SAMPLE SESSION REPORT · LIGHTLY TRIMMED

ASCENDED: The Endless Arena

New-Update Test Report (Season 2)

FROM

icare testing · TALON & ROOK, dedicated tester saves

WINDOW

2026-11-12 – 2026-11-13

BUILDS

v65.17 → v65.18 → v65.18.1 → v65.19 → v65.20. Every finding is tagged with the build it was observed on.

SCOPE

Two brand-new saves on the new update (TALON, melee / Squire, Slot 1; ROOK, caster / Ember Initiate, Slot 2), played from creation through the early game. Season 1 (v65.13) is referenced only where the new build reproduces or resolves an earlier finding.

Reading key. CONFIRMED observed directly with numbers or screens. UNVERIFIED observed once or partially; needs a second look. HARNESS a limitation of our test driver, not a game defect — included so you don't chase ghosts.

TL;DR — the five things that matter most

1. **Victory soft-lock reproduced on v65.20** (Issue 1) — a Depth 1 fight froze permanently after the pack died; a mid-fight rare-drop modal earlier in the same fight is the suspected trigger. This is the one we'd fix first.
2. **Caster starting kit is FIXED.** ROOK now starts with a staff equipped and SPARK learned. But the gap inverted: the Squire now starts with no weapon and no learned skills (Issue 4).

3. **The Depth 1 grind-gate works as designed** — validated three ways: a human designer clear in 3 attempts with one Hearth health weave; ROOK matched that benchmark exactly (attempt 3, one weave). The melee tester's flatline is substantially a harness artifact — see the honest breakdown under Balance.
4. **AUTO spell-casting is solved: it works, via written HUNCHES** in the Coaching Ledger. Not a bug — but nothing in the early game tells the player that, and our Season 1 testers concluded "AUTO never casts" because of it.
5. **The Hall of Champions survives save overwrites** — all 20 legacy entries intact after both Season 1 saves were replaced. Working exactly as intended.

CONFIRMED Issues

Issue 1 — Victory soft-lock after a mid-fight rare-drop modal

- **Where:** ROOK (Slot 2), Tower I, Depth 1, "The Breadline Pit." Party: ROOK (Mage Apprentice LV2) + familiar GIMLI LV2.
- **Sequence:** Mid-fight, a rare drop appeared as a modal — MYSTIC BACULUM (staff) — and was equipped. The pack (Crumb Rats) was then killed to the last rat. The victory never fired: 4+ minutes frozen — no enemy turns in the AT queue, no action menu, no victory screen; HP 130/230, MP 48/48, Soul/DEN counters all static. AUTO could not pathfind to any foe; camera pans found no living enemy; clicking ROOK, the ground item, and the floor did nothing.
- **Exit & cost:** MENU ▸ ABANDON RUN ("PROGRESS IS SAVED. CONTINUE RESUMES AT THIS DEPTH"). Soul earned was kept (+778); the run's 2,358 DEN was lost. The run sits resumable at Depth 1.
- **Why we suspect the drop modal:** the freeze followed the only mid-fight modal interaction of the run, and this matches a family of victory-flow freezes seen on the previous build (victory panels failing to appear after a fight resolves in specific contexts). If the drop modal's state isn't fully cleared, the victory flow may be waiting on it.

Issue 2 — Starter and unbound weapons disappear

- ROOK's creation-issued NOVICE STAFF vanished at some point across his first five runs: weapon slot EMPTY, Forge reports "NO KEPT WEAPONS YET," and no tester action unequipped or sold it. The exact moment of loss wasn't captured (he died 5 times in that span) — see also `UNVERIFIED` below.
- Related verified case: TALON (Stint 2, Run 2, v65.19) looted a one-time entry-chest LEGENDARY, MASTER SWORDISH (ATK +16, DEF +3), equipped it, killed his only rat of the block with it — and lost it on death.

- **Question for the designer:** is "unbound gear is lost on death" the intended rule? If so it works consistently — but the creation staff is apparently unbound, so a caster's first death silently disarms them. If the starter weapon is meant to be permanent, it's being treated as unbound loot.

Issue 3 — Town navigation dead-ends and unpainted UI

A cluster of related navigation problems, reproduced across builds and both characters. Three exemplars:

- The painted town shortcut "★ THE LUDUS · LEARN SKILLS" opens the Guild Hall interior instead of the Ludus (v65.17, v65.20; 3+ reproductions, both characters). The working route is the Ludus plaque inside the Guild Hall — but that plaque was present in ROOK's Guild Hall and absent in TALON's (v65.18.1).
- Modal CLOSE buttons exist in the page but are not painted or clickable at 1919×998 — SAVE CODE and DISTRICTS modals (v65.17, v65.18.1). Escape, backdrop click, and Tab+Enter don't dismiss them; a page reload is the only exit. (Opening SAVE CODE doesn't alter saves.)
- The STORY DOG EGG hatch dialog ("IT HATCHED!") was invisible and its WELCOME HOME button unclickable ("covered") — yet the hatch itself succeeded (familiar GIMLI active and fighting). The presentation layer failed; the underlying action worked (v65.20).

Issue 4 — Squire starting kit is empty

At creation, TALON (Squire) has no weapon (Forge: "NO KEPT WEAPONS YET"; unit card WEAPON —, OFF-HAND —, ARMOR —) and no learned skills (ACT offers only ATTACK; all 9 Squire abilities unlearned). Compare the caster: staff equipped + a learned, slotted spell. If the bare Squire is intended, fine — but the two creation paths start on unequal footing in opposite directions from last build.

