED AVENUES, PAST  
BOARDED-UP STOREFRONTS,  
TOPPLED MONUMENTS,  
AND GLOOMY CANTINAS.**



a hand at the fragment.  
"—stories."

They stood and watched each other awhile.

Then Antron snorted and forced a smile. "Well," he said, "you can head back to your ship if you like. Otherwise, we can work together—for now—to save our own lives."

Miru merely scowled.

Antron added with a shrug: "You're no good to the resistance dead."

"The good news," Antron told Miru as they crept through cramped tunnels leading higher into the mesa, "is that the colony warrens are pretty sturdy. Hard to spot, too. The bombers shouldn't be a problem."

"And the bad news?"

Miru asked.

"As soon as that Imperial frigate gets close, even the most dimwitted bridge officer will detect the colony power generator. We need to shut it down, or it won't be long before the vault is discovered and the frigate atomizes this whole mesa. Bad for us, regardless of your *priorities*."

Antron went on. "No generator means no light, no water, and no filtered air. We'll be miserable while we hide, but your pursuers will eventually write you off as lost or dead in the scrub plains. Marooned without allies."

"By then," Miru said flatly, "it'll be too late to save the resistance."

Antron didn't reply to that. The thought made his chest ache, but what could he do? Instead he shrugged and added, "There's more bad news."

The generator was near the top of the mesa, he explained, in the colony's old industrial center; now it only housed a few aging machines and Antron's rickety ship. The tunnels would get them partway there, but circumventing the Geonosians' vertical shafts meant a detour onto the cliffsides. "Unless," he added, "you're hiding wings under that flight suit."

As clouds of dust swirled and the bombs rumbled, Antron and Miru emerged onto a path halfway up the mesa and began to hike a bramble-ridden slope toward their goal. "Give it two hours until the frigate arrives," Miru said softly.

"Time enough," Antron replied, fearing it wasn't.

As they walked, stopping only to lie flat whenever a TIE fighter shrieked into view, Antron found himself humming fragments of an old Bith opera: the story of a Jedi Knight who had returned to save his people after journeying across the

stars. Since Antron had come to his moon, his musical options had been limited; yet he'd grown fond of the Song of Lojuun.

Miru had been scowling, limping behind Antron and scanning the horizon for signs of their foe. But the more elaborate Antron's off-key humming became the more she began to smile, until finally she let out a hoarse laugh. "You're awfully cheerful," she said, as they crested the top of the slope.

"Petrified, too," Antron said. "But the Jedi say fear leads to suffering, so I try to busy my mind."

"When you live under the Empire, you *learn* to fear."

"Maybe that's why so many people—" Antron began, before Miru's hand struck between his shoulders, pushing him to his knees. For an instant, Antron wondered if he'd misjudged her—if she'd decided to get rid of him and take her chances alone.

A second later, Miru lay prone at his side, and Antron felt shame at his doubt.

Together, they looked ahead onto the flat top of the mesa. Less than fifty meters away, four figures—three armored in white, one in a black Imperial officer's uniform—prowled the edge of the cliff carrying rangefinders and macrobinoculars.

Miru spoke in a soft, clipped voice. "Search coordinators. I thought they'd set up at the crash site. They must have wanted altitude. They'll keep watch while more troops search the ground."

"They're practically *standing* on the hatch to the generator," Antron breathed. "It's concealed, but if they find it..."

"We need a new plan," Miru said. "Can you get us offworld?"

Antron shook his head. "I've got a ship, but it's barely lightspeed-capable. That frigate won't have any trouble shooting it down."

Miru squeezed his shoulder. "We'll figure it out. No other choice. Lead on."

But Antron didn't move. "If we run, they'll detect the colony and destroy the vault!" he insisted. "Wait for those four to leave; then get in the hatch and shut that generator down."

"They're not going to *leave*," Miru said. "Where's your ship?"

Instead of replying, Antron rose to his feet and began to run along the mesa's top. His legs shook as he waved his arms frantically at the stormtroopers and shouted, "You're here! Thank the stars you're here!"

You're already an eccentric old fool, Antron thought to himself. Just look the part, and you'll be fine.

The stormtroopers trained their weapons on him. "This is my moon," Antron hastily explained. "I saw the crash—a *pirate* attacked me. She ran off! I'll show you!" He flailed vaguely toward the dry forests beyond the scrub plains.

Two of the stormtroopers turned to speak to the officer. The third kept his weapon leveled at Antron.

Finally, one of the troopers—Antron couldn't tell which—raised his voice. "Get on the ground. This moon is supposed to be unoccupied."

Antron lowered himself to his knees and tried to keep babbling about pirates even as he ran out of fresh things to say. But he could make this work, he thought. He didn't need a Jedi mind trick to direct the search away from the mesa. He only hoped Miru would follow his instructions.

She could turn off the generator. She could hide. And Antron could find her once he convinced the stormtroopers that he was just some crazed hermit and that she'd run off to the forests or been disintegrated by a bomb blast.

