

Return to Dominaria: Episode 4

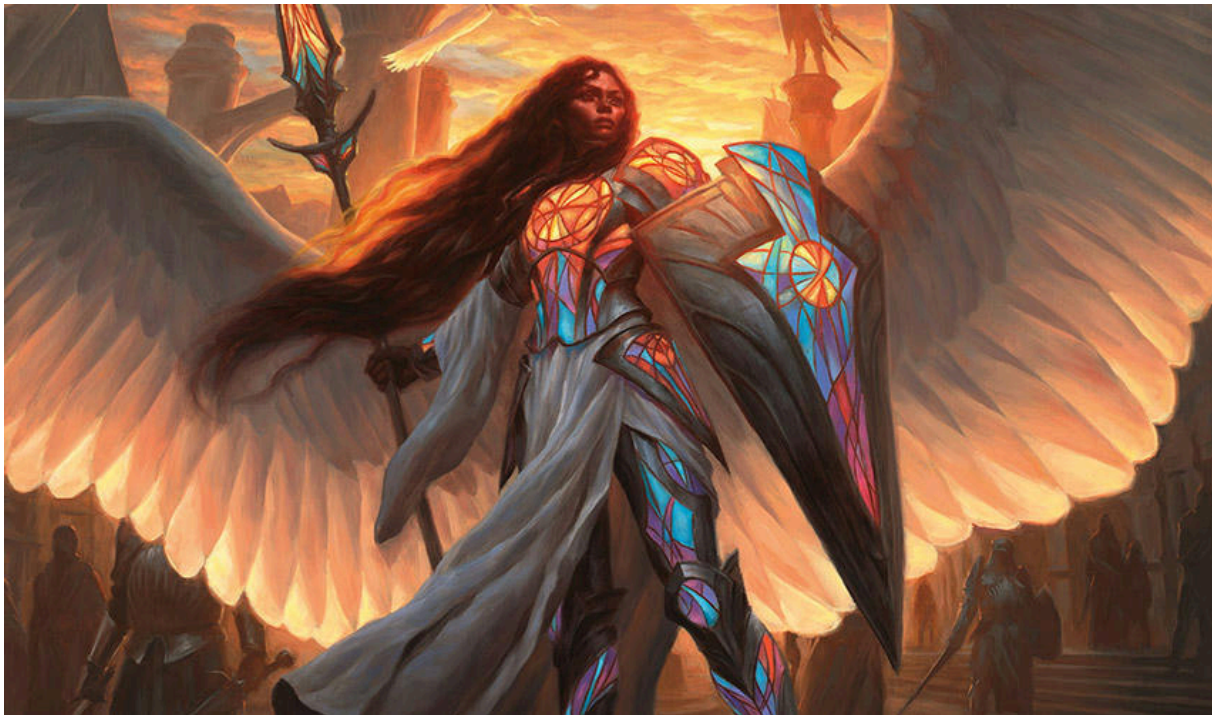
Martha Wells

From set *Dominaria*

Tiana's first conscious thought came as she stood in the Cathedral of Serra, bathed in sunlight splintered into a thousand shapes and colors by the stained glass arching overhead. She was surrounded by other angels in gleaming armor, and by human and aven clerics, their white robes emblazoned with gray feathers to mimic the angels' wings. She knew she had been created for some magnificent purpose; it warmed her heart, hummed through her veins, until her new body glowed like the sun. It was a glorious moment.

Then everything started to go downhill.

Lyra Dawnbringer stepped forward, as beautiful as the sunrise, her dark bronze skin glowing in the light and her mane of dark hair flowing over the icy perfection of her wings. She said, "You are Tiana, and you have been born in answer to the prayers of mortals, for a purpose."linebreak



Art by Chris Rahn

"For battle," Tiana said. "To destroy the forces of darkness." That had to be her purpose. Surely nothing except war could burn in her like this.

There was a faint stir from the other angels, and two exchanged a glance. Lyra's perfect brow furrowed just a little, and she said, "No, not for battle."

“Not battle?” Tiana didn’t want to question Lyra. She had been born knowing that Lyra was one of the angels who had come to Dominaria from Serra’s Realm, that Lyra was as close as any angel would ever come to the blessed Serra, lost when she had sacrificed herself to heal Benalia. But Tiana felt like there had been some kind of mistake. “Are we sure about that?”

