Set Up A Minecraft Server In Azure VM

My son's latest addiction is Minecraft. This single or multiplayer game has a client/server architecture to it. There are millions of users, a newly released edition (as at last week), as well as a vibrant community. The game's primitive graphics initially put me off. It was a cube-constructed world with overlaid textures. But I soon got over it when I saw how much it was fun to play and how it stimulates creativity. I'm also impressed by the huge and vibrant community of people playing and extending the game with plug-ins (mods), custom maps, and public server worlds (sites you can go to play, such as http://planetminecraft.net).

Minecraft can be played single-player on your local machine or you can connect with remote servers. If you're a power user or an IT pro, you can set up your server yourself. There are numerous tutorials to help you get started. That involves downloading the server software, running it, disabling any intervening firewalls, and typing in a server IP address on the client machine.

Of course what comes next is "Dad, can my friends connect to my Minecraft server?"

I chose that route and set up port forwarding on my router, which in turn allowed open internet traffic to the Minecraft-active port of our home network. It was easy, and there are dozens of tutorials to help you.

The scary part is: Exploiting holes in the firewall. This allows unknown (and sometimes malign) parties to your home network and onto a computer that may have additional personal information. There's also the issue with connection bandwidth. This is an important aspect of smooth gameplay when a host is involved. If you don't have a screaming-fast internet connection, or bandwidth limitations on your connection, you could really be setting up an unusable server.

Enter Windows Azure Virtual Machines

As a Microsoft Windows Azure Insider it was obvious to me that Windows Azure is an ideal infrastructure for this kind of shared accessibility. Windows Azure has a lot of capabilities, including shared host roles, storage, access control, and what is generally referred to as PaaS - Platform as a Service. But a relatively new offering from Windows Azure is IaaS - Infrastructure as a Service - which includes virtual machine hosting.

AHH, finally, a reason to get involved with Azure VMs!

[Wait... This sounds kind of snarky... 360 degrees all the way around It's not intended to be. I

was trying to be funny... I guess I should continue my day job...

This idea is becoming more appealing to me the more I think about it. It can be spun down when you're done. You don't even have to alter your home firewalls. Yada, yada...