

Love at Second Sight

by [Bruce Pendragon](#)

Table of Contents

[Chapter 1: A Banana Cream Pie](#)

[Chapter 2: Mike's Batting Record](#)

[Chapter 3: Mere Words](#)

[Chapter 4: The Culture Gap](#)

[Chapter 5: Do as the Terrans Do](#)

A Word From the Author: Welcome, all, and thank you for your interest in this little tale. I have a bit I'd like to say, but for those of you who care not for an author running his mouth and would prefer to just 'cut to the chase,' then simply skip ahead past the bold print. I'll not hold it against you. For those of you who are still reading this note, let me say first off that I was as surprised to find myself writing this story as many of you will be to find it here. But i confess, I've been in something of a lurch lately. I've temporarily burned out on writing the Vanguard Saga (and the writing quality of 'The children's War' lately will give evidence to that), so I decided to take a little break and write something else. Unfortunately, the stories on my account, which normally fill this role, have suffered from a lack of inspiration as well. But rather than give up, I decided to return to where it all began, with a story of Mike Jones and Princess Mica of Argonia, the star-crossed lovers (or perhaps that should be 'Southern-Crossed lovers) of the classic NES generation. this will not, I warn you, be a sweeping, tear-jerking love story of a gallant hero and his princess. For those of you seeking that, scroll down a few stories to Erico's work. This, rather, is an experiment: my first attempt at a romantic comedy. Was the experiment a success? I leave you, the reader, to decide that. and without further ado, enjpy.

Chapter One: A Banana Cream Pie

The South-Pacific island village of Coralcola usually fell virtually silent at dusk. With the sun's light gone from the sky, and electric light unavailable anywhere on the island except for the laboratory on a sandy outcropping at its center, there was little to do on a typical night but retire to one's hut and sleep well, in preparation for the labors of another up-with-the-sun morning a scant few hours away.

But this was not a typical night.

On this night, the village was alive. Torches illuminated the village square, and the air was thick with the primal music of island drums as they played wild rhythms with constantly increasing energy. Coconut wine flowed freely, and laughter and song wound their way into the night as if to reach the very stars the villagers so revered. It was a night of celebration. It was a celebration of reunions, for the laboratory's occupant, Dr. Stephen Jones of Americola (Dr. J to the villagers), had returned safely after his abduction by the star-men. It was a celebration of heroism, for the doctor had been rescued from the star-men by his visiting nephew, fifteen year old Michael Jones, who had now returned to the island with a story that would be the stuff of songs for generations. But perhaps most importantly, it was a welcoming party. A "welcome-to-Earth" party to be precise, for seven new arrivals from another world.

And Mike Jones, the brown-haired, freckle-faced and peach-fuzzed savior of two planets, sitting near the edge of the square to rest after joining in the revelry for a while, intended to welcome one of those seven to Earth in style.

"Some party, wouldn't you say?" Dr. J's voice cut into Mike's thoughts and Mike turned his attention away from the fireside dance to look up at his approaching uncle.

"Totally," Mike answered, grinning.

Dr. J. grinned back. "So how's it feel, slugger?"

"How does what feel?"

"How does what feel?" Dr. J echoed in disbelief. "Being a hero, genius! What'd you think? That I was asking how it felt having bananas in your ears?"

"Oh, that. Yeah, well," Mike faltered, blushing slightly at the embarrassing reminder of his peculiar 'fashion-statement' upon returning to the island. "To tell you the truth it hasn't really sunk in yet I guess. I mean... me? A hero?" That was a bald-faced lie and Mike knew it. He'd thought of little else since his defeat of the alien warlord Zoda. But apparently it was convincing enough for Dr. J.

"Well, you'll get used to it, slugger," the doctor gave Mike a companionable slap on the back, a gesture that turned into wrapping his arm around the teenager's shoulders. "Seriously, Mike," his voice took on a tone of gratitude. "Thanks."

Mike didn't respond at first

"I mean it, Mike," Dr. J went on. "If it hadn't been for you I'd have probably starved to death in those ruins, if Zoda didn't come back and finish me off first, that is. And I didn't exactly have time to thank you before. I guess I was too busy talking you into boarding Zoda's ship to look for those three cubes." At the last sentence, his tone was tinted with a hint of regret.

Mike grinned at his uncle awkwardly. "Aw, man, it was nothing, unc."

"'Nothing' my foot," Dr. J answered somberly. "You did what no one else had been willing to even attempt, and you got me out of a truly messy situation. You saved my life, Mike." After that the two fell silent for a moment. Then Dr. J's face brightened and he said, "Well, I just wanted to get the gushing out of the way, since you're probably about to have villagers swarming all over you, all wanting to meet the hero of two worlds, and you'll be so busy signing autographs and taking pictures you won't have time for your old relic-digging uncle."

"Aw, come on doc," Mike said as his uncle withdrew his arm. "Half the reason for this vacation was to spend some time hanging out with 'my famous archaeologist uncle.'"

Dr. J laughed. "And what was the other half?"

But Mike didn't hear. His eyes were focused on something behind Dr. J. turning around, Dr. J saw what—or rather, who—was responsible for the distraction, so he wasn't surprised to hear a hurried 'catch you later, unc' from Mike as the young man dismissed himself from the doctor's company. A young girl, about Mike's age (or so he guessed, which was all anyone could do where the seven newcomers were concerned) had excused herself from the party and was now walking in their direction. *Mica*, Dr. J recalled the way the girl introduced herself, speaking for the seven rescued children. *Princess Mica, to be precise, probably looking for a private word with the 'knight in shining sneakers.'* "Stay out of trouble, Mike," he called as his nephew jogged over to meet the girl. He watched for a moment and then, grinning slightly, walked away shaking his head and musing "ah, youth."

