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Attracted to the project because "the characters and premise were interesting," Ashley McConnell took on five books beginning with *Quantum Leap: The Novel*.

and premise were interesting, and I thought it would be fun to play around with it. I really wanted to do these books, because I knew I could do a good job. The crass, commercial side is that it would be great free advertising for me. More people will see these than my horror novels, and my name will get known."

General Leaps

Being a realist also doesn't make the longtime fan blind to the weaknesses in the adventures of time-traveling scientist Dr. Sam Beckett and his companion and holographic link to the project, Al Calavicci. "Most of its strengths are in the actors, who are a superb pair, and the writers who did some very good shows," she comments. "But, on the other hand, some of the weaknesses have to do with the fact you can't really treat *Quantum Leap* like a science-fiction show. It doesn't have a certain level of consistency and credibility. Things don't always make sense and it doesn't hang together."

Enjoying the series is a matter of seeing the good points and not nitpicking, she says. "You have to find a way to rationalize it and make it work. I think that's what fans do for many shows. It was supposed to be an anthology show and that leads you to think about what is really important—is it the way you look or who you are? The show emphasizes that it's the person you are *inside* that makes a difference. And that little things in the past or present can make a difference in the future. The point is to take a person, put him in someone else's life and fix something. That's the show's framework."

"The background of the Project and whether Ziggy occupies 47 acres and has seven yellow cubes, three blue cubes and four green cubes doesn't matter. That's not relevant. What's relevant is the story about Sam Beckett trying to fix something and Al Calavicci being there as an observer."

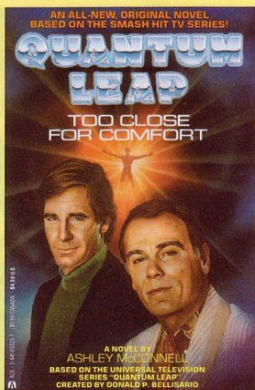
glimpses of life at the Project. I've made my own universe because I've done a lot with the Project that the show's writers never had to think about. I looked at the room they showed and thought that this place must have janitors, living quarters and a cafeteria. It was something I created—sort of the infrastructure of Project Quantum Leap."

McConnell finds writing about the Project and its personnel gratifying. "I tried to figure out how on Earth they could justify Tina, the red-headed bimbo who Al is crazy about. She looks like Al's idea of the perfect woman—no brains at all and a terrific body. What is she doing at this remote desert site with this group of elite scientists? It doesn't cut it. So, I decided to make her a genius, because there had to be more to her. I've worked with Verbeena Becks [the Project's psychologist] in the third book, *The Wall*."

Working on the first novel, McConnell wasn't quite sure just how much freedom Universal and Berkley would grant her. "There are many stories about the limitations which some studios put on licensed books," she notes. "When Universal saw the synopsis, the only feedback I got was, 'Make sure Sam and Al interact.' I never got anything else. They've given me all the rein in the world. They've never told me I couldn't write about this, say that about a character or anything else. On the one hand, it's kind of frustrating, because I would like to know whether this is what [creator] Don Bellisario and company had in mind. On the other hand, it has indicated a remarkable level of trust and given me incredible freedom."

In fact, only once did the studio reject a submitted storyline. "I had a brilliant synopsis on the second book. I pitched the idea of a game show setting," McConnell says. "I was told I couldn't do that because the comic book had already had Sam in a game show. I had to do something else."

McConnell's free rein has even allowed her to theorize about the Project and offer



Too Close for Comfort takes Sam into a men's encounter group, meeting a young, soul-searching Al.

how to walk in somebody's moccasins for real. He goes through a learning experience each time. Part of what I'm thinking about is that if you have somebody who has been in an ivory tower all his life, he needs to learn something about life and people."

Writing *Quantum Leap* for the printed page allows McConnell "to do anything and not have to pay special FX a penny. It's great."

Thinking back to her first *Quantum Leap* novel, McConnell remembers coming up with the basic plot at the Chicago Worldcon. "I called Universal the day before I took off. I got to Chicago and over dinner with Nancy Holder, a horror novelist, we brainstormed. I'm not sure exactly where the idea of Sam being a midway carnny in Oklahoma came from, but I got up at 6 a.m. the next morning, rented a computer and had the synopsis faxed off by 8 a.m."

Some people might see writing a *Quantum Leap* novel as a departure for the author of two horror novels, *Unearthed* and *Days of the Dead*, but not McConnell. "I was doing very traditional kinds of horror, and the first *Quantum Leap* book really wasn't that far away in tone," she states. "What I focused on was the impact on someone, who doesn't know for sure who he is or what's happening to him. He's truly dislocated and wants to go home. Also, he's threatened with the loss of the only thing he has, which is his sense of self. He's threatened with being sent to an insane asylum, which is one of the worst things Sam Beckett can face. From that point-of-view, it's a horror novel."

