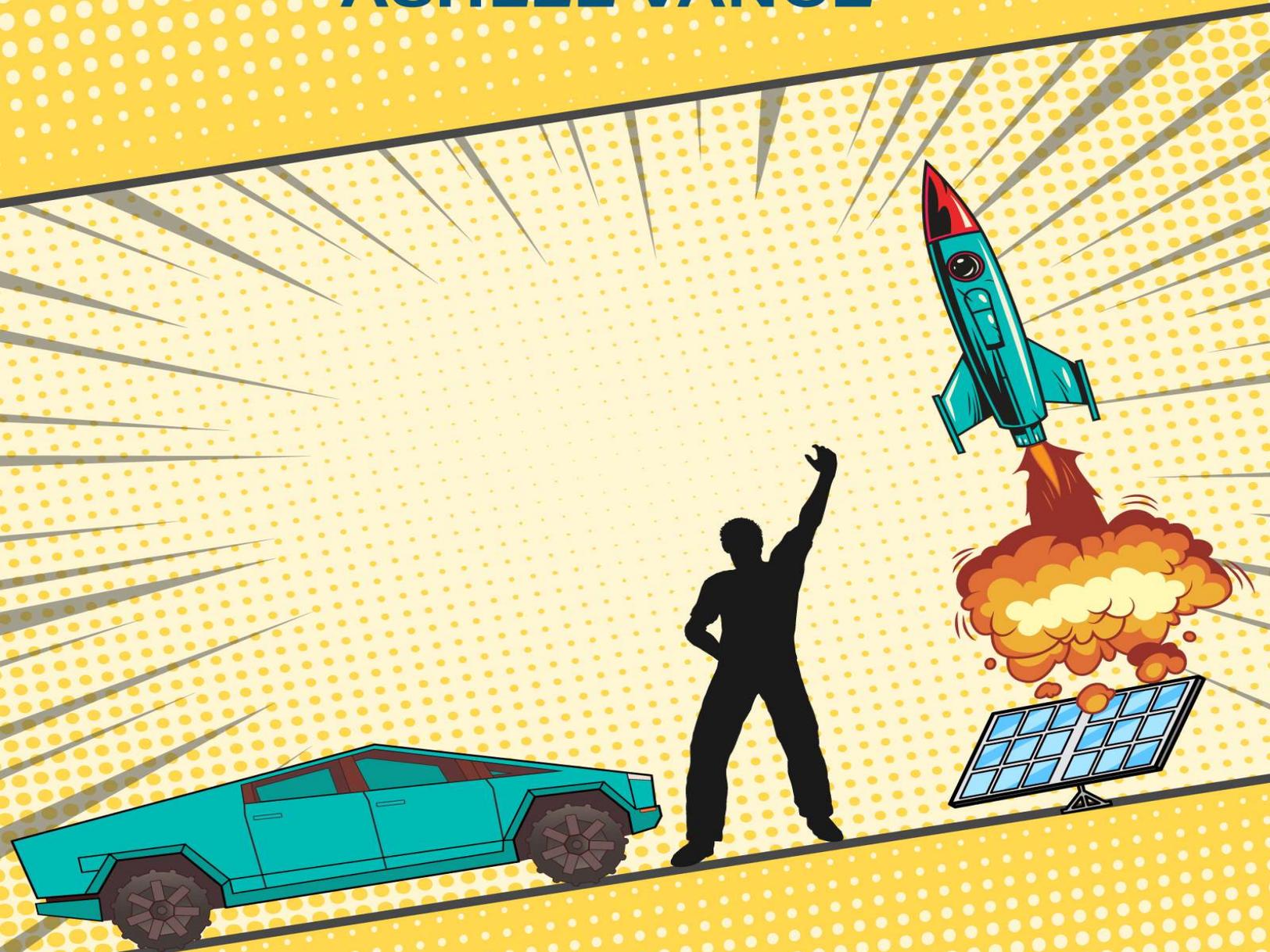


SUMMARY

ELON MUSK

ASHLEE VANCE



Summary of “Elon Musk” by Ashlee Vance

Written by Alyssa Burnette

Delve behind the scenes and learn about the man
behind Tesla, Space-X, and more!

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Introduction

What do you remember Elon Musk for? Is it his baby's wacky name? (Let's be honest, "X Æ A-12 Musk" is too out there, even for a celebrity!) Or maybe you know him primarily for his contributions to technology. But if you're not familiar with him at all, let's go over a quick recap: Elon Musk is a South African-born American entrepreneur and businessman. He is primarily known for his success and innovations in the fields of business and technology. Along with Peter Thiel, he co-founded X.com in 1999 (which later became PayPal), SpaceX in 2002 and Tesla Motors in 2003. Musk became a multimillionaire in his late 20s when he sold his start-up company, Zip2, to a division of Compaq Computers. And over the course of this summary, we'll learn more about what makes Elon Musk so special.



