

All living creatures are our brothers. On Mars as on Earth.



The Martian Death March was written for Dimension X by Ernest Kinoy and aired on January 14, 1951. This gripping story was later produced by X Minus One and aired on September 8, 1955, and then again on November 14, 1956. The college radio station of Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, WMUK, produced the show and aired it September 13, 1973 as part of their short series *Future Tense*.

Ernest Kinoy wrote for radio, Television, films and the stage. Social justice was often a topic of his work. He was one of the writers for the groundbreaking 1977 miniseries *Roots*, and is known for speaking out against discrimination in Hollywood. He has five Emmy nominations and three wins.

This story is narrated by a middle aged man who recalls a life changing childhood incident while growing up on the Martian frontier.

DIMENSION X
The Martian Death March
January 14, 1951

drum roll

HOST NORMAN ROSE: Adventures in time and space transcribed in future tense. (cymbal crash) Dimension X - x - x - x - x... (trails off and blends with sound of theremin)

NBC ANNOUNCER: On stage tonight, Dimension X.

slow music intro that plays throughout dialog

ADULT AL: Maybe you've been over the route of The March. The Cross Mars Highway runs that way now, from the CalMac Canal on the equator, north to The Highlands, with a water station every 20 miles and a radar pickup and towing service running 24 hours a day. But there wasn't any highway 30 years ago in '97. There was desert, hot, burning desert. Sand shifting and blowing, piling up around the empty shells of the ruined cities, ancient when man on Earth was living in caves. I lived at the edge of the CalMac Canal then with my father. He was a prospector, searching the surrounding desert with sonar probe and Geiger counter. Scratching just enough ore from under the Martian sands to pay for our grub stake the next year. I remember he was in the Adamson Digger in the north quadrant when I came running out that day.

FX: loud clattering machinery

YOUNG AL: (over machinery sound) Dad, dad, dad.

FX: click, grind, low hum of machinery

YOUNG AL: There's somebody coming dad, across the desert.

DAD: You sure?

YOUNG AL: I saw 'em. They're a couple of miles out.

DAD: How many cars?

YOUNG AL: They're on foot.

DAD: On foot across the desert?

YOUNG AL: Honest dad, I saw them.

DAD: You sure it wasn't a light reflection off the canal?

YOUNG AL: No, it was dark against the sand.

DAD: Ugh, I don't like that. You run back and get the rifles out. I've got to pull the digger into the shed.

YOUNG AL: Is there going to be fighting, dad?

DAD: I don't know. Got a whole year's ore piled out back in the bins. Ain't going to lose it to no claim jumpers. You get back to the shack and break out those rifles. See that they're loaded, you hear? And jump.

musical transition

ADULT AL: Dad had three surplus army rifles and a couple of home-made grenades made out of ore cans stuffed with Adamson A explosives. We crouched inside the shack waiting. The shadow of the water tower in the doorway grew longer as the quick Martian dusk settled down over the desert.

DAD: There they come Al. There's two of 'em.

YOUNG AL: There's something funny about that second one. Look, he's all spindly and his head's funny.

DAD: Yeah, his head's funny all right. Now that's a Martian.

YOUNG AL: I never saw one off the reservation before.

DAD: There hasn't been one, not in ten years. I don't like this.

YOUNG AL: Here they come. Into the dooryard.

DAD: Now you remember what I told you. Line up the sights and just squeeze the trigger.

FX: click, click, slide

JOHN: Hello? Hello there.

YOUNG AL: Now dad?

JOHN: Hello?

DAD: (TO AL) Wait a minute. (TO JOHN) What do you want?

JOHN: Water.

YOUNG AL: What are you going to do dad?

DAD: Where do you come from?

JOHN: Hullsville.

DAD: You're lying! That's a hundred miles across the desert.

JOHN: I know. That's where I came from. My tank is empty. I need water.

DAD: Well, drop your gear and come up here slow. Tell that Martian to stay where he is.

FX: door swings open, creak, footsteps

DAD: All right now. Who are you?

JOHN: My name is John.

DAD: John, huh? What are you doing with that spider?

CRAY JOHN: His name is Kantalkah.

DAD: I don't care what his name is. What's a human doing with a Martian?

JOHN: I found him in the dry bed of CalMac Canal, nearly dead of thirst.

DAD: Probably ran off from the reservation.

JOHN: When our brothers are caged, they seek freedom.

DAD: Brothers? Those spiders?

JOHN: All living creatures are our brothers. On Mars as on Earth.

DAD: Oh, wait a minute. Bert Alstrom at False Wells told me there was a screwball hedge preacher over there, hollering about letting the spiders loose off the reservation.

