

= Arkham Asylum : A Serious House on Serious Earth =

Arkham Asylum : A Serious House on Serious Earth (often shortened to Batman : Arkham Asylum) is a Batman graphic novel written by Grant Morrison and illustrated by Dave McKean . It was originally published in the United States in both hardcover and softcover editions by DC Comics in 1989 . The subtitle is taken from Philip Larkin 's poem " Church Going " .

The graphic novel was the first Batman story to be written by Morrison before becoming a regular writer in future Batman titles . Inspired by previous works like The Dark Knight Returns , Morrison conceived the story to be his own different approach to the character , using heavy symbolical references and the deconstruction of many iconic Batman villains . The story follows the vigilante Batman , who is called upon to quell a maddening riot taking place in the infamous Arkham Asylum , a psychiatric hospital housing the most dangerous supervillains in Gotham City . Inside , Batman confronts many of his enduring rogues gallery , such as the Joker , Two @-@ Face , and Killer Croc , many of whom have changed since he last saw them . As Batman ventures deeper , he discovers the origin of how the asylum was established , the history of its builder Amadeus Arkham , and the supernatural and psychological mystery that has been haunting the area .

Upon its release , the graphic novel garnered commercial and critical acclaim , and is considered by many to be one of the greatest Batman stories of all time , and one of the best works of Grant Morrison 's career . The graphic novel would later become the definitive story of Arkham Asylum , a critical part of the Batman mythos . The critically acclaimed video game Batman : Arkham Asylum , the first game in the Batman : Arkham series , was based on the graphic novel .

= = Conception and influences = =

The graphic novel was writer Grant Morrison 's first work on Batman , making it the earliest installment in the Morrison 's Batman saga . Morrison would later note in the annotated script of how the graphic novel was to be the start of his own undertaking of the Batman comics . Line 55 of Philip Larkin 's poem " Church Going " was used as a subtitle . In his original script printed in both the 15th Anniversary (2005) and 25th Anniversary (2014) editions , Morrison remarks on several details behind the genesis of the work :

Len Wein ... had written a few short and evocative paragraphs on the history of Arkham Asylum [in the DC Who 's Who series] and it was here I learned of poor Amadeus Arkham , the hospital 's founder ... [Arkham] ' s themes were inspired by Lewis Carroll , quantum physics , Jung , and Crowley ; its visual style by surrealism , Eastern European creepiness , Cocteau , Artaud , ?vankmajer , the Brothers Quay , etc . The intention was to create something that was more like a piece of music or an experimental film than a typical adventure comic book . I wanted to approach Batman from the point of view of the dreamlike , emotional and irrational hemisphere , as a response to the very literal , ' realistic ' , ' left brain ' treatment of superheroes which was in vogue at the time , in the wake of The Dark Knight Returns , Watchmen , and others .

An additional reference to the work as a " response " to trends of the time is made in a later note : " The repressed , armored , uncertain and sexually frozen [Bat] man in Arkham Asylum was intended as a critique of the ' 80s interpretation of Batman as violent , driven , and borderline psychopathic . " Morrison goes on to explain that his symbolic conception of the character is for this book alone , and that his other work involving Batman has cast him in a far different light . He explains ,

The construction of the story was influenced by the architecture of a house ? the past and the tale of Amadeus Arkham forms the basement levels . Secret passages connect ideas and segments of the book . There are upper stories of unfolding symbol and metaphor . We were also referencing sacred geometry , and the plan of the Arkham House was based on the Glastonbury Abbey and Chartres Cathedral . The journey through the book is like moving through the floors of the house itself . The house and the head are one .

During an interview with Alex Carr , Morrison stated that Frank Miller 's The Dark Knight Returns was a huge influence during his development of the story . Morrison liked what Miller did with the

Batman , creating a whole new different character who was a more driven and obsessed vigilante , and Morrison wanted to make his own " different " take on the Batman comics . Morrison also added that they tried to stay away from the original hardboiled pulp influence of the Batman and those seen in American cinema adaptations , but instead use more themes and style from European cinema .

