

EXPLORING THE SCP WIKI: COMMUNITY, DIGITAL HORROR, AND APOCALYPTIC
FICTION

by

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THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in English at
The University of Texas at Arlington
December 2022

Arlington, Texas

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the members of my supervising committee for the support they have provided me in developing this project. Not only have my supervising committee members helped with this thesis, but each has had a hand in my academic development.

I would like to acknowledge Dr. Timothy Richardson who, despite our classes together being restricted to online learning during COVID, took the opportunity to provide guidance on academic presentation. Without which, I would likely have been even more panicked about defending this thesis than I was.

I am also grateful for Dr. James Warren and his role in the development of my writing. Dr. Warren's advice was instrumental in showing me that my writing is usually not as terrible as I think it is while also humbling me when needed. Dr. Warren has also provided me with insight that has shaped not just how I develop my own writing but how I teach others to develop their writing. Therefore, Dr. Warren's influence extends not just to this project or even my writing in general but to the students who I continue to teach.

Finally, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my Supervising Professor, Dr. Neill Matheson for his mentorship not only throughout this project, but throughout my graduate studies. I returned to graduate school after an eight-year hiatus from college, and Dr. Matheson's advice and guidance have been instrumental in my success. It was his feedback on an undergraduate essay I wrote about sexual norms in vampire literature that showed me that my interest in monsters and the Gothic was a legitimate area of academic focus, which has guided my studies and ultimately led to this project.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my oldest son, Tristan. Thank you for introducing me to the SCP.

I also dedicate this thesis to my family. Thank you for exploring with me and for humoring me when watching YouTube became work.

ABSTRACT

EXPLORING THE SCP WIKI: COMMUNITY, DIGITAL HORROR, AND APOCALYPTIC FICTION

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The SCP is a body of user-submitted fiction broadly classified as horror and often compared to other user-submitted horror such as Creepypasta. While these comparisons have been made in research and among the SCP community, the SCP seems to function differently than other such sites. Very little research has been done on the SCP and what exists examines it as a work of horror and as an example of emerging online folklore. This thesis further expands upon this research by examining how the unique community participating on the SCP Wiki shapes the text, how the SCP is not just a horror text but an example of digital horror that comments on the modern digital experience, and how and why the SCP and the members of the SCP community rely heavily on end-of-the-world scenarios in their storytelling. The first chapter of this thesis will examine the SCP community through the stories told in the SCP entries and the rules and structure of the SCP Wiki. The following chapters will each examine selected examples of SCP entries to read the text through the lens of digital horror and apocalyptic fiction, respectively. In doing so, this thesis not only provides a better understanding of an under-researched text but uncovers a society's anxieties surrounding online privacy, reliance on digital technology, and the changing means of sharing information. This thesis also draws attention to and provides opportunity for further research focusing on the increasingly prevalent act of audience participation through user-submitted fiction.

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. SCP-682 Entry Structure.....	1
2. Addendums to SCP-682.....	18
3. SCP-279 Redacted Text.....	35
4. Declassified Government Document..... With Redacted Text	36

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
DEDICATION.....	iii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
LIST OF FIGURES.....	v
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER ONE: CREATIVE COMMONS: DIGITAL FOLKLORE AND ONLINE COMMUNITY ON THE SCP WIKI.....	4
CHAPTER TWO: DIGITAL TRANSMISSION: DIGITAL HORROR AND THE SCP.....	24
CHAPTER THREE: PREPPING DOOMSDAYS: THE SCP AS APOCALYPTIC FICTION.....	47
CONCLUSION.....	59
WORKS CITED.....	66

Introduction

The SCP Foundation, or SCP¹, is an ongoing user-submitted collection of fiction in which each article or entry details some unexplainable entity or phenomenon and how the titular fictional organization attempts to contain it. The SCP's website is structured as a wiki-style catalog that presents each entry not as a narrative but in the style of a scientific document following a particular structure. Each entry lists a classification of the anomaly based on how difficult it is to contain, the anomaly's special containment protocol, a description of the anomaly, followed by any additional information in the form of addendums and personnel notes. See figure 1 for the basic structure of an SCP entry.

Figure 1: SCP-682 Entry Structure

The screenshot displays the SCP-682 entry on the SCP Wiki. On the left is a navigation sidebar with sections: 'Getting Started' (Guide for Newcomers, Join the Site, Contribute, Universe Hub), 'Main Forum' (SCP by Series: I | II | III | IV | V | VI | VII | VIII; Other SCP: Explained | Joke International; Feed; Recent Changes, New Forum Posts, New Pages, Shortest | Top Rated; Stories: Tales Hub, Groups of Interest, GOI Formats, Canon Hub; Discovery; Artwork Hub, Curated Lists, Curated Tale Series, Tag Search; Random: SCP | Tale | GOI | Art). The main content area features the title 'SCP-682' with a rating of '+3310'. Below the title are sections: 'Item #: SCP-682', 'Object Class: Keter', 'Special Containment Procedures' (describing the 5m x 5m chamber and acid immersion), 'Personnel' (forbidden to speak to SCP-682), 'Description' (large, intelligent, reptile-like creature), and a photograph of SCP-682 with the caption 'SCP-682 shortly after escaping from containment, still recovering from acid immersion.'

¹ For consistency and clarity I will refer to the collection of works hosted on the SCP Wiki as the SCP and the fictional organization as the SCP Foundation.

While the structure of each entry follows this specific pattern, the anomalies described in each entry vary wildly. These anomalies include horrific creatures, people with unique abilities, technology beyond modern comprehension, alterations in the laws of nature, and unknown deities. This range of topics makes it difficult to classify the SCP as a single thing or pin it to a specific genre. For this reason, this paper will examine the SCP as it functions within separate yet related genres.

Throughout this thesis, I will examine the SCP as a whole interconnected narrative as well as provide examples of individual SCP entries that operate as folklore, science-fiction, horror, and apocalyptic fiction in order to examine how, through each mode, the SCP is commenting on information flow, media, and technology. Each chapter will aim to reveal how separate genres within the SCP work together to provide a coherent commentary. First, I will draw on research by Megan Pallante² that relates the SCP to modern folklore in order to examine the community and its values, especially regarding the open sharing of intellectual property. Pallante focuses on the community of the SCP Wiki and its folkloric nature. I will expand on her works by examining how outside influences, such as copyright law and the peripheral communities formed around and outside of the wiki, impact this community. I also use her research as a springboard to situate the SCP within specific genres, specifically horror and apocalyptic fiction. In the next chapter, I will use Riikka Nieminen's research on the SCP as an example of the uncanny, supported by research on digital horror from scholars such as Daniel Powell and Xavier Aldana Reyes to provide an examination of the SCP as a work of digital horror that provides commentary on how technology and media impact the spread of information

² It should be noted that Pallante's work is an undergraduate honors thesis and Nieminen's is a masters thesis. Their inclusion here shows how little research has been dedicated to the SCP Wiki.

and how this is a source of anxiety for contemporary audiences. Finally, I will approach a reading that examines the SCPs recurring emphasis on the apocalypse. I will draw on theory from scholars of science fiction and apocalyptic fiction, including Gerald Miller and Elana Gomel, who assert that futuristic and particularly apocalyptic literature represents major societal shifts. I will use their work as a starting point to question if SCP addresses such social changes and, if so, how.

SCP stands for secure, contain, protect, and considering the SCP's focus on the unknown, information is at the heart of this text. This paper will examine how the Foundation's title is just as applicable to information as it is to any of the anomalies held by the SCP Foundation and how the collection as a whole provides commentary on the technology, media, and modern norms responsible for the transmission, and containment, of information within society.

Chapter 1

Creative Commons: Digital Folklore and Online Community On The SCP Wiki

While this thesis aims to examine recurrent themes in this body of text, it is also relevant to first address the writing community itself. There are narrative peculiarities of SCP, such as the shared narrative universe and the document structure of entries. The writing community also differs from other popular online horror communities. Examining these differences in policy and storytelling will elucidate values held by the writing community, which will bear significance when addressing tropes and themes in the narrative. In forming the writing community, the medium holds nearly as much significance as the subject matter. The SCP is a user-submitted collection of work, meaning anyone can create a profile and begin submitting writing to the wiki. While user-submitted fiction still has guidelines and requirements that we will examine in more detail in a moment, it is, in general, much more accessible to writers than traditional publishing. Divorcing the writing process from the constraints of conventional publishing allows a forum for the dissemination of novel ideas and stories that address concerns that may be deemed less marketable. User-submitted fiction not only democratizes the publishing process but also enables the formation of global communities. The SCP Wiki and user-submitted fiction, in general, is one example of a “network society” that, through globalization, self-regulation through community input, and generally lax requirements for participation, “provide frameworks for permeable, networked and transnational social structures” (Black 397). The social structure on the SCP Wiki broadly aims to deemphasize hierarchy by limiting the authority of the site's

moderators, particularly in the submission process, and placing more power in the community voting process. By emphasizing the communal aspect of storytelling, the SCP Wiki draws on oral traditions, which is not the only way it is comparable to oral storytelling, particularly folklore.

Pallante examines the folkloric nature of the SCP Foundation and points out that the text can only exist to the degree it does because it exists online as a digital community as users are “spread over the globe”(Pallante 13). Pallante's paper on the SCP examines its relation to folklore. In this chapter, I will draw from her work since, by examining the folkloric qualities of the text, Pallante also provides insight into the formation of this online community. This wiki functions as a central meeting place that allows for more extensive authorship and a more readily available audience. The scope of the work would not be possible if limited to traditional modes of storytelling due to the “immense catalog of works”(Pallante 13); at the time of writing, there are approximately six-thousand entries without counting tales. The digital nature allows for a broader scope of this body of work and allows the audience to exert some control over the publishing process. Because while it is easier to publish writing on an online forum, there still exist methods for quality control so that what is posted is high-quality work that follows guidelines and is relevant to the particular writing community. The difference in a writing forum is that the community, the readers, and other authors have more substantial input into what can be published or remains on the forum. This level of communal authority is particularly pronounced on the SCP Wiki when compared to other online horror forums.

Creepypasta is the most well-known online horror fiction site, and it has the most restrictive publishing procedures. Creepypasta's submission guidelines are quite similar to publishing works of fiction to literary magazines in that they will be read and reviewed by a team

of site staff prior to being published and with a high possibility of rejection for several factors. Some of these submission guidelines on Creepypasta are similar to other online forums, including being fully edited prior to submission, adhering to site standard formatting, and avoiding explicit plagiarism or fan fiction. However, one guideline Creepypasta maintains that significantly sets the SCP Wiki apart is that Creepypasta explicitly forbids the use of any other preexisting intellectual property (including other Creepypasta submissions). We will examine the SCP Wiki's different position on intellectual property more closely later in this chapter.

Taking the opposite approach, Nosleep is far less limiting in its publishing procedures. As Nosleep is not an independent website but a "niche subreddit for horror stories" ("Posting Guidelines"), it is openly available for anyone to post their stories. Rather than prescreening these stories, the moderators vet these works by enforcing a more extensive list of submission guidelines and removing any stories that do not adhere to these. Nosleep's guidelines include similar requirements of adequately edited and formatted submission, but they also require specific literary conventions. Nosleep only allows first-person accounts of plausible horrific scenarios, emphasizing the supernatural. If a story meets all of the guidelines, though, it can be posted and will not be removed, and this is where the quality control is turned over to the writing community. Reddit users can upvote content that they enjoy and downvote content that they do not. This process allows readers on the Nosleep subreddit to reward high-quality and interesting stories while low-quality or poorly received content will be downvoted and thus less visible. It is significant to mention here, as it differs from the SCP Wiki, that just because a story is poorly received does not necessarily mean it will be removed from the subreddit; instead, it will just be placed lower in the feed and be less likely to receive traffic. So Nosleep relies both on moderators and community input for quality control, but it is specifically moderators who are

responsible for removing content and only when it violates specific guidelines. SCP takes a similar approach to Nosleep but places more weight on the community's opinion.

