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WITNESSES TO THE WOUND

*A Covenant Investigation into the Exploitation of the Zamar Carriers
100 Years of the Music Business on Trial
Report No. 25 of an Ongoing Series*

DAVID BOWIE

and

THE SPIDERS FROM MARS

Bowie (1947–2016) · Ronson (1946–1993) · Bolder (1950–2013) · Woodmansey (born 1946)

Two Wounds. One Report. The Victim Who Became the Perpetrator.

ACCOUNT ONE: Defries / MainMan took 50% of Bowie's net royalties — Bowie co-owned his catalog but paid upward of \$50 million to separate from Defries — issued \$55 million in Bowie Bonds in 1997 to buy back his own recordings — ultimately recovered everything and died worth \$230 million // ACCOUNT TWO: The Spiders from Mars received £30 per week during Bowiemanía while new pianist Mike Garson received \$1,000/week — Defries told them he would rather pay the road crew — Mick Ronson co-produced Transformer, arranged Life on Mars? and Walk on the Wild Side for £50 a week with no royalties — Bowie announced the end of the band onstage without telling Woodmansey or Bolder — Woodmansey was told he was fired on his wedding day — Mick Ronson died at 46 with nothing from the work that built the empire

NOTE: This report documents two separate covenant accounts. In Account One, Bowie is the victim. In Account Two, the Spiders from Mars are the victims of both Defries and Bowie. Both accounts are fully documented. The covenant does not permit only partial truth. Bowie's eventual recovery and financial triumph are acknowledged — they do not close the account against the Spiders.

March 2026 · Kepha Arcemont, Elder and Founder

SECTION ONE — THE GIFTS: WHO YAHWEH MADE THEM

David Bowie: The Shapeshifter Who Changed Everything

David Robert Jones was born January 8, 1947, in Brixton, London — the son of a cinema promotions officer and a waitress. He grew up in Bromley, showed early artistic promise, studied music and art, and by his mid-teens was playing in local bands. What made him different from the beginning was not simply musical talent but a gift for synthesis: he absorbed everything — Little Richard, Anthony Newley, mime, Brecht, Warhol, science fiction, gender theory — and recombined it into something that had not existed before. He changed personas the way other artists changed arrangements. Each persona was a fully realized creative statement.

By 1972, with the Ziggy Stardust album and the Spiders from Mars, he had created one of the most complete conceptual artworks in rock history: a character, a band, a visual language, a sound, a mythology, and a series of songs that permanently altered what popular music could be. ***Hunky Dory. The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars. Aladdin Sane. Pin Ups. Diamond Dogs. Young Americans. Station to Station.*** He produced this body of work between 1971 and 1976 — five years that redefined the vocabulary of rock, glam, soul, and art-pop simultaneously. He did not stop there. ***Heroes. Scary Monsters. Let's Dance. Blackstar.*** He never stopped. He died on January 10, 2016, two days after his 69th birthday, of liver cancer that had been kept entirely private. His estate was worth between \$100 million and \$230 million.

◆ *I am a blues-rock guitarist and vocalist. I have carried the zamar since I was fourteen. David Bowie carried something different from the blues tradition — the art-rock tradition, the shapeshifter tradition, the theatrical tradition. But the covenant gift is the same covenant gift regardless of its form: something was given through a human vessel that the world could not produce on its own and would not have had without that vessel. Ziggy Stardust is the covenant gift in its most theatrical and complete expression. And the story of who paid what for that gift to exist is the subject of this report.*

Mick Ronson: The Working-Class Genius From Hull

Michael Ronson was born May 26, 1946, in Hull, Yorkshire — a working-class port city with no obvious path to rock stardom. He was classically trained from childhood: piano, recorder, violin, harmonium. He learned from his musical family and took it further than his circumstances should have allowed. He was playing in Hull bands, working as a groundskeeper when he was not performing, when John Cambridge recommended him to David Bowie in 1970.

