

# CHRISTINA'S GUIDE TO DRAGON AGE

## A cheat sheet guide to the complicated world of Dragon Age

### THE GAMES:

The Dragon Age series is an RPG where your decisions in a game can carry over to later games, which makes for a highly customizable experience. A companion can end the game in many ways, and that will influence your worldstate for the next game. Some characters can permanently die depending on your choices. In addition, you can choose to recruit all possible companions for your party or a minimum of them, but your max party for any quest is 4, including yourself. You can swap out companions for different quests.

**DRAGON AGE ORIGINS:** Also called DAO. Game number one in the series.

- **Player Character:** You start out as a character from six possible different backgrounds (human noble, noble dwarf, commoner dwarf, Dalish elf, city elf, or Circle mage). This game is the only one of the series where the mages must all come from a singular origin, so all of the other options must be of warrior or rogue classes. The player character is unvoiced and is called The Warden or the Hero of Ferelden.
- **Plot:** You become a Grey Warden and fight an Archdemon after doing quests and gaining army support from a coalition of elves, dwarves, humans, and mages. Additionally, you must depose Loghain, the general who betrayed the king.
- **Romances:** Of the four romanceable characters, there is one straight woman, one straight man, and one bisexual man and woman each.
- **DLC:** There are a bunch of DLC, but the main one that advances the story is called Awakening. It's not completely necessary from a plot standpoint, but it is really interesting and some of the companions introduced are fantastic. There are additional DLC centered on specific characters (Leliana, Morrigan), plus a DLC that gives you an extra companion, Shale.
- **General Notes:** This game has the most traditional fantasy tropes and is great if you love story and lore. The decisions are weighty and the replay value is pretty high even though the graphics are super dated at this point. This game is really close to D&D in game form, where you manually assign all of your attribute points as well as pick your skills from various skill trees as you progress.

**DRAGON AGE 2:** Also called DA2. Game number two in the series.

- **Player Character:** You play as a male or female human who is a refugee from the events of the first game. The player character is voiced and is called Hawke, and they can be from any class.
- **Plot:** Hawke and their family are fleeing the Blight in Ferelden. They reach the city of Kirkwall in the Free Marches, where they create a found family with their companions. There, they discover a major conflict between two rival factions: mages and templars. They also must handle tensions between the Viscount and a group of Qunari stranded in the city.
- **Romances:** All four romance options are bisexual.
- **DLC:** There are a few, but the one that's usually played is Legacy. It's not essential, but the big bad of Inquisition does get introduced in it. There's another that gives you an additional companion, Sebastian. Avoid it, he sucks.
- **General Notes:** This game was a rush job. Basically, DAO was a smash hit, and Bioware was ordered by EA to crank out a sequel in 9 months because EA is a bag of dicks. Bioware did their best, choosing to focus on story and characters over game maps, which makes for memorable characters... but you play the same maps over and over. It's pretty repetitive. This game has a huge social justice theme and deeply explores how oppression leads to violence. It has some of the best companions in all the games, though. You no longer manually assign skill points, but you still pick from skill trees.

**DRAGON AGE INQUISITION:** Also called DAI or just Inquisition. Game number three in the series.

- **Player Character:** You can play as a human, Dalish elf, dwarf, or qunari or any class (except dwarves, who cannot be mages). The character is voiced and is called either the Herald of Andraste or The Inquisitor.
- **Plot:** Following the events of DA2, a conclave is called to broker peace between templars and mages, but it is interrupted when the entire meeting place explodes, killing everyone inside as well as The Divine. You are the sole survivor, and you emerge with a glowing magical hand that can seal rifts in The Veil. You have no memory of what happened. Even so, you become the head of the Inquisition, a force that aims to quell a civil war in Orlais, end a continuing war between templars and mages, figure out why you have sudden magical powers, AND defeat the Big Bad, Corypheus.
- **Romances:** The eight romances are a mixed bag of orientations. There are straight options, a gay option, a lesbian option, and several bisexual options.
- **DLC:** There are three story-expanding DLC (Jaws of Hakkon, The Descent, and Trespasser) plus a valuable merchant DLC (The Black Emporium). They're all pretty good, but the only one that is essential is Trespasser, which is more or less the REAL ending to the game.
- **General Notes:** There's court intrigue, heavy focus on elven lore, a really cool weapon / armor crafting mechanism, lots of good story decisions, diverse locales, and high stakes. Also, of the three games, this one has the least amount of horror content. (The first two are not horror games but have some quests that are pretty horror-inspired.) You pick from skill trees again, but you also get various buffs and resistances from specific quests. You can absolutely start with this game (I did!) but read a little about the various races / factions / etc so you have a little background and don't get overwhelmed with all the info at once. This game also introduced the series' first trans character.

