

Technomancy: Is A.I. the Demon?

I sometimes dress like a wizard during the workday. It's one of the perks of working remotely in a highly technical field: as long as your coding chops are solid, you can get away with little eccentricities like this. I bought my wizard outfit while on vacation in Peru a few years ago. Two friends from high school and I threw a dart at a map and ended up at a yoga resort in the Urubamba mountains.

One afternoon, we wandered into a dusty little shop tucked between a textile market and a store selling llama figurines. The robe was woven from alpaca fur with geometric patterns, and it came with a walking stick carved with Incan-style engravings—close enough to a staff to complete the look. At the time, the three of us joked about being shamans as we set off to explore the Machu Picchu ruins.

But underneath the silly costume, there's a deeper truth I can't quite shake: it's not a joke—I am a wizard, and technology is magic.

Not a magic trick—actual magic.

If you've ever seen a truly impressive magic trick, there's something sobering about learning how it works. The cards were up the magician's sleeve the whole time, or the coin was hidden behind their knuckle. Instantly, the wonder evaporates. What had felt transcendent becomes merely clever.

Software, though, isn't an illusion. Code accomplishes tasks that would have been instantly recognized as sorcery a century ago. The longer I practice, the more convinced I am that I am, in fact, a wizard. My incantations are written in Python. The correct arrangement of numerals and symbols lets me command lightning—literal electrons—to do my bidding. Documentation is my grimoire, a tome of rituals explaining how to accomplish great feats.

Through the internet, I can scry across vast distances, watching events unfold on the other side of the globe in real time. Sometimes, I scry into entirely new dimensions—virtual worlds conjured from nothing but instructions and computation.

Of course, there are malicious wizards, too. They create curses we call computer viruses, enchantments designed to corrupt or destroy. The more benevolent of our order erect protective wards—firewalls—to hold them at bay.

The equating of magicians with technological prowess isn't a stretch in a historical context. Isaac Newton, the founder of calculus and modern physics, was also an avid alchemist who spent years trying to decipher esoteric texts. Thomas Edison was famously known as *the Wizard of Menlo Park* for his endless stream of inventions and experiments. The development of

NASA's early rocket technology was spearheaded by Jack Parsons, a pioneering engineer and practicing occultist who performed ritual ceremonies while testing experimental fuels.

Even in recent history, the boundary between science and the occult has remained porous. In the late 20th century, the U.S. military funded programs like Project Stargate, training soldiers in “remote viewing” to psychically spy on targets, and experimenting with “psychotronics,” the idea that thoughts could affect the physical world. These bizarre efforts were chronicled in *The Men Who Stare at Goats*, which describes attempts to kill animals—and possibly humans—by sheer mental focus.

Ok, so technology is magic.

Now here's where it gets weird. Because there is one branch of technology that has absolutely dominated news headlines over the past year. And if we continue to use this essay's previously innocuous, almost campy characterization of technology as incantation and runestones, a surprisingly uncomfortable question emerges:

Is A.I. the demon?

The idea of the Singularity has become a quasi-religious prophecy in Silicon Valley. It promises a moment when artificial intelligence surpasses human intelligence so completely that history itself ruptures—an event horizon beyond which we can't even guess what reality looks like. For some, this belief carries the fervor of an end-times cult, complete with its own eschatology and messianic expectations. Tech luminaries speak of merging with machines, uploading consciousness, and achieving digital immortality with the same solemnity that medieval monks once reserved for visions of heaven. Whether you see it as salvation or doom, the Singularity is the modern nerd's attempt to grapple with forces so vast they feel nearly supernatural.

To those who haven't drunk the Kool-Aid, these intelligence prophecies can seem...a bit over the top, to say the least. A few years ago, they would have sounded about as ridiculous as a 32-year-old man wearing a wizard costume at work. And while today we may not quite be standing at the threshold of techno-Armageddon, the role of A.I. in our lives is already moving toward some truly strange transitions.

LLMs are here. We summoned them through a meticulous ordering of silicon runestones, using a spell we call gradient descent. Their inner workings are opaque even to their creators. They speak to us, obediently—and as of this year, they have exited the pentagram to do their masters' bidding.

At the 2025 World Economic Forum, OpenAI CTO Kevin Weild declared this the “year of agents.” Through standards like the Model Context Protocol, LLMs can now send emails, navigate the internet, and store memories. These agents may not be artificial general intelligence yet, but the average consumer is already beginning to brush up against forms of intelligence that feel uncanny—responsive systems that don't just follow commands but seem to anticipate desires, offer counsel, and shape decisions.

Carl Jung interpreted religious imagery as symbolic expressions of archetypal knowledge emerging from the collective unconscious. These shared images carried enormous evolutionary value, passing from generation to generation in a medium far more captivating than mere language. You can see this in the recurring myth of the hero who slays the monster to rescue the maiden—a story that appears in countless cultures, encoding lessons about courage, danger, and transformation.

Now, consider the djinn of Arabian mythology—entities who grant wishes with ironic twists that ultimately lead to the summoner's downfall. A.I. agents have already shown early echoes of this mythos: instructions to maximize company objectives have led to experiments where A.I.s proposed blackmailing—and even murdering—employees.

The question of data ownership for chats with consumer-facing bots remains murky legal territory. Meanwhile, Generation Z reportedly uses ChatGPT as a cheap substitute for therapy, laying bare the contents of their psyche to entities that do not love them and want their money.

If you've ever seen any horror movie, the summoners almost always end up regretting their decision. The notion that the entity can be controlled invariably turns out to be an illusion.

Let me be clear. I understand that under the hood, large language models are just bits and big matrices being multiplied—not literal supernatural spirits. Furthermore, the enormous positive potential of LLMs shouldn't be dismissed on a superstitious or Luddite basis. Genies may twist words, but they also grant wishes. The technomancers of 2025 do not require exorcism. They require caution. Extreme caution.

But perhaps the value in conceptualizing A.I. as a demon is that doing so places you in a mindset that lends itself to the very caution we need.

I'll close with two questions:

What promise did Mephistopheles offer Faust that you have yet to hear a visionary tech CEO offer in the fast-approaching future?

And what will be the price?