Like a Diamond in the Sky

by Jewelfox

Summary

The Homeworld Gems have returned to Earth's galaxy, with a "planet-cracker" starship designed to tear chunks off of worlds and turn them into husks like in Peridot's diagram. But it's abandoned and in a decaying orbit, and soon after the Crystal Gems board to investigate they are split up, by attacks from relentless Shard Fusion monsters. Can Engineering Assistant Iris Clarke survive long enough to reunite with them and escape?

tl;dr: An SU-ized version of Dead Space! Because body horror and sci-fi are things both series do really well. Also, gay rocks. MAKE US WHOLE

Note to Steven Universe fans: SU canon is a moving target. This makes writing SU fanfic fraught, especially when your story is set decades in its future. If some future development invalidates half of this story's plot, please just relax and enjoy it for what it is. There's no way I can see the series' plot twists in advance!

Note to Dead Space fans: Like a Diamond in the Sky is Dead Space by way of Steven Universe, not the other way around. You'll find SU-ized versions of Isaac, RIGs, the Ishimura, and a number of plot points, but they might not take the forms you're expecting. Again, please enjoy the story for what it is, and not for what it doesn't claim to be.

For those of you wondering what sense a Steven Universe / Dead Space crossover makes to begin with, I have to ask: Have you PLAYED Dead Space?! Because I'm pretty sure the SU writers have.

(I did not make the linked video. It must have been uploaded by a brave Unitologist, who saw
I was alone, in a world made of crystal. And I was not running fast enough.

My wet, squishy, organic body was giving out. I finally collapsed against a sloped wall of green gemstone, breathing heavily. Trying to catch my breath.

A fan turned on inside my helmet. I reached out with my tongue and pulled a lever next to my chin, sending a spray of lukewarm water into my mouth. Water that used to be sweat, a few minutes ago. My clothes were soaked through with it, trapped as they were between my skin and my RIG's inner layer.

I gulped it down and got another long drink, before raising my plasma cutter again. I needed to use its built-in flashlight to look for ambush spots. The Shard Fusion had gotten ahead of me, and I knew it could be anywhere by now.

My cutter was a bulky, inelegant tool made by humans. It fit around my hand like a set of brass knuckles, with a trigger the width of my palm. As soon as I squeezed it partway, the cutter opened up like a steel flower, its tiny motors whirring. Red dots appeared on the near wall, and an LED flashlight shone on it.

My hand still stung when I did that. The scabs on my fingers kept sticking to the gloves.

The corridor I was in was shaped like a fluted vase, but with the top stretched out into infinity. When I looked up, I couldn't see walls past a certain point. Just blackness, and then a thin strip of stars past the transparent ceiling. It looked tranquil, and timeless.

At floor level, though, this crystal cathedral was a mess. Chunks of rock had been blasted out of the floor, making the footing treacherous. Glass strips the width of my hand, on the wall, had been smashed and were leaking lime green liquid into puddles. Just up ahead, the wall had been caved in on the left, and I couldn't even tell if it used to be a door or not.

I shone my cutter's flashlight on the floor near it. Slimy green hand- and footprints the size of my head splashed out of the largest puddle, and went through the hole in the wall. Had the Shard Fusion used this collapsed bulkhead as an escape route? Or had it caused the wall to collapse?

I really hoped that it wasn't the latter.

I pushed off of the wall I was leaning against, feeling my RIG's weight on my body. Clomping its heavy boots towards the caved-in wall as fast as I could. Once I got there I slowed down, breathing hard again, and shone my flashlight on the rubble so I could watch my footing. The last thing I wanted was to slip and-

"Iris? Where have you BEEN? Garnet and I told you to go back to the ship!"

A blue, hard light screen appeared in front of me all of a sudden, projected by my suit's helmet. It was a scratchy, distorted video call from my mentor, a Pearl with wide and expressive eyes. And it caught me off-guard; I flailed my arms in mid-step, and had to catch myself on one of the crumbling walls.
"Where are you? And where's Amethyst? I thought she was with you! AMETHYST!" Pearl didn't even wait for me to type a response, but cupped her thin hands to her mouth and started calling out to the other Gem.

Wincing at the noise, I kept my plasma cutter at the ready while typing with my free hand. The hard light keyboard beneath the display glowed where I pressed it, and pictures and words spelled out in the window below Pearl. A female computer voice read out the message:


"Missing? What do you MEAN she's missing? She SAID she was going to watch you! When all the ... THINGS, came out of the walls!" If Pearl looked distraught before, now she was frantic.

I was too, and was sweating even harder as I typed. "I. Am. Looking. For. Amethyst. Help. Me."

I was so focused on it, that I didn't notice the lavender arm reach around the corner and grab hold of my leg.

Garnet stepped into the picture, and it was so fuzzy that all I could see of her were her shades and her afro. "Iris, we've found the ship's bridge. I'm coming to get you. Wait for me, and we'll look for Amethyst together."

"No. Time. I. Have. To-"

The hand yanked my leg out from under me. The hard light screen poofed as I hit the rocks I'd been standing on, my free arm taking the blow that would've knocked me senseless.

Before I could react, the hand dragged me into the darkness it came from, across more shattered flooring and rocks. It moved so fast that I couldn't get a handhold on anything. All I could do was try to keep from dropping my plasma cutter ... or hitting my head so hard that I lost consciousness.

