

**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 THREE

Pania watched as Johnson began the chase, trying to head the Black Mask off at the pass. But she had already out maneuvered eight riders bearing down on her, slipping past one was no problem. The pale elf grinned and offered a wave as Black Mask raced passed, and then she waited, counting down from five.

“HA!” she shouted, spurring her mount forward. The maddened posse, combined with the Army soldiers were riding tired mounts. They'd already been racing as fast as they could. So had Black Mask's, but Pania's was fresh. They'd been traveling lightly, and slowly, and it showed as Pania burst into the midst of the posse, keeping pace with them. “Mornin' boys!” she called out, tipping her hat to a pair of deputies. They shared a confused look, then realized Black Mask wasn't the only criminal in their midst.

“P-P-Pale. Pale. Rider!” one of the deputies stuttered as he tried to kick his brain into gear.

“Pale Rider, luv,” Pania finished for him with a grin as she pulled one of her Smith and Wessons from its holster and fired into the ground near the horse's feet. The sudden sound spooked the horse, along with a few others, and they veered off the path. A pair of them jostled and stopped the chase altogether. Pania twirled the pistol easily in her hand as she placed it back in her holster, then reached for her rapier. She rode quickly behind one of the riders from Harrisburg, and gently stuck the rapier against the leather strap that held the saddle on the horse. A flick of her wrist and the rider took a mean tumble, away from the racing stampede of hooves, mind you.

“Johnson!” Pania heard Williams shouting ahead of her. “What the hell are you doing here? You were ordered to watch the prisoner!”

“I'm back 'ere, Capt'n!” Pania shouted as she sheathed the rapier, and spurred the horse forward. She became reckless, slamming her mount into the side of another horse, causing the rider to lose balance and tumble into the dirt. Only the sheriff and a few members of the Williams men were in front of Pania. It wouldn't take her long to catch up to Black Mask.

That is, if she could get away from the clawing hands of Captain Williams, who took a swipe at her. “Capt'n!” Pania shouted out in shock. “Tryin' ta beat a prisoner. 'Ow rude.” She pulled her pistol and fired into the ground near William's mount. The horse swerved and jittered, but didn't completely spook. Williams had good control of his horse. “Dammit!” Pania cursed under her breath and encouraged her horse forward. The other horses were falling behind. Even the horses ridden by Williams' men were slowing. But so was Black Mask's. Pania had to reach her and get her off the road and into the forests. It was probably their only chance at escape.

Shani had heard the gunfire behind her and ducked instinctively. She sneaked a peek back just in time to see a rider tumble to the ground, his horse racing off to nowhere. This confused her slightly, there shouldn't be any reason why that would happen. The answer soon came.

She saw the small rider, mounted on a chestnut mare. Her clothes definitely weren't American. They looked more European, with her thigh high boots, buckles from top to sole, the leather corset and silken blouse tucked neatly under the French looking long coat. The pale skin and lithe features of the woman hit Shani next, and she contemplated this as her horse raced forward. “Thet ain't nuther elf,” she muttered to no one in particular. “Ain't no way. I come ta this plane on my own. Didn't ev'n tell mamma I were comin'.” She sneaked another peek behind her. “Clothes're all wrong anyways. HA!”

Bounty hunter or not, the elf that was coming up hard and fast behind her could be a potential problem. There was no way Shani would simply fire indiscriminately on her. She could be a bounty hunter but what if..

“Dangit! Why didn't I think o' it b'fore?” Of course, she'd seen the dime store novels that were sold right next to the ones about Billy the Kid, Jesse James and even herself. “Pale Rider. I shoul'da figgered so.” She huffed and shook her head as the realization settled in. Still, there was no indication that Pale Rider wasn't in fact going after the reward money herself. It was that thought alone that forced Shani to draw one of her long barrels.

“Got a s'prise fer ya, Pale Rider,” she muttered to herself. “Y'all ain't gittin' no reward money t'day.”

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Pania had just one last rider to race past. This was the deadliest of horse races. A mix of blood-lust and guns, the chasing mob could turn ugly any moment. Not that it wasn't already appearing that way. The pale elf spurred her mount to race faster as she zeroed in on the last rider, inching forward until she was beside him.

