

AL-QADIM 4E PITCH

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With the upcoming release of the new *Prince of Persia* video game this year, console gamers and RPG fans may be more receptive to a return of AL-QADIM. Since AL-QADIM will be compatible with FORGOTTEN REALMS you can tap that fan base too, and with 4th edition's reaching out to the MMORPG crowd you'll be netting those gamers who got into *Prince of Persia*, as well as getting the support of old-timers who loved AL-QADIM's immersive world and rich cultural context. 4th edition supports the play envisioned by AL-QADIM, and maintaining the story-rich world is a priority even while improving the setting.

WHY 4E FOR AL-QADIM?

1. Races united by the Enlightened Faith

In 4e all the races mix together in a cosmopolitan atmosphere. While incongruous to many fantasy settings, this fits the racially tolerant society portrayed in AL-QADIM, itself modeled after the racial tolerance of the Islamic caliphate.

2. Morally ambiguous dilemmas with multiple outcomes

4e puts alignment in the backseat and emphasizes a variety of ways to solve a problem, which is very in line with AL-QADIM's approach in which even the gods cannot be captured with alignment. Combat is an option, but in a world of powerful jinn, clever thinking and suave diplomacy are often more appealing. Conflicting loyalties and interpretations of the Enlightened faith defy "good" and "evil" definitions. It's not always easy to tell friend from foe, and the holy slayer you fight today could help you tomorrow.

3. Adventure trumps simulation & action centers on heroes

With the de-emphasis of simulation, and the "all adventure, all the time" philosophy of 4th edition, the over-the-top stunts of Aladdin or the Prince of Persia's evading complex traps become possible in AL-QADIM. The focus on the encounter allows long desert treks to be summed up with a skill challenge or a brief narrative. Also, while most folk are bound by duty and family, heroes are the center of swashbuckling action, with no one to fall back on.

4. Assumptions about "points of light" setting actually fit AL-QADIM

AL-QADIM is an ancient, fantastic, and mysterious world of holy swords once wielded by prophets, legendary caves of the Loregiver, feuding city-states separated by sweeping desert and grim raiders, sandstorm oracles revealing ruined kingdoms, hidden isles, and menacing jinn. Tyrannical caliphs and fanatic assassins join the ranks of shapeshifting rakshasa and deceitful ghuls; often times it's hard to know just who the monster is. It's a dangerous empire tenuously held together by faith, with the heroes determining its future.

KEEPING AL-QADIM'S FLAVOR

Emphasize the cultural context & traditions

The five virtues, Fate, the Loregiver, the call to prayer, the pilgrimage – these are things that every Enlightened Zakhara shares in common and help simulate the atmosphere of Zakhara.

Everything & everyone has a story

Keep stories as integral to the game, tying different stories into each other, tying rules back to stories and focusing on story first.

Convert kits into builds

Players often praise AL-QADIM's embracing of kits. Each kit (save the kahin) will be converted into a build of a corresponding class. Additionally, several new builds will be provided to enhance the new themes. In making the builds, change any features that unnecessarily burden the setting.

MAKING AL-QADIM EVEN BETTER

Explore more mature themes & play on divisiveness of empire

Several allusions are made to the bloodiness, the divisiveness, the dirty truth behind the golden veneer of Zakhara in the source material, but there was a light-heartedness to much of it. Introduce sectarianism to the Enlightened faith of Zakhara, have competitors to the throne, look at the feuding of the city-states (and they're explicitly called that too), etc. I'm not saying make it dark and rated R, but I think some mature themes could really improve the setting.

Tie the races tightly to the setting

Dwarves and elves seem incongruous in Arabian fantasy, and there was never any mythos of where they came from. Each race would have a story tying it to Zakhara and providing plot hooks for the DM.

Create a magic system suited to Arabian adventures

The adventurers in AL-QADIM were bound to the 2nd edition magic system which came with a lot of baggage. With the exceptions-based design of 4th edition there's a great opportunity to give the magic a unique feel with alternate class features and new powers. Miraculous recoveries, peris turning into ringdoves, dashing rogues escaping on flying carpets, summoned djinni hiding in the marketplace, calling down the evil eye – these are the magic of fantasy Arabia.

