

"This is that rare book that not only informs but entertains. You'll never look at these four companies the same way again."  
—JONAH BERGER, author of *Contagious* and *Invisible Influence*



THE HIDDEN DNA OF AMAZON,  
APPLE, FACEBOOK, AND GOOGLE

*Scott Galloway*

# The Four: The Hidden DNA of Amazon, Apple, Facebook, and Google

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# **The Four: The Hidden DNA of Amazon, Apple, Facebook, and Google**

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**The Four: The Hidden DNA of Amazon, Apple, Facebook, and Google** Scott Galloway  
**NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER**  
**USA TODAY BESTSELLER**

Amazon, Apple, Facebook, and Google are the four most influential companies on the planet. Just about everyone thinks they know how they got there. Just about everyone is wrong.

For all that's been written about the Four over the last two decades, no one has captured their power and staggering success as insightfully as Scott Galloway.

Instead of buying the myths these companies broadcast, Galloway asks fundamental questions. How did the Four infiltrate our lives so completely that they're almost impossible to avoid (or boycott)? Why does the stock market forgive them for sins that would destroy other firms? And as they race to become the world's first trillion-dollar company, can anyone challenge them?

In the same irreverent style that has made him one of the world's most celebrated business professors, Galloway deconstructs the strategies of the Four that lurk beneath their shiny veneers. He shows how they manipulate the fundamental emotional needs that have driven us since our ancestors lived in caves, at a speed and scope others can't match. And he reveals how you can apply the lessons of their ascent to your own business or career.

Whether you want to compete with them, do business with them, or simply live in the world they dominate, you need to understand the Four.

## **The Four: The Hidden DNA of Amazon, Apple, Facebook, and Google Details**

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## **From Reader Review The Four: The Hidden DNA of Amazon, Apple, Facebook, and Google for online ebook**

### **Filip Struhárik says**

Pre m?a bolo zaujímavé ?íta? najmä o tom, ako sa autor knihy pokúsil v rokoch 2008 - 2010 ovládnu? redakciu New York Times, zmeni? stratégiu firmy, stiahnu? všetky ?lánky z Googlu a tým zachráni? Timesy aj žurnalistiku ako takú.

Scott Galloway má z výšky svojho ega pocit, že do najlepšej redakcie sveta doniesol myšlienky, aké tam predtým ani potom už nikdy nikto nemal, že mál odhodlanie, no narazil na pribrzdnených ?udí, ktorí nerozumejú modernej dobe. Jasné, médiá zaspali dobu, no to neznamená, že Galloway im mohol pred 10 rokmi akoko?vek pomôc?.

Svoju knihu napísal tri roky po tom, ako v New York Times urobili tzv. Innovation Report, štúdiu ktorá hodnotila nedostatky redakcie v digitálnej dobe. Do knihy o tom nezmestil ani veti?ku, lebo sa mu to nehodilo. On sa totiž potreboval tvári?, že New York Times sú na webe stále nemožní a od jeho odchodu z firmy sa nikam neposunuli. Faktom však je, že Innovation Report bola miliónkrát trefnejšia, lepšia a vykonate?nejšia, než všetky Gallowayove úvahy dokopy. New York Times medzi?asom urobili obrovské inovácie, no Galloway sa stále tvári, že ?itate?om nerozumejú a vedia o nich akurát tak PS?.

The Four ale nie je len Timesoch. Je o štyroch ve?kých firmách (Facebook, Google, Amazon a Apple), popisuje prí?iny ich úspechu a jedine?nosti - ob?as trefne, ob?as len banálne. Nezorientový ?lovek sa ve?a dozvie, zorientovaný má s ?ím nesúhlasi?.

Treba tiež ale poveda?, že Gallowayov štýl je neznesite?ný, metafory sú vrcholom infantilnosti a neustála potreba vysvet?ova? správanie ?udí len cez sexuálny pud (muži majú rozmnožovanie v génoch, preto chcú Rolexky a Apple) hovorí viac o limitoch autora knihy ako o realite.

