

Atlas Games Presents a *Seven Strongholds*™ Preview:

# THE PSITTAE

A NEW D20 SYSTEM™ CHARACTER RACE BY ROBIN D. LAWS

Have your players wandered off the beaten path yet again? Didn't have time to map out that castle? Just open *Seven Strongholds*™ to find forts, castles, and other well-fortified locations, fully detailed and ready for insertion into your game world.

*Seven Strongholds* is a new book in the **Penumbra** line of D20 supplements from Atlas Games, scheduled for release in late February 2002. As the title suggests, it presents seven ready-made fortresses, waiting for you to insert into your campaign world.

One of the seven locations described is the Perch. Keen-eyed birdmen zealously guard this domed lair, from which they oppress the area's population of "walkers" -- their contemptuous term for flightless humanoids. Known as psittae, these birdmen are a new species that you can introduce to your world.

Like all **Penumbra**™ products, *Seven Strongholds* gives you material adaptable to any fantasy campaign, whether it be a published setting or a world of your own creation. If you are intrigued by the psittae, you don't even have to wait for the book to hit store shelves to add them to your own game world — this free preview gives you all you need.

---

## THE PSITTAE

### PERSONALITY

Intelligent, restless, and high-strung, the psittae (pronounced as a buzzing sound followed by a hard "i") may seem distant or even cruel to mammalian humanoids. Among their own kind, they are highly social, following strict hierarchies of dominance and submission. Dominant individuals, who win their positions through ritualized combat, enjoy the best access to food, shelter, and mating opportuni-



ILLUSTRATION ©2001 BY DAVID INTERDONATO



Requires the use of the Dungeons & Dragons® Player's Handbook, Third Edition, published by Wizards of the Coast.



ties. Subordinates follow their leaders out of a combination of fear, respect, and religious obligation. Always alert to the niceties of status, psittae are quick to take offense, a habit they find hard to drop while traveling in the lands of outsiders. Having been raised in a culture where all disputes are settled by the assertion of rank, they often find it hard to compromise or negotiate. Psittae are highly inquisitive; they believe there is no more satisfying way to die than in investigating a mystery.

Many outsiders incorrectly assume that these humanoid birds suffer from claustrophobia. In fact, they're more than comfortable in caves, which many psittae colonies use as homes. Fiercely territorial, they eagerly make war with other psittae groups who encroach on their feeding grounds or nesting areas.

Contrary to the niceties of most intelligent cultures, psittae feel no sense of shame in relation to their own excrement, and are not revolted by the smell of their own ordure. Layers of the whitish guano typically coat the flooring of a psittae colony. (They might feel differently if they had to walk on the slimy, slippery stuff, but they perch high above it.) A psitta among other humanoids has to train himself not to empty his bowels with unthinking abandon. It is not physically difficult for them to use latrines or chamberpots, though many have difficulty remembering to do so, especially when tired or nervous.

## PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

Psittae are winged, feathered humanoids, with large, rounded heads and big beaks that are both hooked and curved. Various groups display different colors of bright plumage, from eye-popping crimson to vivid cerulean. The first and fourth toes of their scaly gray bird's feet are turned backwards. They're slim of build but tall, with an average height of 5' 11" for both male and female individuals. Psittae who survive to adulthood live, on average, to the age of 130 years. Although a few eccentrics may don clothes, most psittae are loath to hide the splendor of their plumage with mere rags. Psittae bones are pitted with air pockets, lightening their skeletons so that it's easier for them to take flight. Consequently, they're more susceptible to bludgeoning weapons than are mammalian humanoids.

Females lay eggs and do not nurse their young, so they lack mammalian breasts. Unlike many bird

species, both the males and females are elaborately plumed.

## RELATIONS

Psittae lump all of the major humanoid races into the same category, perceiving little difference between them. They refer to them with an insulting psittan word that translates as "featherless." While world-wise psittae are probably more enlightened, individuals who spend their whole lives among their own kind tend to look on the flightless as pathetic and easily exploitable.

## ALIGNMENT

With their hierarchical social structure, respect for the law is bred into a psittan's aerated bones. Although often labeled as evil by outsiders, they're more accurately described as indifferent to the welfare of creatures outside their colony structures. Even otherwise chaotic psittae usually follow the rules of the hierarchy, though they may be freedom-loving and unpredictable in other ways.