Unless, of course, Miru stole his ship and exposed the colony anyway.

Antron heard boots crunch on brittle grass, then the crack and hiss of a plasma bolt. He cried out in instinctive panic and clenched the rocky ground.

Then there was another shot. A third.

He scrambled backward, scraping his palms on stone chips and keeping his nose to the dirt. By the time he'd crawled behind a boulder that passed for cover, the shooting had stopped.

Raising his head, Antron saw the four Imperials sprawled on the ground, flames licking burnt holes in their outfits.

"Your plan was stupid," a voice called. He turned to see Miru limping toward him, her blaster in her hand. "They would've killed you and stayed right here."

Antron stood and stared, sputtering sounds that didn't quite form words. Miru scowled, moving to Antron's side and leaning on him again.

"They won't need to search anymore," she said, and Antron realized she was correct. The screaming of the TIE fighters had suddenly grown louder.

The closest bomb detonated less than a hundred meters away, deafening and blinding Antron. For those few, terrifying seconds, Miru kept moving, tugging Antron along with a strength she surely should have lost during the crash.

But the TIEs didn't seem to spot them. Antron's dazed mind struggled to understand before it snapped to a conclusion: The Empire assumed Miru had killed the landing party, and was bombing her last known position.

They still didn't know about Antron or the vault.

By the time Antron and Miru descended through a hatch into the colony's industrial tunnels, Antron's skin was caked in a paste formed from sweat and dust. Miru watched him as he leaned against a rock wall riddled with metal pipes and dim yellow lamps. She was sweating worse than he was, and at some point—during the fight or the bombing, if not hours earlier—she'd developed a cut in her left arm. Blood trickled into her palm.

"Thank you," Antron said. "For saving my life. Several times."

Miru shrugged. "Who'll take over this place if you're blown to bits?"

Antron smiled grimly. "If they blow me up, this place is next."

The tunnels quaked and metal wailed in the distance as something came untethered. Miru took Antron's arm and began walking again. "My father was a historian," she said.

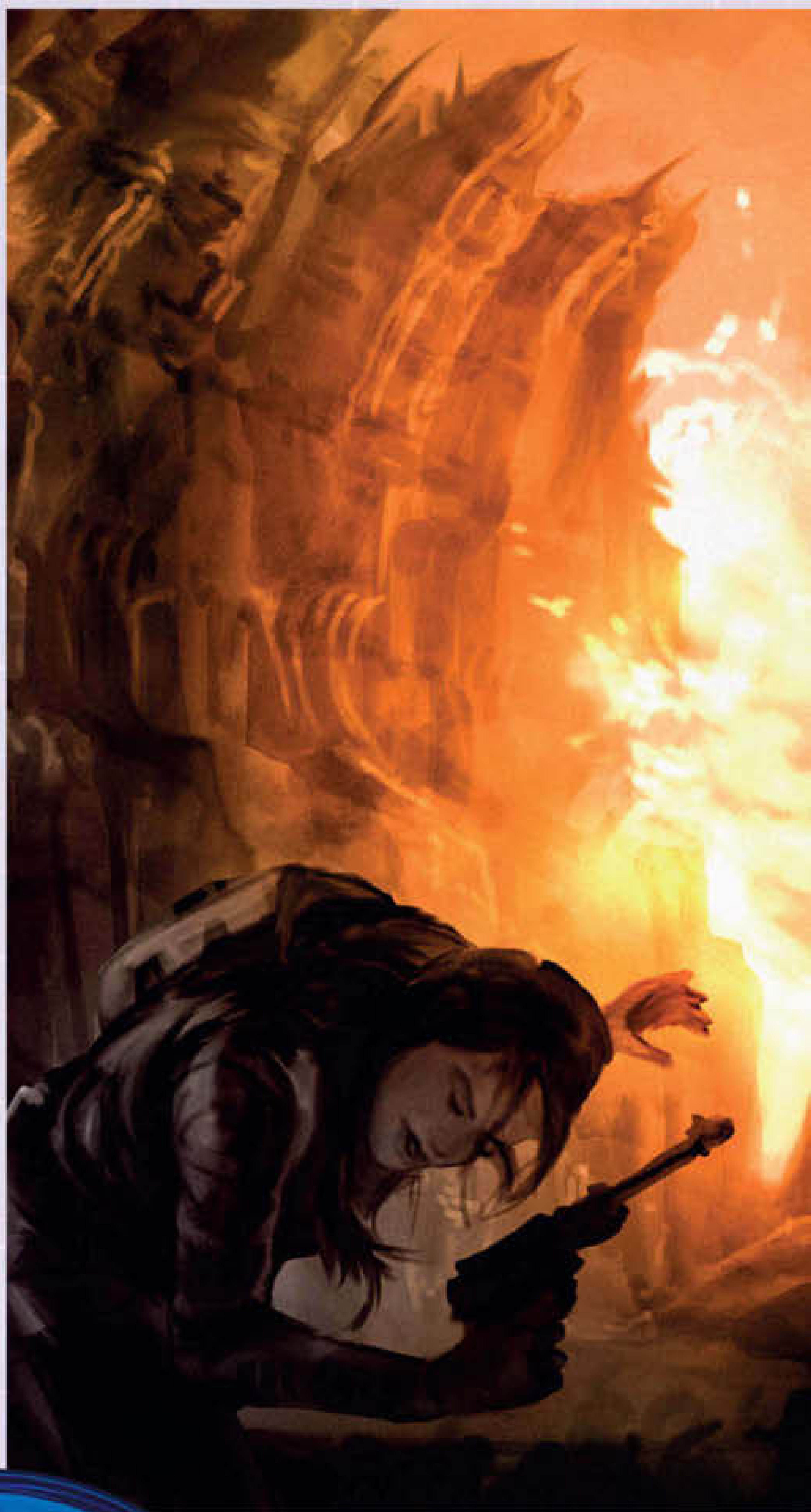
Antron shook his head, trying to follow her logic.

