

Shark Bridge East Tower

This is the third Kachayan Tower built along the top of Shark Bridge to try to investigate the rare, unusual sightings made apparently a long way off, deeper in the great sea-bed fissure line the Bridge crosses. This Tower is still under construction, and been built even more hastily than the West Tower, detailed separately in the Community Atlas. Whether the unusual sightings have any objective reality remains unclear, despite recent attempts using information from the three Towers to try to triangulate to them, as these have been unsuccessful so far.

Although Kachayan crushed-rock-concrete constructions like this Tower tend to have a somewhat irregular surface anyway, partly due to the building methods employed in the deep seas, the speed with which this one has been erected shows in still greater variations than normal. Even the internal chambers are of variable height, with one floor - that between Levels 3 and 4 - so unfinished, the chamber on Level 4 cannot be used currently. The concrete's surfaces inside and outside the Tower are predominantly grey in colour, with patches here and there of a dull redness, as the micro-organisms that give it its colour ordinarily have just recently been introduced by the Kachaya. Such colouring is of course only obvious when there is sufficient light.

Shark Bridge is built from concrete-mortared grey bricks, an ancient, yet still completely sound, structure of unknown origins. It is 40 feet wide (12 metres) and runs east-west across an unfathomably deep fissure, one of the deep sea-floor fractures off the northwestern shores of Alarius known as "The Clawmarks". The top of the Bridge is about 1,650 ft (500 m) below the sea's surface, thus is in permanent darkness.

Along the Bridge from the Tower to east and west are a total of five grey concrete Domes, used to hold construction materials and as rest domes for the builders between work shifts, so as not to disturb the routine activities within the Tower too much. Typically, Kachayan building projects, especially military ones, proceed in a similar fashion, constructing temporary domes like this, which later in the process will be dismantled so their materials can be reused in the main building. The Domes here are all in full use.

The map shows a vertical section through the centre of the Tower and the Domes, along with plan views for each Tower Level and Dome, and the nearby stretch of the Bridge's top. The plan for the lowest Tower level, Level 1, is duplicated in order to show the Tower's location on its foundation mound on the Bridge plan view.

The Tower is a tall, cylindrical column with a domed top, roughly 40 ft in diameter (12 m). Its basal foundation mound is an ovally-extended cone, some 65 ft high (20 m), running about 140 ft along the Bridge (43 m) and right across its full 40 ft width (12 m). Much of this mound has been seeded with corals, which are farmed as a food source by the Kachaya. Some have already begun growing along the nearby Bridge top as well.

The Tower's personnel complement is presently around 40, organised on military lines essentially, led by a lieutenant-rank commander. In addition, between 20-30 more Kachaya involved in construction work may be present at any given time, sometimes with a few attendant sharks used to help in moving heavier or bulkier materials on transport

sleds. The construction overseer can be found in Dome 7 when not occupied elsewhere. Most of these Kachaya carry some form of weapon, usually of simple dagger or short sword type, though the military types may also have additional items with them, such as a spear (often with a multiple tip), net or crossbow. The weapons are mainly composed of stone, reused wood or bone 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 primarily to and from the East Caverns far below the Bridge in the fissure's cliffs, as well as the Bridge's Central Tower to the west. Kachaya numbers can be greater here when convoys, including of farmed foods, are moving between the West and East Caverns especially, following the line of the Bridge. This Tower is particularly reliant on food and materials provided by the East Caverns currently, as too few personnel can be spared regularly for hunting or farm work.

Tower Levels & Domes

1. Live Food Stores: A construction error means this Level is rather taller than any other in the Tower presently. However, this is not thought too problematic, as greater stocks of live food creatures are needed - and kept - here due to the ongoing construction works

that leave little time for hunting or growing food animals otherwise. A substantial number of containers of varying forms - barrels, tubs and buckets, some solid, some of frame-and-net form - hold part of the food stocks, while more are allowed to swim freely. A close-netted, round, ceiling accessway to Level 2, the net openable only from the Level 2 side, is the solitary way in or out.

2. Transport & Stores: The same construction mistake as in Level 1 has led to this chamber being lower-ceilinged than ideal, such that the netted, circular, external doorway on its northeastern side seems larger than usual, although actually it is not. The chamber is also abnormally angular in its mid-wall-height plan view, all further indications of the haste with which this Tower has been built. There are normally two or more wood- and bone-framed, net-bodied, transport sleds here, together with harnesses to allow them to be towed by groups of 4-6 Kachaya or one to two sharks, at a similar speed to a wagon on land, when fully laden. For all the sleds seem flimsy, and they are lightweight when empty, they are really quite robust, capable of holding a surprising amount of cargo in the range of containers favoured by the Kachaya. Also kept here are a number of such spare containers of wood, bone or frame-and-net forms, with a few that hold spare tools and materials as well. A square wooden trapdoor in the ceiling leads up to Level 3, with a round, close-netted opening in the northwestern floor leading down to Level 1.

