

Volume 2 - Chapter 38 - Focus Problem

“A good build isn’t just about stats. It’s a story. A philosophy. A lifestyle. Every slot speaks to how you want to win—and how you expect to be hunted until you do.”
— **Wero “WeTen” Tenmari**, two-time Archion Galactic Champion, PFC 941

[GalaxyNet Gaming Feed - Competitive Spotlight]

*“When you think competitive **Archion** or **Krillson’s Path**, you invariably think builds.*

Builds aren’t just loadouts—they’re stories told through numbers, a complex blend of strategy, synergy, and innovation.

*Veteran competitors remember the legendary trio of build creators: **XalRexx**, known for aggressive early-game strategies, **StaticFyre**, famous for flexible team compositions and support-focused builds, and of course, **MissyMoonlightMayham**, more commonly known as simply **MMM**, whose intricate late-game powerhouses defined the meta for nearly a full decade.*

It’s been two years since MMM vanished without a trace.

The loss still echoes through the gaming communities of every game they touched, felt deeply by the competitive scene as a whole. Their sudden disappearance didn’t just silence a leading voice—it fractured the scene’s ability to swiftly counter new strategies.

*Veteran players openly lament the creative vacuum left behind; teams like the **VoidDrifters** and **ArkNova** publicly credit past victories to MMM’s unmatched build insights.*

Their builds had never been flashy for the sake of being flashy.

They were layered—carefully woven combinations of Ability synergy, optimal Attribute routing, and frame-specific microeconomics. It wasn’t just about what was strong—it was about when, where, and why to take it.

*Whether it is the infamous “Three-Slot Fade Shatter” build that dominates Archion’s mid-cycle playoffs for four straight tournaments so far, or the hyper-adaptive Krillson’s “Ghost Shell” Techblade loadout that has shattered early-tier scaling rules, their builds **still** influence current play, proving how truly long-lasting MMM’s impact has been on the scene as a whole.*

In their absence, theorycrafters and build makers have scrambled to fill the void.

*Names like **KalishPrime** and **ReboundSeven** have stepped up, but even their most rabid fans begrudgingly admit they’re missing that razor-sharp edge MMM always brought—their knack for predicting not just next week’s meta, but the one six patches ahead.*

"It's not that no one's trying," said veteran pro Jassid "Brakemind" Vellar in a recent comm-cast. "But losing MMM was like losing the cornerstone of a house. You can keep the walls standing for a bit, sure—but eventually, stuff starts to lean."

But one thing is indisputable: The competitive scene has slowed.

Responses to emergent metas lag behind. Counter-strategies take longer to surface, and the once rapid-fire evolution of high-level play has shifted into a more cautious, almost hesitant rhythm.

It's not the first time the community's lost a major voice, and it won't be the last. But losing one of the Big Three without warning? That's rare—and undoubtedly rough.

Even so, tournaments are still happening. Teams are still climbing.

And the scene, while bruised, is far from broken.

*With tournaments across the GalacticNet now more accessible than ever thanks to Terra's recent Galactic Entertainment Initiative (EGI), the Terran Gaming Tribune issues a call to all aspiring buildmakers: **Step up. Start theorycrafting. Break the meta.***

There's a vacancy at the top—and history shows us that someone always rises to fill it..."

["Buildmakers Rise: Filling the Void", Karlen Nevas, Senior Gaming Analyst, PFC 943]

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Navigating the System Store's Ability interface, Thea quickly tapped her way into the Passive-type Ability section, eyes scanning across rows of neatly organized entries.

'I've got three slots open—four if I swap out [Quick Draw] or [Agile Stealth]. Five if I replace both...'

She'd spent hours this past week trying to map out her build, scribbling ideas onto her pad, deleting half of them minutes later. The uncertainties swirling around her were just too many, making each choice feel heavier than it probably needed to be.

'I still don't really know how this whole Psychic thing is gonna pan out,' she reminded herself with an inward sigh. 'Not to mention, who knows what Classes I'll even have access to down the line? What if they don't even mesh with what I have in mind...?'

She wished she had some kind of practice space or simulation—like the training grounds back in the arcade—to experiment without committing right away. And while the Terra-sponsored games were great for some of that, the level of restrictions that applied to the actual Allbright System itself were far too numerous to adequately try and portray in them.

Ultimately, changing Abilities later *was* possible, of course, and probably unavoidable once higher Tiers and Rarities opened up, but it wasn't exactly ideal in her eyes.

'With this whole Ability Alteration thing,' she thought, tapping absently on the pad, 'it's smarter to stick with one Ability long-term. Max it out, customize it along the way. Jumping between different Abilities just slows everything down and straight up wastes experience.'

With that in mind, however, there was one area she *definitely* knew she needed help in.