Lyra’s expression was still confident. “We’re certain. You are not a battle angel. You’re the answer to the prayers of mortals who need a guardian.”

“A guardian,” Tiana repeated, reassured. Guardians had to fight to protect whatever they were guarding, obviously, so it was really just a slight variation on being a battle angel. “I will dedicate my life and soul to guarding—” She realized that in her relief she had gotten a little ahead of herself. “What am I guarding?” She hoped it was something big.

Lyra may have hesitated—it was hard to tell. But her voice had the same confident serenity as she said, “A very complicated irrigation system.”

Tiana couldn’t have heard that right. Maybe something had gone wrong when she had been created and the words didn’t mean what they sounded like they meant. “A complicated . . . what?”

“It’s very important,” Lyra assured her. “It has an intricate system of lifts and engines that carry the water from the reservoir up the side of a plateau to the town built atop it. Hundreds of mortals depend on it. They call it the Great Machine.” Lyra’s gaze was so serious. “They prayed for a protector for it. They prayed for you.”

Tiana pushed her disappointment aside. An irrigation system might sound like a strange, and potentially extremely boring, thing to protect, but this Great Machine was obviously very important to the mortals who had prayed for her. Because of that, it would probably get attacked a lot and she would have all the battle she could handle. The mortals would become her friends, and be glad they had received such an exemplary guardian angel for their prayers. She said, “I’ll guard it to the last breath in my body.”

Lyra’s smile warmed her, and the other angels raised their weapons in approval. Lyra said, “Excellent.”

The other angels took Tiana out of the cathedral, and they flew up into an achingly blue sky dotted with white clouds. Buildings floated in midair, all with round turreted roofs and elegant high arches, the brilliant colors of the window glass glowing in the sunlight. Below were rolling green hills and stands of tall trees, and Tiana heard distant birdsong. The wind was cool and sweet. Tiana knew not all the world was beautiful, but on this first morning of her life it seemed as if it were. Linebreak



Art by Dimitar

They took her into a floating building and left her in a sunny room, where human clerics helped her dress in white and gray clothing while the aven flew off to bring armor and weapons for her to choose. “It’s a very good thing you’re finally here,” her new friend the cleric Afra told her. “I’ve heard these people have been praying hard, for some time. The commander was very pleased to learn you were finally coming into being.”

“I wonder why I took so long,” Tiana said, as Afra showed her how to tie laces. “Does that happen a lot?”

“Oh, I’m sure it does. I’m sure it must have happened before.” Afra glanced at the other clerics.

One said, “It was very odd. I can’t remember it ever taking so long for a prayer for a guardian angel to be answered.”

“Maybe because it was an unusual request,” someone else said. “A guardian angel for an irrigation system? That’s so . . . specific. People pray for guardian angels all the time, but never for anything like that—”

Afra frowned at him. “Yes, all the time, which is why it probably took so long. The Blessed Serra can only send us so many guardians at once.”

There was some murmuring from the others, which Afra shushed, but Tiana’s attention was caught by one of the portraits high on the wall. The knowledge she had been born with told her that the man with the brown hair and goatee, dressed as a Benalish man of arms, was a depiction of the martyr Gerrard. Her brows drew together as she studied the spear he held. The downward-pointing blade was a strange shape, almost flat on one side, with a jagged curve on the other and a crossbrace at an angle that somehow suggested flight. It seemed familiar to her, but she couldn’t quite place how. “His spear—where is it from?” she asked.

But then the aven clerics flew back to the balcony with her new armor and weapons, and in the excitement, Tiana forgot her question. Although the answer would come to her in time.

Soon it was time to fly to the town of the Great Machine that Tiana had been created to protect. An escort of angels would accompany her, led by Lyra Dawnbringer herself. Tiana followed Afra out to the broad open terrace where the other angels gathered. She whispered to her, "Is this normal? Does everybody get an escort?"

"Not really," Afra admitted. "But these townspeople have been waiting so long, and their Great Machine is so important to them, Commander Lyra wants to take you there herself."

That made sense. Tiana added, "And she wants to make sure nothing's wrong with me, because I took so long."

Afra winced. "Yes, probably that. But don't worry, nothing's wrong. Holy Serra doesn't make mistakes."

