Be the mistress of your own destiny in 2013!

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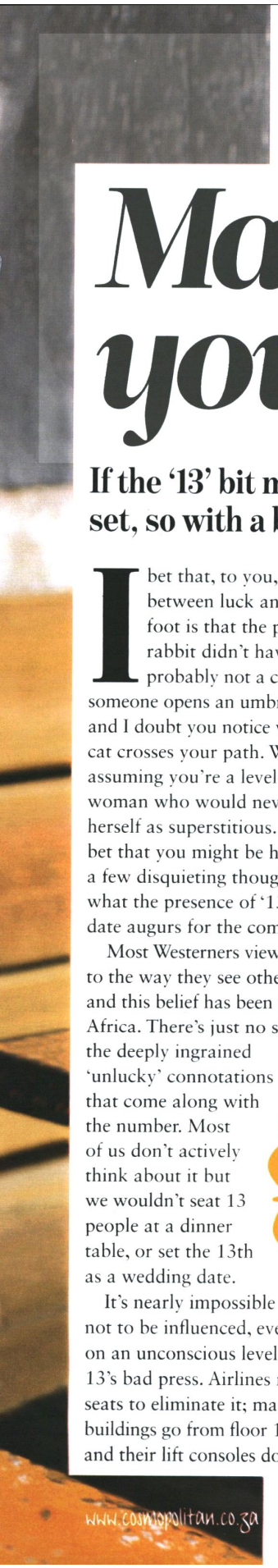

Make 2013 your lucky year

If the '13' bit makes you uneasy, relax! Studies suggest that 'luck' is a skill set, so with a bit of work you can make 2013 your most fortunate year yet

I bet that, to you, the only link between luck and a rabbit's foot is that the particular rabbit didn't have any. It's probably not a catastrophe if someone opens an umbrella indoors, and I doubt you notice when a black cat crosses your path. Why? I'm assuming you're a level-headed woman who would never describe herself as superstitious. Yet I'd also bet that you might be harbouring a few disquieting thoughts about what the presence of '13' in its date augurs for the coming year.

Most Westerners view 13 differently to the way they see other numbers – and this belief has been imported into Africa. There's just no shaking the deeply ingrained 'unlucky' connotations that come along with the number. Most of us don't actively think about it but we wouldn't seat 13 people at a dinner table, or set the 13th as a wedding date.

It's nearly impossible not to be influenced, even on an unconscious level, by 13's bad press. Airlines re-number seats to eliminate it; many high-rise buildings go from floor 12 to floor 14 and their lift consoles don't feature it; suburbs with numerically named avenues or roads leave it out and, if your immediate neighbours live at 12 and 14, you may live at 12a.

About a third of us allow irrational thoughts about 13 being 'jinxed' to guide our choices

Unlucky origins

The fear of the number 13 is the most common superstition of all in Western culture, and its extreme form, triskaidekaphobia, is among our 10 most common phobias. Its roots have been traced back to Norse mythology and the tale of the murder of Balder the Good at a dinner that Loki, the God of Mischief, gate-crashed, bringing the number of guests to 13. The Christian belief that sees Judas, the betrayer of Christ, as the 13th disciple has further cemented the number's ill-fated association.

But the true reason for 13's ongoing negative aura, says psychologist Dr Janne Dannerup of *www.jmdpsych.com*, is that 'in any pairing or division, the 13th person or object is always the odd one out. This draws on our fear of social exclusion and rejection, a bit like the game we call musical chairs. Social and emotional survival is dependent on a sense of inclusion and belonging.'

Full-blown triskaidekaphobics might seem ludicrous: some won't accept R13 in change when shopping, have panic attacks when they count 13 cars in their traffic jam and lose jobs because they won't enter any premises containing the number. But it's estimated that about a third of the rest of us allow irrational thoughts about 13 being 'jinxed' to guide our choices and shape our experiences. We might not take to bed on Friday the 13th, but we're aware of it, and vaguely watchful.

