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# The Pumpkin Deal

A Win-Win Halloween



By Alan Venable  
Illustrated by Lena Venable

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Venable

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presentation on the next page.  
Also see suggestions at the back.**

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*With many thanks to Jeanne Brett, professor and negotiations expert at the Kellogg School of Management, Northwestern University, for sowing this story with a true one of her own, and to Madame Petit, Jeanne's partner in a win-win deal*



In an end-of-October sunset they swarmed  
Down from the sky on their rakes and brooms.  
Of course, you know what nightfall I mean,  
The dreaded eve called HALLOWEEN!

“Witches and wizards!” the boss wizard yelled,  
“What nasty tricks shall we play tonight,  
To fill our evil hearts with gladness,  
By driving other poor creatures to madness?”



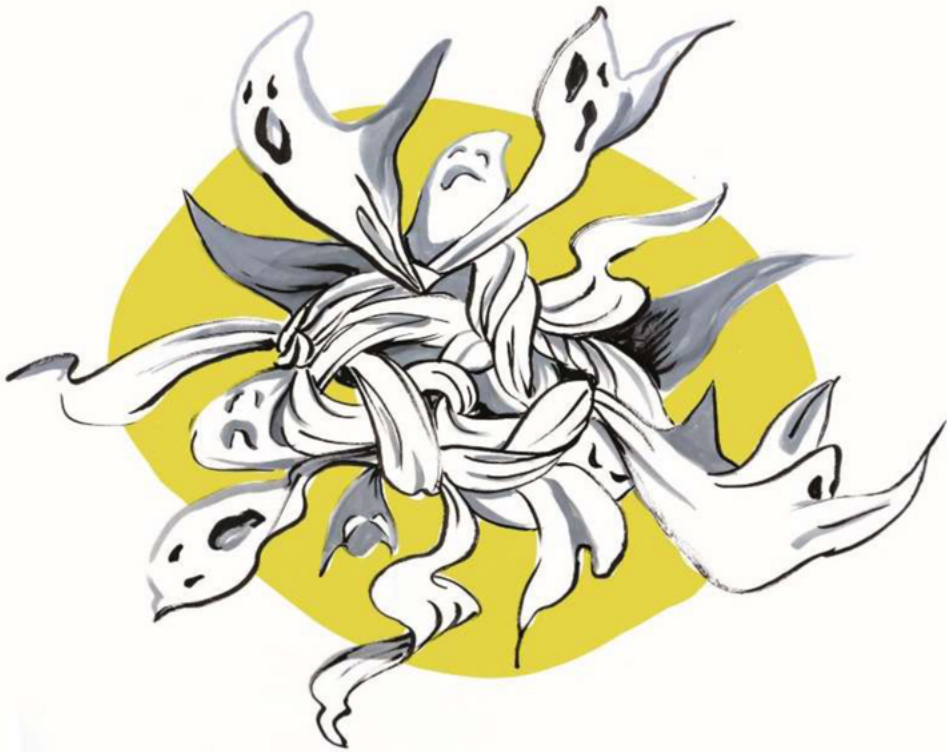
Oh, this was a squabbling posse of loonies,  
Who nattered and nagged at a deafening pitch,  
And haggled and argued, insulted and taunted.  
So most often *none* of them got what they wanted.

"I know!" said one of the quarrelsome gang.  
"Let's boil a cauldron of choke-berry juice.  
We'll drop in some stink bugs and call it a stew,  
And force salamanders to swallow the brew!"



"No, no!" said another. "Let's do even worse.  
Let's mire the spiders in buckets of honey,  
Hold cheese out of reach of ravenous rats,  
And sweep the air briskly to frenzy the bats!"

“No, no, no!” said a third one, “I say we get meaner.  
We’ll tie up the ghosts in their own white sheets.  
We’ll twist them together and leave them to dangle  
All night from a tree in a terrible tangle!”



“Enough!” said the boss. “Now listen to me:  
We’ll go out and capture a bushel of lizards,  
And fill their slithery heads with such scares,  
They’ll toss all night with reptilian nightmares!”





