

HOLIDAY FILMS /  
SHOWEAST 2003

# BOXOFFICE®

THE BUSINESS MAGAZINE OF THE GLOBAL MOTION PICTURE INDUSTRY

NOVEMBER 2003, \$3.95

## REVIEWS

### SUSPENDED ANIMATION ★★★

*Starring Alex McArthur, Laura Esterman and Sage Allen. Directed by John Hancock. Written by Dorothy Tristan. Produced by John Hancock. A First Run release. Thriller. Not yet rated. Running time: 114 min.*

Gather elements of "Misery" and "Whatever Happened to Baby Jane," toss in a bit of cannibalism and reverse the order of things, and you've got "Suspended Animation," a low-budget thriller with several good character actors and no stars, helmed by a veteran director with a sure hand. It's not a masterpiece, but it's effective.

Animator Thomas Kempton ("Dischord's" Alex McArthur) finds himself held captive by a couple of creepy sisters after a snowmobile accident. They plan to kill and eat him as they have several unfortunates who wandered onto their property. All of this happens early on in the film, which is actually about Kempton's obsession with tracking down the daughter of one of his captors and making a movie about the whole crazy event. In the process, he incurs the wrath of the crazy cannibal sister ("Armageddon's" Sage Allen) who got away.

Director John Hancock's long career is notable for some exceptional work on television, including episodes of "Hill Street Blues" and the mid-'80s "Twilight Zone" series, as well as in film, with features like the 1973 Robert De Niro drama "Bang the Drum Slowly" and the 1971 classic horror/thriller "Let's Scare Jessica to Death." Indeed, "Suspended Animation" plays like a '70s horror film: It's very gory and no one is afraid to take it all well over the top. It's raw and simplistic, but oddly refreshing as well. There's definitely something to be said for doing it the old-school way.—*Tim Cogshell*

November, 2003 (R-124)



Let's scare audiences to death again,  
says director John Hancock.

# SUSPENDED ANIMATION

## Cannibal Hangup

By ABBIE BERNSTEIN



It's no Disney film when animator Tom Kempton (Alex McArthur) becomes a captive of the Boulette sisters (Sage Allen and Laura Esterman).

**A**ppearances can be deceiving. By now, most horror fans know to beware of wholesome-looking cabins in the backwoods, but what shall we make of this scene? High in the Malibu hills, with a spectacular view of the cliffs and crashing waves below, in a beautifully maintained yard, a married couple sit in quiet discussion. Are they talking about their stock options, family planning or perhaps Aunt Alexis' latest wicked scheme? No, they're discussing the husband's quest for insight into the daughter of one of two cannibal women who tied him up, cut off his finger and nearly ate him.

Welcome to the set of *Suspended Animation*, the first horror film in 30 years by director John Hancock, who previously wrought 1971's well-respected *Let's Scare Jessica to Death*—before moving on to everything from the Robert De Niro-starrer *Bang the Drum Slowly* to the prison

drama *Weeds* to the Christmas reindeer fantasy *Prancer*.

Between camera setups, Hancock explains why he wanted to return to the horror genre: "I felt like I got kind of typed as warm and human for a long time, and I felt like breaking out, because I'm neither," he laughs. "I wanted to do something scary."

Hancock didn't have to search far for material—*Suspended Animation* (beginning a platform release October 31 from First Run Features) is written by his wife and frequent collaborator, Dorothy Tristan, who estimates that she began work on the script five or six years ago. "I wrote the script, and then I wrote a novel of it, and then I redid the script. Done other things in between, but [worked on it] a long time."

Tristan says her inspiration for *Suspended Animation* was "the desire to have fun with evil. Because in my opinion, we're always trying to be good. It's normal

for most people to be good. We rarely give ourselves the right to be evil, and I found it very satisfying. The idea came to me, and I said, 'I'm gonna write this.' And it wrote itself. The first draft was very different from the final draft, because I wrote a novel in between. I fell in love with the story as I wrote it. It was a mean-spirited thing to begin with. And as I got into it, the obsession with those who do us evil took me over. I went deeper and deeper into that, until finally it came out in a loving way. So my feeling about it is, as evil as many people are, there's love all the way through."

