

Hope Went Two Ways

Byron
the Bard



This module is a short (experimental) adventure for *Promethean: The Created*. It has been designed for a small group of players, ideally just a couple. It is a rule-light module focused on mood, dialogue and discussion. Please refer to the *World of Darkness Rulebook* and *Promethean: The Created* handbook for rules and statistics.

OVERVIEW

This module is designed as a dialogical and inquisitive adventure for a small throng of Promethean in the middle of their Pilgrimage. Differently from classical adventures, this module does not have a clear aim or success conditions; the only driver here is the personal progress of the playing Prometheans along their Pilgrimage. The limited setting of Bleak Manor provides a frame for a number of scenes and vignettes through which the playing Prometheans can grow in their understanding of the torments common to humans and to Created.

The Narrator is recommended to read the whole module first, and to familiarize with the reasons, the motivations and the tragedy of John and Beatrice. Mood is very important, and most of it will be conveyed through interactions with these characters. No order in the exploration or in the scenes is assumed, and the Narrator should flexibly adapt to the choices and the questions of the players.

BACKGROUND

This section provides the Narrator with all the background information necessary to understand the history of the two key non-player Created. It starts with story of Eleutherius Amos and his creature, John. It then switches to the parallel story of Martin van Riksbjerg and his Promethean Beatrice. Finally, it narrates the how the paths of John and Beatrice crossed before they returned to Bleak Manor.

THE LIFE OF ELEUTHERIUS (1730s-1837)

In the spring of 1761, a lonely settler reached the area north of modern day Brandon, Vermont. The travelling man introduced himself to the few other trappers in the area as Eleutherius Amos, hunter and freethinker.

Youth in Ireland (1730s-1750s). Born in the 1730s, Eleutherius was the second son of a wealthy family of Cardiff, which had made its fortune thanks to the trade of wool. However, the young man never showed any propensity or interest for business, and so his father pushed him towards the study of law. Eleutherius proved an excellent scholar, but the study of

human laws quickly bored him. Secretly, he started spending his nights reading tomes about alchemy: a few historical books were available in the family library, others he obtained from shady merchants in the harbour.

One day, a Genoan sailor who claimed to have lived among a community of ascetic monks in the desert of Syria showed him a rare alchemical treatise. The price was steep, the temptation irresistible: to buy the precious treaty, Eleutherius stole the money from his father's safe. When the misdemeanour came to light, his father was furious, both because of the theft and because of the sacrilegious activities of the son. Ashamed and afraid, Eleutherius escaped carrying his treasured books, and boarded a ship bound to the New World.

Sojourn in Boston (1750s). Thinking himself free and safe, Eleutherius set up his new haven in Boston, where he worked as a lawyer during the day, and an alchemist at night. For a couple of years he was able to pursue his work undisturbed; but soon suspicions grew around his nightly activities. His weary outlook, the strange noises coming from his basement, the absence from church: rumors about unholy rituals spread rapidly. As public animosity grew towards him, he came to fear a witch hunt, and so he decided to leave once again, before it was too late.

Great Work at Lake Dunmore (1760s-1780s). Leaving Boston behind, he travelled for several days north-west inland. He crossed what is now the Green Mountain National Forest, and stopped right after Lake Dunmore. The place seemed quiet and remote enough to set up camp, and still not too far from a line of towns recently founded in the colonization of this area. Here he could be the master of himself, provide for his scant needs, and, more importantly, pursue his alchemical studies in isolation.

In the fall of 1761, the town of Neshobe was founded, soon becoming a wintering town for trappers. Eleutherius still avoided the place, preferring the isolation in the wild and arising the suspicions of the locals who wondered how he could survive alone; new stories developed including the tale that he sold his soul to a demon in exchange for sustenance and knowledge. In reality, Eleutherius relied on a Native practitioner of the Great Work, Spirit-of-the-Earth. Spirit-of-the-Earth provided

him with the necessities to survive, and together they traded precious esoteric knowledge. While the United States conquered its independence, the European and the Native exchanged knowledge about the ways of the metals and the marvels of the earth.

Enters Athanasius (1784). Around 1784, after Neshobe was renamed Brandon, Spirit-of-the-Earth died in a fire with local settlers. His son and disciple, Life-from-Under was adopted by Eleutherius, who renamed him Athanasius. The kid happily followed his new master, but the tribe looked distrustfully on the foreigner, and so, soon, the two became outcasts. Deprived of the support of the Natives, Eleutherius was forced back to Brandon. When showing up, the few townfolks who recognized him were surprised by his slow aging; but, more than anything else, they were taken aback by the Native kid at his side. Again rumors spread wildly. But commerce trumped these qualms, and Eleutherius managed to strike agreements with the traders of Brandon. At first he exchanged furs, earning enough only to sustain himself and Athanasius. Then, he suddenly started selling gold. Common people called it the *gold of the devil*, and refused to touch it; but merchants were happy to buy it and re-sell on distant markets. Eleutherius quickly became rich beyond his expectations. He ordered books from London, artifacts from Venice, and relics from Istanbul.

Bleak Manor (1799-1801). In 1799 he started the construction of a large mansion far in the countryside outside Brandon. Superstitious locals refused to take part in the construction, and immigrant workers from Boston had to be contracted. Two years later, Amos Manor House, locally known as Bleak Manor House, became the residence of Eleutherius and Athanasius.

The death of Eleutherius (1837). The years passed and, although Eleutherius managed to extend his life beyond its natural limits, the effects of aging started to take a heavy toll on him. With the help of his disciple, he managed to keep producing new elixirs, but, for how much they could postpone the fatal hour, he could not trick the impending doom forever. This terror slowly led him to being prey to panic attack and to distrust his caring disciple, only to die, desperate and afraid, in 1837. His last words to Athanasius before dying were "Save me."

THE EXISTENCE OF JOHN (1844-1881)

The creature had inherited an intrinsic will to live and fear of death from the ashes of Eleutherius; but it also acquired a deep strive for freedom from the power of the words inscribed on its forehead.

The creature (1844). The last wish of Eleutherius became the life goal of Athanasius. He collected the writings of his master, and there he found notes on how to *give new life to a dead body*. These were among the last researches made by the insane Eleutherius, and, very likely, he would have never conceived of them as a way to achieve new life. Unaware of this, Athanasius decided to complete this study and perform the ritual in the hope of bringing Eleutherius, or at least something of him, back to life.

In 1844, Athanasius finally completed the research of his master. He gathered his alchemical elements, and he fashioned a Construct, a creature made of clay. As he did not want this creature to be his servant, during the bonding ritual he wrote on its forehead the name of Eleutherius in cuneiform characters. The creature was buried in the garden of Bleak Manor, until a night of May it came to life.

It did not take long to Athanasius to understand the folly of his enterprise. The creature seemed to lack every aspect of the nature of Eleutherius: instead of active curiosity, it would show an unshakable passivity; instead of being attracted by books and knowledge, it would fall in still reveries looking over the gates of the Manor; instead of talking to him, it would remain silent like a statue. Even more, it would not answer to the name of Eleutherius. These failure, and the inevitably growing Disquiet, drove an edge between the two. They kept living in Bleak Manor, but they would occupy different wings.

The flight of the creature (1846). After a couple of years, the irreconcilable distance between the creature and its creator, and a primitive desire for the horizon, induced the creature to leave Bleak Manor on the cold night of the 23rd December 1846. After roaming aimlessly, he reached Brandon in the early morning of Christmas 1846. While entering the town, he found on the ground a handwritten page with passages from the Christmas service. From the first name he read, he took his baptism: John.

The stay in Brandon was short-lived though. The creature lived on the side of society for a few months, mingling with other outcasts who seemed to accept him without questioning. However, the aura of Disquiet enveloping him was strong, and he soon realized that he could

not stay in the same inhabited place for too long. As the possibility of a persecution became more real, John abandoned Vermont in the summer of 1847.

The passing of Athanasius (1862). It took Athanasius a few months to realize that the creature had disappeared. The absolute silence from the opposite wing of the Manor finally convinced him to go and check, only to find a cold and empty room. Anger, frustration and repentance mixed into his mind. He spent a few years trying to learn more about Prometheans. At first he caressed the idea of giving life to a new creature, but, then, realizing their cursed state, he decided to avoid it.

Resigned and now struggling financially, Athanasius started selling some of the tomes and the artifacts of Eleutherius to gain the money necessary for survival and for upkeeping the house. At the beginning of the 1860s, Athanasius left for a last journey in the hope of finding his native tribe. Sadly though, the government had deported them, and no home existed anymore where to return. Athanasius returned to Bleak Manor in 1862, and few months later, he passed away, quiet and alone.

Journeying through the North (1850s-1880s). After leaving Brandon, John headed towards colder regions. The North attracted him, both because there were less people who could chase and hunt him, and because the few settlers living in those harsh climates seemed to share with him the same feeling of loneliness. Jumping on the cargo rail carriages, but mostly travelling by foot, John journeyed along the border between US and Canada, from one coast to the other. He kept to the side of civilization, although sometimes he approached human settlement, taking up odd jobs for very short times in order to learn more about men. He also crossed path with a few other Prometheans who fled human cities, but after taking their Measure he decided to go his own way. Only towards the end of 1870s he joined a throng made up by Perm, an Ulgan born in Siberia who took the name of the city where he was created, and Prague, a Tammuz convinced that the eponymous city in the Old World is meant to be the homeland of all the Golems. While travelling with these companions, John took up the nickname Cardiff - John knew very little of the actual city, but he had seen its crest in Bleak Manor. During their joint pilgrimage, John listened to stories of the Old and New World and in his brooding mind he contemplated the picture of men and Prometheans.

THE LIFE OF MARTIN VAN RIKSBJERG (1827-1872)

A Calvinist merchant of art, and a dilettante in sculpture, Martin van Riksbjerg spent his last years in the obsessive and cursed quest for a gone beauty.

