

# DRAGON AGE

THE WORLD OF THEDAS

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VOLUME 1



From the writers and artists of the Dragon Age games

*Introductions by Mike Laidlaw and David Gaider*









Boeric  
Ocean

Par Vollen

The Northern Province

Venefication  
Sea

Rivain

Arlathan  
Forest

The White Spire

Ayealigh

The Drylands

Antiva

Rialto  
Bay

Antiva City

The West

Green Dale

Anaburg

Minster River

Free Marches

Vimmark Mountains

Amaranthine  
Ocean



The Coastlands

The North Road

The Bannorn

Ferelden

Brecilian  
Forest

The River Road

The Hinterlands

Southron Hills

Korcari Wilds

The Frozen Seas





*chapter one*

# WELCOME TO THEDAS



Arlathan is founded some three thousand years before the arrival of humans on the continent. The date is so far removed from recorded history that it is difficult to pinpoint in Chantry years.



The elves are believed to first make contact with the dwarves.

ANCIENT ERA

1 FA

-4600 ANCIENT



**F**ROSTY PEAKS IN THE HUNTERHORNS. Tangled jungles on Par Vollen. The marvelous tunnels of dwarven construction known as the Deep Roads. From these distant edges of Thedas to the center of Chantry power in Val Royeaux, blood has spilled.

Thedas is a continent in turmoil.

To truly understand the world, you must look to its troubled people: the hard choices they have made, the nations they have built, and the bloody legacies they leave behind.

When there isn't a would-be empire threatening war, there's the darkspawn scourge roaring to the surface, threatening to kill everyone, horders be damned. Then there's magic. Mages might not be able to choose their gift, but every nation has ways

to deal with it. Some celebrate and foster magic as a skill. Most violently suppress its use and dominate its users.

Over the course of history, humans have warred with elves, the Qunari, and each other. These myriad conflicts have shaped territories and generations of intolerance and oppression, while religion, be it belief in the Maker, the Qun, or any number of pantheons, elevated some societies to power and left others in ashes.



Records claim humanity arrives in Thedas around this date. This is disputed by scholars, who ask where humanity came from and why they left.

-3100 ANCIENT



Elves are said to first notice the quickening, ending their immortality and frightening them into withdrawal from human contact. This is thought by many to be mere legend.

-2850 ANCIENT



## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THEDAS

The earliest known points of Thedosian history are documented in partial texts and old stories that only hint at the reality of these ancient times. Dalish keepers and the dwarven Shaperate speak of a Thedas entirely devoid of humans, a time when elves reigned over the land, and dwarves ruled the underground.

When humans came, everything is said to have changed. What peace may or may not have existed gave way to all-out war, and humans nearly destroyed the elves with the rise of the Tevinter Imperium. This first human empire and its worship of the Old Gods spread across Thedas. The elves either fled to the far reaches of the continent or were enslaved.

The might of the Tevinter magocracy was unquestioned for generations—until the Blight. Prevailing knowledge teaches that the unchecked power of the Tevinter magisters—specifically, their attempt to touch the realm of the gods—triggered this threat to all living things. This sin corrupted the magisters who entered the Fade, returning them to the waking world as the first darkspawn. The Old Gods they met in the Fade were likewise cast out and locked away underground.

Over the course of human history, five Blights have threatened to destroy Thedas.

The darkspawn, twisted creatures of singular purpose, sought to unearth the trapped Old Gods. The first to wake was Dumat, who took the form of a blighted high dragon known as an Archdemon. He led the darkspawn to the surface, taking an unspeakable toll on the dwarves before terrorizing the humans and elves. Dumat brought humanity to the brink of destruction before a newly formed order known as the Grey Wardens managed to defeat the Archdemon and end his Blight.

The First Blight lasted one hundred years, greatly weakening the Imperium. When the prophet Andraste led an army of barbarians to attack from the south, the Imperium no longer had the strength to defend itself. Andraste proclaimed that magic must serve humanity rather than rule over it, a direct challenge to the Tevinter way of life. Railing against the Imperial magisters, Andraste called the Old Gods lies and blamed their worship for the Blight. Her teachings spread quickly, and much of the Imperium crumbled before her armies. When Andraste burned at the stake, her martyrdom only fueled faith in her Cult of the Maker.

At the start of the Divine Age, another Old God awoke and a Second Blight began. Emperor Drakon, of the new nation of Orlais, became humanity's defender. As he pushed back the darkspawn hordes with his armies, his own power grew, and with it, the influence of the Chantry he created in the name of Andraste.



