

# Dragon Age: Corruption

## Playtest Report

Game Version: 1B

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## 1. Installation

Installation was performed with the aid of a tool (DAModder 2.1.2.286). This required uninstallation of the previous game version (Corruption 1). Mod management and uninstallation was easy using DAModder, which is the primary reason for using this tool.

## 2. Character Creation

### 2.1 Primary Character, Rogue Archer

For my primary playthrough I created a male rogue archer. All Ability points were placed in Dexterity. Chosen Talents were Melee Archer and Rapid Shot. Chosen skill was Combat Training. This differed significantly from my primary playthrough of Corruption 1, in which my build emphasized Stealth, Deft Hands, Coercion, and Stealing in anticipation of testing non-combat game features.

### 2.2 Alternate Character, Warrior Archer

I tried building a warrior with all Ability points placed in Dexterity as a potential archer or dual weapon fighter. The game pre-selects Dual Weapon Sweep as a starting Talent, which is wasteful for anyone who does not wish to play a dual weapon user. I recommend making Powerful or Precise Striking be the pre-selected warrior talent, as they are useful for any warrior build regardless of fighting style.

### 2.3 Difficulty Selection

Normal Difficulty.

## 3. Playthrough

### 3.1 *My House*

#### 3.1.1 My Bedroom

##### 3.1.1.1 Starting Up

After a conversation with Brio, my character appears with arms stretched out to the sides in a neutral model pose. Normal Dragon Age controls function well, and trying to walk shifts the character into a more natural posture. The map and mini-map are blank. My inventory has 1 studded leather armor.

##### 3.1.1.2 Conversation History

The Conversation Log lists conversations with generic titles and no content.

##### 3.1.1.3 Deactivating AI Tactics

I turn off tactics to prevent party members from wasting resources. With tactics off, Brio is consistently poor at seeking and attacking a selected target. He tends to stand idly near his target despite attack commands, and randomly stops attacking targets he was previously attacking. Other party members in the game usually attack fine.

##### 3.1.1.4 Treasure Chest

The bedroom has a chest named "Rollie's Chest." It is unknown who Rollie is. This name is confusing.

###### 3.1.1.4.1 *Chest Contents, Rogue*

The chest contains 2 daggers, 1 shortbow, and 1 leather armor. The leather armor is a useful addition to the studded leather I start with since one of the armors can be given to Ayla later, who starts with no armor. The weapons are suitable for any starting rogue. I recommend adding leather boots and gloves, since they would make sense for any woodsman or hunter to have. From a story perspective, it would make more sense to use leather gloves and boots to replace the player's starting studded leather armor, although

the armor is far more useful in gameplay. I also recommend adding lesser healing poultices since the party has no access to healing for at least the next 6-7 fights.

#### ***3.1.1.4.2 Chest Contents, Warrior***

The chest contains 1 battleaxe and 1 commoner clothing. The commoner clothing is useless and cannot even be sold in the game. This leaves Ayla with no armor for at least the next 4 battles. The battleaxe cannot be equipped by someone with less than 18 Strength, and my character only had 15 Strength. The battleaxe is also unusable with the Dual Weapon Sweep talent that is pre-selected for the player warrior. I recommend replacing the battleaxe with a one-handed axe with a Strength requirement no greater than 15 (minimum for human warrior), as well as a dagger. Both items would make sense for the character's background and would be usable by any warrior build. I also recommend adding leather boots and gloves and healing poultices as I mentioned for the rogue section. Furthermore, I suggest making weapons for any fighting style (Dual Weapon, Archery, Weapon and Shield, Two-Handed) readily available as drops from enemies in the house so that characters of any build will be able to use their talents soon. I have not played as warrior beyond this. Everything in this report from this point onward refers to my playthrough with the rogue archer.

### **3.1.2 Ayla's Room (Living Room)**

Opening the door from the bedroom usually activates the fight in Ayla's room. Rarely, the fight starts when approaching the door but before clicking it. Ayla is initially engaged with a yellow darkspawn, but the door to the hallway opens half a second later, and several more darkspawn enter. This leads to a fight with 5 darkspawn, including 3 yellows, which quickly kill Ayla and the party under normal difficulty. Ayla's AI is stupid and engages the new enemies rather than help to focus attack her original, more wounded opponent. Rarely, the party may survive after Ayla dies, but later fights are too difficult if she does not join. If the game is set to easy difficulty, it is possible to kill the original yellow darkspawn Ayla was fighting before she dies. This interrupts the battle and triggers a conversation with Ayla, after which she joins the party and is healed of all damage. Any surviving darkspawn retain their damage through the conversation and the fight resumes. At the moment, this first fight is by far the most difficult battle in the game. I recommend preventing Ayla and the hallway group from engaging with each other before she joins the party. I also recommend removing one of the yellow enemies in the hallway group to make the difficulty more reasonable for a party with no healing or armor.

#### **3.1.2.1 Ayla Character Build**

Ayla's talents include Shield Bash and Shield Block, neither of which are usable since she has no shield. It would make sense for someone with shield training to have a shield. I

recommend either starting her with a shield or changing her pre-selected talents to more generic ones to allow the player to customize her for any fighting style. Powerful, Precise Striking, Melee Archer, and Rapid Shot are all useful talents for any warrior build, since the first two are used by all warriors, and even melee-based warriors find archery useful to start fights with. Ayla also starts with no armor, which makes it difficult for her to survive, and unlikely that she was able to fight her way to the player's house alone. I recommend giving her various mismatched darkspawn gear she may have scavenged. Ayla joining the party is also a good opportunity to provide the party with healing poultices or appropriate weapons to use with talents. She can say she scavenged some gear and add them to the inventory after the initial conversation.

