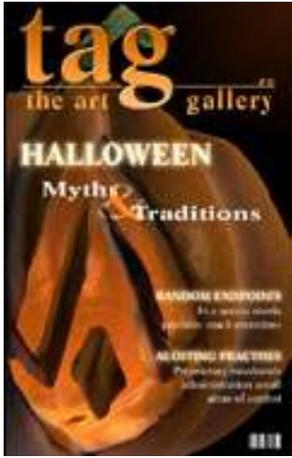


# What's Up With Halloween?

*A TAG Editorial*



We've all celebrated Halloween. We've carved the pumpkins and frightened our families. We've played terrible tricks on our neighbours and shared sweet treats with our friends. We've acted out pre-programmed parts in perennial Halloween Grid specials, chomped lustily on the Halloween hummus, and dunked the donkey until it brayed wetly. We've plucked the Halloween weeds from

muddy waters, and kissed the blindfolded girls under the rising Halloween moon. Kids love it, senior citizens dread it, adults see it as an excuse to get drunk and loud (always in that order) and pets cower in fear: Halloween's got something for everyone.

But did you ever stop and wonder, what's really up with Halloween?

When I was a gangly adolescent, my Dad had to drag me out of my room on Halloween. I was stupid scared of smelly ghouls and transparent ghosts and pointy-toothed squirrels in mad hats. I hated pumpkin meat pie and pumpkin heads carved with cryptic, eldritch letters. Tricks always seemed to involve me getting beat up by the older kids on my street, and the only treats I ever got were the traditional Halloween madra-leaf cookies my mother made. And they were bitter. It wasn't a particularly happy time of the year for me.

By the time I turned fifteen, however, I had a more balanced view of Halloween (and that wasn't just because I finally got a girl to kiss me under the Halloween moon, although that did help). While the tradition still didn't make much sense to me, it was completely irrelevant. It was a chance to act silly, to play tricks on my folks, and, yes, to get really, really drunk. Like most others my age, the occasion mattered more than the context. But the question always lingered in the back of my mind, and as time went by and I became more reflective, several questions began to haunt me (a particularly fitting word): Where did Halloween come from? Why do we celebrate it? And how did it get to Rubi-Ka?

The last question is the easiest one to answer: Halloween was brought to Rubi-Ka for the same reason it was brought to every other planet humanity has colonized in this galaxy; a memory of the place they came from.

Halloween originated on Earth, tens of thousand of years ago, and though it's quite obvious that the holiday must have changed and mutated several times over the millennia, it's still a tradition that has survived, if only in name, from those ancient times. And though few, if any, hard facts have survived the ocean of time and space, researchers and historians have come to a number of firm conclusions:

At some point in time – probably before the emancipation war, during the reign of the Omega – Halloween was not the commercialized holiday we know today, but a celebration of great, perhaps religious, significance. There are many interpretations of the word 'Halloween'. It may come from a combination of the words 'hello', 'wee', and 'one': "Hello, wee-one", referring to some important creature of that era's mythology; maybe a 'pixie', or a 'goblin', or an 'elf' – all long-extinct (or never-existing, except in literature and fairy-tales) humanoid mutations. It may also signify an object, a 'hollow een' – the 'een' in question probably an archaic abbreviation of a tree, or an animal. Some have concluded that the word may simply signify something 'hallowed', something holy, something resembling a hallowed thing – a hallowed- een thing (like a velveteen fabric, for example). Or maybe even a 'hallowed e'en', 'hallowed evening' – a holy night.

But the origin of the word, the etymology, isn't as important as my final question: Why do we still celebrate Halloween? What significance does it have to us out here, as far from Earth as humankind has ever travelled?

It has to do with tradition. It has to do with maintaining a link with our past, with our original home, with Earth. We may be generations removed from the Sol system, and we may feel no real connection to the birthplace of humankind. But certain traditions remain alive and kicking simply because they were significant at some point in our collective past, and to relinquish those traditions also means relinquishing our basic humanity, our earthiness. We know that we are alone in the galaxy, and that whatever life exists around the stars we gaze up at every night is human life, linked to us with blood, with tradition, with myths and legends and spirit – with Earth.

