
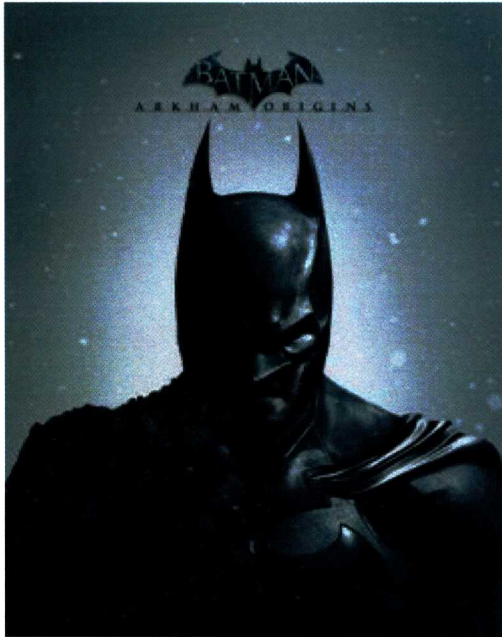


Review: Batman: Arkham Origins

By Matthew Russo  November 14, 2013



Release Date: October 25, 2013

Console: Xbox 360

ESRB Rating: T

Category: Action

Batman: Arkham Origins is the third installment of the *Batman: Arkham* series. It had a lot to live up to as the previous installment, *Arkham City*, was called by one publication “not only the best superhero game ever made, [but] one of the best games ever made.” The game is a prequel (as the word “origins” implies), taking place in Bruce Wayne’s second year as Batman. Personally, as fan of Batman (or Batman dork – I own the entire *Batman Beyond* series on DVD; that’s right, I watch a children’s cartoon on a semi-regular basis), I have been looking forward to this game for quite some time. Let’s see how it measures up.

Story (8.5/10):

On Christmas Eve, Black Mask hires eight assassins to kill Batman. After taking out a few assassins, it is revealed that Black Mask is actually (spoiler alert) The Joker in disguise, because obviously Black Mask wasn’t a strong enough villain to carry this game. Bane also emerges as a major antagonist of the game and comes across more like the evil genius Bane from *The Dark Knight Rises* movie, but he isn’t so close to that portrayal that it seems like a rip-off.

Even though the game is prequel, it takes place after Bruce has already established himself as Batman, avoiding the pitfall of telling the origin story that has already been told so many times (like in the *Year One* comic and *Batman Begins* movie). Everyone knows how Bruce Wayne became Batman: his parents are killed, he vows to stop Gotham’s criminals, he trains in martial arts, blah blah blah. Rather than a brand new superhero, the game gives us a somewhat experienced (but not yet expert) hero.

The Joker beginning his brainwashing of Harleen Quinzel (Harley Quinn) and his change of heart from wanting Batman dead to laying the foundation of their unique relationship are enjoyable to watch play out. I also appreciated the nods to *The Killing Joke* comic.

The concept of fighting off assassins is a good one, but the execution is a little lacking. For one thing, one of the eight slots is wasted on The Electrocuter, a throwaway character who Batman knocks out with one punch. Also, the game kind of gives up on this story halfway through, switching focus to a breakout of Blackgate prison, leaving the remaining assassins to be defeated in side missions. However, the side missions are definitely a positive, featuring many neat characters that are not assassins and don't make into the main game, such as The Mad Hatter, The Riddler (called Enigma here), and Anarky.

One thing I found extremely disappointing was that the amazing fight between Batman and Deathstroke in a shipping yard that is featured in the trailer for *Origins* is not in the actual game. It's kind of a bait and switch. Batman and Deathstroke still fight, but it is not nearly as cool as the one in the trailer.



Gameplay and Controls (8/10):

The game plays exactly like the previous two *Arkham* games, which is definitely a positive as the player really feels the empowerment of being the Dark Knight, with all the gadgets and fighting prowess you could possibly want (except that you probably will want some more gadgets as the game doesn't really add any new ones to the series).

One problem is that there are some bugs in the system. Sometimes a mission requires Batman to interrogate a thug, but occasionally the prompt to interrogate doesn't appear and you have to restart. Also, during combat, the special takedowns are either too hard to pull off or the controls are unresponsive, meaning you rarely get to use them. Furthermore, a few times the game froze on me, forcing me to shut down the system.

The new case file missions that require you to scan for evidence in order to solve crimes are fun little side missions, but it feels like there should be more of them.

