

PRAISE FOR MARK BORAX

The Ruby Heart of the Dragon

Deep thinking about astrological theory side by side with the fruits of an examined life are an unbeatable combo platter. In *The Ruby Heart of the Dragon*, Mark Borax deftly weaves astrological autobiography into a fresh, and very evolutionary, perspective on the twelve signs. A big plus is that he has the craft of a true writer—there’s music in his language too.

STEVEN FORREST, AUTHOR OF *THE INNER SKY*

I’ve been a professional astrologer for 50 years. I thought I knew just about all there was to know about the zodiac, but *The Ruby Heart* offers an entirely new perspective. Mark Borax’s descriptions of the signs, put forth with crystal clarity, are mind-bending. I devoured this book, which I recommend to anyone: novice or well-seasoned, because there is so much new knowledge to take from it.

STEPHANIE AZARIA, CREATOR OF *THE COSMIC PATH*,
COM AND *COSMIC CONSCIOUSNESS*

If you are looking for a book on Sun signs that captures the differences between people born in each of the signs, consider *The Ruby Heart of the Dragon: Sun Signs for Our Times*. This is not an abstract work on the mechanics of the astrological signs, it is a telling in little stories of the author’s zodiac observations that is both insightful and poetic.

BRUCE SCOFIELD, AUTHOR OF *DAY SIGNS* AND OTHER
BOOKS ON MESOAMERICAN ASTROLOGY

This is a book to return to again and again.

DEBORAH KOFF-CHAPIN, CREATOR OF *SOUL CARDS 2*

2012: Crossing the Bridge to the Future

Mark Borax has given us a vision of the future that is as hopeful as it is radical. He is proposing nothing less than that we are beginning to heal the cosmic breach from which all of our other problems—ecological, political, social, spiritual—originate.

RICHARD GROSSINGER, AUTHOR OF *THE BARDO OF WAKING LIFE*

***Cosmic Weather Report: Guidance for Radically Changing Times* (with Ellias Lonsdale)**

I highly recommend Mark Borax to all pioneers working toward the conscious evolution of ourselves and our world.

BARBARA MARX HUBBARD, AUTHOR OF *CONSCIOUS
EVOLUTION: AWAKENING OUR SOCIAL POTENTIAL*

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ebook editions of this work, please visit*

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**THE
RUBY HEART
OF
THE DRAGON**

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**SUN SIGNS
FOR
OUR TIMES**

MARK BORAX

DINANDA BOOKS



PUTNEY, VERMONT

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Published by Dinanda Books
P.O. Box 623
Putney, Vermont 05346

Cover art and design by Peter Selgin
Page design by Chinook Design, Inc.

Printed in the United States of America

ISBN 979-8-9877711-0-5 (print)
ISBN 979-8-9877711-1-2 (ebook)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Borax, Mark, 1954

The Ruby Heart of the Dragon : sun signs for our time / Mark Borax

ISBN 979-8-9877711-0-5

1. Astrology. 2. Spirituality 3. Self-help 4. Philosophy

therubyheartofthedragon.com

CONTENTS

Introduction: Awakening the Dragon	1
<i>Chapter One</i>	
Finger Pointing at the Moon	7
<i>Chapter Two</i>	
A Garden of Possibilities	31
<i>Chapter Three</i>	
Satori at the Crossroads	47
<i>Chapter Four</i>	
The Buried Treasure of Cancer	65
<i>Chapter Five</i>	
Leo's Leap into Embodiment	81
<i>Chapter Six</i>	
The Mad Passion of Virgo	99
<i>Chapter Seven</i>	
The Secret Mirror World of Libra	121
<i>Chapter Eight</i>	
The Magnificent Death of Scorpio	145
<i>Chapter Nine</i>	
The Unbound Glory of Sagittarius	165
<i>Chapter Ten</i>	
Soul-Wrestling on the Transcendental Highway	193
<i>Chapter Eleven</i>	
Bridge-Building Misfits & Holistic Fools	211
<i>Chapter Twelve</i>	
Islands in the Storm	231
Afterword: The Flight of the Dragon	251
About the Author	263
Acknowledgments	265
Appendix: How to Identify Your Dragonhead and Tail	267

This book presumes no former knowledge of astrology but is about much more than its text. To read between the lines, open your third eye—but don't close the other two!

What can we gain by sailing to the moon if we are not able to cross the abyss that separates us from ourselves?

Thomas Merton

Introduction: Awakening the Dragon

ANCIENT PEOPLE SAW THE WORLD AS A RAVAGING MONSTER that can only be tamed by the soul force within you, which remains dormant like a sleeping dragon till you cross the abyss between you and yourself. Astrology, though it often stumbles into lazy thinking, when practiced as a high visionary art is one of the best methods I know of for awakening the dragon.

The zodiac is a creation story that proposes twelve variations on the theme of being human, twelve quests for individuation, twelve life arts, twelve invitations to awaken. It's a tale spun in antiquity, revised many steps along the way. At every stop the zodiac picked something up and dropped something off, becoming a melting pot of world history and culture.

Unlike most tales, the zodiac is a story without an ending, because it's still being written. To update the narrative for these challenging times I've remodeled the signs by dismantling their clichés, stripping them down to core, and building them back up again.

When someone asks what your astrology sign is, they're referring to the sign the Sun appeared to be passing through when you were born. Along with your Sun sign you have two other crucial signs—the one you're leaving behind and the one you're heading toward. Arabian astrologers lent provocative names to the north and south nodes of the Moon, the karmic points where the Moon's orbit crosses the path of the Sun. They called your south node, which contains

issues left over from your past and from your past lives, the dragon's tail, and the opposite point of the north node they called the dragon's head, which indicates the true north of your life, the destiny your soul came back to create.

