

St Viper's Halloween Special. Great Uncle Furnace's Halloween Hell



'If your uncle is trying to blend in then we should tell him the fighter jet on the driveway kinda makes him stick out.' Stretch's feet touched down by the front door of Uncle Furnace's retirement home. She had widened her elasticated arms for flying and now they zipped back to their normal size. PYYAANG!

'No-one else has twenty-million security cameras and a ray gun on their roof, either,' said Demon. The flames whooshing from his palms and through the soles of his boots shortened and fizzled out, and he landed next to her.

'But I see he still gets into the spirit of Halloween.' Stretch was looking at a flashing arrow-shaped sign nailed to the wooden fence, which pointed at the house. It said in a big jagged writing: Trick or Treaters – Knock at Your Peril!

'Halloween's a big event in our house,' said Demon.

As his super villain dad was away on a job, scattering cloud crystals over Europe to cover it in fog in order to steal national monuments like the Eiffel Tower, his mum had suggested they spend Halloween with Great Uncle Furnace. He had moved to Comfort Close at the age of one hundred and thirty, when he no longer had the strength to fight super heroes. Super villains usually resided in offshore oil rigs, hollowed-out volcanoes and deep-sea domes, not in a cul-de-sac of identical-looking bungalows on the Cornish coast. As long as he lived like an ultra-ordinary none of his old enemies would come looking for him. Brilliant!

Demon rang the bell and stared up at a large pack of concrete bricks swaying above his head. 'It's me, Great Uncle Furnace,' he shouted.

The door was opened by Demon's scowling uncle. His skin was the colour of sunburn; he wore thick glasses over a tattooed-on eye-mask, a jumpsuit which bagged at the bum and a short cape. In his hand he clasped a walking stick.

'I saw you coming,' said Uncle Furnace in a thin voice. 'In my day, we didn't fly with our capes flapping behind us through the starry sky.' He raised his stick as he spoke. 'We rode through thunder and lightning on chariots drawn by black stallions, wielding our weapons.'

'Are you talking about the time of the Gods again?' Demon's Mum appeared from the kitchen. 'Happy Halloween,' she said in a sing-song voice. She pulled Demon into a hug with one hand, took Stretch's backpack off her shoulders with the second, held a plate of uncooked beef skewers and bicep-building burgers with hand number three and a box labelled Treats under another arm. 'You must be Stretch. I love your purple hair – it reminds me of poison,' she said. 'Come on in. Dinner's ready.'

'Thanks for having me,' said Stretch.

Demon followed the others through the house to a small dining room, wallpapered with newspaper cuttings of Uncle Furnace and his friends when they were young super villains. Pumpkin lanterns glowed orange on the sideboard. The table had been laid for the celebratory meal. Demon sat as close as he could to the box marked Treats. He could see his mum had filled it with: Bon Bombs, Green Glow Gum, tubes of Pumping Pumpkin Powder, an Anti-Gravity Gun, Rot Your Teeth Toothpaste ... The smell of freshly baked Bat Bites was making his mouth water. He reached in to take one but his mum whipped them away.

'They're not for you, they're for the trick or treaters,' she said.

Uncle Furnace rubbed his hands together. 'I can't wait to see what the ultra-ordinaries have planned for us.'

'You'll get your Halloween present after supper,' Mum said to Demon.

He smiled. Claws crossed he would get a Lightning Bolt Bazooka.

The doorbell rang – DING-DONG –, Demon grabbed the box off his mum and they all jumped up from their seats. Uncle Furnace whacked Demon on the shins with his walking stick, elbowed Stretch out of the way and hobbled into the lead.

A little girl dressed in a pink tutu and fairy wings stood outside, holding a pink wand in one hand and a bucket of glitter in the other.

Uncle Furnace flinched and shrieked. He reached into his pocket, pulled out a hip flask and took a swig of petrol to calm the nerves.

‘Twick or Tweak,’ she said.

‘Tell me, will you bounce my house upside down with your wicked wand?’ asked Uncle Furnace.

‘No.’ Her forehead wrinkled.

‘Then give me whatever torturous trick you have up your sleeve. Don’t hold back – show me your inner evil.’

‘I don’t have any twicks. Only tweats.’

‘Aren’t we supposed to give out the treats?’ Demon said quietly to Stretch.

His friend shrugged.

The fairy handed Stretch her wand to hold, reached into her bucket and scooped up a big handful of silver sparkles. ‘My magic will give you pwetty pink dweams,’ she said and threw the glitter into the air. It fell like rain.

Uncle Furnace screamed, covered his head and dropped the walking stick.