She punched in two simple search tags—"Focus" and "Recovery"—into the Ability Store's search field, then scrolled down the long list of available results.

Over forty different Abilities immediately popped up, all neatly listed, waiting for someone with the right Merit—or in her case, a handy Voucher—and Attributes to claim them.

She hummed thoughtfully as she read each entry, quietly mumbling pros and cons under her breath as she went along. She kept her voice low enough to not disturb Kara, but loud enough to still feel the reassuring echo of her own words.

Ever since childhood, she'd found that talking quietly to herself helped her sort through complex problems. It was almost like she was hearing a friend share their thoughts. Somehow that always seemed to kick her brain into a clearer, more analytical mode—perfect for complicated build theory.

"[Focused Recovery] definitely looks like the textbook pick here, but it doesn't really fit my build, does it...?" she murmured, frowning slightly. "Scaling off Focus and Recovery, boosting each other, sounds pretty good—but only if you're already investing heavily in those Attributes. Way better for Desmond than for me, honestly."

She paused, thinking it over a second time, as she always did.

It was a Silver-rarity Ability—one of those classic "win-more" passives she'd run into so often in games. Abilities like that were powerful because they made your character better at things they were already good at, amplifying strengths instead of patching weaknesses.

They never fixed problems, though.

They just leaned harder into whatever was already working, hence her internal nickname for them: "Win-more."

Good, solid, common—very powerful, even—but not at all what she needed right now.

She tapped back, earmarking the Ability for Desmond—and maybe Corvus too—before swiping to the next entry.

Thea had decided ahead of time to be efficient with today's shopping trip, both for Karania's sake and her own.

Instead of trawling through every last Ability in the catalog, she'd narrowed her search to the higher rarity Passives first. Of course, she *wanted* to see everything—pure research was half the fun—but she'd shelved that for later.

Going full deep-dive while shopping with someone else just wasn't ideal—or so she had read on the cached GalNet article that she had looked up ahead of the shopping trip.

And while higher rarity didn't always mean *stronger* in a straight-up way, they tended to come with more complex restrictions or Attribute interplays—exactly the kind of stuff she was hunting for. Silver-rarity Abilities in particular often required juggling two Attributes or accepting trade-offs, but in return, you usually got more bang for your buck.

Restrictions, after all, came with an increased power budget.

And if she could find something that tied into her strongest Attributes *and* helped her Focus economy? Jackpot. She had two Attributes that were far, *far* above average—if just *one* of them could indirectly support her Focus management, it could be exactly the sort of stabilizer she needed for her build.

She scanned entry after entry, muttering quietly under her breath, a habit by now. Some Ability names alone were enough to tell her they weren't worth the read.

Others, she gave a glance just to be sure.

“[Persistent Focus]... lowers cost based on how much Focus you already have. Not bad. Probably viable with my 4 Focus, but not exactly game-changing.”

A swipe.

“[Silent Reset]... basically [Meditation Focus], just without the full-on meditation clause and way less effective as a result. Pass.”

And then her finger froze on the next one.

There it was—that little flicker in her chest. The familiar spark she always felt when something aligned with the vague shape of what she'd been searching for.

[Passive (Silver) – Focus Retention – Level 0]

Description: Grants the Participant the option to designate a number of Abilities and retain a percentage of the Focus Cost thereof with each use.

Number of designatable Abilities: 1 - Focus Retention: 15%

Growth/level: Abilities+0.1 - Focus Retention+1%/2 levels

Thea's eyebrows lifted.

“That could work really nicely,” she murmured. “And it scales... so it's not locked to just one Ability forever.”

Her brain immediately started slotting it into her current loadout.

“First pick would have to be [Sensory Overdrive]. It’s the priciest and the one I use the most—makes perfect sense. Later on, maybe [Psychic Reversal] if I end up keeping it long-term...? And once I get [Shadow Step] from Val, I can use the final designation for it as well... This is downright perfect!”

She leaned back slightly, considering the downsides.

There was one, and it wasn’t exactly insignificant.

“The only catch is... it doesn’t *reduce* the cost up front. It gives Focus *back* after the Ability activates. That’s not the same as saving—it’s reimbursement.”

She frowned thoughtfully, running the numbers in her head.

“If I’m not careful, it could lead me into thinking I have more Focus than I really do. Trick me into using something expensive when I’m already low, hoping Retention bounces me back above zero... But as long as I remember that and don’t gamble on it? *Should* be safe...”

She gave a small, satisfied nod.

Not perfect, maybe—but definitely extremely close to what she’d been looking for. Probably the closest she would be able to find in the System Store.

