

Chat on Cat-Tale #56: Armchair Detective

November, 2008 in the Cat-Tales Lobby

TheWilder: I almost forgot about Daylight Savings ending

Chris Dee: I knew I was rolling the dice having the chat today, with the time change, but it was the only convenient time for me. We'll just wait a few more minutes to give folks a chance to find the place.

Chris Dee: Let's get started. I know some folks have trouble getting into the room. We can always rewind for latecomers if needed

TheWilder: I guess I'll start things off from the beginning

Chris Dee: Go for it

TheWilder: What was it like to really delve into Knightfall and the accident with Bane in Armchair, rather than just referencing it in previous stories?

Chris Dee: Very satisfying! It's something that I have always...

Chris Dee: Hello Random Equinox, welcome

Random Equinox: Hi, everyone!

cal: Hi!

Chris Dee: Since we're such a small group, it's an open forum. The question is: "What was it like to really delve into Knightfall and the accident with Bane in Armchair, rather than just referencing it in previous stories?"

Chris Dee: Very satisfying. It was a very turbulent episode in the Bat history, and one that I don't think was very well handled.

Chris Dee: To explain: When I was asked about Harvey's healing/rescarring, I said it was something I wasn't prepared to do unless I could do it well and fully explore all the ramifications. Knightfall seems to have brushed up against a dozen of those. Opened a dozen boxes that it was NEVER prepared to unpack.

Random Equinox: Sounds right. My experience of comics back then was extremely limited, but I seem to recall comments that TPTB wanted to make a new Batman, and were surprised that fans wanted the old one.

Random Equinox: Either they weren't expecting to unpack those boxes, or they weren't expecting the public response to its contents.

Chris Dee: I believe that's so

Chris Dee: And while I don't want to go on a big digression about the hubris there, I do feel that it left fans with a lot of unresolved issues. I've been "carrying the one" for a long time.

With Bruce/Alfred, Bruce/Dick, Bruce/Gordon, JP/Everybody, Bat/Cat

TheWilder: Did you have difficulty making sure things agreed with Cat-Tales continuity and such?

Chris Dee: Not too much. I occasionally go back and check something, but the one advantage to being a one-woman band is that I mostly have an internal continuity

Random Equinox: As opposed to trying to maintain continuity amongst multiple writers/editors across multiple storylines.

Chris Dee: Correct.

Random Equinox: Will we ever get to see Jean-Paul's and Azrael's take on all this?

TheWilder: last I recall, isn't he still off with BC?

Chris Dee: I'm really not sure. I don't have any aversion to getting into it, if the story gives me the opportunity. This particularly story, he didn't fit. And as wilder mentions, JP was last seen leaving Gotham.

Chris Dee: Probably for the best. The Bat Family could do their own internal healing better without him

Random Equinox: It would be interesting to see their reaction, even if secondhand, given their involvement in the Cat-Tales equivalent of Knightfall.

Random Equinox: But I agree that there's no point in forcing the square peg in if the hole's round.

TheWilder: agreed

TheWilder: Speaking of other characters, will the poll still be relevant for Not My Kink or for the next story?

Chris Dee: The poll is still relevant, but I may take the current ones down and put up a new one.

cal: On what topic?

Chris Dee: Cal, they are talking about a poll I had on the forums a few months ago that asked what secondary characters you would like to see. As I recall, Cassie, Tim, Whiskers and Nutmeg dominated the findings

TheWilder: I did like seeing Tim, Cassie, Whiskers, and Nutmeg make the story after you added those polls

Random Equinox: I can't complain with those results!

TheWilder: :)

cal: Oh, no, I remember that--I was asking what the topic of the new poll would be.

Chris Dee: Oh okay, new poll would be a clean slate on the old, without those characters who have recently reappeared

Random Equinox: Though I can't recall if Whiskers and Nutmeg had that much screentime in Armchair.

