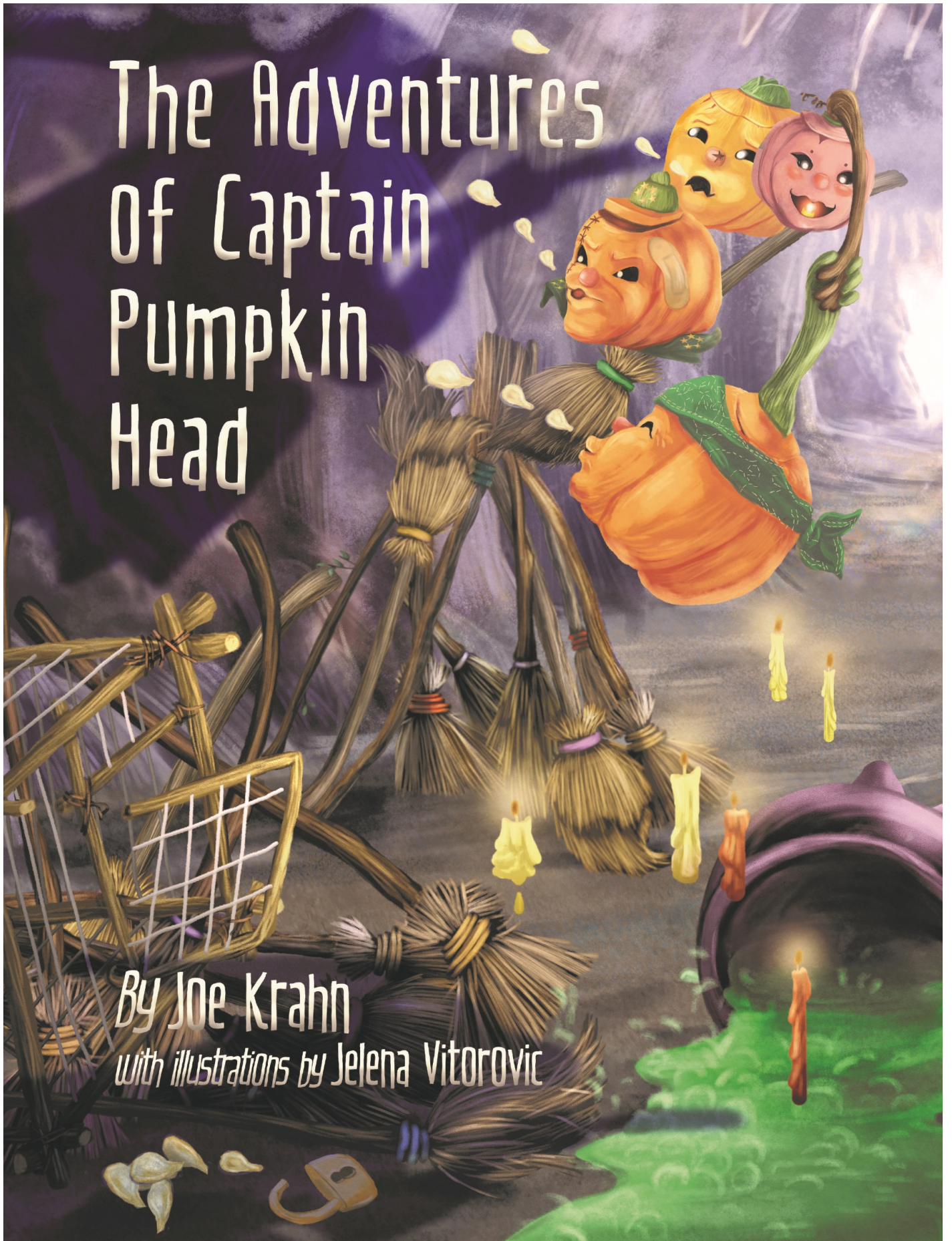


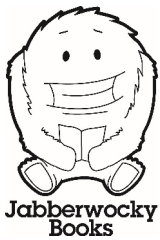
The Adventures of Captain Pumpkin Head

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*By Joe Krahn
with illustrations by Jelena Vitorovic*



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Dedication and Special Thanks

For Esme, my everything. Thank you for your enduring love and inexhaustible support! ∞

For Malia, Nathan, Cecilia, and Isaac – the best children in the world. I’m forever proud to be your dad!

