

# Who are the supercreeps?

## And why is Bowie running scared from them?

by Michael McCarthy

**Scary Monsters** is David Bowie's latest release, and it is at least good. Like all of Bowie's albums, it is not immediately identifiable with any of his previous efforts, and like all his albums it takes a few listenings to become accustomed to his new state of mind before you can really appreciate what he is doing. This album may be even more inaccessible than most of his others, at first, because there is less up-front rock-and-roll and a greater emphasis on his use of voices, with the music being generally more austere and the sound less thick than usual. On the other hand, there are no experimental instrumental tracks, which may make this album more popular than the last three in the long run.

The electronic sounds are still there, but in the background, mixed in with the heavy chorus back-up vocals present on most of tracks. The fluctuation of the vocals, together with the predominant bass and drums, plus Bowie's own voice with his several styles of singing, set the tone for the songs.

The band has been with Bowie since **Station to Station**, and is a well-knit group musically. Especially impressive on this album is drummer Dennis Davis, who through either his own technique or Bowie and Tony Visconti's production has a much clearer and livelier sound than most of the muffled thud-producers so abundant in the age of Disco (which sucks). Davis surpasses himself here with a

simple but effective cracking, visceral drum beat that provides the drive (the "roll" part of rock'n'roll) for all the songs.

There is a proliferation on this album of the heavy, ponderous rhythms Bowie employed on Iggy Pop's **The Idiot**, rather than such faster paced works as **Aladdin Sane**. In fact, the music, the lyrics, and Bowie's delivery all create a morbid and depressing mien. Well-crafted, insightful, compelling, good rock music—but negative and depressing nonetheless. It is an album of songs about alienation, entrapment, the hopeless plight of feeling people and the awful things one is driven to do. It's all the more disturbing because, instead of singing through a character like Ziggy Stardust or the lover by the Berlin Wall (in "Heroes"), Bowie seems to be talking for and about himself. The songs seem more personal, and the lyrics are much more direct than ever before.

Side one opens with "It's No Game". A passionately protesting female Japanese

voice talks (in Japanese) the lyrics over a disturbing mid-tempo instrumental, and is interspersed with Bowie, in a desperate voice, half-screaming snips of the English version. The non-game is living, and the recording business which is a large part of his life. "Up the Hill Backwards" is a somewhat folksy chorus song, sung in a rather odd, high and less than optimistic voice which informs us that nothing has anything to do with us ("if one can grasp it").

The title track follows, and is the mainstay of the album. It is hard-driving, with excellent wailing guitars from Robert Fripp and Carlos Alomar. There are some discordant and disconcerting synthesizers providing an electronic, ominous background (as on most of the other tracks, as well). The "Scary Monsters and Supercreeps" keep Bowie "running scared". (Are they from the real world? the past?). There is a strange girl, stolen rooms and uncloseable doors. It sounds like the general effect of much of

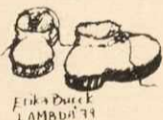
Bowie's music, as does the revealing line "She asked for my love and I gave her a dangerous mind."

"Ashes to Ashes" is an uncharacteristic personal reference, alluding to his "Space Oddity" days (Major Tom is a junkie), the feeling of nothingness he gets from drugs, and their continued hold on him. The music is ethereal and somewhat anomalous. "Fashion" fights disco (which sucks) with its own fire, and an apt description: "bland... boring, loud and tasteless".

Side two opens with "Teenage Wildlife" and some flashy speed guitar by Fripp. Bowie decries the role of leader, and bemoans his entrapment in a niche he rejects. The slower "Scream Like a Baby" is a threatening and bleak description of being hunted, labeled, and shunted away. The drums pound the hopeless feeling into the listener, and the song cuts away, leaving you unsupported. A Tom Verlaine song, murky and with thick background vocals attempts a defiance which is rendered impotent in the following

"Because you're young", which features Pete Townshend on guitar, and prophesies "a million dreams, a million scars". The final track is a slower, all English, and cynically resigned version of "It's No Game", a steady beat, musically austere, effort which asks "where's the moral", but doesn't (can't) answer.

The record is definitely worth having. It is coherent, with solid music and effective lyrics, and the inimitable Bowie magic pervades throughout. It is, however, very down in tone and content, so much so that one wonders if Bowie will live to record another album. In fact, the cover, which includes painted-over covers of his last three albums, shows the artist in a clown suit, not looking happy about it, and holding a cigarette in a style evocative of his song "Rock and Roll Suicide". One conjectures that he has discovered that he is, after all, just like his pseudo-human creations, and he doesn't like it. His expression on this album of his dislike is superb.



## POET

Leonard Mackey

### Necessary Revisions

Almost as soon as it's ended  
the woman who rejected you  
undergoes a quick metamorphosis.  
She—your *love*—is now  
a callous coquette.  
You wonder how you had missed  
what she *really* was.  
How lucky,  
to have discovered your blunder.  
But even this, your *mistake*  
you won't accept,  
imputing it to her wile.

But a grievous irony  
is near.  
Your next affair  
happens to actually  
involve such a  
flirtatious vamp.  
Only this time your distortion  
has her cast in an almost  
seraphic model  
of virtue and benevolence.  
And she becomes  
the love of your life.