“Mornin' Johnson!” she shouted to the rider. Her guard, the last rider. Johnson took one confused look to Pania, and that was all she needed. She reach over, grabbing the collar of his tunic and shoved him hard. His balance in the saddle disturbed, he flailed his arms as he tried to stay up, but to no avail. He tumbled hard as his horse kept running, but had slowed down without the weight of a rider to encourage it forward. “See ye later, Johnson!” she shouted back with a grin.

Now there was just one goal left. “HA!” she shouted as her horse inched closer and closer to the Black Mask. As she approached slowly from the rear,

Pania took note of the position the rider was sitting in. No apparent wounds, she wasn't sitting in the saddle in pain. The pale elf furrowed her brow as she recognized the lay of Black Mask's right arm, and Pania jerked her own Smith and Wesson from its holster.

Closer and closer she inched, her mount's nose slowly creeping forward until finally they were neck and neck. Just in time, as Pania saw Black Mask's motion. She raised her own pistol, cocked and ready, as she found herself staring down the barrel of the Colt. "Best keep tha' iron 'olstered, Mask," Pania called out. "Specially if ye want ta get rid o' these b'hind ye."

"Yeah," Shani snorted a laugh. "An' I bet y'all're gonna help me with thet. Sure. An' the sky's purple, too."

"Think 'bout it," Pania scowled. "Shootin' me's only gonna make me fire 'swell. I'll be dead, ye'll be injured, an' where we gonna be at tha' point." Pania could tell that Shani was considering this information. Without a word, she holstered the pistol and spurred the horse forward for the umpteenth time that morning. Pania followed suit, making certain she was keeping pace with the elven rider.

Behind the pair of riders, there still was a formidable force chasing them, and they still had weapons. This fact became more clear as the sudden report of a rifle sounded out, the bullet whizzing past them.

"Dangit!" Shani shouted out angrily.

"They're terrible shots on 'orseback," Pania assured her. "Couldna 'it the broadside o' a barn."

Shani rolled her eyes at the comment. Great, a comedian. Bet she's a bard. "Take my reins," she said as she held her reins out to Pania. The pale elf took them, albeit hesitantly, and waited for Shani's next move.

The lithe elf showed just how nimble she was, as she twirled her body, still in the saddle, to suddenly face the oncoming posse. "Jist keep the pace, girly girl," Shani instructed as she pulled both long barrels and began firing, hoping that the sudden volley of bullets would be yet another in a long list of discouraging situations for

the posse. Shani fired until both guns were empty, and she holstered them, peeking in front of them again to see what obstacles there were.

"A bridge!" Pania pointed out with a shout. Shani grinned as an idea came to her. The bridge wasn't very big, sturdy enough for a pair of horses, but not sturdy enough for a stagecoach. Which meant it was weak enough to become kindling. Pania watched as Shani pulled four sticks of dynamite from a saddle bag. "Ye in the 'abit o' carryin' explosives wit' ye, are ye?" Pania said with some shock and fear in her voice.

"Ya never know when this shit's gonna come in handy, girly girl," Shani replied with a smirk. She took out her hunting knife and cut down the wicks of the sticks and tied them together with the remaining wick. Carefully, she took out her pack of cigarillos, and carefully lit one of them, taking a quick peek in front to see how far away the bridge was. Timing would be everything. Picking up the four sticks of dynamite, she calculated carefully. The dynamite had to be lit at the right time. She may have been accused of over thirty murders, but she wasn't about to kill off members of the posse indiscriminately.

The posse was a fair ways back from them. Lots of time for the explosion to take out the bridge and leave them to run at a slower pace. Shani took another peek ahead of her, the bridge looming closer and closer. The dynamite hhad to be dropped at the best location to do the most damage so their pursuers couldn't follow. She took the cigarillo out of her mouth and held it close to the wick, watching closely as it flared up quickly. As she heard the sound of hooves on wood, she tossed the dynamite behind her, moving quickly in the saddle as she turned to face forward again.

She took the reins from Pania and spurred her mount again, encouraging Gypsum forward. It was now just a matter of time. Shani didn't have to look behind her to see if the dynamite would blow, it was a given, but there was the nagging sensation that it wouldn't work. "Don't think 'bout it," she muttered to herself. "Jist ride."