

## Sampans

“The Sea is our home. It guides our fate, delivering us to where we must be. It gives us our food, our clothing. It gives us protection from our enemies and trails to our friends.” - Opening lines of the sampan Litany of Heritage.

The sampans are a people apart, living their whole lives shipboard. Each city fleet is composed of several sampans, huge ships designed to hold over 300 souls, numerous guild ships, and a multitude of clan ships, from which the race takes its name. In all, a sampan fleet generally has at least thousand inhabitants.

Sampans are surface elves, and while they occasionally make use of underwater breathing devices, do not display any special ability with water. They will drown as quickly as any other surface dweller. It is unknown why they originally chose to live entirely shipboard, but few willingly leave their seafaring lifestyle. Sampans usually make brief trading stops whenever fate leads them to a friendly port, where they trade their own wondrously crafted items as well as exotic items picked up at other ports. Every sampan learns haggling and bargaining as a child and most are skilled merchants.

Sampans are considered to be extremely polite, formal in manner, quiet, and even tempered. There are no reports from outsiders of a Sampan argument or battle of any sort. **It is considered to be better to kill a man than to be rude to him.** In a culture that lives crammed into ships with little personal space or privacy, attention to politeness is important. Sampans tend to be more formally polite to people they dislike.

Sampans take much of their existence from the sea. Their lightweight armor is made from tanned hides of fish and sharks, their flowing robes are made of sea silk they spin and weave themselves. Most of their meals are fish and sea vegetables plucked from the sea, accompanied by fine delicacies traded in most every port in Amroth.

### Superstitions

Sampans tend to be very superstitious, and have developed many odd beliefs. The sails of their ships are brightly colored, usually yellows, oranges, and reds. Every mast streams with colorful ribbons and golden and silver bells and larger ships always have someone employed to fly a kite with a ugly face on it from the fore of the ship. Sampans will explain that the ribbons and bells are to attract the lucky winds, and the kite is to chase off the malicious North Wind.

Sampans will not allow an inauspicious person near the rudders. Truly unlucky people are occasionally left onshore and not allowed to return to their city fleet until they change their luck.

Sampans believe that luck or fate has a tremendous impact on their lives and will go to great efforts to attract the proper winds of fate. It is believed that one can go to land for a time and find a new breeze of luck. Most youngsters that show the skill and ambition to captain a ship are encouraged to spend a period landbound, away from their city fleet. It is believed that they will pick up auspicious vibrations, and any who can survive in the dangerous world of the landbound must surely have amazing luck.

The sampans have soothsayers who are specially trained in finding the luckiest courses and help guide the members of the city fleet. Whether they are able to chart the winds of fate or a just wise and able to listen to problems and give sage advice, they are greatly respected and revered.

### Government

Sampan city fleets are ruled by a governor and council of ship captains. On each ship, the individual captain's word is law, vital when a wrong action may cost lives and even the entire ship. The governor is involved in any ship to ship dispute and any action involving the entire fleet.

Captains obtain their positions thru maritime skills, politics, and proof of being lucky. By tradition they rule by the consent of the ships occupants, so this tends to be a reasonably democratic relationship. It is often surprising how unlucky an unpopular captain can become in a very short time.

Sampan do not have formalized laws. Those that do not fit into their ordered society are encouraged to leave, and anyone who disrupts the peace of the ship is generally shunned by their fellows. They are not given or allowed to help in daily tasks, they are not talked to, are not offered food from the communal cooking pot. In the eyes of their shipmates they are ghosts.

Personal insults are dealt with between individuals, either with icy formal politeness or thru duels. Attempting to involve others in personal situations is bad etiquette and liable to lower ones status for creating disharmony. If a personal situation can not be dealt with thru polite diplomacy, a duel may be offered. The challenger

If a person is a threat to the ship and society, they are removed. Depending on how large of a threat they are, they may be placed upon the land at the next trading stop, or they may be given a piece of wood to float upon and removed from the ship immediately.

## **Boats**

Sampans are large square-bottomed boats with stern-mounted rudders. The ship hulls are built in several watertight sections so that if one section develops a leak the other sections will hold the boat afloat until the leak is repaired and water is pumped out.

The sails are constructed of several horizontal rectangular sections, which provide shape and strength. Sampan sails are controlled at their trailing edge by lines much in the same way as the mainsail on a typical sailboat; however, in the junk sail each batten has a line attached to its trailing edge where on a typical sailboat this line (the sheet) is attached only to the boom. The sails can also be easily reefed and adjusted for fullness, to accommodate various wind strengths. The battens also make the sails more resistant than traditional sails to large tears, as a tear is typically limited to a single "panel" between battens.

The sail-plan is also spread out between multiple masts, allowing for a powerful sail surface, and a good repartition of efforts. The rig allows for good sailing into the wind.

Each city fleet has at least one sampan, a gigantic ship considered to be owned by the entire city fleet. It is considered a privilege to crew the sampa and every family in the fleet has one or more members on the sampan.

Each guild has a guildhall vessel, that is used for guild functions and staffed by senior guild members and apprentices. As well, individual families have vessels ranging from large houseboats.