

The Purifier

Another soul, naked and flayed, screamed deliciously as it was dragged into The Lantern. Thresh grinned a wicked grin as he watched, and shook his Lantern like a child with a fish bowl. The agitated souls drifted around, a cacophony of satisfying wails echoing from within.

He breathed in the aroma of their suffering, letting out a satisfied sigh. Such delightful agony. He paused in his reverie to consider his next victim. There was a small walnut orchard nearby that reeked of prosperity. Perhaps –

A flash of light and a familiar, dangerous sound interrupted his musings. With a speed that only a wraith warden could match, Thresh raised his Lantern and cast his hooked chains toward his ambusher.

He was not fast enough. For the first time since his transformation, Thresh felt pain.

Searing white light burned in his vision as he fell, a glowing hole in his chest trailing white smoke. Time seemed to slow around him, sights and sounds becoming crisp and clear. His spectral body refused to obey him as he heard the crunch of slow, deliberate footsteps. With some difficulty, he forced his head to loll to the side, bringing his ambusher into view.

He walked with his head down, twin relic weapons at his side, trailing the same glowing white smoke. Despite the gusting breeze, the smoke rose from the guns undisturbed.

Lucian... *'The Purifier.'* Thresh scoffed inwardly. What sweet savor it would be to scrape the marrow from his bones. He tried again to rise, but his spectral form refused to knit his wound. With numb resignation, he realized that he was about to die. Well... again.

The Purifier came to a halt, stepping on the Thresh's wrist as he tried feebly to raise his weapon. The Chain Warden felt a brief pang of joy as he noticed a tear trailing down Lucian's rage-filled visage. Then two words silenced all else in his mind, echoing with soul-rending finality.

"For Senna."

Thresh screamed and writhed as purging beams began searing through him. He was dimly aware of another scream, filled with pain but seasoned with triumph. Thresh and Lucian screamed together for what seemed like an eternity, the Relic weapons flashing again and again, burning away every piece of Thresh's spectral form until there was nothing left but a pile of faintly glowing ash.

When the last bit of his prey was finally purged from the world, Lucian dropped his weapons and wept. Tears that he had not allowed himself to shed for years flowed out of him as he rushed toward the hated Lantern. Its green glow, a harbinger of terror and suffering for so long, would soon be snuffed out. Senna would be free.

He flipped the latch on the small door and pulled on the handle. It didn't move. His eyes widened in rage and he pulled with all his strength, a rictus snarl accompanying a wet scream. It would not open. He

swung The Lantern with all his strength at the rocky ground, but it would not break. Casting it aside, he strode purposefully to his Relics. Spinning where he stood, he aimed at The Lantern and paused.

An unnatural breeze was stirring the ashes of his hated nemesis, and the glow from within them was growing brighter. Lucian rushed quickly to The Lantern, kicking it behind him and preparing for whatever was coming. The ashes continued to stir, growing more agitated each second until they spiraled into a glowing column the height of a man. Lucian squinted into the glow as it grew brighter, finger poised on the trigger of his weapons, until from the ashes, stepped the soul of a man.

The confusion on it's face echoed that of The Purifier. The spirit stood, gazing about itself until it's eyes lighted on Lucian. With brow furrowed, the spirit closed it's eyes and shook it's head. When it's eyes finally came to rest on The Lantern, it's face fell. It's expression slowly shifted from realization, to horror and it looked at Lucian with heart-rending sorrow.

"What... have I done?" It said.

Realization slowly dawned on Lucian. This was the spirit of Thresh, purified and released from the poison of the evil artifacts he had guarded in life. The rage slowly melted out of his heart as he considered the spirit. Utter remorse saturated it's countenance. Perhaps it would help him?

"Spirit, if you seek redemption from your deeds, help me release those imprisoned by your shade." He gestured to The Lantern with his weapon.

The spirit walked silently toward The Lantern, it's spectral form seemingly made of purified light.

"It will answer to me, but The Lantern is ravenous." It said, it's voice a smooth, ethereal echo of the voice Lucian had hated for so long. "When I open the door, it will consume me in moments. You must purify it from the inside..." It paused.

"If you are not fast enough, it will close forever, trapping me inside with the others." It's shoulders sagged with guilt. "It would be no more than I deserve."

Lucian nodded, fighting to control the swirling chaos of his emotions. He readied his weapons as the spirit stepped forward and placed it's hand on the door of The Lantern. With no apparent effort, it swung the door open. Lucian fired three times into the opening, his beams passing harmlessly through the spirit as it was sucked noiselessly into a potential eternity of torture.

The far side of The Lantern burst outward with an explosion of light. As the countless spirits drifted away, they changed from green to golden. Screams from within changed to breathy sighs of relief, and through it all pierced the voice of his beloved Senna.

"Thank you Lucian. We are finally free!" Her serene laughter drifted away on the breeze.

Lucian lost track of time as he stood there, staring into the sky. Finally, for the first time since he could remember, he smiled.