

**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 SIX

The pair of elves walked the moonlight road quietly. Who knew what lay in the forests along the path they walked. Each said very little, as they both wondered just who it was that might have taken their horses. Captain Williams wouldn't have done this, he'd have roused them from sleep and had them both in shackles by now. Pania took out a flask as she walked, pointing out a small bridge five hundred yards ahead.

"Village beyond tha'," she said as she took a swig and passed it to Shani.

"Maybe they seen the horses," Shani remarked as she took a drink. The sudden rush of an unexpected liquid touched her tongue and she coughed heavily, grimacing as she pulled the flask away. "What the hell's this?"

"It's water," Pania said casually and then grinned. "Expectin' whiskey?"

Shani just grumbled as she screwed the cap back onto the flask and passed it back to Pania. The lithe elf had been walking just slightly ahead of Pania, so when she passed the flask back, she had a full view of the road they just traveled. And then she saw something.

Shani stared in wonderment, and slight fear as she whispered to Pania. "Bein' followed."

"Huh?" Pania questioned as she turned to look where Shani was gazing. There, on the road, was a solitary figure. Slight of frame the figure seemed to be there, but not be there at the same time. Under the light of the full moon, he seemed to glow eerily. "Oh gods," Pania whispered as her hand reached for her rapier hilt. As her hand drew closer, the strangest and most terrifying thing happened. The figure was about one hundred yards behind them. In a blink of an eye, he was suddenly five yards away.

Then he bared his fangs.

"Jist run!" Shani shouted as she smacked Pania's shoulder. The action was enough to rouse the pale elf from a hypnosis of wonder, and then something else took her over. Fear, and a sudden need for survival. "Gods damn vampires! I thought here on Earth they was jist all legend an' myth."

"Figure tha' isna so," Pania replied as her feet carried her faster and faster. Still it felt like she was trudging through molasses in January. The covered bridge grew closer and closer.

"Keep runnin', girly girl," Shani tried to encourage. She didn't look back, but had a nagging feeling that Pania might have been attacked. She wasn't sure. "We're almost at the bridge, then we git into thet village b'yond."

Pania kept pace with the lithe elf. Shani was fast, but Pania had run a race or two in her time. The pale elf could almost feel the hot breath on her neck as she ran, sending shivers up her spine. Not even the comforting sound of their boots on the wooden bridge eased her.

The vampire was still behind them. Only the comfort of the village would finally allow them a chance to breath easily. "Try fer one o' the 'omes!" Pania suggested as she bolted for a door.

The street was wide, not the usual pioneering town the elven gunslingers had frequented before. They were in Pennsylvania Dutch territory. The buildings were practicle, the street wide enough to let three teams of horses pass with ease, and at the end of the street, almost like a beacon was the church. A Lutheran building, typical of the settlers of German ancestry that settled in this area of the States. The buildings themselves were well built and sturdy looking. Front doors that were not ornate, but had a very welcoming feel. Each house that lined the main street was two stories tall, and the windows on the upper floor had well crafted wooden shutters that flanked the window opening. Smaller homes and some shops could be seen. A small plumb of smoke drifted from the chimneys of some of the homes, identifying which ones were occupied.

The elves tried each door they could, but found them locked, more than likely empty. Or the residents ignored their cries for help. Pania saw shutters on windows closed. They both huddled in the center of the street, fear creeping deeper and deeper into their bones. Desperately, they looked around the town, speaking in heavy breaths, hoping that the comfort of another would help ease their fear.

"Theys all lock up tighter 'n Fort Knox," Shani breathed. "I don't think they like strangers 'tall."

"Wager ye righ'," Pania replied as she desperately searched the village for one house that might allow them entry. It was then that she realized. "The Church! C'mon!" She grabbed Shani's arm, nearly dragging her as she ran. The doors of the church might not be locked, and it more than likely would be their only saving grace. Closer and closer the doors grew, all the while, screams of terror and madness that came from the vampire grew louder behind them.

The vampire was closing in.

Just when they thought the inevitable would happen, the pair of elves burst through the doors, quickly slamming them shut as they leaned against the now strong wood. The vampire wouldn't enter these halls. Shani and Pania would be safe.

However, as they looked around their new surroundings, they would find they would have company.

As they breathed heavily, letting their hearts slow down from the fright they had just endured, they realized they weren't alone in this hallowed of places. Fifteen village residents had taken refuge inside the walls of the church. Obviously, they knew something was happening. Maybe this vampire had been here before.

The vicar stepped forward, studying the pair

carefully. His brow furrowed as he caught sight of the guns slung low on their hips. "Outlaws," he snorted. "You seek refuge inside this building? Yet you bring weapons inside."

"Refuge," Shani panted heavily as she tried to get her words out. "Vampire... outside... chasin' us... hadda run."