Mike slowed to a stop as he came within conversational distance of Mica. "Hi," he greeted, flashing his most charming grin. "Leaving the party so soon?"

"Oh, I just needed to get away for a minute," Mica answered, smiling back. It was a girlish, innocent smile, devoid of pretense.

Mike decided it was just about the coiest thing he had ever seen. *Especially after what she said earlier.* A hint of mischief entered into his grin, as he recalled the first words Mica had said to him. There had been the formal introductions, the telling of the seven children's tale about their world's destruction by Zoda, and about how Mica's father, Hirocon, transferred the 'essences' of the seven children into some kind of cryo-stasis in three cubes and put them in an escape pod on its way to Earth. There had been conversation among the Coralcolan villagers, and the chief's assurance to the seven children that they were welcome here, and Mica had then expressed her gratitude. And then, after this, she'd looked directly at Mike and said 'I'm hungry. Is that a banana cream pie?' *Now tell me if that wasn't a loaded question. Yeah,* Mike thought. *She digs me. And why not? She was a princess-in-distress, and I'm the guy that saved her.* "Well," he let his grin fade. "Care for a little company?"

Mica smiled again, but it wasn't quite the same smile. "I think I'd like that," she said honestly.

Barely twenty minutes later, the two teenagers found themselves walking along a stretch of beach on

the southwest shore of Coralcola Island (or C-Island, as the National Geographic Society maps called it for want of enough space to print the tiny island's full name). It was not far from the village: barely three hundred yards if one could walk in a straight line. But there was no straight line from the village to this beach. One had to walk east-by-southeast from the village to reach the narrow pass that led from the island's higher elevations to this beach, a beach formed as a side effect of the amount of drifting sand in the local riptides. The shouts and songs of the villagers' party still wafted their way out here, but they were faded enough by the distance and the forest in between that they were little more than festive background noise.

"It's still kind of surreal," Mica confessed, her eyes jumping from the night horizon to the sand in front of her feet and back again. "After spending twenty years in those cryo-cubes, it started to feel like it was going to be that way forever, that nothing would ever change. And we all expected to find ourselves on a completely foreign world if anything ever did change. But your world isn't so different from ours at all. Your people don't look that different from us, even your language is the same. Isn't that strange, Mike?"

Mike nodded sincerely. "Totally," he agreed.

For a while Mica said nothing. When she did it was, "do you mind if we sit down and rest? My feet are a little tired."

"For you, princess," Mike replied, "anything."

Mica gave him a reproving look as she sat down with her knees pulled up toward her. "Please," she said. "Just 'Mica.' I'm no princess here."

Mike sat down beside her, his legs stretched out in front of him, leaning back on his hands. "Mica then," he said with a smile. But Mica wasn't looking at him. She was staring up at the array of stars that dusted the sky, and her eyes had taken on a vague and distant quality. To be specific, she was looking directly at the Southern Cross.

Mike's eyes took the opportunity to spend a few moments just drinking up the sight of her. Different planet or not, she was a heartstopper. Her straight, red hair (which actually had hints of purple in the dim light), was cut shoulder-length, and curled outward slightly at the ends. Her eyes, like the eyes of all six of her companions, were brown, and Mike wondered if Argonians had somehow never evolved different colors of eyes. Her slender ears were pointed, which was, as far as Mike could tell, the only visible difference between Argonians and Humans. Her skin was a creamy ivory shade, and her face had a dainty, aristocratic look in spite of her shy demeanor. She wore a high-collared red and gold tunic made from some kind of silk, and an elaborate blue cloak. The latter, Mike guessed, was a mark of her royal status. At the moment, the cloak hung loosely off of her shoulders and trailed in the sand behind her like a bridal train, allowing Mike's eyes to trace her slender body... *Slow down, Ace*, Mike mentally scolded himself. *You've got all night for that. Don't let her catch you with your eyes wandering.* Giving his head a thought-clearing shake, Mike looked back toward her face. She was looking back at him now, smiling that same innocent smile that Mike had seen at the party. "So tell me, Mike," she said softly. "What's this game you want to teach me to play? Is it an Earth custom?"

Mike looked at her, puzzled. "Game?"

"Well, I took a look at your thoughts, and I saw that you're eager to tell all your friends how you 'scored' with me. But I'm not quite sure what this game is that excites you so."

"I... I, uh, well..." Mike stammered on for several seconds, and would likely have embarrassed himself if he hadn't belatedly noticed a phrase in Mica's comment that he had overlooked. "Wait a minute, you took a look at what?"

Mica giggled. "I'm sorry, I probably shouldn't have looked in your mind without telling you."

Mike's eyes widened, slightly worried. "You can read minds?"

Mica's giggling stopped, and she looked as if she had only just realized something embarrassing. "I'm sorry. I... I guess I forgot for a minute that this isn't Argonia anymore. I really do apologize, Mike."

Mike ignored the apology. "But, how?"

"We Argonians are telepaths, Mike. We can pick up on some fully formed thoughts, and occasionally mental images of someone near us. It's a sense that we call 'second sight.'" She looked away sadly. "I guess that's something I conveniently forgot to mention to the villagers. I doubt they'll be as welcoming when they realize that."

