



6 ~ Scenario: The Lords of Mean ~ Mist

hrough their offices, the characters are going to discover that children under a strange influence have taken over a neighboring domain. To set things right, they will have to fight against a very young Inspired, precocious and already tempted by the Masque. But Perfidy is never easy to detect.

The Plot

INTRODUCTION

Your Eminence, Admittedly, what follows is the consequence of a mistake. A mistake that goes back ten years and is named Adelph. You may remember it. The Decans assigned the medusa bastard Orphyd the mission of endowing a local boy with the Flame. Unfortunately, the traitor Milfalsen's troupe set out after him to steal the precious Flame. During a pitch-black night, cornered and wounded, Orphyd saw an open window. He hoisted himself inside and landed in young Adelph's room. He entrusted the Flame to him rather than let Milfalsen lay his hands on it. Then he ran for his life. Adelph was now an Inspired. With a exceptional Flame too! Particularly bright and powerful, it should have ensured the boy a noble fate. He was not even twelve when he discovered his potential. He was playing with friends in a loft when a heated argument unleashed his anger. As he let out an enraged roar, a flood of flames engulfed the building. The fire killed one of the children and left the others traumatized. Adelph now knew that he was not just another little boy.

But then he was frustrated. Grown-ups never understood where that fire had come from and looked at him askance. But they still treated him like a kid. His aspect appeared to him as a major obstacle. He took refuge in the domain's library where he could dream of the Flamboyance's old heroes, bold men who became kings. What about him? What would he become? Would he have to wait until he was an adult before becoming a hero? Adelph longed for only one thing: growing up. He learned a lot in the library. He also understood that, by manipulating his friends with fear, he could rule them like a king. His dream left its touch on all the domain's children and they all grew too fast, clumsily mimicking their elder. Adelph's power enabled them to take over from grown-ups and leave them helpless. Fortunately, the arrival of a Keshite merchant initiated the fall of the Bleak Children's reign.

SYNOPSIS

The Inspired are sent to a bordering domain to negotiate a difficult transaction. A Keshite satyr has made an attractive offer for great quantities of wood. But the forest lies right between the two domains, and the border has never been established. The idea is to obtain a good price from the Keshite while keeping Lord Manansome's greed at bay. But the Inspired quickly realize that something is up in this domain. The lord is not the lord anymore. Children have taken over. Furthermore, the presence of strangers, and Inspired at that, is not at all to their liking. As the Inspired fathom the how and why of this state of affairs, they get help from a young man, Jerialdo. But he is out to get rid of a rival rather than to save his family. The challenge will be to avoid the trap and manage to save Adelph as well as the community, if it is still possible. This scenario does not rely on a linear plot but on a series of places and characters intimately bound by a secret. We advise you, Eminence, to become acquainted with the story's elements through a first reading rather than start the staging process right away.

Places

WELCOME TO MEAN-MIST

Several hundred people live in this town, protected by ramparts. Commoners make a decent living but they work hard. The middle-class to which Adelph's father, Ocyan, belongs, live a little better. The total lack of children's laughter and shouts could of course be surprising, but the town's activity, with its string of gossips and peddlers, is enough to put newcomers off the track.

Actually, a close look will reveal the children, even if they do not fit their usual expected image. Some strut off, full of self-importance and contempt, other gossip like good house-wives, others still give themselves busy airs and attend their affairs. In short, except their size, nothing sets them apart from the adults.

Most of the town's events take place on the central square where Lord Manansome's Mansion and a church imposingly stand.

MANANSOME'S MANSION

This large manor house surrounds a garden with a small pond in the middle. The architecture is a harmony of curves and angles. The front wall shows only one flourish, the porch, which is endowed with a fresco in spring colors. The inside is adorned with a profusion of colors and ornamentation, playing with the light. Its story goes back to the Flamboyance and is closely linked to that of the hero Filanom.

The Mansion sports four wings, two of which are the personal lodgings of Manansome's family, his wife Arial

MEAN-MIST

Realm: EG's choice

Ruler: Lord Manansome

Strength: 1 Inspired, 1,200 Dullen

BODY: 4/2

Army: 5

Denizens: 6

Defense: 4

Organization: 3

SPIRIT: 5/5

Finance: 6

Information: 4

SOUL: 4/2

Magical ability: 4

Diplomatic relations: 6

This chart uses rules presented in the upcoming supplement "The Gray Papers".

MANANSOME'S MANSION

Nature: Remain of the Flamboyance

Wealth: 5

Powers: +4 to Stealth skill for anyone in the mansion

Main emotion: Humility

Secondary emotions: Fear and Anger

and children Jerialdo and Bellin. They use only one wing and the second has become a lifeless succession of dim rooms with ghost-like furniture. The third wing houses the town's administration, the domain's court of law and the office of Farolf the seneschal. A room has also been fitted out as a classroom for the Preceptorial schoolmistress. Her corpse still lies there. Taking up the fourth wing is the library, a string of rooms with many secret doors. Numerous busts of Mean-Mist's previous lords decorate it. This library is very well stocked for such a domain. It is jealously guarded by Meboden the librarian, who knows every single book.

A network of secrets passages runs through the whole mansion. Parallel corridors and discreet anterooms are thus hidden from the inhabitants' sight. Some are obviously still taken by servants to carry out their orders, but most are not used anymore. Manansome has always believed that his ancestors, over time, forgot some of the passages.

