

Excerpt from "A Good Day To Die," a Fading Lands short story featured in the 13Thirty Books' anthology, **Never Fear – The Tarot**. © 2016, Cheryl L. Wilson.

There it is. The barely audible announcement made Shan realize just how nervous his men were. Spun on threads of the mystic magic Spirit across the Fey Warrior's Path, no Drogon or Merellian could possibly have the words, yet even in his weave Shan's second-in-command, Sandar vel Candis, still whispered.

But then, they'd all seen the carnage Blood Lord Malvern left in his wake. Bodies butchered. Cathedrals beribboned with entrails. Altars to dark gods fashioned from the bones and dismembered limbs of Fey, Elf, and mortal alike. Villages, towns, and even entire cities stripped of all life save the rats and carrion crows come to feast on the blood-drained remains of the dead.

Aiyah, Sandar had reason to whisper. Malvern was as fearsome a monster as ever they'd faced.

Which was why Shan found it so surprising that the entrance to Malvern's hive was so inconspicuous. A brush covered cave mouth that led down into the tunnel-riddled limestone earth of Drogos. Nothing to declare, "Beware, intruders! Death beyond this point!" Personally, Shan thought there should at least be a couple of skulls impaled on pikes, if not a bloodless, eviscerated corpse or two.

He grunted at his own black humor and scanned the area with Fey vision, seeing not just the material world evident to mortal eyes but the glowing threads of magic woven through every aspect of the universe: the four elements--Earth, Fire, Water, Air--as well as the two mystics--lavender Spirit, and dark Azrahn, the magic never to be called. With Fey vision, he could see the life pulsing through the dense vegetation surrounding the cave, see the solid density of the rock and soil, and the silvery white voids of Air where the tunnels led down into the hive.

He scanned for the enemy. Found none near the entrance.

That was as expected, and the reason why this attack had been scheduled for morning. Sunlight was anathema to Blood Lords and their vile minions. Better yet, the higher the sun rose in the sky, the more torpid the Drogon would become, unable to move, lying like the dead and deathless creatures they were. The effects were doubly strong for the oldest among them, which made daytime the best time--the only time--to risk something as bold and foolhardy as sending forces into the depths of an ancient Blood Lord's hive.

Feyreisen, Fire the hole. Shan wove the command in Spirit and sent it out on the Warrior's Path that all Fey males shared.

Three Tairen Souls in their gigantic tairen form padded up to the cave entrance and, in unison, belched great gouts of hot flame into the mouth of the cave. They held the fire for a full chime, sending the inferno as deep as possible. When it was done, all three crouched to gather their strength then launched into the air to join the other Tairen Souls circling overhead.

Shan kept his eye on the cave mouth and his hands near his steel.
Fey, advance. Fire and steel at the ready.