

BAtB Article – Analyzing Obsession

Make no mistake - I'm a beastie. I make no apology for it either. I'm 51, an ex cop, consider myself of sound mind and body (with an above average IQ) and so not the sort of woman to fall willing victim to a fandom.

In fact this is a first and so startlingly unique in my case that I sought to analyse this in an in-depth fashion to come to terms with the BAtB obsession that has well and truly taken over my life.

I admit to being a TVaholic. I never took it seriously (up until now) and have always recognised TV for the pure escapist entertainment that it can be according to your tastes. My tastes are really varied. I will watch the more serious so called 'intelligent' shows like Homeland and The West Wing; the various crime dramas based in gruesome reality (think SVU or CSI) and thought provoking like Elementary or The Good Wife. I enjoy musical shows like Glee (story lines can be silly but the singing is generally fantastic).

When it comes to the chemistry of screen couples I have pretty much seen a long list of star crossed lovers: Buffy & Angel; Sookie and Bill (True Blood); Elena/Stefan or Elena/Damon (The Vampire Diaries); Beckett and Castle (Castle); Olivia and Peter (Fringe - a personal favourite); Sheriff Carter and Allison Blake (Eureka) and many more too numerous to mention. I'm also not averse to horror or blood and splatter shows like American Horror Story and Dexter, another two stand-outs for me. You can't say I'm caught by type or genre. I see the entertainment value in all of them.

But...I have never ever been so swept up in a show in my life. So enamoured that I join fandom conversations; look for new articles and pictures; watch countless YouTube videos plus re-runs of every episode. I'm from Australia where the show can't be purchased on iTunes or Amazon. It hasn't been released on TV yet or cable and live streaming from the US takes VPN protocols and counter intelligence manoeuvres like you wouldn't believe. Thanks to incredible beasties and their amazing support I download (have even learned how to sync to my iPad) and can now watch each episode to my hearts content...

If you had told me even 6 weeks ago I would become so immersed in a single TV show the story of which I knew something about because of the fairy tale, mythology, previous 80's incarnation and the rest I would have said that you were nuts. I don't have time or interest in anything other than watching an episode of a TV show and moving on. How wrong could I be? So why has this show latched on so tight and become part of my daily life and routine? There are a number of reasons which I'm now going to try and explain in more detail.

First to the general plot of the series for those uninitiated to its premise:

Catherine Chandler(played by Kristin Kreuk of Smallville fame) is a NY police detective who was saved by someone or something when her mother was murdered 9 years previously. She has lived with the deep conviction that something other than a human saved her life on that fateful night where she too would have been the next victim of the gunmen who killed her mother.

We fast forward by 9 years where a case throws her onto the trail of an allegedly deceased US army soldier: Vincent Keller, played by Jay Ryan (well known actor who made it big in Australia but is from New Zealand). An emergency department doctor in a NY hospital, he was highly regarded by colleagues as a very decent human being. When he loses both brothers (firemen) in the horror of the twin towers collapse he enlists in the army and volunteers as a subject for a covert operation to become a 'super soldier'. He was told along with others that the drugs administered to them contained vitamins, steroids and other natural enzymes and anti-biotics to aid strength, stamina and general fatigue in war conditions.

But that was of course a lie - what these soldiers were injected with instead, turned out to be highly volatile cross species DNA from a number of different animals. Needless to say the experiment goes horrendously wrong and when adrenaline kicks in these soldiers become monstrous killing machines. With no ability to cure or stop them, the agency that commissioned the experiment - a shadowy corporation called Muirfield, orders their termination down to the last man. Vincent manages to survive and finds his way back to NY where he lives out the next 10 years in hiding aided only by his boyhood friend JT Forbes (the very entertaining comic sidekick played by Austin Basis).

Catherine tracks him down by intuition and unconscious recognition of the 'beast' who had saved her years earlier. Thus begins a very complicated relationship (and you thought FB's "It's complicated" statuses were messy?) You ain't seen nothin' as these two take you on a roller coaster relationship ride. And that's the very core of BAaB - their epic love story, but more about that later.

BAaB is steeped in mythology and fairy tale folk lore. It's been the subject of movies both animated and 'real'; stage musicals and plays plus countless books and articles. The most well known incarnation was the 1980's series with Linda Hamilton (of Terminator fame) and Ron Perlman (Hellboy). I personally didn't watch it so have no basis for comparison. It has been described as a pure and poetic love story with longing glances and deep philosophical connection. The beast more like a lion and constantly in 'beast' mode.

