

= Cortana ( Halo ) =

Cortana is a fictional synthetic intelligence character in the Halo video game series . Voiced by Jen Taylor , she appears in Halo : Combat Evolved and its sequels , Halo 2 , Halo 3 , Halo 4 and Halo 5 : Guardians . She also appears in a cutscene and the epilogue of the prequel Halo : Reach , as well as in several of the franchise 's novels and comics . During gameplay , Cortana provides backstory and tactical information to the player , who assumes the role of Master Chief Petty Officer John @-@ 117 . In the story , she is instrumental in preventing the activation of the Halo installations , which would have destroyed all sentient life in the galaxy .

Cortana 's original design was based on the Egyptian queen Nefertiti ; the character 's holographic representation always takes the form of a woman . Bungie first introduced Cortana ? and Halo ? through the Cortana Letters , emails sent during Combat Evolved 's production in 1999 . Since then , the character has been used extensively to advertise the series . Cortana has been recognized for her sex appeal , believability , and character depth . The character was the inspiration for Microsoft 's intelligent personal assistant .

= = Character design = =

The first Cortana was designed and modelled by Bungie artist Chris Hughes . Cortana 's original Halo model 's face was based on the sculpture of Egyptian Queen Nefertiti .

Voice actress Jen Taylor said that she remained somewhat distanced from the character , and she attended only one fan convention in six years after the release of Halo : Combat Evolved . Despite her role in voicing other video game characters , including Princess Peach , she is not a gamer . She felt that portraying Cortana was occasionally challenging because the character lacks a physical form and is " a computer . " Interviewed about Cortana in Halo 3 , Taylor said that " There 's a lot more drama and a lot less technical jargon this time around . I actually just finished a couple of lines that nearly had me in tears . " When choosing a voice actor for the character , Bungie originally wanted Cortana to have a British accent . Although this idea was later discarded , Cortana still uses British colloquialisms in Halo : Combat Evolved .

Halo Effect : An Unauthorized Look at the Most Successful Video Game of All Time , an essay on references to mythology in Halo and previous Bungie games , analyzed the significance of Cortana 's name , stating is a variant of Curtana , the sword used by the legendary Ogier the Dane , just as the titular AI character of Marathon 2 : Durandal is apparently named after another legendary sword , Durendal . Curtana 's inscription reveals that the sword has the same " temper as Joyeuse and Durendal . " Accordingly , some speculated before the release of Halo 3 whether the " smart " Cortana would follow Marathon 's Durandal in succumbing to rampancy , a concept invented by Bungie in which an AI character becomes insane by gaining too much knowledge .

= = = Attributes = = =

Cortana is constructed from the cloned brain of Dr. Catherine Elizabeth Halsey , the creator of the SPARTAN Project ; Halsey 's synaptic networks became the basis for Cortana 's processors . According to the Halo novels , Cortana is classified as a " smart " AI , meaning that her creative matrix is allowed to expand , in contrast to the limited matrix of other " dumb " AI characters in the stories . This ability allows Cortana to learn and adapt beyond her basic parameters , but at the cost of a limited " lifespan " of only seven years ; eventually , she will fall to rampancy , a terminal state of being for Artificial intelligence constructs , in which the AI " develops delusions of godlike power " , as well as utter contempt for its mentally inferior makers . Rampant AI normally cannot return to their previous state and must be destroyed before they harm themselves and others around them , but Cortana could be saved if she and the Master Chief can get back to Dr. Halsey on Earth ; because she was created using the living tissue of Dr. Halsey .

Cortana is highly skilled and capable of hacking alien computer systems and decoding transmissions and occasionally smug about her abilities . In Halo : The Fall of Reach she hacks into

Top Secret Office of Naval Intelligence ( ONI ) documents out of boredom . Her intellect occasionally causes her to be loquacious to a fault ; in The Fall of Reach , Halsey notes that if she were to let Cortana continue with her hypothesis , then the AI would talk all day . The Doctor also sees Cortana as a teenage version of herself : smarter than her parents , always " talking , learning , and eager to share her knowledge . " Cortana is also described as having a sardonic sense of humor ; she often cracks jokes or wryly comments , even during combat . Her high spirits and lack of programming restrictions give her a set of behavioral " quirks " unique among most AI characters in the Halo universe . For example , she becomes irate and impatient when the Master Chief doubts her judgment in Halo : First Strike .

