

# Hollywood Hologram

By MARC SHAPIRO

**M**ost weeks, he gets two days off. On others, he will go in in the morning and get cut loose in the afternoon. The life of *Quantum Leap*'s resident hologram Al is a walk in the park. And actor Dean Stockwell is happy to be on that garden path.

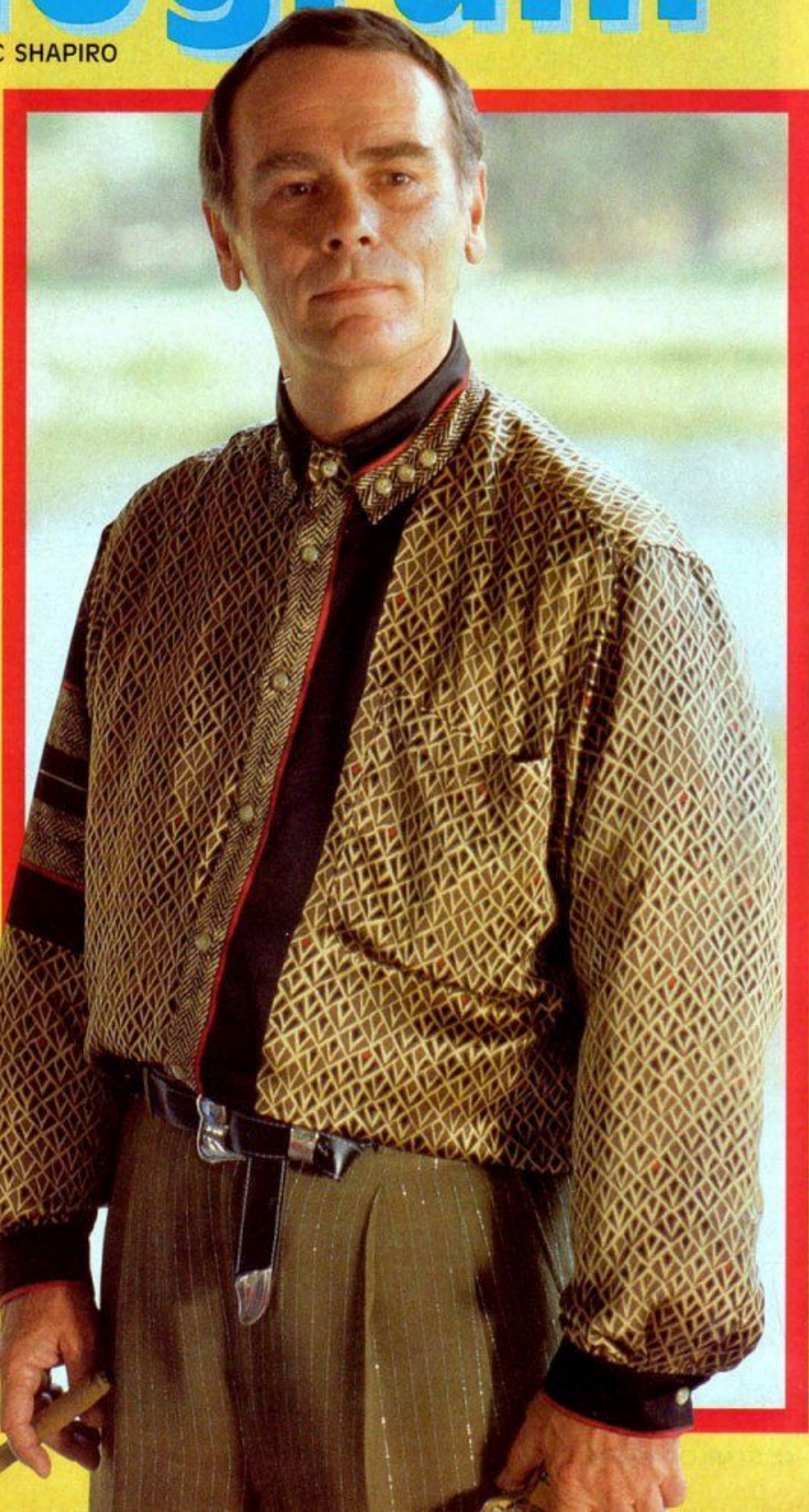
"I've got no complaints," says the soft-spoken Stockwell. "I'm working regularly. I'm not separated from my wife and kids for months at a time. I'm doing a quality show. I know it sounds too good to be true, but this isn't bad at all."

