

Volume 2 - Chapter 39 - Shopping Finale

“On the Emergence and Classification of Novel System Abilities: Combatant and Non-Combatant Perspectives”

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Abstract:

This paper examines the ongoing phenomenon of novel Ability emergence within the Allbright System, exploring the hypothesis that significant individual accomplishments or Faction-level milestones correlate with the generation of previously undocumented System Abilities.

While extensive historical records substantiate the appearance of new Abilities within the Galactic Bubble, the underlying mechanisms remain uncertain, and comparable data beyond established galactic boundaries are not yet available.

Introduction:

Historically, System Abilities have been classified based on their inherent functions, the vast majority of which were among the combat-oriented types.

However, recent evidence indicates a consistent increase in the complexity and diversity of newly observed Abilities, suggesting that the Allbright System dynamically responds to user activity and Accomplishments as a whole.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the patterns behind Ability emergence, with a particular emphasis on distinctions between combatant and non-combatant roles.

Emergence of Novel Abilities:

The most frequently discussed hypothesis is that new Abilities arise in direct response to significant actions undertaken by notable Faction members.

*Case studies, such as the recent emergence of [Aegis of Protection] following Commander Riven's actions in the **Arden Campaign** (PFC 931), suggest a correlation between impactful Accomplishments and the subsequent generation of previously undocumented Abilities.*

However, controlled experimentation remains impossible due to the System's complexity, rendering definitive conclusions difficult.

Alternative theories posit that the System periodically introduces novel Ability permutations entirely independent of user input, effectively maintaining systemic balance and adaptability.

One additional theory raises the question of whether truly new Abilities are being generated at all, or if what we are witnessing is simply a product of observational bias.

This perspective suggests that the Abilities in question have always existed within the System's framework but are only now being documented due to the combined effects of increased research efforts and the escalation of the Galactic War. As more Participants achieve notable Accomplishments or demonstrate extraordinary feats, it is possible that previously inaccessible or dormant Abilities are being unlocked rather than newly created.

At present, the available data remain inconclusive in determining which of these hypotheses—true emergence versus delayed discovery—is more likely to reflect the underlying reality.

Non-Combatant Ability Classifications:

A recent focus in System-related research involves documenting Abilities developed specifically for non-combat roles, such as Mechanics, Pilots, Engineers, and Researchers.

Observations from the past fifty Terran-standard-years confirm a noticeable increase in the variety and specialization of non-combat Abilities.

Examples include [Adaptive Engine Tuning] among Mechanics, [Precision Maneuvering] observed frequently among elite Pilots and Drivers, and [Rapid Data Synthesis] consistently recorded among high-level Researchers.

These findings strongly suggest that the Allbright System does not solely prioritize combatant roles, instead dynamically facilitating skill expression across numerous fields.

Further studies on this topic have long since started and are likely to present findings in the coming years.

Discussion and Conclusion:

While it remains unclear whether the Allbright System actively responds to individual or collective achievements, or if it periodically refreshes its Ability inventory independently, current data support the theory of ongoing, adaptive Ability generation—or unlocking, in the case of the delayed discovery theorem—within the Galactic Bubble.

The absence of comparable data beyond established galactic boundaries necessitates further investigation once the Galactic Bubble disappears.

Understanding these patterns has significant implications for both strategic planning and systemic development across diverse occupational roles within UHF-aligned factions.

Future research should prioritize systematic observation of Ability emergence conditions, detailed statistical analysis of Ability distribution across roles, and expansion of data collection initiatives beyond the Galactic Bubble...

[Journal of System Dynamics Research, Vol. 42, Issue 3, PFC 935]

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Scrolling through the limited selection of Gold-rarity Abilities gave Thea a strange feeling.

'I didn't even bother looking at these when I first got here before the Assessment...' she thought, eyes flicking across the golden text. 'The costs were way too high back then. I never thought I'd be able to seriously consider picking one up—especially not this soon...'

Even now, they were still *expensive*—prohibitively so, for most people. But for her, with the Merit she had stacked up and the [Without Equal] Voucher tucked safely away, they weren't *completely* off the table.

If something truly exceptional showed up... She *could* go for it.

The problem was, she was starting to wonder if anything in this list was truly exceptional.

There were only eight Gold-rarity Abilities available that didn't require a Voucher—*just eight*.

That was barely anything, considering the sheer number of Abilities out there and when compared to the other rarities available in the store. And worse, they felt oddly scattered. Like someone had cherry-picked the weirdest options from a much larger pool and just dropped them in at random.

A few were oddly specific—like [Marathon Runner], which offered impressive Stamina and Vitality buffs... but only really made sense for someone planning to sprint across an entire continent.