For Benji, the Captain’s best friend, and all my nieces and nephews. And for my siblings – Dan, Maggie, and Katie. A special thanks to Katie for encouraging me to transform what was once a series of emails into an adventure book.

For my parents, Dave and Beth. Thank you for a wonderful childhood. With this book – and hopefully others to come – I’m able to reach back and relive it with fondness.

A huge thank you to Jelena Vitorovic! Your teamwork and beautiful illustrations have helped bring Captain Pumpkin Head and all his adventures to life.

Finally, thank you to the entire team at Mill City Press and Salem Author Services for your support throughout the book-writing journey!



To hear all the original songs of the Rap’n Cap’n, visit captainpumpkinhead.com

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My dearest boys and girls –

Let me begin by introducing myself to you. My name is Captain Pumpkin Head, and I'm very happy to make your acquaintance.



Now that you've seen me, I have a question for you: do I look familiar? I'll bet you've seen your share of pumpkins around Halloween, including some that look like me. And I'll bet you've helped create your very own jack-o-lantern. If so, you've probably put a candle inside and watched it glow to life! If you've never done this, I recommend you give it a try. Make sure you have an adult with you when you're carving a pumpkin – it can be a little tricky and a bit dangerous.

While I'm sure you're familiar with pumpkins, I'm not sure if you know of a magical place called Pumpkin Patch Peninsula or whether you know about my fellow jack-o-lanterns or my adventures! And did you know that us pumpkins can read and write? Yeah, in fact, I have a pen-pal, and his name is Benji. He's a little boy who lives in a quiet neighborhood with his mom, dad, younger sister, and dog. You can read some of our letters to each other as part of my adventures. C'mon, let's begin!

Chapter One

The Place We Call Home

Our story begins on Pumpkin Patch Peninsula, where – as you might have guessed – pumpkins rule the countryside. It’s an enchanted place where autumn never ends, and the leaves stay the most beautiful shades of red, orange, and yellow year-round. We get beautiful sunshine in the day, and the nights are crisp yet inviting.

There’s tons to do on the peninsula, including lots of fall festivals! Take it from me, these parties have a little something for everyone – hay rides through the forest, hide-and-seek in giant mazes of corn, loads of games, and the best warm apple cider you’ve ever tasted.

Best of all, we celebrate Halloween every day! That means each night, when our Harvest Moon rises high in the sky, all the younger pumpkins get to go trick-or-treating. I love seeing them dressed up in their favorite costumes as they roll down the cobblestone streets collecting the most delicious candy you can imagine. By the way, it’s good that pumpkins don’t have real teeth. If we did, I’m pretty sure all the sugar we eat would mean a ton of trips to the dentist. Ouch!

At the very center of our peninsula is a castle called Pumpkin Palace. It’s got everything inside that you could ever dream of, including a movie theatre, arcade, bowling alley, and tons of cool places to hang out. Oh, and get this. At the bowling alley, us pumpkins don’t use real balls. Instead, we just roll each other down the lane. We’re crazy like that!

The palace is also where we keep the Sunstone, which is the source of all our magic. No one knows exactly where that big, beautiful orange gem came from, but legend has it that it’s an old meteorite that crash-landed on Halloween night over a hundred years ago. The stone is super mysterious, and even us pumpkins haven’t completely figured out all of its special powers.