"We're jus' wantin' the shelter from the storm," Pania offered in a more complete sentence. "Please, we're no' 'ere ta 'urt anyone..." Her sentence was cut short as the vicar ripped her hat from her head, tilting her head to the side as he caught sight of something else. A thick finger traced the long tips of her elven ears. Pania snatched her hat back and tried to back away, but the vicar was much more determined as he reached out and grabbed her arm.

"Demons," he snorted. "You could very well be working with the vampires."

"Ya know," Shani spat out quickly. "Gittin' kinda tired o' bein' equated ta demons. We're ELVES! Ya know! Like pixies, fairies, sprites an' the like. Fey folk."

"Uh... Shani," Pania said carefully as she tried to speak in an even tone while the vicar cupped her chin in his massive hand. The vicar was not a small man, nor weak, as Pania had discovered. "May'aps keep the roarin' ta a minimum in 'ere." Pleading eyes looked up to the vicar. "Please. We're no' 'ere ta 'urt anyone. We jus' want shelter from wha's outside. It's all we ask."

The vicar let go of Pania's chin and nodded slightly, but with no expression change on his face. "You can stay here until mornin'. Then we expect you to go."

Shani and Pania muttered their thanks then raced to the window, curiosity getting the best of them as they gazed out beyond the small graveyard in front of the church. They gasped as the pale face and deep, dark eyes looked back at them, the twisted smile only made worse by the prominent fangs seemed to grin at them. The elves jumped back with a cry and cowered against the wall beside the window. "Ye think 'e saw us?"

"I'm pretty sure," Shani replied.

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**T**he vampire walked through the graves, just waiting, savouring the scent he had caught from the pair. Sweeter than anything he'd every smelled before. He would savour this hunt, even if it meant he would have to chase them all across this continent. Just feed along the way, and the elves would be his ultimate goal. It was like a high, a euphoric feeling. Their blood would be so sweet, so pure, so filling. His thoughts drifted as he heard the click of a door latch. Turning to the sound, he saw a young woman stepping out from the door way.

"Perhaps I will have no need of the gunslingers this night. My meal has been brought to me. How precious, how lovely. A perfect sample to satiate my lust." He grinned as he slowly walked toward the woman. She was

giving herself willingly, and while the chase often made the blood just as sweet, a willing victim was as exciting. The woman knelt on the ground, shaking as her hands clasped together in prayer. The wind gently touched her white night gown as the vampire stepped closer to her. Whether this girl, who gave herself willingly, or the new blood that seemed full of fight, the vampire would feed this night.

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"E still at the window?" Pania asked in a whisper. The pair had huddled together on the floor, and the closeness of each other seemed to draw some strength for both of them. Shani slowly rose to her feet, eyes peeking above the window sill.

"Holy crap!" she seemed to shout her whisper as she spied what was happening in the moonlight street.

"Shani!" Pania said in a warning voice. "We in a church."

The lithe elf looked to Pania with a furrowed brow. "What? It ain't like I said dangit 'r nuthin'." She looked out the window again, describing what she saw. "There's a woman in the street. Look like some kid. The vampire's walkin' over to her."

"Wha'?" Pania said with shock and scrambled to her feet, gazing out the window. She saw the scene clearly, almost more clearly than she'd like to. "Tha' child's a goner," Pania gasped, stating the obvious.

Shani rose to her feet quickly, drawing both pistols. Those who huddled together in the church stared in disbelief, shocked that someone would draw a pistol in the confines of a holy place. The lithe elf looked to them for a moment, then spoke with reassuring words as Pania joined Shani in a weapons check.

"I ain't one ta let bloodsuckers git 'way with such things like thet outside. Come hell 'r high water, I'm gonna take thet bastard down, 'r die tryin'."

"Then you'll need these," the voice of a young man spoke up. A muscular and tall man stepped forward and held out a small box to Shani. "Silver bullets."

Shani looked over the box a moment before accepting it with a nod. "I take it y'all been roughed up by this one b'fore."

"The clutch of vampires has ravaged our community for years," the vicar explained. "Once a fortnight they steal one person." He hung his head as he described the situation.

"They?" Pania remarked as she loaded her pistols with silver bullets. "So there's more 'n jus' the one. Ye tried fightin' back?"

"Yes," the vicar replied quietly. "But it is difficult. These are just the brood. They are lead by one much stronger."

"Well," Shani stated as she finished loading her Colts. "This'll be one less fer the brood. Thanks fer the bullets, kid," she said turning back to the young man.

"Dieter," he simply said with a smile. "Dieter

Van Bueren."

"Shani," the lithe elf replied as she tipped her hat. "Thet there short one is Pania. Pleased ta meetcha." Shani turned to Pania and offered a grin. "Ya set?" Pania

gave a wordless nod as one hand gripped a pistol, the other held her rapier. "All right then, let's go say hi ta tall, pale an' scary."