= Halo 2 =

 Halo 2 is a 2004 first @-@ person shooter video game developed by Bungie Studios . Released for the Xbox video game console on November 9 , 2004 , the game is the second installment in the Halo franchise and the sequel to 2001 's critically acclaimed Halo : Combat Evolved . A Microsoft Windows version of the game was released on May 31 , 2007 , developed by an internal team at Microsoft Game Studios known as Hired Gun . The game features a new game engine , as well as using the Havok physics engine ; added weapons and vehicles , and new multiplayer maps . The player alternately assumes the roles of the human Master Chief and the alien Arbiter in a 26th @-@ century conflict between the human United Nations Space Command and genocidal Covenant .
 After the success of Combat Evolved , a sequel was expected and highly anticipated . Bungie found inspiration in plot points and gameplay elements that had been left out of their first game , including multiplayer over the Internet through Xbox Live . Time constraints forced a series of cutbacks in the size and scope of the game , including a cliffhanger ending to the game 's campaign mode that left many in the studio dissatisfied . Among Halo 2 's marketing efforts was an alternate reality game called " I Love Bees " that involved players solving real @-@ world puzzles .
 On release , Halo 2 was the most popular video game on Xbox Live , holding that rank until the release of Gears of War for the Xbox 360 nearly two years later . By June 20 , 2006 , more than 500 million games of Halo 2 had been played and more than 710 million hours have been spent playing it on Xbox Live ; by May 9 , 2007 , the number of unique players had risen to over five million . Halo 2 is the best @-@ selling first @-@ generation Xbox game with at least 6 @.@ 3 million copies sold in the United States alone . The game received critical acclaim , with most publications lauding the strong multiplayer component . The campaign however , was the focus of criticism for its cliffhanger ending .
 A high @-@ definition remake of Halo 2 was released as part of Halo : The Master Chief Collection on November 11 , 2014 , for the Xbox One .

 = = Gameplay = =

 Halo 2 is a shooter game , with players predominantly experiencing gameplay from a first @-@ person perspective . Players use a combination of human and alien weaponry and vehicles to progress through the game 's levels . The player 's health bar is not visible , but players are instead equipped with a damage @-@ absorbing shield that regenerates when not taking fire .
 Certain weapons can be dual @-@ wielded , allowing the player to trade accuracy , the use of grenades and melee attacks for raw firepower . The player can carry two weapons at a time (or three if dual @-@ wielding ; one weapon remains holstered) , with each weapon having advantages and disadvantages in different combat situations . For example , most Covenant weapons eschew disposable ammo clips for a contained battery , which cannot be replaced if depleted . However , these weapons can overheat if fired continuously for prolonged periods . Human weapons are less effective at penetrating shields and require reloading , but cannot overheat due to prolonged fire . The player can carry a total of eight grenades (four human grenades , four Covenant) to dislodge and disrupt enemies . New in Halo 2 is the ability to board enemy vehicles that are near the player and traveling at low speeds . The player or AI latches onto the vehicle and forcibly ejects the other driver from the vehicle .

 = = = Campaign = = =

 The game 's " Campaign " mode offers options for both single @-@ player and cooperative multiplayer participation . In campaign mode , the player must complete a series of levels that encompass Halo 2 's storyline . These levels alternate between the Master Chief and a Covenant Elite called the Arbiter , who occupy diametrically opposed roles in the story 's conflict . Aside from variations in storyline , the Arbiter differs from Master Chief only in that his armor lacks a flashlight ; instead , it is equipped with a short duration rechargeable form of active camouflage that disappears

when the player attacks or takes damage .

There are four levels of difficulty in campaign mode : Easy , Normal , Heroic , and Legendary . An increase in difficulty will result in an increase in the number , rank , health , damage , and accuracy of enemies ; a reduction of duration and an increase in recharge time for the Arbiter 's active camouflage ; a decrease in the player 's health and shields ; and occasional changes in dialog .

