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Album Produced by Mick Redman, MV Gerhard, Mike Matessino and Alan Howarth
Music Composed By John Carpenter In Association With Alan Howarth

Business Affairs for Twentieth Century Fox:
 Tom Cavanaugh

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Recording, Mixing, Sequencing and Synthesizer
 Programming by Alan Howarth

Music Editor: Scott Grusin

"BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA"
 Performed by The Coupe De Villes
 John Carpenter, Nick Castle and
 Tommy Lee Wallace

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TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX Presents A **TAFT/BARISH/MONASH** Production **KURT RUSSELL** "BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA" **KIM CATTRALL**
 Music By **JOHN CARPENTER** In Association With **ALAN HOWARTH** Visual Effects by **RICHARD EDLUND** Executive Producers **PAUL MONASH** and **KEITH BARISH**
 Written by **GARY GOLDMAN** & **DAVID Z. WEINSTEIN** Adaptation By **V.D. RICHTER** Produced By **DAVID FRANCO** Directed By **JOHN CARPENTER**



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Complete Original
 Motion Picture Soundtrack

Music Composed By
John Carpenter
 In Association With
Alan Howarth



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ONE OF A KIND CARPENTER

Hollywood has never been in the business of making “cult” movies, a term that by its very definition means limited audiences will show up to applaud a film’s skewed sensibility- usually years after a picture’s release. Yet in spite of this, many a big-budget movie has tried to sneak their wrath when found out. But like its crafty wizard who suffered a similar fate, **BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA** has made the most of being cast underground over two decades ago, amassing an army of followers through the years until thousands now shout the movie’s glory to heaven, earth and the internet.

Where the powers that be may have had no idea what to make of the martial arts lunacy that director and co-composer John Carpenter realized on their 20 million dollars, 1986’s **BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA** is now regarded as a bona fide cult masterpiece, a gonzo highlight in a career that’s included straightforward genre

hits like **HALLOWEEN**, **CHRISTINE** and **STARMAN** - as well as more uncannily eccentric films like **THE THING** and **PRINCE OF DARKNESS** (and even the outright political sci-fi satire **THEY LIVE**). But perhaps none have reflected Carpenter’s true sensibility with such panache like **BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA**, an FX-filled screwball comedy that featured the then-new spectacle of gravity-defying Shaolin action and Chinese mysticism.

Yet if any element of **BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA** sounded off with creative luxury, then it would be its score. Because for their fifth musical collaboration, John Carpenter and Alan Howarth had the vast time to broaden the synth sound they’d helped to pioneer with **ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK** and **HALLOWEEN III**. Now they were playing wall-to-wall rhythm and atmosphere in the key of a fantastical Kung Fu epic, as heard through the rock and roll swagger of the screen’s greatest do-nothing hero. For much like **BIG TROUBLE**’s



BONUS TRACKS

8. Stingers Montage

Alan Howarth’s talent for conjuring all variety of musical sound effects is demonstrated in this narrated collection of score overlays.

9. Big Trouble In Little China (original version)

Performed by “The Coupe de Villes”

This is an “unplugged” version of the end title song, minus the song’s flashier production value in the film. The tune’s original presentation would be heard on **BIG TROUBLE**’s original CD and LP issues.

Liner Notes by Daniel Schweiger

Daniel Schweiger is the soundtrack editor of *ifmagazine.com* and *Venice Magazine*. His composer interview show “On the Score” can be heard at *Filmmusicmag.com*. A devoted **BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA** fan since the summer of 1986, Daniel’s liner notes include John Carpenter and Shirley Walker’s score for **ESCAPE TO LA**.

Track research by Chris Mangione. Special thanks to John Carpenter, Alan Howarth, Ryan Meyer and Sean Sobczak

Visit the ultimate **BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA** fan site *The Wing Kong Exchange* at *Wingkong.net*

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develops as Jack and Gracie give chase after him and Miao Yin. The pulse soon turns into a throbbing love theme on the elevator ride up, with Jack and Gracie engaging in a lipstick-smearing kiss.

5. The Final Escape (Lo Pan's Demise / Getaway)

Carpenter's and Howarth's gift for varying their scene-linking themes shines in CHINA's climactic action cue, as a new calypso theme has Jack and Gracie discovering that Lo Pan has become flesh. Just before he can appease the god Ching Dai by sacrificing Miao Yin, the lipstick-smearing Jack intrudes with his words of wisdom. Wang Chi adds the exclamation point by back flipping onto the scene, and the rhythm gains speed as Thunder gives chase. The action becomes more furiously percussive as Thunder discovers his master's body, and reacts with a grief that literally blows his top. Thankfully Egg is there to help pulley his friends out of the Storm's way, with Jack delivering the coup de grace by dropping a statue on Lightning's bamboo-wearing head. But the danger isn't over yet, as percussion furiously combines with guitar licks and a Calypso beat that's so fast that it even matches the Exchange's alarm bell. With Egg providing explosive cover, Jack and friends escape in The Pork

Chop Express - the beat finally halting with a guitar chord as Burton brakes his rig for a red light. Howarth himself was amazed at the changes the score was able make during this sequence. "By the time that Lo Pan's chamber blew up, I didn't know what to do next," he says. "But we just sat down and came up with new stuff. It was amazing. We were just pulling from this well of creativity that never ran out."

