

Other Planets: Terrible Places For Dates



By Christopher Spacehead

As a planetary scientist, (and a remarkably dashing one at that), I often get asked by science fiction writers what it would be like to live on other planets. I'm always happy to help, speculating as to how all manner of activities - eating, traveling, working, and even maintaining relationships - might function in such an environment. Now, I can understand that they have to take some artistic license with the science for their stories, (especially if they ever want anything to get picked up for screenplay rights), but when I see the contortions they go through in order to make these places romantic, it shifts me to tears! When are people going to learn, other planets are simply not good places for dates. Allow me to elaborate.

Say you're living on the moon, and you go out for a romantic drive in your "moon rover". Yeah, I guess it would be kind of nice to be able to look up in the sky at the Earth, but as soon as you look down, you've got nothing but featureless gray dust as far as the eye can see. And when I say featureless, I mean that it doesn't have any features on it. Get it. But even if you did manage to set the mood, don't bother trying to steal a kiss, because you and your date would both be wearing space helmets! Unless, of course, you are both freaks and can breathe vacuum.

But anyway, space suits were not designed for intimate contact, unless we go apeshit and expand the meaning of intimacy to include kissing your date through reinforced, industrial Plexiglas, which would be about as reasonable as wearing a football helmet to school.

Well, what about Venus? Surely something named after the goddess of love is romantic, right? Wrong! How are you going to have a moonlight stroll on a planet with no moon? Not that you could even see a moon through the crushingly thick atmosphere. And what could be more idyllic than laying out on a blanket on Lakshmi Planum in nice, balmy 800-degree weather and picking out shapes in sulfuric acid clouds? I for one can't think of anything, but maybe that's because my head is a sphere of rock with ice caps. But I digress.



Lame

Let's try Mercury. You might think it would be romantic to watch the sunset from the closest planet to the sun, but with Mercury's slow rotation rate, sunsets take, oh, about 16 hours. Your date will have gotten up and left long before it's over. And assuming that you are not blinded and badly burned by the intense ultraviolet sunlight, once the sun sets, there's really nothing to do for the next 88 Earth days that the night lasts. Mercury is not known for its night life; let's just say the place has no atmosphere.

And the outer solar system is no better. Jupiter and Saturn themselves have no obvious solid surfaces. And as you and your date fall to your deaths in their hot, gaseous atmospheres, you would also be crushed into a very flat couple by the ludicrously strong gravity. With Neptune and Uranus, you know you don't even want to go there. So take the moons of Jupiter, for instance. The gravity of the moons won't kill you, but you'd be left with four possible date locations: Europa, a ball of rock-hard ice with cracks in it; Callisto, which is boring and flat except for a bunch of holes in the ground; Io, home to scads of sulfur-spewing volcanoes; and Ganymede, whose surface ranges from brown to a somewhat different shade of brown. How can anyone consider these ideal romantic getaways? They're about as romantic as a parking lot.



What's Behind Door # Four? Another Shitty Date, That's What.



Jesus, it's boring out here.

Ugh, and the worst was this one author who was trying to make the recent Mars Spirit and Opportunity rovers into some sort of romantic paradigm. Maybe the idea of being alone together on a remote world, seeking each other out in some sort of grand adventurous redemption quest works in novels, but you have to realize that these things can only move 100 meters a day! Their rechargeable solar batteries and moving parts will cease to function long before they could ever rendezvous, and even the solar panels themselves will become encrusted with disgusting layers of Martian dust. So basically, they will never, ever meet, OK! Did you actually expect Jet Propulsion Lab engineers to design something even resembling romance?

I know exotic locations like other planets may seem enchanting at first, but that's only until you stop to think about it. Come on, guys, it's time to realize that - and I think I speak with some authority here - if your date asks you to take her out somewhere else in the solar system, make up some excuse, and keep your ass on the fucking planet. Stick with the dinner and a movie, buy her some flowers, and seriously, everything will be OK.