

**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-TWO

The clink of poker chips only added to the already festive feel of the small saloon. Shani was up in the game, as she'd won a good chunk of her money back that she had lost to Slow Hand over a year ago. As the game went on, she and Slow Hand would share stories, jokes and generally laugh about the strangest of things. A few of the other card players joined in with the uplifting talk as well, making the game much more friendly.

"You remember when we hit that small wagon train, just outside o' Montgomery?" Slow Hand asked as he nudged Shani's arm. "An' that woman in the rich lookin' wagon?"

"Oh shit, yeah," Shani replied with a grin. "She were jist gittin' all hysterical an' screamin' an' whatnot." She chuckled as she tossed back her shot of whiskey and then tossed in her bid for the round as she looked to the other card players. "We never had no intention o' shootin' anyone, but the way them people went on, ya think we was cold blooded murderers."

"An' then Shan just look at the young filly kickin' up a fuss an' she just shouts 'keep yer bodice on, woman. We ain't after yer jewels!'" Slow Hand described with a wide grin as he checked his cards and tossed in his bid.

"So why you two split up?" one of the card players asked with genuine interest. "Ya had such a successful run t'gether, but ya just split?"

"Well, we knew there'd be a time come when we'd haveta," Slow Hand explained. "Law was gettin' tight, an' especially with the war we needed ta lay low. I ended up workin' for some people in the Railroad an' went honest. I figger there's a few lawmen that won't gimme the benefit, though."

"Yeah, we knew there'd be them the'll still try an' come after us," Shani added as she checked her cards yet again. "This pot's too rich fer me, I fold on this one." She tossed her cards aside and grabbed the whiskey bottle to refresh her drink. One of the other players tossed his cards aside angrily.

"Ya pretty much cleaned us all out," he said with a slight sneer. "But now ya foldin'. Ain't gonna gimme a chance ta win back what's mine?"

"Clem," Slow Hand said with an air of caution. "Keep yer shirt on. This here's just a friendly game an' we don't want trouble. We each lost our share. An' it ain't like Shan's been cheatin'." Slow Hand took the bottle and poured himself a drink before he added, "Sides, Clem, if she were cheatin', I'd know." He looked to Shani with a smirk. "She gets this look in 'er eye." Slow Hand lifted the shot glass to his lips and stopped as he saw Clem's hand move toward his gun belt. "You don't wanna do that, Clem," he warned as he leaned back in his chair. His thick, meaty hand rested on the bone handle butt of his pistol as he stared down Clem. For a while, the two gunfighters just glared at each other before Clem realized there were others at the table. Shani and five other card

players had leaned back in their chairs, hands resting on pistols. Even if Clem got a shot off on Shani, at least five more would hit him.

Clem huffed with anger as he stormed out of the saloon, slamming the doors wildly. The card players listened as they heard his spurs jingle loudly down the boardwalk until fading out, and seemed to relax a bit as they went back to their game.

"You be careful with him, Shan," Slow Hand warned Shani as he leaned across the table and pulled in his winnings. "Clem's got a jealous streak. I figger he's gonna call you out b'fore too long."

"Well," Shani said with a resigned sigh as she picked up the cards and began shuffling. "It ain't like I never seen shit like thet b'fore. When the time come, I'll deal with 'im. Let's jist hope thet Clem kin see reason an' leave well 'nough 'lone."

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Pania smiled as she lay next to Arella, playfully twirling a lock of her hair around her finger. Arella's hand gently caressed the smooth skin of the elven bard's arm as she looked into Pania's eyes and she sighed softly. "Been a long time, Pania," Arella finally said for the first time since greeting the curvy elf into her establishment. "Almost a year."

"I've 'ad me travels," Pania replied, her voice never losing it's sultry sound. "I guess ye could say I went on an adventure. 'Ooked up with Shani Wennemein." She smiled slyly as her eyes seemed to twinkle just a bit. "Ye know, the Black Mask."