Morrison admitted that he preferred Brian Bolland to have been the novel 's artist , complementing that McKean 's art doesn 't have " the most terrifying expressions of the real . " Morrison liked Bolland 's art in The Killing Joke , and initially wanted him to have drawn the comic , while criticizing McKean 's choice of making the novel more abstract , adding that it would have been better if it was more concrete . In Morrison 's assessment , his writing and McKean 's art styles clashed and competed with the novel 's symbolic systems , which he said to be its greatest weakness . In the 15th Anniversary and 25th Anniversary paperbacks , Grant Morrison recalls how an early version of the script was passed around for people to look at . Most of them thought the psychological horror and heavy symbolism was not only a failure , but the dumbest Batman story ever , many of whom laughed at the idea . After the release of the graphic novel and the paperbacks , Morrison ends up asking them " who 's laughing now , @ \$ \$ hole ? ? " Morrison would also add that the people " who don 't read comics regularly seemed to really enjoy the book . "

= = Story = =

Commissioner Gordon informs Batman that the patients of Arkham Asylum have taken over the facility , threatening to murder the staff unless Batman agrees to meet with them . Among the hostages are Dr. Charles Cavendish , Arkham 's administrator , and Dr. Ruth Adams , a therapist . The patients are led by the Joker , who kills a guard to spur Batman to obey his wishes . Meanwhile , Two @-@ Face 's mental condition has deteriorated as a result of Adams ' therapy ; she replaced Two @-@ Face 's trademark coin with a six @-@ sided die then a tarot deck , in each instance increasing the number of choices he has (as opposed to two choices from his original coin) in the hope that he will eventually not leave any of his choices up to chance . Instead , the treatment renders him incapable of even making simple decisions , such as going to the bathroom .

The Joker forces Batman into a game of hide and seek , giving him one hour to escape Arkham before his adversaries are sent to hunt him down . However , unbeknownst to Batman , the Joker shortens the time from one hour after being pressured by the other inmates . Batman subsequently encounters Clayface , Mad Hatter , and Maxie Zeus , among other villains . During a struggle with Killer Croc , Batman is thrown out of a window , grabbing onto the statue of the angel Michael . Clutching the statue 's bronze spear , Batman climbs back inside and impales Croc before throwing him out the window , sustaining a severe wound from the spear in the process .

Batman finally reaches a secret room high in the towers of the asylum . Inside , he discovers Cavendish dressed in a bridal gown and threatening Adams with a razor . It is revealed that he orchestrated the riots . When questioned by Batman , Cavendish has him read a passage from the diary of the asylum 's founder , Amadeus Arkham . In flashbacks , it is revealed that Arkham 's mentally ill mother , Elizabeth , suffered delusions of being tormented by a supernatural bat . After seeing the creature himself , Arkham cut his mother 's throat to end her suffering . He blocked out the memory , only to have it return after an inmate , Martin " Mad Dog " Hawkins , raped and murdered Arkham 's wife and daughter .

Traumatized , Arkham donned his mother 's wedding dress and razor , vowing to bind the evil spirit of " The Bat " with sorcery . He treats Hawkins for months before finally killing him by means of electrocution during a shock therapy session . Arkham continues his mission even after he is incarcerated in his own asylum ; using his fingernails , he scratches the words of a binding spell all over his cell until his death .

After discovering the diary , razor , and dress , Cavendish came to believe that he was destined to continue Arkham 's work . On April Fools Day ? the date Arkham 's family was murdered ? Cavendish released the patients and lured Batman to the asylum , believing him to be the bat Arkham spoke of . Cavendish accuses him of feeding the evil of the asylum by bringing it more insane souls . Batman and Cavendish proceed to struggle , which ends after Adams slashes

Cavendish 's throat with the razor .