Birth charts contain many other features, but this volume is concerned with the deep karma-yoga stretch from the dragon's tail to its head, that leads through its heart. Based on your birthday, you can identify those nodal signs using the tables in the back of this book. When you turn to those tables, be aware that you're not looking up your Sun sign but two other signs very important to you.

I see your astrological Sun as a ruby heart, which stimulates the warm emanation of your innermost being and empowers you to shine your creative purpose into the world. Like the sun in the sky, your inner Sun radiates growth rays that impel you to become the whole of who you are. Depending on which sign the Sun was passing through at the time of your birth, those rays shine upon the world from one of a dozen angles.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Your Dragontail, Sun sign and Dragonhead represent your past, present and future. The more you resolve unfinished business at the tail end, the more your ruby heart flashes a laser beam into the territory ahead. The more progress you make going forward, the less binding is the heavy tail of the past.

Awakening the dragon also awakens your life art, because every life is an art, no less complex and transformative than painting, sculpture or music. We're all works in progress with underlying themes, recurring mysteries and splendid breakthroughs. We all have our own way of seeing things, which we don't usually consider an art because nobody told us to. We often take our most unique qualities for granted, unless someone sees into us clearly enough to point them out, which is one of the main reasons I wrote this book.

In art, unlike algebra, there are no right or wrong answers. But there are remedial and masterful methods of practicing your life art,

preliminary graspings and profound discoveries, which the following pages divide by the number twelve. Each chapter is designed as a travelogue through the mysterious and provocative territory of a single sign, a mythic country with its own borders, perils and revelations. To bring the stars down to Earth I dip into my personal adventures through those lands, in some chapters more than others.

Chapters conclude with a paragraph that outlines what it means to have that sign as the head or tail of your dragon. The old country you're departing from and the promised land up ahead are equally worth contemplating, because so far as I can tell, the road to enlightenment runs three steps forward and two steps back. Until you gain a strong sense of what you're moving out of, it's hard to know what you're moving into.

Even if a particular sign isn't part of your dragon, you can learn more about the sign by reading how it manifests as the head and tail of someone else's dragon, which makes the final chapter pages the spice that enhances the main dish of information served up in the chapter. A third variation of the signs can be found in the afterword, which draws the twelve together in a way designed to launch your flight.

Because each sign builds upon previous signs and sets up subsequent ones, I suggest reading the entire book in chronological order, to grasp how your stage of the journey fits with the rest, then going back and rereading about your three main signs. Since everyone contains the whole zodiac in some unique mash-up, you'll probably find pieces of yourself scattered like dragon scales throughout the pages.

Reading the book aloud to someone you care about (perhaps yourself) is recommended, because while reading chapters in progress to friends born in those signs, I found the fuller scope of the material responding to vocalization (which enabled me to practice for recording the audio version). To get the most from my words you should consider them not the final say on the zodiac, but signposts to point you toward your own insights and revelations.

Unlike much astrology information my aim here is not to tell you what to do. You won't find much of that kind of advice. The Soul Level Astrology I practice differs from other kinds by assuming that a core part of you knows who you are and what you need more than I ever could. Instead of telling you what to do my aim is to activate the part of you that already knows. If my writing makes it that far into you and stimulates your inner knowing, I'll feel content that I've done my job. This type of starwork requires more of your collaboration and takes more time to mature in you than other kinds. As with thought-provoking literature or poetry you may wish to highlight sections of the text and return to them later.

Sexuality is one of the main themes I explore in my excavation of the twelve signs. You may have read a book about lovemaking or attended webinars or weekend workshops on sex. You may have gained intriguing concepts and provocative ideas. None of those, however, is the same as lovemaking. You could spend your life attending workshops and reading books—or you could make love. My exploration of the zodiac is similar because none of the tales and ideas I offer here will be complete within themselves until you embody your own unique blend of them.

As you press on into the exotic and familiar lands of the zodiac, you'll probably find yourself occasionally pausing, as if you'd been trudging through the jungle and suddenly came face to face with an ornate temple or breathtaking landscape. Like a transformative music experience or lovemaking session, the stories in the following pages, however compelling they may be, are not so important in themselves as they are in their potential to initiate your own magic. If you find new avenues of thought opening in the days and months ahead, this book will become the gift that goes on giving long after you close the cover.

Working on this manuscript for four years propelled me farther than I'd ever gone into the depths of the zodiac. Each day at my desk the signs never stopped morphing, and I never stopped huffing to catch up to them. Excavating like this launched me on a medicine

journey I haven't come out of yet. I'm not sure I want to come out, so I guess you better come in, 'cause I could use the company.

Mark Borax
Putney Mountain, Vermont
Spring Equinox, 2023
The Year of the Cat



Note: Sun signs, unlike how they're described in newspapers, don't begin and end the same day each month, year after year, but can vary between the 19th and the 25th, so if you're in doubt, you should look up your birth day and year, and in some cases, your birth time, in a trustworthy source, or consult an astrologer. A few clients who've come to me for readings were shocked to learn they weren't the sign they thought they were.

CHAPTER ONE

The first sign doesn't precipitate out of thin air like Athena fully grown from the head of Zeus, but, like life on Earth did, emerges from the sea.

The zodiac (Arabic for "circle of animals") describes twelve variations of human nature that are also stages of consciousness we cycle through. The Piscean sea of merged consciousness completes the cycle and gives way in Aries to the light of a new dawn, which begins the journey all over again.

Out of spirit comes matter. Out of cosmos came Earth. Out of the collective fusion that occurs at the end of the zodiac comes the quest for individuation that starts it off, which will undergo many twists and turns before making it back to the sea.

