

The red berets are mad hatters

IT IS 4:30 a.m., and the Guardian Angel called Tutt is crying. It has been that kind of night on Restaurant Row. A block has been temporarily cleaned up during a 10-hour tour of duty by the nation's most publicized gang. But a full array of civil liberties has been stomped and trashed in the process.

The predawn body count is numbing. A dozen crack smokers have been body-slammed. A half-dozen residents have been searched and chased from their own stoops. Gay men have been mocked and cursed. A dying man has been humiliated. All in the name of crime-fighting.

By the end of the long night, the futility of the posturing the mindless courage, is apparent even to Tutt. He stands outside his headquarters on W. 46th St., his voice choked, his features hard, the defeat real.

The other Angels—Warrior, Ace, Lightning Bolt, Mercenary, Sam, Noel and Patch—are there as well. But the one called Bam-Bam—16-year-old Illye Lichtenberg—is absent. He lies instead in a Manhattan hospital, wounded in the head with a knife, a respirator filling his lungs with air.

Bam-Bam was stabbed a few days earlier, during one of the Angels' sweeps. Four men were arrested, including Maybol Pagan, 25. The Angels, who have been hired to protect establishments on Restaurant Row, responded by throwing Pagan through a restaurant window.

And now, here back on Eighth Ave., is Pagan, fresh out of Rikers Island.

"You're lucky I didn't bring my crew down," Pagan says. "Next time the blows will be death. We'll blow you faggots away."

This threat is met with stares. A crowd gathers, insults are exchanged. Finally, the Angels retreat.

"We got a guy stabbed and this guy is back on the street," Tutt says, the tears welling. "I was waiting for him to say something so I could rock him myself. But we can't just dog a guy with people watching."

With these words, the patrol retires for the night. A door is bolted shut, the street surrendered. The police remain, as they always do when the Guardian Angels and television cameras move on.

The impresario behind all this is Curtis Sliwa, who is rapidly becoming one of the city's silliest figures—a kind of Al Sharpton in red beret. Curtis had been on the scene earlier, prancing before the cameras, bal-



MIKE MCALARY

ancing silver trays of food, watching the local news on television.

In other parts of the city, men of similar age screamed at a television picture of a Met-Cardinal game. But Curtis Sliwa's passion is Curtis Sliwa. He watches his image the same way Ed Koch watches Ed Koch, nodding in agreement with everything he says.

Sliwa, the Subway Hero, is gone from the street by midnight, journeying home by yellow cab.

"Regis Philbin in the morning," he explains, the crease in his beret perfect.

The problem with the Angels is the falsity of their good intentions. The kids are admirable, their virtue pure. But they are taking liberties the law does not allow. Frightened citizens see Sliwa on the television and sigh romantically, imagining him daring. But it is all a lie, a commercial for zealots who defended Bernhard Goetz' right to carry an unlicensed gun and now must worry about being shot themselves.

The ugly scenes played out in the Theater District long after Sliwa has retreated by cab tell the story of the Angels' war on crime.

At the intersection of 46th and Ninth, the Angels arrive to see an object falling from the roof of an

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MARGO LICHTENBERG, mother of wounded Guardian Angel Illye Lichtenberg, hugs her other son, Noah, also a Guardian Angel, after visit to Illye in St. Vincent's Hospital yesterday. Angels, hired to patrol Restaurant Row, are continuing their controversial tactics against drug users. See story on page 27.

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apartment building. The object has torn through a striped awning and cracked on the street. The patrol moves closer and recognizes the object as a man. A jumper.

The Angels can do no more than the rest of us as police and paramedics work to save the man's life. Yet, they seek to appear in control.

"Back off, people," growls the chesty beret called Mercenary.

"Calm down son," a cop advises him.

Later, outside the Sheridan Hotel on W. 47th St., four Guardian Angels berate a tall man in a tight-fitting pink dress. The man is guilty of too much rouge, nothing more, his weapon a bottle of mousse.

"Move it, she-man," the red beret called Lightning Bolt demands.

"Come on, faggot, let's go," Mercenary chimes in.

This kind of conversation does not

make us a safer city. On Sunday night, similar words were directed at two men sitting on a Central Park bench. A stabbing followed.

To witness the Guardian Angels on patrol is to know how far they have taken law into their own stitched fists. Early yesterday, they chased a young white man in a dungaree jacket into the lobby of the Sheridan. The man's pockets were emptied, a crack vial found.

"I'll make you eat this," the beret called Warrior said. The man was dragged to the street, and slammed against a wall, his vial stomped.

Still later, at 3 a.m., 12 Angels rushed into a schoolyard on 47th between Eighth and Ninth. A young man sat in the corner, studying the night sky.

His pants were rolled up to the knee, exposing small red sores. A hypodermic lay at his feet, blood still

warm in the needle. The Angel called Patch put on rubber gloves and fingered the needle.

"What's this?" Patch demanded.

"What's it look like?"

"What are those spots on your legs?"

"What do they look like?"

"How did you get AIDS?"

And then from a beret somewhere behind Patch:

"You a faggot or something?"

THE MAN did not answer. Tutt moved closer. "So what's gonna happen to you, man?"

The man looked to his sores, and then the Angels. The words, when they came, were whispered.

"I'm going to die," the addict said. "I'll just die."

The Angels took the needles and moved on, laughing, leaving a man crying on the street behind them.