There is hidden content within the game , including Easter eggs , messages , hidden objects , and weapons . The most well known of the hidden content are the skulls hidden on every level . The skulls , which can be picked up like a weapon , are located in hard @-@ to @-@ reach places . Many are exclusive to the Legendary mode of difficulty . Once activated , each skull has a specific effect on gameplay . For example , the " Sputnik " skull found on the Quarantine Zone level alters the mass of objects in the game ; thus resulting in explosions being able to launch these objects across larger distances . Skull effects can be combined to provide various new levels of difficulty and / or novelty .

= = = Multiplayer = = =

Like Halo : Combat Evolved , the Xbox version of Halo 2 features a multiplayer system that allows players to compete with each other in split @-@ screen and system link modes ; in addition , it adds support for online multiplayer via Xbox Live .

Halo 2 introduced an entirely new paradigm for matchmaking players together . In earlier games , one person specifies a game type and map and configures other settings , before setting up his or her device as a game server and advertising the game to the world at large . Halo 2 introduced a " playlist " system that automated this process to keep a steady flow of games available at all times , and layered a skill @-@ ranking system on top .

The Xbox Live multiplayer and downloadable content features of the Xbox version of Halo 2 were supported until the discontinuation of the service in April 2010 . The online multiplayer of Halo 2 for Windows Vista uses Games for Windows ? Live . In January 2013 , it was reported that the PC multiplayer servers would be taken offline on February 15 , 2013 , due to inactivity . On February 12 , 2013 , it was announced that the multiplayer servers for Halo 2 on PC would remain online until June , while further support options would be investigated .

= = Synopsis = =

= = = Setting = = =

Halo 2 takes place in the 26th century . Humans , under the auspices of the United Nations Space Command or UNSC , have developed faster @-@ than @-@ light slipspace travel and colonized numerous worlds . According to the game 's backstory , the outer colony world of Harvest was decimated by a collective of alien races known as the Covenant in 2525 . Declaring humanity an affront to their gods , the Forerunners , the Covenant begin to systemically obliterate the humans with their superior numbers and technology . After the human bastion at the planet Reach is destroyed , a single ship , The Pillar of Autumn , follows protocol and initiates a random slipspace jump to lead the Covenant away from Earth . The crew discovers a Forerunner ringworld called Halo , which the Covenant wants to activate because of their religious belief that the activation of the ring will bring about a " Great Journey , " sweeping loyal Covenant to salvation . Leading a guerilla insurgency on the ring 's surface , the humans discover that the rings are actually weapons of last resort built to contain a terrifying parasite called the Flood . The human supersoldier Master Chief Petty Officer John @-@ 117 and his AI companion Cortana learn from Halo 's AI monitor , 343 Guilty Spark , that activation of the Halos will prevent the spread of the Flood by destroying all sentient life the parasite can subsist on in the galaxy . Instead of activating the ring , however , the Master Chief evades Guilty Spark and his robots and detonates the Pillar of Autumn 's engines , destroying the installation and preventing the escape of the Flood . The Master Chief and Cortana

race back to Earth to warn of an impending invasion by Covenant forces .

= = = Plot = = =

Taking place shortly after the events of the novel Halo : First Strike , Halo 2 opens with the trial of Thel ' Vadam , a Covenant Elite commander aboard the Covenant 's mobile capital city of High Charity . The Elite is stripped of his rank , branded a heretic for failing to stop the humans from destroying Halo , and is tortured by Tartarus , the Chieftain of the Covenant Brutes . On Earth , the Master Chief and Sergeant Avery Johnson are commended for their actions at Halo . Lord Terrence Hood awards the soldiers alongside Commander Miranda Keyes , who accepts a medal on behalf of her deceased father , Captain Jacob Keyes .