As an artificial construct , Cortana has no physical form or being . Cortana always speaks with a smooth female voice , and she can communicate through comm systems and project a holographic image of herself from appropriate projectors , such as Holotanks , and appears holographically as a woman . Cortana is said to resemble her creator , Dr. Catherine Halsey , with a similar attitude " only unchecked by military and social protocol . " In Halo : The Fall of Reach , Cortana is described as slender , with close @-@ cropped hair and a skin hue that varies from navy blue to lavender , depending on her mood . Numbers and symbols flash across her form when she is thinking . In Halo 4 Cortana has become more human in appearance with more subtle additions being added to her character model such as a gap being visible between her front teeth . Cortana was played by actress Mackenzie Mason using advanced facial rendering technology to capture movements in her face while speaking to add a more human look .

= = Appearances = =

= = = In video games = = =

Cortana first appears during the introductory cutscene of Halo : Combat Evolved . In the 2003 novelization of the game , Halo : The Flood , Cortana likewise plays an important role . Controlling the Pillar of Autumn 's defenses , Cortana destroys four Covenant targets before the ship 's weapons are disabled . Under the Cole Protocol , Captain Keyes , the Autumn 's commanding officer , prepares to abandon ship : the protocol mandates the evacuation of any AI constructs , thereby charging the Master Chief with safeguarding Cortana from the Covenant . When the Master Chief arrives on Halo , Cortana monitors the communications channels , helps direct human survivors scattered across the ring , and assists the Master Chief in the rescue of Captain Keyes from the Covenant ship Truth and Reconciliation . Inserted into Halo 's Control Room , Cortana looks for a way to activate Halo to use as a weapon against the Covenant but becomes visibly agitated and sends the Master Chief to find Captain Keyes . Cortana stays in Halo 's computer core as the Master Chief encounters the parasitic Flood and is conscripted by the Forerunner construct 343 Guilty Spark to activate Halo 's defenses . The Master Chief and Guilty Spark return to the Control Room intent on using the Index , the key to Halo , to eliminate the Flood , but Cortana reveals the truth that she has learned : Halo does not kill Flood , but their food . Activating Halo would destroy all sentient life in the galaxy . She takes the Index ? thus becoming a target for 343 Guilty Spark ? and plans with Master Chief to destroy Halo . They succeed after Cortana helps the Chief to detonate the Pillar of Autumn 's fusion reactors , causing an explosion powerful enough to destabilize the ringworld . The two escape in a fighter and witness the ring 's destruction .

Cortana appears next in Halo 2 at an awards ceremony for the heroes of Halo : Combat Evolved on the Earth defense platform Cairo Station . A Covenant fleet arrives , and Cortana takes control of the Cairo 's coilgun , the Magnetic Accelerator Cannon , to repel the invaders ; she successfully deactivates a bomb that would have destroyed the station with the help of the Master Chief . Following the Master Chief 's decision to leave the station to " give the Covenant back their bomb " , Cortana chooses to accompany him despite thinking his plan crazy and guides him through New Mombasa in his attempt to capture the Prophet of Regret . Later , upon discovering Delta Halo , Cortana gives Commander Miranda Keyes access to all information on the original Halo and

provides intelligence to the Chief and United Nations Space Command ( UNSC ) Marines on the surface of the ring . When sent by the Flood leader , Gravemind , to the Covenant city @-@ ship of High Charity , Cortana stays put as the Master Chief follows the Prophet of Truth . She promises to detonate the crashed In Amber Clad 's reactors to destroy the city and Halo if the ring is activated . The Arbiter , and Sergeant Major Avery Johnson avert the firing of Halo , but Cortana is left with Gravemind , who has by then overrun High Charity .

