

## = Half @-@ Life 2 : Episode Two =

Half @-@ Life 2 : Episode Two is a first @-@ person shooter video game , the second episode in a series of sequels to the 2004 Half @-@ Life 2 . It was developed by Valve Corporation in tandem with Episode One , the first game in the series , and released in 2007 via Valve 's Steam content distribution platform . The episode was released both separately and as a part of a bundled package , The Orange Box .

Episode Two gameplay consists of expansive environments , travel and reduced linear play , continuing Valve 's policy of orienting each episode around a particular theme or set of technologies . Following the closing events of Episode One , it sees Gordon Freeman and the series ' other major characters moving away from City 17 to the surrounding countryside .

The retail version was released on October 10 , 2007 , in North America and Russia for Windows and Microsoft 's Xbox 360 after repeated delays . The version for the PlayStation 3 was to be released " around two or three weeks later , " as it was produced separately at the Electronic Arts UK studio , according to Valve marketing director Doug Lombardi . This version was further delayed . For the rest of the world , the release date was October 18 . The Steam version was released worldwide on October 10 , 2007 .

## = = Gameplay = =

As with its predecessors , the game is played in the first person as series protagonist Gordon Freeman against transhuman troops , known as the Combine , and other hostile alien creatures . Levels are linear but add a more open environment , consisting of puzzles and first @-@ person shooter game @-@ play . Sequences involving vehicles are interspersed throughout the game , breaking up moments of combat .

One of the focal points of Episode Two was meant to be increased use of vehicles in open areas . However , the game retains its original linear style until the final battle . Episode Two has more puzzles than Episode One , including the biggest physical puzzle yet in the series ? a damaged unstable bridge . The game features numerous " achievements " ( similar to PlayStation 3 's Trophies and Xbox Live 's Achievements ) for carrying out certain tasks . Some are essential to game progress , such as helping fight off an antlion invasion , or defeating the first Hunters . Others are optional tricks or feats the player can perform , such as killing a Combine soldier with their own grenade or running down a certain number of enemies with the car .

## = = = Enemies = = =

Episode Two featured a new Hunter enemy , which had just been seen briefly in a recorded message in Episode One . The Hunter serves as one of the most dangerous enemies within the game and as means of emotional development for Alyx Vance . The Hunter is a powerful and resilient enemy which players must often run from while seeking a means to fight back ; Episode Two 's environments are designed with this in mind .

An interview in the August 2006 issue of PC Gamer magazine revealed that the Hunter stands 8 feet ( 2 @. @ 4 m ) tall . Erik Johnson , the game 's project lead , states that the Hunters are " big and impressive , but they can go anywhere the player can go , " as the player can encounter them both indoors and outdoors . Ted Backman , senior artist for Valve , talks about how the Hunter can express emotions , being a somewhat non @-@ human character . " We want the Hunter to be able to express nervousness or aggression , [ to show you ] whether it 's aggressive , hurt , or mad . " Hunters are very aggressive and they tend to operate in packs , but can also be found supporting other Combine troops . Late in the game , they can be found escorting Striders , using their flechette guns to protect the Striders that the player is trying to attack .

Hunters primarily attack the player by bracing themselves and firing bursts from their flechette cannon . Four flechettes can vaporize an ordinary human soldier . If they do not strike a living target , the flechette charge up for several seconds and then explode , dealing minor damage to everything

nearby . Hunters may also conduct a charging attack or strike with their legs if the player gets too close . Hunters are vulnerable to all weapons , but to compensate , are still quite resilient , making explosives and the pulse rifle 's charged energy ball the most attractive options . Objects thrown with the gravity gun are also effective , especially if the player catches some of their flechettes with the object before hurling it ( one of the in @-@ game Achievements ) . In outdoor environments , they can be run over with a vehicle .

Two new forms of antlion appear in the game . The first is the glow @-@ in @-@ the @-@ dark antlion grub , a harmless , worm @-@ like creature which functions as a minor health pickup and a light source . Killing all 333 of these earns an Achievement . The second is the worker antlion ( or ' acidlion ' ) whose body produces a powerful and poisonous acid . In addition to a ranged acid spit attack , they also explode when killed , launching acid around them in a short radius , making them dangerous close @-@ combat opponents . Although they are thematically similar to the bullsquids of the original Half @-@ Life , they are functionally closer to the poison headcrab ? as an enemy that the player will instinctively prioritize as a target . A new antlion guardian , which has glow @-@ in @-@ the @-@ dark features , was also added . This " Guardian " hunts and attacks Gordon Freeman as the player endeavors to take the larval extract the Guardian protects . The vortigaunt that accompanies the player forbids him from harming the guardian , fearing the extract will be ruined if he does . The player must therefore accomplish his goal while being harried by a creature he cannot eliminate , though the player is eventually given the chance to kill it .

