

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 TWENTY

The crowd had gathered in small groups, whispering amongst themselves. Naturally, they would spread rumor and innuendo about what had just happened. At least they all felt sympathy toward Cole, who's body now cooled on the dusty streets as the doctor tended to him. Shani and Pania walked with determination and looked to the doctor, waiting for some sign. All they found was a heavy sigh of regret from the doctor as he looked up to the pair and shook his head solemnly.

Shani scowled and let out a hiss as she turned to Pania. The elven bard was checking the Smith and Wesson's making sure they were fully loaded. Joshua was doing the same. Shani seemed rather relieved at the sight of Walker, who made his way to them slowly as his large hands held the 12 gage firmly in his grip. His face spoke volumes, he had known Cole for quite sometime, and now his old friend lay dead in the streets on a warm Saturday afternoon in Oxford.

"Doc," Shani turned back to the doctor as she tried to calm herself. "See that Cole gets all a 'ttention he needs. B'gin the ev'rythin' necessary that his family is taken care of." She turned back to her comrades. "Time ta pay Mitch a bit o' a visit, I wager."

"There's gonna be gun play," Walker cautioned her.

"Oh, I have no doubt o' that," Shani replied as she began to walk toward the saloon that stood across from the scene in the town square. "I purty much am expectin' it." Shani was soon followed by Pania, then Walker and finally Joshua. Walker held his shotgun at the ready as the two elves let a hand rest of the butt of their pistols. The gathered crowd began to disperse, knowing full well what was coming. Shopkeepers locked their doors after quickly rushing patrons inside for protection. The town square became very quiet, very quickly. There was only the lone, mourning cry as a bird of prey circled overhead.

Shani took a look to her right, gauging the demeanor of Walker and Joshua, then looked to her left as she studied Pania. That was when she noticed someone else stood zwith them. But it wasn't her first choice. Ming, still in his robes, stood shoulder to shoulder with them, glaring toward the doors of the saloon. "Ming," Shani spoke up in a low whisper. "What the hell ya doin' here?"

He stood firm and never took his eyes off the doors as he replied, his voice was measured and steady. "To do what is right. To avenge those children."

Shani took a deep breath, holding any argument she had to herself. Ming would not be talked out of this. If anything, she had learned the man was very resolute in his decision making. Shani turned her focus back to the saloon and shouted out in a bold voice. "Mitch Canton! Git yer ass out here now!"

The town square was still quiet, the creaking of the saloon doors seemed to echo wildly as a rather cocky

looking Mitch swaggered out. His grin was twisted in a manner that he showed no care as to who it was calling him out. "Well, well," he said in a slow drawl as he walked into the sun. He paused a moment as he took out a cigarette and carefully lit it, his eyes never leaving Shani, and a mocking smile on his face. Five more men followed him, all of them Canton's men Shani assumed. The look in their eyes betrayed their loyalty to the cowboy. "Ain't even sheriff fer a coupla hours an' here ya are, tryin' ta call the shots. I already tol' ya... Sheriff," he said, making certain that the mocking tone of his voice was heard by Shani and all those who surrounded her. "Us Cantons 're the law 'round here, nobody but nobody does anythin' without our say so."

"Thet a fact?" Shani replied in a matter of fact tone. "I see it diffrent. I'm the one wearin' the star, Canton. I am the law 'round these parts. An' as such, y'all 're bound by law. I'm pretty sure I ain't gotta be listin' off the charges fer ya."

"Maybe I should start listin' off yers," Mitch replied as he tossed a paper onto the ground. Another wanted poster. It was always the wanted poster. "Ya know, fifty thousand dollars is a lotta money. Should claim that fer m'self."

"Who's gonna claim the bounty on yer head, Mitch?" Walker called out. The words made Mitch sneer with rage. This wounded soldier had lived far too long for Mitch's liking. "A gun hand like yerself is bound ta make a lotta enemies, an' sooner 'r later, someone's gonna come gunnin' fer you."

"They all too scared," Mitch replied with a snort.

"I ain't," Shani spoke up with a smirk. Her hand rested lightly on her gun, waiting for the cowboys to make some sort of move as she spoke. "There's only one o' two ways this here's gonna end. Either all peaceable like, an' y'all come 'long quietly. 'R we gonna have us some more bodies. An' I guarantee you, that mine will not be one o' 'em."

The town square grew quiet as the two groups stared each other down, the only sounds that could be heard was the wind rustling the leaves of the trees and the song of a bird every so often. Shani could even hear the low breathing coming from her comrades, Ming's was steady, calm and even. Walker's was calm as he seemed to stare down the others, as though his eyes alone would make the cowboys back down. Joshua was nervous. His hands shook, his breath quick, but he stood firm.