Seizing an axe , Batman hacks down the front door of the asylum , proclaiming that the inmates are now free . The Joker offers to put him out of his misery . Batman retrieves Two @-@ Face 's coin from Adams and returns it to him , stating that it should be up to Two @-@ Face to decide Batman 's fate . Two @-@ Face declares that they will kill Batman if the coin lands scratched side up , but let him go if the unscarred side appears . Two @-@ Face flips the coin and declares Batman free . The Joker bids Batman good @-@ bye , taunting him by saying that should life ever become too much for him in " the asylum " (the outside world) then he always has a place in Arkham . As Batman disappears into the night , Two @-@ Face stands looking at the coin and it is revealed that it landed scratched side up ? he chose to let Batman go of his own free will . He then turns to the stack of tarot cards and recites a passage from Alice 's Adventures in Wonderland : " Who cares for you ? You 're nothing but a pack of cards . "

= = Themes and style = =

The story is influenced by many previous deconstructions of the superhero genre . Morrison himself wanted the novel to be his own re @-@ imagining of Batman . Morrison includes themes such as symbolism and psychological horror , while depicting how insanity works within the setting of Arkham Asylum . Morrison references Carl Jung , Aleister Crowley , and Alice in Wonderland , while also presenting psychologically different versions of several classic characters in the Batman universe . Examples include Maxie Zeus , an electrified , emaciated figure with messianic delusions obsessed with electric shocks and coprophagia ; Clayface , who is rapidly wasting away from lack of " feeding " ; the Mad Hatter , whose obsession with Alice in Wonderland has pedophilic overtones ; and Batman himself , who is driven close to the breaking point by the Asylum . Killer Croc was originally drawn as suffering deformities similar to those of Joseph Merrick , the " Elephant Man " , although his final incarnation is that of a humanoid crocodile . The Joker 's mental condition is described as " super sanity " : He re @-@ invents himself every day , to suit his circumstances . He may be a harmless prankster one moment , and a homicidal maniac the next .

The Joker is portrayed with a somewhat homosexual element , described as being indirectly " in love " with Batman . In the script , Morrison initially wanted the Joker to " wear make @-@ up and black lingerie in parody of Madonna . " DC 's editors , however , removed this , believing that readers might assume that Jack Nicholson 's portrayal of the character in the Batman film would be portrayed as a transvestite . Unlike traditional superhero comics , many forms of sexual references are seen , and many of the villains in the novel are heavily sexualized . The Mad Hatter is said to be a child molester ; Clayface is described as " AIDS with two legs " ; and Amadeus Arkham is seen cross dressing .

The setting of Arkham Asylum plays a large role in how the inmates perceive their own insanity . As said by the Mad Hatter , " [S] ometimes I think the asylum is the head . We 're inside a huge head that dreams us all into being . " He also described the asylum as being a " looking glass " that shows the subject their own twisted psyche . Morrison used hypostasis to push the story forward , saying that the psychoanalytic theory and Jungian archetypes was an influence .

= = = Artwork = = =

Dave McKean drew most of the principal art , as well as the cover art of the graphic novel . In illustrating the story , McKean blends paintings , drawings , photography , and mixed @-@ media collage to come up with striking page designs , and dense symbols . He has said that he was " trying to make the book despite the subject , rather than because of it . At the end of the day , if you really love to do Batman comics , then that 's probably the best thing to do . Not liking them , and then trying to make something out of them is just a waste of time . " He also came to think that " overpainted , lavish illustrations in every panel just didn 't work . It hampers the storytelling . " McKean liberally uses symbolism , imagery , and surrealism , and many scenes involve the use of symbols to denote a particular psychological device . For example , a Greek inscription can be seen

scratched on the doorway of Maxie Zeus 's electroshock chamber , which translates into " Discover thyself . " Much of this symbolism was later explained and expanded upon by the release of the 15th Anniversary Edition containing Morrison 's annotated script .

Arkham Asylum has also been praised for Gaspar Saladino 's distinctive lettering work and giving characters their own fonts . The practice of giving characters customized lettering treatments has since become widespread , especially in DC 's Vertigo line and many Marvel comics . Different speech bubbles were used for many characters : Batman 's is black with white lettering , Maxie gets blue with a Greek font , while Joker 's speech is without a bubble at all ; the red , ink @-@ spattered script used for his dialogue is as ungovernable as the character itself .

