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PAGES!



HALO

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO THE HALO UNIVERSE



Future

👁️ Halo series archive: every game revisited and rated

👁️ The impossible Warthog stunt - and how they pulled it off



👁️ Meet 343 Industries: access all areas to the Halo super studio

👁️ The greatest multiplayer maps + how to build your own



Welcome to a new era of Halo

If there's one story in this companion that captures the magic of *Halo* – and there are many to pick from over the next 140 pages – it's the moment when the voice of Master Chief, Steve Downes, first heard his gravelly tones piping from a friend's TV set. What he had filed away as a short voice acting gig had not only morphed into a groundbreaking shooter, but had already made enough of an impact in the local neighbourhood to bring a queue of awestruck fans to his door.

It's this ability, for a world to bust out of the television screen and permeate our personal lives, that defines the truly great videogames. They are games that lodge in the mind long after the power switch is flicked. They are games that coax us into dressing as their heroes, or to dig through millions of words of extended lore, or – as you'll find out later – keep a multiplayer mode alive long after its masters pull the plug. Fans have built entire lives inside *Halo*, whether it's as map architects or mad scientists, attempting to push in-game physics to ever-greater extremes.

This book is a celebration of the entire Halo universe: the games, the people who made them and the stories they have inspired. It takes us from the earliest moment of series inspiration all the way to the eve of *Halo 5: Guardians*' release, a game that promises to start our mad obsession afresh.

Matthew

Matthew Castle
Editor, Golden Joystick Presents... *Halo*

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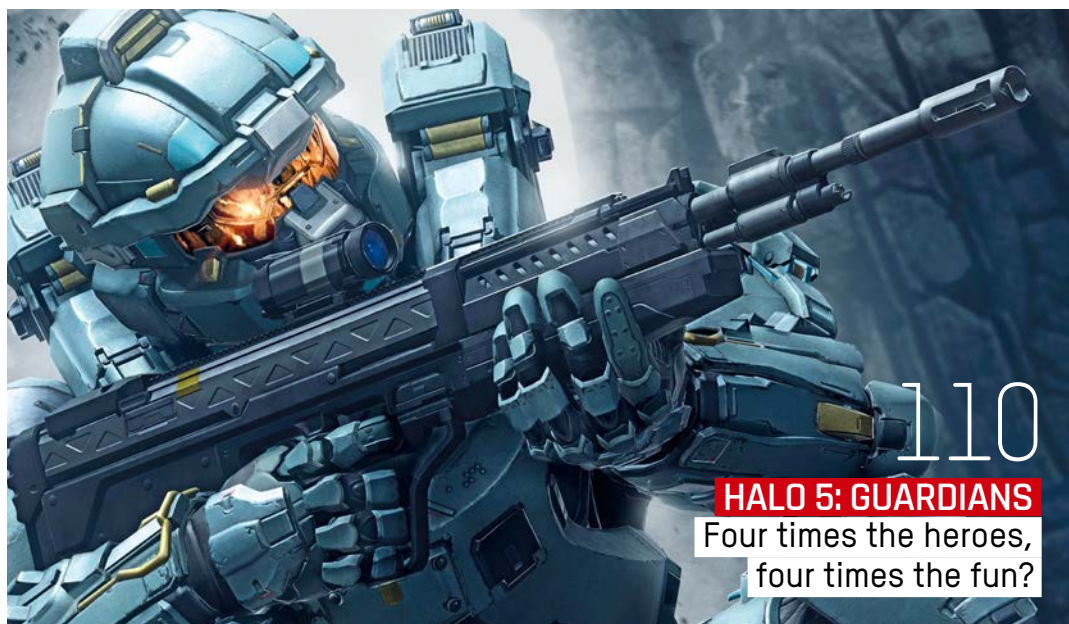
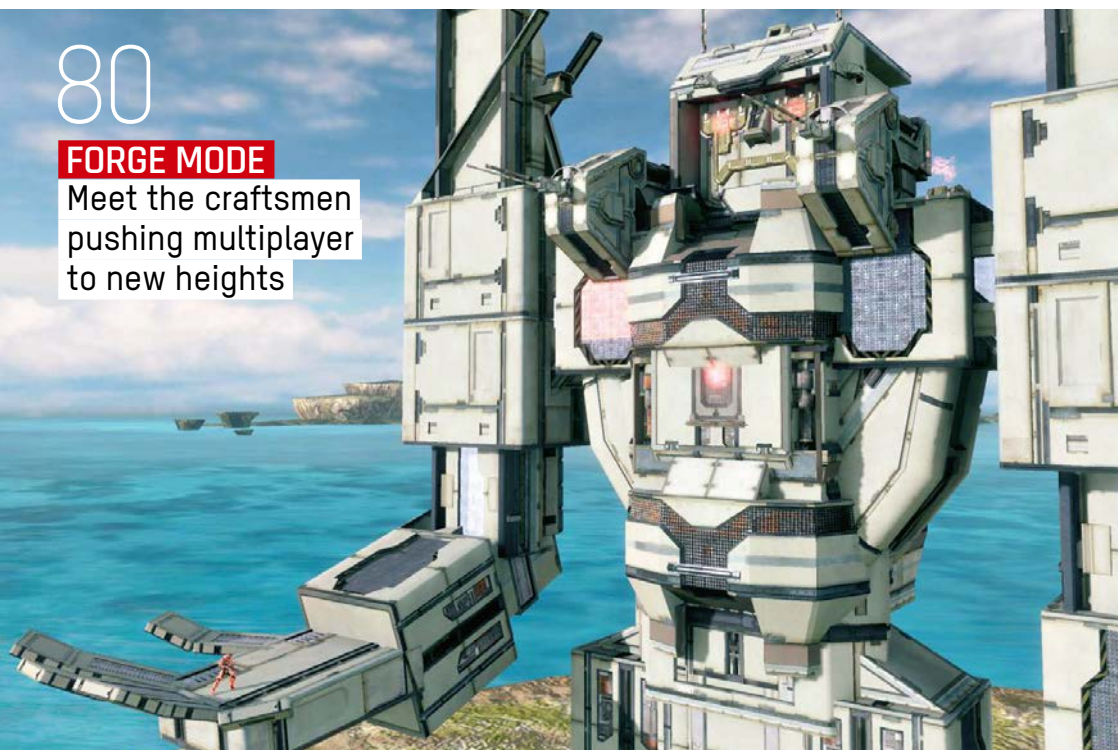
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Contributors



SIMON PARKIN

An acclaimed author and critic for The Guardian, The New Yorker and Edge magazine, Simon quizzed members of the original *Halo: Combat Evolved* team to discover the tale of the world's greatest shooter.



EDWIN EVANS-THIRLWELL

As the former editor of Total Xbox, Edwin pursued every scent of Halo news with an Agent Locke-level of dogged determination. Here he turns his eye on Forge mode and *Halo 5: Guardians*.



CHRIS THURSTEN

The editor of PC Gamer's competitive gaming site, Chris has been a long-time evangelist of *Halo 3: ODST*. We gave him four pages to make the case why it's the most experimental *Halo* game of the lot.



TOM STONE

Official Xbox Magazine's staff writer Tom submerged himself in Halo's expanded universe to write a primer for *Halo 5: Guardians* and a guide to the comics and comics. We hope he comes up for air soon.



CONTACT DETAILS

Future Publishing Ltd, Quay House,
The Ambury,
Bath, BA1 1UA, United Kingdom
Tel +44 (0) 1225 442244
Fax +44 (0) 1225 732275
Facebook www.facebook.com/gamesradarplus
Twitter @gamesradar
Web www.gamesradar.com

EDITORIAL

Editor Matthew Castle
Group Art Director Graham Dalzell

CONTRIBUTORS

Ben Borthwick, Alex Dale, Michael Gapper,
Simon Parkin, Matthew Pellett, Richard
Stanton, Tom Stone, Chris Thursten

MARKETING

Group Marketing Manager Laura Driffield
Marketing Manager Kristianne Stanton

PRODUCTION & DISTRIBUTION

Production Controller Vivienne Calvert
Production Manager Mark Constance
Printed in the UK by William Gibbons & Sons
Ltd on behalf of Future

Distributed by Seymour Distribution Ltd, 2
East Poultry Avenue, London EC1A 9PT
Tel: 0207 429 4000

Overseas distribution by Seymour
International

CIRCULATION

Trade Marketing Manager
Juliette Winyard, juliette.winyard@futurenet.com
futurenet.com
+44 (0) 7551 150 984

LICENSING

International Director
Regina Erak, regina.erak@futurenet.com
+44 (0) 1225 442244, Fax +44 (0) 1225 732275

MANAGEMENT

Content & Marketing Director Nial Ferguson
Head of Content & Marketing, Film, Music &
Games Declan Gough



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www.futureplc.com

Chief executive Zillah Byng-Thorne
Non-executive chairman Peter Allen
Chief financial Penny Lackin-Brand
Tel +44 (0) 207 042 4000 (London)
Tel +44 (0) 1225 442 244 (Bath)

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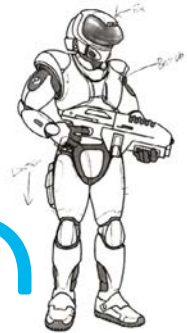


Chief Among Us

The Making of Halo

As amazing as the subsequent games were, we are yet to see anything quite as dazzling as *Halo's* original ring world.

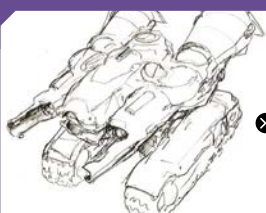
How the first person shooter that changed everything, had everything about it changed first...



Steve Jobs, resolutely handsome at 45, wearing his famous black turtleneck jumper tucked into standard-issue blue jeans, smiled as he paced the keynote stage of the 1999 Macworld Conference. It had only been two years since the Apple CEO had returned to the company that he co-founded in 1976. The iPhone was years away. Apple was still regrouping, gathering its strength after a stretch of barren, difficult years. Now, at last, Jobs had something to show the world, and he knew that it was something good. "We are starting to see some great games come back to the Mac," he said, hands fidgety with excitement. "But this is one of the coolest I've ever seen."

As the lights dimmed and the crowd stilled, an unseen choir struck up a melancholy chant, a haunting melody now oh-so familiar to any videogame player. The towering widescreen behind Jobs lit up. There, hunched over an assault rifle, poised in green armour, his gold visor glinting in the lens flare,





stood Master Chief. After a moment's pose, the iconic space marine began to run. First, past a pair of nodding Elite soldiers. Next he climbed into a 4x4, the vehicle we'd later come to know as a Warthog. The car bounced across hills as the camera circled its dips and soars while, overhead, a purple glider performed acrobatic loops against a bruising sunset. Apple, it seemed, was about to change videogames.

None of this vision came true; at least, none of it apart from the fact that *Halo: Combat Evolved* was a game-changer. A year later Microsoft bought the game's developer, Bungie. Jason Jones, the studio's co-founder, put the decision to sell to Microsoft down to "the chance to work with a company that took the games seriously." Before that, he said, "we worried that we would get bought by someone who just wanted Mac ports or who didn't have a clue." Jobs was so furious at the news that he reportedly called Microsoft's CEO Steve Ballmer the same day to complain. But the deal was done. Halo's team moved to Microsoft's Millennium Campus in Redmond.

Two years later, *Halo* launched alongside Microsoft's Xbox, the company's first videogame console.

While much had changed since that 1999 demo, much had stayed the same. Master Chief was still the protagonist, and hadn't changed his armour. The choir was still in full voice. But the third-person shooter that Jobs had showed off so proudly was gone. And in its place? A first-person shooter, one that, as its subtitle suggested, would rewrite the rules of the genre and define a new era for the videogame industry.

THE MASTER PLAN

"Every game I've ever worked on I've fully believed will come to be regarded as the best one in all of history," says Marty O'Donnell, the composer who wrote Halo's memorable soundtracks (his voice, incidentally, can be heard in the choir who first sang out at the Macworld conference). "But as I sat behind closed doors in 1999 and saw the vision of the first *Halo* game I was... it was just so powerful." Michael Evans, who designed the game's multiplayer modes, agrees. "I think we knew back from the Macworld announcement that *Halo* was going to be something special. Some within the studio thought we sold to Microsoft for too little. And certainly not everyone at Microsoft believed in

the game. I remember someone at one of the big meetings critiquing the game close to its launch. But it's hard to know if we could have made it all happen without Microsoft's support."

Indeed, *Halo: Combat Evolved* had been, if not a troubled project, then at least a confused one for several years before the big move to Washington. At one point, for example, Master Chief had a travelling companion called Blind Wolf, a dinosaur-like creature on whose back the marine could ride. One of the game's proposed titles was 'Crystal Palace'. Another, 'The Santa Machine'.

"We were in the south side of Chicago in the fall of '97," recalls Bungie's Marcus Lehto, art director on the game. "We were in an ancient old Catholic girls' school, on the south side of Halstead. Not a great area of town in Chicago, but that was all we could afford." The company had recently finished work on the real-time tactics game, *Myth: The Fallen Lords* and another team had gone off to start building *Myth II*. Jones and Lehto wanted to put the engine they'd created for these games to wider use, so they began work on an idea for a new game, that would work with the technology, "a sci-fi real-time strategy."

The earliest version of *Halo* was, in some ways, closer to *Destiny*, Bungie's most recent game, than the *Halo* with which we're now familiar: an ambitious open-world exploration game. "It was a

"The third-person shooter that Jobs had showed off so proudly was gone. And in its place? A first-person shooter that would define an era"

No other shooter gave us this many toys to play with. Pew pew pew!







Early pics showed the Chief in curvier armour, with one design even kitting him with ammo bandoliers. Would have made cosplay a lot harder.

armoury in their TARDIS-like pockets. Master Chief forced us to select just two guns at any given time. New had to be swapped for old; there was no stockpiling of weapons. This simple restriction added a neat layer of strategy not seen before in the genre, ensuring that every combination of guns chosen changes the fundamental way you approach each battle. Enter a skirmish with a sniper rifle and a pistol and your experience will be different to the one you run into with a shotgun and a needler, with its shocking pink homing shards. The reduction in choice revealed itself as a simplification that, in turn, added newfound complexity.

The joy of the game's cover and shooting mechanics aligned with the game's enemy designs. Rather than sending waves of identikit aliens at the player, Bungie divided the Covenant into ranks and body-types. There are the plucky grunts, dwarf soldiers with comically tubby arms who will either run at you clutching live plasma grenades in a kamikaze attack, or flee squealing. There are the rangy Elites, with their four-way splitting lips, and guttural war cries. And there are the malformed Flood, shuffling the halls of the notorious Library level, exploding to release a nest of clicking minions.

GOOD BEHAVIOUR

"The idea was that the Elites were like graceful, predatory cats and the Grunts were like crazy little monkeys," says Griesemer. "The Covenant are a tool for the users to deconstruct and play around with." The fine balance of Halo's enemy designs and their attack patterns came late, however. "Before we knew what we were making, we had most of the environments in place but none of the enemy encounters," says Butcher, who programmed the artificial intelligence on the project, giving the aliens their tumbling, lurching attacks and retreats. "We designed their behaviours that way because we knew we wanted to have wave attacks in our title. In this way, we went from that bunch of concept designs to a full-on console title in a very short time."

The influence for these designs, and the wider fiction in which *Halo* takes place, were drawn from numerous science fiction sources. "There's a



huge world," says Lehto, "comprised of a block of islands that you could travel to. It was a top-down, *Commandos* 'lead your troops from the sky' type of thing." More members joined the team and, subtly and slowly, the game began to change shape and direction. "As the tech and art made things look cooler and cooler, we began to pull the camera closer and closer to the action," says Alex Seropian, co-founder of Bungie. "The strategy game became a third-person game, which became a first-person shooter."

"I think the Warthog is the real reason *Halo* became an action game," says *Halo*'s game designer Jaime Griesemer. "In the old RTS-style game it was just so cool to watch a squad of jeeps driving across the terrain [that] we wanted to drive them ourselves. And then we wanted to get out of them and run around as an infantry guy and from there it snowballed into what we eventually shipped. In some ways, *Halo* is the story of the Warthog and the universe we built to drive it around in."

Nevertheless, the sea change came slowly. Even as late as E3 2000 *Halo* was still a third-person action adventure, a far cry from that which players would experience and fall in love with the following year. When the game became a Microsoft-exclusive, Bungie rewrote the game engine specifically for the forthcoming Xbox. Many of the team claim that it only came together in the final four or five weeks of development, a "perfect storm" as technical lead Chris Butcher describes it, when the Xbox hardware settled into its final form, and drew itself up to the height of Bungie's ambition for the project.

FREEDOM IN BOUNDARIES

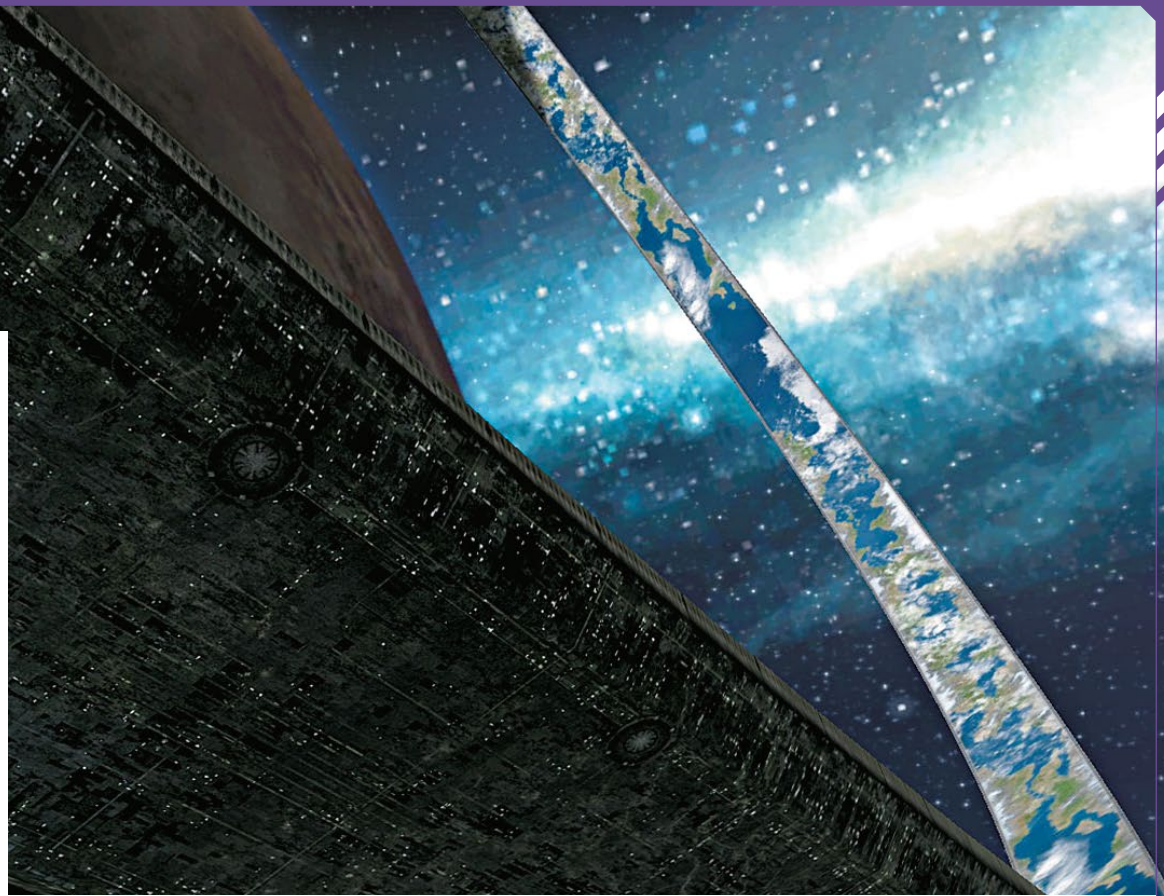
That ambition, on paper, seems like nothing new: a lone space marine and his ghostly AI companion, Cortana, taking on the might of an alien invasion. This is the kind of story that videogames had been telling for decades, since the release of *Space Invaders*. And yet, here on the ring world upon which much of the game takes place, arcing

spectacularly up and overhead in the distant sky, everything felt different, everything felt urgent.

In part, this was thanks to the now ubiquitous evolutions the game brought to the first-person shooter. There was the rechargeable shield, an ingenious piece of design that makes ducking for cover not only a way to dodge bullets but also a respite in which to recuperate. Ten seconds spent cowering behind a rock or tucked in a doorway is an evasive manoeuvre that allows your shield defences to refill, a simple yet momentous tweak that infuses battles with a rhythm of assault and cover that, in turn, infused the FPS landscape beyond it. That rhythm became so infectious, in fact, that game designers would refer to it as *Halo*'s 30-second combat loop, a concept that many have tried to borrow and perfect since, usually in vain.

Then there was the revolutionary two-weapon limit. Prior to *Halo: Combat Evolved*, most first-person shooters allowed players to carry around a virtual

These screens show the earliest version of the game, back when it was a RTS. Note Master Chief's Energy Sword - something we wouldn't get to wield until *Halo 2*. Still, the Warthog looks good, eh?



book by Christopher Rowley called *The Vang* about an alien species that was invading and assimilating people," says Griesemer. "The Vang were basically The Flood but it took days for their gestation period to transform people." *Halo's* story, which has become increasingly arcane and difficult to follow as the series progressed, was perhaps at its clearest in the first game, which follows Master Chief and his AI companion, Cortana, the survivors of a crashed spaceship, as they try to reconnect with other human soldiers and push back the twin invading forces of the Covenant and the Flood. Never before had a game developer given the lone wolf player a sense of being caught up in a war that they were neither driving nor orchestrating. Our role was as much one of spectator as catalyst or solution.

"When we were starting out on PC we had designs on a much more text-based narrative," says Griesemer. "Hints of that exist in Cortana's log books. All of us at Bungie are huge fans of sci-fi literature. Of course there are shades

of Iain M. Banks' *Consider Phlebas*, what with the ship being destroyed. But the influence of something like [Larry Niven's] *Ringworld* isn't necessarily in the design - it's in that feeling of being somewhere else and the sense of scale and an epic story going on out there. One of the main sources of inspiration was *Armor*, by John Steakley, in which

"Never before had a game developer given you the sense of being caught up in a much bigger war"

a soldier has to constantly re-live the same war over and over again. That sense of hopelessness, a relentless battle, was definitely influential."

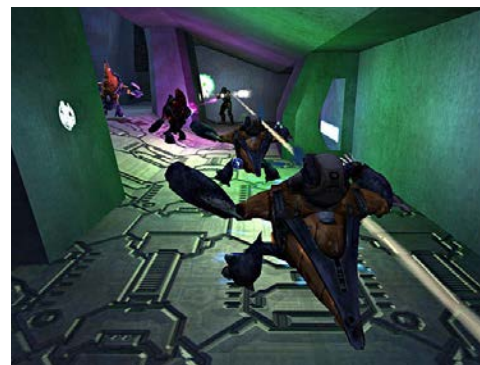
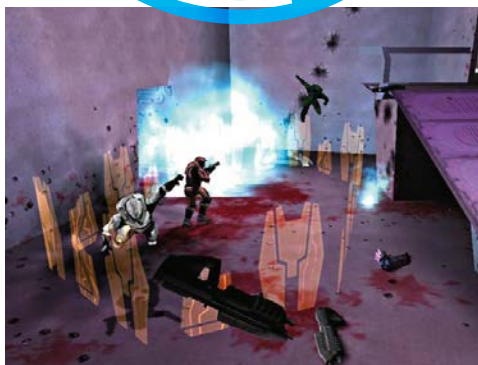
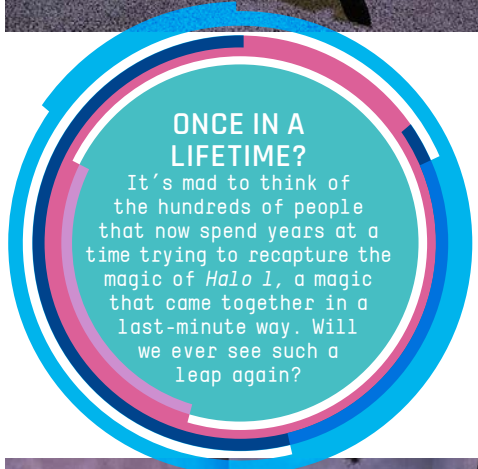
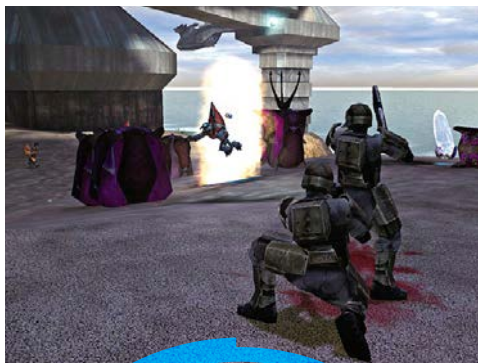
TEN HUT

This wide angle mythology is grounded on screen in the relationship between Master Chief and Cortana - a kind of platonic love story - and, as the game progresses, in the camaraderie that

develops between Master Chief and the marines you find scattered across the landscape. The soldiers fight alongside you, driving the Warthog or manning its mounted gun while cheering you on. When you lose a man it can be upsetting. "With the marines, we had originally designed their animations vastly different to how they turned out," says Griesemer. "The initial idea was that when you jumped in the Hog they'd be clinging to the minigun, crying their eyes out. But we wanted to encourage the player, so that's why we decided to change it and have them hollering and screaming 'woo-hoo!' They're with you, they're behind you all the way."

This excitable marine banter (and its Covenant equivalent, all monkey-esque jabbering) composes the majority of *Halo's* 8,087 lines of dialogue. But it brings the game world to vivid life, in a way ten thousand scripted cutscenes could never do. O'Donnell's soundtrack is instrumental in this work too. "From the outset I wanted that soundtrack to be epic," explains the composer.





At the time only a tiny proportion of videogames employed live orchestras for their soundtracks; mostly they used MIDI orchestras to cut costs. O'Donnell pleaded with Bungie. "I said, if you can cover the costs I can get the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and I will make something truly special. It paid off. That said, let it be known that I didn't turn a profit on the first game."

Unlike most other action games of the era, O'Donnell's soundtrack mixes the bombastic with the tender. "Juxtaposition is a very powerful tool for the composer, one that's woefully underused in videogames," explains O'Donnell. "When writing for an action game I think it's important not to take what is happening on screen for granted from a musical perspective. One must try something unexpected, something fresh and imaginative; something to interest the listeners without distracting them." Indeed, O'Donnell's own favourite musical moment from the game is centred not on pace and volume, but calm and restraint. "There's a snow level [Two Betrayals] set at night towards the end of the game," he says. "You climb into a Banshee and fly up into the sky, snow blanketed mountains all around you. Whenever I play that section I'm surprised at how effective the music works with that scene. I think that's probably my favourite moment."

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

As the game neared launch, Microsoft began to put pressure on Bungie to reconsider the game's title. "At the time, Microsoft marketing thought *Halo* was not a good name for a videogame brand," says Griesemer. "It wasn't descriptive like all the military games we were competing with. We told them *Halo* was the name. The compromise was that they could add the subtitle. Everyone at Bungie hated it, but it turned out to be a very sticky label... so in hindsight it was a good compromise."

Bungie continued to make drastic changes to the game, right up to the final few weeks of development, including redesigning the entire final level, in which Master Chief must drive a Warthog at speed through an obstacle course as he tries to escape the destruction of the titular ring. "The escape came about in the last weeks of development," says Butcher. "We originally had planned just a cutscene with the Chief taking off, but then decided we wanted a real climax. It was originally going to be a driving and fighting section, but we thought that was too much. The real problem was the Warthog. We'd refined it throughout the



For all the elements cut along the way, did no one ever wonder about axing the Flood? These freaky guys give us the heebie-jeebies to this day.

"Bungie made drastic changes right up to the final weeks of development. They entirely redesigned the final level"

campaign levels and then suddenly you couldn't land a jump. We had to really tweak the feedback for that section."

While the game did not launch with online multiplayer support, it had one of the best local multiplayer modes of its day, allowing players to link up consoles and play together on separate TV screens. This feature also came punishingly late in the day. "I joined Bungie to work on *Oni*," recalls Evans. "After we got acquired by Microsoft we first had to finish *Oni*. Then we realised we were going to join the *Halo* team. Hamilton Chu came to me with the idea of having me take over multiplayer, which had been cut from the game. That sounded like a feature we had to ship and I, along with Hardy LeBel, agreed to take it on."

Working toward the fixed deadline of a console launch meant that Evans and LeBel's primary enemy was time. "We had a cool engine, some largely working synchronous networking code and a bunch of single player assets," explains Evans. "But we basically had no support from the art team and very limited support from the rest of design or the

sound team. All the maps were made by contractors, or people sneaking some work in on top of their other jobs. Peter Marks made Hang 'Em High while being the head Bungie.Net admin. Stephen Okasaki did some as well in addition to being an animator."

Despite the pressure, it's a time that Evans, who now works at Riot Games on *League of Legends*, looks back upon with much fondness. "Working on *Halo* was a magical experience, one that I am really glad to have gotten a chance to have been part of. Everyone worked so hard and there were so many super talented people there. We became deeply engaged in the way that teams under fire often do."

A LACK OF BELIEF

Despite the camaraderie among team members Microsoft had reservations about the game even up to its launch date. "When I remember those days," says Phil Spencer, then corporate vice president of Microsoft Game Studios, "the game we were really excited about, the game that had the most internal buzz, was *Munch's Oddysee*. That was

the game we really thought was going to cement our reputation [on Xbox]. Bungie hadn't done any console stuff, and it was unclear if these Mac guys were going to make the jump."

Spencer and the others were proved wrong. Buoyed by gushing reviews, the game sold a million units in five months and three million by the summer of 2003. *Halo: Combat Evolved* earned Microsoft and its brave venture into videogame hardware a respect that would have taken far longer to earn had the game not been part of the Xbox launch line-up. It made a company known as a spreadsheet publisher become known, almost overnight, as a game-publisher with exquisite taste. In this way *Halo* had a legitimising effect for Xbox, a system that prior to release had been viewed as a bulky folly from a mistrusted outsider.

Looking back, that success can be difficult to pinpoint. "There were a lot of very talented people working on *Halo*, but it was also about timing," says Griesemer. "I think the world wanted an epic, heroic story in the fall of 2001 – they wanted to see the world saved." Perhaps, although *Halo* was hardly the first videogame to send its player off to save the world. Whatever the reason, *Halo's* mark on the medium is both clear and lasting, while its stoical space marine protagonist casts a long and enduringly iconic shadow. ☞

Halo's Legendary History

We
dive into
Halo's tangled
lore to prepare
our minds for
the mighty
Halo 5



WHO IS...

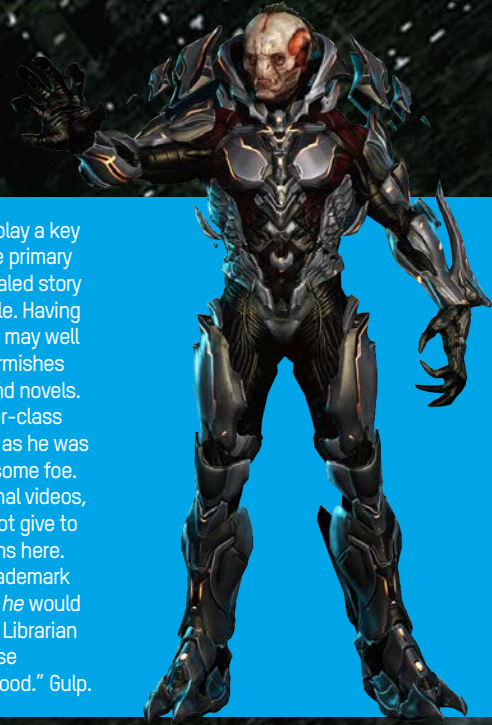
The Didact

STORY A Promethean and the leader of the Forerunner military, the Didact led his people to victory against humanity, but was imprisoned for his opposition of the Halo array. His original body was killed in 100,000 BC, and his consciousness found a cosy new home in the body of Forerunner Manipular Bornstellar. The Didact once again took control of the military in the Flood/Forerunner war but his battle plans were rejected by the Forerunner council, leaving only one option when Mendicant Bias broke their defensive line.

In *Halo 4*, the Didact sets out to wipe humanity off the face of the galaxy, using an ancient Forerunner weapon, the Composer, to convert an entire city into the materials for a Promethean AI army, before being unceremoniously chucked into the void by a heroic Master Chief. The Didact is now in hiding on one of the Halo rings.

NOTES The Didact and his armies will play a key role in *Halo 5*, but whether he'll be the primary antagonist remains to be seen - revealed story details focus on the Chief/Locke angle. Having allied with the Covenant Remnant, he may well be behind many of the smallscale skirmishes that crop up in the spin-off comics and novels.

Now residing in Bornstellar's Builder-class body, the Didact isn't quite as mighty as he was as a Promethean, but he's still a fearsome foe. In one of *Halo: CE Anniversary's* Terminal videos, Guilty Spark remarks: "What I would not give to have a single company of Prometheans here. They would restore order with their trademark lethality, although... that would mean *he* would have to be here, too. And without the Librarian around to temper his rage, well... These Reclaimers might almost prefer the Flood." Gulp.



1,000,000,000 – 150,000 BC

- * The Precursors are the pre-eminent species in the galaxy, moving beyond sentience into practical godhood. They can traverse galaxies in seconds, control evolution and create life.
- * The Precursors helpfully seed the Milky Way with life, looking to raise a species worthy of carrying on their stewardship of the galaxy.
- * The Precursors create a new species, the Forerunners, and look to elevate them to rule the galaxy, but eventually deem them unworthy of the role. They also create humans.
- * The Forerunners go to war with the Precursors.
- * The Precursors create the Flood as a final test for both first generation humanity and the Forerunners.
- * The Precursors are annihilated by the Forerunners.

150,000 BC RISE OF THE FORERUNNERS

- * Forerunners have colonised much of the Milky Way thanks to Precursor technology. They are a now peaceful race and help elevate undeveloped races.
- * The first generation of humans begins colonising the galaxy using more powerful technology left over from the Precursor era. Their civilisation grows to rival that of the Forerunners.

110,000 BC THE FALL OF MAN

- * Humanity and the Prophets make first contact with the Flood and go to war.
- * Humanity retreats into Forerunner space and the Forerunners strike back.

109,000 BC

- * Forerunner general The Didact leads his people to victory against humanity. Humanity is devolved into several different species and its colonies are destroyed.
- * Unbeknownst to the Forerunners, the human/ Prophet alliance had successfully driven the few surviving Flood from the galaxy at the expense of victory against the Forerunners.



100,300 BC THE FLOOD/ FORERUNNER WAR

- * Forerunners make first contact with the Flood on planet G617 g1. The investigating team are killed and the Flood escapes.
- * The Flood/Forerunner war begins. The Librarian hastens her work.

BETWEEN 109,000 AND 100,300 BC THE PRELUDE TO WAR

- * The Forerunners learn of the Flood and begin planning construction of the Halo array as a 'Plan B' in case the Flood returns.
- * Opposing the construction of the Halo array The Didact is imprisoned on the newly-primitive Earth where his wife, the Librarian, makes her home.
- * Construction of 12 Halo rings begins, together with Shield Worlds intended to protect organic species from the Halos' devastating firing effect.
- * The Librarian begins archiving species from across the galaxy, placing samples of every species in sarcophagi on the Ark, far outside the Halos' effect.



WHO IS...

The Librarian

STORY One of the Forerunner Lifeworkers, the Librarian relocated to Earth following the Human/Forerunner war and shepherded the devolved human species back towards civilisation. When her husband, the Didact, was imprisoned she placed a pre-programmed 'geas' in one group of humans, encouraging them over many generations to seek out the Didact's cryptum. The two were reunited on the Ark during the Flood/Forerunner war, but were separated when the Librarian continued on her mission. In the final days of her life the Librarian constructed the artefact beyond Voi and forced the Didact to

activate the Halo array preventing any possibility of her rescue. She survives as a series of digital clones, dotted around the galaxy.

NOTES There is evidence in *Halo CE: Anniversary* to suggest the entire Halo timeline is part of the Librarian's grand design. "Her strength was in planning and positioning the pieces, and then being bold enough to let it happen," says Guilty Spark in one of 343's Terminal videos. It took her 1,000 years to free the Didact and she did it without ever interfering directly. 100,000 years after her supposed death, other plans are coming to fruition...

100,000 BC THE BEGINNING OF THE END

- * The Didact is freed by the Forerunner Bornstellar after 1,000 years of imprisonment. They travel the galaxy together with the proto-humans Chakas and Riser. The Didact dies, but not before transferring his memories to Bornstellar who becomes the new Didact. (Events depicted in *Halo: Cryptum*.)
- * Manipulated by the last Precursor, Mendicant Bias turns on Halo 07 and turns it on its creators, smashing the Forerunner capital. The new Didact takes control of the Forerunners' military.
- * Mendicant Bias seizes control of five of the 12 Halos. The Forerunners destroy them, leaving only seven.
- * Riser and Chakas journey to Halo 07 and help the Didact reclaim the installation, restoring it to the Halo network. Chakas' mind is used as the template for 343 Guilty Spark. The last Precursor is revealed to be a Flood Gravemind and is killed by the Didact. (*Halo: Primordium*)
- * A Forerunner artefact bridging Earth and the Ark is buried in Africa by the Librarian.
- * Conversations between the Didact and the Librarian are recorded and stored on the Ark's Terminals (*Halo 3*).
- * Forerunners create Offensive Bias to fight Mendicant Bias.

HALO: CRYPTUM

Since 343 took custody of the Haloverse they've published three novels tied directly to Halo 4. The first of the Forerunner Saga is *Cryptum*, telling the story of the Didact in 100,000 BC and establishing the complete history of the Forerunners and the original prehistoric human empire. It introduces the humans Chakas and Riser and sees the Forerunner Bornstellar become the new Didact. The Didact eventually kills the man who imprisoned him, takes control of the Forerunner military, and heads off in search of his human friends Chakas and Riser, and the missing Halo 07.



100,043 BC MENDICANT BIAS

- * Forerunners create the Mendicant Bias AI to combat the Flood. It is placed in charge of Halo 07 and tasked with hunting the Flood Gravemind.
- * Halo 07 is test-fired, freeing the last surviving Precursor sealed away millennia earlier by Humanity. He is recaptured and imprisoned on Halo 07.
- * Mendicant Bias begins questioning the last Precursor on Halo 07. Their conversation lasts 43 years.

HALO: PRIMORDIUM

Primordium begins some time after 2556 with the Office of Naval Intelligence capturing a damaged Monitor identified as a duplicate of 343 Guilty Spark. This version of Spark goes on to recount how his personality is based on the ancient human Chakas and tells the story of how the Didact and a small group of humans recovered Mendicant Bias' hijacked Halo 100,000 years earlier. At the novel's climax, the Chakas/Spark Monitor seizes control of the ONI ship and sets a course for the Librarian's resting place, claiming she is still alive with the spirits of his old friends. In the follow-up, *Silentium*, it is revealed that the Flood are in fact the remnants of a group of Precursors, driven mad by the Forerunners' treachery.



100,000 BC THE END OF EVERYTHING

- * The following plays out in hours.
- * Mendicant Bias and the Flood fleet breach the Forerunners' defensive line and move onto the inner Forerunner colonies. Mendicant Bias commands a fleet of almost five million ships against Offensive Bias' tens of thousands.
- * The Didact fires the Halos, killing all sentient life within three radii of the Milky Way's centre.
- * Mendicant Bias' organic Flood ships are destroyed when the Halo array fires. Offensive Bias fleet now outnumbers Mendicant Bias 6-1 and the battle swings Offensive Bias' way.
- * Four minutes later, the Flood/Forerunner war ends.
- * Mendicant Bias' AI is shattered by Offensive Bias. Bits of him spread across space. Parts end up on the Ark and the Prophets' home-world.

30,000 BC HUMANITY RETURNS

- * Homo sapiens rise to become the dominant human species, eventually killing off the Forerunners' other human species on their journey out of Africa.

876 BC

- * The Elites abandon their beliefs and begin studying Forerunner artefacts, accelerating their technological development.

8,500 BC

- * The second generation of human civilisation emerges on Earth.

1962

- * Yuri Gagarin becomes the first human in space for 100,000 years. Good on him.

SOON AFTER 100,000 BC A FRESH START

- * Species archived by the Librarian on the Ark and various Shield Worlds are returned to their home planets by the surviving Forerunners.
- * The Forerunners exit the galaxy. Humanity is given the 'keys' to the Halo array in the Forerunners' absence.
- * The whereabouts of the Librarian and the Didact are unknown.

938 BC THE PROPHET/ ELITE WAR

- * Elsewhere in the galaxy, the Prophets and Elites already have vast interstellar empires thanks to knowledge inherited from the Precursors and Forerunners.
- * Humanity has developed numerous civilisations, but is thousands of years behind these distant beings.
- * The Prophets and Elites go to war.

852 BC THE COVENANT

- * The Prophet/Elite War ends and the factions form a union named The Covenant. The Covenant adds further races over the next millennium as they colonise the galaxy.



2506

* The UNSC abandons Project Orion – the first generation of Spartan super soldiers – because of expense and time.

2291

* Humanity masters faster-than-light travel with the Shaw-Fujikawa Slipspace Drive.

2080

* Humanity's first off-world colony is settled on Mars.

2164

* Humanity forms the United Nations Space Command. The UNSC successfully puts down rebels on Mars.

2490

* Humanity has colonised over eight hundred worlds, including the planets of Reach and Harvest.

2511

* Master Chief John 117 is born.

2525

THE HUMAN / COVENANT WAR BEGINS

* Though it won't be revealed for many years, the Covenant attacked Humanity only after learning that Humans, not the Prophets, were the Forerunners' favoured race.

* The 14-year-old Spartan-IIs undergo extensive cybernetic and genetic modification. Thirty die, 12 are disabled.

* Spartans engage the Covenant above Chi Ceti IV, destroying a Covenant capital ship with the loss of only one man.

2524

FIRST CONTACT

* The Human freighter Horn of Plenty makes first contact with the Covenant. It is immediately destroyed.

2531

HALO WARS



* Troops from the UNSC Spirit of Fire engage Covenant troops on the partially-glassed planets Harvest and colony world Arcadia.

* A gateway opened from Arcadia leads the Spirit of Fire to an isolated Forerunner Shield World where Humanity makes first contact with the Flood.

* Sergeant John Forge detonates the Spirit of Fire's slipspace drive and destroys the planet. The Spirit of Fire's crew begin their long journey home.

2517 THE SPARTAN-II PROCESS

* 75 children are abducted and conscripted into the UNSC's Spartan-II program. John is assigned as squad leader during training.

2532 SPARTAN-III

* The first 300 volunteer Spartan-IIIs enter training. Cheaper than Spartan IIs, the IIIs are to be produced in greater numbers with fewer casualties.

2552 HALO



* September 19-22: the Forerunner data leads the Pillar of Autumn to Halo 04. John 117 is awoken from cryosleep and tasked with protecting Cortana and the location of Earth. The Pillar of Autumn crash lands.

* John 117 makes contact with the Flood imprisoned in Halo 04's research centres. Halo's Monitor, 343 Guilty Spark, attempts to use John to activate the Halo array. Cortana prevents the activation and John detonates the crashed Pillar of Autumn's engines, destroying Installation 04.

* In *Halo: CE Anniversary*, 343 Guilty Spark suggests the destruction of the Halo will awaken and anger the Didact.

2552 HALO 2 & HALO 3: ODST



* October 20: John 117 arrives on Cairo Station and is equipped with Mjolnir Mk VI armour.

* During their search for the Ark, the Covenant accidentally discover the location of Earth. John returns home but quickly follows the Covenant's High Prophet of Regret's retreat back to Halo 05.

* Earth is assaulted by Covenant forces searching for the Ark. An ODST squad in the city of New Mombasa engages in a series of skirmishes with Covenant ground forces.

* November 2: John 117 arrives in Halo 05, assassinates the Prophet of Regret, and encounters the Flood Gravemind.

* The revelation of the Halo array's true purpose creates a schism in the Covenant, turning the doubting Elites against the true believers from the Prophet-controlled races. The Gravemind uses it as an opportunity to seize the Covenant capital.

* John 117 returns to Earth.

2552 HALO: REACH



* While Earth still eludes them, The Covenant find Humanity's second home of Reach.

* August 14: Noble Team takes down a Covenant Supercarrier. It is replaced by hundreds more.

* August 23: Noble Team helps evacuate city of New Alexandria. The city is glassed.

* August 30: Noble 6, Emile-A239 and Carter-A259 die evacuating Cortana's AI core to the UNSC Pillar of Autumn. Then the Pillar of Autumn makes a slipspace jump using secret Forerunner data entrusted to Cortana.

2547

* Desperate for a propaganda victory, the UNSC makes the Spartan-II program public. Spartan-IIs become legendary. When killed, they are listed as Missing in Action to maintain the image of their invincibility.

2552 HALO 3



* November 17: John 117 ejects from the Covenant-controlled Forerunner Dreadnought and falls to Earth. The Forerunner artefact buried under the ocean near Voi is activated by the Covenant, opening a portal to the Ark.

* December 11: Human and Elite ships arrive above the Ark and engage Covenant forces attempting to activate the Halo array.

* John 117 and the Arbiter activate the replacement Halo 04 and escape through the Voi portal aboard the UNSC frigate Forward Unto Dawn. Halo 04's activation wipes out the Covenant forces, the Flood, and the Gravemind.

* The activation closes the portal mid-transit. The Arbiter returns to Earth on December 23. John 117 is lost in space and enters cryosleep.

* The Elites seize control of the Covenant. The Human/Covenant war ends.



2556 LOST IN SPACE

* Cortana files a report aboard the adrift Forward Unto Dawn about the shared history of the Forerunners and humanity. She shows signs of madness, as shown in *Halo Legends: Origins*.

2557 26-27 JULY HALO 4

* Ships of the rogue Covenant remnant converge on Forerunner planet Requiem where they believe their gods are stationed. The Forward Unto Dawn drifts into Requiem's orbit, and is scanned by a mysterious entity. It is then granted access along with attacking Covenant ships through the planet's shielded exterior.

* Master Chief and Cortana travel to the core of Requiem, fighting thousands of Covenant warriors and advanced Forerunner AIs. While attempting to contact an investigating UNSC warship, the Infinity, they unwittingly awaken the Didact, who takes command of all the planet's Promethean AIs, detonates Requiem's core and causes the Infinity to crashland on its surface.

* Having escaped the chaos via a portal, Master Chief assists Commander Sarah Palmer and his old friend Thomas Lasky with the defence of the Infinity, using the ship's turrets to fend off the Didact's Cryptum. The ship is able to escape Requiem after a number of Forerunner Particle Cannons are tracked down and disabled. As the fighting continues, Cortana succumbs more and more to the effects of Rampancy.

* A projection of the Librarian informs Master Chief and Cortana that the Didact intends to use an ancient weapon known as the Composer to obliterate all human life, seeking to reestablish Forerunner dominance of the galaxy. It is revealed that human DNA has been pre-programmed with immunity to the Composer's effects, but this trait needs to be activated. The Chief hijacks a Covenant ship and chases the Didact to a UNSC facility near Halo Installation 03, but is unable to stop him taking possession of The Composer.

* The Didact travels to Earth, where he uses the Composer to transform the entire population of New Phoenix to digital data. Master Chief and Cortana arrive in a Broadsword fighter, board the Didact's vessel and ultimately defeat him, with Cortana sacrificing herself so that Master Chief can land the final blow.

2556 CORTANA

* Cortana enters her seventh year of service: the average age at which 'Smart' AI's begin to degrade.

* Master Chief remains in cryosleep.



BEYOND 2556

* A duplicate of 343 Guilty Spark recounts Chakas' story from the Forerunner/Flood war. He later seizes control of an Office of Naval Intelligence ship, puts the crew to sleep, and sets course for the Librarian's last known location, claiming she is still alive (shown in *Halo: Primordium*).

BEYOND 2556 NEW DANGERS

* An ancient threat rises...

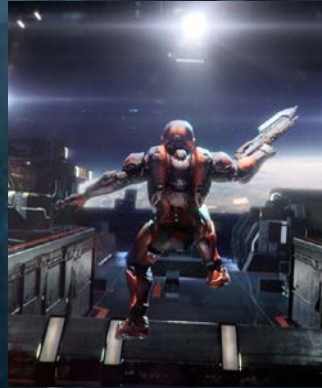
HALO: GLASSLANDS

The first of 343's post-war novels follows Spartan creator Dr Catherine Halsey inside the Forerunner planet of Onyx, and the team tasked with bringing her to trial for the crimes committed in pursuit of the Spartan-II program. 343 later confirmed events in *Glasslands* would lead into *Halo 4*, and sure enough the hyper-advanced UNSC Infinity and its on-board Spartan-IV program were the foundations for *Halo 4*'s Spec Ops and War Games multiplayer modes. *Glasslands* ends with Halsey in ONI custody, the galaxy at peace, and with humanity adopting Covenant and Forerunner technology into their existing tech.



