

THE CASTLE OF DR. SPANKENSTEIN

by Dreyer

Have you ever played an old puzzle game for DOS called The Castle of Dr. Spankenstein?

I had found a copy of it while I was rummaging around at my local thrift store, looking for good deals on some new clothes, and maybe a few things I didn't know I needed. I happened upon a shoebox full of floppy disks sitting on a shelf, below some nice-looking drinking glasses. I flipped through the collection and found a few titles I had almost forgotten about: Number Munchers, Super Solvers: Midnight Rescue, Reader Rabbit 2... mostly edutainment games. But there was one that gave me pause: the label read "The Castle of Dr. Spankenstein" in Cloister Black, yellow text on a deep blue sky, just above a drawing of one of the castle's towers. According to the small text at the bottom of the label, it was published by a company called Røterbuns Software in 1992 — no company I've ever heard of.

It's an obscure title, at best. There is no page for it on Wikipedia or MobyGames, in search engines it returns only scant results and no screenshots, and no one I talked to had ever heard of it — it very well may have been an indie shareware title with an extremely limited release. Holding the disk in my hands and looking at the label, though, I felt a strange nostalgia. A fuzzy but distinct memory in the back of my mind, of sitting in the far corner of a computer lab, or in the den of a relative's house, playing a game by this name on a CRT monitor. I couldn't remember any details, but there were impressions: an ancient castle filled with tricky puzzles and colorful creatures, all rendered in 256-color graphics, a droning soundtrack that set a foreboding atmosphere... and the ever-present feeling that I shouldn't be playing it. That if anyone saw me playing it, I would surely be punished.

It was only 25 cents to relive the memories. I bought it without a second thought, along with a stack of clothes and a glass stein that had caught my eye.

It was a few days before I actually got around to trying the game. I had to dig out my external floppy drive that I hadn't used in years, and I needed to fiddle extensively with the settings of my DOS emulator before it would even recognize the game, much less attempt to run it. Among many other things, the game absolutely demanded to be run in full screen — attempting to isolate it to a window was a no-go. I would have to devote my full attention to it if I wanted to play it at all. Frustrating, but not a dealbreaker for me.

After several attempts, I managed to get the logo for Røterbuns Software to flicker onto the screen. Then, the title screen — "The Castle of Dr. Spankenstein," above a long shot of the castle, standing imposingly in the middle of a lush green island. The title music started, evoking mid-20th-century horror movie themes, and the opening crawl began:

~ EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY ~
LAB ASSISTANT NEEDED

Scientist seeking assistant with intelligence to match her own. Help explore the mysteries of the earth, life, and the cosmos. Must love puzzles, have an insatiable curiosity, and be comfortable with the human body.

Apply in person at Castle Cortex, on Intelligence Isle.

Seeking this promising opportunity from a classified ad in your local newspaper, you arrive on the shores of Intelligence Isle, and soon find yourself standing at the castle gates. But beware: Many devilish puzzles stand between you and the inner laboratory, each one designed to test your logical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills to the limit!

Will you make it through, and prove yourself worthy of the job? Or will you become lost in the stony walls and twisting halls of...

"The Castle of Dr. Spankenstein." The title screen faded in once more. Smiling at the corniness of it all, I clicked New Game.

The first puzzle presented itself as soon as my character arrived at the castle gate. The arch surrounding the front door was adorned with a relief of six nude women, three on each side, clinging to twisting tree trunks and each other's legs, all of them positioned with their naked bottoms facing toward the viewer. I clicked the door to open it — but instead, one of the women's bottoms lit up pink and let out a long beep.

I started to realize why I'd felt so nervous playing this game in the past.

I clicked the woman's butt, and it lit up pink and beeped in the same tone. Then after a moment, it lit up and beeped again, and then the one above it lit up red and beeped. I clicked pink, then red; then pink lit up, red lit up, and a third bottom on the other side lit up in purple.

Simon. I was playing Simon on these ladies' behinds.

The game of Simon went for only six rounds before all the statues' bottoms lit up at once, and the large wooden door opened with a loud and eerie creak. The screen transitioned automatically, and I was in the castle.

The first screen was an open chamber with walls of grey stone. On the far wall there was another door, marked with a sign for stairs going up, and what looked like an electronic lock. Indeed, when I clicked the door, a message popped up: "The door is locked. You'll need the key." On the left wall, there was a green bulletin board, divided into four rectangular quadrants. And in the far right corner of the room was a much more curious sight.

A trapeze hung from the ceiling, and seated upon the bar was a funny-looking creature: squat, purple, and pear-shaped, two horns sticking up from her forehead, long dark hair bound up in a ponytail, breasts hanging low, a little paunch sticking out, wide hips, and legs that ended in a pair of cloven hooves. She was animated, and she swished a pointed tail from side to side as she kicked her

legs gently and swung back and forth. Her blue eyes were fixed on me, a wry smile playing on her lips. I hovered over her, and my cursor changed to a speech bubble: I clicked to see what she would say.

"Well, we've got ourselves another new applicant, have we?" she said in a high and croaky voice. "Well, you're not the first — and judging from the looks of you, you won't be the last, either!" She flashed a row of pointy teeth as she grinned and snickered. "But if you think you've got what it takes, then you just gotta go upstairs and meet the doc. Door ahead is locked, though. I could tell you where the key is, buuuut... I don't wanna!" She giggled. "Why don't you solve some of the puzzles on that board over there? See if you got the smarts to make it? Then maaaaaybe I might think about givin' you a little hint~"

I clicked on her again to see if she would say more. This time, the cursor showed up as an eye symbol when I moused over her.

"What? You never seen an imp before?"

I clicked again.

"Take a picture, why don't you? It'll last longer."

I clicked a third time.

"Don't look at me, buddy! The puzzles are over there!" She pointed to the board on the left with her tail.

