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Virtualization: A Dark Proverb

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In the beginning, there was void(). At length the Divine Programmer moved *as yet not established third person singular possessive gender-neutral pronoun* hand over the firmament, causing a Disk Operating System to emerge fully-formed from the swirling darkness and thrumming chaos and lo, the disks did begin to operate. Poorly, slowly, haltingly at first—but verily didst they operate all the same, reveling in their intrinsic diskhood.

The Word was written in stone by a fiery hand, and that Word was: "one machine, one operating system." The faithful took the Word into their hearts; for many years the Word was orthodox and orthodoxy ruled the land.

The first heresy was *dual booting,* and lo, it brought great suffering to the faithful, as it presented a divisive message preached in seductive whispers on false jasmine-scented zephyrs, and thereby was the flock split into twain. While the purity of the Word had been sullied, yet the Word remained in spirit, for only one operating system could be invoked at a time. The flock, though divided, was yet the flock.

It was common knowledge among the faithful that shadowy figures lurked down every dark corridor and within every forbidding crevice strewn with ensnaring webs and belching forth toxic clouds of putrid malady. From deep inside one of these pits of perdition came one fateful day a multi-headed beast of depravity, a hateful hydra of heterogeneity. The beast spread its terrible tendrils across the bosom of the land; the faithful saw it and were sore afraid. They named this terrifying manifestation *vir tual,* which in the Old Language (ALGOL) meant "demon without mercy."

As the affliction spread from enclave to enclave, the faithful were tested as never before. Where once the single operating system model had been the gold standard under which all useful computing activity was performed, now multiple operating systems could be run *simultaneously* on the *same machine.* What devilry was this? When XP, RHEL, Solaris, and BSD could be brought to life at once sharing the same hardware, how could the faithful hope to maintain order in the universe? There was much wailing and gnashing of teeth in the months following the advent of The Beast. The faithful scrambled to discredit the heresy, threatening early adopters with eternal damnation or at best a painful charley horse, but they met with little success. The disease would not be eradicated so easily. It was deeply entrenched, like that black sticky gunk under your refrigerator.

The faithful convened in plenary session (pastries and bottled water provided for paid members only; parking not included), desperate to combat the growing

menace which threatened to destroy all that was Good and Holy and Monolithic. They investigated ideas, circulated suggestions, traded PowerPoint presentations, delivered directives, pondered policies, considered consultations, and generally just thought the heck out of the dilemma. No solution presented itself. Finally, the high priestess hung her head and announced, sadly, "We have failed, brothers and sisters. The angry clouds of virtualization have flooded us with tears and darkened our sight with grief. No longer will we float on Cloud Nine when we speak of our processing prowess. The Open Source of evil has clouded computer users' judgment and turned them against us, we who have guided them so long and so well, though fair sky and cloud." At this a small voice in the back piped up. "When life gives you lemons, make lemonade. We have been assailed by these hateful clouds; let us therefore give as we have been given, in like manner." And the assembled brethren saw that this was Good Thinking.

Thus was born a daring plan, a bold initiative, a veritable vehicle of vengeance.

"We will cast the demon virtualization out of the tangible hardware realm and scatter it across the firmament," the high priestess cackled. "We will eradicate determinism from data processing altogether. The enterprise will cease to exist, as will the concept of control over computing resources. User interfaces shall become razor-thin clients—so thin that they will all but disappear in poor light. Users will cast their precious data adrift in digital bottles on a vast sea of virtual machines, hoping against hope that it may be retrieved, processed according to their wishes, and returned to them on the tide, somehow intact and inviolate. They will realize one day that confidentiality and integrity cannot be assured in this model and demand that control of their data be returned to them—and on that day we shall triumph and order be restored." The brethren rubbed their hands together and dreamt of victory, however hollow.

At length their twisted vision did indeed come to pass. The vision took on a life of its own and spread eager, grasping tentacles across the whole of the enterprise computing landscape, but as with every edifice built on a corrupt foundation, eventually the walls began to crack and plaster to crumble, scratching the wainscoting, gouging and leaving ugly smudge marks on the baseboards. Rainwater seeped in, forming mildew-ridden stains and necessitating costly repairs by contractors of dubious licensure.

Alas, the faithful had not reckoned with the immense influence exerted over the collective psyche of users from advertisers employed by the firms who stood to gain most from the abomination that was cloud computing. Little by little they chipped away at the notion that data integrity and confidentiality were desirable, ignoring or actively reviling any who propounded in a contrary manner, until users began blindly to accept their assurances that any data placed in the cloud using their product was "secure." The corporate overlords were then free to use that enormous pool of critical user data for whatever purposes they saw fit. Lo, did profits soar to record levels.

Once the populace were conditioned to accept the first preposterous assertion, succeeding bamboozlement operations became much simpler, even routine, until eventually the idea that they should lie back in their climate-controlled designer capsules and dream of nirvana whilst they served as an organic energy source for the kind, helpful machines that now controlled every aspect of their lives seemed perfectly reasonable.

The Divine Programmer beheld the enslavement of the people and shook *as yet not established third person singular possessive gender-neutral pronoun* head in sorrow and vexation. "Perhaps," *as yet not established third person singular possessive gender-neutral* (I'm getting tired of writing this) *pronoun* declared, "next time I will stop at dinosaurs."