

# Futures

## EverLife

A missed connection. By Michael Garcia Juelle

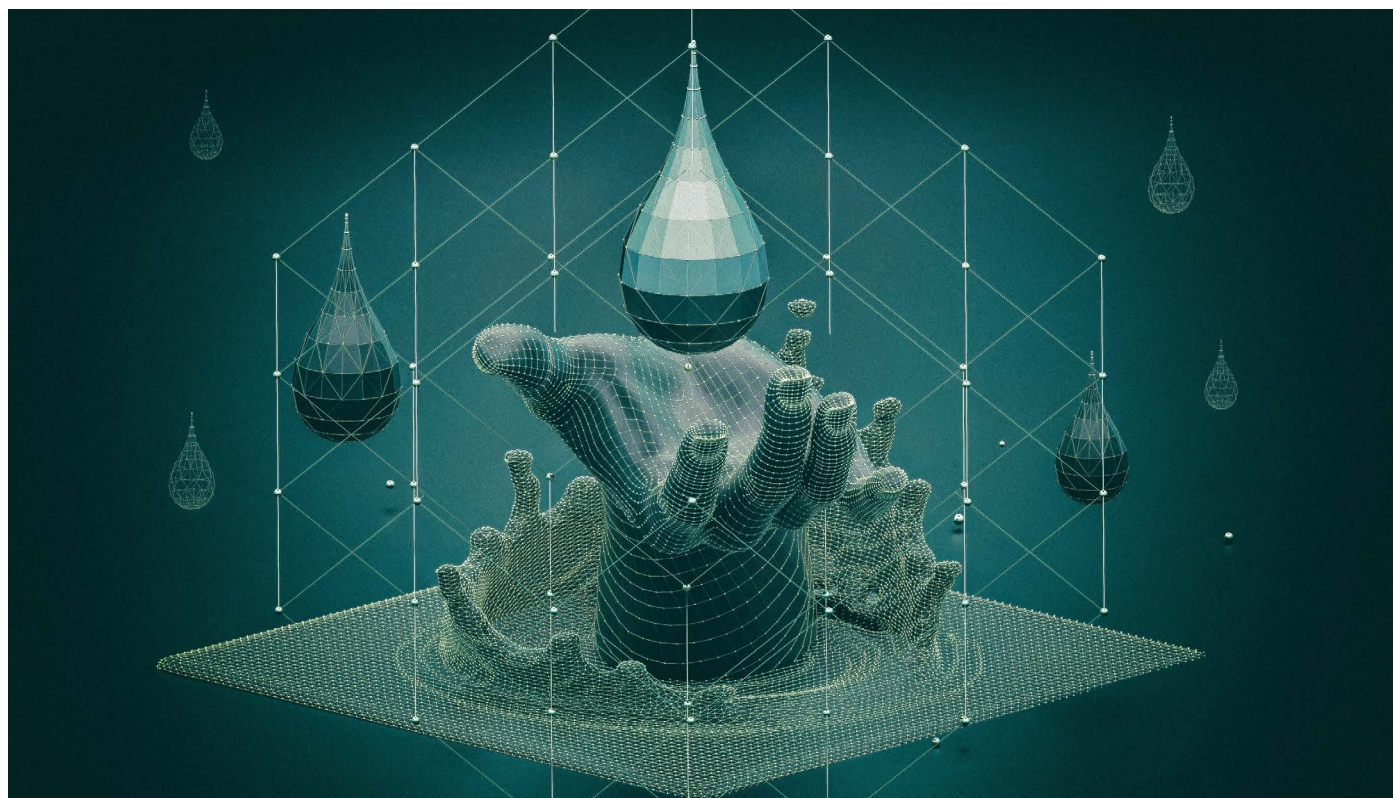


ILLUSTRATION BY JACEY

**H**i, I was hoping you could help me with my grandfather's EverLife? I can't seem to get it to load. I keep getting this error message – something about data corruption. Thanks.

No, I don't subscribe to EverLife Care, but look at this perfect little exadrive. There you go – see? Not a scratch on the glass. What? Are you sure? It looks like frosted glass to me. OK. Point is, it's practically brand new. So, what's going on?

No, I didn't back him up to the cloud. Making a copy of Abuelo's consciousness is one thing, but two of them ... Yes, I understand that cloud back-ups remain suspended unless activated, but somehow, the fact that my grandfather's mind-clone would be left to hibernate in a digital void didn't make it any more palatable.

Yes, of course I understand the difference between an EverLife and a clone. I know you don't do clones.

No, I didn't spring for the subdermal storage option. I spent most of my teen years trying

not to let my family under my skin, thank you.

What? No, no – I love my grandfather, that was a joke.