THE CHURCH

Next to the Mansion stands a small decaying church. Most of its buttresses have collapsed. Facing the wind, the steeple is still standing bravely but who knows for how long... It used to be dedicated to a local hero of the Flamboyance but the cult has long since vanished. The church houses only rats and birds. It is a place of ill repute now. Many deem it cursed or haunted. Rumors allege that a well under the altar leads to the Abyss, and that the crypts used to be jails for demons. If the Inspired investigate these legends a little, they might learn that, about ten years ago, militiamen heard screams during the night. Having glimpsed moving lights, they

ADELPH

Race: human

Age: 13 **Height:** 5'2" (SIZ - 1)

Weight: 85 lbs. **MV:** 2

Attributes

Flame: 3/0

Body: 4/1 **Body modifier:** +3

AGility: 5 STrength: 4

PERception: 8 STamina: 5

Spirit: 5/0 **Spirit modifier:** +5

INtelligence: 10 WILL: 5

Soul: 3/2 **Soul modifier:** +1

CHARisma: 8 CREativity: 6

Secondary attributes

ART: - MEL: 4 ASC: - AIM: 6

HP: 40 SWT: 13 CWT: 20 DB: -1

Fortune Points: 6

Flame powers: Spitfire, Insensibility: impaling weapons

Darkening points: -

Perfidy points: 23

Corrupted Powers

Miasmas of Chaos, Bleak Infancy

Skills

Trials: weapon: dagger 4, Alertness 7, Athletics 2, Dodge 3

Rogue: Intrigue 6, Search 6, Stealth 4

Courtly: Eloquence 7, Fast Talk 3, Stewardship 5, Trade 1

Knowledge: Alphabet: modehan 7, Alphabet: septentrian 5, Astro-nomy 5, Geography 6, History & Legends 10, Languages: keshite 5

Occult: Harmony 2

Assets, Gifts

Presence, Beneficial mistakes, Hypnotism, Dire Wisdom

Faults, Sorrows

Very young, Tempted by the Masque, Traitor's mug (Perfidious Sorrow), Evil Readings (Perfidious Sorrow)

Combat

Initiative: 16

Melee attack: Dagger 13

Ranged Attack: -

Melee Defense:

Dodge: 11

Parry: dagger 11

Ranged defense: 7

Heavy Clothes

Vest only: modifier 0, prot. 1

Weapon (s)

Weapon	Init.	Att.	Def.	Dam. + DB	SIZ
Dagger	0	+2	0	+ 1/P	-1

came closer and crossed the path of a "being, draped in black with ophidians eyes" that vanished into the night. The story is of course a slight misconception of an encounter with Orphyd who had taken refuge in the church to escape Milfalsen. When Jerialdo manages to elude his family, he sneaks in and spends the night, hunched up behind the altar, torn between terror and morbid fascination.

THE HOUSE OF OCYAN

This cloth trader is a very wealthy man. His house is the only one in Mean-Mist to be truly luxurious. Adelph's father is a ruthless man who stops at nothing to be successful in his business. Although he enjoys power, he does not seek Manansome's office. He had great influence on the town until the children took things into their hands. Meeting him is not particularly difficult, but he likes being shown respect. Everybody must be aware of his tremendous wealth and notable status. After all, he belongs to the town's council! His wife died several years ago. Listening to him, one wonders if he is aware of having a son. When asked about him, he will explain that Adelph is studying with Meboden in the Mansion.



ADELPH

The characters

ADELPH, A PRECOCIOUS CHILD

Who is he?

Adelph is no less than a tremendously intelligent being endowed with the Flame. He is also a child who wants

to grow up too fast. He hates having to wait and easily gives way to whims and anger. He does not plan for the long term. He looks like an ugly twelve years-old child (he suffers from the *Perfidy Sorrow*: *Traitor's mug*). He is self-assured and very confident in his abilities. After all, he believes himself to be unique. This confidence crumbles when he finds out that the *Inspired* share his singularity even though they certainly have different powers. From the beginning of his venture, Adelph has been living in the *Mansion's library*. He "convinced" *Meboden* to teach him all he knows. It is, of course, a pretext.

What he knows

As the source of the changes affecting *Mean-Mist*, he knows almost everything. He believes all children are under his control, which is not quite true. He is far from imagining that *Jerialdo the Jitters*, *Jerialdo the Coward*, is ready to turn against him. He also has no idea of the *Masque* and the *Muses*. No mentor has been there to shed light on his situation. His only references are the *Flamboyance's* myths. He devours *Meboden's* legends and historical treatises.

What he plans

Adelph wants to be an adult. To him, this means being ruthless like his father and respected like *Manansome*. An adult has power and dominates others. That is what he wants. Meeting and observing the *Inspired*, he might be tempted to be like them. It greatly depends on their behavior. In this case, he might escape the *Masque* despite his crimes. Otherwise, he will treat them as enemies and do all he can to get rid of them.

THE BLEAK INFANCY

Adelph has a unique and very special power that enables him to make children "grow up". It does not affect their size at all. But for a time, the child will behave as he believes an adult does. It is a poisonous gift, another of the *Masque's* tricks, for the image the child chooses as model is distorted. He will become a caricature: violent husband, shrewish mother, obsessive scribe or fickle lover. A colorful gallery of characters can be created.

Any child coming into contact with Adelph must perform a *WIL* roll against *DIF* 20. In case of failure, he or she undergoes the effect explained above. This effect spreads like a plague. Any contaminated child can pass it on to others with the same conditions, as long as Adelph is in the vicinity (the size of a small town).