A Covenant fleet appears outside Earth 's defensive perimeter and begins an invasion of the planet . While the UNSC repels most of the fleet , a single Covenant cruiser carrying an important member of the Covenant hierarchy , the High Prophet of Regret , assaults the city of New Mombasa , Kenya . The Master Chief assists in clearing the city of Covenant ; with his fleet destroyed , Regret makes a hasty slipspace jump , and Keyes , Johnson , Cortana and the Master Chief follow aboard the UNSC ship In Amber Clad . The crew discover another Halo installation ; realizing the danger the ring presents , Keyes sends the Master Chief to kill Regret while she and Johnson find Halo 's key to activation , the Index .

Meanwhile , the disgraced Covenant commander is presented before the Prophet Hierarchs , who acknowledge that though the destruction of Halo was his fault , he is no heretic . They offer him the honored position of Arbiter so that he can continue to fight for the Covenant . On his first mission to kill a heretic , the Arbiter discovers 343 Guilty Spark , who the Covenant calls an " oracle , " and brings him back to High Charity . Responding to Regret 's distress call , High Charity and the Covenant fleet arrive at the new Halo , Installation 05 , just before the Master Chief kills Regret . Bombarded from space , the Chief falls into a lake and is rescued by a mysterious tentacled creature .

Regret 's death triggers discord among the races of the Covenant , as the Hierarchs have given the Brutes the Elites ' traditional job of protecting them in the wake of the death . The Arbiter is sent to find Halo 's Index and captures it , Johnson , and Keyes before being confronted by Tartarus . He reveals to the Arbiter that the Prophets have ordered the annihilation of the Elites , and sends the Arbiter falling down a deep chasm .

The Arbiter is saved by the tentacled creature and meets the Master Chief in the bowels of the installation . The creature , Gravemind , is the leader of the Flood on Installation 05 . The Gravemind reveals to the Arbiter that the Great Journey would destroy Flood , humans , and Covenant altogether , and sends both the Arbiter and Master Chief to different places to stop Halo 's activation . The Master Chief is teleported into High Charity , where a civil war has broken out among the Covenant ; In Amber Clad crashes into the city , and Cortana realizes that Gravemind used them as a distraction to infest In Amber Clad and spread the Flood . As the parasite overruns the city , consuming the Prophet of Mercy in the process , the Prophet of Truth orders Tartarus to take Keyes , Johnson , and Guilty Spark to Halo 's control room and activate the ring . The Master Chief follows Truth aboard a Forerunner ship leaving the city ; Cortana remains behind to destroy High Charity and Halo if Tartarus succeeds in activating the ring .

The Arbiter is sent to the surface of Halo , where he rallies his allies to assault the Brute 's position . With the help of Johnson , he confronts Tartarus in Halo 's control room . When the Arbiter tries to convince Tartarus that the Prophets have betrayed them both , Tartarus angrily activates the ring , and a battle ensues . The Arbiter and Johnson manage to kill Tartarus while Keyes removes the Index . Instead of shutting down the ring entirely , a system wide fail @-@ safe protocol is triggered , putting Installation 05 and all the other Halo rings on standby for activation from a remote location , which Guilty Spark refers to as " the Ark " . As Truth 's ship arrives amidst a raging battle on Earth , Hood asks the Master Chief what he is doing aboard the ship . The Chief replies , " Sir , finishing this fight . "

In a post @-@ credits scene , Gravemind is seen arriving on High Charity , where Cortana agrees

to answer the Flood intelligence 's questions .

= = Development = =

Halo had never been planned as a trilogy , but with the critical and commercial success of Combat Evolved , a sequel was expected . Bungie writer and cinematic director Joseph Staten recalled that during Combat Evolved 's development , Bungie " certainly had strong ideas for extending the story and gameplay experience that we knew we couldn 't fit into one game " . The added publisher support for a sequel allowed greater leeway and the ability to return to more ambitious ideas lost during Combat Evolved 's development .