2557 HALO: NIGHTFALL

* Legendary manhunter Jameson Locke leads a complement of UNSC troops to the colony world Sedra, where they investigate the origins of a mysterious compound that is lethal to human life. Locke and his comrades discover that fragments of the original Halo 04 installation have crashed on the planet.



BEYOND 2557 HALO 5: GUARDIANS

- * In mourning for Cortana and seeking a purpose in life, Master Chief embarks on a new journey of self-discovery that may lead to conflict with his allies at the UNSC.
- * Agent Locke solicits the Arbiter's counsel in order to unravel Master Chief's fate.
- * The enemies of humanity plot their next move from the shadows...

2558 7 FEBRUARY - 3 MARCH HALO 4 - SPARTAN OPS

- * Six months after Master Chief's battle with the Didact, the UNSC Infinity returns to Requiem with a task force of Spartan-IVs to reclaim the planet from the Covenant Remnant and the Prometheans. Spartan fireteams Majestic and Crimson are instrumental in securing the surface and capturing Forerunner artefacts. One of these artefacts teleports the ship's chief scientist Dr Glassman to Requiem, where he is forced to help the Covenant locate the Librarian's resting place.
- * Dr Catherine Halsey, creator of the Spartan programme, war criminal and the designer of the UNSC Infinity, is brought aboard the ship to assist research on captured artefacts. She is contacted

by an anonymous agent who is investigating the Librarian's secrets. This contact is later revealed to be Jul 'Mdama, leader of the Covenant Remnant.

- * Having abducted Halsey and with Glassman's unwilling aid, Jul 'Mdama discovers the Janus Key, a device that reveals the location of every piece of Forerunner technology in the galaxy. In a private vision, the Librarian instructs Halsey to unite the Key with another artefact or facility known as the Absolute Record.

- * Having obtained one half of the Janus Key, 'Mdama activates a terminal that causes Requiem to collide with its own sun. The Infinity escapes

the destruction with the other half of the Key after Spartan Fireteam Crimson deactivates two artefacts that are holding the warship in place.

- * Both 'Mdama and Halsey are wounded during a shoot-out with Spartan Fireteam Majestic, but are rescued by a Promethean Knight. Believing herself to have been the target of a botched UNSC assassination attempt, Halsey enters into an alliance with 'Mdama to seek vengeance.

- * Returning to Earth, the UNSC Infinity is reassigned to assist the Arbiter with a diplomatic mission.

HALO: ESCALATION

While Commander Sarah Palmer, the Arbiter and the crew of the UNSC Infinity deal with a human conspiracy and Covenant forces in hiding, Master Chief leads a Spartan team to a Halo installation to investigate the fate of a science team. They discover Promethean AIs, the digitised minds of the population of New Phoenix, and the remains of the Composer. Meanwhile, the Didact prepares to welcome them to his world.



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Halo: The Archive

Your guide to every game in the central Halo series from 2001 to 2015

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Halo: Combat Evolved



INFO

Format Xbox, PC
Out November 2001

Developer Bungie Studios
Publisher Microsoft Game Studios

What is it? The game that both made Microsoft's foray into the console market a success and changed the first-person shooter genre forever. We owe it a lot.



The one that started it all: started the series, started the Xbox, and even started an FPS revolution...

Combat Evolved. Just think about that name for a moment. It's a bit of a brazen statement to make, wouldn't you say? Especially in a post-*Doom*, post-*GoldenEye*, post-*Half-Life* world...

In case you were wondering, it wasn't Bungie who made this claim way back in 2001, but Microsoft. Microsoft's canny marketing men and women, in fact, who were concerned the name 'Halo' was soft and didn't think consumers would associate it with a first-person shooter.

So the term 'Combat Evolved' was coined to emphasise this was indeed a shooter and the tagline was duly slapped into the name and onto the box. And somehow, through some stroke of luck or divine intervention from the gaming gods, a miracle happened: in doing so Microsoft's money-spinning marketers had stumbled on a profound truth. 'Combat Evolved' wasn't just more vacuous marketing spiel. *Halo* really was the dawn of a new shooter age, and went on to be one of the most influential games of all time.

But never mind that the two-weapon system, the grenade button, the use of vehicles, the use of checkpoints, the powerful melee strikes, the handy

regenerating shields, the story-telling tricks, and a few dozen other features were all stolen and replicated by other studios in the years after Halo launched. We're not concerned with Halo's lasting legacy right now, just the game that had us cooing in awe when we first whirled up Microsoft's Tankbox a decade ago.

Gaming was a different place back then, and despite a few high profile exceptions (mostly on the N64) the FPS was neither a console shifter nor the overwhelmingly dominant genre it is today. When it came to shooters PC-elitism was very much at work, with most gamers resigned to the fact that a control pad could never provide the same level of response or precision as the classic mouse and keyboard combo.

The Xbox's original oversized controller didn't do much to change that truth, not least because even Mr Tickle would have struggled to wrap his arms around the thing. But it didn't need to, for rather than the Xbox changing how we would play the FPS, in *Halo* the Xbox

fundamentally changed the way the FPS would be designed in the first place.

Take the weapons. Traditionally PC gamers were at an advantage when it came to gun selections because they could simply tap the numbers 1-to-0 to pick their death-dealer of choice. Console folk, on the other hand, had to cycle through them with all the pace of a geriatric granny. *Halo's* carrying capacity restriction put an end to that. Bungie thought about the controller and Halo's combat tactics and came up with a two weapon system that worked brilliantly on a pad and just as well when it came to gameplay. Progression was no longer simply a case of vacuuming up every last gun and ammo pack, but thinking deeply about the challenges ahead and planning correctly.

Halo also dismantled the notion of twitch shooting. Games such as *Unreal* taught us important lessons about how whose mouse moved fastest lived to fight another day, but in *Halo* the cumbersome controller – long heralded

"Rather than the Xbox changing the way we play the FPS, Halo fundamentally changed the way the FPS would be designed"



as the reason why FPS games couldn't function on a console – was no longer a hindrance. And it didn't need to resort to *GoldenEye* levels of snap-to auto aiming to do it, either...

GIMME SHELTER

Halo's regenerating shield was answer to the problem. It meant players could step out of protection and either sprint to a better vantage point or fire off a few well-placed shots before hiding once more, and the net result after a couple of seconds of calm behind cover was to be zero negative effect to health bars.

Compare that to previous titles where any wrong step resulted in a permanent health subtraction until the next medikit pickup, and the familiar balance of the FPS firefight was completely tipped on its head. *Halo* tested its players on a battle-by-battle scale rather than on the ability to maintain a pulse over a long stretch of multiple encounters, and with every scrap you successfully negotiated the game restored everyone to an even playing field.

Why? Because *Halo*'s huge battles were – and indeed, still are – special. Forget about enemies negotiating their terrain in a scripted fashion, popping their heads up on cue as if they were the cast of a light gun game: *Halo*'s Covenant were smart, and that was a real game-changer in 2001. Bungie were able to code AI like we hadn't seen before, and then all that was left to do was the relatively easy task of dropping us and our foes into an area and letting all the brains on the battlefield do the rest. Throw a frag grenade and enemies would clock the threat and dive out of the way. Start wearing down shields and foes would find cover. Get knocked for six by a charged shot and you can bet your green ass the Covenant would charge you down and take advantage.

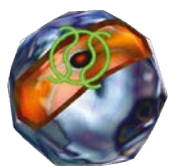
In a world of super glum, brown shooters, *Halo* was defiantly colourful. Those vibrant purples and greens stood out from the crowd.



Recharging energy shields – both yours and those of your enemies – give *Halo* gunplay a distinctive back-and-forth rhythm.

Gear of War

The first selection of Covenant-shredding gear hasn't yet been beaten...



Plasma Grenade

Forget about the UNSC pineapple frags: the Type-1 Antipersonnel grenade's sticky coating guarantees deaths as the Elites who so frequently roll out of our frag's kill radius can't shake this bad boy off.



Banshee

Not only does the single-Covenant air attack vehicle let us indulge in some classic *Duck Hunt*-style precision shooting, when the pilot's finally dead it becomes Halo's best mannable vehicle.



M90 Shotgun

A decent shotgun in its own right, the M90 turns into must-have equipment when Master Chief is trapped in tight quarters with the Flood in the Library. Watch them explode by the shipload.



MA5B Assault Rifle

There's not much standard about the UNSC standard-issue gun. Sure the Covenant equivalent is 'flashier' (albeit saddled with limited usage) but even so we're suckers for the MA5B's gorgeous ammo counter.



M6D Magnum

The default gun in most games is to be discarded as soon as possible. In *Halo*, the ridiculously (and superbly) over-powered magnum complete with generous sniping scope has never been topped.



Overshield

Two shields are most definitely better than one, and even though the Overshield's bonus strength don't regenerate once depleted, the power-up saved us in multiple situations on Legendary.



Plasma Rifle

Halo: Combat Evolved's Plasma Rifle was far stronger than that found in the subsequent games and could stun enemies with ease. Overheating is a major issue in combat, however, so be careful.



Warthog

The M12 Light Reconnaissance Vehicle – aka the Warthog – is only the best damn car we've ever driven in an FPS. Floaty handling plus great weapons make for an epic all-round vehicle.

Mission in Action

Nothing less than a Master-class in level design from the series' finest ever chapter...

MISSION: THE SILENT CARTOGRAPHER



It begins with a stunning Pelican ride over crystal-clear waters.



The beach landing zone is hot, so there's no time to dally.



The rousing Halo signature music ramps up and the epic audio begins.



Another Pelican swings by, this time with a present: a Warthog.



Silent Cartographer let you drive wherever you want. Where next?



To this facility, into which everybody has tried to squeeze a Warthog.



But get to the doorway and it slams shut in front of you.



To find the security override, head into the island's core...



After landing you attack the second shield generator.



The holo-panel inside the facility shuts down the security terminal.



Heavy weapons are incoming but a dropship crashes before attacking.



Time to indulge in a little road rage. Using the Warthog never grows old.



"The Library's an example of terrible cut-and-paste level design, but it ensured more creative levels stood out"

Individually your opponents acted smartly, but they also talked to one another. You could even hear them talking to each other, and the result was FPS gunplay that was more tactical than anyone had seen before. Thanks to gigantic outdoors levels and vehicles, the action was more open and varied than we were familiar with, as well.

Halo had corridors too, of course, and not all of them were great. The Library's gone down in legend as an example of terrible cut-and-paste level design and understandably so. But while it was far from *Halo*'s high point, it both ensured *Halo*'s more creative levels stood out for the trailblazing creations they were, and it gave us a relentless *Left 4 Dead*-style battle against the odds long before Valve brought their zombies along to play. Not a bad haul for a mission many consider to be a write-off.

Then there's the *Halo* itself: a game world like nothing seen before. After an ordinary opening level on the Pillar of Autumn, the sight of the megastructure looping overhead gave *Halo*'s outdoor arenas a sense of place and beauty in ways usually only captured in National Geographic. Never mind the wonderful game mechanics, the *Halo*'s mysteries alone were reason enough to keep

playing. And in Master Chief and Cortana we were treated to avatars interesting enough to keep us both invested and grounded in the human-Covenant war.

HEAD TO HEAD

Of course, *Halo*'s successes weren't all built on the grand design innovations. Plenty of our fondest memories are linked to little things: things such as the tiny gap in the Jackal's shields that were just right for long-range kills with the magnum, or the way the Grunts would throw their arms up in terror and run around scared when we tagged them with a sticky grenade. And who would ever forget the joys of effortlessly flipping the Warthog the right way up after a careless, Titanic-esque charge at a rocky outcrop resulted in a marine-flinging bouncing barrel roll or three?

All of these factors contributed to the undisputed Xbox game of forever, but there was one more trick *Halo* had up its sleeve and it came in the shape of its multiplayer. Even in those early days, before Xbox Live brought online gaming to permanent roost on consoles, *Halo* delivered a masterpiece of a multiplayer mode, and to neglect its importance would be an offence worthy of a lifelong writing ban for us all.

Whether it was tearing up Blood Gulch and Sidewinder in Warthogs and Scorpion tanks or simply roaming the hallways of Rat Race with the needler, *Halo*'s multiplayer matches gave us experiences we'd never sampled before. The mechanics that made the single-player campaign sing worked doubly well in a competitive environment, and saw console LAN parties spring up all over the globe. *Halo 2* might have taken those joys online, but for many the original experience is still the best.

No one single game has managed to slingshot a developer to AAA studio status quite like *Halo* did for Bungie, which deserves credit not just for making a great game to begin with but for tying it into a richly woven universe. Even after multiple sequels, books, comics, films and more, the Haloverse feels like it's just warming up - there's so much more to say about the Forerunners and their technology, about the UNSC's struggle against the Covenant, and about the Chief's personal journey. Some 14 years later, *Halo* still runs rings around the competition. ☺

Halo's physics systems are built for both carnage and comedy. What a way to go...

Play it now

You can pick up the *Anniversary Edition* but it's better to get the *Master Chief Collection*, which includes the Xbox 360 remake and three other games for a similar price.

The Verdict

"Wrings every last scrap of power from the Xbox, with unsurpassed graphics, AI and sound.. Play *Halo* and change the way you feel about games. It's one of the best five videogames on any format, ever." **Official Xbox Magazine, Nov 2001**

9.7



INFO

Format Xbox, PC

Out November 2004

Developer Bungie Studios

Publisher Microsoft Game Studios

What is it? Groundbreaking sequel to Halo and the first FPS to bring online multiplayer to the console owning masses.



Halo 2

How do you top the world's most accomplished console FPS multiplayer experience? Invite everyone to play together, of course!

Three years after *Halo: Combat Evolved* and we were still lugging our stonking great (non-flat screen) TVs about, trying to set up local multiplayer.

It was an innocent time, before *Call of Duty* and *Battlefield*. Before huge MMOs and digital downloads. It was a time when the simple act of playing a game with your mates was about as easy as sticking a tree-trunk sized cigar in your cake hole and attempting to out bad-ass Sergeant Avery Junior Johnson himself. Then along came *Halo 2*. More of the same would have been enough, but we got so much more. This time around Bungie and Microsoft were getting set to change the landscape of online multiplayer forever.

It wasn't just that *Halo 2* brought first person shooter-based online multiplayer to the console owning masses. It's that it managed it with

so much panache. Take *Lockout*, for example. Possibly the most revered and well remembered of all of Halo's multiplayer maps. This frozen facility was, at first glance, a simple collection of outposts, set in the side of a blustery mountain, joined together by a larger square central platform. It was a cold, hard place, filled with severe edges and overseen by an iron grey sky. And yet, begin playing a game of shotguns and swords with your pals and the genius behind its design becomes quickly apparent. It contained such a mix of both tight, closed spaces and areas of wide lines-of-sight, that no one second playing was ever the same as the next. Likewise, other maps were implemented

with equal measures of consideration. The series of abandoned, half-built structures in *Headlong* rewarded both sneaky, long range snipers and daring run and gunners. We felt spoiled by the array of vehicles which our team always spawned near during Capture the Flag matches. The list of quality maps goes on - *Sanctuary*, *Zanzibar*, *Midship* and *Burial Mounds* have stood the test of time especially well. Some of them have been twiddled with and implemented in later games - *Lockout* appears rejiggered as *Blackout* in *Halo 3* - but there's only so much you can do to improve a multiplayer game this great.

Gameplay was a whole new kettle of Grunts too. Gone was the health bar,

"It contained such a mix of closed spaces and areas with wide lines-of-sight, that no one second of play was ever the same as the next"



Only the bravest (read: dumbest) actually spend any length of time sitting on a turret, seeing as how it essentially sticks a whopping great sniper bullseye on your face.

5 Five Masterful Moments



COR BLIMEY

The ending shot of the shuttle taking off deftly illustrates how similar in form *Halo 2*'s ending was to that of the best Star Wars movie, *The Empire Strikes Back*. Was this deliberate, we wonder?



BLADES OF FURY

Equip an energy sword and a tap of the right trigger sends your Spartan/Elite flying furiously through the air towards your unfortunate foe. Often repeated since but the first time was bliss.



GHOST THEFT AUTO

Halo 2 featured the new ability to hijack an enemy vehicle while it was still in motion leading to all manner of rage/laughter when you pulled it off in multiplayer. Yeehaa!



SCARABIAN NIGHTS

You spend the whole level trying to not be killed by the Scarab as it destroys everything, now you have to jump on its back and take it down from the inside? In a word: Epic. (Even better in *Halo 3*, natch.)



SMOKE ME A KIPPER

We took to using Master Chief's last words in *Halo 2* whenever we were asked where we were going. "To finish this fight..." we'd answer (on our way to the shops/lavatory/chip shop).

replaced by a rechargeable armour gauge which ensured that at all moments you had to be aware of the battlefield and where your nearest bit of cover may lie. The beeping warning noise that your armour had rundown became synonymous with soon-to-come death, and made those moments of survival against the odds all the more sweet. Dual wielding made us weep with joy, even if the plasma pistol + anything combo (known lovingly in online vernacular as the Noob Combo) was a touch overpowered.

RUNNING SCARED

But it wasn't just with new multiplayer and gameplay elements that *Halo 2* went about branding its potent form onto our nostalgia lobes. After the relatively plot-light *Combat Evolved*, *Halo 2* was brimming with juicy story. From the very first moments of the campaign we were made aware that *Halo 2* was telling us a story, not just slapping us in a series of Covenant-filled death arenas. It split opinion at the time, but the inclusion of the Arbiter (otherwise known as Thel 'Vadam) as a playable character gave *Halo 2* a narrative edge over its FPS peers.

Where most shooters painted enemies as empty husks, being the Arbiter let us discover the motivations, strengths and weaknesses of our strange alien foes from the inside. Early on, as Miranda Keyes clutches her deceased father's medal to her chest, the Arbiter is seen suffering in a dungeon, as a fiery hot brand is seared into his bared flesh. The neat switches between the unfolding

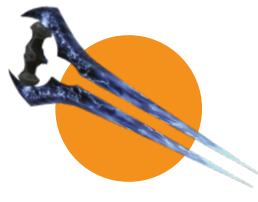
Gear of War

Essential kit for carving up Covenant and giving the prophets a right good pasting...



M6C Pistol

A short-to-medium range semi-automatic UNSC handgun. Holds 12 rounds per mag and fires at a rate of 6 rounds per second. Good for taking out Grunts and Jackals.



Covenant Energy Sword

We only saw this sword in the paws of our enemies in the first *Halo* but now we could wield it ourselves. Makes for intense, and very painful, one-on-one meetings in multiplayer.



Sentinel Beam

Runs out of juice real fast, but given a level head and a decent vantage point its laser beam can be truly devastating. Ideal against the fast-as-lightning Flood in single-player.



M12G1 Warthog LAAV

Essentially the same Warthog we grew to love in the first game, only this time laden with a ball busting great M68 Gauss Cannon (a rocket launcher in laymen's parlance).



Mjolnir Powered Assault Armour Mark VI

The Master Chief's crash landing at the start of the game means a quick suit re-calibration is in order, resulting in this slightly cooler looking armour.



Banshee (Type 26 Ground Support Aircraft)

Dip, duck and dive in the Covenant equivalent of a harrier jump jet. Comes packing serious heat too: a plasma cannon and a Class-2 projectile cannon.



Antimatter Charge

Referred to by Bungie's own Jason Jones as a giant Covenant Space Pickle, this tidy bomb allows for some fairly epic destruction. And equally epic one-liners. It's a nightmare to steer, though.



M808B Scorpion MBT

Sergeant Johnson quips that he knows what the ladies want. We're pretty glad that most ladies don't actually want a ride in a Scorpion tank though... Do they? Our disastrous last Valentine's Day says no.



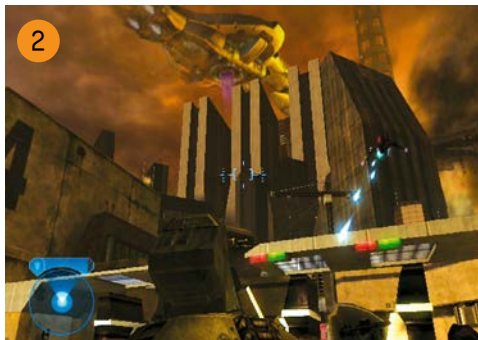
Mission in Action

A huge variety of gunplay topped off with an epic ebbing and flowing soundtrack.

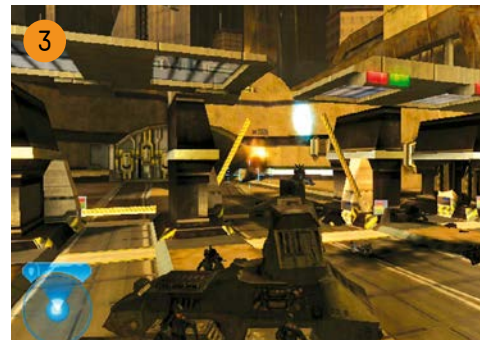
MISSION: METROPOLIS



1 Hop in a tank and take a trip across troubled water.



2 Watch the skies above the bridge for marauding Banshees.



3 Use these handy bollards for cover when fighting the Wraiths.



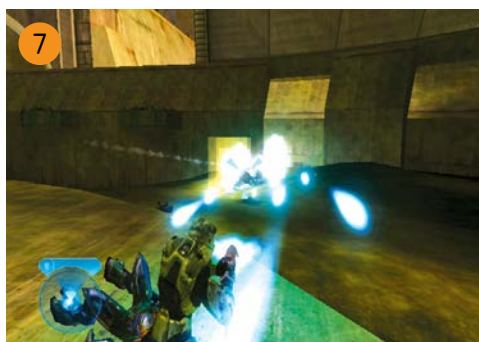
4 Head into the tunnel and there are marines to swap weapons with.



5 This poor Jackal. Pwned from behind every time. Nick his rifle...



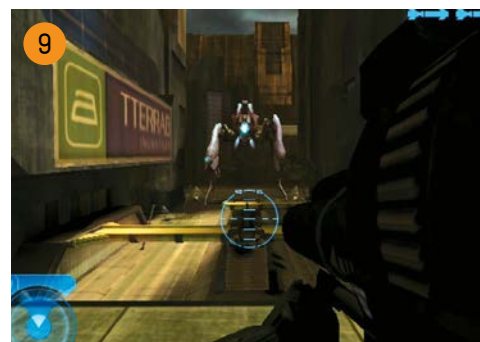
6 ...for some good old-fashioned sniping in the wide area beyond.



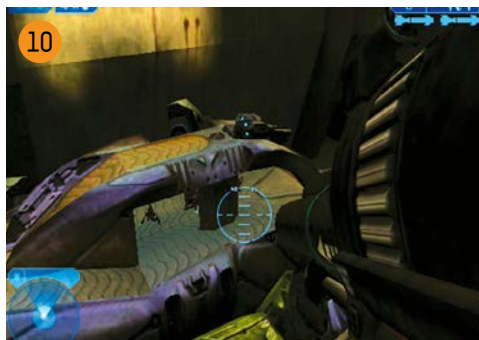
7 Head to the turrets on the central platform to take out the Ghosts.



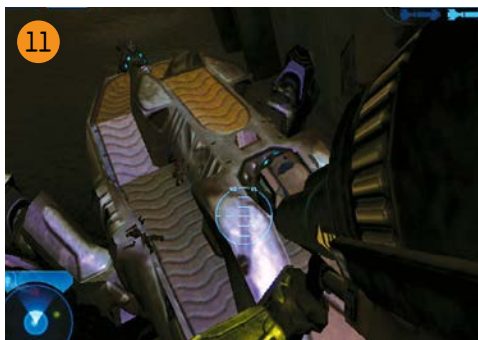
8 But be sure to save one for heading into the city.



9 These rockets... They do NOTHING!



10 Well not from the outside anyway...



11 Load up with rockets before taking the leap onto the scarab's back.



12 Lob a couple of grenades in to take out the massed Covenant inside.




"The last few levels angered more than a few. We had to wait three years before *Halo 3* came out to properly resolve the story"

Banshees might seem decent enough but grab a rocket launcher and they become easy pickings.

twin narratives continue until the Chief and Arbiter finally meet in the pit of the parasitic Gravemind. It helped that Keith David, the legendarily deep-voiced actor famous for surviving John Carpenter's *The Thing*, provides Thel 'Vadam with his iconic throaty brogue.

The levels themselves made way for some palpable moments of tension too. Watching the raging scarab slowly approach your woefully exposed platform in Metropolis. The chaotic task of staying alive as The Flood rampage onto the painfully slowly moving lift in The Oracle. Riding the mechanised gondolas across the gorgeously rendered lake in Regret. Barrel rolling around the skyscraper of The Arbiter in a Banshee. Fighting Brutes for the first time deep in High Charity during Gravemind. And, of course, the final levels, which split so many opinions and drew so much controversy at the time.

"Don't make a girl a promise if you know you can't keep it," she says sadly, as the Master Chief turns his back on her. The fact that the last few levels were played in the Arbiter's two-toed shoes angered more than a few. We had to wait three long years before *Halo 3* came out to properly resolve the story.

Halo 2 was one of the first titles to utilise Xbox Live and set it on the path towards becoming the bastion of online console gaming it is today. It's telling that for two years after its release *Halo 2* was the most played game on the service, until *Gears of War* made an entrance, a whole generation later on the 360. And thanks to the gorgeous *Anniversary* remake – the jewel in *The Master Chief Collection*'s crown – we can appreciate the game, and its genre-defining multiplayer, all over again. Give it another try – you won't regret it. 



Our money's on the orange guy. Just saying.

CORT' IN THE ACT

Other characters began to truly make their mark on the franchise in *Halo 2*, significantly Cortana. Your constant AI companion quips throughout the campaign, so much so that when it came time to leave her behind it very much felt like leaving a part of yourself.

The Verdict

"You'll be surprised and stunned by some of the turns that not only imbue the story with great depth and meaning, but indelibly impact the game... *Halo 2* is the single greatest achievement on the platform." Official Xbox Magazine, Dec 2004

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Play it now

Criminally, *Halo 2*'s Xbox servers were shut down in 2010 so, even if you buy it on eBay, multiplayer is a no-go. It's time to play *Halo 2: Anniversary* in *The Master Chief Collection*, instead.



INFO

Format Xbox 360**Out** September 2007**Developer** Bungie**Publisher** Microsoft Game Studios

What is it? Episode 3 in the world's greatest FPS-series, now with vastly expanded multiplayer and fancy new map editing.



Halo 3

This is the way the world ends? The first trilogy, maybe, but when the series made the leap to the Xbox 360 it was still warming up...

Finish the Fight!" Or, in other words, get the ending that you didn't get in *Halo 2*. *Halo 3* was exciting not just because it was the first proper Halo game for Xbox 360, but because it would pick up where that infuriatingly vague *Halo 2* ending left you hanging. The hype for *Halo 3* was ridiculous. Excitement had reached fever pitch as the first 'next-generation' Halo game approached release, and a massive 40 million Microsoft marketing dollars helped elevate that far beyond boiling point.

It was the reason you bought an Xbox 360. And probably the reason that you bought a copy of *Crackdown*, too. The open-world urban shooter was brilliant in its own right, but Microsoft undoubtedly boosted sales of the new IP by promising all of the buyers access to a three-map multiplayer beta for *Halo 3*. Clever move – in more ways than one.

Multiplayer betas on console weren't as common then as they are today. Despite all that marketing – the trailers, documentaries, events and teasers – Bungie's plan was to let the beta do the talking, and let the players spread the word. And it worked. Participants tucked into the three available beta maps – Valhalla, High Ground and Snowbound – like addicts getting their first fix in years. Work stopped for the weeks it was live. And just like Bungie had planned, pre-orders soared.

The outcome was predictable. *Halo 3* launched on 25 September in the US and a day later in UK to become not just the biggest video game, but the biggest debut entertainment release in history,

selling 3.3 million copies in its first week and making Microsoft and Bungie a whole pile of green. So, apart from spruced-up visuals and the promise of a conclusion to the gripping battle between humans and the Covenant, what was all the fuss about?

TRIUMPHAL ARK

Halo 3's campaign was epic. The same Covenant foe we'd grown to love/hate returned, but this time the focus turned to the Brutes – a clumsy ape-like enemy in *Halo 2* that had transformed into a more intelligent, cunning and co-ordinated foe – demonstrating the vastly improved AI. They were still ape-like compared to the devious Covenant

"Bungie's plan was to let the beta do the talking and let the players spread the word. And it worked"



The Halo series has always featured a standout arsenal of weaponry with which to kill the Covenant and each other with.

5 Five Masterful Moments



EPIC HORNET BATTLE

One of the best levels in the game. Early on you're slapped into a Hornet in a massive dogfight against Banshees, Covenant drop ships and anti air Wraiths. Relive it in full by turning the page. Hurrah!



DOUBLE SCARAB BATTLE

Taking on one Scarab was intense. Now put Master Chief in a Hornet and throw in two hulking Scarabs. And a few dozen Covenant. And some epic music. About as OMG as OMG moments can get.



CO-OP VEHICLE CHARGE

Two friends online, each in their own vehicle, bombing along the dirt paths and canyons of the massive Tsavo Highway mission. And you could do it online. *Halo 5's* co-op story better match this.



TAKING ON A SCARAB

Your first battle against a Scarab in *Halo 3* is mind-blowing. Shoot its legs, climb in, blast its heart and enjoy the truly incredible explosion. Jumping from its exploding body is the stuff of blockbuster cinema.



FRIENDS WITH THE FLOOD?

The most unlikely of partnerships, and yet the battle you fight alongside the Flood is one of *Halo's* finest as you charge along a Covenant-packed bridge. Still don't trust them, mind.

Gear of War

One of gaming's best weapons systems got a whole lot better



Battle Rifle BR55HB SR

Master Chief's go-to human weapon of choice. Its powerful three-round bursts reduce tricky recoil, making it a super-accurate weapon, with a small zoom scope that helped improve mid-range targeting.



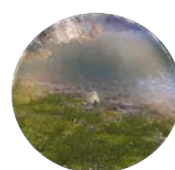
Plasma Pistol

A seemingly useless weapon, but deadly in the hands of a *Halo* pro. One charged shot from this takes out the Elite shields instantly, leaving them open to a single-round headshot kill with a pistol or battle rifle.



Carbine

If there was one weapon that could be used to finish the entire game, it's this one. Accurate at close, mid- and even long-range, decent zoom, very powerful and effective against troublesome shields and armour.



Bubble Shield

Equipment items were new to *Halo 3* and the Bubble Shield was one of the coolest. Drop in anywhere to create an instant shield. Its see-through protection made for some intense stare-downs as enemies waited for us to emerge.



Fuel Rod Cannon

Master Chief was finally given the freedom to use this powerful weapon in *Halo 3*. It's the Covenant answer to the Rocket Launcher, only with rapid-fire. Perfect against Hunters.



Spike Grenade

Halo already had the frag and sticky grenades, but the latter would only stick to living foes or vehicles. The Spike grenade stuck to anything (crucially, walls) opening up new strategies for grenade users.



Hornet

Piloting this heavily-armed flying machine made for some of the best moments in the entire campaign. Lock-on rockets and a machine-gun make the Hornet a headache for anyone in its crosshairs.



Chopper

The most satisfying of the Brute vehicles, the Chopper is both large and fast with a booster that makes it easier to splat enemies. Its front-facing cannons pack a punch, and its wheel looks cool.

Elites, but formidable in numbers. With the Brutes came new Brute weapons and vehicles, of course. The Mauler shotgun, the Brute Spiker, and the stick-to-anything Spike grenade, along with vehicles like the Chopper, the Prowler and the Anti-Air Wraith.

More importantly, the addition of 'Equipment' was a real game-changer. Portable, single-use weapons or tools that could be deployed to assist you in a tough battle added a new layer of strategy to what was already one of the most strategic, intelligent weapons systems in any first-person shooter. Items like the cowardly Bubble Shield and the Power Drain proved crucial in moments of high-intensity combat, and a nicely-placed Trip Mine finally gave the on-foot soldier a satisfying way to dispense of pesky vehicles.

The story campaign leveraged the increased horsepower of the Xbox 360 beautifully. In *Halo 2* you see a giant Scarab. In *Halo 3* you blow two of them up at the same time. In *Halo 1* you fly a Banshee and shoot down the odd enemy. In *Halo 3* you engage in a massive mid-air dogfight in the new Hornet ship against dozens of enemies. Watching large packs of Brutes spread out over massive fields full of buildings and other cover-providing scenery made for epic physics battlegrounds.

The story was perhaps even more shocking. Teaming up with the Covenant and, at one point, even the Flood, got the blood pumping as all hell broke loose on your telly. And of course you finally got to see the moment Master Chief slapped an alien



Mission in Action

Close-range shootouts, vehicle battles and epic overhead dogfights. This mission had it all!

MISSION: THE COVENANT



You kick off the level with a battle rifle and the Spartan Laser.



Banshees take breaks from the battle overhead to attack you.



You soon swap the on-foot action for some vehicular transport.



The action soon moves from the great outdoors to tight hallways.



A room upstairs hosts one of *Halo 3*'s most intense face-offs.



Back downstairs, outside and a short drive later, Cortana gives gifts.



Once high in the air all hell breaks loose. A fleet of Banshees appear.



The Hornet blasts through, but can it take the Phantom?



After landing you attack the second shield generator.



Could the level get any better? Yes. Have a Scorpion tank. Blast away!



TWO bloody great Scarabs and another fleet of Banshees await.



Some *Top Gun*-style skills will eventually earn a big firework show!



"It wasn't until Halo 3 came along that online gaming on consoles was taken truly seriously"

race into shape and put an end to the intergalactic war for good (well, at least until it all kicks off again in *Halo 4*).

But the biggest addition to the campaign was the inclusion of four-player online co-op support. Four grenade-flinging, elbow-dropping, sharp-shooting mentalists slapping their way through hordes of Covenant chumps – it was utter chaos in most cases, but satisfying enough to put a big cheesy smile on your face.

For our money, though, without a doubt *Halo 3*'s ace card was its competitive multiplayer offering. It's almost hard nowadays to remember a time before the *Call of Duty* dominance, but *Halo 3* released two whole months before *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* which, in the public eye at least, was just another war sim. Activision hadn't yet secured its vice-grip on the online FPS market. Online console gaming was still in its infancy but if you were into it then back then, *Halo 3* was the game – the big boy – you were looking forward to. We lost entire weekends to it.

MULTIPLAYER MAGIC

Halo 2 may have pioneered online FPS gaming on consoles and set the bar for skill-based matchmaking, but it

wasn't until the fancy online-ready Xbox 360 came along that online gaming on consoles was truly taken seriously – the game redefined how multiplayer with a controller should behave. The improved physics, subtly rebalanced weapons and cleverly designed maps and playlists made *Halo 3*'s multiplayer a masterpiece of competitive gaming. The Equipment opened up shrewd new techniques, and players' use of grenades was far more crucial than in *Halo 2* thanks to restrictions on the dual-wielding mechanics.

Halo 3 dominated Xbox Live's most played lists week after week as friends partied together – a process made easy on Xbox 360 – to 'charge-plasma-pistol-headshot-combo' some fools online. *Halo 3* also set new standards in post-match stat deliver for consoles. After a game you could go back and see

exactly who did what and how well. Hit up Bungie.net and you could even load a map of the level played and check the trajectories of every fatal bullet fired. Every single bullet. That's not only insane, it's more than some subsequent paid-for subscription services would offer (cough, cough... *CoD: Elite*).

Your Xbox would also save full replays for every match played, which could be re-watched from any angle at any speed, saved, edited and shared among friends. *Halo 3*'s video mode was revolutionary. But the game wasn't without faults; server lag affected the outcomes of melee kills and caused much uproar among fans, players found ways to exploit maps and some even said it didn't look as good as it should have. You can't please everyone.

But any way you look at it, *Halo 3* was a monumental achievement by Bungie, and a true masterpiece of the last generation. It refined and expanded pretty much every great idea offered by *Halo 1* and *2*, while adding a few of its own, and for that reason, it's probably still the Halo game to beat. 🙄

Fixed gun emplacement – let the good times roll.



You'll hear the Banshee before you see it.

The Verdict

Halo 3 stays true to the world created in its prequels, and it's a world able to compete with the best and most vivid that console gaming, not to mention the SF genre, has to offer. It really belongs in every Xbox 360. Official Xbox Magazine, Sept 2007

09

Play it now

You can pick up *Halo 3* for a frankly ridiculous £5 for a used version and under a tenner for a new copy from Amazon. On Xbox One? *The Master Chief Collection* will sort you out.

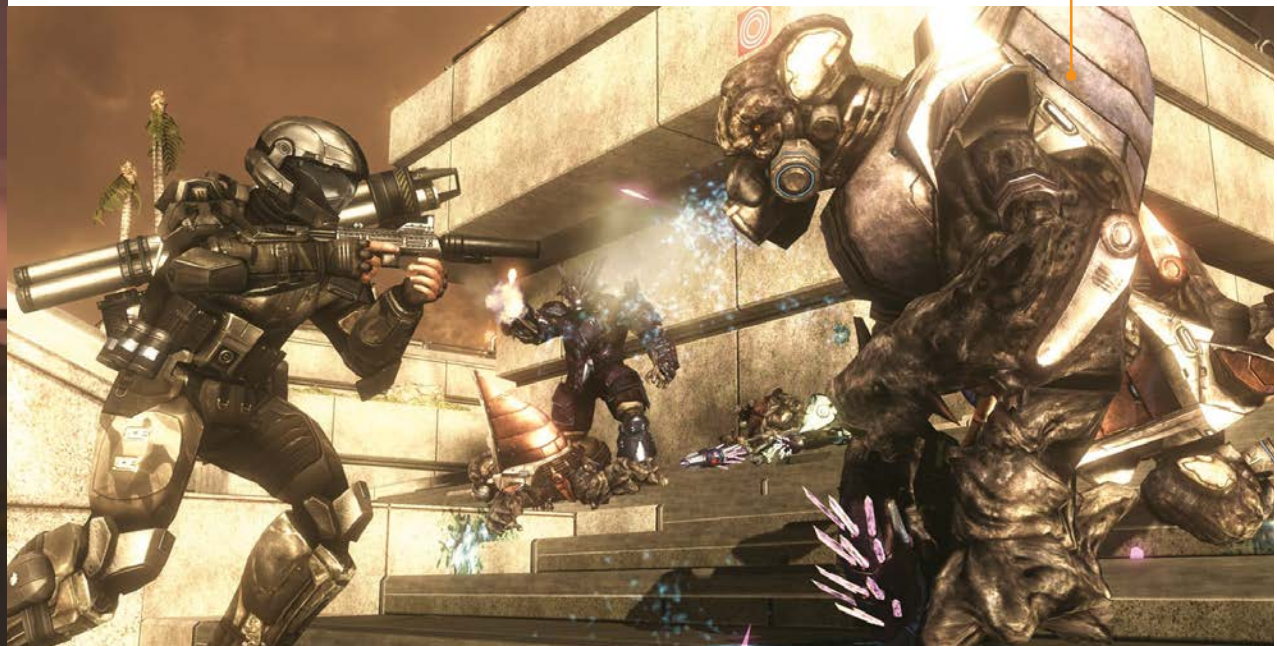
Halo 3: ODST

Bungie's quietest and most inventive game proved Halo could work on a small scale



Handy shield generators can often save your hide, but this here situation is what we like to call floating up a certain creek without a paddle.

From a regular human perspective the grunts are a lot bigger and pack a much meaner punch than we're accustomed to.



INFO

Format Xbox 360

Out September 2009

Developer Bungie Studios

Publisher Microsoft

What is it? A splinter story following a squad of Orbital Drop Shock Troopers in infested New Mombasa.

Originally thought of as an expansion pack for *Halo 3*, *ODST* is far more than that. Although shorter than the main series Halo games, and smaller in scale, it's Bungie's most inventive game and the first proof that 'Halo' wasn't necessarily synonymous with 'Master Chief'. The tale of Sergeant Buck and his Orbital Drop Shock Troopers might amount to a footnote in the wider Human-Covenant War, but it's one hell of a footnote.

As Master Chief fights on the ground in New Mombasa during the opening moments of *Halo 2*, Buck and his crew wait for their orders in orbit. Bungie invested heavily in these principal characters, placing emphasis on a well-rounded ensemble cast for the first time in the series. The casting gives away what TV shows Bungie was watching in the mid-noughties: Buck is played by Nathan Fillion, Dutch by Adam Baldwin, and Mickey by Alan Tudyk - all veterans of *Firefly*. They're joined by ONI operative

"The tale of Sergeant Buck and his Orbital Drop Shock Troopers is a footnote in a broader war, but it's a hell of a footnote"



Halo/Goodbye



How it all begins...

During the Covenant invasion of Earth, an ODST (Orbital Drop Shock Trooper) team assembles for a last ditch cruiser assault - before new orders and a disaster in the air grounds them planetside. So begins the journey to fill in the gaps...



How it all ends...

The reunited team, accompanied by a defecting Covenant Engineer, escape the glassing beams in a stolen Phantom. One month later, the Engineer lights Sergeant Johnson's cigar for him. Awww.



» Dare, played by *Battlestar Galactica*'s Tricia Helfer. Nolan North as Romeo is the exception, but he's in every single computer game so his inclusion is a given. Rookie, the player's point-of-view character, does not speak.

The squad believes that they are dropping onto the Covenant carrier Solemn Penance above the city, but during the dramatic drop sequence Dare redirects them to new coordinates on secret orders. Then, however, the carrier initiates a slipspace jump - prompted by your own actions in *Halo 2*, if you remember - causing an explosion that wipes out the ODST contingent and scatters Buck's squad to the wind.

SHOCK TACTICS

As Rookie, you wake up six hours later. Night has fallen and the city is empty aside from a few scattered Covenant patrols. This is where *ODST* diverges so dramatically from the rest of the series: rather than plunging you into the fiercest action as the most powerful force on the battlefield, its opening shows you a world where the battle has clearly already been fought, lost and forgotten before you arrive.

The Rookie's role in this is to piece together the scattered fragments of *ODST*'s narrative from the pieces left behind in this city at night. This is as close as you'll ever get to 'Halo noir' - an open-ended, open-world game that's as much about atmosphere and exploration as it is combat. We'd seen plenty of the latter in Halo already; *ODST* is a demonstration of Bungie's mastery of ambience, something they're rarely given enough credit for.

The mood of the Rookie's experience is conjured from rain on city streets, the distant glow of burning buildings on the horizon, the silence of the city's interiors and the roaming searchlights of Covenant Phantom dropships. Much is owed to the soundtrack, which moves away from the epic accompaniments associated with the main games to something more subtle: piano, gentle strings, even a lonely saxophone. If you needed proof that this is Halo noir: *there's a lonely saxophone in it.*

You absorb all of this as you hunt the city for hidden audio logs and evidence of your squad's passage. In that regard, *Halo 3: ODST* is an unlikely forerunner of games like *Dear Esther* and *Gone Home*. It may well involve gunning down space-

is part of that legacy, too. Sadie's Story is a side-narrative, discovered through audio logs, that tells the story of a few survivors uncovering a police conspiracy at the onset of the Covenant attack. It's well-produced, and unusually grounded for a game of this type.

It links to *ODST*'s campaign through a single character, Virgil, New Mombasa's Superintendent - an AI that, in peaceful times, managed the day-to-day running of the city. The Superintendent is *ODST*'s standout concept, brilliantly meshing narrative with game mechanics. The conceit is this: the AI wants to help you out, but is limited to expressing itself in the vocabulary of its original function: running a city. It can say certain pre-recorded statements and has to use

"The Rookie's role is to piece together scattered fragments of narrative from pieces left behind in this city at night"

gorillas with an underslung submachine gun, but if it was released today it'd still be considered ahead of its time - and it would probably be called 'Everybody's Gone To The Slipspace Rupture'.

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Despite the bombast of their most famous trilogy, Bungie always had an ear for a subtler and more ambitious form of storytelling. That was evident in the ilovebees alternate reality game, which ran for months and told the story of the Covenant discovery of earth through encrypted websites and secrets hidden in the real world. *ODST*

this in conjunction with the environment in order to communicate with you. Virgil wants you to discover Sadie's story, so as you explore it will attempt to direct you towards hidden audio logs. It will flash stop signs when you walk the wrong way, cause pay phones to ring and, should you head the right way, urge you on with a road crossing that says 'WALK WALK WALK WALK'.

The brilliant thing about *ODST* is that this ambitious exploration system is merely the glue that binds the rest of the game together. As you discover clues you piece together the last six hours, playing sections of the game as



Some pictures tell a thousand words. As far as the brute's concerned, this one tells just one: "AAAAARRRGHH!"



Despite New Mombasa's claustrophobic, wrecked design there's ample opportunity to give gas pedals a work out.


every member of Buck's squad. These sections provide a cross-section of Halo as a shooter, from urban combat to holdout sequences to vehicle bits, a Scarab battle and a highway chase.

Another of *ODST*'s subtle touches is that you're notably shorter, slower, and more vulnerable than the Master Chief. Even though you've encountered set-pieces like these before, you've never seen them through the eyes of a regular (albeit well-trained) human.

TEAM PLAYERS

As one survivor gradually becomes six, *ODST* transitions into a different mode - an ensemble TV-style action film with a sensitive side, and a Halo game where you're regularly surrounded by allies. This is thematically in-keeping with its other great addition, Firefight mode - an arena-based expansion to Halo's traditional co-op that was not only enormously influential within the series, but beyond it. Here you have the genesis of every wave-defence co-op

mode in every shooter that followed it, as well as the basic genes of *Destiny*.

This isn't just a game worthy of study, though - it holds up remarkably well, perhaps because it was so unusual in the first place. Halo's basic gunplay remains as well-crafted as ever, but it's things that *ODST* does differently that make it stand out. It's small but contains more ideas than the vast majority of games in its genre. It gets character out of its actors, rather than exposition. It treats environment design as an equal partner in the telling of a story. It has soul, which is incredibly rare for a shooter - even today. 

The Verdict

Halo 3: ODS manages to earn its own keep while learning from its predecessors' mistakes and balancing fan expectations. It's no small feat, particularly with that Master Chief guy nowhere in sight.. Official Xbox Magazine, Sept 2010

5

Five Masterful Moments



EXPRESS ELEVATOR

The drop sequence at the beginning of *ODST* might be linear, but there's a brilliant sense of pace and scale. It really conveys how you're a small part of a much bigger war, and sets up the fragile hours to follow.



DUTCH COURAGE

The first vehicle section arrives in Dutch's flashback mission. Escaping one of New Mombasa's parks in a stolen Ghost, you run the gauntlet past Wraith tanks and static turrets.



OH NO, ONI

Micky and Dutch engage the defences of - and subsequently destroy - ONI's headquarters, in a running gunfight that takes you outside, inside, and on top of the building. Pulse-pounding stuff.



THIN BLUE LIE

As the Rookie searches for Dare, he's attacked by a corrupt police officer. This is the only time Sadie's Story features in the main game, and the only time in Halo you're ever asked to fight a fellow human.



THE MORNING AFTER

In the finale, all six members of the team fight their last stand as the sun rises over the city. A brilliant arena encounter and fitting ending. You'll want to go back to the start and jump straight back in.



A skyscraper-stand-off against groups of Banshees is one of the game's tougher moments.



88

Play it now

Available on most preowned shelves for a fiver, or as a download (sold separately) in *The Master Chief Collection*.

Halo: Reach

Bungie's final fling was a Chief-less prequel that celebrated Reach's last stand against the Covenant...



They say not to bring a knife to a gunfight, but we guess it all depends how close together you are. Crunch!

Tip of the Sphere sees Noble Team turn wrecking crew to disable Covenant anti-aircraft batteries.



INFO

Format Xbox 360

Out September 2010

Developer Bungie Studios

Publisher Microsoft Game Studios

What is it? Prequel to *Halo: CE*. Play as Noble Six, a Spartan warrior desperately fending off the Covenant incursion on the ill-fated human planet, Reach.

After 10 years in the Halo trenches, Bungie gave us *Reach*. Technically in development for a little over three years it was ultimately the culmination of more than a decade of planning, of nurturing... of dreaming. It was the team's final fling with their franchise, before the licence was surrendered to the Microsoft suits and development reins handed over to 343 Industries. There was angst – Community Manager

Brian Jarrard speculated that Creative Director Marcus Lehto would “shed a tear or two”, but that, “*Reach* is our best game to date. We stand by it, it’ll stand for years and we’re creating something our fans will be happy and proud of.”