Cortana returns in the third installment in the Halo series , the 2007 Xbox 360 game Halo 3 . During gameplay , Cortana appears to the player in broken transmissions , often reciting lines from Fall of Reach and earlier games . Cortana manages to send a message to the Master Chief on Earth through a Flood @-@ infected ship . In her message , she states that Gravemind is unaware of the portal opened by a Forerunner artifact on Earth . Cortana continues to appear to the Chief , who later recovers her from Flood @-@ controlled High Charity . Surprised that the Chief has against all odds rescued her ( as promised ) Cortana produces the Index from Installation 04 , which she has kept as a souvenir . With it , Cortana activates a new ringworld being constructed . While the Flood are destroyed as planned , the slipspace portal through which Master Chief , the Arbiter , and Cortana attempt to escape collapses , thus stranding the Chief and Cortana . Cortana activates a distress beacon , but she knows that years could pass before rescue comes . As the Master Chief prepares to go into cryonic sleep to await rescue , Cortana confides to him that she will miss him . He replies to wake him when she needs him .

Cortana makes an appearance in the last levels of 2010 's Halo : Reach , which in the game 's universe takes place before Combat Evolved . When the Spartan group Noble Team receives orders to destroy important intelligence inside the military installation Sword Base , Cortana contacts Noble Team and sends them to an excavation site under the base . There , Halsey contacts the team and shows them a massive Forerunner structure buried beneath the surface . Halsey downloads Cortana and gives her to the soldier Noble 6 , instructing the team to bring the AI to the UNSC ship Pillar of Autumn . While most of Noble Team 's six soldiers were killed , Noble 6 hands Cortana over to Captain Keyes and elects to stay behind and protect the ship while it makes its escape .

In the fourth game , the Xbox exclusive Halo 4 , Cortana wakes the Chief when Covenant forces attack the remains of the UNSC Forward Unto Dawn , then crashes with him on Requiem . Over the course of the game , Cortana begins showing strange signs and behavior : vocal and graphic glitches , irrational behavior and a tendency to become irritable or angered . Their cause is soon revealed : Cortana 's operation beyond her seven @-@ year lifespan and her interaction with the Halo installations and the Flood have caused her to become Rampant , a state of over @-@ knowledge that makes AIs ' think ' themselves to death . Helped by the Master Chief and kept safe from the captain of the Infinity , who wishes to delete her , she helps in the battle against the Didact , a rogue Forerunner who hates humanity , and stops his scheme to convert the Earth and its people into his army using the Composer . In doing so , she has to fragment her various rampant personalities and upload them into the system , which first brings down the shields around the central core , then enables her to save Master Chief from the Didact . In a final act of love , she shields the Master Chief when he destroys the Composer , then , using the last of her energy to manifest as a solid hologram , she bids a final farewell to the Chief , managing to touch him for the first time .

Halo 5 shows Halsey explaining that Cortana has recovered from Rampancy and attained meta @-@ stability by gaining access to The Domain , a Forerunner database thought to have been destroyed after the firing of the Halo Array . How the UNSC and Halsey are aware that Cortana gained access to The Domain is unknown . She explains to Master Chief on Genesis that she survived by falling through slipspace , and likens the Domain to the " Water Of Life for AI 's " . Her goal now is to preserve an ever lasting peace by subjugating all biological life . Whether this is a direct reaction to her link with The Domain , influence from The Didact ( as their goals are now extremely similar ) or some other external influence is yet to be known . With all Promethean troops and most Forerunner tech now under her command , and believing she cannot trust the Chief , who tries to reason with her , she converts most , if not all of the UNSC 's AI constructs to her cause and begins her assault by plunging Humanity into a new Dark Age , using the Guardian 's EMP abilities

to shut off most UNSC technology , except The Infinity which barely escapes with Roland , the ship 's AI , still intact and seemingly loyal . In the Legendary Ending , a Halo ring can be seen activating accompanied by Cortana humming . Whether she found it or built it is unknown although , considering she has access to the Domain , the Guardians , Forerunner tech and a multitude of different AI constructs at her disposal , building her own ring is not out of the realms of possibility .

