

The Infinity Machine



By Eric Lamb

.*.|:| The [I]nfinity Machine |:|.*. /v(_.- <(Digital Styles)> -._)v=\ by Eric Lamb

"Tudo é tudo, e nada é nada."
- Tim Maia

"Everything is everything, and nothing is nothing."

[a young father with a promising future ahead of him, unexpectedly passes away]

The last thing I remember, I was barely clinging onto life as she wept for me. My sight faded to black until a light appeared. I walked into that light, it was the light from the hospital where I was born. I watched my entire life flash in front of me, and as I finally watched myself die the death that I was currently experiencing, there was a sudden darkness, and then a light behind me. I turned around and saw a black door with a bright light behind it, floating in the void. This is it, the final truth. I was scared, but it was finally my time. I nervously approached the door, and a menu suddenly appeared floating in front of me.

[S]elect your Destination:

[My Home]
[My Space]
[Public Lobbies]
[Recreation Rooms]
[Competitions]
[Events]
[Concert Halls]
[Memory Book]
[Observation Mode]
[Find]
[Library]
[Other]
[Change Server] (Current Server: Milky Way)
[Void]

I was expecting some sort of universal truth revealed to me, not a variety of options to choose from. I was in an existential panic. Was this not the end? I sat for a long time staring at this list and wondering what each of these options meant. I tried to calm myself down, surely I would find the answers through one of these options. After what felt like an eternity of internal struggle, I finally made my choice. (use the search function to make your selection, or just read it through normally, it doesn't matter.)

[Observation Mode]

I wanted to see my family more than anything, but before I could even move my hand towards the option, it was selected. I walked through the door, and there I was back at home in my living room, watching my children comfort my wife as she curled up into a ball of tears on the floor. "Mom it's going to be okay, we're here for you, dad wants us to be strong and live." it was too painful to watch, I did everything I could to speak and reach out, but I was just a ghost.

I heard that ghosts could use ESP or something like that, so I focused as much as I could and, oops, I accidentally pushed the lamp onto the floor. It crashed and scared the hell out of everyone in the room. "I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I did everything I could, I didn't want you to die!" my wife screamed out as my children moved in to comfort her. "Mom, it's okay, everything is okay it was just the lamp, dad isn't mad at you, he loves you and he wants you to be strong." etc.,it was just too much to bear.

Any effort I made to comfort them would either go unnoticed, or cause them more heartache. The last thing I wanted was to be a ghost haunting my family so... I would return here later and use this mode to see what Earth was up to after my passing, as well as observe many other parts of the universe. I also had the option to rewind to the recent past to see anything that I missed. Mostly, I'd return to see my friends and family as they moved on and grew old without me. The result never changed, I'd watch for a while, and then just get sad and leave, and in this moment here and now, watching them made my heart so very heavy, and I'd had enough. I turned around to leave and there was that door and menu.

(S)elect your destination.

[My Home]

I thought the word "home" in my mind and the option was selected before I could even gesture. I was transported to a void and I imagined my ideal home. I thought of my home on Earth, that's all I really wanted, and there I was inside it. I was instantly attacked by all the pets I had ever had in my entire life at once. Were all of you waiting for me? What the hell guys? After being cuddle attacked by my former pets for about an hour or so, I noticed one of my pets venturing over to where my oven once had been, turns out, it had turned into a machine that could prepare any meal in the galaxy.

I watched in awe as my cat, that died when I was 10 years old, walked over to it, opened a menu, and with its paw tapped an option that gave it a world class lobster dish, which it then proceeded to devour without hesitation. I really didn't feel the need to eat, but I discovered that at the same time, I never really got full either. I could enjoy the finest meals from Earth, or any other planet, and I did so periodically while exploring the other new features of my home.

Holographic boomboxes in every room, I found myself organizing a library of music. I thought of an old Motown song and selected the vinyl version. The hologram boombox turned into a old record player, and I was suddenly filled with those warm, familiar sounds. That occasional pop and crackle, the ever so slight wavering of the pitch, the full acoustic warmth of the old analog days.... I would find out later that this was also due to my hearing ability being better than it ever was. I mean, one could spend countless years just absorbed in this endless music library, but anyways..... (yeah I did lol)

There were just so many insane new features to my house, for example, I could change my scenery outside my window just by thinking. Anything from my familiar surroundings, to a dark void, to outer space, tropical sunset, jungle forest... the options were only limited by my own imagination. I could change my appearance at will, I could make my bed any size I wanted, change the size and color (etc.) of rooms, change the lighting and temperature of each room, but with nobody in those rooms... even with my old pets here, eventually it just felt so empty, and the excitement of all of these new features didn't take long to wear off. I longed for social interaction, I felt alone, I missed my friends and my family, and something in my brain made the door appear behind me again.

(S)elect your destination.

[Public Lobbies]

Choose a lobby: a map of the milky way was presented before me, with different locations across the galaxy representing the different lobbies, with a giant lobby in the middle. A strange realization occurred to me, is this what black holes are? Ultra massive planets for spirits? I guess that would make sense, the gravity is so strong that even light can't escape, to beings that are beyond light, THAT might feel like normal gravity. Makes sense to me, idk (it's a story, don't read into it too hard). I picked the black hole closest to Earth and the door opened up into a busy city street. I walked out into the most majestic city that even the most creative of minds on Earth couldn't even imagine. It was like a tropical futuristic paradise.

You could probably tell I'm new in town by the way I'm walking around with my mouth wide open trying to take in the scenery. I was constantly bumping into people on the street because everything was just overwhelming to my senses. "Hey, watch where you're going." a young gentleman said as he bumped into me. "Sorry about that." wait... why did he look familiar? it took me a second. "Professor?" the young gentleman turned around, it was him alright, but he was young and full of confidence, not at all like the burned out old man I knew. "I recognize you, you were one of my students. You're way too young to be here, what happened?" "It's a long story... I came here to see if I could find anyone I knew, you're the first one I ran into. What's going on? What is this place?" The Professor sighed, he was probably on his way somewhere and now he has the burden of giving exposition to my story.

That sigh was as if he had done this many times before, "Most people get in touch with their family or friends first and learn through them. But I suppose as your former professor, maybe the role of educating you on your current circumstances isn't the worst situation. I'm sure you've already come to terms with your own death right?" I paused for a moment, I was unsure, this felt more like a strange dream at this point. "Yeah...." not really though, I was nervous, maybe it was better I heard this from my family and friends, rather from my college professor that hated me for goofing off in class, but... its a bit late for that now. He started going off anyways.