The Shard Fusion slowed down to go through an open doorway. As it dragged me through, I grabbed onto the frame with my free hand and held on with all my might. It seemed to be paying attention to something inside the room, and to not notice my trying to break free. But the hand holding me had a mind of its own, and even without putting its whole weight into it the creature nearly pulled my arm out of its socket.

I cried out in pain, willing my arm to hold on for another five seconds while I faced the Shard Fusion and took aim. It had me stretched out on the floor, and I couldn't get a good view of the creature, but by now I knew what to aim for. I pulled the trigger the rest of the way, and the plasma cutter jolted as the room flashed white with a WHAM.

The hand holding my leg went slack. I scrambled to my feet, frantically kicking the severed limb off of me. It poofed as it hit the wall.

I staggered backwards as fast as I could, aiming my cutter through the door at the bulk of the Shard creature. My back bumped into a wall, and I saw that I was in a small room, with a collapsed wall to one side and darkness beyond. I could see its outlines clearly, because my flashlight reflected off of the polished crystal.

What was through the door in front of me, I could barely glimpse. But it was bigger than I was, bigger than all of the Gems put together, and it was covered in deformed arms and legs but had somehow managed to slide through this rock like a snake. As it turned its long mass to "face" me, I got a glimpse of a mess of white hair on top of its bulk ... before it opened a toothy maw the size of my body, and roared.
Spittle flecked my helmet cam's lenses. The red dots my cutter was pointing at shook. And my heart raced as adrenaline flooded my system, begging me to escape.

But not because I was going to be eaten. Because of the hair that'd appeared on its "head," and the unmistakable bulging eye in its mouth in place of a throat.

Somehow, it managed to scream *words* at me, in a voice resembling Amethyst's:

"MAKE US WHOLE!"

* * *

45 minutes ago ...

* * *

LOG DATE 3 17 1
STATUS UPDATE ...
PRISM EN ROUTE TO AEGIS SYSTEM ...

OBJECTIVE 1: RESPOND TO DISTRESS SIGNAL SENT BY CRYSTAL GEM DEVICE ...
OBJECTIVE 2: IDENTIFY SOURCE OF DISTRESS SIGNAL ...

PARTICIPANTS INCLUDE ...

... PEARL (FACET 2 CUT 7B) - ENGINEERING AND GEM SYSTEMS SPECIALIST ...
... GARNET (FACET N/A CUT N/A) - COMBAT AND DIVINATIONS SPECIALIST ...
... AMETHYST (FACET 5 CUT UNKNOWN) - ROLE VARIES ...
... IRIS C. CLARKE - ENGINEERING ASSISTANT ...

ETA 198 SECONDS ...

I pressed "COMMIT" on the hard light keyboard in front of me, sending my log to the version control system. Then I took my glasses off and put them away carefully, before putting my RIG's helmet on and locking it in place.

I could barely see anything, while it started up. The voices outside were muffled. Then the inside display turned on, and I could see the "bridge" of the spacecraft that Pearl and Peridot had built: The Prism.

It was mostly made out of parts from old Earth machines. The cockpit I was sitting in, for instance, used to belong to an orbiter ... a type of spacecraft that repaired satellites. There were switches and buttons everywhere, even on the ceiling and floor. Some of them had sticky notes saying "DO NOT TOUCH!" on them. Others just had their parts ripped out.

My engineering RIG almost looked like it belonged to this orbiter's long-ago time. It was like a bulky space suit, made of shiny black fabric with white armour plates for added safety. With my helmet on, my breathing echoed inside it, and I could feel my breath on my chin. It felt like my own little world I could take with me, and its weight and the seat harness' pressure were reassuring.

I actually *had* my own little world, of course. The Warp pad on the lower level connected to my room, as well as my co-workers'. But it didn't work while the ship *itself* was in Warp space, so for the past half-hour or so I'd been strapped in and waiting ... while Pearl tried to keep herself
"Isn't it remarkable, Steven? This world is full of so many possibilities ... "

A familiar voice played over a scratchy recording. My mentor was resting her chin on the backs of her hands, while the milky white gem in her forehead projected a flat hologram on top of the console in front of her. I couldn't focus on it, since beyond it were panoramic cockpit windows and Warp space ... a kaleidoscope of blue-and-white light, that burns itself into your brain the longer you look at it.

It was easier to concentrate on my reflection, in the part of the glass nearest me. My RIG's face was metallic and blank, but it had glowing, electric blue eyes, which changed shape when I changed my expression. I smiled at it, and they turned into ^w^s.

I loved how I looked with this thing on. I also loved how people could actually tell what facial expression I had, instead of thinking me cold or distant. Maybe once I got a job on an Earthling ship, I thought, I could get used to this, and people could see me as normal for once. I just hoped that Pearl's recommendation would help ... that, and my upcoming Master's thesis on Human / Gem hybrid technology.

"Each living thing has an entirely unique experience," Pearl's recording went on. "The sights they see, the sounds they hear. The lives they live are so complicated ... a-and so simple. I can't wait for you to join them."

Amethyst yawned loudly, over Pearl's recording. I looked over to see her stretching her arms in her seat, across from me and behind Pearl.

Imagine a short, curvy teenager, with mischievous eyes and a hoarse throat from yelling at things. Except that she had purple skin, white hair that covered up part of her face, and a gem that matched her skin tone set just beneath her tank top's neckline.

Also, she could bench press the ship I was standing in.

That was Amethyst.