The boss fights in *Origins* are a little disappointing compared to its predecessors. *Arkham Asylum* has the excellent Scarecrow, Killer Croc, and Poison Ivy battles while *Arkham City* has great fights against

Mr. Freeze, Ra's al Ghul, Solomon Grundy, and Clayface. The boss battles in the new game are more tame, with many of them (especially those in the "Most Wanted" side missions) feeling like fighting normal thugs. The Deathstroke, Firefly, and the last Bane fights are exceptions, but they still aren't quite as memorable as the battles from the other games. The most unique boss level is The Mad Hatter's "Most Wanted" mission, in which you guide Batman through a hallucination-induced Wonderland. The most disappointing fight is against Killer Croc, which works like a fight against any other large thug throughout the game. After the scary Killer Croc sewer fight in the original *Arkham Asylum*, this seemed like a waste of the character.

The return of the villains taunting you on the game over screen when you die is welcome, as it is one of the distinctive features of the series. It continues to be really cool, although some of the comments were a little generic. Deathstroke's were the best.

Graphics and Sound (9.5):

For the most part, the game looks great. The little touches of Christmas flare are well done: Christmas trees, lights, carols, and other details abound in Gotham City. Batman's slightly bulkier costume makes sense as a prototype to the one he wears in the other two games. It also makes him look closer to the Batman of the *Dark Knight* trilogy rather than the one from the comics. Gotham as a city is laid out pretty well with different neighborhoods that actually have a different character to them. The city doesn't always look the same, which is, of course, a positive.

The only time the graphics don't look so good is when Batman is talking to Alfred in the Bat-cave. Here, the graphics look slightly unfinished, a little pixelated. Still, *Origins* is a good-looking game, what you would expect from the series.

I had some reservations about Kevin Conroy and Mark Hamill (Yes, Luke Skywalker) being replaced as the voice actors for Batman and The Joker, respectively. However, their replacements perform their roles well. Batman comes across younger, which is the intention. The Joker, while not as good as Hamill's portrayal, still delivers a more than credible performance.

Overall Recommendation (8.5/10):

Arkham Origins is a good game, even a great game. It is easily in the top 10 of superhero video games. However, it is not as good as the previous two *Arkham* games, like *The Godfather Part III* (I haven't seen that movie, but I know what people say). I would definitely recommend this game. It's an enjoyable ride. But if you haven't played the other two games, I would recommend playing them **first** to give you the full idea of what a Batman game is capable of. If you have played the others, then you will most likely enjoy this game, even though you may notice that it falls (slightly) short of the standard set by the series.

A Meteor Shower Adventure

By Meg Rachocki ↻ November 21, 2013



The meteor shower was the main occasion, but of course there were other concerns as well. According to Jeffrey Brian Moll Jr. (a bearded bartender characterized by his Quaker appearance and Hipster lifestyle despite his rejection of either notion) one was the time-honored tradition of inebriation. This was attempted in varying degrees by various cast members, but overall was considered a bust.

Scott “DJ Scott Morrow” Morrow took on a private search mission after a neighboring serial camper let slip knowledge of a river monster haunting the bank just yonder. “If you’re quiet,” said she, “and maybe got a few whiskies down, you can hear it hollerin’ across the shore. It don’t like people walkin’ around its area at night. Scared Sampson half to death the first time, bless his heart. Sounds like a rifle full of hellfire.” Sampson, the woman’s miniature yorkie, demonstrated.

Mrs. Mio Yoshigiwa, (wearing a sundress over boy’s swim trunks on top of leggings) wished to avoid defecating in the river, even though her husband said he’d still love her if she did. She also wished to see aliens.

The open star cluster known as the Pleiades – also known as the Seven Sisters, officially known as Messier 45 – contains some several hundred stars (of which a brilliantly piteous few can be seen with the naked eye) which, if the reader resides in the northern hemisphere, are one skip right and two hops up from The Hunter Orion, or (for those in the southern half) at the approximate celestial coordinates of 3 hours 47 minutes right ascension and +24 degrees declination: within the bull, Taurus. The Sisters (daughters of Atlas and Pleione) play fast and loose with their nuclear fusion and are scheduled to expire at the tender cosmic age of two or three million years old. Annually (at coordinates 37.449157, -90.825759, known locally as Lesterville) the cluster appears to host a shower.

It doesn’t, really. But if the reader were to take the word of Mrs. Mio, who takes the word of History Channel expert Giorgio A. Tsoukalos, it’s where most of the ancient aliens come from.

