

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 ONE

Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, August 16, 1863

The citizens of Harrisburg attended to their usual Sunday rituals. It was a sweltering hot summer day, and while most people didn't want to move there still picnics that had been planned after the church services. The pace was slow, fitting for the day, as people walked down the streets from their homes, or rode in horse drawn carriages to their local church wearing their Sunday best. No one seemed to pay any heed to the wanted posters which seemed to litter the lamp posts and bulletin boards as they tried their best to stay in the shelter of the shade. Reward, they proclaimed in bold letters. Wanted. Dead or Alive. \$50,000. A high price indeed for outlaws. But then most of those in the Eastern Seaboard and well into the Midwestern United States knew the name of the Black Mask all too well.

For some, it was from tales of infamy, this black masked rider, robbing stage coaches and banks across the Midwest and into the Eastern States. Threatening the lives of those who would dare stand against her. Yes, there was that as well. This highwayman, was in fact a woman.

It was that fact alone that the dime store novels called *The Adventures of the Black Mask* sold so well, making a little known author a good deal of money for his work. Avid readers would clamor for the latest adventure to read what their "heroine" would do to get herself into and out of trouble.

She became as popular as she was infamous. It was that fame that caused a rift between the public and the federal lawmen trying to catch her.

Neither the law men, nor the public, had any idea what the Black Mask was really all about. Only Shani Wennemein did.

She rode her horse slowly past the church, almost as though she were in solemn prayer. She didn't believe in the religion or the gods of this world, but she would at least respect them. No stealing from a church. No shooting a minister. No gun play in the halls of a cathedral.

Though there was nothing in the good book that said banks were out of the question. Shani smirked as she looked up, taking a tug on the cigarillo as she steered the horse toward the First National

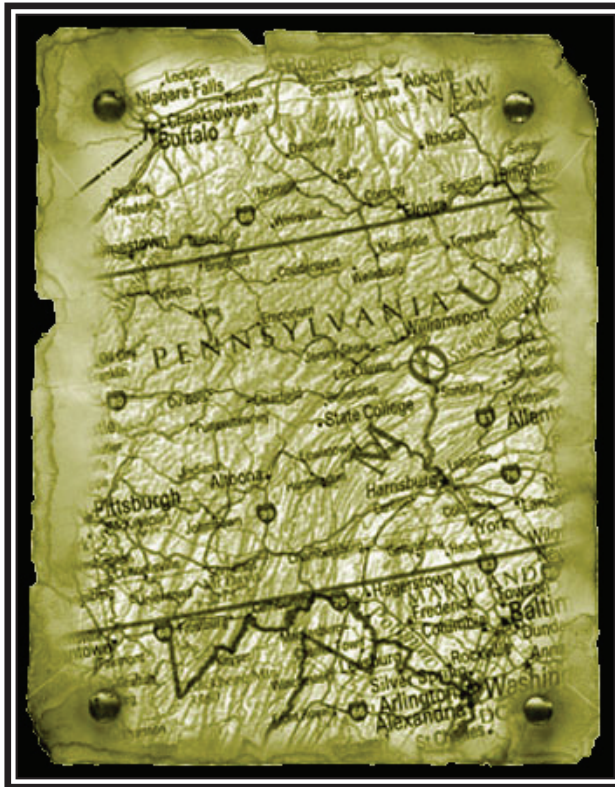
Bank and Loan building. Very few people took notice of her as she stopped the horse in front of a tavern. She casually dismounted the horse, not bothering to walk toward the establishment. It was Sunday it would be closed. She kept her long coat buttoned, hiding the pair of six guns that hung at her hips. Weapons she had grown used to wielding only three short years before when she first found this plane called Earth.

Someplace between hell and amazing grace, Shani would often call it. Here on Earth, she came to raise hell. The thrill of the chase. In a place where her brother could not corral her and lecture her.