Demon grabbed the Anti-Gravity Gun from the box and open fired at the glitter with multiple neon-green beams. ZZSSTT! The sparkles stopped falling and hung in mid-air like a cloud. Demon must have touched the girl with a green light too because her feet rose off the ground. She began to giggle.

‘I’m a weal fairy,’ she said, flapping her arms and turning to fly to the next house. ‘Thank you for my tweak.’

Mum put an arm around Uncle Furnace and helped him back to the dining room. Demon and Stretch walked slowly behind them.

‘Inflicting sickly sweet dreams on a senior super villain – ’ Uncle’s voice broke. ‘ – is way below the buckle.’

‘Demon, would you mind cooking the beef while Uncle Furnace tells us more about being a super villain in the olden days?’ asked Mum.

Demon sat down at the table with the box of treats next to him, picked up a skewer up by the metal ends and blew a jet of roaring flames along the cubes of meat. They turned brown and smelled of tasty barbequed food. He handed the first cooked one to Stretch.

‘Years ago, when super villains deserved the title of *super* – ’ Here Uncle Furnace narrowed his eyes at his nephew – ‘they stirred up great storms and brought down the sky.’

‘Then how come it’s still up there?’ Demon said to Stretch, under his breath.

‘I’d like my meat medium rare.’ Mum glared at him.

DING-DONG.

Uncle looked in the direction of the front door. This time he climbed slowly to his feet. 'You go ahead. I'll be right behind you.'

Demon and Stretch hurried to the door and swung it open.

A boy wearing a tricorne hat, an eye patch and a black jumpsuit painted with white bones waited on the step.

'Good, you're not a fairy.' Uncle Furnace pushed his way in between Demon and Stretch.

'Trick or treat, me hearties?' said the boy.

'If I take a trick I suppose you'll put a shark in my shower!' Uncle Furnace replied.

'No.' He smiled, probably thinking Uncle was teasing him.

'Then what have you got for me?'

The boy pulled a small water pistol from the pocket of his jumpsuit and aimed it at them.

'Sea – ' He pulled the trigger. '– Water!'

A jet of clear liquid shot from the barrel.

'Arghhh!' Uncle Furnace yanked his cape across his face.

Quickly, Stretch extended her neck outwards, opened her mouth wide and gulped down the water. She wiped a hand over her wet lips.

'Cool,' said the boy, as her neck returned to normal.

'Would you take over cooking dinner for us?' Mum asked Uncle Furnace. 'No-one flame grills a bicep-building burger like you.'

He nodded, puffed out his bony chest and shuffled into the dining room, leaving Demon and Stretch to hand over a treat.

'It's downright dreadful to target a senior super villain's weakness,' Demon heard his uncle complain.

Demon reached into the box, pulled out a Bat Bite biscuit by the wings and handed it to the skeleton pirate. 'Be warned they have sharp teeth,' he said.

'Thanks.' The boy headed up the driveway. As he squeezed past the fighter jet he jumped.

'Shiver me timbers!' The pirate put a finger into his mouth and sucked on it.

'Looks like he's just found out why they're called Bat Bites,' said Stretch.

Demon left the box in the hallway and they returned to the table. Uncle Furnace was blowing fire onto the burgers. Every few seconds he stopped to cough and catch

his breath. Demon pulled the Halloween cake, in the middle of the table, closer towards him. This year his mum had made it in the shape of a bomb. He clicked his thumb and finger together to produce a quivering flame on the end of his claw and lit the candle on top.

‘When I was a boy, we didn’t use our power to light candles,’ Uncle Furnace said, sounding wheezy. ‘We captured the sun as it rose at dawn and feasted on its fiery flames. The fire we started spread from country to country, making mountains melt like marshmallows.’

Demon rolled his eyes at Stretch.

DING-DONG.

‘We’ll get it,’ said Stretch, pushing back her chair.

Demon’s tail flicked the back of his legs as he walked with her to the door.

Mum hurried after them. ‘Demon.’

He stopped and waited for her.

‘You have to make allowances for your uncle,’ she whispered. ‘He’s an old man who would do anything to try and take over the world a last time.’ She paused. ‘He envies you.’

‘Really?’ said Demon.

Stretch opened the door and they saw a small person covered in a white sheet.

‘Trick or Tr – ’ The ghost pointed into the house. ‘Do you know you have a fire?’

Demon, Stretch and Mum sprinted back to the dining room. Fire licked the curtains and carpet. The table had turned into a raging bonfire with flames rising up to the ceiling. Uncle Furnace clapped and cheered.

Mum placed a hand on Stretch’s shoulder. ‘Living in a family of fire makers I always keep an extinguisher or two on me.’ She strode off to grab one.

‘Wow, you really do still have it,’ Demon said to Uncle Furnace.

His uncle smiled for the first time in years.