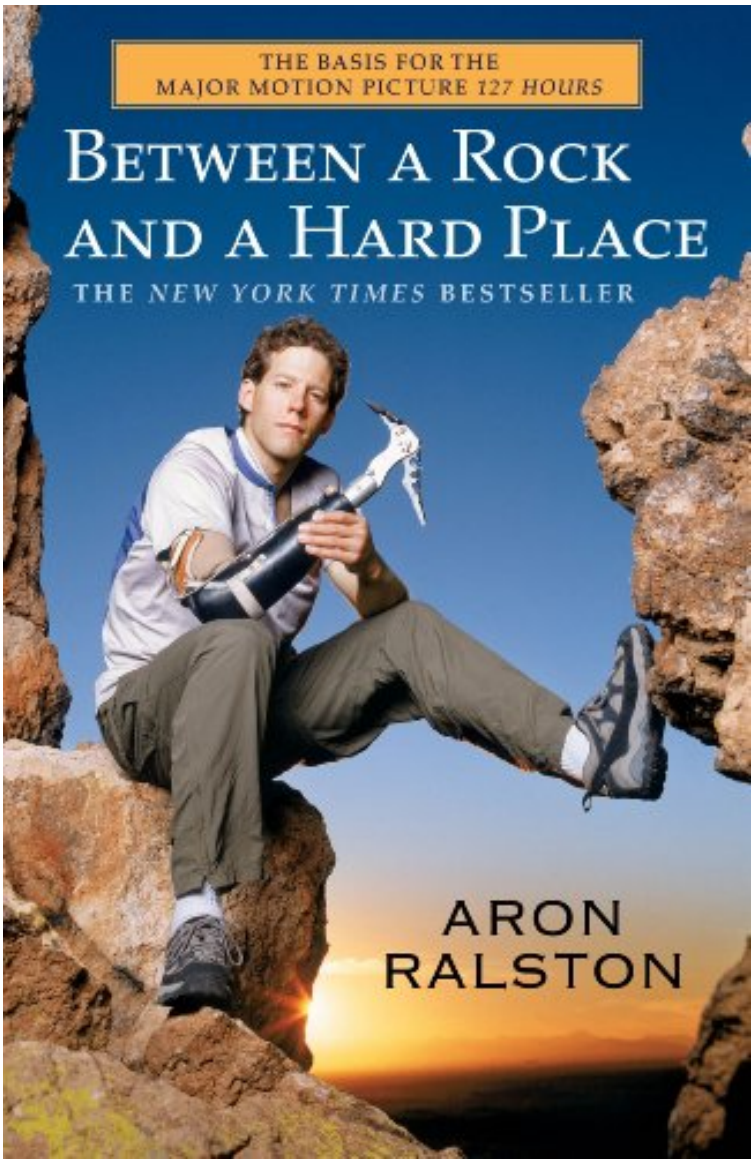
Between a Rock and a Hard Place: The Basis of the Motion Picture 127 Hours (English Edition)



Par Aron Ralston
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Par Aron Ralston : Between a Rock and a Hard Place: The Basis of the Motion Picture 127 Hours (English Edition) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Between a Rock and a Hard Place: The Basis of the Motion Picture 127 Hours (English Edition):

Description : Description du produit One of the most extraordinary survival stories ever told -- Aron Ralston's searing account of his six days trapped in one of the most remote spots in America, and how one inspired act of bravery brought him home. It started out as a simple hike in the Utah canyonlands on a warm Saturday afternoon. For Aron Ralston, a twenty-seven-year-old mountaineer and outdoorsman, a walk into the remote Blue John Canyon was a chance to get a break from a winter of solo climbing Colorado's highest and toughest peaks. He'd earned this weekend vacation, and though he met two charming women along the

way, by early afternoon he finally found himself in his element: alone, with just the beauty of the natural world all around him. It was 2:41 P.M. Eight miles from his truck, in a deep and narrow slot canyon, Aron was climbing down off a wedged boulder when the rock suddenly, and terrifyingly, came loose. Before he could get out of the way, the falling stone pinned his right hand and wrist against the canyon wall. And so began six days of hell for Aron Ralston. With scant water and little food, no jacket for the painfully cold nights, and the terrible knowledge that he'd told no one where he was headed, he found himself facing a lingering death -- trapped by an 800-pound boulder 100 feet down in the bottom of a canyon. As he eliminated his escape options one by one through the days, Aron faced the full horror of his predicament: By the time any possible search and rescue effort would begin, he'd most probably have died of dehydration, if a flash flood didn't drown him before that. What does one do in the face of almost certain death? Using the video camera from his pack, Aron began recording his grateful good-byes to his family and friends all over the country, thinking back over a life filled with adventure, and documenting a last will and testament with the hope that someone would find it. (For their part, his family and friends had instigated a major search for Aron, the amazing details of which are also documented here for the first time.) The knowledge of their love kept Aron Ralston alive, until a divine inspiration on Thursday morning solved the riddle of the boulder. Aron then committed the most extreme act imaginable to save himself. Between a Rock and a Hard Place -- a brilliantly written, funny, honest, inspiring, and downright astonishing report from the line where death meets life -- will surely take its place in the annals of classic adventure stories.

Prsentation de l'diteurOne of the most extraordinary survival stories ever told -- Aron Ralston's searing account of his six days trapped in one of the most remote spots in America, and how one inspired act of bravery brought him home. It started out as a simple hike in the Utah canyonlands on a warm Saturday afternoon. For Aron Ralston, a twenty-seven-year-old mountaineer and outdoorsman, a walk into the remote Blue John Canyon was a chance to get a break from a winter of solo climbing Colorado's highest and toughest peaks. He'd earned this weekend vacation, and though he met two charming women along the way, by early afternoon he finally found himself in his element: alone, with just the beauty of the natural world all around him. It was 2:41 P.M. Eight miles from his truck, in a deep and narrow slot canyon, Aron was climbing down off a wedged boulder when the rock suddenly, and terrifyingly, came loose. Before he could get out of the way, the falling stone pinned his right hand and wrist against the canyon wall. And so began six days of hell for Aron Ralston. With scant water and little food, no jacket for the painfully cold nights, and the terrible knowledge that he'd told no one where he was headed, he found himself facing a lingering death -- trapped by an 800-pound boulder 100 feet down in the bottom of a canyon. As he eliminated his escape options one by one through the days, Aron faced the full horror of his predicament: By the time any possible search and rescue effort would begin, he'd most probably have died of dehydration, if a flash flood didn't drown him before that. What does one do in the face of almost certain death? Using the video camera from his pack, Aron began recording his grateful good-byes to his family and friends all over the country, thinking back over a life filled with adventure, and documenting a last will and testament with the hope that someone would find it. (For their part, his family and friends had instigated a major search for Aron, the amazing details of which are also documented here for the first time.) The knowledge of their love kept Aron Ralston alive, until a divine inspiration on Thursday morning solved the riddle of the boulder. Aron then committed the most extreme act imaginable to save himself. Between a Rock and a Hard Place -- a brilliantly written, funny, honest, inspiring, and downright astonishing report from the line where death meets life -- will surely take its place in the annals of classic adventure stories.ExtraitBetween a Rock and a Hard Place ONE Geologic Time Includes Now This is the most beautiful place on earth. There are many such places. Every man, every woman, carries in heart and mind the image of the ideal place, known or unknown, actual or visionary.... Theres no limit to the human capacity for the homing sentiment. Theologians, sky pilots, astronauts have even felt the appeal of home calling to them from up above, in the cold black outback of interstellar space. For myself Ill take Moab, Utah. I dont mean the town itself, of course, but the country which surrounds itthe canyonlands. The slickrock desert. The red dust and the burnt cliffs and the lonely skyall that which lies beyond the end of the roads. EDWARD ABBEY, Desert Solitaire FRAYING CONTRAILS STREAK another bluebird sky above the red desert plateau, and I wonder how many sunburnt days these badlands have seen since their creation. Its Saturday morning, April 26, 2003, and I am mountain biking by myself on a scraped dirt road in the far southeastern corner of Emery County, in central-eastern Utah. An hour ago, I left my truck at the dirt trailhead parking area for Horseshoe Canyon,

