

**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 FOURTEEN

Shani and Pania studied the grave solemnly. The bartender had brought them out to the cemetery to see the final resting place of the elf who had come to this place and called it home so many years ago. They knew the name all too well. A scourge on their home world, an elf who sought nothing but power, and strove to find eternal life. Perhaps this is what he meant.

"People back home think he's just some lich up in a tower," Shani whispered. Pania merely nodded in reply. "Guess this paints a whole new picture on the bastard. Alla things he done, alla people he tortured. Weird that he come here, an' made things right." Both elves had removed their hats as though in a respectful prayer when they first approached the grave site. "When we git back, should we say anythin'?"

"No," Pania stated in a somber tone. "B'cause no one'll b'lieve us." The two elves slowly placed the hats back on their heads and began to turn back to the wagon owned by the bartender. "An' no tellin' these people wha' 'e were like on our world. Leave 'em with their own misconceptions." Shani nodded slowly as the two began to trudge back to the wagon.

The clouds covered the stars in the night sky. Lightning flashes lit up the area every so often and thunder rumbled in the distance. The wind had picked up just a bit, making it slightly uncomfortable. Shani stopped a moment and looked back toward the grave. It seemed as though she had heard laughter coming from that direction.

"Ladies," the bartender called out. "We had best get ourselves back to town. Storm's coming in, we don't want to get caught in the middle of it."

They all heard the large, familiar clomping hooves Marshal Derringer's Clydesdale as he galloped to the wagon. "Travers," he called out as he brought the mighty horse to a stop. "Get Miss Wennemein and Miss Alow back to the inn. I'll handle what's coming." Travers, the bartender, knew that sound in Derringer's voice. There was more to this storm than just thunder and lightning. "Ladies, step lively, if you please," Derringer advised in a calm voice.

Pania was already stepping into the wagon, while Shani began to lazily run toward the vehicle. She was still twenty feet away when the air became acrid, and the air seemed to be filled with electricity. Then came the lightning bolt; the horses reared back as the loud boom echoed throughout the area. Shani was thrown back several feet toward the graveyard as Pania covered her ears. Travers worked to control the horses and Derringer steered his horse slightly, away from the scorch mark in the earth. He quickly dismounted and looked skyward.

"Huntsman," he shouted to the heavens. "It's been a long time!"

The air filled with eerie laughter, the dirt picked up, swirling together and forming an image. A putrid

orange glow came from within it as the apparition of a man became known. The Huntsman. He laughed as he seemed to float toward Derringer.

"It's been many, many century's, Maximus," he said with a cold chuckle. "Or is it Derringer now. I can never remember, you change your name so many times."

"What do you want?" Derringer hissed through his teeth as he scowled at the apparition.

"What I always want," the Huntsman replied with a sickening grin. "I want my prey."

The Huntsman looked toward Shani who was just now trying to orient herself after nearly being hit by lightning. Her ears were ringing and she found it difficult to stand. This only made it easy for the Huntsman. Ethereal tentacles reached out and surrounded her. Pania had come back to her senses after the blast, and saw what happened. She shouted out in horror as the Huntsman drew himself closer to Shani, enveloping his cloak around her.

"The first of my prey," the Huntsman said with a laugh as Shani disappeared into the blackness that was the Huntsman's form. "The first of many, and you can do nothing to stop me, Maximus," he said with a twisted grin as he looked back to Derringer.

"You bastard!" Pania called out as she drew her Smith and Wesson, jumping down from the wagon as she moved toward the apparition, firing repeatedly on it. The Huntsman only laughed as he pulled himself into the air.

"Time enough for you to join me, little elf," he called out with a sneer. "You're next after all." He moved further and further away as Pania kept firing upon the apparition. When he was completely out of sight, a second bolt of lightning screamed out of the sky, slamming into the ground in front of Pania, sending her flying backwards. She hit the ground and slipped into unconsciousness.

"Marshal!" Travers called out in urgency. "What do we do?"

Derringer knelt down beside Pania's still form. She still breathed, so there was still hope. Gently, he picked her up with ease in his massive arms as he replied to Travers. "Go back to town and find the sheriff and his deputies. Explain what happened, everything. He'll know what to do." Derringer cradled Pania carefully as he mounted his war horse.

