



AGE OF FANTASY

GUIDING VISION

*** SHORT STORY ***

**ONE
PAGE
RULES**

GUIDING VISION

by Christen Sowards

Yiya took a deep breath when he reached the crest and beheld the valleys below. The walk from his village had taken days, but the honour of serving as an attendant to a Frog Mage seer was great. His pride sustained him during the long hike. The valleys of the settlement split into three areas--the nestled river basin of the Gator tribes, the feeding marshes of the Ankylosaurs, and the Saurian city itself nestled between them.

As he rushed down to the hillside he greeted Gators and Guardians patrolling the valley path. From them he found out that his new charge was deep beneath the central temple, meditating on his visions.

The flagstones of the ziggurat were cold beneath his feet. A priest among his tribe, Yiya had been called to attend to Atlake, the Frog-Mage who had been given leadership of the city.

Smiling, Yiya adjusted his grip on his newly granted staff of office. He hoped to protect this great prophet, and perhaps to win a share in his ascendant glory.

Nervously, Yiya entered the Chamber of Vision. Deep in the bowels of the ziggurat, this grotto thrived beyond the reach of the Sun. The magic swelling here sustained life, and granted access to a river of ages. Here, time could be seen in the spirits' motions; a dance of visions great and small.

"You are most punctual," Atlake croaked. A grumble and throat-flair of satisfaction at his new priest's arrival.

"Yes, Seer, I..."

A sharply risen hand silenced him.

The Frog Mage sat upon his palanquin. The thick scent of incense and herbs suffusing the waters of the room nearly overwhelmed his senses.

Then he felt it.

The very beginning of magic. Below the water's surface motes of green light swirled into existence. Each mote swelled in size as power was gathered and shaped by dizzying motions of Atlake's hands and the pulsing croak of his throat-sack beating like a drum.

The power swirled beneath the pond's surface. It writhed--hungry and driven--as it sought the future. The magic bubbled forth from the water bursting in the shape of butterflies, winged windows into a future yet to be.

Yet Yiya's keen eyes could make no sense of these images. He saw only swirling images, fragments of colours without meaning, too dizzying to make out.

But the unblinking eyes of Atlake saw.

He turned to Yiya, "Let us go. There is much that needs doing"

The journey to the idol chamber was straining Yiya's short legs. The thrumming power of the Frog Mage's floating palanquin rushed over as it moved beyond him. Frantically climbing to keep pace he scrambled up the pyramid using his hand-pads after tucking away his staff.

The Frog Mage stopped and stared at an idol of newly cast silver near the temple entryway. The artisans did their best but it was hard to tell the smaller statuary from one another.

It was only the central statues, cast in gold, that were distinguished by signature pieces of jewelry and spirit focuses each Frog Priest had gathered through their careers.

But it wasn't those statues in their glory that Atlake regarded. Yet his eyes lingered on the one in the entryway.

His own statue, Yiya realized.

The Gecko attendants of the temple cautiously approached the palanquin of the floating Frog Mage. They each bowed reverently to Atlake as they approached.

"A kind gesture," Atlake said simply, pointing to the idol in his image, "But melt it down. The silver will be needed."

The Gecko Priests were aghast. Their eyes darted nervously between each other, each of them hoping another would speak.

Finally, it was Yiya who raised his voice, "But Seer, the idol was only recently completed. It has yet to see a second moon. The silver is pure and rare. It had to be carried a great distance and it will be many seasons before we can replace it..."

Atlake looked at his attendant curiously, gently touching a long finger to his large chin. Yiya waited, yet the Mage did not speak. He seemed to expect Yiya to continue, as if to measure his value as an attendant.

Taking a breath, Yiya continued, "It is a symbol of your stature and a symbol of your place in this city. To destroy it would be sacrilege, spitting upon your very name and reputation..."

Then the Frog-Mage interrupted, raising his finger from his chin to signal for silence.

"I care for my people, not my reputation," the Frog Mage spoke slowly as though chiding a child, "just as you must not place your faith in my image but in my vision. I must know that you value my word more than my image."

He looked to the Geckos priests, who looked on him with confusion and awe as he spoke.

