

# The Assassins

by RYKO

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# 1 AFTER A YEAR

They were just approaching their destination. He knew that place pretty well - it was his second home. After all, had he ever had a real home? He looked at those huge buildings and their masking facilities once more and was like always impressed by them. He knew that those tons of concrete he could see were only the tip of the iceberg, a little fragment of the whole. The biggest part was hidden under the ground.

A guard at the entrance had checked the licence plate numbers of the car in his terminal before he turned the power field off. The air in front of the car stopped twinkling and the auto-driver proceeded into the parking lot. The passenger did not wait for the guard to open the door (although he could have - his rank entitled him to), but easily unlocked the resistant door himself. He jumped down onto the metal floor of the terminal and looked at his vehicle - Arax 10, one of newest infantry-transporters, a huge thing measuring 7 meters in height and 14 in length).

"In the times we're living there are no small things anymore" - he thought while unlocking a door with his id-key. In the hiss of its pneumatic mechanisms the door gave way to the corridor. After no more than a hundred steps he nearly collided with his ex-instructor Lieutenant Barlow. Gray-haired Barlow had always liked him as one of his best students, but that time, clearly disturbed, he did not even notice the newcomer, and quickly retired into the west exit. "You used to have better nerves, old man", the man thought knocking on Kommandor Warthley's doors. "We all did..."

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Kommandor Warthley was smiling as usual. This time, however, his smile did not look very natural, as if he was trying to cover some nervousness with it.

"Welcome, captain Jonlan. I'm glad you've been able to arrive so quickly. I apologise for interrupting your well deserved holiday, but I believe you'll understand me when I explain the reasons for our meeting."

Jonlan slowly shook his head. In the Kommandor's voice he sensed the same nervousness, which he saw hidden behind his smile. "What's the matter? Have they found a bomb here?" - Jonlan thought. And then, looking at Jonlan, the Kommandor slowly announced: "We have finally received information concerning the person responsible for the death of your wife."

Suddenly the captain felt as if he had been hit by a big calibre bullet. The world in front of his eyes started to fade. He recalled those events once more... The events known only thanks to the recording retrieved from the memories of a damaged droid present on the aerovire that day.

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Zila Jonlan was satisfied. She could not wish for better weather - blue sky, no wind. The aerovire controlled by Jake the pilot was flying steadily and smoothly. Apart from Zila and Jake there were only Steve (the holocamera operator) and a technical droid on board.

When Zila had started investigating into what was happening behind the scenes in the politics of one of the biggest weapon producers she did not expect it would be so easy to collect all the materials needed for the publication. At the moment she only missed a holo (since she became a reporter all her publications contained holo films and she did not want this one to be an exception). "I'm gonna finish that today. And tomorrow I'll take Aris to Morak. He always wanted to see those famous places. And I'd like to write something interesting about Morak..."

"Hey, look! That's his residence. Steve, be ready with your holocamera!" Zila heard Jake's voice. She did not know that man's name, but she knew he used some cybernetic tricks for inducing false memories, that way he wanted to gain control over all the Marsec Corporation.

Jake slowed down and hovered over the garden surrounding a big villa. Zila and Steve holding his holocamera looked down. Up to that moment there had been nothing interesting to look at - an ordinary house in the middle of a big garden, a few satellite dishes on the roof. They had no permission for landing on private area, and Zila started getting irritated: there was really nothing to holotape.

"Make two rounds!", Zila told Jake. And then they saw a man standing next to one of the trees. There was no need to say anything - Steve had already aimed his holocamera at him. The figure in the garden was obviously human, though its armour gave it a cyber-like appearance. The man moved awkwardly and they could see that his armour had probably been custom-made: it was well adjusted to the considerable belly of its owner. Zila got intrigued by a long pipe-shaped object in the man's hands. Excited, she said, "Look at this, the host came out to say hi, how polite! Jake, he's gotta have a radio receiver in his armour, try to contact him! He may give us the landing permit. Well, I doubt it, but let's try anyway."

