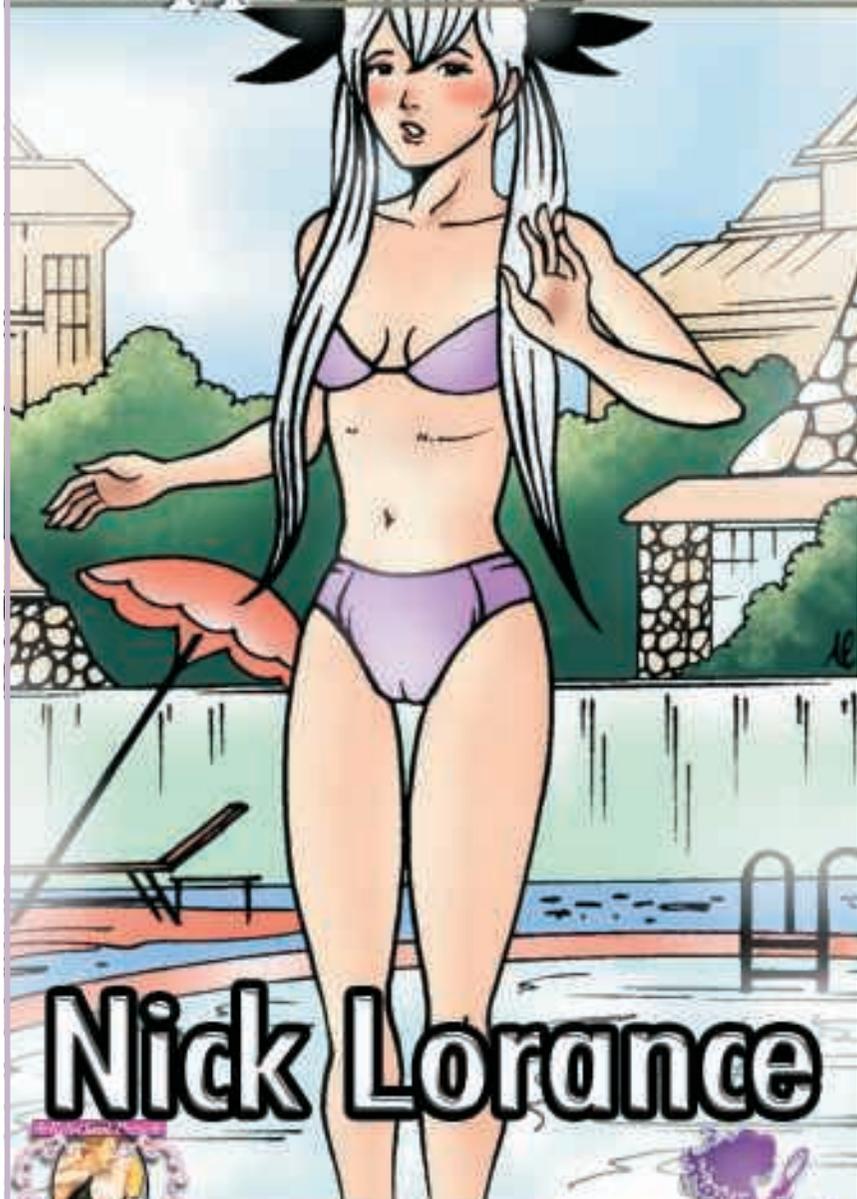


# Trapped Into Anime



# Nick Lorance



A "Young Adult Tv" Novel



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For information address  
Reluctant Press  
P.O. Box 5829  
Sherman Oaks, CA 91413  
USA

Call toll free (800) 359-2116

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# Trapped into Anime

By Nick Lorance

## Prologue

My makeup was perfect. I tilted my head side to side, giving a winsome smile, and the girl in the mirror returned it. In a few minutes, I have to be on the set. My life was a dream, all because of one decision .

..

## Just for a little pocket money

My biggest problem in the job market was my size. My grades were good but my family was lower middle class; without a scholarship, I wasn't going to go to college. Sure I could go to a community college. That meant living at home, and only hoping I could get enough credits. The service was out; as a guy with few mechanical or electronic skills, I would end up swabbing decks. Remember the way Steve Rogers was in Captain America at the start? That was me except no asthma.