## **CLASSES:**

Your player character will be one of the following.

**WARRIOR:** Sword and shield or two-handed, with additional skill trees.

**ROGUE:** Dual wield daggers or a bow, with additional skill trees.

**MAGE:** Self explanatory but you start out with fire, ice, electricity, and spirit skill trees to start.

Halfway through any of the games you get a specialization. What specializations there are for your class vary from game to game. Each of your companions has a pre-set specialization-- some are unique and some are not. Basically, it's a more advanced skill tree for high-level defense or damage. In Inquisition, there are three specializations per class to choose from. If you're unsure of which specialization you want, you should have a recruitable companion in each specialization category that you can test drive during a fight to see if you like it or not.

In Inquisition, if you decide to re-spec anyone in your party, you can purchase an amulet to do so, called The Tactician's Renewal. It cannot change your specialization, however.

## **THEDAS:**

Dragon Age is set on a continent called THEDAS. (It literally stands for THE Dragon Age Setting, lol.) There are several independent nations in Thedas.

### **WHERE THE GAMES TAKE PLACE:**

**FERELDEN:** where the first game and part of DAI takes place. Your basic kinda medieval setting, English accents. Terrain varies from sunny and pastoral to dark and Transylvanian to mountainous and snowy. Fereldens really love dogs.

**ORLAIS:** where part of DAI takes place. Think 1800's France. The capital is Val Royeaux, and Orlais also contains The Dales, a land given to the Dalish elves. There is also a trio of desert zones.

**THE DEEP ROADS:** Tunnels beneath the land, populated by darkspawn and dwarven ruins.

**THE FADE:** In the games, The Fade is a parallel world that exists alongside the real world, inhabited by spirit beings, demons, and various other entities. People sometimes see it in their dreams. Mages draw on The Fade to produce their magic and can lucid dream in the Fade. Only one mortal group has ever physically entered The Fade, and it's their fault the entire world has to deal with Archdemons sometimes. The Fade is separated from the real world by The Veil. Elves call the Fade "The Beyond."

**THE FREE MARCHES:** where DA2 takes place. Kind of a melting pot. Home to Kirkwall, the City of Chains, a city grappling with a history of slavery.

### **OTHER LANDS TO BE AWARE OF:**

**ANTIVA:** We never go there, but some of the companions are from there. Think Spain. If someone sounds like Puss In Boots, they're from Antiva.

**NEVARRA:** Another nebulously European nation. They have cults of death worship and their mages practice necromancy. The nobility is famed for dragon hunting. Not super relevant, but also probably a location in the fourth game.

**PAR VOLLEN AND SEHERON:** We never go there, but these are the homelands of the Qunari.

**RIVAIN:** There are a lot of pirates in Rivain. It's not super relevant. Probably a location in the fourth game.

**TEVINTER:** A nation to the north ruled by mages, but a lot of them are shitty and evil. Also, slavery is commonplace in Tevinter. Think Rome. The next game will be set in Tevinter.

## RACES:

### HUMANS:

- Humans arrived in Thedas after the Elves and Dwarves. In Ferelden, there is a very typical renaissance gentry system, with the order of precedence in Ferelden being Kings --> Teryns (like Dukes) --> Banns (like Earls) --> everybody else. In Orlais, they are ruled by an Empress, they have a more recognizable gentry (Dukes, etc.).
- Most humans follow the Andrastian religion. Basically, think of a female-led Catholic church, and that's the Chantry. Instead of the Bible, they have the Chant of Light. Instead of The Pope, they have The Divine. The Chantry worships The Maker and his bride, Andraste. Andraste is a hero of old who is kind of part Mary, part Boudicca, and part Joan of Arc. The Tevinters follow a modified, male-led version of Andrastianism and have their own version of The Chantry and their own Divine (called the Black Divine).
- There are also pockets of Avvar in Ferelden, who are barbarian-types, and they have their own Gods and practices.

