

Arkham Asylum Study Guide

Arkham Asylum by Grant Morrison

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Plot Summary

Arkham Asylum is a graphic novel featuring the super-hero Batman, that tells the story of Joker and other insane Batman villains taking over the Arkham Asylum for the criminally insane where they are incarcerated. Batman goes into the insane asylum in exchange for the innocent hostages. The story of Amadeus Arkham, founder of Arkham Asylum, unfolds as Batman faces his own inner demons as well as the insane inhabitants. After discovering that the administrator of Arkham Asylum unleashed the inhabitants in order to lure Batman to his death, Batman destroys the asylum with an ax and gets the madmen to release him.

Arkham Asylum begins with an excerpt from Amadeus Arkham's journal, and Arkham's story is interspersed with the modern-day story throughout. Amadeus is trapped in Arkham house as a child, caring for his ill mother who loses her mind. When his mother dies, supposedly by suicide, the grown Arkham, who is now a psychiatrist, decides to convert the house into a home for the criminally insane. While the changes are being made to the house, Arkham's wife and young daughter are murdered by a fugitive criminal lunatic Arkham had been treating. Despite this horror, Arkham opens Arkham Asylum, and one of his first patients is Mad Dog, the killer who murdered his wife and child. A year after the murders, Arkham kills Mad Dog, disguising it as an accident.

As the story of Arkham unfolds from the pages of his journal, Batman's story also unfolds. Batman is called to the commissioner's office because the inmates of Arkham Asylum have taken over the madhouse. They are holding the staff hostage. Batman agrees to go into the asylum if the criminals will let their hostages go. When Batman arrives, he finds the Joker in charge. There are also two doctors who have insisted on staying with the patients: Dr. Charles Cavendish, the head administrator, and Dr. Ruth Adams, a psychoanalyst.

The Joker has Dr. Adams psychoanalyze Batman as a kind of torture. Batman's fear and hurt regarding his parents' murder when he was a boy begins to reveal itself. Then, the Joker makes Batman play a game of hide and seek. Batman has to hide, and the criminals will come find him. Batman goes into the corridors of Arkham Asylum, where he meets again with the memories of his past and also confronts the villains that he has sent into the asylum. Finally, after Batman defeats the final villain, Croc, who symbolizes his personal demons, Batman follows a trail of blood into Amadeus Arkham's secret room.

The end of Amadeus Arkham's story is revealed. Arkham's mother did not kill herself. Arkham believed that his mother was haunted by a bat and slit her throat to save herself. Arkham later tries to kill his stockbroker, and then he is imprisoned in his own asylum. He carves a spell into the floor with his fingernails, feeling that he is finally free within his insanity, and then he dies.

Cavendish has found Arkham's journal and has also gone insane. He believes Batman is the bat that haunted Arkham's mother and that Batman is feeding the insanity of



Arkham house by bringing insane criminals there. He freed the prisoners in order to lure Batman there. Cavendish tries to kill Batman, but Dr. Adams stops him by slitting his throat. Batman goes back into the asylum and tears it apart with an ax. Then, he gets the prisoners to let him go by giving Two-Face, one of the criminals, back the coin he uses to make all of his decisions.



Front Matter and Section 1, pages 1-11

Front Matter and Section 1, pages 1-11 Summary

Arkham Asylum is a Batman graphic novel that tells the story of Joker and other insane Batman villains taking over the Arkham Asylum for the criminally insane where they are incarcerated. Batman goes into the insane asylum in exchange for the innocent hostages. The story of Amadeus Arkham, founder of Arkham Asylum, unfolds as Batman faces his own inner demons as well as the insane inhabitants. After discovering that the administrator of Arkham Asylum unleashed the inhabitants in order to lure Batman to his death, Batman destroys the asylum with an ax and gets the madmen to release him.

The front matter of Arkham Asylum includes a spread with an illustration of wood, a stylized, geometric cross, and nails, which calls the book a passion play. The following spread is an illustration of a fossil of a bat skeleton, an *Icaronycteris*, labeled icon. The title page and credits page contain imagery of windows, writing, shadows, and a clock bound in red string. The story is introduced with a quote from the Cheshire Cat from the book *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. The cat says that everyone in Wonderland is mad.

The journal of Amadeus Arkham is retold through a series of flashbacks. As a young boy, Arkham carries some food up to his ill mother. His father is dead, and the big, empty house overwhelms the young boy's world. When he comes into his mother's room, she will not eat. He urges her to take some, and she finally opens her mouth to say she's eaten. Her mouth is full of beetles, the meal she's made for herself. Arkham notes that the beetle is a symbol of rebirth and speculates that his mother was trying to protect herself. She also had been reborn, into madness.

Meanwhile, in Gotham City, the bat symbol is seen in the sky, calling Batman to the commissioner's office. Batman asks the commissioner what's happened, and the commissioner relates that the inmates have taken over Arkham Asylum, the asylum for the criminally insane. The inmates have taken the staff for hostages, and the city has provided many items the inmates demanded. Now, they want to talk to Batman. The Joker, Batman's arch enemy, is on the phone.

The Joker tells Batman that the inmates, as their last demand, want him to come to the asylum. On the phone call, there is a scratching noise in the background. When Batman refuses to obey the Joker, the Joker introduces Batman to a nineteen-year-old girl named Pearl who works in the asylum's kitchen. The Joker says he's been sharpening a pencil, and Batman hears the sound of the Joker gouging Pearl's eye out with the pencil.

The Joker tells Batman to come to the asylum in half an hour and bring a white cane for Pearl. Batman tells the commissioner that he's going into the asylum, and he asks to

talk with the commissioner privately. The commissioner suggests organizing a SWAT team, but Batman says he's going in to the asylum. His real concern is that maybe the Joker is right that he belongs in an asylum.

Front Matter and Section 1, pages 1-11 Analysis

Arkham Asylum is a graphic novel and part of the Batman series of comics by publisher DC Comics. The reader of Arkham Asylum is expected to be familiar with the character of Batman, the anonymous superhero persona of millionaire Bruce Wayne, and his arch-nemesis the Joker, a demented criminal with a distorted face who looks like a clown. Arkham Asylum is also a dark and psychologically sophisticated story, rich with visual symbolism.

Visually, Arkham Asylum is organized in two-page spreads, with the art completely covering the page, so as to immerse the reader in the action. The bat skeleton that takes up a spread in the front matter evokes the symbol of the bat as a menacing concept that has been within the human mind for ages. Batman is dual. He is a man, but he is also evoking a concept of darkness and night in the costume that he chooses. The costume itself evokes nightmarish images, revealing Batman's troubled psyche, and in Arkham Asylum, Batman is drawn in shadow, reinforcing this idea.

The setting of Arkham Asylum and the story of Amadeus Arkham bring to this graphic novel the theme of insanity. Batman questions his own sanity, as a troubled man whose parents were killed when he was young and who disguises his identity in order to punish criminals. The Joker is a criminal, but he is also a lunatic. His lunacy becomes the central element of his character. Arkham's mother's insanity sets up the house that later becomes Arkham Asylum as a place of insanity, a place where people pass through into a new world, reborn into madness.



Section 2, pages 12-31

Section 2, pages 12-31 Summary

The story returns to Amadeus Arkham, now an adult, returning to his home after his mother's death. He has inherited her house, and he decides that he must devote his life to helping the insane, people like his mother. He sleeps badly through the night, hearing the sound of wings in his dreams.

Back in the city of Metropolis, Arkham treats a mentally ill patient who was beaten and sexually abused by his father. The patient is Martin "Mad Dog" Hawkins, who has become a serial killer and is waiting for trial. Mad Dog mutilates his female victims' faces and sex organs. He also cuts himself with a razor to combat his numbness. Because of Mad Dog, who he feels sorry for, Arkham decides to open a home for the criminally insane in his mother's old house.

After Dr. Arkham tells his wife Constance and young daughter Harriet that they are moving back to his childhood home to convert it into an insane asylum, Arkham dreams that his is a child lost in a funhouse and afraid to go through the tunnel of love. The door to the tunnel of love looks like a vagina. Young Arkham is stuck in the hall of mirrors and afraid of the strangers in the reflections. His father comes to get him, and takes him out without going through the tunnel of love, but Arkham is afraid the strangers will come out of the mirrors to find him. He wakes, feeling almost as if he is home again.

