



# Valley of the Gods: A Silicon Valley Story

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Reporter Alexandra Wolfe's biting but admiring story of Silicon Valley, and the men and women whose hubris and ambition are changing the world.

Each year, young people from around the world go to Silicon Valley to hatch an idea, start a company, strike it rich, and become powerful and famous. In "a jauntily paced anthropological look at Northern California's techtopia" (*Bloomberg Businessweek*), reporter and columnist for *The Wall Street Journal* Alexandra Wolfe follows three of these upstarts who have "stopped out" of college and real life in the hopes of becoming the next Mark Zuckerberg or Elon Musk.

Meet the billionaires who go to training clubs for thirty-minute "body slams" designed to fit in with the start-up schedule; attend parties where people devour peanut butter-and-jelly sushi rolls; and date and seduce in a romantic culture in which thick glasses, baggy jeans, and a t-shirt is the costume of any sex symbol (and where a jacket and tie symbolize mediocrity). Through Wolfe's eyes, we discover how they date and marry, how they dress and live, how they plot and dream, and how they have created a business world and an economic order that has made us all devotees of them.

In her blistering and hysterical examination of this new ruling class, Wolfe "offers a revealing peek inside the privilege, power, and profligacy of Silicon Valley" (*Town & Country*). *Valley of the Gods* "captures the absurdity of this brave new world, pierces the hype, but also conveys the dreams and the passions that can shape a world's economy" (*USA TODAY*).

## Valley of the Gods: A Silicon Valley Story Details

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Author : Alexandra Wolfe

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## From Reader Review Valley of the Gods: A Silicon Valley Story for online ebook

### Alex Moskalyuk says

Overly repetitive and delves into needless details, such as names of people, projects and companies that go nowhere and are mentioned in the book once. Entire chapters are dedicated to digressions (e.g. co-living) that have no relation to the rest of the book contents, and could've easily fit into a few paragraphs.

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### Alida Hanson says

I am interested in this topic, Wolfe has excellent contacts and was invited to shadow Peter Thiel. Unfortunately her writing style has two modes, gushing and flat, which to me is awkward, stilted, and boring. I'm halfway through the book, in the middle of the section about the Symbolic Systems major at Stanford, and wish that Asne Sierstad or Masha Gessen wrote this instead of Wolfe.

Even more painful, references to her father's work (Tom Wolfe), instead of enhancing the book, made me consider nepotism in Wolfe's career, and destroyed my appreciation for her work. I'm not saying my opinion is "right," I'm just trying to explain my response without a snarky one liner which is very tempting in this case.

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### Megan Nigh says

Was really intrigued by the topic, but after many major grammatical errors, I'm done with this book. I'm giving it one extra star for the clever title. However, apart from the clever title, the actual content is full of very basic grammatical mistakes that should have been caught. Examples: on page 88 "With occupants ranging from their late teens to their midthirties, the \$5 million houses full of telescopes, terminals, and other high-tech toys, and everything from pools to **notes** to koi ponds....." Umm you mean **moats**, right?

Page 30: "**He**, like many of the people in the room, from the tech execs to the aspiring fellows, **weren't** the kind of **people** you would find schmoozing at Manhattan cocktail parties." In this instance, "he" is the subject. So he **wasn't the kind of person**, not he weren't the kind of people. Such a basic, basic concept that a decent writer and halfway decent editor should have caught. How many people read this prior to publication and missed this?

Anyway, I'm pretty thoroughly disgusted and am quitting halfway through. Story was interesting enough, but it reads like a poorly written, Sex in the City column knock-off. Not what I expected from a Wall Street Journal reporter.

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### Jim says

<http://observer.com/2017/01/peter-thi...>

## Hannah says

Three chapters in I knew everything I ever (didn't) want to know about Silicon Valley start-ups. Then it became a long list of techie names and descriptions of fridge contents and living arrangements that was almost impossible to follow. Would have been a great newspaper article, but as a book, simply tedious.

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## Lahiru Perera says

Just horrible and uninteresting.

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## Mariya says

Quite interesting book about the life of Silicon Valley - the way of living, the values, everyday things, and people around. It tells a lot about the atmosphere in the Valley and why West is so different from the East - because of the same values, because of the dreams people have and different wishes, because of the desire to change the world and leave their mark on Earth. It is really interesting to get deeper into the world of "Gods" and see how it is all created from the inside. Even though not everyone who goes there is successful or even stays.

The story though sometimes looked a bit messy to me - too many names in one chapter that I could lose the link to the previous chapter or even paragraph.

But still, the book that worth reading for general knowledge and with some good advice of other books to add to my to-read list.

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## Tom Armstrong says

This is a very disjointed book. It purports to follow the story of a few of the first class of Thiel Fellows and their decision to forgo college, move to Silicon Valley, and start companies. But it diverges all over the place (Uber's government relations, Ray Kurzweil, etc). It also rehashes some tired valley cultural crap (everyone wears hoodies, where are you on the spectrum, etc). Overall, this is a pretty disappointing book lacking organization.

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## Peter Tillman says

Pretty good book on SV culture and people. The best stories started out as magazine articles, and the worst parts are pretty disjointed. She's a good writer, and I did (mostly) enjoy the book, skimming over the weakest parts. The student stories were the most variable, but the best of these were the best parts of the book. I can see why the book got mixed reviews. 2.7 stars

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## erforscherin says

I don't usually hand out reviews this low - much less for nonfiction! - but this is truly one of the most terrible excuses for journalism I've ever read.