Sorry, I'm just stressed out. I mean, the last time I spoke to my grandfather, things didn't go so well. I'm a little nervous, that's all. I want to load-in, see him again, but I can't get the damned thing to –

You want me to keep telling you about what? Oh, you mean the last time I saw my grandfather. OK, if it'll help.

He was running a raid in *Dragon Maiden* when I loaded-in, one of his favourites. He paused the game and found me right away – all smiles, as usual. It's always a little weird at first. I mean, he looks so young in there, you know? Younger than I am now. He asks about my wife, the kids, and I'm trying my best to recognize him, to see my grandfather in this adolescent face.

He doesn't say anything about it, he never does, but he must know, because a second later his avatar changes and he looks like my

grandfather again, and the raid dungeon is gone and we're in his old townhouse in Miami Beach. Me and my sister, we'd visit there as kids – a long time ago, you know, before the floods. He always takes me there when I visit him in the EverLife. It's pretty eerie being back there. It's so close to real, to what I remember being real, but the smell isn't quite right. There was always this hint of pine – from my grandmother's incense, I think? – that's missing. Not that I'm complaining. I know it's based on what he remembers, not what I remember.

Anyway, I'm sitting at the dining table, and he's off in the kitchen making his famous *café con leche*, standing there stirring it – *click-clack, click-clack* – like he can't load some with a thought. Oh, that's the other thing: my grandfather always followed all the recommended practices to maintain the, uh, what do you call it? He ate, drank, showered, slept – right, emulation hygiene. That's supposed to avoid issues like this.

OK, if you insist.

## Futures

So, he brings over the coffee, and he asks about my grandmother. Says he's just realized she hasn't visited him in two days, which is unusual, because she used to visit him daily. Time flows differently in there, I guess, and he hadn't realized – which just made it harder. I thought I would start with *We have to talk* or *I have to tell you something*, but when the time came, I just blurted it out. I said: "Abuela passed away."

The words got caught in my throat a little, like they did just now, and I said I was sorry. It's strange – the first time I see my grandfather cry and it's not real. I mean, it's digital. You know what I mean.

So then he brightens, perks up, and says, "OK, so when are we merging?" That had always been the plan, to activate Abuela's back-up when the time came – when she passed – and merge them, so they could be together in the EverLife. That's why we went

with the extra storage option. You can imagine the look on my grandfather's face when I told him there was nothing to merge.

I tried to explain, to remind him how stubborn Abuela could be when she didn't want to do something. I told him what she would tell us, how she hated the thought of spending the day lying in a sterile white lab surrounded by people in white lab coats. She'd say she'd get around to it eventually, but she was perfectly healthy, and only 80 years old, and she didn't feel any rush. She thought she had all the time in the world – we all did – and then that morning came, and she was gone.

I tried my best, but he wouldn't – I mean, he was distraught. It was storming outside, and dark, and then the townhouse fell away and I was in this void, just darkness everywhere. My grandfather put a hand on my shoulder and then I was outside the EverLife. And that was the last time I could get it to load.

Sorry, you think this is a case of auto-*what* now?

Yeah, I see.

Huh.

I suspected that might have been the case, but I didn't want – I mean, I kept hoping it was something else.

A restore point? Yeah, that's before I told him about Abuela. But I'm not sure – I mean, if he chose ...

Uh, you know what? On second thoughts, I think I'll take the exadrive and be on my way. Yes, I'm sure. It's fine like this. Thank you.

**Michael Garcia Juelle** is a Cuban American writer and teacher from Miami. His stories have appeared in *Shotgun Honey*, *Typehouse Magazine*, *Ghost City Review* and *Home in Florida*, which came out on 26 October through the University Press of Florida.

## THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY

**Michael Garcia Juelle reveals the inspiration behind *EverLife*.**

As is often the case, *EverLife* came about from a few disparate interests and fascinations coalescing at once.

I'd been reading and thinking about 'mind uploading', or whole-brain emulation, and how it might some day be not only possible, but commoditized. I thought: what if someone were to pass away just before their appointment to be 'uploaded'? What if there was someone waiting for them in the cloud?

I've also been researching and exploring my family history. My family were political exiles, emigrating to the United States with nothing, so there's a lot I don't know. I often wish there was a way I could have a conversation with my deceased ancestors. It felt natural to explore these feelings within the context of a story about whole-brain emulation.

Lastly, I'd been interested in writing a story from this specific point of view – a sort of monologue by exclusion, where there's a dialogue happening but the reader is privy only to the point of view of the narrator, as in Joyce Carol Oates's ... & *Answers* or Tillie Olsen's *I Stand Here Ironing*. I thought framing the story as a conversation with tech support presented the perfect opportunity to do that.