CRAIG W. CHRISSINGER, New Mexico-based writer, examined Deep Space Nine comics in STARLOG #198.

LEAPS & BOUNDS

Sam & Al make new leaps in & out of Ashley McConnell's novels.

By CRAIG W. CHRISSINGER

When Ashley McConnell thinks back to how she landed the assignment to write *Quantum Leap* books, she can't help but quote Sam Beckett's trademark line, "Oh boy." There's no doubt in her mind that being in the right place at the right time was a big part of getting to headline Berkley Books' original novel series from the Ace imprint.

"It was a set of coincidences as much as anything else," McConnell remarks. "When Universal decided they wanted to do *Quantum Leap* books, they went to Berkley, a sister company, and asked them to recommend some writers. My editor at Berkley, Ginjer Buchanan, knew I was a fan of the show, so she called me, and said, 'Hey, do you mind if I give them your agent's name for this project?' And I said, 'Right, like I would mind?'"

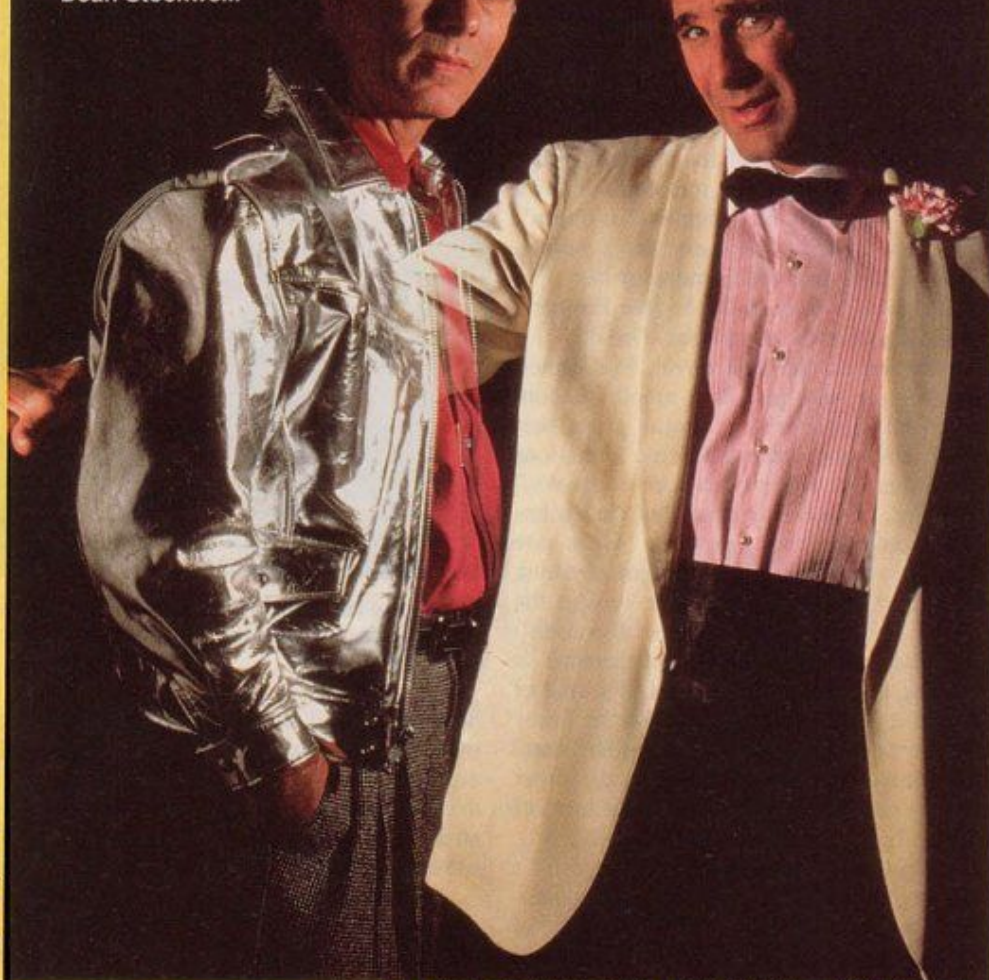
"The only drawback was that I was coming to a parting of the ways with my agent at the time, so I called Universal to let

them know that they should contact me directly. The person I ended up talking to had just finished reading my novel *Unearthed*, which led us to discussing it in depth. They had copies of books from all the writers involved as they wanted writers who had a track record. By the time the conversation ended, I had negotiated a contract."