Meanwhile, Batman arrives at Arkham Asylum. There is salt sprinkled around the outside. Batman tells the Joker to release the hostages, and the Joker lets the people go, including Pearl. Batman sees that Pearl still has her eyes. Pretending to poke them out was one of the Joker's jokes. As they enter the asylum, the Joker tells Batman to loosen up and slaps him on the rear. Batman becomes angry, and the Joker implies that Batman might have an illicit sexual relationship with his young sidekick Robin.

The Joker opens up the doors of the asylum, and the room is presented in an abstracted montage of images and designs representing madness. There are images of clocks, eyes, snakes, stars, Hebrew letters, angels, and astronomical symbols. The moon is shining in through the window, and blue balloons float in the air above a pile of mannequins. The thoughts and mutterings of the madmen are reflected in words, talking about the speed of light, begging for confession, declaring what God is, and ranting about dogs, blood, rats, oranges, dirt, and who killed Bambi. The page also contains a quote from Norman Bates in the movie Psycho. This is madness.

Asylum administrator Charles Cavendish objects to the Joker that he's had enough. The Joker first rants that there can't be too much madness and then kisses Cavendish. Then, he refers to Cavendish's "guilty secret" to bring the man in line. Batman demands to know why there still seem to be hostages there, and Ruth Adams, a psychotherapist,



introduces herself and Cavendish. They insist on staying behind with the asylum and its patients.

The Joker comments that he smells excrement on the floor. Batman's enemy Two-Face, whose real name is Harvey Dent, has relieved himself on the floor because he couldn't decide whether to go to the bathroom. Half of Two-Face's face is scarred and ugly, and he is obsessed with his two-sided nature. He has always made decisions based on the flip of his two-sided coin, a silver dollar with one side marked and destroyed, like his face. The unmarked side means he will do something good, while the marked side means he will do something evil. In order to cure him, Ruth explains, they took his coin and gave him a six-sided die to make decisions with. Now, he has moved to a Tarot deck of cards, which gives him seventy-six possible outcomes. Eventually, Ruth plans to move him to the I-Ching, but in the meantime, Two-Face can't even decide whether to go to the bathroom. Ruth tells Batman that she has to destroy before she can build.

Batman mentions that the atmosphere of Arkham Asylum doesn't seem healthy, and Ruth decries the superstitions and rumors about the house, such as secret passageways, the ghost of Amadeus Arkham, and a bleeding door. Batman notes that the Joker doesn't seem healthier. Ruth says that the Joker is unique. Perhaps he's not curable or even truly insane. Ruth suggests that he suffers from a new neurological disorder that overloads him with information, and that the Joker's actions are his way of coping. She says that he has no true personality.

While Ruth Adams is talking about the Joker, she picks some Rorschach inkblot test cards up off the floor. The Joker walks up behind her, startles her, and takes one of the cards out of her hand. He looks at the inkblot and speculates that it could be two angels having sex, black holes, a new biological process, or a ventriloquist dummy in the trunk of a car. Then, he shows it to Batman and asks what he sees. The next page is a full-page black and white drawing of a bat flying in the blackness.

Batman says that he sees nothing in the inkblot. The other inmates object that the Joker is monopolizing Batman. They want to take off his mask and see his face. The Joker says that the mask is Batman's real face. He wants to delve into Batman's mind and show Batman what it's like to be poked and prodded. The Joker tells Ruth Adams to begin analyzing Batman, starting with some word association. Ruth is reluctant, but Batman says that he's not afraid.

Section 2, pages 12-31 Analysis

Arkham's relationship with Mad Dog is ostensibly that of doctor and patient, but Arkham sympathizes with Mad Dog in part because he is like Mad Dog. Mad Dog's history of abuse and sexual confusion are exaggerated, distorted mirrors of Arkham's own life. Mad Dog suffered severe abuse and is unable to cover up the psychological damage it's done him. Arkham also suffered abuse, but his abuse was much more subtle. Arkham, as a child, was trapped in a house of sickness, with only one debilitated parent, forced to care for her.



The depths of Arkham's damage, including his sexual confusion and emotional numbness, will surface later in his story. Arkham's dream of being trapped in a funhouse, though, shows his burgeoning madness and sexual confusion. The distortion mirrors of the funhouse (like the story of Mad Dog) reflect back Arkham's mental illness to himself, showing that he is distorted and unwell. The tunnel of love is associated with sex, and its entrance is a heart-shaped vagina. Arkham's reluctance to go in reflects his sexual confusion and issues with his mother.

The madness that is shown in Arkham Asylum is tied to magical thinking. Salt, according to superstitious traditions, wards away evil, and the salt around Arkham Asylum alludes to this use. The religious and astrological symbols found inside Arkham Asylum, as well as the symbolism of the Tarot cards, speak to the magical thinking of the inmates. In madness, they tap into the symbols and imagery that haunt the deepest parts of the mind. This opens up a mental world of magic.

Batman's psychology is an important part of the story, and sexuality is an important part of everyone's psychology in Arkham Asylum. Each character's sexual urges or identity is twisted in some way. The Joker is lascivious, making sexual jokes and inappropriate advances to everyone. When he spanks Batman on the rear, Batman reacts with not just anger, but rage. The Joker's implication that Batman's feelings toward Boy Wonder Robin are more than masculine friendship probably has some basis in truth, given the book's examination of sexual confusion.

Two-Face has been reduced nearly to non-existence by his psychological therapy. Without his madness, there seems to be nothing left of him. Ruth Adams says that she must tear him down in order to rebuild him on more solid ground, but is it possible to rebuild something that is so broken? Two-Face seems to have nothing without his madness, and perhaps Batman is afraid that if his deepest madness is unveiled and expelled, he will have nothing left, either.

The Joker uses the Rorschach test as the beginning of his torture of Batman. When the Joker first looks at the card, he gives a string of ideas of what it could be. With the Joker, there is no such thing as inhibition. The surrounding world is input into his mind, and a stream of sometimes bizarre, sometimes crazy, sometimes psychotic responses come out of him. One of the things that the Joker sees in the card is a new kind of biological process, and later that is how Amadeus Arkham describes the house in his journal. Either the Joker, with his high sensory attention to the world, has perceived the same thing, or the Joker has read Arkham's journal.

In contrast to the Joker, Batman says that he sees nothing in the inkblot. This is untrue; Batman sees the bat, which is his personal symbol of some dark, frightening truth. Batman takes on the persona of the bat because it is a powerful symbol, but it is also a dark symbol. Batman carries darkness within himself. Unlike the Joker, Batman holds on tightly to his own darkness, exhibiting constant, careful control. This is why he says he sees nothing, while the Joker, who has no control, sees everything.



Section 3, pages 32-53

Section 3, pages 32-53 Summary

The story returns to Amadeus Arkham's journal. He quotes from the Book of Revelations, about Michael and the angels fighting the dragon. Arkham sees his drive to turn the house into something positive as a fight against his own demons, bringing light into darkness. Meanwhile, his daughter Harriet is having nightmares, which he attributes to her reading of Lewis Carol books. Arkham looks at Harriet's frightening red drawings and hopes everything will get better when he's finished with building the asylum. As he exits his daughter's room after putting her to sleep, he sees a stray joker from a deck of cards on the ground.

Back at Arkham Asylum, Ruth Adams is giving Batman a word association test. He relates the word "mother" to pearls from his mother's broken necklace and "handle" to a revolver. He relates "gun" to his murdered father and "father" to death. When the psychoanalyst says "end," Batman says, "Stop." Then, he says it again, and the Joker laughs at the pain that's being called up.

The scene switches to Amadeus Arkham again. In 1920, Arkham goes to Europe, where he meets famous psychoanalyst Karl Jung and plays chess with the notorious Aleister Crowley. Arkham gets home close to Christmas time, and the house is almost finished. His wife gives him two Japanese clown fish for his aquarium. The clown fish are matriarchal, and when the female dies, one of her males changes sex. This reminds Arkham of the French term for an April Fool, which translates to April Fish.

Arkham gets a phone call saying that Mad Dog has escaped from jail, and he tells the officials that Mad Dog is dangerous. He's brought Harriet a cuckoo clock, which she loves. He worries that she has nightmares, but he tells himself that it's because she's intelligent. He wishes his daughter would never have to grow up.

At Arkham Asylum, the Joker introduces his next game to Batman: hide and seek. The Joker gives Batman an hour to hide, and then all his old enemies will be looking for him. The Joker names the Scarecrow, Mr. Clayface, and Doctor Destiny, who can destroy a person with nothing more than a look even though he's bound to a wheelchair. The Joker also names Croc, who has been chained up in the basement. Batman refuses to play the game, and instead of answering, the Joker tells him a joke: A man goes to the hospital to see his wife and newborn baby, and he asks the doctor how they are. The doctor says they're fine, but his wife's not in her room. The doctor and nurses say, "Surprise!" His wife is dead, and the child is debilitated. At the end of the joke, the Joker shoots one of the security guards. After asking if Batman gets the joke, the Joker puts his gun to Ruth's head and tells Batman to run.

