

MULDER

X Marks the Spot

by Nigel G. Mitchell

FBI Agents Mulder and Scully investigate strange events in San Francisco that Mulder believes may be related to interdimensional travellers.

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San Francisco, California
Golden Gate Park
10:30 PM

Rain pattered on the leaves of Golden Gate Park, and darkened the wooden slats of a park bench. The air a few inches to the left of the bench began to twist and distort, curling into a spiral that imploded on itself, forming the mouth of a swirling tunnel.

A short-haired woman popped out of it, followed by a portly man, a young man, and a tall black man. All four of them landed in a deep puddle of muddy water that sloshed at their impact.

The bearded man, Professor Maximillian Arturo, sputtered and coughed as he stood up. "Good lord, that was worse than usual."

Rembrandt Brown wiped thick mud off his face. "Yeah, not bad enough we're sliding into another universe without gettin' a bath on the way in."

Wade Welles got to her feet, shaking water out of her hair. "Is everybody okay?"

The young man, Quinn Mallory, pulled a small timing device out of his pocket, wiped it off, and read the digital readout. "Yeah, I think so. But we'd better get out of this storm fast. I'm not sure what the

rain will do to this thing."

The four of them began to walk out of the park. Professor Arturo eyed the large life-sized statue they passed on the way.

"Well," he said, "our good friend Abraham Lincoln seems to be here. That's a good sign."

"Yeah," Wade said. "Maybe we're finally home."

Rembrandt eyed the park around them. "Yeah, every time we say that, somethin' weird happens."

"Well, we're okay so far."

Rembrandt squinted up at the clouds overhead with a grin. "Yeah, except for this rain. Maybe we're in a world where Seattle got moved down here."

Wade burst out laughing just as the rain slowed to a drizzle and stopped altogether.

Quinn grinned at Rembrandt. "I don't think so. Maybe we're in a world where the weather responds to voice commands."

The four of them walked out of the park, Quinn, Wade, and Rembrandt laughing with each other, onto a sidewalk beside a well-travelled road. Pedestrians walked the sidewalk visiting shops and other

establishments across the street. Alongside the park, a couple walked hand-in-hand.

Rembrandt's pace slowed as he looked around. "Hey, guys, I think we'd better get indoors. Not good to be out here at night."

Quinn looked down at the dripping timer in his hand. "Remmy's right. Says here we've got twenty-four hours in this world. That should be enough time to find a hotel."

Wade looked up and down the street as they reached the curb. "Where should we go?"

Rembrandt looked back at her as he took a

few steps out onto the road. "I think there's a motel about three blocks -- "

"Rembrandt, look out!"

Rembrandt whirled as a car came screeching around the corner. It barreled towards him at sixty miles an hour, its tires smoking.

Rembrandt tried to dive out of the way, but the car was too fast. Its fender slammed into him. He went flying through the air, landing on the curb, his head striking the concrete with a meaty thwack.

"Rembrandt!" Wade screamed, as she ran to where he lay.

Quinn spun to watch the car that had hit Rembrandt. It was skidding out of control, weaving all over the road. Finally, its tires gave up the battle and sent the car careening up onto the sidewalk. It rammed into a tree, buckling its hood, and bringing the vehicle to a halt.

The people on the street were forming a large crowd as Professor Arturo hurried to kneel beside Rembrandt, who still lay on the ground. Wade was cradling his head in her arms.

"Is he all right?" Arturo asked.

"I don't know," Wade said. "He won't

wake up."

"We'd better call an ambulance, quickly --
"

Rembrandt groaned.

"Wait. He appears to be waking up. Don't move, Miss Welles. The slightest jarring could cause further injury."

Wade nodded, then leaned closer to Rembrandt to whisper, "Are you okay, Rembrandt?"

"I think so," Rembrandt murmured.
"What happened?"

Wade wiped a trickle of rainwater from his forehead. "You got hit by a car. Don't try to move. We're gonna get you some help."

"I feel okay. Got a whopper of a headache, but I think I can get -- "

Arturo placed a hand lightly on his chest to keep him from sitting up. "On the contrary, Mr. Brown, you could be severely injured. Adrenaline may be dampening any pain you may be experiencing. I suggest you remain still until we call an ambulance."

Arturo stood and patted Quinn's arm. "I believe we should check on our sudden visitors, dear boy. They may require

assistance as well."

Quinn followed Arturo, who was striding towards the wreckage of the car. They moved through the throng of spectators who surrounded the crash site, murmuring apologies until they emerged beside the car.

The vehicle was a mangled hunk of smoking metal. Steam hissed from the remains of the hood as the ticking of cooling metal filled the air. Quinn and Arturo approached the car slowly.

"Perhaps it would be wise to remain at a safe distance," Arturo said.

"No," Quinn said. "If somebody's in there,

we gotta get 'em out."

He ran to the driver's side of the car, bracing for an explosion at any moment. When none came, Quinn moved closer, observing that the window was wound up. Even though the glass was shattered and twisted, it was still intact enough to block his view of the car's interior.

"Hello?" Quinn called. "Is anyone in there?"

The glass buckled with a thump. Another thump followed. Then the glass popped out, falling onto the sidewalk with a crash as it broke into hundreds of pieces. The glass had been propelled by a bloody fist

that dropped onto the window's frame, exhausted.

Quinn moved in closer to peer into the car's exterior. A fat man was lying on the steering wheel, the side of his face streaked with blood.

"Hello?" Quinn asked. "You okay?"

The man leaned back, letting his head flop backwards onto the seat's headrest. Quinn inhaled sharply as he realized the man looked exactly like Professor Arturo. His eyes were closed as his chest rose and fell with labored breathing.

On the passenger side of the car, Quinn

could hear Professor Arturo whisper, "Good lord."

Quinn watched the Professor's double for a moment, then ran around to the other side of the car. His running slowed to a halt as he saw that Arturo was looking down at the passenger, who was an exact duplicate of Quinn Mallory.

The other Quinn was leaning back in his seat, his hair matted down with blood. Quinn couldn't see if he was breathing, because a laptop computer with a broken screen was perched in his lap.

"Well," the Professor said in a weak voice, "that seems to eliminate any doubt. This is

not our universe."

"Yeah," Quinn said. "These guys are our counterparts here."

"What in blazes were they doing careening around in the middle of the night? Going on a joyride?"

Quinn noticed something strange about his double. He was wearing a bloodstained lab coat, but there were a series of odd black smudges over the chest. Quinn leaned through the remains of the window and touched one of them.

It wasn't a smudge. It was a hole in the coat that went all the way through to his

double's rib-cage.

"This was no joyride," Quinn said. "I -- I mean, he -- was shot."

"Yes," Arturo said. "Several times. What the devil is happening here?"

Quinn was leaning back out of the car when his duplicate's hand shot up. It grabbed onto Quinn's jacket with surprising strength, pulling him closer into the car.

His double's eyes opened. They focused on Quinn with edges that were red and teary. As Quinn gazed into his own tortured face, his double's free hand pushed a button on

the side of the laptop computer. A disk popped out into his palm.

The young man thrust the disk into Quinn's breast pocket as he spoke in a breathy whisper.

"Don't let them get it," his double croaked. "Run. Run before -- it's -- too -- "

The hand's grip on the cloth loosened until it dropped off completely. Quinn's double rolled his eyes up to the sky as he convulsed slightly, then exhaled with a gurgling noise.

Quinn waited for his counterpart to speak again, then touched two fingers to his

neck. There was no pulse.

"He's dead," Quinn whispered.

Professor Arturo was on the other side of the car, looking up at him over his own double. "Yes. And so's this one."

Quinn leaned out of the car, still gazing down at his own lifeless body. He was barely aware of Wade and Rembrandt, who came staggering over to them.

Professor Arturo watched Wade approach, leaning against Rembrandt, who had his arm around her neck. "Young lady, what do you think you're doing?"

"He's okay, Professor," Wade said.

Arturo strode over to Rembrandt with bold strides. "I'll be the judge of that. Being hit by a car is not a matter to be taken lightly."

"I'm okay, man," Rembrandt said. "No broken bones or anything. Just a little dizzy, that's all."

"Well, there could be serious internal injuries. We -- "

Quinn spoke. "We've gotta get out of here. Now."

Arturo looked at him. "What?"

Quinn began to back away from the car.
"We've gotta get out of here."

"Mr. Mallory, we need to stay in one place
so the police -- "

"No. You heard what he -- I just said.
Someone killed him, and they'll be after us
soon."

"There's no evidence to suggest that,"
Arturo said. "It could be delirium on this
man's part."

Quinn looked at him with blazing eyes.
"Well, even if they aren't after us, we sure
don't wanna be here when the police
arrive. How do we explain the fact that

two people who look just like us are lying in a car wreck with bulletholes in their chests?"

Arturo opened his mouth to speak, then frowned. "Mm. You do have a point."

Wade looked up at the street corner, where a small crowd was beginning to gather. She looked at the crowds that surrounded them, some watching him with wide stares and open mouths. Others were whispering to each other, pointing at Quinn and the dead young man lying in the car. More people were being drawn to the accident, like a magnet.

"Uh, Professor," Wade said, "if we're gonna

make up our minds, we better do it fast."

Arturo sighed. "All right, perhaps we should move on, if for no other reason than to get our story straight. Mr. Brown, are you sure you are well enough to move?"

"I'm fine," Rembrandt said with slurred speech. "Just gotta -- lie down, that's all."

Arturo began to take large steps towards the other side of the street. "All right, then, let's move along, people. Quickly, quickly."

Rembrandt, Arturo, Quinn, and Wade began to run across the street, bolting around the corner as fast as they could. As they ran, Quinn could hear the wail of

sirens growing louder and louder in the distance.

The small crowd watched them go, hurrying closer towards the smoldering wreckage. One of them had a Polaroid camera around her neck, which she fumbled to her eye. She had just enough time to snap a picture of Quinn rounding the corner before the Sliders were out of sight.

The scene of the crash was awash with the flashing red and blue lights of police cars blocking off the road. Policemen roamed, taping off the area, and holding back crowds. A photographer was busy taking pictures of the wreck as a crew of

paramedics worked to free the two bodies from the inside of the car.

As one of the officers worked to hold back a small boy, he noticed a grey sedan drive up the block. It parked a few feet from the taped-off border. The car doors opened, and a man and a woman stepped out. The woman was much shorter than the man, and they both wore long trenchcoats that rippled in the breeze. The couple began to walk towards the crash site with measured steps.

As they approached the yellow tape, the officer held up a hand to stop them.

"Sorry," he said. "Nobody's allowed

beyond this point. I'm afraid you'll have to step back."

The man and woman both pulled wallets out from under their coats. They flipped them open to display badges and ID cards. The man spoke with a soft, monotonous voice. "I'm Agent Fox Mulder, this is Agent Dana Scully. We're with the FBI. What's going on here?"

**

San Francisco, California
10:46 PM

FBI agent Dana Scully watched her partner, Agent Fox Mulder, talk to the

police detective in charge of the crash site. Her eyes flitted to the object that she couldn't seem to keep her eyes off of; the smoking wreckage of a car that had rammed into a tree beside Golden Gate Park.

Scully forced herself to look away. She didn't want to be here. They were just in San Francisco assisting the police department on a kidnapping case. A young girl had disappeared from her locked bedroom in the middle of the night a few days ago. Though it looked like a routine assignment, Mulder had hoped it was an X-File, because the window and doors had been locked from the inside.

Unfortunately, it had turned out to be the girl's father, who had been forbidden from seeing her under court order after a messy divorce. The girl had opened the window from the inside for her father, happy to see him, and had been taken away. It had been a perplexing mystery, but not one that satisfied Fox Mulder.

Scully suspected that was why they were here. They had been driving back to their hotel room to pack for the trip back to Washington D.C. when they passed the car wreck. Mulder had stopped to "rubberneck," as he put it, but Scully guessed it was just his unstoppable curiosity that had driven him to investigate.

Scully couldn't understand what the big deal was.

Mulder finished talking to the detective and began to make his way back to Scully, who folded her arms over her chest.

"Satisfied?" she asked.

"Yup," Mulder said.

"I hope you're happy, Mulder," Scully said.
"We've bothered these people enough. Let's go, so they can do their jobs."

She turned to head back to the car.

"Not yet, Scully," Mulder said. "I want you to see something."

He began to walk to the wreckage of the car.

Scully stared at him, then followed at a safe distance. "Mulder, I'm not in the mood to see any mangled bodies -- "

"I'm not showing you mangled bodies," Mulder said. "I'm showing you what's *on* the mangled bodies."

Scully frowned as she picked her way up onto the sidewalk. "What are you talking about? This is just a car wreck, isn't it?"

"Not quite." Mulder stopped beside the wreck. Paramedics had managed to cut open the door, and were hauling out a body covered with a white sheet. Mulder gestured for them to stop and drew back the sheet covering the face.

The corpse was of a young man with long, dark hair. Scully felt a twinge of depression at the dead man's youth, the knowledge of a life he would never fulfill.

"What do you make of it, Scully?" Mulder asked.

Scully glared at him, then gave the boy's head a quick examination, using her knowledge of forensic medicine to make a

judgement. "Well, it's a Caucasian male, early twenties. Signs of severe impact trauma on the scalp, forehead, and nasal cavity, severe trauma on the neck, probably caused by an impact with the windshield or dashboard. That, combined with the fact that he was pulled out of a car shaped like a pretzel, leads me to conclude that he died from the crash. Satisfied?"

Mulder drew back the sheet further to expose the boy's chest. "What do you make of that?"

Scully frowned as she looked down at the ragged holes in the body. "Wait a minute. It looks like -- gunshot wounds."

"Exactly," Mulder said. "And take a look at this one."

Mulder led Scully to the other passenger in the car, a larger man with a beard and moustache. He drew back the cloth to show his chest, which was also impacted with holes.

Scully pulled her glasses out of her breast pocket and peered through them at the holes. "Hmmm. Interesting." She looked at the paramedics. "Could I see the back?"

The paramedics obeyed, turning the body over so she could examine the back of the body. Holes were clearly visible, which Scully examined.

"Very interesting," she muttered.

"Could they have been shot after the car crashed?" Mulder asked.

Scully leaned back and sighed. "Well, I'd have to do an autopsy to be sure, and, of course, I'm not here in an official capacity -- "

She gave Mulder a harsh look before continuing. " -- but I don't think so. See, the entrance wounds are in the back, and these victims were in the car sitting down. Unless they were shot through their seats, of which I find no evidence, they must have been shot before they got in the car.

Besides, there's no tattooing or burns around the entry wounds. The guns that shot them were fired at long range, more than fifteen inches."

Scully took off her glasses and tucked them into her pocket. After gesturing to the paramedics to continue on their way, she looked up at Mulder. "I see what you mean. These men were murdered."

Mulder held up a finger as he strode away from her. "There's more than that. Come on."

Scully followed closely behind him as he led her over to where a large woman was talking to a policeman. As Mulder

approached the woman, she smiled.

"Thank goodness," the woman said.
"You're the only one who believes me."

"Yes, I am, ma'am," Mulder said.

"Believes what?" Scully asked.

Mulder gestured to the woman. "Go ahead. Tell her what you told me and the others."

