

"Elon": The Name Wernher von Braun Gave Mars' Ruler, 80 Years Before Musk



Some coincidences are so strange they end up looking like prophecies. This one involves a former SS officer who became the father of the American space program, a science-fiction novel rejected by eighteen publishers, and the richest man in the world. At the heart of the affair: a single word, "Elon," used nearly eighty years before that name became synonymous with rockets, electric cars, and the conquest of Mars.

The story goes back to the immediate postwar period. Wernher von Braun, chief engineer of the Nazi V-2 missile program, had just been smuggled into the United States as part of Operation Paperclip. Based at Fort Bliss, Texas, he wrote a manuscript in German between 1948 and 1949 titled [*Marsprojekt*](#), a speculative novel in which he imagined, with an engineer's precision, a human expedition to Mars and the political organization of the colony that would result from it.

"Elon," the Title of Mars' Head of Government

It is in Chapter 24 of the book, soberly titled "How Mars Is Governed," that the sentence which would, decades later, set social media ablaze, is tucked away. Von Braun describes a Martian government led by ten men, whose leader is elected by universal suffrage for a five-year term and holds the title of "Elon." This leader is assisted by a cabinet and a bicameral parliament, including an upper chamber, the Council of Elders, made up of sixty members he appoints himself for life.

"Elon" is therefore not a first name in von Braun's text: it is a function, somewhat like referring to a "chancellor" or a "consul." The German engineer never explains it and does not indicate where the word came from — an ambiguity that would fuel every speculation decades later.

A Cursed Manuscript, Published Sixty Years Too Late

Von Braun tried without success to have his novel published in the United States: eighteen American publishers turned him down one after another. Only the book's technical appendix, stripped of its fictional storyline, was published in 1953 under the title *The Mars Project*, by the University of Illinois Press — it was this purely scientific text that would later influence NASA. The novel itself, with its plot and its "Elon," remained unpublished for nearly sixty years.

It was not until 2006 that a small Canadian specialty publisher, Apogee Books, finally unearthed and published the full text under the title *Project Mars: A Technical Tale*. The passage about the "Elon" was therefore only made public — in English, widely accessible — sixty years after it was written, and thirty-five years after Elon Musk himself was born, in 1971.

The Startling Testimony of Elon Musk's Father

The affair might have remained a bibliophile's curiosity had Errol Musk, Elon's father, not spoken publicly about it in 2022, in an interview posted on YouTube. He explains that he grew up in South Africa reading, as a child, illustrated books by Wernher von Braun and his mentor Hermann Oberth, in which he recalls learning that the leader of the Martian colony held the title of "Elon." According to him, this childhood memory resurfaced when the time came to choose his son's name — all the more so, he adds, because the boy's maternal great-grandfather was in fact named Elon Haldeman, a family coincidence that finally convinced him.

Elon Musk himself reacted to the resurgence of this story on the social network X, joking that it had all been "foretold in the prophecy," without claiming any further mysticism around his own first name.

What the Archives Say

"The Martian government was directed by ten men, the leader of whom was elected by universal suffrage for five years and entitled 'Elon.' Two houses of parliament enacted the laws to be administered by Elon and his cabinet."

— Wernher von Braun, *Project Mars: A Technical Tale*, Chapter 24, "How Mars Is Governed" (written 1948–1949, published 2006)

Reconstructed Excerpt — Rejection Letter from an American Publisher (1949)

None of the eighteen rejection letters received by von Braun has ever been made public in full. Based on accounts gathered by his biographers and the editorial practices of the era, here is a reconstruction of the kind of letter the engineer might have received, offered as an illustration of the publishing climate in which his manuscript was rejected:

"Dear Dr. von Braun, thank you for submitting Marsprojekt to us. While the technical calculations accompanying your narrative are of unquestionable rigor, our editorial committee finds that the fictional storyline lacks the sweep needed to engage a general readership. We encourage you to develop the scientific appendix as a standalone work."

(Illustrative reconstruction based on postwar American publishing conventions — no original of these letters has been located to date.)

Troubling Coincidence, or a Story Reconstructed After the Fact?

Researchers and journalists who have examined this affair urge caution. Several elements weaken the "prediction" thesis. First, the timeline: the passage about the "Elon" only became accessible in English in 2006, by which time Elon Musk was already 35 — Errol Musk's account therefore rests on a childhood memory from South Africa in the 1950s and 1960s, a period when only a limited German-language version of the manuscript could have circulated, something difficult to verify independently.

Second, the word "Elon" was not von Braun's invention: it is an attested biblical name (one of the Judges of Israel in the Old Testament is named Elon), which makes it less improbable that a South African child of Protestant background might have encountered it elsewhere, independently of the novel.

Finally, the story spread and amplified widely on social media starting in 2018, at a time when Elon Musk was already publicly cultivating a near-messianic image as a figure of space conquest — fertile ground for retrospective narrative reconstruction, a phenomenon well documented in social psychology as confirmation bias.

Even so, the lexical coincidence itself is undeniable and verified in the original German text: von Braun did write the word "Elon" to designate the leader of Mars, nearly twenty years before the birth of the man who now dreams of sending the first colonists there.

Prophecy and 2012 - 24 août 2026 - Wakonda - CC BY 2.5