

Wildcards - Chapter 27: The Investors

Thank you for logging in, Quentin. We will begin when all attendees are accounted for. Please stand by.

The CEO exhaled audibly as he turned around in his own chair. He was back in his office and was practically shaking with excitement. The raid had been a resounding success and he was still in shock that it had gone so smoothly. Once Bartleby died, the screen had faded to black as Helena stepped out of the shadows. Even though it was a short raid, it surprisingly wasn't the shortest in Abidden's history. There had been countless raids that had resulted in a full team wipe due to a stupid decision from Ethan. The fastest on record was less than a minute. Quentin had been instructed to nerf the enemies for all raids going forward after that one.

Quentin watched as faces appeared on the screen in front of him. Each of the Paragons appeared, one by one as they logged into the upcoming press conference. He had scheduled some time for the Paragons to debrief before the investors would join the channel. A few minutes after the investors would join the event, the media companies and their reporters would be granted access to the conference. It was a bit unorthodox, but Quentin felt it was necessary. He didn't want to be blindsided by anything and wanted to make sure that the whole team was aligned for the next step of the plan.

When the last of the Paragons had appeared in the chat, Quentin opened up the communication channel and addressed the team warmly.

"Well, I think you can all be incredibly proud of yourselves! Abidden just had its most successful stream of all time... and we're still waiting on official numbers to come in on subscription packages!"

Satisfied smiles and a few laughs filtered through from the Paragons. All of them looked elated and happy with the news. Helena's smile was by far the widest as she spoke.

"Any word from the investors? I'm sure they're lawyering up and freaking out after that!"

As Quentin opened his mouth to respond, another voice joined the channel.

"Nexus Rigs have made an official statement that they are excited to support Vendetta Enterprises."

Kell said in a matter of fact voice. He was in the channel, but his face wasn't seen.

"Otterman Intelligence Solutions made a statement that they are excited to support Abidden's timely new expansion. The majority of the board are pleased with the numbers that are coming in. There have been a few dissenting voices, but only from the bottom of the chain. Some are reserving judgment until more of the expansion is released."

Kell listed a number of investors that were supportive of the expansion announcement, some of which were a pleasant surprise to Quentin.

The CEO smiled as he leaned back in his chair. His mind was racing as he took in all of the information. A question popped into his head as he checked the timer. They still had a few moments before the investors and sponsors joined the conversation. Whatever their official statement was, it didn't necessarily mean that they would share the same sentiment in a private call with him. Quentin fully expected there to be a few explosive conversations in his immediate future.

"Guessing the Sponsors aren't too pleased?"

Quentin quipped which elicited a laugh from the Paragons.

Kell's laugh came through to everyone as he continued with his report.

"You'd be correct. Curio Pharma are trying to get rid of CurioSity already. Looks like Percivus isn't going to be getting a new sponsor after Dryksell's withdrawal either. PlayMates were originally in talks to take on Percivus, but they've decided on a different candidate."

A strange expression crossed Helena's face at those words.

"It wasn't James, was it?"

When no answer came from Kell, Helena repeated the question, this time with more of an edge in her voice.

Kell finally answered with a sigh.

"No, James went into a contract with Nox Holdings. PlayMates is sponsoring my character, if you must know."

An awkward silence crept across the group before Scarr broke and said what was on his mind.

"PlayMates are the ones that offer the live-in sex workers? Aren't they?"

Quentin cleared his throat as he waved his hand at the screen, signalling for the Paragons attention.

"None of that really matters. Kell, well done on your debut tonight! I don't think we could have asked for a better introduction for the Wildcards!"

Helena's expression finally relaxed at those words as her smile returned.

"Yes Kell! You were incredible, I saw the replay footage of you killing Percivus!"

Before Kell could reply, Quentin brought all of the Paragons to silence with a gesture.

"Investors are going to be joining now, everyone brace yourselves for the shitstorm. Don, please don't antagonise them. Kell, I'll leave it to your own judgement on if you'd like to participate or just monitor what happens. Any questions?"

