

The Companion is a diverse, and not especially well-organized collection of snippets, rantings, and extras connected to the Cat Tales series: The recipes for d'Annunzio's Shrimp Arrabiatta, the real life models for Nirvana the ocelot, how 'Pheromones' got his name, and what really happened at Clark Kent's bachelor party.

These items are divided roughly into the following categories:

Catverse: Cat-Tales continuity, shown in purple

DCU: DC continuity, shown in blue

Reality: From the real world, or the real world's history, pop culture, or literature

Normal

Real World Raoul's Coffee Cart

Gotham City gets short-changed in a lot of Batman stories. This city and its people are at the heart of Batman's mission. There was a time, pre-Selina, when it was the only thing he would admit caring for. And yet most fics ignore it entirely. Or worse, when details are given, it either resembles a suburb of East Podunk, or the Land of Mordor where the Shadows lie.

In good New York stories the city itself is practically a character. And that's why, whenever I'm able, I'll insert a morsel of real citylife. Raoul was my first effort in that area, along with the city coming to life in early morning, and for that matter Selina's thoughts about "the Suit in a hurry... that sleeps in the 'burbs."

A Knight at the Opera House

History/Literature One of the delights of a city like Gotham (or as I think of it: uber-NewYork) is the history. The Opera House on whose roof Batman stages that first date is the very one Edith Wharton would have described in *The Age of Innocence*:

"Though there was already talk of the erection, in remote metropolitan distances 'above the Forties,' of a new Opera House which should compete in costliness and splendour with those of the great European capitals, the world of fashion was still content to reassemble every winter in the shabby red and gold boxes of the sociable old Academy. Conservatives cherished it for being small and inconvenient, and thus keeping out the 'new people' whom New York was beginning to dread and yet be drawn to; and the sentimental clung to it for its historic associations, and the musical for its excellent acoustics, always so problematic a quality in halls built for the hearing of music."

Catverse Indeed, Batman knows of this dress rehearsal in the detail he does (down to the arias to be performed and in what order), because Bruce Wayne sits on the opera Board of Directors. A Wayne has sat on the board since his great, great grandmother, Virginia Belmont Wayne, marshaled the old families to forego “the old Academy” in favor of the glittering new Opera House. Then his great aunt, Elena Wayne, formed the Opera Guild to guide the institution through the Great Depression, and became known as “the woman who single-handedly saved the Gotham Opera House.”

[Note in both cases it's the women at the helm. The Wayne Family, like all old, founding families, has had its share of Grandes Dames – a concept that will be revisited in the Wayne Family History.]

Die Fledermaus

Catwoman speculates that the rehearsal they're eavesdropping on is *Die Fledermaus* because this title translates as “The Bat.” It is a lighthearted opera by Johann Strauss in which a certain Dr. Falke attends a masked ball dressed as a bat. He falls victim to a prank in which he is taken to jail in place of his wife's lover, but it ends well, with all the misunderstandings cleared up and the conclusion that “it's best to blame it all on the champagne.”

Giuseppe Verdi

It turns out, of course, that Batman isn't nearly so rigid with respect to his ‘theme.’ He tells Catwoman they are there to hear “a selection of assorted arias by Giuseppe Verdi.” This is the operatic equivalent of the Boston Pops. Verdi's melodies are familiar and appealing even to non-opera lovers. Bruce may have assumed Selina would not know anything about opera – many people don't, and certainly none of the bimbos ever did. So he was hedging his bets: Verdi's works are peppered with stirring love duets, bold and catchy choruses, brilliant arias for sopranos and heroic ones for tenors. What's not to like?

Verdi was born in 1813, and hit the height of his popularity in 1861, when the liberal ideals expressed in many of his opera won him the favor of Victor Emanuel, who'd just united Italy under one king (himself), on the strength of such liberal ideals.