JERIALDO, A GIFTED PUPIL

What he is

Jerialdo is a tormented young man. He has been deeply traumatized by the loft's fire and Adelph's powers. His old friend often makes fun of him, attaching nicknames to him such as the *Jitters*, the *Coward* or the *Whiner*. *Jerialdo* has indeed felt *Terror* in the face of the flame. It has left aftereffects in his mind. As far as Adelph is concerned, *Jerialdo* is torn between fear and jealousy. The *Bleak Infancy* has affected his perception and made him more mature like all *Mean-Mist* children. Like Adelph, he has understood that using fear can bring power. But being dominated, he has also learned to disguise his true thoughts and intentions. Thus, he has been introduced to *Perfidy*.

JERIALDO

Race: human
Age: 15
Weight: 95 lbs.
Height: 5'6" (SIZ 0)
MV: 3

Attributes

Flame: 0/0

Body: 0/0
AGility: 7
PERception: 8
Body bonus: -
STRength: 6
STamina: 5

Spirit: 0/2
INTelligence: 7
Spirit bonus: + 2
WILL: 5

Soul: 0/1
CHARisma: 8
Soul bonus: + 1
CREativity: 8

Secondary Attributes

ART: - **MEL:** 6 **ASC:** - **AIM:** 7
HP: 45 **SWT:** 15 **CWT:** 22 **DB:** 0

Fortune Points: -

Darkening Points: 27

Perfidy Points: 14

Corrupted powers: none

Skills

Knowledge: Alphabet: *modenhan* 6,
Language: *keshite* 4

Trials: Weapon: dagger 4, short
sword 5, bow 4, Alertness 6, Athletics 6,
Climb 3, Dodge 7, Ride 6.

Courtly: Fast talk 8, Stewardship 2

Occult: Demonology 2

Rogue: Hunt 5

Assets, Gifts

Iron will, Second wind, Circle I *Invoking* (Dark Gift), Experienced *Imp* (Dark Gift), Consummate acting (*Perfidious Gift*)

Faults and Sorrows

Absent-mindedness, Phobia: fire (2), *Imp* (Dark Sorrow), Nightmares (Dark Sorrow), Hypocrisy (*Perfidious Sorrow*).

Combat

Initiative: 15, Bow 19
Melee attack: dagger 12, two-edged sword 12.

Ranged attack: bow 11

Melee defense

Dodge: 14

Parry:

dagger 10, two-edged sword 11

Ranged defense: 7

Heavy clothes

Vest only: modifier 0, protection 1

Note: *Jerialdo's Imp* is a tiny creature of darkness with two little red eyes. He lives in *Jerialdo's* shadow, but stays invisible most of the time. He will not be stupid enough to appear when the *Inspired* are around.

Weapon (s)

Weapon	Init.	Att.	Def.	Dam. + DB	SIZ	Range
sword	0	+ 1	0	+3/IS	-1	-
dagger	0	+ 2	0	+1/I	-1	-
bow	+4	0	-	+7/I	0	90 y.



JERIALDO

Jerialdo is a hard nut to crack. He really looks like a child terrified by Adelph but deep down, he only wants to be in his shoes and rule over Mean-Mist. He has established a complex relationship with his imp. He is not afraid of it but of what it represents: the power of the Abyss. At the same time, the creature fascinates him with its unrelenting encouragement to further his plans.

What he knows

He is perfectly aware of Adelph's powers. He too, and for some time now, has been scouring the library's shelves in order to gather helping information. His tormented mind quickly led him to books on the Abyss and demons. Although these were mainly fairy tales of little interest,

he has thus started his transformation. It can only be completed by more serious volumes and practice.

What he plans

As opposed to Adelph, Jerialdo is not in a hurry. He now lives in a permanent nightmare, but has the possibility to master it. He learns and waits. When Adelph stumbles, Jerialdo will be there to stop him from picking himself up. Then he will make sure he gets back the throne, which is his by rights, his father's. He probably will not stop there either...

MANANSOME, SUCH A NICE LORD

What he is

Manansome is among the rare nobles who left their old castle to live in a town. Apart from Mean-Mist, his domain stretches out to three small villages that he visits once a year. The city demands all his attention. He does without a burgomaster and uses only Farolf's and Ocyan's services. Manansome was once a warrior and a leader respected by his subjects. But now that nightmares inspired by Adelph constantly haunt him, he is no more than a puppet. He completely lacks willpower and has to submit all the domain's affairs to Adelph. Farolf hoped to make the most of it but was quickly overcome by the apathy affecting all the town's adults.

Unable to sleep properly, if at all, Manansome is physically exhausted. It shows on his face and makes him look like he is going to fall asleep any minute.

What he knows

Manansome says he is far too tired to make any decision. Neither he nor Farolf are capable of administering the domain. Adelph on the contrary is so intelligent



MANANSOME

MANANSOME

Race: human

Age: 44

Height: 6' (SIZ 0)

Weight: 190 lbs.