In *Suspended Animation*, animator Tom Kempton (Alex McArthur) survives an ordeal that is something like a cross between *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *Arsenic and Old Lace*. Although he has escaped his tormentors, Tom becomes fixated on learning more about them and tracks down Clara (Maria Cina), who seems to have no idea that she's descended from psychotic man-eater Vanessa Boulette (Laura Esterman). Then again, Clara's 15-year-old son Sandor (Fred Meyers) shows signs of being a chip off the old (chopping) block.

Tristan didn't run the premise past Hancock before embarking on the script. "I never ask him," she laughs. "I assume that if I'm interested in it, he will be, too. We've been married for 25 years and we think alike, and if he didn't like it, he would say, 'I think that stinks.'" Then



SEAL OF APPROVAL  
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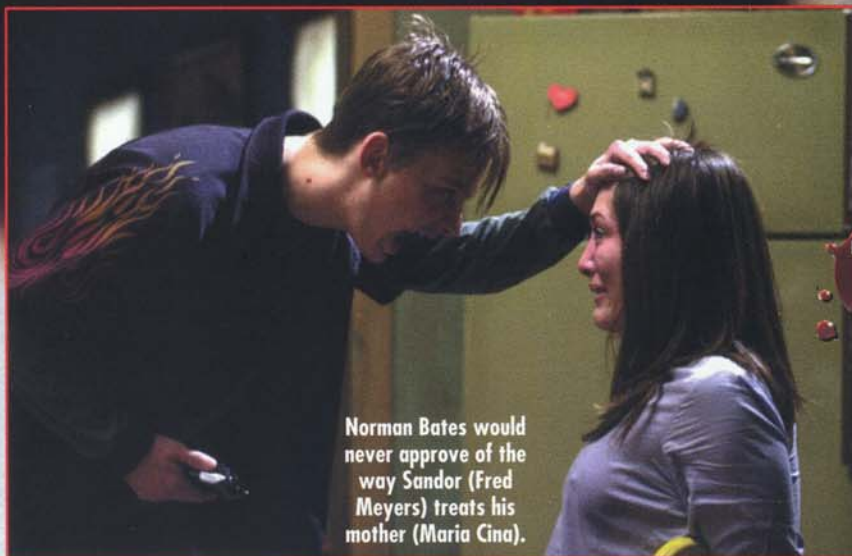
again, so far it has not occurred. "I mean, that situation has not come up—has it?" Tristan asks Hancock. "Can you remember anything where I had an idea and you thought it stank, and that stopped it?"

"No, never," Hancock replies. "Well, I remember you were working on something when [people] were being beaten in it constantly, and I said, 'That's too many beatings.'"

"John was right," Tristan recalls.

The narrative for *Animation* may be grim, but it's an unmistakably happy set—filmmakers, actors and crew people all cheerfully tease and add observations

Photos: Copyright FilmAcres



Norman Bates would never approve of the way Sandor (Fred Meyers) treats his mother (Maria Cina).

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37



during each other's interviews. Although there's a consensus among the production team that *Suspended Animation* is not all that violent for the genre, it still has its share of gory moments. Faith Marie, part of the makeup FX crew who is also production coordinator and one of the 2nd assistant directors, cites some highlights: "Our main cannibal gets shot in the face. We had a gelatin prosthetic that covered part of her face and marred her beauty."

"The character is stuck on herself," Tristan adds. "Not an endearing quality."

Leading man McArthur, perhaps best-known to genre fans as the psycho killer Charlie Reece in William Friedkin's *Rampage*, says he wanted to play Tom largely because of director Hancock. "He directed me in an episode of *Hill Street Blues* 15 years ago, and I just have always wanted to work with him again." McArthur didn't have much time to prepare for the role, as his casting was a last-minute affair: "They sent me the script and I auditioned for it and didn't meet again with them until the end of January. I met with them at 11 a.m. and was on a plane at 3:30 to Indiana."

The role's most difficult aspect, McArthur feels, is that Tom spends much of the film in a state of mortal terror. "The hardest thing to get up is fear," he says. "A lot of men spend most of their lives trying to control fear—when a situation arises, you keep yourself under control—so it's usually the hardest thing for me to work on. But considering the way the scenes were shot, the way I got the role and how fast I had to prepare for it, I had [no problem with] control," he laughs.