Aries is on fire to prove it's alive, a thing of its own, separate from what came before: raw desire at its most basic, freshly arrived and stoked to learn what everything's about.

Aries isn't one of the more elaborate and sophisticated signs. Being first, it's not about making sure all is in place, but simply getting things off to a good start.

Along with initiating the twelve-stage journey, the forward thrust of Aries occasionally launches other momentums, some that reinforce its progress, and some that reinforce Newton's Third Law of Motion, which states that for every action there's an equal and opposite reaction. Like a young ram, Aries often learns what something's about by bashing into it and seeing what happens.

Finger Pointing at the Moon: The Zen Art of Aries

AS THE OPENING STATEMENT OF THE ZODIAC, ARIES launches a course of action the universe can't help responding to, often in unexpected ways, which Aries finds itself having to scramble through by the grace of good intentions and beginner's luck.

Raring to go, Aries is the early response unit of the zodiac, firing off snap decisions that occasionally land it in trouble, a destination many sheep become familiar with long before the age of consent.

When Aries tackles projects with clearly delineated parameters, few signs will go so far so fast. Lacking the defined initiative of such projects, Aries may sink into lethargy or mischief, which is why this sign seldom allows itself to run out of things to do—an idle ram is simply asking for trouble.

Aries thrives when motorized, and fumes when railroad barricades swing down and it's forced to wait, tapping its fingers on the steering wheel with smoke pouring out of its ears.

Shark of the zodiac, the sign often behaves as if its existence depends on keeping going (if sharks stop swimming, even while asleep, they die).

Named after the Greek god of war, Aries is prone to take umbrage when life bogs down in quagmires, as if they're personal insults that must be avenged by forward motion.

Astrologers sometimes associate Aries with the titan Prometheus (Forethought), who dared scale Mount Olympus to steal fire from the gods: the son challenging the father, the feminist challenging

the patriarchy, the progressive urge of humanity overthrowing the old guard.

Though often strongly motivated, rams may only have a vague idea of what they're setting in motion, and even less idea of all they'll have to go through to get where they're going. But what this sign lacks in planning it more than makes up for with high energy and bright spirits. The unbridled exuberance of the first sign draws creative forces out of the ethers into the physical, where the ongoing question becomes what to do with them.

Each sign inherits a gift from the previous, which it transforms during its own stage of the journey, then passes to the next. From the final sign Pisces, the first sign inherits divine restlessness—the sea is always in motion. But unlike the pendulumatic motion of the tides, Aries blazes a trail forward and rarely looks back; most people born under the sign of the sheep are allergic to looking back.

Pisces is the mystic repository in the final stop of the zodiac, the alchemical alembic that sloshes the world body back and forth, while Aries is the burst of energy that jets out of the water like an otter bursting onto the shoreside path dashing uphill to its tribe.

Aries is the one in you who knows life's a discovery walk that comes alive the moment you do.

Aries is new life emerging in early spring, the crisp action that follows indecision, the 'I am' force compelling you to enter existence with avid participation.

If zodiac signs were parts of speech, the first would be a verb; Aries is not so much a thing as an action.

Even though number one is a self-directed sign, such inroads aren't cut for itself alone. After stealing Zeus's thunder, Prometheus didn't keep fire to himself but brought it down the mountain to the mortals who toiled in the shadow of the gods, to help humanity advance out of the dark ages (something we're still working on).

For his impudence, the rebellious titan was chained to a rock on command of Zeus, where an eagle (Zeus himself in one of his many shapes) ate Prometheus's liver each morning. Overnight it grew back, and the

following day was eaten again, until eventually Hercules, during the eleventh of twelve labors, freed the long-suffering titan.¹

So much sharp directed force is superlative for getting things moving. But constant pushing can make you toxic, which is what happens if your liver gets eaten. If Aries follows its battling namesake to the exclusion of other deities, its forward thrust is bound to backfire.

However, along with war, Aries was god of surgery; the same edge that makes a sword can make a scalpel, and many people born under this sign are prone to put their own needs aside to consider the needs of others.

When the premier sign learns that measuring how alive you are by how much controversy you create is a poor strategy for long-term success, it calls upon healing powers more than fight-or-flight instinct.

Its path to maturity leads toward recognizing how the physics of its ambition combine with the effects of personal actions upon a larger sphere of influence. It's fine for Aries to set sights on what it wants and go straight for it, as long as it realizes there are other things in the universe worth considering.

Struggling through trial-and-error growth pains that take more time to digest than this impatient sign usually wants to spend tends to produce one of two behavioral modifications that can alter its emotional capacity and worldview:

1. self-embattlement, where, feeling burned by the world, Aries pulls up the drawbridge that would let anyone in or out of its fortress; or
2. self-expansion, which grows experiential wisdom for Aries to see beyond the moat to the broader view and long-term arc of its growth.

¹ The labors of Hercules, along with the zodiac itself, are one of the many twelves that recur through history around the world: tribes of Israel, disciples of Jesus, days of Christmas, months of the year, to name a few. Cultures and religions as diverse as ancient Babylon, Judaism, Egypt, Rome, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Zoroastrianism feature key examples of twelve, which is often considered (along with its multiple, 360) the number of the Whole. Astrology is largely based on these two numbers.

The latter can open the floodgates of all this exuberant sign has to offer, generating an inclusive energy that draws cohorts, supporters and allies.

Learning such lessons of self-enclosure and release can mature those born under the sign of Aries into first-rate mentors, whose restless spirits and learned patience equip them to speak to the restless and impatient spirits of others, especially those of the young.

As this young-at-heart sign learns more and more about the world around it, and about how its actions affect not just its own life but the rest of the universe, the fair-minded and noble aspects of the sign get carved out of its faux pas.

