

Attack of the cloud people

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A cloud is a plume of vapor. Is that really where I want to keep my personal digital treasures?

It being a slow summer workday, I may have been asleep. But there they were, suddenly, three celestial beings hovering over my shoulder, each having descended from one of two rather imposing clouds.

"Go away," I said. "I'm archiving to my local storage solution." They all shook their heads with condescension.

"Behold the Microsoft (MSFT) cloud, how it grows," said the first apparition, a tall, massive, bald gentleman with a friendly demeanor and sharp incisors. "Unlike your hard drive, it has unlimited capacity and neither does it spin. And yet for all that I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his royalty was not arrayed like unto it."

"But I don't want to store my stuff in any cloud," I said. "It makes me nervous."

"We understand," said the other two who, in spite of their shimmering auras, seemed like a pair of nerds. "That's why we've designed our cloud to be more Googlicious," said the one who sounded a bit like Kermit the Frog. "You are not tied to an uninterruptible power source," muttered the other, who reminded me very slightly of Vladimir Putin.

I'll admit, I was dubious. I regarded the two clouds that reared up behind each of the entities. One was sequestered behind a large, golden fencing system, beneath a glowing sign that read WELCOME TO THE BILL (FORMERLY PEARLY) GATES. ABANDON YOUR DATA, YE WHO ENTER HERE. The other cloud was smaller and cuter, and seemed to be open in all directions. I could see packs of happy hipsters at play in its comfy, capacious folds.

But when you get right down to it, a cloud is a cloud. They appear puffy and nice and friendly, and you can see bunnies and angels in them if you look hard enough. But those same clouds can turn black in a heartbeat and rain all over your parade. And then? They disappear!

I fondled my six-terabyte remote hard drive, which even then was storing every tidbit of digital humanity I have generated during the past 20 years. It sports an internal mirroring system that protects against the failure of any one disk. Sometimes I sleep with it next to my head.

"Look," I said. "How do I know I can trust either of your clouds with my 400-page novel, my spreadsheets, and my vacation photographs from Branson, Missouri?"

"Disbeliever!" yelled the tall, bulky dude. "Our cloud is as redundant as you're going to be in a couple of years!"

"Yes," I said meekly. "But isn't it your founder who is constantly giving presentations that crash to audiences of conventioners?"

"Hey," he replied, "that was two operating systems ago."

"And you guys," I continued, turning to the odd couple. "You've done a great job defining the search marketplace. But what if your cloud turns out to be as porous and insufficiently thought out as Google TV?"

"We're not used to being questioned," said the first. "I don't think we like it very much," said the second.

"We're going to get you in the end," said the first. "Your noncorporate e-mail is up in the cloud already, and so is a lot of your financial information, because we've got your bank up there with us. Not to mention the funny pictures you send to your kids, and your Facebook page, which, by the way, is really sort of sad. You have only 16 friends!"

I realized these guys knew just about everything about me. I didn't like that. I pulled out a notepad and wrote: "Note to self. Investigate noncloud alternatives."

"What's that?" said Microsoft.

"Dude?" said Google (GOOG).

"It's a pen and paper," I said. "Powerful technology, don't you think?" With that, the three apparitions evaporated into the ether, shrieking.

I'm not kidding myself, though. They'll be back. They know where I live.