

I AM A CAPRICORN (Chapter 15)

From: *DANCING NAKED in the MIND FIELD* (1998)

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I began to think about astrology in the mid-1960s after three strangers had correctly classified me as a Capricorn. The probability of that happening by chance is 1 out of 1,728.

The first was Emma, a ten-year-old neighbor in Atlanta, where I was a student at Georgia Tech. I was walking up the steps with my groceries when she proclaimed, "You're a Capricorn, aren't you?" I stopped in my tracks. How did she know? I asked her how a Capricorn acts.

She replied, "Like you."

If Emma was just guessing, it was a good guess. There are twelve signs that your sun can be in when you are born. When people say that you are a Pisces or a Capricorn without being more specific, they are saying that the sun was in that part of the sky called Pisces or Capricorn when you were born. So they have a one out of twelve chance of being right.

At your birth, the Moon, Venus, Mars, and the rest of the planets are also in some particular part of the sky, but those things move around in their own pattern and only people who are more conversant with astrology than Emma would concern themselves with them. When Emma told me I was a Capricorn, I didn't know anything about astrology.

When you look at all the planets and include the sun and moon, their relative positions define a shape at the moment of birth. That shape represents the Native, the person being charted, in an overall way. Several of the planets might be arrayed in a really striking pattern. Or they may not be. In mine, the planets are spread all around but there are these two ominous sets of three planets referred to as T-squares. In my wife's chart, there are three planets in a perfect equilateral triangle called a Grand Trine. T-squares predict that the Native will have a hell of a time getting his shit together and be late handing in manuscripts and may do a short time in jail or even worse. A Grand Trine means the Native will be born with a silver spoon. She might be lazy, but she knows what she has and that's exactly what she needs. That made sense to me from what I knew about us. When I did our daughter Louise's chart, I found that she has a perfect blend of our charts. Louise had the shape of an Aquarian Kite. That's like a Grand Trine mated to a T-square, with her Ascendant headed into her mother's Aquarian sun sign. Out of phase with the kite, she shared a Capricorn sun with me. Totally weird, I thought.

I knew Louise would reflect us genetically – but astrologically?

The next time somebody came at me out of the blue with my sun sign was three years later at Berkeley. I was at a party talking to some woman and she stopped in mid-sentence. “You’re a Capricorn. I know it.”

How did she know?

She said it was the way I was waving my hands when I talked. And the way I held on to the countertop when I was not waving them. I was also leaning forward, then backing off.

In terms of the number of people who had told me my sign, and the number of people who had been right, that was two for two. They both could have been guessing. It’s one in twelve. Two for two on a one in twelve is one in a hundred and forty-four.

Being a scientist, the important thing to me was the long odds. When something unusual happens, a scientist with his thick horn-rimmed glasses and shoddy clothes gets moving. I went back to the astrology books, drew up a few more charts for my friends, and decided that in order to save myself a lot of calculation time and trips to the library, I would write a computer program to do that for me. That turned out to be difficult. Isaac Newton had written down the rules for how things move around each other due to gravity. It was fairly easy, knowing the starting points for two things like the Earth around the sun, to predict where the Earth would be a hundred or even a thousand years later. A computer program could easily do the math. But the problem with the solar system is that there is not just one planet. There are too many planets. Each of them is affected, not just by the sun, which it dutifully orbits, but by each of the other planets. The big ones like Jupiter and Saturn have the greatest effect, but even the little ones make their little perturbations every time they make a close encounter, and after a hundred years things get fairly complicated. Naval Observatory astronomers had been writing programs for years trying to simulate the movements of the planets and they were pretty accurate, but they were still working on it. There were reasons other than astrology for this work by the Navy. Things like navigation and satellites and trying to drop a missile into Red Square.

One night about a month after that party in Berkeley, I was camping by the Navarro River in Mendocino County. People were walking all around from fire to fire and some guy stood outside of our circle listening to me tell a story. When I was done, he stepped into the light and announced that I was a Capricorn. He turned around, and I called to him.

“How do you know?”

He turned. “Because of the way you come on, really strong and then back off. You act like one.” He left haughtily, a swagger in his step, like a goddamned Scorpio.

Three for three of one in twelve – 1 out of 1,728. That’s the probability of three consecutive people independently announcing your sign correctly.

I was convinced that it was not a matter of chance. Those people were observing my behavior and making a reasonable estimate of my sun sign. If people can really do that from a little bit of information, then astrology is worth investigating.

