

**THE CULTURAL STRUGGLE OF ELVES:
HOW *DRAGON AGE'S* ELVES REPRESENT POLITICAL AND SOCIAL
MINORITIES**

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Abstract

In this analysis I will, by employing a postcolonial and feminist perspective, focus on how the elven community of *Dragon Age* reflects political debates about marginalised communities in games, by focussing on the role of the avatar, the non-player characters, and the environment. *Dragon Age* is a pseudo-mimetic text, that has to be understood in through the events of our own world. It reflects the conflicts as metaphorical representations of a world similar to our own. All elven characters (both the avatar and the non-player characters) are othered, placed in the position of the subaltern, and silenced in the retelling of history. The human population, with emphasis on Tevinter, Orlais, and the Chantry, are framed as the colonisers that have taken the elven land out of imperialistic views. Especially the assimilation of the elven into human society is framed by the Chantry as a civilising and ameliorating force, that actually forces the elves to become submissive to the hegemony of the ruling class. Any attempts to restore or regain heritage is difficult, as the colonisers have actively tried to erase it. This imbalance is echoed by the environment, in which the coloniser-colonised relationship is highlighted.

Keywords: Dragon Age, elves, avatar, non-player characters, virtual ethnography, postcolonialism, feminism, other, subaltern, agency, empire, marginalisation, indigenous people, imperialism, imagined communities.

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- INTRODUCTION -

When people think about elves, the image J. R. R. Tolkien has created often heavily influences their description: elves are immortal, powerful, and graceful. The elven people of the *Dragon Age* franchise do not fully comply with this image. They are marked by the destruction of their glory days; they long for a time long ago when they had their own functioning society and immortality. The ‘current’ elven people are fractured and no longer immortal. The main division between the elves is the separation between the ‘city elves’ and the ‘Dalish’. The city elves live, as the name implies, within (human) cities. Within these cities, they are reduced to second class citizens that are only allowed to live in ‘alienages’: a walled off section within a city that’s only meant for elven housing. These areas are reminiscent of ghettos, and are some of the poorest and filthiest places in a city. The Dalish live in the forests, they do not belong to a certain place, as they live a nomadic existence. They are marked by their pride in being elven, and their desire to uphold ancient traditions and rituals. They hold onto their old identity through oral traditions and a few artefacts. They do not desire to be in contact with the human society, but encounters with humans are unavoidable as they’re living in areas that are seen as under humans rule.¹ Both these groups of elves are living as marginalised groups within human society, and have been compared to different kinds of marginalised communities within ‘real life’. For example, the original *Dragon Age* creator David Gaider confirmed on Twitter that Jewish people served as an inspiration², but fans have also made comparisons to other communities like the indigenous Americans³, the Roma⁴, and the Irish⁵.

Fantasy games often shy away from direct engagement with real life racism.⁶ This means they do not often invoke a contemporary societal or academic debate to make a political statement. The *Dragon Age* franchise is no exception to this. Yet, these games do provide us with indirect reflections of real-life world views.⁷ There are many different societal debates and issues reflected within this storyworld, but I will mainly focus on the representation of marginalised minorities.

¹ For a more detailed description of elven history, see appendix ‘Brief overview of elven history’.

² DGaider Tumblr Archives, “Anonymous Asked,” Tumblr, 29 January 2015, <https://the-gaider-archives.tumblr.com/post/109509566283/i-was-wondering-if-the-elves-in-dragon-age-were-at>.

³ Finding-my-culture, “What I need non-indigenous DA fans to understand,” Tumblr, April 17, 2019. <https://finding-my-culture.tumblr.com/post/184257068455/what-i-need-non-indigenous-da-fans-to-understand>.

⁴ Dalishious, ““Never Trust Half an Elf:” The Treatment of Multiracial Elves in Dragon Age is Pretty Hurtful,” Tumblr, March 24, 2018. <https://dalishious.tumblr.com/post/172216493117/never-trust-half-an-elf-the-treatment-of>.

⁵ Non-Toxic DA Confessions, “Confession : I love playing as an elf” Tumblr, May 31, 2018, <https://non-toxicdragonageconfessions.tumblr.com/post/174445234849/confession-i-love-playing-as-an-elf-but-not>.

⁶ Dennis Jansen, “HOW FANTASY GAMES DEAL WITH RACE, AS DEMONSTRATED BY THE ELDER SCROLLS,” *First Person Scholar*, December 12, 2018, <http://www.firstpersonscholar.com/how-fantasy-games-deal-with-race/>.

⁷ Jansen, “HOW FANTASY GAMES DEAL WITH RACE, AS DEMONSTRATED BY THE ELDER SCROLLS”.

Through elves, a non-existent real-life community, we can “narratively acknowledge and explore real-world racial problems in a safe manner.”⁸ I will look at the reflections this franchise provides, and link them through postcolonial and feminist theory to our own society. The reflections of the creators work as a metaphor for these real-issues, allowing players who might not be confronted with these issues in their daily life to experience a different perspective. Players who recognise themselves and/or their community in these metaphors, can use this story as a bridge to talk about their own experiences.

Much research on representation in games has been focused on gender related topics, which means that there has been less focus on race, ethnicity, ancestry, and sexuality in games.⁹ Marginalised groups still have limited presence within research.¹⁰ For *Dragon Age*, the representation of the marginalised LGBTQ+ community has often been researched. This has been done, because the game series has many gay and bisexual characters, that offer possible romances to the player. This has inspired research into queer identification¹¹, the open homosexuality that is presented¹², and even the romantic reactions these characters evoke.¹³

This research will contribute to the debates surrounding marginalised communities, albeit in a different way. My focus will lie on politically oppressed (cultural) minorities. These specific minorities are metaphorically represented in *Dragon Age* through the elven people. The struggles that this group faces, can be recognised across multiple cultural communities (like the earlier mentioned Jewish, indigenous American, Irish and Roma people.) It is important to acknowledge that the elven people in *Dragon Age* do not represent a *single* cultural community, but are facing issues that are recognisable by *multiple* real-life marginalised communities. It is not a story about the Roma, Jewish, or indigenous people, and therefore the main goal of this analysis is not to look at the ‘correctness’ of the representation. Rather, the goal is to scrutinise which social hierarchies, disparities, and power relations the story refers to and supports.¹⁴ In order to work towards this goal, the overarching research question will be: How does *Dragon Age’s* elven community reflect real-life political debates about marginalised communities in games?

⁸ Nathaniel Poor, “Digital Elves as a Racial Other in Video Games: Acknowledgement and Avoidance,” *Games and Culture* 7, no. 5 (2012): 391, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412012454224>.

⁹ Shaw, “From Custer’s Revenge and Mario to Fable and Fallout,” 19.

¹⁰ Shaw, “From Custer’s Revenge and Mario to Fable and Fallout,” 14.

¹¹ Stephen Greer, “Playing queer: Affordances for sexuality in *Fable* and *Dragon Age*,” *Journal of Gaming & Virtual Worlds* 5, no. 1 (2013): 3-21, <https://doi.org/10.1386/jgvw.5.1.3.1>.

¹² Gaspard Pelurson, “Mustaches, Blood Magic, and Interspecies Sex: Navigating the Non-Heterosexuality of Dorian Pavus,” *Game Studies* 18, no. 1 (April 2018), http://gamestudies.org/1801/articles/gaspard_pelurson.

¹³ Annika Waern, “I’m in love with someone that doesn’t exist! Bleed in the context of a computer game,” *Journal of Gaming and Virtual Worlds* 3, no. 3 (2011), <https://doi.org/10.1386/jgvw.3.3.239.1>.

¹⁴ Shaw, “From Custer’s Revenge and Mario to Fable and Fallout,” 20.

- STRUCTURE -

Subquestions and limitations

Before I structure this research question through subquestions, it is first important to sketch some general limits to the scope of my research. The *Dragon Age* franchise is mainly constructed through the three main (single-player) games: *Dragon Age Origins*¹⁵, *Dragon Age II*¹⁶, and *Dragon Age: Inquisition*¹⁷. These games have a total of 16 DLC's¹⁸, three spin-offs, three books, seven novels, a tabletop game, an anime film, and multiple comic series. These serve to give more insights into the story of the game, or even to create small additional stories in the *Dragon Age* world. It is impossible to focus on every item on this list in a single analysis. Therefore, I am mainly focused on the three main games and the Trespasser DLC for *Dragon Age: Inquisition*, as these contain the main storyline of the *Dragon Age* franchise. Within these games, I will limit myself to a few specific locations and characters, that are necessary to understand the political positioning of the elves. This is possible, because these few specific locations symbolise the general way of living, they conjure up a social space full of comparable locations that are all representative (in their simultaneous separate existence) of the oppressiveness of the system.¹⁹ This specific corpus selection is explained with each subquestion.

Now that some limits are in place, I will structure the upcoming research through three subquestions. I do this, because I will divide this research into three main focus areas, which each show the political marginalisation that the elves face. Each subquestion will be discussed on the basis of specifically chosen in-game content²⁰, online discussion topics²¹, and a reflection on the values the game content represents (for a more detailed description, see the "method of analysis" section). The first focus area is the avatar, that allows the player to interact with the game world. This will be analysed through the subquestion: "How does the avatar reflect real-life political debates about marginalised communities in games?" For this subquestion my main focus will be analysing the consequences of playing as an elf or a 'non-elf'. *Origins* offers three different elven backstories for

¹⁵ BioWare, *Dragon Age: Origins*, [Microsoft Windows, Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, Mac OS X], Electronic Arts, 2009.

¹⁶ BioWare, *Dragon Age: II*, [Microsoft Windows, Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, Mac OS X], Electronic Arts, 2011.

¹⁷ BioWare, *Dragon Age: Inquisition*, [Microsoft Windows, Xbox 360, Xbox One, PlayStation 3, PlayStation 4], Electronic Arts, 2014.

¹⁸ DLC stands for 'Downloadable Content'. These are additional items or stories that have to be installed as extras onto a specific main game.

¹⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, New York: Verso, 2016), 30.

²⁰ The selected content is mentioned after each subquestion.

²¹ A first draft of relevant online material can be found in the "Corpus selection" section.

the avatar, *Dragon Age II* has no elven avatars, and *Inquisition* offers one elven avatar.²² Most of these characters are either immediately introduced through their elven heritage, and have race-specific dialogue options. The second focus area are the non-player characters that the player can meet in the game world. More specifically, this research question will be: “How do the non-player characters reflect real-life political debates about marginalised communities in games?” The corpus for this question is centred around different characters that the player meets through their avatar.²³ These characters provide different perspectives on the elven heritage, and highlight the different struggles they face. For example, Merrill seeks lost knowledge even if her ways can be considered unethical, Fenris escaped slavery, and Solas struggles with the change the elven have gone through since their glory days. The third and final focus area is the environment in which the story takes place. There are a few specific places that are very telling about elven history and culture, which will be the in-game corpus associated with this part of the analysis.²⁴ The subquestion that is linked to this, is: “How does the environment reflect real-life political debates about marginalised communities in games?” To analyse this, I will focus on a few specific locations the player has to visit during the game. This includes the Dalish camps (all built according to the same structure, and one available for visiting in all three main games), alienages (visiting possible in *Origins* and *Dragon Age II*, structured in the same way), the temple of the elven goddess Mythal, and the shelters of the elven god Fen’Harel.

Method of analysis

To do this analysis, I will adopt an ethnographic approach. Kiri Miller’s fieldwork thought-experiment of a ‘virtual ethnography’ in a single-player game gives a researcher a new tool to interpret the game design decisions and helps create an understanding of the interpretative work a player might do in the course of their gameplay.²⁵ Ethnography itself revolves around talking to people and following emergent trails, and is a useful technique to search for relevant readings.²⁶ Virtual ethnography in games has been applied before, but is usually associated with multiplayer games. The ethnographer would then observe the other players in the world, for example to research social norms within

²² The entire list of all possible avatars can be found in the “Corpus selection” section.

²³ Relevant NPC’s can be found in the “Corpus selection” section.

²⁴ Relevant locations can be found in the “Corpus selection” section.

²⁵ Kiri Miller, “The Accidental Carjack: Ethnography, Gameworld Tourism, and Grand Theft Auto,” *The International Journal of Computer Game Research*, vol. 8 (September 2008).
<http://gamestudies.org/0801/articles/miller>.

²⁶ Tom Boellstorff, *Ethnography and Virtual Worlds: A Handbook of Method* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 55.

gaming, like T. L. Taylor did in her book *Play Between Worlds: Exploring Online Game Culture* in which Taylor researched social norms in the online multiplayer game *Everquest*.²⁷

Single-player per definition excludes observing the other present players, as the ethnographer is the only one within a single-player gameworld. Yet Miller argues that within this gameworld, ethnographic subjects can still be found; if the ethnographer suspends their sense of disbelief, and treats the in-game characters as actual inhabitants of a place.²⁸ My focus will therefore lie on the in-game characters and the environment they inhabit. The data for this analysis will come from observing the game characters and engaging them in conversation, and by exploring the environment. In total there are four elven player avatars that require a more in depth look: Tabris, Mahariel, Surana, and Lavellan. Furthermore, there are four non player characters that highlight several struggles in the elven community: Merrill (a Dalish elf), Dorian (from a family of slave-owners), Fenris (an escaped slave), and Solas (the elven teacher figure). Lastly, there are two locations that exemplify the struggle of the elven people in human society: Alienages and the city of Halamshiral.²⁹

In order to study the avatars, I will use a slightly different approach for the avatars from *Origins* (Tabris, Mahariel, and Surana), than for *Inquisition* (Lavellan). The many different avatar options are characteristic for *Origins*, allowing for six possible backgrounds in total. Depending on which avatar the player chooses, the game will start with a different origin story. These origin stories function to represent the general living conditions of the specific group within the *Dragon Age* world. The selected avatars show the general life for city elves (Tabris), Dalish elves (Mahariel), and elven mages (Surana). I will note the surroundings, characters, and dialogue within each origin story. *Inquisition* does not have a playable origin story for the avatar, but does offer roleplaying options through race-specific dialogue. For this avatar I will highlight several important conversations that are only available for elven avatars. To study the non-player characters, I will take a more classic ethnographic approach: engaging them in conversation. With the added advantage of replaying the conversation with different dialogue options. To study the environment, 'I' will travel to the mentioned sites to analyse how the environment shows the elven heritage.

From time to time I will supplement this research by using online discussions of the community. It is necessary to include it in some small forms, because representation cannot be understood without looking at the interaction between a game and its players, and how game play contexts shape the implications of a given representation.³⁰ I will not be analysing audience's use of

²⁷ T. L. Taylor, *Play Between Worlds: Exploring Online Game Culture* (Cambridge, London: The MIT Press, 2006).

²⁸ Miller, "The Accidental Carjack: Ethnography."

²⁹ For a more detailed description of the corpus, please see the 'Corpus selection' section.

³⁰ Shaw, "From Custer's Revenge and Mario to Fable and Fallout," 37.

the text, merely using it to highlight that the community sees the representations and metaphors I point out. I will use several online posts and discussion threads that illustrates the audience's use and interpretations of the game, because the intertwined aspects of representation and play necessarily involve audiences' use of texts.³¹

³¹ Shaw, "From Custer's Revenge and Mario to Fable and Fallout," 37.

- DEBATES -

Context

To write this analysis, there are several considerations and concepts that have to be mentioned first. Generally speaking, I will use two angles of approach when selecting works to utilise: those that help me analyse the people of *Dragon Age*, and those that help me analyse the environment.

Furthermore, I will also from time to time refer to online discussion fora to show that, while I recognise these debates about marginalised communities in *Dragon Age*, I am certainly not the only one. This has been a topic of discussion within the gaming community, and therefore I will highlight some posts, threads, and articles that give some insights into this discussion.

The societal context in which this game is produced, is within the system of 'Empire' (that I will explain in more detail later). This system is relevant to understand the society that is created in the *Dragon Age* storyworld. The world of *Dragon Age* is characterised by postcolonial problems, that are most prominently present in *Dragon Age's* elven community. The struggles they are facing are seen in interactions between human and elven people, but also by physical objects like artefacts, ruins, and houses.

The idea of 'empire' is useful in this analysis, not only because video games are associated with neoliberalism and capitalism by commentators who claim an intrinsic connection between colonialism and empire³², but also because it is the underlying system on which Thedas – the storyworld of *Dragon Age*- is built. In an analysis "it is useful to examine how video games represent the principles of empire in their various forms."³³ This storyworld deals with imperialistic problems (for example, the conquering of a major elven city by humans). The downfall of the elven people (them losing their social dominance and becoming fragmented) was originally framed as caused by human imperialistic tendencies. Yet this was further complicated in the last game, where it was revealed that this history was partially incorrect, and the elves played a part in their own downfall. This causes the blame of losing social dominance, to be seemingly partly shifted to the elves themselves. Which creates a problematic implication that marginalised cultures have themselves to blame for their social status. Therefore the system of 'empire' is an important term that is needed to analyse the elven history.

³² Souvik Mukherjee, "Playing Subaltern: Video Games and Postcolonialism," *Games and Culture* 13, no. 5 (2018): 506.

³³ Mukherjee, "Playing Subaltern," 507.

Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greig de Peuter discuss the concept of 'empire' in their book *Games of Empire: Global Capitalism and Video Games*.³⁴ This concept is used to describe planetary militarised hypercapitalism.³⁵ It is a new system of power that closely resembles imperialism, but is composed of economic, administrative, military, and communicative components. However, instead of being governed by a single state like imperialism is, it is governed by global capitalism. It refers to a network of (corporate) power, that is present in everything. It is global due to its geographical reach, but also in its social scope.³⁶ This system is critiqued by the concept of 'multitude', which describes a social force with three main components: (1) the subjective capacity to create new forms of communication, (2) a social movement that resists the primacy of profit and the total monetisation of social relations, and (3) a political project that seeks alternatives to *Empire*.³⁷ When all three of these dimensions come together, they become "a utopian arrow, pointing to a possible future life beyond *Empire*."³⁸ Paolo Virno deems this description of multitude too optimistic, and emphasises that the concept can swing between subversion and submission.³⁹ He illustrates this by stressing how contemporary capital is very good at adapting utopian ideas as sources of revenue, that team spirit, revolutionary change, and individual empowerment are used to increase profits.⁴⁰ Through the multitude, players resist dominant messages encoded within the games of empire, and can also produce alternatives.⁴¹

The people

In *Dragon Age* postcolonialism is most easily recognisable in *Inquisition*, where the player has to expand the might of their organisation (The Inquisition) across the world to defeat the world-threatening villain. However, *Dragon Age* also criticizes itself at the end of their own game, when the player has to decide what happens to the organisation after the villain has been defeated. Overall, the elves are seen as different from the humans, with the popular slur 'rabbit' deeming them frightened animals. They do not have the means to write down and share their own story on a larger scale, instead, human schools teach elven culture by books written by human scholars. This often

³⁴ Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greg de Peuter, "7. Games of Multitude," in *Games of Empire: Global Capitalism and Video Games*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

³⁵ Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greg de Peuter, *Games of Empire: Global Capitalism and Video Games*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), xv.

³⁶ Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greg de Peuter, *Games of Empire: Global Capitalism and Video Games*, xx.

³⁷ Dyer-Witheford and De Peuter, *Games of Empire*, 187 – 188.

³⁸ Dyer-Witheford and De Peuter quote Michael Hardt and Antinno Negri. *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2004).

³⁹ Dyer-Witheford and De Peuter, *Games of Empire*, 188.

⁴⁰ Dyer-Witheford and De Peuter, *Games of Empire*, 188.

⁴¹ Dyer-Witheford and De Peuter, *Games of Empire*, 192 – 193.

leads to twisted views of the elves. Therefore, a part of this analysis will look into how this problem is handled by the game.

To link this situation to real-life I will follow the argument of Souvik Mukherjee, who creates the link between videogame analysis and postcolonialism. Postcolonialism itself is the “interaction between imperial culture and the complex of indigenous cultural practices,” and a “term that addresses all aspects of the colonial process from the beginning to the colonial construct.”⁴² He argues that videogames enrich the understanding of post colonialism in current twenty-first century contexts, and that they call for a wider awareness of related issues in both the development and the analysis of videogames.⁴³ Mukherjee sees videogames as a medium that allows for social criticism. His angle, postcolonial theory, “comprises a wide range of issues connected to the exploitative master discourses of imperial Europe and the responses to them by the peoples of the Americas, Asia, Africa, Australasia, and some regions of Europe itself.”⁴⁴ Postcolonial theory can be used to recognise how decolonized situations are marked by the trace of the imperial pasts they try to disavow.⁴⁵ The postcolonial can be seen in various aspects in videogames, of which Mukherjee gives three examples. First, he sees settler-colonialism, and the feeling of manifest destiny.⁴⁶ The player takes over the entire area and all resources, while feeling it is your right to do so. Exploration of the world goes hand in hand with the expansion of your realm, which fits into the colonial attitude towards your homelands and your colonies.⁴⁷ For example, in *Inquisition* the player can gain new fast-travel points by creating camps of the Inquisition, and establishing your presence in an area. Second, colonialism is seen as a force that is civilising and ameliorating. It is thus framed as something positive that the imperialist is spreading to a ‘less developed’ place.⁴⁸ This can be seen in how the divide between the city elves and the Dalish is framed by the humans: the Dalish, who did not want to assimilate to human society, are framed as uncivilised bandits. Third, the colonial subjects are ‘othered’⁴⁹: they are framed as someone inherently different from the imperialists, creating an ‘us’ versus ‘them’. The colonial subjects are then silenced, deemed invalid by historians and storytellers.⁵⁰ Humans continuously look down upon elves, target them with slurs, and withhold the means to write down their own history. The ‘subaltern’ can be recognised within this problem too. The subaltern is an “individual who does not have the tools or the agency to actively and freely

⁴² Mukherjee, “Playing Subaltern,” 505.

⁴³ Souvik Mukherjee, *Videogames and Postcolonialism: Empire Plays Back* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017), 3

⁴⁴ Mukherjee, *Videogames and Postcolonialism*, 3.

⁴⁵ Mukherjee, *Videogames and Postcolonialism*, 4.

⁴⁶ Mukherjee, *Videogames and Postcolonialism*, 10.

⁴⁷ Mukherjee, *Videogames and Postcolonialism*, 8.

⁴⁸ Mukherjee, *Videogames and Postcolonialism*, 14.

⁴⁹ Mukherjee, *Videogames and Postcolonialism*, 15.

⁵⁰ Mukherjee, *Videogames and Postcolonialism*, 16.

participate in a social order.”⁵¹ The subaltern is part of society submissive to the hegemony of the ruling classes⁵², and often overlooked in writing social history, due to the “traditional bias for the perspective of the elite classes”.⁵³

Benedict Anderson, who created and studied the concept of ‘imagined communities’, provides another angle to discuss the in-game elven communities. The elven community in *Dragon Age* are a highly fragmented people, mostly due to the absence of their own nation. It is impossible for a single elf to meet all of the others, but they know of the group’s existence. It is possible for them to imagine them all, even though they will never meet. The Dalish rely on the shared ‘language’ of religious signs to foster a sense of community, the city elves on the shared experience of living in an alienage. Both groups know of each other’s existence, but do not necessarily feel a strong connection due to their differences. Their connection mostly stems from a shared history, not a shared present.

In his book *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Anderson aims to offer some “tentative suggestions for a more satisfactory interpretation of the ‘anomaly’ of nationalism.”⁵⁴ He defines nationalism as “cultural artefacts of a particular kind”, which can only be understood if one studies how they have come into being, how their meanings have changed over time, and why they have such emotional legitimacy.⁵⁵ Anderson defines a nation as an “imagined political community”.⁵⁶ He calls these ‘imagined’, because even in the smallest nations, it is impossible to meet your all your fellow members.⁵⁷ Yet you *know* that the others are out there, you can imagine them and their lives.

Anderson proposes that nationalism “has to be understood by aligning it, not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with the large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which – as well as against which – it came into being.”⁵⁸ These cultural systems that Anderson mentions are the religious community and the dynastic realm.⁵⁹ The religious community is a community of signs, not sounds. It is a shared understanding of sacred texts, that have to be understood by a person before they’re allowed to become a member of the community.⁶⁰ The

⁵¹ Mukherjee, “Playing Subaltern,” 510.

⁵² Rosemarie Buikema *et al.*, *Handboek Genderstudies in Media, Kunst en Cultuur* (Bussum: Coutinho, 2015), 400.

⁵³ Mukherjee, “Playing Subaltern,” 505.

⁵⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, New York: Verso, 2016), 4.

⁵⁵ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 4.

⁵⁶ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.

⁵⁷ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.

⁵⁸ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 12.

⁵⁹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 12.

⁶⁰ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 13.

dynastic realm is a political system in which everything is organised around a high centre (usually around the monarch).⁶¹ These monarchical states were expanded through warfare or marriages. The decline of these two systems, of the sacred communities, languages, and lineages, marked the beginning of a fundamental change: a possibility to 'think' the nation.⁶²

The change meant a turn to the visual representations of the sacred communities, and created a world in which the "figuring of reality was overwhelmingly visual and aural."⁶³ To describe the technical means for 're-presenting' the kind of imagined community that a nation is, Anderson turns to Walter Benjamin's concept of 'homogeneous, empty time'.⁶⁴ It is a kind of timekeeping marked by temporal coincidence, that is measured by clock and calendar.⁶⁵ Political theorist Andrew Robinson explains this concept clearest: in homogeneous, empty time, each moment is seen as equivalent (homogeneous) and there are no special moments which give it meaning (empty). It simply passes.⁶⁶ This form of timekeeping is important for the development of two media: novels and newspapers. These two media 're-present' the kind of imagined community that the nation is.⁶⁷ It allows for the presentation of simultaneity⁶⁸, and presents the nation as a solid community moving steadily through time.⁶⁹ The calendrical measuring of time and the (simultaneous) consumption of media promote a sense of unity⁷⁰ with a community one has never met, but of whose existence you can be confident.⁷¹

The environment

An important aspect of playing *Dragon Age*, is exploring ruins of a distant past. The past is the foundation upon which the story is built, and its importance materializes in the environments we experience as players.⁷² The ruins in the game act as signifiers of passed glory, representing in romanticized terms a lost object of desire. Their presence promotes knowledge and beliefs that fall outside of rationalism and Christianity/monotheism, which is often valued as a 'lost' way of seeing

⁶¹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 19.

⁶² Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 22.

⁶³ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 22 – 23.

⁶⁴ Anderson quotes Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (London: Fontana, 1973), 265.

⁶⁵ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 24.

⁶⁶ Andrew Robinson, "An A to Z Theory | Walter Benjamin: Messianism and Revolution – Theses on History," Ceasefire, November 15, 2013. <https://ceasefiremagazine.co.uk/walter-benjamin-messianism-revolution-theses-history/>.

⁶⁷ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 25

⁶⁸ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 25.

⁶⁹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 26.

⁷⁰ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 33.

⁷¹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 35.

