

Trick or Trap

by A.B.R.

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Trick or Trap

The ground shook. "Quake!" Someone yelled. Heads bobbed in assent, but no one was deterred, no one panicked, this was Los Angeles and no one was going to miss the Halloween Carnival, just getting underway.

No one dancing on the pulsating human heart stage missed a step, although a few of the dancers staggered a bit. Red veins and blue arteries strobed to a hip hop beat, as a witch's cauldron of costumed partiers danced the voodoo polka, sparklers in hand.

And so it began. A four block long stretch of Santa Monica Boulevard filled with vampires and werewolves, bipedal aliens, superheroes, dancing bears, and cuddly pink bunnies. Bewigged Napoleon's marched hand in hand with Roman emperors, and cyborgs walked with surfer dudes and gunslingers in g-strings. There were Little Red Riding Hoods and a drugged Little Bo Peep, chatting to imaginary sheep. And that was merely the beginning. Denizens of the Carnival sought originality. The preponderance of the costumes were expressive and nonrepresentational, signifying nothing about any fictional or existential reality, unless you count painted bare breasts – always a lovely sight. Some costumes were vaguely suggestive of a theme, and some were simply suggestive: mate bait. Others were outré couture, or just plain weird, but what the hell, it was Halloween, everything was allowed, and gawkers outnumbered costumed partiers by a nontrivial margin, anyway.

A secondary tremor widened a crack in the pavement, in a side alley, emitting a cloud of black smoke redolent of sulfur and stifling perfume. A gaggle of cackling witches rode out of the cloud on broomsticks, rollerblades skimmed across the pavement, shooting sparks.

"Awesome, dude. What powers your sticks?" A spectator inquired moments before the lead witch ran over him. The witches sped ahead, weaving in and out of the crowd of partiers like demented cyclists, in rush hour traffic.

Lilith herself followed the witches out of the cloud, leading a ragtag formation of lesser demons, Italian politicians consigned by Dante to the seven circles of hell, and tormented stars returning to old Hollywood haunts, or was that to haunt Hollywood, one or the other, chicken or egg.

Demons began attacking the crowd with bloody pitchforks. Spectators, believing they were participating in street theater, became willing victims of their mistaken beliefs. They refused to believe the pitchforks were anything but props and that the blood staining their t-shirts was their blood, really, and were dragged down the crack in the pavement, to hell, howling in painful participatory glee.

* * *

"Get the Bikini Girls, and go to Santa Monica Boulevard, pronto. Demons are tearing up the Carnival."

Pretty Caddy started laughing so hard she almost dropped her three thousand dollar camera. She flipped the mike of her cell phone in front of her mouth, still chortling. "Good one, A.B.R. But you got the date wrong. Today is Halloween, not April Fool's Day."

"I'm not joking, Pretty Caddy. People are getting hurt. It's only a matter of time before someone is killed, if they haven't been already. Somebody's got to stop it. Where are the Bikini Girls?"

"We're at a bikini contest. They're on stage."

"Get them off, this is urgent."

Cynthia Sand strutted across the stage. Her sculpted butt cheeks undulated on 5-inch stilettos like a catamaran in a typhoon, as she walked back to the line of contestants after completing her set. The crowd howled. "Shit!" Pretty Caddy swore. She'd missed Cynthia's set; the video she was making was screwed. "Shit!" Pretty Caddy repeated, vexed to the max.

"What?"

"Never mind, I'm on it."

Pretty Caddy ran around to the back of the stage, and up the stairs. Silverback saw her coming and blocked the stairs, preventing her from going onto the stage. Pretty Caddy knew him. Silverback worked security at a lot of the bikini contests. He was affable and invariably courteous and considerate, but fiercely protective of the bikini models. Any hot and horny primate trying to climb onto stage soon found himself practicing aerial acrobatics without wings or a safety net.

"You're not allowed on stage," Silverback rumbled. "You're not a contestant or judge."

Not even the models' managers, hairdressers, or photographers were allowed on stage, and Pretty Caddy did triple duty as all three.

"An emergency came up. I need to get the Bikini Girls off the stage."

"The boss man ain't gonna like that."

"I wouldn't do it if weren't important. You know that."

"Guess so. I'll try to give them the message. Wait here."

Silverback was 6'3", weighed 280, and was built like an NFL lineman. When he said "Wait here," he meant: Wait her or you will need medical insurance. Pretty Caddy was 37-29-36, weighed 110, and was a former bikini model. She waited, and called a cab.

Silverback strolled behind the line of contestants and whispered something to the Bikini Girls. They turned their heads to face Pretty Caddy, saw her beckoning wave, and started walking toward her, looking aggrieved at having to desert the contest before prizes were awarded.

Pretty Caddy ran down the stairs so they would have to follow her. She didn't want Silverback, or his boss, mad at her. The Bikini Girls entered most of the bikini contests when they were in Hell A, the city of fallen agents. The contests were good cover, helped build their profiles, and sometimes added sorely needed extra income.

"I got an emergency call. Grab your bags; a cab is on the way." Pretty Caddy said before the Bikini Girls could protest.

"Figures. Just when I had a shot at taking first prize from that old bitch, Brandi Morgan," complained Galaxy Light, the most statuesque of three bikini beauties, and the only true blonde.

"Forget it. It's never gonna happen," said a laughing Bullet West. Nobody in this business used their real names.

"What do you mean by that? I've got a better bod than that old hag." Galaxy Light protested, showing off round, saline-widened breasts.

"Anybody can buy great boobs, but you can't beat her decibels. This crowd eats out of her hand like trained puppies. She's been the queen of the beach here since sand was invented." Brandi Morgan had been winning bikini contests for a decade, although she wasn't yet thirty, if her bio was to be believed.

"Listen."

The inebriated crowd below the stand had erupted in a cacophony of immature primate mating calls, whistles, hoots, and college football cheers. Brandi Morgan, the last girl to present, walked toward the front of the stage, smiling and waving.

Pretty Caddy saw a cab pulling into the parking lot. "Forget her. We've got an emergency to deal with. Grab your bags; I'll hold the cab."

The Bikini Girls dove into the contestants' tent, grabbed their bags, and rushed to the cab.

"Santa Monica Boulevard, as close to Carnival as you can get," Pretty Caddy told the driver.

"The Carnival? That's halfway across town," Cynthia said.

"This is L.A.; everything is halfway across town."

"What's the emergency there?" Galaxy asked.

Pretty Caddy had been dreading that question. "Word is a pack of demons are terrorizing the Carnival. Our orders are to stomp 'em."

The Bikini Girls stared at her in disbelief. "Yeah, yeah, I know. I didn't believe it at first, either. But something bad is going down. We'll check it out. If there are no demons we can party at the Carnival. If there are, we stomp 'em."

"We're crime fighters, not demon hunters," protested Cynthia Sand. Surveillance and photoreconnaissance were their specialties. Bloodthirsty gangs, cartels, and tongs rarely questioned the presence of bikini models on a photo shoot; they just stood around with their tongues hanging out like every other guy in the vicinity. The Bikini Girls worked the beaches in California, Florida, and the Carolina Coast. Their clients were bounty hunters, private security firms, and local police forces, although the latter generally preferred the same tactics the gangs used.

"Yeah; we're crime fighters. Why didn't they call Buf—" Bullet West's amber eyes opened wide as Cynthia Sand clapped a hand over her mouth. "You can't say that. Okay?" Cynthia was the quiet, cerebral one. She had been seen reading books and had a college degree, so when she spoke the other girls tended to pay attention, except, sometimes, for Bullet, who was young and wild. This time Bullet had no choice. She nodded in acquiescence, since she wasn't packing a pistol.

"How are we supposed to fight demons?" Galaxy asked. "We've never done it."

"I don't know," Pretty Caddy replied. "Silver? Holy water? Salt?"

"Salt's for slugs," Bullet chimed in.

Pretty Caddy gave her the shut up stare. "Use your fruit phones. There must be something on the web."

"Mine's an Android," Bullet asserted.

"It would be."

The Bikini Girls dug out their smartphones. Pretty Caddy's cell phone was an ear clip, so it wouldn't hinder her while she was shooting. She stared into the Halloween night. Nobody celebrates Halloween like Los Angeles. Fireworks were exploding over the city, inexhaustible kids were heading home with bulging treat bags and costumed

figures prowled the streets, on their way to parties or public events, and the Carnival was the biggest event of all.

* * *

The taxi sat in traffic after the light turned green. "How come we're not moving," Pretty Caddy asked the driver.

