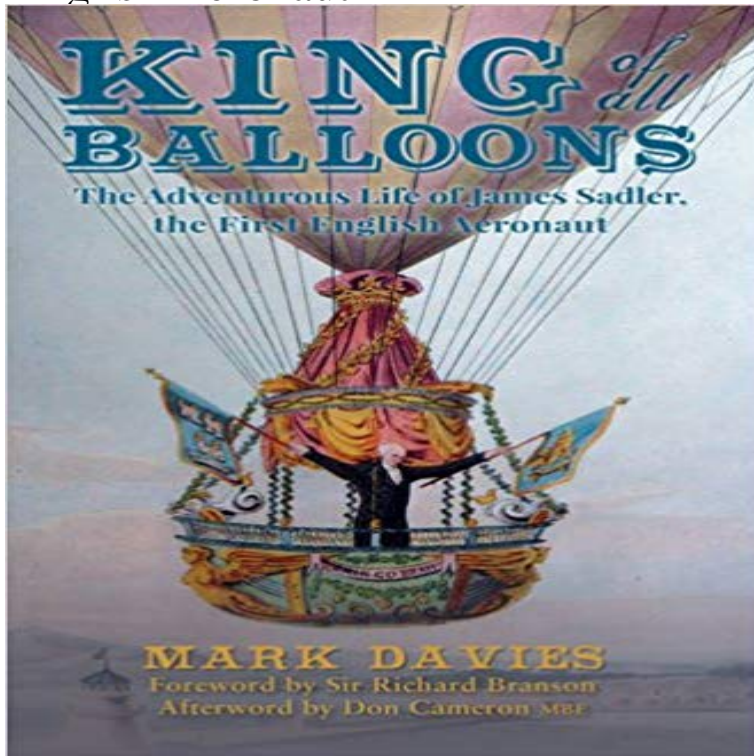


King of All Balloons: The Adventurous Life of James Sadler, The First English Aeronaut



The dramatic stories of the early balloonists have been strangely neglected, their daring initial flights the first steps on mankind's journey to the skies and beyond. James Sadler was an extraordinary English pioneer who overcame many obstacles to achieve his dream of flying. Born the son of an Oxford pastry cook in 1753, he defied the constraints of his upbringing to become the first Englishman to build and fly an air-balloon. When not flying, he applied himself to the medical uses of gases, to engine-design, and as Chemist to the Navy; he designed cannon praised by Nelson and royalty, firearms for the British East India Company and a prototype armored car. Aged fifty-seven, he became the first person to cross the Bristol Channel by air. Mark Davies delves into the complex life of this astonishing adventurer, exploring the ups and the downs of his amazing career against the vivid backdrop of Georgian England. These range from his first ascent, to his support of the first Englishwoman to fly, to his eventual death in impoverished anonymity. Lavishly illustrated, the story also encompasses the stories of Sadler's fellow aeronauts, be they courageous, inspired, risible or - occasionally - fatal. The fascinating world of the first Englishman to fly is a true homage to our national desire to reach for the skies.

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