An elderly Gecko stepped forward and spoke, "If it is your wish, it shall be done."

"The Temple's silver shall fell our foes. I have foreseen this. It is pure and not without magic. So, it must be ready to fly when the time comes, not sitting idle in a statue. The idol is to be melted and given to the dart makers."

The elderly Gecko narrowed his eyes, fixing them upon Atlake as though trying to read the Frog Mage.

"You ask to defile your likeness to make darts. It is a strange request, Great Seer, but we shall honour it. I hope your visions do not misguide you."

"I may only follow the path before me, but your trust will be remembered," Atlake nodded solemnly before turning to Yiya, "Come now, there is much that we must do."

Soon after, they reached the arena while the burning light of the Sun still hung high above them. The stadium held most of the city's Saurian Guardians. The most experienced veterans among the Saurians ran along the pitch, aiming to move a rubber ball through a hoop on the opposing side.

Their kin and many spectators from throughout the city cheered them on from the stands.

GUIDING VISION

by Christen Sowards

The Guardians wore plumed headdresses, whose colour marked their team. Such games were usually reserved for the holidays of great victory, but this friendly bout had been spontaneous and seemed to have turned serious. Some of the guardians bore wounds nearly as serious as those from a battle.

Many of the warriors had taken to rest from exertions that would almost certainly wear them down for the battle to come. Others were well on their way to the same.

Their normal sport grew more grizzly as they kicked and snatched the ball from one another. Each attempting to outmaneuver the others--with varying degrees of success. The Frog priest slid his palanquin into the air above the warriors.

"Hold!" Atlake spoke loudly, "I must call an end to this game."

The players paused immediately at his words, but Yiya saw the irritation in their eyes. The Saurians took great pride in their games and many surely saw this interruption as an insult.

A powerfully built Saurian climbed the wall, hanging from the scoring hoop. Bruised and bloodied from the game, he raised his fist and voice against Atlake.

"What harm does our game do you, Frog-Mage?" the Saurian said, "Have you foreseen some disaster from the game? Will our ball fly free and knock over an old idol in the temple? Or perhaps it will knock over one of the old Geckos?"

Some in the crowd snickered at the remarks, but they were quickly silenced by their neighbours. The crowd watched in tense silence, looking with anticipation at Atlake.

"I admire your bravery, little one," Atlake looked impassively at the Guardian hanging from the hoop, "to speak this way to a Mage."

The Saurian snarled a moment at being addressed this way, yet as he looked upon Atlake's calm demeanour, his courage began to falter. He knew the Frog-Mage did not fear him.

"Such fire and courage is wasted," Atlake spoke calmly, "when it is spent on knocking over idols and speaking ill to your elders. If you seek glory, then tend to your wounds and make yourselves ready. Tomorrow, the time will come when you must prove your strength. Tonight, you must rest."

Atlake paused, looking over the stadium, before returning his dark eyes to meet the gaze of the Saurian, "Will you be ready?"

The Guardian paused a moment as though ashamed, before his eyes lit up as though he had discovered some hidden purpose.

He pounded his bruised chest with his free fist and roared to the crowd, "I will! I will claim the glory that you have foreseen for me! Tomorrow, you shall see my strength."

Yiya wasn't sure if there was magic in the Frog-Mage's words, but he saw something catch through the crowd. It was as though the Mage's words had set their hearts ablaze.

"The game is over," Atlake looked over the crowd, "Make yourselves ready. Tomorrow will be a day of proving."

The Saurians quickly dispersed, hurriedly heading to seek out their companions to prepare. Atlake did not wait for the stadium to empty itself, but moved hurriedly through the crowd who cheered as they saw him pass.

Atlake's next destination took them out of the heart of the city to the steep cliffs of the canyon. The descending path before them slid into the valley like the gullet of an enormous beast.

The sharp red stone that broke the dense vegetation reminded Yiya of gory fangs. The soft pulses of power behind him signaled Atlake's desire to move deeper into the valley. A bellowing call sounded somewhere in the darkness below. Yiya stumbled, falling into a depression which he realized was the massive footprint of one of the Ankylosaur they sought.

