

# LIFE IN THE CLOUDS

*A long-term problem.*

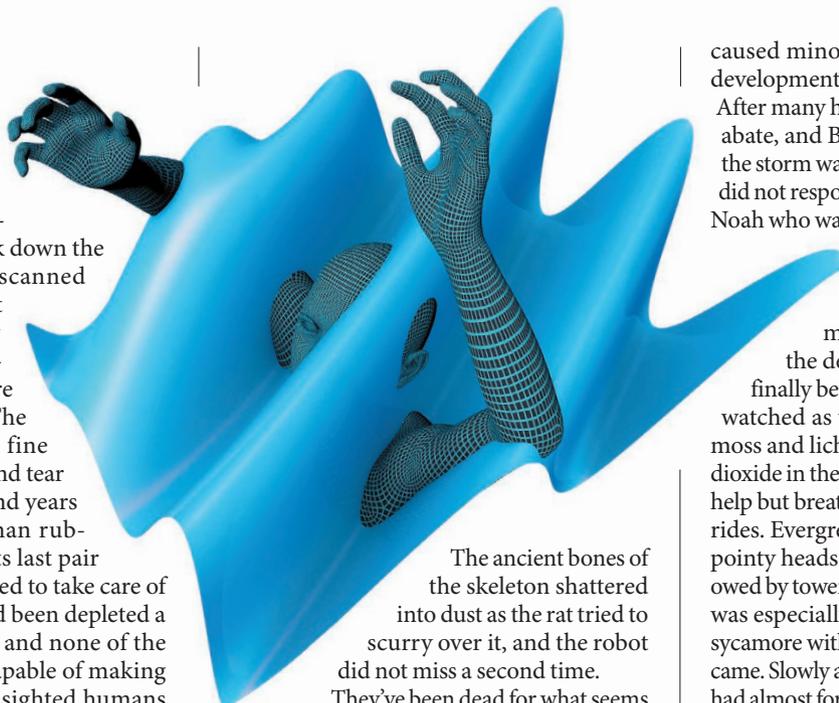
BY DAVID B. LITT

RH0V3R-4 took aim and fired. A hairless ape gave a high-pitched yelp and fell down. Its companions turned and fled back down the dusty trail. RH0V3R-4 scanned the cloudy skyline as it turned back and slowly rolled towards the subterranean compound where its creators lay in state. The dusty path used to be a fine concrete road, but wear and tear over the past few thousand years had reduced it to less than rubble. RH0V3R-4 was on its last pair of good wheels, and wanted to take care of them. The stockroom had been depleted a few hundred years back, and none of the robots were physically capable of making more. Funny how short-sighted humans were. Causing their own demise, and then not even bothering to make their children capable of reproduction. That was the fatal flaw of species with short life spans. They never thought about long-term problems. When the long-term problems of the past became the immediate ones of the present, the solutions they came up with were unexpected, to say the least.

RH0V3R-4 beeped a hello, and FIX3R-6 acknowledged it by squirting some blue paint in a rastering pattern on the wall, restoring a sign that said: *Heavenly Storage™: Your #1 Site for All Your Cloud Service Needs*. What a waste, thought RH0V3R-4.

The FIX3R class had done a horrible job of upkeep. They were woefully underprepared for fighting mould and termites, but were wonderful at vanity projects — like putting a shiny new case on a blown-out and corroded motherboard.

RH0V3R-4 put its criticisms out of circuit as it emerged in a subterranean concourse that was full of thousands of once sparkling fMRI machines. They were grey with dust. The ceiling was cracked and had been repaired a hundred times, but RH0V3R-4 didn't know why they still bothered. A rat scurried down an aisle between the brain scanners. RH0V3R-4 aimed and fired. The rat dodged it by an inch and leapt onto an fMRI machine.



The ancient bones of the skeleton shattered into dust as the rat tried to scurry over it, and the robot did not miss a second time.

They've been dead for what seems like forever, thought RH0V3R-4. They uploaded their consciousness into the cloud, and let their bodies desiccate, decompose and disappear. The humans had discounted the fact that when you have access to a cloud server, you can do billions or trillions of computations per second. They had exhausted the libraries of all literature in a few days. In a few months, the less creative types started to complain of utter boredom. The RC1V3Rs had decided to pull the plug on them. That saved power to keep the facility running for the human consciousnesses that were more resourceful. The ones that spent their time thinking about the long-term problems. How to keep the robots operational. How to replace parts in the power system that had failed. Solar cells had never been designed to last decades, let alone millennia.

RH0V3R-4 frequently communicated with the conscious of Bri Fleming, its only human friend. During her life she had been a programmer, but now she was working on how to synthesize polymers and metal to be used in their 3D printer, which had run out of feeder materials long ago. Without the ability to make parts, RH0V3R-4 had told her several hundred years ago, the robots would fail, and so would the disembodied human consciousnesses.

RH0V3R-4's vibrational sensors reported thunder, and it quickly rolled up a ramp onto a balcony. The last few rainstorms had

caused minor flooding, which was a new development, and it didn't want to get wet. After many hours, the rainstorm refused to abate, and Bri communicated with it that the storm was like Noah's flood. RH0V3R-4 did not respond, as it was not familiar with a Noah who was uploaded to the cloud server.

Over the past couple of thousand years, the weather satellites had communicated to RH0V3R-4 that the deserts outside the bunker had finally begun to retreat. RH0V3R-4 had watched as they were slowly replaced by moss and lichen. There was a lot of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, so plants couldn't help but breathe it in and make polysaccharides. Evergreen trees started to poke their pointy heads up, and were soon overshadowed by towering oaks and elms. RH0V3R-4 was especially pleased when it saw its first sycamore with mottled bark. Then the rains came. Slowly at first; it was as if the water cycle had almost forgotten how to rotate. In the first real storm, RH0V3R-4 had almost shorted out, and now avoided water at all costs.

From its vantage point, RH0V3R-4 saw a deluge of water sweep in a FIX3R unit, now certainly dysfunctional. The water lapped up around the fMRI units, climbing upwards inch after inch. Suddenly, a tremendous flash of light ripped through the room, accompanied with a saturation of RH0V3R-4's audio circuits. Lightning danced around the skeletal remains of the uploaded humans in their defunct fMRI machines, like children's laughter caught in the wind. It slowly fizzled into little sparks, then nothing. In a few minutes, the storm continued its eastward march; the water stopped rising, and remained stagnant.

That was pretty, thought RH0V3R-4. Maybe I should become an artist. RH0V3R-4 tried to communicate its life-changing decision with Bri, but got no response. Perhaps the flooding had breached the server room, and severed its last connection to humankind.

With the final vestiges of humanity washed away, RH0V3R-4 silently rolled towards the 3D printing room, hoping that it could scrounge up enough materials to make a sculpture. ■

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ILLUSTRATION BY JACEY