Another was a Perception-based Ability that boosted your stat by a sizable amount, but only under absurdly specific conditions Thea couldn't imagine encountering outside a simulation specifically set up for it.

Then there was [Forceful Retaliation]—clearly meant for a heavy bruiser-style build. Just the name alone screamed *"hit me so I can hit back harder."*

'Yeah... I'm not really planning on getting hit anytime soon,' she thought with a lop-sided smirk. 'Especially not just to activate an Ability. Isabella might consider it—but even then, she's not invincible either. Maybe Lucas? He's more of the "take the hit and keep going" type...'

Overall, the Gold options were underwhelming. Not surprising, honestly.

“Guess this is where the Accomplishment-only tier really starts,” she muttered under her breath. “Most of the good ones are probably locked behind Vouchers or dropped as RNG rewards from high-tier challenges.”

Still, one Ability *had* caught her eye.

Unfortunately, it wasn’t a Passive—it was an Active-type, which meant she’d have to sacrifice something serious from her current lineup just to make room for it.

No small trade.

Cupping her chin, she reread the description again, eyes narrowing.

If she was going to make a move on this one, it had to be worth the cost.

And she needed to be sure—*really* sure—that what it offered outweighed what she’d lose.

[Active (Gold) – Adrenaline Burst – Level 0]

Description: Allows the Participant to expend a certain amount of Stamina to momentarily increase their Strength and Finesse by a large margin up to a maximum for a short duration.

Cost: 50 Stamina - Factor: 250% - Maximum Attribute: 6 Duration: 3 seconds

Growth/Level: Factor+7.5% - Max+0.1 - Duration+0.1s

“It’s basically a more conditional version of [*Sensory Overdrive*], but for both Strength and Finesse,” Thea mumbled, eyes skimming the Ability’s description for the third time. “Would give me a ton more flexibility for a short burst... and putting both of those together would be—yeah, that’d be *something*.”

She tilted her head, still debating.

“But I don’t exactly have a ton of Stamina, and it wouldn’t really help in most of the situations where I actually use SO at the moment...”

Just a few days ago, she probably would’ve grabbed this Ability without thinking.

It fit her old mindset—maximize combat efficiency, stack raw power, chase perfect execution.

But now, after reflecting more on her role in the squad, where her build was headed, and what she wanted to actually *do*, [*Adrenaline Burst*] didn’t quite slot in as cleanly.

“There’s only so much individual power I need at this point...” she muttered. “I’m already handling most situations far, far better than expected. This’d just boost twitch-reactions—and how often do I *really* need that anymore? If an Obscuritas shows up, sure. But is that really worth burning a whole Ability slot on?”

That was the core issue. Not even the slot itself, really—just what it represented.

Technically, she *could* make room for it.

[Improved Sprint] was one option, though she'd already mentally bookmarked that one for replacement once Vi passed her [Shadow Step]. Then there was [Penetrative Shot]... but that had grown on her more than she liked to admit.

That whole Wall incident had cemented its usefulness.

And paired with [Detect Weak Spots] and her Caliburn, it gave her a solid, reliable answer to extremely heavily armored threats. Plus, once she got her Gram customized and properly synced, the usefulness of it would only get better.

Dropping that Ability now felt like surrendering a game just before the comeback victory.

And then—of course—there was the price tag.

'Nearly 2,000 Merit...'

That wasn't pocket change, even to her.

That was nearly a *third* of everything she had. All her gains from the Cube Trial, every single Accomplishment, and the full payout from the Assessment combined had only come out to a little over 6,800 Merit.

'I can't just impulse-buy this one,' Thea thought, tapping the edge of her pad absently. *'This isn't like the other versions of the Gram—those I could experiment with. I have enough Credits where it doesn't even make a major dent. This, however? If I change my mind later, I'm stuck with it. No refunds.'*

What she really needed was a better sense of how much it would actually *impact* her build.

'Will this actually elevate my overall style or just get in the way...? A valuable addition or just a random add-on...? I wish I had a way to test—'

And then the idea hit her.

"Sovereign," she said quietly, keeping her voice low. "Is there an Ability that functions pretty much exactly like [Adrenaline Burst] in *Archion*?"

She figured the ship's AI would pick up the request—anytime its name was spoken aloud, it usually did.

"Affirmative," came the smooth, immediate reply next to her ear. "The *Archion* Ability known as [Burst of Power] is functionally synonymous."

Thea grinned.

