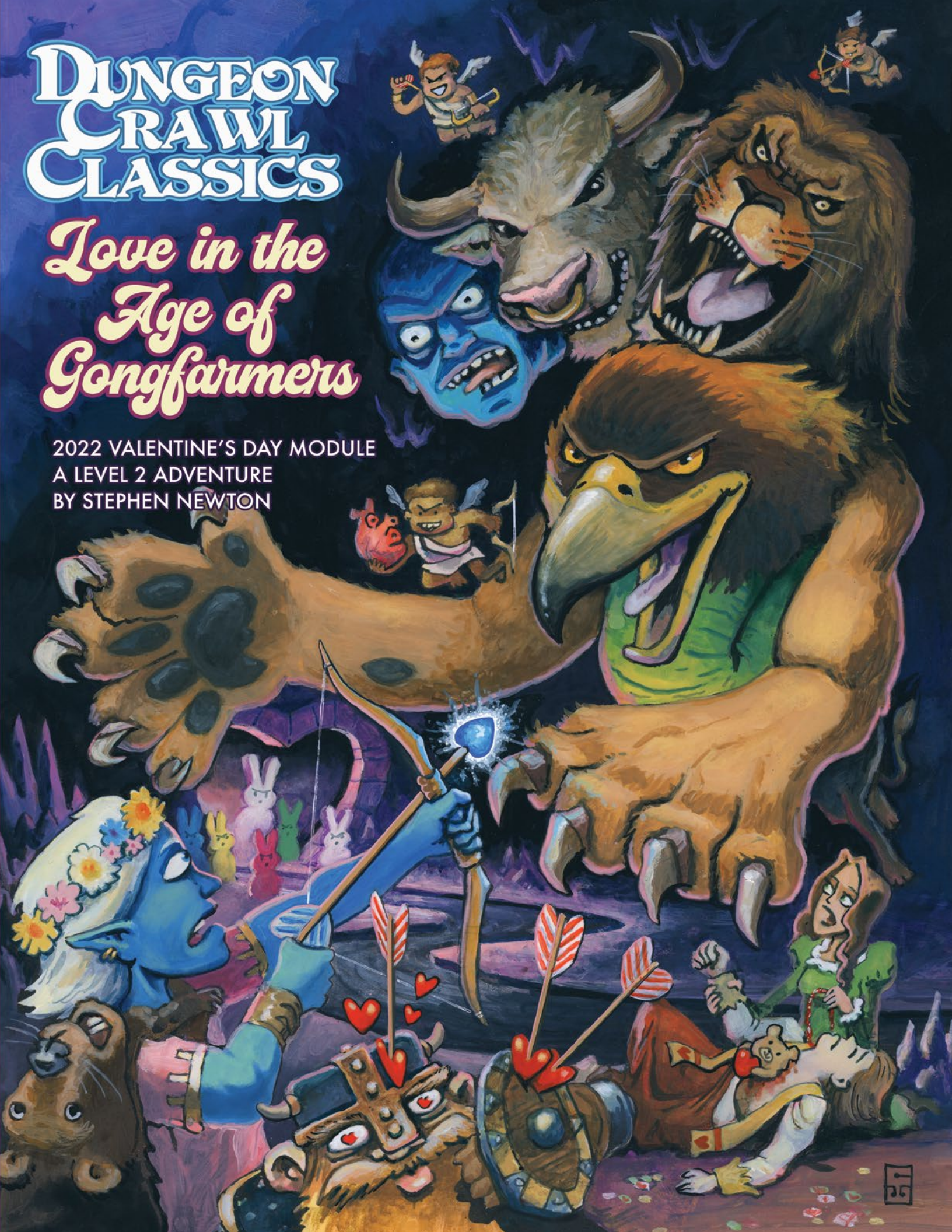# Dungeon Crawl Classics

Love in the Age of Gongfarmers

2022 VALENTINE'S DAY MODULE
A LEVEL 2 ADVENTURE
BY STEPHEN NEWTON

Love in the Age of Gongfarmers

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INTRODUCTION

*L*ove in the Age of Gongfarmers is a Dungeon Crawl Classics adventure designed for 4-6 2nd-level characters. The adventure draws inspiration from the legends related to the origins of the Valentine's Day holiday and other modern Valentine's Day tropes. The adventure contains elements that may be considered bawdy and not appropriate for younger players. Judges are encouraged to read the adventure in advance to judge for themselves what may or may not be appropriate for their table.