Apprenticeship in the Netherlands (1830s-1850s). Martin van Riksbjerg was born in 1827 in Rotterdam, first-born of Jakob van Riksbjerg, a hugely influential and affluent merchant of art with a web of connection throughout Europe, America, and the Far East. He traded paintings, sculptures, ceramics, books and any other object of art which could pique the interest of the aristocracy of the Old World.

Martin was raised in a strict Calvinist household, where he learned the importance of duty and worship. Since his young age he was trained in the profession of the father. Yet, where Jakob was just an excellent art critic, Martin showed to be not only a good judge of art, but also a moderate artist himself. In his scant spare time, he indulged in classical sculpture; in his statues he tried to convey his deep feelings about faith, love, and art.

Dealing in art (1850s). In 1852 Martin took over the leadership of the family business. Travelling all over Europe, he gained the fame of a serious and trusted art dealer, with a keen sense of art and honest work ethics. As his fortune rose, he spent large part of his capital for his own collections, and his house quickly became known for the first-class art it hosted.

Beatrice Vasari (1856-1862). A marriage of interest was set up in 1856 between the van Riksbjerg and an Italian family of art dealers, the Vasari. Despite the nature of the marriage, Martin sincerely fell in love with his new wife and sincerely cared for her.

Beatrice moved to her new residence in Rotterdam. Being herself an educated woman and trained in art, she divided her time between administering Martin's art collection and painting. Her favourite subject was a depiction of the Sacred Heart of Jesus from her home town. She signed her works under the artistic name of Agapiya.

In love with her beauty and her work, Martin himself started spending more time at home, receiving guests and merchants, and delegating affairs to his agents. However, in 1861, Beatrice fell ill with tuberculosis. Despite every effort to find a cure, she was slowly consumed by her illness, until she passed away in 1862.

The diaries of Eleutherius (1863). The death of Beatrice deeply affected Martin. Not only because of her departure, but also because of

the slow withering of that beauty he had loved so much. Too afflicted to remain in those places that reminded him of her, he chose to leave Europe. Possibly moved by a latent desire for destruction, he set sail for the United States, at the time in the grips of a civil war.

He took residence in New York, a city far from the front and very busy. He began roaming art and flea markets, but he could not feel that interest and excitement that used to animate him. However, during one of these trips, he ended up buying an old curious journal from a shady peddler from Vermont. The volume turned out to be one of the journals written by Eleutherius and sold by Athanasius towards the end of his life. Reading it, Martin discovered notes and studies about Prometheans. This immediately grasped all his attention: as the deluded Athanasius believed before him, he also foolishly thought that Azoth could be the key to defeat death.

Siphoning money out of his enterprise in Europe, Martin embarked on an obsessive quest for forbidden lore. Exploiting his networks and his resources, he quickly gathered knowledge about the Created, discovering, in particular, the lineage of the Galateid. Giving life to a Muse seemed at once a way to give form to true beauty and bring back his dear wife.

For years he collected notes, perfecting his knowledge, fashioning the semblance of a Galateid out of the finest marble. His sources finally led him to a shady arcanist of Providence who, after a large compensation, offered the last pieces of forbidden lore required for the generative act.

THE EXISTENCE OF BEATRICE (1869-1881)

Simply beautiful. The brightest reflection of Agapiya. An object of love. And, yet, the creature itself unable to express love.

The creature (1869). Forgetful of any religious restraint, on a night of full moon of May in upstate New York, Martin proceeded to put to use his recently-acquired knowledge. Performing all the operations of the Great Work, the marble he had sculpted in the shape of Beatrice awoke. *Agapiya* were the first words he pronounced when she raised. The creature had all the beauty of his wife, albeit a sort of ghostly veil seemed to separate her from our world.

To Martin's dismay, the Galateid proved as intelligent as remote. The adoration of Martin was answered with cold silences. The creature was neither proud nor cruel, simply she did not understand the feeling of his master. He tried to

instruct her; she learned, but still she could not respond.

The madness of Martin (1872-1873). It was only thanks to his blind love that Martin could leave so close to a Promethean for so long. But as soon as he came to realize his mistakes, the Disquiet generated by the creature started affecting him. Torn between his desperate will to love the simulacrum of Beatrice and the compulsion to reject the unnatural being he had created, Martin started having nightmares and hallucinations. Standing in front of her Muse, he saw his beloved Beatrice being consumed by the tuberculosis until she was transformed into the ghostly presence of the Promethean.

Martin spent entire days in prayer, trying to muster his old faith, trying to do penance, trying to believe everything that had happened was a pure dream. But the presence of creature reminded him of his mortal sin, of his ungodly act of pride, of his coming eternal damnation. The Galateid understood that Martin was unable to separate himself from her, and so she decided to leave in the winter of 1872.

For a few months, Martin regained his senses. But his body and his spirit were severely weakened, and in 1873 he died alone in the bed of his house in upstate New York, forgotten by his family and his agents.

Journeying to the North (1870s-1880s). After disappearing in 1872, the creature lingered for some time around the abode of Martin, looking from afar its creator and unable to explain what was consuming him - unaware that her presence, although removed, still cast a shadow of Disquiet on the house of Martin. Even after his death, Beatrice kept feeling an attachment to the house. She took long journey around the state of New York, heading north; during her travels she would often stray at the margin of towns and villages, observing and collecting stories, rumors and wisdom. However, she would constantly return to Martin's house, at least once a year. Here she would rest in the old abandoned building, enjoy the art collected by her creator, and try to preserve things as they were at the time she left. In particular, as Martin used to have tulips on the table to remind him of his home in the Netherlands, so Beatrice would always arrange flowers on one of the tables of the house.

RETURN TO BLEAK MANOR (1881-1918)

At last, a homecoming to a refuge for two lost Creatures who met on the road while fleeing humanity.

The encounter with Beatrice (1881). In 1881, the throng of John dissolved. Perm chose to head back north, possibly towards Alaska and the Bering Strait, while Prague finally decided to head towards Boston in order to stowaway on a ship and reach the Old World. John decided to stick with the Tammuz, and together they reached Massachusetts. On the shore of the Atlantic, Prague left his parting token to John and embarked. After the farewell, John moved around the Eastern coast. While crossing upstate New York, he stumbled into another Promethean travelling into the wild with a small cart. It was Beatrice, who had been forced to leave Martin's house after a group of state officials had come to repossess the abandoned place. Before escaping, she managed to gather a few paintings, some books, and a tapestry, load them all on a small cart, and disappear into the woods. John offered to help transporting the stuff, and soon the two formed a new throng. After roaming for few weeks and exchanging stories, Beatrice consented to deposit her treasures to Bleak Manor.

Further travels (1880s-1910s). After a brief stop at Bleak Manor, John and Beatrice hit the road again. Their longest journey to date took them across the entire American continent, from Vermont west to the Pacific Coast, and then south through Mexico and into Latin America, all the way to the Tierra del Fuego. Along the road, they met other Prometheans who joined the throng for some time and shared part of the way; only the two of them being remained steadily as the core of the throng. This tour took them more than twenty years, at the end of which they decided to head back home.

Homecoming (1918). On their way back, a feeling that their shared time was nearing the end insinuated between them. However, the country to which they returned appeared to them very different from the one they left. Social and economic changes had transformed the world they considered home. Furthermore, despite they had known conflict in various forms since their creation, the recent decision of the government of joining in the First World War had brought the idea of war closer to everyday life. Crossing the countryside and travelling up the coast, they had seen groups of soldiers marching through the land and boarding transport boats anchored in the harbors.

Most terrible of all, they saw military police in the countryside looking for conscripts, young men torn from their farms and their families to be sent fighting a war overseas. Unable to fathom the reason for such behavior and for such pain, the two Prometheans observed those

enforced separations taking place before their impotent eyes. A hint of sympathy sparked in them: although they could not understand where that suffering came from, both of them, silently and independently, felt they did not want to leave each other. They felt that their Pilgrimage had brought them together. And so, they finally returned to Bleak Manor.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

This module heavily revolves around the drama that connects and separates two Prometheans. Beatrice and John share a common story, both in emotional and concrete terms. They were both created out of the human desire to bring back to life a loved person, and they both have fatefully and unavoidably betrayed this design. In vain, their creators tried to fill their creation with someone else's spirit. A Promethean can not be the receptacle of a human soul, it can hardly act according to human desires it fails to understand. This natural inability to be someone else has lead human beings (Athanasius, Martin) to despair and it has frustrated the desire of the Prometheans of understanding human nature.

Rejected by those they failed, John and Beatrice have been left confused and alone. Their solitary vagaries ended when they met and, taking each other Measure, they recognized a fellow being. Traveling together across the continent they have learned much about themselves through the knowledge of the other. It is this mutual understanding, affection and sympathy that holds their *Lapis Philosophorum*, their key to reach humanity. As their journey together was coming to an end, the possibility of parting started haunting their days. The idea of separation, tragically and violently enacted before their eyes in young boys being taken away from their family to go serve in the Great War, reignited pains buried in the past.

It is a deep bond that has led Beatrice and John to shelter together in Bleak Manor. The stronger the bond becomes, the further they move on their Pilgrimage. Paradoxically, though, as these feelings take better form and shape, they also start casting shadows on their hearts. Indeed the freedom and liberation at the end of the Pilgrimage seems to be necessarily linked to condemning a loved creature to finiteness.

John. A Tammuz brought to life in 1844 by Athanasius in the hope of bringing back to life something of his master Eleutherius. Like many Created in his lineage, John is a brooding and meditative character. At the time of his creation, Athanasius inscribed the word *Eleutherius* (a name whose root means *freedom*) on his

forehead. Instead of channeling the personality of his master, this word of power instilled in John a strong independent mindset and fueled the desire for travel that took him across the continent.

His inquisitiveness and curiosity has led him far on his own Pilgrimage. A turning moment was his meeting with Beatrice, with whom he has travelled and lived together since. He is very attached to her and cares for her deeply. He spends large part of his time thinking about her and about his feelings towards her. This has led him to believe that his affection for her may be complete only once full humanity will be attained. He always talks of affection and fondness towards her, never of love, which he ascribes only to human beings.