‘We were warned that the store doesn’t even have close to every Ability out there,’ Thea reminded herself, eyes flicking back to the interface. *‘So... this is probably about as close as I’ll get with what’s available here.’*

With that in mind, she moved [Focus Retention] into her shopping list with a quiet nod.

Just that one pick—something that could help stabilize her Focus usage—was enough to loosen her shoulders. Her posture relaxed, tension easing out of her spine like she’d taken off a weighted vest. She hadn’t even realized how much pressure she’d put herself under to find *something* to fix that part of her build.

‘Not done yet though,’ she reminded herself, cracking her knuckles before diving back in. *‘Still have at least two more slots to go.’*

Another ten minutes slipped by as she scrolled, tapped, and argued quietly with herself over the merits of each Ability. Some looked promising at first glance, but none really solved the problems she was trying to tackle.

Eventually, she stepped back a little with a quiet, frustrated sigh.

‘Still not happy with the Focus half of my build,’ she mused, tossing a glance toward Karania.

Her friend was still deep in her own search, flipping through data on her own pad without even glancing up. That was answer enough.

‘Surely, she won’t mind if I poke around in the lower rarities a bit more...’

With barely a pause in thought, she scrolled down and applied the same search tags—"Focus" and "Recovery"—this time filtering for Copper-rarity Abilities.

"Alright... let's see if anything snuck under the radar in here."

She tapped on one entry and read it aloud under her breath. "[Recovery Focus] is... definitely not what I need. Just boosting the Recovery stat doesn't help me unless the benefits are disproportionate. Which... They're definitely not."

Swipe.

"Huh...? [Silent Recovery]...?" She paused. "It's basically just [Silent Reset], but for Recovery instead of Focus. Why is this one Copper, but the other Silver...?"

The System usually kept similarly worded Abilities grouped around the same rarity, especially when their effects mirrored each other. But here, both descriptions were nearly identical—just swapping which Attribute they applied to—and yet, the rarity difference was noticeable.

She frowned, thinking it over.

"The only explanation that makes sense is that the System values Focus more than Recovery," she murmured. "Which... would mean it *also* values Stamina less, since Recovery affects both."

It wasn't a dramatic realization, but it still shifted something in her understanding.

'That actually kind of tracks,' she thought, staring absently at the pad. 'In most games, casters have to deal with higher costs than melee classes anyway. Mana, Aether, Psy... whatever you wanna call it—it's always more expensive to sling magic around than it is to swing a sword.'

Then a second thought crept in, one with a slightly bitter edge.

'Though now that I think about it... maybe that's not just the natural way the world works. Maybe that's just Terra, fiddling with the design behind the scenes. Making the Allbright System dictate the gameplay loops again...'

She exhaled slowly, pushing the whole thought aside.

There wasn't much point in obsessing over whether "Focus being more costly than Stamina" was some kind of universal truth or just a rule the System had made up—and that Terra had then copied into all their games.

For her, it felt intuitive. Downright obvious, even.

But she also now knew that this very instinct came from the fact that Terra had designed everything she had interacted with over the course of her life in that way to begin with.

It wasn't some deep truth of the universe—it was just what she'd taught to grow used to.

Not a dealbreaker, by any means. But still... worth keeping in mind either way.

'So, ultimately, that means I'm less likely to find powerful Focus options below Silver, huh?' Thea clicked her tongue, the sound sharp with annoyance, earning her a brief look from Karania to her right, that she did her best to ignore.

It was frustrating, but she didn't exactly have much of a choice.

She'd already combed through the Silver-rarity options and managed to find *something*—just not enough. That left Copper as her only real fallback, unless the stars aligned and she magically stumbled across another choice-voucher for a Gold-rarity Ability.

Which... okay, *technically*, she did have.

Tucked away in her inventory like some priceless treasure—because it quite literally was.

'Don't wanna waste the [Without Equal] Accomplishment Voucher though,' she thought, thumbing the corner of her pad. *'Best to hold onto that one until I actually know more about the Psychic side of things. There's bound to be some solid Psychic-related Abilities at Tier 1, especially once I understand how the whole system really works.'*

For now, she shoved those thoughts aside and kept digging through the Copper-tier list.

There were way more options here—easily twice the number of matches compared to Silver—but it didn't take long to spot the pattern.

Most of them weren't actually focused on Focus at all. They were Recovery-focused.

As in, the *Attribute*, not recovering *Focus* itself.

'Honestly, that's probably on me for using those search tags...' she admitted with yet another sigh. *'But also—seriously, who the fuck at the System-naming committee thought naming an Attribute simply "Recovery" was a good idea? Makes search filters a total nightmare...'*

Grumbling under her breath, she redefined the "Recovery" filter to specifically only include Focus recovery and narrowed the rest of the search to Focus-relevant-only results.

