

Wildcards - Chapter 26: First Reveal

The eSports bar was packed to the brim with stupefied patrons who had been staring at the surrounding screens in absolute shock.

"NOOOOO!"

One patron roared as the Prime Evil appeared throughout the cutscene.

Disbelief was quickly followed by anger as many of the viewers pieced together what was happening. If the Prime Evil was there, it was like a death sentence for Helena. It didn't take long for others to air their grievances

They can't kill her!

She's the only decent one left, who the fuck will take her place?

I told you this would happen. I don't know why we still watch this scripted shit.

What use is an expansion when you've nobody to fucking play it?

Ugh, why isn't Ethan there?!

The cutscene had broken any tension that had built up in the crowd, with various voices cutting through the commotion. Even the servers that were navigating between booths had paused to criticise the events on screen.

When the scene ended and the Prime Evil ordered Helena to approach, the cries of dismay died down and eventually fell into total silence.

There was an unspoken rule that viewers would keep their mouth shut when there was in-game dialogue being spoken.

Any voices that raised in question, opinion or dismissal were quickly hushed by the masses.

Every person in the bar was hanging on each and every word being spoken by Quentin.

The Abidden Raid had been live for a few moments, but there was already an information overload from #Penta-Price and Quentin.

The fact that the CEO of Abidden was so rarely available for comment meant that his words carried a lot more weight than #Penta-Price.

Each step the Celestial Archer took towards the Prime Evil felt like an eternity to the viewers as the CEO revealed information on his new company.

His words about an expansion was met with a smattering of applause from the crowd, but most reserved their judgement.

Rumours had been circulating that Helena was going to be cut from the team at the end of the raid... which had many of her fans sitting rigidly, staring at the screens in silent prayer that it wasn't true.

When the Prime Evil started to deliver his offer to Helena... a stunned silence swept over the crowd as most people unconsciously held their breath in anticipation.

"Or, you can join me... and your friends."

A cacophony of shouts and cheers burst forth from the packed bar at the reveal of the Paragons. Viewers got to their feet and clutched at anyone in range. Never had there been more solidarity between drunken strangers than in that very moment.

With each reveal, the crowd got louder and louder. By the time that the camera showed Greaves standing in the darkness, the bar was in complete uproar. Viewers were jumping on their seats, and nobody had any intention of stopping them.

The Prime Evil and Helena continued to speak back and forth, but the crowd was too far gone to care. They had finally gotten to see the Paragons back together. The fandom had been served and they were euphoric.

Suddenly, the volume increased to a deafening point that forced the crowd to settle down. Many seemed to come back to their senses as they heard the chilling laugh of the Prime Evil.

In the corner of the eSports Bar, the owner held his hand on the screen control interface... waiting for everyone to quieten down before reducing the volume back to a normal level.

"A puppet? No! I want you to become my Disciple!"

A quicktime poll appeared in front of every booth.

Should Helena accept the offer to become the Prime Evil's Disciple?

Literally everyone mashed the same option in record time.

Calculating Results...

98.2% have voted YES

Having been fans of Abidden since its creation over a decade ago, many of the viewers held an ingrained cynicism towards the game. This whole event seemed way too good to be true. Many

were too scared to hope. Others that saw it as a publicity stunt were at least grateful to have been able to witness the Paragons reunited one last time.

All of that doubt that still lingered in them, evaporated upon seeing Helena smile brightly.

"I accept."

The cheer that burst from the crowd shook the entire bar.

The Paragons were back.

"All the important dialogue is done with, you should resume the shoutcasting... if you're up for it."

#Penta-Price gave the CEO a wide grin before he tapped the interface.

Just back from the bathroom, what did I miss? Haha! You know I'm joking, but lets try and talk this one out everyone... did we just see the same thing? The Paragons are BACK! Look at them! Those aren't the same classes we know. Ahhhh! I'm looking at Quentin and he has that big old knowing smile on his face! This is insane. WHOA! MAN DOWN!

As the shoutcaster was speaking, Kincso flickered and disappeared from sight. When she reappeared, she was standing in front of the fleeing Healer, CurioSity.

Look at that replay! Seems like CurioSity tried to run away from the fight... but Kincso had a lot to say about that. Judging from that attack, I'm going to say that the former God Blade has turned into some kind of an Assassin? Unless she teleported, or used some sort of magic I'm unfamiliar with... that was just high octane, raw speed. You're giving me that look, are you going to tell us, Quentin?