JUDGE'S BACKGROUND

*T*he adventure takes place in the small town of Terni where the annual festival celebrating Markhall, demi-god of courtly love, inspirational messages, and mischief, is taking place. Typically, this is a boisterous and bacchanalian festival celebrated by young and old alike. Unfortunately for the PCs, this year, Markhall has been offended by one of Their followers and has plans to sabotage Their own celebration.

The background: a young cleric of the cherub Cupid named Valentinus has fallen in love with Julia, a girl who had been blind since birth. As it so happens, Julia is the daughter of the town magistrate Asterius, who is a follower of the demi-god Markhall and one of the main organizers of the festival. For months, Valentinus offered to attempt to cure Julia's blindness through the grace of his deity. Julia was reticent to accept a gift from a cleric of Cupid given her father's close binds to Markhall, but eventually relented. On the eve of Markhall's festival while her father was out preparing for the annual festivities, Julia consented to allowing Valentinus to attempt to channel Cupid's divine magic to cure her blindness.

Markhall, who has generously provided for Julia all her life—through acts of power granted to her father Asterius—was not at all pleased. Markhall removed the heart of the insolent Valentinus and replaced it with a "Markhall Bear"—a popular stuffed toy given to children during the festival. The Markhall Bear is magically powered and pumps frantically to keep the young cleric alive (if the reader is familiar with toy mechanical monkeys that bang cymbals together, that is similar to what the Markhall Bear looks like inside the cleric's chest).

Markhall, while jealous, is also a demi-god of mischief and is always amused by the toil of mortals. To inspire hope in the cleric's allies, Markhall created a series of challenges and obstacles, along with providing inspirational messages as clues, which can be used to recover the heart of Valentinus and restore him to health. To add further insult and taunt Their rival, Markhall has designed magic weapons similar to those used by Cupid which can be found and used by the PCs, but constructed them mockingly in the style of children's toys.

RUNNING THE ADVENTURE

*T*he adventure starts during the Festival of Markhall. Once the PCs meet Julia and Valentinus in the cave (area 2), they will learn the details described in the *Judge's Background* and begin the adventure in earnest by taking a skiff through the "The Funnel of Love", a series of caverns which appear natural, but actually exist on Markhall's native plane. Julia will plead to join the PCs on their quest (and insist they carry the inert Valentinus with them), but she is a non-combatant. At the end of the adventure, the PCs will face the cherub dragon.

During the adventure, the Markhall Bear will bleat out sardonic "inspirational messages" (see *Appendix II*) to provide clues, goad the PCs, or just remind the PCs that the Valentinus is more than likely going to die soon. The Markhall Bear provides a helpful clue before each encounter, described in the read-aloud text.

The encounters in the Funnel of Love provide the PCs an opportunity to collect Cupid's Arrows — magical arrows that can be vital in the defeat of the cherub dragon (see *Appendix III*). While there is nothing preventing the PCs from speeding through the tunnel avoiding encounters altogether, the magic arrows which can be collected will be very helpful in defeating the cherub dragon. Note: while the Markhall Bear will allude that the PCs need to collect certain items (roses, chocolate, etc.) these are not a requirement to solving the adventure – it's merely another way that Markhall "inspires hope" in mortals.

Before the PCs travel from one encounter to the next, there will be an item floating on the stream which foreshadows what they will face in the upcoming location.

PLAYER START

The PCs begin the adventure at the Festival of Markhall – an annual courtship festival celebrating Markhall (loosely based on the actual Lupercalia festival of ancient Rome).

Area 1 — Festival of Markhall: *The air is crisp and filled with sounds of joy and laughter as you and your friends arrive at the Festival of Markhall – the annual celebration of the demigod Markhall's industriousness, fertility, and romance. During this celebration, folks of all races meet near the misty entrance of Markhall's Cave to watch the Markhall pontifices oversee a bawdy fertility ritual.*

To start the ritual, two giant beavers (also known as gicastors) are trapped and caged and have a gelatinous fluid extracted from their musk sacs – a process that is unpleasant to both the gicastor and the unfortunate soul performing the extraction. Given its inherent dangers, the pontifices of Markhall use kobold "volunteers" to perform the extraction.