Assert the mysterious and menacing qualities of the jinn

Jinn certainly were powerful, and while it was advised to keep them rare, there was a certain Disney-fication that occurred with them. There were clearly good and bad genies, and they came

out of bottles, and many had a playful quality (like Hazim the Fool). While a little bit of this is fine, I'd like to see jinn made more mysterious, more menacing, more like they were perceived in Arabian myth. Most were selfish, and many had sided with Iblis, they had powers of possession, and were unique beings unto themselves who Muhammad even sought to convert.

Crystallize the history

AL-QADIM was vague with a lot of its history, in contrast to Muslim historians who take great pains to reconstruct exact phrases to ensure the train of transmission isn't tainted. While not everything needs to be set in stone, a better sense of large-scale events would be helpful for DMs.

Introduce unexplored conflicts & areas

What about the First Caliph's companions paralleling the companions of the prophet Muhammad? What about a divisive prince who escaped to found his own sultanate a la Andalus? What other tales have passed around about the Loregiver during her travels? There are so many sources for intriguing history that never got explored. Also, expand the edges of the empire, with Isles of the Utter South, Akota to the west, conquering nomads to the north, and the Jungle of Monsters to the east.

AN ERA OF FATE

As the FORGOTTEN REALMS has gotten a 100 year timeline advance, so with the Land of Fate. The 21st Grand Caliph is an old man, having secured peace throughout his demesnes, despite insidious allegations that he is not truly Khalil al-Assad's grandson. Now, his three sons are poised to take the throne, each with their own vision for Zakhara; mortal and djinni alike flock to their banners. The eldest son, a paladin blinded by faith, recovers the Lost Scrolls of the Loregiver, sparking a religious controversy with threatens to fracture the faith. The middle son, a cleric blinded by ambition, attempts to reform criminals and other undesirables with questionable techniques, leading to drastic consequences and backlash. The youngest son, a warlord blinded by love and hate, seeks the hand of the princess of Akota even if it takes war to win her as his trophy. Meanwhile, a mysterious contender to the throne has assumed the title "Caliph of the Shadows", wresting control of the Everlasting holy slayer fellowship to lead surgical strikes against Huzuz's authority throughout the empire. Never before has Zakhara needed Enlightened men and women to defend the land.

THE GREAT UNBINDING

A series of events and critical decisions during the time of Khalil al-Assad led to the breaking of Jafar al-Samal's seal and the freeing of countless jinn who wrecked havoc dancing with sandstorm and hurricane while their brethren revenged themselves upon sha'ir who bound them (or their living descendants). The dao, freed from bondage to the yikkaria, waged a war which shook the World Pillar Mountains for years, leading to a bitter standoff. A cursed race (tieflings) enslaved to devils in hell attained their freedom as prophesied by the First Caliph, and returned

to the Haunted Lands. An elusive race (eladrin), their mystical home become their prison, claimed to be the original inhabitants of the Garden of Paradise and interpret these events as signs – they returned from beyond the veil to seek clues to the Garden’s location. Sha’ir are no longer able to compel jinn to do their bidding, instead relying on contracts with the Djinni Lords to gain power over their subjects. Years later, these events come to be known as the Great Unbinding.

AL-QADIM’S NEW LOOK

Intrigue overtones to a divisive world clinging to the changing faith which united it. “Points of darkness” in the human heart give shadowy overtones to even the most pure-hearted heroes. There is a clear struggle between good and evil, even while more complex conflicts rage. Everyone must make a choice. Character art is more menacing, landscapes have tarnished metallic hues, emphasis on shadow and light, smoke, ripples in water, wind-swept silk. Art looks to Danish painter Kay Nielsen, classic fantasy artists like Ken Kelly, as well as concept art from video games Assassin’s Creed and Prince of Persia. Clean and crisp parchment textured pages with burning/glowing/smoking arabesque indigo calligraphy along border. I think artist Eva Widermann would be a good choice for interior illustration.