the isolated geographic window of Canyonlands National Park that sits fifteen air miles northwest of the legendary Maze District, forty miles southeast of the great razorback uplift of the San Rafael Swell, twenty miles west of the Green River, and some forty miles south of I-70, that corridor of commerce and last chances (NEXT SERVICES: 110 MILES). With open tablelands to cover for a hundred miles between the snowcapped ranges of the Henrys to the southwestthe last range in the U.S. to be named, explored, and mappedand the La Sals to the east, a strong wind is blowing hard from the south, the direction Im heading. Besides slowing my progress to a crawlIm in my lowest gear and pumping hard on a flat grade just to move forwardthe wind has blown shallow drifts of maroon sand onto the washboarded road. I try to avoid the drifts, but occasionally, they blanket the entire road, and my bike founders. Three times already Ive had to walk through particularly long sand bogs. The going would be much easier if I didnt have this heavy pack on my back. I wouldnt normally carry twenty-five pounds of supplies and equipment on a bike ride, but Im journeying out on a thirty-mile-long circuit of biking and canyoneeringtraversing the bottom of a deep and narrow canyon systemand it will take me most of the day. Besides a gallon of water stored in an insulated three-liter CamelBak hydration pouch and a one-liter Lexan bottle, I have five chocolate bars, two burritos, and a chocolate muffin in a plastic grocery sack in my pack. Ill be hungry by the time I get back to my truck, for certain, but I have enough for the day. The truly burdensome weight comes from my full stock of rappelling gear: three locking carabiners, two regular carabiners, a lightweight combination belay and rappel device, two tied slings of half-inch webbing, a longer length of half-inch webbing with ten prestitched loops called a daisy chain, my climbing harness, a sixty-meter-long and ten-and-a-half-millimeter-thick dynamic climbing rope, twenty-five feet of one-inch tubular webbing, and my rarely used Leatherman-knockoff multi-tool (with two pocketknife blades and a pair of pliers) that I carry in case I need to cut the webbing to build anchors. Also in my backpack are my headlamp, headphones, CD player and several Phish CDs, extra AA batteries, digital camera and mini digital video camcorder, and their batteries and protective cloth sacks. It adds up, but I deem it all necessary, even the camera gear. I enjoy photographing the otherworldly colors and shapes presented in the convoluted depths of slot canyons and the prehistoric artwork preserved in their alcoves. This trip will have the added bonus of taking me past four archaeological sites in Horseshoe Canyon that are home to hundreds of petroglyphs and pictographs. The U.S. Congress added the isolated canyon to the otherwise contiguous Canyonlands National Park specifically to protect the five-thousand-year-old etchings and paintings found along the Barrier Creek watercourse at the bottom of Horseshoe, a silent record of an ancient peoples presence. At the Great Gallery, dozens of eight-to-ten-foot-high superhumans hover en echelon over groups of indistinct animals, dominating beasts and onlookers alike with their long, dark bodies, broad shoulders, and haunting eyes. The superbly massive apparitions are the oldest and best examples of their design type in the world, such preeminent specimens that anthropologists have named the heavy and somewhat sinister artistic mode of their creators the Barrier Creek style. Though there is no written record to help us decipher the artists meaning, a few of the figures appear to be hunters with spears and clubs; most of them, legless, armless, and horned, seem to float like nightmarish demons. Whatever their intended significance, the mysterious forms are remarkable for their ability to carry a declaration of ego across the millennia and confront the modern observer with the fact that the panels have survived longer and are in better condition than all but the oldest golden artifacts of Western civilization. This provokes the question: What will remain of todays ostensibly advanced societies five thousand years hence? Probably not our artwork. Nor any evidence of our record amounts of leisure time (if for no other reason than most of us fritter away this luxury in front of our television sets). In anticipation of the wet and muddy conditions in the canyon, Im wearing a pair of beat-up running shoes and thick wool-blend socks. Thus insulated, my feet sweat as they pump on my bike pedals. My legs sweat, too, compressed by the Lycra biking shorts Im wearing beneath my beige nylon shorts. Even through double-thick padding, my bike seat pummels my rear end. Up top, I have on a favorite Phish T-shirt and a blue baseball cap. I left my waterproof jacket back at my truck; the day is going to be warm and dry, just like it was yesterday when I biked the twelve-mile loop of the Slick Rock Trail over east of Moab. If it were going to be rainy, a slot canyon would be the last place Id be headed, jacket or no. Lightweight travel is a pleasure to me, and Ive figured how to do more with less so I can go farther in a given amount of time. Yesterday I had just my small CamelBak with a few bike-repair items and my cameras, a measly ten-pound load for the four-hour loop ride. In the evening, paring out the bike gear, I hiked five miles on an out-and-back visit to a natural arch out toward Castle Valley, carrying only six pounds total of water and camera equipment. The day before, Thursday, with my friend Brad Yule from Aspen, I had climbed and skied Mount Sopris, the 12,995-foot monarch of western Colorado, and had

carried a few extra clothes and backcountry avalanche rescue gear, but I still kept my load under fifteen pounds. My five-day road trip will culminate on Sunday night with an unsupported solo attempt to mountain bike the 108-mile White Rim Trail in Canyonlands National Park. If I carried the supplies Id used over the three days it took me the first time I rode that trail in 2000, Id have a sixty-pound pack and a sore back before I went ten miles. In my planning estimates this time around, I am hoping to carry fifteen pounds and complete the loop in under twenty-four hours. It will mean following a precision-charted water-management plan to capitalize on the scarce refilling opportunities, no sleeping, and only the bare minimum of stopping. My biggest worry isnt that my legs will get tiredI know they will, and I know how to handle itbut rather that my, uh, undercarriage will become too sensitive to allow me to ride. Crotch coma, as Ive heard it called, comes from the desensitizing overstimulation of the perineum. As I havent ridden my bike any extended distance since last summer, my bike-saddle tolerance is disconcertingly low. Had I anticipated this trip prior to two nights ago I would have gone out for at least one long ride in the Aspen area beforehand. As it happened, some friends and I called off a mountaineering trip at the last moment on Wednesday; the cancellation freed me for a hajj to the desert, a pilgrimage for warmth to reacquaint myself with a landscape other than wintry mountains. Usually, I would leave a detailed schedule of my plans with my roommates, but since I left my home in Aspen without knowing what I was going to do, the only word of my destination I gave was Utah. I briefly researched my trip options by consulting my guidebooks as I drove from Mount Sopris to Utah Thursday night. The result has been a capriciously impromptu vacation, one that will even incorporate dropping in on a big campout party near Goblin Valley State Park tonight. Its nearing ten-thirty A.M. as I pedal into the shade of a very lonesome juniper and survey my sunbaked surroundings. The rolling scrub desert gradually drops away into a region of painted rock domes, hidden cliffs, weathered and warped bluffs, tilted and tortured canyons, and broken monoliths. This is hoodoo country; this is voodoo country. This is Abbeys country, the red wasteland beyond the end of the roads. Since I arrived after dark last night, I wasnt able to see much of the landscape on my drive in to the trailhead. As I scan the middle ground to the east for any sign of my destination canyon, I take out my chocolate muffin from the Moab grocerys bakery and have to practically choke it down; both the muffin and my mouth have dried out from exposure to the arid wind. There are copious signs of meandering cattle from a ranchers ongoing attempt to make his living against the odds of the desert. The herds trample sinuous tracks through the indigenous life that spreads out in the ample space: a lace of grasses, foot-tall hedgehog cacti, and black microbiotic crust cloak the red earth. I wash down the rest of the muffin, except for a few crumbs in the wrapper, with several pulls from the CamelBaks hydration tube fastened to my shoulder strap. Remounting, I roll down the road in the wind-protected lee of the ridgeline in front of me, but at the top of the next hill, Im thrust into battle against the gusts once more. After another twenty minutes pistoning my legs along this blast furnace of a road, I see a group of motorbikers passing me on their way to the Maze District of Canyonlands. The dust from the motorbikes blows straight into my face, clogging my nose, my eyes, my tear ducts, even gluing itself to my teeth. I grimace at the grit pasted on my lips, lick my teeth clean, and press on, thinking about where those bikers would be headed. Ive visited the Maze only once myself, for about half an hour, nearly ten years ago. When our Cataract Canyon rafting party pulled over in the afternoon to set up camp along the Colorado River at a beach called Spanish Bottom, I hiked a thousand feet up over the rim rock into a place known as the Dolls House. Fifty-to-one-hundred-foot-tall hoodoo rock formations towered above me as I scrambled around the sandstone and granite like a Lilliputian. When I finally turned around to look back at the river, I jerked to a halt and sat on the nearest boulder with a view. It was the first time the features and formative processes of the desert had made me pause and absorb just how small and brave we are, we the human race. Down behind the boats at Spanish Bottom, a furious river churned; suddenly, I perceived in its auburn flow that it was, even at that exact moment, carving that very canyon from a thousand square miles of desert tablelands. From the Dolls House, I had the unexpected impression that I was watching the ongoing birth of an entire landscape, as if I were standing on the rim of an exploding caldera. The vista held for me a feeling of the dawn of time, that primordial epoch before life when there was only desolate land. Like looking through a telescope into the Milky Way and wondering if were alone in the universe, it made me realize with the glaring clarity of desert light how scarce and delicate life is, how insignificant we are when compared with the forces of nature and the dimensions of space. Were my group to board those two rafts a mile in the distance and depart, I would be as cut off from human contact as a person could be. In fifteen to thirty days time, I would starve in a lonely death as I hiked the meanders back upriver to Moab, never again to see the sign or skin of another human. Yet beyond the paucity and the solitude of the surrounding desert, it was an