⁷² Franki Webb, "Digging Through Dragon Age," *Archaeogaming*, July 19, 2019, <https://archaeogaming.com/2019/07/19/the-archaeology-of-dragon-age/>.

the world.⁷³ The player fulfils the role of archaeologist, who has to “locate and piece together disconnected fragments to solve mysteries of the past in order to further the story”.⁷⁴ The ruins can make us consider why they are there, who put them there, and for what purpose.⁷⁵

The ruins spread across the lands in *Dragon Age* come from a few different diegetic cultures and countries. Many of these depict the gods and/or society of the ancient elves. These types of ruins can be familiar to the player, because their purpose and context relates to the way our own ancestors utilised the landscape.⁷⁶ Like real-life archaeological sites and artefacts, they all have their own specific function and place within the storyworld.⁷⁷ They can “play a defining role in the history of other races.”⁷⁸ The relation between people and the spaces they occupy, create “embedded narratives [that] are told through the settings, surroundings and contents of the environment”.⁷⁹ Which shows the complexity of *Dragon Age’s* world building through environmental storytelling.

One aspect through which the story gains more complexity, is the racial and cultural dynamics between the elven and human people. Their colonised/coloniser relationship has been written about within the story itself, but is also visible through the remains within the landscape itself.⁸⁰ The ruined elven architecture shows the fall of the reclaimed elven lands to the Chantry,



Image 1: An old overgrown elven statue in *Dragon Age: Inquisition*.

⁷³ Webb quotes Tanya Krzywinska, “Blood Scythes, Festivals, Quests, and Backstories World Creation and Rhetories of Myth in World of Warcraft,” *Games and Culture* 1, no. 4 (October 2006): 389.

⁷⁴ Webb, “Digging Through Dragon Age.”

⁷⁵ Webb quotes Andrew Reinhard, “The Philosophy of Archaeology in Video Games,” *Archaeogaming*, August 19, 2013. <https://archaeogaming.com/2013/08/19/the-philosophy-of-archaeology-in-video-games/>.

⁷⁶ Webb, “Digging Through Dragon Age.”

⁷⁷ Webb, “Digging Through Dragon Age.”

⁷⁸ Webb quotes Benjamin Walter, , *The origin of German tragic drama* (London: Verso, 1977), 166.

⁷⁹ Webb quotes Daniel Livingstone, Louchart Sandy, Jeffrey Stuart, “Archaeological Storytelling in Games,” *Digital Games Research Association and Society for the Advancement of the Science of Digital Games* 3, no. 13. (August 2016): 3.

⁸⁰ Webb, “Digging Through Dragon Age.”

through their littered presence.⁸¹ At other times, the player can learn about lost cultures through the retrieval of a priceless artefact – a remnant of a material culture.⁸² The history and lives uncovered in the gameworld are not transcendental. They relate to real experiences, potentially providing new insights into real-world cultural heritage.⁸³ In short, Gunneng argues that the “archaeological remains in Thedas are multifunctional reflecting the thematic elements of conflict, as metaphorical representations of characters and as a world that mirrors our past.”⁸⁴

In the world of *Dragon Age*, European history can be recognised to intensify the playing experience.⁸⁵ It is also necessary to understand these connections, to understand the dynamics between the people in this gameworld. Hedda Gunneng recognises ‘real’ historical patterns in the game that are fetched from different parts of European medieval history.⁸⁶ For example, each of the different countries that make up Thedas draw inspiration from Europe.⁸⁷ Lead writer David Gaider mentioned how this was an intentional design choice. One of the starting points used for designing Thedas was “What if Europe had magic?”.

Gaider himself compared Thedas’ Rivain to Spain, and Antiva to Italian city-states. Gunneng recognises the Italian city states too, and makes further comparisons to the fall of the Roman empire, the Great Migration of the Germanic Invasions, barren and primitive Scandinavia, and the Celtic clan society in Scotland.⁸⁸ Furthermore, *Dragon Age’s* country of Orlais is filled with clues that point towards a French source of inspiration, with most prominent being the court life at Val Royaux that seems heavily inspired by the court of Louis XIV.⁸⁹ Some names in-game aren’t immediately linkable to a specific real-world event, but do have their origin within, or remind the player of, real-world traditions through their phonology. Most prominent are the Celtic or Anglo-Saxon names (like Morrigan, Alistair, Gwynlian), Latin or Latinate names (like Genitivi, Justinina, Greagoir), or French and German (like Anora, François, Aveline).

The major monotheistic religion in *Dragon Age* is ‘The Chant of Light’, which revolves around reverence of ‘The Maker’ and Andraste: a human woman seen as a prophet and raised to divine

⁸¹ Webb, “Digging Through *Dragon Age*.”

⁸² Webb, “Digging Through *Dragon Age*.”

⁸³ Webb, “Digging Through *Dragon Age*.”

⁸⁴ Webb, “Digging Through *Dragon Age*.”

⁸⁵ Hedda Gunneng, “Giving Meaning to *Dragon Age: Origins* (Bioware): A Linguistic Approach,” Paper presented at the *International Academic Conference on Meaningful Play, East Lansing, Michigan, October 18-20, 2012*.

⁸⁶ Gunneng, “Giving Meaning to *Dragon Age: Origins* (Bioware),” 2.

⁸⁷ David Gaider, November 14, 2009, comment on Rutugag “Thedas nations-real world historical insperations [sic]?” <https://web.archive.org/web/20151105103053/http://forum.bioware.com/topic/16536-thedas-nations-real-world-historical-insperations/#entry189310>.

⁸⁸ Gunneng, “Giving Meaning to *Dragon Age: Origins* (Bioware),” 9.

⁸⁹ Gunneng, “Giving Meaning to *Dragon Age: Origins* (Bioware),” 9-10.

status after her martyr death.⁹⁰ Within this story, the life of Jesus as told in the New Testament can be recognised, and his double nature as man and Deity at the same time.⁹¹ The institution responsible for spreading this faith, The Chantry, becomes a central point around which Thedas' society is organised.⁹² Each human city has a local Chantry, with their local religious leader, monks,



Image 2: *The Interior of the Chantry of Kirkwall in Dragon Age II*
Source: *Dragon Age Wiki*.

nuns, clerics, and lay brothers and sisters. The Chantry is responsible for the religious services and charity for the needy in the city.⁹³ Furthermore, The Chantry is responsible for their subdivision 'The Circle', that controls mages by locking them in towers that are designed for the production and storage of knowledge. These towers function as prison, library, and archive. A second subdivision of The Chantry, the 'Templars', function as police for the city and The Circle. They can capture, subdue, or kill mages that are deemed too dangerous. These similarities show that the Chantry is modelled after the Christian church during Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Additionally, the development of the Roman Catholic Church into a political force and cultural institution in western Europe can be recognised.⁹⁴

Gunneng uses these comparisons between the storyworld and our world to argue that there are enough fictitious details to form a cognitive pattern that is easily mapped on to reality as we experience it, shaped by our own historiography.⁹⁵ The usage of names that remind us of the real

⁹⁰ Gunneng, "Giving Meaning to *Dragon Age: Origins* (Bioware)," 8.

⁹¹ Gunneng, "Giving Meaning to *Dragon Age: Origins* (Bioware)," 8.

⁹² Gunneng, "Giving Meaning to *Dragon Age: Origins* (Bioware)," 12.

⁹³ Gunneng, "Giving Meaning to *Dragon Age: Origins* (Bioware)," 12.

⁹⁴ Gunneng, "Giving Meaning to *Dragon Age: Origins* (Bioware)," 13.

⁹⁵ Gunneng, "Giving Meaning to *Dragon Age: Origins* (Bioware)," 10.

world accelerates and reinforces the mapping of causal and temporal patterns. The text does not encourage the reader to accept it as a depiction of our world, and is thus not mimetic. Rather, it draws upon our experience of reality to relate fictitious historical facts in the game to each other with regard to temporality and causality.⁹⁶ The pattern these temporal and causal connections form can be transferred to real historical facts. In this way, the text could be called 'pseudo-mimetic'.

⁹⁶ Gunneng, "Giving Meaning to *Dragon Age: Origins* (Bioware)," 10.

- ANALYSIS -

Part One: The Avatar

The avatar allows for exploration of the gameworld. It allows a player to travel, to meet and be shocked by new cultures, and to explore ethical dilemmas and societal norms. In this, games mimic the 'being there' of classic ethnography.⁹⁷ Through the chosen avatar, the player is able to pass as a native in the gameworld.⁹⁸ The player/ethnographer is hidden for the game world, yet still essential. The cultural experience the game offers, is consumed in terms of prior knowledge, expectations, fantasies and mythologies of the player.⁹⁹ Yet, this fantasy world might be difficult to understand at first glance, because it is not something that exists in real life. This is why it is important to understand that Thedas, the world of *Dragon Age*, draws heavily upon symbolism and metaphors to link it to our real world (like the earlier comparisons between Thedas and Europe, and the Chantry to the Christian Church).

The avatar will help the player understand the gameworld. The avatars of *Dragon Age* have a predetermined background, and this allows race-bound dialogue options that draw upon the knowledge these characters would have. For example, an elven character can discuss the elven gods, even if the player has not yet encountered any mentions of them. A human character cannot. The player's and the character's knowledge must be integrated together to play the game successfully, which is a phenomenon called 'distributed knowledge'.¹⁰⁰ *Dragon Age* facilitates this process through the 'Codex': an in-game journal that automatically gains entries when the player comes in contact with a new subject. The codex entries usually consist of a fragment of an in-game book, story, or sermon.

Navigating a complex world through an avatar creates both opportunities and obstacles. An avatar allows the player the possibility of going native within a storyworld, which can become an obstacle for doing ethnographic research by creating tension between adopting a distanced tourist perspective and identifying with the avatar. By going native, the ethnographer might lose their required distanced perspective.¹⁰¹ Yet the avatar also serves as the key artefact through which a player knows others, the world around them, and themselves.¹⁰² Through the avatar, the player can become a part of the marginalised elven community. This grants access to specific race-bound

⁹⁷ Miller, "The Accidental Carjack."

⁹⁸ Miller, "The Accidental Carjack."

⁹⁹ Miller, "The Accidental Carjack."

¹⁰⁰ James Paul Gee, "Learning by Design: good video games as learning mechanics," *E-learning* 2, no. 1 (2005): 8.

¹⁰¹ Miller, "The Accidental Carjack."

¹⁰² Shaw, "From Custer's Revenge and Mario to Fable and Fallout," 37-38.

knowledge and dialogue options that will create opportunities only elven avatars can utilise. The knowledge and understanding of the avatar help the player to solve the mysteries around them.¹⁰³ However, it can also cause race-bound disadvantages, as racism is a prevalent issue within Thedas. Choosing an avatar, an identity within *Dragon Age*, will decide how the player is viewed in that world.¹⁰⁴ Every possible avatar in the *Dragon Age* games has an established last name, which I will use to refer to them.

City Elves: Life in the alienage

This origin story in *Dragon Age: Origins* shows how tough life is for a city elf in the alienage: they are the poorest residents of the city, have little rights, and are treated as garbage by the humans. The very first thing a player is introduced to is this inequality. The opening cutscene mentions the elves' past as slaves, and how they are not seen as equals to humans, having to pick up serving and labouring jobs where they can. Strong despite hardship, they take pride in their close community. The very first conversation, which happens immediately at the end of the opening cutscene between the avatar and their cousin, shows just how little freedom the elven community has. The avatar, Tabris¹⁰⁵, has an arranged marriage, which will happen later that day. Arranged marriages are necessary in the alienages, as there are only a few different families. This plotline serves to underscore how little freedom the city elves have: even the opportunity to fall in love freely is taken from them.

The lack of any sort of freedom is a recurring theme within this origin story. Within the alienage itself, you can meet multiple people and families struggling to survive. A friend and her family are being evicted from their home, due to their human landlord's decision to use the building for storage space. They are not allowed to own their own property, drawing upon real-life issues of denial of ownership.¹⁰⁶ The alienage isn't even a safe place to be, as demonstrated by a small group of humans –the human lord Vaughan and two friends- storming in and shouting their intention to sexually abuse female elves. They are forced to leave when Tabris' cousin Shianni throws a glass bottle in Vaughan's face. The reprieve that she buys the alienage is short, as the humans will return during the wedding. It is clear that Vaughan values elves as less than humans, calling the wedding a

¹⁰³ Webb, "Digging through Dragon Age."

¹⁰⁴ Webb, "Digging through Dragon Age."

¹⁰⁵ Players can pick the first name of their avatar, but their last name has been predetermined by the game. This has been done to create a backstory for the different avatars. From now on, I will use the predetermined names of the avatars to refer to them. An overview of all avatars can be found in the appendix 'Corpus selection'.

¹⁰⁶ Naomi Schaefer Riley, "One Way to Help Native Americans: Property Rights," *The Atlantic*, July 30, 2016. <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/07/native-americans-property-rights/492941/>.

sham and a moment for the human priestess officiating the wedding to “dress up her pets and have tea parties.”¹⁰⁷ Tabris is knocked out.

The continuation of this story further demonstrates the racial inequality that the city elves face, in which slurs and poverty are common themes. A female Tabris will awaken inside the castle of Vaughan’s father, being kidnapped by Vaughan and trapped together with her bridal party. It is the story of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls in Canada, that still affects the indigenous people.¹⁰⁸ The human male guards that the player must fight through mention how they “await their turn after lord Vaughan,” how the “elves run in packs, like rodents,” and that Tabris is a “knife-eared bitch”.¹⁰⁹ A male Tabris sneaks into the castle to rescue the women. These scenarios show just how horrible the city elves are treated, and that their distrust, and even hatred, is well funded. The elven people have been ‘othered,’ the humans see the elves as something inherently different (and worse) than themselves. They voice this by comparing them to rodents. Like the subaltern, they are subjugated to the hegemony of the ruling class, in this case: the humans. No true justice or changes of the system that produced this violence is achieved, causing this story of racialized violence to have been accused as merely set-dressing.¹¹⁰

The city elves are framed as being disconnected from their heritage. Their lives within the human cities allow for very little elven culture, as they’re expected to follow human faith and custom. This is most strongly underscored by the tree standing within the alienage: the Vhenadahl, or ‘Tree of the People.’ Clicking the sign near the tree reveals a message by the Hahren¹¹¹ of another alienage:

“Mostly the old ways are gone. Each generation forgets a little more of the old tongue, a little more of the traditions. And the few things we keep become simple habits, the meaning long since faded.

So it is with the vhenadahl, the tree of the people. Every alienage has one, I’m told. Or they used to. When I was a little girl, my mother told me the tree was a symbol of Arlathan, but not even she knew more. Keeping the Vhenadahl is just a habit, now. Many cities have let theirs wither and die, then chopped them up for firewood. No great loss.”

- Sarethia, hahren of the Highever Alienage.

¹⁰⁷ See fieldnotes, page 65.

¹⁰⁸ “Our Mandate, Our Vision, Our Mission,” National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, accessed March 6, 2020, <https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/mandate/>.

¹⁰⁹ See fieldnotes, page 67.

¹¹⁰ Dia Lacina, “You’ve a lot of nerve: Knife Ears: Indigenous Trauma and the Female City Elf in Dragon Age: Origins,” *Medium*, March 27, 2017. <https://medium.com/@dialacina/youve-a-lot-of-nerve-knife-ears-indigenous-trauma-and-the-female-city-elf-in-dragon-age-origins-ad4da5a8cdc1>.

¹¹¹ ‘Hahren’ is Elvish for ‘Elder’, and is usually used to refer to someone who is wiser, and worthy of respect. In the alienage it is only used to refer to the leader of the alienage, who is chosen for being the wisest.



Image 3: The Denerim alienage
Source: Own screenshot, Dragon Age: Origins.

The old elven culture means little to them, not because of a natural disinterest, but due to a systematic demand that they forget. When the Dales were taken¹¹², the elves that decided to remain in the human cities could only do so if they complied to the demands of the Chantry and assimilated into the human society by erasing large parts of their own culture. Their tools and agency to participate in society were largely erased. These actions that serve to destroy or violently change a group's culture are known as 'cultural genocide'.¹¹³ Due to them being framed as 'the other', their voices have been silenced. Their actions and cultural traits have been limited in a way that specifically benefits their colonisers¹¹⁴, as they now can profit from their cheap labour. As seen in the message near the Vhenadahl, little of their old culture remains. What they do have, is shown through codex updates throughout the origin story. A city elf has the least updates of any elven avatar: just eleven entries (versus seventeen for a Dalish, and thirty-five for a mage)¹¹⁵. Three of these entries are stories told by a member of their own culture (Sarethia of the Highever alienage), while six of them are given through Chantry sources. Most striking is perhaps the entry for 'The Dalish Elves', which is a tale told by a Chantry scholar about an encounter with elven bandits he assumed were the Dalish. It is the only description of Dalish the city elf avatar receives, and paints all Dalish as bandits. Like Mukherjee wrote, decolonised situations are still marked by their imperial pasts.

¹¹² See appendix: Brief overview of elven history.

¹¹³ Raphael Lemkin, *Lemkin on Genocide* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012), 41.

¹¹⁴ Mukherjee, *Videogames and Postcolonialism*, 8.

¹¹⁵ See fieldnotes, page 51.

Forest Elves: A child of the Dalish

Where the city elves have mostly forgotten Elvish history, the Dalish elves strive to keep their heritage alive. They are the self-proclaimed 'true elves', and some of them look down upon the city elves (or 'flat ears') and humans ('shemlen'¹¹⁶). The player is immediately introduced to the relationship and tensions between humans and the Dalish through the opening scene in the Dalish origin story of *Dragon Age: Origins*: the avatar (Mahariel) and their friend Tamlen find three humans in the forest. Tamlen is hostile to them, but the fate of the humans is up to the player. The three humans can be killed, a single human can be killed as a warning, or they can be let go. This way, there is a complete reverse in power in the human-elven relation when contrasted by the city elf origin.

Their dedication to the elven culture can be seen through a few different conversation options in the Dalish camp, that becomes available after the standoff with the three humans. Firstly, a conversation with the newly arrived ex-city elf Pol functions to show how the Dalish wish to teach the elven heritage to those who are unfamiliar with it. He is welcomed in "re-joining his people"¹¹⁷ implying again how the Dalish perceive the city elves: not truly elves. Pol knows only the Chantry stories about the Dalish, believing them to be "bandits attacking people for no reason."¹¹⁸ A second conversation can be held with Paivel, who is about to give a group of children a history lesson.¹¹⁹ He tells the story of the fall of the Dales, the story of "what makes them 'Dalish'."¹²⁰ According to his story, the land was taken from the elves due to the resentfulness of humans, who did not approve of their way of life. The humans are framed as colonialists, who took all their resources. This story functions to educate the player on Dalish history, but also to show that stories like these are told to children at a young age. This helps stress the importance they give to their heritage. The story ends with 'The Oath of the Dales': an oath the Dalish make to preserve history, and reclaim their homeland. Their oath is: "We are the Dalish: keepers of the lost lore, walkers of the lonely path. We are the last of the Elvhenan. Never again shall we submit."¹²¹ The player has the option to roleplay Mahariel as someone who does not know the tale of the Dales, but this oath always has to be said. This oath is one of their core beliefs.

The knowledge a Dalish avatar in *Dragon Age: Origins* receives at the beginning of the game is focussed on Dalish history. Fifteen out of seventeen codex entries are relevant for their daily life, with the exception of two entries that will start the main plotline and are present amongst all

¹¹⁶ Shemlen is Elvish for 'quick children,' originally referring to humans due to their short live spans. Single use is 'shem,' meaning 'quick child'.

¹¹⁷ See fieldnotes, page 85.

¹¹⁸ See fieldnotes, page 86.

¹¹⁹ See fieldnotes, page 89.

¹²⁰ See fieldnotes, page 89.

¹²¹ See fieldnotes, page 90.

characters.¹²² Most of the entries (ten out of seventeen) are tales by the Keeper¹²³ of another Dalish clan, highlighting that their main sources of knowledge are from their own culture, and that knowledge is primarily passed on through oral tradition. This is further cemented by the hunter Tamlen, who is surprised when he sees written Elvish: his astonishment proves that this is not something he regularly encounters. Even spoken language has mostly been lost, with only the Dalish holding on to the surviving fragments.¹²⁴

In *Dragon Age: Inquisition* the player is again able to choose an elven avatar. This avatar is always a Dalish elf from the clan 'Lavellan'. *Inquisition* does not offer playable origin stories like the first game. Instead, there are multiple characters that ask you about your faith. The Dalish adhere to a polytheistic faith, in which they revere a pantheon of nine gods. The main character in *Inquisition* will bear the title 'the Herald of Andraste,' tying them up within the politics of human faith. Lavellan has the option to discuss human and elven faith with several non-player characters in the game. This opens the possibility of a better understanding of elven history, which I will analyse in greater detail in the next chapter.

Elven Mage: In the Circle Tower

A mage avatar in *Dragon Age: Origins* must always begin in the Circle. This origin story can be played by both a human avatar (Amell) and an elven avatar (Surana). There is very little difference between these characters, as both are severely sheltered from the world outside the Circle and Chantry rule. Surana has two race-bound conversations, one where they briefly discuss elven heritage with a fellow elf, and one where they discuss the treatment of elves within the Circle. Surana knows nothing of elven culture, which is reflected within the codex entries. An elven mage receives far more than the city elf and the Dalish elf combined¹²⁵, yet nothing specific to their race's culture. The Chantry – the coloniser- does not teach about the elves – the colonised. This 'church' founded school focussed on teaching the coloniser's curriculum is largely reminiscent of real-life residential schools, which were focussed on convert indigenous people to integrate them in the coloniser's society.¹²⁶ Indigenous students were isolated, stripped of any traditional clothes in favour of new uniforms, and

¹²² See fieldnotes for the specific entries.

¹²³ The Keeper is the leader of a Dalish clan. They decide where and when to go, and is responsible for keeping and finding historical knowledge.

¹²⁴ Mike Laidlaw *et al.*, *The World of Thedas: Volume 1* (Milwaukie: Dark Horse Books, 2013), 32.

¹²⁵ See fieldnotes, page 51.

¹²⁶ J.R. Miller, "Residential Schools in Canada," *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, October 10, 2012, last modified January 15, 2020, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/residential-schools>.

forced to adapt to the system of the school.¹²⁷ Runaways are captured and forced back¹²⁸, just like the Templars will do to anyone running away from the Circle.¹²⁹

Concluding

Within this part, I have discussed how the avatar reflects political debates about marginalised communities. The avatar itself is the way in which a player interacts with the gameworld around them, but also how they are perceived by the world. If the avatar is elven, then the player becomes part of a race that has been 'othered'. Humans view elves as lesser beings, which causes inequality and also subjugates them to racialized slurs. The player is confronted through racialized violence, in which the city elves have less power to fight back than the Dalish. The elven heritage has largely been erased by human rule, who subjugated the elves to a cultural genocide to silence them. The Dalish try to preserve the fragments they remember, city elves are forcefully disconnected from their heritage, and elven mages aren't taught about their culture at all. This places the elves in the position of the subaltern: they can't participate equally in human society, are submissive to it, and their history is overlooked in favour for that of the humans.

¹²⁷ Miller, "Residential Schools in Canada."

¹²⁸ Miller, "Residential Schools in Canada."

¹²⁹ Laidlaw *et al.*, *The World of Thedas: Volume 1*, 105-106.

Part Two: The Non-Player Characters

While it is through the avatar that the player is introduced to the different struggles the elven people face, it is through meeting different non-player characters that they are given a deeper meaning. Within this part of the analysis, I will analyse four non-player characters that each highlight a different aspect of a problem the elven people face. These characters have a fairly large presence within specific games, as they are companions to the avatar. In each game, the player is offered a set of a few different characters, from which they can choose three that can accompany them on quests. These characters give their opinions about the questlines they are involved in, serve as romance options, and have a personal story arc. This arc serves to deepen the understanding of the character, often showing insights into their personality, motivation, and history. Their story arcs are often related to the specific problems they are facing, some of which exemplify more general struggles of the elven population.

Merrill

Merrill is a Dalish elven woman, who strives to regain fragments of lost elven history. She is first introduced to the player in *Dragon Age: Origins*, where she accompanies them to a strange mirror. The mirror is introduced as being made in Tevinter, and is then broken by another character due to being “a pestilence and a threat.”¹³⁰ In the next game, Merrill has discovered that the mirror is an ‘eluvian’¹³¹, a remnant of the ancient elven society and has dedicated herself to restore it.¹³² Even if it means reaching for extreme methods that turn her into an outcast. This storyline exemplifies the systematic destruction of the elven culture that led to the loss of their culture, and the dedication of the elven people to have their own independent culture.

As Anderson defined, nationalism is based upon having cultural artefacts. Since many of the old artefacts were destroyed, the presence of a surviving artefact is felt more strongly. The dilemma the unknown mirror poses, reflects the same questions as Anderson, who wondered how cultural artefacts come into being, how their meanings changed, and why they have such emotional legitimacy. How the mirror was created is still unknown, but it’s meaning is more clearly present. Once a relatively common object that has now become rare, it shows the decline of the elven empire. Furthermore, by first introducing it as a Tevinter object, the cultural appropriation is underlined. Which is a problem further emphasized because both the player and the avatar do not possess the knowledge to correct this information until the second game. It demonstrates the

¹³⁰ See fieldnotes, page 94.

¹³¹ Eluvian is Elvish for ‘seeing glass’.

¹³² See fieldnotes, page 108.

unknowing ignorance the elven people have towards their own culture, due to the appropriation and destruction caused by their colonisers. The emotional legitimacy stems from the symbolic quest of restoring this object, and by extension, the ancient elven society.

The restoring and recreating of the elven nation is even more difficult than the restoration of the cultural artefacts. Anderson explains how the religious and political communities are slowly turned into the idea of a nation by a shift in the way the world is understood; timekeeping is characterised by homogeneous empty time.¹³³ The current Dalish society mostly is, due to lack of political power, a religious community. The elven faith and lifestyle is what connects the Dalish clans, who otherwise only meet once every ten years.¹³⁴ The original elven system of timekeeping is the oldest within Thedas, but was forcibly abolished by Tevinter after the elven enslavement to humans.¹³⁵ This means that the Dalish sense of timekeeping as a community is characterised by their decennial meeting. Elves thus no longer work by 'empty time', which is a step backwards in Anderson's theory.

