

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-EIGHT

“I mus' say, this were such a lovely dinner, Mr. Kingston,” Pania stated with a gentle smile. “So glad we could come ta see ye place an' share in some int'restin' conversation.”

Kingston smiled as he picked up a wine glass and lifted it in toast. “Mi casa es su casa, as they say,” he replied before taking a sip of his wine. “I am just very pleased that a pair of ladies such as yourselves were able to attend at my invitation. I know that Miss Shani has a rather keen eye to go with her rugged appearance, but she can put on a lovely palette for the eyes when she needs to. But it was my amazement when you walked through my front doors. I had believed that the heavens themselves had opened up and let one of their finest angels descend into my good graces.”

“Oh, well now Mr. Kingston,” Pania tittered as she chuckled lightly. Her outward appearance suggested that she was blushing from the compliment, but inside she only thought one thing. Go blow it out ye arse. She wasn't exactly sure how much more of such saccharine compliments she could take. It was getting to the point where she prayed that Shani would stir up some trouble.

Her prayers were soon answered.

All conversation stopped as three distinct gun shots came from the hallway, followed by the elven gunslinger's familiar whoopin' and hollerin'. “Panny! Git yer ass in gear. We are leavin'!”

Pania rose to her feet, curiosity getting the best of her as she looked to the hallway. First Ezekiel stumbled forward, then Shani, firing back into the hallway without care of who was there. Finally, Kingston rose to his feet, that plastic smile still pressed to his face.

“It would seem that my intentions have been revealed,” he stated as he leaned on his cane. “I did not wish it to come ta this, but I have need ta increase my stable, as it were. Your manservant is of notable strength an' endurance, and would complete my workforce quite well.” As he spoke, the remaining servants slowly began to step forward. Pania watched them carefully, not fully understanding what was going on.

“Quit gawkin' an' jist move!” Shani shouted as she grabbed Pania's arm. The servants were drawing closer to them, but the trio bolted toward the front doors of the mansion. Pania obediently moved, but there were still questions that filled her mind.

“Wha' in bloody 'ell is goin' on?” she seemed to scream back at the elven gunslinger.

“You got yer guns?”

“Aye, I do...” she replied, but Shani cut her off quickly.

“Good, 'cause ya needa pull them irons an' start shootin',” she explained as she reloaded her Colt then pulled her second one and handed it to Ezekiel. “I hope y'all know how ta use this.”

“I... I'm okay with it,” Ezekiel nodded quickly as

he took the pistol carefully.

“Would someone please explain wha's goin' on!” Pania again screamed. Her confusion became more so when Shani pulled a short sword and proceeded to cut a slit into her gown, revealing not only her curvy leg, but also the pistol that was neatly packed into the leather garter belt around her thigh. “Well now. Ye surprise me all the time, Shani,” she said with a sly smile.

“Would ya git yer mind outta the gutter,” Shani scoffed as she began herding the pair through the doors. No explanation came from Shani's lips, but one didn't need to come as they burst through the front doors. Pania saw it all, there had to be one hundred of them. Zombies, all of them. The walking undead.

“Well then,” Pania said as she furrowed her brow. “Why didna ye say so in the first place?”



The three raced into the court yard only to find themselves surrounded. Pania's calculation had outnumbered thirty three to one; she wasn't far off as she observed the shambling husks that came toward them from the gates, the rear of the house, the interior of the house and seemingly everywhere. It would be a tough fight to escape this hell, but the need for survival greatly outweighed the temptation to curl up and die. All three brandished a pistol as they raced to the fountain that stood as the center piece of the court yard. Shani kept watch as the others quickly scrambled on the statue, desperately seeking some higher ground. As her companions climbed, she fired careful shots into the crowd of zombies that slowly lurched forward. They would have to be careful with their bullets, as they might very well run out before it was safe to bolt. When Shani was assured that the other two were safe, she joined them quickly. The three pushed their backs to the statue, a free hand ensuring that they would not fall.

Pania's shots were well trained, even though they were virtually ineffective. Ezekiel, however, fired more out of fear than anything else. Deep inside he felt that this would be his last night on Earth. The bullets hit the zombies squarely, but they did not repel the undead crowd. They needed something bigger.

Something much more powerful than a mere pistol.

“Panny,” Shani cried out over the din of grunts and growls that surrounded them.

“Aye?” Pania called back through heavy breaths of worry and fear.

“Memmer what I said in Oxford,” Shani stated as she tried to jar the elven bard's memory. “The part 'bout not usin' magic?”

