

Tab 1

Adventure Jam #2 - I'Cath

"The Ghostly Coup"

by: u/everything44

Introduction

"The Ghostly Coup" is an adventure made for the 5th edition of Dungeons & Dragons (2014) but it can still be played in 5.5e or even adapted to 2nd edition. It's intended for 4-5 PCs starting at level 4 and ending the adventure at level 7, most likely taking around 4 sessions to complete. The adventure deals with topics like feminism, misogyny, misandry, slave labor and totalitarianism. It depicts body horror such as undead corpses and unnatural quantities of eyes and teeth. Furthermore the adventure is made to be modular that is, it can be changed to better suit different game lengths and play styles these changes can be made by altering the number of, or which, encounters you run from the ones found in Appendix A: Encounters it is suggested to run at least 1 from each table. Feel free to make any other alterations to the adventure and the story, and remember to always have fun while playing.

The Text

Since this is a homebrew adventure made in google docs some concessions have to be made, for example the boxed text will be displayed like this:

Whenever you see text Boxed in like this you're supposed to read or paraphrase it for your players, most information kept in these boxes are important and major for the story, as opposed to most location descriptions those will be left for the DM to decide on how to narrate them so they won't be accompanied by these boxes.

Names of **NPCs** and **Locations** will be marked in bold like this: **Ping'On Tower**, and *Checks* and *Saves* will be marked in

italic like this: *a DC10 investigation check will reveal...*

2e & 5e

This adventure combines lore from both 5e and AD&D 2nd edition this decision was made because 5e describes a more iconic and believable domain that's better fit for modern adventures but 2e has a more interesting history and characters, more specifically this adventure will make use of unnamed emperor (**Huáng Liu**) and, will combine both 5e and 2e's versions of **Tsien Chiang**'s daughters all of which are described in the 2nd edition accessory "Islands of Terror" as for 5e it will make use of the physical and dream version of the domain, although the dream version will take a lot of inspiration from the 2nd edition domain.

Chinese Inspiration

The Domain of I'Cath is very clearly inspired by chinese culture and mythology however D&D 5e greatly lacks in chinese inspired monsters and enemies thus monsters from japanese, jewish and european folklore have been used for encounters these can be kept as is but also be described with the Chinese inspiration of this domain in mind, the latter is recommended.

Adventure Background

A long time ago in the realm of Kara-tur there lived the daughter of a wealthy prince and her name was **Tsien Chiang**, Tsien Chiang was obsessed with the mystery of the number four and its

supernatural and unlucky nature, her father was man of demeaning beliefs especially towards women and their role in society Tsien disagreed with all of his beliefs and disobeyed his prohibition on the study of war and sorcery and with her knowledge of toxins killed her father with 4 different poisons. After her father's death Tsien Chiang cursed her mother and brothers with incompetence and thus left the elders with no choice other than to appoint her as the new ruler of her province. As ruler Tsien Chiang married 4 times and widowed herself 4 times birthing one daughter from each marriage, Tsien killed many men and took many lands and with this great power she achieved she set fear into the hearts of all including the emperor **Huáng Liu** whom her family oathed to serve so she could not harm him. As Tsien Chiang's daughter came of age they started to take suitors but Tsien Chiang killed them all using their bones to create a palace and their blood to paint it, **Nightingale** the only good daughter of Tsien Chiang, was opposed to her genocide but everytime she questioned her mother she was beaten, and everytime, the gods objected with ravenous storms, the fourth time Nightingale was beat Tsien Chiang would've killed her if it was not for **Huáng Liu's** interference Tsien instead killed him and the dark powers claimed the lands of I'Cath, Nightingale is now locked in the dream version of **Ping'On Tower** and the other sisters are trapped in the waking version of the **Palace of Bones** turned into horrifying monsters. and they all seek revenge for what their mother has done to them.

