In Gregory Benford's novel, In the Ocean of Night, one of the characters asks her husband for the daily horoscope. The husband, apparently bored with the daily horoscope routine, offers to "nip out for a small goat, put him to the knife and give ... a prognosis". Such, he believes, is a more gutsy form of fortune-telling. Indeed...

Benford's passage is noteworthy because it illustrates two points: first, fortune-telling in one form or another appeals to most everyone, and second, there are alternatives to the daily horoscope. More than one hundred of these alternatives are listed below, each a compound word ending in "-mancy" (from the Greek "-mantia", meaning "divination").

All of the "-mancy" words presented here can be found in either Webster's 2nd or the Oxford English Dictionary. A dozen or so additional "-mancy" words were discovered while researching this article, but they have not been included because they do not appear in either the W2 or OED.

The vast majority of "-mancy" words actually end in "-omancy", hence the title of this article. Only seven words listed below delete the "o": onimancy, onymancy, scapulimancy, spatulamancy, spatalamancy, arithmancy and tephramancy.

Group I (for the literate): readers of Word Ways will probably appreciate the forms of divination presented below.

BIBLIOMANCY - divination by books or by verses of the Bible
GRAPTO MANCY - by handwriting
LOGOMANCY - by words
ONOMOMANCY, NOMANCY, ONOMANCY - from names or the letters of a name (number of vowels, etc.)
RHAPSodomancy - by picking a passage of poetry at random
STICHOMANCY - by lines of verse in books taken at random

Group II (for the gourmet): the foods listed below may not be haute cuisine, but they can be used to tell your fortune.

ALEUROMANCY - divination by means of meal or flour
ALPHITOMANCY - by means of barley-meal
HALOMANCY, ALOMANCY - by means of salt
OENOMANCY, OINOMANCY - by means of wine
OQMOMANCY - by means of eggs
TYROMANCY - by means of cheese

Group III (for the anatomically inclined): the following forms of fortune-telling are based on observations of the human anatomy. Note, however, that gastronomy has a second, totally unrelated definition.

CHEIROMANCY - divination by means of the hand
CHIROMANCY, CHYROMANCY - by the hand (palmistry)
GASTROMANCY - by the belly; also, by crystal-gazing
ICHNOMANCY - by traces of posture, position, and footsteps
METOPOMANCY - by the forehead or face
OMPHALOMANCY - predicting the number of children a mother will have by counting the knots in the umbilical cord of her first born
ONYCHOMANCY, ONIMANCY, ONYMANCY - from the finger-nails
POMODOMANCY, PEDOMANCY - from signs derived by inspection of the feet
SCHEMATOMANCY - personal history inferred from an individual's form and appearance
SPASMATOMANCY - diagnosing the disease by which a person is about to be attacked by observing the convulsive twitches of the limbs
STERNOMANCY - by the breast-bone

Group IV (for the naturalist): the list below is the largest category of "-mancy" words. They are all based on observations of either plants, animals, or the spoor of animals.

ALECTOROMANCY, ALECTRYOMANCY - by means of a cock with grains of corn
AMNIOMANCY - by means of the embryonic sac
ARMOMANCY - by shoulders of animals
BOTANOMANCY - by plants
CEPHALOMANCY - by means of a head (boiling an ass's head on burning coals)
CRITHOMANCY - by meal strewn over sacrificed animals
HEMATOMANCY, HAEMATOMANCY - by blood
ICHTHYOMANCY - by means of heads or entrails of fishes
MYOMANCY - by the movements of mice
OPIOMANCY - by means of serpents
ORNITHOMANCY - by means of the flight and cries of birds
OSTEOMANCY - from bones
PHYLLOMANCY - by leaves
SCAPULIMANCY - by studying a charred or cracked shoulder blade
SCATOMANCY - by the examination of feces
SPATILOMANCY, SPATALAMANCY - by observing animal droppings
STIGONOMANCY, STIGNOMANCY - by writing on tree bark
SYCOMANCY - by flies or fly leaves
THERIOMANCY - from the movements of animals
XYLOMANCY - with pieces of wood

Group V (more category are sideromancy)

AEROMANCY
ANTHRACOMANCY
ASTROMANCY
AUSTROMANCY
CERAMOMANCY
CERAUNOMANCY
EMPYROMANCY
HYDROMANCY
from water
LITHOMANCY
MARGARITOMANCY
METEOROMANCY
PEGOMANCY
PYROMANCY
SELENOMANCY
SIDEROMANCY
SPATIALMANCY

Group VI (for the naturalist) involves the use of leaves:

ASPIDOMANCY
ASTRAGALOMANCY
AXINOMANCY
BELOMANCY
CARTOMANCY
CATOPTROMANCY
CHALCROMANCY
COSCINOMANCY
CRYSTALLOMANCY
DACTYLOMANCY
ENOPTROMANCY
IDOLOMANCY
LAMPADOLOGY
LYCHNOMANCY
PSEPHOMANCY
RHABDOMANCY
SCYPHOMANCY

Group VII (for the naturalist) includes the study of the unconscious:

ANTHROPOMANCY
ZOOMANCY - by observing the actions of animals

Group V (more for the naturalist): the fortune-telling words in this category are based on observations of natural phenomena. Note that sideromancy has a second unrelated definition.

