

On the morning of October 31st, 1978 - four-hundred and eight people woke up in the small, Northern California town of Palomar.

At dusk, parents and children throughout the community engaged in Halloween activities - trick-or-treating, passing out candy, attending costume parties.

By the end of that autumn night only nine people would be left alive.

Every other soul in Palomar was gone. Left in their places, jack-o-lanterns with detailed carvings of the missing.

*[Intro Music Fades in]*

This is A Voice From Darkness.

*[Intro Music plays, fades out]*

Hello, this is Dr. Malcolm Ryder, parapsychologist. Normally I'd be in the studio taking your calls to help you with your supernatural problems. But not tonight.

Tonight I'm in Palomar, California. Tonight I'm going to tell you the tale of the worst case of the jack-o-lantern murders in American history. What happened in Palomar stands alone - not only in the quantity of people affected but also in a few details that do not occur in any other case.

Palomar is situated roughly 30 minutes South on the highway from Six Rivers National Park. Like many towns in this region, Palomar owes its origins to the Gold Rush. The town never grew large - at its height in the early 20th century it's population boasted a mere 900-some residents. But unlike other Gold Rush communities, it never transformed into a ghost town. At least not until after Halloween night of '78.

The town exists today, though merely as a museum. A place to honor all those lost that tragic night. Throughout the town - year round - jack-o-lanterns carved to resemble the missing are placed where they were found on November 1st.

I spent the better part of today traversing the town, taking in the pumpkins - learning their stories... honoring the dead. We're recording this broadcast from Palomar's former AM radio station. And so we'll start our story here.

Just after 7:00pm on Halloween night the Monster Mash played. The DJ, a man named James Essig, stopped the song midway through the second chorus. He delivered the following message:

“The station’s been given an emergency warning - stay away from Emerson street. Do not take your children trick-or-treating there. We don’t know what’s happened at this time. We’ll keep you up to date as we learn more.”

Essig then played the Monster Mash again - starting the song over from the beginning.

Twenty-some minutes passed.

Essig interrupted another song. He gave the following message:

“If you’re hearing this - stay out of the east side of town - anywhere east of Lansig Street is what we’re being told. Evacuate if possible. Otherwise barricade yourselves and your family in your homes. We still haven’t been given any information about what’s happening... though it appears to be spreading.”

Across town, on Banker Ave - two streets away from Lansig, twelve-year-old Sarah Glenwald and her friends were trick or treating. She gave the following account to authorities:

“I was dressed as Dorothy from the Wizard of Oz. My best friend Jenna was Glinda the Good Witch, and another friend of ours, Becky, was The Wicked Witch of the West. We made my little brother Nick dress up as a flying monkey and come with us. He wanted to go as Batman, and complained the whole night - about how itchy and warm his costume was. About how Batman could beat up all the witches - we just ignored him.

“After we got candy from the Mitchell’s house, we heard sirens. Police cars were at the far end of the street yelling at us to run to them. We had no idea what was going on. But there were jack-o-lanterns all over the street. They hadn’t been there when we approached The Mitchell’s. I think Jenna realized what was happening before I did. Under her breath she kept saying, “No, no, no... Not this...” Her grandparents - four years before - had been taken by the jack-o-lantern murderer.

“Jenna and Becky sprinted towards the police officers. I turned around to grab hold of Nick. But he wasn’t there. I called out for him. Screamed. But he didn’t reply. Down the street - back towards the Mitchell’s - there was a carved pumpkin in the middle of the street. Next to it was a pillowcase with candy spilling out. Nick’s pillowcase. The jack-o-lantern was lit. People say that the jack-o-lantern murderer carves the likeness of his victims into pumpkins. But that’s not right. If you ever saw one up close and lit - you’d know. There’s too much detail. It wasn’t an artistic rendering of Nick etched into the pumpkin. It was more like he’d been stolen out of a moment of time - and a snapshot of him was left across the pumpkin’s surface.

