

GameBox

The Mac game library for emulated systems, Steam, and more

User Manual

Version 1.02

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1. Welcome to GameBox

GameBox is a game library and launcher for the Mac. It gathers your emulated console and computer games, your Steam library, Mac games, and Apple Arcade titles into one browsable collection with box art, screenshots, videos, and full metadata, and launches each game with the right emulator at a double-click.

GameBox supports over 80 systems out of the box, from the Atari 2600 to the PlayStation 3, driven by a configurable list of emulators (RetroArch cores, standalone emulators such as Ares or FS-UAE, and native Mac executables).

What you need

- macOS 15.2 or later on Apple Silicon.
- Game files (ROMs, disc images, or installed Mac/Steam games).
- One or more emulators. RetroArch covers most systems, and GameBox can download and configure it for you (see section 8.4).
- Optional command-line helpers for some features: **ffmpeg** (video fixing, Steam trailers), **chdman** (CHD compression), **maxcso** (CSO compression). Each feature that needs a tool tells you when it's missing.

2. Getting Started

2.1 The three folders

GameBox works out of three folders, set in **Settings > Directories**. On first launch they are created inside your Application Support folder:

Folder	Contents
ROM Directory	Your games, one subfolder per system, named with the system's short name (for example <i>roms/snes</i> , <i>roms/atari2600</i> , <i>roms/psx</i>).
Media Directory	Artwork and videos, managed by GameBox: one folder per system, with subfolders for covers, 3dboxes, marquees, physicalmedia, screenshots, titlescreens, fanart, and videos.
GameBox Directory	GameBox's own data: the cached game lists and your playlists.

2.2 ROMs on other drives

Any system's ROM folder can live somewhere else entirely — an external SSD, an SD card, a NAS mount. Open **Settings > System Folders**, find the system, and press **Set...** to point it at any folder. **Reset** returns it to the default location inside the ROM Directory. Either change rescans that system automatically, and every feature (launching, scraping, compression, deletion) follows the override.

2.3 Adding games

- **Copy files in:** put ROMs into the system's folder, then choose **File > Rescan ROMs**.
- **Drag and drop:** drop ROM files onto the game grid while a system is selected — they are copied into that system's folder and the system rescans itself.

- **Steam:** installed Steam games are found automatically from your Steam libraries, across every Steam library folder on every drive.
- **Mac games and Apple Arcade:** point **Settings > Mac Games** at the folders containing your games; any .app bundles found there are added.

Multi-disc games: cue sheets and their data files belong together in the same folder. Games referenced by an .m3u playlist are shown as one entry — the individual disc files are hidden from the browser.

3. The Main Window

3.1 The system sidebar

The left edge lists every system that has games (plus, at the bottom of the list, your playlists and the compiled lists: Favorites, Last Played, and All Games). Click a system to browse it. Systems with no games are hidden unless **Show Empty Systems** is enabled in Settings > Misc.

3.2 The game grid

The toolbar above the grid controls presentation:

- **Art type:** 3D Boxes, Covers, Marquees, Physical Media, Screen Shots, or Title Screens.
- **Columns:** 4 to 14 columns of tiles.
- **Sort By:** Title, Rating, Release Date, Developer, Publisher, Genre, Players, Last Played, or Times Played — with **Favorites First** and **Descending** toggles.
- **Search** (top right) filters the grid live by name.

When sorting by anything other than Title, each tile shows the sorted value overlaid at the bottom of its art — star ratings, dates, developer names, and so on — so you can see at a glance why the grid is ordered as it is. Favorites carry a red heart, and in playlists and compiled lists each tile shows its system's badge.

3.3 Selection

- Click selects a game; the info panel opens on the right.
- Command-click adds or removes individual games from the selection.
- Shift-click selects a range.
- **Edit > Select All** (Cmd-A) selects everything currently visible (respecting the search filter); **Select None** (Cmd-Shift-A) clears.

3.4 The info panel

The right-hand panel shows the selected game's fanart and marquee, its video preview (or a screenshot when there is no video), and the details: file name, star rating, release date, publisher, developer, genre, players, times played, and last played. The pencil button opens the metadata editor; the heart toggles the favorite flag. Below the details sits the game's description.

3.5 The Edit menu and the clipboard

- **Copy** (Cmd-C) puts the selected games' file names on the clipboard, one per line — paste them into any text editor or spreadsheet.

- **Cut** (Cmd-X) does the same and also removes the selection from the current playlist (playlists only; the files themselves are never touched).
- **Paste** (Cmd-V) reads file names from the clipboard and adds the matching games to the current playlist (playlists only).
- Text fields still behave normally: when you are typing in the search bar or any settings field, the shortcuts perform ordinary text editing.

