

THE ADVENTURES OF BLACK MASK AND PALE RIDER

TALES OF TERRA-KAL

BY TIM HOLTORF



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

VERIT'S BIG DAY

Arcanum Bridge, Hall of the Magus, Mage Academy

Unia Wennemein nodded as the guards opened the massive double doors that lead into the grand hall that was set aside for the Magus, those few who attained a certain stature within the society of mages. She walked into the room with confidence, feeling slightly smug with her appearance. The Magus were more concerned with their books and their knowledge than actually imparting that to others. At one time, Unia was offered a position in the grand hall, but she declined feeling that her purpose was to help teach those that wished to practice magic.

Often, Unia was seen as a clumsy, doddering fool, but she knew that her purpose in guiding the next generation of mages was much more wise than locking herself away in the hall. Besides, she had a family. Her son, a knight of the court, and her daughter, a wild spirit that often would end up in some adventure or another. Many believed that Shani was a slight disappointment and embarrassment for Unia. But the Headmistress of the mage academy did not see it as such. Shani was her own person, and she followed her own path.

Unia stopped in the main hall at the center of the room, surrounded by the desks of the different mages that made up the Magus. Each was old beyond their years, and Unia wondered if they'd actually ever gone out into the world. Another reason why Unia declined an offer to join them. She just couldn't see herself locked away in a tower, doing nothing but reading books of magic, missing something as magical as a sunset. Try telling that to the Magus, however.

"You called for me, M' Lords," Unia said in a bold voice, both so the mages could hear her well enough, and to assert her confidence in front of them. Almost as though she were saying that she could have been one of them, but she just didn't wish to be.

"Headmistress Wennemin," one of the mages stated in a slow voice that seemed to grumble more than speak. His long hair was grey and stringy, and he never rose from the chair that he sat in. None of them did. "As you know, we have the capabilities of sensing when power has become greater in the weave that makes up the realm of magic. When another practitioner has entered our fold. We have sensed something for a while, and we believe we know who is gaining in power."

Unia nodded in reply. "Who is this new power that has drawn your attention?"

"Her name is Pania Alow," the mage stated, surprising Unia, but she forced herself not to display that before the Magus. "I want you to draft a letter, and send one of the messengers in the usual manner. Offer an open invitation to her to join us. We believe she can be guided in her quest to become a sorceress."

Unia Wennemein walked into her chambers with many thoughts filling her head. Pania Alow had never shown any interest in magic before. Yes, she had shown talents, but that was only to display an artistic flair not bring the weave to her own control. Unia also believed that due to Pania's attitude she'd make a rather undisciplined sorceress. Not a slight, really, but Pania was more carefree than any other sorceress before her. Still, Unia had a letter to scribe and deliver, but she also still had her own lessons to teach. It meant only one thing.

She sat at her desk and wrote quickly on parchment as she called out to the ether. "I need a messenger," she stated with a soft voice filled with pleasantries. Something she'd grown used to when calling upon these special messengers. Unia continued writing as a small glow appeared at the side of her desk.

It moved quickly around, almost flitting about. Finally the glow subsided and the object seemed to squeak announcing her arrival. A tiny pixie sat before Unia, perched carefully on an ink well. She grinned up at Unia, patiently waiting for some command.

"Ah, Verit," Unia said with a smile. "Most often you are busy aiding the other pixies as they prepare for their appointed assignments with student mages." Unia perked an eyebrow as she felt something on her shoulder. Her own pixie, Lillia poked her head out from Unia's robes and grinned as she saw Verit, waving frantically. The motion almost caused her to fall and she clung to Unia's robes, letting out a small giggle of embarrassment. Unia merely smiled as she folded up the message she had just finished writing. "I need you to deliver this, Verit," Unia said as she handed the message over to the tiny pixie.

To an outside observer, they might inquire just how a being three inches tall was going to carry a letter without taking the better part of a year. But as Verit took hold of the message, a magical transformation took place. It began to grow smaller in Verit's hands, until it was small enough for her to place in a small satchel she carried. She looked to Unia once again as the message was neatly tucked away.

"I need you to go here," Unia said as she began to mutter a cantrip, and a map appeared on her desk. She pointed to a small location just outside of Brockton. "I need you to deliver this letter to Pania Alow. Can you do that for me?" Verit nodded quickly and gave a military salute. "Good. Miss Alow has grown in magical power and the Academy wishes to speak with her. She'll probably need to be trained. And assigned her familiar..." Unia's voice droned on for a bit as she considered what needed to be done as Verit waited patiently. Finally, Unia snapped her attention back to Verit. "Where was I? Oh yes. The letter. Well, carry on Verit. Time is wasting with us merely sitting her talking."



With another salute Verit took the air and began her flight. The message would be delivered. But if only she could really decipher the rest of what Unia was talking about. Was she to become Pania's familiar?