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### **Susan says**

Not particularly new information, but a nice clear analysis of how these companies came to be as big and successful as they are. On the one hand Galloway seems to be primarily impressed by their succes, on the other hand, luckily, he's also critical:"The world needs more homes with engaged parents, not a better fucking phone."

I was disappointed coming to the end of the book where Galloway gives career advice on how to be as successful as these companies. Apparently it would be worth it to work at least 80 hours a week. I sincerely hope our youth realizes there is more to life. "Only hire A-s, because A-s only hire A-s, while Bs hire Cs. Winners recognize other winners; while also-rans can be threatened by competitors."

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### **Wen says**

I agreed with several reviewers that the book uncovered few new insights, yet my biggest issue was the

author's lack of focus. The book tried to cross among business strategy, business history and self-help genres, unfortunately failed to stand out in any.

The contents within each chapter could have used better organization and less digression. One had to weed out non-essential chatters, like the author's ideology in social responsibilities and the detailed account regarding to his boardroom setback at New York times, to get to some of the most valuable messages.

The four chapters dedicated to the four companies, Amazon, Apple, Facebook and Google respectively went from good, satisfactory, subpar to poor. And the rest of the book was not much more than common sense.

The essential takeaway of the book was the moat, or sustainable competitive advantage, of each of the four companies the author dubbed horsemen. Here I shared most of Galloway's points, including Amazon's low cost of capital, Apple's premium brand segmentation, Facebook's relationship nurturing and Google's role as the epic information center. However when it comes to implementations, I'm not convinced that establishing low-cost universities would strengthen Apple's eco system, nor do I believe Facebook has the resources and ability to police fake news, while NVIDIA is already capable of creating realistic image of fake celebs.

Also I think Microsoft is already the fifth horseman, given its unparalleled position in enterprise markets and its cloud momentum. All the companies mentioned above target a mixture of consumer and commercial markets, Microsoft's heavy focus on the production (work) side, rather than the consumption (play) side, should position it well in the marketplace going forward.

Overall I think there are more insightful books out there on the subject.

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### **Gretchen Alice says**

My library is the coolest. For our staff holiday party, we arranged a Secret Santa book exchange where you'd be paired up with someone who read different genres from you\*. Their assignment was to pair you up with a book outside of your normal reading patterns\*\* and my "santa" gave me *The Four*, since I don't read a whole lot of nonfiction. This is exactly the kind of book where I would read the jacket copy, think "oh, that looks interesting," and then never get around to reading it.

Scott Galloway presents a convincing argument for the legitimacy and domination of Facebook, Google, Amazon, and Apple. He calls them "the four horsemen" and goes into how each of them became such a massive world power. They each appeal to different needs of ours--social connection, information seeking, product acquisition, and luxury. Galloway acknowledges the fact that none of them are inherently good, so to speak, but none of them are necessarily evil, either. (Well, maybe Facebook.) I rely on each of these things on a pretty much daily basis and it was strange to confront how much I depend on them. (I'm trying to wean myself off of my personal facebook, but it's still a thing I need for work and that kinda sucks!) Eventually, other companies will likely come along and upset the balance of power, though that might take a while. Some of Galloway's analogies were overdone and lots of the finance stuff went over my head, so I'm not a total nonfiction convert just yet. But I did greatly enjoy getting outside of my comfort zone. I loved reading and thinking about something different.

\* My husband: "So...you gave each other homework."

Me: "Yeah, it's great!"

My husband: "Nerds."

\*\*I can't wait to hear what my recipient thinks of my choice for them!

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### **Quintin Zimmermann says**

Scott Galloway equates the Big Four - Google, Facebook, Apple and Amazon - to the Four Horseman of god, love, sex and consumption respectively.

The author proceeds to examine and deconstruct the strategies that the Four employed in becoming the present giants of industry, the exploitation of their own mythologies and consumer habits as well as their overt and covert anti-competitive techniques to stifle their competition.

This is all extremely illuminating, but there isn't much new here that you aren't able to read elsewhere. The prominence of these ubiquitous companies in our daily lives means that they are already subject to extensive research and analysis in many books, publications, research papers and articles.