She tipped her hat as a few citizens passed her by. People would remember a kind smile and warm eyes more than the fire and brimstone that the preachers in the church would call her. The thought of her relation to a demon. They would often mistake her elven heritage for that of a demon or devil. These humans were always so quick to judge. No wonder the Indians had their problems with the European settlers.

Shani flipped out her pocket watch and checked the time. She scanned the streets and watched the last of the citizens entering their churches to pray, and a smile formed on her lips as she looked skyward. "Well Lord. Can't say I worship ya none, but I gotta pray ta make certain ain't no one git in my way as I liberate this here bank o' it's funds. There's people out there

more needy 'n these here that could use this ta survive." As she clicked the pocket watch closed, she raised the black mask over her face and unbuttoned the long coat. Time for the Black Mask to go to work.



♥♥And I looked, and behold a pale horse," the preacher cried out from the pulpit, fist held high in the air, his voice filled with fire and brimstone. "And his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth." The preacher fell silent as he looked out upon the congregation, the pause in his sermon acting as dramatic effect. "Friends,"

he finally said in a softer, more friendly tone. "I speak to you of these words from the Book of Revelations, because I have seen that very rider." He held his hand high and his voice raised slightly. "Nay, I have seen two of those riders. Just as you have seen them. You see them on the wanted posters, which I have heard decorate newspapers and bulletin boards from here to Tombstone. The Pale Rider, and the Black Mask." He paused again, letting this information sink in to the ears of his parishioners.

"To date, these two have been a plague on our society," the preacher announced. "They are everything that the Bible teaches us not to follow. Just last week, it was heard that Black Mask ransacked a caravan, laying waste to all those who rode the carriages. And Pale Rider. She aids the savage Indians that have fought us in the past." He paused again as he rested both his hands on the pulpit, studying his congregation intently. "These actions themselves are nothing, compared to their... suspect lineage, my friends. Should you ever have seen them as I have, they both have rather pointed ears. Pointed ears, I say." There was a small gasp of shock from the congregation, encouraging the preacher to continue. "This alone proves they are demons and devils set upon this earth to thwart good God fearing men and women."

The congregation was riveted to every word, not even blinking as he spewed forth lies of his own. Uneducated drivel, as some might say. But this revelation would not have stopped him. Because he had God on his side.

"I ask each and every one of you to pray now," he said in a solemn voice that only grew as he reflected the fire and brimstone of his heart. "Pray that these heathens are captured, and they in kind face God's mighty wrath."



Pania Alow tossed the duster coat to the ground and rolled up her sleeves. Hokolessqua had taken a bad hit by a rancher's bullet. The metal shard had cut through a major artery, and the bleeding was bad. She quickly worked, covering the wound with a cloth and pressing her hand against it to quell the flow. Two of the Shawnee braves that brought Hokolessqua to her tried to help her, but her patient was struggling against the pain.

"Fire water," one of them suggested.

The pale elf shook her head. "I'll no' use whiskey ta deaden the pain. No' when them Europeans 'ave been tryin' ta push it onta ye." She reached to her boot and pulled a knife from a small scabbard and sighed as she looked into Hokolessqua's eyes. "This is gonna 'urt." She looked to the pair of braves as they took firm hands to hold down Deer Chaser as Pania did her work. The pale elf took a deep breath and nodded to Hokolessqua. As he nodded back, she quickly straddled his form and took her hand away from his wound, the blood soaked cloth falling slowly from the bullet wound. She had to

move quickly, stabbing the dagger into his shoulder. His voice cried out in pain as she dug for the bullet, one of his companions at the ready, hand hovering over a hot iron to cauterize the wound after the small elf finished. Hokolessqua's eyes rolled back as his screams of pain fell short as he succumbed to unconsciousness, just as Pania extracted the bullet.

"NOW!" she shouted, and the brave closed the wound. Pania moved back, grabbing a basin of water to clean the now closed wound. She felt along Hokolessqua's neck, finding a weak pulse. "E'll be fine. Jus' get 'im back ta the tribe, an' le' 'im rest fer a time."