We'll be releasing limited information on each of the new Classes throughout the stream, but you're correct. That was just Kincso's speed. She chose Dervius in the Pantheon.

Pantheon? Dervius? What are those?

Character Creation has had a complete overhaul and introduced the Pantheon of Gods. Dervius is one of the Six Gods and represents Dexterity.

Sounds incredible! So Kincso is an Assassin?

Ghostblade, actually.

Okay, okay... they're going to kill me if I don't ask you about this Disciple of Darkness role? What does it all mean? Will Helena and the other Paragons actually be players in this game? Or is it just their likeness that is being used?

What you're seeing is the real players. They're all back and they can't wait to take on the Heroes! The Disciple of Darkness is a part of a new ranking system that we've implemented in Abidden. You're already familiar with Standard, Master, Unique and Legendary? Disciple is the next rank after Legendary. A Deity must recognise a Player and their accomplishments in the game. Helena has been at Legendary rank for almost two years, so the transition to the next rank made a lot of sense to us. Balance in the game is so incredibly important, which is why we wanted to give the Villains at least one powerful player to begin with.

At least one? Aren't the Paragons the same rank as before?

They've all started again. Each of them are at Standard, Level 1... with the exception of Scarr, who is actually at Commoner Rank, and needs to level up to become Standard Rank. That's a long story though!

Right, we're going to have to save all of this for later. BECAUSE BARTLEBY IS RUSHING GREAVES!

Quentin glanced over at the screen which was showing the comments. It looked like there was a lot of confusion happening in one of the forums.

Scrolling through the feed, the CEO grinned as he saw a single question getting a lot of traction.

JeffX is at a party in District One... so why is he in the raid?

"GET BACK!"

ShieldBro roared as he threw up his right arm. A full-plate shield appeared in front of him, protecting his large frame.

Wasting no time, the Hero twisted his left arm and activated another protective skill.

An abrupt white light flashed out from his body as the barrier spread across him and his teammates.

"CURIO! BUFF BARTLEBY! PERCIVUS, TELEPORT US OUT OF HERE!"

ShieldBro's voice which previously lacked conviction was suddenly powerful as he shouted a series of commands.

As much as he wanted to turn around to see if they were following his orders, he knew he couldn't risk it.

The entire situation was chaotic and there was nothing they could do other than ready themselves to fight against the Paragons and the Prime Evil.

Suddenly a tremendous force slammed into his shield and pushed his entire body backward.

ShieldBro's eyes widened as he saw what had collided with him. The towering frame of the Battle Brewer was slumped against the full-plate shield.

"Bartleby?! Get the hell back in there! Wait, why aren't you buffed?"

Grabbing his warhammer, Bartleby got to his feet with a grin on his face. He looked at the Tank with a curious expression on his face.

"Healer died, man. Look!"

ShieldBro turned to where the larger man was pointing, only to see the collapsed form of CurioSity. Sitting on his back and twirling a dagger in her hand was Kinsco.

The Paragon waved at them with a grin on her face before she disappeared without a trace.

"Fuck! invisibility?"

ShieldBro panicked as he swung his arm around to protect himself.

A voice filled with laughter answered him to his left.

"Not invisible."

The same voice taunted him from his right.

"Just *really*..."

Kinsco was directly in front of him.

"Fast."

ShieldBro tried to turn around but the dagger had plunged into the back of his neck. She had managed to flank him in a split second.

The protective barrier exploded as her weapon made contact, saving him from being assassinated.

Kinsco's excited laughter echoed out from all around them.

It felt like she was mocking them.

Bartleby pulled a keg from his inventory and started to drink heavily from it, his eyes darting around to check for any signs of the assassin.

"PERCIVUS! WHERE IS THE TELEPORT?"

ShieldBro roared again as he warily turned with his shield at the ready for another surprise attack.

A burst of blue light billowed around the chamber before creeping forward and ensnaring the corpse of the dead healer.

At its source was Khance, weaving his hands as he stared intently at his prize.

The corpse twitched before eventually convulsing on the spot.

A despairing wail echoed throughout the room as Khance resurrected CurioSity as a ghoul.

