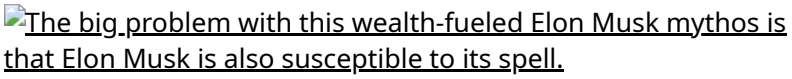
Elon Musk's 'Pedo Guy' Trial Shows the Depth And Danger of Musk's Own Sociopath Mythos

By Chris Roberts •

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The big problem with this wealth-fueled Elon Musk mythos is that Elon Musk is also susceptible to its spell.

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Almost always, Elon Musk gets a pass. Elon Musk is excused when he errs or blunders because he is rich—stupid-rich, No. 23-on-the-Forbes-list rich—and because he is doing Big Things with his wealth, like colonizing space and building unprofitable and impractical but social-media-friendly electric cars.

Someone this successful, this good at earning free and fawning press, must surely be doing something *different* than peons like you and me—something *better*—and so, when Elon Musk does something that is quantifiably rash, half-assed, or catastrophically dumb, you are encouraged to unbelieve your own eyes. No, that wasn't a boneheaded comment, a juvenile lark gone wrong or a very bad and not funny attempt at a "joke." That was a six-dimensional chess move, a sophisticated misdirection—or, *something*. You just couldn't *see* it!

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The big problem with this wealth-fueled Elon Musk mythos is that Elon Musk is also susceptible to its spell. Elon Musk is so very often right—look at the proof! Here is everyone saying so—that Elon Musk cannot admit it, to himself or anyone else, when he is so very obviously and egregiously wrong.

That is one theory to explain why Musk has spent the last two days in a Los Angeles courtroom defending himself in a defamation case, the subject of a lawsuit after he very publicly called a man—whom he'd never met, but whom he was having a public dispute via the media—a pedophile, a baseless allegation made in a furious red mist of wounded pride that is now costing him, and us, time and money.

Oh, but that's not what Elon Musk actually said, or meant, we are now expected to believe. When Elon Musk referred to Vernon Unsworth, a British expatriate living in Thailand and an expert cave diver assisting with the rescue of a group of Thai boys stranded in the Tham Luang cave complex in the summer of 2018, as a "pedo guy"—the retort Musk managed to cook up after an exasperated Unsworth said Musk's attempt to hijack the rescue with a cave submarine was a

ludicrous PR stunt—he just meant that Unsworth was a "creepy old guy," he tried to tell the court. Pedo means something else for South Africans (quick: name someone else from South Africa who is not Nelson Mandela), we were told.

Elon Musk spent three hours in court on Tuesday trying to argue the meaning of words, attempting to convince rational human beings on a jury that the way he used a word is different than the way the rest of us would use it. This exercise, and the rest of it—actually getting to trial, rather than trying to settle, as most people caught dead to rights doing something wrong (or at least actionable) would do—came *after* Musk tried to dig his way out rather than admit defeat.

Last summer, after his spat with Unsworth, Musk hired a private investigator to see if Unsworth, who is married to a prominent Thai woman from the Chiang Mai area—an area that Musk apparently discovered has some connection to child sex trafficking after some Googling—in fact, actually fancied boys, like Musk publicly suggested.

That the private investigator was a con man—and that there is no evidence Unsworth is a "pedo guy"—doesn't seem to matter. Elon Musk was taken in by someone willing to play Musk's own mythos against him. Then, after he was swindled, he just kept on digging. He told a prominent cybersecurity expert that the allegation was true. He then sent an email to a Buzzfeed News reporter in which he called Unsworth a "child rapist," and in which he said he hoped "Unsworth fucking sues" him.

Elon Musk built a myth out of whole cloth in a moment of pique and then, with an allegedly cooler head, tried to build a shirt factory out of it. Elon Musk does not know when to quit, Elon Musk cannot admit he is wrong and Elon Musk is perfectly content to sacrifice other peoples' time and reputation on the altar of his own hubris.

Attractive framings for this imbroglio abound. Attorney Alex Spiro, representing Musk, referred to his client's dispute as "a fight between men." Writing in *The Guardian*, Julia Carrie Wong described yesterday's proceedings as a forum for the "fragility of male egos," the stage for a pair of rutting rams to create a noisy distraction that serves only as a monument to their senses of self. Maybe—it's possible that Unsworth, were he not so peacock-proud, could have just shrugged the whole thing off. But in our analysis, the one asteroid-sized ego so large it is capable of altering the tides, or at least the course of Elon Musk's actions, is Musk's alone.

What set Musk off was Unsworth giving an interview to CNN in which he disparaged Musk's submarine solution. He watched it two or three times, Musk told the courtroom, and then fired off his angry tweets. More than a year later, it's still a trigger. As the Verge's Elizabeth Lopatto noted, that interview still infuriates Musk so much that he "turned pink while he watched it." Musk then followed up that unforced error with a literal parade of more of the same. Musk ensured that Unsworth had no option but to sue—Musk dared him to do it!

Is there some twisted method here? No, and do not waste a second searching for one.

"There are a lot of things I say, and not all of them have the same quality of thought," Musk said on Tuesday, in an apparent rare moment of clarity. Does he truly think this now—that his Twitter feed is a literal waste of malformed thoughts and $20 million weed jokes, with the occasional deep-space JPG? If he did, surely he would have settled the case, as *The New York Times*' Sarah Jeong observed.

More likely, in Elon Musk's mind, he believes he's still right. Just another in a series of world-altering acts of staggering hubris.

Filed Under: Business, Technology, Elon Musk, lawsuit, Tesla, SpaceX, elon musk tweet, The Boring Company, Vernon Unsworth

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