Sometimes exhibiting fear didn't require much acting, McArthur adds, discussing the scene where Tom loses a

We'd bet Ann  
Boulette's (Allen)  
favorite movie star  
is Kathy Bates  
in *Misery*.



finger. "I had to have a prosthetic hand made so they could hack it off. It wasn't uncomfortable, but that was a little exciting, when they raised that cleaver and whacked off that fake finger, right next to my real one."

Actress Cina says of the shoot, "It's been an adventure, unlike anything else I've ever experienced, because of the storyline's dark nature and what we all go through, my character in particular. You're taught by acting coaches and teachers how to get to those places—but no one really teaches you how to come back!" she laughs. "So it has been interesting."

Playing scenes covered in blood has been particularly challenging, Cina notes: "Most of it, I think, is psychosomatic. We just used buckets and buckets of blood. And at first, you're like, 'Oh, fake blood,' but psychologically, after spending an afternoon being covered in [another character's] blood—at the end of the day, we went to the movies, and there was a gory scene. I couldn't take it, because the effect that spending an afternoon surrounded by blood had on me was something that doesn't shake off very easily."

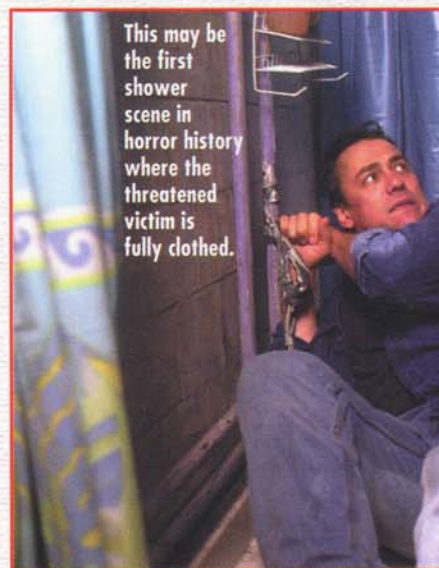
"But at the same time," Marie chimes in, "I've got to tell you, it's a heck of a lot of fun doing it, just making blood pump from someone's neck."

"Yeah," Cina remembers, laughing, "she was squeezing it."

"We run a tube through the [appliance]," Marie explains, "and physically, by hand, were pushing it through there, basically with mustard bottles. We put tubes into the bottles and squeezed it up through there, and used a latex bladder glued to the neck with a prosthetic laid over it and blending into the skin, so we were putting tubes through the neck, covering it up with a fake neck and making incisions."

The scene was made

This may be  
the first  
shower  
scene in  
horror history  
where the  
threatened  
victim is  
fully clothed.

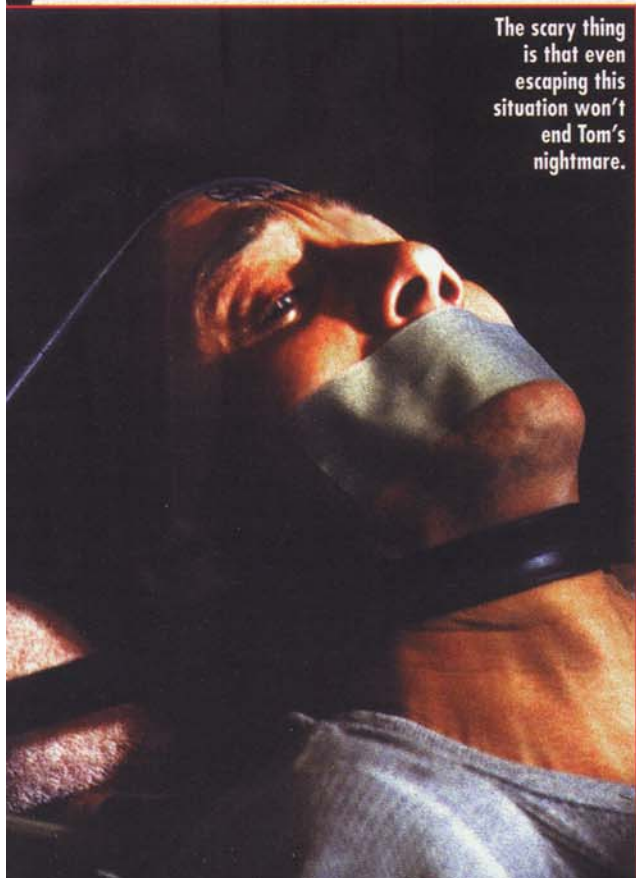


more complicated by the fact that the actor in question didn't like having his neck touched under normal circumstances. "We spent two and a half hours in makeup doing the scene," Marie recalls, "and he was just gripping the chair the whole time, but he was such a trouper—it actually made him physically sick, but he did it and he went through the scene. It was very scary, but it was cool."