MV: 3 HP: 54 SWT: 18 CWT: 27 DB: +2

Combat

Init. 15, sword 16, Buckler 12

Att. sword 18, Buckler 18

Dodge 17 (armor 7)

Parry: sword 18, Buckler 20

DB: sword +6/IS, DB Buckler +2/C

Armor

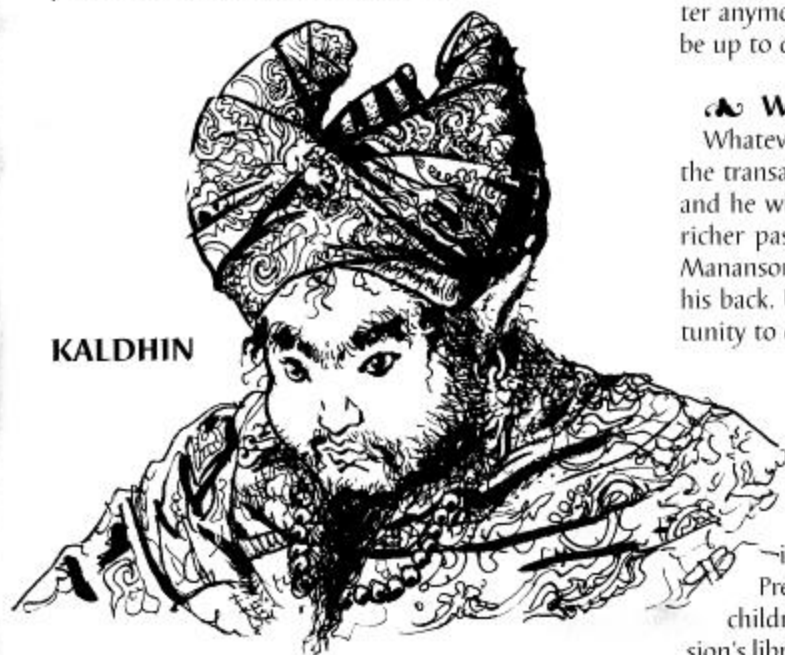
Partial plate, protection 13

and gifted! The thought of his new master's age does not even enter his mind. He does not see him as child any more but as the next seneschal of Mean-Mist. Needless to say, Manansome will be useless to the Inspired.

♣ What he plans

He has no energy left to think. Indeed, his dearest wish is now to sleep one night without being awakened by horrendous nightmares. Getting him to react will be extremely tricky. Some of the spirit that used to drive him might resurface should his children be endangered. Unfortunately, this might very well mean escaping Adelph's claws to fall into Jerialdo's jaws.

KALDINH



KALDINH

Race: satyr
Realm: Keshe
Age: 38
Height: 5'9"
Weight: 195 lbs.

MV: 3

Useful Bases

Eloquence 15, Fast-talk 15, Trade 18.

KALDINH, A SOMEWHAT DISORIENTATED MERCHANT

♣ What he is

The satyr has been sent to negotiate a wood purchase on behalf of a northern building site in need of timber. Sharp and smart, he has always managed to make the most of the trickiest situations. Critics would say he is hypocritical and deceitful. That is not enough to make him a Masque agent, at least not willingly... He will always be nice to the Inspired, hoping it will help the negotiation.

Kaldinh has a gut hatred of mages. He believes they possess myriads of terrifying powers. His main fear is that they could be capable of reading his mind and seeing right through him. As for Mean-Mist, he hates it. No woman has responded to his overtures and that is really abnormal!

♣ What he knows

He has not missed the fact that Manansome is not his usual self. He doubts that the lord of Mean-Mist will be able to see the deal through. After the disaster of their first encounter, he immediately realizes that something is up and Manansome definitely is not the domain's master anymore. It remains to be seen if the new one will be up to do business.

♣ What he plans

Whatever happens, Kaldinh only wants to conclude the transaction. The building site needs its timber fast and he will not let this wonderful opportunity to get richer pass him by. He intends to take advantage of Manansome's "illness" to deal with the Inspired behind his back. Unfortunately, he will never have the opportunity to clinch the deal...

MEBODEN, A WORRIED LIBRARIAN

♣ What he is

This dear old man has spent his whole life in the library. As a young man, he trained in Preceptorial but he discovered that he didn't like children very much. He was hired to be the Mansion's librarian. The library is his territory and he knows it through and through. He is proud of every book. At first, he resented Adelph's presence. But the child is so different from the others! His intelligence and talents have seduced Meboden, who is now Adelph's loyal follower. Having never known children's screams and shouts, the scholar easily accepts the seriousness of Mean-Mist children. Most have inherited their parents' faults, but that is how it goes - cats do not breed dogs. On the other hand, Adelph and Jerialdo seem quite promising, even if the latter lacks his father's presence.

♣ What he knows

Everything in the library, and that's a lot! Apart from that, Meboden has become a useless pawn of Adelph. Having given him access to all the books, there is nothing else he can do. Meboden's taking care of the library is the only thing that prevents the young Inspired from getting rid of him.

♣ What he plans

Meboden has no other ambition but to die among his precious books. He hates strangers rummaging through his shelves; they might damage something. If chased, Adelph will seek shelter in the library, knowing that

Race: human
Gender: male
Age: 59
Height: 5'7" (SIZ 0)
Weight: 155 lbs.

MV: 3

Stewardship 12, Etiquette 10, Alphabet 15

Meboden will shield it with his own body rather than let anybody mess it up, even if he has to confront his lord Manansome.



MEBODEN

Race: spriggan
Gender: male
Age: 39
Height: 4'6" (SIZ - 1)
Weight: 95 lb

MV: 2

Acrobatics 10, Alphabet 15, History & Legends 14.

This spriggan trained in Preceptorial. Until recently, he was private tutor to Manansome's children. He befriended Dalanna, the town's schoolmistress, who was the first to notice the changes in the children. She confided in him. Produgal had a chat with Jerialdo and Bellin (Manansome's second son) and realized they were under somebody's influence. Dalanna's death had already panicked him, and when his two pupils attacked him, he hid himself in the Mansion's secret passages. Since then, he has been living shut away in there, while the children have no more interest in him.

