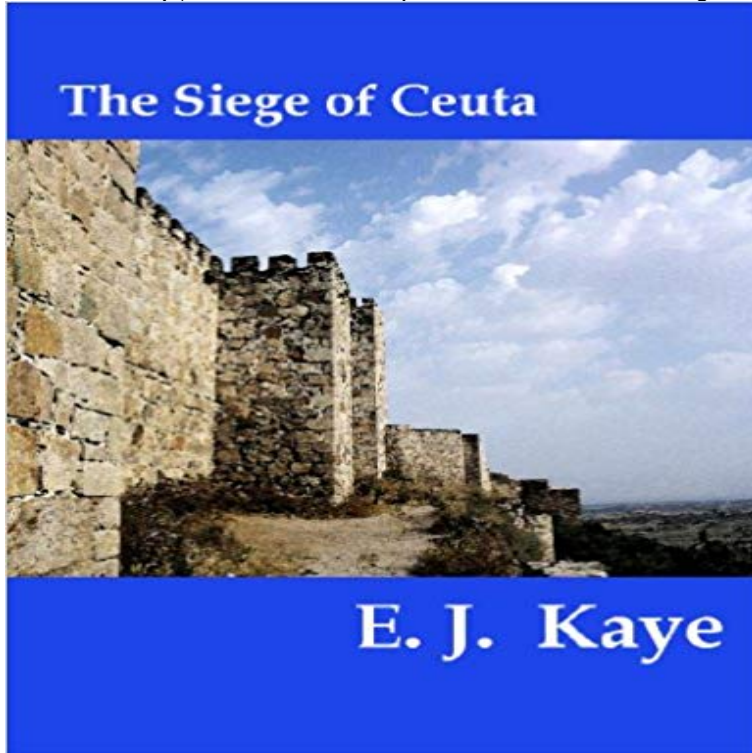


The Siege of Ceuta (The Gibraltar Quartet Book 2)



As the year 700 AD dawned, Christendom was in retreat. In the Eastern Mediterranean, the remnant of the Roman Empire ruled from Constantinople was caught in a nutcracker composed of barbarian tribes in the Balkans and triumphant Islam in Syria and Armenia. Resolute in their determination to defend their culture and Christianity, Imperial soldiers fought their Saracen foes in an on-again, off-again border war. In Western Europe, the Germanic Visigoths held sway over Spain and the southwestern part of modern-day France. Their rule was a thin veneer under which the native population labored, and the Visigoth lords tried to keep their own warrior culture separate from their Roman-influenced subjects. East of the Visigoths, the Christian Franks dominated the balance of France and parts of modern Germany. They contended with waves of pagan barbarians further east, and the powerful Lombards who controlled northern Italy. Imperial troops held Rome and much of Southern Italy and Sicily, but had recently lost all of Palestine and North Africa to the surging Muslims of the Omayyad Caliphate. Under the banner of the Caliph, the faithful sought to bring Islam to the entire Mediterranean and beyond. Only the small outpost of Ceuta, poised on the straits of Gibraltar, remained as a testament to the power of the Roman Empire and a last foothold of Christianity in Africa. By the close of *In Desperate Straits*, the first novel of the Gibraltar Quartet, the town of Ceuta was under siege by the Muslim forces. The Exarch Julian had prepared the town by strengthening the defenses and laying in provisions. The Saracens, led by the scarred Berber general Al-Nadib, had suffered setbacks by land and sea at the hands of the determined Imperial garrison. Now, the Islamic host outside the walls of Ceuta faced a garrison augmented by Visigoth, Frank and Lombard mercenaries. In Hispania, the old

King Egica had died, replaced by his drunkard son Witiza. The Visigoth lords were split between serving Witiza and wanting a strong monarch such as Duke Roderic of Baetica on the throne. Roderic, assisted by the sons of Witiza, has plotted actively for the day when he would attain the coveted throne. Julians defense of Ceuta is endangered by his growing rage at the Christian Church, the Visigoths, and the Emperor. At the Emperor Justinians direction, the Church stands by while Imperial troops murder Christians, including Julians family. Meanwhile, Duke Roderic has been instrumental in causing the suicide of his wife, a daughter of Julian. Angry and depressed, Julian begins to question the foundations of his life

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