3.6 Filtering and collapsing ROM sets

The **Filter** menu in the menu bar (and a matching button in the browser toolbar) narrows what the grid shows without touching the library: Hide Played, Hide Unplayed, Hide Without Metadata, Hide Without Images, Hide Without Video, and a Hide Rated Below star threshold. Filters combine, are off by default, and persist between launches; **Show Everything** (Cmd-Shift-F) clears them all. They apply everywhere the browser's list is used — the grid, arrow-key and gamepad navigation, letter jump, and Select All.

A full ROM set usually carries several dumps of the same game — region releases, revisions, verified and alternate dumps. **Collapse ROM Sets** (Settings > Misc, on by default) folds these into one entry per game, and picks the dump that runs: playable releases ahead of demos and bad dumps, then your Preferred Region, then the latest revision, then verified dumps ahead of alternates, then the later build number. Right-click a collapsed game and open **Version** to see every dump and pick a different one — the choice sticks for that game. Turning the setting off shows every dump again; nothing is ever deleted or renamed.

4. Playing Games

4.1 Launching

Double-click a tile (or press Return with a game selected) to launch it with the emulator configured for its system. A full-screen overlay appears while the game starts, and the play count and last-played date are recorded.

4.2 Choosing the emulator per game

Right-click a game and open **Run With** to see every emulator configured for its system, with a checkmark on the one currently in effect. Picking one launches the game with it *and remembers it as that game's own default* — other games in the system are unaffected. Choose **System Default** at the top of the submenu to clear the override. The choice survives library rescans.

4.3 Multi-disc games

Right-click an .m3u game and open **Run Disk** to boot a specific disc. The pick persists as that game's double-click default; **Whole Playlist (Disk 1)** restores normal behavior (which also keeps the emulator's own disk-swap menu working). To combine loose disc files into one .m3u game, select them all, right-click, and choose **Create M3U Playlist**.

4.4 Keyboard and gamepad

Input	Action
Arrow keys	Move the selection around the grid.

Input	Action
Return	Launch the selected game (or select the first game).
Escape	Clear the selection and stop the preview video.
Any letter	Jump to the first game starting with that letter.
Gamepad D-pad	Move the selection.
Gamepad A	Launch the selected game.
Gamepad B	Clear the selection.
Gamepad Y	Toggle favorite on the selected game.

Controllers are detected automatically, including wireless ones; a message appears when one connects or disconnects.

5. Playlists

5.1 Creating and managing playlists

- Right-click any game and choose **Add to a new playlist**, or add to an existing one from the **Add to playlist** submenu. When several games are selected, the whole selection is added.
- Rename a playlist by double-clicking its name in the sidebar. Names must be unique; a collision is refused with a message.
- Delete a playlist by right-clicking it in the sidebar. The games themselves are not affected.
- Remove games from a playlist with right-click > **Remove from playlist**, or with Cut (Cmd-X).

5.2 The Playlist Generator

File > Playlist Generator builds playlists from your whole library with live filters. The sidebar holds the filters; the table always shows exactly what the current settings produce — nothing is destructive, and filters combine in any order:

- **Name** search with Contains, Doesn't Contain, Is, or Is Not.
- **Where:** System, Genre, Developer, Publisher, and Players pickers, each listing every value in your library, with Any to disable.
- **Rating:** at-least and at-most star thresholds.
- **Extras:** favorites (all / only / none), only games with metadata, and remove duplicate names.

Individual games can be removed by hand with the per-row trash button or by selecting rows and pressing **Remove Selected**; **Restore** brings them all back, and **Clear All Filters** resets everything. Save the result as a new playlist or append it to an existing one — games the playlist already contains are skipped automatically.

6. Metadata and Artwork (Scraping)

6.1 ScreenScraper setup

GameBox fetches metadata and art for emulated systems from ScreenScraper.fr. It works without an account, but a free account raises your daily request quota considerably — enter your login in **Settings > Scrapers**.

6.2 Running a scrape

Open **File > Scrape ROMs**. Toggle the systems you want (Select All / Select None / Invert help with bulk changes), then choose:

- **What to download:** Metadata Only, Metadata and Images, or Metadata, Images and Videos.
- **ROMs to scrape:** All, or only games missing metadata, images, or videos.

Progress appears in the Activity Viewer with a quota meter showing how much of your daily ScreenScraper allowance remains (green, then orange below 25%, red below 10%). Requests are paced to your account's per-minute limit, and every ScreenScraper error condition (wrong login, server overloaded, quota exhausted, and so on) is reported in plain language instead of failing silently. Your **Preferred Region** (Settings > Misc) decides which region's names, dates, and artwork win when several are available.