"Well, as I said," the woman said, "my husband and I are here on vacation from Iowa, and a friend of ours suggested we see Golden Gate Park before we go. Well, we're leaving at three in the morning, so

my husband decided we should go see it now, even though it's dark. So we're walking along, because it's only a few blocks from our hotel, when we hear a loud crash, screeching of tires. I told my husband, a car crashed. So we come around the corner, and there it is. That car right where it is now."

The woman held up a finger. "But there was something else. Four people, three men and a woman. And they were all around the car. One of them, a black man, looked like he was hurt, but the others seemed okay. It looked like they were talking about the crash, then they saw us coming towards them, and ran away."

Scully narrowed her eyes as she shook her head. "I don't get it. What's not to believe about that?"

"Well," Mulder said, "how about the fact that two of the people who ran away from the scene looked exactly like the two dead people in that car."

Scully looked at the woman. "Are you serious?"

The woman nodded. "I'm positive. I was giving my statement to that nice policeman over there when I saw them taking those poor people out of that car, and I *know* they looked just like the men who ran away."

Scully tilted her head to one side as she folded her hands over her lap. "Uh, ma'am, don't you think there's a chance you were mistaken? I mean, it's a dark night, and the men you claim you saw were running away."

The woman plunged a hand into her purse and dragged out a photograph which she thrust into Scully's hand. "Does this look like a hallucination?"

Scully looked at the photograph in her hands, obviously taken with a Polaroid instant camera. The photo showed four people, three men and one woman, running away from the car. The woman

and a black man were facing away from the camera, but the other two were looking straight at it. Scully could see their faces clearly, and recognized them as the same men who had been pulled from the wreckage of the car.

Scully looked at the woman, then back at the photo. "There -- has to be some mistake."

"There's no mistake," Mulder said. "That was taken a little after the crash, you can see it right there."

"Well, maybe the victims got out of the car -- "

Mulder pointed at the ambulance parked nearby, its lights flashing. "You saw the paramedics. They had to use the Jaws of Life to get those bodies out of there."

Scully looked up at him. "So what are you saying? That two exact doubles of the dead men are running around San Francisco?"

"That's exactly what I'm saying."

Scully handed the photo back to the woman. "Okay. That's pretty strange, but I still don't see -- "

Mulder began leading her towards Golden Gate Park. "You will."

Scully was very tired and just wanted to go home after a long day, but she knew Mulder. She had seen him like this before, and knew he wouldn't rest until he had run the entire thing by her. She could only wait until his enthusiasm waned or she could convince him to calm down, the latter of which was almost impossible. She followed Mulder as he began hurrying down a dirt road that had been soaked in the rain. Mud squelched around her high heels as she struggled to keep up his frenzied pace.

Mulder stopped and thrust out a finger, pointing at the muddy path. "See those footprints?"

Scully looked down at her feet, where four sets of shoeprints could be seen in the mud, heading back the way they came. In one of the prints, the word NIKKE had been imprinted in the ground from the shoe's tread.

"Those prints lead out onto the street," Mulder said. "They belong to the people we saw in that photograph. It was raining heavily a few minutes before the crash. The four people in that photo were the only ones in the vicinity. If these prints were made during the rainstorm, they would have been softened and erased. But they're still clear and fresh."

"So these prints belong to those missing

people. What about it?"

Mulder walked to a park bench, where he knelt beside a puddle. "Look. The prints lead out of this mud puddle. But there are no other prints anywhere around it. It's as if those four people just appeared in this puddle and started walking towards the street."

Scully stared at him. "So what are you saying? That they just -- appeared out of nowhere? That they came from the puddle itself?"

Mulder looked up at her. "Didn't you see *Attack of the Mud People* on cable last night? Stranger things have happened."

"Mulder," Scully said, "I know you're disappointed about our last case, but I think you're making more out of this than necessary."

"But doesn't this all strike you as a little odd? Two people in a crashed car who've been shot to death before the crash? Four other people who walk out of Golden Gate Park with no visible means of entry, two of which look exactly like the dead men?"

"Yes, Mulder," Scully said, "it is very strange. But it is also not our jurisdiction. We're FBI agents, not police detectives. This isn't even our city. The police are paid to solve these things. Let's just let them do

their jobs while we go back to the hotel for a hot shower and a soft bed."

"Excuse me," a voice said.

Scully and Mulder looked to see a man in a police officer's uniform approaching them.

"Can I help you two?" the officer asked.

"We're with the FBI," Mulder said. "Just looking around."

"Well, you're also standing in a crime scene. Now, unless you two have authorization to be here, I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to leave."

"But -- "

Scully interrupted Mulder to say, "Of course, officer. We were just leaving. Come on, Mulder."

Mulder gave the officer a critical look, then followed Scully down the muddy path, back to the car.

Behind them, the police officer waited until they were out of sight, then pulled out a cellular phone. He pushed the redial button, then said, "Yeah. Yeah, they were just here. I got rid of them. But they saw the footprints. No -- no, I don't think they spoke to Dr. Mallory or Dr. Arturo. They were dead before the agents got here. Yeah,

everything's under control. Right. Right, I'll clean up on this end. Out."

The officer slipped the cellular phone into his pocket, checked once more for spectators, then began dragging his boot over the mud, erasing the shoeprints that were left behind.

Sunnyview Motel
11:02 PM

Quinn unlocked the door of their motel room, then held it open for Wade, who was leading Rembrandt by the hand.

"You sure you're okay?" Wade asked.

"How many times do I have to say it?" Rembrandt asked, clutching his forehead. "I'm fine. No broken bones or nothin'. Got a flock of geese peckin' in my skull, and I'm a little queasy, but other than that, I'm okay."

The Professor followed them into the room, turning on the lights to illuminate their small quarters. "Well, it would seem that Mr. Brown has suffered a mild concussion."

Rembrandt looked at him as he eased himself back onto one of the three beds. "Is that serious?"

The Professor leaned over him, studying

his dilated pupils. "Perhaps. Perhaps not. The side effects don't seem too severe, so I will hazard a guess, and say no. However, I would recommend you remain in bed for a full twenty-four hours with no exertion, just to be on the safe side."

"Oh, don't you worry about that," Rembrandt murmured as he closed his eyes. "I feel like I could sleep for a week."

"So we're okay?" Wade said.

The Professor straightened and hooked his thumbs on his vest pockets. "On the contrary. I believe you're forgetting our little incident by the park."

"No, I'm not," Wade said. "We'll just call the police, tell them what happened, and take it easy for the next twenty-four hours until we slide."

"Oh, of course," Arturo said. "We'll just call the police, and tell them we're four visitors from another dimension who happened to be standing around when a car containing our interdimensional counterparts crashed in front of us. Oh, but don't worry. Those bulletholes were there before we got there. Is that it?"

Wade gave him a sneer. "Very funny. Well, whadda you think we should do?"

"Nothing," Arturo said. "Absolutely

nothing. I say that, for once, we should do exactly what I always said we should do, which is not get involved."

"Are you crazy? Somebody killed those two people. We have to help the police catch the murderers."

"Miss Wells, we know even less about the incident than they do. As a matter of fact, we know almost nothing about this world. For all we know, this dimension may be one in which we could be arrested merely for being in the vicinity. They certainly will have something to say about our remarkable resemblance to the victims. Besides which, the fact remains that, in this world, someone wanted me dead. And

I am certainly not going to give them a chance to try again."

Wade spun on her heels to look up at Quinn. "Quinn, whadda you think we should do?"

Quinn didn't respond. He only continued to stare at the computer disk he was holding in his hands, one stained with bloody fingerprints.

"Quinn?"

He looked up at her, startled. "What? Oh, sorry, I wasn't listening. I just -- it's weird to know that, on any world -- I'm dead. It's like -- walking over my own grave or

something."

Wade rested a hand on his. "I know, Quinn. I'm sorry. But -- we need to figure out what we should do next."

"Oh," Quinn said, tucking the disk into his pocket. "Right. Yeah. Uh, I agree with the Professor."

"What?" Wade asked as Professor Arturo grinned at her.

"Yeah," Quinn said. "For now. We can't do anything for the police until we figure out what's going on ourselves. I think we should lay low, at least for tonight. We should get some sleep, figure out what

we're gonna do in the morning."

"Exactly," Arturo said. "An excellent suggestion."

Arturo walked over to the third bed in the room. "Well, there are only three beds, so one of us is going to sleep on the floor. Since common courtesy dictates that the lady be comfortable, Miss Wells gets the second bed. And, since I was here first, I get the third bed. That leaves you, Mr. Mallory -- " Arturo sank back onto his mattress. " -- to adjourn to the floor."

Wade grinned at Quinn as she sauntered to her bed. "It's a good thing we slid with a gentleman."

"Yeah, good for you," Quinn grumbled as he dragged a handful of towels out of the bathroom onto the floor.

He spread the towels as smoothly as he could, piling them up to add a bit of cushioning. Then he took off his jacket, rolled it into a pillow, and lay it at the head of the makeshift bed. As he leaned back, Quinn remembered the computer disk and pulled it out of his jacket pocket.

He turned it over in his hands. "Hm. I wonder what's goin' on. I mean, who would wanna kill me and the Professor? And why? And what's on this disk that was so important? Wish we had a computer so

we could see what's on this thing."

Wade was fluffing up her pillow as she said, "Maybe we can rent time on a computer at Kinko's or something tomorrow."

Arturo lay back on his bed, pulling his blankets to his chin. "On the contrary, Miss Wells. I believe we should simply toss the disk into the nearest trashbin at our earliest convenience. I am of the opinion that we would be better off not knowing what's on it."

"Maybe you're right," Quinn said, and tucked the disk back into his jacket. "We're not gonna be here that long. Maybe we

should just let it go. But -- I can't stop wondering. If I'm gonna die, I'd at least like to know why."

Arturo closed his eyes as he sighed, "Trust me, Mr. Mallory. In this instance, curiosity has already killed the cat."

Wade leaned over and switched off the bedroom lights. "I swear, Professor, you've got no thirst for adventure."

"Thank you, Miss Wells," Arturo murmured. "I believe that's the nicest thing you've ever said to me."

King's Arms Hotel
11:32 PM

Scully typed on her laptop computer by the light of a single lamp burning on the desk in her hotel room. She paused to take a sip of her Diet Pepsi, reviewing what she had written. The report would be filed with her superiors at the Bureau. She was glad that, for once, she was going to return to Washington without stories of bizarre or unusual incidents. It was a simple kidnapping, the kind she had joined the FBI to solve. She knew Mulder was disappointed, but there was a first time for everything.

Scully went back to work filling in the form, then paused as she realized she had forgotten the name of the auto mechanic

who had helped them track down the kidnapper. Scully rifled through her notes, only to discover she hadn't written it down, either.

She sighed and headed for the door. Maybe Mulder had a copy of it. She left her hotel room, crossing the hallway to the room across from hers, and knocked three times.

"It's open," a voice called out.

Scully turned the doorknob to discover it was unlocked. She pushed the door open to find the hotel room sheathed in darkness. The only light was from the window, against which Mulder was silhouetted, looking out at the city, his face

cloaked in moonlight.

"Mulder?" Scully asked. "Is everything okay?"

"Yeah," Mulder murmured. "What is it, Scully?"

Scully took a few steps into the room, moving out of the light of the hallway. "I just wanted to borrow your notes for a second."

"Sure, go ahead. They're on the dresser."

"Thanks." Scully picked up Mulder's notebook, then looked at him. "You sure you're okay?"

Mulder remained silent for a moment, then said, "I can't stop thinking about the crash."

"Oh. Well, I can understand that. It was pretty gruesome. I mean, a young boy like that dying so horribly -- "

Mulder turned his head slightly towards her, moving his features out of the light. "No, I mean the whole thing. It doesn't add up. I can't figure out why those men had doubles or why they were hanging around the crash."

Scully sighed. "Mulder, for all we know, the dead men could have had twins."

"Both of them?"

"It happens."

"So why were they hanging around the crash? Why didn't they call the police to save their brothers? And why haven't they come forward?"

Scully threw up her hands. "Who knows, Mulder? Maybe they were the ones who killed them in the first place."

Mulder nodded and turned back to the window. "That's what I was thinking. But I have some other theories."

She took a few more steps into the room, moving to Mulder's side. "Mulder, I know you, and I know you're inclined to make more out of this case than necessary. But I'm asking you as a friend to try to let it go. I think it'll be good for you. You have to learn that you can't win them all. And not everything that's strange or unusual has a strange or unusual solution. Remember the kidnapping case -- "

Mulder nodded. "Yeah, I know. I owe you a steak dinner."

Scully smiled as she moved back to the door. "Well, you're the one who made the bet, not me."

Mulder turned back to the window to look up at the stars. "I guess you're right. But, you know me. I love a good mystery."

Scully paused in the doorway, held up Mulder's notebook, and shook it slightly at him. "You're right, Mulder. I do know you."

"Hey, Scully," Mulder said. "You ever heard of Nikke?"

She leaned back into the room. "What?"

"Nikke. That was the name left in the mud by one of those shoeprints. Could be the manufacturer."

Scully smirked. "It sounds like a joke name. You know, like Nike, only with two K's."

"Yeah. I guess so. 'Night, Scully."

"Night, Mulder."

She closed the door behind her, leaving Mulder to continue to gaze out at the swollen moon above the window, a moon that looked like a hole had been cut out of the sky.

San Francisco, California
Sunnyview Motel
6:58 AM

Quinn woke up the next morning with a sudden ache in his back from sleeping on the floor. He sat up, twisting to try to work the kinks out of his neck, and groaning softly.

Rembrandt was still sleeping, as was Professor Arturo, but Wade was sitting crosslegged in front of the small black-and-white TV on their dresser, watching the news.

"Morning, Quinn," Wade said. "Sleep well?"

"I wish," Quinn murmured, staggering to his feet. "What's for breakfast?"

"Air, so far," Wade said. "And we've only got a few bucks left, so we can't go on any spending sprees."

Quinn felt his spine pop as he straightened. "Great. Maybe I can get some candy bars from the vending machines. Want anything?"

Wade went back to watching the TV as she said, "Yeah, a Three Musketeers bar."

"It's not just for breakfast anymore, huh?" Quinn asked, then ducked to avoid the pillow that came flying back at him.

Quinn hurried out of the motel room, still laughing to himself. He was only dimly

aware of the newscaster's voice on the television behind him, talking about a mysterious light seen in the sky over Texas last night.

Quinn lurched across the motel to an alcove where a series of vending machines waited to dispense candy, soft drinks, newspapers, and bags of ice. Quinn popped a few quarters into the candy machine and got four candy bars. He also got four cans of soda, and was about to head back upstairs when he noticed the newspaper machine.

It was displaying the front page of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, on which there was a cover story about the president's continued

denial of a cover-up at Roswell. But, in a corner of a page, there was a grainy photo of a car that had impacted with a tree. Beside it were two photos that looked like driver's license photos. They were of Quinn and Professor Arturo. The caption read *SCIENTISTS DIE IN FATAL CRASH*.

Quinn pumped a quarter into the machine and got a copy. He headed back to his motel room, reading the article on the way.

Quinn walked into their hotel room to find both Rembrandt and the Professor awake. Arturo was holding Rembrandt's wrist, checking the pulse with his watch, and didn't look up when Quinn entered.

"Ah, good day, Mr. Mallory," Arturo murmured. "I trust you've acquired a veritable bounty for our morning repast?"

