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The Wizard of Sun City: The Strange True Story of Charles Hatfield, the Rainmaker Who Drowned a City's Dreams

Garry Jenkins

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The story of the West is in many ways the story of the quest for water. Faced with widespread droughts in the late nineteenth century, serious minded men became convinced that artificial rain would be the next great scientific breakthrough. Professional rainmaking companies sprang up, and cities and towns began hiring rainmakers to “milk the skies.” Most were glorified confidence men, but one—Charles Hatfield— appeared to be the real thing. He erected enormous towers and burned a secret mixture of chemicals atop them, and more often than not, the skies obeyed. Before long his work was celebrated—and his secret sought—on four continents.

Hatfield’s career reached its zenith in January 1916, when he was hired to create rain by the booming city of San Diego. Within a month, the city suffered the worst floods in its history, with dozens of deaths and damages in excess of $4 million.

Filled with firsthand research and the flair of a thriller, *The Wizard of Sun City* is a biography of a visionary scientist, a chronicle of a virtually unknown subculture, and ultimately the story of the tumultuous events of January 1916 that gave Charles Hatfield a reputation as the West’s most controversial rain wizard.

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