What Ronson brought to Bowie was irreplaceable: a classically trained musician who could hear what Bowie's songs needed and provide it at the highest possible level. **He arranged the strings on *Life on Mars?* — one of the most celebrated string arrangements in rock history. He arranged *Changes, Kooks, and Quicksand* on**

Hunky Dory. He co-produced *Transformer* with Bowie, played the piano on *Perfect Day*, and his guitar provides the sonic architecture of everything Ziggy Stardust was. He was later named the 64th greatest guitarist of all time by Rolling Stone. He died of liver cancer on April 29, 1993. He was 46 years old. He died with no financial legacy from the work that built the Bowie empire.

His wife Suzi Ronson testified: *"He had no idea of his own worth, no idea how talented he was. He was just grateful not to be a school gardener any more. Heartbreakingly, he thought David and Defries were his friends, people who would look out for him, and they milked this naivety for all it was worth."* The covenant names the exploitation of a man's gratitude as a stumbling block. Ronson was grateful. He was working-class. He was not equipped to protect himself in the industry into which his gift had placed him. He was milked for it. The record is entered.

Trevor Bolder and Mick Woodmansey: The Hull Rhythm Section

Trevor Bolder was born June 9, 1950, in Hull. Mick Woodmansey was born in Driffield, Yorkshire. Both came from the same working-class northern English musical world as Ronson. Bolder played bass with the precise, restrained authority that the Ziggy Stardust sound required. Woodmansey's drumming provided the engine for some of the most commercially successful British rock of the early 1970s. Together with Ronson they were the backbone of everything that made the Ziggy Stardust era work as music.

Trevor Bolder died May 21, 2013, of pancreatic cancer. He was 62 years old. He had spent much of the intervening four decades with Uriah Heep. Mick Woodmansey has continued to perform and speak publicly about the Spiders era. Both men were paid £30 per week while at the height of Bowiemania. Both were fired without warning at Hammersmith Odeon on July 3, 1973 — one of them on his wedding day.

SECTION TWO — ACCOUNT ONE: BOWIE VS. MAINMAN AND TONY DEFRIES

The 50/50 Contract and the \$50 Million Separation

The MainMan Deal — Half of Everything

Tony Defries met David Bowie in 1970 when Bowie was at a low point in his career, trapped in a theatrical mime niche and desperate for the rock stardom he craved. Defries was a solicitor with an aggressive commercial vision. He extricated Bowie from his existing management contract, signed him to RCA Records, and built the MainMan management structure around him. What he negotiated for himself in return was extraordinary: **the employment contract between MainMan and Bowie shared Bowie's net royalties fifty-fifty.** Standard management rates at the time were 15 to 20 percent. Defries took 50 percent.

Defries made one genuinely beneficial business decision: he negotiated Bowie's RCA deals so that the two would co-own the recording copyrights — a provision almost unheard of at the time. This meant that unlike most artists in the series, Bowie

co-owned what he recorded. The problem was that he co-owned it *with Defries*. The man who took 50 percent of the net royalties also held shared ownership of the catalog. When the relationship deteriorated — as it inevitably did, accelerated by Bowie’s cocaine addiction and the mutual resentments of the MainMan years — separating from Defries required buying him out of shared ownership of a catalog that had generated and would generate hundreds of millions of dollars.

The \$50 Million Separation and the Bowie Bonds

Bowie and Defries parted ways in 1975. The separation terms were complex and resentment-laden: Defries gave up personal management but retained shared control of aspects of Bowie’s catalog. Bowie resented the arrangement for years. The full financial cost of getting clear of Defries’ ownership position has been estimated at upward of \$50 million.

In 1997, Bowie and investment banker David Pullman developed what became known as Bowie Bonds: \$55 million in asset-backed securities paying 7.9 percent interest, secured against future royalties from Bowie’s pre-1990 catalog. All 300 bonds were purchased by Prudential Insurance. **Part of the proceeds were used to buy out Defries’ remaining ownership interest in Bowie’s recordings — to purchase what Bowie had created.** He used future royalties as collateral to buy back his past. The Bowie Bonds were the most sophisticated act of catalog recovery in rock history up to that time.