Dorian Pavus

Dorian is human man, who comes from a Tevinter noble family part of the ruling class. Slavery is still a common practice for wealthy Tevinter families, as is reflected in Dorian's own stance on the subject. He supports slavery at first, mentioning how he prefers the system to the alienages. He likens alienages to "inescapable poverty" and sees slavery as an ameliorating force: a position that earns "respect, comfort, and could even support a family". That "some slaves are treated poorly" may be abuse of power, but Dorian defends that it shouldn't be held against Tevinter so strongly because abuse of power is not exclusive to Tevinter.¹³⁶

Dorian's perspective is that of the coloniser. His hurtful stance does not stem from malice, instead it is framed as ignorance. He had not yet considered alternatives, due to the normalcy of the system.¹³⁷ The biased system that he grew up in, did not consider the subaltern perspective. This is not only harmful to the people it erased, but also to those it teaches their skewered perspective. By only teaching a perspective fitting to them, they try to justify upholding a flawed system. This system has greatly benefitted them, at the cost of exploiting the elven people: after the elven enslavement Tevinter expanded across most of northern Thedas. Which is a story not unlike the territorial western

¹³³ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 22.

¹³⁴ Laidlaw, *The World of Thedas: Volume 1*, 32.

¹³⁵ Laidlaw, *The World of Thedas: Volume 1*, 23.

¹³⁶ See fieldnotes, page 109.

¹³⁷ See fieldnotes, page 108.

expansion of the U.S, at the expense of the African and Cherokee people.¹³⁸ It was even said that the first contact of the elves with the Tevinter humans caused the elven loss of immortality¹³⁹, similar to the diseases the European colonisers introduced to the Native American people.¹⁴⁰

The skewered perspective Tevinter has through appropriation of the elven culture, stems from their feelings of manifest destiny: feeling it is the coloniser's right to take everything from the colonised. As Dorian said the "Imperium went to great lengths to expunge elven history," the 'to claim it as their own' is silently present. This claim over elven inventions was seen in Merrill's eluvian which was presumed Tevinter at first, but the claim is also casually hinted at when Dorian and Solas talk about the origin of their fighting techniques.¹⁴¹ The Tevinter Imperium has always described itself as being "founded on the notion that [they] defeated Arlathan."¹⁴² By defeating Arlathan, they felt entitled to everything they had. Yet even this event became part of Tevinter's skewered perspective caused by their feelings of manifest destiny; in *Dragon Age: Inquisition* it is revealed that the elves were weakened due to internal war, and Tevinter only picked up the pieces like a "carrion feasting upon a corpse."¹⁴³

Dorian is the first Tevinter companion, and criticises the workings of Tevinter politics by openly speaking against the ruling body of Tevinter. For example, there is the belief amongst Tevinter commoners that even from humble origins someone can arise to power. It is a sentiment that is greatly reminiscent of the American dream¹⁴⁴, and like the American Dream, does not hold much truth.¹⁴⁵ Both systems privilege the elite. By being the only Tevinter companion helping to defeat the main villain of *Dragon Age: Inquisition* Dorian eventually gains the reputation of 'the good Tevinter'.¹⁴⁶ After the events of the game, he eventually returns to Tevinter to use his political power

¹³⁸ Daina Ramey Berry, "How U.S. Westward Expansion Breathed New Life into Slavery," *History*, August 29, 2018, <https://www.history.com/news/westward-expansion-slavery>.

¹³⁹ Laidlaw, *The World of Thedas: Volume 1*, 27.

¹⁴⁰ Thomas R. Hester, "Historic Native American Populations," in *From the Gulf to the Rio Grande: Human Adaptation in Central, South, and Lower Pecos Texas* (Lincoln: Karl Reinhard Papers/Publications, 1989), 77.

¹⁴¹ See fieldnotes, page 110.

¹⁴² See fieldnotes, page 111.

¹⁴³ See fieldnotes, page 110.

¹⁴⁴ Ellie Quick, "The American Dream: Fantasy or Reality?," *English Class Publications* 21, 1, https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/english_class_publications/21.

¹⁴⁵ Robert Oak, "The American Dream is a Fantasy," *The Economic Populist*, August 2, 2010, <http://www.economicpopulist.org/content/american-dream-fantasy>.

¹⁴⁶ See fieldnotes, page 109.

to start reforming¹⁴⁷. Yet if his stance on slavery explicitly changed remains unsaid, and is still a topic for debate amongst fans¹⁴⁸¹⁴⁹.

Fenris

That slavery in Tevinter is not as rose-coloured as Dorian made it out to be, can best be seen by the character of Fenris: an elven man who was forced into slavery and managed to escape. Where Dorian is blinded by the perspective of a coloniser, Fenris tells his experience of Tevinter slavery as the perspective of the colonised. He tells about the brutal life that slaves have, how his master “had no desire to teach his slaves anything that made them think they’re worthy beings.”¹⁵⁰ Even when freed, slaves are not considered citizens, instead they become part of a subclass with limited rights.¹⁵¹

The elven population in general, but especially the elves within human society, are in the position of the subaltern. Firstly, they do not have the freedom to participate in the social order: city elves and slaves do not have equal rights to humans, and the Dalish are still mostly portrayed as uncivilised bandits. Second, they are still submissive to the hegemony of the ruling class. Those with more political power take advantage of the power imbalance, for Tevinter slaves this often means dying as a magical sacrifice.¹⁵² Thirdly, they are still overlooked in social history. The researchers and writers are often Tevinter or Chantry scholars, who do not take the elven perspective into account. Slaves often cannot read¹⁵³ and do not possess the means to publish, preventing them from participating in academic debates.

Another characteristic often linked to the subaltern, is the inability to speak for themselves.¹⁵⁴ Gayatri Spivak sees the subaltern as a “voice from below that can never articulate itself”; commenters on her work mention how there’s “no subaltern subject that can know and speak itself.”¹⁵⁵ However, the elven people are not voiceless: they are silenced. Alienages can be submitted to ‘purgues’ wherein many city elves are killed, an event similar to a pogrom: an (approved) attack against religious, racial, or national minorities.¹⁵⁶ Slave rebellions in Tevinter are common, yet not

¹⁴⁷ See fieldnotes, page 111.

¹⁴⁸ Maleoppressor, “[Spoilers All] Why is Dorian’s stance on slavery so overlooked?,” Reddit, May 2, 2018, https://www.reddit.com/r/dragonage/comments/8gib52/spoilers_all_why_is_dorians_stance_on_slavery_so/.

¹⁴⁹ Dalishious, August 26, 2018, comment on aroace-hippo “Thoughts on Dorian and Slavery and his Problem™,” <https://dalishious.tumblr.com/post/177409801747/thoughts-on-dorian-and-slavery-and-his-problem>.

¹⁵⁰ See fieldnotes, page 112.

¹⁵¹ Laidlaw, *The World of Thedas: Volume 1*, 78.

¹⁵² Laidlaw, *The World of Thedas: Volume 1*, 79.

¹⁵³ See fieldnotes, page 112.

¹⁵⁴ Mukherjee, “Playing Subaltern,” 510.

¹⁵⁵ Mukherjee, “Playing Subaltern,” 505.

¹⁵⁶ “Pogrom,” Encyclopaedia Britannica, last modified December 13, 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/pogrom>.

strong enough to overcome the power imbalance between them and their slavers.¹⁵⁷ The elves live in a system in which the elite profit of their oppression and voicelessness, which the elite cannot afford to lose. As Fenris said: “Tevinter would crumble without the slaves.”¹⁵⁸ By baselessly calling these elves voiceless in a system that profits of their voicelessness, would support the oppressiveness of the system by attempting to deprive the elves of their power. Those who have no voice can’t speak against you.

Solas

Solas is an elven man, who is introduced to the player as an knowledgeable scholar who specialises in elven history and magic. At the end of *Dragon Age: Inquisition* it is revealed that Solas is actually the ancient elf known as Fen’Harel, who the Dalish acknowledge as a god. He dislikes the Dalish, because their traditions have become twisted from the original elven rituals. Unbeknownst to the Dalish, many of their traditions actually promote the enslavement and oppression of the elven people. Not unlike Tevinter, Arlathan also had an enslaved population.¹⁵⁹

The twisted traditions are most strongly illustrated through the Dalish’ vallaslin: facial tattoos representing both their transition into adulthood and their dedication to one of their gods. Solas will reveal that in Arlathan the vallaslin were used by nobles to mark their slaves.¹⁶⁰ The conversation that follows lets the player consider original versus new meanings. Does the new, more positive, meaning outweigh the original oppressive meaning? Can the two even be separated? It’s not a



Image 4: Three out of fifteen styles of Vallaslin.
Source: Matt Rhodes, Tumblr.

¹⁵⁷ See fieldnotes, page 113.

¹⁵⁸ See fieldnotes, page 113.

¹⁵⁹ See fieldnotes, page 113.

¹⁶⁰ See fieldnotes, page 113.

question the game will answer, instead opening up a debate about the genetic fallacy: judging something based on someone else's opinion.¹⁶¹ The vallaslin are still debated amongst fans¹⁶², as everyone has to decide for themselves to adhere to the original meaning (Solas') or the new meaning (the Dalish').

Concluding

In this last part of my analysis, I have taken a closer look at the way non-player characters reflect debates about marginalised communities. Both sides of the coloniser-colonised relationship are reflected in these characters. The coloniser (Tevinter) has framed slavery as an ameliorating force, that has purposefully repressed and erased the subaltern (elven) voice. The subaltern voice is not fully erased, as the elves still rebel against the role Tevinter pushes them in. Tevinter's feelings of manifest destiny led to them believing it was their right to take the elven resources, which in turn lead to the elven people losing more of their heritage. The elven people try to reclaim remaining fragments and artefacts, but sometimes information has become twisted from its original source in such a way that new traditions have been formed instead. This leads to questioning what it exactly means to be elven.

¹⁶¹ Norwood Russel Hanson, "II. The Genetic Fallacy Revisited," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 4, no. 2. (April 1967): 101.

¹⁶² countess_dagoth, "[spoilers DAI] About the Vallaslin," Reddit, February 11, 2020, https://www.reddit.com/r/dragonage/comments/f26qoj/spoilers_dai_about_the_vallaslin/.

Part Three: The Environment

Within this part of the analysis, I will be taking a closer look at the environment of the *Dragon Age* world. Earlier I have established that the world was heavily inspired by European history, which is essential to understand the dynamics between the people. It also serves to “fuse the world inside the [game] with the outside world”. These dynamics can also be recognised within the landscape itself, which is why I have chosen two key locations: alienage and the city of Halamshiral. It is not necessary to analyse every alienage within the game, because they are all imagined as typical of their kind. None have in itself any unique importance, but all are representative (in their simultaneous, separate existence) of the system they uphold.¹⁶³

The alienage

The alienage in the city of Denerim, where the avatar Tabris started, is the largest alienage accessible in the *Dragon Age* games. More important, this environment was built to introduce the player to life in an alienage, which means it’s meant to represent the overall quality of life a city elf experiences. It introduces the player to a world of political violence and segregation as part of racial discrimination.¹⁶⁴ and In the first part, I have shown how the elves are othered and treated as second-class citizens. This conclusion is echoed by the environment as well.

The Denerim alienage is a dirty place: the buildings are dirty and clustered together, clutter lies in many corners, broken and leaky houses are badly patched, water pools in potholes, and rats run around freely. This design implies their poverty, and their lack of resources to repair the alienage. The edge of the alienage is fenced, with ramparts at the borders from which some of the rest of the human city can be seen. The houses are built with sturdy -well kept- bricks, which is a sharp contrast to the dirty plaster and decaying wood structures of the alienage. The human houses are higher and decorated with towers, that shows both the dedication and resources that have been put into these buildings. It is this contrast that shows there is no lack of resources in Denerim to repair and upgrade the alienage: there is a lack of interest to spend these resources on the elven community. Their treatment as second class citizens is clearly present in the environment. The colonised people have to live off the resources the colonizers are willing to share. The elven people have no political say in the cities, because they are not represented. This echoes a struggle of the Roma people, who are not represented adequately in the UN and human rights organisations, because they lack a nation.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 30.

¹⁶⁴ Webb, “Digging Through Dragon Age.”

¹⁶⁵ Jessica Reidy, “The Harmful History of “Gypsy”,” *Bitchmedia*, August 11, 2017, <https://www.bitchmedia.org/article/gypsy-slur-netflix>.

The alienages are camp-like neighbourhoods forced upon the elven people, after Orlais took the Dales. This has led to parallels being drawn to the relocating of the Native Americans, the WWII-era Japanese-American internments in the U.S., Jewish ghettos¹⁶⁶, and Chinatowns.¹⁶⁷ After the fall of the Dales, the leader of the Chantry declared that all elven should be placed in alienages, an order not unlike the American president Roosevelt’s executive order 9066 that incarcerated the Japanese-American in concentration camps.¹⁶⁸ Mukherjee’s three examples of postcolonialism can be recognised within the implementation of the alienages. First, Orlais claimed the Dales as part of their country after they expanded, feeling like it was their right since they won the battle. Second, the existence of alienages are framed as a civilising and ameliorating service that the humans gratefully extend to the elven. In a codex entry written by a Chantry scholar, the alienages are described as the human’s “goodwill” that lets the elves live “under the protection of humans” to “integrate them”.¹⁶⁹ Which casually never mentions that they were the colonisers they had needed protecting from. Third, the colonised are framed as someone inherently different from the colonisers. That same codex entry frames a clear ‘us, the humans’ versus a ‘them, the elves’: the humans are charitable and good, and the elves that have to be pitied or feared.



Image 5: The Denerim alienage
Source: Own Screenshot, *Dragon Age: Origins*

Halamshiral

Halamshiral used to be the elven capital city of their new homeland, the Dales. The Dales were given to the elven people, after they were freed from Tevinter slavery. The name ‘Halamshiral’ means ‘the

¹⁶⁶ Poor, “Digital Elves as a Racial Other in Video Games,” 388.

¹⁶⁷ Poor, “Digital Elves as a Racial Other in Video Games,” 385.

¹⁶⁸ Richard Lidz, “Life in the Internment Camps,” in *Many Kinds of Courage* (New York: Putnam, 1980), 145.

¹⁶⁹ See fieldnotes, page 117.

end of the journey' to symbolise the end of their struggle for freedom. The journey from Tevinter to Halamshiral is known as 'the Long Walk,' which is direct parallel to the Long Walk of the American Navajo people.¹⁷⁰ The Navajo people were forced to walk from their homeland that spans from eastern Arizona to western New Mexico, to a them appointed reservation in New Mexico.¹⁷¹ After the Dales were taken, the Orlesian Emperor built a palace on the ruins of the city.¹⁷²

Halamshiral represents the second loss of the elven homeland and is, as what Webb called, a lost object of desire.¹⁷³ The name itself is especially exemplary of the loss. Mukherjee mentioned how "the act of naming is significant for the expansionist agenda of Empire," and by not changing the name, the coloniser can flaunt their possession of the city. To understand what truly happened to the Dales and Halamshiral, the player has to locate and piece together disconnected fragments of the past.¹⁷⁴ An unattended book here, an unassuming scroll there, together they tell how the Dales were conquered by means of an Exalted March: a holy war sanctioned by the Chantry.¹⁷⁵ These Exalted Marches are greatly similar to Christian crusades: a holy war in response to threats to Christian holy places and peoples.¹⁷⁶

The cultural appropriation and power imbalance between humans and elves is flaunted, by having framing the lost capital of the Dales as the "seasonal retreat" for Orlesian nobility. The power imbalance is emphasized by the random snippets of conversation an elven avatar will hear, referring



*Image 6: Halamshiral's winter palace.
Source: Own screenshot, Dragon Age: Inquisition*

¹⁷⁰ Poor, "Digital Elves as a Racial Other in Video Games," 385.

¹⁷¹ Jennifer Denetdale, *The Long Walk: The Forced Navajo Exile* (New York: Chelsea House, 2008), 49.

¹⁷² See fieldnotes, page 118.

¹⁷³ Webb, "Digging Through Dragon Age."

¹⁷⁴ Webb, "Digging Through Dragon Age."

¹⁷⁵ Laidlaw, *World of Thedas: volume 1*, 117.

¹⁷⁶ Angeliki E. Laiou and Roy Parviz Mottahedeh, *The Crusades from the Perspective of Byzantium and the Muslim World* (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2001), 3.

to them as the “elf savage” or being surprised at their race by wondering aloud: “A Dalish? No, that cannot be.” The main character has built a formidable organisation already, but has to win the approval of the present nobility (ranked on a scale of 0 – 100 points). Elven characters receive the message: “Orlesian nobility looks down on elves. The court watches you with a critical eye.” The elven avatar starts with a penalty of 10 points. A human avatar will gain a 5 point bonus.

Concluding

Halamshiral exemplifies the results of the expansionist agenda of the colonising forces. It’s fall has led to the loss of the elven homeland, and caused the elven heritage become disconnected fragments. The colonisers forced the elven people, who they view as inherently different, into ghetto-like neighbourhoods under the pretence of being generous. This relocation placed the elven people in the position of the subaltern, in which they are still stuck.

Conclusion

Dragon Age is a pseudo-mimetic text, that has to be understood in the context of the real world. It reflects the thematic elements of conflict, as metaphorical representations of characters and as a world that mirrors our past.¹⁷⁷ It holds many embedded narratives that are told through the settings and environments,¹⁷⁸ but also through the people. I have shown in this analysis how the elven community reflects many political debates about marginalised communities in games, by focussing on the role of the avatar, the non-player characters, and the environment.

All elven characters (both the avatar and the non-player characters) are placed in a position with less (social) power than the human population. There might not be any colonies, but they still live in situations marked by an imperial past. They are othered, placed in the position of the subaltern, and silenced in the retelling of history. The human population, with emphasis on Tevinter, Orlais, and the Chantry, are framed as the colonisers that have taken the elven land out of imperialistic views. Their militarised expansionist perspective eventually led to a split that forced the elves to either become nomadic, or assimilate to the society of their colonisers. Especially the assimilation is framed as a civilising and ameliorating force, that actually forces the elves to become submissive to the hegemony of the ruling class. Any attempts to restore or regain heritage is difficult, as the colonisers have actively tried to erase it.

To look at the environment, it is important to consider why it is there, who has created it, and for what purpose.¹⁷⁹ The elven sites show the human/elven power imbalance, their

¹⁷⁷ Webb, “Digging Through Dragon Age.”

¹⁷⁸ Webb, “Digging Through Dragon Age.”

¹⁷⁹ Webb, “Digging Through Dragon Age.”

coloniser/colonised relationship. First in the alienages, and later also in Halamshiral. The places reflect the thematic elements of their conflict¹⁸⁰, like the disconnection from their heritage, the cultural appropriation by the humans, and the disrespect the humans have for them.

In a storyworld this large, it is impossible to analyse every single detail. As such, many things have still gone unsaid. For example, the oppressive system can lead to disconnection from or even revulsion towards their heritage (as demonstrated by the elf Sera), or how an elven avatar can also become a coloniser for their own organisation. Yet an important theme still missing is a larger scale criticism of the empiric system in the form of the multitude, done within the gameworld itself. The social criticism it currently presents are mostly based on the acknowledgement of the problem, not the resolution of it. Within the game there have been small uprisings (slave rebellions in Tevinter, unrest in the alienages), but no true change has been achieved. This larger scale criticism on the empiric system will probably be achieved in the next *Dragon Age* game, currently announced under the title *Dragon Age: the Dread Wolf Rises*. The Dread Wolf is also known as the ancient elven God of Rebellion, and he returned to the world in *Dragon Age: Inquisition*. He is appalled at how far the elven have fallen. At the end of the game, elves start to leave under mysterious circumstances, to join the Dread Wolf's rebellion. It can only mean one thing: change is coming.

¹⁸⁰ Webb, "Digging Through Dragon Age."

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BioWare, *Dragon Age: II*, [Microsoft Windows, Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, Mac OS X], Electronic Arts, 2011.

BioWare, *Dragon Age: Inquisition*, [Microsoft Windows, Xbox 360, Xbox One, PlayStation 3, PlayStation 4], Electronic Arts, 2014.

Glossary

Alienage: walled-off section in a human city, where the elvish community lives. Reminiscent of ghettos.

Andraste: the human prophet, who lead the uprising of the slaves. Also known as the 'Bride of the Maker'

Arlathan: the capital city of the old elven empire Elvhenan.

Chant of Light: the name of holy book of the Chantry.

Chantry: the name of the church of the Maker. The Chantry is responsible for the most common calendar in Thedas, for the Circle of Magi and the Templar Order, and religious services.

Circle of Magi: an institution led by the Chantry that imprisons mages, and forces them to study magic. They regulate the use of magic in all nations who embrace the Chantry. Mages that are not part of the Circle are hunted down and/or killed. Mages that are deemed too dangerous are killed by the Templars.

City Elves: the elven people that live within the alienages in human cities, who chose to adapt to human life after the fall of the Dales.

Codex: a journal that fills with information about the world around the player. It is updated whenever the player comes in contact with a new topic. Entries are written like excerpts from books, stories, notes, songs, etc.

Dales: the land given to the elven people after they were freed from the Tevinter slavers. The Dales were later taken over by the neighbouring country Orlais, of which it is currently a province.

Dalish: the elven people who did not wish to become part of the human society. They hold on to fragments of the old ways, in hopes of one day gaining a new homeland. They live as nomadic clans.

Eluvian: 'seeing glass,' a magical item that looks like a mirror. The eluvians formed a network that allowed the elven people to communicate and travel. They were presumed to be made by Tevinter people, which was disproved later.

Elvhenan: the land of the ancient elven people.

Elven Pantheon: the nine gods of the Dalish elves who are seen as responsible for creating the world, thus also being known as 'the Creators'. It is later revealed that they were not gods, but

powerful mages. They were sealed away due to the separation of the physical world and the Fade.

Fade: The realm of magic that can only be accessed by the mind of a mage when they are asleep or in a deep trance. It is the home of spirits and demons, and considered very dangerous. The Veil keeps the Fade and the physical world separated.

Hahren: 'Elder,' an Elvish term used to refer to someone who is wiser, and worthy of respect. In the alienage it is only used to refer to the leader of the alienage, who is chosen for being the wisest.

Halamshiral: the old capital city of the Dales. The name means 'The End of the Journey', which symbolised the end of the escape from Tevinter slavery. After the Dales were taken by Orlais, it became mainly known for housing the winter holiday home of the Orlesian Emperor/Empress.

Keeper: the leader of a Dalish clan.

Maker: the deity worshipped by the Chantry, also referred to as 'The Maker of the World'.

Orlais: this nation in Thedas is known for its extravagance, and for being the birthplace of the Chantry. Their expansionist aggression led to them eventually crushing the Dales, and taking it as a province.

Templar Order: a military institution led by the Chantry that trains Templars: warriors who are tasked with subduing, hunting down, and/or killing dangerous mages.

Thedas: the world in which *Dragon Age* is set.

Tevinter: this nation in Thedas is known for its pro-magic attitude, in which a group of powerful mages (the Magisterium) rules society. Tevinter destroyed Arlathan and took the elven people as slaves. Slavery is still an active practice.

Vallaslin: 'bloodwriting,' tattoos that Dalish elves put on their faces to signify their passage into adulthood, and their commitment to a chosen elven god.

Vhenadahl: 'tree of the people,' the tree that is planted in an alienage, as a reminder of Arlathan.

Brief overview of elven history

This overview was written in March 2020. As of yet, not much is known about the fourth instalment of the *Dragon Age* games. *Dragon Age: Inquisition* has shown that elven history is more complex than assumed, and not every event happened as the previous games described it. Some events are still vague, as different viewpoints claim different reasons for the same event. This overview of elven history is based on what is known until now.

Anchor Event	Elven Calendar	Imperial Calendar	Chantry Calendar
Founding of Arlathan. ¹⁸¹	1 FA	-6405 TE	-7600 Ancient
Humans explore Thedas.	4500 FA	-1905 TE	-3100 Ancient
Tevinter Imperium founded.	6405 FA ¹⁸²	0 TE	-1995 Ancient
Arlathan falls, Tevinter enslaves the elves.		975 TE	-975 Ancient
The elves rebel and gain freedom.		1024 TE	-171 Ancient
Dales given to the elven people.		1030 TE	-165 Ancient
Chantry founded.		1195 TE	1:1 Devine
Dales taken by Orlais.		1315 TE	2:20 Glory

The Elvhen people were intrinsically tied with magic: their society, culture, and very beings were tied into it. They prospered in their land, Elvhenan, with their capital city of Arlathan. Their society was ruled by nine strong mages, who were power hungry slave-owners. After seven of the mages tried to murder one of their own, Fen'Harel (the Dread Wolf) began a rebellion. He freed many of the slaves, and sealed away the seven mages. To do this, Fen'Harel separated the magical world (the Fade) from the physical world, causing everything tied to magic to crumble. The Elvhen society weakened, and the people lost their immortality. Fen'Harel falls into a deep slumber.

While the elven society weakened, the humans of the Tevinter Imperium took advantage. Slavery is a common practice in Tevinter, and the weakened elves are now forced into slavery under human rule. Elvhenan ceases to exist, and now becomes a part of the Tevinter Imperium. Tevinter claimed the elven culture as their own; the elven origin of objects was slowly forgotten. Eventually, the human woman Andraste and the elven man Shartan lead a rebellion against Tevinter, freeing the slaves.

¹⁸¹ Conversion to the Imperial and Chantry calendars are a rough estimate.

¹⁸² The Tevinter Empire abolishes the elven calendar after the fall of Arlathan.

The newly freed elven people begin a journey in search of a new homeland, "The Long Walk". They receive a new land, The Dales, and create a new capital city: Halamshiral. Halamshiral is Elvish for "the end of the journey". The elven people guarded their land, but eventually border skirmishes escalated. The elves would not convert to the human religion (The Chant of Light), and eventually the Chantry led a religious crusade (an Exalted March) against the Dales. The neighbouring (human) country Orlais provided the troops, and claimed the Dales as a province of Orlais. The elven people were given a choice: assimilate to the human cities, or leave. Those who stayed became the City Elves, those who left became the nomadic Dalish clans.

Dragon Age: Inquisition ends by revealing that Fen'Harel has recently awoken, and plans to restore the elven people. Even at the cost of wiping out the other races.

Corpus selection

Available avatars

This list is an overview of all possible avatars the player can choose over the course of the three main games. All text is taken from the character creation screens of the mentioned games. For this analysis, the most important distinction is elven avatar versus non-elven avatars. A full list is provided for the sake of completion.

DRAGON AGE ORIGINS (6 backgrounds)

First choice: Male or female

“Men and women in Ferelden are generally regarded as equals, both genders are evenly represented in most organisations, noble houses, and military forces”

1. Human

“The most numerous, yet the most divided of all the races. Only four times have they ever united under a single cause, the last being centuries ago. Religion and the Chantry play a large part in human society. It distinguishes them culturally from elves and dwarves more than anything else. Humans can be warriors, rogues, or mages.”

Racial benefits: +1 strength, +1 dexterity, +1 magic, +1 cunning

a. Cousland

- i. (rogue, warrior - living in a noble household)
- ii. “Born to wealth and power second only to royalty, you find your training in both diplomacy and battle put to the test as your brother leads the bulk of your family’s forces to war in the south”

b. Amell

- i. (mage - living in the Circle)
- ii. “Wielding a power as dangerous as it is potent, you know that magic is a curse for those lacking the will to control it. You anxiously await your Harrowing, the one chance to prove yourself against the demons lurking without and within. Succeed, or be slaughtered by the knights who ward against your kind”

2. Dwarf

“Waging a losing war for generations, trying to protect the last stronghold of their once vast underground empire from the darkspawn. Dwarves are very tough and have a high resistance to all forms of magic, thus preventing them from becoming mages.”