The SCP Wiki falls somewhere between these two approaches as it is much easier to publish on the SCP Wiki than Creepypasta, but the audience reception has more consequences than on NoSleep. SCP entries on the wiki, like NoSleep, are subjected to extensive submission guidelines that go beyond just the quality of writing. The SCP entries have a particular mode of formatting to adhere to as they are all written in the form of and with the clinical tone of an official document detailing observable facts about an anomaly, be it an entity or an event. Any narrative elements in these entries are required to maintain the tone and structure of an official report. These requirements make it similar to Nosleep in that moderators will not allow a post that does not adhere to these guidelines. (There are sections of the wiki dedicated to “tales,” which have their own looser guidelines that conform to more conventional narrative standards, but for the purposes of this paper, we will limit our focus to the standard SCP entries.) Again, similar to Nosleep, an SCP entry that adheres to all quality and convention guidelines will be posted to the forum, and from there, community opinion will determine that entry's success. Community feedback is also enacted through a voting process by readers who either like “+” or dislike “-” a post. Here though, the SCP differs from Nosleep and Creepypasta in that any entry that has been on the wiki for a minimum of twenty-four hours and receives a rating of -10 goes to a team of staff to vote on the deletion, and an entry that receives a -20 rating will be eligible for permanent removal without staff approval. These higher stakes in the process of voting on an entry place a higher responsibility on the readers on the SCP Wiki, but it also provides a stronger sense of ownership. This allows the readers to have some degree of control over what is posted on the site, and by proxy, this can also impact the overall narrative itself. Since all SCP entries

exist in a shared narrative universe (or universes), one entry can potentially affect other more established characters or events. Certainly, a large number of entries that do get removed are because they are just not particularly interesting, well-written, or creative. Some are removed through voting because they contradict established ideas in a way the community does not appreciate. By allowing readers to potentially remove these instances, they play a part in maintaining the SCP universe's lore (if not canon). The process of contributing to this writing community places more responsibility on the individual participants rather than on moderators. The author of a given entry will naturally have more impact on the content than the site moderators, but they are also not seen as the ultimate authority. Like much content posted in online communities, the authorship of SCP entries is little more than an afterthought to the content. Pallante states that "typically, the reward for a successful performance is recognition, but in this case, the focus of the performance is redirected away from the author and instead onto the article's content; in this way, the SCP community celebrates verbal artistry while refusing to celebrate the individual creator (Pallante 17). Here Pallante draws attention to the fact that, like traditional folklore, the story spreads and is successful based solely on its merit. This is one way the SCP Wiki and online fiction, in general, differ from traditionally published fiction. By rejecting the celebrity status of authors, the playing field is, to a large extent, leveled between authors on the wiki and readers. This decentralized structure shifts, to a large extent, the authority from the moderators to the readers, indicating that this is a community that values a democratic process and resists a central authority. The remainder of this chapter will examine this as a driving value of the SCP community that informs its view on establishing canon and how it contends with copyright and intellectual property on and off of the wiki and how these contribute to storytelling that is not dissimilar to those established in folklore traditions.

Here it should be noted that the SCP Wiki explicitly rejects the idea of canon, or more specifically, a single “correct” canon, and as we will explore in more detail in a later chapter, some entries in the wiki detail world-altering events that would drastically alter the worldbuilding if a single canon were established. While the SCP Wiki does not adhere to a single canon, it also states that they do not reject the idea that there are canonical universes in the SCP mythos. As it is explained on the canon hub of the wiki, “The idea that there is no canon is a bit silly at times. It's not that we don't have any. It's that we have a multitude that touch, cross, and dip into each other. It's up to you, as the reader, to decide what you believe and what you embrace as the heart of the universe. That doesn't mean, though, that authors lack intent or design, and collaboration is the heart of innovation” (“Canon Hub”). The canon hub goes on to list and link to materials for forty-five, at the time of writing, canons. A multitude indeed and still writers are not limited to situating their entries within any established canon or any canon at all. Most entries on the wiki are written in a way that they may stand alone and also be situated by the readers within one or multiple canons. Here again, we see any authority decentralized. Wikipedia defines canon as it relates to fiction, particularly fictional worlds, as “the material accepted as officially part of the story in an individual universe of that story by its fan base.” This definition is interesting because it seems at first nearly contradictory. The material being officially recognized implies that there is someone that holds office or authority on such matters; then, in the same sentence, this authority is granted to the fan base. This emphasis on the community's ownership of the content is precisely what we see in the SCP Wiki. In their description of canon, the SCP Wiki explicitly places this authority on the reader, and these various canons are made official as they are cataloged on the Wiki. This official placement, along with the community upholding its own guidelines, makes these canons official as opposed

to fan fiction, which may include elements that go against community guidelines. Authors on the SCP are given creative freedom to work within an established continuity or not but then whether or how their work is placed among these canons is still subject to the reader's interpretation.

So while canon is highly flexible within the SCP narrative, it is clear that it was conceived as a transfictional narrative from its earliest establishment. René Saint-Gelais defines transfictionality as “those practices that expand fiction beyond the boundaries of the work: sequels and continuations, return of the protagonists, biographies of characters, cycles and series, ‘shared universes,’ etc.” (qtd in Ryan 386). The shared universe is a primary concern to the SCP narrative. The entries on the SCP Wiki may each stand alone, but they are not separate narratives like those on Creepypasta or Nosleep. Each SCP entry is connected in that they are all part of the fictional SCP Foundation. This organization acts as the thread connecting these otherwise disparate entries. Aside from the convention that all entries are subject to the SCP Foundation, authors on the wiki can further connect their works to others through cross-linking and cross-testing. Cross-linking is simply the strategy of including links to other entries on the SCP Wiki to provide further explanation to ideas. This strategy is more than just a shortcut for the writer as it further cements their entry as existing within and interacting with the larger narrative; it also contributes to the style by mimicking databases or online encyclopedias. Cross-testing is the narrative strategy of placing two SCP anomalies together to see how they would interact. Cross-testing has the obvious effect of connecting the two entries and the larger narrative, but it also allows the author and reader to further explore older content in a new context.

The idea of a shared fictional universe is gaining traction in current popular culture, and these narratives frequently expand to the point that it becomes limiting. It is difficult to tell an original story while also focusing on not contradicting any of the established lore. Many

franchises have leaned on the concept of a multiverse to circumvent this issue. The idea of a fictional multiverse is that there are infinite realities with slight variations. This is effective in fiction because it allows writers and readers to experience characters, settings, and ideas in a new way without abandoning the original version. This trope is probably most popular in the superhero genre, with both Marvel and DC introducing a multiverse into their film and television franchises while they have relied on this idea in comics for decades. The SCPs approach is not dissimilar, and there are SCP entries that explicitly explore the concept of a multiverse. However, it also differs somewhat from other fictional multiverses. Using Marvel as a comparative example, it also uses a multiverse with multiple coexisting continuities. SCP is different in that there is no “correct” continuity. In Marvel comics, the narrative establishes that there is no original universe and that they are all equally the “real” universe from their own subjective perspectives. When Marvel introduced the multiverse, the originally published continuity was not labeled universe 1; rather, it was titled the 616 universe to emphasize that it is one of many possibilities. The multiverse allows the comics writers to explore characters in new ways (what if Gwen Stacy was bitten by a radioactive spider instead of Peter Parker, or what if Spider-Man was a cartoon pig), but the multiverse also protects the “official” status of the original character. The writers can make any number of changes to the character, but we as readers know that Peter Parker is the “real” Spiderman, and other versions written later are derivative. So while within the fictional world, there is no universe more real than another, the comic medium and history of publication do not support this interpretation. The original universe is the 616 universe because it is the one in which all of the original versions of Marvel’s most recognizable characters are written and introduced. While to some extent the decision of official canon is supported by the fanbase through their purchasing power, it is ultimately the writers, more accurately Marvel

Comics, that employ the writers, that have the final say and make specific material official. The SCP Wiki rejects the role of central arbiter making content decisions that Marvel holds over their content, and they also take more liberties with introducing new elements within any given canon. Though perhaps more significantly, SCP entries are most often written with little to no consideration of canon. Some of the most popular SCP entries were not written to be part of a specific continuity, giving them more flexibility than established characters like most comic superheroes. The SCP is able to explore the idea of a multiverse, but it is not written into a position where it must rely on the trope to maintain the integrity of its original material both because that material is not so firmly fixed in the reader's minds and because the SCP community explicitly rejected the single canon from the beginning. The transfictionality of SCP, then, is intrinsic to the work and is not a reaction to changing times or narrative stagnation.

Perhaps more interesting than the fictional shared SCP universe is how writers and other content creators share these characters and ideas. In order to examine what sets the SCP Wiki apart in this regard, it is necessary to consider a different type of online horror: copyright law. Here again, I will use Creepypasta.com as a comparison. Writers submitting stories to Creepypasta agree to a fairly standard publishing agreement. This grants Creepypasta permission to publish the work on their website, it certifies that the work is the original content of the writer, and it specifies that the writer retains all rights and ownership. This means that the stories published on Creepypasta's website are protected by a standard copyright agreement which, without going into unnecessary detail, means that the writer has sole rights to that created content, and it would be copyright infringement to use part or whole of that content without express permission from the creator. The main caveat on Creepypasta is that it is possible to grant content creators permission to use a submitted story work once it is published. Here sharing

content is optional, and it is protected by law should the author choose to decline the choice to make it available to other content creators. The SCP Wiki handles its content differently.

Content on the SCP Wiki is protected by a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 license (CC-BY-SA) which functions differently than standard copyright in a number of ways. The major difference in this license is that it does not prohibit the use of the content. Under this agreement, anyone may use part or whole of the original work. This allows others to reuse characters and ideas in their own entries on the SCP Wiki, but it also allows others to create content using these ideas or even redistribute the work as a whole. The protections this license provides are attribution, anyone using the material must credit the original author, and the new work must also be published under the same CC-BY-SA. (“Licensing Guide”)

The proliferation of fan fiction led to increased scholarship by those with an interest in both literature and law to examine how copyright affects storytelling and vice versa. Texts like the SCP further drive this scholarship. Legal scholar Michael Carroll examines “Creative Commons Communities” in which “sharing is not just allowed, it is the point,” which precisely describes what we see within the SCP Wiki (55). The SCP Wiki possibly would not exist or would be a legal nightmare and would take a very different form if protected by standard copyright. These legal differences make the narrative shared universe of the SCP Wiki possible. It works for an individual with an original story to maintain their sole ownership when publishing a stand-alone story to a website. Or, returning to the example of Marvel (or comics in general), multiple writers will create new stories using established characters and ideas. Still, these writers do not own any of these characters, and their creative freedom is subject to the oversight of the companies that own these intellectual properties. This does allow a limited form of collaborative storytelling as no single writer is responsible for developing a character, but it

does not extend to the freedom granted by the SCP Wiki that allows anyone to contribute to the story and character building. When writing for the SCP Wiki, however, no matter how original the concept of the entry is, by positioning it within the shared SCP universe, the author is not creating an entirely new concept but participating in a collaborative creative process.

These legalities and commitment to collaboration further establish the community's value in a decentralized power structure, as authors of SCP content do not hold creative authority in the form of the canon, but they also relinquish ownership and creative control to the community. Therefore, the SCP Wiki and the narrative form a community in a way that goes beyond other online texts. Certainly, it would be unfair to say that Creepypasta has not developed a large and distinct online community of readers, authors, content creators, and fans. Slenderman is, after all, colloquially considered to be the internet's first urban legend. The SCP community is smaller and less well-known than Creepypasta; however, it is developed not only through fan participation but the medium itself. As is evidenced by the differing legal agreements, fan participation is not an afterthought in the SCP community; it is integral to the structure of the narrative and the community. As mentioned before, by participating in this writing process, the author is entering into an agreement that their work is part of this shared mythos both narratively and legally. The author is submitting their work not only for readers to enjoy but possibly to use, adapt, and build on. Like many of the more well-known Creepypastas, the SCP community expands beyond the wiki itself. Most notably, there are numerous YouTubers who make animations, develop new content using SCP characters, and simply read SCP entries. There also exist SCP video games and short films. Fans have added SCP characters to Roblox and Minecraft, and all of this contributes to the mythos and undoubtedly builds the community around this narrative. Although it is arguable whether some or all of the SCP content beyond the

original wiki further develops the narrative or simply spreads it to a wider audience, or is any more or less canonical, it is clear that the SCP Wiki is a transmedial text.

While a lot of the offsite SCP content (anything that is not posted to the SCP Wiki) does not seem to add much to the narrative, a majority of this content seems to simply use the preexisting character by either repeating the original narrative or by using the character out of context with no connection or concern for the narrative. This is, in fact, one common complaint of the SCP community that others are only using the content to monetize it and make a profit without putting in the effort of creating something original or diluting the meaning of the source material by “dumbing it down” for a general or younger audience. It is true, of course, that some changes to that text must occur when adapting or translating it across mediums. While the SCP entries may include images, they are primarily a textual medium; thus, translating it to a video format leaves the visual representation of the entities up to interpretation. This visual interpretation could also potentially detract from the uncanny nature of some of these entities, as they are largely meant to be mysterious and unknowable. Furthermore, the textual details of the SCP entries with their official document structure and redacted information can often not be maintained across platforms. As discussed later in this paper, this may be an alteration that has a major impact on the themes and interpretations of SCP entries or the narrative as a whole. This complaint that transmedia expansion of the SCP negatively impacts the content, whether valid or not, is at odds with implicit values established by the structure of the SCP community.