Jake looked down at the man to check if there was an antenna on his armour. Zila only managed to register that the pilot's face had suddenly got completely pale, when a strong blow of hot air pushed her against the cabin wall. Hardly aware of what was happening she felt something soft falling on her saving her from getting crunched by the sparkling, dysfunctional droid. When she noticed that this 'something soft' was in fact the headless and armless body of Steve, she nearly choked on her own vomit. Attempting to get free she realised she could not move her left arm. Crying in horror she saw it jerking aimlessly two meters away from her. Where it originally belonged were now only open veins and a

fountain of blood. It started getting dark in front of her eyes and she realised she was dying...

Jake roared in pain like an animal. But he was still holding the controls in his hands. Nailed to the seatback by some loose element of the droid he would have been able to see his own bowels on his knees had he not been looking at the machine controls. From his waist down he felt nothing at all, but he knew that he had shitted in his pants. The machine, utterly destroyed, could not keep the height. Jake prayed, "The town is not too far away. Nowadays medicine can make miracles..." But the machine was going down. Jake understood why - he had lost feeling in his own hands. In panic he shouted, "I don't wanna die!!! No!!!"

The machine hit the ground and the explosion caused by sparking in the fuel tanks ripped it into pieces. It was not earlier than then that the droid's eyes died away...

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"Our intelligence has informed us where that motherfucker is now". Hearing this Aris returned to reality. "The information is very precise. His name is Regnix. Sterner Regnix."

"I think I understand..."

"Yes. I want you to take the command of this liquidating action.", looking at Jonlan with some unhealthy fascination the Kommandor confirmed.

"Thank you for the trust. But do you think that after all that... ..you know... ..am I ready?"

"Of course! I'm sure you are! It happened so long ago... By the way, we're short on time; he can move somewhere else. In this situation, I believe, you can skip all the usual med tests."

"Thank you again. I accept the proposal, of course."

"I knew you would! Here are the documents you'll need while planning the action. So, my role ends here. I wish you luck."

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Aris Jonlan had a lot to think about before he went to bed (as he had had much to think about for the whole year spent in The Psychological Health Institute on Kawitan). Once more he was analysing all the events of the day and those, which had taken place eleven months ago. "The Kommandor has never mixed private and official matters. He is OK. He's done it especially for me. I'll have to remember old Barlow's maxim - "HATRED KILLS REASON." With a trembling hand Jonlan poured himself the next round, almost spilling everything on his newly prepared action plan.

"Regnix. Sterner Regnix. Oh, yes... I can already visualise the letters on his tombstone. No! That beast doesn't deserve a grave like Zila's." He was about to cry. "I'll kill him the most cruel way I can think of! Even if he surrenders! Even if he begs for mercy! He's dead already! And his body will be food to Splurges and Dwellers, even if I have to drag it to the second part of the Galaxy! I will bless Kommandor Warthley to the end of my days... I will..."

Indeed, hatred kills reason...

## 2 THE HUNTERS

Naturally, he had a terrible hangover the next day. Moaning, he reached for the medkit and put it to his arm. The apparatus buzzed silently while quickly analysing the blood contents and soon it injected an appropriate antidote. "In half an hour I'll be well, but these chemical tricks will kill me in the end. Well, tough luck, today I mustn't be ill." Jonlan took a quick shower and dressed. He liked his uniform. In fact, he wore it everyday, which had earned him a reputation of a military maniac. He knew though that many of those who called him a fanatic kept heavy lasers or other weapon at home themselves.

He was very hungry, but managed to restrain himself from eating anything. There was no use risking getting shot in the filled stomach. Locking the door, he thought, "I wonder who will clean up my room, if I... Anyway, that won't be easy." He left.

"I wonder who will clean up..."

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There were four men waiting for him Jonlan a little waiting-room. They stood up and saluted, when he came in. He quickly examined them: "Uniforms in the ideal shape, I certainly appreciate passion for order. They seem to be a good choice." He was satisfied - yesterday he had spent many hours studying psychological profiles of over two hundred soldiers. He knew the importance of the so-called "human factor" in action.

