

THE OFFICIAL MAKING OF

# BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA™

TARA BENNETT & PAUL TERRY  
FOREWORD BY JOHN CARPENTER  
AFTERWORD BY KURT RUSSELL





# JACK BURTON

“He’s not functioning all that well...but he’s got a heart of gold, lots of courage, and he’s excited about things.” KURT RUSSELL

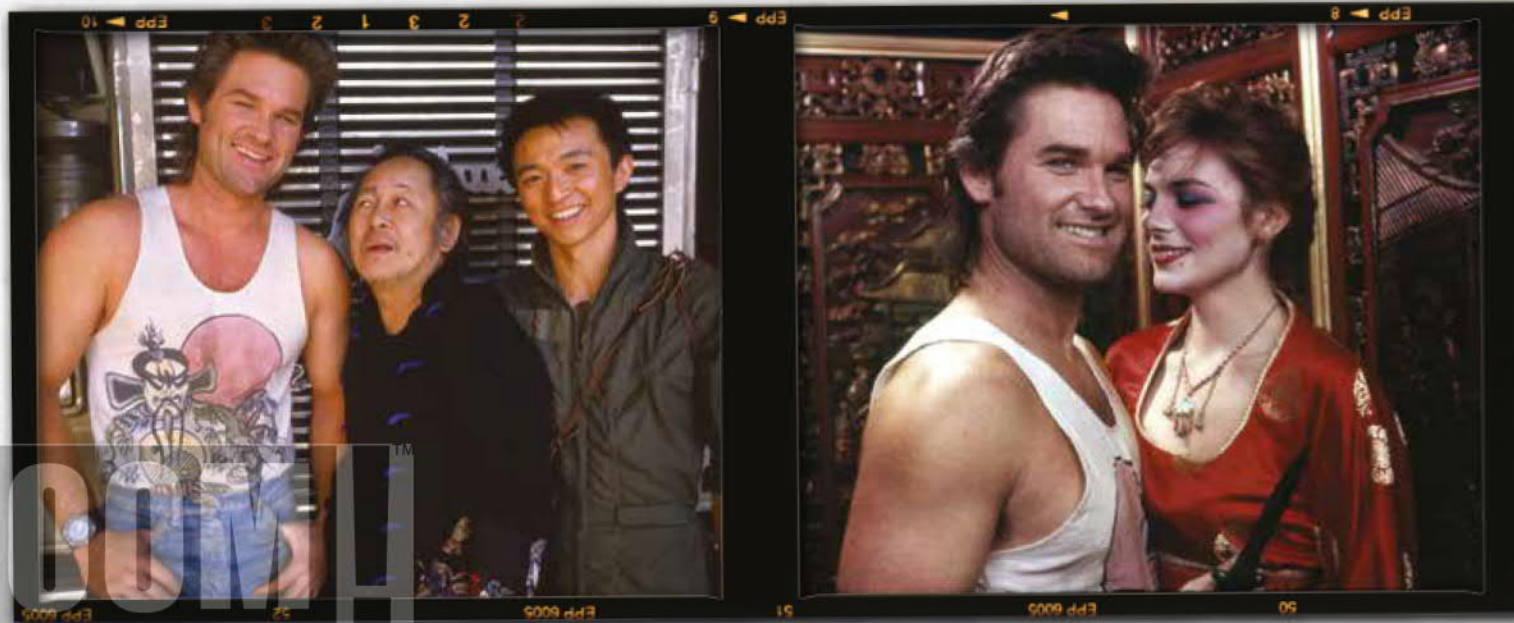
INT. PETERBILT CAB - DAY

A truly unusual person up here running the whole show, yapping into his CB, drinking coffee, scarfing down a customized baked ham sandwich on a monster roll. JACK BURTON they call him when they're not calling him more trouble than he's worth.

Damn right, Jack Burton is “unusual.” You’d be accurate in describing the guy at the center of *Big Trouble in Little China* as loud, brash, and not too quick on the uptake. But what really sets him apart from the protagonists in the pack is that Burton isn’t the hero of his own adventure. No, he’s actually the goofy sidekick who’s completely overwhelmed trying to navigate the mysteries of San Francisco’s Chinatown.

When you think that *Big Trouble*’s twist on the prototypical action hero template, churned out by Hollywood year after year, was conceived of and executed so perfectly 30 years ago, it certainly makes you look at Jack Burton in a brand new light.

After W.D. Richter was commissioned to adapt the *Big Trouble in Little China* story into a contemporary piece, the invention of the Jack Burton character ended up driving the new screenplay’s tone and



OPPOSITE: Kurt Russell in action as Jack Burton

TOP: A script extract of the introduction of Jack Burton

BOTTOM LEFT: Russell, Victor Wong and Dennis Dun pose in front of the Pork-Chop Express

BOTTOM RIGHT: Russell with Kim Cattrall, caught in a candid laugh on the set



# PORK-CHOP EXPRESS

“Jack just wanted his truck back...that is it. He has no more depth than that.”