A ram who comes to understand not just the mechanics of doing but the science of its own nature (and everyone's nature is at least in one important way unique) sometimes becomes a golden fleece, contributing something worthwhile that raises the bar of aspiration for others.

Its devotion to a worthy cause can make Aries the most heroic sign. When its heroism outgrows the superficial idealism of youth and tunnel vision of zealots, the youngest sign begins to grow up.

Much Aries development comes from paying attention to its many experiences in the school of life, which is the main form of education likely to make sense to this hard-driving, sharp-edged opening act of the twelve-part play.

Lessons learned in the school of hard knocks regarding the subject matter of how to relate well with others while getting your own needs met go a long way toward polishing the sign's rough edges.

Later signs will make good use of the raw finds of Aries, but for now its rawness is exactly what the doctor ordered to get the zodiac off and running. When it learns from its bashes and blunders, the primal power of Aries can be directed toward incisive instant analyses of situations other signs might get tangled in.

Similar to how a person grows to their fullest when someone strongly believes in them, anything Aries focuses positive attention on is likely to flourish. Aries itself flourishes by strongly believing in itself without getting hung up on itself.

When the attention of this sign lags, it can get caught in the rising whine of an engine redlining in neutral. Somewhere inside that crescendo pistons are pumping, sparks are flying and exhaust is pouring out, but nothing's going anywhere.

Lack of enthusiasm or focus is a sure sign that some relationship, job or life context is no longer fueling this energetic sign. With such high idling, Aries either needs to get in gear and haul ass, or dig down to learn if some deeper engagement with a situation is possible.

The answer may be found by approaching choice points less like intellectual analysis stations and more like electrical wiring. This sign has so much bright urgency to connect that its restless energies seek outlets as avidly as electricity seeks a circuit. Once the circuit is rewired by Aries connecting to whatever it needs to connect with, and grounded by the grace of strong, clear intentions, the free flow of its energies almost always shows it the way to go.

Regardless of how stuck an Aries gets, how rattled or mystified, once this sign imagines itself more as a verb than a noun—less of a thing and more as energies stored up looking for a place to happen—it cuts complications by breaking down the equation of which way to go into something it can sizzle through instead of analyze and deliberate over.

Even though this restless sign doesn't always get where it starts out going, that's not likely to flounder it so much as give it a pinball bumper to rebound off and keep going. Though if it bounces around too much it's likely to get out of control and plunk down the gutter.

But it'll come back as soon as somebody pulls the plunger and fires the next ball up the alley and around the ramp for another go at life, another shot at love, another turn of the wheel.

Sometimes the goals of this goal-oriented sign turn out transitory or ephemeral. The constructive forces those searches set in motion, however, can have long-term shelf life, especially when they draw helpmates to aid this sign's solo searching.

In the 1980s when I started submitting comic book scripts to publishers, I found an ally in the only agent who represented comics writers and artists, Mike Friedrich, who happens to be an Aries.

True to his sign, Mike blew away the Old Guard of the industry by fighting for creators to get well-paid for their work, and start to gain a percentage of the lucrative licensing funds that were lining publishers' pockets, while chaining artists like Jack Kirby to their drawing boards, cranking out daily page rates for a pittance.

If a publisher was reluctant to relinquish control, Mike encouraged his clients to consider leaving that company and working for another, or joining the growing stable of independent writers and artists Mike assembled when he became the first publisher granting creators full rights, by launching Star * Reach comics.

Though I'm not an Aries, in my late twenties I was bursting with Aries-like energy to make a name for myself. Since my teens I'd had poems, articles and stories published, and had made a few bucks selling gags to Hallmark cards, but my lifelong dream to author a book kept starting to manifest and slipping away through the ethers almost as much as my love life did. So I reined some of that dream in and aimed it toward launching a comic book series.

I began tackling superhero plots, cobbling together treatments for Jonn J'onzz, Martian Manhunter; Hawkman and Hawkgirl; Batman, the Metal Men and many more, as well as my own creations, none of which sold. Eventually I wrote a one-shot science fiction script, *I Shot the Last Martian*, as an homage to Ray Bradbury, which Mike placed at Eclipse Comics for my first comics sale.

Mike told me that even though most of my tales wouldn't get sold, each submission opened the door to crafting relationships that could easily outlast any particular story I might be obsessing on.

He schooled me to recognize an unsold submission as the first stepping stone of a professional odyssey rather than something I should lose sleep over. I shouldn't think of selling scripts so much as buying relationships, and, above all, no matter how much rejection I got I needed to stay positive, especially when talking to editors.

Of course, as a young writer hot under the collar I didn't want to hear that my stories might not get sold! But his advice paid off when I stayed

positive and Marvel bought a Fantastic Four time-traveling love story from me.

Intuiting the most direct path from *here* to *there*, Aries is the geometric line of the zodiac, reducing complications to the shortest distance between two points. Delays that trip up other signs evaporate in the friction lines of an Aries on top of its game, whose ability to cut to the quick can be rallying.

Because Aries is the first responder of the zodiac, it tends to generate momentum others like to get in on. When friends or allies appear, Aries can form partnerships that compensate for its personal blind spots, rounding out the narrowness of its linear thinking with the complexity of the surrounding view.

Sheep may seem distant, and not easy to read behind their mad dashes and knowing smiles, but if you gain the respect of an Aries, they're likely to cover your back and bristle at any injustices you suffer.

You can sometimes infer how much an Aries believes in you by how much space they grant you. The sign isn't likely to stand on ceremony, as an Aries values personal freedom over social niceties. Its greatest compliment may be to give you no compliment at all, to stand back and let you do your stuff.