Quentin spoke quickly as his eyes watched the clock.

None of the Paragons said a word, which allowed Quentin to tap the screen and allow the investors into the call.

Didn't think you had the balls to do that, Quentin! Long overdue if you ask me, long overdue! We at PBS Group think it's about time for a change.

A husky voice started the proceedings with a laugh. It was one of the minor shareholders that only accounted for around one percent of Abbiden's ownership, Pandora's Box Security Group.

"Thank you so much for the kind words, Miss Pithos."

Quentin answered with a genuine smile, wondering which investor would be the first dissenting voice from the pack.

Haha! How many times do I need to tell you to call me Pandora? I don't want to be too presumptuous, but we'd love to have a chat about sponsoring Frederick Hargreaves again. It's good to see you again, sweetie.

Greaves' smile was surprisingly gentle as he spoke for the first time on the call.

"I'd be happy to chat in the future, Pandora."

Delighted to hear that, Greaves! You were incredible tonight... absolutely incredible. I'll be in touch with Kell to sort something out.

With that said, Pandora Pithos muted herself on the call, content in the fact that she had called first preference on sponsoring Greaves.

Another moment of silence passed before at least three investors started to speak at the exact same time. One of them went silent, while two continued to speak louder in the hopes it would drown out the other.

Eventually, one of them relinquished and a singular deep voice remained speaking.

...yes, thank you. Quentin, it's been an exciting evening but there are some concerns. Why were we not briefed about this new expansion? Also, another question we have is about the legal proceedings your team have taken against a former representative of the board, Victor Romero.

Any of the background chatter between the investors suddenly went quiet at those words. The voice that was speaking belonged to a member of Royal D1, the second largest shareholder of

Abidden after Nexus Rigs. Quentin took a moment to collect himself before answering, it had been one of the questions he had expected to arrive and Elvira had already briefed him on the best answer to give them. The excitement of the night and the fact that Quentin had felt free of the board's influence for the first time in years, created a newfound bravery in the CEO. Before he could even think about the lines he had rehearsed with Elvira, he instead went on the offensive.

"It has been an exciting evening. The first in years. Why were you not briefed about the expansion? Probably the same reason I wasn't briefed about the Paragons being replaced. We wouldn't have agreed on the topic. Just like you pushed your agenda, I've pushed mine."

Quentin retorted in a calm tone as he leaned forward in his chair. One of the voices on the line started to laugh, another gasped and quite a few expressed disbelief. The most important of those voices that had asked the original question, was deadly silent as the CEO continued to speak.

"The legal proceedings that have been brought against Victor Romero were in the interests of the Paragons that were unfairly dismissed. It has since been resolved out of court, an independent arbitrator made a ruling that both parties were satisfied with. You didn't ask a question, so I can only imagine that you were making a statement of concern. Next question."

Mr. Bell, there is no need for hostility. We at Royal D1 need to protect our interests and make sure that our investment is still sound. We can assure you that we have no agenda outside of making returns on said investments. Your behaviour at this moment in time is causing me to doubt your leadership and suitability as CEO of Abidden Zoetic Enterprises.

The voice continued, this time equipped with its own edge. Quentin opened his mouth to snap back at the man, but was instead interrupted by a familiar voice.

"Kell Daystar. Head of Media Partnerships. I'll take this."

Thank you, Mr. Daystar. I hope you can shed some light on this situation for us all.

"Royal D1 owns 11.8% of Abidden at this moment in time. You already know how lucrative that investment has been in the years since, so I won't take up all of our valuable time by jumping into the financials. Tonight alone, Abidden's viewership reached its highest in recorded history. Our subscriptions are up 16% and we have met and exceeded all of our contractual obligations to you. So please don't insult our intelligence by claiming you have a concern regarding your investment. If you wish to withdraw your funding, we have a substantial list of companies that would replace you in an instant."

Quentin merely gaped at the screen, completely thrown by Kell's words. He had thought that he had maybe gone too far, but his little spat was nothing to Kell's path of destruction. Silence followed for a moment, before Kell continued.