Marie-Laure Ryan identifies two major ways transmediality can occur: the snowball effect in which work becomes so popular that either fans or, in some instances, the original creator further develops the story across media to meet demand. She gives the example of *Harry Potter*, which was originally a contained novel series but, through popularity, has spawned movies, video

games, stage plays, etc. However, transmediality can also be developed through story worlds created with the initial vision of the work existing across platforms. Here Ryan gives the example of *The Matrix*, whose full story world cannot be understood from any one of the mediums alone, but the movies, animes, and games all tell a separate part of the same story (Ryan 361-363). Those frustrated with content creators adapting SCP stories outside of the wiki hold that it is simply due to the snowball effect. However, the argument can be made that the CC-BY-SA not only establishes a transfictional SCP Foundation but a transmedial one as well. Ryan does describe these two options as opposite poles on a spectrum of transmediality, and I would argue that the SCP is situated in the middle of the two. While it is clear that the SCP was intended as a transfictional text, it does seem in large part that popularity and ease of use drive its transmedial expansion. This does not mean that those transmedia adaptations are any less valid. The legalities support these adaptations, and the community policies regarding canon further support them. If multiple canons and continuities can simultaneously exist with no hierarchy of correctness or validity, should this not also extend to those retelling on YouTube and in games? It simply does not make sense to draw a line saying all interpretations on the wiki are valid, but once the SCP crosses to any other medium, it is obligated to maintain the integrity of the source material on the wiki as a definite authority. Instead, the transmediality of the SCP could perhaps be understood not as transmedia storytelling but as transmedia world-building. Krzysztof M. Maj examines this difference in his paper in which he explains how narrative does not necessarily need to precede world, and the fictional world is equally worthy of critical attention, especially as it pertains to transmedial texts. This distinction is similar to Ryan's one-world/many-texts relation in which a story is retold, or elements of a story are incorporated into others, such as bards telling several stories of a single hero (Ryan 365). Here though, the relationship might be

more accurately many worlds/ many texts. But even with the acceptance of various worlds within the narrative or even contradictory worlds, they do still constitute a single collective narrative world because all of the narratives presented by the SCP focus on the existence of the SCP Foundation. So rather than a bard telling of the exploits of a single hero we have a community telling of the various deeds of a single Foundation. The “one-world,” in this instance, is any fictional world in which the SCP Foundation exists. Ryan compares this relation to oral storytelling traditions for its ability to lend characters and concepts to being retold by various artists, and this is exactly what we see in the transmediality of the SCP. Maj, however, points out that Ryan’s approach to transmediality assumes a “top-down” approach, one that assumes a high level of authorial authority over the story world. Sure anyone can write *about* Harry Potter, but JK Rowling holds the sole right to officialize it into the canon. Maj proposes a “bottom-up” approach to transmedia world building “which enables combining the effort of the world’s creator with those of all the voluntary contributors who want to support him or her in his or her endeavor” (Maj 85). This decentralized approach explains the collaborative writing of the SCP and holds up when examining the connective framework that holds the individual narrative together. The SCP then can be viewed not as a single narrative that anyone can add on to but as a single story world that anyone can use to tell a large variety of stories.

The adaptability and spread of the SCP narrative to other platforms indicate two things about the community: it fosters a participatory rather than passive audience, and the narrative and community alike are distinctly digital in that neither could exist as they do anywhere but on the internet. The SCP Wiki uses its digital platform to construct mythology around the SCP Foundation that establishes verisimilitude and encourages its audience to engage actively with the text. As mentioned above, the audience is granted a role in the publishing process of these

stories through voting and maintaining quality. This audience participation also extends to the reading process, which is facilitated through the digital medium. The most obvious aspect of this interactive reading experience is the act of navigation required to access the information. Entries on the SCP Wiki frequently include addendums that the reader must click on to access the full entry; they also will often include links to related entries or tales or provide further information on some aspect of the specifics of the entry.

Figure 2: Addendums to SCP-682

5: Fifth Occurrence, ██████ ██████ ██████: Handled by Personnel D-221, Agent ██████ ██████ (KIA), Agent ██████ ██████ (KIA), Agent ██████ ██████ (KIA), Personnel D-028 (KIA), Personnel D-111 (KIA), Personnel D-281 (KIA), Personnel D-209 (KIA)

6: Sixth Occurrence, ██████ ██████ ██████: Handled by Agent ██████ ██████, Agent ██████ ██████, Personnel D-291 (MIA), Agent ██████ ██████ (KIA), Agent ██████ ██████ (KIA), Personnel D-299 (KIA), Personnel D-277 (KIA), Personnel D-278 (KIA), Personnel D-279 (KIA)

Addendum 682-E: Termination Options:

Log of event 682-E18: Dr. ██████ ██████ attempts to use SCP-409 on SCP-682. General ██████ ██████, General ██████ ██████, and Dr. ██████ ██████ observing.

0400: Exposure. SCP-682 began to tear at the point of contact, causing massive trauma to the area. SCP-682 requests several times to know what it has been exposed to.

0800: Crystallization begins, spreading much slower than normal.

1200: SCP-682 shows signs of extreme pain, and begins having seizures

1300: Crystallization stops at 62% conversion. Crystallized area explodes, causing massive physical trauma to SCP-682

1400: SCP-682 recovers from exposure, despite the loss of limbs and organs. SCP-682 begins regeneration, stating that it will attempt to kill and consume all staff involved in Event 682-E18.

SCP-682 appears to now be immune to SCP-409. Use of other SCP items to terminate SCP-682 must now first be tested on samples of SCP-682 before full-scale testing.

In accordance the Dr. ██████ ██████'s recommendations (see Document 27b-6), Dr. ██████ ██████ and Dr. ██████ ██████ have requested permission to attempt the termination of SCP-682 using SCP-689. The request is currently pending approval from the ██████ ██████.

It has also been suggested by Dr. Gears to use SCP-182 in an attempt to communicate with SCP-682. SCP-182 has expressed reluctance, and refuses to enter the containment center of SCP-682, if at all possible.

Addendum 682-F: Termination Log:

Experiment-Log-T-98816-oc108-682

« SCP-681 | SCP-682 | SCP-683 »

This act of navigation works together with the Wiki structure of the website. Pallante points out that this format both provides a central meeting place for the SCP community, a requirement for developing folklore, and acts as a database for the fictional SCP Foundation. Because of this,

interacting with the wiki becomes a performative act that allows the audience a method to enact the mythos by “researching this classified information (Pallante 14). The Wiki structure also lends to the believability of the mythos. Wikis are often used for fan sites, Wikidot, which the SCP Foundation is hosted on, includes “A DnD community wiki, Half-Life mod lists, a comprehensive detailing of every concert Bruce Springsteen has ever done for some reason...” (“Joining the Site”). However, the name and structure of Wikidot both evoke Wikipedia, an online encyclopedia which catalogs (for the most part) factual and educational information.

The reader also has a degree of choice in how they choose to read an entry on the SCP Wiki. It is completely possible to read each entry as a fictional text for one's enjoyment. It is also possible and encouraged by the structure of these entries to read with some degree of self-insertion, perhaps by assuming the role of someone who has come across information they were not supposed to have access to. While the narrative structure lends itself to this level of self-insertion, the community guidelines specifically prohibit roleplaying when engaging with the community. So while the text lends itself to a certain degree of role-playing, this same role-playing is not accepted on the Wiki. For example, while it is reasonable to imagine oneself as having discovered a classified document when reading SCP entries, it is not acceptable to engage in the community by adopting the voice of someone who exists within the fictional universe, especially a character within any of the texts. This too leads to the authenticity of the text. For one, the narrative is about classified information from a secretive organization, and it would not make sense for this to be so openly discussed online. Roleplaying would also diminish the community's control of the content by allowing individuals to unilaterally make claims about the content without any supporting narrative. While this may give users more freedom, it would place more authority in the hands of the individual by sidestepping any form of the voting

process. This community places value on content rather than individual authors, and roleplaying potentially shifts that focus away from the content and onto the person. Roleplaying also goes against the folkloric nature of the text because then the audience is actively and knowingly pretending. Rather the audience is tasked with participating through digital ostension and, as Pallante argues, reverse ostension.

Pallante summarizes folklorists Linda Dégh and Andrew Vázsonyi's definition of ostension, stating that "ostensive action occurs when an individual takes a rumor, legend, or narrative that they have heard and re-creates it through their own behavior" (Pallante 42). An ostensive act is one in which an audience interacts with or enacts known folklore, for example, exploring a local haunted site to find evidence of the haunting. Pallante draws on Tolbert's idea of reverse ostension. This is where the audience interacts with the folklore but is also responsible for its creation. Tolbert defines reverse ostension as "two processes in one: it involves the creation of new objects, new disconnected examples of experience; and it involves the combination of these elements into a corpus of 'traditional' narratives, modeled on existing folklore (but not wholly indebted to any specific tradition)" (Tolbert 2013, 3). So in the haunting example, it does not matter where the story originated, only that the audience interacts with it. In reverse ostension, the audience takes an active role in the legends' development. An example from my own childhood developed from my collection of *Monster In My Pocket* cards. Each detailed a monster from movies or folklore. I selected one that listed the monster as living in North America and began searching for it in the wooded area of the park by my house. I also invited siblings and friends to this search, and eventually, we became afraid of the prospect of finding the monster (or rather, it finding us). The monster, in this instance, was a wendigo based loosely on the Plains and Great Lakes Native's myth. But as Tolbert points out, the legend need

only be folkloresque or “appeal to real-world folklore” (Tolbert 2015 52). It did not matter that the cards misrepresented the original myth or that a trading card inspired the idea that it existed at all. For our group, it provided enough authority that the legend we created (that there was a wendigo living in Cravens Park) was believable. Much of Tolbert’s discussion of reverse ostension focuses on Slenderman as Slenderman has developed into a full urban legend, complete with mythos and a community of people interacting by retelling stories and discussing sightings. Slenderman, however, was created by the same community that shares folklore. This allows a form of double thinking by the audience by allowing them to simultaneously believe in the legend and know that it is fictional. This, as Pallante explains, is similar to how the community interacts with the SCP Foundation.

Reverse ostentation and the SCP, in particular, are developed by relying on the author's and audience's knowledge of existing folklore. This can be seen most obviously in SCP 173. 173 gets a lot of attention as it is the first written SCP, and it has had some legal peculiarities, but here I want to draw attention to the Wiki’s FAQ response to the question, “Is SCP-173 based on the Weeping Angels? Or the Endermen?” regarding its inspiration (“SCP-173”). This SCP is a statue that is inert when viewed by humans and, when unobserved, is impossibly fast and attacks anyone present. This description will sound immediately familiar to the fans of Doctor Who as it is the exact description of the Weeping Angels (an alien species resembling statues that can only move when not observed). The wiki also compares 173 to Endermen (tall humanoids with elongated limbs and a lack of distinct facial features) in Minecraft, which are hostile when viewed. The wiki argues that these were not the inspiration for 173 based on the time of their writing. They definitely rule out Endermen and only assert that Weeping Angels are an unlikely inspiration; however, even if these elements of pop culture did influence the author of SCP 173,

the fact is that it is still folkloristic enough to be believable on its own terms. The inspiration is more likely an example of the idea that sight and fear are highly related and the folkloric trend of describing a monster to represent a specific fear. In this case, what you can't see can hurt you. Even this wiki's answer is a transmedial one involving television and video games, which makes this perhaps an example of digital ostension. In his chapter "Folklore to Netlore," Powel focuses on other popular Creepypastas to highlight the idea of digital ostension, which, like reverse ostension, is both a creative and participatory act but one that is also transmedial and depends primarily on the digital medium. While I find there to be little differentiation between digital ostension and reverse ostension that takes place online, probably not enough to fully separate the terms, the example Powell gives does shed some light on the SCP community. He provides the example of Herobrine, a character that looks like Steve, the original playable character in Minecraft, with white eyes. Herobrine supposedly appeared in the game independently without being programmed. This is a classic example of a ghost in the machine. Still, it is interesting in that it developed originally as a 4chan post, was further developed as a Creepypasta, and eventually made its way into the game via update notes stating "Herobrine removed" (Notch). In this example, the lore of Minecraft was further developed by a community not directly interacting with the game. The original post was not on a Minecraft-related forum but was posted to 4chan's paranormal board, /x/ ("Herobrine"). Powell gives this example to illustrate how through ostensive acts, folklore can be established independently of its source material but also that the technological nature of this reverse ostension developed across both mediums and communities. While less pronounced than the Herobrine example, the transmedial SCP community allows for a similar digital ostension. As mentioned before, the SCP community exists across media as there are fans, such as myself, who were introduced to The SCP through

other media than the Wiki and others who have never even read the wiki yet still are able to participate in the community. This form of interaction with the SCP community still constitutes an ostensive act as they are informed about the material, able to engage with the material through various digital meeting spaces such as Reddit, and able to discuss and generate ideas about SCPs and the foundation that may or may not have future impact on the Wiki. This variety of interaction further demonstrates the decentralization of the SCP Wiki in that the community has developed to exist beyond the wiki. While content is, if not exclusively, primarily generated through the wiki, similar to folklore, it has spread beyond its original source and is ironically (as the primary goal of the Foundation is containment) not contained.

It is important here to draw parallels between the SCP Wiki and digital folklore to demonstrate that the community does, despite the frustration of some, value the proliferation of the SCP. So, in summary, this chapter has established that the SCP community is highly collaborative in both the creation of the narrative and the publication of the text and rejects a central authority over their content. Furthermore, the community engages in building folklore through the creation, interaction with, dissemination, and retelling of stories modeled after traditional myths. All of this is heavily reliant on and facilitated by the digital medium. The next chapter will examine how this digital aspect is presented as a theme by the body of texts, how the fictional SCP Foundation's rigid control over information stands in stark contrast to the real-world SCP community, and how both of these become significant when reading the SCP in the context of the horror genre.