“Have it your *own* way,” the rest of them grumbled.  
(They always gave in when the big boss took over.  
At quarrels the old goat was always the roughest.  
When wizards got tough, he was always the toughest.)



Then an eighth witch started chirping among them,  
To whom none of them wanted to listen.  
She'd just woke up from a nap in the thicket.  
(Her chirp was the reason they all called her “Cricket.”)

“Good evening, sisters and brothers,” said she.  
“Regarding the madness we’re making tonight,  
May I remind you, what all of us crave  
When Halloween skeletons rise from the grave?”



“Did you all forget what we like to do first?  
We like to carve pumpkins with terrible faces,  
With candles inside them that cast a weird glow  
To light up the rest of our terrible show.”

“Fie!” cried the others (as witches must say),  
But then fell silent ’til one of them murmured,  
“Our jack-o-lanterns! How did we forget  
How we always brighten our Halloween fête?!”

And before the boss could command them to stop,  
The other six maniacs screamed with delight,  
And flew in a fleet to the neighboring village  
To burgle eight pumpkins by trickery or pillage.





But the market was closed at that darkening hour,  
And not even one pumpkin was left in the stalls —  
Just old, squishy carrots and other such clutter  
As villagers normally throw in the gutter.

At once the boss wizard planted his claws  
In an ancient, beat-up, yellowing cabbage,  
Too moldy and rotten to make sauerkraut.  
“This is *mine!*” he announced, and paraded it out.



“Finders, keepers!” cried out another,  
A nasty old eggplant squished in his grasp.  
With that, the rest of them started to fight  
Over the rest of the garbage in sight.

I mean all except Cricket, who landed last.  
“No pumpkins at all?” asked she.  
“And nothing for you,” they replied, “which is fair.  
Since you arrived last, you may not get a share.”



“Well, how about this?” she said, after some thinking.  
“Since the market is all out of pumpkins,  
Let’s fly out to the fields on the chance we might find  
That some farmers left some of their pumpkins behind.”



And before the boss wizard could open his mouth,  
The others threw down what they had,  
And sped off cackling, into the night,  
Until harvested land came in sight.



“Look! There they are!” The mob swooped down  
On seven last pumpkins below,  
By the side of a fence and mostly concealed,  
Except one that the moonlight revealed.



Boss wizard landed at once on the biggest.  
The other six followed his lead,  
Pouncing on smaller ones for their own,  
Until all of the pumpkins were gone.



But when they tried to pick up these treasures  
And carry their booty away,  
They discovered each one was tied down by a tether  
Of vine as tough as dinosaur leather.



“I see there are only seven,” said Cricket,  
Searching the shadows for one for herself.  
“It’s true, I’m always showing up late.  
However, the fact is, we do need eight.”

Well, none of them paid her any attention.  
They got down on elbows and knees.



They gripped their vines with bony thumbs  
And nibbled madly with rubbery gums.

Then a sibilant whisper came out from the shadows.  
“Stop!” the voice seemed to whistle.  
The boss raised his head and demanded, “Now *who*  
Dares to tell one of *us* what to do?!”



Propped up all alone by a stick-woven fence,  
An odd-looking figure they saw.  
In a hay-stuffed shirt and an old straw hat.  
A scarecrow? Well, who needs to listen to *that?!*

“Look, Cricky,” said one of the sisters.  
“See what’s hiding under that scarecrow’s hat?  
Another pumpkin, and what a fat one!  
Why don’t you take that one?”



Poor witch Cricket. She wanted a pumpkin,  
As much as the others. And yet,  
She didn’t see how it could ever be right  
To make off with somebody’s head in the night.

“You guys all keep chewing,” the boss commanded.  
“No scarecrow is going to stop us.  
If he raises a finger, we’ll lay on a curse  
that will turn him into a cockroach — or worse!”

“Just try,” hissed the scarecrow. “See what you’ll get!  
I’ll summon the barnyard hounds with a whistle.  
They’ll dash out here and tear you to shreds  
Before those pumpkins are loosed from their beds!”



This was not welcome news to these dithering witches,  
For, as much as they doted on felines,  
Of canines they harbored a terrible fear,  
And shivered whenever a dog came near.