In school I swam, was in choir and danced. My voice didn't change that much, I went from a first soprano to a mezzo-soprano though by definition I was a countertenor. It would have been embarrassing for most guys if they were chosen for what would be a woman's solo, but I did it well. But it wasn't getting me a job in this market.

It all started with an e-mail I got. It ended up in my Spam folder, but after getting a nasty note from one of the job websites I visit about how I had dumped them into my spam folder, I checked it religiously every day. I stopped when I came to it, because it was an odd tag.

### **Carl Waller, Cosplay for cash.**

One thing I have enjoyed since my last year of middle school was cosplay. I have been in so many costume contests, from Sci-Fi conventions to anime ones, I don't even know how many there have been since then. I enjoy the entire Japanese Anime scene; making the exact duplicate of a costume from a show is hard work, but fun. Part of it is the guessing which character you are portraying, because the announcer will ask the audience to guess, and the one who gets it wins a prize too. I didn't win often at the start but since my Junior Year in High School I won about as many as I lost.

So someone is going to pay me to dress up? Coolness! I moved it to my inbox, then clicked the link there. The site came up; Land of Cosplay Fantasy. There were a series of cute girls in assorted costumes. The header buttons offered a MODELS area, and on the far right EMPLOYMENT. I clicked it.

The button led to an employment application.

I went on. After the usual you would anticipate, location, education, job history, it got into a physical report. Weight, height, build, that kind of thing. Of course that made sense. As much as the parody of Paris Hilton's burger commercial had been funny, it was only because people had seen the original. There are people who will dress up as, say, Batman who look like they should have tried for Pillsbury Doughboy. I filled it in; Height, 5'1", weight 100 pounds, build— I looked at my options, and put down swimmer.

At the end of the physical report was 'do you have a picture of yourself in a swim suit?'. I figured, what the hell? I didn't have a picture but I did have a camera, so I went into the master bathroom where there was a full-length mirror, and took one. I connected the camera to my laptop and sent it. The last question was 'are you willing to relocate for this job?'. That was a no-brainer; if it paid enough, why not? Better than living at home with my parents.

Then there was a list of animes. I didn't know them all, but I knew quite a few. At the bottom of that page was a button marked 'Do you watch one not on this list?'. There were, so I clicked it. Five pages later, I finally finished. Now a page popped up to assure that I was done. I clicked the submit button and there was that little ball showing it was being accepted. Then instead of saying 'we'll get back to you', another page popped up with only two questions.

HAVE YOU EVER CROSSPLAYED?

IF NOT, HAVE YOU CONSIDERED IT?

That was a What the Fuck moment. Cosplay is dressing in costume. Crossplay is when you dress in the other sex's

clothes. I had often been referred to as Bishônen, which roughly translates as 'beautiful youth', but is applied to boys rather than girls. At the last Anime convention I had dressed as Takashi Komuro from High School of the Dead, and someone shouted 'Hideyoshi Kinoshita!', which referred to a character in an Anime entitled Baka and Test. That is someone so androgynous that not only do the other characters think he is a girl, they even refer to him as a separate gender with his own changing room and bath in one episode.

So I answered the first question as no. For the second I entered WHY? since it gave me that option.

As I began filling it out, I noticed what might be a chat window in the bottom right corner. Curious, I clicked on it. 'Is anyone there?', I typed.

There was an immediate reply. "Hello, my name is Hannah. I am one of the Human Relations people here. We monitor when there is a new application when possible. When I noticed this application, I was checking it out. I am sorry to bother you."

"No bother. Just surprised."

"Since I am monitoring, I can take over filling it out from here."

I was a bit disturbed. "Why are you monitoring?"

"The company hires young people for photo ops at Conventions, photo shoots and some films. When an application passes the proper filter, one of us monitors."

"So you sent the e-mail?"