6.3 Steam games

Steam titles are scraped from Steam itself — no ScreenScraper account or quota involved. Turn on **Mac Steam** in the scrape window and GameBox fetches:

- Description, release date, developers, publishers, genre, Metacritic rating, and player modes from Steam's public store API.
- Cover, marquee (Steam's transparent logo), fanart, title screen, and a screenshot — taken from Steam's own artwork cache on your Mac when present (no download at all), or Steam's public CDN otherwise.
- The store trailer as the game's preview video. Steam serves trailers as streams, so this needs ffmpeg (a fast remux, no re-encoding); without ffmpeg the trailer is skipped and everything else still works.

Scraped Steam data survives library rescans, and each Steam game appears exactly once even when its install folder contains stray extra app bundles.

6.4 Editing metadata by hand

Right-click a game and choose **Edit Metadata** (or press the pencil in the info panel). Every field is editable: display name, developer, publisher, genre, star rating, player count, release date, description, play count, and last-played (including resetting it to Never or Today).

6.5 ES-DE import

If you have an ES-DE (EmulationStation Desktop Edition) setup, **File > Read in ES-DE Meta Data** imports its gamelist.xml metadata into matching games.

7. Media: Artwork and Videos

7.1 Artwork types and the image cache

Each game can have covers, 3D boxes, marquees, physical media shots, screenshots, title screens, and fanart. To keep memory use low, GameBox stores reduced-size copies (240 pixels wide, JPEG) of grid

artwork on disk and shows those in the browser — controlled by **Use Reduced Images** in Settings > Misc. Marquees, 3D boxes, and physical media always load at full resolution (marquees need their transparency; the others are detailed photography), as do Steam, Mac, and Apple Arcade games, whose art comes from app icons. The in-memory cache size is adjustable in Settings > Misc.

7.2 Preview videos

A game with a video (an .mp4 in the system's videos media folder) plays it in the info panel, looping, pausing when GameBox goes to the background. **Mute Movie Audio** in Settings > Misc silences all previews.

7.3 Videos that won't play (scrambled video)

Some scraped videos — most often MAME clips — are encoded in a format Apple's video decoder cannot display (H.264 4:4:4), which would appear as scrambled garbage. GameBox detects these up front and treats them as if no video existed. Turn on **Fix Incompatible Videos** in Settings > Misc and each one encountered while browsing is queued for conversion (one at a time, cancellable in the Activity Viewer); the moment a conversion finishes, the video starts playing where it was wanted. Conversion requires ffmpeg — the setting says so if it's missing, and detection works either way.

7.4 GameBox TV

File > GameBox TV opens an ambient channel that plays random game preview videos back to back, each capped at 30 seconds. As each video starts, a broadcast-style banner slides in over the picture — system logo and game name, with the star rating and genre beneath — holds for ten seconds, and slides off.

- **Previous** steps back through what you've watched; **Next** jumps to another random video.
- **Play** launches the game on screen (with the usual play bookkeeping).
- Filters narrow the rotation: a system picker (only systems with videos are listed), a genre picker that adapts to the chosen system, and a minimum star rating. All three combine.
- The channel pauses while GameBox is in the background — including while a launched game runs — and resumes when you return.

8. Tools

8.1 Compression Helper

File > Compression Helper compresses and decompresses ROMs in place. Pick a system, tick the games (Select All / None / Invert, or select every file of a given extension), choose a target format, and press Compress or Decompress. Formats offered depend on what the system supports and which tools are installed:

Format	Needs	Notes
.zip	nothing (built in)	Any file or folder. Cue sheets bring their data files into the archive.
.7z	nothing (built in)	Same coverage as .zip.
.chd	chdman	From .cue/.gdi/.iso/.toc disc images. DVD-based systems (PS2, PSP, Wii...) use the DVD variant automatically.

Format	Needs	Notes
.cso	maxcso	From .iso images.
.pbp	a PBP tool	Listed when a tool is installed.

Files keep their names with the new extension. Decompressing a single-file archive restores the file; a multi-file archive becomes a folder named after the game; a .chd extracts back to .cue+.bin (or .iso for DVD systems). Every operation writes to a temporary file and only replaces the original after verifying success — cancelling from the Activity Viewer always leaves the in-flight game exactly as it was. Games mid-conversion are hidden if you reopen the window, so they can't be processed twice.

8.2 Deleting games

Right-click a game (or a selection) and choose **Delete ROM...** Separate switches control what goes: the game file itself (which also removes it from the library and every playlist — cue sheets take their data files along), the metadata, the artwork, and the video. Deletion always asks for confirmation.