Clicking on her further only made the last few messages loop, so I turned my attention to the board. I clicked the upper-left quadrant, and a new window appeared in front of me: A 4x4 grid, with the numbers 1 through 15 written in to each square, with one left blank.

It was a sliding puzzle.

I *hate* sliding puzzles.

I fumbled around with the puzzle for what felt like ten minutes, getting absolutely nowhere. Every time I thought I had gotten a few numbers into their proper place, I realized that the way I had done it made getting some other number impossible. Worse was that I couldn't just click a tile to move it into the blank space; I had to click, hold, and drag it into place, every single time. *Frustrating*.

As I struggled with the puzzle, the voice of the imp suddenly interrupted:

"Oh boy, you're gonna have real trouble ahead if you're that stuck on this!"

Awfully mean thing of the developers to do when the player's already frustrated, I thought. I continued messing around with the puzzle, almost getting there several times, but not quite.

"I can ask the doc to give you something more your level. How do you feel about stacking plastic rings?"

I got the feeling that the developers were so excited about getting voice acting in their game, they failed to consider that it might quickly become obnoxious.

After a moment more of fussing and fiddling with the puzzle, the imp spoke again:

"You know what's gonna happen if you don't get through this, right?"

This time, a dialog box of a green nodding head and a red shaking head popped up, over the puzzle window. I sighed and clicked the shaking head.

The imp giggled, then grabbed onto the bar she was sitting on and flipped upside-down, holding herself up by her calves — and now I could see her bare bottom, marked with a bright pink handprint on each cheek!

"You're gonna end up just like me!" she sang.

Despite my frustration, I had to smile at the cuteness of it. That was the premise, was it? Solve the castle's puzzles, or earn the spanking of a lifetime? I wondered if there was a game over screen or a bad ending where you would end up imprisoned in the dungeon or something, getting endless spankings for your incompetence — but no matter how long I floundered in the sliding puzzle, at least, there didn't seem to be any way to reach a fail state.

Eventually, through some flash of inspiration, or just dumb luck, I managed to solve the sliding puzzle. When I did, there was a cheerful chime, and its quadrant on the board lit up in a brighter shade of green. The other three puzzles were much easier to solve: a magic square in one corner; in another a set of simple arithmetic problems where I had to drag the right numbers into the right spots; and last, a jigsaw puzzle, which turned out to be a classic painting of Aphrodite spanking Eros over her knee.

If I didn't know any better, I would say that this "Doctor Spankenstein" had some sort of fixation with people's rear ends, and the beating thereof.

Once all the puzzles were solved, the board flickered and flashed and chimed. There was a whirring sound as a hatch opened up in the ceiling, right over the imp's head — and suddenly that smarmy smile of hers turned into a look of panic! She squeaked and jumped off of the trapeze, only for a pair of robot hands to snap out from the hatch above and grab her in mid-air! One hand grabbed onto her ankles and hung her upside-down, showing off her chubby bottom; while the other lifted up into the air, and swung down to give her — what else — a good hard spanking!

"Ow! Ow! Ow! Ow!" she squealed, twisting and writhing and thrashing her tail all about, but she couldn't wriggle out of the hand's grasp, and there was no shimmying her bottom out of the path of the spanks! "All right! All right! You win!" She shoved a clawed hand into her ponytail, and she pulled out a card and tossed it onto the floor. The card added itself to my inventory automatically: a plain white card bearing a symbol of a circle with a single dot in the middle of it.

Once I had the card, the robot hands stopped spanking, and they turned the imp back over and set her feet down on the floor. One hand grabbed onto the back of her head and pushed her firmly into the corner, facing the wall, and the other wagged a stern finger at her. Her bottom was all covered in pink now, the shape of the handprints lost in the fresh blush. The trapeze rose up into the air, and was replaced with a neon sign reading "Naughty Little Brat," with an arrow pointing down at her.

When I clicked on her after that, all she did was grumble: "Stupid hands 'n mmmnnfnnhng with their dumb dmhgnhm puzzles ghnfgmddfmmgh..."

Feeling a little more satisfied with myself, I clicked the electronic lock on the door. The lock beeped, the door creaked open, and I proceeded to the next floor.

I entered into another stone room, where there was yet another wooden door, this time with a big sign over it that read "LABYRINTH." Beside the door, there was a row of three imps — one red with two short pointy horns, one yellow with stubby horns, and one green with long curved horns — seated on stools, wearing T-shirts and nothing else, their wrists bound with manacles connected to the floor with chains. The imps' T-shirts had names written on the chests: Ashley, Beth, and Chloe, from left to right. Above them, a sign read in an official font:

THREE IMPS HERE ARE WAITING TO SERVE AS YOUR GUIDE
EACH ONLY TELLS TRUTH OR ONLY TELLS LIES
THINK HARD ON THEIR WORDS — YOU MAY CHOOSE ONLY ONE
THE REST WILL BE PUNISHED, THOUGH THEIR SINS MAY BE NONE

In other words, I reasoned, I would have to listen to each imp's testimony, decide which ones are telling the truth, and take one of them as my guide — otherwise I would get nothing but bad directions through the labyrinth ahead. First I decided to hear what Ashley had to say.

"Beth is the biggest liar I've ever seen," Ashley chirped, gesturing toward her neighbor with her head. "Don't pick her!"

It was clear where this was going. Next, I listened to Beth.

"Chloe is a liar-liar pants-on-fire," she scoffed, rolling her eyes toward Chloe. "I wouldn't trust her to walk me down a straight hallway!"

And finally, Chloe:

"I'm the only one tellin' the truth around here," she insisted, her chains rattling as she pointed to herself with her thumbs. "Ashley and Beth are filthy liars — don't listen to a word they say!"

