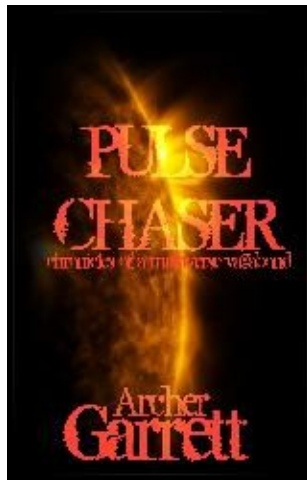


PULSE CHASER

By : **archerg**

What if you were told that this world, as unique and isolated as it may seem, is quite actually far from being all alone in the universe? Would you scoff, or guffaw at such a notion? Perhaps you might feel the urge to introduce the postulator to one of those delightful jackets that often accompany those plush, yet Spartan, padded rooms? I will concede it certainly does seem preposterous, and I myself might even reject such nonsense as high fantasy, if Iâd not been there myself. Perhaps we are alone in the universe; I certainlyâve not met any strange fellows from other planets, but we are most definitely not alone in the multiverse.



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PULSE CHASER

chronicles of a multiverse vagabond

part 1

Archer Garrett

* * *

This is a work of fiction. All of the characters, organizations and events in this novel are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously; any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead is entirely coincidental.

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Journal Prologue

What if you were told that this world, as unique and isolated as it may seem, is quite actually far from being all alone in the universe? Would you scoff, or guffaw at such a notion? Perhaps you might feel the urge to introduce the postulator to one of those delightful jackets that often accompany those plush, yet Spartan, padded rooms? I will concede it certainly does seem preposterous, and I myself might even reject such nonsense as high fantasy, if Iâd not been there myself. Perhaps we are alone in the universe; I certainlyâve not met any strange fellows from *other* planets, but we are most definitely *not* alone in the *multiverse*.

The multiverse, you wonder? What might such a contrivance even be? Please allow me to attempt to explain, given my utter ignorance in all things scientific, much to my grandfatherâs chagrin. The best that can be determined, this alternate earth has not always existed, at least not in its current form. If it did, then it was a mirror image of our own earth. Its history and inhabitants are exact replicas of our own, up until the point of the *split*. This splitting of the worlds was when a unique life was breathed into the alternate earth, and its point of singularity was finally reached. The split was a birth, of sorts.

The fissure of the worlds occurred approximately (or perhaps precisely) at the time of the Carrington Event in 1859. The great solar storm was named after the late Mr. Carrington, a dear friend and colleague of my grandfatherâs, though I never heard the storm referred to by this name. When my grandfather subsequently discovered the existence of the alternate earth, he took to referring to the storm as Dickâs Disaster; Mr. Carrington was rather not amused.

Though they originally thought that they had discovered a completely new realm, a thorough examination of this alternate worldâs history yielded an interesting find. The history of the two worlds began to diverge after Dickâs Disaster. The divergence was minor at first, like a bullet spiraling just slightly off its mark. In the beginning, the differences were subtle and barely noticeable, but as time went on, the contrasts were stark.

The catalyst for these changes was the very thing that put the *disaster* in Dickâs Disaster. Perhaps it was a defense mechanism formulated by the natural order to protect us from an increasingly volatile sun, or perhaps

PULSE CHASER

it was something else, but while *our* sun's storms have subsequently grown more docile, *their* corresponding storms have been much more savage. Mr. Carrington hypothesized that after the storm of 1859, the alternate world began to act as a solar buffer for us, thus allowing our world to continue with its increasingly complex technological advances. The alternate world however, was forced to evolve in a manner that was much more resilient to their frequently-occurring electromagnetic pulses. The volatile atmosphere resulted in the abandonment of the study of electromagnetism, in favor of chemistry and biology, though even they were limited in certain developments because of the storms. The alternate world fell into a prolonged, hybrid Industrial Revolution.

As a child, I always found my grandfather's romanticized recollections of the era of his youth to be fascinating. Later, when he confided in me about his fantastical sojourns to a place that still held close the things that our world had seemingly cast aside, I knew in my heart that I had to see this world for myself.

Upon his death, my grandfather's vast estate was distributed amongst his children and grandchildren. Many considered it to be a family scandal when my brothers received all manner of oil and mineral rights, priceless works of art and numerous other riches, while I, his *supposed* favorite grandson, received nothing other than a bureau containing the bulk of his and Mr. Carrington's journals and research notes. I can still remember the feeling of elation as I, his sole confidante, opened the bureau and retrieved the sealed envelope that waited for me atop the collection of dusty papers. His words are still as clear in my mind as the day I read them.

