

CHALLENGE 20

By David Parker

Lights up on Sebastian Rex, sat at a desk with a laptop, surrounded by empty coffee cups, wine bottles and glasses

He pours the last few drops of wine into his glass. He manages a few drops as he looks through his emails.

Sebastian: 20 new emails.

He sighs and slams the empty bottle down on the table.

For God's sake.

He opens up his emails – they are represented by actors on the stage, who appear under spotlights with each new mail read.

Roberta: Hey Sebastian, how about coming up with a decent challenge this time?

Joe: Dear Sebastian, here is the play, it is crap, love Joe.

Helen: Hi Sebastian. I know you're not expecting masterpieces with these, but come on these challenges are horrible.

The emails start overlapping slightly.

George: Hey jerkface, here's my piece of shit play, to go with your piece of shit prompt.

Fred: Oh what's the point, I'm only in this for the money.

Wendy: Hi Sebastian, your prompt was shit so I just ignored it.

Dan: Sebastian, why do you torture me so?

Davina: Dear Sebastian, the weekend is the only time I get to see my kids, did you ever think about that when you made the weekend challenges? Did you? DID YOU?

Jean: Hey Sebastian. This play is crap, all my plays are crap. I hope you're happy.

Minicabit: Get 25% off your cab bookings during Happy Hour today

Sebastian starts to get more and more stressed and angry, as the emails overlap and repeat more aggressively.

Kyle: Yo Seb. I could have written 50,000 words of my novel this month, but instead I am wasting it on this waste of time.

Robert: Hi Sebastian, I'm only in this play because you also wanted someone called Robert.

Tesco Extra: Dear Mr Rex. As requested, we have processed the return for your order 484BJKGFHT. We have refunded £22.00 to your payment card. It will usually take 3-5 business days for the refund to appear on your card statement.

Harry: Dear Sebastian. Fuck you. Here's my shit.

Irene: Dear Sebastian. I don't know how to use this fancy email so I have posted my play to you, I hope it reaches you safely. From Irene.

Richard: I smeared some shit, that is my play to you.

Charlene: Hey Sebastian. Challenge 14 was the worst. No one's going to want to read this play, this was a waste of life.

Sam: Oh Challenge 14 can eat a dick.

The emails continue to repeat and overlap, until everyone is talking all at once. Eventually Sebastian loses his shit and hurls an empty bottle across the stage.

Sebastian: ENOUGH!

SMASH!

Enter Adam.

Adam: *(Nervously)* Erm... h-hey Sebastian.

Sebastian: Oh... Hey Artistic Director of the Space Adam Hemming – You know I wish you'd let me just call you Adam.

Adam: Is this a bad time? And no, you know the pact we made.

Sebastian sighs.

So, what's the problem then?

Sebastian: No it's fine just... *(He sighs)* Just catching up on my wonderful correspondence with the participants of 29 plays later...

Adam: Oh I'm sure it's not that bad.

Sebastian swivels his laptop round.

Sebastian: See for yourself.

Adam inspects the laptop.

Adam: Oh wow Jesus I... You know if these writers put as much effort into the erm... *colourful* use of language in these emails, we'd have some new Shakespeare's in our midst. I didn't know it were physically possible to end that ligament into *that* orifice.

Sebastian buries his head in his hands.

Hey come on.

Sebastian: All I wanted to do was give people a chance to create some theatre, to give writers a chance to create pieces of writing and experiment with things they never would have dreamed of. And this is the thanks I get.

Adam: I mean, one guy claims to have sent a page of his own shit. And *actually* emailed the physical work across.

Sebastian: The sad thing is... it still counts. It's still a play. Everything is a play, even *this* is a play.

Adam: Not a very good one at that.

Sebastian: And who's going to get blamed for that?

Adam: Who?

Sebastian: Me of course. I came up with these challenges didn't I? So whenever these writers end up writing something rubbish the blame always gets thrown my way.

Adam: Why? It's the shoddy carpenter that blames his tools for collapsing a cupboard. It's the bad driver that blames his car for being on top of a person. It's the piss poor excuse of a person who blames alcohol for the bad mistakes made in life.

And it's the poor writer who blames you when he or she writes a shit play.

Sebastian: That doesn't make me feel any better. Maybe I should come up with some better prompts.

Adam: NO! No Sebastian, your prompts are gold and will continue to be.

Sebastian: Really? Then why are people saying these things? I never wanted this. I hoped people would embrace the challenges, create things they would never dream of doing. But instead it seems people are going out of their way to make shit plays, as if they are trying to spite me.

Adam: Well if people don't like it... Then give them something to hate.

Sebastian: Like what?

Adam pulls up a seat and a glass of wine and begins writing.

Adam: They want a challenge. I'll give them a challenge.

Sebastian: What are you doing?

Adam: I'm coming up with your next challenge. Let's see... When did this theatre first start up?

Sebastian looks at his wine bottle.

Sebastian: 1996.

Adam: 20 years ago. Right... (*Typing*) Write a play with 20 characters in it.

Sebastian: What? You can't do that-

Adam: -One of them is called Robert, the other... (*With glee*) Roberta!

Sebastian: Robert *and* Roberta? No you can't do that Adam, you can't!

Adam: Silence Sebastian!

He downs his wine.

Now let's see. Let's have them set in a Space, or in *The Space*. OR *IN SPACE*!

Sebastian: (*Fearful*) Adam no, stop this you can't. A play *in Space*, it's never been done in the history of 28 or 29 plays-

Adam: There needs to be a build up to something, a dramatic conclusion. Bonus points, they need to reference 1996 in there somewhere.

Sebastian: But no one cares about the bonus points, nobody cares!

Adam: They'll care now Sebastian. They'll all care. You know why? Because they'll hate this challenge! They'll hate it so much that they'll *have* to complete, they'll feel obliged to.

Sebastian: Adam you're scaring me.

Adam: Quiet Sebastian! What else can I get these suckers to do?

Sebastian: Adam please, no more!

Adam: This play will need to be written standing up – ON ONE LEG!

The stage starts to rumble, static comes over the speakers, a storm is heard. The lights start flickering.

Sebastian: Adam stop, you'll be run out of town.

Adam: This play will need to be written between the hours of 2:05 am and 3:16 am. It must feature a character of nervous disposition, a character of multiple origins who has 2 kids, a cheating husband and an allergy to the fur of Siamese cats. It must feature an indoor, outdoor and abstract setting. It has to feature zombies, where one of them is concerned about the unsettling racial conflicts in the United States. One must be a Donald Trump supporter, who falls in love with a Muslim who has an affliction to the works of Jean Paul Satre.

Sebastian: Adam please stop. It's gone to your head, you're gonna burn.

Adam: Don't you see. We have the power here. We come up with the challenges for these writers. They'll hate it, but they'll still write it. With every play these writers create based on an absurd prompt they take one step closer to being our slaves. It starts with the Space, but soon our reach will stretch to the city of London, into every City, every county, every country, every continent, every planet, into every SINGLE CORNER OF CREATION! THIS IS MY ULTIMATE DESTINY SEBASTIAN. THE DESTRUCTION OF REALITY ITSELF!

BANG!

EXPLOSIONS, SMOKE, THUNDER, LIGHTNING, MORE FIRE AND THEN.

Calm.

(Calmly) On second thoughts, maybe 20 characters will be enough...

Sebastian breathes a sigh of relief.

(With great evil) For now.

He lets out an almighty evil laugh as the lights flash on and off and THUNDER sounds.

Curtain