A lavender blur filled Pearl's projection, now, as the Gem I'd only known from recordings like this -- Rose Quartz -- continued speaking in it. "Steven, we can't both exist. I'm going to become half of you. And I need you to know that every moment you love being yourself, that's me. Loving you, and loving being you. Because you're going to be something extraordinary. You're going to be a-

"Are you watchin' that again, P?" Amethyst reached up to hold on to the back of Pearl's chair with one hand, and tried to look at her around it. "How many times are you gonna replay it?"

"Once." I saw Garnet adjust her mirrored shades, in the reflection next to her seat in front of mine. "Just before we arrive."

Garnet was the tallest of the four of us, and with good reason. She was a permanent Fusion of Ruby and Sapphire, two Gems that'd escaped their Homeworld long ago.

For most Gems, Fusion was a dance; an intricate set of emotions and movements, not unlike a bird's mating displays, that ended with their hard light shells melting into each other. It formed something greater than the sum of its parts, but it took effort to keep it together for long, especially if the fused Gems disagreed on anything.

For Garnet, it was a conversation. One that'd started thousands of years ago, and showed no signs
of stopping. Her outer appearance reflected that; she was tall, powerful, and confident, utterly owning the skin-tight outfit she wore and the shades and afro on top.

Her voice was deep and smooth as silk, and the part of her reddish face that I could see beneath her glasses was rarely annoyed or impatient. But the part that I couldn't see was even more important; behind her shades, I knew, was Garnet's third eye, which let her see into the future.

Sometimes I wondered what it'd be like, to be a part of that conversation with them. It wasn't a thing I could do, with this organic body of mine, nor did I think she would want to. But it made me blush, sometimes, when she paid attention to me.

Which wasn't often.

Pearl turned off her projection, and frowned at the other two Gems. "Rose Quartz could have sent that distress signal! I'm just ... reminding myself of what she looked and sounded like up close."

Amethyst snickered.

"Besides," she went on, "this is the video message that she left for Steven. Where she addresses him personally. It's a reminder of both of the forms that she took, while she was living on Earth with us! I thought that the two of you would appreciate this part of our history."

Pearl was much paler than the other Gems. Skinnier too, barely filling out her blue space suit, and between Garnet and Amethyst in height ... pretty close to my height, actually. Her short, pink hair tapered to a point just behind her head, which was almost as sharp as her face. Especially when she was glaring at someone in disapproval, which she did often.

She'd spent the longest time out of anyone in our group on the Gem Homeworld, in a nearby galaxy. When she'd rebelled against the Great Diamond Authority, and became a Crystal Gem, it hadn't been because she'd particularly cared for the people of Earth. For her, it'd been all about her devotion to Rose Quartz; a kind, compassionate, nearly perfect Gem, who'd inspired a knightly devotion in Pearl.

"I will fight in the name of Rose Quartz, and everything that she believes in!" That was Pearl's loyalty oath.

How do I know all this?

Because she wouldn't shut up about it! I was supposed to be getting hands-on experience with the human-Gem hybrid machines she and Peridot had designed, to save Earth from the Cluster and keep Homeworld from invading again. But Pearl had filled every spare second with lectures about Gem history and society, and especially about Rose Quartz and Steven Universe ... Rose's child, with a man named Greg Universe. A half-human child, that she'd willingly traded her life for.

Pearl would often talk about Steven as though he were still alive.

"Yeah, I appreciate it. I appreciate that it's history." I saw Amethyst gesture at Pearl. "That was what, fifty years ago now? I moved on from my ex in like, twenty."

Um, I thought. That was all. Just "Um."

"Amethyst!" Pearl clenched her fists and glared at her, over the back of her seat. It looked like she was about to say something that she would consider uncouth.
"Amethyst, that's enough." Garnet's voice softened, as she looked over at the pilot's seat. "And Pearl. We don't know who broadcasted that signal. It could be anyone."

"But she broadcasted it to our Wailing Stone! One of the ancient Gem machines that *Rose Quartz herself* used to organize the first Crystal Gems!" Pearl was pressing her hands together now, and her eyes looked star-struck.

"Yeah. On a frequency she's probably shared with any Homeworld Gems who would listen to her."

That was a part of their story that they were tight-lipped about. Garnet and Amethyst wouldn't give me straight answers, and the one and only time I asked Pearl where Rose Quartz was she looked like she was going to cry. The impression I had was that after Steven had passed away, and she had re-formed from "his" gem, she'd left to do something incredibly dangerous. But this was the first time they'd said anything about Rose Quartz being on *Homeworld*.

... or their Homeworld, anyway.

"That's why this is so important! If *Rose* trusted them, then-"

I saw Amethyst unbuckle her seatbelt, and climb over the back of her chair towards the coffee maker and snack bar in the back of the cockpit. Pearl *said* they'd put it in for me, but I felt like Amethyst had gotten the most use out of it.

I decided to join her, unfastening my four-point harness and swimming out of my seat. Unlike her, I couldn't just walk in the Warp's microgravity.

"Heeeeeeey, Chrissy." Amethyst waved, and got a handful of used coffee grounds from the machine. She crunched on them, bits and pieces floating away from her mouth, and I made a >_< face. Then I brought up the log that I'd typed on my RIG's computer, and pointed out my name to her. "Iris," it read, since I was covering up the rest with my hand.

"Fine with me, Irissy!" She swallowed the grounds, and I saw a lump pass through her throat. "You're wearin' that hockey outfit again?" she asked.

I poofed the hard light screen, and nodded to her.

"How come I never see you in anything else?" She tried to catch all the pieces that'd floated away from her.