The meteor shower of interest during this expedition has a point of origin slightly northwest of the Pleiades, and is generally associated the stellar constellation Perseus. The Perseid shower has no actual relation to Perseus, and instead owes its existence to a stream of debris ripped from the Swift-Tuttle comet. The Earth plunges through the peak mass of this particulate cloud every August, causing the pre-dawn sky to blaze with trails of falling wishes.

This August our friends travelled to Bearcat Getaways River Resort in Lesterville, an area of Missouri discovered by a man looking for a route to China, famous for UFO encounters, named for a popcorn-scented Southeast Asian civet, and home of Bebe's Bistro. The campsite was a hodgepodge of nylon. Two worn wooden picnic tables were loaded with paper plates, stacks of bratwurst, and no fewer than three percolators full of poorly brewed gourmet coffee at any one time. Greasy paw prints led to a trail of torn plastic baggies and shreds of foil from a raid the night before. Raccoons, it was empirically determined, love paprika.

Folding chairs surrounded the fire pit as their occupants gazed up at the sky through the opening in the oak leaf canopy. Munching on sausages and roasted summer squash, the group listened as Mrs. Mio held court on how the moon was formed and the ways it impacted our evolution. It was huge and bright that evening, just visible rising through a clump of trees behind Daisy Duke, Scott Morrow's Subaru.

Finally, it was time. Away from the pollution of city lights, the group loaded blankets and s'more essentials into a pickup truck and drove from the campsite down to the riverbank for an unobstructed light show. A wide expanse of white gravel became host to a makeshift theater. S'mores were made and chairs and blankets situated. Internal struggles arose between a desire for the warmth of fire and a need for darkness to see the sky. The midnight air was thick with mist rolling off the water's surface as conversation drifted towards the universe.

One: "No, we're on the very edge of one outer spiral arm of our galaxy, like...in the boondocks. The Milky Way looks milky because its the glow from looking into the center of the galaxy."

Another: "Since stars are a gajillion light years away, we're actually seeing them as they were a gajillion years ago. Half of 'em could have supernovaed five thousand years ago and we wouldn't know 'cuz that light-image hasn't reached us yet."

In response: "Wait, so if someone on another planet from one of those other stars was looking at us right now, they'd be seeing our past? Like just monkeys or pools of bacteria?"

The heavy silences of boggled minds were more and more frequently interrupted by bursts of excited shouting as the Perseids began to shower in earnest. They appeared almost randomly across a panoramic expanse of starlit black. Cries of "There, look there!" were rendered almost useless as the meteors streaked furiously across the sky, glittering out of existence as quickly as a sideways glance. A hot debate broke out over a suspicious ball of light; Jeffrey B. Moll Jr. argued it had to be a satellite, even though it was obviously an alien.

In other news, the demon river monster turned out to be a beaver slapping its tail on the water.

Fall Hunting

By Richie Kemper ◉ November 21, 2013



Growing up, I was always outside during this time of the year, whether it was to pick apples, romp around the neighborhood in costume or (my personal favorite) to partake in the archaic practice of hunting. Hunting has always been a fixture in my family's culture. My dad and two of my uncles are hunters. One fall day my Uncle David stopped by our house with his recent kill, an averaged sized doe. Naturally as a kid this sparked my fascination. It was the first time I had ever touched a deer.

As I grew old enough my dad began to take me out into the woods, but only as spectator. I would follow behind copying his every move. Once in our tree stand I became the vigilant watchman, constantly scanning the foliage for movement. My senses often deceived me then. I would hear a patch of fallen leaves crunching. My heart beat faster as I glanced toward the origin of the noise only to find a squirrel had jumped down from a tree in search of acorns. This essential skill took time to properly hone.

By the time I was ten I had learned how to shoot a gun and started becoming an active participant. Being able to pull a trigger was not all I needed to know, however. Responsibility is needed in order to willfully take a life of any sort. To only wound is repugnant. Every hunter should think of themselves as being a sniper, in only taking a shot which will result in a clean and humane kill. I have always felt a high level of respect toward any living thing, simply for being a creation of the divine. I find no fault with taking an animal's life if for the right reasons such as to provide sustenance for a family. After every kill I silently thank the animal and God for its life which will enhance my own. These words I hope are somewhat comforting to the animal's spirit to know its death was not meaningless.

