

The Poseidon Project
Chapter 2

May 5, 1996, Miami, Florida

Scully rubbed her eyes and blinked several times to adjust to the dim light in the harbor. Mulder had insisted that they arrive as early as possible to the dock, even though the ship wasn't slated to begin boarding for another three hours and wouldn't even depart for another two after that. The air was hot and muggy even though it was early in the morning and the humidity was quickly getting to her. She heard the car trunk slam behind her as Mulder finished unloading their suitcases, and she turned around to face the agent. She felt groggy, and her voice reflected it, surprising even her.

"Mulder, your enthusiasm is commendable, but why bother showing up this early? We can't even get our things onboard yet and your supposed paranormal event isn't even supposed to happen until tomorrow." Mulder chuckled and tossed her suitcase at her. She caught it and stumbled, almost losing her footing. Mulder took his own suitcase and began to walk towards the dock where the dark outline of a ship loomed.

"I pulled some strings so that we can examine the ship prior to departure. I figured that you would like the opportunity to make sure there's nothing wrong with the ship that might be contributing to the disappearances." Scully hefted her suitcase and followed him, shaking her head.

"Mulder, there's still nothing that suggests these disappearances were anything more than coincidence. Their unique alignment is something that just makes no sense. I mean, the *Echo* could just have easily been named the *Revenge* and still have disappeared. There's no evidence that it's the ships' names that cause the disappearance. And besides, it still doesn't account for the fact that the last of these 'linked' disappearances was a train. Who's to say it won't be another train this time?" Mulder held a hand up for her to be silent for a moment, and Scully sighed. They had almost reached the end of the dock now, and she looked up to take in the sight of the *Nereid*.

The ship was massive, bigger than most of the cruise ships she had seen (though admittedly, most of her knowledge came from brochures about the ships and not the ships themselves). It was a gargantuan white steel creature, with several decks and a gleaming hull. Scully realized that her mouth was open and she quickly shut it, shooting a quick glance at Mulder to ensure that he hadn't seen her in such a state of juvenile awe. She smirked as she noticed him in a similar position, neck craned in an attempt to see the top of the ship. They were at the water's edge now, and were greeted at the edge of ship's gangplank by a man in a neatly pressed white sailor's uniform, complete with a little white hat. Scully suppressed a grin, thinking that the whole outfit seemed more at home on a 1940s Navy recruitment poster than as the attire for a cruise line employee. He had sandy blonde hair and his slightly crooked teeth were

showing as he forced a smile at the two agents. He extended a hand towards Mulder.

"Welcome to the *Nereid*. My name's Damian, I'm a member of the crew here. You two must be those FBI agents the captain told us about. He called about an hour ago, said it was important that we let you on early. If it's not too intrusive, could you tell me why that is?" His voice had a hint of a Southern drawl to it, but it was obvious he was trying to maintain an accent of neutral origin. Mulder kept his face unreadable as he shook the crewman's hand.

"Just routine inspection. We got word up at Quantico about some cruise liners that failed to present suitable records of their transactions for food and other amenities on the boats. Bureaucracy, really. It shouldn't take too long." Damian nodded and made his way up to the ship's entrance, motioning for the agents to follow.

"I understand the concern. Some of our competitors try to undercut us by buying their foodstuffs for cheap from places of a less than sanitary nature. Doesn't do 'em much good in the long run though, what with all the passengers getting sick. Tell you what. Since you've got your luggage with you, I'll take you to your rooms first, then I can show you both to where we keep our records." He led them through several narrow corridors and up a flight of stairs to a pair of rooms side by side. He then handed each of them a key and stood off to the side while they opened the doors.