My dearest William,

I have saved the most precious of my treasures for the only one that will truly appreciate them - you. The greatest danger of wealth unearned, aside from arrogance and a life unlived, is the paralyzing fear of losing what has been gained. I leave you nothing but the riches of an opportunity for a life well lived - a life of adventure. Seizing the few, fleeting moments of glory that this life presents us is not about capitalizing on such an opportunity; it is about shedding the passive for the passionate. So go, shed the passive, my son; revel in the passionate, live your adventure.

In this journal, is but a few of my stories.

-William Stallworth

Journal Entry 37a **An Introduction to the Caribbean Expedition**

I've likely repeated it numerous times in my diaries, but I suppose once more will not cause you any undue suffering; Terra, as I've taken to calling it, advanced in a manner that was technologically divergent from our own path. As a note, Terra is merely Latin for Earth. I've bestowed this alternate world with a title for no other reason than as a measure to distinguish between the two earths, so as to avoid confusion. After perusing some of my earlier entries, I sometimes found *myself* confused as to the whats and whoms of which I was referring. Nonetheless, back to Terra.

Since the study of electromagnetism was mostly abandoned, the minds of many thinkers were freed to pursue other fields of study; namely, these being chemistry, metallurgy and biology. Note I say that the study of electricity was *mostly* abandoned; the electrical *does* exist here, though it is very limited in scope. Because of the need for Faraday cages in all things electric, the costs and application of such can be quite prohibitive.

The advancement of chemistry in Terra was far greater than anything in our world. Many of these discoveries were used for the betterment of society, but some, I fear, will soon be used by evil men - just as we've recently seen in our own world. That however, I shall save for another entry.

PULSE CHASER

As you look around your world, youâ€™ve probably realized that science and technology often outpace the sensibilities and ethics of man. We often have to learn by burning our fingers, but our collective memories are short-term and our lessons learned are soon forgotten; our bandaged fingers always go wobbling back into the dancing flames.

In the early years of the divergence, environmental concerns were nonexistent, and pollution was rampant in both worlds. The inhabitants of the multiverse were forced to eventually address their smog-filled cities and the acid rain that pattered on their heads, but Terra had a far worse problem in the early days â€” what to do with the extremely toxic by-products of chemicals and processes that were being developed?

At first they were dumped openly on the ground in deserts and other sparsely inhabited areas, but this created vast wastelands. Burying the chemicals was attempted next, but due to their highly corrosive nature, contaminated groundwater soon became a dire issue. Finally, a solution was devised; the by-products would be dumped in the depths of the oceans, far from civilization. What could possibly go awry? As we would soon discover, quite a many things, actually.

Most of the creatures of the sea that ventured into the designated dumping grounds quickly perished, but this was not the case for all species. Some creatures experienced horrific mutations, far worse than any could have imagined. One class in particular that was affected in this manner was cephalopods â€” specifically squid and octopi. These creatures experienced vastly increased growth rates and exhibited extremely aggressive and territorial mannerisms. Even so, this journal entry would not exist had it not been for architeuthidae, known to us commoners as the giant squid.

The largest documented architeuthidae was 43â€™ long and weighed over 600 pounds, but many an old sailor had a tale or two of a monstrous beast that exceeded 60â€™ in length. Our toxic dumping had the effect of tripling, or possibly even quadrupling, the size of the already-massive creatures. Entire ships began to disappear without a trace, and sailors began to bring stories to port of mythical krakens, except they were no longer a myth. After a particularly gruesome attack against a barque in the Caribbean was witnessed by a passing vessel, a team of men was organized to track down and exterminate the offending beast. This is where my story begins.

Journal Entry 37c **The Culmination of the Caribbean Expedition**

Weâ€™d been on the hunt for two long months, and every man was exhausted. We had grown weary of our expedition, and all desired far more than a single night in port. Consumption of rum was forbidden by the captain, because of the nature of our charge. Some had even taken to murmuring that it all was a farce; there was no monster, it had all been just another fable created by drunken mariners to explain one more ship lost at sea. I began to fear the men would soon mutiny if the campaign was not abandoned.

