

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-ONE

The casket closed on Cole's body as the remaining gunslingers stood by solemnly. No one said any words as the very private ceremony took place. Ming bowed his head in quiet prayer for the man he had never known, but obviously a man who tried to uphold justice. Walker's expression didn't change much, making him seem that much more hardened due to his age and the things he'd seen. Joshua wept softly as the casket was peacefully loaded onto a wagon. Cole had been a mentor to him, quite possibly the one man who had helped him after his dreams of success were wiped clean.

Shani and Pania stood by and waited. They neither knew the man well enough, nor could they say any words for him. It was best the things needed were left up to his friends. Shani looked toward Walker as he limped along the boardwalk, placing his stetson squarely on his head. If anyone would be the best to tell Cole's wife, it would be Walker.

"I'll take Joshua with me," he said to the two elves. "Tell Mary Anne 'bout what happened. Probably be a better part o' the day." Shani nodded solemnly as the old gunslinger limped over to his horse. Joshua slowly mounted his own as the pair readied themselves for the journey to Cole's old homestead. The wagon would follow, and it would be there that Cole would be laid to rest.

Ming had moved on, staying in his stoic manner of little words, as he went to the church to see about the children. Leaving Pania and Shani behind to contemplate the events that had happened so recently. The pair moved back into the Sheriff's office where they had secured Mitch and one of his comrades. Both were passed out, the effects of the alcohol finally taking its toll on the men. Pania could only sigh as she looked to the cages.

"I could ride out there," Pania suggested in a quiet tone. "Ride out there an' rain fire on 'em. End this once an' fer all."

Shani looked up with a scowl on her face. "Ya ever hear o' somethin' called the Salem Witch trials?" She paused long enough for the elven bard to acknowledge with a nod, but even Pania knew where this was going. "Ya start flingin' magic in a place like this, we both gonna git strung up, Sheriff's star 'r no. I mean, it's a dang miracle that they ain't done that b'cause o' what we look like. Ya add a massive fire ball into it, an' we kin kiss our butts good bye." Shani sighed deeply as she stopped her rant, knowing that her voice had raised just a bit. She wasn't mad at Pania, but mad at the situation. Part of her would have ridden right out there to that ranch and help Pania in any way she could. "Sorry. But we gotta play this the ol' fashioned way."

"There's gonna be a lotta gun play," Pania said with a somber look in her eyes. "Isna there?"

Shani nodded her head slowly. "Gonna be ready fer it?"

Pania snorted a weak laugh and finally nodded in reply. "Aye, I'll be ready fer it. An' if anyone gets too close, I've always go' me rapier. Diff'rent in this place, bu' at least it's no' magic." Shani finally smiled for the first time since Joshua told them about Cole. It was somewhat forced, but at least she could allow herself to do so, knowing that she had Pania on her side.



Cole was his only friend.

At least, that's how he felt. Joshua had known no other that had seemingly sacrificed everything in order to help out someone that he barely knew, and for that, Joshua was eternally grateful, but now, Cole was dead. Killed by men in a drunken rage because Cole was interrupting their fun. The Cantons always looked at things in a more selfish light. It had to stop now. It didn't matter that there was a new sheriff. Each sheriff always looked at things the same way. Analyze the situation, and go from there. More often than not, they ended up dead, beaten, scared or worse.

Joshua was going to end it, once and for all.

He left the homestead alone, not saying a word to anyone. Not even to Mary Anne, whom he felt the worst for. Joshua just got on his horse and seemingly rode aimlessly. His aimless riding took him directly to the doorstep of the Canton ranch. He was alone, as he faced eight riders, including Dorval himself. Joshua could see more men at the main house, in his grief he ignored the fact that they wore blue uniforms.

"Deputy Clemens," Dorval shouted out as Joshua brought his horse to a stop. "What brings you out this way? Sheriff Wennemein send you out here?"

"No," Joshua replied in a shaky voice that betrayed his own fear. But something deep inside overrode any fear he felt. Vengeance. "I'm here ta let you know, just how bad Mitch shot up Cole."

Dorval chuckled a bit as he heard the quavering in Joshua's voice. "Well, that's just too bad, Clemens. I heard that Cole got in the way an' took a bad hit at the wrong time." He shrugged lightly as his hands remained lightly tapping the saddle horn. "Pity, really."

"Pity!" Joshua shouted back. "What your men done was pure evil, Dorval. One day, yer gonna rot in hell b'cause o' the things you done." Without thought for his own safety, without consideration of the consequences, Joshua reached for his pistols. He would never get the chance to draw as the bullets from Dorval's men ripped into him. Joshua's body fell with an unceremonious thud to the ground.

