

# 15. Rocket Man

In the chapter "Rocket Man" from a book on SpaceX's inception in 2002, Elon Musk, alongside Adeo Ressi and Jim Cantrell, embarked on a trip to Russia with the initial aim of purchasing a used Russian rocket for a Mars mission. The journey involved a peculiar meeting dense with cultural exchanges, including a lunch where Musk passed out from an equal balance of food and vodka, and a vivid negotiation scene that reflects both the challenges and the almost comedic misunderstandings in international business transactions.

Facing dismissive and ultimately unfruitful negotiations with the Russians—who demanded exorbitant prices for their decommissioned missiles—Musk's frustration catalyzed a pivotal shift in his approach. The prohibitively high costs quoted for the rockets, coupled with a contentious interaction where a Russian official spat in their direction, did not deter Musk; instead, these experiences spurred an evolution in his thinking. Rather than securing a used missile, Musk contemplated creating a venture to develop rockets privately, aiming not just for satellite launches but for human space travel as well.

Adopting a first-principles perspective, Musk scrutinized the fundamental costs of rocket materials versus their retail price, identifying what he dubbed an "idiot index"—a measure of inefficient pricing due to traditional manufacturing methodologies. This analysis revealed the potential for significant cost reductions, propelling Musk to envisage building rockets more economically.

Upon returning home, fueled by determination and a newfound vision, Musk broached the idea of starting his own rocket company, SpaceX. This proposal was met with skepticism from his cohort, leading to an intervention that paradoxically solidified his resolve. He was undeterred by reminders of the high failure rate in rocketry; instead, the emphasis on risk and the possibility of financial loss underscored his commitment to advancing space exploration.

Musk's steadfastness, framed by a narrative that oscillates between humorous anecdotes and pivotal moments of insight, highlights not only his unconventional approach to problem-solving but also his audacity to rethink and challenge the status quo in aerospace. This chapter effectively sets the stage for the birth of SpaceX, encapsulating the mixture of ambition, adversity, and the drive for innovation that characterizes Musk's entrepreneurial spirit.