"We're in Pangaea city on Gaia-BH1, I'd imagine if anyone you knew on Earth passed on, they might be here... well, for a while at least. There's a vast universe to explore, but there are also those who are waiting for their loved ones to pass on, you'll most likely find them here in Pangaea city. I myself am waiting for my wife. Time just feels a bit a bit faster for us here so it won't be that much of a wait." he said. I thought of all of my loved ones that have passed on. "How will I find them?" I asked. The Professor smiled. "This city is bigger than you could ever imagine. My advice would be not to rush things, take your time and enjoy yourself, you'll find those you're looking for eventually... but, at the end of the day you can just use the (Find) function to find who or what or whatever you're looking for. But like I said, maybe stop and smell the roses first, take your time, because, it's infinite... Well anyways, I'm on my way to meet a friend at the moment, so I'll see you around."

The professor gave a smirk and a nudge and went on his way. I took his advice and wandered for a while. It truly was a paradise, I experienced more than I could have ever hoped for, I met a lot of the people I was looking for, and made a lot of new friends long the way. Some of Earth's greatest chefs were here in this city, decades and centuries of honing their abilities, not for money or for fame, but because they truly live to see a satisfied customer. Craftsmen and artists of all types decorated the city with untold splendor. This alone could satisfy a lifetimes worth of adventures and encounters, and it was just one small public lobby out of an infinity. Eventually though, I thought of all of the other features the door had to offer, and it seems my curiosity summoned it because when I turned around,

there it was on the wall of the bar I was in. Okay...

(S)elect your destination.

[Find]

The door already knew who I was trying to find, the option was selected and the vision of my father that was in my mind was suddenly appearing on the door as it opened. It took me to a large concert hall where a jazz band was playing. A wild and familiar saxophone solo took over the song and stopped me in my tracks. John Coltrane. My father was a huge Coltrane fan, and my childhood was filled with memories of sitting in the living room, playing with tinker toys and Lincoln logs and other things while my father was listening to Coltrane on vinyl and reading the newspaper in his favorite chair. As the nostalgia took me over, I spotted him. There he was in the front row, with the biggest smile on his face, completely lost in the frantic saxophone solo. I started to move away from the door and towards my father, but a hand on my shoulder stopped me before I could take a step. "Don't bother him now, wait until it's over." I turned around and nobody was there.

The song ended in a roar of applause and then the band and crowd disappeared. My father turned around and it was like he was seeing a ghost. "Son, is that you? Why are you here so soon? What..." "Dad... I..." I burst into tears and my father ran to me and held me in his arms. "I've missed you son, we've got a lot of catching up to do." We took a seat in the empty concert hall, and we did some catching up. After a while, eventually I asked about Grandpa. "He's probably out exploring the universe somewhere, or in some friendly competition, you know how much he liked to race." That made me smile, thinking about Grandpa being the fastest in the universe. Dad smiled too. "You know, I didn't get to spend much time with him growing up. The man was a workaholic and an adrenaline junkie. It wasn't until after I died and I found him that I finally got to spend some time with him. Now it's time for me to do the same for my son." I looked at him puzzled. "What do you mean? You were a great dad and you were always there for me." The door suddenly appeared behind us. "I want to show you something." My father said as he beckoned me to enter.

(S)elect your destination, or continue reading...

[Recreation Rooms]

I walked into the door to find myself in the forest near my home. My father stood before me, standing proud as he motioned his arms across the scenery. "Whaddya think? I built all of this from memory. It might not be exactly the same, but it's enough to feel like you're home again." I looked up to find the tree house that my father had built for us, new as the day he built it. "Dad? What is all this?" "It's the forest paradise we grew up in. The mortal world was all about growing up and taking control, but here, it's okay to let go sometimes and be a child again." My father and I were suddenly children again as he laughed and climbed up the rope ladder. "C'mon! I wanna show you something!"

We climbed up to the tree house to find it looking better than it ever had been. "These were the renovations I wished I could have done before you, your brother, and your sister grew out of it." he said. We hung out at the tree house and played like kids with all of our favorite toys. I climbed to the top of the tree and I noticed that there was an old cabin on top of the hill that was never there before. "Whats that?" I asked. "That's the cabin my grandpa built, it was already gone by the time you were born." I hung in the tree staring at the cabin, thinking about the past before my father continued. "Time passes and the land changes, but the way things were still exist in our memories, and here in this place,

we can recreate them to the best of our abilities, and even make changes. In these rooms, the only limit is your imagination."

and with that in mind, we played adventure like little kids until the sun went down. But as night came, "I think its time to head home, even souls must rest." my father said, we were both exhausted from a full days adventure. The door appeared and opened to reveal a slightly older version of my home. "C'mon, stay a night at my house." I nodded. So I stayed the night at my fathers house, the same house I inherited after he died, but it looked the way it did during his childhood. I took a nice tour through the past and then got some good rest. In the morning I had breakfast with my father, he showed me how to call him or anyone else using telepathy, we did some more catching up, and then we parted ways and went on our next adventures.

(S)elect your destination.

[Concert Halls]

The Concert hall list was an endlessly exciting read, all of the universes greatest superstars that have passed on were here to perform. This was just the list of the current performers, you could also look up your favorite artists to see when they're playing next as well. I went to countless shows and met so many famous musicians and performers, not just from Earth, but from other planets as well. It seems that they're using the recreation rooms to make their ideal practice spaces. You could also view past performances, mortal or otherwise. This is the ultimate music nerds fantasy, and as much as I'd like to stay here forever, as well as go on and on forever about all of the musicians and performance artists that I got to experience, there is much more this universe has to offer..... well.....

...okay, on second thought, let me just flex a little bit (a LOT because you wanna know, right?), I got to see any show, performance, rehearsal, jam sesh etc. anything that my imagination could think of. I got to see Black Sabbath's formation, first shows and rehearsals, Tim Maia's rational cult performances, the moment Marvin Gaye was performing at the Apollo theater and saw Tammi Terrell and rushed to see her, bringing her on stage for her last public performance singing "You're all I need to get by". I saw illegal underground punk and metal shows in Russia and the middle east that risked life and death just to bring a small handful of people comfort and freedom of expression.

