

**Their on-screen
fairytale romance
has meant big
real-life changes
for Linda Hamilton
and Ron Perlman.**

HER

■ **BY LESLEY SALISBURY**

RON PERLMAN had two claims to fame in his 15-year acting career: he was a grunting, hairy, prehistoric tribesman in *Quest for Fire*, and then a hideously deformed hunchback in *The Name of the Rose*. Even his wife had trouble recognising him under all the makeup. So, when he was offered *Beauty and the Beast*, he turned it down flat. No more rubber noses, no more fangs and disfigurements, no more wigs and beards. He just wanted to be himself.

Then he read the script his manager had slyly dropped on the doormat. "And, before I'd even finished the second act, I was on the phone. I knew what it meant — four or five hours a day in the makeup chair — but I also knew that whatever I had to do to play the part was worth it. I just knew this was my biggest chance."

Which is more than most people did. When the series was first shown in America, Perlman was ridiculed in the press and critics dismissed the show. Now, much to Perlman's delight, they're eating their words. The series is a big hit, mainly with women viewers and, to Perlman's even greater delight and amazement, he's become a sex symbol. And better yet — he's being recognised without his makeup.

Women mob him in supermarkets, send marriage proposals, describe their wildest dreams and dedicate pages of poetry to him. Or perhaps, if truth be known, to Vincent, the mysterious half-man, half-beast who lives underground in New York and who appears doomed to carry on a Gothic romance with the beautiful Catherine, played by Linda Hamilton.

"Vincent has lit a spark under something sexual... more so than

Linda Hamilton: "Glamour is hardly my style. I'm usually invisible."

any of us imagined he would," said Perlman from Beverly Hills. He's a big man, with wavy hair, designer stubble, a boxer's nose and an incongruously sensuous, velvet voice that had tea-sipping ladies at the next table eavesdropping and sighing.

"He's a joy for me. He's one of the most attractive characters I've ever read in literature and I'm very proud to play him. Women say he's the ultimate fantasy love, someone who asks nothing in return but gives 100 percent. His motives are pure, unconditional.

"He's a throwback to the age of romanticism. For 180 years, people wrote plays about the decision between love and honour and what someone would actually put their life on the line for and I think people miss that kind of romance. Vincent's values are incredibly romantic and traditional, he has tremendous physical strength, which makes him super-heroic, he's a champion of the underdog and he's a great lover without asking for that love to be of this world.

"No wonder I have letters like this" — he pulls one out of his pocket to show me — from a woman who was widowed after being happily married for 30 years. He reads part of it aloud: "... but maybe there's hope. If I could find someone to love me like that I wouldn't care if he looked like a goat."

Perlman, 38, is now back in the makeup chair — master designer Rick Baker has whittled the makeup time from eight hours to four, but Perlman still needs to be at the studio at four o'clock most mornings — for another series.

Although his Jamaican-born wife, fashion designer Opal Stone, can see through his leonine look, four-year-old daughter Blake isn't allowed near the screen.

"That's the tough part about doing the show — how my daughter reacts," he says. "The makeup

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is so real looking. If it was just a mask or an obvious makeup job, she'd have no trouble making the switch from Daddy to Vincent. But I become transformed physically. You can't tell where I finish and Vincent begins. It's an extraordinary creation."

Perlman and Stone have been together for 14 years, married for eight. They met in New York when he was a struggling actor and are enjoying the fame and success the *Beast* has brought them — a new home in Los Angeles, their old apartment in New York, a personal trainer to work out with and the security a hit show brings.

"I've always been seen as a natural for a Neanderthal," he says, only half-joking. He describes himself as a "fat kid, a pretty ugly one" from a working-class family — father a TV repairman, mother a clerk in the New York City Department of Health — and says he developed a "pretty bad inferiority complex".

"When the boys started discovering girls and girls started discovering boys, I felt a great inferiority. It caused me pain which I carry to this day. These features which are now just rugged were very rugged as a child. I wasn't winning beauty contests... I lived with the pain of adolescence daily and that made Vincent easier for me. I know how he feels.

"Then I decided that if I was going to take a special place in life it was not going to be based on how I looked. Acting — playing someone else — saved me.

"Now I look on Vincent as my last laugh. He's my revenge for all those girls who looked at me at high school and went 'Uecch!' It does feel good to know they can see me now."

LINDA HAMILTON had almost as much of an identity problem as Ron Perlman before *Beauty and*

the Beast "unveiled" her. "Glamour is hardly my style," she says. "I'm usually invisible. I've played a lot of rape victims on television in programmes such as *Hill Street Blues*. I've been a battered wife. My films have all been action-adventure. [*The Terminator*, *King Kong Lives*] and I've been strung up on a cross by religious fanatics in Stephen King's *Children of the Corn*. I usually end up getting knocked about."