"Marshal," Travers said in a small voice. "It's true, isn't it. All those things you told us. It's all true."

"Yes it is, Travers," Derringer replied with a soft sigh. He looked to Travers and nodded in his direction. "Get going. Find the sheriff. I'll tend to Miss Alow. She is our only hope right now."



Her world was black, the wind whistled in her ears. When Shani opened her eyes, tiny dancing lights in a sea of black was all she saw. It didn't look like the night sky at all. It was different, as though she was racing through the world at unimaginable speeds. She tried to move her arms, but found herself paralyzed, not by fear, but by something else. She could still move her head, and still had control of her voice as she grunted trying to move. She at least could still hear well enough.

The laughter filled the area, sickening, demented laughter that could send chills down the spine of any mortal. "I see my little prize is awake," the voice seemed to call out from everywhere. "So good of you to join me."

"Who... who the hell are ya?" Shani shouted then began coughing violently.

"Tut, tut," the voice warned. "Too much shouting and you could injure yourself. And we wouldn't want that." He chuckled lightly, as it seemed to echo all around.

"Wha... whaddya want with me?" Shani seemed to plead, wanting answer to this confusing and confining situation. Her voice was stuttering badly, like she used to when she was just a small girl.

"What do I want?" the voice repeated in a shout that filled Shani's ears, then he spoke again in much softer tones, highlighted with a sickening laugh. "What do I want? I am the Huntsman. I seek out my prey. And I take it. You and your little friend have interested me. Capturing you was easy. Capturing your friend will not take much at all. Especially with you for bait.

"Whyn't you jist go STRAIGHT TA HELL!!" Shani shouted as she narrowed her eyes and forced courage into her very being as she snarled.

The laughter filled the area again, and the specter who spoke finally showed himself. His face made of the mists, his hair, wisps of wind and clouds combined. Shani could see his eyes as the dim light grew just a bit. They were dark and hollow, and his voice sounded like thunder when he spoke.

"Oh, I have no doubt of that," he spoke with a twisted smile. "I just need one more, and we can all go together."

objects in the room. It took her a great deal of energy to realize the large figure in the room with her was actually Marshal Derringer.

"Me 'ead," she finally said in a quiet tone as she squeezed her eyes shut. She tried to get up, but found it difficult and merely slumped back onto the bed again. "Wha' were tha' thin'?" she finally asked. "An' why it call ye Maximus?"

"He is called the Huntsman," Derringer replied in a tired voice as he busied himself at a nearby stove. He poured hot water into a set of cups, and added several herbs to the mixture along with some tea, which he allowed to steep for a while as he spoke. "And I have hunted him for a long, long time." He pulled up a chair and set it beside Pania's makeshift bed, sitting himself down rather heavily, and continued.

"To answer your other question, I will need your complete confidence. Have you ever participated in a dream walk before?" Pania shook her head, allowing Derringer to continue. "A dream walk, is when one person can see the past of another. I have done it before, I learned it during my time in Tibet, and found that even the Natives here can participate in such things." Pania furrowed her brow, confused by what the Marshal was describing.

"Bu', 'ow's tha' gonna get Shani back?"

"To know your enemy," Derringer continued. "Is to be able to trap your enemy. I'm going to take you back with me, so you can see the first time I faced the Huntsman." He rose to his feet and retrieved the tea cups, handing one to Pania. The pale elf took it carefully, taking in the aroma of the mixture, what seemed to smell like lilacs mixed with blueberries.

"Bu' why me?" she asked in a voice that sounded more tired than what it should have. Even with just a scent of the tea, the mixture was beginning to take effect. "Wha' 'ave I go' ta do with bein' able ta stop 'im." She took a sip as she watched Derringer take a sip from his own cup.

"You have a connection to magic," he explained to her. "Something I do not have." He watched her as she lay back down on the bed, her eyes beginning to close as though they had weights attached to them. "For now, just sleep. And walk with me. Everything shall be revealed that you need to know."



Pania's eyes slowly opened, and the small elf raised a sore hand up to inspect her forehead. Her vision was blurry at first, and she had a difficult time focusing on