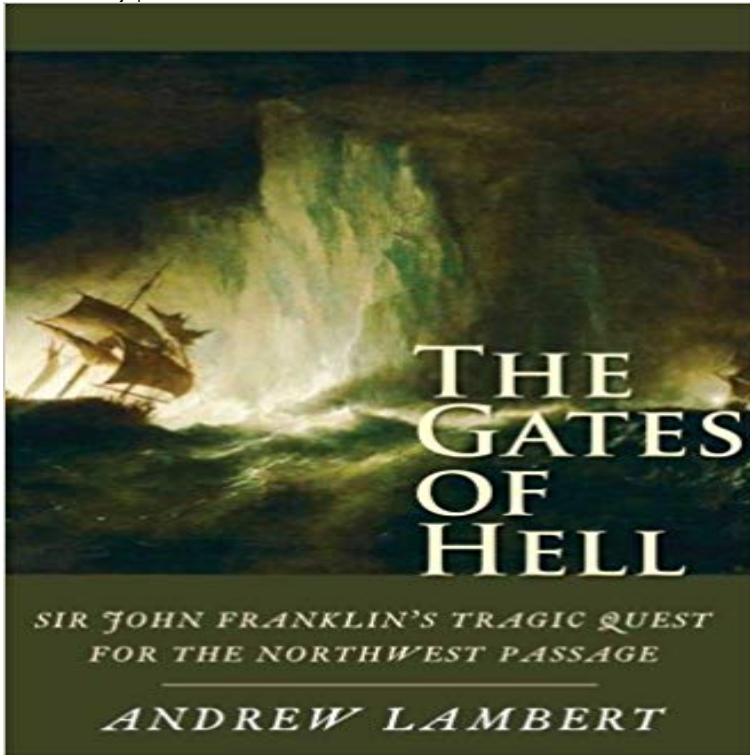


The Gates of Hell: Sir John Franklins Tragic Quest for the North West Passage



Andrew Lambert, a leading authority on naval history, reexamines the life of Sir John Franklin and his final, doomed Arctic voyage. Franklin was a man of his time, fascinated, even obsessed with, the need to explore the world; he had already mapped nearly two-thirds of the northern coastline of North America when he undertook his third Arctic voyage in 1845, at the age of fifty-nine. His two ships were fitted with the latest equipment; steam engines enabled them to navigate the pack ice, and he and his crew had a three-year supply of preserved and tinned food and more than one thousand books. Despite these preparations, the voyage ended in catastrophe: the ships became imprisoned in the ice, and the men were wracked by disease and ultimately wiped out by hypothermia, scurvy, and cannibalism. Franklin's mission was ostensibly to find the elusive North West Passage, a viable sea route between Europe and Asia reputed to lie north of the American continent. Lambert shows for the first time that there were other scientific goals for the voyage and that the disaster can only be understood by reconsidering the original objectives of the mission. Franklin, commonly dismissed as a bumbling fool, emerges as a more important and impressive figure, in fact, a hero of navigational science.

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