

A CAT-TALES COMPANION

Once upon a time the Cat-Tales Companions began as a not especially well-organized series of guides to the many references, from classics to comics to pop culture, that peppered the Cat-Tales universe. Unfortunately they were too time-consuming to prepare and were soon discontinued to make way for other types of extras that also allowed me time to write the actual stories.

String Theory, however, is so rich in allusion to specific comic stories past and present, I decided to make an exception. So, without further ado...

String Theory: A Special Cat-Tales Companion

CHAPTER 1: PRELUDE

Wayne Manor, Master Bedroom
Now.

This simple convention of noting the time of a scene as "Now" or "X minutes to now" is first and foremost a nod to Brad Meltzer's *Identity Crisis*, which used the device to highlight the moment of Sue Dibny's murder as one of supreme importance. It is almost Joycean to isolate a moment in time in this particular way and frame all other moments in relation to it – a literary technique far beyond what is seen in even the best comics.

The importance of the moment itself (to others besides poor doomed Sue) will become clear by the end of the story. The moment of Sue's death is analogous to the Kennedy assassination or perhaps the "shot heard around the world" that ignited the American Revolution. It marks an end of innocence and sets events in motion that will climax in both DC's *Infinite Crisis* and ours.

Maybe I should alert the Watchtower that the fabric of reality is unraveling again

An unimportant reference to Zero Hour, when characters from alternate realities began bleeding into the main comicverse just as will eventually occur in Wayne Manor.

"Doorbell."

"Is that for real or are you trying out a 'Kitten-Protocol' to save the sweaters..."

Bruce had rigged a telephone to distract Alfred from the grill, a "barbecue protocol," so to speak, in the previous *Cat-Tale #43 Napoleon's Plan*.

"You're actually the second immortal this month to show up uninvited with a gift for me," she said pointedly.

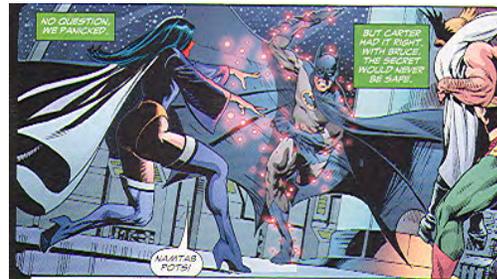
The first was Ra's al Ghul in the aforementioned *Napoleon's Plan*.

"If Bruce won't want them here, that means either they're some adorable-but-stolen bit of cat-kitsch, possibly 'for Candace from BW,' or else they're magic."

Alludes to *Cat-Tale #32: Women Lacking Complexity*, when Bruce found a stolen cat figurine he had given to a previous girlfriend among Selina's possessions when she first moved into the manor.

“After what Zatanna did’, Yes, precisely. After what Zatanna did to Bruce I helped you. I pledged my power to use as you wished. You both owe me this debt.”

Details of Zatanna’s use of magic to remove Batman’s memories are introduced in Brad Meltzer’s *Identity Crisis* and Bruce (and Selina’s) discovery of this fact and Jason’s pledge referenced here as well as numerous other details are all covered in *Cat-Tale #41: Identity Element*.



***Département de Physique Théorique, L'Université de Genève
Geneva, Switzerland
60 minutes from now***

The reader should soon realize each of these Geneva worlds are parallel universes where a lecturer named Luthor is teaching about String Theory. While the Wayne Manor scenes with Bruce, Selina, and Jason Blood all take place “Now” these Luthor worlds are all in the past, 60 minutes from now, then 30, then 15, they are slowly but surely catching up to our timeline, when our Bruce will make a call which intersects with the conversation we hear each Luthor respond to. Uh oh.

When Selina begins to dimension hop, these three realities will all be identified as those very similar to ours by the presence of a pink sapphire. In each case, the Bruce Wayne of that reality gave his Selina a pink sapphire ring at the close of the MOMA opening, just as ours did in *Cat-Tale #42 Déjà vu All Over Again*.

“The 20th Century brought about two great theories of the universe,” Lewis Luthor announced, resuming his lecture. “Two great theories which do not agree...”

