

# **Eyelids of the Blind**

**Rich Ormbrek**

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# 1

Mander put his foot forward. The long, narrow ski slid along September snow still wet from a morning storm, a slight resistant tug with each push. Mander felt good. His tracks were initial tracks. Here in the high country they always were. Here urban, quick entertainment were foreign. He could travel as his forefathers had: with provisions to reach a destination, without predilection for returning. No quitting, no clowning. Mander could go with self-reliance as his illustrious uncle, Ernest Shackleton, had a hundred and sixty-five years ago, feeling unshadowed.

Mander paused, looking across the horizon of The Rockies. His breath steamed into the morning air, joining the meltings on a thousand trees. He knew where he was. Shackleton had not been so fortunate – but he and his entire crew had endured. They had withstood the toughest weather in the world at The Straits of Magellan, surviving shipwreck and an incredible do-or-die journey to reach a whaling station for help. The six month ordeal spanned 1915-1916, war years far away while uncle and his crew faced a war with nature. No man's land asserted its eminence.

The journeys were not as epic now. Mander knew that. He accepted it. He at least went with a similar gait. It was understandable that most of his peers would never consider such activity. Mander realized each person was like a prism. Whatever passed through you made varying impressions on all else. There was no fault. They also received different impressions. But his were defined. His had a cadence about them. A mourner's incantation: the dull thud of unavoidable toil. His ancestors had not enjoyed that tempo. They had lived it.

Mander set off again. He was approaching a ridge. The wind had changed direction – now it was sweeping over the crest, chilling him. He was used to the cold from his work in aquaculture. There it was a constant, numbing cold. In the high country it oscillated with the wind ... bearable then excruciating. Mander moved faster.

Suddenly the snow bank he was on gave way. His left leg struck – he felt the ski snap – then his right ski dug into the snow, wrenching

his body violently upside-down. He was in the air once more. Chills colder than anything he had felt before shot through his back. He breathed heavingly, as in intercourse. Oh God! Let me stop!

The next hit took his breath away as he landed on his back. He was still upside-down. He felt himself sliding head first as on an extreme toboggan run. The several seconds of gliding would have seemed a split-second except for hesitations to his momentum caused by the jagged rocks catching at his clothes. Then he was off this part of the hill into the open air, coolness replacing roughness. The next impact was against Mander's midsection, but it felt slight because of his terror that the end was yet to come. Then suddenly he was slowing down. It was darker. The stopping took so long Mander thought it was a cruel trick – perhaps he was skidding to the next cliff. But he did stop. He was in shock, stunned, but conscious. He was deep in a snow bank. Mander knew he could not rest – he could not pass out here. He began digging toward the lighter snow.

It was an instinctive move – toward the light. Mander stopped in realization. He turned and kicked at the snow around him with his left leg. It was hardest about two feet above where his legs had settled after the fall. Mander rolled slowly until he was completely over. He began digging at an angle opposite the hardest snow, toward the darker snow, toward the cliff. Moments passed without measure, silent in a soft tomb, yet Mander did not panic. He realized the snow around him was powder – his sliding on the hill fortuitously had taken him beyond the cement-like wet snow of the avalanche.

Sensation was returning to all parts of his body. He felt stinging, deep body bruises and intense pain in his right knee. The digging now hurt; snow and ice had entered his gloves. Mander dug at an even pace to prevent further shock. He packed the snow hard behind him with his left leg and gained steadily. The pain and cold gave way to euphoria as Mander noticed a definition of shades – black and white – earth and sun – indicating he was close to escape. With a resurgence of hope, Mander burrowed for the darkness of the hill.

Once he made it atop the snow, relief replaced anxious desperation. Mander slid along the snow to a grove of fir trees, using them as a buffer against the wind. He surveyed the damage to himself:

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some sort of tear in his right knee, a gash across his left hip to his abdomen, overall abrasions and bruises and extremely sore shoulder blades. Worst of all the impact to his mid-section had torn off his survival belt. The contactor was gone, he had no way of calling for help. He had planned the trip to last two weeks. His wife, Camile, would not expect him until then. She had confidence in his competency: he had been on hazardous trips often before and never experienced serious incidents. His deflector was likewise somewhere lost in the snow – its ultra high pitched sound would no longer protect him from predatory animals. Also he had lost his lighter and pain pills, at least at night the increased cold would mask the pain. Ironically, by loosing both, he would be comfortably cold.

