

= Half @-@ Life : Decay =

Half @-@ Life : Decay is a multiplayer @-@ only expansion pack for Valve Software 's first @-@ person shooter Half @-@ Life . Developed by Gearbox Software and published by Sierra Entertainment , Decay was released as part of the PlayStation 2 version of Half @-@ Life in 2001 . It is the third expansion pack for Half @-@ Life , and like its predecessors , Decay returns to the setting and timeline of the original story , albeit portraying the story from the viewpoint of a different set of protagonists : two women scientists working in the Black Mesa Research Facility . Decay is a cooperative multiplayer game , designed to be played by two people working together to pass through the game 's levels .

Decay was not a critical success , but was received with some positivity by video game journalists . Many reviewers felt the game was fun to play through with a friend , but that its more puzzle @-@ oriented gameplay somewhat detracted from the overall experience . A number of reviews stated that the game simply felt little more than an extra add @-@ on for the PlayStation 2 version of Half @-@ Life . A group of Ukrainian developers unofficially ported the game to Windows as a modification of the PC version of Half @-@ Life in 2008 .

= = Gameplay = =

As is the case with the other games in the Half @-@ Life series , Decay is a first @-@ person shooter . Like the original title it is based on , Decay requires players to engage in combat with hostile non @-@ player characters and complete various puzzle solving tasks to advance through the game . However , Decay differs from Half @-@ Life and its first two expansion packs , Opposing Force and Blue Shift , in that it is designed for cooperative multiplayer gameplay . This requires players to work together to progress through the game 's levels and complete puzzles as they arise in @-@ game . Although intended to be played by two people in split screen mode , Decay can still be played by a single player . In this case , the player can only control one character at a time , and can switch between the two characters quickly . When not in use , a character has sufficient artificial intelligence to defend themselves , but otherwise does not move from where they have been left by the player .

In Half @-@ Life , players usually fight alone and only occasionally encounter friendly non @-@ player characters who assist them , such as security guards and scientists . While Decay still features levels where this is the case , significant sections in Decay are dedicated to working with friendly non @-@ player characters , usually escorting them to various objectives and protecting them in firefights . An array of enemy characters from Half @-@ Life populate the game , including alien lifeforms such as headcrabs and Vortigaunts , as well as human soldiers sent in to contain the alien threat . The players have access to a limited selection of Half @-@ Life 's weaponry to assist them in the game . Although developed after Opposing Force , no non @-@ player characters or weapons from the earlier expansion appear in Decay .

The game is unique in the context of the Half @-@ Life series in that it is the only game divided into separate missions , each with a specific objective to pursue , instead of consisting of a single unbroken narrative . How players perform in each mission is ranked at the conclusion of the level as a grade from " A " to " F " . This score is based on each player 's accuracy with weapons , the number of kills they acquired and the amount damage they sustained during the course of the mission . Should players successfully complete the game 's nine missions with " A " grades on every level , they are given access to a bonus cooperative mission , in which they can play as a pair of Vortigaunts , as well as the ability to play through the PlayStation 2 version of the original Half @-@ Life as a Vortigaunt .

= = Plot = =

Decay is set in the same location and timeframe as Half @-@ Life . Half @-@ Life takes place at a laboratory called the Black Mesa Research Facility , situated in a remote desert in New Mexico . In

Half @-@ Life , the player takes on the role of Gordon Freeman , a scientist involved in an accident that opens an inter @-@ dimensional portal to the borderworld of Xen , allowing the alien creatures of Xen to attack the facility . The player guides Freeman in an attempt to escape the facility and close the portal , ultimately traveling to Xen to do so . Like the previous expansions , Decay shows the story of Half @-@ Life from the perspective of a different set of protagonists . In Decay , players assume the roles of Colette Green and Gina Cross , two doctors who work in the same labs as Freeman , analyzing anomalous materials and specimens retrieved from Xen in prior teleportation experiments . After the experiment that causes the alien invasion takes place , Green and Cross must work with two ranking members of the science team , Dr. Richard Keller and Dr. Rosenberg , to contain and stabilize the deteriorating situation in Black Mesa .

Decay begins with Gina Cross and Colette Green arriving at the Anomalous Materials Labs at Black Mesa and reporting to Dr. Keller , who is readying the day 's analysis of an unknown specimen . Despite the objections of Dr. Rosenberg to pushing the analysis equipment beyond its design capacities , Cross and Green are assigned to assist setting up the experiment for Gordon Freeman . When Freeman inserts the specimen into the scanning beam , however , it triggers a " resonance cascade " , causing massive damage to the facility and teleporting alien creatures into the base . Keller and Rosenberg agree that Black Mesa cannot deal with the situation on its own , and so decide to call for military assistance . Cross and Green escort Rosenberg to the surface , where he sends a distress signal to the military . However , the military are ordered not only to contain the situation , but to silence the base by killing its employees . Rosenberg elects to stay behind to meet with the military on arrival and Cross and Green return to Keller .

