 pulse

“Pulse”

Written by B.A. Bellec

All rights reserved.

1st Draft of Manuscript: June 1, 2020

2nd Draft of Manuscript: ETA October 1, 2020

Release: ETA April 2021

This is a sample. The writing here is still subject to editing and the final published version could differ from this draft edition.

No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without permission except in the case of brief quotations in critical articles or reviews.

This book is fiction. The names, characters, businesses, organizations, places, events, and incidents either are the product of the author’s imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Dad, this one is for you!

Thanks for all those monster stories I grew up on.

Preface:

If you read *Someone's Story*, thank you! Thank you for giving me a few hours. For coming back for more. For spreading the word. For giving me the confidence to do this again!

The best way to repay you is to surprise you again.

Pulse is different. It's fun and scary but I always try to write with a purpose. I have a few social messages in the story. It was a different experience to write this compared to the introspection of *Someone's Story*. However, I brought the same passion and I am thrilled with the result!

Also know there will be two books. Maybe more...I broke my first story in half because some of the themes were clashing. Even book 2 will be a bit of a surprise. I will always try and do that. Keep my readers on their toes.

;)

B.A.

What is business?

A contract between parties to deliver goods or services. The current business climate is overrun with greed, nepotism, and the continuous growth model is spiraling out of control as the people at the top gain more and more power. New ideas are few and far between. The golden age of technological innovation has passed and the new generation coming up is being forced to find jobs in a climate dominated by ridiculous assumptions from comfortable people deep into their careers.

What is government?

The individuals the people elect to represent them. Government has become too influenced by business with lobbying, fundraising, and status taking priority over social issues and environmental disaster prevention. The oligarchy running things won't relinquish their old way of thinking and is seemingly okay letting a race war break out while a pandemic sweeps the nation and multiple places catch fire both metaphorically and physically. Government has become a giant popularity contest instead of a means for the people to communicate and influence societal needs.

What is technology?

The primary tools we use to improve our day-to-day lives. Society is becoming neglectful and narcissistic. This is fueled by the social media marketing world of pitching cool rather than creating practical solutions. Brand influencers and lifestyle bloggers dominate

marketing but what are we teaching our youth with this message? Technology has also disconnected us from our surroundings. We have destroyed the roots from just a few generations ago and our social fabric is breaking down. We barely know our neighbors or co-workers and spend most of our time online or watching Netflix, glued to the technology that is supposed to make our lives easier but instead is feeding our addictions. Making matters worse, most people are out of touch with supply chains and have no idea the environmental damage they cause with their lifestyle. They don't understand waste, they just want the next thing and they want that thing to be as cheap as possible. Child labor, sex trafficking, horrible work conditions, pollution, disease. None of it crosses their minds as long as the next thing is affordable. Ignorance is bliss for a little while, but it will catch up with us one day soon.

Business, government, and technology have their flaws. Flaws have by-products. 2020 is a wake-up call. COVID-19, social injustices, wildfires, and Donald Trump. We, as a society, need to be mindful, respectful, and more balanced. Society needs to demand change for any change to happen. If we continue as we are going, who knows what we will unleash next. *Pulse, a work of fiction, could become a reality if we don't start to pay attention to what others are doing and respect our surroundings.*

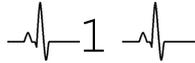
- B.A.

Part 1

All great changes are preceded by chaos.

- Deepak Chopra

Pulse



11:12 AM, Wednesday, July 11, 2040

2 Days Before the Festival

the hiker

THE LAND BELOW WAS BEING destroyed by a parasite. A hiker stands atop a hill, alone. He stopped to take a big gulp of water. It's hot. Sweat is showing through the band on his straw hat with a tie-dye ribbon on it, and his red shirt is stained with hard work. This hill isn't high, especially for someone who has done the Appalachian Trail. This is just a daytrip to get his feet wet before he ramps up his efforts and puts a mountain underneath him in a few weeks. The last few hundred meters of this hill is nothing compared to the grizzled trip up Mount McKinley in Alaska a few years ago.

He looks back down the path. He is high enough that the hill does reveal some of the lay of the land below him. Most notably there is a massive amount of activity. Dozens of construction trucks are parked where they are clearing out trees and putting the finishing touches on the festival grounds. A brand-new ferry dock had been built and a path from the dock to the grounds is also cleared out. The dock itself is sleek and modern, and it leads to a giant archway at least three stories tall. That archway is the thing that catches his eye the most, littered with Pulse logos visible even from up here. The satellite tower is just as tall. It is off to the side a little and sporting at least seven dishes. They all faced different directions. And the screens. There were screens all around the stage and the walls. Huge screens too. The blocks of speakers were the

B.A. Bellec

size of a small vehicle and there were so many blocks he couldn't even count them all.