exultant thought that peeled back the veneer of our self-important delusions. We are not grand because we are at the top of the food chain or because we can alter our environmentthe environment will outlast us with its unfathomable forces and unyielding powers. But rather than be bound and defeated by our insignificance, we are bold because we exercise our will anyway, despite the ephemeral and delicate presence we have in this desert, on this planet, in this universe. I sat for another ten minutes, then, with my perspective as widened as the view from that bluff, I returned to camp and made extra-short work of dinner. Riding down the road past the metal culvert that marks the dried-up source of the West Fork of Blue John Canyon, I pass through a signed intersection where a branch of the dirt road splits off toward Hanksville, a small town an hour to the west at the gateway to Capitol Reef National Park. Hanksville is the closest settlement to the Robbers Roost and the Maze District, and home to the nearest landline public telephone in the region. Just a half mile farther, I pass a slanting grassy plain that was an airstrip until whatever minor catastrophe forced whoever was flying there to head back to more tenable ground. Its an indication of how small planes and helicopters are typically the only efficient means of getting from here to there in this country. Some of the time, though, its not financially worth leaving here to get there, even if you can fly. Better just to stay at home. The Mormons gave their best efforts to transect this part of the country with road grades, but they, too, retreated to the established towns of Green River and Moab. Today most of those Mormon trails have been abandoned and replaced by still barely passable roads whose access by vehicle is, ironically, more sparse than it was by horse or wagon a hundred years ago. Last night I drove fifty-seven miles down the only dirt road in the eastern half of two counties to arrive at my embarkation pointit was two and a half hours of washboard driving during which I didnt pass a single light or a house. Frontier ranchers, rustlers, uranium miners, and oil drillers each left a mark on this land but have folded their hands in deference to the stacked deck of desert livelihood. Those seekers of prosperity werent the first to cross the threshold into this country, only to abandon the region as a barren wasteland: Progressive waves of ancient communities came into being and vanished over the ages in the areas canyon bottoms. Usually, it would be a significant drought or an incursion by hostile bands that made life in the high country and the deserts farther south seem more hospitable. But sometimes there are no defensible answers to explain the sudden evacuation of an entire culture from a particular place. Five thousand years ago, the people of Barrier Creek left their pictographs and petroglyphs at the Great Gallery and Alcove Gallery; then they disappeared. Since they left no written record, why they departed is both a mystery and a springboard for the imagination. Looking at their paintings and standing in their homes, gardens, and trash heaps, I feel connected to the aboriginal pioneers who inhabited these canyons so long ago. As I grind my way out onto the open mesa, the wind slaps at my face, and I find myself already looking forward to the final hike through Horseshoe Canyon, where I will finish my tour. I cant wait to get out of this demeaning wind. To judge from what Ive seen on my ride, there are few significant differences in this area between Blue John Griffiths day and the present. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has graded the century-old horse trail and added scattered signposts, but even the ubiquitous fences that partition the rest of the West are noticeably absent. Perhaps its the lack of barbed wire that makes this place feel so terrifically remote. I spend a lot of time in out-of-the-way areastwo or three days a week in designated wildernesses, even through the winterbut most of them dont feel half as isolated as this back road. As I consider this, abruptly, my solitude changes to loneliness and seems somehow more tenacious. While the regions towns may have simmered since those raucous days when the Robbers Roost was earning its name, the outlying desert is still just as wild. A mile past Burr Pass, my torturous ride into the thirty-mile-an-hour headwind finally comes to an end. I dismount and walk my bike over to a juniper tree and fasten a U-lock through the rear tire. I have little worry that anyone will tamper with my ride out here, but as my dad says, Theres no sense in tempting honest people. I drop the U-locks keys into my left pocket and turn toward the main attraction, Blue John Canyon. I follow a deer path on an overland shortcut, listening to some of my favorite music on my CD player now that the wind isnt blowing so obnoxiously in my ears. After Ive hiked through some dunes of pulverized red sandstone, I come to a sandy gully and see that Ive found my way to the nascent canyon. Good, Im on the right route, I think, and then I notice two people walking out of view thirty yards downcanyon. I leap down the dune into the shallow wash, and once Im around the dunes far corner, I spot the hikers, who look from this distance to be two young women. What are the odds? I think, surprised to find anyone else this far out in the desert. Having been inside my head for three hours, and perhaps wanting to shake that feeling of loneliness picked up out on the road, I pause to take off my headphones, then spur myself to catch up. Theyre moving almost as quickly as I can manage without jogging, and it takes a minute before I can tell that Im making any distance on them at all. Id been fully

