

Preview

Batman: Arkham Origins

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"I don't care who does it. I don't care how they go." In one Christmas Eve, The Black Mask watches, impassive, as his henchmen bring in today's victim and forces him down to his knees. Another henchman hands over a still-burning cigarette and The Black Mask bends down, letting the red light illuminate his grinning skull.

"I just want The Bat dead," he whispers — and fills the victim's eye with a Christmas present: a red-hot cigarette end.

In another place and in the later time, a man wakes up to find himself hanging upside down with The Batman holding on his leg. "Where's The Black Mask?" the dark knight demands, then drops him from the clock tower. Soon the cord around his leg twangs and the man is a big yo-yo, bawling his eyes out and banging his face on the clock's surface. Then The Batman hears the man's phone ring, informing him of his destination: Diamond District Tower.

The Batwing brings the dark knight onto one of the towers in South Gotham. He takes in his surrounding, then jumps off the tall tower, his fluttering cape providing a DC Comics equivalent to a hang-glider. From the Local Surveillance you can find on the right-hand side of the screen, The Batman can hear someone begging for help. He rushes there — using gravity, momentum and a grapple gun (R1 button) to make himself faster — and sees four people ganging up on one victim.

Using a glide kick (square button) The Batman swoops down on one of them. And before the thugs have time to recover from the shock, he jumps back to his feet, hits the nearest one on the chin, strikes another one on the jaws and kicks the third one until he's flat on the snowy street. Then, seeing the fourth thug is approaching, he twirls in the air, kung-fu style, and lands three hits that bring him down.

From then it becomes messy. They attack the dark knight all at once. He re-introduces them to his fists — the screen goes slow-mo just before every hit — then he brings them down with his special combo takedown (circle and triangle buttons). And each time one of them falls down for good, you can see tiny surrealist bats fluttering out of their shadows and disappearing from the screen. In seconds all four thugs are flat on the street, not daring to move for fear of what he might do to them.

But The Batman mustn't relax yet. The night is still young and it'll be an eventful one — especially because the great crime lord Black Mask has placed a bounty of 50 million dollars on his head and even unleashed eight greatest killers in DC Universe after him. But the dark knight doesn't know these yet.

Next, The Batman encounters a Crime in Progress — a new and dynamic system where crimes appear at random as you roam through Gotham City. Using his grapple gun to go back into the sky, The Batman flies into the Diamond District — the destination mentioned in the phone. There he learns that he has to locate and diffuse a bomb before the time ticks to zero.

The first objective is no problem. The Batman finds the bomb hidden near the statue of an Ancient Greek-like woman. But even after he hacks into the control system he notices that the bomb is still active. So he goes back into the sky, climbs the nearest tower and tries to destroy the detonator itself — all under six minutes. And this is a bit of a problem because the detonator is guarded by four more thugs, each with a degree in martial arts.

The Batman sneaks at them from behind. Luckily they're all so engrossed with the detonator; none of them sees what's coming. He tackles the nearest one with a combat takedown (triangle button) before forcing him down with a sharp elbow on the stomach. Then he swoops on two others and brings them down with one hit each, and he finishes just in time to counter (triangle) the fourth thug's kick with a punch in the stomach and shoulder-throws him onto the third thug who tries to get back on his feet.

The second thug, now standing again, rushes at him with murder in mind. Once again The Batman swoops at him — but the thug is able to avoid it and counter with a kick. But the dark knight returns that counter, grabs on his ankle and throws him 360° so that he falls face-first on the snow. And by then the third and the fourth thugs — annoyingly more persistent than the others — are ready to repay The Batman with a few punches of their own.

The Batman continues to struggle with the three thugs (the one he brought down with the sneak attack hasn't got up since) as the countdown enters its last five minutes. A punch here, a kick there — even he can't avoid suffering some damage. One minute nearly passes until, finally, The Batman returns the last thug's attack with a series of counters that ends up with a hard head-butt. Then more surrealist bats flutter out of the thug's shadow and over the dark knight's shoulder, disappearing yet again from the screen. Only then he faces the detonator and brings it down with one hit (X button).

Mission complete. But don't take your hands off the controller yet, because in seconds The Batman will have to deal with a police heli. And yet more crimes that will come.

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All these take place before the events in Arkham Asylum. The younger and less experienced Batman, approximately two years into his vigilante career, has to survive this Christmas Eve's bat hunt without any ally, not even the cops. Warner Bros has done an excellent job with this game — the gameplay is freaking awesome and after two minutes of watching The Batman's slow-mo fighting moves, your hands itch for the controller.

Available for PS3, Xbox 360, Wii U and PC, Batman: Arkham Origins will be released in two weeks' time (25 October 2013). You can pre-purchase it in Steam <http://goo.gl/kQDP3g> or in the official website <http://goo.gl/VdXlUq> for a chance to play as Deathstroke.

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