Moving as swiftly as his short legs could, Yiya hurried down the valley path, weaving around rocks too small to trouble the enormous creatures here, or the floating palanquin of the Frog Mage. The Ankylosaur Handlers' camp shone ahead like a flickering ruby.

Reaching the Handlers, Yiya swept forward to introduce Atlake. He barely made it through the first run of honorifics before the thrum of the palanquin's magic nearly knocked him to the ground.

It was clear that Atlake felt time was of the essence.

"You will graze the Ankylosauruses in groups," Atlake croaked in a manner brooking little debate, "Along opposing sides of the canyon."

"The last seer took little interest in our grazing," one of the Handlers bowed his head, "Have you foreseen some trouble with the fields?"

Another nudged him sharply. This Handler spoke softly, "Pay him no mind, Great Seer. It shall be done. We can have it done in five days."

"It must be done by sunrise," Atlake replied, "Can you do it?"

The second Handler spoke, her voice almost a squeak, "It... well, such things take time, Great Seer."

One of the massive creatures lumbered forward, drawn by the sounds of tension in its Handler's voice. Yiya marveled at its size. A massive creature whose wide head was visible from both sides of the Handler. It looked like a living battering-ram.

It was surprising to Yiya that it gave the Gecko a gentle nudge of concern, bumping the Handler to the balls of her feet. Fortunately the Geckos' wide pads balanced her attention and she reached a hand back to soothe its nuzzle.

"Do you trust in your Seer?" Atlake spoke softly, "If it could not be done, I would not ask it of you."

"It shall be done," the first Handler spoke with a smile as he patted his companion on the back.

Atlake gave a nod of approval before turning his attention to the valley, "You will divide the herd as follows...."

The two Handlers took careful note of the Frog Mage's orders and began to trace and repeat back Atlake's orders for clarity. The fires danced across Atlake's eyes and Yiya wondered if they held satisfaction at his forming design, or perhaps another vision not yet disclosed?

GUIDING VISION

by Christen Sowards

The Sun had all but faded to a smoldering line of red across the western mountains. The lengthy climb from the Canyon had moved Yiya's legs from sore to ache to burn and back again to the point where he could barely even remember what pain to complain about.

Atlake, of course, hovered on his palanquin unconcerned by their pace or the effort of moving his own ponderous bulk.

At least the way to the Gator's swampy pools was downhill from here on. The howling wind led them down to the marsh. However, halfway down to the pools they veered, taking a twisting second path toward the woods along the southern shore of the river.

Yiia looked questioningly up at Atlake but the Frog Mage said nothing. They drifted along, as Atlake eyes seemed to comb the swamps for something. Yiia looked too, unsure of what he sought. His eyes leapt toward any movement or oddity which he could find in the reeds, but none seemed to interest Atlake.

"Climb up here."

The levitation palanquin stopped. Yiia looked at Atlake, uncertain whether misheard the Mage's command. He tried at failed to read the Atlake's expression which remained as impassive as ever and no explanation seemed forthcoming.

After a moment of silence, Atlake made a gesture with his arm, signalling the Priest to hurry.

Yiia scrambled deftly onto the palanquin.

The palanquin began to move again. Yiia looked around and realized they were moving off the trail. The palanquin moved silently and swiftly into the air.

Atlake made no sound, even his breath was slow and steady.

The only noise was the soft rush of the river.

Across the river a small stream emerged from a dense copse of trees, and Atlake directed the palanquin to seek further up the tributary. The soundless progress wound up the contours of the stream bed until in the failing golden light Yiia saw it. A pack of small deer, lapping at the river side and unaware of their presence.

A large scaled arm emerged cautiously from the treeline. Wordlessly, it motioned for Atlake to approach. Yiia looked at Atlake to see his response, but the Frog-Mage had already begun to lower the platform.

The hulking Gator carefully righted itself, revealing its full size as it carefully emerged from its hiding place. Its powerful frame only bearly concealed by the mass of jungle.

"Seer," A low growling voice spoke in as soft a whisper as it could manage, "You must be more cautious or we shall lose our prey. My tribe hungers."

"That is why I have come," Atlake spoke softly.