expecting a solo descent in the Main Fork of Blue John Canyon, but meeting like-minded people in far-flung places is usually a fun addition to the experience for me, especially if they can keep a fast pace. In any case, I can hardly avoid them at this point. At another bend, they look back and see me but dont wait up. Finally, I catch up with them but cant really pass them unless they stop, which they dont. Realizing that were going to be hiking together for a while, I figure I should initiate a conversation. Howdy, I begin, hows it goin? Im not sure if theyre open to meeting a stranger in the backcountry. They answer with a pair of unadorned his. Hoping for something a little more engaging, I try again. I wasnt expecting to see anyone in the canyon today. Even though it is a Saturday, this place is remote, and so obscure I couldnt even tell it was here from the Robbers Roost dirt access road, despite my map that definitively shows the canyons presence. Yeah, you surprised us, sneaking up like that, the brown-haired woman replies, but then she smiles. Oh, sorry. I was listening to my headphones, kind of wrapped up in my thoughts, I explain. Returning the smile, I extend an introduction: My names Aron. They relax noticeably and share their namesthey are Megan, the brunette who spoke to me and who seems to be the more outgoing one of the pair, and Kristi. Megans shoulder-length hair whirls attractively around her hazel eyes and rosy-cheeked face. Shes wearing a blue zip-neck long-sleeved shirt and blue track pants and carries a blue backpackif I had to guess, Id say she likes the color blue. Kristis blond hair is pulled back in a ponytail that reveals the sunny freckles on her forehead and her deep grayish-blue eyes. Besides her clothesa plain white short-sleeved T-shirt with blue shorts over black long underwearI notice that Kristi has accessorized for the day, wearing small silver hoop earrings and dark sunglasses with faux tortoiseshell frames and a snakeskin-pattern retaining strap. Unusual to have earrings on in a canyon, but Im hardly dressed to kill, so I skip issuing a fashion citation. Both women are in their mid-twenties, and I learn in response to my first question that they both hail from Moab. I briefly work on memorizing their names, and which one is which, so I dont goof it up later. Megan doesnt seem to mind joining me in conversation. She fires off a story about how she and Kristi overshot the Granary Spring Trailhead and got lost in the desert for an hour before they found the start of the canyon. I say I think it is easier to navigate on a bike than in a vehicle because the landscape passes more slowly. Oh my God, if wed been on bikes, wed have dried up in the wind before we got here, Megan cracks, and it serves to break the ice. The canyon is still just a shallow arroyoa dry sandy gulchnestled between two sets of thirty-foot-tall sand dunes. Before the terrain becomes more technical, we ease into a friendly exchange, chatting about our lives in the polarized resort communities of Moab and Aspen. I learn that they, like me, work in the outdoor recreation industry. As logistics managers for Outward Bound, they outfit expeditions from the companys supply warehouse in Moab. I tell them Im a sales and shop worker at the Ute Mountaineer, an outdoor gear store in Aspen. Theres a mostly unspoken acknowledgment among the voluntarily impoverished dues-payers of our towns that its better to be fiscally poor yet rich in experienceliving the dreamthan to be traditionally wealthy but live separate from ones passions. There is an undercurrent of attitude among the high-country proletariat that to buy ones way back into the experience of resort life is a shameful scarlet letter. Better to be the penniless local than the affluent visitor. (But the locals depend on the visitors to survive, so the implied elitism is less than fair.) We understand our mutual membership on the same side of the equation. The same is true of our environmental sensibilities. We each hold Edward Abbeycombative conservationist; anti-development, anti-tourism, and anti-mining essayist; beer swiller; militant ecoterrorist; lover of the wilderness and women (preferably wilderness women, though those are unfortunately rare)as a sage of environmentalism. Remembering an oddball quote of his, I say how he delighted in taking things to the extreme. I think there was an essay where he wrote, Of course, were all hypocrites. The only true act of an environmentalist would be to shoot himself in the head. Otherwise hes still contaminating the place by his mere presence. Thats a paraphrase, but its effectively what he said. Thats kind of morbid, Megan replies, putting on a face of sham guilt for not shooting herself. Moving on from Ed Abbey, we discover that were each experienced in slot canyoneering. Kristi asks me what my favorite slot canyon is, and without hesitation, I recount my experience in Neon Canyon, an unofficially named branch of the Escalante River system in south-central Utah. I wax poetic about its five rappels, the keeper pothole (a deep, steep, and smooth-walled hole in the canyon floor that will keep you there if you dont have a partner to boost out first), and the Golden Cathedral: a bizarre rappel through a sandstone tunnel in the roof of an alcove the size of Saint Peters that leaves you hanging free from the walls for almost sixty feet until you land in a large pool of water and then swim to the shore. Its phenomenal, you have to go, I conclude. Kristi tells me about her favorite slot, which is just across the dirt road from the Granary Spring Trailhead. Its one of the upper forks of the Robbers Roost drainage, nicknamed Mindbender by her Outward Bound friends. She describes a passage in that slot where you

traverse the canyon wedged between the walls some fifteen feet off the ground, the V-shaped slot tapering to a few inches wide at your feet, and even narrower below that. I mentally add that one to my to-do list. A few minutes later, just before noon, we arrive at a steep, smooth slide down a rock face, which heralds the first slot and the deeper, narrower sections that have drawn us to Blue John Canyon. I slide fifteen feet down the rock embankment, skidding on the soles of my sneakers, leaving a pair of black streaks on the pink sandstone and spilling forward into the sand at the bottom of the wall. Hearing the noise as she comes around the corner, Kristi sees me squatting in the dirt and assumes I have fallen. Oh my gosh, are you OK? she asks. Oh yeah, Im fine. I did that on purpose, I tell her in earnest, as the skid truly had been intentional. I catch her glance, a good-natured shot that tells me she believes me but thinks Im silly for not finding an easier way down. I look around and, seeing an obviously less risky access route that would have avoided the slide, I feel slightly foolish. Five minutes later, we come to the first section of difficult down-climbing, a steep descent where its best to turn in and face the rock, reversing moves that one would usually use for climbing up. I go down first, then swing my backpack around to retrieve my video camera and tape Megan and Kristi. Kristi pulls a fifteen-foot-long piece of red webbing out of her matching red climbers backpack and threads it through a metal ring that previous canyoneering parties have suspended on another loop of webbing tied around a rock. The rock is securely wedged in a depression behind the lip of the drop-off, and the webbing system easily holds a persons weight. Grasping the webbing, Megan backs herself down over the drop-off. She has to maneuver around an overhanging chockstonea boulder suspended between the walls of the canyonthat blocks an otherwise easy scramble down into the deepening slot. Once Megan is down, Kristi follows skittishly, as she doesnt completely trust the webbing system. After shes down, I climb back up to retrieve Kristis webbing. We walk thirty feet and come to another drop-off. The walls are much closer now, only two to three feet apart. Megan throws her backpack over the drop before shimmying down between the walls, while Kristi takes a few pictures. I watch Megan descend and help her by pointing out the best handholds and footholds. When Megan is at the bottom of the drop, she discovers that her pack is soaking wet. It turns out her hydration-system hose lost its nozzle when she tossed the pack over the ledge, and was leaking water into the sand. She quickly finds the blue plastic nozzle and stops the waters hemorrhage, saving her from having to return to the trailhead. While its not a big deal that her pack is wet, she has lost precious water. I descend last, my pack on my back and my delicate cameras causing me to get stuck briefly between the walls at several constrictions. Squirming my way over small chockstones, I stem my body across the gap between the walls to follow the plunging canyon floor. There is a log wedged in the slot at one point, and I use it like a ladder on a smooth section of the skinny-people-only descent. While the day up above the rim rock is getting warmer, the air down in the canyon becomes cooler as we enter a four-hundred-yard-long section of the canyon where the walls are over two hundred feet high but only fifteen feet apart. Sunlight never reaches the bottom of this slot. We pick up some ravens feathers, stick them in our hats, and pause for photographs. A half mile later, several side canyons drop into the Main Fork where we are walking, as the walls open up to reveal the sky and a more distant perspective of the cliffs downcanyon. In the sun once again, we stop to share two of my melting chocolate bars. Kristi offers some to Megan, who declines, and Kristi says, I really cant eat all this chocolate by myself... Never mind, yes I can, and we laugh together. We come to an uncertain consensus that this last significant tributary off to the left of the Main Fork is the West Fork, which means its the turnoff for Kristi and Megan to finish their circuit back to the main dirt road about four miles away. We get hung up on saying our goodbyes when Kristi suggests, Come on, Aron, hike out with uswell go get your truck, hang out, and have a beer. Im dedicated to finishing my planned tour, so I counter, How about this?you guys have your harnesses, I have a ropeyou should come with me down through the lower slot and do the Big Drop rappel. We can hike out... see the Great Gallery... Ill give you a lift back to your truck. How far is it? asks Megan. Another eight miles or so, I think. What? You wont get out before dark! Come on, come with us. I really have my heart set on doing the rappel and seeing the petroglyphs. But Ill come around to the Granary Spring Trailhead to meet you when Im done. This they agree to. We sit and look at the maps one more time, confirming our location on the Blue John map from the canyoneering guidebook wed each used to find this remote slot. In my newest copy of Michael Kelseys Canyon Hiking Guide to the Colorado Plateau, there are over a hundred canyons described, each with its own hand-sketched map. Drawn by Kelsey from his personal experience in each canyon, the technical maps and route descriptions are works of art. With cross sections of tricky slots, identifications of hard-to-find petroglyphs and artifact sites, and details of required rappelling equipment, anchor points, and deep-water holes, the book offers enough information for you to sleuth your way through a decision or