6. Goodbye, Jack

The reflective plucks of a Chinese synth harp and a low, curiously threatening tone play as Jack and his friends celebrate their victory at the Black Pearl. Though this cue was written to start off with this scene, Carpenter chose to clear music for the first two minutes, dialing the score in as Jack and Wang Chi part outside of the restaurant. Jack concludes with his usual blowhard advice, the music's dark tone paying off with the Beast Man's shock chord, as it's revealed he's hitched a ride on the Pork Chop Express.

7. Big Trouble In Little China (End Credits) (album version) Performed by "The Coupe de Villes"

John Carpenter provides the main, Jim Morrison-like voice for his band of fellow writer-directors. With their rocking guitars and keyboards capturing the score's flavor, The Coupe de Villes show themselves off as a surprisingly effective "vanity" act that could easily have continued in the genre arena. This particular version features the added production bells and whistles that Fox music head Elliot Lurie wanted for the song, especially given its appearance on MTV.

Jack Burton, Carpenter and Howarth were two white men entering a strange Chinese underworld with nothing but their wits and overactive imaginations to guide them.

But where Jack Burton survived with a lot of Asian help and some lucky reflexes, John Carpenter and Alan Howarth got by on far more than the seat of their pants, fusing their technical and improvisatory know-how into a score both view as the highlight of their careers - a soundtrack whose magical fighting skill has been of major note in the continuing mass appeal of BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA.

ARRIVING IN CHINATOWN

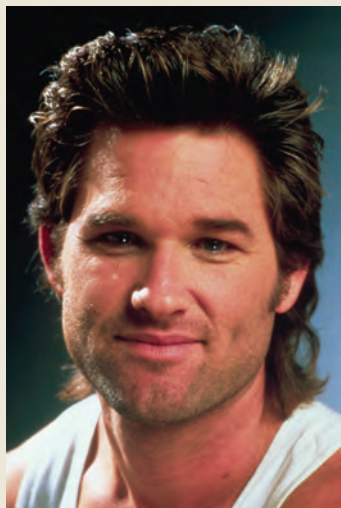
At the time, BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA may have first appeared as a curio in a directorial resume that had included suspenseful genre films like ASSAULT ON PRECINCT 13, THE FOG and CHRISTINE. But John Carpenter had also been a long-time fan of such Hong Kong actioners as ZU: WARRIORS FROM THE MAGIC MOUNTAIN and SWORDS OF FAME. In these imports that barely got play outside of Asian theaters and American grindhouses, Shaolin monks would use combos of cosmic lightning, ancient scrolls, supersonic swordplay and mid-air footwork to take on legions of demonic enemies. ENTER THE DRAGON these pictures weren't, reserving them to a few American admirers in the know. "I just loved Kung Fu movies when I was a kid," says Carpenter. "Not just the Bruce Lee films, but the crazy ones as well."

In 1985, it was a more realistic martial arts film that had fallen out for the director, as the effort he put into developing Eric van Lustbader's hit book "The Ninja" didn't pan out for big screen. Yet the time still couldn't have been better for Carpenter to capitalize on the

mainstream success he'd achieved with the sci-fi romance STARMAN. That good Karma was soon to arrive in the script for BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA.

When Gary Goldman and David Z. Weinstein set out to write the first screenplay for BIG TROUBLE, they envisioned a fantasy-adventure set in San Francisco's Chinatown during the late 1800's. While 20th Century Fox did purchase their screenplay, it would sit on the shelf until ROMANCING THE STONE rekindled the spark for the kind of exotic, period adventure that RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK had ignited. But the idea, and expense related to its old west setting made the project's producers Keith Barish and Paul Monash uneasy. Their solution was to hire W.D. Richter to retain the "central conceit" of Goldman and Weinstein's script, while updating the action to present-day San Francisco. But W.D. Richter's "adaptation" would go far beyond modernizing the story. As one of the cinema's true eccentrics, Richter's directorial debut THE ADVENTURES OF BUCKAROO BANZAI ACROSS THE 8TH DIMENSION won instant cult acclaim for its witty satire that upended sci-fi and superhero conventions. Richter would fill BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA with the same type of offbeat humor and action. "Richter's script was like no other I had read," Carpenter enthused. "It had an odd sense of humor and off-the-wall dialogue that I fell in love with, just nutball stuff. So I knew that this movie would be something you'd never seen before."

However, when it came to filmmaking, Carpenter relied on the familiarity of his technical collaborators and actors. Having first worked with former Disney teen idol Kurt Russell on the 1979 TV movie ELVIS, Carpenter would re-define the star's image as the gruff anti-hero Snake Plissken in 1979's ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK (and latter ESCAPE FROM L.A.). He'd then let Russell's charisma



stand toe-to-tentacle with *THE THING*'s makeup effects. Playing the loudmouthed Jack Burton (complete with John Wayne drawl) would present Russell with a truly outlandish character, one who still had to be heroic in the face of his own incompetence. "John and I wanted to have a guy who wasn't as sharp as he thought he was," Russell says. "Jack's a blustery sort of blowhard who has a lot of self-assurance. And it really is not too handy. That made playing him a lot of fun because Jack gets out of trouble in ways you wouldn't expect him to."