Mander brushed all the snow off his clothing to help them dry. This activity, the lack of wind and the slight shock he was still in caused him to pass out. Luckily his arms were huddled around his middle; the essential body heat was preserved.

He remained unconscious until the afternoon placed intermittent rays through swaying branches directly on his face. The dark and light patterns on his eyelids brought back fresh memories of horror to his mind. He awoke with a start. His forehead was shiny with cold sweat. Instantly he shivered violently, then sat up and rolled his shoulders vigorously, trying to get warm. *No more of this*, Mander thought. *I've got to get going. No more. I can't pass out again. I won't awaken.*

He felt his knee. It was warmer in spots, blood pooling up in the damaged tissue. Mander braced himself against the side of the hill and stood up. His ski pole was about twenty-five feet away. He crawled over to get it, then returned to the trees. Using the point of the pole, he cut tediously and inaccurately to get four branches. These he fashioned into a splint, and fastened them to his knee with material from the rips in his jacket.

Mander stood up again, this time aided only by his ski pole. He bent his left knee repeatedly to test the splint on his right side. It was workable. He then scanned the immediate area. The sleeping bag he had lost off his back in the fall was sticking out of the snow like an orange bolder. The rest of the backpack was twenty feet further away. The remnants of his skis were close to the hole he had made in the fall.

He retrieved these.

The bindings on his right ski held as he attached it, but only the back of the ski remained. It had broken along a separation in the metal edge. Mander laughed at his right boot with only splinters to the front. His left ski was in better shape, all the front and half the back was intact. But the binding was destroyed. Mander cut the straps from his backpack and secured his ski to his left boot.

How pitiful, he thought, the man who saved Camile's life when her helicar malfunctioned now could barely walk. He had been to the depths of the oceans and far into space – and now, he felt like a worm, a snail. He quickly put all the dried food and the canteen from his backpack into his sleeping bag. He draped the bag around his shoulders and tied the ends about his midsection.

Looking like a Boy Scout flunk out, Mander started back toward the trailhead. He moved out with his left ski and just matched that progress with his near useless right ski. All it provided was a measure of balance. Progress was slow, and painful. It would take considerably longer to return than the two days required to get this far. The rest of the day until sunset was an experience unheard of amongst Mander's contemporaries. Pain. Pain was no longer a price to be paid, a deterrent. Lingering pain was unknown. Pain was stopped. Now. For Mander, however, the unlikely combination had come. He was without relief, without resort. He had to take it; he had no choice. At dusk when Mander crawled into his sleeping bag, he was physically and emotionally more exhausted than he had ever been.



Mendocino's primary inlet, just south of the old town plateau, was the location of two architectural achievements that echoed the town's artistic heritage. Vesta was the creator of both. Her floating marine science classroom was built around a tidal rock. Open ended to the west, it allowed waves to re-nourish the sea life clinging to the rock. Further east sandy beaches ended at a preserved automobile road and bridge. She had upgraded the bridge. Current helicars converted to go through this modern version of the drive-through trees famous throughout old California. Vesta had created a canopy studio above the bridge. Its exterior was constructed of sponges, and in the shape of a human brain.

Inside, Mander's partner, Camile, was hosting a Thought Show. This profession was one of the most popular in the society. There were literally hundreds of these shows in scores of languages beamed from the laser satellite system. Host times were only one hour per day since so many people wanted to participate. The bulk of such work dealt with off-screen background research to enable a host to address many subjects instantly. Each host was somewhat encyclopedic, but each did specialize. Camile's expertise was in language and philosophy. People contacting her were drawn by an interchange of ideas in those fields. Camile, as all Thought Show hosts, was adept at cultivating promising concepts and stopping poorly-developed ideas in the bud, prodding and pruning. To callers the sense of participating, of having an influence of thousands – perhaps millions – was compelling. When one idea was being expressed, a computer hooked to the contactor panels scanned incoming calls for influencing, supplemental ideas relating to the original idea. These callers were introduced to the audience in pertinence to the accompanying material. This feature made an evenly flowing show, with each idea being dissected, digested and savored.