figure out where you are, but not a single item extra. After we put away the maps, we stand up, and Kristi says, That picture in the book makes those paintings look like ghosts; theyre kind of spooky. What kind of energy do you think youll find at the Gallery? Hmm. I pause to consider her question. I dunno. Ive felt pretty connected looking at petroglyphs before; its a good feeling. Im excited to see them. Megan double-checks: Youre sure you wont come with us? But Im as set on my choice as they are on theirs. A few minutes before they go, we solidify our plan to meet up around dusk at their campsite back by Granary Spring. Theres going to be a Scooby party tonight of some friends of friends of mine from Aspen, about fifty miles away, just north of Goblin Valley State Park, and we agree to caravan there together. Most groups use paper plates as improvised road signs to an out-of-the-way rendezvous site; my friends have a large stuffed Scooby-Doo to designate the turnoff. After what Ill have completedan all-day adventure tour, fifteen miles of mountain biking and fifteen miles of canyoneeringIll have earned a little relaxation and hopefully a cold beer. It will be good to see these two lovely ladies of the desert again so soon, too. We seal the deal by adding a short hike of Little Wild Horse Canyon, a nontechnical slot in Goblin Valley, to the plan for tomorrow morning.

New friends, we part ways at two P.M. with smiles and waves. Alone once again, I walk downcanyon, continuing on my itinerary. Along the way, I think through the remainder of my vacation time. Now that I have a solid plan for Sunday to hike Little Wild Horse, I speculate that Ill get back to Moab around seven oclock that evening. Ill have just enough time to get my gear and food and water prepared for my bike ride on the White Rim in Canyonlands National Park and catch a nap before starting around midnight. By doing the first thirty miles of the White Rim by headlamp and starlight, I should be able to finish the 108-mile ride late Monday afternoon, in time for a house party my roommates and I have planned for Monday night.

Without warning, my feet stumble in a pile of loose pebbles deposited from the last flash flood, and I swing my arms out to catch my balance. Instantly, my full attention returns to Blue John Canyon. My raven feather is still tucked in the band at the back of my blue ball cap, and I can see its shadow in the sand. It looks goofyI stop in the open canyon and take a picture of my shadow with the feather. Without breaking stride, I unclip my packs waist belt and chest strap, flip my pack around to my chest, and root around inside the mesh outer pouch until I can push play on my portable CD player. Audience cheers give way to a slow lilting guitar intro and then soft lyrics: How is it I never see / The waves that bring her words to me? Im listening to the second set of the February 15 Phish show that I attended three months ago in Las Vegas. After a moment of absorbing the music, I smile. Im glad at the world: This is my happy place. Great tunes, solitude, wilderness, empty mind. The invigoration of hiking alone, moving at my own pace, clears out my thoughts. A sense of mindless happinessnot being happy because of something in particular but being happy because Im happyis one of the reasons why I go to the lengths I do to have some focused time to myself. Feeling aligned in my body and head rejuvenates my spirit. Sometimes, when I get high-minded about it, I think solo hiking is my own method of attaining a transcendental state, a kind of walking meditation. I dont get there when I sit and try to meditate, om-style; it happens only when Im walking by myself. Unfortunately, as soon as I recognize that Im having such a moment, the feeling ebbs, thoughts return, the transcendence evaporates. I work hard to set myself up for that fleeting sense of being wholly pleased, but my judgments about the feeling displace the feeling itself. Although its ephemeral, the general well-being that accompanies such a moment will boost my temperament for hours or even days. Its two-fifteen P.M., and in the balance of sunshine and thin stratus layers, the days weather is poised at equilibrium. In the open section of the canyon, the temperature is about fifteen degrees warmer than it was at the bottom of the deep slot. There are a few full-fledged cumulus clouds listing like lost clipper ships, but no shade. I come upon a wide yellow arroyo entering from the right, and I check my map. This is the East Fork. Kristi and Megan definitely chose the correct fork to return. The choice seemed obvious then, but even obvious decisions need to be double-checked in the backcountry. Navigating in a deep canyon can be deceptively complex. Occasionally, Im tempted to think that theres nothing to it; I just keep going straight. With three-hundred-foot walls fencing me in five feet to either side, I cant really lose the bottom of the canyon, like I can lose the route on a mountainside. But Ive gotten disoriented before. A forty-mile solo trip in Paria Canyon comes to mind. There was a stretch about a third of the way into the canyon when I completely lost track of where I was. I hiked roughly five miles downstream before I found a landmark that indicated an exact position on my map. This became critical, because I needed to find the exit trail before night fell. When youre looking for an entry/exit, sometimes being fifty yards off-route can hide the way. So now I pay close attention to my map. When Im navigating well in the canyons, I check my map even more frequently than when Im on a mountain, maybe every two hundred yards. If we could see the many waves / That float through clouds and

sunken caves / Shed sense at least the words that sought her / On the wind and underwater. The song blends into something atonally sweet but unattended as I pass another shallow wash coming in from the right. On the map, the arroyo seems to correspond with what Kelsey has named Little East Fork, dropping from a higher tableland he labels Goat Park. The elevated benches and rolling juniper-covered highlands of Goat Park to my right are up above the 170-million-year-old Carmel Formation, a sloping capstone of interlayered purple, red, and brown siltstone, limestone, and shale strata deposit. The capstone is more resistant to erosion than the older wind-deposited Navajo sandstone that forms the smooth ruddy-hued cliffs of the scenic slot canyons. In places, this differential erosion creates hoodoos, freestanding rock towers and tepees, and tall dunes of colored stone that dot the upper reaches of the canyons cliffs. The juxtaposed textures, colors, and shapes of the Carmel and Navajo rock layers reflect the polarized landscapes that formed themthe early Jurassic Period sea and the late Triassic Period desert. Settling out from a great sea, the Carmel Formation sediments look like solidified mud that dried up last month. On the other hand, cross-bedded patterns in the Navajo sandstone reveal its ancestry from shifting sand dunes: One fifteen-foot-high band in the cliffs displays inlaid lines slanting to the right; the next bands layers slant to the left; and above that, the stratification lines lie perfectly horizontal. Over the eons, the dunes repeatedly changed shape under the prevailing force of wind blowing across an ancient Sahara-like desert, devoid of vegetation. Depending if the sandstone shapes left behind are beat upon more by wind or by water, they look like either rough-hewn sand domes or polished cliffs. All this beauty keeps a smile on my face. I estimate that the distance I have left to cover is about a half mile until I reach the narrow slot above the sixty-five-foot-high Big Drop rappel. This two-hundred-yard-long slot marks the midpoint of my descent in Blue John and Horseshoe canyons. Ive come about seven miles from where I left my bike, and I have about eight miles to get to my truck. Once I reach the narrow slot, there will be some short sections of downclimbing, maneuvering over and under a series of chockstones, then 125 yards of very tight slot, some of it only eighteen inches wide, to get to the platform where two bolt-and-hanger sets provide an anchor for the rappel. Rappel bolts are typically three-inch-long, three-eighths-inch-diameter expansion bolts set in either hand- or cordless-drilled holes that secure a disc of flat metal bent into an L-shape called a hanger. The hangers have two holes, one in the flush section for the bolt to hold it to the wall, and one in the bent lip that can be clipped by a carabiner, a screw-gate chain link, or threaded with a length of webbing. When the bolt is properly installed in solid rock, you can load several thousand pounds on it without concern, but in slot canyons, the rock often rots around the bolt shaft due to frequent flooding events. Its reassuring when there are two bolt/hangers that can be used in tandem, in case one unexpectedly fails. I have my climbing rope, harness, belay device, and webbing with me for the rappel, and I have my headlamp along to search crevices for snakes before putting my hands in them. Im already thinking ahead to the hike after the rappel, especially the Great Gallery. Kelseys guidebook calls it the best pictograph panel on the Colorado Plateauand the Barrier Creek style, the style against which all others are comparedwhich has piqued my interest since I read about it on my drive to Utah two days ago. Gold in my hair / In a country pool / Standing and waving / The rain, wind on the runway. Im caught up in another song and barely notice the canyon walls closing in, forming the beginning of the slot, this one more like a back alley between a couple of self-storage warehouses than the skyscrapers of the upper slot. An anthemic guitar riff accompanies me as my stride turns into more of a strut and I pump my right fist in the air. Then I reach the first drop-off in the floor of the canyon, a dryfall. Were there water in the canyon, this would be a waterfall. A harder layer embedded in the sandstone has proved more resistant to erosion by the floods, and this dark conglomerate forms the lip at the drop. From the ledge where Im standing to the continuing canyon bottom is about ten feet. About twenty feet downcanyon, an S-shaped log is jammed between the walls. It would provide an easier descent path if I could get to it, but it seems more difficult to access via the shallow and sloping conglomerate shelf on my right than by the ten-foot drop to the canyon floor over the lip in front of me. I use a few good in-cut handholds on my left to lower myself around the overhang, gripping the sandstone huecoswater-hollowed holes in the walllike jug handles. At full extension, my legs dangle two, maybe three feet off the floor. I let go and drop off the dryfall, landing in a sandy concavity carved deeper than the surrounding floor by the impact of floodwaters dropping over the lip. My feet hit the dried mud, which cracks and crumbles like plaster; I sink up to my shoe tops in the powdery platelets. Its not a difficult maneuver, but I couldnt climb directly up the drop-off from below. Im committed to my course; theres no going back. A new song starts up in my headphones as I walk under the S-log, and the canyon deepens to thirty feet below the tops of the sand domes overhead. I fear I never told you the story of the ghost / That I once knew and talked to, of whom I never boast. The pale sky is still visible above this