3. Armoury: Several large, wood, bone, or frame-and-net containers on the floor here hold additional weapons, with tools and materials to repair or make more. A wooden trapdoor to the southeast connects with Level 2, while the unfinished floor of Level 4 above forms only a half-closed ceiling to this chamber.

4. Floor Under Construction: For the Tower's personnel, this is little more than an extended corridor between Levels 3 and 5 presently, as it is too incomplete to have any real function. Construction problems have led to the floor's failure, and the floor will almost certainly have to be completely removed and rebuilt from scratch. As the vertical section suggests, what there is of the floor currently has begun to sag down into the chamber below, which is now threatening to cause the rest to collapse into Level 3. A ceiling opening to the southwest leads into Level 5.

5. Rest Area & Shrine: Due to the "missing" Level 4, this Level has become the default rest area, shrine, priest's and Tower lieutenant's quarters. Net hammocks are slung from most available surfaces across the ceiling and walls away from the Shrine on the north wall. The Shrine has a half-life-sized statue of the leading Kachayan military deity Elvass set on a circular plinth, in typical upright pose, offerings bowl held in both hands at chest height. Even so, some of the Tower's staff have still to be barracked in Dome 11 on the Bridge when off-duty. Regalia and other personal items used by the priest and lieutenant are stored in the two chests by the west and south walls respectively. An opening in the southwestern floor leads down to the rest of the Tower, while a similar opening in the central ceiling leads up to the Watch Dome. A net-closed doorway on the east wall leads to the outside.

6. Watch Dome: Two Kachaya are always on-watch here, standing, sitting or lying on the platform set below each of the north- and south-facing, circular, netted windows. Other Kachaya on watch duties wait on the floor taking a break from observing, and record all sightings the window observers report. Angular measuring devices lie loose on each

platform to assist in such recordings. After an hour or two watching, the observers swap with the recorders to help try to preserve their alertness. The nets do not hinder visibility to the outside for those on the platforms, and can be quickly opened or removed to allow a rapid exit for others of the Tower's staff at need. Anything sighted - travellers, animals or anything more unusual - is reported and recorded, and any necessary actions taken. Fish shoals may provoke a sudden hunting party, for example, as long as they are very close-by. As its small, relatively cramped, dimensions may suggest, this is only a temporary observation area. In theory it should be replaced at some point by a more suitable, larger, structure, with more viewing openings. A central floor opening links to Level 5 below.

7. Construction Stores & Rest Dome: An assortment of containers, tools and some materials are stored in this, the westernmost of the five Domes close to East Tower. Much of the interior though is reserved for resting construction workers. The overseer for the builders is quartered here too. Some simply rest and eat on the floor, while others - including the overseer - have net hammocks slung from the ceiling and away from the round entrance hole high up on the eastern side. The number of Kachaya here varies throughout the day, dependent on what tasks are underway.

8. Construction Stores Dome: Around one-third of the space inside this closest Dome to the Tower's west side is given over to a large pile of crushed rocks and larger stone fragments ready to be mixed into construction concrete. The state of the floor indicates the pile has been considerably larger than it is currently. A single circular doorway opens low on the eastern side for access. Occasionally used to store other materials and tools as well, usually in containers if so, and more rarely used as additional rest-space for part of the building team.

9. Construction Stores Dome: The closer of the three Domes east of the Tower, like Dome 8, its interior is dominated by a large pile of raw crushed rock and larger fragments that will be used to create fresh building concrete. The Dome is too full of this to have any additional use just now. A single round doorway opens low in its western wall.

10. Construction Stores and Rest Dome: Tools and containers here hold a variety of items used in building work, while leaving plenty of space for more of the construction crew to rest and eat, either on the floor or in net hammocks slung from the ceiling and walls. A round doorway facing west provides access.

11. Rest Dome: Although occasionally used for storage too, the easternmost of the five Bridge Domes was originally meant as an extra eating and resting place for construction workers when the crew was larger than normal. Most of the time now, it is used as an overspill barracks for the Tower's personnel, given building problems mean there is insufficient space inside the Tower for its usual complement. Net hammocks are slung from most available ceiling and wall spaces away from the west-facing ceiling access hole.