Bowie went on to become, in the estimation of Billboard, one of the most visionary businessmen in popular music: owning his recordings, early to the internet, instrumental in the development of music royalty securitization, and ultimately dying with an estate worth \$100 to \$230 million. **He recovered from what Defries had done. Fully, completely, and with greater sophistication than almost any artist in the industry.** The covenant acknowledges this recovery. But the covenant also notes that the recovery does not retroactively justify what Defries extracted, nor does it close the account against the Spiders, whose recovery was not possible in the same way because Ronson, Bolder, and Woodmansey had no co-owned catalog to securitize.

SECTION THREE — ACCOUNT TWO: THE SPIDERS VS. DEFRIES AND BOWIE

£30 a Week, the Hammersmith Ambush, and Fifty Quid for Transformer

The Wage Disparity That Broke the Band

The Spiders from Mars — Ronson, Bolder, and Woodmansey — were paid £30 per week each at the height of Bowiemania. This is the documented figure from multiple independent sources including Woodmansey himself, the 2017 documentary *Beside Bowie: The Mick Ronson Story*, Suzi Ronson’s memoir, and Trevor Bolder’s interviews with Classic Rock magazine. £30 per week. During a period when the Ziggy

Stardust album was number five in the UK, when the band was filling arenas in America, when *Aladdin Sane* went to number one. £30 a week.

DOCUMENTED WAGE COMPARISON: *Mike Garson (pianist): \$1,000 USD per week. Mick Ronson, Trevor Bolder, Mick Woodmansey (Spiders from Mars): £30 GBP per week each. Ratio: Garson earned approximately 10 times more per week than any individual Spider. Woodmansey learned this when Garson casually suggested he buy a Lamborghini.*

Woodmansey described the moment he learned: he was reading a magazine, saw a Lamborghini, said “oh, that’s nice.” Garson, confused, asked why he didn’t just buy one. When Woodmansey explained what he earned, Garson was stunned. The Spiders confronted Defries. His response, as documented by Woodmansey in multiple interviews: *“I don’t think you’re worth a penny of it. In fact, I’d rather give it to the road crew because they’re worth more than you.”*

The rhythm section threatened to leave the tour. They stayed, and were given raises — but the relationship had been permanently damaged. Bowie’s response to their protest was reported by Angie Bowie: *“They can’t hold me up like that. I don’t care who they are, I simply won’t have that kind of disloyalty.”* **The musicians who had built the sound of Ziggy Stardust were characterized as disloyal for asking to be paid what the work was worth.** The covenant names this precisely: the hired worker who asks for his wages is not disloyal. The employer who calls the asking disloyal is inverting the covenant order.

Mick Ronson — Fifty Quid for Transformer

Mick Ronson co-produced Lou Reed’s *Transformer* album in 1972 alongside David Bowie. He played piano on *Perfect Day* — one of the most widely known pieces of piano playing in popular music. He arranged the string and brass elements. He played lead guitar. The album became a classic and made Lou Reed an international star. The single *Walk on the Wild Side* became one of the most recognized songs of the decade. *Transformer* has sold millions of copies across fifty years of continuous commercial release.

Suzi Ronson’s testimony: *“He produced Lou Reed’s *Transformer* album with David, another example of his genius; the piano he plays on *Perfect Day* is sublime. He got a credit for that album but no royalty, no money. All of that for fifty quid a week.”* **A credit. No royalty. No money. Fifty quid a week.** The album that built Lou Reed’s career and contributed its fundamental sonic character to Mick Ronson paid Ronson in the same way the entire Bowie arrangement paid him: a wage that was contemptuous of the value being delivered.

He also arranged the strings on *Life on Mars?* — without which the song would not be the song it is. He arranged *Changes*. He played the guitar on *Ziggy Stardust*, *Suffragette City*, *Moonage Daydream*, and every other track that defined the era. He died at 46 with no financial legacy from any of it. **The covenant asks: what did the arrangement of *Life on Mars?* earn for the man who arranged it?** The answer is: fifty quid a week and a credit.