ten-foot-wide gash in the earths surface. In my path are two van-sized chockstones a hundred feet apart. One is just a foot off the sandy canyon bottom; the next sits square on the corridor floor. I scramble over both blockages. The canyon narrows to four feet wide, with undulating and twisting walls that lead me to the left then back to the right, through a straight passage, then left and right again, all the while deepening. Colossal flood action has scooped out beach balls of rock from the sandstone walls and wedged logs thirty feet overhead. Slot canyons are the last place you want to be during a desert thunderstorm. The sky directly above the canyon might be clear, but a cloudburst in the watershed even ten or twenty miles away can maul and drown unwary canyoneers. In a flood, the rain falls faster than the ground can absorb it. In the eastern United States, it might take the ground days or weeks to reach saturation and for rivers to flood after many inches or even feet of rain. In the desert, the hard sunbaked earth acts like fired clay-tile shingles, and a flood can start from a fraction of an inch of rain that might come in five minutes from a single storm cloud. Chased off the impermeable hardscrabble, the downpour creates a surging deluge. Runoff gathers from converging drainages and quickly becomes a foot of water in a forty-foot-wide section of the canyon. That same amount of water becomes a catastrophic torrent in a confined space. Where the walls narrow to four feet, the flood turns into a ten-foot-high chaos of churning mud and debris that moves boulders, sculpts canyons, lodges drift material in constrictions, and kills anything that cant climb to safety. In this meandering section of the narrow canyon, silt residue from the most recent flood coats the walls to a height of twelve feet above the beachlike floor, and decades of scour marks overlay the rosy and purplish striations of exposed rock. The undulating walls distort the flat lines of the strata and grab my attention in one spot where the opposing walls dive in front of each other at a double-hairpin meander. I stop to take a few photographs. I note that the time stamp is a minute slow compared to my watch: The digital cameras screen says it is 2:41 P.M., Saturday afternoon, April 26, 2003. I bob my head to the music as I walk another twenty yards and come to a series of three chockstones and scramble over them. Then I see another five chockstones, all the size of large refrigerators, wedged at varying heights off the canyon floor like a boulder gauntlet. Its unusual to see so many chockstones lined up in such evenly spaced proximity. With two feet of clearance under the first suspended chockstone, I have to crawl under it on my bellythe only time Ive ever had to get this low in a canyonbut there is no alternative. The next chockstone is wedged a little higher off the ground. I stand and brush myself off, then squat and duck to pass under. A crawl on all fours and two more squat-and-duck maneuvers, and Ive passed the remaining chockstones. The defile is over sixty feet deep at this point, having dropped fifty feet below the sand domes in two hundred feet of linear distance. I come to another drop-off. This one is maybe eleven or twelve feet high, a foot higher and of a different geometry than the overhang I descended ten minutes ago. Another refrigerator chockstone is wedged between the walls, ten feet downstream from and at the same height as the ledge. It gives the space below the drop-off the claustrophobic feel of a short tunnel. Instead of the walls widening after the drop-off, or opening into a bowl at the bottom of the canyon, here the slot narrows to a consistent three feet across at the lip of the drop-off and continues at that width for fifty feet down the canyon. Sometimes in narrow passages like this one, its possible for me to stem my body across the slot, with my feet and back pushing out in opposite directions against the walls. Controlling this counterpressure by switching my hands and feet on the opposing walls, I can move up or down the shoulder-width crevice fairly easily as long as the friction contact stays solid between the walls and my hands, feet, and back. This technique is known as stemming or chimneying; you can imagine using it to climb up the inside of a chimney. Just below the ledge where Im standing is a chockstone the size of a large bus tire, stuck fast in the channel between the walls, a few feet out from the lip. If I can step onto it, then Ill have a nine-foot height to descend, less than that of the first overhang. Ill dangle off the chockstone, then take a short fall onto the rounded rocks piled on the canyon floor. Stemming across the canyon at the lip of the drop-off, with one foot and one hand on each of the walls, I traverse out to the chockstone. I press my back against the south wall and lock my left knee, which pushes my foot tight against the north wall. With my right foot, I kick at the boulder to test how stuck it is. Its jammed tightly enough to hold my weight. I lower myself from the chimneying position and step onto the chockstone. It supports me but teeters slightly. After confirming that I dont want to chimney down from the chockstones height, I squat and grip the rear of the lodged boulder, turning to face back upcanyon. Sliding my belly over the front edge, I can lower myself and hang from my fully extended arms, akin to climbing down from the roof of a house. As I dangle, I feel the stone respond to my adjusting grip with a scraping quake as my bodys weight applies enough torque to disturb it from its position. Instantly, I know this is trouble, and instinctively, I let go of the rotating boulder to land on the round rocks below. When I look up,