To make things run smoothly on the peninsula, every pumpkin has a job. Some are harvesters, who work in the pumpkin patches where the new baby pumpkins grow. Others are in charge of brewing cider or planning festivities. Of course, there's also peninsula security. Yes, even our magical land needs protection from the things that go bump, bump, bump in the night!

And that's where I come in. As a member of the Pumpkin Patch Peninsula Protection Posse – or “P5” for short – I'm responsible for helping guard our kingdom and all of its magical power. We also sneak away sometimes on secret missions around the world. I'll tell you more about those in a minute.

By now, maybe you've guessed there are some who would like to steal our magic and take control of the peninsula. The list of these villains is long but includes gangly ghosts, freakish ghouls, sly goblins, crazy clowns, zany zombies, sneaky spiders, and even the occasional vicious vampire. They're all a little scary, but the most frightening are the wandering witches! We've been fighting off their flying army for as long as I can remember.

Something you might be wondering is how us pumpkins are able to do certain things – like brew cider or write letters to a pen-pal – without having any hands or fingers. Well, the answer is our magic allows us to transform our stems. Yeah, we can actually make them sprout on command, even grow little hands.

And I'll let you in on another secret. You know how sometimes pumpkins get rotten or moldy? Or worse – have you ever seen a pumpkin smashed in the street? It's not a fun job to clean them up, but we have special crews that come to each and every neighborhood around Halloween time to collect the old, squishy, rotten, and even smashed pumpkins. We take them back to the peninsula, and with our powers, we're able to make them good as new.

Chapter Two

New Recruits

In order to protect our land, we need a posse strong enough to keep the evil witches and other monsters away. To make sure we have the best pumpkins for the job, every fall, the posse sets out across the globe in search of new recruits. But here's the thing – we can't simply yank some poor, unsuspecting gourd out of the dirt and expect him to be P5 material. That's *not* how it works! You see, only the bravest pumpkins can serve as protectors, so we have to visit every neighborhood – even yours – in search of just the right jack-o-lanterns.

Until I was chosen for the posse, I had lived a normal pumpkin life. Truth be told, it wasn't all that bad. I lived with Benji and his family, who I told you about earlier. My job was to guard their front porch, which had all the Halloween decorations you can think of – bats, goblins, vampires, spiders, and mummies. Even a gaggle of witches! As content as I was, I longed for a life of excitement and adventure. Little did I know, adventure was about to find me!

I'll never forget the night I became a member of P5. It was a chilly October evening and I was sitting on my porch, like I always did, when I heard a faint sound coming from down the street. It wasn't like anything I had ever heard before. I was used to cars passing by and even a faraway train whistle would sometimes wake me from a nap. But this was a strange sound, as if something was traveling at record speed.

Just as my curiosity was starting to get the best of me, I saw them. It was a group of pumpkins rolling along in perfect formation. *These must be members of the famous P5*, I thought, *and they must be on a secret midnight mission*. I couldn't let this opportunity slip away.

"Hey, what are you guys doing?" I shouted from the porch. Startled and annoyed at my outburst of curiosity, they rushed over.

New Recruits



“What are *you* doing?” the leader of the pack asked in a stern voice. “If you yell like that, you’re going to wake somebody and blow our cover. Can’t you see we’re P5?”

When I heard him say that, I could feel my face light up as if the candle burning inside me had just multiplied.

“You’re with the posse? I knew it!”

“Shhhhh!” the leader pleaded. “Yes, we’re with the posse. I’m General Pumpkinator, and I’m leading a special mission to find new recruits. But we’re going to end up being pumpkin soup if you keep yelling and somebody finds us out here.”

“Sorry,” I whispered, my face turning a darker shade of orange from embarrassment. “It’s just that I’ve always wanted to serve in the posse, and I’m a little tired of guarding this old porch. Besides, the owners have a big dog to protect the house.”

