

## Advanced Level Design: Stealth

All stealth games have a simple objective: accomplish the goal while staying out of sight. The games themselves will add nuance to this with the level design and the behavior of the AI. These kinds of games require you to plan out your course of action on the fly as you navigate through the levels and avoid getting spotted. I'm not that good at these kinds of games, but I respect these games for their interesting and unique level design and mechanics.

I think a good stealth game has to be challenging and make you use your brain. Stealth encounters don't want you to blitz through the level like it's a hack and slash, so the mechanics and level design need to prevent that. At the same time, the game needs to give you a certain amount of tools that can help you complete the level while making the game fun.

I know Metal Gear Solid is the creme de la creme of stealth games, but I don't have any personal experience with those games. So instead, I'll talk about the Batman Arkham games, as I think the stealth levels in those games are phenomenal. Every stealth level follows the same pattern in terms of layout: Batman starts off out of sight in a big room, and all of the enemies are standing or slowly walking around with guns. Batman doesn't have any sort of resistance to guns since he's only human, so getting spotted and shot at will put Batman in serious danger. This incentivizes the player to avoid getting spotted. In order to take down the enemies, the player has access to a wide range of tools and gadgets. This gives the player a lot of freedom in how they want to take down the enemies. At the same time, these tools have to be used wisely because most of them won't outright take down enemies for you, only stunning them long enough for you to take them down yourself. Levels may also provide a number of routes for the player to use, such as through vents and grates. Players can use these paths to perform surprise attacks or make quick getaways, but if an enemy spots Batman using one of these hidden paths, they will stay aware of them for the rest of the encounter, essentially blocking them off as stealth routes. All of these factors combine to make stealth levels in the Batman Arkham games intense, thrilling, and fun.

As much as I like the Insomniac Spider-Man games, I think the stealth segments in those games are kind of a joke in comparison to the Batman Arkham games (I'm talking about Spider-Man stealth, not the MJ or Miles segments from the first game). My main problem with them is that they are too easy. Spider-Man has ton of freedom of movement, which makes it easy to stay out of the enemies' sights. Across both the first game and Miles Morales, Spider-Man has a ton of tools that allow him to take down enemies from far away, making it basically pointless to sneak up behind them. By far the most egregious aspect of the stealth in these games is that when you scan the environment, the game will straight-up tell you if it's safe to take down an enemy. Now you don't have to be aware of your surroundings when taking down an enemy, you can just take them down if the game tells you 'yes'. All of these factors make stealth in these Spider-Man games unsatisfying and boring. Also, unless stealth is required for a mission, stealth in these games is completely pointless because you can fight the enemies normally by dodging bullets and throwing their guns around. Why would I want to sneak around and slowly pick off enemies when I could use the more fun route and blitz through them?