*Because I can't breathe in a vacuum,* I thought. *Because my tools are designed to work with Resource Integration Gear. Because I need my RIG's kinesis module to lift half the load you can carry. Because it flashes a warning light on my back if I'm injured or out of air-"


It wasn't a joke, but Amethyst laughed heartily anyway. "Good one, C!" She slapped my back with her coffee-stained hand, and it knocked me into the machine.

I winced as I righted myself. *At least she's stopped hitting on me,* I thought. That had been awkward on multiple levels.

When I regained my balance and turned to face her again, she was dipping tea bags in a cup of hot water before eating them. The blob of water didn't want to stay in her cup, and she had to keep pushing it down. "So like, when we're out all day doin' stuff, do you poop in that thing?"
I shook my head.

"I bet you would if somebody scared you!" She wiggled her grimy fingers at me.


"Bha ha ha ha! I bet I could ... "

I just shook my head. But Amethyst had gone back to snacking, while Pearl and Garnet had gone quiet. I wondered how long it would be 'till we got there.

I saw Pearl look around a bit, nervously, and steeple her fingers in front of her. Then she sighed, and played that projection again.

"Isn't it remarkable, Steven? This world is full of so many possibilities ..."

The Prism lurched, as we came out of the Aegis system Warp Gate and gravity went back to normal. I managed to land on my feet, while Amethyst's hot water blob splashed and sizzled on the floor. And as one, all three of my co-workers gasped.

Past the windows which made up the side walls and ceiling, a brown planet was bleeding in space. Huge chunks had been torn out of it; a debris field had formed into rings. And in low orbit over that planet, suspending a thick piece of its crust by four glowing tethers, was the thing that'd apparently done this to it.

It looked like two greenish eight-sided diamonds, connected at their shared tip.

Diamonds.

"Pearl, get us out of here." Amethyst tossed her empty cup aside, and ran up and clutched the back of the pilot's seat in both hands. "Get us out of here NOW!"

"I ... I don't believe it." Pearl was staring, wide-eyed, out the window. Her projection was gone. "We've been tricked by Homeworld. It was a trap!"

"No," Garnet said, and stood up.

Everyone turned to look at her.

She held her hands over her head, their palms pressed together as though she were beginning a dance, and I swear my heart skipped a beat. Oh my stars, I thought, is she really going to ... But then she brought them apart, in a "zoom in" gesture, and the stars swept past us. The "windows" gave us a closeup, of the debris field surrounding the ship.

I had to hold on to the back of a seat, to keep from getting dizzy.

"See those?" Garnet pointed out shining, multicoloured specks strewn amid the rocks. "Those are pieces of Gems. Something terrible happened here. Something almost as terrible as cracking a planet open."

Pearl looked confused. "But if we try to find out what it was, isn't this ... 'planet-cracker' going to crack the ship open?"

"I don't think so. Look." She gestured at it. "No lights are on. It's not doing anything. I doubt if there's anyone left to even notice us."
Amethyst was hiding behind Pearl's seat. I realized I was hiding too, and made myself stand up straight. Just in time for the stars to sweep past and make me feel dizzy all over again, as Garnet zoomed back out.

"But there has to be someone there," Pearl protested, gesturing urgently at the planet-cracker. "Otherwise, who sent us the distress call?"

"They didn't just send it to us," Garnet reminded her. "If you think we're the only ones getting transmissions from space, you haven't seen what the humans have been up to lately."

*Or other Earthlings,* I thought.

"So if you want to answer that signal, you'd better do it soon. There's no telling who else has heard it. Or what they will do when they get here."

"Okay, then." Pearl took a deep breath, and put both hands on the control column in front of her. "Let's go in there and find Rose."

"Or whomever," Garnet reminded her, and sat back down in her seat.

Amethyst stayed hidden behind Pearl's seat, holding onto the back of it like a lifeline, until the ship started to move. Then she glanced between Garnet and Pearl, before standing up. "Uhhhhh ... I'll be right back."

She ran out. A second later, I heard the bathroom door slam shut and lock.

* * *

I tried to hold still in my seat and make myself as small as possible, as we approached the planet-cracker. But I couldn't. I was too excited. And so my hands started flapping themselves unbidden, until the knuckles on my RIG's glove were knocking against the window.

That brought me back to reality. A reality which, from this angle, looked *very* unreal.

I had seen pictures of Homeworld Gem ships before. Pearl had even let me run conductivity tests on pieces of Peridot's warship, under her close supervision, until they unfolded into bowling-ball-shaped robots and tried to walk away. But I'd never been *inside* of one; never walked through its corridors, or seen its equipment up close. And I hadn't thought I ever would.

Now I was watching what seemed to be an enormous docking bay, in between the two diamonds, fill my field of vision. And everything inside of it *shone.* Perfectly flat crystal surfaces above and below us gleamed, in the glare of our landing lights. And I saw traces of triangular patterns etched into them, as the light reflected off.

What I didn't see were any ships. Just platforms that looked like landing pads, and flat rectangles stacked on most of them. Were those Homeworld ships? I knew their technology could change shape in response to electrical and other stimuli, like a crystalline version of smart metal. Because as flat and inert as it looked from outside, it was actually made up of honeycombed cells ... each one containing the instructions for how to replicate itself and related devices, folded inside of its walls.

Sort of like how most human cells contained DNA.

By all rights, I should have been terrified of what a machine like that could do. Of a whole army of "robonoids" coming into being, despite the lights still being out, and squishing me like a bug. I
should have ran and hidden somewhere, and just prayed to get out of here soon. A part of me wanted to do that.