Makeup artist James Lacey adds that it's part of his job to help the actors adjust to makeup that is physically and/or psychologically uncomfortable. "That's the thing—that's why makeup people get paid well, because we are psychologists. [Actors] come in here and we set the tone, we have soothing music, try to create a nice, easy atmosphere, positive, and it sets the tone for the day for them."

The appliances were made by Victor Cao. "Victor has a very large effects/makeup supply store [Fun FX] in South Bend, Indiana," Marie reveals, "which is about 45 minutes from where we house [the *Animation* production] company. I know him because I've been in prosthetic makeup as a hobby for quite a while. I called him up and said, 'Hey, would you be interested in doing a film?' and he said, 'Well, we'll see what we can work out,' and he built our prosthetics, which are wonderful, but he didn't have the time to do applications. We worked kind of tag-team."

The scary thing  
is that even  
escaping this  
situation won't  
end Tom's  
nightmare.





"I was shocked that we could find somebody like that in the Midwest," Hancock interjects.

Filming on *Animation* was originally intended to be divided between Indiana, where Hancock has a studio, and the Malibu location, but the production wound up visiting Canada as well. "We chased the snow," Tristan says. "We still had a snowmobile chase and an avalanche [to shoot]. We lost [the snow] in Indiana, so we had to go up there."

Assistant director Anthony Aguilera points with pride to the speed of production on the 48-day shoot: "This is a high-definition [video], two-camera wire deal, in the field, and these guys have been cranking out 20 setups a day. That's amazing for anybody, especially the conditions these guys have to shoot under. We've probably done 650 setups so far, and maybe we'll end up with a total of about 700 by the time this picture is through. But our best day was 34 setups in a 12-hour day."

Hancock had not worked with high-definition digital video before, but feels it suits *Animation* for reasons of both texture and budget.

"This digital technology sees into shadows so well, it really gets wonderful detail there and I thought that would be good for something scary. I was so impressed with the [photography] tests. It looked so rich and deluxe and you save the cost of the film up front; you can shoot as much of it as you want and blow up the final movie. I shoot a lot, big [number of takes] ratio. [High-definition was a] big cost-saver up front. It costs quite a bit later to blow it up, but you end up only blowing up the final product." Cinematographer Misha (The *Rune-stone*) Suslov notes that high-def is easier to light than film: "It's so wonderful."

The digital medium has made itself felt in all aspects of the production, Marie explains. "It affects everything—it affects wardrobe, it affects makeup, it affects locations. It picks up certain things—we have not really been able to use red in the film, especially in the chase scenes with the snowmobiles. We're afraid of it bleeding in the picture. [The movie blood] is maroonish—we have to be very careful about the bright red blood."

"Yeah, you don't want the

blood to be bleeding," says Lacey, playing on words but sincere. "You can quote me on that."

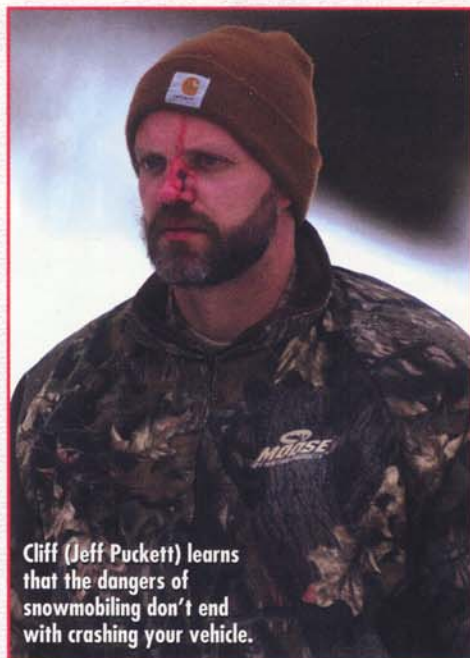
"We had to tone down the bright red," Marie adds. "We had to use a darker-colored blood, because a bright red looked so vibrant—we'd put it on and they'd go, 'Eh, I don't think so,' and we'd go back to the monitor and go, 'No, no, no,' and use a thicker, darker blood."