"Yeah," Quinn said. "I got you a Snickers and a Diet Pepsi."

He tossed them to Arturo, who caught and regarded them with a wrinkled brow.

"Ah, yes," Arturo said. "Truly the food of the gods."

Rembrandt grinned up at Quinn. "Hey, no skin off my nose, Q-Ball. I'm so hungry right now, I could eat anything."

"Great," Quinn said. "Because I got you a Twix and a Mountain Dew."

Rembrandt caught them and ripped open the candy wrapper. "Fine with me. But I think we should think about tryin' to get some money."

Arturo nodded as he chewed. "I believe Mr. Brown has a point. Unless we get home soon or unless we happen to run into another world where money rains from the sky, we should start thinking of ways to build up our funds."

"Yeah," Wade said as she opened the Three Musketeers bar. "If only we didn't have to jump from world to world so soon, we

might be able to get jobs."

Quinn sat down on his blanket and unfolded his newspaper on the floor. "Something to think about, all right."

Wade frowned and switched off the TV set, which was beginning a report on mutilated cattle in a Midwestern town. "What's up, Quinn?"

"There's an obituary in here about last night's car crash," Quinn said.

Arturo leaned forward. "Really? Any interesting news to report?"

"I'll say," Quinn said. "It says here that you

and I were scientists working for some outfit called Nomad Electronics before we died. And that the police ruled the death an accident."

Rembrandt was about to eat his second Twix bar when his hand froze on his way to his mouth. "Are you kiddin'? You guys had enough holes in you to make swiss cheese jealous."

"Indeed," Arturo said, "despite Mr. Brown's lack of tact, he does have a point. That was hardly a suicide."

Wade looked from one grim face to another. "So -- what're you guys saying? That the police are covering up the

murder?"

"Perhaps," Arturo said. "Or perhaps they are simply respecting the privacy of the families or don't want the press to exploit the story. However, it does cast a grim light on turning ourselves in to the police."

"Yeah," Quinn said. "Whatever's going on, we'll have to figure it out ourselves."

"What?"

Wade punched the air. "All right! We're gonna be detectives, just like Nancy Drew!"

"Out of the question," Arturo said in a

loud voice. "We are not here to bring anyone to justice. If we start running around like a quartet of Sherlock Holmes, we could do serious damage to the natural flow of this world. And even if we do find our killers, what then? We certainly cannot stay to testify in a trial. The whole investigation would be a waste of effort."

Quinn got up and began pulling on his jacket. "Maybe. Maybe not. But I'm not gonna stay cooped up in here all day. I wanna take a look around. Anybody coming?"

Wade leapt to her feet. "I'm right behind you."

"Me, too," Rembrandt said, reaching for his blankets.

Arturo slammed his hand down on the bed, pinning him down. "Absolutely not, Mr. Brown. I told you before, you must remain calm and in bed until we slide. And I will remain with you to ensure that you do it. Besides which, I am quite content to let the police handle the investigation into my death."

Quinn shrugged as he tugged on his collar. "Suit yourself. Ready, Wade?"

"Right behind you, Quinn." Wade followed him as he left the room.

Arturo sighed, shaking his head. "Wisdom is wasted on the youth."

He looked at Rembrandt, who held up a deck of cards.

"Gin rummy?" Rembrandt asked.

"You're on." Arturo took the deck and began shuffling the cards.

King's Arms Hotel
7:13 AM

Scully folded the last of her blouses into the bottom of her suitcase and locked the case shut. It was the third piece of her luggage, of which there was a lot. She had

expected to be in San Francisco for at least a week to solve the kidnapping, but the solution had taken less than a day. Their return flight wasn't until that evening, but she believed in packing early.

As Scully hoisted the suitcase onto the floor to join the rest of her things, her hotel room door shook with knocking. Scully crossed the room and unlocked the door to find Mulder standing on the other side.

"Morning, Scully," he said, and held up a copy of the San Francisco Chronicle. "I brought the funnies."

"Wonderful," Scully said. "I travelled

halfway across the country, but at least I won't miss Calvin and Hobbes."

Mulder walked past her into the room, surveying the decor, then stopped by her suitcases. "You're packed already?"

Scully shrugged and headed for the closet. "I thought I'd get an early start."

"You should pack like me," Mulder said. "I keep a toothbrush and a pair of Speedos in a Zip-Lock baggie, and I'm ready for anything."

Scully began unhooking cloths from hangers inside her closet. "Unfortunately, some of us require a little more

preparation."

"Come on, I thought we'd take in the sights before we go back to Washington."

Slinging coats over her arm, Scully strode past him to the garment bag lying on her bed. "Thanks, but I've already seen San Francisco. There was a forensic symposium a couple years back, and I took the grand tour. You go on ahead without me."

Mulder unfolded his newspaper and snapped it open in her face. "Read this."

Scully frowned as she took the paper from him, examining the front page. When she saw the obituary in the lower-right-hand

corner, she glared at Mulder.

"Are you still hooked on this?" she asked.

Mulder pointed at the second paragraph. "Professor Maximillian Arturo and Dr. Quinn Mallory. Both dead on arrival. It says right here that Arturo had no living relatives, and Mallory was an only child. No twins."

Scully tossed the paper onto her bed. "I'm sure there's another explanation."

"Like what?"

Scully began folding the sleeves of her jacket over the chest. "I don't know. I'm

not investigating the case. As you can see, I'm packing to go back home this evening."

Mulder swept up the newspaper again and pointed to another paragraph. "It says here that the crash was an accident."

Her coat dropped into her garment bag as Scully looked at him, then at the paper. "What?"

"The police have ruled the crash an accident, Scully. I guess the bulletholes we found in their chests were just there for decoration."

"That's strange," Scully murmured. "Why

would they print something like that?"

"It also says the two men worked for a company called Nomad Electronics. Sound familiar?"

Scully looked up at him. "No, should it?"

"They signed a contract with the government last year. Eighty-six billion dollars for top-secret defense research. The grapevine tells me that the company hired specialists in the field of aviation, leading to the conclusion that the research has something to do with aeronautics."

Scully smirked at him. "This grapevine wouldn't happen to be known as the Lone

Gunmen, would it?"

Mulder pulled out several folded sheets of paper out of his coat pocket. "They also faxed me this. It's an article published in the JOURNAL OF QUANTUM PHYSICS two years ago. It was written by Dr. Arturo and Dr. Mallory."

Scully took the article and read the title. "'The Grand Unification Theory And Its Relevance To The Existence of Hyperspatial Anomolies, Incorporating Their Connection And Effect On The Known Universe.' Well, at least now I'll have something to read on the plane ride home."

"What's it talking about?"

"I don't know," Scully murmured, skimming the article. "It's really a little over my head. I'd have to read it a few times to get the sense of it."

"How about reading it while we take that drive?" Mulder asked.

Scully folded her arms. "Wait a minute, you're not just using this tour-thing as an excuse to investigate this murder, are you?"

"Perish the thought. I just thought you seemed a little stressed, that you could use a relaxing drive through the city."

Scully sighed as she closed her suitcase. "All right, I'll go. If only so I can keep an eye on you."

"Great," Mulder said as he headed for the door. "Lemme grab my keys."

He left the hotel room, leaving Scully shaking her head. He was like a child sometimes, but at other times he was the wisest man she knew.

Fulton Street
9:42 AM

Wade was dying of curiosity as she and Quinn got off the bus to stand on a corner facing a long row of suburban housing. He

began to inspect a map from his pocket while Wade peeked over his shoulder.

"Now will you tell me where we're going?" she asked.

"Yeah," Quinn said. "We're going to see my mother. I have to know if she's all right. Besides, the paper says she's still alive, and this is the first world we've been in where she exists in almost a month. I miss her a lot. And maybe she'll have some answers."

Quinn began walking down the street with Wade by his side.

"Wow," Wade said. "It just hit me. You're a

scientist in this world. That's pretty cool."

Quinn looked up at the sky with a dreamy grin. "Yeah. No basement laboratories, no substandard equipment. I always felt that, with a little backing, I could've done some really great things."

Wade punched his arm. "Well, you created a dimensional gateway out of spare parts. That's nothing to sneeze at."

"Yeah," Quinn said, "but look where it got us. The thing broke down on our first try."

"Through no fault of your own."

"Maybe."

Wade and Quinn approached the front gate of the house. Quinn stopped in front of it and carefully eased the wooden gate open. The hinges squealed, softly.

"Well," Quinn said, "at least some things never change."

Quinn climbed the stairs onto the front porch and rang the doorbell. Wade positioned herself beside him and was composing herself when the door of the house opened.

Quinn's mother peered out with a vague smile. "Yes, who -- "

Her eyes locked onto Quinn. They widened as her jaw dropped to her neck. She took a step back, shaking her head, as she touched her chin with a finger.

"No," she whispered. "It can't be. You're -- you're dead -- "

"No, Mom," Quinn said. "I'm alive."

"No. I -- I saw you, they told me -- "

Quinn held up a hand. "It's a long story, Mom. Can I come in?"

His mother seemed to be looking through him rather than at him as she backed out of the doorway. "Of -- of course, I mean, I

suppose, but -- how -- "

Quinn moved through the door, pausing only to give her a peck on the cheek. "Great seeing you again, Mom."

She only stared at him with wide eyes.

Wade held out her hand to him. "Hi, Mrs. Mallory. Remember me?"

His mother took her hand with a light grip. "No. Should I?"

"I guess not," Wade said, then stepped into the house, wondering if she and Quinn had never met in this world or if she even existed. After the incident with Quinn, she

wasn't sure she wanted to find out.

Quinn had taken a seat in the living room when Wade and his mother came in. Wade found herself a comfortable stool as Quinn's mother dropped heavily into an armchair by the unlit fireplace.

"I don't understand," Quinn's mother whispered. "How can you be alive? I went down to the morgue and identified your body."

"I know, Mom," Quinn said. "It's kind of hard to explain, and I'm not even sure if I should. So I'll just say that I'm here, and I'd like to ask you some questions, no matter how strange they may sound,

okay?"

"I -- suppose so."

"Good. Now, Mom, I need to know if you have any idea why someone kill -- I mean, tried to kill me."

His mother's brow wrinkled even further as she shook her head. "I don't understand what you're saying. Why would anyone try to kill you?"

"That's what I want to know."

"Well, when did this happen?"

Quinn glanced at Wade before saying,

"Wait a minute. Don't you know that I was shot four times?"

His mother pressed her fingers against her mouth. "No. No, you died in the crash, I saw it, how did you -- "

Quinn took her hands, trying to calm their trembling fingers. "Never mind, Mom. Never mind. Just tell me this; what was I working on at Nomad Electronics?"

His mother yanked her hands away from Quinn as if they were on fire. Her eyes blazed as she hissed, "How dare you ask me that question. You know what you do there, and you know how I feel about it."

"What?" Quinn asked. "No, I don't -- "

His mother stood up, glaring down at him. "I don't know what kind of game you're playing with me, but it's obvious you've gone to a lot of trouble to make a fool out of me. We haven't spoken in two years, and as far as I'm concerned, it can be another hundred. Get out!"

"But, Mom -- "

She shoved him in the chest hard enough to knock him out of his chair. "I said, get out!"

Quinn lay on the floor, staring up at his mother, who loomed over him, breathing

heavily. He nodded, slowly.

"Okay," he said. "We'll go. Come on, Wade."

Wade rose to her feet as Quinn stumbled to his feet. They walked to the front door, almost in a daze. She found herself outside on the front porch beside him as Quinn's mother came up from behind.

A pair of keys hit the back of Quinn's neck and landed on the sidewalk.

"And take your fancy sports car with you!" his mother yelled. "You can't buy my love anymore!"

The door slammed behind them.

Wade looked back at the door. "Wow. What was that all about?"

"I dunno," Quinn murmured, rubbing his neck. "I think there's more to this thing than meets the eye."

He scooped up the keys off the sidewalk, then read the key ring, which was attached to a leather symbol for a Porsche. He looked up at the curb, where a Porsche stood, waiting.

They unlocked the door and Quinn climbed behind the wheel.

As he started the engine, Quinn said, "Well, at least we got a car out of it."

Wade rubbed the fine leather interior. "Yeah, wish we could take this through the gateway with us. Where to next?"

Quinn pulled out into the street. "Nomad Electronics. I think it's time I went back to work."

Inside the house, Quinn's mother watched them drive away. She stood at the window for a moment, then moved to the phone. She dialed a number she had never dialed before, one given to her by a strange man that morning who she had sworn she would never call.

It didn't ring. A voice immediately picked it up, and said, "Yes, Mrs. Mallory?"

Quinn's mother froze before she asked, "How did you know who -- "

"What do you have to tell us?"

Quinn's mother chewed on her thumbnail before she said, "I just wanted to let you know -- you were right. He came. My son came back to see me. He's not dead."

A moment of silence passed before the voice said, "I see."

"But it was very strange," she said. "He was

asking me all sorts of questions about himself and me -- he even said he was murdered. I don't understand it. What's happened to him? What's going on? If that was my son, then who did I see at the morgue -- "

"Thank you for your help, Mrs. Mallory," the voice said. "You've done a great service to your country. But, as a matter of national security, I'd like to ask that you never call this number again. Destroy anything with this number written on it. Don't tell anyone about it, and don't try to trace it. Goodbye."

There was a click as the call was disconnected.

Quinn's mother hung up the phone. She stared at it for a long time, wondering if she had done the right thing.

Washington D.C.

Location Unknown

9:51 AM

An office, its windows darkened by thick grey curtains. Bookshelves line the walls, filled with books that are not available to the general public, books that had been suppressed before publication. Their authors are no longer available to discuss their book's contents.

Several large armchairs were gathered in a

circle around the room. Men of various ages and nationalities were seated in them. They glanced around at each other, trying to read the emotions in each other's faces. They all saw the same thing: fear.

When the door opened, a mixture of relief and horror swept the room. A man walked in. His age was indeterminate, but a guess might have placed him in his early fifties. His craggy face was set in a perpetual state of grim determination, but his manner was calm.

The man closed the door behind him, pulled a cigarette case out of his pocket, and selected a Marlboro from its interior.

"It's official," he said as he placed the cigarette in his mouth. "They're alive."

A deep sigh rippled through the room.

"Both of them?" a man with an Indian accent asked.

There was a moment's silence as their visitor lit the cigarette in his mouth with a lighter. He spoke with the cigarette clenched between his lips. "The existence of Quinn Mallory has been confirmed. Since the woman at the park reported seeing both men, it is reasonable to conclude that Arturo has survived as well."

"That woman," a man with an Egyptian

accent said, "knows too much."

The cigarette-smoking man took the cigarette out of his mouth to exhale a cloud of smoke, then said, "Not to worry. She's been taken care of, as well as that disturbing photo of hers. Mallory's mother will be eliminated as well. The police have been controlled with the usual speed, as have the news media."

"But they are alive," a man with a French accent said. "This could jeopardize our entire operation. They could even release the location of the Chop Shop."

"But it's impossible," a man with a British accent. "I tell you, I saw them die myself."

"Obviously not."

"But the bodies -- "

The cigarette-smoking man sat down in an empty armchair and crossed his legs. "Gentlemen, please. Calm yourselves. I'm not sure what has happened here, either, but I can assure you that we will get to the bottom of this. We will identify these men who've come into our midst, determine their origin -- then eliminate them."

