

**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 TEN

Shani grinned as she stepped easily into the room, hands held onto her gun belts as she looked about the room. Pania shot her a glance that simply said are ye bloody crazy. Shani just shrugged and shouted out in her usual way. “YEEEEEEHAW! Howdy boys!” The vampires stopped feeding for a moment, looking somewhat bewildered as to why someone so brazenly would enter their domain. One of them slowly rose to his feet, letting the lifeless form of the woman he feasted upon drop with a thud to the floor. Her pale, lifeless hand stretched out as though begging for a rescue, as her vacuous eyes looked to the ceiling. Blood soaked her apron, staining it a deep, dark red.

The young vampire snorted a laugh as he looked to the others of the clutch. He grinned as blood dripped from his fangs and hunger renewed itself with the scent of fresh blood that seemed much sweeter than their current fare. “Look at this,” he said with a laugh as he wiped blood from his lips. “We have a regular gunslinger in our midst.” He turned to face Shani once again. “I suppose you happen to be the fastest gun this side of the Mississippi, too.”

“Hell no,” Shani said with a smirk as she seemed to rock back and forth on the heels of her boots. “I’m the best dang gunslinger this here country ever seen. ‘R will ever see.” As an added exclamation point, she quickly drew pistols and started firing.

As Shani fired, Pania steeled herself and plunged forward, moving to stand at Shani’s back. Pania wasn’t as good a gunslinger as Shani was, but she wasn’t a slouch either. Her timing was impeccable. Just as Shani had run out of bullets, Pania began firing, allowing the lithe gunslinger time to reload. When Shani was ready again, Pania would need to reload her own. The vampires slowed down a great deal with each hit, the poison of the silver working its way through their bodies and slowing them down to a crawl as blood flowed from their bodies like streams of red.

One vampire drew too close to Pania, and she lashed out with a roundhouse kick, landing her boot square in the vampire’s chest and knocking him back and off his balance slightly. This was followed with the report of her Smith and Wesson point blank at the vampire’s head.

“Stakin’ time,” Shani called out as she continued to fire. The small village had prepared them well, right down to some of the innovative weapons they themselves had managed to create. Which included a stake-bracer for each wrist. A quick release on the bracer, and a stake would launch out of a small sheath, shooting it out toward its target at a velocity much like a crossbow bolt. Shani was the first to demonstrate this as one vampire tried draping his arms around her. The stake shot out from the device attached to her wrist and drove itself through the creature’s chest. It lurched back slightly, then fell over as

its body began to disintegrate into nothing.

Pania picked up the pace as she took out another vampire, using her rapier to distract and damage it as she positioned herself to thrust a stake through the creature’s heart. A second one felt the sting of a stake as it tried to advance, but the elven bard was too fast for it, its body slowed by the silver poison’s effect on its system. A fourth one dropped as Shani let a stake fly point blank, smirking with satisfaction as it plunged into its chest. Then there was only one.

“Cut an’ run ‘r fight an’ die,” Shani suggested to the lone vampire with a grin. “Choice is yers, either way y’all gonna be dead by dawn, I wager.” The vampire looked between Shani and Pania, hissing angrily, then bolted for the door. Shani moved quickly, cartwheeling over a chair and grabbing a stake out of an already dead vampire. As her feet landed she drove the stake through the vampire’s back, letting the force of her body’s momentum carry through and push the stake home. The vampire hissed in rage and pain as his body began to become more lifeless than it had before.

The five were dead, and Shani and Pania hadn’t taken a scratch. This was almost too easy. Pania approached the couple cowering in the corner. “Ye alright?” she asked, knowing the answer as soon as she had spoken the words. They were physically fine, but mentally, it would take a while to forget. The woman just looked at Pania, her eyes wide with fright. Pania looked around the room for a moment, as Shani gathered the bodies of the fallen. She’d start the vampire bonfire soon enough.

“Here,” the elven gunslinger called out as she tossed a pair of stakes to Pania. The bard caught them easily and reloaded each bracer, then her pistols as she continued to look around the room. It was an old kitchen, and it seemed as though not much had been updated. Even the cupboards and counters on the walls looked well aged.