### **3.1.2.2 Ayla Conversation**

It is unclear why Ayla would risk her life to come help the player when her primary motivation seems to be her own survival. She really wants to get away from this place, so why is the player so important to her?

### **3.1.3 Hallway**

The hallway to mother's bedroom has a door that leads to an empty room that might be a garderobe. This room is distracting and makes me think for a moment that it might be important. I recommend removing this room.

### **3.1.4 Mother's Bedroom**

#### **3.1.4.1 Conversation About Mother**

Walking a party member near the mother's corpse triggers a conversation with Ayla. I like changes since Corruption 1, such as Ayla's more sympathetic tone and the new sorrowful but rational dialog choices for the hero. However while the changes appear in the subtitles, the spoken audio does not always reflect what the subtitles say. There are also some spelling mistakes.

##### ***3.1.4.1.1 Lines with Audio Discrepancies***

I'm so sorry.

We have to get out of here, otherwise it'll be us next.

We can come back for her, but right now we have to get our of here.

### ***3.1.4.1.2 Lines with Spelling Errors, marked with [brackets]***

We can come back for her, but right now we have to get [our] of here.  
Come [one], we've got a long night ahead of us.

### **3.1.4.2 Mother's Key**

I find a key on Mother's body that has a blank inventory icon.

## **3.2 Town Exterior**

### **3.2.1 Meeting Girk**

#### **3.2.1.1 Girk's Fight**

This battle starts very suddenly. It is a jarring transition when coming out of the house. I recommend having a cutscene to introduce the fight as well as Girk. The fight also starts very close to the party and involves many characters in a narrow area, so there is very little room to maneuver. The small space makes attacking the right target frustrating, especially for Brio who already has targeting problems and takes up too much space to maneuver between people. I recommend placing the enemies a little further back where the road is wider. This battle is also very difficult on normal mode, since the enemies can quickly kill Girk. However, unlike Ayla, Girk has a better chance of survival, and automatically resurrects during the conversation after the fight. If it is important for Girk to survive, I recommend removing one of the shrieks to lower the difficulty. If it is all right for Girk to die but revive after the conversation, then the fight can be left as is for a very high difficulty battle, as long as the party is given some healing items before it exits the house. At the moment, this is the fifth most difficult fight in the game, but adding any healing items to the party will reduce its difficulty by a lot.

#### **3.2.1.2 Girk and Ayla Conversation**

It is very interesting that there's an option to kill a potential party member. This feature gives the player a feeling of control and the ability to make meaningful choices. Unfortunately, the option to kill Girk does not initiate a fight at this time. The player can still talk to Girk after choosing to kill him and be given the armory key. There is also no option to leave Girk but not kill him. It could make sense to distrust a darkspawn but not want to actually kill it after receiving its help. It would also be good to have a chance to talk to Girk again later to recruit him if the player left him the first time.

### 3.2.1.3 Getting Armory Key

Currently, the player might not think about talking to Girk to get the key, especially when neither Ayla nor Brio have conversation options. There is no reason for the player to try to talk to party members. However, the player needs the armory equipment to survive, since it is currently the only place in the game to get a full set of decent armor for Ayla to tank with (aside from the Holy set, which cannot be completed until the end of the game). Without the armory, Ayla goes through most of the game unarmored unless she takes the starting armor from Girk or the hero, and even that is too weak to tank with. It is a good idea to put in secrets, but not if those secrets are required for survival, especially when the player cannot backtrack to the armory later. However, if Ayla started with some light armor, and was able to piece together a full suit of medium armor in the outdoor town area, then that may be enough to survive without the heavy armor in the armory. Given Girk's motivation as revealed in the end, it would make sense for him to point Ayla to the armory without the hero trying to talk to him.

### 3.2.1.4 Girk's Appearance

Girk's weapons do not look right when hanging on his back. They clip through his body. In the earlier version of the game (Corruption 1), sometimes his equipped weapon would not visually change after a weapon switch, and his sword could stick out the top of his shoulder instead of hanging down his back, although I have not noticed this problem in the current version.

## 3.2.2 Skymas Conversation

The conversation with Skymas doesn't feel like the player is talking to someone who is dying and does not have much time left. The following line sounds good, but feels wordy and contemplative rather than urgent.

"You're right. Darkspawn are not counted among the horrors of Blood Basin. But, they are there now, the question is why."

In particular "the question is why" is too contemplative.

When asking Skymas about the armor key, he says "You should go there and gear up," which feels out of place for the setting.

Ayla seems too willing to enter the Blood Basin for someone whose primary motivation seems to be survival. She does not seem to be the type who would try to be a hero except for maybe to save the player.