There had been no sign of the kraken, as if he *knew* we were seeking him out. I donâ€™t mean to imply that our presence would have struck fear into the beastâ€™s heart, for we certainly wouldnâ€™t have; he had taken ships much larger than ours. If I should dare venture into the mind of the beast (which is a preposterous endeavor, I admit), I would suppose in hindsight that weâ€™d been followed for perhaps weeks; I shall never be convinced otherwise that the kraken had not taken it upon himself to follow us, so that he might better understand his adversary.

We had left Cockburn Town, on the tiny island of Grand Turk, only two days prior on a southeasterly course with a destination of Tortola. Though I no longer recall our exact location, I do know it was somewhere in the Puerto Rico Trench. Knowing what I know now, it shouldâ€™ve been rather obvious to us that we should meet him where we did; the Trench was home to the deepest depths in the Atlantic, the perfect place for the

PULSE CHASER

Kraken to set his snare.

Our ship was an armored cruiser of approximately 250â in length, with a complement of 300 officers and men. She was powered by twin steam engines with a three-mast barque for auxiliary propulsion, to aid us on the open waters. She had been outfitted with a series of massive harpoons that could fire in any conceivable direction or angle. The vessel was smaller than most cruisers, and was selected for that very reason. The thought was that we would need a nimble ship to pursue the beast for days on end, slowly wearing it down until finally, we would strike.

The evening sun blazed like an unbridled inferno, deep in the west. The horizon would soon be awash with oranges and reds and pinks, before fading into a purple so regal that Victoria herself would lust to be wrapped in its cloak. Finally, all would be consumed by a blackness so complete, that we would all certainly die if it were not for the countless, twinkling sentries of the Caribbean night. But for now, the sky was still the deepest of azure, its only blemish the black smoke that billowed from our stacks.

I remember the sky so well because I was on deck, leaning against the starboard railing and breathing in its beauty. Pagan and French were beside me, puffing on their pipes and musing aloud the merits of abandoning ship.

ââ!No, Iâm serious; when we make it to Road Town, Iâm leaving this ship and *never* coming back.â

French laughed heartily and replied, âYou said that in Cockburn Town, and on Cat Island, and in Nassau! But here you are Pagan! I already know you for a liar, but if you keep it up, everyone else will too!â

âHe said it in Miami also.â I added leisurely.

âMiami!â French roared even louder in remembrance as he continued, âI forgot *all* about Miami!â

âBah,â Pagan muttered as flicked his wrist, âthe devil take you both!â

Pagan turned and stared out over the water as he continued to murmur to himself.

Frenchâs laughter slowly faded, until the three of us were standing in silence. He slapped his friend's shoulder reconcilingly and said, âWhile I would agree that freeing ourselves from this floating stockade sounds rather appealing, they would surely find us and hang us from the yardarms, my friend. Tortola is no Puerto Rico; we would certainly be found.â

Pagan did not respond to his friend, but rather continued to stare out across the waves.

âCome on now Pagan, donât-â

âQuiet! *Look at that!*â He ordered.

We both turned and gazed in the direction of Paganâs outstretched arm. In the distance, scarcely more than a hundred yards away, a dark shadow rested just beneath the surface of the water. Slowly, the shadow drifted in our direction. Suddenly, it surged towards us with a speed and fury that shocked us all into a stupor.

French was the first to wrest himself free of the trance; he turned and fled to alert the others, shrieking and waving his arms all the way. Paganâs pipe clattered on the deck, its sound freeing us from our daze. I fumbled awkwardly with the rifle slung over my shoulder, while Pagan retrieved his in one fluid motion. He

PULSE CHASER

tracked the shadow's movement toward us with deft precision, while continually stepping back from the railing. Suddenly, when it seemed it would certainly slam into our hull, the apparition disappeared into the depths.

We turned and stared at each other, dumbfounded as to what had just occurred, too frightened to speak. By now, a group of sailors had begun to gather behind us, on the upper deck. A chorus of laughter began to erupt among them as they looked down upon the likes of us, shaking visibly while we clutched our rifles. Pagan turned and violently shook a fist at them while remaining perfectly quiet, but it did no good.

Finally, I spoke.

“Perhaps it was a whale?”

He turned and scowled at me as he snarled back, “Weren't no *whale*.”

As Pagan began to edge closer to the side of the boat, I tried to talk him back, but it was no use. “Give it a moment!” I pleaded, and then, “Stand down now!”

When he reached the railing, he leaned over cautiously, his rifle still plastered to his shoulder at the ready. For several long moments he stared down into the blue abyss, scanning intensely for any sign of the disturbance.