Racial benefits: +1 strength, +1 dexterity, +2 constitution, 10% to resist hostile magic

a. Aeducan

- i. (rogue, warrior - living in a noble household)
- ii. “As the favored child of the dwarven king, you proudly take up your first military command... only to learn that the deadly intrigues of family and sycophants may pose a greater danger than even the battlefield.”

b. Brosca

- i. (rogue, warrior - bottom of society)
- ii. "Born casteless in a land where rank is everything, bound as the lackey and thug of a local crime lord, you have spent your life invisible... until chance thrusts you into the spotlight, where you can finally prove whether you will be defined by your actions or your birth."

3. Elf

"Once enslaved by humans, most elves have all but lost their culture, scrounging an impoverished living in the slums of human cities. Only the nomadic Dalish tribes still cling to their traditions, living by the bow and the rule of their old gods as they roam the ancient forests, welcome nowhere else. Elves can be warriors, rogues, or mages"

Racial benefits: +2 willpower, +2 magic

a. Tabris

- i. (rogue, warrior - living in Alienage (City Elf))
- ii. "You have always lived under the heavy thumb of you human overlords, but when a local lord claiming his 'privilege' with the bride shatters your wedding day, the simmering racial tensions explode in a rain of vengeance"

b. Mahariel

- i. (rogue, warrior - living in the forest (Dalish))
- ii. Proud of your role as one of the few 'true elves,' you have always assumed you would spend your life with your tribe... until a chance encounter with a relic of your people's past threatens to tear you away from everything you have ever known."

c. Surana

- i. (mage - living in the Circle)
- ii. "Wielding a power as dangerous as it is potent, you know that magic is a curse for those lacking the will to control it. You anxiously await your Harrowing, the one chance to prove yourself against the demons lurking without and within. Succeed, or be slaughtered by the knights who ward against your kind"

DRAGON AGE II (1 background)

1. Human

a. Hawke

- i. (mage, rogue, warrior - refugee)
- ii. Mage: "Mages command arcane spells and hurl bolts of magic from their staves. Despite their immense power, mages are vulnerable when allies fall or when enemy troops attack them directly."

Rogue: "Rogues can wield a dagger in each hand, or rain arrows from a distance. They are particularly adept at tearing down individual opponents, and are the only class that can pick locks or set traps."

Warrior: "Warriors are masters of melee combat. Some heft an enormous two-handed weapon that strikes several at once. Others pair a one-handed weapon with a shield that doubles as a bludgeon."

DRAGON AGE INQUISITION (6 backgrounds)

Note: information about the specific character's background only becomes available after the avatar is chosen. As a result, this text is dependent on the player's choice of gender and name. This version of the text is neutral, and not the actual text the player would see in game.

1. Human

"Humans are the most numerous and powerful race in Thedas. They are also the most divided politically and seem to thirst for conflict.

Human characters receive a bonus ability point at the start of the game

a. Trevelyan

- i. (rogue, warrior - living in a noble household or the Circle of Magi)
- ii. Rogue/Warrior: "[Player name] was present at the Temple of Sacred Ashes as a representative of his/her family's interests, along with other distant relatives in the Chantry. [He/She] was the only survivor at the temple after the explosion. Rumors that the mysterious mark on [his/her] hand is a sign of the Maker's favour were spread by those who claim they saw the divine prophet, Andraste herself, lead [Lord/Lady] [Player name] out of the Fade.

Mage: "As a mage, [Lord/Lady] [player name] Trevelyan was expected to spend [his/her] life in the Ostwick Circle of Magi. A sedate place, the Ostwick circle did not decide in favor of either templars or mages, clinging to neutrality during the rebellion. [Player name] was chosen as a delegate to the Conclave in the hopes [his/her] noble position would provide protection for [his/her] fellow mages while negotiation continued. Trevelyan was the only survivor of the explosion that rocked the Temple of Sacred Ashes."

2. Elf

"Elves are a historically oppressed people, distinguishable by their lithe frames and pointed ears. Though most survive in the poorest fringes of human cities, others live as nomads known as the Dalish.

Elves receive a bonus of 25% to ranged defence."

a. Lavellan

- i. (mage, rogue, warrior - living in the forest (Dalish))
- ii. Mage: "[Player name] manifested a talent for magic as a child. The clan's leader, Keeper Deshanna Istimaethoriel Lavellan, taught [him/her] how to control and hone [his/her] new powers. [Player name] grew into a capable mage, far away from the eyes of the templars and mage Circles. When tension between the two factions erupted into warfare, spilling into the countryside, Clan Lavellan was forced to pick up and move. [Player name]'s Keeper sent [him/her] to spy on the Conclave at Haven, as the outcome might determine the fate of [his/her] own clan."

Rogue/Warrior: “[Player name] became a hunter at a young age, growing into a respected protector and provider. The recent mage rebellions disturbed [his/her] clan's way of life, as the fighting spilled out into the countryside. Clan Lavellan's leader, Keeper Deshanna Istimaethoriel Lavellan, chose [Player name] to spy on the meeting at the Temple of Sacred Ashes between the Divine and the feuding factions, so [he/she] could bring back news of the outcome.”

3. Dwarf

“Dwarves are short, stocky, and most spend their entire lives underground. Those exiled to the surface are often merchants or smugglers.

Because dwarves have no connection to the Fade, they cannot be mages, but receive a 25% bonus to magic defence.”

a. Cadash

- i. (Rogue, warrior - smuggler)
- ii. “News of the Conclave shook up the Carta's usual operations, as its success or failure would have tremendous impact on the demand for lyrium for years to come. [Player name] was one of a handful of Carta dwarves sent to spy on the proceedings at Haven. [He/She] was the only survivor of the explosion at the Temple of Sacred Ashes. Rumors that the mysterious mark on [his/her] hand is a sign of the Maker's favor were spread by those who claim they saw the divine prophet, Andraste herself, lead Cadash out of the Fade.”

4. Qunari

“The Qunari are a race of horned giants who follow a strict religious text known as the Qun. Those who have abandoned its principles are known as Tal-Vashoth and often work as mercenaries.

Qunari characters get a bonus of +10% physical damage resistance.”

a. Adaar

- i. (mage, warrior, rogue – outcast)
- ii. Mage: “ When [player name] manifested a gift for magic, [his/her] parents arranged for a mage among the Tal-Vashoth to teach [him/her] how to control [his/her] talents. [He/She] joined the Valo-kas mercenary company as a young adult, making a name for [him/herself] over the years as a capable and powerful mage. [Player name] was hired to provide protection at the Conclave, as a neutral party to stand between templars and human mages.”

Rogue/Warrior: “Qunari who are not part of the Qun, facing limited acceptance in society, often take advantage of their reputation by taking on mercenary work. [Player name] Adaar joined the Valo-kas mercenary company as a young adult, making a name for [him/herself] over the years as a capable and resourceful soldier. [He/She] was hired to provide protection at the Conclave, as a neutral party to stand between templars and mages.”

Non-Player Characters

The elven characters are **bolded**, and briefly described.

DRAGON AGE ORIGINS

1. Alistair Theirin
 - a. As the bastard child of a human king and an elven servant, Alistair was taken in by an Arl until he was recruited into the grey wardens.
2. Dog
3. Leliana
4. Morrigan
5. Oghren
6. Shale
7. Sten
8. Wynne
9. **Zevran Arainai**
 - a. Zevran is a city elf from Antiva, where he worked for the assassin's guild 'the Antivan Crows'. After a failed attempt to assassinate you, Zevran can be asked to become a companion. He does not have any strong connections to his elven heritage.
10. Loghain Mac Tir

DRAGON AGE 2

1. Anders
2. Aveline Vallen
3. Bethany Hawke
4. Carver Hawke
5. **Fenris**
 - a. Fenris ran away from a Tevinter magister, who forced his family to become slaves. Branded with lyrium tattoo's over his body, he is a fierce warrior who wants to see slavery abolished.
6. Isabella
7. **Merill**
 - a. Merill is a Dalish elf who chases lost remnants of the old elven civilisations. She will pay any price to regain any sliver of lost knowledge. As a result, she was cast out from her clan for being too extreme.
8. Sebastian Vael
9. Varric Tethras

DRAGON AGE INQUISITION

1. Blackwall
2. Cassandra Pentaghast
3. The Iron Bull
4. Cole
5. **Sera**

- a. Sera grew up in the city as a ward of a human noble. Facing psychological abuse for being elven, she has a dislike for anything she regards as too 'elfy'.
- 6. Varric Tethras
- 7. Dorian Pavus
- 8. **Solas**
 - a. Solas is introduced as a lone wanderer, who has incredibly detailed knowledge of elven history. Later revealed to be one of the few remaining members of the ancient elven civilisation. He cares most for the restoration of the ancient traditions that have become twisted over time.
- 9. Vivienne de Fer

Extra:

- 1. Morrigan
 - a. As ex-companion from *Origins* Morrigan, a human mage, returns as an advisor on elven history. This role can cause her to clash with Solas, and an elven avatar.

Locations

- 1. **Alienages**
- 2. Dalish Camps
- 3. **Halamshiral**
- 4. The Fade (The Forgotten Library / Shelters of Fen'Harel)
- 5. Exalted Plains
- 6. Temple of Mythal

Fieldnotes

The Codex serves as a catalogue of sorts, in which the player can (re-)read important information about the world of Dragon Age. Entries are added when the player comes in contact with the subject through NPC's, cutscenes, or items scattered throughout the world. This list details the codex entries a city elf, a dalish elf, and an elven mage receive. This information is the basis on which the player goes to Ostagar, the central point where all avatars start playing the main storyline. Therefore, this overview will show to which aspects the player is already introduced at the beginning of the game. It is thus essential to the framing of the world to the player.

Where the codex entries overlap, the cells have been highlighted. The in-game sources have been included to show that the player can receive conflicting reports about a topic, due to the difference in the situatedness of the source.

#	City elf, Tabris	Dalish elf, Mahariel	Elven mage, Surana
1	The City Elves Source: Sarethia, hahren of the Highever alienage	The City Elves Source: Gisharel, keeper of the Ralaferin clan of the Dalish Elves	The Harrowing Source: Brother Genitivi, Chantry Scholar
2	Alienage Culture Source: Sarethia, hahren of the Highever alienage.	Arlathan Part Two Source: Gisharel, keeper of the Ralaferin clan of the Dalish Elves	History of the Circle Source: Sister Petrine, Chantry scholar
3	Vhenadahl: The Tree of the People Source: Sarethia, hahren of the Highever alienage.	Arlathan: Part Two Source: Gisharel, keeper of the Ralaferin clan of the Dalish Elves	Hierarchy of the Circle Source: Knight-Commander Serain
4	The Dalish Elves Source: Brother Genitivi, Chantry Scholar	The Dalish Elves Source: Gisharel, keeper of the Ralaferin clan of the Dalish Elves	The Black City Source: Enchanter Mirdromel
5	Darkspawn Source: Sister Petrine, Chantry scholar	Darkspawn Source: Sister Petrine, Chantry scholar	Darkspawn Source: Sister Petrine, Chantry scholar
6	Grey Wardens Source: Sister Petrine, Chantry scholar	The Grey Wardens Source: Sister Petrine, Chantry scholar	The Grey Wardens Source: Sister Petrine, Chantry scholar
7	Chant of Light: Blight Source: Threnodies 8	Fen'Harel: the Dread Wolf Source: Gisharel, keeper of the Ralaferin clan of the Dalish Elves	Chant of Light: Blight Source: Threnodies 8
8	Duncan Source: None given.	Elgar'nar: God of Vengeance Source: Gisharel, keeper of the Ralaferin clan of the Dalish Elves	Duncan Source: None given.

9	Valendrian Source: None given.	Ghilan'nain: Mother of the Halla Source: Gisharel, keeper of the Ralaferin clan of the Dalish Elves	First Enchanter Irving Source: None given.
10	Commandments of the Maker Source: Transfigurations 1:1-5	June: God of the Craft Source: Gisharel, keeper of the Ralaferin clan of the Dalish Elves	Andraste: Bride of the Maker Source: The Sermons of Justinia I
11	History of Ferelden: Chapter 1 Source: Sister Petrine, Chantry scholar	History of Ferelden: Chapter 2 Source: Sister Petrine, Chantry scholar	Knight Commander Greagoir Source: None given.
12		The Breccillian Forest Source: Sister Petrine, Chantry Scholar	Beyond the Veil: Sprits and Demons Source: Enchanter Mirdromel
13		Halla Source: None given.	Wisp Source: former Senior Enchanter Maleus
14		Aravels Source: Taniel, clan hunter	Sloth Demon Source: Tyrenus, templar-commander of Cumberland
15		Dales Source: Gisharel, keeper of the Ralaferin clan of the Dalish Elves	Rage Demon Source: None given.
16		Giant Spider Source: None given.	Giant Spider Source: None given.
17		Wolf Source: Mother Ailis of Denerim	Wolf Source: Mother Ailis of Denerim
18			The Fade Source: First Enchanter Josephus
19			Mana and the Use of Magic Source: First Enchanter Wenselus
20			The Four Schools of Magic: Primal Source: First Enchanter Josephus
21			The Four Schools of Magic: Creation Source: First Enchanter Josephus

22			The Four Schools of Magic: Spirit Source: First Enchanter Josephus
23			The Four Schools of Magic: Entropy Source: First Enchanter Josephus
24			Blood Magic: The Forbidden School Source: First Enchanter Josephus
25			Maleficarum Source: The Sermons of Justinia I
26			The Cardinal Rules of Magic Source: First Enchanter Wenselus
27			Rite of Annulment Source: Sister Petrine, Chantry scholar
28			The Founding of the Chantry Source: Sister Petrine, Chantry scholar
29			The Maker Source: Threnodies 5:1-8
30			Fraternity of Enchanters Source: First Enchanter Josephus
31			The Tranquil Source: First Enchanter Josephus
32			Deep Stalker Source: None given.
33			The Tevinter Imperium Source: Brother Genitivi, Chantry scholar
34			The Aeonar Source: Sister Petrine, Chantry scholar

35			Lyrrium Source: Brother Genitivi, Chantry Scholar
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General observation about the nature of the codex updates:

City Elves: least entries of all three elven avatars. City elves are tucked away in human cities, and their codex entries highlight their daily life (Hahren, Tree, Alienage culture). Religion-wise, they lean towards the Chant of Light, and they only receive some history of Ferelden itself. Their sources of information are Hahrens of alienages (about their own daily life), or chantry-approved sources (all sources that provide information about the outside world).

Dalish Elves: the Dalish elves are largely sheltered from the human society. They are focussed on keeping their own culture alive, and the codex entries reflect this: fourteen out of seventeen codex entries relate directly to their everyday life in the forest. Most of their history is preserved through oral storytelling, which is also reflected. Many of the entries are from stories by a Keeper.

Elven Mage: an elven mage leads the most sheltered life of all. Even though they receive the most codex entries of all three, they receive barely any practical knowledge about life outside of the Circle Tower. All information comes from Chantry sources. Within the entire origin, there are only two elven-specific dialogues: with Eadric and Duncan. You can discuss your lack of knowledge about the elven society, and the treatment of elves. Even though this origin offers the most codex entries, an elven avatar knows nothing of their heritage.

City elf

You are introduced to the world through an alienage. You are forced into an arranged marriage, and are immediately confronted with the poor conditions of the alienage. The rest of Denerim can be seen in the distance, not showing any of the same signs of neglect. Later as you see the Arl's estate, it will become increasingly clear that there is no lack of resources in Denerim, merely a disregard to use them to help the elven population. The game makes it clear that this is the most a city elf can expect from life. The city elves view the Dalish as a sort of last resort, a place to run away to.

Important conversations:

Elves make offhand comments "thank the maker" > no elven religion mentioned

Dilwyn & Gethon saved some money, 15 silver to help you start a new live. It's a big deal. Later Vaughan casually offers you 40 gold as a bribe. Underscores difference in wealth.

Nessa's Family has to leave Denerim, human-owned building has to be sold.

Dalish elf

The Dalish are mostly focussed on themselves. They try to keep their old ways alive, and this is seen in every aspect. They place decorations that honour old gods, and tell stories of the past. Hahren Paivel tells the story of the Dales, which shows the oral storytelling in progress. Written elvish is rare, as demonstrated by Tamlen's astonishment at seeing it. Some city elves join the Dalish, as seen

through the training of Pol. A Keeper's job is to remember, but it is later highlighted how much is forgotten, as the Keeper did not yet recognise the Eluvian. Duncan even believed it was Tevinter in origin, instead of Elvhen.

Important conversations:

Paivel: History of the Dales told to children

Pol: City elf moving to the Dalish

Duncan: Called the mirror an object from Tevinter

Elven mage

Only two conversations about elven heritage. None taught by Chantry. Most codex entries, yet most sheltered.

City Elf, Tabris

“Denerim: the largest city and capital of Ferelden. Long ago, the elves lived as slaves to humans, and though they’ve been free for many generations now, they are far from equals. Here they live in walled-off community known as the Alienage working as servants and laborers when they can.

Despite these hardships, Denerim’s elves are a strong people who take pride in their close community. This is the only world you’ve ever known... until now.”

Shianni wakes her cousin, Tabris, up for her wedding day, because you have overslept. Can accuse Shianni of being drunk.

Arranged marriage, option to be happy or angry about it.

- When unhappy about it: Shianni brushes it off, “who else are you going to marry, besides, I snuck a peak, he’s handsome”. She is happy you’re getting married, because there will be festivities. Calls you lucky. Can tell her that she just wants to get drinks, and Shianni “which won’t happen until you get married”

“A day for celebration” begins

Your house is large, but relatively bare. There’s a bunkbed and a ‘normal’ bed, some dirty and torn carpets, a bathtub and toilet within the living room, and a table for two. Books, bottles, and candlestubs littered across the place. Single room.

Cyrion (Father) reminisces you’re growing up, and mother has passed away.

- Unhappy or happy choice again

(unhappy) You can’t choose who to marry due to tradition. You must trust your elders, dowry has been paid, Chantry has to give permission. Dowry decides which spouse moves to the other alienage. Parents represent children, without parents, Elder decides. (Like for Soris)

- Can appreciate his efforts
- ask about groom
- ask about Soris
- miffed your father chose for you.

(miffed) father says there is no other choice “do you want to marry someone fifteen years your senior?”

“The sooner this wedding starts the less chance you two [Soris] have to escape”

- Reassure your father
- small chance is still a chance
- want to see betrothed
- thank father

Martial training comes from mother. Father says I should not mention it to betrothed.

- Dismiss its importance,
- accuse father of not telling him,

- he'll find out anyways

(he'll find out) Father definitely wants that to be later, in case you two are seen as troublemakers. It was a mistake your mother Adaia made

- Let's get on with this,
- humans have killed her,
- mother was a great warrior

(humans killed mother) "Our world is so full of many injustices"

Codex unlocked: The City Elves

The humans tell the tales of Andraste, and to them, she was a prophet. To our people, however, she was an inspiration. Her rebellion against Tevinter gave our people a window through which to see the sun, and we reached toward it with all our strength. The rebellion was brief but successful; even after the death of the prophetess, we fought on for independence as the human Imperium began to crumble. In the end, we won freedom and the southern land known as the Dales, and we began the Long Walk to our new homeland.

There, in the Dales, our people revived the lost lore as best could. We called the first city Halamshiral, "end of the journey," and founded a new nation. Isolated as elves were meant to be, this time patrolled by an order of Emerald Knights charged with watching the borders for troubles from humans.

But you already know that something went wrong. A small elven raiding party attacked the nearby human village of Red Crossing, an act of anger that prompted the Chantry to retaliate and, with their superior numbers, conquer the Dales.

- "The Rise and Fall of the Dales" as told by Sarethia, hahren of the Highever alienage

Codex Unlocked: Alienage Culture

There have always been alienages. They have been around for as long as elves and shems have lived in the same lands. Ours isn't even the worst: They say that Val Royeaux has ten thousand elves living in a space no bigger than Denerim's market. Their walls are supposedly so high that daylight doesn't reach the vhenadahl until midday.

But don't be so anxious to start tearing down the walls and picking fights with the guards. They keep out more than they keep in. We don't have to live here, you know. Sometimes a family gets a good break, and they buy a house in the docks, or the outskirts of town. If they're lucky, they come back to the alienage after the looters have burned their house down. The unlucky ones just go to the paupers' field.

Here, we're among family. We look out for each other. Here, we do what we can to remember the old ways. The flat-ears who have gone out there, they're stuck. They'll never be human, and they've gone and thrown away being elven, too. So where does that leave them? Nowhere.

- Sarethia, hahren of the Highever alienage.

Outside the house, the alienage is scraped together from wood. Outside are three elves, one who sings a drunken song about seducing a girl, while being a married man. You can talk to him

- You're drunk!
- Glad to see you're celebrating
- Just doing the rounds collecting gifts

(you're drunk!) "It's a wedding, isn't it"

Random elven woman walking around the Alienage says "thank the maker"

Dilwyn arguing against the importance of bloodlines, partner (Gethon) talks about 'breeding' and her being from 'good stock'. Friends of avatars mother.

- Father loved her
- Father never really mentioned you
- What can you tell me about mom?
- I have to go

(tell me), beautiful, full of live, father still doesn't speak about her that much

- Thank you
- Any friend of my mom's is a friend of me
- NOT getting married
- Not interested in your wishes

(any friend) "It means the world to us to see you happy. We've saved a bit of money for this ady. We'd.. We'd like you to have it to help start your new life."

- That's very generous,
- I'm honoured,
- I can't accept

(can't accept) They insist.

- Thank you,
- Very well. For you,
- I don't take charity. End of story.

(very well) Maker bless you. (receive 15 silver)

Elf man shout's 'Where's the drink/' / Other man wishes good luck with the ball and chain

Elf woman "Oh your lasts moments of freedom, enjoy them"

Interacting with a sign at the tree unlocks the codex

Codex Unlocked: Vhenadah! The Tree of the People

Mostly the old ways are gone. Each generation forgets a little more of the old tongue, a little more of the traditions. And the few things we keep become simple habits, the meaning long since faded.

So it is with the vhenadahl, the tree of the people. Every alienage has one, I'm told. Or they used to. When I was a little girl, my mother told me the tree was a symbol of Arlathan, but not even she knew more. Keeping the Vhenadahl is just a habit, now. Many cities have let theirs wither and die, then chopped them up for firewood. No great loss.

- Sarethia, hahren of the Highever Alienage.

Cats, dogs, and rats run around in the Alienage.

Elven woman is pissed Tabris got a husband. "Your father has the money to get you a good man" She resents you for it, because she got a fat drunken husband who does not know what to do with a woman. Child says "Only humans don't care about being respectful" > father said it this morning when my brothers didn't want to get out of bed, said they were acting like lazy humans.

- Your father was right to scold,
- I'm sure your brothers aren't that bad,
- It dangerous to say such things,
- Sure get lost

(dangerous) "there aren't any humans here, so I say what I want"

A Beggar near the end of the Alienage asks for a coin

- Tell me your story
- Here you go
- Give me a gift
- Go crawl off and die
- Sorry, I have nothing

(here you go) "may the makers eyes look down with love on your day"

Soris greets Tabris, about celebrating the end of their independence.

- Don't worry it'll be fine
- getting cold feet
- Running away still an option

(running away) "are you insane, where would you go? Into the woods to live with the Dalish Elves?"

- You're right
- The dalish?
- It could happen
- Not thrilled with marriage

(Dalish) “happy wood elves living far from humans’

Codex unlocked: The Dalish Elves

I took the road north from Val Royeaux toward Nevarra with a merchant caravan. A scant two days past the Orlesian border, we were beset by bandits. They struck without warning from the cover of the trees, hammering our wagons with arrows, killing most of the caravan guards instantly. The few who survived the arrow storm drew their blades and charged into the trees after our attackers. We heard screams muffled by the forest, and then nothing more of those men.

After a long silence, the bandits appeared. Elves covered in tattoos dressed in hides, they looted all the supplies and valuables they could carry from the merchants and disappeared into the trees.

These, I was informed later, were the Dalish, the wild elves who lurk in the wilderness on the fringes of settled lands, preying upon travellers and isolated farmers. These wild elves have reverted to the worship of false gods and are rumoured to practice their own form of magic, rejecting all human society.

- From In Pursuit of Knowledge: The Travels of A Chantry Scholar, by Brother Genitivi.

Nessa’s Father > “The human who owns our building has decided to sell it for storage space. We can’t afford to live anywhere else, so we’re leaving Denerim.”

- I understand, good luck
- Where are you going?
- Too bad, goodbye.

(where are you going?) The Ostagar Ruins, Highever is not possible

- Why not?
- Is there anything I can do to help?
- You could stay at our place
- Good luck

(why not?) “Traveling isn’t easy, briberies cost a lot. Humans are a suspicious lot, I’ve heard the humans in Highever are worse than here.”

- Is there anything I can do to help?
- You could stay at our place
- Good luck

(You could stay at our place) “too many people in one room, don’t need charity”

- I understand, good luck
- You should learn to let others help you
- Have a proud death on the road

(You should learn to let others help you) “Goodbye indeed.”

Wait! Can I talk to you a moment? [daughter approaches]

- Get lost.
- Of course.
- Sure, but make it quick

(Of course) I apologise for my parents, they're too proud. Don't like to be surrounded by human soldiers who haven't seen a woman in months.

- Would some money help?
- Maybe you should stay here
- I wish I could help, but I'm busy
- You may not like it, but they will.

(maybe you should stay here) I would, but my father would have to believe I have a future here.

- Let me talk to him
- Would some money help?
- I wish I could help, but I'm busy
- Good point, enjoy entertaining soldiers

(Would some money help?) They would need 3 silvers to go to Highever, and 10 silvers to stay here.

- Here's 10 silver. Take it. Stay where you belong.
- Here's three silvers. Take it. Go to Highever.
- Someone must be willing to help
- I'm afraid I can't help.

(here's 10) Thank you, you have saved my family! I love you!

Humans break into the Alienage, shouting and wanting to claim the elves. The leader shouts: "grab a whore and have a good time" Shianni is angry: "touch me and ill gut you!" Elf next to her tries to defuse the situation: "we're celebrating a wedding"

The human slaps the elf who tries to defuse the situation.

Soris walks up to you: "maybe we shouldn't get involved."

- I won't let these humans abuse us
- Shianni will get herself killed
- Objection noted, now get out of my way
- Let's not endanger ourselves needlessly.

(Shianni will get herself killed) Fine, but's let tr to be diplomatic, shall we.