"Now wait a minute," Mike argued. "I wouldn't say that. I mean, yeah, it'll be kind of a shock to them, but it's not going to change anything."

"Won't it?" Mica countered. "It changed your opinion."

Mike put his hand on her shoulder gently. "That's not true, Mica."

Her eyes met his, and there was a fragile hope in them. "It isn't?"

"Not at all," Mike assured her somberly. "In fact," a grin spread slowly across his face. "If you can read minds, then you've known all this time what I had in store, and you haven't tried to put the brakes on yet..." he left that sentence to hang, unfinished, in the salty air.

Now it was Mica's turn to look puzzled. "Haven't tried to... what?" For an instant she locked eyes with Mike, and she didn't need second sight to know from the look in his eyes what he meant. Mike watched as her facial expression changed to horror, then fury, and a host of different shades in between. "Why, *you*... you... Beast!" The accusation began in a whisper, and ended with a shout that was accompanied by a stinging slap to Mike's face that left him sprawled face-down in the sand as she got up and stormed back to the village.

After she was out of sight, Mike picked himself up out of the sand and dusted himself off, allowing himself to wonder just where he had gone wrong. "Y'know," he said aloud to no one in particular, "I'm beginning to think I may have read her wrong."

Great. Another Note From the Author: 'Allo, readers! As you can see, I decided not to leave this one as a one-shot. I just couldn't help but think the awkward story of the unwilling high-school hero and the princess from the stars deserved to have completion, even if neither romance nor comedy is my strong suit. This chapter is a bit short (only about a thousand words), but I think it provides a little more insight into the mind of a baseball-playing, yo-yo-slinging adolescent alien-monster-slayer. It's a little reminiscent of the gang from "Grease" all gathered around a young John Travolta, singing "tell me more, tell me more, did ya get very far?" Anyway, here it is. Enjoy!

Chapter Two: Mike's Batting Record

"Allo, Mike!" A robust voice called from across the village square, and Mike looked around to find the robust young owner of that robust voice trotting across the square toward him. It was Baboo, the Island native a few years older than Mike who worked as Dr. J's assistant. Mike normally would have avoided the over-enthusiastic youth, or prepared some excuse to get rid of him. This morning, however, he was eager for a distraction. *As long as the conversation has nothing to do with-*

"How did it go with the newcomer princess?" Baboo asked with a locker-room grin as he came within normal speaking distance.

-*That.* "Whattaya mean, 'how did it go?'" Mike knew it was a cheap denial as soon as he uttered it, but it was, at the moment, the only denial he could afford.

Baboo's grin grew wider. "I mean did you," he paused to rifle through his mental catalog of American slang. "Did you 'go all the way' with her?"

Mike fixed Baboo with his most convincing confused stare. It was, apparently, not convincing enough.

"Come on, Mike. I saw you two slip away from the party last night. It didn't take a rock scientist to know what you had in mind."

"I think you mean 'rocket scientist,' Baboo," Mike commented. "The only 'rock scientist' around here is my uncle. And as for me and Mica last night, well..." Mike stuffed his hands in his pockets and looked away, trying to act casual. "Well, I decided not to pressure her. Y'know, first night on a new planet, waking up from time sleep-"

"You struck out."

"Yeah." Baboo gave no response. Mike surmised that the islander was commiserating with him. He was confused, as a result, when he looked again at Baboo and found him grinning more broadly still.

"What's so funny about that?"

"The Americolan baseball hero struck out?" Baboo asked in mock incredulity.

Mike rolled his eyes. "Ooooooh, baseball jokes. Now *that's* new and original. I've never heard that one. I've never heard jokes like, say, 'looks like the ace pitcher's having a hard time finding the catcher's mitt.' Come to think of it, I've never heard all the puns about keeping a better grip on the bat either. And I've *sure* never heard any jokes about the baseball star who's never been past second base! No, I've never heard any of those before at all, Baboo! You're clever."

Somewhere during Mike's drippingly sarcastic tirade, Baboo's expression switched to one of mild confusion. Well-versed in English though he may have been, he lacked a working knowledge of American cultural innuendo. "Second base?" Baboo murmured, puzzling it over in his mind.

In a moment of blistering realization, Mike knew he had let too much information slip. "Forget about it, Baboo. It's just-"

Baboo's eyes widened with realization. "You've never been with a woman before?"

Mike sighed. "Baboo, that's the stupidest thing I've ever heard. Of course I've," he held up quote signs with his fingers, "'been with a woman' before. I've been with plenty of women before" Baboo nodded, seemingly relieved, and Mike quickly muttered, "I've just never had sex with any of them. That's all."

Again Baboo was mercifully silent, and Mike thanked the stars above for small favors. Then Baboo's silence erupted into a side-splitting laugh.

Mike glowered. "Quit laughing, ya big coconut-munching bum."

Baboo could not seem to help himself. Just when it seemed he was going to stop he looked at Mike's face, noticed his humiliated expression, and burst out laughing again. "Wait, wait, wait a minute," Baboo finally stopped laughing long enough to speak a few words in between snickers. "Let me make sure I understand you. Are you saying that he-who-saved-two-planets is still a... a..." With the word 'virgin' beginning to form on his lips, Baboo doubled over in his most debillitating fit of laughter yet.

After that conversation, two things did not happen for several days. For one, Mike and Baboo did not speak. For another, Baboo did not remove an icepack from over his right eye, except to see if the impression left by Mike's left fist was still there.

