

**THE ADVENTURES OF BLACK MASK AND PALE RIDER**  
**A TALE OF SIX GUN AND SORCERY**  
**BY TIM HOLTORF**



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Black Mask & Pale Rider, Shani Wennemein and Pania Alow are copywritten by Tim Holtorf 2009.

## PART EIGHT

**M**orning came quickly upon the small village. As the sun began to peek over the horizon, many of the townsfolk were already full into their chores for the day. They worked together as a community, ensuring that they would survive. Neighbours would help neighbours, keeping everyone sustained with all the essential necessities. All but two residents of the village were busy with the beginning of their day. The other two, happened to be a pair of elven gunslingers.

Shani pushed her hair out of her eyes and stretched as she yawned. The sound of a rooster crowing greeted her as she slowly opened her eyes. Pania was right, the nightshirt was comfortable, and the feather bed was a great deal more comfortable than the chair ever would have been. She rubbed her eyes and began to move, but heard a squeak of protest as she did so.

“Five more minutes,” the muffled voice of Pania sounded out. It was then that Shani realized something very, very strange. She looked down and furrowed her brow as she saw the tiny hands of the elven bard wrapped around her waist. Shani huffed slightly and rolled her eyes as she lay back down.

“Ya moved the pillows,” she stated matter-of-factly.

“Mhmm,” Pania replied in her muffled voice. Shani could tell that the small elf did not have her head buried in a pillow, but against her shoulder.

“An' the extra blanket.”

“Mhmm.”

“We never done nuthin' last night, did we?” Shani inquired in a mildly annoyed tone. “I never started drinkin' 'r nuthin', did I?”

“No,” Pania said as she sighed and moved her head to speak more clearly. She was smiling broadly as she gave Shani a squeeze.

“Cut thet out,” Shani remarked as she looked over her shoulder. Her nose came only a fraction of an inch from Shani's, and she could see the look in Pania's eyes. She quickly moved to look back at the door to the bedroom. “An' git thet thought outta yer head. C'mon, we gotta git up.” Pania reluctantly let Shani's waist go, stretching as she lay in the midst of the feather bed. Shani lazily walked over to the wash basin and ran water through her hair. “I smell breakfast bein' cooked. Two good meals in less 'n a day.”

“Cannu argue wit' tha',” Pania said with a smile as she rolled out of bed and waited for Shani to be finished with the washing basin. “Jus' wonder when we gotta go o'er the details o' the clutch.” Pania plopped down in a chair as she waited, watching Shani with some mild interest and smiling slight. Thoughts rushed through her mind, and she only sighed slightly. Give it time, she thought to herself. “An' I wonder wha' these 'orses are tha' they say they found,” she finally said as though trying to change the subject in her mind.

“Be nice if they were ours,” Shani said as she moved over to her clothes. She began to lift her nightshirt but stopped and looked toward Pania. “Y'all kin look the other way now,” she said as she arched an eyebrow. Pania sighed heavily and moved to the wash basin, busying herself with a quick morning clean up. Shani shook her head and rolled her eyes as she began to dress. The only thing she was thinking about was breakfast, that was enough. She had no interest in whatever filled Pania's mind.



**B**reakfast was filling. Eggs, bacon, fresh bread, and a large bowl of oatmeal. Much heartier than they normally would have had. The pair of elves found themselves much more lively because of it. They could easily settle down here and forget about home, their own families, and live out a peaceful life. But they really never would fit in. Elves, they were considered different without a word spoken, and gunslingers to boot.

But right now, gunslingers is what this village needed.

The elders had gathered in the village square as some of the younger men brought out two large chests. Shani and Pania just watched as they opened the chests revealing a large number of weapons. Frederick stood beside them, explaining what needed to be done.

“We'll prepare the weapons,” he said in a soft tone to the two elves as he watched the proceedings. “These weapons have been with many of the families for generations, brought with us from Europe. They hold a special meaning, and we believe if they are used they will give a greater deal of luck to both of you.”

