*Crash Down*

***Morning***

The jabbing pain cut like a dull knife between the eyes of Fenn. His skull was rattling and the burning muscles spasmed in his lower back and upper shoulder blades. He did not want to consider the shape his legs and hips were in from the precipitous fall. It was uncanny that anyone could survive *that* fall.

Fenn regained consciousness and sensed the rushing water carrying him downstream from a roaring mountain spring. His body hit rushes and rocks as he went, which slowed his descent enough for him to pull himself to the side of the river and embrace the bank.

Pulling himself up on his forearms and kicking his legs to shore he appraised his belongings. Blaster was missing. So was his survival pack and commlink. Luckily, his vibro-blade remained hidden inside his left boot. It would have to do.

Studying the terrain and topography, Fenn could see the mountaintop in which the team was to establish a fire base in which to coordinate artillery strikes and orbital bombardment. He would have to climb, and the thought of doing so was not appealing in the slightest to the commander. The forthcoming climb was to be the least of Fenn’s problem, as the gurgling sound of the guttural roar of the undead.

Fenn pulled his blade from the boot and brought it up to his chin. Two undead were stumbling towards the hobbled commander, their movements clumsy and without urgency. Still unable to stand, Fenn pulled his legs towards him and was able to brace his weight up on his knees. Taking the blade in one hand and balancing his weight on the other, he lunged at the closing undead and was able to cut one down by the knee. Fenn was on the undead before he fully hit the ground, smashing the blade’s hilt into the skull of the ghoul and smashing it in.

The second undead was now within range and lunged forward, stumbling over its ungainly legs. Fenn had to regain his balance quickly, throwing an elbow into the sternum of the undead giving himself breathing room to counterattack. He tossed himself backwards, landing on his tailbone and crawling backwards. He swung his damaged legs behind him in a semi-circle, and crawled forward with vibro-blade at the ready. The undead was now struggling to stand back up, beginning to rise. Fenn lunged forward, both hands on the blade sending all of his might and momentum into the slashing blow. The vibro-blade caught the undead in the lower abdomen, gutting the former Judecca denizen.

Fenn almost feinted. The exertion had drained him of his last resolve. He blacked out nearly immediately. Waking up with sunlight cascading into his eyes, Fenn sighed heavily. He was glad to be alive, but weary of the ordeal he had just endured. He had no way of communicating with his men on the mountaintop. Salvation was so far away, yet so close it was a tantalizing proposition to make the climb alive.

By this time, feelings were returning to his legs. Fenn uneasily pulled himself up by climbing the base of a tree stump. He was able to place some weight on his legs, and hobbled slowly. Moving to a nearby stump, he sat down hacked at a nearby sturdy branch. While no survivalist by any means, Fenn was able in short order to fashion a crude walking stick with a sharpened end on one side and a comfortable handle on the other. He was lucky, able to find vines which were thick enough to fashion into a makeshift line of rope. Fenn tied one end of the rope to the stick and the other around his wrist. He used smaller branches to whittle down hand held spikes.

The commander took stock of the situation rapidly. The path up to the mountaintop was traversable on foot, however undead were surely hiding everywhere on the route. The rock-face was an entirely different matter. He could climb, perhaps, but it would be an endurance match for his muscles and resolve. He had to reach the top by nightfall. If the sun fell, Fenn would be unable to hold off the marauding undead. He took tiny branches now, the newest stocks and made eight small spikes. He removed his boots, and forced the spikes through the toe of the boot to use as cleats for the coming climb.

He made his way to the rock-wall. It did not seem impossible, perhaps a climb of two-hundred yards. Perhaps if he made more spikes and rope he could tether himself to the line and make safety loops. He was unsure of the tensile strength of the rope, if it was too strong it could snap and break his back during a fall. Too soft, it could snap and Fenn would fall to his death. Gritting his teeth the commander began his ascent.

***Later***

His arms ached with a fury dread as he pulled himself up the final precipice of the mountaintop. His body gave up as it came to a needed rest dangling dangerously close to the edge. Fenn looked around and saw several makeshift buildings and crew served weapon pits covering the paths down the mountain. It took time before anyone saw him, as Fenn was too tired to move or make any sounds after the climb. The ascent must have taken close to two hours, but all sense of time had left the man. He was able to keep his eyes open only long enough to see Delak racing towards him. Everything went black.

Fenn awoke on a medical gurney, inside a tent being attended by Delak and Chrome. Both men looked uneasily at him. “We were preparing to send a rescue party to find you, but our drop zone was compromised. It was like the undead knew we were coming…took us until fifteen minutes ago to clear the area to set up a base camp.” Chrome explained.

“Great work making it back Commander Fenn. Sleep tight, we have work to do in the morning!” came Delak’s response, trying to revitalize his comrade. Fenn fell back to sleep.