"There's some kind of disturbance at the Parade, the streets are closed."

"What parade? I told you to take us to Carnival."

"Same thing. The official name for it is Carnival, but everybody calls it the Parade, with a capital P," Cynthia said, without looking up from her smartphone.

"How far are we from the Parade?" Pretty Caddy asked the driver.

"Four blocks."

Pretty Caddy tossed him a couple of bills. "Get out girls. We have to walk from here."

The sidewalks were as crowded as the roads, and the pedestrian traffic was one way: in the direction of the Parade. Evidently news of the disturbance had not yet disseminated or no one cared. To this crowd it would probably add to the excitement and draw ambulance chasers, Pretty Caddy thought sardonically. She felt a mood coming on.

"Now I believe up to half a million people go the Parade," Galaxy said, remembering something she'd read on her smartphone. "It's going to be hard to find anything in this crowd."

"Demons stand out from the crowd." Pretty Caddy looked at all the outlandish costumes on the sidewalk. "Well, maybe not this crowd." Caddy hailed from Iowa.

"Did anybody find out how to kill demons? I can't find anything," Bullet grouched. Surfing the web was not her thing; she was an action girl.

"Nothing useful," Cynthia Sand reported.

"Not me," Galaxy Light echoed.

Bullet tossed her smartphone into her bag. "Great; I can see the headlines now: Bikini Girls fight demons with nothing but their wits and their tits."

"You create too many headlines," Pretty Caddy said in annoyance.

"It works for me," Bullet retorted.

"Enough banter. We need to do this. Galaxy, see if there is a Catholic Church around here. They might know something we can use."

"Can I go home and get my gun?" Bullet asked.

Pretty Paddy had to give her request serious consideration. Bullet's marksmanship was legendary. In the Miss Teenage Wyoming contest the judges applauded her quick draw exhibition, and were impressed by the fact she used live ammo. After she put a bullet through every judge's Stetson, without killing anyone, she was universally declared the winner and crowned before her smoking Colt was holstered.

The Wyoming State Police awarded her a full scholarship, and she graduated summa cum laude in marksmanship. She was the only graduate in the Academy's history who could be put six shots in one bullet hole. All the state troopers referred to her as One Bullet. She liked the nickname, and adapted it for modeling when she traded her parka and snowmobile for a bikini on a southern beach.

"There isn't time Bullet."

"There is a church a few blocks west of Santa Monica Boulevard," Galaxy reported.

"Good. You come with me. Cynthia, take Bullet with you and find out what's going

down in the Parade. Try to keep her out of trouble."

"Good luck with that," Bullet muttered. She felt a mood coming on, and when she got moody, people ran.

* * *

As Cynthia and Bullet got closer to Santa Monica Boulevard they began to encounter people moving against the flow of pedestrian traffic. At first it was a trickle but the numbers soon increased.

"Don't go to the Parade. Some real freaks are ruining the party." A scantily dressed Elvira warned Cynthia and Bullet. "Yeah; real freaks!" Confirmed a girlfriend dressed in a sexy Chatty costume.

"Bring it on!" Bullet pushed Cynthia ahead of her, not that Cynthia needed any urging. The warning was all the confirmation Cynthia needed. She wanted to make a difference. Wanted to fight people smuggling, prostitution slavery, child exploitation, and too rarely had an opportunity to do so. Most of their cases involved identifying beach level dealers, watching smugglers or the beach houses of known criminals, and locating parole jumpers and children kidnapped by parents who had lost custody battles. She didn't know where to fit demons into her typology of evil but worried she would soon find out.

The crowded sidewalk merged into the crowded street party on Santa Monica Boulevard. It was still early in the night and the crowds had not yet peaked, more people were arriving all the time.

"This is crazy," Bullet said, seeing all the strange costumes. "Look, there is a guy dressed like a hot dog," she chortled. "Oh look, there is Princess Le—"

Cynthia clapped a hand over Bullet's mouth before she could finish. "You can't say that, all right?" Bullet nodded, eyes spitting vituperation. Cynthia removed her hand and Bullet stomped down the boulevard.

* * *

Entering the church Pretty Caddy and Galaxy Light saw a priest standing with his head bowed in front of an altar. Lives were at stake, they didn't have time to waste and rushed down the center aisle determined to speak to the priest, even if it meant interrupting him. The priest crossed himself and turned around; his mouth dropped open and he gaped at Galaxy's bikini.

Galaxy was from the stereotype-free state of Delaware. She was used to blank looks on peoples' faces when she said told them where she was from, but the look on the priest's face bordered on a catatonic state. She knew she shouldn't but couldn't stop herself from waving a hand in front of his face. "Hello, anybody in there?"

Pretty Caddy gasped.

Consciousness flickered in the priest's eyes. He muttered a prayer and crossed himself, and quickly repeated the ritual. Spiritually fortified, he found the power of speech and said: "This is a house of God. You should not come into my church dressed like that, my child."

"It's an emergency."

"I will hear your confession." The priest smiled to convey understanding and compassion; thinking: this out to be good. "Come with me, my child."

"Confession?" Galaxy recoiled as she remembered what it meant. "That's not why

we're here."

The priest frowned, and Pretty Caddy could see that for once Galaxy's natural charm was failing her. It wasn't unusual to see men, kids, dogs, and cats following her down the street.

"We were working undercover when an emergency call came in," Pretty Caddy explained, feeling guilty about telling a white lie in a church. "Demons are terrorizing the Halloween Parade. We need to know how to fight them. Can you help us, Father?"

Disbelief and confusion waged a brief war on his face. "I'm not trained for exorcism."

"The report we heard just said that demons were terrorizing the Parade. We don't have the details yet. The rest of my team is on the way to the scene. But I need to know how to fight demons," Pretty Caddy emphasized.

The priest blinked incredulously. "I don't know what to tell you.... I suppose I could call the Bishop." The priest said it like he'd rather not.

Pretty Caddy could tell this was going nowhere. "We can use all the help we can get. Can you spare any holy water? I don't know if it will work, but we have to try something."

The priest hesitated, growing suspicious.

"We won't ask you for any wine, promise." Pretty Caddy said, guessing the reason for his reluctance.

"Water I can do," the priest said with obvious relief, and a sincere desire to get rid of them. "I'll get you some."

* * *

Cynthia caught up to Bullet. Partners had to stick together. Bullet knew that, from her training with the Wyoming State Police. "Seen any demons?" Cynthia asked.

"No." Bullet had a Yellowstone temper, hot and spectacular, and all too regular, but she got over it quickly.

A rollerblading witch zipped out of the crowd and executed a U-turn in front of the barricades closing off Santa Monica Boulevard, bowling over an LAPD SWAT team in the process. The witch disappeared into the crowd with a zig and a zag and a riotous cackle, but not before turning a guy costumed as a bird in a wire cage, into a frog. "Ribbit."

"I'm not kissing that frog," Bullet insisted.

"I didn't say anything Princess," Cynthia replied.

A woman who had been walking hand in hand with the birdcage picked up the frog and kissed it. Nothing happened; it didn't turn back into a man, or a bird. The woman giggled, and kissed the frog a second time. "He's a better kisser now. Maybe I'll keep him after all." She told the crowd gathered around her. All the women broke into peals of laughter.

It took a couple of minutes for the LAPD SWAT team to pick up their truncheons and shields, straighten their helmets, and reform their line. By then the rollerblading witch was gone, and there wasn't much the SWAT team could do but crack the heads of a few drunks and throw them in the paddy wagon for proper beating, er processing, down at the station.

"The report was accurate. Transmogrifying bird boy into a frog went beyond stage magic. We better find that witch."

"Transmogrify? Eggheads! Why can't you just be a bimbo like the rest of us,

Cynthia?"

"Hey, we all have our skill sets. It's what makes us a good team. So quit your bitching and find that witch, before L.A. is infested with frogs. It's hard enough to find guys to date as it is."

Bullet stopped in her tracks, as they say in Wyoming, arched her back, pushed up her breasts, and gave Cynthia one of those you-have-got-to-be-kidding looks.

"Not that I have any trouble getting dates," Cynthia said, acknowledging the thrust of Bullet's argument. "But it's hard to find guys I want to go out with a second time."

"That I believe."

* * *

By the time Pretty Caddy and Galaxy Light got to Santa Monica Boulevard the Parade was heating up, party wise and demon wise. They heard screams farther down the street but couldn't determine the cause. A few minutes later a witch, sitting on a broom, rollerbladed through the crowd wreaking havoc, much to the amusement of anybody who wasn't bowled over. One drunk raised his glass to salute the witch.

"How does the witch do that?" Galaxy asked.

"Demon power. I don't know." Pretty Caddy threw up her hands in despair. The crowd and the situation defied explanation, and she didn't like it. To LA's jaded party set the demonic interruptions were titillating, the element of supernatural risk spiced up the party, was a new intoxicant. "This is the best Parade ever," people exclaimed between drinks. Pretty Caddy was tempted to abandon them to their fate, but her sense of professionalism prevailed. What else could a girl from Iowa do, she would have to save people in spite of themselves. They were victims, though she knew not of what. Stupidity probably, Pretty Caddy thought acidly.

Her mood was interrupted by a costumed demon appearing directly in front her, as if it popped up through the pavement. No, not as if, it did pop up through the pavement. She saw the crack it came through.

The demon looked like a voodoo god from a 1970's grade B horror movie. It was tall, 6'5" at least, and that was before taking into account the top hat it wore. Its black face was painted pale white, and it wore a white tux and tails, and white gloves. The demon leered menacingly at Pretty Caddy and she splashed it with holy water. Water drops sizzled and spat like cooking oil on a hot griddle, and wisps of smoke curled from the contact points. "The Devil's children play while the cameras roll," the demon said and laughed a devilish laugh. It burst into black smoke and was sucked through the crack in the pavement.

"I thought that only happened in television shows," Galaxy said, as if she wasn't sure if she should believe what she saw or not.

Pretty Caddy held up her container of holy water and peered at it. Galaxy had her own container. "This stuff really works. I thought that priest gave us tap water, to get rid of us."

"Maybe he should have; tap water is lethal," Galaxy quipped. She would only drink bottled water.

"I wonder what the demon meant by 'while the cameras roll.' "

"Strange thing for a demon to say. Unless—" Galaxy systematically searched the crowd and their surroundings. "Up on the roof, there's a camera crew."

Pretty Caddy studied the camera crew through the zoom lens of her camera. "I don't

see a station logo. Television crews plaster their logo all over the place. Wait. I see something else. The cameraman has horns."

"Are they real?"

"I think so. But this is Hollywood, who knows." Pretty Caddy adjusted one of the settings on her digital camera. "The assistant has a tail."

"It's time for takeout," Galaxy said in a resolute but ladylike voice.

Pretty Caddy groaned and lowered her camera. "We really need to hire somebody to write you better lines."

* * *

In a dank basement images of Pretty Caddy and Galaxy Light taking out the demonic camera crew flickered on a cheap video monitor. "Who are those two bitches killing my demons?" An angry voice shouted in the semi-darkness. "Blonde bimbos in bikinis are definitely not in the script. I don't want heroes, this is a documentary."

Sacrifice them! Sacrifice them!
Red-horned Satan wants them
Satan orders you to slay them!
Sacrifice them! Sacrifice them!

The sole and slinkiest background singer in the demon chorus wandered out of the fires burning inside a pentagram. Uber evil jack-o'-lanterns lit with fluorescent black lights, personifying the face of demonic power, sat on every point of the pentagram.

"I need a replacement camera and crew."

The slinky, background-singing demon strolled leisurely up to the creator of this tabloid scenario and patted his cheek. Oily skin rolled off like smegma. "Ooh, gross!" The demon wiped its hand and talons on his shirt.

Michael Moore, failed documentary maker, was in sorry shape. Weeping pustules were breaking out all over his face and body, and his sight was burning out. He could barely see the raw film feeds he was editing on the monitor he crouched in front of. Supremely envious of his famous namesake and ruined financially by decades of failure, he had made a deal with the Devil. In exchange for his soul the Devil had agreed to unleash his demons on West Hollywood's Carnival so Moore could have more one more kick at the metaphoric film can and produce a hit. The Devil was exacting his dues, but failing to provide an adequate budget. Moore had never expected the Devil to be a skinflint, although it was well known that Satan cheated whenever possible and inserted invisible clauses into contracts. Snooze and you lose your soul was his motto.

"If you want anything more you have to give the Devil something." The slinky demon dipped its horns at the monitor, "Those two girls."

* * *

"We're never going to find that witch in this crowd," Bullet complained, as they slowly worked their way up Santa Monica Boulevard.

"The witch is probably not the only demon at the Parade, Bullet.... Bullet, did you spot one?"

Bullet was gawking at costumed characters, but Cynthia couldn't tell which one had caught her attention: the cross dresser wearing a combination of dominatrix outfit and

frog man's suit; the cardboard knight recycled from a Medieval Fair; the guy painted green wearing a hockey goalie's mask and a Day-Glo jockstrap, or a clutch of escapees from a sci-fi con. "What's so fascinating?" Cynthia asked her. Bullet was staring so intently Cynthia worried a demon had her in thrall.

"One of those guy's looks just like Wha—"

Cynthia clapped a hand over Bullet's mouth. "Don't say it."

Bullet knocked Cynthia's hand away and whirled around and glared at her. "Quit doing that!"

"You can't mention characters from movies. This is a low budget story. A.B.R. can't afford lawyers."

"~#! Hollywood. They spend millions of dollars on promotion, and sue anybody who mentions their characters. And who is A.B.R. anyway? I've never seen him."

"Nobody has."

"It smells fishy to me. If I was still a state trooper, I'd investigate him."

"Caddy did. She couldn't find much. Galaxy thinks he's one of those alphabet agencies, but Caddy says no."

"Fine! Don't clap your hand over my mouth again. Nobody tells me to shut up."

"Can we get back to work now?"

"Yeah; we can look for demons, but what are we supposed to do if we find one, write it a ticket. I don't even have my gun. They should call this outfit boobs on heels. We're a joke."

Cynthia, smart girl that she was, decided silence was the best response, saying anything would just provoke Bullet and prolong her hissy fit.

They made their way up the street, ignoring catcalls and whistles and guys calling out 'hey baby' in preface to various invitations, all equally repellent. Bullet's mood improved, she only broke one groper's arm and let the rest off with a warning, if you call death threats a warning.

Cynthia and Bullet navigated around a keg party of Vikings and Goths wearing enough fish net to start a tuna fleet. Then pushed their way through a throng of gawkers and found themselves on the edge of a small clearing, in the middle of Santa Monica Boulevard. Occupying the center of the clearing was a blonde dressed like she had stepped off the streets of Manhattan, circa the 1950's.

"She looks like Marilyn Monroe."

Bullet glared at Cynthia. "How come you can say that and I can't say anything?"

"Proper names of real people aren't subject to copyright or trademarks," Cynthia primly informed her.

Before Bullet could think of a rejoinder, or give Cynthia a good slap, Marilyn's dress flew up and she tried to pin it down, exactly like in ... the classic scene from that famous movie. You know the one.

"You can say it! Titles can't be copyrighted. Ah! I'm surrounded by ignorance." Cynthia felt a mood coming on.

Marilyn Monroe's dress flew up again. "Why is her dress flying up like that?" Bullet wondered aloud. She'd never seen the movie, but she didn't feel a wind, and being from Wyoming she knew what wind was, it came from ~#! Canada.

She and Cynthia exchanged direct looks. "Demon!" They cried in unison.

"After her," Bullet shouted, and charged straight for demon Marilyn.

Demon Marilyn turned and ran, flitting effortlessly through the crowds. Cynthia had to push her way through, scattering apologies as she ran. Bullet forced her way through, heedless of the crowd in her pursuit of the blonde demon, who taunted them mercilessly, by stopping in every opening in the crowd to let her dress fly up and then flitting out of their custody. Demon Marilyn led them on a merry chase part way down Santa Monica Boulevard, hung a left at a bespattered paintball warrior in an elf mask, and darted into a side street. She paused in front of a shop door to taunt them. Her skirt blew up and she pinned it down, red lips forming a perfect O. An expression seen more frequently in fiction than in nature and as alluring as it is trite, demon or no demon.

Demon Marilyn turned and ran through a solid door like it was smoke. Despite their corporeal disadvantage in crowds, Bullet and Cynthia were hot on her heels and in close pursuit. A feat that was only possible because they had changed into sensible shoes in the taxi. Galaxy had not. She regarded sensible shoes as sartorial anathema and wouldn't be caught dead in them. Cynthia thought Galaxy's stylish heels were going to be the death of her, but it wasn't possible to argue rationally with a footwear ideologue. Cynthia had tried, and failed.

Bullet consented reluctantly to wear high heels on stage and in the studio, but discarded them immediately after the shoot. Combat boots were her footwear of choice, but she had to admit they clashed with a string bikini.

Bullet didn't need combat boots to kick down a door, which she proceeded to demonstrate, delivering a powerful kick that smashed the door open and almost knocked it off of its hinge pins.

"You have got to show me how to do that," Cynthia said.

"Buy a lock pick."

"Do you see the demon?"

"No. Maybe there's a back room. I'll check it out."

"I should go with you, for backup."

Bullet shrugged indifferently. "Fine, you can stun it with your polysyllabic lexicon for tedious discourse, and I'll collar it."

"Bullet. I'm impressed. Did you come up with that yourself?"

"I dated a script writer last week. He wrote it for me."

"And you've been waiting all this time for a chance to use it, have you?"

"Yup." Bullet beamed triumphantly at Cynthia.

Cynthia resented Bullet's attitude. "I was an army brat; my Dad taught me how to defend myself."

"I didn't know that. What did your Dad do in the army?" Cynthia's association with the military raised her a little higher in Bullet's estimation.

"He was a quartermaster."

"What's a quartermaster do?"

"He was in charge of drawing and quartering terrorists and war criminals."

"Cool." A cross expression flashed across Bullet's face when she realized Cynthia was putting her on. "Stuff a rag in it Cynthia. They're not allowed to do that anymore."

"You're supposed to kill demons, not arrest them Bullet."

"Fine with me, but how are we supposed to do it? Clobber them with a chamber pot." Bullet had noticed they were in an antique store.

"There must be something here we can use for weapons. Check those armoires. I'll

take this side of the store."

"There's an armory here? Cool. I feel naked without a weapon.... Where is it?"

Bullet asked when she didn't see a weapons locker.

"That row of furniture along the wall."

Bullet glanced at the row of furniture and back to Cynthia. "You mean those pimped up dressers?"

"Don't damage anything; they're valuable."

Bullet snapped off a mock salute, and walked away.

Cynthia searched the French quarter, skipped the Chinese porcelain, discarded the bric-a-brac as worthless, and surprisingly couldn't find anything in the Early American Classics section, not even an iron fireplace poker. She thought for sure there would be weapons among the American antiques.

Cynthia looked for Bullet, hoping she had found something useful. Every drawer on Bullet's side of the store was hanging open. She was rummaging in one of the drawers. "Find something Bullet?"

Bullet pulled out a fork and turned it over in her hand. "Nah. A fork. It's silver plated."

"Silver might be good. Keep it."

"There's a whole drawer full." Bullet started tossing silver-plated forks into her bag. "I feel like I'm shoplifting."

It was first time Cynthia had ever seen Bullet look guilty or embarrassed about anything. "Call it commandeering."

Bullet perked right up. "We took that at the police academy. Thanks." Bullet went to throw the last fork into her bag and changed her mind. "Let's check out the back room," she said, holding a silver-plated fork in one hand.

They converged and walked together toward the back room. When they were almost to it Demon Marilyn attacked through the closed door, and the demon's beautiful face transformed into a grimace of snarling, spitting evil. Bullet barely had time to overcome the startle factor and stab it with the fork. Demon Marilyn went up in a puff of smoke and the silver-plated fork clattered onto the floor.

Bullet picked it up. "It worked," she said in amazement.

"Better give me one of those forks."

Bullet handed Cynthia a couple of forks. "We should go back to the Parade and hook up with Caddy and Galaxy," Cynthia suggested.

On their way through the store Bullet picked up a sort of familiar looking device. "What's this?"

"A brass blowtorch."

Bullet shook it. "It's empty."

Cynthia had seen kerosene lamps somewhere. She looked around the store and spotted a row of beautifully decorated kerosene lamps lined up on a counter. "Maybe there is a can of kerosene for those lamps."

"I'll see." Bullet ran off to look for kerosene.

Cynthia pulled out her smartphone. She had found what she was looking for by the time Bullet returned, carrying the blowtorch in one hand and a silver-plated fork in the other hand. "A sporting goods store should have something we can use for weapons. There is one on this block."

"Let's do it."

"It's closed." Bullet sounded peeved. She wanted to get her hands on some serious weaponry. Silver-plated forks didn't conform to her definition of a weapon.

"Do your thing."

Bullet booted the door open, and walked inside. "I don't see a gun department."

"Look around, there must be something here we can use."

Bullet spied something of interest, and headed toward the back of the store. Cynthia went in the other direction. She found a selection of knives and picked up a large one with the head of an elk stamped on the leather sheath. The knife had an imitation pearl handle and bands of abalone shell above the finger guard and below the pommel. Made in China was stamped on the 6-inch blade. Cynthia pulled it out of the sheath, and hefted it. The knife felt comfortable in her hand, balanced. There was a slit in the sheath to hang it from a belt, but Cynthia was afraid the knife was too heavy for her bikini. She found straps with buckles in the camping section, and then commandeered two of the knives and went to look for Bullet.

The sound of hammer blows led Cynthia into a back room. She found Bullet flattening silver-plated forks, with a rubber mallet. "Take over Cynthia," Bullet ordered. Bullet tucked a silver-plated fork into the strap of her bikini bottom. "Keep yours. We'll make arrowheads with the rest." Bullet put a cutting disc in a cordless drill, and began cutting the flattened forks down to size, leaving an inch behind the tines to use for a tang. In a surprisingly short time they had the forks mounted in stock arrows.

"Odd looking arrows," Cynthia commented, and picked up one.

"Demon bolts." Bullet scooped up the arrows and ran back into the store. Cynthia followed her to the archery section. Bullet chucked the arrows in an empty quiver, slung it over her back, and studied the high tech crossbows hanging on a display wall. She picked a powerful crossbow, complete with pulleys, balance weights, laser sights, LED wind speed readout, and arrow rack. She tested the trigger action, approvingly. Then she filled the arrow rack with bolts from her quiver.

"Do you know how to use one of those things?" Cynthia asked dubiously.

"Nothing to it. Aim; squeeze the trigger and the perp falls down. Just like a gun."

Cynthia eyed the crossbows on display. "Maybe I should take one."

Bullet looked askance.

"I can shoot a gun."

"I've seen you on the pistol range. You're not bad. But ... on a crowded street..."

Bullet let the question dangle in the air.

It forced Cynthia to reassess. She was a pretty good shot, but not in the same league as Bullet, but then, nobody was. Not with a handgun, anyway. "Maybe you're right,"

Cynthia conceded. "You're our sniper, girl."

"Damn straight!"

"Oh, I almost forgot. I've got something for you." Cynthia handed Bullet one of the knives.

Bullet smiled at the knife. "This keeps getting better." Bullet pulled the knife out of its sheath, and wrinkled her nose at it.

"There are other knives."

"It will do." Bullet strapped the fancy knife to her thigh, below the silver-plated fork

tucked into her string bikini. Cynthia copied her.

Bullet held the crossbow in one hand and picked the blowtorch up off the floor, and pumped them in the air, "Let's go demon hunting!"

The side streets leading to Santa Monica Boulevard were busier than ever. No one paid especial attention to Bullet and Cynthia. They were gorgeous, male eyes followed them, picturing them naked; but that was normal. Women turned up their noses and made catty remarks to their girlfriends, but that, too, was normal. It was Halloween and this was Hollywood, and everybody was drinking, nobody thought twice about Bullet's crossbow. Cynthia suspected they could pack RPGs and nobody would bat a false eyelash, but she didn't mention it to Bullet, she'd go and get one.

At the intersection Bullet took one step onto Santa Monica Boulevard, and jumped back and flattened herself against a wall. "Witch coming. Hold this." Bullet handed Cynthia her crossbow, and dug into her bag, pulled out a lighter and lit the blowtorch. She peered around the corner, waiting.

With masterful timing, Bullet leaped out and grabbed the handle of the witch's broom with one hand, and applied the blowtorch. The straw caught on fire. The broom threw itself from side to side, trying to avoid the blowtorch flame, then bucked and reared. Bullet relinquished her hold and the broom shot into the air, out of control. It performed a loop the loop and flew straight into a building. The force of the impact catapulted the witch nose first against a 3rd floor concrete wall, and both she and her broom slid down the wall, trailing smoke.

"That will peel off the warts," Cynthia commented archly.

Bullet studied the blowtorch. "Not as much fun as a gun," she decided, "too quiet." Bullet turned it off.

"Come on, it was hilarious. I want to smoke another witch." Cynthia was bubbling with enthusiasm. She was having fun and making a difference. What could be better?

They heard screaming behind them. "Quick! Give me my bow." Cynthia thrust the crossbow into Bullet's outstretched hand, and gripped her silver-plated forks. They turned around to look for the source of the screams, and a hugely obese man loomed in front of them, blocking their path. Sweat ran down his face and saliva dribbled from his mouth. Pudgy hands reached feebly for Cynthia, rolls of fat wobbled along his arms, and its eyes bulged, trying to see inward and outward, at the same time. It parted its lips to speak, opening a dark mouth of hell. "The horror," it wheezed.

"Fork it Cynthia."

Cynthia plunged one of her silver-plated fork into the rolls of fat over its man breasts. A thick cloud of black smoke enveloped them, shrouding the street.

Bullet sputtered and coughed. As the smoke cleared she asked: "What was that?"

"Marlon Brando."

* * *

After defeating the demon camera crew and wrecking the camera, because it needed wrecking, Pretty Caddy and Galaxy walked beside a long line-up waiting for restaurant tables. Pretty Caddy tried to focus on searching for demons and cameras, but she couldn't completely avoid being distracted by the costumes and antics of the partiers.

"Are you sure there are more cameras?" Galaxy asked.

"The demon said 'cameras,' plural."

"The roving eye sees all. I'll look for cameras."

"And demons."

The crowd was raucous and getting louder. Pretty Caddy tried to tune it out. She lost the sense of individual voices and words blurred into meaningless murmurs; a torrent of phonemes churned by rapids. Shrieks and howls rose above the din and fell back into the swelling burble. She felt herself being drawn into it, and an image flashed through her mind: hundreds of monkeys swinging through a primeval forest, chattering, chattering, chattering—"Caddy. Are you all right?"

"Are you all right?" Galaxy repeated when Pretty Caddy didn't respond. "You look like you've seen a ghost. You haven't, have you?" Galaxy looked around rapidly, half expecting to see one. She had never believed in ghosts but anything seemed possible tonight.

"I heard the inner voice of the urban jungle. It was frightening, worse than demons." Pretty Caddy said in a faint voice, shaken by the experience.

"I don't think so." Galaxy gave Caddy a questioning look.

"Maybe you had a contact high," Galaxy suggested, sniffing the air and smiling broadly at Caddy.

"We've got a job to do," Pretty Caddy said, brusquely changing the subject.

"Back to bossy, you're good to go. I spotted another camera. It's on a light standard, across the street. Not the closest one, the next one down."

Pretty Caddy saw a small object fixed to the lamp standard. "Are you sure it's a camera?" Galaxy nodded in the affirmative. "I need to get closer. My eyes aren't as good as yours."

In order to cross the street they had to thread their way through knots of people partying and gawking. Pretty Caddy wanted to get right under the camera, so she could get a good look at it and make sure it wasn't a security camera or traffic camera, although it was in the middle of the block instead of overlooking an intersection.

Evidence to the contrary, it seemed inconceivable for demons to film the Parade. Pretty Caddy understood creating mayhem and claiming souls, it was what demons did. But why would they film it? She couldn't picture demons relaxing by a lava pit eating popcorn and watching home movies after a hard night of torturing the damned. "Hey Lucifer, did you see the way I turned that guy into a centaur. Petty good spell, huh." "That's old. Pontius turned an Intel video chip designer into a Pentium II, and recycled him. Ask him to show you how to do it some time." "Who dripped blood in my popcorn? I'll rip their balls off and dangle them from my horns." It couldn't be, Caddy thought. It felt wrong. If demons wanted to make a home video they'd film it on their cell phones, same as everybody else. Why bother with a professional camera and crew, even if the camera was bottom of the line.

"It sure looks like a camera to me," Galaxy said.

They were close enough to the light standard now that Pretty Caddy could see it clearly. It was a remote controlled camera transmitting wirelessly over the Internet. Pretty Caddy thought she recognized the model, it wasn't a cheap webcam but wasn't a pro model, either. The camera was mounted well above the heads of the crowd and out of their reach. Pretty Caddy instinctively knew it was the Devil's. "How do we take it down?"

Galaxy snorted delicately, indicating it was a stupid question. She nodded to point

out a guy leaning against the light standard, clutching a can of beer. "I'll ask him to shimmy up the pole and take it down. Guys will do anything for me." Galaxy put on a smile and walked toward him.

The guy leaning against the pole looked like he had been partying hard and early. "He's too drunk," Caddy objected.

Galaxy stopped but decided to give it a try. "I need to get my camera down. Can you help a girl out?" Galaxy asked sweetly. Guys always fell for it.

"You're not wrecking this camera," the drunk snarled, and transformed into its true form, a scaly entity with horns, a tail, and cloven hooves. "I have other plans for you."

Galaxy retreated to stand by Caddy's side. The demon ran forward and lunged at them. "Go right," Pretty Caddy cried out, and dodged left. The demon was almost between them. "Now!" Caddy shouted and they both threw water at it, catching the demon in a holy water crossfire. The holy water bubbled and hissed like acid, and ate holes in its scales. The demon exploded in a puff of sulfurous smoke.

Galaxy covered her nose and turned her head away. "It stinks when they do that."

They retreated and waited for the smoke to clear and the wind to purify the air. "We still need to take down that camera," Pretty Caddy said.

"Not a problem." Galaxy pulled off a shoe, and gauged the distance to the camera. Then put her arm back, took aim, and threw her shoe. She could throw a stiletto heel like a black ops ninja. Her shoe rotated heel over toe over heel, twice, spiked the webcam and knocked it off the light standard.

"Take that Cynthia!" Galaxy exclaimed.

"Are you two still arguing about footwear?"

"Cynthia's fashion challenged," Galaxy said in a voice of someone delivering final judgment, and limped unevenly on one bare foot and one four-inch heel, to go and look for her shoe.

She found it, and the webcam, in the shrubbery, where everything always lands. Her stiletto heel was impaled in the lens of the camera. Galaxy grinned and held it aloft for Caddy to see. "Bullet's eye."

Pretty Caddy groaned.

She hated puns.

* * *

Moore slumped behind his editing board holding his face in his hand, oblivious to his deteriorating physical condition. He had just watched the bikini bimbos kill a demon. His film *Demons of Hollywood* was the first documentary to record demons terrorizing a city. The Devil had granted him exclusive rights and guaranteed its success. Moore had chosen the Halloween Carnival for the location, but those bikini bimbos were ruining his documentary, and giving him bad visuals. They should have been terror stricken.

He glanced at the live feeds on four small monitors, above his editing board. One of the live monitors was dark. Just then a camera got hit by a flying object and a second monitor went out. "There goes another camera!" Moore shouted. He jumped up from behind his editing board. "You've got to get me more cameras, Lilith. I've lost coverage of half of the Parade."

"Quit whining. You're already over budget. You still have one camera crew and a remote. I'll order my demons to concentrate in those areas."

"You're demons are getting wiped out. Two actors and my narrator were killed. So

was a witch." Moore sat down in despair, and was distracted by a new development on one of his two remaining live monitors. "Make that two witches. Another one just crashed in flames."

"What? Not possible." The background singer lost control and reverted to its true form.

"I didn't see what happened!" Moore said defensively. "The first one crashed in flames while you were away."

"Okay; it's not your fault. I can accept that." Lilith returned to the form of a slinky background singer wearing a hot red outfit, for its role as the female lead. "What were the Italian politicians doing while I was reporting downstairs?"

"Eating pizza and arguing about old political battles and murders. The lesser demons had to intervene to prevent a civil war."

"Politicians!" The demon sneered. "After 800 years you'd think they'd learn." The singing demon snapped its talons and two demons clad in red flannel pajama hoodies with wide, flared sleeves teleported into the basement. "Build me two crucifixes," Lilith ordered. She snapped her talons again, and whips materialized and cracked over the demons' hoodies and drove them like donkeys.

"Forget the politicians. Get me more cameras! I'll need more than two when the demon onslaught terrorizes the Parade, in the climax."

"I told you. You have to sacrifice those bimbos first. Where are they?"

"I lost track of them after they knocked out the remote camera."

"The demon I sent to guard the camera must have captured them. It had orders to do so."

"The bimbos killed it."

Lilith's face scrunched and her eyes burned. "It was one of my playthings." Flames erupted in a fireball around the demon and shot in every direction, scorching the basement walls and ceiling. Someone on the floor above them screamed. Moore flinched in terror and cowered behind his editing board.

"I'll take care of those two bimbos myself," hissed a voice reverberating with evil intent, inside the fireball.

The flames subsided and flared out, and the background-singing demon stood in their place. It checked its outfit, making sure the straps were in all the right places and everything was covered that should be covered. "How do I look?" It asked Moore in a silky feminine voice.

Moore peaked over the top of his editing board and nodded vigorously, afraid to say anything.

* * *

The crowd parted and a stunning female demon strolled toward them, tail swishing like a lioness in heat. Galaxy immediately noticed the matching triangular points on the tip of its tail and tines of its trident, and the color coordination with a blood red bikini. Its shoes were to die for. This was a demon that understood fashion. It could model for a glamour magazine. Galaxy was tempted to ask for the name of the designer, but thought better of it; it wasn't done.

Remembering their mission, Galaxy started to swing her bottle of holy water, but before she could douse it the demon extended a taloned hand and shouted: "Freeze." Galaxy froze in position, still conscious.

Pretty Caddy was incensed. "That's it, just 'Freeze.' No consulting leather tomes or manuscripts on parchment, no long incantations in Latin or Babylonian, no animal parts or ceremony, you just say 'Freeze.' "

The demon gave Pretty Caddy a contemptuous look. "Try to keep up. I'm Lilith, the Vice Demon of the underworld and Satan's concubine. I don't need reference material, the power is in me. It's all in the wrists." The demon waggled the hand holding Galaxy in thrall.

"Hold that pose." Pretty Caddy raised her camera and sighted through the viewfinder. "Try to look mysterious and sexy." Pretty Caddy set the flash for maximum brilliance and shot multiple exposures. The lights caused the demon to blink and look away, and its hand dropped, releasing Galaxy from its spell.

Pretty Caddy scrolled through the exposures on the viewer, liking what she saw.

"I know that look. The photos are good. Can I see them?" Pretty Caddy turned her camera so Galaxy could see the digital images. One image stood out, and Pretty Caddy brought it up on the viewer. "It's a cover photo," Galaxy said immediately.

"That's what I thought when I saw it."

"Hey! Remember me." The demon struck the pavement with the handle of its pitchfork. The ground shook and a fissure opened and ran across the boulevard, swallowing a party of steam punks. They tooted their whistles all the way down. "That's more like it. I feel better now," the demon declared, and started walking away.

"We can't let it get away, it's a danger to everyone," Pretty Caddy said. They ran after it, determined to douse it with holy water, risks and high heels be damned. But no matter how hard they ran they couldn't close the gap. The demon just kept walking away from them and maintained the same lead. After sprinting after it for a block and a half they were breathing hard. Galaxy turned an ankle and they had to stop.

"How does it do that?" Galaxy said, gasping for breath.

The demon looked over its shoulder, rolled its eyes and shook its head contemptuously, implying it was contending with hopeless incompetents. "Take as much time as you need girls. I've got until midnight."

"What happens then? You turn into a pumpkin?" Galaxy retorted.

"Call it a curfew. I'm topside on a Halloween pass."

"Oh! I so want to scratch its eyes out. Brunettes think they're so smart."

Before they could react the demon held up its hand and muttered something they couldn't hear. The pain in Galaxy's ankle vanished. She looked down at her foot and shot a look at the demon. "All better now?" The demon said smugly. It wasn't really a question. The demon turned away and walked down the street, pointedly ignoring them.

Galaxy flexed her ankle and tried putting weight on it. "It doesn't hurt. That's weird."

"Weird doesn't begin to describe it."

"It is getting away." Galaxy was about to run after the demon.

"Hold on." Pretty Caddy had never fought demons before, but the situation defied all logic, her intuition was ringing fire hall decibel alarms. She needed a moment to think.

She didn't get it. The demon turned onto a side street. "We're going to lose it," Galaxy cried, and lit out after it. Pretty Caddy had no choice but to run after her.

Pretty Caddy rounded the corner right behind Galaxy and saw the demon standing at the top of a flight of stairs leading down to a basement level. The demon calmly watched

them running toward it. It waited until they had almost caught up to it; then walked casually down the stairs and through a closed door.

Galaxy started to run down the stairs after it. Pretty Caddy grabbed her arm and pulled her back up the stairs. "It smells like a trap to me."

Galaxy shrugged off Pretty Caddy's grip, in a huff. "You were the one that said we had to go after it."

"We need backup."

Pretty Caddy called Cynthia. "Whatch ya doing girl?"

"Burning witches." Cynthia chuckled like she was having the time of her life.

"Great. You've turned Salem. Wicca's will be picketing our studio. I'll have to buy spell detectors."

"These are Halloween witches. You know the type: broomsticks, warts, maniacal cackling. Bullet lights their brooms on fire, and they fly out of control and crash into buildings. It's a hoot."

"I hate to rain on your fireworks, but we need backup."

"What's up?"

"We chased an A-list demon into a basement. I think it's a trick, or a trap."

"It is. We chased Marilyn Monroe into an antique store. She hid and attacked us. Where are you?"

"What did you – never mind, we'll talk." Pretty Caddy read Cynthia the address on the side of the building. Galaxy interrupted her, "Caddy, you have got to see these tacky red flannel pajama hoodies with – oh, oh." Pretty Caddy snapped her head around just as four demons grabbed them and forced them down the stairs. "Demons got us—" Pretty Caddy managed to say before her cell phone was ripped from her ear.

The door opened of its own accord and they were pushed inside. Now that she wasn't hemmed in by a narrow stairwell and had some room to work with, Pretty Caddy grappled with the demons and Galaxy struggled against her captors. They had lost their holy water in the stairwell, and the demons were impervious to punches, kicks, and knees to the groin. Galaxy and Pretty Caddy fought to stay together, but they were outnumbered and being forced deeper into the basement with each passing moment.

"I'll flay you alive if let them near the jack-o'-lanterns that power the portals," snarled the voice of the demon who led them to the basement. Pretty Caddy glanced behind her; a malevolent face glowed with an eerie dark light. Flames danced on the floor behind it. A demon grabbed her by each arm, and yanked her off her feet. She aimed a kick at the jack-o'-lantern, out of spite, but her kick fell short.

Two more demons in red pajama hoodies ran out of a dark corner where they had been lurking. One demon seized Caddy's feet and the other one immobilized Galaxy's feet, and they were carried to the back of the basement. The demon holding Pretty Caddy's feet lifted her legs above her head, wrapped a plastic tie around her ankles, and secured her feet to a post. Two more demons held her down while a third demon stretched her arms along a cross pole and tied her wrists and upper arms to the cross pole.

The demon in the hot red bikini stood over them, gloating. "I am so glad you decided to stay. Satan chose you to be the guests of honor for our little sacrifice tonight."

* * *

Hanging upside down and squirming in her bonds Pretty Caddy did not analyze the semiotics of a satanic inverted cross, nor was she inclined to engage demons in a

discussion of the principles and hidden meanings of their arcane rituals and eschatology. The ergonomics of her cross sucked and she was too busy cogitating about her impending sacrifice. Besides, they were demons, they'd lie.

She could turn her head and did so, and saw Galaxy hanging upside down on an inverted cross beside her. "Do you have plans for tonight, or are you just going to hang around here?" Galaxy asked her with a straight face.

Pretty Caddy groaned.

"I was hoping to cap the night off with fireworks," Caddy replied in a voice laden with innuendo.

"Good one! Consider yourself high fived." Galaxy was determined to keep their spirits up.

"Consider it done." Pretty Caddy looked up at her open toed shoes, and wriggled her toes. "I've never seen my toenails from this angle. I need a pedicure."

"The color of your nails doesn't do you justice."

"I woke up on the wrong side of the mirror. What can I say?"

"Maybe it's the lighting in here."

"Ghastly. Isn't it?"

"You'd think a director would know better."

"Shut up!" The director stomped across the basement and glared down at them.

"Shut up," he shouted, redundantly. "You're going to be human sacrifices. Act terrified. Scream! The camera is rolling."

"Pleeze. I'm a glamour model. I don't scream." Galaxy said indignantly. "Get Pitchfork Betty, over there, to scream for you. She seems like the type."

"Galaxy, did you sign a contract or release I don't know about?"

"No. I didn't sign anything, Caddy."

"Didn't think so. I'm the official videographer of the Bikini Girls."

"Yeah; she's the official videographer. You can't film us, it's illegal. It is, isn't it, Caddy?"

"It definitely is. He can't film us unless we sign a release. It's the law."

"Okay. Okay. I'll get a damn release." Moore turned to go get one and Lilith smacked him up the side of the head. "Moron. They're screwing with your head. Now get back there or I'll screw it right off your neck."

Moore leaned over them, squinting, nearly blind. "Scream. Damn you! I don't need your release. *Demons of Hollywood* is a sure hit. The Devil guaranteed it."

"Ain't never gonna happen," Pretty Caddy told him, all serious-like. "You're camera angles are all wrong. Putting your cameras up high, I mean, really, what were you thinking? Shooting down makes your characters look small. Set them low and shoot up, it makes your characters larger than life."

"It's a documentary."

"Fine, shoot at eye level; it creates a realistic effect. I do it all the time."

Turning her head to face Galaxy, since everything else was tied up, Pretty Caddy said, "He doesn't even know the basics about cinematography. No wonder his films always flop."

"He is fundamentally flawed."

Pretty Caddy groaned.

"If I have to listen to one more of your bad puns, I'll scream. I mean it, Galaxy. I

will scream."

"Shut up! Both of you. My film won't flop. *Demons of Hollywood* is going to the biggest drawing documentary of all time. The Devil guaranteed it."

"Fat chance. Even YouTube rejects your videos."

"Ooh; that was nasty, Caddy. I like it."

They both burst into laughter, enraging Moore further. His neck bulged and his face turned red, pustules popped and secreted, and the veins in his eyes stood out and throbbed.

"Scream or I'll sacrifice you right now!" Moore shouted angrily, and leaned over them and stared into their faces, willing them to scream in terror and beg for their lives.

Pretty Caddy and Galaxy broke into fresh peals of laughter.

"Scream!" Moore bellowed hysterically, stuck in an anger loop.

Pretty Caddy's eyes were getting watery from laughing so hard. "Why do evil villains always expect everyone to tremble in terror and beg?"

"And scream. Don't forget the screaming."

"They can't stand people laughing at them."

"I could never date a villain without a sense of humor," Galaxy quipped between sobs of laughter.

"Me neither."

"You're ruining my documentary!"

Moore snapped. "Sacrifice them now!" He screamed at the political demons.

Sacrifice them! Sacrifice them!
Red-horned Satan wants them
Satan orders you to slay them!
Sacrifice them! Sacrifice them!

"Isn't she ever going to get to the second chorus?" Pretty Caddy complained.

The pajama wearing demons leered at them and pulled out sacrificial knives that had sent heretics to hell, sacrificed wealthy Moors and unrepentant Jews, and sealed the fate of more than one political rival, including, for some, the demon standing beside them.

There was a loud crack of splintering wood, the door burst from its hinges and crashed to the basement floor. "Trick or Treat!" The Avenging Bikini Model from Cheyenne stood in the doorway, crossbow raised in firing position. She swept her crossbow around the room, pausing momentarily at every demon, hoping it would make a threatening gesture and give her legal grounds to squeeze the trigger. "Unhand my friends you fiends."

Cynthia Sand ambled through the doorway and struck a thoughtful pose.

"Melodramatic; but you got their attention Bullet."

"Cut!" The director jumped up from behind the editing board, in an apoplectic rage.

"You bimbos aren't in the script. Get out!" Moore screamed, in his habitual exclamatory style. "Get out, right now!"

Sacrifice them! Sacrifice them!
Red-horned Satan wants them
Satan orders you to slay them!

Sacrifice them! Sacrifice them!

"Shoot the background singer, Bullet. I hate that song." Pretty Caddy hollered from the far side of the pentagram, her face hidden from Bullet's view by jack-o'-lanterns and flames, the only sources of illumination in the basement.

Bullet turned her bow on the demon clad in a blood red bikini. It started to raise its hand. "Shoot it quick, before it casts a spell on you," Pretty Caddy warned. Bullet didn't need urging. Raising a hand was the threat gesture she had been waiting for. Bullet squeezed the trigger and an arrow flew across the basement, right on target – like there was ever any doubt. The silver-plated tines of the demon bolt impaled Lilith before it could cast a spell, and the demon exploded in a mini-mushroom cloud of yellowish-black smoke.

Whips cracked, and political demons rushed at Bullet to avenge the death of their mistress and primary torturer. Bullet fired bolt after bolt with the speed and accuracy of legendary Mongol archers, minus the horse, obviously. There wasn't room to ride in the basement and the ceiling was too low. Her horse was running free on the range in Wyoming, pining for her to return.

One by one, Bullet's relentless fusillade turned the political demons and their hideous red flannel pajama hoodies into clouds of smoke. The sixth and last demon burst into a cloud of smoke a scant six feet in front of Bullet.

The smoke was so thick the Bikini Girls couldn't see each other across the room, and the air reeked of acrid, sulfurous fumes. But the Devil wasn't done yet. It hadn't claimed billions of souls and ruled Hell since time immemorial by being a quitter. No. No. No. The head of a horned demon rose through the flames burning inside the pentagram. Firelight danced on its scales and its burning red eyes were visible through the clouds of smoke. Bullet shot it before its cloven hooves touched the concrete floor. Another rose to take its place, and Bullet shot it, too.

Hanging upside down on her inverted cross Pretty Caddy saw a third demon emerge and knew something had to be done soon. Bullet would run out of arrows before Hell ran out of demons. Of that she was sure.

"Cythnia!" Pretty Caddy yelled because she couldn't see Cynthia for smoke. "The jack-o'-lanterns power the portals." She didn't say anything else. Cynthia was smart; she'd take it from there. Pretty Caddy could do nothing more, being tied up and all.

Cynthia was guarding Bullet's six when she heard Pretty Caddy holler. She saw the black lit face of the nearest jack-o'-lantern glowing eerily through the haze, and shivered. It was the most evil thing she had ever seen. She could feel the evil force the jack-o'-lantern radiated at light speed. She wanted to scream but couldn't look away. It was the Song of the Sirens in Pandora's jack-o'-lantern.

Cynthia tore her gaze away from the face of the jack o'-lantern with pure willpower. She knew it had to be shut down. But how? She counted five jack-o'-lanterns, all seemingly identical, all electrical.

The breaker box! There is always a breaker box in the basement. I have to find it.

A red-eyed demon rose out of the flames burning between the jack-o'-lanterns. Bullet shot it. How many is that now, four or five? Cynthia thought. She'd lost count, didn't know how long she had stared into the face of the jack-o'-lantern.

"I have to shut down the jack-o'-lanterns, Bullet."

"Do it."

"You're back will be unguarded."

"Go." Bullet ordered, and stepped away from the doorway and reached into her quiver for more demon bolts.

Cynthia searched along the front wall first. She was afraid she would miss the breaker box in all the smoke, and searched systematically with her hands as well as her eyes. She knew that if she missed it she wouldn't get a second chance. Bullet would run out of arrows and demons would erupt through the portal, kill them all, and terrorize the Carnival. Or worse yet, possess them and use their bodies as instruments of terror.

Cynthia forced herself to concentrate on her search for the breaker box. She came to a corner and began to search along the side wall. The smoke was thicker away from the doorway, the air foul and choking. She could barely breathe and feared for Pretty Caddy and Galaxy hanging out of sight at the back of the basement.

The side wall was longer and time dragged. Every once in a while a quick, orienting glance at the pentagram revealed another demon emerging through the portal and bursting into a dark cloud, adding yet more smoke to the congested air. Cynthia was forced to rely more on her hands than her eyes to search for the breaker box, and every addition to the cloud brought them all closer to the end of Bullet's depleting supply of arrows.

Near the far end wall Cynthia found a set of abandoned stairs leading to a sealed door. The area under the stairs was a shadow in the darkness, the home of terror, every fiber of her being rebelled at the thought of entering it.

Cynthia thought of the breaker box under the stairs in her granny's house, remembered other old houses she had prowled through as a kid, and forced herself, mentally kicking and screaming against it, to step under the stairs.

It was too dark to see anything. Her hand bumped against an unseen object and recoiled instinctively. Flinching all the while, she forced her hand back and traced the outline of a rectangular box. She felt a catch and opened it. Cynthia reached inside and her hand froze as she thought of another fear to add her growing list: electrocution.

Trying to counter her fear, she extended a single finger and felt the familiar shape of a circuit breaker, and breathed a smoke-filled breath of relief when sparks failed to shoot out from it and fry her.