Plotbooks

A plentitude of plotbooks can work with this adventure as long as it takes the characters to find the undead emperor **Huáng Liu** who can be moved to better fit the plot, the adventure may as well start off with the players in the market meeting the haunted merchant, furthermore the

"Populus Encounters", found in **Appendix A**, can be used as plotbooks for the adventure by simply making one of them the first encounter of the PCs.

Running the adventure

Leveling Up

The PCs should level up (or get enough XP for them to level up) when they finish the emperor encounter, when they awake from their first dream and after they reach the Palace of Bones.

Possible Occurrences

It is very likely that the players might do some of the things described in this sub-section and that is why it is here, to clear things up.

- Sleepless PCs

There are multiple ways that a player character might be able to avoid needing sleep, the most likely scenario is their race, for example elves, reborn, and warforged go into a trance or become inactive instead of sleeping. Whether the party sets up watches or there are characters that don't sleep the PC(s) that stay awake will encounter one jiangshi or lesser Jiangshi they can only wake up those that did not eat any food inside I'Cath's dream version.

- Entering a House

If the party breaks into a house during the day it'll have a 50%(1-10) chance of being empty and 50%(11-20) of holding sleeping residents that can't be woken up, if they break in during the night it's a 50%(1-10) chance of having the same sleeping residents, 30%(11-16) of having sleepless resident(s), and 20%(17-20) chance of being empty.

- Killing the Emperor

If the PCs kill the ghostly emperor, the next time they sleep they're met with a parade at the end of which they meet **Tsien Chiang** who thanks them and throws a feast for the Party, if they eat the

food they can no longer wake up by normal means, if they defeated Tsien Chiang in the dream they wake up in an unfamiliar location (could be a different domain or the material plane) if they destroy the Nightingale bell Tsien Chiang's screams can be heard all throughout I'Cath as her daughters brutally slay her.

Starting the Adventure

This sub-section describes multiple ways to start the adventure.

Adventuring Group

The simplest way to start the adventure is to create a party that has already adventured together beforehand. This fits with adventuring groups in which all PCs are from the same plane of existence but needs more diverse groups to be slightly familiar with the ravenloft setting to accommodate native and non-native PCs.

Narcolepsy

The PCs all wake up laying down on the streets of **I'Cath** next to one another, they aren't familiar with the city or the people around them, you could also turn to each player and sum up their backstory as if they had just dreamt it. Starting the adventure with characters that don't know each other can be tricky, this option makes the characters second guess their backstory and hold onto the only people who are in the same situation. It also ties well with the doubt of which version of I'cath is real and which is the dream, and the fact that the players also awake on the road during the dreams of I'Cath.

Strangers in a Strange Land

The previous option might not be satisfying to some players and DMs so a more simplified version of that is this option that sees the PCs all being brought in by the mists into the same street surrounded by unknown people, but be careful because this option might cause inter-party conflicts and fails to establish

an actual group of adventurers that trust each other.

The Streets of I'Cath

After entering the domain of **I'Cath** the party might choose to wander the streets if they do run at least 1 "Street Encounter" and 1 "Populus Encounter" **Appendix A**, in whichever order you'd like (you can also skip straight to the Gwai-Huit Center), if they decide to rest run the "Entering the Dream" sub-section

Gwai-Huit Center

The **Gwai-Huit center** is an octagonal city center, there are 4 store fronts on each of its sides, except for the north and south sides, and a couple stalls, in the middle of the center is a statue depicting the empress of I'Cath **Tsien Chiang** it appears to be the only thing in the square that has not been touched, if the party attacks the statue it summons 4 specters around itself. If one of the PCs are native to the Forgotten Realms (Toril) campaign setting they can make a DC 18 *history check to translate the name of the shops if they succeed mention there's a rice shop, a fresh vegetable shop, a jewelry store, a Feng-shui shop and many others, mention as well a shop that has their sign defaced and illegible [Lao's general shop]*. Whether the party chooses a shop from the ones mentioned or they decide to search through them regardless of the history check, describe the shops as being ransacked and missing all their products a DC14 *investigation check will reveal what type of shop it used to be, describe, on a successful save, finding grains of rice on the floor or putting pieces of china together etc... to guess the merchandise of the shop, another DC16 investigation check allows the party to find hidden, untouched, merchandise, maybe under the floorboards or someplace else this could be food, gems, art etc... worth up to 20gp in value.*

