



Star Wars Tarkin (novela)

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James Luceno

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Luceno insufla vida a Grand Moff Tarkin, un fascinante personaje clásico de Star Wars: Una nueva esperanza.

Relato situado entre los Episodios III y IV.

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"Tarkin narra un relato convincente de misterio a la vez que revela mucho acerca de un personaje polémico y el régimen opresor que representa. [James] Luceno ha demostrado una vez más que los villanos de Star Wars son más divertidos que los buenos. "- New York Daily News.

*LANZAMIENTO ESPECIAL MES STAR WARS Y LA LECTURA (OCTUBRE)

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320 pages

Extrait

1

The Measure of a Man

A saying emerged during the early years of the Empire: Better to be spaced than based on Belderone. Some commentators traced the origin to the last of the original Kamino-grown soldiers who had served alongside the Jedi in the Clone Wars; others to the first crop of cadets graduated from the Imperial academies. Besides expressing disdain for assignments on worlds located far from the Core, the adage implied that star system assignment was a designator of worth. The closer to Coruscant one was posted, the greater one's importance to the Imperial cause. Though on Coruscant itself most effectives preferred to be deployed far from the Palace rather than anywhere within range of the Emperor's withering gaze.

For those in the know, then, it seemed inexplicable that Wilhuff Tarkin should be assigned to a desolate moon in a nameless system in a remote region of the Outer Rim. The closest planets of any note were the desert world Tatooine and equally inhospitable Geonosis, on whose irradiated surface the Clone Wars had begun and which had since become a denied outlier to all but an inner circle of Imperial scientists and engineers. What could the former admiral and adjutant general have done to merit an assignment most would have regarded as a banishment? What insubordination or dereliction of duty had prompted the Emperor to exile one he himself had promoted to the rank of Moff at the end of the war? Rumors flew fast and furious among Tarkin's peers in all branches of the military. Tarkin had failed to carry out an important mission in the Western Reaches; he had quarreled with the Emperor or his chief henchman, Darth Vader; or his reach had simply exceeded his grasp, and he was paying the price for naked ambition. For those who knew Tarkin personally, however, or had even a passing familiarity with his upbringing and long record of service, the reason for the assignment was obvious: Tarkin was engaged in a clandestine Imperial enterprise.

In the memoir that was published years after his incendiary death, Tarkin wrote:

After much reflection, I came to realize that the years I spent at Sentinel Base were as formative as my years of schooling on Eriadu's Carrion Plateau, or as significant as any of the battles in which I had participated or commanded. For I was safeguarding the creation of an armament that would one day shape and guarantee the future of the Empire. Both as impregnable fortress and as symbol of the Emperor's inviolable rule, the deep-space mobile battle station was an achievement on the order of any fashioned by the ancestral species that had unlocked the secret of hyperspace and opened the galaxy to exploration. My only regret was in not employing a firmer hand in bringing the project to fruition in time to frustrate the actions of those determined to thwart the Emperor's noble designs. Fear of the station, fear of Imperial might, would have provided the necessary deterrent.

Not once in his personal writings did Tarkin liken his authority to that of the Emperor or of Darth Vader, and yet even so simple a task as overseeing the design of a new uniform was perhaps a means of casting himself in garb as distinctive as the hooded robes of the former or the latter's signature black mask.

"An analysis of trends in military fashion on Coruscant suggests a more tailored approach," a protocol droid was saying. "Tunics continue to be double-breasted with choker collars, but are absent shoulder-boards or epaulets. What's more, trousers are no longer straight-legged, but flared in the hips and thighs, narrowing at the cuffs so as to be easily tucked into tall boots with low heels."

“A commendable alteration,” Tarkin said.

“May I suggest, then, sir, flare-legged trousers—in the standard-issue gray-green fabric, of course—accented by black knee boots with turndown topside cuffs. The tunic itself should be belted at the waist, and fall to mid-thigh.”

Tarkin glanced at the silver-bodied humaniform couturier. “While I can appreciate devotion to one’s sartorial programming, I’ve no interest in initiating a fashion trend on Coruscant or anywhere else. I simply want a uniform that fits. Especially the boots. The stars know, my feet have logged more kilometers aboard Star Destroyers than during surface deployments, even in a facility of this size.”

The RA-7 droid canted its shiny head to one side in a show of disapproval. “There is a marked difference between a uniform that ‘fits’ and a uniform that suits the wearer—if you take my meaning, sir. May I also point out that as a sector governor you have the freedom to be a bit more, shall we say, daring. If not in color, then in the hand of the cloth, the length of the tunic, the cut of the trousers.”

Tarkin considered the droid’s remarks in silence. Years of shipboard and downside duties had not been kind to the few dress and garrison uniforms he retained, and no one on Sentinel Base would dare criticize any liberties he might take.

“All right,” he said finally, “display what you have in mind.”