“Magic o' this world,” Pania said quietly. Shani nodded wordlessly in understanding. While these people did not know of magic as the elves did, they still had a magic all their own. “May'ap this'll 'elp t'ward vanquishin' the evil foun' 'ere.”

Frederick looked over to Pania, his brow furrowed as he tried to understand her words. “Ya kin feel it,” Shani explained to him. “There's somethin' dark in the woods when ya ride. Jist like a naggin' feelin' at the back o' yer skull.” Frederick nodded slowly, understanding exactly what they meant. He'd felt that feeling many times before.

“The location of the clutch we know of all too well,” Fredrick explained. “Fifteen miles north of here, the forest grows dank and thick, and the mist rises. As you draw closer, you will suddenly see your goal. It is very rare for anyone to return alive from such a journey, but we have been fortunate to have one survivor.” Frederick bowed his head as though in prayer. “Even if it cost him his sight.” Those who had gathered remained silent as though any word spoken would be a travesty against

this one man. Shani and Pania refrained from speaking during this time. Flip remarks and quick wit were not what they needed right now. Frederick looked back to the two elves as he spoke, changing the topic to their current goal instead of misfortunes of the past. "You two will head out on the road after the noon meal."

"Um..." Shani said as she raised her hand slowly. "Whyn't we jist head out, I dunno, maybe now. Catch 'em durin' the day. Whiles theys all 'sleep in their coffins." She looked to each person for some confirmation of the logic she tried to convey, but found no reassuring looks. "I'm gonna go out on a limb an' say that's b'cause thet'd be easy."

"Ye cannu see the castle durin' the day," a voice called out. Slowly, a middle aged man hobbled forward, leaning his weight on a cane as a woman, more than likely his wife, assisted him. A blindfold was wrapped around his eyes. Both elves immediately knew that this man was the lone survivor spoken of earlier. "Only by the light of the moon, will the vampire's castle make itself known."

"Great," Shani huffed as she looked to Pania. "Why is it supernatural boogety boos always gotta make things hard."

immensely. But as the elves walked into the barn, it wasn't the weapons they were concerned with.

"Gypsum!" Shani called out with a smile and looked to Dieter. "Them two horses ya found musta been ours." She raced over to the stall and inspected the horse carefully. He was none the worse for wear, and seemed quite happy in his stall as he munched away at his pail of oats. Dieter motioned to Shani and directed her to a pile of gear, neatly packed away. Shani nearly giggled with glee as she found her satchel, still full of the cash from the bank job, all five thousand dollars were still intact as far as she could tell. She put her emotions in check for a moment and patted the satchel. "I'll leave this here," she informed Dieter with a nod.


Dieter smiled and shook his head, but only assisted in preparing the horses. "Don't ride them hard," he finally said with a helpful suggestion. "You'll need them fresh for the ride back. And fresh just in case you have to return riding hard and fast."

"Aye," Pania said with a sigh and a light nod. "I've go' a feelin' we may be needin' ta do so." She looked over to Shani for some consolation. Shani smirked slightly as she picked up the saddle and walked over to her horse.

"C'mon," the elven gunslinger simply said as she started saddling up the horse. "Sooner we git on the road, sooner we find this place."

"Indeed," Pania offered quietly as she followed Shani's example. As she finished saddling up her horse, she began stowing the extra weapons in easy to reach places, taking care to note where everything was. Once she was finished, she looked to Shani and spoke in a quiet, but even tone. "Inta the mouth o' 'ell we ride."

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**D**ieter opened the doors to the stable as quietly as he could. Behind him, Shani and Pania followed, carrying their new arsenal of weaponry. Adding to the pistols they wielded, and in Pania's case, a rapier, they each carried a crossbow and two quarrels of bolts. The weapons would help, no doubt, in particular, the two gun belts filled with silver bullets. Those would help