All of the science behind String Theory in these lectures and throughout the story is taken from Brian Greene’s *Our Elegant Universe*.

“Bruce, I hate what Zatanna did to you more than you will ever know. I hate that poisonous witch and her magic so much that it impressed Etrigan”

In *Identity Element*, Jason Blood conducted a Seeing Ritual with Selina which enabled her to watch Bruce take his revenge on Zatanna. Since Jason was involved, so was Etrigan, and as noted here and elsewhere, he was quite impressed with Selina’s animosity towards the League and Zatanna.

Etrigan has also been established, both in *Cat-Tales* and in canon comics (*Detective Comics #603*), as feeling kinship with Bruce, whose relentless drive stemming from hatred and a desire for revenge make him, to Etrigan’s mind, a brother demon trapped inside a fleshy human cage.



*If knew he who had sent his dream,
Rash Jason would suspect some scheme.
Resort then I to tricks with light,
With purple flame, and mortal fright.*

Jason Blood's nightmare and the creepier aftermath are covered in the final scene of *Napoleon's Plan*.

*Between Order and the Chaos," is it not what Pit-Boy said?
Ra's al Ghul is no true demon, but neither is he dead.
In his Pit he glimpsed the No-Thing in the Void beyond the Is.
And he spoke of coming Crisis, at the heart of it your Ms.*

Ra's al Ghul went into the Lazarus Pit in Chapter 1 of *Napoleon's Plan* and subsequently warned Batman about seeing Catwoman at the heart of a coming crisis.

CHAPTER 2: DIMENSIONS

Mundus Alius Nail



The Nail was a superb Elseworld by Alan Davis which began with the premise that Ma and Pa Kent got a flat tire that fateful day, they never found baby Kal-El, and the comicverse evolved without a Superman.

Joker was given a powerful alien technology which he used to slowly and painfully murder Robin (Dick) and Batgirl (Barbara) before Batman's eyes. Wild with rage, Batman then kills Joker. Selina is instrumental in snapping him out of it, and together they join the fight to defeat the true enemy pulling Joker and others' strings (Jimmy Olsen).

This she does as Batwoman, in the traditional yellow and red costume (minus the purse).

In the sequel, *Another Nail*, Selina is still Batman's partner in crimefighting, but her costume has changed to better resemble her traditional Catwoman catsuit.

The first time he had met Whiskers and Nutmeg, they sensed Etrigan and reacted with panic and dread. He spoke to them in Mau-im-dwo, the ancient tongue used by the priests of Bast to speak with divine and mortal cats.

This is from *Wicked Verse: Blood and Glass*.

Wayne Manor, Mundus Alius 2



Earth-2 is the traditional name for the Golden Age heroes whose careers began in the 40s and whose fates as they aged began to be told in the 1970s. The original Batman/Bruce Wayne of Detective #27 and Batman #1 married his Catwoman/Selina Kyle and produced a daughter, Helena, who became the

Pre-Crisis Huntress on her mother's death (*Secret Origins of Superheroes* #17).



How the Earth 2 Bruce and Selina came together is told in arguably the best Batman story of all time: *The Autobiography of Bruce Wayne*, (*Brave and the Bold* #197, April 1983, reprinted in *The Greatest Batman Stories Ever Told*), while the wedding itself was shown in 1981's *Superman Family* #211.

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What I call the "modverse" is more or less the 1960s television series crossed with Austin Powers in terms of self-aware parody of the decade. It has no significance in the greater story, it was just thrown in for fun...

Wayne Manor, Mundus Alius 116

...on the other hand, has enormous significance. Selina's presence in the Batcave and the dialogue overheard there is taken from *JLA* #116, the second part of Geoff Johns's story arc CRISIS OF CONSCIENCE which kicks off DC's *Infinite Crisis*.



It will be this world and these events which produce the "persistent anomaly" which bleeds into our reality in the Wayne Manor study every 43 minutes (Kree).

"That's the 'I don't know if I'll ever want to be married' ring from the MOMA opening"

As stated above, Bruce gives Selina this ring in *Déjà vu All Over Again*, and “Pink Sapphire worlds” will be important later when Selina begins to dimension-hop.