Music festivals were not a thing the hiker would attend, but he knew of PulseFest. How could he not? It was on social media everywhere for months and Friday was only 2 days away. There was an energy on the island. Panic almost. Trying to get ready for 100,000 people. What he sees he doesn't like. He has been here before. Caumsett Park is a gem for anyone living around New York. Seeing this humungous stage and the destruction it brought to the land makes him want to do something, but he is only one person. He also had heard the rumors. The backroom deal that landed Pulse this island in exchange for the LaGuardia Airport renovation. These politicians didn't have the best interest of a regular person like him in their minds. They want what is best for their survival. This festival left behind a swath of destruction.

Beautiful blue sky. Green trees. Dark blue water crashing into the beaches below. Birds chirping. Squirrels chattering. The sun is beaming down. Get your mind off the evil people that run America and focus on being in the moment.

He swings his backpack off, and it plunks to the ground. The backpack is heavy from all the extra gear he will need on the bigger hikes coming his way. This hike was a training exercise. Load up the flashlight, ropes, binoculars, fire making kit, first-aid kit, and whatever else he could grab out of his garage. Today wouldn't be the day it mattered. Today all he needs is a few things. He pulls out a can opener, followed by some tuna, and a fork.

Tuna is a rarity now. Humanity almost fished tuna to extinction. The price of a can went up tenfold years ago and now you could eat dozens of tubes of paste or have one can of tuna. Still, rewarding a hike with tuna was a requirement. With a few quick spins, the tuna is open, and he sits on a nice rock, taking a ten-minute break to soak in the environment a little more. The smell. Intoxicating. A few shakes of Frank's Red Hot to finish the meal preparation. He wishes he could eat

tuna more often. He used too. Ten years ago. It was his dietary staple in university. Now all he eats most nights is NutriPaste. The nutrient paste was developed by a California company and they marketed it to the booming tech industry. When the wildfires of 2037 happened, Pulse bought the company. The paste is garbage, but you can get an entire box of it for next to nothing. They had flavors, Ice Cream, Taco Night, Pizza Time, Caesar Salad, but all the pastes start to taste the same after a few months. The Food and Drug Administration approved them for mass consumption a few years ago as the primary meal replacement of choice when a mysterious food poisoning outbreak hit most of the United States and somehow NutriPaste was the sole paste that got the approval.

The paste is full of sugar and syrup and becomes quite addicting. Eating anything else besides the nutrient paste is a treat for this hiker and for most people. After fulfilling his food needs, he reaches towards his right wrist. His news feed and social media scrolls in front of him. He does not want that though and moves his right hand down. A menu comes up and he reaches his left hand towards his health tracking app. The data from his hike. He might not have been a fan of what Pulse was doing to the land, but he loved his PulseBand. It was a sleek, small device. White and about the size of a rubber band with a small red Pulse logo and a little black spot where the images projected out. The best thing about a PulseBand is sometimes he would forget it was on because it is so small and light. A marvel of modern technology. The perfect hiking companion among the ten million things it did.

After he analyzes his hike, he takes a quick photo by snapping his fingers on his left hand while holding his right hand out in front of him. A moment later the PulseBand displays a projection of the festival grounds. He snaps again to finalize the photo and then he posts to PulseStar. As soon as he hits send, a few friends and family like the photo. The app then prompts him with some giant red text asking if he would like to promote his message for 0.5 PulseCoin. That was a meal! No way! Enough of this. He turns off his PulseBand and packs up his bag.

B.A. Bellec

Now for the down part. After a few minutes of hiking, he notices something. The different perspective of looking down reveals a berm off to the side of the trail that he missed on the way up. It is also weirdly quiet. As he gets closer, he begins to feel it. Something is off. The vibe has changed. An eerie dread is creeping over the land around here. He debates turning around and going back to the trail, but he is comfortable walking through the bushes from all his time hiking much worse trails and he is only a few steps away from the berm, so he pushes on.

When he comes to the crest, he realizes on the other side is a cave and the berm is the backside where the hill had opened. A giant rock sits at the edge. Teetering almost above it. Ready to collapse down and perhaps close this cave forever. He decides to give the entrance a look, carefully.

He stops and pulls out his flashlight from the massive backpack. The light shines down the cave and hits something white. Is that bone? He makes his way over and around rocks. It is getting darker as he gets deeper. Progress is slow because of the jagged terrain. The entrance is shrinking. He points the light up again towards the white, but can't make it out. Still a little further.

