

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.

PROLOGUE

The years would roll by, times would change, ideas would conform and new ones would rise up. What was believed to be fact, would soon become a myth. The old ways passed onto the Christian beliefs, as men would war over something as simple as a thought. Always, the one passage would be completely forgotten, in all religions. The basic premise of peace and good will. Perhaps this is why the mythical creatures of the European nations began to disappear. In particular, the fey folk became less and less prevalent. No one questioned this, however, as ideas did change, giving way to new ideas and new beliefs.

By the early 18th century, man had taken a new interest in the stars. New theories were developed. New planets were found, and man's imagination began to wonder. Could life exist from the confines of this earthly realm? Perhaps so, but the answer only lie in the imagination of the dreamer.

In 1802, a little known German astronomer gazed each night toward the heavens. He did so faithfully, each night, as he found what he believed to be a new star never recorded before. He wrote down his findings, but never did he report anything to other astronomers. This new star was like his own lover. At night he would gaze upon it and dream, wondering if the planets that orbited it held any life at all. What would their society be like? What would their practices be? Would they hunt and farm like people on Earth? Each night, he would dream of the star he had called Terra-Kal.

The name held no real meaning, only for him. Terra, the latin for Earth, and Kal, a nickname of a long lost lover. To this little known astrologer, Terra-Kal became his secret desire.

Billions of miles through space, eyes did in fact gaze to the heavens, and eyes did in fact dream with their own wonder, if the tiny blue planet they saw did in fact hold life. Terra-Kal had many similarities to Earth. But instead of human life, it was the elves ruled the land. Long had they forgotten how they arrived on this plane, believing that it was divine intervention from the One a being who cared for them. While only a handful debated philosophy and religion about their very own beginnings, the rest of the populace farmed, hunted, and danced and sang. Students of the arcane would delve into the

depths of ancient tomes, learning how to let the land's magic flow through them. Some would be protectors of the very land itself, while there were those who were connected to the very fabric of existence, others would be there to administer and police. The grand cities of the land needed order, after all.

While the elves of Terra-Kal went about their daily lives, there were still those with adventurous hearts.



Brockton, Festival of Renewal, Year of the Seedling

From far and wide, elves throughout the land would congregate in the town of Brockton. No fighting, no disputes, no arguments. Brockton's festivals were a time of celebration. Each year, two festivals were held, one which saw the graduation of the students from Brockton Academy of Art, and the second which would welcome new students into its hallowed halls. These festivals also celebrated the harvest and the time of seeding for the farmers in the area.

Brockton became a mecca during these weeks long celebrations. Markets were opened, festival tents were set up displaying paintings and sculptures, small stages were arranged as entertainers would take turns singing, acting and playing pieces of music. Often,

it was the recent graduates that plied their trade to those who had gathered. But everyone from every walk of life would come to take part in the peace and tranquility that would envelope the community for this one week.

Dignitaries from across the land would arrive, taking the time to mingle with those of common background. Station and rank meant nothing during the Brockton Festivals. Everyone was equal. This was why the Arch Druid of the Garden enjoyed this time. No bickering with the Magistrates from Stonebridge. No dealing with patrols of Knights through the lands of the Garden. Here, he could bring his wife and children and talk in more enjoyable tones with those from other cities in the realm. Maliki Argith had many friends and cohorts



from the realm.

Karl and Titania Alow, two of the most talented to graduate from the Academy. Long had these two visited the Garden. Maliki learned that Karl had long believed nature was an art and an artist. Because of this, the two became fast friends, even attending each others weddings when the time came. The two talked and wrote letters for many decades.

It was through the festival that Maliki met one other. Skilled in magic, Unia Wennemein had an open mind that Maliki had never before seen coming from someone who lived in the towers that were Stonebridge. Unia was a single mother, her husband killed by a cowardly elf, jealous for her husband's station in Stonebridge. She carried on, teaching at the Mage Guild and raising her two children. When Maliki first met her, he believed that she would be just like any other he had met from Stonebridge. Unia proved him wrong, as time and time again she would be the first to greet him with the kindest and most genuine of smiles.

