

**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 FIFTEEN

Shani grew worried. It had been a while since her last conversation with the Huntsman. He hadn't made himself as accessible as she would have liked. There was one thing she found in this creature that seemed to be a very human quality, one shared by many elves as well. A raging ego. He already had one elf, but he wanted the other as well. Pania reserved her thoughts to the fact he was using her as bait.

There was something else about this huntsman, something that didn't sit well with Shani at all. His arms protected his chest, which seemed to glow a ghastly green, when he made his appearance. Perhaps that was the key to his destruction. Maybe, like a lich in some ways, he carried his own brand of magic to keep him alive for so many years.

Shani could test the theory, if only her hand could move to reach her long barrel. For now, she would wait, perhaps in time she could find the will to move, and finally end this.



Wisps of smoke filled the air as Pania walked along. She knew there was ground below her feet, but she couldn't see it. The blackness was everywhere. And she felt so alone. Just as her body began to shiver, a reassuring hand clasped her shoulder. Pania turned quickly, somewhat comforted to see the massive frame of Martin Derringer. She watched his eyes as they turned from her to gaze out into the black.

Pania turned to see if he had seen something beyond the blackness. Slowly, a scene began to form; a massive wall that stretched out for miles. Peasants traveled the road that ran along it, and men in gold armour with red cloaks and shields of bronze patrolled the wall. She looked back to Derringer for a moment, speaking in a near whisper, only made more ghostly by the vision they watched. Where are we?

Hadrian's Wall, he simply said. The year is 66 A.D. Legio II Augusta had completed the wall that pushed the Scots north. He motioned with an open hand toward the scene as several riders approached in the same regal armour as the guards that lined the wall. Keep watching.

Pania looked back to take in the scene fully, and her eyes widened as she saw one soldier dismount a massive war horse. His hair was jet black, his olive skin only made his armour gleam that much more. He was a handsome man, well built and strong in body and from his eyes, strong in faith.

That was when Pania noticed it.

You, she only managed to stammer.

Keep watching, Derringer replied in a calm tone.

Pania obeyed the request, and her eyes turned back to the scene again. Three soldiers were approaching the large

man. Pania assumed that he was their general.

"Hail Caesar," the three called out in unison as they saluted.

"Hail Caesar," the large man replied. His armour wore the crest of the ranking general of the legion stationed at Glevum. They were the remaining soldiers of the Legio II Augusta after the defeat at the hands of Queen Boudica. The general himself swore to remain and protect those citizens of the Britannia Tribes that became loyal to Rome. "What news do you bring?"

"Sir," one of the soldiers spoke in a serious tone as he approached. "We have received word that a woman wishes to speak with you. She calls herself a soothsayer, and can grant great insight into the coming days."

The general furrowed his brow slightly as he rested his hand on his gladius. A finger tapped the hilt of the sword as he looked to his soldiers. "What is her name?"

"Morgan le Fay, Sir," the soldier stated quickly. The general's look became even more tepid. The soldiers knew nothing of this name, but he was obviously all too familiar with it. "She has come to our main camp, and awaits you, Sir." The general moved quickly past his soldiers with great determination. Two of the men took up flanking positions immediately; they sensed some distress in the general's mood, and their own emotions began to mirror it. They had known the general long enough to know when he was suspicious.

The camp was well tended, soldiers rested in shifts as they continued their patrols. Evening was falling, and most of the men had gathered in the main tent. The general moved past it, toward his private tent, where the soldiers directed him. He stood outside the entrance for a moment before looking to his men. "You two remain out here. I will call you if I need you." They nodded quickly taking their places on either side of the entrance as the general slowly moved inside.

She stood with her back to the doorway, but he knew all too well that she was aware of him. He heard the small chuckle as he drew closer to her. "Why don't you dispense with the facade, le Fay," he suggested to her. By his conversation, the tone in his voice, it was more than clear that they knew of each other.

"Just as you have dispensed with your own facade," she replied in a hoarse whisper. "Or do your men know of the legend that is Gaius Thadius Maximus, General of the Legio II Augusta?" She turned, holding a small smirk as she looked into his eyes. Her eyes seemed to distract from the gaussian robes she wore that seemed to flow like water around her shoulders as they draped down her body. "The general who controls the beast."

