



"In some sense, [*Big Trouble in Little China*] is [the promised *Buckaroo Banzai* sequel]..."

W.D. Richter

"I knew it!"

Tim Boo Ba

Tim "Tim Boo Ba"* *Monro* interviews W.D. "Rick" Richter the director of *Buckaroo Banzai* and the writer of *Big Trouble in Little China* and rips the lid off the secret relationship between these two cult classics. Tim assumes the reader has an encyclopedic knowledge of *Big Trouble*. If this is not the case he suggests consulting Wingkong.net, which is an extensive depository of *Big Trouble* lore. Also, the opinions expressed here are the views of the interviewer and do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of the editors of *World Watch One*.

Tim Boo Ba: On the *Big Trouble in Little China* DVD commentary track, Kurt Russell asks John Carpenter if you had directed *Buckaroo Banzai* before you wrote the script to *Big Trouble*. Carpenter says you did and Russell gushes that you were the "toast of the town" in Hollywood at the time. What's it like being the "toast of the town" in Hollywood?

W.D. Richter: That's an excellent question, Boo Ba. Can I call you "Boo Ba?"

TB: It'd be like a dream come true.

WDR: Well, I had to ask because it's such a ridiculous name, I thought it might offend you. What was the question?

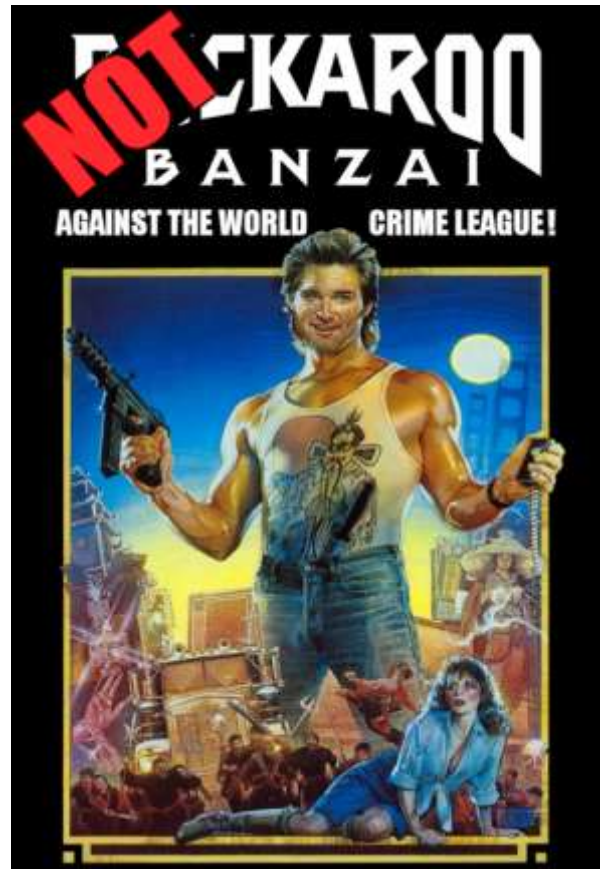
TB: What's it like being...

WDR: Right...the toast of the town. Painful. I got severely burned by Buckaroo's theatrical flame-out. Coast toast. Nothing to gush home about.

TB: So, everybody knows that *Big Trouble* is a re-written version of *Buckaroo Banzai Against the World Crime League* and that you were forced to re-tool it because David Begelman was sabotaging the Buckaroo franchise at the time. What was the original script with Buckaroo fightin' Hanoi Xan like?

WDR: Now, see, I don't write the Buckaroo adventures because I don't know the guy. Mac Rauch writes them because he does. "Write who you know," Boo Ba. That's why I wrote my version of Jack Burton into my version of *Big Trouble*. I know "Jack" because we were in Scouts together, and Mr. Russell had a few phone conversations with him, as did John. Hanoi Xan is kind of hard to get on the line, but I did listen in once when he called Mac to chew his ass out for not giving him a bigger part in the movie. Xan has a real high voice, like a lady, so what I did was I based the Miao Yin character on him, except I made her good.

* Tim Boo Ba first appeared in *Amazing Adult Fantasy* #9 (1962).



TB: But I've confirmed the *Big Trouble/Buckaroo Banzai* connection with two unimpeachable sources; Wikipedia.org and IMDB.com! Why not just come clean?

WDR: Boo Ba, are you a trial lawyer? Are you setting me up here? Hoping I'll reveal something that'll move global markets? Are you actually working for the Chinese?

TB: In this economy, aren't we all? And I totally get it that you're probably contractually obligated to stick with your cover story, but c'mon, it's kinda obvious that *Big Trouble* really *is* *Against the World Crime League*!

WDR: If you only have a hammer, Boo, every problem looks like a thumb. Spin me your nutty theory. I'm all ears.

TB: Yes! The moment I've been waiting for!!

