

Shark Bridge West Tower

The second Kachayan Tower built on top of Shark Bridge, when it was realised some of the rare, unusual sightings made along the fissure line the Bridge spans were considerably more distant than first thought. The idea was this would allow more accurate triangulation to the possible source. It remains unclear whether such sightings are objectively real or not, however.

The Tower, while sound enough, shows signs of quite hasty construction, with walls of uneven thickness, regularity and straightness, and where the rooms are of a less consistent diameter than would be ordinarily typical for Kachayan buildings. Like the other Shark Bridge Towers, this one is made from crushed-rock concrete, whose surfaces within and without the Tower have a dull reddish colour in sufficient light, thanks to micro-organisms encouraged to coat the concrete. Two disused former living and storage Domes, and the part-dismantled, part-collapsed, remains of a third, are set on the Bridge some way east of the Tower.

Standard Kachayan building practice, especially on military sites, is to construct several concrete domes for the builders to store materials and rest in, near the place the structure is to be built. Ultimately, such domes are demolished as the structure approaches completion, and the dome material reused in the new building. Here that did not happen, as the builders were needed sooner than anticipated to construct the East Tower, where they still are.

Shark Bridge is a 40-foot-wide (12 metres), ancient, grey-brick bridge running west-east across the southern end of an unidentifiably deep sea-bed fissure line, one of those called "The Clawmarks", around 350 miles (560 kilometres) off the nearest shore of Errynor in northwestern Alarius. It is in the Kachayan Ellenge Province, around 20 miles (30 km) north-northeast of the capital itself, Ellenge town, and its top lies in water some 1,650 ft deep (500 m). This means the Bridge and Tower are in perpetual darkness.

The map shows a short stretch of the Bridge's top, along with the Tower and the old construction Domes alongside it. It presents a vertical east-west section through the centre of the Tower and the three Domes, together with plan views of each level and Dome. The lowest level, 1, is duplicated in plan view to show it, and thus the Tower, in relation to its basal concrete foundation cone, and the Domes.

Farmed corals, used as food by the Kachaya, cover much of this basal mound and the adjacent Bridge top and upper sides, with some having begun to colonise the nearer, more complete, old Domes now too.

The Tower is about 250 ft tall (76 m), a cylindrical column roughly 40 ft in diameter (12 m). Its foundation mound is a conical oval, approximately 130 ft long (40 m), 40 ft wide (12 m) and 65 ft tall (20 m).

Between 40 and 50 Kachaya are usually present at or near the Tower. These personnel are organised on chiefly military lines, with the Tower's commander having the rank of lieutenant. Most Kachaya here are armed, with personal weapons including daggers or

short swords, crossbows, nets and spears (some with multiple tips). Such weapons have a mix of wooden, bone and stone parts, the blades and tips typically of sharpened stone or bone pieces. Nets are of reused old ropes, or woven from treated and preserved skins, cartilage and softened bone.

The Kachaya are of a generally humanoid form and Human-like size, thus have a body with four limbs and head, all of which are scaled, with hands and feet also similar to those of Humans, but rather larger, with sharp claws instead of nails, and webbing between their fingers and toes. Roughly 1 in 200 is born with four usable arms instead of two; typically, they grow to be taller than the average. Males and females are physically similar, though females are more commonly magically proficient. All have small control fins on their arms, legs and back. Their heads are ruggedly square by Human norms, their faces flattened, with large, dark, forward-facing, fish-like eyes, a mouth full of robust, sharply pointed teeth, and spines around the edges of their faces which can look like horns, partly hence their common name of "Sea Devils". They are all able to breathe freely above or below the water, though they can breathe air for only quite short periods. They prefer to live in deep, quiet waters, which is where they are more liable to be encountered, and hence their own name for themselves of "The Quiet-Water Folk". Their communication is largely telepathic when undersea, within eye-to-eye range (they have a normal vision range even in the darkness of the deepest oceans, albeit seeing only in black-and-white unless some light is present), or vocal speech in air, though they can use either at any time. They have a bioluminescent patch above each eye that they can show or hide at will too, which can be used to communicate over greater distances in the dark. They are also able to use a sonic attack when in water from time to time, over typical hand-to-hand combat distances. Kachaya leaders tend to be physically and/or magically strong individuals, and although they have an aristocracy of sorts, their leaders do not necessarily come from it. Such leaders usually survive only as long as their strength and success lasts. They pair-bond and maintain loose family structures, giving birth to live young that mature to adult forms in 8-10 months, young that are able to feed and look after themselves independently from birth. While social standing can be determined by heredity, aptitude and forcefulness are more important, because although adults can live to be 50 or so, most die younger, often by violence or accidents. (The Kachaya are loosely similar to the Sahuagin of D&D.)

