

Secure, Contain, Protect:
Building a Digital Folklore Mythos through Collaborative Legend
Creation

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Abstract

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The SCP Wiki is a collaborative creative writing website specializing in the bizarre and horrific. Within a fictional world, supernatural creatures threaten humanity's survival. The Foundation, a shadowy organization, aims to secure and contain these entities and protect the human race from extinction. Each SCP article delineates in scientific tone the containment procedures of a particular entity.

There are four distinctive elements of the SCP Wiki. First, the community, with its large user base and amount of content, can only exist online because of the accessibility of information and collaboration.

Second, the writers' artistic style intentionally mirrors the visual aesthetics of declassified government documents in order to lend realism to their own fictional works.

Third, the SCP Wiki community has collaboratively constructed an elaborate legend complex about the fictional Foundation, which they then engage with through writing and community participation. This demonstrates that, although it does not have to, reverse ostension, engagement with a self-made legend, can occur in a purely digital community.

Last, the community's group formation and reverse ostensive practices are mutually co-constructing. Group members are drawn to the SCP Wiki because of their interest in the content, but the content only exists because group members collaboratively construct it.

This thesis explores the unique group formation and folklore processes used by the SCP Wiki community. Despite its geographically distant users, the Wiki's community continues to grow. The SCP Wiki and its fiction work with the Foundation demonstrates how online communities engage with legend creation and ostension, and elucidates how reverse ostension and group formation interact.

Keywords: folklore; digital folklore; legend; narrative; SCP; SCP Foundation; digital performance; ostension; reverse ostension; folkloresque; creepypasta

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Chapter One: Building a Foundation

“In-character, what is the SCP Foundation? We are the last bastion of security in a world where natural laws rapidly break down. We are here to protect humanity from the things that go bump in the night, from people who wield power beyond mortal understanding. We are here to make the world a safer place. We are the holders of wonders, and the caretakers of dreams. We are why the world continues.”

–The SCP Wiki, *FAQ*



Figure 1. SCP Foundation CLASSIFIED. SCP Wiki

The first thing one sees when they access the SCP Wiki is bold bright red type reading **CLASSIFIED** (*Figure 1*). It would seem like the front page for a large government organization, a website that is not meant to be seen or accessed by the general public. The SCP Wiki is actually something quite different: a creative writing website. If the site’s homepage seems like a front for a mysterious organization, that is because it is. The SCP Wiki website is structured similarly to an online database such as Wikipedia, where for the most part each page corresponds to a particular article. The site is designed to mimic a database that contains entries created and maintained by a highly secretive organization, called The SCP Foundation. The Foundation is a clandestine organization composed of researchers and military-esque personnel. Its stated purpose is to find anomalous entities that exist on Earth, capture them, and contain them in their own secure facilities, as seen in its Mission Statement in *Figure 2*. Once the anomaly is in captivity, the Foundation studies its properties and effects in an attempt to understand how the

anomaly functions. The organization operates in near-absolute secrecy, hidden from the view of common people. As a global institute, it does collaborate with several national governments, but it is not beholden to a single country and seems to hold rights that supersede those of nations. For example, the organization has no issue traveling to any place on the planet. There may be some countries who themselves are entirely unaware of the organization's existence, though it is likely that most do.

Mankind in its present state has been around for a quarter of a million years, yet only the last 4,000 have been of any significance.

So, what did we do for nearly 250,000 years? We huddled in caves and around small fires, fearful of the things that we didn't understand. It was more than explaining why the sun came up, it was the mystery of enormous birds with heads of men and rocks that came to life. So we called them 'gods' and 'demons', begged them to spare us, and prayed for salvation.

In time, their numbers dwindled and ours rose. The world began to make more sense when there were fewer things to fear, yet the unexplained can never truly go away, as if the universe demands the absurd and impossible.

Mankind must not go back to hiding in fear. No one else will protect us, and we must stand up for ourselves.

While the rest of mankind dwells in the light, we must stand in the darkness to fight it, contain it, and shield it from the eyes of the public, so that others may live in a sane and normal world.



We secure. We contain. We protect.

— The Administrator

Figure 2. "Mission Statement". SCP Wiki.

The Foundation is not real, but rather a complex mythos collaboratively developed by users. The fictional universe in which it exists is very similar to our real world, but with the

addition of supernatural objects and creatures that pose a threat to the continued survival of humanity. Within this universe, the Foundation was established in order to protect humanity, and to keep them unaware of the dangers all around them. It is a fictional organization, drawn from users' imagination, which purports to house these supernatural objects and creatures. The abbreviation SCP stands for both the Foundation's motto, "Secure, Contain, Protect," and their unique brand of "Special Containment Procedures," the specific and often outlandish and creative ways that the Foundation uses to keep the anomalies secure. It is also the name that the organization uses to refer to the entities within its walls: SCPs (also sometimes written as 'SCiPs' or 'skips'). This nomenclature reduces the anomalies to mere numbers, calling them by names such as SCP-173, which obscures the monstrosity that may hide behind such an innocuous title.

Despite how much it may appear to be a prison, the Foundation has an unofficial slogan: 'cold, not cruel.' In response to a survey I conducted with SCP participants, user tako wrote, "...the foundation seems extremely cold and unerringly dedicated to containment, giving room for the reader to question whether the foundation is entirely good in a moral sense, especially when challenged by fringe groups or particularly sapient scps." Although the Foundation does capture entities, including anomalous humans, and contain them in cells the organization does not see itself as a villain. In their ethos, the need to protect the entirety of humanity justifies the price of the freedom a few of its members.

At this point, it is necessary to place the SCP Foundation in the larger dimension of digital literature and creativity. For as long as the Internet has existed, people have been using it to share their writing. Folklorists have begun to look at the world of fan fiction (Kitta 2016), in which authors take characters from a source medium, like a book or show, and write their own

stories involving those characters. Fan fiction is extremely popular, with several websites dedicated to hosting these works, such as archiveofourown.org. By engaging with known texts, authors can explore worlds that they already enjoy and take the narrative into their own hands.

Another genre of Internet literature that has exploded in popularity over time is creepypasta. Essentially, creepypasta are scary stories that are written and distributed online. The definition provided on Creepypasta.org reads, “Creepypasta is the internet definition for short stories designed to unnerve, disturb and frighten the reader” (creepypasta.org). They are similar to the spooky stories that are told to little kids around the campfire in the middle of pitch-black woods. The ultimate goal of creepypasta is to scare the reader, and many such stories are very successful in doing so. Creepypasta as a term derives from the Internet term copypasta, which is itself a portmanteau of the words ‘copy’ and ‘pasta’. The term refers to large portions of text being copy-pasted from one website to another, with the word paste changed to pasta for comedic effect. Creepypasta is a subset of copypasta, because it is usually text-based and often widely shared. Some creepypasta exist only as standalone narratives, while others may be multiple chapters or interwoven stories.

In their introduction for a special issue of the journal *Contemporary Legends*, which centers on popular Internet creation Slender Man, Trevor J. Blank and Lynne S. McNeill write,

...creepypasta is an emergent genre of Internet folklore that involves the creation and dissemination of a particular style of creative horror stories and images. It draws on the disturbing, monstrous, strange, grotesque, and/or unknown while invoking the thematic and structural qualities of legendary narratives, including the use of personal narratives; ritual; ostension; familiar “real” settings, contexts, and ancillary characters; and an accompanying air of plausibility in an effort to elicit feelings of playful uneasiness, paranoia, and genuine fright among audiences (Blank and McNeill 2015, 5).

Many creepypasta stories draw on pre-existing legend narratives for their inspiration. Slender Man is one of the most well-known creepypasta, with several derivative games and web series

based off his mythos. Andrew Peck suggests that the Slender Man mythos is based off popular understanding of paranormal experiences and media horror tropes (Peck 2015b). Not all creepypasta centers on cryptid-like creatures, however. Much like with traditional horror literature, the subject matter varies wildly.

The SCP Wiki is not creepypasta, but it is intimately related to the genre. Many users participate in both communities as writers or fans. A number of respondents to my survey noted that they had first come across the SCP Wiki by reading creepypasta stories on different websites and seeing it referenced or linked to, and were drawn in by the unique style of the writing. Not everyone enjoys both creepypasta and the SCP Wiki, however. User Chris writes, “Creepypasta exists as a platform for stories, whilst the Foundation itself is the story. It sucked me in because of that, when I’ve never been a fan of creepypasta [sic] or anything of the sort.” He hints at another crucial difference between the two. Creepypasta exists as a genre of storytelling, in which completely unrelated works fall under the same umbrella term. The Foundation, however, is more of a fictional universe where, although the articles are all separate entities, they are all related to the Foundation itself. Lastly, the SCP Wiki is different from creepypasta because of its writing structure. Creepypasta are traditionally first or third person narrative stories that have protagonists who take actions, while the Foundation’s articles are narrative-less and lack protagonists. The format of writing is specifically crafted to take on a clinical, emotionless, and remote tone. This topic will be discussed more in chapter three.

Although there are more than likely many other writing genres and communities, fan fiction, creepypasta, and the SCP Wiki stand out because they all possess their own large and dedicated communities with whom they share their works. These communities are often purely digital, thus they are imagined communities inherently. Imagined communities are groups that

individuals feel a part of even though they cannot know everyone who is a part of a group (Anderson 1991). Users in these communities cannot intimately know one another because they span the globe. For example, the SCP Foundation also has over 43,000 subscribers on Reddit and over 22,000 likes on their official Facebook page. The true number of total users is unquantifiable, though, as many people access the site without directly engaging with it. The Internet provides users with the space and tools to come together, to grow, and to establish themselves as a community.

In this thesis, I will be analyzing popular creative writing website the SCP Wiki. Specifically, I will showing how the community has developed a unique writing genre and built a fictional legend complex for a secretive, fictional organization called the SCP Foundation. In chapter two, I begin by looking at the ways that the SCP Wiki use the Internet to create a community of like-minded writers within a shared, non-corporeal space. The Wiki, as both a community and an artistic work, can only exist because of the Internet, as the site's presentation and the users' communication fundamentally relies on the tools and space the Internet provides. Chapter three expounds on the characteristic database-esque aesthetic style of the Wiki in order to demonstrate how the community draws upon pre-existing connotations of declassified documents in a folkloric way. Although folklorists do not think of such documents as folklore, I suggest here that it is possible for groups to take them as models and build them into a genre for their own creative purposes. I continue by using folklorist Jeffrey Tolbert's theory of reverse ostension to explain the creation and maintenance of the fictitious Foundation's mythos (2013). The community constructs the mythos by engaging with the Foundation as if it were real, even though it is their own invention. Lastly, I claim that Wiki's use of reverse ostension and its community building are mutually co-constructing. The community is established and maintained

through the user's reverse ostensive acts, while these acts are themselves constructed in response to the community. Throughout the chapters, I draw several quotes from the users themselves, of the 154 who responded to a survey I conducted in October 2016. A full list of their responses is available online, with a link provided in the appendix of this work.