“No, that is another department. Remember when you were in the costume contest at JapAnimeCon? You were in the costume contest?” I agreed that yeah, I had been there, and had been in costume. “Remember you had to fill out the Registration card? With your e-mail address?” Again I had to say yeah. These days every job usually asks that you give an e-mail if possible .

“The pictures taken at all public costume events are online, the Recruiting department selects pictures, and sends e-mails offering jobs. Our pay scale is based on the answers given by the applicant.”

All right, that made sense. “So I am accepted?”

“Provisionally, yes. Your last answer was why when asked if you considered Crossplay. One of our options for employees is Otokonoko, or Trap. Do you know what it is?” I wasn’t sure, and said so. “The term is applied to boys who dress as girls. In Japan they have dedicated cafes and fashion shops where the service personnel are all boys dressed in attractive female clothing. The pay for a Trap character is higher than it would be for you to dress as a male character.”

“Really?”

“Yes.” She replied. “Take that last costume contest for an example using the High School of the Dead Characters.” Give me a while here with my Photoshop.”

A few minutes later she sent a picture inside the chat box. It was the same one I had sent, but costuming had been added. Instead of me in my bathing suit, I was Rika wearing a SWAT team outfit with

shaded glasses, purple hair, and a stunning set of breasts. Then another, Rei with long orange pony tail, a sailor outfit, and an M14. This was followed by Saya with long orange twin tails, sailor suit and glasses. Then Yuriko, Saya's mother, waist-length red hair with a red dress split up to her hip with a Skorpion submachine gun in one hand and a thigh holster with an automatic. Finally Saeko in a sailor suit, the skirt slit on both sides, waist-length blue-black hair coming to a point between the eyes, a katana, and a pair of serious breastworks.

"If you will notice," she went on, "all I did was use that one picture you sent and photoshopped it. With proper makeup and prostheses, you could be standing inches from a person, and they would not be able to tell you were a boy."

"And if I had been working for you?"

"Standard pay for a convention photo-op is ten dollars per hour if you were dressed as Takashi."

Ten an hour. Not too bad just to cosplay as a guy. "And if I were to go for one of the options you sent me?"

"It depends on how much effort we together can put into the costuming, makeup and roleplaying ability. It starts at twenty to forty dollars an hour on average. Obviously if you went for the far end; Saeko, and you could play the part well, as much as fifty an hour. For a film, which can be a fan film where you are hired, it can start at one hundred an hour and even a contract if a major production as an extra."

Wow. "How is it verified?"

“You know how conventions are. Everyone wants a picture with their favorite character, and we give our employees business cards with their names to pass out whenever a convention attendee gets a picture. Again, let’s take that JapAnimeCon as an example. According to the convention records and the hotel security cameras, you spent twenty hours in attendance, only five in costume. If you had shown up on the first day dressed as Saeko, stayed in character that entire time, and could play the role well, you would have taken home a thousand dollars just for walking the walk and talking the talk. If someone had taken you for a meal in costume, that time would have counted as well.”

I leaned back, looking around. I was still living in my old room with my parents. With a thousand dollars in hand, I could get my own place.

“So I am accepted provisionally. How do I prove myself?”

There was a longer pause. “I am checking conventions within fifty miles of your address. Only two, about a month apart. That is one reason we ask if you are willing to relocate. There are more conventions in major cities than there are where you live. If you were living in the Northeast, and are also willing to travel, there are fourteen between Boston and Miami in that same month period.”

Mentally I looked at four *thousand* dollars for twelve *day’s* work. “So I pay to go to the conventions, travel room and board?”

“No. First, we have housing units in every major convention city, so when you go from say Philadelphia to Miami, we would fly you there, and you have a

place to stay with a chauffeured vehicle from the rooms to the convention. We get dedicated passes at the conventions via a corporate discount, which we give to you. Costumes are delivered or already on site for you to wear including the necessary prostheses. All you are paying for is the time of the person doing the makeup, unless you can do it yourself.

“We offer ensembles of their request to the conventions. The promoters choose the show or game they wish to have present, and we supply the main characters of that work. As an example, you could go as any of the women mentioned if that had been chosen.” I could learn more about makeup. I had some skill for portraying say Captain Harlock with his scar. I said so.