General Pumpkinator looked me in the eyes, and just as I thought he was about to tell me to stick to my ordinary pumpkin life, he said, “Actually, we haven’t had much luck tonight finding anyone crazy enough to join us. You know, being a member of the posse isn’t easy, and it’s dangerous, too! If you want to be part of our team, you need to be courageous, and you have to do what you’re told. Can you handle that?”

“You bet I can!” I shouted. “I’ve waited all my life—”

“Be quiet!” the General insisted. But it was too late. The family dog was making his way toward us, and by the look in his eyes and the sound of his growl, he wasn’t happy to see my new friends.

“Let’s roll!” the General exclaimed, and down the street we zoomed, leaving the dog in our dust.

Chapter Three

Fitting In

After arriving on Pumpkin Patch Peninsula, General Pumpkinator introduced me to the other members of the posse.

“This is Sergeant Pumpkin Seed. He’s in charge of, well, he just does whatever we need him to do. Over here is Major Pumpkin Patch. She’s our air defense gourd. This is Lieutenant Pumpkin Bread, our equipment and supply specialist. Oh, and this here is Colonel Pumpkin Face, an all-round warrior. Last but not least, this is Commander Pumpkin Dude, who leads all our training exercises.”

Turning to me, the General said, “Fellow pumpkins, this is our newest recruit. Hey, what’s your name anyway?”

“My first name’s Jack, and my last name’s Lantern, and I’m sure happy to meet all of you!” I said with excitement.

The posse roared with laughter.

“What?” I asked with embarrassment.

“Let me guess,” Lieutenant Pumpkin Bread said with a cynical smirk. “You have a middle initial, and it’s ‘O,’ right?”

“Yeah, how’d you know that?” I asked.

“Here’s the thing, newbie,” the Lieutenant quipped with a heavy dose of arrogance. “Every pumpkin we bring to the peninsula thinks their name is Jack-O-Lantern. And they all *think* they have what it takes to be one of us.” Then, speeding over to me and looking directly into my eyes, he said, “As for you, Jack...I’ll bet you fizzle out after one measly day.”



The Lieutenant's words hung in the air like a dark cloud as all the pumpkins in the posse stared on quietly. Being the new guy was hard enough, but Lieutenant Pumpkin Bread's less-than-warm welcome made me feel like coming to the peninsula might have been a mistake.

As I began to second guess my dream of becoming a member of P5, Major Pumpkin Patch broke the uncomfortable silence. "Okay, cool it, Lieutenant," she said. "And just ignore him, Jack. He gets like that sometimes. You just need to do your best here and everything will fall into place. Now, let's give you a *real* name. But first, tell us if you have any special talents."

"Talents?" I asked.

"Yeah, you know, talents, skills, anything that can help the posse defeat those evil witches once and for all!"

I paused. "Well, I don't think this will help with the witches, but I'm a pretty good rapper!"

As if being laughed at earlier wasn't bad enough, the pumpkins were now in full hysterics, hooting and hollering like a pack of hyenas.

"Ha, now I get it!" snarked Lieutenant Pumpkin Bread. "Is that what your little bandana is all about, newbie? Hey, how many Grammys have you won anyway?"

With humiliation setting in, I thought about turning around and leaving for good. Somehow, I dug deep, found a bit of courage, and convinced myself that it was now or never. Just as it seemed that the group might faint from amusement, I dropped a rhyme.

*"I'm a rappin' pumpkin, ain't that somethin'
Whenever I'm around the ground will start bumpin'.
Shakin', breakin', and fallin' apart.
Trust me when I say, you don't want me to start."*

*"Cuz I'll drop a million lines that'll scramble your mind.
Mixin' twistin' rhymes, yeah I'll leave ya behind.
And you'll try, to reply, but you'll break down and cry.
You need me to rewind!?!...Ha-haaa.
Nah! It's time for goodbye! Whoa!!!!"*

"Was that enough? Man, I got MORE stuff!"