**Chapter Two:
The Digital Writers' Circle**

*The community is in a continuous process of
reinvention. We're international and work with
people from other countries.*

–Vivax, SCP Wiki user

The SCP Wiki is not a ‘traditional’ community. They do not break bread, hold festivals, or share physical space. The entire community is contained within the website itself, along with a few outposts of the group on websites like Reddit and Facebook. What makes the SCP Wiki users a community is their shared love of the mythos that they have built around the Foundation. It is a community that can *only* exist online. Users are not only spread over the globe, but they also generate an immense catalog of works. There is no way that the community could have become as large as it is without the Internet bringing shared access to the content to all users. Kapchan writes that performance is “...where we balance on the edge of the imaginary and the real” (2003, 137). The Foundation takes this a step farther, as the website itself acts as both a community center and the face of the fictional Foundation. This leads to a dual performance of users’ competence in writing the articles and establishing group identity through participation with others.

The SCP Wiki emulates a database in the form of a ‘wiki’, a term that derives from the popular reference website Wikipedia. Much like real encyclopedias, both Wikipedia and wikis act as centralized hubs of information, with individual pages dedicated to discrete topics. Wikis are created and maintained by users, who regularly update the information found on the site. Wikis often center on a single topic, such as a television show like Star Trek or a book series like Harry Potter. The wiki’s website acts as a storehouse of user-created entries that detail different aspects of the topic. For example, a wiki for a book series would have pages for each individual character, as well as the organizations and locations within the series. Wikis are vernacular fan

works that gather up information from source material and then organize it into the wiki format. The SCP Wiki is unique, however, because it does not reference an outside work; instead, it references itself. The SCP Wiki community uses their site as a means of constructing the database of the fictional Foundation. Although community members write all of the content on the site, the articles themselves are structured to appear as though fictional Foundation personnel wrote them. This heightens the realism of the organization by obfuscating the authors and the community, which I discuss in detail in chapter four. The SCP Wiki is two things at once: it is the place where the community comes together to create their collaborative mythos and it is the enactment of that mythos itself.

Much like how actors perform on a stage, the SCP Wiki community uses their website as the location for their collaborative performance. This format can only work in a digital context. Consider a traditional writers' circle, in which a group of authors physically sit down together and exchange their work. Writers' circles often work with paper copies of their work, and they share their ideas vocally in person. If the SCP Wiki were such a group, there is no way they could have generated such an expansive and collaborative body of work. Instead, the removal of physical restrictions provided by the Internet allows them to establish a broader community in terms of geographic barriers.

Although over 55% of the tens of thousands of users of the SCP Foundation website live in the United States, the top ten countries of residence also include Canada, England, Australia, France, Germany, Brazil, Italy, Mexico, and Scotland (SCP Foundation: 2016 Community Survey). Not everyone who enjoys the website posts in the forums or interacts with the community; many are casual browsers. The users span several time zones across the globe. Gathering tens of thousands of people together, particularly from such distant regions, would be

a logistical nightmare. It seems unlikely that any technology today would allow so many people to interact simultaneously, except for the Internet. A conference call with forty thousand people might get a bit hectic, after all.

The Internet allows users to gather in a way that facilitates group formation across time and space. Folklorist Andrew Peck states that one of the ways that digital interaction differs from real life communication is that it occurs asynchronously (Peck 2015). Users are able to post articles, comments, and forum posts to the site at a time that best suits them; and other users can engage with those posts at any time, no matter how far in the future it may be. Users can respond to posts online days, weeks, and even years after the original comment or question was posted. Replying to a year old forum post is possible, though it is questionable whether the original user will see the response after such a long time. A comparable analog for this is letter writing, though this also faces some of the same barriers as the Internet due to geographical distance. A dialogue online can take place over significant expanses of time, and the SCP Wiki uses this to their advantage. The website was started in 2007, and users have contributed thousands of articles in the past ten years. All of them are still accessible, still able to be interacted with by any user in the community. The articles remain relevant regardless of how old they are.

In addition to making the logistical aspects of the collaborative writing more manageable, the Internet also facilitates the community's group formation and sense of cohesion. In person, groups form their shared identity through common experiences; friendships and bonds are made through events such as attending a sports game or concert, going to the same school, having the same hobby or skill, or liking the same music. People connect over these shared experiences, establish friendships, and begin to organize themselves into groups. SCP Wiki users, however, cannot form groups in this way because of how dispersed they are globally. Despite the distance,

the SCP Wiki community has developed its own integrated speech community, using the Internet to facilitate their collaboration. Richard Bauman writes,

...each speech community will make use of a structured set of distinctive communicative means from among its resources in culturally conventionalized and culture-specific ways to key the performance frame, such that all communication that takes place within that frame is to be understood as performance within that community. (Bauman 1977, 16)

Again, there are two aspects of the SCP Wiki that operate simultaneously: the website as community and the website as façade for the Foundation. In both, the community makes use of performance through the means of the Internet. The articles constitute performative acts that can be judged based on their quality and adherence to the style of writing. Before an article is posted, the author submits it on a forum and requests critiques from other users. After integrating that critique, the authors can post the articles as official submissions, complete with their own SCP number. While a single author writes each article, other users are able to contribute to and edit the article with their critique even after it is posted. Similarly, articles are not signed; it is possible to discover the author's name by digging into the history of edits made to the page, but the format does not offer attention or obvious credit to the creative writer whose work other site members enjoy. This information is completely de-emphasized because it breaks the sense of realism that is so important to the Foundation's portrayal. In this community, authors are not contributing work in order to achieve recognition or improve their writing skills (although this certainly happens). While most writers' circles focus on improving their own works for personal reasons, the SCP community's authors write specifically for the community-focused goal of improving the larger collaborative work that constitutes the Foundation's legend complex.

Because the community only exists in an online context, users of the SCP Wiki construct their identities anonymously and without reference to many physical aspects of themselves. They have only a username, an avatar, and their own words with which to construct their identity

within the group. This may seem like a hindrance to the community; after all how can people bond if they do not truly know one another? However, users find this to be a benefit of the Internet because there is less fear of personal rejection or physical harassment. They are free to express themselves more openly, which for the SCP Wiki community has led to better article critiques and a stronger sense of community. User Vivax writes, “There's a [high] degree of internal consistency and quality then other pasta. The community is in a continuous process of reinvention.” It is not the users themselves, but their contributions that are judged and this is all that truly matters when building a collaborative mythos like the Foundation. Furthermore, the SCP entries are not only performances of identity or of a role, but aesthetic performances. As Richard Bauman argues, performers are evaluated by how well they enhance the experience of the audience (1977: 11), and this is certainly true for SCP authors because they write to shape users’ experience with the Foundation. 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. Unless an author contributes frequently, is a part of the site’s staff, or is harassing other users, the contributions of all users are judged equally depending on their content; no one is singled out for fame because of the quality of their contributions.

While they do not share *physical* experiences, users do share interest in the Foundation and its fictional universe. Group identity is formed through users’ interactions with one another, even though they are, essentially, anonymous. The only important thing is that the person is contributing to the community in a positive manner, either through writing or through

commenting. By interacting with one another in a shared digital space, as well as the fictional one that the Foundation exists in, users are bound together.

The aspect of digital performance is important to consider in this context because it directly affects group formation. The way that writers engage with one another is structured by the shared online space. The SCP Wiki has developed within the context of the Internet, a fact which has helped shape the form in which it now exists and the ways that individual users participate in the community and establish themselves as community members. The Internet and its effect on how social interaction takes place are critical to understanding the space that the SCP Wiki occupies. The articles that make up the Foundation's 'database' are creative works generated by users with the express purpose of existing digitally. The existence of the database is based on the idea of shared access. If the Foundation kept its articles in a spiral notebook, for example, it would not have flourished into the community that it is now. A digital repertoire of fantastic anomalies provides users with much easier access and ability to contribute. The database is not real in the sense that it does not have an analog counterpart; however, the act of posting written works to the site establishes the site's validity as a creative platform. The digital format provides the perfect playground for users to experiment artistically, building new and dynamic ways of constructing unique written works. Those works, however, contribute to the success of the fictional universe and the cohesion of the community rather than to the reputation of the individual creator. The SCP Wiki's existence and success demonstrate that the Internet can fundamentally change community building.

Chapter Three:

Declassified: Governmental Folkloresque

In-character, the Foundation may put false and contradictory information in "public" versions of SCP articles as a security measure.

–The SCP Wiki, *Questions About SCPs & Stories*

The SCP Wiki website sets the tone for the mysterious articles to follow by having a dim, brick red header image sporting the name of the Foundation and its slogan hover oppressively over the site's content. Under this is a collection of links to SCP articles organized by series number, each of which contains 1,000 SCP articles. The numerical series of articles does not necessarily correspond to their chronological date of submission, however. Users can pick which number to use for their article as long as that number is freely available. Currently, the community is working to fill out Series III, deciding to fill out all of the numbers 2000-2999 before the creation of further series. The website is designed in a way that employees of the fictional Foundation could use it to complete their own work within the organization. For example, an employee curious about the anomaly they are assigned to may look up that entity's file, though perhaps they might be better off not knowing what horrors lurk behind the walls they guard.

SCP-895: Anatomy of an SCP

In order to appreciate how the SCP articles serve as the building blocks of the Foundation legend complex, we need to understand what an SCP article typically looks like. For this, I have chosen SCP-895, titled "Camera Disruption," though I will use additional SCPs to help illustrate specific points. Titles for articles only appear when the SCPs are listed numerically and not on the actual article itself. In this case, the titles represent the name of the article itself as a work of fiction, similar to naming a short story, and not necessarily the name of the anomaly described in

the article. Because of this, users almost exclusively refer to the articles and entities by their SCP number, which takes on the role of title. Each article looks identical in format, although there are a number of stylistic variants and additional content that can authors incorporate which I will discuss later.

While we will be looking specifically at the format in this chapter, it is important to note that readers can interpret the articles in numerous ways. The most straightforward is that users knowingly read them as a work of fiction they enjoy as readers. On some level, I think this is always the case. However, many authors and readers of the site read the articles with a more in-depth engagement. Whether they imagine themselves as low-level personnel or as an administrator with high security clearance, they read the articles from an ‘in-universe’ perspective as if they are an employee of the Foundation reading the file. Indeed, the writing style itself encourages this type of engagement. I will go into more detail about this in the chapter on reverse ostension.