A classical logic puzzle. I'm a little embarrassed to admit I needed pen and paper for this one; in hindsight it's simple enough if you just think it through:

Suppose Ashley's telling the truth. That means Beth is lying about Chloe, which means Chloe is also telling the truth; only that would mean that Ashley's a liar again — a logical contradiction.

Now let's say only Chloe is telling the truth, as she attests. That means Ashley and Beth are both liars, and Ashley being a liar means Beth is telling the truth — contradiction — which means Chloe's a liar again — another contradiction.

Now suppose Beth is telling the truth. That means Chloe is lying about both Ashley *and* Beth being liars — which means that *either* Ashley *or* Beth *or both* are telling the truth. But, we already know that Ashley can't be telling the truth. That means there must only be one truth-teller after all, and it's *Beth!*

I made my decision, and Beth's arm cuffs clicked open and fell to the floor with a clatter. Beaming, she hopped off her stool and skipped over to me, while the other two huffed and pouted — only to sit up at attention at a mechanical whirring sound overhead. Two robotic arms came down from a hatch in the ceiling, each one holding a fat, pink, bubbly bar of soap in its three-clawed hand — and without ceremony they shoved the bars into each Ashley's and Chloe's mouths, pumped them in and out to work up some suds around their lips and chin, then pushed them in firmly to leave them there. Ashley slumped her shoulders and sulked, while Chloe looked down at the bar in her mouth in wide-eyed surprise, a deep brown blush spreading across her apple-green cheeks — almost as if she was learning something new about herself.

I honestly don't remember much about the labyrinth. Just a ponderous walk through identical twisty passages of gray stone. Beth's directions always steered me right whenever there was an intersection, and we never hit a single dead end on our way to the exit. Sometimes I would peek down the other passages and see what looked like other puzzles — probably more opportunities to prove my logical thinking skills, in case I flubbed the first test. I could have turned down a dead end on purpose just to see what they were, but I decided I would rather just get through it.

"Well, here we are!" Beth chirped when we arrived at the exit, and she proudly gestured to it with an open hand. "Oh, and one more thing before you go..." She stuck a hand down her collar, and she pulled a card out from between her breasts, bearing a symbol of a circle with a cross in the middle of it, and handed it to me. "You'll need this to get through the door. Well... see ya! And good luck!" She gave me a friendly wave and scurried away. I scanned the card, the door clicked open, and I headed up to the next floor.

Soon I was standing in a sound booth, overlooking a theater room. A number of imps were seated in scattered positions across the theater, some sitting patiently, some sharing a bag of popcorn, some lying across their seats and sleeping. At least one pair of imps shared a seat, one straddling the other's lap as they snogged — the others seemed to pay them no mind. Wine red curtains framed the stage, upon which stood two imps at stage left and stage right, each one dressed in silks and bells and golden bangles. At center stage, eight imps were lined up in a row, each one a different color — red, yellow, green, blue, white, black, orange, and pink. They all faced away from the audience and were bent over, tails in the air, showing off their bare bottoms — and I could see that each one was sporting a jeweled plug, in a color that complemented their skin tone. A megaphone was positioned in front of each of their faces, and at their feet lay a row of eight paddles on mechanical arms, each one positioned perfectly to snap up and strike their bottoms!

On the desk, there was a catalog with today's program, a book of sheet music for various songs, and a pile of unlabeled punch cards — save one, which had the words "TEST PATTERN" written on it in black marker, and had one hole punched in each of its eight columns. On the wall, there was a poster labeled "FREQUENCY SPECTRUM", with notes from low C to high C marked along a line of increasing Hz values.

It became clear what the chart was for when I inserted the test pattern card into the slot of the console in front of me. Lights flickered on the console, and up on stage, the paddles on the floor started to rise up. From left to right, and then right to left, each one snapped up and smacked an imp squarely on the butt, and each imp in order let out a yelp — each yelp ranging from low C to high C, but out of chromatic order — while the imps on either side of the stage belly-danced to the rhythm. A waveform of each cry showed up on the monitor in the center of the console, along with its measured frequency.

There were eight buttons on the console, each one sharing a color with one of the imps on stage. When I pressed a button, it would lock in; when I pressed another, the imps of those two colors would switch positions, standing up awkwardly and waddling over to each other's spots.

The program showed that there were three songs that needed to be played: "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star", "Old MacDonald Had a Farm," and "Those Endearing Young Charms" — only the first few bars of each, which is all the punch cards had room for. There were many more songs in the songbook, and many more punchcards in the pile, than were in the program. The program was probably randomized for each playthrough. Further complicating the issue was that I quickly discovered, through trial and error and repeated plays of the test pattern (which I'm sure the imps on stage were less than grateful for), that the notes that each column on the punch cards represented were not consistent across punch cards — all I could glean from them was the timing and relativity of the notes, and I would have to compare that to the songbook's sheet music to find the melody it was meant to play.

To sum it up: first I had to determine which imp cried at which note; then for each song, I had to determine which punch card corresponded to the song, then move the imps into whatever position would allow them to cry out the song when I inserted the punch card, then insert the punch card, watch them get their plugged-up bottoms walloped, and hopefully hear them holler to the proper tune.

It was an exhausting puzzle, to say the least — and a time-consuming one. Whenever I made a mistake, the audience would softly boo and toss popcorn toward the stage; when I finally got a song right, they would politely clap and call out words of encouragement. Either way, whenever there was music, the dancers danced, sultry smiles on their faces while they shook their hips for everyone's amusement.

(By the end of the second song, it looked like the one imp in the audience sitting on the other's lap had left. For a moment I thought my repeated mistakes had chased her off — only to blush as I realized, on closer inspection, that the seated imp's thighs were spread, and her partner was kneeling in front of her, her face buried firmly between them! And I seemed to be the only one who noticed, or at least, the only one who cared.)

