

Shark Bridge Central Tower

This was the first of the three Kachayan Towers built atop Shark Bridge, a 40-foot-wide (12 metres) ancient grey-brick bridge spanning west to east across the southern end of one of the unknowably deep fissure lines in the sea bed, far off the northwestern coast of Errynor in Alarius known as “The Clawmarks”. The Bridge is around 1,650 ft (500 m) below the sea’s surface, so is in perpetual darkness.

The map shows scaled representations of a vertical east-west section through the Tower’s middle, with top-down floorplans for each level in the structure, including a plan view of the lowest level, 1, in relation to the appearance of the foundational mound and the top of the Bridge.

The Tower is made from ground-up-rock concrete, whose external and internal surfaces, if seen in enough light, have a dull red colour due to the micro-organisms encouraged to live there. It stands about 250 ft tall from the surface of the Bridge (76 m). For most of that distance, it is a rough, cylindrical column around 40 ft in diameter (12 m), set on a solid concrete base of an oval, conical form, some 65 ft tall, 110 ft long west-east, by 40 ft wide north-south (20 m × 33 m × 12 m). At the top, the Tower expands along the axis of the Bridge (only) so its east-west length becomes about 100 ft (30 m), while its north-south width remains at 40 ft or so. The height of this upper level is fairly constant too, except towards its outer, long-axis, ends, where both ceiling and floor slope together roundedly. Much of the enclosed chamber, and its north and south walls, are roughly 30 ft high (9 m). The lower chambers are somewhat variable in height, between 25-30 ft (7.6 to 9 m).

Although well-built in typical Kachayan fashion, most surfaces are somewhat uneven, with few truly straight edges. Partly this is due to the nature of the free-form concrete construction methods used, though partly here equally suggestive of it having been built quickly. Anyone familiar with Kachayan building practices may realise the uppermost level has been reconstructed, probably more than once, into the enlarged form now apparent, compared to the rest of the Tower. The somewhat concave outer surfaces of the base cone’s long sides could indicate at least some of the concrete may have been reused from here in doing so. Again this might be suggestive of haste, or perhaps merely a lack of suitable alternative materials.

Corals grow across most of the Tower’s base and the surface of the Bridge nearby, extending down the Bridge’s sides a short way in places too. Some have been encouraged to grow there, and indeed the Kachaya make use of farming and gathering them at times for use as food.

Around 50 Kachaya live and work here. Most carry weapons, including spears (some with multiple heads), short swords/daggers, nets and crossbows. Blades and tips are made chiefly from sharpened bone or stone, including obsidian, while the hafts are predominantly of reused salvaged wood, or bone. Nets are largely made from suitable recovered and reused rope, or woven from softened bone, preserved animals skins and cartilage. Since patrols, messengers and those transporting various items pass between the Bridge Towers, the two Cavern systems deeper in the fissure, and settlements beyond the fissure within the Kachayan Ellenge Province, the number of Kachaya here at this

“crossroads” point can be very variable at times. Temporary camps often form along the Bridge nearby if a large consignment of materials is being moved, for instance, with transport sleds, personnel, cargo and towing sharks in attendance. As the line of the fissure is essentially a “highway” for the local Kachaya, especially to and from the capital Ellenge, some 15 km (10 miles) south-southwest of the fissure’s end (so roughly 30 km, 20 miles, south-southwest of the Bridge), this Central Tower is a common assembly and staging point for such journeys, as well as a landmark for those simply passing-by.

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.)

Like the other Towers along Shark Bridge, this facility is run on generally military lines, under an overall leader with a rank of captain.

Tower Levels

1. Live Stores: Live food animals are kept here, of various kinds. Some are maintained in the - usually net-covered - tubs, buckets and barrels shown on the map, while others are allowed to swim freely. Not all the containers are solid. Some have only wood or bone frames strung with netting. A round, close-netted, ceiling entryway, openable only from Level 2, is the only way in or out.

2. Transport: Two transport sleds (sometimes more) are kept here, with harnesses for use by towing groups of Kachaya or sharks, plus ties to hold cargo loads securely on the sleds. The sleds themselves are lightweight constructions made from wooden or bone frames strung with netting and cargo ties. While seemingly flimsy and easily moved when unladen, they are robust in use, and can carry a surprising amount of cargo when properly packed, often of different sorts and in quite a range of containers. A laden sled can be towed by 4-6 Kachaya, or one to two sharks, at a speed not dissimilar to that of a laden wagon on land. Wooden, or wood, bone and net storage containers are kept here as well, some with spare tools and materials for making or repairing more. A large, round, close-netted opening in the northwest-facing wall leads to the outside. A smaller close-netted hole leads down to Level 1, while a closed square wooden trapdoor in the ceiling leads up to Level 3.

3. Rest Area: Off-duty Kachaya rest and eat here, and there is a small shrine on the north wall, with a floor-set statue of the leading Kachayan military deity, Elvass, who has the form of an upright Kachayan holding an offerings bowl at chest height in both hands. It is about half life-sized for an adult Kachayan, and is set on a low, circular plinth. Resting Kachaya may be on the floor, although most prefer net hammocks slung from the walls and ceiling at various heights. A square wooden trapdoor in the floor allows access to Level 2. A circular opening in the ceiling leads up to Level 4.

4. Armoury: Large floor-set containers of typical Kachayan mixed-media construction hold spare weapons, tools, repair and other materials used by the Kachaya stationed here. In addition, the Tower's captain and priest live here when off-duty. Their personal items, including tools and regalia used in their official activities, are stored in the two small chests also on the floor by the south wall. Both use net hammocks slung from the ceiling when resting. A round floor opening leads down to Level 3, with a similar hole leading up through the ceiling to Level 5.

5. Watch Room: Several Kachaya are usually present here. Duty on-watch in the Watch Tower level above involves relatively short periods there, the equivalent of an hour or two only, before taking a rest break here, to help ensure constant alertness. Here too are records maintained by the personnel present regarding all sightings from the Watch Tower. These include travellers arriving or departing, or merely passing by, as well as more unusual sightings. Fish shoals spotted nearby can see a rapid release of hunters from the Tower, for example, including via the netted oval doorway opening outside to the northeast from this chamber. All sightings are reported to the captain or their appointed deputy in the course of the day, with only the more unusual or unexpected being passed-on more immediately. A circular floor opening leads down to Level 4, with a much larger ceiling hole leading up to Level 6, to aid rapid communication of fresh sightings made in the Watch Tower.

6. Watch Tower: A larger, ovaly-rounded chamber tops-off the Tower, with seven, large, horizontally elongated oval windows, closed by nets, set into both the north and south walls. Each viewing window has a large, slab-like shelf projecting from the wall below it, where Kachaya on watch can stand, sit or lie, and still be able to view easily outside along the fissure. There are devices for measuring angles lying loose on several of these shelves, to allow rapid triangulation of distant or unusual sightings. Details of all sightings are quickly passed by sonic, physical gesture, or telepathic, communication via the large floor

hole to the recorders in the Level 5 Watch Room. At least 3 or 4 Kachaya are always on watch here, split between various of the northern and southern windows, changing places and sides of the chamber frequently, again to help maintain full alertness. The window nets do not affect visibility out for those on the adjoining shelf, and can be easily opened or removed entirely should that prove necessary - such as when a rapid deployment of all personnel within the Tower is required. Occasionally, fresh non-food stores and materials are brought in this way too. The room has been altered several times, to its current elongated shape with its multiple viewing locations, to try to better establish the reality and nature of the few, rare, most unusual sightings of Something Unknown apparently much deeper in the fissure.