The logo for 'Dungeon Crawl Classics' is written in a stylized, blue, outlined font. The background of the entire cover is a red gradient. In the upper left, a portion of a yellow stone castle with multiple towers and battlements is visible. The central illustration depicts a bald, bearded man with a red beard and a blue and white striped tunic. He is embracing a green-skinned mutant woman with long, wavy green hair. The woman has a green, horn-like protrusion from her mouth and is wearing a purple sash. The man's expression is one of intense focus or aggression. The scene is set against a red background with green foliage at the bottom.

**DUNGEON
CRAWL
CLASSICS®**

HOLIDAY MODULE #12
A LEVEL 3 ADVENTURE
BY BRENDAN LASALLE

Love Mutants of Castle Heartache

Brendan LaSalle

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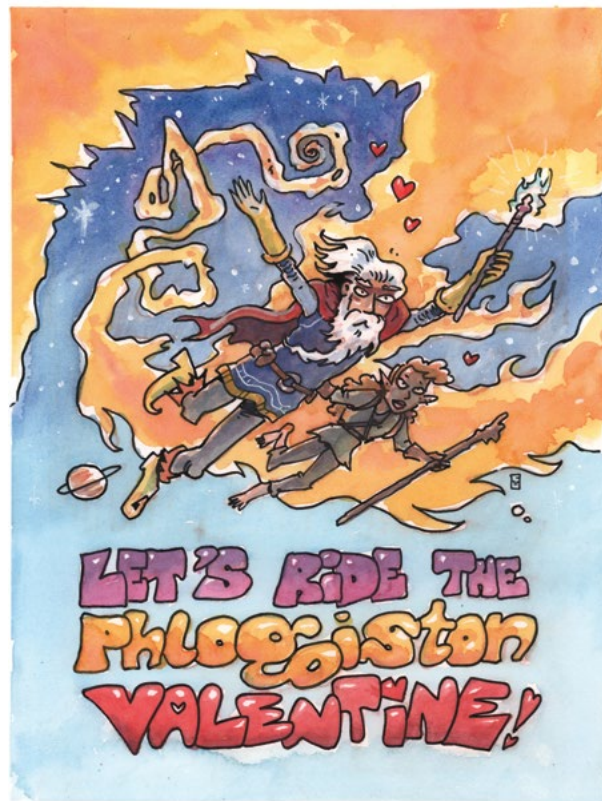
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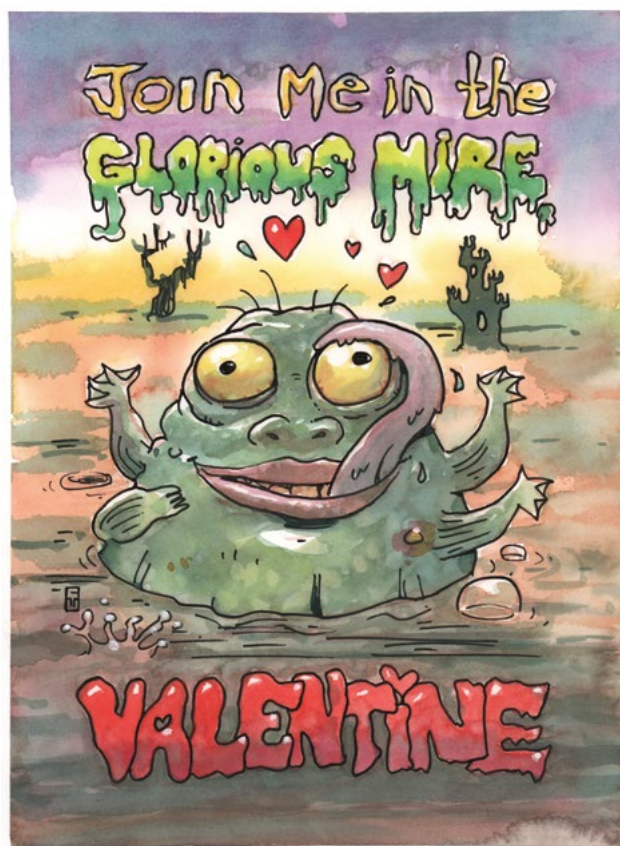
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Love Mutants of Castle Heartache

A LEVEL 3 ADVENTURE

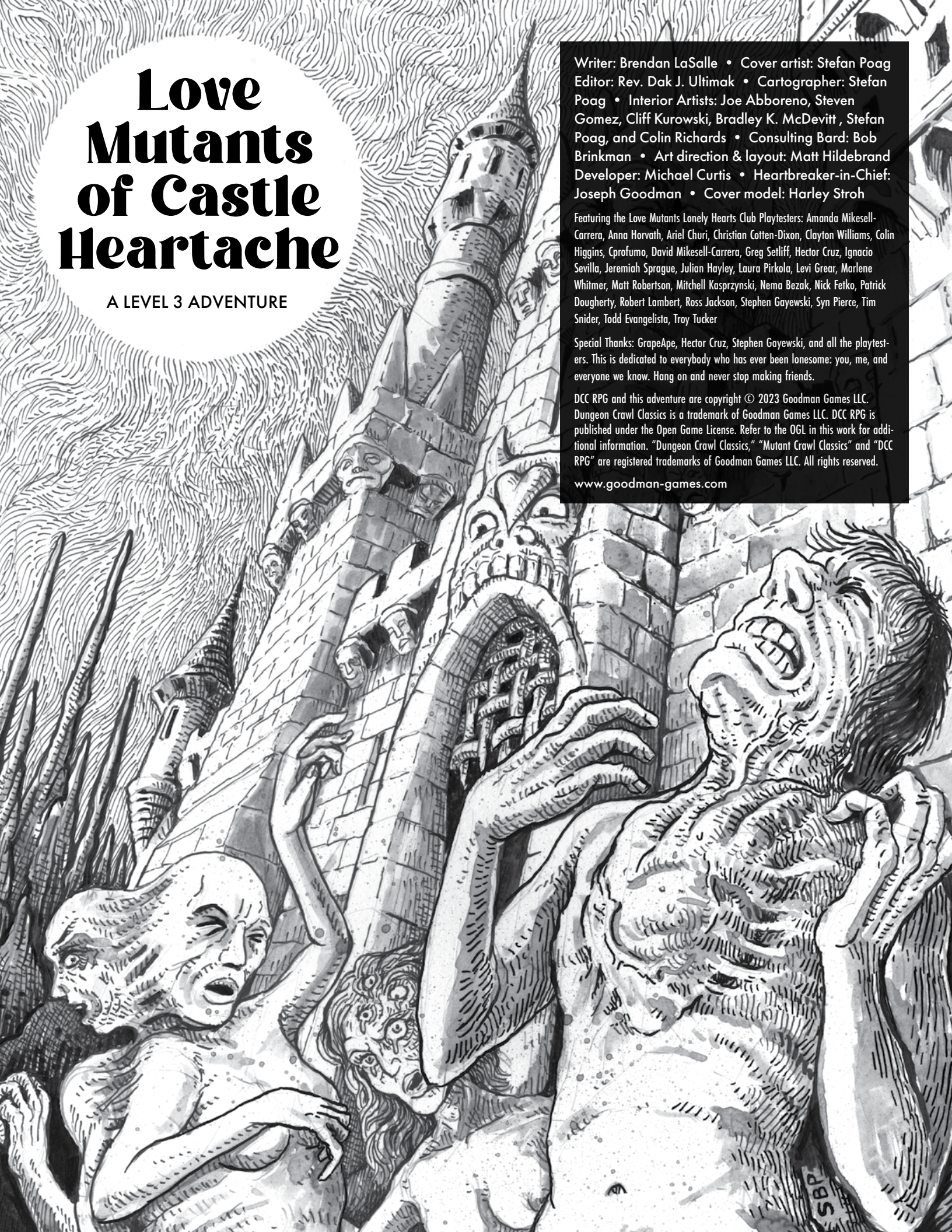
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Special Thanks: GrapeApe, Hector Cruz, Stephen Gayewski, and all the playtesters. This is dedicated to everybody who has ever been lonesome: you, me, and everyone we know. Hang on and never stop making friends.

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INTRODUCTION



Remember the good old days when love was Love, NPCs were to be wooed, and the finale of every dungeon was a camera panning to a fireplace? Sigh no more! Those days have returned with open arms and hearts full of longing!

Love Mutants of Castle Heartache is a Dungeon Crawl Classics adventure designed for 4-6 3rd level characters. Sanguinaldo, seneschal of the Mad God Olathvee, sends each character an arcane invitation, transporting them to the Demi-plane of Heartache. There they must search for the pieces of Olathvee's fragmented soul, as assembling them is the only chance to revive the Un-god and remove an existential curse from our world.

Love Mutants of Castle Heartache can be played with characters from any DCC setting. Olathvee's pain reaches out to every world in the universe, affecting all sentient beings. Sanguinaldo reaches out to adventurers from some far-flung realities and transports them to Castle Heartache with the power of the Black Invitations. Fantasy heroes, mutants, ninjas, pirates, and more could answer Sanguinaldo's summons in an attempt to save the world and discover their heart's true desire.

BACKGROUND

Olathvee, the Mad One, the Un-god that feeds upon the creation and destruction of the bonds of passion between mortals, went a-courtin'. It didn't go well.

