

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 SEVENTEEN

Travers made certain the bottles were packed carefully into the saddle bags as he secured them on Gypsum. He gave the horse's neck a gentle pat before he stepped back and looked to the elf that sat in the saddle. Shani tipped her hat in thanks and offered him a friendly grin.

"Much 'bliged, Travers," Shani said with a grin. "The whiskey's 'ppreciated, an' thet wine's gonna be a taste o' home fer sure."

"Le's 'ope the whiskey lasts longer 'n the wine," Pania snickered as she steered her horse to stand beside Shani's. Shani looked over at the elven bard and smirked. "Thanks 'gain fer all the supplies. An' the time spent 'ere. Be 'ard ta ferget ye kindness."

"It was a pleasure to have you ladies," Travers said with a smile. A few of the townsfolk gathered around as the pair of elves prepared themselves for the next leg of their journey. A few of the poker players seemed to breath a sigh of relief knowing they wouldn't have to lose their money to Shani anymore, as the ladies from the tavern gave Pania pleading eyes to stay and join their performances. "Where's your next stop?"

Shani looked over to Pania for that answer. "Eadin' ta Shreveport," Pania replied. "Plan on cuttin' through Miss'ippi first. Coupla towns there I've 'eard 'ave some contacts with the Railroad." Pania didn't have to say the full name, as the townsfolk knew what she meant. Fortunately, these people seemed to sympathize with the plight of the slaves, and hoped the North would somehow come out victorious even if they abhorred the war.

"Be careful on the roads," the deep voice of Marshal Derringer called out. He walked up to stand beside Pania's horse, and the elven bard smile gently as he ran his large hand through her horse's mane. "You will be missed around here. But you will also be remembered." Pania nodded as she smiled to him. She looked back to Shani as the elven gunslinger tipped her hat to Derringer. It was like a signal to move. Both elves coaxed their mounts forward and the horses began a slow trot down the street and out-of-town.

There was no need to rush, they had all the time in the world.

Eight horse and riders stopped as they neared the town. Captain Samuel Williams glared as he saw the group blocking him, twelve men, all on horse back.

All wearing badges. He looked to the one wearing the familiar badge of a United States Marshal. "Marshal, might I ask why this meeting?"

"Captain Williams," Marshal Martin Derringer called out, surprising the army captain with such a formal greeting. "Your reputation precedes you. Word has come down from Harrisburg that you are relentless in your chase of two fugitives."

"Yes it is, Marshal," he said with a sigh. "Am I to believe that this meeting is to assist us in such a capture?" As if in answer, the eleven men that flanked the Marshal drew pistols and rifles, aiming at the soldiers. Captain Williams shifted uneasily in the saddle as he scowled. He did not need this right now.

"No, Captain," Derringer replied, his hand still resting in his lap as he leaned back in his saddle. "In fact we will not be assisting you in their capture. I have met them, and I am now convinced of what I suspected."

"And just what is that?" Williams asked, his eyes locked onto the Marshal.

"More than likely three quarters of what has been printed on those wanted posters is fabricated," Derringer replied quickly. "I've come to know the two you seek, and have seen them in a different light. You would be wise to return to Washington and tell the President that chasing them is not worth the trouble." Captain Williams remained in his saddle as he glared at Derringer. His men looked to him every once in a while, waiting for their orders.

"If that is the case, Marshal," he finally replied in a slow, even tone. "I believe that our business here is done. We'll meet again, I am certain." His men began to move as he did, looking to the trail that circled the town.

"No Captain," Derringer muttered to himself. "I hope we most certainly do not."

Just outside Oxford, Mississippi, September 5, 1863

The two horses walked slowly along the trail as the sun rose. Shani and Pania had broken camp half an hour earlier, and felt better about traveling during the early morning hours. It was cooler, and easier to see any opposition on the road. So far, they hadn't seen much, just a couple of ranchers herding cattle and a few Confederate soldiers passing by. No one really paid either one of them much mind save to wave hello.

At least they received a bit of a welcome when Pania tended to the wounds of some of the soldiers. A few of the soldiers were quite thankful for the aid, not only for medical needs, but just having them there. Pania even received the moniker angel of mercy for her appearance, while Shani got a chance to help lift the spirits of the men with a few jokes and a shared drink or two.

They were only a few miles outside of Oxford, Mississippi when they first heard the gunfire. Pania

sighed heavily as Shani tightened her grip on her reins. “When it rains, it pours, don't it?” she stated as she looked to Pania. The smaller elf nodded and coaxed her horse forward as Shani did the same. As they rode faster, they could see smoke start to billow over the crest of a hill.

They weren't going to have a leisurely ride to Shreveport.