Tiana hugged Afra goodbye and went to join the others.

Tiana's first real flight was wonderful, and she played the wind against her wings as she followed the other angels. They flew past hills dotted with small towns and villages, and then over heavy forest, and finally out over broad grassy plains. Tiana spotted a well-worn road winding along beneath them and knew they were getting close. Her heart pounded with excitement. She was about to see the reason for her birth. Which was not to fight at the side of Lyra Dawnbringer and the other battle angels to destroy the forces of darkness, but to protect a large and complicated machine. *But it's an important machine*, she told herself. *And I'm sure it'll be attacked a lot.*

It turned out she was right about that part.

As they approached the plateau, a haze of smoke hung over it. At first Tiana thought this was normal; the other human towns they had flown over hadn't had this much smoke, but maybe it was a byproduct of the Great Machine. But the sudden sense of agitation from the other angels warned her something wasn't right.

They flew closer, and that was when she saw the town was in ruins. It had been attacked and burned, perhaps only a few days ago. The buildings were smoking ruins of tumbled stone and wood, and the dead lay in the streets. They circled around the plateau and Tiana saw what was left of the Great Machine. The wooden platforms were charred and the glass broken, the heavy chains shattered, metal tubes and gears twisted and bent. It had been huge, and had climbed the whole side of the plateau up from the reservoirs and canals that brought water from the distant river.

Tiana was too stunned to feel anything at first, except a heavy lump in her throat, like something was trying to choke her from the inside. They landed in what was left of the town's plaza to help the survivors, and Lyra said grimly, "This is the work of the Cabal."

So the forces of darkness had come to the place Tiana had been born to watch over, but she had been too late to fight them.

Tiana had to fold her wings in tightly to climb out from under the engine shield. "Tell Tien she wasn't wrong. It was a bad connector with a blockage in one of the mana flow controllers."linebreak



Art by Eric Deschamps

Hadi gave her a hand up. Despite the protective leather aprons they wore over their clothes, they were both covered in grease and the remnants of the sea-bottom mud they were still cleaning out of the *Weatherlight*'s mechanical systems. Hadi said, "That's a relief to hear. I'd hate to have to redo all that piping."

They took the stairs up to the deck, and Tiana shook out her cramped wings and walked to the railing. Molimo's seed had almost finished regrowing the *Weatherlight*'s hull and its interior decks, which was good and bad. Good because it gave them somewhere to stand and protected their rebuilding efforts from the weather. Bad because it made the engines and other systems more difficult to reach. Tiana would certainly do it differently if she was ever called upon to supervise the rebuilding of a legendary skyship again.

The camp had expanded since Jhoira left, with more tents and some roughly built wooden sheds to house the work crew and protect their equipment. They had also built an elaborate scaffolding to support the grounded *Weatherlight* and provide easy access for the workers. The sun was setting past the rocky hills that protected their cove and gleaming off the waves, and by the failing light they knew it was past time to stop for the day. The cool breeze already carried the scent of fried bread and onions from the cooking pit and their makeshift kitchen. It made Tiana a little sorry that angels didn't need to eat. She said, "Re-piping wouldn't have been a disaster, though. We're still ahead of schedule."

"We are," Hadi agreed, packing up his tools into a leather satchel. "And that's due to you."

Smiling, Tiana glanced at him. "Oh, am I a harsh overseer?" She thought their speedy progress was more due to the caliber of the crew Jhoira had hired.

"You know what you're doing and you enjoy the work. That's the best we can ask for," Hadi said. He paused, one hand on the scaffold's rail. "I admit, I was surprised. I didn't expect an angel to know so much about artifact engines. I thought you'd be more . . ."

"Useless?" Tiana suggested. By now she knew Hadi well enough to tease him. Once you'd spent endless hours crammed into various small spaces rebuilding a magical skyship's power train together, there were few things you couldn't say to each other. And Tiana was surprised, too; she knew her

knowledge came from Serra, details about the *Weatherlight* 's mechanical systems pouring into her head whenever she needed them. It had been happening since she had brought the Powerstone back to life. But she knew it wasn't a normal thing to happen to an angel. Especially a guardian angel whose reason for existence had been destroyed.

