

## MR. GIBSON'S HALLOWEEN

by  
H. David Whalen

Priest Medical Corporation opens their new mega facility on an over-sized previously empty desert lot east of Phoenix, Arizona. The ribbon cutting ceremony to be held at ten AM, Monday morning November third.

This Friday evening before the official ribbon cutting ceremony, Priest sponsors a gala at their new campus. State Senator A. R. Jiles, the city mayor, and dozens of other politicians, celebrities and company personnel attend the affair.

Makala Ray, President of the company, stands to talk with Senator Jiles, surrounded by a group of men and women. She spies Alan Gibson, Chief Pharmaceutical Development Scientist, looking over a tray of hors d'oeuvres presented by an elegantly dressed black-gowned hostess. Ms. Ray calls Alan to come over and meet the senator.

Gibson joins the group. After introductions and the obligatory chitchat, a young male employee, anxious to hear the rest of the senator's story interrupts and suggests he finish his tale.

For the newcomer's benefit, Senator Jiles starts at the beginning. He tells of the Bell wagon train heading west, from what is now known as Tortilla Flats, below the foothills of Superstition Mountains following the Apache Trail towards central Arizona. The year eighteen-forty-nine. Unbeknown to Bell or any of the thirteen families, a band of Indians braves led by young Geronimo followed them throughout the day. The pioneers bed in this very spot. Jiles bounces his index finger in the air pointing downward. The braves in full war paint and riding Appaloosa ponies attacked at midnight. It was Halloween night exactly one-hundred and seventy-six years ago. Every man, woman, and child massacred and wagons burnt.

Senator Jiles goes on to tell personal anecdotes outlining facts that Geronimo and his band continue to haunt this site every Halloween. Moreover, he has heard stories of teenagers, attempting to debunk the legend, visit here at midnight and never seen or heard from again.

The wide-eyed group hangs on Jile's every word.

Without warning the building shrouds in blackness. Not a ray of light seeps into the monstrous foyer. Screams and gasps echoed throughout the room.

Ms. Ray yells for everyone to calm down. The backup generators will engage in seconds. Her encouraging words go unheard.

Alan Gibson's eyes draw toward the balcony atop the staircase. Lording over the room stands Geronimo as real as the night's harvest moon.

The Apache leader points at Gibson, "Ik'idá, kq̄ yá'édiná'a". The scientist does not understand, "Long ago, there was no fire."

Security agents flick on flashlights, and beams scour the room. Guests trample through the large double doors onto the moonlit parking lot. Vehicles jump to life. Tires screech. Within minutes, Priest Medical personnel left alone.

Ms. Ray directs employees to go home. She will have maintenance locate and fix the problem.

Gibson sits alone in his white Tesla Model X and stares at the dark monolith. He wonders if his equipment survived the crash. Lights flicker, and the building illuminates.

The scientist glances at his Royal Besan wristwatch. Not yet, ten o'clock, he decides to check his lab. He enters the structure. The unlocked door does not surprise him. No duty guard does.

Gibson, wary of the elevator, takes the stairs two floors up. He shoves his key card into the slot and rests his right palm gently on the hand scanner. The secure door silently glides open, and he goes straight to his central computer terminal.

“Good evening, Alan. Happy Halloween.” The monitor changes from a yellow smiley face to a jpeg of a flowing-robed witch flying on her broomstick in front of an full orange moon. “Trick or Treat?”

Looking over his setup, “Treat, Mister C,” absently mutters the scientist.

“Sorry, no treats tonight.”

Not paying attention, he flips switches and presses buttons on and off, and turns oscilloscope knobs back and forth, staring from one monitor to the next.

“That leaves option B, Alan.”

The room slowly darkens until blacker than a starless desert night in the eighteen hundreds. Not even a single machine’s LED lit.

*Crap, where’s maintenance?*

He spins at the presence of a dim glow behind him. Geronimo stands, face painted white, red and black strips down each cheek.

Gibson closes his eyes and shakes his head.

*It’s only a hologram generated by C.*

Reopening his lids, Alan stands beside a large rock encircled crackling campfire. Twelve additional war-decorated braves surround the scene.

An ember jumps from the fire and lands on the back of his hand. He slaps the burning cinder.