The object of his affection was Dirgeadellia, a sorceress who meant to transcend her mortal form and become a patron. She spent her life seeking out ancient tomes and rituals that lead her to making bargain after bargain with the dark powers that dominate magic. While her powers are not yet patron level—it will be centuries before she completely leaves mortality behind—she has sacrificed so many bits of her body, soul, and destiny to the Outer Forces that what remains resembles humanity only superficially. Her desire for power was all, and no man, no deity, no immutable law of the Universe would stand in her way.

It was Dirgeadellia's passion that caught the attention of Mad Olathvee and drove him wild with desire. The Un-god decided to woo the sorceress. Any sensible creature would see this for the truly terrible idea it was, but Olathvee is one of those sad beings that falls hard for the emotionally unavailable and even Sanguinaldo, his cool-headed seneschal, could not talk sense into the foolish immortal.

Olathvee mustered all of his considerable power, starving his patron followers who couldn't succeed in an *invoke patron* check for months, and channeled it into an arcane mating display unprecedented in the universe. He covered the moon with roses, summoned the shades of ancient musicians to play love songs underneath Dirgeadellia's window, wrote ten thousand poems in starlight in the night sky over her research tower.



Dirgeadellia wasn't having any of it. Her emergent immortal self remained aloof while the last vestiges of her humanity were repulsed by the cosmic vulgarity of the Un-god's gambit. She sent him back a cosmic nastygram, punctuated with an arcane ward against ever contacting her again on pain of cataclysmic disjunction.

Olathvee was dejected on a scale incomprehensible to mortals. He took to his enormous clawfoot tub in a terrible sulk. His emotional misery filled the entire universe until there was nothing left in his breast but pain. In a final fit of anguish, the Un-god ripped out his own soul, tore it apart, and flung the fragments into his dungeons.

Olathvee's desperate act created a chain reaction that reverberated across the multiverse. First, the Un-god's personal demi-plane altered itself to match its creator's new mind state. Thus was Castle Heartache born. The Mad One's guards and servants, all extensions of the demi-plane itself, were then transformed to love mutants, cursed creatures twisted and warped by their sudden disconnection to the cosmic passion that created them. The love mutants snatched up the portions of their master's soul and hid them away, creating wards and protections around them.

But the worst was yet to come. Olathvee's heartbreak spread across every universe. The reverberations of the Mad One's pain have infected every being capable of love. This effectively broke up every relationship in the universe in one fell swoop. Everyone alive now is both utterly repulsed by the one they formerly loved, and aches to be near them again.

Do not underestimate the power of pain and isolation. The desolation Olathvee created will cause the end of sentient life on earth within a generation. The Mad God's seneschal,

Sanguinaldo, is the only hope for his master and the universe: he will summon heroes to brave the dungeons of Castle Heartache, collect the fragments of Olathvee's soul, and face the love mutants of Castle Heartache.

BEGINNING THE ADVENTURE



he consequences of Olathvee's rash action spreads across every world in the space of a day. Every lover, every committed partner, every dreamer that once imagined happiness with another had their hopes for love snatched away in an instant. The PCs see this in the world and possibly in themselves: suddenly everyone in the world both can no longer stand the sight of their significant others and is incredibly sad and lonely for them at the same time. Affected beings both realize that the feelings are almost certainly artificial, as they passed through the entire universe in a wave that affected everyone, and at the same time can not rationalize their pain away. This affects all the intelligent species and even animals that mate for life. The crisis is everywhere, undeniable and unmistakable, and philosophers postulate that this may spell doom for the world.

Several days after the catastrophe begins the PCs each receive a personalized invitation card from Sanguinaldo. These are in the form of black hearts trimmed with lace that open along a jagged split in the middle. Inside they all say the same thing:

I offer you a chance for glory and riches and an opportunity to save our world from the present calamity. Arrangements are in place for your transportation. With utmost sincerity, I remain – Sanguinaldo.

As soon as the PCs decide to take on the quest a midnight-blue portal opens before them, leading to the demi-plane of Castle Heartache. The magic of the invitations is such that even if all the PCs enter separately, at different times or even from different worlds, they all arrive in the fields around the castle in proximity at the same time.

COLLECTING PIECES OF OLATHVEE'S SOUL



he pieces of Olathvee's soul look like ever-morphing three-dimensional puzzle pieces, that cycle through vibrant colors and shapes as one watches. When brought within 5' of one another, the fragments attract each other like magnets, combining to make a larger soul fragment.

When all the pieces are put together, Olathvee's soul appears to be a glowing scarlet ovoid, which pulses with internal radiance as multicolored sparks orbit around the mass. Simply touching it to Olathvee's person causes it to re-absorb into his body, which revives the Mad One from his pitch-black humor.

The PCs may attempt to keep Olathvee's soul in an attempt to claim his power for their own. Any number of schemes might be enacted, limited only by the player's imagination. The judge must rule what may happen in any of these in-

stances but should bear the crisis of love across every world in mind when deciding what may happen.

NOTABLE CHARACTERISTICS OF CASTLE HEARTACHE



astle Heartache is a chaotic, strange demi-plane where normal physical laws do not apply. The entire dungeon is well lit by torches and candelabras, but their light sheds no heat nor smoke and can neither spark a normal fire nor be extinguished without magic.

All of the stairs go down in every direction. If the PCs turn around mid-way down a stairwell they suddenly find themselves going down to where they previously began, which was formerly up. They still arrive at their intended destination (with the exception of the Endless Spiral, area 1-12), but that location is now impossibly at the bottom of the stairwell they just came down from.

Castle Heartache is beautiful but melancholy. The walls are carved from living rock, giving the entire dungeon a feel of catacombs, but catacombs that have been decorated by a master. Beyond area 1-3, all the floors have velvet carpets and accent rugs, the walls are covered in beautiful tapestries with astonishingly realistic depictions (but how sad! Dogs trying to nudge their owners back to life, a matchgirl dying alone in the snow, weeping women in wedding dresses, and worse again and again) and some hide secret doors. Every piece of furniture is bespoke, every color carefully chosen, but all the grandeur serves only to heighten the intense sadness that seems to radiate from every painting, statue, and objet d'art.

While the PCs explore the demi-plane they are struck with a particularly depressive form of insomnia. Visitors can rest their bodies but can not sleep, haunted by intrusive thoughts of love and sorrow. This means that the adventurers may not recover hit points, spells, Luck points, ability damage, or disapproval in the Demi-plane of Heartache through mundane means.

The demi-plane is populated by love mutants, so designated to place them apart from post-apocalyptic mutants that can be affected by specific circumstances and benefits (such as gaining new mutant defects on a natural 1, for example).

Secret Doors: All secret doors that aren't otherwise described (e.g., areas 1-6, 1-8, and 1-10) are cleverly hidden by tapestries. The hidden doors can easily be discovered with a DC 12 Intelligence check, and a check of 15 or more will recognize that a similar subject connects them, making any other secret door discoveries automatic. For example, tapestries can be of a crying child holding a key, a treasure map to a broken heart, or the entrance to a secret garden.

Area 1-1 – Castle Exterior: As you enter through the portal you see an astounding sight. You appear at the edge of a clearing around a castle of unbelievable proportions, surrounded by drooping green and wilting topiary. The size and design of the structure's towers astounds – it is the apotheosis of every storybook gothic castle you have ever seen. Five flags fly at half-mast from above its five towers, each with a dark heart. The sky is twi-

light purple and before it you see what appear to be hundreds of people milling about in front of the castle. Beyond them you see a closed portcullis.

The crowd in front of the castle is composed of love mutants, and as the PCs approach the castle they see that each person has some strange physical characteristic. They all behave chaotically—a man with a huge, oversized pulsing lump in his chest over his heart screams into the wind, while a woman with a dozen continuously weeping eyes pulls her hair and calls out the name of her estranged love. A couple fused together back-to-back continuously spins about, trying at once to face and avoid one another. All of the mutants screech, cry, and rend their garments in deep distress.

As the PCs approach the castle they notice that one mutant stands above the rest. The Bleak Champion wades through the masses, attacking everyone in front of him and shouting again and again, “Down with Love! Down with Love!” Eventually he spots the PCs and charges at them.

The Bleak Champion (1): Init +0; Atk frigid air ball +6 missile fire (2d6 + freeze) or stomp +3 melee (1d12); Crit 1d8/M; AC 14; HD 8d8; hp 64; MV 20' lumber (cannot move twice in one round); Act 3d20; SP immune to cold, vulnerable to fire (2x damage), aura of cold, stunned by truth, freeze (DC 14 Fort save or frozen 1d3 rounds); SV Fort +9, Ref +4, Will +4; AL L.