Idealistic and romantic, driven by instinct, impatient with red tape, Aries is the part of us at odds with the delayed gratification and indirect results of *Technotopia Moderna*.

The forthrightness of this sign is the kind of approach that flourished in the straightforward culture of days gone by, when direct connections abounded and a camaraderie of the mind was fostered in classrooms, on porch rockers and around after-dinner tables.

In our day, simple, clear, direct encounters and conversations that encourage speakers to really listen and to open their minds to new ideas have become so rare they're almost extinct. Everybody gets so caught up in keeping everything going they have little left for good old-fashioned dialog.

Sometimes Aries becomes so focused on the task at hand it steam-rolls over potential allies that could help it thrive or prevent it from

making blunders. Recognizing the gifts of others enough to take cues from them is a frequent traffic redirection for the do-it-yourself sign of the zodiac.

However, some rams are difficult to reason with and impossible to slow down or redirect. That might not work out disastrously, depending on the accuracy of their aim, subtlety of their thought and their ability to read people.

Instinct runs strong in the early part of the zodiac, where sophisticated understandings and subtle thinking don't usually come naturally but are hard-won and dearly bought.

An Aries who augments its forward drive with subtle thinking may become skilled at correcting its course midstream, like paddling a canoe through surging whitewater.

But when instinct dominates an Aries who lacks subtle thought and surround vision, the intensity of their drive can make them overshoot their mark or capsize their canoe.

Though Aries gains a lot of mileage running on grit and friction, its maturity depends on easing up on conflict as a way to jump-start its battery, and finding smoother alternatives in order to get up the full head of steam it needs to go all the way into wherever it's going.

People-reading skills, though not usually this sign's natural-born talent, come in very handy because some people need no hand-holding and benefit from clear requests and instructions, whereas others need heavy maintenance if you wish to draw them along.

An Aries good at reading people can adjust how much force it applies compared to how much grace and diplomacy. People-reading skills help sheep preserve their mountain-moving power for when most needed.

A thriving Aries can be one of the most positive and productive members of the zodiac. Since Aries is almost always moving strongly in a certain direction, if you feel affinity with that direction and are interested in going along, in the blink of an eye Aries will be more than happy to sweep you in its wake.

The V-shaped formation of migrating geese conserves the flock's energy, because each bird flies slightly above the one in front, reducing

wind drag, which allows every other bird to rest its wings while the others carry the load, until they trade off. Similarly, with Aries, when the movement of a certain group augments its own momentum, the premier sign can end up gliding along, directing the action or focusing the group.

Many Aries individuals have a strong relationship to words, and when they apply the same crisp economy of motion to their clarity of expression as they apply to achieving their goals, they can snap productivity and meaning in place as briskly as a set of Legos.

I have an Aries jeweler friend, Scott, who in the late 1990s was once dining in a booth next to the one I was sharing with Chris, another Aries friend of mine, at a Santa Cruz breakfast cafe. I'd been going through a sequence of crises (which I'll get into in a minute). I told Chris I felt like a boxer who, every time he barely gets up off the mat, gets whomped down again. I said I was reeling and blurted out that I wanted to get to the opposite of crisis, whatever that might be.

Recalling Scott had a way of clearing mental underbrush and cutting to the quick, I knocked on the little glass partition between our booths and said, "Hey Scott—what's the opposite of crisis?"

Instead of being put off by this out-of-the-blue question he took in my request with a slight nod, closed his eyes, went somewhere inside himself, then said, "Harvest."

Bingo! If I couldn't stop getting battered, I at least needed to find some way to draw the crises into harvest.

Although I'm Libra, the sign opposite Aries, Aries is at the root of my birth chart, the sign at the very bottom, foundational to my existence. You could say Aries is the ground I walk on. Libra tends to be as complex as Aries is simple. Libra weighs and balances, checks and measures, ponders and philosophizes, while Aries acts.

I needed to summon the full firepower of my Aries root at that time because I'd been laid low by a two-year onslaught in which my uncle died, my father died, my grandmother died, and my mother.²

² This chapter of my life began two years after the closing scene of my book *2012: Crossing the Bridge to the Future*, soon to be republished as *Love, Sex and Astrology*.

As if the deaths weren't enough, I also suffered a health setback and financial loss.

Two days after the harvest/crisis in the restaurant, Wendy, the woman I was deeply in love with and had been living with, told me she was going to move out.

I was dumbfounded.

Sitting on the hardwood floor, holding hands and facing each other, I fought to make sense of this continuing nightmare.

I don't get it, I said, because—wasn't she still in love with me like she always told me?

Yes, she replied.

Had I done something to diminish her feelings?

No.

Isn't our relationship as magic and awesome as we always say it is?

Yes.

Is our sex still beyond belief?

You know it is—you'll never find anyone to make love with the way we do.

Then—how can you go? Why would you leave?

After a long pause, when the very room seemed to be holding its breath, she shrugged. I don't know, Mark, she said—I guess your heart's just bigger than mine.

I tried to find a place inside myself that could fathom what this meant.... A bigger heart. *Does that mean a smaller brain?*

I wondered if it were true, this big heart, and how long it had taken her to figure out, and if there was anything I could do about it. I'd thought we were having a rough spot but not the end.

We'd been living in a cottage in the Santa Cruz Mountains, which we called the hobbit hole, perched directly over a little bend in the San Lorenzo River, where, with a sheepish look in her eyes, Wendy pried her fingers out of mine and stood to go.

After a long hug that I had trouble ending she walked to the door and gazed soulfully back at me while dramatic theme music poured through my head.

I flashed on a cinematic rescue, where, instead of standing there like a sawn Redwood about to topple, I'd run after her, tap her shoulder, and to the chorus of Van Morrison's "Crazy Love," she'd change her mind, rush into my arms and the credits would roll.

