

ALT-LIT

Paper dragons, haunted theaters, one very large cicada: An introduction to SCPs



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One of the weirder relics of my early days on the internet—one that I’m certain many if not most of my fellow netizens around my age are quite familiar with—is Creepypasta: a type of horror story born in and propagated through internet forums and social media, originally in the form of blocks of copied and pasted text, then through memes and references, and eventually through other forms of media such as videogames, video essays, and more. Back in the early-to-mid 2010s, creepypastas were everywhere on the internet. In “Backrooms” memes, *Slenderman* games, random ‘Jeff The Killer’ jumpscare, and more, creepypastas became a pillar of modern internet-based media as a whole. Despite their sheer cultural

impact, most creepypastas were neither particularly well-written nor much more than simple scary stories, and their general tone and content were not all that diverse.

Then, sometime in 2019, I found something that fit that “internet-based text story that branches into other stuff” niche for me in a way creepypastas were never able to: SCPs. SCP is the term used to refer to anomalous entities, objects, and phenomena within the shared fictional universe of The SCP Foundation—a universe populated with a staggering number of incredibly diverse stories written by people from all over the world. These stories are written in the format of classified reports as part of this fictional Foundation’s enormous database of anomalies to be contained, studied, and hidden from the public and range from

standard horror pieces to fantasy fics to sci fi jaunts of multivarious scope, and so much more.

The SCP Foundation (or simply “The Foundation” as it is generally referred to in-universe) itself is a clandestine global organisation working to contain anomalous entities and phenomena. Within the universe’s branching canon(s), the Foundation is responsible for protecting the public from said anomalies by containing and studying them, and preventing people from learning about their existence. Their ‘About’ page on the wiki opens with a message from the in-universe character, The Administrator, stating “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.”

Each anomaly within the universe is assigned a number and filed as an SCP (if you’re wondering: there’s no single official full form for the abbreviation, but in a number of SCP entries, the term stands of Secure Containment Protocol), and these reports become what we readers—researchers digging through Foundation databases—get to see.

If you’ve read this far and are interested in experiencing it all for yourself, here’s a few tips on where to go and how you might start. If you’d like to go directly to the wiki and just start reading (which I honestly recommend! Part of why SCPs and this style of online media are so compelling and accessible is how easy and fun it is to just dive in headfirst and see how that goes), I suggest checking out their guide for newcomers on the site first so you don’t feel immediately lost or overwhelmed.

Additionally, if you’re unsure which SCP to start with—especially because the entries are listed as numbers rather than names—the wiki has a very helpful ‘Guide For Reading’ that also links to several curated recommendation lists. For the more visually inclined, there are also several SCP YouTube creators who make content based on SCPs and the universe ranging from readings with accompanying graphics and voice

a lot more to offer in terms of diversity of concept and content. Some of my favorite horror pieces from these later entries are SCPs 3199, 3456, 6373, 3935, 5999, (content warning for all of the following ones—they are all quite disturbing and/or disgusting) 3288, and 3084.

Ones that are not strictly horror but personal favourites: SCP 3004 is a very conceptually cool anomaly with a lot of religious symbolism; SCP 507 is a normal guy with an unfortunate “superpower”; SCP 093 is a mysterious red disc that transports people to alternate dimensions, seemingly based on regrets carried by whoever holds it; SCP 049 is a plague doctor trying to cure a mysterious disease he calls The Pestilence; SCP 426 is a sentient toaster (I told you the topics were diverse); SCP 1762 is a box of paper dragons (and it’s an emotionally devastating read); SCP 1461 is an anomaly similar to and inspired by Mark Z. Danielewski’s *House of Leaves*, SCP 3426, is a fantastically-written sci fi anomaly that causes the end of sufficiently developed planetary civilisations, and, last but not the least, SCP 7034 is an endless highway and the harrowing account of one man trying to get back home to his family.

All in all, if you like collective fictional

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acting to deep dive video essays.

Last but not least, here are some recommendations from me:

To cite some that are mostly horror based: While, unlike Creepypasta, SCPs are not all horror stories, there are still a massive number of them on the site. Some of the best and most popular classic SCPs are horror-themed—SCPs 096, 682, and 106 are all classic “monsters”, SCPs 140, 354, 087, and 701 are all scary objects or places, and SCPs 610 and 231 are more on the disturbing/disgusting side. More modern entries from after “Series I” (the first 1000) have

universes, interesting and compelling concepts, and reading a wide range of contemporary writers’ work, SCPs are absolutely for you. So jump on in, have fun, and if you like any ones not mentioned here: tell me about them, I’m always looking for more.

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FICTION

Writer's block

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Asif stares at the blank page, his chest tightening with that all-too-familiar dread. The cursor blinks back at him, steady and unbothered. “Another night,” he mutters, the words stale on his tongue, “another blank slate.” He bites the end of his pen. The plastic tastes gritty—like failure, like the dust of old attempts. The digital clock on the nightstand glows cold: 11:47 PM.

Soon.

Beside him, Shefali sleeps soundly, a deep symphony of snores rising and falling in rhythm. Usually, her presence pulls him under too. Tonight, her sleep is just another reminder of what he can’t reach—peace, quiet, rest.

“How does she do it?” he wonders, eyes tracing the gentle rise and fall of her chest. “One minute she’s talking, the next she’s gone, like diving into another world.” He envies her ease, her escape.