Camile was sitting in the laser studio to the left of a computer, facing a set of laser disc monitors. With these she could hold incoming quotes, graphs, pictures and drawings germane to a specific subject. One monitor showed the caller as they talked together. Her engineer

informed her that Fuzhou China 5 would be over in ten seconds. It also featured an expert in language/philosophy; continuity continued. A few holdovers from the previous show would now be routed through English/Minbei translators for their comments and Camile's responses.

At precisely 0600 American West Time, Mendocino's coast was shrouded in thick fog, the gulls were quiet, farmers starting work on equipment they could see, ranchers had yet to let their stock out – but every few miles house lights had come on – for Camile's show was starting. Camile began as she always did, with some philosophical speculations. It was a good way to start with drowsy people rubbing their eyes and sipping wake up cups.

“Good morning my Fellows. It is six in the American West. First, some opening statements.”

A man in Santa Rosa grinned at his laser set while buttering his toast.

Camile continued, “Let me say there are no keys to combination locks.”

A night construction worker from Ukiah, soaking in a barrel tub, opened her eyes.

Camile went on. “Man cannot look at The Director in a direct fashion.”

Stopping his planting to contemplate these observations, a Klamath man sat in an Agrocopter, attached atop a control tower. Four seeders purred in neutral, dark brown earth to the rear, golden unturned earth in front.

“You must look at the things on the stage, and the stage itself – then you will conceive The Director.”

A Nanping resident rubbed her chin thoughtfully and picked up her contactor.

“Humankind has no answer for the back of the book,” Camile asserted. “The back of the book tells nothing anyway. It is in spontaneous decisions when meeting each problem where man excels.”

In Bishop a man grabbed a novel from a nightstand and opened it to the back, the woman next to him was now wide-awake, snickering. They began wrestling on their waterbed.

“I am absolutely sure there are no absolutes,” Camile said

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smirkingly.

Time zones west, a New Zealand at the Geyserland Observatory stopped her astronomical chores long enough to comb her hair.

Camile typed on the laser screen:

God, The Hologram  
Without light in time  
Dot for dot  
Line for line.

Time zones east, an Iowan wearing headphones continued mowing her lawn with an atomic mower. The molecular structure of the particular grass and the height desired were programmed: a beam severed all grass above that height.

Camile gestured toward the abyss outside her window, "Humanity looks out a dirty window into a fog. Some try out of body experiences. But they can be so unsettling they can leave you beside yourself." In Edinburgh a man listened unattentively to Camile while comparing cerebellum response variables.

"Before the story is told, it is known. Humanity can never know the curtain call, so they must know the performance."

A Gary woman warmed to Camile after dispatching a robot carrying molten steel to forming casts.

"We look to those who take control, from the messianic to the maniacal. For some we light candles, for some we hold their feats to the fire."

Mother Gabrielle's eyes brightened as did the candles she was lighting in preparation for her mass in San Luis Obispo.

"Here we welcome orphaned ideas. Here, anonymously, at the back door ... a bit farther down the road from the warming aura of majority opinion. But even so, some contact was there. You came cradled whether with care or shame. We will uncover you and use you. You will be spoken in the wheel of human imagination."

One, in Nairobi, about to put a contactor down instead touched the appropriate code.

"That, my Fellows, should get us going. Let us hear from you,

what kept you up last night? What seeds have come to bloom in your minds?"

The number thirty-seven appeared on the computer – already that many ideas were registered into the computer. Once the first idea was expressed to Camile, any others consistent with that subject would be programmed to appear with those callers all together in conference. Camile pushed a button marked NEXT.

The first caller from San Ignacio said, "Hunting season was in the fall so humans would seem warm-blooded by contrast. I believe the hunting of animals was used as a screen to mask mans' hatred of birds."

Camile asked, "Sky shadows?"

"Oh ... yes, that too. But mainly the envy we have of their gliding freedom."

Another idea was let go in Ensenada, "I believe man hates birds because they do not share his dread of gravity. Like when man scrambles into graves so they won't fall off the earth."

A caller from Wichita suggested, "Man's love of private property originated when God forgot to fence Heaven and Satan fell off."

"Thank you Michael!" Camile said. Drowsy viewers were now more awake after spontaneous guffaws.

"The idea of sky shadows," Camile continued, "is significant in relation to explorers – the darkness after the sunset would intensify the uncertainty – so they would hate anything which darkened – covered – the sky."

"Perhaps this is why people hunger after gold –" a woman from Dakar said, "the color of the last security of the sunset."