The new incarnation has been criticised for having a lead actor who is way too handsome to be a beast. He only has a scar on his face. How is that beastly? In today's world of horror, war, serial killers and personal demons this argument holds no merit for me. Evil or badness is often not seen on the outside - it's within! When he turns into his beastly persona he is terrifying (read a cross between The Hulk, The Terminator and a nightmare out of any monster fairytale) and there is always the risk that one day he will turn and not revert back to his humanity. His DNA is in constant flux so anything is possible. I also believe in 2013 if he was always in beast mode the show would not be as successful with the predominantly female audience. There is a need to experience the human Vincent because he portrays what is possible in relationships when two people adore each other and are willing to sacrifice themselves for that love.

Talk about obstacles - these two face them all. As well as coming to terms with what Vincent is, Muirfield is also after him as is the NY Police Department. He has become known as an anonymous vigilante because he has a tendency to rescue innocents and the villains often get killed in the aftermath of his terrifying rage. The public respect him (after all it's the bad guys that are dying) but the police have a need to bring him to justice as no man is above the law. Catherine can't help him openly for fear of alerting his enemies to his whereabouts. There are also other shadowy players who have their own personal quest to find him for various nefarious purposes; whether to exorcise their own evil tendencies (Muirfield it seems did a lot of experimentation on human guinea pigs) or to understand him in more detail. Some just want to cut him open and see what makes him tick...

After 10 years in virtual solitary confinement with only his best friend for company, the woman he saved years earlier enters his life and turns it completely upside down. He learns to trust, to love and to live a more 'normal' life. The progression of this relationship is the show's heart and soul. Their chemistry is off the charts. I can honestly say I have never seen anything like it on the TV screen. If these two are acting they deserve an Oscar. They both have significant others in their lives so it seems there is no budding relationship between our co-stars although trying to convince the fandom that they are only acting is proving to be almost impossible. Whether they are or aren't, their love story is at once endearing, real, painful, funny, full of possibilities and very, very damned sexy. Like choreographed soft porn art. Tastefully represented and full of wonder and angst as these two discover just how deep their connection goes. And we are right there with them, experiencing the euphoric highs and depressing lows. Anyone who says that they can't act hasn't watched more than an episode or two. In the early days as the show was finding its feet, it was a little contrived at times but hell - a new show telling an age old story with well known characters was always going to attract armchair critics. Re-imagining the series for a 2013 audience was never going to be easy but the network has pulled it off. As the season progressed so did the actors. They do a stellar job both in the lead roles and the rather well drawn out supporting roles. We are emotionally invested in their lives.

But at the same time we get criminal procedurals with Vincent helping Catherine behind the scenes on her cases. With his heightened senses he is a really handy backup partner to have. We get suspense as Muirfield and other enemies close in on our beast. We get humour from JT (more about that later). The romance is an excruciating, deliciously slow build up - it takes 15 episodes for the first sex scenes (although it seemed to take years). They fist kiss in episode 14 and it was a case of screaming at the TV - 'Kiss already. Put us out of our misery'.

Sexy has a whole new definition when it comes to these two and one could write novels on the reasons that make Vincent so attractive to Catherine and all women in general. Handsome (when not in beast mode), intelligent, well built, tender, strong, sexy voice, thoughtful, funny, poetic and painfully honest (well except when it comes to telling Catherine the truth of her background because of his misguided attempts to protect her). But I digress. This is as yet to play out to what I'm sure is going to be the season finale cliff-hanger to beat them all. You will probably hear a wail from beasties the world over who can seriously not get enough of this love affair and make no mistake - a very deep love affair it is.

Vincent is the quintessential bad boy. A beast with a heart of gold who becomes less beastly and softens because of the love of one woman. That so plays into the psyche of women everywhere with their secret yearning to be the person who can tame the beast and conquer all. He may be the beast to the rest of the world but not for his Catherine who he would never harm. Clichéd? Absolutely, but no less real for the cliché. We are human beings with our own scars, foibles and idiosyncrasies. We often lead routine lives as mothers, wives and workers who are so not in touch with our feminine or sexy inner essence. BAAtB brings out the yearning that most of us have for deep connection with a soul mate. We so often settle for second best. In BAAtB we watch a relationship that is epic, all consuming and told with such tenderness and pathos by the actors that we can't help but swoon in anticipation. They have to overcome tremendous odds to be together and you sense that they will prevail even though there are going to be some torturous trials along the way.

It is such a great mix of action (Kristin's expertise in martial arts means that she can be a kickass heroine as Catherine), romance, comedy, suspense and reality (well mostly if you take into account the whole beast thing). Mind you with what we read of science and DNA experimentation, turning soldiers into super soldiers doesn't seem that much of a stretch...