JOHN: Let no man call his life his own. No man, no tribe, no nation.

DAD: (LAUGH) I guess that's you all right. (LAUGH) Yeah, Bert told me they called you Crazy John. Oh well, I don't suppose there's any harm in you. Go on, fill up your tank at the Airstill. You can even have supper with us.

JOHN: We would be happy to.

DAD: We? What do you mean we?

JOHN: Kantalkah and myself.

DAD: That spider? Oh no. Not having a Martian sitting down to eat with me. But you come on though.

JOHN: Thank you sir, no. Where my brother is not welcome. I cannot go.

musical transition which then plays throughout the monologue

ADULT AL: The old man filled his tank at the Airstill tower, and the Martian went through the ash pile for half-burned fuel brick. When we went in the house for supper, I could see them silhouetted against the fire. The old man with his wild hair and beard and the thin spidery arms and legs of the Martian.

YOUNG AL: Dad.

DAD: What now? (SIGH)

YOUNG AL: Were the Martians always on the reservation?

DAD: Since the Outpost Three Massacre, they have been.

YOUNG AL: What was that?

DAD: Back before you were born, they lived wild in the mountains up north.

YOUNG AL: Were they fierce?

DAD: Fierce enough. There's only one place for them spiders.
Behind wire.

YOUNG AL: Yeah, it sure is.

musical transition

ADULT AL: Out in the dooryard, the campfire flickered at the base of the water tower. The first of the Martian moons had set. The other wouldn't rise for several hours. I could hear the sand peepers out in the desert as I stood there. The old man and the Martian were sitting on the ground, huddled close to the fire. It gets cold fast on the desert when the sun goes down.

FX: crickets

JOHN: That you, boy? You can come up to the fire if you'd like.

YOUNG AL: My dad wouldn't like it.

JOHN: Alright.

YOUNG AL: But I'm not afraid of no spider.

JOHN: No, there's nothing to be afraid of.

YOUNG AL: How come his arms are all skinny?

JOHN: Ask him.

YOUNG AL: Does he talk?

JOHN: Yes, his name is Kantalkah.

YOUNG AL: (TO JOHN) It is, huh? (TO KANTALKAH) Hello.

CANTULCOT: Hello, boy.

YOUNG AL: He talks funny.

CANTULCOT: It is not my language.

YOUNG AL: Why isn't he on the reservation? You can get in trouble helping spiders to escape.

JOHN: He is my brother. He was caged. When my brothers were in bondage, I came to them and said, lo, the time has come for deliverance.

YOUNG AL: You talk funny, too. Is it true that you want to let all the spiders off the reservation?

JOHN: No man has the right to imprison the innocent.

YOUNG AL: Do they really call you Crazy John?

JOHN: I have been called many things.

YOUNG AL: You really think we ought to let all those old spiders off the reservation?

CANTULCUT: Boy, we die here in the desert. We die in the sun of the sicknesses you have brought from Earth.

YOUNG AL: That's 'cause Martians are just weak. I bet I could knock you down myself.

CANTULCUT: You could. We are a different people. We have not the strength of muscle of Earthmen. But we will not stay here to die.

YOUNG AL: You won't get off the reservation. The patrol takes care of that all right. They won't let any stinking old spiders out.

FX: quiet drumming throughout John's dialog

JOHN: (TO HIMSELF) Even in the minds of children, is planted the poison of evil. How long? How long?

musical transition which then plays throughout the monologue
somber and low

ADULT AL: That night through the window, I could see the flicker of the old man's campfire. He was walking up and down now, shouting, singing hymns verse after verse, his white beard catching the light as he passed behind the fire. The Martian sat slumped over. His thin spindly arms folded across the huge barrel chest that had developed over the centuries as the air of

Mars thinned and escaped into space. In the morning I looked out and they were gone.

musical transition which then plays throughout the monologue

ADULT AL: Looking back now, we wonder how they did it. The high voltage wire around the reservation carried a fatal charge. The patrolmen in the tower had 50 caliber machine guns. The desert around the camp was mined heavily. And yet, at dawn August 7, 1997, they broke out. I was down at the dried-up canal bed, hunting sand peepers, when my father came running after me.

FX: running footsteps

DAD: Al! Al!

YOUNG AL: Here I am.

DAD: Come on, back to the house.

YOUNG AL: What's the matter, Dad?

DAD: Now shut up and run!

FX: multiple running footsteps

YOUNG AL: What is it?

DAD: Spiders busted loose. Bert Alstrom radioed in.

YOUNG AL: Are they comin' here?

DAD: They're headed this way, murdering devils.

