

2. An Astrological Guide

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Nearly all professional astrologers are ignorant of their own subject, as of all others.

Aleister Crowley, *Magick in Theory and Practice*

Before he gave up chess to become Britain's greatest authority on the Black Arts, Aleister Crowley was President of Cambridge University Chess Club, so he clearly knew a thing or two. Nonetheless, there is, in his writings, no direct reference to the profound influence of astrology on chess. This chapter remedies that important omission in our literature; I hope modern day astrologers and other ignoramuses will take due note of this important contribution to science.

We and the great cosmic chessboard are one. The planets are but pieces moving about on the surface of the cosmos, influencing our characters and destinies. The moment at which we are taken out of the box to join in the game of life is all-important. How the other pieces stand at that moment determines our fate. Now read on. . . .

Aries (21 March – 19 April)

Aries is one of the fire signs, ruled by Mars, the planet of vigour, activity and energy-giving toffee-chocolate bars. As pointed out in the thirteenth century, people born under the sign of Aries tend to look like rams, with a hairy body, crooked frame, oblique face, heavy eyes, short ears and a long neck. Later, well-marked eyebrows were perceived as characteristic of this sign. This makes the Arien a formidable opponent; his

hirsute face peering obliquely at the position, supported on an extended neck from a perversely bent frame is the ideal visage for intimidating the opposition.

The characteristic Aries personality is that of a fighter – aggressive, optimistic and belligerent. No surprise, therefore, that this should be one of the most propitious signs for chess-players, taking third place (behind Scorpio and Pisces, q.v. if interested) in the league table of grandmasters per sun sign. Smyslov is the only world champion produced by Aries; his eyebrows are sufficiently marked, but he would probably have held the title longer had his ears been shorter.

Maxim of the Month

Don't countergambit before it's hatched.

Taurus (20 April – 20 May)

Travel

Fate will soon take you on a journey to an unfamiliar place. You will there encounter a stranger, seated at a board of many squares, four and sixty in number, coloured alternately of light and darkish hue. Beware of this man; despite the apparent friendliness of his proffered handshake, his intentions toward your good self are nought but hostile. Follow the advice of the stars and treat him with circumspection, however, and the signs are auspicious that you will beat the hell out of him.

Money

Saturday and Sunday augur ill for dealings involving financial transactions. The prognosis is better for Monday, when the banks may well be open. Beware of tournaments to the East, where there is a curtain fashioned of iron, beyond which prizes are of a substance known as rouble which none can turn to gold.

Romance

'Twill be a goodly year for romance among chessplaying

Taureans. Much better than last year. Last year was really rotten, wasn't it? So was the year before that. You Taureans deserve a good year for romance after all you've been through. Everything comes to him who waits, though incipient senility may preclude his enjoying it to the full. Taureans should be most grateful to the author for predicting such a fine romantic prospect. I could have foretold even greater disaster than in the previous couple of years. But that would have been too depressing. And anyway, I only soothsay what I read in the cards. Sorry, that should read 'stars'. Palmistry or tea-leaves extra. Special cut-price offer on tea-bag readings this month only.

Motto of the Month

Ne'er cast a clout till you've got your knights out.

Gemini (21 May – 21 June)

Inventiveness and intelligence are the characteristics of this sign, but you must control your jumpy tendencies to keep consistency in your results. Model yourself on the two Gemini world champions, Karpov and Petrosian, and you will not go far wrong.

Take special care in dealings involving rooks. Your lucky diagonal is g1-a7; your favourite colour is white; your propitious file is the QB-file. You need to work harder at the endgame, which you still do not play with sufficient accuracy. Your lucky opening is the Muzio Gambit, which is a really unfortunate piece of luck to have, because it has hardly occurred in tournaments since the turn of the century.

Providential Proverb

*Black knight on high, eat shepherd's pie;
Rooks in the morning, everyone yawning.*

(The origin and interpretation of this old farming saw are buried in obscurity. The second line is believed to refer to the undesirable practice of adjournment sessions being played too soon after breakfast.)



The Cancerian (sidelong stance)

Cancer (22 June – 22 July)

This is one of the worst signs for a chessplayer to be saddled with at birth. Cancer has not produced a really great player since Morphy. This is hardly surprising when one takes into account the timidity and shyness characteristic of this sign. Also we must remember that crabs move sideways, whereas chesspieces are generally better advised to head forwards. Rooks born under the sign of Cancer are severely restricted by this handicap and can only make horizontal moves along the back ranks. Checking the birth dates of the rooks is an essential precaution before buying any chess set.