He has understood quite a lot: that the children are dominated by a dark force and that it all started soon after the loft fire. Traumatized by their friend's death, they changed. They lynched Dalanna because she probably discovered something. He has also discovered Adelph's taking over the library. He knows that the child stays there night and day, sleeping in a secret chamber. He also knows that Meboden fears him and that Manansome is completely under his influence.

Staying hidden is enough for now. In the long run, Produgal definitely intends to escape. His behavior points him out to the Inspired as the perfect suspect. He has the size of a child and always keeps to the secret passages, only coming out at night. Surely, that is the attitude of a perfidious creature.

Kaldinh, a Keshite merchant, arrives at the Inspired's domain with an offer. He wants to buy a tremendous amount of wood for a building site in the north. The trees in their forest have the perfect trunks for frameworks. Unfortunately, the forest is bordering Manansome's domain, and the border has never been clearly established. Of course, nobody wants to be taken in. The Inspired, because of their offices, are sent to the neighboring domain to negotiate a compromise.

In Harmundia, most institutions own land, even academies or schools, so property disputes are widespread. In this case, the sums at stakes give the affair some importance. The idea is to get the upper hand on Manansome while remaining on good terms with him. Even a Censor will be useful in these dealings, his importance and stature serving to impress the other party. Of course, an Inspired with courtly skills will be perfect.

If the Domain really does not fit this layout, data is easy to adjust. Even Lyphanian nomad tribes have ter-

ritories. In a desert climate, the forest can be replaced by mountains with mineral deposits. If the Inspired's Domain is a keshite caravan, they can always act out Kaldinh's part as negotiator.

Act 1: Contact

THE ENTRANCE

The Inspired enter Mean-Mist in the late afternoon. The town's activity does not amount to much. Shops are closed, the streets almost empty. The atmosphere is strange and the Inspired could easily think that there is a curfew. But the welcome at the Mansion can just as easily dispel any suspicious thought. An affable staff leads the horses directly to the stables. Lady Arial, Manansome's wife, informs them that her husband is very busy with the city's affairs and will only join them for supper. She suggests that they should rest in their apartments until then and a young manservant comes for them.

Of course the Inspired could take advantage of the free time to wander in Mean-Mist. They will soon be disappointed - the town seems dead. People are shut away in their homes. The very few passers-by, when hailed, are quite uncommunicative and seem intent on avoiding the newcomers.

They might then turn to visiting the Mansion. No one will stop them, and the staff will remain courteous. Lady Arial will carry out her duties as well as she can, but remain hesitant and standoffish.

THE MEAL

Now comes the time to feast and meet Lord Manansome. The whole family is there: Manansome, Arial, the two children, Jerialdo and Bellin. Also present are Meboden the librarian, Farolf the seneschal, and of course Kaldinh the merchant.

Despite a few troubadours who are trying to amuse hosts and guests with their acrobatics, dance and music, the evening promises to be utterly boring. Having welcomed his guests and apologized for his earlier discourteous absence, Manansome spends his time in muttered talk with Farolf, paying them no more attention. Lady Arial manages to smile, but not to hide her boredom. She cannot even busy herself by keeping the children in check. They are as good as gold, sitting straight and looking grave. As for Meboden, he looks a little weird and is not sociable at all.

In short, Kaldinh sticks out in this sorry party. All smile, he asks the Inspired about their trip and other unimportant subjects. But behind the smile, his sincerity seems rather doubtful. The only individual capable of normal conversation at this table could talk forever without meaning a single word.

SOME HISTORY

1439	Birth of Adelph, son of Ocyan, in the city of Mean-Mist
1441	Chased by a Masker, Orphyd gives a Flame to young Adelph so it will not fall into the Masque's hands
1449	Adelph discovers his Inspired talents during an argument with his friends. He is responsible for a fire and the death of a child. Nobody understands how the fire started. Adelph resents being a child and wants to gain the adults' recognition.
D -5 weeks	Under the influence of the Masque, Adelph develops a unique power. All the city's children grow up too fast and take over from the adults.
D -4 weeks	Adelph comes to live in the Mansion. Thanks to the Miasmas of Chaos, he disturbs Manansome's sleep with terrible nightmares.
D -2 weeks	Preceptorial's schoolmistress Dalanna tries to confront Adelph. She is killed by the militia under the influence of the children who see her as the symbol of the grown-ups' tyranny. Private tutor Prodigal is attacked by Jerialdo and Bellin. He seeks shelter in the Mansion's secret passages.
D -1 week	Adelph takes over. Completely incapacitated by his nightmares, Manansome is nothing but a puppet.
D Day	The Inspired arrives in Mean-Mist.

THE NIGHT

As soon as the meal is over, Manansome dismisses the troubadours and takes his leave, wishing his guests good night. Everyone else takes their cue from him, leaving the Inspired on their own. A young manservant suggests they should return to their apartments.

Kaldinh will try to get in touch with the Inspired he believes to be the leader of the group, or with the one he has found to be the friendliest. He will want to know in what state of mind he views the negotiation and whether a deal could be reached quite quickly, arguing that it would be to everyone's advantage, particularly the Inspired's. Kaldinh believes Manansome incapable of seeing the deal through. If questioned, he will burst out laughing and leave with a contemptuous retort: "Did you get a good look at him?"