Verdi's operas include *Aida*, *La Traviata*, *Un Ballo in Maschera* (A Masked ball), *La Forza del Destino* (The Force of Destiny), *Falstaff*, *Otello*, *Don Carlos*, *Il Trovatore*, *Simon Boccanegra*, and of course *Rigoletto*.

Rigoletto / La Donna e Mobile

An Opera in 3 acts, first performed at Teatro la Fenice in Venice in 1851, Libretto by Maria Piave, after Victor Hugo

The tragic hero of the title, Rigoletto, is a hunchback jester in the court of the Duke of Mantua. This synopsis courtesy of *Opera News*

ACT I. Mantua, 1500s. At his palace, the Duke lightheartedly boasts to his courtiers of amorous conquests, escorting Countess Ceprano, his latest prize, to a private chamber as his hunchback jester, Rigoletto, makes fun of her husband. Marullo announces that Rigoletto is suspected of keeping a mistress, and Ceprano plots with the courtiers to punish the hated buffoon. Attention is diverted when Monterone, an elderly nobleman, enters to denounce the Duke for seducing his daughter. Ridiculed by Rigoletto and placed under arrest, Monterone pronounces a curse on both the Duke and his jester.

On his way home that night, Rigoletto broods on Monterone's curse. Rejecting the services offered by Sparafucile, a professional assassin, he notes that the word can be as deadly as the dagger. Greeted by his daughter, Gilda, whom he keeps hidden from the world, he reminisces about his late wife, then warns the governess, Giovanna, to admit no one. But as Rigoletto leaves, the Duke slips into the garden, tossing a purse to Giovanna to keep her quiet. The nobleman declares his love to Gilda, who has noticed him in church. He tells her he is a poor student named Gualtier Maldè, but at the sound of footsteps he rushes away. Tenderly repeating his name, Gilda retires. Meanwhile, the courtiers stop Rigoletto outside his house and ask him to help abduct Ceprano's wife, who lives across the way. The jester is duped into wearing a blindfold and holding a ladder against his own garden wall. The courtiers break into his home and carry off Gilda. Rigoletto, hearing her cry for help, tears off his blindfold and rushes into the house, discovering only her scarf. He remembers Monterone's curse.

ACT II. In his palace, the Duke is distraught over the disappearance of Gilda. When his courtiers return, saying it is they who have taken her and that she is now in his bedchamber, he joyfully rushes off to the conquest. Soon Rigoletto enters, warily looking for Gilda; the courtiers bar his way, though they are astonished to learn the girl is not his mistress but his daughter. The jester reviles them, then embraces the disheveled Gilda as she runs in to tell of her courtship and abduction. As Monterone is led to the dungeon, Rigoletto vows to avenge them both.

ACT III. At night, outside Sparafucile's run-down inn on the outskirts of town, Rigoletto and Gilda watch as the Duke flirts with the assassin's sister and accomplice, Maddalena.

Rigoletto sends his daughter off to disguise herself as a boy for her escape to Verona, then pays Sparafucile to murder the Duke. As a storm rages, Gilda returns to hear Maddalena persuade her brother to kill not the Duke but the next visitor to the inn instead. Resolving to sacrifice herself for the Duke, despite his betrayal, Gilda enters the inn and is stabbed. Rigoletto comes back to claim the body and gloats over the sack Sparafucile gives him, only to hear his supposed victim singing in the distance. Frantically cutting open the sack, he finds Gilda, who dies asking forgiveness. Monterone's curse is fulfilled.

La Donna e Mobile is sung twice, first at the top of Act III when the Duke has been led to the inn, and again in the distance when Rigoletto has been given the sack - when it's reprise can only mean that the Duke is still alive and is not the body Sparafucile has delivered!

There is some validity in Selina's assertion that in singing *La Donna e Mobile*, the Duke is projecting – certainly *he* is fickle in his affections, but that by itself would not necessarily indicate a fear of commitment, as she claims. The more telling aria is at the opening of Act II, where he expresses genuine feelings for Gilda, when he is alone and it cannot be a pretense to further his seduction.