Rambling and often incoherent, it feels like the author ran about eight different articles through a blender and didn't even bother to copy edit; often I'd have to stop several times per chapter and reread a page multiple times because I couldn't follow the train of thought. The narrative wanders all over the place, jumping from topic to topic at random, then going off on some wild unrelated tangent, then suddenly chattering on again about the life of someone who was last mentioned twenty pages ago who you now can't remember.

More than that, the journalism here is just plain *lazy*: the author recites facts but never connects anything together critically, or digs into anyone's motivations at all. Even the most basic questions - How did A lead to B, and then to C? Why did that person do X instead of Y? How did Z make them feel, and what did they do about it? - go completely unanswered. It's like reading a first-grader's book report: all quotes and no analysis, just empty substance.

And just in case you think I'm exaggerating about the incoherence, here are just a few random examples:

Zuckerberg took the program as an attack and spent all night writing a JavaScript obfuscatory to break the Winklevi's - how the Mark Zuckerberg character jokingly refers to the Winklevoss twins, as though Winklevi (pronounced "winkle-vie") is the plural of a Latin -us ending - code.

(Ye gods, that was painful even just to type out. My kingdom for some punctuation, or at least a footnote!)

Polyamory intrigued Burnham, though he didn't subscribe to it. Friedman did too. Granted, he wasn't as excited about Friedman's Seasteading Institute.

(I've reread it five times and still can't make heads or tails of it...)

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## Serena says

I found this book disjointed and hard to follow. I was interested in reading more about the distinct culture of Silicon Valley but there was no engaging narrative to follow, and the author's feelings seeped into the reporting more than I would like. I decided not to waste my time about half-way through the "Gluten-Free Open Marriages" chapter.

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## Mary says

Not just her father's daughter, Wolfe is a little less satirical and a little more empirical than father Tom as she

chronicles the quirky world of the Silicon Valley inventors who change the world day by day in a binary way, but who have social and emotional deficits that leave them spinning toward an uneasy adulthood casting about with diet and exercise regimens, polyamory, and a quest for immortality. It is not for nothing that Google's logo looks like the front of a crayon box, that its premises can resemble a playground, and that its employees dress like dorm rats. No need to leave childhood behind when one becomes wealthy beyond one's wildest imaginings in one's twenties.

How the actual nurturing of the bright and inventive happens is of note, with the Thiel fellowships offering an alternative to college, and with the entire notion of college being cast into doubt. The struggles of the fellows are noteworthy, but the book's attempt to cover a range of issues seemed to sacrifice some depth.

The book caused quite a stir when published but many of its trenchant observations have been more than amply eclipsed by Mike Judge's Silicon Valley, which presents disrupters in their habitats in a fiercely funny way. The book and the show affirm each other. I enjoyed Wolfe's work, but would wish that she dig deeper and not wider next time.

By the way, as I am counting this toward my 2018 book goals, I note that I am counting this although the "reading" experience was by way of audiobook. No sense in letting a good listen go to waste.

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### **Mei Dean Francis says**

I'm a voyeuristic person in tech who likes Silicon Valley (both in real life and as a topic) and loved Tom Wolfe, but I couldn't get past the second chapter of this book, which I paid full price for (I never do that!). It received a positive review in a womens' magazine I trusted until now.

The writing is amateurish, clickbait-y, repetitive, disjointed. As a deep dive article, it might have been interesting, but I'm having trouble figuring out who this book's intended audience is-- people familiar with the tech world will find it grating and explicatory, and people unfamiliar with it will get lost quickly. Hopefully someone in between will find it in the Tiny Library I'll be leaving it in. (I never do that, either.)

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### **Andrew says**

\*3.5 stars\*

I don't really care about Silicon Valley. And I'm even less enamoured with the crazies who inhabit it. But this one held my attention as it follows the ups-and-downs of Peter Thiel's dropout fellows. They're the special kids. The ones who go to MIT at 14 with no social skills. But then they arrive in the Valley and are fêted (with copious kale), encouraged, and worshipped (sometimes polyamorously).

It helps that many are working on immortality projects, trying, literally, to become gods.

So, take a trip to the Valley.

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### **Christin.P says**

Halfway through the book, I gave up and a two-star rating is generous. The main points I couldn't get past:

**\* Structure of the book**

It's not clear to me what **Wolfe's** overall storyline is. She gets lost too many times in side stories of a gazillion people and it feels like she info-dumps just to show off her connections and "insights".

**\*Language**

Typos, convoluted sentences, missing punctuation, more typos. Who proofread this book before publication?

**\*Writing Style**

This book lacks flow and clarity, both in style and content. A chapter ends and you're left hanging: What's her message here? Which conclusions does she draw? Also, her observations of the Valley stay very much on the surface: people's relationship status, party/networking/work locations, housing situations, wardrobe styles, to name a few. The reader is left to figure out how those pieces of information are in any way relevant to what the tech companies actually do.

**\*Logic**

The timeline is absolutely confusing because **Wolfe** jumps between people's stories, what they work on, who they work for. One chapter you find yourself in late 2012, the next you're moved back to early 2012 with someone else's story. I couldn't keep up.

With everything that Silicon Valley is known for and pumps out into the world, it's beyond me how **Wolfe** got away with publishing such a low-quality book.

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