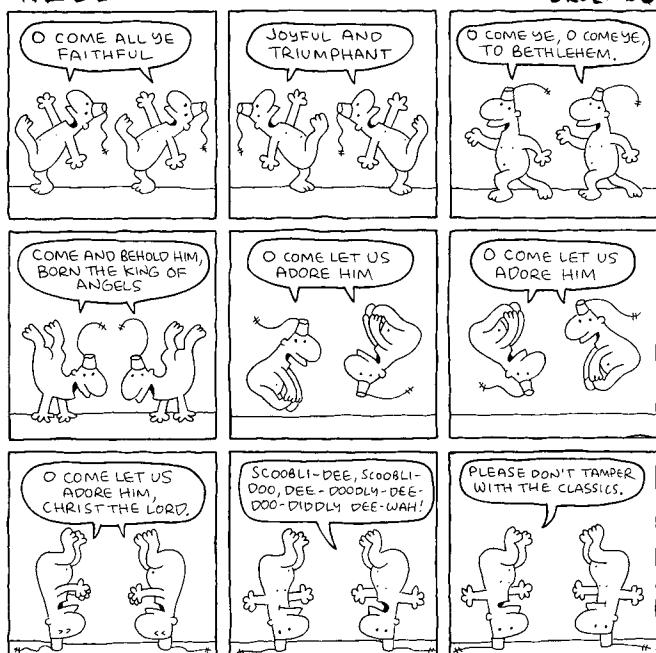


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**free will astrology** BY ROB BREZSNY

**ARIES** (March 21-April 19): In 1874, a fire broke out in an underground coalfield in western China. It burned non-stop until 2004, when firefighters finally squelched it. In the intervening 130 years, 200 million tons of fuel went to waste, spewing out copious amounts of polluting gases. I nominate the denouement of this long-running drama to serve as your personal metaphor for early 2005. In January and February, you will finally douse a smoldering inner fire that has been a poor use of your ambition. This will set the stage for a fresh start. No later than your birthday, you will ignite a new blaze that's both more efficient and more worthy of you.

**TAURUS** (April 20-May 20): Have you heard of the book, *Toxic Sludge Is Good for You: Lies, Damn Lies and the Public Relations Industry?* How about George Orwell's science fiction novel, *1984*, in which the government trumpets the slogan, "War is peace, freedom is slavery, ignorance is strength"? If I could, I'd give you these books as holiday gifts, Taurus. I'd also present you with an altar made of fine wood. With these foundation materials, I'd ask you to begin building a Truth Shrine in your home. This source of power might help you stay alert for and immune to the elevated levels of BS you'll be called on to fend off in 2005. Maybe it would also inspire you to be in service to us all as you earn the title of "Radical Truth-Teller."

**GEMINI** (May 21-June 20): As I meditated about what would be the perfect holiday gift for you, I kept coming back to the fantasy of a thousand doughnuts. Nothing pleased me more than the mental image of your living room floor covered with boxes of Bavarian cream, chocolate frosted, jelly-filled, glazed, and apple crumb doughnuts. Here's the astrological explanation for my intuition: I think fate plans to blow your mind with sweet extravagance in 2005. Receiving a thousand doughnuts would be a metaphorical rehearsal.

**CANCER** (June 21-July 22): Over the centuries, numerous ships carrying treasure have suffered mishaps and sunk to the bottom of the world's oceans. Most have remained there undisturbed, their gold and jewels seemingly lost forever. In the last decade, though, teams of treasure hunters have developed high-tech recovery equipment that allows them to locate and extract the sunken riches. I believe that there will be a comparable development in your life in the coming months, Cancerian. You'll find ways to access valuables from the past — stuff you had always assumed was irretrievable. Your first project will become apparent soon. Here are a few symbolic holiday gifts you might consider buying yourself: sonar, a diving suit, a treasure chest.

**LEO** (July 23-Aug. 22): Many spiritual teachers say you're most likely to succeed at meditation if you sit quietly in a sanctuary. They believe you need to retreat from the world in order to develop compassionate objectivity about life. The 18th-century Zen Buddhist teacher Hakuin Ekaku had a different view. "Meditation in the midst of activity is a billion times superior to meditation in stillness" was his motto. I agree with him. But one of the reasons it's superior is because it's so much harder. Have you ever tried to see God in your boss while he or she is yelling at you about some trivial mistake? Are you able to remain open-hearted to a loved one when he or she isn't being open-hearted to you? Believe it or not, Leo, you could go a long way towards mastering these skills in 2005. It'll be prime time to learn how to meditate in the midst of the daily chaos.