8.3 Activity Viewer and Statistics

Window > Show Activity Viewer lists every background job — scraping, compression, video fixing, installs — with live progress, a cancel button per job, and the scraper's quota meter. It comes to the front by itself the first time a job starts in a session, so background work is never invisible — only the first time each run, so it never becomes a nuisance. **Window > Show Library Statistics** charts your collection by system, genre, decade, publisher, developer, and rating, plus most-played breakdowns of each.

8.4 Install RetroArch

File > Install RetroArch downloads the latest stable RetroArch from the official libretro build server into /Applications, installs every emulator core GameBox's systems reference (skipping ones you already have), and writes sensible first-run defaults — fullscreen, pause in background, single-press quit, controller autodetect, auto-indexed save states — only if RetroArch has no configuration yet. An existing setup is never touched. Progress and cancel live in the Activity Viewer, and the installed paths match GameBox's emulator configuration, so games launch immediately afterwards.

8.5 Orphaned Media Scan

File > Orphaned Media Scan... walks the whole media folder and lists every image, video, and PDF that no game in your library points at — name, system, kind, and size, sortable, with a running total of the space you would recover. Systems with no games loaded are skipped by default (a system that simply hasn't been scanned yet would otherwise look entirely orphaned); a toggle includes them if you really want them checked. **Move to Trash** asks for confirmation, then removes the files as a cancellable job in the Activity Viewer — to the Trash, not a permanent delete, so a mistake can be undone from the Finder.

9. Settings Reference

Open Settings with Cmd-comma (GameBox > Settings).

Tab	Contents
Directories	The ROM, Media, and GameBox data folders.

Tab	Contents
System Folders	Per-system ROM folder overrides for collections spanning multiple drives. Set... picks a folder; Reset returns to the default; either rescans the system.
Mac Games	The folders scanned for Mac games and Apple Arcade titles.
Scrapers	Your ScreenScraper login and password.
Systems	Per-system default emulator assignments.
Emulators	The emulator roster: name, application path, core path, load command, and extra arguments. Add new emulators or reset to defaults. RetroArch cores live here as one emulator with per-system core choices.
Misc	Mute Movie Audio; Show Empty Systems; Use Reduced Images (section 7.1); Collapse ROM Sets (section 3.6); Fix Incompatible Videos (section 7.3); Preferred Region for scraping; Image Cache Size.

10. Optional Command-Line Tools

A few features use external tools when present. GameBox looks for them in the standard Homebrew and /usr/local locations; each feature clearly reports when its tool is missing, and nothing else breaks.

Tool	Used for	Install
ffmpeg	Fixing incompatible videos; downloading Steam trailers.	brew install ffmpeg
chdman	CHD compression and decompression (part of MAME's tools).	brew install rom-tools
maxcso	CSO compression for ISO images.	brew install maxcso

11. Tips and Troubleshooting

- **A video shows as missing but the file exists:** it is probably in a format the Mac cannot decode — see section 7.3 and enable Fix Incompatible Videos.
- **Scraping stopped with a quota message:** ScreenScraper limits daily requests. A free account raises the limit; otherwise try again tomorrow. The quota meter in the Activity Viewer shows where you stand.
- **A Steam game appears twice:** rescan (File > Rescan ROMs) — current versions keep exactly one entry per game even when the install folder contains extra app bundles.
- **A game launches with the wrong emulator:** check for a per-game override (right-click > Run With — the checkmark shows what's in effect) before changing the system default in Settings.
- **Games on an external drive aren't found:** make sure the drive is mounted, then check Settings > System Folders points at the right place and rescan.
- **Multi-disc discs clutter the browser:** select the discs, right-click, Create M3U Playlist — the discs merge into one entry.
- **The grid shows stale artwork after replacing files:** select the game again or restart GameBox; the image cache refreshes automatically after scrapes and deletions.

12. Help and Languages

12.1 Built-in Help

Help > GameBox Help (Cmd-?) opens this manual's contents inside GameBox itself, as a searchable topic list — Welcome, Getting Started, The Main Window, Playing Games, Playlists, Scraping Metadata, Artwork and Video, Filtering and ROM Sets, GameBox TV, Tools and Housekeeping, Settings Reference, Keyboard Shortcuts, and Troubleshooting. The search box matches against the body of every page, not just its title.

12.2 GameBox in your language

GameBox's entire interface — every menu, button, toggle, and dialog — is translated into English, Simplified Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, French, German, Italian, Brazilian Portuguese, Russian, and Thai. GameBox follows whichever of these your Mac is set to (System Settings > General > Language & Region), the same way every Mac app does — no separate setting inside GameBox.

GameBox Help carries its own independent language picker at the bottom of its sidebar, since a reader wanting help in a particular language may not want the whole system switched. It opens in your Mac's language the first time you ever open it and remembers a manual choice after that.

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