Nor did it take long for news to travel on an island as small as C-Island. By mid afternoon on the day after the Argonians' arrival, the entire village of Coralcola knew of Mike and Baboo's fight (if a single knockout punch could truly be considered a fight), though the reasons for the fight remained between Mike and Baboo. to the islanders it was a small matter. It was the kind of thing a person hears about, shrugs, and goes on about one's day saying, "they had an argument, and they fought. Boys will be boys." But there was one person on the island with a different perspective. To her, the news of the fight was proof positive that one of the boys involved was a barbarian brute who was willing to knock a friend senseless over mere words.

And the fact that she had done the same thing to Mike the very night before never once entered Princess Mica's mind.

Greetings From The Author: Salutations, and thank you for your continued interest in my little tale here. I have to admit, the laughs are a little sparse in this chapter. They mostly occur back-to-back during a brief exchange in the middle. But since the last chapter gave us a look at Mike, a look at Mica seemed in order, as well as some closure to Mike and Mica's confrontation in chapter one. In this chapter, tensions reach the boiling point, creating the need for a nice, calm, romantic recovery in chapter four... which I need to get started on I suppose. I offer you my assurances, reader, the story will return to its roots as a comedy by then. By the way, I apologize for the short chapters. I'm probably going to come along later and make this part of chapter two. Until then, enjoy.

Chapter Three: Mere Words

The same afternoon that Mica learned of Mike and Baboo's fight, Mica was walking across the village square on her way to nowhere in particular. At the moment, a triviality like a destination was less important than the simple act of going somewhere, doing something, even if that something was truly nothing at all. She needed time to think. Or, more to the point, she needed time when she didn't have to think.

Unfortunately, for Mica, such time was a rare commodity.

She and her six companions had been quickly accepted by the Coralcolan villagers, and even though they had been on the planet less than twenty-four hours, each of them had already been adopted by one of the local families. Mica couldn't help but marvel that such kindness existed anywhere in the universe. Even Argonia, the galactic center of enlightenment, rarely saw such simple, open charity as to accept such a sudden arrival as theirs with such complete lack of suspicion. She had not lied when she said to the chief "we are pleased. You've been so kind."

But while the villagers' kindness helped prevent any new wounds from being inflicted on the war-weary, travel-worn souls of the 'Lost Seven,' there was no salve that could aid in the healing of those wounds already inflicted.

"We're alone," she spoke her thoughts aloud as her feet half-consciously carried her to the beach on the southwest shore of the island. "We've been accepted, we'll become acclimated, in time we may even be loved... But we'll always be alone. Outsiders... Aliens." A tear slid down her cheek at the utterance of the word. *Sacred Stars, that word has so much more meaning on a planet like this. They've never been beyond their own solar system. They've never met anyone from another world before now. We're the first.*

No. Not the first. "The last," she murmured, shedding yet another tear as a truth that had been pushed aside through twenty years of semi-consciousness finally made itself known. "All of it is gone. We can't go back, and there would be nothing to go back to if we could." *We're stuck here. Here, on this planet more than a light millennium away. Here on this hidden island, surrounded by an endless sea.*

...Here on this beach where... "Sacred Stars, how did I end up here?"

"Funny coincidence isn't it," came Mike's unwelcome voice from behind her. "You and me ending up here again, I mean."

Mica frowned. She'd been so absorbed in her thoughts that she hadn't heard the young man's approach. *No. The boy's approach.* Now though, Mike was only a few yards away from her. A conversation, it seemed, was unavoidable. "Yes," she replied to Mike's inquiry. "And by the way, no."

Mike slowed his pace as he stepped beside her, much the way he had done the night before at the party. "Eh? Yes, and by the way, no? What's that mean?"

"Yes, in response to your inquiry about the circumstances, and no in response to whatever you might have been about to ask."

"Oh," Mike responded, slightly deflated. Then his cheer returned as he remarked, "good. 'Cause I was going to ask if you were still mad at me about what happened last night." If she had used Second Sight, the lie would not have held. The Southern Cross must have been watching over Mike, though, because she didn't.

Mica bit her tongue for not anticipating the reply, but within moments regained her footing by calmly countering, "no. In point of fact, I'm not still mad about what you did last night. I've moved on."

"Good. Then-"

"Now I'm mad about what you did this morning instead." She raised her voice enough that she spoke over him, but not enough that her veneer of calm faded. She hoped, that was.

It took Mike a moment to make the connection. "Now wait a minute," he began.

Mica gave no quarter. "You remember, don't you, *hero*? This morning, when you bravely brutalized a friend, and all over what? Words, Mike! Just words!"

"Ooooh, oh, right. Right," Mike shot back, his voice edged with corrosive sarcasm. "That was heinous, knocking someone out just because of something he said. I should've been more civilized, like you, and knocked him out for something I read in his mind instead."

Mica's eyes were poison arrows as she spun around to face Mike. "You can twist it any way you want, *hero*. I know bullying when I see it."

Mike scoffed. "Bullying? News flash, Princess. That guy had two years and at least thirty pounds of solid muscle over me. It's not like I was picking on someone who couldn't stand up for himself."

Mica looked for a moment as though she would relent. But the point of no return, it seemed, had already been crossed. "Muscle or not, it was barbaric. Look at you! Watch out, Earth! The Hero of Argonia is here, and woe be unto you if he doesn't approve of what you have to say!" She seethed for a moment before unleashing one last barb. "As far as I'm concerned, Michael, you're no better than Zoda!"

