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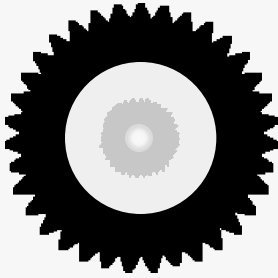
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Table of Contents

TIME AND LOCATION	5
THE RING OF FIRE	12
DIS	17
NIOBIA	22
KERAIT	30
MO-MO KEU-KEU LAND	38
THE CHRONICLES	47
BESTIARY	53
Buffalo (Water)	53
Crocodile	53
Elephant	53
Fire Elemental	53
Jackal	54
Kor-Ny-Kor, Dragon of the Physon.....	54
Loshandar	54
Loshandar's Spawn	58
Rhinoceros	60
Salamander	60
Serpent.....	60
Sphinxes	60
Totem Beasts	61
Verdant Dreamer	61
MAGICAL TRADITIONS	63
Colossi Magic	66
The Order of Juno	74
Niobian Spellcasting.....	75
STORIES SOUTH OF THE SUN	79
AKEEM'S CRUSADE	81
Conclusion	94



Chapter One

Introduction

I am the Emperor Prester John and I exceed in riches, virtue and power all creatures who dwell under heaven. Seventy-two kings pay tribute to me. I am a devout Christian and everywhere protect the Christians of the empire, nourishing them with alms... If you can count the stars of the sky and the sands of the sea, you will be able to judge thereby the vastness of our realm and our power.

— Letter from the Good Prester John to the Emperor of Byzantium, late Twelfth Century A.D.

Early in the twelfth century, Europe received reports of a vast, Christian empire beyond the known world. In 1145, Bishop Hugh of Jabala (Syria) officially confirmed the stories in his report to the Pope. Bishop Hugh identified the ruler of this empire as one Prester John, a figure of such magnificence that he could afford a scepter of solid emerald. Following that, dozens of explorers and diplomats produced reports from the lands of Prester John.

Then the Emperor of Byzantium received an actual letter from the hand of Prester John. John expressed his interest in joining a Crusade. He also described his land in terms which soon became known throughout Europe. “My lands reach toward the rising place of the sun. Honey flows in my land and milk everywhere abounds. In one of our territories no poison can do harm and no noisy frog croaks, no scorpions are there and no serpents creep through the grass... In one of the heathen provinces flows a river called the Physon, which,

emerging from Paradise, winds and wanders through the entire province; and in it are found emeralds, sapphires, carbuncles, topazes, chrysolites, onyxes, sardonyxes and many other precious stones.”

Popes sent missionaries and kings sent ambassadors to the lands of this John. The explorer John of Plano Carpini, a Franciscan monk, traveled into the lands of the Mongols, and reported the existence of John’s empire. Friar Odoric of Pordenone actually visited the mysterious empire, although he reported that John had exaggerated the tales of his wealth. Roughly 150 years later, Marco Polo wrote that the empire of Prester John had fallen to Ghengis Khan.

The legend of Prester John is real. The Empire of Prester John was not. Nevertheless, John played a significant role in the tales and even the military strategy of the Middle Ages. In the game **Ars Magica™**, which is based on the premise that medieval mythology was actually correct, the empire of Good Prester John certainly existed. And it has much to offer for magi.

This sourcebook describes the Golden Empire South of the Sun for whatever sort of Saga you prefer. Storyguides could base an entire Saga in these lands. A Storyguide could also use these lands once, as an exotic setting for a single quest. Between those extremes, European magi could find many things to interest them in the lands South of the Sun. This book presents three cultures, each with its own political significance and traditions of magic. These new traditions may have lore to offer the followers of Hermes. Furthermore, according to precedent, the Order of Hermes must either absorb foreign magi or destroy them.