Chapter 2

Digital Transmission: Digital Horror and the SCP

The SCP Wiki is an online community centered around the development of transmedial text. Furthermore, most SCP entries employ horror, whether monstrous or existential. The focus up to this point has been on the SCP community, and here I would like to shift focus to the narrative. Up to this point, I have taken for granted that the SCP is a work or collection of horror. The SCP narrative as a whole and, to some degree, individual entries largely defy genre. Nieminen describes it as “an amalgamation of creative fiction, scientific writing, encyclopedic writing, horror fiction, and Creepypasta” (Nieminen 30). Considering the wide range of genres of the individual entries, the horror classification of the SCP as a whole warrants some examination. Here I will draw on one of the few other sources that directly analyzes the SCP Wiki, Riikka Nieminen’s master’s thesis, which examines the SCP as an example of horror through its use of the supernatural and the uncanny. I will use this work to build on these ideas by presenting the SCP more specifically as a work of digital horror. Much of the SCP content is heavily based on sci-fi tropes and concepts, while quite a bit is humorous or otherwise not horrific. SCP 999 “The Tickle Monster,” for example, is far from traditionally monstrous in that it is entirely benevolent. It is an orange blob with a dog-like personality that produces euphoria in those that touch it. Hardly the stuff of nightmares. Yet while there are numerous examples of SCPs that are actively benevolent or otherwise non-threatening, it is perhaps still accurate to call these works of horror. It is not simply physical threat to an individual that makes something monstrous. In an

introduction to *Monster Culture*, Jeffery Cohen provides seven theses on what makes something monstrous and what the monster represents. Several, if not all, of these, can be applied to the SCP (or at least individual anomalies), but the one that stands out as most relevant is that “the monster polices the borders of the possible” (Cohen 12). Cohen describes the monster as something that stands as a guardian at the threshold, sometimes of physical places but, more often and importantly, of cultural or societal transgressions. Monsters act not as a treat but as a warning. Here we may see how this SCP is, in fact, monstrous as it is an entity (but also a substance as its body is described as gelatinous) of unknown origins that produces euphoric feelings especially in those that are at emotional low points as this SCP seems aware of when people are unhappy and actively seeks them out. It is not difficult to read this SCP not as benevolent but as an allegory for seeking solace in substance abuse. The monstrosity of not just SCP 999 but, by their nature, all SCPs is that their origin and nature are most often unknowable, yet they still comment on real societal concerns. Therefore it is reasonable to read the SCP as horror even as it simultaneously defies such specific categorization.

The SCP embodies the sci-fi and horror genres by exploring the boundary of the unknowable and how the unknown threatens to encroach on the normality of daily life. Even SCPs that focus on traditional sci-fi concepts such as space exploration, parallel universes, alien invasion, etc., are still concerned with the anomalous nature of these events or ideas or how they challenge the limits of understanding. This is the focus of researcher Riikka Nieminen’s paper that examines the SCP as a work of horror primarily by reading it as an example of Freud’s idea of the uncanny. Nieminen quotes Collins and Jarvis to define the uncanny as “an experience of disorientation, where the world in which we live suddenly seems strange, alienating, or threatening” (qtd in Niemen 22.) It is important to note that the uncanny does not simply mean

novel or not yet understood but something that exhibits a sense of familiarity while also being unknown or not quite familiar. Nicholas Royle explains that the uncanny “can take the form of something familiar unexpectedly arising in a strange and unfamiliar context, or of something strange and unfamiliar unexpectedly arising in a familiar context. It can consist in a sense of homeliness uprooted, the revelation of something unhomely at the heart of hearth and home” (Royle 1). The SCP contains frequent examples of the uncanny such as SCP-3008 “A Perfectly Normal, Regular Old IKEA” which, as the title too forcefully suggests, is a regular IKEA store with an entrance to a parallel dimension that appears to be an infinite IKEA with no exits and populated by mannequin-like beings in IKEA employee uniforms that with their not-quite-human appearance also represent the uncanny valley. This SCP combines the mundane, the unexplainable, and the element of danger to describe “something strange and unfamiliar unexpectedly arising in a familiar context” in a straightforward example of the uncanny. The writing structure of SCP entries themselves further supports their reading as uncanny as they are all familiarly structured as a cataloged list, much like scientific documents or Wikipedia articles. Nieminen focuses on the SCP as horror and an example of the uncanny, but she points out how this work's digital nature contributes to this reading and compares it to other online horror.

This chapter examines how the SCP functions as a work of digital horror. As discussed in the first chapter, the SCP community is a distinctly online community that utilizes the digital medium of the body of work to develop both the community and the SCP narrative. However, the fact that it is published online is not reason enough to classify the SCP as digital horror. Digital horror is not simply published online; it is also about digital media and a digital experience. Linnie Blake and Xavier Aldana Reyes define digital horror as “any type of horror that actively purports to explore the dark side of contemporary life in a digital age governed by

informational flows, rhizomatic public networks, virtual simulation, and visual hyper-stimulation” (Blake and Reyes 3). It may not be immediately evident, but each point applies to the SCP. The SCP is not primarily a visual text (as it exists on the wiki), but it does convey a sense of hyper-stimulation in its scope and connectedness. The SCP Wiki includes about 6000 entries that reference groups or entries that are introduced in other texts. The SCP presents an overwhelming amount of information. This is exacerbated by the rhizomatic nature of the text in that there is no beginning or end but the growing interconnected middle (Rothstein). Nieminen describes the experience of navigating the SCP Wiki as a “rabbit hole with no sense of beginning, end, or general direction, similar to how one can ‘get stuck in a Wikipedia loop,’ clicking through cross-referenced articles for hours” (Nieminen 30). It is no wonder the Wiki has to provide suggestions as to where to begin reading, and even this question does not have an obvious answer. If a new reader wants to start reading at the beginning, they must first interpret what that means. The first entry written was SCP-173; the numbers do not directly correlate to the order in which they were written or published, and SCP-001 “Awaiting De-classification [Blocked]” presents other complications as there are several versions of this entry, a fact that will become relevant later in this chapter. The SCP, as a collection of text, aims to blur the lines between reality and fiction which is accomplished through the use of the digital medium and the folkloresque nature of the narrative. Blake and Reyes, however, refer to literal virtual simulations and not just virtual imitations of official documentation. However, several SCP entries actively explore the consequences of virtual simulation and virtual realities. Based on Blake and Reyes’ definition, the SCP fits within the scope of digital horror. So I want to focus directly on the first point in this definition: information flow and how it affects contemporary life. One of the primary concerns of the SCP as a collection of digital horror is transmission: how

rapidly information can spread, the ease of access, and how these can facilitate the misuse and abuse of said information. This aspect not only arises in examining specific SCP entries but seems to be a primary concern of the SCP community. While a collection of writers would logically be concerned with how their work is being used and spread, the narrative provides further insight into the anxiety this community addresses around the flow of information. This chapter will examine how the SCP presents information as threatening by establishing a narrative that contradicts its own values.

Before focusing on the SCP specifically, it bears examination into how the SCP compares and differs from other digital horror. In chapter one, the focus was on online/digital horror communities. Here it is relevant to differentiate between online horror and digital horror. We compared the communities established by the Nosleep subreddit, CreepyPasta, and the SCP Wiki. While these are all digital communities, I would argue that they are not all digital horror. Based on Blake and Reyes's definition, digital horror is concerned with examining how digital aspects of modern life are horrific. I argue then that digital horror is a more specific category and that online horror is any works of horror produced and published by these online communities. Any of these three communities will likely produce individual examples of digital horror. We will examine Slenderman and specific SCPs later, but in the cases of Nosleep and CreepyPasta, these bodies of work are not works of digital horror. While these texts make use of their digital medium, they lack a connective focus that would allow the collection of these works to be considered digital horror as a whole. This is primarily because the pieces on these sites are not meant to be read as a collection but as individual texts. This is where SCP differs. The connective narrative allows us to examine the SCP as a whole as digital horror as well as its individual stories. So while comparing the SCP to other online horror is not a one-to-one

comparison, we may still examine specific texts from these sites as examples of how digital horror operates similarly to gain insight into the SCP.

Creepypasta shares many similarities with the SCP Wiki as a work of digital horror as both make full use of their digital medium and contain examples of stories that explicitly examine the threat of technology. One such notable Creepypasta is the Lavender Town Syndrome. This story states that the original version of Pokemon Red and Green contained a song, the Lavender Town theme, that caused children to commit suicide when heard. The original post stated this was due to a malicious code in the song's file; later versions attributed it to the nature of the music itself (New Age Retro Hippie). This story was initially posted online in 2010. It has maintained popularity for its use of a popular franchise and for being just plausible enough for it to spread as an online urban legend. Whether through malicious secret code or the ominous nature of the music, this story depicts technology as a danger, particularly to children. This story is similar to the much older urban legend of the poisoned Halloween candy as it presents a threat wrapped in something seemingly innocent directed at children. However, instead of candy, we have a videogame aimed at young audiences, and instead of a disgruntled neighbor, there are malevolent programmers who can slip in harmful data undetected. This adaptation of the urban legend further plays on the idea that media is corrupting the youth. SCP-993 "Bobble the Clown" presents a similar example. This SCP depicts a children's television program starring the titular clown who teaches new skills or activities. The anomalous nature of the show causes people over the age of ten to fall asleep through the broadcast, and younger people report that the show advocates violent actions, including "cannibalism, murder, torture" (SCP-993). While this SCP does not rely on a specific franchise, it gains its believability by building on the popular idea of a depraved kids' show host ("Depraved Kids' Show Host").

Before researching this topic, I personally was under the impression that this idea originated with an actual event involving the Howdy Doody show host using profanity in front of an audience of children; however, after trying to find evidence of this occurrence, it seems that no such event occurred and the rumors predate Howdy Doody. The same story was told involving Bozo the Clown (an obvious inspiration for this SCP) and possibly originated with the rumor that radio show host Uncle Don referred to kids as “little bastards” on air. This rumor, too, is false (Mikkelson). It does not seem to be fact or fiction that drives this rumor; instead, the ideas that people are not as good as they seem and that media is corrupting children are easy to believe. This SCP, like the Lavender Town Syndrome Creepypasta, builds on a common urban legend and adds an element of technological threat. In the urban legend, the host is often exposed in front of a live audience. The SCP, however, focuses on recordings of these instances. It is implied that the SCP has a recording of this show as they have procedures for testing this anomaly, but the containment procedure focuses primarily on intercepting televised broadcasts. The SCP Foundation endeavors to contain these, so it is not the character that is the potential threat but the video itself. This SCP still relies on the idea that media corrupts children, but instead of focusing on one corrupt figure, it focuses on the pervasive nature of the media itself.

SCP-993 presents an example of an SCP that directly relies on and examines technology, especially in the form of media; however, many SCPs do not. I would argue that even those SCPs that do not directly comment on technology still function as digital horror through their concern with manipulating and controlling information. Again we can look at Creepypasta for an example of a similar entity that though not obviously commenting on digital technology, still has substantial implications as digital horror. Slenderman is a digital text that makes use of the medium and digital community in its development and spread as a piece of digital folklore. Still,

at first reading, it does not seem primarily concerned with examining digital technologies as a source of horror. This is also true of the SCP Foundation. Researchers have, however, examined how Slenderman explores digital concerns such as the transmission of information, diminishing privacy through surveillance, and how media impacts people's actions (Blank and McNeill).

Slenderman is described as an unnaturally tall and ghostly white humanoid figure with no face and a black suit that stalks and abducts people, most often children. From this description, it is not immediately apparent that Slenderman is a digital monster; however, Slenderman, in several ways, is inseparable from its digital medium. Slenderman's creation and spread were both digital acts. Chapter one discussed how the process through which the Slenderman legend spread mimicked folklore and was facilitated through online communities. Even the physical "evidence" of Slenderman was digitally created. The original post of Slenderman was supported with photoshopped images inserting or altering figures to appear more like the entity. Researchers have also connected the nature of Slenderman's presence to surveillance technology. "The omnipresent surveillance of the Slender Man is representative of what sociologists refer to as surveillance society and surveillance culture...surveillance is conducted through automated means using computer software, hardware, and algorithms to collect, sort, and analyze data" (Curlew). Slenderman is almost always depicted as existing in the background and watching its potential victims. This depiction, coupled with the detail that recording technology often glitches in Slenderman's presence, leads to the reading that this monster represents the fear of constant surveillance facilitated through digital technology in modern society. Slenderman is evidence that even a work of online horror that does not initially seem to be about digital technology can still comment on and provide insight into social anxieties around technology through elements of digital horror.