However he is afraid of achieving the *Lapis Philosophorum* without sharing it with Beatrice. Reaching the great goal of becoming human is conceivable for him only if Beatrice is with him. And yet, a deep fear blocks him: the awareness that mortality implies finiteness. Not that he is afraid of his own death; what he can really not contemplate is to condemn Beatrice to an end. These dark and scary thoughts locked in his head have kept him company during the lonely hours he spends by himself in the garden or in the cabin. Painfully, these meditations have caused him to spend more and more time brooding alone.

Beatrice. Beautiful like all Galateids, Beatrice was the creation of a Dutch art dealer become obsessed with the desire to see his wife again. Carved to perfection in stone, she was called to life with the name *Agapiya* (a name whose root means *love*). More than other Muses, Beatrice can spark the love of anyone who looks at her; but like other Galateids, her inherent coldness may be the cause of great sorrows, as his creator experimented first hand.

Because of the nature bestowed upon her, Beatrice has always been fascinated by the idea of love. She spent time observing his creator, she spied on other humans, she read about it. Yet she feels cursed, in the sense that she believes that love, or any other feeling she may express, would only be an *imitation* of a true feeling. After meeting John, she has developed a strong attachment to him, but she is afraid of thinking about it or naming what sort of feeling she experiences.

Beatrice knows that the *Lapis Philosophorum* must be in John's reach, although she is not aware of how close he is to it. She is sincerely happy of the progress of John on the Pilgrimage, but this thought is shadowed by the idea he might be gone. In vain, she tries to console

herself that all she feels is an imitation, and that, if John were to go, this farce of feelings may find an end.

SETUP

The story revolves around the exploration of the residence of Bleak Manor and the interaction with its two inhabitants, John and Beatrice. The exploration of the house is meant to provide a framework allowing players to discover the story of John and Beatrice, relate with them, and explore questions and dilemmas related to memory, meaning, and loss. The module itself provides boxes with potential questions that can be asked by the players or the NPCs, together with guidelines for the answers that John or Beatrice may offer; these questions should be taken as suggestions for prompts and occasions to spark dialogue and discussion. Very importantly, these questions are only guidelines: the narration should not freeze around these specific prompts, nor should the players be fed these questions; the storytelling should flow naturally letting the initiative of the players at the table drive it. Similarly, the Narrator is invited to change, replace or add different elements inside Bleak Manor in the form of literary or artistic references that better suit the interest and shared knowledge of the group.

Completion of the story is absolutely in the hands of the players: when they decide they have learned and grown enough, or whenever they choose to leave Bleak Manor, the story ends. Success (milestones) is defined as a significant engagement with the situations presented. Optionally, successful completion of the module may be defined as helping John and Beatrice move on along their Pilgrimage: in the case of John this could mean making him accept the mortal fate of Beatrice; for Beatrice this would amount to accepting that her feelings are not imitations; for both, this could resolve in the achievement of the *Lapis Philosophorum*. Notice that any progress for Beatrice or John may very likely reflect and aid the PCs in their own striving for mortality. In any case, the Narrator should always reward interest and involvement, and not stick to predefined goals.

STORY HOOKS

There are different ways in which the Narrator may get the playing Created involved in the story.

- *Shelter*: if the throng has recently arrived in the area of Brandon, they may be looking for a place where to shelter and rest for a few days. Bleak Manor, apparently uninhabited and

remote, may seem like a perfect option.

- *Brandon Lore*: one or more Prometheans with local knowledge about Brandon or Vermont may have heard stories about the cursed Bleak Manor. A recent stop in the vicinity of the town may be the occasion to check out the old house.
- *The Ramble*: while travelling the North-East of the US, one or more Prometheans may have met another Created and heard a story about reclusive Prometheans living in Bleak Manor. The tale may have spiked the interest of the players, and traveling nearby Brandon may be the opportunity to learn more about this story.
- *Azothic Beacon*: although the inhabitants of Bleak Manor tend to dampen their Fire to keep Pandorans and visitors away, in rare moments of desperation John loses control of his Azothic radiance, and his presence may be felt by Prometheans happening to go through Brandon.

Before getting to Bleak Manor, the Narrator may want to play one or more scenes in Brandon. This may allow the players to acquaint themselves with the local folklore and find out about the abandoned house from townfolks. Playing in Brandon is also a good opportunity to introduce a few characters who may return in the story later and present the players with challenges arising from the Disquiet they bring along.

ARRIVING AT BLEAK MANOR HOUSE

The old and almost disappeared path you have been following has led you in front of a heavy and rusty iron gate. Beyond the black and reddish bars you can glimpse an old manor, what must have been once a glory of the New England architecture. Under the leaden-gray sky, the garden and the house itself seem motionless and barren.

The first impression of Bleak Manor should convey a sense of desolation and neglect. The place looks deserted, and the area surrounded by its walls has been tainted by the Disquiet of the two Prometheans living there. The locale has also the vague feel of a haunted house, but this aspect should not be pushed too much, as the story is not meant to be a horror story.

Outside the gates. A small path leads all the way up to the gates of Bleak Manor. This trail is almost completely gone, as very few people tread it. A check in the muddy ground would reveal the old footprints of a group of kids who made their way to the gate for the thrill of the experience.

The entire Manor is surrounded by a wall

standing about 2.5m tall. At the top, rusty spikes are meant to dissuade trespassers from climbing. The wall and the spikes are old, and a sufficiently strong Promethean would have no problem in bending the spikes and entering the garden.

The main entrance is constituted by an iron gate, large enough for a carriage to pass through (although, the last time this gate was opened must have been decades ago). A heavy metal chain wrapped around the bars locks the main gate.

A smaller solid metal door opens in the wall to the left of the gate. This door constitute the actual passage used by John or Beatrice in the rare case they have to leave Bleak Manor. The door itself is locked, but not robust enough to resist against the forcing attempts of a sturdy Promethean. Players may also decided to bang on the door, which will alert Beatrice inside (see below).

On the side of the door, an inquisitive Promethean may notice a couple of chalk Pilgrimage marker drawn on the wall. The meaning of the signs are *Wasteland* and *Caution*. These symbols were traced by John, not really with the aim of scaring visitors, but mostly to discourage anyone not resolute enough.

Garden. Once beyond the gates, the Prometheans will find themselves into the large garden surrounding the house. Unfortunately, nothing is left of the greenery that in the past must have graced this land. Instead, a mockery of ash-grey grass covers the space from the gate to the house. The blades of grass themselves have a brittle consistency, and they break into ash as soon as touched. Trails of decomposed grass highlights frequently walked trajectories across the garden. An easily distinguishable trail goes from the main house to a cabin. A harder-to-detect path connects the cabin with the small cemetery behind the house. Three barren and dead oaks stand by the manor, by the cabin and by the cemetery, respectively.

From the outside, Bleak Manor looks quite decrepit, with stained walls, dirty windows and an old roof. Despite the current state, it is easy to realize that in its heydays, this house must have been quite impressive, with its main facade decorated in the New England style, and a wide and elegant garden in front.

The manor is a two-story building with two entrances: the main door on the front, and a smaller service door. Traditionally, this secondary door was meant for the servitude, although no servants ever lived in Bleak Manor; instead this became the access reserved to John once he and Athanasius ended up living

separately in the house.

Most of the windows are dirty enough that peering inside is quite hard. A couple of windows though (room C, F, H on the ground floor; room P, U on the first floor) are clean, although often obscured by heavy black curtains.

Meeting Beatrice. Beatrice will likely be the first character met by the players. Working with her sculptures (in room B or C), she will notice the Azothic presence of the players as they approach and pass through the gates of the Manor. If the characters behave noisily in the gardens, or if they simply knock at the main door, Beatrice will show herself and greet the newcomers. The players will immediately notice her beauty, like a Greek statue, and the quiet and cold tone of her voice.

As long as the characters behave properly, Beatrice will invite them inside, taking them through the entrance (room A), the bare living room (room F) and then offering them a seat in the large dining room (room I).

Polite, but not talkative, Beatrice will do her best to make the guests feel welcome. There is clearly a thread of childish happiness in her because of the unexpected visit, as well as curiosity towards the newcomers, but at the beginning she will refrain from asking personal questions, accepting that the characters may just be passing by.

Bleak Manor does not normally host visitors, but the characters are invited to stay. If they want to spend the night, they may rest in one of the bedroom upstairs (room S,T), or find themselves a place where to lie down. Beatrice will explain that another Promethean, John, lives in the Manor, although at the moment he might be in the cabin. So far as the characters are respectful, they can make themselves at home.

Meeting John. John has spent of lately more and more time in the cabin, and when characters show up he will likely be there, busy in his works and thoughts. He had been unconsciously aware of the approaching Azothic aura of the characters, but, not sensing any danger from them, had kept working.

The Narrator is left free to decide when and where to introduce John. Players may just stumble into him while walking through the garden or when stopping at the cabin. John himself may decide at a certain point to come back to the Manor, either alerted by something happening or simply out of his own will. The Narrator is suggested to take advantage of this opportunity to make an impressive entrance. Alternatively, John may just go back to the main

building to partake in the usual tea ceremony at 6pm.

In any case, John would probably strike the characters at first as a stark and rather grumbling Promethean, not unlikely many Tammuz. He would probably stare at the newcomers, silently taking their Measure. He does not dislike guests, but he is annoyed at the idea that his meditations may be upset by the visiting throng. He will try to keep conversation short at first, hoping the players will leave soon. However, if probed with the right questions or wisdom, he will readily open to them.

THE MANOR

The entire manor will be available to the characters to explore. Plans of the house, together with sample images, are provided in appendix. In general, almost no door is locked, as only John and Beatrice live here and they do not have anything to hide from each other. Guests, however, are expected to behave respectfully, and excessive or untactful snooping around may be frowned upon. John and Beatrice owns keys for the main and side entrance doors, for the statuary (room B), John's room (room L), and for the main rooms upstairs (room P, Q, S, T, U). Running water is available only in the kitchen (room J) and the bathroom (room M) on the ground floor; having no actual need for toilets, all the other bathrooms are not in use anymore. In the evening, light is provided by candles.