If the Center is reached by night read the following boxed text:

You reach what seems to be the only place in this city not crowded by buildings, this large plaza has store fronts on all its sides, and a statue standing at its center behind it are two Jiangshi who haven't noticed you yet, all the shops are closed at this time but you can smell a weird scent in the air.

If the party has encountered burning “incense of waking” previously they have advantage on the DC15 *investigation check to find the source of the smell, on a successful check they identify the smell coming from **Lao**’s general store* if the party fights the lesser Jiangshi then Lao will open the store front to see what's going on.

If the Center is reached during the day read the following boxed text if they reach it during the night don't.

You reach what seems to be the only place in this city not crowded by buildings, this large plaza has store fronts on all its sides, and a statue standing at its center, all but one shop seem to be deserted and abandoned, you can hear a sweet melody coming from a shop to your right that seems to hold all kinds of products to sell.

If they didn't check beforehand the party notices the shop's defaced sign.

The Merchant & The Emperor

If the party approaches the shop during the day they find **Lao** a merchant, relaxing and playing a ruanqin. Otherwise they find the shops', shoji like, front to be closed. A DC13 *perception check allows the PC to identify a figure inside the store.* **Lao** only speaks to the characters if one of the members of the party says something to him, if the party is friendly **Lao** allows them to take shelter for the night he also explains the use of the incense he's using see “incense of waking” **Appendix B**. Regardless of the time he identifies the party as adventurers and asks where they're from.

If the party wants to buy something from **Lao**'s general store, he refuses gold because “it has no use here” and asks instead for them to get rid of the ghost in

his pantry, otherwise he offers the party some merchandise if they resolve the problem.

In the large pantry beneath the shop lies in between barrels and sacks a **Ghost** he notices the party and introduces himself as **Huáng Liu** “rightful ruler of this land” if questioned about himself or the land he reveals the details in the “Adventure Background” sub-section, he will ask the adventurers to free his people by destroying the Nightingale bell and allowing the daughters to take revenge on their mother, he also suggests destroying the bell while dreaming because there are no Jiangshi in the dream, furthermore he warns the party not to eat anything during the dream, if the party has a character that cannot sleep then Huáng Liu will instruct them on a loose part of the wall that when removed contains 1 “Amulet of Sleeping” see **Appendix A** if there are more than 1 sleepless party members he mentions that Tsien Chiang has one in her palace's treasure room. If Huáng Liu is intimidated he will go into the ethereal plane and come back in 1 day but if attacked he will fight to the death. The emperor can appear later and anywhere in the physical world but he cannot access the dream version of I'Cath.

Entering the Dream

If the characters go to sleep, read the following boxed text describing I'Cath's dream version.

You wake up laying down on a dry dirt road. The sun is high in the sky and reflects off the fields of golden wheat that stretch for miles on each side of the road. There are a couple of farmers a little ways into each of the fields. In the distance you see a building with 5 tall towers standing tall at the end of this long dirt road.

Run at least 2 “Dream Encounters” found in **Appendix A**, after the encounters are done the party suddenly falls asleep and wakes back up where they went to rest. Players in the dream world cannot be woken up if they have eaten anything from

the dream or if they've used the Amulet of Sleeping's exhaustion cleanse ability.

Ending the Adventure

The Palace of Bones

The Palace of bones is the only place that is the same in both the physical and the dream version of I'Cath because of this any changes made to the dream version of the palace happens in the physical world as well and vice versa, emperor **Huáng Liu** mentions this when he suggests the players destroy the Nightingale Bell in the dream.