"Bartleby, we need to find Percivus!"

ShieldBro hissed, but the larger man was in no mood to listen to orders.

"Dude. I just got attacked by GREAVES. You think I'm going to leave here? This is the best day of my fucking life."

Bartleby laughed as he picked up his warhammer. His face was resolute as he looked across the room at the entity that had previously thrown him like a ragdoll.

At the edges of shadow, a series of chains could be seen sliding across the ground as though they were snakes.

Stepping out from the darkness, Greaves stood completely bare chested. His arms and neck were decorated with thick metal chains.

"MY NAME IS BARTLEBY VON BRUTTMEISTER! YOU'LL REMEMBER MY NAME THIS DAY!"

The Battle Brewer roared as he raised his warhammer threateningly.

Without so much as a reply, Greaves rotated in a full circle with a single arm outstretched. One of the chains on his arms let loose and swung in a vicious arc towards Bartleby.

"NOPE!"

Bartleby shouted as he leaped into the air, his face awash with relief as the chain swung below him.

The reprieve was short lived as Greaves' chain wrapped around a column.

Greaves roared as he pulled viciously on the chain, propelling himself forward at a dangerous speed.

Bartleby barely managed to bring his warhammer up as Greaves' chain-clad fist smashed into his panicked defence.

The force of the impact was tremendous and Bartleby was flung backward once again.

Instead of waiting for the Battle Brewer to get to his feet or recuperate, Greaves pushed forward on the offensive, a look of fierce concentration on his face.

"WHOA!"

Bartleby exclaimed as he floundered on the ground.

Greaves' second chain unravelled as the former General of Light began to rotate his arms, swinging the chains in circular arcs.

With each rotation of the chains, the height was greater and their rage was longer.

Just as the chains were about to come into contact with Bartleby, the Battle Brewer took out a small golden keg that he took a quick swig from.

The effect was immediate and dramatic.

The Battle Brewer was back on his feet and covered in a red glow. Without any roar or pretense, he started to swing his warhammer in wide arcs, forcing Greaves to briefly retreat.

ShieldBro kept ducking and turning on the spot, not wanting to give Kincso an easy angle to finish him off.

CurioSity's corpse danced merrily in the centre of the chamber to the sound of Khance's laughter.

Helena was consumed by darkness as her character creation continued.

On the far side of the chamber, out of sight and out of earshot, two figures huddled together.

"I did not sign up for this shit."

Percivus spat as he pulled a couple of vials from his inventory.

"So, how can you teleport me with you?"

JeffX asked curiously as he watched the Spellcaster set up the Teleportation Gate.

"I'm not teleporting us, the gate is. That's what I'm making here... once it's done, you just step in the centre and think about where you want to go and it'll take you there."

Percivus explained quickly as he waved his arms vaguely.

"That's at least what the skill says. Anyways, shut up... I don't want them finding us over here."

A few more moments passed before Percivus sighed and took a step back.

"Is it done?"

JeffX asked again, this time a little more eagerly.

The Spellcaster grinned in response as he turned to take one last look at the Paragons.

ShieldBro was prone on the ground with Kinsco dancing on top of his body in step with the Ghoul version of CurioSity.

Bartleby was surprisingly still alive, albeit bleeding profusely. His warhammer was gone and he instead continued to fight with his fists against a calm and collected Greaves.

Percivus knew that there was no chance of victory. The best option was to escape and regroup after everyone successfully respawned.

Turning around to tell JeffX to hurry, Percivus let out a yelp of surprise when he saw the half melted face of the Bard.

Underneath the dripping skin was what looked like a ceramic face mask. It's features were theatrical and terrifying.

"Sorry, Percy... I'm new to all this game stuff."

The Bard laughed as he plunged a dagger into the side of the Spellcaster's neck. The blade sank into the terrified Hero who merely fell backward instead of fighting back.

Percivus clutched at the wound and screamed, his eyes locked onto the still melting face of JeffX.

The figure stabbed again and again with the dagger, the first time glancing off the Spellcaster's chin before the next strike found his eye-socket.

Percivus died as the last piece of melting skin hit the floor.

"Nothing personal, Percy. I just have somewhere I need to be..."

With that said, the figure stepped onto the teleportation gate and disappeared as a system wide announcement popped up for every user.

A Wildcard has been Revealed!