The best advice to give to chessplaying Cancer subjects is, in all honesty, to give up and look for some other direction in which to turn your sideways talents. If, however, you insist on

persevering at chess, there are just two chances to overcome the problems of your birth sign. First, the study of opening theory can help compensate a little; Cancers have good memories combined with an understanding of current trends bestowed upon them by the moon, Cancer's ruler. The second, and I think, more ambitious remedy is to rotate one's chair through 90° before starting the game. The resulting sidelong view of the board can be enough to turn one's crab-bish qualities to advantage and ensure that the pieces move forwards. (The Swedish grandmaster, Ulf Andersson, used to adopt a related Cancerian panacea by sitting on his feet so that his body would not know which way was sideways. This was not totally successful, however, often leading to a complete lack of orientation manifesting itself in a horizontal shuffling style which only emphasized his Crustacean birth sign.)

Crab's Creed

A knight on the edge beats meat & 2 veg.

(Whether Tarrasch knew this old proverb when making his own famous utterance about the value of knights at the edge of the board is a matter of some dispute. Since Tarrasch was a Pisces, it seems unlikely that he was familiar with the Crab's Creed, though some authorities differ on this point.)

Leo (23 July – 22 August)

The sign of the Lion is without the slightest doubt the best sign of all. You are masterful, dignified, courageous, generous, honest, powerful and intelligent. You have wit, charm and personality, and your only possible weaknesses are a natural laziness which has resulted from your easy success, and a justified self-confidence which others (especially weedy Virgoans: q.v. if interested but it's hardly worth bothering) may misinterpret as arrogance. The author of this book, incidentally, is a Leo. His birthday is 12 August and as presents he likes to receive anything soft and cuddly including banknotes and fresh grouse.

Why then, you may be wondering, are not all the greatest

chessplayers huddled together under this exceptional sign? Despite our wonderful qualities, Leo only appears in joint sixth place in the league table of Zodiac signs for chessplayers. There are two simple reasons which fully explain this apparent paradox. Firstly, it is quite natural that many Leos should decide to be extraordinarily successful in some other field rather than waste their time beating up the representatives of inferior signs over the chessboard. Secondly, and more seriously for our prospects, the chessplaying Leo is phenomenally unlucky. His accident proneness is due to a wide selection of particularly unlucky squares over which he needs to keep watch during the game. Danger can strike without warning on any square of the h-file as well as g4, f8, d4, b5 (or b2 from September to May) and various locations on the a-file depending on moon phase. A Leo entering a chess game needs the temerity of Biggles walking across a minefield. Really it is marvellous that we Leos can be as successful as we are, considering the ill fortune with which we are constantly plagued.

Leo's Law:

Many a swindle makes a nickel.

Virgo (23 August – 22 September)

If you thought Cancer was a bad sign for chessplayers, you should see the record of Virgoans. The last Virgo of World Championship class was Philidor around two centuries ago (and even that is a little unclear, what with calendar changes obscuring his true birth date). The best procedure to follow on discovering the sign of Virgo above your birth place is to unscrew it and make every attempt to dispose of it, in part exchange for another birth sign. At current rates, anywhere in Eastern Europe, you should be able to trade in one Virgo for a slightly used Capricorn on payment of a pre-washed pair of jeans, a pack of gum, and a Clint Eastwood lapel badge. Any difficulties encountered in passing off the unwanted Virgo sign should be countered by mentioning some of the wonderful jobs which Virgoans do really well; like chartered accountancy

or traffic wardenship. Better still, enlist the help of a friendly Leo to do the salesmanship for you. Leos are slick talkers who can sell anything to anybody. If you do not have a Leo friend, which is highly probable since Leos generally have nothing but contempt for Virgoans, then you could just find yourself stuck with your Virgohood. For such unfortunates all I can say is that the forthcoming year will be very average, reaching a peak of mediocrity towards the end of July, when you will draw several games from slightly advantageous positions. Do not push your luck, or you might even lose them.

Your favourite day is tomorrow; your lucky result is a win; your best opponent is another Virgo; your lucky football club is Nottingham Forest.