Well aged, but the mirrors still worked well enough. Pania stopped as she studied the mirror she spied carefully. “Odd ‘ow a buncha vampires would keep these thin’s, aye,” she commented as she continued to stare at the reflection. In the mirror, she could see a good portion of the room. Including the woman who remained on the floor.

But not the man.

Her ears perked up slightly and she twirled fast and hard, a stake already in her hand. It caught solid in the chest of the vampire, taking him completely by surprise as he let out a gasp of shock. Pania looked into the vampire’s eyes and smirked as his form began to wither. “Elven ears, lad,” she explained easily to the creature. “E’en with ye preternatural abilities, I can still ‘ear a boot scuff on the stone floor.” She planted a boot in his chest and pushed back, sending the creature crashing

to the ground, just before his body disintegrated. Pania looked over to the woman and sighed. Before they had a chance to act, the vampire had fed from her, killing her quickly. "She ne'er e'en 'ad a chance ta scream."

"Hate ta say it," Shani commented as she dragged the last body onto the pile. "But I'd rather not be draggin' victims 'long with us. I hate thet she died, but she's prolly in a better place now. Ain't no one able ta walk 'way from a scene like this an' be able ta act normal ever 'gain." Pania only nodded. It was heartless, but it was true. The elven bard just watched as Shani lit a match and tossed it onto the pile of bodies. It was amazing how quickly they lit on fire, like kindling in a freshly dug fire pit. Pania's eyes studied the room again, until something caught her eye.

A piece of parchment lay by a wood burning stove. Nothing really out of the ordinary, but it had writing on it. Writing that Pania recognized. She bent down to pick it up, covering her nose and mouth as the flames licked higher. Shani grabbed her arm and lead her out of the room into the adjacent hallway. This afforded Pania time to study the parchment closer.

By this time, Shani took note of what Pania had found. "Whatcha got?"

"Foun' this on the floor," Pania said in a slow voice as she furrowed her brow. "An' this mean we're no' the only wanderers." Shani gave the elven bard a perplexed look, forcing Pania to explain. "'S written in elven." The confusion was replaced with shock as Shani slide beside Pania to take a closer look. "Look like it taken from a journal," Pania stated.

Indeed it was.

My needs are met on this plane, it would seem I have found a place worthy of my attention. No wizards or knights to attempt to take me down. These humans are so easily fooled. Only the rare few know of my true nature, my true goals. Those usually find themselves turned, if worthy enough, to add to my army. When the time is right, I will indeed have my army, and we

shall return home, using the portal. Unfortunate that the portal also happens to be the one thing to bind and trap me. Perhaps it is a good thing no one on this plane can read Elven. How fortunate for that indeed.

"So," Shani said with a snort of a laugh. "Dealin' with an elven vampire. Jist great." She sighed as she looked to the tapestries on the walls. "Guess we jist gotta find this bindin' portal 'en. Good thing she never 'xpected a few more elves ta come poppin' 'round."

"There's more," Pania said pointing to the parchment. "Seem tha' this vampire 'as put it in a chamber, uses it like it's own private study an' bed chambers. We jus' 'ave ta find the room, an' then we find the text o' the ritual."

"Figger this vampire'd keep thet information close at hand," Shani replied, sounding more like a question than an actual statement.

"It's worth a shot," Pania said with a shrug as she continued to study the parchment. The writing was very familiar in a way, Pania furrowed her brow as she continued to look over it. "I think I know this." She looked to Shani, her brow furrowed slightly. "Coupla nigh's 'go, I 'ad this strange dream. A woman kept comin' ta me, callin' out ta me. I kept seein' pages from a book." She held up the parchment so Shani could see it clearly. "All wit' this 'and writin'."

"Female elven vampire. Jist great. This here world brings 'bout some o' the worst o' our world, don't it?" The question was rhetorical, the lithe gunslinger expecting no reply as she looked about the hallway they had stepped into. Shani let out a long sigh before she spoke. "So what's the plan 'en?"

"Plan?" Pania replied as she quickly stuffed the parchment into her duster coat. "We find this text fer the ritual an' bind 'er. Failin' tha'..." Pania said with a shrug as she checked her pistols again.

Shani followed suit, replacing spent cartridges, as she completed Pania's unfinished sentence. "Then we jist kill the bitch."