

LAST WORD



(Micro)climate change issues

Charlie the Rain King had much to teach about striking a deal , writes Darrel Bristow-Bovey

I have spent most of this week negotiating a number of contracts with a number of different people, which is always an awkward business. I'm a tough cookie and talk a big game from afar, but when I sit down across the table from a bank of hard-baked killers unburdened with my nougat-layer of self-doubt and personal insecurity, I tend to crumple like a cake left out in the rain.

No, instead I rely on the decency and generosity of my adversaries, which you may think is a tenuous strategy, but I console myself by thinking about Charlie Hatfield. Charlie was a shrewd businessman, a hard-nosed negotiator, and above all he was a rainmaker.

He started off selling sewing machines door to door in southern California in the early 1900s. He was a legendary salesman — my own father, himself a door-to-door operative of no mean ability for the Singer Sewing Machine company in Durban in the early 1970s, used to tell stories of Charlie “Rolling Thunder” Hatfield, who never took a closed door for an answer, and was once chased down the street by a shotgun-wielding homeowner who later came round and bought one of his most expensive models.

But Charlie Hatfield was meant for better things. He was a dreamer and a Quaker and a man of fierce enthusiasms and private passions, and after a long course of personal study in the art and science of pluviculture, he declared himself a Rain King. Actually, he called himself a “moisture accelerator”, but it came to the same thing. Using a secret recipe of 23 herbs, spices and chemicals, including dynamite and nitroglycerine, which he mixed in vast galvanised evaporation tanks mounted on tall metal towers, Charlie Hatfield could make water fall from the sky.

In the semi-desert of southern California, this was a very useful skill. He advertised his services at \$50 a downpour, and following a series of apparently successful interventions in the microclimate, his fame grew and grew. He took his schtick to the Yukon and to Mexico; he performed emergency rainmaking to extinguish forest fires. The rain fell and his star rose, and as any canny



businessman knows, that earns you the big chair at the negotiating table.

So when the San Diego City Council approached Charlie Hatfield to help them break a drought, Charlie Hatfield knew how to drive a hard bargain. Brushing aside their opening gambits, the confident Rain King declared he would create rain for free, but would charge \$1,000 per inch as the water level rose in the Morena reservoir. It was an audacious, extravagant contract, but if anyone could pull it off, it was Charles Mallory Hatfield. The council agreed by a vote of four to one, and in December 1915 Charlie and his brother Joel built their platform beside the dam.

Did Charlie also do rain dances and offer prayers to the

Quaker heavens? Alas the details of his dusky arts remain overcast and occluded, but within days, on January 5 1916, it started to rain. Hoorah! cried the townsfolk. Told you so, said Charlie Hatfield.

On day two the rain was still falling, and still on days three and four and five. Charlie and his brother were rubbing their hands and imagining their bank account filling with the dams. But like many a backyard inventor before him, Charlie had forgotten to invent an “off” button. As the dams overflowed and bridges and train tracks were swept away and power supply went down, the grateful mood of the townsfolk started to turn.

When animals were swept away and weak swimmers were drowned, the city council called in their lawyers for a series of late-night meetings. The rain finally stopped on January 10, then started again. The Lower Otay Dam collapsed, sending a wall of water 6m high rushing down into the city, drowning farms, buildings, schools.

By the time the rain finally stopped, the townsfolk had a question or two for his majesty Charlie Hatfield the Rain King. A lynch mob formed outside his hotel, and he only escaped by disguising himself as a barefoot Japanese farm labourer, thus compounding his sins to our modern eyes. Not only did he destroy a city, he also wore yellow-face. He may be grateful that Twitter didn't exist in 1916.

The council was ready for him when he presented his bill. “The rain was an act of God,” they said.

“It wasn't an act of God,” said Charlie indignantly. “I made it rain.”

“In that case,” said the council's lawyers, “Here is the bill for the damages to the city. That will be \$3.5m, please.”

“You can't charge me for that,” spluttered Charlie Hatfield. “It was an act of God!”

“Ah,” said the council, and took their lawyers out for a martini and a generous

steak lunch.

Charlie never did get paid by the council. He was a good rainmaker and a better negotiator, but he forgot a deeper truth of being in the world: it's not the contract that matters, as much the person you sign it with.