AEROMANCY - by air, including augury (flight of birds)
ANTHRACOMANCY - by inspection of burning coals
ASTROMANCY - by the stars (astrology)
AUSTROMANCY - from observation of the wind
CAPNOMANCY - by smoke
CERAUNOMANCY - by thunderbolts
EMPYROMANCY - by fire
HYDROMANCY, HIDROMANCY, YDROMANCY - by signs derived from water, its tides and ebbs, or spirits therein
LITHOMANCY - by signs derived from stones
MARGARITOMANCY - by pearls
METEOROMANCY - by observations of meteors
PEGOMANCY - by springs or fountains
PYROMANCY - by fire, or by signs derived from fire
SELENOMANCY - by observation of the moon
SIDEROMANCY - by means of the stars; also, by watching burning straw
SPODOMANCY - by means of ashes

Group VI (for the technocrat): the methods of divination presented here involve the use of man-made objects.

ASPIDOMANCY - by means of a shield
ASTRAGALOMANCY - by means of dice or huckle-bones
AXINOMANCY - by means of an axe-head
BELOMANCY - by means of arrows
CARTOMANCY - by playing cards
CATOPTROMANCY, CATOPROMANCY - by means of a mirror
CHALCOMANCY - by means of vessels of brass
CLEIDOMANCY, CLIDOMANCY - by means of a key
COSCINOMANCY - by the turning of a sieve held on a pair of shears
CRYSTALLOMANCY - by means of crystal
CUBOMANCY - by the throwing of dice
DACTYLIOMANCY - by means of a finger-ring
ENOPTROMANCY - by means of a mirror
IDOLOMANCY - by idols
LAMPADOMANCY - by the flames of a torch
LYCHNOMANCY - by lamps
PSEPHOMANCY - by drawing marked stones from a vessel
RHAHDOMANCY - by means of a rod (divining rod)
SCYPHOMANCY - by means of a cup

Group VII (for the necromancer): these forms of divination delve deep into the occult, much more so than all the others listed.

ANTHROPOMANCY - divination by the raising of dead men, or by the
entrails of men

DEMONOMANCY - by demons
PSYCHOMANCY - through communication with spirits of the dead
NECROMANCY - by means of communication with the dead; magic in general
NECYOMANCY - by summoning Lucifer
SCIOMANCY - by communication with the shades of the dead

Group VIII (miscellaneous): the following "-mancy" words defy categorization, but they are by no means less intriguing. There are some delightful entries here -- note, for example, the word gyromancy.

AMBULOMANCY - by walking
ARITHMANTY, ARITHOMANCY - by numbers
CEROMANCY - from the figures produced by dropping melted wax into water
CHRONOMANCY - divination to determine the favorable time for action
CLEROMANCY - by lots, or with dice
GEOMANCY - by means of figures or lines
GYROMANCY - by walking in a circle until felled by dizziness -- the divination is based on the point of falling
HIEROMANCY - from sacred things; from observation of objects offered in religious sacrifices
JUDAEOMANCY - by means of Jews
LECANOMANCY - by inspection of water in a basin
LOGARITHMOMANCY - by means of logarithms
MOLYBDOMANCY - by noting motions and figures in molten lead
PSEUDOMANCY - consciously false or pretended divination
ONEIROMANCY - by dreams
TEPHRAMANCY, TEPHROMANCY - with ashes from an altar
THEOMANCY - by oracles or others supposed to be immediately inspired by some divinity
URINOMANCY, UROMANCY - diagnosis of diseases by examination of the urine

Group IX (for the skeptic): if none of the above diversions sound plausible, and if you're not particularly fascinated by your daily horoscope, then you might be inclined to classify all fortune-telling as MOROMANCY - foolish divination

But if you believe it's all moromancy, you might well be in the minority. A lot of people have had to be interested in fortune-telling to come up with all these variations.

Interestingly, Webster's 2nd lists a total of eight "-mancy" words which do not refer to a form of divination. Of these eight, four are technical terms (adiathermancy, athermancy, diathermancy and electrothermancy), and two more are rather obscure (aldermancy, the position of aldermen; labiomancy, lip-reading). The final two are more common, and they are not long or difficult. Can you guess them? If baffled, see Answers and Solutions at the end of this issue.