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Quicklet on Guns, Germs, and Steel by Jared Diamond (Book Summary, Analysis, Review)

Nicole Silvester

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ABOUT THE BOOK

While working in New Guinea in 1972, where he was studying bird evolution, Jared Diamond met a local politician touring the area. At the time, Papua New Guinea was approaching independence after long being administered by Australia. Yali, the politician, spoke about preparing his people for independence, and asked Diamond many questions about history and other topics. Finally, he wanted to know why the conquering Europeans had arrived with so many goods and technology, while the New Guineans had so little of their own.

It seems to be a simple question, and yet answering it took Diamond twenty-five years. Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies, is his attempt to answer not just Yali's question, but the whole question of why some peoples in some parts of the world developed technological advances before others, and why some of them were then able to conquer other peoples using those advances.

MEET THE AUTHOR

Nicole has been writing since she could make letters with a pencil, and has been making a living at it for more than ten years. She has gone back to school too many times, studying archaeology, folklore, writing and visual art. She writes fiction under several pen names, and also does printmaking, book arts, and photography. She's an avid amateur natural historian with a particular fascination for things that fly, whether it's birds, bats or insects. And if it's possible to be both a luddite, with a love for the low-tech, and a technophile, with a fascination for everything new and shiny, Nicole is both. She reads too many books, plays too many video games, and watches too much anime.

EXCERPT FROM THE BOOK

Guns, Germs, and Steel is, as mentioned above, Jared Diamond's attempt to answer the question of why some societies were able to conquer their neighbours and spread across the globe, instead of being conquered while their neighbours did the spreading. The usual reasons a person might think up to answer that question are generally unsatisfactory. Biological explanations, that some peoples are more intelligent than others, are not only distasteful (and racist), but unproven. In fact, studies of human intelligence—the ones that overcome cultural bias—tend to show that humans are, on average, pretty much the same across cultures.

So why did some cultures develop the technology to conquer more quickly, and some didn't develop such technology at all? Diamond takes us right back to the beginnings of human settlement on the different continents to show that the explanation may be largely geographic. That is, the places where people settled gave them more or fewer advantages in the areas necessary for developing the social complexity, which in turn could lead to technological advances.

BOOK OUTLINE

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