

APRIL 18, 1974

Last night, the wind blew at full ferocity. Doors and windows rattled to accentuate the dry howling gusts. beating against my house. Windmills screeched on and off in the restless darkness. Metro-Goldwyn Mayer supported by Warner Brothers couldn't have created a better show to keep the drought in mind.

In my neighborhood, a penful of dogie lambs bleated all night. These victims of the dry spring had been fed enough to satisfy their hunger pains. Their mournful cry was perfect to stage a drought-time nightmare.

I dreamed of being smothered by a pile of empty feed sacks covered in cottonseed meal. Old ewes trampled across my entombment, prodded by hysterical bankers. Cows ran bellowing in the aftermath, herded by consumers eating peanut butter sandwiches. Empty meat counters flashed in sequences. An auctioneer's chant supplied background music.

Drought ridden herders have the least resistance to the nocturnal tricks of the subconscious. Dry weather causes both day and nightmares. One never knows when he is dealing with reality or has slipped off into an imaginary world.

Fantasy is closely related to the livestock business. Doctors know that cow and sheep people are so deeply affected by the make-believe economics of the trade that they are forever close to losing touch with reality.

What I speak of, for example, are propositions such as gambling on feeder calves on a falling fat market and a rising feed market, or replanting cows to calve in weather so dry that the birds don't care to nest.

I think the reason that we all continue to be caught in the clutches of our trade is that we are never actually punished for our mistakes. Small puppies are trained by sharp swats with a folded newspaper. Animal trainers use buggy whips to discipline their charges. But herders are allowed to fall into big catastrophes followed by severe crises without ever being rapped across the nose.

Time after time, I've told my wife to stop petting her mother cat after she had kittens. All she is doing is encouraging the old kitten bank to have another litter. If she'd fall in and give the cat a sound thrashing after delivery, it might at least slow down the assembly line. I place great faith in the rod in either animals or humans. Posterior treatments of young kids has always been a good route to improved report cards.

In idle conversation, herders do say that they wish someone would have kicked their so-and-so's for making such and such trade, yet it never happens in the physical sense, only in the financial sense.

Were I to prescribe a solution to the entire problem of the industry today, I'd say that we all ought to be turned wrongside out with a quirt until we promised to refrain from owning four legged stock. Ninety percent of us would be incurable, but at least the other 10 percent could be diverted into something that was appreciated.

Dry days fade into windy, dusty nights in the Shortgrass Country. Feed wagons still roll in most parts. April is the rainy month. We'd better get one soon or there won't be any need for pillows and beds.