As the wizard who transforms from a wrinkled banker to a ten foot-tall ghost, veteran actor James Hong

(*BLADE RUNNER*) was put through eight hours of makeup to play David Lo Pan. But while Hong would all but steal *BIG TROUBLE* with his vainglorious villainy, the actor also brought real sympathy to an "evil dream" who's been cursed to be fleshless for 2258 years, and now just wants to be loved - even if he has to wed and kill a girl with green eyes to appease the gods. "Poor old Lo Pan, he doesn't get anywhere," Carpenter chuckles. "He's kind of a *Dracula* character in a way, sad and mysterious. I liked him a lot, and that's because James got the character, and the dilemma of wanting to be human again."

To play Lo Pan's ersatz Van Helsing, Victor Wong (*PRINCE OF DARKNESS*) was cast as Egg Shen, a Si-Fu with a firm grasp on the "force" of his culture's spells and potions. Much of Egg's time is spent dispensing legends to the clueless Jack, newspaper reporter Margo (Richard's daughter Kate Burton), and future *SEX AND THE CITY* regular Kim Cattrall as Gracie Law. Having already displayed a talent for sexy humor in *PORKY'S* and *POLICE ACADEMY*, the beautiful actress dispensed Richter's overwhelming dialogue with the charm of a screwball comedy heroine. Cattrall's spirited performance summed up *BIG TROUBLE*'s salute to such fast-talking Howard Hawks' films as *BRINGING UP BABY* and *HIS GIRL FRIDAY*, as translated for a world of Chinese mysticism.

With a shoot that ranged from San Francisco to Los Angeles, John Carpenter rolled his biggest production yet for three and a half months from October of 1985 to January of 1986. The energy, and enjoyment of the shoot would be readily apparent with the high spirits onscreen. Yet even as he had a "blast" filming *BIG TROUBLE*, the director wasn't readily able to describe the magic he was capturing. "*BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA* is an



2. Dragon Eyes

Jack looks nervously at the water bubbling below him, only to have a shock chord strike as a Chang Sing is snatched by one of the bog's ungodly creatures. Lo Pan's theme re-enters as Gracie wakes from her spell. But her consciousness is short-lived as the prowling synth strings and percolating samples of *Lightning* electrify her into true zombie-dom for the wedding ceremony.

3. Into The Spirit Path

BIG TROUBLE enters its longest stretch of music with Egg's theme as his warriors find the Wing Kong's fishy storeroom. Lo Pan's theme next takes on march percussion as Jack sees his armored soldiers and the Wing Kong going to the ceremony, a melody that reaches its evil glory as his prized wedding guests descend via escalator in the main skull chamber. Back outside in the hallway, a weird, low hum fills the soundtrack as Lo Pan's smirking eyeball guardian arrives to communicate his master's gloating to Egg Shen. Jack gives the eyeball a shot,

then enters Lo Pan's rooms to a new suspenseful motif. But Lo Pan is too preoccupied to care, a grand statement of his theme heralding his arrival at the ceremony. Carpenter's and Howarth's creativity brings out yet another new theme as Egg's warriors prepare for their big showdown by taking their "medicine."

4. The Great Arcade

A grandly sinister theme plays Lo Pan's moment of triumph, his wedding organ swelling as the sorcerer inserts the needle of love into Miao Yin while an enraged Wang Chi watches. Percussion picks up with Howarth's eyeball effect as it spots the wedding crashers. Wang Chi puts its lights out, and a guitar vamps into a theme that will play under *BIG TROUBLE*'s most outrageous Hong Kong-style action, its calypso/ kettle drum groove joining the wild "Oriental" guitar playing with an energetic sound that recalls Carpenter's scoring of the climactic car chase in *ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK*. Here this ethnically incongruous, and dazzlingly creative approach accompanies a cosmic video game duel between Egg Shen and Lo Pan, the Chang Sing's defeat of the Wing Kong, and Wang Chi besting Rain after mid-air sword duel. Lo Pan's chamber is left in ruins, and a throbbing rhythm



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CD TWO

1. Call The Police

Safe at Gracie's apartment, Jack and Wang Chi ready for their second round with Lo Pan. A meditative theme for voice and Chinese synth strings appears for Egg Shen and his Chang Sings, the music becoming much darker as Gracie finds Miao Yin floating under a hypnotic spell. Lo Pan and his theme enter next, its melody particularly ominous as the sorcerer tells the green-eyed Gracie that she'll take part in the do-or-die ceremony of taming the burning blade. Lo Pan's power beam erupts with glistening chimes, whereupon Egg's theme brings the warriors to his warehouse of priceless potions. It also holds the entrance

to Lo Pan's underworld, letting Carpenter and Howarth subtly introduce organ elements as the heroes slide down. Drum hits and voices enter next for a demonstration of Thunder's physical prowess, the music's dream-like quality complimented by close-ups of the women's green eyes. Egg's theme returns as he regales Jack with tales of the unnatural people who roam the bog of the dead trees, with the ceremony's drone returning for Rain's swordplay demonstration, which ends as he puts the burning blades into place. Oriental percussion and high-pitched sustains send Gracie and Miao skyward with the sword, proving them both worthy of Lo Pan's hand in unholy marriage. While this seven-minute cue plays continuously, Carpenter chose to occasionally dial it out of the film to focus on Egg's mythic dialogue.

action-adventure-comedy Kung Fu ghost story monster movie. It's everything you can imagine," he put it. "What we're doing with the audience is to start them in reality, and then slowly take them into the fantasy. And because the film's an incorporation of American sensibilities and Chinese mythologies, the biggest challenge is to juggle all of those elements. There's never been a film like this, ever."