The Hammersmith Ambush — July 3, 1973

On July 3, 1973, at the Hammersmith Odeon in London — the last night of the Ziggy Stardust tour — David Bowie announced from the stage, with no advance warning to Woodmansey or Bolder: "Of all the shows on the tour, this particular show will remain with us the longest — because not only is it the last show of the tour, but it's the last show we'll ever do." He had told Ronson in advance. He had not told Bolder or Woodmansey.

The announcement was made to the world before it was made to the band. Angie Bowie's response was direct: *"What is freaky – chilling – is the fact that he kept them on... and only once they'd given him their best and were enjoying their most triumphal moment, did he let them have it – full bore... in the most public, humiliating manner possible."* She called it *"ruthlessness – non-confrontational cowardice, and cruelty."* Trevor Bolder's assessment, told to Classic Rock: *"Me and Woody were ignored like we weren't even in the band."*

Woodmansey was told he was fired on his wedding day. Not before. Not after. On the day of his wedding, he received word that his employment with Bowie was over. This is the Hammersmith ambush made personal: the man who had drummed on every track of the Ziggy Stardust and Aladdin Sane albums received his dismissal notice on the day he married.

"David and Defries were both equally guilty in this exploitation. You might ask why Mick put up with it, and I can only say it was ignorance. He had no idea of his own worth, no idea how talented he was. He was just grateful not to be a school gardener any more. Heartbreakingly, he thought David and Defries were his friends, people who would look out for him, and they milked this naivety for all it was worth." — **Suzi Ronson, Mick's wife, from her memoir Me and Mr. Jones (2024)**

SECTION FOUR — THE THREE WITNESSES (DEVARIM 19:15)

Corroboration of the Record

WITNESS One: Mick Woodmansey direct testimony (multiple interviews, including *Ultimate Classic Rock* and *BBC*): confirms £30/week wage for the Spiders; confirms discovery of Garson's \$1,000/week salary; confirms Defries' response: 'I would rather pay the road crew more than you'; confirms the confrontation and threat to leave the tour. Trevor Bolder direct testimony (*Classic Rock* magazine interview): 'The royalties weren't arriving; they never arrived. We got nothing in the end... People will rob you in this business.' Confirms the Hammersmith announcement ambush.

WITNESS Two: Suzi Ronson, *Me and Mr. Jones: My Life with David Bowie and the Spiders from Mars* (2024 memoir, reviewed in *Variety* April 2024): confirms £50/week wage for Ronson at height of Ziggy era; confirms *Transformer* co-production with no royalty, no money beyond the weekly wage; confirms direct testimony: 'David and Defries were both equally guilty in this exploitation'; confirms Woodmansey fired on his wedding day. Reviewed and corroborated by *Variety*, *The Guardian*, and *Classic Rock*.

WITNESS Three: *Billboard* ('David Bowie, Businessman,' January 2016): confirms 50/50 royalty split between Bowie and Defries under MainMan contract; confirms Bowie paid upward of \$50 million to separate from Defries; confirms 1997 Bowie Bonds of \$55 million used partly to buy back rights from Defries; confirms Bowie's estate worth \$100+ million at death. Corroborated by *Far Out Magazine* (Bowie Bonds), *Wikipedia* (Tony Defries and MainMan), and *Variety* (Why David Bowie Killed Ziggy Stardust, June 2023).

SECTION FIVE — THE COVENANT ANALYSIS

The Torah Charges — Both Accounts

Account One Charge: The 50/50 Stumbling Block — Vayikra 19:14

"You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your Elohim: I am Yahweh."