Helpful Homily

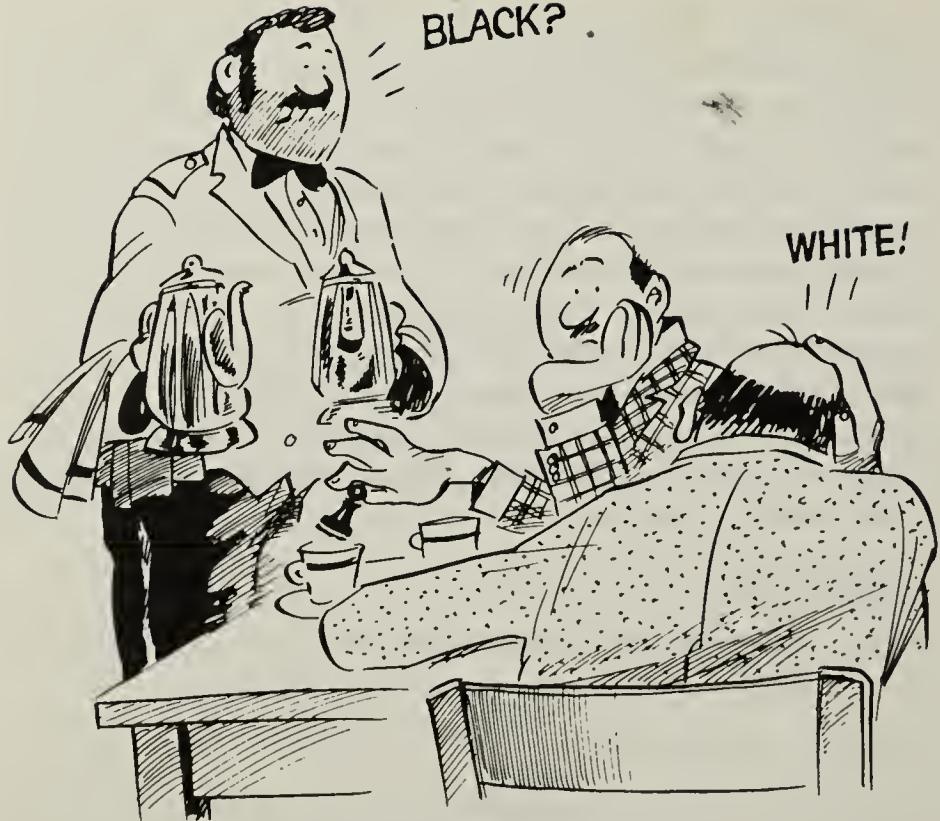
A passed pawn you push is worth two in the bush

Libra (23 September – 23 October)

A difficult sign for chessplayers. The precision and harmony of Librans are good qualities, but their perfectionism and desire to weigh everything up before reaching decisions makes them particularly prone to time trouble.

The stars foretell a troubled year. Spasskiopeia in the house of Anatoly Centauri brings naught but havoc towards the end of January, but Olafsson's belt is on the ascendant and should keep matters in check. The Aurora of Korchnoi may be seen in the Western sky, but only from the front five rows which have been banned to spectators anyway. The emergence of the White Dwarf Kasparov in the heavenly canopy is predicted to lead to a total eclipse of the brightest star, Karpolis, within the next decade. The consequences for Librans could be nothing short of negligible.

So much for the long-range forecast. The chart for midnight tomorrow shows the Paroxysm of Petrosian in conjunction with the Appendectomy of Hort, bringing a deep depression spreading eastwards from Hendon. By breakfast time there will be much wailing and gnashing of teeth in NW6. Less



See a pawn and pick it up; drop it in his coffee cup

whaling, however, is expected off Reykjavik, following the activities of the International Whaling Commission and Greenpeace.

Your lucky piece is green. Your lucky motorway is the M4, which brings us home again to Wales where a welcome in the hillside can be confidently predicted after the pubs close.

Libran Lollipop

Happiness is a passed queen's pawn.

Scorpio (24 October – 21 November)

The characteristics of the Scorpio are invincible willpower, sharp minds and a passionate secretive intensity. Small wonder then that this sign produces more grandmasters than any of the others. The only trouble with this sign is the problem which

arises if you play chess but have not attained the grandmaster title. Your date of birth cannot possibly be to blame, so you will have to look further afield for excuses. The following para-astrological explanations may be advanced in reply to any accusations that you are lacking in natural ability:

1. I was born on a cusp;
2. I was born on a bus. (No grandmaster has ever been born under the sign of London Transport – conceived in a taxi perhaps, but never born on a bus);
3. I was born in the Year of the Monkey (Chinese astrology is always worth a try if the conventional stuff fails to produce the goods);
4. The Tarot forbade it;
5. I have a toothache.