The puzzle dragged on so long that I was almost getting sick of watching the imps get spanked over and over. But there was a surge of satisfaction as my hands guided the final punch card into the slot, certain that I had set up everything just right — and then having my certainty confirmed, as wooden paddles slapped methodically against those thick and supple bottoms, the imps' cries ringing out in a flawless rendition of the melody! As the last song ended, the audience rose up to clap and cheer (even the one on her knees raised her hands up as high as she could!), and the dancers gave a deep bow as the curtains fell.

The console ejected the punch card, and then another smaller card, bearing a symbol of a crescent moon. I snapped it up and hurried to the exit door, which clicked open as soon as I swiped the card across the scanner.

The last room before the laboratory took me by surprise, with its sheer enormity and beauty. A great circular atrium, lined wall to wall with fully stocked bookshelves, and every portion of wall not covered by shelves was painted deep blue, dotted with stars and moons and comets. Up above, a huge glass dome, for sunlight to shine through. And in the middle of the room, there was a great big model of the solar system: ten silver spheres positioned around a big one in the center, suspended on tracks. The device looked complicated enough to move — but alas, it sat perfectly still.

I made my way towards the center of the library, passing several more imps along the way. Imps in blazers and tight dresses paced about with practiced gaits, sorting bookshelves and keeping their eyes on the patrons — the librarians, it would seem. Imps in headdresses and black dresses waggled feather dusters across the shelves. A trio of imps were squashed together shoulder to shoulder and hip to hip, reading a ponderous fantasy novel with rapt attention. A pair were engaged in playful combat, trying to slap each other with hardcover books, until a librarian imp loudly cleared her throat at them — they hid the books behind their backs and grinned, only for the librarian to pinch their ears and lead them away. A grape-colored imp lounged on a bean bag, casually flipping through a book on evolutionary theory, while a bubblegum-colored imp sat on her knees in front of her, her head buried between the other's spread thighs and her hand wriggling about between her own — the one reading the book glanced up at me with a self-satisfied smirk, and I blushed and quickly averted my attention. On the other side of the orrery, there was a pair of white sliding double-doors, with a sign written in large font above it:

LABORATORY — NO IMPS ALLOWED INSIDE
WITHOUT EXPRESS PERMISSION
UNAUTHORIZED ENTRY = 500 SPANKINGS **MINIMUM!**

A clear warning if there ever was one. Since I was no imp, though, and since I had come here for the lab assistant position to begin with, I took a confident step toward the door —

"Hey. *Hey.*"

I turned around, to see another imp marching toward me. She was wearing a newsboy cap between two curled sheep horns, atop a puff of curly hair, skin bright red and speckled with black, like some kind of poisonous frog, and she wore a set of denim overalls and leather gloves, with a toolbelt loosely strapped around her waist. As she approached, she shook the end of a wrench at me.

"No one's allowed through that door without the doc's permission."

"Oh... sorry, I'm here for the lab assistant position," I said with a polite smile. "I need to see the doctor..."

"That's all well and good, but rules are rules." The imp shrugged. "No one goes through without the doc's say-so. Door's locked, besides."

"Hmm. Do you have the key?"

"Uh-uh."

"Is there anyone here who can take me inside?"

"Fraid not. None of us are allowed in without her say-so either. You read the sign, right?"

"Well, how am I supposed to ask for—"

"*Shhhhhh!*" A librarian imp pushing along a cart of books stopped to shush me, and then turned her nose up and moved along.

Blushing, I started to speak again, making sure to control my volume. "How am I supposed to ask the doctor's permission to see her, if I can't see the doctor to ask her permission?"

"Mmm..." The mechanic pursed her lips and tapped her wrench against her chin. "Tell you what. You help me with a problem I got, I'll call up the doctor and see if she'll let you in. Here, follow me." She turned around and waddled her way over to the orrery in the middle of the library.

I couldn't help but stare at her bottom as I followed, and I grinned as I realized that her overalls came with a *dropseat*.

"I'm trying to get this thing up and working again," she said, tapping a knuckle gently against the base of the orrery. "I've gotten all the internals fixed, but well... see how it's all gray and not moving? It's supposed to be all lit up, and the celestial bodies 'n' what not are supposed to be all movin' about their orbits. Looks like we need to install some activators into this panel over here—" She swung open up a little door on the orrery's base, and she beckoned me over to look — "and it looks like they've all gone missin'."

I crouched down beside the mechanic to take a look at the panel. There were eleven thin slots on it, all lined up in a row. They were marked with the numbers 0 through 9, and then A, and each one looked big enough to fit a single card —

A card. I reached into my pockets, and I fished out the three cards that I had earned for solving the last three puzzles. "Like these?"

The mechanic's eyes lit up, and she held out a gloved hand. "Yeah, lemme see those!" I handed the cards over, and she shuffled through them, knotting her brow as she looked over the symbols. "I can't tell what these are supposed to be. The slots just got numbers and letters on 'em..."

I noticed that there was a handwritten note taped to the inside of the panel cover, with the names of the celestial bodies written in alphabetical order, a symbol written next to each one — the alchemical symbol, I now know. When I pointed it out to the mechanic, she smiled, excited. "Oh hey! Sharp eye! Now let's see..." She held up the card with the circle and the dot. "So, this one's the Sun... so this goes..." She started to count along the row of slots, while also counting down the list.

I realized the puzzle would not be quite that straightforward — and a flash of inspiration hit me. *My very excellent mother just served us nine pies.* "No," I said. "Slot 0."

"Zero?" She gave me a skeptical look, but shrugged and pushed the card into Slot 0. It clicked into place — and then our surrounding were bathed in an orange light. We looked up to see swirls of

orange and red cover the surface of the great big sphere in the center of the model, washing across it like ocean waves.