— Vayikra (Leviticus) 19:14

David Bowie in 1970 was desperate for success and, by his own account, "*basically dived in somewhat naively with Defries to make it happen.*" He did not have independent legal counsel who could evaluate what 50 percent of net royalties would mean for the commercial output of the most important recording artist of the coming decade. He was blind to the ground because the success he craved required trusting someone who could see what he could not. **The Vayikra 19:14 charge against Defries stands: a man who understood commercial music contracts negotiated a 50/50 royalty split with a young artist who did not understand what he was agreeing to.** The fact that Bowie eventually recovered through extraordinary business acumen does not cancel the original stumbling block. It documents, rather, what the cost of the stumbling block was: \$50 million and the complexity of the Bowie Bonds to buy back what should never have been given away. *I am Yahweh.*

Account Two Charges: The Spiders — Vayikra 19:13 and 19:14

"You shall not oppress your neighbor or rob him. The wages of a hired worker shall not remain with you all night until the morning."

— Vayikra (Leviticus) 19:13

£30 per week during the peak commercial output of the Ziggy Stardust era. No royalties for *Transformer*. No money for the arrangements of *Life on Mars?* and *Changes* and *Ziggy Stardust* and every other track that built the catalog. Trevor Bolder: "*The royalties weren't arriving; they never arrived. We got nothing in the end.*" **The Torah's standard for the hired worker's wages applies to every £30 weekly payment that should have been calibrated to the commercial value being delivered.** A pianist hired later received \$1,000 per week. The men who built the sound from the beginning received £30. The directional imprecision of the accounting flows against the Spiders and toward those with more negotiating power. The covenant names it robbery.

The bilateral account for Bowie: Suzi Ronson's testimony names Bowie and Defries as *equally* guilty. This report accepts that testimony. Bowie was being exploited by Defries simultaneously. His own financial situation was compromised. But he was staying at the Plaza in New York while the Spiders were at a cheap hotel. He knew what the disparity was. He chose, in Angie Bowie's words, non-confrontational cowardice over addressing it. The covenant does not permit silence about others' exploitation as a defense. **Knowing that your bandmates are paid £30 while you stay at the Plaza is not a defense. It is a participation.**

The Hammersmith Charge: Treating a Covenant Worker Without Dignity — Vayikra 19:35-36

"You shall do no wrong in judgment, in measures of length or weight or quantity. You shall have just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin."

— Vayikra (Leviticus) 19:35-36

The announcement at Hammersmith was a false measure applied to the Spiders' standing. They had given everything the Ziggy Stardust era required of them — they were, in Trevor Bolder's words, at their most triumphal moment when it happened — and were informed of their dismissal by a public announcement before they were informed privately. Their contribution was given full commercial weight in its exploitation and no weight at all in its conclusion. **Just measures require that workers who have delivered full commercial value receive at minimum the basic dignity of private notification before public announcement.** The Hammersmith announcement, and the wedding-day dismissal of Woodmansey, are entered as covenant violations of basic dignity owed to the hired worker.

Covenant Acknowledgment: The Recovery

"The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom, and whatever you get, get insight."

— Mishlei (Proverbs) 4:7

David Bowie got wisdom. After the MainMan years he managed himself with extraordinary sophistication, owned his recordings, issued the Bowie Bonds, bought back the Defries interest, and died with a \$230 million estate. **The covenant honors the recovery.** It is documented here as the only example in this series of an artist who was severely exploited, learned precisely from the exploitation, and built a commercial fortress that no subsequent party could breach. The Bowie Bonds were an act of covenant wisdom — using the commercial value of the gift to secure the gift permanently. **The recovery does not close the account against the Spiders. It stands alongside it. Both are true. Both are in the permanent record.**

SECTION SIX — THE LIVING WITNESS: KEPHA ARCEMONT, 2026

A Blues Guitarist Reads the Record

Life on Mars? The string arrangement that Mick Ronson wrote for that song is one of the most celebrated musical contributions in the history of British pop. It is the arrangement — the sweeping, cinematic orchestral architecture — that transforms a good song into the iconic recording it became. Ronson wrote it. He received a credit on the album. He received fifty quid a week and no royalties. He died at 46.