“Aye,” Pania replied, a smile forming on her

face as she could tell what the next words from the elven gunslinger's lips would be.

"Fergit I said anythin' 'bout it," Shani stated flatly. "'Cause we need a fireball cooked up somethin' fierce."

Pania only smiled in response as she tossed the Smith and Wesson to Shani. As the shambling crowd advanced, Pania began muttering her incantations, her hands became alive with flame as she weaved her fingers together, forming a larger ball. Without warning, she hurled it into the largest group of zombies that advanced. Most were tossed back, some burned to cinder. All of those in the line of fire were suddenly engulfed in flames. That still did not stop their forward movement. But it would eventually, as the dry bodies were perfect kindling for the magical flame. The burning bodies smelled like oily, wet rags as they burned, it was stomach wrenching, even more so when witnessing the shambling, mindless animated corpses flailed their burning arms in one last attempt to attack.

Shani kept firing into the advancing crowd, looking back to the mansion every so often. On the main balcony, she saw her target. Kingston had dragged his dark mistress with him. From what Shani could gather, the woman was the central cause of this, but not of her own accord. Rather, she was forced by Kingston. Some how he had a hold over her, and Shani would find out what. "Hey Kingston!" she shouted out over the echoing sounds of gunfire, magical assault and zombie shuffling. "Nice dinner! Hate ta run, though!"

"Oh, you will not run far, m'dear!" he called back before turning to his charge. He held tightly to her arm and spoke in a voice filled with venom. "That girlish one seems to have your power. Do whatever you can to stop her. Remember, your family's life is at stake." Isabella nodded timidly and began to concentrate on the pale elf in her tattered dress.

"Her powah is strong," she said in a voice that was like a squeak. "It not be o' this world." She turned quickly to look at Kingston as his hand squeezed tightly around her arm. The look in his eyes were enough to kill, and she understood that not only was her family's life at stake, but her own as well. She had no choice, she had to try. As the zombie horde began climbing slowly up the fountain, she again concentrated on the pale elf.

"Bloody..." Pania shouted out as she tried casting another hellfire, but found something blocking her concentration. "I cannu ge' 'nough power t'gether. Somethin' keeps interuptin'." She quickly looked around

the area to see who might be able to counter her spells, and soon she found it. "There!" she cried as she pointed to the balcony, right toward Isabella.

Shani nodded, knowing exactly what Pania was motioning to. "I wager so, but I dare say she ain't doin' it b'cause she want ta. I figger Kingston's got a hold o'er her." She loaded her Colt and cocked back the hammer as she steeled herself. "Time ta sway his mind."

Kingston ducked quickly as bullets hit the marble railing of the balcony. The gunslinger had decided he would make an excellent target. "Fire on that bitch!" he shouted to his body guard. "Make her bleed, but don't kill her. I want to watch her die. Slowly." The bodyguard took his rifle and fired, indiscriminantly into the massive throng in the courtyard below. He had no clue who he was firing on, as his bullets were replied in kind quickly and much more effectively than his own.

The bodyguard's head snapped back quickly, and his body slumped to the ground, a trail of blood trickling down his forehead. "Thet's how ya shoot, ya bastard. Maybe ya should learn how ta handle a pistol, ya yella coward!" Shani shouted from her position, hoping her words would infuriate Kingston to the point of making a fatal mistake. "Girly girl, we need more fire power! Keep hurlin' fireballs 'r lightin' bolts 'r whatever ya got!"

"It's no' like I've go' an endless supply!" Pania shouted back. "I'm nearly drained o' all o' me..." She stopped as she realized that one of her spells did something she wasn't expecting; as she raised a hand to cast another fireball, she felt a surge of power rush through her body, as though divine blessing was granted upon her. Pania, Shani and Ezekiel only watched in amazement as a pure, white light seemed to spread forth from Pania and went outward. With each zombie it touched, it destroyed them completely, crumbling them to piles of dust. At the outer edge of its reach, the zombies turned in fear, shambling away from the three as they perched on the statue.

"H...how the hell ya do thet?" Shani asked in a much quieter tone.

"Um... I dunna know?" Pania only replied in a rather meek voice. Whatever it was, it had given them a lot of space. The danger had seemed to pass, as the zombies where either scattered in pieces or running aimlessly. Shani just smirked as she found her senses and climbed down from her perch. Pania and Ezekiel soon followed. "Wha' now?"

"Don't it make sense ta go see the bastard what started this," Shani asked with a sneer as she reloaded her Colt. "I intend ta misbehave!"