

PIETOR'S  
NOTEBOOK

# *Thera's Tale*

a story from Kerwin Rabbitroo

**Dark  
Enchantments™**  
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*The rain fell slowly over the forested valleys of Eastern Gaul. Pietor adjusted his broad hat and continued plodding along the road. His fur was soaked and caked with mud, but he paid no mind. Other thoughts engrossed him so totally that no amount of physical discomfort could dislodge them. It was growing dark and he was hungry—the grey roofs of Alven could be seen from the next rise. . . .*

## Thera's Tale



**I**t was widely suspected by the villagers of Alven that Thera de Monlier was a witch. Despite this, her unusual practices with the occult arts were overlooked by most, for she was the town's only physician. When the Spotted-Death swept through the countryside, agonizingly killing all who contracted it, her village was spared. Thera had produced a miraculous elixir which she sold to all those who could afford the steep price she had set. Many families were bankrupted, but they survived.

The squire's family was another matter. A few short weeks before the outbreak of the disease, the Squire d'Alven had proclaimed that all practitioners of the mystical art were no longer to be tolerated within his ancestral domain and that all such persons were to be dragged from their homes to answer for their crimes. The sheriff did haul in Old Gurdie, but she was deemed insane by the King's Judge, Artuer Gasteur, who ordered that she be returned to her home unfettered. No one, not even the

sheriff, would dare to bring such a matter to the attention of Thera de Monlier. That would have been the end of it, except for the Spotted-Death that tormented the landscape.

The disease was first reported in the seaport of Westlin and worked its way over the countryside with the rapidity of wild-fire in a dry August. The villagers panicked at the news of an outbreak just a few miles beyond their town's steep walls. They ran to the stone residence which had been erected by Thera de Monlier's maternal grandfather, the Baron du Olsein as a present for her grandmother. It was not far from the town, but the unusual bangs and flashes which erupted from its walls at irregular intervals kept away all but the most bold or the most gravely in need.

Alfonse the Silversmith was the sole member of the village on friendly terms with Thera. He had known her most of his thirty years and could not help but be intrigued that the physician who could have been no less than sixty by his father's reckoning had maintained the aspect of someone only in her late twenties. Indeed she was quite beautiful with a slender grace that marked her of elvish kin. Even her ears seemed oddly pointed, but again they seemed to suit her and complement her strange beauty. Alfonse was also alone amongst the villagers in that he knew for certain that Thera de Monlier was indeed a most powerful sorceress. Like many in her profession, she decided it wise to front for her experiments in arcane arts by presenting a philanthropical or harmless facade to the population which dwelled near her home. Many of her like were regularly practicing as physicians, teachers, accountants, fortune-tellers and entertainers. Alfonse

had even heard rumors that there were certain wizards working secretly as attorneys, though Thera found this difficult to credit.

He decided to call on Thera about lunchtime. Alfonse knew she would best tolerate his unannounced visit towards midday. In any case, he was only person that she would allow such liberties with her time. Anyone else arriving unannounced might risk her wrath. "It looks like they'll soon be callin' on your specialty, Terri," he said as she greeted him at the door.

"Yes, I've heard it said that the Death is already upon the Cather farm. We have a few days still," replied the enchantress.

Old Gurdie ambled out of the woods carrying a tattered wicker basket and talking to herself. "Eres the weeds, milady," she drawled, removing from her basket a cluster of bulbs or tubers that resembled tiny onions and offering them to Thera.

"Thank you, my dear. Now see if you can find some fresh Fox-nips, the brown ones with the oddly narrow stem," replied Thera.

The ancient crone flashed a toothless grin at Alfonse which made his skin crawl and shuffled back towards the unmapped forest. When she was out of earshot, he said, "It's a lucky thing that she was judged mad and not a witch."

"Luck had nothing to do with it!" snapped Thera, her eyes narrowing like a feline ready to pounce. "I had to bribe Gasteur to free her. If it wasn't for that fat hog of a Squire, the Sheriff would never have risked my wrath. He'll regret the day he decided to cross me!"

When the villagers arrived at Thera's home, she announced that she had a cure and protection against the Spotted Death. She charged them exorbitant amounts, but they gladly paid hav-

ing heard about the agonizing torments of those in the Death's painful grip. Even the Squire's men came to acquire potion for their master. Thera especially enjoyed charging them double. Alfonse remained at her house throughout the afternoon, helping to appraise the value of the rings, necklaces and bracelets that many brought in place of scarce coin. In a single day Thera de Monlier had become the wealthiest woman in the province.

