

How to survive identity theft at Halloween: a guide for witches | GUEST COMMENTARY

By K.E. Flann

It's the classic gaffe. You spot an ambitious coven's pop-up event in a neighborhood subdivision and swoop down on your broomstick to hobnob with other key stakeholders in the for-profit wish bargaining industry. But instead of a networking function, you find yourself at a "Trunk or Treat" at a Lutheran church or, worse yet, a PTA meeting's spooky backyard rosé event. It's a total nightmare, and this is only the beginning.

Once you've attracted their notice, these impostors may enter you, without your knowledge in the cul-de-sac costume pageant, where you'll compete with fourth graders for a jumbo bag of wax lips. But when you inevitably prevail, all you'll have for your trouble is a dispiriting bag of corn syrup knockoffs, not the authentic waxy-lips-of-corpse you expected. If you respond by invoking security protocols and wipe these con artists from reality, their cohorts — posing as hot dogs or Bob Ross — could retaliate, holding spell books for ransom, decoding passwords for magic wands and more.

While identity theft is not preventable, you can minimize its effects by observing conventional business wisdom on Oct. 31: Always regard new networking contacts as human beings.

Understand what they want. From long experience, you won't be surprised that humans are duplicitous — refusing payment for wishes granted in good faith, despite contracts they signed in blood for authentication. They often

vilify you to avoid responsibility for debts they incur freely. They continually enhance this holiday in order to leverage your identity, procuring resources in your name (specifically candy, with special emphasis on full-sized Snickers). They'll go any distance and traverse as many steps as it takes to obtain items of extraordinarily low value, as well — including pretzels, breath mints, granola bars, loose change and toothbrushes.

Work through feelings of embarrassment and self-blame. Identity thieves are always looking for new ways to perfect impersonations, and they get better at it all the time. Thus, while it is normal to feel embarrassed, you must remind yourself that “witch” is in the top five identities stolen at Halloween every single year.

- Say to yourself (either out loud, or in your head), “I do feel embarrassed about what happened, but that get-up could have fooled anyone. It was of horrifying Cosplay quality, with real burlap and horse hair. This was beyond my control.” Saying these words can help you process your emotions and may also place a hex on the perpetrators.
- You could try jotting your feelings in a journal. Many find the process of journaling a great way to draft really strong curses on those who wronged them.
- Find a good support system. Talk to your familiar about what's going on. If you don't feel comfortable showing weakness, simply shred your familiar when you're done.

Keep score: Many others have shared your experience. You may be surprised to discover that last year, 70 million witches were victims of identity theft — good witches, bad witches and especially sexy witches. That averages to about one witch every 0.4 seconds. Witches have their identities stolen a staggering 100% of the time on Halloween.

Don't let up. It takes time to untangle the myriad effects of a large-scale deception, and you may endure them far into the future due to “account fraud”

— which is when humans have a totally different account of what happened than you do.

Seek closure: Identity theft is a faceless crime, especially when there are masks involved. The first feeling might be disbelief — you might laugh and laugh. But after the initial shock, the entire gamut of emotions may materialize, including rancor, fury and everything in between. Imprisoning the perpetrator in a salamander’s body may not bring the comfort you expect, which luckily provides a boost for your rage when the next impostor comes along. You can’t control identity theft, but you can at least opt not to control your reaction to it. And remember: if someone tries to make you put your hands in a “creepy feel box” or guess the amount of candy corn in a jar, simply yell out, “This is a witch hunt!” Humans will be confused, however fleetingly, by their problematic relationship with you, and you’ll make your escape.

Stay safe!