"You hooked up with Black Mask?" Arella said with a soft chuckle. "I never saw you as the gunslinger type, Pania. What's she like? You and Black Mask... You two never..."

"Oh no!" Pania replied with a giggle. "No' fer lack o' tryin', mind ye. Shani's no' tha' type. Bu' she's an 'onourable person. As far as fightin' go, I'd no' 'ave no one else ta back me up." She moved closer to Arella, wrapping her arm around her waist as her fingers gently caressed Arella's backside.

A shudder went through Arella and she closed her eyes as a soft moan escaped her lips. "You keep doin' that an' I would have to say that you may be in trouble."

"Trouble?" Pania replied with an impish grin. "I dunna 'ear ye complaining 'tall, luv."

"No complaints, love," Arella stated as her hands gently cupped Pania's cheeks. She leaned in closer to the elven bard, and gently pressed her lips to Pania's. It was going to be a good night after all.

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The door to the post master's home slammed open with violence. A man sitting by a fireplace set down his pipe and looked up with a scowl as he reached for a pistol that lay on a side table. As he saw the man who entered his home he sighed and shook his head with frustration. "What now, Clem?" he announced with some annoyance.

"I hear word there's a group o' U.S. Army not far from here," Clem said with a touch of ire in his voice. "You get a word out on the telegraph, Black Mask is here in town."

The post master sat motionless for a moment as he tried to comprehend what Clem had just informed him. One of the most wanted gunslingers in the United States was here in Bloomington. He shook his head as he snapped back to reality and rose from his chair. "I know there's a group in Bedford. They came in from Washington not that long ago." He lead Clem to the back room of the house where his telegraph machine was, and sat down at the desk, pencil and paper in hand. "Lead by a veteran captain. I met him three years ago, good man too."

"Well, you get this captain here, an' I'll point him in the direction o' Black Mask," Clem stated as the wild look in his eyes became even worse.

"It'll take a couple of days," the post master informed Clem. "Captain Samuel Williams only arrived last week, and he'll more than like want fresh horses and train his new rotation. I'll get word out, but don't expect them here for at least fer a few hours, maybe even 'til tomorrow mornin'."

"You just get word out," Clem replied as he looked back to the front door of the house. His eyes held that wild look of a man scheming. "If it come ta it, I can keep Black Mask busy. An' if it so happen that I kill 'er, so much the better. Posters say dead 'r 'live anyway."

*Bedford, Indiana, October 14, 1863*

A sharply dressed junior officer walked with purpose down the hallway of the bunkhouse. Most of the men were already asleep, but this man knew that their commanding officer was still very much awake, and the message he had received by telegraph would be welcome indeed. He stopped before the door to the captain's quarters, taking a moment to straighten his neatly pressed blue uniform. Light was spilling out underneath the door, an indication that Captain Samuel Williams was still awake. The junior officer knocked lightly on the door and awaited the reply from inside.

"Come in," Williams muffled reply came quickly. The junior officer opened the door quietly, and stepped inside the room. Williams looked up from the work he had laid out on his desk, which included maps, transcripts and a large journal. "What is it Beaumont?" he asked as he removed the pipe from his mouth.

"Wire just came in from Bloomington, Sir," he explained quickly as he crossed the room to stand in front of the desk across from Williams. "Seems that Black Mask has been seen at a saloon there." He handed Williams the transcript of the telegraph message and stood at ease as he awaited further orders from the Captain.

Williams looked over the transcript as he furrowed his brow. The junior officer knew that Williams had already formulated a plan as the Captain laid the paper down on his desk and sat back in his chair. "Let the men sleep for now. Wake them at Oh Six Hundred hours. I'll assume that Pale Rider is with her in Bloomington as well. Those two have been riding together since Harrisburg, so I don't doubt they'll be in Bloomington together." The junior officer snapped a stiff salute and turned on his heel as he exited the room.

Williams took a puff from his pipe as he contemplated the news. Strange how fate seemed to draw these two gunslingers together, and how fate always placed them so close at his fingertips. Perhaps this time, he'd capture them in Bloomington.