I saw a lot of "Occult" black metal forest shows, which now I understand is a lot less about worshipping anything, than it is about the current generation's disdain for the world that the previous generations had left them. I traveled to early Brazil and saw the creation of Capoeira and the Birimbau, the music and "dances" (self defense) that eventually lead to the creation of some of the greatest music (and dance moves) that the Earth had to offer... I watched Lemmy from Motorhead make a drug deal with who would eventually be his drummer and together with Fast Eddie, completely revolutionized rock and roll at a time when heavy metal and punk rock made people think that rock and roll was just a thing of the past. I got to be a transparent ghost witnessing all of this. and eventually you will be too hehehe ;) but tbh you don't need to be a ghost to imagine all of the great music history that you could possibly witness, cmon... dream with me.

Weather Report, Candlemass, 2pac, Choppin, Helloween, Glen Campbell, The Four Tops, Mayhem, Praying Mantis, NWA, Nocturnus, Death(s) (both bands, the Florida death metal band from the 80/90s AND the proto-punk band from the 70s) Van Halen, Dre and Snoop, Judas Priest, Sergio Mendez, Possessed, Hank Williams, Compton's Most Wanted, Rainbow, Bad Religion, Pagonini, Saint Pepsi, Arcturus, Outkast, Ralph Stanley, Darkspace, Smash Mouth (say what you want, they put on a GREAT

live show idgaf), Diana Ross and the Supremes, Johann Sebastian Bach, Negative Approach, V.O.N..... I watched the entire soundtrack of Oh Brother Where Art Thou? Being recorded in the studio.

I watched session recordings of the Motown Funk Brothers in the snake pit of "Hitsville", and I watched them hang out at the morgue next door trying to avoid work, the recording of Bell Witch's Mirror Reaper while mourning the death of drummer Adrian Guerra, the first performance of Mozart's Figaro (the faces of the people in the crowd were a performance unto itself, I think this is why people like reaction videos, and those are all here too if you want), several legendary hip hop shows in South Central LA (sorry east coast, you know we're over 9000% better), the infamous moment which lead to the Count Basie song "Lester Leaps In" in which Lester Young, high as balls, and almost missing the show (to the dismay of his band mates) leaps in at the very last second to deliver the saxophone line and he nails it like a boss. At least that's how the story I heard went anyways, what really happened was a bit less romantic (everyone was high af, memory and nostalgia, it is what it is, no shade from me tbh).

BUT most importantly, I got to see my friends perform again. All of those songs that would have been otherwise lost to time but still existed in my memory. The song my friend wrote about his psychedelic journey, in which he was bestowing all of his earthly knowledge into a green cube, but also at the same time, seeking knowledge and answers to the universal questions from it, as if to say, what you were looking for was inside you the whole time. He never did record it, but he did perform it live, and he insisted that I help him with vocal harmonies, which I did to the best of my abilities.

I think I've made my point and gone off way longer than necessary, OR maybe it was necessary? I wanted to hopefully give YOU an idea of how hard YOU would nerd out, given the access. I hope your imagination runs as wild as mine does, because it's there, waiting for you to experience. But yeah, so anyways... the universe has more to offer than just music, you can come back here anytime you want.

(S)elect your destination.

[Events]

I took a look at the list of events, most of these words were foreign to me, but it would seem the Galangtak catching festival was about to begin, so I opened the door to a strange new planet. "Places everyone! The festival is about to begin, get your nets ready!" said a chubby little alien with a mustache for a beard. A tall, pale alien woman with long flowing rainbow hair was going around handing nets to people and placed one in my hand. I still wasn't sure what was about to happen but-

Suddenly all of the flowers in the field around us opened up and released a glow. "AAAND GO!!" shouted the fat little alien in charge as he jumped up in the air. "Remember! Red is worth 1 point, yellow 3 points, and blue 10 points!" From the flowers emitted different colored lights that shot out, and zoomed around in the air. Wow they're fast! I really didn't do so great, but it was a heck of a lot of fun, I even caught one of the blue ones. Turns out, they're delicious! I never thought alien bugs could taste so good. Especially that blue one, now I see why they're worth so much.

After hunting and snacking, a village elder came and told us the story behind the festival, and there was a fun ritual dance that I got to participate in, and at the end of the night we all sat and looked up at the stars and watched the meteor shower. What a great festival, I got to experience the traditions of a culture that mortals on Earth would never know about, I made friends that I would have never would have otherwise met in a million lifetimes, and I snacked on delicious Galangtak bugs all night long and slept beneath the stars. I awoke feeling well rested, I definitely want to do this again as well as see

some of the other events, but for now, I feel great and I'm ready to continue my journey.

(S)elect your destination.

[Memory Book]

Thoughts of my family and wanting to return to better days turned the door into a book. It was a book of my memories. I really don't want to go into too much detail, but some of my favorite memories include: skipping rocks on the lake with my childhood friends and talking about the latest comics and cartoons, fishing with my brother on summer vacation, my first time leaving my small town, my first kiss, that time I made a funny joke in school and it had everyone laughing for a week straight, my first time seeing the ocean, the time I stole my parents car and crashed it... thinking they'd want to kill me, but they were in tears just glad that I was safe and telling me that everything is going to be okay, meeting my wife for the first time, our first date, us deciding that our kids were old enough to watch my favorite movie, and seeing the looks on their faces as they had their minds blown, reminding me of how I felt when I was their age and having the same experience... etc..

The memory book was 100% accurate, but only according to our fragile memories as mortals. I'd imagine someone with dementia would have a hard time re-experiencing what their final days were actually like, they might have to go into observation mode and rewind time to the best of their abilities. That feature is at least semi-reliable enough at least to the life span of the person viewing it, mostly anyways. It's not so easy for observation mode to look into the past, it goes against the flow of time, and that's what the memory book function is for. I could stay in here forever if I wanted to, get lost in all of the best moments of my life... and I do here and there, but there is so much I want to learn and explore, so I try not to spend too much time in here. (I spend more time in here than I'd like to admit, but... lets move on)

(S)elect your destination.

[Other]

What is this? More options?

[Languages]

[Reference Guide]

[Test Mode]

[ESP Tuning]

[Adjust Visible Color Spectrum]

[Change Planetary Access Points]

[Requests]

[Delivery Services]

[Invisible Mode](OFF)

[Change Permissions]

[Block User]

Fool I was, to think that [Reference Guide] would tell me some kind of meaning behind all of this, but it did do a great job of explaining what all of these different options all do.