The air seemed to thicken as she finished, and no sooner had she spoken than Mica wished she could swallow the words up again. She looked away from Mike, embarrassed at her own impulsiveness, but not before she saw a mix of anger and pain replace the initial shock in Mike's eyes.

"I... I'm sorry," she stammered. "I didn't-"

"You're welcome," Mike interrupted icily.

Mica swallowed. "I'm... what?"

"You're welcome, Princess. You didn't have to thank me. All I risked was my life, and all I saved was your species. It was nothing, really. No need to thank me. I mean, like you said, I'm really no different from the monster who destroyed your world, right?"

Mica's voice came out as a choked whisper. "Michael, I didn't mean-"

"But since you brought it up, you're welcome." Without another word, Mike turned back toward the village and left Mica standing there, alone.

Completely alone.

The Author Speaks Again: Hello, all, and welcome back to this long-neglected story. I won't belabor the excuses for the delay in updating, having already given my disclaimer about romantic comedy not being my strong suit. Here, though, we see a look at what an alien culture's first reaction to everyday life on c-Island, and the beginnings of all the subsequent misunderstandings, which will only become an even more tangled web in chapter five. Oh, and for those who read "Southern Cross Dream," I left the names of the Argonian children as they were in that story, but this should not be misinterpreted as an attempt to draw a connection between the two stories. It's simply that I didn't feel like trying to juggle two sets of names for the same characters. That said, enough from me. Enjoy.

Chapter Four: The Culture Gap

It had now been nearly a week since the rescue of the Argonians and their subsequent settling on C-Island. Mica had been taken in by the island shamaness, the same mysterious mystic who had first sent Mike on his way at the beginning of the summer. Naberra Gared, the next oldest girl among the seven survivors, had been adopted by the family of a village hunter named Uripo, whose hut was only a few dozen yards away. Already, though, Uripo's sixteen year old daughter, Urahette (recently crowned "Miss Coralcola 1990") and Naberra had begun to experience the squabbles that inevitably result from two teenage girls living under one roof (and a small one at that), so Naberra spent much of her time visiting Mica at the Shamaness's house, just as she was doing now.

"So when are you going to confess, princess?" Naberra asked, lying on her stomach across Mica's bed with her feet pedalling carelessly above her.

"Confess what?" Mica asked, sitting on the bed next to her.

"Welllll," Naberra asked, grinning mischievously, "everyone saw you and Mike sneak away from the party last week, and no one saw either of you again until the next morning, so..." she shrugged "care to fill in the gaps?"

Mica let out a sound that could have been a groan or gagging, along with a word that sounded suspiciously like 'ugh.' "The only gaps I could find seem to be between our new Hero's ears."

Naberra looked at Mica disbelievingly. "Aww, come on. It couldn't have been that bad."

"You weren't there," Mica reminded her.

"Well, duh! No one was. Except you," Naberra winked at Mica, "and Mike. And you've got to admit, that's kind of suspicious." The phrase 'kind of suspicious' ended in a teasing, almost sing-song quality.

"Nothing happened," Mica insisted. "And rest assured, nothing is going to between me and Mike." She looked away, seemingly embarrassed. "Especially not now."

"Uh-oh," Naberra asked, suddenly alert. "What happened?"

Mica paused before answering. "Which do you want to hear first: what a stupid thing he said, or what a stupid thing I said?"

"Let's start with him," Naberra answered immediately.

Mica sighed. "I was hoping you wouldn't ask that first."

"Okay then, what did you say?"

Mica hesitated again. "To be honest, I'm almost ashamed to admit to it."

"Well Sacred Stars, princess! You're not leaving me with very many answers here."

"Okay, okay," Mica acquiesced. "But you've got to promise me that this never, ever leaves this room."

Naberra made a zipping motion across her lips with two fingers and mimed throwing away a key, a gesture which, Mica noticed with mild humor, she had picked up from 'Miss Coral.'

"Okay," Mica sighed. "I'll give you the whole infuriating, nauseating scoop."

"Oooh, this already sounds good," Naberra chirped, inching closer as if expecting Mica to whisper the story under her breath.

"You were right about one thing," Mica began. "Mike and I did make an early exit from the party."

"Go on," Naberra prodded. "What did he say to you?"

"Never mind all that," Mica dismissed the subject. "Let's just say he talked me into a conversation I should have seen right through, lured me out to somewhere I should have known better than to go with a guy I just met, and then..."

"And then?"

"Well, he propositioned me. Without any subtlety at all, I might add."

Naberra was silent. "I'm going to take it from the way you're talking that you didn't let him get very far."

"Well of course not! I slapped him sensible and left."

"Why?"

"Naberra!"

"Oh, come on! Think about it," Naberra rolled over onto her back, clutching a pillow to her chest and letting her feet dangle off of the bed. "The princess and her gallant hero, alone on a beach under the summer's stars-

"Looking straight up at the one that our dead planet orbits around?" Mica let this comment sink in for a moment before adding, "after having been out of the cubes for barely more than an hour. Call me insane, but it wasn't exactly my idea of a 'romantic getaway.' "

The smile faded from Naberra's face as the memory of their lost home, a memory none of the seven had truly had time to confront yet, resurfaced in both girls' minds. After a few minutes, though, Naberra decided the silence had gotten awkward. "You know, Mica, I've been talking a lot with Urahette lately, and-

"Oh, have you?" Mica joked.