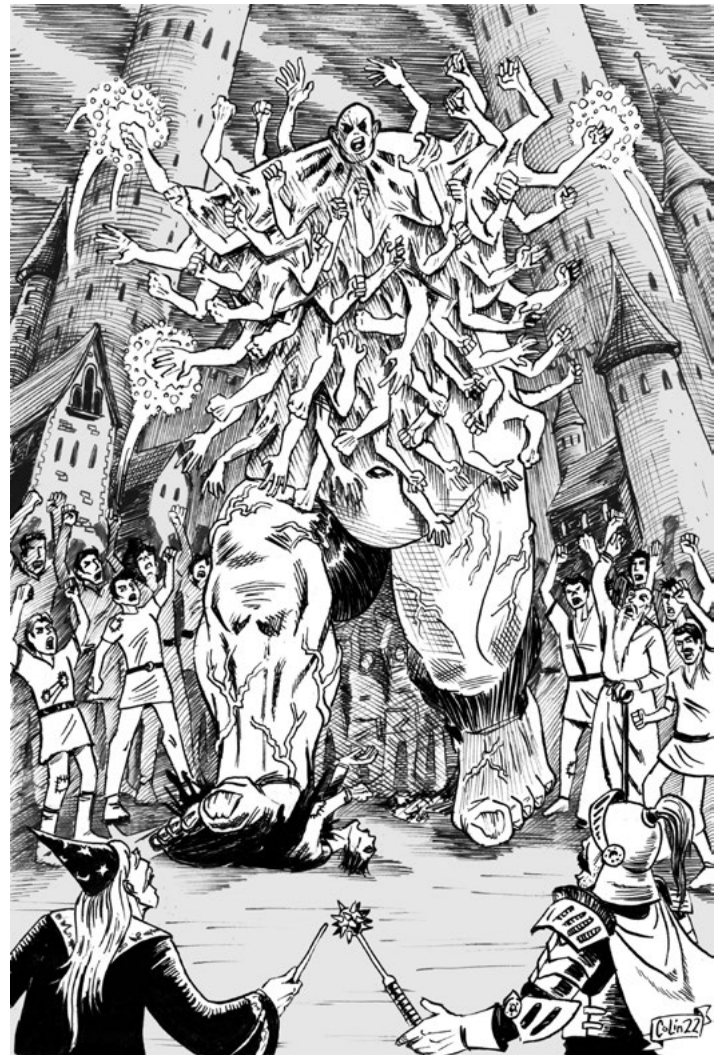
The immense Bleak Champion seeks to harm others rather than deal with his own pain.

Not a true giant, the Bleak Champion is a pale, 20' tall love mutant. His torso, pelvis, and legs are proportionate for his size, but his head and 100 left arms are all proportionate to a standard human. His arms ring the entirety of his torso like needles on a cacti. The creature is deathly pale, with skin the color of a fish belly. Its only form of communication is a single bellowed phrase “Down with Love!”, and its mouth constantly expels a dense freezing mist that surrounds its body.

The Bleak Champion can summon and hurl 3 balls of frigid air at opponents up to 30' away every round. Targets struck must make a DC 13 Fortitude save or be frozen into immobility for 1d3 rounds. Targets who fail the save fall prone, and the vile champion may attempt to stomp them to death on its next action. Note that the creature has 3 action dice but can only make 1 stomp attempt per round.

The Champion is immune to cold damage but vulnerable to heat (heat related damage is doubled). If an opponent shouts some irrational truth at the beast—something about the unbeatable power of hope or love, for example—it may shock the Champion into thinking about the truth of its existence. The shouter should make a Personality check. The Bleak Champion must make a Willpower save (DC = opponents Personality check) or stand in stunned contemplation, unable to act save for defending himself for 1 round.

Once the PCs approach the portcullis, Sanguecaldo appears and asks to see their invitations. Sanguecaldo is a handsome man with salt and pepper hair and mustache wearing red robes who carries a wand of office, a gnarled wood



staff topped with a combined male-female sign. Satisfied, he wills the gate to open and the PCs may enter. Once they are inside, the portcullis closes, and a mass of love mutants soon gather around it, screaming for Olathvee to bring love back to the world.

Area 1-2 - The Foyer: *The portcullis lifts with a whine of tortured metal. The castle floor is an intricate puzzle of patternless flagstones, none of which seem to fit completely so there are gaps and overlaps throughout. Wall sconces alternately hold shaggy arrangements of rough-cut ashen cyclamen or smokeless torches. You hear warbling music from deeper inside. An embroidered rug depicts a child trying to drag a sinking horse out of a swamp.*

Stepping through the entryway triggers Castle Heartache's defenses against improperly attired guests. The character's outfits instantly morph into deeply romantic attire. This may be of any appropriately romantic theme: gothic, calavera, courtesan, corpse-face, or similar sadly poetic attire to match the castle's gloom, possibly with new hairstyles and make-up to match. The changes are only cosmetic, but they are universal, effacing weapons and armor without altering their innate properties. This change lasts until the PCs exit the pocket realm, unless the PCs wish for it to be permanent.

Sanguecaldo greets all of the adventurers and bids them follow to the great hall.

THE UPPER CASTLE

Love Mutants of Castle Heartache takes place in the grounds and the dungeon level below Castle Heartache itself. There is no entrance on the map to the upper level of the castle—part of the hell Olathvee has created for himself in the demi-plane is that he can never enjoy the upper tiers of his creation, as he now believes himself to be unlovable and unworthy of anything but the dank basement.

This isn't to say that the PCs can't find some clever point of egress to the upper floors. They could climb up (an easy DC 13 climb check as there are trellises twined with black roses and sad gargoyle statues with ready handholds and similar all over the place) and enter through a window or balcony, or use some sort of magic to pass through a wall. If the PCs make it into the upper castle read or paraphrase the following:

The upper castle is an empty, lonely place. Every room you examine has only one solitary object inside, always without its mate: a picture frame with no picture, an empty desk without a chair, a single dancing slipper. The castle is utterly quiet, and even the smallest sounds echo and distort for far too long a time to be natural.

No matter how long their characters search the upper floors, they don't find anything interesting or useful, nor any way to the basement other than going back to the castle grounds and entering through the portcullis. They cannot rest in the upper castle; the curse of insomnia pervades the entire demi-plane (see Notable Characteristics of Castle Heartache, p. 3). For every 3 hours spent exploring the upper areas, the PCs must each make a DC 13 Willpower save or become addicted to the castle's empty melancholy and wander forever, unable to leave of their own volition.

Area 1-3 – The Clawfoot Bath of Exquisite Misery:

This is a huge hall with vaulted, buttressed ceilings. On the far end of the hall, you see a shocking sight: An enormous clawfoot tub, more than 60' long, takes up the entire south wall. There is three-tiered scaffolding built along side of it, with stairs that lead from one level to the next. Soaking in the tub is a colossal humanoid. You can see his head leaning on the west end of the tub and his pale feet sticking up to rest on the east end. The being is handsome and well-formed, with long straight black hair falling into the tub's dark water, high cheekbones, and a thin mustache. The colossus stares up at the ceiling with its great, sad eyes, and seems to take no notice of your presence. On the east and west walls are two huge double doors, each under a tiled sign that looks like a careful mosaic recreation of a madman's scrawl: Lost Hope over the East door, and Eternal Despair over the west.

Sanguinaldo is worried for both the catastrophe of love and his heartbroken master, and continually frets over the Un-god's condition. Sanguinaldo explains the situation: that his master has had his heart broken by Dirgeadellia (whom the

seneschal personally considers both unworthy and dangerous), and that in his terrible sadness the Mad One ripped out his own passionate soul, tore it into five sections, and hurled the fragments in to the depths of his dungeon, only to be hidden away by the Mad One's former guards and servants, who are now transformed into love mutants. The worried seneschal asks that the PCs go and find all five pieces and bring them back here to be reunited with Olathvee. He says that they may keep any other riches they find, and that the alternative is a world without love that will die off within a single generation. Sanguinaldo explains that he cannot leave his master's side because he is, in essence, an extension of the Mad God's demi-realm, representing the last vestiges of the Un-god's compassion and drive for self-preservation.

Assuming the PCs agree to take on this quest, Sanguinaldo lets them know that they can reach the dungeons through either door. Before they can leave, Olathvee utters "THE GLOBE" in a massive, hoarse voice. Sanguinaldo, shocked, offers to show the PCs the Snow Globe of Missing Souls, allowing them to find a glimpse of their soulmate. The seneschal retrieves the artifact from its hiding place behind the tub, and shows it to the PCs. See Appendix I for the effects of viewing the snow globe.

The characters may climb the scaffolding to gaze upon Olathvee, who remains insensible and still, and mostly hidden be-



neath dark waters and soap bubbles. If a PC leaps into the tub they suddenly find themselves in a black ocean during a torrential thunderstorm. Waves toss them violently and they are in immediate danger of drowning. They must be helped by someone on the outside, who can throw them a rope (which appears to come down out of the sky to the immersed), or find some unconventional means to save themselves.

Area 1-4 – Fountain of Tears: *You see a three-tiered fountain that showers water down upon its basins from its highest nozzle. The outside of the three basins are carved in a pattern of faces covered by hands – as if the subjects were in intense distress. You see silver coins in the fountain's three basins.*

This is a fountain of tears, the result of a thousand missed chances and misunderstandings. The coins in the fountains represent wishes made by those pledging themselves to Olathvee for deliverance. If the coins are examined, the “heads” side prove to be all different—each a unique being, humans and humanoids and creatures unrecognizable—and the “tails” side all have the same wish in a thousand different languages: “Give it to me again to do over differently.”

The PCs can safely throw coins in the fountain, but if they break the surface of the water with a hand or implement the Lacrimation Elemental bursts out of the water and attacks, fighting to the death.

The Lacrimation Elemental (1): Init +2; Atk fist of tears +4 melee (1d10 + grapple); Crit 1d8/M; AC 15; HD 4d8, hp 29; MV 15', Swim 60'; Act 1d20; SP immune to crits and non-magical weapons, grow pseudopods, elemental traits, grapple at +6; SV Fort +4, Ref +3, Will +6; AL N.