[Languages] was a sort of reference manual and could translate other languages in real time. Not super

helpful for communicating with the uh... immortal, seeing as we all communicate telepathically for the most part, but for observation mode it's a must have feature for observing other cultures and other planets. I've not only picked up a lot of the languages from Earth, but a few here and there from other planets as well, mostly from just wanting to understand song lyrics.

[Test Mode] is exactly what you think it is, much like a recreation room but specifically for testing changes made to ones self. You can do this pretty much anywhere, but here you can go into ultra fine detail, even alter your voice, and I definitely spent a lot more time in here than I'd like to admit, making myself look "cool".

[ESP Tuning] is for calibrating psychic powers, which I was barely even aware of, although I wasn't exactly looking to become a vengeful spirit terrorizing mortals, but it could come in handy if you want to make subtle but positive changes on your home planet. Most of us have moved on from our home planet though, we are all one people of the universe, and it won't take you very long in here to realize that either. Most of us choose to leave the mortal worlds alone, but... that's just most of us.

[Adjust Visible Color Spectrum] is a cool feature I didn't know I wanted, I am now able to see infrared and ultraviolet, really cool stuff. You can also access this in test mode, but this is a quick and easy way to flip through different color filters that I've saved as presets.

[Change Planetary Access Points] I did a bit of modifying here, setting my home locations on each mortal and immortal world that I've visited so far. Now when I visit those worlds, instead of the door opening at a random location, it will open at a specific location on each world. I've been changing this constantly as I've been exploring.

[Requests] This is sort of like the Craigslist of the universe, people can request or offer goods and services, there's even a dating section on there as well. Just on a whim to see if I could get some quick answers, I requested that "Someone tell me exactly what the hell is going on. What's the meaning behind all of this?" And I was instantly flooded with responses like "the sooner you stop worrying about it, the sooner you'll find out." or "One of these again? Go vent your existential anxiety on My Space you loser." or "This isn't the place for this, you need to reach out to those close to you to find the answer." or "check the Void." etc.. I did help some guy trying to remember the name of a restaurant from Earth, so I did my good deed and moved on.

[Delivery Services] These are like online stores, only there's no currency, you just look for what you want and it will be delivered. I've always wanted a keytar, so I custom made a keytar made of lightning, and had it delivered right to me. It sounds like anything I want and I couldn't be happier.

[Invisible Mode] currently turned off, maybe if I wanted to lurk on public lobbies and listen to people this might be useful, but I don't feel the need. I'm sure there are some lonely, unlikable souls out there that just want to be around people without being noticed, those who were definitively evil in the mortal life and have faced universal scorn beyond the grave, or maybe the need for this feature goes back into the early days of creation, I can only speculate.

[Change Permissions] you can let other people access your home and recreation rooms etc., you can fully customize the security of your experiences. You can request access as well, and all of this is also accessible through the My Space feature as well, everything here is connected.

[Block User] not sure why I would ever want to "block" someone, whatever that means. I suppose it

would just make you invisible and inaudible to that person, like you don't exist anymore. What really tickled my brain is the fact that it says "User". I had to sit there and wonder about this one for a while. It pulled my brain back into that existential crisis. What are we? What is all this?

After some pondering about my existence, and customizing all of my "settings" and did some looking around, I decided to see what else the door had to offer.

(S)elect your destination.

[My Space]

Wow, so this is what social media would be like if it were something we could connect to with our minds, using telepathy to create an interconnected world that feels real. "Holy hell, what is this? This is crazy!" I said. My words became a physical message. I could see orbiting around me, family, close friends, friends, old friends, and acquaintances orbiting the furthest. It didn't take long to get responses. "What are you doing here so soon? What happened?" and the like. I told my story, and reconnected with lost friends etc., this would be a place I could return to periodically to check up on all the people that I love, even if we are all far apart.

I spent awhile drifting around the realm of thoughts and ideas, although I didn't find the answers I was looking for, it felt comforting to know I wasn't alone. All of the new people I've talked to here and elsewhere were added to the different spheres that orbited the planet-like avatar that represented me, and this more than anything made me feel more connected to the universe as a whole. There was also a feature here to find any of the people you've recently encountered anywhere. This realm is also directly connected to the realm of competitions, and all of the achievements of all of the people I've ever known were on display on their "My Space avatars", I think it's time to add some achievements of my own.

(S)elect your destination.

[Competitions]

Unreal... I know life likes to compete, but this is just ridiculous. The list is so long I could get lost for years just reading on what different types of competitions there are. I know my Grandpa liked to race, so I figured I'd start looking there. I entered as a spectator, and looked at the list of participants. I didn't see his name there, but a familiar face was eyeing that same list with eyes like a hawk. "Uncle is that you?" "Oh hey! Almost didn't recognize ya kiddo how you been?" we caught up for a minute before the race started, seems Grandpa is racing under a fake name so as not to scare away the competition. 1st place! That's my Grandpa! We all caught up and I listened as my Grandpa and Uncle talked about the upcoming races and the participants to worry about. After watching my Grandpa take home another grand prix trophy, I decided to check out some of the other competitions.

I shouldn't be surprised that there are video game speedrunning competitions here too, but what's really surprising is to see an alien from the other side of the galaxy take 2nd place in a Mario 64 any% race. It got me thinking of what sort of competitions other planets had to offer. By far the most popular competitions that I saw were Tetris, and soccer. It seems that other planets had their own version of soccer (futbol), and a universal standard of rules had been set. Tetris on the other hand, swept through the galaxy like wildfire, and had begun to spread throughout the universe. The top players in the cosmos came together to create the ultimate version, although a great deal of purists still play the NES versions.

By far the most exciting competitions to watch were the fights. Sword battles, survival hunts, sniper battles, underground street fights, wizard battles, guild battles, they all had me on the edge of my seat. I'll go back to searching for whatever universal truth is out there once my primal urges have been satisfied, I can't get enough of this excitement! I even saw a fight that looked like it was straight out of a cartoon, two powerful beings destroying an empty planet in their battle, very epic. I didn't end up joining any competitions (yet), but I got my fill of thrills and headed back to the door.

(S)elect your destination.