Never had a truer word been spoken. An almost allegorical representation of its creators’ last stand before moving onto franchises new, *Reach* – a prequel to the original *Halo: Combat Evolved* – regales us with the tale of humanity’s darkest hours in the battle against the

“*Reach* was ultimately the culmination of more than a decade of planning, of nurturing... of dreaming”



Halo/Goodbye



How it all begins...

The Covenant has managed to sneak onto the peaceful planet of Reach, but Noble Team has uncovered evidence of the enemy. This in-engine cinematic shows the crew being flown in for reconnaissance...



How it all ends...

The briefing for Noble Six's final mission? Survive. Unfortunately, it's impossible; just try and take down as many Covenant scum as you can before the end arrives. Bring lots of ammo. And maybe a hanky or two.

» Covenant. A darker, more brooding saga than those tales that preceded it, the swapping out of the iconic Master Chief for doomed members of Noble Team was a brave but inspired stratagem.

When *Reach* was released in late 2010, a lot of (blood stained) water had trickled under the shooter bridge.

Unreal-powered juggernauts like *Gears of War 2* had not just raised the technical bar, but curbstomped it into a million pieces – while *Modern Warfare* had become both the campaign and multiplayer king. *Halo 3*, for all its customisable charms, suddenly seemed seriously dated. Bungie realised that, to emancipate their creative vision for *Reach*, they needed to overhaul their engine. The result was a revelation; a sprawling sandbox campaign that not only rammed in ultra-intense four-player co-op combat but simultaneously rendered mass background battles that starkly illustrated the sheer scale of the intergalactic warfare. The studio finally had the looks to match their brains, and it was an utterly mesmeric combination.

OUT OF REACH

Naturally, *Reach*'s beauty was far from only skin deep. Bungie wanted to exceed expectations in all areas. First up: the campaign. An extended Beta guaranteed that weapon balancing – already wonderfully aligned – reached almost Zen-like levels of calibration, while a gamut of new Covenant foes

reinforced Halo's status as possessing the most intelligent and diverse range of adversaries in the shooter pantheon. Then you have hands-down the most iconic arsenal in gaming, bolstered with new tools. Vehicles, traditionally a series forte, evolved to see Noble Six and squad blast off into space to carry the fight to the alien invaders.

Finally, many (rather reactionary) Halo fans fretted when Bungie confirmed that Spartan Armor Abilities were being integrated into *Reach*'s single player campaign. Honestly, they needn't have worried; within half an hour you'll swear they'd been ever-present in the series since *Combat Evolved*. They also add another neat layer of spatial strategy to those hectic combat encounters;

considering the muted response to the single player in *Halos 2* and *3*.

They divide fan opinion, but we also had a really soft spot for Noble Team. They are an infinitely cooler, more badass bunch than the squad that the Rookie was hanging around with in *Halo 3: ODST*. Six is deliberately quiet – a cipher for you to imprint your own personality upon. The remainder resonate in their own peculiar ways, from officious Carter, man-mountain Jorge, quiet Jun and psycho Emile to one-armed lady Spartan Kat. Kat was a proper proponent of sci-fi girl power – all female savvy and righteous empowerment. She's a great mix of brains, guts and combat savvy, not just a collection of curves holding a gun.

"Spartan Armor Abilities are so good you'll swear they'd been part of the series since the original *Combat Evolved*"

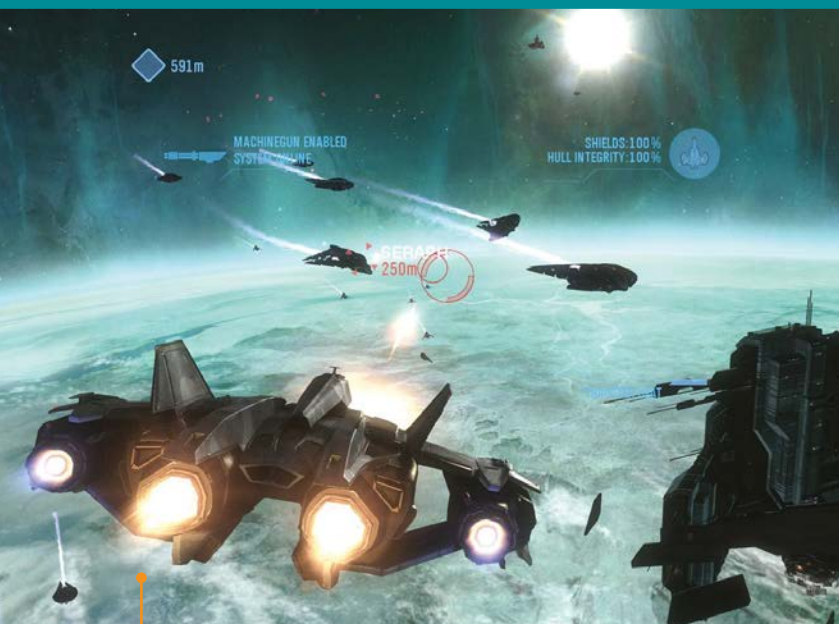
nothing quite beats soaring up high using the punchy Jet Pack to establish a sniper nest, coming to the rescue of beleaguered buds with a well-timed Shield Drop or taking the best hit a Hunter can throw at you thanks to the Armor Lock's temporary invulnerability.

ROOKIE ERROR

The Armor Abilities served to subtly reinvigorate what was effectively a decade-old formula – truth be told it was hard to imagine a future Halo without them. It all culminated in arguably the strongest campaign in the series so far... and a great riposte

As is always the Halo way, multiplayer is where the true genius of *Halo: Reach* lay. Technical advances in matchmaking resulted in fewer frustrations and the customisation was – as usual – simply sublime, but the true seeds of success were sown in new modes like Firefight Versus – where co-op buddies teamed up to fight against a combination of AI and human Covenant hordes. The fully customisable Firefight 2.0 also shone. Thirty different wave traits (if you fancy solely facing off against Hunters, it's a cinch), boss waves, variable shooting rates, grenade capabilities, lines of sight, hearing radiuses, luck, immunity





Long Night of Solace blasted Halo to infinity and beyond. We're desperate for more space action in future games.



The best way to tackle an Elite? Bring tons of tooled-up Spartan mates to the party...


to headshots... and about a million other things. You were only limited by your imagination. Or lack of it.

Perhaps Bungie's smartest move, though, was evolving Forge further – it was less a map editor and more a continent of infinite possibilities. Pounced upon by a creative community (deemed the 'Halo Nation') like no other, it all but guaranteed *Reach*'s legacy as one of the most important shooters of this – or indeed any other – generation (read more on page 80). There's a huge amount of love, affection and – most importantly – respect for the community here; an almost symbiotic relationship that arguably no other videogame enjoys. It's as much our game as theirs.

BACK TO KIRKLAND

The moniker 'Combat Evolved' may not have been to Bungie's tastes when Microsoft's marketing brains effectively forced the unsubtle subtitle onto the first *Halo* game back in 2001 – but in the grandest of ironies it perfectly surmises

the approach the Kirkland, Washington studio have adopted down the years.

Halo has always been something of a unique shooter in many respects, with a breadth of vision that might not always have quite been realised but was constantly apparent. *Reach*, then, was a fitting epitaph to a studio that was about to take a giant, uncertain leap into the unknown as it began its multiformat relationship with Activision. Hey, we heard it worked out quite well for them. Halo has grown since then, too, and in *Guardians* proposes a sweep of changes as radical as *Reach*'s. Here's hoping 343 Industries can pull it off. 

The Verdict

Bungie has finally got the ingredients just right. After the stripped-down step back of *ODST*, the FPS giant takes a massive leap forward, but it's worth the risk. *Reach* may fall, but its memory will never fade. **Official Xbox Magazine, Sept 2010**

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Five Masterful Moments



EXECUTIONS

Getting the drop on a hulking Elite in *Reach* lets sneaky Spartans plunge the knife in for a cinematic one-hit kill – a first for the series. Kills get more colourful in later games, but these start the trend.



FIREFIGHT 2.0

There are too many magical moments from this stellar slice of multiplayer to list, but the sense of human camaraderie against hopeless AI odds remains a *Reach* highlight, and a neat nod to its wider themes.



LONE WOLF

If you were aware of Halo lore, you knew *Reach* could only end one way – but that didn't stop the lump in the throat when our epic last stand turned to bittersweet surrender. I'M NOT CRYING.



LONG NIGHT OF SOLACE

In one of the game's more ambitious levels, Halo collides with Wing Commander. Soar into space and barrel-roll your way to intergalactic glory over the Covenant hordes. A truly classic blockbuster moment.



NIGHTFALL

Halo isn't known for any night/sniper missions – Master Chief isn't one for subtlety, after all – so the chance to penetrate the Covenant defences, ninja-style, made for a refreshing change of pace.



Reach is home to some indigenous nasties, like these savage, Rancor-alike Gútas.



9

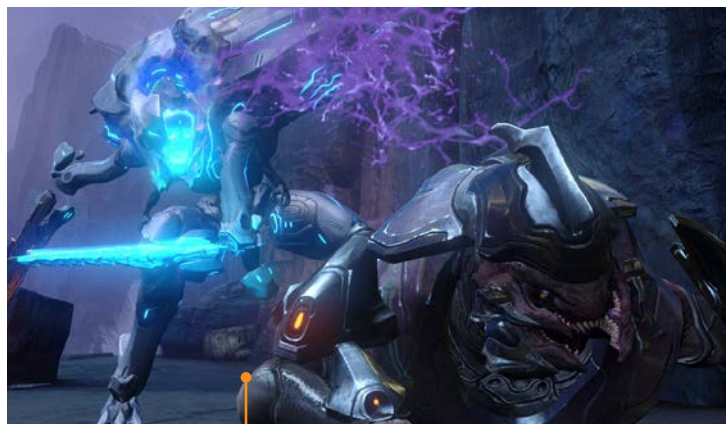
Play it now

Reach is the only Halo not to appear in *The Master Chief Collection*, so find a Xbox 360 copy. Will soon be backwards compatible on Xbox One, too.





Not everything changed - you can still thump people with the flag. Rejoice!



Neon souls light up the mostly mechanical forms of the Prometheans.



INFO

Format Xbox 360
Out November 2012
Developer 343 Industries
Publisher Microsoft Game Studios
What is it? 343's first ever *Halo* sequel, and the first part of Master Chief's next trilogy of adventures.

Halo 4

With Bungie gone and Master Chief in deep space, here's how new studio 343 Industries faced up to the challenge of making Halo 4...

When 343 Industries came into being in July 2009 it had a long list of things to do. Small things, like growing from scratch a studio that could operate at the very peak of blockbuster development, reintroducing the most recognisable and important character on Xbox, reinventing the most successful game on Xbox (while simultaneously making it the same, obviously) and doing it all under the shadow of a fixed-in-stone, autumn 2012 release date for the game it had been created to deliver: *Halo 4*.

Actually, that's the short version. 343 was also to assume gradual control

the entire *Halo* universe, from plushie Grunts to tie-in novels. Not to mention the fact that each of the items on the new studio's to-do list unpacked into a complicated subset of tasks and problems. For instance, making a new *Halo* game starring Master Chief also meant winning back the confidence of fans who'd been burned - or at least disappointed - by *Halo 3*'s forceful pre-release invitation to 'Finish the fight', which actually ended in a narratively ambiguous abandonment of the game's

hero (a phrase that, to be fair to Halo's marketers, is less poster-friendly).

This in turn required the return of something like *Halo*'s good old days of uncomplicated zealotry. The rabid anti-human thrust of the Covenant in *Combat Evolved* told us exactly what we needed to know about the dangers faced by Master Chief, and stopped us having to pause for too long to wonder about the humanity of our superman protagonist himself. Since then, *Halo* had undergone a kind of narrative drift: while the game

"It reconnects us to Master Chief, and it reconnects Master Chief to the mythological foundation of the series"



Timeline

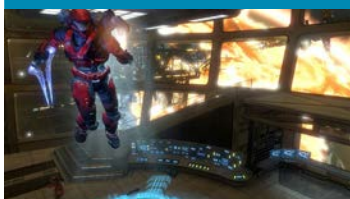
How 343 Industries eased into the driving seat of the Halo franchise



Halo Waypoint

November 2009

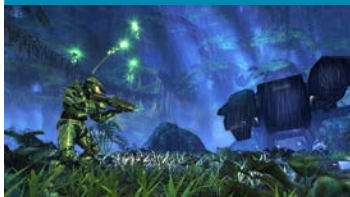
343's first step into a larger world. Waypoint was a good place to start: a community data hub accessible through PC and mobile apps that rooted the studio about as firmly in the series as it's possible to get.



Halo: Reach

August 2011

Bungie finished *Reach* in 2010, its last significant act in the Halo universe, and passed over control of the game and its servers to 343 in 2011. 343 went on to build *Reach* map packs with Certain Affinity.



Halo: Combat Evolved Anniversary

November 2011

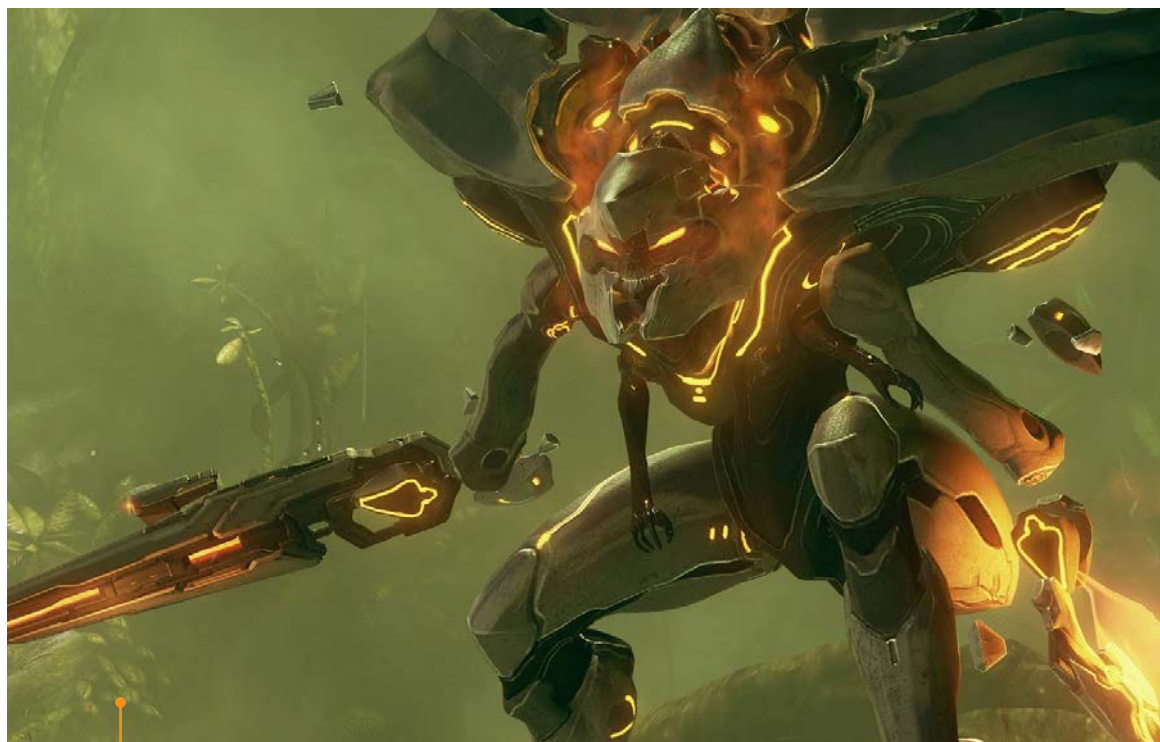
343's first major Halo was this very impressive anniversary edition of *Combat Evolved*, pulled together with help from Certain Affinity and Saber Interactive.



Halo 4

November 2012

The big one. In successfully releasing a full, standalone instalment of the series, 343 fulfilled its founding purpose. More than that, by doing it well, the studio began a new chapter for Halo and Master Chief.



Promethean Knights are the centre of the Forerunner assault. Clad in energy shields they are fearsomely strong and are able to teleport out of your line of fire. Best tackled with a shotgun, and quick.

was revolutionising multiplayer, Master Chief was traversing the fog of war and having, if not an existential crisis, then a momentary pause as to where he should fire his gun next.

And that's why, from a certain distance, 343's daunting catalogue of things to do and solve actually becomes just one thing: give us back Master Chief. This is *Halo 4*'s biggest achievement. It reconnects us to Master Chief, and it reconnects Master Chief to the mythological foundation of the series in the shape of the Forerunners. In doing so it also presents him with the kind of clear-cut threat to humanity he deserves - Forerunner warrior-general The Didact; his face snarling and hand hovering over a doomsday device.

CHIEF AMONG US

What this means in practice is that many of *Halo 4*'s big gains come from falling back on the template of *Combat Evolved*. The Chief is reunited with Cortana, who's still a compensatory mouthpiece who balances our hero's stoicism with a flow of fast-talking exposition, and still so well written and performed nobody cares. It's great to have her back. The pair find themselves drawn towards another Forerunner world which, like the lush ringworld of Master Chief's first adventure, offers a mysterious, grand landscape of revelation and exploration. And, after the grave sense of being cast adrift at

the conclusion of *Halo 3*, it turns out this new world and our heroes aren't so far away after all: within moments the Covenant - or at least, a rogue Remnant faction - are back in the picture, and the cannon fodder of the UNSC aren't far behind. From the very beginning, *Halo 4* seems as familiar as well-worn slippers. And that seems like a very good idea.

Accordingly, the action is no grand reinvention of tried and tested ideas. In fact, that's quite possibly why this breakaway sect of the Covenant has been co-opted into the game: to ease

"Halo 4 is a pragmatic step away from the deliberate pace of classic Halo, embracing its rivals' speed and brutality"

us in with the familiar sound of plasma rifles and grunt squeals, the practiced rhythms of the Elite's ducks and cover dodges. Making everything just like it was prepares us for how things are going to be in this new journey. And how it is going to be involves *Halo 4*'s most significant contribution to the wider Halo lore: the Prometheans.

The Prometheans are many things. Firstly, they are much better than the Flood. Empirically and unequivocally: they are more fun to fight, they are more interesting to look at, and their backstory is gruesome, compelling, high sci-fi stuff. In fact, both inside and

outside of the fiction, they are clearly designed to be 343's antidote to the Flood, a digital species superseding the creatures of flesh and decay, a tacit promise that Halo will never again make you walk through a level that looks like the inside of a giant bowel, honest.

FLAME ON

They are also quite a lot like the Covenant. They have a three-tiered hierarchical structure led by the towering Knights, reminiscent of Elites with an internet disco makeover, and backed up by fluttering drones and packs of small, grunt-like canine units. This isn't a bold enough move to install the Prometheans alongside the

Covenant in terms of distinctiveness or durability. Our new enemies do not measure up to their forebears - but then, they don't need to. Their job is to facilitate the return of Master Chief, and they do just that. They provide the three-way battles and tight, clustered fights that make *Halo 4* feel so much like a return to the series' basics: the 30 seconds of fun, the Assault On The Control Room, and the building blocks of *Halo*. Asking them to be iconic on top feels almost ungrateful.

If the campaign was a measured success, then *Halo 4*'s multiplayer found itself at a crossroads. For years



Promethean Watchers are slippery fliers who'll either snipe at you, intercept your grenades, drop force fields in front of allies or flee, wings closed to present a smaller target.

Halo had ruled Xbox Live with a steady hand - literally so, with its combination of perfectly-weighted moving and aiming and a skill-matched, level-playing field approach to multiplayer. But the ruthless quality of *Call Of Duty* created a hungered trend for frenetic shooting powered by custom loadouts, unlockable armouries and killstreak rewards. Bungie had already made concessions to this trend with *Halo: Reach*'s power-ups, and in designing *Halo 4* 343 was faced with a decision to double-down or back up.

In the end it doubled-down. *Halo 4* is a conscious, pragmatic step away from the more deliberate pace of the classic *Halo* online game, one that at least partially embraces the speed and brutality of *Call Of Duty*. Sprinting might be the most fundamental change, upping the speed at which the game is played and the mindset of those involved. Frantic, fast decisions match the need for furiously quick reactions. This is not your older brother's *Halo*.

Other things your hypothetical sibling might be confounded by include custom loadouts, which fundamentally alter the uniformity and tactical balance of the series by allowing for individual

combinations of primary and side arms, updated versions of *Reach*'s armour abilities and *CoD*-style passive perks called tactical packages and support upgrades. Finally, as if in recognition of a standard new feature set for online shooters, *Halo 4* includes ordnance drops, which replicate *Call of Duty*'s tangle of killstreak rewards.

EVOLVE OR DIE

And here's the thing die-hard fans of Halo multiplayer and veterans of early 2000s LAN parties don't want to hear: this was the right thing to do. 343 chose the right road. *Halo*'s classic balance and setup was a beautiful thing, but the compelling, frustrating and frantic mechanics of *CoD* can't be un-invented, and they are the new normal. Players vote with game time and discharged rounds, and ignoring them would be settling for second place and nostalgia.

As with the campaign, 343 might not have aced multiplayer at the first attempt, but it took bold strides and set out the beginnings of a vision that is, at least, not standing still (those who resolutely refuse to do anything other than stand still are also covered, however, by playing *Halo 2: Anniversary*

5 Five Masterful Moments



MEAN STREAK
Controversial as *Halo 4*'s new streak rewards are, there's nothing like calling in a drop pod that contains a light machinegun - this weapon chews through other Spartans like an out-of-control lawnmower.



MOUNT THE MAMMOTH
It's no Scarab, but you'll have a lot of fun exploring, riding and defending this enormous UNSC ground vehicle in the Reclaimer mission. Especially if you wear a jetpack and wield a rocket launcher.



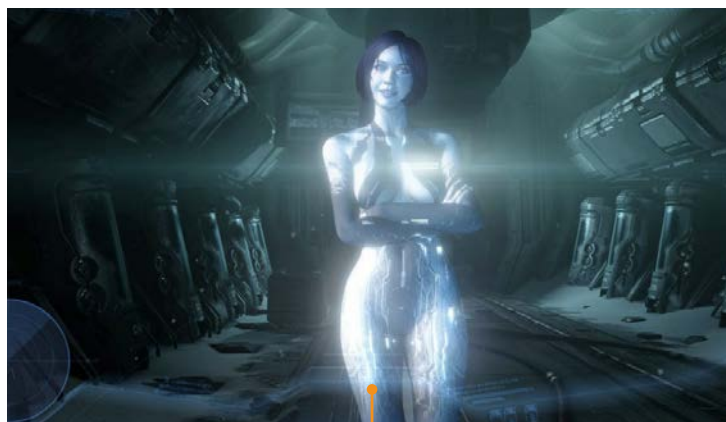
PROMETHEAN POWER
They're cut from the same archetypes as UNSC gear, but Forerunner guns are the game's most exotic firearms, formed from planes of neon light. The sound effects are equally impressive.



SEEING STRAIGHT
The Promethean Vision Armour Ability is one of the best-balanced infra-red modes we've experienced - its range increases as you hold the button. Nailing an assassination this way is gripping.



OFF THE RAILS
Every Rail Gun projectile has to be charged up, obliging you to lead your target (and generally, aim for its feet). Should you do so successfully, it's an instant kill. Perfect for ending matches with.



and its untouched multiplayer as part of *The Master Chief Collection*).

Assuming responsibility for a series as big as Halo is like waking up at the controls of a UNSC infinity-class destroyer and having to learn what all the buttons do in the cockpit and how to repair the elevators, all while trying not to crash. Spit the word out, but Halo is a transmedia phenomenon, and from a standing start, 343 is in charge of it all. *Halo 4* might not be a triumph, but it is a substantial success: a fresh start and a new direction. Considering the weight on 343 Industries' shoulders, that's some achievement. 🕹️

The gradual breakdown of Cortana's mind gives this story some dramatic heft.

The Verdict

"Microsoft's home-grown mega-studio hasn't yet rendered Bungie's classic Halo games surplus to requirements, but it has proven that it can make a great Halo of its own. A fine start to the Reclaimer trilogy." **Official Xbox Magazine, Nov 2012**

09

The Rare Stuff

Halo's greatest swag, from trainers to real-life Warthogs...



Halo Fleet Battles: The Fall of Reach

£80 - www.shop.spartangames.co.uk

Thought *Guardians* was the only Halo game out this year? Think again. *Fall of Reach* is a tactical tabletop game that comes with 49 detailed ship models (32 UNSC, 17 Covenant) all accurate to the videogame series. Extra packs and upgrades can be purchased for intermediate players but now we're getting ahead of ourselves. *Fall of Reach* is easy to learn, but tricky to master. You'll have to use your *Halo Wars* honed skills to dominate the battlefield in this strategic game.



Limited Edition Halo 5: Guardians Xbox One

£399.99 - www.game.co.uk

A 1TB Xbox One with a sleek, silver design. The UNSC logo on the faceplate is a dead giveaway that it's been inspired stylistically by Spartan Locke and UNSC technology. But it's not just a Halo console on the outside, as it comes with built in Halo sound effects, and is bundled with clever extras. Spartan Locke's dossiers on Fireteam Osiris and Blue Team, a Spartan themed steelbook case, the *Fall of Reach* animated series and a Warzone REQ bundle.



Mega Bloks Halo Heroes

£3.25 - www.ebay.co.uk

Grab yourself a stash of Mega Blok's Halo Hero Packs and hope to hell that you're lucky enough to receive an ultra rare micro-action figure. You could of course cheat and bag yourself a particular figure from eBay, but we're warning you, be prepared to pay a small fortune (and run the risk of tainted goods). If you're in the business of finding the rarest figurines only, be on the lookout for Active Camo characters, as well as our favourite, the loveliest/loooniest of AI's, Cortana!



Halo 5: Guardians Series 1 - Spartan Locke

£35.99 - www.forbiddenplanet.com

We're all familiar with Master Chief, but what of the man who must hunt him down? This ten-inch deluxe action figure is just one of a detailed, official set of *Guardians* Spartans. Not only a great accessory and perfect addition to any Halo figure collection, Locke also comes with a download code for exclusive in-game content. The figures are pretty cheap now, but we'd recommend snapping up any you want fast - they're destined to become the collectors' items of tomorrow.



RISK: Halo Legendary Edition

£44.99 - www.halowaypointstore.co.uk

We've been battling the Covenant and the Flood for years, but what if we had a go at fighting from their side of the war? In this version of the classic game *RISK*, you can fight to destroy humanity, activate a Halo and begin the Great Journey as the Covenant. Or, if you fancy something just as evil, you can play the Flood, annihilating all as you infest the battlefield. This villainous board game comes with maps based on the Halo universe, including a 60" Halo ring map. Fire that bad boy up. Whoop!



Cortana Statue

\$199.00 (approx £127) - www.wetanz.com

This stunning representation of John-117's AI companion, courtesy of Weta Workshop, is part of a broader line of models, including the Arbiter and Master Chief statues. And you'll be pleased to know, unlike the Warthog on the right, Cortana is definitely available for purchase; or at least was... unfortunately, yet another limited item means yet more searching on auction sites, and make no mistake, this one's more elusive than an active camo sporting Elite. Good luck with that.



Halo: Reach - Legendary Edition

£100.00 - www.ebay.co.uk

Even when it was first released, back in late 2010, finding a sealed *Halo: Reach* Legendary edition was much like finding every single Skull in *Halo 2*: blooming difficult! Suffice to say eBay is probably your best bet, with your chances increasing significantly should you opt for purchasing second-hand. If you are indeed successful you'll be treated to various goodies; including the limited edition in its entirety and, more importantly, a stunning statue of Noble team, courtesy of McFarlane toys! Your shelves will groan with Spartan might.



Halo 3 - Special Edition Zune

£150 - www.ebay.co.uk

Zune! Remember Zune? That was a thing. Though horribly outdated, this 2007 collector's edition *Halo 3* Zune boasts a moderate 30GB storage capacity, and comes pre-loaded with a plethora of Halo goodies; which include soundtrack albums from *Halo: CE* and *Halo 2*, as well as Halo documentaries, trailers, and a few episodes of *Red Vs Blue*. If that isn't enough the device itself wouldn't look out of place in the Halo universe, sporting both the UNSC and *Halo 3* logos.



Replica Warthog

Price: In your dreams! - www.wetanz.com

Yes, this is actually a full-sized, working replica of a Warthog! Built by New Zealand based Weta Workshop (they of *Lord of the Rings* special effects fame), this behemoth started life as a humble Nissan SUV. As the Hog's startling accuracy suggests, it was originally created for the planned Peter Jackson Halo movie. However, with that firmly down the pan, we're guessing it spends most of its time ferrying Weta employees to and from the nearest fast-food drive-thru...



Halo 3, Adidas Trainers

\$185.00 (approx £119) - www.amazon.com

Nobody really knows what's behind John-117's infamous Mark VI helmet. But we're certain that on the odd occasion he does step out of his Mjolnir Power Armour, he's likely to sport a pair of these comfy looking *Halo 3* trainers, courtesy of Adidas. Unfortunately, having been released in 2008 and limited to only 100 pairs, you'll likely need an abundance of cash, and not to mention luck, if you're planning on owning a pair. So good hunting!



Halo 3 - Legendary Edition

\$169.95 (approx £109) - www.amazon.com

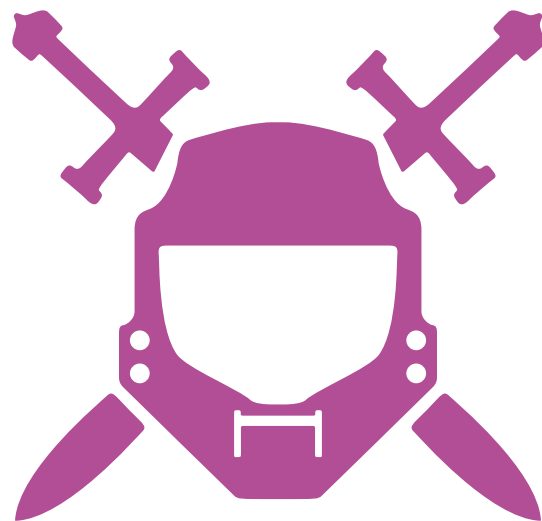
Released way back in 2007 the *Halo 3* Legendary edition is now something of a rarity. And yet, even if you're planning on shelling out the extra cash to secure your very own copy, the scaled replica of Master Chief's Mark VI helmet, a plethora of collectible goodies (such as a making-of documentary and behind-the-scenes content) and, of course, the actual game itself, should make this one well worth the purchase. Imagine your cat wearing that helmet. Awesome.



Halo UNSC Infinity 9" Replica

£44.99 - www.forbiddenplanet.co.uk

One of the key plot elements in *Halo 4* is the legendary UNSC Infinity, a 19,000-foot ship, the most powerful humanity has yet created. Now you can appreciate mankind's greatest achievement in your own bedroom, thanks to this highly-detailed, 9-inch replica model, secured by a UNSC branded stand. Short of a ride on the actual ship, having this on our bedside table is the next best thing. We're not sure we have 19,000 feet of spare room, anyway.



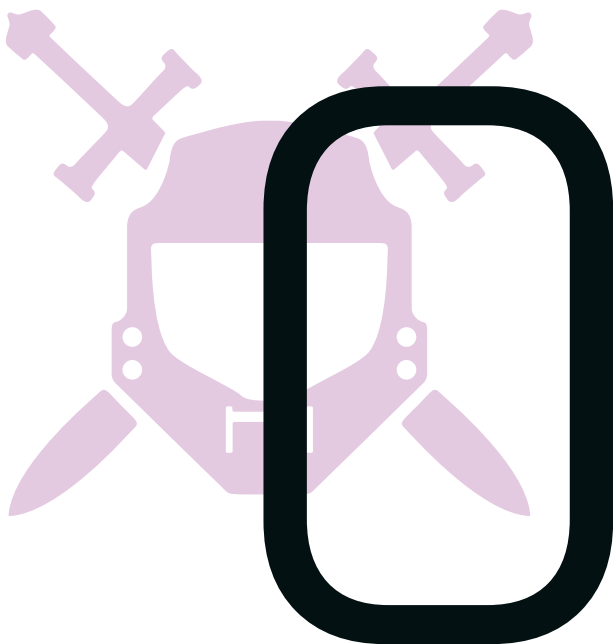
The Man Who Made Multiplayer

Halo 2's multiplayer
lead Max Hoberman
recalls the early days of
matchmaking magic



Background Check

NAME Max Hoberman
JOB TITLE Co-founder, Certain Affinity
BIO Joined Bungie in 1997, led multiplayer design for *Halo 2*. Left to form Certain Affinity midway through *Halo 3*'s creation.



ne of the earliest Bungie hires, Max Hoberman helped pin us to the sofa with his work on multiplayer for the first three Halo games before leaving to found Certain Affinity. The studio built multiple map packs for Call of Duty and Halo, as well as early Xbox Live games Age of Booty and Crimson Alliance. Here he takes us back to where it all began: local multiplayer on Hang 'em High.

You were at Bungie in the *Halo 1* days before going on to become the multiplayer lead on *Halo 2*. What do you remember most about the development of multiplayer in the first game?

With *Halo 1*, the multiplayer team was so starved for resources that we really didn't have very many multiplayer maps. We actually thought there was a chance that Xbox Live was going to come online in time for our game, so in the early days we were working on a bunch of online multiplayer-related stuff that my team was working on that actually ended up appearing in *Halo 2*. But the multiplayer team was so starved for resources. At the same time we were also building up the user-interfaces for the game and, you know, all the server-side stuff...

I had a guy on my team who was running the community team at the time – I mean like running Bungie.net – who wanted to try his hand at being a designer. His name was Peter Marks and he wanted to become a designer, so he asked me at one point if he could make some *Halo* maps and I told him I was trying to motivate him into coming into work at the time, so I told him, "Yeah, sure, as long as you get your other stuff done, you can make some maps."

And then he ended up being the one designer who created, well, probably more than half of the actual multiplayer maps that shipped. Just kind of on the side – he'd never really made any maps before. He's the one who built Hang 'Em High, for instance.

Wow!

That was his very first map and that one was funny – I remember it because the very first thing that he did was a sketch for a map which actually turned out to be Hang 'Em High, and it was like this top-down sketch for the map, and I remember him showing me and I remember just scratching my head. You can imagine a top-down sketch of Hang 'Em High – how crazy and chaotic that would be. I remember just scratching my head and being like, "Yeah yeah sure, looks great..." and the funny thing was it turns out what he had drawn was physically exactly what he modelled and turned into Hang 'Em High. I remember just being shocked because I was like, "I had no idea what was going on in this guy's head." And what he was putting on paper [was] a very clear vision for what he wanted and it turned into the crazy chaos that is Hang 'Em High.

"There are a couple of maps styles that have proven themselves - one style is the big open vehicle sandbox, like Blood Gulch"

The dual-hedgehog gun is truly sensational.



In your expert opinion, what makes a good Halo multiplayer map? What elements go into that?

It's an interesting question because the Halo multiplayer maps kind of fall into a couple of different categories, and there's a couple of different styles of maps that have proven themselves and work really well again and again. One style is the kind of big open vehicle sandbox, which is obviously what Blood Gulch is, and I think that what makes those vast maps work so well is that mixing together of crazy vehicle mayhem with fun infantry spaces.

We actually tried to recreate one of those maps in the [*Halo: Reach*] Defiant Map Pack, but I really think that that particular style of map is easier than most of the other Halo maps because I think what makes them great is the sandbox mechanic in the game: the weapons and the vehicles and the infantry and the ranged combat. So I think in some ways when you're making one of those really big sort of open sandbox maps, really all you're trying to do is design something that is balanced for the guys on foot and balanced for the guys in vehicles and really just sort of create interesting, intimate spaces. Then you create interesting encounters, even if it is a crazy man-cannon that launches people up into the sky to the middle of the map!

There's no secret formula for those maps because I think really you're just trying to design something that plays to the mechanics of the game, and in a way the map is almost a backdrop to the sandbox mechanics of the game. So I think what makes those maps work well is you don't get too heavy-handed with it and that you keep it subtle and you don't try and add too much map on top of all the crazy sandbox mechanics. That sounds way more philosophical than I probably meant it.

But there's another type of map. I mean, there are a whole lot of different classes of maps... but if the vast maps are at one end of the spectrum, at the other end of the spectrum there are maps that are really tight, like lots of corners, opportunities for jumping and

verticality and that kind of thing. They are my personal favourite, actually.

I think that style is exemplified by Lockout, which is hands-down my all-time favourite map. And I think that's a really different style of map, and what really makes those style of maps work is just really a lot of attention paid to creating loops, where you don't create dead-ends, you create these sort of figure-eights and you create these loops and those loops were both horizontal but they're also vertical.

And then there's another category of maps, of which the biggest is the objective based maps. I'm thinking of the older-school ones, like High Ground is one – Zanzibar-style maps which is an asymmetric very big base-oriented map which is a whole *other* category.

But that's something about Halo that I love so much — there isn't just one play style and there isn't just one style of map. It really caters to a huge audience and a lot of people enjoyed the full spectrum or at least a chunk of the spectrum. Like, you can go from a broad vehicle-style map to playing like a Lockout super tight-quarters map and have a blast in either one, and I think that range is pretty unique to Halo.

So if you were stuck having to play one Halo map for the rest of your life it would be Lockout?

<laughs> Oh man, that's tough because now I've played it so much... Yeah, that's an interesting question. I don't know, but Lockout would certainly be in consideration, if not the one. Lockout has always been really one of my favourite maps, [and] that's a funny map because when we were working on that map for *Halo 2*, it almost got cut. It was me and [Bungie multiplayer designer] Chris Carney at the time and it really wasn't working — the whole thing wasn't coming together. And we were ready to throw up our hands and give up on it, and then at one point I took

At this range, both players will fall foul of the splash damage.



Vehicles tend to make you the centre of attention.



The risk of hijacking obliged *Halo 2* drivers to think things through.



Halo's maps are often as tall as they are broad. Only *Titanfall* really matches this sense of verticality.

on offence and one on defence. But the guy who was on defence was sort of close enough to the enemy flag that he could also help on offence. It was interesting because it turned out to be such a popular map, especially among all the competitive players like all the Major League Gaming guys.

What multiplayer games were you into leading up to the Halos?

We would always play a lot of shooters at the office and I would say *Tribes* was huge. When we fired up *Tribes* it would practically be the whole company jumping in there and playing it. A good ten or fifteen guys — we weren't that big of a company back then.

It would be remiss not to mention the pistol in *Halo 1* as it pertains to multiplayer. How do you feel about it in hindsight?

I would play in playtests and I didn't realise until after we shipped how powerful the pistol was. It actually wasn't common knowledge around the office. It was like this well-kept secret, and I learned in later years through [Bungie co-founder] Jason Jones that he would always try to sneak that into his games. He did that for *Marathon* and others, trying to sneak in those sort of unexpected sort of hidden power-weapons or hidden advantages. The rumour was he did it because whenever he'd go and get challenged by the fans he have sort of a leg-up and have an advantage on them. <laughs> I don't know if there's any truth in that, but

» a pass at the paper design of the map and I really just changed a couple of things to do kind of what I was saying — add better circulation, improve the flow, and I added the path that allowed you to get behind the base, you know up on the base where you can get on the roof?

You bet.

Originally, that whole path of getting up on the building didn't exist, so I added that and then we added that crazy long walkway — the big L-shape walkway hanging out in space. We added those two things and a couple other minor tweaks, but primarily the addition of those two things turned the map from being just really not very fun at all to being really, really enjoyable.

So what's your least favourite map?

The biggest disappointment for me, the one that didn't work but still shipped — there were plenty of them that didn't work but we were wise enough to cut... I would say Burial Mounds is probably my least favourite. But Burial Mounds

is interesting because I remember when we were working on it, it was one of the first maps that I worked on for *Halo 2*. We were trying to create a map that would have a lot of vehicle and infantry combat but was a pretty compact map and not a giant beast like Blood Gulch, and that map just never... it just really failed in many ways. I had a few memorable moments on it, but for the most part, I think at the time I really hadn't learned the value of cover and alternate paths and stuff, as much as I have since. And the end result turned out to be this open death-pit.

We do remember trying to stay out of the middle...always, always avoiding the open area at all costs.

I found conceptually it's a good model but for some reason we just never really took it far enough on Burial Mounds. A counter-example of that is Midship. That was literally the first map that I designed for *Halo* when we were still pre-Microsoft. Actually, I made a big racetrack that was a Ghost/Warthog

crazy racetrack called Motocross. But that never saw the light of day. The first map that I worked on that ever shipped was actually Midship. I remember doing all the paper design for it and that turned out to be a hugely popular map.

Midship is awesome.

That was an example of a map that we really sort of iterated on sort of over and over again to get it right. I had this explicit goal when designing Midship, I had decided I wanted to make a map that was fun for four players. Because at the time we were still kind of mentally living in this world where not everyone could go to a big LAN party, so we were thinking about players who only had one Xbox and just four players and how sucky it was that they didn't get to play Capture the Flag. So I pretty much decided I wanted to make a map where four players can play CTF and have fun.

The basic premise on this map was that I would stick the flags close enough together that you could basically have one player on the team

Dramatic damage modelling makes it easier to prioritise targets.



yeah I didn't actually find out until like a month or two after we shipped. A friend of mine was always just kicking my ass and he finally one day told me why and he told me the way the pistol worked and I was just shocked. I had no clue. As soon as I realised that and I started using it, I just started tearing it up big time, relative to how I was before.

I think that having that really powerful accurate weapon in the game was a really good thing, [but] making it a weapon that everyone had by default, I'm kind of on the fence on, and making it a weapon that new players really couldn't understand without either a lot of research or somebody having to explain it to them I think was just kind of mean. <laughs>

So then I guess given what you've stated were you pretty against the pistol for Halo 2? Obviously it didn't ship, it didn't happen but was there a fierce debate at Bungie for Halo 2 for it at all?

Yeah, our general feeling was that we always strive to have...there's no

such thing as having a game perfectly balanced but we always strive to get as close as we could to that, to that sort of ultimate goal. I think kind of conceptually, nobody was opposed to the mechanics, but I'd say the general sentiment when we were working on

"Halo's just such a fun sandbox. You can be so creative with the map ideas, much more so than in other games"

Halo 2 was that, "Oh wow, that was a little bit too unbalanced," and I think we were trying to get some weapons in there that got you some of the same benefits, like the Battle Rifle. And that's kind of where that originated.


Are there any incredible Halo multiplayer map ideas that are still stuck in your head that you have yet to have the opportunity to make?

Oh yeah! I haven't done a whole lot of original Halo maps. I mean, all the Defiant maps were original, but since I left Bungie those three are the only original maps that we've done because we've done a lot of remakes.

At one point we actually had [an old] *Marathon* map that was my all time favourite, the map called Mars Needs Women. When we were working on the [Blast-tacular] Map Pack that I did at Certain Affinity, we actually had a playable prototype of that Mars Need Women map playable on the Halo engine that was actually coming along really nicely and was a lot of fun.

Unfortunately the *Halo 3* beta came along and [accelerated] our schedule by a month, so we had pull back a little bit and not do as many maps as we thought we were going to do. So that would be one, I still think that that map would be fantastic on the Halo engine.

There are a couple of others. There was actually another map that we were prototyping at the same time, another completely original map that for the same reason our schedule got pulled in and we just kind of had to put it on the back-burner.

But yeah, Halo's so fun. It's such a fun sandbox thing. You can be so creative with the map ideas, much more so than in other games that, yeah, I don't know if I'll get tired of [making] Halo maps. It's really quite enjoyable! 

The Medals

159 ways Halo 4 celebrates
your acts of heroism



1 Melee



2 Beat Down



3 Assassination



4 Headshot



5 Kill



6 Sniper Rifle Kill



7 Grenade Kill



8 Binary Rifle Kill



9 Sword Kill



10 Railgun Kill



11 Vehicle Kill



12 Beam Rifle Kill



13 Splaser Kill



14 Rocket Kill



15 Supercombine



16 Hammer Kill



17 Plasma Kill



18 Fuel Rod Cannon Kill



19 Splatter



20 Airsassination



21 Assist



22 Vehicle Destroy Assist



23 Distraction



24 Emp Assist



25 Guardian Angel



26 Road Trip



27 Wheelman



28 Wingman



29 Flyin' High



30 Protector



31 Bulltrue



32 Killjoy



33 Headcase



34 Kill from the Grave



35 Reload This



36 Showstopper



37 Hijack



38 Skyjack



39 Busted



40 Vehicle Destroyed



41 Snapshot



42 Hail Mary



43 Revenge



44 Ordnance Earned



45 Avenger



46 Close Call



47 First Strike



48 Last Strike



49 Retribution



50 Vengeance



51 Comeback Kill



52 Double Kill



53 Triple Kill



54 Overkill



55 Killtacular



56 Killtrocity



57 Killamancaro



58 Killtastrophe



59 Killpocalypse



60 Killionaire



61 Killing Spree



62 Killing Frenzy



63 Running Riot



64 Rampage



65 Untouchable



66 Invincible



67 Inconceivable



68 Unfriggenbelievable



69 Extermination



70 Ball Holder



71 Ball Keeper



72 Ball Master



73 Ball Hog





74 Magic Hands



75 First Touch



76 Carrier Kill

							
77 Carrier Kill Assist	78 Ball Kill	79 Smooth Moves	80 Ballsassination	81 Catch	82 Long Bomb	83 Nice Catch!	84 Interception
							
85 Alpha Conversion	86 Flood Conversion	87 Final Conversion	88 Flood Victory	89 Ancient One	90 Flood Kill	91 Flood Kill Assist	92 Last Man Standing
							
93 Clever	94 Flood Hunter	95 Flood Survivor	96 Flood Exterminator	97 Flood Infector	98 Flood Carrier	99 Flood Juggernaut	100 Flood Gravemind
							
101 Flag Defense	102 Flag Assist	103 Flag Capture	104 Flag Carrier Kill	105 Flag Runner	106 Flag Kill	107 Flag Champion	108 Flag Driver
							
109 Flag Joust	110 Flagsassination	111 Base Capture Initiated	112 Capture Initiation Assist	113 Base Captured	114 Capture Assist	115 Turret Destroyed	116 Base Offense
							
117 Base Saved	118 Base Defense	119 Turret Built	120 Fortification Assist	121 Resupply Assist	122 Survivor	123 Hero!	124 Gotcha!
							
125 Shield Door Destroyed	126 Hill +5	127 Hill +10	128 Hill +15	129 Hill Dominance	130 Vehicle Hill +5	131 Vehicle Hill +10	
							
132 Vehicle Hill +15	133 Vehicle Hill Dominance	134 First Point	135 Hill Offense	136 Hill Defense	137 Hail to the King	138 Hill Assist	
							
139 Regime Change	140 Saviour	141 Regicide	142 King Assist	143 King Kill	144 Execution	145 King Spree	
							
146 Kingtacular	147 Reign of Terror	148 Site Extracted	149 Beacon Converted	150 Beacon Armed	151 Site Saviour	152 Convert Stopped	
							
153 Arm Stopped	154 Expert Extraction	155 Site Offense	156 Site Defense	157 Arm Assist	158 Convert Assist	159 Extraction Assist	



Our pick
of the greatest
Halo multiplayer
maps that have
entertained us
over the last
decade

Violent Cartographer



Although the Halo story has always been strong, the series perhaps shines brightest in multiplayer. *Halo 2* was the first game to truly bring online FPS to Xbox Live, while games like *ODST* and *Reach* have taken the idea of map editing and simplified it enough to offer widespread popularity – even amongst gamers who would never touch similar ‘user-generated content’ options elsewhere (see pg 80 for more on that). So here are the eight best, brightest and bloodiest maps in Halo’s history. As you’d expect, most have been remade across various Halo games, showcasing their lasting appeal and incredible nostalgia value.

PIG STICK

Head down this side of the base and you can grab the Energy Sword. As this map has loads of blind corners and corridors, the sword is a handy weapon.

DID YOU KNOW?

Lockout was built for *Halo: CE*, where it was called 'The Cage'. This early version finally appeared in *Reach* as a Forge map.

Lockout

(Halo 2)

BLACKOUT (Halo 3 – Legendary MP)

LOCKDOWN (Halo 2: Anniversary)

A deceptively smart map, this one. In essence it's two towers, but the sniper rifle sits on the shorter tower, so even if you grab it, you don't have the height advantage. Below the towers? An open killzone and a multi-layered warren of tunnels that make for great hunting grounds with a Plasma Sword or Shotgun. Ideal for Team Slayer, the map is so brilliant because there are so many kill angles. With a sniper you can pick off enemies who think they're safe to move, but at the same time you can pull off a miraculous escape by ducking around a corner and out of an opponent's cross-hairs. Plasma grenades fly around like sticky balls of death, and there's always someone who falls off the map, all adding to the fun.