The other men began to murmur amongst themselves, debating their next course of action. The cigarette-smoking man was unconcerned. He had covered up many

things over the course of his career. The deaths of two scientists, however troublesome it may be, was not even a strain for him.

Because he knew that the Red Robin Project would continue at any cost.

San Francisco, California
4159 Blue Jay Way
9:48 AM

From the passenger seat, Scully watched Mulder drive their rented sedan into a suburban area of the city.

"Why are we stopping here?" she asked.

"Just thought we could check out the less-travelled areas," Mulder said. "And talk to Dr. Mallory's mother."

"Mulder, it sounds like you're still trying to investigate last night's car crash."

Mulder pulled up in front of a quaint house. "I am. I just wanna talk to this woman for a minute. I have a feeling we're onto something."

Scully climbed out of the car as Mulder got out of his side. "You still haven't told me what you think is going on here."

Mulder was heading up the front walk as he said, "I'm working on it, Scully. I'll let

you know as soon as I do."

Scully followed him onto the front porch, then stood to one side as Mulder rang the doorbell. A woman opened the door a crack to peer through.

"Yes?" she asked.

"Mrs. Mallory?" Mulder asked.

"Yes, who are you?"

Mulder held up his wallet, exposing his badge and ID card. Scully echoed his motion.

"I'm Special Agent Mulder," he said, "this

is Agent Scully. We'd like to speak to you about your son's death last night."

The woman closed her eyes. "Please. I don't want to talk about it anymore."

"Any more?" Mulder asked. "Has someone spoken to you already?"

"Yes, my son."

"Your son?" Scully asked. "But he's -- "

"I know," the woman said. "He's dead. But he just came to see me, asking all these bizarre questions. I don't understand it. The man said -- "

"What man?" Mulder asked.

The woman's mouth clamped shut. "No. They told me not to say anything. I can't -- "

"Please, ma'am. It'll just take a second."

The woman sighed with obvious resignation. "All right."

She pulled the door open wider, allowing Mulder and Scully to enter the small house. Scully looked around the lobby, admiring the decor. Mulder didn't seem to notice as he followed Mrs. Mallory into the living room.

Scully sat down. "Now, Mrs. Mallory, when you say your son came to see you, do you mean that someone *like* your son came to see you?"

"I don't know," the woman said. "It might have been someone else, but he looked and acted exactly like my son. He even called me Mom. And he had a young woman with him."

Mulder pulled out a Xerox copy of the Polaroid they had seen last night, holding it out to the woman. "Was that woman the one in this photo?"

Mrs. Mallory looked at the photo, then nodded. "Yes, that's her."

"Have you ever seen her before?" Mulder asked.

Mrs. Mallory shook her head. "No. Never."

"What about the other men?" Scully asked.

Mrs. Mallory pointed to one. "The African-American, I've never seen before, either. But the man with the beard was Quinn's college Professor. Then he started working with him on that unification thing."

"Unification?" Scully asked.

"Yes. Oh, what's the name, that thing --

the Grand -- Unified -- "

"The Grand Unification Theory?" Scully offered.

"Yes, that's it."

"What's that?" Mulder asked.

Scully glanced at him. "Well, it's a theory that's supposed to unify the three fundamental forces of nature as aspects of a single interaction. It's supposed to lead to an explanation of -- well, everything. Stephen Hawking's been working on it."

Scully turned back to Mrs. Mallory. "Are you saying that your son and his physics

Professor were working on it, too?"

"Well, yes," Mrs. Mallory said. "At least, they used to, down in the basement. They would work over here because Quinn said I made great lemon drop cookies for snacks. I think he was just trying to get back on my good side."

"Can we see the basement?" Mulder asked.

"I suppose so." Mrs. Mallory got up and led them to a door that opened to a dark stairwell.

She snapped on the lights as she moved down the stairs, illuminating a basement filled with unusual and mysterious

machinery, which all looked like it was made out of spare parts. Scully thought she could see a blender hooked up to a car battery, but the rest seemed so random and assembled in such unusual configurations that she couldn't make heads or tails of it.

But the center of the room was a large blackboard on which was scribbled mathematical computations and problems. All of it seemed to end at a large equal sign with a question mark beside it.

Mulder and Scully exchanged a glance, then Mulder began to examine the board.

Scully turned to Mrs. Mallory. "Did you say that your son was trying to get on your

good side?"

"Yes," Mrs. Mallory said, folding her hands over her lap. "I never forgave him for the work he started with the government."

Mulder looked away from the blackboard at her. "What work?"

"Nuclear weapons," Mrs. Mallory said.

"Nuclear weapons?" Scully repeated.

"Yes. It all started with that science fair -- " Mrs. Mallory placed a hand over her mouth. "Oh, dear, I forgot that's all national security."

"It's all right, Mrs. Mallory," Mulder said. "Scully, take a look at this. Whadda you make of it?"

Scully pulled out her glasses to read the blackboard. "Well, it seems to be a mathematical theory of some kind. But it's way over my head. I can't make heads or tails of any of it."

"Was this connected to your son's work, Mrs. Mallory?" Mulder asked.

"I don't know," Mrs. Mallory said. "One day, he and the Professor came running out of the basement yelling how he solved it. He published some sort of a paper in a scientific journal, then a week later, he told

me he was quitting his weapons research to pursue something else. I think he was trying to make me happy, but he didn't fool me. His work for those warmongers can't be erased. He was making bombs even more powerful than they already are, more powerful than they need to be, and that's something I can't forgive."

Mrs. Mallory headed up the stairs, followed by Mulder and Scully.

"Thank you, Mrs. Mallory," Mulder said. "You've been a great help. We won't bother you any longer. Come on, Scully."

Mulder and Scully headed out of the house, leaving Mrs. Mallory to close the

door behind them. Scully thought she heard the click of a lock in their wake.

When they were back in the sedan, Mulder was buckling himself in as he asked, "Ready for another tour, Scully?"

Scully was reading the article in the Journal the Lone Gunmen had faxed them as she asked, "Where to?"

"Nomad Electronics. Maybe we can get some answers there." Mulder put the car into gear, then headed out onto the open road. "How's that article coming?"

"I can't understand most of it. But then, I'm not a physics expert." Scully lowered

the magazine. "I certainly don't see anything in here worth killing over."

"What are those two words in the title?" Mulder asked.

"Hyperspatial anomalies?"

"Well, I think it's a reference to a theory proposed by Einstein. He said that space and time were pliable, like a rubber sheet, and that gravity was just a curving of that sheet. It's been postulated that you might be able to push down on that sheet and connect one end of space with another, speaking metaphorically, of course. The gap between those two points is called hyperspace. A hyperspatial anomaly would

be a tunnel connecting the two points, commonly-known as a wormhole."

"Fascinating," Mulder said.

"Yes, it is, but I don't see what it has to do with the murder. And now we get proof that someone claiming to be Dr. Mallory is alive and moving through San Francisco. You have any ideas?"

"I think his murder has something to do with his government work," Mulder said.

"I meant this whole double thing."

Mulder drove in silence for a moment before saying, "Have you ever heard of

doppelgangers?"

"It's a German word, literally means 'double walker.' Refers to a psychological mirror image or a split personality, usually in a literary context."

"It's also the term used for a phenomenon in which certain people can project mirror images of themselves that are as real as you or I. I have cases in the X-Files in which people have seen exact duplicates of themselves appear and begin performing tasks, watching TV, even moving objects. The most famous case was an instance where an entire classroom saw their school teacher outside their windows, running and playing in a garden. Only problem was

that their teacher was writing on the blackboard at the time."

"So you're saying that Mallory and Arturo have doppelgangers?" Scully asked. "And that they're now moving around the city?"

"Maybe," Mulder said. "Or maybe it's the extraterrestrials again, the ones who impersonated my sister. They can take on humanoid forms. It's not inconceivable that they might have taken on the form of Dr. Mallory and Dr. Arturo."

"But why?" Scully said.

"I dunno. I guess we'll have to ask them."

Nomad Electronics

11:43 AM

Nomad Electronics was a massive complex of gleaming white buildings in the heart of San Francisco. A well-trimmed hedge disguised the large chain-link fence that surrounded the site, laced by the occasional ELECTRIFIED warning sign.

Quinn drove up to the front gate, where a guard tower waited alongside a striped barrier. A man carrying a rifle came trudging out to meet the car as it drew to a halt. Quinn exchanged glances with Wade before treating the guard with a broad smile.

"Morning, officer," he said.

"Passcard," the guard said in a bored tone.

Quinn made a show of patting his clothes in a futile search. "Oh, uh, I seem to have misplaced -- "

The guard raised the barrel of his rifle, then stopped and broke into a smile. "Oh, it's you, Dr. Mallory. Nice morning, isn't it?"

"Yes, uh," Quinn made a quick check of the guard's nametag, "Bob, it is."

The guard ducked his head a little to look at the passenger side of the car. "Oh,

brought a friend with you today, huh? Afraid I can't let any unauthorized personnel on the complex unless you sign this form."

The guard went to the booth and returned with a clipboard and a pen. Quinn scribbled his signature on the bottom, trying to keep up his smile.

The guard took back the clipboard and tipped his hat. "Have a nice day, sir."

He walked back to the booth, making a gesture to another man inside. There was a click, then the barrier rose with a grinding noise. Quinn tried to keep his smile up as he drove past the gate into the complex.

When they were safely on their way up the main road to the complex, Quinn released the smile with a gasp. "Oh, man, that was close."

"Yeah," Wade said. "I guess that guy doesn't read the paper."

Quinn had no idea where his parking space might be, so they continued their drive to a Visitor's Parking lot beside the main building. The car eased into the space, its tires crunching on the heavy concrete. When Quinn switched off the engine, Wade spoke up.

"So what're we gonna do here, Quinn?"

Wade asked.

"I dunno," he said. "I figure we should snoop around, see if we can find out anything about what I was doing here. Maybe I can get some clues as to why someone killed me."

"Okay," Wade said. "But we'd better keep a low profile. We lucked out with that guard, but if we met anyone who knew you and the fact that you're supposed to be dead, we'd have a lot of explaining to do."

"Yeah, you're right."

Quinn rummaged around in the glove compartment until he found a large hat

and sunglasses. He put them on, checking his appearance in the mirror.

"Well," he murmured, "it's not exactly Lon Chaney, Jr. , but it'll do for now. We'd better stay away from as many people as possible."

Quinn and Wade got out of the car and crossed the parking lot until they reached the large white building at the center of the complex with the words NOMAD ELECTRONICS on its front in raised letters.

"Into the belly of the beast," Wade murmured as they stepped through the revolving doors.

Behind them, a rented sedan was driving up to the front gate of the Nomad Electronics complex. Inside, Scully watched Mulder pull up alongside the guard booth. He wound down his window as a large guard approached the car with both hands gripping a large rifle.

"Can I help you, sir?" the guard asked.

Mulder opened his wallet to display his credentials. "Special Agent Mulder from the FBI. This is Agent Scully. We'd like to talk to someone in charge."

The guard examined Mulder's badge and ID card, then ducked down to read

Scully's. When he straightened, he asked, "Concerning what?"

"There were two homicides last night," Mulder said. "We're conducting an investigation into their deaths, and we were told they worked here. We need to talk to their employers. Strictly routine."

The guard watched him for a moment, then said, "Hold on."

He trudged back to the booth.

When he was out of earshot, Scully asked, "Conducting an investigation?"

Mulder looked at her. "I didn't say it was

an official investigation."

The guard returned to the car, pointing at the largest building in the complex. "Drive into that parking lot over there, and go straight through those doors. Don't go anywhere else on the complex. Someone'll meet you in the lobby."

"Thank you, officer," Mulder said. "Keep up the good work."

The guard shot him another look, then waved at the booth. The barrier raised slowly, its wood creaking, and Mulder guided the sedan under it.

When he was through, Mulder pulled into

a Visitor's Parking space, then turned to Scully.

"Coming?" he asked.

Scully folded her arms over her chest. "No, thank you. I like to avoid situations where I can get arrested."

"Suit yourself. Be right back."

Mulder got out of the car, pulled his trenchcoat around himself, and headed up to the main building. Stepping through the revolving doors brought him into a luxurious lobby decorated with paintings of various electronic devices, all produced by Nomad Electronics. Men and women in

lab coats moved briskly through the lobby, headed to different locations in the building.

Mulder headed for one of the elevators along the walls. He was stopped by a large woman who stepped into his path.

"Are you Agent Mulder from the FBI?" she asked.

"That's right."

"I was told to meet you here." She glanced over his shoulder. "I was also told there were two agents who entered the compound."

"She stayed in the car."

The woman unclipped a walkie-talkie at her belt and spoke into it. "This is 239 to Security. Send someone down to the Visitor's Parking area to check for a Caucasian woman in the passenger side of a grey sedan. Over."

She held the walkie-talkie to her ear for a moment. It crackled again with a voice that said, "This is Security to 239. Presence of caucasian woman in the passenger side of a grey sedan confirmed. Over."

"Affirmative, Security," she said. "Keep an eye on her. Make sure she stays there. Over."

The woman hooked the walkie-talkie onto her belt again, then folded her hands over her lap. "I was told you wanted to speak to someone regarding a murder."

"Yes," Mulder said, "although I believe I requested someone in charge."

"I'm close enough," the woman said.

"And you are -- "

"What murders are you referring to?" she asked.

Mulder nodded. So much for subtlety. "Last night, two men were found dead in a

car that collided with a tree in Golden Gate Park."

"Yes, Dr. Mallory and Dr. Arturo," she said. "But I was told they died in the car crash."

"Well, unless the crash put four bulletholes into their chests, you heard wrong," Mulder said.

The woman's eyes narrowed. "Where did you get that information?"

"I was at the crash last night. I examined the bodies myself."

"I see," the woman murmured. For a

moment, something like a trace of fear crossed her face, then she looked up again. "The police have closed their investigation of the incident. Why are you here?"

"The FBI is conducting its own independent investigation."

"I assume you have authorization?"

"Yes," Mulder said without hesitation.

"Then you won't mind if I call your superiors to check."

"Not at all."

"Follow me." The woman turned on a heel

and strode to the information desk in the lobby. She leaned over it to get a phone and began to dial.

Mulder glanced around the lobby, trying to think of some way of getting further into the building before she completed her call. He couldn't. There were guards beside every elevator in the lobby, all of whom seemed to be glaring at him.

Mulder sighed and took one of the pamphlets on the desk. He began reading about the wonderful innovations Nomad was making in the field of electronic components. He figured that was the most information he was going to get out of this place.

On the seventh floor, an elevator slid open. Wade stuck her head out to look around the lobby. When she saw no one, she whispered, "Coast is clear."

Quinn stepped out of the car with her, glancing around, pulling his hat low over his face. "Okay, so far, so good. Now all we gotta do is find my office."

They walked down the lobby, their footsteps muted by the soft carpeting on the floor. It was lined with rows of doors, all displaying the names of various scientists, and all locked. Quinn and Wade reached the end of the lobby, where the names DR. QUINN MALLORY and DR.

MAXIMILLIAN ARTURO were engraved on a door.

Unfortunately, the door was made of steel that looked four inches thick. It was also sealed tight.

"Now what?" Wade sighed.