"Eyyyyyy—!" the mechanic cheered — and then it was her turn to get a *shush* and a sharp look from the librarian. She flinched and rubbed the back of her head, smiling apologetically. "Anyway," she said softly. We went on to find the bodies that the other two cards belonged to — the crossed circle was for the Earth, and the crescent, naturally, was for the moon — and at my suggestion, we pushed them into slots 3 and 4, respectively. As I'd hoped, we watched on the model as the vast blue of the ocean spread across the Earth, the verdant landmasses taking shape within, and the Moon took on its sterile white glow, orbiting serenely around its partner.

My satisfaction was brief. There was still the matter of the *other* eight cards.

"Hmm..." The mechanic held a finger to her lip and tapped her hoof. "Last time this happened, I hear someone had pulled out a bunch of bits from inside the machine and hid 'em around the library as a goof. Probably was the activators... Maybe you could look around here and see if you can find 'em?"

"But this place is so big," I said, looking around at the library's expanse. "How am I supposed to find eight little cards around here?"

The mechanic shrugged. "Just start looking, I guess," she said. "Maybe start in the mythology section and just work your way around?"

I'm sure she could hear my frustrated sigh as I marched away to the bookshelves. Of course. This wasn't a tit-for-tat: this was the final test, and that mechanic was my proctor. And though the scientific process involves some measure of fumbling around in the dark, I failed to see how finding needles in haystacks was any measure of my competence.

I started in the mythology section and rummaged through the shelves, looking for any stray bits of paper. A few times, I was faked out by loose checkout slips and expired library cards — no 'activators' to be found anywhere. I searched through the religion section, through science fiction and fantasy, through history and economics, through romance and classical lit — still, my search turned up nothing. I was wasting so much time and energy, and becoming increasingly desperate. How had I come so far, only to be stymied now? What was I supposed to do? Those cards could have been anywhere. And what if there were fake cards with fake symbols, just to trick me and waste my time? I'd only looked at that note for a brief moment; I didn't have the symbols memorized for Mercury or Venus or —

I stopped. Mercury. Venus. Mars... My hand went to my brow. I was being so foolish. *Start in the mythology section.*

I hurried back as quietly as I could, and I looked for a book on Greco-Roman mythology — one stuck out to me right away, once I knew what I was looking for. I pulled it off of the shelf, plopped down onto a free bean bag, and flipped through it. Soon I found several pages listing off the various Greek gods, their Roman counterparts, and the domains that they governed. I had forgotten a lot about the subject, and was happy for the refresher.

Mercury was Hermes, patron of commerce and the post. Venus was Aphrodite, mother of Eros, patron of love (and spanking too, I suppose, depending on who you ask). Mars, of war. Jupiter, of storms. Saturn, the harvest. Uranus, the sky. Neptune, the seas. And Pluto, the underworld.

From here, I was able to narrow down my search significantly.

I worked my way around until I found the economics section again, and happened to find the card of Mercury stuck under a copy of Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*. In the romance section, an imp was lazing atop a beanbag reading a Harlequin novel, and she was using the Venus card as a bookmark — I paid her a dollar to give it to me, and she used the dollar as her bookmark instead. Mars was easy to find in the section on war history. Looking for the meteorology section eventually led me to Jupiter; agriculture to Saturn; astronomy to Uranus; oceanography to Neptune — I wracked my brain to find a match for Pluto, till I caught myself wondering why the library had such a small section on geophysics.

All eight cards in hand, I rushed back down to the center of the library, where the mechanic was elated to see my success. Using the note on the hatch for reference, we slid each card into place in order of distance from the sun — and we watched with pride and awe as the orrery lit up in all its vibrant colors and began to move, each planet drifting along in its orbit around the fiery Sun in a dazzling cosmic display.

The mechanic gave me a good hearty thump on the small of my back. "Excellently done, friend," she said. "Now you just wait by the door — I'll radio the doc and have her open it up for you."

I stood waiting in front of the door for several minutes — long enough to wonder if I had been set up for something. Just when I was starting to get nervous, though, there came a soft buzzing sound, and the double-doors slid open. I looked over my shoulder, and spotted the mechanic a good distance away, holding a transceiver to her ear and flashing me a big thumbs-up. I gave her a thumbs-up and a big smile back, and hurried through the door — which thumped shut behind me the moment I was through!

The click of my shoes echoed as I proceeded down a white hallway, toward another set of double-doors on the other end. Security cameras hung from the ceiling, rotating on their supports to watch me as I passed by. Once I was within a few dozen paces of the door, it slowly slid open, inviting me. I paused, smoothed out my clothes, adjusted my hair, made absolutely sure that I was presentable — and then I stepped inside.

The main laboratory was just as clean as the hallway that had led to it. There was a faint chemical smell in the air, along with the low and soft hum of machinery. Toward the far wall, a plush chair with a high back sat in front of a large console, and a grid of dozens of screens. On one side, a computer graphic of global weather patterns; on the other, a readout from a protein-folding program; in one corner, security footage from various rooms in the castle; in the other, a pornographic video of a woman being paddled.

The chair spun around, and in it was seated an older woman, dressed in a lab coat and slacks and white high-top sneakers. A mess of frizzy gray hair sat atop her head, her face was gaunt but jovial.

She looked at me through square lenses; her face brightened, as she rose up to approach me. As she got closer I could more clearly see her beauty, her radiance — I think, right then, I had fallen in love.

"Congratulations!" she cheered, reaching out to take my hand and give it a good shake!
"Congratulations, congratulations. You have passed every test with flying colors! You are going to make the perfect lab assistant: logically minded, sharp-eyed and studious, able to think outside the box when needed..." She looked me over. "And cute to boot~!"

My heart swelled with pride, and I couldn't stop myself from smiling. I was shaking the hand of Dr. Spankenstein — *the* Dr. Spankenstein!

"So I've got the job?"