STUCK IN THE MIDDLE

Want to know the secret of winning a match on Lockout? Control this point of the map. It's central, it's sheltered and it's close to the shotgun.

WATCH YOUR STEP

Lockout is one of the easiest maps to fall out of, with walkways precariously criss-crossing over multiple levels. There will always be at least one suicide per game.

I SEE YOU

This is where the sniper rifle spawns, but thoughtfully Bungie have placed a pair of explosive barrels right behind it to prevent excessive camping.

I HEAR YOU

The gravity lift is a great way to switch levels in Lockout, but unfortunately the noise it makes ensures EVERYONE knows exactly where you are...

**DID YOU KNOW?**

This map was actually DLC in *Halo 2*, and appeared as part of the Bonus Map Pack.

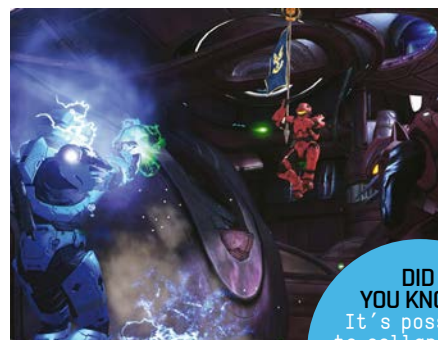
Wizard

(Halo: CE)

WARLOCK (Halo 2)

WARLORD (Halo 2: Anniversary)

Dastardly close-combat map that's perfect for Slayer or Oddball. Here there really is nowhere to hide, so whoever grabs the skull usually only gets a few seconds to charge away from the pursuing pack. The central platform always turns into a horrific scene of carnage, so smarter players flank the edges, especially during objective-based games. It's because everything is so open and exposed that this map works, although the addition of the Active Camo (in the central column, which you need to really scrap to get) adds a layer of uncertainty when you're tracking enemies. Frantic, but brilliant fun.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

It's possible to collapse the centre bridge on the Midship version of this map.

Midship

(Halo 2)

HERETIC (Halo 3)

TRUTH (Halo 5)

Bit of a Marmite map. Let us make the case for its brilliance. First off: Plasma Grenades. Fans of sticking glowing blue grenades to other people love this map because you're constantly stocked, and the number of blind corners mean you can trap enemies as they sprint around the arena. Second: it's utter chaos. Although the sword in the central platform is by far the most powerful weapon, the amount of debris packed into the level means you can often take down a sword-wielder with a basic assault rifle. The map's small size makes it ideal for smaller 2 vs 2 or 1 vs 1, but sadists will also find it a great home for Rocketball.



DID YOU KNOW?

This is one of the few Halo maps where a glitch makes it possible to flip a hefty Scorpion tank.

Blood Gulch

(Halo: CE)

COAGULATION (Halo 2)

BLOODLINE (Halo 2: Anniversary)

Painfully simple map, perfectly executed. There's a giant tower at each end, an open battlefield ripe for a Warthog jolly, and sneaky paths down the side where you can snipe from or assault the opponent's base. There's nothing like sneaking around the back during Capture the Flag, swiping the banner, and rushing out of the front door to be met by your chums in a Warthog. Or you could use the teleporter, although when enemies follow you through, you don't get too far. The worst bit? Sniper Ledge, which some access by flying there in a Banshee. Thankfully, it's such a popular spot that most players know to keep an eye on it.



DID YOU KNOW?

Did you know that you can shoot down the coconuts that grow in the trees?

Ivory Tower

(Halo 2)

REFLECTIONS (Halo: Reach)

This map really shouldn't work, but it does. The key is the sloping waterfall area that flows down from the balcony to the foyer, because it means you can enjoy mini-skirmishes on several layers. The lift accessing the back of the balcony means snipers are never safe, and the fact that a stash of rockets sit under the waterfall, bang in the middle of the map, means they're a risky prize. The best mode by far is Rapid Assault on this, and because Sticky Arming is enabled, it gets seriously tense when you're throwing bodies at the bomb to try and get it armed. The Reflection version in *Reach* looks beautiful, making it one of the most handsome Halo maps too.

SAFETY FIRST

Sneak through here and down the path to the far side of the base. There's a hole in the wall here ideal for Capture the Flag sneakiness.

GUNISHMENT

People often ignore this fixed turret here, but – especially in *Halo 3* where you can detach it – it's a powerful weapon with a great view of the map.

FRONT DOOR

It takes balls to walk straight through the front door during CTF, but if you get there inside a Warthog early on you can catch your opponents unprepared.

WHEELY GOOD

If you don't mind sticking out like a sore thumb, you can use the wheel to get yourself on the catwalks of the base. Just jump aboard.

CAMPING OUT

Tucked away at the bottom of this screenshot is Camp Froman. It's here you find one of the sniper rifles, and it's an important strategic point on the map.

DID YOU KNOW?

This was the first map to be shown from *Halo 2*, and it was playable at E3 2004.

NOW YOU SEE ME

In the *Halo 3* version (Last Resort) there's an Active Camo in the centre of the wheel. In *Halo 2* (Zanzibar) there's an Energy sword hiding in there.



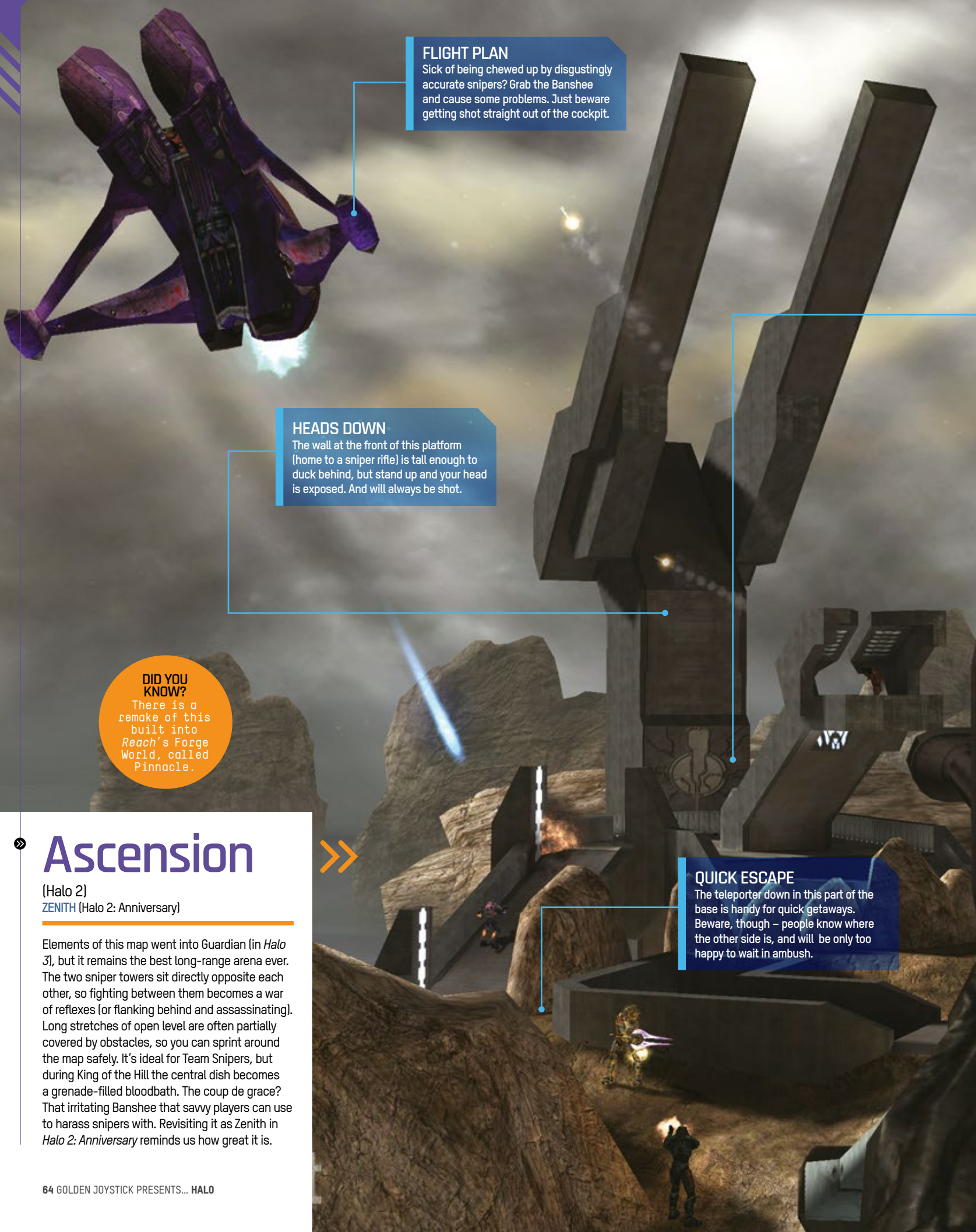
Zanzibar

(Halo 2)

LAST RESORT (Halo 3)

STONETOWN (Halo 2: Anniversary)

Possibly Halo's best base-themed level, making it ideal for One Flag or One Bomb game types. For attackers there are so many ways into the Fortress, from the small rubble hole on the right to the giant windmill in the centre, to the open entrance around the back. The rush you get from sneaking in, stealing a flag and being covered by a sniper on the seawall as you dash back to base is one of the best feelings in Halo multiplayer. As a defender? Tension comes from never knowing where the assault is coming from, and – when it happens – repelling it with quality teamwork. Or, do you sit in Camp Froman outside and pick off attackers as they try to flank?



FLIGHT PLAN

Sick of being chewed up by disgustingly accurate snipers? Grab the Banshee and cause some problems. Just beware getting shot straight out of the cockpit.

HEADS DOWN

The wall at the front of this platform (home to a sniper rifle) is tall enough to duck behind, but stand up and your head is exposed. And will always be shot.

DID YOU KNOW?

There is a remake of this built into *Reach*'s Forge World, called Pinnacle.

Ascension

(Halo 2)

ZENITH (Halo 2: Anniversary)

Elements of this map went into Guardian (in *Halo 3*), but it remains the best long-range arena ever. The two sniper towers sit directly opposite each other, so fighting between them becomes a war of reflexes (or flanking behind and assassinating). Long stretches of open level are often partially covered by obstacles, so you can sprint around the map safely. It's ideal for Team Snipers, but during King of the Hill the central dish becomes a grenade-filled bloodbath. The coup de grace? That irritating Banshee that savvy players can use to harass snipers with. Revisiting it as Zenith in *Halo 2: Anniversary* reminds us how great it is.

QUICK ESCAPE

The teleporter down in this part of the base is handy for quick getaways. Beware, though – people know where the other side is, and will be only too happy to wait in ambush.

SNIPER HUNT

In *Ascension* the player with the sniper rifle is king. There's one on each 'base', although if you're playing a round of Team Snipers, er, everyone has one.

VIOLENCE ON SCREEN

One cool feature in *Halo 2* is the tiny screen on your sniper rifle that shows off the action happening in your sights. It was mesmerising, at the time, and is still a charming touch.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

This is one of the most popular user-created maps in *Halo: Reach*'s version of Forge.

Foundation

(Halo 2)

This is just basically a big old circle of death, and is one of the more simple Halo maps. It's ideal for smaller games of Slayer, with the central arena offering cover for those brave enough to charge for the juicier weapons, while others circle the upper balcony level trying to pick them off. The side-rooms show a real spark of genius, because they offer players places to spawn where they won't be instantly picked off. Meanwhile the turrets that sit on the upper level are great for picking off players in the centre, but using them leaves you painfully exposed. Get good at this map and it's a feast of kills, but the steep learning curve means you'll get butchered for hours before you truly appreciate its beauty. Tough love.

DONT AGREE?

Join the great Halo map debate on the Golden Joystick Facebook group

The five worst maps**1 CONSTRUCT (Halo 3)**

This follows the same structure as *Foundation* (a giant ring o' death) but somehow gets it wrong. Teams follow each other around the upper ring, spamming grenades and patrolling each lift with sickening efficiency.

2 BURIAL MOUNDS (Halo 2)

This open, quite barren map lacks any real structure or form, but that merely makes it ordinary. True bastardry here comes from the fact that it's so easy to spawn-camp by sitting on the cliff opposite one team's starting spot.

3 SNOWBOUND (Halo 3)

The most played map on the *Halo 3* Beta, this combines a mixture of so-so weaponry with irritating blast-shields and an almost redundant Ghost to create something that was both over-familiar at release and unimpressive.

4 COLOSSUS (Halo 2)

The pit in the centre of this map is a miserable killing field that's tough to escape once you drop in. It's also one of the easiest maps to spam the Plasma Pistol/ Battle Rifle combo, which people do. Constantly.

5 BROADWALK (Halo Reach)

Too many exposed spots, and a bizarre shape, make this map a nightmare to navigate. Its main weakness, though, is its lack of any truly compelling features – there's just nothing really memorable here. It's just... ho hum.

It took seven years
to get from here...

THE TWO

...to here

TOWERS

"No one
believed it
could be
done..."

The amazing story of how
two Halo obsessives landed
the ultimate jump



ROCKET MEN



KEVIN MARNELL
"Mr. Monopoli"



THOMAS LASKEY
"Duelies"

H

alo's tallest towers were never built to be climbed, and yet players climbed them, launching skywards by using a mountain of grenades and a kick from a rocket-propelled Warthog. From the top of one you can make out the other tower, just beyond the sheer rock faces and the canyon separating them. It wasn't so long after the first players saw the top that one asked a question nobody could answer for almost seven years: with enough grenades and more than a smidgen of luck, could a player jump from one tower to the other?

"Anyone who plays *Halo: CE* for any length of time will see lots of things exploding, chain-reacting and flying across the screen," says original Halo tricker Randall Glass. "(And they're) usually Grunts." Glass was among the first *Halo* players on the Halo.Bungie.org fan forums to exploit these chain reactions and Grunt-launching physics.

"Someone had posted a shot of himself standing on top of Silent Cartographer, outside of the gameplay area," continues Glass. "I thought I'd

try to one-up him, so after a couple of frustrating hours of experimentation using grenades and a rocket launcher, I managed to launch a Warthog on top of the same mountains and drive around. It felt like landing on the moon."

Glass captured the setup and cut together a one-minute instructional video called 'When Pigs Fly' for the HBO forums. It was an instant hit, but his second video changed everything. 'Warthog Jump' was a series of 'Hog launches over Silent Cartographer's arch, set to Blur's Song 2 and samples from *The Matrix* and *Star Wars*. It went viral in the days before YouTube made online video distribution easy – HBO posters mirrored it and spread it to other forums, and a movement was born. It was such a hit Glass was eventually taken on a tour of Bungie's studios.

Halo trickers would use launches and other techniques to explore parts of the game Bungie never intended any of its users to see. A player can carry four frag grenades and will drop them when he dies, so two players can harvest dozens

of grenades from a level's enemies and build a stockpile. One grenade triggers nearby grenades, and the cumulative blast can be used to launch vehicles and players huge distances. With enough grenades you could propel yourself to the top of Halo's towering peaks – but what would you do when you got there?

HELLJUMPERS

In 2004 a poster on Halo.Bungie.org's forums built a website dedicated to Halo tricking. High Impact Halo became the home for players who had launched thousands of Warthogs over Silent Cartographer's arch, seen the bottom of The Maw, and crammed every vehicle into Blood Gulch's bases. On 10 September, HHH forum member Grenadesticker described his plan to launch from one tower to the other on *Halo*'s second level. He never made it, but the idea was too good to let go and others kept attempting it. Unfortunately, the act seemed impossible.

"Yeah, everyone who tried thought it was impossible," says Kevin Marnell – a

"Tower to tower was actually the first Halo 1 trick I ever attempted," says Kevin Marnell.

WAITING GAME

"I remember I launched for eight hours and it felt like not even an hour had passed," says Marnell. "I remember looking at the clock and thinking, 'Man, I just wasted an entire day.'"

young Texan known as Mr. Monopoli on the forums at High Impact Halo's successor, Jumprs.org. "But one November I came up with a new idea for the setup, and I was getting some close attempts. Suddenly everyone else started getting back into it."

Originally a *Halo 2* tricker, Marnell is too young to have been part of the original tricking community. Now 21 years old, he was aged only eight when *Halo* hit shelves in 2001. "I went with my brother to get *Halo* at launch. I didn't even like *Halo*, because he was three years older than me, and he would always beat me!" After *Halo 2*'s release in 2004, Marnell's older brother didn't get to win so often, as Marnell set about tearing the game apart.

"I liked super bouncing, sword-flying, and the old-school tricks that made *Halo 2* what it was," he explains. "Tower to Tower was actually the first *Halo 1* trick I ever attempted. I remember watching another poster, Lonestar, try it about a year before; even he decided it probably wasn't possible. But after



Just getting to the top to begin the jump requires some major skills.

seeing how close he got I figured it just had to get done."

If not impossible, going Tower to Tower was certainly improbable. Before launch you'll have to spend time on the setup – Marnell puts his first attempts at close to 20 hours. You'll need almost 130 grenades in total and the game only spawns enough on Legendary difficulty. All three of the level's Warthogs must be launched to the top of the towers with grenades – two on one, one on the other – and a further 30 grenades need to be gathered atop the launching tower, four at a time. Before launch, the two 'Hogs on the landing tower are flipped onto their noses with a grenade in exactly the right place – a matter of

horizontal – the physics were never consistent. Worse, *Halo*'s Fall Timer is always out to kill you mid-flight: fall for too long and you die. The launch has to be straight and fast and has to hit a vertical surface, or Halo considers it a suicidal plunge and even an accurate launch ends with the player's death.

"The fall timer is the biggest challenge," says Marnell. "Getting a horizontal launch was such a difficult task – that's why the Hog placement was so important. Lonestar actually walked me through my setup and I messed it up – hanging the 'Hog's rear wheels off the edge. He thought it was a bad angle but after launching for about ten minutes we knew it

"Halo jumpers would use launches and other techniques to explore areas Bungie never intended any player to see"

centimetres. It's this wall that keeps you from sliding off the platform if you're lucky enough to go in the right direction when the launch tower explodes.

MISSION IMPROBABLE

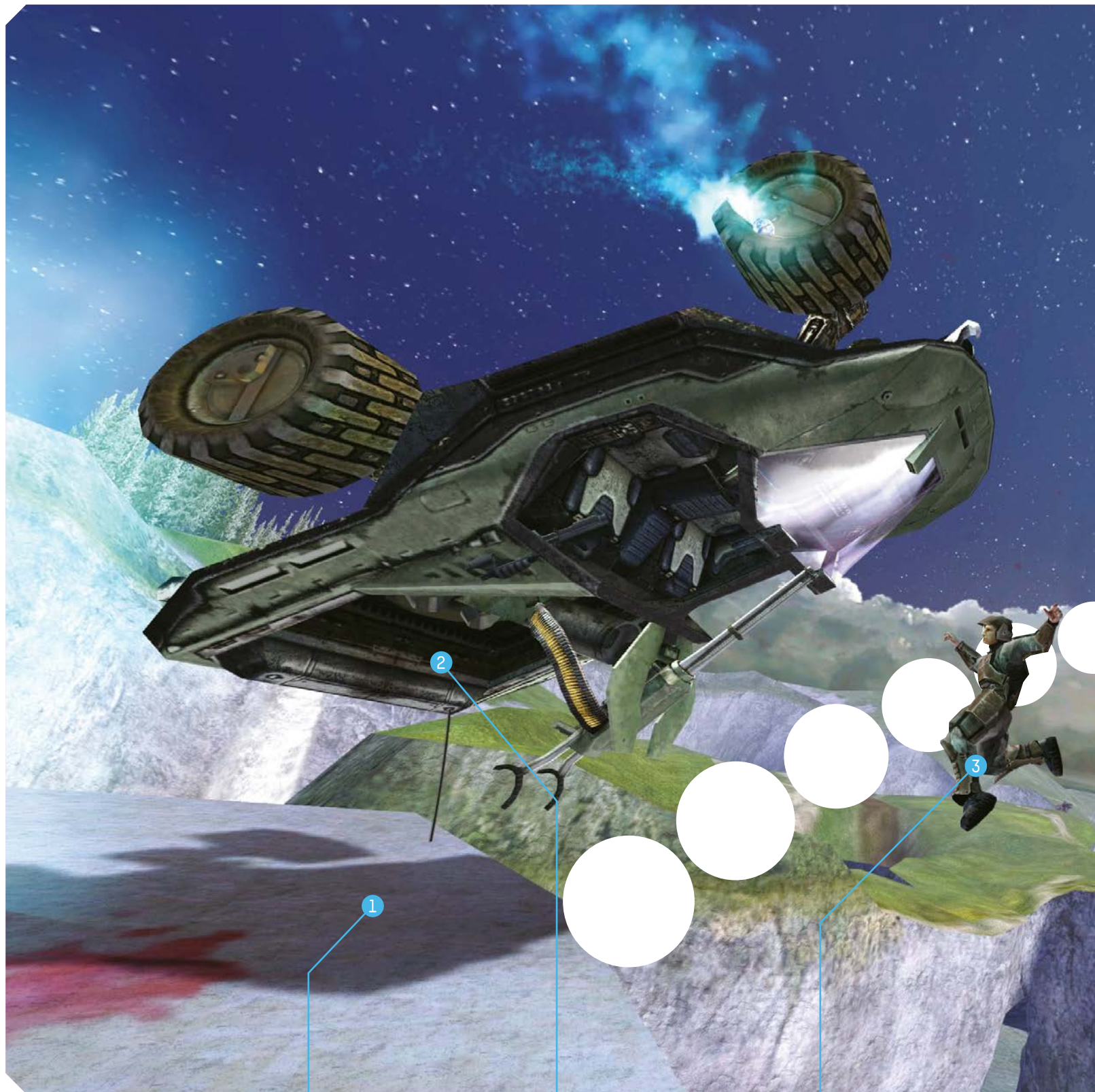
The launch itself was more a matter of luck before Marnell began work on the problem. Trickers pile grenades on top the launch tower and place a Warthog between themselves and the blast, using the force from the flying 'Hog to propel themselves across the gap. Riding an unpredictable explosion, players went vertical more often than

worked. Before that, it was like a one in one hundred chance that you'd get a horizontal launch, but the new 'Hog placement allowed for much more consistent horizontal ones."

In the end Marnell had the setup down to under ten hours – six at his best – and was leaving his Xbox on for days and weeks at a time, using his tower-top checkpoint to launch over and over again. Then in January 2011, Marnell learned that Tower To Tower had become a race.

Thomas 'Duelies' Laskey was 18 when he started escaping *Halo 2*'s





• Preparation

Prior to their flight, Laskey and Marnell gather 30 grenades atop the launching tower - that's around eight launches from the ground, depositing four grenades at a time. Player Two will snipe Player One, dumping his grenades on the tower.

• 'Hog wild

Direct exposure to the blast is lethal, so the final ground launch deposits the Warthog on the launch tower. Grenades are piled up and the 'Hog aimed at the opposing tower with its rear wheels dangled over the edge. Player Two forces a checkpoint.

• Launching

Atop the Warthog, Laskey and Marnell must throw a sticky grenade to trigger the frag pile, then jump onto the 'Hog's turret. The brutal snap when the grenades explode will fling them from the turret and propel them towards the distant tower.

Leap of Faith

Hitting a tiny bullseye from five hundred metres, Halo's ultimate stunt is more art than science



4 In flight

Getting a 'hog to go vertical is comparatively easy, but Laskey and Marnell aim for a low, long trajectory. If everything goes to plan, they will catch sight of glitching scenery far below as they see the world from an angle no player was ever supposed to.

5 Landing

Prior to launch, Laskey and Marnell will have prepared two Warthogs on the landing tower to form a safety net. Landing feet-first is fatal. Anything but a perfect impact on a horizontal surface will send you back to your checkpoint.

multiplayer maps. Like Marnell, Laskey wasn't a *Halo 1* tricker, but Lonestar and Marnell's discovery of a consistent launch had opened the door for a player to be the first to go Tower to Tower.

"When Kevin started doing it he got really close quite a few times," says the 24-year-old Laskey, another regular on Jumprs.org. "I was actually gonna try it then, but I was in my final semester of college so I didn't have much time. I had to put it on hold until May."

Marnell, meanwhile, was launching as often as he could. "I think I did the setup probably 15 times," he says. "I'd take a couple of weeks off and come back to it, but when High Impact Halo closed back in April I really wanted to get it done. For about a month straight I had my Xbox on. I just did it over and over but I couldn't get it."

"The longest I left my console on was two weeks, and I thought that was maybe a little too long. I've had power outages countless times. One time the power went out within like ten minutes of finishing my setup. One time I threw a grenade at my pile, and the second my grenade exploded I got a checkpoint. Another time my dad thought he was doing me a favour by turning my Xbox off. I was... kinda disappointed."

FAILURE TO LAUNCH

He kept launching. "In April I think I hit the tower, like, ten times within an hour and every time I'd just die on impact," he says. "I hit the 'Hogs too, which we thought would let me survive. I reached a point where I thought it wasn't possible. If it were I would have landed it by then."

Marnell took May off and returned to the challenge in June. In all, he captured over 200 hours of footage on his laptop, minus the lengthy setups. That's 25 eight-hour working days – a month's work. That's 72,000 ten-second launches.

But it was a race Marnell lost. Laskey attempted his setup only three times. "I actually ended up watching Lonestar's entire setup," he explains. "It helped me figure out what I needed to do, and then Kevin inspired me to keep doing the trick. The first time I did the setup, it took me about twelve hours, then I left my Xbox on for almost a week."

Maine resident Laskey spent spring wrapping up his finals in Engineering and went back to launching in late May. "Kevin was doing the setup in about six hours at the end," he says, "but I wanted to be more careful and not get anything wrong. I might spend over an hour on one launch if it wasn't working."

Laskey estimates that he launched himself around one thousand times, but that's a conservative estimate.

From late May to early June his Xbox had been powered on for five long days, and on the morning of 4 June he was losing his confidence in the accuracy of his setups. "I was actually considering reviewing the whole thing. I just felt like I had the position of the grenade pile wrong and I couldn't get low launches. Most of them were ending on that cliff behind the tower, or it would be a weak launch and I'd hit the cliff in front of the tower." Then, on the evening of 4 June, after almost seven years, Thomas Laskey was the first Halo player to jump from Tower To Tower.

HAPPY LANDINGS

"I think I was really close to tripping the fall timer," says Laskey. "I was surprised I lived. I ended up hitting a corner of the tower and it bounced me up. There's a slight incline. It slowed me down enough to make it. It didn't really hit me all at once; I landed on it and I didn't really think about it, then a few seconds later I realised I was on the other tower and I was alive. I was speechless, basically; I just checked my capture card to make sure it was recording."

"I actually took time before I reported it. I spent all day Sunday editing the video and I uploaded it Monday morning. It was a surprise to everyone except Kevin – I told him over Skype."

For a moment, Marnell didn't believe him. "And then I didn't know whether to

be mad or happy. I was excited that it had finally been landed but then I was disappointed that it wasn't me who got it first. I wasn't gonna give up, so I launched for, like, eight hours a day for the next day and a half."

Marnell jumped from Tower to Tower on Monday, landing perfectly on the wall he had built from Warthogs on the opposite platform. "I looked over at my laptop to make sure it was recording, then I just stood up and walked away. In the clip, the launch takes ten seconds and then there's another 30 seconds of my character just standing there. I didn't know what to do so I walked to my refrigerator and got a drink – orange juice – and walked back to my Xbox to make sure I was still on the tower."

"I wasn't really that disappointed," he says, when asked about coming second. "With the whole community of trickers it's not really about 'hey, I did this first!' We generally just try to accomplish things together, but at the same time I was thinking 'man, that should have been me!'"

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY

Both men agree about who had the better landing – "I don't want to sound cocky, but I think I did," says Marnell. "Yeah, he did," agrees Laskey. "But I don't know – what's the 'better landing' anyway? I guess not taking any damage, and he did that. I guess the

next challenge for me is to do it in the new Halo game..."

In November 2011, *Halo Anniversary* introduced a new generation of players to the first Halo. Identical to the original in every way, the same glitches and tricks exploited by Marnell and Laskey in *Combat Evolved* are possible in *Halo Anniversary*, even with the new HD character and vehicle models turned on.

Marnell feels that *Anniversary* restores aspects of Halo that have been lost as the franchise has grown and devs have become more militant about quality assurance. "There's a bunch of people who never experienced *Halo: Combat Evolved* and *Halo 2*, and they think *Halo 3* and *Halo Reach* are the best. And honestly, I don't think they're very good games production-wise or glitch-wise. Halo was this open world but now there's bouncy elastic barriers which keep you in and force you to go in one direction the whole game."

Laskey agrees. "I don't think Halo 1 had any obvious barriers or killzones at all, or not any that mattered anyway. I understand Bungie didn't want anyone to use glitches to their advantage in multiplayer, but in campaign they put a lot of barriers in and it's really hard to get around that stuff."

It seems wrong to complain about restrictions when Halo was never built for this, of course, but the tricking scene is so vital, so necessary to



Even 10 years on, there's still so much to be impressed by in *Combat Evolved*.

The jump is impossible to land without a Warthog.



STICKY GRENADES

When Laskey made his first attempts on the original Xbox he found stockpiled grenades would vanish. The launch is only possible on 360 where extra RAM keeps them on the map.

These shots of Halo give you a sense of how skilled the men had to be to even scale the tower.

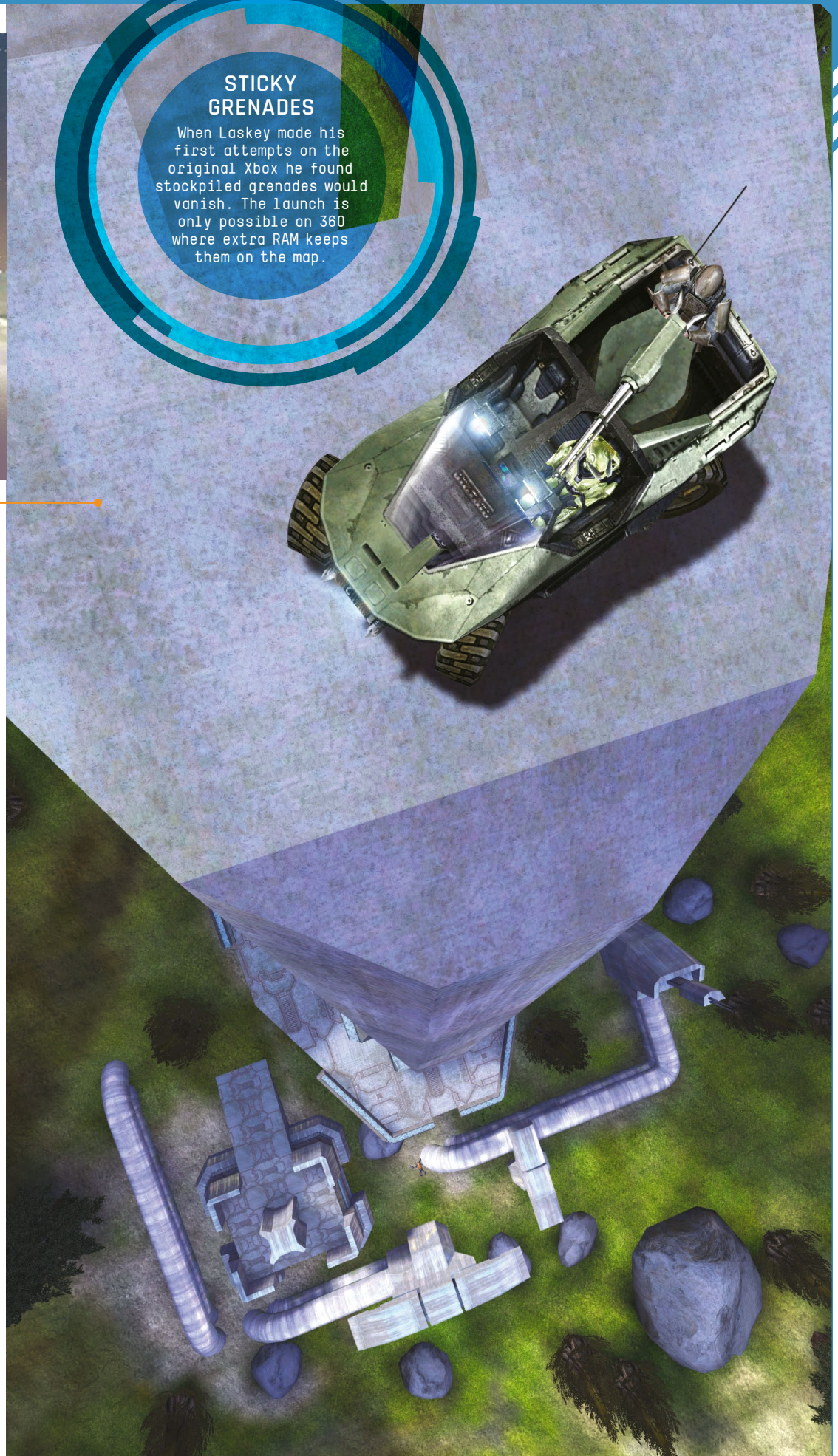
the new game's authenticity that Microsoft's team at 343 Industries and Saber assembled *Anniversary* with all the old tricks and glitches in mind.

LEAP OF FAITH

"Every jump we've tried so far has worked," observes 343's Frank O'Connor, speaking to Halo.Bungie.org. "One of the big tests is the Tower to Tower jump – we hadn't thought that was possible, so we didn't try it out; but now that we've seen it, we're going to give it a shot. We understand that a significant chunk of our audience for this product will be using it for these kinds of tricks, and we made sure that they'd be able to do most, if not all, the things they could do on the original."

Halo defined the Xbox but it was the players who defined *Halo*. Ten years after it first hit shelves, the game's final, most difficult challenge was invented and accomplished by players who created a new way to play. "It's truly amazing to me how this game that was just designed for shooting enemies and driving vehicles can also be used for so much else," says Laskey. "I love seeing what I can do with that – doing things the game designers didn't intend."

For Marnell, the appeal of tricking is even simpler than that. "I like that you actually have to try," he explains. "Some games you just play on autopilot and nothing really matters. Glitching involves actually making the decision to do something. People think glitches are random but it's very rare we do something randomly. We set out to do something, we know what we're gonna do, and we get it done." 🕊







The Last Stand

Meet the players who kept Halo 2 multiplayer alive, long after Microsoft shut it down



The 14th of April, 2010 was the end of an long, violent, hugely enjoyable era. The original Xbox Live, the service that proved – mostly thanks to *Halo 2*'s popularity – that online multiplayer didn't have to be PC-exclusive, was shut down so Microsoft could focus on its Xbox 360-based successor. In the final days there was a sudden surge in player numbers on classic Xbox games like *Counter-Strike*, *Mechwarrior* and of course, *Halo 2*. But when the clock finally ticked past midnight and the games went dark, a handful of players realised they were still connected – and would be for as long as they left their consoles on.





Thankfully, *Halo 2*'s multiplayer finally returned in *Halo: The Master Chief Collection*.



Ah, the joys of the energy sword beatdown.

We have no idea why Spartans love flags so much.



Halo Anniversary brings the Banshee back. Whoop.

Pick a hand, Mr Elite. Preferably the left one.



» For another three and a half weeks — until system errors and power failures finally dwindled their number to zero on 11th May — that's exactly what they did. Not even the temptation of early access to the then-beginning *Halo: Reach* beta could lure them from their final, epic run. But just who were these *Halo 2* superfans? Why did they choose to play so long, and what was the experience like? We interviewed five of the final few, identified by their GamerTags, to find out.

When did you realise you could keep playing *Halo 2* after Microsoft's cut-off?

HiredN00bs Well, the cut-off didn't happen exactly at the end of the day of the 14th. People were still able to sign on for some time on the 15th. I left my (original) Xbox on that night, and the next day I saw posts from people who said that they couldn't sign on anymore. I turned on my monitor and I was still going! I did not originally plan to stay on past the cutoff; in fact, I figured the system would automatically boot us out of the game at some point.

What was it that made you decide to hold out for so long?

xxBooker Dxx I loved *Halo 2*. It was the game that got me on Xbox Live. I just wanted to play until I could not.

HiredN00bs It was a combination of novelty, curiosity, and nostalgia.

"It was special to be able to give *Halo 2* a proper send-off and show Bungie and Microsoft how much we love it"



A majestic end. But then came the teabagging.

Agent Windex For the memories, for the love of the game, and just because *Halo 2* is so much fun to play.

TBC I had not planned on it whatsoever. The first few days, I stayed on because I had logged in with two of my friends, and each night we talked and always decided, "Let's play again one more time tomorrow." I also had decided to start streaming so I could share the experience. Every day in my [live Internet] stream, I was asked if I'd keep going, and when it came to calling it a night, I couldn't bring it to an end. Eventually it transitioned into, "OK, I'm going to keep playing and keeping this alive for however long I can." It also helped a lot since I'm deaf and wasn't privy to the in-game voice chat, so that some of the final few players started coming into my stream and talking to me. Players were thanking me. It gave me an even stronger appreciation of the game and the community.

How difficult was it to keep all your consoles powered on and connected to Xbox Live for all that time?

Agent Windex It was really difficult to stay online. I had to survive two storms! I really have no idea how the electricity didn't go out.

TBC Since I hadn't planned on this at all, I had shutdown enabled, so every night I'd have to put a rubber band on my controller to keep it from going idle while I slept. Weather was really cool in my area so I'd have the windows open and my ceiling fan going, keeping my room at a constant 70 degrees.

It must have been quite odd in the game at that time. What did you guys do in *Halo 2* for all of those extra weeks?

Agent Windex Well, for the first week, we mainly played Big Team Battle, but when the numbers got too small to play that, we did customs mainly.

TBC If we had 6-8 players, we'd play Team Training and/or Rumble Pit. If we had more (12-16), we always wanted to play Big Team Battles. Occasionally we'd play custom games like Zombies, MLG, Hide and Seek, Tower of Power, Tremors, Troy and glitch our way out of the maps.

HiredN00bs An interesting thing to note during all this: the *Halo 2* matchmaking system continued to work, even after Bungie's statistic-collecting servers had been unplugged.

Can you remember how were you finally kicked off *Halo 2*?

xxBooker Dxx I was kicked off due to a power failure.



xxMAKDADYxx Ethernet turned off due to home remodelling.

HiredN00bs Stupidity took me out of the game. I was carrying my gamertag on a USB stick, took it to a friend's house to show him the *Reach* beta and instinctively logged into my account. I clicked the guide button to abort, but it had already booted me off *Halo 2*.

TBC On April 23 at 2:24 am, my Xbox froze. I knew it was coming since I could smell the metal smouldering earlier that day. People in my stream cried when they saw it happen live, which really touched me, that a game could bring us to a point where we became so emotionally invested in it.

What did this experience mean to you?

xxMAKDADYxx It was special to be able to give *Halo 2* a proper send-off and show Bungie and Microsoft how much we love it.

TBC I am really fortunate to have met and made friends out of the players/fans who came and supported us in our dedication. If it wasn't for my stream, I would have honestly never become close to the players/fans due to communication barriers.

HiredN00bs I'm honestly surprised at all the media attention it got. I met a friend of mine who lives in New York for brunch last Sunday, and he told me he read about it on CNET. There was a point where I felt like I was done, ready to log off, but then all of the messages started to pour in from all over Xbox Live encouraging me to keep going.

What does *Halo 2* mean to you?

TBC College-years memories. My deaf friends and I started with [Halo 1] and about 10-15 of us got the midnight release of *Halo 2*. There were LANs, MLG events, parties, jokes, friendships, epic games, and so much more.

HiredN00bs From a gameplay perspective, it's my least favorite of the franchise (though that's kinda like saying vanilla ice cream is your least favorite in Neapolitan — it's still delicious ice cream). It was the online play, and the smooth online interface the game incorporated that really sucked me in. I mean it many ways, *Halo 2* made Xbox Live what it is today.

Will you stay in touch with your fellow *Halo 2* holdouts?

Agent Windex Of course, I've played with them in *Reach* multiple times.

xxMAKDADYxx Definitely. The final group was very close and had a lot of fun. ☹

The Books and Comics

Want to know the stories behind the games? Get thee to a library and dig up this lot...



7. Uprising

A four issue comic book collection
(2007-2009)

Brian Michael Bendis

A heavy hitting tale, revolving around the Covenant attack on Cleveland, Ohio during the invasion of Earth. Covenant forces attempt to hunt down a mysterious key said to be hidden there.



11. Helljumper

A five-strong comic collection
(2009-2010) Peter David

A group of Orbital Drop Shock Troopers (ODSTs) from the 105th, otherwise known as Helljumpers, touch down on colony planet Ariel in a bid to discover the source of a mysterious distress beacon.



1. The Fall of Reach

The first Halo novel and prequel to Halo: Combat Evolved
(2001) Eric Nylund

This first Halo novel reveals how a six year old John-117 came to be enrolled in the Spartan-II project. It also details the first few blows between humans and Covenant as well as the first meeting of the Master Chief and Cortana.



4. Ghosts of Onyx

A standalone tale and the fourth Halo novel
(2006) Eric Nylund

A celebrated Spartan, Kurt-051, begins training a new batch of Spartan-IIIs on the planet Onyx, only for things to go a bit wrong when a group of trainees goes missing in an ancient Forerunner ruin...



8. The Cole Protocol

The sixth Halo novel
(2008) Tobias S. Buckell

Lieutenant Keyes travels to the outer colonies near Hesiod, during the first days of the Human-Covenant war, when the location of Earth is kept a closely guarded secret via the Cole Protocol, wherein all data pertaining to Earth is closely guarded or destroyed.



12. A Fistful of Arrows

Fan-made graphic novel, set after the events of Halo: Reach
(2010) Levi Hoffmeier

Spartan-III soldier Jun-A266 and the Noble Team successfully rescue a female hostage. However, the hostage has an agenda of her own, triggering a series of events that test the loyalty of Noble Team, both to their mission and to each other.



2. The Flood

Novelisation of Halo: Combat Evolved
(2003) William C. Dietz

Following the plot of the first game, The Flood begins in the year 2552 as the UNSC ship Pillar of Autumn discovers the first Halo ringworld. A battle with the Covenant there leads to the release of The Flood, the infamous parasitic race of zombie-esque monsters. Good work everyone.



5. Halo: The Graphic Novel

Various authors tackle the Haloverse
Various (2006)

Four stories detailing the events in and around the first Halo game leading up to Halo 2. Deals with events on both the human and Covenant sides of the conflict.



9. Halo Wars: Genesis

Comic included with the Limited Edition of Halo Wars
(2009) Phil Noto, Graeme Devine and Eric Nylund

The UNSC attempt to discover the meaning behind a Covenant message during initial contact with the unfriendly bunch. The events of this graphic novel lead up to the creation of the Cole Protocol.



13. Blood Line

Five-part comic also known as Halo: Spartan Black
(2010) Fred Van Lente

Spartans and Covenant alike are stranded on an isolated moon, holding host to a dangerous indigenous entity. To survive, these old enemies will have to team up to tackle the new foe. Easier said than done.



3. First Strike

Bridging the gap between Halo: Combat Evolved and Halo 2
(2003) Eric Nylund

After the destruction of the first Halo, Master Chief and Cortana meet up with other survivors and attempt to waylay the Covenant, who are now headed towards Earth. A good primer for Halo 2.



6. Contact Harvest

Fifth novel, focusing on back-story
(2007) Joseph Staten

Set 27 years before Halo: Combat Evolved, this book follows the cigar-chomping Staff Sergeant Avery Johnson, who appears in the games, as the human race first comes into contact with the Covenant.



10. Halo: Evolutions

A collection of short stories
(2009) Eric Nylund, Tobias S. Buckell, B.K. Evenson, Jonathon Goff, Frank O'Connor, Eric Naab

A collection of 11 short stories told from various perspectives throughout the Halo universe, detailing the conflict between human and Covenant forces.



14. Halo: Fall of Reach - Bootcamp

Comic based on the first Halo novel
(2010) Brian Reed and Felix Ruiz

The Spartan-II program launches, as Dr Casey and Lt. Keyes observe the boy who will become the legendary John-117. He is kidnapped and brought to Reach, where his life as a Spartan is about to begin.



15. Halo: Fall of Reach – Covenant

Second arc in the Fall of Reach series
(2011) Brian Reed and Felix Ruiz

Charts John-117's first battle with the Covenant, as he learns how to become the ultimate warrior and discover the truth behind his adversaries actions, before an entire planet becomes glass.



19. The Thursday War

The second novel in the Kilo-Five trilogy
(2012) Karen Traviss

Picking up where *Glasslands* left off, *The Thursday War* tells the story of how human and Covenant alike deal with infighting and rebellion.



23. Silentium

Third and final novel in The Forerunner Saga
(2013) Greg Bear

Set during the final years of the Forerunner empire, Ur-Didact and the Librarian – a husband and wife team – learn the origins of the Flood, and must commit an incredible atrocity to stop the deadly parasite infecting the universe.



27. New Blood

Short novel exploring the origins of Spartan Buck
(2015) Matt Forbeck

Edward Buck reminisces about his military career and receives an incredible offer for him and his squad to join the Spartan-IV programme. When a fellow Spartan is killed on a space station, Buck and his fellow trainees must track down the murderer.



16. Cryptum

First of the Forerunner Saga trilogy
(2011) Greg Bear

Tells of a young Forerunner, Bornstellar-Makes-Eternal-Lasting, who journeys to Earth 100,000 years before the events of the games. This tale begins to reveal the terrible events which lead to the construction of the Halo Arrays and the destruction of the Forerunners.



20. A Sangheili's War Is Never Over

Fan-made novel, set after Halo 3
(2012) Levi Hoffmeier

With its ships at war, the Sangheili council worry that the unguarded Sanghelios will be invaded by Jiralhanae forces. The Arbiter challenges a Jiralhanae champion to a duel. The fate of a world is in his hands...



24. Escalation

Graphic novel series set after Halo 4
(2013 – present) Christopher Schlerf, Brian Reed & Duffy Boudreau

Told in multiple arcs that are set between *Halo 4* and *Halo 5: Guardians*, this series mainly focuses on the crew of the UNSC Infinity. It explores how the Chief, and the entire universe, have been effected by the dramatic events of *Halo 4*.



28. Hunters in the Dark

Novel exploring the origins of Spartan Vale
(2015) Peter David

When deadly AI Tragic Solitude activates the Halo Array in an attempt to rid the Milky Way of "destructive species" including the Sangheili and humanity, future *Halo 5* hero Olympia Vale must use her diplomatic skills to try and save countless lives.



17. Glasslands

First novel in the Kilo-Five trilogy
(2011) Karen Traviss

Picks up after *Ghosts of Onyx*, telling the story of how Dr Halsey, the brilliant mind behind the Spartan-II project, attempts to bring home game changing research from the forerunner shield world Onyx.



21. Halo: Fall of Reach – Invasion

Final arc of the Fall of Reach series
(2012) Brian Reed and Felix Ruiz

As the Covenant begin their invasion of Reach, Spartan John is given his Mark V armour and meets his AI companion, Cortana, for the first time. Together they're pushed to breaking point...



25. Mortal Dictata

Final novel in the Kilo-Five trilogy
(2014) Karen Traviss

The Covenant war is over, but ONI face a terrible consequence of the Spartan-II programme. Black ops squad Kilo-Five must test where their loyalties lie after the father of a Spartan comrade, hunting the truth of his daughters abduction, threatens to glass Earth's cities...



29. Last Light

Novel about Blue Team under the leadership of Spartan Fred-104
(2015) Troy Denning

Maverick detective Veta Lopis investigates murders on the planet Gao. Brutal killings start after the arrival of a UNSC research battalion protected by Blue Team, led by the legendary Fred-104. Could there be a serial killer hiding in the Spartan ranks?



18. Primordium

Second book in the Forerunner Saga trilogy
(2012) Greg Bear

After the dramatic events of *Halo 3*, an ONI monitor named Chakas begins to reveal the story of his previous life as a human, fighting to survive when banished to Halo installation 07.



22. Initiation

A three-part series exploring the origins of Commander Sarah Palmer
(2013) Brian Reed

The UNSC flagship Infinity is under attack. Sarah Palmer and her comrade Spartans must fight to keep control of the ship. With every Spartan aboard in mortal danger, Commander Palmer faces the ultimate test of her abilities.



26. Broken Circle

A novel that explores the origins and great schism of the Covenant
(2014) John Shirley

Before they united and became the Covenant, the Prophets and the Elites were two alien species in bitter war over the sacred artefacts left by the Forerunners. This novel explores the conflict and roots of their coalition.



30. Saint's Testimony

Short story about the trial of an AI
(2015) Frank O'Connor

Smart AI Iona is one week away from legal termination to avoid the data corruption condition known as 'rampancy' that appears after an AI has exceeded seven years of its lifespan. Iona fights this decision in a trial for her life.



