

THE ADVENTURES OF BLACK MASK AND PALE RIDER
A TALE OF SIX GUN AND SORCERY
BY TIM HOLTORF



The Adventures of Black Mask & Pale Rider by Tim Holtorf is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-No Derivative Works 2.5 Canada License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/2.5/ca/>).

Based on a work at taholtorf.wordpress.com. Permissions beyond the scope of this license may be available at <http://taholtorf.wordpress.com/black-mask-pale-rider/>.

Black Mask & Pale Rider, Shani Wennemein and Pania Alow are copywritten by Tim Holtorf 2009.

PART TWENTY-EIGHT

Kingston dragged Isabella with some difficulty, as she struggled to get away. While he did not often show it, Kingston had quite a formidable strength, having worked in the fields before he took over the plantation's operations. He forced her along, snarling as he did so, dragging her down a dingy hallway toward a locked door. Quickly and effortlessly, he threw her to the floor in front of the door as he reached into his suit jacket and produced a pistol. "Now my dear," he sneered as he worked the lock on the door. "It's time that you and your family paid dearly for this failure. I cannot abide by failure, and those who fail must pay." He tossed the lock to the side and cocked the hammer back on the pistol, slowly lowering it to aim at Isabella. "You shall be first, my dear."

Isabella flinched and shrieked as the report of a pistol sounded out. She felt her heart stop, but only for a moment. She looked to Kingston with fear, and then wonder, as a trail of blood red began to flow down the clean white shirt that he wore. Without any grandeur, he fell over to the ground, the life pulled from him.

Isabella slowly turned to look away from Kingston, down the hall. There stood Shani Wennemein at the end of the long hallway like a shadowy spectre, a smoking gun in her outstretched hand. Behind the elven gunslinger were Pania and Ezekiel. All three appeared to be out of breath. Isabella shrank back as Ezekiel stepped forward. "Please. Please don't hurt me," she pleaded, her voice coming out in a squeak.

"Ain't nevah plannin' on doin' such a thing, Miss'm," Ezekiel replied in a calm voice. "Way I see it, y'all been forced ta do things that ya never want ta do in the first place."

"He... he foun' out," she began to speak, telling the tale of what she had done. "Foun' ou' wha' I could do. Said he'd kill mah fam'ly if I did no' do as he said." She curled her knees to her chest and wrapped her arms around them. Ezekiel knelt beside her, as though to console her as Shani and Pania looked on.

"Wha' now?" Pania asked quietly.

The elven gunslinger twirled the pistol and holstered it as she took a deep breath and looked around. There wasn't much life left in this place. Kingston and his body guards were dead. The zombies were destroyed, and those that managed to escape wouldn't last very long. "Lets jist get the hell outta here," Shani said with a long sigh as she looked to Pania and then to Ezekiel and Isabella. "All o' us." Shani lit a cigarillo as she picked up a discarded torch. She used the end of the cigarillo to light the torch as she walked toward the mansion. Carefully, she started the expensive curtains on fire as she kicked over a kerosene lamp. With the mansion slowly burning, she tossed the torch onto the pool of kerosene and walked out without looking back.

Outside Munroe County, Indiana, October 10th, 1863

Two riders flanked the three wagons, their watchful eyes gazing over the landscape as though searching for that one thing that would bring salvation. Every so often they would ride to each wagon ensuring that each was fine, and each time the pair that rode in the driver's seat nodded their reassurance. Pania and Shani had to make certain, each wagon contained the most precious cargo they had ever escorted. In total, the pair of elven gunslingers had freed sixty slaves from Kingston's plantation. Just before they torched the grounds. More than likely something that law men in the south would want to hang them for now.

The small train halted as Shani held up her hand to signal them. She watched the lights of the farm yard carefully as Pania coaxed her horse beside Shani's. "What ya figger?" Shani asked as she lit a cigarillo. "Should we chance it? I mean, last few places were duds, but the ol' man back in Knoxville tol' us there'd be a place in Minnesota we could bring 'em."

"There's only one way ta find ou'," Pania replied as she took a deep breath and pushed her horse forward. Shani looked back to the small train and gave the signal to move forward. In the lead wagon, Ezekiel Morgan sat with a hooded cloak to cover his features as his trained hands took control of the reins. Isabella sat beside him, almost as if Ezekiel were trying to protect her.

As they pushed forward, Pania began to hum, and then sing, an old gospel hymn, which was used more often as a signal to the stations of the underground railroad that passengers wished to board. "The Gospel train's comin', I hear it just at hand, I hear the car wheel rumblin', And rollin' thro' the land."

The elven bard's voice was that of an angel, soft and pure, commanding those in earshot to listen. As Pania sang, other voices added to the song from the wagons as they recognized the lyrics. "Get on board little children, Get on board little children, Get on board little children, There's room for many more." The voices grew as they neared the small farm. Shani could see a pair of men begin to approach on horse back and she steeled herself for the worst. All the while the voices continued. "I hear the train a-comin', She's comin' round the curve, She's loosened all her steam and brakes, And strainin' ev'ry nerve."

The riders drew nearer to the wagon train, and Shani seemed to breath a sigh of relief as she saw one of the riders. His skin as dark as midnight, his features like chiseled stone, but his eyes soft and caring. Still the voices continued, and the riders soon joined in. "The fare is cheap and all can go, The rich and poor are there, No second class aboard this train, No difference in the fare."