True to his statements, Stockwell does look decidedly at peace as he discusses the joys of time travel in the lobby of a Universal Studios screening room. Stockwell has been sprung from his *Quantum Leap* chores a bit early this morning, the better to be skewered in an hour or so by members of the foreign press corps. But the prospect of baring his soul and dredging up memories of his childhood stardom of the '40s doesn't seem to bother the actor.

"And that's because I'm prepared now to accept and deal with the value of what I do," says Stockwell. "When I was a young man, I was unable to deal with the media. Now, I'm comfortable with all that. I'm proud of the career I've had and I'm happy that I'm still able to enjoy some measure of success."

That success, in the guise of *Quantum Leap*'s happy-go-lucky hologram Al, came at a time when one would have suspected that Stockwell would be the least interested. Following a decade of near-obscure, Stockwell's stock rose with acclaimed performances in *Blue Velvet* and *Married to the Mob*. The actor was definitely in demand.

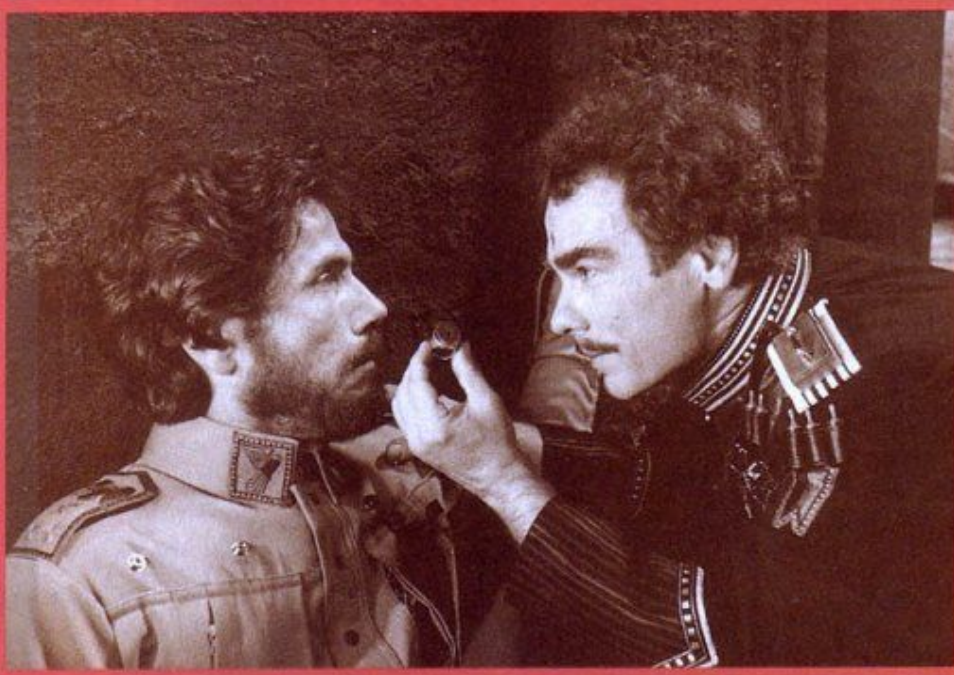
Tagging along after his time-hopping pal, Dean Stockwell takes a "Quantum Leap."







Blue Velvet Photo: Copyright 1986 De Laurentiis Entertainment Group



Dune Photo: Copyright 1984 Universal City Studios, Inc.

"People who only know me from *Quantum Leap* are going to be surprised if they rent that film," says Dean Stockwell of his "suave" crooner in *Blue Velvet*.

"Being in demand might look like one thing from an outside perspective," says the actor, "but the truth is that I didn't get another offer for 10 months after *Married to the Mob*. All the time those offers were supposedly coming in, I was trying my damndest to get a job.