She hadn't even wanted the mission to watch over the revival of the *Weatherlight* 's Powerstone. She had been picked for it because she had been created to protect a machine and the *Weatherlight* was a machine and this was the only thing the Church of Serra could think of to do with her. She had never expected to feel this way about the skeletal remnant of a skyship, no matter how legendary its reputation.

"Aloof," Hadi corrected with a grin. "With a mind on higher things."

"Skyships are fairly high things," Tiana remarked. "At least once we get that motivator working."

They always posted sentries, and doubled their number through the night. Tiana patrolled the air at intervals, circling over their anchored supply vessel and all around the camp. So far she had to drive off a kavu, its tongue aflame, and violently discourage a small hunting party of goblins, but nothing too strenuous. Protecting the work crew from harm was the job she was supposed to be doing as a guardian angel, not helping Hadi and Tien and the others fix the engines. But then, finishing the *Weatherlight* more quickly meant the work crew would be able to leave Bogardan sooner, and go somewhere safer, which technically fell under the category of guarding them. At least that was how Tiana was justifying it, and she was the one left in charge.

And if Serra didn't want her to do it, she wouldn't be sending her this new knowledge. Tiana loved fiddling with the skyship's mechanical systems, loved figuring things out and fixing them. She thought maybe she loved the *Weatherlight* .

It was well past midnight and Tiana was taking a break, perched up on the scaffold to contemplate the waves rolling up the beach and the stars, when she heard someone run toward the *Weatherlight* . She rolled off the platform and dropped to the ground as Farim, Hadi's young cousin, sprinted into the torchlight. "What is it?" Tiana said, keeping her voice low.

Farim reported breathlessly, "Mari spotted someone coming. One man, walking over the meadows toward camp."

"Right. Spread the word to the others," Tiana ordered, and leapt into the air. This part of Bogardan was mostly uninhabited, but there were pirate enclaves and hunters, and others here who might have gotten word of the camp's existence. One man approaching at night could be anything from a lost traveler to a spy for a Cabal force.

She slid sideways across the wind, tilted her wings, and dropped to a landing behind the hillock where Mari's sentry post was. Mari, like all the work crew, was now used to an angel abruptly dropping out of the sky, so she didn't flinch when Tiana appeared beside her. She was crouched behind a screen of brush, and she handed Tiana one of Hadi's seeing-scopes. It was a chased metal tube like a normal telescope, except it allowed the viewer to see in the dark. Tiana's night vision was much better than a human's, but she took the scope anyway, since the magic in its construction tended to provide a much clearer view of whatever one was looking at. Mari whispered, "I think he's alone."

Tiana focused on the approaching man. "Seems to be." She couldn't spot any other movement. He moved like a tired human, a pack slung over one shoulder, but there was something off about him. She handed the scope back to Mari and stood.

She pushed off into the air again and circled high over the meadows. There was no movement from here to the frozen black waves of the lava fields, no sign of anyone else approaching. The man had spotted her and stopped, peering up at her in the dark. Either he had heard her wings, which seemed unlikely, or his night vision was at least as good as hers. *Huh*, Tiana thought. She glided down and landed not far from him.

He was dressed as a Benalish knight, with a distinctive inset of stained glass in the center of his chest armor and in the hilt of the sword slung across his back. He had clearly been traveling for some time, from the state of his clothes and the muddy hem of his tabard. This close, Tiana had a better view of his face. And his eyes, glowing faintly red in the darkness. There was no mistaking what he was. Tiana lifted her spear and said, "I see you're a vampire. Sorry about that. Any last words?"

He lifted his hands, palms out. "Angel of Serra." He bowed deeply to her, just like a real Benalish knight. "I swear on Serra I haven't come here to harm anyone."

"Haven't you?" Tiana asked, curious. "You're a vampire, so, you know, you have to be planning to harm people at some point."

He shook his head, and she saw he seemed exhausted. "No. I'm not this way by choice. I fight against my condition with all my will."

"Who are you?" Tiana asked. It might be more accurate to say *who were you*, but that also seemed like adding insult to injury.

"I'm Arvad, Knight of Benalia. I was captured and made a vampire." His voice was even but there was a thread of resignation in it. "I've tried not to harm anyone, and mostly succeeded."

Some distance behind her, Tiana could hear Mari whispering an explanation to the workers who had come out to defend the camp. "Why hasn't she killed it yet?" someone said.