"I dunno," Quinn said. "I wish I could've gotten the key from my double."

Wade looked at the doorknob, then frowned, "Hey, there's no keyhole."

Quinn followed her gaze, then studied the entire door. She was right. There was only a small plastic square beneath the knob

where a lock would be.

"What is that?" Wade whispered.

Quinn grinned. "I got an idea."

He pressed his thumb against the square. A red light glowed on the plate, illuminating his thumb, then there was a soft beep.

"Thumbprint verified," a computer-generated voice said.

The door clicked and swung open.

Quinn grinned down at Wade, who stared up at him.

"How'd you know that would happen?" she asked.

"Easy. I never liked keys. You can lose them, they can be copied -- " He wiggled his finger at her. "But you can't copy a thumb."

"Not until now, anyway."

They walked through the door into a vast laboratory. They passed electronic equipment scattered around the room, ducking to avoid the thick web of power cables and wires that interconnected them.

"Wow," Wade said. "What is all this stuff, Quinn?"

He frowned at a small device with little prongs on its surface. "I dunno. Most of it I've never seen before. I can't even tell what this is made of."

"Must be really high-tech."

"I guess so. But it means I can't figure out what I was doing here."

Wade brushed her hand over a large cube attached to a gyroscope. "You have any notebooks in here, anything like that?"

"Well, I used to keep a journal on videotapes in my dimension," Quinn said. "Maybe we should look around for a

camera or something like that."

They turned in different directions, studying the masses of machinery around them. Wade pointed at one of them.

"This looks like a camera to me," Wade said.

Quinn pushed some of the wiring away from a small boxlike object on a desk that turned out to be a Macintosh computer. The camera was fitted on top of the computer, connected to it by a thin wire.

"Nice," Quinn said. "But it's not a videotape. I think it feeds into the computer."

Quinn switched it on. After giving off a pleasant tone, the computer warmed up, running through the startup procedure, until it flashed a screen that read "Password Required."

Quinn typed in a name. The screen flashed "Password Accepted," then moved on the main menu.

"How'd you know that was the password, Quinn?" Wade asked.

"Easy," he said. "That was my father's name. I noticed he's not alive in this dimension, either. Figured he was as much on this Quinn's mind as he is on mine."

Wade rested a hand on his shoulder as he studied the various folders. There were dozens of them, all labelled with scientific names like "Nuclear Fusion Matrix," "Dilithium Crystal Generation," and "Gravometric Flux Capacitors."

"Man," Quinn said, "I wish we'd brought that disk my double gave me so we could read it. I bet that would've explained a lot."

Wade pointed at one of the folders that was labelled RED ROBIN PROJECT. "Hey, that looks like English. Try that."

Quinn double-clicked on the folder with

his mouse. A series of files were listed, all documents. They were dated from several months ago to the present.

"There's no way we can read all this," Quinn said. "We'd be here all day. We'd better take it with us and read it somewhere else."

Quinn rummaged through the desk drawers until he came up with a box of computer disks. He slid one of the disks into the computer, then set it to copy the files onto the disk. As the computer hummed, Quinn leaned back to wait.

They became aware of footsteps coming down the corridor. The footsteps stopped

in front of the metal door of the office. Quinn and Wade could hear voices outside.

"This is it," a man's voice said. "Hand me that thing, will ya? Gotta drill this lock off -- "

A soft whine could be heard, as well as the grinding of metal against metal.

Another man spoke. "What's the rush cleaning out this office, anyway?"

"Beats me," the first man said. "Guys who worked in here died or something. Top brass is afraid to leave all their work sittin' around."

"We gotta hide," Wade whispered.

Quinn looked around the room. There were no other doors, only nooks and crannies among the machinery, all of them cramped and filled with jagged metal edges.

They heard a sharp ping as the lock came off, followed by the first man saying, "That's got it."

Wade dove into a small space between a large filing cabinet and a machine shaped like a metal donut. Quinn hit the "Cancel" button on the copying menu on the computer, then yanked out the disk that

popped out. When it was safely in his pocket, Quinn crawled in next to Wade.

They curled themselves up tightly against the wall, breathing as softly as they could, as footsteps came into the room.

"Brother," the second man said. "This place looks like Frankenstein's lab."

"Yeah," the first man said. "And the boss wants all this stuff either dismantled or destroyed by noon."

"Great. Uh-oh -- " There was a sound like patting cloth. "Oh, man, I forgot the security level waivers. If Security catches us in here without 'em -- "

"We'd better go get 'em," the first man said.

"But what about all this stuff? There's no lock on the door, anybody could -- "

"Relax," the first man said. "We'll just be gone for a second, and nobody can haul away any of this stuff without a forklift."

The second man shuffled forward a little. "What about the computer? It's on and everything."

"Well, they said they want everything in here destroyed, so that's easily taken care of."

There was a loud grunt, then a crash of shattering glass and crumpling metal. A loud pop of electricity followed, carrying the smell of burning rubber with it.

"Good thinking," the second man said.
"Let's go."

The two men walked out of the room.

When Quinn heard their footsteps fade away, he leaned out of the crawlspace. He could see the office door wide open. Beside it, resting on its side on the floor, was what was barely recognizable as the Macintosh computer. It was smashed and broken, giving off thin tendrils of smoke from the

remains of its screen.

"Well," Wade sighed, "so much for that."

"Yeah," Quinn said. "All we've got now is what's on this disk, and we don't even have a computer to read it."

"Great. That makes two of 'em. Let's get out of here, Quinn."

"I'm with you," Quinn said, getting up.
"Curiosity only goes so far."

They crawled out of their hiding place, then hurried out of the office to the elevators. Within moments, they were speeding back down to the lobby, the disk

safely in Quinn's jacket pocket.

"I see. Thank you. Goodbye." The woman slammed the phone down and wheeled to glare up at Mulder. "They say you were sent to San Francisco to investigate a kidnapping, not a murder."

"Really?" Mulder asked. "Oh, man, where's my head today? I guess I'd better get going. Say, you wouldn't happen to have seen a little girl -- "

The woman picked up the phone again and began to dial. "I'm calling Security, Agent Mulder. You have exactly ten seconds to be out that door before you're escorted out by force."

"Right. Thanks for your time." Mulder headed for the main door of the building with a quick pace.

As he walked, an elevator door slid open and a young man and woman got out. They headed for the front door as well, and Mulder had to slow down to avoid colliding with them. The young man was wearing a hat and sunglasses, but when he glanced back, Mulder felt a tingle in his stomach.

Even with the glasses, the young man looked exactly like Dr. Mallory. He was rushing towards the revolving doors even faster than Mulder was, trailed by a young

woman with short brown hair.

"Hey," Mulder said. "Dr. Mallory?"

The young man glanced back at him.
"Yeah?"

Then a look of horror crossed his face. He grabbed the arm of the young woman beside him, and they ran for the doors.

Mulder began to run. The couple reached the doors before he did, sending it spinning in their wake. Mulder had to wait a few precious seconds before it slowed down enough for him to duck into one of the compartments.

By the time Mulder was able to get out of the building, a Porsche was backing out of a parking space in the Visitor's lot. The top was down, and he could see that the young couple was inside. The young man looked back at Mulder over his shoulder before roaring to the front gate at high speed.

Mulder bolted to the grey sedan parked nearby. He jumped into the driver's seat beside Scully, who was still reading the Journal article. She gave him a curious look as he fumbled for his keys.

"What's going on, Mulder?" she asked.

"Dr. Mallory's alive," Mulder said, pushing his keys into the lock.

Scully lowered her book with a frown.
"How do you know?"

"Because I just talked to him."

Mulder backed the sedan out of the space, turned, and sped off after the Porsche that was making its way onto the main road.

Scully peered at the sports car rushing away from them. "Are you sure?"

"Positive," Mulder said. "He saw me, then ran for it. There was a woman with him. They got in that car and drove away."

Scully leaned forward in her seat. "Hm.

This is very strange. Maybe investigating this case wasn't a stupid idea, after all."

"Thanks, Scully," Mulder said. "I knew I could count on you."

San Francisco, California
12:13 PM

As their Porsche roared down the street, Wade looked over her shoulder at the stream of cars behind them. "I think we lost him."

Quinn relaxed his foot on the gas pedal until they were going a comfortable and legal speed. "Man, that was close."

"I'll say." Wade slumped back into her seat.
"Who do you think that was?"

"Got me. I've never seen him before. Maybe he was somebody I knew in this world. I knew going to Nomad was a bad idea." Quinn swept a hand through the air.
"Well, that's it. Investigation's over. The Professor was right. Let's just go back to the motel and wait for the slide."

They drove in silence for a moment.

"Hey," Quinn said, "you think maybe that was the guy who killed me?"

Wade gave him a quizzical look. "What makes you say that?"

Quinn shrugged. "I dunno. It just struck me. The guy who murdered me must be around somewhere. We know I was connected with Nomad Electronics, and so does the killer. I dunno. I don't wanna get paranoid over this. Maybe he was, maybe he wasn't. But I know one thing. If I ever see him again, I'm gonna get some answers, one way or another."

Sunnyside Motel
1:30 PM

Quinn pulled his Porsche into a space in the motel's parking lot and trudged to the door of their room. They unlocked it to find Rembrandt and Professor Arturo

sitting on Rembrandt's bed, cards spread before them.

"Ha, ha!" the Professor yelled, throwing down his cards. "Gin! I believe that brings the grand total to seventy-five cents, Mr. Brown."

Rembrandt tossed his cards aside. "Yeah, I'll pay you back when I get back to our world. Hey, Q-Ball, how'd it go?"

Quinn took off his jacket and hung it beside the door. "Lousy. My mom treated me like the devil incarnate, we got another useless computer disk at Nomad Electronics, and got chased out by this weird guy in a trenchcoat."

Arturo folded his hands over his lap. "Now are you satisfied, Mr. Mallory?"

Quinn shut the motel room door behind him. "Yeah, I'm satisfied. I've had it with investigations and mysteries. Whoever killed me can stay wherever he is, 'cause I'm not coming to him. For once, I'm gonna just sit back in this world and relax. Right after I take a shower."

Quinn headed for the bathroom, running his fingers through his hair. Arturo and Rembrandt picked up their cards and began arguing about the score while Wade flicked on the TV set.

It was the news again, giving a report about mysterious disappearances in a Florida swamp.

Wade watched it, murmuring "Who writes the news in this place? The National Enquirer?"

There was a knock at the door.

"I'll get it," Wade said, then called out "Who is it?" as she headed for the door.

A man's voice called out from the other side. "FBI."

Wade froze. She looked down at Arturo and Rembrandt, who were reflecting her

horrified expression in their own faces.

Wade swallowed, then said, "What do you want?"

"We're investigating two homicides that occurred last night," the voice said. "We believe you could have valuable information regarding the case."

Wade crept towards the door to peer through the side window. There, she got a perfect view of a tall, thin man standing next to a shorter woman with strawberry-blond hair.

"Oh, no," Wade whispered.

"What's going on?" Arturo asked.

Wade backed away from the front door. "It's the guy. The guy who chased us at Nomad. We gotta get out of here."

"What?" Rembrandt asked.

Another knock came to the door, harder this time. "Ma'am, I have to insist you open this door. This is official business."

Wade bolted for the bathroom door. "We gotta get out of here!"

The door shuddered as if a heavy object had collided with it. A woman's voice said, "Mulder -- " then the door shuddered

again.

Arturo struggled to his feet as Rembrandt crawled off the bed. They both followed Wade to the bathroom door, which she threw open.

Quinn was just taking off his shirt beside the running shower when the three of them burst into the bathroom. He scrambled to pull his shirt back on as he yelled, "Hey, what's the big idea?!"

They all heard the splintered crash of the motel room door being broken open. Heavy footsteps rushed towards the bathroom.

"They followed us, Quinn!" Wade yelled.
"Run!"

Wade ran to the bathroom window and hauled it open. She squeezed her thin frame through the tiny opening, landing on her feet in a grimy alley behind the motel. A brick wall faced her, making the alley fork left and right.

Quinn didn't wait for any more instructions. He threw himself through the window, barely managing to fit his shoulders through before landing on his back in the alley. Wade helped him up, then they both turned to see Professor Arturo struggling in the grip of the windowframe.

"I can't," he grunted, "get through -- "

"Hurry up, fatman!" Rembrandt yelled behind him. "You're gonna get us -- "

The man and the woman in trenchcoats slid into the bathroom, guns raised and aimed at Rembrandt and Arturo.

"Freeze!" the woman yelled. "Out of the window, now! Hands on top of your heads!"

Arturo pulled himself out of the window, then yelled at Quinn and Wade. "Run! Get out of here! Save yourselves!"

Quinn and Wade looked at each other, then ran. One ran to the left, the other to the right, down the narrow alley.

Scully kept her gun on the black man and the large bearded man as Mulder ran past them to the window. Scully still felt slightly dazed from the events of the past few seconds. Only a few minutes ago, they had been knocking on the motel door where they had seen the young man and woman from Nomad enter. The next thing they knew, they were breaking down the door and covering four people trying to escape through the window.

But the most shocking thing was that Mulder had been right. She had seen the

two men, both exact doubles of the dead men from last night. Scully found herself staring at one of them, the large man in her sights, trying to find some variation from the man she had seen. Even his beard was the same.

The two men put their hands on their heads, trembling, as Mulder leaned out the window.

"They're getting away, Scully," Mulder said. "We gotta go after them."

Scully managed to recover enough to ask, "What about these two?"

Mulder pulled a set of handcuffs out of his

belt. He snapped one bracelet onto the man who looked like Professor Arturo, slipped it under the pipe for the sink, then snapped the other bracelet onto the black man's wrist.

"They're not going anywhere," Mulder said. "Let's go."

He climbed through the window as if it was greased, leaving Scully to struggle through it on her own. When they were both outside, Mulder pointed to the left.

"You take the girl," he said. "I'm going after Dr. Mallory."

"Or the man who looks like Mallory,"

Scully said.

"Not now, Scully." Mulder bolted down the right-hand side of the alley.

Scully shook her head, then ran in the opposite direction.

As she moved swiftly through the narrow passageway, she caught sight of the end. It was sealed off by a heavy chain-link fence topped with barbed wire. As Scully drew closer, she could see that the girl was trying to climb it, reaching her hand up to pull the barbed wire high enough for her to slip through it.

Scully brought her gun up and in front of

her face, aiming for the young woman's leg. If she gave any resistance, Scully would shoot to wound.

"Freeze!" she yelled. "Get down from there! Now!"

The girl stopped, her hand still stretched up in the air, then cautiously scaled downwards. When her feet were inches from the floor, the girl jumped down.

"Hands on top of your head," Scully said. "Turn around, nice and slow."

The girl placed the palms of her hands on top of her head, then turned in place as slowly as she could. When the girl was

facing Scully, her eyes widened and her jaw dropped.

"Whoa," the girl whispered. "Are you really a cop?"

Mulder was running as fast as he could down the alley. He couldn't see the man he was chasing, but that didn't surprise him. As he ran, Mulder could see that the alley ended in a large court that was open to the street. The young man had escaped. He could be anywhere, but Mulder was determined to find him. He kept going into the court, heading for the street to have a look around.

As he rounded a corner, Mulder could hear

a rustling and a bang. He turned to see the young man who looked like Mallory coming up from behind a trash can.