The Lacrimation Elemental is a unique being that sprung to life when Olathvee shredded his loving soul. He is entirely formed of the tears of the lonely and brokenhearted, and he means to spread delicious misery and pain to any who ask for it by disturbing his water.

The beast appears to be a 6' tall column of salty water with two enormous lovely blue eyes set near its center of mass. In combat the creature creates a pseudopod ending in a huge salty fist and strikes at opponents. Opponents struck by the creature's fist must make a grapple check vs the creature (grapple check +6). If the creature wins the grapple, the Lacrimation Elemental has latched on to the victim's face, forcing part of its mass into their lungs to drown them. A successful grapple check allows the victim to break free and catch a breath. Targets begin smothering, having ½ their current Stamina score in rounds to get free before dying of suffocation. The elemental has only 1 action die but may grow extra limbs so that it can maintain multiple grapples while it lashes out at additional opponents.

The Lacrimation Elemental is immune to critical hits and non-magical weapons. Blessed weapons and attacks from magically blessed individuals can strike it normally, and weapons blessed by a Lawful priest do +1d damage. The creature has no need to sleep, breathe, or eat, although it does make a yummy noise every time it absorbs tears from a heartbroken host.

The 3,000 coins are not legal tender in any world but if collected could be traded or melted down, being the equivalent of about 300 gp, or sold as an oddity.

Area 1-5 – The Lonesome Captive: The PCs hear garbled shouting and the ringing of steel clashing with steel as they near the entrance to area 1-5.

This room is a torture chamber. To your left is a vertical rack and a horizontal iron maiden. To your right is an unlit brazier and a rack of hanging iron implements, flails, and light bludgeons. On one wall is a cage of steel bars set into ceiling and floor. Outside of it you see five humanoids in grey uniforms and wide leather belts. In place of hands, they have long curved hammers, and they bang on the cage bars with a tremendous noise. Their backs are to you as they shout invectives and threats at their prisoner, a man-snake hybrid. The prisoner has a snake body, 20' or longer, a humanoid torso covered in scales, human arms held out straight from his shoulders as if being stretched wide by some unseen force, and a head with both snake and human features. It cowers away from the bars but never relaxes its outstretched arms.

The Heavy-Handed Guards are part of Olathvee's castle guards from the before times, now tormenting one of their former fellows whom they reject for mutating into a snake-man. If the guards notice the PCs they will all scream and clash their hammer hands and attempt to chase them away. They attack if they are unsuccessful, and work together to prevent the release of the prisoner.

Heavy-handed Guards (5): Init +0; Atk fist-hammer +1d4+1 melee (1d4 +2 +1d4, limited deed); Crit 1d6/III; AC 16; HD 2d12; hp 17 each; MV 20'; Act 1d20; SP limited deed; SV Fort +2, Ref +2, Will +1; AL C.

The Heavy-handed Guards appear to be humanoids with enormous over-sized steel brick hammers for hands. The guards all dress in chainmail hauberk over grey guard uniforms. They speak common and shout nonsense invectives and threats, essentially warning all to comply or be hammered.

The guards have a limited deed die of 1d4. As with *Mighty Deeds of Arms*, the attack and damage are modified by this die, and if the die result is a 3 or higher, they can attempt one of the following deed like effects: knocking the target down, shoving the target away, sunder weapon or shield.

One of the guards has a ring of keys on his person, one key of which opens the cage door.

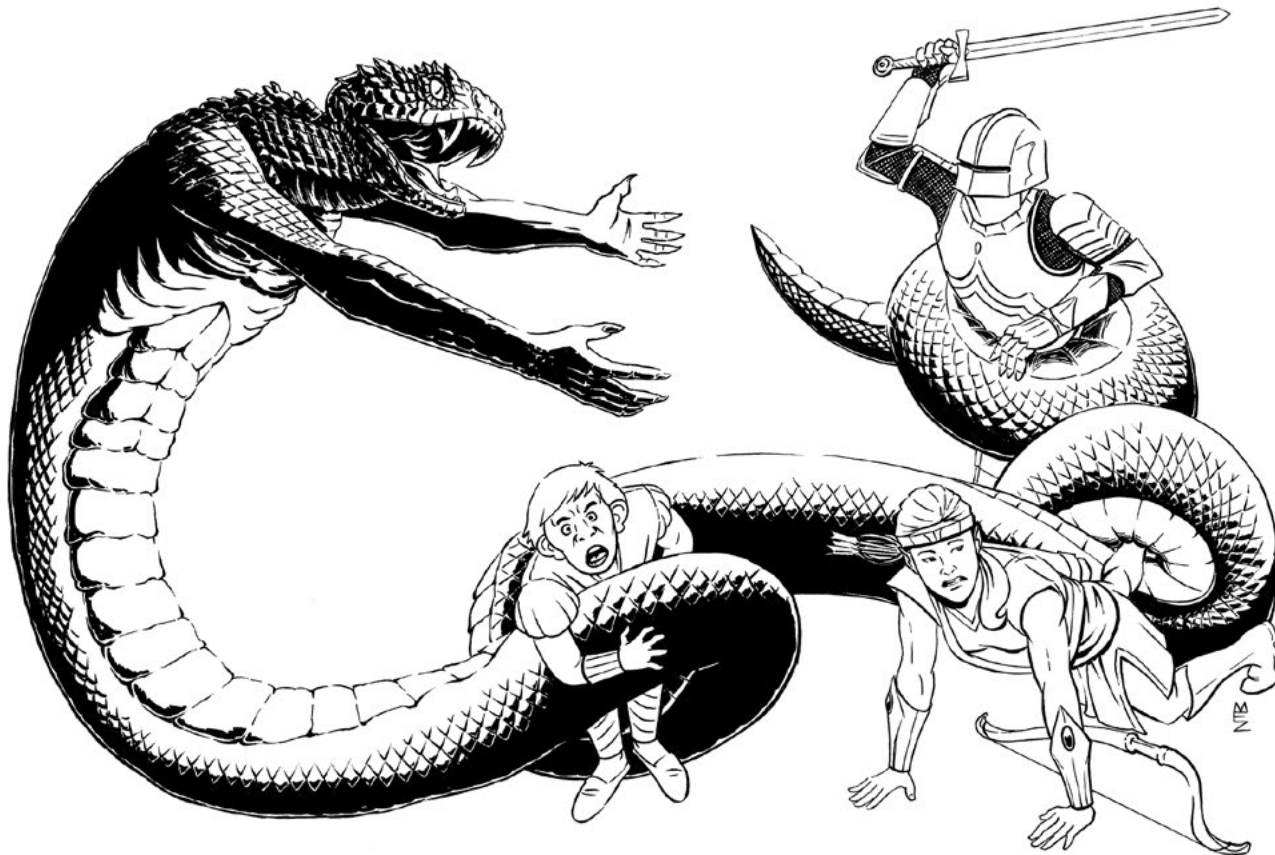
Once the creature is out of its special cage it automatically wraps around every humanoid within 30'. Every target is automatically affected—it is as if the Lonesome Captive simply teleports around its victims, which are all squeezed together by the creature's coils.

The Lonesome Captive (1): Init + 0; Atk intertwine targets (special); Crit none; AC 13; HD 5d8; hp 21; MV slither 30'; Act 1d20; SP mute, natural grappler (1d24+3), automatically intertwine body, vulnerable to physical affection; SV Fort +4, Ref +0, Will +5; AL N.

S = Secret Door
1 square = 5 feet

LOVE MUTANTS OF CASTLE HEARTACHE





The Lonesome Captive is a mute love mutant whose body automatically ensnares those around him to satisfy his unsatisfiable need for positive touch.

The Captive can technically speak the language of snakes in his current form, and if the PCs have a way of communicating with him the Captive speaks of his utter loneliness, his unfair detainment, and his inability to control his mutated body. He begs for the PCs help in restoring the castle and his person.

Victims of being intertwined must make a Reflex save, with varying results depending on their roll:

Reflex save	Result
1 or lower	The target's body and neck are wrapped in multiple coils, fully grappled and smothering, and will suffocate and die in (1/2 target's Stamina) rounds.
2-10	The target is fully grappled and may not attack or cast spells until they break free.
11-13	Both legs or both arms are caught (50/50), preventing either normal moving or fighting/spellcasting.
14-16	One arm is entangled (50/50 L/R arm, could prevent fighting or shield use)
17-20+	One leg is entangled, preventing normal movement.

The Lonesome Captive is a natural grappler, with a grapple check of 1d24+3, making it extremely difficult to escape the creature. However, there is one failsafe way to escape. If any entangled target simply hugs the Lonesome Captive back, the creature uncoils, returns the hug, and dissolves into ugly

crying. One minute later it reverts to its original form as one of Olathvee's castle guards, and is confused as to what is taking place.

If the Lonesome Captive survives the encounter and the PCs ask if he knows the location of the shards of Olathvee's soul he gratefully points to the section of wall that hides the secret door.

Area 1-6 - The Secret Door: The secret door is fairly easy to find if the PCs search (DC 12 Intelligence check). A section of wall slides aside on a track, revealing the passageway.

When the secret door opens an envelope appears in the door gap itself. If the PCs open the envelope a fragment of Olathvee's soul appears in the air above it. The envelope also appears if the PCs come from the other direction (i.e. use the secret door to gain entry to area 1-5), but if the PCs come in through that direction they get caught in the Lonesome Captive's coils, as above. In this case the Heavy-Handed Guards all scream and shout at the adventurers for attempting to free their prisoner, but they can't do anything about it because their hands can no longer manipulate the keys to the cell.