Hancock and Tristan used to live next door to the estate where today's filming is taking place, until the catastrophic Malibu fire in 1993 left their home in ruins. They haven't rebuilt on the property, Hancock explains: "We're afraid it will burn again. We have two mobile homes that we use [on the grounds], one as an office and one to live in." The couple divides their time between Malibu and LaPorte, IN, where their production company is based. "We always had in mind filming *Suspended Animation* in northern Indiana, where we shot *Prancer*. We learned on that movie that it was a good place to do a snow picture, because you have snow and it's not too cold to work, so we always thought we'd shoot it right here [in Malibu] and in Indiana."

"And that was part of the genesis of it, really," he continues. "We wanted to do a winter thing, and it started out with guys on a snowmobile. Then these crazy ladies enter and it really took off when they began to talk. Originally, the novel started with the fire that burned this house. We wrote it to film in our dead house." At the time, they hadn't realized that the next-door neighbors' home would be available as a location: "We lucked out."



As Tom's wife Hilary, Rebecca Harrell (left) returns from director John Hancock's *Prancer* for a much more chilling snowbound tale.



Cliff (Jeff Puckett) learns that the dangers of snowmobiling don't end with crashing your vehicle.

Over two years after the Malibu shoot, *Suspended Animation* has turned out to be one of those rare horror films made without a distributor to be picked up for theatrical release—on Halloween, no less. "Which is really the perfect time," Hancock notes, speaking by phone from his Indiana office. "It was always my hope that it would be released on Halloween. I was determined to have a theatrical release. Sometimes you can get more money quickly if you just go to cable and give them a premiere, but I didn't really want to do that."

Hancock has known First Run executive Seymour Wishman for decades, although this is the first time the company has put out one of the director's films. "We invited [Wishman] to a screening as a friend, and then he said, 'Well, I think I can sell this,'" says Hancock, who observes that prerelease reaction has been strong. "We've won Best Feature at the Haunted Newport Festival—we've won three different first prizes at film festivals. People were scared, or horrified—they would say, 'It ruined my day,' that kind of thing," he laughs.

It seems unlikely Hancock will go as long between horror projects again as he did between *Let's Scare Jessica to Death* and *Suspended Animation*. For one thing, he points out, "I don't think I'll live long enough!" At present, he is working on screenplays about the Civil War and drugs in high schools, but he and Tristan do have another horror script in the offing: "It's about a couple living in Malibu, and the guy's sister comes and there's a creature from someplace else. There are beheadings."

For now, Hancock has simple hopes for *Suspended Animation*'s audiences: "Just come and have a good time—and wear a Halloween costume to the opening."





## SERIALKILLERVILLE!



**SUSPENDED ANIMATION** (2001) ♂♂♂  
D: John Hancock. Alex McArthur, Laura Esterman, Sage Allen, Rebecca Harrell, Maria Cina, Fred Meyers, Daniel Riordan, Jeff Puckett, J.E. Freeman. 115 mins. (TBA)

More than 30 years after his over-the-top 1971 cult shriekfest *Let's Scare Jessica to Death*, director Hancock returns to the genre fold with a new flick that leaves the top but the merest speck in the (decidedly cracked) rear-view mirror. With enough goofy, gruesome twists to fill a half-dozen thrillers, *Suspended Animation* starts out as a cannibalistic Misery (complete with Kathy Bates clone Allen) as major Hollywood animator Tom Kempton (McArthur) finds himself a captive of a supremely scary middle-age sister act—backwoods Baby Jane variation Vanessa Boulette (Esterman) and her portly sib Ann (Allen)—following a Midwestern snowmobile mishap. After a couple of sadistic, squirm-inducing vignettes, the film suddenly veers into icy *Deliverance* terrain before time-and-place-shifting to L.A. and a profusion of additional shocks and surprises so exteme as to border on literal overkill, including a close-up pimple-popping moment to rival *Clean, Shaven*'s infamous fingernail-removal scene. To delve into specifics would seriously risk ruining *Suspended Animation*'s unapologetic Grand Guignol pleasures; suffice it to say that Hancock and scripter spouse Dorothy Tristan have the chops to pull off one of the most outlandish fearfests of recent years, one that would form a terrific twinbill with the Don Dohler gore-a-thon *Harvesters* (VS #42). Among the thespes, former screen psycho McArthur (*Rampage*) turns in strenuous work as an ultra-victim, rivaling Zohra Lampert's ordeal in *Jessica*. The Boulette Family—including serial-killer teen grandson Sandor (Meyers) and creepy jailbird brother Philip (Freeman)—can take its rightful place beside *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*'s Sawyer clan as one of the nuttiest nuclear units in fright-film history. When we caught *Suspended Animation* at a Palm Beach International Film Festival matinee, the audience gasps were loud and frequent; this would have been a great flick to watch with a vintage 42<sup>nd</sup> Street crowd. Look for it wherever it turns up next, hopefully in time for Halloween 2002. ♂

