



Left: Danny Boyle.  
Right: James Franco as Aron Ralston, shooting on location outside Moab, Utah



**BOYLE:** Every bloody film ends up being about the last film, and you try not to do that. Here we had the challenge of doing something different — to go from a billion beating hearts in India to one guy in Utah. And I like to think of myself as a dynamic filmmaker. In this film he can't move, and I liked the limitations of filmmaking in a story like this. How reductive can you be and have it still remain a movie?

*Did you ever mountain climb?*

**BEAUFOY:** I did spend the most amazing time in Jordan climbing the sandstone rock walls — the ones you see in the film *Lawrence of Arabia*. Alone in the desert, high above the desert floor, dancing with death. I used to do a lot of it when I was less of a fat writer: rock walls in Jordan, snowy mountains in Bolivia, crags in the Lake District of England. I completely understand Aron's drive to be alone in the outdoors. He was heavily criticized after the accident for going out into the wilderness alone, but that's the purest way to experience it.

*Devil's advocate: Why should we care about a man who was dumb enough to go hiking, tell nobody, and lose his arm?*

**BOYLE:** The survival instinct should never be underestimated in any one of us — it connects us all, from the foolish to the brave, from the shrinking violet to the adamant. The man cuts his arm off, yes, but you'd be capable of doing that yourself. You may not do it as successfully as he did — you might not even survive it — but the survival instinct is still there.

**BEAUFOY:** It's also about facing your worst demons, your failings in life. Aron had five days to think through just how he'd got to where he'd got. Not just literally, but metaphorically, in terms of his relationships with his friends and family.

*Is it true that when you met him last winter, Simon, Ralston dragged you up a few mountains, jet lag and all?*

**BEAUFOY:** I thought we were going down the street for coffee and a chat. Instead, he took me up a number of the Flatirons. Five

# The Essence of Survival

A LOOK AT HOW OSCAR-WINNING DIRECTOR DANNY BOYLE BROUGHT ARON RALSTON'S TRUE-LIFE EPIC TO THE BIG SCREEN.

by LOIS CAHALL

**F**OR THEIR FOLLOW-UP TO *Slumdog Millionaire*, the three Englishmen behind that Oscar-winning, \$365 million blockbuster — director Danny Boyle, screenwriter Simon Beaufoy, and producer Christian Colson — left the pulsing, overheated streets of Mumbai and alighted on the vast, snow-dusted plateau surrounding Moab, Utah, to dramatize the true story of Aron Lee Ralston. Ralston, you'll recall, was the 27-year-old mountaineer who, trapped by a boulder, amputated his own arm to save his life in 2003. In the new movie *127 Hours*, James Franco stars as Ralston, who's now 35 and a new father living in Boulder, Colorado. (Ralston was also a consultant on the movie.)

The Brits will admit that watching a guy all alone, pinned under a boulder in a remote canyon — and eventually making the decision to saw through his forearm with the dull

blade on a knockoff Leatherman — might seem an odd choice for a night at the movies. They also insist that the story has universal appeal, and that by the time the self-amputation comes, as Boyle attests, "You're living it with him, and you're egging him on — willing him to do it."

Boyle and Beaufoy talked to us in Salt Lake City when they were still shooting the film, and later by phone as they were finishing up final edits in preparation for a sneak preview at the Telluride Film Festival and the formal premiere in September in Toronto, where three in the audience reportedly fainted during the amputation scene — before a five-minute standing ovation.

**MJ:** Surely you could have selected a more surefire subject for your follow-up to *Slumdog Millionaire* than a guy stuck in a crack. Why'd you do this?