Human man approaches Tabris: "What's this, another lovely one come to keep my company?"

- You need to leave at once
- Let's just talk this over shall we?
- Dream on, human

- Human scum! You'll regret what you have done here!

(Dream on, human) "hah! Do you have any idea who I am?"

Shianni throws a glass bottle in his face. The human is the son of the Arl of Denerim, as another human calls out. Shianni is shocked, "what? Oh maker"

- Look, things got out of hand
- Take him home, if you don't mention this, we won't
- Maybe his father should have taught him better manners
- Then just imagine what we'll do to you two.

(take him home) "you've a lot of nerve, knife ears! This'll go badly for you"

Shianni is nervous about this. Soris betrothed shows up, together with an unknown man.

- Then this handsome man must be Nelaros
- And this man must be my betrothed
- And who's the fellow with her? Not mine, I hope?

(my betrothed) Soris told me many things about you, some of it even positive. Are you nervous?

- Let's leave them to prepare
- Not really, you?
- I was until I saw you
- Sort of nauseated, actually

(nauseated) He's not calm either.

- Well, things can only get better
- How was the trip from Highever?
- How do you feel about moving to Denerim?
- I'm just not interested in this whole deal

(Denerim) It was hard to leave Highever. Humans take less notice of you in Highever.

Soris: "Don't look now, we have another problem"

- What do you mean?
- Is it Vaughan? Has he returned?
- Anything to put off the wedding for a while

(Vaughan) Another human just walked in, could be one of Vaughan or a random trouble maker. Need to move him along before someone does something stupid.

[Duncan shown standing in the alienage]

- Right. Let's go talk to him
- One human shouldn't cause much trouble

- Let's just kill him

(kill) You really scare me sometimes, you know that?

- I'm joking
- I'm serious, I hate humans
- Fine, let's scare him then

(Scare) "Let's do this quickly."

The man stands in the Alienage, he is armoured. He greets Tabris and Soris as you walk up to him.

Duncan: "Good day, I understand congratulations are in order for your impending wedding."

- You are not wanted here.
- This is a private ceremony.
- Let's talk about your impending beating.
- Thanks, but please go. I'd rather avoid unpleasantness.
- Do you have business here, human?

(Thanks, but go) "what manner of unpleasantness might you be referring to?"

- The Alienage just isn't a good place for humans to be.
- The kind involving our boots in your backside.
- Please. You can't be **that** thickheaded.

(the alienage just isn't a good place) "I'm sorry, but I have no intention of leaving"

- Fine. Maybe we can compromise.
- I will ask once more, politely. Please leave.
- Then let's start with your thrashing.

(Please leave.) "And I refuse yet again, now what?"

- Fine. Maybe we can compromise.
- I'm not backing down. This is no place for you.
- Are you seriously looking for a fight?

(not backing down) "Surely it hasn't escaped your notice that I am both armed and armored. Any fight between us would be rather one-sided."

- I'm no stranger to battle. Bring it on.
- All the more reasons for you to go.
- Do you intend on using that weapon?

(all the more reason) "I have no intention of leaving, unless you intend to force me to do so."

- Fine. Maybe we can compromise.
- I'm no stranger to battle. Bring it on.
- You're not staying, armed or not.

(not staying). Soris encourages you not to die. Duncan tells you that he isn't here to fight. The Elder walks towards you, he and Duncan are friends.

- You know this human, elder?
- I'm so sorry, I had no idea...
- Any friend of the Elder is welcome here

(you know this human) “May I present Duncan, head of the Grey Wardens in Ferelden”.

- What’s a Grey Warden?
- Why would a Grey Warden come here?
- He’s still a human. He shouldn’t be here.
- Well met, Duncan.
- And why should I care?

(He’s still human) “the grey wardens are deserving of respect. Why are you here?” “A blight has happened, Cailan needs people” “unfortunate time, wedding is happening” “Duncan apologises for his interruption, you will speak later.

Codex unlocked: The Chant of Light: The Blight

Codex unlocked: The Grey Wardens

Codex unlocked: Darkspawn

Codex unlocked: Duncan

Codex unlocked: Valendrian

“Remember that our strength lies in commitment to tradition and to each other”

Every alienage has a hahren, an elder. It falls to the hahren to arrange marriages for those without family, to negotiate with the guards when there’s trouble, and to act as a sort of mayor and surrogate uncle to the people of the alienage.

The title, like so many things, is a holdover from the time of Arlathan, for hahrens are not necessarily the oldest person in the community, or even all that old. Tradition gives the role to the oldest soul, the wisest, cleverest, and the most level-headed. Valendrian has been the hahren of the Denerim Alienage since he was in his thirties.

The wedding begins. Soris and Tabris and their new spouses stand on a platform, while a Chantry sister arrives. Soris: “it looks like everyone is ready”

- Let’s get this over with.
- Good luck, Soris.
- I’m excited.
- I can’t do this.

(Good luck). “you too cousin, maybe it won’t be so bad after all”

Valendrian makes a speech. “Friends and family, today we celebrate not only this joining, but also our bonds of kin and kind. We are a free people, but that was not always so. Andraste, the Maker’s prophet, freed us from the bonds of slavery. As our community grows, remember that our strength lies in commitment to tradition and to each other.”

Chantry sister begins speech about the maker: “In the name of the Maker, who brought us this world, and in whose name we say the Chant of Light, I—”, Vaughan -the human from earlier- interrupts. He is angry at being attacked, and comes to ‘collect’ the women, hinting that he is planning to rape them.

Vaughan: "Sorry to interrupt, Mother, but I'm having a party and we're dreadfully short on female guests."

Sister: "Milord! This is a wedding!"

Vaughan: "Ha! If you want to dress up your pets and have tea parties, that's your business. But don't pretend this is a proper wedding. Now, we're here for a good time, aren't we boys?"

Vaughan's follower: "(laughs) Just a good time with the ladies, that's all."

Vaughan: "Let's take those two, the one in the tight dress, and... where's the bitch that bottled me?"

Vaughan's follower #2: "Over here, Lord Vaughan!"

Shianni: "Let me go, you stuffed-shirt son of a---"

Vaughan: "Oh, I'll enjoy taming her. And see the pretty bride..."

Nelaros: "don't worry, I won't let them take you"

- I can handle myself, we have to fight!
- I'll go with him. It'll be alright.
- Run! We have to get out of here!
- I won't let them take Shianni!

(we have to fight!) Vaughn laughs at you, and looms over you with his taller build. He suggests "avoiding further.. unpleasantness."

- Please, just don't hurt anyone.
- Don't you dare touch me! I'll kill you!
- Take me, but let the others go!
- Let them go! You have no right!

(Let the others go!) "that wouldn't be much of a party". His henchman slaps Tabris, and Tabris black out.

When Tabris comes to, a the Chantry sister is praying when Tabris comes to. Tabris and three other women are locked in a room. Shianni: "Thank the maker you've come to. We were so worried."

- Where are we?
- Owww!
- Is everyone all right?
- All right, that human dies!

(Is everyone all right) "we're scared but unharmed. They locked us in here to wait until that.. bastard is 'ready for us'

- Then we need to get out of here!
- We'll kill the first human that opens that door.
- I'm sure he'll listen to reason once he's sobered.
- Chances are we'll be raped, beaten, and killed.

(we'll kill) "we're five unarmed woman, what makes you think we can kill anyone?"

Codex unlocked: The Commandments of the Maker

The five woman are arguing, claiming it'll be worse if they resist. Someone is coming.

- Stay calm. Do whatever they say.
- Be quiet. Don't do anything until I say.
- If you see an opportunity, take it.
- When the door opens, attack!

(attack) The door opens, 6 armed guards enter. One woman shouts at them to stay away, and the guards slice her throat. They take the other woman, and try to bind Tabris. They warn her not to resist, or they'll slice her throat too. "Be a good little wench or you'll end up like your friend, there."

- Try it. See what parts you lose first.
- Yes, come closer. I'll behave, honest.
- I'm sure we can make a deal here.
- Please don't hurt me!

(come closer) "that's a good girl". Soris enters with a sword, slides it to you. A fightscene triggers. You kill the guards as a training sequence to teach you the basic triggers of combat. Soris: "I can't believe they killed her! Are you all right? They.. didn't hurt you, did they?"

- No time to talk. The others need us.
- I'm fine now, just shaken.
- Nothing rattles me, you know that.
- Where'd you get the sword?

(no time) "That Grey Warden, Duncan, gave Nelaros and me his sword and crossbow, but that's all we have.

- Come on. We'll grab weapons as we go.
- Why didn't Duncan come?
- Nelaros is here?
- Did you have to fight your way in?

(Come on) Nelaros is guarding the end of the hall, let's discuss this with him.

In the next room the (human) cook spots you. He sees your bloodied state, and panics, wants to call guards. The elven kitchen hand knocks him out. "you've no idea how long that shem's had it coming"

- Have you seen a group of elven maidens?
- I'm [Kallian]. This is Soris.
- That was murder!
- Come with us. We could use another hand.

(come with us) "thanks but no thanks, they'll blame this one on you, and I'm not pressing my luck fighting the guards.

- Have you seen a group of elven maidens?
- I understand. Get somewhere safe.

- Coward.

(elven maidens) Yes, dragged them to lord Vaughn quarters. You should hurry if you want to help them. Now if you'll excuse me, I'm getting out of here before the storm hits.

Outside the kitchen is the dining hall. Upon entering three humans rise, wanting to know where you, an elf, managed to get a weapon.

- I was... er, he was... Oh, sod it. (attack.)
- I found it nearby, I was bringing it to the armory.
- Get back to your game, and maybe you'll live.

(Found it nearby) "is that so? An unlikely story if ever head one. You maggots are gonna die slowly. [the humans attack]

An elven woman is working in a storage room next to the dining hall. She can't be spoken to.

In one of the next rooms, three guards surround your fiancé. They kill him. The leader of the trio speaks, "See, I told you there would be more. Elves run in packs, like rodents." "Should we keep the knife-eared bitch alive?" "They killed our boys, she dies."

- You killed Nelaros!
- Tell me where the others are!
- Surrender now, and you'll live.
- I'm going to enjoy this...

(Tell me) "Don't worry sweet thing, they're being taken care of. When lord Vaughan is done, we get our turn." [attack]

The humans are killed by Tabris and Soris. Soris crouches over Nelaros' body. Soris: "Nelaros... I'm so sorry."

- He died to save me.
- Come. Let's find the others and leave this place.
- He died. We're alive. Let's keep moving.
- We'll, I never wanted to get married anyway.

(He died to save me) "Let's make sure it wasn't in vain." ['Wedding Ring' can be taken from Nelaros' body]

In the next rooms there are multiple people working for the castle: (off-duty) guards, dog trainers, cleaners. The (human) guards and dog trainers immediately attack you upon sight. The two elven cleaning maidens ignore you.

Codex unlocked: The history of Ferelden: Chapter 1

After fighting through a few rooms, you walk into the room where Vaughan has Shianni on the floor. Two other humans are present too. They want to attack you, but Vaughan hold them off "Quiet, you idiot! They're covered with enough blood to fill a tub. What do you think that means?"

- You tell me.
- It means your guards are dead.
- Start talking, you've only seconds to live.

- You're going to pay for what you've done!

(Start talking) "here's our situation. You are skilled, obviously. We fight here, perhaps you could even manage to kill us.." he tells Tabris that if he is killed, his father will burn the alienage to the ground. He offers Tabris 40 Sov. to turn away and leave Denerim tonight. "you take that money and leave Denerim tonight. No repercussions, and you can go wherever you like."

- All I want is your head
- What about the women? Will you let them go?
- You can't buy me.
- Then give me the money. I accept your deal.
- We can kill you and steal your money.

(what about the women?) "The women stay. They'll go home tomorrow, slightly worse for wear, and you'll be long gone. That's the deal. Take it or leave it."

- No deal.
- All right.
- I'm going to enjoy killing you.

(No deal.) "Bah! I always regret talking to knife-ears! Now I'll gut your ignorant carcasses, instead! [Vaughan and his two friends attack]"

The humans are dead. Soris walks up to you: "He.. he's dead. Tell me we did the right thing, Cousin."

- Of course.
- It's a little late for regrets.
- He forced my hand.
- What's important is that Shianni is safe.

(He forced my hand) "That's true. I'll check the back room for the others. Shianni needs you."

Shianni is crying when you go to her. "D-don't leave me alone... please.. please take me home. (sobs)"

- Yes, let's go home.
- Everything will be alright.
- Can you walk?

(Can you walk?) "I.. I think so.. You killed them, didn't you? You killed them all.

- Like dogs, Shianni.
- I did what had to be done.
- Not just them. All the humans who hurt you.

(Like dogs) "good. Good.." Soris returns with his fiancée. She asks if Shianni is going to be alright.

- Let's just get out of here.
- I hope so
- Would you be?

- She'll live, how are you?

(Would you be?) "Shianni is strong, she'll recover." Soris implores you to leave quickly.

- Good thought.
- Yes, I've had enough of this place.

(I've had enough) Soris takes the rear guard. The group leaves the estate.

The Elder and Duncan greet you back at the Alienage. Two elven died at the estate. Shianni is taken home to rest. The Elder asks what happened.

- Vaughan's dead.
- The arl's family just got a bit smaller.
- Battle! Glorious battle!
- I'd rather not talk about it.

(Vaughan's dead.) Duncan: "Then the garrison could already be on their way. You have little time."

- I'm not sure what we should do.
- We'll hide out here until things blow over.
- WE may need to leave Denerim for a while.
- If they come for us, we'll fight them.
- Perhaps we should try to find the Dalish.

(Find the Dalish) "I might be able to help you" The guards arrive, looking for the Elder. The guards want justice. "The arl's son lies dead in a river of blood that runs through the entire palace! I need names, and I need them now."

- (step forward) It was Soris and me.
- (step forward) it was my doing.
- (stay silent).

(It was me.) "You expect me to believe one woman did all of that". Your courage is admired, but you will have to go to the dungeon. Duncan steps forward to invoke the Right of Conscriptation. Tabris is placed into Duncan's custody.

- You can do that?
- Hear that? You can't touch me!

(you can do that?) The guard cannot challenge his rights, but implores him to get Tabris out of the city. He leaves. Duncan tells you that you have to say your goodbyes. You're leaving immediately.

- Understood.
- You don't have to do this. I'm safe now.
- But what's going to happen here?
- And if I don't want to be a Grey Warden?

(What's going to happen here?) "For the moment they are fine" A larger threat looms over them, for which he needs Grey Wardens. Saving Tabris' life and conscripting her was a coincidence. "Say your goodbyes. Your life here is over"

Tabris' father is standing outside their house: "If... this is what the Maker has planned for you, then I guess it's for the best. Your mother would've been pleased.

- I hope so.
- You're not pleased?
- It's too late for talk now. I have to go.

(you're not pleased?) "I just wish there was another way. I dreamed of grandchildren, family gatherings... and (sigh) I'm sorry. This isn't helping. Take care, my girl. Be safe. And wise. And... well, you know. We'll all miss you.

Valora (Sorís' Fiancée) and Shanni are inside the house. Valora thanks you when she sees you.

- Don't worry about it
- We elves need to stick together
- Be good to Sorís

(need to stick together) "You're the sister I've always wanted. Shianni seems to have regained herself. I'll leave you two alone. Good luck, and thank you again"

Shianni stands a little further off. "you took all the responsibility for what happened. You're amazing, you know that?"

- I just did what had to be done
- How are you holding up?
- I have to leave soon
- I got my reward. I'm leaving this hole
- I should be going

(I did what had to be done) "You always do. They'll write legends about you one day." "When the world was at its worst, there you came—fire in your eyes, like something out of a storybook. I'll never forget that." "(sigh) I love you, Cousin. make us proud out there."

- I love you too, Shianni.
- Enough with the mushy stuff!
- Goodbye

(I love you too) "Maker watch over you"

Dalish Elf, Mahariel

You were born amidst the Dalish elves: noble wanderers who refuse to join the society of humans that subjugated their homeland so long ago. The Dalish travel the land in tightly-knit clans, struggling to maintain their half-forgotten lore in a human world that fears and despises them. You spend your time hunting with your clan-mate Tamlen in the forests, and as is sometimes the case, your quarry is not always the local wildlife...

[human man is fleeing, stumbles, and looks up to see a drawn bow being pointed at him. There are two more men behind him.]

Human man #1: "It's a Dalish!"

Tamlen: "And you three are somewhere you shouldn't be!"

Human man #2: "Let us pass, elf. You have no right to stop us!"

Tamlen: "No? We will see about that, won't we?"

[Mahariel has their bow drawn, and moves over to stand next to Tamlen]

Tamlen: "You are just in time. I found these... humans lurking in the bushes. Bandits, no doubt.

Human man #2: "We aren't bandits, I swear! Please don't hurt us!"

Tamlen: "You Shemlen are pathetic. It's hard to believe you ever drove us from our homeland."

Human man #3: "W-we've never done nothing to you Dalish. We didn't even know this forest was yours!"

Tamlen: "This forest isn't ours, fool. You've stumbled too close to our camp. You shems are like vermin—we can't trust you not to make mischief." "What do you say, lethallan? What should we do with them?"

- Kill them—what do I care? The others will never know.
- Let them go. You judge humans too harshly.
- Let's find out what they are doing here.
- Give them a warning. Killing them will only bring trouble.

(Kill them) "I like the sound of that. Anything to say in your defense, shems?"

(Let them go) (Scoffs) "you are too soft. How many injustices must our people suffer before you resent them properly?"

(Let's find out) "Does it matter? Hunting or banditry, we'll need to move camp if we let them live."

(warning) "Letting them go might bring more of them. You are too soft."

Human man #1: "L-look.. we didn't come here to be trouble. We just found a cave.."

Human man #2: "Yes, a cave! With ruins like I've never seen! We thought there might be, uh..."

Tamlen: "Treasure. So you're more akin to thieves than actual bandits."

- If you've been there, you should have the treasure to prove it.
- Ha! I'd like to see these ruins.

➤ We know this forest. There are caves, but no ruins. You lie.

(Prove it) [no reaction from Tamlen]

(Ha!) “So would I. I’ve never heard of ruins in these parts.”

(We know this forest) [no reaction from Tamlen]

Human man #2: “I.. I have proof! Here... we found this just inside the entrance.” [hands over small object]

Tamlen: “This stone has carvings.. Is this elvish? **Written** elvish?”

Human man #2: “There’s more in the ruins! We didn’t get very far in, though...”

- Why not?
- How do you know that’s elvish, Tamlen?
- This sounds like a trap. Don’t believe it.

(why not?) [skip to “There was a demon”]

(How do you know?) Tamlen: “I’ve seen something similar on the Keeper’s scrolls.

(trap) Human man #2: “A trap? We didn’t even know you elves were here! We-we were just trying to find the treasure!”

Tamlen: “And this is all you found? Why didn’t you look for more?”

Human man #2: “There was a demon! It was huge, with black eyes! Thank the Maker we were able to out-run it.

Tamlen: “(scoffs) a demon? Where is this cave?”

Human man #2: “Just off to the west, I think. There’s a cave in the rock face, and a huge hole just inside.”

Tamlen: “Well, do you trust them? Shall we let them go?”

- Kill one. The others will make sure no one else comes.
- You’ve frightened them enough. They won’t bother us.
- So they can bring a mob to drive us out? Kill them all.

(kill one) Human Man #2: “No! No, wait! You... you can’t do this!!” [Tamlen shoots him]

(let go) Tamlen: “Run along then, shems... and don’t come back until we Dalish have moved on.”

Human man: “Of course! Thank you, thank you!” [the humans run away]

(kill all) “Yes, one could expect no less from a shem. This will not take long...” [Tamlen and Mahariel shoot the humans]

Tamlen: “Well, shall we see if there’s any truth to their story? These carvings make me curious.”

- Sounds like a good idea.
- Shouldn’t we inform the keeper?
- I’m not sure... I have a bad feeling about this ‘demon.’

(Good idea) “And if we find anything, the keeper will want to know.”

(Inform the keeper) “She might be interested in these carvings, but let’s see if there’s anything more before we get excited. Besides, we’re already here. Now they said it was to the west...”

(Bad feeling) “Skittish shems say it’s a demon, and you believe them? They probably woke up a bear. Let’s see if these ruins actually exist, then we’ll worry about what to do.

Codex unlocked: The Dalish Elves

In time, the human empires will crumble. We have seen it happen countless times. Until then, we wait, we keep to the wild border lands, we raise halla and build aravels and present a moving target to the humans around us. We try to keep hold of the old ways, to relearn what was forgotten.

We call to the ancient gods, although they do not answer and have not heard us since before the fall of Arlathan, so that one day they might remember us: Elgar’nan the Eldest of the Hun and He Who Overthrew His Father, Mytha the Protector, Fen’Harel the Dread Wolf, Andruil the Huntress, Falon’Din the Friend of the Dead, Dirthamen the Keeper of Secrets, Ghilan’nain the Mother of Halla, June the Master of Crafts, and Sylaise the Hearthkeeper.

We gather every ten years for the Arlathven, to retell the ancient stories and keep them alive. For when the human kingdoms are gone, we must be ready to teach the others what it means to be elves.

- As told by Gisharel, keeper of the Ralaferin clan of the Dalish Elves

Mahariel and Tamlen start walking towards the ruins. As they go, they find a dead halla surrounded by two wolves. The wolves attack the two hunters, triggering the combat tutorial.

Codex unlocked: Halla

No creature is more revered by the Dalish than the halla. No other animal has a god of its own. These white stags are much larger than ordinary deer, and the Dalish halla keepers carve their antlers as they grow, making them curve into intricate designs. In ancient times, these stags bore elven knights into combat, but since the fall of the Dales, they are used less as mounts and more to pull the aravels.

Codex unlocked: Wolf

A tree stump unlocks a tale about the Brecilian Forest:

Codex unlocked: The Brecilian Forest

There are places in the Brecilian Forest where the Veil is so thin the difference between awake and dreaming is next to nothing. In one such place, a wood-shaper was born under such unfortunate stars that his mother named him Abelas, which means "sorrow." And he lived up to his name. He could keep no apprentices, and lost his stock of bows in mishap after mishap, until finally he had nothing. The rest of the clan began to fear that his ill luck would harm them, too, and whispered among themselves of casting him out.

Abelas heard them and resolved to change his luck, and so went into the forest alone to seek a suitable tree from which to make bows.

At last he spied a young rowan growing beside a stream. He drew his axe, and the tree cried out in fear, begging to be spared. But Abelas said, "If I do not take your life, mine will surely end." With two strokes he felled the tree. From the tree, he made the finest three bows he had ever crafted. Pleased, Abelas returned to camp and gave his bows to the hunters at once.

By nightfall, however, the camp was in an uproar. The hunters had returned with braces of hares which, when cut open, revealed only worms and sawdust. The elder said it was a sign that the hunters had robbed some spirit of its host, for it is well known that spirits do not go about the waking world on their own, but inhabit another creature's body. The elder worked a charm to banish the spirit back to the Fade, and the clan went to sleep hungry.

The next day, the hunters brought back a doe, and again the beast bled sawdust. Now the clan began to fear the spirit would starve them, and wondered what they had done to deserve it. Abelas came forward then and told of the rowan tree. The Elder considered for a long time before declaring that they must replace what Abelas had taken from the spirit. So he sent the hunters to dig up a rowan sapling, and bring it, living, to the camp.

There the elder ordered the sapling planted, and appealed to the spirit for forgiveness.

There was a terrible sound then, as if the whole forest were crying out in protest. Darkness fell upon the camp, though it was just past midday. And when the darkness passed, a rowan grove, every tree bearing the frozen face of a terrified elf, stood where the camp had been. From then on, it was forbidden in every clan to cut living trees in the Brecilian Forest. The spirits know nothing of forgiveness.

- "The Rowan Grove: A Dalish Tale," from *Ferelden: Folklore and History*, by Sister Petrine, Chantry Scholar

A little further ahead is the opening to a cave. It is large, and spires mark the entrance.

Tamlan: "This must be the cave. I don't recall seeing this before, do you?"

- No, I don't. Let's check it out.
- No, and I don't think we should go in alone.
- No, and that worries me. We should be wary.

(worries me) Always the careful one. Fine, but I'm not running back until I know there's something worth making a fuss over. Come on, let's at least see what's there. How dangerous could it be?"

[upon entering] Tamlen: It looks like those shems were telling the truth, but these ruins look more human than elven.

Giant spiders guard the entrance. They attack.

Codex unlocked: Giant Spider

Mahariel will address the player, when they click too much on a single thing. "Do you want me to get you a ladder? So you can get off my back?"

The ruins are long deserted. Spiders have made their nests, sunlight filters through the ceiling, plants and trees grow within the halls. There are swirling decorations and markings that make it seem like a temple. Broken and opened caskets lay in one of the rooms. In one of the next corridors, dried corpses lay on the floor. It is impossible to tell if they were human or elven. A statue stands in the hallway.

Tamlen: "I can't believe this. You recognize this statue, don't you?"

- Enough gawking. Let's move on.
- It's worn, but it looks vaguely familiar...
- Maybe. Why should I care?

(Looks familiar) Back when our people lived in Arlathan.." "This looks like human architecture... with a statue of our people. Can these ruins date back to the time of Arlathan?"

- This isn't the time of place for a history lesson Tamlen.
- It's interesting. So much of our past is lost to us.
- We're nowhere near Arlathan, and this proves nothing.
- Perhaps, but there isn't much left down here.

(it's interesting) "I'd never have guessed ancient elves might have lived here, with humans."

A trigger plate activates a trap. Walking corpses/skeletons defend the final room. A large spiked monser 'Bereskarn' defends the room. It resembles a bear, with patches of fur missing to show the muscle underneath. Tamlen exclaims upon slaying: "Creators! What was that thing?"

The final room is circular, and has a mirror at the center. The mirror is surrounded by a statue of two people holding swords, with a staircase leading up to it. When walking past, Tamlen attracts your attention.

Tamlen: "You aren't going to leave without taking a closer look at the mirror, are you?"

- If you're so eager to look at it, go ahead.
- I'll come back and look at it later.
- I don't trust it, and neither should you.

(I'll come back) "I want to look at it now, it's the only thing here that isn't broken. Wonder what this writing is for. Hey, did you see that? I think something moved inside the mirror.

- Inside the mirror? Let me see.
- Get away from it, Tamlen...
- You're imagining things.

(let me see) "look don't you see it, there it is again." [faint whispering]

A great flash throws you back. You black out. In between the darkness you see a man standing over you, asking about your health. After that, you wake up at your clan.

Fenarel: "You're back at camp. Everyone is worried sick about you. How do you feel?"

- How did I get here, Fenarel?
- Fine, Fenarel, but a little groggy.
- Worried, where is Tamlen?

(Worried) "We don't know. The shem who brought you here saw no sign of him.