The palace is made up of 5 towers, one rising from each of its vertices and Ping'On tower from its main building where the Nightingale bell and Nightingale herself is imprisoned.

The dream version of the palace holds many servants fulfilling multiple different jobs contrary to the physical version which is completely abandoned and whose only permanent inhabitant is Tsien Chiang, it is needless to say Chiang prefers the dream version of I'Cath.

Before the party reaches the palace run another Street encounter or Dream encounter depending in what version of I'cath they are in

The Palace of Bones Rooms

Room 1: Treasure & Throne Room

This long room is decorated with multiple riches and treasures hanging on the walls, at the end of it lies a golden throne. Although Tsien Chiang is very proudly the Ruler of I'Cath she very rarely comes to the throne room, especially in the physical world. This is where the feast is held if the emperor is killed by the party.

Room 2: Tsien's Daughters' quarters

At the base of the 4 towers are the quarters of each of Tsien Chiang's daughters in the dream world all but one are occupied by the daughters' sleeping human form they can only be awakened by destroying the Nightingale bell, the other quarter is

abandoned, it used to belong to Nightingale but she is now imprisoned in Ping'On tower, In the physical world they are left empty most of the time but sometimes one of the free daughters may wonder into their own quarters.

Room 3: Tsien's Quarters

Tsien Chiang's quarters are located behind the treasure room and below Ping'On Tower it also holds the only entrance to it, Tsien Chiang is only ever in the physical version of her quarters when she wants to go into the dream version of I'Cath and vice versa.

Room 4: The Library

The library is where Tsien Chiang spends most of her time, it holds a multitude of books and scrolls, most about religion, mathematics, and spiritualism. Its dream version has a female librarian since Tsien considers it a job too good for men.

Room 5: Ping'On Tower

The ascent through Ping'On tower is endless as long as you take the spiral staircase you will never reach its top, instead to do so you must fly through its middle, this can be achieved by riding Nightingale's song that can take the form of a giant canary with the size category of huge. While climbing the staircase the party can find one regular Jiangshi.

Room 6: Nightingale Belfry

In the belfry of Ping'On tower lies the physical boy of Nightingale weakened and still scarred from the beating that brought I'Cath into the mists, to destroy the Nightingale bell they must either cast shatter on it or convince the part of Tsien Chiang and her daughters' spirits that are trapped within in it, *with a DC 13 persuasion check*, to revolt against the darklord, Nightingale suggests this option, if all else fails dealing 44 or more bludgeoning damage against it will destroy it.

The Final Confrontation

After the party destroys the

Nightingale bell they can find Tsien Chiang in combat with her 3 evil daughters (you can choose which of the 5e daughters to replace with Nightingale) If they don't destroy the Nightingale bell Tsien Chiang will attack anyone other than herself or her servants that she find in her palace, in the physical version of I'Cath when she's not in the library or in her quarters she casts invisibility on herself to not be seen by her daughters. After defeating Tsien Chiang the characters fall asleep once more, then wake up anywhere the DM would like them to. Alternatively you could let the party wander through I'Cath, maybe even open its gates, if so let them meet the emperor again and make him move on now that his unfinished business is concluded or as much as you can move on in the Demiplane of Dread.

Appendix A: Encounters

1d4	Street Encounters
1	Empty street in which there are Half as many lesser Jiangshi as there are PCs (rounded up)*, or, if it's day , 3(1d4+1) Swarms of Zombie Limbs break out of a nearby building
2	Abandoned barrels filled with rotten food and being ravaged by 3(1d4+1) diseased Giant Rats and (1) Swarm of Maggots
3	A pile of charred corpses along with (1) curious Dybbuk
4	A small shrine that if disturbed summons 3(1d4+1) Specters

*: describe the street as having water gathering near the houses, because the street is raised in the middle, if a Jiangshi gets within 5ft of the water and it's illuminated by bright light the Jiangshi sees its own reflection.

