

ARENA: SAHA

GAME DESIGN DOCUMENT

Exploration Action RPG • Knowledge • Choice • Consequence

Working GDD v0.3 • September 2026

Document status. This GDD consolidates the current single-player direction and the design decisions developed in the recent Arena work. Older competitive/four-playable-champion material is treated as legacy unless explicitly reintroduced. New companion details discussed recently are marked as evolving design rather than silently treated as old canon.

1. High Concept

Arena: Saha is a third-person exploration action RPG about knowledge, intention, relationships and consequence. The player controls Tariq, an initially ordinary seeker who becomes capable through exploration, training, investigation and experience. The world remembers what he learns, whom he trusts, what he chooses, and how he uses knowledge.

Player fantasy: Become capable because you understood the world - not because a menu simply raised your level.

Core verbs: Explore • Investigate • Choose • Learn • Train • Traverse • Fight • Become.

2. Design Pillars

Pillar	Design promise
Exploration & Parkour	Vertical environments, hidden routes, landmarks, traversal challenges and discoveries reward curiosity.
Investigation	Clues, testimony, manuscripts and environmental evidence give the player information that can materially change later play.
Choice & Consequence	Choices change relationships, routes, opportunities, skill access and story states rather than only moving a morality meter.
Learning & Training	Important abilities are discovered or offered through experience, then trained and practiced before mastery.
Knowledge as Value	Intelligence represents accumulated understanding, experience and wisdom inside the fiction; it is not a scientific IQ score.
Reactive World	NPCs, companions, factions and regions can remember important decisions and respond later.
Boss as Examination	Regional bosses test what the player learned in that region, not only combat statistics.

3. Core Gameplay Loop

Explore → Discover / Investigate → Understand → Choose → World Responds → Train / Gain Intelligence → Prepare → Boss / Major Challenge → Consequence → New Journey.

Exploration produces information. Information changes what the player understands. Understanding enables decisions and preparation. Decisions alter relationships and world state. Training turns discovered opportunities into usable skills.

Major encounters then test the combined result.

4. Player Character - Tariq

Status: sole required playable protagonist for the current MVP. **Starting identity:** young traveler/seeker, not an assassin, fixed class, chosen super-warrior, or predetermined mage. His mechanical and visual identity should evolve from the journey.

Area	Direction
Movement	Third-person movement, sprint, jump, mantle, vault, climb and ledge traversal; exact parkour set is prototype-driven.
Investigation	Scholar's Eye / inspection direction reveals meaningful evidence and leads without automatically solving mysteries.
Combat	One practical primary sword plus learned techniques and contextual tools. Combat is one pillar, not Tariq's entire identity.
Alchemy	Material-state or transmutation interactions are a supported Al-Madinah direction.
Knowledge	Codex, clues, manuscripts and learned world rules support investigation and Intelligence.
Growth	Tariq changes through training, discoveries, companions, cultures/factions and decisions; avoid locking him into one class tree.

5. Companions & Relationships

The current relationship direction keeps Tariq as the player-controlled protagonist. **Layla, Romulus and Noor Shaheen** are companion/NPC characters whose beliefs, knowledge, availability and story arcs can react to Tariq. They are not automatically extra playable heroes.

Character	Current design direction	How they can affect Tariq
Layla	Companion associated with hidden knowledge, portals/invisible routes and another perspective on reality.	Can expose knowledge or traversal opportunities; trust/disagreement can change what she shares and which events remain available.
Romulus	Companion associated with land, animals, territory and the Nova Roma side of the world.	Can influence Tariq's understanding of creatures, territory, survival and regional conflicts; his support should depend on relationship state.
Noor Shaheen	Companion direction associated with truth, revelation/insight and Silent Heights; exact biography remains open.	Can help Tariq notice or interpret things he might miss. Her arc should have independent goals and should react to Tariq's choices.

Relationship rule: companions are not skill vending machines. Each has goals and limits. Tariq can agree, disagree, earn trust, lose support, learn from them, or alter their future. Different combinations of relationships should produce different versions of the same Tariq.

6. Influence, Not Classes

The broader peoples/cultures/factions of Arena should influence Tariq rather than becoming six rigid classes. A player may learn techniques, knowledge, traversal methods or perspectives from multiple sources. The final playstyle is a hybrid created by the player's journey.

The exact final list of six peoples/nations is **not yet sufficiently defined in the current source material**. Older material references Humans, Jinn, Animals and Angels, while newer discussion introduces other cultural/alchemical directions. The final six should be locked before production naming and faction UI are finalized.