### **3.2.3 Healing Item Cache**

The cache of healing items on the left hillside has some stairs leading to it. Characters can sometimes get stuck on the top step for a moment when walking up the stairs. It is also strange that characters need to use the stairs to reach the top of that hill instead of walking up the hill without the stairs, since the hill at that point is not noticeably steeper than the earlier part of the hill closer to the road. The player just walks into an invisible wall around the hilltop without any indication that it is impassable. Moving up the hill from the road looks awkward because it is so steep and characters' feet often do not touch the ground. I recommend making a sharper visual distinction between passable and impassable terrain. Hills that the player can walk up should be less steep, while hills that should not be walked on should be nearly vertical like cliffs so that the player has a better idea of what is passable. The border between passable and impassable terrain should be very sharp and clear.

### **3.2.4 Bridge Pathfinding**

Pathfinding for both AI party members and enemies is disrupted by the edge of the first bridge. The second bridge seems fine. Walking an individual active character using WASD controls does allow passage onto and off of the bridge, but mouse control fails.

### **3.2.5 Gaps Where Player Can Exit Level Bounds**

#### **3.2.5.1 Gap On Left of Healing Cache**

Walking up the hill left of the healing cache allows the player to go past the windmills.



### 3.2.5.2 Gap Behind House to Mountain

The player can walk behind the last house on the left of the road and then walk to the right of the house and up the hill.





### 3.2.5.3 Gaps Between Fences and House Doorways

The player can walk through the gaps between the fences and the house doorways where the fence leads up to the door. There is fire there, so players may not think to try to walk through the gap, but it is still passable, and allows the player to go behind the houses toward the valley.

### 3.2.5.4 Gap Behind House to Valley

If the player can get behind the last house on the right side of the road (by walking through the fence gaps described in 3.2.5.3) there is a gap between two trees that the player can use to enter the valley.



### 3.2.5.5 Gap at Second Bridge to Mountain

The player can walk around the second bridge by going left up the hill. From the hillside next to that bridge, the player can also walk up the mountain to exit the level or walk down under the bridge into the valley.



### 3.2.5.6 Gap to Right of Path After Bridge

The right side of the path between the bridge and temple door is completely open to allow players to go down to the valley.

### 3.2.6 Armory Exterior

When walking to the armory door, the player can get caught on the doorstep sometimes.

## 3.3 Armory Interior

### 3.3.1 Ayla Conversation

Ayla tells a story about a cursed bow, but the player's response refers to a cursed sword.

"Story goes that one day a guy picked up this bow..."



"So? It could have been just that one sword that was cursed."

Also, the word "guy" seems out of place in the setting.

### **3.3.2 Treasure Chests**

The chests have strange names. The heavy chainmail and the bows are extremely useful, but none of the gear feels very special or worthwhile to put such a devastating curse on. The warpaint looks strange on Brio.

### **3.3.3 Skeleton Fight**

This room is too cramped to maneuver. Party members cannot find their targets and often stand there doing nothing, which is frustrating. I recommend removing the dividers in the middle of the room and putting the chests up against the room walls. Grabbing the bows from the chests first can make the fight more manageable. The fight triggered by `armory_chest_3` is probably the fourth hardest fight in the game. By this point, the player has had a chance to acquire armor and healing, but the fight involves 3 yellows and 1 orange along with 2 whites, which is more elites than the player has to fight anywhere else in the game. The difficulty is not unreasonable, but it is very hard. It is as hard as a fight can possibly be without becoming unfair.

### **3.3.4 Ash Wraith Fight**

Like the skeleton fight, the ash wraith fight is made more frustrating by the room layout. The difficulty is very hard, but reasonable. Ayla's armor seems useless against the wraith's magic, so it can nearly kill her with one spell. It is the thirteenth most difficult fight in the game.

## **3.4 Temple Interior Entrance**

The door back to the town cannot be highlighted as an object.

### **3.4.1 Wormiel First Fight**

This may be the toughest Wormiel fight, but that is because having Kinley makes every later fight easier (mages are the most powerful characters in Dragon Age). In terms of how strong the enemies are though, this is the easiest Wormiel fight because there are so few opponents. The only way to win is to kill the mages before they cast any high damage spells, which requires using Brio to stun them. If any two mages focus fire on any character, that character dies. That means if I get unlucky, and two mages decide to

attack Ayla, she dies. If I get unlucky and any mage casts fireball as his first spell, I lose. The power of mages to instantly kill off characters makes all the mage fights in the game depend greatly on luck. Ayla cannot use Taunt during a mage fight because they will kill her. If I kill any enemies, I can loot their bodies during the fight, but after the fight the bodies turn invisible and unselectable, even though their names are still there. This is the sixth most difficult fight in the game. (Most the hardest fights in the game are in the first half.)

### **3.4.2 Kinley**

It is possible to pick the lock on Kinley's cage before speaking with him, and he still asks to be freed. Kinley's Magic ability is too low to equip the Piece of Wood staff in the chest next to him. His Magic is also too low to select Fireball or any other third tier spell for another two or three levels. I recruited him at level 4 with a Magic of 19. A human mage starts the game with at least 16 Magic and has 5 points to spend. Considering that characters earn 3 ability points per level, where did Kinley put all his points? He should have had 14 points to allocate by this time, so why are only 3 of them in his Magic stat? My other characters have their primary stats in the mid-20s by this time. The enemy bloodmages I fought to free Kinley were casting Fireball, which requires 27 Magic to cast, indicating they are far better mages than Kinley. Despite this deficiency, as a mage, Kinley is still the most powerful character in the party once his Magic stat is increased. If players do not modify their active four party members after recruiting Kinley, Kinley becomes an extra active member who fights alongside the party, but cannot be ordered to use his talents.