One of the Inspired could be tempted to make a nocturnal visit of the Mansion. If one the child-manservant sees him, he will warn Adelph straight away. He could also encounter Kaldinh trying in vain to fathom the situation by going to the library to talk to Meboden.

Finally, a perceptive Inspired (PER + Alertness against DIF 15) could witness Manansome meeting with somebody wrapped in a coat in the Mansion's yard. The somebody is short - like a sprig - and talks in a low voice.

The tone of the conversation clearly indicates that it is Manansome who owes the explanations. If he or she manages to hide (AGI + Discretion against DIF 17 - do not forget the Remain's bonus), the Inspired can hear what is said. The overall discussion is clear: the "spriggan" - Adelph - is unhappy about the Inspired's presence in Mean-Mist. They just might cause trouble and the talker does not want his authority undermined. They do not have to be eliminated, but they must leave as soon as possible. This wood business must be settled quickly.

THE NEGOTIATION

The negotiation takes place the day after, in the main room. Lady Arial is there with two other women. They are chatting away while working on their embroidering. Children - including Adelph and Jeriardo - quietly play before the hearth. Manansome, Farolf and the Inspired are settled around the table. Farolf lays out maps given by Meboden as well as legal parchments proving Manansome's ownership of the forest. The Inspired probably have their own maps and legal documents. In short, each party legitimately claims the forest.

The Inspired soon realize that Mean-Mist's lord is not really capable of pulling this off. His twitching face betrays his nervousness. He looks exhausted. The Inspired must first believe that Manansome is troubled, by the weight of his charge perhaps. Farolf is no great help. A seasoned negotiator (PER + Diplomacy against DIF 15) will understand that Manansome is behaving as if he was not the decision-maker, which is surprising.

Kaldinh starts by letting the two parties settle their argument. After a while, he offers a common fund. He needs thirty healthy oaks. According to the forest's capacity, he will choose the trees and the payment will be equally shared by the two domains. This solution enables both of them to stick to their claims. Of course, it does

not solve the problem. It might be high time to sort out this border question. If somebody expresses the idea out loud, Kaldinh will take it in stride and remind the assembly that matters of this kind must be submitted to the highest authority in the realm (the First Baron if the domain in Urgamand, for example). This kind of appeal means endless delays and a significant loss of profit for the two parties.

But Manansome does not back down. He asks Kaldinh for an appraisal of the price he intends to pay. The satyr answers that he cannot possibly do that, since it all depends on the number, size and quality of the trees. He states that he needs about three hundreds steres (a local unit of measure, roughly equivalent to one cubic yard of wood). At this point the children, not knowing what a stere is, start questioning each other. The Inspired, focused on the debate, will probably not notice the background noise (PER + Alertness against DIF 25).

Someone well informed about raw material prices (INT + trade against DIF 15) could give an estimate of fifty gold pieces per stere. But Kaldinh, good Keshite merchant that he is, counts only in scrapes. He will be happy to point out that the price of a stere in the area is five hundred and forty-eight scrapes. Thus, the price of three hundred steres can be estimated at a hundred sixty-four thousand and four hundred scrapes. This of course gets even more complicated when the numbers must be converted in local currency, depending on where the scenario is taking place. Moreover, the conversion is meaningless since, according to trade traditions, it must be calculated by a neutral third party.

But to make things easier, Kaldinh does not mind calculating a first estimate. What follows is a true masterwork of commercial warfare. The Inspired may be able to follow the satyr's quick reasoning if they have some training in the matter (INT + Trade against DIF 18). They may even realize that, without ever cheating, he makes the calculations much more difficult than they should be (SM 10).

Manansome and Farolf do not follow at all and are utterly confused. Kaldinh has to go over his reasoning several times, but without any success. The children's whispers gets louder and louder. The whole scene becomes hectic and irritating. Manansome will not bulge. Kaldinh gets all worked up and finally asks that the women and children leave the room to bring back some order.

A heavy silence settles at once. The guards look bewildered but not as much as Manansome. Kaldinh goes pale, realizing he must have made an Etiquette blunder. Manansome mutters to lead the women and children out. The debate starts again. Kaldinh is tense. Manansome is lost. After a short while, the latter suddenly gets up, mumbles undecipherable words and rushes out.

CURRENCY EXCHANGE SYSTEM

It has been designed by the Keshites and is a true masterpiece. In a world using mainly the decimal system, designing an exchange system with a base 11 is pure cruelty. As a rule, Keshite merchants use scrapes, especially when they are buying. The advantage is the seller is fooled by the big figures he hears. Here is a reminder: the reference currency is the gold piece used in the Mercenary Republic. It is worth 11 scrapes. But the Keshites use their own currency, the dirhem, to pay. So if it is actually a third party who carries out the calculations, the seller needs to turn to somebody who will buy back his dirhems. If the Keshite merchant has any knack for business (and they usually do), he will be the only one able to do so. Merchants and negotiators have become masters in this art. Their clients' minds are so deadened with the calculations that they usually do not realize that part of the money actually goes back from whence it came. Needless to say that most of the time, the aforementioned third party in charge of the exchange happens to be one of the merchant's acquaintances...

Act II: Symptoms

HESITATIONS

The Inspired will probably be at a loss as to what should be done after such a disaster. Manansome's strange behavior should intrigue them. Soon, a young manservant informs them that the lord is feverish. The negotiation will have to wait a while, probably until the day after. And there is no way Manansome can be reached even by offering to cure him.