Our little experiment I did was by accident. I had my chart done by a shop in La Jolla that sent your birth date, time, and place to a company in L.A. that used a computer to do the calculations and then select a number of paragraphs about you from a huge number that they had about everybody. It was what you would call a computerized expert system. Most of the things that the fifty-page document said about me were correct. But some of them were entirely wrong. It turned out that the ones that were wrong were derived from my rising sign.

The rising sign in a chart is sensitive to the time of birth more than anything else in the chart. It is the part of the sky that is coming up over the eastern horizon at the time and place where you are born. It changes every minute.

The computer assumed that someone would not really know what *actual* time he was born if he was born during World War II in America. We had an extra hour of daylight savings time. In 1944, when I was born, if your birth certificate said that you were born at 1:53 PM in December, you were really born at 12:53 PM. I knew that when I filled out the form. I put in the right time and called it EST rather than EWT. The computer figured I didn't know what I was writing and corrected EWT to EST. The result was I got a horoscope that was an hour off. My moon was misplaced just a half degree to the west. Against the backdrop of the stars, the moon moves slowly toward the east, not to be confused with its apparent movement to the west caused by the earth's rotation. But my rising sign was way off. It was Taurus instead of Aries.

Being educated in these things, I was more entertained than damaged. God forbid I had been dependent exclusively on that computer to tell me all about myself.

To be an Aries rising and to mistakenly think that you are a Taurus rising could cause you to conclude that you were fucking up. A Taurus feels himself to have physical substance, he takes care of things like a farmer, he doesn't depend on others a lot because he knows they can't be trusted. His humor is ironic if at all, and he is thoroughly fixed. He is a mountain. He does not pray for he knows that nothing changes. But he believes.

An Aries rising feels his oats, but not his substance. He does new things. He is alone and so he originates. He has a conscience because everything that happens is his fault, but he can behave excessively since no one else is there. He dares. He prays. But he does not believe.

I knew that a mistake had been made when I read the paragraphs that were based on my rising sign.

The rest of the printout was correct. I wondered whether someone familiar with me, but not with the fault in this rendering of my horoscope, could determine which of the various pronouncements was wrong.

I gave the printout to a really good friend who didn't know anything about astrology. I asked him to go over the two hundred or so items about me and put an x beside any that he thought did not apply to me. He did. Almost exclusively he marked those items that were derived from the bogus rising sign.

I had copied the printout so nobody could see his x 's because I am a scientist. I tried to find more people who were willing to look at my horoscope seriously. I found two. They also put x 's most often by the paragraphs that had to do with my misplaced rising sign.

I explained the error to the people with the computer they redid my horoscope with the correct time. The new one fit. Once more I asked friends to mark passages that didn't apply to me. There were fewer x 's and they weren't concentrated on items from the rising sign.

From all this I and conclude a number of things. A horoscope that accurately reflects your personality can be cast by a computer if you give it the correct birth data, and at least three of my friends know me at least as well as a computer program. It was entertaining and a pretty cheap experiment. Little girls, people at parties, and voices out of the darkness by the Navarro River can tell you what month you were born in.

We consider ourselves to be sophisticated, intelligent, modern people. Our psychologists and sociologists consider astrology to be nonsense. Academic departments concerned with human behavior consider astrology to be a confusing distraction, with no serious value to their pursuits. And it's not that they've never heard of it. They've noticed that every daily paper in the world has a column devoted to it and that lots of humans pay attention to it. The reason they don't pay attention to it is that it would embarrass them in front of their colleagues. There's no proven body of facts in the social sciences that says human behavior does not contain elements that are related to planetary patterns at the time of birth. Instead, there's a broad and arrogant understanding among social science professionals that folklore, like astrology, is for simpletons. Without doing any simple experiments to test some of the tenets of astrology, it has been completely ignored by psychologists in the last two centuries.

Most of them are under the false impression that it is non-scientific and not a fit subject for their serious study. They are dead wrong. Whether or not the present-day practitioners of astrology are using scientific methods has no direct bearing on whether the body of knowledge they employ is true and

valid. To have dismissed it without any experimental evaluation as insubstantial drivel from the masses says a lot about the fact that the present-day mental health practitioners have their heads firmly inserted in their asses and generally need more help than they provide.