## **3.5 Animal Path**

This is by far the easiest path to take first since none of the battles are particularly hard. Ayla's tanking ability is effective against everything on this path. The armor and bows from the armory help make most of the fights easy. The Bloodmage Path is by far the hardest, and Ayla's armor and shield are nearly useless there, so clearly the best choice is to take the Animal Path to help Kinley level up his Magic enough to carry the party on the other paths.

### **3.5.1 Bloodmage with the Wolves**

After rescuing the bloodmage from the wolves, at the first conversation branch, selecting "What are you doing here" breaks the conversation and causes the bloodmage to run away. The journal is still updated as if the bloodmage had told the player about the talking animals. At the same branch, selecting "Get out" causes the conversation to restart. Later in the conversation, the player can say "You can leave now," which also causes the conversation to restart.

Later in the conversation, the player can ask if Taela let her minions know if the animals could talk, and the bloodmage's response has a word usage error:

"I hope it was the former, because if it was the [later than] we all failed miserably."

This should be changed to [latter, then].

(If you want to send me a copy of all the game text, I could grammar/punctuation check it for you.)

### **3.5.2 Spider Ambush at Treasure Chest**

In a large cavern later in the area, there is a treasure chest. Approaching the chest triggers spiders to drop from the ceiling near the chest, although one also drops in the tunnel leading down into this cavern. It is possible to use a stealth character to trigger the ambush but not get attacked. It's like the spiders are ambushing nothing. This was also possible in many parts of the original Dragon Age, and looks strange.

### **3.5.3 Transition to Spider Boss Area**

The transition is sudden and jarring. The player needs some indication that the zone is about to end. In the original Dragon Age, a mouseover exit icon would appear on the exit trigger, and walking into the trigger would prompt players to check if they were sure they wanted to exit.

## **3.6 Spider Boss Area**

### **3.6.1 The Queen**

If Kinley is standing too far from the queen, the camera does not show him when he speaks during the conversation. It is possible to talk to the queen and recruit her into the party before killing all the spiders in the room. However, spiders keep attacking even with the queen joining. If players do not modify their active four party members after recruiting the Queen, she becomes an extra active member who fights alongside the party, but cannot be ordered to use her talents. The Queen may equip items as a human, such as swords and armor

### **3.6.2 Transition Back to Animal Path**

The transition is sudden and jarring. The player needs some indication that the zone is about to end. In the original Dragon Age, a mouseover exit icon would appear on the exit

trigger, and walking into the trigger would prompt players to check if they were sure they wanted to exit.

### **3.7 Darkspawn Path**

This is the medium difficulty path. The ogres, shrieks, and emissaries make the battles more varied and challenging than the animal path. Ayla is capable of tanking most enemies on this path, but healing from Kinley makes a big difference against the ogres. Every party member can be useful here. Overall, this is the best-designed part of the game in terms of combat difficulty for the average player. However there are numerous containers throughout the path that can be opened but contain nothing, which are distracting.

#### **3.7.1 Meeting Lanra**

At the first meeting with Lanra, there is a container called "Corpse" which is not visible and cannot be looted. This is in addition to the openable but empty container "Charred Corpse." The player's dialog choice "She seems a little loopy" feels strange for the setting.

#### **3.7.2 Ogre Room**

When encountering the first ogre, it is impossible to see into the ogre's room through the doorway. It is possible to fall off the walkway into the stairs by using WASD to walk or being knocked in by certain attacks. Mouse walking can bring a character back onto the walkway. It is also possible to walk up the fallen statue.

#### **3.7.3 Transition to Lanra Boss Area**

The transition is sudden and jarring. The player needs some indication that the zone is about to end. In the original Dragon Age, a mouseover exit icon would appear on the exit trigger, and walking into the trigger would prompt players to check if they were sure they wanted to exit.

### **3.8 Lanra Boss Area**

#### **3.8.1 Lanra Conversation**

When trying to get Lanra to leave, selecting the line "You're testing my patience here" ends the conversation with Lanra staying in the cave and the Ornate Chest with the holy armor cannot be opened.

### **3.8.2 Transition Back to Darkspawn Path**

The transition is sudden and jarring. The player needs some indication that the zone is about to end. In the original Dragon Age, a mouseover exit icon would appear on the exit trigger, and walking into the trigger would prompt players to check if they were sure they wanted to exit.

## **3.9 Bloodmage Path**

This path is very hard because most of the battles involve at least three enemy mages, and it only takes two or three strong spells to kill any party member. If the enemies ever decide to focus fire on a party member, that person is dead. Ayla's tanking ability is difficult to use here, since her armor seems ineffective against magic, although her high damage is still useful. Area effect abilities and healing also tend to draw group aggression, which make them risky to use as well. Winning is a matter of hoping the enemy mages do not cast heavy spells or focus fire for their first attack. If the mages do not kill off party members with their first attack, it is not too difficult to kill the mages before they can do anything else, but players have to really be lucky in the first few seconds of the fight. This path requires better tactical ability than the average player is likely to have, as well as good luck. However, good tactics do make a large difference in these fights, and they are the most tactically interesting fights in the game, even if some of them are inappropriately difficult. I highly recommend limiting the number of mages per battle to one or two (including Wormiel) and replacing the others with demons, undead, or golems that do not have so much frontloaded damage. This will decrease the likelihood of the player simply dying at the start of the fight from bad luck. Another possibility is to keep a high number of mages, but replace their spells so that at most two use damage spells while the rest use Heal and disabling spells like Paralysis, Horror, and Mind Blast, along with personal defense spells like Rock Armor and Arcane Shield. This shifts their emphasis from damaging the party to preventing damage from the party, keeping the mages useful but not as lethal.