Chris Dee: Random, they never have enough

cal: Yeah, I was torn between Cass/Tim and Whiskers/Nutmeg. Don't remember who I ended up voting for

TheWilder: hey Star_Ranger

cal: Hello

Random Equinox: Hi!

Star_Ranger: Berf!!!!

Chris Dee: Hey SR

Chris Dee: Cats and Joker always want more screentime

Star_Ranger: Now, that doesnt surprise me; at least for Joker. Part of his insanity is his egomania

cal: I suppose that means that the hyenas are just ravenous for it then, hmm? :-)

TheWilder: I don't know how he would fit, but I would like to see Francois again

Star_Ranger: And, anyone who is kept by cats know they are ALWAYS the center of attention

Chris Dee: Okay, first question from the mailbag

Chris Dee: Q. What comics Selina is referencing at the end?

Chris Dee: A: The whole Falconi Jewelers incident is taken from Catwoman Year by Doug Moench, issues 38-40 I believe. I made two changes. In the comic version, it is Two-Face that Catwoman captures, not Joker. Given Cat-Tales Selina's close personal relationship with Harvey, I switched it to Joker. She did capture him in a later story, so it's not like I exaggerated her abilities on that score.

Random Equinox: Two-Face would appreciate the number of changes, no doubt.

Random Equinox: What's the second change?

Chris Dee: The other tweak was that in the comic, she did know that Joker was in the van. Her mistake in their version was that she "didn't know how dangerous he was" - because in this era, even writers who treated Selina right seem compelled to make her STUPID.

Random Equinox: I don't mean to nit-pick, but was it "stupid" or "naive"?

Chris Dee: Hm, that's a fair question

Star_Ranger: Its the 'post'. They're idiots

Chris Dee: Doug was always good to our favorite couple, so let's cut him some slack and go with naive.

Star_Ranger: To be honest Chris, I think its mostly a male insecurity. Tripods dont really know how to relate well to a gorgeous woman who is at least as inteligent if not more.

cal: The ones who many comic authors seem to be targeting, anyway.

Chris Dee: That could be. I just know when someone asked Sorkin how he keeps writing these strong, funny, wonderful women he answered that he's the son of one, and the brother of one, and the lover of one, etc.

Chris Dee: basically said "how do you guys get away with NOT writing them"

cal: Makes sense to me. A lot of fiction writing is getting inside your characters' heads

cal: and if you're going to let a thing like gender stand in the way, you probably have no business writing fiction.

Chris Dee: Back to the room. Your turn for a question

Star_Ranger: Ok, Question... You sort of did the 'locked room' mystery back at halloween a couple of years ago. So, what was the motivation to create another similar story?

Random Equinox: And why do it as a Poirot-style whodunnit, as opposed to some other whodunnit?

TheWilder: And where did you draw inspiration for the cast of original characters in Armchair?

Chris Dee: Good questions, and interrelated ones. okay let's see...

Chris Dee: I grew up on Agatha Christies. When other girls were reading Nancy Drew, I was devouring the Poirot short stories.

Chris Dee: And by the by, if anybody thinks Eddie's intellectual superiority can be a bit much, steer clear of the cat-eyed Belgian. He takes no prisoners.

Chris Dee: Anyway, I do have this love of classic mysteries, and Batman is one of the world's great detectives. So I suspect it was just a matter of time.

Chris Dee: I flirted with the genre early on in Trick or Treat and again Identity Element, but I had never done a tale in the true style of the classic whodunit where the mystery IS the story.

Chris Dee: So what changed and why now?

Chris Dee: Within the past year, I did get the entire David Suchet series of Poirots on DVD and had myself quite the binge. That's what really planted the seed.

Chris Dee: There's one in particular where Poirot is stuck at home and Hastings has to be his eyes and ears.

Chris Dee: It all came together pretty quickly, that if Bruce was injured, it would not only set up that kind of long distance detective opportunity, it could open the old Azrael wounds

Chris Dee: Random, "Why Poirot?" Hercule Poirot has two qualities that were just right.