## PSITTAN LANDS

In most realms, psittae are rare creatures who congregate only in colonies of a hundred or fewer individuals. A single colony may claim a territory of several thousand acres, maintaining its boundaries with regular aerial patrols. Other humanoids who do not threaten the colony may be allowed to live in psittan territory in relative peace, though they'll either have to pay tribute or suffer periodic raids from above. Psittae have been unable to transcend their habit of making war on rival colonies, preventing the development of larger political structures like kingdoms. (GMs may, of course, choose to create exceptional places where psittae have made this leap to larger communities.)

## RELIGION

Psittae recognize an extensive pantheon of deities led by the distant and impersonal Ch'gatibal the Lawmaker, a father figure too aloof and dignified to accept prayer or communicate with worshipers. Instead, most psittae direct their worship to his daughter, Ch'sunuskam the Clever, a trickster and explorer who gets into trouble but finds useful

things, like fire and the secret of breaking coconuts. Other deities include Ch'habugja Black-Robe, who sternly enforces Ch'gatibal's laws, and is Ch'sunuskam's nemesis; Ch'jahnisi the Provider, who seeds the earth with the food psittae forage for; and Ch'niththaim Taker-In-The-Night, the forbidding goddess of death and the underworld.

## LANGUAGE

Psittan tongues and beaks are capable of producing a much wider range of sounds than mammalian humanoids, so their language is peppered with squawks, clicks, and mimicked sounds beings of other species find utterly impossible to recreate. Fortunately, they have no such problems with other languages, often learning Common to more precisely specify to local humanoids the detailed nature of the tribute they demand.

## NAMES

Psittan names are polysyllabic, knotted with difficult consonant combinations, and invariably preceded by a shrieking noise best approximated with the prefix Ch'. Examples include Ch'thabugj, Ch'ailmailhkin, Ch'hausthun, Ch'arabair, Ch'un-garnjthun, and Ch'lonsfriggei.

## ADVENTURERS

Psittan adventurers fall into two categories. Some are outcasts or eccentrics who have fled their home colonies to avoid a dominance duel, or after losing one. Others go out into the world as a sort of pilgrimage in tribute to the holy wanderings of Ch'sunuskam the Clever. They hope to return to their colonies one day, with the useful knowledge and magic they've acquired on their journeys. Their discoveries will allow them to challenge their colony leaders and send them shrieking from their perches. Some psittan adventurers develop an affection for the featherless and their ways, never returning to their homes.

## PSITTAE RACIAL TRAITS

**Ability Modifiers:** +2 Intelligence, -2 Constitution

**Size:** Medium

**Base Speed:** 20 feet, fly 45 feet (poor)

**Flight (Ex):** Psittae have large, feathered wings and can fly, provided they begin by dropping from a height; for example, from a cliff face or tall tree. They can't simply rise into the air, even with a running start, so their flight is more limited than that provided by the *fly* spell. They'll almost never find good flying opportunities in the typical underground environment. Psittae cannot take flight while carrying a heavy load; while carrying a medium load, they can do so only by making a DC 20 Strength check. A failed check means that the character plummets to the ground, taking falling damage. Psittae wearing armor over medium weight cannot fly, but speed penalties for lighter armor don't apply to their flight speed. Special abilities such as the barbarian's Fast Movement do not affect the flying speed of a psitta character.

**Awkward Winged (Ex):** Because they have evolved arms as well as wings, psittae can't fold their wings down against their bodies as neatly as can ordinary birds. Even with wings folded down as far as they'll go, psittae need five feet of clearance to move comfortably down a passageway or corridor. Any passageway less than three feet across is impassable to a psitta.

**Attack From Above (Ex):** When entering combat against an opponent who is not in flight, a psittan's threat range for critical hit purposes increases by 1 for each previous round spent in the air, to a maximum of 3. The psittan must have been traveling in a more-or-less straight line through the air: diving or swooping are acceptable, but not circling.

The psittae have also learned to use their melee weapons in emulation of a claw attack during a dive attack: they get double damage with handheld weapons whenever they can swoop in from thirty feet (as a charge), but can't combine a critical and the dive attack damage.

**Mimicry:** Any psittae can purchase the Mimicry skill (see page 4) as a class skill.

**Beak Attack (Ex):** Unarmed attack damage 1d6; this is standard damage, not subdual, and has a critical x2 despite being a natural weapon.

