

The Paradigm Discourses

“Search Party”

You always find it in the last place you look. – pessimist
Well, I sure hope you stop looking once you've found it. – wit

“Has anyone seen Paradigm?” Understanding’s voice boomed out across the gathering.

Banter quieted down quickly. A few random voices piped up, “Nope.” “Not recently.” “Not for a few days.”

Understanding’s gaze traversed the room like a forward operative identifying targets. “I need more than that. Those who think differently than those around them can switch emotional states in a heartbeat; high highs, low lows. Anyone here think Paradigm is on a high right now?”

To their credit no one avoided eye contact. Curiosity stood, “He missed last week, and he’s not here tonight. He’s never late, at least not by much, and when he has had to be elsewhere, he’s always let someone know.”

“Or dragged one of us with him.” Reason piped up.

Understanding said, “Okay then, let’s take that as a clue. Those of you who have been drafted somewhere before team up and go visit those spots. No one leaves here alone, two-man teams mandatory. I want everyone back in one hour to share intel and regroup.

“Questions?”

There were none. After some brief conversations as past escapades were shared, everyone teamed up and left two by two. Theory and Experiment of course, were the first to leave. Then Logic and Proof teamed up, as did Reason and Mathematics. Out the door they all went.

Dogma came over to Curiosity, confessing, “You know, he’s never actually asked me to accompany him anywhere. You?”

Curiosity, “Me neither and I’m pretty sure I made it clear I was interested. I pressed him on it once; he said that whenever he hoped to share something with the group, he wanted me here, fresh, without prior exposure, because he thought my reaction would help energize the rest of you. I suppose that’s a compliment.”

Dogma, nodded, and having nothing of value to add chose not to give evidence of the fact.

Understanding strode over to them, “Why are you two still here?”

“Paradigm has never actually drug us along on any of his side trips.” Dogma confessed.

Understanding, considering, then commanded, “Good, then your job is to think of places he might go, maybe places he’s never been. When he’s licking his wounds, does he look for isolated spots where he can be alone, or does he favor public spots where he can be surrounded by people?”

“You mean strangers. Does he know anyone but us?” Curiosity was confronting Understanding, not a role she found natural. Understanding shook his head, “Don’t know.” Visually piercing them he added, “Think of something.” He returned to his desk and fumbled papers, but they just ended back up in the same place. He was genuinely worried.

Paradigm surveyed the cityscape from the height of the water tower. He liked the view, and the isolation; gave him a chance to think. While not actually legal, he had befriended one of the water department employees; he had a gifted son, who was a handful, and Paradigm had taken some time to tutor him. Sometimes, karma seemed like a real thing. Anyway, ever since, as long as he was discreet, he could sneak up here without getting into trouble.

Off in the distance he could make out Understanding's house, if you could call it that; 'abode' better captured the general ambiguity. It was a cross between a residence, museum, and town hall, with pre-avantgarde architecture. It was on a large plot, on the crest of a ridge and well isolated by the grounds, which was fortunate, for it failed to match the general neighborhood architecture in nearly every way. Whoever the architect was, the result was well suited for parties, at least of the sort where conversation, interaction, challenge, and debate were the social norm. It had turned out to be a perfect venue for the group, with a descent view to the west as well. Some of the sunsets had been memorable.

Paradigm had been sitting on the upper walkway for two hours, legs actually dangling beneath the handrail, swinging back and forth on their own accord, like some girl-scout. He had enjoyed the setting of the sun, and now the deepening twilight, when motion at Understanding's abode caught his eye. Looked like two guests were leaving, early, earnestly and in a hurry. "That's odd he thought." Then a couple of minutes later he observed another pair leave, in a similar way. He almost missed them, as he had been idly thinking about Venus low on the horizon. Then two more left the abode; that finally roused his full attention. "What's goin' on down there?" he asked of no one in particular.

He stood and stretched, wondering if he should climb down.

Curiosity looked at Dogma, "Ok, first thing we have to do is try to think like Paradigm. Where would he go to regroup?" She looked at Dogma who had acquired a wry look, "You want me to think like Paradigm? Seriously?" Dogma made sure she felt the cognitive dissonance.

Curiosity tried to suppress a smile but failed, "Ok, I realize the challenge in that. Maybe what we need is a change of scenery. Follow me." She led the two of them out onto the deck, "Looks like we missed the sunset." The two of them surveyed the western part of town, then looked back up the hill, he to the south following the valley, and she to the north following the ridge line. There she spied the water tower.

"Dogma," she said, "you ever get the feeling that Paradigm likes to grok it all, that if he could, he would lay out all knowledge onto one large diagram that he could survey in totality with a single glance?" She looked at her comrade. Dogma nodded, "Seems to me you have a knack for capturing a person's character. You just defined Paradigm to a tee. Me, I'd want all of human knowledge in a library index card cabinet, every detail organized and easy to find."

Curiosity, "You two might have more in common than you think." While Dogma pondered that imponderable, she continued, "You ever climb up the town's water tower?"

"Never even occurred to me; it's not legal, nor probably safe either."

Curiosity, now thinking out loud more than actually communicating, “It would give one a bird’s eye view of the whole town, would it not?” She looked at him. Dogma, after a slight pause, “It would indeed. Maybe we should check it out.”

Paradigm walked once around the water tower taking the whole town in. He knew he was depressed, and he knew why. It wasn’t good to mope, but he also knew that some time had to be offered to his brain, brain mind you not mind, for it to deal with the trauma of false hope. Soon enough it would be time to get ‘back on the horse.’ His role on the team was not actually at risk, but they had agreed to follow his lead, and he felt like he had let them down; led them on a merry goose chase. He took a last look at Understanding’s abode and decided that he should suck it up and show up tonight. It would be courteous and responsible, and if they laughed, they laughed. He wasn’t ready to give up just yet anyway.

He started climbing down, jumping the last few feet to the ground only to have the bejesus scared out of him; he nearly landed on Curiosity and Dogma. “What are you two doing here?”

Curiosity, with the stern look a mother gets when their children put their parent’s through something nerve wracking, summarized the evening; him being absent last week, now late this week, Understanding’s stern leadership, everyone pairing off to find him, her inspired guess. She was quite eloquent about it. Paradigm felt a little foolish, somehow, he had generated consternation just by absence. He mustered an all too inadequate “Sorry.”

They made it back within Understanding’s one-hour time limit, just before Theory and Experiment arrived; the two other search party pairs had returned bare minutes before. With the group assembled, Understanding stood and addressed them all, “We accepted a quest...as a team, no exceptions.” He surveyed the room; “Enough about that. We’ll regroup next week. Go home.”