Hunting is not only about the kill. I view it as a way to connect with the past, a way to walk with our ancestors. Sneaking across the leaf strewn forest floor I can't help but ask myself, "Where there people who lived their everyday life like this?" They may not have had the technological advancements we do, but to spend their days in such beautiful environments makes me envious. To some, sitting in a tree for hours on end may seem mundane. I welcome the countless hours of staring at trees and undergrowth. The only movement I may see for long stretches of time is the occasional gust of wind shuffling the leaves. I have found nothing in this world as relaxing as sitting high atop the canopy while watching the rays of the sun slowly peak over the horizon. I've often wondered if this is how being omniscient feels like. Some of my best thinking has come while watching leaves break free

from the clutches of their branches and fluttering slowly toward the ground. The inherent silence grants me the clarity to view life through a fresh lens from which to work through life's tribulations. Don't get me wrong, I still pay attention to the world around me. My ears listen, my eyes view, but my thoughts wander, though easily recalled within a moment's notice. Away from the bustling essence of "the real world", the woods are a place where for a fleeting time the problems of everyday life are forgotten.

Hunting is a way for me to keep myself healthy, not only physically, but mentally and spiritually. A cleansing of the self. I feel a deeper connection to the divine here. The wilderness is a place where I can feel the presence of those who have gone before me. A sense of being on the same wavelength as the rest of the world, knowing, in due time, I as well will return to the earth.

Fontbonne Vs. SLU

By Bryton Curtis ◌ November 21, 2013



As the Griffins of Fontbonne University Men's Basketball walk out of the visitor's locker room, through the entry way, and onto the game floor of the Chaifetz Arena, reality started to set in. The Griffins have spent several hard grinding weeks preparing themselves for this moment, for the challenge of facing Saint Louis University, who also happens to be the seventeenth best team in the nation at the highest level of college basketball. Not to mention, they face the NBA draft prospect Dwayne Evans. So, while the men of Fontbonne Basketball were walking onto the game floor, analyzing everything from the crowd attendance to the media presence to the SLU players throwing down vicious dunks in their pregame warm-ups, they felt that chill up their spines, they felt their palms get sweaty, they felt the nerves pulsing through their veins, and they saw what they were up against when the clock struck seven.

As expected by everyone who had an opinion on this exhibition game, Fontbonne's nerves became obvious to everyone watching in the first couple minutes. Turnover followed turnover followed turnover, the mindless mistakes, which more often than not led to highlight dunks for SLU, began to add up quickly. It soon became unbearable and frustrating to even watch. The Griffins were being overpowered, out-toughed and out-skilled by the dominating Billikens. Head coach Steve Schafer went to his bench early in this exhibition trying to find some players, any players, who could produce an ounce of anything. At a point in the game during the first half with about twelve minutes to go, the score was SLU twenty and Fontbonne University three and also in those eight or so minutes of play Fontbonne committed nine turnovers. It was a lackluster performance at the start.

As the game went on it seemed as if Fontbonne was just going through the motions, looking a bit defeated mentally. Searching for answers, Dallas Haywood took matters into his own hands. He quickly raced up the floor with a defender draped all over him, he dribbled hard to his left, then behind his back, and shifted back right, immediately stopped, took a step backward and created just enough space from the agitating defender to hoist up a challenging jump shot and drain it.

That play started an attitude change in this game for the men wearing purple and gold. After making a few shots more shots, the energy became contagious and infected the rest of team. Their confidence increased, the intensity ratcheted up, and the effort was amplified. The Griffins had finally settled down from the hype of facing a nationally-ranked team and started to perform the way they know

how. It actually started to look like basketball instead of Sports Center highlights for SLU. The defense did its best to make it tougher for SLU to score and the offense executed its schemes more sharply than the early minutes. One could say that in brief glimpses throughout the game, the Griffins actually showed great promise. Whether it is Dallas' step back jump shot, Bryan DeGeare hitting a crucial three pointer and blocking two consecutive shots on the defensive end or Orkin Bakis showing some fight in the Griffins that wasn't seen early on in the game, the change was night and day. Griffin basketball fans have nothing to feel but encouraged about the potential season this team could have. In this exhibition contest, the fans witnessed the new talent of the team combined with the "never die" attitude that has always been a staple of the purple and gold. Instead of feeling disappointed about the predictable loss, people should feel hopeful about the promising season to come. The team demonstrated the ability to compete at a very high level, which says a lot for the upcoming year.

The final score of the game doesn't matter, because for Fontbonne, it wasn't about winning, it was about learning. Billikens taught these young men from Fontbonne a lesson on how to win at the collegiate level. With most of the contribution coming from freshmen and sophomores, the lesson was necessary. Taking away the positives and the obvious areas for improvement from Thursday night's game, the Griffins go to practice and prepare for a year still full of great possibilities.