



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

PHANTOM What did you think of the digital video experience?

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, 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 42nd Street. I love an audience that goes, "Oh no, don't go in there!"



A loony Laura Esterman menaces Rebecca Harrell.

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.