

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

Forging the Realms Archive | 10/29/2013



Flask of Dreams

By Ed Greenwood

*How and where and when did the **Forgotten Realms** start? What's at the heart of Ed Greenwood's creation, and how does the Grand Master of the Realms use his own world when he runs **D&D** adventures for the players in his campaign? "Forging the Forgotten Realms" is a weekly feature wherein Ed answers all those questions and more.*

Rumors of the magical marvel called the Flask of Dreams first began to circulate in the Heartlands of Faerûn in the late 1400s DR, borne on the wagging tongues of merchants traveling the trade routes. It has been spoken of many times since, in flurries of sightings and wild tales that die down into a decade or so of quiet, only to flare up again thanks to new sightings and experiences.

The Flask of Dreams is a plain belt-flask of cast metal sheathed in leather, of the expensive and sturdy sort traditionally made in Memnon and Darrowmar, and latterly copied fairly well (as opposed to cruder earlier copies) by makers scattered all over the Heartlands. It bears no distinctive markings, and its contents appear to be plain, clear water (having no unusual hue or smell) of slightly bitter (some reports say "nutty") taste, that grows a pleasant but strong warmth in the chest and belly of imbibers.

The contents of the Flask of Dreams cause a diseased, sorely wounded, poisoned being to fall into a deep sleep characterized by vivid dreams. When they awaken, they are entirely healed (even of life-changing infections, afflictions, and curses such as some sorts of lycanthropy or vampirism) and restored to whole health (full hit points).

Moreover, although their dreams aren't "real" and are dominated by an ongoing, confusing stream of unfamiliar images, over time the stream of images will include individuals, things, and places familiar to the dreamer, and a dreaming being who exerts his or her will sufficiently can steer dreams to concentrate on a place, being, or specific item. The dreams show the dreamer the current state of that chosen focus, as if he or she were present but unable to hear or do anything, or be seen or heard (or as if he or she is viewing a silent movie of the desired focus). In other words, the dreamer can see where someone or an item is, and what's happening to that being or thing, or he or she can view a specific locale and see who's there and what's going on.

A dreamer of strong will who has heard of this power or discovers it early in slumber can use the condition to check in on as many as (some reports attest) six persons, places, or things, anywhere in the Realms, even if the beings or items happen to be in an unknown location. Most imbibers from the Flask dream of one or two foci at most.

After the flask is emptied, its efficacy is gone, and no matter what is used to refill it—including, at least two tales insist, enchanted potions—what thereafter comes out of it is plain, clear water and no more. No one knows how or when such a flask regains its powers—or if it ever does. The diligent and brilliant young sage Aummur Thakalanthus of Athkatla has advanced the theory that each flask exhibits these powers only once, whereupon the magical benefits shift to another flask until it is drained, and so on; for obvious reasons, no one has yet been able to test this belief.

Although what a particular individual saw in dreams as he or she was being healed often makes for a captivating story—men left for dead located their would-be slayers; childhood sweethearts were tracked down; and at least one adventurer learned much about a dragon she had long hunted, including where to find it—those who wield the Art or take a professional interest in it, from sages and wizards to clergy of Mystra, are particularly interested in who created the Flask of Dreams, and for what purpose.

Speculation about the creation and purpose of the flask is, of course, rampant, from deities seeking new Chosen to insidious creatures who feed on thoughts encouraging a steady stream of individuals to dream as so provide them with sustenance.

Among Cormyr's Wizards of War, the belief has arisen that the flask is actually a succession of spells cast on as many flasks, in an organized endeavor launched by archwizards who are searching for someone well hidden (who is presumably a capable wielder of Art, in order to hide so successfully in the first place), and these archwizards hope to find their quarry through the "aroused minds" of others, as the Wizards of War put it.

This view was first raised by a minor War Wizard named Dathlar Sarsund, who believes that mighty archmages of the elder days (Ioulaum and his ilk) are still alive and active in the Realms—just choosing not to show their true natures and identities to most mortals. He admitted that he had no idea who created the flask or who they're trying to find, but he believes the flask's magic is "just one manifestation of a great and ongoing struggle for power that simmers beneath the notice of most of us, a contest far more subtle than wars of armies and castles and even hurled fireballs. I see these strivings as trying to steer life in the civilized Realms in specific directions, with results that seem inevitable but have their seeds in small deeds decades and even centuries before. We are all puppets, even if we realize it not."

Unsurprisingly, such views are not applauded by some clergy, who firmly believe that any such steerage is the "purview of the gods, and gods alone!" (as the priest Undrathras Imdoamrel, High Holy Speaker of Oghma put it) and that mortals are simply incapable of anything beyond what Sarsund terms the "brute force" methods of warfare, blockades, laws and their enforcement, and "the ongoing march of achievement" (which is the Faerûnian term for what we in the real world might call technological advancements). Further, many priests believe that successes in these brute force methods are impossible without the favor of the gods.

This is, of course, a matter of endless and sometimes fierce philosophical debate, for many sages counter that if mortals can achieve nothing without divine aid, why should anyone strive to do anything? Fate (that is, the will of the gods, or of the mysterious Ao the Overgod) will have its way regardless.

As Elminster said, "Such thinking can pass a long wait or lonely vigil at a fireside passably enough, but to dwell on such things overlong is to invite—nay, court—madness."

As for Sarsund's beliefs, however, Elminster would say only, "He's on to something." (He refused to say a word more on this matter, even when questioned repeatedly and insistently.)

The sage Naranthrae Ilwood of Elturel believes that not only is Sarsund correct, but that one or more of these hidden "mighty mortals" is behind the long passage of years between large and devastating orc hordes sweeping down out of the North (so the rise of hordes isn't due just to the existence of Many-Arrows). She's been trying to discover if this is being done to prevent devastation in the so-called civilized North, or to build the strength of orc tribes and force some advancements in their internal lifestyles (by their having to "get along" together for decade after decade), or both.

The Waterdhavian noble families of Maernos and Melshimber, both known for their learning, believe that there are no mighty mortals involved in the ongoing behind-the-scenes power struggles, but rather gods who do not believe in open violence to achieve their ends, specifically Siamorphe and Chauntea. Others, of course, disagree—including, interestingly enough, some of the clergy of Siamorphe and Chauntea.

The sage Aummur Thakalanthus is uncertain if the Flask of Dreams is or should be, in scholarly debate, linked to Sarsund's beliefs about an ongoing, behind-the-scenes struggle for power—but he believes this power struggle does exist, that it has been occupying the greatest dragons, beholders, and illithid lords for centuries, and that it should for the sake of convenience be known as the Slow Game.

Interestingly, Thakalanthus has found references to "a slow game" in writings of two notorious (and presumed dead) archmages: Halaster and Khelben "Blackstaff" Arunsun.



When asked about that, Elminster of Shadowdale replied, "Some folk can't resist prying too much for their own good, can they?"

About the Author

Ed Greenwood is the man who unleashed the *Forgotten Realms* setting on an unsuspecting world. He works in libraries, and he writes fantasy, science fiction, horror, mystery, and romance stories (sometimes all in the same novel), but he is happiest when churning out Realmslore, Realmslore, and more Realmslore. He still has a few rooms in his house in which he has space left to pile up papers.

©1995 - 2015 Wizards of the Coast LLC, a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc. All Rights Reserved.