But the part that'd propelled me through college, taking risks and pushing my limits, couldn't wait to get out there in person. It'd fuelled me in Quiz Bowl grudge matches and arguments with my step-dad, and it had even let me overcome my shyness to ask Pearl, in person, if I could base my thesis on her and Peridot's work.

This was just as scary as that had been. But I was too excited to care. Live or die, I was going to see a Homeworld ship first-hand ... so to speak. All I cared about was taking lots of pictures and notes, and making sure they survived.

Oh. And the Crystal Gems too, if possible. Not that they needed my help. They were ancient, formed at the peak of Homeworld's power. So their abilities were beyond even other Gems'.

I was really just tagging along.

The *Prism* touched down on a landing pad. Pearl shut down its systems, one by one, flipping a switch and saying "Check" after Garnet said each one's name from memory. I tuned them out, instead unfastening my harness and standing up. Then I waited next to the door, bouncing up and down on the balls of my feet eagerly.

"Air filtration system," Garnet recited.

Pearl flipped a switch. "Check."

It occurred to me that I ought to have all my tools handy. What if I needed to carve my own doors? What if I wanted to bring back a piece of machinery? What if I needed to stim with my torpedo level, watching the bubbles swim back and forth behind glass as I tilted it, or hug it like my favourite plushie?

... don't judge me.

"Primary battery," Garnet said.

Another switch. "Check."

I unlatched the wall straps securing my tool chest, and dragged it out onto the wet floor. Taking this outside would be a pain, I knew, but I was sure I could manage it.

"Secondary battery," Garnet said.

"Let's leave that on ... " Pearl replied. *In case we need to get out of here in a hurry*, I knew she was leaving unsaid.

The excitement just made me grin even more. *Yay*, I thought, *I'm going to be chased by Homeworld Gems!*

I didn't hear Pearl and Garnet unfasten their harnesses, or even notice them until Pearl barely stopped herself from putting a hand on my shoulder. "Um, Iris!" she said, pressing her hands together instead and smiling awkwardly at me.

I cocked my head at her questioningly, like a bird.

"This may be a very *dangerous* mission," she said, looking away nervously. "I know you're excited
about Gem technology-

I started flapping my hands again.

"-but there is a very good chance that you could be injured, or even killed here. And I don't want to have to explain to your mother that I couldn't prevent that from happening."

"Neither do I," said Garnet, her hands on her hips. She was standing behind Pearl.

I stopped flapping, and froze in place. Something about the matter-of-fact way Garnet said that made my blood run cold.

"It's up to you if you want to come with us or not. You're an adult, at least as far as humans are concerned, and you're entitled to make that decision. But I'm begging you, Iris ... please listen to me for once!" Her hands clasped each other tightly, as she held them up towards me. "Please, at least promise me you'll head back to the ship if something goes wrong."

I could see the o_o; face I was making, in the gem set into Pearl's forehead. I finally winced, and then nodded.

"Okay. Thank you, Iris." Pearl closed her eyes, and let out a sigh of relief. Then she stared out past the windows, and a wistful look overtook her. "I've ... I've lost enough friends this century."

I blushed hard, and looked away from her so she couldn't see my RIG's face. She had never called me a friend before.

Then Garnet clapped her hands together, and I jumped. "Let's go!" she ordered. "There will be time for reminiscing once we've gotten back home safely."

I gulped and nodded to her, then waited for them to open the hatch and descend the ladder. I barely felt the air pressure change. For whatever reason -- probably the same reason Gems liked Earth-like planets -- it was a breathable nitrogen-oxygen mixture, according to my helmet's heads-up display. Which was good, because my RIG had a limited O2 supply.

I set my RIG's helmet cam to record, just in time to hear the toilet flush down the hatchway. Then I used kinesis to pull my steel toolbox out the door and onto the landing pad, before climbing down the ladder myself. Garnet and Pearl were standing there waiting for me, so I tried to hurry.

I heard the bathroom door slam open. "You could've at LEAST waited for me to finish before turning the lights out on me!" Amethyst shouted.

"Oh!" Pearl seemed taken by surprise. "I forgot that you ... do that. Sometimes."

I'm going to have to edit this part out, I thought, and nervously glanced down at the "Record" icon in the corner of my vision.

Even with the Prism's lights out, it was bright enough to see what I was doing. The sun was rising over Aegis 7, and the crystal walls sparkled with textures and patterns. Garnet and Pearl didn't even bother to turn on their gems' lights, as they waited for me and Amethyst to catch up with them.

I picked the toolbox back up with kinesis, and hurried over to them with one arm still extended at it. But even with my RIG's kinesis module doing the heavy lifting, it moved towards me at the pace of a leisurely walk.

Pearl frowned, and put one hand to her chin. "Are you sure you need all those tools, Iris?"
I tried to think of a response, when suddenly I felt the toolbox's weight lift. "I got this," Amethyst said, hefting it onto her shoulder as though it were made of styrofoam. She gave me an unusually serious look. "Us Earthlings gotta look out for each other."

I just bowed to her, gratefully.

Sometimes it was easy to forget that humans weren't the only people from Earth. The Gem Homeworld had actually used Earth as the site of a "kindergarten" for growing new Gems, a process which involved injecting chemical catalysts into the ground and had poisoned it for miles around. If the Crystal Gems hadn't fought to save Earth, then people like Amethyst, who were grown in Earth’s kindergarten, would have been the only remaining Earthlings.