Forged for greatness

Halo's level editor is the greatest ever to grace a console shooter. We speak to a pair of veteran Forgers about the journey from Halo 3's breakthrough Forge mode to that of the upcoming Halo 5: Guardians

W

e all know what to expect from Halo at this stage, right? A story that takes you to exotic planets laced with aeons-old Forerunner architecture. Spectacular battles that arise from proven weapon balancing, marvellous layouts and smart, volatile AI. A multiplayer component that's equal parts chaos and finesse. The details may alter from release to release but the broad strokes haven't changed drastically since *Halo 2* turned Halo's multiplayer into a global phenomenon. But there is *another* Halo beneath all this, a Halo that's in a state of constant flux. A Halo quite unlike any other.

It's a Halo that bends the beloved fundamentals of the main game beyond recognition, chewing up map layouts and tweaking the physics, playing around with colour palettes, damage settings and objectives. It's a Halo in which you're as likely to find yourself chasing a floating island through a city in a perpetually accelerating Warthog as shooting another Spartan in the face. This is the Halo that exists care of Forge mode, the accessible yet complex level editing suite that first saw light of day in *Halo 3*. Originally intended as a way for multiplayer obsessives to make small balancing adjustments to layouts, it has led to an avalanche of custom modes and map variants, all available for free via player-to-player fileshare or, if the player creation in question is especially impressive, in official matchmaking.

Some of Forge's more competition-minded variants are solid enough to stand alongside the pick of those crafted by 343 and Bungie - game types like the legendary Grifball from Rooster Teeth, a bruising take on rugby featuring Grav Hammers and Energy Swords, or Phreak Nation's Ninjanaut, in which everybody teams up against one player armed with infinite Active

Over the following pages you'll find a few of the weirder and more wonderful custom modes and maps from Halo's history. To sample them, look up the associated user's Gamertag while playing the Halo game listed, and access the fileshare. Bear in mind that you might need to download a map and a mode separately, and that we can't guarantee these maps will be available forever.



1. Trash Compactor

Created by Final Chaos
Get it from GrammyXBL (Halo: TMCC)

A frantic Infection variant in which the zombies knock an inexhaustible supply of objects (including Phantom tanks, Ghost bikes and so forth) down a chute lined with mancannons, while the human players try to dodge the resulting lethal debris. A work of comedy genius.

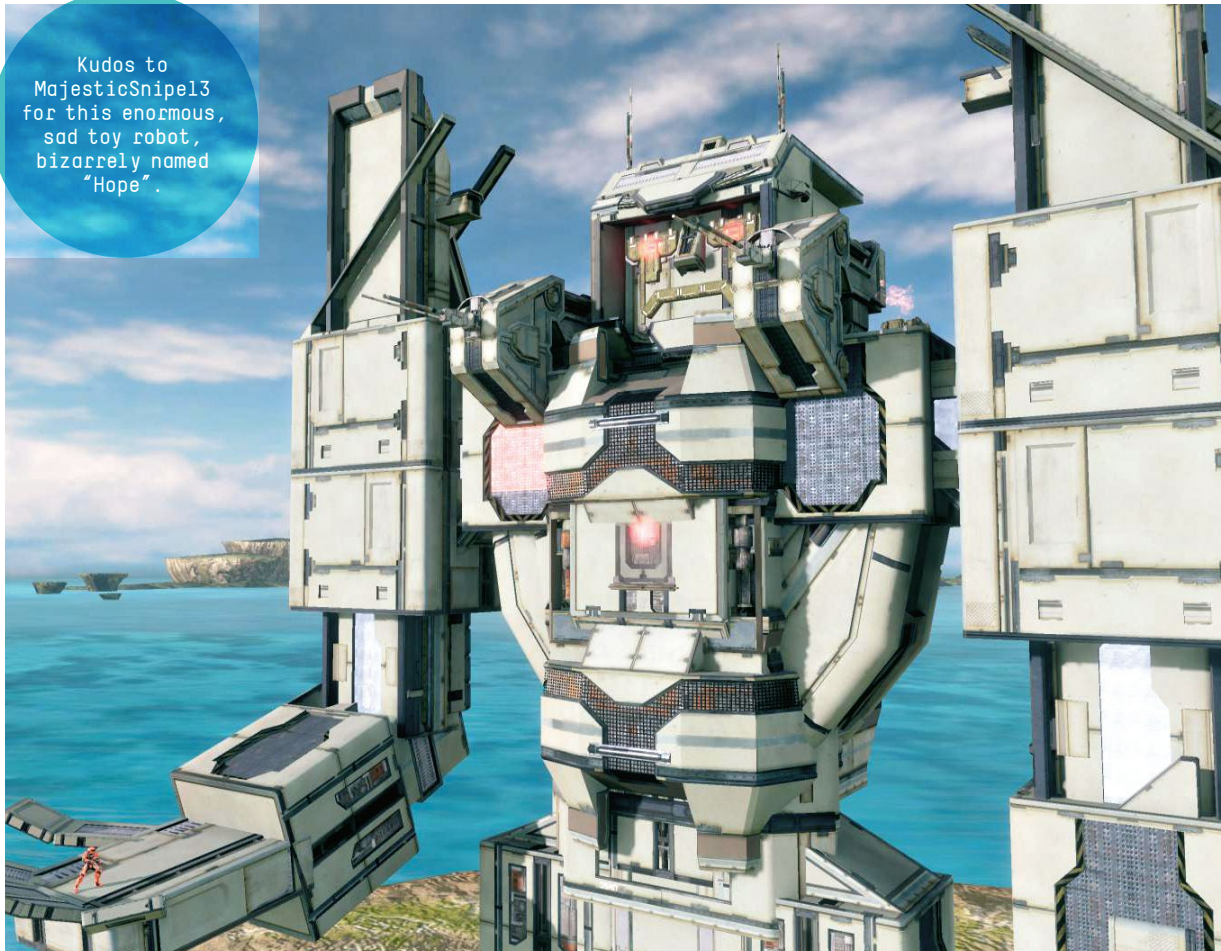


2. Armor Walkers

Created by MetaWaddleDee
Get it from MetaWaddleDee (Halo: Reach)

Best played on the custom map Grab and Hold - available for download from the same user - this exploits a glitch to let you equip the vehicle-killing Armor Lock ability alongside Evade. One side tries to use their now invulnerable body to stop the other's Warthogs making it to an exit. Crunch.

Kudos to MajesticSnipe13 for this enormous, sad toy robot, bizarrely named "Hope".



Camo and super-speed. Others have been thrown together for the giggles, like TurbTastic's Beer Pong, in which the ping-pong balls are swapped for Spartans riding Mongoose quad bikes.

There are Forge maps that pay homage to classic environments from other games, like *Super Mario Kart*'s psychedelic Rainbow Road or Dust from *Counter-Strike*. There are maps that push into other genres: tricky bite-sized platformers with variable gravity, or single player RPG maps complete with levelling systems, weapons upgrades and door puzzles. And of course, there are maps that are assembled simply to make something dramatic or beautiful. A hundred-metre-high sculpture of a Skirmisher, frozen in mid-gallop, say, or a Forerunner Dreadnought, dangling in the atmosphere of a Halo ring.

FORGING AHEAD

Each successive game in the main series has added new tools, objects and canvases to Forge's arsenal, and the result is a dedicated editing community that numbers thousands of players worldwide. Some of the most committed, talented Forgers are effectively designers in their own right, working off-site. "There is quite a lot of similarity between what we

do as hobbyists and what they do as professionals," observes Nicholas "Warholic" Alexander, a member of the secretive Community Cartographers group, which works with 343's Sustain team to select Forge maps for the long-running (and reliably crazy) Action Sack competitive playlist.

"The difference is that we don't have the same tools, but with enough time and dedication, we can create a map that can play just as well, if not better, than a developer-made map. It just takes the right amount of time and the right talent." Among those prepared to go the distance is Sean Hodgins, the veteran Forger behind popular YouTube personality Mr Pokephile. "I get home from school or I get home from work, and the first thing I do is sit down, switch on the Xbox and Forge for a few hours," he tells us.

Hodgins and Alexander hail from two very different backgrounds. Based in Toronto, Canada, Hodgins is working towards a degree in film,

while Alexander is a fine arts graduate who runs a gallery in New York. Both came to level editing in Halo via similar paths, however - by playing the Tony Hawk games, which feature a robust skatepark editor. "I noticed that people were taking it and manipulating it to create obstacle courses or puzzle maps where you didn't necessarily rely on your skateboard," recalls Hodgins. "And I really got interested in that, so I started making maps in Tony Hawk games, and it just naturally [translated] to Halo."

As the hidden depth of Forge's tools made itself apparent, what began as a casual interest gradually evolved into something more enduring. "I had no idea that I had any natural inclination for level design, until it got round to *Halo 3* and *Halo: Reach*," comments Alexander.

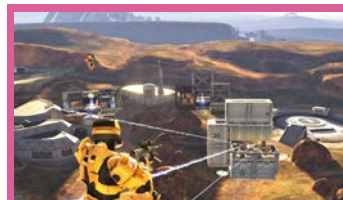
Hodgins' first Forge map for *Halo 3* - created at a friend's house while his own Xbox 360 was away being repaired - "was a terrible, terrible version of High Ground, where we blocked off all the entrances to the main base, and

"Some of the most committed, talented Forgers are effectively Halo designers in their own right, only working off-site"

Created by AeroStrike 04, the Promethean Battle Wagon is Godzilla with a dash of Optimus Prime.



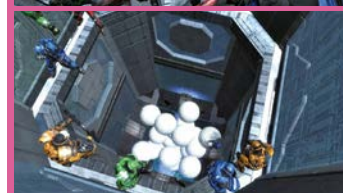
sasytre500's towering statue of the Master Chief captures Halo 2's promotional art in all its squatting majesty.



3. Duck Hunt/Clay Shooting

Created by WetBeaver
Get it from WetBeaver (Halo 3)

A bit like the timeless English sport of clay pigeon shooting, only the pigeons are infected Spartans with sniper rifles who have been launched from man cannons, and the shooters are sitting in Gauss cannon turrets. Much more fun than clay pigeons.



4. Flushing Toilet

Created by Darth Human
Get it from Darth Human (Halo: Reach)

An absolutely demented mix of map and mode variants. Teams struggle to climb the inside of a massive cistern that gradually fills with giant golfballs. At intervals the cistern "flushes", killing anybody who hasn't reached a ledge. Imagine if this was somehow considered canon.

We're not quite sure who made this, but we suspect Nintendo wants a word.



» made it an Infection variant, where it was one-shot-kill for the zombies. And people hated it. They absolutely hated it. Because the zombies would just mindlessly run at the gate, and you'd just mow them down - there was no way for them to get in. It was horrible." Alexander had a comparatively promising start, thanks in no small part to some input from a New Zealand-based Forging guru, 'WALDO the lemon'. One of his very first maps, a "very basic" symmetrical affair with some ambitious player movement options, was featured by the community, and placed second in a map-building contest.

NUTS AND BOLTS

So how do you go about dreaming up and bolting together a Forge map? "For me personally, I start with an epicentre, the middle point of the map, and I like to define that space as much as possible," Alexander explains. "And I guess the 'neurons' or routes just spread from the centre outward, and I eventually design the bases, the outer perimeter of the map. But for some reason I start in the centre, as if it's the most important part. It's not, but that's where I start."

Another good beginner's tip is to put the layout in the hands of fellow players as early as possible. "Player feedback is the top priority when it comes to Forging maps," says Hodgins. "You're constantly testing them. You're playing the same map four or five times over, multiple times a week. You're constantly getting notes on what to fix, so you fix those things, you go back, you do the process over and over again."

The feedback process has naturally become easier as the internet has grown more sophisticated but, thanks to the series' mammoth sales success, Forge had a friendly and constructive community in place from the off. "[At the time of *Halo 3*] YouTube wasn't really a thing," Hodgins says. "Video capture cards weren't around as much as they are now. So people would just upload their maps to ForgeHub.com with screenshots, and there would be comments and reviews."

A topic of much debate in the Forge community is how to strike the delicate balance between the aesthetic appeal of a map and its purely functional elements. All Forge creations must work within a memory budget that limits the number of objects in place - though there are exploits that allow you to get around this - and more detailed creations may experience frame rate drops that hinder competitive play. How much you should allocate to making a map look good depends a little on the game type it's for. Infection (now known as Flood), for example, has elements of horror, and is thus best played on maps deliberately designed to chill.

THE GHOST HOUSE

Both Alexander and Hodgins have found success with Infection variants. Alexander's Sewers map for *Halo: Reach* is a fiendish two-level affair: zombie players are able to run around below

"A topic of much debate in the Forge community is striking the balance between the aesthetic appeal of a map and its functional elements"

xenopsyche's
Vastet is truly
terrifying.
Imagine playing
Territories in the
shadow of that.



the surface of the water, leaping up to eviscerate human players (who don't have access to motion trackers) as they advance cautiously through the maze. Hodgins's Temple, meanwhile, is laid out to encourage tactical planning among both human and infected players, with well-judged hold-out locations and some cunning escape routes.

"[I designed] it so that it was fun to play as a human and also as an infected player, which is a big struggle for a lot of Infection maps," comments Hodgins. "It's a lot of fun as a human, but the moment you become infected you're just pushing on until you kill the other human players. So when it flips around you get the fun of a human trying to stay alive and, as a zombie, the thrill of the hunt rather than just mindlessly throwing yourself at them."

THE MASTER BUILDER

Forge has come a long way since the days of *Halo 3*. In particular, the leap from *Halo 3* to *Reach* brought with it a massive expansion in terms of both tools and objects, with an entire set of empty level canvases, Forge World, available on the disc. This somewhat

came at the cost, however, of the detail and personality of individual props. "*Halo 3* had the best textures for pieces," says Alexander. "I would say that *Halo: Reach* was extremely sterile and repetitively gray, and then the community complained and we moved on to textures that were more artful and designed, but almost too much so, in *Halo 4*, so that it over-complicated the space. And then it reverted back to very simplistic textures in *Halo 2: Anniversary*. So it's a balancing act, and the developers are trying to find that happy fit between something that looks great and is also simple. Hopefully *Halo 5* is the place where they'll find that."

Hodgins concurs. "The reason *Halo 3* was so good was that the blocks themselves weren't just blocks, they were actual things. You had staircases, you had fence pieces, you had trucks, you had barrels. Now we kind of have square blocks, we have four-by-four flats, we have walls. They're not things, they're blocks. So it's up to us now to add texture to them, and we're using two objects or more to do the work of one object. There's still a level of creativity to that, but in *Halo 3* they

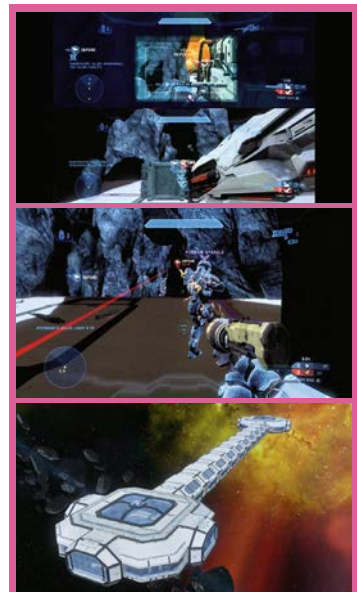
were actual things, so our maps felt more thematic, more immersive, even given that they had a more limited selection of objects, a more limited budget and crappier canvases."

ARMED AND DANGEROUS

Reach's introduction of Armor Abilities - innate secondary powers such as Active Camo, holographic decoys and a jetpack - also brought about a sea change in Forge design, not entirely for the best. "When you have jetpacks, you can break every line of sight that you try to control, because you can just shoot up 30 feet in the air," notes Alexander.

"I think the Armor Abilities were great in terms of experimentation, but in terms of the execution, I would say that they needed a little more refinement and balance. Like the invisibility! I don't think people should be given invisibility as a preset option. It should be as it was in *Halo 1* or *2*, where it's an object that's there on the map for people to fight over, so that it brings them all together."

Armor Abilities have, however, lent themselves to some esoteric new breeds of map. An example is saltykoalabear's UNSC Low Gravity



5. Meta Raid

Created by The Fated Fire
Get it from SpiffyNoob (Halo: TMCC)

This is Capture The Flag for those in search of quick gratification. Battles take place on tiny, linear maps with a bare minimum of cover using the Husky Raid game variant. Players get random primary and secondary weapons every time they respawn. You can expect to die a fair bit.



6. Wraith Attack on The Blocks

Created by Ell3ment/gunnergrunt
Get it from OUTCOME (Halo: TMCC)

Now available as part of *The Master Chief Collection*, this mix of map and mode variants sees a gang of players jump from block to block while a Wraith lets rip at them. Watch out, the blocks move and touching the floor will kill you. Barmy brilliance.

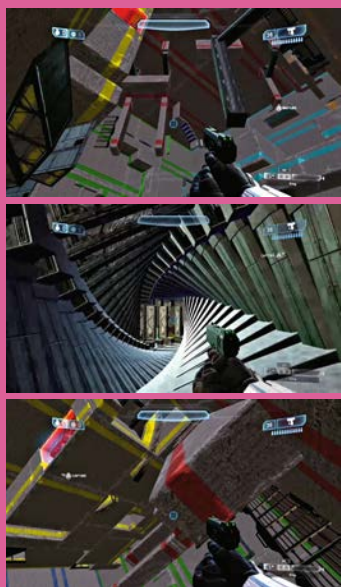


7. Sumo

Created by TrueDarkFusion/
TheYavimayan

Get it from TurbTastic (Halo: TMCC)

Popular collection of variants in which you try to shunt each other out of a ring. In this case, everybody's driving a Mongoose and the ring is a floating platform that shrinks every 15 seconds. Players have no weapons save inertia. Thank God for that Mjolnir armour, eh?



8. Cubeskew

Created by LEE C G

Get it from LEE C G (Halo: TMCC)

A trilogy of game variants designed for a single player. They throw you into distorted maps that are littered with teleportation pads in which gravity misbehaves constantly: floors become ceilings, then walls. Try your best not to throw up.

One of *Gears of War*'s Brumaks comes to *Halo: Reach*, all thanks to xSo6x Grim.



Combat Simulator, an enormous tower stocked with free-floating asteroids, Banshee spawns and gravity hammers. All players are equipped with inexhaustible jetpacks; cue many a midair kill and long plummet into the pool at the map's base. A recipe for no-nonsense rounds of Slayer it ain't, but there's no denying the glee it fosters.

A FUTURE FORGE

Halo 5 lacks *Halo 4* and *Reach*'s Armor Abilities, but does support Spartan Abilities - a sprint move, running slides, boost-jumps, jet-dashing, a hover move and a sensational ground-pound, all of which are - crucially - available to every player by default. Hodgins and Alexander are both looking forward to the new game, but express the hope that it'll offer a set of "classic" modes or settings that allow people to play and design maps as in the earlier Halos. "I already know that the option to remove sprint is confirmed," says Alexander. "So if you're a returning player and you want to play more traditional Halo, you can


just turn off sprint, then that will slow down the walking speed. You won't be able to perform the new abilities like the dash or the slide, because those are all activated by the sprint."

The lasting beauty of Forge is partly that it demonstrates what a flexible sandbox the base game already is. Bungie designer Jaime Griesemer once observed that Halo succeeds because it's "30 seconds of fun", over and over - a remark that was taken out of context to mean that the action is all about repeated, structurally identical bursts of short-term gratification. But Griesemer's larger point is that it's a different 30 seconds of fun every time.

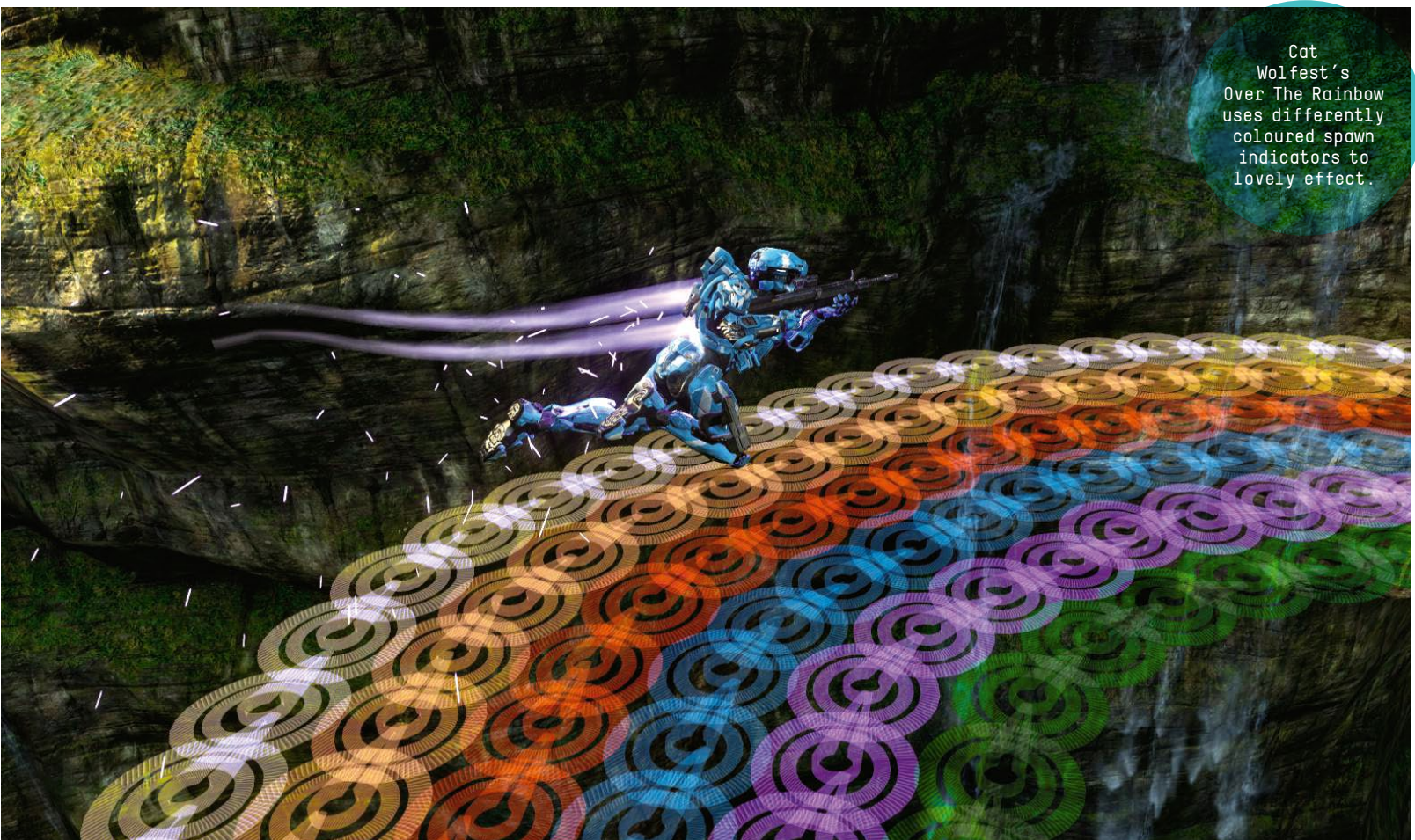
A Grunt's sanity may crumble at exactly the wrong moment, sparking a kamikaze attack on your position. The carcass of a Wraith tank might tumble off a bridge, creating a new cover spot in the midst of a raging firefight. A Jackal might roll into the path of a rocket intended for a massive Hunter, obliging you to polish the latter off with naught but an Assault Rifle. The game's

AI and object physics are so nuanced, so receptive to player improvisation, that each firefight is in some ways an exercise in level editing. It's a setup that's as dramatic, absurd or harrowing as the effort you put in.

Forge is thus a natural evolution for Halo, an extension of its identity rather than a bolt-on aimed at the hobbyists. It's also one of the main reasons that Halo games enjoy such a long, healthy afterlife once the launch buzz has died down. Where other shooters on console have dwindled away to nothing for want of content between instalments, this one is a seemingly inexhaustible wellspring of surprises.

"It's kind of the lifeblood of Halo, a huge propellant factor that keeps the game relevant long after it ships," observes Hodgins. "One year after a game's out most people aren't playing it as much, but with Forge you are constantly producing new maps - there's thousands of maps being produced every day, and you're constantly discovering new things. It keeps the game alive. You go back to it and you're going to play something new every day, checking out new modes and variants. I think Forge should have a bigger focus with future Halo games, because it is at the centre of the community." 

"The beauty of Forge is that it demonstrates what a flexible sandbox the game already is at a base level"



Man of Few Words

The legendary Steve Downes reveals how he became the voice of Master Chief, one of gaming's greatest protagonists

Take a moment to picture Master Chief Petty Officer John-117 with his helmet off. We're prepared to bet your mental image looks nothing like Steve Downes, the nationally syndicated Chicago radio host whose military-grade gravel accent has defined the character since *Combat Evolved*. The epitome of calm for the most part, the Master Chief is a difficult personality to voice – there's none of the over-the-top venting you'd associate with a protagonist like *Gears of War*'s Marcus Fenix, but nor is the Chief a robot, particularly following the emotional trauma of *Halo 4*'s conclusion. We spoke to Downes about how he became involved with Bungie, how the character grew on his watch, and how the Master Chief might evolve in future...



Background Check

NAME Steve Downes

JOB TITLE Voice actor

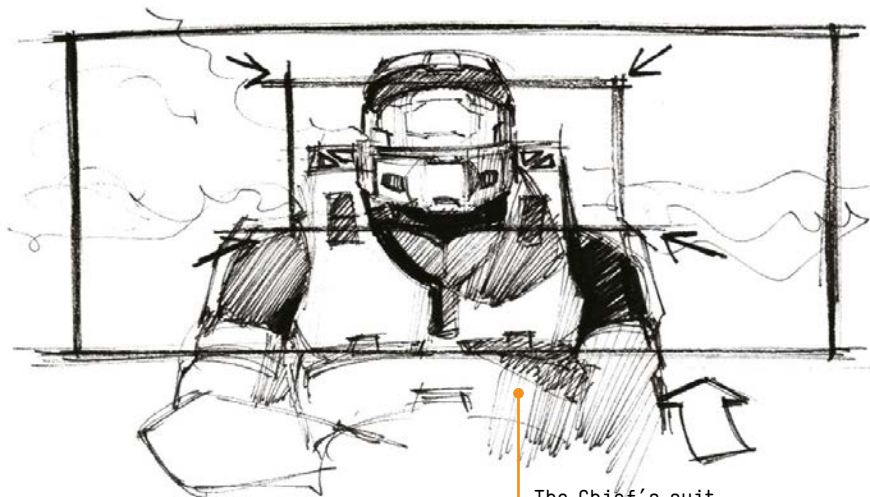
BIO Has worked as a radio host since the late 1970s before breaking into games in 1999.







Downes had no idea Halo would grow so huge.



The Chief's suit is meant to evoke medieval armour.

» You worked in radio before voicing Master Chief, right?

I've been doing radio for a very long time in Los Angeles in the 80s, and I started doing commercial voiceovers at that time. Then I moved to Chicago and continued it, but radio is my "day job." Music has been my passion all my life, so to be able to play rock and roll for a living is a pretty sweet gig.

How did you get involved with the Halo franchise?

I did a small PC game in 1999 called *Septerra Core: Legacy of the Creator* that [Halo composer] Marty O'Donnell was involved with. This was back when Bungie was based in Chicago and Marty was familiar with me on the radio and was a fan, so I'm told. He had called me in to read for what was a pretty minor character in a pretty minor game, and that was my first experience ever doing voiceovers for gaming. I had a lot of fun doing it and Marty and I got along great, but that was the end of it and I didn't hear from him for another year or so until he called me to tell me that there

was another game that was going to be of much larger scale and thought I'd be right for the main character: Master Chief. I came in, we read some lines, and that was that. Little did I know at that time, but it was going to be a life-changing experience!

How did they tell you to play Master Chief in those early sessions?

Well it was very little. First, I didn't have anything to look at. They didn't even have a sketch of a character, so it was really just a conversation that Marty and I had. He briefly described an overview of the game and then talked to me about Master Chief and how he was sort of this super soldier who was a bit of a lone wolf. As often happens when you're trying to make a character, Marty would make suggestions to me, and the suggestion he made for The Master Chief was to think of Clint Eastwood in the old spaghetti westerns, in that he was a man of few words, but when he did speak, somebody usually got killed. We refined it from there, but that was really the jumping off point.

How the suit has changed



Halo: CE
2001



Halo 2
2004



Halo 3
2007



Halo 4
2012



When they described what Halo was going to be, did you have any idea that it would become as big as it has?

I had absolutely no idea! I was brand new to videogaming at that point, and when you go in to do voiceover – especially gaming voiceover – you go in and do your session for maybe a day or two, maybe more, and you're done with it. Unless you're into the gaming culture, which I wasn't at the time, you have no exposure to it. It's not like a TV commercial where you see it on your screen some point down the line. I had no idea that the game was going to be that big, and it took until almost a year later that I had any inclination that this thing was exploding under my feet.

What was that realisation like?

I remember it quite well. I was visiting a friend in Florida and his kids were playing *Halo*. I walked through the living room while they were playing it and it rang a bell. I had forgotten about it because there was no reason for me to stay in contact with it. I said, "You know, I think I voiced a character in that game." The kids stopped and said, "Who was it?" and I didn't remember his name, but I thought it was the main guy

"Once I got into it, I realised that there was this huge culture I wasn't aware of. It was a mind-blowing experience"

in the game. They said, "Master Chief?" and I said "Oh yeah! It was Master Chief, that was it!" Literally within 15 minutes, there were probably 30 to 35 of their friends outside their door either carrying their Xbox or their copy of *Halo* for me to sign. I was flabbergasted. We made a beeline down to GameStop where I saw a life-size cutout of Master Chief and I realised something was happening.

And it really defined not only gaming on the Xbox platform, but the first-person shooter genre as a whole at that point...

Absolutely. And I would say maybe even until *Halo 3* the success of the series was kept mostly within the gaming world. You weren't seeing articles in *USA Today* or the *Wall Street Journal* like you do now. When *Halo 4* came out in 2012, it was a major news event. In the first two or three games, unless you were in that world, you weren't aware of what was going on. Once I got into it, though, I realised that

it was this huge culture that I wasn't even aware of. It was really a mind-blowing experience.

Were you worried about this gig ending with Halo 3, given how the marketing seemed to suggest that it was Master Chief's final game?

I didn't think it was over. I knew there would be more *Halo*. It was way too popular and the demand was way too strong. Quite frankly, the story was not close to being finished. There was a whole lot of story to tell. I never doubted that there would be more *Halo*. What I was unsure of was would I have anything to do with it. Bungie was my connection, and almost all of those people were now gone, and it was a whole new crew. I had no guarantee that I was going to continue to be involved with it.

Obviously you've seen a team shift during your time with the role. How did

Every hero needs a solid line-up of friends and ugly enemies.



Cortana is quite literally the ghost in Master Chief's machine.



the job change when the development switched from Bungie to 343 Industries?

Well there was a period of time where I didn't hear anything, but then one day I got a call from my agent asking me to come in and do some test readings, which I thought was interesting. I went down to the studio and met a few of the people involved with the game. We started reading some lines for what would become *Halo 4*.

We were both trying to figure out [if I would still be a fit] since Master Chief and his role would be very different in *Halo 4* than it had been in the three previous games. They wanted to see if I would be up to the challenge, and I wanted to see if they were people I could work with. I had a good working relationship with Bungie and Marty, and it was comfortable. This was going to be a whole new thing, so we both sort of had this little feeling out period.

Do you like where 343 Industries has taken the story in *Halo 4*?

I gotta say, that when I found out where they were taking the story in the next game, it was exactly where I was hoping it would go. With each game, Master Chief's story unfolded a little more... and there was another story there between him and Cortana that, up to that point, had sort of been left to the player's imagination. I always thought it would be great to help tell that story.

Master Chief and Cortana have been inseparable. How closely did you work with Jen Taylor in not only performing, but also fleshing out your characters?

A lot of people find this hard to believe, but Jen and I had never met, much less worked together, until the 10th anniversary of the first game at HaloFest

in Seattle. That was the first time we ever had any kind of real conversation. She worked in Seattle and I worked in Chicago and we never worked together. When we did meet, fortunately, we became friends and got along well. It would've been a real drag if we didn't like each other! That was not the case, and 343 Industries realised that in order to get the kind of performances they needed to get out of us as individuals, they would need to bring us together. It became much more critical than in the first three games. It was the first time that Jen and I had worked together and, for me, it made all the difference in the world. It really was a very exciting experience, and often times a very emotional experience.

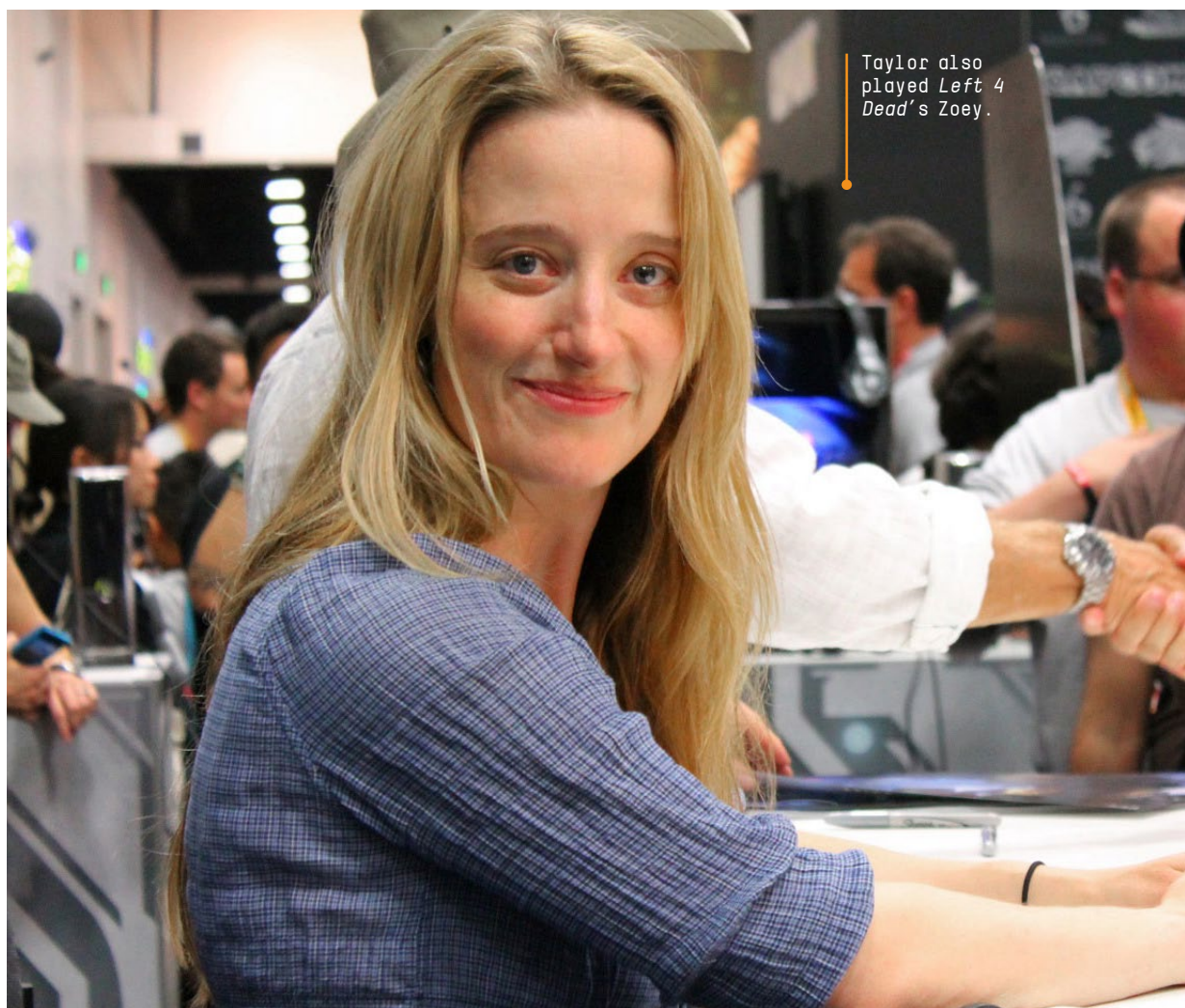
It feels like he's grown more complicated over time. What are your thoughts on the Master Chief's evolution over the course of the numbered Halo games?

By the time it got to *Halo 4*, he was struggling with his own mortality and he was certainly struggling with his own emotional mortality. As things happened in *Halo 4*, and Cortana began to unravel, that was the only real emotional connection that he had experienced in his adult life. Not to mention what they did in a working relationship. As he saw her begin to unwind and finally began to accept that there was going to be an end to her, I think it was extremely difficult for him to deal with. That was the challenge for me. You're not going to have a scene where Master Chief is

Art Attack



Though detailed, Halo's aesthetic is founded on simple, striking colour contrasts.



Taylor also played *Left 4 Dead*'s Zoey.

Complete *Halo 4* on Legendary and you'll get a peek under the helmet.



going to become completely undone, fall to his knees, and start crying, but yet, there were emotions in him that he didn't really know how to deal with. When you're approaching that kind of a character, you have to figure out how to emote a character that is uncomfortable with emotion.

Where does the character go from here?

There's nothing I can divulge to you because, quite frankly, I don't know anything! Anything I'm saying here [in 2013] is pure speculation, but I thought that trailer they did was very exciting. I think the popular theory is that maybe he's gone rogue, which would not be out of the question given what he went through. He's holding Cortana's chip, so it would seem as though there is some desire to reactivate that, but again, it's pure speculation. There are so many different possibilities here. You've got to give the credit to the writers for fleshing out a story with that much depth.

You mentioned you that you weren't a huge gamer before you played Master Chief. Has that changed?

You know, I've made efforts. [Laughs] When you've gotten your ass kicked by as many eleven year-olds as I have, you begin to wonder if maybe the gameplay part of this isn't your forte. I leave that to the professionals who are out there playing the game on a regular basis. My interest and my involvement have always been in the storytelling part of it. I was a big science fiction fan growing up, so obviously when I heard what this



Jen Taylor and Downes finally met a decade after *Halo 1*'s release.

"You're not going to have a scene where Master Chief starts crying, but there are emotions in him he can't deal with"

story was about, I got really excited about being involved with it. [...] With *Halo 4*, I went through and just watched the cinematics. Even without all the gameplay attached those scenes tell a really cool story, so I love watching the larger story unfold.

You've heard your own voice on the radio probably more times than you can count, but what is it like hearing your voice coming from a different face in a game?

It's different. I always hear it and I would like to go back and do it again, especially when you see the context of what's happening. I'm very happy with the way that *Halo 4* turned out, but I can't resist that notion of wanting to go back to the studio and do it again because maybe you can do it just a little bit better this time around.

You voiced a part in *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes*. Are there any other roles you'd like to try?

Well I still do commercial voiceovers and obviously the radio gig here in Chicago on a station called The Drive. The thing about voicing a character like Master Chief is that it does sort of pigeonhole me into that role unlike other voice talent, like my friend Tim Dadabo, who



Halo 2's plot was rudely bitten-off before its proper conclusion.



did the voice of Guilty Spark in the first three games. Tim has a wide range of voices. He does a lot of animation and other voice characters. I don't do a lot of different voices. What you see with me is pretty much what you get. What I did with *The Avengers* was not Master Chief, but for anybody who was paying attention were probably like "Hey that guy sounds a lot like Master Chief!" Consequently, I don't do a lot of voicing for other games, but I've got to tell you, if you're going to be pigeonholed into performing just one character, I'll take the Master Chief any day. 🐍

The 25 Greatest Ways to Slay in Halo

A collection
of the best weapons,
kit, vehicles and
boosts that have
made Halo the
world's finest
FPS

25 POWER DRAIN

(Halo 3, ODS, Reach)



Or the big blue ball of death, as it's also known. This item is fairly simple in concept, but can be deadly (or suicidal) if used properly (wrong). Deploy it to unleash a shield-draining bubble, then finish off opponents with a long-range rifle like the Battle Rifle. Easy.

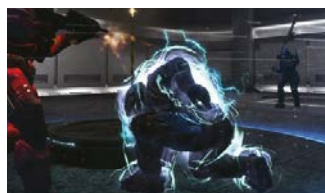


24 GRAVITY HAMMER

(Halo 3-4, ODS, Reach)



Boooooom! It's that electronic thudding noise that really makes the Gravity Hammer special. In multiplayer it can be a frustrating weapon to wield, as a hit doesn't guarantee a kill, but you forget all about that when you pound an opponent clean off the map. Bye!



23 ARMOUR LOCK

(Halo: Reach)

Mixed bag, this one. As an attacker, the Armour Lock can be hugely frustrating, as your quarry escapes damage by curling up into an invincible ball. If his mates arrive to shoot you, it's irritating – a triumph of defence. If they don't show, though, you've got time to reload before lining up the perfect headshot.



22 M247H HEAVY MACHINEGUN

(Halo: Reach)



Let's give a big, perforated hand for the fixed (mostly) machinegun – the unsung hero of many an FPS. Sharp-eyed readers will notice we've plumped for the *Reach* version of the HMG. Why? It's a little weaker, but has a quicker rate of fire, making it more satisfying for spraying an area with bullets while laughing like a maniac.



20 M68 GAUSS CANNON

(Halo 2-4, ODS)



Now this is a fun little weapon. The Gauss Cannon, often found attached to Warthogs, can punch a hole through armour (so it's great against Scarabs and Wraiths) but it can also devastate infantry. Plus, it makes an incredibly satisfying metallic thud noise when you fire it into someone's face.

21 SPECIAL APPLICATIONS RIFLE

(Halo: Reach)



Not the most manoeuvrable of sniper rifles, so it's lower down the list than the traditional S2 Sniper. What it does deliver, however, is power. With every shot hitting like a rhino, picking off a Grunt with this almost feels like a waste of a bullet. You should be using it to take down tanks, or starships, or gods...



»



19 GHOST

(Halo: Combat Evolved, Halo 2-4, ODS, Reach)

Yeah, they're a bit rubbish in an open fight, largely because the driver is painfully exposed from behind, but the Ghost has speed on its side. Its plasma cannons pack the punch of a broken waterpistol, but there's great satisfaction to be had from boosting into an opponent for a splatter kill.



18 SPARTAN LASER

(Halo 3-4, ODS, Reach)



If a man tells you that the Spartan Laser is actually called the M6 Grindell/Galilean Nonlinear Rifle, that man is not your friend. He isn't anybody's friend. The Spartan Laser may take an age to fire, but it can punch a hole through anything. It doesn't need a flowery name. It hates flowery names.



16 ACTIVE CAMOUFLAGE

(Halo: Combat Evolved, Halo 2-4, ODS, Reach)

17 BRUTE SHOT

(Halo 2-3, ODS)



Okay, the Brute Shot makes the list because it looks cool. Yes, it can be fun unloading a barrage of underwhelming shells into a man's surprised face, but they're pretty unsatisfying. No, it's more entertaining to melee enemies in the back with the Brute Shot's vicious blade-stock.



Is there a more finely balanced invisibility pick-up in any other shooter? If so, we're yet to see it. That's a joke, by the way. 'See it...' Oh forget it. Ahem. Anyway, Active Camo works best in multiplayer, as you're only 100% sure your enemy is in the same room as you when they finally melee you in the back.

15 M41 SSR ROCKET LAUNCHER

(Halo: Reach)



We like rockets just as much as you, so don't complain that this is relatively low on the list. We love rockets so much, we plumped for the variant that lets you fire two at once, the M41. Because firing one rocket at a time is for chumps. In *Reach*, the M41 lets you lock on and shoot two rockets at once. Hear that chumps? *Two* rockets.



14 PLASMA PISTOL

(Halo: Combat Evolved, Halo 2-4, ODS, Reach)



When you first play *Halo*, you'll be convinced the Plasma Pistol is the worst weapon ever created. It's weak, it makes a funny noise, and it's carried by cannon-fodder. Then you learn to overcharge it. Then you learn – in *Halo 2* – to overcharge it and quickly switch to your Battle Rifle for an instakill. Yes!



13 OVERSHIELD

(Halo: Combat Evolved, Halo 2-4, ODST, Reach)



There's something immensely satisfying about having an extra layer of shielding in a game where one-on-one conflict is often decided by who shoots first. The Overshield is a great leveller. If you're not the most accurate, or just a bullet magnet, you can get some kills.

12 COVENANT CARBINE

(Halo 2-4, ODST, Reach)



That's right – the Covenant Carbine is this high on the list. Why? Because its rate of fire is your rate of fire. Unlike the steady Battle Rifle, the faster you hammer the right trigger on this baby, the faster it fires. With a trigger finger honed by years of vigorous doorbell-ringing, we're practically unstoppable.



11 SCORPION TANK

(Halo: Combat Evolved, Halo 2-4, ODST, Reach)

Driving the Scorpion is as close as you'll ever come to feeling invincible in a Halo game. Okay, clever multiplayer folk know how to take a Scorpion out, but the Covenant? Not a clue. The mounted heavy machinegun is fun, but the massive cannon is one-way ticket to hell. Boom.



10 BUBBLE SHIELD

(Halo 3, Reach)



Possibly the most tactical pick-up in Halo. The Bubble Shield guards against all attacks. However, anyone can walk through it without hindrance. So, when do you use it? Not when your pursuer has a shotgun, but if they're carrying rockets you can easily deflect splash-damage back at them, potentially turning certain death into a clever kill.



09 M6D PISTOL

(Halo: Combat Evolved, Reach)



Some will argue that this is the best weapon in any Halo game. They are totally wrong, but never mind. In the original *Halo* this pistol was pretty overpowered, thanks to its 2x zoom and a shot that's second only to a sniper bullet, though it's let down by a low fire rate and small clip size.



08 COVENANT NEEDLER

(Halo: Combat Evolved, Halo 2-4, ODST, Reach)



A misunderstood beast, the Needler was a bit guff in the original *Halo*. When Bungie upped the fire-rate and let us dual-wield the weapon in *Halo 2*, though, the Needler became everyone's best bud. Targets filled with needles will explode, killing anybody nearby. It was so devastating, the developers had to tone it down for *Halo 3*. Catch someone in the open with a pair of Needlers and you'll win, even if you die in the process. If they break line-of-sight, though...



07 S2 SNIPER RIFLE

(Halo: Combat Evolved, Halo 2, Halo 3, Reach)

Every game has a sniper rifle now. It's the law. Back when *Halo: CE* was released, it wasn't such a common thing. Perfectly balanced from the start, Halo's sniper works on a simple principle. One shot removes shields, a second kills. One headshot means a straight kill.



06 JETPACK

(Halo: Reach, Halo 4)

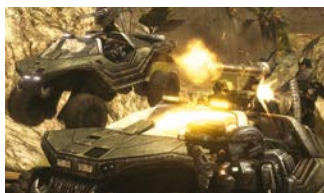


By the time *Reach* arrived, many thought the old Halo formula had run out of steam. And while the game suffered from a middling solo campaign, and a multiplayer that – despite being full of bells and whistles – merely buffed the online of previous games, it did add the Jetpack. All of a sudden new tactics were born. In the Forge, fresh levels sprung up based on the idea of flinging yourself around like well-armed fleas. Well balanced, nice to use, and *Reach*'s smartest addition.

03 WARTHOG

(Halo: Combat Evolved, Halo 2-4, ODST, Reach)

Halo's iconic vehicle really deserves its own feature. The spongy suspension – although occasionally irritating in the heat of a firefight – makes it a joy to drive, and fits perfectly with the feeling of being in an otherworldly environment. A skilled driver/gunner combo can devastate in online play.



05 PLASMA GRENADE

(Halo: Combat Evolved, Halo 2-4, ODST, Reach)



The first time you throw one of these and score a kill, it's close to a religious experience (not least because it sends the other guy to heaven). Here's a glowing blue ball of death that sticks to your target and lets you revel in their confusion before they detonate. In single player, Grunts will run around screaming – straight into an unsuspecting friend, with any luck. There are few multiplayer kills more satisfying than sticking an opponent with a Plasma grenade – right on their face. It's brilliantly sadistic and, surprisingly, few rival FPS devs (generally keen to crib from Halo) have copied the idea.



04 M90 SHOTGUN

(Halo: Combat Evolved, Halo 2, Halo 3, ODST)



Another weapon that appears in every game ever. Except *Spyro*. In Halo's multiplayer, the shotgun is probably the most sought-after armament, thanks not only to its deadly punch from short range, but also the confidence it gives you to get stuck in. It's easy to rack up double and triple kills with one of these, if you can get in amongst the opposition. During the campaign, it's by far the best weapon to take against the endless waves of the bullet-absorbing Flood. Its design has probably changed the least across the Halo games, with only slight tweaks to range and ammo capacity.



