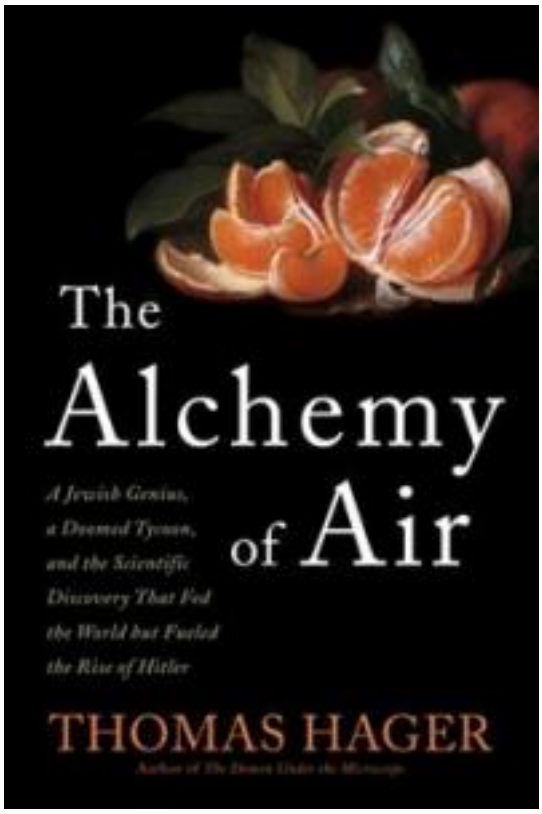
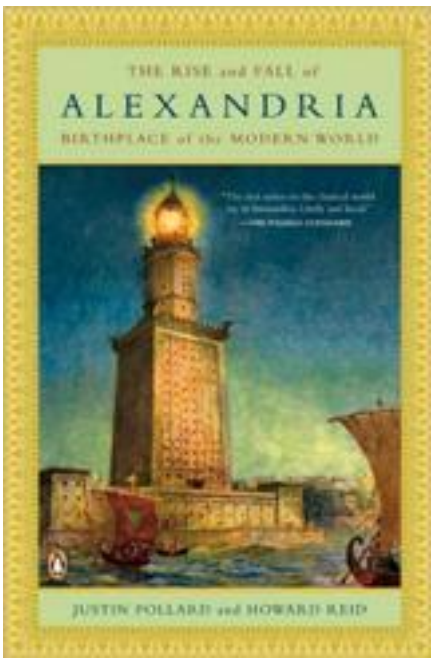
History

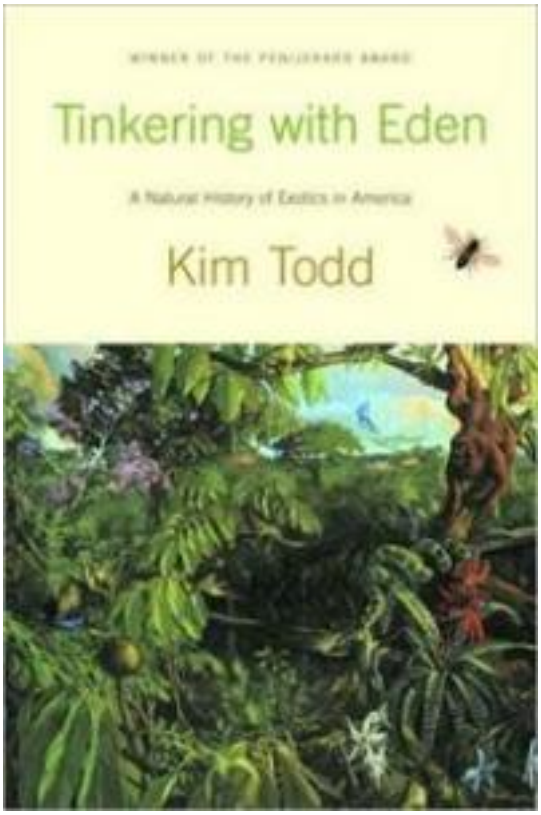
**All summaries from Amazon.com unless otherwise stated.*



The Alchemy of Air by **Thomas Hager**
At the dawn of the twentieth century, humanity was facing global disaster: Mass starvation was about to become a reality. A call went out to the world's scientists to find a solution. This is the story of the two men who found it: brilliant, self-important Fritz Haber and reclusive, alcoholic Carl Bosch. Together they discovered a way to make bread out of air, built city-sized factories, and saved millions of lives. But their epochal triumph came at a price we are still paying. The Haber-Bosch process was also used to make the gunpowder and explosives that killed millions during the two world wars. Both men were vilified during their lives; both, disillusioned and disgraced, died tragically. The Alchemy of Air is the extraordinary, previously untold story of a discovery that changed the way we grow food and the way we make war–and that promises to continue shaping our lives in fundamental and dramatic ways.