"I don't control it, le Fay," he scowled as he spoke. "We co-exist."

She tittered as she spoke, smiling at the comment made by Maximus. "You will soon learn that you cannot

always escape the beast that haunts us all, Maximus.”

“What do you want, le Fay?” he said with a huff, displaying his displeasure with her need to taunt and tease.

“I have warning for you, Maximus,” she stated as she studied the large man. “And if you do not heed it, then you shall be forced to fight this for the next millennium.” She let her words sink into Maximus' ears before she continued. “The autumn winds begin to blow, and no matter how loyal the Britains are to you, they still hold faith in the old ways. And they will fear the Wild Hunt.”

“I have heard of this wild hunt,” Maximus replied with a scoff. “Lead by a phantom huntsman, who can steal your soul just for looking at him. I know the story. A myth, nothing more.”

Morgan laughed aloud with Maximus' last words. “A man who is a beast, saying that the Huntsman is a myth.” She chuckled at the irony before continuing. “Heed my words Maximus. If you refuse to listen, then the fey folk cannot help you. Your destiny will be to chase the Huntsman wherever he roams, until you find a fey worthy enough to slay him.”

Pania's eyes grew wide and she looked back to Derringer. She suddenly knew why he thought she was the key. He believed that she was the fey that could kill the Huntsman. Derringer motioned with an open hand again, and the scene changed. Soldiers lined the wall now, villagers huddled together as the sky grew dark. Thunder rumbled as lightning streaked the sky.

“General Maximus,” one of the soldiers called out. “There are rumours of bandits south of Glevum. They attack during the storms.”

Maximus furrowed his brow as the information was presented to him. Perhaps this was what the myth was, just bandits that used the storms as a cover. “Find me two of the fastest riders,” he said in an authoritative voice. “They will join me. We'll hunt down these bandits and end this myth once and for all.”

The soldier saluted and shouted out quickly as he carried out Maximus' orders. The general strode quickly to his horse, noting that his man servant had already made arrangements to prepare the mount for the journey. Maximus smiled as he approached.

“Always one step ahead of me, Sipico.” He shared a laugh with the man before mounting the massive war horse. “It's time Pegasus. Let the winds carry you fast and hard as your namesake.” As if in reply, the war horse reared back, letting out a call heard throughout the stables. With a confidence not seen by any horse, Pegasus moved as quickly as his large frame would allow, the ground seeming to tremor with each hoof strike, obediently going where his master would guide him.

Soon, the war horse was joined by two smaller Arabians. Maximus saluted the riders and they fell into rank, flanking him as they rode. This hunt might be for not, but at least they would try to end this madness. Maximus donned his helm, and held his shield firm as he

encouraged his horse into a gallop. The massive hooves seemed to thunder as they hit the ground. The Arabians increased speed to match, their riders knowing they could easily outrun any huntsman. Their steeds were the fastest in the legion.

They rode for miles through forest paths, into the rich green fields and finally the hilly meadows. Keen eyes watched closely for any movement along the roads as they traveled the worn paths. They reached a clearing, and something in Maximus knew they would catch these bandits.

“Sir!” one of the riders called out. “Straight ahead! Lone rider!” Sure enough, Maximus saw the rider, sprinting along. He sneered as he spurred his horse forward, hearing the pounding of the hooves from the Arabians as they matched the speed of the war horse.

Closer and closer they neared. The bandits mount was merely a nag, Maximus assumed. Not a trained military horse with the endurance of the gods themselves. As they neared the lone rider, Maximus drew his gladius, raising it high in the air, and calling out in a commanding voice. “ROMA VICTOR!” His soldiers matched his battle cry as they too drew blades and urged their horses faster.

The air then filled with laughter as the thunder roared in the sky above them.

The lone rider seemed to tilt and reel as it turned back on the three. He carried a scythe, and used it with expert ability. His first attack came at the left flanking soldier, cutting him in half as a hot blade would cut through butter. The rider seemed to fly with the winds themselves. Maximus now knew his folly; he should have listened to le Fay. The second soldier remained brave even in the face of most certain death. He had no doubt that even in death, he did what he needed to do. Death is what he received.