It was not often that they could all attend the festival together, but Maliki cherished the times when they could. He especially enjoyed it when all of their children could play together. His own son, Waien, looked forward to the festival when he and his distant friends could run together once again. Waien, along with Mandrel Alow and Sywyn Wennemein, had a brotherly spirit, and it made Maliki smile. Even when that brotherly spirit would involve pranks pulled on the two girls, Pania Alow and Shani Wennemein. Much younger than their brothers, they had only recently began playing together.

"I'm goin' ta be a princess," he would often hear Pania announce. "An' I'm goin' ta marry a 'andsome prince someday."

"Me? I... I'm gonna be... I'm gonna own a big library," Shani would boast through her stuttering voice. "I'm gonna have millions of books!"

Maliki would watch with his wife, Cherisa, and with his friends, as the children would pull pranks, play and laugh together. Even when some of those pranks would cause the prissy and prim Pania Alow to let loose with a shrill scream, after her own brother would plop a wet frog into her hair. Shani's brother Sywyn was a bit more rambunctious, as he had the knack for pulling on Shani's pig tails, only to receive a swat from his sister.

"Ya hit like a girl, Shani," Sywyn would tease after receiving such a swat. To which Shani would scowl and pout.

It was all in good fun, really. Maliki enjoyed these times. As he looked upon all their children, he could tell that they would have many great adventures.

orders to ride to Pennsylvania and search for the outlaw known as Pale Rider. For several months, this outlaw had been stirring up trouble from the east coast to the territories, and during this dark time in the new nation's history, such activities had to be quelled. Now he along with his men were assisting local posses in trying to find this Pale Rider.

So far, no such luck.

Williams looked out over the landscape as he sat tall in his saddle. The sun was starting to sink, giving warning that evening was coming on. The group had been searching all day long under the hot sun, and not a single sign of this outlaw anywhere. Private Michael Johnson steered his horse and moved closer to the Captain, gazing out where Williams was looking.

"Not a blessed sign, Johnson," he muttered to himself as he filled his pipe with tobacco. The ritual with his pipe was a sign to the men that he was ready to retire this chase, at least for the evening..

"No, Sir," Johnson agreed, in part to make comment, but also in part to inform Williams that his own eyes could not find a thing either.

"It's like she disappears into thin air," Williams sighed heavily as he looked over at Johnson. "The men are getting restless. It's late." Williams looked over his small command and took a deep breath. "Alright men. Saddle up. We'll head back to Reading and rest and restock. We'll continue in the morning." The men slowly climbed into their saddles and began the trek back to Reading. Another wasted day. Sometimes it all seemed for nothing.

The fields and surrounding marshes grew quiet as the horses hooves began to fade in the distance. Only the call of a few blackbirds and frogs broke the tranquility. One frog began hopping madly to shore as the water of the marsh began to ripple.

The supple form rose from the water easily, and spit out a cat tail reed from her mouth. Her blond hair was matted from water and algae. Slowly, she began walking toward the shore, pulling wet leaves and twigs out of her hair and tossing them aside without care. She stopped a moment as her hands worked a moment in her shoulder length hair, and slowly and carefully she pulled a small passenger out into the open.

"Well now," she said in a soft whisper to the small frog as she held it close to her face. "Cannu 'ave ye there, luv. Though ye may very well keep the flies 'way, I doub' tha' ye'd like it." The frog let out a croak in reply, as if trying to agree with her. She held the small creature close to the water and opened her hand, watching it as it hopped away.

"Gonna need a 'ot bath," Pania Alow muttered as she climbed the shoreline. "An' gonna need me 'orse. Now where'd tha' beast ge' ta, I wonder."

Many years later, in another place

Captain Samuel Williams had been dispatched quickly only three weeks before by the President. Williams, along with a small group of men, had been given

Skeeter Jacobson burst into the small tavern with a wild look in his eyes. He'd been riding, none stop, for two days. The heat from the days of riding and lack of any real food made him a little more than ornery. He was mad as hell, and he was looking for the one that crossed him. He looked from face to face in the tavern, his eyes meeting the cool looks of the gunslingers as everyone treated his entrance with some hesitation. Finally, he saw his quarry. Sitting in the corner of the bar, she lounged in her chair, leaned back against the wall. One hand held a whiskey glass, half full as her stetson covered her eyes. Her right leg lay propped up on the table as she drained her glass and reached for the bottle to fill it again. The only time she looked up was when she leaned forward to place the bottle back on the table. Her face tilted up as she caught sight of Skeeter.