An important feature for Halo 2 was multiplayer . Multiplayer in Combat Evolved was accomplished via System Link , and only came together weeks before the game was released . Most players never played large maps , while a subset greatly enjoyed 16 @-@ player action via four networked consoles . " We looked at the small set of fans who were able to do this , " said engineering lead Chris Butcher , " and just how much they were enjoying themselves , and asked ourselves if we could bring that to everybody . That would be something really special , really unique . "

The story for Halo 2 grew out of all the elements that were not seen in Halo : Combat Evolved . Jason Jones organized his core ideas for the sequel 's story and approached Staten for input . According to Staten , among the elements that did not make it to the finished game was a " horrible scene of betrayal " where Miranda Keyes straps a bomb to the Master Chief 's back and throws him into a hole ; " Jason was going through a rather difficult breakup at the time and I think that had something to do with it , " he said .

Halo 2 was officially announced in September 2002 with a cinematic trailer , subsequently packaged with Halo : Combat Evolved DVDs . A real @-@ time gameplay video was shown at E3 2003 , which was the first actual gameplay seen by the public ; it showcased new features such as dual @-@ wielding and improved graphics . Many elements of the trailer , however , were not game @-@ ready ; the entire graphics engine used in the footage had to be discarded , and the trailer 's environment never appeared in the final game due to limitations on how big the game environments could be . The restructuring of the engine meant that there was no playable build of Halo 2 for nearly a year , and assets and environments produced by art and design teams could not be prototyped .

In order to ship the game , Bungie began paring back their ambitions for the single- and multiplayer parts of the game . Chris Butcher commented , " For Halo 2 we had our sights set very high on networking . ... Going from having no Internet multiplayer to developing a completely new online model was a big challenge to tackle all at once , and as a result we had to leave a lot of things undone in order to meet the ship date commitment that we made to our fans . " With only a year to go until release , Bungie went into the " mother of all crunches " in order to finish the game ; in a 2007 interview , Jamie Griesemer , one of Halo 's design leads , said that this lack of a " polish " period near the end of the development cycle was the main reason for Halo 2 's shortcomings . Butcher retrospectively described Halo 2 's multiplayer mode as " a pale shadow of what it could and should have been if we had gotten the timing of our schedule right " ; the campaign mode 's abrupt cliffhanger ending also resulted from the frenzy to ship on time .

= = = Windows version = = =

On February 9 , 2006 , Nick Baron announced that a version of Halo 2 would be released on PC , exclusively for the Windows Vista operating system . While this was a deliberate decision by Microsoft to push sales of Vista , the game could be enabled to play on Windows XP through an unauthorized third @-@ party patch . The game was ported by a small team at Microsoft Game Studios (codenamed Hired Gun) who worked closely with Bungie . As one of the launch titles of Games for Windows ? Live , the game offered Live features not available in the Xbox version , such as guide support and achievements . The Windows port also added two exclusive multiplayer maps and a map editor .

Halo 2 for Windows Vista was originally scheduled for release on May 8 , 2007 , but the release

was pushed back to May 31 on the discovery of partial nudity in the game 's map editor ? a photograph of a man mooning the camera was presented as part of the " .ass " error message . Microsoft offered patches to remove the nude content and revised the box ratings .