The Old Gods are said to begin whispering to humanity from the Black City. They teach the Dreamers of the Neromenian tribes magic. Power shifts, and these Dreamers become both priests and kings among their people.

-2800 ANCIENT



The Alamari tribes cross the Frostback Mountains and settle in the lands that will eventually become Ferelden. Alamari legend says they were fleeing a "shadow goddess," but scholars believe they were escaping a natural disaster.

-2415 ANCIENT

Drakon enlisted mages, who eventually formed the Circle of Magi. They harnessed their magic to smite the darkspawn, and, alongside the Grey Wardens, killed the Archdemon. The Second Blight was over.

It was during these troubled times that the influence of the Chantry spread and solidified across much of Thedas. The religious body, which preached Andraste's Chant of Light and worship of the Maker, became so powerful that even the

Imperium converted—although they would later split to form the Imperial Chantry over differing interpretations of magic's role in society.

Over the ages, three more Blights ignited and threatened the surface world, only to be stopped with aid from the Wardens. In between Blights, the Schism between the Chantry and the Imperial Chantry led to a series of conflicts between Orlais and the Imperium. Their warring accomplished little for either

## HISTORY OF THE EXALTED MARCHES

An Exalted March is a call to arms declared by the ruling Divine. It is named for Andraste's Exalted March on Tevinter. Although Chantry faithful have not historically been forced to fight, there has been significant pressure to join past marches, for fear of otherwise being branded a traitor to the faith.

### EXALTED MARCH OF THE DALES

#### 2:10–2:20 Glory

The Exalted March of the Dales began in 2:10 Glory after the elves of the Dales captured the Orlesian city of Montsimmard and marched on Val Royeaux. The Chantry called for war against the elves. It became known as the Exalted March of the Dales. Orlais was the only nation to provide troops.

Despite considerable elven victories, the elven capital of Halamshiral was conquered and the Dales were crushed. The Orlesians uprooted elven settlements and forced the elves into human settlements or a nomadic life. The elven nomads came to be known as the Dalish.

### EXALTED MARCH ON STARKHAVEN

#### 2:80 Glory

In 2:15 Glory, Starkhaven's King Fyruss, with backing from Tevinter allies, attempted to invade the rest of the Free Marches. Fyruss failed to conquer any neighboring city-states, despite launching multiple campaigns over several decades.

Eventually, the Imperium took matters into its own hands, removing Fyruss from power and taking Starkhaven for itself. Suddenly, Starkhaven was everyone's problem. The Chantry called an Exalted March in 2:80 Glory to free Starkhaven from its Tevinter invaders, and Starkhaven regained its independence following a short but bloody battle.

### EXALTED MARCHES ON THE TEVINTER IMPERIUM

#### 4:40 Black–5:10 Exalted

In all, four Exalted Marches were called on the Imperium. The Chantry was so focused on the marches that they named an entire age after them. In 4:40 Black, the Chantry called the first march to combat the magic-friendly nation's perceived heathenism. Over many years and three more marches, Chantry-backed forces made it well into Imperium land. But they fell short of conquering the seemingly impregnable capital of Minrathous. In the end, the marches did little more than solidify the ideological divide between the two nations.

The Exalted Marches on the Imperium ended with the beginning of the Fourth Blight.

### THE NEW EXALTED MARCHES

#### 7:25–7:84 Storm

This series of three marches on the Qunari began after they landed in Thedas and swept across the continent in a bid for expansion of borders and influence. The period was significant in that it saw the many nations of Thedas, including the Imperium, working together to repel a common threat that wasn't a Blight. The Imperial Chantry dispatched troops to retake Seheron, while Andrastian Chantry forces focused on freeing Rivain.

The second march was called in 7:52 Storm and ended in disaster. Chantry forces were pushed back and the Qunari captured most of Antiva.

The Qunari weren't finished. They sailed south on the Amaranthine to Ostwick. "Their plan was to overwhelm the Marcher cities of Starkhaven and Kirkwall, Starkhaven to block the roads leading north, and Kirkwall to block ships on the Waking Sea coming from Orlais, all in an effort to deny supplies to the Thedas armies assaulting Rivain," Brother Ferdinand



During Exalted Marches, an indomitable force assembles to put down threats to Chantry order.

