

STYLE

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Demons to some, angels to others

Not every American sees the humor in the country's annual celebration of Halloween

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From costumes of convicted swindler Bernie Madoff to masks of a vampirish Barack Obama, the US is preparing its annual ghoulish take on reality for Halloween.

But not everyone is laughing at some of the costumes for Saturday's festival, which for years has seen the US confront — and mock — its own demons.

Immigrants' rights groups are incensed at one outfit that combines an orange prison jumpsuit, a bug-eyed space alien mask and a green card. For those who can't guess what the outfit portrays the answer is printed across the front of the jumpsuit: Illegal Alien. Ironically, carrying a "green card" work permit would make it a legal alien.

Angelica Salas, executive director of the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles, demanded that department store chain Target remove the costume, which she called "distasteful, mean-spirited and ignorant of social stigmas and current debate on immigration reform."

Many Target customers gave the costume the lowest product rating possible on the store's Web site — 1 of 5 stars — and expressed their distaste in the "guest review" section.

"The costume is a sick sign of the times we are living in, in this country where those who are not 'people like us' might as well be from another planet and are considered less than human," one customer wrote on the Web site.

There are no objections to Bernie Madoff masks, which are proving popular even in Manhattan costume stores near the convicted con man's old haunts. However some think that the financial bogeyman is so reviled, even portraying him is risky.

"I was looking at it, but I feel if I wear it I might be attacked because a lot of people hate him right now," one customer at Ricky's Halloween store in Manhattan told local reporters.

The horrors of the recession are reflected elsewhere as newspapers and Web sites are filled with tips on how to skimp for Halloween.

Their advice seems to be working. According to the National Retail Federation, the average customer will spend US\$20.75 per costume — a 14-percent drop from last year. Leading thrift store chain Goodwill reports a sales surge of 7 percent.

One guy who seems popular all over the country is the late King of Pop, Michael Jackson, who died in June of a drug overdose. His most famous role in his *Thriller* video makes him a natural for the annual scare-fest.

Jackson's documentary movie *This Is It*, which is on general release, will be in cinemas, and fans are already snapping up Jackson wigs and jackets.

Past and present political figures are also selling well.

These include former US presidents George W. Bush and Bill Clinton. But neither can come close to the popularity of the current President Barack Obama, his wife Michelle and US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. Also popular is Sarah Palin, former governor of Alaska and Republican candidate for vice president.

Parents of pre-teen girls increasingly feel a distinct sense of unease every time Halloween comes around, as many popular costumes for this age group seem inappropriately revealing. The phenomenon was duly noted in the 2004 Lindsay Lohan movie *Mean Girls*, when one of the characters says: "Halloween is the one night a year when girls can dress like a total slut and no other girls can say anything about it."

Theresa Walsh Giarusso, who writes the Momania blog in Atlanta, Georgia, looked through costume ads and was truly horrified.

"The Batgirl costume also appeared to actually be a Hooker Batgirl costume," she complained, disapprovingly noting that the "sailor, devil, milk maid, pirate, Red Riding Hood and even Raggedy Ann all appeared to be working the streets with ridiculous short skirts and some revealing bust lines."



Scary in a hurry

BY CATHERINE SHU
STAFF REPORTER

Boo! Halloween is around the corner and you've left costume shopping until the last minute. But fret not. A cluster of well-stocked costume rental shops near Red House Theater in Ximending will save you from being reduced to wearing a sheet over your head.

The stores on Hanzhong Street (漢中街) between Chengdu Road (成都路) and Zhangsha Street (長沙街) carry similar selections of merchandise, including cheerleading outfits, ballet tutus, Chinese opera costumes, baroque gowns that would not look out of place in a school production of Shakespeare, and plush costumes for the furies among us.

Rental prices vary little in the neighborhood and are reasonable — most costumes are between NT\$400 to NT\$800 per day. Some stores, however, stand out for the upkeep of their merchandise and their service. These include the newly-opened Quanguo (全國) at 168 Hanzhong St (漢中街168號), tel: (02) 2388-7198, and Qinglong (青龍) at 137 Hanzhong St (漢中街137號), tel: (02) 2331-4989, across the street. Quanguo's two floors of costumes are neatly hung on easily accessible racks and there are dressing rooms in the back with a decent amount of privacy. The service staff is friendly and attentive, while the outfits themselves are clean and well maintained. Standouts include a cream-colored evening gown made out of layers of chiffon that looked ready to waltz into an episode of *Mad Men*, several Korean *hanboks* in shimmering pastel hues and a goofy plush ear of corn.

Qinglong's costume selection is similar, but the store's showroom is less well stocked than Quanguo's (most of the costume shops on Hanzhong Street have binders full of photos that you select costumes from), making browsing a little less pleasurable. Qinglong seems especially popular with families (giddy children were tearing up and down the aisles last Sunday) and has a notable selection of mascot costumes, including Doraemon, Hello Kitty, a penguin and a somewhat creepy looking dolphin.

Xinfeng (新豐) at 146 Hanzhong St (漢中街146號), tel: (02) 2389-4680, is tiny, but differentiates itself from its neighbors with beautiful *hanfu* and other traditional Chinese clothing. A short and simple brocade *qipao* is just NT\$350 to rent.

Lianfong's fancier items, including a gorgeous silk robe with lush embroidery, are NT\$850 and up. Bour Dance (寶琦華) at 130 Hanzhong St (漢中街130號), tel: (02) 2312-1910, is another



For gore and a whole lot more, Ximending's selection of costume rental stores fit the bill.

PHOTO: TAIPEI TIMES

standout on the block. The spacious, well-appointed dance-wear store sells high-quality leotards, tights, dance skirts and footwear for ballet, ballroom and flamenco dancers, as well as Chacott stage makeup. Smaller dance stores on the block include Xinchao (欣潮) at 167 Hanzhong St (漢中街167號), tel: (02) 2382-5454; its neighbor Youyang Shenghuo (有氣生活) at 169 Hanzhong St (漢中街169號), tel: (02) 2312-1123; and Ting Ting (婷婷) at 158 Hanzhong St (漢中街158號), tel: (02) 2388-2993.

Want to impress other revelers with a realistic, oozing gash on your neck or drench yourself in stage blood? Then walk a few blocks over to Ben Nye Taiwan (花莉) at 40, Hankou St, Sec 2 (漢口街二段40號), tel: (02) 2381-3220 (call 0963-007-211 for English service), which has sold stage makeup for more than 30 years. As the name implies, the store specializes in Ben Nye cosmetics from the US, but it also sells a variety of other special effects makeup. Halloween kits (including vampire, cat and old age makeup) are NT\$700 each. Other ghoulish staples include wax for building up your nose or creating scars, spirit gum and crepe wool hair.

FYI: Most costume stores on Hanzhong Street are open from 9:30am to 8pm on weekdays. Dancewear stores close an hour earlier. Quanguo is closed on Sundays.



PHOTOS AGENCIES