"What of you?" one of the braves asked. "Law men chase you. They will always hunt you."

"I know," Pania said as she sat back against a large rock. She used the remaining water in her canteen to wash the blood off her hands, wiping them clean with a handkerchief. "Jus' b'cause I give aid ta savages." She sighed to emphasize the sarcasm in her voice. These Indians weren't savages, they were people just like the Europeans who came to settle here in this new world. The Europeans were just too blind to see. "No' many places lef' ta run, mind ye."

One of the Shawnee braves slapped her on the shoulder and smiled. "For what you do for our people, we will always offer you shelter."

Pania nodded as she offered a kind smile. She looked as Hokolessqua began to rouse from his force slumber. "Careful, lad," she said with a gentle warning. "Ye'll still be in a bit o' pain fer a while." She held out the slug she dug out of his shoulder to him. "A souvenir o' ye day."

Hokolessqua gingerly took the slug and studied it as he furrowed his brow. "Odd something so small, hurt so much."

The pale elf only nodded as she rose to her feet. "Bes' be off m'self. I'd start movin' yeselves. Slowly, mind ye. Never know wha' the lawmen 'roun' 'ere gonna do ta three like ye." She grabbed her gear and walked to her horse, giving one last look back to the trio. A tip of her hat and a small smile was all that needed to be said, and she mounted the chestnut mare with ease and began moving south.

After all, Harrisburg might be nice this time of year.

One of the braves rose to his feet and lifted his arm in a solemn wave as she rode on. "Watch the trail, Pale Rider."



The steel bars that stood in front of the bank vault were no match for Shani's skill with a lock. The padlock, as new as it looked, was easily picked and quickly gave into the elf's lithe fingers. Now it was time for the vault, and this would be much more difficult, but not by much.

Her keen elven ears listened closely, ear pressed

against the cold steel of the vault, as the tumblers dropped into position, turning the combination lock slowly until the final click could be heard. Shani gave a small laugh as she opened the vault. "This here's easier 'n stage coaches," she whispered to no one in particular. Her enthusiasm was clear, this would be the biggest haul of her short, yet storied career on Earth, and she hadn't even toured Europe yet. Her attention was focused completely on the bags of money that had been sorted the previous Friday. She smiled to herself as she gazed over the sacks and piles of crisp new bills. Only a few would need to be taken, no reason to be that greedy. Besides, there was a small farming community in the western settlements that could use the funds due to the recent drought.

As she filled her satchel, she didn't hear the scuffle of tiny feet behind her. In her planning, she never assumed that someone could have followed her inside the bank. This would become apparent in the next few seconds.

"Hi!" the rather excited voice of the child said behind her as she dropped her satchel and reached for her irons. She stopped just as she was about to cock the hammers back and let out a quick breath. Shani couldn't believe that such a young boy had gotten the drop on her. Sloppy, Shan, real sloppy.

"Kid," Shani said tersely to the boy as he grinned happily. "Y'almost got yerself a gut fulla bullets." She holstered the long barrel Colts and picked up her satchel, keeping an eye on the boy. "What the hell ya doin' here anyhow? Ain't ya s'posed ta be in church now?"

"I snuck out," he replied with a grin. "Yer the Black Mask, aintcha?" He seemed way too excited to be meeting one of the United States most wanted criminals. "I wanna ride with ya!"

Shani was about to start walking out of the vault, but the boy's words made her stop rather quickly. "No!" she said with a great deal of force. "I ain't yer mamma, an' I ain't 'bout ta take some wet b'hind the ears kid with me on the run. What I do's dangerous, an' I ain't 'bout ta risk the life o' some kid."

The boy frowned slightly at the rejection, he almost appeared as though he was going to start crying. "But you risk yourself every day."

"Yeah," she replied quickly as she began moving out of the bank. "B'cause I know what the hell I'm doin'."

"You take me with ya, 'r I'm tellin'!" the boy shouted at her.