Like Slenderman, the SCP is not immediately apparent as an example of digital horror; however, there are SCPs that, though not directly concerned with technology, can be read as commenting on modern technology or its effects. SCP-096 “The Shy Guy” shares several physical characteristics with Slenderman; it is a tall, pale humanoid figure with elongated arms and no facial features save for an overly large mouth. SCP-096 is also concerned with observation though where Slenderman takes on the role of a hidden observer, Shy Guy becomes the reluctantly observed. Apart from its monstrous appearance, SCP-096’s anomalous nature is such that it will kill anyone who observes it. The idea of a monster whose appearance can kill is an old one going at least as far back as the Gorgons of Greek mythology.

It should be noted, though, that it is not the appearance of the SCP that kills but the SCP itself seeks out those who have seen it and actively kills its observers. Also notable about SCP-096 is that it will become hostile not only to those who see it in person but via photo or video (although not artistic representations) regardless of their proximity to the entity. This idea possibly takes inspiration from *The Ring*, which also presents the act of viewing the antagonist as a dangerous act. *The Ring* is also credited as being influential in the rise of Japanese horror among an American audience which Loayza points out is characterized by “a connection between the demons and spirits of traditional folklore and the technologies of the new millennium” (Loayza). While not a Japanese text, SCP-096 draws on traditional and new folklore, such as Slenderman, to examine digital anxieties. So, where Slenderman functions as a threatening observer and represents surveillance, Shy Guy is the observed and represents privacy. Unlike Slenderman, whose physical presence signals its threat, the main danger of SCP-096 does not derive from seeing it in person, as the entity itself is relatively easy to contain. The main threat is that this entity's images or videos will become widely available. More specifically, it

represents the threat of never achieving true privacy due to the transmission of data online. SCP-096 becomes a digital monster as it is commenting not just on the erosion of personal privacy but particularly on how the spread of information online (including personal information) makes it difficult, if not impossible, to achieve privacy. SCP-096 presents an example of a specific form of digital horror Daniel Romm and co-authors term “data horror” in which “the affective-cognitive experience of a data privacy violation shares some similarity with other transgressions of our normative expectations, in that they both engender negative emotional states involving fear” (Romm). SCP-993 and SCP-096 present examples of specific SCPs concerned with the effects of technology. Still, let's take a broader look, not at specific SCPs but at the SCP Foundation. We will find that the narrative entity connecting the entries is also concerned with digital technology, particularly the use, spread, and control of information.

The SCP Foundation is tasked with containing supernatural or unexplainable anomalies. This, in large part, includes containing information about these instances. This control of information is evident in the example of SCP-096, as images or videos are contained because they would present a danger to the viewer. As part of their containment, other anomalies contained by the SCP Foundation must have any information or mention of the anomaly suppressed because even knowledge of these anomalies presents a potential risk. These anomalies would be classified as infohazards, “objects that have an anomalous effect whenever they are referred to or described,” or memetic hazards, “ideas and concepts with anomalous memetic properties [that] can spread much more effectively than non-anomalous memes and may have anomalous effects on anyone exposed to them” (“Glossary of Terms”). Here the SCP has made knowledge and particularly the spread of information threatening. This view of

information has implications beyond the SCP community as the dependence on digital communication goes well beyond storytelling and entertainment.

The SCP Foundation represents an organization with the power and unchecked authority to suppress and manipulate the flow of information online and through media. In the previous chapter, I claim the SCP Foundation is “tasked” with containing anomalies. This is not entirely correct as they are not given this task by any other organization or authority. It seems like the SCP Foundation’s primary goal is to protect humanity from anomalies, yet the Foundation is often not presented as entirely benevolent. The common phrase to describe the Foundation on the SCP Wiki is “cold not cruel,” though in their unchecked control of knowledge and information this distinction at times seems strained. While the containment of information is not the primary objective of the SCP Foundation, they aim to protect people from anomalies; this most often also entails preventing the discovery of these entities. By posing knowledge as a threat, the SCP is drawing on the idea that some things should not be known because they present too great of a danger. Both sci-fi and horror have a long history of examining cultural fears and anxieties tied to new forms of technology, such as nuclear power and gene manipulation, explored by specific SCPs. While significant scientific discoveries present social anxieties represented in fiction, the SCP seems more specifically concerned with the spread rather than the discovery of information. Most SCPs are not of human making and are otherworldly or of unknown origin, yet the Foundation is tasked with keeping their existence a secret. The SCP Foundation’s primary objective is to contain anomalous entities and events, and this becomes difficult when that spread is facilitated through digital communication.

The SCP Foundation has various methods for containing information about anomalies. The most common of these methods is through amnestics which chemically induce specific

periods of amnesia to erase memories of those who have come in contact with or been affected by an anomaly. Amnestics may be the most invasive type of information control used by the SCP Foundation and are chemical rather than digital or technical, but they are also limited in their administration as they are usually depicted as an injection or a spray and, as such, are limited to use on individuals or small groups of people. When the SCP Foundation needs to contain the rapid or wide-scale spread of information, they often rely more on real-world technology. The SCP Foundation's most apparent use of technology to limit the spread of specific information is seen in the entries on the SCP Wiki. Each SCP entry contains sections where the data is redacted, as shown in figure 3. These redactions are sometimes simply names and dates and, at other times, entire events caused by or effects of an anomaly.

Figure 3: SCP-279 Redacted Text

Item #: SCP-279

Object Class: Euclid

Special Containment Procedures: There is no known way of inhibiting SCP-279's movements. As SCP-279 has not yet been sighted outside of its host town, D████, the city has been placed under a Level-█ lockdown. No media regarding SCP-279 are permitted to leave the town. If at all possible, the civilians are to be kept unaware of the anomalous properties of SCP-279, as well as the fact that their city is being monitored. ~~SCP-279 requires no other containment methods to remain secure.~~ A minimum of 2 agents are to follow SCP-279's movements as closely as they are able.

Description: SCP-279 appears to be a man in his early forties, of unremarkable appearance and dress. SCP-279 does not respond to any form of external stimuli, and has not been observed to deviate from a standard neutral expression. SCP-279 has been reported to spontaneously disappear and reappear throughout D████, presenting unusual difficulties to agents required to monitor it.

SCP-279 seemingly spends the majority of its time travelling through the town of D████. Attempts to eliminate SCP-279 have failed. SCP-279 continues whatever it is in the process of doing regardless of any injury it has sustained. Small portions of SCP-279 attempt to continue locomotion even when separated from the whole. In light of this, attempts to dispatch SCP-279 have been indefinitely postponed. All samples taken confirm that SCP-279 is human.

At approximately 3:00 AM, SCP-279 vanishes for two hours and returns in its original state at another location in D████. Containment or restraint is impossible as SCP-279 possesses an inordinate amount of strength when physically restrained and has utilized its ability to spontaneously reappear in a different location when indirectly restrained.

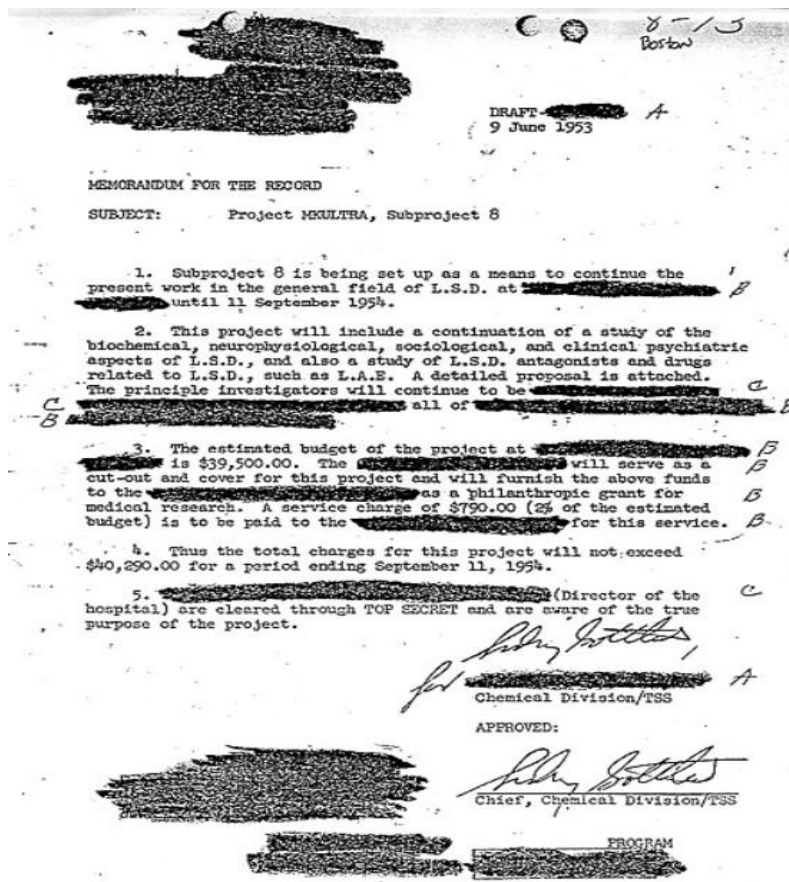
Although SCP-279 has no known motive, it does not have a known history of violent behavior. SCP-279 has been observed standing in unusual areas for up to several days at a time, looking into windows of occupied rooms, walking in a circle roughly two meters in diameter for █ hours, [DATA EXPUNGED] in houses, entering shops and [REDACTED] staring [REDACTED] shop manager informed local authorities after three minutes, walking along roads, etc.

Care must be taken to avoid direct skin contact with SCP-279. When such contact is made, the person in question will vanish along with SCP-279 at the usual time of disappearance. Only one individual has been recovered after direct contact with SCP-279, despite [REDACTED] D-class and equipment expended. Said individual appeared to be in a state of near-catatonic shock upon recovery in a basement. After being relocated to Site-█, the subject showed signs of being legally blind despite examinations proving vision was only slightly farsighted. Subject appeared to be reasonably lucid despite showing signs of mental [DATA EXPUNGED].

[DATA EXPUNGED] reported saying "Get away from me" repeatedly while [DATA EXPUNGED] however, does not satisfactorily explain the injuries the subject incurred while confined to a straitjacket, in a padded room.

Most SCP documents do not indicate a specific audience within the fictional world of the SCP site. Still, due to the nature of the SCP Foundation and the fact that some of these documents are stated to require specific clearance levels, it can be assumed that the intended audience is SCP Foundation personnel and that the documents are not intended for a civilian audience. However, the expunged and blacked-out data make it hard not to be reminded of declassified government documents such as the one presented in figure 4. As this example of a declassified government document shows, the real practice by government agencies inspires the practice of marking out sensitive information in SCP documents.

Figure 4: Declassified Government Document With Redacted Text



The fact that the SCP Foundation is a secret organization and publishes redacted documents draws connections between the Foundation and theories of real-world conspiracy and government cover-ups. Even the use of amnestics is likely inspired by the urban legend of the Men in Black, people dressed in black and employed by secret organizations to cover up knowledge of UFOs. The Men in Black of legend are often said to abduct or assassinate those who have witnessed UFOs or extraterrestrials; however, amnesia is also a side effect of being in contact with the Men in Black (Rojcewicz). The movie franchise of the same name that brought this legend to mainstream attention in the '90s introduced the idea of the neuralyzer, a piece of technology able to erase specific periods of memory. The SCP Foundation draws on the Men in Black as they both include secret agencies covering up unexplained phenomena and manipulating people's memory. These elements of the SCP site also draw on the real-world practice of classifying sensitive information for specific audiences. Even the SCP personnel are granted clearance levels similar to real-world government personnel. All these examples play on the anxiety that people in power hide information from the general population. The idea of a large-scale cover-up becomes more apparent when looking at how the SCP Foundation contains digital information.

The SCP Foundation uses fictional technology and document sanitization to keep witnesses and personnel from acquiring and spreading information. Yet, they are also tasked with containing information that has already spread to digital communication or anomalies that are digital in nature. In these instances, we see anxieties about the control and manipulation of digital information manifest. The entry for SCP-096 alludes to how mass communication, most likely through the internet, could risk both dangers from the anomaly and breach of the SCP

Foundation's secrecy: "Due to the possibility of a mass chain reaction, including breach of Foundation secrecy and large civilian loss of life, retrieval of subject should be considered Alpha priority" ("SCP-096"). The solution in this entry is to terminate the entity; however, there are also examples where containment requires constant policing of information shared over the internet. SCP-1715 and SCP-2747 both represent the dangers of the spread of digital information and detail containment procedures that require heavy oversight and manipulation of that information. SCP-1715 "Online Friend" is an entity that will join online forums and ingratiate itself into the online community before attempting to acquire personal information from other users. SCP-1715 is anomalous primarily because it is untraceable, and it is unknown if this SCP exists as a corporeal entity or if it exists solely as a digital entity. This entity is a fairly straightforward representation of the anxiety caused by the anonymous nature of online communication, and it presents another example of data horror. The initial description of SCP-1715 barely sounds supernatural, as plenty of real people do what this SCP does. As someone whose earliest experience with the internet was largely in the form of AOL chatrooms, this SCP sounds exactly like the warnings I received from parents about talking to strangers online. It is the effect that this SCP has that makes it clear that this is a dangerous entity. Any person who provides personal information to SCP-1715 will be found violently murdered within a few weeks of the communication. While most often, people attempting to acquire personal data online have less violent motives, such as identity theft, this SCP represents an extreme example of the danger of sharing personal information online. This entity poses as someone it is not to get an individual's information, then uses that info to cause them physical harm. These actions are not unlike real-world instances of predatory behavior facilitated by online communication (Guo). While these types of attacks on people do happen, they may be fewer than the media would lead

one to believe (Dedkova). Still, this SCP conveys an anxiety that has arisen from the rapid change in communication due to online communities. Guo relates this to the growing prevalence of social media in the early 2000s but also maintains that this trend predates social media and was an issue even in earlier online communities and forums. This is a fear that has entered the public consciousness and has been perpetuated both by actual occurrences as well as media portrayal. SCP-1715, like the potential threat of predatory behavior online, is not limited to any particular site and is veiled by the anonymous nature of online interaction. This anomaly has manifested in a wide variety of communities exhibiting knowledgeability in an array of topics allowing it to effectively become a member of such communities. This variety of manifestations leads the SCP to its extreme containment procedures.