"Geo-thermal sulfur springs contain the oldest known DNA," a Sparks guest announced. "If it appears in all life henceforth, that could suggest the compulsion to war. The sulfuric perfume of gunpowder."

Camile's concentration was lessened by thoughts of her own explorer. Mander was barely into his trip, she barely into her trepidation.

A caller from the Owen Valley asked the initial caller: "What about Fish?"

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Do you think they are part of the *screen*?”

“Probably. Man is not totally at ease in water.”

A man from Bremerhaven observed, “I feel many fish are pulled onto boats now because in Noah’s time they were the only ones to escape the pairs quota.”

From Kanpur a woman commented, “Man has always tried to cover the taste of animals he is about to eat with spices! Making animal’s taste like plants because plants just seem to be there for the taking. Then we can forget that animals ran for their lives –“

“We disguise it also by eating animals which run the slowest!”  
The quick cogency of the Belgrade translator and the Mendocino engineer where scintillating.

On the board a Scottsdale person criticized cleverly: Lord Preserve Us.

Camile mused, “Early imprinting sticks: stalking, attacking hunters transferred that level of excitement and satisfaction into male sexuality. Those components remain in modern man, seduction and rape.”

On the comment screen Hollywood was heard: *Cher chez le femme* should be *cher chez le cher chez*.

“Not just the active males,” Camile asserted. “When nurturing is lessened, sublimation results. When government is daddy the only way to get hugs is to do wrong. Tight handcuffs are the bureaucratic equivalent.”

The comment screen showed a translation from the previous audience in Zhangzhou: alcohol ... drugs – to lose awareness by the guilty hunter now vulnerable to the prey?

“Golf,” a Quito woman advised, “is the new male hunting fraternity. Something is hit, pursued, buried. Strokes are embellished by wood and iron. Amid the new urban hearth, the ancient green link. Garish clothes, uncamouflaged – the prey cannot bolt.”

“Likewise,” a man from Ann Arbor advised, “polo is symbolic sword play. Off with the peon’s head!”

“Man does seem the specie in tantrum,” Camile observed. “The self-deprecation sadly not a satire, but a documentary vehicle with too much milage.”

The computer said Subject Ended. The engineer played through, pushing the NEXT button and a new caller appeared.

From Rangoon a man said, “The tree is the root cause of the coming of knowledge to man. The Sanskrit word for three is tres and the Latin word for three is tres. Adam, Eve and the tree makes three.”

On the screen a lady from Sula asserted, Woman: the clothes tree – sparkling with colors, limbs adorned with bracelets and furs we fashion to make up for that first delicious bite.

A caller from Happy Valley, Pennsylvania said, “I’m glad Eve liked the apple – and the stem. If Adam and Eve had been gay, we wouldn’t be.”

Camile said, “The serpent of the Garden of Eden was evil because it’s shedding skin represented reincarnation and transmigration. The apple of that knowledge would make man more complacent, less striving for discovery and search.”

A woman from Torino cleared her throat, “That serpent was represented by the tie covering the Adam’s apple.”

Others tied in the computer:

“Ties cover our American heritage – rope burns on the necks of rustlers.”

“Ties which flared out suggested the closeness of success. He had made it, but the hangman’s noose was opened and poised.”

“Some, with a hang up from the Eden tree, thought the hangman’s rope symbolized the snake.”

“You men hangings were a subconscious attempt to put mistakes back on the trees?” Camile asked innocently.

There was a momentary pause in the conversation. Many of the callers actually jerked to increased attention. Some wore slight smiles of obvious intellectual appreciation. The other speculations were of fractional importance, but accepting the blame for all that played against the rules of the original Creator was devastating. It held man up as just another sniveling animal, caught where he did not belong. Cowering in a corner and blaming the Creator for his neck which lowered his head in humility and his tear ducts which turned his eyes into those of a beggar.

The engineer now put up a poem he had been saving for awhile.

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Row You Peons  
Across the moat  
Grab the land to stay afloat.  
Rows and rows and rows  
Forcing things to grow  
Rowed and rowed  
You Row Peons  
Re-planted.

Camile added, “The cut was really at the authority of Eden, thus there can be no satisfaction. There is no standard. The You-row-peons were merely elaborating on lost monarchy, or God.”

A man from Fresno commented on the screen – From the titled to the entitled.