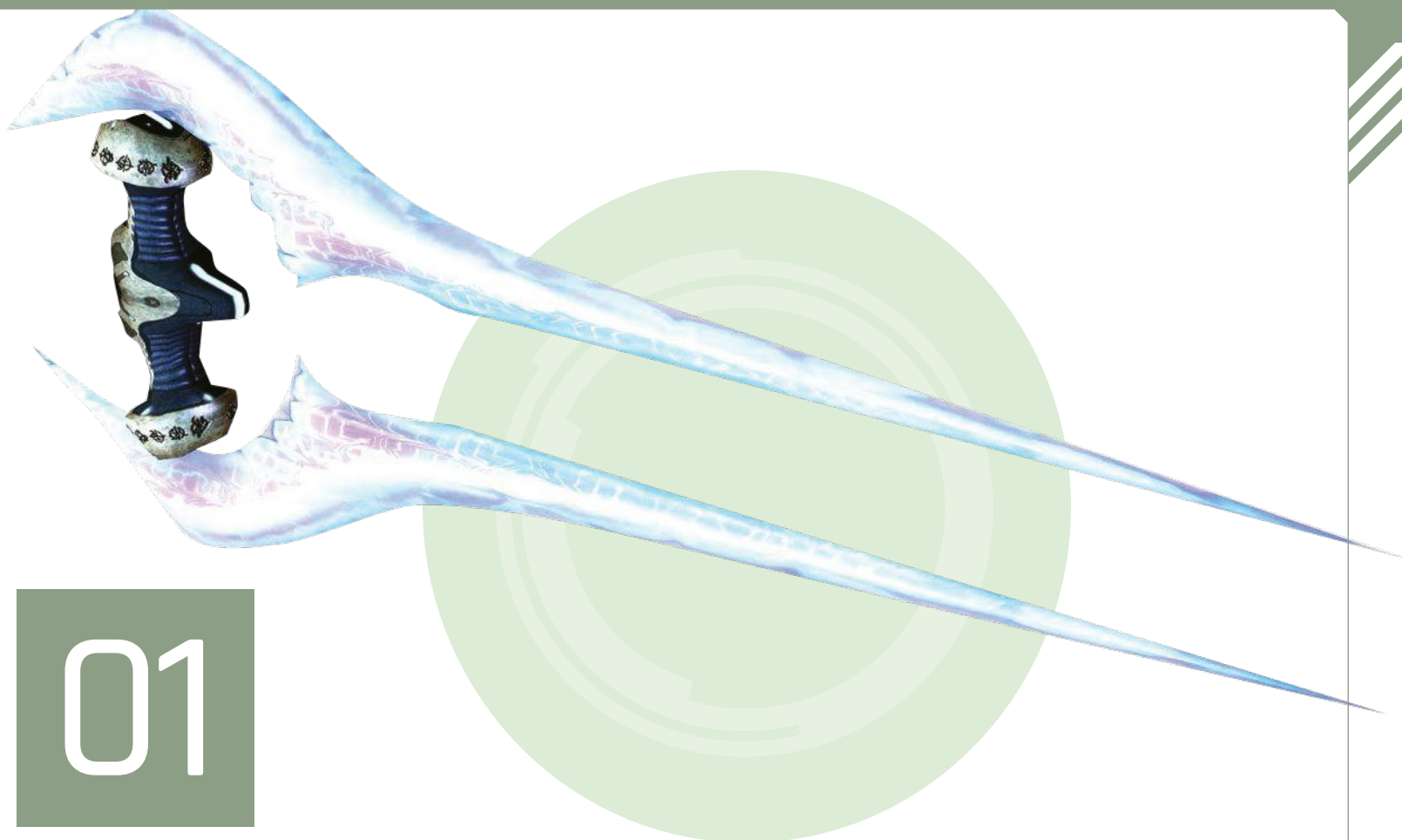
02 BR55 BATTLE RIFLE

(Halo 2, Halo 3, ODST)



The assault rifle in *Halo: CE* was a bit of a Jack-of-all-trades. In *Halo 2*, however, it's wonderfully versatile. The zoom, burst fire and generous clip compliment Halo's mix of long and short range play. That's why it's the default starting weapon in *Halo 3*.





01

Covenant Energy Sword

(Halo: Combat Evolved, Halo 2-4, Reach)



It's ironic that the best weapon in a shooter is in fact a sword. You couldn't actually wield a Plasma sword in the original Halo (and marines couldn't carry one in *Halo 2*), but it was there, in the hands of those viciously deadly Elites. So when Bungie first demoed the weapon in action in *Halo 2* it generated the most whoops of the entire demo. It's a one-hit kill weapon. Lock on and tap the trigger to charge an opponent and kill with a brutal uppercut. Unlocked, you just swipe, but it won't necessarily kill your target. Usage is limited by a power-bar, but whacking enemies in their backs won't decrease its charge. There's a badge in multiplayer specifically for killing an enemy while they're charging you with the sword. Good luck with that.

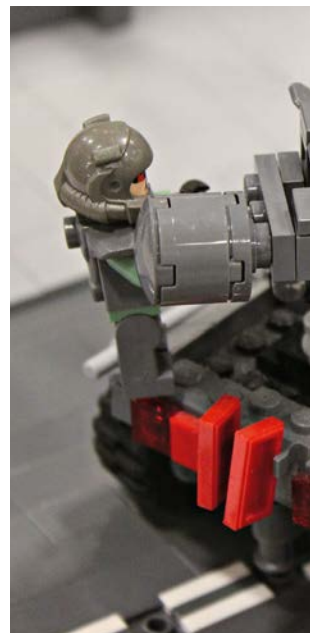
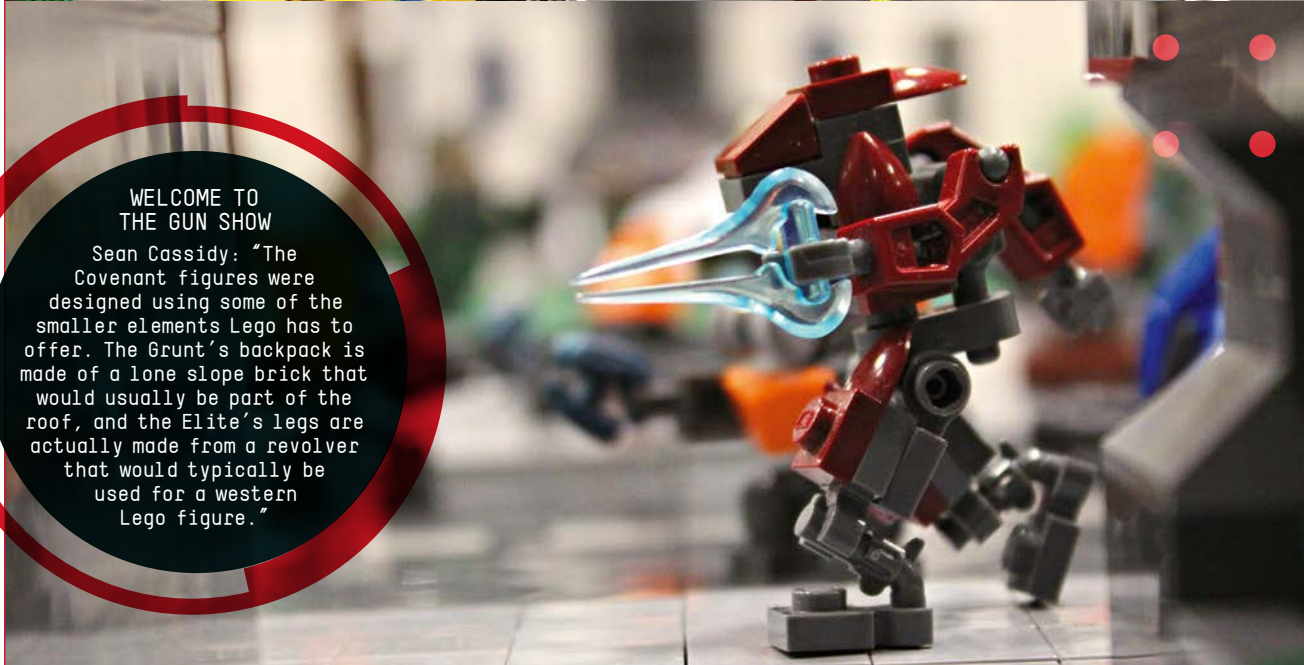
SUCH GREAT HEIGHTS

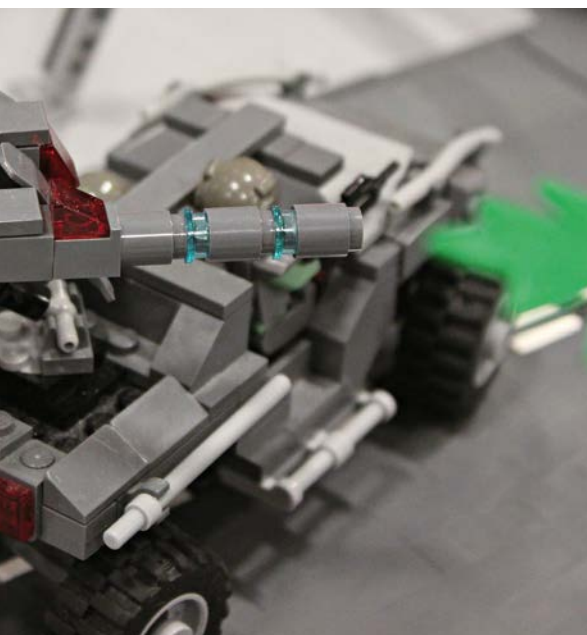
Sean Cassidy: "The one thing I would've changed is to add a bottom building/floor to the main building in the back centre, as it actually has one in the game, with the towers on top of it. The reason I was unable to do this was because I lacked the time and resources, along with already having a few other buildings on my plate. It worked out well though, because without the bottom layer the height of the building was consistent with the rest."



WELCOME TO THE GUN SHOW

Sean Cassidy: "The Covenant figures were designed using some of the smaller elements Lego has to offer. The Grunt's backpack is made of a lone slope brick that would usually be part of the roof, and the Elite's legs are actually made from a revolver that would typically be used for a western Lego figure."





The Master Builders

Meet the block-busting brains behind the epic Lego recreation of The Battle of New Mombasa

Featured at Brickfair 2015, Sean Cassidy and 18 other Lego creators presented this stunning recreation of *Halo 2*'s The Battle of New Mombasa. The model's over twenty square feet in size but boasts incredible attention to detail. We talked to Sean and his fellow builders to see how they recreated this iconic Halo moment.



"The weapons and armour pieces are designed and custom moulded by Lego vendors, while the faces are digitally printed on blank Lego heads"



Why build a Halo 2 scene out of Lego?

SC I've loved Lego for as long as I can remember; I started with collecting Star Wars sets. I got an Xbox for Christmas one year, along with *Halo*. After playing, I knew it would be awesome to recreate scenes in Lego. I've seen some scenes online and wanted to try it out myself. This was about five years ago... Halo is now my favourite videogame, and my primary reference for building in Lego.

There's an amazing range of vehicles here. What was the design process?

SC I designed about half the vehicles, and a collaborator named Tyler Clites designed the others. I did design at least one from each faction, though. I use a program called *Lego Digital Designer*, which allows me to design something before I physically build it. This is what I use for designing vehicles. It allows me to have all of the pieces to hand, whether it be blue, curved pieces I used to get the organic flow of the Covenant Banshee, or smooth, slightly angled grey pieces that I used to get the sharp, industrial feel of the Warthog.

With 18 people involved how did you keep the build so visually consistent?

SC I took tons of pictures of buildings from the specific level in the game, and essentially told each person who was doing a building to pick their favourite one from the game, and recreate it. This way each building made would be like the in-game one, and they would flow together by having the same style.

Any major problems along the way?

SC If you're talking about shattering into tons of pieces, one of my skyscrapers was completely apart when I opened the box I packed it in. Very little of the building was still intact, and I spent nearly an hour on the first setup day trying to piece it all back together.


Why this part of Halo history? Were there any other contenders?

SC I've always loved this mission ever since I played *Halo 2* originally, but the design of the buildings back then were a little bland. Recreating them in Lego would leave a lot of blank walls. So with the release of *Halo 2 Anniversary* in *The Master Chief Collection*, I knew that with updated graphics this city would be perfect to recreate. There weren't any other contenders, as I've already built smaller recreations of two other cities from Halo in years past: New Alexandria from *Halo: Reach* in 2013, and Sigma Octanus IV – which is actually a planet – from the novel *Fall of Reach* in 2014.

You have spent a lot of time playing this level. Anything you think the developers should have done differently?

SC I think that level was very well done, which is one of the reasons I decided to build it. I would like to be able to see more of the city or maybe see the interiors of more buildings. Getting to go inside them would be pretty sweet.

Finally, how did you stage the warriors for the battle?

SC I made a few marines that look injured, so I knew I'd have a few dead ones. It's a war, so it's likely that people will be dead. No major characters though. In terms of placement, I generally stuck the UNSC closer to the front, the Covenant closer to the back. A few units slipped passed the lines here and there, but that's about it. I also had a few action sequences I knew I had to include which made it into the final build, like the marine stationed behind an ammo crate. 

SOLDIERS OF MISFORTUNE

Sean Cassidy: "As for the UNSC, most of the parts are official Lego parts that matched either the colour or design of the soldiers. The weapons and armour pieces are designed by third party Lego vendors and custom moulded, while the faces are digitally printed on blank Lego heads."

GUNS ARE NOT A TOY

The tiny weapons are produced by BrickArms, a company that specialises in making the Lego parts that Lego won't. The minifig-scaled injection moulded guns are hand-injected in small aluminium moulds designed and cut by Will Chapman in his Redmond, WA workshop. All are available at BrickArms.com.



BRICK BY BRICK

Ross Fallon, constructor behind of one of the larger buildings: "Creating the building in *Lego Digital Designer* was easier than actually assembling the 6,500+ bricks. It was a challenge, but it fit well with the rest of the sections, and I couldn't have been more proud of all everyone involved."



WRITING'S ON THE WALL

Victor Fernandez, EclipseGrafx.com: "We assisted Sean Cassidy at the convention by designing and producing extra printed parts that accented the remarkable build. Because we travel with our printer to certain events, we were able to work together and get all the details just right for the display."



Guardians of the Galaxy

343 Industries discusses
its plans for Halo's future
and reveals the secrets to
building a universe without
losing sight of the Spartan
warrior at its heart...



As the head of 343 Industries, Bonnie gets to reveal all the biggest Halo secrets at E3 and Gamescom.

As 343 Industries takes stock of Halo with *The Master Chief Collection* and moves towards the much-anticipated release of *Halo 5: Guardians*, we interview the Chief's own guardians. 343 Industries studio head, Bonnie Ross, and franchise development director, Frank O'Connor, explain their plans for Halo's future, get to the heart of what makes Halo tick and reveal why it's important to keep the mystique of Master Chief alive...

To us, the campaign playlists in *The Master Chief Collection* really hammer home the vast diversity of play styles contained in Halo. What, to you, is the core essence of the series?

BR I'll talk about that from a couple of different angles. For me, when we first put the feature in to unlock all the campaigns, it was like it unlocked a whole new Halo for me. I like to traverse and get myself lost, so I like the playlists – I particularly love Final Four, where you play the final mission of every game, as it really highlights the differences from game to game.

» What I've really found myself playing and loving is *Halo 1* and *2*, because I go back and forth between them. I think they're very similar. You ask what the core essence of Halo is, and I think it's that perfectly balanced gameplay, but it's also that sandbox, and what I love about *Halo 1* and *2* is that you're so free within that sandbox. In *Halo 1* you can drive that Warthog anywhere you want – you can drive it in the water or up that hill – and I think that's iconically Halo, at least on the campaign side. The third thing that personally drives me is the story. *Halo 1* brought the FPS to the console and it brought the story to the FPS. That combination had me hooked.

FC It's hard to say, as I have two levels of engagement. One is to step back and look at our audience and not get monomaniacal about one aspect. There's this huge community of different players, and part of my job is to stand on top of this building, looking down on our whole audience and not get focused on one thing. Luckily, I like the variety of Halo. When I was playing FPS games when I was younger, it was *Doom*, *Quake* – simple, baseline arena play, really straight-up shooting. The

way Halo introduced vehicles and all the play mechanics we take for granted now is massive to me. But the thing that is really the seed of Halo for me is the ability to explore these worlds. I can see the story, I can see the gameplay mechanics and I can go explore – and it gives me the tools to explore. Sometimes the tools are literal – the vehicles – and sometimes it's just well thought-out gameplay mechanics.

There a vast swell of media projects – shows, comics, books – beyond the games. Do you not run the risk of confusing the message of the games?

BR When we first started the studio I put four pillars in place, but the essence is putting players at the core: the game is in our DNA. But when you look at the overall franchise, our ability to sell hundreds of stories in this universe is that franchise. Of course, we can never alienate the core player because that's what Halo is. But that fan also wants an epic story in a sci-fi universe, so we try to balance that. You can only tell so much story in an FPS, and so we deliberately use other media. You don't have to experience [these], but if you do, they are better together.

"In *Halo 1* you can drive that Warthog where you want – in the water or up that hill – and I think that, on the campaign side, that is iconic Halo"

We'd like to think this is how Bonnie gets to work.



Do you think those stories outside the games can maybe draw in people who don't play the game?

BR From my own experience, I was working on *Zoo Tycoon* when we first shipped *Halo 1* and we all got the book, *The Fall of Reach*, six weeks before the game released. I read the book first and so I knew John's backstory – knew he was kidnapped as a six-year-old – so when I play the game, Master Chief means so much more to me and I really think those experiences are better together. [People] may not play everything we're making, but it's an amazing sci-fi universe. I love that universe and the depth you get with *Nightfall*, *Forward Unto Dawn* or with our books. I met this one guy with his seven-year-old in a store, never played our games but had read all our books and loved them. I think that's amazing.

How do you grow a universe like this to such a vast scale without losing sight of the core idea that started it?

FC We definitely think of Halo as... I don't want to use the word 'fake', but we definitely think of it as an invented history. In gameplay terms, it's kind of like World War II. Wars are bad and complicated, but World War II is this conflict that you say, "Yeah, there really were good guys and bad guys in that war," and you can't say that about a lot of conflicts. As a child, I would build aircraft and battleships, and I would look at the silhouettes and say, "This is the Axis and this is the Allies."

Halo is similar in terms of how the history's constructed. Really recognisable silhouettes, colours and palettes for the Covenant and the UNSC. It's in some ways anachronistic, you know? 26th-century soldiers, running around with machine-guns and driving vehicles that sound like they have gas in the engines. All that's done on the surface to make it familiar and approachable, but then we give you the ability to go explore in this big universe and these strange, mysterious places. It's built like that on purpose.

The expanded fiction is great for fans, but do you worry that the 'narrative' universe may grow so big as to make it difficult to find an entry point?

FC That's a great question and it's a practical issue we have to deal with: how big is the universe? How is its continuity? To go back to the World War II comparison, there's no barrier to entry to someone watching *Saving Private Ryan* or watching a spy drama like *Valkyrie*. It's a big conflict that has recognisable import and meaning,



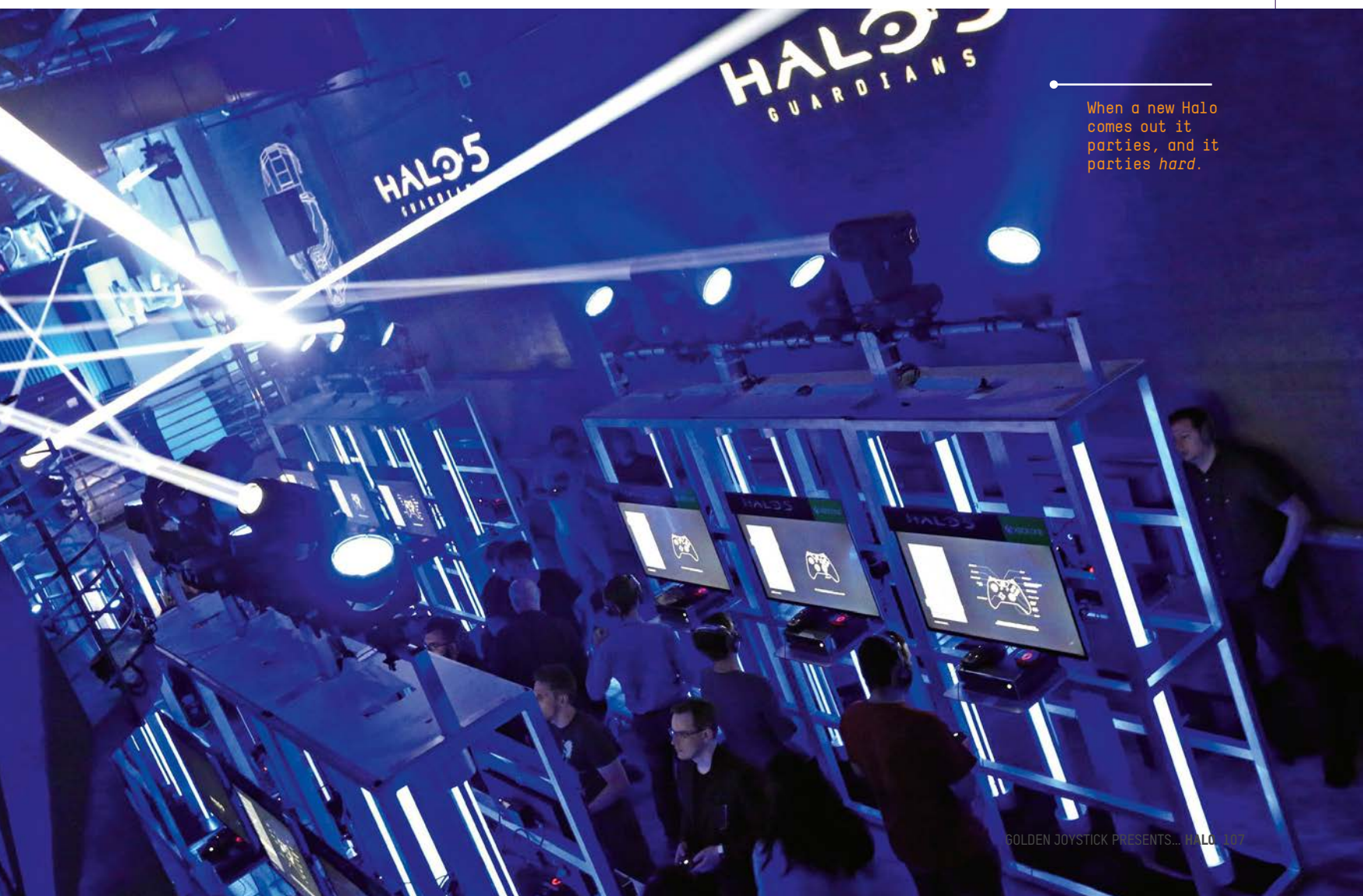
and real stakes. *Hell in the Pacific* is a great example – it's a movie about two soldiers from opposing sides trapped on a desert island. It's a reverse *Robinson Crusoe*, but it's a WWII story and that's what's important – you understand the personal stakes in these stories. You also understand, in our case, the galactic stakes. There's no barrier to entry for well-told stories. We have to get better at it – videogames are getting better and better at storytelling – but it's not just universe-building, it's technique. Gaming is in the early stages of cinema; I think we're moving into the 'talkies' phase and we have to get to the colour phase, but that's happening already. I played the new Konami *Silent Hills* demo and I was literally too scared to continue. That's important, and I think we are going to see more and more of those moments.

Before joining Bungie, Frank worked on the *Official Xbox Magazine*. He has gone far.

Where does Master Chief fit into this? We invest a lot in this character, but he's almost beyond the conflict.

FC Chief is complicated because in some ways he's this literal vehicle for you to inhabit and go explore this adventure. I go in, as Frank, and I'm running around in this galaxy full of terror and madness. People like literally filling those shoes, but over the years the stuff that has happened to him has become more meaningful and people keep asking us about him. The simplest version of the question I get is, 'What does he look like?' There's this weird tension that players have between 'I want to know more about him' and 'I don't want him to stop being me'.

You know what? I'm okay with that. I don't think there's any pressing need for us to do a biopic about the Chief and show his face on the cover. I think it's okay for people to still have him 'be' them. And it might get a little more complicated in the future. Already, in *Halo 4*, things got more complicated for Master Chief, for the universe – and it definitely humanised him, but I don't think we took it too far. I think we'll see how it plays out. He's a real guy; we've



When a new Halo comes out it parties, and it parties hard.



Lollypops to celebrate *The Master Chief Collection*. We knew he was a sweetie inside.



The launch party for *The Master Chief Collection* was the first time fans got to play *Halo 5*'s multiplayer beta. They kicked our ass.

we play Halo and we can never lose sight of that, but we're also passionate about moving forward. It's an amazing opportunity to take this legacy, package it and offer the exact same gameplay experience but also have this new play experience. It's a labour of love, but you do ask yourself how to bring the two together and make it part of our future.

Do you ever worry about becoming overprotective of something as a fan?

BR As you saw in the media from our six-second beta leak [in October 2014 fans kicked off about the apparent inclusion of scoping], we have a constant barometer pushing against us and it's healthy. I think that Halo is known for its innovation. It brought the FPS to the console and with *Halo 2* it brought multiplayer to the console and everything is pushing innovation, but then we have that core Halo formula that we can't lose. For us there's that challenge that we have to move things forwards and some people don't want us to. And it's a really healthy push and pull because there is something that is iconically Halo, but at the same time, our DNA is about innovation. We have to constantly question ourselves and our fans question us.

The original Halo only came about because of what the Xbox could do. How are you finding Xbox One to work with? What potential lies there?

BR A lot of areas I can't talk about now, but with *The Master Chief Collection* you've got dedicated servers – you

» described him physically in the books – there's no real mystery there if you go explore the canon, but forcing it down people's throats might be a mistake right now. But we'll see how people feel about him in the future.

With a mini-series, *Nightfall*, exploring his background, Locke appears to be a really substantial addition to the Halo universe. Is this maybe 343 stamping its ownership on the series a bit more, with a hero of its own making?

BR No, no, no – Master Chief is our hero! What's really interesting to me is that across the franchise, Halo has a tendency to kill all its supporting cast. Think of *Halo 3* – Master Chief's presumed dead, you've got Cortana lost in space and everyone else is dead. Miranda Keyes is dead, Sergeant Johnson is dead... everyone's dead! I don't want to just tell the next Halo game; I want to tell the next Halo story for the next two decades – so we've got to build a cast of characters. You'll see in *Halo 5*, Master Chief is going through

something and it's important that we have another character there. It's yet to be seen if Locke is a hero or not – you'll learn a bit more in *Nightfall*. Putting *Nightfall* in a Master Chief retrospective gives us the background on Locke and drops him off at the door of *Halo 5*.

FC I would say definitely not – that it goes back to your last question about how you humanise the Chief. We don't want to do that; we want the Chief to be in some ways above the fray – he's literally a legend in the universe he inhabits. Locke lets us humanise the boots on the ground without messing with the Chief – the irony is that Locke is going to do some of the heavy lifting for people's need for better storytelling and characterisation without altering the Chief. The Chief is the core hero in the story, without a doubt.

Forget how long you play as each character [in *Halo 5*] or whatever – it's really about contextualising the Chief. As much as Locke's an important character in the universe himself, he's

also going to be a useful cipher for you to explore Master Chief's character from an outside perspective.

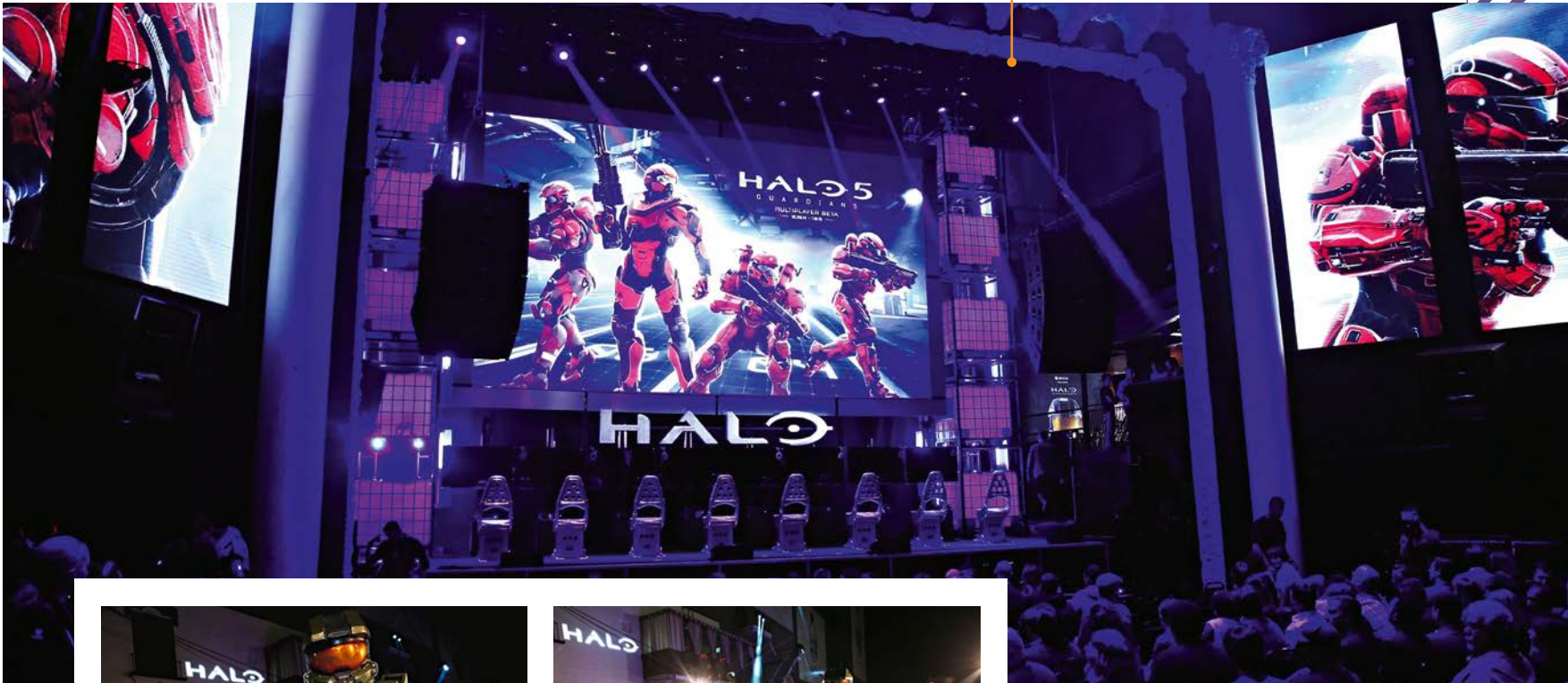
In which case, do you see Locke as a replacement for Cortana?

FC Locke is going to help contextualise the universe in a way that Cortana necessarily couldn't. She was so close to the Chief and had the big picture historically, but she didn't necessarily have the big picture of what was going on elsewhere in Earth's conflict. Locke is going to help solidify and contextualise the stakes, as well as the legend of the Master Chief.

It's interesting that you've just come from the ultimate act of curation – *The Master Chief Collection* – but you're also creating the next game. You've got a foot in the past and the present...

BR For us, we're fans just like everyone else. I found myself playing the *Halo 2* campaign at one in the morning the other night, and I was like, 'Oh my God, what am I doing?' That nostalgia is why

343 knows how to put on a show. This was grander than most film premieres.



could have that before, but we've got a real focus on that on Xbox One. It also enabled us to do 60fps, 1080p, so we can definitely easily bring that to games that were hard to bring to 60fps.

In *Halo 5: Guardians* you're going to see some of the things I've touched on. You're going to see us using the cloud more, which gives us the ability to really have that epic universe and you'll hear lots about that. But it's too early to talk about that. [This was November 2014.]

Saying that, playing back through *Halo 4* in *The Master Chief Collection* we were blown away by how good it looked – it rivals some current-gen games.

BR We have the smaller publishing team that was working on *The Master Chief Collection* and then we have our internal team working on *Halo 5*. When we got *Halo 4* up on the Xbox One, the art team was almost weeping. "This is what it was supposed to look like – you can see every single thing. This is what I drew and you couldn't see it on Xbox 360." It's been a joy for them as well.

***Halo 4* was praised for all manner of things, but is there one element you're particularly proud of and would like to see developed further in *Halo 5*?**

BR One of the things that is interesting for us, and one of the reasons we put all four games together in *The Master Chief*

"In *Halo 5* you're going to see us using the cloud more, which gives us the ability to have a really epic universe"

Collection, is that in *Halo 4* we wanted to tell the start of his hero's journey – he's been a pawn in the UNSC, been kidnapped as a child and conscripted into a super-soldier program. Sure, he's saved humanity, but he's never made his own decisions. So with losing his closest companion at the end of *4* he's questioning everything. Through Cortana you see his humanity and with *Halo 5* he's in a very different space.

You'll definitely see a difference. He's on that hero's journey arc.

FC *Halo 4* was our first Halo game as a team and so there were a lot of things that we did that we're just nakedly proud of: the technology, the way the team came together. But there are a lot of things we want to do better. Even though we had this long legacy of Halo games before, we had to find our feet and find out where our audience want to go. That's the main reason for doing a beta for *Halo 5* – we're the first to say that we should have done a better job of multiplayer. It's a great multiplayer experience, but a lot of things maybe went too far and a lot of things didn't go far enough, so the beta is going to help us tune it. It's not a focus test, but we'll look at all the data and the anecdotes, and make a better multiplayer game as a result. But the thing I'm most proud of in *Halo 5* is that the things we're doing with the technology are designed to speak to the things that appeal to me about Halo in the first place – which are scale, epicness and the world-building that the original *Halo: Combat Evolved* did on the Xbox. We also want to go back to that space of innovation with features and non-game interactions with things like Forge and save films – we want to make as big an impact on Xbox One as the game series has on Xbox 360 and the original Xbox. 🐉

Covenant of Champions

Halo 5: Guardians takes the journey of a lone hero and transforms it into a spectacular ensemble piece

You have to feel sorry for the Covenant at this point. They just can't catch a break. For over a decade, *Halo: Combat Evolved*'s motley crew of extra-terrestrial bogeymen have tussled with Master Chief and the United Nations Space Command for control of the galaxy. They've laid down their lives on planet after planet, beachhead after beachhead. They've expired beneath the tyres of Warthog jeeps, crumpled under rocket fire or tumbled, limbs wagging comically, from the cockpits of shredded Banshees. They've been rammed and routed, bombarded and crushed.

In the course of the long struggle with Earth, the Covenant have come to see the Chief as no mere flesh-and-blood adversary but a figure out of myth – a "Demon", to quote the hysterical

Grunts of *Halo 3*. You can easily imagine Brute nursemaids telling tales of John-117 to infant Prophets as they tuck them in at night. "Eat your vegetables or the Master Chief will get you!" Well, the Demon is back in *Halo 5: Guardians*, and he's brought a whole bunch of friends.

CO-OP SHOP

Previous Halo campaigns have treated us to four-player co-op, but *Guardians* is the first in the series to be completely constructed around the idea, with three other controllable characters present throughout the story, and AI filling in for missing players. It stars not one but eight Spartans, split into two Fireteams – one led by the Master Chief, the other by the protagonist of live-action mini-

series *Halo: Nightfall*, Office of Naval Intelligence agent Jameson Locke.

These aren't just any Spartans, either. Chief's Blue Team are tanky old Spartan-IIs – veterans, like John himself, of the struggle for humanity's vanquished fortress world, Reach. They're legends in their own lifetimes. Locke's Osiris squad are Spartan-IVs – a nippy new breed of mega-soldier, recruited from the UNSC's rank and file and battle-tested on the Forerunner planet Requiem in *Halo 4*. One of them is Nathan Fillion. Always handy. Both the junior and senior Spartans are endowed with the expanded movement and offensive abilities that other soldiers staring and muttering about favouritism. They can jet-dodge. They can hover.

"Previous Halo campaigns gave us four-player co-op, but this is the first in the series to be constructed around the idea"

Not all the Covenant are unfriendly. You fight side by side with Elites at times.



“343 no longer has to worry about sitting in the shadow of Bungie - it has demonstrated that it knows what makes a Halo game tick”

- They can execute ferocious ground pounds, annihilating even shielded opponents in one fell swoop. They can perform running uppercuts and slides. They can revive each other in the fray. It's not all bad news for the Covenant, however. Osiris Team's role in the story is to hunt down Blue Team, which has gone AWOL after a mysterious attack on a peace conference. But whether you take to the field as Chief, or give chase as Locke, you can rest assured that there

will be plenty of Jackals, Elites, Grunts and Hunters to slaughter along the way.

Much as we pity the Covenant, however, we think Halo's current custodians at 343 Industries have it tougher. The studio no longer has to worry about sitting in the shadow of Bungie, Halo's original creator and the developer of *Destiny* - with *Halo: Combat Evolved Anniversary*, *Halo 4* and *The Master Chief Collection*, it has demonstrated that it knows what makes a Halo game tick. But it's hard to

overstate just what a challenge it built up for itself with *Guardians*.

Master Chief is the first-person shooter genre's most celebrated one-man-band. He's the quintessential lonely hero, Superman by way of Clint Eastwood. In pure design terms, he's the beating heart of an exquisitely reactive AI and physics sandbox - a glittering framework of enemy types, tools and terrain variables, all pivoting around John-117's capabilities to spectacular effect. Adding seven other playable Spartans to the mix entailed a bit of a rethink, to say the least, and that's on top of the technical pressures of developing a brand new engine for Halo on Xbox One. Oh, and let's not forget multiplayer, which features those snazzy Spartan Abilities plus a colossal new mode, Warzone, in which armies of players and 'bots do battle simultaneously. What on Earth inspired the brave soldiers of 343 to try all this?

FOUR DOWN

The story begins five years ago, with 343 fresh from its success with *Halo 4*. “We were winding down on *Halo 4* and thinking about moving to a new console, and we had already planned some of the technological upgrades that we wanted to make to the engine,” recalls Josh Holmes, studio head for *Halo 5*. “And early on we started talking about the types of stories that we wanted to tell and the experiences that we wanted to create, and we really wanted to focus on a much more sociable experience, especially in our campaign.”

“And that sort of led us in the direction of building up the two squads, each of which has four Spartans that you can control, which would enable us to support seamless drop-in, drop-out cooperative play. We also wanted to introduce a new character in Agent Locke, who would be a direct contrast to the Master Chief, and allow us to examine the Chief more closely as a character via an external perspective or lens, if you will.” Again, co-op has featured prominently in Halo games before - if you have any previous experience with the series, it is likely your fondest memories include careening around a Covenant fortification in a Warthog while a friend showers the place in minigun bullets. But, Master Chief teaming up with the Arbiter in *Halo 3* aside, the series has never managed to make co-op a convincing part of

Blue Team's Spartan-IIs have their work cut out for them when faced with the new breed of Spartan-IVs.





Warzone's risky genesis

New mode Warzone is the most dramatic of *Guardians'* multiplayer innovations - it pits 12 player teams against both one another and AI on enormous maps. "Warzone was a lot more challenging than we thought," recalls 343 Industries co-founder Bonnie Ross. "And there were points where it did not feel like it was coming together. It was a huge bet for us. I think it was pretty nerve-wracking at some points, but there was a moment several months ago where people started getting good scores back from user research." 343 knew from the outset that nailing down Warzone's appeal would be tricky. "Someone said 'Look, it's going to be really crappy until we get this system working, and then we need this netcode to be supporting that, blah blah blah...'" comments franchise development director Frank O'Connor. "Somebody in the production office had kinda drawn a line, saying: 'This is roughly where it will start to be fun.' If you do really good planning and production - and I think we pride ourselves on that - there shouldn't be too many crazy surprises. But it does get nerve-wracking when you're waiting for that breakthrough to happen, whether it be something as big as a mode or just a specific weapon."



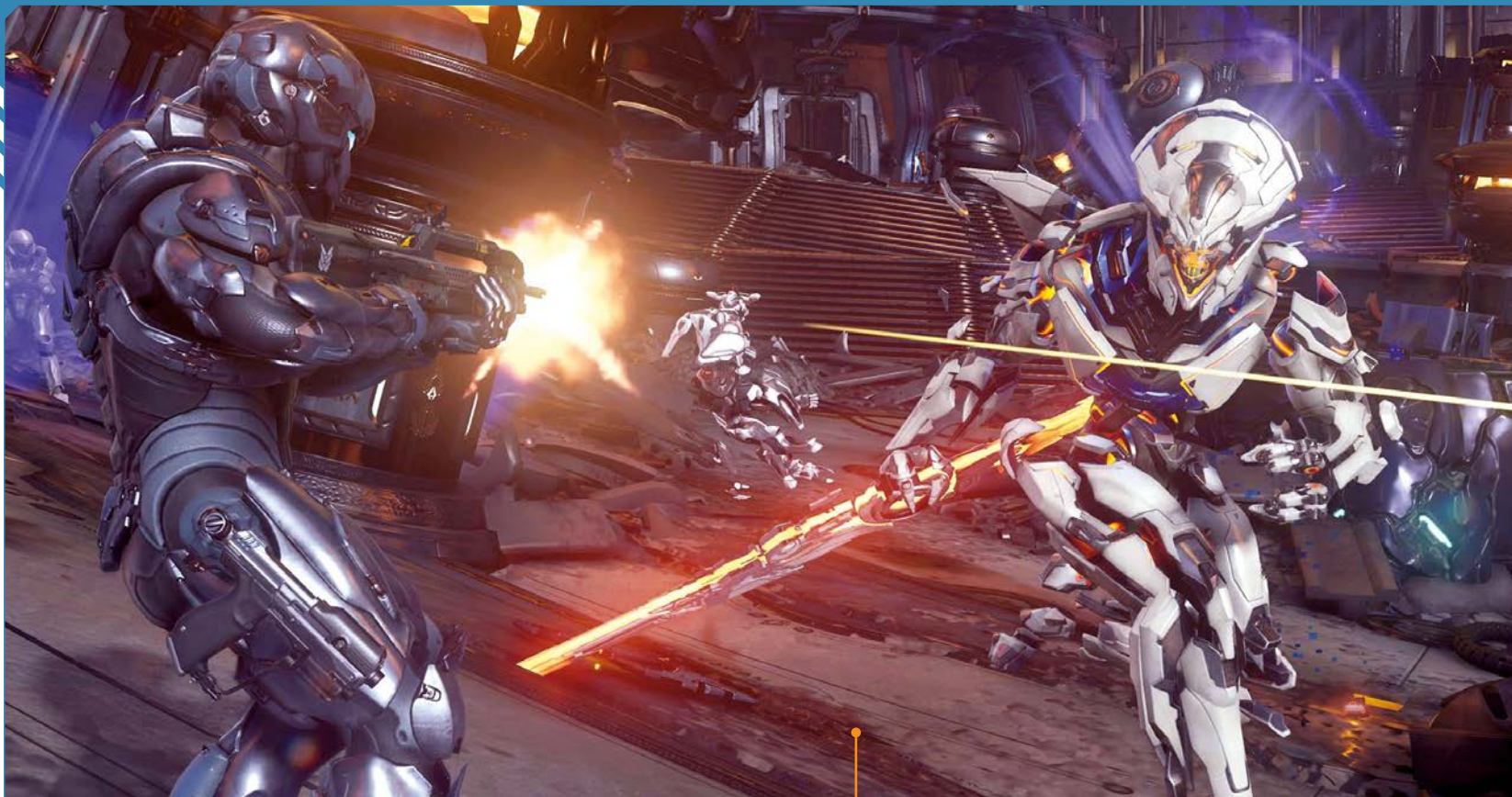
Hunters are as dangerous as ever - shielded against shots from the front. Bring rockets.

"Guardians stars not one, but eight Spartans"



Co-op is online-only, with the team doing away with split-screen for the first time in the series.





» its narrative. In *Halo 2*, co-op players appear as duplicates and the guest doesn't have a role in cutscenes. Fireteams Blue and Osiris, by contrast, are fully fleshed-out personalities with their own subtly differentiated heads-up displays (reflecting their variety of visor shapes), loadouts, tweaked basic traits (such as a longer radar range or beefier shields), and their very own voice actors – including a characteristically insouciant turn from Firefly actor Nathan Fillion as Buck, who first took the stage in *Halo 3: ODST*.

HOG SQUAD

"I think co-op has always been a big part of Halo's campaign, but in the past it's sort of been treated as a completely separate experience, where you just have three other clones of the Master Chief running side by side," says Holmes. "The narrative breaks down. One of the big creative goals that we had for *Halo 5* was to bring that into focus and support it through the story.

"And then, from a technological standpoint, a huge amount of investment went into the AI system for the other Fireteam members," he continues. "As well as moving the campaign to dedicated servers to enable that seamless drop-in, drop-out experience, and allow us to deliver a campaign on a much greater scale. [A campaign] where you have the ability, as individual players, to split up and explore and support one another from

different elevations within the level, and many different paths. It's been a really fundamental part of the design process for campaign. It's flipped the paradigm for the campaign in previous Halos, where solo was very much the focus and co-op was there as an add-on, but wasn't really embraced."

Halo 5: Guardians is essentially a giant game of cat and mouse, where you alternate between the perspectives of the Master Chief and Spartan Locke – the former's actions raise questions which the latter's missions then seek to answer. It's unclear why exactly Master Chief has gone rogue, though the as you play, you'll start to get a few hints and understand his motivation. Spoiler-free intro: the Chief's being held responsible for a terrorist raid on human-Covenant peace talks, supposedly killing 19 security guards and making off with an ambassador, who is later found dead.

Have years in the trenches – and in particular, *Halo 4*'s traumatic finale – begun to take their toll on John-117's sanity? Are the long-buried stresses of Spartan-II training, under which children were abducted by ONI and surgically augmented, to blame? Or is he the victim of a stitch-up job? Events in the wider galaxy suggest that there's much more to Chief's revolt than meets the eye: entire solar systems are mysteriously falling silent, and the ancient Forerunner general known as the Didact is presumably still at large in

The Promethean soldiers from *Halo 4* return – watch out for teleporting Knights.

Locke on

How do you get under the skin of a famously taciturn personality like Master Chief? Osiris Team leader and Office of Naval Intelligence manhunter Jameson Locke is *Halo 5*'s answer to that question. "We really liked this idea of introducing a stark contrast to Chief, and someone who could examine Chief a bit more closely as the focal point of his journey, the mystery he was set to solve," says studio head Josh Holmes. Locke is also, he adds, a means of investigating "some other aspects of our universe that haven't been explored as deeply in the other games. ONI is a kind of shadow organisation that has its finger on a lot of the events that impact the UNSC and ultimately, the galaxy. What would it mean to take someone from that organisation and have them make the transition to Spartan-dom?" Executive producer Kiki Wolfkill expands: "You look at Chief, who is sort of conscripted as a child and became a Spartan not necessarily by choice, and then there's Locke, who chose to be that kind of person – those contrasts are really interesting."



the shadows. There's also Dr Catherine Halsey to consider – architect of the Spartan-II programme, nowadays to be found in the company of the Covenant splinter group led by Elite zealot Jul 'Mdama. And finally, there are the titular Guardians, huge Forerunner constructs looming over a number of planets, their function unknown.

MAN OF THE HOUR

Chief's sudden AWOL status is both an opportunity to widen Halo's narrative focus, and get to grips with aspects of John-117's character that perhaps aren't accessible when looking at the world through his eyes. "Master Chief is our icon, but the universe is so big, and there are so many different types of connections that you can make with those characters," observes Kiki Wolfkill, executive producer and one of the key figures behind *Halo: Nightfall*. "It's fun for us to explore how we can build other characters that are strong and interesting, and maybe have some ambiguity to them, [characters] that players can relate to differently than they do Master Chief.

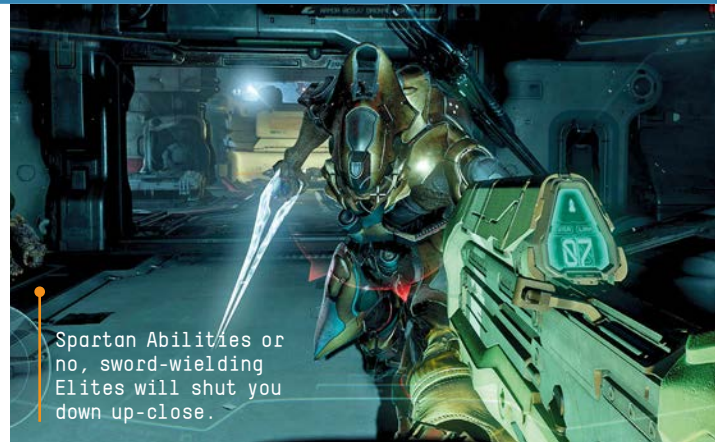
"Even before *Halo 4*, we were sort of mapping out Master Chief's arc," she

adds. "We had a good sense for where we wanted him to eventually end up, what his journey would loosely look like. I think things are culminating based on that arc. How we got there shifted a lot through the course of both *Halo 4* and *5*, but we've introduced a lot of questions throughout the years with the Halo universe, and I think it's important to start to resolve some of those, but also introduce some new threads."