—The Phantom

## Filmmakers in Focus! LET'S SCARE THE AUDIENCE TO DEATH! DIRECTOR JOHN HANCOCK ON *SUSPENDED ANIMATION* As Told To The Phantom

The Phantom spoke with  
director John Hancock in  
April 2002.

**PHANTOM** You did *Let's Scare Jessica to Death*, then went into serious dramatic films. What drew you back to the thriller genre?

**JOHN HANCOCK** Well, I've always liked them. I mean, you know, there's a lot of accident in terms of what projects you're offered and I guess I got kind of typed after *Bang the Drum Slowly* as warm and human. And I don't feel warm and human especially. *Suspended Animation* gave me the chance to scare people again.

**PHANTOM** Do you have any particular memories of making *Bang the Drum Slowly*? De Niro was just reaching stardom at that point.

**HANCOCK** Yeah, he was wonderful, he was very easy to work with. The producer on that was very difficult but consequently everybody involved in it artistically got along very well. The difficulty was all focused on one guy!

**PHANTOM** Do you like this genre more than the dramatic films?

**HANCOCK** I like it all. Whatever I'm working on I'm tending to like. I felt a little weird doing *Prancer*, about a little girl and a reindeer! But I got into it. I love to switch—you know, do one thing, then do quite a different kind of thing. Between *Weeds* and *Prancer* felt like the biggest switch of all.

**PHANTOM** *Suspended Animation* is an indie. How did it come about?

**HANCOCK** Well, you know, *Let's Scare Jessica to Death* and *Bang the Drum Slowly* were both independent productions.

**PHANTOM** And this one was written by your wife [Dorothy Tristan].

**HANCOCK** Well, we wrote *Weeds* together, and she wrote *A Piece of Eden*. Then the last draft of *Prancer* and a project for HBO called *Steal the Sky*.



All Trussed Up With No Place to Go: Alex McArthur stars in John Hancock's *Suspended Animation*.  
(Photos courtesy of John Hancock)

**PHANTOM** Is her novel *Suspended Animation* available?

**HANCOCK** It's not published yet.

**PHANTOM** Is it pretty close to the script?

**HANCOCK** Yeah, it is. Obviously, it has a lot of stuff in it that the script doesn't have.

**PHANTOM** *Suspended Animation* starts at a very high pitch and continues to top itself. Of all the over-the-top elements, I think the top-per is the pimple-popping.

**HANCOCK** Yes!

**PHANTOM** Was that in the original script?

**HANCOCK** Yeah, sure—that's my wife!

**PHANTOM** And you had to bring in a pimple FX person?

**HANCOCK** Yeah, sure, it would have been disgusting if it had been his own. Yeah, that was good.

**PHANTOM** And the kid was something.

**HANCOCK** Yeah, he's good. He has some Disney television series [*Even Stevens*]. Much different part!



Psycho sister Sage Allen casts warm and fuzzy glance in scene from *Jessica* director John Hancock's *Suspended Animation*.

**HANCOCK** Across the street, yeah, and on the lot. We lived there for 20 years and it burned in that big fire in '94. Four hundred houses burned in Malibu. The house across the street was rebuilt and the guy loaned it to us. We did not rebuild ours for fear that it would burn again. It seemed like a huge investment of time and money just to see it burn again. 'Cause that area burns periodically.

**"I guess I got kind of typed after *Bang the Drum Slowly* as warm and human. And I don't feel warm and human especially."**  
**John Hancock**

**PHANTOM** Now, *Let's Scare Jessica to Death* was released directly to theaters. That wasn't a festival entry.

**HANCOCK** No, God—Paramount bought it, changed the title from *Jessica* to *Let's Scare Jessica to Death*. It was really Frank Yablans' campaign, with the wonderful poster.