"I'm no' as fast as ye," Shani heard Pania whisper. Both elven gunslingers kept their focus on the cowboys.

Shani clenched her teeth as she replied in a whisper of her own. "T'day ya are." Her eyes were locked on Mitch. She studied him carefully. Even when drunk, she could tell he was still a dangerous man. Perhaps even more dangerous than when he was sober. No inhibitions. No fear of death. Six feet tall and bullet

proof. "Last chance, Mitch," Shani called out to him. "Y'all kin make the decision now."

From the barricaded shops, townsfolk would dare to watch, peeking out to see what was happening as the five would face off against the cowboys. Some cried, knowing that this scene had repeated itself so many times, and each time with the same result. Others prayed that this might be the end, that finally the corruption, the chaos would come to an end. Such was life in a town ruled with an iron fist.

A young man with wild eyes stood beside Mitch. He looked even more twisted than the gun hand, and even more dangerous. But he was a greenhorn, and didn't know that every action was being measured by the elf that stood twenty feet away. Shani saw his subtle movements, heard his quiet laughter, saw his shifty eyes. She knew he would be the first to make the mistake of drawing.

It came without question. The world seemed to slow down as the young man's hand moved as though stuck in molasses. Mitch's hand gripped the pistol firmly as he pulled it from his holster, cocking back the hammer, he raised it up, leveling it with the elven gunslinger. Just as he was about to pull the trigger, a pair of bullets slammed into him. He never had a chance as the shots fired by Shani were faster than he could ever think to be.

The shots became deafening as both sides fired with equal speed and exuberance. Ming rushed forward, catching a cowboy by surprise as he swatted the man's gun away with a simple swipe of his hand. His movements made this gun fighter suddenly very, very afraid. Ming was fast; put a gun in the man's hands, he could be a deadly gunslinger, but he didn't need a gun. It wasn't long as the cowboy never had a chance to fight back. His unconscious body fell to the ground quickly.

The other cowboys were finding their success was of equal or lesser value to their now fallen comrade. One of them tried firing on Walker, the only contact was to land two bullets into his leg, his wooden leg. Walker only replied with a large amount of buck from the barrels of the shot gun.

With two brigands now down, one of them grew scared. His mind raced as he saw his buddies fall, heard the bullets smack into the ground, the walls of the saloon and into the bodies of his friends. They were suddenly out gunned, and out classed by these five. And this one just bolted.

"One's takin' off!" Joshua shouted out.

"Leave 'im!" Shani called out. The firing had subsided. Two cowboys lay dead, and two more including Mitch, were injured. Sheriff Wennemein walked confidently over to Mitch as he dropped his gun into the dirt. "Y'all gonna keep this up?" she sneered to Mitch. He only replied with a glare of his own as his eyes shot daggers toward the Sheriff. "Take 'em ta the prison. Lock 'em up 'till we kin sort this out."

"What's the charge?" Mitch shouted out.

"Disturbin' the peace!" Shani shouted back as she walked toward her partner. "An' the killin' o' a sheriff's deputy." Mitch furrowed his brow as Joshua pulled him to his feet easily and began to lead him off to the office. "Take the dead an' prepare 'em burial. 'Least they gonna git thet."



Gator didn't stop running. Even without his horse, he bolted for the open spaces beyond the town of Oxford. He ran all the way back to the ranch. There, a few of the cowboys stopped him and tried calming him down. They all knew what to do when he told the tale, and they led him quickly to the main house. Dorval would know what to do.

Harold "Cheater" Dorval was a calm man for someone who was leader of such a group like this. They originally came out with a family from Boston to settle and farm, but the ravages of weather, constant attacks from rustlers, and then the war took it's toll. That was when Dorval decided to fight back, and his twisted sense of justice had made himself think he was king of Oxford. He had no use for the law, unless their goals matched his own. The news that Gator told him nearly brought him to a maddening rage, but he remained calm.

"So there's a new sheriff in Oxford," he snorted. "It would seem that Walker is getting bold, but not bold enough to do the job himself." He walked across the length of the porch that looked out into the west of his rustic ranch house. He stopped as he stared into the eyes of a man in a blue uniform. "Captain Williams. It'd appear your goal an' mine 'r now the same. You want this Alow an' Wennemein dragged back ta Washington. An' now I want 'em dead."

Captain Samuel Williams smiled with some amount of malice as Dorval spoke the words. "There is nothing that says I have to take them back alive, Mr. Dorval."