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## Halloween Cocktails Needn't Be Frightful

By ERIC FELTEN

Halloween has become a pre-eminent cocktail occasion, and I have a horror of the drinks commonly put forward for spooky sipping. For starters, there is the unfortunate reliance on lightful shtick, as when the Martha Stewart crowd suggests making green drinks that bubble, served up in beakers and laboratory flasks. But for the most part, the problem is just lousy drinks — a devilment I hope we can exorcise with a classic cocktail that's dying to become the drink of the season.

Some Halloween party advisers can't help but suggest the sanguinary Bloody Mary. And just in case that name is insufficiently hematic, Finlandia vodka suggests a variation made with lime vodka that it calls Vampire Juice. Not bad, but not particularly successful at the witching hour — the brunchy old Bloody isn't exactly designed for consuming after 6 p.m.



Stylen Glass for The Wall Street Journal

### Satan's Whiskers

1/2 oz gin  
1/2 oz dry vermouth  
1/2 oz sweet vermouth  
1/2 oz freshly squeezed orange juice  
1/2 oz Grand Marnier  
1 dash orange bitters

Stir with ice until blingily cold and then strain into a stemmed cocktail glass. Garnish with orange twist. For a variation, substitute Cointreau Noir for the Grand Marnier.

liqueur.

Others push the candy theme. Three Olives Vodka is flogging "ooey-goey" recipes for "candy cocktails." Its recipe for the Jolly Rancher using a green apple-flavored vodka is hopelessly sweet, but at least the Jolly Rancher is an actual drink that has had some limited success among the morbidly sugar-obsessed. The rest of the Three Olives Halloween lineup displays the sort of gimmickry that plagues the holiday's cocktails. Not only is there the Gummy Worm Martini, made from — ugh — mango vodka, raspberry vodka, blue curaçao and Sprite, but the Tootsie Roll, an abomination assembled out of something called "chocolate vodka," Amaretto, and chocolate syrup.

Nor is there a shortage of drinks with pumpkin themes or flavors making the rounds. Among them: the Jack-O-Tini (bourbon, sour-apple schnapps and cranberry juice), the Jack O'Lantern (tequila, Baileys and Kahlúa) and — riffing on the Spanish word for pumpkin — the Calabattini (Herradura tequila, Monin pumpkin spice syrup and half-and-half). Alas, I prefer to eat pumpkin pie, not drink it.

The folks at liquor giant Brown-Forman have been seeing how many of their brands they can jam into one cocktail shaker. They came up with a Vampire Kiss Martini using Finlandia vodka, Korbel sparkling wine and Chambord liqueur, and a Candy Apple Martini using Chambord and Finlandia together with Tusca

All of the above strike me as more tricks than treats. But not every drink promoted for Halloween this year is doleful — a remarkable development that is, in a way, some of the best evidence yet that the quality of cocktails is on the rise. Bacardi has a slate of drinks for the occasion, with hardly a stinker in the bunch. The Witches Brew — made with rum, fresh lime juice, St. Germain elderflower liqueur, simple syrup and a little pomegranate juice — may be a bit sweet, but that is fixed by dialing back the liqueur and the sugar syrup. And particularly clever is a rum version of the classic Ward Eight. The century-old original was made with rye whiskey, lemon juice, orange juice, and grenadine; substitute aged Bacardi 8 rum for the whiskey, and you get a PsychWard 8.

But it was at a bar called Bourbon, in Washington's Adams-Morgan neighborhood, that I recently enjoyed a cocktail born to be the official drink of Halloween — a 1920s classic called Satan's Whiskers. The name comes from what was once a common exclamation (when such interjections employed more than four letters). Harry Craddock's 1930 "Savoy Cocktail Book" included two recipes for Satan's Whiskers: one "straight," the other "curled" (a variety that suggests the drink did boffo box office). The recipes had in common gin, sweet vermouth, dry vermouth, orange juice, and orange bitters. The remaining ingredient — one or another sort of orange liqueur — made for the difference in nomenclature. Add Grand Marnier and you get a straight Satan's Whiskers; use orange curaçao and the whiskers are curled.

The bar manager at Bourbon, Owen Thomson, makes a killer Satan's Whiskers, and achieves by even-so-slightly tweaking the original recipe. Craddock called for using equal parts of the gin vermouths and juice, with a half-part of the orange liqueur. And that may be the best call when using orange curaçao. But Mr. Thomson found that in using Grand Marnier, equal parts made for a better, more balanced drink. It is a cocktail he likes to make for people who think they don't like gin. "If they like Satan's Whiskers," Mr. Thomson says, "they'll enjoy its cousin, the Bronx, and then you're almost at a Martini or Martinez."

Make the Satan's Whiskers at home and you will be tempted to use juice out of a carton. That way damnation lies (or at least an unsatisfying cocktail, which is plenty bad enough). You really must squeeze fresh oranges, preferably blood oranges, for the drink to work at all.

Stick with the Grand Marnier version of the cocktail. Or try a fresh variation by using Cointreau Noir, a new type of Cointreau that, like Grand Marnier, has a brandy base.

One last point on the drink: Don't forget the orange bitters, and avoid the mistake of substituting Angostura. Happily, orange bitters are becoming more and more available. One of the newest additions to the U.S. market is an excellent brand from Germany called The Bitter Truth.

Satan's Whiskers is a superb drink appropriate to any time of year. But give the devil his due and try it Friday night.

**Mr. Felten is the author of "How's Your Drink?: Cocktails, Culture and the Art of Drinking Well" (Agate Surrey). Email him at eric.felten@wsj.com.**