Or so I'd been told. Honestly, looking around at this massive planet-destroying starship, and seeing how small and insignificant even the Crystal Gems were next to it, I had to wonder ... had Homeworld lost, or just gotten sick of Earth and given up?

Both in the original war, five thousand years ago, and when they came back.

And if they were so powerful ... what had happened to the ones on the planet-cracker?

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I found out in less than a minute.

We'd made our way into some kind of side room off from the docking bay. Garnet was shining the gem lights in her hands onto high walls that could accommodate a giant fusion; shimmering arrows set into the floor; and a number of securely-closed doors. The arrows let straight from the entrance to the largest pair of doors in the opposite wall, but you could barely see them unless the light was shining at the right angle.

"I could force these doors open," she said. I looked more closely at them; something had already smashed the ones that were farthest away.

Pearl was searching, too. "Yes, but there's got to be something ... wait. Here." She focused the light from her forehead gem onto a dais, which was set on a platform at chest height to me.

The two of them effortlessly jumped onto the platform, as though they were hopping up a stair step. Pearl examined the dais, and frowned. "This probably has the controls that I need, but without power I can't do anything."

"I can fix that," said Garnet, and put both hands on it.

I stayed away from the platform until after she jump-started what turned out to be a console, with a bright spark and a loud SNAP of electrical energy. Then when the top of it started glowing, I put my arms on the edge of the platform and tried to see what it was doing.

That was a mistake.

As soon as I did so, some kind of electrical interference came crashing down on my head, literally. My teeth hummed, and my arms and head vibrated and grew progressively numb. I jumped back, but my RIG's helmet had already shut down, and I could only make out dim, foggy shapes.

Why had Garnet and Pearl turned yellow? It took me a moment to realize that the interference hadn't been a residual effect from Garnet's jump-start. There was a force field in between us. And some kind of weird siren was blaring, while light flickered outside of the force field.
I heard Amethyst's voice yelling over the siren, while I tried to clear my head of stray muscle spasms and electrical jolts. "Whatever you did, shut it down, P!"

"I ... I can't! But it's not because of us, I mean, I'm pretty sure this is supposed to be happening ..." Her voice was hard to make out. And it was moving, relative to me. Why was it moving?

I yelped, as something picked me up around my waist and set me down a few feet away. "Well, whatever it is, make it stop!" Amethyst's voice was right next to me now. I guessed she'd been the one to pick me up? Had the arrows been like a conveyor belt or something?

After a second or two, Pearl laughed nervously. "Okay, everyone, settle down ... the room's just been placed under quarantine. I'm sure there's an easy way to fix this!"

"I'm not so sure." I could barely make out Garnet's muffled voice, through my helmet and over the siren.

"Quarantine?" Amethyst yelled, incredulous. "Like for disease? I'm not THAT filthy!"

I looked around. Through the lenses that didn't match my prescription, I could see the glow of other force fields, including one that I was pretty sure was blocking the way we came in. And I could see moving shapes, too; Garnet, Pearl, Amethyst, and ... no, wait. That couldn't be. Was something moving in from behind Amethyst? Something that she hadn't noticed? Wouldn't Garnet and Pearl have seen it by now?

Especially Garnet?

"Gaah, make it stop!" Amethyst was covering her ears now.

I tugged at her elbow, and she jerked away suddenly. "Iris, this hurts!" she said, turning to face me. "I don't have a helmet covering my ears like you d-"

She must have seen whatever it was, just then. Because the next sound I heard was the CRACK of a rock-studded whip; Amethyst's weapon, that she could pull out of the gem in her chest. "Garnet, Pearl, we've got company!"

"What?" Pearl sounded startled. "Oh my gosh, those look just like-

Pearl was never much for swearing.

"Amethyst! Iris! Get out of there now!" Garnet's voice was nearly drowned out by more whip cracks. "Iris, take her to the ship!"

What!? Me? I thought. Then I covered my head, because everything was happening all at once and it was all very loud.

An entire bass orchestra seemed to be playing around me. Colourful blurs swam past my field of vision, shouting and gurgling without forming words. Things that sounded like wet sacks slapped the floor. Garnet summoned her metal fists, with a sound like a pulse cannon going off, and yelled "Pearl, they're in here too!" before delivering a bone-crunching SMASH with them.

I ducked instinctively as soon as I heard her summon her weapon, just in time for Amethyst's whip to crack over my head. Something big made of hard light POOFed right next to me, its corporeal membrane vanishing, and I barely heard a sound like glasses clinking against each other before she grabbed me by the arm and ran.
"Hold the door for me!" Amethyst yelled, and practically threw me at it. I staggered right through another force field, before realizing what was going on. These were designed to block Gems' hard light physical forms, not puny organics like me; that's why it had just tingled when it came on over my head, instead of decapitating me. And the reason I was pretty sure it'd came on over my head was-

"Iris, come ON!"

I ran back to the doorway and stood inside it, backing myself up against one wall and holding my arm out as high as I could to block the force field underneath. I got a teeth-rattling electrical buzz for my troubles, along with what I was pretty sure was Amethyst kicking the toolbox through and then brushing past me. She grabbed my free arm and we ran again, the force field coming down on something chasing her with an icky SPLASH.

We ran what seemed like a long way, my legs barely letting me keep up with her. I heard my tools rattling next to her, so I guessed that she'd brought them with her when she ran. A bright light nearly blinded me for a second, and confused me until I realized that we were back in the docking bay, only running towards the sun this time.