SHAOLIN SCORING

Once principal photography had wrapped on *BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA*, John Carpenter could turn to perhaps the most relaxing, and creatively rewarding part of the filmmaking process- that of scoring. As the son of a well-respected music professor in Bowling Green, Kentucky, it appeared that Carpenter might follow in his father's footsteps after being taught the violin and piano, then spending his teen years singing and playing in rock bands. But with a love of movies that was as strong as his desire to play music, Carpenter saw enrolling at the University of Southern California's film program as a way to combine directing with his musical aspirations.

It was at USC where Carpenter met future Coupe De Ville player (and writer-director) Nick Castle, as well as classmate W.D. Richter. Figuring that he came "cheap," Carpenter first scored the 1970 Oscar-winning short *THE RESURRECTION OF BRONCO BILLY* before his first full-length soundtrack for the 1974 student film turned-feature *DARK STAR*. Where that cult movie was awash in electric sci-fi atmospheres, Carpenter would show his talent for melodically lean, percussive scoring in the tense grooves of 1976's *ASSAULT ON PRECINCT 13*. But it was with 1978's *HALLOWEEN* that Carpenter truly defined his minimal, thematic style, creating one of horror's most memorable scores with the help of the



Alan Howarth with John Carpenter

"Bowling Green Philharmonic" - actually himself with orchestrations by Dan Wyman. Wyman would also be the "electronic orchestrator" for Carpenter's score to *THE FOG* in 1980.

It was with 1981's *ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK* that Carpenter began to work "in association with" Alan Howarth. Though his cutting edge electronic sound effects work had included *THE FINAL COUNTDOWN*, *BATTLE BEYOND THE STARS* and *STAR TREK: THE MOTION PICTURE*, Howarth was just as interested in scoring, and was sure to pass his composing demos along to *STAR TREK* picture editor Todd Ramsay. When Ramsay began cutting *ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK*, Ramsay heard that Carpenter was looking for a new musical assistant, and passed one of Howarth's demos along. The tone was quickly set for the collaboration between Carpenter's instinctual abilities, and Howarth's talent for effects-based musical design.

"Scoring is a 'feel' thing for me, which is the only way I know how to do it," Carpenter says. "I ignore all of the directing when I become a composer, and just try to look at what's happening on the monitor in front of me, and accompany it. I'm kind of a crude composer in that way,

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because I don't write things out. And I can't really read music very well. So it's all improvised."

Yet Howarth quickly found Carpenter's approach to be as spot-on as any notes a "properly" trained composer might write. "John is a master, and he intuitively knows where the music's supposed to go, especially because it's his movie."

First working out of Howarth's dining room, then at his home studio in Glendale, the pair would produce many of the 80's most impressive electronic soundtracks, creating a distinctive sound at the height of such synth-based groups and composers as Tangerine Dream (NEAR DARK), Vangelis (BLADE RUNNER), Barry DeVorzon (LOOKER) and Jonathan Elias (VAMP).

At first, Howarth went to UCLA to take formal scoring classes while he was working on ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK. His lessons (as well as time listening to Police records) helped evolve Carpenter's sound with NEW YORK's urban, Calypso-beat action and eerie religious atmospheres. The duo next turned that year to the score for the Carpenter-produced HALLOWEEN II, delivering an edgier, more developed approach to The Shape's music. When the series went in a completely different direction for 1982's HALLOWEEN III, Carpenter and Howarth accompanied the film's computer-chip terror with their coldest, and purest electronic score yet. For 1983's killer car movie CHRISTINE, Howarth assisted Carpenter on the score's sinister, slow-driving burn.

By the time Carpenter walked in to score BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA, Howarth had filled his studio with the



11. Friends Of Yours? / Escape Iron Basin

Carpenter and Howarth effectively traverse another large section of CHINA as a pissed-off Lo Pan sees that Grace, Margo and Donald have shown up for an impromptu tour of the Wing Kong Exchange. Below it, Jack and Wang Chi free themselves to lurching samples, a motif that also accompanies the gassing of Gracie and her pals. After they're carted off by the Wing Kong's female contingent, Carpenter and Howarth conjure a hauntingly beautiful theme as Wang Chi tells Jack about the legend of Lo Pan's subjugation in 272 B.C. Breathy synths arrive with Thunder. Pounding rhythm picks up as Thunder shows his talent for chest expansion, knocking Jack into a wheelchair, which then hurtles to the edge of a long-drop well. It's only Howarth's gnarly, gong-like synths that enable Jack to pull himself up. Back in Lo Pan's chamber, a majestic statement of his theme transforms the crippled old man into a vital, imposing wizard. Lo Pan's theme becomes subdued, even tender, as his ghost form hopelessly tries to stroke Mao Yin. Action reigns again with a burst of percussion as Jack, Wang Chi and Donald fight a round of Wing Kong, with Jack inadvertently plugging his first bad guy.

