



ARIES: Two old friends, confusion and chaos, stop by to read the refrigerator of your relationships. Many powerful influences on Mars, planet of separating wheat from chaff, make whatever pleasure you have niddled with guilt. Hunker down and work, draw a line in the sand around your karma, and resist the urge to let someone who says they love you kick it in your face. Fix what's broken and don't waste time crying over spilt blood.



TAURUS: Defying all odds, the creative juices are flowing. In keeping with the odds, some of your flights of brilliance will be hopeless twaddle, but the percentages carry you through. Chances are good that business and love will blur nicely this month—you could wind up sleeping with the boss or going into business with your lust object. It could lead to pain and sadness, but then, what doesn't?



GEMINI: You should listen to the little genie grabbing your lapels and shrieking "Go out and play." You've been good, so has your work, and you deserve a day at the track. It would be the best of ideas to take your partner with you. With luck, the smoldering discontent will be cooled before he or she has to go upside your punkin head for taking matters a wee tad too much for granted. Take note which side your bread is buttered on—and who does your baking.



CANCER: The stars will be very surprised if sometime this month you don't look at what you laughingly call your love life and say, "Boy, this is pretty stupid." Resist the urge to hold on to something that's not there. Roll with the punches and come to grips with your motivations. They might surprise you. Remember the old saw—you can either have a relationship or talk about it—and then ignore it. If there was ever a time for truth telling, you're looking at it.



LEO: You are one lucky rascal. Venus (planet of cosmic kissy-kissy) continues to cuddle all month. You couldn't be more charming, magnetic, and just basically cuter than a speckled pup if you tried (and we both know you won't). For what it's worth, everyone thinks you're the best thing since the invention of light—and phoney humility aside, you're hotter than a two dollar pistol. Be sure your heart is good, then seize the old carpe diem, as they say. If you waste time fondling your reviews, you could miss having your earlobe really nibbled by fate.



VIRGO: Happy birthday, nitpickers and worry freaks, you're on a roll. Define a goal, kick off a new obsession, buy a cowboy hat. If the stars aren't kidding around, and they're not, you're in the harvest mode. A good time to check out your cashflow machinery—tuneups are much more fun than overhauls—but don't get bound up in pictures of dead presidents. You may need to explain this to someone who would love you much more if you had money. Take everything that's offered and give everything you have. That way the books balance themselves.



LIBRA: If there was ever a month to invoke balance, it's staring you in the face. You won't do it sitting on your heels. Archons speak louder than inactions, and blueprints aren't the same thing as houses. Listen to your heart (stop gagging) and ignore vapid pundits who will give you half a chance, run your trap to its knees. The urge to avoid relationship troubles by whooping it up with friends is (listen up) suicidal. Ask yourself if you've bitten off more than you can chew.



SCORPIO: The unbeaten path of your karma is slicker than a pair of eels in a bucket of Crisco this month. Fortunately, it's your teepee that's lost, not you. Remember that unflagging arrogance, indomitable self-righteousness, and obnoxious egotism that make up your roughcut charm? Dust them off, booblah, and remember it's a long game. Don't try pushing any ropes. Find a comfortable cave, roll the stone to the closed position and don't leave it if you remember who you are.



SAGITTARIUS: Not the month to lounge around in your bathrobe eating Bon-bons. Gifts are waiting, but you have to go pick them up. Put yourself into new constructs and new groups, frame your picture in the world outside. Do not, however, grasp at straws. Behavior like this is beneath you, seize the moral high ground, work for the benefit of others and don't leap at flirtations. Avoid people wearing Puka shells and driving leased convertibles.



CAPRICORN: Isn't Capricorn a funny word when you say it out loud? It might sound fun to carry on as usual—licking wounds and plotting revenge—but what you need to do is get out and mix it up with humans you don't trust. Speak your mind and watch your wallet. Be bold and remember that nothing, including disaster, comes to those who don't try. Work goes much better than relationships, an area in which you should try not to behave like a puppy. Enjoy yourself, if only to keep from making someone else miserable.



AQUARIUS: As if you needed encouragement, you would do well this month to broaden your horizons. If nothing else, it evokes chaos—the only order you're ever satisfied with. Dance to different drummers but stick with your partner. This shouldn't be hard. What might be hard is prying the two of you apart long enough to get fed and watered. While you're snoodling, make sure you're not using your love as a security blanket. One shouldn't use love for anything. The universe doesn't like that.



PISCES: A good month for fish people. Work (that portion of your life you ignore in favor of writing brooding poetry) goes well—so well, in fact, that romance could blossom by the water cooler of life. Hopefully, this will be enough to distract you from making financial decisions that could make the S&L bailout seem like a lawn party. Stay inside, let no one take advantage of your cosmic wishy-washiness, and consider the dance of action/reaction. You should also avoid ducks. Don't ask.

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the beach squadrons of diggers create lines of holes and piles of sand, which cast dark shadows against the brightening light from the east.