*“Cuz I’m straight up crazy, moonstruck? Maybe!
Try to slow me down but you will never tame me.
I’m a true Tom Brady, yeah it’s time to pay me.
Never see the day when they will ever trade me.”*

*“Now some will try to say that I’m a bit too sly.
A real wise guy, hmmm, I wonder why?
It’s not as if my rhyming is a federal crime.
But they’re the jealous type, so all they do is whine.”*

*“Still I would be lyin’ if I said that’s fine.
Yo, it’s not alright – No way I let that slide.
You bet that I won’t let ‘em try to steal my shine.
I never run and hide, this pumpkin’s in his prime!!!”*

Stunned and in silence, the posse looked around at one another. After what felt like forever, Commander Pumpkin Dude declared, “That...was...awesome!” And at that moment, I became the newest – and maybe coolest – member of the team.

“Okay, Jack,” General Pumpkinator said. “You’ve got a spot on P5. And from now on, you’ll be known as Captain Pumpkin Head.”

“Yeah,” Colonel Pumpkin Face declared with a smile. “The ‘Rappin’ Cap’n!”

“And now that we know what to call you,” said General Pumpkinator, “your first duty will be to make sure that the perimeter of Pumpkin Palace is secure. Take it seriously, Captain. There’s no unimportant job on the peninsula, *especially* protecting the palace.”

“I understand, sir,” I said with a renewed sense of confidence.

“Let’s be sure that you do,” the General answered in a serious tone. “After all, the Sunstone is behind those walls, and if it’s lost or stolen, us pumpkins are done for.”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“Well, in order for me to answer that,” the General explained, “first you need to know a little bit about the Sunstone itself, as well as our pumpkin history.”

Upon hearing this, all the pumpkins circled around and listened intently.

"A long time ago," the General began, "a blazing orange meteorite shot across the midnight sky before crash-landing right here on the peninsula. When it slammed into the ground, it formed a massive crater deep in the earth. A short time later, a bunch of little pumpkins, magical ones, began popping up out of the dirt. Those gourds were our very first ancestors."

"That's incredible!" I said.

"Yes, yes, but there's more to the story," said the General. "Buried in a huge pile of rocks at the bottom of the crater, the pumpkins discovered a stone that glowed as bright as the sun. Little did they know that it was the stone's magic that brought them to life. Mesmerized by its light and beauty, the pumpkins took the alien gem to the surface and soon went to work filling in the crater with dirt. Once they finished, they began building our palace directly over the spot where the meteorite had landed."

"And where do you keep the Sunstone?" I asked the General.

"Aha! That's the most important part. You see, when the space rock hit the earth, it created a small but powerful energy vortex deep inside the ground. And it's the vortex that activates the Sunstone and makes it glow to life. Unfortunately, we've discovered that if we move it too far away from the energy field, the stone goes dark and all our magic just disappears."

"Why does that happen?" I asked.

"We don't know why, Captain. But pumpkin legend says the Sunstone's power can be unlocked on other parts of the peninsula. We've tried many times, but we've never been able to figure out how to do it. Anyway, we keep the stone on a special pedestal in the center of the palace, directly above the vortex."

"General, you can count on me!" I exclaimed. "I'll guard the Sunstone with my life."

"That's what I wanted to hear, Captain. Now, before I forget, take these," the General said as he threw me a bag of what looked to be ordinary pumpkin seeds.

"What do I do with them?" I asked.

"Man, you sure have a lot to learn," groaned Commander Pumpkin Dude as he rolled up next to me. "Look, I know whoever carved you probably cleaned out all your seeds and tossed them in the trash. But those little marvels can save your life during run-ins with the witches."

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Then, removing my lid and dumping the seeds inside of me, the Commander said, “We store them in here, and when we need them, we spit the seeds out for protection. Watch, like this.”

Turning toward some training targets, the Commander blew a hail of seeds from his mouth, hitting bullseyes with every shot!

“Practice, that’s all it takes,” the Commander said with confidence. “Just make sure you practice.”

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