



# Horoscope Detective

## The Anatomy of a T-Square

by Frank C. Clifford

**Editor's Note:** This article has been abridged from sections presented in the author's book, *Getting to the Heart of Your Chart: Playing Astrological Detective*, Flare Publications, 2012.

A t-square is formed when (at least) two planets in opposition ( $180^\circ$ ) both aspect a third planet by square ( $90^\circ$ ). This third planet, known as the focal planet or apex, is situated around the midpoint of the opposition. All three "legs" should be within an acceptable orb of each other ( $8^\circ$ ). It is estimated that some 40% of charts have planets that form this pattern.

### Importance

In general, astrological aspects show a *dialogue* between planetary principles/energies, but the t-square configuration is a dynamic pattern that links and interlocks these energies. It usually dominates a horoscope and can be seen in the central "scripts" — the major events, challenges, and themes — that are encountered in life.

By its very nature, a t-square ties up at least three houses in the horoscope, and if we take into account each leg's rulership of other houses, this configuration can link even more.

### Where to Start: The Aspects

Getting to the potential meaning of a t-square can be a challenge for professional and student astrologers alike.<sup>1</sup> Before analyzing a specific t-square, we must take into account the actual aspects involved in the pattern: the opposition and the square.

The confrontational or divisive nature of the opposition demands an awareness and balance of the planets involved. Ideally, there can be an integration of these conflicting parts, or at least a truce. An opposition reveals major relationship patterns and themes, and it's certainly the case that we tend to stick with the "nicer" of the two planets and project the more "difficult" one onto other people. Unless dissociate (out of sign), an opposition involves a polarity (e.g., Leo–Aquarius), and it's important to understand the interplay between these signs.

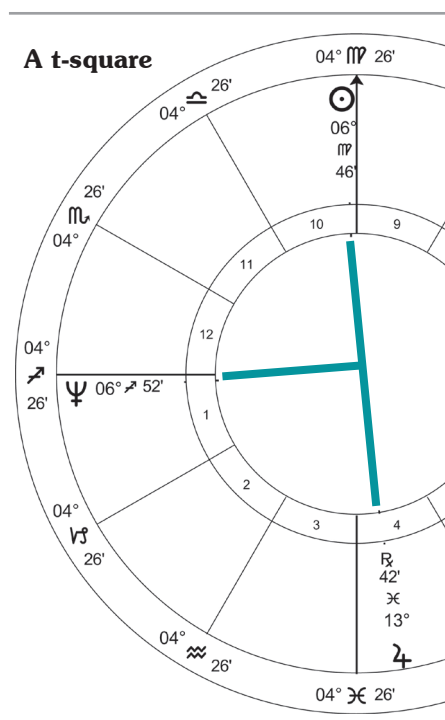
Both ends of the opposition are in square to the focal planet. Squares

appear as dynamic, recurring obstacles across our path — ones that require serious effort in order to create something of value. Research suggests that our greatest life accomplishments can be described by the nature of the planets in square to each other. At worst, they can seem like the hardest tests we face; we feel paralysed until we master them. With squares, there's no pain without gain and "no guts, no glory."

### Linking the Parts

The next step is to look for common links between the planets, signs, elements, modes, or houses involved, such as: Is the t-square entirely or mainly cardinal? Does it fall across cadent houses? Spotting any recurring themes will help our assessment. Perhaps one planet rules two of the three legs of the configuration. In the **Figure** (at left), notice that the t-square is mutable and has a Jupiter/Sagittarius–Pisces and Neptune/Pisces flavour. The challenge here would be to negotiate the dominant thrust of the t-square — Jupiter, Neptune, and their signs — with the conflicting message of the earthy, mundane Sun in Virgo.

Then, after spotting any themes or "overtones," the next stage is to pull apart the various planetary combinations (in the above example, Sun–Jupiter, Sun–Neptune, Jupiter–Neptune) and tackle these individually, considering their meanings and core principles. How do they act, react, and interact in combination?



## The Focal Planet

A t-square is like a pressure cooker of energy, edginess, and stress. It symbolizes facets of ourselves which are at odds with one another. As the central player, the focal planet is this configuration's dynamic point of release and resolution; it's where the seesaw polarization of the opposition can manifest in a concrete way. It offers a powerful solution to the pent-up tension. The sign and house placement of this planet is usually expressed vividly and repeatedly in the life story. It can sometimes be overemphasized by its owner to the point where the nature of the opposition is ignored, putting great stress on the affairs of the focal planet in a person's life.