Tiana wasn't quite certain why she hadn't killed him yet. She could sense he was a vampire, but something about him was different. She said, "Define 'mostly.'"

Arvad looked away, then admitted, "I fight the Cabal whenever I can. Sometimes, in the heat of battle, I can't help myself."

"But only the Cabal?" Tiana asked. It was a tricky moral point. The Cabal were by definition gleeful murderers, and even embraced their own deaths. And it wasn't as if a mortal Benalish knight wouldn't have been killing Cabal grinnants and clerics, too. He just wouldn't have been drinking their blood.

"Only them," he said, and Tiana sensed he was telling her the truth. After a moment, he added, "I don't know where that would fall in the moral code of the Church of Serra."

"Well, I was just thinking about that. It's a tough one. I'm new at this myself," Tiana said. "The Cabal murders a lot of innocent people, and they're so deluded they don't seem to care if they live or die themselves. But blood-drinking . . ." She wagged a hand. "It's tough to say. But to get back to the point, the Cabal isn't here, so why are you creeping up on our camp?"

"I wasn't creeping, I was walking in the open," Arvad corrected, and gestured to the empty fields around him. "And . . . I'm not entirely sure. I've been drawn to this place, first to Bogardan, then toward this area. The closer I came, the less my compulsion affected me. It's been easier and easier to resist it, until . . . until standing here. I barely feel it at all. The relief is indescribable." He hesitated. "Can it be you? I've been within sight of other angels, and they never affected me this way before."

"No, it's not me." Tiana thought he sounded honestly confused. And if he had truly been feeling his compulsion abate the closer he came to their camp . . . She had a strong inkling of what might be influencing him. "When did you start to feel drawn here?"

Arvad had to pause to think. “It was on the night of the full moon, two months ago. It happened suddenly. I was on the eastern coast of Aerona, following the last few survivors of a Cabal scouting group, and I felt . . . It’s hard to describe. I killed the grimnants, stole a small boat, and sailed in this direction.”

That was confirmation for Tiana’s theory. That had been the day Jhoira had brought the *Weatherlight* up, the day her prayer had stirred its Powerstone back to life. “I think I have an idea of what might be causing that.”linebreak



Worn Powerstone | Art by Henry G. Higginbotham

His voice went rough with hope. “Something nearby. Do you think it would cure me?”

“It’s worth a shot,” Tiana said. She lowered her spear. Drinking the blood of Cabal cultists might be a tricky moral point for the Church, but the possibility of a cure for vampirism wasn’t. “Come on, let’s try it. And it goes without saying, if you touch anyone here, I’ll gut you like a fish.”

“That probably won’t kill me,” Arvad warned her.

He was certainly honest. “I’ll come up with something,” Tiana promised.

“That’s fair,” Arvad said, and started forward.

Tiana stood by while Arvad stared at the Powerstone. “Is it doing anything?” she asked. The senior work crew huddled at the opposite end of the engine access compartment, armed to the teeth.

“No.” Arvad turned away. His shoulders tensed under his battered armor, as if he was fighting down a surge of emotion. Then he faced her, resigned again. “Thank you for letting me try.” He nodded to Hadi and the others, including them in his thanks. “Would you like me to leave?”

Tiana glanced at Hadi and Tien. Tien had edged forward, peering at Arvad. She said, “Your face is better. Not so pale. And your eyes aren’t so red.”

Tiana agreed. “Can you show us your . . .” She pointed at her own mouth. “You know.”

Arvad's brows quirked at the weirdness of the request, but he opened his mouth to reveal his fangs. Tiana's eyes narrowed. "Definitely smaller."

Hadi nodded. "I think so, too."

Tiana glanced at the others. "We need to discuss some things," she told Arvad.

They went back up on deck under the star-filled sky. The work crew had rigged up a lighting system working off the *Weatherlight*'s Powerstone, and Hadi had turned it back on since the entire camp was awake now. Insects buzzed around the deck lamps and the rest of the work crew was waiting down by the cooking pits. "Give us a moment," Tiana said, and left Arvad standing at the rail while they retreated to talk.

"What are we going to do?" Hadi said. "He's telling the truth. We can see it."

"But do we trust him?" one of the others asked.