The Chief levels an arrow and lets it fly. The jagged stone arrowhead rips a hole, and lodges into Gibson’s shoulder. Blood gushes. A volley of arrows, from every direction, pummel his body and the scientist falls into the flames.

Not a clue how long unconscious, Alan wakes. The room illuminates. His frame smolders. Nubs of burnt-off arrow shafts protrude throughout. He rolls around the floor distinguishing the few remaining flames, all the while screaming in unbearable pain.

The agnostic scientist prays for death to come quickly. He last thought before blacking out.

Awakening, Gibson stares at his watch. It charred beyond recognition and not working.

*There must be people in the building by now!*

Alan painfully manages back into his chair. He lies his head back and stares at the ceiling. He cannot make out the fluorescent lights behind the mineral fiber tiles. Gibson tries to take his mind off the pain and forces a daydream of the joyous afternoon craving a jack o’lantern with his four-year-old son.

Directly above, a ceiling panel swings open. The recently carved smiling pumpkin fills the void.

The gourd starts morphing. The round happy-face eyeholes turn into fiery downward double pointed ellipses. The smiley mouth into an angry disproportion void.

The round squash come to life. “Time is up, Mr. Gibson!”

“Leave me alone!” His decimated body trembles uncontrollably.

Hot candle wax drips, drilling holes on top of holes, and boring deep to Gibson’s bones.

“Help! Help me!” shrieks the scientist.

The laughing apparition disappears. The room returns to silent darkness.

*My wife must be looking for me by now! She calls all day long. I’m sure that when I didn’t answer, she’s alerted someone to search for me!*

Alan’s visualizes his wife’s loving face, just before he passes out again.

*What's that?*

Gibson jumps to attention at the sound of crunching chicken bones. He agonizingly looks over his left shoulder.

An Aboriginal native sits cross-legged in front of a fire chews on a wing, which turns into an arm... his arm. Alan forces a glance down. Chunks of flesh hang from missing parts of his arm and waterfalls of blood splatter off the floor. Ever new bite leaves fresh teeth marks and another void. He cannot focus his mind over his screams. He feels a tug on his other arm and watches it tear from its socket. His screech is louder than physically possible. His torture more insufferable than ripped apart on a thirteenth-century rack, deep within the Tower of London.

The cannibal's head spins a three-sixty rotation. Returning to the home position is Gibson's lovely bride, devouring his arm. She smiles, blood and human secretion drip from her lips.

Too much for Alan, and he is gone from this world once more.

Gibson's will-to-survive takes control. Barely conscious, he struggles to stand.

*I've got to get out!*

Halfway across the floor, the walls crack and start to close inward.

NO! NO! He screams aloud.

Alan tries to stumble onward. The walls speed up entrapping him within a tiny square. Too small for him to turn around. Blood veins spread across the hospital-white concrete walls. They permute to a living pulsating organ.

Lah-dup! Lah-dup!Lah-dup!

The bloody soft tissue repeatedly embraces and retracts Gibson's body.

His wife's voice heard over the constant pulsating noise, "Come home, dear."

Alan's Royal Besan wristwatch appears strapped to the organ. The dial clears, and shows the time as nine-forty-eight, the instant he had entered his lab. The hour hand starts to move visually. It accelerates to a blur. And suddenly stops at three minutes before the witching hour.

The clock-radio alarm beeps repetitively. The digital red letters flash seven-oh-five. Instinct dictates and Alan hits the snooze button as conventional on any workday. The second time the bell starts buzzing, he smashes the off button and lays wide-awake vividly recalling his fearful night.

Alan pulls a hand from under the covers and examines it. He puts palm to face. Body and head normal. Not a burn. Not a single wound. No more secretion of any kind drips.

*It was all a nightmare!*

Alan rolls over to kiss his wife.

Geronimo's neon-red eyes pop open, "Time to come home."

The face contorts. Skin bulges and stretches out of shape. The Prince of Darkness' face replaces the Indian's face. Alan is back in his lab at Priest Medical Corporation. The bed bursts into flames all around Gibson.

Halloween is over for another year.

Mr. Alan Gibson, Chief Pharmaceutical Development Scientist, never seen in this world again!