It didn't happen.

Robotically packing my things into cardboard boxes the next few dreary days and sleepless nights, I kept telling myself something right must be going on beneath so many things that seemed so wrong.

From being knocked down and climbing back up so much I'd come to believe the universe runs on some mystic interconnectedness I couldn't explain, but sensed had to be there.

Blow after blow after blow was anything but random. There had to be some message in the barrage, some meaning to the pattern. I knew loss after loss couldn't go on forever, but meanwhile, where was my life?

My life had always been volatile and unpredictable, now suddenly it had become even more volatile and all-too-predictable. If I could find the method to the madness, maybe I could start to harvest the crisis.

I thought about the Zen parable of the hermit who lives in a cave with only sandals, begging bowl and robe, and contemplated a similar course of action.

Returning from bathing in the river, the hermit finds a thief making off with the robe and sandals. He rushes after him holding up the bowl, shouting, "You forgot *this!*"

In similar fashion, at age forty-three when so much was being stripped away, I decided that instead of grasping to put things back, to go the opposite direction and release even more. So I gave away or sold my books, clothes, journals, musical instruments and CDs. With each trip to relinquish a load, I felt psychic weight lift, till I could walk past bookstores and music shops without feeling the slightest pull.

I went on the San Francisco radio show, atop a wharf-side skyscraper, that I'd used for ten years to build my astrology career, announced I was letting go of my practice, leaving the Bay Area and, like the Fool in a tarot deck, leaping into the unknown.

From my family's deaths I received a modest inheritance, which I took advantage of to keep a twenty-five-year promise to myself: that if I could ever afford it I'd buy a big Harley. I chose a brand-new, 1998 black-and-chrome Low Rider off the showroom floor (which I dubbed Blackie), hopped in the saddle and was off.

With no parents, grandparents, lover, home nor job; no cell phone nor schedule; no one to answer to and no possessions other than what I packed on Blackie (including my mother's ashes), like that Zen monk I went naked into the world, raw and reeling, with no conception of what should happen next.

I got rid of my watch because I had nothing but time. I was dazed and confused but free, or so I told myself several times a day, while waiting for the punch-drunk haze of Santa Craze to wear off and the magic of the road to kick in.

It was a strange bliss to not know where I'd sleep each night, where I'd end up and who I'd meet. Hanging onto my handlebars like the forked ends of a divining rod, all I had to do was keep one wheel in front of the other, as I dowsed the white-striped highway to some unknown destination.

If I wanted to turn left I'd turn left. If I wanted to go right I'd go right. If I wanted to keep going I could ride all night. If I fell in love with someone I could pull over and spend the rest of my life there.

There was nothing to answer to but the rhythm of the road and the thrumming gas tank I laid my chest on to feel direct connection with everything my tires touched, as I flew through a world that rose up and streamed behind me in monochrome and Technicolor.

At a Boston Harley shop I had Blackie crated to ship to London, then flew across the Atlantic. From England I rode through the tunnel to France, Belgium and Holland, then up and over the Alps into Italy, where I rented a quiet inexpensive apartment with marble floors in the medieval hilltop city of Bibiene, in Tuscany, between Florence and Siena.

In that bucolic and storied setting I settled down to catch my breath, gain my bearings and allow time to begin whatever healing it had in store.

I spent days walking the streets, cruising around on Blackie, writing songs and looking for my life, as if it were a lost cat I might find around the corner some afternoon along the grass strip where the old men played bocce ball, or in the alley beside the heavenly smells of fresh-baked bread.

Mornings I gazed from my small balcony to the distant silhouette of the mountain a nobleman had gifted Saint Francis for his woodland ministry. It wasn't Assisi, where his more famous church is, that I was looking at, but La Verna, off in the Apennines, site of his original chapel and still-functioning monastery.

Instead of an archetypal triangular mountain, La Verna's left side is a vertical rock wall that climbs to the structure's highest peak, then gradually slopes down like a long ramp stretching to the right, where it ends in a shorter vertical wall that parallels the one opposite. I took to sketching that ramp, which began calling through my dreams.

Since Mom always wanted to go to Europe, where her parents came from, but never made it, on the last day of September—her birthday—I rode Blackie up into the mountains.

In the dark, tiny, rough-hewn chapel with dirt floor, I kneeled down and touched the mattress-sized and -shaped slab of solid rock, about a foot thick, that Francis slept on with no blanket or pillow. I felt stale energies whooshing out of me as if by vacuum cleaner, which made me feel this was the real deal. Sometimes at supposedly sacred sites I get nothing at all, but in that rustic chapel I was buzzing, and Francis's great and tender spirit seemed hard at work, flushing my system and eroding the numbness.

Back in the parking lot I unbuckled my saddlebag, took the sack of ashes and made my way through the forest. At the edge of the cliff I'd been gazing at from afar, I tipped the sack and poured the ashes out to where they sparkled in the breeze. Their flight over the mountain was my mother's last dance.

At the end of my Italian year I shipped Blackie to Los Angeles and continued my ride. One late morning in the Spring of 2000 I found myself in Sedona, Arizona, rooming at a friend's house, feeling rootless, displaced and hungry for female companionship.

I decided to take a day trip over Mingus Mountain to the historic wild-west town of Prescott, seeking a cigar and a woman, hoping the wind on my face or a possible romantic intrigue might lift my spirits.

I pulled on my boots, fired up Blackie and rode over the mountain to the edge of Prescott, where I spied a curvaceous woman with platinum hair, in a tight ice-blue dress, leaning against a street sign, as if luring me like a film noir siren.