Bruce’s behavior here giving her the ring is telling. It is clearly the Pink Sapphire Bruce Waynes who have begun to question if Zatanna used magic on Selina.

Jason didn’t like the idea of staging another seeing ritual with Selina...

‘Another’ because there was a previous one, in *Identity Element*, when he enabled her to view the deliberations at the Watchtower and then Batman’s visit to Zatanna. In that ritual, as in this, Jason used the silver bowl and the

water of Avalon obtained from that enchanted isle by Lyle, the present seer, in payment for the return of an important relic called the leabhar seun, which she had foolishly lost to him

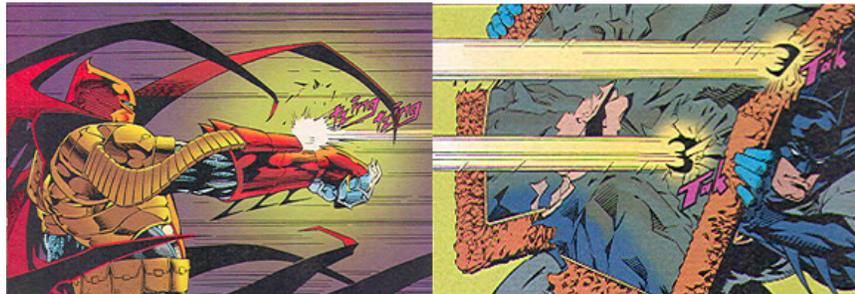
Catwoman was with him during that episode, which occurs in *Wicked Verse: Blood and Glass*.

“YOU are not the Batman! I am the Batman! Now Get Out!”

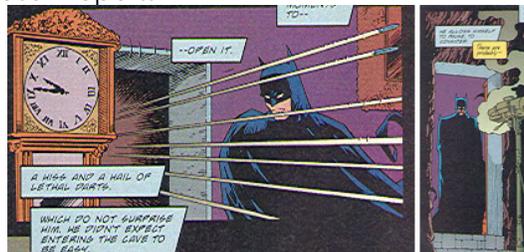


The first dimensional anomaly to occur once the spark ignites is from KnightsEnd Part Ten CLIMAX in *Legends of the Dark Knight* #63, which ended the whole Azrael as Batman mess which began in Bane “breaking” Bruce in Knightfall.

The final confrontation begins in Wayne Manor, as depicted here, and eventually led to the cave.



On the first attempt to access the cave, Batman discovers that Azbat, ever the psychotic and paranoid homicidal zealot, has added deadly booby traps to the entrance via the clock passage, just as Jason reports.



Jason indicates that he encased Dr. Leiverman in a *βυλλεα ρηδμβά* or a “magic bubble.” This ability was introduced in *Cat-Tale #30 Splitsville*, one so encased will see and hear only what Jason wills them to.

The three of them ran back into the study just in time to see Hawkman pick up the grandfather clock and bash Batman over the head with it.

This hallmark image from JLA #119, the last installment of Crisis of Conscience (see Mundus Alius 116 earlier in this chapter) introduces the persistent anomaly which will become a major plot point in the next chapter and continue throughout the crisis.



CHAPTER 3: KREEEEE

The fight scene Selina walks through is a more detailed description of the same JLA #119.



From the headlock to the de-winging to “the tnucc”, it’s all taken from this scene.

The other “random one-shots” Selina reports are also taken from comics.



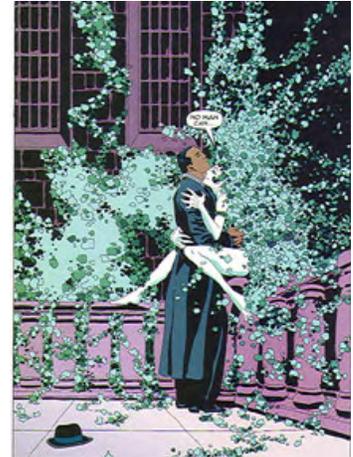
“and a costume party going on in the Great Hall. You were Henry VIII, which I must say isn’t an ideal look for you, but I made a stunning Catherine of Aragon”

is from Pre-Crisis when Bruce and Selina were dating. The party took place in *Batman 319*, a Gentleman Ghost story.

