

The Paradigm Discourses

“Causality”

*There once was a lady named Bright,
who traveled much faster than light.
She set out one day,
in a relative way,
and returned on the previous night.*

– Reginald Buller

Backstory:

Since its inception the Realm has been faithfully served by the National Letter Service (NLS). All letters are delivered in secure envelopes, which prevent the contents from being observed in transit or read before the envelope is opened. While bureaucratic, the NLS is very precise; successive letters between any two addresses are always delivered in the same order in which they are mailed.

In recent eons, the speed with which letters travel has come to be perceived as slow, even though nothing else in the Realm moves any faster. As the Realm has expanded, the time taken to mail letters from one end to the other has become unacceptably long.

Curiosity was pacing back and forth, brow furrowed, when she nearly collided with Paradigm. “Excuse me,” he said.

Curiosity, “No, no that was my fault, I’m lost in thought. Wait, that’s too kind, I’m just irritated.”

“I’ve a little free time; can I help?”

Curiosity, obviously relieved at the prospect of a sympathetic ear, jumped at the offer. “Oh, yes, please.”

“Alright, what’s the situation?”

“As you know, Understanding sends out regular updates on the groups’ progress, but he uses a letter chain. Dogma and I are the first links in the chain, and we receive a regular stream of letters in white envelopes. We always get them at the same time, simultaneously, then forward them on.

“I’ve felt honored to be first in line, along with Dogma, but perhaps I’ve become complacent and entitled.

“Last week I started getting letters in red envelopes, but at half the usual rate. I like Dogma, but it bothered me that suddenly, he was getting updates before me. What was worse, he was now getting blue envelopes, but at double the usual rate. I was even more behind than I had thought.”

Paradigm looked at Curiosity, almost looking through her, his thoughts going in a dozen directions at once. He stared off into space for a long time.

“Well?”

Finding his tongue, “What did you do about it? What have you tried?”

“First thing, I fired off a letter to Dogma and asked him to copy and forward his letters. He did so, honorably, they showed up in the usual white envelopes, but each one was always later than the corresponding red envelope. It was irritating. Why is the NLS so slow?”

“It’s the causality laws. You know bureaucracies; they never met a law they didn’t like.”

“Well, what doppler came up with that?”

“Prima Poincaré, from the Relativity Committee, if I recall.”

“Well, we need something that is faster than letter.”

Paradigm tried, he really tried to resist his warped sense of humor, but in the end it was inevitable.

“I see – you want FTL.”

Scowling, “You say that like it’s a bad thing...”