the backlit chockstone falling toward my head consumes the sky. Fear shoots my hands over my head. I cant move backward or Ill fall over a small ledge. My only hope is to push off the falling rock and get my head out of its way. The next three seconds play out at a tenth of their normal speed. Time dilates, as if Im dreaming, and my reactions decelerate. In slow motion: The rock smashes my left hand against the south wall; my eyes register the collision, and I yank my left arm back as the rock ricochets; the boulder then crushes my right hand and ensnares my right arm at the wrist, palm in, thumb up, fingers extended; the rock slides another foot down the wall with my arm in tow, tearing the skin off the lateral side of my forearm. Then silence. My disbelief paralyzes me temporarily as I stare at the sight of my arm vanishing into an implausibly small gap between the fallen boulder and the canyon wall. Within moments, my nervous systems pain response overcomes the initial shock. Good Christ, my hand. The flaring agony throws me into a panic. I grimace and growl a sharp Fuck! My mind commands my body, Get your hand out of there! I yank my arm three times in a naive attempt to pull it out. But Im stuck. Anxiety has my brain tweaking; searing-hot pain shoots from my wrist up my arm. Im frantic, and I cry out, Oh shit, oh shit, oh shit! My desperate brain conjures up a probably apocryphal story in which an adrenaline-stoked mom lifts an overturned car to free her baby. Id give it even odds that its made up, but I do know for certain that right now, while my bodys chemicals are raging at full flood, is the best chance Ill have to free myself with brute force. I shove against the large boulder, heaving against it, pushing with my left hand, lifting with my knees pressed under the rock. I get good leverage with the aid of a twelve-inch shelf in front of my feet. Standing on that, I brace my thighs under the boulder and thrust upward repeatedly, grunting, Come on... move! Nothing. I rest, and then I surge again against the rock. Again nothing. I replant my feet. Feeling around for a better grip on the bottom of the chockstone, I reposition my upturned left hand on a handle of rock, take a deep breath, and slam into the boulder, harder than any of my previous attempts. Yeearrgg... unnnhhh, the exertion forces the air from my lungs, all but masking the quiet, hollow sound of the boulder tottering. The stones movement is imperceptible; all I get is a spike in the already extravagant pain, and I gasp, Ow! Fuck! Ive shifted the boulder a fraction of an inch, and its settled onto my wrist a bit more. This thing weighs a lot more than I doits a testament to how amped I am that I moved it at alland now all I want is to move it back. I get into position again, pulling with my left hand on top of the stone, and budge the rock back ever so slightly, reversing what I just did. The pain eases a little. In the process, Ive lacerated and bruised the skin over my left quadriceps above the knee. Im sweating hard. With my left hand, I lift my right shirtsleeve off my shoulder and wipe my forehead. My chest heaves. I need a drink, but when I suck on my hydration-system hose, I find my water reservoir is empty. I have a liter of water in a Lexan bottle in my backpack, but it takes me a few seconds to realize I wont be able to sling my pack off my right arm. I remove my camera from my neck and put it on the boulder. Once I have my left arm free of the pack strap, I expand the right strap, tuck my head inside the loop, and pull the strap over my left shoulder so it encompasses my torso. The weight of the rappelling equipment, video camera, and water bottle tugs the pack down to my feet, and then I step out of the strap loop. Extracting the dark gray water bottle from the bottom of my pack, I unscrew the top, and before I realize the significance of what Im doing, I gulp three large mouthfuls of water and halt to pant for breath. Then it hits me: In five seconds, Ive guzzled a third of my entire remaining water supply. Oh, damn, dude, cap that and put it away. No more water. I screw down the lid tight, drop the bottle into the pack resting at my knees, and take three deep breaths. OK, time to relax. The adrenalines not going to get you out of here. Lets look this over, see what we got. Amazingly, its been half an hour since the accident. The decision to get objective with my situation and stop rushing from one brutish attempt to the next allows my energy to settle down. This isnt going to be over quickly, so I need to start thinking. To do that, I need to be calm. The first thing I decide to do is examine the area where the boulder has my wrist pinned. Gravity and friction have wedged the chockstone, now suspended about four feet above the canyon floor, into a new set of constriction points. At three spots, the opposing walls secure the rock. On the downcanyon side of the boulder, my hand and wrist form a fourth support where they are caught in the grip of this horrific handshake. I think, My hand isnt just stuck in there, its actually holding this boulder off the wall. Oh, man, Im fucked. I reach my left fingers down to my right hand where it is visible along the north wall of the canyon. Poking down into the small gap above the catch point, I touch my thumb, which is already a sickly gray color. Its cocked sideways in the space and looks terribly unnatural. I straighten my thumb with the fore and middle fingers of my left hand. There is no feeling in any part of my right hand at all. I accept this with a sense of detachment, as if Im diagnosing someone elses problem. This clinical objectivity calms me. Without sensation, it doesnt seem as much my handif it were my hand, I could feel it when I touched it. The

farthest part of my arm I can feel is my wrist, where the boulder is pinning it. Judging by appearances, the lack of any bone-splitting noises during the accident, and how it all feels to my left hand, I probably dont have any broken bones. From the nature of the accident, though, there is very likely substantial soft-tissue damage at the least, and for all I know, something could be broken in the middle of my hand. Either way, not good. Investigating the underside of the boulder, I can touch the little finger on my right hand and feel its position with my left hand. Its twisted up inside my palm, in a partial fist; my muscles seem to be in a state of forced contraction. I cant relax my hand or extend any of my fingers. I try to wiggle each one independently. Theres no movement whatsoever. I try flexing my muscles to make a tighter fist, but there isnt even the slightest twitch. Double that on the not good. Nearer to my chest along the wall, I cant quite get my left forefinger up to where it can touch my right wrist from below. My little finger can barely slide into the space between the boulder and the wall, brushing my arm at a spot on the lateral side of the knob of my wrist. I withdraw from prodding around and look at my left wrist and estimate that it is three inches thick. My right wrist is being compressed to one sixth its normal thickness. If not for the bones, the weight of the boulder would squeeze my arm flat. Judging from the paleness of my right hand, and the fact that theres no blood loss from a traumatic injury, its probable that I have no circulation getting to or from my trapped hand. The lack of sensation or movement probably means my nerves are damaged. Whatever injuries are present, my right hand seems to be entirely isolated from my bodys circulatory, nervous, and motor-control systems. Thats three-for-three on the not good checklist. An inner voice explodes into expletives at the prognosis: Shit! How did this happen? What the fuck? How the fuck did you get your hand trapped by a fucking boulder? Look at this! Your hand is crushed; its dying, man, and theres nothing you can do about it. If you dont get blood flow back within a couple hours, its gone. No, its not. Ill get out. I mean, if I dont get out, Im going to lose more than my hand. I have to get out! Reason answers, but reason is not in control here; the adrenaline isnt wholly dissipated yet. Youre stuck, fucked, and out of luck. I dont like to be pessimistic, but the devil on my left shoulder knows better than to keep up any pretenses. The little rhyming bastard is right: My outlook is bleak. But its way too early to dwell on despair. No! Shut up, thats not helpful. Better to keep investigating, see what I learn. Whoever is arguing from my right shoulder makes a good pointits not my hand I need to worry about. Theres a bigger issue. Stressing over the superficial problem will only consume my resources. Right now, I need to focus on gathering more information. With that decision made, a feeling of acceptance settles over me. Looking up to my right, a foot above the top of the boulder on the north wall, I see tiny wads of my flesh, pieces of my arm hair, and stains of my blood streaked on the sandstone. In dragging my arm down the wall, the boulder and smooth Navajo sandstone acted like a grater, scraping off my skins outer layers in thin strips. Peering at the bottom of my arm, I check for more blood, but there is none, not even a lone drip. As I bring my head back up, I bump the bill of my hat, and my sunglasses fall onto my pack at my feet. Picking them up, I see theyve gotten scratched at some point since I had them on in the open sunny part of the canyon an hour ago. Not like thats important, I tell myself, but still I take care to put them on top of the boulder, off to the left side. My headphones have gotten knocked off my ears, but now, and in my calm, I hear the crowd on the live CD cheering. The noise evaporates as the disc winds to a stop, and the sudden silence reinforces my situation. I am irreversibly trapped, standing in the dimly lit bottom of a canyon, unable to move more than a few inches up or down or side to side. Compounding my physical circumstances, no one who will suspect I am missing knows where I am. I violated the prime directive of wilderness travel in failing to leave a detailed trip plan with a responsible person. Still eight miles from my truck, I am alone in an infrequently visited place with no means to contact anyone outside the fifty-yard throw of my voice. Alone in a situation that could very shortly prove to be fatal. My watch says its 3:28 P.M., nearly forty-five minutes since the boulder fell on my arm. I take an inventory of what I have with me, emptying my pack with my left hand, item by item. In my plastic grocery bag, beside the chocolate-bar wrappers and bakery bag with the crumbs of the chocolate muffin, I have two small bean burritos, about five hundred calories total. In the outside mesh pouch, I have my CD player, CDs, extra AA batteries, mini digital video camcorder. My multi-use tool and three-LED headlamp are also in the pouch. I sort through the electronics and pull out the knife tool and the headlamp, setting them on top of the boulder next to my sunglasses. I put my camera into the cloth goggles bag Id been using to keep the grit out of the components, and drop it in the mesh pouch with the other gadgets. Except for the Lexan water bottle and my empty hydration pack, the remaining contents of my pack are my green and yellow climbing rope in its black zippered rope bag; my rock-climbing harness; and the small wad of rappelling equipment Id brought to use at the Big Drop rappel. My next thought is to brainstorm every means possible that could get me out of here.