"And oh yes, Ivy -I'm not kidding, Queen Chlorophyll herself wearing little more than a leaf and a smile- out on the patio. We will not discuss what she was doing out there, other than to say it's lucky for you that I know that's an alternate universe."

As well as the "sequel" Selina reports in the next chapter are both taken from *The Long Halloween*, the February and March episodes respectively.

"Did you not see that goggled, flat chested insult to all things Catwoman straight out of the pages of the Gotham fucking Post?"



Catwoman appears at length in the Crisis of Conscience arc, including the climactic fight in *JLA* 119, and as it is present continuity, it is regrettably the "new look" with the goggles, looking as unattractive and unfeline as ever. We need hardly wonder at Selina's indignation.

Wayne Manor, Mundus Alius 3

And speaking of goggles, Owlman is the Batman counterpart on Earth-3, who returned from the forgotten annals of pre-Crisis in the more recent (and ill-named) hardcover ElseWorld called *Earth 2*. ("Earth 2" being *their* designation for *our* Earth). This story of the Crime Syndicate of Amerika establishes the whole background where it is Bruce and not Thomas Sr. who dies in the alley, etc. but also establishes the control Owlman maintains over the others in the CSA without their knowledge. He is seen to be having an affair with Superwoman (Ultraman's wife Lois) but wipes off her kiss as soon as he turns away. Like the "negatives" he holds over Ultraman, this Owlman clearly has a protocol of his own for each of his powered associates.



~~Alfred taught her when the girl Stephanie-Spoiler came to my realm.~~

That eerie mind-voice can only mean Hella, Norse goddess of the underworld, guardian of the Fifth Circle, and on-again/off-again girlfriend of Janus, has returned to the Tales. Hella was introduced in *Cat-Tale #36 World's Finest: Red Cape, Big City*. One can only "enter her realm" by dying of course, and as she states Alfred did indeed teach Selina his special method of brewing tea in *Cat Tale #39: Polishing Silver* which deals with Spoiler's death.

A man with white hair suddenly stood beside her, in the white tie and tails of an old-fashioned stage magician. His right hand was stained with blood, his left held a top hat with the bloody carcass of a white rabbit resting inside.

Anyone that knows only the cartoons and thinks Zatara is that nice old man who taught Bruce escapes can now be undeceived: Zatara is CREEPY. Even when he was alive he was creepy. His appearance here as well as much of his speech is take from Neil Gaiman's *The Books of Magic*. And any of you who thinks I went overboard just to shock you, NOPE, I spared you *dozens* of more dead, bloody bunnies at his feet!



Cats are unique in the magic world, Bruce. They're the exception to every rule. Their 'essence' is a mystery, and they defy any means of classification necessary to make the magicks run true. Trying to hex one can bring about the most unpredictable reversals. The powers of a black cat potion are the most difficult to call or control... I, I shudder to think what a 'purple cat' might—

Unlike Science, there is no one absolute and definitive source on all things magical. But all that Jason says with respect to the meaning of the colors yellow and purple and his comments here on the Black Cat potion and the "reversals" caused by cats are all grounded in actual magical lore and reference. Nothing was invented to accommodate the story.

CHAPTER 4: HERE AND NOW

"He almost hit me like that once. Was a vault. Cat icons. I had made a joke that it wasn't really stealing, it was more like practical socialism."

This references a pivotal moment in the Bat/Cat relationship from *Cat Tale #2 Normal*.

"I've only seen him like that twice before: The first time was hell month when Nightwing was missing, the prospect of losing someone else that he loved to a criminal... and the second time was the mindwipe, the day Superman told us what he knew, the details, about the magic mindwipe"

From *Cat-Tales #28 Awkward Pauses* and *#41 Identity Element* respectively.