"Yeah, y'all go 'head an' do thet, kid," Shani scoffed as she loaded the satchels onto the horse. The quarter horse chuffed in minor protest, knowing that he'd have to bolt at a full gallop soon enough. "Like anybody's gonna b'lieve ya thet I'm in..." She stopped speaking as she settled into the saddle. The boy was gone. She scanned the streets for the nine year old, only the tell tale sound of the church doors slamming gave her any indication where the boy had gone. "Well... shit!"

Pania let the chestnut mare follow the trail without any coaxing. After all, she wasn't unfamiliar with the territory. The female elf that had become known as Pale Rider to the tribes was used to carrying medical supplies back and forth. In a way, Pania was a stage coach robber as well, hitting only coaches that carried medicines and supplies. She took only what was needed, and often the stage coaches carried an excess of supplies. It was these actions, as well as giving them to the Indians, that made her wanted by federal law. She wasn't sure what the price on her head was, but if she could save a few people, it was all worth it.

Her mind wandered as she sat in the saddle. She was tired, it had been a hard few days of riding, and only more coming in the next few days. New Orleans was a long ride to the south. She supposed that pissing in the United States government's oatmeal wasn't enough, she might as well do it to the Confederates as well. The war had been raging for two years, all over slavery, and she planned to get involved. No better way than getting involved in the Underground Railroad. Besides, she knew a few trails that lead to the British Northwestern Territories.

Pania's thoughts were so focused on what she wanted to do, she didn't think about what she needed to do. So it came as no surprise that she found herself suddenly surrounded. Pania only sighed as she looked over the uniforms of the Union soldiers. Her face lit up with a smile as her gaze stopped on one of them, evident that she recognized him. "Mornin' Capt'n Williams," she said in a voice that sounded like a song. "Nice ta see ye out fer a ride with the boys on such a fine day. Wha' bring ye out this way?"

"Pania Alow," Williams announced without fail, ignoring Pania's greeting. "Also known as the Pale Rider. You are here by bound by law. You will be placed under arrest, charged with robbery, aiding the enemy, and murder."

"Murder!" Pania shot back with some shock. "I think ye been readin' 'em dime store novels too much, Capt'n. I've no' drawn blood bu' in self d'fense. Sure, I put down a couple, I'll no' lie 'bou' tha'. Bu' they were scoundrels wha' done thin's far worse 'n anythin' I done."

"You will be taken to Harrisburg," Williams continued. "Where you will await transport to Washington where you will stand trial."

"Ooo! 'Arrisburg," she said with a coy grin. "I were 'eadin' tha' way anyway." She moved her horse closer to the Captain, stopping only when the soldiers cocked their rifles. "Easy, boys. I'm no' the Black Mask, I'm no' a quick draw specialist." She looked back to Williams with a playful glint in her eyes. "So, shall we ge' goin' then. I'd like ta see the President 'ventually. After all, I'd like ta speak with 'im 'bout the slave trade in the south."

Williams opened his mouth to speak, but found he couldn't. He had been told Pale Rider was a dangerous



criminal, blood thirsty and would stop at nothing to escape. But here she sat on her horse, waiting to be escorted. “Uh... this is... rather unexpected.”

“Wha’?” Pania replied with a laugh. “I were goin’ ta ‘Arrisburg anyway, an’ ye ‘ave yer orders ta take me there. It’s a win-win situation, ‘far as I can see.” She casually looked over the soldiers with a grin. “C’mon boys, chop chop. Dunna fall b’hind.” She steered her horse down the trail, stopping only to look back at

Williams and his men. “Ye comin’ ‘r no’?”

Eventually Williams motioned his soldiers forward. Pania’s actions still confused him. The ride along the road confused him even more, as he listened to Pania hum gospel hymns as they sauntered along. What he didn’t know was that Pania’s calm and gentle demeanor was actually a ruse. After all, she had to ditch her armed escort somehow, and she plotted and schemed as she kept her horse on pace with the other riders as they lead her along the road to Harrisburg.