JOHN CARPENTER

Some heroes have a sidekick, a significant other, or even a lovable pet to help get them through this journey called life. Well, Jack Burton has all of those combined in the form of a massive, 18-wheeler Peterbilt truck dubbed the “Pork-Chop Express.”

After watching *Big Trouble*, it's impossible for anyone to conjure an image of Jack Burton without his beloved big rig. Screenwriter W.D. Richter says Jack and his truck were always conceived as one, the proverbial ham hauling ham up and down the western corridor. Inside the cab, jabbering away on the CB radio using his truck's name as his handle, is the only place where the legend of Jack Burton never disappoints.

So it makes all the sense in the world that rescuing his rig is Jack's primary objective that fuels the bizarre hero's journey of *Big Trouble*. “Jack just wanted his truck back,” Carpenter laughs at the simplicity of the quest. “That's *all* he wanted. That is it. He has no more depth than that. He doesn't even learn anything!”

In reality, Kurt Russell wasn't at all familiar with big rigs, so that became a new skill-set. “I'd never driven an 18-wheeler,” the actor admits. “I had to learn how to do that because I was gonna be [driving] onto the

set, and that set was tight. It was built so that you could get the truck in, but there wasn't a lot of room. So that's what I remember, backing it up, using the mirrors, and learning how to do that.”

The actor says he's also always admired the signature logo the production came up with for the truck. “The Pork-Chop Express artwork was kinda fun,” Russell snickers. “Those big rig guys like the insignia stuff, so the pig running and the silhouettes of the girls was a good mix of old-standby images and fun.”

For research, Russell reveals he also dipped his boots into the culture of CB radios, which became a pop culture craze in the late '70s. “I didn't get deeply into that culture, but I'm embarrassed enough to say that I got into it somewhat,” Russell grins sheepishly. “I had a CB in my [Chevy] Blazer. I don't know if I had a moniker or anything, I don't remember, but I talked to people out there. But I had about as much desire, and understanding, to do that after a month as I do being a part of Snapchat or Instagram,” the actor cracks gleefully. “I always thought of it as an emergency device. ‘Help me! I'm trapped at the bottom of a mountain! My truck has fallen and I can't get up.’ So I didn't become a part of it, but

BOTTOM: A variety of images of the Pork-Chop Express on the *Big Trouble* set

RIGHT: The Pork-Chop Express being dressed for a scene on John J. Lloyd's Chinatown set





# WANG CHI

"I felt *Big Trouble* wasn't your typical martial arts film. It was kind of like a genre of its own."

DENNIS DUN

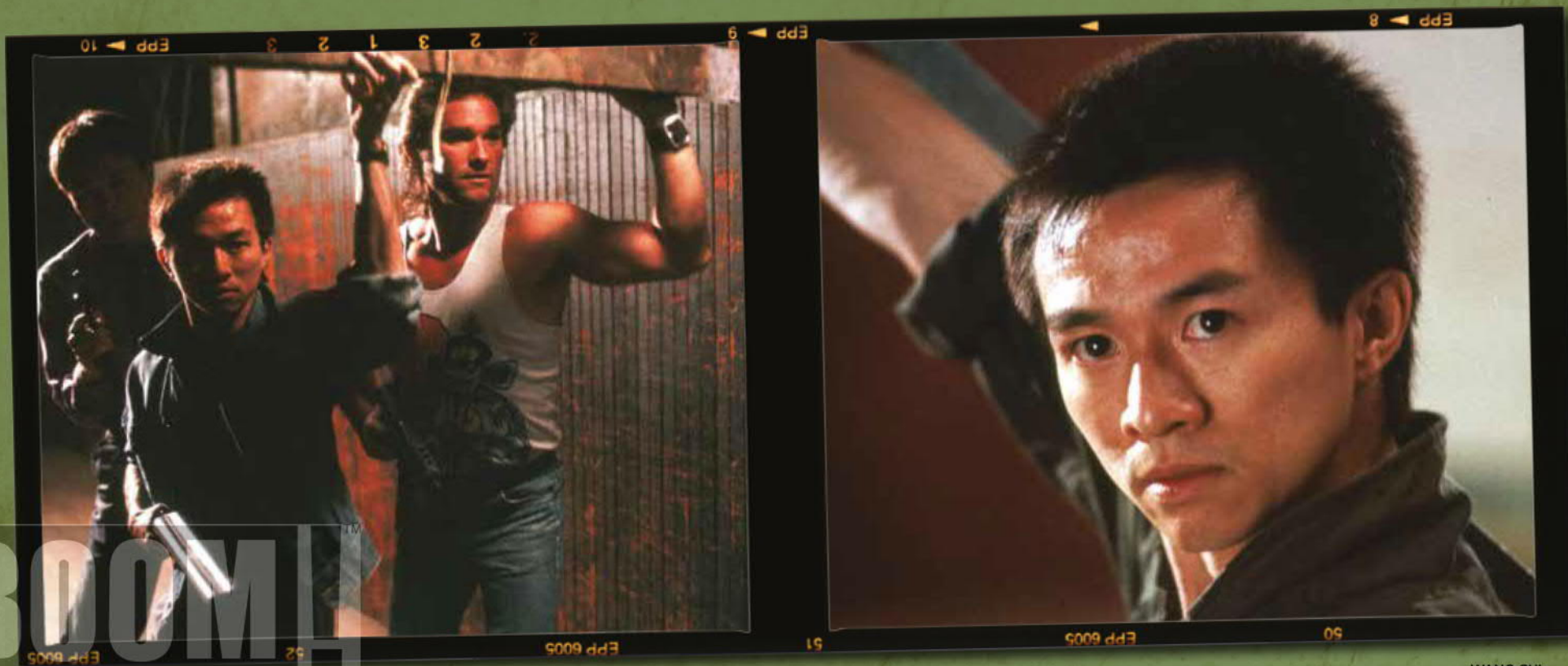
When asked about the origins of Wang Chi, screenwriter W.D. Richter pauses for a moment, and then joshes, "If I thought that Jack Burton should not shut up, because he was alone in a truck and CBs were a big deal and that made him somewhat of a blowhard, then you'd better not just populate this movie with people like him. You better have some grounded characters. If Jack is the centre, there has to be a balance around him of people who, weirdly enough, *need* him, but kind of sense that this is a tragic

