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SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2010

The Year of the Tiger is upon us, and it seems that many astrologers think we should head for the hills. While the tiger is admired for its strength and speed, it is also feared for its vicious cunning. To make matters worse, 2010 is associated with metal, which, according to the astrological system of the Five Elements, is tied with the color white. White tigers are not only strong and vicious, but also unusual and therefore often perceived as unnatural, which gives this cosmological beast a monstrous quality that has the fortune-tellers all a tremble.

War and misfortune follow in the tiger's wake, and such is its potential for destruction that one local astrological Web site (tw.5d8z.com) states that traditional Chinese families are reluctant to ask the help of people born in a tiger year to assist in tasks such as moving house or organizing marriage celebrations. They should not look at pregnant women or new-born infants, either. Put this way, the tiger sounds like the ultimate slacker star sign.

Other good news for tiger people is that since 2010 is associated with metal, financial good fortune will attend people in this, the year of their birth sign.

While tigers might be getting rich, people born in the year of the monkey, the snake and the dragon need to watch out, for these signs are in direct conflict with the tiger, and the big cat is not an animal to turn the other cheek. An article in the *Apple Daily* (蘋果日報) cites traditional practice as requiring people born under these star signs, which must add up to quite a large number, to make a pilgrimage to the five temples nearest their home to absorb auspicious energy and shake off the tiger's fearsome aura. This should be done within 15 days from today to be effective.

Certainly within Chinese literature, the tiger is usually associated with conflict. The most famous story involving a tiger is probably the one recounted in the classic novel *Outlaws of the Marsh* (水滸傳), in which the martial hero Wu Song (武松) gets drunk and defeats a tiger in hand-to-hand combat (武松打虎). As the tiger is usually portrayed as a beast of mystical powers, this victory enhanced Wu's status as a warrior of super human strength.

The divine aspect of tigers is largely due to their association with the Earth God (土地公), whose shrines are dotted across the country. Tigers are believed to be servants of the Earth God, who often lends his underlings out to other deities as a suitably prestigious form of conveyance. If you look carefully, you will often find a small image of a tiger under Earth God shrines.

Although this little tiger is parked, as it were, in the Earth God's garage, he's still quite important, and the faithful regularly seek the tiger's aid in calming the fears of small children or seeking protection from illness. The tiger is also a bringer of wealth, and many businesspeople pray to the



Caution:
challenging times lie ahead

Though astrologers have issued words of warning for the Year of the Tiger, the future isn't all doom and gloom

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Tiger Lord (虎爺) to aid their commercial endeavors.

The tiger is not all bad, and while feared, it is also respected. A huge number of popular phrases in Chinese feature the tiger, probably the best-known one, familiar even to non-Chinese speakers, is “crouching tiger, hidden dragon” (臥虎藏龍), a phrase suggestive of great powers held in check behind a seemingly innocuous exterior. The tiger is often coupled with the dragon, highlighting the former's mystical powers. The phrase “dragon moves, tiger changes” (龍行虎變), referring to world-altering events like the rise and fall of dynasties, acquires its meaning from no lesser source than the *Yi Ching* (易經), which, to paraphrase, says that the clouds are commanded by the dragon, and the wind by the tiger. When a sage rides upon a tiger all creation takes notice.

It is venerable endorsements like these that have put the tiger right up at the top of the astrological charts, and has allowed astrologers to go to town with their picture of a year full of uncertainty, but also of opportunity. It seems we are heading for “interesting times,” when only the bold will win through.

Fortunately, there are ways of mitigating the effects of the tiger. In addition to various religious rites, commentary on astrological Web site Fateasia.com suggests that people refrain from purchasing tiger-themed ornaments over the New Year period, or tiger-themed toys for children, as this could usher in bad tiger vibes and generally upset the feng shui. The site suggests that *kirin* (麒麟, the Asian unicorn) or *pixiu* (貔貅, a combination of dragon and lion), which are both auspicious, be used as substitutes.

Even though it is a tiger year, the beast itself seems to be getting short shrift all round. Clearly the Lunar New Year holiday is the time to brace ourselves for a challenging year ahead before the arrival of the much more lovable rabbit.