

Building background knowledge to visualize a difficult scene: This is from the book *Deathwatch* by Robb White. To put the scene in context, Ben—the boy who is climbing—is fleeing from Madec, who is trying to frame him for a murder. Madec has cut off water supplies from Ben, and Ben is close to death from dehydration. Read this scene, and then look online to see if you can find information about rock climbing that will help you visualize the scene. Draw pictures in the margin that show how you visualize the scene. (Stick figures are fine.) Tomorrow we'll figure out a way to act this out.

not a break or flaw in the straight wall.

Something, the cold of the glacial ages, or the violence of earthquakes, or the temperature of a certain upflow of magma, had formed in the stone of the butte a shape almost like a funnel standing on end which had been cut in half from top to bottom. The ledge intercepted this stone funnel about halfway up the cup of it. High above him Ben could see the rim of the funnel, very wide there, perhaps a hundred feet across. Below him the spout was a chimney such as the one he had climbed, but instead of being vee-d this one was round, a cylinder cut in half.

From where he stood, it was at least fifty feet across open space to the other side of the bisected funnel, farther than that if you measured across the curved stone face of the funnel itself.

On the other side he could not make out exactly what the formation was, for a thin wall of basalt, a slab which had not broken off stood straight up at the outer edge of the butte, apparently unconnected to the mass except at the base. This thin wall and the solid wall of the butte formed a narrow corridor which lay in deep shade, the slab wall between it and the sun.

It didn't really matter what was in that dark corridor, for he could not get over there.

He could, in fact, go nowhere. He was too close to death now to make it back down that long, vee-d chimney and, even if he had been in his best physical condition, there was no way, without ropes and pitons and hammers, spiked boots

and heavy gloves, to climb the sheer face of the butte.

And without someone on the other side to anchor a rope bridge for him, there was no way across that curved bank of stone which formed the cup of the funnel.

Ben was standing there helplessly staring at the stone wall when something struck his arm, forcing it back against the rock, and then the sound of the shot cracked the silence.

With the sound still echoing, Ben shuffled back into the protection of the slab and stood plastered against it.

Moving his arm only a little, he stared in amazement at a small, purplish hole in it halfway between his wrist and his elbow.

Slowly turning his arm over, he saw the other hole, this one more ragged and with a little stream of bright blood flowing out of it and down into the palm of his hand.

There was no pain at all.

Ben put his thumb on one hole, his forefinger on the other and pressed gently. Now there was pain, but nothing compared to the aching of his mouth, or the burning of his eyes, or the sun on his raw flesh.

He moved his arm slowly from the elbow, raising and lowering it and then turning it from side to side. These movements caused no more and no less pain in the wounds.

He drew his hand into a fist, watching his fingers moving easily and normally.

He had been shot. But it did not hurt him, and it had not damaged him. Even the blood had stopped flowing.

Ben had not thought about Madec for a long time. Now he did.

Madec was shooting now to kill him.

And Ben's body falling from this high cliff, smashing down against the ledges and finally into the breccia would be so mangled and broken that no one would suspect that he was dead before he fell.

Faintly, as though from another world, he heard the Jeep engine start.

Madec was trying to find a position where he could see Ben again.

It would not, Ben realized, be hard to do.

Somehow the sound of the Jeep set his mind adrift and he was suddenly thinking of a thing called a Velo-Drome that he had seen at a county fair when he was a boy. A girl with a long red scarf trailing in the wind had ridden a motorcycle up from the bottom of a wooden pit, going around and around until she left the sloping wooden sides and the motorcycle was traveling on the perfectly vertical wall of the thing. He had stared at this, not believing it could be done, but she was doing it, the red scarf trailing straight behind her, as she lay, flat out in space. . . .

In a few minutes, Madec would have maneuvered into position to shoot him again.

Ben knew that he had only until that Jeep motor stopped.

Reaching behind him, he pulled the bundle of sotol leaves and the slingshot around to his stomach. He lashed them all into a compact bundle and then worked the whole thing around to his back again, tying it against his backbone.

Lifting one foot and then the other, he ripped the shreds of his shorts from his feet.