"Separate rooms, as requested. I'll give you folks ten minutes to get settled in and then I'll come back and show you to where you wanted to go. I've got to go make sure the itinerary is all in order." Damian quickly moved off down the corridor and around the corner, leaving Mulder and Scully alone outside their rooms. Scully hauled in her suitcase and set it on the bed, looking around at her accommodations. Modest, but not overly so. This trip would be fairly comfortable, at least insofar as the room was concerned. She decided to go and check on Mulder's room and found him relaxing on the bed, arms folded behind his head and suitcase tossed haphazardly to the side in one corner of the room. Scully smirked. To his credit, he did appear to have shaved, and the shirt he wore had less than half the wrinkles of the one he was sporting in his office a few days earlier. She rapped her knuckles on the doorframe and he turned his head towards her. She sat down in a chair near the doorway and adopted a cynical tone.

"So, Mulder, what's your current plan of action regarding what you consider to be our imminent disappearance? Do nothing and just see what happens?"

"That's the essence of it. When you say it, it sounds a lot worse, though. Why don't we just call it naturalistic observation?"

"Because that would imply some scientific element to all this, an element which this case is severely lacking. Do you have any theories as to where these missing transports were taken?" Mulder sat up and thought for a moment.

“Well, given that Poseidon was the Greek god of the ocean, and of earthquakes, it could be that we’re bound for some massive fissure in the seafloor, one that current deep-sea diving equipment is unable to reach. That or it could be a dimensional rift of some sort that spits us out into an alternate universe where the Earth is 90% water instead of 75%.” Scully sighed.

“Mulder, while that would be fascinating if it were true, the fact remains that no trace of the transports that disappeared was ever found again. What makes you think it’ll be any different this time around?”

Mulder stood up from the bed, a slightly somber expression on his face. “Nothing, really. There is a very real possibility we won’t make it back from wherever we go. But if I’m right, Scully, this is tangible evidence that the X-files actually contain truth to them. We’ll have been to somewhere no one has charted before.”

Scully gave him a concerned look. “Mulder, I know you’re searching for truth, but don’t let that search make us into martyrs. Maybe it’s best if we–” She was cut short by the sound of Damian clearing his throat in the hallway.

“Sir? Ma’am? I’d be happy to take you to the records room now.” Mulder mumbled something that vaguely sounded like an acknowledgement and followed the crewman into the hallway. Scully trailed behind them a fair distance, looking at the walls of the ship. Nothing suggested it was anything but a well-built, sturdy craft. Damian led them down several decks to a part of the ship where the pristine white of the living quarters had been abandoned and replaced with the grey drab of functionality. Pipes ran along the side of the corridor and there was little to no paint on the walls. A dull metallic jingling rang off the walls as Damian fiddled with a ring of keys. He had stopped before a metal door marked only with a small plaque that read “Records” about a foot from the top of the frame. Settling on a particular key, he turned it in the lock and pushed the door open, fumbling to his left in an attempt to find the light switch. It clicked on and the room was bathed in a dull orange light. He turned to face the agents.

“Just let me know if you folks need anything else. When you’re done here, just follow the yellow line on the floor to get back to your deck. We’ll begin boarding other passengers in a bit, so things might get a little hectic.” He checked his watch and moved off down a different hallway, leaving Mulder and Scully at the entrance to a dimly lit room filled with several filing cabinets and a single naked light bulb hanging from the ceiling. Mulder clapped his hands together.

“Let’s get started, shall we? Lots of boring receipts that we need to look through for the next couple of hours. Why didn’t I tell them we were here to inspect the food itself? That might not have been so mind-numbing.”

Scully rolled her eyes and pushed past Mulder, opening the nearest filing cabinet. She pulled out the front folder and handed it to Mulder. “Let’s get started, Mr. Amazing Undercover

Agent. We've got receipts to scan and contracts to look over. Maybe in a few hours they'll give us a lunch break."

They made it through the first two cabinets before finally deciding to quit, this decision aided by their growing hunger. By then it was about a half-hour to their departure, and other passengers were shuffling through the halls by the time they got back up to their rooms. Scully was exhausted by a combination of the heat and having woken up at an ungodly hour, and as soon as she shut the door to her room she lay down on her bed and drifted off almost immediately.