Dressed in an olive-drab body glove that encased him from neck to ankles and concealed the scars left by wounds from blasterfire, falls, and the claws of predators, Tarkin was standing on a low circular platform opposite a garment-fabricator whose several laser readers were plying his body with red beams, taking and recording his measurements to within a fraction of a millimeter. With his legs and arms spread, he might have been a statue mounted on a plinth, or a target galvanized in the sights of a dozen snipers. Adjacent to the fabricator sat a holotable that projected above its surface a life-sized hologram of him, clothed in a uniform whose designs changed in accordance with the silent commands of the droid, and which could be rotated on request or ordered to adopt alternate postures.

The rest of Tarkin’s modest quarters were given over to a bunk, a dresser, fitness apparatus, and a sleek desk situated between cushioned swivel chairs and two more basic models. A man of black-and-white tastes, he favored clean lines, precise architecture, and an absence of clutter. A large viewport looked out across an illuminated square of landing field to a massive shield generator, and beyond to the U-shaped range of lifeless hills that cradled Sentinel Base. On the landing field were two wind-blasted shuttles, along with Tarkin’s personal starship, the Carrion Spike.

Sentinel’s host moon enjoyed close to standard gravity, but it was a cold forlorn place. Wrapped in a veil of toxic atmosphere, the secluded satellite was battered by frequent storms and as colorless as the palette that held sway in Tarkin’s quarters. Even now an ill-omened tempest was swooping down the ridge and beginning to pelt the viewport with stones and grit. Base personnel called it “hard rain,” if only to lighten the dreariness such storms conjured. The dark sky belonged chiefly to the swirling gas giant that owned the moon. On those long days when the moon emerged into the light of the system’s distant yellow sun, the surface glare was too intense for human eyes, and the base’s viewports had to be sealed or polarized.

“Your impressions, sir?” the droid said.

Tarkin studied his full-color holo-doppelgänger, focusing less on the altered uniform than on the man it

contained. At fifty he was lean to the point of gaunt, with strands of wavy gray streaking what had been auburn hair. The same genetics that had bequeathed him blue eyes and a fast metabolism had also granted him sunken cheeks that imparted a masklike quality to his face. His narrow nose was made to appear even longer than it was courtesy of a widow's peak that had grown more pronounced since the end of the war. As well, deep creases now bracketed his wide, thin-lipped mouth. Many described his face as severe, though he judged it pensive, or perhaps penetrating. As for his voice, he was amused when people attributed his arrogant tone to an Outer Rim upbringing and accent.

He turned his clean-shaven face to both sides and lifted his chin. He folded his arms across his chest, then stood with his hands clasped behind his back, and finally posed akimbo, with his fists planted on his hips. Drawing himself up to his full height, which was just above human average, he adopted a serious expression, cradling his chin in his right hand. There were few beings to whom he needed to offer salute, though there was one to whom he was obliged to bow, and so he did, straight-backed but not so low as to appear sycophantic.

"Eliminate the top line collars on the boots, and lower the heels," he told the droid.

"Of course, sir. Standard duranium shank and toes for the boots?"

Tarkin nodded.

Stepping down from the platform, out from inside the cage of laser tracers, he began to walk circles around the hologram, appraising it from all sides. During the war, the belted tunic, when closed, had extended across the chest on one side and across the midsection on the other; now the line was vertical, which appealed to Tarkin's taste for symmetry. Just below each shoulder were narrow pockets designed to accommodate short cylinders that contained coded information about the wearer. A rank insignia plaque made up of two rows of small colored squares was affixed to the tunic's left breast.

Medals and battle ribbons had no place on the uniform, nor in the Imperial military. The Emperor was scornful of commendations for sand or pluck. Where another leader might wear garments of the finest synthsilk, the Emperor favored robes of black-patterned zeyd cloth, often concealing his face within the cowl—furtive, exacting, ascetic.

"More to your liking?" the droid asked when its cordwainer program had tasked the holoprojector to incorporate changes to the boots.

"Better," Tarkin said, "except perhaps for the belt. Center an officer's disk on the buckle and a matching one on the command cap." He was about to elaborate when a childhood recollection took him down a different path, and he snorted in self-amusement.

He must have been all of eleven at the time, dressed in a multipocketed vest he thought the perfect apparel for what he had assumed was going to be a jaunt on the Carrion Plateau. On seeing the vest, his grand-uncle Jova had smiled broadly, then issued a laugh that was at once avuncular and menacing.

"It'll look even better with blood on it," Jova had said.

"Do you find something humorous in the design, sir?" the droid asked in what amounted to distress.

Tarkin shook his head. "Nothing humorous, to be sure."

The foolishness of the fitting wasn't lost on him. He understood that he was simply trying to distract himself from having to fret over delays that were impeding progress on the battle station. Shipments from research sites had been postponed; asteroid mining at Geonosis was proving unfeasible; construction phase deadlines had not been met by the engineers and scientists who were supervising the project; a convoy transporting vital components was due to arrive .??.