“I grabbed Nick’s pumpkin. When I turned back around, Jenna and Becky were no longer there. Neither were the police. There were only jack-o-lanterns up and down the block. I walked past them all - saw all their faces - Jenna’s, Becky’s, - others I recognized - my friends and

neighbors. The street was silent except for the small sound of candles flickering in dozens of pumpkins.”

Sarah wandered the jack-o-lantern filled streets until she arrived back at her home. Her parents missing. Pumpkins left in their place - the candles still burning.

After midnight, on November first a horse galloped down her street. There was a knock on the front door. Three slow rasps that shook her house. She was still in the kitchen with her family of jack-o-lanterns. She did not get up - terrified to leave them. The front door creaked open and heavy footsteps came toward her.

A tall, thin man - without any hair on him - dressed in a black suit entered the kitchen. He and Sarah looked at one another for a moment. Sarah asked him who he was. He did not answer. But he stepped forward. She flinched and closed her eyes. One by one he opened the tops of the pumpkins and blew their candles out. She did not open her eyes again - fearing the worst. A deep voice whispered in her ear:

“Another time. Another place.”

Her eyes didn't open until she heard the horse galloping away.

Back at the radio station just after 1am on November 1st, Essig played no music. He allowed dead-air to fill the radio waves. Occasionally he interrupted the silence with his pleas. The last message he gave to his phantom listeners was the following:

*“I can no longer reach the police station. No one is answering there or anywhere else. I've called my wife... She's not picking up. Please. Please... If anyone else is left in Palomar, call into the radio station. All lines are open. Please let me know I'm not the only one.”*

But no one called in. There were only eight other survivors in Palomar, and none were tuned into Essig's show. And so he abandoned the station.

He drove slowly through the small town's streets. At the intersection of Main and Church there were multiple car crashes. In every vehicle - jack-o-lanterns.

A large grey stallion stood in the middle of the road. Nearby a giant of a man dressed all in grey. The grey giant approached Essig's car, gesturing for him to roll down his window, then told him:

“Another time, another place.”

He then disappeared on his horse.

All nine survivors claimed to encounter a tall man dressed monochromatically. Always with a horse. Always stating the same phrase:

“Another time, another place.”

Seven of the nine survivors are now presumed dead. Over the intervening years, each has disappeared. Jack-o-lanterns that resemble them have been found at all their last known locations.

Sarah Glenwald and James Essig are the only two remaining survivors of Palomar. Their current whereabouts are currently unknown - though it's widely believed both were placed in some form of witness protection.

In all cases of the Jack-o-Lantern Murders, Palomar stands alone in multiple respects. No other instance saw the same quantity of disappearances. Thirteen people disappeared and were replaced by jack-o-lanterns at a Colorado cabin in 1947. That's the second highest number of disappearances to date.

And in no other case have there been survivors who've encountered strange giant men who travel by horse and give cryptic, threatening messages. In no other instance of the jack-o-lantern murders have there been any survivors - period.

Several conspiracy theories have risen out of Palomar - that it wasn't a true case of the jack-o-lantern murders - but a government experiment gone wrong. That aliens abducted most of the town. That the giants were the horsemen of the apocalypse and they began the rapture that very night - and whenever James Essig and Sarah Glenwald disappear from the earth, the end of days shall commence.

Personally, I believe whatever happened in Palomar was a case of the jack-o-lantern murders - plain and simple. That whatever causes these disappearances is stranger and more powerful than we've given credit. But perhaps I'm wrong and the end of the world is nigh.

With those thoughts, I believe we'll end our show for the evening.

The next time you hear from me, I'll be back in our Chicago studio - ready to take your calls. However, that will not be soon. A number of you who've called into the show or left voicemails need my help. I'll be traveling the country over the next month aiding a few callers with special problems. That said - Amanda, if you're listening - please call. Let me know if there's anything I can do to help. Please tell me you've taken my advice and haven't approached The Traveling Salesman. That you haven't opened the door.

Until next time... this has been A Voice From Darkness.

[Outro Music]