7. Skill Discovery, Training & Upgrade

Stage	Player experience
1. Opportunity	A discovery, mentor, companion, region event, boss consequence or behavior makes a skill opportunity available.
2. Offer	When appropriate, the system can present a small set of context-sensitive skill offers rather than an enormous static tree.
3. Training	The player must learn or train the technique; ownership is not identical to mastery.
4. Practice	Use in traversal, investigation or combat builds familiarity and proves the mechanic.
5. Upgrade	Further experience, materials, relationship access or meaningful use can evolve the skill.
6. Consequence	A learned ability can create new solutions, but choosing one path can also mean delaying or losing another opportunity.

The system should avoid generic XP farming. Repeating trivial actions should not be the optimal way to become 'wise' or unlock every skill.

8. Intelligence - Knowledge as Currency / Value

Intelligence represents accumulated understanding, knowledge, experience and wisdom inside Arena's fiction. It is deliberately broader than IQ. Discovering hidden architecture, understanding a boss pattern, solving an investigation, learning a world rule or connecting evidence can contribute to it.

Potential uses include knowledge services, specialist training, access, interpretation, tools or other knowledge-driven economy sinks. One unresolved design question remains important: whether spending Intelligence literally reduces Tariq's cognitive capability, or whether the spendable balance is separated from his persistent knowledge state. The latter may be clearer to balance.

9. Niyyah System

Intelligence asks: What did Tariq understand? **Niyyah asks:** Why/how did he choose, and what pattern did his behavior form?

Niyyah is a fictional game system for context and behavioral consistency - **not** a measurement of a real person's religious intention, faith, or moral worth, and not a simple good/evil bar. The world should communicate it mainly through consequences, relationships and opportunities rather than a constant moral score.

10. World & Regions

Region	Current thematic role
Al-Madinah Al-Khafiya	Hidden city; manuscripts, alchemy/material interactions, investigation and the Archivist thread. Primary MVP region.
Nova Roma	Ancient-imperial / territorial direction; associated in older material with Romulus and animals/territory.
Silent Heights	Mountain/highland direction; associated in older material with Noor's truth/revelation concepts.
Veil Quarter	Hidden/other-reality direction associated with Jinn/portals in older material; requires careful final fictional treatment.
Barzakh	Liminal/borderland concept from earlier world work. Religious terminology and representation require deliberate review before final canon.

The world should feel interconnected, vertical and discoverable. Visual identity can combine ancient architectural language, regional cultures, alchemical technology and restrained supernatural layers. Religious or theological imagery should never be added casually just because it looks fantastical.

11. Al-Madinah MVP Slice

Prototype goal: prove the game thesis with one character, one compact region fragment, one investigation, one relationship/faction conflict, one Intelligence interaction, three contextual skill offers, and one boss.

Beat	Playable content
Arrival	Tariq enters a compact Al-Madinah district and learns baseline movement, camera and interaction.
Exploration	Rooftops, alleys, vertical landmarks and at least one hidden route demonstrate parkour and curiosity reward.
Investigation	A missing manuscript / archive mystery introduces evidence, testimony and Scholar's Eye.
Choice	The player decides how to act on incomplete or conflicting information; an NPC/relationship/world state changes.
Training / Skill	The journey produces a contextual skill opportunity that must be trained or practiced.
Boss	Archivist of the Closed Gate tests evidence-reading, material interactions and combat.
Verdict	The encounter ends with a consequential decision that changes the region or future opportunities.

12. Boss - Archivist of the Closed Gate

Phase	Design
Test of Evidence	False clues / misleading telegraphs. Investigation can help identify the real pattern, but knowledge should make the fight smarter rather than mandatory.
Transmutation Chamber	Walls/platforms or material states change the combat/traversal space; learned Al-Madinah rules create options.
Verdict	The conclusion is a choice, not merely a kill screen: e.g. destroy, preserve, expose, or another final set after narrative testing.

Reward philosophy: new understanding, world-state change, relationship/route consequence and a contextual skill opportunity. Raw damage should not be the only meaningful reward.

13. NPC & Faction Design

Important NPCs need a gameplay job: information, access, relationship, economy, training, route or consequence. For a vertical slice, a small authored cast with multiple states is stronger than dozens of static exposition characters.

At least one faction conflict should be present in the MVP. Exact faction names and the final six-group world structure remain open and should not be invented into canon prematurely.

14. Equipment & Gadgets

Item	Purpose	Status
Tariq's Sword	Practical primary combat weapon; can gain learned techniques without turning Tariq into a fixed warrior class.	Core
Field Codex	Records clues, world rules, discoveries and unresolved contradictions.	Proposed/supporting
Scholar Lens	Inspection/focus prop supporting investigation and Scholar's Eye.	Proposed/supporting
Alchemical Tool / Bracer	Applies learned material interactions in Al-Madinah.	Supported direction / form TBD
Utility / Climbing Gear	Supports traversal where useful; parkour itself should remain primarily character movement.	Optional MVP

15. HUD / UX Principles

HUD should remain readable and restrained: health/stamina/focus or equivalent player state, current objective, compass/minimap only if necessary, quick tools/abilities, contextual interaction prompts, and Intelligence when relevant. Niyyah should not become a permanent 'morality meter' that tells the player what the game thinks of every action.

