

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 THIRTY-FOUR

“Miss Dorchester,” one of the girls said in a hurried voice as she raced down the steps. “There’s gunslingers in the streets. Four ‘r five of ‘em.”

“I know, Charlotte,” Arella explained with a nod as she peeked out the window of the front room, pushing the silken curtain back just a bit. “But one o’ them gun fighters isn’t a man. That’s Black Mask out there.” Charlotte had been joined by a few of the other girls as they too peeked out the window. With the call of the familiar name, the girls let out a gasp. Black Mask’s notoriety had gone a long way.

“She’s no’ ‘lone,” Pania said behind them. She was busily loading her Smith and Wessons, slamming the chamber shut and twirling it expertly before holstering the pistol. The girls looked back for a moment then to Arella. The house mistress had mixed feelings with what was about to transpire. Pania could sense this and a small smile crept over her features. “No worries, luv. No’ like we cannu deal with the likes o’ Clem an’ ‘is boys.”

“Just don’t kill ‘em, okay,” Arella replied with a frustrated breath. “They maybe no accounts, but they ain’t bad men.” Pania nodded carefully, making sure her eyes met Arella’s, then moved quickly to the front door.

As she reached out to open the door, Charlotte ran up to her with a pleading look in her eyes. “Clem’s all kinds of stupid, but he’s a good person deep down. Don’t hurt ‘im. Too bad.”

“So Arella’s said, Pania replied with a nod and a soft smile. “I’ll make certain no’ ta’ urt ‘im too bad.” She turned the door knob and opened the door loudly so all in the street could hear. Heads turned as her boots hit the wooden boardwalk. They watched as she walked with confidence toward Shani. The elven gunslinger only shrugged her shoulders as she saw the bard.

“Bout time y’all got out here,” Shani said in a low voice as Pania stopped beside her. “An’ here I thought it were gonna be borin’.” Shani looked over Pania for just a moment before she smirked. “Were she good?”

“I guess ye’d ‘aveta experience wha’ tha’ might be like sometime,” Pania replied with a coy smile as Shani narrowed her eyes slightly. Pania went over one last check of her weapons before her tone became a touch more serious. “Just dunna kill ‘em,” Pania said quietly as she finally took her stance beside Shani.

“I figgered as much,” Shani replied with a nod. “These boys don’t look like much. They talk, but they ain’t got the balls when push come ta shove.”

The night air grew quiet even with the gathering of spectators. It was rare that Bloomington had a midnight gunfight in the middle of the streets, let alone any time of day. It was all new and exciting, yet at the same time frightening. In this case, two of the gunslingers were very well known. Shani and Pania stared down at Clem and his boys. The Shani took into account the shots that would wound the four with ease. Make it fast, let them

cry in the dirt, and it would be over.

Hands hung carefully over their holstered six shooters. Every so often, a gunslinger would flex his or her fingers, always eyes watching the opponents. Clem began to crouch, his hand twitching just slightly; he was partially scared, partially excited. Who wouldn’t be when you’re faced with two of the most notorious gunslingers in the Union and the Confederacy. He sneered as he tried to look intimidating to the two elves, but just like in the poker game, neither Shani nor Pania gave a hint as to their demeanor. This seeming lack of emotion, this kind of poker face was the kind stuff that made Clem incensed with rage. It would only cost him.

But not from the barrel of a gun.

Clem’s eyes grew wide as he felt the blade escape from his chest. He hadn’t heard the footsteps behind him. He screamed out as he felt his very life force being drawn from his lips. The spectators drew back as Clem’s body began to decay and wither before their very eyes. Within seconds it was over. Clem’s buddies drew back, looking to the new player who had arrived. The tall figure tossed Clem’s body aside with ease. The black cloak seemed to be alive, the figure’s face masked by a long scarf, his stetson pulled down so even his red eyes were almost obscured. He held the long blade beside him as he stretched out a boney finger toward Shani and Pania.

“There is a bounty,” he said in voice hollow of emotion and devoid of life. “And I intend to collect.”