= = Critical reaction and legacy = =

The graphic novel was published in October 1989 in the wake of Tim Burton 's film Batman . Upon its release , the graphic novel became a commercial success and catapulted Morrison and McKean 's name in the comic book industry . Editor Karen Berger revealed that it has sold " close to a half million copies " by 2004 , making it the best @-@ selling original graphic novel in American superhero comics . According to the Grant Morrison website , the series has already sold over 600 @, @ 000 copies worldwide .

Hilary Goldstein of IGN Comics praised the story and its " claustrophobic " portrayal of the asylum , saying that " Arkham Asylum is unlike any other Batman book you 've ever read [and] one of the finest superhero books to ever grace a bookshelf . " Goldstein also ranked Arkham Asylum # 4 on a list of the 25 greatest Batman graphic novels , behind The Killing Joke , The Dark Knight Returns , and Year One . Rolling Stone praised the book as being one of Grant Morrison 's best works , calling it " [his] first big commercial hit ? and his first shot writing Batman , a character he would spend a great deal of time with over the course of his career ? was this ground @-@ breaking graphic novel featuring the grim , twisted artwork of painter Dave McKean . In this darkly poetic , psychologically rich tale , Batman faces off against the Joker , Two @-@ Face , the Scarecrow and other villains inside Gotham City 's house for the criminally insane . " Joseph Szadkowski of The Washington Times called it as " one of the key sequential @-@ art stories of the Batman library . "

Keith Dooley of Comics Authority describes it as " psychologically and visually jarring book [that] brings the reader along with Amadeus Arkham and Batman on their journeys through their psyches in a world full of symbolism . " Adding also that " Batman , his foes , and all of humanity are greatly affected by the power of symbolism , with this story laying before the reader that these fictional characters ' stories are also , in many ways , our stories . " Lucas Siegel from Newsarama also praised the comic , describing the art as " striking , beautiful , and yes , today 's secret word : disturbing . "

Andy Shaw of Grovel on the other hand had a more negative response , praising the artwork of Dave McKean and calling it " brilliant " , but criticized Morrison 's story as claustrophobic and " has more ponderous psychology than action and , as a result , not enough room to fit any decent action in . " Shaw would later add that Morrison 's work " doesn 't stand up to his rivals , " and that " mixing the history of the asylum ? famous dumping ground for Batman 's psychotic foes ? with a typical Batman adventure is interesting enough , but Morrison throws too much at the hero in too small a space . This makes Batman 's journey through Arkham 's finest nutters appear too easy ? more of a stroll through a fairground haunted house with a few old chums than a serious battle for his life . Coupled with an anti @-@ climatic ending , there 's little feeling of impending disaster ? the chronicled event should probably appear in Batman 's casebook of over @-@ hyped walkovers . " Morrison himself admitted that the amount of symbolism made him " [ending] up being accused of doing the most pretentious Batman book ever .

In October 2005 , a 15th Anniversary edition was released . The new reprint contained Morrison and Karen Berger 's annotated script that breaks down and explains much of the symbolic references in the series , as well as principal art and step @-@ by @-@ step samples of the story .

= = In other media = =

In the film *Batman Begins*, Jonathan Crane's entrance to the asylum's cellar with Rachel Dawes mirrors the Joker's own entrance with Batman in the novel.

The game *Batman: Arkham Asylum* is loosely based on the comic, which follows a similar premise and also shares the same name from the comic. Additionally, the new warden of Arkham, Quincy Sharp, believes himself to be the reincarnation of Amadeus Arkham, and makes frequent reference to the history outlined in the comic, including Amadeus's mother's dementia, the murder of his wife and daughter by Martin Hawkins, and Amadeus's murder of Hawkins;

Under this delusion, Sharp "haunts" the mansion and recreates several tableaux which appear in the comic, including the cell which Amadeus inscribed his name into the floor.

At one point in the game, Quincy Sharp calls the Joker "filthy degenerate", just as Batman does in the graphic novel.

Additionally, in the beginning of the game, The Joker says to Batman that he is "always welcome" in Arkham.

= = = Other sources = = =

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