

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-SEVEN

♥♥Jeb, be a good boy an' fetch my cane if you would," Kingston said in a calm and cool voice that held the air of sophistication. "We are entertaining two fine ladies, so I must make certain my attire is appropriate." He smiled to the small black boy and waved him off to carry out his duty. Kingston fussed a bit in the mirror as one of his body guards stood by near the window. Kingston looked over to him somewhat curiously. "Is there any sign of the carriage?"

"Not yet, Sir," the guard replied as he adjusted the cuffs on his jacket. Dressed in finery, the man looked more like one to be more at home on the range than working as a guard on a plantation. The hired gun looked back to the window as the small boy ran back in with Kingston's cane.

"Why thank you, Jeb," Kingston replied with an overly genuine smile. Why don't you go downstairs an' ask Miss Mabel for some corn bread, hmmm." The boy smiled and Kingston saw the question that seemed to hang in the boy's eyes. "An' yes, you may ask for some fine Swiss cheese to go with that." The boy ran off excitedly as Kingston waved him off yet again. "Make certain ta inform Marcus that we'll be lockin' the gates once the carriage arrives."

"Sir?" the gun hand inquired as he looked back to Kingston.

"This Miss Wennemein spent a great deal of money on that slave," Kingston said as he tucked the cane under one arm. "That means he is worth a great deal, and is someone to be added to the stable." The gun hand nodded and quickly stepped out of the room as Kingston slipped into his evening gloves.

"You must be careful, Mahstah Kingston," the deep, seductive voice of the black woman said from the shadows. Kingston turned to look in her direction as he arched an eyebrow.

"An' why would you say that, Isabella?" he asked, punctuating the question with a thud of his cane on the hard wood floor.

"That woman was a gunslingah," Isabella commented. "She is powerful. Ah can feel it in me bones."

"Well," Kingston replied with a sly smile. "If that is the case, then we will most assuredly have to call upon your talents, my dear. For how many people in this world have ever had ta deal with the walkin' dead b'fore?"

that lead to the mansion that lay before them. She took in the area with a gunslinger's eye, taking note of the hiding spots that snipers could hold themselves up in; from the fountain in the middle of the well cared for courtyard to the upper balcony of the mansion. Once satisfied, she turned her attention back to the carriage and assisted Ezekiel as Pania climbed down to the ground. The elven bard moved slowly as she climbed down, making certain her dress didn't become snagged on the carriage at all, or fall face first as she struggled just a bit. Ezekiel quickly came to her assistance.

"Well then," Pania said with a sigh as she looked around the grounds. "Fine lookin' place, isna it?"

"Fine 'nough," Shani replied as she once again turned her attention back to the grounds and tried to determine where attackers might lay. "If ya don't mind livin' in a bunker." The three began walking toward the front steps of the mansion, both elves taking in the beauty of the place. Shani, though, could not help but feel a sense of foreboding as they walked past the marble of the Roman columns. Then there was that tug on her arm.

She looked to her left and found Pania smiling as she stood beside the elven gunslinger, arm neatly tucked into Shani's. "Um... what're ya doin'?"


"A lady needs an escort, ye know," Pania replied with a grin.

"I'm fine," Shani stated with a nod. "Really, I don't need no escort." Pania furrowed her brow and let out a harrumph. No time to argue, however, as Ezekiel approached the door and knocked loudly to announce their presence. Shani had her mind on other details. "Got a Colt slung on my side in a shoulder holster an' two short blades jist in case. You packin'?" she asked of Pania.

"I've go' one o' me pistols tucked 'way in a garter," Pania replied with a sly smile. "Wanna see?" she asked with a grin as she looked to Shani. Pania's arm was still tucked into the elven gunslingers, and Shani's only response was to roll her eyes and sigh. Any further banter between the two elves was brought to a quick halt as the massive double doors, made of only the finest oak no doubt, were being opened.

A rather sophisticated looking manservant bowed to the trio and quietly bid them enter. The lobby of the mansion was incredible. Two stair cases that hugged the wall while seeming to embrace the room with warmth. An elegant chandelier hung with care from the tall ceiling. Paintings were displayed, obviously announcing the former owners of this plantation, which gave a hint as to the long lineage that Kingston came from in the Americas.

The three stood in the lobby and marveled at the sight. Pania gazed with wide eyed wonder, while Shani took a much more skeptical view of the place. Ezekiel too



The carriage came to a slow stop at the front gates of the plantation. Ezekiel hopped off the back of the carriage and moved to the door, opening it with ease. Shani took her first steps out onto the pristine racked path

gazed about the room, but his eyes drifted back to a spot on the floor, making certain to keep himself unnoticed in his position behind the two elves.