Mulder raised his gun, aiming it at Mallory. "Freeze! Hands on top of your head!"

"You're the guy who killed me, aren't you?" the young man asked.

"What?"

Then Mulder noticed the young man was holding a grimy two-by-four. Before he could react, the young man was swinging it at Mulder's head.

Mulder ducked, but wasn't fast enough to avoid getting struck in the temple by the plank of wood. He went down onto the hard concrete floor. Before he could recover, the young man was on top of him.

Mulder wrestled with him, feeling a fist punching into his ribs again and again. They rolled on the floor, splashing through a puddle of muddy water.

"Who are you?" Mallory yelled. "Who are you working for? Why'd you kill me?"

Mulder managed to get his foot on the young man's chest and shove him off. "I didn't kill you!"

As Mallory went staggering back, Mulder realized he wasn't holding his gun anymore. It was lying behind a garbage can. Mulder made a dive for it.

He was stopped by Mallory's fist, which glanced his jaw, sending him to the floor again.

"Then who are you?" Mallory yelled.
"Answer me!"

Mulder launched himself at the young man, striking him full-bodied in the chest. They collided up against a brick wall. Mulder grabbed the front of Mallory's shirt.

"I'm Agent Mulder from the FBI," Mulder said, then drew back a fist, and clocked him in the jaw.

Mallory landed on the hard concrete on his back. He stared up at Mulder with wide eyes. "What?"

Mulder swept his gun off the floor to aim it down at him. "I'm from the FBI. Now lie down on the ground. Hands on top of your head."

Quinn obeyed, lying down on his stomach, putting his hands on top of his head.

Mulder looked up to see Scully entering the court, pushing the young woman

ahead of her. The girl's wrists were pinned behind her back by Scully's handcuffs.

Scully looked down at Quinn, then back up at Mulder. "Well, it seems you've got the situation in hand."

Mulder wiped a trickle of blood off his lip. "I guess so. It's time we did something I've been waiting to do all day."

Arturo twisted his wrist with a grunt, scraping it against the water pipe. "I think -- I think it's beginning to come loose."

Rembrandt gave him a tired look. "Give it up, man, it ain't gonna happen."

"Look, just because you have this twisted desire to remain a prisoner does not mean I share it."

"Hey, I don't wanna go to jail anymore than you do. I'm just sayin', you're not gettin' outta those handcuffs. There's nothing we can do but sit here and wait for them cops to get back."

Arturo used his free hand to twist at the pipe. "I think I can unscrew this -- "

They heard footsteps in the bedroom. The man in the trenchcoat entered, holding his gun on them. Arturo noticed his tousled hair, his muddy clothes, and bloody lip, and felt a rush of pride. Quinn had

handled himself well.

The man knelt to insert a key into the lock of Arturo's handcuffs, keeping his gun pressed against Rembrandt's forehead.

"Don't try anything," the man said. "I'm not in the mood."

When the handcuff had snapped free, the man grabbed Arturo's coat and hauled him to his feet. Then he waved his gun at Rembrandt.

"Let's go," he said, "outside."

Rembrandt and Arturo obeyed, walking ahead of him into the bedroom with their

arms raised. They found Quinn and Wade sitting on the edge of one of the beds, watched by the woman in the trenchcoat, who had her gun on them.

"Siddown," the man said.

Arturo and Rembrandt took a seat beside the others. All four of them looked up at the man, who leaned against the wooden dresser against the wall in front of them.

"Okay," the thin man said. "Now we're gonna get some answers."

San Francisco, California
Sunnyview Motel
3:38 PM

" -- so we came back here," Quinn finished. "When you came in, we thought you were the guys who killed us, so we ran, and I -- defended myself."

Mulder rubbed his jaw, which sported a fresh Band-Aid from the medicine cabinet. "Yeah, I remember that part."

"Honest," Wade said, "it's the whole truth."

"Such as it is," Arturo added.

Mulder looked down at them with an odd expression. "Hm. Another dimension, huh?"

"Actually," Arturo said, "it's a parallel world. An alternate reality adjoining this one."

"Right," Mulder said, "I got it. I have the whole *Back to the Future* series on laserdisk."

Scully looked away from the four people sitting on the bed to stare at Mulder with a crooked smile. "Mulder -- you don't actually believe all this, do you?"

Mulder gave her a curious look. "Why, don't you?"

Scully's smile faded when she realized he

was serious. "Of course not. I mean, come on. They expect me to believe that this kid -- " She pointed at Quinn. " -- built an interdimensional gateway generator in his basement?"

"Well, not my basement," Quinn said. "It's a laboratory. It's got everything. I built it from spare parts I got at the junkyard."

"Yes, I've seen it," Arturo said. "It's actually quite impressive."

"What's the matter, Scully?" Mulder asked. "The concept of alternate realities too much for you?"

"Mulder," Scully said, "this is nonsense."

First of all, the concept of alternate dimensions is a theoretical construct, a mathematical possibility. It's not something that you go -- sliding into."

"But we -- " Wade started.

"Second of all," Scully continued, "the idea that other planes of existence would mirror Earth exactly except for a few minor changes is ludicrous. That's like -- expecting aliens to look exactly like us except for spots on their necks."

"Actually, Scully -- " Mulder started.

"In the third place," Scully interrupted, "even if alternate realities existed, the

creation of a 'wormhole' between them is impossible with modern technology. To get into the physics of it, even if you managed to create a wormhole in space, the material it was made of would have to be able to withstand a million trillion pounds of pressure per square inch in order to keep from caving in on itself. No known substance has that kind of property."

"What about exotic matter?" Quinn asked.
"That would be strong enough to withstand the pressure, wouldn't it?"

Scully gave him an irritated glance. "It doesn't exist. That's just a mathematical theory as well."

Quinn grinned as he said, "What if I found some?"

Scully rounded on him. "You can't 'find' exotic matter. The only place in the universe that might have anything even close to it would be a black hole, and they don't exist on Earth."

"What about within matter itself?" Quinn asked. "What if I used an atom smasher to create sub-atomic particles which contained within them -- "

Scully held up her hands. "Okay, okay, you're a physicist. Fine. But there's no point in arguing about this, because even if it was possible to create dimensional

wormholes, I don't believe you created one for a second."

"Why would they lie?" Mulder asked.

"Oh," Scully said, "I don't know. Maybe to avoid a conviction for murder?"

"Murder?" Wade squeaked.

"That's right, murder. You were seen fleeing from the site of an accident. Presumably, you were the last ones to see Dr. Mallory and Dr. Arturo alive. That makes you suspects."

"I *am* Dr. Mallory," Quinn said.

"You can't be him," Scully said. "Dr. Mallory is dead. I examined the body myself."

"I told you, I'm not the same Mallory. I'm Quinn Mallory from another dimension."

Mulder pointed at him. "Scully, how do you explain what's happened?"

"I don't know," Scully said. "But there's bound to be another explanation. Plastic surgery or makeup or maybe that wasn't Dr. Mallory and Dr. Arturo we found in that car, after all. I don't know. All I know is that, if these people are from another dimension, then I'm Mork from Ork."

"I can't believe, after everything we've seen, that you still won't open your mind to new possibilities."

Wade perked up as she asked, "All you've seen? Like what?"

"Yeah," Rembrandt said, "who are you guys, anyway?"

"We're special agents of the FBI," Mulder said. "We work on a remote branch of the Bureau called the X-Files, which contains unexplainable and unsolved cases from the 1930's to modern day. And we've seen stuff that would blow your mind. Men with no bones, human leeches -- "

"Bigfoot?" Wade asked.

"Not yet, but I'm working on it. UFOs -- "

Professor Arturo gave out a snort. "UFOs, indeed."

Mulder looked at him. "What, you don't believe in extraterrestrial life?"

"Of course not," Arturo said. "It is poppycock and nonsense designed to sell cheaply-printed newspapers on the supermarket checkout aisle."

"But I've seen them," Mulder said. "I've witnessed actual encounters with extraterrestrials and UFOs. My own sister

was abducted by them when I was young."

Arturo shook his head. "This is preposterous. And you're skeptical of *us*."

Wade rested a hand on his. "Wait a minute, Professor. All this time, we've been assuming we're on an Earth like our own. But suppose we're on a world where extraterrestrials and all the other weird mysteries on our world actually exist."

Arturo folded his arms over his chest. "I refuse to believe that aliens exist on any world."

Scully spoke up. "And I refuse to believe that you're from another dimension."

"Then, dear madame, I believe we're at a stalemate."

Quinn held up a hand. "Wait a minute, I've got two computer disks. Now I dunno what's on 'em, but I got one from myself before I died, and another from a computer at Nomad. If we had a computer, we could take a look at what's on them, and maybe figure out what's been going on."

Mulder snapped his fingers. "Scully, go get your laptop."

"What?" Scully asked. "Mulder, this is -- "

"Come on, Scully, what harm can it do?"

Scully glared at him, then headed for the door, murmuring, "That's what I'm afraid of finding out."

All of them were gathered in front of Scully's laptop as she sat on the bed, typing away, bringing her to the File menu.

"Okay," she finally said. "There's one text file on this disk. It's dated -- yesterday."

"Bring it up," Mulder said.

Scully shot him a glare before clicking on the file folder. The screen filled with text.

Scully frowned through her glasses at it.
"What is this?"

"It's a letter," Quinn whispered. "It's a letter from myself. I must have written it on that laptop computer before I died. I mean, before he died. I mean, before the other me died."

Mulder looked at him. "That must get pretty confusing sometimes."

"Tell me about it," Quinn murmured.

They all began to read:

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

These may be the last words I will ever write. I wish I could make this really profound or something, but it's hard to concentrate with four bullets in my chest. Professor Arturo is driving, but I can tell he's having the same problem I am. We're not sure how much longer we can hold out, but we have to get as far away from that place as possible. The truth must be known. That's why I'm writing this. If I don't survive, maybe this disk will. In case, you don't already know, my name is Quinn Mallory. I used to be your average honors high school student with an unusual fascination in quantum physics. I guess all this started the day I built a nuclear bomb for the school science fair.

Wade looked at Quinn. "You built a

nuclear bomb?"

Quinn winced. "Tried to. Didn't quite work out, and I never told anybody about it. It was just a stupid idea, anyway. I'd seen this movie and -- well, anyway -- "

They continued to read:

It almost didn't work until I figured out a way to build it with almost no radioactive material, applying a new formula in quantum mechanics. The bomb was confiscated at the fair, and I was put on suspension, but the weirdest thing happened. This guy came to my door, saying how he'd heard about my development and wanted me to work for the government. I'll never forget

that guy. I came to know him well over the years, but never liked him. Never saw him without a cigarette in his mouth. Anyway, my mom didn't want me to do it, said developing better bombs was evil. But the man promised to fund any research project I wanted. It was too good to pass up. I accepted. Mom never forgave me for that.

They set me up at an outfit called Dynamic Industries, a front company for the CIA's Directorate of Science and Technology. I built them their bomb, as well as a few other things I'm not proud of. All the while, I tinkered with a new concept in quantum physics called the Einstein-Rosen-Podalsky Bridge, a theoretical gateway between dimensions. I came close to solving it, but

couldn't do it alone, so I asked my old physics Professor, Maximillian Arturo, for help.

Together, we solved the Grand Unification Theory and published a paper on the feasibility of interdimensional travel.

That's when the cigarette-smoking man (who I call Cancer Man) came back. He told me the government had a project for me that would incorporate my work in wormhole theory. He quoted a salary, and we said yes. Moved us to another company, Nomad Electronics, where they rolled out the red carpet for us.

Our work was different than I expected. They kept giving us these weird machines

and devices, asking us to analyze them and try to use them to develop our wormhole. The stuff was incredible, did some things to time and space even Einstein would have boggled over. But the question of where they were getting it was always avoided or ignored.

Eventually, it became clear to the Professor and I that something was wrong. The technology we were using was centuries ahead of anything that exists today. We became determined to find out its true source. After exhausting several channels, we finally managed to trace the machinery to a truck that carried it to Nomad on a weekly basis. One night, we followed the truck to a warehouse near the bay. There, we found something that I'll never forget. It changed

my whole view of the world and everything in it.

But we paid a price. We got caught. Tried to escape, but the guards managed to get off a few shots before we could get out. That's how we ended up here, speeding through the city, bound for who-knows-where. I know now that the people who are doing this are bigger than anything we can fight. There's nowhere to run, nowhere hide. But we run, because nothing left to do.

That's it. Can't even type anymore. Hope this gets to someone beside Cancer Man. If it does, go to this address. You'll find everything you need there. And tell Mom I love her. And that I'm sorry.

Mulder leaned back, gazing into space.

"Wow," Quinn breathed.

"Oh, come on," Arturo said. "There has to be some mistake. Does your double mean to imply that the government is somehow involved in his death?"

"They're not implying anything," Mulder said. "Your duplicates were assassinated by government agents."

Arturo hooked his thumbs in his coat pockets as he said, "That's preposterous. Dr. Mallory was obviously delirious. Our government would never do a thing like

that. That's -- communistic. We live in a free society, not a dictatorship."

Wade rested a hand on his arm. "Hey, Professor, remember this isn't our world."

"Now do you believe it, Scully?" Mulder asked.

"Of course not," Scully said, gesturing towards the screen. "This doesn't prove anything. For all we know, they could have written this a few minutes ago."

Quinn held out another computer disk. "Well, let's try this one."

Scully snatched the disk from him and

jammed it into her laptop. She clicked on the files contained on it, and they were treated to a long string of text flowing on the screen.

Scully squinted at the text as it passed by. "This is the formula that was written on Mallory's blackboard in the basement."

"That's my Grand Unification Theory," Quinn said.

"Ours," Arturo added with a grin. "I knew you should have brought me in on your little project, Mr. Mallory. We could have solved it a lot sooner, you and I."

Scully pointed at one graph that went by.

"Now, wait a minute. That was a spectrographic analysis of some sort of metal. Those figures were faked. No substance on Earth has that kind of density."

"Well, look at this," Quinn said. "You think we could write something like this in a few hours?"

"You could've written it months ago."

"For what?"

"To fool us."

"Why?!"

"I don't know," Scully said. "You tell me."

Mulder straightened, running his fingers through his hair. "Well, I know one way to settle all this. We can go to the address on that disk."

"What?" Scully asked. "You can't be serious."

"I'm dead serious, Scully. Anybody coming?"

"I'll go," Quinn said. "I gotta follow this through to the end."

"Me, too," Wade said. "This is gonna be so cool. Professor?"

"Certainly not," Arturo said. "I don't believe a word that -- other Quinn says. And as I've said before, I'm quite satisfied knowing nothing about my own death."

Rembrandt threw off his blankets. "Well, I'm goin'. I've been cooped up in here too long."

Arturo blocked him with a hand. "Ah, ah, ah, Mr. Brown. You heard what I said. No exertion or excitement for twenty-four hours."

"You gotta be kiddin' me," Rembrandt said. "Who are you, my mother?"

"I am the fellow you owe seventy-five cents to, and I am also the fellow who will lie on top of you, if that's what it takes to keep you in bed."

Rembrandt shook his head. "Man, when you make a threat, you go for the jugular. Fine, I'm stayin', but we're gonna play gin rummy until I get my money back."

