

THE LANTERN OF HATE

Written by

Daniel Avril

INT. FACTORY - OFFICE - NIGHT

LENIN, 29, exhausted from overwork, sits at his desk talking into a cellphone. A pulsating red lantern sits by his side on the table; a glowing heart illuminates the area instead of a normal lightbulb.

LENIN

Is she on the line? Great! Um, just send the remaining packages at the usual spot. I'll pick them up as soon as I can.

Lenin grabs a pen and jots down some notes next to a blueprint.

LENIN (CONT'D)

Oh, uh, by the way, can you send over the "fixer" too? Some of my equipment has gone...

Lenin glances cautiously at the red lantern. Beads of sweat dot the skin on his face as ambient heat seeps from its heart.

LENIN (CONT'D)

...Haywire. I can't do anything until it's back to normal again. Great, thanks.

After hanging up, Lenin wipes sweat from his face, then examines the blueprint on the table.

LENIN (CONT'D)

Schematics seem pretty airtight. If my calculations are on point, the armor should be done by next week.

Lenin stares into the lantern's heart, then narrows his eyes.

LENIN (CONT'D)

And then you'll let me go, right?

The lantern's heart burst into a red flame that scorches the table. Lenin hurriedly grabs the blueprint and ducks under the table.

LENIN (CONT'D)

Okay, okay! After this is done, then we'll discuss my contract. The factory should be receiving more parts any minute.

The lantern's flame calms down. Lenin stands up, then stares longingly at the grandfather clock standing next to the door. He sighs.

LENIN (CONT'D)

How did things come to this?

Lenin glances back at the living lantern.

LENIN (CONT'D)

To think that I went from a being a
happy business owner to being
threatened by some lantern if I
don't do what it wants.

Lenin reaches for gloves in a toolbox beside his desk, puts them on, then grabs the lantern as he heads outside.

LENIN (CONT'D)

Tell me, why did you appear out of
thin air in front of me? Oh, right.
You can't talk yet.

The lantern's flame grows slightly in size, startling Lenin.

INT. FACTORY - ASSEMBLY LINE - NIGHT

Raw metal parts are piled up in front of a conveyor belt while folded construction arms wait idly nearby. Pieces of a giant mechanical tiger hang on the ceiling in the center; its chest has a gaping hole roughly in the shape of a lantern.

Lenin stands in front of a computer terminal overlooking the conveyor from the second floor. He waves a hand over a confirm button. Hesitant, he glances at the lantern in his other hand.

The lantern's heart GROWLS as its flame grows briefly, nearly burning Lenin's hand.

LENIN

I know. One wrong move and I'll be
burnt to a crisp. You'd better
uphold your end of the deal.

Lenin inches his hand to the confirm button.

A distant RUMBLING startles Lenin. He peers toward the wooden entrance door behind the assembly, widening his eyes.

The door SHAKES and RATTLES until it's BLASTED open by a battering ram. SCU SOLDIERS swarm inside.

SCU SOLDIER
Search the area! Hopefully the
heart's body hasn't been activated
yet.

Lenin heaves a sigh of relief.

LENIN
Finally, I'm saved. Maybe this
nightmare can --

Lenin screams in agony as the red lantern's flames overtake
his arm, then engulfs his body. Lenin slowly calms down and
stands up straight. His eyes glow red.

ENTITY (LENIN)
(deeper tone)
You lied to me.

Police footsteps steadily get louder.

ENTITY (LENIN) (CONT'D)
You said you were calling a
supplier for parts, but that wasn't
who you really contacted, was it?

Lenin, possessed, flexes his free hand, then stares into the
lantern.

ENTITY (LENIN) (CONT'D)
For this transgression, consider
our contract void. You're stuck
with me now. As for them...

Possessed Lenin darts his eyes toward the terminal and
presses the confirm button.

The construction arms SPRING to life and begin putting
together robotic tiger limbs as the conveyor feeds the parts.

Squadron of soldiers flood the second floor and point their
guns at Possessed Lenin.

SCU LIEUTENANT
We have you surrounded! Put your
hands up and drop the lantern!

Possessed Lenin slowly raises the lantern in front of him.
Flames spew out from its heart onto the floor, morphing into
two flaming tigers. They shoot fireballs at the squadron.

Two ARMORED SOLDIERS rush ahead and deploy energy shields,
blocking the fireballs.

Surrounding soldiers fire at the flaming tigers, and they dissipate. Possessed Lenin narrows his eyes.

ENTITY (LENIN)
The Special Containment Unit?

Possessed Lenin grunts. The lantern's heart beats faster, then shoots out an intense beam of fire towards the squadron.

The armored soldiers' shields take the blast. After a few seconds, the lantern lets up and the blast fades. Black soot stains the ground in its wake.

Possessed Lenin eyes the soldiers, then lets out an inhuman growl. The armored soldiers give way.

LORA, 30's, fierce commanding officer dressed in a black suit steps forward, meeting Possessed Lenin's glare. A folded bow and quiver hang behind her back.

Upon registering Lora, Lenin's eyes return to normal for a second. The fires around him abate.

LENIN
Lora?

The lantern's fire engulfs Lenin again and he screams, gripping his head with his free hand. The arm holding the lantern reddens from the intense heat.

LORA
Surround him!

Lora gestures to two soldiers beside her.

LORA (CONT'D)
You two, shut that conveyor off!

The soldiers obey her and the squadron splits up.

Regular soldiers rush to shut down the conveyor, while the two armored soldiers corner Lenin and deploy shields that fuse, forming a cylinder around him.

The lantern's persona repossesses Lenin's body. He creates a surge of flames centered around him.

The armored soldiers close in slowly. One of them manages to bash Possessed Lenin on the head, knocking him to the ground. The lantern falls out of his grasp.

LORA (CONT'D)
Grab it!

Before the armored soldiers can capture the lantern, its heart self-immolates in massive pillar of fire. The eyes of the metal tiger hanging in the assembly glow bright, as if coming alive.

The armored soldiers' shields show signs of damage.

SCU ARMORED SOLDIER
It's not gonna hold!

Lora makes a quick glance at Lenin, who's collapsed on the ground but still conscious. She grits her teeth, grabs her bow, and unfolds it. She loads an arrow and aims into the vicinity of the lantern, waiting for a clear shot.

Pieces of the factory's ceiling, softened by the flames, CRASH onto the scene. The soldiers share concerned looks.

Lora holds still like a hunter lying in wait. For a split second she catches a glimpse of the lantern's heart in a flash of white heat, then releases the arrow.

On impact, the heart lets out a blood-curdling SCREECH like that of a dying tiger, then explodes, sending searing flames everywhere. The explosion shreds away the armored soldiers' shields. They rush to act as meat shields for Lora and Lenin.

Lenin, however, struggles to his feet and shoves a soldier aside. Frost forms on his singed arm and he shoots a wave of condensed ice at the explosion, CRYSTALLIZING it and creating a wall of ice. Everyone stares at Lenin, speechless.

Lenin shivers as he holds his left arm. He slowly turns to the squadron and turns pale in the face. The SCU soldiers aim their weapons at him. Lora gives him an intense glare.

LORA
You're one of them?

SCU LIEUTENANT
So, why did you *really* call us here?

LENIN
Put the guns down. I'll explain everything.

Lenin sighs.

LENIN (CONT'D)
Let's just say I needed to break a contract.