He turned the palanquin toward the river and gently leaned forward. His finger touched against the muddy flowing river, and he intoned a strange croak.

In an instant, his spell began to do its work. An ethereal glow flowed through the water as the river began to turn with the weaving of magic beneath its surface.

A moment later, there was an eruption of power as the glow dissipated into a ghostly mass of fangs and fury.

A swarm of ethereal piranhas burst to the surface.

The deer had no time to react and within seconds, they lay dead by the side of the stream. Over a dozen thick bodies dropped at the side of the stream.

Yiia saw the spell, simple and effective, but the combined effect turned his stomach slightly. Atlake cleared his throat and gave the Gecko's feet a meaningful glance. Yiia realized the request and hopped down beside the palanquin.

The Gator looked over the dead prey in surprise and soon, a number of others began to emerge, cautiously approaching the dead deer.

"There was no sport in that kill," the Gator spoke in a low snarl, revealing his jagged teeth.

Instinctly Yiia recoiled as he felt the heat of the great creature's breath against his scales. Yiia turned to Atlake, and saw the Frog Mage's impassive expression shift slowly into a smile.

Yiia looked as the Gator's mouth opened wide and then erupted with laughter.

"Of course, an empty stomach cares little for sport," the Gator spoke as his laughter died down, "You have my thanks."

"Eat well," Atlake spoke slowly and solemnly as though giving a blessing, "You must be ready for tomorrow's trials."

"We will feast in your honour," the Gator growled with satisfaction, "With full stomachs, we will follow you, wherever your visions guide us."

Atlake nodded, "I shall not join the feast as there is another task I must attend to..."

By the time they reached the Shifting Grove, the stars were the only light above them. Around them, narrow stalks of river canes stood in a tight array, bands of green and black in the night's darkness. His own vision faltering,

Yiia looked towards Atlake, who seemed to be scanning the trees. Following the Frog Mage's eye, he managed to see why they had come.

Chameleons. They hung among the canes black and green-striped in perfect mimicry. Their stillness was unnerving. Yiia knew there were many more, perhaps it was the breathing--a small uncontrollable thing with the presence of Atlake this near.

"Why do you come here to see us, Great Seer?" One of the voices spoke, breaking the stillness of the night.

"I have come to you bearing a gift," Atlake's words were met with silence.

He gestured for Yiia to come forward to the edge of the palanquin. With some effort, Yiia strained and pulled the bags free of the palanquin. As he struggled, the silver darts inside the bag tore through the sackcloth and spilled themselves into a glimmering pile in the center of the grove.

GUIDING VISION

by Christen Sowards

"You know the idols of the temple are protected," Atlake spoke, "They do not bend or break, only the temple fires may melt them. I have melted my own idol, so that its magic may provide you with silver stings."

Chameleon gasps ruined their camouflage.

"The destruction of an idol heralds dark times," a voice echoed from the reeds, "To use it as a weapon would bring worse harm to us than to our foes!"

There were a few murmurs of agreement.

"A seer destroying his own idol heralds stranger times still," another responded from a different hiding place within the reeds, "What fate do you bring us?"

Silence followed, but Yiya could feel as the eyes turned to himself and Atlake even if he could not see them.

"A dark shadow comes to our home unbidden. It shall arrive by tomorrow's first light," Atlake replied, "I give you the means to drive it back. Now, the decision lies with you; shall you make use of my gift, or do you believe that you can hide from your fate?"

With these words Atlake, turned to leave. Yiya heard canes shake as the Chameleons cautiously slinked down, but Atlake did not look back.

Yiya awoke to Atlake's chuckling, just as the Sun had come up.

"They have come, Yiya," Atlake spoke, "As I had foreseen."

Yiya was taken aback for a moment, surprised to hear the Seer address him by name. Before he could say another word, Atlake held out the orb which he had been observing carefully.

Cautiously, Yiya took it. In a moment, the orb carried Yiya's vision far across the jungle, to the valley below them. Daemons had come through hidden voidgates in the night, hoping to ambush the Saurians. Yiya's pupils grew wide with shock as he looked upon Atlake's serene expression.