YOUNG AL: Did they kill anybody?

DAD: Six patrolmen when they busted through the wire. Now get inside.

YOUNG AL: What are you going to do, Dad?

DAD: Wire a keg of Adamson A across the gate. You get in there and get the guns out.

FX: tense musical crescendo

ADULT AL: I got the rifles and shoved a full clip in each one. Then I slipped a primer fuse in the home-made grenades and lugged them out on the porch. Dad was running lead wires back to the detonator from a half keg of Adamson A he'd set across the gate.

DAD: There. That's set. Give me one of those rifles.

YOUNG AL: Will they be here soon?

DAD: You can see the dust over the rise.

YOUNG AL: There they are, Dad. There they come.

DAD: Now wait a minute, wait a minute. Hold up. I want to get a good shot. Let 'em get closer.

YOUNG AL: Dad, that's Crazy John up in the front. There. He's taller than the spiders. You can see his beard.

DAD: Yeah, you're right. The renegade rat. Probably helped them break out of the reservation. Now listen, Al. If anything happens to me, you light out back to the shed. You can hide out in the empty ore bins till they go away. You got that?

YOUNG AL: All right, Dad.

FX: breathing and faint screeching, muffled voice "water"
"water"

YOUNG AL: The spider's shouting something, Dad.

FX: breathing and faint screeching, clearer voice "water"
"water"

DAD: It's probably a trick. Get down there lad, you're in the way.

FX: breathing and faint screeching, clear voice "water"
"water"

DAD: Yeah, I got them clear now. Right in the head. Now up a little now.

FX: bang

DAD: I got him, I got him.

YOUNG AL: Dad, look out. They've got guns.

FX: bang-bang, bang-bang, bang-bang

DAD: Down, get down.

FX: bang-bang, bang-bang, bang-bang

DAD: Aaagh.

YOUNG AL: Dad, Dad.

DAD: (EXHALE)

FX: thud, thump

DAD: Get out, Al. Get out to the shed.

YOUNG AL: But Dad, you're hit.

DAD: Go on. Those spiders are going to rush. Get going.

YOUNG AL: I can't leave you.

DAD: Shut up. Get out of here. You hear?

FX: shouts blend into music

ADULT AL: I ran back through the house to the shed. And behind me I could hear the Martians sweeping up to the dooryard. Then suddenly the ground shook. And I could feel the dull concussion waves hit my ears as the Adamson A exploded.

FX: booooooom whoooooosh

ADULT AL: I could hear the high whispered screams of the Martians and the rattle of fragments on the metal roof of the shed. I dived into the empty ore bin and slammed the hatch almost shut. I crouched there watching the thin edge of light that filtered through, listening to the brittle tramping of Martian feet on the board floor of our house. The shooting had stopped and the shouts had died away. I sat there waiting. And then suddenly a shadow fell across the edge of light and the hatch slid open on top of me.

FX: sliding grinding scrape

YOUNG AL: You leave me alone. I'll kill you.

JOHN: Boy, I've been looking for you.

YOUNG AL: Where's my dad? What did you do to my dad?

JOHN: He's dead.

YOUNG AL: You killed him. You and those spiders, you killed my father.

JOHN: Come out of there, boy.

YOUNG AL: You let go of me, you murderer.

JOHN: Come on out.

FX: shuffle, shuffle

YOUNG AL: I'll kill you. I'll kill all those stinkin' murderin' spiders.

JOHN: They are our brothers, boy. Your father shot without warning and the fire was returned against my orders. You did not have to shoot. Our brothers came in peace. They're going home to their mountains. We came to get water for the journey.

YOUNG AL: You mean you just wanted water? You...you...(GASP)
Dad! Dad! (CRYING)

KANTALKAH: John, the infantry patrol will be following us soon.

JOHN: We must go.

KANTALKAH: The boy?

JOHN: We'll have to leave him here with water and supplies.

KANTALKAH: No, the infantry patrol will question him. We need the time. He goes with us.

JOHN: He can't. It's straight across the desert to the mountains. He'll die.