Pagan jerked his head around as the catcalls from above began to rain down on us more intensely. He pointed at the leader of the group and began to curse violently at them, his face red with fury. The men cackled and riposted with insults of their own, until all at once, they grew silent and stared at him blankly.

I watched in horror as Pagan continued to berate the men, thinking he had triumphantly threatened them into silence. His sneer faded into a look of confusion, as a steady patter of seawater began to rain down upon him. My heart sank as I watched his face flash with terror as he looked skyward and saw the towering, black tentacle that loomed overhead. I shouldered my rifle and fired at the limb, but it was too late. The feeler lunged at Pagan and wrapped around his torso before he could utter a sound. His eyes bulged from the pressure it exerted on his body as it squeezed him without remorse. As it lifted him off the deck, the massive head of the kraken surfaced; a series of smaller tentacles flailed about, until it brought Pagan near. The feelers then folded outward, like a monstrous flower in bloom, revealing two mandibles that opened and closed hungrily over its mouth. The kraken relaxed its grip just enough for Pagan to cry out with dread, before it tossed him effortlessly into its beak and swallowed him whole.

As my friend's wail was forever cut short, I turned and ran for safety. Overhead I could hear the sounds of pandemonium, but it all was a blur of distant echoes, as if I had suddenly fell into some deep chasm. A confusion of orders and panicked shouts rang out all across the deck. Smoke began to fill the air as shots rang out from rifles and pistols. All of it melted together into a collage of cacophony, except for one sound; I can remember the clarity of metal scraping against metal, as a group of men above me turned the crank that pivoted one of the colossal harpoons towards the beast.

I suddenly slammed face-first against the deck as my feet were yanked out from underneath me. A wave of pain rushed outwards from my nose as crimson sprayed all around me. My eyes watered uncontrollably from the impact to my face; I rubbed them with my sleeve in an attempt to regain my vision, and was astonished at the amount of blood that gushed from my nose and stained my coat. This was not the condition I had hoped to be in during the encounter. Still confused by what had happened, I rolled over onto my back and gazed in trepidation at the ghastly, black arm that had wrapped itself around my ankle. The last moments of my friend's life began to flash to the forefront of my own mind. I strained to reach my rifle, but it was

PULSE CHASER

hopelessly out of my reach. I clawed furiously at the deck as it began to drag me towards the railing.

In the haze that surrounded me, I could hear what sounded like the voices of men calling out to me. Their chants were rhythmic and urgent, like the angry shouts of a lynch mob around a gnarled oak tree. Were they calling for my death?

No! My *cutlass*! The words finally rang true to my ears; of course! I twisted my body and unsheathed my blade; all the while, the railing loomed ominously closer. Despite the sharp pains that shot through my face and the blood that now burned my eyes as it threatened to paint my entire face red, I focused my strength. Every muscle in my body contracted at once, and like a bolt of lightning I shot upright. I growled like a cornered animal and swung the blade in a wide, sweeping arc, connecting perfectly with the stinking, black limb. All around me, I could hear the cheers of the men erupt and then fall silent again; still, it pulled me closer. I hacked furiously, again and again at the tentacle until finally, a screech unlike anything I had ever heard pierced the air. Begrudgingly, the kraken released its grip.

I turned and scrambled on all fours, searching for the traction needed to stand upright, but the deck was slick with my own blood. I finally found my footing and again resumed my retreat; I ducked low and snatched up my rifle mid-stride.

After disappearing behind the quarter deck, I attempted to regain my composure, but my mind refused my efforts. I shrugged out of my coat and cut off one of my shirt sleeves to use as a temporary bandage for my shattered nose. The crimson plume spread quickly across the white cotton, but the pressure did begin to restrict the blood flow.

A great disturbance to my right caused me to turn and look towards the ship's bow. A long tentacle wrapped itself around the ship's front mast and began to tug vigorously. As I peered around the corner, I gasped in shock at what I saw; the kraken slowly began to pull itself up onto the deck.

Our cannons were useless at this angle; all that we had at our disposal were the mighty harpoons. The sailor seated behind the giant, mechanical sea spear began to lower the hulking beast into position as his companions spun him in the direction of his quarry. The kraken screeched angrily as the disgustingly large eye (I would venture to say it was nary a bit less than four feet across!) on the side of its head focused on the sailor and his weapon fashioned uniquely for this very encounter. The beast reared back unexpectedly and spread its numerous, smaller feelers wide, like a strong gust of wind tussling a dainty sun dress. At first, I thought the kraken had seen enough of his foe, and any moment now, he would dive back into the depths, but I was wholly mistaken.