Verit circled the small house a few times. There was a nice courtyard and a small stable attached to it with a beautiful white mare. As for any signs of the blond haired bard, Verit could not see any at all, so she took to searching the windows to see if one might be open. As luck would have it, a window was open just a bit, that lead into what looked like a library. Verit flew inside and hovered in the air as she cooed at the sight of all the books piled neatly on the massive bookcases. There had to be hundreds, if not thousands. Pania, it would seem, was well read.

Verit shook the thoughts from her mind and continued with her appointed mission; delivering the letter. She landed gracefully on the writing desk and reached into her satchel. Carefully, she placed the letter on the desk, watching with a smug smile as it returned to it's original size. Now it was merely time to wait. She didn't mind, the room was a wonderful place to wait after all, so many books and baubles and shiny objects.

A glint of silver caught her eye, and she turned to see some strange object. Metal, with a wooden handle, it appeared. Resting carefully inside a leather bound sheath. Verit crept closer for a better look. Odd, there was what appeared to be a switch on the top, and one underneath. As she studied the strange object, she noticed a second one, similar in design sheathed in a similar manner. And this one was laying on the desk. She crept closer, and stepped onto one side of the wooden portion of the device and began to push.

Slowly, the device came out of the sheath. Verit's eyes grew wide as she saw the metal continued on in the form of a tube. What strange and wonderous thing was this? Maybe this Pania was an inventor and had created a device to help her with her writing. Verit pushed excitedly on the device as it slid much easier. She was far to excited to notice how close she was to the edge of the desk...

...until it was too late.

The device slipped off the desk, catching Verit by surprise. She nearly tumbled, but caught herself and rolled onto the desk. She breathed heavily and winced as she heard the first crash. Then she nearly screamed in terror as a noise that sounded like thunder filled the room. Going on instinct, she darted for the nearest hiding place, which just happened to be inside the sheath the device had come from. The noise had frightened her, and she shivered in the darkness. Was the device really something else? Was it alive?

The thoughts were pushed away as she heard the tromping of boots on hard wood and the ching of some bell. She then heard a voice. "Wha' the bloody 'ell

were tha'?" the voice said with a great deal of shock and worry. Maybe this was Pania. "Wha'.... how the bloody 'ell did me pistol get outta the..." The voice was cut off as though someone else interrupted her, but Verit saw the hand attached to the voice reach for the letter. Verit slowly crawled out of her hiding spot as she watched Pania. She was holding the letter in one hand, in the other twirling the device Verit had discovered.

Verit became very curious about the way Pania was holding it, and having lost all fear from the noise of the "thunder stick" she walked to the edge of writing desk, watching her. Pania was still reading the letter, muttering to herself as she read the words.

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw the glow. It was slightly unnerving, and she nearly cocked the hammer back on the Smith and Wesson and point it at the object, but stopped herself as she took a deep breath. "Bloody 'ell," she said with a sigh as she caught her breath. A pixie, a small, harmless pixie. "I could o' shot ye, ya know." She looked to the pistol and then to the pixie a moment, and started to put two and two together. "Were tha' ye playin' wit' this?" The pixie nodded slowly, almost sheepishly, as though she'd been caught doing something wrong, like a child. "This is a very dangerous weapon," Pania informed her, then sighed. "S'ppose it's me own fault fer leavin' it lyin' 'bout. Never though' tha' a pixie'd be comin' ta see me, mind ye." She set the letter down and picked up the gun belt, placed the pistol back in the holder and marched over to a cabinet to put it all away.

Once she locked the cabinet tightly, she turned and looked to the pixie. "So the mage academy wishes ta see me, aye?" The pixie nodded with a grin. "An' they say I'll need a familiar." The pixie stopped a moment, as though she seemed to recall a long conversation of muttered, run on sentences.

The light went on above Verit's head, and she took to the air, driving right for Pania's head. The elven bard stepped back a bit, as though to avoid the oncoming missle, and felt a sharp pinch as a strand of hair was pulled from her head. She blinked and looked to Verit, who proudly held a strand of blond hair in her hands. She twisted and turned in the air, slowly transforming the strand into ether through some magical spell.

Pania blinked several times as she felt a rush run through her. Images began to fill her head as she tightly closed her eyes. Once the spell was done, the rush was gone, and she looked to Verit. "An' tha' familiar... would be you?" Verit began to nod, then held a rather perplexing look as she considered the question. Pania sighed and sat down at her desk as she held out her hand to Verit.

"I take it, tha' werena s'pposed ta 'appen," Pania said with a small smile. Verit shrugged just a bit as she looked directly to Pania. The tiny pixie sighed as she shuffled her feet in Pania's palm. "Little matter, luv. Fer now, stay with me, an' if there's a problem, we can always talk ta the mages at the academy." Whether it

was something she wished to do or not, Verit had become a powerful mage. Or in Verit's case, a familiar to an enthusiastic swashbuckler with a penchant for guns. what many pixies dream of. Becoming a familiar to