Atlake moved his hand in a slow gesture, bringing the orb to focus on the western edge of the fight. Yiya could see a crashing rush of War Daemons seeking a foe that was no longer there; the Daemons were running through the grazing grounds for the Ankylosaurus herds.

Per Atlake's command, the Ankylosauruses had been divided and were now able to meet with the Saurian flanks.

Saurian Veterans formed into teams around them, mixing their ranks and leading the rest of their people into battle. Eager to prove their worth, the Saurians fought with fury and skill.

The Gators fought alongside them, their hearts eager and their bellies full. Their strength held the center of the Saurian's line in tact even as War Daemons rushed in headlong against them.

Across the way Atlake pointed again and Yiya saw winged daemons lying in the field, their bodies broken from a long fall. Yiya focused his eyes carefully, observing a precisely placed silver dart in each fallen Daemon. The orb's magic pulsed, revealing the silhouette of their chameleon assassins.

The Champion of the War Daemon was eventually cornered by a pair of Ankylosaurs. Massive and horned, the powerful creature was surrounded.

Assaults from both sides by the veteran-led squads and terrible armoured lizards harried and scored the fiend. Its wings near broken, it screeched in frustration and flew from the battle.

Seeing their Champion flee, the Daemon forces broke.

Yiya continued to survey Atlake's work through the orb.

It seemed as though everything had been accounted for. Each Ankylosaur had been placed expertly. The Saurians and Gators fought ferociously, the Saurians eager to prove their strength to the Frog-Mage and the Gators with renewed energy. Even the Chameleons fought carefully, measuring each shot as though to prove themselves worthy of the darts Atlake had given them.

"You knew this was coming," Yiya said in awe, "But why did you not tell us your vision more clearly? We might have better served you if you had told us everything."

"Perhaps, or the Saurians might have competed for their place in formation or the Gators may have spent the evening with empty bellies, preparing for war," Atlake replied, "I said only what was needed and nothing more."

"Then you have won us a great victory," Yiya replied, "without us even understanding it at the time."

"Our people won this victory, not I," Atlake smiled, "As I knew they would. It was their strength, skill and bravery that won this day. All I had were fragments of visions, glimpses of their potential. My role was only to guide them to where they had to be."

AGE OF FANTASY - GUIDING VISION

Mission Background

Simmering tensions have led to a battle anticipated to be fought at daybreak the next morning. The armies both need an advantage, and the enchanted treasures they guard may be worth sacrificing in order to gain a needed edge.

The Battlefield

For this mission you'll need a 6'x4' table with at least 10-15 pieces of terrain on it.

The Armies

For this mission you'll need two armies of equal point cost.

Deployment

The players roll-off, and the winner picks zone A or B to be their deployment zone, with their opponent taking the opposite. Then the players alternate in placing one unit each within their deployment zone, starting with the player that won the deployment roll-off.

First Turn

The player that has won the deployment roll-off gets the first turn.

Objectives

Before deployment, players have to set up a total of 10 objective markers.

The players roll-off to see who goes first, and then alternate in placing one objective marker each inside of their deployment zone, and at least 9" away from other objectives.

At the end of each round, if a unit is within 3" of a marker whilst enemies aren't, then the objective is seized and remains seized even after leaving.

Shaken units can't seize markers, and if units from both sides are contesting a marker then it becomes neutral again.

At the end of each round players get 1 VP for each objective marker they seized in the enemy deployment zone, plus 3 VPs if they seized all objective markers in the enemy deployment zone.

At the end of the game players get 1 VP for each deployment zone in which they seized more objective markers than their opponent, as well as 2 VPs if they destroyed all units with enchanted weapons in the enemy army.

The game ends after 4 rounds, and the player that scored most VPs wins.

Special Rules

Breaking Dawn: During the first round, units get -1 to hit when shooting at enemies over 6" away.

Energized Blast At the beginning of each round, if a player has seized all objective markers in their deployment zone, the enemy closest to their deployment zone takes D6+1 hits.

Special Equipment

Enchanted Weapons: Before the game begins, each army may provide up to 3 units with enchanted weapons, but must remove one objective marker in their deployment zone for each weapon. Units with enchanted weapons get +1 to hit when attacking.