A wave of motion rolled through the creature, as if all of his expanded muscles were contracting in concert. A disgusting, belching noise filled the air, and an even more hideous, black blob shot forth at the harpoon. The shrieks of the men were short-lived; the ink melted man and metal alike.

Something jerked me from behind and almost caused me to tumble backwards; I teetered for a moment as I struggled to regain my balance. Finally, I spun on my heels, rifle at the ready; it was French, urging me to follow him. I chased after him and a small group of others as they frantically raced to the back of the ship. A loud commotion caused me to look over my shoulder one final time; as one of the kraken's long tentacles continued to pull it farther up onto the deck, his second tentacle whipped through the air and flung a group of men like rag dolls. My nights are sometimes still haunted by the sound of their cries and the sudden, sickening crunch as they collided with the ship.

As we rounded the back of the ship, we happened upon a group of marines and sailors. Perhaps it was French's plan all along to meet up with the men, but I am rather unsure; I never asked him later, and he

PULSE CHASER

never brought the encounter up again. From the look in his eyes just moments before, I assumed he aimed to commandeer a lifeboat, which was a perfectly acceptable act of cowardice to me; we *were* facing a kraken, after all. Nonetheless, as the men came into sight, French threw his shoulders back and swaggered up to join them.

I am certain I looked a sight to the others with the blood-soaked bandage tied around my face, but they paid my oddity no mind. As we approached, the men were just finishing the plans for their assault, which seemed to amount to nothing more than to charge the beast with guns blazing. I wanted to remind them that such a tactic had not turned out well for Pagan, but instead held my tongue. At this point, I was fully committed to the idea that we would all certainly die soon, so why should I preclude these men from dying with their honor? The sailors were grim-faced, but the marines appeared as fearless and unshaken as any men I have ever seen. Looking into their eyes, I found my courage; I could fight and die beside men like that.

Once again on the starboard side, we were half the ship's length away from the beast. Martel, the marine's commander, ordered us to follow him in a single-file line along the wall of the quarter house, so as not to garner the kraken's attention. We rushed forward while the beast continued to assault our compatriots.

On Martel's command, we broke our formation and swung wide across the deck. We stood shoulder to shoulder firing on the beast with our lever-action rifles. The rounds pierced the kraken's soft flesh and caused it to emit a blood-curdling squeal. The hair on our arms stood on edge as we continued to march forward, while the war cries of the marines urged us on.

The beast turned his attention to us and began to use his two, long tentacles to pull himself in our direction so that he might consume us whole. The sight of the creature charging our ranks will always be remembered as one of the most strikingly fearsome images recorded in my mind. With every awkward movement of the kraken as he dragged his body across the deck towards us, my life began to flash before my eyes with thoughts of everything I had yet to do. In a moment of selfishness, I was filled with sorrow for my lot, before realizing that the men beside me had wives and children that would never see them again.

When I thought that our fate was surely sealed, a blur caught my eye in the distance. Before I could conceive what the blur might be, a massive harpoon slammed through the kraken's head and sent a hail of splinters in our direction as it pierced the deck an arm's length from our feet. With the creature pinned to the ship, we redoubled our assault with a newfound ferocity. The kraken struggled in vain to wrest itself free, but it was no use. After several more volleys from our rifles, the creature collapsed into a lifeless heap on the deck.

* * *

That night, with a mangled front mast and the sobering loss of seventy brave souls, we turned south and made our way towards Puerto Plata with our trophy. Perhaps it was a commendation from Pagan and the other fallen as they looked down on us from the heavens, or perhaps it was just another of the solar storms that frequent this realm, but we stood on the deck and stared in wonderment at the most magnificent aurora that I have ever witnessed in all of my time in this place. A wholly indescribable array of reds and greens and blues swirled over our heads and reminded me that, as dangerous and unforgiving as our worlds may be, there is often beauty in the midst of the suffering.

Armed with new knowledge of the beasts, the subsequent expeditions paid much less dearly with the lives of their men. Though the beasts are rumored to still lurk in the depths of the deep sea trenches, the stories of them are much rarer these days. Some already say that it was an elaborate conspiracy of sorts, and that they never truly existed at all. But *I* remember the day, with a crimson-stained rag wrapped around my face, I stood in defiance alongside giants of men, and defeated the kraken.

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