[Library]

I'm sure most people would have headed here first, perhaps here I would find the answers all living, and non living beings search for. I entered the Milky Way library to find hundreds of thousands of busy minds hard at work, studying. I'm getting the feeling that it's not gonna be so easy to find what I'm looking for. Still, this was a marvel to behold, all of the knowledge of every soul that ever lived in one place, like the library of Alexandria, or Wikipedia, but on a galactic scale.

I wasn't sure where to start, when a menu suddenly appeared before me.

[Media Library]

[Latest Discoveries]

[Historical Records]

[Biology Encyclopedia]

[Space-time Maps]

[Ecosystem Measurements]

[Molecule/Space-time Simulator]

[Discussion/Debates]

[Peer Review]

[Logbook]

[Chat Archive]

[Change Library] (Current Library: Milky Way)

Well that sure is a lot to take in isn't it? I mean, I've got all the time in the universe, so I went through them carefully, one by one.

[Media Library]

I could see why this was the first on the list. The movies, shows, plays, poems, art, music, performance art, all of the documented media from the milky way was here, and it was immense as the stars in the night sky. This also included everything that was in my "boombox" at home, as well as everything in the Concert halls. Rehearsals, private performances, and lost art were also here to find. This area alone seemed to stretch into infinity, I dabbled here and there for a minute (a long time), and I would return here later, but each of these areas of the library are just as endless and infinite.

[Latest Discoveries]

This is just what you'd expect. I read the latest entry, which was about the discovery of life arising on a planet with no star, something that very rarely occurs, even in our cosmos of infinite possibilities. The authors of the article traced the origins of that life to a planet with no atmosphere, in which the microbial life had developed, but hadn't evolved much further due to their environment being starved of natural resources, until a comet collided with the planet and sent its fragments into space. Using the

space-time simulator, they retraced the steps to find that origin planet, and saw the meteor fragment land on that dark planet. There, the microbial life that was hidden inside the meteor fragment found the chlorine and silicon environment that it needed to thrive. Even without sunlight, this now microbial life will perhaps one day, in a few billion years, become a race of sentient beings that will join in our research.

[Historical Records]

Carl Sagan's wet dream, a database containing historical records of every civilization ever recorded in the milky way galaxy. It even contained the Alexandrian library in its entirety. Things that were lost to time were here, everything back to the first records of civilization, but it didn't go any further than that. Other planets had their origins fully mapped out, some, like ours, had many pieces yet to be put together, and many scientists and historians from Earth were still putting all those pieces together. I poured through the chapters of Earth's history, and then I moved on to other planets. I spent an immeasurable amount of time in here, another section I would refer back to in my studies.

[Biology Encyclopedia]

The family trees of each planet was found here. Most of these are a work in progress, with new species being added constantly by researchers hard at work. It was interesting to see how many strange creatures were once alive on our own planet, and then went extinct, and it was the same for every planet. I'm not much of a biologist, but this was still fascinating enough to take up a lot of my time.

[Space-Time Maps]

It's like observation mode but with extra features, mostly oriented towards making observations of the past flow more seamlessly and accurately, with the ability to adjust for certain variables that might factor into changes that occur over time. It's not perfect. but it's slightly less frustrating than regular observation mode once you know how to use it right. Watching the history of the Earth unfold was pretty cool, I also took a peak at what's beneath the clouds of Jupiter, as well as what's in the sea of Neptune, I won't spoil the surprise ;). I'm sure the scientists that spend who knows how long in here researching the universe can tell me what I need to know.

[Ecosystem Measurements]

Much like the space-time maps, but this feature is specifically for measuring atmosphere, analyzing terrain, climate change, biodiversity, statistics like that etc.. Basically just analyzing chemical changes over time to the best of our abilities, measuring statistics, making forecasts, etc.. Taking a look at the Earth, oof, I know I don't need to tell you guys, you already know. But if you could only see what I see, you would be a LOT less complacent about it.

[Molecule/Space-time Simulator]

Much like the recreation rooms or test room, but this room is for testing the physics and chemistry of the universe. I'm sure there are chemists and biologists out there, shrinking themselves to the size of atoms, playing with molecules and subatomic particles and building their own little universes. I'm not much of a scientist, but I did have a lot of fun learning about and experimenting with the elements. My favorite part of this feature was using theoretical chemistry to make all kinds of cool explosions, though I never did figure out how to split an atom apart no matter how hard I tried, so props to the Earth scientists for figuring that one out (not so much props for what they did with it though).

[Discussion/Debates]

This is where the brilliant minds of the milky way come to discuss science and politics. For example, I saw a discussion about whether a virus that's been developing on an asteroid would be a cataclysmic

threat to the nearby planet/civilization, and whether they should intervene. Different estimates showed the predicted survival rate of the species, and it seems a unanimous decision was reached. It would be hard, but they could survive, and as long as at least 25% of the species could survive, they would not intervene. A species must be strong enough to survive and develop on its own, but it seems that some kind of council of scientists is there to keep an eye on things just in case.

[Peer Review]

This is where theories and ideas are presented, and depending on the evidence/experiments, these are either accepted or disproved by the community. You know the drill. As a joke, I presented a report about the theory of how the fart creatures of Melchior-7 came to evolve, and as evidence I submitted a picture of my butt. As a result, I was banned from submitting reports or joining discussions/debates for 15 years. Worth it.

[Logbook]

This is a logbook of changes that have been made to the library, theories that have been altered or disproved, discoveries that were proven to be hoaxes, any alteration or addition or deletion to the library is documented here.

[Chat archive]

This is an endless archive of past discussions/debates. If something new is discovered, a past discussion/debate may be brought out of the archives for further studies. I did searches for “god” and “deity” and “creator” and didn't find anything relevant, mostly just references to the many mortal mythologies of the galaxy. I did see the names of a lot of famous scientists and philosophers from Earth in there, it makes me smile that their thirst for knowledge continued even beyond the grave.

[Change Library] (Current Library: Milky Way)

To think that each galaxy has its own library, it's mind blowing. One could spend a million years in just one of these libraries and never learn everything it has to offer. I don't think I'm ready to venture outside the milky way just yet, there's still so much to experience here, buuuut I did go look at a few just out of curiosity for just a little bit, and woah, the diversity of the Milky Way galaxy was insane enough, being in these other galaxies felt like I was in another reality. I'll be returning here eventually, in a long long time... but for now, back to the Milky Way library.

