We created a miracle. We, the people of Halidar big and small, together we made a miracle. A fountain of healing in a sea of pain and destruction. Now, I'm no historian, but as a participant in its creation, I think it would be a tragedy not to record its story as I know it.

Halidar was in chaos. Shrouds covered several quarters, turning what were once homes and hearths into mazes of anguish and suffering. A massive rift had broken its way into the city, and out of it spilled vicious monsters of every variety.

But most pressing for this story is the drought. Around a month before this occurrence, maybe two but my memory ain't always the best, our water had dried up. Most of our fountains weren't producing water, and the ones that did gave no more than a trickle. So much danger lay in and around Halidar that the already difficult task of getting water from farther afoot was nigh impossible.

Our vulnerable, the babies and the sick and the elderly, were dying. But thirst was creeping on all of us. Every throat in Halidar was dry, our soldiers were growing weak, and our people were growing desperate.

One of our few remaining fountains stood in the Guildmark quarter, where the healing houses lay. Though its water was as slow a trickle as tears down a cheek, it had water, and that precious resource was being used by Guildmark to tend the patients in the healing houses. And oh, the patients.

The innumerable patients, packed between the walls like sardines. Those who'd escaped the shroud, broken in mind and body, were already task enough. But with the drought, the creatures of the rifts running wild, the fighting between quarters, and the ailments of Halidar I'm sure I've already forgotten, then healing houses needed every ounce of resources they could find.

But our vulnerable were not the only ones in need. And I think that's where our story really begins.

In the midst of all this chaos, us adventurers were told that people from the Riftlands quarter had taken up arms, entered into the Guildmark Quarter, and laid claim to the fountain. This contest troubled us for a number of reasons. If fighting broke out between the two groups, which was very likely, the fountain could be caught between them and broken, taking away one of our few remaining water sources. But underneath that already pressing matter was a deeper one.

Cause the trouble with Halidar didn't start with shrouds and cracks and droughts. It started with the fighting between us, between people from different lands, between species with historical conflicts, between our past and our present, between duties that pull a body in opposing directions. A conflict like this, if left unattended, could create a new shroud.

Now, at this time we did have a faint hope, a promise of water returning. Elemental callers from Weathered Faces had gone to drum up blue elementals, in hopes that they could bring us water.

At the same time, some of our party had been, for over a month, trapped in some liminal quest in the bowels of our city that, if completed, might return the water.

But these were all faint prospects. There was no water, and the situation had long since passed dire.

So to the fountain we went. The people of Guildmark and the Riftlands were arguing, and though they had not come to blows yet, that prospect was viscerally imminent.

The party separated the two groups as best we could and talked to them.

Now, this was a very long and drawn out debate, as all complex things are. Many deals were suggested and rejected, many were conflicts settled between little groups, who brokered a tentative agreement that then fell flat when brought to the larger collective. For the sake of brevity, I will try to simplify it to the core issue.

The core issue between the two groups was one of priorities: who do you sacrifice when a sacrifice must be made?

Guildmark had a duty to run the healing houses, to tend to the vulnerable and heal the sick as best they could. Those they tended to, they could not survive without water. If the sick and the babies and the elderly did not get water now, they would die. So Guildmark prioritized them.

But the Riftlands had a different priority. They'd taken the fountain, not out of greed or malice, but to give water to those they thought needed it most. The city was under imminent threat. The creatures of the rift were deadly, and needed to be fought back. The people stuck in the rift and the shrouds needed to be rescued. All these things needed to be done by strong fighters. But fighters dying of thirst were not strong. If our soldiers fell, the whole city would fall, and so would the Riftlands. And the Riftlands had been their home for far longer than Halidar and its promise of connection had existed. So the Riftlands prioritized them, and took the fountain.

Both groups fought for the welfare of the city, but a great conflict lay between them in how that welfare was to be achieved.

Eventually, after much trial and error, shouting, fights almost turned to blows, both groups came to an agreement. The fountain would be guarded by the people of the Riftlands, and the water would be used by them for whatever they saw fit. But for a few hours a day, the people of Guildmark Quarter would have full use of the water, to use however they pleased. Guildmark said they only needed a few hours a day, and could make do.

While this was going on, some of our party had gone under the fountain to fix the pipes, to return the trickle to a hearty stream. With the hope of fresh water in the coming days, the deal was struck.

That evening, the water came back, and so did the other half of our party. They'd succeeded.

And the next morning, I believe, word came that the fountain had changed. The water, now free flowing, was exhibiting magical properties of healing and return.