The comedy is generally provided by Vincent's slightly geeky scientist friend JT Forbes. He tries to be the voice of reason and at first tries to keep Vincent and Catherine apart for their own safety but even he gives up against the unstoppable soul connection that is Vincat. He has some of the best lines: when he realises that Vincent still hasn't managed to get his act together with Catherine physically he utters the classic line: "Even I get laid by the 23rd date"...there is another scene where JT is trying to talk Catherine out of finding Vincent (in early episodes when she is drawn to him like moth to a flame) and he says that Vincent doesn't have Twitter because..."he can't have followers" and that is only the smallest taste of his humour. It is so very funny at times. We also see painful side relationships. Cat's police partner Tess is having an affair with their married boss; Cat has to contend with her father re-marrying a woman half his age; she also has to deal with a younger, really annoying sister. All of these are reflected in everyday life for all of us and are usually well scripted (there are exceptions at times but no show gets it 100% right).

Did I mention epic romance? I did? You're right. I repeat myself for a reason. IT IS EPIC! Boy oh boy do these two know how to sizzle on the screen. Fleeting touches, desirous glances through half lidded eyes, yearning looks across a room, unspoken love that jumps out of the screen and grabs you by the throat. It is intense. And when they do get it on, My God – the intensity ramps up by about a million degrees. So much so that beasties the world over are craving Jay and Kristin's connection in real life, tough luck that they have partners. Pfffft - means nothing. Do the wild thing already.

Some of Vincent's best lines to Catherine:
(I rate them top three so far up to the end of episode 19)

1. I am so in love with you
2. I don't know what to do now because I can't live without you
3. I couldn't handle losing you. I couldn't live. I wouldn't WANT TO...

There is probably not a woman alive who wouldn't respond to those lines spoken by such an impossibly sexy man/beast. Hats off to Mr Ryan for making us believe them when he says them. Plus dammit, he has the sexiest growl of a voice since...lord I don't know - it IS the sexiest voice this chick has ever heard uttered on TV. Hands down winner. The voice combined with the looks and charisma are a winner for the network. Talk about the perfect actor for the perfect role. And yes he is handsome, but not in a clean cut, pretty way. He is dishevelled, exudes a dangerous air and seems like he is in a constant battle to control his beastly tendencies. We believe he can beast out or be a poetic dreamer and boy is that a difficult combo for an actor to convey with real conviction – he does it and then some. I like and respect the actor Jay Ryan because of his immense craft of bringing Vincent to life but I am IN LOVE with Vincent Keller – the character he portrays. There is a difference.

Now this brings me to the armchair critics. Ok, the genre may not be your thing, you may not be into epic love stories (is that even normal?) or the mythology, but give it a chance. A lot of the critics seem to lampoon it for the sheer hell of it. He's too handsome (how is that a problem?) he only has a scar (you obviously didn't see him morph into the terrifying beast) it's all too clichéd (name me a show that's not in part) it's not as good as the original or not like the original (please it is 2013 - we have different ideas of what turns us on and a full time beast just won't cut it any-more). The actors are wooden (did you actually watch BAaB or were you absent?) Wooden is not the word I would use to describe their emotions or interactions (although it could describe a certain part of his appendage when he makes love to Catherine).

Then there are those damned fans that demand social media savvy from the stars and wail when they don't get it. Get a grip. I may adore this show to bits but it is a TV show. Mind you it indicates just how powerful it has become when fans bemoan that they can't get enough personal interaction with their beloved beast. As an actor he is sensational in the role and is very generous with his time for interviews, articles, fans out in public and numerous radio and TV appearances. So he doesn't Twitter much. Who cares? He is an object of fantasy not reality. He's an actor! Fandom going into meltdown certainly means that the show is working on a very deep, intense level though. I don't believe the network could possibly have foreseen what they created with this re-tooling of an old story. It's tapped into a zeitgeist that is immense. Don't write it off or underestimate the power of women to drive the momentum forward. It is selling like crazy in the digital world because we want to see more. Once is not enough and stories of watching each episode over and over again are increasing exponentially. Even the cast are amazed at how powerfully passionate the fans have become in such a short space of time.

Mark my words - this time in 12 months they will be THE hottest couple on the TV screen. But with that come more critics and people who love or loathe the show. To the beasties all I can say is don't be a force for negative, spread the love and passion and be a force for good. Let the actors find their way and do what is comfortable for them. Invest in them, yes, but don't let it drive you to become rabid crazy fans that let their passions dictate bad or stupid behaviour!

To those who haven't watched it yet - give it a go. Every single amazing beastie I have connected with online all have the same story to tell. Young or old, like me, they have never, ever connected this viscerally with characters in a show before and are just as stunned at their intense reactions as I was. And don't think that beasties are only women – more and more men are coming into the fold because of its action, humour and suspense, not to mention a strong love for Kristin Kreuk as Catherine. Gorgeous and kickass she fulfils many a fellow beastie's fantasies.

We all agree that we've never been this obsessed before in our lives. There is power in those reactions so don't ignore them or laugh them away - check it out for yourself and then join us on one of the best most exhilarating, satisfying rides you will ever take. You have no idea how much fun it is or how much you will learn about yourself and what your deepest desires are...



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