Easing the throttle I gazed at her and she gazed back, then I told myself it was too good to be true, and accelerated to pass by.

Just before passing I braked, pulled over and asked if she wanted a ride. She hopped on, said her name was Gloria, wrapped her thighs around me, and asked if I wanted a beer at the corner bar. After beers she asked me to take her home.

We got on Blackie and she directed me through several turns toward the outskirts of town, down a long curving hill, up another, through more dips and turns, into a sprawling housing development, where she had me stop in front of a nondescript tract house that looked like the others.

We went in and she poured me orange juice, then filled a small pipe with ganja that she lit and we shared. She put Sade's "Smooth Operator" on the stereo, went into the bedroom, came out in a peach-colored nightgown, and we slow-danced in the kitchen.

After everything I'd gone through prior to my two-year ride, and everything I'd gone through since, that kitchen dance was surreal, as though I'd stumbled into a movie about some guy who happened to be me.

As we glided over the linoleum Gloria held me close, and said she made jewelry. She whispered she was in love with my necklace—a striking piece I'd picked out in Albuquerque during the early part of my ride. The necklace reminded me of Mom because of its showpiece of five fire opals, which, when I was a child, she'd told me was my birthstone.

Those azure gems, strung on a silver chain between black-enameled silver-barrel beads, were of rare depth and brilliance, with ruby flames in their core. Many people I'd met on my ride had seemed hypnotized,

and it took me a long moment to realize they were staring at my necklace rather than me.

Impulsively I unclasped the chain and placed it around Gloria's neck, blue opals flashing against her platinum hair.

"What are you doing?! No, *I can't*—," she said as I fastened it.

She broke away, turned off the music and said, "Look. I gotta tell you. I brought you here under false pretexts."

"Huh?"

"The truth is, I'm gay. I know you're interested in me, but I gotta tell you it's not gonna go that way. Okay? Is that cool? You can stay if you want. I'll cook you an egg but then I gotta go to work."

I thought about it, shrugged, and said okay.

After the meal she told me it was time to go. At the front door she gave me her phone number, which I pocketed.

I got in the saddle, fired up Blackie, lost my bearings in the neighborhood, asked a kid for directions, then rode back to Sedona before placing my hand on my throat and realizing I'd forgotten the necklace. When I reached my friend's home I phoned Gloria and left a message for her to call so I could retrieve it.

After three days when she didn't call, I phoned again. She picked up and said she was meeting friends at a bowling alley that night where I could come get the piece. Adding that her plans were sketchy, she said she'd call back to confirm. She never did.

Four days went by with me leaving messages she didn't answer. The next morning I awoke with the realization she had no intention of returning the necklace.

I lay in bed fuming, till I realized anger was pouring out of me that I could channel into direct action, Aries-style, instead of taking the more Libran approach of batting the situation around in my head.

Though I didn't know if I could make good on it, I felt the trail to the necklace was imprinted in some Aries zone of consciousness in me, which knew the shortest distance between my current whereabouts and the jewels. Having no hypnotist at hand, I decided to navigate by Zen and outrage, like a finger pointing at the moon.

I fired up my bike and rode to Prescott, where I somehow managed to make my way to Gloria's neighborhood. I parked around the corner so she wouldn't hear the roar of my engine before I switched it off.

I walked to the house, pressed the buzzer, and waited. She opened the door wearing the gems, then flinched, recognizing me. I held out my hand palm-up and said, "Give me my necklace."

Trembling, she unclasped it and handed it over, muttering, "I was gonna give it back, ya know."

I walked away saying nothing. When I got to Sedona I saw she'd removed beads and shortened the chain to fit her neck.



Aries is the *ki* in Aikido, the *shakti* in Tantra, the *chi* in Tai Chi. Aries is the art of meeting the living moment, as if each moment has something for you that you can't retrieve unless you dive in. So many vital connections would die on the vine if this most eager member of the zodiac didn't dive.

Throughout our lives, destiny asks us to dance, but we shake it off, caught in whatever agenda happens to be running our minds that moment. If I'd clung to Santa Cruz after all the losses I would've probably kept spinning my wheels. Hopping into the saddle sprang me from the dead to the living, though it would eventually take another year or so after Sedona for the numbness to wear off.

Inside the most pragmatic ram a romantic lurks beneath a blue-and-white striped awning, awaiting a rendezvous beside the cut-glass vase of fresh flowers sitting on a café table. Like Paris in the 1920s, a part of every Aries wants to stay awake all night long exchanging food, sex and conversation.

The Aries experience changes radically when love comes along. Similar to how the sign dives into a moment, it tends to dive into relationship, which can work well if the pool is deep and the person ready. If not, due to its straightforward approach this isn't the best sign to sort subtle agendas and mixed messages. Those kinds of love often lock horns with Aries like bighorn rams in mating season.

Since I launched my astrology career in 1987, fewer Aries clients have come to me than any other sign. I think this is because the most self-directed member of the zodiac is less likely to make themselves dependent on the counsel of others, and perhaps less inclined to follow metaphysics in general, which can seem far removed from the shortest distance between two points. When Aries does get interested in the subtle arts, though, they tend to go very far very fast.

After Aries gets the ball rolling, the vast majority of the zodiac is yet to come, which is why it's not up to the introductory sign to make sure everything's neatly tied with no loose ends. But it *is* up to Aries to get things off to a good start, and though this is largely a matter of intention, it's also a matter of *energy*.

The secret superpower of the first sign is the use of energy. The kind of energy I mean makes a cat run up to one stranger and turn tail on another. Cats are so masterful at reading and running energy they can lie down on a king-sized bed with two humans in it, and somehow confine the big bodies to a cramped little margin. Many animals are energy experts and so are young children. Adults, not so much, because we get clogged with excess thought, jaded by experience and sidetracked by ego, and childhood's psychic feelers dull from lack of use.