Messengers and patrols are sent from here mainly to and from the West Caverns below the Bridge arch in the fissure's cliffs, and the Bridge's Central Tower to the east. Kachaya numbers here can be variable occasionally, when larger groups or convoys, including of farmed foods, are moving between the East and West Caverns particularly, along the line of the Bridge.

Tower Levels & Domes

1. Live Food Stores: A variety of live creatures are kept here, some loose and free-swimming, others held in containers, such as buckets, barrels and tubs, often with netted tops, or made from nets over more open frameworks. A close-netted ceiling entrance hole, the net openable only from Level 2, is the sole accessway.

2. Transport & Stores: At least a couple of transport sleds and their towing harnesses are kept here, with various wooden, wood and net, or simply net, storage containers, some

empty, some with tools and materials inside. The sleds are designed to be towed by a group of 4-6 Kachaya, or one or two sharks. They are of wood and/or bone frames strung with nets and cargo ties. Despite a quite flimsy appearance, the sleds are really quite robust, and capable of holding a surprising amount of cargo in a range of commonly-used Kachayan containers. Typical towing speeds are not dissimilar to those of laden wagons on land. A large, round, close-netted doorway leads out through the western wall, with a smaller, close-netted opening in the floor leading down to Level 1. A closed, square wooden, ceiling trapdoor leads up to Level 3.

3. Rest Area & Shrine: A half-life-sized statue of the leading Kachayan military deity Elvass stands on a round plinth on the southwestern floor. This has the form of an upright Kachayan holding an offerings bowl in both hands at chest height. Off-duty Kachaya rest and eat here, commonly in net hammocks slung from the ceiling and walls at various heights. The square wooden trapdoor in the southeastern floor leads down to Level 2, while an open ceiling hole to the northwest connects to Level 4 above.

4. Armoury & Priest's Quarters: Access from Level 3 below is via an open floor hole in the northwest, while a second open hole in the southeast ceiling leads up to Level 5. Several large containers holding extra weapons, materials and tools to make and repair them are placed on the floor in here. These are of various types, sizes and forms, some solid wood or bone, others a mixture of those materials and nets. The Tower's priest lives here when off-duty, whose personal items, including essential regalia used for ceremonies, are stored in a small chest also on the floor by the south wall. A net hammock is slung from the ceiling above this chest for resting in.

5. Watch Room & Tower Commander: The Tower's lieutenant lives here, with a net hammock for resting in slung from the ceiling above the small chest by the north wall that contains personal items for duty use. Several other Kachaya are usually here, taking a break from watch duties in the observation level above, and recording sighting details noted by the watchers in Level 6. A netted circular doorway leads outside to the southwest, with an open floor hole leading down to Level 4, and another hole in the ceiling's centre leading up to the Watch Tower.

6. Watch Tower: At least 4 Kachaya are always on-watch here, one at each circular, netted window, either standing, lying or sitting on the large observation platform shelf-slabs built into the walls below each opening. Periods on watch are limited to an hour or two at a stretch to help preserve alertness. Anything sighted - travellers, animals or anything more unusual - is reported to and recorded in the Watch Room below, and any necessary actions taken. Fish shoals may provoke a sudden hunting party, for example. Each window has its own angular measuring device to help record the position of unusual items spotted. The nets do not hinder visibility outside for those on the platform-shelves, and can be quickly opened or removed to allow a rapid emergence of more of the Tower's crew at need.

7. Old Living Dome: The closer of the two intact disused Domes used once as storage and living quarters for part of the construction crew building the Tower. Now partly colonised on its exterior by corals, and still occasionally used as a storage dome or rest area when a larger group of Kachaya are stopping here temporarily. The Dome has a grey colouration, where not hidden by coral growth, and if there is sufficient light to tell, as the

usual micro-organism coating has been allowed to die-off. A single, round, open accessway is set low on its west side.

8. Old Living Dome: The middle of the three disused Domes east of the Tower is similar in appearance, and occasional reuse, to Dome 7. Its accessway is higher up its western wall, and fewer corals have yet taken over its outer surface being the chief differences.

9. Collapsed Old Dome: The easternmost of the three disused former storage and living Domes was being dismantled for its materials to be reused elsewhere when the construction team was moved off to build the East Tower on Shark Bridge. Since then, the unstable upper parts of the Dome have fallen-in to its floor, leaving only much of the lower walls still standing. In time, it will be fully demolished and cleared away, likely with Domes 7 & 8 too.