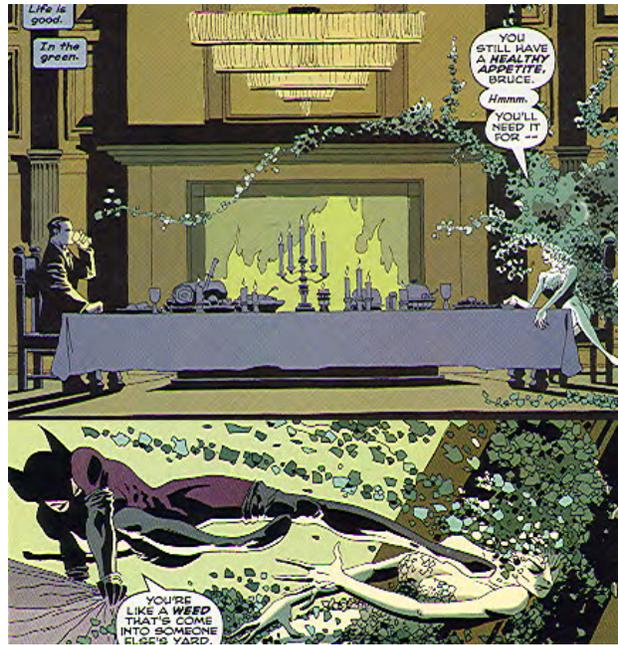
"This is infinity we're dealing with, Selina. And Infinity has nothing to do with time. Infinity is that dimension of here and now which thinking in 'time' cuts out. This is it, if it doesn't exist in the here and now, it doesn't exist. And the experience of Infinity right here and now is the function of life."

This bit of metaphysical wisdom is spoken by Jason Blood but it is really from Joseph Campbell in *THE POWER OF MYTH*.

"Ivy on the patio," she blurted, "Remember Poison Ivy on the patio earlier, there's a semi-interesting sequel going on in the dining room. You, with seriously too-short 1940s hair, were most definitely greened and um, it looks like me in an interesting but properly purple and ungoggled outfit – with a tail – kicking her ass."

As mentioned earlier, this is indeed the "sequel" to Ivy's greening Bruce in *The Long Halloween*.

"It was just Bruce. Cat pins Bruce. Banned from the kitchen because he tried to make a sandwich once and didn't know the lettuce and the lunchmeat had special drawers Bruce. Bruce that watched the tape of Ra's al Ghul on the View no fewer than 63 times, Bruce that wanted her to bring her pet tiger to Bludhaven as a 900 lb bodyguard"



From *Cat-Tales* #4: *Catfight*, #6 *Domestic Affairs*, #8 *Plan 9 from the Demon's Head* and #23 *Loose Ends*.

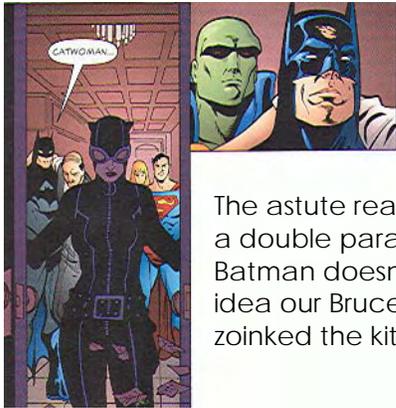
"Didn't Despero's fin used to go the other way?"

This one is there for the true fanboys: what MyklarCure justly described as one of the most stupefying pointless changes after the first Crisis...



Pre-Crisis "Starfish" Fin

Post-Crisis Dorsal Fin



The last four words hung in the air as the chimera of an alternate reality Batman called to the chimera of a goggled Catwoman as she turned her back on the Leaguers and left the manor in disgust.

The astute reader of both String Theory and the JLA scene will perceive a double parallel: in both cases, yes, Catwoman is leaving when Batman doesn't want her to, but also both Batmans are plagued by this idea our Bruce and Selina can't seem to speak about: "this Zatanna-zoinked the kitty idea you've got."

The alternate reality Hawkman picked his severed wings off the floor and joined the procession of somber Leaguers heading for the door.

What can I say, it was just too *perfect* to leave out. As was...