**ELVES:** There is SO MUCH elven lore, but the basics are that elves used to be immortal, but something happened to the ancient Elvhen people (highly theorized to be contact with humans) that caused them to become mortal.

- **The Dalish:** The Tevinter Imperium sacked the greatest ancient Elvhen city, Arlathan, and enslaved most of the elves they did not kill. Some of the elves who fled and survived fought alongside Andraste against the Tevinters, and were given The Dales in Orlais as a reward. These became the Dalish elves, who are nomadic and who do their best to remember their ancient Gods and heritage, but it's been so long it's sort of like playing telephone. The Dalish wear vallaslin, facial tattoos dedicated to various elven Gods. They are very suspicious of humans, whom they call "shemlen" (or "shems" for short). They are led by mages called Keepers and travel from place to place in ship-shaped wagons called Aravels. The third game is particularly heavy on Dalish lore, with several trips to ancient Dalish temples to learn more about who the old Elvhen Gods (called the Evanuris) really were.
- **City Elves:** The city elves are a whole different matter. In Ferelden and Orlais, they're not slaves, but they're at the bottom of the ladder. Forced to live in slums called Alienages, most city elves are servants and hired hands. City elves tend to be Andrastian.
- **Elsewhere:** In places like Tevinter, they are still slaves.

**DWARVES:** Most dwarves live completely underground in massive cities called Thaigs, and if they ever leave the underground, they are exiled. Each Thaig has a King and / or Queen and its own nobility, plus several under-castes. The biggest dwarven kingdom in Ferelden is called Orzammar.

- The dwarves are the guardians of the Deep Roads, labyrinthine tunnels where darkspawn come from. They have entire warrior squadrons called The Legion Of The Dead whose sole job is to kill as many darkspawn as possible so they don't reach the surface.
- There are also dwarves on the surface-- they either self-exiled or are children of exiles. They are considered casteless. Most of them are merchants of some sort, allowed back into the Thaigs twice a year to restock.
- There is a dwarven crime / smuggling syndicate called The Carta.
- Dwarves are the only race that cannot become mages. They have no connection to magic, which allows them to mine a toxic, addictive substance used by mages to boost their power-- lyrium.
- Dwarves don't have a religion, but they revere their ancestors who have done great feats, who they call Paragons. A dwarf can become a Paragon while still living.

**QUNARI:** The qunari are both a race and an cultural group, kind of. If they are huge and have horns (with one exception) and a greyish skintone, they are Qunari.

- The Qunari operate as a collective and will take in members of other races provided they follow the rules of the Qun, their society. There are a lot of Qunari elves who fled from slavery in the Tevinter Imperium because life under the Qun, while restrictive, is better than slavery.
- They prize the collective over the individual to an extreme. There are no traditional families-- children are collectively reared and then assigned their job as teenagers. In the Qun, no one has names, only job titles. There is an army, led by Arishoks (generals), a whole spy faction (the Ben Hassrath), and various other roles to be assigned, like Tamassran who take care of vulnerable members.
- They may take on nicknames for the benefit of outsiders when they are stationed outside of their main homeland, Par Vollen.
- If a Qunari leaves the Qun, they are considered permanently exiled and called Tal-Vashoth. Often, Tal-Vashoth are hunted down and killed. There is no religion in the Qun.

## ENEMIES:

**ARCHDEMONS:** Remember when I said that only one group has ever been physically in the Fade? That was a group of high Tevinter mages (called Magisters) who wanted to find The Golden City (where the Maker lives), which is located in the Fade. But in physically entering the Fade, they perverted the city in their greed, and it became the Black City. The Magisters (of whom there were seven) were trapped there, and became Archdemons. When an Archdemon awakes and comes to the real world, they often take the form of a dragon, and they spread blight across the land. Archdemons are endgame baddies.