In the ensuing silence, the storm began to beat a mad tattoo on the window.

Doubtless Sentinel Base was one of the Empire's most important outposts. Still, Tarkin had to wonder what his paternal grand-uncle—who had once told him that personal glory was the only quest worth pursuing—would make of the fact that his most successful apprentice was in danger of becoming a mere administrator.

His gaze had returned to the hologram when he heard urgent footsteps in the corridor outside the room.

On receiving permission to enter, Tarkin's blond-haired, clear-eyed adjutant hastened through the door, offering a crisp salute.

"A priority dispatch from Rampart Station, sir."

A look of sharp attentiveness erased Tarkin's frown. Coreward from Sentinel in the direction of the planet Pii, Rampart was a marshaling depot for supply ships bound for Geonosis, where the deep-space weapon was under construction.

"I won't tolerate further delays," he started to say.

"Understood, sir," the adjutant said. "But this doesn't concern supplies. Rampart reports that it is under attack."

2

Blows Against the Empire

The door to Tarkin's quarters whooshed open, disappearing into the partition, and out he marched, dressed in worn trousers and ill-fitting boots, with a lightweight gray-green duster draped over his shoulders. As the adjutant hurried to keep pace with the taller man's determined steps, the strident voice of the protocol droid slithered through the opening before the door resealed itself.

"But, sir, the fitting!"

Originally a cramped garrison base deployed from a Victory-class Star Destroyer, Sentinel now sprawled in all directions as a result of prefabricated modules that had since been delivered or assembled on site. The heart of the facility was a warren of corridors linking one module to the next, their ceilings lost behind banks of harsh illuminators, forced-air ducts, fire-suppression pipes, and bundled strands of snaking wires. Everything had an improvised look, but as this was Moff Wilhuff Tarkin's domain, the radiantly heated walkways and walls were spotless, and the pipes and feeds were meticulously organized and labeled with alphanumeric. Overworked scrubbers purged staleness and the smell of ozone from the recycled air. The corridors were crowded not only with specialists and junior officers, but also with droids of all sizes and shapes, twittering, beeping, and chirping to one another as their optical sensors assessed the speed and

momentum of Tarkin's forward march and propelling themselves out of harm's way at the last possible instant, on treads, casters, repulsors, and ungainly metal legs. Between the blare of distant alarms and the warble of announcements ordering personnel to muster stations, it was difficult enough to hear oneself think, and yet Tarkin was receiving updates through an ear bead as well as communicating continually with Sentinel's command center through a speck of a microphone adhered to his voice box.

He wedged the audio bead deeper into his ear as he strode through a domed module whose skylight wells revealed that the storm had struck with full force and was shaking Sentinel for all it was worth. Exiting the dome and moving against a tide of staff and droids, he right-angled through two short stretches of corridor, doors flying open at his approach and additional personnel joining him at each juncture—senior officers, navy troopers, communications technicians, some of them young and shorn, most of them in uniform, and all of them human—so that by the time he reached the command center, the duster billowing behind him like a cape, it was as if he were leading a parade.

At Tarkin's request, the rectangular space was modeled after the sunken data pits found aboard Imperial-class Star Destroyers. Filing in behind him, the staffers he had gathered along the way rushed to their duty stations, even while others already present were leaping to their feet to deliver salutes. Tarkin waved them back into their swivel chairs and positioned himself on a landing at the center of the room with a clear view of the holoimagers, sensor displays, and authenticators. Off to one side of him, Base Commander Cassel, dark-haired and sturdy, was leaning across the primary holoprojector table, above which twitched a grainy image of antique starfighters executing strafing runs across Rampart's gleaming surface, while the marshaling station's batteries responded with green pulses of laser energy. In a separate holovid even more corrupted than the first, insect-winged Geonosian laborers could be seen scrambling for cover in one of the station's starfighter hangars. A distorted voice was crackling through the command center's wall-mounted speaker array. *Revue de presse*

"*Tarkin* tells a compelling tale of mystery while revealing much about a character who has fueled debate among fans since 1977, as well as the oppressive regime he represents. [James] Luceno has proven once again that the villains of *Star Wars* are as much fun as the good guys."—**New York Daily News**

"Another home run in the new canon . . . This is the highest and best distillation of Tarkin stories, old and new, we've ever been given."—**Big Shiny Robot**

"A spectacular novel, with the intrigue, action, and profound characterization we have come to expect from the pen of Luceno . . . [*Tarkin*] provides a nuanced, multi-faceted anti-hero who is captivating, ominous, and calculating; in many ways, this is an origin tale of the Empire [and] a fascinating portrait of one of the more popular characters in the Original Trilogy. It may very well be one my favorite *Star Wars* novels."—**Coffee with Kenobi**

"A fascinating look at the pathos of one of the galaxy's most criminally underused characters."—**TheForce.net** Présentation de l'éditeur

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