Ready, he stood a second longer, looking out across the ledge at the hot, smooth, slanting face of the funnel.

Far below him the Jeep appeared and braked to a stop, the dust settling around it. Madec got out, moving in the dust.

Ben had an odd, clear thought: I don't want to die here. Not here, on this barren piece of stone.

He came out on the ledge.

He came out fast, pushing himself out with his hands against the wall and, as he ran, he tried to block off the pain which pounded up from his feet.

Whether Madec shot at him or not he would never know, for he seemed to have come into a bright, hot, tiny world, filled with sunshine, stone and silence. He did not hear his own breathing, or the thudding of his feet, or the increasingly hard beat of his heart.

He did not feel anything, not the wind of his movement, or the heat of the sun, or the gentle rubbing of the bundle against his ragged back. All he felt was the soles of his feet, his whole attention moving down to those two areas of flesh and concentrating there.

He ran straight off the end of the ledge, straight out into the sloping stone funnel.

Now the areas of his feet touching hot stone changed. He was no longer running flat-footed; the left outer sole of his left foot and the inner sole of his right were all that touched.

Every sense of feel he had he concentrated there in his feet, feeling every tiny roughness, his skin seeming to grasp it and let it go, feeling every smooth area, his skin sucking itself against it. His toes felt as sensitive as fingers, touching, gripping, pushing, letting go.

As he ran, his left hand brushed the wall at his side with delicate, gentle caresses, not grasping, not pushing, not holding, his fingertips just flitting along the stone.

He held his right arm out, only slightly bent, his fingers open and spread as though to find assistance in the air itself.

Focusing his mind on the touch of his feet against the stone, he drove power down into them when he felt that he had some tiny grasp; did not force it when he felt that there was no grip, only smooth, steep stone.

He ran and ran, touching, flying, fingering, balancing, floating, as the curved wall of the funnel seemed to spin beside him.

He was trending down. He had planned to make this passage straight across the funnel from the wide ledge to the dark corridor on the other side, it, too, ending with a sharp edge at the face of the funnel.

But he was going slowly down the steep slope, each step a fraction lower than the last.

When he had left the ledge he could look across empty space and see into the dark corridor, see the small stones lying on its floor, see the walls where they touched it.

Then he could not see the floor any longer, for the opening was moving slowly, slowly upward.

If, when he reached the narrow opening of the corridor he could not get into it, all he could do was to run on, on to the edge of the funnel and then into space for there was nothing else.

The corridor was a black rectangle in the reddish-brown wall on which he ran. It was coming closer—and rising higher.

Ben flung his arms up, his fingers curled and reaching.

They found the sharp edge and locked themselves to it.

Everything stopped, the movement, the feel of air, the light touching of his feet, and he hung, his body flat against the steep wall, his arms stretched to their limits, his fingers curled over the edge of the corridor's floor.

The stone against him felt strange. It was as though, in all the time he had been running he had not been in contact with the earth, the fleeting touches of his fingers and the small areas of the soles of his feet not really touching the stone.

This stone was solid and warm and felt soft, as though he were lying on a warm, stiff-fibered carpet. It was a sleepy, delicious feeling and there

was no reason to end it; just hang here on this warm carpet and sleep.

The fingers of his right hand had slipped steadily, nerve by nerve, but he had not noticed it.

Only the snapping movement of his little finger, as it slid off the edge, brought his attention to his hands and made him feel the growing strain coming down his arms in tight strings of pain.

He worked his body upward, and at last rolled over into the darkness of the narrow corridor.

His muscles trembled, jerked, shivered as he crawled on his hands and knees into what was not a corridor but a tunnel, the outer wall solidly curving over at the top and becoming a part of the butte itself.

Sometime, a million years ago when the desert was a sea, waves had formed this tunnel, wearing the sides and floor smooth, rounding the sharp edges of the stone.

Ben crawled on toward where light showed a slight bend in the tunnel. The floor here began to slope downward and was very smooth, the stone almost gleaming in the subdued light coming from the far end.

He got around the bend slowly.

And there lay the lake. A great lake of dark, sparkling, clear water, held there by the stone.

Is this realistic? Could this really happen?

Why or why not?