'Perfect. I can run some tests with my current setup in the sim first,' she thought, already visualizing how it might feel in a live scenario. *'See if it actually fits before throwing a third of my Merit at it.'*

She quickly earmarked *[Adrenaline Burst]* in her personal profile for later, tagging it for future review, and pulled back to double-check her shopping list—making sure everything she'd already selected was still locked in.

[Passive (*Silver*) – Focus Retention – Level 0] - Cost: ~~552 System Merit~~

[Passive (*Iron*) – Focus Capacitor – Level 0] - Cost: ~~225 System Merit~~

[Notice: 1x (*Silver*-rarity Ability Voucher) and 1x (*Iron*-rarity Ability Voucher) applied to nullify System Merit costs.]

She paused for another moment, running through the decisions one last time, then gave a firm nod to herself and confirming the purchase.

“I should leave the last slot open. At least until I get another Voucher...” she muttered, backing out of the Ability menu. “Using Merit this early on without a real plan isn’t gonna be worth it. I need to be smart about my resources.”

With the last slot shelved for now, she exited the Ability section and flipped back over to the Skill tab. A small icon in the corner let her know she had an unread message—her eyes flicked to it automatically.

It was from the Rune priest.

Thea perked up a bit, feeling that usual mix of curiosity and mild apprehension that always came with interacting with the enigmatic man. She opened it quickly, eager to see what sort of breakdown he'd sent about her request on Skill priorities.

[“Physics, Chemistry and Mathematics. Biology ain’t that important. Should do just fine like that... Almost certainly. Maybe... *Probably.*” —Anrake]

She stared at it. Blinked once. Then again.

“That... *That’s it?*” she asked out loud, tone somewhere between baffled, offended and incredulous.

Apparently loud enough, because Karania strolled over with a curious look. “What’s up, Thea?”

Without a word, Thea held out the pad for her to read.

Karania glanced at the screen, then gave a small, amused hum. “Huh. Well, hey—looks like I was on the right track with my advice, at least. I’ll take that as a win.”

Thea groaned and let out a heavy sigh, thumbing back into the Skill interface and removing [Basic Biology] from her planned curriculum for now, effectively placing it at the bottom. “It’s still way too many Research-type Skills though...”

Karania just smiled sweetly from the side as Thea grumbled.

“Haaa... Guess we’re really not getting around asking Major Quinn for a permission slip, huh?”

“Yuuuup!” Karania chirped, way too happy about the idea of waltzing up to the proprietor of the entire Star Sector they called their home, and also the leading person of this entire Recruitment Drive, and asking her for a favour.

With another quiet sigh, Thea finalized her Skill Class selection and saved it to her profile for now. Classes weren’t scheduled to start for another week anyway—at least that gave them some time to figure things out properly.

“Anyway,” she said, glancing over, “you find anything good while you were digging through the store earlier? You looked pretty into it.”

To her surprise, Karania shook her head. “Not really. I’ve flagged a few Abilities, but nothing jumped out as a must-have yet. I still need more data before I commit to anything.”

She leaned on the edge of the console as she spoke. “I’m hoping the Digital Missions we’re starting next week will give me a lot more varied encounters than the Assessment did. I can only get so far with the classic ‘*medic, I got shot*’ routine. Doesn’t tell me what I really need to build a full Squad Medic portfolio. I want to see more scenarios, more edge cases—stuff that actually challenges my preconceived notions on how to handle medical emergencies. Until then, I’m holding onto my Vouchers and Merit. No point in rushing.”

Then she raised an eyebrow and tilted her head at Thea. “What about *you*? Judging by how much you were pacing through the menus earlier, I’m guessing you found something?”

Caught off guard—and *mildly horrified*—Thea blinked. “Wait... you heard that?”

Karania’s grin was *far* too satisfied.

“Yeah...” Thea muttered, defeated. “I picked up a new Silver and a new Iron Passive. Both aimed at shoring up my Focus issues. Less chance to Overdraw, and I can actually use my Abilities more frequently now. Also found a Gold that seemed interesting, but I’m gonna test it out in *Archion* first, see if it fits.”

“That’s... actually really smart,” Karania said, blinking in surprise. “Did *not* expect you to test something before buying.”

“Hey!” Thea immediately pointed at her, eyes narrowing. “That... That is rude!”

“What?” Karania feigned innocence. “It’s not like you didn’t just tell me, like, twenty minutes ago that you bought—what, five? *Five* Full License guns? For weapons you have *no* plans to use? *Purely for research?*”

She rolled her eyes dramatically. “Excuuuuse me for thinking my little impulse-buy gremlin might have a teensy-tiny problem with hoarding shiny things. I didn’t know that impulse control only applies to some resource types, not *all of them*.”