## Other Considerations

Look for a "release" aspect — one that is foreign to the configuration (e.g., a trine from the focal planet). This will show a constructive "way out" of a set pattern or a way to avoid any compulsive behaviour associated with the t-square. It may bring an opportunity/lucky situation (trine) to that particular "script."

I would include the angles — the Ascendant, Descendant, Midheaven (MC), and IC — as focal points, but these would reveal how the opposition has been impacted by (and will impact) a specific environment, as shown by the particular axis.

I think the importance of the missing leg of a t-square (the space opposite the focal planet) is sometimes overemphasized by astrologers. It is interesting in the sense that every focal planet will have a polar opposite sign, and such a lopsided focus on the focal planet's zodiac sign would necessitate a rebalancing of the polarity.

## An Example

When studying the t-square in the horoscope of Queen Elizabeth II,<sup>2</sup> I was determined to look beyond the well-documented Saturn, which is the focal planet and conjoins her MC in

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Scorpio. (See **Chart**, below.) I soon discovered that the whole configuration describes stories that have been at the centre of her life since birth.

Let's break up the t-square:

1. It is in fixed signs. These are signs concerned with rigid attachment, ongoing immovable situations, and a determination to preserve the status quo.

2. The planets involved are Mars, Jupiter, Neptune, and Saturn. Mars and Jupiter are dynamic and motivating — forceful planetary principles *in motion*. Neptune is softer and glamorizes, subtly undermines, or permeates a situation. Saturn is the odd one out — it's the steady, stabilizing force, anchored in the tried-and-tested and traditional.

3. Mars–Jupiter in Aquarius suggests a progressive, rousing crusader fighting for social change; there may be a great desire for personal freedom. The conjunction opposes Neptune in Leo, which suggests royal scandal, a weakening of the monarchy, or a longing for the imperial greatness of yesteryear. Aquarius versus Leo manifests in a division between the common man (the *hoi polloi*, the plebs) and the patricians (those born to rule).

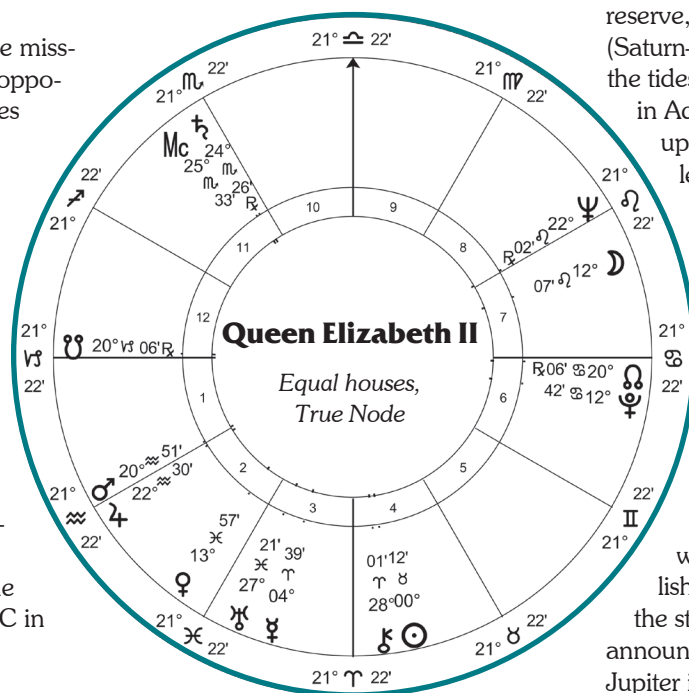
4. The schism inherent in the opposition is released by its squares to the apex: Saturn on the MC in Scorpio. What does this suggest?

- a reputation for safeguarding institutions in times of deep crisis
- an unbending moral code
- a stoic, dour public face that conceals deeper emotions
- an unswerving sense of duty and responsibility — one that has been stressed as important by the parents (MC/IC); someone burdened by expectations
- an "establishment" job for life until death; no escape from a "destiny."