Her potions worked quite well. The Spotted Death passed by the village of Alven and into obscurity. Shortly afterward, the Squire's family broke out in a mysterious rash which pockmarked their skin. Several times the Squire's men came to Thera's home and each time she sold them a salve which alleviated the Squire's strange condition, but only for a few short days. Each time they returned she raised the price, slowly bankrupting the squire's meager treasury. When at last all the gold was gone, she started taking the Squire's possessions in trade for the thing which could alleviate his suffering albeit temporary. Unable to pay for servants, the Squire himself took to coming in person to beg for a cure.

When, at last, the Squire was too weak to come himself, he sent for the enchantress though he had nothing to left trade but his wife and daughter. Thera only laughed at him. "A pity that you believe the practice of magic so evil. It could have saved you from the crawling disease which is slowly consuming you," she told him within the great hall of the Squire's manor.

The Squire weakly supported himself with a cane and begged Thera for her aid. The walls around them were lined with ancient portraits and sculptures of his great ancestors. While he pleaded, Thera cast her glance about the room until her eyes

came to rest on a frieze of special interest. In it was depicted a group of people before the vast mansion that was the Squire's present day home. The people portrayed did not interest her as much as a creature off to one side. It look like a unusual sort of kangaroo, the likes of which she had not seen except in her books of distant lore.

"What's that?" she asked, interrupting the Squire's pleas.

He looked up and examined the picture. "That's my great-great-great father Eliza d'Alven's household. It was commissioned shortly after he built this house and founded the village."

"Indeed. What is that creature on the right?"

"It was a family pet. Great-Uncle Solset called it a 'rabbitroo' once. . . ."

"What became of it? Where is it now?" asked Thera.

"It was put to rest in the family vaults more that a two hundred years ago."

Thera turned to leave, placing a bottle within reach, "Bring me the remains of its body, I will provide you with an effective cure for your condition."

"But wait, the vault . . . It may take days to find it . . . I can't disturb my ancestors!" he cried.

Without pausing to argue, Thera said, "I'm sure you'll manage. I'll await your visit tomorrow, but do not linger. The disease that eats away at you accelerates over time until not even a robust cure can save its victims. The potion I'm leaving with you will give you a day's vitality with which to accomplish your task."



The next afternoon, the disheveled squire arrived with his wagon hitched to an ancient nag. A large burlaps sack was heaped in the center of the wagon's bed, while all around them hung a the musty odor of the long rotted dead. The smell was thick in his clothes, but worse from the wagon. "I've brought that loathsome thing you've demanded," he wheezed.

"Excellent!" enthused Thera. "Bring it inside at once and receive your reward."

Weak with exhaustion, the squire shouldered the ponderous sack and clumsily followed the sorceress inside. He dropped the noisome bag on the carpeted floor and gasped, "Please, the cure. . . ."

"But of course, where are my manners?" Thera unlocked a glass-doored cabinet filled with crystal vials and decanters. She took down three identical flasks of beautiful cut-crystal and handed them to Squire d'Alven. "Here is what you seek."

The shivering noble uncorked the flask and downed the thick liquid without hesitation. He sighed in relief and breathed a subtle prayer of thanks.

Thera smiled as slowly his eyes grew wide and he coughed while gasping his chest and then his throat. He sank to his knees gasping for breath as if he was drowning. "You're fortunate," said the sorceress. "You'll die a quick death while your wife and child will slowly die of the crawling disease which invades their mortal essence."

Stricken with the hollow sensation of the poison, the squire gasped in comprehension unable to speak. He tried to rise, perhaps in some murderous attack on the sorceress, but the poison

dragged him back down and then he collapsed as the last breath was squeezed out of his lungs yet no air could penetrate the vacuum to refill them. Thera de Monlier stood beside his prostrate form and said, "Perhaps in the next life you'll speak better of magicians and their trade!"



Little remained of the D'Alven Rabbitroo. A few scraps of its fur remained, but no other tissue, its flesh having long since decayed to dust. "The fat fool even lost its skull. . . ." she mumbled, poking through the remains. The bones, however, were in excellent condition. Undaunted by the relatively poor condition of the find, Thera spent the next several days fitting the jumble of bones back together and setting them in an upright stance on a exhibition pedestal.

While she worked, a simple plan began to take shape: *Since I have the skeleton of a rabbitroo, I am already well on my way to obtaining a complete creature, she reasoned. I can use the skeleton as a guide for developing a finished creature. All I would need to do is to use my healing magic to reproduce enough living tissue to reform the organs, muscles, and hide. Perhaps I could even use the flesh from living kangaroos and rabbits to build a synthetic version of the creature.* The more she pondered, the more she realized that she would need extensive information about the creature's anatomy so as to make her ersatz rabbitroo flesh as accurate as possible.