Thea crossed her arms and gave Karania a sharp scowl. “What’s *wrong* with spending resources when you’ve got them...? I’ve got plenty of Credits, not much Merit. So it makes sense to spend Credits where I *can* and save the Merit for stuff I actually *need*. It’s just logic, Kara!”

“Nope,” Karania replied cheerfully. “Impulse-buy gremlin it is. Long may she reign.”

Thea let out a long, dramatic sigh, the fight draining out of her.

She’d learned better than to argue when Kara latched onto one of these things—especially when she was clearly having *way* too much fun with it.

“Aaaanyway,” Thea said, waving a hand dismissively, “I’m done with the System Store for now, so I guess we’re free the rest of the day?”

Karania didn’t miss a beat. “Ehhh, no? No, you’re not. And I’m not either.”

Thea’s brow scrunched up, visibly confused.

‘Wait... Did I forget something?’ She mentally ran through her checklist. *‘Armour—done. Focus Boosters, weapons, research materials—check. Skills planned, Abilities selected... I’m pretty sure that’s everything I needed...?’*

She was mid-internal audit when Karania’s pout made its dramatic appearance.

“You *promised* we’d go shopping for clothes together after we were done!” she said, downright offended. “Don’t tell me you forgot already! We need to get you something—*anything*—other than that pullover.”

To really hammer the point home, she grabbed a fistful of said pullover and tugged at it with mock disgust.

“Hey!” Thea swatted her hand away. “I *like* this one! What’s wrong with it?”

It *was* her best outfit. She’d *specifically* worn this one for the trip for that very reason.

She had triple-checked that on the GalNet articles before they had left that morning. Multiple articles had clearly said that for casual off-duty trips, especially shopping excursions with friends, you were supposed to wear something “comfortable, casual, and clean.”

This pullover hit *all* three.

Karania flailed a little, struggling to find the right words—probably for the very first time, ever—hands gesturing wildly in the air like they might summon the perfect argument from thin space.

“It’s... it’s just—*ugh!* You need *more* clothes, Thea! *Options!* And you *promised*. So, no takebacks. We’re *going!*”

Thea groaned quietly but didn’t protest much more than that.

Deep down, she knew there was no winning this one.

Not when Kara was already dragging her out of the System Store and toward the civilian district like she had been mortally wounded and needed to be brought to the med tent ASAP.

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A little over fifteen minutes later, Thea found herself standing in front of what could only be described as a *small mountain* of clothing—each piece hand-picked by Karania extremely quickly, as if she had been thinking about this excursion and mapping out the perfect route to get all the pisces as quickly as possible, and stacked with alarming precision on a nearby bench.

Shirts, jackets, frilly tops, fitted pants, and even—*much to her horror*—actual *dresses* were buried somewhere in the pile.

She blinked slowly, arms crossed. “Do you *really* think I need to try *all* of these on? I have perfectly functional uniforms. And my pullover still works just fine—”

“Yes! Yes, I *do* think so!” Karania cut her off, full of righteous energy. Before Thea could retreat another step, she gave her a light shove toward the fitting room. “Now stop arguing and get in there already!”

Thea let out a long, theatrical sigh as she shuffled toward the changing booth. “Why doesn’t the Sovereign just... I don’t know, *magically* put the clothes on for us or something? Would make all of this way less annoying.”

Karania leaned against the nearby wall, smug smile firmly in place.

“Because, dearest Thea,” she began, her tone far too pleased with herself as if she had already expected this exact line of questioning, “the Sovereign is a *warship*. A troop transport designed to train future Marines—not host fashion shows. Her functions are reserved for training simulations, strategic deployment, and managing assessment data. *Not* casual shopping.”

She gestured toward the rows of hangers and shelves around them.

“It’s probably the same reason there’s physical clothes here in the first place. If this were one of those high-end boutiques on any of the Inner-Worlds? You’d just throw on a base-layer and it’d morph into whatever outfit you wanted. Try-on process handled by fabric projectors, full-range mirrors, AI stylists. Minimal effort. Maximum glam.”

She snapped her fingers dramatically. “But all that eats up power and bandwidth. And the Sovereign’s got better things to do—like making sure we don’t die. So, instead... we get this.”

She waved a hand at the clothing pile. “Good old-fashioned fashion chaos. Honestly? It’s *way* more fun this way. I *guarantee* it.”

Thea stared at her for a second longer, unsure of whether she wanted to respond to all that or not.

Then, she grabbed a pile of clothes and disappeared behind the curtain with nothing more than a resigned groan and an eyeroll that would make even Isabella proud...