Skill UI needs clear states: unavailable → opportunity discovered → training available → trained → upgraded. The UI must communicate *why* a skill became available.

16. Art & Audio Direction

Visual: grounded third-person fantasy with region-specific architecture, practical costumes, dark navy/stone foundations, restrained gold and blue-violet supernatural/knowledge accents. Tariq begins visually neutral and can accumulate subtle influence from his journey.

Audio: regional ambience, environmental storytelling, readable combat telegraphs and distinct sonic signatures for investigation, Intelligence discovery and supernatural layers. Final cultural instrumentation should be researched rather than treated as generic 'Middle Eastern fantasy'.

17. Technical Direction

Target engine and exact rendering pipeline remain production decisions. The prototype should prioritize stable third-person controls, traversal readability, AI/NPC state, saveable choice variables, investigation data and the dynamic-skill pipeline before expensive world technology.

Gaussian splatting / advanced capture may be explored as a production or environment technique, but it should earn its place by solving a concrete visual or workflow problem. It is not itself a gameplay pillar.

18. Accessibility

Planned baseline: remappable controls, subtitles, scalable UI/text, color-independent icon language, adjustable camera sensitivity, readable interaction prompts and difficulty/accessibility options for combat timing where feasible. Investigation clues should not rely solely on color.

19. Scope Control

Do not build the entire world first. The vertical slice succeeds if a new player can understand within a short session that exploration produces knowledge, knowledge changes choices/preparation, relationships react, training changes capability, and the boss tests what was learned.

Build now	Hold for later
Tariq + one polished movement/combat kit	Multiple playable protagonists
One Al-Madinah district	All world regions at production scale
One investigation chain	Huge quest database
Small companion/NPC presence	Full companion arcs for every region
One contextual skill-training loop	Massive static skill tree
One boss with 2-3 meaningful phases	Many bosses before core systems work
Choice-state persistence	Competitive/Battle Royale mode

20. Narrative & Religious/Cultural Guardrails

Arena may draw inspiration from intention, responsibility, knowledge, consequence and culturally specific environments. The fiction must not claim that a game variable measures a player's real religious intention or faith.

Direct representations or terminology involving angels, Jinn, Barzakh, afterlife, judgment, sacred texts or ritual practice require separate review before final publication. Where the design is not settled, temporary fictional terminology is safer during prototyping.

21. Business / Release - Not Yet Locked

Final monetization model, price, launch date, funding requirement, publisher requirement, sales forecast and full marketing plan are **not supported strongly enough by the current design material to lock into this GDD**. They should remain TBD rather than being invented.

The immediate deliverable should be a playable vertical slice and a short pitch package that proves the game's identity before forecasting a full production budget.

22. Current Open Design Questions

Question	Why it matters
What are the final six peoples/nations/influences?	Companion arcs, faction design, skills, worldbuilding and UI all depend on a stable taxonomy.
Exactly how does Intelligence spend work?	Avoid punishing learning or creating confusing 'become stupid when buying' behavior.
What variables drive Niyyah?	Needs understandable consequences without exposing a simplistic moral score.
How are companion relationship states represented?	Must affect availability, knowledge and story without becoming a dating-style meter by accident.
How many skills can Tariq combine?	Defines build diversity, balance and whether influence paths remain meaningful.
What is the MVP's exact ending state?	The slice needs a consequence that demonstrates the larger game's promise.

23. Vertical Slice Acceptance Criteria

The slice is successful when a first-time player can: (1) identify Tariq as an explorer/seeker rather than a preset class; (2) use parkour to discover meaningful information; (3) complete an investigation without the game solving it automatically; (4) make a decision that visibly changes an NPC/route/state; (5) understand why a skill opportunity appeared and train it; (6) use learned knowledge to alter a boss encounter; and (7) leave with a consequence that suggests a larger reactive world.

24. Short Pitch

Arena: Saha is a third-person exploration action RPG where what you learn and why you choose matter as much as how you fight. As Tariq, explore an interconnected world, investigate hidden truths, learn from companions and cultures, train evolving abilities, and face bosses that test your understanding. Knowledge has value, relationships remember your actions, and the same protagonist can become radically different through the player's journey.

GDD note: this document intentionally distinguishes current direction from unresolved or legacy material. It should be updated whenever the six influences, companion arcs, Intelligence economy, Niyyah rules, or MVP scope are formally locked.