From Luzon a woman lamented, “Without standards, some feel justified with conviction on being pro or con on criminal rights. Simply their wanting is enough!”

A call from Longyan worked because she did not need to be translated. “Punks start fireworks.”

A man from Tampico entered on the board: Drive by shooters: made by others, propelled by others, graduates from the middle finger to the index finger.

“Math class was a zero tolerance area,” a man from Libreville added.

Another from Kagoshima said, “Discipline to a gang is loading with the right caliber.”

Camile considered the fact that when she or her guests made a historical error – only feelings would be hurt by challenging callers. But a miss-calculation by her partner, Mander, could mean deadly reality.

A caller from Hattiesburg put something on the laser screen a bit more serious than a pun. “Felony ... ‘feel lonely.’”

“This country’s penal area in North Dakota,” Camile advised, “is called *Felonia* for good reason.”

A woman from Cordoba observed, “We prove we have passed a basic connection where we take the umbilical thumb out of our mouth,

curl it into a fist and prove it's dry by touching it to another's body."

There was another voice from Kelso; "We're Sunday souls. We rush out to beg forgiveness for the very emotions implanted in us by Whom we are imploring."

A voice in the wilderness from Corsicana said, Television preachers used to cable God collect."

Camile advised, "Masochists mistake the light with the switch. ... As for God being The Ruler of our lives, that is the misconception between finite and Infinite. He knows what will happen only in that She has gone past that infinite time. She chose for us since He knows; choice implies doubt. The players react and choose. Then when their too greedy demands overlap, they blame The Creator that let them choose anything in the first place."

A lady from Khalkis activated the screen: God, transcribed.

Camile nodded toward the board; hesitated dramatically then spoke – "God is not a pronoun."

From Madras another vented his anger. "Is the ozone depletion phenomenon, the crack in the shell, man's abortion of man?"

This unleashed a plethora of calls. So many came in that it tested the screener's facility in assessing pertinence and merit.

A man from Caracas seethed, "Abortionists can stay up for the party, they've already put the kids to sleep."

"Your space in heaven," a lady from Vallejo advised, "was taken by the child you agreed would not see the light of day."

A statement from Palm Harbor echoed 1990's American politics. "Tell me, is abortion also for the children?"

Another from Sherbrooke picked up on the comment, "Partial vote abortion?"

"Politics and abortion are interestingly mixed," Camile asserted. "Early in the United States Revolution, the Americans lost often – that may have something to do with them entering the World War after early losses by others. It is intriguing in the ultimate early loss – aborted babies."

"Choose to give the baby choice," a man from Canberra said.

"There is no Underground Railroad for fetuses," a woman of Niigata observed, "they are merely ground under."



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This ignited Camile. “From Dred Scott to general dread, legal property is a misnomer when applied to humans. We should never pat the weak on the back for taking the life of the weaker.”

Another voice from Charleston said, “Americans who abided abortion had to separate religion – morality – from the state. Those who kill their kids have no one to care for them when seniors. An amoral state was fundamental.”

A voice from Sao Paulo speculated, “Christians feel a compulsion to sin to make Christ’s death for us worthwhile.”

The board was activated from Regina:

From stone tablets

To

Stoned tabloids.

A line lit up from Los Banos; “Moses saw a burning bush. Smokers see a burning bush too, just less revealing.”

On the laser screen appeared a note from Bristol:

Born an acronym

I tried everything

Unable to discover

The initial meaning.

Another caller from Shreveport claimed, “God made the world in six days, then rested. In came man, free of supervision – orphaned, unwanted, unwarranted, unrooted. Are we surprised at what happens?”

Camile replied while shaking her head negatively, “I disagree. The One made actors capable of doing anything in time – even of stopping the play. This is not advocacy, but trust. Man too often took an image of clay rolled back up and flung against a corner of the craft shop wall. Clay, awaiting the next fancy of God, the next sculpture, the next *likeness*.

But creation is unrefined. It is raw, brand new and instinctive. Nature does not see earth as a dusty joke, as the pimple of the universe. God does not look down on creation. ... He is nostalgic for nerve.”

A flashing light from her engineer alerted Camile. She reacted: “... But someone will look down on me if I presume to be so important

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as to cut into their time. ... That's the show for this morning. May you be assessed by verbs rather than adjectives.”