

# Leap In The Dark

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## DVD Review: *Sixteen Days In China* - A Documentary By Martin Atkins

What would you do? How far would you go if you were a musician and record producer who was sick and tired of all the bullshit involved in the North American music scene to find something new and exciting? Where would you be willing to travel in order to find bands and musicians whose first priority was making great music and not about being stars?

Well if you're [Martin Atkins](#) and you're with a record company called [Invisible Records](#) and you'd heard that there was something exciting in China, you get on a plane and fly off to Beijing for sixteen days to check it out. Your hope is to get some bands into the recording studio, and even better sign them to contracts so you can produce a CD of their music back in the States. What a great idea!

Last year I was able to listen to the results of that trip on the two recordings that Martin produced as a result of that visit, [Look Directly Into The Sun](#) a compilation of the bands he recorded while over there and [China Dub Soundsystem](#) a series of tracks that Martin worked up with traditional Chinese and Tibetan music he recorded in Beijing, and overdubs recorded in Chicago back at his own studio. I remember being blown away by the music on [Look Directly Into The Sun](#) as it was everything that I had loved about bands like The Clash, The Ramones, and all the really good punk from both sides of the Atlantic. I could see how Martin, former drummer with Public Image Limited (PIL), Nine Inch Nails, and other post punk/industrial bands, would have fallen in love with the music and the bands.



So, this year when the opportunity arose to see him tell the story of that trip on DVD I jumped at the chance to check it out. We hear so much about China these days that any opportunity to get some first hand information from someone who has been over there would be interesting enough, but a DVD about recording punk rock musicians in China sounded too good to pass up. What I hadn't counted on was what an interesting, honest, and just flat out funny man Martin Atkins is, and the combination of him, the music, and his voyage make [Sixteen Days In China](#), produced by [MVD Visual](#), highly entertaining, thoughtful, and bloody informative.

Right from the start you know you're going to be dealing with something a little different from your standard documentary, as it opens with Martin doing a stand up on a city street waxing philosophical about what it is that might attract you to a specific place. At first you think he might be in Beijing until the person shooting interrupts to point out to Martin that you can see the Sears Tower in the background, and you realize he's shooting in his current home town of Chicago. What I love is that he kept all those bits in, and through out the movie we watch him trying to shoot this footage of Chicago standing in for Beijing and keep having to stop because something way too obviously American will show up in the footage.

The biggest irony is of course when we do get to Beijing is how much there is that's familiar in among all that's different. Probably the most ubiquitous sign of Western cultural invasion is the coffee chain Starbucks. Martin spends a little time on that phenomenon, but then moves on to what's important, the music. We find out that he had



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