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A Nerd's Lament: The only negative review of Batman Arkham City you'll probably ever read.

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The game is immense, sprawling even. The details of the environment are so intricately rendered that it seems each corner is its own short story. The gameplay is smooth yet still challenging and the voice acting is far and away some of the best you'll hear in video games today, but despite it's individual triumphs, "[Batman: Arkham City](#)" adds up to a repetitive and deceptively shallow Batman experience.



This was not an easy conclusion to come to and I've struggled with it for some time; I had no intention of ever not loving this game. The first installment of this series, "[Batman: Arkham Asylum](#)" was such a surprise, not only was it a great gaming experience but it was a genuine addition to

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A screenshot from "Batman: Arkham City." Warner Bros.

the Dark Knight canon.

It had at its heart the spirit of adventure that marks the great Batman stories. It combined the boldness of invention found in "[The Dark Knight Returns](#)," the overwhelming visuals of "Hush" and the intricate storytelling of "The Long

Halloween."

Beyond that it was a perfection of the stalk and strike style game made popular by the "Metal Gear" series.

While Arkham City boasts the same gameplay and garishness, it is wholly lacking in any substantive storytelling.

There is nothing in the main story arc of Arkham City that approaches the amazingly surreal nature of the Scarecrow sequences from "Arkham Asylum," only a few forced replacements via the Mad Hatter and Ra's al ghul.

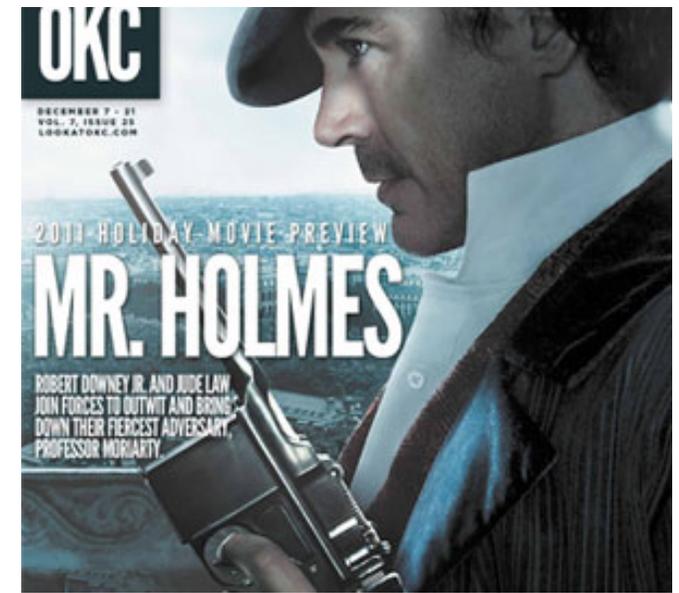
There is a great sequence with [Solomon Grundy](#) that appears as an appendage to an unconvincing penguin plot.

That is the bane of the good parts of the story: They always feel like an unimportant appendage to the drudging primary goals. (SPOILER: Speaking of Bane, if I thought this game was going to think that I would believe that Bane could be held at bay by an elevator cage door then I don't think I would have ever bought it.)

To quickly tell it, [Bruce Wayne](#) is captured and placed in a mega-prison located inside the walled off center of old Gotham. The prison is run by [Dr. Hugo Strange](#) who spends most of his time mocking you over loudspeaker about something called "Protocol 10."

You then go to work tracking down what's going on in the prison city, supposedly under the guise of finding out what "Protocol 10" is all about.

Halfway through, Batman's path is rerouted by the Joker.



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Two-Face, Mr. Freeze, Penguin, Talia al ghul and Catwoman are also in it for some reason and you even get to play as Catwoman.

That's about the bulk of it.

As Batman, you travel through the labyrinthine world and sub-world of old Gotham with aesthetics more interesting to study than any part of the game is enjoyable to play.

But play you must, over and over through loosely skilled button mashing fights or repetitive boss play while a story that pretends to hook in and out of itself powers straight along through dull plot twist after dull plot twist.

The side missions are in themselves great little short stories but pursuing them typically landed me with automated voice messages like “we have to rescue Talia” or “there's not time for that now” (the game is very talky, there are very few quiet moments which makes it difficult to immerse in any of it).

When I thought I had enough experience to track down a side mission I was already in a mandatory part of the primary story or I just didn't feel like traipsing across the city to get some freeze gun I would never use from some medics rescued earlier in the game.

There is, however, a brilliant final act courtesy of [Mark Hamill](#)'s outstanding Joker but it is too little too late: By the time you're at the end of the game, the thought of going back behind the walls to finish off the side missions and challenges is an exhausting prospect.

Batman's plight is Sisyphean, he fights the same battles over and over only to have them re-emerge to be fought again.

“Batman: Arkham City” has that existential tedium at its heart, and the more the gameplay resembles Batman's actual experience, the less we want to be Batman.



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