Being the bold spirit that I am, I went around the library philosophizing with the many characters there about the idea of “God”, or some kind of meaning to existence, thinking that I might just be laughed right out of the library, but I wasn't. There were many rumors about a great “designer” or “architect”, but that's all they were, rumors. The people there weren't shy about talking about such subjects, but at the end of the day, it seems the existence of a higher power comes down to billions of years of “he said, she said.” and that wasn't good enough for me.

Some of the beings in the library were well over a thousand years old, and their answers were to be expected of such ancient and wise creatures. “You must look within yourself to find the truth.” or “And what will you do when you find the answer?” or “And what if there is no answer? What would you do?”. They were no help either, although in a few thousand years, I'll probably sound just as condescending as them.

Was I a fool to think that there was some kind of meaning behind all of this? I was most definitely not the first to feel this way, but maybe their curiosity ended in the same way mine will. There was only one way to find out.

(S)elect your destination.

[Change Server]

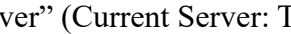
After dabbling in the Milky Way for quite a bit, I decided to see what else was out there. A small map of the universe with the Milky Way in the center was presented before me. I could always call for “home” and the map would re-center to this, so I decided to scroll out as far as I could. I soon discovered that I could zoom out, and that there was no limit to this, so I kept scrolling and zooming out, and scrolling and zooming out... to the point where I was driven by mad obsession. I kept scrolling and zooming out, over and over and over and over again for what seemed like almost an Earth year or so, it just never ended.

I didn't want to give up, I felt like if I chose a destination, I would be admitting defeat. There had to be an end eventually right? After suffering a maddening toll on my mental health, I eventually had a breakdown, and started zooming in, but while still moving outward in the same direction as much as possible. I had zoomed out so much, that everything was a never ending blur of black and grey-blue-green, and it took me what felt like another year of frantic zooming. I wasn't even scrolling anymore, it just felt like being out of oxygen and swimming for the surface, begging to see the surface light for a glimpse of hope. Eventually, a very long eventually.... my frantic zooming came to fruition, and I began to see clusters of galaxies again. I can't even begin to imagine how far from home I was, or what life in the universe is like out here, but I eventually found my way to a rather large galaxy that looked much like my own, and I selected it.

[The  Galaxy]

The creatures in this galaxy heavily relied upon what I can only describe as “smelling” or “scents”, as well as feeling “auras” or something... rather than like us, who primarily use sight and/or sound, or like pretty much any creature we know or could imagine communicates. I say “smelling” or “scents” only because that's the closest thing we have to the sensation, it still doesn't feel quite right to say, but I think that's as close as I'm gonna get. For example, it's not just saying “Hello!”, the essence of that expression also holds a lot of undertones, such as personal feelings towards that person, the state of mind of the person expressing the greeting, the intent of where the conversation is hopefully heading, etc. Each expression is a complex story within itself, it took a while to get used to, and even the ancient ones there who thought they had seen it all had never seen a creature quite like me and were quick to study me and exchange information.

Most probably just stick to their own galaxies, or perhaps only venture out into the local cluster out of sheer boredom or curiosity. But, I wager, over the eons there probably have been many like me, trying to do what I did, scroll out as far as their sanity would let them. I wonder how many had more fortitude than I did, which would either A) They catch up to the ever expanding edge of the universe within the change server universe map realm, and see the universe expanding at the speed of light in real time, or... more likely.... B) Go absolutely insane before they even got close, if such a thing even exists. Makes me wonder about where they eventually ended up.

I shuddered at the thought and was glad that I stopped where I did, I still had a healthy amount of my sanity left, and a lot of things I wanted to do with my existence. The door eventually appeared behind me. (S)elect y- “Change Server” (Current Server: The  Galaxy) “Home.” (Current Server: Milky Way Galaxy) I can't tell you how good it is to look at a map of home after being away for so long.

(S)elect your destination.

[Void]

Now is your chance to read or re-read any of the sections above that you haven't already gotten enough out of. Don't rush, time is infinite. I encourage you to go back, re-read, re-imagine, or recreate. I originally started this story trying to keep things as vague as possible, wanting it to be just a blueprint for YOU to imagine yourself in these same situations, for you to imagine how much time YOU would spend exploring the infinite wonders of the universe etc., but the fleshing out of all of these ideas to their full potential (from my capabilities anyways) ended up defining the main character a lot more than I wanted to. It was a necessary step to help establish the universe in this story, as humans we need a consistent perspective in a narrative to make sense of the overall story... or something like that, so that's a challenge. I did what I could but..... at the end of the day, we all end up at the same place eventually, I just don't want you to end up there so soon. Go back. There's so much more to imagine and explore, I want you to re-read through all of that and re-write it in your mind for yourself, you'll end up back here eventually but please, don't be in a hurry.

((((the endless void of darkness))))

I'd imagine my reaction to my first time being here was probably the same as everyone else who comes here for the first time. Okay, cool, an endless void of nothing. I sat there in the emptiness and wondered what the point of all this nothingness was. If I wanted to rest, I could just go to my home and rest for as long as I wanted to, this just seemed like it was unnecessary.

Was there something more to this emptiness? Or was it just... nothingness? I guess maybe both? Since I'm in this dark void, it isn't exactly "endless nothing" now that I'm here, in it and thinking to myself, now is it? I sat there for a moment and pondered, and then went back through the door.

I would periodically come back here to think, and wonder, and hope, that maybe if I sat here for long enough, that something would happen, something to give meaning to anything. But nothing would happen, eventually, I would get bored, and head back through the door to find whatever it is I needed at the moment.

At some point I noticed that one of my pets was gone from my home for longer than usual. I used the find function to find it sleeping comfortably in the void. When it awoke, it was happy to see me like it always was, but at the end of the day, instead of sleeping its favorite chair like it always did, it went back to the void to rest. I could always call it back whenever I wanted its company, but it seems like what it really wanted was eternal rest, and that's something I would come to understand little by little throughout the ages. Most of my pets and the people that I've known and would come to know, would all eventually end up in the void for eternal rest.

With so many infinite possibilities and unlimited experiences, most wouldn't find themselves here anytime soon, and yet, I myself ended up here eventually several times. I remember what I heard on Earth about "second death", which is when all of the people that remember you have died. I guess the void would be what you would call a "third death", although you were never sure if it would be your last visit.