Also, articles are not the only creative works on the SCP Wiki. There are also sections of the site dedicated to ‘Tales’, which are stories complete with characters and narrative structure, as well as small but dedicated role-playing communities who interact as if they are actual personnel. However, the SCP articles are the main feature of the site and the one that users contribute the most; it is for this reason that I have focused exclusively on them.

Numerical Naming

SCP-####: Each article begins the exact same way. The very first piece of information we are given is the anomaly’s identification number, in this case SCP-895. This designation is the official name by which both Foundation “staff” and the community’s users will refer to the

entity or object. The use of seemingly arbitrary numerical classifications draws upon the common practice of corrective facilities giving identification numbers to prisoners. Doing this strips the prisoner of all personal context, effectively dehumanizing and objectifying them. The rationale behind this suggests that the prison officials will treat the person more like an object, preventing them from developing personal connections with the prisoners. This is also the case for the Foundation; because many of the SCPs are humanoid and/or capable of verbal communication, there is a risk of the SCP befriending or confusing a guard. This may enable the SCP to escape its confinement and lead to what the community calls a “containment breach.” In order to prevent this, the Foundation relies upon the numerical naming system as the first measure of safety. In addition, the Foundation is not interested in holding to moral or ethical imperatives or providing compassionate conditions for the anomalies they contain, being more interested in the protection of society and the furthering of scientific knowledge. Many are held in less than humane conditions and are often subjected to horrific experiments. The numerical system also allows officials to distance themselves from the SCP in order to justify their abhorrent treatment.

Object Classes

The next piece of information we are given is the anomaly’s object class. On the website’s guide to object classes it is written, “The class assigned to an object is generally determined by a number of factors, but most importantly by a combination of its difficulty to contain as well as the danger posed to Foundation personnel and humanity at large.” The classification is not static either: as the Foundation interacts with the object and understands it better, they may consider updating its classification. There are three primary classifications for

SCPs: Safe, Euclid, and Keter. Objects that the Foundation deems Safe pose little to no threat to humans, either because they are inherently non-dangerous or because, even though they may be dangerous, they can be safely contained and rendered harmless. For example, SCP-348 is a Chinese ceramic bowl that, when placed in front of a human who is sick, will automatically fill itself with soup. The soup is not harmful to ingest and poses no threat to humans, so it is deemed safe as it is inherently not dangerous. Alternatively, SCP-1025 is a book entitled "The Encyclopedia of Common Diseases." When a person reads about an illness they begin to exhibit signs of that illness themselves. This SCP is considered safe despite the fact that it can actually be dangerous because the only requirement for avoiding its harmful side effects is to prevent read it.

The Euclid classification acts as an intermediary between 'essentially harmless' and 'dear god, please do not let this thing escape because the world will end'. As the Object Class guide notes, most anomalies at the Foundation possess this classification because they are,

...either insufficiently understood or inherently unpredictable, such that reliable containment is not always possible, but do not pose sufficient threat to qualify for Keter classification... In particular, any anomaly that exhibits autonomy, sentience and/or sapience is generally classified a Euclid-class entity at minimum, due to the inherent unpredictability of an object that can act or think on its own.

An example of a Euclid class is SCP-1471, a mobile application that causes the phone to receive messages containing images of a particularly spooky entity in places where the phone's owner often goes. Over time, the images become closer to the owner's current location, until they are able to see the entity in their peripheral vision and on reflective surfaces. Although the entity does not enact any violent behavior, the mechanisms of its operation are not fully understood and so it is given the Euclid classification.

The most dangerous object class that an SCP can be assigned is Keter. Keter class objects can be exceptionally difficult to contain, pose extreme risk to Foundation personnel or the human



SCP Foundation

Secure, Contain, Protect

[SCP Series I](#)
[Series II](#)
[Series III](#)
[Other](#)
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[Information](#)
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SCP-895

rating: +912

Item #: SCP-895

Object Class: Euclid

Special Containment Procedures: SCP-895 is sealed closed and stored in an isolated underground containment cell at a depth of approximately 100 meters. No cameras, microphones, or other surveillance equipment may be brought within the 10 meter "Red Zone" radius of SCP-895 without express permission from at least two (2) Level 3 personnel.

Any on-site personnel exhibiting unusual behavior or signs of psychological trauma are to be screened immediately, and removed from the site or terminated as the situation warrants.

Description: SCP-895 is an ornate oak coffin recovered from the ████████ Mortuary by SCP personnel on ████████, following reports of unusual footage captured by surveillance equipment installed at that location. When questioned, mortuary staff were unable to determine the source of SCP-895 and how it was transported to the location. Upon attempting to open SCP-895, agents on location found the object empty; however, observers viewing the live camera feed were [DATA EXPUNGED]. Until further notice, SCP-895 must remain closed at all times.

SCP-895 causes disruptions in video and photographic surveillance equipment within 50 meters similar to vivid, disturbing hallucinations with variable duration and regularity corresponding to the camera's proximity to SCP-895. Within a range of 5 meters from SCP-895, footage captured can cause severe psychological trauma and hysteria in most subjects. These disruptions do not extend to observers physically present within the area.

Addendum 895-01: Audio excerpt from the SCP-895 Recovery Log (██████)

03:41L - **Command:** Team One, Command. All civilians have been detained and evacuated. You are cleared to move in and capture.

03:41L - **T1Lead:** Command, One Lead. Roger, we are moving in.

03:43L - **T1Lead:** We are inside the lobby. Video feed check.

03:44L - **Command:** Team One, Command. We are receiving...[pause]...we are seeing blood on the walls, please confirm.

03:44L - **T1Lead:** Negative, Command, it's clean in here. Nothing out of the ordinary.

03:45L - **Command:** ... it's gone. Team One, advise possible memetic properties in effect.

03:45L - **T1Lead:** Copy, Command. Team One moving into storage area.

03:47L - **T1Lead:** We are in the storage area, object located.

03:48L - **Command:** Christ, it's moving... Team One, confirm, object appears to be alive and moving.

03:48L - **T1Lead:** ... Command, negative, we see no movement. Object appears to be normal.

03:48L - **T1Lead:** Two, open it up.

03:48L - *Sounds of weapons being readied, followed by creaking as object is opened.*

03:49L - **T1-2:** Sir, it's empty.

03:50L - **T1Lead:** Command, One Lead. The object appears to be empty.

03:51L - **T1Lead:** Command, do you copy?

03:51L - **Command:** *Sounds of screaming and retching.*

03:51L - **T1Lead:** Command, do you copy?!

03:52L - **T1Lead:** Shit, we're bugging out. Close that thing!

Addendum 895-02: Following Incident [DATA EXPUNGED] and the loss of 3 personnel, the Red Zone of SCP-895 has been extended from 5 meters to 10 meters, and security personnel shifts have been reduced to 4 hours as a precaution.

cognitohazard container engraved euclid hallucination scp visual wooden

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User Resources

Figure 5. SCP-895 "Camera Disruption" SCP Wiki

race as a whole, or some combination thereof. Because they are so extremely dangerous, these SCPs are often given much stricter containment procedures, and are kept under heavy security at all times. There are a few other, lesser-used classes in the Foundation's repertoire, but a vast majority fall within these three classes.

Containment Procedures

The section that comes after the object's number and class, the special containment procedures, delineates in exacting detail how the object is to be contained. It is also one of the inspirations for the name of the SCP Foundation, as containment is the second main goal of the organization. The containment procedures can vary as significantly as the SCPs themselves do, and it is an expectation for writers to create only the most fitting procedures instead of over exaggerating them. The How to Write an SCP Guide states,

Containment of an object should be clear and logical. No flourish, no extraneous resources; every SCP should be provided with what it needs, no more, no less...Overall, containment must strike a balance between logically and successfully containing an object as well as current technology is capable of, and being reasonable in its demands for resources. Most SCPs don't need an on-site nuke to contain them.

The SCP's object class also affects the type of containment procedures necessary, since the threat posed by a Keter class object is significantly higher than for a more harmless one. Like all aspects of the article, the tone of this section is clinical and scientific. Most, if not all, measurements are given in metric in order to prevent confusion. In particular, this section is written as a directive, such that a Foundation employee who is charged with containing that object can access it and follow the procedures directly. A guide on the site named Dr. Mackenzie's Common SCP Pitfalls reads,

...the Special Containment Procedures section of a document is generally thought of as the emergency instructions for maintaining or re-asserting containment over

an object in case of a catastrophic failure or breach. A responding team has to know how to keep themselves and the SCP safe until a more permanent solution can be established.

By following the instructions that are contained in the Special Containment Procedures section of the report, the Foundation can prevent or at least lessen the risk of a containment breach.

One of the interesting aspects of the special containment procedures is that it comes *before* the description of the SCP, which colors the readers' perception of the object itself without even knowing the characteristics of object itself. For SCP-895, our example from *Figure 5*, the containment procedures specify that it must be isolated 100 meters underground, and no camera or electronic recording devices can be brought close to it unless you have the permission of two Level 3 personnel. This stylistic choice piques the readers' interest by providing answers to unspoken questions. Why does SCP-895 need to be kept so far underground, and what effect does it have on recording equipment that it requires so many personnel to consent before equipment can even be brought near it? The reasoning behind the containment procedures may not be expressly stated, but most often can be determined based on the object's description.

Description

At last, after teasing information, the author provides a detailed physical description of the object itself as well as its non-physical characteristics and effects. A major component of SCP articles is the clinical, scientific tone in which they are written. Although I will go into more detail on this aspect later, it is important to note that writers are encouraged to write their articles from the position of researchers within the Foundation. The How to Write an SCP Guide states,

You're writing from the perspective of an SCP researcher...researchers should try to be detached and unemotional in their writing. Not because they don't have emotions, but because letting that slip into their writing makes them seem less objective and makes the writing more emotionally charged.

The emphasis on writing from this in-universe perspective shapes the entirety of the writing process, but becomes most evident in the SCP's description. Consider modern horror stories, including many creepypasta as well as novels and short stories. Authors describe many creatures in relation to the narrator, through excruciating detail about the closeness of monster's breath bearing down on their neck for example. These emotionally complex narratives instill fear in the reader by allowing the reader to assume the role of the narrator and feel as if the monster is bearing down upon them. The SCP Wiki, however, takes an alternative take on description by focusing on the detached tone and syntax. In late 2016, I was fortunate enough to be able to conduct a survey of the website's community members in which one question specifically asked users about what they say as the purpose of the writing style. User Damien responded,

The choice of the Foundation to format its articles as declassified documentation forces the reader to engage with the material in ways that other urban horror stories do not. Where someone may describe a monster as "a huge, drooling beast with two rows of razor-sharp teeth", a Foundation document would describe the same creature as "A semi-sapient canid approximately 9 metres long from snout to tail. SCP-#### has two (2) rows of sharpened incisors which are used for dismembering and disemboweling its victims." The measured and straightforward delivery of the material does not invoke emotion in the reader in the traditional sense of it being told; rather, the reader is made aware of the object and left to fill in the blanks with his own imagination, which is often far scarier than a long-winded paragraph describing exactly how 'bad' this particular thing is.

