

The Lich's Inspection

By C. Jade Wyton

A mysterious lich inspects the state of a commission she has purchased from a very unethical scientist.

Contains descriptions of child death, gore, and unethical science/medical practices.

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The corpses of dead children lay littered across the laboratory.

Not many of the bodies were full and complete; most had at least one part harvested, and all had been cut open and searched through for viable pieces.

The lich walked past the gory scene in stride, her short gnomish legs somehow carrying her farther and faster than her human companion's own.

The man was a scientist, of whose white coat was so stained in old blood it looked like it was intended to be brown. He disgusted the lich, but he was willing to do the work she needed, so she would put up with him.... For now.

'Ah, I wish you'd warned me you were coming!' said the scientist. 'Then I could have cleaned up and—'

'And hidden your failures from me?' chided the lich. 'No. I'm not paying you to keep secrets.'

'Mm, I know, but—' he didn't get the chance to finish before the lich had made it to the back of the laboratory and thrown open the doors.

She confidently made her way into the room and, not waiting for the scientist to catch up, began to look around.

*Ah!*

There they were.

Fifteen tubes of fluid, standing roof to floor and wide enough to fit a grown human inside....

The liquid was too opaque to see the other contents through, but that was maybe for the best— The children inside would not be a pretty sight, this soon into their incubation. Their flesh still needed time to heal and stitch together before they were ready to be seen....

The lich's eyes narrowed as she noticed a freezer by the tubes, and she ignored the scientist's protests as she made her way over and opened it.

'What is this?' she demanded, scowling.

'Spare parts,' answered the scientist.

'You're wasting time and resources, not using these!' she growled. 'You have enough here to make another body. Why haven't you?'

'They're for emergencies,' the scientist reassured. 'If one of the children has failure in an organ I can replace it without having to start over completely.'

The lich's scowl softened, slightly, though she didn't look any kinder.

'Smart,' she said. 'Have you needed to use any, yet?'

'I replaced number five's stomach,' said the scientist. 'It perforated a week

into incubation and almost killed her.’

‘Hmp,’ the lich’s eye twitched. ‘You didn’t inform me that you almost lost one.’

‘If I informed you every time I *almost* lost one, we’d be talking twice a day,’ the scientist shrugged. ‘Much more efficient to only report the failures, not the close calls.’

‘And what an impressive amount of failures you’ve had,’ retorted the lich. ‘What lot of girls is this, now? And yet you’ve had *none* survive.’

‘Seventy two separate attempts,’ said the scientist. ‘A little over a thousand children, total. But it’s not all bad news. Every batch gets closer and closer to host viability. Why, two of these children have even developed heartbeats! None of the previous batches had—’

‘Which girls have heartbeats?’ the lich asked curtly.

‘Thirteen and fourteen,’ said the scientist. ‘Unsurprising that their development is so similar; they were made with parts from the same children. Two tabaxi, an aarakocra, and three kenku went into them.’

The lich walked past the scientist, ignoring as the man tried to show her the console by the first child, and stood by tubes thirteen and fourteen. Slowly, carefully, she placed a hand on the cold glass of each one, and took a breath.

Her hands glowed a deep, sickly green, and the fluids in the tubes began to bubble and swirl, growing hot and thick as the lich’s magic seeped through it.

Then, as quickly as she had placed them, she withdrew her hands and the tubes returned to normal.

‘Fourteen is stronger,’ she said, simply. ‘Her parts are accepting each other and mending faster. Though I think that may be because there’s some damage to number thirteen’s brain.... I think you left it too long without oxygen while operating.’

‘Should I terminate her?’

‘No,’ said the lich. ‘It’s very minor damage. And despite her faults, she will make a good backup. We can always switch their heads, if need be.’

‘And the others?’

‘Continue their incubation,’ she answered. ‘Those that remain viable may strengthen in time. Those that don’t... so be it.’

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