The last one didn't seem like that a big deal to Selina, not with an AU Green Lantern out on the lawn making an energy platform to transport non-flying AU Justice Leaguers the hell off of Wayne property...



What I most enjoy here is the way Hawkman gets right in and waits while Canary keeps the rest of them there for ten minutes with the hugging goodbyes. So does he just not have any friends, or is he that ignorant of the most fundamental social niceties?

CHAPTER 5: MUNDUS ALIUS

The first Mundus Alius (Other World) has already been covered: it is Owlman/Earth 3. Owlman originally had Psi-abilities in his first appearances, presumably because the Pre-Crisis writers could not conceive of a non-powered being remaining alive let alone being a contender amongst the likes of Ultraman and Power Ring. The *Earth 2* hardcover explained the lack of these abilities with a throw away line to the effect that he'd eroded the concentration needed to use them. I don't recall if it was implied that it had gone up his nose, but it certainly fits the general vibe of that universe.

Now as the other worlds Selina encounters in this jump...

She seemed to have a throbbing lump under her mask and as she squinted into the mirror – a mirror which wasn't IN the Batcave that she knew – she saw that it was the old mask from her old skirted costume and... the calendar on the table said in was October 1950.

Earth 2. And her head is throbbing because a brick recently fell on it.

This is from *"The Secret Life of Catwoman"* in *Batman #62*, where Catwoman's real name is revealed to be Selina Kyle, and which puts forth the airline-stewardess-with-amnesia origin, which *The Autobiography of Bruce Wayne* then built on, where Catwoman admits to Batman that she made up the story as a convenient out because she had come to question her criminal career.



"I'm naked in the trophy room."

Yeah, okay. Remember the days when comics were so "silly and childish" compared to the adult sophistication we know today? Well in THOSE days, yes, Batman brought Catwoman to the Batcave with the tattered remnants of her costume *barely* holding on (and did he ever *thank* Tom Blake for that deathtrap? He did not!), and when we next saw her, she was waking up, as our Selina phrases it, flat out nude.



As a matter of interest, they're not finished yet. In response to "Lucky I kept one of your old costumes in my trophy room," Selina responds that she "Got lucky in more ways than one."

No really.

Anyway, *Batman #324*, the second part of a Catman adventure for which, see above, nobody thanked Blake.

"I wanted to brush up before Dr. Luthor arrives"

Lewis Luthor is from the first Pink Sapphire World introduced in Chapter 1.

"What she did to that Flash villain in Keystone."

What is there to say? Those who will not learn the lessons of history, repeat them. This references Geoff Johns's fantastic Identity Crisis crossover in *Flash #214 - 218*, which showed the comics world how a crossover should be done. Shortly after the Dr. Light outrage, Barry Allen's Flash had Z alter one of his villains called The Top.



"Top of the train station, first night?"

Batman and Catwoman's first encounter, as well as the kiss referenced next, both occur in *Cat-Tale #33 Cattitude*.

Chapter 6: MUNDI NOBLISSIMI

"a woman he'd never seen rattled, even when he and Batman surprised her breaking into LexCorp that time."

This episode is from *World's Finest Year 8: Cat and Mouse* (November 99) in the comics and was referenced heavily in *Cat-Tales #36 World's Finest: Red Cape Big City* and *#43 Napoleon's Plan*.

There he saw Bruce walking down the stairs —in a suit? — Holding a baby?!? And Selina...on the stairs behind Bruce, and she wore a chicly tailored dress, white gloves and a fashionable hat. He himself - he blinked - he himself as Clark Kent but with a touch of gray beginning at his temples was suddenly standing at the foot of the stairs, Lois beside him in an even chicer skirted suit.



This anomaly is obviously Earth-2 again with Bruce and Selina married with little baby Helena.

This particular *appearance* for Superman's benefit is a nod to the *Infinite Crisis #3* cover in which Golden Age Superman presumably introduces Earth-prime Batman to that classic Bat-Family.