“The biggest prick in the entire opera” is, by and large, a most accurate characterization.

“**Traviata is next**”

The soaring love duet from *La Traviata* that Selina declares to be “a little much” could have been “Love me for ever” from Act II... but actually it's not a duet at all but two arias sung in counterpart from the end of Act I.

Alfredo, having been dismissed from Violetta's party, repeats his declaration of love from the street beneath her window, while Violetta reflects on this (*E strano* 'How curious' and *Ah! Fors' e lui* 'Ah, is it he') seeming to see a new, purer life in what Alfredo offers her – Finally, only half-persuaded such a life would be possible, she declares *Sempre libera* 'Free as ever' and resumes her life of pleasure – only to be found living with Alfredo at the opening of the next act!

We can only speculate, of course, why Selina found this duet discomfiting.

“impassioned italiano fortissimo”

Italiano should be self explanatory, *fortissimo* is the musical designation for very loud, i.e. the soprano, tenor & conductor are screaming at each other, and as two of them are opera singers, they put a lot of lung power into it.

“a porcelain art deco figurine of a woman walking a leopard on a leash”

Josephine Baker was only one celebrity of the 1920's who appeared with large exotic cats such as leopards or ocelots, as if they were pets, walked on a leash with jeweled collars.

Sleek female forms were always popular with art deco artists working at the time. Figures of this kind would be exquisite *objets d'art*, but not especially rare.

“We're not like other people, and we shouldn't try to define our relationship in their terms.”

I don't recall the details anymore, but this concept came about thanks to some spectacularly stupid pundits at DCMB discussing Bruce's love life as if they were debating Veronica or Betty to ask to the prom.

Real World

The Catitat

The word is taken from the tradename of large, landscapable pens for big cats used at preserves like the one described.

The place itself is based on two such big-cat preserves:

Shambala (www.shambala.org) - Tippy Hedren's preserve in California (for which Selina's tiger, Shimbala, is quasi-named) and Wildlife on Easy Street (www.wildlifeeasyst.com) - in Florida, where I made the acquaintance of a very special ocelot named Nirvana.

Nirvana



My first view of Nirvana was exactly what Selina describes in Chapter 2, two eyes and nothing else (but a faint growling sound) in the black of her little hutch in her catitat. Nirvana did indeed growl instead of purring. And she did once decide to groom a scar,

licking it patiently with her rough little tongue, until she smoothed it out. Try and turn it before she was done, it played out exactly like it does in the story: pause – teeth – turn – and she went right back to work.

History Secular Icons

Someone once asked if I got this particular piece of loot from the Catwoman novel by Lynn Abbey & Robert Asprin (which I don't recommend unless you like Miller's whore at her flat out stupidest).

I didn't get it from the novel, but from actual East European Art History. Icons, or household religious images, most often in enamel or hand-carved birch, are largely associated with Russia and Ukraine. As are Ukrainian Easter Eggs – which predate the celebration of Easter and indeed Christianity in that part of the world. The eggs were linked to fertility and domestic life, and decorating them with symbolic colors and designs was part of a Spring Festival in honor of the sun. When Ukraine became Christian, many of the pagan traditions were adapted to the new beliefs.

If it was true of eggs, why not of icons?

Excelsior Towers

Like the original Waldorf Astoria, the Excelsior is a hotel build from the lavish townhouses of two feuding hostesses of the Gilded Age. The houses were built across the street from each other, and each tried to out do the other in opulence and grandeur. They were eventually joined in the most spectacular engineering feat of their day, to become the lobby of the Excelsior. Decades later, like the current Waldorf Astoria (rebuilt uptown 1931 to make way for the Empire State Building on its original site), a residential tower of luxury suites was added. These towers are among Catwoman's favorite hunting grounds.