Scott Galloway does make a concerted effort to draw business lessons from the Four, but I find this part unconvincing as you cannot extrapolate success from the unique circumstances and individuals that birthed the Four. Great success requires ingenuity, not imitation.

However, it is seldom that you have the convenience of all Four being the subject matter of one singular book. It is further interesting how these four divergent companies are slowly, but inexorably encroaching upon each other's special areas of expertise in the race to become the first trillion dollar company.

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### **Donna says**

This is a nonfiction/science/technology book. The author focuses in on Amazon, Apple, Facebook, and Google and does a nice little analysis on how these monsters have managed to corner the market. My inner geek found this kind of fascinating. It was amusing, and I enjoyed the sarcastic humor. That part was 4 stars.

Now this did feel a little long, and towards the end, it unravels a bit....so 3 stars.

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### **John Plowright says**

‘The Four’ considers the enormous power accrued – for good and for (tax-avoiding, job-destroying, fake news-propagating) ill – by the big four technology giants Amazon, Apple, Facebook and Google.

This examination takes place at a very interesting time for, as author Scott Galloway makes abundantly clear, the only competition the Four face is from each other, and the race is now on between them to become the premier operating system.

The first half of the book looks at the history of retail and the business strategies of each of the Four (such as the inspired decision to transition Apple from a tech to a luxury brand and to move into retail), whilst the second half chiefly considers the Four’s relations with governments and competitors and suggests future trends.

Galloway most definitely knows what he’s talking about. Now Professor of Marketing at NYU’s Stern School of Business, he previously founded or co-founded nine firms, some of which foundered at the hands of the Four. These experiences have not embittered him. On the contrary, he writes not only with great insight but also with considerable humour, not least about the origins of our consumerist cravings.

In so doing, Galloway occasionally overstates his case, as when he writes that, “At its core, Apple fills two instinctual needs: to feel closer to God and be more attractive to the opposite sex.” The bald facts are already sufficiently astonishing - Apple has “a cash pile greater than the GDP of Denmark, the Russian stock market, and the market cap of Boeing, Airbus and Nike combined” - for there to be any need for this kind of hyperbole.

This book is by turns frightening and funny, depressing (on the demise of quality print journalism) and visionary (on the possibility of a tuition-free university).

I cannot recommend it too highly, as it is both a superb eye-opener and an entertaining page-turner.

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## **Blake says**

Glad this book was a very short read, since it's not worth much of anyone's time. I tend to not write my thoughts up on books I've read in a formalized fashion, but this one can't slip by.

Galloway's writing style is insufferable, and right off the bat in the introduction demonstrates himself to be an egomaniac misogynist who has a chip on his shoulder for everything wrong that has happened to him over the course of his career. Yes, things happen to him that cause problems in his life (many businesses he's been a part of have been crushed by the likes of Google and the others), not problems from how he acts in the face of the cards he's dealt. To paraphrase:

I can't work in big companies?—?they don't listen to my superior opinions so I had to become an entrepreneur.

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He's clearly done well for himself financially over the years and has a cushy job teaching at NYU that he seems to loathe, and he can't escape the fact he was on the losing end of lots of tiny (irrelevant) skirmishes in the broader battlefield of the Big Four's rise to power.

Here is the premise of the book: these companies are always written about and studied, but Galloway is in his mind the first to think of them in a unique and new way. The groundbreaking take, paraphrased:

Apple/Amazon/Facebook/Google accumulated capital and advantage and recognized what they had going for them and how to leverage it for money and power.

Not only is he so “whip smart” in his own view, but his writing is a bizarre mix of facts melded with with opinion and ridiculous statements explicitly designed to provoke any reader capable of reason. One example:

“People are drawn to the brand of Apple in order to appeal to the opposite sex and to feel closer to god, or to become more godlike themselves”

There is simply so much salt in his writing, you'd expect him to be trying to preserve food before refrigerators came around. He's clearly smart (not as smart as he thinks he is) and pithy, but wholly unlikable by any and all conceivable measures.