During a mission, we found that these properties had led the fountain to become a sort of inlet in a sea of chaos. The city was metaphorically on fire. I honestly wish it had just been on fire, that would have been easier than the layers upon layers of violence. But at the fountain, there was respite. People could sit in calm silence, lick their wounds, even have a friendly conversation. It was lovely.

That night, there were reports that the fountain had started flowing and singing, and our party went to investigate that. Now, I was home with the baby during this mission, but from my party member's reports this was indeed true. Furthermore, when they were at the fountain, a Court of Light member appeared to them. It asked them to name it. They were unable to, but from their reports it had something to do with community and sharing. Despite their unsuccessful attempts to name it, its presence was still felt.

Unfortunately the next part of our story is not so kind, for here I must memorialize.

We lost two of our party members to the Chain Troll at the Bellmorn trial. Hector, a man from Eldar, and Paku, my wife's niece. Both were very special to me, and both died heroic deaths fighting a great beast of morganti and memory. Hector was a drunkard and a father, a warrior and a kind soul. Paku was a gambler and a twin, a priest and the savior of my child. It is my deepest desire for them to always be remembered.

Now, it had been Paku's wish to take the patients to the healing fountain. She made this known to us shortly before she died. So we took that up as a mission, combining it with a mission to subdue the fighting at the Guildmark healing houses.

The Guildmark quarter was a mess. The patients were piling up, and each of them was consumed by the madness the shroud left on them. The poor things, at night they were consumed by screaming and wailing and fighting. The healers were at their wits end and out of resources, and the neighbors to the healing houses were unable to stand the chaos of the wounded spilling out of the houses. By the time we got there, it was a riot. They were killing patients.

We did our best to subdue the fighting. Many died, both patients and party members, I among that number. But eventually we were able to calm things down enough to take a few of the patients to the fountain. They were all troubled in their own way, suffering physical and mental changes. They never really left the Shrouds, not their minds, at least. But they were alive.

At the fountain, there was a growing confusion. People from all quarters had seen this beacon of unity and hope, and wanted to do something with it. Something to help it, something to

preserve the one good thing we had at the time. Conflict was beginning to arise between all these groups wanting to help. But we managed to organize them, finding each quarter's strengths and how they could be applied to the fountain.

The patients themselves drank the water and slowly felt better. They were not fixed in their entirety, but they were a little better.

By the time we left, there was an air of good cheer that I had not felt in Halidar in months.

But the fountain did not go unnoticed by the forces of darkness. That night, we got word that a sea of the zombie-like people from the shroud was descending upon the fountain. Most of our party had gone to the haunt of the chain troll. That left me and a handful of others to defend the fountain. In hindsight, that was a poor decision, because while the chain troll was resolved with conversation, we were locked in brutal combat.

It was a fucking wave. No, a wave makes it seem as though it came and went. It was a roaring flood. Hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of insiders came crashing down on us from left and right, each hell bent on destroying the fountain.

It was a bitter, vicious fight. You couldn't move without stumbling into a body- body of your friend, body of your foe, bodies standing up and fighting and bodies lying down and groaning. And it was dark, so dark. The only light was from the fountain, and that didn't go far into the sea we were buried in. The air was filled with kicked up dirt so thick it was like a fog, and it clung to the sweat on our skin.

Everyone was critical. Some healed, some took down enemies, others fixed the fountain when it broke or went dim. I found my own use, sneaking around the darkness and taking down bodies before they even knew what hit them. There were several times the fountain went dim, and our party had to revitalize it. I don't know how many deaths we collectively took, but I'm sure the count would be ludicrous.

It felt never ending. But eventually, after I don't know how long, the flood began to turn into a stream, and eventually, a trickle. Finally, there were none left. Somehow, we'd not only survived, but won.

As we were surveying the field and counting the casualties, a figure appeared. It was far away, and in the dark it was hard to see many details, but it wore a black crown. My memory on this part is a little hazy, but from what I do recall, and what other party members have recorded, it asked us if we'd really won, if our success doomed another city to fall.

This is, in my opinion, bullshit. One city was always gonna fall, and there was no way in hell I would ever choose my wife and daughter's city to be the sacrificial lamb. Besides, if this figure really was the top dog, so to speak, what reason would you ever have to listen to its words? We won. We kept the fountain safe, we saved Halidar from utter ruin. That's all that matters.

With that, I’m pretty much done. I hope the fountain will come to symbolize the safety and unity we fought tooth and fucking nail for. In the meantime, I’ve gotta go put my daughter to bed. I’ve been holding her while writing this and my arm is starting to fall asleep.

-Sasha Latendresseteaux