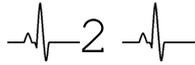
The smell really starts to get to him. Rotting remains. He shines his light around. His hair stands on end as he hears a noise behind him outside the cave. As he spins, he falls. His light flies into the air and lands a few feet away. His backpack, being so massive, pushes up and partially crushes the back of his head. He gets a little dizzy from the impact. Stupid overstuffed bag. When he tries to move his ankle, it immediately stings with pain. What has he done? Stuck on the ground of a cave in the middle of nowhere. That is when he notices the graveyard of carcasses off to the side. He crawls over to the flashlight he dropped and moves it around a bit. Elk, deer, a cougar. Not all of them are picked clean. Some have their throats torn out with fresh flesh dangling. Pools of blood soak the rocks below. Other animals appear to have their organs consumed as if something clawed into them. Even stranger.

Some of these carcasses have no fur, they look sickly and wrinkled. His heart races. His life flashes before his eyes. Sweat beads begin to form on his forehead as he realizes he is trapped on the ground in a cave where a savage beast has been feeding.

A rock shifts powerfully near the entrance. Something large looms. He snaps the light towards the noise. The movement causes his ankle to flair up with pain again. Fifty feet in the distance he sees the silhouette of a bear standing. The light is just hitting enough of it to make out the strange white, wrinkled, and hairless skin of one paw. Something is dripping from its mouth onto the ground around the paw. The creature is having trouble breathing, labored wheezes echo through the cave.

It slowly moves from the entrance making small wheezy grunts every few steps. The hiker yells out to try and scare the monster, but his screams of terror do nothing as what now looks like some type of bear slowly advances. The hiker abandons his bag and his hat, crawling as fast as he can until he finds a small spot to hide. He tries to get his PulseBand to make a call, but it isn't working. The fall must have damaged it. His heart races. His hands become moist from the sweat. His body begins to shake. His mouth is dry. He thinks about his family. They always told him to be careful when he went on these hikes. Guess it finally caught up to him. He turns and his eyes grow wide with fear as the massive white wrinkled paw, dripping with clear slime, crashes towards his head.

B.A. Bellec



5:38 PM, Tuesday, July 3rd, 2040

10 Days Before the Festival

georff

GRIND THE DAY AWAY. THAT is the motto. Georff repeats this in his head over and over. Tonight, he would get what he wants. Tonight, he has a gig! But the gigs have been drying up as of late. It has been weeks since he had one. To pay the bills, he serves coffee. It's boring and his hours are dropping every month. Those stupid red and white orbs. P-7500 is what they call them. To Georff they are a threat against his livelihood. The rich get richer. The owner bought a fancy new P-7500 and then had it programmed to make all the beverages. It is faster than Georff, never makes a mistake, and never takes a break. To make matters worse, once it is done making beverages, it can go out and clean the tables. All for a few thousand dollars. Georff, nor any normal person, just can't compete. The job market was brutal before the P-7500 came to market. The last few years have made it near impossible to find service jobs, which was about all that was left anyways. At least Georff could make people laugh. Those P-7500's can't do that.

Once the last table is clear, he quickly scampers to the back and grabs his duffle bag. Inside it, the recipe for a smile. While still stewing about the P-7500, he slowly pulls on his oversized blue

pants with white polka dots, his giant yellow and red sneakers, and his blue, yellow, and red striped shirt with red suspenders. He is running a little late. He pops in his PulseLens and hurries out. This meant he would have to do the rest of his costume on the fly.

He ordered his PulseCab though the OS projecting in front of his eye now. As soon as he left the back, all the customers looked over and returned surprised glances. You do not see a grown man halfway dressed as a clown in many coffee shops.

Owner: What are you doing! I told you not to change at the shop!

A mother and her two kids were sitting in the corner. The kids look scared by Georff. The P-7500 made its way over towards their table. It stopped and spun a few times. Trying to get their attention. Then the little tiny metal arms came out and it quickly folded a napkin into an origami dog. The children lit up with joy. Georff ignored most of this and hurried out, but he did manage to capture a quick recording on his PulseLens. Before he is even out the door, he has posted on PulseStar with the message: “Whose job are they taking next?”. Entertaining people was about the last thing left for Georff to do and even his days there looked to be numbered. Before long, these P-7500’s would have Netflix standup specials and the rest of us would be stuck struggling to find our next tube of NutriPaste. Georff has other reasons he dons his clown gear besides the money, but if there is no money it would be impossible to maintain.