When mentioning companies often build on ideas from other firms missing a key way of bringing something to the market (think of where Apple and Microsoft are compared to Xerox), he snidely adds that “inspiration from others” is “Latin for theft”. Red herrings abound in his writing, where there is clearly some backstory

as to why he is upset about some facet of society, but is completely irrelevant to the discussion at hand. On the topic of Apple, he writes “the world needs more homes with engaged parents, not a better fucking phone”. Sure, and remind me where Apple comes in to the rescue for that problem?

He's also bitter that when he consulted the NYT on how to save their failing business that he couldn't convince the powers that be to have Google acquire them. He makes sure you don't forget that this would have been brilliant, and it was his idea, and everyone else was too stupid to realize it. Finally, he makes a Bruce Jenner trans joke while talking about LinkedIn in the context of its acquisition by Microsoft. What?

I'll let this verbatim excerpt speak for itself, since it is emblematic of how the entire book reads: “Drive a Porsche, even at fifty-five miles an hour, and you feel more attractive?—?and more likely to have a random sexual experience. Since men are wired to procreate aggressively, the caveman in us hungers for that Rolex, or Lamborghini?—?or Apple. And the caveman, thinking with his genitals, will sacrifice a lot (pay an irrational price) for the chance to impress.”

He claims Facebook is always listening with the microphone in your phone with the most sinister of intent and has a citation to back it up. When you check that citation, it is an article that states that this claim is likely not completely true, but provides steps on how to revoke microphone access to the Facebook app just in case. This article also links to Facebook's official press site that (of course) states they only use the microphone when you are actively using the app for a feature that requires audio capture, such as live streaming, and that captured audio does not contribute to the ads you are shown. That Galloway doesn't caveat this in his writing directly instead of relying on the reader to flip through his footnotes is completely irresponsible, and he knows exactly what he's doing by sowing FUD to get you to nod your head with him as you blithely read on.

Given that this is a 2-Star Book in my opinion, and not a 1-Star Book?—?here's why: there are some decent bits in here, but not many. I've tried to separate the wheat from the chaff, and here's where I've landed:

- History favors the bold, and compensation favors the meek
- Benjamin Button economy: a concept by which companies like Facebook and Google and their products age in reverse, getting better and better with more usage, quite unlike your Nike running shoes. Invest in Benjamin Button companies, and you'll build a nice nest egg
- Here are the 8 key factors that explain why Apple/Amazon/Google/Facebook have risen to power in such an astounding manner: product differentiation, visionary capital, global reach, likability, vertical integration, AI / lots of user data, accelerant for careers as a talent draw, and desirable geography

All told, I cannot recommend anyone contribute to the success of this book, or the goober behind it. He says that these companies are so commonly known and written about by armchair pundits who think they're on to something new that no one's ever thought of before, and he's partially right.

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## **Mehrsa says**

This is terrifying and hilarious and necessary. Everyone should be reading this—especially policy makers and young people. The horsemen of the apocalypse will not be faceless nameless terrifying beasts. They'll be the friendly trustworthy platforms we all use. What do we even do as consumers? That's the most depressing part. We need the ease and speed of amazon because we're too overworked to sown our days at Target. As for apple, he's got my number. Why have I been holding on to the fancy boxes my iPhones come in? They

know our primal instincts and are cleverly exploiting them. As for Google as God, that was spot on.

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## Diego says

This book is excellent.

Galloway deep dives into how these companies know how to exploit our primal instincts. Extremely interesting take. It's hard to argue he's wrong. I wish I could take his class at NYU, but like he mentioned, they charge \$62K per class, \$500 per minute, and it's criminal.

Amazon will take over the world; many jobs in retail will disappear. Bezos is a genius, and secretly and in plain sight, evil. I have Amazon stock, so I'm ok with it. Though it's not my fault, can other companies compete? Very difficult since Amazon has so much capital to do whatever the hell they want. I'd be surprised if they didn't place their 2nd HQ in Washington DC, they can become much more politically involved.

Apple is the luxury branding prime example. Amazing they have only 16% of the market, but over 90% of the cellphone profits. Wow. Great quote, "The world needs more homes with better engaged parents, not a better fucking phone." Steve Jobs is idolized too much and was pretty much a terrible person. This may be more apparent in Walter Isaacson's Steve Jobs book.

