

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 NINETEEN

The small group stood silently in the sheriff's office as one of the deputies stood watch over the wagon. Word had been sent to the local banker that the strong box had finally come into town. The man who had ended the gunfight before it really started sat heavily in a chair behind a desk and studied those that entered. The Chinaman was fairing well for taking a bad hit to the shoulder and losing a lot of blood. The children were physically fine, but the trauma they suffered would remain with them for a very long time.

They were still a little ragged and dirty, as they had to hide for so long. Even though they were safe, they both still had fear in their eyes. The young boy seemed protective of his sister, as he kept close by at all times. The girl stayed with him, all the while looking like a sad China doll, even with her floral print dress all covered in dirt.

Shani and Pania stood opposite the man, across from the simple desk. He didn't quite know what to make of these two. A pair of female gunslingers, and from all appearances, they had quite the history about them. Neither one stood taller than his shoulder, and he wasn't a very tall man to begin with. But he'd seen how quick the black haired one had been. No matter how big or small they were, they were dangerous.

"Where ya come from?" He asked with a heavy breath as he sat back in his chair, his right hand massaging the muscles in his leg.

Pania looked to Shani and for a fleeting moment, she wondered if he wanted the general heading of where they had just ridden from, or the literal description of their home world. "Franklin, West Virginia," Shani finally spoke up. "We're headin' fer Shreveport."

"What's in Shreveport?" he asked calmly.

"...Underground Railroad," Pania answered quietly. Shani looked to her and whispered about how close they were to the south. Pania just shrugged and whispered back about at least being honest. The man heard it, and chuckled lightly.

"That is a most interestin' statement," he chuckled as he opened a drawer and removed two pieces of paper. Worn by the weather, but still very readable, he lay them on the desk. Shani audibly gulped as she saw yet another piece of evidence that had become the bane of her stay on Earth. Wanted posters. "Considerin' the information that come through 'bout you two."

"Well," Pania remarked with a sigh. "It'd seem tha' our reputation do precede us." The man only nodded as he sat back in his chair. Pania studied his eyes for a moment, and found all she needed to know. Walker wasn't one to worry about grand details, he wanted things straight from the hip, honest information with no sugar coating. "I s'pose ye want ta know 'bout the wagon." The man nodded with a look that gave away how impressed he was with Pania's offer. "We were

ridin' a few days, when we saw smoke plume up on the 'orizon. Took us three hours o' 'ard ridin', bu' when we go' there, Ming an' them two wee ones were all we found 'live.'

"We found the strong box," Shani added casually. "I maybe a highwayman, but I ain't takin' blood money, hell no. An' we found this," Shani said as she reached into coat pocket and placed the silver star on the desk. The man sighed heavily, recognizing it as he gently picked it up.

"Goddammit," he cursed heavily under his breath. "Been waitin' for Marsden ta get ta us, thought he got held up in red tape is all." He looked to the two elves for a moment before continuing. "We been without a sheriff goin' on a year now. Nobody in town's willin' ta take the position, either too old, too scared 'r ain't interested."

"Wha' 'bou' ye?" Pania suggested. "Ye've go' the look 'bout ye."

"Look is a helluva lot more 'n what it takes, Ma'am," he said with a smirk as he propped up his right leg on the desk. His left hand balled up into a fist and tapped lightly on his left shin. Both elves could hear the distinct sound of wood, knowing full well this man moved so slowly, not because he was disciplined or determined, but because he had no choice. "I fought fer the south, but I will forgive the comment 'bout the Railroad. I may have the look, but I do not have the feel fer bein' a sheriff. 'Specially after I lost my leg at Chickamauga." He looked to the star for a moment as he spoke. "This place needs someone with a quick hand an' quick wit 'bout 'em. Someone that can see the trouble an' diffuse it b'fore it gets too ugly." He looked up as he studied Shani for a moment. "It didn't take long ta see that in you."

Shani blinked a few times as his words sunk in. So did Pania. "Um..." Shani began to say as she tried to find the words. "Y'all tryin' ta tell me that I'd make a good sheriff?" The man nodded his confirmation of her suspicions. Pania smirked slightly and laughed a bit before she looked over at Shani. The elven gunslinger furrowed her brow, but said nothing to the bard in response. Pania was right to scoff; the irony of the situation had not escaped her notice. Both Shani and Pania had spent the better part of their stay on Earth as wanted outlaws, and now Shani was given the chance to become the long arm of the law. "Well," Shani finally said. "Guess I could give it a try."