### **3.9.1 Entrance Fight**

This fight against five mages is totally dependent on luck. There are enough mages to kill the whole party instantly if they use the right spells. Usually, the AI is not smart enough to do that, but it is easy for them to randomly kill off one party member before the player can act. Even with good tactics, bad luck can kill the player, making this fight unfair. This is the eighth most difficult fight in the game. After this fight plus finishing the other two paths, Kinley is finally strong enough to cast Fireball and use his starting staff.



### **3.9.2 Wormiel in the Hallway**

This time Wormiel has more support than during the first encounter, but it is easier because now the party has Kinley to heal and it is possible to draw some of the enemies away from the rest of the group so as to not fight all of them at once. The mages can still focus fire to kill off a party member, but this is much less likely than in any of the other mage fights since they do not all engage at once. This is the ninth most difficult fight in the game. It is very hard, but using good tactics can help a lot so it does not seem unfair.

### **3.9.3 Wormiel with the Archers**

There are a lot of archers, but Ayla can tank them and Kinley can now Fireball them all to death very quickly. Wormiel himself still makes this fight dangerous though. This is the tenth most difficult fight in the game. It is very hard, but using good tactics can help a lot so it does not seem unfair.

### **3.9.4 Wormiel Finale**

Since Wormiel has a lot of mage support, it is harder to use Ayla to tank, but Kinley's Fireball can help kill enough of the mages quickly so that Ayla can get back to tanking. Even though there are more mages here than during the entrance fight, it is less likely for them to focus down one of the party members instantly because they do not all engage at the same time. This fight is much like the hallway fight against Wormiel. Again, it helps to draw some of the enemies away from the main group, and it is easier to do so here than in the hallway. There is also more room to retreat or maneuver, and the player can run all the way back to the entrance of the level if necessary. This is the seventh most difficult fight in the game, and the difficulty is appropriate for a final battle against a villain. Even though the player faces more mages here than during the Bloodmage Path entrance fight, this fight is only slightly more difficult because terrain and positioning are more favorable to the player this time, enabling tactical maneuvers that were not possible at the entrance. It is very hard, but using good tactics can help a lot so it does not seem unfair.

#### **3.9.4.1 Wormiel's Teleportation**

Wormiel's excuse that he lost because he ran out of teleportation runes may be a bit out of place unless it is further developed. In the Dragon Age universe, teleportation by humans is accepted by most mages as being impossible due to how magic works. This is in Codex Entry 83: The Cardinal Rules of Magic. If Wormiel was able to somehow defy the rules of magic, I would expect Kinley to be quite shocked. It would also be simple to change his teleportation runes to ninja smoke bombs with a visual effect similar to that of a Choking Powder Cloud Trap combined with Stealth.

## **3.10 Taela Boss Area**

### **3.10.1 Taela's Guards Fight**

This is the most unfair fight in the game except for the first fight when the player meets Ayla. There are many mages that can focus fire and kill party members easily. They often cast fireball and if they cast two Fireballs, the party is dead. The enemies have a major positioning advantage behind their barricade, which makes them immune to archers and melee. The time it takes to walk the party around the barricade is more than enough for the mages to kill the party if they attack correctly. This fight is probably impossible without Kinley. Even with Kinley, it requires a lot of luck and careful tactics. The barricade makes for a very interesting tactical encounter since mages can shoot through it but other characters cannot, but combined with the overwhelming firepower of the enemies it is too much. Here more than anywhere else in the game, I urge replacing most of the mages with something else and just keeping two elite mages, or replacing the mages' damage spells. This is the second most difficult fight in the game.

### **3.10.2 Meeting Taela**

Taela's comment on Kinley's name, "How extraordinarily unassuming," seems too much like the writer telling rather than showing, like Anakin Skywalker constantly telling Padme how much he loves her rather than letting the audience sense it. It feels wrong for a character to have to point this out. The name actually is not that unassuming, since the player has little context by which to evaluate people's names in this world, so rather than agree with Taela when she makes the comment, I find myself wondering "Really?"

If players do not modify their active four party members after recruiting Taela, she becomes an extra active member who fights alongside the party, but cannot be ordered to use her talents.

#### **3.10.2.1 Kinley**

I like how open-minded Kinley is about working with both Girk and Taela. In many games, characters can be irrationally obstinate in their opinions, but Kinley's flexibility makes him seem very wise. At the same time, he has a clear sense of values so he is not wishy-washy either. He is not a weak-minded character who can be charmed into going against his beliefs, but he is smart enough to come to his own conclusions about when compromises are efficient.

### **3.10.2.2 The Queen**

Siding with Taela against Kinley does not anger the Queen, although given how the Queen reacts during the meeting with the Five, it probably should.

### **3.10.2.3 Fighting Taela**

The Taela fight does not work. She turns into a pride demon but just stands there. The player can fight and kill the abominations however.