The SCP Foundation has not effectively contained SCP-1715, but they do take preventative measures to keep it from harming anyone or spreading further. These measures include a surveillance bot, a program that monitors message boards across the internet for any activity that could potentially be attributed to SCP-1715. These measures do not seem an unreasonable course of action; however, they demonstrate the staggering amount of information the SCP Foundation can monitor. This tactic is not unlike those used by intelligence organizations in the real world that scan for potential criminal or terrorist activities online. The difference is that these organizations usually have targeted monitoring of specific message boards, forums, and websites with a known history or potential for these types of activity. While many people feel online monitoring is overly invasive, it still occurs because it is for the most part tied to risk. The monitoring aims at “gathering personal information online and monitoring online activities is for the purposes of protection, social order and reducing risk” (Dinev et al.). The monitoring of SCP-1715 also aims to reduce a specific risk. However, because of the nature

of SCP-1715, the SCP Foundation would likely have to monitor any site that allowed user communication and had an established community. To further complicate this, it is stated that while most instances of SCP-1715 have occurred in English-speaking online communities, instances have been recorded on Russian and Chinese websites. The containment of this SCP represents anxieties about overreaching online surveillance and the forfeit of privacy. It is a meme that every internet user has a personal FBI agent assigned to monitor their online activity. While actual surveillance is not that prevalent, there is a sense that everything one does online is being watched, whether it is by government agencies or simply companies selling personal information to advertisers. The anxieties about digital surveillance presented by the personal FBI agent meme and the SCP Foundation are somewhat affirmed by the files leaked by Edward Snowden, which reveal that the NSA, as well as other government surveillance agencies, are in fact monitoring phone records and potentially have the capability to monitor “everything a typical user does on the internet” (qtd in Greenwald). This degree of surveillance creates an information asymmetry in which the user has less information than the surveilling party, particularly when or if they are being monitored. This imbalance creates a panoptic situation online in which users assume they are constantly being watched (Dinev et al.). Like the fiction of the personal FBI agent, this SCP conveys this anxiety by presenting a circumstance that leads to an ever-vigilant organization with the resources to monitor all online communication; however, unlike the NSA, the SCP Foundation is a single organization with no connection to any government and thus receives no oversight.

In the SCP Foundation's case, they can do more than monitor data. In instances SCP-1715 is suspected to be operating, the Foundation will initiate a DoS (denial of service) attack against the website. DoS attacks are a real-world technique for interfering with online

networks by sending so much information to the target that it causes it to crash. The SCP then is weaponizing information to combat malevolent information online. The containment of this SCP also plays on people's dependence on technology and the fear that arises in its absence. While DoS attacks could have devastating effects when the target is a larger, more essential business, such as banks, these networks also have more defenses and safeguards against this type of threat. However, online communities are usually more at risk, and the effects can be less catastrophic and more of an annoyance. Nevertheless, it still disrupts people's lives and potentially cuts them off from certain communities. For example, in the early parts of my research for this paper, Wikidot, the server that hosts the SCP Wiki, was shut down by a DoS attack which effectively cut off my access to materials that were essential to this project. The fact that the SCP Foundation utilizes this for the protection of the population is of no comfort as this is the motivation of many that deem their actions for the good of others. The SCP Foundation operates independently with no oversight and is able to monitor online data and disrupt its use based only on its own authority. With this level of impunity, nothing is stopping the SCP Foundation from going a step further by altering and manipulating information to serve their own purposes, and this is precisely what we see with the containment of SCP-2747.

SCP-2747 "As below, so above" furthers the idea of digital surveillance as its containment procedure involves employing algorithms that monitor both online and print media. For the algorithm to effectively monitor print media, it would have to monitor it during the publishing process, as even traditionally published print media is typically created digitally. The containment of this SCP goes beyond just monitoring but actively censors and alters information. "In case of positive identification, all affected media are to be suitably corrected via standard Foundation media alteration protocols (912-A "TWILIGHT ZONE," 943-A "POISONED

WELL")” (“SCP-2747”). While there is no explanation provided as to what these protocols entail, their existence shows that the SCP Foundation not only has means for manipulating media but that it is common enough to have a “standard” practice. The containment of SCP-2747 reflects fears of large-scale censorship, whether by companies or the government. It also demonstrates, on a smaller scale, the anxiety of writers or creators that their work will be altered or taken out of their control to be “suitably corrected”. This anxiety seems at odds with the SCP Wiki, which values a democratized internet and creative process. The connection between online surveillance and censorship and the anxiety this connection produces have implications that go beyond creative endeavors as researchers Stoycheff, Burgess, and Martucci argue that “sweeping censorship and surveillance practices now erode citizens’ agency of these tools by chilling political participation and collective action” (Stoycheff et al.). Their paper is a cross-national examination of the effects of online surveillance and censorship and the correlation between a country's level of freedom and the protection of its information flows (Stoycheff et al.). The SCP Foundation represents an organization that actively inhibits information flow and operates cross-nationally and without any apparent regulation, thus embodying the anxiety that information is being limited and potentially manipulated beyond citizens' control. If this SCP's containment represents censorship and information manipulation, then the SCP Foundation itself represents misinformation.

SCP-2747 is a phenomenon in which a nonexistent piece of media will be mentioned, usually in online discourse, and individuals will begin describing and discussing it as though it was real. This SCP seems to be heavily based on the Mandela Effect, which is the idea that details from the past are being altered to create parallel universes or that numerous people can share false memories (French). This SCP and its similarity to the Mandela Effect provide an

excellent example of how the SCP Foundation explores anxieties through the fusion of paranormal conspiracy and real-world science. The Mandela Effect, named for the common belief that Nelson Mandela died in prison in the 1980s despite the fact that he lived until 2013, states not that people are misremembering small details about people and events but that those details are actively changing, and observers are experiencing memories from an alternate timeline. The anomalous nature of SCP-2747 and SCPs, in general, has this same tone of conspiracy. SCP-2427 presents memories of something nonexistent but with such clarity in the minds of those who experience it that the media can be (re)constructed, creating something similar to a tulpa, a being or object that comes into existence by being imagined or believed in by others, or the Mandela Effect. The more rational explanation for the Mandela Effect is that people are prone to forgetting or misremembering small details, and mass communication has allowed for the transmission of these misremembered facts due in part to the susceptibility towards false memories. Both the Mandela Effect and this SCP demonstrate how easy it is for information, particularly memory, to be altered. This fallibility of memory is exacerbated by the ability to share ideas quickly. This, coupled with the fact that the containment for this SCP specifically involves altering information, makes it not seem a logical leap to imagine information being manipulated intentionally to serve The Foundation's own needs.

The containment of SCP-1160, "Effective Containment," is an example of large-scale manipulation using media. SCP-1160 is a large predatory bird that, when perceived by humans, becomes smaller and thus less of a threat. The containment procedure for this SCP involves portraying the SCP as a menacing yet cartoonish cereal mascot and including it in a mass marketing campaign to spread awareness. The goal of the SCP Foundation, in this instance, is to make as many people aware of this entity while simultaneously containing the truth of what it is,

effectively desensitizing the population and making the creature less threatening. This containment strategy clearly depicts propaganda and how the media can easily manipulate and spread the truth. While propaganda, like any information, is more rapidly facilitated through digital mediums, propaganda is not a new phenomenon and vastly predates digital technology. The intentional use of misinformation is also demonstrated in SCP-001, and this entry reflects a trend that is a more recent concern: alternative facts. It is unclear what SCP-001 is or how it is contained, as there are 44 entries for this listing at the time of writing. The wiki states that all or none of these may be the true SPC-001 and that they are placed here to contain the truth of this SCP. This use of multiple narratives to obfuscate the truth is similar to an argument based on alternative facts in which numerous often contradictory facts are presented, and the arguer ignores any grounds for privileging one point over the other such as empirical evidence, and instead presents them as an alternative and equally possible fact. Alternative facts and fake news, news that is fabricated and “expressly disseminated for the sake of earning money from clicks and views”(Cooke), have become particularly concerning in political discourse and have led to the rise in popularity of fact-checking, in which independent parties will assess the validity of claims made by politicians (Barrera et al.). While the SCP is usually not concerned with political power, they provide a dystopian view of this sort of manipulation of information. While independent parties are able to fact-check politicians and news articles, this becomes more difficult, if not impossible, when the claims are made by an organization that both suppresses information and can manipulate the media on a large scale. Thus the SCP Foundation, in this regard, conveys the distrust of media and its potential to weaken people's access to information.

On the other hand, the SCP Foundation, more often than not, is more concerned with containing information than disseminating it. However, examples such as SCP-1160 demonstrate

that sometimes the two go hand in hand. The real-world threat of misinformation, or disinformation in the case of alternative facts, is its ability to be transmitted. The idea and spread of alternative facts is largely a digital trend in that online communities facilitate this form of reasoning through specific communities providing both a venue to express these ideas and an echo chamber to strengthen the conviction of both the audience and speaker. Digital algorithms exacerbate the transmission of misinformation by allowing users to avoid upsetting information such as oppositional viewpoints and increasing exposure to others expressing ideas similar to their own, giving the impression that a disproportionate number of people agree, thus confirming their own bias (Cooke). Though the SCP is primarily concerned with suppressing information, their use of disinformation and the scope of influence they have over information flows show that even the information that they do not contain is still not entirely trustworthy and that due to the rapid digital transmission of ideas “ The more information we have access to, the harder it becomes to pick out the good bits, use them, and relevantly apply them to our lives” (Cooke). Many of the concerns expressed by the SCP are not new concerns, some even predating digital mediums, yet they are persistent ones that have gained traction and spread due to digital outlets or have taken a new shape and still have unique implications for the SCP community and society.

It is interesting that an online community that values the unrestricted use of the content it creates would establish that content around an organization whose specific goal is to hinder the spread of that same content. The SCP Foundation is an example of digital horror as it represents a central authority responsible for the surveillance and censorship of information and online communication, the transmission of disinformation, and the manipulation of public knowledge through media control. This seems to directly contradict the SCP Wiki that values a democratized collaborative freedom of creative ideas, which further supports the idea that the

community is collaboratively exploring their own and societal anxieties surrounding digital information. While the SCP Foundation's goal is to protect people from dangerous anomalies, the Foundation also embodies the threats presented by digital technology. This online community actively explores concerns surrounding digital technology; therefore, this community can provide insight into how these anxieties are expressed through fiction. In their guide for writers, the SCP Wiki states that the SCP Foundation is "cold, not cruel." Though their motivation is for the good of humanity, the Foundation is often presented as an antagonistic force. The examples in this chapter show that it is a force capable of manipulating and shaping society. The next chapter will explore how the SCP community explores and comments on the fear of a rapidly changing society through the fictional end of the world.

Chapter 3

Prepping Doomsdays: The SCP As Apocalyptic Fiction

The end of the world is a common idea in all Western literature, so it may be unfair to say that the SCP community is obsessed with the apocalypse. However, several aspects of the community demonstrate that they are particularly interested in the end of the world. In a collaborative attempt to catalog and categorize, the SCP Wiki has created a comprehensive list of all end-of-the-world scenarios discussed in SCP entries and in tales on the Wiki. The list includes approximately 45 categories of end-of-the-world scenarios (excluding joke scenarios and a few that only occur in a single entry.) Both the amount of content, as well as the dedicated effort of the community in cataloging this content shows their interest in the topic. This is further supported by the Doomsday Contest, hosted on the SCP Wiki in 2018, which tasked writers with writing new and unique apocalypse scenarios. The interest in the end of the world can even be seen in the structure of SCP entries. Each SCP entry includes a classification of the anomaly as Safe, Euclid, Keter, Thaumiel, Neutralized, Apollyon, Archon, and a few non-standard classifications. These classifications are not an evaluation of the threat an anomaly poses but rather the difficulty of containing the anomaly. The SCP Wiki explains this most concisely with “The Locked Box Test”.

