



RA

Watching a flaming match, a child flexes tiny eye muscles to adjust the curvature of his lenses, causing the object to spring into focus.

Hello everyone!

Congratulations with the seventh issue of “Astra News”!

This is a special Halloween issue. I want to thank everyone who contributed to this issue!

Happy Halloween!

Enjoy!

The cover for the seventh issue was designed by Leonid.

Initially, it was used as the cover for the booklet of a Halloween event held on October 30, 2021 featuring the reading of the poem “The Raven” by Edgar Allan Poe. The idea behind the performance was not only to read the poem, but to also experiment with representing the stanzas with symbols.

At the end of this issue, I’ll give you a glimpse of the cover/collage that I started to work on yesterday. It’s unfinished in every possible way. Try to guess where it is heading.

*Yours,
Leonid Vishnevskiy*

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The Origins of Halloween

By Keira Young

Halloween. A holiday where everyone ingests varying types and amounts of toxins into their body and call it fun. Like many holidays, it has many corporate benefits, with the total amount spent just in 2018 on candy, decorations, etc. being about 9 billion dollars making it an economical gold mine, but I'm not writing today to explain all of the corporate strings being pulled here. I am writing to enlighten you on the origins of Halloween.

Halloween, like many other holidays, originates from Pagan/Celtic traditions, later assimilated into Christian context. Specifically, the earliest traces of Halloween are found in the celebration of Samhain (pronounced sow-in). Samhain is the last installment of the 8 yearly Sabbats, the day before the Pagan new year (November 1). Sabbats were festivals often celebrating the natural cycles of the Earth and its seasons. Other, lesser known, Sabbats include Yule (the origin of Christmas), Beltane, and Litha (for more information on sabbats [The Sabbats - Learn & celebrate the 8 sabbats | The Witchcraft Way](#) , be respectful). Way back when, people in these cultures believed that on one day of the year (Samhain), the line between the realm of the dead and the world of the living would become, in a sense, blurred. They also believed that this "blurring" would allow spirits to find their way back into the world of the living for just one night. These could be either malicious or benevolent spirits, but they didn't take any chances. To minimize the amount of mischief taking place that would harm their likeliness of survival, they would be sure to collect the harvests before the 31st of October (Samhain) so these malevolent spirits wouldn't be tempted to raid/destroy their food supply, because their will be no more food until the coming year.

Samhain was a day where everyone could feel closer to the people that they have lost. Not all of the spirits that came on this night were evil or mischievous. A belief was that your family members or friends who'd passed away would come and visit. Many people would take this as a time to honor them by lighting a candle, setting them a place at the dinner table, maybe even pouring them a glass of wine.

There were other spiritual happenings during this celebration as well. A traditional part of this festival would include many bonfires, like a lot of bonfires, I'd imagine more than that is safe. These fires would be representing the power of the Sun and the corresponding deities (Apollo, Amaterasu, Helios, etc.). They hoped that these bonfires would help protect their harvest throughout the winter so they don't starve to death.

Samhain also had many prophetic advantages. The presence of otherworldly beings practically breathing over your shoulder would probably allow some more direct "communication" with them. A popular technique was used to allow a path for this information called scrying. Scrying was a practice in which you look for patterns, shapes, and messages within a certain medium (often looking into a flame, mirror, or something floating in water like candle wax or thread). There were many other forms of communication/divination (if it ends in "mancy" it's probably one of them).

Assimilation

Like many modern holidays we now celebrate, Samhain was assimilated to have a different meaning. When Romans conquered the region, they mixed two of their own holidays to make something similar, Feralia and Pomona. Feralia was a holiday where people honored the dead, And Pomona was a celebration of the harvest honoring the goddess of the same name, Pomona, who is their goddess of fruit trees and orchards, turning Samhain to a different importance.

People once again tried to replace the holiday of Samhain, but it was the Christians this time. They tried to overshadow it with All Soul's Day which took place on November 2, it was also very similar to Samhain. Another mix of Celtic and Christian tradition is All Saint's Day, which was also known as All Hallows. Some of you may be ahead of me at this point, but since this holiday took place on November 1, the day before (October 31) was known as All Hallows Eve. Samhain, taking place on October 31, became known as the popular synonym for the holiday, All Hallows Eve (the precursor name to "Halloween").