Genitivi wrote. "The attack on Starkhaven eventually failed, but Kirkwall was attacked in a daring night raid where the Qunari used their leashed saarebas mages in an unprecedented display of sorcery. The walls were torn down and the city was taken, and for the next four years, Kirkwall endured the most brutal occupation in its history."

A third Exalted March was called, and a contingent led by an Orlesian chevalier named Ser Michel Lafaille forced the Qunari out of Kirkwall. The march pushed on and the war turned in favor of the ruling Thedosians. By 7:84 Storm, the third New Exalted March on the Qunari ended. The Qunari maintained only one stronghold on the continent (the city of Kont-aar in Rivain), but the cost of dislodging them was high. Much of northern Thedas was laid waste. The Llomerryn Accords were signed between the Qunari and every nation except Tevinter, ushering in an uneasy peace.



The Alamaari living near Lake Calenhad break away, becoming the Avvar. The two groups war with each other for centuries.



The Neromenian tribes split to form four kingdoms: Tevinter, Neromenian, Barindur, and Qarinus.





power, and was put aside with the landing of a mysterious new race who called themselves the Qunari.

The horned giants, who follow a strange set of rigid ideals, sought to convert Thedas to their way of life. They possessed superior technology, and in a great war, cut into the heart of Thedas. Together, the human nations of Thedas pushed the Qunari back to the continent's fringes, forcing a fragile peace between the Chantry and the Qunari that has persisted for two ages. Only the Imperium would not relent, and tensions with the Qunari persist there.

By the time the Fifth Blight struck in the early years of the Dragon Age, it had been generations since Thedas faced an Archdemon. The Warden ranks were considerably thinner as respect waned. Somehow, two young Wardens and a united Ferelden beat impossible odds to kill the new Archdemon and stop the Fifth Blight from spreading across the continent.

In the Free Marches and Orlais, meanwhile, tensions between the Circle of Magi and the Chantry arm of authority known as the templars were coming to a head. Shortly after the end of the Fifth Blight, an apostate mage destroyed a Chantry temple in Kirkwall. Further unrest in the Orlesian capital of Val Royeaux led to a battle in the city's Circle between templars and high-ranking mages. When it was revealed that the Divine, head of the Chantry, had all but supported the mages in this conflict, many templars and Seekers severed ties with the Chantry, spelling an uncertain future for all.



The entire Kingdom of Barindur vanishes under unknown circumstances.

-1610 ANCIENT



Thalstan, also known as the First Priest of Dumat, is the first known person to wield blood magic. He claims to learn the art after personally communicating with Dumat, an Old God.

-1595 ANCIENT



The Chasind people break off from the Alamarri and settle in the Korcari Wilds.

-1415 ANCIENT



This only scrapes the surface of the continent's long, storied history. For a more detailed account, see the timeline of events that runs the length of this book.

## GEOGRAPHY & CLIMATE

Thedas is a vibrant, diverse land of arid desolation, verdant forests, and frigid mountain ranges. Often climate and geography vary widely over short distances. The volatile, volcanic marshland of the Nahashin Marshes in western Orlais, for instance, could not bear less similarity to the fertile Heartlands some three days east.

Cutting through the middle of the continent is the Waking Sea, a busy waterway lined with some of the continent's biggest cities, including Val Royeaux, Cumberland, and Kirkwall. The

sea connects to the mighty Amaranthine Ocean, so massive and turbulent only the bravest dare venture far off the coast.

In the southern regions, temperature changes grow most extreme, as heavy precipitation spells severe rains, and, in Ferelden especially, harsh winters. By contrast, heat reigns in the north. This is most pronounced in the driest steppes of the Anderfels. The inhospitable region offers little more than oppressive heat and blowing dust.

That which might lie beyond the known world is of great interest to scholars. Few people have explored and fewer have documented the northern reaches— islands like Seheron and Par Vollen, and the impenetrable jungles of the Donarks. What lies still further north, and indeed, across the Amaranthine, is anyone's guess. The Qunari, relatively new to Thedas and perhaps the only race with the means to travel so far, actively suppress any knowledge of where they came from and why they left.

Foreldans are accustomed to unpredictable and often miserable weather.



The kingdoms of Neromenian and Tevinter unite after Darinius, High King of Neromenian, takes control of the Tevinter throne.

-1207 ANCIENT



Dwarven gladiatorial contests known as Provings become popular among the nobles of the Imperium. A Grand Proving arena is constructed in Minrathous.

-1200 ANCIENT