- There was a human?
- We drove off some shems in the forest.
- I don't remember anything. I was in a cave, then... nothing

(we drove off) "I doubt you could have driven this one off. He appeared out of nowhere ... He left you here and ran off again. The keeper's been using the old magic to heal you.

- I need to talk to the keeper right away.
- Is anyone looking for Tamlen?
- The shemlen was a Grey Warden?
- Will I be alright?

(looking for Tamlen) Of course! Most of the hunters are off looking for him right now. But the keeper wanted to talk to you as soon as you woke. Stay here, Ill get her."

The keeper, Marethari, approaches. "... I know not what dark power held you, but it nearly bled the life from you. It was difficult even for my magic to keep you alive."

- Duncan? Is that the one who brought me back?
- I kept telling Tamlen that we should have come back!
- What happened to us?
- Then Tamlen could be sick, as well?

(Tamlen could be sick) "If he encountered the same thing you did, yes. The Grey Warden found you alone.. already stricken. Duncan thought there may have been darkspawn creatures inside the cave. Is that true?"

- All I remember was the mirror...
- Why listen to anything a shemlen says?
- I'm not sure. What does a darkspawn look like?
- Did he not go inside the cave himself and see?
- There were walking corpses and other strange monsters.

(strange monsters) “Walking corpses? Dark magic, but not darkspawn. I know not what the other creatures might have been. What else did you find? What is the last thing you remember?”

- A mirror. Tamlen touched it.
- Did Duncan mention a mirror.

(A mirror.) A mirror? And it caused all this? I have never heard of such a thing in all the lore we have collected. **And Tamlen remains missing..** (sigh) and I was hoping for more answers when you woke, but there are only more questions. Do you feel well enough to show us the way, da’len? Without you we will not find it.

- I am up to it, Keeper. I feel fine.
- I don’t know. Is my sickness gone?
- Could I simply describe the way to someone?

(I am up for it) I am relieved to hear it. I am ordering the clan to pack up so we can go north. Take Merrill with you to the cave. Find Tamlen if you can, but do it swiftly.

- Take Merrill to the cave and find Tamlen. I understand.
- The clan is leaving?
- Are you not interested in the ruins and the mirror?
- Why do you want me to take Merrill?

(are you not interested?) “I would be lying if I said I was not. But whatever knowledge lies in that cave is not worth our children. I send you back with hopes of finding Tamlen, and that is all.

- Take Merrill to the cave and find Tamlen. I understand.
- The clan is leaving?
- Why do you want me to take Merrill?

(the clan is leaving?) “If there is any truth to what Duncan said, then the Darkspawn may show up soon. We must get away from that horde. But that is not our only concern. Did you encounter any other humans out in the forest?”

- Three of them. We drove them off.
- Yes, actually. Is it important?
- None that I can recall.

(Yes, actually) Although you hurt no one, these humans roused their nearby village against us. As everywhere, our people are not welcome here. We have stayed too long, and we must move on—quickly.

- Take Merrill to the cave and find Tamlen. I understand.
- You’re going to let those shemlen drive us off?
- Why do you want me to take Merrill?

(let them drive us off) “Our clan could slaughter their entire village if we cared to... but at the cost of bringing their king’s rage down on our heads. These people are simple and have simple fears. This is their land, so we will go peacefully.

- Take Merrill to the cave and find Tamlen. I understand.
- Why do you want me to take Merrill?

(Why Merrill) "Merrill knows a degree of my magic. Tamlen's chances of surviving will .. I also wish for Merrill to see this cave and mirror. She has a sense for these things, and could shed light on the nature of this illness."

- Take Merrill to the cave and find Tamlen. I understand.
- But doesn't Merrill risk getting ill as well?

(risk Merrill) "You recovered, and Merrill will too. Still, be careful.. should you come upon this strange mirror again, do not touch it."

- Take Merrill to the cave and find Tamlen. I understand.

(take Merrill) "Go quickly, for Tamlen's life hangs in the balance."

- Pray for me, Keeper
- I have questions about this Grey Warden.
- I am curious about the darkspawn you mentioned.
- I need more equipment before I go

(Pray for me) [exit conversation]

(Grey Warden) "When Tamlen's life is at stake? Oh, very well."

- I thought the Grey Wardens had disappeared
- Why did you believe anything this shemlen said?
 - "He seemed honorable, and his care for your safety speaks well of him. I trust my judgement."
- How did he know where to bring me?
 - "Looking for our clan
 - (follow up question) Dalish have joined the Grey Wardens before?
"Indeed. The Grey Wardens once consisted of the best from all races. I know of no Dalish joining them since the days of the darkspawn wars, however.
(follow up question) What if he asks for one now?
"It would be a great honor, though I don't know why any Dalish would choose such a life. Regardless, he has not asked."
- Are these Wardens great warriors?
- I have no more questions about the Grey Warden, Keeper.

At the end of this conversation with keeper Marethari, the Dalish camp becomes available to be explored. You stand in a clearing in a forest, where the clan has made their camp. The sounds of livestock (halla) can be heard. There are multiple aravels around you, a communal fireplace has been set up, a walled-off section for the halla has been made. Runed stones are placed around the camp.

Fenarel stands by the aravel across from the Keeper. "Is the keeper sending you back to that cave to look for Tamlen?"

- Why do you want to know?
- Yes, I'm going with Merrill
- Yes, though I don't know why

- Does everyone know about the cave?

(yes, with Merrill) “I want to go with you. Keeper Marethari probably won’t approve, but I can help find Tamlen.”

- I don’t think that’s a good idea.
- I’m only supposed to go with Merrill
- It’s too dangerous, Fenarel.
- All right, come with us.

(all right) “Good, I’ll follow you. Just to make sure Merrill doesn’t run to the keeper when you tell her I’m coming.

[Marethari grants permission to add Fenarel to the search party, when Mahariel asks for it]

At the edge of the camp, a wolf statue looks out into the forest. Upon clicking, it triggers a codex update.

Codex unlocked: Fen’Harel: the Dread Wolf

There is precious little we know about Fen’Harel, for they say he did not care for our people. Elgar’nan and Mythal created the world as we know it, Andruil taught us the Ways of the Hunter, Sylaise and June gave us fire and crafting, but Fen’Harel kept to himself and plotted the betrayal of all the gods. And after the destruction of Arlathan, when the gods could no longer hear our prayers, it is said that Fen’Harel spent centuries in a far corner of the earth, giggling madly and hugging himself in glee.

The legend says that before the fall of Arlathan, the gods we know and revere fought an endless war with others of their kind. There is not a hahren among us who remembers these others: Only in dreams do we hear whispered the names of Geldauran and Daern’tal and Anaris, for they are the Forgotten Ones, the gods of terror and malice, spite and pestilence. In ancient times, only Fen’Harel could walk without fear among both our gods and the Forgotten Ones, for although he is kin to the gods of the People, the Forgotten Ones knew of his cunning ways, and saw him as one of their own.

And that is how Fen’Harel tricked them. Our gods saw him as a brother, and they trusted him when he said that they must keep to the heavens while he arranged a truce. And the Forgotten Ones trusted him also when he said he would arrange for the defeat of our gods, if only the Forgotten Ones would return to the abyss for a time. They trusted Fen’Harel, and they were all of them betrayed. And Fen’Harel sealed them away so they could never again walk among the People.

- From The Tale of Fen’Harel’s Triumph, as told by Gisharel, Keeper of the Ralaferin clan of the Dalish elves

A dusty scroll sitting against an empty crate unlocks another codex entry.

Codex unlocked: Arlathan: Part Two

You ask what happened to Arlathan? Sadly, we do not know. Even those of us who keep the ancient lore have no record of what truly happened. What we have are accounts of the days before the fall, and a fable of the whims of the gods.

The human world was changing even as the elves slept. Clans and tribes gave way to a powerful empire called Tevinter, which—and for what reason we do not know—moved to conquer Elvhenan. When they breached the great city of Arlathan, our people, fearful of disease and loss of immortality, chose to flee rather than fight. With magic, demons, and even dragons at their behest, the Tevinter Imperium marched easily through Arlathan, destroying homes and galleries and amphitheaters that had stood for ages. Our people were corralled as slaves, and human contact quickened their veins until every captured elf turned mortal. The elves called to their ancient gods, but there was no answer.

As to why the gods didn't answer, our people left only a legend. They say that Fen'Harel, the Dread Wolf and Lord of Tricksters, approached the ancient gods of good and evil and proposed a truce. The gods of good would remove themselves to heaven, and the lords of evil would exile themselves to the abyss, neither group ever again to enter the other's lands. But the gods did not know that Fen'Harel had planned to betray them, and by the time they realized the Dread Wolf's treachery, they were sealed in their respective realms, never again to interact with the mortal world. It is a fable, to be sure, but those elves who travel the Beyond claim that Fen'Harel still roams the world of dreams, keeping watch over the gods lest they escape from their prisons.

Whatever the case, Arlathan had fallen to the very humans our people had once considered mere pests. It is said that the Tevinter magisters used their great destructive power to force the very ground to swallow Arlathan whole, destroying eons of collected knowledge, culture, and art. The whole of elven lore left only to memory.

- “The Fall of Arlathan,” as told by Gisharel, Keeper of the Ralaferin Clan of the Dalish Elves.

On the side of an aravel hangs a skull, clicking it unlocks another codex entry. A text appears as it is clicked: “This carved head represents Elgar’nan, the elven god of vengeance and the head of the Dalish pantheon. He is thought of as the patron of the Dalish and the god that will one day see them restored to their rightful glory.”

Codex unlocked: Elgar’nan: God of Vengeance

Long ago, when time itself was young, the only things in existence were the sun and the land. The sun, curious about the land, bowed his head close to her body, and Elgar'nan was born in the place where they touched. The sun and the land loved Elgar'nan greatly, for he was beautiful and clever. As a gift to Elgar'nan, the land brought forth great birds and beasts of sky and forest, and all manner of wonderful green things. Elgar'nan loved his mother's gifts and praised them highly and walked amongst them often.

The sun, looking down upon the fruitful land, saw the joy that Elgar'nan took in her works and grew jealous. Out of spite, he shone his face full upon all the creatures the earth had created, and burned them all to ashes. The land cracked and split from bitterness and pain,

and cried salt tears for the loss of all she had wrought. The pool of tears cried for the land became the ocean, and the cracks in her body the first rivers and streams.

Elgar'nán was furious at what his father had done and vowed vengeance. He lifted himself into the sky and wrestled the sun, determined to defeat him. They fought for an eternity, and eventually the sun grew weak, while Elgar'nán's rage was unabated. Eventually Elgar'nán threw the sun down from the sky and buried him in a deep abyss created by the land's sorrow. With the sun gone, the world was covered in shadow, and all that remained in the sky were the reminders of Elgar'nán's battle with his father—drops of the sun's lifeblood, which twinkled and shimmered in the darkness.

— From *The Tale of Elgar'nán and the Sun*, as told by Gisharel, Keeper of the Ralaferin clan of the Dalish elves

Next to the pin for the halla stands an elven woman: Maren.

Maren: Aneth ara. "It's good to see you recovered."

- Thank you. I should go.
- How are the halla faring, Maren?

(halla) "They fare well. The keeper called for the clan to move on, and they'll be ready to take us ... May I ask of Tamlen's fate? Some say the clan will leave before we find him.

- I won't allow that to happen.
- We're going to find him; don't worry.
- He may very well be dead.

(may be dead) "The halla mourn our fallen. No sound is more heart wrenching than their mourning cry. At least they won't be crying over you. They are quite fond of you.

- They are your friends then?
- The halla are beautiful creatures
- Should that make me happy?

(friends) "they're more friends than servants. We do not dominate them as the shemlen do their horses and dogs." "At any rate, I do not envy the keeper's decision. I'll pray for Tamlen's safe return."

Next to Maren, a broken statue stands. A lady without a head or hands, labelled 'Ghilan'nain'. Upon clicking it unlocks a codex entry, and shows the text: "This broken, moss covered statue once represented Ghilan'nain, the elven goddess of guides and navigation. To the Dalish she is known as the "Mother of the Halla"

Codex unlocked: Ghilan'nain: Mother of the Halla

They say Ghilan'nain was one of the People, in the days before Arlathan, and the chosen of Andruil the Huntress. She was very beautiful—with hair of snowy white—and as graceful as a gazelle. She kept always to Andruil's Ways, and Andruil favored her above all others.

One day, while hunting in the forest, Ghilan'nain came across a hunter she did not know. At his feet lay a hawk, shot through the heart by an arrow. Ghilan'nain was filled with rage, for the hawk—along with the hare—is an animal much beloved of Andruil. Ghilan'nain demanded that the hunter make an offering to Andruil, in exchange for taking the life of one of her creatures. The hunter refused, and Ghilan'nain called upon the goddess to curse him, so that he could never again hunt and kill a living creature.

Ghilan'nain's curse took hold, and the hunter found that he was unable to hunt. His prey would dart out of sight and his arrows would fly astray. His friends and family began to mock him for his impotence, for what use is a hunter who cannot hunt? Ashamed, the hunter swore he would find Ghilan'nain and repay her for what she had done to him.

He found Ghilan'nain while she was out on a hunt with her sisters, and lured her away from them with lies and false words. He told Ghilan'nain that he had learned his lesson and begged her to come with him, so she could teach him to make a proper offering to Andruil. Moved by his plea, Ghilan'nain followed the hunter, and when they were away from all of her sisters, the hunter turned on Ghilan'nain. He blinded her first, and then bound her as one would bind a kill fresh from the hunt. But because he was cursed, the hunter could not kill her. Instead he left her for dead in the forest.

And Ghilan'nain prayed to the gods for help. She prayed to Elgar'nain for vengeance, to Mother Mythal to protect her, but above all she prayed to Andruil. Andruil sent her hares to Ghilan'nain and they chewed through the ropes that bound her, but Ghilan'nain was still wounded and blind, and could not find her way home. So Andruil turned her into a beautiful white deer—the first halla. And Ghilan'nain found her way back to her sisters, and led them to the hunter, who was brought to justice.

And since that day, the halla have guided the People, and have never led us astray, for they listen to the voice of Ghilan'nain.

- From “The Tale of Ghilan’nain,” as told by Gisharel, keeper of the Ralaferin clan of the Dalish elves.

By a firepit, three elven woman and a child stand. Ashalle can be spoken to.

Ashalle: “By the creators, it is good to see you whole and well. I was so worried!”

- Aneth ara, Ashalle. It is good to see you, too.
- You really shouldn’t worry so much about me.
- Enough, Ashalle! I don’t need to be mothered by you anymore!

(Aneth ara) “All that time you were ill, the keeper didn’t know you we’re going to live or die. I’ve been outside the keeper’s tent the whole time. I have never been so relieved as when I heard you would pull through! What happened? Everyone says Tamlen may be dead!”

- I shouldn’t say, just yet.
- They may be right.
- He’s missing. That’s all we know right now.

(missing) "That's awful. He's been a good friend to you since you were fledgelings. You must be more careful. Your mother and father, may they rest in peace, would be horrified to see you take such risks."

- I should go.
- You've never spoken of my parents much, Ashalle
- You always say that.

(never spoken) "What happened to them is a sad tale, and it's in the past. Reopening old wounds benefits no one."

- (persuade) Don't we Dalish strive to learn of our past?
- Perhaps you're right. I should go.

(persuade) [fail] "you've much to do tonight with Tamlen still missing. I will tell you another time."

(persuade) [success] "True. Perhaps you're old enough to hear this, though it... hardly seems like the right time.

- Is there ever a good time?
- Perhaps you're right. I should go

(Is there ever a good time) "Very well. If I do not tell you now, you'll only wonder... One day, bandits caught them alone in the forest. Your father was killed, but your mother escaped."

- Humans killed my father?
- I always thought they died together.

(humans killed) Yes, but also city elves, too. Those of our kind living with humans do not hold to the old ways. Your mother held onto life long enough to give birth to you, but grief wracked her heart. One night, she... simply walked into the moonlight and never returned."

- My mother abandoned me?
- That was a foolish and weak thing to do.
- I... don't know what to say.

(mother abandoned) "She just.. couldn't carry on without your father. The clan decided not to discuss this around you, lest this poison your heart with sadness."

- I can't believe I've never heard this tale.
- You shouldn't have told me.
- No, I understand.

(can't believe) "our people have learnt to live with much sorrow; it seemed only right that we not dwell on it. Your mother did leave you a gift, something of your father's for you to have once you were older. Perhaps the time has come..."

- I'm not sure that I want it.
- You only remember this now?
- Oh? Where is it?

(Oh) Take this key. You'll see some chests behind the storage aravel by the halla pen. One of them was your mother's. Its contents are yours if you wish."

A hunter and another elf, Ilen, stand by a nearby aravel.

Ilen: "I'm glad you've recovered. Once we find Tamlen, we can concentrate on the journey northward."

Hunter: "Thank you for the bow, Master Ilen. It is light and sturdy... much better than the one I made last year.

Ilen: "You are more than welcome. My father made it and used it against the Clayne tribes."

Hunter: "I will carry it with honor."

- May I see your crafts, Master Ilen?
- (Persuade) Could I ask you for a bow as well, master Ilen?
- I would like to hear the story of your father's battle.
- Why would you relinquish such a relic?
- I should go.

(story) "Then I am proud to tell it. Our clan was one of the first to flee the Dales. When we came to Ferelden, the fiercest of the shemlen were the barbarians known as the Clayne. We didn't wait for them to attack us. Every Dalish clan in Ferelden united to bring the battle to them."

- We attacked them first?
- Ha! Serves the humans right! Let them fear us!
- There are more Dalish clans in Ferelden?

(we attacked them first) "They were barbarians without honor. They would have slain us without a second thought. The ensuing battle went well for us. That day, we carved out our reputation of being the deadliest archers. Our arrows won us the right to wander these woods at will. It was this very bow that my father used that day."

Hunter: "Thank you for the tale, Master Ilen... and especially the bow. I will honor its history.

(why would you relinquish?) "We are all the same clan. His hand is as my hand. I have relinquished nothing. It was my father who first spoke of the Vir Tanadhal—the Three Ways of the Hunter. The first is the Vir Assan—the Way of the Arrow: to reach for our goal, unrelenting. The second is the Vir Bor'assan—the way of the Bow to bend, but not to break. The last is the Vir Adahlen—the Way of the Wood: we are as ancient as the forests, each tree a part of the greater land. All Dalish are united in this: One day we shall have a homeland again."

(crafts) [opens shop]

On the aravel next to Ilen, hangs a carved wooden head. Upon clicking, it unlocks the codex entry for June, and says: "This carved wooden head represents June, the elven god of craftsmanship. All the ancient skills of the Dalish are said to have originated from him long ago."

Codex unlocked: June: God of the Craft

We dedicate all our crafts to June, for it is he who taught the People to bend the branches of trees to make our bows, and to fashion coverings of furs and ironbark. Without June, would we have the aravel, or the harnesses for our halla?

When the People were young, we wandered the forests without purpose. We drank from streams and ate the berries and nuts that we could find. We did not hunt, for we had no bows. We wore nothing, for we had no knowledge of spinning or needlecraft. We shivered in the cold nights, and went hungry though the winters, when all the world was covered in ice and snow.

Then Sylaise the Hearthkeeper came, and gave us fire and taught us how to feed it with wood. June taught us to fashion bows and arrows and knives, so that we could hunt. We learned to cook the flesh of the creatures we hunted over Sylaise's fire, and we learned to clothe ourselves in their furs and skins. And the People were no longer cold and hungry.

- As told by Gisharel, keeper of the Ralaferin clan of the Dalish elves

Two elven men (Pol and Junar) stand across from the Ilen's aravel, they are practising their archery on a few targets.

Junar: "...You weren't here when Pol arrived, were you?"

Pol: "I've heard of you. Everyone is talking about you and the other missing hunter. A Grey Warden brought you back here!

- You're not Dalish, are you?
- The hunter's name is Tamlen.
- Do you know about Grey Wardens?

(Tamlen) "I hope you find him soon"

Junar: "Pol is a "flat-ear". He just arrived here a few days ago from the human lands.

Pol: "I heard rumors in a nearby village that a Dalish camp was close, and I hoped to find your hunters in the forest."

Junar: "You were fortunate I didn't shoot you, Pol. I thought you were a shem, and a bandit at that. You're not the first city elf to rejoin his people. I'm sure you'll find life among us more satisfying than with the shems, if no less harsh."

Pol: "In the Alienage, we hear terrible stories about the Dalish. They.. aren't true, right?"

- Only the parts where we sacrifice young elves to the gods.
- Prove yourself useful and the clan will be your home.
- Just don't be a coward like some and flee.
- You've nothing to worry about, Pol.

(nothing to worry) “Thank you. The clan has been very kind and welcome, I never expected it to be like this.”

When interacting with Pol again, you can ask him about life as a city elf.

Pol: “It was good to meet you. Perhaps I’ll get to hunt with you some day.

- I should go.
- I’ve never seen a shemlen city. What is it like?
- Do elves from the city learn to fight or shoot a bow?
- We hear city elves don’t know what it means to be elven.
- Why did you leave the city?

(shemlen city) “You’ve never been to a city? Surely you’ve at least visited a town?”

Junar: “We occasionally trade with the shemlen in small villages, but only a few in the clan undertake that task.”

Pol: “I can’t imagine never having seen a city. It’s... crowded, with buildings all squeezed together. There are people everywhere, and it always stinks.”

- And elves live together with the shemlen?

Pol: “Only if they’re servants. Most of us live in a part of the city called an “alienage,” separated from the humans by walls. That’s where all the poorest folk live. Laborers, dockhands, and thieves... and that’s if you’re lucky.”

- That hardly sounds like freedom.

Pol: “We don’t think about it like that. To most folks, that’s just how it is.

(fight or shoot a bow) “Andraste’s Mercy! No! none is allowed to walk around with **any** weapon. Fighting just gets you arrested. And I’ve never had to leave the city before, much less learn how to hunt.”

(means to be elven) “Well, back in the city, we hear the same about you—stories about Dalish bandits attacking people for no reason.”

Junar: “We would never resort to banditry!”

Pol: “I’m just saying that’s what we hear. And it’s elves who say these things, too, not humans.”

- They just don’t know the truth.

Pol: “even if they did, I honestly don’t think most of them would want to leave. Wandering and hunting doesn’t sound like much of a life.

Junar: “At least they would live as free men, and as equals.”

Pol: “Maybe. But to most elves I know, the only difference between them and humans is how much coin they have. Coin is the great equalizer, not living free.

(why did you leave) “I got into trouble for stealing. I’m not a thief... I just never had a choice. My mother was a maid, and was lucky if I could get work at the docks. You make a living

however you can, right? When Mother died, I got drunk, and was caught picking a guard's pocket. They were going to hang me, but I escaped, and... well, here I am."

- We don't have much call for thieving.
- Sometimes, we must take what we need.
- You won't have to resort to that anymore

(not anymore) "I'll do my best to adjust and fit in. I never dreamed you would be so welcoming. I thought at best you might hide me for a bit. (chuckles) I'm glad I was wrong."

A small bonfire surrounded by benches stands near the halla pin. A small scroll lies on one of them. Clicking unlocks a codex entry for the city elves.

Codex unlocked: The City elves

It is hard to tell our children about those of our people who have decided to live in the shemlen's cities. They ask, "Why would anyone want to be treated like that?" And sometimes I do not know what to say. I do not understand it myself. They were freed, but they have returned to live in the service of their former masters. They are housed like animals in walled sections of the shemlen's cities. They do the meanest of tasks and are rewarded with nothing. Why? I do not know.

We tell the children that the elvhen are strong, that we are a proud people, but they hear of these city elves who choose to toil under the humans' heavy hand. How do we teach them pride when they know there are others who would allow themselves to be trampled into the dust? So we tell them that these city elves are to be pitied, that they have given up on their people, given up their heritage. We tell them that some people are so used to being controlled that, when freed, they know not what to do with themselves. They are weak and afraid--afraid of the unfamiliar, afraid of our life of wandering. Above all, they are afraid even to hope that one day we may have a home of our own.

- Gisharel, keeper of the Ralaferin clan of the Dalish elves.

A scroll on the opposite side of the fire, unlocks a story about Arlathan.

Codex unlocked: Arlathan: Part One

Before the ages were named or numbered, our people were glorious and eternal and never-changing. Like the great oak tree, they were constant in their traditions, strong in their roots, and ever reaching for the sky.

They felt no need to rush when life was endless. They worshiped their gods for months at a time. Decisions came after decades of debate, and an introduction could last for years. From time to time, our ancestors would drift into centuries-long slumber, but this was not death, for we know they wandered the Fade in dreams.

In those ages, our people called all the land Elvhenan, which in the old Elven language means "place of our people." And at the center of the world stood the great city of Arlathan, a place of knowledge and debate, where the best of the ancient elves would go to trade knowledge, greet old friends, and settle disputes that had gone on for millennia.

But while our ancestors were caught up in the forever cycle of ages, drifting through life at what we today would consider an intolerable pace, the world outside the lush forests and ancient trees was changing.

The humans first arrived from Par Vollen to the north. Called shemlen, or "quicklings," by the ancients, the humans were pitiful creatures whose lives blinked by in an instant. When they first met the elves, the humans were brash and warlike, quick to anger and quicker to fight, with no patience for the unhurried pace of elven diplomacy.

But the humans brought worse things than war with them. Our ancestors proved susceptible to human diseases, and for the first time in history, elves died of natural causes. What's more, those elves who spent time bartering and negotiating with humans found themselves aging, tainted by the humans' brash and impatient lives. Many believed that the ancient gods had judged them unworthy of their long lives and cast them down among the quicklings. Our ancestors came to look upon the humans as parasites, which I understand is similar to the way the humans see our people in the cities. The ancient elves immediately moved to close Elvhenan off from the humans, for fear that this quickening effect would crumble the civilization.

- "The Fall of Arlathan," as told by Gisharel, keeper of the Ralaferin clan of the Dalish elves.

A book in the bushes around the bonfire, unlocks a codex entry about Ferelden history.

Codex unlocked: History of Ferelden: Chapter 2

The occupation was a dark blot on Ferelden's history. Our people, who from time immemorial valued their freedom over all else, were forced to bow to Orlesian rule. The Empire declared our elves property and sold them like cattle. Chevaliers routinely plundered freeholds of coin, food, and even women and children, and excused it as "taxation." And for 70 years no Landsmeets were held, for the Imperial throne had declared our ancient laws a form of treason.

King Brandel was one of those who escaped. He tried to organize the other fugitive lords to retake their land, but Brandel was neither clever nor persuasive, and the nobles preferred to take their chances alone. Ferelden might still be little more than a territory of the Empire were it not for the fact that his daughter had all the charisma that her royal father lacked. The Rebel Queen's rule began with a midnight attack on the imperial armory at Lothing. It was swift and successful, and with their pilfered arms the rebels began a campaign against the Orlesians in earnest.