How had the Homeworld Gems let ships in and out while keeping the air inside, I wondered? It must have been another kind of force-

Amethyst threw me by the arm into the Prism's side hatch, and I reflexively curled up with my arms over my head, my RIG taking most of the bruises as I SMACKed into the wall. I had just enough presence of mind to roll out of the way as my steel toolbox flew overhead and hit the wall above me, before coming down with a clatter where I had been laying.

"We're here!" Amethyst shouted, her hoarse voice straining. I heard her clatter up the steps to the hatch. "Start the ship!"

Umm ... I felt dazed, I'd just ran at full tilt while wearing a suit of armour, and I'd had the wind knocked out of me by Amethyst playing rough again. Plus, I couldn't see anything, and I couldn't even tell her that without my RIG's electronics. Which had apparently been fried by the force field's EM interference.

Or had they? I ran one of my fingers along the touch sensor just below my neck, and saw the familiar blue glow of my keyboard and screen appear in the air in front of me. I guessed it'd only been my RIG's helmet that'd shut down. Maybe I could touch-type if I took these gloves off. Or maybe I could try to find my glasses, which I would probably need for-

Something thumped on the outside wall. Then the floor started to tilt towards the wall that I'd hit, and I heard a bass rumble that sounded like a freaking dragon was right next to me.

"Crud!" Amethyst jumped back out of the Prism. I heard her whip crack a couple of times, and then our spacecraft the size of a house came crashing back down, its landing gear strained but not broken. When it hit the floor I bit down on my tongue and drew blood, and barely realized it since my bones felt like they were still rattling.

I took long, deep breaths to steady myself, while Amethyst fought off whatever these things were outside. None of this felt real, and it didn't help that the last time (okay, the last few times) the Crystal Gems had fought things I had just hid and tried not to get in the way. I wasn't an ancient warrior, I was a postgraduate student!

Something crashed into the side of the ship again, tilting me towards the hatch for a second. I
braced myself this time, still tasting copper in my mouth, and realized I was losing control of my breathing. Oh great, I thought, a panic attack. It's like part of my brain was still working and analyzing what was going on, while the rest of it was caught up in primal fear.

Okay, what do I have to work with ... the rational part of my brain thought.

I was cowering on the floor with my arms over my head. I'm going to die I'm going to die I'm going to DIE!

I need to take off these gloves and this helmet first.

I cringed so hard it was like a spasm, clutching my head tightly. NO! This is not coming off!

As long as my hands were clinging to each other, I started unfastening the gloves' seals, pulling them off slowly and methodically and letting them drop to the floor.

No no no, I'm not ready to die! I thought, while my hands unsealed my helmet on autopilot. I'm not done being me! I'm not ready for what happens next! I'm not-

I came back up to a kneeling position, pulling my helmet off and gasping for breath. Feeling my heart pound, my chest heave, and my hair stick to the sides of my face. Something lavender smacked into the window right as I looked up, but then it got peeled off by something holding onto it.

I heard stone-breaking crashes as loud as artillery fire, outside. Amethyst was having a bad day.

Alright, I thought, first things first. Find my glasses.

I jumped up and climbed into my seat, fumbling around with the side compartments as the Prism shook. After what felt like far too long to be doing this, I came up with an empty frame, and glass cuts on my fingers and thumbs.

Okay, I thought, as Amethyst's whip cracked outside and my cuts throbbed in time with my heartbeat. Next step. Fix my RIG's helmet.

The only part you could replace without disassembling the entire thing was the battery. So I got back down on my hands and knees, next to my tool chest, and smeared blood on the lid as I pried it open. I kept spare batteries in here, for my RIG's helmet and my plasma cutter. But everything had been mixed up so much that I had to just feel for them blindly.

I cried out, as something sliced a thin red line across my thumb, and I sounded much smaller and higher-pitched than I meant to. Found the disc saw, I thought, and set it aside as carefully as I could. My hands smelled like blood.

I heard something smash into the wall high above me. Amethyst, or one of the things?

My fingers latched on to a small, metal rectangle, and it just as quickly slid out of their wet grasp. I gritted my teeth and held my RIG's arm out at the tool chest, using kinesis to pull things out one by one and feeling at them until I was holding the battery again. Then I dried my hands off on the back of the chair I was kneeling behind, and pried open a catch in the back of the helmet with a flathead screwdriver, before tearing out the battery and locking the new one in place.

The old battery was still sizzling. It stung just to touch, and I burned myself a few times before just using the screwdriver on it, too. I don't recommend doing this when you're not in a life-and-death situation, unless you want to risk causing one.
Finally, I got the new battery in the right way, put the cover back on and locked my helmet back in place. By the time I'd put my gloves back on and environmentally sealed them, the visor's display had come back online, and I could see the mess that I'd made of the floor.

I ran for the pilot's seat and sat down, just in time to watch Amethyst fall out of an impact crater high up on the wall. I couldn't see her hit the ground, but I heard her POOF, and saw a cloud of lavender smoke.

I whispered a word that Pearl would've considered uncouth.

Before I could figure out what to do next, something massive lurched past the cockpit, bumping into the *Prism*’s nose cone and making me grip the chair to keep balance. It was ... what the heck was it? All I could see was a mound of heaving, multicoloured flesh, shaped sort of like a giant slug. Arms, legs, and ears studded its back, just kind of dangling there, or falling off to flop and twitch on the deck. And beneath it were dozens of limbs, clustered on its "foot" like a centipede, dragging it forward surprisingly quickly.