“Very well, we won’t steal them,” the boss relented.  
“We will offer to *buy* all instead.  
They can’t be worth much. I’d say that a few  
Of our bent, rusty pennies will do.”



“*All* my pumpkins you want? That’s a terrible offer!”  
The scarecrow responded with passion.  
“And don’t for a moment believe that I’m bluffing.  
We scarecrows may have more inside us than stuffing!”

Meanwhile, Cricket was trying to listen  
To all that the scarecrow was saying.  
Who knew what interests might lurk in his head,  
Besides these things that he'd already said?



“Excuse me, scarecrow,” she said to him sweetly,  
“Is there more you might want to pass on?  
When you talk, what I mostly hear is a squeak.  
Is your mouth too little for you to speak?”



“Yes, it is,” the scarecrow whistled back,  
“That’s all the farmers could find time to cut me.  
My poor owners are always so busy these years,  
They cut me just pinholes for eyes, mouth and ears.”



“Perhaps I could fix that,” Cricket suggested.  
“Is there some help you think I might be?  
Also, I’m wondering, or have I forgot  
Why seven pumpkins cannot be bought?”

“Oh, I could sell *seven*,” the scarecrow replied,  
“As long as my head stays behind.  
Surely, with *your* ears you just heard me say  
That *all* is the number I can’t give away.”

“I heard that!” the boss wizard said to his mates.  
“The scarecrow says we can take seven.  
We just need to leave the eighth one behind.  
I don’t think Cricket can possibly mind.”



“But I *would* mind,” Cricket protested at once.  
“However, perhaps we must settle for seven.  
I can understand why, from what he has said,  
He would not offer to sell his own head.”

"I don't think you understand *at all*,"  
Said the scarecrow. "It isn't that simple.  
Because if you did take it, please do explain  
How, next year, the farmers could carve me again."



"I realize my face is not much to look at,  
And in two weeks my pulp will be mushy,  
But if I can hold on to what I hold dear,  
My farmer can carve me a new one next year."

“How I wish you could see inside my head!  
See how full it is of a treasure  
That makes a farmer burst into a cheer  
In spring, when warm days for sowing are here!”



At that moment, however, the strokes of midnight  
Tolled out from the steeple in town.  
“Fie!” cried the seven. “That means we must scoot!”  
And they tore up their vines by the root.

They flung some coins at the scarecrow's feet,  
Took off with pumpkins a-flying,  
Home to the thicket to duck out of sight  
And party the rest of the night.



Meanwhile, witch Cricket's brain was brimming  
With all that the scarecrow had said.  
With her own and scarecrow's interests to guide her,



A new possibility sprouted inside her.

Slowly, with well chosen words she described  
A new offer her brain had just hatched.

“A deal...?” she asked.



“It’s a deal!” he said.  
And to Cricket he handed...



...his head.



By the time witch Cricket got back to the party,  
The chokeberry punch had been boiled.  
The stinkbugs were swimming around in the stew,  
And some poor salamanders had tasted it, too.



Then they all carved lanterns with candles inside,  
To light up the rest of their games.  
They honeyed the spiders and frenzied the bats,  
Hung up smelly cheeses to torment the rats.

For more fun, they tied all the ghosts up in knots,  
And bombarded the lizards with stories  
That left the reptiles laughing in stitches  
And turned into nightmares for seven scared *witches*.



An hour before daybreak, the madness was over,  
With no other sound than the snoring.  
The fire was ash, the sky was dawning  
“It’s time we must go,” said Cricket, yawning.



She gathered up her new companion,  
Flew over the mirroring moon  
At just the right angle so scarecrow could see  
His new face and say to himself,



“That’s ME!”

Back by the dew-covered fence at last  
She set his head back on his collar,  
As he, after being awake the whole night,  
Fell asleep in a new autumn light.



“And here’s what I promised, here in this sack.  
It’s all that your farmer will need,  
In the spring when the days turn warm,  
To sow you again with his corn.”

So that, my friends, was the pumpkin deal.  
I hope you'll discover its meaning.



“So long,” chirped Cricket. “‘Til next year, friend,  
When Halloween flies ‘round again....”