But the turning point of the war came when a young freeholder joined the queen's army. The lad, Loghain Mac Tir, possessed a remarkable talent for strategy, and quickly became the favorite advisor of young Prince Maric. The queen finally died at the hands of Orlesian sympathizers anxious to curry favor with their painted masters, and Maric took her place as the leader of the rebellion. Loghain became Maric's right hand. Maric and Loghain led the

rebels in a new campaign against their Orlesian oppressors, culminating in the battle of River Dane, where the last Chevaliers in Denerim were crushed. With the capital once more in the hands of Fereldans, the battle to free our people was finally over. But the battle to rebuild what had been lost had only just begun.

- From Ferelden: Folklore and History, by Sister Petrine, Chantry scholar

A few elves are standing near the bonfire. An elder man can be approached.

Paivel: "So you have returned to us, da'len. We are grateful you are whole and well."

- The shemlen are responsible for this.
- I'm glad to be here, as well, Hahren.
- Sure, old man.

(glad to be here) "So you should be! What were you two thinking, wandering into that cave without first coming to tell the keeper!"

- You're right, Hahren. We should've come back here, first.
- Tamlen insisted we go inside.
- We wanted to see if there was anything to tell, Hahren.

(wanted to see) "once you saw what was inside, you should have returned. But you kept exploring, didn't you? I suppose your youth can be forgiven. Sadly, Tamlen pays the price. Losing you would be a terrible crime, da'len. You belong to more than just yourself. Or do you not remember?"

- What do you mean?
- I'm sorry, Hahren. I'll try harder next time.
- So I made a mistake. Why go on about it?

(sorry) "(sigh) Would you even know the reason behind your efforts? I wonder. Let us tell these children of the fall of the Dales. You can honor me by sharing in the telling."

- I have important things to do, Hahren.
- Certainly, Hahren.
- Tell it yourself. I'm no storyteller.
- I don't know if I remember all of the tale.

(certainly) "Come then, help me as I go along. Children! Here the tale of the fall of the Dales! Hear what makes you 'Dalish'! Would you care to begin, Da'len?"

- Long ago, we were slaves to the humans.
- Why don't you tell it from here, Hahren?
- Well children, it starts with a mommy and daddy elf...

(long ago) "Yes slaves to a terrible empire the humans build on the darkest magic. When it fell, we became free. We built a homeland in the Dales, worshipping the Creators and rebuilding the culture and history we lost in our long years of slavery."

- But the humans wouldn't let us be.
- I forget what comes next.
- If you've ever lost your bow, it was a lot like that.

(but the humans) “They were resentful, because we would not worship their gods, and because we put our people first. Over the years, their nations grew cold toward the Dales. In their eyes, we were blasphemers and cruel tyrants.”

- Than the humans declared war on the Dales.
- And then.. some kind of war? I forget.
- But also great for festivals, so I’m told.

(declare war) “And so the Dales fell. They took our lands, and dispersed our people, forcing us to live in their cities and abandon our gods. But many of us refused to relinquish our ways. We instead chose to scatter to the winds, wandering the lands.”

- We chose wandering the lands rather than the human rule.
- Please tell the rest, Hahren.
- Not to mention that the shemlen cities smell terrible.

(smell terrible) “all right, that’s quite enough of you. To survive and preserve our culture, the clans stay apart until the day the Elvhenan have a homeland once more. We shall then return the old ways to those of our people who have lost them. We are the Dalish: keepers of the lost lore, walkers of the lonely path.

- We are the last of the Elvhenan. Never again shall we submit.

(elvhenan) “The oath of the Dales, and no smart-mouthed comment? Thank the Creators for small mercies. I will let you get back to your tasks. I pray you find Tamlen quickly.”

- I should go.
- I would like to hear more about our history.
- What do you know about that Grey Warden?
- What did you know about the darkspawn?
- Did elves ever live in caves?

(caves) “I’ve never heard of such a thing.. .. We were varied as the shemlen, though fewer in number. Perhaps some of us lived in caves then, but all knowledge from that era is lost.

(history) “Now that’s something I rarely hear. Of course.”

- Tell me about Arlathan.
- Do no books record our history?
- Why do the shems allow us to exist at all if they hate us so much?
- What happened to the elves who didn’t join the Dalish?
- Do you think we’ll ever find another homeland?
- I think that is all. Thank you.

(Arlathan) “Ah yes, the lost city. Before the shemlen enslaved us, even before they came to this part of the world, our people lived in glorious Arlathan. Legends say that our ancestors were immortal, and we possessed magic the shemlen could only dream of.”

(books) “When the humans enslaved us, they took away our language, history, and immortality. We quickened to the pace of life and retained nothing of ourselves. We were slaves for so long that even when we became free, there was little for us to recover. If books still exist, I do not know of them.”

(exist) Perhaps they have no choice. Dalish clans are scattered to the winds, and rarely gather. And why bother? We have nothing they want.. no land, no treasure. And we always move on, allowing no one to grow too angry with us. Some might see this as cowardly, but we are proud. We are the last, and we will survive.

(not Dalish) They remain in human cities, forgetting all they once had. We call them flat-ears; for they differ little from their shemlen masters. A few may return, but we must accept that they know nothing of the lore, or why we keep it.

(homeland) We can hope to find a new home one day, where the Dalish and the flat-ears will build a land even greater than Arlathan. We shall teach the flat-ears the lore they lost... and perhaps they will teach us to understand the shemlen at last. That is the only way we shall truly live in peace.

On the edge of the camp, a note and a scroll lie near an aravel. The note unlocks a new codex entry for the aravels.

Codex unlocked: Aravels

*"We are the Dalish: keepers of the lost lore, walkers of the lonely path.
We are the last elvhen. Never again shall we submit."
--The Oath of the Dales*

Someone once told me that humans flee when they see the sails of our aravels flying above the tops of trees. I say, good, let them flee. The humans took everything from us-- our homeland, our freedom, our immortality. What's a little fear compared to all the horrors inflicted upon us? I recite the Oath of the Dales to myself each day when I sleep and when I wake: "Never again shall we submit." Never again.

The keeper says that one day the Dalish will find a home that we can call our own. But why? Why should we tie ourselves to stone constructions like the humans and the dwarves? What is wrong with the life we have now? We owe nothing to anyone, we have no master but ourselves, and we go where the halla and the gods take us. There is nothing more wonderful than sitting on an aravel as it flies through the forest, pulled by our halla. We are truly free, for the first time in our people's history. Why should we change this?

- From the journal of Taniel, clan hunter.

The scroll unlocks new information about the Dales

Codex unlocked: The Dales

You will hear tales of the woman Andraste. The shemlen name her prophet, bride of their Maker. But we knew her as a war leader, one who, like us, had been a slave and dreamed of liberation. We joined her rebellion against the Imperium, and our heroes died beside her, unmourned, in Tevinter bonfires.

But we stayed with our so-called allies until the war ended. Our reward: A land in southern Orlais called the Dales. So we began the Long Walk to our new home.

Halamshiral, "the end of the journey," was our capital, built out of the reach of the humans. We could once again forget the incessant passage of time. Our people began the slow process of recovering the culture and traditions we had lost to slavery.

But it was not to last. The Chantry first sent missionaries into the Dales, and then, when those were thrown out, templars. We were driven from Halamshiral, scattered. Some took refuge in the cities of the shemlen, living in squalor, tolerated only a little better than vermin.

We took a different path. We took to the wilderness, never stopping long enough to draw the notice of our shemlen neighbors. In our self-imposed exile, we kept what remained of elven knowledge and culture alive.

- "The End of the Long Walk," as told by Gisharel, keeper of the Ralaferin clan of the Dalish elves.

Merril awaits you on the edge of the camp, to go look for Tamlen. Merrill want to look for Tamlen, but is also interested in looking for valuable items. She is not too worried about getting sick, too. "Even if I get sick, finding Tamlen – or something valueable—will be worth it."

When you walk out into the forest you are attacked by two unknown creatures.

Merril: "What were those things? Were those darkspawn?"

- I don't know!
- You're asking me?
- That would make sense.

(sense) "I've never seen anything like them. You can smell the evil on them. Where did they come from? Where they here before?"

- I think I would have noticed.
- Maybe they followed the Grey Warden here
- Maybe the mirror has something to do with it.

(would have noticed) "Let's move on and hope we don't meet anymore of these monsters. Before we go, are you alright? Were you hurt during the fight."

- I'm fine, why do you ask?
- Nothing I won't recover from.
- Stop fussing over me.

(fine) Fenarel: "you.. do look quite pale, now that Merrill has mentioned it."

- What are you implying?
- I'm fine.
- It's just the exertion.

(implying) "Nothing.. forget I said anything. Let's go."

A little further, at the place where the wolves first attacked Mahariel and Tamlen, an abandoned campfire lies.

Merril: "I wonder whose camp this is. Do you remember it being here?"

- Maybe it belongs to the shemlen who found me.
- No, this wasn't here before.
- It's abandoned, whomever it belonged to.

(Shemlen) "you're probably right. Didn't he say he was headed back to the cave? If so, he's not here now. And we've seen no sign of Tamlen. Maybe we should... Wait, do you hear that?"

- What?
- No forest creatures. It's too quiet.
- Spooked already? I don't hear anything.

(no forest creatures) "Exactly. The forest is too.. still. Something's in the air... something unnatural.

- Careful, I don't like this.
- Perhaps we'll see more walking corpses.
- We should go back now.

(careful) "It seems whatever you woke up inside that cave, spread outside. The sooner we find this cave, and Tamlen, the sooner we can leave. Take us there quickly.

As you walk towards the ruins, you find more darkspawn. Once arrived, the scattered bodies of the spiders Mahariel and Tamlen killed earlier litter the floor. However, dead darkspawn lie amongst them now, too.

Merril: "So these are the ruins? Interesting. They are definitely of human origin, but with elven artefacts scattered amongst them. But we must find Tamlen—or what's left of him. I can't imagine he's still alive with those creatures about."

- Don't talk like that! You don't know!
- You're probably right.
- Maybe they took him hostage.

(Don't talk like that!) "You're right. We should explore farther before I go on about my fears. I'm sorry."

Apart from some darkspawn, the beginning of the ruins are empty. In the final room, Duncan stands before the mirror. He noticed someone coming by the sounds of fighting, but is surprised when he sees Mahariel. "You're the elf I found wandering the forest, aren't you? I'm surprised you have recovered.

- If you heard the fighting, why didn't you help?
- I don't know you, human. Nor do I owe you anything.

(I don't know you) Merrill: "Even if you don't know this human, a Grey Warden deserves your respect."

Duncan: "It was my duty to return an injured Dalish to your clan; your people have always been allies with the Grey Wardens."

- An understanding human? How nice for you.
- Most humans I meet aren't worth talking to.
- I suppose I should at least thank you.

(Most humans) "Then I should be thankful we are having this discussion. My name is Duncan, and it's a pleasure to finally meet you. The last time we spoke, you were barely conscious."

Merrill: "Andaran atish'an, Duncan of the Grey Wardens. I am Merrill, the keeper's apprentice."

Fenarel: "And I am Fenarel. Did you... come here alone, human? Battling all those creatures?"

Duncan: "Yes. Though I must admit, you took a great deal of pressure off me. Your keeper did not send you after me, did she? I told her I would be in no danger."

- We're looking for our brother Tamlen.
- No, though we knew you'd be here.
- We're not in the habit of rescuing humans.

(Tamlen) "So you and your friend Tamlen both entered this cave? And you saw this mirror?"

- Yes, Tamlen touched the mirror, and I blacked out.
- You've found some trace of Tamlen?
- Was that bear we saw a darkspawn?
- You knew about the mirror?

(bear) Perhaps. The mirror draws darkspawn to it. The Grey Wardens have seen artifacts like this mirror before; it is Tevinter in origin, used for communication. Over time some of them simply... break. They become filled with the same taint as the darkspawn. Tamlen's touch must have released it. It's what made you sick—and Tamlen, too, I presume."

- Then we should destroy it.
- Can we fix it?
- We need to take it to the keeper.
- So it's true. I had the darkspawn plague.

(fix) "Unfortunately no. It will taint all those who come near it, now."

Merrill: "I do not fear this sickness. The keeper knows how to cure it."

Duncan: "She may have weakened it, but she cannot cure it. Your recovery is only temporary. I can sense the sickness in you, and it's spreading. Look inside yourself and you will see."

- Then what should I do?
- I don't know if I believe you, human.
- Perhaps there is... something to what you say.

(what should I do) "First, we deal with the mirror. It is a pestilence and a threat."

[Duncan walks up to the mirror, that glows and crackles with purple energy. A low noise emanates from the mirror. Duncan grabs one of his swords, and smashes it completely.

Duncan: "It is done. Now, let's leave this cursed place. I must speak with the keeper immediately regarding your cure."

- I agree. Let's leave.
- How dare you just destroy the mirror!
- What about Tamlen?
- Can we just leave the cave like this? Is it safe?
- Why not just tell me what the cure is?

(Tamlen) "There is nothing we can do."

- So he's dead, then? Are you sure?
- I'm still alive. He could be too.
- I'm not leaving until I find him.

(I'm still alive) "Let me be very clear: there is **nothing** you can do for him. He has been tainted for three days now, unaided. Through your keeper's healing arts and your own willpower, you did not die. But Tamlen has no chance. Trust me when I say that he is gone. Now, we should return.

- Won't there at least be a body?
- Can we just leave the cave like this? Is it safe?
- Why not just tell me what the cure is?
- I'm not ready to give up the search just yet.
- Very well. Let's go back to camp.

(Body) "The darkspawn would have taken it."

Fenharel: "Why would they have taken is body? Not to... eat it, I hope..."

Duncan: "Darkspawn are evil creatures, and it is best to leave it at that. I'm... sorry."

- Can we just leave the cave like this? Is it safe?
- Why not just tell me what the cure is?
- I'm not ready to give up the search just yet.
- Very well. Let's go back to camp.

(not ready) If you prefer, I can wait outside while you look around. But I assure you, he will not be here. I suggest, however, leaving sooner rather than later. You are sick, whether you feel it or not, and it does you no good to linger."

- Then wait outside. I'll be out when I'm ready.
- I just want to look around to make sure.
- I apologize. I didn't mean to be rude.
- I... suppose you are right.

(make sure) "As you wish, I will see you back at camp."

At the end of the passageway behind the mirror a 'strange statue' can be found. Upon clicking it reads: "A strange statue commemorating the emergence of—and short lived—trading relationship

with dwarves who dug too high and too frugal and struck elves.” No codex entry is added. The statue triggers an ambush of walking corpses.

The party and Duncan arrive back at camp, and are greeted by keeper Marethari.

Marethari: “I’m relieved you have returned! And I did not expect to see you again so soon, Duncan.

Duncan: “I was not expecting to return so soon either, Keeper.”

Marethari: “Dare I ask of Tamlen? What did you find of him?”

- If he was alive, the darkspawn would have taken him.
- Nothing. He’s gone.
- The Grey Warden says we will find nothing.

(darkspawn) “There.. there were darkspawn in the cave?”

(nothing, he’s gone) “I see. Merrill, what about the mirror? Did you bring anything back?”

Duncan: “I can answer that, Keeper. I destroyed the mirror.”

Marethari: “I intended to use it to find a cure for this mysterious illness. I trust you had good reasons for your actions?”

Duncan: There is much to discuss, Keeper. I have learned a great deal since I was last here.

Marethari: “Let us speak privately within my aravel then, Duncan. Merrill, warn the hunters. If darkspawn are about, I want the clan prepared.

Merrill: Ma nuvenin, Keeper. Right away.

Marethari: “Da’len, allow me some time to speak with Duncan. Seek us out at my aravel later, and we can discuss your cure.”

- Very well, keeper.
- Why can’t we discuss it now?

(Very well) “Tell Hahren Paivel what has occurred. He now has the sad task of preparing a service for the dead. Follow me Duncan. I am eager to hear what you have to say.

Leaving the conversation unlocks two more codex entries.

Codex unlocked: The Grey Wardens

Codex unlocked: Darkspawn

Mahariel approaches hahren Paivel.

Paivel: “So you return with the Grey Warden, but without Tamlen. What happened, da’len? Is he truly lost to us?”

- Yes, Hahren. He is dead.
- The Grey Warden says he is, but I’m not sure.
- It’s my fault. I failed the clan.

- Don't look at me like that. This isn't my fault.

(Grey Warden) "Even if he is not, we must leave soon. . . . It seems the will of the Creators that I sing the firge for those .. Swiftly do starts burn a .. Tenderly land enfolds you .. Dagger now sheathed, bow longer tense. During this, your last hour, only silence.

- The keeper wants me to tell you to prepare a service
- I don't recognise that poem.
- Must you so prattle on?
- Will you prepare a service for Tamlen, please?

(poem) "Our ancestors did not age as we do. The shemlen... Instead of death, those who.. It was supposed to be a beautiful time, a celebration of the elder's long life and contribution to his people. Alas, we have no such ceremonies these days.

(prepare service, please) "Of course. We've no body to return to the soil, but we shall still sing for Tamlen. . . . Tell the keeper it shall be done before the clan is ready to move on.

- Thank you, Hahren.
- But what if Tamlen isn't dead?
- Will the clan still leave?

(thank you) "I ask only one thing, if I may. This Grey Warden. You have met him now, yes? Is he a good man?"

- He seems honorable—for a shemlen.
- I truly cannot tell, Hahren.
- He's a shem. That's all you need to know.
- He saved my life, and is a friend to the clan.

(saved me) "Interesting. What is it he talks to the keeper about, I wonder? Perhaps you should go and ask.

- I should go.
- I would like to hear more about our history.
- What do you know about the darkspawn?

(history) leads to the same questions as before.

(go) "Of course. May the gods guide your path, da'len."

Duncan and Marethari stand outside her aravel.

Duncan: "Your keeper and I have spoken, and we've come to an arrangement that concerns you. My order is in need of help. You are in need of a cure. When I leave, I hope you will join me. You would make an excellent Grey Warden.

- Am I to become a Grey Warden, Keeper?
- What does this have to do with my cure?
- Me? A Grey Warden? This is madness!
- I would be honoured, but how did this come about?
- I can't just leave my clan.

(what does this) Duncan: "Everything, I'm afraid. The darkspawn taint courses through your veins. That you recovered at all is remarkable. But eventually, the taint will sicken and kill you, or worse. The Grey Wardens can prevent that, but it means joining us."

- Then I will join you.
- Can't you just give me the cure?
- I will not join out of pity.
- Will I be able to return to my clan?
- You would do that? That is very generous.

(able to return) Marethari: "We do not know. But we could not watch you suffer. The Grey Warden offers you a way to survive."

Duncan: "This is not simply charity on my part. I would not offer this if I did not think you had the makings of a Grey Warden. Let me be clear: You will likely never return here. We go to fight the darkspawn, a battle that will take us far from your clan. But we need you and others like you.

- I am honoured by your offer.
- Is the clan sending me away?
- I would rather take my chances. No, I refuse to go.
- Why should we trust this human, keeper.

(sending away) Marethari: "A great army of darkspawn gathers in the south. A new Blight threatens the land. We cannot outrun this storm. Long ago, the Dalish agreed to aid the Grey Wardens against a Blight, should that day arrive. We must honor that agreement. It breaks my heart to send you away. As it would to watch you die slowly from this sickness. This is your duty, and your salvation."

- Then I accept this privilege, Duncan, if you'll have me.
- If this is my duty, then I will go.
- This is all I've ever known, this is my home!
- Is this the only way?

(home) Duncan: "A home that darkspawn might tear apart. This way, you can find a cure **and** protect your clan."

Marethari: "I cannot express my sadness at sending one of our sons off into such danger, away from the clan that loves him. But if this is what the Creators intend for you, da'len, meet your destiny with your head held high. No matter where you go, you are Dalish. Never forget that."

- It this is my duty, then I will go.
- Then I accept this privilege, Duncan, if you'll have me.
- Please, do not cast me away.
- I refuse to listen to this! No, I will not go!

(duty) Duncan: "I welcome you to the order. It is rare to have a Dalish amongst us, but they have always served with distinction."

Marethari: "I know you'll do your clan proud, da'len. Take this ring. It is your heritage and will protect you against the darkness to come."

Duncan: "A valuable gift. So, are you ready to go?"

- Yes
- Now?
- I would like to stay for Tamlen's funeral
- Can I say goodbye to my clan, at least?

(Tamlen's funeral) Duncan: "We have much ground to cover, but I cannot deny you that Say your farewells... then we must be off."

Marethari: "Come then, da'len. Before the Creators guide you from us, let your clan embrace you one last time."

Cutscene triggers in which you walk past your clan members. Greet Merrill and Marethari, and then leave with Duncan. No funeral really shown. You leave for Ostagar.

Cailan: "You are Dalish are you not? I hear your people possess remarkable skill and honor.

- Too bad the same can't be said of yours.
- I thought humans considered us dangerous vagrants.
- You know of the Dalish, King Cailan?
- Thank you, your Majesty. You are too kind.

(dangerous vagrants) "To be fair, your people can be a bit... standoffish. Not that I blame them, ofcourse."

Humans – even though they personally have not drove the elves from the dales (it was so long ago), they do still benefit from the system that has been put in place

Halla keeper: we do not dominate them like the shemlen do their horses and dogs -> in city elf origin you meet houndtrainers, who keep mabari in cages barely wider then themselves.

Elven mage, Surana

“On a cliff overlooking the dark waters of Lake Calenhad stands the tower fortress that is home to the Circle of Magi. This tower is the only place in Ferelden where mages may study their art among others of their kind. Within the high stone walls, the Circle practices its magic and trains apprentices in the proper use of their powers. But the Circle Tower is as much a prison as a refuge; the ever-vigilant templars of the Chantry watch over all mages, constantly alert for any signs of corruption. This gilded cage is the only world you know. Found to be sensitive to magic at a young age, you were torn from your family and grafted here as an apprentice. Now, that apprenticeship is nearly over and all that remains is the final test: the Harrowing.”

This is why the Harrowing exists. The ritual sends you into the Fade, and there you will face a demon, armed with only your will.

- I am ready.
- Is there any other option?
- What happens if I cannot defeat the demon?

(cannot defeat) “it will turn you into an abomination, and Templars will be forced to slay you.

Keep your wits

[you touch the basin. The screen goes black, and you reappear in a yellow-ish and barren world: the fade.]

Codex unlocked: The Harrowing

Among the apprentices of the Circle, nothing is regarded with more fear than the Harrowing. Little is known about this rite of passage, and that alone would be cause for dread. But it is well understood that only those apprentices who pass this trial are ever seen again. They return as full members of the Circle of Magi. Of those who fail, nothing is known. Perhaps they are sent away in disgrace. Perhaps they are killed on the spot. I heard one patently ridiculous rumor among the Circle at Rivain, which claimed that failed apprentices were transformed into pigs, fattened up, and served at dinner to the senior enchanter. But I could find no evidence that the Rivian Circle ate any particular quantity of pork.

- From *In Pursuit of Knowledge: The Travels of A Chantry Scholar*, by Brother Genitivi.

Codex unlocked: Knight Commander Greagoir

“Your magic is a gift, but it is also a curse. The Circle of Magi has trained you, and we templars of the Chantry stand vigil to ensure that training is adequate.”

Codex unlocked: First Enchanter Irving

“If you want to survive, you must learn the rules and realize that sometimes, sacrifices are necessary.”

In the Fade, a disturbing statue stand next to you. It seems like a man with tentacles in stead of arms, and two more tentacles sprouting from the top of his head. Clicking it unlocks another codex update.

Codex unlocked: Beyond the Veil: Spirits and Demons

- From Beyond the Veil: Spirits and Demons, by Enchanter Mirdromel.

As Surana starts walking, a Wisp attacks. Defeating it grants a codex entry.

Codex unlocked: Wisp

- From the journal of former Senior Enchanter Maleus, once of the Circle of Rivain, declared apostate in 9:20 Dragon Age.

In the fade you meet a 'mouse' who transforms into an apprentice. He failed his Harrowing, and got stuck. You are to find something in the Fade that is hidden, and defeat it. That is your test. Mouse follows you, to help you.

A twisted structure stand a little further, clicking it unlocks a codex update.

Codex unlocked: The Black City

- From Beyond the Veil: Spirits and Demons, by Enchanter Mirdromel.

When you walk away, a spirit wolf attacks you. Defeating it unlocks a codex update.

Codex unlocked: Wolf

- Mother Ailis of Denerim, 9:10 Dragon

A Spirit of Valor meets Surana, if their worth is proven to him, he will give Surana a staff. A sloth spirit lies sleeping ahead. It looks like a bear with parts of his fur torn off to show the muscle underneath, covered in spikes. He talks to Surana and Mouse about the demon ahead, but will remain friendly if unprovoked. Exiting the conversation triggers a codex entry.

Codex unlocked: Sloth Demon

- An excerpt from a transcribed desposition of Tyrenus, templar-commander of Cumberland, 3:90 Towers.

If you answer three riddles correctly, the sloth demon will teach Mouse the form of his bear. If you fail, he will attack. Upon completion, Mouse will take shape of a regular bear, and the quest continues.

Near the boss arena grows a vein of lyrium. Clicking it will unlock a codex entry.

Codex unlocked: Lyrium

- From In Pursuit of Knowledge: The Travels of a Chantry Scholar, by Brother Genitivi.

The boss, a rage demon, reveals that Mouse and he had an agreement to both fight Surana, just like the previous apprentices before them. Mouse betrays the demon to help you. Mouse praises

Surana's abilities. He expresses regret that he has fought against apprentices before. He tells Surana that he can only return to the living world, if Surana lets him in. He is revealed to be a pride demon. He tells Surana to keep their wits about them, and leaves.

Surana wakes up. Another apprentice stands over them: Jowan, a friend. He asks about the Harrowing, and expresses frustration that he has not been asked to take the test yet. An apprentice has three options: the Harrowing, the Rite of Tranquility, or death.

Codex unlocked: Rage Demon

- None given.

The Circle Tower, is as the name implies, a large circular tower. It is spacious, and built for community living. Sleeping quarters are large rooms with bunkbeds, with shared bath/toilet area. The environment is decorated with large statues of various hooded figures. The light within the tower comes from candles, sconces, other fires, and stained glass windows. The windows are so high up, that looking out is impossible. Most of the space around you is dedicated to studying. There are bookcases filling nearly every room, and tutors work with apprentices of all ages to teach them about magic.

An elven apprentice walks past; "The circle is so much nicer than the Alienage, is it?"

A book in the nearby library unlocks a codex about the fade

Codex unlocked: The Fade

- From Tranquility and the Role of the Fade in Human Culture, by First Enchanter Josephus

Another book in the library grants another codex

Codex unlocked: Mana and the Use of Magic

- From The Lectures of First Enchanter Wenselus

On your way to the Senior Enchanter to talk about your Harrowing, you see an elf, Eadric, reading a large tome. When approached, you can begin a conversation with him. The elven mage avatar has a unique line of dialogue.

- I just wanted to greet another of my kind.