As Damien notes, SCPs are able to achieve a sense of fear in readers despite the uniqueness of their stylistic approach. Instead of providing them with the space to imagine themselves as the narrators, readers are encouraged to interact with the writing specifically because style triggers an imaginative response. In a classic narrative style, the author describes the creature in the process of dismembering human, often using details that help the reader to imagine the scene as the author intends. Essentially, the author is using words as a medium for painting a mental image within the reader's mind. The SCP style, however, adamantly refuses to provide such evocative details, instead opting for a careful delineation of the creature's *potential* for dismembering humans. This

leaves the reader free to imagine that situation in a way that draws upon their own personal intrinsic fears. After all, it is often the idea of what lurks in the darkness that scares us more than the monsters themselves.

In the case of SCP-895, the anomaly is a seemingly innocuous oak coffin. Here the article provides us with the reason for the staunch prohibition of recording devices: the coffin is capable of creating disturbing images on the video that are not present in real life. In *Figure 5*, blood splatter on the walls spells out the words “GET OUT.” In a feature unique to this SCP, the image is actually purported to be a live feed of the coffin, which cycles between gruesome images of the chamber full of body parts and blood splatter followed by a conspicuously clean chamber as if the blood was never there. The image itself is actually a perpetually looping GIF, but the date information beneath the image depicts the time at the reader’s location updating by the second much like an actual live feed might. The changing image and time create the illusion of a live feed, which provides an incredibly immersive reaction to the SCP because the reader can feel as if they are watching an actual live feed.

Some SCPs have additional components or sub-entities associated with them, the variety of which evades description. Because these components are inherently tied to the original SCP, the Foundation gives them derivative classifications in ascending numerical order, such as SCP-####-1 followed by -2, or alternatively SCP-####-A and -B. This taxonomy represents their dependence on the main SCP while differentiating it as a separate entity. There are two common types of sub-entity: the first of which are objects or entities that the main SCP produces or that appear in conjunction with it, and the second are entities that are affected by the SCP through means like infection, possession, or mental transference. An example of the first is SCP-087, a platform staircase similar to one that can be found in a typical college campus that appears to be

unending. Any person descending the staircase eventually encounters SCP-087-1, a disembodied head that lacks pupils, nostrils, and mouth. The face only appears in conjunction with the staircase, so it is marked as a sub-entity of SCP-087. SCP-637 is an example of the second type. It is a black cat that exists only in the mind of an elderly woman named Margie, who is given the classification of SCP-637-2. To her, the cat appears completely unanomalous and acts like a normal house cat. The containment procedures prohibit Margie be given any drawing instruments because if she were to draw the cat and another person views that drawing, the cat would be able to enter the mind of that person. In this case, the sub-entities skip classification -1. Presumably, Margie is not the first human to have encountered SCP-637, and although that person or persons are unknown to the Foundation, Margie is given the designation of 637-2 to highlight this fact.

Addendum

Imagine a manila folder with the words “TOP SECRET” stamped across the front. Inside are a number of documents paper clipped together: photos, receipts, lab results, or anything that is not directly related to the information that is considered of highest importance. The addenda of SCP articles function similarly to those additional materials, providing authors the space for supplementary content, such as transcripts, experiment logs, documents, and/or evidence, particularly related to how the Foundation has interacted with the anomaly during capturing and containing it. Addenda are numbered in a similar manner as typical of documents labeled in a database. For example, “Addendum 895-01” or “Addendum 231-a” demarcate which SCP they are related to.

Addendum — (Plural: addenda.) An additional section of a SCP article that either expands on specific aspects of the primary Description, shows a progression of information over time, or otherwise provides additional insight that does not fit into

the Description block. All test logs, interviews, and exploratory information are generally written as addenda. (Dr. Mackenzie's Glossary of Terms)

While the use of addenda is optional, many authors utilize them to enhance the immersive elements of their articles. Some addenda do contain narrative-like sections that provide a much more detailed and descriptive perspective of events that take place over time, as opposed to a static description, though they are still characteristically detached in tone. These sections contain more “subject did x” statements, while the description is purely a “subject is x” report. SCP-093, a red stone disk capable of producing alternate dimensions, possesses such narratives, specifically accounts of D-class personnel entering the alternate dimension, how the D-class behaved once there, and the events that transpired. In addition to narratives, SCP-093's addenda also contain several transcriptions of newspaper clippings that the D-class retrieved while in the alternate dimension, descriptions of tests Foundation researchers performed on SCP-093 and their results, and a copy of the original iteration of the SCP article itself, as researchers have presumably updated the current version after testing.

In our example article SCP-895, the author provides an addendum consisting of a transcript of an audio session, in which organizers tested the effects of the coffin. In fact, this is how the Foundation confirmed the visual discrepancies between videotaped and live perspectives of the coffin. Those physically present saw nothing unusual while those watching remotely witnessed extremely graphic and bloody images.

The Document Aesthetic

The style and format of a typical SCP article may seem eerily familiar to some. The style and clinical tone are similar to government documents, conjuring up ideas of hidden archives filed away out of site until, after decades, they become declassified. *Figure 6* is a memorandum

from the controversial 1950's government program MK Ultra, an operation in which the government tested the effects of LSD on humans without their knowledge or consent. It was a covert experiment by the government to determine if mind control, induced by the psychoactive effects of the drug administered, was a viable tool for combat. Although the government destroyed a significant number of documents from the project in order to cover-up the unethical experiments, some survived until 1977, when they were declassified under the Freedom of Information Act ("Project MKUltra"). I chose MK Ultra as a real life source of comparison with the SCP Foundation for numerous reasons related to both its style and format.

Style

The first and most obvious stylistic similarity is that both MK Ultra and the SCP Foundation revolve around secretive organizations engaging in highly problematic behavior unbeknownst to the general population. They both share an intense amount of confidentiality regarding their operations. The organizations involved with the MK Ultra experiments were nebulous, consisting of universities and independent science centers in addition to government officials and facilities. This decentralization makes it difficult to hold one group accountable. However, the experiments breached so many ethical mores that those in charge felt that the only way to protect themselves and the others involved was to enact the ultimate form of redaction: destroy hundreds of thousands of documents. Information on several key players was lost during the document purge, making the extent of their involvement impossible to know. Although the SCP Foundation consists of a solitary organization, it possesses a similar nebulous structure. The names of some administrators and high-level personnel remain visible, but for the most part the identities of those involved are kept under the strictest secrecy. The Foundation also keeps the physical locations of its many sites carefully hidden from public knowledge. Both MK Ultra and

140-83
DRAFT

29 May 1963

MEMORANDUM FOR : THE RECORD
SUBJECT : MKULTRA, Subproject 140

1. The purpose of this subproject is to provide for the continuation of investigational programs involving utilization of human volunteer subjects and the services of [REDACTED]

2. This program is designed to exploit clinical, laboratory and institutional facilities as well as professional knowledge in providing answers to specific questions and solutions to specific problems of direct interest to the Agency. This subproject will permit the utilization of the professional services of [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] who is located in [REDACTED]

3. The scope of [REDACTED] services will include the following:

- a. Consultation with TSD on programs of technical interest.
 - b. Maintain an investigational cover activity for backstopping and use in conducting clinical evaluation and feasibility trials of interest to TSD.
 - c. On request, assist in designing experimental
- [REDACTED]

Figure 6. MK Ultra Memo, 29 May 1963. Courtesy of Internet Archives.

the SCP Foundation base the success of their clandestine operations on the public being completely unaware of the horrors that are taking place.

Both projects are stylistically similar in that they possess a specific form of communication, primarily that of detachment. As noted above, one of the requirements for writing an SCP is to write from the perspective of a Foundation researcher who is “detached and unemotional.” Most scientific and official writing strives for objectivity. To achieve this, authors are encouraged to write in a way that lacks emotion, which they can accomplish in a handful of ways. For instance, these types of documents usually lack any sense of narration or narrative voice. For the most part, the documents serve as a way to delineate information, not to tell a story. An example of this is the lack of descriptive adjectives used in the text. There are few, if any, judgment-based adjectives; things are not ‘gut-wrenching’, ‘horrific’, or even ‘bad’. Such adjectives imply a narrator of some sort who is providing their own perspective of what is being described, as is common of creepypasta stories, but they also lead to a loss of objectivity. For this reason, authors avoid judgment adjectives whenever possible. They can supply descriptive adjectives, however, though the quantity of these depends on the author. SCP-895, for example, is described using a descriptive adjective only once: “an *ornate* oak coffin.” While notions of what is and is not ornate may veer into the realm of philosophy, in typical use the word ornate is descriptive, indicating something that possesses intricate details. This would be as statement of fact and not opinion, thus not referencing any judgment on behalf of the author. While people are ultimately responsible for writing the SCP articles, whether one takes that to mean the pseudo-researcher or the actual author, the minimization of narrative voice is one of the most direct ways that writers establish a sense of objectivity.

A second aspect of narrative consists of the telling of a series of events that take place in time. Authors typically do not do this in SCP articles because, as with judgment adjectives, it implies the author/narrator's point of view instead of an objective one. That is not to say that events do not take place over time in SCP articles, however. When authors do use temporal narration, they present it in a way that makes it clear that the information comes from an alternative source and the author is not supplying it directly. For example, SCP-895's first addendum contains an audio transcript delineating how Foundation personnel tested the anomalous effects of the coffin, complete with timestamps. These events clearly take place over time, but because it is framed as an addendum and transcript, it is clear that the narrator/author is not the one telling the sequence, thus preserving the lack of narrative voice.

The second addendum of SCP-895 sterilely states that, after the incident, the conditions of the SCP's containment were altered. This returns the article to the narrator-less style, with a dedicated focus on providing accurate and objective data instead of judgmental points of view. It is through this lack of narrative voice that SCP articles establish their connection with documents like MK Ultra. SCP authors are required to write in this style for all of their articles. While it is a skill to be able to write this way, the website does offer a few tips in the form of a guide named Clinical Tone: Declassified:

“What should you think about when writing in a clinical tone?

