

AstralSaints - Structure & Mechanics (Non-Technical)

1) Core Vision

- Skill-first, difficulty-driven top-down vertical shooter.
- No pay-to-win. Cosmetics only. Competitive depth with clear mastery curve.

2) Game Modes

- Normal Mode (Ranked): Sequential universe map with nodes; boss every 5th node. Own ladder (Bronze->Diamond, tiers I-V). Seasonal resets.
- Endless Mode (Ranked): Infinite waves with periodic bosses; ships can evolve mid-run at score thresholds. Separate ladder and seasons.
- Story Runs (Scaffolded): Optional pre/post dialogue scenes on Normal and Boss nodes. Endless excluded by default. Always skippable.

3) Player Loop & Retention

- Dashboard after login: current ship image (click -> Ship Selector), leaderboard panels, player stats, daily challenges/tasks, quick links to Map and Modes.
- Dailies/Challenges: first login of day, first level clear, mode-specific tasks, rotating objectives.
- Events: time-boxed events with entry conditions and cosmetic rewards; future special ships/weapons.
- Seasons: configurable length; seasonal rewards; rank name persists, tier resets.

4) Progression Systems

- Ships: 5 starters - Pegasus, Dragon, Phoenix, Andromeda, Cygnus - unlock 5 more with progression/events.
- Upgrades: Armor, Vitality (HP), Power split into Normal Weapon Power and Special Weapon Power.
- Evolutions: 3 permanent stages per ship; faster/stronger handling and stats.
- Hidden Special Form: unlocks invisibly from 2nd evolution onward; temporary, high-impact; requires in-run conditions; grants a unique special ability.
- Skill Tree: Four branches - Power, Tactics, Survival, Resources.
 - Small nodes (+% stats, cost tweaks), Gate nodes (unlock archetype mods), Keystones (strong effects with trade-offs).
 - Seasonal reset of allocations; content remains cosmetic/structural, not pay-to-win.

- Cosmetics: Skins for ships, weapons, power-ups, HUD themes; cosmetic shop and event rewards only.

5) Universe Map & Level Structure

- Map: Spatial universe with level nodes; every 5th node is a Boss node.
- Levels: Standardized wave patterns that escalate within the level and across levels.
 - Early zones: basic predictable patterns for onboarding.
 - Later zones: palette/theme shift; AI gains unpredictability and mixed behaviors.
- Boss Levels: Bosses themed after the 12 Golden Constellations until the universe shift event.
- Universe Shift: Occurs at ~Level 20+, where universes collide; aesthetic overhaul and difficulty spike. First boss post-shift is Bahamut - drops a mysterious item reminiscent of Final Fantasy's materia.

6) Enemies, Weapons, Drops

- Enemy Waves: Movement templates with combinable patterns; escalating health/damage/speed.
- Drops:
 - Temporary buffs: strength, speed, defense, etc., last until level end.
 - Weapon swaps (5 archetypes): change firing pattern during the run.
 - Base weapon boosts: transient power-ups for damage rate.
 - Special-form points: persist across levels; required for hidden special form.
- Weapons:
 - Base weapon upgradable via earned points.
 - Special weapon track separate from base.

7) Difficulty Model

- Player-selectable difficulty tiers: Four named tiers (TBD names).
- Rank-based hidden handicap: Higher ranks increase enemy HP/damage/speed and reduce drop generosity.
- Hectic ceiling: Late-game tuning for high skill expression.

8) Competitive Layer

- Leaderboards: Global, regional, and friends; daily/season/all-time tabs. Separate boards for Normal and Endless.
- Ranks & Tiers: Bronze, Silver, Gold, Platinum, Diamond; tiers I-V per rank.
- Season Management: Adjustable thresholds per season.
- Social: Friends/rivals tracking and simple clubs (up to 10).

9) HUD & UX

- Bars & Indicators:

- Health/Armor bars
- Energy/Special-form meter
- Weapon type and power level
- Special-form points counter
- Combo multiplier
- Wave/level number, score, timer
- Boss health and phase cues
- Last-Second Mechanic: Ultra-rare lifesaver.
- Clarity: Skippable story overlays.

10) Story Framework

- Pre/Post Dialogue Segments: Optional before/after eligible levels and bosses.
- Conditions: Level ID, difficulty, ship/evolution, rank tier, flags.
- Outcomes: Set flags, grant cosmetics, unlock ship variants.

11) Meta Screens

- Landing/Login
- Dashboard
- Ship Selector
- Universe Map
- Shop
- Profile

12) Economy & Fairness

- Monetization: Cosmetics only.
- Event Rewards: Cosmetics, titles, visual FX variants.

13) Balancing Principles

- Wave pacing: Peaks and valleys.
- Boss identity: Unique specials.
- Drops & swaps: No dominant strategy.
- Rank handicap: Keeps challenge high.

14) Open Naming Items

- Difficulty tier names
- Unlockable ship roster
- Boss roster details