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## **Big Trouble** **(COLOR)**

**Orphaned by distrib, amiable screwballer faces uphill b.o. battle.**

A Columbia Pictures release of a Columbia-Delphi III production. Produced (uncredited) by Michael Lobell. Directed by John Cassavetes. Screenplay, "Warren Bogle" (Andrew Bergman); camera (Panavision, Metrocolor), Bill Butler; editor, Donn Cambern, Ralph Winters; music, Bill Conti; cos-designer, Joe I. Tompkins; casting, Mike Fenton, Jane Feinberg, Judy Taylor, production manager, Howard Pine; production designer, Gene Callahan; assistant directors, Duncan Henderson, Chris Ryan; set decorator, Lee Poll; sound Martin Bolger. Reviewed at Cinema I, N.Y., May 30, 1986. (MPAA Rating: R.) Running time: 93 MINS.

Steve Rickey	Peter Falk
Leonard Hoffman	Alan Arkin
Blanche Rickey	Beverly D'Angelo
O'Mara	Charles Durning
Noozel	Paul Dooley
Winslow	Robert Stack
Arlene Hoffman	Valerie Curtin
Dr. Lopez	Richard Libertini
Peter Hoffman	Steve Alterman
Michael Hoffman	Jerry Pavlon
Joshua Hoffman	Paul La Greca
Detective Murphy	John Finnegan
Police Captain	Karl Lukas
Maid	Gloria Gifford

As yet another major studio title that almost didn't make it off the shelf because of poor test previews, "Big Trouble" is a small, mild-mannered comedy featuring an ensemble of screen comedians doing what the public is accustomed to seeing them do. It's up to older moviegoers, those disenfranchised from today's broad screen teen comedies, to pack the theaters and prove Columbia wrong. That, however, makes for an unlikely scenario.

Conceived to capitalize on the success of Falk-Arkin's 1979 laugh-riot "The In-Laws," "Big Trouble" saw trouble during production in early 1984. Original helmer Andrew Bergman ("In-Laws" scripter) withdrew and John Cassavetes took over. Final product omits the names of coproducer/writer Bergman and coproducer Michael Lobell.

Echoing the story line of their earlier collaboration, Falk plays the incorrigible conman, a comic to straight man Arkin's hapless, unwilling accomplice. Pic also borrows from the classic "Double Indemnity," with Arkin as the insurance salesman gone bad and Beverly D'Angelo as the wife who conspires to murder her husband (Falk).

Unlike Fred MacMurray and Barbara Stanwyck, however, it's not love that motivates them to swindle the insurance company but a \$5,-000,000 insurance policy. D'Angelo can collect if Falk dies in a fall off a train (sound familiar?). Arkin, under pressure from wife Valerie Curtin to send his three sons to Yale, would also reap the ill-gotten gain.

In the intermittently amusing variation on the "Double Indemnity" theme, it turns out Falk and D'Angelo faked the husband's murder. Arkin finds out he was duped when Falk comes to a meeting with Arkin's superiors (Charles Durning and Robert Stack) "disguised" as the widow's attorney.

Although laboring outside of his narrative element, to say the least, Cassavetes did a creditable job directing his actors, all of whom rise above the thin screenplay. Comedic highlights include initial meeting of the conspiratorial trio and Falk's attempts to act the corpse during the investigation by skeptical claims chief Durning.

Proceedings get out of hand toward the end in a misfired climax involving terrorists out to bomb Stack's insurance offices. But the authorities are all too willingly to embrace more white lies from the lovable, resourceful conmen out to make a dishonest living. That yields an all's-well-that-ends-well conclusion, and even a sequel setup.

Tech credits are fine, although Bill Conti's ceaselessly whimsical score evokes tv sitcoms. Overall tame tone of "Big Trouble," however literate and well-intentioned, might explain preview audience apathy. Barring boffo returns in its exclusive Gotham run, distrib reportedly isn't willing to expend any more energy and money on the film at this juncture. — *Binn.*