She displayed the finished skeleton in a prominent spot of her workshop and then embarked on an intensive review of all the information she could gather on rabbitroos. One by one she scanned each of her zoological texts, hoping for some clue as to

the creature's origins. Frustratingly, those scarce authorities that offered any remark of substance about rabbitroos tended to conflict with each other on the creature's makeup as well as its origins. One authority flatly stated:

*These creatures commonly referred to as "rabbitroos" are little more than an interesting European relative of the common red kangaroo found in abundance on the continent of Australia. The folklore that suggests that these beings are possessed of supernatural or magical properties is purely without serious foundation.*

The great zoologist Albertus Klax, schooled as a magician and explorer, wrote in one of his travelogues:

*The creature known to us as a rabbitroo is unusual in the animal kingdom, for it is possessed of sufficient mental power and instinct to manipulate the ether to its own ends such as by spontaneous use of teleportation to evade capture or harm.*

Perhaps what frustrated her most about the zoological texts was their lack of detail. The authors would say "like a kangaroo" or "like a big rabbit" but never really illuminate their comments with useful detail, or better yet, a diagram.



Some weeks later, Thera was in the town of Alven to purchase fresh food and supplies for her workshop. As she was leaving the bakery, she spotted an unfamiliar stall set up at the far end of the main street. Curious about the weather-beaten wagon beside the stall, she ventured closer and saw a distinguished-looking gentleman writing notes in a stitch-bound sheaf of paper.

His fingertips were lightly stained with ink and his face had a vaguely Eastern cast. He smiled broadly to reveal a gold-capped incisor.

When she was within speaking distance, he said, "Good morning, milady."

She peered at his booklet and the other books that sat on shelves behind him. "What is it you sell? Books?" she asked.

He smiled again. "Very special books. Books of wisdom from all over civilization, from every corner of the Empire."

She smiled perfunctorily. "I see."

"I have many tomes that might interest a refined woman such as yourself."

"I'm afraid I've accumulated more books than I'll ever have opportunity to read."

"Then perhaps there's a special subject that interests you. I have many specialized books and references."

Thera paused. "Perhaps you might have something of use to me. I'm looking for materials on a creature known in these parts as a rabbitroo."

"Hmmm . . . I haven't had much call for such material. Give me a moment." He removed a leather case from his coat pocket from which he withdrew a set of gold rimmed spectacles, then he consulted several of his stitch bound booklets.

Thera noticed that these booklets contained writing in numerous languages, many of which were unknown to her.

The sage reviewed his notes for several minutes. "Yes . . . yes, I do indeed have something that might interest you." He disap-

peared into his wagon and emerged seconds later with several heavy tomes and a chart case. “These were taken from the keep of Kinberg Wornstet, the great philosopher-mage shortly after his death, some thirty years ago,” explained the encyclopedist. “Perhaps you might find these of interest.”

Thera carefully opened the first tome and to her delight saw that the book dealt almost entirely with the subject of rabbitroos. All the details were there: the various types, breeds, habitat, diet, and anything else she cared know about the creatures. Another of the volumes appeared to be a book of magical spells and rituals. Inside the chart box were several large diagrams detailing rabbitroo anatomy.

The sorceress didn’t haggle with him—when he asked for thousand pieces of gold, she hurried to her home and returned with gems easily worth his asking price, if not a bit more. She impatiently waited while he gathered up the books for her, wrapping them in a fine cloth embroidered with the mark of his guild. “May the knowledge contained in these tomes bring you enlightenment,” he smiled as he handed her the bundle.

*Once Thera was well on the road back to her keep, the sage returned to the comfort of his wagon. Dropping the guise of a human, Pietor resumed his familiar jag-legged shape, his heavy tail lashing with the stiff discomfort that the illusion of a human form imposed upon him. He brushed out his floppy ears with a paw, reseated his broad-brimmed hat and grinned.*



Thera wasted no time in hurrying home with her prize. She placed the charts on the wall of her study and set to culling forth

every secret bound-up in these rare books. In one book she was delighted to find that a rabbitroo's special abilities did not lie in its head. This was confirmed by an experiment of a wizard in employed by Grand Duke Cannut III:

*Experiments have shown that garments such a cloak or boots made from the hide of a rabbitroo are ineffective protection against the ravages of space-time travel. In particular, it is virtually certain that a rabbitroo's teleportative properties are incontrovertibly intertwined with the creature's life force. Thus, its body must be alive for its teleportative powers to function.*