### **3.10.2.4 Meeting Taela Repeatedly**

It is also possible to talk to Taela after she joins the party and speak as if just meeting her. If this is done in her boss room and the player angers her, it triggers the pride demon and abominations to spawn, and Taela can help fight the abominations. If the player angers her while in the hallway with Thorwald, this triggers an ogre alpha, genlock, and hurlock to spawn but just stand there.

### **3.10.3 Taela Character Build**

Like Kinley, Taela starts with an unusually low Magic ability for her level. I recruited her at level 8 but with a Magic of 25. My main rogue character had a Dexterity around 40 at this point. Her Magic is also not high enough for her to cast third tier spells, even though many enemies in the game have been casting them. Strangely, she does start off knowing Fireball even though her Magic is too low to learn it. She is the only character with a specialization, which is shapechanger. This is surprising since I thought she was supposed to be a bloodmage. Since Kinley is the Bloodhand, it would make sense for him to also have access to bloodmage specialization.

## ***3.11 Chamber of the Five***

Purity is not capitalized, but it probably should be.

After entering this room the first time, it is possible to exit back into Thorwald's hall without talking to the Five, and go all the way back through the Temple Entrance where Kinley and Wormiel are met. However, after exiting, the player cannot re-enter the chamber of the Five.

### **3.11.1 Meeting the Five**

During the conversation, there is a blurry obstruction that partially hides the Five.

It is never explained why the Holy Armor is needed to enter the chamber and what its connection to Ayla is. Who created the Holy Armor and what was its purpose? Why does Ayla need to die?

When the Five talk about coming to the temple because they were losing a war against barbarians, Kinley says "Newsflash, you lost," which feels out of place for the setting.

The Five mention the existence of an altar in the temple that can create vessels like Ayla. This makes me wonder where the altar is. If this altar is never seen in the game, and knowledge of its existence is not critical to the plot, I recommend not mentioning it.

Ayla comes to the conclusion that the village elders knew of her identity as the vessel. However, the motivation of the elders for keeping her there and sending her back to the Five remains unclear.

It is difficult to believe that killing Ayla is the only way to escape the temple. Every player's first thought will be simply to kill the Five and fight through the temple to the exit. Given that the party has killed everything encountered during the adventure so far, it is hard to imagine something the party cannot kill. There needs to be some explanation for why the party cannot destroy the Five.

### **3.11.1.1 Text Errors**

When asking the Five what Ayla has to do, their response has a capitalization error:

"[all] we need is to drench our bones with her blood..."

If the player decides to kill Ayla while Kinley is in the party, one of Kinley's responses has a punctuation error:

"I'm not letting an innocent [girls] blood be shed for the benefit of these Tevinter dogs."

### **3.11.1.2 The Queen**

If the player immediately decides to kill Ayla, Kinley objects, but the Queen has no special dialog, although she sides with Kinley and Ayla against the player. The Queen only has special dialog if the player initially refuses to kill Ayla and the Five make her an offer. After Kinley persuades the Queen to stay with him against the Five, then the Queen says something when the player decides to go against Ayla.

### **3.11.1.3 Taela**

Taela does not have any special dialog during this scene, which is surprising.

### **3.11.2 Fighting the Party**

Choosing to kill Ayla while Kinley and the Queen are in the party leads to an extremely difficult fight with the player alone against everybody. This is the third most difficult fight in the game, and is only possible if the player has many healing items. Although the fight seems nearly impossible, the difficulty is still fair since the fight can easily be avoided. It is a good optional fight for players who want an extreme challenge.

## ***3.12 Escape with Ayla Ending***

### **3.12.1 Ogre Fight**

The battle against the ogre alpha is the most visually and tactically interesting of the end fights. It takes place in an impressive-looking room against a couple different enemy types. However, it is not an especially challenging battle, since most of the battles before the temple and during the Bloodmage Path were much harder.

### **3.12.2 Lanra**

If Lanra helps the party escape Thorwald's hall, the player can return to the hall later and speak with Lanra again to repeat her conversation.

### **3.12.3 End**

The actual ending is abrupt, as the game exits to the main menu right before the party reaches the temple exit.

## ***3.13 Inside Purity***

The conversation with Purity is has some odd moments. Supposedly, Purity takes the form of the player's mother, but since the player never sees the mother alive and cannot recognize her, this has no dramatic impact. It would be more meaningful if Purity looked like Ayla.

The player says the Five will be reborn as a baby. This is an unnecessary plot detail that will never be further developed, and distracts the player from the immediate situation. It also unclear why the player character would know this.

Purity never gives a good reason to trust her. The player's only dialog choice when deciding to help her is to "accept fate," which is more or less what all the treacherous liars throughout the game have been telling the player to do. She is not any more credible than the Five or Thorwald or Skymas. She is just another quest giver sending the player on a suicide mission. Who is Purity to decide what fate is? Stopping the Five may be worth dying for, but what does it have to do with fate? It would be nice for the player to have some response that challenges her credibility and addresses all the betrayal witnessed so far in the story. Perhaps the player does not believe that killing the Five is necessary to save the world, but decides to try to hurt them anyway to avenge Ayla or out of resentment for being used.

