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By Dusty Saunders
SCRIPPS HOWARD NEWS SERVICE

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► An hour that's completely animated.

► A series of programs featuring an "evil leaper" — an attractive woman who wants to harm people rather than help them.

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For three seasons, Scott Bakula, through the magic of fertile imagination, has leaped into the bodies of a variety of fictional characters: athletes, teachers, Broadway performers, cowboys. You name the body, Bakula, as Sam Beckett, has leaped into it.

He's even been a woman on seven occasions. ("I think Scott's starting to enjoy dressing in drag," laughs Dean Stockwell, Bakula's co-star on NBC's "Quantum Leap.")

But this fall, on at least two programs, Bakula will vault into two real-life characters — Lee Harvey Oswald and Richard Nixon.

The Oswald tale — a two-hour special kicking off the season Tuesday, Oct. 6 — is the result of a brief association that executive producer/creator Don Bellisario had with the accused assassin when the two were in the same Marine unit in Tustin (Orange County) in December 1958.

"Like most Americans, I watched all aspects of the Kennedy assassination on television," Bellisario recalls. "And I was shocked when I realized I knew Lee Harvey Oswald.

"He was a strange duck. And

hostile. He wanted to argue all the time and was passing out a lot of communist propaganda.

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"You might say I'm offering the flip side of the Oliver Stone argument," Bellisario says. "In fact, the idea for this script came after Stone's 'JFK' was released."

Bellisario won't talk about the content or the ending. "Obviously, we can't change history. But I have an ending which will satisfy a lot of viewers."

Adds Bakula: "Sam Beckett has saved a lot of people in historical situations. Too bad we can't save John F. Kennedy."

The script in which Sam becomes Nixon is still being worked on.

"Now that we're an established series, we can take a few more liberties with our scripts," Bellisario says.

Other "Quantum Leap" plots for the fall season:

▶ A "definitive story" about a Vietnam veteran.

▶ A two-person show featuring a romantic interlude on an island

with Bakula and Brooke Shields, a la her "Blue Lagoon" movie.

▶ A three-part episode dealing with a murder mystery in a small town.

▶ An hour that's completely animated.

▶ A series of programs featuring an "evil leaper" — an attractive woman who wants to harm people rather than help them.

▶ And last — but not least — an episode in which Bakula gets involved with Dr. Ruth Westheimer. ("I can hardly wait for that episode," Bakula says.)

Bakula and Bellisario voice enthusiasm about all aspects of their fall season except the new 8 p.m. Tuesday time period.

"I think the move will hurt us," Bakula says. "That's too early a time for our fans who are used to seeing us later in the evening."

Bellisario says the time period change won't affect the content of the series. "No one at NBC has asked us to alter anything in the way of style and content. But I wouldn't change — even if they asked me."

Have any of Sam Beckett's leaps been disastrous as far as entertainment is concerned?

Bakula doesn't think so. "I've been worried a couple of times. But Don and his crew have been able to pull everything together in the editing room," Bakula smiles and adds: "But we haven't done the Dr. Ruth show yet."