The Facebook section could really freak some people out. Haha. I knew they personalized ads based on what you are looking at and typing, but not that it can hear background noise. They are able to personalize what people see based on interest, thus they get info on their silo'd views. This is a problem as evident by perceived fake news on Facebook. Wrong info can radicalize idiots and push their beliefs into what they think are facts. Aka. Trump being elected. Pretty much sounds like Facebook will be the contributor to the end of the world by feeding what people are interested to see based on their beliefs. They only take a platform stance which is irresponsible. At some breaking point, government would have to step in.

The Google chapter is not as clear, it seems to be half a story about the search engine being God and his story in the New York Times board...and failing to work with them. Google is confusing as it's only a search engine, it's unclear how their stock price continues to grow, but they do have a stronghold on advertising. They are intriguing.

I find it interesting it's better to break the law and lie rather than not, it's the smarter business choice in their industries. "Is the government going to turn against Wall Street and millions of consumers?" Likely not. The Four will continue to push boundaries, but also control their industry since they are the only one of their kinds. Eventually they will be beaten.

His next chapters are about the next potential companies that could derail the Four. His common standards for company success is brilliant in regards to these similar companies, though most of them relate to all businesses. Cheap capital, product differentiation, talent, etc. The relatively new outlier is big data and A.I.

I also like the section on what it takes to be part of the Four and to be exceptional in a world of average individuals. A sort of self help portion. He owns six businesses, so he has empirical evidence of talent. First, is to work hard, don't be a jerk, and help others. That is the basic level, but still billions can do this. Next is emotional intelligence or maturity, this determines how you are able to handle stress and work with others on tough projects. Women are more emotionally mature and at an earlier age. I agree with him that women are the future. I've found that having a woman boss is better since I don't have to weave through an ego. It's just

about getting shit done in an open format.

Another skill is always challenging the existing process, being curious. Growing companies that handle change need this otherwise complacency will kill it from the inside.

A Bezos quote that resonates with my company, "What kills mature companies is an unhealthy adherence to process."

Another is ownership. Extreme ownership. Similar to the book by the navy seals. Own up to everything. Ego, failures, team, change, etc. This can also show that a person has grit, the ability to see something through until the end no matter how hard it is.

This also assumes that you need to go to college. That is important. You make more in a lifetime just because of it. But a major portion is that a person grows the most there. I thank college for my personal growth, not just education. I was extremely immature and culture shocked, my grades were mediocre, but in the end, it helped me mature and realize the real world is out there. Education is assumed and many smart people exist, but these traits are what separate you from the pack. College helps with that.

One major problem is college is getting way too expensive. I firmly believe that rising tuition will be a major contributor to rising income inequality.

Other tid bits:

- Move to a city. They are hubs of innovation and investment.
- Invest in yourself and your strengths. Improve your weaknesses just enough so they no longer hold you back.
- How to manage young people: clear objectives, metrics, invest in them, and empathy. Personally I've noticed they don't work well with ambiguity; they become unhappy and don't hide it. They won't work hard just because.
- Be loyal to people. People help one another if you help them. If your boss is not helping you, you either have a bad boss, or you are a bad employee.
- Don't follow your passion, that's bullshit. Follow your talent.
- People who complain about others and how they got screwed, are well, losers.
- Exercise will help enable grit, and will help you handle stress.

I appreciate he recognizes that these four companies are contributing to income inequality and are dangerous to our economic society. They employ 418K employees together, but are worth 2.3 trillion. The same as the GDP of France. But he is not a political analyst, so no further is mentioned.

Again, this book is excellent. Confirms my stock holding positions. Only reason I may not be buying more is the impending impeachment, which may dip the market. We'll see.

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### **Diana Nassar says**

If you don't want to read a whole book on each of The Four tech giants then, obviously, this book is for you. Scott Galloway captures the strategy, strength, and "wow" factors of each of these companies by mapping them to the Four Horsemen of god, love, sex, and consumption [guess which is which. Daha.]. I think this mapping methodology, besides being catchy, made the book quite relevant and easy to follow.