### **3.13.1 Fighting Purity Ending**

#### **3.13.1.1 Purity Fight**

Purity has a few interesting attacks, like a stun and knockdown, but Dragon Age is optimized for group versus group combat, and one-on-one fights in this system tend to be tactically boring. As a rogue archer, this fight was not very difficult, especially since I had saved up healing poultices. I just kept attacking my one target and healed when needed. There is no decision-making about whom to attack or heal, or where to move. However this fight would probably be impossible if the player came into it with no healing items. The fight against Purity takes place in a very boring room.

This fight would be more tactically interesting if in the middle of the fight, the game enters a dialog in which Purity turns into a full dragon, but the Five get released to help against her.

#### **3.13.1.2 Girk**

Girk may still be in the party after returning from within Purity, and leaves the temple with the player. It seems strange for Girk to tag along at this point.

#### **3.13.1.3 End**

Like in the escape with Ayla ending, the actual end when approaching the temple exit is very abrupt.

### 3.13.2 Fighting the Five Inside Purity Ending

Having to fight five consecutive battles without rest seems intimidating at first, until it becomes clear that most of the Five are fairly weak. This is like a very long one-on-one fight like the one against Purity, in which the player just attacks the same target repeatedly and uses healing items when needed. The desire demon has some interesting attacks. The ash wraith also has some good attacks, and is actually somewhat challenging. The others are extremely weak and boring. The most disappointing one was the pride demon, because it could not even damage my rogue, despite being the last one and having the most intimidating appearance. If the enemies were all upgraded to yellow level, it would make the fight tenser, although still not tactically interesting. This fight also takes place in a very boring room.

This fight would be more tactically interesting if Purity joined the player and they fought all the Five at once.

## 4. Overall

### 4.1 Story

The story starts strong with the village being destroyed by darkspawn, leaving the player wondering what is going on. Each of the three paths within the temple have their own mini-plots, which are successful and also help flesh out details of the backstory. However, the main plot itself does not go anywhere, and seems to be put on hold while exploring the three paths. Thorwald's explanation about destiny and collecting the Holy Armor pieces is not very interesting. The twist that comes after, when it is revealed that the whole destiny explanation was a lie, is good. It is never clear why the Holy Armor is important, where it came from, or how it got separated. It just seems like an excuse for a fetch quest. Fortunately, the mystery of talking animals, crazy Lanra, and wanting to kill Wormiel keep the player engaged. The player's ability to skip boss fights, recruit bosses, and kill party members allows for a great feeling of control in spite of the environments' small physical scope. This degree of plot control is the most impressive aspect of the game. The manipulation by the Five is interesting. The parts when they use Girk to kill Ayla or persuade the Queen to aid them are powerful. However, the Five themselves lack presence as villains. They never do anything to show how dangerous they really are, and the battle against them inside Purity is quite easy. Taela and Purity claim the Five are dangerous, but that is telling rather than showing, and not very convincing. In contrast, Wormiel may not be as great as he claims, but he is definitely powerful and has a persisting presence throughout the game that makes him matter to the player. Wormiel seems like the single most powerful character in the game and I get the impression he could kill the Five. How are the Five so dangerous that players must sacrifice their lives to stop them? In spite of the Five supposedly being joined as one, they always seem to appear as Five whether in their chamber or inside Purity. The relationship between

Thorwald and Skymas and the Five is never made clear. It is never really explained why Ayla needs to die for the Five to return.

## **4.2 Characters**

### **4.2.1 Kinley**

Kinley is a very likeable character. He is both roguish and responsible. He has a clear personal code of ethics and duty, but is also very compromising. He agrees with the player because he is intelligent and not because he is a sheep that needs to be persuaded. He is charming and confident, especially when sticking with his lies even when he knows the player knows he is lying. His role as the Bloodhand and his secret mission give him the most interesting story of all the party members. This character is worth developing in a full length RPG.

### **4.2.2 Ayla**

Ayla is an ordinary girl who wants to survive and help her sister. It is easy to identify with her even if she is not as likeable as the more heroic Kinley. Her interactions with Lanra help to flesh her out and make her more human so that the player cares more if Ayla dies. She is an incredibly durable warrior for such an ordinary person though. This is never really explained, but it may have something to do with her being the vessel. Her status as an animated person with no soul is odd within the Dragon Age universe. Almost everything that moves in Dragon Age is animated by a soul. Undead are corpses containing demons. Golems are stone with dwarf souls. What animates Ayla? Also, what motivates her to rescue the player hero at the beginning and enter the temple?

### **4.2.3 Wormiel**

Wormiel is too arrogant to know when he has lost. He is a persistent and powerful foe, so finally defeating him feels good. It would be amusing to play up his sense of self-greatness even more. It is unfortunate that he does not appear later in the story. As the only persistent enemy in the game, he is a better antagonist than the Five. I would like to see what happens to him in the end. It would be reasonable for him to return to aid Taela at some point.

### **4.2.4 The Queen**

The Queen has an interesting backstory and a distinctive personality. Her role as a boss makes her especially memorable as a party member. Her willingness to aid the player



despite having been enemies makes her likeable. The interaction between her, Kinley, and the Five is also very good.

#### **4.2.5 Taela**

Taela's wish to work with the player despite having been enemies makes her likeable and memorable. The possibility of losing Kinley during that meeting also helps to make it a memorable encounter.

#### **4.2.6 Lanra**

Lanra seems a straightforward crazy character, but when she offers to aid the party, she becomes interesting. Her coming to help or avenge Ayla during the escape is a very memorable moment.