= = = Cheating and updates = = =

A common complaint regarding Halo 2 's online play was widespread cheating , which began occurring almost immediately after the game 's release . Users exploited bugs in the game and vulnerabilities of the network to win ranked games and thus increase their matchmaking rank .
Some players used " standbying " to cheat , in which the player hosting the game intentionally presses the standby button on his or her modem ; this results in all players except the cheaters freezing in place . This way , the cheater would be given time to accomplish an objective in the game . " Dummying " involves using an Elite character and a vehicle , exploiting a glitch which would cause a doppelganger of the player to appear . Cheating also includes softmodding , in which a player uses devices such as Action Replay and computer programs to gain unfair advantages , and bridging , which uses computer programs to give a player " host " status , and therefore the ability to disconnect other players from the game session . A game exploitation called " superbouncing " or " superjumping " is labeled cheating by many in the Xbox Live community , and Bungie employees have described it as cheating when used in matchmaking . Another exploit called " BXR " allowed players to melee , cancel the animation , and quickly attack for an instant kill ; this exploit and many others were removed from the game 's sequel .
Bungie released several map packs for Halo 2 , both over Xbox Live and on game discs . The Multiplayer Map Pack is an expansion pack intended to make Xbox Live content and updates available to offline players , and was released on July 5 , 2005 . The disk contains the game 's software update , all nine new multiplayer maps , a documentary about the making of the maps , and a bonus cinematic called " Another Day on the Beach " , among other features .
On March 30 , 2007 , Bungie announced that two new maps would be available on April 17 , 2007 . Bungie 's own Frank O 'Connor confirmed that both Xbox and Xbox 360 users would have access to the content . The two new maps were remakes of maps from the original Halo : Combat Evolved , " Hang em ' High " and " Derelict " . Due to issues with distribution of the maps , the updates which made the maps mandatory was released on May 9 , 2007 , later than planned . Bungie also reset all ranks for Halo 2 at the same time . On July 7 , also known as " Bungie Day " , Bungie released the map pack called the " Blastacular Map Pack " for free .

= = Soundtrack = =

Halo 2 's soundtrack was composed primarily by Martin O 'Donnell and his musical partner Michael Salvatori , the team that had composed the critically acclaimed music of Halo . O 'Donnell noted in composing the music for Halo 2 that " Making a sequel is never a simple proposition . You want to make everything that was cool even better , and leave out all the stuff that was weak . " O 'Donnell made sure that no part of the game would be completely silent , noting " Ambient sound is one of the main ways to immerse people psychologically . A dark room is spooky , but add a creaking floorboard and rats skittering in the walls and it becomes really creepy . " Halo 2 , unlike its predecessor , was mixed to take full advantage of Dolby 5 @.@ 1 Digital surround sound .
In the summer of 2004 , producer Nile Rodgers and O 'Donnell decided to release the music from Halo 2 on two separate CDs ; the first (Volume One) would contain all the themes present in the game as well as music " inspired " by the game ; the second would contain the rest of the music from the game , much of which was incomplete , as the first CD was shipped before the game was released . The first CD was released on November 9 , 2004 , and featured guitar backing by Steve Vai . Additional tracks included various outside musicians , including Steve Vai , Incubus , Breaking Benjamin , and Hoobastank . The Halo 2 Original Soundtrack : Volume Two CD , containing the game music organized in suite form , was released on April 25 , 2006 .

= = Release = =

The release of Halo 2 was preceded with numerous promotions , product tie @-@ ins , and movie trailer @-@ like commercials . There was a Halo 2 Celebrity Pre @-@ Release Party at E3 2004 , in which a private home was transformed to replicate the world of Halo , complete with camouflaged Marines and roaming Cortanas .

In addition to more traditional forms of promotion , Halo 2 was also part of an elaborate Alternate Reality Game project titled " I Love Bees , " which cost an estimated one million dollars . This " game " centered on a hacked website , supposedly a site about beekeeping , where an AI from the future was residing . The project garnered significant attention from sites including Slashdot and Wired News ; Wired noted that the game was drawing attention away from the 2004 Presidential Election . The game won an award for creativity at the 5th annual Game Developers Choice Awards and was nominated for a Webby award . On the morning of October 14 , 2004 , a leak of the French version of the game was posted on the Internet , and circulated widely .

Halo 2 was sold in both a standard and " Limited Collector 's Edition " . The Collector 's Edition features the regular edition and includes several promotional offers , a special cover and a special DVD of the making of Halo 2 . The instructional booklet is also written from the Covenant point of view rather than from the UNSC point of view used in the regular edition . Also enclosed is the " Conversations from the Universe " booklet that contains additional information from both the human and the Covenant side of the Halo storyline ; transcripts are available online . The game is enclosed in an aluminum case with the Halo 2 logo .