Catwoman and Stealing

Selina's quandary at the Catitit introduces a theme that will come into its own later in **Satori**. Can Catwoman compromise on the life of crime, in particular, stealing, and be true to herself? There are two issues tied up in there, IMO, "Can she?" and "Would she?" Stealing is, from time to time, what Catwoman *does*; it is not what Catwoman *is*. The little girls (later represented by Steph and Cassie in **Satori**) who declare Catwoman is just about "theft and mooning over Batman" are the female equivalent of the fanboys who insist "Bruce Wayne died that night." Pat easy answers to questions that have no easy answers.

Life isn't like that, we all learn soon enough. And neither is fiction – not the kind that has any ability to engage the reader for however long it asks for their attention. And certainly not the kind that lasts beyond when the last page is turned.

The relationship between Batman and Catwoman continues to

intrigue us 80 years after it was introduced. If a 12 year old could wrap it up in 10 words, believe me, it wouldn't still be around.

The lifesblood of drama, in my opinion, is never denying either party a choice.

Of course Selina CAN stop stealing, if she chooses to. It astonishes me that these girls think they're being feminists when they deny her *choice*.

On the other side, Batman can refrain from arresting her – he has, on numerous occasions. Even more puzzling than the girls, are the fanboys who insist Bruce is incapable of doing what he's already done.

So much for “Can she”. “Should she” is, again, not as simple as the 12 year olds with little-girl ideas about feminism want to make it.

In the text Selina attributes to herself the PC assumption that it's a matter of ‘a woman not compromising her job for a man’ and she recognizes that she's fooling herself.

“SHE wanted to be a free independent thief and HE wanted to tame her. How simple, how right...She saw now it wasn't simple at all: Yes, she wanted to be free and independent, but she also wanted to need and be needed. Yes, she wanted to steal if she felt like it, but she wanted too to make someone happy, to be the kind of person he would respect and be proud of. It wasn't simple.”

DCU stalactites, stalagmites (and bats, oh my)

In the 1980s, Doug Moench finally brought the Batman / Catwoman romance to a head in an astonishing Pre-Crisis run in Batman and Detective Comics. The location of “Interlude at the Stalactite” is a veiled homage to Doug. – There was, you see, a rather memorable stalactite analogy introduced in **Batman #389** and revisited in **Detective Comics #560**. I adore Doug Moench, but even his strongest advocates (and I'm one of them) admit he can be a little ...well... Did I say it was a memorable stalactite? Let me rephrase, it was a memorably *phallic* stalactite – and it was dripping (I am not making this up!) onto a cat-shaped stalagmite. There was talk of the two formations meeting and fusing. It was...as I said...quite, um, memorable.



Anyway, moving along, stay with your tour people...

“la gatta e mobile”

a reference back to the aria, *La donna e mobile*... “gatta” of course, is Italian for cat.

“terra incognita”

Is Latin for “unknown earth”... it was the indication on maps, which were written in Latin at that time, to mark, literally, uncharted territory.

“Yeah,” I say, fully aware it’s not at all the sort of thing Catwoman would say to Batman. “I guess I would have thought of that if I’d been thinking clearly. Would you, um, like to come in and ah, have some coffee?”

Coffee is “the non-relationship beverage of choice” according to the oft-quoted Buffy the Vampire Slayer. “It’s hot and bitter – much like a relationship.”

J

Okay. Confession.

There is actually no significance whatsoever to the coffee. But I had to make some room in the Companion to comment because this chapter is probably my favorite in all the Cat-Tales saga. It’s the point where everything changes, because Bruce and Selina become real to each other. The attraction was one thing, you can be attracted to an image. Actual feelings, the L-word, that requires a person, not a persona.

Literature Jeeves

Jeeves is the main character in a series of enormously funny short stories by P.G. Wodehouse. He is valet to the lovable but featherbrained Bertie Wooster. Bertie often gets into “scrapes” either by getting himself engaged to unsuitable girls, or falling short of the demands of his imposing Aunt Agatha or eccentric Aunt Dalia. Bertie also has many friends, some impecunious and dependent on some aunt or uncle, and others who fall in love. Whatever the predicament, Jeeves will find a solution. – That is assuming he’s disposed to share it, as he will not be if Bertie insists on wearing that white mess jacket he bought in the *Cote d’Azure*.