"I made it known throughout the industry that I was interested in a series. One of the things that was mentioned was a series based on my character in *Married to the Mob*. About that time, [creator/producer] Don Bellisario was putting *Quantum Leap* together and saw *Married to the Mob*. He liked that I could do comedic stuff, and it was his feeling from the beginning that I would be right for it."

Stockwell read the pilot script, liked what he read and told Bellisario (STARLOG #150) that he was interested.

"Immediately, I saw that the show had many things going for it. For openers, it was an extraordinarily original concept. I'm not going to go off the wall here and say that *Quantum Leap* is the most *avant garde* show in the history of television, but by current television standards, it is cutting-edge kind of stuff.

"I also liked the idea that Al was the equivalent of a desk sergeant who sends the other cops out to arrest the bad guys. I felt that, at my age, it would be more appropriate for Scott Bakula [playing Sam Beckett] to take the lead. I like the idea Al comes in and out and provides the local color. I also liked the idea that the show featured only two characters."

Throw in Don Bellisario's enviable TV track record and a guaranteed 13-episode run, and it was easy to see why Stockwell jumped at the chance to be the only hologram on television.

"Well, I didn't exactly jump," he corrects. "There was the concern of whether I could continue to play the character over an extended period of time and not have him become repetitious and boring. I also had the normal, human fear of whether or not I would have a co-star I could get along with. Given the fact that Scott is the only person I have scenes with in this show, it would have been hell if we didn't hit it off. But I got very lucky because Scott [STARLOG #153] is a joy to work with."

Stockwell is also having a good time working with his holographic alter-ego, a creation he describes as far from being a mirror image of himself.

"I'm *not* playing myself. I've always worked through intuition in creating my characters and that's the way it is with Al. I'm quite a bit different from this character.

**The actor credits director David Lynch's popularity for the rediscovery of *Dune*, although Stockwell notes that too many cooks spoiled that film.**



The discovery of the twist is as big of a historical event as Stockwell wants Al and Sam to encounter.

He's much more flamboyant and flippant than I am. A guy like Al looks at environmental problems and political and social situations in a humorous way, while I tend to take them very seriously. He's conscious of the negative things going on in the world, but they don't disturb him very deeply. Al just plain enjoys life in a different way than I do, but it's a way of life that I've instilled in him."

### Future Peeks

Stockwell isn't big on anecdotes, claiming to "be more concerned with the overall quality of the entire show as opposed to any individual things that my character has done." But from the tidal wave of moments that was *Quantum Leap*'s first 13 episodes, the actor does manage a pleasant memory or two.

"I'll always remember the pilot, the way the whole concept of the show was played out in a smooth and logical way. The moment when Al walks through the rocket plane and the sequence where I'm in the cockpit with Sam, who doesn't know how to fly in the plane, are great. The moment where Al leaps into the baseball game was also a nice touch.

"One of the best episodes for Al was the season's last episode, 'MIA.' The idea of putting Al through all these emotional turns in trying to get Sam to change history was definitely a different facet of the character."

Stockwell, on the FX front, claims he has had no trouble adjusting to the blue screen work. But he offers that being a hologram does cause some FX problems for those around him.

"We just finished a scene the other day where Al appears in the wind," he notes. "Since Al is a hologram, it can't appear that any part of his clothing or hair is being rustled by the wind. They plastered my hair down with all kinds of grease and put a barricade in front of me to divert the wind.

"And we have those scenes where Al appears in a crowd, which I think drive the directors and extras crazy. The extras have to look like they're walking past me and yet not making it look like they're *trying* to walk around me. It's rough sometimes, but we always manage to overcome the problems. If we didn't, the audience would notice," he chuckles.

One of *Quantum Leap*'s big selling points is that, unlike such past series as *The Time Tunnel* and *Voyagers*, this show's time travelers don't trip into in the predictably important historical events. It's an aspect that Stockwell favors.

"I would imagine that showing up at Pearl Harbor or some other historical events would be interesting. But it's also

"Sam [Scott Bakula] *won't* be coming back as a dog, at least not yet," laughs Stockwell.