And so, *Quantum Leap: The Novel*, pub-

lished in November 1992, marked the beginning of McConnell's association with the series. Soon after she turned in the first manuscript, Universal called to ask about two additional books. While working on them, she was contacted about a fourth and fifth book. "I agreed, since it was an interesting show and it struck a chord with me," the New Mexico author recalls. "The characters

"Most of its strengths are in the actors, who are a superb pair," the author says of *Quantum Leap*'s Scott Bakula and Dean Stockwell.



Leap Photo: Paul Drinkwater/Copyright 1987 Universal City Studios Inc.

For the second book, *Too Close for Comfort*, McConnell had to quickly come up with a new plot when the game show idea was axed. In the published novel, Sam leaps into the middle of a men's encounter group in 1990 New Mexico and meets a younger, soul-searching Al. Needless to say, the near-future holographic Al is embarrassed and not amused.

"I had thought about a men's encounter group and looked for the most unlikely person I could think of, which was obviously Al," she recalls. "Setting it in New Mexico helped a lot, because I could think of places and know what I was describing. I got to further develop ideas I had about the Project and the consequences of Sam's leaping."

The third book, *The Wall*, centers around the Berlin Wall. "It takes place in another place I know pretty well. Sam leaps into a little girl who's not quite six when the Wall is going up, and then again when it's coming down. One of the things I was trying to do was create a role that Scott Bakula would have trouble playing. There are a couple of things I would like to go back and tinker with, but once it gets going, it's the strongest book I've done."

Her fourth *Quantum Leap* novel will most likely be controversial upon its release

in April. After all, *Prelude* examines what led up to Sam's first Leap. "Fans are really going to look at this one hard and it'll be interesting to see how they react. There is a disclaimer that it is not presented in any way as the way it *had* to be done. They can go with it or not.

"When I explained to my editor that it was just the build-up and didn't have a Leap in it, she said, 'Oh, that's interesting.' It picks up from the end of *Too Close for Comfort* and carries through to Sam's first Leap. It talks about the funding problems, how the Project got built, and some of the problems they had with the politics. It's the kind of book I wish I could have written and then come back to rewrite a year later. It's not a bad book, but I could probably do a trilogy on the theme."

Written Leaps

McConnell is finishing up work on an as-yet-untitled fifth volume. "Sam leaps into a bartender in a ski resort town during summer. There's a bunch of teenagers, who have to entertain themselves and think the best way is to go drinking.

"Al seems to have gotten married again, which I hadn't originally planned. Al walks out of the imaging chamber to find that he's

married and has been for some time. He kind of likes it and doesn't quite know what to do about that, and neither do I. I've got to work all this out."

This book doesn't have an exact publication date, as Berkley will be releasing *Quantum Leap* novels by Melanie Rawn and Melissa Crandall between McConnell's last two efforts. McConnell is looking forward to seeing just how they make the Leap. "I thought it was terrific, because adding other writers broadens the field, with a new perspective and a new set of ideas, giving fresh voices to the books," she comments. "I want to read Melanie's and Melissa's books because they are going to be really neat. I think it's Melanie who's doing *Night of the Morning Star*, where she takes the opposite tack and definitely has Sam's whole body leaping. I want to see what she does with that."

Finished with *Quantum Leap* for the moment, McConnell next unleashes *The Demon Wars*, a fantasy trilogy due out in 1995. The books are set 200 years after a war with demons that humanity would rather forget, and focus on Jazen the Bastard. The first volume, *The Fountains of Mirlacca*, shows the beginnings of a great school of wizardry when the boy Jazen decides to tag along with a group of traveling sorcerers. In *The Itinerant Exorcist*, Jazen has "learned some stuff and he's going around looking for demons to cast out." The final book is *The Courts of Hell* and concerns Jazen challenging the demons in their lair. "Much of this has to do with the fact that truly evil people rarely think of themselves as evil," she divulges. "What you call a demon may not be a demon in its own eyes. What does Evil think of itself when it's at home, putting its feet up and reading a book?"

After that, McConnell would like to work on a historical fantasy set during World War II and then something similar to *Magic Incorporated*, where technology is based on magic. "I wonder what the security force would be like for a test lab for spells?" she quips. A return to horror isn't out of the question, either. "I may do more horror stories about Gil Santillanes. He's a good continuing character and I like him a lot. I've also created a city and, hey, you can't let it go to waste."

As for more *Quantum Leap* novels, McConnell admits she needs a break from them, but won't rule out a possible return. "Five books in two years with the same characters is tough," she says. "But I did have this brilliant idea at the San Francisco Worldcon and my agent seems to think I could pick up another one. Many of the letters I've received have asked if there will be more books, and I will keep writing them because they want more."

For Ashley McConnell, working full-time plus writing is difficult, but she has plans for the future. "I hope some day to have a life, but I don't expect it to be soon. My eventual goal is to write for a living. I have many, many more stories to tell, and I hope that the people, who enjoy the *Quantum Leap* novels, will read some of my other books as well." ❀