The first official release of Halo 2 was in Canada , Australia , New Zealand and the United States on November 9 , 2004 . Anticipation for the game was high ; three weeks before this release , a record 1 @.@ 5 million copies had already been pre @-@ ordered . Massive lines formed at midnight releases of the game ; the event garnered significant media attention . This was followed by releases on November 10 , 2004 in France and other European countries , and November 11 in the UK . The game sold 2 @.@ 4 million copies and earned up to US $ 125 million in its first 24 hours on store shelves , thus out @-@ grossing the film Pirates of the Caribbean : Dead Man 's Chest as the highest grossing release in entertainment history . The game sold 260 @,@ 000 units in the United Kingdom in its first week , making it the third fastest @-@ selling title in that territory . On June 20 , 2006 , Xbox.com reported that more than a half @-@ billion games of Halo 2 have been played on Xbox Live since its debut . Halo 2 is the best @-@ selling first @-@ generation Xbox game with 8 @.@ 46 million copies sold by November 2008 . As of September 25 , 2007 , Halo 2 was the fifth best @-@ selling video game in the United States with 6 @.@ 3 million copies sold , according to the NPD Group . From the day of its initial release and up until mid @-@ November 2006 , Halo 2 was the most popular video game on Xbox Live , even after the release of the Xbox 360 ; its position was eventually surpassed in 2006 by the 360 @-@ exclusive Gears of War . Halo and Halo 2 are still some of the most played games for the Xbox console .

= = Reception = =

Halo 2 received critical acclaim . On review aggregate sites GameRankings and Metacritic , the game has attained overall scores of 94 @.@ 57 % and 95 out of 100 , respectively . Halo 2 received multiple awards , including Best Console game and Best Sound Design from the Interactive Achievement Awards . According to Xbox.com , the game has received more than 38 individual awards .

Many reviewers praised the audio for being especially vivid . Multiplayer especially was noted in being the best on Xbox Live at the time . Game Informer , along with numerous other publications , rated it higher than Halo : Combat Evolved , citing enhanced multiplayer and less repetitive gameplay . Most critics noted that Halo 2 stuck with the formula that made its predecessor successful , and was alternatively praised and faulted for this decision . Edge 's review concluded that Halo 2 could be summed up with a line from its script : " It 's not a new plan . But we know it 'll work . "

The game 's campaign mode received some criticism for being too short , and for featuring an abrupt cliffhanger ending . GameSpot noted that although the story 's switching between the Covenant and human factions made the plot more intricate , it distracted the player from Earth 's survival and the main point of the game ; while Edge labeled the plot " a confusing mess of fan @-@ fiction sci @-@ fi and bemusing Episode @-@ II @-@ style politics . "

The Windows version of the game received mixed reviews , with IGN rating it a 7 @.@ 5 / 10 , and GameSpot giving it a 7 @.@ 0 / 10 . Most criticism was due to the late release date , and the graphics being dated . It received an aggregate score of 72 @.@ 67 % from GameRankings and 72 out of 100 from Metacritic .

= = = Legacy = = =

Several publications have listed Halo 2 's innovative matchmaking technology as one of the turning points in the gaming industry during the 2000s . Television channel G4 's Sterling McGarvey wrote that " Bungie 's sequel was a shot in the arm for Xbox Live subscriptions and previewed many of the features that would set the standard for Microsoft 's online service on the next machine " . The editors of Popular Mechanics listed Halo 2 as one of the top fifteen events of the decade , crediting the game with bringing online multiplayer to the console masses . The Province 's Paul Chapman concurred , writing that games like Call of Duty : Modern Warfare 2 would not be as enjoyable to play if not for the ground Halo 2 broke .