ANDERSON - his second-in-command. He had been examined most precisely: he might have to take over the command and continue the action... Eight years of good military service, wounded three times, very loyal, never been commanding. Impressive body build. Primary specialisation: rear protection. Secondary specialisation: battlefield medician.

STONE - Four years in the army, ordinary but loyal service. Has a wife and a small daughter. Does not like killing, never does it without necessity. In the past an accident with a Patrol Droid which almost got him killed, now he hates all droids, even civil ones. Primary specialisation: heavy weapons operator. Secondary specialisation: communication technician."

HARRIS - Saudarkar, ten years of service, five actions on Morak. A very interesting person, a real maniac (famous for killing a Battle Droid with a light sabre). In 2489 degradation due to killing a sardaukar who wanted to surrender. Artificial right arm (too risky grenade throw). Scorns death, never afraid. Primary specialisation: grenades. Secondary specialisation: traps.

TURNER - two years in the army, ex-mercenary, well trained. A villain, enjoys killing, but knows the limits. Interested and cynical. One of the best snipers in the army. Primary specialisation: sniper. Secondary specialisation: killing from hidden positions”

”Sit down, gentlemen. I’m captain Aris Jonlan. I’m gonna command you in the battle today. You’re all professionalists, so I’ll concentrate on the main points”, he switched the holoplayer on. ”This is the aim of our attack on the recreational planet CX-1. We’re gonna move by Arax 12 because of its masking capabilities. The house has only one level, there are no armoured windows nor doors.” Turner smiled at the thought of windows.

”Two entrances,” Jonlan continued. ”I and Anderson will enter the right, Stone and Harris the left one. Turner will take care of the windows. And now a few words about our enemies: the aim is protected by an unknown number of Combat Droids, model 2, made on Triox, armed with Blasters M-7000, with 256 spare energetic units. Armour: twenty on the front, sixteen on both sides and twelve on the back - weak armour, isn’t it? The aim himself handles weapon pretty well, too. That’s all. Any questions? So, let’s proceed to the gunroom.”

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The gunroom was a big hall divided into two equal parts. One could always sense some specific atmosphere there, maybe that was why Jonlan loved that place so much. Five men came in and went in the direction of several huge metal cupboards with doors made of some transparent material. The men found their cupboards by the numbers they had been assigned. ”Just like in kindergarten”, Jonlan found that thought funny, but at the same time strangely depressing...

As the men opened their cupboards, puffs of preservative gas got out. Inside there were products of the most advanced technology known to humanity - The Battle Uniforms of Armoured Infantry, better known as just Armours. The commander looked tenderly at his armour - it had been waiting for him for a year. He began by undressing completely and putting a special pair of tight, elastic trousers on. The trousers were equipped with a small, uncomfortable, but necessary device collecting urine (a subject of many jokes, along with Battle Droids). The armour was very heavy due to the amount of karvin used in its production, so Jonlan had to use a special electric crane to put it on. The karvin invention was a real break-thru: it finally made it possible to protect soldiers from the energetic and some other types of newer traditional weapon.

He was ready in ten minutes. The armour was really impressive - it weighted

a ton, but thanks to a hydraulic mechanism powered by a small local generator Aris could freely move.

He looked at the helmet he was holding in his huge gloves. The helmet – the state-of-the-art achievement in electronic miniaturisation – provided sight enhancement systems, special glasses, strategic scanner, and a speed-aim system. Before putting the helmet on Jonlan removed dust from a small picture of a smiling sectoid. Jonlan had made this picture a long time ago, although Barlow (back then still a sergeant) had warned him, "When the enemy shoots at an unknown unit, it's routine. It gets worse if he recognises, say, an old personal opponent. Then he might get better motivated, even fanatical." Sergeant Barlow was like father for Jonlan, but that time Aris had not followed his advice, and, after the common trend, drew the sectoid on the inside of the helmet front glass. In a short time that picture had become famous in the enemy armies.