thing that's happening." Of any character in *Big Trouble*, no one is more grounded, focused and heroic than Jack's best friend, Wang, so memorably realized by Dennis Dun.

Without a moment's hesitation throughout the story, Wang is prepared to: bet the farm on being able to slice a bottle clean in half with a machete, face hordes of martial artists, and battle supernatural forces in the name of rescuing his love, Miao Yin.

Yet the journey that found Dun playing his half of one of cinema's

THESE PAGES: Wang Chi (Dennis Dun) prepares to battle; escaping with his buddies Jack Burton (Kurt Russell) and Eddie Lee (Donald Li)







# THE ALLEY BATTLE: CHANG SING VS. WING KONG

“Of the fighting and all of the spectacular stuff,  
I love the alley fight.” JOHN CARPENTER

TOP LEFT: Wing Kong  
fighters in action

TOP CENTER: Stuart Quan  
as Chang Sing #4

TOP RIGHT: Martial artist  
Gerald Okamura poses with  
his Wing Kong character's  
signature gold six-shooter

OPPOSITE: Cast and crew work  
hard to film the alley battle

As a life-long martial arts buff, the alley battle in *Big Trouble* between the Chang Sing and Wing Kong was John Carpenter's first opportunity to stage a full-blown, martial arts melee on film. “These varied, beautiful and wonderful Chinese martial arts movies are violent but with an innocence about them. They're great martial arts action movies. So with *Big Trouble*, it was a case of, ‘What a great chance to do some of that in an American film.’ But you can't get normal American actors to fight like that. It takes years and years of training.”





# GRACIE LAW

"I didn't really know what I was in store for, because I'd never done anything like it."

KIM CATTRALL

If Jack Burton is the antithesis of a classic hero, then it's no surprise that his sparring/romantic foil is as far removed from the typical, action-film, heroine-in-distress as possible. That's immediately clear the second we're introduced to Gracie Law in the arrivals area of the San Francisco International Airport. A straight-arrow with a quick intellect, there's no question Law's got Jack's number as he sidles up to her with a lame pick-up line she shoots down like a sniper.

Gracie Law is a Howard Hawks-style heroine: a fast-talker, independent and fearless, even when caution might be the smarter move. Law clearly doesn't need saving, because she's saving others as a feisty civil rights crusader, with an insider's knowledge of the shady dealings of Chinatown, especially those of reclusive businessman, David Lo Pan. She's a delightfully progressive character within an utterly weird film

that, gratefully, makes its subversion equal-opportunity.

Because the role required the actress be adept in talky comedy, action, and look amazing in a ceremonial bridal costume, director John Carpenter admits casting took awhile. "I wasn't sure about Gracie Law. I remember we looked around and tested a bunch of actresses."

Kim Cattrall was a theatrically trained actress who studied at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts and the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in New York City. Earning a prestigious Genie Award nomination in 1982, Cattrall consequently was making a name for herself in Hollywood via her work in two huge comedies, *Porky's* (1981) and *Police Academy* (1984). Cattrall says she was sent the script for *Big Trouble in Little China*, and admits the idea alone of working with John Carpenter was cause for excitement. "I've always been a big John Carpenter fan. 'I'd

BOTTOM LEFT: Director John Carpenter advises Kim Cattrall during the airport sequence

BOTTOM RIGHT: A publicity photo featuring Cattrall, Kurt Russell and Suzee Pai

OPPOSITE: Cattrall as Gracie Law in her bridal ceremony gown and makeup