- Avoid contractions
- Avoid colloquialisms
- Incorporate quantitative measurements
- What you see is what you describe
- The object is dead to you

Hitting all these boxes might not guarantee perfectly clinical tone - that only comes with practice - but it should get you extremely close to that mark.”

The ultimate goal of maintaining this style is to completely remove the narrator, and thus provide an objective account. Objectivity is key to allowing readers to see the Foundation as a legitimate, or at least realistic, organization.

Format

While style is critical to communicating in a document-esque tone, it is perhaps more important that the articles look the part. The visual characteristics of government documents make them easily recognizable and help establish the document's formality. Articles on the SCP Foundation clearly emulate these characteristics. For example, the MK Ultra document in *Figure 6* is broken up into a series of segments carefully delineated by their heading and numerical order. SCP articles, too, follow a distinct orderly categorization. Containment procedures always come before descriptions, just as subject headings come before their constituent parts. Although the format of SCP articles does not mimic this particular document's format exactly, it is still clearly related aesthetically. After all, although there are many different styles of documentation that following different formatting, they all adhere to the concept of what scientific documentation should look like in general; formal, organized, delineated, everything in its place.

SCP articles mimic documentation format in terms of their individual details as well. One of the most striking features of the MK Ultra document is the heavy use of redaction throughout. These tactics are used to obscure information from the view of the reader. Whether that information remains available for the privileged few is unknown, but the redaction makes it blatantly clear that the redacted information has been deemed too dangerous or sensitive to be shared, leaving those who lack the relevant clearance level left in the dark. Names and dates are often erased to protect the identities of those involved. Techniques for erasing data like this are

also prevalent in SCP articles as well. SCP-895 uses blacked out text such as [REDACTED] in addition to forms like [REDACTED] or [DATA EXPUNGED]. In fact, all three of these techniques have different meanings within the SCP Foundation writing style, though the specifics may vary depending on which user you ask.. User EchoFourDelta, quoted in a guide entitled Zen and the Art of [DATA EXPUNGED], writes “Redacted means that the information has simply been withheld from that iteration; expunging something is completely deleting it, the data no longer exist.” As a reader of the site, I tend to view the black bars as a similar means of redaction as the black marker in the MK Ultra documents, where the information has been physically stricken from the record and is unrecoverable; while data that has been expunged or redacted still exists somewhere in the Foundation’s records, but is only accessible to a select few. Though these definitions are by no means universally shared, it is worth pointing out that the techniques are often seen as having distinct nuances, with some preferred over others depending on the situation. Authors utilize these information eliminating techniques within SCP articles as a means to elicit fear and/or curiosity from readers. The How to Write an SCP guide reads,

Redactions, [DATA EXPUNGED], and similar censorship can be used to add mystery or remove extraneous data. **You should know what information you are expunging.** Don't expunge something so you don't need to write it; hide key information to draw the reader in deeper. Make them wonder what's behind the hidden information. (emphasis original)

Within SCP-895 are examples of two of the techniques, employed for different purposes. The first encountered is the black bar style: “SCP-895 is an ornate oak coffin recovered from the [REDACTED] Mortuary by SCP personnel on [REDACTED]...” The hidden data is clearly potentially incriminating identification information. It is safe to assume that the Mortuary has an official name, but the Foundation does not permit us as readers to know what it is. Later on, the article states, “Following Incident [DATA EXPUNGED] and the loss of 3 personnel, the Red Zone of SCP-895 has been extended from 5 meters to 10 meters...” The Incident referenced

corresponds to the events that are recorded in the audio transcript. While we know the events that transpired, its number is inaccessible to us. Presumably, the Foundation holds some record of the events on file, but knowing the incident number is most likely required for access. In this case, expungement may remind the reader that there is a plethora of information within the Foundation. Sometimes it is the hint of further knowledge that tells us how little we really know.

Another way that SCP articles are similar to documents like MK Ultra is their classification. Many a manilla folder has been stamped with the words ‘Top Secret’ or ‘Eyes Only!’ in an effort to maintain absolute confidentiality about the contents within. The motif is so common that it can even be found in clip art folders, readily accessible to paste over personal use documents. Given that the SCP Foundation is an organization wholly bent on preserving the integrity and confidentiality of their documents, it seems obvious that they, too, would use such markings. Although not many articles directly reference such labels, some do and to great effect. SCP-008, shown in *Figure 7*, makes an especially intriguing use of it. When a reader first loads the page for SCP-008, they are presented with a page that vibrantly demands the user present their Level 4 Clearance in order to gain access to the article. In fact, this text is a link; all a user has to do is click it. Once pressed, the page displays text that tells you your clearance was accepted, below which the contents of the article are displayed. This ingenious use of classification immerses the reader immensely. Although no actual clearance was presented, the fact that the article is demonstrated to be secret allows the reader to feel as if they are special in receiving access.



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◆ Recent Changes

◆ Most Recently Created

◆ Most Recently Edited

◆ Site News Hub

SCP-008

rating: +325 + - ✕


BY ORDER OF THE OVERSEER COUNCIL

THIS FILE IS SUBJECT TO LEVEL 4 CLASSIFICATION

== LEVEL 4 CLEARANCE IS REQUIRED ==

- Please input security credentials -

Create account or Sign in



SCP Foundation

Secure, Contain, Protect






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User Resources

SCP-008

rating: +325
+
-

BY ORDER OF THE OVERSEER COUNCIL

THIS FILE IS SUBJECT TO LEVEL 4 CLASSIFICATION

== LEVEL 4 CLEARANCE IS REQUIRED ==

- Security clearance adequate. Accessing file...

Item #: SCP-008

Object Class: Euclid

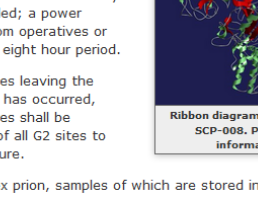
Special Containment Procedures: SCP-008 samples have been deemed Class V extreme biological hazards, and all related protocols apply. Incineration and irradiation measures will be deployed in the event of political or military action which may result in the facility being dismantled; a power failure; or zero communications from operatives or outside channels during any given eight hour period.

The quarantine period for operatives leaving the facility is four months. If a breach has occurred, incineration and irradiation measures shall be deployed. It should be the policy of all G2 sites to not prepare an evacuation procedure.

Description: SCP-008 is a complex prion, samples of which are stored in each of the known G2 sites. Research into SCP-008 is highly classified and primarily aimed at preventing research which may lead to the synthesis of SCP-008 in the distant future. Traits of the SCP-008 prion include:

- 100% infectiousness.
- 100% lethality.
- Transmission through exposed mucous membranes and all bodily fluids.
- Not airborne or waterborne.

Symptoms of infection with SCP-008 manifest no more than three hours after exposure, and include:



Ribbon diagram illustrating tertiary structure of SCP-008. Primary amino acid sequence information has been redacted.

Figure 7. SCP-008 Clearance is Required. SCP-wiki.net

The Rationale

Folklorists traditionally do not consider declassified documents as items of folklore because the government creates them. They exist as products or perhaps detritus of the government itself, an organization typically seen as the antithesis of the vernacular. This does not preclude them from being used in folkloric ways, however. By structuring their articles as mirrors of declassified documents, the SCP community is intentionally drawing on the visual genre that is specific to this style of documentation. Bakhtin states that speech genres develop over time because they achieve specific communicative functions (1986). Government documents in general exist as a means of holding bureaucratic bodies accountable for their actions by forcing them to leave a paper trail. The style of classified documents, with redacted and expunged information, their respective style may have originally developed due to the highly restricted access to the content. They still appear in the same format as traditional documents, but there are two authors in this case: the original author of the document, and a second ‘author’ who alters the article to make it less damaging to the organization in preparation for public consumption. Over time and in response to numerous controversies, the visual appearance of declassified documents entered the public consciousness as a genre in and of itself.

When thinking of declassified documents, readers already have some images in mind of what those documents represent. For example, declassified documents are often viewed as exceedingly controversial simply by the nature that they were confidential in the first place. The fact that information was consciously kept from public knowledge lends credence to the idea that that information is somehow problematic. After all, they would not spend the effort to hide information that is innocuous. By revealing the information, the public is given the chance to look under the hood of our government. Adding to their controversial nature, declassified

documents are often dredged up as proof for conspiracy theories such as the faking of the Moon landing, or the incident in Roswell, New Mexico. Questions like ‘how much more is being kept secret?’ or ‘how do we protect ourselves?’ begin to crop up. Suspicions rise that the government withholds this information from us because it is to someone else’s advantage or a paternal assumption that the public is not ready to know the truth. The fact that some declassified documents do contain truth, like MK Ultra, raises suspicion over all documents. There is a certain apprehension involved in reading the documents; we are afraid of what we might learn, and projects like MK Ultra tell us that we have every right to be, that our government is not acting in the best interest of its populace. We recognize that the government is hiding information for us, that we are not the ‘your’ in ‘for your eyes only’. There is an unmistakable allure to declassified documents. Being able to glimpse that which we are not supposed to see is thrilling. For better or worse, humanity has a wandering eye. If someone dangles the carrot in front of our eyes, most of us would reach for it. Access to information that has been officially sanctioned as taboo intrigues us.

The writers at the SCP website recognize that people perceive declassified documents as controversial and tantalizing, so they intentionally emulate them in order to confer that controversy onto their own fictive articles. By alluding to the style, writers can compel readers to apply the genre of declassified documents to their own work. These documents can act as indictments of their creators by being evidence of their shady dealings. They act as proof of the horror that takes place behind closed doors. The Foundation *is* a shadowy organization withholding information from the populace of extremely threatening objects hidden within their walls. The use of the declassified document style lends authority and legitimacy to their writing. Legitimacy is important because the documents held by the Foundation depict entities that can

challenge suspension of disbelief. In their survey response, user K.V. noted that it is difficult to find most typical folktales truthful. There are typically magic or supernatural elements to the tales that break suspension of disbelief, or they are simply too over the top to be believable in the first place. While falsification of government documents has occurred, it is generally safe to assume that the information in a declassified document is truthful. The US Government would love to hide the MK Ultra experiments, yet there are declassified documents to prove it happened. SCP writers can apply this for-better-or-worse truthfulness to their own articles by emulating the style.

In addition, readers of declassified documents feel excited that they can view such sensitive information. Although the SCPs are fictional, that sensation of excitement is still tangible for the reader. The document style that the Foundation requires increases the realism of their writing, providing greater immersion for the reader than typical horror tales. Describing the use of the style, user Chris wrote in his survey response, “It plays into the nagging feeling a lot of us have that there is so much important information that official government bodies are withholding from us; flicking through the Foundation is like seeing information we aren't meant to see - but not too much. Just enough.”