"Don't try," he said as he rose to his feet and walked over to her. He placed the silver star on her coat and stood back just a bit. "Just do it. I ain't big on pomp an' ceremony, but I'd say this is it, Sheriff Wennelein. Time ta turn in that moniker o' Black Mask, don't ya think?"



Shani's first duty as sheriff was to make Pania one of her deputies. That brought the count to four in total. There was Joshua, a young but determined man who had moved from New York to Mississippi with the wild dream of setting out on his own with a little section of land. That little section of land burned quickly, as the Canton boys gave him a warm welcome, leaving him homeless. He was invited to stay with Cole until he could find his own place to stay. It would have broken anyone else, but he dug deep inside and found his determination bigger than ever.

Cole was older, and really wasn't a gun hand, though he had a sense of duty.

And then there was Walker.

Johnathon Calib Walker, as he introduced himself to Shani and Pania after dubbing the elven gunslinger the new sheriff. An old Confederate soldier, he held a wisdom in his eyes that saw past the cover that most would stop at. He only cared about what was right for his home. Especially with a wife and a new born.

After the introductions had been made, Shani turned her attention to the children. Ming watched over them protectively, but he wasn't a father, more like a guardian. He watched over them because he had no other choice. Walker suggested they look into taking them to the local church. The preacher there may have been a drunk, partaking a bit too much in the sacramental wine, but he knew people in the area who would take the young ones in and give them a good home.

The two elves took the children by the hand, and walked slowly over to the immaculately built church. Like a palace in this town, it was a sight to see. Not unlike the temples that Shani and Pania would often see back home. Inside, the church was well kept, but felt oh so quiet and so very much alone. Shani doubted that very many people came here on a Sunday. And currently, it seemed as though no one was here.

"Ello!" Pania called out as she moved up the center aisle of the rows of pews. "Anyone 'ere?" She listened for a moment, hearing nothing. Just as she was about to turn back to Shani and suggest they try some place else, there was a small ruckus that came from the room behind the alter. With some effort, a middle aged man stumbled from the room, seemingly surprised to see anyone here on a Saturday afternoon. Pania tipped her hat as the man stared at the two.

"Hello?" he called back, seemingly taken aback that anyone would be here. "Didn't... didn't hear anyone come in," he explained as he walked up the aisle to meet them. "Was getting ready for tomorrow's sermon." He stopped when he took note of the two children that seemed to hide behind Shani as they clutched to her long

coat.

"We found these two this mornin'," Pania explained without waiting for any questions. "Parents're gone. They'll need a family. Walker said ye'd be able ta 'elp."

His demeanor seemed to change, became more determined as he nodded. "I know a good family that will take them in. Good Christians. And they'll be able to provide for them." He watched as Shani spoke in hushed tones to the children. Reluctantly, they moved to sit in one of the pews by the preacher as he watched Pania and Shani. He saw the silver star clear as day and seemed to take a deep breath. "You... you're the new sheriff."

"I wager so," Shani replied with a small huff. "Woke up this mornin' never thinkin' this'd happen." She looked to the children and smiled. The pair looked to Shani with their own smile, having taken to the kindness of this elven gunslinger. "Well, we best git. I figger we ain't gonna be stayin' very long, maybe long 'nough ta git a new sheriff, but it seem there's some cleanin' up ta do." She looked to Pania and motioned toward the door, tipping her hat to the preacher as she turned to leave. "Preciate it, padre. Thank ya kindly."

The pair walked back into the sunlight of the streets and stood for a moment as they watched the people returning to their busy day. The lengthened shadows told what time it was, as the sun made its way to the horizon. It seemed to add to the feeling of peacefulness, almost as though the earlier gunfight never happened at all. Shani sighed heavily as she thought this must be an everyday occurrence here in this small town.

Joshua's shout brought them out of simpler thoughts. He ran toward them quickly, with excited, yet fear filled eyes. "Sheriff..." he stammered as he tried to catch his breath. Both Pania and Shani raced to his side and waited as he tried to catch his breath. "Tried...tried stoppin' Cole. Tol' him it weren't no use tryin' ta talk ta Mitch. But Mitch were drunk down by town square an' shootin' off his pistols as he screamed 'bout b'comin' mayor. Seem they heard 'bout ya b'comin' Sheriff."

"What happened ta Cole?" Shani said through clenched teeth, knowing full well what the answer would be.

"Dead," Joshua finally blurted out. "Mitch shot 'im without even so much as a how d'ya do."

Shani glared as she stared down the street. "Pania. Git yer guns ready. Joshua, go find J.C." She clenched her fists as she took a deep breath, trying to push back the anger that welled up in her breast. "This bullpucky ends now."