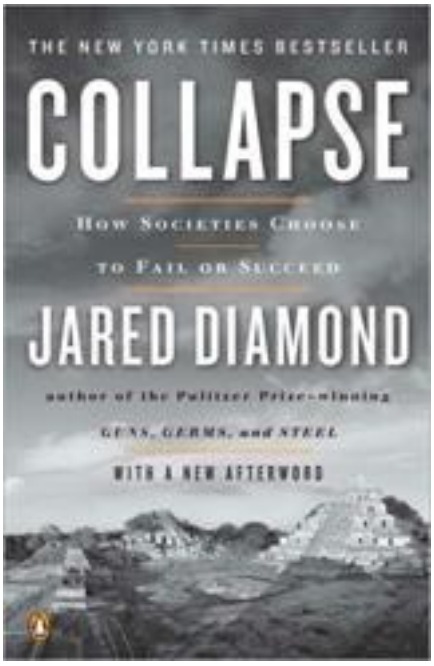


The Rise and Fall of Alexandria by **Justin Pollard and Howard Reid**
A short history of nearly everything classical. The foundations of the modern world were laid in Alexandria of Egypt at the turn of the first millennium. In this compulsively readable narrative, Justin Pollard and Howard Reid bring one of history's most fascinating and prolific cities to life, creating a treasure trove of our intellectual and cultural origins. Famous for its lighthouse, its library-the greatest in antiquity-and its fertile intellectual and spiritual life--it was here that Christianity and Islam came to prominence as world religions--Alexandria now takes its rightful place alongside Greece and Rome as a titan of the ancient world. Sparkling with fresh insights on science, philosophy, culture, and invention, this is an irresistible, eye-opening delight.

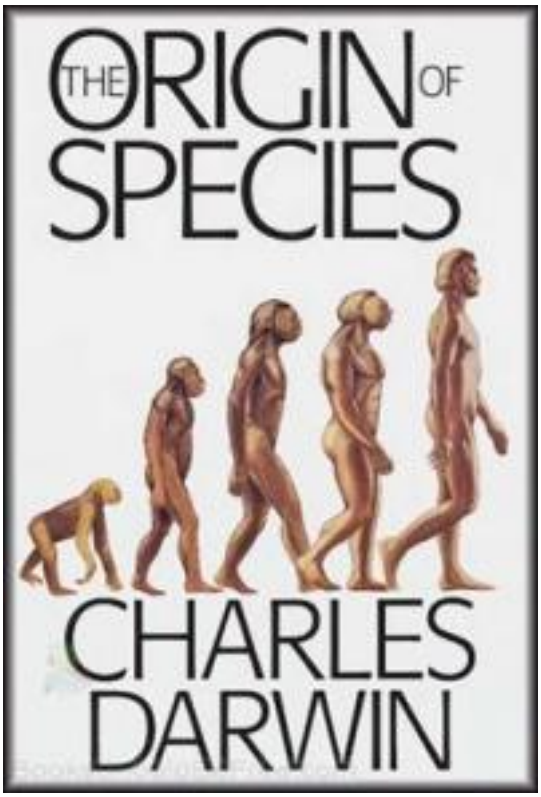


Tinkering with Eden by **Kim Todd**
Mosquitoes in Hawaii, sea lampreys in the Great Lakes, mountain goats in the Olympic Mountains of Washington State -- not one of these species is native to the environment in which it now flourishes, sometimes disastrously. Kim Todd's Tinkering with Eden is a lyrical, brilliantly written history of the introduction of exotic species into the United States, and how the well-meaning endeavors of scientists, explorers, and biologists have resulted in ecological catastrophe. Todd's amazingly assured voice will haunt her readers, and the stories she tells -- the

astronomer who unleashed the gypsy moth in a botched effort to breed the silkworm, the druggist who brought starlings to America because he wanted the landscape to feature every bird mentioned by Shakespeare -- will forever change how we see our increasingly afflicted landscape and its unanticipated inhabitants.



Collapse by **Jared Diamond**
Environmental damage, climate change, globalization, rapid population growth, and unwise political choices were all factors in the demise of societies around the world, but some found solutions and persisted. As in Guns, Germs, and Steel, Diamond traces the fundamental pattern of catastrophe, and weaves an all-encompassing global thesis through a series of fascinating historical-cultural narratives. Collapse moves from the Polynesian cultures on Easter Island to the flourishing American civilizations of the Anasazi and the Maya and finally to the doomed Viking colony on Greenland. Similar problems face us today and have already brought disaster to Rwanda and Haiti, even as China and Australia are trying to cope in innovative ways. Despite our own society's apparently inexhaustible wealth and unrivaled political power, ominous warning signs have begun to emerge even in ecologically robust areas like Montana.



The Origin of Species by **Charles Darwin**
On December 27, 1831, the young naturalist Charles Darwin left Plymouth Harbor aboard the HMS Beagle. For the next five years, he conducted research on plants and animals from around the globe, amassing a body of evidence that would culminate in one of the greatest discoveries in the history of mankind—the theory of evolution. Darwin presented his stunning insights in a landmark book that forever altered the way human beings view themselves and the world they live in. In The Origin of Species, he convincingly demonstrates the fact of evolution: that existing animals and plants cannot have appeared separately but must have slowly transformed from ancestral creatures. Most important, the book fully explains the mechanism that effects such a transformation: natural selection, the idea that made evolution scientifically intelligible for the first time. One of the few revolutionary works of science that is engrossingly readable, The Origin of Species not only launched the science of modern biology but also has influenced virtually all subsequent literary, philosophical, and religious thinking.

Web Links

Discussion Questions for Collapse by Jared Diamond

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