Area 1-7 - The Sad Clown: The PCs hear singing as they approach this junction, a lovely but sad tenor singing in an unknown language.

There is a stage set into shallow alcove at this juncture. Standing upon it is a clown in black and white make-up and costume, lit by footlights set into the base of the stage. He sings a deeply sad song in his deep tenor. A painted background on canvas hanging behind him shows the skyline of some magnificent city under a full moon.

The Sad Clown is a love mutant with clown make-up and outfit as parts of his body. The clown sings to torment him-

self with his loneliness. He ignores the PCs as much as he can and attempts to flee if attacked (AC 10, 3 hp). If the PCs ask for directions the clown points west towards the door leading to area 1-8.

Patient adventurers who stay here will eventually hear the amazing tenor sing all of their names, and possibly the names of any of their estranged significant others. If the PCs have some means of understanding the Sad Clown's language (a Romance language from a far-off world), they comprehend that the clown's song features everyone in the party. If the PCs listen through the opera singer's entire cycle (taking an hour), they hear that the clown sings of his life before losing his love and turning into a love mutant, the coming of the adventurers and the circumstances that brought them to Castle Heartache, and his hopes for deliverance for Olathvee and all effected beings. Listening and comprehending the singer's entire cycle gives the PCs insight into themselves and earns the PCs 3 XP.

Area 1-8 – The Scrapbooks of Memory Laney: *The door opens to a cozy, cluttered bedroom. The walls are lined with bookshelves, and you see hundreds of volumes, all seemingly well-loved and overstuffed with bits of paper. Against the south wall of the room is a comfortable looking bed. An elderly woman sits up in bed, covered in comforters and quilts, paging through a book. She smiles in surprise as you open the door and waves you in.*

The woman is Memory Laney, a love mutant who has become one with her pillows and bedclothes. If she were to flop out of her bed viewers would see that her back has an array of attached pillows and that her torso ends in a great long pile of duvet and comforters, that she can wiggle about like a snake's tail.

Laney is happy for company and will cheerfully talk about her plight, even demonstrating the particulars of her mutation. She was Olathvee's scribe and secretary before the calamity, and she is eager to return to her position when this is all over.

If the PCs ask about Olathvee's soul fragments, Laney says that she had one and put it into one of her many scrapbooks, but she cannot remember which book. She requests the PCs bring her the books one at a time, and if so she will find it for them. But she warns them to be careful as she has been menaced by a creature recently.

When the first book is taken off the shelf, the scissors swarm flies out from the space behind it and attacks. They do not attack Laney, who throws her blanket top over her head and hides. The swarm centers itself around the character with the lowest Luck score for the duration of the fight.

Scissors Swarm (1): Init +6; Atk snip swarm + 6 melee (1d5); Crit 1d8/M; AC 13; HD 7d6; hp 33; MV fly 30'; Act 1d20; SP swarm traits, bleeding wounds, immunities, hover; SV Fort +2, Ref +6, Will +2; AL C.

This is a swarm of enchanted scissors, determined to keep anyone from recovering Olathvee's soul fragment from Memory Laney's scrapbooks. The scissors swarm appears

to be a cloud of ever-snapping scissors of every size and description that can fly about or hover as it wishes.

The scissors swarm begins as a 20' diameter cloud. The swarm gets an attack on every creature in its area on its round, rolling separately to hit and on damage for every target. Wounds caused by the swarm continue to bleed at a rate of 1 hp per round until the wound is bound or healed magically.

For every 10 points of damage the swarm takes it loses 5' of its diameter, shrinking so as to be able to strike fewer targets, to a minimum of 5'.

The scissors swarm is immune to critical hits and sleep effects. The creature doesn't need to sleep, eat, or breathe, and is immune to disease, poison, and magical aging.

Once the scissors swarm is defeated it takes 3 hours for the PCs and Laney working together to find the right book. During that time Laney proudly points out some of the high points of her scrap books, which are loaded with sketches, articles, photographs, and bits of text from a thousand worlds that Olathvee and his court have interacted with over time. Eventually she flips a page and the soul fragment appears in the air over the book. She thanks the PCs profusely for being good company and wishes them luck on their quest.

If the PCs decide to attack Laney they can defeat her fairly easily (AC 5, hp 6, maximum move 5' by dragging her comforter-body behind her. It takes 13 hours and a successful Luck check for the PCs to find the soul fragment without her, with a failed check meaning they need to spend another 13 hours for an additional attempt.

The secret door on the west wall is a bookcase that slides aside to reveal the carpeted cave leading to area 1-10. Memory Laney is unaware of the secret passage leading to area 1-9, which is accessed by a trap door underneath her bed.

Area 1-9 – The Treasure Room: *This is a wide room with white marble walls and floor. There are three chests against the south wall, all of them open and seemingly empty. The west wall is one huge bookshelf, the topmost pigeonholed, and it's full of books. On the northern wall there is an empty trophy case with glass walls and glass doors. The case has a loop for a lock but there is no lock, and it stands slightly open. Next to it is the door of a mega vault that must weigh several tons. The vault door has no visible lock, handle, or any other mechanism. On the eastern wall is an armoire, its doors half open showing an empty interior.*

The vault door can only be opened by each member of the party sacrificing a meaningful item to the demi-plane by placing it into the empty case.

The sacrifice should be substantial, meaningful, or magical. A coin would not do, but all of the coins the character carries would if it leaves them penniless. A warrior's lucky weapon, the tarot cards of a former fortune teller, a prize trophy of battle—all these things can work the charm. The judge should consider esoteric gifts, such as a story never told or their PCs greatest memory (possibly costing experience points), or similar sacrifices. Castle Heartache has the



ability to remove and store any such items, so allow interesting, creative, or especially moving sacrifices to be allowed.

If a PC's sacrifice is found worthy by the Castle, then the door will rattle—slightly for the first sacrifice, with each sacrifice making it rattle more until the final sacrifice throws the door wide. At this point several things happen at once.

Inside the vault are wonderful and protected memories of love and pain. They all come rushing into the room at once, form a fragment of Olathvee's soul, and join with any other soul fragments the PCs carry.

The Thief of Flesh materializes inside the armoire and instantly charges the PCs. The Thief of Flesh means to thwart the quest so that the misguided thing might continue to mitigate his pain by becoming someone else.

The Thief of Flesh (1): Init +4; Atk tentacle grab +6 melee (1d6 + absorb flesh, 15' reach) or central maw bite +4 melee (1d8); Crit 1d12/M; AC 17; HD 7d8; hp 51; MV waddle 15'; Act 2d20; SP absorb flesh (DC 12 Fort save or creature absorbs 1d4 hp); SV Fort +6, Ref +2, Will +5; AL C.

The Thief of Flesh is a love mutant whose love for their fellow man has been corrupted into a horrifying desire to become others by absorbing their flesh.

The Thief of Flesh is a 7' tall corpulent humanoid with four long tentacles for arms, each ending in a hand with three smaller tentacles for fingers. The creature's skin is a patchwork of the skin of many humanoids, clearly all of different ages, skin tones and proportions. The creature has a vesti-

gial head which flops about bonelessly. Its huge red eyes are in its chest, and its belly has an enormous mouth full of savage predator teeth.

The creature attacks by reaching out with its long tentacles. The suckers in its tentacled fingers and arms steal bits of flesh from its opponents, leaving strange, painful divots in the target's body. Any creature struck by the Thief of Flesh must make a DC 12 Fortitude save or lose an additional 1d4 hit points which are gained by the creature. Stolen hit points can raise the Thief of Flesh above his beginning hp total—it grows larger, meaner, and eventually adopts the worst traits of his victims.

The Thief of Flesh won't normally bite unless the creature is subject to a grapple or other close-quarter attack that brings him in body-to-body contact with an opponent, as it cannot absorb hit points by biting.

When the Thief of Flesh dies it vomits a stream of miscellaneous gold, coins, jewelry, and items it has accidentally absorbed during its reign of terror in Castle Heartache. The PCs find 427 cp, 70 sp, 122 gp, 11 rubies worth 50 gp each, and an assortment of rings, earrings, lucky charms, and a handful of ivory buttons in its sputum.

Area 1-10 - The Nighthawk Bar: If the PCs listen at the door, they hear a sad song sung and played on several instruments coming from inside.

You enter a familiar scene: a dark bar. The entire wall across from the entrance is a long bar with a dozen empty stools in front of it. The wall behind the bar has neatly ordered bottles, arrangements of stacked glassware, hanging wine goblets, and bowls of what appear to be grapes. There is one glass jar in the center filled with bits of paper and coins. Standing at the bar, washing pint glasses, is a lone barkeep with the head of a grey tortoise-shell cat. Her garb is unusual—a simple shirt that shows off her tattooed arms and shoulders, and plain trousers. The bar is empty except for one table in the far corner, full of humanoids. The men expel great gouts of smoke with every breath. They all shout and gesticulate angrily towards the barkeep, who seems to be trying to ignore them. Looking around, it appears the source of the strange, sad music is the colorful box in one end of the room.

Esme the barkeep is a non-combatant love mutant who is cursed to work this bar until close. The Smoking Men refuse to leave, unwilling to their end sport of haranguing and insulting the bartender.