*Experimentation has shown that variants on the rabbitroo's form have been acceptable. One such experiment involved the complete replacement of a rabbitroo's head with that of a dog. Despite the grafting of the two, no reduction of the rabbitroo's temporal-spatial nature was detected. Other experiments have demonstrated that other superficial aspects of the dog could be added to the rabbitroo without loss of that nature, yet major combinations which involved supplanting the basic shape of a rabbitroo ended in a sharp loss of its teleportative abilities. This suggests that so long as the fundamental geometry of the rabbitroo is retained other combinations would be possible, yet little experimentation has yet to be undertaken.*

One book confused her—a book of magical spells and rituals. Given her knowledge of the arcane arts, she found herself unaccustomedly confused by the techniques described in the manuscript. *No human can do this!* she thought frustratedly. She continued to try to work out the spells in the book, for the ritu-

als it described were extremely powerful. *With spells like these, I could be the most powerful magician in the province!* she thought ambitiously. All her attempts at repeating the spells failed, the power slipping away from her body in the wrong ways, ricocheting about her fingers in unusual patterns. Though the spells were clearly powerful, she lacked ability to channel the energy through her body in the manner stipulated by the spell's instructions.

It was early evening some days later—darkness had begun to creep over the land. Not the least bit tired, Thera lighted an old brass lantern and continued to work into the night. Gradually she found herself grown increasingly sleepy, but she forced herself to stay awake. Little by little she had begun to understand the true nature of the rabbitroos.

She awoke in the dimness of her study about midnight. Taking another volume from her recently acquired books down from the shelves, she began to read. To her surprise, the pages that made up the last half of the book were all stuck together as if from intense age combined with moisture. She turned to the back half of the book and found the first of the stuck pages. Trying to free it, Thera found that it was more than stuck, it had deliberately been glued in place. Using a scalpel she carefully began to separate these pages, to find that the pages were only a front; their centers had been cut out to form a hidden compartment. Inside this compartment was a silver necklace and a tiny small scroll of paper, wrapped with a faded black ribbon.

She studied the spell and her eyes widened in amazement. "It cannot be," she murmured as she read through the lines. Before her eyes danced the very spell of reanimation she had sought. It was clearly a reconstructive spell of great power—it promised

to “restore life to lifeless bones.” Her head swam with the intricacies of the tiny scroll and its amulet of power. The complexities overwhelmed her so that although she could understand the broad outline of the spell, she couldn’t fathom its workings. Trembling she picked up the amulet and put it about her neck. Her finely honed sensitivity to things magical tingled with delight. “It is still imbued with power,” she mused with excitement.

Rising to her feet she crossed the room, still clutching the scroll. “Now your secrets will be revealed,” she told the lifeless skeleton. Gathering the mana about her, she began to chant the spell.

A glow of power manifested itself around the rabbitroo bones as Thera felt her energies merge with the amulet to transform and twist the mundane world. The amulet pulsated with a cool blue glow of its own. Energy pored onto the silvery metal surface and began to coalesce into powerful force. Thera felt the powerful energies and stepped back from the rabbitroo skeleton, trying to put some distance between herself and vortex that now swirled around the lifeless bones. The energy continued to take shape and Thera felt herself being drawn by the vortex. She nervously took another step back from the glowing skeleton.

Too late, Thera felt her own flesh seized by a powerful magnetic attraction. She turned to flee her own spell, but the power radiating from the amulet had already engulfed her as well. She struggled against the titan forces as she dropped to the floor and tried to blindly crawl away from the vortex of energy. Straining against the spell’s powerful pull, she screamed in terror as the flesh began to rip from her body.



Thera's mind suddenly snapped back into consciousness. It was morning and she was alone in her study. On the floor was a singed piece of charred parchment and tarnished amulet of ancient design. She cast her glance towards the display stand where the rabbitroo bones had been kept, but all that met her gaze was an empty platform. What's happened here? Thera pondered as she groped to remember the previous night's experiment. Looking away from the platform, she turned focused on the other side of the room and gasped. Stretched out on the floor was the headless skeleton of a woman, picked clean as if it was never graced with muscle and skin.

Trembling she looked down upon her own body and discovered the result of her experiment: the rabbitroo skeleton was indeed now clothed in flesh—her own. She whimpered in horror as she looked at her once beautiful body, now twisted into a fleshy parody of a rabbitroo.



*The skies seemed to clear to the south as Pietor made his way alongside the woods which bordered an ancient farm. Adjusting his hat, he smiled to himself as he considered his handiwork. "Some day, I should return to Alven and see if that silly sorceress ever learned to hop!" he chuckled, slipping quietly into the wood's dim shelter.*



*<http://www.mindspring.com/~rabbitroo>*

*Thomas H. Traubitz, Publisher*