"I'll let you decide," Tiana said. They were the ones who would be the most at risk. Tiana might not be a battle angel, but in a vampire versus angel confrontation, she would definitely bet on herself.

She waited while the others talked, her arms folded, watching Arvad. He was slumped at the rail, and she thought about what it would be like to grow up and become a knight, to be dedicated to protecting Benalia against danger and fighting the growing forces of the Cabal, only to be caught and forcibly turned into a monster with the compulsion to feed on human blood. It made her problem, being an angel created to answer the prayers of people who no longer existed, seem a minor inconvenience in comparison.

Finally everyone finished talking, and Hadi gave her their verdict. He didn't look happy about their decision, but he said, "We don't know that he's telling the truth; we have no reason to trust him. But others, including myself, hate to turn him away if continued exposure to the Powerstone might cure him. As a compromise, he can stay but not in our camp, and you must pledge to watch him."

Tiana nodded, and went to tell Arvad.

He seemed surprised not to be told to leave immediately. He said, "That's very generous. I agree."linebreak



Art by Lius Lasahido

Under the Powerstone's influence, Arvad had lost his vampiric sensitivity to sunlight, so he camped down on the beach, often stripping out of his armor to stand in the surf with a pole and catch fish to supplement the workers' dinner. Tiana, watching him from the dunes, reported to Tien, "He says it's the most normal thing he's done since he was turned."

"You should go fishing, too," Tien told her. "You've been working so hard, you need a rest."

"Mmm," Tiana said. She didn't want a rest, she wanted to work on the *Weatherlight*'s systems while she still had a chance.

But at least with Arvad she had someone to talk to at night who didn't sleep either, and who shared her fascination with the *Weatherlight*. She sat down on the beach with him during her break from night patrol, and they both contemplated the skyship. With bright moonlight and their night vision, it was almost as good as looking at it in the daytime.

"There's something on the hull down there," he said one night. "That dark spot."

Tiana peered at it. "Looks like a spot of fungus. To regrow the hull, Jhoira used a seed from a tree spirit named Molimo. We've noticed it tends to sprout things occasionally."

Bemused, Arvad asked, "How did she manage to get that?"

"Because she's Jhoira," Tiana grinned. "She's a force of nature."

Arvad paused. "She isn't . . . *the* Jhoira? The one from the legends about the original *Weatherlight*?"

"She *is* that Jhoira, and those aren't legends, they're all true," Tiana admired the way the moonlight glanced off the new glass in the *Weatherlight*'s ports.

Arvad digested that in silence for a time, then said, "She means to use it to fight the Cabal, then." He glanced at her. "You'll help her?"

Tiana ducked her head. It wasn't a comfortable subject for her. "I'm not a battle angel. I'm just supposed to guard the camp and watch over the Powerstone. Make sure no one tries to use it for anything but good and just purposes."

Arvad seemed surprised. "I didn't think you were a battle angel, I thought you were an artificer angel."

Tiana frowned. "No. There aren't any artificer angels."

"But you're the one directing all the work." He tapped his ear. "There are few good things about my condition, but the improvement in my sight and hearing is one of them."

"I don't have any official angel skills. I'm not supposed to be working on the engines, but I just—" Tiana waved her hands, trying to explain it. "Serra is giving me the knowledge of where things are supposed to go. I can see how everything is supposed to work."

"If Serra is giving you that knowledge, then it's an official angel skill," Arvad said.

Tiana wasn't sure why she wanted to argue the point. It might be some inborn loyalty to the Great Machine, destroyed though it was. "But that's not my purpose."

"What is your purpose?"

"I was supposed to guard a great machine, but it was destroyed before I got there. I was born too late. The church doesn't know what to do with me now. Watching over the Powerstone was my first real mission."

Arvad nodded toward the *Weatherlight*. "That's a great machine."

Tiana sighed in exasperation. "But it's also not my assignment. Serra is giving me the knowledge to help rebuild it, but the *Weatherlight* is not my reason for existence."

"Just because your original reason for existence was destroyed doesn't mean you can't get another one. Believe me." He saw she was uncomfortable with the conversation and changed the subject. "Perhaps when Jhoira returns, I can offer her my service." He looked at her, his expression grave. "You should too."

Tiana didn't respond. In a month or so the *Weatherlight* would be ready to fly again. Could she let it fly without her? *You'll have to*, she told herself. She was an angel, and joining Jhoira's crew wasn't her purpose.