Your most ingenious change was to pull the ol' switcheroo with the traditional hero/sidekick relationship. Wang Chi, who shares Buckaroo's Asian ancestry, is the actual "hero" of *Big Trouble*. Jack Burton is the comic sidekick. Jack plays the same role as a low-level Blue Blaze Irregular caught up in the shenanigans, like Casper or Scooter Lindley from the first movie. It's a clever enough ruse to fool Hollywood bigwigs, but not us hardcore Hong Kong Cavalier fans—Wang Chi is actually Buckaroo Banzai!

Once you watch the movie with your code broken the rest of the pieces fall into place. David Lo Pan/Lo Pan is Henry



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Shannon/Hanoi Xan—duh! The Wing Kong martial art murderers are obviously Xan's World Crime League bravos. Lo Pan's lieutenants; Thunder, Rain, and Lightning play the same role as Hanoi Xan's inner circle; Derek Warlock—Torture Master, Big Jack Mathers—Finance, and Dr. Hacken Kreuz Berndt-Ghoat—Xan's personal physician.**

You morphed father-figure Dr. Hikita and his scientific widgets like the "Oscillation Overthruster" into Egg Shen and his magical MacGuffins like the "Six Demon Bag." Margot Litzenberger, Eddie Lee, and Uncle Chu play the roles of various Hong Kong Cavaliers and Banzai Institute support staff.

WDR: Will you please run that by me again?

TB: I never get tired of this—Wang Chi is Buckaroo. Jack Burton is a beefed-up Caspar Lindley equivalent (who got his truck stolen instead of his helicopter). Lo Pan is Hanoi Xan. The Wing Kong are Xan's bravos. The three Storms are the three members of Xan's inner circle and Margot Litzenberger, Eddie Lee, et al. are various members of Team Banzai!

WDR: Boy. My God. Whew. Sounds as complicated as a G-cypher. Isn't Jack more like Perfect Tommy on beer than just some "low-level Blue Blaze Irregular caught up in the shenanigans"?

TB: So you admit it—Jack Burton was actually Perfect Tommy with a drinking problem in the original version of the script! Any other obvious parallels I missed?

WDR: Well, you know, this is pretty thin ice you're skating on, Boo Ba. Folks see way too many parallels in life that are, in reality (where most life happens), more like intersections. I'm thinking of Ronald Reagan and Mao. Jack Benny and Picasso. True enough that Derek Warlock appeared in *Return of the Screw* and Big Jack Mathers appeared in *A Tomb with a View*...and both titles end with "w", the first letter in "World Crime League" AND "Wheaties." You haven't actually even seen Dr. Hacken Kreuz Berndt-Ghoat yet, though, have you? I'm lost here. I need a compass or at least a protractor. "Hacken Kreuz" translates from German to "chopped cross" or swastika. "Berndt-Ghoat" is a simple corruption of "burnt goat," which is a common offering in satanic rituals. But that doesn't prove anything, does it? Or does it? Math is not my strong suit. Did you know that Ellen Barkin was originally cast as Jack Burton? Then they found out she couldn't drive a stick, and they paid her off so she could go after Ron Perlman 24-7.**

TB: I'd heard that, yeah. Nice to have it confirmed by you, though. But what about the green-eyed twins, Miao Yin and Gracie Law as Peggy Banzai and Penny Priddy?! Peggy was a

prisoner of Xan like Miao Yin was a prisoner of Lo Pan. Penny would have joined Team Banzai to rescue Peggy just like Gracie Law did for Miao Yin in **Big Trouble!** With Buckaroo and Peggy reunited, Penny would naturally form a reluctant romance with another character, just like Gracie Law did with Jack Burton!

WDR: Holy cow. But that can't be right. I mean, Peggy Banzai wasn't Chinese, was she? And Lo Pan is actually Spanish or Italian for "the bread."

TB: I'll take your word for it. One last quick question. I found the following info on Wingkong.net via Wikipedia.org via *Starlog Magazine*, or some such, "The first version of the **Big Trouble** screenplay was written by first-time screenwriters Gary Goldman and David Weinstein. Goldman had been inspired by a new wave of martial arts films that had 'all sorts of weird actions and special effects, shot against this background of Oriental mysticism and modern sensibilities.' [1] They had written a Western originally set in the 1880s with Jack Burton as a cowboy who rides into town." [2] If **Big Trouble** started as **Buckaroo Banzai**, how can there be an earlier version of the script with Jack Burton as a cowboy?

WDR: What the hell are these numbers you keep saying? Are they part of the question?

TB: They indicate footnotes from the original source material that I was too lazy to delete. According to this material, "Goldman and Weinstein envisioned combining Chinese fantasy elements with the western." [3] They submitted the script to producers Paul Monash and Keith Barish during the summer of 1982. Monash bought their script and had them do at least one rewrite but still did not like the results. He remembers, "The problems came largely from the fact it was set in turn-of-the-century San Francisco, which affected everything - style, dialogue, action." [2] None of this is true is it?

WDR: Shouldn't that be "4"?

TB: What?