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The Early Years

The introduction to this book neatly summarizes most of what the average person knows about Elon Musk. He is a notable public figure because of his contributions to science and technology; in the age of Instagram, this-- along with his marriage to singer Grimes-- has earned him something of a celebrity status. But how much do we really know about the man behind these accomplishments? In this chapter, we'll take a look at Elon Musk's childhood and learn about the experiences that made him the man he is today. Although Musk is now one of America's most notable billionaires, he didn't start out that way. Elon Musk was born in 1971 in Pretoria, South Africa. And although conspiracy theories have circulated, suggesting that his father-- Errol Musk-- owned an emerald mine and inherited apartheid money, Musk has solidly refuted these stories.

Though he did attend a private school while growing up in South Africa, Musk has repeatedly asserted that he attended college on scholarships and student loans and graduated with more than \$100,000 worth of student loan debt. And although he has more than made up for any socio economic inequalities, his present success can't erase the pain of his tragic and tumultuous childhood.

Like many successful scientists and inventors, Musk was lonely and introverted as a child. In fact, he was so lost in his own world that, when he was 10 years old, his parents actually took him to a doctor to test for deafness! It turned out that there was nothing wrong with his hearing; he simply daydreamed so much that he was totally checked out! As a result, he rarely noticed when people were speaking to him. This was as much a coping mechanism as a form of creative expression, however. Unfortunately, his dreamy, introverted nature made him an easy target for bullying and Musk cites vivid recollections of the torment he endured at school. On one occasion, he recalls that his bullies convinced his best friend to entice him out of his hiding spot and into a trap. This betrayal is among his most painful

memories because he was so hurt when he realized that his friend had colluded with his bullies.

But this was by no means the only instance of bullying he encountered. At one point in his high school career, he was beaten so badly that he had to be rushed to the hospital. And even when the beatings weren't quite so severe, he regularly came home covered in bruises, battered and exhausted after being shoved around all day. When his bullies weren't physically assaulting him, they called him names, belittled his interests, and made him feel insecure about every facet of his personality. And, worst of all, the torment didn't end when he came home. His parents divorced when Musk was quite young and his father was physically and emotionally abusive. But because his mother's busy schedule required her to be away a lot, young Elon made the choice to live with his father anyway. This painful decision, made at a young age, indicates a loneliness so deep and heartbreaking that he would rather be bullied both at home and at school than be constantly alone.

And life with his father was certainly not easy! On more than one occasion, his father demanded that young Elon and his brother sit perfectly quiet and still for four hours or more while he yelled at them. Musk later went on to describe his life as "non-stop horrible" both at home and at school. But he also credits his torment as being a driving factor in his success. The pain of his reality drove him deeper into his own head and encouraged him to imagine better, happier worlds. He numbed the pain with his love for reading and his budding interest in computers. And by the time he was twelve years old, he had invented and sold his very first video game! These early experiences influenced the man Musk later became and he frequently says that he is grateful for the adversity he experienced. Without the pain of his early years, he argues that he might not have been driven to escape, to create, or to prove himself. And he worries that a decided lack of adversity may have a negative impact on the lives of his own children in the future.



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Musk's Educational Experiences and Early Career

In South Africa at that time, young men faced mandatory conscription into the military when they reached the age of 17. Musk already knew that military service wasn't for him, so he emigrated to Canada. Because his mother was a Canadian national, her heritage would enable him to later obtain citizenship. He wanted to move to the US, but at the time of his emigration to Canada, he could barely afford so much as a sandwich. He definitely couldn't afford to make an even bigger international move and start a new life for himself with no money.

It was a little easier to settle in Canada, where he was able to crash rent-free with various assorted relatives on his mother's side. But even though he sort of had a place to stay, nothing about his life was permanent or satisfying, and he quickly tired of doing odd jobs and sleeping on other people's couches. Eventually, he decided that going to college was the right answer, so he enrolled at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario and majored in Physics. Musk's college experience allowed him to blossom and truly find himself. He soon found that college was a different world from high school; here, he was free to be himself and pursue his real interests. This gave him the freedom to get to know himself better and identify his positive traits such as ambition and determination.