**VIRGO** (Aug. 23-Sept. 22): Virgo rapper Xzibit was asked by an interviewer what he was hoping to get for Christmas. "All I want is a Hummer H2, a big-ass plasma TV, and an AR15 assault rifle with a 30-round clip." Though your own holiday wish list may not include any of Xzibit's items, I do encourage you to fantasize extravagantly about what gifts might pump up your power in 2005. According to my analysis of the astrological omens, you should even let yourself entertain some rather macho trains of thought as you imagine the enhancements you'd like to bring with you into the new

year. How about sessions with a hard-driving life coach, lessons in ashtanga yoga, or a definite plan to undertake a brave outdoor adventure?

**LIBRA** (Sept. 23-Oct. 22): In 2005, you should go to great lengths to put yourself in positions where you will be pleasantly surprised, profoundly taught, and rigorously inspired. The coming months will be an excellent time to seek out experiences that will change your mind about many things. You're finally ready to shed a slew of old attitudes and beliefs that worked well for you once upon a time, but which are now mostly dead weight. Here are some symbolic holiday gifts you might consider buying yourself: a blank slate, a bottle of baptismal water, an outfit of all white clothes.

**SCORPIO** (Oct. 23-Nov. 21): This year the Boston Red Sox won baseball's World Series for the first time in 86 years. The team thereby dispelled "The Curse of the Bambino," which had plagued the franchise since it traded away Hall of Famer Babe "Bambino" Ruth in 1918. Of the 25 players on the Red Sox roster in 2004, five were Scorpios and five were Gemini. The Scorpios included four premier talents who were instrumental in breaking the curse: Johnny Damon, David Ortiz, Curt Schilling, and Pedro Martinez. I believe this vignette foreshadows your fate in 2005, Scorpio. You too will banish a jinx that has burdened you for far too long. And Gemini (like Boston's star Manny Ramirez) may be valuable allies. Here's a symbolic holiday gift you might consider buying yourself: a Boston Red Sox good luck charm.

**SAGITTARIUS** (Nov. 22-Dec. 21): In 2005, I hope you seek out more demanding and rewarding alliances. I'd love you to align yourself with a network that spreads your highest values with maximum intensity. My heart will also sing with joy if you use better tools to express your generous urges and try more daring strategies to promote justice. To encourage these developments, consider getting yourself these holiday gifts: a device that enhances your ability to communicate, a pep talk from the most practical idealist you know, and a talisman that symbolizes a promise you make to your future self.

**CAPRICORN** (Dec. 22-Jan. 19): "I have climbed to the top of a greasy pole." So proclaimed 19th-century politician Benjamin Disraeli when he had at last ascended to the job of prime minister of Great Britain. Please picture that greasy pole in your mind's eye, Capricorn. I would love to give it you as a holiday gift. It would be an apt symbol for the work you have ahead of you in 2005. PS.: I expect to see you at the top by next October.

**AQUARIUS** (Jan. 20-Feb. 18): Last January, NASA landed two vehicles on Mars. For months their solar panels provided them with just enough energy to explore the alien terrain. One of the rovers recently experienced an inexplicable power boost, however. It happened overnight, and NASA's team isn't sure why. "We surmise that for some reason dust is being removed from the solar panel," said spokesman Jim Ericson, "and that's increasing the efficiency of the sunlight being converted to electricity." I regard this as an apt metaphor for what lies in your future Aquarius. In 2005, you too will enjoy mysterious rejuvenations as you reconnoiter exotic territory.

**PISCES** (Feb. 19-March 20): In my imagination, I'm now handing you a battle flag similar to those carried by the armies of medieval Europe. It's a windsock in the shape of a red, winged dragon with black eagle claws and a long yellow tail. Inside it is a device that unleashes a loud, raucous whistle whenever the wind blows through it. In presenting you with this symbolic gift, I'm exhorting you to pump up your martial forces in 2005. I'm encouraging you to be wild-hearted and strong-willed as you fight the good fight.

**HOMEWORK:** What gift could you give a loved one in order to change his or her life for the better? Testify at www.freewillastrology.com.

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