The scythe slashed through the air with ease, cutting through both horse and rider. The soldier fell lifelessly to the ground, never having the chance to cry out in pain as his blood spilled onto the ground. The Huntsman merely stopped and turned to face Maximus.

“You should have listened to le Fay, General.” He laughed as he charged Maximus. His scythe had already cleaved two men, what would be a third.

General Maximus had been a Roman Legionnaire for over 300 years. He could almost tell when an attacker was too brazen in his motions, too egotistical. The Huntsman was no different. Maximus grabbed the scythe with his shield hand, feeling the tip bury into his belly, but forcing himself to ignore any pain. The force of the blow carried him off his mount, and he fell to the ground. The Huntsman slowly walked over to him. It seemed to be a hollow victory.

“Just like all the others,” the Huntsman sneered as he raised up the scythe to finish Maximus off. The farmer's blade arched down toward the General, as the Huntsman laughed with sickening glee. His glee was cut short, as his scythe suddenly came to a stop.

Maximus had caught the handle near the blade and held firm, pushing himself to his feet as the Huntsman tried in vain to force the weapon from his hands.

“What is this?” the Huntsman shouted as lightning flashed in the distance. Maximus laughed in reply, almost matching the bravado of the Huntsman. He knew when he had been double crossed, he knew that le Fay had not mentioned everything about the Roman General to the Huntsman.

“It would seem that le Fay did not tell you everything,” Maximus stated with a twisted sneer. He gave a twist of his wrist, and snapped the blade off the handle, leaving the Huntsman only to scowl in rage. With an angry scream, the Huntsman drew back the handle and attacked. He laughed as the now useless scythe had become a most effective spear, and the Huntsman's strength made sure it pushed through the gleaming armour of the General.

Maximus cried out in pain as he felt the weapon go right through him. He backpedaled, weakened by the blow. The Huntsman merely gloated as he assumed that victory was his. Maximus raised his head in defiance, sneering at the Huntsman as he spoke.

“No, le Fay told you nothing of me.” One hand grabbed the wooden handle that jutted from his chest, the other grasped the point that came out his back. With a roar he snapped the handle and pulled it out. Blood poured from the wound, but even the Huntsman could tell that something was most certainly wrong.

The General removed his helm and let it fall to the ground like a child's discarded toy. His massive hands reached up to unclasp the cloak he wore about his shoulders. The breastplate fell to the ground as he rose to his feet. The Huntsman could tell, Maximus' wound was healing. Much more rapidly than any human wound ever should.

Maximus breathed heavily, hunching low to the ground, and then the Huntsman understood. The general's

hair grew longer, his muscles became more taut and sinewy. At the edge of the battle scene, the unseen figure of Pania watched in horror as her mind screamed at her what it was she was seeing, but she didn't want to believe it. Pania's eyes widened as Maximus' face contorted as it seemed to transform before the Huntsman. Pania could only watch, realizing that while she may have been walking in a dream, her body was alone, lying helplessly in that room.

With a werewolf.

General Maximus had completely transformed, only the skirting of his uniform the only mark that he was a member of the Roman Legion. He snarled toward the Huntsman, teeth bared as he crouched low, readying himself for a strike. The Huntsman laughed again, believing that the beast had taken over completely. This would still be a worthy kill. He drifted closer to the werewolf, a smile in his eyes.

That smile turned to a scowl as he realized his own folly as he saw Maximus' eyes. They weren't the eyes of a beast in rage, they contained an intelligence. He realized just a little too late, that the wolf had his wits about him.

The massive wolf reached out and grabbed at the Huntsman, shouting as he did. “Do not think I am a mere beast that can be trained to heel, Huntsman! For I will be your hunter. I will never stop chasing you!” The Huntsman could only reel back, try to escape. A werewolf with intelligence as this was unheard of. He lifted into the air as he sped away from the wolf.

As he flew higher and higher, he began to laugh as he called out. “And so it shall be, Maximus. The Hunter will become the Hunted. For all time!” He disappeared into the clouds, just as the storm began to break. The light of the moon streamed down, and Maximus looked about him. The carnage. He fell to his knees by the bodies of one of his men, and tilted up his head as he gave a mournful howl.