"Well, that's a fine mess," Dorval said with a mild chuckle as he steered his horse back toward the main house. His men split off, one group to deal with Joshua, the other continuing a patrol of the property.

Dorval never liked to fight, to be honest. But when push came to shove, he always had his men to back him.

“Dorval!” the familiar voice of Captain Williams called out. Dorval could see the other soldiers mounting their horses. “I will not stand for the shooting of a peace officer.”

Dorval sighed and shook his head as he leaned back in the saddle. “You don't get it, do ya, Captain. I am the peace 'round here. I am the law in these parts. This is my town, an' my place. Them that wanna play sheriff gotta understand ta play by my rules.”

“And that includes killing a sheriff's deputy?” Williams replied in disgust. “I am hunting Alow and Wennemein. But I won't require your assistance in this matter. I'm taking my men north. Should those two decide to return north, then I will pick up the trail again.” He strode over to his horse and mounted it quickly. “But I will not be part of a slaughter like this.”

“That's too bad,” Dorval called out as Williams ordered his men forward. He smiled ever so slightly and shouted as Williams and his men began to disappear down the road. “I'll tell ya what, I'll send their bodies ta Washington in a day 'r two. How that sound?” Williams didn't even respond as he and his men continued to move forward. “Gator,” Dorval called out to one of his faithful. “Find out 'bout Mitch. We're gonna have ta get 'im back. This encounter has given us a good way ta send a message.”



Shani watched as the doctor patched up Mitch and his comrade, her hand always close to her long barrel Colt. Pania remained close as well, hoping that her suggestion of medical care for the gunslingers was not a mistake. At first, she was going to offer it, but gave into Shani's demand that they bring in the town doctor. Shani was not going to let a monster like Mitch anywhere near Pania.

Johnathon walked back into the sheriff's office in a somber mood. He'd seen Joshua ride off, but had no idea where he went. His face showed lines of worry, but he was not one to go off half cocked chasing something he couldn't understand. His attitude was one of a waiting game, unless the situation called for much more drastic measures. In the past, he'd found that waiting and observing would bring the best results.

He walked up to Shani and spoke in a quiet voice. “Dorval's gonna send someone ta get him outta here.” Shani looked up to Walker and nodded in reply. She knew, she was expecting it. “Gonna have ta see what happens. Probably gonna try somethin' t'night.”

Mitch continued to glare at Shani and Pania in turns, smirking as he barely heard Walker's words. To him, it didn't matter if they were prepared, they'd be dead by morning. Dorval was one tough customer. The small group continued to talk amongst themselves, watching Mitch as they did to ensure he didn't get any bright ideas. As the doctor finished his work, they shackled Mitch up and put him back in the cell. He wanted so badly to say something to mock them, put them in an uneasy situation, he could feel something coming to the surface. But he'd never get the chance.

The door to the office opened quickly as a soldier in a blue uniform entered. Walker seemed to grimace a bit at the sight of the uniform, but made no move. Shani and Pania recognized who it was immediately. Private Johnson, one of Williams men. “Pania Alow, Shani Wennemein,” he said politely, even so far as to tip his hat. “Captain Williams sent me. We were in the area, but are returning north. You two have amnesty here, as long as you remain in the Confederacy, Williams said he will not give chase.” The two elves seemed to breath a sigh of relief with the news. “However, should you decide to return north, he will give chase again.”

“Why the news, Johnson?” Pania inquire quietly. “No' sayin' it's no' 'ppreciated, mind ye.”

Johnson looked toward the elven bard a moment before he continued. He remembered the chase, and remembered that Pania had him dead to rights, but she didn't kill him. Maybe the wanted posters embellished the events of Pale Rider's past, and in a way, he grew to respect her. “Dorval's men killed a deputy by his ranch. We were going to enlist their aid in capturing you two, but not after that.”

“Deputy!” Shani said with some shock. She looked to Walker and Pania and each of them realized who Johnson meant. Joshua. Shani sneered as she spoke through clenched teeth. “Thank ya fer the information, Johnson. 'Least it give us some warnin'.” She tipped her hat as Johnson left the office, then turned to Mitch and gave him a sneer. “Y'all have no idea how much yer boss is gonna pay.”

“Oh, I ain't gotta worry 'bout nuthin', little girl,” Mitch sneered right back. “Come this time t'morra, yer all gonna be six feet under. You have my word on that.”