The electric car pulled up so quietly. It was almost instant too. Just moments passed between ordering the car and exiting the shop, but the car is already arriving. The driver, yet another P-7500. Georff just grinds his teeth and gets in. He did not have another option tonight. Normally he avoided PulseCab like the plague because of his growing anti-Pulse sentiment. Just as he is getting in, his lens

displayed a giant red warning. The message he had just put up had been flagged as insensitive and taken down. This was happening more and more lately. You couldn't say anything bad about a P-7500 or you risked losing access to the Pulse system and if that happened, you were living off the grid in isolation because the whole world runs on Pulse. It would be hard to even buy day-to-day necessities if you got a ban because all the stores ran the OS. After the warning, another message came up asking if he wanted to upgrade to a premium account. Almost every time you do something on the system, they prompt you with some kind of message or upsell. This is driving Georff mad. He cleared the Pulse spam and grumbled under his breath for the duration of the drive.

Once inside his destination, he took the quick left to the restroom and did not waste a second getting out his white, red, and blue makeup and his wig. With almost no time left to spare, he darted up two flights of stairs.

The children can't wait. The laughter fills up the room as soon as he turns the corner. Unlike the stuck-up snobs and their offspring at the coffee shop, the children here were struggling. They needed this. They poked at Georff's two big red puffs of hair. Jumped on his oversized shoes. An hour of balloon animals and cheesy jokes with children that wanted it. Needed it. Nothing beats a gig at the children's hospital for Georff the Clown.



9:52 PM, Tuesday, July 3rd, 2040

Georff is making some Kraft Mac & Cheese and getting ready to settle in and watch his favorite show, Survivor, which is still going strong after 80 seasons. Usually, his dinner is NutriPaste, but Survivor is his treat night and he would always make himself a box

of his favorite treat to go with Survivor even though he could barely afford it. The simple things in life. He is scrolling his PulseStar feed on the wall screen in his kitchen while the water is boiling. Most of the posts are about the PulseFest happening next week. Georff has a mild interest, but couldn't even afford to travel. At least he was going to be able to watch the live stream. Just as the water started to steam, he felt a vibration on his wrist. He quickly raised and leveled his forearm to view the projection.

A paid gig! Tomorrow! On July 4th! Wow!

Georff squeals with glee and immediately posts a smiley face to PulseStar. It must have been a referral from the hospital. He doesn't bother to audit the offer. With the way the last few years have gone, any paying job is good for business. It has been months since the last non-volunteer offer. That is what worried Georff. The P-7500's were taking the service jobs and no one is willing to pay for his entertainment anymore. The modern world was a sad and desperate place. He looks at the photo on the wall. His late wife. She always wanted to have a child and it never happened. Georff missed her and these clown gigs are his way of keeping her legacy going. When Georff puts on that makeup, he always thinks back to those days when she was a nurse in the palliative care section of the children's hospital. Making the kids smile when they were so close to the end was all she ever wanted. Georff kept that going, one job at a time, to honor his late wife and give back to a world falling apart.

He punches his left fist against the accept button projecting above his right wrist, finishes up his Kraft Mac & Cheese, watches Survivor, and then snuggles into bed thinking about all those smiles instead of those stupid P-7500's.



2:34 PM, Wednesday, July 4th, 2040

The reminder came through his PulseBand. He had until 3:30. The destination is somewhere new. A warehouse outside the city, only a few blocks away from the PulseLab. Georff has never been there but knows of the area. Everyone did. PulseLab was where they did most of their research and development. Who knows what they were cooking up. The next great invention to steal more jobs? Another product to give rich people something to desire? Whatever it was, Georff would never be able to afford it.

Because it was a holiday, he had way more time. Instead of taking a PulseCab, he went old school and got in an Uber. His NutriPaste in one hand and his duffel bag containing the clown costume slung over the shoulder of the other arm. The driver is a middle-aged man with a turban.

Driver: Hi there, my name is Rameesh!

He had a thick accent.

Georff: I'm Georff.

Rameesh: Still heading to Unit 12 on Pulse Drive?

Pulse had built the entire industrial complex and had named the roads around it. It covered miles.

Georff: Yup.

Rameesh: So you like small talk? How goes it?

Georff: Not great.

Rameesh: Oh. Sorry to hear that. What's up?

Georff: Well, the coffee shop I work at, they just got a P-7500.

Rameesh: Let me stop you right there. I know all about that feeling.

Georff was thrilled. Another anti-tech'er. Georff leans forward listening to him a little more intently.

Rameesh: Uber is talking about merging with PulseCab. It's probably only a matter of time. I will have nothing. They got my sister too, she used to work at the grocery store. All the cashiers got replaced by P-7500's and she hasn't found a job in months.