Pania blinked hard as her hand reached for her Smith and Wesson. It was impossible, there was no record of such a creature on this planet before. Yet here he stood. “D’ye realize wha’ tha’ is, Shani?” Pania asked as her eyes widened. She wanted to run, but she thought of those that lined the street. This monster would kill them all.

“Yeah, I know what thet sonofabitch is,” Shani replied as she pulled out both long barrel Colts, tightening her grip on them as she glared at the tall dark figure. “It’s a godsdamned lich!”



There was a stunned hush that filled the street as the gathered crowd stared in disbelief at the corpse that had only moments before been Clem. The tall, dark figure had taken him down so easily, without any effort whatsoever. At the other end of the street, the two elven gunslingers knew all too well what this creature was, and if he wasn’t stopped then all of Bloomington could be destroyed. Shani and Pania quickly drew their weapons and began firing. Clem’s buddies scurried away like rats as they realized this was more than they had bargained for.

Shani heard the loud boom of a twelve gauge shot gun and looked to her left in time to see Slow Hand reloading the hand held cannon. "Slow Hand! What the hell ya doin'? Git as many people outta here as ya kin!"

"Bar keep can do that, Shan," he replied with a sneer as his gaze landed upon the dark figure. "If this here thing's gonna chase us down an' kill us, then I ain't runnin'. I'm goin' down fightin'." As though he wished to emphasize his statement, he let loose with another volley toward the dark figure.

Pania fired off her Smith and Wessons, wincing slightly at the sound of the twelve gauge. Her attention was diverted as she heard another gun firing off, but knew it was neither Shani's nor her friend Slow Hand's weapons. She turned to her right and took a deep breath as Arella held the Winchester rifle steady in her hands. "Slow Hand's right, Pania. I ain't one ta back down from a fight. Especially when I got so much to lose." The elven bard merely nodded and fired again at the figure. The bullets only seemed to slow him down.

"Reloadin'!" Shani called out as she dumped the empty cartridges from her long barrels. The four had managed to create a small line and backed up as the figure advanced. Behind the four was chaos as townsfolk ran for their lives. The figure kept advancing upon the four, laughing maniacally as he did. With a calm and boney hand, he pointed at the fallen corpse of Clem. The dusty bag of bones began to move, rising to it's feet and shambling after it's new master.

"CLEM!" came a shout from across the street. Pania looked over in time to see Charlotte racing toward the once living cowboy.

"Charlotte!" Pania shouted out with a voice filled with desperation and warning. "Luv! No! Do..." Her words fell short as the walking undead grabbed Charlotte with an unearthly strength as it's arms wrapped around her and lifted her up, snapping her spine. Lifelessly, she

fell to the ground. Pania screamed out in anger and fired again until her pistols were emptied.

"Girly girl!" Shani shouted out as she nudged Pania's shoulder. "Keep yer whits 'bout ya, girl. This ain't time fer revenge."

Pania snapped back to reality and shook her head as though she were shaking loose cobwebs from her mind. A cry from Arella made the transition to the here and now complete. Pania watched as the fresh body of Charlotte lurched to it's feet, shambling behind the undead Clem and their dark figured master. "Arella! She's gone! She's dead! There's nuthin' we can do!" Arella's eyes welled up, and then she grimaced with anger as her delicate hands gripped the rifle.

Pania finally holstered her pistols and began conjuring. Two well placed fireballs made a direct hit, engulfing the two shambling corpses in flames. Only the lich remained, as he seemed to shrug off the magical flame with a raspy laugh from his decayed lips. The tall figure stopped to observe the now burning corpses and began to smile. He looked back toward the four, in particular toward Pania. "I knew you were filled with power. I shall enjoy taking it from you."

"No' without a fight," Pania shouted back. The chaos that was behind them was gone as the crowd had long since left, leaving only an eerie silence in this newly created ghost town. Only the lich and the four gun fighters graced the street with their presence. They continued to fire upon the lich as he advanced, however, the bullets merely ripped through the fabric of his tattered cloak.

Shani saw it first, as her sharp eyes searched wildly for some way to win. As the lich's cloak billowed out, she caught sight of a glowing, red crystal that hung in a necklace around the figure's neck. "Girly girl," she said with gritted teeth. "Ya listen up, 'cause I got us a goddsdamned plan!"