

30th Anniversary Special Interview

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Writer

1) When did you first become aware that B&B had a fandom?

Common sense led me to assume that Koslow's Beauty and the Beast had a fandom before I ever sought out anything to do with such a community—because every television series, for better or for worse, has a fandom. I first decided to watch the series on Netflix in early 2011 because the show happened to be streaming online then, and because I was already an admirer of Ron Perlman and he had a starring role in this 1980s fairy tale, and because I was at that time working on a writing exercise that required me to analyze episodes of a television show I was unfamiliar with. Only later, as I became more interested in the series and its production, did I search online for fan sites and publications.

Honestly, though, by the time I tentatively wandered into the online fan groups in 2012, the fandom that clearly existed in decades past had dwindled and, well, decayed. I don't believe a cohesive fandom for Koslow's Beauty and the Beast exists at all today. What I've found instead is a conglomerate of people who prefer to let their dreams inhabit a very narrow slice of B&B fanon—that collected body of fan-created works that has been built up over the past 30 years now—rather than the original series canon. Conversations and new fan creations tend to revolve around that sparse fanon sliver, and its interpretive priorities, while the real content of the original material languishes in distant memory. Many people are now so deeply submerged within the fanon perspective, they cannot even perceive what is actually there in the original episodes anymore.

I know there's a broad international spectrum of individuals around the world who do, in fact, continue to enjoy the 1980s story, its world, and its characters. Some have built and continue to develop impressive platforms to encourage constructive endeavors among fantasy-lovers, both on- and offline. I also know that the fanon fans who strive to control the fandom groups and events mostly enjoy expressing only contempt for the most noble, honorable, and creative aspects of Ron Koslow's urban fairy tale. I believe this may have happened because, like the face of the Beast in this tale, the story itself is a mirror. People's reactions to the reflections they see therein reveal a great deal about the nature of the viewers. Contempt for

virtuous characters exposes the ignorance, prejudices, and lovelessness of the contemptuous ones— of the Topsiders, to borrow some Tunnels slang from the story: those quite ordinary human beings who drove the Tunnelfolk to seek refuge underground from our society's madness and fear. The fanon fans' contempt for, and even the fear of, diverse and unconventional beauty indicates a small-minded and hard-hearted outlook. In the story, frightened men look into the face of the Beast and see only the shape of their own fears, and small men see only ugliness. Similarly, what the audience believes of these characters, what we behold when we look upon these fictitious faces, and the conclusions we choose to share about whatever we've noticed, all tell a lot about who we really are. And then, of course, real-world actions reveal even more.

*I briefly emerge from my habitual internetly silence to share these particular observations for one reason: to offer a "heads-up" warning for fellow wanderers who either enter into the 21st century B&B fandom fray unawares, or who have been here awhile, yet feel they have no voice among the fanon fans, but also nowhere else to go for any crumbs of B&B magic. I have conversed with many of you during the past five years, coming and going through the various websites. We share a common frustration with the fanon fans' campaign to eliminate all things beautiful from the story, and with the lack of opportunity for open, civil discourse within the established groups online. Fellow wayfarers, I simply want to assure you that, truly, no matter what you are told, you are not the problem. You are also not alone. And Ron Koslow's *Beauty and the Beast* television series remains an inspiring work of art.*

2) Why did you decide to write fanfic?

Oh, I had several reasons, all of which reinforced each other. Mostly, I decided to write fanfiction to please myself. I wanted to cobble together a little stage where I could entertain my questions about issues the series raised, and where I could satisfy my curiosity about how the fairy tale world works and how the characters might go about living their lives. I wanted to further pursue the mythology's innumerable possibilities and roads-not-taken. I also just plain wanted to get to know these wonderful characters better. Later on I discovered, rather to my surprise, how much fun I have when I revisit the 1980s decade as an adult woman. I feel no desire to return to the era of my childhood, but I do find it interesting to reconsider that extravagant last hurrah of the 20th century from a new vantage point.