The long hot days went past, the work continued, and Arvad didn't eat anybody, though the Powerstone hadn't cured him yet. Tiana was starting to think he might really mean to stay until Jhoira returned so he could ask to join her crew. She was bracing herself not to be jealous if Jhoira agreed. Arvad deserved a chance.

Then one afternoon she was up on deck with Hadi talking about the final engine test when she caught a flash of light in the distance. She stepped up to balance on the railing. Alarmed, Hadi followed her gaze. "Was that the volcano?" he said.

"No. No, it's worse." Tiana raised her voice and sang the alarm. "Everyone, run! Take cover in the rocks!"linebreak



Art by Daarken

Streaking toward them from the mountains was a phoenix. A huge raptor, its wingspan several times the size of Tiana's, its entire body engulfed in flames. *It's going to burn the Weatherlight*, Tiana thought, and a rage filled her, as pure and burning as Serra's holy light. *Never, never.* Not while there was breath left in her body. She leapt into the air, barely conscious of Hadi swinging down the scaffold, of the work crew scrambling out of their tents and calling out in alarm.

As the phoenix swooped in, Tiana readied her spear and darted up toward its chest. At the last instant, it rolled down and under her. Its clawed feet struck at her. Heat washed over her and burning pain ripped across her shoulder and knocked her down and almost out of the air. She flapped her wings to recover and circled back in. But the phoenix took the opportunity to dive low over the camp and set the tents on fire. Tiana shouted in fury and dove down to fling her spear at its back.

Its wing slammed up and hit her, and Tiana's own wings fouled. She fell, hit a rock, and bounced off. She slid down a gravel slope and struggled to her feet, untangling her wings. Her spear was a melted lump. Terror freezing her heart, she twisted around to see the *Weatherlight*. The phoenix dove on the vulnerable skyship and there was no way she could get there in time—

Then the phoenix jerked, knocked off its course by an arrow slamming into its neck. It burnt the arrow out of its body with a twitch of its fire feathers, but another took its place, then another. Tiana scrambled back to the top of the rock and saw Arvad on the ground near the skyship. He had a longbow and was just letting fly another arrow.

Tiana drew her sword and held it up, and prayed for the sacred magic of the Church of Serra. Instantly she felt the divine power flow through it to her hand. She snapped her wings out and jumped off the rocks, then caught the air again and angled upward. As Arvad's next arrow struck the phoenix, Tiana shot up into the fire and drove her sword in right under its breastbone.

The creature shrieked and twisted in midair. Determined to keep it from falling on the *Weatherlight*, Tiana shoved it toward the beach. She kept pushing until her skin started to singe and the primal fear of burning her wings off made her disengage. Flapping to stay aloft, she watched the phoenix tumble, try to right itself, then fall into the waves in a broken heap.

Tiana turned back toward the shore and it occurred to her that her clothes and possibly her hair were actually on fire.

She landed on the packed dirt near the camp and Farim dashed up and threw a bucket of water at her. She sputtered, water dripping down her face. Arvad threw a wet blanket over her wings and asked urgently, "Are you all right?"

Now that the fire was out, Tiana could tell the damage was superficial, and angels healed quickly. "I'll be fine." She saw Arvad looked singed, too, and his tabard had clearly been on fire at one point. "You?"

"Arvad saved us," Tien said, still breathing hard. She pointed toward the smoking ruin of a tent. "He lifted the canvas so we could get out. And he saved the *Weatherlight*. I think he saved you, too."

There were a lot of things Arvad could have done, with Tiana dead and the camp in chaos. Fed on the workers fleeing the camp or stolen the Powerstone and run off with it. Instead he had acted exactly how a Benalish knight should.

And Tiana had acted exactly like a guardian angel. The *Weatherlight*'s guardian angel. The thought of the skyship being destroyed had almost destroyed her. She knew now she would defend it to the death. *Is this what you want, Serra?* Tiana asked, but there was no answer. Maybe because she already had her answer, when Serra had empowered her sword with enough force to kill the phoenix in one blow.

When Jhoira returned, Tiana would offer to serve her as crew on the *Weatherlight*. It wasn't the purpose she had been born for, but it was the one she wanted more than anything.