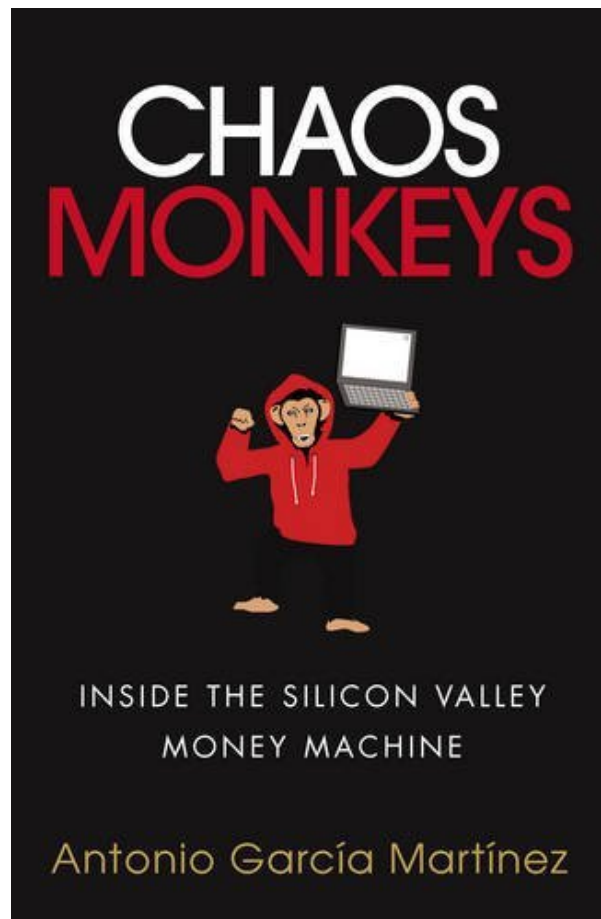


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CHAOS MONKEYS



INSIDE THE SILICON VALLEY
MONEY MACHINE

Antonio García Martínez

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Most helpful customer reviews

270 of 276 people found the following review helpful.

Amazingly accurate coverage of Facebook's internal culture, the good, the bad, and the ugly. (Plus much, much more!)

By C. Goolsbee

I worked at Facebook from 2010 until 2015, and until now I have never seen the inner machinations as accurately portrayed as they are in '*Chaos Monkeys*'. Facebook very carefully maintains a public relations campaign (almost more internally focused than external) to convince the world it is the best place to work... ever. In reality it is just like any other large company, with plenty of political intrigue, infighting, silo-building, and collateral damage. Sure, the mini-kitchens have organic bananas, and pistachios that stressed slobby software engineers neither have to shell, nor leave a pile of shells littered all around the floor... but in reality they are shackled to an oar, pulling to the endless beat of a drum. Code. Code. Code. It is all here... the creepy propaganda, the failed high-profile projects, the surreal manager/staff relationships, the cultivated cult-like atmosphere, the sharp divide between the have-it-all, and the "hope to have enough to escape" staff. The bizarro world of inside FB, around the IPO. I was there and experienced many of the same corporate events and milestones myself. Antonio Garcia Martinez captures it all perfectly.

That's only the last half of the book.

The rest is a tale of escaping from startup hell, making a go at reaching startup heaven, then making deals to salvage it all when reaching the critical trial-by-fire that every startup must face: die, execute flawlessly, or exit.

There are some who will find the tone, the voice, or the political incorrectness of both to be too harsh to digest. I've already seen that in a few of the reviews here. To them I say "grow up"... put on your big boy/girl pants and read this for the story. The tale it tells. The facts it presents. The data with which it backs it all up. Because it is all true. The exposition of complex systems are described using appropriate, and facile metaphors. Many of the standard Facebook tropes ("stealing/selling your data", "Zuck is evil", etc.) are explained for the misleading baloney that they are. Best of all it describes how the advertising media really operates, going back to the dawn of it, and how Facebook, Google, et al are merely extensions of a system that has existed for two centuries. It is worth the purchase price for that lesson alone, all wrapped in a great, and true story.

For myself, having lived through much of the same experience at Facebook (from onboarding, the devotion, the cynicism, to the inglorious, frustrated exit bungled by one of the legion of Facebook's incompetent and narcissistic manager corps) I found myself going from laughter, to nodding agreement, to gut-wrenching bouts of PTSD as I turned the pages of 'Chaos Monkeys'. Now I no longer have to justify myself to people who ask me why I left Facebook - I can just tell them to read this book, since it explains it better than I ever could.

74 of 79 people found the following review helpful.

Insightful, hilarious and accurate take on the insanity of silicon valley

By Veljko Skarich

Chaos Monkeys is a bargain, since you are really getting four books in one. First, our lucky reader is treated to a Sherman-style total war on the vanities and conceits of the tech elite. For the hater in all of us, it is uncompromised, savage delight. He particularly takes aim at noxious myth of meritocracy in the valley. As anywhere, those educated at the right places, and taught the right diction and manner of speaking rise to the top. For whatever reason, people in silicon valley seem to need reminding of this fairly often, perhaps more than most.