We know little about ancient astrology besides the fact that as long as five thousand years ago civilizations ranging from Babylonia to China independently looked to the heavens for help in understanding life on Earth. In the seventeenth century, when men like Galileo, Kepler, and Newton were laying the foundations of astronomy, they were also concerned with the astrological significance of the observations they were recording and learning how to predict. Somewhere along the line, though, the precision that they could bring to the act of measurement and mathematical prediction must have outweighed the usefulness of the thoughts they could bring to bear on the rather more vague concepts that astrology required. Men who stay up all night looking through long black tubes, recording numbers with four or five digits, and inventing calculus don't necessarily know a whole lot about human beings, and they aren't likely to take an interest in the complex interactions between people and the stars. They've got enough to worry about just trying to figure out why the orbit of Mars is elliptic instead of circular.

So astronomy separated itself from astrology. But not because one worked and the other didn't. No one did extensive empirical testing of astrological facts and concluded nothing useful could be predicted from any of it. Astronomers just preferred to stick to the cyclical movements of planets rather than the cyclical movements of people.

They specialized in the numbers. And astronomy is a rich and interesting field because of it. Behold the nice pictures of things far away that the Hubble telescope sends back.

But astrology is still here and it could be a valuable tool for understanding human beings if serious students of behavior would lower themselves to examine it. Are there any serious students of behavior? Medical researchers have for a long time recognized that folk remedies often work. Ethnobotanists examine the healing use of herbs by primitive people, who don't know what molecules are, but when the herb works, it works, and therefore it gets incorporated into scientific medicine. If nobody knows how it works, somebody finds out. Folklore is a rich source of new information. But you don't hear about modern psychologists out mining the world of folklore for new concepts. You don't hear about it because it is not done.

They're stuck with a loose set of theories of learning and behavior that completely ignore a vast area of human understanding that begins with the premise that all men are definitely created equal. They are divided into a complex array of different types that can be at least sorted out, if not partially understood, by looking at the positions of the planets in the sky at the site and

time of their birth. Preposterous, but it is true, and it is scientifically accessible. Furthermore, these various types of people are affected differentially by the continued movement and rearrangements of those same planets for the rest of their lives. They come in and out of cyclical bursts of creativity, periods of deep depression, warm fulfilling experiences, horrible losses, and on and on.

How can somebody call himself a student of human behavior and hang out a shingle offering to help humans solve their problems without at least studying astrology? How could an institution of higher learning grant someone a Ph.D. in psychology without requiring at least a few courses in astrology? If psychologists were doing okay, that is, if they had a good track record for freeing their patients from the pain that they pay good money to sort out and be relieved of, then I could see why the good head doctors could thumb their noses at the folklore of astrology, but *nobody* would be so demented as to imagine for a moment that when you go to a shrink you get anything resembling good mental health. If you are lucky in your choice of psychologist, maybe you won't do yourself in this year, but no one expects a human in chronic emotional pain to get a miracle cure. In other words, psychology is practiced by a bunch of well-paid incompetents. They can't fix a broken heart.

They ought to be looking around for some new theories. Freud, Jung, Maslow – they were cool, fun to read maybe – but we're still neurotic, and some of us still jump off bridges. Astrology by itself is not the answer to all our problems any more than herbs from the Amazon witch doctor, but it's a shame to waste such a vast and ancient resource because of the simple fact that our modern witch doctors are too frozen in their attitudes to look around.

I don't go to shrinks. Would you take your car to a mechanic who refused to acknowledge the existence of separate makes and models?

Astrology also contains a deep mystery or two that should whet the appetite of any curious student of "what's going on in the universe." How the hell does my brain have any way of knowing about the relative position of the planets before I learned how to use the *Nautical Almanac*? It must somehow be in touch with these things either directly or indirectly since it seems to be affected by them. And the "how" of that should be interesting to a physiologist as to a sociologist, or a psychiatrist, even a physicist. The fact that it is correlated with these things can be easily established by observing the non-random distribution of birthdays among various professions.

A recent scientific study of the distribution of medical students in birth months discovered that a lot of medical students were born in late June. They postulated that it was because the sun was up earlier and so there was more light for them right away and they could be outside and therefore would get interested in biology. Well, that was bullshit. It's the same in Australia, and

the sun is not up early in June down in the antipodes. Successful applicants to medical school do not come equally from each month. They cluster around Gemini – Cancer in both hemispheres. More biochemists are born in Sagittarius. Lawyers have their own distribution, and some people claim reasonably that lawyers hatch from eggs and eat their own young – not obviously – so they have their own separate problems. Sociology has so far turned a blind eye to these things. It could be that's one of the reasons sociology is so boring and such a worthless science. It's pedantic and uninformed.

I was born at 17:58 Greenwich Mean Time on December 28, 1944 in Lenoir, North Carolina. You can find out more about me from that than you can from reading this book.

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