Mulder turned to Scully. "How about you?"

Scully beckoned him with a finger. "Follow me, Mulder. I wanna talk to you."

She marched into the bathroom. When Mulder was inside with her, she shut the

door firmly behind them, then wheeled on Mulder.

"Are you crazy?" she hissed.

"What?"

Scully pointed at the door. "The people in there are either pathological liars or hopelessly insane. Why would you even dream of listening to them, much less following them to a location we know nothing about?"

"I can't believe you're still holding this against them."

Scully lowered her voice to a whisper.

"Mulder, have you stopped to consider the fact that they could be working for the people who've been trying to stop us all these years? They've played on your gullibility before. Why wouldn't you expect them to try it again?"

"Look, Scully," Mulder said, "something's happening here, something big. Those people are involved somehow, and I have to know what's going on. I'll be careful, but I'm not going back to Washington without some answers. Now, are you coming with us or aren't you?"

Scully looked up at him for a moment before drawing her gun and checking the cylinder. "All right, fine. I'm coming with

you."

She snapped the cylinder shut again. "If for no other reason than to watch your back. And you have to promise me that, at the first sign of trouble, we get out of there and let the police take it from there. Okay?"

"Okay. I knew you were a sport, Scully." Mulder opened the door and charged out, followed by Scully, who was shaking her head.

Mulder headed past the others to the door. "Okay, gang, let's move out."

Wade and Quinn followed him out into

the parking lot, followed by Scully, who kept her hand lingering beside the holster around her ribs at all times.

Mulder climbed behind the wheel of his sedan. Wade got into the backseat. Quinn was about to climb in beside her when Scully gripped his shoulder with a hand.

"Excuse me," she said, "would you mind sitting up front? I'd like to keep an eye on you."

Quinn raised an eyebrow at her, but said, "Sure, uh -- no problem."

He took his place in the front seat while Scully climbed in beside Wade. As she

buckled her seatbelt, Scully noticed Wade staring at her out of the corner of her eye.

Scully wrinkled her brow at her. "What? Why are you staring at me?"

Wade held up a hand. "Oh, sorry. It's just -- I've never met a female police officer before."

Scully snapped her belt buckle into place. "I'm an FBI agent, not a police officer."

"I've never met one of them, either."

"Fascinating. Let's go, Mulder."

Mulder backed the car out and began to

drive to the address on the file.

Scully noticed Wade staring at her again. She rolled her eyes. "Now what?"

"You carry a gun?" Wade asked.

Scully raised an eyebrow. "Obviously. I had it pointed at you a minute ago."

"Yeah, I know, but, like, you carry it all the time, right?"

Scully folded her hands over her lap, glaring out the front windshield. "When I'm on duty, yes."

"You ever kill anybody?" Wade asked.

Scully paused before saying, "A few, yes."

"Cool," Wade whispered. "You ever get in any car chases?"

"Not really, no."

"Ever hang from a helicopter?"

"No."

"Ever kick down a door?"

"Yes."

"Grab somebody's car and tell them 'This is official police business?'"

"No."

"Dust for fingerprints?"

"Yes."

"Ever bust up a drug ring -- "

"Ah, yes. No."

"Ever talk to a Mafia kingpin?"

"Yes."

"Shoot up some Martians?"

"No."

“Drive on two wheels?”

“No.”

Wade held up her hands, miming firing an automatic rifle. "Ever bust up a drug ring, where they're, like, shooting at you with bullets flying all over the place, and so you grab an Uzi, and mow 'em all down like grass? *Thpt-thpt-thpt-thpt --* "

"Mulder," Scully said, "how long until we get to that warehouse?"

Sunnyview Motel
4:12 PM

Arturo glared at his cards, deep in thought.

"Come on, Professor," Rembrandt said, "put down a card."

"Can't you see I'm thinking? Gin rummy is a game of careful strategy."

Rembrandt looked at his watch. "It's also been fifteen minutes since your turn started. You gotta put down a card or forfeit."

"All right, all right." The Professor reached for one of his cards, his forehead prickling with sweat. If he lost this game, he would lose his entire life savings at that point; eighty-two cents.

He was relieved when a knock came at the door.

Saved by the bell, Arturo thought, putting down his cards. "I'll get that. I'm inclined to wonder what the others found at that odd location -- "

Rembrandt put down his cards. "Professor, would you let me off this bed for one minute? I feel fine. Even my headache's gone."

The Professor looked over his shoulder at him as he headed for the door. "Tut-tut, Mr. Brown. As I said before, you can't be too careful with a man in your condition."

Professor Arturo opened the door. It wasn't Quinn and the others. It was a group of men in grey coats, wearing sunglasses.

"Maximillian Arturo?" one of the men asked.

"Yes," Arturo said. "That's right. And you are?"

The man pulled a gun out of his coat pocket and shot Arturo in the chest. The Professor felt a wave of dizziness on the impact that sent him toppling over into the man's arms. Just before he lost consciousness, Arturo could hear Rembrandt hit the floor when the men

shot him as well.

Warehouse

4:27 PM

The grey sedan pulled up in front of a drab concrete building surrounded by a flimsy chain-link fence. Quinn climbed out of the sedan and looked up at the broken windows and weathered brickwork, shaking his head.

"This can't be right," he said.

Scully got out and stood beside him, her hands folded over her lap. "Are you satisfied? Now could you please drop the charade and tell us what's really going on?"

"I didn't do this," Quinn said. "I've never seen this place before in my life. But this can't be the source of all that technology."

"Obviously."

Mulder slammed his cardoor and walked past them towards the warehouse. "There's only one way to find out."

The front gate was held shut with a padlock and chain so rusted that it almost disintegrated in Mulder's hand as he twisted it off.

Scully walked up to his side with her hands in her pockets. "Mm. I can see why the

government would want to keep anyone from finding out about this place. Very high security."

Mulder held up the padlock that was staining his hand with red flakes. "This could be a trick to throw people off, make them think the place is deserted."

"Well, they've done a very good job," Scully said. "Fooled me completely."

"Ever pick a lock?" Wade asked.

"Would you knock it off?"

Mulder pushed open the gate, its hinges squealing. Quinn, Wade, Scully, and

Mulder walked up the gravel-strewn walk to the front door. It was ringed with a layer of rust that had warped and eaten holes in the once-solid steel. It was locked, but Quinn was able to reach through a hole in the door to unlock it.

The door swung into the vast cavernous interior of the warehouse. Shafts of light fell from the windows, casting bars of shadow onto the hundred of cardboard boxes that filled the chamber.

Scully walked towards one of the boxes, her heels like gunshots in the echoes of the warehouse. She tore open the cardboard that was gummy and twisted by rainwater to reach inside. She pulled out something

furry and slimy that dripped out of her hand.

"Congratulations, gentlemen," she said. "You've uncovered the US government's secret stockpile of rotten tomatoes."

"What?" Mulder rushed forward to tear open another box, which he could see now was labelled GOODWILL:SOUTH AFRICA. It was filled with moldy spheres which had once been produce.

Scully tossed the tomatoes back into the box, rubbing her hands off on her coat. "It looks like these were supposed to be shipped to South Africa in -- " She read the date. "1983. Got caught up in red tape, as

these things often do, never left the docks."

Mulder held up a handful of the tomatoes, squeezing them into paste between his fingers. "This can't be. There's got to be another explanation."

Scully folded her arms over her chest as she watched Quinn and Wade wander deeper into the warehouse in a daze. "Now, are you two going to start answering questions truthfully or do we have to get the police do it for us?"

Wade disappeared around a stack of boxes. "Hey, these boxes are loose -- Oh, man!"

Quinn ran after her. "What's going on -- "

When he was out of sight, his footsteps halted. "Wow."

Scully and Mulder exchanged a glance, then followed.

Scully was reaching for her gun when she rounded the corner and came to a sudden halt. She forgot the gun in her hand, letting it fall to the floor of the warehouse with a clatter. Her eyes went up and up, following the contours of what she couldn't believe she was seeing.

Wade had moved a section of the boxes aside, exposing the center of the warehouse, which had been hidden from view by the fortress of crates surrounding

it. There, balanced neatly on stalks of metal, was an enormous metal disk shaped like a saucer turned upside-down. A square gap in the side of the disk allowed a view into its interior, one filled with dark passageways and corridors.

"Scully," Mulder said, "that's no tomato."

Location Unknown
4:49 PM

Professor Arturo opened his eyes, but he could still see nothing but darkness. Then a brilliant light was focused into his eyes, forcing him to squint. The light was giving off heat that made his skin burn wherever it touched. He could see something

moving in the light, the silhouette of a man, but only for a brief second.

"What's going on here?" Arturo asked.

"Who are you people?"

"We're asking the questions here," an unnaturally deep voice said, so deep that Arturo could tell it was computer-enhanced. "What is your name?"

"Professor Maximillian Arturo," he said.

"You're lying," the voice said. "Professor Arturo is dead. Tell us your real name."

"That is my real name. Look, if I'm under arrest, I am entitled to one phone call and

the presence of my lawyer."

"You're not getting anything until you tell us your name," the voice said.

"That *is* my name!" Arturo yelled. "I am Professor Maximillian Arturo! I'm a professor of cosmology!"

"Professor Arturo is dead. If you refuse to talk of your own free will, we will make you tell us what we want to know."

Arturo felt hands pin him to his chair. A sharp sting in his bicep made him realize that someone was forcing a hypodermic needle into his arm.

"What is your real name?" the deep voice asked.

"I swear," Arturo gasped, "it's the truth. I have no other name."

The room was silent for a moment, then the voice said, "Let's assume you're telling the truth. Then answer this -- is Maximillian Arturo dead?"

"Yes."

"Then how can you claim to be him and alive?"

Arturo grit his teeth, sweat pouring down his face in rivers. "You -- you won't believe

me."

"We'll believe anything," the voice said.
"Tell us. How can you be claim to be Arturo, when Arturo is dead?"

Arturo couldn't think of any other answer but the truth. He couldn't tell if this was because of a drug they had put into him or because of his blind fear, but had no alternative. "Because -- I'm not from this world. I'm from another dimension."

Another moment of silence passed, then the voice asked, "What kind of dimension?"

"A dimension exactly like this one -- but

different. My companions and I -- accidentally slid out of an alternate reality, and now we're moving from one to the other, trying to find our way home. We dropped into this one last night. We were there when the car crashed, but we had nothing to do with it, I swear."

"How did you -- slide out of your dimension?"

"My companion," Arturo said. "Quinn Mallory. He invented this machine that creates gateways to alternate realities -- "

"The Bridge?" the voice interrupted. "He perfected the Einstein-Rosen-Podalsky Bridge?"

Arturo nodded, feeling drained from the lights and the pain. "Yes. Yes, it works. If it handed been for a minor mishap, it would have been -- wonderful -- "

Then he drifted back into blissful unconsciousness.

Location Unknown
4:31 PM

The old men looked up at the man who entered the room, smoking a cigarette. One of his hands was in his pocket, while the other held a cigarette that he regarded as if it were fine art.

"An interesting development," the man said.

"Well?" a man with a Russian accent said.
"What did you find out? Are Dr. Mallory and Dr. Arturo alive?"

The cigarette-smoking man knocked his ashes off on the oriental carpet before saying, "No. They're both dead, as I promised you."

A collective sigh passed through the room.

"But we have a new problem," the man said. "It seems Arturo and Mallory have returned in a new form."

"What are you babbling about?" a man with a Japanese accent asked.

"Four people have crossed from another dimension into our own. Two of them are exact counterparts to Mallory and Arturo."

"That's preposterous," a man with an Australian accent murmured.

The cigarette-smoking man glared at him. "After all we've seen and done, I would think you'd be a little more accepting of unusual concepts."

"What evidence do you have of this -- dimensional thing? Just the word of a desperate man?"

The man put the cigarette back into his mouth. "Yes. But it's enough. We gave Arturo enough juice to make him dance naked through a convent. Besides, part of the Red Robin Project was to develop dimensional gateway technology. It does not seem out of the realm of possibility that this would occur elsewhere simultaneously."

"Well," a man with a South African accent said, "it seems we have solved our little problem."

"Not quite," the cigarette-smoking man said around the cigarette in his clenched lips. "Agents Scully and Mulder have

encountered and joined forces with our interdimensional visitors."

A silence passed through the room like a cloud.

"Good lord," a man with an American accent whispered. "This is a complete disaster. If they uncover the location of the Chop Shop -- "

The cigarette-smoking man exhaled a cloud of smoke as he said, "They already have. A silent alarm went off about a minute ago warning of the presence of intruders at the Shop. But calm yourselves. Red Robin will be destroyed before they can tell anyone else about it."

"But what about the project?" a man with a Swedish accent asked.

"It will continue," the man said. "We've salvaged enough from Red Robin to continue our research into the next century. You see, we no longer have need of it. If what our guest has said is true, then it seems our visitor, Quinn Mallory, has solved the puzzle of the Bridge. With him, we will be able to complete our work and begin the next phase of operations. As I told you, gentlemen, nothing will stop us now. Nothing."

"And how do we get him to cooperate?" a man with a Canadian accent asked.

"Simple," the cigarette-smoking man said.
"We give him what he wants."

Warehouse
4:38 PM

Scully stared up at the massive disk-like object that was perched in the center of the warehouse on four slender legs. Sunlight falling from a skylight in the roof seemed to glow on its surface, on which patterns swirled and moved in no obvious pattern. A soft musical tone filled the warehouse, one that soothed Scully's heart at the same time that it terrified her.

"What -- is that?" she whispered.

"It's just what it looks like," Mulder said.
"It's a UFO"

"Wow," Wade breathed, circling around it.
"I've wanted to see one of these things my whole life."

Scully shook his head. "No. No, this can't -- it can't be real."

Quinn pointed at the thing looming above them. "Well, just look at it? You ever see anything like it? You ever see light shine over any Earth substance that way with that kind of texture? You ever see anything this big support itself with such thin material?" He kicked one of the four

narrow stalks supporting the object, causing it to ring in a humming tone that faded away.

Scully took a step towards the machine. She could see that its surface was pocked with square holes, carefully cut out of the walls of the craft. From those holes, she could see through to a complex network of tubes, wires, and other components that she couldn't identify.

"Well, if we assume that it *is* a UFO," Scully said, that leaves us with the question of what it's doing here."

Mulder looked down at a cardboard box at his feet. It looked just as worn and

weathered as all the others, but when he tore it open, Mulder pulled out a long, slender shaft of metal with a crystal on the end.

"I think it's obvious, Scully," Mulder said. "This is the source of Dr. Arturo and Dr. Mallory's mysterious technology. The government's been chopping up this thing for spare parts."

He tore open another box, which also contained an alien object. He showed Scully the label. "This one's going to UCLA." He moved to another box. "Just as I thought. The tomatoes were a front. This is the real stuff. It's being shipped to universities and research laboratories all

over the world. They're all doing what Mallory and Arturo were doing; examining and experimenting with it a piece at a time."

"But I don't get it," Quinn said. "I was a quantum physicist. I wasn't a -- UFO guy. Why'd they give it to me?"

"Didn't you read the letter?" Mulder asked. "It was because of your dimensional gateway research."

Scully shook her head. "I don't follow you."