A. Entrance Hall. A long and dark entrance hall welcomes the visitor to Bleak Manor. The main door is made of heavy oak and it has several locks and bolts on the inside. On the side of the entrance, an old metal umbrella stand now contains only an iron bar, which can be used to reinforce the main door. On a coat hanger, a couple of heavy coats, hats, scarves and gloves are hanging; these are the clothes the Created use to disguise themselves in the rare cases they have to leave the Manor.

A wooden bench on the opposite side of the room suggests that the place may have been used also as a waiting room. To entertain guests, the barrel vault is divided in fifteen sections, each decorated with a small fresco with a mythological theme. The darkness of the room and the subdued colors make it hard to appreciate the paintings. Thanks to its learning or because of innate knowledge, a Promethean who studies the frescoes long enough will recognize that each episode is taken from one of the fifteen books of Ovid's *The Metamorphoses*, a long poetic work collecting myths and legends of the ancient times. Many of the depicted stories

are connected by the theme of change and metamorphosis, and, as such, this work has been the object of intense and dedicated study by many alchemists. Looking at the paintings longer, a Promethean will realize that the author or the commissioner favored episodes involving Mercury and Minerva. Not so subtly, this series represents a fitting welcome for an alchemical abode.

On the floor there is an old, yellowish, mud-stained carpet with an emblazoned crest (see Figure 1). The crest represents the city of Cardiff. Eleutherius ordered this item from his hometown. The crest has two mottoes: above, *Deffro mae'n ddydd*, meaning *Awake, it is day*; below, *Y ddraig goch ddry cychwyn*, meaning *the Red Dragon will lead the way*. If they can read Welsh, Prometheans may be led to attribute an esoteric meaning to these words.

On this carpet, a trail of white dust, created by the movement of statues from one room to the other, connects the entrances of the two statuary rooms (room B, C).

- *Are all the locks on the main door necessary? Are they meant to keep someone out of the house, or to imprison someone inside?*

John and Beatrice may explain that those locks have been on the door since the house was built. They may both agree that such security is indeed useless now, but they may also remark on the symbolic imagery of those chains: we are locked into an empty house.

- *What is the meaning of the painting on the ceiling?* Beatrice can explain that the painting is a celebration of the Great Work. She may point out in particular those panels where Minerva appears and add that she had spent hours looking at her and wondering about her role: is the knowledge Minerva bestows helpful in our Pilgrimage? John may further explain that the work had been commissioned by Eleutherius, as a celebration of the transformative quest of alchemy. John may look somehow dismissively at this fresco, sharing his doubts about it: is there really any contact between the Great Work of Men and the Great Work of Prometheans?

- *What is the crest referring to?*

Beatrice would answer that it is the crest of a city beyond the sea, whose name she forgot; this, however, will lead her in a reverie about journeys on the sea. John knows the actual origin of the carpet and the motto written on it. Although he does not believe the crest to have any esoteric meaning, if questioned about the deep meaning of the motto, he will provide something of a cryptic answer: "sometimes the fool points to the cloudy sky and shouts 'The Moon!'".

B. Sculpting Hall. A large room that used to be a study, this area has been transformed in the sculpture laboratory of Beatrice. All around the room, blocks of stone of various sizes (the largest having the height of a person) and sculptures at various stages of completeness lie scattered. On the western side of the room stands an unused fireplace; over the mantelpiece and inside the fireplace itself,

Beatrice has placed chisels, hammers, nails and several other sculpting tools. In a corner, a mattress surrounded by books reveal that this room is used by Beatrice not only as a workroom, but also as her living quarters. Most of the books are art catalogues that Beatrice has clearly perused. Open books and dog ears show an interest into Renaissance and Baroque sculptures, such as *Laocoon* (see Figure 3) or *The Rape of Proserpina* (see Figure 2). Samples of statues around this room seems to try to capture some aspects of this sculpting style. However, all statues are incomplete and, curiously, they all have their faces undefined.

- *Why are so many of your statues unfinished?*

Beatrice may contemplate the works around the room surprised by the question. She may compare her struggle in finishing her works to the struggle of the Created along the Pilgrimage. Do not the characters wander off their trail? How do they overcome being taken in alternative directions?

- *Why are these statues missing face?*

The face is the last part Beatrice sculpts, and the eyes the last details. Beatrice may have hard time confessing it, but she is afraid that once given a face, her creations may take life as Prometheans. This is of course an ungrounded fear, that must have emerged from the unconscious memory of her own creation.

C. Statuary. A large and sunny room during the day, this former drawing room has been transformed in a statuary. Like a crowded museum room, sculptures are ordered along the walls, trailing off toward the living room (room F). Contrasting with the experimentation in the sculpting hall (room B) and in the books collected in that room, all the statues in this room are characterized by a marked staticity, reminding of Early Greek sculpture (see Figure 4). The faces actually have a high degree of detail, but the eyes and the gazes seem utterly void. Beatrice has fashioned the facial features out of Prometheans she had encountered during her journeys. This may allow the Narrator to introduce the statue of some other Promethean that the players may have encountered and met during their own Pilgrimage. This would offer an opportunity to talk with Beatrice about common acquaintances. However, although some of the statues may be recognized, the overall feeling in this room is one of disquiet: the eyes of these characters seem hopelessly lost in the void, lacking something. Some Prometheans may feel a sense of identification with these statues (and, indeed, following this chronicle, Beatrice may make statues with their resemblances!)

- *Who are these statues representing?*

Beatrice will defensively answer that Art is meant to represent the universal. If pressed, she may acknowledge

that the facial features belong to real Prometheans that she had met in her existence. However, she will hold that the presence of particular details is not meant to compromise the universal value of the work.

- *Are these men or Prometheans?*
Beatrice will let the players answer this question. What do you think? Do you feel they may represent you?
- *Why are these faces so unrequited? Why are these statues so static?*
Life and dynamism seem to be human aspects that escape Beatrice's artistic expression. She may ask for the help and advice of the characters: what is there in the gaze of a man, in the gesture of a human being that I can not capture?

D. Bathroom. A small room that used to be a bathroom, this space has been converted to a storage area where Beatrice has relegated rejected works. Inside and on the floor lie a few human statues with arms broken or without heads. These are all works that tried to capture the dynamism of Baroque sculpture, but, by mistake or by experimentation, have been compromised, and now lie here covered in dust and webs.

- *What happened to these statue?*
Beatrice may explain that when she tried to give these statues life (by which she means artistic dynamism), something went wrong. May have I overstepped a boundary in what we are allowed to express in art?
- *Why were they not destroyed?*
She would explain that these are still her creations, and, despite the failure, maybe they could one day be fixed and restored. Besides, mistakes are hard to contemplate, but are we meant to remove them completely from our existence? On the other hand, John may express a sense of uneasiness about those partial and grotesque sculptures, which re-evokes in his memory some dangerous encounters with Pandorans.

E. Stairs. A set of stairs leads up to the first floor. Half-way up a large portrait of Hermes Trismegistus hangs on the wall, staring directly to whoever is climbing the stairs. The half-bust depiction holds a book in one hand and keeps a globe balanced on his fingertip, conforming to a standard of the Hermetic tradition (see Figure 5). The portrait is actually a portrait of Eleutherius. A tag on the frame has only a date: 1801.

- *Who is in the picture?*
John would probably answer to this question evasively, explaining it represents Hermes Trismegistus. If the players had gained her trust, Beatrice may add that John told her that the person depicted is an ancestor of his.
- *Is he your ancestor? Why did you not tell us?*
John would nod to the first question, and then in turn ask the players how they feel about their creators. He thinks of himself as the sin of his ancestor, and thus talking about Eleutherius makes him feel the burden of this original sin.

F. Living Room. Wide glass door opens on the eastern wall towards the garden. This must have

been once a bright and festive living room, where guests could have be entertained - although Bleak Manor under Eleutherius and Athanasius never knew many visitors. The room is still full of light during the morning hour, but the emptiness gives it a melancholy feeling. Grains of dust can be seen dancing in the rays of light, while on the walls the only decoration is given by the shaded areas where once paintings hung. Above, a rich chandelier is covered by a thick layer of dust.

All that is left of the furniture is a rough wooden table in the center of the room, and a white metal tea table with two iron chairs in front of the large windows. The wooden table was made by John and, despite lacking any decoration, is solid and robust. On the metal table lies a gray tea pot together with two small cups. Under the tea pot, there is a consumed copy of *The Book of Tea*. The volume is actually one of the first copies of this work published in 1811, stolen by John from the offices of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. John and Beatrice stage their own tea ceremony in this room every day at 6pm, and characters may be invited to join. The ceremony is not really a proper tea ceremony, but more of a ritual of their own.

When not taken by sculpture, Beatrice may be found quietly sitting on one of the chairs looking outside on the garden. There she stays, either looking at her reflection in the glass or trying to catch a glimpse of John.

- *What are you looking at?*
This question may easily awake Beatrice from her reverie. She would probably answer by simply pointing to the building in the garden where John spends a large part of his time. Further probing may reveal that she was indeed thinking of him.
- *Why the ceremony?*
Both Created seem keen on having their ceremony, and since they have no way to taste the tea itself, some other reason must motivate them. Beatrice may argue about the beauty of the ceremony itself; its patterns may inspire her in ways of expressing feeling and dynamism that would otherwise escape her. John would probably refer to the book on the table, and the idea that sharing a cup of tea is a way of sharing humanity. However, he might express doubts about it: are we just mocking the ritual, as we are mockeries of human beings?

G. Study. This internal room used to be a small study. It still retains a writing desk and an armchair, but the place is now reduced to a sort of common storage area where John and Beatrice drop documents and other objects that do not have any other specific location. Curtains and carpets from other rooms (e.g.: the sculpting room) are deposited on the armchair. On the desk, a postcard with a view of the wild

Tierra del Fuego stands like a picture (see Figure 6); on the backside, someone wrote the address of Bleak Manor, but no other message or salutation is present. Indeed, the postcard has never been sent. Around the desk and within its drawers, the characters can also find a limited amount of cash; a few documents including a registry for the house; fake birth certificates for Beatrice and John, both with the forged stamp of the state of New Jersey; tickets for trains in the US and Brasil, few of which are actually validated; maps of New England; old and dated newspapers, the most recent dating 1918 and showing a picture of General Pershing and his assessment of the war in Europe.