**Nonstandard Feet (Ex):** Psittae can't wear boots, including magical ones.

**Lightweight Bones (Ex):** When suffering a critical hit from a bludgeoning weapon, the damage multiplier of the weapon is increased by 1 — for exam-

ple, a light mace critical is not x2, but x3.

**Racial Modifiers:** +2 racial bonus on Climb checks on natural surfaces, like cliffs and trees; -2 racial penalty on all Diplomacy checks.

**Automatic Languages:** Common and Psittan

**Bonus Languages:** None

**Favored Class:** Barbarian

---

## THE PSITTAN PANTHEON

### CH'SUNUSKAM THE CLEVER

**Alignment:** Lawful Neutral

**Domains:** Knowledge, Trickery, Luck

**Typical Worshipers:** Any psitta

Ch'sunuskam is the psittan hero who tricked the older gods into bringing them the vital gifts of civilization, including fire, speech, and the secrets of dome-making. The myths depict her as a carefree wayfarer whose curiosity gets her into trouble, and whose ingenuity gets her back out of it again. She is a patron to blacksmiths and an encourager of troublemakers.

Ch'sunuskam is depicted as a bright-eyed, colorfully feathered psitta, always in a dynamic pose. Her symbol is an anvil; her favored weapon is the long spear.

### CH'HABUGJA BLACK-ROBE

**Alignment:** Lawful Neutral

**Domains:** Law, Protection, War

**Typical Worshipers:** Fighters and rangers

The enigmatic Ch'habugja Black-Robe is the war-maker of the gods. He is celebrated for slaying the ancestral foes of the psittan gods, including Kwathaa the Undulating Serpent and G'gobi Egg-Stealer. In many stories, he either captures and punishes Ch'sunuskam the Clever, or is fooled by her, depending on who tells the tale.

He is depicted as a stern-looking psitta covered in a mantle of black feathers. His symbol is a feathered fist; his favored weapon, the longbow.

#### NEW SKILL:

## MIMICRY (INT, TRAINED ONLY)

Use this skill to imitate sounds: you can duplicate specific voices or realistically copy noises. If you also allot a rank of the Perform skill to the task, you can entertain others with amusing vocal impressions of people they know. Mimicry of animal cries or other natural sounds can be used to signal your compatriots without alerting sentries. You can also use these imitations in hunting, to attract beasts of the wild.

**Checks:** Use the difficulties below when your artifice is showing; that is, you're not trying to fool people as to the origin of the noise, but just show them how good you are at mimicking a sound. When you seek to deceive, make an opposed check against the target's Listen skill.

#### DC Attempted Sound

- |    |  |
|----|--|
| 10 | The cry of an ordinary animal  |
| 13 | Speech with a specific foreign accent  |
| 20 | Imitating a particular individual's speech   |
| 23 | The cry of a monster or exotic beast   |
| 25 | A noise or sound effect: a breaking dish, howling wind, the scraping of a sword on whetstone |

**Retries:** These are generally not possible; once you've broken the illusion, you can't recapture it.

This is a class skill for bards, rangers, and rogues.

### CH'JAHNISI THE PROVIDER

**Alignment:** Lawful Good

**Domains:** Good, Magic, Plant

**Typical Worshipers:** Paladins, foragers and crazy idealists

The merciful Ch'jahnisi seeds the earth with fruit and nut plants for psittae to glean from. She is noted for her forgiving nature, which sometimes



# SEVEN STRONGHOLDS

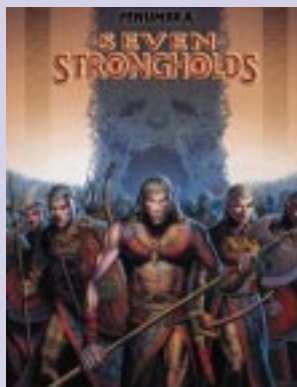
If you like what you see, be sure to ask for *Seven Strongholds* in your friendly local game store. Besides giving you all the details of the Perch, home to the psittae, this 128-page sourcebook features six more ready-to-use locations:

**The Barrows:** A concrete bunker allows a determined troop of gnomes to hold at bay the misshapen monsters of the subterranean world, intent on breaking through to the surface.

**Castle Briar:** An elven warlord protects his living castle from jealous rivals.

**Gloom Keep:** Under a sunless sky, grim-faced humans protect their senile, maddened deity from the world.

**Old Mound Fort:** An Iron Age ditch-and-rampart fort, refurbished by



halfling adventurers, offers a way station for treasure-hungry dungeon explorers.