Chris Dee: As one of the FFnet reviews pointed out, he plays fair with readers.

Chris Dee: Holmes - we all love him, including Bruce - but most modern readers have the same experience with him: They know "whodunits", they figure this is the granddaddy of them all, and they sit down thinking they're going to solve the mystery. They pay attention, then Holmes disappears for two acts and returns with a solution that started years ago in India.

Chris Dee: The modern reader is left scratching his head. With Poirot, you're almost always given everything you need to piece it together.

Star_Ranger: Or some other minutia that one inevitably overlooks

Chris Dee: The other attractive feature with Poirot is he is all about the psychology.

TheWilder: also reminds me of Jeph's Hush

Chris Dee: Forensics has its place, but CSI shows mess up is making it the focus. That's not how you FIND the killer, that's how you CONVICT the killer.

Chris Dee: Probably the funniest spoof of those shows was on MadTV early on, the lab rats analyzing the molecular makeup of this knifeblade, closeups on their eyes, Shatneresque delivery of their oh so dramatic pronouncements, when the police detective comes in and asks what the hell they're still doing with that knife. The guys wife confessed two hours ago.

Random Equinox: *snort*

Random Equinox: I can agree with those readers and their thoughts on Holmes.

Chris Dee: Anyway, I didn't mean to run over Wilder's comment. Hush is probably THE great comicbook mystery. Where the mystery itself is where the charm of the story comes from.

Chris Dee: I think later attempts to use the character missed that vital ingredient. It wasn't anything about Hush personally that made that story such a page turner, there wasn't any magic in the trenchcoat. It was the excitement of the mystery unfolding

Star_Ranger: Ugh... which reminds me of another problem with having the Hairdo around. Lazari pits

TheWilder: But having Harold be the out was a little out of left field

Chris Dee: Point. I was maybe too quick with the superlatives there

Chris Dee: To be fair, Jeph is kind of famous for a WTF resolution where the dénouement should be.

TheWilder: that is true

Chris Dee: (Said with love, Jeph, wherever you are)

TheWilder: But I've heard good things with him at Marvel, if not reading it first-hand

Chris Dee: Oh I have no doubt. He's a storyteller at heart. That's like being a musician rather than "a cello player", if that makes sense.

Star_Ranger: Maybe that's why he's got a problem with the Dénouement? he doesn't want to have to end the story

Star_Ranger: and hopes that someone will go wtf, so he can start another story explaining that?

Random Equinox: I read some of his Marvel work. Wasn't nearly as good as Long Halloween or Hush. But I haven't read enough to know whether that's an anomaly or not.

Random Equinox: Don't you love cliffhangers?

Star_Ranger: ONLY when I know just how long I'll be left hanging.

Chris Dee: Hm, well "not as good as TLH" is kind of like saying "not as good as citizen kane". If you write one of those in a lifetime, it's got to be a mixed blessing, because god, how can you ever top or equal it?

Random Equinox: That's true, Chris. Based on my memories, let's just say it definitely didn't equal it.

cal: like Citizen Kane--there's a good argument that Welles just went downhill from there

Random Equinox: Hopefully, his more recent stuff was better. I wouldn't know.

Star_Ranger: Have to agree with that thought

Chris Dee: well anyway, when someone has been consistently entertaining it's easier to forgive the little stuff

Chris Dee: Before leaving the Jeph question, I had one more thought up there

Chris Dee: It might be that his beginnings are just too good. With Hush, the expectation after the first third was so high, probably nothing could have lived up to it

TheWilder: since TLH is still on-topic, where do you think Nolan and co. will go from here?

Chris Dee: Chris Dee: I'm going to take a pass on that question. I have a lengthy answer and we won't have enough breadcrumbs to get home. Maybe I'll put it in the blog one of these days.