- *You have been travelling long?*

Beatrice and John may tell about their journeying across the American continent, but they will not spend too much time on details unless asked for. Instead, when possible, they will ask the same question to the characters, asking about their journeys and what they have learned on the road.

- *You travelled by train in US and Brasil?*

Actually, they mostly travelled by foot, and certainly not with train tickets that would have admitted them in a carriage full of people. Those tickets in the study were mainly discarded tickets, collected from the ground in order to reconstruct their itinerary.

- *Who wrote the postcard from Tierra del Fuego?*

The postcard was actually acquired by Beatrice when they arrived to the southernmost point of the continent. Beatrice and John will remark about the irony of acquiring such a souvenir; it is a behavior that they can hardly explain, but something they felt like doing and that they cherished afterwards. If questioned about the address, Beatrice will say that she instinctively wrote the address of Bleak Manor: maybe she thought of that place as home?

- *Have you not read any paper after 1918?*

Indeed after retiring to Bleak Manor, the two Prometheans have known very little of the outside world. They may indeed even ask news about the First World War which, unbeknownst to them, has ended. If John or Beatrice trust the characters enough, one of them may add that it was the events of 1918, the war and cases of forced conscriptions they saw in the countryside that convinced them to retire together to Bleak Manor.

H. Lower Library. Three large libraries are present in Bleak Manor. The lower library contains a large collection of books relating to conventional arts and sciences: history, history of art, literature, mathematics, chemistry and biology. Reference texts, such as encyclopedias and atlases are also available. The room, however, is in a very chaotic state. Books have been read, consulted and then left in random places or even abandoned open on the floor. Tomes lie around here and there, clearly out of place. Volumes of the encyclopedia are out of order. The chaos, and the tall wooden bookcases that cover the walls and partition the room in different areas give this room the feeling of a

maze. No tables are available for study, although a few chairs may be used to sit if cleared of the random tomes piled upon them.

Given the disorder, it is hard to trace exactly what the inhabitants may have been interested in reading as books on any possible subject seem to be scattered around. A close and careful inspection would reveal that under a chair lies a worn-out and heavily annotated copy of *War and Peace*. Scribblings on all the sides seem to analyze and explain the behavior of the main characters, trying to get a grip on how and why they felt and acted in specific ways. The amount of underlining and notes make it resemble a textbook used by a schoolchildren to learn a difficult and complex topic.

- *Why such chaos in the library?*

Both Beatrice and John will not find anything to justify the disorder in the room. After all, what is the point of bothering keeping the place tidy when you can always find what you need, albeit possibly with a longer time expenditure?

- *Who was studying War and Peace?*

The book had been used and studied by Beatrice. She will explain that she found the book fascinating and quizzing. Do the guests know the book? Do they understand the actions of men? Truth is that, afraid that her emotions may only be imitations, she had set out to study this book in order to better understand herself.

I. Dining Room. This large central room is occupied by a long sturdy table surrounded by ten wooden chairs. The furniture is of high quality, imported by Eleutherius from France. However, the table has seen very limited use, since Eleutherius and Athanasius have rarely dined here, and John and Beatrice have little use of a table for meals. The surface of the table and of the chairs is thick with dust.

Yet, at the center of the table stands a light blue vase with two white fresh orchids. Following her habit, Beatrice has collected the flowers from the garden, near the cemetery, and arranged them on the table. Normally, because of the aura of John and Beatrice, flowers would not last more than a day. Now, with the added presence of the players, the orchids will hardly survive more than a couple of hour. Sensing their decay, if nothing prevents her, Beatrice will likely be there to contemplate their petals falling down.

- *Why these flowers?*

Beatrice will just explain that arranging flowers on the table is a habit of hers, and it just happens that these orchids grow in the garden, near the cemetery. She will not offer a meaning for the white flowers, but, if questioned, she may explain that the symbolism of white orchids is related to faith and beauty.

J. Kitchen. A large kitchen with an annexed larder divides the main area of the house from what were originally the servants' quarters. The kitchen is quite spacious, with several hobs, a large sink, a couple of tables where to prepare food, a number of large pots, dishes and other tableware. Although this kitchen was never used to its full potential, it had clearly been designed as a place where to prepare large meals for small parties of guests. All utensils have been left in their original place for many years.

The room acts now mostly as a passageway from John's own room to the lower library and the statuary. On a wall, John has hanged three prints that Beatrice has taken with her from Martin's home. These prints represents three episodes from the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice: the charming of the animals by Orpheus (see Figure 7); the death of Eurydice bitten by a snake (see Figure 8); the descent of Orpheus in Hell to save Eurydice (see Figure 9). Observant Prometheans will realize that these prints do not depict the complete arc of the myth of Orpheus; the final part, where Orpheus breaks his promise not to look at Eurydice until outside Hell, and thus loses her forever, is not represented.

- *Why are the prints of the myth of Orpheus so different?*
The prints were part of a collection which belonged to Martin. Beatrice acquired them before the house was repossessed by the human authorities. She herself heard the story of the myth from her creator, and it was one of the first stories she shared with John. For some reason they both liked the story and thought it worth remembering.
- *Is there a last print of the myth of Orpheus?*
There was indeed a last plate, representing the unhappy fate of Orpheus and Eurydice. Both John and Beatrice will recount the same story: the print was taken from Martin's house, but, somehow it *got lost* during the journey to Bleak Manor. Further inquiries will not produce much more information, leaving the characters wondering whether the loss was by chance or by design. Still, John muses, this leaves the story open; how would you end it?

K. Utility Room. This dark room with a low ceiling and an backdoor exit on the garden worked as a utility room, a tool deposit and a small workshop. Servants or inhabitants of the house would use this space to perform small works of repair, carpentry, and general upkeep of the house. Among the random items and lined boxes, characters may find a few brooms, buckets, some tins of paint, a variety of screwdrivers, hammers and other building tools, washing liquids of different strengths, oil and grease, wheels and gears, gardening tools and more. Compared to other places in the house, this room shows more signs of use, as John

would from time to time look around here for tools.

L. John's Room. This room in the far east of Bleak Manor was originally designed as a room for the servants. After creating John, Athanasius, unhappy with his failure and the presence of the creature, had relegated the Golem in this far wing of the house. The room is very simple and essential, in certain ways more reminiscent of a stable than a room. The floor is quite messy, in part covered with dirt and grass. A bedframe with its mattress has been raised against the wall; in its place a soft layer of straw has been dispersed on the floor. This is actually due to the preferences of the Tammuz, who likes resting closer to earth. A chest, together with a rough table and a chair is the only furniture present in the room. Athanasius did not provide for any furniture, so the content of this room consists of the very first woodworks made by John. The chest contains few tattered and unremarkable clothes that John has collected over the time, either from his journeys or simply from Athanasius' closet. On the table lie a few white papers, a pencil and a small leather-bound journal. The diary is open on the first page, where a dedication reads *To Cardiff: Is there something more than death? Some other end to friendship? – Prague*. This journal belonged to Prague, one of Prometheans with whom John travelled the longest, and it was left to John as a parting token when Prague stowed away on a ship bound to Europe. The reference to Cardiff may confuse the Prometheans: it has nothing to do with the actual city, it is just a pseudonym that John took up for himself at that time. Prometheans, especially other Tammuz, will recognize the quotation as words pronounced by the mythic hero Gilgamesh. Browsing the rest of the journal can provide quite an accurate reconstruction of the places that the throng had touched during their Pilgrimage. However, except for the introductory dedication, the work is pretty dry and matter-of-fact, more similar to a log than a journal.

- *What is the dedication for?*
John, who was meditated on those words for many a days, can explain to the characters that the dedication was written by his companion Prague before departing to the Old World. Being both Golems, they shared this innate knowledge of the Gilgameshian tradition, and so Prague left him with this quotation.
- *What meaning have you found in the dedication?*
The degree to which John will answer this question depends on his relation with the characters. He had indeed pondered on the question for a long time. Although hard to express, what concerns him is that the same question clouds his relation to Beatrice. The doubt

that torments him is whether death is the inevitable aftertaste of their *Aquae Vitae*, their *Lapis Philosophorum*.

M. Bathroom. Although the Prometheans do not really need it, this is the single operating bathroom in the house, with a large sink, bathtub and toilet. Two mirrors are present in the room: one above the faucet, and one on the back of the door.

N. Stairs. Passing the large portrait of Hermes Trismegistus on the stairs (room E) leads to the landing on the first floor. Wooden boards creak and dust is raised by the steps of the visitors. This floor is indeed rarely visited by the inhabitants of Bleak Manor, and the main rooms (room S, T) have been left unopened for years.

O. Bathroom. This bathroom is out of commission, no water reaching it. Moreover, the bathtub has been filled with dirt. This was the doing of John, who sometimes, like other Tammuz, feels the call of the earth and lies resting in the dirt.

P. Upper Main Library. The largest and most precious library in the manor is devoted to occult and esoteric books. The best of craftsmanship in terms of bookcases and tables has been selected for this room: all the furniture comes in solid wood perfectly worked and lavishly decorated. Decorations, such as carved flowers and lion heads, enrich tables, chairs and even shelves. Furthermore, the entire room seems to be pervaded by a sense of sacrality. The old tomes lie in perfect order, nothing seems out of place. A large store of Hermetic knowledge has been accumulated in this room, ranging from alchemy, transmutation, chrysopoeia, theurgy, exorcism, thaumaturgy, to cabalistic writings. Some of the texts are also dealing with Prometheans. In particular, notes handwritten by Eleutherius and Athanasius which were not sold detail the creation of Prometheans, while few other spurious accounts touch on the topic of the existence of the Created. Players willing to spend time reading may be given the opportunity to learn more about their nature or the history of Prometheans; however, the amount of authentic knowledge that has been collected by humans on the Promethean condition is always limited.