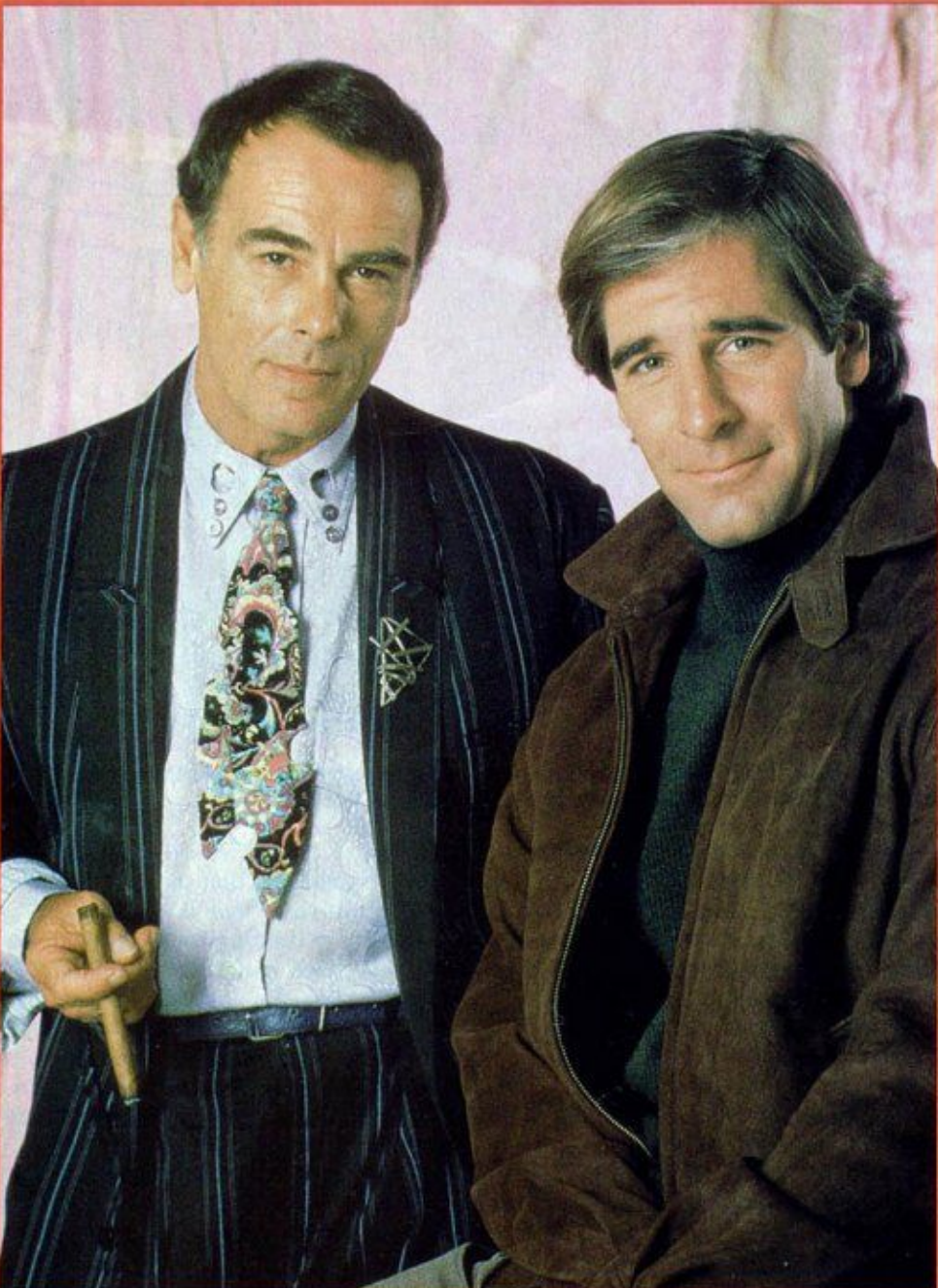


Photo: Fred Sabine

Photo: Chris Haston/NBC



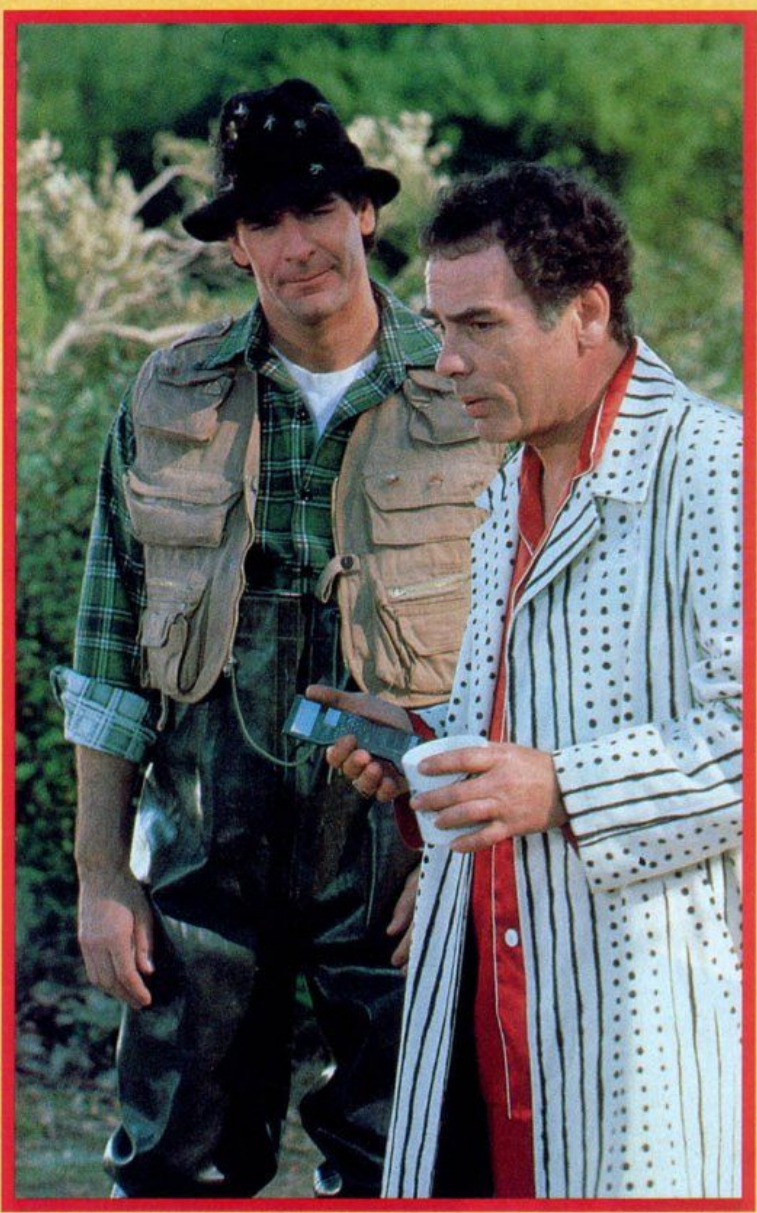


Photo: Ron Tom

"Given the fact that Scott is the only person I have scenes with in this show, it would have been hell if we didn't hit it off," admits Stockwell.

quite interesting that Sam leaps into these human, personal moments that ring so real and so down-to-Earth. I think we've proven that you can do a time travel series in which every episode has the grandeur of the sinking of the *Titanic*. We're doing very small stories that are addressing very important issues."

And it is that element, the actor feels, that has seen *Quantum Leap*'s audience grow beyond the SF community.

"The show has had that science fiction cult sort of following from the beginning," he asserts. "What other people have discovered is the strong human dramas mixed in with the science fiction

elements. I would be willing to bet that even the science fiction audience has found more in this show than they expected."

But it's a candid Stockwell who wonders how much more time *Quantum Leap* has left. After clinging by its fingertips in its Friday at 10 p.m. slot, the network saw the light and moved the show to Wednesday, where its ratings began a steady climb to respectability and consequently a pick-up for another season.

"And put back on Friday night," Stockwell complains. "I like the idea that we're on earlier than 10 p.m., but it's still Friday night, the *worst* television night of the week. And look what we're up against!

You can't think of *Quantum Leap* and *Full House* in the same breath. We're going into the proverbial toilet and wasting our opening shows. It's a real shame."

Stockwell offers that those who have opted for other than *Quantum Leap* on Fridays will be missing a season that will "further extend the variety of possibilities that the show has already presented."