If no Inspired was there to witness the night encounter between Adelph and Manansome, Kaldinh tells them about it. He assures them that he saw Mean-Mist's lord in the yard with a spriggan. The latter seemed to be the one giving orders. The Keshite is convinced that this spriggan secretly rules over Mean-Mist. It is obvious to him that Manansome does not behave normally. Since he arrived, he has never seen him taking care of the city's affairs or calling a council meeting. Farolf appears just as incompetent.

THE MANSION

The Inspired now have more time to take an interest in their surrounding. By going to the library, they can find out information about Filamon, the local hero, to whom the church is dedicated (PER + History against DIF 10). Nothing unusual – he fought a lot of demons. His best friend betrayed him to his enemies who snuck inside his home at night to murder him. Only his daughter survived. Ten years later, she married the traitor and killed him on their wedding night.

They might very well meet Adelph in the library, hunched over a pile of parchments and books, all dealing with legends of the Flamboyance. Adelph will then feel that they are akin to him, and therefore extremely dangerous. As for Meboden, he does his best to prevent Adelph from being disturbed. If somebody so much as touches a book, he literally growls and offers, in a most unkind way, to help the visitor find what he is looking for before he knocks everything down.

By skillfully questioning the staff (CHA + Intrigue or Fast Talk against DIF 18), they might learn that a shadow has been seen edging its way along the corridors. Supposedly, someone lives hidden in the Mansion. Food regularly disappears. Lady Arial and Lord Manansome have been told, but nothing has been done. It is of course Prodigal.

Finally, should they find themselves in the wing housing the city's council, they might wonder about the stench. The room that used to be the Preceptorial classroom is in chaos. There is evidence of fighting. The body of a woman, dressed in a torn preceptorial uniform, lies behind a desk. The crime is several days old. She is lying on the floor, her arms pinned to the wall, propped up by spearheads (Terror roll against DIF 10). The body

shows countless bruises – she was lynched. If questioned, Farolf will explain that the punishment was deserved. The preceptorial schoolmistress, Dalanna, was a traitor working for the enemy – to be chosen depending on the scenario's location – and seeking to pervert the children. He seems quite unperturbed at the body's fate, and points out that it has been left to rot on the lord's order.

By investigating town's children, now without schooling, the Inspired might learn about Manansome's children's private tutor, a spriggan called Prodigal. He has gone missing several days ago. Manansome is waiting for Preceptorial to send another schoolmaster.

THE TOWN

The Inspired will probably want to stretch their legs in town. There is a lot more going on during the day than in the evening. If they pay just a little attention, Mean-Mist weirdness can be detected.

A militia is in charge of maintaining law and order, as well as defending the town. But strangely enough, these men themselves have an escort of children, robust young fellows sporting the same fierce expression as their elders, with knives on their belts. Apart from the richest denizens, everyone seems to fear them, and gets out of their way as they march by.

Depending on how long they spend outdoors, the Inspired might witness numerous scenes involving children. A young boy works as a public writer although his writing is appalling. Girls scour the peasants' market doing their shopping.

The inhabitants of the Domain's three other villages are not affected by Adelph's spell. They too are a bit taken aback by recent events. The Inspired can question them. They will learn that precisely five weeks ago, Mean-Mist's children started taking part in all the town's activities. It is indeed strange but the peasants put it down to urban eccentricity. As long as their children do their work in the fields and respect traditions, there is nothing to worry about.

In a tavern, children gather and talk about very serious (or so they believe), matters. By discretely listening in (PER + Fast Talk against DIF 10), the Inspired will find it is a cock and bull conversation. They are discussing the after-effects of a war won long ago, the threat of a snowstorm when it definitely is not the season, or other problems usually alien to children of this age.

MILITIAMEN

HP: 40 SWT: 13 CWT: 20 DB: 0

Init. 10: spear 14, sword 11

Att: spear 10, sword 10

Dodge: 8 (armor 2)

Parry: spear 11, sword 11

DB: spear + 4/L, sword + 4/L

Armor: partial banded mail, protection 9

♣ In the evening, six drunk teenagers, belonging to the militia's escort, beat up a peasant. They are very aggressive and will attack any male coming their way. The Inspired will hopefully be able to keep themselves in check, for these children certainly do not have any fighting ability. But to spice up the situation, they could be joined by real militiamen.

WRONG TRACK

As mentioned before, Prodigal is lying low in the Mansion's attic. This labyrinth of beams is only accessible through the manor's secret passages. Prodigal uses them a lot at night, to pinch food in the kitchen or spy on the residents. Finding him will demand speed and persistence. If chased, he will keep to familiar ground, where he has the advantage.

In the secret passages, corridors, chambers, stairs and so forth, will come one after the other. The sprigman is not fast but knows his way better than the Inspired. Nothing is more infuriating than to enter a room just as an invisible door bangs closed!

In the attic, the chase will be all the more difficult. This time, it is the sprigman's height that is an advantage. The Inspired must be constantly careful or bang their heads every few yards (AGI + Athletics or Acrobatics, restrictive Dodge, against DIF 15). The attic covers the same area as the manor. It is dark and hot. Every move sends dust flying around. The floor is shaky and crumbles if someone fumbles. Not to mention the birds and reptiles that have taken up residence... Without a touch of magic, the venture will prove dangerous and difficult.

The easiest way is to observe Prodigal's nocturnal wandering and set up a trap. But most importantly, the Inspired should understand that they must act alone. Brought into the confidence, Adelph will try to get rid of Prodigal.