Catverse Fathers’ Day

There was a fanfic, “For the Guy who has Everything” by Syl, in which Batman spent a frustrating evening finding crimes already foiled and the perpetrators already tied up by the time he reached the scene. It turned out it was a Fathers’ Day gift from Nightwing. Batman reacted predictably, chewing him out for taking a risk or something.

This seemed so totally right – exactly the sort of thing Dick would think up, a nice idea but delivered in such a way that it was sure to honk B off – that I decided to claim it for the Catverse.

Xanadu

As the text indicates, the name is taken from a poem by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Said to have occurred to him in a dream, Coleridge awoke and took it down as he remembered it:

In Xanadu did Kubla Kahn

A stately pleasure dome decree:

Where Alph, the sacred river, ran

Through caverns measureless to man

Down to a sunless sea.

So twice five miles of fertile ground

With walls and towers were girdled round,

And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills,

Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;

And here were forests ancient as the hills,

Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.

And so on.

“this less-than- professional interest in the catburgler was at least a sign that there was still a human being in there”



Alfred actually voiced this sentiment in the second installment of Catwoman Year 2 by Doug Moench (who else!), **Catwoman #39**. Bruce grumbled about it, but you'll notice Alfred is still employed in part 3.

Xanadu is also, as stated in the text, the name of Charles Foster Kane's estate in *Citizen Kane*. Kane most certainly took the name from this same poem.

[I would prefer not to admit knowing there was an Olivia Newton John movie of that name, set in a disco roller rink, however I am forced to admit, when I wrote this chapter, I did a Google search for the poem to check the spelling on Kubla Kahn, and found, to my horror, the Olivia Newton John movie has FAN SITES!]

The Xanadu resort itself is an amalgamation of several places – a Palm Springs hideaway depicted in the movie *The Player* where the famous clientele were addressed by letters (“a phonecall for you, Mr. M”), and an actual island profiled on the Travel Channel where the likes of Brad Pitt and Prince Andrew can vacation with a modicum of privacy. Other details are drawn from Sanibel Island off the West coast of Florida, Chica Lodge in the Keys, and assorted locations in Hawaii.

The Arab Dish Dash

Xanadu is a resort for the very, very rich, so Bruce's choice of an Arab Dish Dash to conceal most of his head was quite clever. No one on the island would look twice at a Sheik wearing designer sunglasses.

Contrary to popular belief, the headdress has no religious significance. It's simply that the desert is very, very hot, and covering the head with a white, airy cloth is more comfortable.

DCU

“she bobbed in front of him, upside down, legs suspended from a tree, and kissed him full on the lips”



This little move is taken from Catwoman Year 2, part 3 (**Catwoman #40**), in reference to which our friends the reality-challenged fanboys complained that a woman of Selina's body type couldn't see Batman if she hung upside down like that, let alone kiss him – proving yet again their limited experience with 3-dimensional women in the real world.

The readers of the Cat-Tales message boards may recall a spirited discussion on this subject, when I assured one such misinformed jackass that even in the *real* world, busty women

saddled with *actual gravity* can still hang upside down without giving themselves a black eye.

Catverse **“You cannot sum up a human being's existence in a sentence like a listing in the TV Guide.”**

It's an answer to “Bruce Wayne died that night” to “Catwoman is a thief” to “Black and White” and to all the other bumper-sticker proclamations out there spouted by people who want to use their mouths without being bothered to use their brains. There are no easy answers. There are no “10 word” answers.

There's a lot of Aaron Sorkin in Cat-Tales, and on this subject I'm going to give him, and West Wing's Jeb Bartlett the last words: “Every once in a while – *every once in a while* – there's a day with an absolute right and an absolute wrong. But those days almost always include body counts. The rest of the time...”