Batman is running through the halls of Arkham Asylum. Then, in a flashback, the reader sees young Bruce Wayne, who will later become Batman, exiting the movie Bambi with



his parents. His mother is scolding him for crying at the film. She tells him to be more grown up, or else she'll leave him. Batman is still running through the halls. There is a distorted mirror on the wall. In another flashback, Bruce Wayne is again leaving a movie with his parents. This time, it's Zorro. The young boy is playing. In the present, Batman smashes a mirror. In the past, the words "leaving you" repeat, as a gunman kills young Bruce Wayne's parents, stealing the pearls from around his mother's neck. Batman is in anguish. He takes a piece of the broken mirror and pushes it through his hand. Blood drops to the ground, and Batman calls for his mommy.

Back with the Joker and the other inmates, the television is showing the movie Psycho, and Norman Bates calls to his mother. One of Batman's enemies, Professor Milo, says that they should get him right away, even though the Joker promised Batman an hour. Two-Face won't join the conversation. He's busy admiring the scarred moon and says that God created the Earth because the moon landed scarred side up. Another enemy of Batman calls that they're bored, and the Joker agrees to let them go after Batman.

The scene returns to Amadeus Arkham. He comes home on April 1, 1921 to find that the front door is open. He calls to his wife and then begins to walk through the house. He finds his wife and daughter in Harriet's room. They are dead, their bodies mutilated. "Mad Dog" is written on his daughter's dress. Harriet's head is missing, and he sees it in her doll house. The cuckoo clock chimes. Arkham goes and puts on his mother's wedding dress. He comes back and kneels by the bodies, getting blood on the white lace dress. Arkham comes to his senses in the bathroom, weeping and vomiting. His life has been reduced to nothing but vomit. Arkham says that he thinks he may be ill.

Section 3, pages 32-53 Analysis

The image of the Archangel Michael fighting the dragon, or Satan, is an externalization of an internal struggle. Amadeus Arkham is not fighting an external dragon. Instead, he is fighting his inner demons. This image will resurface during the external struggle of Batman against his enemy Croc, but this struggle will be, in its own way, a struggle of Batman against himself. Who is the angel, and who is the demon? Batman sees in himself a darkness that is criminal and that he fears, and so when he fights the criminals, he is also fighting the criminal impulse in himself.

Arkham's fight against his demons brings him back to Arkham house, the prison of his youth. He believes that he will change it into something positive and a force of light, but already there are indications that this will not be the case. Harriet's nightmares show the force of evil that seems to surround the house. Everything that happens is full of portent for the future. The books of Lewis Carol bring to mind the Mad Hatter, a Batman villain imprisoned in the asylum in the future. The joker card on the ground is a portent of the Joker's future incarceration. The family is surrounded by madness already, even before the house becomes an asylum.

When Batman takes the word association test, all of his answers relate back to the traumatic moment of his life that changed his whole future. When Bruce Wayne was



young, his parents were killed by criminals outside a movie theater. Every image in Batman's world comes back to the image of his parents' deaths. This psychological core is packed with imagery and associations. Parents are protectors, but Bruce's parents were wrenched from him. A child's life is supposed to be free of care, but Bruce's life was suddenly full of pain. As Batman flees through the twisting corridors of Arkham Asylum, he is moving through the recesses of his own mind. He is faced again with his parents' deaths and with his own reflection. The villains in the house are not Batman's enemies. Batman himself is his own enemy.

Karl Jung and Aleister Crowley, who Arkham meets with in Europe, are symbolic of the untapped and sinister depths of the mind. Arkham's clown fish are also symbolic, this time of sexual confusion. Arkham, like the gender-changing clown fish, takes on his mother's role as protector during her sickness and even more so after her death, leading to sexual confusion. Arkham symbolically takes his mother's place when he puts on her wedding dress after the murder of his wife and child. The wedding dress is also symbolic of a rite of passage and a baptism into a new life, much as Arkham portrays the beetles his mother eats during the opening of the book. The reference to an "April Fish" brings up the motif of April Fool's Day, the date when Arkham's family is murdered, the date when he murders Mad Dog, and also the date when the Joker lures Batman to the asylum.



Section 4, pages 54-69

Section 4, pages 54-69 Summary

In Arkham Asylum, Clayface, one of Batman's foes, is walking down the corridor, moaning about his diseased skin. He comes to Batman, wanting to infect him, too. As Clayface reaches out to infect Batman, Batman kicks him in the leg. Clayface's leg crunches and cracks through. Clayface is incapacitated.

The frail, skeletal figure of Doctor Destiny is wheeling his wheelchair down the dark, empty hallways, calling for Clayface to push his wheelchair. As Doctor Destiny nears the stairs, a foot comes at him from behind. Batman kicks him down the stairwell, and Doctor Destiny ends up in a crumpled heap at the bottom of the stairs.

Another one of Batman's enemies, the Scarecrow, is looking for him, dragging his pitchfork across the floors of Arkham Asylum. Batman, crouching on the ground of one of the rooms, watches the horrifying Scarecrow as he goes past. Then, Batman feels something on the floor. It is scratched lettering. Batman turns on the light and sees writing carved all over the floor. Batman peers out into the corridor, and then suddenly, he finds himself in a hall of mirrors, reflected back at himself.

The Mad Hatter, another Batman rival, calls to him. The Mad Hatter says that Arkham Asylum plays tricks with the mind. He calls disorder an indication of a higher order that no one can understand, and then he says he's interested in children because they are mad. The Mad Hatter lewdly and menacingly says he's especially interested in little blonde girls. Then, he says he thinks that they're all dreams inside the asylum's head, or perhaps Batman's head. He calls Arkham Asylum a looking glass, or mirror and says that they're all Batman. He then disappears, and Batman is left looking at himself in a mirror.

The story returns to Amadeus Arkham's journal, where he writes that eight months after his wife and child are murdered, Arkham Asylum opens. It is named for his mother, Elizabeth Arkham. Mad Dog Hawkins is one of the first patients. Mad Dog tortures Arkham by recounting everything he did to Arkham's wife and daughter, while his colleagues praise him for having the kindness to treat Mad Dog as a patient. On April 1, 1922, a year after the murders, Arkham electrocutes Mad Dog under the cover of electroshock therapy. No one suspects it is anything but an accident. Arkham cannot feel anything when he kills Mad Dog.

Arkham begins wandering Arkham Asylum in the middle of the night. He has a secret room where he goes to keep his journal. He believes that this regular routine is necessary to help his mind. Sometimes Arkham hears mad laughter coming from an empty room. When he tapes over the mirror in his office, the laughing stops. Arkham goes back to his endless walking. He feels that he is part of some larger thing that he



cannot understand and that the house is alive. It wants madness, and Arkham is part of it. He calls the house a maze in which he is lost.

Back in modern-day Arkham Asylum, Batman approaches a door. Over the door are scrawled the words "Discover Thyself" in Greek. Inside, another Batman villain, Maxie Zeus, is hooked up to electroshock therapy equipment. He calls to Batman, saying that he is God. The electricity empowers him, he says. It will allow him to bring paradise to Africa and gain the worship of the masses. Maxie Zeus offers Batman the power of electricity. Batman turns and walks away.

Section 4, pages 54-69 Analysis

As Batman wanders through the corridors of Arkham Asylum, he is faced with the madmen he has captured and incarcerated. Clayface is portrayed as a carrier of pestilence who wants to infect Batman with his disease. Literally, this is a disease of the flesh, but metaphorically, this is also a disease of the mind. Batman walks among the criminal and the insane. He is the flipside of these criminals, and so he is also very close to walking among them.

Batman is not a forthright fighter in combat with the villains. He kicks Doctor Destiny down the stairs, viciously. Batman dares not be within Doctor Destiny's gaze, but his actions are ruthless and even cowardly. He cracks through Clayface's leg and hides from the frightening Scarecrow. When Batman finds himself in the hall of mirrors, he must examine himself, his actions, and his beliefs. The mirrors offer a look into another world, a world of the mind and of madness.