And the impact of the new story structure on how the game plays? Well, the obvious consequence of having three other Spartans at your back throughout the mission is that those sandbox set-pieces are much more elaborate – and chaotic. With its floaty vehicle handling and taste for assaults on fortified outposts or arenas, its heavy artillery and its plethora of unmoored cover objects, Halo has always done a great line in large-scale battles, but *Guardians* sets a hectic new standard.

The first mission from Blue Team's side of the campaign, aptly named, 'Blue Team', takes place inside a stray ONI research vessel, the Argent Moon.

A recipe, you might have thought, for a suspenseful corridor crawl rather than a



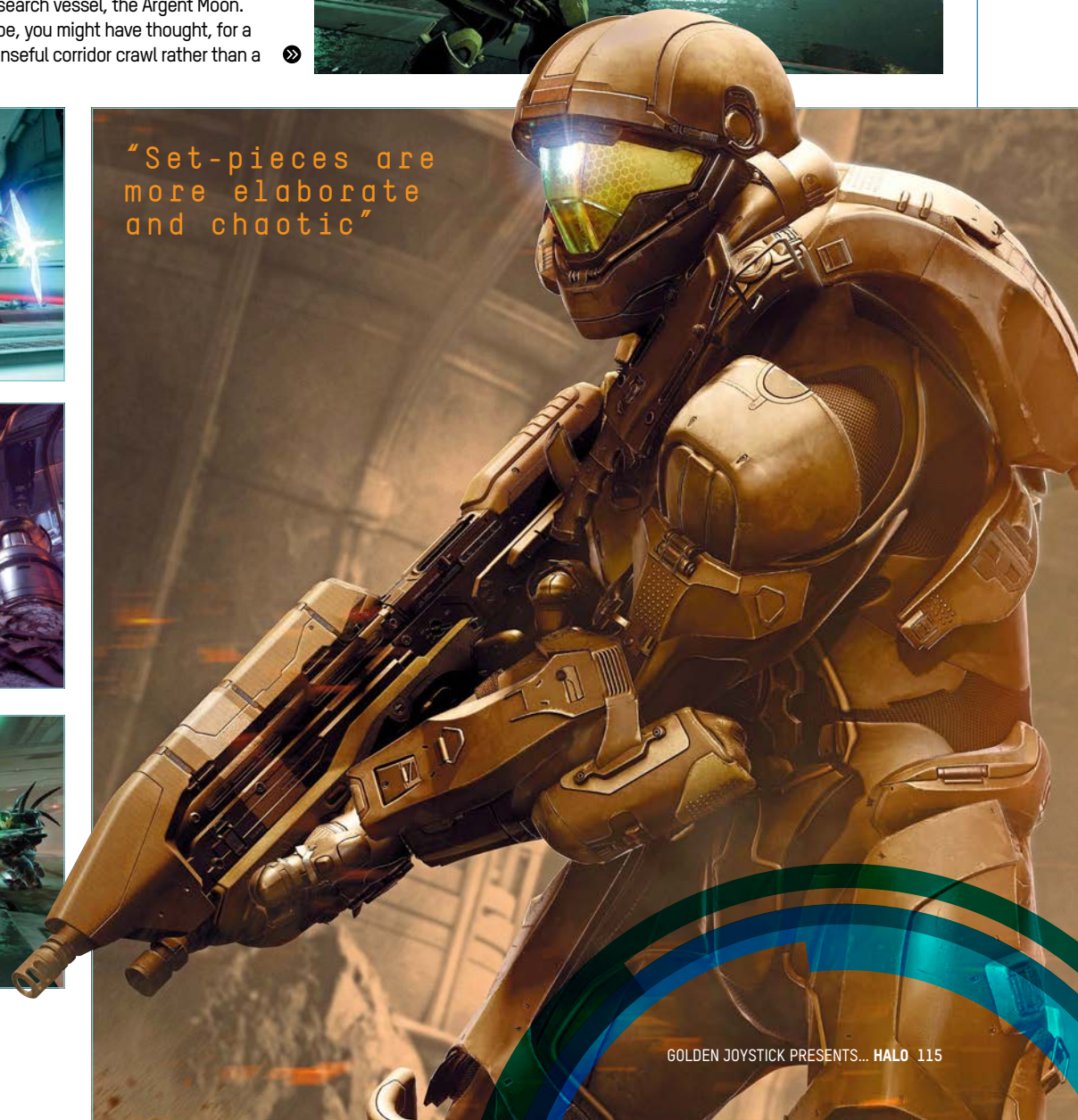
Spartan Abilities or no, sword-wielding Elites will shut you down up-close.



Packing the SAW light machinegun and a launcher? That Elite is toast.



"Set-pieces are more elaborate and chaotic"



» blastfest, and indeed there are touches of this early on. As the mission begins, Chief and his chums smash through a reinforced hull window to surprise a batch of Covenant interlopers, who are unceremoniously sucked out into the void. As they descend into the ship's bowels, something hammers on the bulkheads from the other side, leaving visible dents. Subsequently, a Grunt scurries abruptly out of a cloud of steam, hefting a plasma grenade in each fist. It's nothing a brisk Battle Rifle burst to the face can't nobble, but it's a pleasant shock, nonetheless.

When not in combat, the side characters serve a purpose familiar from *Gears of War*, here commenting on goings-on in a manner that raises tension while filling in cracks in the narrative. Frederic draws your attention at one point to a strange stealth ship parked in the Argent Moon's hangar. Idle chatter of this sort helps make up for the absence of Cortana, Chief's erstwhile AI comrade, though we suspect that the effects of her departure on his emotional life won't dissipate so easily.

FEELING BLUE

It's not till Blue Team reaches vast storage bays in the vessel's interior, however, that the co-op really takes flight. And we do mean that literally. A ramming charge breaches the wall above a giant tunnel environment, allowing the Spartans to drop right into the midst of a Covenant detachment. The squad spreads out, some using their thrusters to jockey with the aliens up close while others look for vantage points. The effects of *Halo 5*'s Spartan Abilities on the tempo and tactics of gunplay are vast and comprehensive. Ground pounds are both an offensive tool and a means of moving quickly (if not quietly) between elevations. The aerial dash and mantling allow players to snake around the outsides of structures, latching onto facets of the level geometry that in previous games would have served only as scenery.

In order to host a higher headcount and the new ability set, the game's environments are larger and more packed with routes than those of *Halo 4* – a real estate expansion that is most obvious in a later point in the level when Blue Team stumbles on a flock of Banshees. A couple of players promptly take to the air to strafe Covenant heavies while the others engage on-foot, cue dizzying scenes as missiles fired by the new Hydra launcher miss friendly vehicles by inches. In addition to being much more numerous, the



Revamping Arena

If you're a traditionalist, the Arena playlist is where it's at – "it" being no-nonsense, 4v4 combat and a selection of mostly familiar modes, including Capture the Flag, Team Slayer (aka, team deathmatch) and Strongholds, where players fight for possession of scoring zones dotted around the map. There's also Breakout, a round-based match type in which no respawns are allowed. Players don't get shields or a motion tracker, and everybody starts with a souped-up SMG, a pistol and a single frag grenade, collecting other weapons on the map. The result is an experience that's all about dexterity and knowledge of the terrain – a nice alternative to the joyful lunacy of Warzone. Fans of SWAT mode from previous games will love it.

Covenant have evolved a few new behaviours to fend off the Spartan onslaught. Hover directly behind a Hunter in preparation for a ground-pound, for example, and you're asking to be swatted like a lumpy robot fly.

Osiris Team's missions will be no less frenetic, but Locke's access to some fancy Artemis Tracking technology makes for a relatively methodical feel – closer, perhaps, to the outpost infiltration sections of an open world game like *Far Cry 4*. The technology sends out a waveform that flags enemies and interactive objectives on heads-up displays, allowing the wary player to assess the situation and plot a strategy before leaving cover. An example is a mission that takes place in a locked-down UNSC facility. Killing all nearby Covenant and thus resetting the building's security protocols is one way to proceed, but you can also hunt down and disable the generators, or hack terminals to activate sentry turrets.

The new squad orders system prove handy here – you can tap the D-pad



Each Spartan's custom HUD reflects their personality and combat style.



"Environments are much larger and more packed with routes"



Along with Jackals, Hunters and Grunts, Elites return to the fray.

Is this the Covenant edition of Cortana, or their equivalent of a hotel lobby fountain?

ONI-61314



Griever feature

With three other players around, there's obviously the risk that somebody will spoil it for everybody else - we'll admit to running down co-op partners aplenty in *Halo 3*. How do you prevent such antics? "I don't think you do," confesses Josh Holmes. "I think part of the fun of co-op is empowering players to infuse themselves into the story, and there are things that emerge as part of that where you're bouncing off one another, which can lead to some pretty crazy moments." This doesn't extend to letting people ruin the story, however. "There aren't really ways that you can 'break' the narrative, but definitely you may miss some of the narrative in voiceovers if you're too busy team-killing one another. We do see some pretty crazy moments here within the studio. The mean time to someone murdering another player in an elevator is, as it turns out, quite short!"



» while aiming at an object, character or area to issue a context-sensitive command, such as Revive or Pick Up Weapon. You aren't required to do this to progress – *Halo 5* isn't Rainbow Six and the AI heroes can take care of themselves – but it could make life easier when you're pinned down and bleeding, unable to reach that Fuel Rod gun on the other side of a room. Let Nathan Fillion take the risk instead.

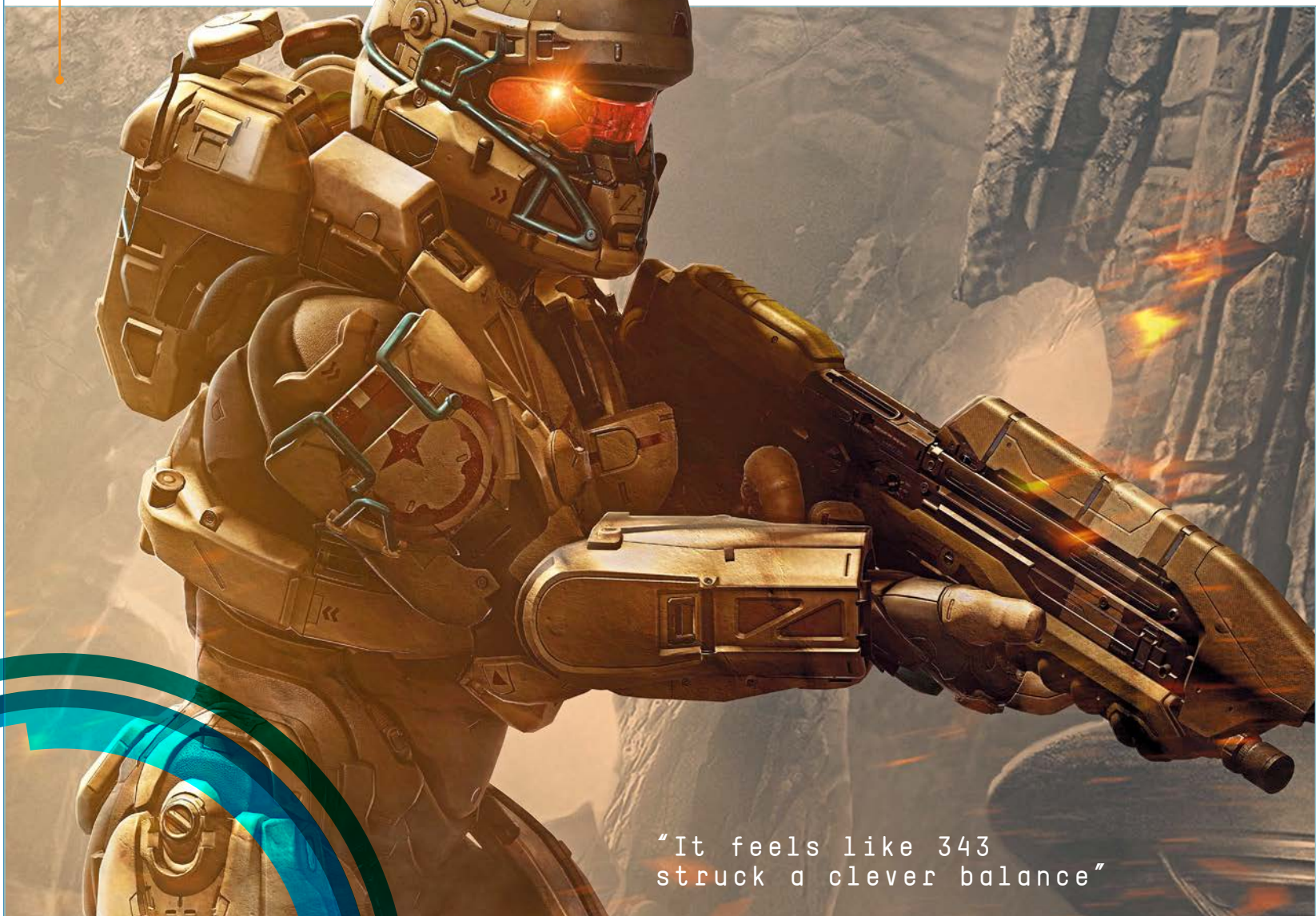
The orders system may reflect 343's hiring of Tim Longo as creative director. Longo has some fearsome credits, including a lengthy stint on the Tomb Raider franchise with developer Crystal Dynamics, but he's perhaps best known for *Star Wars: Republic Commando*, an acclaimed first-person shooter for the original Xbox which features some comparable squad commands. "He joined us back in 2013 and stepped into the shoes that I filled on *Halo 4*," says Holmes.

Some levels offer hidden side routes.

The boost jets put the emphasis on lateral movement in duels.

"And he's just been a fantastic addition to the team. He was able to take the core vision that we had right at the beginning of *Halo 5* and really shape it into something incredibly special. He brought a lot of his own unique perspective to the table and some of his experience. That, combined with the trust that we'd all built for each other throughout *Halo 4*'s development – those were two big changes for the team with *Halo 5*."

Frank O'Conner, Halo's franchise development director and the man with the closest thing to a Halo road map, expands on this. "I don't want to use the word 'natural', but there's something unnatural about starting up a studio in the middle of a franchise," he says. "Whereas this process



"It feels like 343 struck a clever balance"



of moving from *Halo 4* to *Halo 5*, from Xbox 360 to Xbox One, has actually felt very natural to me. It feels much more like regular run-a-studio business. But instead of the pressure coming off, at least as far as public scrutiny is concerned – I think the pressure is back on, because *Halo 4* was pretty well received, but we have to one-up ourselves. We're not chasing ghosts anymore. We have to be impressive with every new thing instead of just 'good enough', or instead of 'surprisingly okay', you know? That's where the pressure comes from. But again, it's a much more natural and digestible pressure, I feel."

LORE MASTER

O'Connor joined Bungie to work on *Halo 2* before leaving to oversee development of *Halo* after Microsoft took full ownership of the franchise. His long experience was, of course, a useful resource when it comes to the most obvious sequel dilemma: how do you introduce new concepts without alienating fans of the previous games? "I've worked on *Halo* for every sequel," he says. "If you remember the E3 demo of *Halo 2*, that was five minutes of non-stop new feature introductions, things like dual-wielding, and some of those went away. Every iteration you're trying new things and your devs are always

trying to push forward. Sometimes the biggest resistance you meet is tradition, and the things that fans love.

"There's a way to strike a balance, as [343 co-founder] Bonnie Ross has said, between satisfying that core – what people describe as the heart of *Halo* – and moving things forward technically in terms of scale and features, and certainly in terms of mobility. Otherwise I think you can get mired in tradition and end up stagnating. You have to dance this careful dance of innovation and improvement. I wish I could tell you there's a magic formula for that, but there isn't. Iteration and things like the beta are the best tools we have."

The launch of *Halo 5: Guardians* was a watershed moment for a series that, for all the efforts of latter-day contenders like *Titanfall*, remains key to the Xbox's appeal. Before release, some fans expressed concern that a four-player emphasis would take something away from a series so beholden to the idea of a lone hero, but now that's it's in the wild, it feels like 343 struck a clever balance – Master Chief's new friends are as much windows into the soul of one of gaming's great characters, as they are arresting personalities in their own right. The Covenant may not be all that thrilled by *Halo*'s latest incarnation, but for the rest of us it's an epic, exhilarating ride. 🐉

Promethean foes still explode into beautiful flecks of burning orange. So satisfying.



Weapons check

Halo 5 features flashy new models of many classic *Halo* weapons, such as the Chief's trusty Assault Rifle and the shield-stripping Covenant Pistol. But there are new varieties, too. The Covenant Plasma Caster is a particularly fearsome specimen – its bolts stick to targets when fired in Smart-Link mode (think iron sights but sexier), but ricochet from other surfaces. You can also charge it for a short-ranged, high-damage blast. Humanity's answer? The Hydra launcher (pictured), which fires homing airburst explosives. Characters in the campaign also receive their own custom versions of generic weapons, like Kelly Shaddock's shotgun, which sports a cute rabbit design. It won't look so cute when she's aiming it at you, of course.

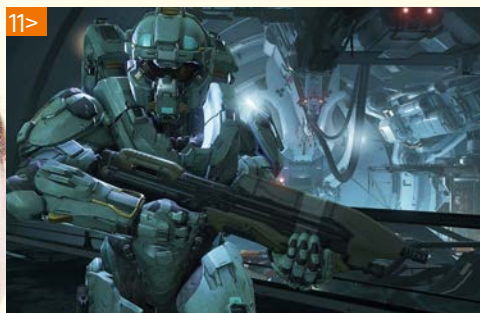
EVERYTHING
YOU NEED TO
KNOW ABOUT...

Halo 5: Guardians

We help answer 15 of your
frequently asked questions
about the Halo lore surrounding
Master Chief's latest outing

Even though 2015 left us spoilt for choice when it comes to great new games, *Halo 5: Guardians* was still our most anticipated Xbox One exclusive. But for a newcomer trying to get into the series, four games' worth of backstory can be pretty intimidating. Especially if you then start including the spin-off games, tie-in novels, TV series, ilovebees.com... So we've compiled this list, giving you everything you need to know if you want to dive right into Master Chief's latest adventure.





"Cortana tragically dies during *Halo 4*'s ending, but not before delivering an emotional farewell that doesn't so much tug at the heartstrings as rip them out"

15> WHO IS MASTER CHIEF?

Seriously? John-117, better known as the Master Chief, is a Spartan-II, a super-soldier working for the United Nations Space Council (UNSC). Trained since the age of six to be the ultimate soldier, John-117's body was augmented, improving his reflexes, strength and eyesight, as well as giving him near-unbreakable bones. Despite a description worthy of the Terminator, John's no dull robot – he's incredibly protective of humanity and his other Spartans. He's a loyal soldier and a hero, one who's saved the universe many times. But in *Halo 5*, Master Chief has gone AWOL. It's the game's first grand mystery: why would the UNSC's best soldier abandon his post?

Further Playing: *The Master Chief Collection* will bring you up to speed on the main series thus far – and it'll do so on your Xbox One, to boot.

14> WHO IS CORTANA?

Being a Spartan gets all sorts of lonely, which is why Master Chief grew so very attached to Cortana – his AI partner and closest confidant. She's a bit like the voices in your head that tell you to shoot things, but somehow not as

worrying. This digital companion who helped out the Chief was with him for (most of) the first four games.

But not anymore. During *Halo 4*'s epic conclusion, Cortana tragically dies, but not before delivering an emotional farewell that doesn't so much tug at the heartstrings as rip your heart out of your chest completely. Such a downbeat ending left Chief more emotionally drained than we've ever seen him, a state some speculated could have motivated him to go AWOL.

Further Playing: The perfect excuse to blitz through *Halo 4* again.

13> WHAT IS THE SPARTAN-II PROGRAMME?

The original UNSC super-soldier programme sought out children with extraordinary physical or mental gifts (John-117 had both, naturally). Then the UNSC abducted those children, replaced

them with clones so that no one would know, and forced their victims through vigorous military training until they could barely remember their former lives. Ouch. And we thought not getting *Halo 2* for Christmas all those years ago meant we had a rough childhood.

Benjamin Giraud is a journalist who's interviewed several people who knew Master Chief. His hunt for the truth has revealed some of the more horrifying aspects of the Spartan-II programme, including said cloning and abduction of children. Those who want to know more should start with his work.

Further Listening: Giraud's nosey investigations are all chronicled in the *Hunt the Truth* podcast.

12> WHO ARE BLUE TEAM?

Cortana may be gone, but Master Chief won't be fighting alone. For the first time in a *Halo* game, he'll be fighting alongside Blue Team, the legendary Spartans who will be familiar to fans who follow *Halo* lore outside of the games themselves. It means all four players have their own individual character in co-op, with their own backstories and motivations. The three other members of Guardians' Blue Team – Fred-104, Linda-058 and Kelly-087 – were abducted at age six for the Spartan-II programme, and have known John-117 all their lives. Interestingly, for co-op to work, Blue Team will have to vanish along with him. What is so vital that four Spartans are willing to risk their reps?

Further Reading: *Halo: The Fall of Reach* is the first tie-in novel, and marks Blue Team's first appearance.

11> WHO IS FRED-104?

Fred's not an elitist. He's never liked the special treatment Spartans get from humans, and doesn't consider himself above baseline troops. While that's a nice sentiment... come on, Fred. You're widely regarded as arguably a better marksman than the Master Chief himself. Those lesser troops aren't fit to lick the mud from your boots.

Fred's incredible skills in combat, strong leadership and second-to-only-one-at-most shooting make him worthy of his own series of games. But Fred doesn't compete with Chief, and is happy for John to take the Blue Team's lead. All those skills *and* he's gracious? Can this guy do anything wrong?

Further Reading: The novel *Halo: Last Light* has Fred-104 in a starring role. Find out more inside.



»

10> WHO IS LINDA-058?

If you want the best sniper, look no further than Linda. (Er, if you can see her – she’s probably quite far away.) She’s the quietest member of Blue Team – who wants a loud sniper, after all? – but underestimate her, and her trigger finger, at your peril. She once took down two assailants so fast, Master Chief himself couldn’t tell which she’d shot first. Often she’s referred to as the ‘lone wolf’ with regard to her habit of taking her own path and watching the team’s back from afar. Basically, if you have a back, and would like someone to watch it, there’s none better.

Further Reading: The *Halo: Fall of Reach* comic adaptation **Boot Camp** shows the childhoods of John-117, Kelly and Linda. They had it rough.

09> WHO IS KELLY-087?

Kelly was always quick, but then she got augmented. Now she’s the fastest Spartan, which makes her easily the fastest person in the world (take that, Usain Bolt). Her speed gives her a natural advantage on the battlefield, but she excels in other areas of combat, too. Notably, she’s shown an incredible tolerance for extreme pain, successfully recovering after several critical wounds. Kelly also comes equipped with a very cynical sense of humour – though we guess this is justified when all you’ve known is war. It helps spice up *Halo 5*’s writing. Cortana’s relationship with Master Chief helped humanise him in the previous Halo games, so expect the presence of his trusted chums to have the same effect here.

Further Reading: Again, the *Halo: Fall of Reach* comic is best if you want to learn more about these supporting Spartans and their gruelling training regimes.

08> WHO IS SPARTAN LOCKE?

You’re not just playing from the Master Chief’s perspective in *Halo 5 Guardians*; you also step into the boots of the Spartan tasked with hunting down the universe’s toughest soldier. Jameson Locke is one of the best field operatives that the ONI (Office of Naval Intelligence) ever produced. He’s cautious, logically minded and can really handle himself in a fight, despite preferring to resolve conflict through negotiation. Hey, *Deus Ex* called – it wants its protagonist back.

Locke’s distrusting nature and non-confrontational approach contrasts with John-117’s all-guns-blazing methods. Although it’ll feel odd playing as your opponent, he’s fixing to be a worthy adversary for the Master Chief. And hey, maybe they’ll be pals by the end.

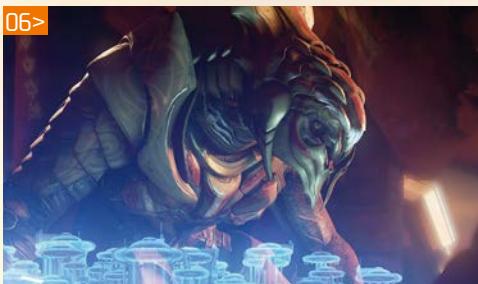
Further watching: Locke is the lead in the *Halo: Nightfall* TV series. You can watch it on the Halo Channel in *The Master Chief Collection*.

07> WHAT IS SANGHELIOS?

The Covenant, a religious and militaristic order determined to wipe out the human race, were the main antagonists of the original Halo trilogy. They had to start somewhere – Sanghelios, legendary home world of the Sangheili race, the origins of the Covenant and the planet we probably associate with peace the least. It was mentioned way back in *Halo 3*, but *Guardians* marks the first time we get to visit the planet. Being the first new-gen Halo (and the biggest one yet, too) you explore a world of incredible scale. But considering his history with its people, don’t expect the Chief to receive the warmest of welcomes. ‘Miffed’ is putting it lightly. **Further Reading:** Sanghelios features heavily in the novel *Halo: Glasslands*.



06>



03>



02>



05> WHO ARE FIRETEAM OSIRIS?

Locke's assembled Fireteam Osiris from a whole new pool of Spartan heroes, some recognisable to diehard fans of the series. Most familiar is Buck, a fan favourite after his standout role in *Halo 3: ODST*, making a long-awaited return here (bringing Nathan Fillion, his voice talent, with him). We've already seen him provide some welcome comic relief in what was running the risk of being the most sombre and serious Halo yet. Interestingly, Buck held off becoming a Spartan for several years because he didn't want to abandon his battle-hardened crew. We wouldn't be surprised to find 'LOYALTY' tattooed across this guy's biceps.

Further Playing: *Halo 3: ODST* is the underrated gem of the Halo series and the perfect introduction to Spartan Buck. It has also been released as an add-on to *The Master Chief Collection*.

04> WHO IS HOLLY TANAKA?

The remaining members of Team Osiris may not be as recognisable, but they're more than worthy of their posts. Holly Tanaka's homeworld was

"Guardians are legendary Forerunner technology, apparently back to begin the 'Age of Reclamation'. Destroying the universe to start anew? Sounds like a threat worthy of Halo"

06> WHO IS THE ARBITER?

Thel 'Vadam, probably better known as the Arbiter, has had his differences with Master Chief (to say the least). But these former adversaries finally buried the hatchet during the events of *Halo 3*, as the Arbiter learned the truth about the Covenant's nefarious plans. In the years following the game, the Arbiter has been off touring the states of Sanghelios, making the difficult case for a permanent peace between the aggressive Sangheili and humanity.

That's a pretty noble, non-violent goal – so just why is the Arbiter seen chatting with Spartan Locke about his mission to track down Master Chief? Might the Chief have disrupted the Arbiter's plans for peace? If the Arbiter wants us dead, it's impossible to know who we can trust any more.

Further Playing: *Halo 2* and *3* are just as much the story of Thel 'Vadam as they are John-117.

destroyed when she was a helpless child, meaning she had to grow up fast. Forced to adapt quickly, Holly developed a wide range of skills to help her fellow survivors, but also learnt how to take on – and beat – a superior foe. Basically, she got her whole Spartan-IV training before the programme had even heard of her. Tanaka has shown a nobility in saving others and refusing to leave survivors behind. Not hard to see why that kind of loyalty would appeal to Spartan Locke and friends. She, and her favoured DMR and magnum combo, are most welcome on our Fireteam.

Further Reading: *Halo: Escalation* issues 17 and 18. The 'Glass Horizon' storyline covers Tanaka's origins.

03> WHO IS OLYMPIA VALE?

Note to self: call future daughter 'Olympia Vale' to guarantee offspring awesomeness. More than just a cool name, Vale is a diplomat, completely

fluent in Sangheili. She prides herself on her ability to form interspecies relationships. When an adversary threatened to activate the Halo array in a previous adventure, she was willing to sacrifice herself to save the Earth – always a good trait to have in a Spartan. Olympia's more verbal abilities are an interesting contrast to the traditional speed-power-sniping prowess of Blue Team. You can see why Locke would want someone of her skills on the more thoughtful Fireteam Osiris, especially with their first stop being Sanghelios.

Further Reading: The novel *Halo: Hunters in the Dark* should be enough to convince anyone of her credentials.

02> WHAT ARE THE GUARDIANS?

These hulking mechanical structures are legendary Forerunner technology, apparently back to begin an 'Age of Reclamation'. Destroying the universe to start anew? Yeah, that sounds like a threat worthy of Master Chief's time.

Because they're larger than some small towns, nowhere is safe. Guardians are capable of concealing themselves underwater, or under lava, and can produce mighty shockwaves that make short work of buildings and Covenant aircraft. They're colossal in size too, all 1.4 kilometres of them. We know what you're thinking: this is the kind of big bad most games would save for a final boss, right? Well, you meet them right at the start of *Halo 5*. Hope you brought a spare pair of pants, because you might need them after this battle.

Further Watching: You can watch the whole E3 demo – and the initial reveal trailer where we first saw a towering Guardian – online.

01> WHAT IS HALO 5?

Ah, the big question. It's a sci-fi first-person shooter. Single-player or up to four-player in co-op, showing every other game in its genre how this should be done. It's a shooter where every weapon has a purpose and everything is perfectly balanced. It's a hugely popular PvP multiplayer series, that's also yet to have a truly bad single-player campaign to its name. It's the same 30 seconds of fun, over and over, but now with new-gen power and scale behind it. Get reading/watching/listening/playing, because the Xbox One's epic exclusive is available now.

Further Playing: *Halo 5: Guardians*. It's available to download now for anyone with a Game Pass subscription. 🎮

The Master Chief Correction

The Chief returns to our consoles with something old, something new, something borrowed – and Red vs Blue

Everyone knew he was coming back. From Xbox One's announcement, it was always just a matter of time before the Chief crashed through the atmosphere and reminded us all just what a real FPS looks like. The focus of *Halo 5: Guardians* is exactly that, and with it a beautiful surprise that every long-term fan has been dreaming of. This is a game built from the ground-up to return Halo multiplayer to its first principles, and to the forefront of the competitive shooter scene. "From the day we first started working on this game," says 343 Industries executive producer Josh

Holmes, "competitive has been the core of the experience."

We spent a day playing the *Halo 5* multiplayer beta, which launched on 29 December and run until 18 January, and in the opening presentation Holmes and creative director Tim Longo ruined all our carefully prepared questions. Almost every single aspect of *Halo 4* that troubled fans is gone. *Halo 5* runs on dedicated servers, there are no more Ordnance drops, Armor Abilities are out, loadouts are gone, flinching has flinched, fixed weapon spawns are back, hello to a sexy 60FPS and – sweet Cortana! – the whole thing's built around a skill-based ranking system.







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We've got the skinny on all of it, but the first and most obvious question is why? After all, in an industry built on constant forward momentum it's unusual to see such a high-profile FPS hark back to classic multiplayer roots – and, perhaps, something of an admission that *Halo 4* just had too much stuff going on. "A big part of it is just putting all players on an equal footing," says Holmes. "Making sure there's an equal playing field. Tim [Longo] has been very passionate about making sure every player has the same set of abilities that they can employ and use as tools on the battlefield."

"Yeah, we've been really focused on keeping the skill gap pure, so it's learning about how to use all these toys," says Longo. "We kind of talk about it like peeling an onion's layers over time, so you might take a chance and start trying to learn how to use ground pound, then you go on to add this and you add that. But everyone has that suite of abilities and then it's just how you use it to increase your skills. That kind of return to form is the whole point of arena multiplayer."

BEST OF THE BUNCH

We've much more from Holmes and Longo, but first let's get to the juicy details and... ground pound? It's a me, Master Chief? Perish the thought. *Halo 4* was great, but it added a huge amount to multiplayer in the form of loadouts and Armor Abilities, which *Halo 5* deals with by giving everything to everybody – up to a point. The Spartans you'll control in multiplayer have new Mjolnir armour suits that incorporate tweaked versions of the very best abilities from the earlier Halo multiplayer modes, but activate depending on what you're doing.

So for example if you're in a firefight and push the analogue stick in a direction plus B, you'll activate a thruster-powered evasive dodge – which can also be triggered in midair to squeeze out a little more distance. If you're sprinting forwards and press melee, you'll perform the 'Spartan Charge' – a forward shoulder-ram that

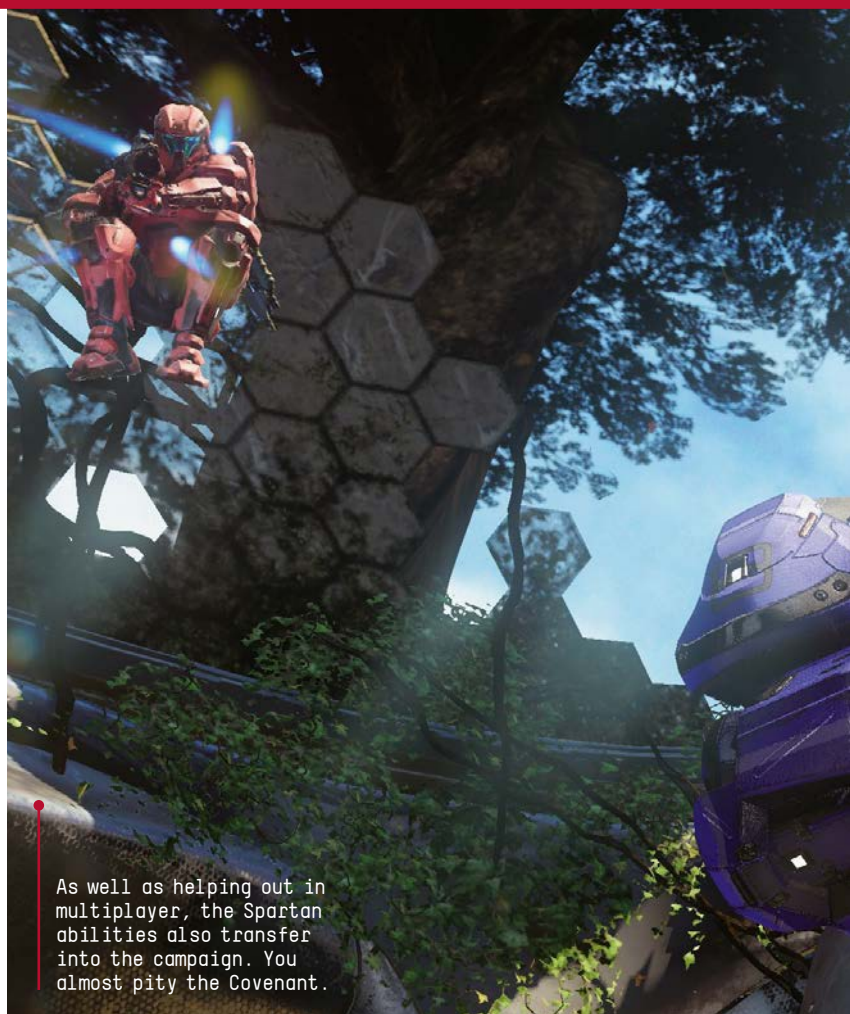
THE DE-SCOPING CONTROVERSY

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN DE-SCOPING AND FLINCH, AND WHY IS IT A BIG DEAL? LET US EXPLAIN EVERYTHING

One of the fans' biggest criticisms aimed at *Halo 4*'s core mechanics was the removal of de-scoping, which is how taking a hit while zoomed-in with a scope would instantly return you to a 'normal' view. *Halo 4*'s replacement was 'flinch' where, upon taking a hit, a player's reticule moves a little in a random direction. *Halo 5: Guardians* reverses this decision – but why does it matter so much?

"De-scoping in the past has always been a really important thing for *Halo*," says Longo. "Perhaps unknown in a way for people who just play it for fun and not so seriously, because it's a really important balancing mechanic for scoped weapons like sniper rifles. It forces people who are playing at range to make different decisions and move around the map more. So with our focus on competitive this time and making everything as even and balanced as possible we felt we needed to bring back de-scoping – so those guys who like to sit back and just kind of own everyone with a sniper have a slightly more difficult time."

"One of the big differences between flinch and de-scoping is that when you get hit and you flinch, you don't know where the scope's going to go," adds Holmes. "The pro gamers that we talk to – and we've also hired some onto the team to test and help refine the game – they describe it as a case where you're fighting the game instead of the player. With de-scope, even though it's kicking you out of scope, you're always fighting the player because you maintain your reticule position and you can still get that shot if you're calm and cool in the moment."



As well as helping out in multiplayer, the Spartan abilities also transfer into the campaign. You almost pity the Covenant.

we used on more than one occasion to send enemies flying over the side of levels. Zoom in on your target while jumping and thrusters will automatically activate to give your Spartan a little more hangtime – which balances the powerful surprise factor by also making you something of a sitting/floating duck.

Then there's that tasty ground pound. *Halo 5*'s most obviously delicious new

combat, but it also makes Spartans much more manoeuvrable in general and balances these increased abilities out with tactical downsides. Infinite sprint is now the default for all players, but sprinting now stops the shield from recharging – so if someone's losing a fight and high-tails it, you can chase them down in the knowledge they've sacrificed their shield timer.

"Spartans have new Mjolnir armour suits that have the very best abilities from earlier Halo multiplayer"

ability, this is activated when you're in the air and click in on the right stick, which brings up a large red targeting reticule on the floor below and sets off a warning audio cue (which can be heard by other players). Release the right stick, or charge it to the max, and your Spartan zooms down from above like death itself, landing fist-down with a spine-shattering oomph that obliterates anything in the way. It's high risk and high reward, but the damage and the small-but-devastating impact makes it an irresistible new toy to play with.

This isn't it by a battle rifle long shot. *Halo 5* gives you many new options in

The recharge time on shields also feels quicker than in *Halo 4* (although Holmes claimed he couldn't exactly remember if this was true, thanks to it changing so much during development). If you're sprinting and click the right stick, you go into a slide and stop in a crouched position – useful for both entering combat and dashing into cover.

GET MOVING

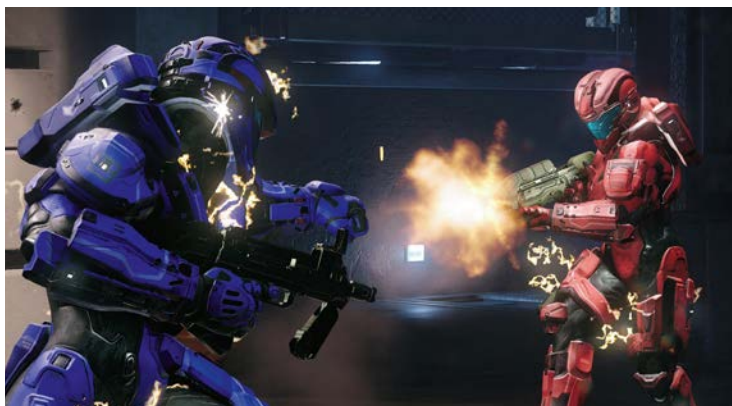
By far the biggest change is the addition of clambering – if a Spartan's jumping for a ledge, you can now press jump a second time to grab on and climb up in double-time. This is not new



to the FPS genre but it is new to Halo, and the implications for map design are enormous. The most obvious impact is in packed arenas, which are filled with platforms running alongside and within the more normal thoroughfares. One of the maps we played was a new version of *Halo 2*'s classic Midship, now called Truth, and the ramps at either side lend themselves wonderfully well to this new style of movement. The change to Halo's feel isn't perhaps as fundamental as you would think it might be, because what clambering does is simply get you somewhere quicker and with fewer of those awful failed jumps where your stomach hits the platform edge with a weedy crunch. We won't miss it.

So why did 343 Industries move away from the customisable Armor Abilities towards a one-Spartan-to-rule-them-all design? "We decided to really focus the abilities around what it means to be a Spartan," says Holmes. "That's the inspiration, thinking about what it would be like to be this super-powerful walking tank on the battlefield with all of this tech at your disposal. So some of those are abilities you've seen in *Halo 4*, like thrusters, but from that kind of 'Spartan fantasy' we're creating a single cohesive set of abilities."

Saying 'what does it mean to be a Spartan?' is a good tagline, of course, but what does it actually mean in the context of designing a competitive



Starting Gear

Every player in Breakout begins with the same loadout. "The starting weapons are carefully chosen," says Longo. "First you have *Halo 5*'s SMG, so an SMG where you can go into a scoped view, then you have your magnum as well to flip to for longer distances." On top of this there's one frag grenade, which encourages synchronised throwing into packed areas like the house at the start of the round.

Obviously those weapons are serviceable enough, but a big part of Breakout's rhythm is in how the teams divide up the power weapons on their side of the map - because there aren't enough for everyone. In particular each side has easy access to one BR, which allows for kills at a much longer distance than usual, and the team has to decide whether to risk splitting off to go for extra grenades, or stick with their BR buddy and protect them in the hope of getting a few long-range pick-offs. Naturally some rounds devolved into a set of headless chickens running everywhere, but when you see good players in Breakout the co-ordination is amazing.



Breakout!

Halo 5's new competitive mode broken down

Halo 5 introduces a new competitive mode to the series called Breakout. This is a four-on-four battle set in a small arena packed with cover, where Spartans have slightly less health than usual and begin with the same two weapons and one frag grenade apiece. A game of Breakout

takes place over a maximum of nine rounds, with the first team to win five rounds declared the victors. Breakout matches start with the opposing teams jumping into the arena and landing on opposite sides. Cover blocks the immediate sightlines, with a large 'pit' area located in the centre of the map, as well as an enclosed structure on one side containing sticky grenades, a hill on the other with

extra frag grenades, and two bird's-nest locations with handy battle rifles. Remember these locations. Every fight is a furious and speedy tactical engagement, with the announcer shouting out kills, and catching opposing players off-guard or outnumbering them almost guarantees the kill. It also requires much more cautious play than 'normal' Halo multiplayer - you've less health, no respawn, and every

lost comrade makes the enemy team that much stronger. The feeling as you whittle down the opposition and four Spartans begin hunting down the last enemy in this small space is delicious, and conversely the tension when you're that sole survivor is like nothing Halo has done before. Especially with dead teammates watching your every move. Here are the ingredients of *Halo 5*'s biggest departure.





Paintball!

"Breakout came from Kevin Franklin, who's our design director for multiplayer," says head of development, Josh Holmes. "He's a big paintball fan and has always wanted to create a mode that gets some of that, capturing that elimination feel - so in Breakout you kind of jump into the arena and then it's one kill and you're out."

Breakout was in fact something 343 had considered previously, but didn't have time for. "Franklin's talked about that mode since we were doing *Halo 4*," says Holmes. "We didn't have a chance to do it then, but he always wanted it since then. I want to emphasise that when we're talking about paintball, he used to play competitive paintball - so it really has that kind of emphasis." Breakout isn't strictly 'one hit then you're out', but it goes some way towards that feel by ensuring players take much less punishment before going down than in 'normal' Arena multiplayer.



Counter-Strike

One of the most venerable and well-known competitive FPS games of all time is *Counter-Strike*, and its structure is short two-minute rounds of 5-on-5 with no respawning. "I know [Kevin Franklin] was also competitive in *Counter-Strike*, though I'm not sure how good he really was," laughs Holmes. "So that's another big inspiration for Breakout."

Kevin Franklin sounds like our kind of chap. Breakout's round structure is unmistakably similar to *Counter-Strike*, though there are big differences between the games - *Counter-Strike* is objective-based and its rounds are tied together with an economy system, for example, where Breakout has fewer rounds, no economy, and the only objective is to kill the enemy team. Nevertheless, the importance is in what a round structure like this does for the moment-to-moment of competitive FPS play - it makes players less foolhardy, encourages co-ordinated teamwork and, more than anything, makes every single round matter.



Roll like the Chief

How to get a headstart in multiplayer's Arena

Don't sprint everywhere!

The most common mistake we made in our first few hours was sprinting away from close-fought battles - and forgetting that it stops the shield from recharging, which leaves you vulnerable.

Surprised? Slide!

If an enemy pops up as you're sprinting, the animation to bring your gun to bear will let them get the first shot. But if you quickly transition to a slide, you're able to fire fast, stay on the move and make yourself a smaller target.

Edge case

A new problem for ranged gunners is that players can clamber up to elevated positions - so you now need to keep an eye on the ledges in front of you as well as whatever's behind. It's very easy to stick someone clambering towards you. Just saying.

Spartan charge into battle!

The Spartan Charge does a ton of damage and will one-hit kill enemies that are already damaged. It's also incredibly useful for knocking enemies' aim off-kilter, much more than a simple melee.

Thrust-me-do!

The thruster-powered dodge can be triggered in mid-air to boost yourself forwards and grab onto a platform you might otherwise miss.

Don't be first: be smartest

Because *Halo 5* gives such obvious cues about when the power weapons spawn, everyone rushes to them. Sit back, relax, and when the timer hits zero bombard them with grenades and claim your new toy.



The ability to clamber up onto platforms opens up a vast number of new angles of attack. Makes surviving a true art.

"The most important thing about *Halo 5* is that it simply feels great to move around, with new traversal options really opening up a level"

multiplayer experience? What comes first the cool move or the cool design idea? Holmes responds with a question. "So you remember how the Chief in *Halo 3* kind of slams down? I mean, man, I wish I could do something like that, come flying down from space and 'wham!' in the middle of a match." So do we, Josh (and a few of you lot, too).

"Really, it's about delivering those big moments but in a balanced way," adds Longo. "So something like ground pound is hard to execute, but if you get it there's a big payoff. You just expect Spartans to be able to do some really cool stuff, so you wanna deliver that but then balance it for multiplayer."

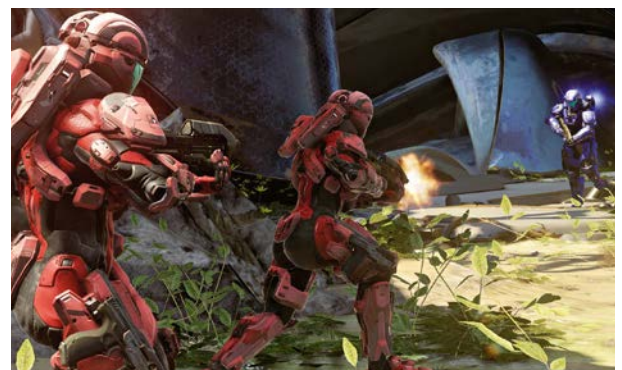
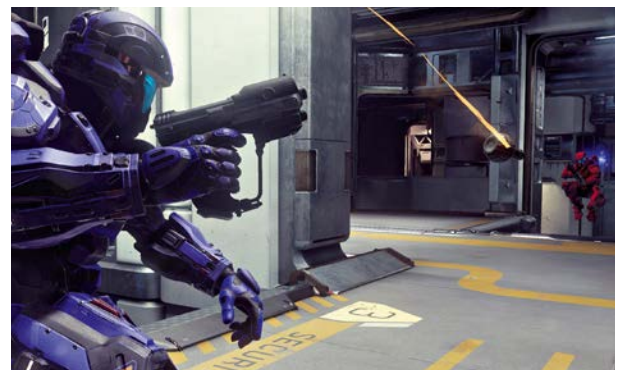
POUND FOR POUND

The *Halo 5* beta eventually ran with seven maps in total, though at this early stage we were only able to play the life out of three. The first is instantly familiar: *Halo 2*'s incredible Midship, a symmetrical, purple-hued interior with 'bases' at opposite ends, a giant light-bridge across the centre, and curved

walkways around each edge. Here, it's been renamed Truth and the main addition is clamber points dotted at convenient points around that make it easier to get where you're going faster.

The most important thing about *Halo 5* is that it simply feels great to move around the stages - the new traversal options give you a wider range of approaches to any part of the level, and using them requires no real adjustment or, after a minute or two, even conscious thought. It's like you've always been able to clamber, and going back to *Halo 4* afterwards felt weirdly restrictive. What's really nice about *Halo 5* is that it keeps the faster pace of *Halo 4*, but strips back all of the extraneous elements to focus exclusively on evenly matched Spartans battling over control points and power weapons.

In fact, if there's one thing that stands out - apart from the fact the animations, textures and incidental level details add up to an amazing-looking game - it's that the multiplayer maps seem to have found that rhythm



from the earlier games, where timed weapon and vehicle spawns would see enemy teams converge and duke it out. Power weapons spawn at regular intervals, which is communicated both with an icon on the HUD and in-game chatter that tells you when the spawn is getting close – the latter part of a new automatic VO system that communicates enemy positions within teams without players needing to talk.