After what seemed like only seconds after she had closed her eyes, she was awakened by knocking at her door. Mulder's muffled voice came from through the door. "Scully? You alive in there?" She groaned and rubbed the last bits of sleep from her eyes, then moved to open the door to see Mulder dressed in a horrendous red Hawaiian shirt and khaki shorts.

"What time is it?" she mumbled.

"About six in the evening. You missed the welcome address by the captain and our departure." She snorted.

"What, did he say anything important about our planned disappearance tomorrow?"

"No, but he was so very kind to inform us all that the lower levels of the ship were off-limits, not counting our little excursion to the records room this morning. Now, come on. I'm off to have third lunch. Or is it first dinner? Does 6:00 make it dinner now?"

Scully followed him to the ship's dining hall. A few passengers were filtering in, seemingly trying to keep normal meal schedules even though the food was technically available at all hours of the day. She didn't remember what she finally ended up eating, but the food was passable. It was around eight when they returned to the hallway outside their rooms. Mulder opened his door and prepared to enter his room, but Scully touched his arm lightly.

"You're positive this event will occur tomorrow?" He nodded.

"Could even be as early as midnight tonight. I'm not sure about the time frame." She smiled sadly.

"I hope you're wrong, Mulder. I really do. But I don't take pride in that fact. Your theories haven't often been wrong in the past." He nodded wordlessly and slipped into his room, closing the door behind him. Scully felt cold for the first time since they had stepped off the plane in Miami. She shuddered involuntarily and went into her own room. Not feeling particularly tired after her long nap, she sat in bed with a book, reading until her eyelids became too heavy to hold up.

Scully shot out of bed in a panic. The gentle movements of the ship had been nearly unnoticeable when she fell asleep, but now they were so violent she felt as if she could be jostled against the walls of her room at any moment. She threw on a coat and ran out into the hallway, pounding on Mulder's door. She quickly checked her watch. 4:30 a.m. May 6. Mulder's door swung open, he was already dressed and didn't look like he had slept at all.

"Mulder, what the hell is happening?"

"It's a storm, just like the one in the fisherman's diary."

"Well, what do we do?! I'm not just sitting here and waiting to get slammed into the walls below decks."

Mulder nodded in agreement and pointed to the stairwell farther down the hall. "Let's try to get above deck. I want to observe this if it's really happening." Scully shook her head in disbelief but said nothing, running up the stairwell and finding the door to the deck locked tight. Mulder waved for her to move aside and began to pick the lock. Meanwhile, the ship's movement had intensified; it was all the agents could do to keep their balance as it moved from side to side. Finally the lock clicked and the door burst open.

Howling winds were whipping across the deck and rain was coming in horizontally from what seemed to be every direction at once. Scully couldn't make out anything for a moment, but heard Mulder's laughter. Her vision cleared slightly and she could see him pointing at the sky, where several lights danced above the ship. The lights were of several different colors, each one brilliant and vivid. Scully saw reds, blues, purples, greens, and yellows darting overhead as the rain kept coming down. She lost her balance and slipped backwards down the stairs, her head making a sharp crack as it collided with the handrail. Her vision swam and she lost consciousness.

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Scully's eyes were closed when she became aware again, and her whole body ached. She groaned in pain and heard Mulder's voice from somewhere off to her left. "Good, you're all right. Don't open your eyes just yet, you're still in a bad way."

"Mulder, what happened to us? Are we still on the ship?" She heard his voice getting closer as he spoke, but what she noted was the sound of his footsteps. They seemed louder...and somehow more numerous.

"My theory was wrong, Scully."

"So that's a 'yes, we're still on the ship'?"

“No. My theory about Poseidon. True, he was the Greek god of the sea, but I overlooked another one of his domains.” Scully’s heart sank.

“And what was that, Mulder?”

“Horses.”