**DARKSPAWN:** Evil monsters that come from the Deep Roads in four main flavors. We find out why there are four main kinds of Darkspawn in the first game, and spoiler alert, it's gross. When an Archdemon wakes, the darkspawn amass in hordes and rush to the surface. Their blood is toxic and causes humans to go mad, sicken, and die. This is called A Blight. The first game deals with putting down a blight, and the third game deals with a decent amount of darkspawn, too. They are the foot soldiers of evil.

**DEMONS:** Spirits from The Fade can be good (Compassion, Justice) or Evil (Pride, Despair). The evil ones are called demons. A good spirit can even be twisted to become evil through various means. When there are rifts in the Veil that separates the real world from The Fade, demons can pass through and cause death and destruction. Also, demons can possess mages who are not strong enough to withstand their influence. In the third game, you must close these rifts in the Veil and fight a shit ton of demons while doing so. There are about a half dozen different kinds of demons, each with its own look, weaknesses, and attacks. They are mid-level baddies.

**DRAGONS:** There are two high dragons in the first game, one in the second, and ten in the third game (plus another in the DLC), not counting Archdemons. You don't have to kill any of them if you don't want to, but they are often in the way of high level loot, and the crafting materials you get from killing them are some of the most valuable in the game.

**THE VENATORI:** Tevinter supremacists who ally with the big bad of Inquisition for power. Basically if the KKK had magical powers. They are evil henchmen, basically.

## FACTIONS:

**TEMPLARS:** Tonally close to real templars during the Crusades, actually. They are the Chantry's military arm. Many templars are stationed in mage circles, to keep watch over the mages and kill any mage who has become possessed. To do this, Templars take lyrium, which gives them strength and stamina, but is also highly addictive. The Chantry regulates the Templars' lyrium supply to minimize this, but it happens. Also, many Templars are so frightened of the power that mages have that they have become highly oppressive in their duties, which leads mages to make deals with demons out of sheer desperation to escape. This is the basis of the mage / templar conflict.

**SEEKERS:** Another military branch of the Chantry, and the ones who are in charge of governing the Templars. Not terribly relevant to overall gameplay, but in the third game we learn how Seekers gain their powers (they do not take lyrium) and it has really interesting lore implications that I bet will be important in the next game.

**MAGES:** A mage is anyone with magical ability of any race (except dwarves, who can't be mages). Mages draw from the Fade to do spells and can lucid dream there. Mages have great power, but are also very vulnerable to demons due to how often they interact with The Fade. For this reason, various races deal carefully with mages.

- **The Qunari** carefully control individual mages (whom they call Sarebaas) and it really seems like they are treated like caged animals / tools more than anything.
- **The Dalish** always have mages as their leaders (called Keepers), but also limit the number of mages in a clan to three. If a clan has more than three mages, they send their extra mages to other clans for training.
- **The Tevinter Imperium** is ruled by powerful mage families and their parliament is entirely created of mages.
- **In Orlais and Ferelden**, it's just a straight up shitshow. Anyone of any social station who shows magical abilities is sent to their local Circle Tower, which are spread throughout the continent. They are carefully trained by Senior Enchanters to control their powers, and led by First Enchanters, but also watched over by templars whose fears often lead them to abuse the mages in their care. Many families try to hide their childrens' magical abilities for this reason, and the lack of formal training leaves them wide open for demon possession that can lead to mass death (this is called "becoming an abomination"). Where you / your character stands on the potential dangers posed by mages can strongly influence your choices in all three games, especially regarding the mages vs templars conflict and the status of Circles in general (some mages think they are necessary, others want to abolish them, etc). It's a very nuanced topic.

**GREY WARDENS:** Grey Wardens can be of any race. They are an order dedicated solely to killing darkspawn and Archdemons. Only a Grey Warden can kill an Archdemon or survive the taint of darkspawn blood. (There is lore as to why, but if you want to play the first game, I won't spoil it.) The tradeoff for this is that at some point (10-20 years) after becoming a Warden, they begin to hear "the Calling" to go off to the Deep Roads and kill as many darkspawn as they can until they are overwhelmed. Many Wardens are pressed into service. Think of them sort of like the GOT dudes at the Wall. The player character in the first game is a Grey Warden, and they feature prominently in one of the main quests of the third game when all the Grey Wardens in Ferelden mysteriously begin to vanish.