No more. For the first time in her career, the sultry, honey-haired Hamilton, 32, is playing a romantic heroine and she's as fascinated with her *Beauty* role — she plays lawyer Catherine Chandler — as are the fans who keep stopping her in the street asking, "When are you going to kiss him?"

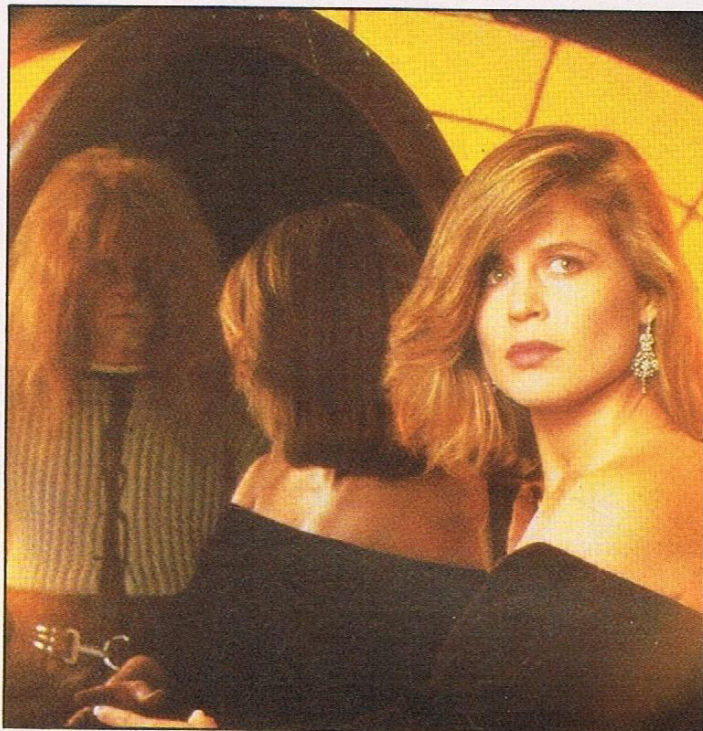
The answer comes later this series. Off-screen also, Hamilton and Perlman have grown closer. They had never met — she'd seen him in *Quest for Fire* and he'd seen her co-starring with Arnold Schwarzenegger in *The Terminator* — but now Hamilton admits she leans on Perlman off-screen as much as Catherine relies on Vincent on-screen.

"One day I was so angry about something at work that I burst into tears and flew into his arms. I find him enormously strong and soft and kind. We have so much in common."

Part of that includes a troubled childhood and adolescence. Her father, a doctor, was killed in a car crash when she and her identical twin sister Leslie were five. "To this day, I'm afraid of people leaving me," she says.

She and her sister were so close, she suffered a lack of identity and cut off her hair and eyelashes when she was 16 to make herself more

Ron Perlman: "Vincent has lit a spark under something sexual."



distinctive. She also gorged herself up to 76kg, 25kg more than she weighs today.

"I wanted to be ugly," she remembers. "I became the intellectual, the thinker, as opposed to my sister, the cheerleader. I was voted class snob."

When her sister took up nursing, Hamilton took up acting — and found her identity. But life still wasn't without its problems. Now, she has decided to speak openly about them, including her darkest time when for three years she was addicted to cocaine.

"There are drugs that expand the soul but cocaine is one that just closes the heart," she says. "It's a very alone, horrible sort of shrinking drug. I quit on my own but there was a time I feared I would have to go in for treatment. I really was in trouble."

She is "so clean" now, she says, that she and her husband, actor Bruce Abbott — they married five years ago — have even given up smoking and drinking. Their only habit, they claim with a laugh, is a spiced rum — "and then only on Thursdays".

More trouble came when Hamilton, brought up in Maryland, moved to Los Angeles in 1979 and started making money in TV series such as *Secrets of Midland Heights* and *Kings Crossing*. When she tried to put a deposit on a house, she discovered that her business

manager had swindled her out of \$107,000. "It was a nightmare," says Hamilton. (He was stealing from other show-business clients and was subsequently jailed for five years.)

But now the troubles are over and she and Abbott live in a beautiful home in the wealthy suburb of Pacific Palisades. There's just one thing missing from their home, she says — a baby.

"I want to have one soon, that's my role. I'll say it right now; I love doing the show, but I don't want to have to wait too long to have a baby. We'll have to find a way to work it in or I'll just have to leave. I even find myself envying my sister, who lives in New Jersey and has two children. I sometimes look at my life and the fast, breakneck pace of it and compare it with hers. Hers is more solid."

"And more boring," says Leslie, who has now joined us. "I feel like kicking myself sometimes. That could be me up there on screen. But I wouldn't trade places with Linda. Mind you, it's tough when I've had a day of sick children and snotty noses and then Linda calls and her biggest trauma is choosing a gown for an event she has to attend."

Will Linda get her beast? Will a baby intervene? Stay tuned. ■

■ **BEAUTY AND THE BEAST**
TV2, Friday, 8.30pm