WDR: Never mind. I'm sorry, excuse me for interrupting. I just think you said "2" when it should've been "4". No problem. One is just twice the other. What happened next?

TB: So, according to internet sources, "Goldman rejected a request by 20th Century Fox for a re-write that asked for major alterations. He was angered when the studio wanted to update it to a contemporary setting."

WDR: Now I must object. The studio only hated the script they bought. They had no idea why or what to do about it, so they

**Derek Warlock first appeared in *Return of the Screw* #1 (2006). Big Jack Mathers first appeared in *A Tomb with a View* #1 (2009). Dr. Hacken Kreuz Berndt-Ghoat remains at large. "Hacken Kreuz" is German for "chopped cross" or swastika. "Berndt-Ghoat" is a corruption of "burnt goat"—a common offering in satanic rituals.

***Ron Perelman is a billionaire who has owned, among other things, Revlon, Marvel Comics, and Ellen Barkin. He was "technically" married to Ellen "Penny Priddy" Barkin from 2000 to 2006. Rumors have it that she may have received up to 65 million dollars and all the cigars she can smoke in the divorce settlement. Good for her.



sent it out to a bunch of writers, me included. We came in one by one and pitched our desperate thoughts. I said, "Let's make it contemporary so there's only one level of separation for a modern audience." Larry Gordon, who was Supreme Commander of Production at the time, called my idea "a no brainer." I think that was a compliment, or I at least took it that way since, remember, I was toast at the time, hungry for a kind word.

TB: Amazing, amazing. That's the best Hollywood story I ever heard...full of pathos and heartbreak! Wow! But back to internet's version of the events, "So then the studio then removed the original writers from the project. However, those guys still wanted credit for their contributions..."[4]

WDR: "5."

TB: "So the studio brought you in, a veteran script doctor..."

WDR: Where on Earth do you get your information, Boo Ba?

TB: Wingkong.net via Wikipedia.org via *Starlog* or some such.

WDR: I was just a writer looking to stay alive. Oh, right, and the toasted director of the cult film **Buckaroo Banzai**.

TB: So, according to one version of the origin of the **Big Trouble** script, you extensively rewrote it, modernizing everything. Almost everything in the original script was discarded except for Lo Pan's story.[5] I mean [6]. You used **Rosemary's Baby** as your template, presenting, as you said on *Meet The Press*, "...the foreground story in a familiar context—rather than San Francisco at the turn-of-the-century, which distances the audience immediately—I just have one simple remove, the world underground. I figure you, Mr. & Mrs. Audience, have a much better chance of making direct contact with the story."[2]

WDR: "2"?! Are you drunk, Poo Ba? That doesn't sound like anything I'd ever say. I was on *Meet the Press* to demonstrate how to make a pirate hat out of a single page of the *New York Times*.

TB: That's "Boo Ba." Legend has it that you wrote your own draft of **Big Trouble** in ten weeks.[3]

WDR: Five weeks. And "8" not "3."

TB: Gah! Why didn't I remove those numbers when I had the chance?! So, the story goes that Gary Goldman contacted you by phone...

WDR: Disguising his voice. Rather poorly, I thought, even though I'd never heard him speak before.

TB: ...and suggested that you should not work on the project. According to internet sources, you told him, "I'm sorry the studio doesn't want to go forward with you guys, but my turning it down is not going to get you the job. They'll just hire someone else." Fox wanted to deny Goldman and Weinstein writing credit and eliminated their names from press releases.



Fandom's information org chart: The Spice must flow.

WDR: Sure. So they wouldn't have to pay them their bonuses. Studios love to screw writers. It's like sex for them.

TB: Speaking of sex, is it true that the characters in the film reminded John Carpenter of the characters in **Bringing Up Baby** or **His Girl Friday**?

WDR: John has his own helicopter, and he's a crackerjack pilot. John's one of the good guys. But I never met Howard Hawks. Did he make a lot of movies with Asians?

TB: No, no. Cary Grant was English. But these characters you wrote in **Big Trouble** are very 1930s, Howard Hawks people [11].

WDR: I think so, yeah, 11. You mean, the rapid-fire dialogue, especially between Jack Burton and Gracie Law? Is that an example of what the John might be referring to?

TBB: I guess so, but to get back on track—a lot of people wonder what happened to *Buckaroo Banzai Against the World Crime League*, the promised **Buckaroo Banzai** sequel...

WDR: Not a day goes by when I don't too, Boo. In some sense, BTILC is it. But mostly it's not. I mean they're both about people in trouble, just like all of us are, some more than others, like you.

TB: The internet says, and I believe it, that when your *Buckaroo* sequel fell through, you radically retooled the script into *Big Trouble*, handed to John Carpenter, and voila, a classic was born.

WDR: What script? Mac's? Are you saying I stole Mac Rauch's sequel script and sold it to Fox? You'll be hearing from my lawyers, Timmy.

TB: They'd have better luck suing George Spelvin or Alan Smithee.****

****Look 'em up.



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