Mulder looked down at her. "Remember when we first met, and I told you about

UFOs, and you said it was impossible for anything to move between solar systems, due to the enormous distances involved, even at the speed of light? Well, it's been speculated that extraterrestrials don't come from space at all. Maybe they come from another dimension parallel to our own."

Quinn pointed at him. "So you're saying that maybe this thing had a wormhole generator on it, something that created an Einstein-Rosen-Podalsky Bridge, and the government was trying to figure out how to make their own. And they needed my research to do it."

"Exactly," Mulder said.

"Fantastic," Quinn whispered.

Scully pressed her hand to her forehead. "Mulder, how do we know this thing isn't some elaborate hoax designed to make us think exactly that?"

"One way to find out," Mulder said. "We can go inside the ship, take a look around, maybe even take a sample for analysis."

Mulder took a step towards her, his eyes shining. "Don't you get it, Scully? This is it. This is the proof I've always been searching for that intelligent life exists outside our world. I mean, forget photos and scientific studies. This is ET's Ferrari, and we've got the keys. We could drive this

thing right out of here to the nearest TV studio, buzz the Golden Gate Bridge."

Scully smirked at him. "You're not serious, I hope. We can't fly this -- "

"Uh, guys?" Wade asked.

Everyone turned to look at where she stood, looking down at a small box against the wall.

"When you find a box," she said, "with a digital clock on it that's going backwards, that's a bad thing, right?"

"That sounds like a bomb," Scully said.

Quinn looked down at the opposite wall and pointed. "Hey, there's another one over here."

Mulder and Scully both looked around the edges of the room. They found another, and another, and another --

"It's gonna blow," Mulder said. "We must have triggered some sort of defense system."

"Fifteen seconds!" Scully yelled. "Run!"

They all bolted for the front door, leaping over boxes in their path. Wade was the last to leave the warehouse and only took a few steps before the warehouse erupted in a

massive explosion. Wade was sent flying through the air to land on her back as pieces of smouldering wood and metal came raining down from the sky. Scully, Mulder, and Quinn helped Wade to her feet, running for the perimeter fence through the manmade hail. By the time they reached the car, most of the debris had fallen, leaving behind a smoking crater where the warehouse had once been.

"I don't believe it," Mulder gasped. "They blew it up. They blew up their own ship just to keep us from getting or telling anyone about it."

"That's one theory, sure," Scully said, wiping soot off her cheek. "Or maybe it

was blown up to keep us from finding out it was a fake."

"I don't believe this!" Quinn yelled. "What's it take to convince you of anything? I'm surprised you believe in daylight enough to wake up in the morning!"

Scully poked a finger in his chest. "Hey, I'm not the one who goes around telling people they're from an alternate dimension. Mulder -- "

Mulder's coat rang. He looked down and pulled out the cellular phone in his breast pocket. After exchanging a glance with Scully, he hit the SEND button.

"Agent Mulder," Mulder said.

Scully moved closer so she could hear a deep voice they knew too well on the phone. It belonged to the one they knew as Cancer Man.

"Hello, Agent Mulder," the voice said. "I trust your little visit went well."

"Reasonably so," Mulder said. "Until you tried to blow us up."

"Well, we can't have you giving away all our secrets, now can we?"

"You did a lousy job. We're all still alive."

"Well, that is a shame, considering the trouble we went to installing all those bombs. Explosives don't come cheap, you know, especially the kind that would reduce an alien spacecraft to powder in a matter of seconds. Oh, by the way, are Mallory and the girl with you?"

Mulder looked up at Quinn as he said, "Yes, why?"

"I just thought he'd like to know we have a guest with us. A Professor Maximillian Arturo, back from the dead."

"You're lying," Mulder said through clenched teeth.

"Go back to your motel room at the Sunnyview Motel -- Room 36, I believe -- and see for yourself. We'll be waiting for you at the Abraham Lincoln statue in Golden Gate Park at exactly ten-thirty tonight. Bring all the evidence you've collected on this incident, including your newfound friends and the two computer disks of Mallory's. Don't try to copy the disks, either. We have ways of telling, and that would make life very unpleasant for you."

There was a click as the call was disconnected. Mulder slammed the phone shut and jammed it into his pocket. He began to walk briskly to the door of the

sedan. Scully followed, climbing into the passenger side.

Quinn and Wade watched him with puzzled expressions, then got into the backseat of the car.

"What's going on?" Wade asked.

"I'm not sure yet," Mulder said. "But I think we're in very deep trouble."

Sunnyview Motel

5:22 PM

They could see that the motel room door was wide open. Quinn didn't even wait for the car to stop. He threw open his door,

jumped out of the moving sedan, stumbled, and broke into a run for the doorway.

The room was a mess. Amid the chaos, Rembrandt Brown was lying on the floor, his hands and feet bound behind his back. He looked up at Quinn over his gag, grunting softly.

"Oh, man," Quinn said as he untied him. "What happened?"

Rembrandt waited until Quinn had taken the gag out of his mouth, then spat string out of his mouth. "I dunno. Me and the Professor were playin' gin rummy, there was a knock at the door, he answered it --

there were these big guys with sunglasses. They shot the prof and me with some kind of tranquilizer dart. I woke up a few minutes ago like this."

Mulder and Scully stood in the doorway as Wade hurried to help Rembrandt up.

"You okay?" Wade asked. "How's your head?"

"It's fine," Rembrandt said. "Fit as a fiddle. Told the Professor I was okay."

"Why did they leave him and take Rembrandt?" Quinn asked.

Mulder spoke. "They didn't want him.

They wanted Arturo to answer questions. They probably left Brown behind to tell us what happened. So we know they're not bluffing."

Quinn advanced on them. "Okay, now it's my turn to ask questions. What's going on? Who are these people?"

"We don't know who they are," Scully said. "Not really. We believe they're a rogue element within the US government."

"And possibly other governments as well," Mulder said. "They've been trying to stop us from uncovering a series of small conspiracies which I believe leads to a much larger conspiracy. And we believe

Cancer Man is somehow involved, maybe even the leader of the group."

"Okay," Quinn said, "what's all this got to do with us?"

Scully closed her eyes. "They've taken Dr. Arturo. They want to exchange him in Golden Gate Park."

"In exchange for what?"

"All our information on this case," Mulder said, "and, I suspect, you."

"Me?" Quinn asked. "Why me?"

"Because if you actually created a bridge

between dimensions, and what I believe is true, then you hold the key to their entire research program."

Wade threw down the rope used to bind Rembrandt on the floor. "I don't get it. All this fuss, just to go to other dimensions. I mean, what's the point? Why are they so determined to get it?"

"I don't know," Mulder said. "With a wormhole generator, it might be possible to connect distant points on Earth, allowing them instantaneous travel from one country to another. Handy for wars and assassinations. Or maybe they wanna use it for the space program. Or maybe they don't know, either. They just know

they want it. But if they want the secret this badly, then there's no way we're gonna let them have it."

"Well, what are we gonna do about it? If we don't exchange the Professor, he'll die. Won't he?"

"Yes," Scully said.

Quinn was glaring at the floor, deep in thought. Then he looked up, his eyes wide. "Wait a minute. That's it. That's the answer."

Golden Gate Park
10:24 PM

The moon was high over Golden Gate Park. Only an occasional jogger moved down the cobblestone paths that wound through the trees. All of the joggers were wearing earpieces that allowed them to communicate with a large black van parked a few blocks away.

The grey sedan pulled up alongside the park. Its occupants got out. They all looked at their watches, then began to move deeper into the forest.

The statue of Abraham Lincoln stood on its pedestal, gazing into the horizon, not looking down at the bearded man sitting in a nearby park bench. As Mulder, Quinn, Wade, and Scully approached, the man

looked up with a dazed expression.

"Oh, thank heavens," he whispered.

"Professor?" Wade called out. "Are you all right?"

She began to run towards him.

A voice called out of the darkness, one that sounded too deep to be human. "That's far enough."

Wade drew to a halt a few feet away from Arturo, who looked back at her with sadness in his eyes.

"Do you have the disk?" the voice asked.

Quinn held up two computer disks.
"We've got 'em."

"Are there copies?"

"No. These are the originals, I swear."

"Throw them onto the grass, near the park bench," the voice said.

Quinn lowered the disk. "No. We had a deal. The Professor for the disks."

"And you," the voice said.

Quinn nodded. "Fine. And me. But first, you let the Professor go."

"No," the voice said. "First, you come over to the bench with the disks. We also want the device you use to open the Bridge."

"Let the Professor go!" Quinn yelled.

"You're not in a position to bargain."

Quinn grinned as he yelled, "Yes, I am. I have what you want. I *am* what you want."

"We'll kill the Professor."

Mulder raised his gun, aiming the muzzle at the back of Quinn's head.

"Then he kills me," Quinn said. "And the

only man left on Earth who can figure out how to create the Bridge dies. So if you don't wanna see my precious brains splattered all over the grass, you'd better let him go."

A moment of silence passed, then the voice returned. "You're bluffing."

Mulder drew back the hammer on his gun, giving off an ominous click. "Try us."

Another moment of silence passed.

"All right," the voice said. "He goes. But first, toss the timer for the Bridge into the shadow at the base of the bench."

Quinn pulled the small, square device out of his pocket. He threw it into a pool of shadows beneath the park bench.

"Arturo," the voice said. "Take two steps forward."

Arturo took a few lurching steps towards Quinn.

"All right," the voice said. "He's free to go. Now it's your turn."

"Okay," Quinn said. "Here I come."

He shot a glance at Wade, who nodded back at him. Quinn glanced down at his watch, then began to walk forward,

holding up the disks.

Wade cautiously reached into her jacket pocket. She drew a black object from within it, slipping her hand over its end.

Quinn and Professor Arturo walked past each other, standing side by side. For a moment, they smiled at each other.

"I'm sorry it had to come to this, Mr. Mallory," Arturo said.

Quinn rested a hand on Arturo's shoulder. "Don't be. It's gonna be all right."

The object in Wade's hand beeped. She flipped open the cover and turned a dial on

its end. A cone seemed to emerge from the device that warped space itself, ending in a swirling vortex that formed in mid-air with a rushing noise. The gateway appeared right next to Quinn and Arturo.

Quinn got a firmer grip on the Professor's shoulder and ran for the portal, pulling him along with him. They both jumped through into it and disappeared in a flash.

"No!" the voice yelled. "Kill them!"

Guns opened fire all around the clearing. Scully and Mulder ducked and rolled behind trees, which they used as cover for return fire. Wade and Rembrandt dove behind a boulder which grew pockmarked

from the bullets that thudded into them.

"Go! Mulder yelled. We'll draw their fire!"

Mulder leapt up and began to run away from the portal, firing into the trees and bushes from which the government snipers lay. When the fire turned towards him, Rembrandt and Wade seized their chance and bolted for the imploding gateway that hovered above the park. First Rembrandt, then Wade vanished into its depths. It closed behind them immediately.

"No!" the voice screamed. "It can't be!"

A man in black ran out of the shadows behind the park bench. It was Cancer

Man. He swept up the device that Quinn had tossed under it, folding open its base.

Mulder couldn't help grinning to himself when he imagined Cancer Man's face seeing his precious timer was simply a cellular phone.

Cancer Man glared up at Mulder and Scully. "You'll pay for this. Men!"

The gunshots abruptly ceased. Cancer Man walked back into the shadows. Mulder could hear rustles of movement in the brush around them, then they were alone.

Scully waited a moment before rising to

her feet. She could only stand and stare at the point in space where something she had never seen before had appeared and swallowed up four people without a trace.

"Mulder," Scully asked, "what just happened here?"

Mulder brushed off his coat. "Simple, Scully. We've just solved another X-File."

He checked his watch. "And we've still got time to catch our flight back to Washington."

Mulder and Scully began to walk back to their rented sedan.

"Why didn't they kill us, Mulder?" Scully asked.

"We're not a threat to them," Mulder said. "Their technology and our evidence either blew up or jumped into another dimension. It was as much a loss to us as it was to them."

Scully shook her head. "That was incredible, even for us."

"But you do believe they were from another dimension?"

Scully looked up at him. "I believe the *government* thought they were from another dimension. I'm not sure what I

believe."

They walked up to the grey sedan parked at the curb. Mulder dug out the car keys, then patted his coat pockets.

He sighed. "Well, I know what *I* believe. I'm gonna need a new phone."

Epilogue

The Sliders exploded out of the portal, landing on the grassy lawn of Golden Gate Park with a series of thumps. Quinn stumbled to his feet immediately, studying his fallen companions.

"Everybody okay?" he asked.

Arturo nursed his back. "Yes, I believe so."

Rembrandt grinned as he rose. "Hey, we did it. We got away."

Wade jumped up to give Quinn a kiss and a hug. "That was a great idea, Quinn."

"Not really," Quinn said. "But it was good enough. Too bad about Mulder's phone, though."

Rembrandt took it from him and slipped it into his pocket. "Don't be. Let's just call it a souvenir."

They gathered themselves together and began to walk out of the park, towards the

street. Quinn looked from one end of the park to the other. There were no signs of anyone, not even a mugger. Only the wind whistling through the trees filled the silence.

"Now where are we?" Rembrandt asked.

Arturo looked up at the statue of Abraham Lincoln they passed. "Well, our good friend Abraham seems to be intact. That's a good sign."

"Uh-oh," Quinn said as the road came into view.

Even from the edge of the park, they could see something was wrong with the city.

There were no lights in the buildings, which were broken and decrepit from lack of repair. The streetlights were all smashed and dark, leaving the city moonlight as its only source of illumination.

As they walked out onto the sidewalk, Quinn looked down to see the ground was covered with narrow slips of paper.

"What's happened to this place?" Wade asked.

"I dunno," Rembrandt said. "But I don't like it."

Arturo bent down to pick up one of the slips of paper. He tilted it to examine it in

the moonlight, then his jaw dropped.
"Good lord. It's *money*."

Wade grabbed the paper from his hands, read it, then scooped up a handful from the sidewalk. "He's right. The ground is covered with dollar bills."

An elderly man turned a corner onto their street, riding a bicycle. He was wearing torn and tattered clothes that were little more than rags.

"Excuse me," Quinn called out to him. "I wonder if you could tell us why there's all this money on the street."

The man didn't even slow down as he rode

past, yelling, "We all threw it away. It's worthless. Didn't you hear about the crash?"

"What crash?" Quinn yelled, but the man was already out of sight.

"Well," Arturo said, "this is just a theory, of course, but it would seem that the man's comment about a crash could indicate a stock market crash. Perhaps this world is one in which America has suffered a devastating economic collapse, plunging it into a depression worse than anything that occurred in our world. Inflation has reached the point where dollar bills are virtually worthless."

Rembrandt looked at Quinn. "How long we got in this world, Q-Ball?"

Quinn took the timer from Wade and read the display. "Uh -- thirteen minutes and forty-two seconds."

Wade shrugged. "I guess we're not gonna be here long enough to do anything. Might as well relax."

"Not quite, Miss Wells," Arturo said. "There's one thing we can do that will probably serve us well in our journey. Since it is unlikely that the currency in the next world will be as inflated as this one, it would seem logical to gather a stockpile against further depleted funds."

"In other words," Quinn said, "everybody stuff your pockets."

The Sliders began scooping up handfuls of money and stuffing them into every available pocket.

As they worked, Rembrandt couldn't help grinning. "So much for our money problems."

The End