

Dave Hearne

*Prompts: A Crying Boy
A Dark Cave
Become a fully-qualified astronaut*

As a crying boy in a dark cave, becoming a fully-qualified astronaut seemed like the impossible. Especially when you consider that the impossible had to be achieved within an hour!

Between sobs, pushing his matted fringe aside, he looked down at his watch. '11.01'. Now there was less than an hour to go before the entire planet exploded!

He watched water drip from the ceiling, playing its part in the materialization of glistening stalagmites littering the sooty floor of the cave. These upward-growing mounds of mineral deposits that had precipitated from the unremitting cascade of liquid were not particularly mesmerizing, truth be told, however given the penchant writers have for describing such things in their literature, his misfortune could be deemed inadequate without such annotations. Therefore, he watched on, satisfying the preposition, article and adjective count for the paragraph that now concluded.

He wondered what kind of people these writers from Writers Rendezvous actually were, putting him in such a dire situation in the first instance. It was purported to be nothing more than ill-fated happenstance though he did wonder if this lot were a nefarious collection of vexed scribes who took great delight in plotting then penning his doom.

He could not say how he knew about these writers, though post-it notes forging his fate did sit before him, no doubt concocted to seal his fate with devilish delight. Conversely he did not know his own identity: who he was, where he was and what he was doing here. He also didn't know how he'd become an astronaut in the next 56 minutes!

According to NASA, all he needed to do was complete a master's degree that included engineering, biological science, physical science, computer science or mathematics. Then he had to have at least two years of related professional experience obtained after degree completion or at least 1,000 hours pilot-in-command time aboard a jet aircraft. Then there was the long-duration flight physical! Surely a cakewalk in the 55 minutes remaining?

With the die cast, he sat there and continued the tirade of tears for the next 50 minutes, waiting for the boom, of which there could be no escape. He narrowed his eyes and hissed at the post-it notes. 'Character, Setting, Resolution' my arse, he thought to himself.

Snapping out of it, the boy slinked to the entrance of the cave, looking at twin moons glare back at him, shimmering with laughter at his quandary. So, he wasn't on Earth ... wait a second! He purposefully shoved his hands into his pockets, racking his brain to recover from the posthypnotic amnesia that afflicted him. Where had that come from? Posthypnotic amnesia? He'd put something in one of those pockets, something he knew he'd need to regain his memory ... his pocket-pulling became frantic. His hands felt paper, a note hiding in the corner of a back pocket. He unfurled it before his eyes, his heart pounding as memories flooded back to him.

'You are Avon, a fully qualified astronaut, and those writers are about to hypnotise you so you forget who you are! This so they can read all about your demise! Is it any wonder they collectively turn out so much crime fiction? I think not! If you find this note, it's not too late! Your rocket, the 'Dayboro Express', sits on the other side of the cave.'

And in reading those words, he knew who he was. He sped out of the cave, into his ship, and then blasted off. The planet exploded below him but he was safe, headed back to Earth. Crying Boy 1, Writers Rendezvous nil.