"I think map control is so important to map flow, particularly in a competitive experience, and so having those power positions on the map that you have to fight over just creates a really good flow within the combat," says Holmes. "The other thing we wanted to focus on

within the map design is the Spartan abilities. For example, locations where different abilities are more useful – so there are clamber routes as well as elevated positions where you might want to line up a ground pound. The flipside is that if you're below that spot, you know through experience that you may be vulnerable to an enemy above you. We're really focusing on those elements of map design."

DROP ZONES

Halo 4's Ordnance drops and loadouts had shifted away from this idea of the map guiding player movement, so while there were still choke points and the like there was no impulse to make





You'll unlock new cosmetic parts by opening REQ Packs, earned with XP or purchased with a microtransaction.



The eSports Strategy

Halo 5 wants to put the Chief back at the top of competitive gaming - but how?

The idea of competition is at the core of *Halo 5* - and 343 is looking to deliver for both normal players who want a skill-based matchmaking experience and the top professional FPS players. It's no small goal. One of *Halo 4*'s low points was when Major League Gaming decided it would no longer feature the game, and we sense this may have stung 343 a little more than it lets on.

"We wanna be back at the top," says Longo. "So we're trying to integrate as many eSports-centric features as possible." The ecosystem of competitive gaming has grown hugely over the past few years, so the beta was not only *Halo 5*'s strategy for bouncing back, but part of the response to the new gaming landscape.

eSports for all

The starting point for bringing Halo back as an eSport is that, while not everyone's a pro, everyone likes to feel like a pro. "One of our focal points is on creating a competitive experience for all skill levels, and so one of the terms we throw around is 'eSports for everyone'," explains Holmes. "We want

to allow people to engage in that competitive experience whether they're a true pro player that's in the top 200 in the world, or whether they just want to compete with friends." Which leads to...

Spectators

One of the biggest omissions in *Halo 4*, from an eSports perspective, was that it lacked a spectator mode. "So now we have a spectator mode," laughs Longo, as he whoops and waves a foam finger in his face. "For our beta, what you can do is go in and spectate on any match where one of your friends is playing, but what we want to do for the full game is allow you the ability to spectate any of the top players - and then we'll be highlighting those matches within the Halo Channel using our own community team."

Competitors

Although *Halo 5* will have an XP-based ranking system for unlocking cosmetic items, this is now hived-off from each player's Competitive Skill Rating. "CSR has seven tiers - the last two of which are semi-pro and pro," says Longo. "And anyone playing

the game can rise up and attain that status - the pros will be the top 200 people in the world, and they have individual ranks so at any given time you'll be able to look up and know who the best in the world is." Spoiler: it will not be us.

Casters

The last part of the online equation, and in some ways the key to *Halo 5*'s potential eSport popularity, is that people inclined to broadcast their Halo games can do so with the minimum of fuss. "We're integrating spectator mode and Twitch streaming into the Halo Channel so we have our own undivided attention on streaming that sort of eSports mentality," explains Longo.

Casters can also make a difference to which players are being seen, in effect curating the best of the best so we can just tune in and watch. "People who are casting matches and then streaming to Twitch will be able to aggregate the top players who are playing," explains Holmes. "So you can go onto the Halo Channel and you'll kind of see those bubble up and tune into those matches." Sounds good to us.

epic cross-map struggles to pick up a newly spawning sniper rifle. "We want everything to be intentional for the player," says Longo. "So when you go for a certain spot on the map, there's an intention to do that rather than there being a random quality to it. Everything's been thought through about how these maps flow, so when a weapon position is chosen the players know where that is, when it's coming and that enemy players are likely going to be hitting it at around the same time." And there's no randomisation of power weapons? "Yep, no randomisation."

THE GUN SHOW

Hold us close, Chief, because this is everything we've dreamed of. The second map available, Empire, is set atop a skyscraper under siege - which is why you can Spartan Charge your enemies off the sides for kicks. Overall the map is slightly bigger than Truth but it's also a much more enclosed space - all corridors, pillars, doorways and elevation spots. On Truth the power weapon was the sword right in the middle, but here two sniper rifles spawn at opposite ends of the map at exactly the same time - which in our games led to either a giant bunfight over one of the spots, or both teams separating





“Empire is set atop a building under siege - which is why you can Spartan Charge your rivals off the side for kicks”

briefly, securing their sniper, and then going back on a deadly hunt.

Our skills were as sharp as ever, so our very first game saw a spectacular kill frenzy with the sword – important not because it shows we’re awesome at Halo, but because it shows how much muscle memory was working right from the get-go. *Halo 5* adds so many improvements, particularly when it comes to manoeuvring around levels, that the most surprising thing

is it feels like a Halo game at the core. Particularly notable is the return of mid- to long-range BR and DMR battles and a fresh emphasis on the assault rifle as the starting weapon, but other minor tweaks like increased grenade damage and a reduced time before shield recharging feel like a return to classic principles. In other words, that incredible *Halo 2* and *3* feel.

The team seem to agree. “Halo 2 is kind of a defining multiplayer experience on console and, for me, one of the defining arena shooters of all time,” says Holmes. “So to be able to bring that back and have the classic roots coming through in this experience is awesome.”

A theme of our time with Holmes and Longo, however, is that this arena mode is just one part – albeit clearly a very important one – of where 343 wants to take the game. “Right now what we’re showing is just the arena portion,” says Holmes. “We have a much larger experience for multiplayer which we’ll talk about closer to launch, but for now it’s all about 4v4 arena.”

At the time this hinted at something like a split between an Infinity Slayer mode, as in *Halo 4*, where you get all of the toys to play with, and then a much more focused competitive multiplayer component designed around balance and a level playing field. The former would later manifest itself as Warzone (see page 134), but the latter is still key to *Halo 5*. “I think that’s the cool thing about having the arena mode dedicated to the competitive experience,” says Longo. “Because we can actually decide what weapons are used and then be very focused about it. But arena is the tip of the iceberg, so there’ll be other modes with more weapons. We can be really specific – that’s the beauty of arena – and it’s not meshed-together as it has been in the past, where you end up with a kind of half-and-half.”

RANK AND FILE

Which leads to the biggest question of all, for nerdy Halo junkies like us, anyway – is skill-based ranking in matchmaking back? Is it ever. “We have two systems,” says Longo. “We have levelling up for things like the armour unlocks and cosmetic things in the arena mode, and then CSR [Competitive Skill Rating] is there for your skill. And that can go up and down based on your

performance, so that’s designed to show what your ‘real’ skill level is – so you can attain iron, bronze, silver, gold, onyx, semi-pro and pro. You move up and down that chain.”

The ‘pro’ ranking, in particular, will individually rank the top 200 players in the world – surely a dream for every serious Halo player (were it so easy). Though it never seemed this way at the time, with hindsight you can look back on *Halo 4* and see it as something of an experimental entry in the series – testing out new elements both in-game and structurally, while adapting the best of the competition. For many players it worked, and for some it moved a little too far from that classic Halo formula.

We went to play *Halo 5: Guardians* with a bunch of questions based around the elements of *Halo 4* that the fans were most vocal about disliking. In the first ten minutes, each one of those questions was answered by the game itself – every element that players found problematic in *Halo 4* has been addressed and either rolled back or improved upon. *Halo 5* certainly shows that 343 Industries is listening to fans. More than anything else, it shows that the core multiplayer experience of Halo is absolutely classic – and coming back with a vengeance. 🌀





This Means War

Welcome to Warzone, the radical new multiplayer mode where anything can happen

If the snippet of *Halo 5*'s campaign that opened Microsoft's annual E3 conference was light on enemies – opting for scene-setting and cinematic escapes over classic gunfights – a trip to a vast bank of demo pods showed us where they were hiding. Warzone, a new multiplayer mode, drops two teams of 12 into a landscape swarming with Covenant and Promethean forces. If you picture *Breakout*, *Halo 5*'s sparse four-on-four offering out to woo the e-sports crowd, at one end of the multiplayer spectrum, Warzone sits unashamedly at the other: an everything but the kitchen sink smackdown only made possible with the technological grunt of Xbox One.

Unhelpfully pitched as “player vs player vs everything”, it's better described as a hybrid of *Halo*'s classic Dominion mode and a MOBA. Victory hinges on either amassing 1,000 points, having the most points at the end of the match, or destroying the Power Core at the heart of the enemy

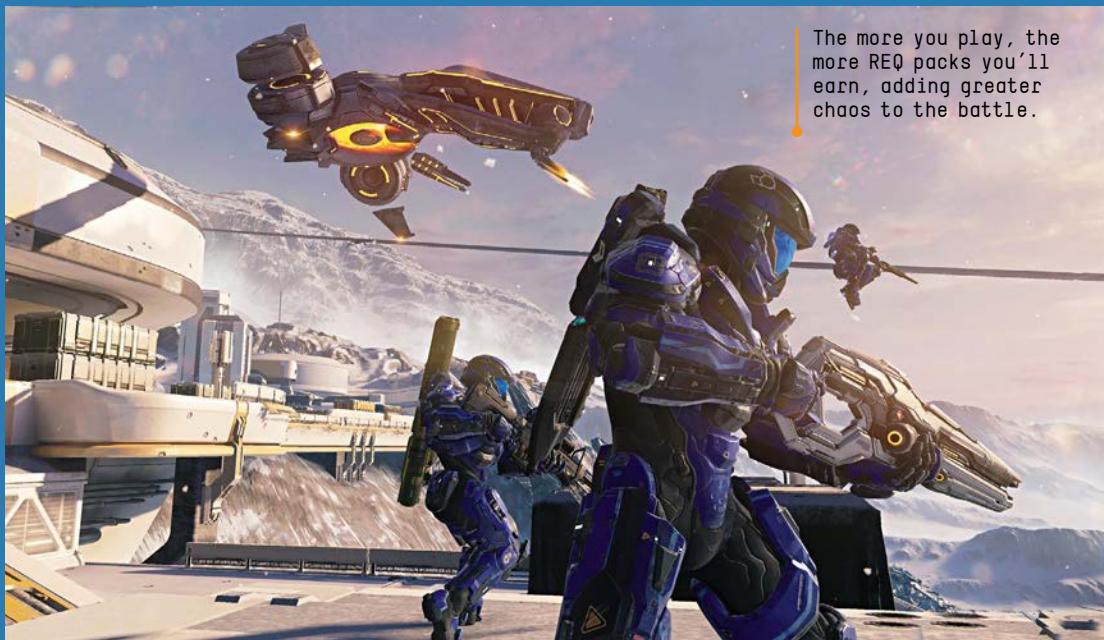
base. Hitting 1k with kills alone is just too slow. Capturing neutral bases (the Dominion bit) grants a gradual trickle of points; a good place to start lengthening a headstart. Grabbing all three of those bases not only turns a trickle into a gush, but opens up the doors to the enemy HQ for that final assault on the Core. But all this is easier said than done due to the inclusion of AI bosses that, if toppled, grant huge point payouts. Can you afford to squat on a base with a potential 200 points sprinting around no-man's land?

On paper it's a remarkably clever balancing act. The threat of any points-driven mode is that once a team has a comfortable lead, it can become difficult for the other team to catch up, leaving them to fight towards an inevitable loss. This, obviously, isn't very satisfying. By making Power Core destruction an instant win 343 creates a second path to victory that ignores points completely. Even if a team is leading 800 to 200 (sounds unlikely,

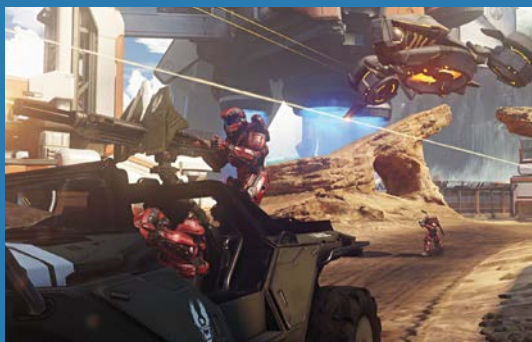
yes, but then you've never seen us play), the losers still have an opportunity to size the neutral bases and storm the Core. When all three bases are captured you definitely sense the game transform into something else as all 24 players congregate around the two entrances to the now-exposed core.

IN THE ZONE

What perhaps sounds chaotic on paper reveals clearer patterns in play. Fights begin with your team punching through Promethean forces in your home base, warming up your trigger finger before letting you out into the wider map to home in on neutral territories. Here's where the routes to victory begin to branch. In one match we manage to take all three bases, but in hunkering down to protect them we hand a crucial boss bounty to our opponents. In another life our own attempt to cash-in on a high value Sangheili General ends in several perforated Spartans and lost ground. The idea that some bosses are



The more you play, the more REQ packs you'll earn, adding greater chaos to the battle.



easier than others creates a fun tactical wrinkle, as more attractive bounties – their arrival announced by the urgent tones of the game's commentator, Commander Palmer – drag all 24 rivals into a Catch the Pigeon-style dash.

REQ HAVOC

Of course, much of this assumes a level playing field. Forget that. Starting out with an assault rifle and magnum, new weapons and vehicles have to be 'bought' at Requisition Posts or as you respawn after a death. The catch? Energy, the currency used to buy them, is earned during the match, so you can't just order up the most powerful goodies in the first minute. Energy is tied to your REQ Level; this starts at Level 1 in every round and is lifted by capturing bases and killing enemies. The higher the level, the more energy reserves you have to splash out on death-dealing. So it is that a Warthog makes way for a Mantis, which makes


way for the Phaeton. The latter is a new bomb-lobbing bird of prey that feels like the Prometheans' Banshee equivalent, albeit with warping tech that lets you juke left or right to mislead enemy fire.

The point is, each side's firepower escalates by design, the grounded fight slowly taking to the skies, and frail soldiers replaced with squads of stomping mechs. Even with a high REQ Level under your belt, there are still tough decisions to be made: do you spend small blasts of energy on a constant stream of mid-tier upgrades – beefier weapons and the like – or do you bank it for that tasty Phaeton?

PACK IT IN

Interestingly, which items are available at REQ Posts depends on the REQ Packs that you unlock across *Halo 5's* online play. Bought with victories, or rewarded when your profile levels up, packs contain a mix of cosmetic items for general deathmatch and

equipment only available in Warzone. While it's wise to keep better items from contaminating competitive Arena play, it's a little disheartening to hear that packs can be bought with real-world cash – although 343 will funnel funds into tournament prize pots. A sweet idea until some rich jerk rains down Phaetons on day one. Yes, the in-match REQ Level prevents people spamming powerful REQs, but only time will tell if this move will fracture the community.

What's evident right now is how cannily Warzone offers different flavours of Halo to different people. Old hands can choose to play the vanguard, pursuing the big game, while newbies can contribute by holding down the base, or hopping on a Warthog's gun turret. It has the structure of a team game but, spread out over a map four times the size of any that came before, boasts the scale and chaos of the solo campaign's sandbox. When you're faced with red team on your left and the Banshee-riding 'Baron 'Sroam' (one of the named legendary bosses) screaming up on the right, you have to remind yourself that you're not in the middle of one of *Halo 4's* Chief/Covenant/Promethean three-way. And it's every bit as cool as that sounds. 

"Firepower escalates by design, the grounded fight taking to the skies, and frail soldiers replaced with mechs"

Ordnance Survey

Warzone will launch with six maps, with six more to follow as free DLC. Here's what lies in wait...



ESCAPE FROM A.R.C.

This mining colony is on the brink of flooding, the approaching waters only held back by giant forcefields as two teams do battle around its abandoned machinery. Lots of ramps and tunnels make this great for ground combat, while Banshees and Phaetons duke it in the sky above.



RAID ON APEX 7

First revealed in the Mega Bloks replica pictured above, the PR gimmick overshadowed what's really exciting about this map: it's a spiritual successor to *The Silent Cartographer*, with beaches and coastal caves providing a sandy battleground as two teams attempt to seize a Forerunner Spire. Looks absolutely incredible.



MARCH ON STORMBREAK

A power station built into the Stormbreak mountain range, this is notable for both its deadly drops from snaking walkways and the appearance of a legendary boss character based on *Halo Wars'* Field Marshal Re'gish Wamik (Warzone is a combat simulator, explaining how historical characters can appear on the battlefield).

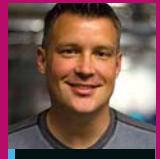
New Team Old Hands

We talk to 343 Industries, in
2011 and 2015, to see how
Halo has changed the studio



What a difference four years makes. Since we last spoke to 343 Industries it has released *Halo 4*, *The Master Chief Collection* and is now putting the finishing touches to *Halo 5: Guardians*. We jumped at the chance to do a follow-up interview and see how Halo's guardians have adjusted to the challenges and where they plan to take the Master Chief next.

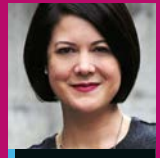
Meet the Team



JOSH HOLMES
Studio Head for
Internal Development



DAN AYOUB
Studio Head for
External Development



KIKI WOLFKILL
Executive Producer



FRANK O'CONNOR
Franchise
Development Director



BONNIE ROSS
Founder and General
Manager



Tell us a bit about your background.
Kiki Wolfkill I've been at Microsoft Game Studios since before it was called that. I started working on PC titles in 1998, and came up through the art side – I was the art director for our racing studio for a while, and spent a lot of time in Liverpool working on the *Project Gotham* series, and *Forza Motorsport*. I then went on to work as art director for Microsoft Game Studios, so I worked on *Halo 3*, then joined 343 in 2008 as an executive producer.

What made you decide to join 343?

Kiki Wolfkill Part of the opportunity was being able to build a team – that's sort of a once in a lifetime opportunity. Secondly, it was being able to build a team to do something as monumentally important as this: it wasn't just a case of 'it's Halo, it's important'. There's a future to think about for the IP, and what we chose to do was going to be very important in helping to define what that future was – that was an enormous challenge that was hard to turn down.

Josh Holmes I started as a designer at EA Canada, and worked on a bunch of games there – notably I was a lead designer on the original *NBA Street*, and *Def Jam Vendetta*. I left EA in 2004



Halo 4 showed us a different side to the Chief, as he dealt with both a threat to mankind and Cortana's corrupting mind.

"There was a future to think about for Halo, and what we chose to do was going to be important in defining that future"

and co-founded Propaganda games in Vancouver, which was subsequently acquired by Disney. I worked with them for about four years, and came to 343 in 2009 as an executive producer, moving into the studio creative director role in 2010 to begin work on *Halo 4*.

What are 343 Industries' broader, high-concept goals for Halo?

343's first take on multiplayer modernised with its new loadouts.

Josh Holmes For us this is all about the return of the Chief, the journey that he'll go through as a character and a hero in the universe. For us that's a big part of what the campaign experience is about, but then we've got some interesting aspects that will also tie in across the whole game. The core of what excites us about the project is getting back to Master Chief's story.

Kiki Wolfkill I think alongside that, it's exciting that we're also doing *Halo: Combat Evolved Anniversary* in the studio. When we started off, one of the things that was really important for us was thinking about our first experiences with *Halo 1*. There's a sense of scale, mystery and epic adventure that we really wanted to find our way back to – not that we'd gotten too far away from it – but there was just a purity of adventure that it was important for us to bring back to *Halo 4*.

This is your first full Halo project at 343. Have you felt any of the pressure behind taking the franchise over?

Kiki Wolfkill We think of it more as a responsibility, and with that comes a certain amount of pressure. There's an amazing fanbase, and we don't want to just ensure that the fans feel the series is in good hands – we want to take them somewhere with us as well. We don't just want to give them the same thing again to make them happy – we want to give them what they expect, but





The *Halo 5* team is currently hammering out the final details of the game, but to step back from that for a moment, we're curious what the broader high-concept goals are for the series?

Bonnie Ross When I first started 343 it wasn't just about creating the next *Halo* game, it was about paving the foundations for the next twenty years. So I look at this as just the beginning; this is *Halo 5*, the second in the Reclaimer Saga, and when you look at what we're doing with those games and trans-media I think this is just the beginning of where we're going with the future with Master Chief's story. I think that what we're doing as well with live action and animation, as well as with *Halo 5*, is trying to tell our story and expand the universe in different ways so that we do have a foundation to tell stories over the next twenty years.

Frank O'Connor Yeah, I think Bonnie's kind of nailed it there as far as what we tried to do with the game, but I think simultaneously we were kind of building and founding our studio and our culture. So in the process of building *Halo 4* we had to establish and build an entire studio from scratch. And some sort of artificial things happen to your culture in that speed, but I think we're



You'd look faintly miffed, too, if you had to deal with the horrors of *Nightfall*.

now comfortable with who we are as a studio. Weirdly enough this is the biggest we've ever been, but this is the first time I've felt like I know all of the team and that every time you walk around the corner it isn't a fresh face any more. And it sounds like a small thing but it really has helped the studio feel cemented in its own culture and in its own persona instead of chasing other studios or trying to be an artifice rather than a naturally, organically evolved culture within the studio.

Bonnie Ross Yeah, with *Halo 4* we were essentially a start-up studio working on an established franchise, which is a really challenging place to be.

"I think we're stepping into the game with more confidence in what we can do and I think audiences and fans should expect more from us with *Halo 5*"

And I think that with *Halo 5*, we're no longer a start-up company; we are an established studio who... I think we're stepping into the game with a lot more confidence in what we can do and I think audiences and fans should expect more from us with *Halo 5*, and hopefully we will deliver on that.

In our earlier interview we raised the idea of there being a 'Bungie Halo' game and a '343 Halo' game, as if different studios might bring a distinct flavour to the series. With two games under your belt, do you have a better feel for what a '343 Halo' game is?

Kiki Wolfkill I don't think it's as easy as saying "Here are the attributes that differentiate the games". Every studio brings its own set of passions and focus and we went into *Halo 4* really trying to be balanced with making sure that we could deliver a *Halo* game that people would expect, while trying to introduce some new lines of thinking. Certainly with *Halo 5* and the co-op focus – and ways of looking at storytelling through co-op – those are some of the places where I think the team's passions shone through. In multiplayer you see a lot of

The early beta was a great chance for 343 to iron out the kinks. Such fun!





“The big challenge was finding the confidence to bring a new and fresh perspective whilst maintaining that core of what makes *Halo* great”



also give them more. *Halo* is obviously a really precious IP, and that's because of the fans and community around it. We don't just want to maintain it, we want to move it forwards.

You guys must have had a ton of ideas that you wanted to bring over.

Josh Holmes There were so many ideas, and part of the challenge was to really focus on the things that we felt were the most important. The other big challenge was finding the strength and the confidence to take risks, and bring a new and fresh perspective whilst balancing that with the core of what makes *Halo* great – the things that made us fans of the series in the first place. But we can't just regurgitate the same experience. For the whole team, I think finding that balance has been one of our biggest challenges: how do we push new ideas, whilst continuing to respect that classic legacy. In terms of specifics, we're still pretty tight-lipped about what we're doing.

Kiki Wolfkill It's definitely been a learning curve – there are times we try things and it's like: 'oh yeah... that's why that doesn't work.'

Frank O'Connor Like sword bloom.



Kiki Wolfkill The more we experimented, the more we came to realise that

there's definitely some magic behind the *Halo* gameplay – and the more the team worked together and began to understand it, the more the ideas began to shift to reflect that.

Could you talk a bit about the transition between Bungie and 343?

Frank O'Connor The transition actually started years ago – it was October 2007 when the transition started, and it's been a long, careful, and delicate process. The publishing team was working on *ODST*, *Reach*, and *Halo Wars* so actually the process really wasn't abrupt. The final handover in August was really just data and stats. You'll still be able to check all your stats and stuff on Bungie.net but you can do it on halowaypoint.com too. Bungie is itching to move on with its new project, and they're gonna do a great job of supporting the community still as it relates to Bungie and *Halo* – for as long as they want, really, but the data and stuff they're passing to us.

Bungie had a real commitment to community – can you talk about your philosophy and plans in that area?

Frank O'Connor Our community team have already been working with Halo fans for over a year, and they're going to continue to do that and expand. Our end goal is to take care of the fans as well as Bungie did. That should be any videogame maker's goal. When you have an audience as disparate as *Halo*'s is, understanding what makes them tick is vital to understanding what needs to be in your game.

Josh Holmes I think what's made the transition easier is that both of us

share a drive to do what's best for the community, and make sure that the experience for the fan is as seamless as possible. A lot has to go on behind the scenes to make that transition run smoothly, of course, but it ultimately all comes back to wanting to do what's right for the community.

Kiki Wolfkill The *Halo* IP is strong and rich partly because of what the community contributes to it. It's a key aspect of *Halo* not just as a successful game franchise, but *Halo* as an IP – and so we need to be able to take care of that as well as we would any other part of the universe.

Josh Holmes When we talk about where we take *Halo* in the future, we need to maintain a balance between taking ownership of the universe, and sharing some of that authorship with the community. *Halo* has a great history of innovation when it comes to allowing users to create their own experiences and tell their own stories – look at stuff like [popular web series] *Red vs Blue*. It sort of exists in that strange area where it's not quite in the universe's canon. It has sort of touchpoints with it. I think the fact that the franchise has allowed and invited that is part of what makes *Halo* strong. We want to continue to empower fans to create and share experiences within our universe.

Is it daunting, having to maintain things like Forge or Firefight? Are you ever tempted to strip down and start again?

Kiki Wolfkill When we started, we took a very deliberate look at everything that had come before us – and we needed to focus on what would be the right quality of experience. If things added to that or fell out of that, the main filter was: how do we deliver a kick-ass experience? It wasn't so much a case of needing to tick all of the boxes. It comes down to needing to be compelling, cohesive, and exciting – the overall package is the important thing.

Josh Holmes The challenge is, if you continue to expand the surface area each time you can only go so deep in any one area – you're just continuing to develop what you've worked on before, and adding slightly incremental improvements. It really prevents you from making a big splash. What we've chosen to do philosophically is maintain the breadth of the experience that makes *Halo* great, but also ensure that if we can't do something at the utmost level of quality, then we shouldn't do it. Everything we deliver we want to be of



Spartan Abilities really alter the tactical options open to players.

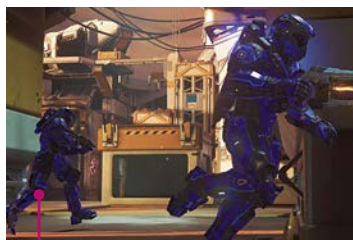
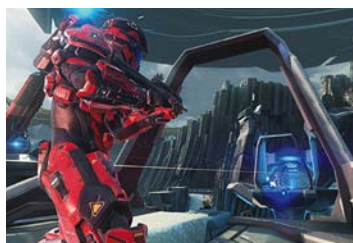
the flavour of the creative team who focused on taking that in a few different directions which include getting back to some of the competitive focus but also, again, looking at co-op play and looking at these big experiences that you can share with a number of different people.

Josh Holmes Yeah, one of the things that we focus on a lot as a studio – and it’s a reflection of having all of our fiction and franchise story development under one umbrella here in the studio – is that we’re always thinking about the story that binds it all together, and trying to balance all of the things that we build within the game so that they connect to that extended fiction, and I think that that is maybe one of the subtle shifts if you compare the way that 343 approach the game to maybe the way that it was approached in the past with Bungie.

Dan Ayoub Yeah, to further build on that, everything we do on that story level is very deliberate, and I think that the fact that that’s all managed from 343 really gives the universe that sense of cohesion. Even with multiple studios working on it. We’re seeing it now with Creative Assembly when we announced *Halo Wars 2* – it’s a different studio and they are bringing a different take to *Halo*, they’re bringing their own passions and everything to that game, but because it’s all managed through the team here at 343, we can make sure that we’re telling a consistent story that ties everything together.

Interesting you bring Creative Assembly up as compared to four years ago you now have a large family of studios

“We do know what’s going to happen in the next game pretty well at this point, and we’re doing serious planning and even some writing on the next game”



Arena play feels a lot tighter than *Halo 4*’s. Here’s hoping the e-sport crowd agrees.

working towards the same goal. Do you feel like you learn from them as well as giving them the guidance?

Dan Ayoub Oh, absolutely. One of the things that I enjoy the most about external development is that everybody has different ways of doing things, and brings different passions and experiences to the table. We learn a tremendous amount working with our partners, and I like to think that they learn from us as well. What makes these relationships successful is everybody’s bringing separate skills to the table, but also a passion for the franchise, and we’re able to plug them in to different groups within 343 like our franchise team or our linear teams and all of that stuff, again to make sure that we’re always being consistent to the end customer.

How do you find those studios? Do look for a certain level of “Halo-icity” in them?

Dan Ayoub It really depends on a game-by-game basis, right? In the case of Creative Assembly and *Halo Wars 2*, it was quite simply “Who do we think is going to the best job on an RTS?” I’ve been a fan of Creative Assembly for a long time, I was a huge fan of the *Total War* series and so when we started the work on *Halo Wars*, it was a much more targeted experience. They were the first people I called up. And I was really excited by how excited they were

to get that call! So it really depends on the exact type of game we’re trying to build. If it’s an entirely different genre we’ll look for a level of experience in that particular genre, but passion is definitely first on our list as well.

With so many passionate fans working together, are there ever disagreements? What happens in those situations?

Dan Ayoub Thunderdome! That’s when Thunderdome hits! But yeah, I think everybody – not just in our leadership team, but everybody working at 343 – is incredibly passionate about what it is they’re doing, and when you’ve got passionate, creative people, you’re definitely going to have disagreements right? In fact, I think it’s healthy and I think if those stop happening then I think you’ve got a serious problem on your hands because it means that some of that passion is starting to lapse...

In our earlier interview there was a sense that the studio was still feeling its way around where it was going to go with the story. Now you’ve got the first part of this arc out of the way and you’re about to have part two hit. After *Halo 4* did you have a clearer view of what the next step was, narrative-wise?

Frank O’Connor Yeah, I think we did, and I think our narrative team would probably do a coffee spit-take if they heard me say that! But we are way more planned ahead than we ever have been in the history of the franchise. *Halo 1* was unique, because you don’t know if there is going to be a sequel. You don’t know if you have a franchise at that point. I think by the end of *Halo 2* we knew we had a successful franchise and that we had a story, but *Halo 2* itself suffered so many giant changes as a result of production issues along the way that all the plans for the story kind of got thrown out of the window in some way. So by the time we started on *Halo 3*, there was a feeling of... “OK, we’ve got to finish telling the story that we had in *Halo 2*, but we also have to move it forward.”

So [343] kind of had the luxury of being able to bond the universe and figure out roughly where the story is going to go. We kind of know what’s going to happen in the next game, and we kind of know what’s going to happen to the Master Chief ultimately, but I think if you start making those stepping stones too rigid, then you’re not being realistic about the game development process. But we do know what’s going to happen in the next game pretty well at this point, and we’re doing serious real planning and even





Look at those swish moves. Is it Fred Astaire inside the suit?

the highest level of quality and polish, and that's been the core of our decision making in design.

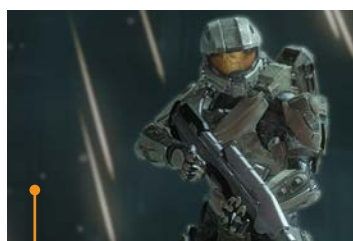
It's a hard idea to pin down, but do you expect Halo 4 to play like a Bungie game, a 343 game, or a marriage of the two?

Josh Holmes I think there's gonna be obvious similarities in terms of the way the game feels – after all, part of the reason the team came together is due to a love for the way *Halo* plays and feels, so we definitely didn't approach *Halo 4* with the idea of starting again afresh – but I think that the changes we're making will give the game a freshness that will make it feel different. It's going to feel like our own *Halo*; so not completely the same experience that you've played before.

Kiki Wolfkill Our goal is an amazing *Halo* game. People looking back will probably be able to say: "this is the flavour that 343 added" in relation to the games that came before.

Frank O'Connor We'll come under a lot more scrutiny than Bungie did, even though their teams shift monumentally between games. There's definitely core people still there, but other than that, vastly different people worked on each game. There'll be differences in style that will be attributed to 343 that wouldn't have been examined under the same microscope if it had been another Bungie team doing it. You get that between levels in a game – level 2 in *Halo 3* is different than level 3 because slightly different pockets of the team are working on it. There's little subtle things that we'll be held to an exacting standard for. That would have happened

"I think that the changes we are making will give the game a freshness that will make it feel different. It's going to feel like our own *Halo*"



If there's one thing 343 is really good at, it's moody shots of the Chief looking mean.

anyway. But there will be 343 elements and there will be core Halo principles.

Are there any non-Halo games that you're looking into in terms of inspiration?

Frank O'Connor Every game designer is influenced by the things they're ingesting – not just in terms of games, in terms of everything – devices, movies, you know... the cloud.

Are there any other Xbox 360 games you guys admire personally?

Josh Holmes I was really blown away by *Red Dead Redemption* – to me, that was such an amazing narrative experience. Being able to express myself in an open world environment in whatever way I saw fit, but also managed within that experience to give me the spine of the story that went through all of it. It wasn't just window dressing – it managed to make me care about the characters and the places, and that makes it really stand out.

Kiki Wolfkill I look at things they did with *LA Noire*. I wouldn't say the whole truth or lie mechanic worked – or at least I don't read people well, apparently – but they're really pushing things forward in terms of characters and story. I'm mostly interested in storytelling, and it's fascinating to see how games like *LA Noire*, *Heavy Rain*, and even *Call of*

Duty tell their story. It seems to be the place where games are evolving the most right now, outside of technology. So those are some highlights, although I've not played *Duke Nukem Forever* yet, so... [oh, the power of hindsight – Ed.]

Josh Holmes *LA Noire* was really intriguing for me in terms of the mechanics they tried to introduce – I thought it was successful in some ways, and not so successful in others. We had a hearty debate about how you could present that same experience in another way – it felt like the open world didn't really add a ton to the experience. But within games it's becoming increasingly harder to see real new innovation and people taking risks. I thought it was pretty exciting for that reason; it was a mechanic we hadn't seen in another game.

Do you find it difficult to innovate, especially within the bounds of a genre as well-known and as well-defined as the first-person shooter?

Josh Holmes Absolutely – particularly within the first-person shooter area. How do you take a genre as explored as ours and find ways to add new ideas and innovation to that in a way that enhances the experience? That for us has been a huge challenge – doing that whilst remaining true to the core of the Halo experience and what people expect from it.

Do you think there's room for Kinect functionality in Halo?

Josh Holmes Absolutely – I think there's room for Kinect functionality in all game experiences. The technology has the potential to enhance different experiences in different ways, so it really comes down to looking at how you harness the device and seize its potential. I think that the way that you apply it is obviously going to be very different depending on the experience.

Halo 3's ending seemed very ambiguous at the time. Was the story for Halo 4 all planned out by the end of Halo 3?

Frank O'Connor No, it wasn't. Funnily enough, the elements of the first *Halo 4* trailer were probably the only things that had already been assumed or considered, but everything after that was new.

Kiki Wolfkill Part of it too was working out what the story needed to be. It's definitely a story that goes beyond *Halo 4* – we're looking at what we want to be able to say about Master Chief, so having the time to do that is pretty cool.

some writing on the next game already, and that's a luxury – we've never been in that position before.

It certainly feels like all these narrative threads - characters from across the expanded universe - are being pulled together in Halo 5. Was it always the intention to bring these together?

Frank O'Connor I think we're actually trying to reverse that – we're creating all these external areas of fiction so that we have a richer universe to pull from. We knew that we were going to be having squad mechanics in *Halo 5* and that we wanted a more co-operative game, so we wanted to make sure that the co-op characters were meaningful and that meant building Blue team and that meant building a symmetrical team to them. People get worried that they're going to have to go and read a novel to understand this stuff in the game, but really that stuff is creating a kind of table of ingredients for the chefs to build a meal with, rather than being the subject of the story itself.

If you go read the books and the comics and watch the movies and animations, you're going to have a richer experience, but really those things serve to support the game. Everything ultimately supports everything else, but we really need the game to be a standalone experience, so that fans who are new to the series, or fans who just don't have the time to read or watch an animation, are going to have a completely whole experience when they play the game. And it's an experience I think that manifests from the stuff that is in it being properly realised in the first place rather than ad-hoc additions that we simply create from scratch to fill in any holes in our gameplay.

Bonnie Ross Yeah, but also to give credit to Frank's team, it is very deliberate that if you're a hardcore fiction fan, everything should be connected for you, know what I mean? There shouldn't be holes in our universe, and Frank's team is sort of a centralised universe canon creative team that works on every project and their job is to make sure that if we know we're going to want to put a new character in the game, that we've identified what we're going to do with them – whether that be a comic book or a novel or an animation – to give more back story. As Frank says, you don't have to read anything outside of the game, but we want to delight those that do. We want them to feel like they know parts of our universe that no one else does, so when they see something in the game, they have that "Ah-ha!"

Nightfall was a great example of how 343 is growing Halo's wider tale.

343
2015

"There's definitely a core fan that appreciates a competitive focus, but we have a broader ambition to create a foundation for e-sports for Halo's future"

moment that I think you get when you do transmedia well.

Do you think 343's relationship with the Halo community has changed over the last four years? It strikes me that a lot of the recent decisions really speak to the core fan, whether it's the focus on competitive play or the Hunt the Truth campaign. These are quite hardcore Halo activities to me. Do you think it's more about those fans now?

Josh Holmes I think there's definitely a core Halo fan that appreciates the competitive focus, but we're thinking of *Halo 5* with a much broader ambition to establish a foundation for e-sports for the future of Halo, and we're trying to build an experience that embraces players of all skill levels that love the spirit of competition, and that's the goal in building out the Arena experience [as opposed to the Warzone mode].

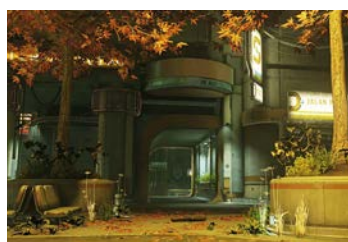
I think there has been a renewed focus on engaging the community throughout the development. For *Halo 5* we held a beta earlier than we ever had before so that we could take that feedback and be able to react to it. And we were able to make a number of changes based on the feedback from the community. We've also created a Halo community feedback programme that engages about 25,000 of the community members that are most engaged with the franchise and we

use them as a sounding board for all sorts of decisions that impact the game – I think the community is such an important part of everything that we do as a franchise and one of the biggest strengths that we have with *Halo*.

Kiki Wolfkill With a lot of the storytelling we do like *Hunt the Truth*; I think we're always looking at opportunities to both satisfy that story passion with our fans but also to think of ways of pulling people into this universe as well. And *Hunt the Truth* was actually really interesting in that it did sort of build an audience that wasn't just core Halo fans. I think we're always experimenting with what sort of stories can resonate and how we build stories that give a little bit more depth and detail to the universe for existing fans but also are interesting for people intrigued with sci-fi and that wider genre.

Dan Ayoub If you look at how the studio has changed over the past four years, I think we've built more ways to communicate with that community that we didn't have before. Look at everything we do with the Halo Channel and you look at Halo Waypoint – we've created more ways for that community to interact with us and more ways for us to interact with them, and ways for different types of players and people to get involved in the franchise with some of the linear work we've done beyond just the games.

Frank O'Connor I think communities have, in general, changed pretty radically. I've been working in games for more than ten years, and the tools that used to be these fairly esoteric, secret



343
2011

Halo 4 looks even better played in The Master Chief Collection. Mmmm.

Frank O'Connor But it's a great setup: your favourite hero is ready to be awakened for his next challenge, and it's a very mysterious thing.

Casting your minds back, what is your first Halo memory?

Kiki Wolfkill I didn't get a chance to play the first game during its development as I was working on other titles, but it was the first game I played when I got my hands on a retail kit. My first real memory is the second level – I remember being in that environment, and having this awesome sense of being part of a bigger thing. There's a sense of empowerment as a player and a person, and the mystery behind Master Chief as a person. When I think about Halo, that's the moment I think of first. When you stepped out into that world it didn't look that alien, but you felt like you were entering a real place.

Master Chief means different things to different fans. What do you think Master Chief stands for, as a character?

Kiki Wolfkill For me as a player, what he stands for is heroism and triumph against the odds. Those were the things I've always taken from him, even before understanding the wider fiction of Master Chief. I can beat the odds, and I can be a hero – I'm fighting for something worthwhile.

You've said Halo 4 is Master Chief's journey. One of the things that's defined Master Chief is how his vague, faceless character lets players step into his shoes. Is there an opportunity here to flesh his character out a little more?

"I definitely believe there's an opportunity to give the Chief a little more dimension without taking away the sense of personal empowerment"

Kiki Wolfkill I definitely believe there's an opportunity to give him a little more dimension without taking away the purpose he serves for you, which is that sense of personal empowerment. There's opportunity in how characters relate to the Chief around you, and in the decisions that you make, to give him some depth. When we talk about Master Chief as a hero, sometimes there need to be events along his journey that really reinforce what that means.

I don't want my image of who I am as Master Chief being sullied by character aspects being pushed onto him. We're working to find a balance, because I do think he is a unique character in that as a player you switch in and out, between "this is me" and being able to look at him from the outside.

How do you expect to put your stamp on the series as 343 Industries?

Kiki Wolfkill We're not so much setting out to put our stamp on it – we're just looking to bring a fresh perspective and that will create some perceptive differences.

Why did you guys pick Saber to make Anniversary?

Frank O'Connor We looked at a bunch of developers, because we knew what we wanted to do – essentially just adding this graphics layer on to the top of

what was already there. They had some really good technology, good tools, good people. It was a really specific thing that we wanted them to do, and Saber's been great to work with. If we were starting a game from scratch we'd look at things differently – we might still consider Saber, but for the bespoke tailored thing we were looking for they were the right partner for the job. Switching between classic mode and Anniversary mode you can definitely see the great job they've done.

Let's talk about Halo and pop culture. We've seen a lot of Halo stuff being used in TV shows like 30 Rock – does that matter much to you?

Frank O'Connor It matters in a really important way: that we don't do it on purpose. Most of it pops up organically because people like it. We were auditioning actors for *Halo 4*, and the number of people who tried to be auditioned was hugely exciting – people search it out just to get involved. The funniest reference I ever saw was, I think, on *The Daily Show* – you could just tell that they'd written that sketch because they like *Halo*. Pop culture is really just the things that you're consuming – we're just one of them.

Do people have to ask for permission?

Frank O'Connor It depends – fair usage

laws means that people can just use footage for certain things, but sometimes they ask for permission or send over specific requests – we always cooperate and send stuff over if we think it's cool enough.

What's the best surprise you've seen in terms of pop culture and Halo?

Frank O'Connor When they used it in *30 Rock*, probably. It's always best when I see it referenced by things or people that I personally really like. I once had lunch with a very famous comedian in New York just because I worked on *Halo*. He used his PR to set it up just because he wanted to talk about *Halo* – and that was very surreal. That was the most surprising example. "Can you come and have lunch with this celebrity because he wants to talk about *Halo*?"

You guys have relationships with Red vs Blue and Major League Gaming – how important are those relationships when it comes to building on the franchise for this game and beyond?

Frank O'Connor They matter enormously. The main thing is, they're both organic – *Red vs Blue* sprung from a couple of fans making a movie with machinima, and it grew into a phenomenon and now it's their business. With MLG, they would have had some other game if it hadn't been *Halo*, but *Halo* happens to work very well in a competitive space because of how it's balanced and tuned. MLG is very important to us because it shines a very favourable light on *Halo*'s balance; you can't play a competitive game unless it's properly balanced. *Red vs Blue* is very important because it shows the richness of the talent that's within our community – talent that's able to break out of the bounds of the *Halo* stuff and show that they're real artists.

Being a part of the broader cultural conversation, is that an important part of the Halo brand?

Frank O'Connor Yes and no. When people are trying to start a successful franchise, can you imagine how terrifying that is? 99% of them are not successful, and the successful ones make it because they're executed well. For a new franchise, you've always got that fear – we don't have that, because it's already successful. Our fear is about execution: we have to make a good *Halo* game and produce high quality *Halo* products, or else otherwise we damage it. That's the number one terror: don't break it, but also have the confidence to do new things and show your take on that universe. That's scary. ☹



backwater places that were connected to the studios are now wide-open, and things like Twitter and Facebook and social media makes that community much more mainstream and broad.

And the interesting thing is that we used to have fairly monolithic tastes within the community – there used to be a sort of core agreement and that's gone. We have a big game and it's got lots of components, and lots of sub-audiences, and so I think our job is about trying to find ways to both accept that and embrace it and give all those different types of audience all the information they need and want, whether it's entertainment or factual.

But we also try to keep a steady path and not be swayed in terms of the gameplay or content decisions by whatever's trending on Twitter today, because the bigger that community gets and the more varied those opinions become, the less easy it is to draw out a linear, scientific trend and so we have to rely on better data and much broader communication than we have ever had to do before. It's another kind of balance, but it's also a fantastic tool because now instead of hearing from one line of that audience, we get to hear a very varied set of voices, which is obviously healthy.

Bonnie Ross If our relationship with the community has changed I hope it has only gotten stronger. When we shipped *Halo 4* we got a lot of feedback on what people liked or didn't like about multiplayer, and with *Halo 5* we were very deliberate in putting a beta out a year early so that we could actually have a dialogue with that community, and I think that it's been very helpful for us; we got great feedback from the beta and we were able to make sure that we could incorporate what we were shown so it would be helpful to make the final game better. Our community does make our game better.

And then I think you kind of touched on it when you said we are really going for a core audience and you listed competitive e-sports but also in the same breath you mentioned *Hunt the Truth*. There is an overlap with those audiences, but they are also two very separate audiences, you know? One is really fanatic about our story, and the other is driven by our multiplayer. So as Frank says, the community has just grown and it's very different. It's hard to say that it's "core" as much as you just have different audiences that really like different things about the game. It's really just a very big and vocal audience, which is great.



Could Locke get his own spin-off series? Guess he'll have to survive *Halo 5* first.

"We also try to keep a steady path and not be swayed in terms of the gameplay or content decisions by whatever's trending on Twitter today"

Having done this for several years is there an element or moment you would say you most fondly remember?

Josh Holmes It's this weird thing that we're going through now on *Halo 5*. As we get down to the end of the game, we pull incredibly long hours where we go through a process of triage for bugs; we review issues in the game and figure out what are the most high priority things to address. It's a point in the project where you have the ability to make the most impact on the quality of the title, because every little polished element that you put in there makes a huge direct impact on the end experience. The hours are long so it can be a little gruelling, but it's also strangely – and we were just talking about this last night – one of the most exciting parts of the entire development process because you're finally seeing everything come to fruition.

Dan Ayoub I have to go back to my first E3 after joining 343. I'd always been a fan of *Halo* but that was my first E3 as an insider, and that was when I saw how special it was to so many people.

When we were doing *Halo: Combat Evolved Anniversary* just the number of


younger children who would come by the booth and had some kind of thing going on in their lives and *Halo* was their way of communicating with people... listening to them so passionately describe what the game and universe meant to them was incredibly humbling. In my fatigued moments those are the things I look back on to get the energy to plough through it.

Kiki Wolfkill Yeah, it's funny because we get so jaded about E3 because it's so much work to get there, but one of my fondest memories is E3 in 2012 which was the first time that we publicly showed *Halo 4* and people were able to play it. It had been a hard road to get there for the team and we, as a studio, had faced an uphill battle in terms of whether people believed that we could build our own *Halo* game. You always have some amount of self-doubt, especially when things are challenging, and to get the response that we did was an incredible experience – it was energising and a relief and made it less scary that there was still the rest of the game to develop.

But I think that was also the moment when we started to have a more open

relationship with the community. It was a turning point for us as a studio that we had sort of built from nothing, and so I think it was just a really pivotal moment in terms of "we can do this", and that all of the hard work that we've been putting in over the last three years was really starting to be realised.

Josh Holmes Yeah, I think that moment was felt very deeply across the entire studio. When you're working on a game for as long as we do, you lose perspective and you can't really see the forest for the trees. Going to E3 in 2012 and seeing the response from fans was an energising experience for the team. They felt so excited about the response that it helped fuel the rest of that entire project; the fans and the community helped power us through to the end.

And I think we feel the same way with *Halo 5* as we see the response from the beta – it was very hard for the team to come out with a beta as early as we did, both from a development perspective and also just from the perspective of being nervous about shipping early work; people are painfully aware of all of the little issues that are in the game, and getting people comfortable with being able to show their work in progress was very tough. But seeing the response from fans and then having the dialogue with the community around the game I think has been incredibly empowering for the team and has given the team a lot of energy throughout the course of the project. 





COVENANT OF CHAMPIONS
How Halo 5: Guardians reinvents the first-person shooter



THE TWO TOWERS
Two fans pull off the most audacious Halo stunt ever seen



THE MAKING OF HALO
The untold story behind Xbox's revolutionary sandbox blaster



THE MASTER BUILDERS
Discover the secrets of Forge mode: the Halo game you build