Differently from the other libraries, the tidiness of this room and the thick stratum of dust point out the fact that no one has been using this room in a long time. Indeed, after Athanasius gave up his esoteric research in the last years of his life, this room has been virtually sealed, save for a few times when John or Beatrice have come inside.

• *Has no one used this library?*

John and Beatrice both agree that true answers about the Promethean nature can not be found in the books in this library. Alchemy may provide a starting point for beginning your journey and a good interpretative key for the condition of the Created, but something else, something different seems necessary to move on.

Q. Laboratory. As the previous room to which it is connected, the laboratory has been left in an uncanny order. Several robust tables are lined along the walls and through the center of the room; various alchemical equipments are neatly disposed on them; tubes, bottles, and other tools are perfectly clean, except for a patina of dust accumulated in time. On the shelves, ceramic tins and metal container are carefully labeled and disposed according to the contents. A large chimney is available, to provide both heat and fire for any sort of experiment. To any assessment, the laboratory looks like an excellent place where to conduct alchemical studies. If the characters want to perform any experiment, or if they are searching any not-too-rare alchemical element, this laboratory may be the place they are looking for.

On the walls hang a few paintings. Three large rectangular Medieval-looking paintings depicts characters undertaking different scholarly enterprise. The Prometheans should have no difficulty in recognizing in these depictions the representation of traditional arts and sciences. On the first wall, one painting is the representation of the *quadrivium*: arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy. On a second wall, another one details the *trivium*: grammar, logic, rhetoric. On a third wall, another painting, in the same style and by the same author, portrays two more disciplines. This is an unconventional image, but smart Prometheans may read it as the representation of two esoteric sciences making up a sort of *bivium*: alchemy and theurgy. A careful Promethean will recognize a similarity between the figures depicting alchemy and the portrait on the stairs (room E). Indeed Eleutherius had his own visage reproduced in the personification of alchemy, and Athanasius' in the one for theurgy. Finally, an insightful observation will reveal that on the fourth and last wall, a space has been left to hung a last painting, but no trace of such a painting is available anywhere in the house.

• *What are these paintings about?*

The hosts can easily explain that the paintings represent traditional fields of knowledge since the ancient times, particularly the trivium and the quadrivium. The bivium is an addition designed by Eleutherius and Athanasius.

• *Is there a missing paint?*

Indeed by design there seems to be a space for a fourth and last painting, but neither John nor Beatrice are aware of such a painting anywhere in the house. They have been wondering, though, what it could have been. Some sort of final form of knowledge or wisdom?

- *Is the laboratory in use? Can we work there?*

Both John and Beatrice are skeptical anything of use may be gotten from alchemical research, but they would not mind the characters doing work in there. Out of curiosity they would still ask what they plan to do and what they expect to achieve.

R. Corridor. A carpeted corridor leads from the stairs to the main bedrooms upstairs (room S,T). Elegant wood panels cover and partition the walls. A single painting hangs near a window. It is picture retrieved from Martin's house by Beatrice and brought here in the early 1880s. It is a traditional depiction of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, painted according to a traditional Italian style. A small signature in the lower right corner, *Agapiya*, reveals the authorship: the work was made by Beatrice Vasari, wife of Martin. The Galateid always felt a strange attachment to this painting, possibly due to the fact that she was meant to replace the human Beatrice. The painting has been placed in this safe spot on the upper floor, visible anytime John or Beatrice are visiting the Upper Main Library.

- *Who is the author of the painting?*

Beatrice will at first offer an obvious answer: *Agapiya*. If the players assume she is the author, she will not make explicit efforts to deny it, as she feels something of her identity is hidden behind that name. In case of further questioning, though, she would go on to reveal the true identity of *Agapiya* as her creator's wife.

- *What is this painting?*

Beatrice would suggest her own interpretation of the painting: it depicts the condition of the Prometheans. If surprised by her explanation, Beatrice would invite them to think whether they are not in a condition where they lack something as important as that heart in the painting. John is particularly sensitive to this reading. For both of them this image is a reminder of an essential lack of something.

S. Athanasius' Room. This room had been occupied in the past by Athanasius. Although Eleutherius wanted to decorate it as richly as his own room (room T), he accepted to have it modeled according to the more sober tastes of his disciple. The room still contains some of the possessions and the notes of Athanasius, but it is conceived of mainly as a guest room - although very few strangers ever show up at Bleak Manor, and even less decide to stay overnight. Indeed in the room there is still a double mattress, on which a set of bed sheets and linen had been folded and left undisturbed for a long time, as if waiting for someone to come rest here. Similarly, two closets have been emptied - part of the content disposed, and part

taken over by John - as if to provide a visitor with space where to place her own belongings.

On a large desk, a collection of books and notes concerning alchemy, esoteric knowledge and Native American traditions has been piled together, again as in an effort to make space. The handwriting of the notes belongs to Athanasius. A cursory look at them will reveal that large part of his studies seemed to have been devoted to an intersection of the Hermetic ways with the wisdom of the Native American tribe to which he belonged. A closer inspection will reveal, buried deep among other notes, the recordings of Athanasius about the experiment that had brought John to life. This reading will reveal the hope of Athanasius of resuscitating his master, and his consequent disappointment. A sense of desperation and despondency characterizes the last pages of these reflections.

Promethean are welcome to use this room as their own during their sojourn.

- *Who lived here?*

John will not make a mystery that his creator resided in his room. However, his answer will be short and dry, possibly avoiding referring to Athanasius by name. He now has even feelings towards his creator, but he still prefers to avoid the topic. He may be induced to talk more about him if the Prometheans were to share similar experiences about their own creators.

- *What was the desperation that took hold of Athanasius?*

John is aware that the desperation felt by Athanasius was due to his own failure in bringing back to life Eleutherius. This is something that actually puzzles him and for which he may seek the counsel of the players: how can someone be desperate because someone else is what it is?

T. Eleutherius' Room. This richly decorated room used be the bedroom of the founder of the house: Eleutherius. He himself designed the content of this room, from the lavish four-poster bed with marble-looking columns to the closets with golden inlays, from the bookcases decorated with wooden gargoyles to the bureau with its lockable partitions. However, the splendor of the room has been partly compromised by decades of abandonment. Neither Athanasius nor John had made much use of the room since his owner passed away. The bed has been unmade, but thick red curtains still hang around it. The closet contains several sets of rich clothes following the fashion of the late 1700s. The bookcase hosted rare books Eleutherius acquired in Europe as well as his collection of notebooks, but these works have been decimated and sold out during the last years of Athanasius' life. The bureaus lies now open, the ink dried, and the very last memories of Athanasius unevenly scattered. Reading these notes is now difficult, partly

because only fragments of them survive and partly because incoherent in their content. Prometheans may still gather that whoever wrote them was prey to a visceral fear of dying.

This room too is considered by John and Beatrice as a place where guests may rest.

- *Who lived here?*

John never knew Eleutherius, so he will just explain that the room belonged to the master of his creator, a person of great power and knowledge, who came from the Old World and lived for more than a century. John learned quite a bit about Eleutherius from Athanasius, and if the characters are particularly inquisitive, he may reveal to them particulars about Eleutherius' quest for knowledge and immortality.

- *How come the notes are incoherent?*

This is something John had meditated about for some time. It is as if a great mind had been crushed by time. Is it possible that living too long may be a curse?

U. Upper Secondary Library. The last and smaller library in the house contains books on the subjects of philosophy and religion. High wooden bookshelves cover the four walls, while a large oaken table stands in the middle of the room. Similarly to the lower library, disorder reigns in this room; many of the bookshelves are indeed partially empty, as many books have been removed and left on the central table or scattered on the floor around the room. An old chimney is also occupied by various tomes. The local collections focus particularly on texts devoted to Medieval philosophy and theology, although Prometheans may easily find any classical work of ancient philosophy. Several of the texts collected on the central table seem to be related to the *Divine Comedy*, including contemporary commentaries and catalogues containing representations of Dante's journey. Many of these catalogues are open on images of Hell, but a few of them are held on pictures of the meeting of Dante and Beatrice (see Figure 11). Under one of these images, a note has been written: "Io sono lo Principio della pace (Vita Nova)", meaning "I am the principle of peace (New Life)".

- *Who is reading the Divine Comedy?*

John had been reading the *Divine Comedy* on and off in the past years. He has been fascinated with the topic of the journey through Hell, Purgatory and Heaven, and its intricate imagery. May this be a representation of our Pilgrimage? Is man on a Pilgrimage too?

- *What is the note "Io sono lo Principio della pace (Vita Nova)"?*

John will just explain that it is a quotation from another work of the same author of the *Divine Comedy*. It is a reference to Dante's Beatrice, which John has momentarily identified with Beatrice. However, this identification is a profoundly human act of which John himself is not consciously aware. He has written those words, and believes those words to be meaningful, but he

may have hard time explaining why.

THE CABIN

A rough wooden shed in the garden, this cabin is a place that John uses as a small carpentry, or simply where to meditate. John began constructing this place just after coming to life, but the work was actually finalized only after he came back to Bleak Manor with Beatrice.

The cabin has large windows and lacks a proper door; as a Promethean, John does not mind the cold, and prefers for the light to come in instead of shutting it out. Walking around the building allows the players to get a fairly clear idea of what is inside the construction. A large and sturdy working table is mounted facing one of the windows. Likely, if John is inside, he would be standing at the table, measuring, sawing or planing wood. Although usually deep in his work, John is quite alert and aware of the surroundings: if anyone passes near the window, he would probably spot the movement.

Beyond the working table, the cabin is crammed with planks, branches and random pieces of wood. Mostly, they are raw pieces of wood still waiting to be transformed. The floor is covered in chips and splinters. John never cleans or sweeps the floor, as he appreciates the sound of wood chips creaking under his feet.

A few artefacts are spread here and there: a chair with slightly uneven legs; a thick walking stick, probably meant for a very robust man or a Promethean; some spoons and mixed kitchen tools that probably never saw any use.