#### **4.2.7 Girk**

Girk is interesting because of the option to kill him at the start and seeing the end result of not killing him. As a character, he does not bring much, but as a medium for exploring player choice and causal relationships, he is excellent. Killing Girk after he kills Ayla is a cool moment. The fight is extremely easy and not all that satisfying, which has an interesting effect from a storytelling perspective, since revenge really can be simple and unsatisfying. He snuffs out Ayla's life in an instant, and it takes the player only a few seconds to kill him for it. It highlights the fragility of life and the futility of vengeance. Girk was just a puppet anyway.

#### **4.2.8 Skymas**

Who is Skymas? What is his relationship with the Five? What is his motivation?

#### **4.2.9 Thorwald**

Who is Thorwald? What is his relationship with the Five? Why is he standing outside the chamber of the Five and why are they inside?

#### **4.2.10 Purity**

Is Purity really part of the Maker? She does not seem credible after all the lies experienced throughout the game. Her explanation that the Five are a grave threat to the

world is not particularly convincing. It is not enough for a real person to give his life for. I cannot simply take her word that the Five will bring about the apocalypse. What kind of power do they have? Why not simply go back to the normal world and kill the Five there? Also, Purity's response to the player's refusal to help is odd. If she thinks the player is strong enough to kill the Five, and she thinks she is strong enough to kill the player, why does she not kill the Five herself?

### **4.3 Combat**

Combat difficulty progresses awkwardly. The game starts out very difficult, but then it gets much easier after meeting Wormiel. Afterwards, the only very difficult fights are the ones during the Bloodmage Path, some of which are inappropriately difficult. Purity and the Five are durable enemies, but tactics make no difference against them, so they are not interesting end bosses. The best fights in the game are against ogres for average players or against Wormiel for advanced players. The last fight against Wormiel is a very good fight. The difficulty at the beginning of the game makes it seem like it is designed for hardcore tacticians. When the difficulty lowers to average Dragon Age difficulty during the animal and darkspawn paths, the change is startling, although it can also be a welcome relief. The fights during the animal path seem a bit easy, but they are still good for leveling up Kinley, who starts with poor abilities. It is unclear what skill level the game is targeting. Despite there being three paths to take in any order, the large difference in difficulty between them makes it most rational to take animal first, darkspawn second, and bloodmage last. The player can choose a different order, but is given no obvious reason to do so. I recommend targeting the average player and changing all the fights to match the difficulty of the darkspawn path, but making all the boss fights similar in difficulty to the Wormiel fights.

#### **4.3.1 Most Difficult Fights**

- (1) Ayla's Room (3.1.2) (unfair)
- (2) Taela's Guards Fight (3.10.1) (unfair)
- (3) Killing Ayla, Kinley, and the Queen (3.11.2) (near impossible but fair given the circumstances)
- (4) Armory Chest 3 Skeletons (3.3.3)
- (5) Meeting Girik (3.2.1.1) (unfair)
- (6) Wormiel First Fight (3.4.1)
- (7) Wormiel Finale (3.9.4)
- (8) Bloodmage Path Entrance (3.9.1) (unfair)
- (9) Wormiel in the Hallway (3.9.2)
- (10) Wormiel with Archers (3.9.3)
- (11) Purity Fight (3.13.1.1)
- (12) The Five (3.13.2)
- (13) Armory Ash Wraith (3.3.4)
- (14) Any Ogre Fight

Anything not on this list is not particularly difficult. Even ogre fights are not truly difficult, but they are on the list for comparison purposes. Some of the unfair fights are less difficult than fair ones because they can be impossible or easy depending on how the AI chooses to attack. If this game is meant to target the average gamer, I recommend lowering the difficulty on all fights ranked 1 through 10. If this game is meant for advanced players, then only the ones marked unfair absolutely need to be changed.

#### **4.4 Treasure**

Most of the items gained during the game are not especially memorable, but that is also the case with Dragon Age overall. By the end of the game, the party has a few magic melee weapons, most of which were from the armory. The temple itself contains little reward, and enemies do not drop special loot. The darkspawn path has many treasure containers, but with no treasure inside them. Ayla gains the Holy Armor, but nobody else is able to fully replace the armor they had at level 1. There are also no bow upgrades for archer characters, so by the end they are still using the tier 1 bows from the armory. There is no steady progression of loot quality. Almost all the gear is either tier 1, which is weak, or tier 6, which is unusable until late in the game. Since there are no merchants, much of the loot dropped by enemies is pointless since it cannot be sold. Gold is useless. Gems are useless. Most crafting components are useless since the player cannot buy recipes or the additional components necessary to complete an item. Runes are useless without an enchanter. The only useful items dropped by enemies are the occasional healing items and the belts dropped by the bloodmages. Sometimes one of the bombs or a swift salve can be useful too, but they are rare. I highly recommend replacing all the useless item drops with usable equipment.

#### **4.5 Non-Combat Skill Use**

There are almost no opportunities to use non-combat skills, which is something a new player should be warned about when building a character. There are no traps to disable and no pockets to pick. There are almost no locks to pick or people to persuade. Crafting is nearly impossible without access to a merchant. One rank of Poison-Making can be useful for using some of the found poisons. Survival rarely makes any difference, but it was weak in the original Dragon Age too. The only worthwhile skill is Combat Training.