The Mad Hatter does not attack Batman. Instead, he acts as Batman's guide to the world of the insane. The Mad Hatter takes on the characteristics of the character from Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, so he is a resident of the world that exists through the looking glass, the backwards, distorted world of madness. The Mad Hatter knows insanity. He tells Batman that all of the villains are elements of Batman's psyche and part of his internal struggle. They are projections of Batman's dark side. The Mad Hatter also compares Arkham Asylum to a mind, and so Batman's journey through its corridors is a journey through the depths of his own mind, much like Amadeus Arkham's late night wanderings through those same corridors.

Amadeus Arkham covers up his mirror in order to hide his madness. The laughter is a materialization of the insanity within him, and the mirror is the passageway into the backwards, Alice-in-Wonderland world of madness. This is when Arkham calls the house a biological process, reflecting what the Joker sees in the Rorschach test, which is also a reflection of the Joker's insanity.

The electricity of electroshock therapy is meant to cure insanity, or at least alleviate it. Arkham uses this supposedly curing element to kill Mad Dog, and Maxie Zeus uses it to feed his own sense of empowerment and hubris. The electricity is, literally, power, but the power is also a corrupting force. Maxie Zeus becomes absorbed in his own greedy



acquisition of electrical "power" and believes himself a god. Arkham takes advantage of the power he has over his patients to kill the hopelessly insane Mad Dog who he once felt sorry for. Batman rejects Maxie Zeus and the lure of power when he walks out of the room.



Section 5, pages 70-91

Section 5, pages 70-91 Summary

Amadeus Arkham's friends take him out to the opera to help him regain his health, but his problems are deeper than they realize. Arkham takes psychotropic mushrooms and begins to think that the house is a living creature that is trying to tell him something. He feels something and turns to see the clown fish make the astrological sign of Pisces, the fish, which is related to the moon card in the Tarot. The card means death and rebirth.

Arkham writes that he must follow the path shown to him. Meanwhile, Batman is following a path of blood on the floor. Arkham writes that he must confront a dragon, and Batman comes to confront his own dragon, Croc. Arkham writes that he's afraid he is not strong enough to overcome the dragon, and Croc knocks Batman backward. The mushrooms start affecting Arkham's mind, and he feels terrified. Meanwhile, Croc lifts Batman above his head and throws him out a window, shattering the glass.

Batman grasps onto a ledge, barely saving himself. He pulls himself up and finds himself at the foot of a statue of an angel holding a spear. It is the Archangel Michael conquering Satan. Arkham's journal entries continue, as well. He writes that he feels he has nothing to save himself. He runs mindlessly through the asylum, without even the comfort of prayer, since he has no God. Batman takes the spear from the statue and reenters the asylum. As Arkham describes his madness, Batman turns on Croc with his spear.

Arkham compares himself to three martyrs: Attis, Christ, and Odin. Only his own reflection will prove his existence. He believes he hears the dragon coming for him, and he tears the tape off of his mirror. Finally, he sees himself and his mother. While Arkham narrates from his journal, Batman struggles with Croc, pushing the spear through the monstrous enemy, but also wounding himself in the same way, and finally pushing Croc out through another window.

Arkham awakes the next morning, unsure of whether he is the hero or the dragon. Batman is wounded from his fight with Croc, but he follows the blood trail he saw earlier into the wall. He breaks into Arkham's secret room, where he finds Dr. Cavendish and his hostage, Ruth Adams. He has a razor, and he has already wounded her. Batman realizes that Cavendish was the one who let the prisoners out. Cavendish shows Batman Amadeus Arkham's journal.

In the journal, Arkham recalls a repressed memory. It is 1920, and Arkham is visiting his ill mother. He hears wings underneath her bed, and she complains that something is coming for her every night. Then, he sees it: a bat. The bat is what has tortured his mother. To save her, Arkham slits his mother's throat with a razor. His mother's death is seen as a suicide. Arkham, now knowing the truth, dons his mother's wedding dress again. He is one with the madness that he confines in the walls of Arkham Asylum.



Cavendish is wearing Arkham's mother's wedding dress. He identifies Batman with the bat in Arkham's journal, since Batman is the one who sends the madmen to Arkham Asylum. Batman says that he is only a man, but Cavendish identifies him with a supernatural evil. Cavendish relates that Arkham was locked up after he tried to kill his stockbroker in 1929. Arkham used ritual and magic to try to protect himself from the bat, scratching a spell into the floor of his cell with his fingernails. Arkham's journal relates the freedom he finds in madness. After he finishes carving his spell into the floor, he collapses, dead.

Section 5, pages 70-91 Analysis

The moon is a recurring visual motif throughout Arkham Asylum, and in the beginning of this section it is related to the Tarot and also to the clown fish. The moon symbolizes death and rebirth, much like the beetles that Arkham's mother ate. The moon symbolizes transformation, and transformation is associated with madness. Madness is a crossing over into a new life and an act of becoming a new kind of being. The word "lunatic" relates the moon etymologically to madness; the moon is a maddening influence.

During the fight with Croc, Batman's story is combined with Arkham's story. As Arkham metaphorically fights his battle with his inner demon, Batman literally fights an externalization of that battle with the dragon-like Croc. When Batman lands by the statue of Michael standing over the slain beast, Satan, it is like Arkham's voice coming to him from the past. Arkham quotes the passage from Revelations regarding Archangel Michael defeating the dragon, taking it as his inspiration for turning the house of his childhood horrors into a house of hope for deliverance from madness. This idea of Arkham's is why the statue of Michael is on the asylum. Arkham calls it a symbol of the victory of reason. It almost seems that Arkham has placed the spear there so that Batman, in some unimagined future, can confront his own demons. This is an example of the interconnectedness of past and future that exists throughout the novel, as if the human mind can reach out through time. While Arkham is lost, Batman is saved, and so in a way, Arkham also seems eventually saved.

In Arkham Asylum, the lines between hero and villain are blurred. Arkham struggles against himself, and so he becomes unclear where the dragon ends and he begins. Batman also struggles against himself. As he fights an external battle, he also fights a battle with himself. As he pushes the spear into Croc, he pushes it into himself. The actual fight becomes a metaphor for the internal struggle, and Batman arises victorious but wounded. This, though, is only one level of the struggle. As with the human mind, the fight goes ever deeper.

Batman must enter a secret room, revealing connections between the past and present, in order to solve the mystery of Arkham Asylum. This directly parallels the need to delve into untapped memories (like Arkham's memory of killing his mother) and reveal connections between the past and present in order to understand the psychological conflicts of the human mind. The secret room hides a past memory in an untapped part

of the mind. Cavendish's exposure to it has driven him insane. The dark part of Amadeus Arkham has reached out through time and destroyed Cavendish, just as the hopeful part of Arkham reached out through time and saved Batman.



Section 6, pages 92-116

Section 6, pages 92-116 Summary

Cavendish describes finding Arkham's journal in the hidden room. He believes that he is meant to finish Arkham's work. He put the salt around Arkham Asylum so Batman could not escape. Batman tries to tell Cavendish that he's ill, but Cavendish believes that Batman is the one who is sick. Cavendish attacks and cuts Batman with the razor. The bloody razor flies out of Cavendish's hand, and the two men are locked in a struggle. Cavendish has his hands around Batman's throat, calling him a mommy's boy.

Batman calls out to Ruth for help. She picks up the razor and slits Cavendish's throat. Her eyes filled with rage. Then, she realizes what she's done. The razor falls from her hand. Batman tells her that Cavendish deserved it, but she is horrified. She says that she didn't mean to do it.

Batman asks her the way out, and Ruth tells him that she thinks it's down the passageway. Batman asks her for Two-Face's coin. Ruth is still struggling with the guilt over killing Cavendish, but she gives Batman the coin. She realizes that he is going to undo all the psychological work she has done on Two-Face. He is going back among the madman, even though they have a means of escape through the passage. Batman feels that he has to prove himself, even though the idea is insane.

Batman takes an ax and begins destroying Arkham Asylum. One of the inmates runs to the Joker, screaming that Batman is wrecking the asylum. The Black Mask, another one of the inmates, complains that the Batman is too dangerous and that the Joker's plan was a bad one. Batman, after smashing up the house, drops his ax at the Joker's feet. Batman says that they are free, but the Joker says that Batman is still in their power.

Batman says that Two-Face should decide what happens to him and gives Two-Face back his coin. The Joker thinks it's a great idea. Two-Face flips the coin. Batman will go free if the clean face comes up, and he will die if the scarred face comes up. The coin flies into the air, with a flash of light. Two-Face catches it and says that Batman will go free. The Joker honors the bargain, wishing Batman well outside in the madhouse. Batman is welcome back any time he wants. Meanwhile, Two-Face looks at the coin in his hand. It has landed scarred side up. He looks at the house of Tarot cards sitting on a table and tells them that he cares nothing for them. Then, he knocks down the pack of cards, and the card on the top is the moon, symbol of transformation.