KANTALKAH: John, since the Earthmen came to Mars, the Highlanders have died like the grass in the hot sun. We are going home. One life cannot stop us.

musical transition which then plays throughout the monologue

ADULT AL: They tore Adamson Airstill from the tower and mounted it on poles. They piled our supplies in the yard and loaded them on their backs. And then they started.

musical transition which then plays throughout the monologue

ADULT AL: I marched with the old man at the head, and the columns stretched out behind us on the desert, women, children, the sick and the dying, some showing the signs of the diseases that were trivial to the Earthmen, but deadly to the Martians. Chickenpox, German measles, and the bronchial infections that raced through the vast areas of Martian lungs, eating away the tissue till death came in a last spasm of coughing. I turned to look back at our house, but the sun was behind it, blinding red, and the old man pulled me around as he marched, his eyes fixed on the horizon where far to the north rose the cool mountains that were the ancient home of the Highlanders.

musical transition which then plays throughout the monologue

ADULT AL: Fourteen of the Martians died the first day. They dropped to the side of the column when they could go no further, and died. The march went on. The sun burned down in the day. The air shimmered with the heat. And at night, under the cold racing light of the twin moons, the winds cut at tattered clothing and scattered the feeble fires that dotted the campsites. On the fifth day we swung wide to avoid a mining settlement, but not wide enough. They were in ambush behind a pile of rocks.

FX: bang-bang

JOHN: Down! Down boy!

YOUNG AL: Why aren't the spiders fighting back?

MINING LEADER: Go on back! All of you! We're giving you your last chance to get back to the reservation! I'll shoot the whole lot of you!

JOHN: Let us go in peace!

MINING LEADER: Who's that? You! What are you doing with them spiders?

MINER: That's Crazy John.

JOHN: A voice cries out to the Universe, your brothers must have justice!

MINING LEADER: We'll give 'em justice!

FX: bang-bang

JOHN: (TO THE MINING LEADER) I shall lead them home! Home! To the promised rest! Home to the mountains! (TO THE MARTIANS) March forward! March forward!

FX: bang-bang, bang-bang, bang-bang

musical transition

ADULT AL: Past the rocks they marched, and the Earthmen fired as fast as they could reload. A Martian would spin and drop as the heavy caliber bullets shook his bones to brittle fragments. But the march went on.

musical transition which then plays throughout the monologue

ADULT AL: We wound across the desert in wild zigzags, following the paths the old man had traveled through the years. Only once a patrol plane hovered on the horizon and then shot away. The days went on, the weeks, and the Martians died. They died of exhaustion. They died of the disease we had given them. And they died of thirst. The Adamson Still could produce 27 units of water an hour, no more. And on that they died of thirst.

JOHN: Here boy, here's your water.

YOUNG AL: That's more than the others got.

JOHN: Take it.

YOUNG AL: You're giving me your water.

JOHN: It will be provided to me. He that brings justice to his brothers will drink deep of the water of righteousness. He that leads his brothers to their promised rest will savor the cool draughts of the mercy of heaven. Here. (COUGH WHEEZE) Drink your water, boy.

musical transition which then plays throughout the monologue

ADULT AL: Across the desert, from the CalMac Canal to Fever Dip, past the towering mesas of the Higgins Badlands, across the dry sea bottoms, they marched. On the 54th day of the march, we halted at evening. The air was thinner and colder now. The rations had long since been exhausted. And around the campfires, they cooked the hard, bitter kernels of the dogbush nut that grew on spiny stalks like earth cactus. I lay down to sleep wrapped in the old man's coat. Early in the morning, before sunrise, I woke suddenly. The ground mist that had covered the desert the night before was lifting slowly. And I saw the old man standing by the burned-out fire, the vapor swirling around his legs, and the cold light of the false dawn edging his wild beard.

JOHN: Go back to sleep, boy.

YOUNG AL: I can't.

JOHN: The end is near. I've led them through the wilderness, dry shod across the seas. And before us lie the mountains. (GASPING COUGH)

YOUNG AL: It's over. We're there.

JOHN: I have led them to their home. And -- I must go back -- to the desert.

YOUNG AL: You mean alone?

JOHN: Now, even now, I hear a voice in the wind. Carry the message to the men of Earth. Bring to this new world the message of the old. All beings created in the Universe are my brothers. And he that harms my brother harms me. (WHEEZE)(COUGH) Good-bye, boy. You'll be safe now.

musical transition which then plays throughout the monologue

ADULT AL: The Martians found him 500 yards from the camp, dead. He had given me his water. He had divided his ration among the sick. And yet his gaunt tall body had lasted till the march was done, till the mountains were in sight. For now the mist rose. And before us towered The Highlands, the tall green mountains, and the cool sky. The march was over. Of the 7,000 Martians who started, 900 were alive. They gathered now on the rise of ground and faced the hills, their thin bodies wavered as they stood. And some dropped to the ground as they stood there. But there was a light of hope in their large staring eyes. Most of them had died. But they had died on the way home. And now the march was over.

FX: grinding engines

ADULT AL: Then the patrol planes were spotted on the horizon. And within ten minutes they had landed. The Martians stood silently as the squads piled out and set up the 50 caliber machine guns and petroleum gel flamethrower.