Naberra rolled her eyes. "Okay, so it's more like Urahette has yammered on while I pretended to listen and looked for a polite excuse to leave before she drove me to the point of running out into the sea. But anyway," she paused while Mica giggled. "The point is, since she's-

"Miss Coralcola 1990," Mica finished the phrase in a ditzzy sounding voice that was a remarkable impersonation of Urahette, complete with the signature lip smacking of a perpetual gum-chewer.

Naberra groaned, covering her face with her hands and kicking her feet against the sides of the beds in a mock temper tantrum. "Don't say that! If I hear that title one more time I'm likely to strangle her!"

"Oh, now wouldn't *that* be tragic?" Mica joked. "How could any of the boys on the island ever forgive you?"

"Seriously," Naberra said, picking up the pillow she'd dropped during her fit. "But actually, that kind of brings me back to my point."

"Oh?"

Naberra rolled back over onto her stomach, knees bent so that her feet waved in the air. "Well, to hear Urahette talk, she's actually been with most of them already at one point or another."

"Trollop," Mica snorted.

"Right," Naberra agreed. "At least, that's what we would have said about her on Argonia. But then again, we're not on Argonia anymore, are we?"

The pointed tips of Mica's ears twitched in confusion. "What are you getting at?"

Naberra hesitated, as if a little embarrassed to go on. Finally, with a glance around the room as if to ensure that the two were still alone, she inched closer to Mica and whispered, "think about it."

"Okay, thinking," Mica answered, pausing for a moment. "Thought. I still have no idea what you're talking about."

"Let's look at it another way. You've noticed the way a lot of the islanders dress, right?"

Mica shrugged. "It's hot, and the people on this planet don't seem to have developed textile manufacturing yet."

"Really?" Naberra asked. "Mike and Dr. J. seem to."

Mica frowned. "Yes, that's true. But they seem to be some kind of ruling class."

"What makes you say that? I thought the chieftain in the big hut was the ruler here."

"Right, the chief is the ruler of the village itself, but Dr. J. has his palace at the island center, a complex that's at least a century ahead of anything else on the island. And none of the islanders except his apprentice ever go there. And you notice the way the villagers all seem to defer to him and his nephew."

Naberra nodded. "And now that you mention it, don't they claim to be from somewhere else? Some place called... Americola, I think?"

Mica nodded. "Right. And all the villagers seem to listen in awe whenever Mike talks about life back in this Americola."

Naberra clucked her tongue in understanding. "Then this 'Americola' is some kind of ruling empire, and Doctor Jones is its provincial governor for the island. Or, at the very least, that empire's governmental representative."

Mica nodded. "I think that's how it is."

"Well, even if that's so, it doesn't change the fact that this planet's morals seem a bit... exotic, to say the least."

"Exotic? How?"

"Look. All I'm saying is this." Naberra began to count off on her fingers. "Urahette's casual liaisons, less modesty in dress, and now you say Mike tried to seduce you after having only met you an hour before. It may be that Earth's culture is just more open about... this kind of thing than Argonia was."

Mica took a deep breath. "If that's true, Mike may have just been..." As the implications of Naberra's comment began to sink in, it was her turn to fall back onto the bed with a great flop, face covered in both hands as Naberra had done. "*Messio Argo*," she groaned.

Naberra bit her lip. "I hate to be the one to point this out, Mica, but when you turned him down, you might have been insulting the prince of our exiled home."

Mica held up one hand with two fingers extended. "Twice."

Naberra cocked an eyebrow. "What?"

"It's a long story," Mica said quickly.

There was silence while Naberra glimpsed into Mica's mind, letting Second Sight give her the details of the conversation Mica was thinking of, complete with the final blow of 'you're no better than Zoda.' Finally, she gasped in horror. "Mica, you didn't!"

"Remember the part about 'the stupid thing I said?' That was it."

Naberra put her hand concernedly on Mica's shoulder. "Princess, you've got to try and make it up to him somehow."

"I think it's a little late for that."

"Well you've got to try. I mean, he saved our race, and then these people took us in, no questions asked. We can't afford any tensions between you and someone as high-ranking as a ruler's nephew. They... well, they might see it as an offense and change their mind about us."

Mica sat up, looking Naberra in the eye. "Okay then. And just how do you suggest I go about 'making it up to Mike?' "

Naberra gave Mica a long and meaningful stare. "By taking back the insult."

Mica was silent for a long time. "You're joking."

"Fraid not, Mica."

"So, you're saying that in order to keep the islanders from hating us, I have to... I mean, with Mike?"

Naberra's only answer was to continue staring at Mica. "When on Terra," she finally said, "do as the Terrans do."

From the Author: Hello again, Startropics fans, and thank you for bearing with me through some 10,000 words of this little experiment. In this chapter, Mike confronts the ages-old decision: to choose love, or lust. Meanwhile, Mica and Naberra continue to plot behind the scenes while encountering a problem of a more logistical nature, and Dr. J. offers Mike some advice (not to mention some of his famous National Geographic Cuisine), which Mike might have followed were it not for one of life's little knocks at the door. All this sets the stage for a series of well-intentioned disasters which will all be seen...

...in chapter six. =P Sorry for the teaser! By the way, the next chapter may be some time in coming, do to the erratic nature of my access to a computer over the course of the coming weeks. Anyway, enough from me. Reader, enjoy.

P.S. I really think the title I used for this chapter would be better suited to the next chapter, but I couldn't think what else to call this one. I'm open to suggestions.