= = = Weapons = = =

Episode Two features no new additions to Gordon Freeman 's inventory , but introduces a new form of Gravity Gun ' ammunition ' , the ' Magnusson Device ' , named after the egotistical head of the White Forest base rocket project , Dr. Magnusson . Prior to the game 's release , this weapon had been referred to as the ' Strider Buster ' . The item is useless on its own ? it must be deployed via the gravity gun . Level designer Dario Casali describes it as a ' sticky bomb that you fire at a Strider 's underbelly that will draw power from the Strider 's internal power source . ' In @-@ game , the device will stick so long as it contacts the Strider 's body , and will instantly destroy it when fired upon with any other of the player 's weapons . However , Hunter escorts will prioritize them as targets , either destroying them in the player 's grasp or shooting already @-@ attached ones off .

Valve 's developers said new weapons were not a priority . The gravity gun was the direction of innovation they were most interested in , and objects like saw blades and flares were more interesting additions to the game . This policy was implemented with the Magnusson Device and more varied Gravity Gun ' ammunition ' such as logs and half @-@ height butane tanks , which are easier to aim than full @-@ size fuel drums .

= = = Vehicles = = =

Large sections of the game feature a car which resembles a gutted @-@ and @-@ rebuilt 1969 Dodge Charger . It appears to have been tuned for performance . A radar system is installed later in the game , allowing the player to locate Rebel supply caches . In the final battle , a rear @-@ mounted storage rack for Magnusson Devices is added and the radar is adjusted to track enemies and Magnusson Device dispensers . A homing unit is also installed so the player can quickly locate the car in the chaos of the final battle via a readout in the Hazardous Environment suit .

= = Synopsis = =

= = = Setting = = =

In contrast to Episode One 's entirely urban setting , Episode Two sets the action in rural areas , villages , forests , as well as mining facilities and mountain caves . The exact location remains

vague , with signs in Russian still hinting at a Eastern European setting , although gas pumps with the prices displayed in Swedish have added to the confusion . The gameplay is in parts , and , to an extent less geographically linear than in the previous games , with the climactic fight in particular taking place across an entire map rather than in an enclosed arena .

= = = Plot = = =

Continuing the plot of Half @-@ Life 2 and Episode One , Episode Two consists of seven chapters telling the story of Gordon Freeman and Alyx Vance 's journey to a large Lambda Resistance base called White Forest . The Combine 's Earth occupation forces have used the destruction of the Citadel to begin opening a massive super portal which , if allowed to reach critical size , would allow the Combine to call in reinforcements from their homeworld and destroy the Resistance . However , as explained by Dr. Kleiner 's broadcast in Episode One , it has also caused a communications blackout , leaving the Combine isolated and disorganized in the meantime . In addition , Combine Advisors , some of them still unhatched from their pods , are scattered about the region after evacuating the Citadel . A crucial part of the plot is the Combine 's message home , which was copied by Alyx and Gordon before making their escape , that the Combine sacrificed the Citadel to send . It contains data on the Combine portal code , which the Resistance can use to collapse the portal before it forms completely .

After Gordon and Alyx climb out of the wreckage of the train they used to escape City 17 , they proceed away from the former city on foot . At an old transmission station , the duo temporarily establish communication with Dr. Kleiner and Eli Vance , who are currently at White Forest . After an update of events at the now @-@ destroyed Citadel , as well discovering the importance of the transmission packet copy that Alyx had made , they are cut off as Combine sweep the area , forcing them to move . At an abandoned mine , Alyx is critically wounded by a Hunter . A vortigaunt discovers them , and leads them to an underground Resistance shelter . The vortigaunts there have the power to heal Alyx ; however , Gordon must first venture into the nearby antlion colony to recover the larval extract necessary for the healing procedure .

Gordon retrieves the extract and the vortigaunts begin to heal Alyx . While they are distracted , the G @-@ Man is able to contact Gordon for the first time since the start of Episode One . He hints at Alyx 's importance to his own long @-@ term plans , revealing that he saved Alyx 's life at Black Mesa despite objections from an unspecified third party . The G @-@ Man then instructs an unconscious Alyx to tell her father to " prepare for unforeseen consequences . "

After Alyx has recovered , she and Gordon proceed to White Forest . They arrive before a convoy of Combine troops , despite being slowed by multiple ambushes , road blocks , and a near @-@ death encounter with an Advisor . There , Alyx and Gordon are reunited with D0g , Dr. Kleiner , and Eli Vance . The player is also formally introduced to Dr. Arne Magnusson , another former Black Mesa scientist who is egotistical , verbose , and authoritarian . The team of scientists are preparing a rocket , which they plan to use in conjunction with the Combine portal code and the satellite array launched by Gordon in Half @-@ Life , to close the Combine superportal .

After Gordon fends off an initial Combine attack on the base , Alyx gives Dr. Kleiner the message from Judith Mossman which she recovered at the Citadel in Episode One . It contains footage and the current coordinates of the Borealis , an Aperture Science research vessel which , as Kleiner explains , one day suddenly vanished into thin air along with part of the surrounding drydock . Although it is not explained what technology the ship contains , Kleiner insists that it should be used to aid the Resistance effort , while Eli counters that it is impossible to control and must be destroyed . Regardless , they agree that Alyx and Gordon will travel to the Borealis and attempt to find Mossman . Alyx then unconsciously delivers the G @-@ Man 's message to her father , who is physically shaken . After having Alyx leave temporarily , Eli reveals to Gordon that it was the G @-@ Man , whom he refers to as " our mutual friend , " who provided Black Mesa with the test sample that caused the " resonance cascade " ( the Black Mesa incident ) in Half @-@ Life , and whispered that same strange warning to him just as Gordon entered the test chamber . He promises to further discuss this with Gordon after the superportal is closed .