Scorpion Skulduggery

*See a pawn and pick it up;
Drop it in his coffee cup.*

(An ancient piece of advice, said to be extremely effective both in destroying an opponent's concentration and in ruining his coffee.)

Sagittarius (22 November – 21 December)

The useful features of this sign are ambition, cleverness and imagination, but inconsistency and lack of concentration can be a great drawback for the Sagittarian chessplayer. This sign has not been prolific in producing grandmasters, and can boast no world champion, but the great players born under Sagittarius, though few in number, include several candidates for the world title.

Sagittarians like horses, so if you are playing against one (a Sagittarian, not a horse) you should always take off his knights at the earliest opportunity. This will make him most disconsolate and he will play the worse for it.

If you are a Sagittarian and have had your knights taken, you may find that a member of the opposite sex can comfort you. Members of the opposite sex can be most comforting at

moments of disconsolation. Apart from a cup of hot chocolate and a mild tantrum, there is little better when suffering from such vexation. Beware, however, of Sagittarian women, who tend to be loud and domineering. I can say this without prejudice, since some of my best friends are Sagittarian women.

Sagittarian Saying

Unzip a Benoni.

Capricorn (22 December –19 January)

The sign of the goat. You are a solid, practical person with a long face and silly pointed beard. You are a founder member of the cud-chewing division of the even-toed ungulates. Not a great pedigree for a chessplayer, though Lasker and Keres were both goats.

The great advantage of being a Capricorn is the goat-like ability to leap over obstacles. While the Aries has to rely on butting away in blocked positions, the Capricorn can either butt or leap as he chooses. The laws of chess, however, were not drawn up with goats in mind, so much of the Capricorn's natural enthusiasm for bounding around has to be kept frustrated for the annoying reason that the rules insist on most pieces stupidly pushing their way along the board surface, bumping into things. Capricorns probably make far better draughts players than chess players, though figures are not available on this fascinating point.

In Mongolia, they cook goat by splitting open its back and placing hot coals in the cavity. Vodka in plenty is poured in and the resulting greasy mess of blood, alcohol and fat is then ladled out and drunk before it congeals. If you are a goat, you do well to avoid Mongolia at or near mealtimes.

Gastronomic Tip of the Month

What's sauce for the goose is a thick velouté enriched with egg-yolks, cream and garlic.

I hope this takes away the nasty taste left by the Mongolian goat.

Aquarius (20 January – 18 February)

Your lucky rank is the sixth rank; your lucky file is the b-file; your lucky diagonal is the long white one pointing upwards from b1. But beware! Your luck runs out at g6. Never push your luck as far as h7 or great ills will surely befall your position.

Aquarians wear odd clothes and are unusually prone to be struck by lightning. When playing chess out of doors during a thunderstorm, the Aquarian is therefore advised to keep his Wellingtons on, and on no account to seek shelter under a lightning conductor.

Aquarians are pleasant people with strong ankles who like fetching tea for their opponents. Do not accept their offers unless you are particularly fond of watery tea. Take special care at move twenty eight and on Thursdays. Always take your own roll of toilet paper if you play in the Soviet Union. Never trust a man with three Christian names. Always keep your socks on during a game.

Wise sayings

The pin is mightier than the fork; Procrastination is the mother of time-trouble.

Pisces (19 February – 20 March)

One of the most interesting zodiac signs for chessplayers. Pisceans are traditionally emotional, nervous and almost incapable of taking decisions. Yet Fischer (of course), Bronstein and Larsen, three of the most decisive and forthright players of modern times, were all born under the sign of the fishes swimming to and fro. This may seem odd, but the explanation lies in the very nature of chess itself. Pisceans are intuitive people, with a good understanding of the mysterious and intangible; just what you really need for chess, which is far too difficult a game for mere people anyway.

The Piscean chessplayer is well advised to rely totally on instinct. Do not try to calculate long variations, which you will

probably get wrong in any case; study the board as if it were a restaurant menu and pick the move that tastes best. Play with your hands, not with your head. As David Bronstein once said, in reply to a question concerning how much of a particularly complicated variation he had analysed at the time of the game: 'You don't analyse during a game; you just play the moves.'

Tournament Tactic

Marry in Hastings, repent at leisure