Other Traditions

Pumpkin Carving

More fire. Never enough fire. Pumpkin carving back then was very similar to the modern tradition, just instead of pumpkins, they would use any type of gourd that they could get their hands on. Taking a piece of the harvest and filling it with fire (once again representing the Sun) would, like the bonfires, promise safety for the harvest throughout the Winter. Another possible origin is that people in Ireland and Scotland would do the same thing, only they were doing it to placate Stingy Jack, a mythological figure of theirs.

Trick or Treating

The very beginning of this tradition started because people would leave out small offerings to the malicious spirits to keep them from doing bad things to their only food supply, the harvest. Once Christianity took over, young bachelors would go out on Halloween and call out for the gifts that were left for the spirits. After a long, work-filled, harvest, this was a way to let off steam and enjoy themselves with "pranks". These young men were called guisers (gee-zers), this is because they often wore disguises, costumes if you will, which could be the origin of dressing up on Halloween. It is also said that the origins could be from ancient Celtic people dressing up in animal skins to act basically like a scarecrow and drive unwanted spirit attention from their harvests. Another reason for trick or treating could be the tradition of Mumming in the Middle Ages. People would dress as demons and other ill-intended beings in exchange for food and drink, sometimes even money.

Mythological Monsters and Creatures

- Black cats
 - Some people think that black cats are bad luck, this is because people in the Middle Ages believed that witches turned into black cats to avoid suspicion
- Sidhs (fairies)
 - People would dress up as monsters and in animals skins so the Sidhs wouldn't want to kidnap them
- Pukah
 - Was a shapeshifting being would receive offerings from the harvest
- The Lady Gwyn
 - A woman dressed in white and is headless
 - Also accompanied by her loyal black pig
- The Dullahan
 - Could appear in many different, mischievous, forms
 - Was an omen of death and bad fortune
- The Faery Host
 - Was a group of hunters would kidnap people
- The Slaugh
 - Also being that kidnaps souls

Coming to America

All of these traditions were brought to America by immigrants, many of them were Irish who were escaping the potato famine.

New traditions

The influence of American culture upon these traditions made a whole new generation of meanings and practices. One of these is that women started using the scrying techniques mentioned earlier in the article to predict what her future husband would look like. In terms of more recent developments, Halloween has been made a holiday where it is expected for people to give kids that come to their houses candy, where kids can dress up and be whatever they want for just one night. It has also been made into, pretty much, a second April 1, kids run around pulling pranks on neighbors and vandalizing public property in some cases. It is a holiday for candy companies, employees probably expect a big bonus this year. Halloween candy has been made into a 2.6-billion-dollar market. Not to mention costume and decoration companies, which turn Halloween into a gold mine, with 9 billion spent just a few years ago. Spirits cross over and interact with the living. Not to mention, we have come to consume exorbitant amounts of toxins into our bodies.

If the spirits are spending all this energy in coming to us, we might as well meet them halfway.

Pumpkin's First Halloween

by Leonid Vishnevskiy

Video Audio file: <https://youtu.be/LgmRx5134IM> (preferable to listen to rather than read)

I am looking out of my window, and there, I see monsters. I see witches. I see giant ducks. I see beings that you could never imagine. A walking box, even.

They are going around people's houses, and stealing from them. Once the people in a house see them, they give away their possessions. And eventually, they themselves get converted into monsters, because at some moments, new monsters walk out of those houses.

I have been noticing how quickly they have been taking over. Earlier, I saw ghosts gathering around houses. Giant spiders were everywhere. Scarecrows stood in places. Apparently, crows were our only defenders, as why else would the scare-crows have been sent in?

But crows by themselves were scary. The scare-crows were even scarier. Their smiles penetrated my mind, their eyes my soul.

There were some people walking along the streets, but they were walking with the monsters. The monsters had captured them.

And there I saw again people giving away their possessions.

Suddenly, I heard a knock on our door. Fear engulfed me. Trying not to make noise, I walked slowly downstairs, and there I saw my parents, unlocking the door.

"No, dad, don't!" I screamed.

But it was too late.

"Retreat!" I screamed even louder.

And heard ... an echo ...