THE GRATEFUL MOOD OF THE TOWNSFOLK STARTED TO TURN

Illustration: Keith Tamkei Source: Getty Images, 123rf.com/LennaPronne

Your Stars

By Linda Shaw



NOZI SOFUTE

March 28 1958, Joburg, 12h00

Sun sign: Aries

Moon sign: Cancer

Rising sign: Gemini

You're at that stage when you're wondering when you get to take it easy. The answer is: not yet. A much more interesting question is, what ideas do you have for starting something? There's money and opportunity around, but only if you're willing to play the entrepreneur. First you'll have to get your health in better shape. Have you had all the check-ups? Are you taking care of your body? Once you have that on the go, you'll be able to devote your attention to a fabulous new venture. And if you're feeling alone, ask for help. Not everyone is a mind-reader. You have a very big heart and a real desire to make a difference in the world. But in order to achieve that, you'll need to take your power back and make something happen. You're a lot more powerful than you think. Let yourself be a winner.

Want your chart read?
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VIRGO

Aug 23 - Sep 22

Marvellous. You've had plenty of time to develop your social skills — as if you needed to. And with the planets gathering in your corner, you now have the chance to develop your initiative. This week is about your personal power — and there's plenty of that to go around. The ever-present health annoyances started moving on last week and you're feeling better than ever.



LIBRA

Sep 23 - Oct 22

There's travel brewing, with a potentially long and meaningful look at foreign climes. Even if you don't actually move, you'll come back with expanded ideas about how to make the most of your life and your finances. Even so, try to stay practical. It's one thing at a time here. The potential for confusion could mess up your plans, if you let it. So don't let it. Use Friday's new moon to decide what you really want.



SCORPIO

Oct 23 - Nov 21

If you're looking for a career change, the courage and energies are there for you, especially after Friday's new moon. You have the power to make huge amounts of money now, as long as you're careful not to cut corners or become unnecessarily stingy. Take note, too, to be polite to authority figures. They're in the mood to zap you. So if anyone questions you, apologise.



SAGITTARIUS

Nov 22 - Dec 21

Mental challenges begin to fascinate you as you adjust your focus. Don't waste this extraordinary new energy on ridiculous — though wildly entertaining — mind games. There's genius in that mind of yours. It's just too darn lazy to drag itself off its butt and make itself known. If you need help, look out for someone who'll influence you greatly and force you to take the reins.



CAPRICORN

Dec 22 - Jan 20

You know how you love to check out shortcuts. The ability to find them is a gift in itself. But not this time. This time, the power of your ambitions is clouding your vision — convincing you that the occasional casualty is an acceptable part of the deal. Take care. If you'll just stick to the standard route, you'll get what you want anyway. No pain necessary. Besides, Friday's new moon is sending you off on a fabulous new adventure.



AQUARIUS

Jan 20 - Feb 18

This is a great time for you. There's luck on your side and a delicious new confidence in your own strangeness. Just watch your relationships — all of them. This kind of energy can make you seem more detached than ever. Enthusiasm like this needs to be shared. Try — once a day — to hug someone. You might like it. Use Friday's new moon to reassess your love life.



PISCES

Feb 19 - Mar 20

Tell everyone who's clamouring for your attention that you'll be available next month. Or maybe the month after. And then make sure you are. For now, though, workaholism appears to be your ailment of choice. Even when you're not working, you're working. And if you must, you must — even though a few breathing exercises might help keep your stress levels down.



ARIES

Mar 21 - April 19

As of now, it's more money, more opportunities, more applause, more adoration — but less health. Behind that irresistible smile lurks a wobbly little pair of legs that are dying to sit down. Take a break. No-one will mind, or even notice. After all, what's the point of being a superstar if you're lying flat on your back? Besides, Friday's new moon brings even more fantastic chances to make your mark.



TAURUS

Apr 20 - May 20

That burdensome feeling of responsibility for others is changing into one of genuine caring. Slowly that annoying sense of duty is becoming a need to be part of something you value. Which doesn't mean you'll be working even harder to support an apparently useless bunch of dependants. It means you can release the control and let them fly. They may surprise you.



GEMINI

May 21 - June 20

Caution in love is what's needed. New and old relationships are suddenly demanding the kind of attention you're afraid to give. Long-standing friendships will probably weather the storm — provided you keep those insane opinions to yourself. But the others? That's up to you, and how much you care. The career, meanwhile, is going really well.



CANCER

June 21 - Jul 22

Progress is slow, with budget problems causing frustrating delays. This is your moment to share resources — as in you borrow theirs. And don't fret about paying back the favours. Your star is on the rise, with fabulous new prospects coming in on Friday's new moon. Meanwhile, remember that your life is exactly as it was meant to be. But that doesn't mean you can't change the parts you don't like.



LEO

Jul 23 - Aug 22

If it's a change of direction you're after, get your hat and coat. The planets are sending special rays to help you along. Even so, take particular note of all budgets — and get receipts. In this mood, you'll easily overspend — and even more easily take on everyone else's problems just because you're feeling so invincible. Join a charity to help focus that energy.