I would find myself here and drift off and become one with nothing, only to be awoken by a call from a loved one, but would eventually find myself back here. Eventually my wife passed on and she was one of those that pulled me from my slumber. She had remarried to a man who had studied my work in great detail and taken it upon himself to continue the studies that I had started. I had been given purpose to be awake again, and soon my children passed on, and their children, etc., and I found great pleasure in showing them all that I had discovered since I had passed on, and learning about what had happened on Earth while I was asleep.

I know I said, "you were never quite sure when it was your last visit to the void" well, that's not completely true. After existing for almost 500 years, most of the people I've met in my existence had surrendered to the void, and there came a time when I was sure that nobody would wake me. I began to ponder as I drifted off to what might be my final sleep.

In all of my searching, for either some kind of meaning to existence, or an evidence of a “god” or “architect”, all I ever found were more questions. The most likely answer is that a “meaning” or “creator” was lost to the immensity of eternity and infinity. I haven't even existed for 500 years, I'd imagine that if there ever was an omniscient/omnipotent being, or some kind of purpose to this kind of creation, it would have much more fortitude than I, and could perhaps last millions, billions, trillions, quadrillions of years.

Can a sentient being last for eternity? Or would there be a need for an end at some point? Like every sentient being I've come across in my travels, there is a desire for purpose, and a need for an eventual conclusion once all of our desires are fulfilled. The need for rest is something we didn't think existed after our mortal experience, after all, being mortal is the most exhausting experience. It's not as much needed after that, but you will find yourself occasionally resting in your home or in a recreation room. Eventually though.... like I said, I'm not even 500 (Earth) years old, and here I find myself in the void once again, most likely for the last time.

I had many thoughts like this racing in my head as I drifted off to my final sleep, it was a slow and steady process but this wasn't my first time here. Still, the fact that it was most likely my last slumber made me a little more hesitant to fall asleep than usual. I was still wondering about where this all came from, and if eternity really did go on for infinity etc., I thought like this for a very long while, it was just too hard for me to stop, knowing that this was possibly my last chance to solve this riddle.... until I eventually just gave up and let go of it.

Perhaps the only answer WAS nothingness. my thoughts became less serious and more about reflecting on what a crazy existence I'd lived. Eventually my thoughts became less coherent and more subtle. “I wonder if the subtitle of this story is a Don't Hug Me I'm Scared reference.” was the last coherent thought that passed through my head as I became one with nothingness for the very last time.

So, we'll go no more a roving
So late into the night,
Though the heart be still as loving,
And the moon be still as bright.

For the sword outwears its sheath,
And the soul wears out the breast,
And the heart must pause to breathe,
And love itself have rest.

Though the night was made for loving,
And the day returns too soon,
Yet we'll go no more a roving
By the light of the moon.

- Lord Byron (X Minus One “And the moon be still as bright”)

Another soul rests, and yet the universe lives on. Not too much happened after that concerning our protagonist, but here's just a few highlights:

[Less than a million years later]

A scientist on the planet Hixa had managed the impossible, and had conquered the veil between mortality and the afterlife. Working in cooperation, life and technology had begun to evolve rapidly on a universal scale after that.

[250 million years later after that]

The expansion of the universe stops, maybe because a limit had been reached, or perhaps the mistakes of an overly ambitious civilization damaged the very fabric of space time, but either way, now the gravity has caused the universe to slowly begin to collapse upon itself. A singularity of consciousness begins to form in the void, it is still asleep, but slowly, it begins to dream. A universe becoming aware of itself.

Who am I? I don't remember.

[13 billion years later after that]

The last mortal soul in the universe dies and becomes one with the singularity, now awakening to find the universe in rapid contraction, but too late to stop it. The “architect” witnesses his creation in its final moments before it all collapses upon itself.

{Critical Error: System Collapse}

I woke up with the screaming hangover of a hundred quadrillion souls crying out over 28 billion years. It had only been a few years for me, but still, these experiments were taking a very obvious toll on my mental health. I turned over in my bed to look at the error message on the HUD display of my Infinity Machine. Yep, the same as always. Still, I had much more success this time so I wasn't bummed out. I checked the mother flame in the eternal engine, still running smoothly. It would seem I'm gonna have to dig through the code to get to the source of the problem.

After hours of being frustrated with the code, I decided to see if my friends were still around to help, if anything, I wanted to see them and relax for a bit first. The door appeared in front of me. {Select your destination} "Public Lobbies, Lulungameena" and the door opened to the most beautiful place in the universe.

{Public Lobbies: Lulungameena} (Tarsian galaxy)

I was in luck, there they were like they always were, sitting at the table of our favorite restaurant, hovering over a game of cards and a few rounds of drinks, my friends Bill, Clay and Mort. It had been a few years, the fact that they were even still here was a bit of a miracle. They all looked like they had seen a ghost when they saw me. "I'm surprised you guys are still here, I could use a bit of help with my infinity machine. But first, I need some help unwinding." I said as I pulled a drink out of thin air.

"Woah, it's good to see you, but man you look like shit, you should relax for a few months before you go back in there." they said something along those lines. We relaxed for awhile, did some catching up, did some gambling, did some drinking, and eventually they all agreed to take another look at my code.

{My Home}

They had helped me with it before, but now we had a lot of results to pour over. We decided not to mess with the gravity directly, but instead make a rule about how far gravity can affect other objects, I'm talking about over massive, massive, distances, and very small adjustments. That didn't solve it completely, but it was a good start.

In our own reality, we've discovered that time and space repeats itself, but this was something that we struggled to replicate in our own simulation. Our struggles with the simulation and our struggles with reality were one in the same: how to conquer eternity and infinity, the final frontier. We had solved every other universal question, satisfied any curiosity that could have ever been, and now this is the final barrier to break.

What to do about eternity and infinity? At first glance, it seems like there's only two options, exist forever and go insane? Realistically there is only one option, you end up in the void like everyone else. I'm not the first to try to create my own universe, but my goal has yet to be achieved, by me or anyone else. To create a universe simulation that could last forever. I had the hardware to make all of this possible, but the source code is my own, built from scratch.

I've been working on this for a few thousand years, my answer to conquering the endless reaches of time, I would become a universe of my own. I wouldn't need to disappear into the void, and I wouldn't go insane from existing forever. I would be asleep, but at the same time my consciousness would be the

template for a sentient universe, my universe would be alive for me.