While the rocket is being prepared , White Forest comes under attack by a dozen Striders escorted by Hunters . Gordon engages and destroys them using experimental explosive charges created by Magnusson . The rocket is successfully launched and the super portal is closed , isolating Combine forces on Earth from their homeworld . Alyx and Gordon then prepare to leave for the Borealis , at which point Eli again warns Gordon about the ship 's " cargo " . The three of them head into a hangar , intending to board an old helicopter which Alyx has restored . However , a pair of Advisors burst into the hangar and restrain them . Alyx and Gordon watch helplessly as Eli is killed by one of the Advisors , but as the second Advisor prepares to kill Alyx , D0g bursts in through the roof and attacks it , causing both Advisors to flee . The game fades out slowly as Alyx , sobbing , clutches her father 's body .

= = Development = =

Episode Two was developed simultaneously with Episode One by a development team led by David Speyrer . This schedule of simultaneous development aided them in streamlining the story between the two games to create an immersive storyline . The technology used was the same for both games , allowing the development teams to quickly fix any technical problems that might arise from either game ; this happened often because of the multi @-@ platform release .

An announcement was made on July 13 , 2006 stating that Episode Two would be released on Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 in addition to the PC , where previous iterations of the series separated . It was originally rumored that Episode Two would be delayed until 2008 . On June 14 , 2007 , however , Valve confirmed the release date for Episode Two to be October 9 , 2007 for all announced platforms . Valve handled the development of the game for the PC and Xbox 360 , while Electronic Arts British office in Chertsey worked on the PlayStation 3 version of the game . It was announced on September 7 , 2007 that the PlayStation 3 version of the game would be delayed because the development studio behind the game was in the United Kingdom , away from Valve 's development team , and therefore lagged behind in its schedule . Valve 's marketing director , Doug Lombardi , gave assurance that the Xbox 360 , PlayStation 3 , and PC versions of the game would be identical in functionality and performance .

= = = Audio = = =

Episode Two 's soundtrack was composed by Kelly Bailey , who also composed the music for the Half @-@ Life series ' other installments . The music is used sparingly throughout , played primarily during scenes of major plot development or particularly important action sequences , such as an early fight with a massive wave of Antlions or speeding down train tracks while being fired on by a helicopter . The soundtrack is included in the Russian edition of The Orange Box and is also sold separately . An audio commentary is also featured , as in Episode One and Lost Coast .

A notable change to the vocal cast is the inclusion of actor Tony Todd as the voice of the Vortigaunts . He replaces Louis Gossett , Jr. in the role . Actor Adam Baldwin voices several of the civilian and rebel NPCs , most notably the character who informs the player of the Striders ' locations in the penultimate chapter .

= = Reception = =

Half @-@ Life 2 : Episode 2 received critical acclaim . The game had an average score of 90 @.@ 68 % based on 22 reviews on the review aggregator GameRankings . On Metacritic , the game had an average score of 90 out of 100 , based on 21 reviews .

Dan Adams of IGN rated the game 9 @.@ 4 out of 10 and praised its improved visuals and expansive environments , but cited the short six @-@ hour length as a drawback . He said : " Any way you look at it , Episode Two stands out , even among the Half @-@ Life series , as something special ... a burly experience packed into roughly six hours or so that offers up all the diversity , level design , and thoughtful gameplay we 've known while making sure to propel the story forward and

leave us wanting more . " Bit @-@ tech.net awarded the game a 10 out of 10 score , citing approval of how the story turns and the introduction of side stories and new characters . 1UP.com praised the game , noting that the game 's " entire five @-@ hour experience " was " vivid , emotionally engaging , and virtually unsurpassed . " PC Gamer UK also applauded Episode Two , noting it " is the most sumptuous chapter of the Half @-@ Life saga , and by a country mile . " The New York Times enjoyed the gameplay , saying , " The battles in Episode 2 of Half @-@ Life 2 often require as much ingenuity as they do fast reflexes . "

Computer and Video Games commented on the game 's graphics , saying that although the game 's engine was " starting to look its age , " its " wonderful art design and the odd bit of technical spit @-@ shine ensure that Episode Two [ ... ] doesn 't lose any of its wow factor . " They also noticed that the game " goes about fixing a lot of the niggling complaints we had about Episode One , " especially applauding the open forests and rocky hills from Episode Two .

Several reviewers noted shortcomings . The New York Times commented on the story for Episode Two , noting , " While it sows a few seeds for the final episode of the trilogy , the game lacks the driving force of the previous episode . " GameSpy criticized the game , saying it is " a little more inconsistent than its predecessors , " and that the opening segments of the game were " arguably the weakest " parts .