SERGEANT: All right you spiders, hands up and stay together. Gather in a bunch and don't try anything.

MAJOR: Sergeant.

SERGEANT: Yes sir.

MAJOR: Shoot the first spider that moves and shoot to kill.

SERGEANT: All right, come on.

FX: shouting, talking, murmuring

SERGEANT: Where's the boy? There was a boy reported.

YOUNG AL: Here I am.

MAJOR: You all right kid? They didn't hurt you?

YOUNG AL: No, no I'm all right. John gave me his water ration.

MAJOR: Oh the leader, eh? I've got a warrant for him. Where is he?

YOUNG AL: There. He's dead.

MAJOR: Ah, just as well. I'd hate to be him in front of a settler's jury.

YOUNG AL: What are you going to do to them?

MAJOR: The spiders? You see those transport planes coming in? We're going to ship them all back to the reservation where they belong.

YOUNG AL: You mean take them all back?

MAJOR: (TO YOUNG AL) Lock, stock and barrel. They'll be back behind wire before tonight. (TO SERGEANT) Hey Sergeant! Get them broken up in groups of 50. The first transports are coming in.

YOUNG AL: You can't. You can't do that.

MAJOR: What are you talking about, kid?

YOUNG AL: Oh you can't take them back. They're home. John said they were home.

MAJOR: You take it easy kid. You're all right now. We rescued you. You don't have to worry about these spiders anymore.

YOUNG AL: You can't take them back. It isn't fair. I won't let you. I won't let you.

MAJOR: Hey, hey, hey. Let go of me.

YOUNG AL: I won't let you.

MAJOR: Hey Sergeant.

SERGEANT: Yes sir.

MAJOR: Peel this crazy kid off me.

YOUNG AL: They're home. Can't you understand? You can't take them back. (CRYING)

SERGEANT: (TO YOUNG AL) All right now kid. Easy, easy. (TO HIMSELF) Must be the Marian sun. (TO THE MARTIANS) All right you spiders. Step it up. Move along. These transport planes. Go over now. You're headed right back to the reservation.

heavy drum blends into musical transition and music plays throughout the monologue

ADULT AL: They separated them in groups of 50 and loaded them in the planes. Nine hundred out of seven thousand. And soon the first big-bellied ships waddled out on the hard sands and lifted slowly into the air. Headed back to the south, flying over the trail of dead and dying who started on the march to The Highlands. The march to home.

YOUNG AL: (CRYING)

MAJOR: Come on now kid. You'll feel better as soon as you get back to civilization. Don't worry about them spiders. They're taken care of now.

musical transition which then plays throughout the monologue

ADULT AL: Before the plane took off, I looked once more at the green mountains, towering through the mist. And then just before the motor raced, I saw John. Crazy John. Propped up against a dognut bush where the Martians had placed him. The wind from the south gave the wild hair and beard a-a rippling life. He faced the hills, the home, and the rest he had promised his brothers, as he led them through the wilderness of Mars.

music outro blends into theremin that plays for first part of announcement

NBC ANNOUNCER: Be with us at this same time next week for another adventure into the unknown world of (cymbal crash) Dimension X - x - x - x - x...(trails off)

Historical Glossary

Dad says, "Bert Alstrom at False Wells told me there was a screwball **hedge preacher** over there, hollering about letting the spiders loose off the reservation." A dictionary definition says this designation comes from Calvinists hundreds of years ago who would give speeches and sermons out in rural areas outside of the reach of civil authorities. This was during the time of the Protestant Reformation when going against the religion of the King was dangerous. In the context of the 1950s in the US when it was legal to belong to any religion, a "hedge preacher" was someone who taught iconoclastic values that went against the status quo.

When the Major finds out that Crazy John is dead he says, "Ah, just as well. I'd hate to be him in front of a **settler's jury**." During the time of Westward expansion in the US there were areas where people had set up homes and farms that did not have any infrastructure: no stores, no schools, and no police force or court system. A group of neighbors would get together to meet out justice to those they caught breaking the norms of the community. To avoid being accused of vigilante justice or lynchings, they copied the procedure of a court and acted out their verdicts with the community's approval. Of course the settlers of Mars would not be pro-Martian so their "settler's jury" would not see John's actions as just and would no doubt impose a harsh punishment.

Young AI asks the Major, "You mean take them all back?" and he says, "**Lock, stock and barrel**," which is an idiom meaning every part. A gun has a handle (stock), a trigger device (lock), and a tube through which a bullet travels (barrel). So the idiom means the whole gun, and by association, the whole of anything.