"Yes, yes, you've got the job! Now let's get started right away!" With hurried steps, she led me away, and felt like I was walking on air as I followed. She guided me over to a pair of consoles covered in switches, knobs, and lights. She ushered me over to stand at one of them, then hurried away to take her position at the other. In front of us, there was a glass tube on a base, with wires running from the ceiling to a lid on the top — the tube was wide and tall enough to fit a person inside.

"The first thing you're going to assist me with — turn the knob labeled ACZ up to twenty, would you kindly," said the Doctor as she fiddled with several switches. "The first thing you're going to assist me with, is a trial of the latest version of our impification procedure."

I blinked as I turned the knob to the prescribed level. "Impification...?"

"Yes! You've seen them — you must have. Those fat-bottomed little creatures all about the castle? Those are imps. What we'll be testing is the process of transforming a human subject into another one of their kind."

My heart skipped a beat. Transforming? *Human subject*? My mind flashed back to the warning that purple imp had given me, all the way back at the first puzzle room: *You're gonna end up just like me.*

"So... all of those imps I met," I started, pointing vaguely in the direction of the library. "They were all...?"

"Oh no, a lot of them were like that when I first set up shop here. Came with the property, they did! But I've studied them intently, and it turns out they're not much different from you and I, genetically. Their psychology seems much less complicated, however — they're driven mainly by carnal desire, opportunities for mischief, and an unwavering loyalty toward whomever they see as their lord.

"And since I own the deed to this land," she added, a satisfied smile on her face, "that lord would be me."

"So they all obey you?"

"More or less," said the Doctor. "They're naughty by nature, and easily distracted. But set them to a task, and find a way to make it fun, and they'll devote all of their attention to it!"

"Like a game..."

"Like a game. And if they get really rambunctious — well, all it takes is a good, hard spanking to set them straight!"

I gently nodded my understanding, lips pursed. Is that what all this was about? All those puzzles, all those contraptions... had she simply found a way to automate the process of spanking her imps enough to keep them in line?

"Well, you'll see in a second, won't you. Press that green button on the left side, if you would, and let's have a look at our subject."

I pressed the green button, and a hatch opened up at the bottom of the tube. A figure rose up into the tube from underneath, hugging herself. A girl, about my age, full-figured, curly brown hair, healthy complexion — and naked from head to toe.

"There she is," the Doctor beamed, making her way over to the tube. "Look at her. She's going to make the most wonderful imp, isn't she? Can't you just imagine her fat little bottom jiggling as she scurries about? Oh, I wonder what color she'll be! I'm betting some shade of blue — Aaah, I'm so excited!" She turned to the girl in the tube. "Aren't you excited?"

"Doctor, please! You don't have to do this!" The girl pressed her hands to the glass. "I can still work! I can still help you—!"

"Oh, but you've been so much help to me!" said the Doctor sweetly, pressing her hand to the glass to line up with the girl's. "And you'll continue to help me yet. There will *always* be a place for you in my castle, sweetheart. Just not right here, is all!" She pulled away from the tube. "Don't think of this as the end, my dear! This is merely a new beginning!"

The Doctor bounded back to her place in front of the console, ignoring the girl as she thumped on the glass and shouted "Doctor! Doctor!" over and over again. The girl fixed her gaze on me, then — with a look of anxiety, of shame, of longing and desperation. One look into her eyes, and I realized who she was... or more to the point, who *I* was.

I was her replacement.

"Preparing main transphysic array!" the Doctor called out. "Set sigma resonance to two-five-seven!"

The Doctor's voice was authoritative — my fingers moved on their own, adjusting the appropriate sliders on the console in front of me, while I did the best I could to ignore the girl's thumping and shouting.

"Adjust ACZ to fifteen!"

I turned the knob down, and there came a droning sound that quickly rose in pitch. I looked up at our subject: She had pulled away from the glass, and was standing in the middle of the tube, thighs

clenched as she hugged herself tightly. Her head was bowed; she seemed to have resigned herself to her fate.

"Activating in three... two... one!"

The Doctor grabbed onto a lever and pushed it up with a decisive *thunk*, and the glass tube filled with blinding light. Electricity sparked and crackled, and from inside the tube I heard not a scream, but a wail — one that slowly rose higher and higher in pitch, until sputtering out into strained gasps. The Doctor pulled the lever down — *thunk* — and the light faded. The tube was filled with smoke.

"All signs nominal," said the Doctor. "Run the fans for twenty seconds, then disengage the lock."

I flicked a lever, and the fans began to whirl. I waited the twenty seconds for the smoke to thin, and then pressed another button that lowered the glass into the floor, leaving the subject with us.

Where the girl once stood, there was now a pudgy little creature about a meter in height. The curls of her hair fell over her shoulders, and a pair of stubby horns poked out from her brow. Her breasts were small, her tummy was round, her hips were wide, and her skin was a deep indigo, the color of the sky just before the sun dips below the horizon. I looked over at the Doctor, who looked back at me with an I-told-you-so smile.

The creature stepped off of the platform on unsteady legs, hooves clicking against the linoleum floor. She looked down at her belly, at her legs. She looked over her shoulder, down at her bottom, at the long pointed tail sticking out. She looked at her hands, now turned into scratchy, grabby little claws.

"...I'm an imp," she croaked.

"You *are* an imp," said the Doctor with a warm, approving smile. "And you're adorable, and you're lovely, and you're *perfect*."

Her tail whipped around to her front, and she took it into her hands. Her lip quivered and her face twisted. She looked as much like she was about to sneeze as like she was about to cry. "I'm an imp..."

Her chest heaved as her breaths quickened, her body rocking as she inhaled and exhaled, hard. I feared she might hyperventilate.