I forget to face the sea, forget to slant my weapon seaward. Facing the sea, according to Amos' guru, has to do with angling the gun in the same direction as the clam angles, and thereby avoiding breaking the shell. Yet there may be a more profound meaning as well, for if there is anything I have learned in life it is always to keep your face toward the danger. "Never turn your back on the surf" is a basic canon of body surfing and tide-pool observing alike, and there are a good many other dangers that are better faced directly, lest the big wave come and harvest you.

The real trouble with Oregon is that strangers keep coming from every point of the compass, and those who live here are unprepared to kill them before they reproduce. Nature abhors not just a vacuum but also an unpopulated place or unfilled niche. Nor can I quarrel with that, for not only were the Chinook and the Tlaxtonians and my editor newcomers, but my father as well, without whose westering I would probably be a native of Cincinnati. We are all immigrants here, or the descendants of immigrants, except the clams.

I used to complain about the constant immigration. We Oregonians are among the greatest lovers of empty space. Having ourselves arrived to fill the local emptiness, we instantly turn and demand that no one else be allowed entrance to Eden.

The Tao of the Oregonian is this: that nowhere else on earth are there so few people occupying so much space in such a hurry to declare that space already too full of people. Try explaining that lust for solitude to, for example, Asians. I used to try, in South Korea and such places, and receive only puzzled stares for my troubles. They wondered why anyone would want to live in such an empty, and therefore obviously inhospitable, place.

That leaves me on the edge of a continent across which my ancestors have been westering for several generations, facing the sea and gunning down razor clams. My face may be to the ocean, but my back is to the real danger to Mother Oregon—those incoming waves of outlanders who come here primed to build businesses, run for office and to edit newspapers dedicated to protecting Oregon and its citizens from all the dangers Planet Earth provides. Except ourselves.

Meanwhile, on the darling beach, it turns out that I can spot clam dimples with the best of them. Amos may be a bivalve or two ahead, and the beach as full of people as a hermit's nightmare of a Washington's Day Sale, but we both seem likely to catch our full 24-clam limit, as the sky turns from red to crimson, orange and gold, and is an enriched blue out over the sea.

Demography is our real problem. We may argue all we want about damming the Grande Ronde, saving the Deschutes, or paving paradise to put in a parking lot, but as long as the people keep pouring in, the biosphere must biodegrade.

The demography of clams and men alike seems profoundly inevitable, as we get our limit of little clams at Little Beach. Nor may one return small clams to the sand, for once moved they cannot live. We are told that the future of clamdom is in our hands, and must not be abused, which is at once true, and a lie. The great clam bed in the sea will replenish the despoiled clam beds near the land if it is clammy possible, but winters and their raging storms will do far more damage to those sandy beds than we mere mortals can ever do. Last winter tore out the beach to bedrock and scooped sand by the ton seaward, decimating the intertidal beds, and probably the offshore ones as well.

I count on newcomers to Oregon to battle to save the beautiful country. As for me, I will probably continue to remind myself of fights I fought in younger days, and victories won or lost. That is the Oregon way, I think. The first generation comes in, full of resolve to save, preserve and modify, while the natives, a bit too comfortable, simply enjoy the place. Searching for my 24th and final razor clam, I contemplate the fact that, in all my years of writing, I have never dealt with an editor who was born here. I've written for editors from back East and down South, and been edited by persons from Ohio and England and such places, who seem to me to lack an ear for the Oregon sound. I am represented in the Legislature by a woman from New York, on the City Council by a woman from Montana, and in the county by a man who just barely arrived from all over America. I suspect that will continue. Oregon offsprings either flee the blackberry swamp, or like me, stay and learn to enjoy the land, but newcomers are the ones who change and mould the place, in an image of what they think Oregon is, or ought to be.

I conclude that the ecological warriors are right in every respect but one. They do not know—perhaps they cannot know—that the true Tao of Oregon is merely to be here now. To enjoy and learn the place, and let the future come over the mountains as it always has, wave after wave. The Oregon that can be saved is not the true Oregon, as a Taoist would put it. I thank them for their efforts, and go on living. I don't think they will save my Oregon from inundation, nor do I believe that Oregon will be much—if any—better, for clam or man, than New Jersey (my personal metaphor for Desolation Row) once the human beings have filled it up, as they assuredly will. All places fill, in time, for humans and razor clams alike have reproductive resources equal to their task, and the task of every creature, realized or not, is to fill the ecological niche to the brimming point.

All this is terribly cynical, and makes me hungry, so we stop in Seaside for breakfast. Seaside, that Coney Island of the North Coast, is what all Oregon will eventually look like. Then back to Amos' cabin to stand in unaccustomed sun, cleaning clams. Cleaning clams is not half so much fun as digging them, but is no less philosophical, and in the evening we will eat them, which is at least as much fun as either. Then the Tao of clam and clam digger will merge, and we will go forward together into the future.

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