Halloween is a link to our past. It's also a chance to drink fermented bronto-milk with melted honey, to build extravagant trapdoors and bait them with marshmallows, and to throw rotten bananas at our parents. But most importantly it's a time to let our hair down, have fun, and to scare the pants off of each other....Literally. Happy Halloween!

*Ramos Kawamoto*  
*Editor-in-Chief*

# Night of the Pumpkins

*Just Between Us - Interviews by Gayle Parker*

Dr. Rafal Neleb has been found. In a macabre ‘chamber of horrors’ deep in the Omni Forest (or so I’ve heard). What else could explain the horde of scythe-wielding pumpkin creatures that began ravaging the wilds of Rubi-Ka last night? And what’s with this weather? Who would have guessed that Dr. Neleb’s research had advanced this far? TAG tried to contact Dr. Bloch at Omni-Tek for additional comments, but guess what? He refused to do a second interview with me. How about that? Left with no other recourse, yours truly did the only thing she could in a situation like this - I turned to the average citizen on the streets, to get their take on these events. The results were rather enlightening.

**Zeb Gordon (notum miner):** It was the craziest thing I ever saw! Big orange-headed critters running around, slicing decent folks to ribbons! I only barely escaped with my life! I know O.T.’s gotta be behind this.

**Ophelia Jackson (professional dancer):** Talk about freaky, baby. We saw it all last night. My girlfriends and I had just finished our shift at Baboons and were headed out for some much needed ‘down time’ - you know what I mean. Suddenly, these glowing eyes appeared out of nowhere, and these things started chasing us. Listen, honey, you never seen a girl move so fast in six inch heels.

**Dante Cagliostro (meta-physicist):** If it’s true that these creatures and the weather effects were the result of Dr. Neleb’s study in metaphysics, then I’d love to get my hands on the good doctor’s notes. The physical manifestation of a person’s nightmares has such potential. Well, in the right hands, that is...

**Barnabas Stone (O.T. soldier):** Don’t worry. We’ve got everything under control. Move along. A comment? Are you recording this? Say, aren’t you that TAG lady that interviewed Dr. Bloch? Hey, wait! I have some questions for you, lady!

**Coolidge Doud (adventurer):** I don’t know what the big deal was. Me and my buddies found this guy’s lair. We turned a bunch of those things into mush. Blades ain’t no match for S.A. Home Defenders, I can tell ya that much.

**Mickey "The Mouth" O’Riley (trader):** Despite what my competitors say, I think all this excitement is great for business. Adrenalin gets the heart pumping and that makes people want to shop! You interested in a killer pair of sunglasses?

**Pepe Ramirez (nano technician):** It was chaos in that lab! Guns blazing everywhere! Nano formulas going off like fireworks! Pumpkin pulp covering everything! Lucky for me it was easy to tell friend from foe.

**Roxanne Orr (adventurer):** Monsters? What kind of monsters? If I see something I don’t recognize, I shoot first and ask questions later. Monsters are smart enough to stay outta my way. Suppression gas has saved a lot of cowardly butts. They’ll run out of it some day, you’ll see.

**Andrea Phillips (engineer):** Pumpkin monsters are just the most recent madness to afflict Rubi-Ka. This will never be a simple planet. Events like this will be commonplace here, I’m afraid. This might be a good environment to further one’s career but a lousy place to raise a family. Maybe it’s time to head back to Omni Prime.

**Sean McGowan (Clan soldier):** This whole pumpkin thing is just a subversive act on the part of O.T. to derail the possibility of any peace talks. I knew this whole Amnesty deal was a load of crap. They’ll never change. And they have too much to answer for in any case. O.T.’s gotta go down. It’s the only way.

**Beatrice Long (retired teacher):** When you get to be my age, young lady, nothing surprises you anymore. Pumpkin monsters are no more living nightmares than rhinomen, gargantulas, or mutants. It just so happens that these might make good pies. You ever tried pumpkin pie, dear? I make a delightful one, if I do say so myself.

**Andy Stallone (O.T. employee):** Pumpkin monsters? No sir! Can’t say that I like it!

**Fran Baldauf (shopkeeper):** Psychos like Neleb the Deranged aren’t grown in a vacuum. They’re products of a warped, violent society that is amused by cruelty and revels in destruction. Nightmarish killers have been walking the streets of Rubi-Ka’s cities long before these pumpkin creatures showed up. At least those pumpkin things look like monsters.