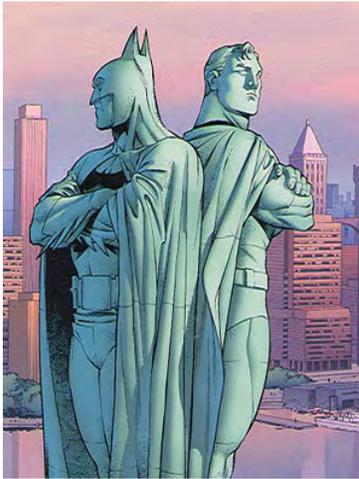
Golden Age Superman has come to be represented by graying temples, and of course Bruce and Clark's relationship in any credible incarnation makes Clark and Lois a natural as godparents.

In *Cat-Tales*, Superman has been campaigning mightily for a Bruce/Selina union since *Red Cape, Big City* so it's only fitting that, as long as alternate realities are leaking in, he glimpse this particular universe.

The astute reader may also notice that a Clark-related anomaly began when Superman came into the vicinity of the manor, after which Superman was then involved or present in the worlds Selina jumped to. Both result from the manor itself as nexus and physical host of the cosmic instabilities.



A trio of villains from the distant future, the 31st century, traveled into the past, my past, and Superman's. And they intervened at the critical points...



This is from Jeph Loeb's *Absolute Power* arc in *Superman/Batman* #14-18, in which all events from Green Lantern and Zatanna's fates to that of the Kents and the Waynes, occur exactly as described. From "Obey or Die" and Batman's use of Zee's magic to the (understandably) "gloomiest bat-funk on record" when it was all over, it's all there in the panels.



"You were there...Both alternate timelines "

Also straight from the panels, alternate Selinas were involved in both alternate-Bruces's lives.

The observant reader will note that it is really here that Selina is pictured with the diamond cuffs and dog collar that appear in her Owlman adventure in *String Theory*.



I am sorry that I couldn't abide by the agreement we made at the waterfall that day. When I talked to Bruce, I brought up the protocols...

This is from *Cat-Tale* #41 Identity Element. It is another indicator of Pink Sapphire world's sharing most of *Cat-Tales* continuity.

The Watchtower



I love this scene, it's another one that is a labor of love for the true fanboys. Just about everything in this section is rooted in both *JLA* #119 (the climax of the Crisis of Conscience arc) and the Silver Age *Secret Society* issues Geoff Johns drew on with such sly style. We'll get to that shortly, but first...

"Six paragraphs on the 'naughty grin' seems a bit excessive. And it really isn't a 'special power,' you know."

Believe it or not, a miniature-and-stats based roleplaying game called HeroClix does in fact have Catwoman (a properly purple Catwoman with a 'naughty grin') credited with, just as Superman notes here, 'incapacitate and mind control abilities.' (Who are we to argue, she *can* stop a charging bison – or at least a grunting crimefighter – in his tracks).

When Selina reached the Watchtower's Monitor Womb, she saw her own file open on the large viewscreen...

JLA #119, Martian Manhunter admits Batman back into the Watchtower and promptly concludes that it is the early league's material on *Catwoman* he is interested in, not what they did to *him*. Here Batman introduces the same line of thinking as in *String Theory*, that Catwoman had been in the Secret Society for a brief time. Now *hold that thought...*



This is how good Johns is: (also -cough- how good I am)

Secret Society #1
Catwoman is listed in a CAPTION among a number of villains said to be waiting for Sinestro to arrive at a secret location. *But she doesn't actually APPEAR anywhere in the issue.*

Around issue #3 the letter column had a letter asking about this, and the editor replied, lightly covering the faux pas, saying that "Catwoman made an early exit" or some such.

"punched a button to enlarge a detail on the far right. The zoomed image showed Catwoman talking with Felix Faust and smiling a little too warmly"

The detail, also from JLA #119.

Now, while all of the party stuff is my own invention, all I can say is *that smile + early exit = I know what's really going on here.*

In real life, I look a lot more like Selina than either Geoff or Gerry Conway who wrote SSSV#1, and I've done that frozen party smile. There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that, whatever else happened in any version of this story in any universe, the guy with the wand-kabob just said his wife doesn't understand him.