◆ *I am Kepha Arcemont. I have recorded with session musicians including Kenny Aronoff and Philip Bynoe — both of whom appear in Hired Gun, both of whom have navigated the same hired-gun economics this report documents. The Spiders from Mars were hired guns at the highest possible commercial level. They built something that generated hundreds of millions of dollars. They received thirty pounds a week and were fired from the stage without warning. The covenant question that every recording artist must ask about the musicians who play with them is the Bemidbar 18:21 question: am I providing covenant provision for the service being rendered, or am I extracting covenant service and returning poverty wages? Bowie's answer to that question in the Ziggy Stardust years was thirty pounds a week. Defries' answer was worse. The Torah names both answers.*

Bowie died in 2016 worth up to \$230 million. He had learned. He had fought. He had won. The covenant honors that. But Mick Ronson died in 1993 at 46, without the resources that his contribution to the Bowie catalog had generated. The man who arranged **Life on Mars?** did not die with a financial legacy proportional to what that arrangement is worth. He died with the knowledge that what he had built was beautiful and the experience of having been paid fifty quid a week for building it. **That is the wound in this report that does not close with Bowie's recovery.** It is Mick Ronson's wound. It belongs in this series. It is in the permanent record.

SECTION SEVEN — THE COVENANT VERDICT

Yahweh's Record — Both Accounts

Two accounts. Two wounds. One report. Neither cancels the other.

ACCOUNT ONE — DEFRIES vs. BOWIE: Tony Defries negotiated a 50/50 net royalty split with David Bowie, a young artist who was desperate for success and did not have independent legal counsel evaluate what 50 percent meant. Co-ownership of the catalog was built into the structure. The eventual separation cost Bowie upward of \$50 million. He issued \$55 million in Bowie Bonds in 1997 to buy back what he had created. Vayikra 19:14 — stumbling block before the blind. **COVENANT ACKNOWLEDGMENT:** Bowie recovered. He managed himself with

extraordinary sophistication, owned his recordings, and died worth \$230 million. The recovery is honored. It does not close the charge against Defries.

ACCOUNT TWO — DEFRIES AND BOWIE vs. THE SPIDERS: Mick Ronson, Trevor Bolder, and Mick Woodmansey received £30 per week at the height of Bowiemania while a later-hired pianist received \$1,000/week. Ronson co-produced Transformer and arranged Life on Mars? for £50 a week with no royalties. Bolder and Woodmansey were fired by public announcement at Hammersmith Odeon without private notification. Woodmansey was told he was fired on his wedding day. Vayikra 19:13 — wages withheld. Vayikra 19:14 — stumbling block before the blind (Suzi Ronson: 'he had no idea of his own worth'). Suzi Ronson: 'David and Defries were both equally guilty in this exploitation.' Both are charged. Both charges are entered.

MICK RONSON: Died April 29, 1993, of liver cancer, age 46. Named 64th greatest guitarist of all time by Rolling Stone. Arranged Life on Mars?, Changes, Walk on the Wild Side, Transformer. Received £50 a week and no royalties. Died with no financial legacy from the work that built the empire. Bemidbar 18:21 — to the Levites I have given every tithe, in return for their service. The covenant standard for those who serve the covenant sound is ongoing provision proportional to what their service produces. Ronson's service produced hundreds of millions. His provision was fifty quid a week. The judgment is entered.

"Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it."

— Mishlei (Proverbs) 3:27

When it is in your power to do it. Bowie was staying at the Plaza. The Spiders were at a cheap hotel. It was in Bowie's power to address the disparity. It was in Defries' power to pay the musicians who were filling the arenas. **The Torah's standard is not that the employer must always maximize wages. The standard is: do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power.** The good that was due to Ronson, Bolder, and Woodmansey was proportional compensation for work whose commercial value they could see in every arena they filled. The power to provide it was present. The provision was not. ***The judgment is entered. The record is complete. Selah.***

SERIES NOTES

Report No. 25 is structurally unique in the series: it is the only report where the primary named artist is simultaneously a victim (Account One) and a co-perpetrator (Account Two). The covenant does not permit partial truth. Both accounts are entered in full.

Selah.

*Miqdash Bethel Covenant Assembly · Pearl River, Louisiana · March 2026
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