Chris Dee: Briefly finishing up the original Q about Poirot, this story was all about the psychology, from before the murder when Bruce deduces why Oracle sent the films she did, we see the detective mind doing what it does best.

Chris Dee: And a real quick question from the IM window from ussentinel who is having technical issues and can't make it into the room:

Question: Did you deviate any of the core parts of the mystery from your initial game plan during the course of you writing this?

Chris Dee: Nope, not on the mystery. I had that outlined before I began. The rest of the story was fluid, like all CT. But the actual murder, suspects, motives, and how they would unfold were all pretty much as outlined

Chris Dee: Another question from the room, or should I go back to the mailbag?

Star_Ranger: Q, Cassie and Dick; re Cars and body language... did our support for cassie that cars can reflect their owners body language surprise you?

Chris Dee: Yes it did. Dick is crushed. Cassie is doing her victory dance

TheWilder: I think Dick was a little too unyielding

TheWilder: haha

Random Equinox: Though Cassie's victory still doesn't justify her refusal to ask for help in the navigation department.

Chris Dee: Men are supposed to have a monopoly on that, are they?

Random Equinox: Props for gender equality, perhaps?

Star_Ranger: I stand by my point on that one... she's used to thinking in terms of rooftops, not roads

TheWilder: although Alfred's victory dance at the end was definitely justified

Random Equinox: Hell, yeah!

Random Equinox: LOL

Chris Dee: :D

cal: Alfred's probably grinning his head off (internally, of course) at his ability to temper B's Battitude :-D or its manifestation, at any rate

Chris Dee: I don't think any two words in the canon has got as many comments as "Alpha Medic"

Random Equinox: Move aside, Joker, there's a new nemesis in town. And one more effective than the Hairdo.

Star_Ranger: I dunno about that, but definably feels content at finally getting Master Bruce to understand that taking care of himself should be just as important to the Mission as analyzing the latest version of Fear Toxins

Random Equinox: I guess that's the problem with being so focused on taking care of everyone else: taking care of yourself is downgraded to a low or nonexistent priority.

Random Equinox: That latter concept sorta goes outside the box.

Star_Ranger: Indeed. See it happen a lot in RL.

Chris Dee: There's definitely a line in working out, practicing a martial artist, any athletic training - you block the pain, you block the exhaustion this come first. Even non-physical endeavors like studying for finals, pursuing a medical degree. You're exhausted and you push through it and that's a GOOD thing. Comes a point where you have to realize that's far enough

Chris Dee: I think there is a feeling with athletes that giving up at any point is what separates the gold medal from the silver one

cal: True. I'm reminded of the bit in Polishing Silver where he talks about his frustration with their self-inflicted Zogger beatings

cal: It's the "sharpening the saw" analogy

Random Equinox: I was going to say "diminishing returns", but I like "sharpening the saw" better.

Chris Dee: *nods

cal: Random Equinox: They're second cousins at the very least.

Star_Ranger: Oh man, that was another great tension breaker. Tim and Dick and Bat homework vs 'School' homework

Random Equinox: Not to mention Batman's reaction.

Chris Dee: Oh yes!

cal: hee, I loved that

TheWilder: I loved seeing the Robins commiserate

Chris Dee: A beta and 3 reviews all said the same thing

Chris Dee: "No Bruce, they've always been that way, but they're not afraid of you now and they let you see it"

Random Equinox: "And how is the 'World's Greatest Detective' only seeing it [i]now[/i]?"

Chris Dee: Point

cal: I think it's a forest-for-the-trees thing

Chris Dee: Another quick one from the mailbag. Q. Is this murder plot taken from X ?

Chris Dee: Yes, in part, in each different case of X.

Chris Dee: There's an old precept in academic writing: if you take from one source, it's plagiarism. If you take from 10, it's research. If you take from 100, it's original thought.

Chris Dee: Noel's murder has drawn elements from 3 or 4 different Poirot short stories, the Sunny von Bulow case, 2 Dominic Dunne novels, Dexter, a couple Law & Order episodes, 2 video games, assorted IM conversations I had over the last year, and what I had for breakfast on any given morning I was writing.