One night a couple of years before he turned my crises toward harvest, I went with my Aries friend Scott to a party at a farmhouse on the outskirts of Santa Cruz. Following him three steps in from the door, I saw his eyes dart birdlike left, right and center, where he asked the hostess, "Did something big just happen here?"

"*Yeah*—my neighbor just called the cops and about a hundred people left."

Scott nodded, as if confirming something he already knew.

Somehow he'd read invisible vapor trails I'd been oblivious to. Like the wake of an ocean liner after the ship passed, he must've sensed energy currents that parted when the guests rushed off.

If you follow energy through the world like dowsing, functions previously assigned to your analytical process shift to direct. En route to Prescott, if I hadn't gotten so hot under the collar, if I'd paused coolly

at each intersection to analyze which way to go, I might not have gotten there.

In our information-heavy, instinct-weak period of history, the Aries part of us craves direct encounter. Below the pixelated deluge of noninformation, we long to break out of delayed gratification into something fresh, vital and alive.

In the end it turns out what this sign has been seeking is just what it started with, except more: more direct connection, more ecstatic release, more satisfying moments, more rich exchange of energies, like electricity that keeps steadily flowing.

Like the Zen master brandishing his bowl to the thief, and like Francis rushing out of his father's market stall to dwell among the wild creatures on the mountain, even a complex modern life, if you're ready to release its clutter, can be stripped down, enabling you to move through the world like a finger pointing at the moon.



ARIES DRAGONHEAD/LIBRA DRAGONTAIL

***From the
complicated
to the simple***

With Libra behind you and Aries ahead, you're departing from the complicated and heading toward the simple. Beware second-guessing. Trust your gut. Pondering comes naturally to you because you got good at it in an earlier life, but don't linger there, or you'll stumble around a clockface of past-life footprints. Direct engagement is what you came back for. You have to engage more than your mind, though, and dive off the clock into strong subtle energies that usher you forward. That dive streamlines your ride through the physical plane, bypassing convoluted thought webs that trap the free movement of individuals. As quick as thought travels, energy travels quicker. Underneath the complexities of our time, the spirit of the species is fuming to bust loose, and Aries leads the charge. Thoughts can carry human consciousness into the future, but energy links your subtle senses to life-enhancing forces of the present. Your dragon is stalking evolutionary breakthroughs you might not find with your mind, but they can be identified by the tingling in the forearms of the dowser in you.

From the simple to the complicated

With Aries behind you and Libra ahead, you're departing from the simple and heading toward the complicated. In earlier lives you saw most things entirely through your own eyes while missing the views of others. You got so caught up in your own track you couldn't tell if it was veering toward or away from someone else's, which limited your empathy and understanding. This time around you're developing clairsentience, which, similar to clairvoyance (which is psychic vision) and clairaudience (psychic hearing), enables you to sense what others are experiencing without needing to be told. The more you care about someone, the sharper this sense grows. It takes lots of back-and-forth to master it. Going too far can unbalance you by becoming so inundated with the other person's experience you lose track of your own. Not going far enough risks chasing your tail by repeating past-life self-enclosure. Your dragon is flying out of a narrow past toward the shared world that manifests when two get together heart to heart and soul to soul. If you're in one of those shared worlds, put your ear to the ground and learn to listen. If you're not and want to be, put your ear to the ground and listen anyway, because that world is busy being born in you the same time it's being born in the person you're going to share it with as soon as you're both ready to find each other.

ARIES DRAGONTAIL/LIBRA DRAGONHEAD

CHAPTER TWO

Just as spring's warmth follows winter's chill, an aura of promise seems to follow Taurus around. And just as a bucolic panorama of cows on a hillside suggests contentment, the presence of this springtime sign can feel reassuring, suggesting that even though life on Earth has become strange these days, some things, at least, can still be counted on.

Their ability to recognize quality and grasp the way things operate draws this resourceful sign into situations where others depend on them. They're often viewed as rock-solid, but, like a calf on spindly legs, their own experience is usually a bit shakier than that. Perhaps their inherent understanding of quality makes them very aware of things that fall short of what they could be, and uneasy about whether they should do something about it.

Thoughtful more than impulsive, Taurus is the hands-on inventive engineer of the zodiac, who loves to get its hands on ideas, tools, instruments and other things that adjust, tighten or just plain feel good to touch (which leads to Taurean sex, which I'll get to in a moment).

An abundance of tactile awareness seems to give Taureans the sense of life as something to grasp and hold. When things go that way, Taurus is a happy camper, but grumbly and out of sorts when it doesn't, though many of the sign's biggest lessons are provoked by such anomalies the way a bull is provoked by a matador's flashing cape.

I see Taurus as the gardener of the zodiac, in a garden of possibilities.

Now that Aries got the ball rolling, it's up to Taurus to figure out what to do with it. Now that the first sign

launched the journey of individuation, the second contemplates how best to use it.

How to use and be used comprise the large part of bovine journeys. Most Taureans spend their lives looking for a way to be used that nourishes the body and satisfies the soul, but they have to spend a lot of time getting used for the wrong reasons before they find it.

Though they're one of the most industrious signs, most Taureans delight in puttering around, peeking in on what the wind and weather are up to in the garden, or doing nothing at all. As with a cow chewing its cud, or a gardener kneeling on the ground, the bulk of Taurine attention is often directed down and in rather than up and out.

One of Taurus's fondest notions—which the universe seems hell-bent on sabotaging—is to contemplate its life away. What action is to the first sign, stillness is to the second, rich contemplative stillness, where seeds germinate in darkness far from the busyness.