"Sam *won't* be coming back as a dog, at least not yet," laughs the actor. "We are starting an episode next week in which Sam will be a girl in a beauty pageant. In the season's first episode, Sam came back as himself at age 14 and attempted to change the lives of his family. He attempted to get his father on a diet because Sam knows he'll die of a heart attack in three years. He tried to keep his brother from going to Vietnam and getting killed and he tried to keep his sister from meeting a guy who she'll marry and who turns out to be an alcoholic and wife beater. In doing that, he revealed to his family, who thought he was crazy, that he's traveling through time."

And what of the future for AI?  
 "Not much that will be different from what you saw in the first season. We've done a Halloween show where you'll see something different, but I'm not going to tell you what it is."

### Period Pieces

Stockwell is more than willing to talk about his other major genre entry, *Dune*. The actor, who discussed other aspects of his career and his work in that much-maligned film in STARLOG #90, defends the movie and its director David Lynch.

"The experience was enriching and working among those incredible sets was really exciting. Unfortunately, the film just didn't go together as a whole. What happened was that the director was given only a portion of the entire film to make while other portions were given to other people. Consequently, we had four units working independently of each other at all times. David was working with the principal actors, somebody else did the special FX, another person was in charge of the worm sequences and somebody else did the soldier battle sequences. The stuff David did was great. Unfortunately, the rest of the stuff didn't fit together with it.

"But I feel that *Dune* has gone on to establish a much better reputation than it had when it first came out. Part of that has to do with the current popularity of David Lynch. Overall, I think a more selective view is being taken of the film and people are finding a lot to like about it."

Stockwell, though, can find nothing to like about his role in the 1970 horror film *The Dunwich Horror*.

"During that period, I basically did what was offered to me," he sighs. "It was not something I would have done if there had been a second offer. I had no job so I said, 'OK, I'll do it.' I wasn't crazy about

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the movie. In fact, I thought it was stupid. I played that part largely tongue-in-cheek and that helped me get through it."

The *Dunwich Horror* and another genre nugget, *The Werewolf of Washington*, were the questionable high points during a rather barren second re-entry into acting following a five-year dropout during the '60s. Stockwell claims no regrets at what he calls his hippie period.

He says, "The '60s turned into this incredible revolution of ideas and I just wanted to be a part of it. So, I grew my hair long, became a hippie and dropped out for five years. In a way, it was like the childhood I never had, and so I have no regrets."

"And while I couldn't get arrested for a long time when I got back into the business, it wasn't like I was just sitting around. I did a lot of dinner theater and occasional guest shots on television. It's just that when you do those things in this business, nobody knows you're working."

Stockwell made up for lost time during the '80s with the films *Paris, Texas*, *To Live and Die in L.A.*, *Gardens of Stone*, *Beverly Hills Cop II*, *Tucker: The Man and His Dream* and an inspired performance in Lynch's *Blue Velvet*.

"I loved that role, but I knew going in that it was going to be a risk because it was so strange a film and everybody in it automatically got caught up in the strangeness. People who only know me from *Quantum Leap* are going to be surprised if they rent that film," he laughs.

Stockwell's ready-to-be-released projects include the films *Backtrack*, *Palais Royale*, *Sandino* and the TV mini-series *Son of the Morning Star*.

One current project of great interest to the environmentally-conscious actor is his participation, as the voice of bad guy Duke Nukem, in the cable and syndicated cartoon series *Captain Planet and the Planeteers*.

"It's a well-done show that will not only entertain kids but enlighten them to the environmental problems we have," Stockwell says. "The ozone layer and the environment are some of the most serious problems we have and I'm glad I'm able to use any celebrity status I have to help inform people of this problem and to encourage them to do something about it."

Stockwell's publicist reminds him that he has an auditorium of foreign press waiting, and so the actor adjourns to their presence and the inevitable questions about his childhood acting career that he patiently answers one more time. One query, attesting to his career longevity and survivor status over a number of decades, brings out the thoughtful in Stockwell.

"Yeah, I'm a survivor," says Dean Stockwell. "But at least with *Quantum Leap*, I'm not just a new somebody. I'm just me." ☆