"Well, well," announced the broad smiling voice of Jeremiah Kingston as he sauntered into the lobby. "What a sight indeed. Two fine lookin' ladies. Allow me ta introduce myself, I am Jeremiah Kingston, the Third," his smile seemed to grow as he held out his hand to each lady.

"Pania Alow, if ye please," the elven bard said as she took his hand and curtsied with a coy smile. Kingston seemed to chuckle as his eyes drifted across Pania's curvy form.

"I do b'lieve we've already met," Shani said as she removed her stetson, but shook Kingston's hand as a matter of formality.

"Yes indeed, we have," Kingston replied. His eyes fell on the figure of Ezekiel and his smile again grew just a bit more. "I am so pleased to see that you have brought your manservant with you. I believe that if we associate from such lower class people, perhaps they can become educated in the ways of higher society. I am all for equality, but a person needs ta know their place first b'fore they can ascend."

"In'erestin' philosophy," Shani said with a slight smirk. Gods he's such a racist bastard, she thought in almost the same breath.

"I do b'lieve we can discuss more o' this over dinner," he said as he held out a hand to usher the pair toward the dining room. As they walked, Pania wondered if the dining room was just as immaculate as the lobby of this rather palatial mansion.



Shani dabbed the corners of her mouth with her napkin and waited for the dessert to be brought around. It was an excellent meal, and seemed full of flavour. Kingston even surprised both elves as he allowed Ezekiel to sit at the table with them and partake of the meal. Although while his explanation did make some sense, it still seemed rather odd to see. His philosophy was simply just because they are slaves does not mean that they should not be well fed. Shani remained quiet for most of the meal, letting the conversation flow between Kingston and Pania. The elven gunslinger could see the look in Kingston's eyes and smirked as he continuously looked over Pania. If only you knew, was her only thought.

Dessert was brought to the table and the conversation continued, but Shani had a very wandering spirit, and the conversation began to bore her. When there was a lull in the discussion of the slave trade, she finally spoke up.

"As innerstin' as this is," Shani said politely with a soft smile. "I have a small need ta freshen up. Ya know, powder my nose, as it were." She rose to her feet with a small nod to Kingston. "An' ifn y'all don't mind,

I'm gonna take Zeke here with me." She looked over to Ezekiel and nodded. The tall, black man rose to his feet attentively.

"If ya must, then I will not stop you, Miss Wennemein," Kingston replied with that oh so patented smile. "Allow one o' my servants ta direct ya both ta the proper quarters." Kingston snapped his fingers and one of the several servants stepped forward. Dressed quite fine, the man bowed and moved to Shani. Again he bowed and wordlessly motioned for them to follow. There was just one thing that bothered Shani about these servants. While they wore rather fine clothes, each one also wore a hood, hiding their face. When the question was brought up, Kingston explained that it was a family custom that dated back to the days in England, when servants would hide their faces while in the company of lord's household.

Shani thought on that for a moment as they walked. When they finally were out of earshot from the dining room, she spoke. "Sorry 'bout draggin' ya from dessert, Zeke. I jist wanna make sure yer fine."

"Wha' 'bou' Miss Pania?" he asked with some worry in his voice.

"Panny kin take care o' 'erself," she replied with a low voice. "Sides, I ain't worried 'bout Kingston tryin' ta woo 'er inta steppin' inta his bed. She's as gay as the day is long." She caught the confused look in Ezekiel's eyes and explained further. "She's more innersted in my backside then his." He nodded, satisfied with the translation, though found it rather disturbing to say the least, having meeting a woman for the first time that only had interest in other women.

As they walked down the long hallway, Shani took note of the man servant sent to escort them. He shambled along slowly, as though hobbled. She doubted he could actually run, and for a moment she wondered if Kingston would be so low as to sever the tendons in their ankles. "Quite a nice place here," she said back to the man servant as she motioned to the paintings that hung from the walls with care. The man servant did not respond, which perplexed Shani. Slaves would often respond quickly and politely, she had learned. Perhaps it was just Kingston's servants that remained quiet when spoken too. But something and this man told Shani otherwise. The movements of the man didn't add up.

She moved quickly, reaching out to the man servant and grabbing his hood, ripping it off with ease. The man servant did not respond, but Shani reeled back, one hand pushing back Ezekiel, the other reaching for one of her Colts.

"Miss Shani, wha's wrong?" he said quickly as he remained behind the elven gunslinger.

"Ev'rythin', Zeke," she hissed in return as she stared at the man servant, taking note of the flesh that seemed to hang from his face, the vacuous eyes and the stringy hair. "I knew dang well thet Kingston weren't up ta no good. But one things clear now, I know a goddamned zombie when I see one."