This newfound voyage of self-discovery soon blossomed into a quest for success. He developed strong opinions about space travel, science, and technology, and he became convinced that he could use technological advances to save and improve the human race. After two years at Queen's University, Musk had developed the grades, the confidence, and the financial ability to move to the US by transferring schools. And although he still financed his college education through student loans, he was finally able to accomplish his goal of moving to America. He transferred to the University of Pennsylvania and continued his studies there until he graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Physics, as well as a Bachelor of Arts in Economics from the Wharton School. The diversity of his degrees reflects the varied

nature of his interests and laid the groundwork for his future career in which creativity and science were equally intertwined.

However, his time at college was not a purely academic experience. He also found some creative (and slightly shady) ways to make money, like the time that he and his friend rented a 10-bedroom frat house that they turned into a nightclub. They supplied girls, booze, and parties in exchange for a \$5 admission fee. And while their guests got increasingly intoxicated, Musk remained sober and fully in possession of his mental faculties so he could take their money. In addition to these enterprising ventures, he also met the woman that he would later marry and have 6 children with him. Her name was Justine Wilson and, at first, she wasn't interested in him at all. But Musk wore her down with his signature determination and persistence-- qualities that are awesome in an inventor but might be slightly creepy in a prospective boyfriend! By the time he graduated, however, he and Justine were married and starting a family.



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Musk's Career Begins to Take Off

Following his graduation, Musk immediately decided to take his career to the next level and move to California. Silicon Valley was a hub of technological genius and he was a young tech whiz looking to make his next move; it seemed like a match made in heaven! So, Elon, Justine, and their family moved to California. It was then that his career began to take off. His early experiences in Silicon Valley made him an overnight dotcom millionaire, thanks to the success of his startup, Zip2. Shortly thereafter, he launched another company with co-founder Peter Thiel, and what started out as X.com would later become PayPal, the service loved and used around the world today!

Some people might have been content to quit after becoming a millionaire in their mid-twenties. But Elon Musk was just getting started. And that's when he dove headfirst into the space industry. At that time, the Mars Society was conducting an experiment in which they sent sexually active mice into orbit. This experiment was conducted with the intention of hopefully being the first organization to put life on Mars. Established in 1998, the Mars Society is the world's largest and most influential space advocacy organization dedicated to the human exploration and settlement of the planet Mars. Musk was fascinated by the Mars Society and their mission and he wanted to get involved. He liked the idea of a short-cut that scrapped the plan to send mice into space; he wanted to send them straight to Mars instead and see what happened.

Although that plan was never executed in the end, Musk's career in the space industry took off very quickly. He created a company called Space-X with the intention of building cheaper and faster rockets. Initially, the deadlines he set were impossible; he aimed for Space-X to launch their first rocket only 15 months after the company was founded! Of course, this was well beyond the bounds of possibility, and this early demand for the impossible soon came to serve as an example of what working with Elon Musk would be like. Because he had so much brain power and so many big ideas, he was eager to put his

plans into practice as soon as possible. And if it wasn't immediately possible, he wanted to change the world to make it possible! His brilliant ideas and relentless work ethic soon turned Space-X into a multi-million dollar company in its own right and established Musk's new company as a world leader in the space industry.

But once again, he wasn't content to stop there, and that's when he created Tesla. Tesla is a revolutionary electric car company. That's right-- electric cars are kind of his whole thing now. So, it's no surprise that Elon Musk and Tesla are the United States' poster children for sustainable automotives. Having received start-up money from the United States government, Tesla's first electric car did very well indeed. It was marketed primarily towards America's super-rich and its success fueled Musk's future projects. Building on the success of his first, exclusive design, Musk set out to design something that would be more commercially available: the Model S. The Model S is a luxury sedan that was designed with one purpose in mind: to be faster, cooler, smarter, and sleeker than any traditional vehicle on the market. Musk knew that if he could make electric cars look cooler than the options, people would be more likely to buy them, even if those customers weren't especially interested in the environment. And he was right! With the ability to accelerate in one second and a battery life that allows it to run 300 miles, the Model S is every car fanatic's dream. It also enabled Musk to dominate the current electric car market. His success also occurred at the perfect time. Because just as the Model S took off, Japan's electric vehicle market took a massive hit, allowing Musk to seize control of the international electric vehicle market.



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Final Summary

Today, Elon Musk stands as an emblem of a revolutionary inventor. We think of him as a man who is successful at everything he does. But his reflection on his personal life illustrates that life has not always been easy for him; as a child, he was bullied at school and abused at home, and he experienced a great deal of pain. However, Musk credits his early traumatic experiences with a great portion of his success. Without adversity, he believes that he might not have been so motivated to succeed. But his pain is not the only driving factor in his success; Elon Musk is also someone of incredible passion and intellect and he is relentlessly committed to pursuing his goal: improving the world through technology.



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