There is an extra layer of interpretation here, however. How many people outside government have actually handled declassified documents personally? The number is surprisingly small, considering the pervasiveness of the ideas about them. According to the Washington Post, there are 5.1 million people in the United States with security clearance (Fung 2014). This amounts to 1.7% of the population. For how few people have seen these documents, it would seem like everyone knows what a declassified document should look like. Where then does this shared knowledge come from? The notion of what such a document is, what it

represents, and how it appears, is constructed through popular culture. Even though most people might not have seen a declassified document up close and personal, several television programs and movies have used them in their storytelling. In fact, the use of documents like this is so pervasive that media critique website TV Tropes has a page dedicated to it (“Conveniently Interrupted Document”). The premise of X-Files, one of the most famous shows about shady government dealings, hinges entirely on the notion that such taboo records do exist. Interestingly, the CIA itself has utilized the symbolism of the show’s name when releasing their own declassified documents about UFO phenomena (“Take a Peek”). Political dramas and spy movies have also taken part in this construction with top-secret folders landing on the desks of various Presidents. Lastly, there is a genre of television dedicated to exposing the truth about conspiracies, about topics like aliens and the moon landing among others, which is rife with shots of documents and footage aimed at revealing things hidden by the government. These media treat documents as if secret and forbidden, as something that is only seen by chance. The titillation of looking behind the curtain is shown in Technicolor in the safety of one’s living room. Collectively, these media representations shape the perspective that average, non-governmentally involved people have of the ‘art form’ of declassified documents. There is a specific way that they must look in order to fit the expectations of the audience. Documents are only documents, after all, but the way they are shown can enrapture us in their mystique. This popular culture shift in perspective is poignant here because it means that the SCP Wiki community is constructing a unique vernacular expression ostensibly based on an official item, but it is in actuality drawing from a popular culture genre.

Chapter Four: Reverse Ostension Engineering

*In an age where everyone questions everything, the
idea that an organization of this scale can maintain
such a level of secrecy isn't exactly hard to imagine.*

–DrHades, SCP Wiki user

To begin a discussion of reverse ostension, it is important to first distinguish what ostension means in its original form. Ostension is an action or practice that is inspired by knowledge of a legend, in an attempt to directly interact with the legend. Folklorists Linda Dégh and Andrew Vázsonyi defined ostensive action as the real life re-enactment of a pre-existing narrative (Dégh 1983, 8). Using the example of Halloween candy poisonings, they point out that because these rumors are pervasive and persistent that they may have led to actual people poisoning candy, regardless of the rumors veracity (11-13). They also highlight copycat killers as individuals directly engaging with a narrative (13-14). Essentially, ostensive action occurs when an individual takes a rumor, legend, or narrative that they have heard and re-creates it through their own behavior.

Legends take root in every culture, germinating in the imaginations of the folk until they blossom into variable narratives that community members share with one another. The pervasiveness of legends demonstrates their influence on and importance to the people that maintain them. Legend tripping is a form of ostensive action where people re-enact legends, particularly urban legends or supernatural stories (Ellis 1989, 202). These actions tend to concentrate on specific geographical sites, which people visit in order to engage directly with their legend of choice. To provide an example, I will use a popular legend from my youth. Growing up in urban North Carolina, I heard through excited whispers from friends about a creepy and bizarre location in a town about an hour away from where I lived. I was told that out on the edges of Siler City, set back into the woods was a place called the Devil's Tramping

Ground. Amidst the trees and bracken there was a circle of completely barren land approximately forty feet across, within which no plant could take root. According to the legend any object placed within the circle overnight would appear outside of it by morning. This allegedly happened to a group of people who decided to camp there: in the morning, they woke up to find their tents far away from where they had been set up within the circle.

As a kid, the idea of the Devil's Tramping Ground captured my imagination. When I was in my late teens, a friend and I decided to visit the site to experience it for ourselves. Although the experience did not provide any supernatural moments, our desire to visit that space and experience the legend for ourselves drove us all the way out there. By engaging with the legend directly, we were performing an ostensive action. It was our own legend-trip, as we were quite literally making a trip to explore a legend first-hand. While the reality of the Devil's Tramping Ground may not have held up to our expectations of it, its physical existence allowed us to take ostensive action by visiting it.

In his work with the popular internet legend creature Slender Man, folklorist Jeffrey Tolbert builds on this solid grounding of ostension to put forth his theory of *reverse ostension*. If ostension is hearing of a legend and then engaging with it, Tolbert's reverse ostension involves a group of people collaborating to create an entirely new legend based on their familiarity with common legend themes and narratives such as monsters or hauntings, and then interacting with their narrative creation (Tolbert 2013). He writes,

Reverse ostension is therefore, in fact, 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) (3).

Ostension proper relies on individuals hearing a legend that comes from an unverifiable source.

In my earlier example, my friend and I had heard of the Devil's Tramping Ground from friends,

who had heard it from their friends. The original source of the legend had been completely obscured. In reverse ostension, however, groups purposefully develop fictitious legends and then, despite knowing the source of the legend and its falsity, interact with it anyway. Slender Man is a perfect example of reverse ostension because his legend mythos is the product of a community of internet users who collaboratively invented his characteristics. Each user is critically aware that the narrative was fake, but they participate in expanding and elaborating on it regardless. Slender Man is also popular enough that people wear costumes of him for Halloween (Peck 2015a). This costumed expression of the digital cryptid constitutes a reverse ostensive practice because people are shaping their real life behavior of dressing-up as a direct connection with a legend they veritably know is false.

Reverse ostension does not need to occur online, however. An analog example of reverse ostension would be if I and a group of my friends develop a rumor that the ghost of a forlorn student haunts the school library. Collectively we decide that the ghost is a girl, had been a junior in life, and any number of characteristics we may apply to her. By defining her characteristics, we construct the legend. This exercise of imagination is not in and of itself reverse ostension, though; after all, both ostension and reverse ostension require an interaction with the legend. However, if we were to visit the library in an attempt to talk to or channel the ghost we invented, we would be committing a reverse ostensive act as we had created a legend and then enacted it through our behavior. The crux of reverse ostension is that people *invent a legend* and then proceed to interact with it as if it were real.

For the discussion of how the SCP Wiki community engages in reverse ostensive practice, I will break the following chapter into three sections based on Tolbert's definition. We begin by demonstrating how the SCP community creates new objects through their writing,

moving to the process of combining their narratives, and then transitioning to how they model their legend on existing folklore. I will build on this content in my conclusion.

Creation of New Objects

The beginning of reverse ostension is the formation of new objects, on which a community builds their legend. The forms of objects can range wildly, from photographs to personal narratives and even costumes. For the Foundation, it is the articles. Each SCP article represents an experience, for both the writer and the read, and for the Foundation as a whole. Through the process of constructing the article, a writer develops the anomaly into a coherent and understandable figure. They create internally consistent rules for that entity to follow, such as behavioral patterns or characteristics, much like how most authors create characters. What differentiates SCP writers is that they are not coming up with everything on their own; they are creating characters to exist in a collectively determined universe. Their creatures must fit into the mythos somehow, though there a lot of room for experimentation. For comparison, consider fan fiction writers. These writers write their own stories based on the source material, making use of components of the original such as characters, settings, or even just concepts that exist in another author's work. This is similar to how SCP writers interact with the Foundation mythos; they write their works to be compatible with source material. In this case, however, the community of which they are a part is the creator of the source material. By writing in this way, SCP authors intentionally craft their articles to be individual aspects of a larger mythos.

The database format of the website aids the creation of SCP articles because each is capable of existing entirely on its own. They act as 'entries' in a database that the Foundation would use. It is here that the blurring of realism of the Foundation's existence begins. The actual

experience the reader of the site would have, pulling up file after file, is nearly identical to how an employee of the Foundation would use the database. If the employee wanted to know more about a particular SCP, they would presumably pull up the same file that readers do. The database exists as an artifact in two places simultaneously: that of the real world of the reader and the fictional world of the Foundation. This unification of the real and the fictional is inherent to the style of writing itself. The Dr. Mackenzie's Common SCP Pitfalls guide states,

Remember that [a SCP article] is supposed to be an executive brief; a high-level staff member such as an Overseer doesn't have time and shouldn't have to dig through your entire document in order to figure out that the object being described is a rusty knife that mind-controls people into sacrificing babies (please don't use that idea, it's only an example).

Authors are compelled to write their articles from an in-universe perspective, as if they are actual Foundation personnel documenting an anomaly that actually exists. This is critical because it allows readers to get in on the act. User Tallar writes,

While reading some of the more terrifying and disturbing articles, I felt a sense of unease in my gut. I could almost say I felt ill. But it was because it was so easy for me to believe that I was reading real, factual accounts of anomalous entities and phenomena. Sometimes I imagine what it's like for the D-class personnel as they're forced to test and/or interact with the subjects of the articles...

Out of curiosity, I used one of the most rigorous methods for finding out how people react to the

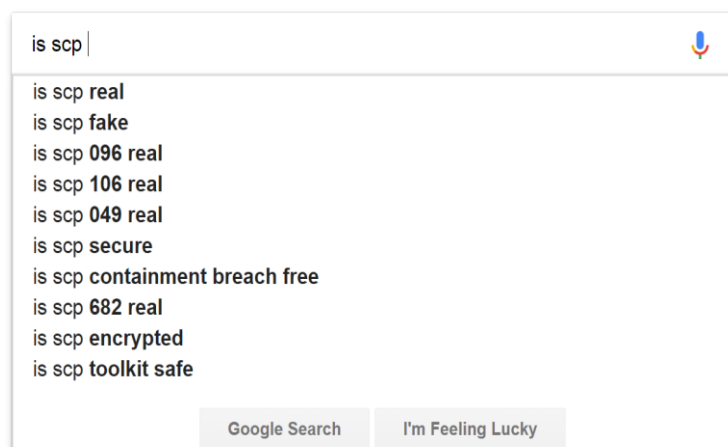


Figure 8. "is scp" Google search results Screen capture, 3/6/2017

SCP Wiki: Google search. *Figure 8* shows the results of searching "is scp." Of the ten results, the first five relate to the truthfulness of the website or specific articles, with six total calling it into question. For many readers the suspension of

disbelief is important to their interactions with the Foundation, which is why the realism in style

and tone features so prominently. It allows them to imagine that world as real, although they know that it is not. These collective experiences, these database entries are the bedrock of the SCP Wiki community's reverse ostension practice.