Neither end of the opposition appears particularly relevant to the Queen's temperament; instead, we are most aware of her unwavering public reserve, a firm ability to soldier on (Saturn–MC in Scorpio) and weather the tides of social change (Mars–Jupiter in Aquarius), keeping a stiff (Saturn) upper lip in times of scandal, press leaks, and divorce (the opposition to Neptune in Leo). Looking closely at her life events, we can see how she has maintained a delicate balancing act when dealing with such a precarious opposition:

## Mars–Jupiter in Aquarius opposite Neptune in Leo

Princess Elizabeth was born into a time when a class war threatened the British establishment; troops kept order on the streets, and a general strike was announced the week of her birth (Mars–Jupiter in Aquarius).



## T-Square Anatomy

She found herself in line to the throne because of male instability (Mars–Neptune): Her uncle Edward’s scandal-filled relationship with twice-divorced Wallis Simpson led to his abdicating the throne and deserting his responsibilities. Throughout her reign, it would be this modern-day issue of divorce that most threatened her position: first, her sister’s affair with a divorced man; then, the scandal and dissolution of her children’s marriages. But, interestingly, the Queen’s response has often been to avoid direct conflict and bury her head in the sand (Mars–Neptune can be an emotional ostrich).

The new Elizabethan age was sold to the public as an era of social change, but this was an illusion. Pomp and ceremony (Saturn) dictated her coronation in June 1953, even though the government had hoped to create the biggest-ever national party for the people (Mars–Jupiter in Aquarius).

The Queen was the first monarch of the television age (Jupiter in Aquarius). She agreed to allow cameras to film the Royal Family in their daily lives, but this backfired and led to press intrusion, which fed the public’s hunger for royal scandal. (The TV documentary, which would wash away the last remnants of royal mystique, aired on June 21, 1969, when transiting Neptune was conjunct the Queen’s MC.)

The Queen’s husband, Prince Philip of Greece, embodies this opposition, too. Not only has his name been tainted by rumours of extramarital affairs, but

Philip also sacrificed his cherished naval career for marriage. (Elizabeth’s father and grandfather were naval officers as well.)

Even the Queen’s beloved royal yacht *Britannia* is depicted by her natal opposition: It was a giant pleasure boat designed, but never put into service, as a hospital ship for use in wartime!

Elizabeth inherited a powerful but dwindling empire; over the years, numerous Commonwealth (*common wealth*: Jupiter in Aquarius) countries have demanded their independence. There has been a reduction in the monarchy’s prestige and influence, and respect has faded. In the 1950s, to criticize the monarch was to condemn England. By the 1990s, the Royal Family was seen as an expensive ornament that titillated the public with its soap opera-style, ongoing dysfunctional dramas.

### **The Focal Planet: Saturn on the MC in Scorpio**

Raised by her Victorian father, Elizabeth was warned from an early age that change was dangerous. But rapid social change and progress in her lifetime have meant a slow death of tradition (Saturn in Scorpio). Her reign has involved maintaining a delicate balance between preserving the monarchy and adapting to changing times and the cries of popular opinion — in reality, 60 years of battling against modernization.

As Elizabeth was growing up, divorce (*freedom* from the institution of marriage) was anathema to her — it was against her traditional set of beliefs. Later, the sexual romps and extramarital exploits of her children (who married

“commoners” — Aquarius) undermined her position.

Yet, with Saturn as the focal planet and elevated at the MC, she has shown a stoic and steely resolve in the face of adversity, holding her family together and maintaining a 60-year grip on her royal birthright. The Queen has always perceived her role as a divine calling. But how many sacrifices were made (Neptune), and at what cost to her own personal freedom (Mars–Jupiter in Aquarius)?

### **Chart Data and Source**

**Queen Elizabeth II**, April 21, 1926; 2:40 a.m. BST; Mayfair, London, England (51°N31', 00°W 09'); AA: from Buckingham Palace records.

### **References**

1. For more on t-squares, I would recommend reading *Planetary Aspects: From Conflict to Cooperation* (CRCS, 1987), by Tracy Marks, an influential astrologer in the early 1980s.
2. Further ideas on this configuration can be found in my textbook, *Getting to the Heart of Your Chart* (Flare, 2012).

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**Frank Clifford** is an astrologer and palmist and the author of a dozen books on these subjects, including *Getting to the Heart of Your Chart: Playing Astrological Detective* (2012), *Solar Arc Directions* (2011), and *Palmistry 4 Today* (2010). Frank runs the London

*School of Astrology* ([www.londonschoolofastrology.co.uk](http://www.londonschoolofastrology.co.uk)); his Web site is [www.flareuk.com](http://www.flareuk.com), and he can be contacted at [info@flareuk.com](mailto:info@flareuk.com)



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