

ELON MUSK



HOW THE BILLIONAIRE CEO
OF SPACEX AND TESLA
IS SHAPING OUR FUTURE

ASHLEE VANCE

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About the Book

THERE ARE FEW INDUSTRIALISTS IN HISTORY WHO COULD MATCH ELON MUSK'S RELENTLESS DRIVE AND INGENIOUS VISION.

Musk is the man behind PayPal, Tesla Motors, SpaceX, and SolarCity, each of which has sent shock waves throughout business and industry. In this lively, investigative account, veteran technology journalist Ashlee Vance offers an unprecedented look into the remarkable life and times of Silicon Valley's most audacious businessman. Written with exclusive access to Musk, his family, and his friends, the book traces his journey from his difficult upbringing in South Africa to his ascent to the pinnacle of the global business world.

Since arriving in the United States in 1992, Musk's roller-coaster life has brought him grave disappointments alongside massive successes. After being forced out of PayPal, fending off a life-threatening case of malaria, and dealing with the death of his infant son, Musk abandoned Silicon Valley for Los Angeles. He spent the next few years baffling his friends by blowing his entire fortune on rocket ships and electric cars.

Cut to 2012, however, and Musk had mounted one of the greatest resurrections in business history: Tesla, SpaceX, and SolarCity had enjoyed unparalleled success, and Musk's net worth soared to more than \$5 billion.

This is a brilliant, penetrating examination of what Musk's career means for a technology industry undergoing dramatic change and offers a taste of what could be an incredible century ahead.

About the Author

ASHLEE VANCE is one of the most prominent writers on technology today. After spending several years reporting on Silicon Valley and technology for the *New York Times*, Vance went to *Bloomberg Businessweek*, where he has written dozens of cover and feature stories for the magazine on topics ranging from cyber espionage to DNA sequencing and space exploration.

ALSO BY ASHLEE VANCE

*Geek Silicon Valley:
The Inside Guide to Palo Alto, Stanford, Menlo Park, Mountain View, Santa
Clara, Sunnyvale, San Jose, San Francisco*

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For Mum and Dad. Thanks for Everything.

ELON'S WORLD

“DO YOU THINK I'm insane?”

This question came from Elon Musk near the very end of a long dinner we shared at a high-end seafood restaurant in Silicon Valley. I'd gotten to the restaurant first and settled down with a gin and tonic, knowing Musk would—as ever—be late. After about fifteen minutes, Musk showed up wearing leather shoes, designer jeans, and a plaid dress shirt. Musk stands six foot one but ask anyone who knows him and they'll confirm that he seems much bigger than that. He's absurdly broad-shouldered, sturdy, and thick. You'd figure he would use this frame to his advantage and perform an alpha-male strut when entering a room. Instead, he tends to be almost sheepish. It's head tilted slightly down while walking, a quick handshake hello after reaching the table, and then butt in seat. From there, Musk needs a few minutes before he warms up and looks at ease.

Musk asked me to dinner for a negotiation of sorts. Eighteen months earlier, I'd informed him of my plans to write a book about him, and he'd informed me of his plans not to cooperate. His rejection stung but thrust me into dogged reporter mode. If I had to do this book without him, so be it. Plenty of people had left Musk's companies, Tesla Motors and SpaceX, and would talk, and I already knew a lot of his friends. The interviews followed one after another, month after month, and two hundred or so people into the process, I heard from Musk once again. He called me at home and declared that things could go one of two ways: he could make my life very difficult or he could help with the project after all. He'd be willing to cooperate if he could read the book before it went to publication, and could add footnotes throughout it. He would not meddle with my text, but he wanted the chance

to set the record straight in spots that he deemed factually inaccurate. I understood where this was coming from. Musk wanted a measure of control over his life's story. He's also wired like a scientist and suffers mental anguish at the sight of a factual error. A mistake on a printed page would gnaw at his soul—forever. While I could understand his perspective, I could not let him read the book, for professional, personal, and practical reasons. Musk has his version of the truth, and it's not always the version of the truth that the rest of the world shares. He's prone to verbose answers to even the simplest of questions as well, and the thought of thirty-page footnotes seemed all too real. Still, we agreed to have dinner, chat all this out, and see where it left us.

Our conversation began with a discussion of public-relations people. Musk burns through PR staffers notoriously fast, and Tesla was in the process of hunting for a new communications chief. "Who is the best PR person in the world?" he asked in a very Muskian fashion. Then we talked about mutual acquaintances, Howard Hughes, and the Tesla factory. When the waiter stopped by to take our order, Musk asked for suggestions that would work with his low-carb diet. He settled on chunks of fried lobster soaked in black squid ink. The negotiation hadn't begun, and Musk was already dishing. He opened up about the major fear keeping him up at night: namely that Google's cofounder and CEO Larry Page might well have been building a fleet of artificial-intelligence-enhanced robots capable of destroying mankind. "I'm really worried about this," Musk said. It didn't make Musk feel any better that he and Page were very close friends and that he felt Page was fundamentally a well-intentioned person and not Dr. Evil. In fact, that was sort of the problem. Page's nice-guy nature left him assuming that the machines would forever do our bidding. "I'm not as optimistic," Musk said. "He could produce something evil by accident." As the food arrived, Musk consumed it. That is, he didn't eat it as much as he made it disappear rapidly with a few gargantuan bites. Desperate to keep Musk happy and chatting, I handed him a big chunk of steak from my plate. The plan worked ... for all of ninety seconds. Meat. Hunk. Gone.

It took awhile to get Musk off the artificial intelligence doom-and-gloom talk and to the subject at hand. Then, as we drifted toward the book, Musk started to feel me out, probing exactly why it was that I wanted to write about him and calculating my intentions. When the moment presented itself, I moved in and seized the conversation. Some adrenaline released and