12. Escape From Wing Kong

The score remains pensive as the heroic trio sneak into the Wing Kong's female slave cells. Wang Chi tries to fake out the wildcat Kongs by taking Donald "hostage," only to have a new action guitar pad rise when they call his bluff. This steady percussion hits all the movement of Jack springing the prisoners while Wang Chi and Donald take out the pole-swinging women. Thunder appears with more thugs, and the score ups the percussive rock ante as Jack and company dive into a sewer system. Burton emerges to give the panicked Gracie a big wet kiss, the music calming down as he shrugs it off to the thrill of being alive. The score is almost soothing as Jack finds their way to a storeroom, where he unlocks a door to seeming safety - only to have an electric gong hit reveal a mob of waiting Wing Kong.

13. Hide!

The scene's fight theme starts mid-tempo as the villains hack through the door, the music quickly picking up speed for Jack to get off a few lucky shots before Wang Chi wipes the floor with Wing Kongs. Like much of BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA's percussive writing, Carpenter and Howarth skillfully raise and lower the music's speed with overlapping percussion as Jack and company escape from the Exchange, with a howling sample pouncing in for Gracie's kidnapping by the gawky Beast Man. A brief lull occurs as Jack and Wang Chi realize that their women are still trapped. Speedy action resumes as Gracie is carried to the Beast Man's chamber, whereupon the music goes to an eerie lull. Voices announce the arrival of the elderly Lo Pan, who's delighted to find that Gracie also has green eyes.

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their knife throws, Carpenter brings back his "Alley Rumble" music as Thunder, Rain and Lightning make short work of the Chang Sing. An ominous musical sustain signals Lo Pan's quick recovery after getting run over by the Pork Chop Express, and his temporary ray-beam blinding of Jack. Wang Chi arrives to hide Jack in a cellar, with more metallic-sounding percussion heard as they rush past the Wing Kong's "pawns" The Lords of Death, and the triumphant Storms.

7. Tenement / White Tiger

A brief burst of rhythm from "Miao Yin's Abduction" gets Jack and Wang Chi back into the now-deserted street, whereupon the music segues to Jack and Gracie driving up to The White Tiger, a house of ill repute that holds Miao Yin for the highest bidder. Calimba percussion captures the patter of rain outside of Wang's pink Cadillac, wherein Gracie, Wang and his maitre d' Eddie Lee (Donald Li) convince Jack that their destiny rests in his capable hands. The rhythm picks up speed as Carpenter intercuts between Gracie meeting her reporter friend Margo, and Jack playing the nerdy, green-eyed fetishist "Henry Swanson" to ferret out Miao Yin. Sharp-eyed Kurt Russell fans will note the actor is wearing the same yellow business suit from his other cult classic USED CARS.

8. Here Come The Storms

Mysterioso music heralds the earth-shaking arrival of the Storms, with a ghostly rhythm track raising the roof for them. "Oriental" guitar licks build with Jack's hopeless attempt to slug it out, the percussion soon evaporating as The Storms snatch Miao Yin into the sky. Carpenter and Howarth segue to a more sedate, even tender mood as the heroes end up back at Gracie's apartment to unleash broadsides of expository dialogue as to their predicament.

9. Wing Kong Exchange

Realizing that Miao Yin is in the clutches of the reclusive, aged banker David Lo Pan, Jack and Wang Chi disguise themselves as telephone repairmen to enter his Wing Kong Exchange - "the most dangerous cutthroat den of madmen in Chinatown." Carpenter and Howarth's steady rhythm and creepy ambience keep pace with their sneaking about, all while Chi's Uncle Chu (Chao Li Chi) and Egg discuss Lo Pan's ghostly nature over food at Wang's Black Pearl restaurant. Back at the exchange, the score unleashes a flood of eerie synths as Jack and Wang Chi nearly drown when an elevator sends them to the corpse-filled Hell of the Upside-Down Sinners.

10. Lo Pan's Domain / Looking For A Girl

Lo Pan's theme is fully introduced by glistening bells, as the now business-suited Rain takes the bound Jack and Wang Chi into his master's Buddha-filled office. Chimes and voices then take over the melody for Lo Pan's appearance as a frail, wheelchair-bound eccentric. The music remains at an ominous, yet somewhat sympathetic tone as Lo Pan tells them his tale of supernatural woe.



latest synth "toys." "I'm a techno junkie who always has to have the coolest, newest thing. John loved that," Howarth chuckles. "Where we'd started out with a bunch of analog synthesizers and a 24-track tape recorder, everything was now in force for BIG TROUBLE. We had Macintosh computers running digital sequences, and MIDI was letting us play five keyboards at once. It all gave a new sonic depth and richness to our music. And where we'd previously had six to eight weeks to score a film, we now had fourteen weeks."

