

48. Fallout

In 2018, Elon Musk faced significant personal and professional challenges, notably illustrated through his interactions with the media and his appearance on the Joe Rogan show. David Gelles, a reporter from the New York Times, engaged Musk in a revealing interview where Musk shared the toll his work was taking on his personal life, mentioning sleepless nights at the factory and lesser time with his children. Musk also refuted claims of any association with disgraced financier Jeffrey Epstein. This interview showcased a rare vulnerability, leading to heightened concerns about Musk's health and Tesla's leadership stability, causing Tesla's stock to plunge by 9 percent.

Musk's decision to appear on Joe Rogan's podcast was an attempt to address public speculations about his mental state. The interview, remembered for Musk's controversial on-air consumption of marijuana, further affected Tesla's public image and prompted a NASA investigation due to SpaceX's association. This episode also revealed Musk's playful side, as he brought a not-a-flamethrower to the show, embodying his tendency to intertwine seriousness with humor, a trait that extends to his ventures and public persona.

This period also highlighted strains in Musk's relationship with his brother, Kimbal, who had been a long-standing supporter. A disagreement over financial support for Kimbal's business led to a temporary rift, showcasing the intense pressures and personal challenges the Musk brothers faced amidst their professional endeavors.

Key Tesla executives, including JB Straubel, Tesla's co-founder, and key figures like Jon McNeill and Doug Field, exited the company during this tumultuous time. Straubel's departure, after 16 years with Musk, was particularly notable, underscoring the impact of the intense stress and Musk's mercurial nature on his closest allies and the company's leadership stability. This chapter portrays Musk as a complex figure facing immense pressures, balancing immense ambition with personal vulnerabilities, and experiencing both strain and support in his professional and personal relationships.