"I'm an imp... *I'm an imp!*" She let go of her tail, which thrashed about like it was trying to escape. One hand clutched her breast, and another shot between her thighs, fingers jamming into her slit! Her eyes bugged out as she stared into the middle distance, knees quivering and tail lashing about frantically as she kneaded her teat and pumped her fingers in and out of herself! "*I'm an imp!*" she screamed! "*I'm an imp! I'm an imp! I'm an imp—!*"

"Oh, you *naughty* little creature!" scolded the Doctor, an amused chuckle cutting in. She took several long strides toward the imp and scooped her up by the underarms, breaking her reverie. She turned her about and secured her snugly under her left arm, her head and hands and cloven hooves dangling and her chubby indigo bottom sticking up and out. And without a moment's hesitation, she snapped her right hand high up into the air, and brought it down with a sharp and resounding SPANK!

"What do you think you're doing?!" Up her hand went again, and then — SPANK! "What do you think you're doing?!" SPANK, SPANK! "You've been an imp for less than a minute, and you're *masturbating*—" SPANK! "—*right* where everyone can see?!" SPANK! "Where my new *assistant* can see?!" SPANK! "Have you no *shame*, you dirty little thing?!"

She continued to slap the imp's bottom all over, smartly and sharply, as the little creature wiggled and squirmed, kicking her cloven hooves in the air and waving her hands and whipping her tail all around! At first she squealed, and then squeals gave way to moans, and moans gave way to whines, as a faint purple blush began to blossom across her buns.

"Tell me what you are!" the Doctor barked, and she gave her another loud SPANK! "Tell me what you are, right now!"

Vowels dribbled from the imp's mouth, and her lips and tongue fumbled as they failed to find purchase on them. "I'mma ggg-gh! I'm fff-ngg-guh-huh...!"

The Doctor's hand snapped up and slammed down twice on the imp's sit-spots, hard! "Speak! Clearly!"

"I'M A GRIMY, GRUBBY, GROSS LITTLE GOBLIN!" she shrieked, loud enough to make me wince! "I'M A FILTHY, NASTY, HORRID LITTLE IMP — AND I NEED — TO BE — **SPAAAAANKED!**"

"YES! YOU! DO!" the Doctor shouted, her booming voice filling the room as she beat the imp's blue bottom like a drum, matching the cadence of her scolding with the rhythm of her swats! "You're a filthy little monster with a fat, naughty ass that is made to be spanked! You dirty, nasty, squat little masturbating SLUT!"

The Doctor spanked, and she spanked, and she spanked and spanked and spanked. I could only stand there frozen, eyes open wide and jaw hanging slack. Soon her kicking stopped, her head and limbs hung limp like a ragdoll's, and her tail flopped to the side, conveniently laying out of the way of the Doctor's strict punishment! She sucked in deep breaths, and let them out in heaving, blubbing sobs! "*Ssssluuuut! I-hi'm a sluuuu-huuuut!*"

The Doctor looked over her shoulder, and she fixed her firm gaze on me. "Call for the servants, kindly," she ordered me. "The intercom is by the door!"

Immediately I bolted to action. I hurried over to the door, and I pressed what looked like the intercom button and called for servants to come to the laboratory, while behind me the steady rhythm of flesh against flesh rang out, underscored by a soft and husky chant of "*slut, slut, filthy slut, filthy little slut*". A scratchy voice answered, and in short order, two gray imps with stubby little horns, both wearing lacy headbands and black dresses, strode into the room beside each other. They watched as the Doctor laid a dozen more spanks down on the imp's behind, now as purple as a ripe plum — then lugged her over to the servants and set her down on the floor with a click of her newly formed hooves, shaking as she gasped and panted and sobbed, her face wet with tears and snot, a glistening trickle running down her inner thighs.

"Take this one to the baths and have her washed," the Doctor instructed, pushing the sniffling, sobbing imp forward by the shoulder. "Take her to the sleeping pits to rest for an hour, then have her fitted for a collar, a jeweled plug, and a *chastity belt*. Also, I would like the word 'slut' written on her belly in gold paint—" She traced her finger across the imp's quivering belly, just under the navel. "Right here. Then put her to work cleaning the halls. And keep an eye on her — I don't want her fondling herself while she's supposed to be working. Do you have all that?"

"Yes ma'am!" the two servants chattered, and they took the new imp by the shoulders, standing on either side of her, and ushered her toward the open door. The imp gasped and hiccuped and blubbered, but followed along between them with her hands in front, offering not a whit of resistance. As their hooves clicked across the linoleum floor on their way out of the room, I saw the two servants exchange playful grins — and I swear that just before the door slid closed, I saw one of their hands sliding down and squeezing her purpled buttock.

Once they were gone, the Doctor stretched her hands up over her head and drew in a long breath, then let out a refreshed sigh. "Well! That was quite the diversion! But we've spent enough time on that, haven't we!" She turned on her heel and headed for the side door. "Come along, my assistant! There's much work for us to do, and unlike our friend there, it certainly won't do itself!"

I wanted to follow. But my feet wouldn't move. I couldn't stop thinking about what we had done. What I had just done. But what I couldn't stop thinking about, more than anything else, was the look on that imp's face. My heart pounded, my stomach fluttered, and a certain strange determination filled me, as I focused on that image, seared so deeply into my mind's eye. That wide-eyed, vacant look as she stared into nothingness and screamed those words over and over, furiously and shamelessly debasing herself in full view of us. It was not a look of horror, or despair, or even resignation.

It was *rapture*.

I thought back to all the imps I had met on my way through the castle. The ones that had teased me and lied to me in the puzzle rooms, the ones that had shook their hips and presented their bottoms for the audience in the theater, the ones reading and playing and fornicating in the library — and I remembered just how many smiling faces I had seen. Were they all as happy as she? Were they all living in the same state of ecstasy, the kind that had driven the former assistant to masturbate so openly, so mindlessly, as her first instinct?