However, in my personal opinion, this mapping limited the comprehensiveness of the book. I disliked the chapter about Google. I think there is much more to Google than linking it to New York Times [and writing more stuff about NYT than about Google itself!]. Having read a couple of books about Google, I would not

say this is the best resource to learn about Google strategy.

Amazon chapter, on the other hand, was quite comprehensive, relevant, and even scary.

I especially enjoyed the "business and body" concept; the "fact" that all successful businesses appeal to one of three areas of the body [brain/heart/genitals] and that part ends up pretty much determining the strategy and outcomes of that business.

Who is going to win the 1 Trillion race? Who is going to be the Fifth Horesman? Galloway makes a couple of interesting guesses.

An enjoyable and short read. Galloway's writing style is direct and so full of humor. I recommend it!

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## Bernd Schiffer says

According to the book description, "...Galloway [the author] exposes the truth about these 'Four Horsemen'". For me, his explanations and comments are utterly sensational and without any substance. The author is also not considering important aspects, therefore only delivering half (or even less) of the story.

I stopped reading at the beginning of the third chapter. The first chapter is an overall introduction, the second is about Amazon, the third about Apple. In the second chapter, the author pictured Amazon as wanting growth for the sake of world domination, without even considering their aim for being No 1 in regards to customer satisfaction. The impression I got was that the author wants people to know that Amazon is evil and that it tries to rule the world and that it must be dealt with.

What really put me off is the author's crusade against Amazon the job killer. Amazon's fulfilment centres are a bad thing because they are automated which is what eliminates jobs. No mention of the reduction of costs resulting in cheaper prices for customers. No mention of fast(er) delivery service and therefore better service. But instead a populistic boss bashing at the end of the chapter: *"What's clear is that we need business leaders who envision, and enact, a future with more jobs—not billionaires who want the government to fund, with taxes they avoid, social programs for people to sit on their couches and watch Netflix all day. Jeff, show some real fucking vision."* It's an utterly one-sided and cliched view. It fuels unsubstantiated FUD (fear, doubt, uncertainty) in the already suspicious but uninformed reader.

I put the book aside when the author "discussed" the issue of Apple not willing to comply with a court order for the government to be able to unlock the iPhone. This is how the author wrote down his view of one of Apple's arguments here: *"Apple, by creating a new IOS that allowed the FBI to open the phone with brute force, would create a backdoor that could not be contained and could end up in the wrong hands (SPECTRE?)"* SPECTRE, the organisation from the James Bond franchise which stands for 'Special Executive for Counter-intelligence, Terrorism, Revenge, and Extortion'? The author brings this up and belittles the whole point, instead of reflecting on the impact on the right of privacy (4th amendment).

The final nail in the coffin in which I'm going to bury this book in for me was his further thoughts about Apple's argument above: *"My response to the first claim: If Apple was creating a back door for others to use, it was a pretty unimpressive door. More like a doggy door. Apple estimated that it would take six to ten engineers a month to figure this out. That ain't the Manhattan Project. Apple also maintained this key could end up in the wrong hands and prove hugely dangerous. We aren't talking about the microchip that gave rise to the Terminator, which travels back in time to destroy all humanity."* Manhattan Project? The impact of a product is unrelated to the time it took to build it. Terminator? How is that even related to this point? The problem of a backdoor like this is that it could lead into a potential 1984 scenario, which is concerning on its own, but undoubtedly horrible when viewed in the context of everything Edward Snowden revealed in the

past. Snowden is not mentioned even once in the whole book.

I was looking forward to reading a book that is intelligently critical about the Four. Instead, this book only rambles against cliche views of technology companies on rainbow press niveau.

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### **Stef says**

Engaging and interesting but the humor might not be for everyone.

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### **Mina says**

"My nightmare job is the "invisible until you fuck up" position. It's never been a better time to be exceptional, or a worse time to be average."

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### **Brittany Reads says**

You might think you're reading this book in English, but Scott Galloway actually writes in clickbait.

My spoiler-free review is included in my monthly reading wrap up here: (timed link)

<https://youtu.be/sJ1nqlnUsIk?t=132>

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