

Arcturian Jewel-Mites

Humanity first came across these [gorgeous, horrible pests](#) during the First Glimmer Expedition. Glimmer is an extremely pretty, but only barely human-habitable planet orbiting the red giant star Arcturus, and creatures like the Jewel-Mites are a large reason why the place is only barely habitable. Simply put: Jewel-Mites eat gemstone. One particular type -- the kind that's most hardy offplanet -- eats diamond.

Why is this bad? Because even in the interstellar future people use diamond fairly extensively, particularly since the methods for making it cheaply have been known for centuries. The First Expedition to Glimmer nearly didn't make it back off-planet before they ran out of food, because Jewel-Mites got into the planetary drive of the *Verrazzano's Revenge* (the primary exploration vessel of the First Expedition) and weren't found before they had almost chewed through the entire synthetic diamond protective covering the blast chamber. As it was, the *Revenge* was eventually deemed unfit for further service, and cannibalized for parts.

But people still touch down on Glimmer, despite the fact that they need to use landers that are practically made out

of *wood* and *glass*: the planet has gemstone where most terrestrial worlds might have sand and rock. While it's pretty cheap to get synthetic gemstones these days, it's still cheaper to go down to Glimmer with a bucket and a shovel - and there are ways to spray for Glimmer-Mites that will keep the creatures far away from the beach people are currently shoveling.

But, of course, sometimes somebody doesn't do a good job spraying, or doesn't even bother to spray, and ends up with a hold full of gemstone that's also infested with Jewel-Mite eggs. It takes a few years for the eggs to hatch, which means that they could be anywhere in settled space by then, which means that a Jewel-Mite infestation is a rare, but not unknown, situation. Fortunately they do not flourish, off-planet. But for a while they can seriously bollix up a mining colony, or orbital refinery, or spaceship...

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