Georff: That's the thing. These robots are popping up in every store, but every single robot replaces two or three people. Pretty soon, there won't be any service jobs left. What are we supposed to do? It's getting desperate out there...

They were stopped at a light. Rameesh dug into his pocket and pulled out a business card.

Rameesh: Do me a favor?

Georff: Sure.

Rameesh: Go online and follow me here. When Uber replaces me, I am going to have to play my drums for a living.

He handed it back just as the light turned.

Georff: Oh man! I am a clown dude! Please come find me too!

Rameesh: You know, the crappy thing is you can't get anything out of a ride with a P-7500. It's all efficiency. No interaction.

Georff: I get it. I like having a little conversation. It makes the time fly and I appreciate the comradery. Networking. My worry is that even my clown gigs will dry up in a few months.

Rameesh: I know man. I know. I am lucky to get 1 or 2 drum gigs in a week. Is that where you are going now?

Rameesh points to a building in front of him.

Georff: I guess.

Rameesh: Strange place.

Georff: Must be corporate. I have two acts. One for children and one for adults. My adult act is basically a standup routine.

Rameesh: That's cool.

The warehouse is unmarked. No logo. No name above the door. They pulled up.

Rameesh: Don't forget to find me.

Georff: Did, in the back, on my PulseBand while we were talking.

Rameesh: Cool!

They wave goodbye and Georff pulls his stuff from the trunk then makes his way to the door. A scanner hits his eyes and a female robot voice greets him.

Welcome Georff

The door opens. He steps inside and there is an arrow pointing him left. It seems to be a large circle of approximately a dozen more doors. One opens with a hiss and Georff makes his way towards it. There is also a yellow light above it to capture his attention. The scent of fresh lemon cleaning product fills the air as he approaches. Strange, most greetings are a little more personal and why is the room freshly cleaned. He steps in and it's a small room. All white. Once inside the door closes and seals up abruptly behind him. He can barely see the cracks that outline the door now that it is back in position. Against the wall is a mirror, bench, and stool. How thoughtful. He sits down and puts his smile on.

Fifteen minutes pass, Georff is ready for action, but has no idea what to expect. He just paces the room waiting. He tries to use his PulseBand, but they must have had a corporate efficiency blocker. Then he hears a buzzer. The white wall opposite the door begins to lift revealing an overwhelmingly bright room. After the initial shock of the glare subsides, it looks almost like an operating room with the white floors, glass, sterile steel, and the volume of light cascading down.

To his surprise, across from him is another clown. Georff waves slowly and awkwardly. The other clown does the same. They both start to walk towards the middle. Once Georff starts to leave the smaller room, he sees all the other clowns. There must be twelve, one for each room when he walked in.

Now Georff is worried. He didn't do his homework and this place is giving him a bad vibe. He looks up and sees a glass dome above the room. There appear to be people, but he can't make them out

through the glare of the lights. The real troubling thing is there was no music. No laughter. Just a room full of clowns. Georff stops breathing. He is listening and observing intently. Looking for a clue. A few of the clowns are familiar. It's a small community and Georff knows most of the competition for gigs. They look as lost as him.

No one wants to speak or act first. A few moments feel like an eternity, then abruptly the lights turn red, and the same buzzer from before repeatedly screams out. Multiple cameras drop down from the ceiling. Everyone jumps, spins, and screams.

Terrified, panicked actions and expressions fill the room. Georff isn't immune to fear, his knees are weak. His stomach is turning. His makeup is running from the sweat coming off his forehead. He panics and scrambles to try and get to a wall. There is a small red and white orb with tiny mechanical arms, both holding mini saws, slashing through the clowns leaving nothing but destruction behind. Georff looks down and sees a body. Not a full body. A body sliced clean in two at the hips and the organs have now spilled out in a mass onto the ground below. Blood was still pooling.

Georff knew P-7500's were programmed to never harm a human. Seeing that little orb floating around and dismembering his colleagues to bits was not just terrifying, Georff felt for all of humanity. If this was possible, who knows what other evils lurked in the unknown.

Suddenly, the orb spins towards Georff. Again, he breaks for a safe place against the wall, fighting through another clown on the way. Just before he could get to safety he trips over his big, stupid, oversized shoes. From the ground, he looks up and this time he can make out a man in a black suit standing above him through the glass dome. The man has a giant, sinister grin as he watches the

chaos below unfold. Georff closes his eyes and prays for a miracle as flashes of his late wife cascade into his mind.

**Check out this [post](#) for more
information on *Pulse***