The novel concludes with another quote from Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, the scene where Alice awakes from Wonderland, returning to reality. At the end of the novel, there are pictures and words representing the thoughts and characters of Batman and the villains in the book. Batman's image is a bat, with black and white typewritten characters, describing cowardly criminals, his parents death, and his decision to



become a bat, which will strike terror into the criminals. The Joker's symbol is the moon, and his description is one of anarchy, letting all horrors out into the world.

Two-Face's two sides are represented, and the Black Mask is just a blank square. The Mad Hatter is arrogant and sinister, and his pedophilia is referred to again. Croc is just an animal, a dragon. Doctor Destiny is a mysterious, elusive figure, and Maxie Zeus is a Christ figure. Clayface is an unclean, pestilent abomination, and Professor Milo's words protest that he is completely sane, but his image is a bloody scalpel.

Section 6, pages 92-116 Analysis

Cavendish not only wears Amadeus Arkham's mother's wedding dress, but he also uses the same weapon that Arkham used to kill his mother, a straight razor. Cavendish embodies Arkham's insanity, embracing Arkham's relationship to ritual and magic in his use of the salt to contain Batman and sharing Arkham's conflicted emotions surrounding a mother figure, as evidence by Cavendish's cries of "mommy's boy" while strangling Batman.

Instead of Cavendish reenacting Arkham's matricide, however, Ruth is the one who commits murder. Arkham sees his mother in a mortal struggle with a bat that tortures her, and to save her from the bat, he kills her. What were his true motives? As a youth, Arkham is imprisoned in his mother's house, a slave to her, her illness, and her insanity. As an adult, he must harbor resentment toward his mother, and he is conflicted between love and hate of her. Ruth sees Cavendish, an authority figure to her, just as Elizabeth Arkham is an authority figure to her son, in a mortal struggle with another bat. Ostensibly, her motives are to save Batman from Cavendish, but her face twists in rage when she kills him. She says later that she did not mean to do it, but is this true? Ruth has been subservient to Cavendish, and she has just recently been his hostage. She must be harboring resentment, much as Arkham must have resented his mother. Ruth is truly reenacting Arkham's crime.

After Cavendish is dead, Ruth and Batman have an easy way out of Arkham Asylum, but instead of fleeing, Batman feels compelled to finish his battle with himself. He chooses to destroy Arkham Asylum, which is an odd choice metaphorically, since the asylum has been equated to Batman's own mind. However, the house is also depicted as the embodiment of insanity, so perhaps it symbolizes the disturbed parts of Batman's mind instead of the totality of his mind. The destruction of the asylum is cathartic, freeing Batman from his anguish.

Batman shows himself to be ruthless, since he does not pause to regret or even rationalize Cavendish's death. In his ruthlessness, perhaps there is strength. Batman goes to face his demons, the insane criminals, without a second thought. He uses his mental powers instead of his physical powers to escape from the asylum. Batman knows that Two-Face needs his coin. Without it, he is nothing. When he returns the coin to Two-Face, he is reestablishing normalcy in the Batman universe, where things should be black and white instead of colored in confusing shades of gray. This is almost self-

reflexive, as Arkham Asylum steps outside of the traditional black-and-white, good-versus-evil Batman comic to present a convoluted psychological story where good and evil meld. Batman is ready to return to a traditional Batman role. Two-Face particularly needs this simple good versus simple evil world, and he cannot help but be grateful to Batman. For once, his good side and evil side are united, and he lets Batman escape.



Full Script and Notes and Thumbnail Layouts

Full Script and Notes and Thumbnail Layouts Summary

At the end of the 15th anniversary edition of the graphic novel, the full script of the preceding graphic novel is presented, along with notes from the author, Grant Morrison. In his notes, Morrison thanks Jim Clements, who shared Morrison's interest in Arkham Asylum and inspired many aspects of the story, including the idea of moving Two-Face gradually away from his coin to a multi-faceted decision-making process. The subtitle comes from the poem "Curch Going" by Philip Larkin, and Morrison acknowledges Lewis Carroll, quantum physics, Karl Jung, Aleister Crowley, and surrealism, among others, as influences on the story.

Morrison explains that the bat in one of the opening spreads is the oldest complete fossil bat, found in Wyoming. The story's main symbolic motifs are the moon, the shadow, the mirror, the tower, and the mother's son, and the structure of the house is connected to the structure of the story, moving from level to level. Morrison comments on the bat that torments Elizabeth Arkham as being a haunting from the future and says that Robin was originally included in the script but was removed for artistic and aesthetic reasons.

Morrison's original script gives more detailed descriptions of Batman and of character movements and interactions that were removed because of the style of the art. Batman is portrayed as a dark and obscure character, often barely visible. Morrison comments that the Batman of Arkham Asylum is not the only valid vision of Batman and that in other comics he has written Batman as a highly sane character. The Joker purposefully uses sexual language to get on the nerves of Morrison's repressed Batman.

Morrison also notes that "Mad Dog" was modeled by Mark Nevelow, an executive in DC Comics' Piranha Press. Morrison also relates that his original version of the Joker was cross-dressed in Madonna-style clothes, an idea that was removed for a more traditional Joker costume and details the origins of the madmen's lines when Batman first enters the asylum. As a side note, Anthony Perkins, the actor who portrayed Norman Bates and is featured in Arkham Asylum, was a fan of the graphic novel when it first came out.

Morrison presents an alternate scene where the Joker introduces all the villainous inmates of Arkham to Batman, one by one. Morrison also explains that the idea of the Joker as hypersensitive and almost super-sane is one that's been with him for years. Two inmates, Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum, are minor characters in the scene where the inmates want to begin their game of "hide and seek" with Batman. Morrison points out that they represent the separation between right brain and left brain.



Morrison also points out that Batman's word association test brings up his insecurities about his parents' death and tells the reader to search for more connections between "pearl" and "mother" in the book. He also relates the clown fish to the later appearance of the Joker, a clown, the gender-transformation theme, and the fish symbol for Christ. Morrison connects the death scene in the movie *Bambi* to Bruce Wayne's own mother's death years after young Bruce cries at the movie, and he obscurely mentions that in addition to the Joker's "joke," he remembers a joke about "a donkey's severed knob and two nuns in a convent garden."

The scene when Batman cuts himself with the glass is minor in the original script, and the artist, Dave McKean, expanded it to a massive, bloody event, modeled by writer Neil Gaiman. On the other hand, the scene where Arkham finds his dead wife and child was toned down from a ritualistic cannibalism scene, with Arkham later coughing up pieces of his family instead of merely vomiting.

Morrison notes that some of the ideas from the scene with the Mad Hatter are revisited in Morrison's play "Red King Rising." The Mad Hatter serves to explain to the reader important elements of the graphic novel. He relates the dangerous hallucinogenic mushrooms that Arkham takes to the mushroom in Carroll's *Wonderland* as well. Morrison also mentions that the earliest Batman stories have Bruce's mother die of a heart attack when her husband is shot, which Morrison feels is more archetypal than versions where Mrs. Wayne is shot.

Morrison relates Croc to the dragon from *Revelations*, representing chaos. The fight between Michael and the dragon is a fight between the rational and irrational, and Morrison says that the spear stands for the rational. Morrison draws a numerological connection between Christ, Satan, and Messiah, explaining that Croc appears in a crucifixion pose as a perversion of Christ. He comments that the richness of subtext, symbolism, and connections to mythology did not stop the book from selling, although most readers would not absorb much of it.

In the final scene when Cavendish takes Ruth hostage, Morrison comments that, like clown fish, the two switch gender roles, and again notes that Batman haunts Elizabeth Arkham across the expanse of time. At Arkham's death, Morrison admits that according to earlier writings about Arkham, he was singing "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" when he died, but Morrison mistakenly gave Arkham lines from "The Star Spangled Banner."

Returning to the thematic comment of the story, Morrison says that Cavendish, in trying to remove Arkham's spirit from the house has instead summoned Batman, a bringer of death. He relates this reversal of purpose to the reversal of April Fool's Day. He says that Batman is unable to fight off Cavendish because Cavendish represents Batman's own insanity. In the end, Batman comes out of the struggle as a strong, rebuilt self.

