

# Review: 'Arkham Asylum' is Batman at his best

August 26 2009, By LOU KESTEN , Associated Press Writer

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In this video game image released by Eidos, Batman battles some of the Joker's henchmen in "Batman: Arkham Asylum." (AP Photo/Eidos)

(AP) -- The video-game industry has defeated more superheroes than Lex Luthor could ever dream of. Superman, Aquaman, Iron Man, X-Men: All rendered lifeless by forces more focused on making a buck than on delivering thrills.

So calling "Batman: Arkham Asylum" (Eidos, \$59.99, for the Xbox 360, [PlayStation 3](#)) one of the best superhero games ever is kind of a backhanded compliment. Let's just call it a great game, period. For DC Comics fans, it's a must-buy, but it's hugely entertaining even if you aren't versed in the whole Batman mythology.

It begins with the Caped Crusader ushering the Joker back to Arkham Asylum, Gotham City's home for the criminally insane. This time,

however, the supervillain has set up a clever trap and quickly takes over the entire facility. Besides setting free hordes of violent lunatics, the Joker has an even deadlier endgame in mind - and only Batman can stop it.

Fans will relish the chance to take on familiar foes like Harley Quinn, Poison Ivy, Killer Croc and Scarecrow. Combat is easy to handle, and Batman can usually handle a dozen or so henchmen without breaking a sweat. But it's more rewarding to take them out one by one, using Batman's stealth skills to sneak up on them or swoop down from the rafters.

More intriguing is the opportunity to explore Arkham, the eeriest [video-game](#) setting since Rapture, the underwater city in "BioShock." The dank, decaying facility oozes menace and depravity, even when the all-seeing Joker isn't taunting you over the public-address system.

Throughout the asylum, you discover tools from Batman's utility belt: "batarangs," explosive gel, a grappling hook and other wonderful toys that open up new areas of Arkham and help you uncover its secrets.

"Arkham Asylum" developer Rocksteady Studios borrows freely from other games: puzzles from "The Legend of Zelda," stealth from "Metal Gear Solid," freaky nightmare sequences from "Eternal Darkness." But those are pretty good games to imitate, and this game blends its influences smoothly.

The mood reflects the darker tone of last year's "The Dark Knight" movie, and younger Batfans may find the violence and dialogue disturbing. The smart script is by Paul Dini, a veteran of the noirish "Batman: The Animated Series," and that show's two stars - Kevin Conroy as Batman and Mark Hamill as the Joker - deliver stellar voiceover work.

Demanding fans will be disappointed by the absence of some popular villains, and most of the major boss battles are lackluster. And it's frustrating that Batman's powers are sometimes unnaturally limited, forcing you to solve problems the way the programmers want you to do.

But it's a fascinating journey, combining a solid story with a lively mix of diverse gameplay styles. Rocksteady has, at long last, delivered a superhero game that's really super. Three-and-a-half stars out of four.

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On the Net: [www.batmanarkhamasylum.com/](http://www.batmanarkhamasylum.com/)

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