TheWilder: oh, where did you gain inspiration for the original characters?

Chris Dee: Oh boy, I'm not even sure anymore. I knew I wanted a Dominic Dunne or Danielle Steele kind of family. High powered, dysfunctional, squabbling. The typical rich family/network mini-series kind of people...

Chris Dee: but quirky enough that they would know Richard Flay and invite him for the weekend.

Random Equinox: Since Flay's schedule's wide open.

Random Equinox: Because Eddie hasn't taken him up on his invitation yet.

Chris Dee: I need to start extorting money from these characters. Eddie will pay a lot to be kept out of a RF story. Or at least not to appear on the same page.

Star_Ranger: *Giggle*snort*twitchsmile*

Random Equinox: OMG

Chris Dee: (I'm perfectly happy to hold off on the next question if we want to keep throwing things at Eddie)

Random Equinox: Eddie may check himself into Uncle Jerry's House o' Fun, just to score some drugs that would blank that image out.

Random Equinox: Poor Eddie.

TheWilder: you took the words out of my mouth

Chris Dee: He is one of those characters that lends himself to that phrase

Star_Ranger: *thumps RE with a jokerfish for subjecting him to o deprivation*

Chris Dee: No one ever says "Poor Hugo"

TheWilder: it just doesn't feel right when saying it

cal: Eddie might be one of my favorite characters, actually

Random Equinox: Ditto.

Random Equinox: Well, the Cat-Tales version, anyways.

Chris Dee: I see Joker waving bye-bye to his next potential appearance in favor of the other funnyman

cal: He's a bit like Selina (but don't tell her that) in that he does the rogue thing largely for the thrill of it, and doesn't have the frankly insane aspect that a lot of the others do

TheWilder: I wonder what he would have to say about Catwoman officially joining the Bat Family

cal: btw, I saw a *lot* of Jokers out for Halloween the other day.

Chris Dee: Yes, me too. He's very popular this year.

Chris Dee: Go TDK

Random Equinox: TDK FTW

cal: bounce from TDK, I'd bet

TheWilder: :)

cal: heh, a triple!

Chris Dee: HAHAAHAHA

cal: Great minds.

Chris Dee: One more question from the mailbag, and then I'll take a final one from the room. Q from the message board on Cassie's communication: How do you teach someone a complicated idea or any of the vitally important skills for a successful assassin without some sort of structured communication.

Chris Dee: Answer: You can't. You absolutely cannot. There's an overrated episode of Star Trek: The Next Generation that puts forth a "language" based on a Victorian parlor game. There's no way this language can be learned, and more importantly no way it gets this species into space.

Chris Dee: (And I do like Star Trek, but I reserve the right to poke them when they don't make sense)

Chris Dee: I don't know how DC handles the Cassie question, but I look at it this way: A human baby makes every noise in every language. They repeat the one that gets a response from the milk-machine. In English, it's any variation on "Ma" and in aboriginal Australia it's a certain click, but whatever sound makes the big mommy-face smile, THAT'S IT!

Chris Dee: David Cain didn't care about Cassie being able to speak, so he never would have given that reinforcement. But he wanted her able to understand, so there is still plenty of reinforcement on the receiving end. Just nothing on SENDING.

Star_Ranger: Keith or classic?

Chris Dee: If any of you have been to Tokyo, you may have encountered several Japanese who can understand English quite well, but won't speak it for fear of not doing it well. You can see them mentally translating your question, formulating their answer, and then STOPPING with this terror look and falling back on "No English". But then, if you point, they'll be happy to shake their head yes or no to tell you which way the Chiyoda station is. So they understand fine, but they're not going to talk.

cal: I can usually get the gist of what Spanish speakers are saying, but I'm hard pressed to say much in the language

Chris Dee: That's pretty much how I handle Cassie's language situation

cal: and if I did, I bet I'd sound like a Spanish-speaking Cassie.

cal: Grammar is tough.

