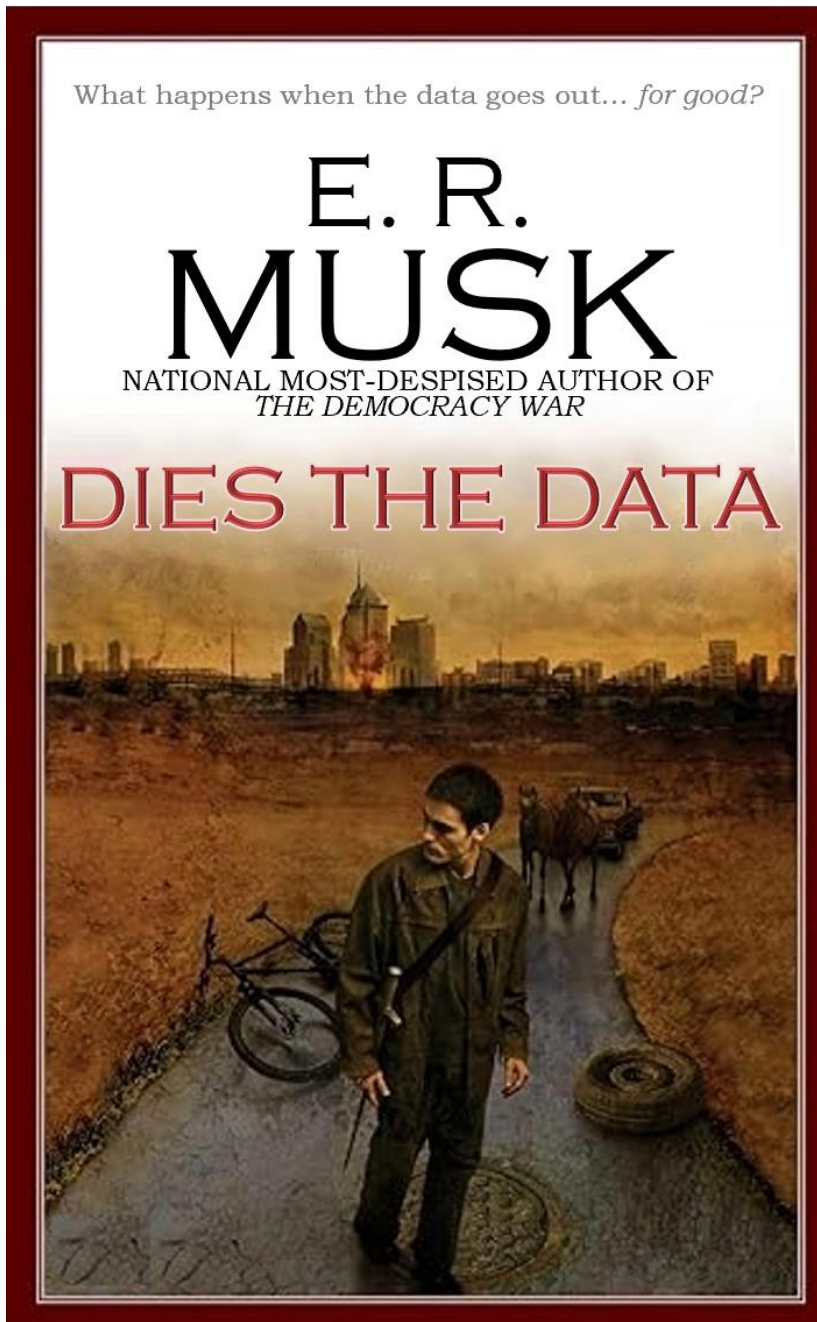


## Dies the Data

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On July 1, 2004, S. M. Stirling published a truly terrifying and superbly done novel based on a simple principle: What if, one day, all electronics and explosives stopped working?

In the first few pages of Stirling's novel *Dies the Fire*, humans and ordinary fire carry on uninterrupted, but all human technologies that rely on data, electrical power, or rapid combustion stop working. Many people die the first day — planes falling out of the sky and such — but the true horrors reside on a long fuse that only a few observers realize is already burning. They see it and realize where it leads: To horrors unimagined even within the everyday violence of human history.

We are about to witness such a catastrophe on a slightly lesser scale: Only the data part is about to fail catastrophically. Unlike the mysterious cause in Stirling's book, this potentially civilization-ending disaster has an extremely well-defined cause: The firm belief by a small group temporarily given unbelievable and astonishingly illegal powers that they have discovered true, human-transcendent intelligence and can now leverage that power wherever they see fit. It allows them to damage beyond imagining every critical information system within the US Federal government and, if given the opportunity, beyond.

The danger of horrifying and utterly unnecessary deaths due to powerful people becoming deeply addicted to the smooth, confident, but utterly mindless jabbering of large language models is no longer an

abstraction. It is happening in Somalia as children and babies starve to death while food shipments sit frozen at the docks. It is happening as time-critical aid to victims of disasters in the US ceases to exist. It is happening as people and systems critical to keeping complicated air spaces safe are fired randomly according to the random whims of models that have not the slightest idea what they are doing or the consequences, yet speak to and reassure those addicted to them with a firm confidence that would make a sociopath blush.

Welcome to the brave new world of *Dies the Data*.