The list shrank instantly. From over a hundred down to... less than ten.

'Wow...' she thought, leaning back a bit as her brows lifted. *'The System **really** does value its Focus, huh?'*

Diving into the narrowed-down list, Thea quickly tossed aside most of the remaining Abilities.

A few were generic stat boosts, others were just too niche or aimed at builds she'd never touch. But then her eyes landed on one entry that made her pause.

"[Focus Capacitor]...?" she muttered, brows lifting. "The description reads almost exactly like [Arcane Battery] from *Archion*...!"

Excitement bubbled up again, a flicker of the same thrill she'd felt earlier when she found [Focus Retention]. She remembered [Arcane Battery] well—it had been one of those deceptively simple but incredibly build enabling Abilities.

Low cost, easy to fit into a build, and perfect for massive openers.

It didn't help much in longer fights, sure, but in the first few seconds of a clash? It let you dump firepower *fast* on Burst-type builds. Thea had used it more than once herself, usually as a crutch to let her heavier Ability setups breathe in the early game.

"It'd let me overcap my Focus by a decent chunk... but just like [Arcane Battery], it wouldn't let me use outside sources to get there," she mused, voice quiet and thoughtful but a grin slowly spreading on her face as things fell into place. "Only regeneration..."

Just to be sure she wasn't imagining things, she reread the full Ability description, double-checking every line.

[Passive (Copper) – Focus Retention – Level 0]

Description: Grants the Participant the capability to overcharge their Focus reserves above their limit by a certain amount. Only Focus from regeneration can overcap in this manner; Consumables, external Abilities or other sources of Focus Resource are still limited by the usual Focus maximum.

Focus Overcap: 50

Growth/level: Focus Overcap+2.5

"It's a flat bonus too. So it's actually *better* for me right now, since I don't have a huge Focus pool. Percentage-based bonuses would barely move the needle, but this? This is an actual fat chunk of bonus Focus for me to use."

The restriction was annoying, sure, but she'd already thought of a workaround.

"[Meditation Focus] should pair ridiculously *perfectly* with this. The description says it 'increases recovery speed of HP, Stamina, and Focus while meditating.' That should absolutely qualify under the regeneration clause...!"

Doing some quick mental math, she nodded to herself.

That extra 50 Focus at Level 0 came out to around a 22.2% boost to her current pool—and if it scaled all the way up to nearly 44.4% at max level? That was seriously impressive.

In terms of raw stats, it was basically like sinking almost two full level-ups' worth of Attribute Points straight into Focus by the time it hit Level 20—and that wasn't even accounting for any future Ability Alterations.

That was a *massive* boost, especially for such a low-cost-of-opportunity Ability.

"Yeah, having to sit and meditate before a mission might suck," she muttered, still thinking aloud, "but this is definitely a Prep-type Ability I can work with. Charge it once, bank the bonus, and re-up it during downtime. Easy. I need to use my [Meditation Focus] more anyway to get it levelled up and Altered."

She tapped the selection button before she could second-guess it and moved the Ability into the shopping list.

This one was a definite keeper—at least until she reached a higher Tier or got access to Gold-rarity Abilities and beyond. Odds were good those would have more specialized Focus options that fit her build even better, but for now, *[Focus Capacitor]* would do the job just fine.

‘That just leaves one more Ability slot to fill,’ she thought, clearing the filters and watching the massive Ability list reappear. *‘Focus is pretty much covered now, so this one’s a bit more open for interpretation, huh...?’*

She’d been chewing on this exact question for a while—mostly during the long, quiet hours in the medical wing. Should she use some Merit to fill that last Passive slot and fully round out her current profile? Or should she leave it empty and hold onto the points for later?

It wasn’t an easy call.

From where she stood now, there wasn’t anything she *desperately* needed anymore.

Fixing the Focus issue had been the big priority—and now that it was handled, nothing else stood out as critical.

The problem was, she only had one Silver and one Copper Voucher left from her earlier Accomplishments. Anything else would have to be bought with actual Merit, and those points didn’t grow on trees.

Between potential uses of the Faction Trait and future investment opportunities, burning Merit on a “maybe helpful, but definitely not mandatory” Ability felt... risky.

She’d thought it through a few different ways, but always landed in the same spot.

‘If I find something fun, I’ll grab it. If not... I’ll wait. Maybe a Digital Mission or two will drop more Accomplishments my way. Could get more Vouchers. More options.’

That seemed like the smartest play. No reason to rush it.

So, after a quick flick of her eyes toward Karania—who still looked fully absorbed in her own search, brow furrowed and fingers tapping rhythmically across her pad—Thea turned her attention back to the Ability list.

She scrolled up to the few Gold-rarity options available without needing a Voucher, just to see if anything jumped out at her...