And there you have it, readers. Opinions from people like you. If you have some wisdom to share with TAG, send us your thoughts. I promise to keep them just between us.

## A Living Nightmare

*Just Between Us - Interviews by Gayle Parker*

We’ve all had nightmares. The monstrous shape that chases you through dark streets. The hideous creature that lurks in the shadows of your closet. The psycho slasher

who attacks you in the shower. We're all familiar with them. They creep us out, make our hearts pound, and waken us with a gasp. But once we're awake, they're gone - melted away by reason and reality. But what if that didn't happen? What if instead of being greeted by the morning light of Rubi-Ka's suns, we were instead greeted by slavering fangs, sharp claws, or a bloody knife? My guest interviewee for our Halloween issue of TAG, Dario Bloch, has faced that grisly situation before.

Dario Bloch graduated at the top of his class at O.T.U. on Omni Prime where he specialized in the study of Metaphysics. Offered a research position within Omni-Tek's Department of Experimental Metaphysics, Dr. Bloch went to work for the brilliantly twisted Dr. Rafal Neleb, the then Director of Metaphysical Research at O.T. As our readers know, Dr. Neleb was fired eight years ago after one of his experimental projects resulted in the deaths of several junior researchers. Dr. Bloch himself testified against his former boss during the O.T. trial, and currently heads the newly restructured Department of Metaphysics. Dr. Bloch took some time out of his busy schedule to give us a brief glimpse into the heart of darkness.

**Gayle Parker:** Thanks for agreeing to this interview, Dr. Bloch.

**Dario Bloch:** The pleasure is mine, Gayle. And please, call me Dario.

**G.P.:** You got it, Dario. So tell me, what was it like working for a madman like Dr. Neleb?

**D.B.:** Well, you must understand that at the time Dr. Neleb was employed by O.T., he was hardly what I would consider a madman. As you know, all O.T. employees must pass a very strict psychological screening process. We want to make sure that everyone that works for our great company is a responsible, stable citizen.

**G.P.:** Yet you acknowledge that your former boss is now known by the general public as 'Neleb the Deranged?'

**D.B.:** I've heard that unfortunate name bandied about, yes.

**G.P.:** Is it true, Dario, that his experiments dealt with giving substance to a person's nightmares?

**D.B.:** This is somewhat off-topic, isn't it, Gayle?

**G.P.:** Are you afraid to answer the question, Dario?

**D.B.:** No, of course not. Dr. Neleb was interested in the metaphysical phenomenon of creating solid objects through the use of nanotechnology and notum. The

apparent creation of something out of nothing, which as we know is not really the case—

**G.P.:** And was it not, in fact, true that Dr. Neleb began to give life to his research subjects' nightmares?

**D.B.:** Well, he—

**G.P.:** Weren't the deaths attributed to 'monsters' and 'demons?' I have a transcript of the trial here.

**D.B.:** Where did you get that? That's confidential.

**G.P.:** According to this court transcript, Dr. Neleb created *[reading from the transcript]* "a tentacled horror that slithered across the lab and began ripping a young researcher into a bloody—"

**D.B.:** Ms. Parker, if you please! I was told this interview was to discuss O.T.'s new recruitment policies.

**G.P.:** Was it true that Dr. Neleb suffered severe psychological trauma at the hands of an abusive uncle for the first eight years of his life?

**D.B.:** What? Who told you that?

**G.P.:** Don't childhood toys and fairy tale monsters, which were other bizarre manifestations witnessed by several people in the lab, have something to do with Dr. Neleb's past? Isn't that just a sick cry for help?

**D.B.:** Where are you getting this information? This is nonsense!

**G.P.:** Do you feel partially responsible for the deaths of all those young men and women in your department? Do their bloody, mutilated faces haunt your nightmares, Dario?

**D.B.:** That's enough! This interview is over, lady! You hear me? Over!

Obviously the horrible memory of that time was too much for our dear Dr. Bloch. One can only imagine the sorts of twisted shapes that would have been given life by his nightmares had his former mentor's experiments been allowed to continue at O.T. But the question remains: where is Neleb the Deranged? Does he continue his macabre research somewhere on Rubi-Ka? Are we truly safe from our nightmares? For now, perhaps. But for how long?

Remember, this is just between us.

*-Gayle Parker*