Among the rough content of the cabin, one object of great refinement will catch the attention of the Prometheans. On one side of the working table, there is a small model of a theater. It has the size of a puppet theater, but the scene is populated by a few miniatures of acting characters and background elements. The miniatures are detached and can be moved around: there are two old figures holding rakes, three or four noble- or priestly-looking characters, and a couple of pine trees. The detail and the care of each element is stunning; whoever carved this little theater must have had enormous talent and put extreme care in its realization. A Promethean knowledgeable about theater or Eastern literature will recognize the subject as *Takasago*, a Japanese Noh play about the eternal relationship between two spirits personified by two pines. John had the opportunity to read the play while traveling with Beatrice, and it made a deep impression on him. Since the return to Bleak Manor, being unable to find a copy of the work, he had been working

on this small miniature theater to perfect it and to reenact the story in order to preserve its memory.

- *What is the subject of the miniature theater?*
John can tell the title of the play, but he will be shy in explaining the content. If bothered by the guests, he may try to get rid of them telling them to look for the book in the Lower Library, although he knows there is no copy of it. If the characters have his trust, John may summarize the story for them. Alternatively, the characters may ask Beatrice. She has actually seen John reenacting the story in that same miniature theater, and she will be more open to explain to them the plot.
- *What is the meaning of the miniature theater?*
The miniature theater is clearly an objectification of the doubts and the struggle of John along his Pilgrimage. However, he is unable to express this very human feelings in a verbal way; unless the characters talk to him at some length, his answers will remain mostly evasive. Similarly, Beatrice will be unable to put into words the reasons and the feelings of John, and she will probably suggest the characters to ask him directly.

THE CEMETERY

A small area in the north-western corner of the garden is reserved for a few simple tombs. A dead oak casts its shadow over this little cemetery. A bush of white orchids, uncommonly resistant, is the only trace of life and vegetation. Very rarely, John wanders around this area and ponders about his creator.

- *Who is buried in the cemetery?*
This question may prompt John to narrate part of the story of Eleutherius and Athanasius. The level of details will depend on the trust and the questions asked by the players.
- *How do these white orchids survive?*
The truth is that neither John nor Beatrice know why these flowers have not died. It remains an open question for them, and they try to appreciate the mystery of it. This bush is actually the source of the orchids that are sometimes displayed in the dining room (room I).
- *Is there no tomb for Martin?*
After exploring the cemetery and observing all the memorials for persons related to John, the players may ask Beatrice why there is no tomb connected to her. She will explain that Tammuz are inherently closer to the ground and to tombs, but that is not the same for every Promethean. Some prefer to preserve the memory of a person in a work of art, or in a flower. Certainly the players must have similar feeling, isn't it?

Eleutherius first tomb. The most impressive tomb is constituted by a refined marble slab. On its surface, a professional carver has engraved the name "*Eleutherius*" together with a cross, the date "1837" and the epitaph "He lives in the earth".

The tombstone was commissioned by Athanasius after the death of his master, and the epitaph expresses his desire to let his teacher live again in the form of a Promethean.

This wish had been clearly frustrated, and the sentence had remained there as a sort of warning.

- *What is the meaning of the epitaph "He lives in the earth"?*
John may just pretend not to know, but if willing to answer he will explain that it refers to the arrogance of Athanasius, believing that Eleutherius could go on living in this clay - and saying so he would point to himself. But could really anyone live in someone else?

Eleutherius second tomb. Nearby Eleutherius' first tomb, a second rougher tombstone is planted in the ground. This is a cheaper stone slab, on which a series of cuneiform characters have been traced by a less expert hand. Promethean whose memory contains traces of cuneiform can make out the sound of the word as "*Eleutherius*".

This second Eleutherius' tomb has been erected and engraved by Athanasius after the realization of his failure in extending Eleutherius' life and personality into a construct. The tomb does not really contain anything, and has a purely symbolic value. John sometimes stops in front of it to meditate on his existence.

- *Why two tombs for Eleutherius?*
John will challenge the Prometheans with the question of whether someone could die twice. If they believe so, then this one is Eleutherius.

Spirit-of-the-Earth tumulus. Beyond the oak, a small elevation of the ground reveals to a knowledgeable Promethean the presence of a tumulus. The construction is smaller than a real tumulus, but a few features, like a pseudo-entrance, betray the artificial nature of the mound. The reduced size may suggest to the players that the tumulus does not contain any body. Indeed, this symbolic mound had been constructed by Athanasius in memory of Spirit-of-the-Earth, and to commemorate the debt of gratitude he had towards his first master and father figure.

- *Whose is the tumulus for?*
John can explain the character that the tumulus must have been erected very late by Athanasius, since it was not there in John's early days. Yet, probably it is never too late to erect a tomb and make peace with your past, isn't it?

Life-from-Under (Athanasius) tomb. Side by side to the above tumulus, another tomb has been dug out in more recent time. Because of the absence of any vegetation growth, the Prometheans may still notice the perimeter of the digging. Here, upon returning to Bleak Manor, John buried the skeletal remains of

Athanasius. At the head of the tomb, John has placed a simple wooden cross on which it has hung a plank with the inscription “Neither free, nor immortal”. The epitaph is a play on the meaning of the name of his creator and his master, and it is meant as a sort of memento for John himself.

- *What is the meaning of the epitaph “Neither free, nor immortal”?*
John would smile and respond that we should all try to find a meaning for this statement. Are we, as Prometheans, ever free? Or really immortal? And what of us, if we were to attain humanity?

EPILOGUE: LAPIS PHILOSOPHORUM

As it should be clear, the Pilgrimage of John and Beatrice has brought the two Created together. Their *Lapis Philosophorum*, the key to mortality, their *Aquae Vitae*, the balsam of human life, is hidden in the realization of their mutual importance. Such an unspoken feeling is what led them together to Bleak Manor in 1918. In the quiet and hopeful Vermont evening they discovered that their key to humanity was there, unseen but within their grasp. Each one could donate it to the other. But, this was also the moment that hope went two ways. While glimpsing at this secret, they had a bitter foretaste of the human condition: while each one would gladly attain humanity for oneself, would they offer humanity, with its burden of mortality, to the other? Facing each other with a devotion that in everything - except word - was love, they froze in front of the question whether an eternal farce of life would not be preferable to a finite existence condemned to an end. With these question hope fled, and they settled lost in their existences between the timeless walls of Bleak Manor. To the players is left to follow the steps of these divergent paths, learn from John and Beatrice, and possibly pilgrimage further with them.

DISCLAIMERS, REFERENCES AND SOURCES OF INSPIRATION

The locale of Brandon and the plans of Bleak Manor has been inspired by real-world sources:

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brandon,_Vermont
- http://quarriesandbeyond.org/states/vt/pdf/vt-town_of_brandon_new_englnd_mag_11-1897.pdf
- <https://www.therowleystates.com/stay/hall/melmerby-hall/>

A few notes on the works referenced in the game:

- The name of the house is taken from *Bleak Manor*, a novel by Charles Dickens.
- The quotation *Is there something more than death? Some other end to friendship?* in Prague’s journal comes from a poetic rendition of the poem *Gilgamesh* by Herbert Mason.
- The sentence from *Vita Nuova* by Dante Alighieri: “Io sono lo Principio della pace” (“I am the principle of peace”) placed in the Upper Secondary Room is actually misquoted. The original is “Io sono a vedere lo Principio della pace”, meaning “I am in front of the principle of peace”, referring to the fact that Dante’s Beatrice is now dead.

Finally all the characters and their relationships are purely fictional.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

- *Original story*: Byron the Bard
- *Proofreading*: Byron the Bard
- *Playtesting*:
- *Layout*: DnD 5e LaTeX Template (<https://github.com/rpgtex/DND-5e-LaTeX-Template>)
- *House Plans*: eTeks SweetHome 3D (<https://www.sweethome3d.com/>)
- *Cover art*: *Kiitsu Takasago (detail)* by Suyuki Kiitsu (author), Fraxinus2 (photography), licensed under public domain, retrieved at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kiitsu_Takasago.jpg

FIGURES



Figure 1: *Coat of Arms of Cardiff (Capital of Wales)* by Felipe Fidelis Tobias (digital art), licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0, retrieved at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Coat_of_Arms_of_Cardiff.jpg#/media/File:Coat_of_Arms_of_Cardiff.svg



Figure 2: *The Rape of Proserpina* by Gian Lorenzo Bernini (author), Architas (photography), licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0, retrieved at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Rape_of_Proserpina_\(Rome\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Rape_of_Proserpina_(Rome).jpg)



Figure 3: *The Rape of Proserpina* by Hagesandros, Athenedoros, and Polydoros (author), Waterborough (photography), licensed under public domain, retrieved at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Laocoon_Pio-Clementino_Inv1059-1064-1067.jpg



Figure 5: *Hermes Trismegistus* by Pierre Mussard (author), Tomisti (photography), licensed under public domain, retrieved at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:HermesTrismegistusCauc.jpg>



Figure 4: *Peplos Kore (so called)* by Unknown author, Marsyas (photography), licensed under CC BY-SA 2.5, retrieved at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:ACMA_679_Kore_1.JPG

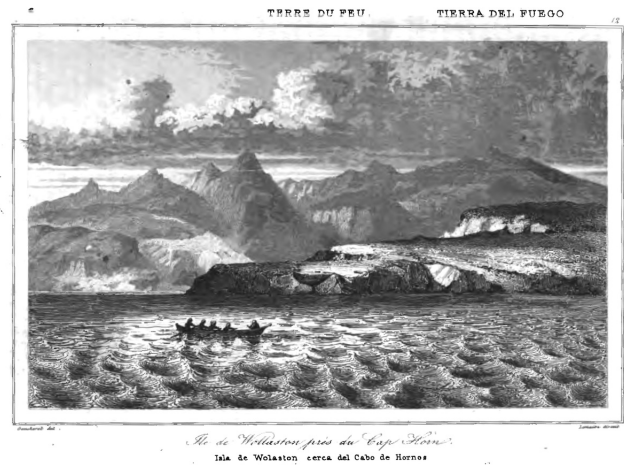


Figure 6: *Historia de la Patagonia, Tierra de Fuego, é Islas Malvinas (page 65)* by Frédéric Lacroix (author), Shooke (photography), licensed under public domain, retrieved at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Page65-Historia_de_la_Patagonia,_Tierra_de_Fuego,_%C3%A9_Islas_Malvinas.png