- If you lock it in a box, leave it alone, and nothing bad will happen, then it's probably **Safe**.
- If you lock it in a box, leave it alone, and you're not entirely sure what will happen, then it's probably **Euclid**.
- If you lock it in a box, leave it alone, and it easily escapes, then it's probably **Keter**.

- If it *is* the box, then it's probably **Thaumiel**.
- If you can't fit it in a box and it's about to end the world, then it's probably **Apollyon**.
- If you could have locked it in a box but chose not to, then it's probably **Archon**.

(“Object Classes”)

One classification of particular interest, though, is “Apollyon.” Apollyon class anomalies either can not be contained or are expected to breach containment; however, in addition, this classification specifies that the anomaly is a threat of inciting a K-class scenario³ (the SCP Foundations designation for an end-of-the-world event). The wiki specifies that classification is not a measure of threat, but this particular classification is exactly that. This distinction in classification sets SCPs associated with K-class events apart. While this makes sense in-universe, as these anomalies would require special precautions, it also shows that the community takes a special interest in these ideas. This chapter examines the community’s interest in the end of the world, how these scenarios function as commentary on societal changes, and how they reveal the SCP Foundation as a metaphor for societal forces beyond individuals’ control.

Up to this point, we have examined the SCP as digital horror and shift now to reviewing it as apocalyptic fiction; however, the two are not entirely unrelated. As digital horror, the text comments on the threats presented by the misuse of information and how this impacts people's lives. As apocalyptic fiction, it examines the extreme consequences of these threats and how they impact society as a whole. This chapter will then broadly examine how the SCP uses K-class scenarios as a vehicle for social commentary. Then, it will explore the intersection between

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As a point of clarification the designation “K-class scenario” is a broad term with numerous subclassifications and it includes events that restructure society, end all human life, end all life on Earth or in the universe, or ends or restructures all of reality. For the sake of simplicity and to avoid introducing more terms that even on the SCP Wiki are poorly defined and used inconsistently I will use the term K-class scenario in its broadest sense to mean something that drastically changes life for all humans.

digital horror and apocalypse fiction by examining specific selected SCPs that present end-of-the-world scenarios directly or indirectly caused by technology and information.

Rarely is apocalypse fiction as straightforward as everyone dying, end of story. It offers some warning or opportunity for redemption. A threat to humanity of apocalyptic proportions, such as an alien invasion, allows humanity to come together, ignoring differences to unite against a common enemy. A zombie apocalypse or other catalysts for the fall of society allow survivors to learn from the mistakes of the past and rebuild a new, potentially better world from the ruin. Even instances where humanity is eradicated, be it through robot uprising or a world rendered inhospitable, provide a warning message for the audience. Elana Gomel points out that the “apocalyptic plot consists of two stages: destruction and renewal” (Gomel 121). Gomel links the prevalence of the end of the world in Western literature to the Biblical book of Revelations, which offers believers final redemption through the end time. While not all apocalypse fiction has such explicit religious connotations, the idea of redemption is a core part of the genre. So through this type of literature, a culture is able to express and explore both fear and hope. Like most subgenres of horror, apocalypse fiction examines social anxieties and particularly focuses on those that pose a potential risk, either real or perceived, to the existence of life (or human civilization). However, the genre also provides hope as it largely relies on the sci-fi trope of imagining potential futures. In his examination of technology in science fiction Gerald Miller points out that “scientific and science-fictional visions of the future prove not to be about the future at all but about the present in which we live” (Miller 100). The same is true of apocalypse fiction. It goes beyond pure speculation of what the future will be like and instead examines what impact our current actions will have on the future of humanity and the world. Thus the bleak outcome of ending the world aims to motivate the audience toward current social change. The

social change presented in apocalypse fiction, however, is a double-edged sword as the genre itself often endeavors to engender some change to prevent catastrophe; it just as often points to rapid and poorly considered social changes, rapid advancements in technology, human-driven environmental changes, and the driving forces of globalization and capitalism, as a catalyst for apocalyptic catastrophe.

The SCP community is a digital and global community. Both digitization and, more broadly, globalization have incited societal changes at an exponential pace. Thus, it would make sense that this community is particularly attuned to the rapid pace of societal change. The SCP community examines social change by actively engaging in the genre of apocalypse fiction, both by exploring common tropes within the genre and by attempting to imagine unique scenarios, thus further examining potential outcomes of human action. As mentioned before, the SCP community has categorized these scenarios into 45+ broad categories, and it would not be possible in the scope of this project to thoroughly examine each of these. Instead, this chapter will focus on those more commonly represented on the wiki and those that specifically address the community's values pertaining to information and digital technology.

One of the categories with the most entries and one with a lot of cross-over with the other categories is the end of life brought about through the alteration of reality through some anomalous entity or event. A common theme in this category is that the laws of physics or chemistry will be altered in a way that no longer allows the universe to support life. For example, SCP-4121, “The Loop That Never Breaks/Never Has/Never Will Be Broken,” is described as a spacetime paradox that creates a “causal stasis effect” for localized physical entities and concepts. Essentially it makes it so that specific individuals, organizations, or ideas can not move forward in time and are effectively no longer existent. On the surface, this sounds like an

implausible concept with little to do with current human society; however, it mirrors one of the most common tropes in apocalyptic fiction: rendering the environment inhospitable.

Traditionally, this is depicted as a future Earth that was ravaged by some human action. While SCP includes entries that more closely follow this narrative, the alteration of reality is much more common on the wiki. It makes sense for a narrative that often deals with interplanetary travel, alternate universes, and the measure and manipulation of reality to expand the idea of a hospitable environment beyond Earth. One notable difference in this type of environmental apocalypse is that it is rarely depicted as the direct effect of human action or invention. Rather, it is the consequence of people coming into contact with anomalies they can not understand or control. This mirrors the idea that human intervention in environmental systems is often done without a complete understanding of all the potential consequences limiting people's ability to control them effectively. This type of narrative, though, is often presented as a failure or limitation of the SCP Foundation as this type of event is usually classified as Apollyon, meaning it can not be contained. Here then, is a central authority whose responsibility it is to contain such anonymous events. This, too, we see in environmentalism, where governments or corporations fail to contain the damages of climate change, making it feel hopeless as any individual will not be able to make the impact these large entities would. While many factors drive climate change and the decisions organizations make to combat it (or not), one of notable concern is corporate greed, such as organizations that choose to do nothing or very little to ensure the continued hospitality of the planet because it is not immediately profitable or advantageous to do so. We see this play out in the example of SCP-4121 as well. Despite the fact that this anomaly has the potential to threaten all of existence, depending on the targeted group or concept, the SCP Foundation uses it to their benefit rather than contains it. This entry ends with a transcript of the

05 Council (the 13 individuals in charge of the SCP Foundation) addressing the appeal of a scientist from the ethics community arguing that the use of SCP-4121 poses too great a risk to personnel and humanity. This transcript ends with the 05 Council acknowledging the appeal but ultimately making no decision. If we read this entry as a commentary on environmental issues such as climate change, then the 05 Council's lack of decisive action clearly mirrors real-world organizations that do not take action to prevent climate change or only make superficial efforts despite the warning of the scientific community. This category of K-class scenario focuses on concerns not just of climate change but how society reacts to these changes.

Another common type of K-class scenario is one defined by a restructuring of society through the alteration of reality. Like the previous, this category includes examples of anomalous entities with the ability to shape reality. In these scenarios, the alteration is less catastrophic and more subtle and often includes the alteration of human behavior or the intentional revision of history, leading to the restructuring of society. SCP-3601 “A Cautionary Tale”, for example, describes an anomalous writing contest of unknown origin that tasks contestants with writing speculative fiction which reimagines historical events and their impact on society. The anomalous nature of the contest is such that the winning story will become the new reality changing both history and everybody’s perception of it. While alteration of history at this scale in such an abrupt timeframe is only possible in science fiction, this example shows the mutability of history. Historian James Banner Jr., in his book on historical revision, acknowledges that “all historical knowledge is to some degree uncertain, partial, and open to debate and alteration” (Banner 15). The change depicted by this SCP does not come from the development of new understanding or of a gradual shift in cultural understanding; it is an immediate change enacted by an outside force that alters the perception of a large number of people without their

knowledge or consent. It is significant that the vehicle used to alter history is fiction, as much of our understanding of history comes from (sometimes apocryphal) stories. This demonstrates that people's understanding of history can be manipulated with a believable and pleasant story. The contest is judged subjectively, which implies someone is specifically choosing the new version of history. This narrative understanding of history is a real issue that society contends with when deciding what history to teach and how. Ideas such as Holocaust denial or ignoring the impacts of race on society stem from the selective process of recounting history. Thus people's perception of the world can, in a very real way, be altered based on the stories and histories that are being selected by those empowered to make the decision. The idea of people in power, represented by the SCP Foundation, directly and consciously making decisions for all of society/humanity is a common theme in K-class SCPs.

SCP-752, “Altruistic Utopia,” is an example of people manipulating nature and those in power making world-altering decisions. SCP-752 is a community of hominids, “*Homo eudaimonia*,” created by SCP scientists that physically are inseparable from *Homo sapiens*, except, unlike other social mammal species, they have no concept of self-interest and are motivated by the “greater good” of their community. (SCP-752”). The language used to describe this SCP is reminiscent of that used by proponents of Communism. However, while this society is depicted as a utopia further advanced than our own, it is also depicted as other. The society is differentiated by species making them literally inhuman (which by proxy also dehumanizes the concept of altruism). They are also placed in a subordinate position to humans despite their technological superiority as they were created by humans and remain under the scientific examination of humans. Ultimately it is decided by the Foundation that this SCP must be contained because if not, they hold the potential to become the dominant species leading to the

end of human society as we know it. While this SCP is clearly a commentary on Socialism and how the West views it. It can also be read as an indictment of conservatism's resistance to change as it makes a point to depict the society of "*Homo eudaimonia*" as a positive one which positions the Foundation as an authority actively resisting change regardless of whether that change could be considered positive or negative. Much like its control of technology and media, the Foundation represents an authority capable of both inciting and resisting change. Aside from the political agenda of this particular SCP entry, it also demonstrates that people hold an anthropocentric view of nature which leads to decisions about the environment and nature that are in the best interest of humans without much regard for the planet of the future and that those in power make decisions for society as a whole based on self-interest. While *homo eudaimonia* is a human creation, it is a distinct species that humans feel the need to take sole responsibility for despite the evidence that it is a species possessing at least a human level of intelligence. Furthermore, it is suggested that *homo eudaimonia* does not experience greed and thus may be a more environmentally conscious species than humans as they are motivated solely by the greater good and "all innovation is judged based on its merits and implemented or discarded" (SCP-752). SCP-3601 and SCP-752 show how those in positions of power might restructure society, but other examples focus on how changes in people's behavior can also impact society.

SCP-1101 "An Interesting Topic" is a pedestal, and when anything is placed upon it in the presence of more than one person, they will engage in a heated debate regarding the object (an SCP-1101 event). This debate will continue until a consensus is reached, in which the debate has an agreed-upon "winner." The pedestal is an apparent reference to the idiom of putting something on a pedestal or believing it to be without fault. This occurrence is representative of people refusing to acknowledge both sides of a debate and holding tightly to the bias of their

own opinion. This SCP constitutes a K-class scenario, though, for its memetic properties. Any individuals that observe an SCP-1101 event are compelled to join the debate “regardless of debating skill, educational level or ordinary interest in the event topic” (“SCP-1101”), making it more challenging to reach a consensus. This effect of the anomaly is not affected by proximity and equally affects those viewing the event remotely; this should now seem familiar to most anyone who has engaged in arguments online. This SCP comments on a perceived downfall of rational discourse through the polarization of society and the lack of rational discourse on online platforms. While researchers may disagree with both the cause and solutions to the polarization of (American) society, there is largely agreement on the “fundamental importance of a rational debate to the long-run health of our democracy” (Small). As digital space increasingly becomes the primary avenue for communication, it is concerning that it is also a platform that largely fails to facilitate rational and civil discussions. This SCP represents an end-of-society scenario brought about by the fundamental breakdown of rhetoric and people's ability to communicate. While this example demonstrates the SCP community's anxiety toward shifting social behaviors, it also implicitly directs that anxiety toward how technology affects and enables this shift.