Combining the Narrative

Once the new objects are created, the second step is to take these disparate units of experience and combine them into a cohesive whole. Once unified, they become the new legend complex. The Foundation mythos is built out of the SCP articles themselves. Tallar writes,

The topics of the articles all revolve around a single unifying feature: the Foundation itself. They are all related, yet so incredibly vast in subject matter. The articles of the Foundation open doors to whole other worlds and dimensions. And the Foundation is always present, whether it's securing and protecting, or merely observing.

The mythos cannot be found in any individual article, however. Each article functions as a small facet of a larger whole, a part of the larger legend. It is only through viewing them as a collection, as more than the sum of their parts, that the Foundation begins to take on a substantial form. Imagine a person walking into a room full of mirrors. Each mirror reflects a different image of the same person. Each article, like a mirror, creates a vision of the Foundation. When all the articles are taken together, the image resolves into a clearer, more intricate and more realistic image.

Modeling on Existing Folklore

On the surface, the Foundation is not modeling on any existing folklore. However, as I argued in chapter three, the SCP Wiki's use of the document aesthetic can be seen as a taking an official and widely recognized genre and using it for vernacular, folkloric ends. Tallar responded,

The articles of the Foundation don't read like a typical scary story. They read like a real-life declassified government document, as was stated in the question. Documents like that are interpreted as true in the real world. When a scary story is structured like that kind of document, it is made more believable.

While creepypasta takes on the more traditional narrative style of horror literature, the SCP Wiki circumvents this. The adaption of this non-narrative technique is essential for creating the Foundation's realism given its status as a quasi-governmental organization. The folklore on which the Foundation as an organization models itself is found in the popular notions of what shadowy organizations look and act like, an idea itself based on the shadowy actions of real-life government bodies.

Individual articles, however, often draw inspiration from folklore and legends. SCP-1000, for example, is Bigfoot. In an addendum, an employee named Director Jones summarizes the gossip that travels around the Foundation after SCP-1000's containment: "Did you hear Sasquatch is an SCP? Are we gonna capture and contain Batboy next?" The Director then goes on to say that the popular conception of Bigfoot was actually fabricated by the Foundation as a way to prevent people from believing in the existence of such creatures at all. Here, the author of the article is tying in real world media like the infamous Bigfoot video with the fictional SCP universe. SCP Wiki writers often utilize real world objects, events, legends, and myths and incorporate them into the larger mythos. In their survey response, an anonymous user writes,

[The Foundation] is unique from urban legend in the sense that they are taking the legends and pulling them out of their legendary aspect. They quantify, analyse [sic], dissect, poke, prod, and do everything possible to control every aspect their existence. Everything is explicit, no hand waving or "some people say."

Writers are drawing on pre-existing folklore by taking something that readers are already familiar with and looking at it through the SCP Wiki's characteristic clinical tone. This accomplishes a few things. First, it encourages the readers to engage more with the article because they recognize the urban legend, possibly feeling like they possess special knowledge.

Second, it continues to blur the line between the real world and the world of the Foundation by linking the two together. Although some readers may find it breaks their suspension of disbelief, many users' survey responses indicated that, if the Foundation were real, it would contain these types of anomalies. User River Rain notes, "the foundation [sic] only wants to understand the things we can't comprehend." There are many, many things in our world that we do not yet understand.

Conclusion

Tolbert's work with Slenderman points out that people can engage in reverse ostension with creepypasta (Tolbert 2013, 2016). One thing that sets the SCP Wiki apart from other creepypasta is the fact that the Foundation is an organization. Many creepypastas revolve around a single creature or person, such as Slenderman. Therefore, in all original works, Slenderman has to be a central character, or at least influence the narrative significantly. However, SCP Wiki authors are not required to include any particular character in their writing, allowing for much more freedom in creativity. The Foundation is a setting within which the authors can place their own unique creatures. This shows that reverse ostension can occur in nuanced ways. The legends that communities like the SCP Wiki build are intricate and multifaceted; they encourage ostensive interaction because they allow people to contribute to the mythos dynamically.

The SCP Wiki community drew itself together through a shared interest in a fictional organization that takes weird things and studies them. Collectively, they developed a mythos that spans over three thousand SCP articles, each describing a unique entity. By creating these articles, writers imbued the Foundation with a sense of realism that drives the imaginations of tens of thousands of readers and writers. Even though the fictionality of the Foundation is readily

apparent, many users engage with the website as if it *were* real. They read the articles pretending to be personnel, or write ones where they explore new aspects of the Foundation. Most importantly, they follow the internally consistent procedures of the universe. Although there is a lot of creative space to play around, there is an overall consensus on the way things are done. Often the best-received articles are the ones that encourage readers' think of the Foundation as realistic, even if only for a moment. The way they do that is by embracing reverse ostension throughout the entire writing process. The community simultaneously creates, participates in, and enacts the Foundation mythos. To the community, the Foundation exists, even if it is not *real*.

Conclusion:

The Digital Restaurant at the End of the Universe

The Foundation, in-universe, is a worldwide shadow organization opposed by other worldwide anomalous powers, with stories all across timelines and parallel universes. From slice-of-life to being a moon wizard gnome, there's a little niche in the Foundation'verse for everyone.

—Zyn, SCP Foundation Survey 2016

What draws users to SCP Wiki and the Foundation? Where does the allure come from? In my survey, I sought to find this out was by asking users directly what they think the most fascinating aspect of the Foundation is. Out of those responses, a few topics came to the fore. Many users valued the writing for its quality, creativity and unpredictability. Other users were endlessly intrigued by the scale the mythos has achieved. Still more cited the community itself, its uniqueness and positively, as the most mesmerizing part of the Foundation. I will look into these in more detail in the following section. In the final section, I argue that the website's successful community building and its reverse ostensive practices are inextricably linked. Users established the group because of their engagement with the fictional legend complex, and the complex exists because the group creates it collectively.

The Writing

As we saw in chapter three, the SCP Wiki has carefully cultivated its distinctive style of writing. The community has come to love the restricted format because it allows them to focus on their ideas rather than the writing. This allows for an experimentation that other styles lack, as they have effectively removed the necessity of narrativization in storytelling. User William says, “The innovation and creativity of the community is a large aspect of what makes the Foundation so intriguing. The [writers'] ability to take everyday items or concepts, such as a pencil

sharpener, vending machine or religion, and give them new life, meaning or abilities through tales and descriptions.” Making ordinary objects extraordinary, including toasters (SCP-426), video tapes (SCP-1981), and even horses (SCP-1156), is something the SCP writers excel at. These articles entice readers to see these objects anew, or perhaps keep a wary eye on their toaster the next time they make toast.

While some articles take mundanity and make it stranger, other articles bring about more than just terror. Several articles are meant to be funny, endearing, or tongue-in-cheek. There is an entire category of ‘Joke SCPS.’ They follow the same naming scheme as other articles but add a J at the end to indicate that they are not to be taken seriously. For example, SCP-2412-J is the Foundation’s take on Santa Claus, complete with bottomless gift sack and reindeer. Don’t worry, he is not a permanent captive. Santa and the Foundation have an agreement: Santa agreed to be contained at the Foundation as long as for one night a year he is allowed to deliver presents to children around the world. This article highlights the specific way that the Foundation interprets phenomena through the case of beloved Christmas icon Rudolph: “The nose of SCP-2412-3i displays an abnormally red coloration; it is likely to be a result of a mutation.” Authors can get inspiration from everywhere.

Beyond jokes, a significant number of SCPs are not horror or jokes at all, but rather sweet. A Reddit thread on the SCP subreddit entitled “What are some of the most heartwarming and innocent SCPs?” received 127 responses, with over twenty different article recommendations (Reddit). The variation in article content demonstrates what user Mazed values in the Foundation,

You click on an SCP article, and you never, ever know what you're going to get. You might laugh, you might cry, you might feel a sudden desperate need to look over your shoulder, or all three. Occasionally you'll even learn something, be it

about obscure mythology, historical trivia, or quantum physics, or anything. It's really pretty wonderful like that.

Even with the regimented writing format, or perhaps because of it, writers are able to craft amazing, unpredictable, and narrative-less written works enthrall readers and keep them engaged.

The only thing one can expect from an SCP article is the format; everything else is a surprise. Yet at the same time, the site maintains a sense of a cohesive whole. Many users cited the consistency in the quality of articles helping them see the Foundation more as an actual organization than a collaborative writing project. An anonymous respondent writes, “[the site] forms a cohesive whole, and gives the sense of being connected to something larger--each document isn't just a standalone story, but gives you the impression you've stumbled onto something bigger than any single SCP.” This overall cohesion is crucial in allowing users to engage with the website in a reverse ostensive way, as discussed in chapter four.

Lastly, the way in which authors write the articles permits readers to personalize their experience with the Foundation. Users’ preferences vary wildly, and there is something hiding in the articles that will appeal to almost anyone. The community also prides itself on never enforcing a particular interpretation of the mythos, either of the individual articles or the Foundation as a whole. There is a consensus about who the Foundation is and how they operate, but there is no hard and fast rule that everyone must believe in to be a part of the community. The only thing that never changes is the format, and even that can be played with as we saw in chapter three. A page titled ‘Canon Hub’ reads, “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 which 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.” This gives readers the power to construct their own view of the

Foundation, fully embracing their own conceptions and thus allowing them to engage more directly and sincerely with the content. User Nate elaborates,

How everyone has their own head-cannon, and that's how it's meant to be at this point. In all other forms of media, you have the creator's intended story, and if you want you can create your own head-cannon but that's almost never as valid as the creator's intent. In many SCiPs, you have to choose what you think actually happened, like with SCP-1943 where you have to decide if the girl is anomalous or not, and both versions are equally valid.

Though it may be that people generally believe that there is an authority dictating which readings are canonical, it is true that each person engages with a work differently. Bakhtin asserts that there are multiple versions of a single world: the one that the author creates and the one that reader reads, meaning that each reader will interpret the text in a unique way because they bring different information with them from other readers (1981). Every user's interpretation is valid, and this is where the genius of the SCP Wiki becomes apparent. Readers interpret written works separately; it is the nature of literature that its experience is intimately personal. Readers bring their own ideas and pre-conceived notions to the content and, as Nate points out, most of the time this is not 'valid' and ends up relegated to personal thoughts or fan works. The SCP Wiki, on the other hand, tells readers that their view of the content is entirely legitimate.

The SCP Wiki community may have more of an interest in asserting the validity of each readers' interpretation because the nature of the document style is heavily related to authority. The government, an ultimate authority, creates these documents and the information contained within them is therefore officially sanctioned. It follows that, by emulating the style, the Foundation's documents are also authoritative in that respect. However, no article directly talks about the Foundation as an organization, only what the Foundation does. It is through reading a collection of articles that a reader comes to understand what the Foundation is, what its values are, and how it operates. Most information users learn about the Foundation is delivered

indirectly, by inference. Each user is allowed to develop their own canonical interpretation. The community fosters engagement with the site directly by filling in the blanks for themselves, a process that also generates reverse ostensive practices. Just like with the articles' consistency, the personalization of experience that the website offers encourages readers to believe in the Foundation and interact with it in new, profound ways.