Chris Dee: *nods* It really is. And English is just insane

Random Equinox: The same can be said of any language. The way Superman "handled" Cassie was very sweet, though.

cal: Don't forget the largest vocabulary of any human language, you know, just to make it interesting.

Random Equinox: Oops, meant that as two separate posts.

cal: I really liked that bit.

Chris Dee: Clark's heart is the most super thing about him, in my book. You have to love the guy

Star_Ranger: I have to concur with that thought, and its always good to see a reminder of how Cain was an idiot.

Random Equinox: I see Batman's injuries provided a convenient vehicle for it, but why choose now to bring Catwoman further into "Team Bat"?

Star_Ranger: My thought is more why not?

Star_Ranger: And that ties into speculation I'm not going into about just what "not my kink" will cover

Chris Dee: Well, A major theme of this story was acknowledging past mistakes and making an honest effort to make up for it.

Chris Dee: In fact, I'm going to digress for a sec and retract my last answer about this being a Poirot mystery. In a larger sense, it's a Holmesian one, in that a Sherlock Holmes story was never about the reader solving the crime, but rather it was about spending time with these unique characters in that very particular world they inhabited.

Chris Dee: To a considerable extent, Noel's murder was a subplot and this story is about the Bat Family acknowledging those mistakes of the past and making up for them.

Chris Dee: The left turn when it got to Selina – that it wasn't the Bane/Azrael period but an earlier episode, that was one of those little things you discover as you write

Chris Dee: Cats are the exception to every rule, it seems.

Chris Dee: There was this memorable piece in the old comic where Selina did what everybody had been talking about: recognized a mistake and fixed it. Once that episode was on the table between Bruce and Selina, the outcome wrote itself.

TheWilder: I particularly liked seeing Selina through Bruce's eyes throughout the mystery and his interpretation of what was going through her mind

Chris Dee: That was fun for me too. He loves her, but she's still this bundle of unknown unstable chemicals

Chris Dee: So much of Bruce's reactions felt like "she's getting purple on my case"

Random Equinox: And now that the offer's been made and accepted, she's going to "get purple" on Gotham.

TheWilder: It'll be fun to see how her point of view will influence the rest of the Bat Family

Random Equinox: More than they've already been influenced.

Star_Ranger: I dunno Wilder, She's already had a really powerful influence on the whole clan since Book

TheWilder: well, like RE said

Star_Ranger: Point.

TheWilder: at least to a higher degree if she's going to be more hands-on

Random Equinox: And "laying down the law".

Random Equinox: *whip-crack*

TheWilder: perhaps Tim's comment will be casually leaked out on the Oracom?

Star_Ranger: I think, however, that we're starting to jump the shark though... We're going to have to wait till Chris starts recounting "Not My Kink" to find out.

Random Equinox: Maybe. Though there's no shame in imagining all the shenanigans that'll pop up.

Chris Dee: Hm, I do usually leave the chat with some little tease from the next story

Chris Dee: In this case, I don't know if I can top the cover

Star_Ranger: Point. But lets wait till Chap and we can speculate on the MB.

Chris Dee: Well on that note, I think we're ready to close the book on Armchair

Chris Dee: Thanks for coming out guys. This was an amazing chat

cal: Great job on this one, by the way--CT's always good, and this is one of the best in a while

TheWilder: this was really fun

cal: looking forward to NMK.

Star_Ranger: No, thank YOU for giving us plus years of great reading about Complex characters who grow and learn!

Random Equinox: Thank you for setting this up, and for writing such a great Cat-Tales for us to chat about.

Chris Dee: Thank you very much. I'm glad you enjoyed it.

Random Equinox: Ditto on what Star_Ranger said.

Chris Dee: Have a good one

Random Equinox: Ciao!

cal: bye!

Star_Ranger: *waves* *hits eject*