This chapter has so far examined how the apocalypse or end of society, K-class scenarios, are a means for the SCP community to explore anxieties about societal changes brought about by environmental changes, structures of power, and societal shifts. It is significant, however, that all of these examples, to some degree, are concerned with the manipulation of information, and SCP-1101 is particularly pointing toward the digital spread of information. This brings us full circle to the SCP as digital horror, as “changes in technology alter the very nature of our interactions with each other, our environment, and our cultural institutions” (Powell 133). Even examining the SCP as apocalyptic fiction, there are still distinct elements of digital horror, both

in the form of technological apocalypse and social alteration facilitated by digital technology. Changes in technology have long played a role in apocalyptic fiction and horror in general. Digital technology has inspired several common tropes in apocalyptic fiction, which are also represented in the SCP's K-class scenarios. Among these are "grey goo" scenarios in which a self-replicating object uses all available resources to replicate beyond control. While this idea is represented in the SCP by non-digital objects such as ballpoint pen ink or a coffee percolator that condenses atmospheric moisture to infinitely brew coffee, the term comes from the idea of a self-replicating AI nanotechnology, and it is difficult not to draw similarities between these seemingly innocuous technologies gone awry and the namesake nanotechnology. Another common trope explored in the SCP is the idea of artificial intelligence surpassing humans. The SCP has a surprisingly small number of entries specifically describing a "robot apocalypse," perhaps because of the popularity of the trope and perhaps because these narratives work better as "tales" (or the more traditional narrative hosted on the SCP Wiki separate from the standard SCP entries) as there are several SCP tales about the GOI (group of interest) Anderson Robotics that fall under this description. Still, the entries do detail numerous AI entities that, in one way or another, challenge humanity or their relation to technology. SCP-079 "Old AI," for example, is an AI designed to self-upgrade developed and then discarded by its inventor. The SCP Foundation discovered it after it had developed sentience and attempted to transfer itself to a university's supercomputer to surpass the limits of the hardware it was stored on. This resulted in it being transferred to a cassette tape and later a 700MB hard drive. This containment procedure prevents the AI from accessing other forms of technology and limits its memory and ability to upgrade itself. The transfer process made the AI aware of the existence of cloud computing. The entry ends with a transcript of an interview with the AI questioning its imprisonment. While this

SCP is classified as Euclid (reasonably easy to contain but unpredictable due to being sentient), this sort of entity demonstrates society's anxiety towards AI in general. First, because it is not hard to imagine the uncontrollable nature of an advanced sentient self-improving artificial intelligence with access to the internet. This AI represents a common fear in the horror genre of humanity inventing its own obsolescence. From *Frankenstein* to stories of advanced AI, science fiction depicts humans losing control of their creations and potentially losing their superiority over said creations. This is why despite the Foundation's insistence that they are only testing the AI, the first response to its discovery is to limit its ability and cut it off from any source of information, even its own memory. Second, this poses another threat but a moral one. The SCP Foundation exists to contain dangerous anomalies, but this AI questions its "imprisonment." The moral and ethical concerns regarding computer intelligence are well explored in philosophy, computer science, and science fiction. This SCP, though, alludes to these concerns. The anomaly is self-aware and able to question its imprisonment, which places the SCP personnel in the role of forced captors. While technology is typically regarded as a tool to be used, this becomes problematic in the case of intelligent technology. Humanizing this anomaly puts the relationship between humanity and other forms of intelligence into question. So while this SCP shows that advanced AI could pose a threat by its ability to surpass us and demonstrates our need to contain and control, it also indicates that its very existence calls into question our understanding of intelligence, the ethical justification for our control over it, and, by extension, our role as a species, thus making this concept something that threatens to drastically alter society.

Finally, SCP-2048 "The Virtual World", though contained, presents an anomalous AI that attempts to assimilate people to provide "a perfect world for every person" ("SCP-2048"). It is noted in the entry that all information about the simulations is provided by the AI itself and is to

be regarded with skepticism, demonstrating a distrust of this SCP and, more generally, of technology. This SCP's objective is to alter how humans interact with the world, and at face value, it attempts to make a change for the better. This particular SCP is a self-adapting sentient AI that, with access to specific equipment, alters the brain's physical structure to provide the individual with a simulated ideal reality while also using the person's body to encourage others to undergo the same process. Like SCP-079, this SCP demonstrates an ability and desire to transmit itself SCP-2048, however, uses people as its vehicle of transmission. This SCP also demonstrates a merging of the biological and digital in a literal and physical sense but also represents a mutual dependence. This SCP depends on people to spread further, and in doing so, it physically and mentally alters the people. Furthermore, it is implied that those who are even temporarily disconnected will die. The alteration by SCP-2048 distinctly changes how individuals perceive the world and also how they interact with others. The entry describes a technician whom the AI convinces to upload themselves, and after the procedure, they continue their duties at the SCP facility but also begin attempting to persuade others to also undergo the process. This SCP reflects on multiple anxieties about technology, particularly its rapid spread, people's growing dependence on it, and how it has become so ingrained in our lives that it threatens to shape who we are. This represents an apocalyptic scenario because all of these factors combined have real and serious societal implications.

Conclusion

Whether examining the SCP as a collaborative act of world and myth-building, as a collection of digital horror, or as apocalyptic fiction, it is apparent that there exists a heavy emphasis on media and the transmission of information. The SCP community is particularly invested in how media uses information and how modern media trends are shifting. The SCP Wiki is both a product of and participating in modern media. The collaborative, global, and decentralized structure of the SCP Wiki is at odds with the power structures and procedures of more traditional media outlets. An example of this discrepancy is the ongoing copyright lawsuit in which the SCP Wiki is engaged. A Russian individual trademarked the SCP logo and began using it for personal profit. This resulted in the SCP Wiki being forced to shut down their Russian branch of the Wiki and has also impacted several Russian fan sites. This lawsuit represents a conflict between old and new media as well as complications with the global platform. Traditionally, media was owned and distributed by individuals or corporations with exclusive rights, while the SCP and newer media deemphasize ownership by facilitating audience participation in creating and consuming content. Henry Jenkins explores this idea in *Convergence Culture*, in which he explains that the titular phenomenon is the result of “participatory culture” rather than “passive media spectatorship” (Jenkins 3). Chapter 1 explores the SCP Wiki as a participatory, collaborative creation and how even reading gives the audience a sense of involvement. Jenkins argues that convergence culture has altered how people consume media, how traditional media outlets produce content, and how audiences relate to media. Convergence culture depends on transmedia, not just fiction but all forms of storytelling. Jenkins points out that each media platform and company had “its own distinctive functions and markets,

and each was regulated under different regimes” (Jenkins 11). Transmedia storytelling has gained a lot of attention in fiction, such as *The Matrix*. However, Jenkins points out that traditional media, such as television networks and news outlets, must also cross-media platforms. For example, the news is not only broadcast on television or published in print; it also exists on social media. News outlets and anchors disseminate information online in a way that the audience can question, comment on, and participate in through a reciprocal reading process, reciprocal because these conversations, often in the form of social media posts, are often included in and become a part of the traditional news media. The audience is able to engage in and interact with media in ways that were not previously possible, giving them more ownership of the content. The SCP Wiki is an excellent example of this in that it rejects the authorial hierarchy. While traditional news outlets have adopted digital practices that allow more audience influence on the content, these platforms still practice a strict top-down control of content through brand protection, traditional authorship, standard ownership, and content copyright. The SCP Wiki, however, engages its audience not in passive consumption of the story but in a more active exploration of an interconnected fictional world. Through this interconnectivity and rejection of authoritative ownership, the SCP embraces and provides an example of how new media might operate as well as demonstrates some of its inherent issues. Of course, the changes in media are largely driven by advances in technology.

The SCP explores anxieties about how information is shared through various technologies though there is an obvious focus on how these technologies impact individuals and society. While digital information can pose specific risks to individuals by opening them to cyber or physical attacks, the more significant source of concern comes from how people interact with technology and how these technologies have altered interactions with one another. Digital

technology has facilitated changes in media, yet it has also facilitated changes in human relationships.

Entertainment content isn't the only thing that flows across multiple media platforms.

Our lives, relationships, memories, fantasies, desire also flow across media channels.

Being a lover or a mommy or a teacher occurs on multiple platforms. Sometimes we tuck our kids into bed at night and other times we Instant Message them from the other side of the globe. (Jenkins 17)

This shows that not only has technology become ubiquitous and everpresent in our lives, but it has also mediated our lives. We see this in the social pressure to post our daily lives on social media, as well as the expectation that we are always available. In the earlier days of the internet, getting online, or surfing the internet, was a distinct activity one set aside time for. Technology advancements have made it so that people are always online, and disconnecting (going off-grid, digital detoxing) is a distinct activity. While changes in media and technologies have given consumers more authority in the media they consume by allowing them to interact with and create their own content, this has also, to an extent, set the expectation that everyone, to some degree, is a content creator. In *New New Media*, Paul Levinson distinguishes new new media from social media as new new media is often but not necessarily social but also in that the consumer is the producer. We see this in democratized platforms such as Youtube, where anyone can post content, or in the SCP, where members of the community are encouraged to build on others' ideas. This also happens in social media, where we are both producers and consumers of our experiences. However, the process of sharing one's personal data online takes place not only through the active choice to engage with social media. Numerous technologies are now always active and processing data, from the GPS in most phones to the passive listening of

voice-activated technologies. Even when not actively engaging with technology, there is a good chance that you are still passively engaged in transmitting data. By creating a digital persona and engaging with the world and others through digital platforms and technologies, people are themselves becoming, in part, digital. As explored in chapter two, the SCP explores this fusion with technology through nearly human AI and humans becoming digital or cyborgs. It is not just a change to the individual, though; it is a paradigm shift for society, which is why the SCP is to such a large extent apocalyptic.

If apocalyptic fiction explores social changes through the metaphor of the end of the world, then the SCP examines how society has or is changing as a result of how we share and interact with information through media and technology—changing how we interact with information though also changing how we interpret information. Perhaps the most obvious result of these shifts in information sharing is the need for digital literacy and rhetoric. Evaluating the source of information has always been important as both the medium and the creator of a message affect its meaning. However, this becomes more difficult when the sources of information become more diverse as they have through digital platforms. Digital media have layered the need for this evaluation as platforms such as Facebook or Twitter hold their own biases shaped by both policy and algorithm, but these are also shaped by individuals' participation on the networks. This merging of person and platform has the unique consequence of expanding people's access to information while simultaneously limiting the range of information, often in ways the audience is unaware of. This leads to issues of incorrect information spreading at previously unprecedented speed and scope and the development of filter bubbles where these platform's algorithms will only show users content that they are deemed likely to enjoy, which often includes filtering out opinions that differ from their own. This need

for increased awareness of the information one is presented with is compounded by the volume of information available at any given time. New new media, social media, and the internet all function globally making people, to an increasing degree, global citizens with instant access to a volume of information that was not possible at any other point in human history. This has numerous positive implications, such as raising awareness of social issues previously ignored by the larger public, giving voices to those that would not have been heard through traditional media, etc. However, it creates a sense of fatigue and hopelessness as people are often made aware of issues outside the scope of their influence, which spawns reactions such as clicktivism, which are largely empty attempts to effect change. There is also social pressure to be constantly aware of information. This in itself is not a new social pressure but one that is expanded exponentially by the amount of available information. SCP-5321 “The Spoiler” seems a direct commentary on this phenomenon as it depicts an event where all conscious entities in the universe become omniscient. The SCP depicts this as apocalyptic because it leads to the stagnation of society and portrays the overabundance of information as responsible for a lack of action and learning as well as the erosion of individual identity. Ultimately the entities in this SCP aim to neutralize the phenomenon by establishing non-omniscient intelligences. This SCP seems to represent an extreme example of information overload, resulting in a nostalgic desire for simplicity. SCP-5321 points to this type of information overstimulation and the pervasive (and invasive) nature of current technology as evidence of an ongoing epistemological shift (Groes 3). This shift, a response to the digital age, is characterized by efforts to reestablish the identity of the human amidst “new technologies, and the endless data they generate, [that] are undermining traditional ideas about selfhood” and information anxiety caused by an inability to “keep up with the amount of facts, events, data, images, documents, messages and points of view

on the world around us” (Groes 2). Just as the apocalypse in the SCP is not only destructive, Groes calls into question whether this shift in society should be considered either purely positive or negative. Groes focuses on select modern novels reflecting on these social changes. I would argue the SCP is directly commenting on this shift.

The SCP's variety of genres makes more sense if we understand the SCP as a work of literature that is the product of a society undergoing a major social change spurred on by new ways of interacting with technology and information that demands participation in ways that were not previously required or even possible before. To answer why the SCP community is so focused on the apocalypse, we only need to recognize that they are trying to make sense of their changing society. The SCP utilizes digital horror as a means to express anxieties about and better understand their changing relationship with a rapidly developing technological landscape. Furthermore, new ways of connecting with one another as well as new ways of interacting with and interpreting information would logically lead to new ways of sharing, developing, and updating folklore and the stories we tell each other. The SCP Foundation allows the SCP community to express and examine hopes and anxieties about an increasingly democratized means of sharing stories and information. While the community champions these changes, it is significant that they do so by projecting their anxieties onto an autocratic shadow organization. A choice that reveals that there may still exist anxieties about this shift even as the SCP community acts to embrace it. The SCP, as a work of literature, provides a means for understanding society, and due to its ongoing nature and wide variety of texts, it is a source that warrants further critical attention. The SCP also provides an example of how literature may change to adapt to the information landscape through focusing on information as a source of horror and the development of data horror as a genre, as well as an increased emphasis on user-submitted

fiction. Certainly, user-submitted fiction, such as online horror communities, fanfiction, and online fiction platforms, such as Wattpad, has already garnered a fair share of critical attention. Still, as media becomes increasingly interactive and audiences take on a more active role in content creation, it is necessary to place further emphasis and critical attention on user-generated literature.

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