

The Red Synod

The Great Siphon hummed with heavy, resonant enmity.

Inside the brass-ribbed bell of the grand transit cylinder, the Council of the Red Synod hung suspended in their nutrient-rich vats. Their vast, glistening domes pulsed beneath clusters of ocular lenses, three-limbed manipulators



twitching in rhythmic sequence as the planetary launch protocols ticked toward zero.

Between two massive tripod cooling vanes stood an uninvited man.

He had draped an absurdly long, frayed woolen scarf around his neck and over his shoulder—nearly dragging on the deck of the Martian vehicle. His hands were thrust deep into an overcoat heavy with pocket lint and strange brass dials. The Strange Gentleman—as he was known to the residents of Hearthcombe—took a bite from a crumpled bag of confections, chewed thoughtfully, and offered the bag to the central nutrient vat.

The Council offered no response.

“Pity. Pure cane sugar. Terrible for the arterial pressure, though I suspect you haven’t got the plumbing for it.”

The central vat flared an incandescent, furious amber. A mechanical translation horn rasped across the vault, harsh and metallic:

**«UNAUTHORIZED BIOLOGICAL ENTITY. YOUR PRESENCE DELAYS TRAJECTORY NINE.
YOU WILL BE DISSOLVED FOR CANISTER LUBRICATION.»**

The Traveler smiled. His wide, brilliant eyes held no fear—only the terrifying, quiet certainty of someone who already knew how the book ended.

“Oh, trajectory nine is quite dead, old boy. You see, you have built magnificent heat-rays. Splendid, terrifying tripod legs. You have mastered high-velocity ballistics and hollowed out a dying world just to cross a quiet meadow of stars. But your biology is sterile. Pedantic. Absolutely devoid of imagination.”

The lenses whirred, focusing with predatory sharpness.

«TERRESTRIAL LIFE IS WEAK. SOFT MATTER. WE CONSUME AND OCCUPY.»

“You consume what you do not understand,” the Traveler corrected, stepping forward until his boots clicked sharply against the launching rail. “You think Earth is an empty estate ripe for eviction. But you have overlooked the soil. The water. The trillions of invisible sentinels riding every single breath of terrestrial wind.”

He pointed a long, leather-gloved finger directly at the central ocular stalk.

“I did not bring an armada to stop you. I did not need to. While your cylinders slept in the cold dark between worlds, I was at work. Planning. Plotting.”

The Traveler's tone softened slightly. “I chose an ordinary, stubborn lad with a yearning to sail the Earth’s oceans—to visit every port of call in every corner of the world. Today he breathes native air into every harbor from Portsmouth to the Pacific. A bespoke microscopic key, if you will, sleeping in the common damp.”

The Traveler took a step back, tipping his brim with a dark, mocking grin.

“Go on, then. Launch your cylinders. Drop your iron upon the heather. But the moment that hatch opens and you draw your first breath of Earth, you aren't conquering an empire.”

He leaned in, his voice dropping to a theatrical whisper.

“You’re walking into an open grave dressed as a victory march.”

Archival & Copyright Notice: *Transcribed from the Hearthcombe Municipal & Sovereign Ledgers. © 2026 Duffy & Ward. All original narratives, character profiles, and lore pertaining to the Village of Hearthcombe are protected by copyright. Classic extraterrestrial lore elements derived from public domain source literature. All rights reserved.*

www.duffyandward.com

www.hearthcombe.com