If the PCs approach the bartender, she greets them and asks for drink orders. The bar has all common spirits, and if a PC asks for something rare or exotic have them make a Luck check for every item ordered to see if the Castle Heartache bar stocks it. If questioned she says she has always been the bartender here but since Olathvee removed his soul she has been stuck here on shift, unable to clock out until the last guest leaves.

If the PCs attempt to oust the Smoking Men it can go many ways. A clever trick, some use of a magic spell, or similar gambit all might work. Allow the PCs to enact a solution here, requiring dice rolls as appropriate.

Some plans will simply not work. The Smoking Men will not be bribed away (they are having too much fun, and they intend to skip on the check anyway), and if threatened they will square off, stand their ground, and eventually fight if provoked enough. During combat they never stop screaming at the bartender.

Smoking Men (5): Init +1; Atk claw +1 melee (1d3) or flaming rat vomit (10' range); Crit 1d8 III; AC 14; HD 2d8; hp 15 each; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP bleed rats, flaming rat vomit (DC 13 Reflex save or 1d4 damage for 1d4 rounds); SV Fort +2, Ref +2, Will +1; AL C.

The Smoking Men are a group of love mutants who blame their sorrow on others, in this case on Esme the bartender. Their sorrow turns to rage at the chosen object of their ire, and they become vessels of irrational hate.

The Smoking Men appear to be humanoids with the heads of bulldogs. They expel reeking smoke with every exhalation. One staring at an open-mouthed Smoking Man might see a tiny rat head poking out from the back of its throat. In battle they grow claws and distend their jaws to spit flaming rats at their opponents. They can hit targets within 10' with their spew of flaming rats. Targets must make a DC 13 Reflex save or be covered in flaming rats, which burn their target for 1d4 damage per round before burning to vile-smelling ash in 1d4 rounds. Targets covered in flaming rats can use their full combat round to try to shake the rats off, an act which requires a DC 13 Agility check or a clever tactic. Spellcasters covered in flaming

rats take a -1d penalty on spellcasting. During combat, they continue to insult, berate, and threaten Esme the bartender.

Smoking men bleed rats if cut, and the rats run in all directions. When reduced to zero hit points, they are nothing but shredded skin bags and fleeing rats.

If the PCs successfully defeat or get rid of the Smoking Men a red telephone materializes and rings. Esme the barkeep answers it, and tells the PCs that she just got a message from "downstairs" — they should use the secret door behind the jukebox and go downstairs.

Area 1-11 - The Door Keeper: The secret door leads to a downward curving hallway, that goes under the bar and into a small room.

This is some kind of waiting area. There are a dozen high-backed ornately carved benches, all of which sit facing the south wall. There are hundreds of black balloons all hovering up against the ceilings. There is a passageway to a stairwell on the south wall, and standing on the ceiling besides it is a humanoid in a rumpled suit. The humanoid's face is actually upside down, making it right-side up to you. It looks down at you suspiciously.

This is Vikededestienine, the immortal guardian of the door. Gravity pushes him up rather than down, so he must walk along ceilings. If the PCs ousted the Smoking Men from the Nighthawk Bar, Vikededestienine nods at the adventurers, waves his hands, and a fragment of Olathvee's soul flies in through the passageway, connecting with any other pieces of Olathvee's soul they encounter. The guardian warns them



not to go down the passageway, which leads to an infinite downward staircase that won't let you go back up the stairs.

If the PCs have not ousted the Smoking Men, Vikededestienine answers any questions gruffly, doesn't seem to know much, but says they shouldn't go through the passageway, but he doesn't know why. This is actually the truth, he won't know about the curse of the spiral stairway until Castle Heartache puts the information in his head, which only occurs if the PCs roust the Smoking Men.

Area 1-12 – The Spiral Stairs: *The spiral stairway has a neatly carved wooden banister on the wall side, and a guard rail on the interior. Looking over the guard rail you see the stairs spiral downwards as far as you can see. The stairs are covered in neat velvet carpet.*

This is the infinite stairway down. If the PCs start making their way down the stairs they fall victim to its treacherous magic.

The stairs go nowhere but down, infinitely. If the PCs look over the guard rail, they can see far but not to the bottom. Every 20 rotations or so the stairway has a 20' wide landing, with couches, a table with a pitcher of water, and a dish with olives.

Once they do attempt to go back up the stairs, they start to hear ghostly voices from below. The voices are extremely low but if the PCs are very quiet and listen carefully, they hear the far-off voices urging the PCs to continue their way down. If the PCs try to reverse and go back up the stairs, they find themselves going down again, no matter how often they try it.

There are many ways to escape the stairway. If the PCs haven't gone down too far they could use a rope and grapple to climb up through the center of the stairwell (DC 10 climb check, on a natural 1 they fall down the center of the stairway forever). They could use magic, including summoning flying creatures to fly them back to the top or calling for divine intervention (DC 20 *Divine Aid* check). Allow clever plans a chance to work.

There is a mechanical way they can leave that even wise Vikededestienine doesn't know. The PCs could lie down on the stairs and pull themselves up hand-over-hand up the handrail to the top, dragging their legs behind like dead weight. This is an excruciating, exhausting process that could take hours or days to accomplish, depending on how far down the PCs descended before stopping.

Area 1-13 – The Unspeakable Library: *This is a well-appointed room with neat bookshelves and a huge desk. An off-white section of the wall is framed off, and there are several lines of words upon it. Standing before this wall is a very strange humanoid with far too many mouths. She moves the lines of words around the board, which stick to the wall as if magnetized. The mutant seems to be deliberately scrambling the words. There are several tapestries on the walls that depict melancholic scenes – a lonely girl looks over her balcony while a hidden man watches from the shadows, a king mourns for his slain daughter, and a dark-skinned warrior with tears in his eyes takes his own life over the body of a beautiful woman.*



The creature is the Syntax Vandal, a love mutant who protects a section of Olathvee's soul. She is hopelessly confused about what is happening, and in her mind she is saving the Mad One's soul fragment from invaders who are trying to destroy it.

As soon as the Syntax Vandal notices the players she will attack, first by summoning gabbling maws and then with her spells. She fights to the death or until the puzzle is solved, all the while valiantly defending her master's existence.

The words stuck to the white section of wall are parts of a puzzle. The words are one of the thousands of love poems – in this case a sonnet – that Olathvee had written in honor of the object of his affection, Dirgeadellia. The poem is a Shakespearean sonnet (the tapestries on the wall are clues representing Romeo and Juliet, King Lear, and Othello). The punctuation and rhyme scheme should be clues to putting the puzzle together. The puzzle hides a fragment of Olathvee's soul, and putting the lines together in the correct order reveals the fragment.

See Appendix II for the mechanics of the puzzle and information about Shakespearean sonnets.

The Syntax Vandal (1): Init +3; Atk teleport punch +7 melee (1d7); Crit 1d14/I; AC 19; HD 9d4; hp 34; MV 30' (teleport); Act 1d20 + 1d16; SP null communications, summon gabbling maw, spell use (check +7), immune to turn unholy; SV Fort +5, Ref +7, Will +8; AL C.

The Syntax Vandal is a 5' tall humanoid love mutant of

strange proportions. She has five mouths—mouths where eyes should be, mouth where ears should be, a mouth where it's nose should be. In addition, she has only one arm (the right arm), and the arm has three additional mouths on it, all on the outward facing side of her forearm. All of its mouths speak in different voices, and they all speak continuous nonsense, with each voice seeming to seek to drown out its fellows. The mutant wears a sort of draped toga, clearly made from a tablecloth. Despite its bizarre physicality, the creature can see and hear perfectly.

The Syntax Vandal moves by teleportation and can instantly transmit herself to anywhere it can see as a move action. Her high AC comes from her ability to reactively teleport a few inches out of the way of most incoming attacks. The Vandal attacks by teleporting with her fist out towards its target, giving the blow extra momentum.

Before the catastrophe The Syntax Vandal had a kind word for everyone and loved to listen to music and poetry, and was a master of flirtation via coy love talk. Now her presence twists language, hampers spellcasting, and thwarts spoken communication. She scrambles all communication within 60' of her person, causing creatures in her presence who attempt to talk to only produce a "word salad," a disordered assortment of random words and phrases. This has a dire effect on spellcasting: spellcasters who attempt to cast a spell in the Syntax Vandal's presence make their spell check (including spellburn, if any), then must roll randomly to see which of their spells is actually cast, regardless of whether or not the spell is appropriate or even safe for the situation. Only spells that can be cast without a verbal component are immune to this effect. If the random determination is of a spell that requires spellburn and the caster hasn't done any spellburn, then it is as if the caster didn't attempt to cast the spell at all, i.e. they may attempt to cast it normally in future. Likewise, the creature is immune to turn unholy, as it simply twists the cleric's words of admonishment around in its mind until they become gracious encouragement.

The Syntax Vandal can cast the following spells, which have their own unique manifestation in this place. Any PCs may guess at what spells the Vandal is actually casting, but a wizard can make DC 20 spell check to know for sure what spell the Vandal actually casts. Note that the Vandal has two action dice (1d20 +1d16), so it may cast multiple spells on its turn (Spell check +7).

- *Cantrip* (creates nonsense subtitles in the viewer's field of vision)
- *Color Spray* (creates a cacophony of chaotic, confusing sound rather than light)
- *Web* (bands of nonsense words engulf the targets)
- *Flaming Hands* (a flashing strobe appears from the creature's palm, searing targets with pulses of white light)

The Syntax Vandal can summon a gabbling maw, a babbling fey creature that devours with no purpose but to devour. The Vandal need only point at a surface near the target and a hungry mouth appears on it and attempts to bite. It costs the Vandal one action die to summon a hungry maw, so she

could conceivably summon two in a round. Summoning a gabbling maw is automatic, requiring no check.