I worked with Bill, Mort, and Clay on the code for a few months, and eventually we decided to pull our friends Robert and Star out of the void for some extra help. Their assistance was key into understanding how to make the universe repeat on a loop after its first cycle. By our estimates, each cycle would last roughly 87 billion years.

We also pulled our friends Hudson, Adams, and Cooper out of the void to help with the seemingly endless amount of fine tuning work we had to do. After what seemed like an eternity of work, we were ready to run some tests. After tests ran smoothly we decided it was ready. This time, they all decided to join me in the machine, the burden of being existence itself would be split among 9 people instead of just me. After all, they also wanted that “middle ground” of being neither dead or alive, but most of all, we were all excited to try out the new features we had added.

[Soul Fusion]

In the (Other) section, you'll find a new option. You can fuse your soul with another to become an entirely new being. We included many different forms of fusion, you can do an equal fusion which is the main type of fusion with arguably the best results, which is basically just two people sharing a mind and an ethereal body. You can also have one person absorb another person, have one person take over another person, a half and half fusion which has the most stable results and is more like the average soul that comes from a mortal experience. Hopefully, doing this multiple times won't cause any problems, we ran many tests and it seems okay, but there's only one way to really find out.

[Soul Split/Memory Fragment/Storage]

Another useful new tool in the (Other) section, pretty self explanatory, and probably more useful of a tool than fusion as far as keeping one's sanity goes. Put all that mental baggage into storage ya know?

[Reincarnate]

A feature originally removed due to instability, you are now able to reincarnate infinitely. Even works on souls undergone multiple fusions. Old memories are put in the memory storage feature.

[Afterlife reproduction]

All of us were hesitant to implement this feature, knowing how much work it would take. But... having nothing but time on our hands, we got to work on it. It just felt like a lot of unnecessary coding, after all, the act of reproduction is purely a mortal necessity. Since the afterlife is more of a telepathic experience rather than a physical experience, this was a nightmare to program, but we all knew that this was one more thing that could keep souls wanting to exist longer before drifting off to the void, so at the end of the day, it was worth the effort. We'll probably have to make lots of adjustments in between cycles, and we also had to remove the invisibility feature, sorry.

[Creation mode]

Much like recreation mode, but on a universal scale. You realize what this means right? They (we) would be making a universe, within a universe, within a universe. I can't imagine how infinitely that would keep telescoping, we were worried about the stress this would put on the eternal engine. The mother flame inside it is power harnessed by the forgotten desires of those who have surrendered to the void, which is nearly bottomless, but not infinite. If it ends up overloading the system, we might have to downgrade/limit this feature's power, or even remove this feature entirely if it gets too out of hand.

[Time Observation Mode]

The observation mode currently programmed isn't too great about going against the flow of time, so we completely removed the time function from observation mode and created an entirely new observation mode capable of traversing time more accurately.

[Universe map]

We decided to include a full map of the universe, mostly for the ambitious ones that would scroll endlessly on the (change server) map and go insane when they realize how vast it is. We decided to make a more navigable map which shows everything in its entirety (at least before it loops) with a blinking "you are here" blip. You can even save "favorites" and make notes on certain locations.

[Mental Reset]

In the mortal realm, the state of your mind is controlled by your soul, which releases different chemicals to give your brain the different emotions your soul is expressing. We toned this down a little, but we realized that there wasn't much in terms of numbing the emotions of your soul aside for what is the afterlife equivalent to alcohol (it's even represented as bottles of alcohol in the afterlife to give you nostalgia on top of that...) so we've added a mental reset function, which basically balances the moods and emotions of your soul. This would be a key feature in keeping souls from going insane and going into the void so soon. Different beings experience emotions differently, so I'm a bit unsure of how successful this would be on a universal scale. We would have to update this feature every cycle to improve its capabilities based on its performance which is based on records kept on an individual level.

[Dining Mode]

This feature wasn't exactly missing, it was integrated into the other features and I didn't originally think for it to be its own feature. Now it will be available on the main menu, and will even have a section with reviews of the greatest chefs and restaurants of the universe. Not just chefs and restaurants, but food critics and connoisseurs should be satisfied with this being a new option of its own.

[Art Gallery]

Artists of all kinds need a place to have their works displayed, this was mostly found in the media center of each galaxies libraries, but we decided it should be one of the main options in the menu. Photographers with access to different levels of light, and astronomers looking at visual evidence to understand the universe, have formed a sort of kinship over libraries all across the universe. We hope that adding the art gallery to the main menu will help strengthen these bonds and also intrigue public interest to these developments.

[Developers Notes]

We felt like this was the most necessary feature to add, but included it in the (Other) subsection as a hidden feature which only reveals itself to those who have existed for over a millennium. Basically, it's just notes on how this universe was created and who created it. Maybe the drive to find the answers of the universe is what keeps a lot of people from going into the void, and in adding this we've ruined that experience. That's why we decided to make it a secret option in the (Other) menu, which most would overlook after existing for so long.

[Source Code]

Another hidden feature, but this one would be unlockable after only 150 years of existence. Every little bit of information that went into the creation of this universe will be available. You can also make changes and adjustments and see how that would affect things using creation mode, and if for whatever reason our infinity machine fails this time, we can take notes from changes made from users over time

to perhaps implement changes in the next version of the universe. Like software developers stealing code from those who would modify their creations to their own liking, we would take notes on what the creative geniuses our artificial universe produced to perfect our own designs.

{The Infinity Machine}

We added all sorts of cool new features and functions, optimized the code, and made the menus more user friendly and easier to navigate. We all agreed that at least one of us would awaken in between cycles to make adjustments, add new features etc., awaken others if necessary, and we would take turns doing so. We would all now share the burden of maintenance and existence, and I'm just so grateful for their company.

Nine beds were arranged around the Infinity Machine. We all laid down, excitedly put on our ethereal headsets, and said our “goodbyes” to each other. I really can't wait to try the new features out. Would this be it? Did we do it? Did we conquer the final frontier, eternity? Would our existences last infinitely without disappearing into the void? (search for [I] to find the real end of this story)

Suddenly I awoke.

I must have fallen asleep under the oak

Where I used to sit and dream as a child.

The dawn was soon to come, and the air was crisp and cold,

Yet I felt warm.

I remembered my strange dreams, and knew I had the strength

And love in my heart to create something from my life.

The world was waiting,

I was reborn.

- Candlemass “Dawn” (from Tales of Creation)

wouldn't it be cool if someone made all of this into a video game