**PHANTOM** Today you have an independent and it goes the gradual film-festival route. What does that process add to the film's final fate?

**HANCOCK** I don't know. It seems to me this kind of picture is better if it's bought by an entity with some advertising money. That was the intention and it still is. Maybe the festival thing will work—I haven't really been through this. Both *Bang the Drum Slowly* and *Jessica* were bought by Paramount. So my experiences are with a large entity with a lot of money to put behind a campaign. But we're making the rounds here. I'd love to see it come out on Halloween.

**PHANTOM** The ending of *Suspended Animation* leaves a sequel possibility.

**HANCOCK** We weren't really serious about that. We just put a little zinger on the end. ☿

**PHANTOM** What did you think of the digital video experience?

**HANCOCK** Well, I'd do it again in a minute. I mean, it's so wonderful to not use such heavy lighting equipment and to be able to see right on the set what you're getting. No surprises. I was very happy with the look; the process of converting it to 35mm went very smoothly. To me it looks like 70mm. It's a great process. It saves a couple hundred thousand dollars. Which on this kind of budget is, you know, a nice piece of change. I mean, if I had paid for that many feet of 35mm, it would have just been grotesque. You can do another take, you can improvise, shoot all the second unit you want. What you're shooting on is very inexpensive. There's extensive cabling, which was kind of laborious in the snow, but that was really the only downside.

**PHANTOM** Had you directed an all-out action sequence before?

**HANCOCK** Well, in *Weeds* and I guess in *Baby Blue Marine*, but I don't think I'd done a chase like that.

**PHANTOM** When I saw *Suspended Animation*, there was more audience gasping and squirming than I'd seen in a long time.

**HANCOCK** Well, that's good! I wish I could've come! The best screening we had was on the South Side of Chicago, in a roller rink. We had an invited audience. The best experience I've had with an audience was the opening of *Let's Scare Jessica to Death* in the Criterion Theater on Broadway right near 42<sup>nd</sup> Street. I love an audience that goes, "Oh no, don't go in there!"



A loony Laura Esterman menaces Rebecca Harrell.

**PHANTOM** About the casting: I remember Alex McArthur as the psycho in *Rampage*.

**HANCOCK** I never saw that. He played the villain in a *Hill Street Blues* I did years ago. I've read him for things over the years. I've always liked him.

**PHANTOM** It's kind of a thankless role.

**HANCOCK** Getting the sh\*t beat out of him the whole time!

**PHANTOM** How'd you find the two sisters?

**HANCOCK** Well, Sage Allen—the casting director in Los Angeles, Rosemary Weldon, found her. It turns out I had known her in New York. She had read for some plays that I did in New York. She was married to Lester Lanin for many years, was the singer with his band. He did, like, every deb party on the East Coast for about 30 years—more, probably. Laura Esterman works all the time in New York theater and is an old friend of my wife's, and mine as well. She was wonderful in an Off-Broadway play, *Marvin's Room*. I think she won an Obie for that. She really is terribly good.

**PHANTOM** You've relocated to LaPorte, Indiana.

**HANCOCK** Yeah, we've done three pictures in Northern Indiana. We did the Christmas picture, *Prancer*. And then a couple of years ago we did *A Piece of Eden*, and now this one. The price is right here, boy. That's a big advantage. You get so much more for the buck here than you do out there.

**PHANTOM** According to the press notes, you filmed some of the L.A. scenes on the lot of a house you used to live in.

# Suspended Animation

by David W. Thompson

**S**YNOPSIS: Shot on Sony's 24P HD, *Suspended Animation* is a full-length feature based on the riveting novel by Dorothy Tristan. In this edge-of-your seat suspense thriller, Thomas Kempton is a successful Hollywood animator. His hit movies are of the grand tradition of fairytales replete with evil witches, dark forests, and innocent victims. On a much-needed vacation, Tom takes a snowmobile trip with some pals to get away from his work for a while. The relaxing weekend takes an unexpected turn when he gets lost in the woods and finds himself in a real-life "grim" fairytale of his own. At the hands of psychotic sisters his nightmare begins. Barely escaping with his life, his unsettling brush with death leaves him obsessed by the experience and one of his captors. His twisted psychological journey on the dark side eventually leads him into the life of his captor's estranged daughter and her psychotic son. Trying to turn his bizarre experience into a hit animated feature only endangers him and his family by luring his captor back to her original prey.