I realized that I was standing upright and leaning over the dashboard, just in time to see an unnaturally long arm reach for Amethyst's gem.

I wanted to scream and flail my arms, but I didn't. Instead, I made myself scramble back to the hatch, stopping on the way to pick up the remote-control disc saw and a rack of circular blades. Then I made myself go down the steps, trying not to make any sound.

I went underneath the *Prism* and ducked behind its strained landing gear, keeping it between me and the thing. Every part of me wanted to run, but the rational part of me wanted to know: What was that? I vaguely remembered the Crystal Gems talking about some kind of mutant experiments made by Homeworld ... shards of broken Gems, taken and forced to fuse together. But I hadn't been able to find out anything useful, because Garnet had called an end to the discussion. In a tone that said you did not want to argue with her.

Was this what those looked like?! I'd always thought they were smaller!

Whatever it was, it had picked up Amethyst's gem and opened some kind of maw in its front. So this was it; now or never.

I pulled the trigger part of the way, and my disc saw spun and WHIRRed loudly. The creature turned to look, and inside of a giant, tooth-studded maw I saw an entire cluster of eyes.

My breath caught. But my hands acted on autopilot, and one of the eyes started squinting as a red dot appeared on it.

I pulled the trigger the rest of the way.

A diamond-edged saw blade the size of my head shot out of the RC-DS, controlled by a tiny kinesis module. It was so fast that I didn't see it make contact with the eyes. But I saw the Shard Fusion beast recoil, clamping its jaw shut and writhing.

I swung the RC-DS like a fishing pole, grinding the remote-controlled saw blade against everything in the beast's mouth. Until that blade stuck and gave out, and the Shard Fusion retched, expelling a mawful of tiny gem fragments and one dull, corroded disc saw.

I stared for a second, horrified at the carnage. Then I realized its arm, held high over its maw, was still clutching Amethyst's gem.
Before I knew what I was doing, I had run out in the open to get a better angle. The creature's maw opened and its remaining eyes glared at me, just in time for the red dot on its arm to turn into a whirring saw blade.

It CLINKed, and ground into something hard.

The Fusion was using Amethyst's gem as a shield.

Two long, spindly arms held it between them, the saw blade spinning and sparking as I tried to swerve it to carve them instead. Fingers fell off, but more grew in their place. Something finally gave way, and I thought that I'd broken its grip, but then I heard the CLINK CLINK of two objects hitting the floor.

The spent saw blade, and half of Amethyst's gem.

A muffled screech came out of my throat, like a tiny animal's threat display, as I ran forward launching saw blades at random. Frack you! I thought, my eyes fixed on the creature. Hydraulically frack every shard in you!

The mammoth Shard Fusion raised its arms, as though to protect itself from a swarm of furious wasps. The blades messily carved off its limbs, sending them to flop on the deck for a moment before poofing, but there were always more in their place. Finally, the creature roared and came right at me, much faster than I was expecting.

The next thing I knew, I was rolling off of the Prism's front landing gear tires and hearing ringing in my ears. I flopped onto the floor, trying to breathe, trying to stand upright, and winced at the mangled remains of my saw on the floor. Everything hurt.

Far in the distance behind me, I heard the wet slapping of the creature's limbs on the floor, and stone sliding and crumbling. Then nothing. I managed to turn around, and saw a gigantic hole in the wall on the other side of the docking bay. So that was what it had been heading towards.

I sighed, all my energy leaving me. It's over, I thought, isn't it?

Then a violet glimmer caught my eye, and I saw that Amethyst's other half was still there on the floor.

I scrambled towards it, clutching my side. It didn't feel like any bones were broken, but I was going to be covered in bruises when this was over.

Finally, I reached down and picked up one-half of my annoying, frustrating, and very dead friend, feeling like I was cradling her face in my hands. But when I looked into its shiny, reflective surface, I saw my RIG's face, its eyes wavering as I tried not to cry. And I remembered what she'd said to me:

Us Earthlings gotta look out for each other.

I closed my eyes, took a deep breath, and counted to three. Then ten. Then twenty. Finally I gasped and screamed indistinctly, looking all around and flapping my arms in the air. I was overstimulated and terrified, but this was my way of processing what had happened, so I could think clearly enough to know what to do next.

The shards needed to be bubbled. I needed to find Garnet and Pearl. And we needed to get the frack out of here.
But what about Amethyst?

Aside from a few nicks on her facets, the cut that'd split her gem was surprisingly clean. I'd never been taught Gem first aid, but maybe there was some way to make her whole again? To fuse her two halves together, without solder or glue. The Homeworld Gems had to have medical stuff on their ship, right?

Right?

I glanced longingly at the door we'd all gone through ten minutes ago, hoping to see Garnet and Pearl come back out of it. Then I clenched my fists, and carefully placed Amethyst's gem in one of my RIG's pockets. Before climbing up the steps to the *Prism's* hatch, gritting my teeth at the pain in my hands and side.

A minute later I came back out, with a half-dozen batteries in one hand and my plasma cutter in the other. I had never wielded a weapon before, but I clutched it like one of Pearl's duelling swords, my mind already racing to figure out how I'd beat this monster and save Amethyst.

Nothing came immediately to mind. So I half-walked, half-jogged towards the hole the Shard Fusion had crawled through, hoping that I'd figure *something* out. And knowing I had to try, either way.

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