1d4	Populus Encounters
1	A ghost hunter / monk approaches the party and offers his home for the characters to pass the night, if the offer is accepted he gifts the party with 1 mirror and 2 lucky charms (which count as holy symbols), he tells the party to find glutinous rice to protect themselves from Jiangshi and suggest looking in the Gwai-Huit center *
2	The party is approached by a man whose son is sick and in need of medicine but he isn't strong or brave enough to go to the Gwai-Huit center , if the party offers to help he gives them a large steak for the party to trade, the man refuses the party to enter his home due to the fact he keeps his lesser Jiangshi wife shackled there next to his feverish son forced awake by the "incense of waking"
3	A person laying in the middle of the street, or inside a cart, completely unconscious, the party can tell the person is sleeping but they don't seem able to wake up them up, the party also can't identify any magic that's being cast on the person, DC11 <i>perception or investigation</i> check reveals the person is holding burned up incense a DC15 <i>religion or arcana</i> check reveals it's "incense of waking"
4	A Commoner begging for their life as another threatens to burn them alive because "they're turning into a Jiangshi"

*: if the party slays them they find a +1 wooden sword and a Bell of Jiangshi Control see **Appendix B**, 1 health potion, a small pouch of glutinous rice, one lucky charm and 1 mirror, if the party after accompanying them steals from their home they find one health potion for each PC, 2 more mirrors and 2 more lucky charms along with a sack of glutinous rice.

1d4	Locales *
1	The outer wall of the city there are no visible exits except for immensely heavy gates that are barred and impossible to move
2	A temple & mortuary containing 1 Jiangshi at night and an additional 6 lesser Jiangshi during the day when they are all sleeping
3	A water well in which lives a Sea Hag that charges for water, during the day 2d8 commoners gather around it to trade and get water
4	A dried up water canal that contains corpses, paper lanterns, and trapped lesser Jiangshi

*: these places can serve as set dressing and backdrop for the encounters found in the previous tables.

1d4	Dream* Encounters
1	A philosopher herding chickens across the road.*
2	A commoner farmer collapses near the party in blood curdling screams of pain while agonizing and holding their head, soon after (1) Dream Eater flies out of their head.
3	A Banderhobb devouring a commoner working the fields.
4	A Giff holding I'Cath's banner they claim that they used to be an adventurer like the PCs but he now works for I'Cath, they can't recall why they settled down

*: dreams are weird and not grounded so you might get nonsensical situations like a person herding chickens.

Appendix B: Items

The following magic items can be given as random loot or be found in the place(s) and people described

Amulet of Sleeping

Wondrous item, uncommon (requires attunement)
Found in: Tsien Chiang's treasure room & Lao's Pantry

This amulet ignores a humanoid creature's ability to not sleep, allowing elves and other races to sleep and dream.

Exhaustion Cleanse: When worn by a humanoid with more than one level of exhaustion the person can choose to spend 8 hours sleeping if they finish the rest without waking up all exhaustion levels are cleared

Bell of Jiangshi Control

Wondrous item, very rare (requires attunement)
Found on: Tsien Chiang

When this bell is rung all undead creatures within 50 ft hear it, Jiangshi that hear the bell have the spell Dominate Monster cast on them with a save DC of 15, Jiangshi that are touching holy symbols immediately fail the save.

Incense of Waking

Wondrous item, uncommon
Found in: Most household and the Gwai-huit center

If you are the first person to inhale the smoke released by this incense you don't require sleep and any level of exhaustion received has its effects delayed by 24 hours.

+1 Wooden Sword

Weapon, uncommon
Found on: Ghost Hunter(s) or Monk(s)

+1 to attack (1d6 +1 bludgeoning)
You have +1 to attack and damage rolls with this wooden shortword

Appendix C: NPCs & Monsters

Lesser, Jiangshi

Jiangshi can rise in two different ways the one described in Van Richten's guide to Ravenloft is a corpse long dead that has been entombed and rises undecayed due to disturbed graves and many other reasons, like being transported to another realm, the second type is the lesser Jiangshi those that are recently deceased and have never been buried, they also rise, but are noticeably weaker.