HighDef.Org recently interviewed John Hancock at FilmAcres, his studio and home, located in LaPorte, Indiana.

**HighDef.Org: (HD)** What are the advantages and disadvantages of being located in Indiana instead of LA/Hollywood?

**John Hancock: (JH)** You get so much more for the dollar here - location fees are very cheap and salaries are smaller, you can put more up on the screen per dollar. I run my studio, FilmAcres, from my home. This is another advantage. My parents were in the fruit business here for 60 years. That's where the farm-oriented

name, FilmAcres, comes from.

**HD:** Your background has mainly been in film, having directed many features, who or what finally sold you on using electronic cinema, 24P HD, specifically, to shoot *Suspended Animation*?

**JH:** A couple of years ago at Cannes I saw the Sony demo. I followed that with a visit at Fletcher/Chicago and saw some of the same clips as well as additional footage and I just liked the quality of it. It worked out so well, the relief of not having to pay for the film up front and being able to shoot all you want is a big advantage for me, because I tend to shoot a lot. The people at Fletcher were helpful. Mainly it was just looking at the demos.

**HD:** I also understand that this was the first time that Misha Suslov, Director of Photography, shot with 24P HD?

**JH:** We both had certain trepidation about a new thing. It seemed to work out. Fletcher was helpful in showing Misha how to use the equipment.

**HD:** What was Misha's experience using the 24P HD camera?

**JH:** He'd do it again in a minute. I think he would rather do that than go back to film at this point. Misha liked the fact it took less time in lighting and how responsive it was at low light levels. He also likes the look of it... it's beautiful.

**HD:** What concerns did you have going in?

**JH:** Well, I was concerned, since we have a very physical picture with a lot of snowmobile mounts and working in the cold. We were concerned that the equipment would malfunction or fall apart from vibration. But

it proved to be quite rugged.

**HD:** What disadvantages, if any, did you experience while shooting in 24P HD?

**JH:** The monitoring system is still fairly elaborate and difficult to move around in the snow. But, you'd have that with video assist on film too. You just don't have to be cabled quite so much. You also don't get a good image through the eyepiece, yet.

**HD:** Would you say that the 24P HD format proved itself to you?

**JH:** Absolutely. By being able to see what you're actually getting, right away. And the cost savings out front is so big. To not have to worry about how much you're shooting is a big factor for me.

**HD:** What do you feel the future of electronic cinema is?

**JH:** I think it is going to take over the world, I really do. I think it has so many advantages.

**HD:** Do you plan on using 24p HD on future projects?

**JH:** Yes, absolutely. It is my preference.

**HD:** Will you use film again?

**JH:** I doubt it. I will use film only if someone insisted.

**HD:** Do you think you would be limited with 24P HD on certain projects versus film?

**JH:** I can't think of any.

**HD:** It sounds like you have been converted?

**JH:** Absolutely. You know a lot of things are not all they're cracked up to be, but this one is.

**HD:** Let's assume that some of your colleagues are





reading this article, what advice do you have for them?

**JH:** Don't be afraid of it. It's a tremendous new technology. If you tend to consume film this is the way to go.

**HD:** What are your plans, at this point, with *Suspended Animation*?

**JH:** I will be flying off to New York next week to work with Angelo Badalamenti who is doing the score, and we're going to do the sound post in Toronto, and then finish in Los Angeles and try to sell it to a studio. ♦

*For more information on John Hancock's *Suspended Animation* please visit [www.suspended-animation.com](http://www.suspended-animation.com)*



## **JOHN HANCOCK**

Directing credits –

### **FILMS:**

*Bang the Drum Slowly*  
*Weeds*  
*Prancer*  
*A Piece of Eden*  
*Let's Scare Jessica to Death*  
*Steal the Sky*  
*Baby Blue Marine*  
*California Dreaming*

### **TELEVISION:**

Episodes of-  
*Hill Street Blues*  
*Twilight Zone*  
*Cracker*  
*Cover Up*

### **COMMERCIALS:**

400+ Kmart ads

### **ALSO:**

Off-Broadway Director  
 Artistic Director  
 Stage Director