A maw can be placed upon any unattended object—floors and walls, top of a table, on an unattended weapon on the ground, etc. The gabbling maw's can only bite at adjacent targets. It costs the Syntax Vandal 1 action die to summon a maw, but she can create as many of them as she has surfaces to put them on. The gabbling maws all gibber complainingly, adding to the dissonance of the room.

Gabbling Maw (no limit): Init (same as creator); Atk bite +4 melee (1d4); Crit 1d4/M; AC 12, HD 1d8; hp 5 each; MV 10'; Act 1d20; SP one action only; SV Fort +1, Ref -3, Will +2; AL N.

The gabbling maw appears to be a wide protruding mouth full of sharp teeth that appears randomly on a surface. The creature can only bite adjacent targets. The creature moves by shifting across surfaces, and can even slither from surface to surface (i.e. from the wall to the floor, or from the ceiling to a bookcase), but it can only move or attack in a single round, not both.

A gabbling maw can be turned by a cleric, but in the presence of the Syntax Vandal communication issues makes all turn unholy checks against them -1d.

If the PCs solve Olathvee's sonnet puzzle by putting all the lines in their correct order, the Syntax Vandal transforms back to her former self, an unassuming guard with a passion for poetry and coy love talk, who is utterly confused about what is happening and where she is. At the same time all gabbling maws yawn and disappear. Additionally, the lines of the sonnet glow for a moment, and then a fragment of Olathvee's soul appears before them, combining with any other fragments of the soul the PCs carry.

AND JUST LIKE THAT



f the PCs collect all five fragments of Olathvee's soul and bring them back to area 1-3, the sparkling ovoid slowly floats over to Olathvee and phases into his body. Olathvee snaps out of his fugue. The Un-god is still extremely melancholy, but he breaks out of the dark spiral he was in. The Mad God's realm transforms: once again it is the nexus of all desire and loss, and love rules the demi-plane. All surviving love mutants are returned to their former state, and the castle regains its original luster and magnificence.

Olathvee's curse is lifted from every realm, and millions of happy reunions take place.

Olathvee is grateful for the adventurers who have rescued him from his folly. He offers his patronage to the surviving PCs who wish it, and any of the band who cast *patron bond* to create a connection to Olathvee gain a +4 to their spell check. The judge can find more information on Olathvee in *The Book of Fallen Gods*, which has a write up of the deity. The PCs are returned to their home world along with all the riches they found in the castle's dungeon.

The returning heroes who chose to gaze into the snow globe have a decision to make. Is it time to seek out their soulmate? Everyone who received a vision from the artifact knows that happiness is out there, possibly around the corner, perhaps in another world, and now their real quest begins.

REBOUND QUEST

If you wish to use *Love Mutants of Castle Heartache* as a gateway to further adventures, consider the following alternate ending.

When the PCs reunite Olathvee and his unfragmented soul, it catches the attention of Dirgeadellia, who has been spying on the Un-god ever since he made his ill-advised intentions known. The PCs ability to rectify Olathvee's nearly apocalyptic mistake impresses her; these adventurers might be useful in her quest for power and patron-hood.

While Olathvee thanks the PCs for their service, a black cloud forms in the air in the great hall. The cloud charges with lightning and a moment later blast of electricity streaks towards the Mad One, only to slow down and stop a half-

inch from his ear. It seems to whisper to Olathvee, who looks first incredulous, then entranced.

Dirgeadellia convinces Olathvee that she was impressed with the whole ripping-out-your-own-soul thing, and that she may . . . may! . . . be willing to give his romantic intentions another thought. And as a gesture of good will, she asks that he persuade the brave adventurers who returned his soul to him to perform an easy task.

This task could be absolutely anything, but it will definitely not be easy. The PCs, borne upon promises of riches and glory, could be asked to perform nearly any quest that may only tangentially aid Dirgeadellia in her quest for power and immortality. The PCs could be asked to retrieve an artifact, slay a monster, disrupt a plan, or nearly any other dangerous thing one can think of. This could take the PCs to any other dungeon, in any world or setting—Olathvee can transport them to any point in the universe in a world where sentients fall in and out of love. And if the adventurers need further persuasion the Mad One just might offer to clear a path to a reluctant catspaw's soulmate . . .

APPENDIX I: THE SNOW GLOBE OF MISSING SOULS

Read or paraphrase the following to the PCs the first time they see the globe:

The Globe seems to be some kind of toy, a small glass globe filled with water and sparkling particles that dance about, giving the illusion of snow. As your eyes light on it you hear a far-off wind for just a moment, and feel a bracing rush of cold pass by your cheek.

The Snow Globe of Missing Souls gives those who dare glimpse into it a vision of their soulmate, here defined as the person most perfectly suited to be their closest relationship, be that relationship of the romantic, platonic, familial, or comrade-in-arms variety.

The player gets to choose the nature of the relationship for their character, choosing one of the choices below. When their character looks into the globe, they see a snowy landscape with a 2D image of their soulmate and a tiny background scene that gives a hint as to their whereabouts. This glimpse only begins the quest for that individual to find their soul mate, and the first step of that quest is reuniting Olathvee with his soul.

- **Adventuring Partner:** If the adventuring partner is someone the PC will meet in future, then they gain 3 points of spendable Luck that do not add to their Luck score but that may be spent at any time. If the adventuring partner is in their current group then a) both partners must agree to choose one another as Adventuring Partner soulmate, taking the same result in their snow globe choice, and b) they

may then spend their Luck points to aid one another. If one or both partners has a special Luck spending ability (i.e. thieves or halflings) they still may only share Luck points on a 1 for 1 basis using this ability.

- **Enemy:** The character has a twisted relationship with some enemy, possibly as of yet unknown to them, possibly someone they have contested with in the past. The character can draw on their ire at that enemy one time during this adventure, allowing them to force an opponent to re-roll any one roll.
- **Familial:** A family member, perhaps long-lost, estranged, or previously unknown, is the PCs soul mate. Knowledge of this gives the adventurer the ability to re-roll any one d20 check while they explore Castle Heartache.
- **Romantic:** The PC can call on the power of their upcoming connection once in this adventure, allowing them to re-roll one failed saving throw at +1d.
- **Self:** The player chooses their self to be their character's soulmate. They may choose to heal 3 HD during this adventure, which may be used in any configuration.
- **True Friendship:** The player chooses a true friend to be their character's soul mate. The PC can drawl on the power of that friendship one time while exploring the Castle, which grants them the ability to re-roll any one failed skill check.

APPENDIX II: THE SONNET PUZZLE



sonnet is a type of poem that contains fourteen lines, is composed in iambic pentameter, and is formatted to a specific rhyme scheme, which varies for each type of sonnet. Iambic pentameter is a style of verse writing in which each line contains ten syllables, divided into five metrical feet. In iambic pentameter, each metrical foot contains an unaccented syllable followed by an accented syllable.

The sonnet puzzle in *Love Mutants of Castle Heartache* is a Shakespearean sonnet with heroic couplets, that conforms to the standard rhyme scheme of its type: ABAB CDCD EFEF GG.

The judge should copy the sonnet and cut the individual lines in their boxes out of the puzzle and present them to the PCs in a jumble. The PCs must put the sonnet back together

in order to solve the puzzle, using the rhyme scheme and punctuation as guideposts.

If during the fight a player spends their entire round working on the puzzle, they may make one attempt to solve. Multiple players can work together but they cannot speak out loud due to the power of the Syntax Vandal—they can move the words around and gesticulate but cannot speak.

There is no consequence for a failed attempt to solve, except that the fight continues and the soul fragment fails to appear. In playtests some groups solved the puzzle fairly easily while others had a difficult time with it. Feel free to give out hints—for example, if the PCs arrange some lines correctly, perhaps those lines fuse together so the PCs know to move on to another section of the sonnet.

Here is the sonnet correctly arranged:

Judge's Reference

MY VOID-SPAWN LOVE'S TENTACLES CAN BUT KILL,
INFLECTING WOUNDS THAT STEAL A BODY'S BREATH

LIKE DEMON'S TALONS, MURDERING AT WILL
AND CAUSING PIOUS MEN TO PRAY FOR DEATH!

THE BLOOD MY LOVE DOTH BLEED IS POISON FELL,
A SINGLE WOUND MIGHT DROWN A BREATHING TOWN
WHEN SANGUINE RICHES BLOODY WOUNDS EXPEL
AND VENOM FROM HER VEINS DOTH PATTERN DOWN!

MY DARK LOVE'S TONGUE IS BEST TO DOOM PRONOUNCE,
EACH SYLLABLE A HELLISH DAMNING CURSE;

PHILOSOPHERS THEIR FAITH IN GRACE RENOUNCE
AS SOULS AT HER COMMAND DO LEAVE THE EARTH!

ALL PARTS OF HER APART ARE LETHAL ART:
TOGETHER THEY HAVE CLAIMED MY BEATING HEART.

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Players Handout

A SINGLE WOUND MIGHT DROWN A BREATHING TOWN

ALL PARTS OF HER APART ARE LETHAL ART;

AND CAUSING PIOUS MEN TO PRAY FOR DEATH!

