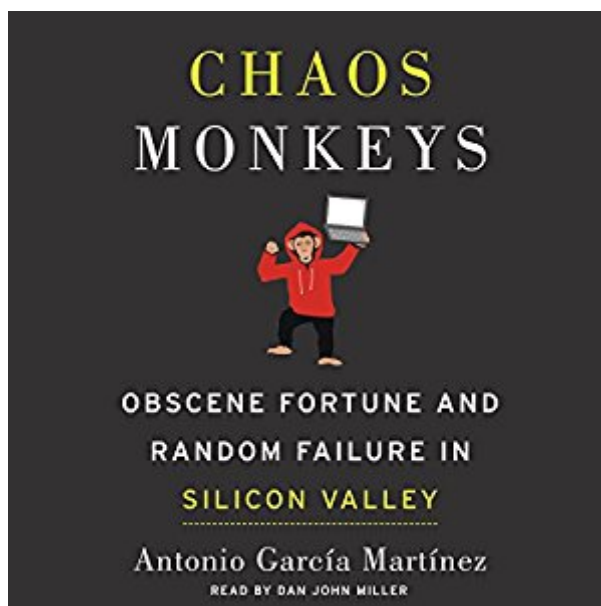


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Chaos Monkeys: Obscene Fortune And Random Failure In Silicon Valley



Synopsis

Liar's Poker meets The Social Network in an irreverent exposé of life inside the tech bubble, from industry provocateur Antonio Garc a Mart nez, a former Twitter advisor, Facebook product manager, and start-up founder/CEO. The reality is, Silicon Valley capitalism is very simple: Investors are people with more money than time. Employees are people with more time than money. Entrepreneurs are the seductive go-between. Marketing is like sex: only losers pay for it. Imagine a chimpanzee rampaging through a data center powering everything from Google to Facebook. Infrastructure engineers use a software version of this "chaos monkey" to test online services' robustness - their ability to survive random failure and correct mistakes before they actually occur. Tech entrepreneurs are society's chaos monkeys, disruptors testing and transforming every aspect of our lives from transportation (Uber) and lodging (AirBnB) to television (Netflix) and dating (Tinder). One of Silicon Valley's most audacious chaos monkeys is Antonio Garc a Mart nez. After stints on Wall Street and as CEO of his own start-up, Garc a Mart nez joined Facebook's nascent advertising team, turning its users' data into profit for COO Sheryl Sandberg and chairman and CEO Mark "Zuck" Zuckerberg. Forced out in the wake of an internal product war over the future of the company's monetization strategy, Garc a Mart nez eventually landed at rival Twitter. He also fathered two children with a woman he barely knew, committed lewd acts and brewed illegal beer on the Facebook campus (accidentally flooding Zuckerberg's desk), lived on a sailboat, raced sport cars on the 101, and enthusiastically pursued the life of an overpaid Silicon Valley wastrel. Now this gleeful contrarian unravels the chaotic evolution of social media and online marketing and reveals how it is invading our lives and shaping our future. Weighing in on everything from start-ups and credit derivatives to Big Brother, data tracking, social media monetization, and digital "privacy", Garc a Mart nez shares his scathing observations and outrageous antics, taking us on a humorous, subversive tour of the fascinatingly insular tech industry. Chaos Monkeys lays bare the hijinks, trade secrets, and power plays of the visionaries, grunts, sociopaths, opportunists, accidental tourists, and money cowboys who are revolutionizing our world. The question is, will we survive? Bonus content: an exclusive interview featuring Antonio Garc a Mart nez in conversation with journalist and author Steven Levy.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 15 hours and 31 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: HarperAudio

Audible.com Release Date: June 28, 2016

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B01EM53OMO

Best Sellers Rank: #12 in [Books > Computers & Technology > Business Technology > Social Media for Business](#) #13 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Professionals & Academics > Computers & Technology](#) #18 in [Books > Computers & Technology > Internet & Social Media > Social Media](#)

Customer Reviews

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. 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.

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 shitty 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.

Mr. Martinez chronicle's of his career in Silicon Valley is entertaining, refreshingly honest and of historical significance. The first part of the book details his time at AdGrok, a startup of no great consequence, where he cut his teeth in Silicon Valley. It is a tale of ambition, greed, irreverence, vengeance and betrayal, sprinkled with enough kindness and chutzpah to keep even the less morbid reader engaged. The second part of the book chronicles Mr. Martinez career in Facebook, as a member of the nascent Ads team. It is a fascinating and unforgiving account of the culture and personalities that propelled Facebook to profitability. Of historical significance is the brilliant description of the evolution of the surprisingly technical world of Internet advertisement, written in the first person by someone who had a hand in its shaping. The tale is interesting in of itself but the book is made by Mr. Martinez prose. His writing is articulate, witty and erudite. Most importantly, in a world where BS is a major currency, Mr. Martinez's voice is a breath of fresh air in its irreverence and honesty. He spares nothing and no one: SV Feminists, SJWs, greedy VCs, sycophant middle managers and sociopath CEOs. I suspect many readers will be turned off by his candor, but I for one thoroughly enjoyed his genuine, if sometimes coarse, voice. I wish Mr. Martinez all the best in his nautical adventures and best of luck in his literary career - it is hard to imagine he can come back to technology after this.

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