One of Carpenter's and Howarth's biggest considerations was how "Chinese" to make BIG TROUBLE's soundtrack, a challenge given that they'd had no experience with the culture's music. "A lot of the Asians on the film gave me various samples of modern Asian music, and the sound was nothing at all like what you'd think it would be," Carpenter says. "So in the end, I went at it in my own way, which was to focus on what was going to work for this movie. So it was never like 'I'm going to be Chinese.' That would have turned this into a 'chopsocky' score, which is a Caucasian cliché of what Asian music is supposed to sound like.

"If anything, we were ignorant white guys trying to imitate Chinese music to our own ears," Howarth adds. "Parallel

fourths and fifths said 'Chinese' to us. So the whole score was approached very innocently. There was no musicology, or studying for it. Whatever sort of nooded like Chinese music, we did. In the end, it was all in the way we played the instruments that made them imitate Chinese-sounding things."

Nevertheless, Howarth would assemble a "sound palette" of Chinese instruments to draw on for the score, samples that would mostly be used for percussion. China's high-tech synths would include an Emulator 2, a Prophet V, and an EMU drum machine, with the "Big Kahuna" being a Kurzweil 250. In their machine-filled studio, the only live instruments to be played by Carpenter and Howarth were a Fender, electric and bass guitars.

Instead of scoring from CHINA's start, Carpenter and Howarth began their musical pass through BIG TROUBLE from its first action scene, as Jack and Wang Chi pursue the Lords of Death into an airport parking garage after they've kidnapped Miao Yin. It was the inspiration they needed to create musical "beds" that would give each fight its own musical character, with suspenseful atmospheres and Howarth's sonic effects linking the film's set pieces together. "You can't Mickey-Mouse every action, especially since it's so frantic in the movie," Carpenter says. "What you have to do is look at the entire sequence from beginning to end so you can tell a story with the music, and drive it with rhythm and a beat. It's bizarrely like jazz in a way, although the music comes out bluesy and orchestral."

For Carpenter and Howarth, the key to finding that rhythm for BIG TROUBLE's frenetic combat was to create a tempo for the scenes before beginning to score them. The result was a 'click track' that would hit every lightning bolt, sword slash and flying fist, no matter their

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speed. "Neither of us were the kind of keyboard players who could keep pace with stuff like that. So the sequencing was really man and machine stuff," Howarth says. "First, we'd create a pattern of notes that you hold down on the keyboard. Then the computer would pick through those notes on its own, randomly or in sequence. And once you've heard the rhythm it's come up with, you respond to it with your own melody, and build on top of the music. In the end, the film becomes an electronic coloring book, where you're adding layers and layers of digital samples. But it was always the images, and characters that drove the sounds we selected from the instruments."

While *BIG TROUBLE*'s score would be rich in character motifs for *The Storms*, the *Chang Sing*, *Egg Shen* and *Lo Pan*'s underworld, it was when Carpenter doubled-back to the film's beginning that he came up with a major theme for Jack Burton, whose reactions mirror the viewers' amazement at what this fantastical CHINA holds. Both cultures' musical viewpoints are heard through the Oriental "twang" that accompanies Burton's electric

guitar, his percussion motoring into San Francisco with a rock and roll attitude. "The opening was temped with ZZ Top's 'Just Got Paid,' which was a great feel for a blowhard truck driver," Carpenter reveals. "So I took that beat and made my own song out of it."

BIG TROUBLE's other big character theme would be given to Lo Pan. Unearthly voices, synth chimes and guitar chords embody both the ancient mystery, and tragedy of this rather pathetic villain. Subtly played when Lo Pan is in the guise of a wheelchair-bound banker, the theme then rises with full, haunting power upon his transformation into a sorcerer who can materialize through walls. It's a theme that will reach operatic heights during Lo Pan's double-wedding ceremony.

Though *BIG TROUBLE* was certainly a "lighter" score for Carpenter than anything he'd done since *DARK STAR*, its percussive action would be nearly equaled with low pads of sinister atmosphere as Lo Pan's plot is unraveled to Jack, or in the tense scenes of the heroes making their way through the monster-filled caverns under Chinatown. Carpenter responded with creepy ambience and jolting effects that nearly matched the sinister tonal quality of *THE FOG* or *CHRISTINE*. "I grew up in the good old days of science fiction and horror movies, so I think my musical heritage goes along with that," the director remarks. "It's fun to do scary scoring, because you can get away with a lot of tones and descending progressions, even if everything in *BIG TROUBLE* was E-major as opposed to a darker E-minor."

As his music trekked through no shortage of Chinese hells and energetic action pads, Carpenter would end up creating his longest score yet, with over 80 minutes of music for *CHINA*'s 99 minute running time. "I always talk about music as being wall-to-wall carpet," the director

about Jack and the film's events by a doubtful attorney. Though this scene is an obvious addition to *BIG TROUBLE*, Carpenter and Howarth ably use it to set the tone for the film's eerier moments.

2. Pork Chop Express (Main Title)

Jack Burton's rocking theme is established by an off-kilter electric guitar, percussive energy and humorous "Oriental" overlays as he drives his big rig *The Pork Chop Express* into San Francisco on a dark and stormy night. Jack's boisterous, musical energy continues as he gambles at the loading docks with restaurateur pal Wang Chi and his Chinese compatriots.