"Well, well," Shani Wennemein drawled as she leaned back in her chair. "I never figgered y'all fer the type ta hold a grudge, Skeeter. Least I figger ya got a grudge, by the look in yer eyes."

Skeeter stood on the other side of the table, his body shaking with anger as he frothed at the mouth with just the very sight of the elven gunslinger. "You cheatin' whore!" he finally shouted as loud as he could. "I give you money ta bed down an' you just run off."

"I done tol' ya the first time, Skeeter," Shani replied in a cool voice. "I ain't one ta sleep with someone fer money. An' I ain't a whore. Ya do rememmer me sayin' thet, right?" Skeeter lashed out with the statement, his hand smashing the whiskey bottle. He was so enraged, he didn't even take note of the cuts the glass shards had made on his hand. "Skeeter, thet were a twenny dollar bottle o' whiskey," she said evenly as she began to rise to her feet. The other gunslingers in the tavern began to make their way to the exit, knowing full well when the bullets would start flying.

"You. God dang. Whore!" Skeeter shouted. His rage was intense as he grabbed the table and tossed it aside, stepping forward to close the gap between himself and the elven gunslinger.

Shani appraised the situation quickly. Skeeter was at least a foot taller than she was, and he stood about an even six feet tall. He was fit to be tied, but his rage was going to cost him. "You callin' me out, Skeeter?" she asked through cleaned teeth.

Skeeter sneered as his eyes widened with the rage he felt. "Yeah. I'm callin' you out." Shani merely nodded and allowed Skeeter to back up toward the exit. She began to walk slowly, watching him. Skeeter made the mistake of looking back to the door. Shani was quick as she drew a Colt, slamming the butt into his temple. Skeeter saw stars as he fell to the floor. He tried standing

back up, but felt a boot in his mid section that knocked the wind out of his sails. Once more, he tried to rise, only to fall righ back to the floor as a bottle smashed over the top of his head.

Finally, he looked up bleary eye to see the business end of one of Shani Wennemein's Colts. "Ya godsdamned lucky I'm in a charitable mood, ya sonofabitch," Shani hissed, as she held her weapon in a firm grip. "Otherwise, ya'd have a bullet plugged through yer brain pan an' I'd leave ya on the floor ta bleed." She quickly twirled the six gun and holstered it, then dropped to a crouch in front of Skeeter. "Whyn'tcha do yerself a favour, Skeeter. Git the hell outta here, b'fore I stop feelin' so charitable. Unnerstand?" Skeeter nodded shakily as he began to realize just how lucky he was. "Good. Now git outta here. Crawl outta town on yer hands an' knees an' back ta the rock ya come from."

Skeeter Jacobson began to crawl out of the doorway of the tavern, his sobs beginning to come forth as Shani just watched him, a lithe hand hanging near her gun belt. As soon as Skeeter had left the establishment, Shani pulled out a hundred dollar bill from her money belt and slapped it on the bar. "Bar keep. 'Nuther whiskey bottle. An' jist keep the rest ta buy a fancy new table fer yaself." The bar tender nodded as he grabbed the bill and retrieved her whiskey. As the elven gunslinger took her bottle and sauntered back to her chair, she looked to the doors that Skeeter had just crawled through. "Fight like a girl my ass."



A crowd gathered as three lawmen stood at the bulletin board. One was hammering up two new posters. Already, the board had been covered with other announcements and posters. Most of them wanted posters for gunslingers, brigands and cutthroats wanted in the area. These two new posters were no different. As the lawman who posted the bills finished, he turned to look to the gathered crowd, addressing them in a loud voice.

"By order o' the United States government, the outlaws known as Black Mask an' Pale Rider are hereby wanted, bound by law," he called out as his deputies flanked him, watching the crowd carefully. "It's advised that ya do not approach 'em, but if you do ever find yerselves having ta face 'em, there is a fifty thousand dollar bounty on each o' their heads."

"Dead 'r alive, gentlemen," the lawman added. "Anyway ya see fit."

Let the adventure begin