AND VENOM FROM HER VEINS DOTH PATTERN DOWN!

AS SOULS AT HER COMMAND DO LEAVE THE EARTH!

EACH SYLLABLE A HELLISH DAMNING CURSE;

INFLECTING WOUNDS THAT STEAL A BODY'S BREATH

LIKE DEMON'S TALONS, MURDERING AT WILL

MY DARK LOVE'S TONGUE IS BEST TO DOOM PRONOUNCE,

MY VOID-SPAWN LOVE'S TENTACLES CAN BUT KILL,

PHILOSOPHERS THEIR FAITH IN GRACE RENOUNCE

THE BLOOD MY LOVE DOTH BLEED IS POISON FELL,

TOGETHER THEY HAVE CLAIMED MY BEATING HEART.

WHEN SANGUINE RICHES BLOODY WOUNDS EXPEL

DUNGEON CRAWL CLASSICS LANKHMAR

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13 OTHER LANKHMAR ADVENTURES AVAILABLE FOR DCC LANKHMAR!

Enter the thrilling world of Fritz Leiber's Nehwon, home to the legendary city of Lankhmar and the infamous heroes Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser! Prepare yourself to battle members of the city's nefarious Thieves' Guild in fog-shrouded alleys, to barter for cursed curios in the Plaza of Dark Delights, and to seek the wisdom of Ningauble of the Seven Eyes and Sheelba of the Eyeless Face! All this and more is possible with DCC Lankhmar.

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Beautifully detailed poster maps of Lankhmar and Nehwon

THE PHLOGISTONIC EYE SEES ALL!

Behold! Once again it is time for the unrelenting gaze of the Phlogistic Eye to peer across the multiverse. It perceives all, knows all! Staring into the very hearts of mortals to uncover that which drives them to create. Observing the daily lives of these tiny wretches as they gather for comfort in a cold, uncaring universe. The Eye looks upon you. Dare you look back? In this installment, the Eye peers into the lovelorn soul of author Brendan LaSalle and compels him to talk about Holiday Module #12 Love Mutants of Castle Heartache!

As soon as I had a solid idea of what I wanted to write for the 2023 Valentine's Day adventure, I emailed handsome Harley Stroh and asked if it would be okay if I put him on the cover as the romantic hero in the tentacular embrace of our twisted bodice-ripping love mutant. He quickly sent me back an enthusiastic yes because, as I'm sure you all know, he rules.

I really wanted to get weird for the follow-up to Stephen Newton's brilliant *Love in the Age of Gongfarmers*. Stephen's adventure deftly hit every trope of the holiday to wonderful effect. If my adventure wasn't going to be a derivative slog, I had to take it someplace bizarre.

I researched romance: love songs, greeting cards, and rom-com clips on YouTube. I read poetry at the library and listened to almost ten minutes of a psychology of love podcast while playing a video game. Finally, I started reflecting on my own memories from Valentine's Day Past. There was all the inspiration I needed – turns out, nearly every February 14, before I met my wife, was a strained, socially-mandated farce at best, a pit of unmitigated despair at worse.

(Lori likes to watch horror movies and dance in the kitchen for Valentine's because, of course, she rules.)

Love Mutants of Castle Heartache is about loneliness, longing, and the decadent misery that comes from wallowing in rejection and self-recrimination. Every monster in the dungeon has a bit of myself from my old bad days, viewed through my modern filters and stated up DCC-style. Influences include all the heartbreak songs (especially *Misty Blue* by Dorothy Moore and The Motel's *Only the Lonely*), the old Clermont Lounge in Atlanta, the concept of love languages, Shakespeare's sonnets, and all my own Valentine's Day misadventures.

I'm absolutely over the moon for Stefan Poag's cover art, and I'm grateful to him and all the other artists who treated my bizarre illustration requests with real diligence



Author Brendan LaSalle, verified Love Mutant

and seriousness. There is no thrill in the world quite like opening an email attachment and seeing a truly talented artist's treatment of one's very strange concepts. Treating the uncanny and ridiculous seriously is a huge part of my aesthetic and the art for this one certainly does that.

My deepest thanks for checking out *Love Mutants of Castle Heartache*. I hope y'all have fun exploring the lonesome catacombs beneath the castle. I am deeply grateful for my weird life and the opportunity to share weird adventures with you.

One last note: I always put together a soundtrack of inspirational music for every writing project. When I got started on *Love Mutants*, I put together a no-brainer playlist of a zillion heartache songs from every musical genre, but it just wasn't working for me. I tried old favorites, classic metal, 80's hip-hop, nothing but Prince and Motorhead, Lo-Fi . . . everything was wrong. I have no idea of how I landed on it but I wound up listening to the Grateful Dead's *Terrapin Station* side 2 on repeat for weeks while I turned my tabletop notes into the first draft. I think its description of a melancholy place that seems to be about the world, but not of the world, inspired my visions of the strange catacombs beneath Castle Heartache.

The Phlogistic Eye does not indulge in such quaint human insanities as "love," but it is sure that those troubled by that madness will enjoy this holiday scenario. But what is this? The Eye glimpses yet another gathering of mortals. Strange how they find comfort with one another in these bizarre conventicles. Here is but a fleeting glimpse of what they Eye saw during Gamehole Con in Madison, WI.



A truly bizarre bazaar was erected with goods from countless worlds for sale.



Beware the plotting of artists when left to their own devices!



Curious garb was worn, emblazoned with the sigils of their patrons.



The lucky ones are rewarded at the booth raffle.



It seems so bare without a ziggurat, doesn't it?



Doug Kovacs leads the damned down *Inferno Road* presented by *Hobonomicon*.



High spirited comradery was on display by the Goodman Games' crew!

Strange what these mortals do in the face of an uncaring cosmos, hmm? As always, the Phlogistic Eye eagerly awaits whatever sights Goodman Games produces next.

*The Phlogistic Eye sees all, knows all! Keep your own eyes open and await its next return in future *Dungeon Crawl Classics* adventures!*



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ROLL WEIRD DICE

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Level 4



□ DCC #86:
Hole in the Sky
Level 3



□ DCC #87:
Against the
Atomic Overlord
Level 5



□ DCC #87.5:
Grimtooth's
Mus. of Death
Level 1



□ DCC #88:
The 998th
Conclave of
Wizards Level 6



□ DCC #88.5:
Curse of the
Kingspire
Level 2



□ DCC #89:
Chaos Rising
Levels 1-5



□ DCC #90:
The Dread God
of Al-Khazadar
Level 4



□ DCC #91:
Journey to the
Center of Aereth
Level 4



□ DCC #92:
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Dragonwall
Level 3



□ DCC #93:
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the C. Kingdom
Level 2



□ DCC #94:
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Level 3



□ DCC #95:
Enter the
Dagon
Level 5



□ DCC #96:
The Tower of
Faces
Level 6



□ DCC #97:
The Queen of
Elfand's Son
Level 1



□ DCC #98:
Imprisoned in
the God-Skull
Level 6



□ DCC #99:
The Star Wound
of Abaddon
Level 3



□ DCC #100:
The Music of
the Spheres
Level 5

— MCC RPG —



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for All
Level 1



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Ultradimension
Level 2



□ MCC #4:
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ATOZ
Level 3



□ MCC #5:
Blessings of the
Vile Brotherhood
Level 4



□ MCC #6: The
Apocalypse
Arc
Level 5



□ MCC #7:
Reliquary of
the Ancients
Level 0



□ MCC #8:
The Data Orb
of Mankind
Level 3



□ MCC #9:
Evil of the
Ancients
Level 3



□ MCC #10:
Seeking the
Post-Humans
Level 0



□ MCC #11:
The Omnivary
of Eden
Level 2

EMAIL TODAY

*Missives from the Purple Planet, Shudder Mountains, or the Center of Aereth should expect 6 to 8 weeks for reply.

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is waiting to
rush your order
out today!

*PLEASE ... the Cyclops
can take orders only ...
CANNOT answer rules
questions.

Love Mutants of Castle Heartache

HOLIDAY MODULE #12

A LEVEL 3 ADVENTURE BY BRENDAN LASALLE

Ever been dumped so hard you transformed into a bloodthirsty mutant monster? We see you, hero.

Olathvee, Mad Un-God of mortal passion, lies heartsick after his romantic advances went ignored by the otherworldly object of his affection. Now his cosmic desolation grips our entire world, separating every lover from their other and threatening to end civilization within a generation. The only chance for the multiverse is a dangerous quest that will pit our lovelorn heroes against Olathvee's own castle guardians, mutated by metaphysical anguish into horrifying creatures. Who dares to delve into the darkest, loneliest corners of Castle Heartache?

This is a 3rd level holiday adventure inspired by true events.



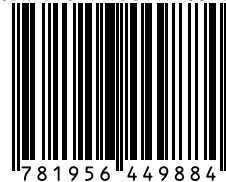
Designer Brendan LaSalle, verified Love Mutant

Brendan J. LaSalle, Esquire, is a humble game designer, poet, bon vivant, and a Virgo with a bad moon rising. He enjoys long walks on the beach, tasting fine Jägermeisters, and slow dancing in the kitchen, often by himself. He describes himself as a romantic fool, although his wife insists on the caveat "light on the romantic." He lives in the magical city of Kennesaw with his alluring yet mysterious wife, a disobedient yet charming dog, and two vexatious yet delightful cats.



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