## OTHER STUFF TO KNOW:

**APOSTATES:** Any mage that is not part of a Circle is called an apostate. Apostates include Dalish mages, mages rebelling against the Circle, Tevinter mages, Avvar augurs, and... Morrigan. Templars often hunt down Apostates to kill them or force them into a Circle.

**ANTIVAN CROWS:** They don't feature a ton in the main game, but one of the companions in the first game is a Crow and they get mentioned sometimes. They're an assassin for hire organization from Antiva.

**BARDS:** In Ferelden, they're musicians. In Orlais, they are musicians... and deadly spies / assassins.

**BLOOD MAGIC:** This is a highly taboo form of magic practiced by some mages. It makes one especially vulnerable to demons, but also grants very strong powers. Tevinters use blood magic the most. Everyone else considers it forbidden. Except Merrill, a companion in the second game who is basically an Elven Cupcake, lol. Many mages on the run from templars turn to blood magic for protection.

**ELUVIANS:** Magic mirrors created by ancient elves. Used as portals between places in the real world, The Fade, and other planes of existence they created with their elven magic.

**RED LYRIUM:** In the second game, you find out that there is a substance called red lyrium that is a blighted version of regular lyrium. It basically turns you full-on Targaryen nuts and grants immense physical invulnerability. In the third game, the big bad starts actively mining it for reasons that I'm sure are completely fine.

**TRANQUILITY:** This is a hard thing to talk about without giving spoilers. Basically, if a mage cannot control their powers or is too weak to fight off demon possession, they are made Tranquil. It's basically magical neutering. A ritual is done to sever the mage's connection to The Fade, and thus, to their magic. This prevents them from being possessed, but it also removes all of their outward emotions and desires. They speak in a creepy monotone and are purely logic-driven. Tranquils are usually taken care of by mages and given specific tasks within mage towers, like running stockrooms, research, etc. Some mages regard Tranquility as sad but necessary, and others view it as intolerable cruelty where death would be preferred.

## GAMEPLAY MISC:

**CRAFTING:** You can often craft unique or customized weapons and armor for yourself or for your companions.

- Very rudimentary in DAO. Only a couple of crafting options, and no control over aesthetics.
- Nonexistent in DA2, although you can limitedly upgrade your companions' armor.
- Incredible in DAI. You can get weapons / armors through quests and loot, but you can also custom craft a ton of armors once you get the schematics (available at vendors or as quest rewards). Halfway through the game you get access to armor tinting as well, so you can custom color your armors depending on what materials you have on hand. (Amass a horde of cloth / leather / metals. They don't weigh anything in your inventory and you need them for crafting.) Some of the high level metals are even duochrome. You can also harvest plants and use them to upgrade your potions (healing potions, elemental resistance potions, grenades, lyrium potions for mages).

**ENCHANTING:** In addition to crafting, you can enchant your weapons. In the first two games, Sandal does this for you with runes you have crafted or received as rewards. In the third, when you reach Skyhold, acquire the arcanist and she will teach you about enchanting.

**COMPANIONS AND ADVISORS:** All of your recruitable companions have their own stories that you can uncover by talking to them. A lot of the time, the best place to do that is wherever home base is. DAO, it's in camp. DA2, it's in their individual homes. DAI, it's at their locations at Haven or Skyhold. DAI also introduces four Advisors, three of whom are from previous games. But as your Inquisitor is just meeting them, you don't need to have played the prior games to get to know them. They help you run War Table operations with their specialized skills, and you can visit / talk to them to gain access to their personal quests.

**APPROVAL:** Each game has a different system regarding companion approval. What one companion objects to another likes, depending on their own background and POV.