**Steelface Point:** An imposing dwarven fortress protects the mouth of a mountain pass from the orcish horde and its war machines.

**Uthront Fort:** Ambitious half-orcs occupy a newly built motte-and-bailey castle as an early stage of their effort to mold the local humanoid raiders into a mighty and unified army.

## ORDERING INFORMATION

If you are interested in buying a copy of *Seven Strongholds*, these are the “vital statistics” your store may need. (Usually a game store needs the stock number, while a bookstore needs the ISBN.)

**Stock Number:** AG3212

**ISBN:** 1-58978-011-6

**Suggested Retail Price:** \$20.95 (US)

On our website, you can find more information about our games and where to buy them, free downloads like this one, and more!

[WWW.ATLAS-GAMES.COM](http://WWW.ATLAS-GAMES.COM)

angers the other gods or leads to trouble, as in the story in which she takes pity on G’gobi Egg-Stealer and brings him back from the dead.

Ch’jahnisi the Provider is shown as a large psittan female with a fringe of white feathers around her neck. Her symbol is the papaya, and her favored weapon is the net.

## CH’NITHTHAIM TAKER-IN-THE-NIGHT

**Alignment:** Lawful Neutral

**Domains:** Death, Destruction, Earth

**Typical Worshipers:** Barbarians and fighters

Although Ch’niththaim Taker-In-The-Night is generally loathed and feared by ordinary psittae, she is not so much an enemy of the gods as a terrible relative whose presence must be suffered. Her dread laugh rattling around her dry and dusty throat, she sweeps the souls of the slain off to the loamy underworld, meting out the judgements that determine one’s eternal perch in the great celestial dome.

Some fighters and barbarians dedicate themselves to her grim cause, ensuring that their fellows may fear, but never love, them.

Ch’niththaim appears as a skull-faced psitta with only a few ragged feathers dangling from her spindly frame. To make her symbol, string a dozen songbird skulls on a circular wire frame. Like most psittan deities, she favors the long spear.

## CH’GATIBAL THE LAWMAKER

**Alignment:** Lawful Neutral

**Domains:** None

**Typical Worshipers:** No direct worshipers

The distant patriarch of the psittan gods is not directly worshiped, has no priests, and does not deign to provide magic or guidance to those foolish enough to seek these from him.

Unlike the other members of the pantheon, he is not depicted as an anthropomorphic figure; instead, he appears as a stylized sun. If he had a favored weapon, it would be the long spear.

## LEGAL INFORMATION

This free preview is published under the terms of the Open Game License (reproduced below). All of the text in this document is Open Game Content.

“d20 System” and the “d20 System” logo are Trademarks owned by Wizards of the Coast and are used according to the terms of the d20 System Trademark License. A copy of this license can be found at [www.wizards.com](http://www.wizards.com). Dungeons & Dragons® and Wizards of the Coast® are Registered Trademarks of Wizards of the Coast, and are used with permission.

Seven Strongholds and Penumbra are trademarks of Trident, Inc., d/b/a Atlas Games. Atlas Games and “Charting New Realms of Imagination” are trademarks of John Nephew, used under license. The Atlas Games logo is a trademark of John Nephew and Trident, Inc., d/b/a Atlas Games.

Copyright ©2002 Trident, Inc., d/b/a Atlas Games.



Atlas Games  
PO Box 131233  
Roseville, MN 55113  
USA

web [www.atlas-games.com](http://www.atlas-games.com)  
e-mail [info@atlas-games.com](mailto:info@atlas-games.com)

## OPEN GAME LICENSE VERSION 1.0A

The following text is the property of Wizards of the Coast, Inc. and is Copyright 2000 Wizards of the Coast, Inc ("Wizards"). All Rights Reserved.

