

# Romantic Fables of Beauty and the Beast

By MARC SHAPIRO



Retelling a classic love story, creator Ron Koslow adds a gritty, Big Apple reality to an underground fantasy world.

## Beastly Realities

"The only reason I'm here is that I felt *Beauty and the Beast* could be something different," he declares. "I wasn't interested in doing the business-as-usual type of thing for television. The consensus was that this show could be the doorway to exploring certain aspects of relationships that hadn't been explored on television for quite a while."

Koslow concedes, however, that taking the chances that *Beauty and the Beast* entailed was not without its moments of doubt.

"There were moments when I was working on the pilot script when I said, 'My God, this is awfully strange for television,'" says Koslow. "I mean, here we were taking a fairy tale (and to a large degree, the Cocteau film), transplanting it to gritty New York City and attempting to make a creature with a lion's face into a sympathetic, believable lover. I would say that's pretty daring."

His concern was shared by the CBS brass who, while gung ho on the pilot, basically had their fingers crossed that this "high concept" would fly.

Flying was going to depend on the casting of Catherine and Vincent.

"I was thinking about Linda Hamilton [FANGORIA #60] and Ron Perlman [STARLOG #128] while I was writing the pilot," explains Koslow. "I loved Linda in *Terminator* and felt that her character in that film, that of a woman in transition, was much like Catherine. I called Linda's agent and was told that there was no possibility of her doing the show. Of course, all of that changed after we managed to get the script to her.

"In Ron's case, we knew going in that he had gotten tired of playing roles in makeup. But, once he read the script, he realized the challenge of playing a role with an infinite number of possibilities outweighed having

to sit in a makeup chair for six hours a day."

Much of the *Beauty and the Beast* pilot, directed by Richard (Link) Franklin (STARLOG #126), was filmed in New York City (where the story takes place). The premiere episode, which introduces Catherine Chandler as a rather graphically disfigured knife attack victim as well as some tender give-and-take between Catherine and Vincent, primarily set the standard that Koslow, story editor George R.R. Martin (STARLOG #118) and others connected with the show have worked hard to maintain.

"With *Beauty and the Beast*, we're walking a very fine line," says Koslow. "This show is a constant juxtaposition of tones and textures. One minute, we're on the gritty New York streets and the harsh reality of that life and the next, we're underground in a mythic fantasy world.

"There is a very delicate balance involved in dealing with both a real and fantasy element in a natural way. The real world has to be just that—real—and yet not get so overblown and out of control that it destroys the myth. So far as I'm concerned, *Beauty and the Beast* has done a great job of mixing the two elements and making them work."

## Beautiful Fantasies

Ron Koslow, despite his rookie status on the small screen, is no stranger to making things work. Koslow, born in Denver and raised in St. Louis and Los Angeles, had already put part of a college career (UC Berkeley and UCLA) behind him and was

MARC SHAPIRO, veteran STARLOG correspondent, profiled Tim Dunigan in issue #129.

Ron Koslow will never be accused of having tunnel vision. But underground is where the veteran producer/writer's thoughts went when a CBS TV programming exec phoned one day with left-field idea for a new series.

"Kim LeMasters [now CBS Entertainment President] had recently seen the Jean Cocteau film version of *Beauty and the Beast*," recalls Koslow, "and he wanted to know if it would be possible to create a contemporary version of *Beauty and the Beast* as a *continuing* series. I told him it sounded interesting and that I would do some thinking on it."

Koslow's thoughts immediately turned to a recent article that described an estimated 300 miles of tunnels beneath the city of Manhattan and the people who were living in them.

"It was fascinating," notes Koslow. "People were foraging for food in the dumpsters of some of the city's most expensive restaurants and living fairly decent lives. Combining a mythical underground world with a classical love story set against seemingly insurmountable obstacles seemed like a great idea."

An idea that, midway through the current TV season, has made *Beauty and the Beast* a CBS hit. Koslow's first venture into television, the bittersweet love relationship between above-ground attorney Catherine Chandler (Linda Hamilton) and kindly beast/man Vincent (Ron Perlman) has struck a definite nerve with viewers. Ratings have been good. Koslow, who wears the twin hats of creator/supervising producer, is currently "busy enough for three lifetimes." And enjoying every second of it.