Another skewered vanity is that the work being done there is “changing the world.” The nirvana of being paid millions while doing meaningful work is the final privilege being sought by the waves of wall street refugees making their way out west. Only the most self-deluded really buy it, and as Antonio shows, those often happen to be working at the most influential and powerful companies. Is Facebook really changing the world? Without question, but when Facebook uses the language of historical figures, implicitly placing itself on the same podium as Cato the elder, say, it is both creepy and pathetic. Furthermore, the same gulf between the windfalls of the upper echelon and the rank-and-file is still present.

The second book is a detailed, unsparing deep-dive into the trenches of the ad tech industry. Just for that, it is worth reading if your job has any remote connection with selling online. You will come away with more awareness of how pixels convert to dollars. This theme occupies most of the second half of the book. If anything, the vivid metaphors he uses to describe the otherwise dull and esoteric details of identity matching and attribution will serve you well anytime you must summon a complete picture of this complex web in your head. Even non-specialists will find fascinating the descriptions of how private data is collected and sold, not to mention probably realizing they have been worried about the wrong kind of privacy violations.

Third, there is a marvelous how-to guide for aspiring entrepreneurs hidden between the diatribes. Antonio managed to meet many of the key players in the industry. His detailed accounts of many of these meetings (confrontations) offer a unique behind-the-scenes vantage which many manuals for silicon valley success avoid, so the authors can remain in good stead with the figures involved. In addition, there is another way that Chaos Monkeys serves as an excellent preview of what entrepreneurship entails. Other how-to books are so smitten with the idea of entrepreneur as Hero that they often fail to convey the tedium, anxiety and chaos that are most of the day-to-day realities for any entrepreneur. These other books mention that building a company is hard and stressful, but often seem shy to mention exactly why, beyond executing a bad idea, or a linear increase in working hours. In reality, the unspoken “hard” part of any startup is not the actual hours involved, or the idea, or execution, but rather the unwavering conviction you must have to keep at it when things are totally falling apart. The struggle to convince yourself, your investors and your customers that your vision of the world is the correct one is constant war against entropy, counterfactuals, competitors or self-doubts. Any of these must be swallowed, digested, spat out, and freeze-dried as more grist for your sales pitch mill. Every entrepreneur will immediately recognize what Antonio unabashedly portrays: the dreadful gulf between the inward awareness of all the chaos and flux at the startup, while preserving the outward image of polish, order and optimism. In fact, the delusion of performing world-changing work as an

entrepreneur (even when you're just building a s***ty analytics panel) is so pervasive, it cannot be solely attributed to narcissism. The book makes the point that this delusion is actually an emotional coping mechanism to endure the aforementioned doublethink on a daily basis.

Finally, we are given an intimate, unsentimental portrait of Antonio's tortured psyche. While I wouldn't necessarily advocate "praying for Antonio's soul," as a previous reviewer stated, his relentless self-deprecation and raw honesty balance out some of the selfish decisions he makes in the book. He is extremely well read, and I suspect this background informs a somewhat tragic theme of the book— for a certain type of person, the only hope that can lift the cynicism and misanthropy of early life disappointment is to undergo a meaningful quest with loyal companions. There aren't many of those quests around anymore, unfortunately, nor is there a surfeit of loyal companions in the sort of places and professions that demand one's full faculties. In the book, many characters and causes fail to meet this high bar, of course. I suspect more than a few failed idealists will find a kindred spirit in Antonio, despite the caustic tone throughout. That said, there is plenty here to be offended about, if that is your sort of thing. Some of the criticism is justified. For example, there is some objectification of women that could have been omitted. However, if that is your ONLY take-away, then you are precisely the sort of self-important, thin-skinned windbag that is rightfully skewered in Chaos Monkeys.

103 of 112 people found the following review helpful.

You will either love or hate Martinez's voice (I found myself doing both ...

By Argyrios Zymnis

If you are remotely interested in startups and tech you should read this book. This is Liar's Poker crossed with Silicon Valley, with a smattering of Hunter S. Thompson-esque ruminations about life, capitalism, and everything.

You will either love or hate Martinez's voice (I found myself doing both at different parts of the book). I'm sure a lot of people are going to get hung up on some offhand sexist comments or the dirt thrown at Facebook's execs (and I'm sure that Martinez could have avoided both while keeping the book interesting). The real gems in the book, however, are the tangents that Martinez takes to describe in a really simple way some fairly technical concepts. For example the way that he describes online advertising and why it is similar to security trading is really well done.

Read this book if you want to see how the Valley works from someone who was in there, drank the koolaid, but have the clarity of mind to get out of there and write about it.

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