Better safe than sorry

Even if we don't seriously believe there's anything cursed about 13, we adopt a philosophy of 'better safe than sorry'. And when we see any evidence that supports this philosophy, it becomes even more deeply ingrained. 'People have a tendency to look for the things they expect to see,' says Dannerup. 'If you've been conditioned in childhood to expect bad things to be related to the number 13, you're more likely to interpret any everyday occurrence as related to this issue. ▸

It's part of the human condition to need to make sense of the world and how it works.'

The problem, though, is we *don't* take similar note of the very many things that don't agree with it, let alone those that totally and without question contradict it. In memory, we might link a particularly horrible event or experience with the 13th, and yet something fantastic that also happened on the 13th will be remembered without its date.

The fact that the mistrust surrounding 13 isn't a worldwide phenomenon – that some cultures regard 13 as extremely lucky and that in others, different numbers are as loaded with the same ill omen – should give us pause for thought. In China, Japan, Vietnam and Korea, for example, it's four that's dreaded – to such a degree that not only are fourth floors taboo, but even phone numbers and car licence plates containing a four are avoided because they're seen as harbingers of extremely bad luck.

The L-factor

So what is luck, really? Can certain things or people automatically be 'lucky' or 'unlucky'? Dannerup thinks not, believing that whether you are 'lucky' or not boils down to you.

Research by UK psychologist and author Richard Wiseman, a professor of the public understanding of psychology at the University Of Hertfordshire, demonstrates just that. Over a decade, Wiseman conducted experiments with thousands of people and concluded that when it comes to luck, superstitions such as numbers, colours or anything else don't matter at all. What really influences whether we experience good fortune or ill, is us. In his book *The Luck Factor* (Arrow), he explains that a significant portion of 'good luck' is directly due to one's state of mind and specific behaviours. He has discovered that so-called 'lucky' people have a specific skill set that has nothing to do with their intelligence, when they were born or even their material circumstances. Lucky people, he found, are generally extroverts, and aren't anxious, close-minded or pessimistic.

According to Wiseman, the essence of luck is opportunity, and the more opportunities you encounter and the more receptive you are to these opportunities, the 'luckier' you will be. So rather than living with your unease, why not seize *this* opportunity and see whether he's right? It could be the first step towards shaping your own luck, your happiness and your future.

Shape your own luck

Eighty percent of the people who took part in Wiseman's experiments felt their luck greatly improved by following his four principles of good fortune. Embrace these now to ensure your year is your most prosperous yet:

1 MAXIMISE CHANCE OPPORTUNITIES
Network, adopt a more relaxed attitude to life and be open to new experiences.

2 LISTEN TO LUCKY HUNCHES
Listen to your intuition and don't dismiss 'gut' feelings. To make more effective (read: 'lucky') decisions, regularly meditate and clear your mind of other thoughts.

3 EXPECT GOOD FORTUNE
When you're sure your future includes good things, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy and helps you persist when faced with failure. It also positively shapes your interactions with others.

4 TURN BAD LUCK INTO GOOD
Instead of dwelling on the negative aspects of events, remind yourself they could have been worse. Don't give in to powerlessness: see how and where you can take control of a situation because it's the only way to get a better outcome.

BEYOND SUPERSTITION

IS IT TIME TO GET HELP?

If your fear of 2013 (or the number 13) is affecting your social and professional functioning, or if it is accompanied by panic, terror, dread, a racing heart, hyperventilation, nausea, shaking and anxiety, you may have full-blown triskaidekaphobia and should seek professional help. Call the South African Depression And Anxiety Group on ☎ 011 262 6396 or visit *www.sadag.org*.

FRIDAY THE 13TH

STEP OUT OF THE HORROR MOVIE...

2013 has two of these 'unlucky' days: in September and December. A phobia about Friday the 13th is known as paraskevidekatriaphobia, but there's no evidence to suggest it's based in reality. While road accidents and emergency-room visits may increase on this date, being anxious, unfocused and 'jittery' about the day's so-called ill omens is thought to be the reason.

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