Jonlan put the helmet on. The assassins were ready too. Only the saudarkar did not want any armour. He scorned it. They had checked all the installations for the last time, and moved to the next room: a store of most modern tools men and other races devised to kill. They armed themselves. The commander and his second-in-command took marsecs with two magazines - the best weapon of that part of Galaxy. Stone chose a heavy laser (worse than a marsec, but with a higher shooting speed) and a cartridge of fifty energetic units. Harris chose some AP-50 grenades, and an M-4000. Turner, as usual, took a sniper rifle with a very precise aiming system (only single shoots).

Having armed themselves, they proceeded to the interplanetary launchpad, where a small, but very fast space craft was waiting for them. Boarding, everybody thought about one thing - Would they ever see that planet again?

Everybody but Jonlan.

He thought about Regnix.

### **3 THE PRICE OF REVENGE**

The journey took about two hours, but it was tiring because of the armours. Anderson kept studying the action plan, looking for dangerous moments. Stone was trying to write something (a testament?), which was not easy with the battle gloves on, Turner was telling jokes to himself, and Harris was asleep - the best testimony of his great psychical condition.

Jonlan was thinking of the past.

Before he met her, he had not believed in sentiments: as an in vitro child he had never had anyone close. Their meeting was quite a cliché. After the spectacular action on Luna (where Jonlan together with one saudarkar broke the defence of the whole enemy base) she interviewed him. It was the beginning. They had gone to bed a few times, just for the fun of it, and then he understood it was the real thing.

He only knew two feelings now - the second one he had experienced on the day of her death.

"It's today. Today. At last."

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In the military base on CX-1 they took an Arax 12. Jonlan had chosen this model because of its holo-masking systems, thanks to which they could get undetected as close as seventy meters to the aim. The vehicle was expertly driven by a sectoid, a small humanoid creature whose face resembled that of a mouse. The sectoid turned out to be a very talkative one. All the way he kept talking, mispronouncing the 'w' sound in the manner typical of its race. After twenty minutes they saw a house on their monitors. Arax stopped. As they were leaving, the driver said:

"Good luck! I'll ait for you here! For the whole team!"

They had to run sixty-five meters uncovered. Even though their armours had special systems jamming the visual field of droids, they knew they would not come in undetected - the enemy had been waiting for them. The soldiers reached the house and the squad parted. Nobody was shooting at them yet. "They don't wanna risk, perhaps prefer shorter distances", Jonlan thought approaching the right entrance with Anderson.

"Positions reached?", asked, and when heard the acknowledgement: "Now! No prisoners!"

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Stone sent an energy beam into the door and smelted it. Harris came in at once and faced two Combat Droids. In less than a second a series of blaster flames turned his unarmoured body into a bloody arid substance. The saudarkar died with a smile on his lips. The robots did not notice an AP-50 grenade rolling in their direction from his dead hand... Turner had reached the window and quietly broke it with his weapon. At the same moment a big explosion shook the whole house breaking all the windows on his side. A moment later Turner saw Droid 7 going to the source of the detonation. Turner aimed and, smiling maliciously, pulled the trigger. The bullet punctured the droid and killed it. The hunter nodded and continued the search.

After destroying the door the captain intended to enter at once, but his second-in-command stopped him and came in himself (he considered it too dangerous for the commander). Suddenly Anderson felt a stinging pain in his right arm and saw Combat 3 whose barrel still smoked. Holding the gun in his left hand Anderson killed the droid with a full series. The Combat Droid, pushed by the power of the bullet to the next room, in puffs of smoke ceased to exist. Anderson looked at the source of his pain. The energy beam of the droid's weapon had cut off half of his arm. The wounded arm was being dressed by the medical systems



of the armour, which also gave remedy against the shock. Jonlan came in just in time: two bullets from his laser destroyed Droid 5 attempting to kill off the wounded soldier. Jonlan expertly looked at Anderson's wounds and concluded "He's gonna live!"