“When can you start?” Hannah typed.

“How soon do you need someone?”

“We always need people. Give me a moment.” There was a long pause. “This next weekend there is a convention in Denver. They have asked for an ensemble from the Anime Dancing in the Vampire Bund. Considering your build, do you think you could portray Mina Tepes?”

I thought furiously. The character was what is called Gothic Loli, which usually means an underage girl or an older girl who just looks underage who tends to dress in Goth style. During the series she dressed in either very strict or very provocative attire. But since she was a vampire and four hundred years old, she had the attitude of someone who was ageless. “How soon do I have to be there?”



“Considering we need to assure you are properly costumed, I would suggest you leave immediately. I can have a ticket waiting for you at the local airport tomorrow morning, the airline will call to verify it. Merely pack your things and notify us of what to pick up by calling this number. We will move it to the main dwelling in New York where you will go afterward. Your parents will be given contact information so they can keep in touch.

“I hope you enjoy working with us. Good day.”

Pack to leave tomorrow morning? I didn't have a lot, mainly books and DVDs. I went down the hall to the living room to where Mom and Dad were sitting, watching television.

“The Changeling is out of his cave,” Dad commented. I grinned at him.

“Well, why are you gracing us with your presence now?” Mom looked up from her knitting. Dad was just under six-foot and built like a linebacker. Mom was an inch shorter than I am and fine boned. Except for my eyes and hair color, I looked like Mom would have if she had been a boy.

“I just got offline with a company. I've got a job!”

“About time,” Dad said.

“Doing what?”

“Working at conventions. Helping with the costumed events,” I said. I didn't want to admit doing *what* at them. My parents would intervene like Mr. Incredible if I told them.

“So when do you start?”

“They are buying me a plane ticket to go to Denver.”

Dad harrumphed, something he does exceedingly well. “Sure. I’ll believe it when I see it.”

The phone rang, Mom picked it up. After a moment, she hung up. “That was the Delta ticket counter. Carl has a seat on the ten AM flight tomorrow morning.” They both looked at me.

I packed a couple of suitcases, then went to the local storage place for boxes. By eleven PM, I was all packed. Mom fluttered in a few times to make sure I hadn’t left anything, her expression woebegone. “I knew you would get a job, but I didn’t expect you to leave so quickly.”

“Mom, it’s not like I am falling off the planet,” I assured her.

Dad woke me up bright and early Monday morning. Mom hugged me with tears in her eyes. Dad was more stoic but when we got to the airport early enough to deal with the hours of going through the check in, he handed me a box. He knew how I liked Godiva chocolates, and had bought me a one pound box. We picked up my ticket, and before I walked through to begin the process, he gave me a hug that almost cracked my ribs. “Be safe.”

## **Getting ready to Dance**

I’d love to tell you all about Denver, but from the moment I arrived, I was running. A guy was standing there with a sign with my name on it, and after get-

ting my two bags, I was in a sedan with him driving. The 'housing unit' was one of those old residential hotels where a traveling salesman might stay you still see downtown in every major city, the kind like a European hotel that starts on the second floor with the first floor taken up by a dry cleaners and a small mom and pop restaurant. From the outside it was a dump. But inside it had been refurbished and painted and was very bright and cheery.

It was like checking into a hotel, except I didn't have to flash ID, fill out a card or pay for it. I went to the front desk, where a young woman checked me in, handed me a key, and a man took my bags up to the room. There was a welcome packet which explained that both businesses were owned by the company. We ate there and had our clothes and costumes cleaned for free, while they were also open to the public.

I was in 216, a room they had made by taking the tiny cubicles that used to be there and cutting an opening to make something large enough for a kitchenette dining table and private bath. There was already a microwave refrigerator and coffee maker, though the packet told me I had to buy anything I wanted to make in my room. It was about three times the space I had in my old room at home, so it was heaven.

Someone knocked, I answered. A young man about five inches taller than I was with long brown hair was standing there. One thing that struck me as odd was he wore what looked like a woman's dance leotard. "Carl? I'm Sonya."