**Alan Venable** has written many books for young readers, as well as the novel *Ratting on Russo*. He was born in Pittsburgh and settled in San Francisco with his orthographer wife Gail to raise their children, Noe and Morgan. Grandchildren Ember, Peregrine and Juniper live nearby.

**Matleena (Lena) Hanninen Venable** illustrated her first story about witches at age four in a diary she inherited from her sister. Born in Finland, she entered the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs in Paris to study illustration and went on into apparel design. Her current main craft is software engineering. She lives in Pacifica, California, with her husband Morgan and daughter Juniper.



# FOR TEACHERS & PARENTS

*The Pumpkin Deal* introduces children ages 8-10 to some key ideas about how to be a good, “win-win” dealer. A win-win dealer is someone who can negotiate a purchase or trade in which both sides get what they wanted. No one ends up feeling cheated.

## Thanks to Jeanne Brett & Madame Petit!

Some years ago, Alan helped Northwestern University management professor Jeanne Brett prepare a book called *Negotiating Globally: How to Negotiate Deals, Resolve Disputes, and Make Decisions Across Cultural Boundaries*. It began with the example of a negotiation she undertook while living in a small village in France.

Her daughters were in the local two-room school. The teachers wanted Jeanne and her husband to organize an American-style Halloween party complete with pumpkin carving. Jeanne searched everywhere for enough pumpkins for the children to carve. She finally found them at Mme. Petit’s roadside stand. She describes what happened next, surprisingly, in “Negotiation Tips: Know Your Interests,” a short video available at <https://tinyurl.com/y2euyao7>. With Jeanne’s permission, Alan adapted and expanded her tale.

## Reading and discussing the book in class

25 What is the scarecrow talking about? Is it something he doesn’t mention by name?

28 Why doesn’t the scarecrow want to sell or trade pumpkin number 8. What sort of exchange do you think Cricket might make that would be good for the scarecrow? What things could she do for him and his owners?

*After* Was this a win-win ending? How so?

What did Cricket do when the scarecrow refused to sell all the pumpkins?

In the end, how much money did Cricket pay for her pumpkin?

What does the scarecrow do that helps him and Cricket to make a great exchange?

What could the other witches and wizards learn from Cricket and the scarecrow?

**Broader ideas.** Here are several tips from Jeanne’s that your class can discover:

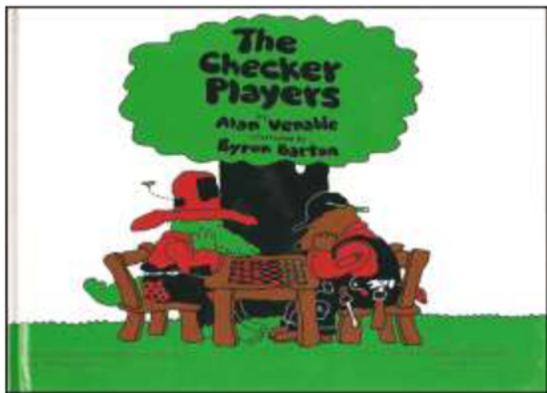
- *Think ahead about what you want.* Jeanne call these wants your *interests*. Cricket wants enough pumpkins for everyone in her group to have one to carve.
- *Choose the sort of offer you want to make.* Jeanne calls this your *position*. Cricket and her group’s first position is that they want to *buy* all the pumpkins. When that doesn’t work, Cricket finds a new position about what sort of trade she can make with the scarecrow.
- *Think about what else you could do if the deal doesn’t happen.* Jeanne calls this your *best alternative*. For example, Cricket could just go home without a pumpkin of her own. The other witches’ jack-o-lanterns could light up the party. Or maybe she could find some other way to make a lantern without a pumpkin.
- *Find out what things the other person wants.* Cricket finds out as much as she can about why scarecrow won’t sell all eight pumpkins. She finds out why the scarecrow can’t sell them all. She also finds out that the scarecrow is unhappy about his pinhole face.
- *Instead of making threats or getting angry, get curious. Ask questions:* Jeanne’s “magic questions” are “*Why?*” and “*Why not?*” In a respectful way, Cricket asks questions to find out why the scarecrow cannot sell all eight pumpkins. The scarecrow answers honestly.
- *Combine both parties’ interests into an offer for a trade-off deal.* Cricket’s offer is this: If the scarecrow will let her carve him, she will satisfy his two big wants or needs. It’s a good trade-off so he says yes.