Once reunited with Keller , Cross and Green work to seal the dimensional tear to stop the invasion . The military arrive and try to remove all personnel as well as the alien force . After resetting key equipment to prevent a second dimensional rift , the two are tasked with preparing a satellite for launch . The satellite , which is launched by Freeman in Half @-@ Life , is used in tandem with ground @-@ based equipment to significantly weaken the effects of the resonance cascade . Keller tasks Cross and Green with activating this set of prototype equipment , a displacement beacon , which through the satellite may be able to seal the dimensional rift . However , after activating the beacon , both characters are caught up in a " harmonic reflux " , a distortion caused by the rift . Despite this , Cross and Green are able to return safely and Keller congratulates them on their success .

The unlockable vortigaunt mission provides background information explaining how the orange crystals used by the rift @-@ sealing machine in Half Life : Decay are acquired and used by the Nihilanth during the final boss battle in Half Life . The two player @-@ controlled vortigaunts battle through Marines and Black Ops in the underground Black Mesa complex to find the orange crystals in the back of a military van . At this point the screen fades and the mission is declared a success ; it is presumed that the Nihilanth warps them back to Xen and installs the crystals in his cave .

= = Development = =

A cooperative Half @-@ Life game was first alluded to by publisher Sierra Entertainment in November 2000 with the announcement of a PlayStation 2 version of Half @-@ Life . At the time , however , it was unclear how a cooperative version of Half @-@ Life would be implemented ; the developers , Gearbox Software , were still experimenting with finding the most balanced amount of players to build a cooperative game around . By E3 2001 , the game had acquired the title Decay , named after the scientific concept of exponential decay for consistency with the scientific names used by previous Half @-@ Life titles . While the E3 convention only provided a demonstration of the main Half @-@ Life PlayStation 2 game , further details were released relating to Decay 's premise and story , as well as confirming that the cooperative mode was to be designed for two players . The game 's use of new model sets were also showcased . These new models were updated versions of Gearbox 's High Definition pack for Blue Shift , featuring higher numbers of polygons and animation features such as facial expressions . The enhanced models were around twice as detailed as those in the High Definition pack , which itself was of a much higher quality than

the original models in Half @-@ Life . Media updates through the months following E3 showed various screenshots and the trailer to the game . On August 18 , 2001 , Sierra announced that Decay was nearly complete , and would be submitted to PlayStation 2 manufacturer Sony for verification within days . The entire Half @-@ Life for PlayStation 2 package achieved gold status on October 30 , 2001 , and the game was released on November 14 , 2001 .

In October 2005 , work was begun by a group of Ukrainian developers to port Decay over to Windows , as a modification for both the old World Opponent Network and current Steam versions of Half @-@ Life . The port relied on the discovery of a method that allowed Decay 's PS2 game files to be deciphered , thereby allowing the files to be ported to Windows . The port went into the beta development stage in December 2007 and was released publicly on September 23 , 2008 . The port was received well by the journalists in the industry ; GameSpy site Planet Half @-@ Life noted that it was a shame that an official PC version of Decay never emerged , while British journalist Alec Meer stated that it was " fantastic to have this short but sweet lost Half @-@ Life episode on PC at last , and it even has something the PS2 version didn 't ? online play " .

= = Reception = =

Decay received a weak but overall positive reception from the video games industry 's critics . Writing for GameSpot , Doug Radcliffe argued that Decay was " impressive " , praising the design of puzzles required players to work together , as well as the way in which the ranking system discouraged players from competing against each other . GameSpy 's David Hodgson was more reserved in his views of the game ; although describing it as " great fun " , he noted that it could become " tedious , with one member waiting for minutes at a time , while the other scratches their head , then completes an objective " . In addition , Hodgson felt that the more puzzle @-@ orientated nature of Decay left the action elements " a little muted compared to Gordon 's single player quest " . Allgame described Decay as an " added bonus " for the PlayStation 2 version of Half @-@ Life , but noted that as the game was designed for two players , it significantly suffered when a single player attempts to play it by switching between two characters , a point that both GameSpy and GameSpot agreed on . In his review for IGN , critic Doug Perry felt that Decay was " neat in its own limited way " , but that it was more of a distraction from the main game , " a complementary cup of vegetable soup than a piping hot main dish of New York steak " . While The Electric Playground reviewer Steve Smith stated that the control scheme for the PlayStation 2 version of Half @-@ Life " is about the best we have seen on the PS2 or any console " , he concluded that although Decay was a " nice add @-@ on " , it was " no reason to buy this port " .