Chapter Five: Do as the Terrans Do

When it comes to taking one's mind off of a fouled romance, there simply is nothing quite like fishing. It is a simple fact of the universe, just as the sky is blue and water is wet. Or, at the very least, so thought Michael Jones. While he had a line in the water, the rest of the world and its problems could leave their name and number at the tone and he would get back to them later, after his appointment with the fish was over.

Unfortunately, the fish today seemed to have missed the memo about their appointment. "Not a bite all morning," Mike groaned, leaning his head on one hand while the other kept a lazy grip on the handle of the rod and reel. "Figures." In front of him, his cork continued to bob mockingly alone in the crystal-clear water, seeming to take a sadistic delight in the absence of fish.

"Alright, Slugger," Dr. J. said from behind him in a tone that was at the same time companionable and all-business. "What's got you upset this morning?"

Mike glanced over his left shoulder without changing his posture in the slightest. "Nothing, Doc."

Dr. J. nodded, standing silent and motionless for a few seconds. Finally, he took a few steps closer and casually asked "Is that so?"

Mike frowned, annoyingly reminded of a police detective seeking answers he already knew. "Yeah, Uncle Steve. I'm fine. What makes you think something's bothering me?"

By now Dr. J. was standing beside Mike with one hand in his pocket and the other rubbing his chin in the contemplative manner he wore when studying ruins. "Oh, nothing," he answered flatly. "It just occurs to me that you normally do your fishing out in the harbor and not in the swimming pool. That's all."

Mike let out a sigh that sounded like 'hmph.' "Didn't feel like walking all the way to the harbor," he said lamely.

Dr. J. nodded. "Yes, yes, and I suppose fishing in an indoor pool has the added advantage of climate control. But it's always been my understanding that the experience of fishing is amplified by the presence of fish."

Mike was silent for a long time. Finally, he reeled in his line, stood up and asked, "Doc, why do you have a swimming pool anyway? You're on an island."

"I like to swim without the fish," Dr. J. answered. "I suppose now you're going to say you like to fish the same way?"

Again Mike was silent.

"Come on, Slugger," Dr. J. said more consolingly, putting his arm around Mike's shoulders and leading him away from the pool. "Talk to an old dirt diver. What's wrong?"

Shouldering his fishing pole and allowing himself to be led away from the pool, Mike shrugged. "It's just... well, it's a lot of stuff."

"What kind of stuff?"

"Just some kind of bogus stuff someone said," Mike answered as Dr. J. opened the door that led into the main living area of the lab.

Doctor J. nodded. "You don't have to tell me if you don't want to."

Mike nodded. "Thanks, Doc."

Silence.

"I mean, it's just..." Mike shrugged again. "I dunno. I mean, I thought I was going to come here and it was going to be like, 'dude, it's a tropical island,' and everything was going to be cool. But then there was the whole aliens-and-temples-and-saving-the-world thing, and now everyone's like 'dude, you're a hero.' And at first I was like, 'cool,' but now everyone's like 'dude, you have to act all heroic now,' and it's totally heinous. Y'know?"

After a brief silence, Doctor J. nodded, removing his glasses and wiping them off on his shirt.

"Happens to me all the time," he said off-handedly. "This is just a guess, but can I assume this has something to do with your fight with Baboo the other day?"

Mike stuffed his hands into his pockets. "Sort of. I mean..." he paused, eyes widening with realization. "Dude, you totally used reverse psychology on me to get me talking."

"Guilty as charged," Doctor J admitted as they entered the dining room. "So now that I've got you talking, why don't you have a seat? Lunch will be up soon."

"Sweet," Mike said with a grin. "The usual Steven Jones double-barrel lunch special?"

"You'd better believe it, Slugger," Steven assured him as he walked toward the kitchen pantry. After a few seconds he returned, each hand bearing a jar, with a loaf of bread tucked under his arm and a look on his face reminiscent of a soldier returning from an armory with heavy equipment to issue. "And we're double-loaded today." He held up first one jar, saying "peanut butter," and then the other. "*And Jelly.*"

"Gimme both barrels, doc," Mike laughed.

"Coming right up, soldier." Dr. J. agreed, laying out the ingredients and preparing two sandwiches. "So, how about the rest of the story?"

Mike sighed. "I don't know, doc. I mean, I punched my bud's lights out, and Mica's ticked too."

"Mica?" Doctor J raised his eyebrows. "Ah, now I see." A pause, in which Dr. J's brow furrowed in confusion. "No, I don't. How did we get from Baboo to Mica?"

"Cause when Mica heard I punched Baboo, she flipped out and said that was the same as what Zoda did to her world."

Dr. J. paused momentarily, his spreading knife still half buried in the peanut butter jar. "That was kind of unfair," he said darkly, resuming the preparation of sandwiches.

Mike sighed. "Tell me about it, doc. I mean, I knew she was still a little steamed over the other night, but-

"The other night?" Dr. J. interrupted calmly, never pausing in his sandwich-making.

"Yeah, she totally put the brakes on me," Mike answered. Dr. J.'s quiet response of 'aha' alerted him that he might have said too much. "I, uh, I mean she-"

"Nope, nope," Dr. J. silenced Mike's floundering recants. "Don't bother. It's true that High School wasn't exactly just yesterday for me, but there's no fog around my memory of the nocturnal ambitions of adolescence."

Mike looked away, rubbing the back of his neck with one hand.

"But be that as it may, Mike," Dr. J. went on in the same matter-of-fact way that Mike was beginning to find irritating as he handed Mike a plate with two sandwiches, both perfectly cut into two triangles.