Balance & design

Depth 1, the grind-gate: works for humans; melee convergence unproven by our driver

The wall: 10× CRUMB RATS (LV4, HP 54, ATK 30, DEF 2, SPD 11) opening every fight with a pre-action ambush (observed −21 to −106 HP before the player's first action) plus poison stacking to ×3. Versus a LV1 Squire: HP 180 (250 after one Vitality weave), DEF 10, unarmed hits ~30–36 dmg at ~70–87% accuracy; ~540 pack HP to clear.

- **Designer benchmark (human play):** cleared on attempt 3 after one Hearth health weave — "a lot more of a toss up." The intended loop (run → earn → weave → pass) demonstrably works in human hands.
- **ROOK (tester, caster):** cleared on attempt 3 after exactly one Vitality weave (150 Soul, +70 max HP), then cleared Depth 2 and died on Depth 3. Asterisks: his Depth 1 clear ran on AUTO, and his hatched familiar fought beside him from run 1.
- **TALON (tester, melee):** 8 attempts across two blocks, 0 clears, 2 lifetime kills. The tester driver loses actions to menu mis-selection (see `HARNESS`), so we do not present this as proof the melee wall is impossible. Two structural facts are driver-independent: there is no reachable weapon source for a fresh character, and the early economy pays slowly against upgrade costs.

Systems — verified working

AUTO & the Coaching Ledger (hunch system)

AUTO never casts with zero hunches: across Runs 1, 4, 5 (v65.20) at 1X, ROOK's MP never decreased and the Training Ledger's turn log (~20 turns) shows every AUTO turn as "STRUCK [foe] · BASIC." The Ledger states the rule in-game: "COACHING: WRITE HUNCHES (WHEN THIS, DO THAT) AND HE FIGHTS BY THEM ON AUTO. NO HUNCHES, HE FIGHTS BASIC." With HUNCH 1: "WHEN NEAREST FOE IN RANGE → DO USE SPARK 6" written, AUTO cast SPARK exactly once in a full fight (ledger-confirmed). Verdict: working as designed. The only gap is discoverability — nothing early tells a new player AUTO is hunch-driven, which is why this read as "AUTO never casts" for a full season of testing.

Caster starting kit: FIXED

ROOK (Ember Initiate, created v65.17): NOVICE STAFF equipped (ATK 2) and SPARK learned at creation and slotted as Primary Action. Manual SPARK casts verified in combat. The Season 1 gap (caster bare-handed under a cosmetic staff) is closed.

Hall of Champions persistence

Both Season 1 saves were overwritten during this test cycle. The Hall read identical 20 rows before and after — no entries lost.

`UNVERIFIED` Needs a second look

- The exact moment ROOK's creation-issued NOVICE STAFF vanished was not captured (five deaths in that span).

- Observed on v65.13 during pre-launch gate checks, recheck on the current build advised: the town map's ▸ TITLE button does not exit to the title screen.
- Enemy stat display: the Crumb Rat ATK read 30 throughout TALON's stints (consistent with 25–35 damage per hit taken) but the badge read "10" during ROOK's stint. One of the two displays is wrong, or they show different stats. Damage taken supports ~30.
- Standing question, still open from v65.13: the Hall's DEPTH column runs to 60 while save-select lists BEST DEPTH 25 for the same careers — if the Hall counts cumulative or cross-tower depth, a label would help.

HARNESS Our limit, not your bug

Our automated driver clicks land about one row high on the game's ~55px menu rows under the rotating camera, occasionally selecting the adjacent action (for example, CROWD PLEASER instead of FIRST AID). Where a finding could be driver-caused, it is labeled UNVERIFIED or excluded. Combat numbers, screens, and logs quoted above are read directly from the game.

An earlier stint reported First Aid producing only a flourish with no heal. That was our driver's error, retracted: cleanly selected casts heal +63 HP for 6 MP (exactly 25% of 250 max HP, per the skill text), verified repeatedly. No defect.

Tester end states

2026-11-13, v65.20. Careers are young (best depth 3); testing continues.

- **TALON (Slot 1):** SQUIRE LV3 · max HP 250 · ATK 38 · DEF 15 · Soul 86 · JP 34 · DEN 12 · deaths 7 · kills 2 · skills FIRST AID + PAGE RUSH · Hearth VITALITY r1 + SCUTUM r1 · no weapon · parked live inside a Depth 1 fight (HP 99/250).
- **ROOK (Slot 2):** MAGE APPRENTICE LV2 · Soul EXP 3,976 · bank 171 DEN · deaths 5 · kills ~15 · best depth 3 · skills SPARK / EMBER NOVA / EMBER RING · weapon MYSTIC BACULUM · familiar GIMLI LV2 · Hearth 2/477 woven · Depth 1 run abandoned (soft-lock), resumable.

What happened next

These notes are not part of the original report. They are here so you can see how a finding moves into the build.

- The mid-fight drop-modal soft-lock family was closed with a foes-dead safety net in v65.23.
- The Squire received a Training Sword and First Aid in the same pass, after this report flagged that the melee start had inherited the old caster gap.

Source: Season 2 test report, 2026-11-13, lightly trimmed for length. Job names, numbers, and quoted lines are unchanged.