The musk sac gel is then mixed with sugar and egg yolks into a concoction collegially known as "nog". Revelers collect switches from nearby trees, dip them into the nog and chase each other to show their amorous intentions. Being slapped with a nog-dipped Markhall Strip is an indication that someone desires to spend a romantic fortnight with you under Markhall's Moon.

The ritual begins! The screeching of the giant beavers heralds that the kobolds have successfully completed the musk extraction. This year only 3 of the kobold laborers were dismembered by the angry, uncomfortable beasts! A fortuitous omen! The crowd grows restless as the pontifices and revelers begin the courtship rites. Excited revelers dip their switches into the nog and zealously eye other celebrators to slap!

A few of your fellow villagers come prancing your way waving thin bands dripping with nog. They seem eager to express their romantic intentions.

The PCs may join the festivities by dipping their own switch and attempting to chase others, avoid being chased, or something entirely different (see *Partaking in the Festival* below.). On the second round after the PCs have had a chance to choose their actions, see *Festival Interrupted* to continue.

PARTAKING IN THE FESTIVAL

Judges are encouraged to make the fertility festival entertaining, but not creepy (this is a Valentine's Day-themed adventure, after all). The following are some ideas about how to run the festival at the table, but the judge should adapt based on their players' comfort levels. The two festival pontifices of Markhall (both cloaked in full-body, gicastor-skin robes) are also there to make sure things don't get too out of hand. Note: judges who like to run a "darker" themed game should substitute one of the nameless pontifices with Julia's father Asterius.

Markhall Pontifices (2): Init +0; Atk sacrificial daggers of Markhall +1 melee (1d6 + *blood loss*); AC 11; HD 2d8; hp 6 each; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP spellcasting (+2 spell check):

spells (1st) *detect magic, food of the gods, protection from evil, resist cold or heat, word of command*); SV Fort +0, Ref +0, Will +2; AL C; Crit III/d8.

Sacrificial Daggers of Markhall: The pontifices of Markhall fight with extra keen daggers meant for removing musk sacs. Targets struck must make a DC 12 Fort save or incur an additional 1d3 hit points of blood loss damage.

- Musk-slap an NPC to gain a romantic follower: The PC has found love! DC 12 Personality check. Success indicates the NPC is receptive to the PC's "advances" and agrees to become a "romantic follower" for the remainder of the adventure or perhaps longer (see p. 310, DCC RPG for examples). PCs who gain a romantic follower receive +1 to Will saves while the romantic follower remains healthy. If a romantic follower dies, the PC suffers a -1 penalty to all Will saves and loses 1 Luck point.

- Avoid being musk-slapped by an NPC: "It's not you it's me…" The PC is approached by a reveler who does not strike their fancy. DC 12 Ref save to avoid being slapped. Success indicates the PC avoids any entanglements and receives +1 to initiative rolls for 1d4 turns for deftly handling the situation. Failure indicates the PC has left someone with a broken heart and incurs a -1 penalty to initiative rolls for 1d4 turns.

EVENT: FESTIVAL INTERRUPTED

Jocular flirtation and the smell of gicastor musk pervades the festival green as revelers, now spattered with nog, begin to pair up and peel away. However, your mirth is interrupted when you notice that some of the playful squeals of delight have transformed into screams of terror. Looking over to the source of the noise, you see that the gicastors have somehow escaped from their cages and have started rampaging through the crowd.

In addition, someone, or something, has adorned the recently slain kobolds with glowing red necklaces of linked jewel hearts. Despite their savage wounds the hearts have revived the vermin! The kobolds open their eyes – now a milky shade of death's gray – and begin shambling towards the revelers with a malice unique to those who have suffered from an untimely death.

The demi-god Markhall, in the ultimate act of disapproval (see *Judge's Background*), has freed the agitated gicastors and animated the kobolds slain from the musk extraction ritual. The surviving kobolds will either flee or turn on their captors at the discretion of the judge.

Angry muskless gicastors (2): Init +2; Atk bite +2 melee (1d6); AC 13; HD 3d8; hp 18, 16; MV 30' or swim 30'; Act 1d20; SP infravision 60'; SV Fort +3, Ref +2, Will +1; AL N; Crit M/d8.

Un-dead kobolds (3): Init -1; Atk bite +0 melee (1d4-1); AC 10; HD 1d4; hp 3 each; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP un-dead traits (can be turned by clerics, do not eat, drink, or breathe, are