(greet) Eadric: "Are you surprised? We're probably more attuned to magic than humans are... or at least our ancestors must have been. With most of our history lost, I suppose I'll never really know. Maybe the Dalish elves would, but I've never met one."

- Dalish Elf?
- Lost History?

(elf) "They live in the wilderness, traveling where they will. I've heard they keep the old beliefs alive."

(lost history) "When elves were taken on as slaves, we lost most of our culture. Few of us even know our own language. I hear the Dalish try to keep the old ways alive. It must be easier for them, outside human rule."

- I wouldn't want to be a Dalish elf.
- I wish I knew the old language.
- The past is gone, why bother?

(Dalish) "Neither would I, must be a hard life."

(old language) "As do I. Perhaps One day I'll have the chance to learn it."

(why bother?) "To know who you are, you must know where you've been. We're lost without our history. I didn't know anything about elves until I came here."

Eadric: Are you from an alienage? I'm from a farm outside Highever. My mother worked as the cook's assistant there."

- It's none of your business where I'm from.
- I'm from the Alienage in Denerim.
- I can't quite remember where I was from.
- I lived in Lothering.

(Denerim) "I'm glad I didn't grow up in one of those. Life was hard on the farm, but at least we were treated fairly well."

(Can't remember) "They must've taken you away when you were very young."

(Lothering) No extra line.

Eadric: "I suppose it doesn't matter where we're from, does it? We're in the Circle now."

- I suppose that makes us luckier than other elves
- That's not a better life
- We're reviled as mages as well.

(luckier) "I am satisfied knowing the humans who looked down upon me will fear me instead."

(not better) "I am satisfied knowing the humans who looked down upon me will fear me instead."

(reviled) "I am satisfied knowing the humans who looked down upon me will fear me instead."

Eadric: "But I should get back to my books."

- Goodbye, then.
- Thank you for talking with me.
- Fine, go back to your books.

(goodbye) "Good day."

(Thank you) "Good day."

(Fine) "Good day"

Some nearby bookcases unlock new codex entries.

Codex unlocked: The Four Schools of Magic: Primal

- From The Four Schools: A Treatise, by First Enchanter Josephus.

Codex unlocked: The Four Schools of Magic: Creation

- From The Four Schools: A Treatise, by First Enchanter Josephus.

Codex Unlocked: Hierarchy of the Circle

- Knight-Commander Serain of the Chantry templars, in a letter to his successor.

Codex Unlocked: The Four Schools of Magic: Spirit

- From The Four Schools: A Treatise, by First Enchanter Josephus.

Codex Unlocked: History of the Circle

- From Of Fires, Circles, and Templars: A History of Magic in the Chantry, by Sister Petrine, Chantry scholar.

Codex Unlocked: The Four Schools of Magic: Entropy

- From The Four Schools: A Treatise, by First Enchanter Josephus.

Talking to Senior Enchanter Torrin unlocks another codex entry, about the politics within the circle.

Codex unlocked: The Fraternity of Enchanters

- From The Circle of Magi: A History, by First Enchanter Josephus.

A random book grants another codex

Codex unlocked: The Cardinal Rules of Magic

- From The Lectures of First Enchanter Wenselus.

Codex unlocked: Maleficarum

- From The Sermons of Justinia I.

An open book grants another codex.

Codex unlocked: The Rite of Annulment

- From Of Fires, Circles, and Templars: A History of Magic in the Chantry, by Sister Petrine, Chantry scholar

An altar grants another codex.

Codex Unlocked: The Founding of the Chantry

- From Ferelden: Folklore and History, by Sister Petrine, Chantry scholar

Another is granted by an open book, lying in front of a statue of a woman.

Codex unlocked: Andraste: Bride of the Maker

- From The Sermons of Justinia I

Bookcases grant more codex entries.

Codex unlocked: The Chant of Light: The Blight

- Threnodies 8

Codex unlocked: The Maker

- Threnodies 5:1-8

Surana meets the Grand Enchanter, who is discussing the possibility of a mage conscript for the Grey Wardens with Greagoir and Duncan. He congratulation Surana on becoming a mage, and gives them a day off. He requests that Surana escorts Duncan to the guest quarters. Upon leaving the conversation, a codex entry is added. The codex entries for Greagoir and Irving are updated.

Codex unlocked: Duncan.

- None given.

When Surana walks into the guest quarters, a codex entry is added.

Codex unlocked: The Grey Wardens

- Ferelden: Folklore and History, by Sister Petrine, Chantry scholar.

In Irving's room, a stack of books unlocks an entry about blood magic.

Codex unlocked: Blood Magic: the Forbidden School

- From The Four Schools: A Treatise, by First Enchanter Josephus.

Duncan can be spoken to, and he talks to you about the treatment of elves.

- What do Grey Wardens do?

(GW) "Our duty is to battle darkspawn wherever they appear. We are elves, humans, and dwarves united by this common purpose.

- Elves?
- Have there been many darkspawn attacks?
- We should be on our way.

(elves) “Some of our most honoured Wardens have been elves. The hero Garahel, the last Warden to slay an archdemon, was one such. The darkspawn threaten everyone. They do not distinguish between the races, and neither should we. Has being an elf in the Circle been difficult?”

- Yes. All the time.
- No. Not at all.
- A little.
- Why? Should it have?
- I’d rather not talk about this.

(Yes.) “It is hard to change perceptions. I have tried to reason with many, and failed. If one has always seen elves as less than human, it’s hard to imagine them as something else.

- It hurts when people talk down at me.
“Do not let that discourage you. Let it temper you and make you stronger.”
- I am a mage now. People should fear me.
“You should want respect. Fear is just a different kind of hatred.”
- It’s not fair.
“Do not let that discourage you. Let it temper you and make you stronger.”
- I don’t care what others think of me.
“A good attitude, though be careful not to take it too far.”

(No.) “I suppose you are mages first, and elves or humans second. Being a mage has its own set of problems, I expect. Taken from your families as a young age, told you are the prey of demons... it is not a life many would choose, had they a choice.” [end conversation]

(A little) Same as answering ‘Yes’.

(why) “Elves are often treated as lower class in the cities. I was curious about your own experiences. “Granted, the Circle is nothing like Denerim or Val Royeaux, but certain opinions tend to persist.”

- I suppose some people have commented on my heritage.
“If one has always seen elves as less than human, it’s hard to imagine them as something else.” [leads to the same dialogue options as ‘Yes’]
- I’ve never been treated badly here.
“I suppose you are mages first, and elves or humans second. Being a mage has its own set of problems, I expect. Taken from your families as a young age, told you are the prey of demons... it is not a life many would choose, had they a choice.” [end conversation]
- I’d rather not discuss it.

(rather not) “Of course. I understand this topic might be sensitive.”

Leaving the conversation unlocks a codex update about the darkspawn.

Codex updated: Darkspawn

- Sister Petrine, Chantry scholar

As you leave, Jowan stops you. He wants to talk somewhere safe. He takes Surana to the chapel, where he introduces the girl he likes, Lily. He has overheard that the Circle is going to make him tranquil, and fears losing her. He wants your help to destroy his phylactery, to make sure no one can track him.

Codex updated: The Tranquil

- From On Tranquility and the Role of the Fade in Human Society, by First Enchanter Josephus.

On your way to help Jowan, you meet a Senior Enchanter who confesses that the tower has a Giant Spider infestation in the basement. Helping her clear them out unlocks the codex entry for Giant Spiders.

Codex updated: Giant Spider

- None Given.

Helping Jowan and Lily gain their freedom, you break into a forbidden part of the tower to find Jowan's phylactery. Sentries guard the area. Small darkspawn run around.

Codex updated: Deepstalkers

- None given.

In the second to last room, a statue speaks to you. It is of Tevinter origin: it hosts the spirit of a prophetess. She has been captured because the Archeon she was advising did not believe her. Leaving the conversation grants a codex entry.

Codex updated: The Tevinter Imperium

- Brother Genitivi, Chantry Scholar

Jowan and Lily have destroyed Jowan's phylactery, but on their way out they are stopped by Enchanter Irving and Captain Greagoir. They have been found out, and to escape Jowan resorts to blood magic. He overpowers everyone, but Lily becomes scared of him and refuses to go. Jowan leaves without her. Leaving this conversation will unlock another codex entry about a mage's prison.

Codex unlocked: The Aeonar

- Sister Petrine, Chantry scholar.

Companion conversations

Merrill

"I've spent the last few years restoring this. One of my clan found it in the Brecilian Forest, we think. Poor Tamlen. We never found him. Just the shattered pieces of the eluvian."

➤ What's an eluvian?

"Long ago, the elves had a kingdom. An empire that covered Thedas. And every city had an eluvian. The mirrors let them communicate across the empire, but I don't know how exactly. My people have lost so much. We know nothing of the days before Arlathan. This is a piece of our history. I know it can help my people. I can at least recover this one small part of our heritage."

➤ This is why the keeper sent you away, isn't it?

"The keeper wanted me to destroy the fragment I kept. She said our ancestors meant it to be forgotten. But it's a Keeper's place to remember! Even the dangerous things. We argued, I... left. She's wrong. This mirror could teach us so much about who we once were!"

Dorian Pavus

"The Inquisition supports free mages, what's next? Elves running Halamshiral? Cows milking farmers?" (said in Haven)

The Inquisitor asks Dorian about slavery: "Did you have slaves?"

Dorian: "Not personally, but my family does and treats them well. Honestly, I never thought much about it until I came south. Back home, it's... how it is? Slaves are everywhere. You don't question it. I'm not even certain many slaves do."

➤ You're saying they like it?

➤ It's not like that here.

➤ That's a terrible attitude.

(You're saying they like it?) "You think slaves like it that way? Don't be ridiculous."

Dorian: "I didn't say they *like* it. It's all most of them know.

(it's not like that here) "That's it? You don't question it?"

Dorian: "In the south you have alienages, slums both human and elven. The desperate have no way out. Back home, a poor man can sell himself. As a slave, he could have a

position of respect, comfort, and could even support a family. Some slaves are treated poorly, it's true, but do you honestly think inescapable poverty is better?

- Treated poorly?

“Is that what you call it? “Treated poorly”?”

Abuse heaped upon those without power isn't limited to Tevinter, my friend.

- At least they have a choice.

“At least they're free. They don't have slavery forced on them.”

You think people choose to be poor and oppressed? I doubt it. I don't know what it's like to be a slave, true. I never thought about it until I saw how different it was here. But I suspect you don't know, either, nor should you believe that every tale of Tevinter excess is the norm.

- I suppose not.

“If the Elves had helped Orlais during the Second Blight, Orlais might not have turned on them later.”
(Said while travelling)

(Epilogue conversation after the defeat of the main protagonist)

Dorian: “I was passing through the hall this morning, and a serving girl saw me and squealed. Actually squealed. Dropped her laundry and everything. Such a mess. She was completely breathless. “You were at the battle with the Evil One, weren't you?” I didn't even get a chance to answer. She hugged me. *Hugged* me. This is your influence.”

- You're a hero.
- You enjoy it.
- It won't last.

(enjoy) “Admit it. You're having a ball.”

“I don't trust camaraderie. All these people, smiling, buying me drinks... it's unnatural. Mind you, I can't say I hate the notion of being “the good Tevinter.” “I suppose you can't all be evil bastards.” The blacksmith said that, and he *spat* when we first met. I hope my father hears. He will shit his smallclothes from shock, I swear.”

- You're a good example.
- Thank you for your help.
- Will you be leaving?

(good example) “you're an example of how noble Tevinter could be.”

“For southerners, maybe. Back home they’ll be rolling their eyes behind their fans. Meanwhile they’ll conveniently forget the bastards who wanted Corypheus ruling us all. I’ve decided to stay in the Inquisition. For now.”

➤ You will?

“Tevinter lacks the presence of my best and only friend. It’ll keep.”

(The Inquisitor asks Dorian about the ruling system of Tevinter.)

Dorian: “The Magisterium rules. That magisters are all mages is considered a... convenient technicality. More importantly, commoners believe it can. Tevinter legend is chock-full of mage heroes from humble origins. So they hold out hope. “Someday, my son or my son’s son will be a mage. Someday.” Poor sods don’t realize that means he’ll be a quaestor at the ass end of the Hundred Pillars. At best.”

(A conversation between Dorian and Solas, if both are in the same party)

Dorian: “Solas, that little flare you sometimes do with your staff... You’re redirecting ambient energy to your personal aura?”

Solas: “Yes. The effect clears magical energy and creates a minor randomizes barrier to impair incoming magic.”

Dorian: “Fascinating. It’s a Tevinter technique. I’ve never seen anyone in this part of the world do it.”

Solas: “The technique is not Tevinter. It is elven.”

Dorian: “Oh! That means we... never mind, then.”

Solas: “But do go on about the wonders of Tevinter magic.”

(A conversation between Dorian and Abelas, an ancient elf)

Abelas: “The shemlen did not destroy Arlathan. We Elvhen warred upon ourselves. By the time the doors to this sanctuary closed, our time was over.

Dorian: “Wait, that’s not right. What are you saying?”

Abelas: “You would not know truth. Shemlen history is as short as the pool of your years.”

Dorian: “What did the Imperium do, then? Are you saying it wasn’t a war?”

Abelas: “The war of carrion feasting upon a corpse.”

“He said the elves destroyed themselves, before my countrymen came along. Could that be true? I can hardly believe it.”

“The imperium went to great lengths to expunge elven history. You might be the last to know the truth.”

(A conversation between Dorian and Solas, sometime later)

Solas: “You are still troubled by what you learned at the temple, Dorian.”

Dorian: “The Imperium is founded on the notion that we defeated Arlathan. It's not something my people should be proud of, but they are. It's ingrained in their psyche.”

Solas: “You think they would not accept the truth?”

Dorian: “I'm worried what it might do to them if they did.”

(A letter Dorian addressed to the player, which can be found in the last DLC.)

Inquisitor,

It was good to hear from you, my friend. For months I've had only the Society of Maevaris's fledgling Lucerni party: Junior members of the Magisterium so filled with fire and zeal, and so wildly inept at politics, Mae keeps a bucket of ice water on hand in case one accidentally immolates himself. Lest I give you the wrong impression, we *are* making progress. But it will take a great deal of skill to keep the Lucerni alive through the usual schedule of Minrathous scheming long enough to become a real political faction. Fortunately, they do have me.

I'm sorry to hear that politics are plaguing you as well. Must be something going around, like a pestilence or an Orlesian fashioned trend. Hopefully Josephine can defuse the Fereldan outcry and persuade the Orlesians to stop circling you with a collar and leash. You know she did always love a challenge.

I'll find an excuse to make a trip south soon. We should really catch up in person, don't you agree?

Dorian

Fenris

Hawke: “I take it these men we're looking for you.”

Fenris: “Correct. My name is Fenris. These men were Imperial bounty hunters, seeking to recover a magister's lost property, namely myself. They were trying to lure me into the open. Crude as their methods were, I could not face them alone.

(A conversation between Fenris and his sister about his lyrium tattoos.)

Varania: "You said you didn't ask for this, but that's not true. You wanted it. You competed for it. When you won you used the boon to have Mother and I freed."

Fenris: "Why are you telling me this?"

Varania: "Freedom was no boon. I look on you now and I think you received the better end of the bargain"

(A conversation between Fenris and Sebastian, about the Andrastian faith)

Sebastian: "Were you ever dedicated in the faith of the chantry?"

Fenris: "I have no memory of my childhood. Danarius had no desire to teach his slaves anything that made them think they're worthy beings."

Sebastian: "I'm sorry. I can't imagine how difficult your life has been."

Fenris: "No, you can't."

Sebastian: Whether you were taught it or not, the Maker has room at His side for every soul. Even yours.

(Fenris tells the player, Hawke, why he ran away)

Fenris: You've heard of Seheron? The Imperium and the Qunari have fought over the island for centuries, now. I was there with Danarius during a Qunari attack. I managed to get him to a ship-but there was no room for a slave. I was left behind. I barely got out of the city alive. There are rebels in the Seheron jungles called Fog Warriors. They found me and took me in, nursed me back to health. I stayed with them for a time. Until Danarius finally came for me. I'd grown fond of the rebels. They bowed to no master and fought for their freedom. It was.. beyond my experience. When Danarius came, they refused to let him take me. He ordered me to kill them. So I did. I killed them all. It felt inevitable. My master had returned and this, this fantasy life was over. But once it was done, I looked down at their bodies. I felt... I couldn't... I ran. And never looked back.

(When Hawke gives a book to Fenris)

Hawke: "I have something for you."

Fenris: "it... it's a book."

Hawke: "The book is by Shartan, the elf who helped Andraste free the slaves. You know about him, right?"

Fenris: "A little. It's just... Slaves are not permitted to read. I've never learned"

(Hawke asks Fenris about the slave trade)

Hawke: "The slave trade is still in operation in the Imperium?"

Fenris: "It varies from one archon to the next. One outlawed it many years ago – he was quickly assassinated. Tevinter would crumble without the slaves. The Imperium's elite know no other way."

Hawke: "Seems like a slave rebellion would end that."

Fenris: "There are rebellions all the time, actually. Most of them end... poorly. The Senate always unites when faced with "sedition". One day, things will change. Then the magisters will see just how fragile their hold is."

Solas

(If the player plays as a Dalish elf (Lavellan) and plays Solas' romance, they'll hold this conversation about the vallaslin)

Solas: "Your face. The vallaslin. In my journeys in the Fade, I have seen things. I have discovered what those marks mean."

Lavellan: "they honor the elven gods."

Solas: "No. They are slave markings, or at least, they were in the time of ancient Arlathan.

- That can't be right.
- That's a lie!
- That doesn't matter.
- We were wrong?

(that can't be) "My clan's Keeper said they honoured the gods. These are their symbols."

Solas: "Yes. That's right. A noble would mark his slaves to honor the gods he worshipped.

After Arlathan fell, the Dalish forgot."

(lie) "Why would you say that?"

Solas: "Because it's true"

Lavellan: "Bullshit! That's bullshit! Is there anything in this world you won't tear down just to prove how smart you are? Why would you tell me this?"

Solas: "Because you deserve better!"

(doesn't matter) "Whatever the marks were before, the Dalish have reclaimed them. They mark me as one of them.

Solas: "I know. For everything I have said about the Dalish, I admire that indomitable spirit."

(We were wrong) "So this is... what? Just one more thing the Dalish got wrong?"

Solas: "I'm sorry."

Lavellan: "We tried to preserve our culture, and this is what we keep? Relics of a time when we were no better than Tevinter?"

Solas: "Don't say that. For all they got wrong, the Dalish did one thing right. They made you."

Solas: "I didn't tell you this to hurt you. If you like, I know a spell... I can remove the vallaslin."

- I'm not sure.
- No. They matter to me.
- I'd like that.
- Forget the past.

(I'm not sure) "These marks have been part of me for so long. I don't know if..."

Solas: "I'm so sorry for causing you pain. It was selfish of me. I look at you, and I see what you truly are... And you deserve better than what those cruel marks represent."

(No.) "Even if what you're saying is true, I don't think I can just let you erase them."

Solas: "I'm so sorry for causing you pain. It was selfish of me. I look at you, and I see what you truly are... And you deserve better than what those cruel marks represent."

(Like that) "If what you're saying is true.."

Solas: "It is."

Lavellan: "Then... my people vowed never to submit to slavery."

(Forget the past) "I don't wear the vallaslin for the ancient elves. I wear it for me."

Solas: "I know."

- I want to keep the vallaslin

"I know you told me because you wanted to help, but the vallaslin is part of who I am. I hope you can see past..."

Solas: "Stop. You are perfect exactly as you are."

- Remove the vallaslin.

"then cast your spell. Take the vallaslin away."

Solas: "Ar lasa mala revas. You are free."

(A statue of Fen'Harel at Mythal's temple triggers a codex update, and a conversation)

Codex entry

The Dalish use “Harellan to mean “Traitor to one’s kin,” but the word does not appear in any elven text before the Towers Age. The ancient root-word is related to “harillen,” or opposition, and “hellathen,” or noble struggle. The Dalish call Fen’Harel a god of deception, but I posit a far more accurate translation would be “god of rebellion”.

What he rebelled against is a story lost to time. In Dalish legends, Fen’Harel seals away the other deities out of love for trickery. If we understood more ancient elven, we might find earlier versions of the Dread Wolf’s story give him a more nuanced motivation beyond spite.

- From *A Treaty on the Pagan and Heretical Customs of the Elven*, by Senallen Tavernier of the University of Orlais, commissioned by Empress Celene.

Morrigan: “Why would *this* be here?”

Lavellan: “Something wrong?”

Morrigan: “It depicts the Dread Wolf, Fen’Harel. In elven tales, he tricks their gods into sealing themselves away in the beyond for all time. Setting Fen’Harel in Mythal’s greatest sanctum is as blasphemous as painting Andraste naked in the Chantry.”

- Sorry, I’m stumped.
- You can’t know everything.
- There’s a lot we don’t know.
- (Dalish only) My clan had Fen’Harel statues.

(My clan) “My clan set statues of the Dread Wolf outside our camp. They’re meant to frighten harmful spirits.

Morrigan: “Perhaps. I thought the ancient elves above quaint superstitions.”

Solas: “For all your “knowledge,” lady Morrigan, you cannot resist giving legend the weight of history. The wise do not mistake one for the other.

Morrigan: “Pray tell, what meaning does our elven “expert” sense lurking behind this?”

Solas: “None we can discern by staring at it.”

Lavellan: “You said this Mythal was worshipped as a goddess.”

Morrigan: “So one assumes. What is a God but a being of immense old power? The dread old gods were nothing more than dragons, after all. They rise as Archdemons, and they die. Perhaps Mythal was a powerful elf, a ruler among her kind. History often plays storyteller with facts.”

Solas: “You admit lack of knowledge, and yet dismiss her so readily?”

Morrigan: “I do not dismiss her. I question her supposed divinity. One need not be a god to have value. Truthfully I am uncertain Mythal was even a single entity. The accounts are.... varied.”

- What accounts? “There are varied accounts of Mythal?”

Morrigan: "In most stories, Mythal rights wrongs while exercising motherly kindness. "Let fly your voice to mythal, deliverer of justice, protector of sun and earth alike." Other paint her as dark, vengeful. Pray to Mythal, and she would smite your enemies, leaving them in agony."

Solas: "More Dalish tales, I assume?"

➤ You know more, Solas? "If you know more about this, Solas, speak."

Solas: "The oldest accounts say Mythal was both of these, and neither. She was the Mother, protective and fierce. That is all I will say. This is not a place to stir up old stories."

Morrigan: "Whatever the truth, all accounts of Mythal end the same: exiled to the beyond with her brethren."

➤ What do you mean, "exiled"?

Morrigan: "Tricked by the Dread Wolf, as all the elven gods were said to be, trapped in a land beyond the Fade. Many Dalish believe this is why the Elves fell from grace and their gods did not save them. Or perhaps they were simply rulers slain by Tevinter. Who can say?"

Environment

Alienage

(A book in the alienage triggers a codex update, if the player isn't playing as an elf)

When the holy Exalted March of the Dales resulted in the dissolution of the elven kingdom, leaving a great many elves homeless once again, the Divine Renata I declared that all lands loyal to the Chantry must give the elves refuge within their own walls. Considering the atrocities committed by the elves at Red Crossing, this was a great testament to the Chantry's charity. There was one condition, however--the elves were to lay aside their pagan gods and live under the rule of the Chantry.

Some of the elves refused our goodwill. They banded together to form the wandering Dalish elves, keeping their old elven ways--and their hatred of humans--alive. To this day, Dalish elves still terrorize those of us who stray too close to their camps. Most of the elves, however, saw that it was wisest to live under the protection of humans.

And so we took the elves into our cities and tried to integrate them. We invited them into our own homes and gave them jobs as servants and farmhands. Here, in Denerim, the elves even have their own quarter, governed by an elven keeper. Most have proven to be productive members of society. Still, a small segment of the elven community remains dissatisfied. These troublemakers and malcontents roam the streets causing mayhem, rebelling against authority and making a general nuisance of themselves.

--From *Ferelden: Folklore and History*, by Sister Petrine, Chantry scholar

Halamshiral

(A codex entry is triggered upon entering the Exalted Plains)

Codex entry: The dales: a promise lost

There, see the Winter Palace at Halamshiral. Gaze upon its white walls and golden spires, built on the broken dreams of a people. Our people.

The human prophet Andraste was a slave in the Tevinter Imperium, as our ancestors were. When she rose up against them, we rose up with her. Together we fought for freedom. In gratitude and kinship, Andraste promised the elves a new land: the Dales. And although she died, her sons kept her promise.

Our people came from farthest Tevinter to claim this new land. Here, our journey ended. This was our Halamshiral. As we laid the first stone for the city, our people vowed that no human would ever set foot on our lands. The greatest of our warriors swore to uphold this vow. One by one they came, invoking the names of Elgar'nán and Mythal, Andruil and Ghilan'nain. Before all our gods, they dedicated themselves to Halamshiral, becoming our protectors, our Emerald Knights. They would ensure that the Dales remained free.

It was free. For over three centuries. But the humans and their new Andrastian Chantry would not let us be. They pushed against our borders. They sent missionaries to spread the word of their prophet. They sought ways to subjugate the People once more. When we refused, we angered them.

They destroyed us. Even the Emerald Knights could not stand against the might of their army, armored in faith. In the name of their Andraste, they burned Halamshiral, scattering us to the winds. They forgot that once, long ago, Andraste's followers and the elves marched together. They forgot that Andraste called Shartan "brother."

—*A Promise Lost*, as told by Keeper Gisharel to the young hunters of the Ralaferin clan on the outskirts of Halamshiral

(Upon arriving in Halamshiral)

Codex entry: Halamshiral

After the glorious reclamation of the Dales, the elven capital lay empty and in ruins for years, a haven for bandits and highwaymen and all manner of miscreants. The land lay unused until the Exalted Age, when Alphonse Valmont, the very Lion himself, declared that a palace should be built there in honor of the valiant actions of his brothers in besting the armies of false Emperor Xavier Drakon. Originally called Chateau Lion, it was designed as a grand retreat for the emperor's brothers and their families.

The city of Halamshiral grew around the palace. The first records of its existence appear in the Storm Age, when Emperor Cyril granted the title of marquis to Ser Reginald Montclair for "administration of Halamshiral."

An elven uprising destroyed Chateau Lion in the Blessed Age. When Emperor Judicael I rebuilt it, he named the new retreat the Winter Palace. It was designed more for the emperor and his immediate family than for any cadet branches of House Valmont, and became the heart of the Imperial Court in the darkest months of winter.

—An excerpt from *Architectural History of Orlais, Volume I* by Elodie Ferneau

(Walking around Halamshiral)

Woman 1: "Is that the Inquisitor?"

Woman 2: "An elf savage? Maker forbid. This is Gaspard's idea of a joke."

Unknown person: "A Dalish? No, that cannot be."