Morrison sees Batman as a redeemer as he destroys the asylum and allows Two-Face to step out of his normal role. The Joker is not a traditional villain, particularly when he lets Batman out of the madhouse, but more a guide through the underworld. At the end



of the novel, Morrison comments that Batman is cleansed and ready to become a hero again. Finally, Morrison notes that the quotes from Alice in Wonderland serve as bookends supporting the thematic content of the story. The last section of the edition presents Grant Morrison's original thumbnail layouts of the visuals for Arkham Asylum.

Full Script and Notes and Thumbnail Layouts Analysis

The graphic novel is filled with subtle and hidden meaning, and Morrison's annotated script points out many features that the reader may miss or that only exist as subtle hints in the novel. The moon, the shadow, the mirror, the tower, and the mother's son are all symbols of transformation and of hidden selves. The moon is associated with madness and also with change. The shadow is a transformation of the self and an echo of the self, as is the mirror. The tower, in the Tarot, is also associated with change and upheaval. The mother's son is a transformation, in that the mother is transformed into the son in a new generation.

The mother's son in the novel is also transformative in that the son transforms into the mother, through cross-dressing and gender confusion. The element of gender confusion in the novel would have been heightened if Morrison's original conception of the Joker had been accepted. The Joker's speech is flamboyant and sexual, and his actions are lascivious toward other men, so the Joker as Morrison portrays him is not only a gender-bending character but a fundamentally sexual character as well.

The un-joke that the Joker tells is also a transformation. Every joke is inherently a transformation, a turning around of ideas. The Joker himself turns around all the ideas of sanity, and his joke turns around the idea of jokes into something twisted and backwards, a mirror image of reality. This is one of the reasons why Lewis Carol resonates so well with Morrison's work. The mad world through the looking glass is backwards and turned around. It is transformed, like so many things in Arkham Asylum.

Morrison's review of the original script shows another kind of transformation as well: the transformations that his ideas and conceptions went through in the development of the novel. Dave McKean's vision adds much to Arkham Asylum, including the moody, shadowy depiction of Batman. McKean is also responsible for the bleeding that seems to purify Batman when he cuts himself with the broken glass. If some of Morrison's massive quantities of symbols and suggestions are lost in McKean's shadows, a tone of darkness and shadow is gained that implies many of the same meanings.

Morrison recognizes that his book is rich with allusion and symbolism that many readers will not consciously assimilate, but however subtle it is, Morrison's depth of mysticism is felt in the novel. The visual design communicates a richness and depth, and even the undiscerning reader will absorb implications about psychology and change throughout the novel. These implications hint at the full mythology below the surface of the work. Morrison's notes are interesting because they reveal even further the detail that went into the generation of this novel.



The reversal of April Fool's Day resonates with the reversal of joking, and the reversal of madness, and the reversal of gender transformation, and the reversal of a distorted reflection in a mirror. All of the themes of Morrison's work meld together into a mystical idea about transformation in general and madness in particular. Within the realm of Arkham Asylum, everything is reversed. The book itself is a reversal of the typical good versus evil Batman comic, blurring all of the lines between heroes and villains.



Characters

Batman

Batman is a superhero who wears the costume of a bat. His real identity is Bruce Wayne. When Bruce is a child, his parents are shot dead by muggers after the family leaves a movie theater. Because of this, Batman is driven to fight crime, and he dons the costume of a bat to strike terror into criminals. Batman is forced to confront his own inner demons by going into Arkham Asylum, a madhouse overrun by the insane. He must struggle with his reasons for becoming a crime fighter and his desire for revenge for a crime that can never be revenged.

Batman is a carefully controlled character. He refuses to admit that he sees a bat in the Rorschach inkblot that the Joker shows to him, holding in the impulses that he believes reveal his inner nature. Batman is repulsed by the Joker's chaotic nature and exuberance. The Joker is extroverted, and Batman is introverted. The Joker exposes all his deepest secrets to the light, never constraining or controlling himself, while Batman carries all his deepest secrets moldering inside of him. The Batman is a creature of the night, shielded in shadow and hidden from the world.

Batman emphasizes the rational over the irrational. He is a detective who fights crime with precise thought and reasoned action instead of superhuman powers. His tools are his carefully trained and disciplined body and his equally disciplined mind. Batman uses his rationality to decide what he needs to do to get Two-Face and the Joker to let him out of the asylum. However, he also embraces his darker impulses by going back into the asylum in order to destroy it.

The Joker

The Joker is Batman's literary foil. He is the embodiment of chaos. The Joker is clearly in charge of Arkham Asylum. His personality is so outlandish that nothing seems able to hold up against him. He has no controls limiting his actions, and he ruthlessly shoots a guard in the head, showing that he is capable of anything. However, he only pretends to gouge out Pearl's eye with a pencil. The Joker thinks it is funny to make Batman believe he's responsible for blinding the young girl. Everything is a joke to the Joker.

When the Joker tells Batman the "joke" about the man who goes to the hospital to see his wife and newborn child, he is reversing the idea of a joke. A joke is funny because it ends with something unexpected but also something that makes sense, if you look at it in a new way. It forces the mind to take a new path. The Joker's "joke" does the same thing. The ending is unexpected but also makes sense. However, the joke is horrifying instead of funny. The unexpected is terrible and even unthinkable. The Joker gives all things equal value. He is not repulsed by the terrible. The joke is funny to him because death carries no horror for him.



The Joker is a villain, but he acts as Batman's guide in the story more than as a villain. The Joker has no goal. He seems to want to torture Batman, but he also is leading Batman on a path to health. Like the psychoanalyst, Ruth Adams, the Joker seems to pull Batman apart in order to build him into a stronger person. At the end of the novel, the Joker is happy to let Batman go out into the massive insane asylum that is the world. He could kill Batman, but he doesn't. In part, this is because of the Joker's chaotic nature, but in part it is because of the Joker's function as a guide for Batman in the world of the subconscious mind—the Joker's world.

Amadeus Arkham

The founder of Arkham Asylum, Amadeus Arkham is a disturbed individual. As a child, Amadeus Arkham's life is out of control. He has no freedom. He is trapped in, and absorbed by, his house because of his mother's illness. When his mother slips into insanity, Arkham is further trapped and alone, without any freedom or outlet.

Arkham wants to help people, and so he becomes a psychologist. However, he is deeply conflicted. Arkham loves his mother, but he also hates her for trapping him and stealing his childhood. Arkham cares for his patients, but on another level he also hates their insanity. When Mad Dog kills Arkham's family, this hate is congealed, and Arkham's love-hate feelings toward his mother are repeated in his feelings toward Mad Dog. In both cases, these feelings lead to murder.

When Arkham establishes his asylum, he is trying to turn around the home of entrapment and darkness into a place of healing and light. However, unwittingly, Arkham turns the house into a place of further entrapment. Arkham becomes entrenched in the house itself, losing himself in its corridors. He tries to deny his own madness, and this makes Arkham's madness worse. The asylum becomes a prison, not only for the inmates who inhabit it but for Arkham himself. Arkham claims to find freedom in insanity, but in reality he has built his own trap. He can never escape his own mind.

Elizabeth Arkham

Elizabeth Arkham is Amadeus Arkham's mother. She is ill, and young Amadeus has to care for her when he is a boy. Elizabeth Arkham goes insane. Years later, Amadeus Arkham kills his mother and represses the memory.

Commissioner Jim Gordon

The commissioner of Gotham City calls in Batman to deal with the rebellion of inmates at the Arkham Asylum.



Pearl

Pearl is a nineteen-year-old girl working at Arkham Asylum when it is taken over by the inmates. The Joker pretends to gouge Pearl's eye out when Batman refuses to come to the insane asylum.

Martin

Beaten and sexually abused by his father, Mad Dog has grown into a serial killer who mutilates the faces and sex organs of his victims. Arkham treats Mad Dog before his trial, and later the criminal kills Arkham's wife and child. Mad Dog becomes one of the first inmates of Arkham Asylum, and Amadeus Arkham later kills him by electrocution, calling the incident an accident.

Constance Arkham

Constance is Amadeus Arkham's wife. She is murdered by Mad Dog Hawkins.

Harriet Arkham

Harriet is Amadeus Arkham's young girl. Harriet is sensitive and troubled. She is murdered by Mad Dog Hawkins.

Charles Cavendish

Administrator of Arkham Asylum, Charles Cavendish stays behind with his asylum and its patients after the other hostages leave. Cavendish, it turns out, has gone insane. He found Arkham's journal, read it, and became convinced that the "bat" it refers to is Batman, the thing the madmen fear. Cavendish arranges for the prisoners to escape and take over the asylum, to lure Batman to Arkham Asylum. When Cavendish tries to kill Batman, Ruth Adams slits his throat with the razor he has dropped.