Miru kept talking. "He believed in the Jedi. Believed in the Republic. Before the Empire got to him."

She didn't look at Antron. "I don't remember life before the Empire," she said. "I don't know whether your cave full of stories counts for anything. I can't."

They reached a branch in the tunnel, and Miru halted, waiting for Antron to take the lead. "But you believe in this stuff. You almost died for it. If you say your mission takes priority... we can do it your way."

Antron watched Miru in surprise, watched her stand as straight as she could



**ANTRON WATCHED MIRU IN SURPRISE, WATCHED HER STAND AS STRAIGHT AS SHE COULD DESPITE HER EXHAUSTION AND BRUISES AND CUTS, WAITING FOR ORDERS WITHOUT A WORD OF COMPLAINT.**

despite her exhaustion and bruises and cuts, waiting for orders without a word of complaint.

He listened to a dim, distant rumble and thought of the Jedi Padawan Nes Ukul, who'd given his life protecting a species whose language he didn't speak on a planet whose name he didn't know.

It was Ukul's Master who'd said, "There is no more selfless act than to perish for another's cause."

Antron swallowed, considered praising Miru, thanking her, and decided against it. She didn't seem to need comfort, and he didn't have the dignity to spare.



a ship out of the mesa and off the moon.

There was also the Imperial frigate. He'd need to distract it to give Miru any chance of escaping the system intact. For this, Antron didn't have a plan so much as a grab-bag of stalling tactics: The "confused old man" routine; maybe a fake message from the search party. Somewhere, the colony even had a few weapons waiting to be turned on; with luck, they might be functional.

Antron tapped a command into the workstation, then fumbled through a crate, looking for the colony schematics.

As he dragged a tool chest over to a third console and sat down with a sigh, he wondered whether Miru would understand what had changed his mind.

He thought of all the Jedi whose stories he'd read, their noble deeds and ends. Miru didn't need their inspiration—she'd learned nobility even under the Empire's boot. And she'd reminded him of the ideals he'd wanted to protect.

Sacrificing the vault would be a tragedy. Sacrificing the resistance—sacrificing tough and courageous men and women who struggled every day—didn't seem like a very Jedi thing to do.

*Jedi died for people above things.*

Antron was humming again as he scrubbed dust off a screen with his sleeve and saw that his ship had been powered on. Miru had taken the hint.

The generator room rumbled, metal supports shrieking like TIE fighters, as another bomb struck.

He switched to scanners, watched them blink as the Imperial frigate came into orbit around his moon. He cracked his knuckles, tried not to think about the vault. He had a job to do. One way or another, Miru would get away clean.

And maybe if he was fortunate—if the Force was with him—the vault would survive after all. If the mesa collapsed under a barrage of plasma, some enterprising researcher might dig up the rubble in a century or two. And if Antron somehow *survived* the ordeal, well...

He laughed as he remembered one last story and one last lesson: Jedi might sacrifice themselves, but they never give up hope. 🙄

"You take the left, and I'll take the right," he said. "There's a backup generator you need to shut down while I handle the primary."

Miru frowned. "Can you make it on your own?" she asked.

Antron flapped a hand dismissively. "I'm old and fat, but I can walk down a hallway. Shoo!"

Miru limped into the darkness. Antron turned on his heel and headed down a narrow corridor, emerging into a chamber lined with consoles and cluttered with crates and toolboxes. The generator hummed comfortingly under the floor, and after surveying his surroundings he wiped his brow and set to work.

He thought about Miru, and how in a few moments she'd arrive in the hangar bay and realize he'd lied about the backup generator. He'd have to seal her inside in case she tried to turn back and find him. After that, he could power the bay doors so she could get his heap of

## MORE TO SAY

For more information on Del Rey Books please visit [star-wars.suvudu.com](http://star-wars.suvudu.com)

## HAVE YOU?