Lesser JIANGSHI

Medium Undead, neutral evil

Armor Class: 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points: 60 (9d8 + 20)

Speed: 20 ft.

STR 17 (+3) DEX 2 (-4) CON 17 (+3) INT 14 (+2)
WIS 10 (+0) CHA 11 (+1)

Saving Throws: Con +5, Int +4, Cha +3

Damage Vulnerability: Fire and Radiant

Damage Resistances: Bludgeoning, Piercing, and Slashing from Nonmagical Attacks

Condition Immunities: charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned

Senses: Darkvision 60 ft (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 10

Languages: understands any languages it knew in life but can't speak

Challenge: 4 (1,800 XP)

Proficiency Bonus: +2

Jiangshi Weaknesses. The jiangshi has the following flaws:

Fear of Its Own Reflection: If the jiangshi sees its own reflection, it immediately uses its reaction, if available, to move as far away from the reflection as possible.

Susceptible to Holy Symbols: While the jiangshi is wearing or touching a holy symbol, it automatically fails saving throws against effects that turn Undead.

Unusual Nature. The jiangshi doesn't require air.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The jiangshi makes two Slam attacks or uses Consume Energy.

Slam. Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 9 (1d8 + 3) bludgeoning damage.

Consume Energy (Recharge 4-6). The jiangshi draws energy from a creature it can see within 30 feet of it. The target makes a DC 14 Constitution saving throw, taking 11 (2d8+2) necrotic damage unless they succeed. The jiangshi regains hit points equal to half the amount of necrotic damage dealt. A Humanoid slain by this necrotic damage rises as a jiangshi 5 days later

Tsien Chiang*

Medium Humanoid, lawful evil

Armor Class: 11

Hit Points: 103 (14d8 + 40)

Speed: 30 ft.

STR 10 (+0) DEX 9 (-1) CON 10 (+0) INT 17 (+3)
WIS 16 (+3) CHA 11 (+0)

Saving Throws: Int +6, Cha +3

Skill: Arcana +6, History +6

Condition Immunities: charmed, exhaustion, frightened

Senses: passive Perception 13

Languages: Common, High Shou (Kara-Tur)

Challenge: 8 (3,900 XP)

Proficiency Bonus: +3

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Tsien Chiang makes 2 scimitar attacks or 1 scimitar attack and casts a spell(s).

Scimitar. Melee Weapon Attack: +3 to hit, reach 5ft., one target. Hit: 4 (1d6) slashing damage

Spellcasting. Tsien Chiang casts one of the following spells, using intelligence as the spellcasting ability (spell save DC 14):

At will: chill touch, true strike, mage hand.

2/day each: hex, barkskin, darkness

1/day each: circle of death, invisibility

*: if the Nightingale bell is broken before the party confronts Tsien Chiang her total HP lowers by 22 (4d8 +4) and her strength and constitution scores lower to 9 (-1)

Appendix D: Resources and Inspiration

Sammo K.-Bo Hung “Encounters of the Spooky Kind” (1980)

Ricky Lau “Mr. Vampire” (1985)

TSR “Islands of Terror” p. 32-37, (1992)

TSR “Domains of Dread” p. 88-89, (1997)

Tsui Hark, Wellson Chin “The Era of Vampires” or “Tsui Hark’s Vampire Hunters” (2002)

Henry Selick “Coraline” (2009)

WOTC “Van Richten’s Guide to Ravenloft” p. 118-123, (2021)

PHD&D “Let’s make I’CATH in 5e!” [https://youtu.be/YlQ6Uy08r9k?si=vnW74zFiyccKrA_P] (2022)

u/WolfOfAsgaard recommends: Watabou: map generator for I’Cath streets [<https://watabou.itch.io/neighbourhood>]

u/JoJoFanatic’s Friend: “Emboldment” Adventure Jam #1 (2025) {inspired the formatting and design of the document}