I quickly realized that I was jealous of them.

The Doctor stopped, turned to look and saw that I was not following. "Is something the matter?" she asked as she strode back to me. "You've got the job — no better time to get started than now, yes?"

"O-of course, Doctor," I stuttered. "But... um..."

"What is it?" The Doctor tilted her head slightly to the side, and gave a look that said she would give her patience generously, but not indefinitely.

My chest thrummed. My voice caught in my throat. But I had to force myself to speak. Dr. Spankenstein was a busy woman, as she said. Soon we would be fully focused on her work — but right at that moment, I had her full attention. And I might not have gotten the chance to ask again.

"If it's not too presumptuous, Doctor," I said, my voice quavering, "I would like to make an unusual request..."

It has been over a month since Dr. Spankenstein made me her new assistant. My days since then have been the most comfortable, the most productive, the happiest of my life. They have followed a regular routine: I wake up as the sun is rising, and I do stretches and vinyasas until the servant imps arrive. They massage my shoulders and arms and legs, they help to bathe me and groom me, and then they bring me my breakfast. I eat my meal — often a simple but nourishing plate of grilled fish and porridge and roasted vegetables, along with a cup of coffee — as I look out the window of my room in the castle's eastern tower, and watch the waves lap onto the beaches of Intelligence Isle. When my meal and my meditation are done, the servants help me into my lab coat, and then I make my way to the laboratory to begin the day's work.

In the first few days, before I got dressed, I would admire my reflection in the mirror: squat, pear-shaped, no taller than a meter, not counting the horns — two ivory horns, extending out just a bit from my brow before curving sharply upwards, standing tall and proud, each one's tip stained with bloody rouge. I would trace my pointy nails over my smooth and lustrous skin: alabaster white from head to hoof, save for the powdery gray freckles across my collar and shoulder blades. I would roll my bulbous breasts in my palms; I would squish my pudgy belly. I would giggle at myself, flashing rows of pointed teeth as I grinned, two beady red eyes gleaming with pride as they gazed back at me. I would turn around and stick my fat bottom out, my slender tail waving in the air as I stared at my two round and jiggly cheeks, and the glints of ruby red flesh between my buttocks and my chubby thighs. I would smack myself on the butt as hard as I could, to watch the opulent red pigment fill the shape of my hand across the skin. The servants would often stand there watching as I delighted in my new form, the adorable, perfect form so graciously given to me by the Doctor — some of them simply rolled their eyes, while others cracked knowing grins.

My responsibilities in the laboratory are many. I keep the testing rooms clean and organized; I remember where every instrument, every solution, every document is kept, and when the Doctor asks for something I bring it to her without delay. I make sure the machines are maintained and the computer systems are operational and up-to-date. I sift through books and papers and digital documents, keeping a careful eye out for information critical to her research. I remind her to eat and to drink; I call servants on her behalf to bring her whatever she needs from outside the lab. I sit by her side, or sometimes on her knee, as she explains difficult problems to me; and I ask her questions to help guide her thinking — though often, simply starting to explain the problem to me is all it takes for her to reach a breakthrough on her own. She is a brilliant mind, after all.

When I do my job well, she calls me a good girl, and she pats me on the head, or rubs my horns, or plays with my pointed ears, as she praises me for my cleverness and hard work. When I make mistakes or underperform, she gently chides me, and she reminds me how smart and diligent I am and that she knows I can do better; she says that she can send me to work in the kitchens or with the servants for a day if my mind needs a break from the demands of the laboratory, though it would be a shame not to have her wonderful assistant around. And at the end of every work day, no matter how I behaved, she picks me up and carries me over to her chair, where she bends me over her lap, and she spansks my chubby bottom, hard and loud, until every square inch of white skin is flushed with the luxurious red pigment kept hidden in my veins. Then she dismisses me to take the long walk back to my room, my painted behind peeking out from under the hem of my lab coat — so that all the imps I

pass on my way can look at my bottom and snicker and chitter at my expense, as they see that even with my esteemed position, I am not so much better than them.

In time, another player might come to the gates of the castle, looking to become the Doctor's next assistant. I do not know what will happen if they succeed. Perhaps they will still be found wanting compared to me, and the Doctor will send them away, or make them into an imp and find another use for them. Or perhaps she will decide that she would prefer a human-sized assistant after all, and find another use for *me*. It doesn't matter. If I stay in the lab, I will attend to the Doctor's every need. If I am sent to the kitchen, I will learn to cook the most delicious meals for her. If I am to be a servant, I will answer her every beck and call; I will clean the castle's halls until they sparkle; I will serve and obey her new assistant without a hint of jealousy. And if I am sent to the puzzle rooms, then so be it: I will taunt and tease the newest candidates with such viciousness that they cannot *wait* for my comeuppance; I will lie through my teeth until the soap comes to wash my filthy tongue; I will dress in bells and bangles and silks and dance for the player's pleasure, and when the hammers of the spankophone strike my bottom I will sing at perfect pitch. And at night I will lay in the pits with the other imps — the servants who had waited on me, the imps who had taunted me in the puzzle rooms, the indigo imp who was once the assistant I replaced — and I will have many sleepless nights as they take turns ravishing me, grabbing handfuls of my alabaster skin in their claws, pinching and twisting and slapping, gripping my proud horns like handlebars and forcing my mouth between their thighs, reveling in my fall from grace, hissing and snickering through pointed teeth as they ask me if I still feel special. And I would still feel so, so special; because I serve Dr. Spankenstein, and whether that be as her assistant, or her maid, or her test subject, or her whore, no greater honor exists.

I cannot quit the game. I do not remember how to quit. There is no cursor for me to move. There are no buttons for me to press. And I don't care. I don't want to leave. I only want to serve the Doctor. I only want to serve the Doctor. I only want to serve the Doctor...