"I appreciate that we're all feeling excited at this moment in time, and due to the secretive nature of us releasing an expansion without the market knowing... it led us to make some unorthodox decisions. All of those things were accomplished under Quentin's leadership, which has resulted in our best performance in history. If you wish to discuss Royal D1's future with Abidden or a potential withdrawal, I can make time for us to speak later in the week. For now, we have an upcoming press conference to prepare for, and a range of equally important investors that have questions for us."

I apologise. You're correct Mr. Daystar, I believe the excitement of the evening made me choose my words poorly. Lets have that meeting next week, congratulations on a great event tonight.

Kell's voice remained calm and collected as he responded.

"Thank you. Next question to Quentin, we'll take Nexus Rigs."

Quentin merely stared dumbly at the faces of the Paragons who returned his blank stare.

Nexus Rigs here. We knew about the expansion, but we never could have anticipated such a performance. Keep it up, Quentin. To the Paragons... welcome back! That's all from us.

"Thank you. Next question to Quentin, we'll take Otterman Intelligence Solutions."

Henry here! Just wanted to say... WOW! That was a phenomenal performance! I think you know what I'm going to ask, but I think now is a better time than any... will we be seeing some Otters in this expansion?

The CEO couldn't help but laugh.

"You know what, Henry? We put a Unicorn in for JeffX... leave it with me. We might end up getting the Otters!"

Actually! Yes! What the hell happened with JeffX? There was a different Villain! Can you tell us about that person?

As Quentin opened his mouth, Kell interrupted once again but with a gentler tone.

"Nice try, Henry. We can't leak information about *those* individuals just yet."

Oooooh! You've more than one! Okay, I'm invested... Ha, you know what I mean! That's all my questions, thank you.

"Thank you, Henry. We're short on time before the press conference is due to commence. Are there any investors that have outstanding questions for Quentin and the Paragons?"

Kell asked matter of factly before falling silent.

When no questions came it seemed as though the investors were ready to wrap things up and end the call. It was then that Greaves spoke.

"Can I ask a question to the investors?"

Quentin and Kell made no move to block the Paragon from speaking and after a moment, a number of voices indicated that they'd be happy to hear him out.

His normally gruff voice was surprisingly calm as he spoke.

"You all sound really happy that we're back."

Greaves paused for a second as he took a breath, confusion written all over his face.

"So... why did you get rid of us in the first place?"

Quentin thought Kell would jump in, but it didn't happen. Kell remained quiet, curious about what answer would come of it.

Royal D1 here. To be frank, our advisors and representatives that we embedded into Abidden told us that there was more money to be made with more popular Heroes. We did the numbers and it made sense. Looking back, it was the right decision at the time.

Greaves nodded his head as the answers began to flow in.

Nexus Rigs here. Five custom Rigs for the Paragons versus twenty-four custom Rigs for a new host of Heroes, all with different data and requirements... it was more profitable, more publicity and helped further our own research. It was never anything personal against you or the Paragons.

PBS Group! Greaves, honey... I fought tooth and nail to keep you in the game. We just didn't have enough voting power at the time. We still made more money by going with the majority, but it never sat right with me.

We crunched the numbers and it made more sense to diversify the Heroes. It was nothing personal. I crunched the numbers again tonight, and the Paragons are once again the team to bet on!

Greaves thanked each investor that answered his question until the call again went silent.

Quentin looked at each of the Paragons and was surprised to see a mixture of surprise and happiness on their faces.

"Kell Daystar. Thank you all for your time, we shall revert back to liaising with investor appointed representatives from this point onwards. I appreciate that tonight was more of a debriefing than it was a full investor call, but time is not on our side right now. Good night!"

When the last of the investors left the call, Quentin exhaled loudly in relief.

"That wasn't as bad as I thought it would be!"

The Paragons nodded their heads and chattered between themselves, relief on many of their faces.

Kell's calm and calculated voice brought them back to reality.

"The press-conference is about to begin!"