Turner came to the next window and looked in. And gasped in horror when he saw a muzzle levelled at him. The first shot stopped at the helmet, but it made Turner blind. Before the ex-mercenary was able to realise what had just happened, the second bullet turned his helmet into a bowl of bloody soup. The weight of the armour brought him to the ground.

The whole hall was demolished. Stone was just carefully passing the remains of two droids, still in flames, and something else (he did not even want to know what it was) when suddenly he noticed a metallic shine and sent a long series of laser beams in that direction, killing a droid. Had he come in sooner, Turner would have been still alive.

Aris had thrown a grenade and after one moment he could see the results of its work: pieces of a destroyed droid burst out from behind the corner. "Imagine I haven't done this...", he thought and surely took one step. He had felt a strong hit on his chest, almost bashing him down despite the weight of his armour. He automatically pulled the trigger and saw Droid 1 being destroyed by the bullets. Jonlan understood that he had been saved by his armour (it was strongest just at the chest part). Yet he felt pain when breathing and probably had broken ribs. Having thanked his destiny Aris entered the main corridor.

And understood that he had to die. About six meters in front of him, nearby the room door, an armoured man stood and kept his Marsec aimed at him. Aris' weak armour would not stop any more hits. But the opponent looked at the captain and dropped his gun instead of using it. He made a tragic "Don't shot!!!" gesture.

Jonlan saw massacred Zila in front of his eyes. He shouted, "You mother-fucker! It's for her!" and pulled the trigger. The enemy's armour stopped two bullets, and the third one went through, throwing pieces of lungs and ribs out through the hole it made in the man's back. The shot man stood still for a moment, wheezing and quaking, and then fell down.

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"Through. All through", Aris thought, "Now I wanna look into his face." He approached the punctured body and installed the helmet off. And became speechless with horror. Dead eyes of Lieutenant Barlow were staring at Jonlan. On that terrible instant he understood the whole cruel truth.

He understood, why Wearthley and Barlow had been so nervous the day before. They must have had an argument just before his arrival.

He understood, why he had been chosen for that action. Wearthley wanted to be sure that in the deciding moment Barlow would face someone, who would

not hesitate to pull the trigger.

He understood, why Kommandor had not sent him to do the med tests - mental specialists would have found a complex of hatred in Aris' psyche making it impossible for him to correctly assess the situation.

He understood, why he was still alive. Lieutenant had noticed the picture on his helmet, and that was why he dropped his weapon.

And then he began to cry like a little child, kneeling at the body of one of the two people whom he had ever loved. He still could not answer the most important question - "Why? What was my role? Why did the old Lieutenant have to die?"

Stone and dazed with medicaments Anderson came just in time to stop the commander from doing away with himself...

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A few days later a note appeared in the press: In yet unexamined circumstances one of the principal commanders of our army, Kommandor Jason Wearthley, left our planet and moved to an unknown location. The exhaustive investigation has brought to light that he was the main force behind the widely heard-of scandal in the Marsec corporation managing board. He is also directly responsible for the crash of one of our aerovires (three employees were killed). His latest crime was a sneaky misuse of the Special Group of Armoured Infantry to slay Lieutenant Barlow, who had probably discovered Kommandor's dirty doings. The Star Police has undertaken an extensive search for Wearthley.

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Now Jonlan has got a lot of time for thinking. How much time will he spend here this time? "It's not that bad here. Everybody takes care of me... Only these doors without handles... But, damn it, I'm not insane, they won't keep me here forever! One day they'll release me. Or I'll escape... And then I'll find you, Wearthley, and you'll pray for a quick death. I'll enjoy your pangs. I'll kill you slowly, cool. Without hatred..."

Hatred kills reason.

P.S.: All those events really took place and the people depicted in the story did exist. You can check it yourself - play LASER SQUAD, first scenario - THE ASSASSINS...

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Written by: © RYKO, Gdansk 1992.05.07

Translation from Polish: © tsca, Gdansk 1993.01.29 [tsca: Sorry for the broken English of this translation. This is on purpose!!!]