- In DAO, you can get approval or disapproval through your dialogue and choices, but you can buy approval through gifts and basically bribe people to like you.
- DA2 has a unique friendship / rivalry system that compounds itself.
- In DAI, you get approval or disapproval based on your dialogue and choices. Approval affects if you are friends with some of your companions or not (and whether you can romance them or unlock their personal quests). In a lot of cases, if approval gets too low, the character may permanently leave your party, or you could ask them to leave. There is no approval that applies to advisors in Inquisition, but your dialogue and choices can affect a couple of spoilery things.

## MY OWN PERSONAL TIPS FOR INQUISITION:

**A GREENER GARDEN:** You can use the garden at Skyhold for growing rare plants to upgrade your potions. Or you could be like me and just grow amrita vein for funsies. Nothing like a reverent, religious garden full of potted dicks.

**CREATURE RESEARCH TABLE:** Make a habit of hitting this table every few hours. You'll get a lot of free XP and Influence, plus useful buffs. In Haven, it's located in the Chantry to the left of the war room. In Skyhold, it's located on the second floor of the spiral tower.

**CRAFTING POINTERS:** Fade-touched materials are used in crafting to grant an extra buff. Guard on Hit materials are fantastic. As for regular crafting, anything with "cotton" in the name will grant heal on kill when you're crafting weapons, and that is SUPER handy. Make sure you take any weapons and armor to the upgrading stations, because you can often add extra crafted slots to both, as well as enchanted runes to weapons.

**DRAGON FIGHTS:** A dragon can deal fire, ice, or electricity damage. Whatever damage they deal, they are immune to, so consider that when choosing what mage to bring to a fight. Also, Vivienne's Knight Enchanter specialization is super helpful in some of the tougher fights. You can also craft elemental resistance potions for your party if you need to.

**FETCH QUESTS & COLLECTIONS:** Good lord, there are a lot of fetch quests and collections. Mosaics, Astrariums, Shards, Songs, Regions, Mugs, Notes, Landmarks.... try not to get overwhelmed, I've never done them all on a single playthrough. The ones I do every time are the astrariums (because I find them a fun mini-game) and the shards (because they lead to really helpful elemental buffs, especially if you want to fight dragons).

**INFLUENCE:** I definitely have a top 5 Inquisitions Perks list, but spend your first point on the one that expands your search radius. It's worth it. Another good one to pick as soon as you can is More Healing Potions. It expands your healing potions from 8 to 12. Once you're at Skyhold, you can do a war table mission for a vendor who sells influence, but it ain't cheap.

**IRON BULL:** Save the Chargers. Trust me on this.

**LELIANA:** She is my favorite character evaaaaaah but make her play nice sometimes, please. Niceness before knives, Leliana.

**MAGE SKILL TREES:** What elements you choose are pretty subjective, but make sure you snag barrier from the Spirit tree early on.

**REQUISITIONS:** Not all the individual zone requisitions are useful, but you will need to use the requisitions table to craft various things for your specialization and for Skyhold. Doing regular requisitions give s you power, but you may waste valuable crafting materials. Choose wisely.

**SAD SPLINTERS:** Save the splinters at the gate of all three captured fortresses and then visit the requisitions table.

**THE BLACK EMPORIUM:** Make sure you get this DLC for DAI. It gives you access to an additional vendor where you can buy crafting supplies and adjust your character's face.

**THE GOLDEN NUG:** This allows you to synchronize your schematics so that whatever you find in your first playthrough, you have nearly immediately in you second, and so on. Think of it as a vault for lots of valuable recipes and schematics, and make sure you tap the nug at least after every main quest.

**THE DALISH GODS:** For story reasons, right before you do the What Pride Had Wrought main story quest, skim the wiki on the Evanuris.

**THE HINTERLANDS:** The enemies in this zone are like, level 2 - 20. You're not meant to zero out a whole map before progressing to a different zone. You can come back to finish higher level quests as you level up. (I did not know this my first time through and died A LOT, lol.) Take that as a general tip: if a zone has enemies that are too high-level, you can leave and come back later.

**THE TINIEST CAVE:** Absurd. Worth it. Google it.

**WICKED EYES AND WICKED HEARTS:** A whole quest that takes place at an Imperial Masquerade Ball. Don't do this quest high or you're gonna be super confused. There are a lot of side quests that you have to track at the same time and some parts of it are timed.