

Tigers of the Poisoned Claws

[\[The Day After Ragnarok\]](#)

City: Clemson, South Carolina

Population: 500 free citizens, 1,000 slaves

Controls: Clemson and area around it

Government: Machine

Problem: Serpent Cult

Heroic Opportunity: Arcana

City Aspect: Twisted and Scientific.

Clemson superficially was able to weather the Serpentfall well enough, being up in the mountains (by South Carolinian standards, at least); but it still got thoroughly saturated with venom-tainted rain and snow, and the stuff took root in the soil. The savants at the agricultural school tried their best to purify their food and water, and for a while it seemed like they had succeeded. In reality, the effects were simply delayed, and proved more insidious.

It started with programs to **manage** the Serpent-taint, instead of purge it. Indeed, “How much exposure was ‘safe?’” seemed to be a reasonable question, and at first the school could find volunteers ready to risk their lives for the community. But as the pool of volunteers dwindled,

the faculty started to show fewer and fewer scruples about finding replacements. The programs were working, you see. Breakthroughs were imminent. They just needed more data; which meant, more test subjects.

The progression was obvious. First the college used captured bandits. Then they used their own home-grown criminals, as it were. From there it was a short step to use people who were not 'Clemsonites;' soon, the thought of having a permanent breeding population of test subjects seemed obvious enough. Anyone objecting too loudly were the first ones to go into the breeding pits.

Today, Clemson is a terror to its neighbors. The college sends out teams of Tigers to track and waylay lone travelers or small groups, and Tiger 'scouting agents' to sniff out larger settlements. When they find a suitable target, the Tigers ambush their victims using their Poisoned Claws (darts dipped in certain alkaloids derived from Clemson's biology department). Then the Tigers bring their prey back home. White people with exceptional qualities and the right temperament are offered a place in the community (where they will swiftly be driven mad by the diet); everybody else gets tossed in the breeding pits, where they languish until a Clemsonite professor needs more test subjects.

What makes the town so horrifying is how determinedly **normal** its inhabitants try to appear. Clemson is, superficially, a place in fine physical shape. The water and power are still in, people have enough to eat, the roads get patched and the lawns get mowed. A quirk of the way Clemson presents itself is that while the area looks to have a Serpent Taint level of 2, it's actually 4, and 5 in the breeding pits (which are a bit more extensive at this point than the Clemsonites realize). When the horrors get fully revealed it can be a bit overwhelming, particularly since the incessant experiments get stranger and more horribly baroque every month. But there's still definitely valuable stuff to loot. While the town is madness solidified, it's been doing quite a bit of solid research into the effects of Serpent-taint on organic material. This information would be worth quite a bit to the right researchers.

Assuming, of course, that it doesn't all go up with the rest of the town when Clemson is eventually purified in the cleansing flames. Which, honestly, is what needs to happen to the town at this point. Just don't breathe any of the fumes.

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