He’s tried everything—every tired first line, every desperate opening: “A lone wolf howled at the moon.” “The old woman’s eyes held a secret as ancient as time.”, even absurdities like “The pigeon blinked.”

“There’s nothing there, Asif,” he told himself then, though his voice sounded hollow in the silence. But deep down, he knew. He tried everything—locked it, wedged a chair under the handle, stacked books against it like a barricade. Still, the sound came as if mocking him.

None of them work. Each phrase feels borrowed, like wearing someone else’s shoes. Tight. Wrong.

His gaze shifts to the bedroom door. It’s old—solid wood, painted in a once-cream color that has faded to something more like tired bones. Its surface is chipped, scarred with time. Unremarkable to anyone else. But Asif knows better.

That door holds something. A secret. A



ILLUSTRATION: MAHMUDA EMDAD

ritual.

11:58 PM.

The air thickens. There’s a buzz to it now, subtle but unmistakable. His pulse starts to race—a drumbeat in his ears.

“Just listen, Asif,” he murmurs, adjusting against the headboard. Notebook balanced on his knees.

“Just listen.” He tightens his grip on the pen. Knuckles go pale.

Midnight.

Prick... prick... prick...

It begins. Soft. Delicate. Almost like a whisper made of needles. It slices through Shefali’s snores, sharp and clear, yet impossible to pin down.

He holds his breath.

“Where is it?” he whispers. “Top of the door? Near the handle?”

But the sound shifts, like it doesn’t want to be found. It doesn’t come from the surface of the wood, but within it—like something alive, trapped, tapping from inside.

The rhythm doesn’t stay steady. Sometimes, it’s a quick flurry. Sometimes, they’re long pauses that stretch like a long, deep breath. It’s maddening.

He remembers the night he flung the

door open, convinced he’d find the source. Just the hallway. Empty. Still.

“There’s nothing there, Asif,” he told himself then, though his voice sounded hollow in the silence. But deep down, he knew. He tried everything—locked it, wedged a chair under the handle, stacked books against it like a barricade. Still, the sound came as if mocking him.

Now, he listens with a strange, quiet reverence: “Is it Morse code?” he wonders. “A message? A warning?” His starved imagination starts spinning wild theories: a ghost, a spirit in limbo, a sentient piece of the building remembering something ancient. The sound crawls into his brain, itching at the base of his skull. His pen slips from his hand, forgotten. His focus narrows to the door—just the door—and the persistent, taunting rhythm.

Then—an urge. Sudden. Bold.

He picks up the pen again.

“No,” he says aloud. “I won’t let it win. I won’t wait for the perfect line. I’ll write what’s real.” Eyes closed, he lets the sound wash over him, lets it fill the quiet spaces in his mind. And then, he writes.

The first line doesn’t come like thunder

or prophecy. It comes like the noise. Quiet. Honest.

“The first line didn’t come. What came is the intermittent prickling noise from the door.”

He pauses. A smile tugs at one corner of his mouth. It’s not profound. But it’s true. And for the first time in what feels like forever, it feels like a beginning.

The prickling continues—steady, strange—and Asif, finally, begins to write. That moment of triumph doesn’t last.

The next night, the prickling returns. And the one after that. Always at midnight. Always that same quiet knock from within. What was once a puzzle becomes a torment—A tick. A drip. A slow erosion of sanity. He wakes up every morning with a headache nesting behind his eyes. Sweat clings to his skin. Not from heat—but from anxiety. Even during the day, the sound follows him. He hears it in his bones, in his imagination. He stares at doors—his office, the bathroom, even the fridge—half-expecting that same sound to begin again.

One morning, Shefali touches his cheek, softening her voice: “Asif, you look exhausted,” she says. Her palm is cool

against the fever of his skin. “Are you okay? You’ve been... quiet. You’re scaring me.”

He flinches: “Just writer’s block,” he mumbles. “It’s... a beast.”

But it’s more than that. And he knows it. She deserves the truth, but how does he explain it? How do you tell someone you’re haunted by a door? He sees it—the pity in her eyes.

Poor Asif is a ghost in his own world again. He hates that look. His writing withers. That once promising line now taunts him: “The first line didn’t come...” It just sits there. A dead end.

He tries to write more, to shape the sound into a story. But the words twist away from him. His thoughts feel tangled, frayed. The narrative won’t come. Just like the door won’t open.

Then, one night, it starts early.

11:03 PM.

Faster. Louder. Like tiny fists beating on the inside of his skull. He slaps his hands over his ears. It doesn’t help. The sound intensifies.

“Stop it!” he hisses, voice cracking. Tears sting his eyes.

“What do you want from me?” His breath comes ragged. Heart hammering.

And then—

Silence.

Deafening.

Too wide. Too heavy.

He turns to Shefali—sleeping, untroubled. She doesn’t hear it. She never does.

He is alone. Alone with a door that only whispers to him.

“Am I going mad?” he whispers to the empty room. No answer.

“Is it me? Is it my mind prickling at itself? Is it making shadows on the inside of my skull?”

A shiver runs through him. Colder than any breeze. The door watches. Waits. Not just a door anymore—but a presence. A patient adversary.

And with each midnight tap, it chips away at what remains of his grip on reality.

Haroonuzzaman is a translator, novelist, poet, researcher, and essayist. Besides teaching English in Libya and Qatar for about 12 years, he has had 20 years of teaching experience in English Language and Literature at Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB).