



HELL O WEEEN

by

The Weekend Warrior

Halloween might seem like a holiday that holds adults hostage to the ravages of children, but the wise reader (with a little help from The Warrior) can find advantage amid the havoc. For one thing, the custom that sends the little clots around dressed up like gruesome bloodsuckers, ghastly butchers, obscene little monsters, grisly slabs of pestilence and slobbering evil incarnate could be seen as truth in advertising concept (Pirandello would have loved it).

Sure, the season also licenses the little hellions to knock at the doors of normal folk and demand "treats" under penalty of playing dirty "tricks" on homeowners if not satisfied, a repugnant form of protection racket for infantile delinquents. But who says the besieged householder can't play a few tricks of his own? All in fun, of course.

For instance, it's loads of fun to watch a four-year-old, tellingly dressed as a pirate, plunge his greedy hands into a bowl in which several pounds of M&M's have been carefully poured over a few mousetraps. Yo, ho, ho, me hearty. Not much of a trick, really. But then hardly a treat, either.

Repulsing these already fairly repulsive little hordes should involve at least as much imagination as they did in outfitting themselves. Sticking a few obviously child-sized skulls on the fence posts can keep the little nippers at bay while maintaining the spirit of the holiday. Of course, there's also the traditional, symbolic version--the Jack O'Lantern. Simple enough to make; all you need is a candle, a sharp knife, a scoop and a trifle-too-trusting tyke named Jack.

It used to be easy just to stop by the drug store for "Ex Lax" and "Pheenomint", which so closely resemble chocolate and chiclets. And it was heart-warming to imagine the little lumps moaning on their potties while their extorted goodies erupted. But today's kids are wise to such tricks, so try adapting another traditional set-up, the apple bobbing tub.

Beginners can merely wait until the little rotters kneel to snap up the proffered fruit, then boot them right in their booties. Okay, it's unsubtle, crude and low-tech, but it makes its own statement. Advanced apple-baiting techniques include tying small but tenacious alnico magnets (available from the back pages want ads where popular mad scientists get all their goodies) to nearly invisible fishing line leading out of the water and over to your favorite trolling rod. When you hear the limpetlike click of a magnet smacking a set of dental braces just snatch up the rod and settle back in your front porch fighting chair for clean fun and macho, Hemingwayesque exercise. If you use a light (20 pound, say) line, even a five year old goblin can put up a darned good fight. I've also found their frantic sunfishing and thrashing around seems to keep other tricksters from approaching.

The average kitchen contains a veritable arsenal of anti-personnel treats. Chocolate-coated Alka-Seltzer tablets create time-delayed havoc: for more immediate foaming sprinkle donuts with oven cleaner. "Mints" from air fresheners are refreshing...but why not just write to the address on your screen for a copy of Freddy Krueger's Household Hints or (better yet) Wiley's Halloween and Diet Cookbook with icky recipes such as Roach Motel Wafers, alum cookies and Tabasco kisses. Fans of projectile vomiting might find it worthwhile to lay in a little syrup of ipecac for the occasion.

On some occasions I actually go so far as to give the little rodents real candy, but only cylindrical types like tootsie rolls. These make it easier to hide the firecrackers tipped with tiny slow fuses so they'll go off in the indefinite future. When they explode they reduce the paper sack to confetti (More peripheral festivity) and blow a cloud of candy all over the street in a manner reminiscent of the Mexican piñata. The charges are too small to seriously injure the children. Unless, of course, they have already wolfed them down without chewing or indeed unwrapping them. But then, parents repeatedly warn children that such practices lead to tummy aches, and I always support parental wisdom when possible, or at least when convenient and/or profitable.

A little thought can turn Halloween from a trial into a really fun affair in which kids actually come to your door and *volunteer* to be guinea pigs in unwholesome psycho-social experiments. Let your imagination run free, if not totally amok. How much trouble would it be to hinge your (heh, heh) "Welcome" mat so a touch of the doorbell would plunge your tender visitors into chambers of spiders, snakes and similar gruesome greeters? A little informed cooperation could turn your entire neighborhood into a theme park of gory dementia, a sort of Steven King's Candy Cane Lane. Have a happy hosting the horrors, huh?

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