The easy ideas come first, although some of them are more wishful than realistic. Maybe other canyoneers will traverse this section of slot and find methey might be able to help free me, or even give me clothes, food, and water and go for help. Maybe Megan and Kristi will think somethings wrong when I dont meet them like I said I would, and theyll go look for my truck or notify the Park Service. Maybe my Aspen friends Brad and Leah Yule will do the same when I dont show up for the big Scooby-Doo desert party tonight. But they dont know for sure that Im coming, because I didnt call them when I was in Moab yesterday. Tomorrow, Sunday, is still the weekendmaybe someone will come this way on his or her day off. If Im not out by Monday night, my roommates will miss me for sure; they might even notify the police. Or my manager at the shop where I work will call my mom when I dont turn up on Tuesday. It might take people a few days to figure out where I went, but there could be a search out by Wednesday, and if they find my truck, it wouldnt be long after that. The major preclusion to rescue is that I dont have enough water to wait that longtwenty-two ounces total after my chug a few minutes ago. The average survival time in the desert without water is between two and three days, sometimes as little as a day if youre exerting yourself in 100-degree heat. I figure Ill make it to Monday night. If a rescue comes along before then, it will be an unlikely chance encounter with a fellow canyoneer, not an organized effort of trained personnel. In other words, rescue seems about as probable as winning the lottery. By nature Im an impatient person; when a situation requires me to wait, I need to be doing something to make the time pass. Call me a child of the instant-gratification generation, or maybe my imagination was stunted from too much television, but I dont sit still well. In my present situation, thats probably a good thing. I have a problem to solveI have to get out of hereso I put my mind to what I can do to escape my entrapment. Eliminating a couple ideas that are too dumb (like cracking open my extra AA batteries on the boulder and hoping the acid erodes the chockstone but doesnt eat into my arm), I organize my other options in order of preference: Excavate the rock around my hand with my multi-tool; rig ropes and an anchor above me to lift the boulder off my hand; or amputate my arm. Quickly, each option seems impossible: I dont have the tools to remove enough rock to free my hand; I dont have the hauling power needed, even with a pulley system, to move the boulder; and even though it seems my best option, I dont have the tools, know-how, or emotional gumption to sever my own arm. Perhaps more as a tactic to delay thinking about self-amputation and less as a truly productive effort, I decide to work on an easier optionchipping away the rock to free my arm. Drawing my multi-tool from its perch above the boulder, I extract the longer of the two blades. Im suddenly very glad I decided to add it to my supplies. Picking an easily accessed spot on the boulder in front of my chest and a few inches from my right wrist, I scratch the tip across the boulder in a four-inch line. If I can remove the stone below this line and back toward my fingers about six inches, I will be able to free my hand. But with the demarcated part of the stone being three inches thick in places, Ill have to remove about seventy cubic inches of the boulder. Its a lot of rock, and I know the sandstone is going to make the chipping tedious work. My first attempt to saw down into the boulder along the faint line Ive marked barely scuffs the rock. I try again, pressing harder this time, but the backside of the knife handle indents my forefinger more readily than the cutting edge scores the rock. Changing my grip on the tool, I hold it like Norman Bates and stab at the rock in the same spot. There is no noticeable effect. I try to identify a fracture line, a weakness in the boulder, something I can exploit, but there is nothing. Even if I focus on a small crystalline protuberance in the rock above my wrist where I might be able to break out a chunk, it will be many hours of work before I can remove even that tiny mineralized section. I hit the rock with the butt of my hand, still holding the knife, and ask out loud in an exasperated whine, Why is this sandstone so hard? It seems like every time Ive ever gone climbing on a sandstone formation, I break off a handhold, yet I cant put a dent in this boulder. I settle on a quick experiment to test the relative hardness of the wall. Holding my knife like a pen, I easily etch a capital G on the tableau of the canyons north side, about a foot above my right arm. Slowly, I make a few more printed letters in lowercase, e-o-l-o-g-i-c, and then pause to measure the space with my eyes and lay out the rest of the letters in my mind. Within five minutes, I scratch out three more words, then touch them up, until I can read the phrase Geologic Time Includes Now. I have quoted mountaineer and Colorado Thirteeners guidebook author Gerry Roach, from his Classic Commandments of Mountaineering. Its an elegant way of saying Watch out for falling rocks. As most people who live on fault lines are well aware, the processes shaping and forming the earths crust are current events. Fault lines slip, long-dormant volcanoes explode, mountainsides turn to mud and slide. I remember trekking with my friend Mark Van Eeckhout through a field of boulders and coming upon a house-sized rock. We said to each other, Wow, look at the size of this one! Wed imagined what a spectacle it would be to see something that size separate from a cliff a thousand

feet above and fall, spawning rock slides right and left, crashing with apocalyptic force. But cliffs dont just form in the middle of the night when no ones watching. Ive seen riverbanks collapse, glaciers calve and let loose tremendous icefalls, and boulders plummet from their lofty perches. Gerry Roachs commandment reminds climbers that rocks fall all the time. Sometimes they spontaneously break away; sometimes they get knocked loose. Sometimes they fall when youre so far off you cant even see them, you only hear a clatter; sometimes they fall when you or your partners are climbing below them. Sometimes one will pull loose even though you barely touched it; and sometimes one will fall after youve already stood on top of it... when youre using it for a handhold and it shifts... when your head is right in the way and you put your hands up to save yourself... Its rare. But it happens. Has happened. This chockstone pinning my wrist was stuck for a long time before I came along. And then it not only fell on me, it trapped my arm. Im baffled. It was like the boulder had been put there, set like a hunters trap, waiting for me. This was supposed to be an easy trip, few risks, well within my abilities. Im not out trying to climb a high peak in the middle of winter, Im just taking a vacation. Why didnt the last person who came along dislodge the chockstone? They wouldve had to make the same maneuvers I did to traverse the canyon. What kind of luck do I have that this boulder, wedged here for untold ages, freed itself at the split second that my hands were in the way? Despite obvious evidence to the contrary, it seems astronomically infeasible that this happened. I mean, what are the odds?From Publishers WeeklyRalston's story is one of the most gut-wrenching and compelling real-life adventures in recent years: in early 2003, the avid rock-climber and outdoorsman became trapped in a Utah mountain canyon when an 800-pound boulder pinned his right arm. He spent six days there, fighting both the physical challenges of pain and dehydration, and the psychological horror that eroded his hope and energy. Eventually, he amputated his own arm with his pocket knife in order to gain his freedom. It's a truly remarkable story, and hearing Ralston retell it is alternately fascinating and unbearable. After a brief setup that details his life as an adventurer, he arrives at his moment of horror, walking the listener in painstaking detail through everything he felt and thought; his honest and blunt language (" 'What are you doing, Aron? Get that knife away from your wrist!' I feel vaguely ill... my vision blurs in a nauseating swirl"), paired with his direct and non-sensational delivery, wrap the listener in a mental blanket of claustrophobia. Although squeamish listeners might find this audio presentation too overwhelming, it's a riveting document of one man's extraordinary trial.