## Other activities

**Write a letter to the seven wizards and witches.** Advise them on how they might get more of what they want when they try to make a trade or deal with someone else.

**Perform the story.** *The Pumpkin Deal* can be turned into a short, funny play or staged reading. Request a free, adaptable script from [PumpkinDeal@OneMonkeyBooks.com](mailto:PumpkinDeal@OneMonkeyBooks.com).

**Write to the author or illustrator.** Ask questions or tell us what happened in your class with the book. We will write back! [AlanLena@OneMonkeyBooks.com](mailto:AlanLena@OneMonkeyBooks.com).



## *The Checker Players*

Picture book (ages 4 to adult)  
32 pages hardcover, paper or pdf

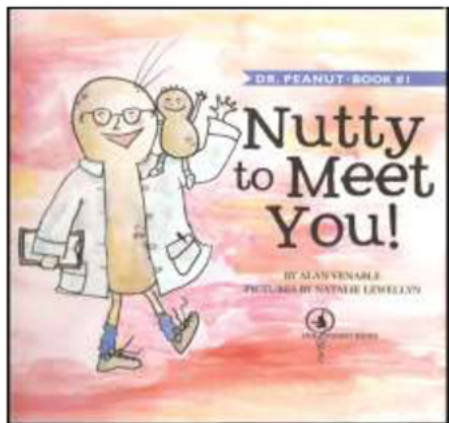
“A story that will delight young children.”  
— *School Library Journal*

“Intelligence and humor.... It has that rare substance.” —*New York Times Book Review*

“Charm and sense.” —*New York Magazine*

“Barton's sketches nicely capture the humor in this elementary lesson that two can do better than one.” —*Publisher's Weekly*

“As teachers we've found *The Checker Players* to be the perfect book for children of all ages. If ever a book promoted tolerance and fair play, this is it.” —*Mary Fessenden & Ruth Rath*



## *Nutty to Meet You!*

Picture book (ages 4-7)  
30 pages hardcover, paper or pdf

“Reviewer's Choice.” —*Children's Bookwatch*

“Delightfully nonsensical. What civilized conversations they have!” —*Small Press Review*

“Plain pea-nutty fun.” —*Old Schoolhouse Magazine*



## *Don't Eat Dr. Peanut!* *Six Nutty Tales*

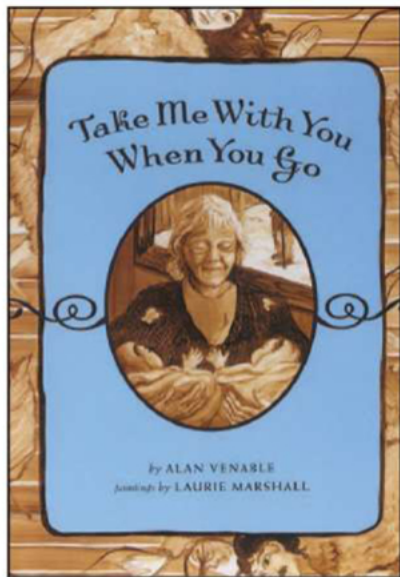
Illustrated chapter book (ages 6-10)

76 pages

Paper or pdf

From the natural and playful science of snails, talking peanuts, and kids, to even more outlandish truths and half-truths for young minds to make sense of.

This book combines *Nutty to Meet You!* with five more adventures in getting along with others.



## *Take Me with You when You Go*

Illustrated chapter book

111 pages

Jacketed hardcover or Smashwords ebook

“A magical book, a unique fairytale. As a read-aloud or read-on-your-own, this story pulls you from one page to the next. For ages 6-10, but older children will enjoy it, too.” —*The Old Schoolhouse Magazine*

“A story of love, loss, and longing. Brother and Sister are self-sufficient, resourceful and kind, so they can live under any condition, but they long to be reunited with their parents. A great bedtime story for the older child.” —*ForeWord Magazine*

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