The Mythos

One of the first things that readers notice is the expansiveness of the Foundation mythos. There are quite literally thousands of SCP articles on the site. Often when new readers encounter media that has such a vast mythos, it is easy for them to become discouraged. How can they ever hope to comprehend it all? For me personally, this is how I felt when approaching the popular fantasy novel *Game of Thrones*. There was a large amount of background information that I had to know in order to understand the complexity of the story. This limited my ability to engage with the text because much of the nuance of characters' motivations was lost on me. Surprisingly, this feeling of being overwhelming does not seem to affect the SCP Wiki's readers. Despite its depth and complexity, complete knowledge of the Foundation's mythos is not required to enjoy the articles. Instead, the reader's perception of the Foundation builds with each article they read. There is no one entry point, no 'beginning'; instead the SCP Wiki embraces more of a 'choose your own adventure' engagement style. Readers can start from any article and still develop an understanding of the Foundation's characteristics. Dr. Mackenzie's Common SCP Pitfalls guide states, "SCPs Must Stand On Their Own. This means that a reader must be able to 'get it' even if it's the first SCP they ever read. You must assume that the reader won't have the context of other, more fleshed-out articles to bolster your own."

The expansiveness of the universe is one of the defining features of the Foundation. It is constantly growing as users contribute more articles to the site, building on the mythos with each SCP. Some articles reference the same personnel who work at the Foundation, other fictional organizations that users created as oppositional forces, and other small details. It is not necessary to understand these references to enjoy the article, but they do provide readers who are aware of them with a more enriching experience. As users begin to recognize these references, they feel as though their understanding of the Foundation shifts. User Mazed writes,

[What makes the Foundation immersive is] the actual story content, with established universe with it's reasonably consistent "mythos", involving things like the frequent occurrence of alternate timelines interacting with each other, esoteric and offbeat religions (like the Church of the Broken God and Fifthism), recurring background characters and organizations (such as the Hanged King, Dr. Wondertainment, and the Serpent's Hand), and the Foundation itself's dogged determination to deal with these categorically ludicrous things in as objective a manner as possible.

The mythos allows readers to become completely enmeshed in the fictional universe. In this way, reading articles feels a lot more like stumbling onto a database of a mysterious organization than reading a traditional narrative. An anonymous respondent writes, “Over the years of reading I feel I have witnessed the birth of a literary sub genre, rather than the compilation of previously existing stories.” The creation of a cohesive, dense, and accessible mythos is crucial to the success of the SCP Wiki, and is one of its most cherished features.

The Community

The SCP Wiki is a strong community despite their inability to have face-to-face interaction. While there are ways of approximating physical communication online, such as video chat, the community does not employ them. Instead, they interact almost entirely through

text. The ability to send textual information over the Internet is the base for the community. Noyes writes, “If individual acts of identification create the reality of social categories, the reality of a community with which to identify comes from collective acts” (Noyes 2003, 29). Communities are built through collective action, and that is exactly what the SCP Wiki community does as they develop the Foundation mythos. Noyes stresses that there is a tension within groups because community members try to conflate their imagined idea of the community with their actual interactions with its members. Their community is imagined because they cannot know every member within it, or they may never interact with all of its members. This is also true for the SCP Wiki community; they may never get to know all of the tens of thousands of users that access the site. Despite this, users still feel strongly about the community and their place within it. What differentiates the SCP Wiki from other imagined communities is that there is the ability for all users to interact. An American cannot meet every other American, even if they wanted to, because of geographic barriers; it is a physical impossibility. The SCP Wiki, however, does not suffer the same drawback. The website is their gathering place, and every user has access to that site, regardless of any geographic barrier. Though it is unlikely that one user will meet every other user, by having shared access to the site of interaction, they have the potential to meet one another. This allows the SCP Wiki community to sidestep Noyes’s tension, and potentially conflates the imagined community with users’ actual interactive networks.

The most frequent aspect of the Foundation that users found fascinating was the community itself. Many mentioned its humble beginnings, others the support of their fellow writers. Most of all, users cited the impressive scale of collaboration that takes place. Before there was a dedicated website, there was a community. User Nick W. writes, “It started out as a few blocks of text and pictures on an anonymous forum, but grew into a massive compendium of

almost-believable items.” The creation the SCP Wiki website later on helped solidify the group by giving them their own space to come together. This space is much like the writing circle one might find in a local library, but the nature of its online location shifts the way that individuals interact with one another, as discussed in chapter two. In their survey response, an anonymous user wrote,

As a writer, the immense world created by the people on this site is so beautiful to me... The way that people have taken a single 4chan post and turned it into a world with so many different classifications, organizations, concepts and characters is extremely impressive, perhaps unprecedented. And that's to say nothing about how the site welcomes reinterpretations of every single part of that world. People love to experiment within the given format, but the site is so much more than that.

From humble beginnings, the website has grown exponentially. Despite this swift growth, the community as a whole is incredibly engaged with one another, and the sense of comradery is evident to its users.

Users were also inspired by the positivity of the community. It is not uncommon for online spaces, particularly those that focus on creative works such as YouTube, to attract negativity and derision; perhaps the anonymity of the Internet encourages some users to tear down others. The lack of this vitriol on the website surprises user Keith Weston, who says “[The most fascinating thing is] the minimal impact of disparate personalities on the development of the community; despite some disruption, it has grown into a very well developed virtual community.” The SCP Wiki as a community has worked together to create a safe environment where users can feel empowered to experiment with their art, free from the abuse that often plagues websites. This is even more inspiring given the size of the community. The Authors’ Pages is an index of all SCP Wiki writers that have contributed at least three or more articles or tales to the website. Listed on it are 253 contributors, many of whom have several articles to

their name. There are several users who have contributed fewer than three articles and countless others whose participation is limited to forum posting or commenting on articles.

Beyond all other responses, most users said that collaboration was what they appreciated most. The support provided by the community is crucial to the success of the SCP Wiki itself because it allows collaboration to exist. User Matthew lists what fascinates him most as “The sheer amount of people that work together to create a whole data base filled to the brim with excellent writing. They have a common uniting structure and are allowed to be creative. The support in that community is incredible and the people are so good to each other.” Ultimately, this is the heart of the SCP Wiki. The website, the mythos, the Foundation in its entirety is a community effort to create a world that captivates users and provides them with a creative outlet. It is a collective where all are welcome, provided they do not mind a scare or two. User Tom H describes this quite beautifully:

The collaborative nature of the Foundation is easily the most fascinating thing about the project for me. The idea that anybody can contribute as long as their ideas are good allows for some excellent collisions and meldings of minds, creating an incredible universe spanning thousands of objects born from hundreds of minds. And yet despite this disparate nature, the Foundation is so expertly coordinated: that same article template and that same vision of the Foundation's nature and purpose creates a fascinating concept, made all the more so as it spawned from a single article about a sculpture that moves.

Conclusion

As the anonymous user notes, the Foundation mythos was built by the community as they worked together to delineate its characteristics. The uniqueness of the concept and format drew in users to participate in the mythos formation. The process of group formation is by definition crucial to the development of the SCP Wiki community, but it is made possible through the group's collaborative reverse ostension practices. The group exists to participate in the creation

of the Foundation mythos, and the Foundation exists because of the users' communal effort in generating it. The two are inextricable from one another.

The SCP Wiki acts as a creative playground for users to experiment with a malleable fictional universe of their own invention. As shown in chapter four, many users engage with the Foundation as if it were real, despite objectively knowing it is not. Indeed, part of the attraction users have for the mythos is the realism itself. User Nobody writes,

What makes the foundation so fascinating to me is how realistic it is. Having some military experience myself, I can easily imagine that the US military would act in a very similar manner to the foundation if they were to create a branch that had the job of securing and containing these anomalies as the SCP foundation has. From the operations of actually securing the anomaly, to the daily lives of the members, to even the fact the foundation has rival organization all adds to it.

The heightened realism allows and encourages users to participate with the Foundation through reverse ostension. It draws many to the SCP Wiki in the first place. Some believe, at least initially, that the articles may actually *be* real. It is for this reason that the website so adamantly points out that none of the content is real; it is the first question answered in their FAQ. User Tallar writes,

The entries are treated and written very professionally. They appear to come from the database of a very real, very serious company. I'll admit that when I first got into reading different entries (other than that of SCP-173), I wasn't entirely aware that I was reading works of fiction. It helps that some of the moderators of the wiki are sources of accurate scientific knowledge, to help authors make their creations even more detailed and plausible.

Whether or not the Foundation is fictional, however, does not matter to the community. It does not have to be physically and objectively real for them to act as if it were. The Foundation's realism is achieved in part through its internal consistency. Everything about the Foundation makes sense, no matter how unusual it is, because the community has carefully constructed it.

As folklorists, we focus on topics such as genre, group, interaction, and performance.

The SCP Wiki community challenges traditional notions of these topics, complicating them due

to their use of the Internet to build a successful community and imaginative mythos. They have built a mesmerizing organization that blurs the line between reality and fiction, all while reminding us that it truly is not real. Its legend complex is expansive and shared with tens of thousands of community members. Every day it continues to grow as members participate in the community, posting comments and submitting articles. In this thesis, I have first showed that the SCP Wiki community and the Foundation are shaped by being an online space. Next, that the Foundation translates an official writing style into a vernacular and folkloric legend expression. Lastly, the SCP Wiki demonstrates that the processes of group formation and reverse ostension can be mutually co-constructive.

Appendix

Notes on Survey

In October of 2016, I created a Google Form entitled “SCP Foundation Survey.” I coordinated with the SCP Wiki’s Internet Outreach Team, and they posted a link to my survey on the official SCP Foundation Facebook page. I received 154 responses from users. However, since the users who responded to my survey were all directed there from the Facebook page, their responses may not be completely generalizable to those of the entire community.

The survey contained six questions regarding the users’ personal views about the Foundation. There were also two questions regarding identity information, both of which were optional. Users were given the option to provide their name and/or username and their email address. All email addresses were removed prior to publishing the results in order to protect the users’ privacy. Names that were voluntarily provided were kept. Those included in the survey responses and cited in the above work are used with permission.

The survey can be viewed by accessing the following link to DropBox:

<http://goo.gl/mCRihG>

The survey responses can be accessed through this link to DropBox:

<http://goo.gl/hhrX3f>

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