Ruth Adams

A doctor at Arkham Asylum, Ruth Adams stays behind to care for the patients after the other hostages leave. The Joker forces Ruth to psychoanalyze Batman. In the end of the novel, Rush Adams kills the asylum's administrator, Charles Cavendish, when Cavendish tries to murder Batman.



Bruce Wayne's Mother and Father

Bruce Wayne's mother and father are shot dead by criminals as the family is leaving a movie theater. The event so psychologically affects Bruce that later in life he becomes Batman, a vigilante superhero.

Clayface

One of Batman's foes, Clayface is a wretched carrier of disease. Batman breaks Clayface's leg with a kick as Clayface reaches out to infect him.

Doctor Destiny

Doctor Destiny is a frail, skeletal figure in a wheelchair, but one look from him can destroy an enemy. Batman pushes Doctor Destiny down the stairs to escape from him.

The Scarecrow

The Scarecrow is another enemy, who Batman evades in the corridors of Arkham Asylum.

The Mad Hatter

The Mad Hatter is a pedophile enemy of Batman's who is styled after the Mad Hatter from Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. The Mad Hatter tells Batman that all of his enemies are just a reflection of himself and part of his own twisted mind.

Maxie Zeus

Batman runs across Maxie Zeus, an old enemy who is now hooked up to an electroshock machine and gathering the electricity from it. Maxie Zeus says that the electricity gives him godlike power and offers it to Batman, but Batman turns and leaves.

Croc

Croc is a reptilian Batman rival who is portrayed as a dragon Batman must battle. Croc throws Batman out a window. Batman takes a spear from a statue, which he uses to defeat Croc.



Professor Milo

Professor Milo is a Batman villain who believes that he is completely sane. Milo is frustrated with the Joker's antics.

Black Mask

The Black Mask is an inscrutable Batman villain with a black, empty face.



Objects/Places

Arkham Asylum

Arkham Asylum was Amadeus Arkham's childhood home. After his mother's death, Arkham turns the house into a home for the criminally insane. Rumors persist about the sinister house as being haunted or evil. During the novel, the inmates take over Arkham Asylum in order to force Batman to come into the asylum.

The Wedding Dress

After Amadeus Arkham's wife and child are killed by a lunatic that Arkham has been treating, Arkham dons his mother's wedding dress.

Salt

When Batman comes to Arkham Asylum, he finds the house surrounded by salt, which is used to drive away evil spirits.

Two-Face's Silver Dollar

Two-Face uses a silver dollar, marred on one side, to make decisions. During his treatment, Two-Face's silver dollar is taken away from him. Batman returns Two-Face's silver dollar, and in gratitude, Two-Face allows Batman to escape at the end of the novel.

Japanese Clown Fish

Constance Arkham gives her husband Japanese clown fish for Christmas just before her death. When a female matriarch dies, one of the male subordinates changes sex to take her place. This reminds Arkham of the French term for an April Fool, which translates to April Fish.

Cuckoo Clock

When Arkham returns from Europe, he gives his daughter a cuckoo clock. After he finds his wife and daughter murdered, Arkham hears the cuckoo clock chiming, symbolizing his madness.



Hall of Mirrors

As a boy, Amadeus Arkham is stranded in a hall of mirrors at a funhouse, afraid to go out through the tunnel of love. His father has to come rescue him. The distorted mirrors represent reflections of Amadeus's disturbed mind. Later, Batman finds himself in a hall of mirrors in Arkham Asylum.

Amadeus Arkham's Journal

Amadeus Arkham keeps a journal, chronicling his establishment of Arkham Asylum and his descent into madness. Charles Cavendish finds Arkham's journal and himself goes mad.

The Spear

When Batman is thrown out a window by Croc, he finds a statue of Archangel Michael with a spear. Batman takes the statue's spear and uses it to defeat Croc.

The Secret Room

Amadeus Arkham writes in his journal in a secret room of Arkham Asylum.



Themes

Madness

The central theme of Arkham Asylum is madness and human psychology. The story divides the human mind into two impulses: a rational impulse and a chaotic impulse; the good and the evil; the ego and the id. Two-Face embodies this dichotomy. He is physically and mentally divided into good and evil. Batman and the Joker together represent the two sides of the mind. Batman is the controlled, rational ego, while the Joker is the chaotic, irrational id. Batman struggles against falling into the Joker's mad world throughout the story, while Arkham fights a similar struggle within himself.

The beginning of the story quotes the Cheshire Cat from Alice's Adventures in Wonderland saying that we are all mad "here." The "here" of the quote is Wonderland, and the analogous place in Arkham Asylum is the asylum itself. However, Wonderland is a world of dreams, inside Alice's mind, and similarly Arkham Asylum is symbolic of the mind. As Batman travels through the asylum, he travels deeper and deeper into his own psychology. The story seems to say that everyone is mad, in some deep part of his or her mind. Denying that madness, as Arkham does in covering up the mirror that reflects him to himself, only makes the madness grow stronger. Confronting that madness, as Batman does when he chooses to go back into the asylum instead of escaping out a passage, gives the ability to control the madness and become a rational being.

At the end of the story, Two-Face, who represents the mental division between rationality and irrationality, is no longer divided. For once, he is of one mind, which allows him to follow his free will instead of the chance flip of a coin. The irrational, mad part of the human mind has not been defeated, but instead, it has been integrated into the whole. Batman has struggled with his demons and accepted them into himself.

Sexuality

One of the primary elements of Freudian psychology is sexuality, and sexuality plays a primary role in the madness of Arkham Asylum. Amadeus Arkham's psychological conflict is wrapped up in his mother, and in Freudian psychology the relationship between the mother and son is deeply connected to sexuality. Arkham's guilt over his mother's death takes on a sexual aspect. He takes on her role after her death, mentally changing genders much as the clown fish changes gender. This is one reason why Arkham wears his mother's wedding dress.

Arkham's sexual confusion is also shown in his dream of being trapped in the funhouse. The hall of mirrors reflects the madness that Arkham is afraid of in his own mind, and the only way out is through the tunnel of love. However, the tunnel of love is a tunnel of sex. It's opening is a heart-shaped vagina. Arkham cannot exit through that tunnel. He is



trapped with his own impulses, unable to move forward into the frightening avenue of sexuality.

Batman's sexuality also becomes an issue in Arkham Asylum. The Joker is a blatantly sexual creature, unafraid to follow whatever impulses assail his mind. Meanwhile, Batman is a closed and contained being, displaying no outward sexuality. When the Joker slaps Batman on the rear, Batman reacts with rage and repulsion. All of Batman's sexual impulses are denied and repressed. While the Joker implies that Batman is secretly attracted to his young sidekick Robin, this is not necessarily the reason for Batman's repressed sexuality. Batman is a tightly controlled person, focusing his energy on maintaining rationality and not letting loose his impulses. Batman needs this control because of his fear of his own desires, and sexuality is among these deeply denied desires.

Heroes and Villains

Batman is a traditional superhero, while the Joker is his arch-nemesis, a traditional super villain. However, in this story, the hero, Batman, must examine his inner self for demons worse than any external villain. The Joker becomes Batman's guide through his own psychological process instead of a traditional villain. The line between hero and villain is blurred. The same ambiguity of hero and villain is present in the story of Amadeus Arkham.

As the story begins, Amadeus Arkham is a selfless boy caring for his ill mother. He grows up to become a caring psychologist, working to help the most abused and most violent of criminals. Arkham seems like a hero. As the reader goes deeper into the story, Arkham begins to take on villainous qualities. He takes revenge on Mad Dog for the murder of his wife and child, but this can be forgiven. Then, the reader learns that Arkham killed his own mother. Perhaps the killing is a mercy or an act of madness, but Arkham must have harbored feelings of resentment toward the mother who overshadowed his childhood. Is Arkham a hero or a villain? In truth, he is both. When he battles his inner demon, he is battling himself.

The story of Arkham resonates back on Batman, a creature of revenge. Batman's motive for fighting crime is to avenge the death of his parents. He can be violent and ruthless. Is he truly a hero, or is he only lashing out in anger at a crime he can never make right? This is the core issue that Batman struggles with. Is his emotion overcoming his reason? Is he truly a hero? Are his enemies only a reflection of his inner turmoil? When Batman shows humanity toward one of his enemies, returning Two-Face's most valued possession, he is redeemed. Batman uses reason and even kindness to get out of the asylum, instead of using the ax that is in his hand. He is ready to be a hero.