Figure 7: *Orpheus en Eurydice* by Virgilius Solis (printer), Mr.Nostalgic (photography), licensed under CC0 1.0, retrieved at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Orpheus_en_Eurydice,_RP-P-OB-54.652.jpg



Figure 9: *Orpheus and Eurydice* by T. Burke (author), Wellcome Images (collection), licensed under CC BY 4.0, retrieved at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Orpheus_and_Eurydice._Colour_photogravure_after_T._Burke,_17_Wellcome_V0035930.jpg



Figure 8: *Eurydice Bitten by Serpent* by Regius (author), Bibi Saint-Pol (photography), licensed under public domain, retrieved at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Regius_-_Eurydice_Serpent.jpg

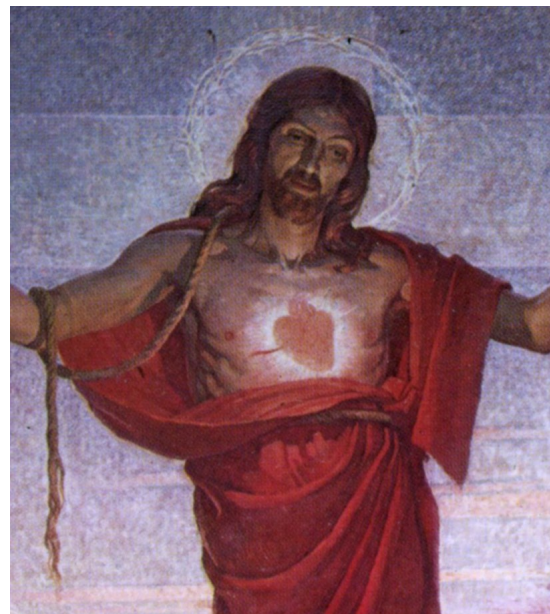


Figure 10: *Sacred Heart being adored by Blessed Mary of the Divine and Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque (detail)* by Corrado Mezzana (author), Bremond (photography), licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0, retrieved at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:HerzJesu_mit_Droste_zu_Vischering_und_MMA.jpg



Figure 11: *Dante and Beatrice from Houghton Library Inc 4877 (B), leaf C iii verso (detail)* by Catablogger (photography), licensed under public domain, retrieved at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Houghton_Library_Inc_4877_\(B\),_leaf_C_iii_verso.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Houghton_Library_Inc_4877_(B),_leaf_C_iii_verso.png)

HOUSE PLAN

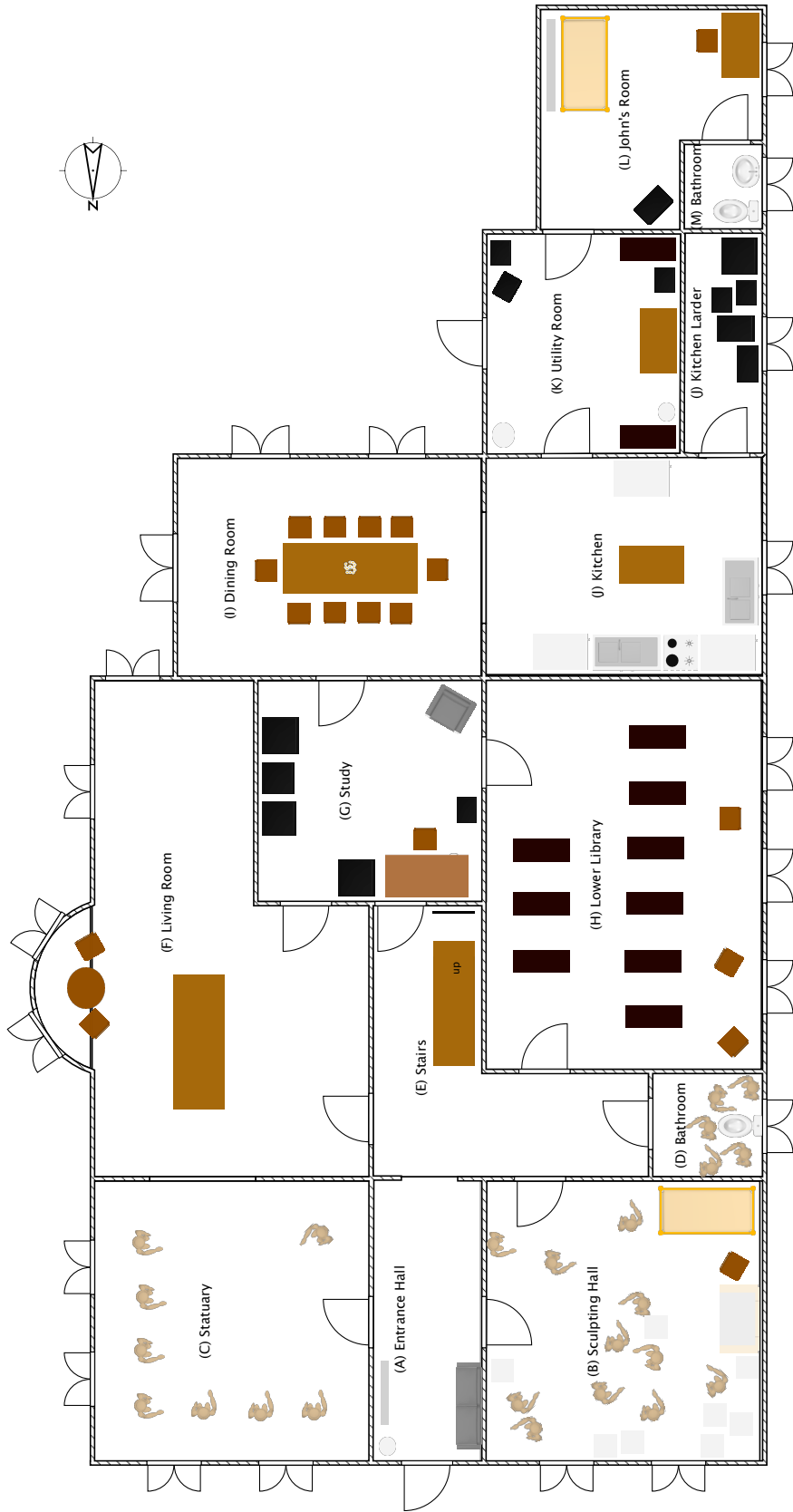


Figure 12: Bleak Manor. Ground Floor.

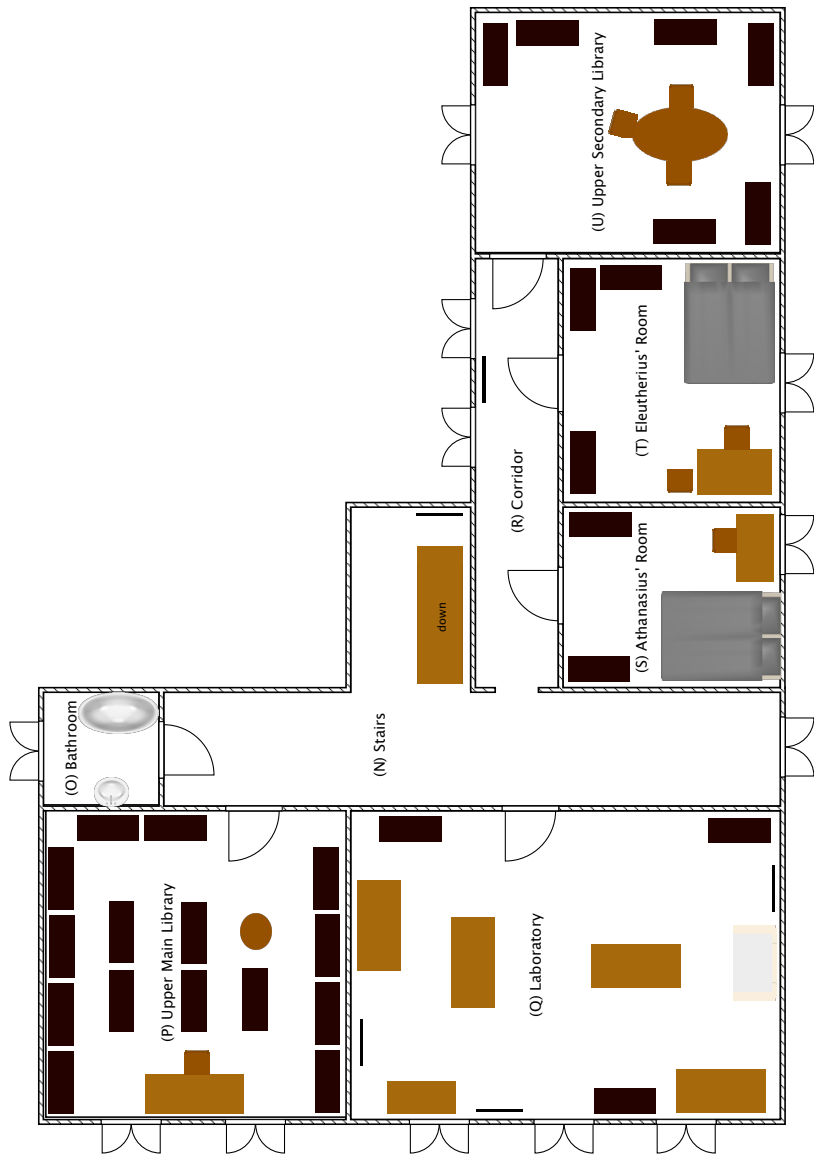


Figure 13: Bleak Manor. First Floor.