Then everything depends on the Inspired's diplomatic skills. It does not take much to realize that Prodigal is truly panic-stricken. He looks like a victim, not like a plotter or a Masque agent. The trouble is that he is convinced that his pursuers are Manansome's men. Avoiding violence and threats is the only way to make him talk (CHA + Fast Talk against DIF 15). He will then tell everything he knows, from the loft's fire to Dalanna's murder to the change in the children. Unfortunately, he has no idea about who is responsible. But he has noticed that Adelph, Ocyan's son, has taken up residence in Meboden's library. Anyway, he is convinced that Jeriardo knows a lot more than him about all this.

Act III: Cure?

JERIALDO'S CONFESSION

Questioned by the Inspired, Jeriardo first keeps his ground. He behaves like a true Mean-Mist heir and

orders them to leave him alone, threatening to call the Mansion's militiamen.

However, Jeriardo knows his time has come. Eventually he bursts into tears, suddenly a child again, and accuses Adelph of being a demon. He is the one responsible for the fire and Dalanna's death. He is the one who made him and Bellin attack Prodigal to get rid of him. He has the power to control people and has put the children under his yoke. All this is true, of course. But Jeriardo's Consummate Acting (Perfidy Gift) enables him to convince even the Inspired that Adelph is nothing but a threat, a vermin to be wiped out as soon as possible. Playing his last dramatic trump card, Jeriardo admits that Adelph intends to kill Kaldinh who has proved too nosy. The satyr must be found at once!

KALDINH'S BODY

The unfortunate Keshite indeed lies in his bed, his throat ripped open. Numerous bites and claw marks are scattered around his body (Terror roll against DIF 10). An expert will recognize the work of an Imp (PER + Demonology against DIF 20, if the Inspired has an Imp). But a human is responsible for Kaldinh's death; the wounds made by the Imp are secondary. If Jeriardo is still with the Inspired, he will pretend to burst into tears again. He will do his best to bring the Inspired to consider extreme solutions. At this moment, Anger, the secondary emotion of the Remain, might get into the act...

CATCHING ADELPH

The Inspired probably know where he is. The library takes up a whole wing of the Mansion, stretching out over several floors. Thanks to Prodigal, the secrets passages can be used to arrive directly in the reading room. The Inspired then have surprise on their side.

Adelph is in a "meeting" with other children (the young militia escort), laying plans to get rid of the Inspired. Of course, depending on previous events and the noise due to Prodigal's chase, Adelph could well be ready to welcome the Inspired and not at all surprised. The children protecting him carry large knives (Attack 9, Parry 8, Dodge 5, HP 35). Hopefully the Inspired will be aware of their opponents' young age and hold back their blows!

Meboden will also get involved by throwing himself on an Inspired in a fit of rage. He is a distraction, but not much more. The Inspired's real adversary is Adelph himself. He is not a seasoned warrior and only carries a dagger, but he has a strong Flame. If cornered, he will not hesitate to use his Spitfire power. In this environment, the fire will spread rapidly, feeding on the books. It will consume the library and reach the rest of the manor. Much depends on the Inspired's actions. They may choose to try to stop the fire, help the children out, or focus on stopping Adelph from running away.

If Adelph manages to escape, he will gather a crowd and round up the militia, accusing the Inspired of having

caused the fire. A verbal sparring match may then take place between him and an eloquent Inspired. Reminding people of the previous fire would be a good argument to spread doubt in their minds but Adelph's adversary starts off very disadvantaged (CHA + Eloquence roll, DIF 16, modifier -4 which can be made up for by good arguments and a punchy style).

In case of success, the Inspired then has to manage the situation. If he really has won the crowd, Adelph could well be in danger, and the young Inspired will fight back with all he has. The most efficient solution would probably be to talk sense into Adelph and convince him that he is wrong either during the sparring match (SM 15) or afterwards (CHA + Fast Talk against DIF 23).

Epilogue

ADELPH'S FATE

If he is still alive, the players find themselves in charge of an Inspired child marked by the Perfidy. He is probably best off between the hands of the Decans, so the seasonlings can complete his training. He will remain vulnerable to the Masque, that cannot be undone, but hopefully, with time, he will be much more careful and learn from his wrongs. Then maybe Orphyd will not have made a mistake by giving him the Flame.

JERIALDO'S FATE

The players have had little opportunity to see through him, unless they believe Adelph when he says he did not kill Kaldinh. Even Adelph is far from suspecting that Jerialdo the Jitters duped him.

If everything goes back to normal, Jerialdo can take up the part of the thoughtful son again. He is very conscious that a time will come when he will be lord of Mean-Mist. His father's weakness should make the wait quite short. Let us wager that, in several years, the Inspired will have to contend with such a neighbor.

On the other hand, if Jerialdo is unmasked in any way (his Imp could get noticed), he will run away. He will gain enough experience on the road to become a fearsome adversary. As a seasoned Invoker and an exceptional Masque's minion, he will come back to take revenge.

FINDING OUT THE REAL STORY

If the Inspired are curious, they can ask questions about Adelph when they meet the Decan Council. They will learn about Orphyd who had to protect a powerful Flame from the Masque. Adelph was never chosen – it was the luck of the draw. One thing leading to another, they might get interested in the powerful Masker who has been operating in the area for dozens of years: the fearsome Milfalsen, a former eminence grise who relentlessly chases Inspired and seasonlings. He will make sure your players have a lot on their plates during future sessions!