But which breaker was the right one? Cynthia thought of throwing them all and reached higher. Near the top of the breaker box she felt the large double breaker of the main switch. She put her thumb against it. The tenants would be mad as hell when their televisions quit working, but lives were at stake. She turned her head, hoping a blue moon was out, and popped the main breaker.

Looking between dusty stair treads, she saw the fluorescent black light inside a jack-o'-lantern go out. The fires died down to licks of hellfire flickering along the floor inside the pentagram. "No!" Moore screamed. His scream turned into a prolonged wail of terror, as he was sucked through the air and into the pentagram, amidst a dense cloud of smoke. The licks of hellfire died instantly.

Cynthia walked out from under the stairs. "That put out their pumpkins."

Pretty Caddy screamed.

"Not you too, Cynthia."

Cynthia stopped and stared at Pretty Caddy in complete bafflement. "What—" Cynthia shook her head. "I don't want to know," she muttered to herself, and went to help Caddy and Galaxy.

On the way, Cynthia walked by an unlit jack-o'-lantern and gave it a good kick. The top went flying and the side caved in. It felt really, really good. The jack-o'-lantern was evil. Cynthia kicked it again and went berserk, kicking pumpkins, ripping electrical cords from wall sockets, smashing black lights, and stomping on fragments of glass and rind, until the faces of evil were toothless and every jack-o'-lantern was utterly destroyed and laying in a thousand pieces.

Recovering her senses, she stood in the middle of the desecrated pentagram and surveyed the damage: pulp, shards of pumpkin skin, and shattered glass littered the floor and stained the walls. The basement looked like a pie factory after a tornado: Cyclone Cynthia.

"You done?" Pretty Caddy asked.

"Yeah; I'm good."

"How about cutting us down?"

Cynthia pulled the knife with an imitation pearl handle from the sheath strapped to her bare thigh. "I can do that."

With Bullet's help Cynthia released Pretty Caddy and Galaxy, and soon had them standing upright on their feet. While they massaged their arms and ankles and gravity returned their blood to its natural pathways and body parts, Bullet collected her spent demon bolts. Just in case...

Galaxy picked up one of the arrows, saw the fork mounted in place of an arrowhead and broke out laughing. "These sure are funny looking arrows. Where did you buy them, Granny Clappett's Grill and Armory? Or did you order them from an infomercial on late night television: 'With Nugent's Magic Two in One Arrows you can you kill your game and eat it too.' "

Bullet marched across the basement and snatched the arrow from Galaxy's hand. "It saved your overexposed ass."

"Bullet, you're my hero." Galaxy grabbed Bullet's head in both hands and planted a wet one on her lips.

"Ugh!" Bullet wiped her mouth with the back of her hand. "That's disgusting."

"And my ass is not the only one overexposed." Galaxy administered a playful backhand slap to one of Bullet's nearly bare cheeks.

"I was talking about how many websites you show it on."

Galaxy aimed a haughty profile at Bullet. "I sell more photos than you do."

"Can we get out of here? I'm sick of this place." Pretty Caddy said in a tone of voice that brooked no dissent. She was 27 and still did some modeling and sold her share of photos, but sometimes she felt like a babushka babysitting the grandkids.

* * *

When they were back on Santa Monica Boulevard Pretty Caddy decided it was time for the babushka to take charge. "We should patrol for demons. Stay together this time."

"How much are we getting paid for this job?" Bullet wanted to know.

"It's pro bono," Pretty Caddy replied.

"Yeah; great, we risk our lives and get boned."

Galaxy giggled.

Bullet shot her a scornful look. "That's not I what I meant. Crawl out of the gutter, Glamour Girl."

"Pro bono means done for free, as a public service," Cynthia explained.

"I didn't sign up for charity work. We're supposed to get paid. This is America, the land of the fee and the buck."

Cynthia was appalled. "It's 'the free and the brave,' " she corrected, tersely.

"I can't be free and brave if I'm broke." Bullet lapsed into a sullen silence.

They patrolled the Parade from La Cienega to Doheny Drive. The crowd was more crowded, the drunks drunker, the catcalls and whistles more frequent and obnoxious, but there was nary a witch, nor demon, nor red pajama hoodie to be seen anywhere. All the demons on the boulevard had apparently been sucked down to Hell when the portals closed. The only sign of the demons earlier presence was an abandoned camera. That is until a squad of ghouls from the USC film school spirited it away. Then there was nothing left.

"It looks like we averted supernatural disaster. I think we can go home," Pretty Caddy said, "unless you want to stay and check out the guys."

They made a perfunctory survey of the inebriated primates around them. "Nah!" They said in unison and slapped their hands together above their heads. "We're outta here," Galaxy declared.

Walking away, Cynthia glanced back and saw Bullet standing alone in the street, staring up at the sky. Cynthia nudged Pretty Caddy and nodded toward Bullet, and they walked back to her.

Cynthia stopped beside Bullet. "I've never seen a fireworks show like this. It doesn't burn out." Bullet sounded mystified, and a trifle awestruck, which was not at all normal for Bullet and prompted Cynthia to look up.

Hundreds of thousands of lights were streaming across the sky, and they were nothing like fireworks, they were all of a color, a faintly bluish white, and blurry, and they weren't falling to earth like fireworks.

"I've never seen the Northern Lights," Galaxy said.

"It's not the Northern Lights," Bullet said evenly. "These lights are coming from the east, from somewhere high up – too high for fireworks."

Rivulets of softly glowing lights separated from the main stream and descended like meteor showers toward Ventura, and Santa Barbara, and San Bernardino, and over Riverside and Orange County. The Bikini Girls watched a rivulet of lights descending directly over their heads divide into two rivulets, and then those two rivulets divided, and the process was repeated again, and again, and again. Then all of those streams of lights fanned out, like starbursts in slow motion, and softly glowing lights disbursed across the county, floating soft as feathers onto Los Angeles, and Long Beach, and Burbank, and all the other communities in L.A.

It was a rapturous vision of great beauty, filling the heavens with light, and Cynthia thought she knew what it portended. "The Celts believed the souls of all the children who were going to be born in the next year entered the world on Halloween. Those lights must be them."

Bullet's head snapped around and her eyes locked on Cynthia, in a panic. "I don't want to get pregnant." Bullet dropped her crossbow and ran. They watched her dodge through the crowd and lost sight of her. Moments later they caught a fleeting glimpse of

Bullet hurtling the barriers closing the street, and she was gone.

"We should go after her," Galaxy said, and took a step forward, preparing to run. Pretty Caddy thrust out an arm to stop her. "Bullet will call when she wants to come home."

Pretty Caddy flexed her shoulders. "I need a massage. My shoulders are sore from hanging upside down. Let's check into a spa." She glanced up at the lights drifting over the city, and smiled. "Hell is closed for the night."

Author's Note

I was born on Halloween and it has always been a special day for me. Everybody in my little neighborhood knew it was my birthday and I was given double helpings when I went to their door trick or treating. After making the rounds a couple of neighboring families would gather in my parent's yard to blow off fireworks.

I often wanted to write a Halloween story, but never cared much for horror stories and that genre dominates Halloween literature and cinema. Another genre I don't read is fantasy, but in the last few months a couple of titles on library shelves piqued my interest. The first was *The Spy Who Haunted Me*, by Simon R. Green. After dipping into it I took it home and read it, and followed it some months later with Tanya Huff's *The Enchanted Emporium*. What struck me about both novels was their humor and (sometimes) amusing depictions of the dark subjects of the horror genre. It struck me that this type of urban fantasy was ideally suited to my view of Halloween, and I attempted to write a Halloween story in this genre.

Probably because I was born on Halloween I have always been fond of the Celtic notion that all the souls that are going to be born in the next year enter the world Halloween night. Halloween was the New Year in the Celtic lunar calendar, so it made more sense in their society than it does in ours.

I wanted *Trick or Trap* to be humorous and entertaining. It is difficult to know whether I succeeded or not, humor is so subjective. More likely I have offended half the universe. I seem to have talent for that. I apologize if anybody was offended reading it. Such was never my intention. The story was written in the spirit of the dispensation granted Halloween by the general public and most religious organizations. It is all for fun, and not to be taken seriously.

Happy Halloween!

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About the Author

A.B.R. was born in British Columbia, Canada, and continues to live there. He became an avid reader at a young age, and his interest in books and writing is life long. More information can be found on his website and social media sites.

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