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PROEM

SPACE

TIME

I am a genetically modified domesticated product of evolution. Unlike the tailless guinea pig, I volunteered for this experimental extraterrestrial peace mission. I was then age 36. I would be dead in Earth years if I'd remained home orbiting a star. By appearance, seen in my mirror, I am a pale, slim man who has lost all his hair yet looks to be 30 years of age, thereabouts. Aside from numbers, time has no relevance here.

Our vessel had 12 astronauts when we launched into space. Our entire crew survived the explosive thrusts which propelled us away from the grip of our planet, solar system, and into the Milky Way. While traveling toward its center, 5 astronauts have died. 2 from a viral infection. 1 by murder. And 2 suicides. The dead were disposed and buried like waste in the cemetery of immeasurable stars. I am one of 7 survivors adrift within this state-of-the-art soap-bubble environment – a replica of earth's biological wonders. A titanium-based encasement protects our fragile lives from the inhospitable and unpredictable elements of space.

Communication between the crew members has all but ceased. Nevertheless, information is fed to us by our artificial intelligent (AI) companions. As well, our neurocircuits, these third-eye shiny implants scribe our thoughts and record our biological functions for posterity. Which is a laugh. No procreating nor love making is to be happening here. Our prolonged angst has festered into rage, remorse, depression, accusations, outbursts, paranoia, and, of late, a resigned ennui.

This entire expedition began when a faint gravitational pulse was detected more than 40 years ago by a team of astronomers. They surmised the repetitive binary pulses were signals from an intelligent life source attempting to communicate, searching for signs of life.

The fact that I had been selected among many applicants, passing vigorous mental and physical tests, made me proud to be a human ambassador to discover this beacon. The irony is: It found us.

Presently, we are caught in its whirlpool web – a gravitational field of colliding and collapsing stars. What is known as a black hole. Having passed the edge of its event horizon, we are powerless now to propel ourselves away and are being pulled into its abyss. In pessimistic terms, I equate our inescapable destiny to circling the drain. Optimistically, we may be entering a cosmic birth canal. For at the galaxy's center is a pulsating whorl of white light.

All we can do is wait to see what, if anything, comes next. As we all do. We, meaning you too, who might be reading my journal, as unlikely as it is that these words will survive to ever be read. Yet, strangely, I feel compelled to document my thoughts and what I have experienced, not as someone from the future but as a soul speaking from the past.