*On a more practical level, I originally came to the television series for the sake of my writing, and then I quickly realized that spending time devising new material about a fantasy world I grew to love could help me improve the skills I hoped to exercise. Thus, amateur *Beauty and the Beast* writing became my hobby/playground/workshop/laboratory. I do admit, too, that when I eventually went looking for fan-generated storytelling, I was appalled and offended by some of the fanfic I came across. This was to be expected; there are good reasons why the fanfiction genre generally holds a negative literary reputation. But I wondered if maybe I could challenge myself to do better. I started writing to see what might happen. Many moons later, people I met online encouraged me to share my results with them. So I did.*

3) What character(s) do you enjoy writing about the most?

Vincent, first and foremost. Also Jacob Wells, Ellie Peterson, Mouse, Rebecca, Brigit O'Donnell, Laura Williams, Lena, Winslow, Pascal, Edie, Isaac Stubbs, Elliot Burch, Peter

Alcott, Joe Maxwell, numerous Extras that capture my attention, and, of course, Diana Bennett. Diana is the most difficult character for me to get close to, though. She's so dear a hero to me that I am very hesitant to step into her shoes to write about her. I'm afraid I couldn't do her—or my own vision of her—justice in my scribblings.

4) Do you prefer long stories or short ones?

I prefer to read and to write short fanfiction stories, but when more space is needed to fully explore a narrative's possibilities, I understand that long stories are the way to go. Long stories do require a serious commitment, both to create them and to receive them! Just as in the televised series, each short teleplay in each season has its own individual value, yet the powerful lengthy arc of the Trilogy plus Season Three holds a special place in my heart.

5) Do you feel you have more stories in you yet to write?

Yes. I sat down a year or so ago and wrote out a list of my untold project ideas. My list filled a single sheet of typing paper. I'm checking things off one by one as I find the time to work on my B&B hobby writing.

6) What aspect of the B&B fantasy world intrigues you most?

The utter heroism of the outcasts. They are amazing people, both as individuals and as a collective society. Everything about the world of the Beast is beautiful and fascinating to me. From the moment I first glimpsed that world on my computer screen, it felt like I'd finally come home. Exploring that world, along with the hearts of the characters who live therein, has healed me and helped me to grow.

7) Have you written other fiction, or any non-fiction?

Yes. I am a writer. I have written and seen published or performed short stories, poems, essays, scripts, recipes, music, and news articles. I am currently writing what I hope will become a series of novels.

8) What person do you prefer to write in (i.e. first, second, third)?

I have no preference, although I believe writers must exercise skill and advanced responsibility to employ second person narration well. I choose whichever narrative perspective is best for the story.

9) What do you wish they had explored (or explored more) in the series?

I do wish the storymakers had been given the opportunity to really delve into the nature and complexity of the complete Tunnels community, especially the lives of the Helpers. It was wonderful, though, in what they were able to accomplish, to see the interactions between Underworld and Upperworld, and the ways everyone connected with one another through love and trust and secrecy.

10) What aspect of the series do you like least?

The embedded prejudice and bigotry.

I know Beauty and the Beast is a product of its time. I know Koslow and the other storytellers had to make many concessions just to get—and keep—the show on the air for as long as they did. I know the story was primarily written and produced by a group of white male dreamers (expressing a varied range of social enlightenment) who made a “1980s Hollywood effort” to be a-little-less-exclusive and a-little-less-bigoted than usual. I also know the series attained positive and groundbreaking achievements in modern storytelling about poverty and disability, as well as storytelling about an inclusive, counter-cultural community. They admirably challenged many stereotypes and advocated for the dignity of many oppressed groups of people. Much of the series content is beautiful, powerful, and original.

None of which nullifies or excuses the sexism, heterosexism, racism, classism, ethnocentrism, and, yes, even the ableism that were exhibited throughout all three seasons of the series—on-screen, and behind the scenes. That is the one aspect of the series that I persistently try to eradicate in my own visitations to the Beauty and the Beast universe: I experiment with confronting and dismantling the embedded prejudices and bigotry—both the embedded biases in my own paradigm that I inherited from my culture (and even now unfortunately benefit from within my society), and the embedded biases that are spun into the very fibers of this televised story that otherwise so captivates my imagination.