Style

Point of View

Because Arkham Asylum is a graphic novel, its point of view is a third person camera, much like a movie, watching the action unfold. The camera is guided by the writer and artist, pointing out to the reader details such as the moon Tarot card that falls to the ground when Two-Face knocks down the house of cards and the joker card on the floor of Harriet Arkham's room, prescient of the Joker who will later inhabit the house.

During the flashbacks to Arkham's life, the story is told from Arkham's journal, so it takes on Arkham's first person narrative point of view. Arkham is descending into madness, so his point of view is unreliable. He has repressed his own memory of killing his mother, and he has experienced disconnects from reality and hallucinations. Arkham's journal is a journal of impressions, things that originate inside Arkham's mind, as much as it is a journal of events and facts. The real story is not the external story of his family's death and Arkham's revenge, but the internal story of Arkham's struggles with his own impulses.

The story of Batman follows Batman's character and so takes on his perspective of events. Batman begins at the outside of the madhouse and the reader follows him as he explores deeper and deeper levels of the structure, symbolic of moving more and more deeply into Batman's own mind. The flashbacks to Batman's parents' death reinforce this internal journey. Batman's parents' death is the primary motivation behind Batman's actions, and so it is necessarily a core element in the story, coloring everything that happens to Batman.

Setting

The graphic novel is set in Arkham Asylum, home to the madmen of Gotham City. The asylum is a fixed part of Batman's world, the home for the criminally insane where Batman's villains are sent, repressed from the world, and from which they periodically escape, much like repressed impulses erupting out in neurotic behavior. The asylum is portrayed as a living creature, a "biological process" that is beyond understanding and craves madness. In this way, the setting is a new take on the traditional haunted house, a physical focus of evil.

However, the asylum is also a reflection of the human mind. As Batman travels into the depths of Arkham Asylum, he is traveling into the depths of his own mental conflicts and processes. The biology that is beyond human understanding is the biology of the human brain itself, which on many levels defies analysis. The setting is dark, moody, and filled with symbols and signs, showing the writer and artist's impression of the darkest recesses of the human mind.



In addition to being a reflection of the human mind, the asylum is also a prison. Purportedly a place for regaining health, the asylum is mainly a place for confinement and repression. Arkham is trapped there as a young boy, and he again becomes trapped there as an adult, wandering its corridors. He makes Arkham Asylum a place of incarceration instead of a place of freedom and redemption.

Language and Meaning

The language in Arkham Asylum is sparse but also filled with meaning. Each character brings a unique voice to the story, and these voices are presented visually as well as with words. Arkham is an intellectual, and his musings are filled with references to science, philosophy, and magic. He has an extensive vocabulary, but he also expresses poetically his descent into madness. Arkham's voice comes through in his journal, which is presented in a handwriting-like print and encased in boxes designed after old paper, evoking the idea of a journal and also the idea of time or antiquity. Arkham's story is something more ancient than the sixty or so years that have passed.

Batman's words are sparse and controlled. Batman keeps his deepest, inner self confined and disciplined, and his words reflect this. Batman's words are encased in black bubbles, reflecting his shadowy, hidden nature, but the font is traditional, reflecting Batman's adherence to rationality and principles. The Joker's words contrast completely with Batman. The Joker is the Batman's literary foil, his opposite. Where the Batman is controlled, the Joker is completely without control. Where the Batman is hidden and silent, the Joker imposes himself loudly on every situation. Where the Batman says nothing, the Joker expounds endlessly. The Joker's words are riotous and casual, unafraid to use idiom and offensive language. Visually, the Joker's words are uncontained by boxes, in a red, riotous font that erupts into different sizes and shapes. Where Batman is order, the Joker is chaos.

Other minor characters have unique fonts depicting their voices. Clayface's words are distorted and watery, contained in distorted bubbles. The Mad Hatter's words are slowly wavering with unreality, containing occasional swirls, giving an almost childish and sing-song quality to his voice. Maxie Zeus's words are contained in electric blue, reinforcing his biblical phrasing. Each of the character's voice reflects his personality and role.

Structure

Arkham Asylum is a graphic novel, and its visuals are extremely important. The artwork fills the page, leaving no white edges, creating a complete immersion in complex imagery. The artwork is composed of spreads, giving a full visual effect to a two-page area. The pages are also graphically divided into panels, often set into a larger background image, emphasizing how elements of the story interconnect and affect each other. The panels tend to be vertical, giving an impression of prison bars.

The novel tells two stories simultaneously. The story of Amadeus Arkham is told in flashback, but the flashbacks are based on Arkham's journal. The reader does not



realize, as the story begins, that the journal itself plays a main role in the modern-day story. The story of Batman, which is interspersed with that of Arkham, begins with Batman's traditional response to the bat signal, but it soon becomes non-traditional as Batman moves through Arkham Asylum, going deep into his psychological issues as he moves deeper into the building itself.

When Batman reaches the center of Arkham Asylum, the two stories begin to merge. As Batman has his climactic battle with Croc, Arkham's journal entries are superimposed on the battle between Batman and his "demon." After this struggle with a gatekeeper to the last stage of revelation, Batman enters Arkham's secret room, and the literal connection between the two stories is revealed to the reader. Arkham's journal is the inspiration for Cavendish to unleash the asylum's prisoners as a way to attack Batman. Two sides of Arkham's personality live on in Cavendish and Batman. Cavendish embraces the insane, while Batman, known for his detective intellect, embraces the rational. The story of Arkham in the past intertwines with the present story, but while Arkham succumbs to insanity, Batman first embraces and then defeats his psychological conflicts. In the end, Batman uses his rationality to escape, calculating Two-Face's response to the return of his coin, and the return to the normalcy of good and evil.



Quotes

"But even then, I think I understood that mother had been born again, into that other world. A world of fathomless signs and portents. Of magic and terror. And mysterious symbols." —Amadeus Arkham, page 5

"It's me. I'm afraid. I'm afraid that the Joker may be right about me. Sometimes I...question the rationality of my actions. And I'm afraid that when I walk through those asylum gates...when I walk into Arkham and the doors close behind me...it'll be just like coming home." —Batman, page 11

"What's the matter? Have I touched a nerve? How's the Boy Wonder? Started shaving yet?" —The Joker, page 21

"Oh, don't be so predictable, for Christ's sake. That is his real face. And I want to go so much deeper than that. I want him to know what it's like to have sticky fingers pick through the dirty corners of his mind." —The Joker, page 31

"Just as the Archangel subdued the Old Dragon so shall I bend this house to my will. I will bring light to those dismal corridors of my childhood. I will open up the locked doors and fill the empty rooms. And set above it all an image of the triumph of reason over the irrational." —Amadeus Arkham, page 32

"Bruce, I'm warning you! If you don't stop crying and act like a grown-up, I'm leaving you right here." —Bruce Wayne's mother, page 42

"Ah yes, the apparent disorder of the universe is simply a higher order, an implicate order beyond our comprehension. That's why children...interest me. They're all mad, you see. But in each of them is an implicate adult. Order out of chaos. Or is it the other way around? To know them is to know myself. Little girls, especially. Little blonde girls." —The Mad Hatter, page 61

"My movements through the house have become as formalized as ballet and I feel that I have become an essential part of some incomprehensible biological process. The house is an organism, hungry for madness. It is the maze that dreams. And I am lost." —Amadeus Arkham, page 65

"You who've kept this place supplied with poor mad souls for years. You who've fed this hungry house. Do you see? You are the bat!" —Dr. Charles Cavendish, page 86

"I pity the poor shades confined to the Euclidean prison that is sanity." —Amadeus Arkham, page 89

"Arkham was right; sometimes it's only madness that makes us what we are." —Batman, page 95



"Parting is such sweet sorrow, dearest. Still, you can't say we didn't show you a good time. Enjoy yourself out there. In the asylum. Just don't forget—if it ever gets too tough...there's always a place for you here." —The Joker, page 101



Topics for Discussion

What is the role of the Joker in Arkham Asylum? Is he truly a villain? Why does he want Batman to come to the asylum?

Is Batman truly a hero? What is Batman's heroic task in Arkham Asylum?

What are Ruth Adams' motives for killing Cavendish at the end of the novel?

Why is Two-Face able to step out of his reliance on chance and make a decision to let Batman leave Arkham Asylum at the end of the novel?

Why does Batman go back into Arkham Asylum to tear it down when he could escape through the passage with Ruth?

Why does Amadeus Arkham kill his mother?

What parallels are there between Amadeus Arkham and Batman?