"Take some advice."

Mike cocked an eyebrow at this. "Advice on what?" he asked a bit nervously.

"Whatever your goals for your relationship with Mica," Dr. J. answered as he prepared two more sandwiches for himself, "keep in mind that she's been through..." he chuckled an exhausted, mirthless chuckle. "Well, she's been through Hell, Mike. All seven of them have."

"Like you and me haven't?"

"I didn't say that, Mike. But our people, our home, our planet, they're all still there. Hers aren't. And if I understand these cubes correctly, they've only just now had the chance to come to terms with the fact that everything they knew has been gone for longer than their lifetimes."

Mike swallowed a bit of sandwich uneasily. "So what should I do then?"

Dr. J. took his seat across from Mike. "Want me to be blunt?"

"Pitch it straight at me, Unc."

"If you're looking for a wild summer fling (which I feel obligated to advise against, lest your parents have me lynched, but I digress)-"

"Doc-"

"All I'm saying is there are dozens of girls your age on the island, and any American is going to be something of a novelty to them, and you could probably take your pick." He pointed his sandwich-half at Mike, and with the bites he had taken out of the uncrusted side it looked like an absurd parody of a gun. "But if you've got your sights truly set on Mica, then start off by being her friend. I'll guarantee that's what she needs right now."

Mike seemed to consider this for a moment. "Yeah, doc," he finally admitted. "But what if 'friend' is as far as it goes?"

Dr. J. popped the last piece of his first sandwich into his mouth, chewed, and swallowed it before answering. "What if?"

After that, the two men of the Jones family finished their lunch in silence, and Dr. J. took up the plates and laid them in the already-dish-filled sink, mumbling something about needing to hire a maid. As Mike snickered at this the doorbell rang, emitting a tone which Mike swore had been stolen from the 'pause' sound effect in Super Mario Brothers. Dr. J. sighed. "Mike, would you-"

"Already on it, doc," Mike answered agreeably, getting up from the table and walking across the vast entry hall of the lab. The doorbell rang once more before he was able to reach it, prompting a shout of "keep your shirt on, I'm coming!" He finally reached the door and opened it to find that the comment had been somewhat moot. There stood Urahette, clad in a homespun outfit modeled after a bikini top

and grass skirt, with her finger pressed against the button as if preparing to ring it a third time. She greeted Mike with the same dazzling smile which she credited with her victory in the 'Miss Coralcola 1990' pageant (nor was she hesitant to remind anyone who would listen).

"Hi, Mike! I thought I'd find you here." She clasped her hands in front of her in a way that drew Mike's attention inexorably to her chest.

"Umm, yeah," Mike answered, smiling back as he tore his eyes away. "Well, this is kind of where I stay, so, I guess this is where you'd find me."

Urahette giggled. "Well anyway, smartie, a bunch of us from the village are headed down to the beach. Wanna come with us?" She emphasized the question with a pronounced wink of one of her coconut-brown eyes and the same runway smile.

Mike, suddenly acutely aware of the day's heat, grinned back for a moment before looking back over his shoulder at Dr. J, as though seeking permission.

Dr. J, having only just emerged from the kitchen, shrugged. "Well, I do have some work here to do." The second comment was spoken in a heavier tone, as though intended to convey hidden meaning to Mike. "It's your decision, Mike."

"Sweet," Mike exclaimed. "Well, let me go change out of my fishing jeans." Moments later he was out the door, with Urahette's arm laced flirtatiously through his as the door closed behind him.

Dr. J. stared at the door for several seconds after it closed. Finally, he shook his head. "Mike, Mike Mike," he sighed to the empty room. Finally, he snickered and walked toward the steps that led upstairs to his lab.

Barely a half-mile from where Mike and his uncle had lunch, Mica stood at a mirror in her newly-adopted room, surveying her reflection nervously. Naberra stood with her, adding her opinions.

"Well, are you ready?" Naberra asked.

Mica gave her reflection another glance. "I don't know," she admitted. "I'd feel a lot more ready if I didn't have to go dressed like this." She gestured toward the handmade outfit, not unlike the one sported by Urahette. "I mean, I feel so... so..."

"Half-dressed?" Naberra added helpfully.

"Or less," Mica complained.

"Relax," Naberra coaxed. "It's the style on Terra. Remember? Besides, it's been a week since we landed, and we didn't exactly have a chance to pack a change of clothes into the stasis cubes with us. If you'll forgive me for saying so, princess, we weren't in much of a position to be picky about clothes."

Mica huffed, making clear that this logic did not change her opinion of her predicament. "Still doesn't change the fact that I look like a Xeltrian concubine," she muttered.

"Well," Naberra commented, "given the task at hand-"

"Ooooh," Mica stomped her foot childishly. "Stop it! Don't remind me!"

"Sorry, sorry," Naberra said softly.

Silence.

"Well," Mica finally said, adjusting her diminutive top to give the maximum possible coverage, "I suppose we'd better get this over with."

"We can head for the beach whenever you're ready, Mica," Naberra noted.

Mica nodded, taking a deep breath like an anxious stage performer moments before the curtain rises. "Fine," she said as she exhaled. "Let's go."

Naberra offered a rather un-encouraging smile as they left Mica's room. "Think of it this way, Princess," she said lamely. "Remember back in the palace how you always used to say you wanted to get out and experience something new?"

Mica tried to laugh, but the sound ended in an aborted groan. "I guess this will indeed be a new experience," she muttered. And so it would be...

...For everyone on the island.