3. Abduction At Airport

The composers' ability to carve *BIG TROUBLE*'s score into large, thematic sections first shines as Jack and Wang Chi wait to pick up Miao Yin (former *Penthouse* model Suzee Pai) at the airport. Throbbing percussion alerts Jack to the prowling street gang, *The Lords of Death*, with Miao Yin's green-eyed beauty represented with the harp-like plucks of "Asian" synths. The music's pace picks up energy as Miao Yin is singled out for such a fate, its intensity doubling as Jack and Wang Chi are nearly run over by the *Lords* in a parking garage, then give chase with the *Pork Chop Express* into Chinatown. Even when the film cuts to *Egg Shen*'s tour bus, Carpenter and Howarth don't release their rhythm's suspense, the cue's theme gliding along under *Egg*'s travelogue until he's rudely interrupted by a near head-on with the big rig.

4. The Alley (Procession)

Jack and Wang Chi find themselves in a narrow street, where members of the *Chang Sing* hold a funeral

procession for their assassinated leader. Carpenter and Howarth use an ominous atmosphere, violin effects and a subtle variation of Lo Pan's theme for the increasingly tense scene as *The Wing Kong* appear to continue a centuries-old rumble, the music going out as they unleash machine gun fire on their rivals. Though this cue was written to start when Jack notices "the good guys," Carpenter chose to play source music for the procession's first twenty seconds with the score arriving with the appearance of a *Wing Kong* "hatchet man" (played by *DIE HARD*'s Al Leong)

5. The Alley (War)

Tense drum hits play the *Chang Sing* as they break out their traditional kung fu weapons and gather the dead. *The Wing Kongs* counter by pulling out their blades, until a full battle royale erupts as the groups rush into each other with wood-block percussion and "Chinese" guitar. Howarth adds various electronic swooshes to accentuate the slicing weapons and breaking heads of the furious martial arts action, which is interrupted by the crack of *Thunder*. The melody that drives *BIG TROUBLE*'s first action set piece would come from actor Victor Wong. "He was watching us score the scene, and told me about this song he remembered as a kid, when the Chinese were fighting the Japanese right before *World War II*," Carpenter recalls. "Victor demanded that I use this tune, and picked up a guitar to play it for us. That's the only time I was truly influenced by a performer while scoring a film."

6. The Storms

Voices, nerve-crawling violin effects and Lo Pan's theme introduce his supernatural henchmen *The Storms*, who descend from the sky with electrifying visual effects. Upon

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on to work with such composers as Shirley Walker on MEMOIRS OF AN INVISIBLE MAN and ESCAPE FROM L.A., and Jim Lang on IN THE MOUTH OF MADNESS and BODY BAGS.

Whether John Carpenter decides to remain in the director's chair, or to resume composing in the future, the exuberance and ingenuity he and Alan Howarth gave to the film and score of BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA will always make it career highpoints for them. "In many ways, I think it's the best soundtrack I've ever done," the filmmaker says. "I had a great love for the project, which was just an unusual movie to come out at the time. I haven't seen anything like it in the past, or since. We had great actors, and the top martial artists. It just all worked."

"I love being the first kid on my block to play something, and this was the first tongue-in-cheek, over-the-top score like it," Howarth concludes. "There was never any omnipresent need to rush it, or any technical issues to sweat through while producing the music. We could truly craft the mixes like never before, and give this fifteen times the polish beyond any soundtrack we'd done. BIG

TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA represented the apex of the world of John Carpenter at that time."

TROUBLE TRACKS

With John Carpenter's fans looking forward to his scores as much as his films, the director had an excellent track record of seeing most of his soundtracks get a release. BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA was no exception, even though CDs and LPs at the time of the film's 1986 release didn't have the space to contain his vast score for the film. Enigma Records first issued 45 minutes of the score in both formats upon BIG TROUBLE's release.

Now after over two decades, this double CD marks the first time that all of BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA's score has been made available from 20th Century Fox, and presented in film order. The film's three-track archival mixes by Alan Howarth were cleaned up and assembled by soundtrack preservationist Mike Matessino (also the producer of the DVD documentary THE THING: TERROR TAKES SHAPE), who explains, "The score was in excellent condition. Using modern audio technology to remove noise and bring out the fullness of the recording's dynamic range, we ended up with a digital restoration that sounds better than when the score was recorded."

At last, the music of BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA truly shakes the pillars of heaven.

CD ONE

I. Prologue

Foreboding synths and voices accompany Egg being grilled

says. "You don't notice the carpet as you walk around your house, but you like the feel of it. And in that way, the music supports the drama and imagery that's on screen here. We had three editors who were always seeing how much faster they could make the film. And I needed to be light on my feet like that as a composer, to always push the tempo, whether it was accompanying the fight scenes or the actors delivering their lines. So it's the score that ties the film together with a kinetic sense of energy."

While BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA referenced no end of Hong Kong and American action films on its journey, John Carpenter's most referential ode was saved for the rocking end credit song by the Coupe de Villes - a group comprised of the director and his pals Nick Castle and Tommy Lee Wallace. Carpenter had first played with Wallace in their high school band Kaleidoscope, and then jammed with Castle while both studied film at USC. All had found success as genre writers and directors, with Wallace directing HALLOWEEN III and Castle directing THE LAST STARFIGHTER. While the band had played at wrap parties, and been heard on a car radio in HALLOWEEN (for which Castle also played The Shape), The Coupe de Villes would be given their biggest exposure with BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA, with the group even getting their own music video that a press release claimed would "push video imagery to its limits."

For a tune whose rambunctious energy was inspired by Ray Parker Jr.'s' GHOSTBUSTERS theme song, Carpenter's low vocals would counterpoint Castle's higher voice, with Wallace providing harmony. All of the bandmates (plus an unseen Howarth) would contribute the energetic guitar work. When the song was visualized for MTV, the Coupe de Villes were placed in a movie cutting room, with video strobing effects accompanying

scenes of the movie appearing on strips of celluloid and a Steenbeck editing machine.

"The way I look at it, no one's ever too old for rock n' roll," Carpenter says. "I thought this was a perfect chance to do a main title. It was also something else making that music video. We shot it through the course of one night on a little sound stage. The whole idea was to get to sing and strut our stuff. No one else was going to pay us to do this. In fact, we didn't get paid to do it! The experience was ridiculous, and also a lot of fun. I think everyone ended up being impressed by the song and the Coupe de Villes."

As BIG TROUBLE sped towards its release as one of 20th Century Fox's big summer films, the director couldn't have been more optimistic about the mass appeal he hoped the movie would have. "I'm almost 40 years-old now. And since I'm getting older in my career, I thought I'd better do something nuts while I still could do it. But I think the primary reason for making BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA is to see the world through the eyes of my son, who's now two year's old. I can see a really ridiculous, fun world, an enormous, wondrous world. And Chinese cinema sees the world through a child's eyes like that."

BIG TROUBLE

The creative freedom that John Carpenter was afforded as a director and composer resulted in a film that fit the bill as pure summer entertainment. However, 20th Century Fox hadn't reckoned that it would be a far more subversive blockbuster than their last action hit ROMANCING THE STONE, let alone the INDIANA JONES clone they were hoping for. For where Kurt Russell's Jack Burton may have had the muscle and

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charisma, his character didn't begin to fit the marketing mold of a traditional movie hero. "RAMBO 2 was out, which was the template for action films. They were all patriotic," Carpenter says. "They wanted an action hero. I don't think they realized that I would make the white guy look like a blowhard John Wayne idiot who couldn't do anything."

The immediate result was that Fox tried to make Burton look more heroic by having Carpenter add a scene to the beginning of the film, wherein Egg Shen praises Jack's "great courage" to an attorney before demonstrating some magic. As studio head Lawrence Gordon insisted to The New York Times that BIG TROUBLE would be "no kiddie movie," Fox readied BIG TROUBLE to be one of their prestige 70-millimeter releases during the summer of 1986, along with SPACECAMP and ALIENS. But it was that the far more commercially certain ALIENS that would get the studio's marketing muscle.

On July 2nd, BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA opened in 1100 theaters to largely dismissive reviews, with Roger Ebert calling the film "one extended chase sequence." Where most critics were as befuddled as the studio by BIG TROUBLE's stylized comedy, the film would receive some major defenders. Richard Corliss at Time magazine enthused that "John Carpenter propels things faster, and way smoother, than a speeding 40s serial," while Walter Goodman at The New York Times said that "If, as it not unlikely, you should lose track of what is going on, don't be concerned. What matters is the stunts, and the spirit, and this latest set of exotic exploits gives good value." Jimmy Summers at Billboard singled out the score by saying "The music has a real rock feel, with a lot of synthesizers and guitars, though it doesn't take itself that seriously."

In spite of its grosses and reviews, John Carpenter had once again charmed his fans, and given a wake up call to the offbeat pleasures of Hong Kong cinema. Perhaps no



admirer would immediately come to the film's defense with the passion of Box Office Magazine's Jimmy Summers. "We could have sworn BIG TROUBLE was a good movie. It was everything a comic book-style adventure should be. So either we were wrong, or we saw a different movie."

Like every cult film from THE MONSTER SQUAD to BUCKAROO BANZAI to emerge out of the 1980s, BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA's repeat cable showings, and VHS and laserdisc releases brought it the rightful acclaim it was theatrically denied. At the time of a 2001 double-DVD release that confirmed the film's appeal, Carpenter remarked, "We were ahead of the curve on this Chinese / Kung Fu mysticism, which is now very

popular. BIG TROUBLE was basically a comedy, and a lot of people at the time didn't get a film that went against conventions like that. But the film found its audience on home video, and people started to love it. Now look at movies today. Everyone's on a wire!"

Yet the days of such Hong Kong-by-way-of Hollywood successes like THE MATRIX and SHANGHAI NOON were a long way off after BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA was seemingly overlooked. Deciding to leave studio filmmaking behind for a while, John Carpenter returned to his low-budget genre roots with the sci-fi satire THEY LIVE and his chilling PRINCE OF DARKNESS. These films would mark the director's last scoring collaborations with Alan Howarth before moving

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