1. Definitions: (a) "Contributors" means the copyright and/or trademark owners who have contributed Open Game Content; (b) "Derivative Material" means copyrighted material including derivative works and translations (including into other computer languages), potation, modification, correction, addition, extension, upgrade, improvement, compilation, abridgment or other form in which an existing work may be recast, transformed or adapted; (c) "Distribute" means to reproduce, license, rent, lease, sell, broadcast, publicly display, transmit or otherwise distribute; (d) "Open Game Content" means the game mechanic and includes the methods, procedures, processes and routines to the extent such content does not embody the Product Identity and is an enhancement over the prior art and any additional content clearly identified as Open Game Content by the Contributor, and means any work covered by this License, including translations and derivative works under copyright law, but specifically excludes Product Identity. (e) "Product Identity" means product and product line names, logos and identifying marks including trade dress; artifacts; creatures characters; stories, storylines, plots, thematic elements, dialogue, incidents, language, artwork, symbols, designs, depictions, likenesses, formats, poses, concepts, themes and graphic, photographic and other visual or audio representations; names and descriptions of characters, spells, enchantments, personalities, teams, personas, likenesses and special abilities; places, locations, environments, creatures, equipment, magical or supernatural abilities or effects, logos, symbols, or graphic designs; and any other trademark or registered trademark clearly identified as Product identity by the owner of the Product Identity, and which specifically excludes the Open Game Content; (f) "Trademark" means the logos, names, mark, sign, motto, designs that are used by a Contributor to identify itself or its products or the associated products contributed to the Open Game License by the Contributor (g) "Use", "Used" or "Using" means to use, Distribute, copy, edit, format, modify, translate and otherwise create Derivative Material of Open Game Content.

(h) "You" or "Your" means the licensee in terms of this agreement.

2. The License: This License applies to any Open Game Content that contains a notice indicating that the Open Game Content may only be Used under and in terms of this License. You must affix such a notice to any Open Game Content that you Use. No terms may be added to or subtracted from this License except as described by the License itself. No other terms or conditions may be applied to any Open Game Content distributed using this License.

3. Offer and Acceptance: By Using the Open Game Content You indicate Your acceptance of the terms of this License.

4. Grant and Consideration: In consideration for agreeing to use this License, the Contributors grant You a perpetual, worldwide, royalty-free, non-exclusive license with the exact terms of this License to Use, the Open Game Content.

5. Representation of Authority to Contribute: If You are contributing original material as Open Game Content, You represent that Your Contributions are Your original creation and/or You have sufficient rights to grant the rights conveyed by this License.

6. Notice of License Copyright: You must update the COPYRIGHT NOTICE portion of this License to include the exact text of the COPYRIGHT NOTICE of any Open Game Content You are copying, modifying or distributing, and You must add the title, the copyright date, and the copyright holder's name to the COPYRIGHT NOTICE of any original Open Game Content you Distribute.

7. Use of Product Identity: You agree not to Use any Product Identity, including as an indication as to compatibility, except as expressly licensed in another, independent Agreement with the owner of each element of that Product Identity. You agree not to indicate compatibility or co-adaptability with any Trademark or Registered Trademark in conjunction with a work containing Open Game Content except as expressly licensed in another, independent Agreement with the owner of such Trademark or Registered Trademark. The use of any Product Identity in Open Game Content does not constitute a challenge to the ownership of that Product Identity. The owner of any Product

Identity used in Open Game Content shall retain all rights, title and interest in and to that Product Identity.

8. Identification: If you distribute Open Game Content You must clearly indicate which portions of the work that you are distributing are Open Game Content.

9. Updating the License: Wizards or its designated Agents may publish updated versions of this License. You may use any authorized version of this License to copy, modify and distribute any Open Game Content originally distributed under any version of this License.

10 Copy of this License: You MUST include a copy of this License with every copy of the Open Game Content You Distribute.

11. Use of Contributor Credits: You may not market or advertise the Open Game Content using the name of any Contributor unless You have written permission from the Contributor to do so.

12 Inability to Comply: If it is impossible for You to comply with any of the terms of this License with respect to some or all of the Open Game Content due to statute, judicial order, or governmental regulation then You may not Use any Open Game Material so affected.

13 Termination: This License will terminate automatically if You fail to comply with all terms herein and fail to cure such breach within 30 days of becoming aware of the breach. All sublicenses shall survive the termination of this License.

14 Reformation: If any provision of this License is held to be unenforceable, such provision shall be reformed only to the extent necessary to make it enforceable.

### 15 COPYRIGHT NOTICE

Open Game License v 1.0a Copyright 2001, Wizards of the Coast, Inc.

D20 System Rules & Content Copyright 2000 Wizards of the Coast, Inc.; Authors Jonathan Tweet, Monte Cook, Skip Williams, based on original material by Dave Arneson and E. Gary Gygax.

“The Psittac,” an excerpt from *Seven Strongholds*, Copyright 2002 Trident Inc. d/b/a Atlas Games; author Robin D. Laws