= = = In novels = = =

The origin of Cortana is not explained in the video games , but in the Halo novels . Her first chronological appearance in the story is in Halo : The Fall of Reach , a 2001 prequel to the first Halo game . Dr. Halsey allows Cortana to choose which SPARTAN @-@ II soldier to accompany on an upcoming mission ; Cortana picks the Master Chief , whom she believes is her best match . Cortana makes a reference to this event via voiceover in Halo 3 during a cinematic before gameplay begins . Cortana and the Spartans are assigned a near @-@ suicidal mission : to take the cruiser Pillar of Autumn to the home world of the Covenant , an alliance of alien races , and capture one of their Prophets to force a truce . Cortana 's role is to act as a mission specialist , hacking the Covenant systems and piloting the captured Covenant ship . Before the mission , Cortana helps the Master Chief to survive the near @-@ lethal exercises designed to test the Chief 's MJOLNIR battle armor . Afterward , she plants incriminating evidence in the files of Colonel Ackerson , the ONI operative who nearly killed both of them , as revenge . When the Covenant attacks the planet Reach , one of the largest planetary military bases besides Earth , Cortana guides the Pillar of Autumn based on star charts on a Forerunner tablet , thus bringing them to Halo . During Halo : The Flood , Cortana serves the same role she did in Halo : Combat Evolved , but her role is expanded such as showing her saving the Master Chief 's life from a Flood Infection Form at one point .

Eric Nylund 's 2003 novel Halo : First Strike takes place immediately after the events of Halo : Combat Evolved . Cortana and the Master Chief , seemingly the sole survivors of the events of Halo , discover a small number of other UNSC personnel have in fact escaped the ring . Cortana helps to take control of a Covenant cruiser , Ascendant Justice , and later returns to Earth with the remaining survivors after destroying the Covenant space station Unyielding Hierophant . In this novel , Cortana gains the ability to create imperfect clones of her program . A clone that the Master Chief and his Spartan Blue Team bring to Unyielding Hierophant eventually re @-@ clones itself hundreds of times to aid the Spartans in completing their mission .

= = = In promotion = = =

Bungie first introduced the Halo series publicly in 1999 by sending the Cortana Letters , a series of cryptic email messages , to the maintainer of [marathon.bungie.org](http://marathon.bungie.org) , a fan site for one of Bungie 's previous series , the Marathon Trilogy . The strategic use of cryptic messages in a publicity campaign was repeated in I Love Bees , a promotion for Halo 2 . Although Bungie does not consider most of the letters to be canon , Cortana speaks many of the same lines in Halo 3 . According to C. J. Cowan , Bungie 's director of cinematics , the studio used the character here to give story clues without actually revealing the story .

Cortana has been turned into an action figure twice to promote Halo . The first was released as a seven @-@ inch ( 178 mm ) miniature as part of the Halo : Combat Evolved series of action figures . The character is also featured in the first series of Halo 3 action figures , distributed by McFarlane Toys . In an interview , McLees noted that the first action figure was supposed to convey an older appearance than was depicted in the games . This was accomplished by making the figure look a little buxom , despite McLees ' direct request to reduce the mass of the figure . She explains that the sculptor appeared reluctant to make the change and that time constraints ultimately left the design intact .

= = = Windows Digital Assistant = = =

Microsoft developed its virtual assistant for the Windows Phone operating system under the codename Cortana , but retained the name for the final product following a strong response in the developer community . The voice actor of Cortana in the games , Jen Taylor , provides the voice for the virtual assistant . Microsoft released a beta for Cortana in April 2014 with the developer release of Windows Phone 8 @. @ 1 . Microsoft also released Cortana virtual assistant on the Xbox One , Windows Phone 8 @. @ 1 , and Windows 10 .

= = Reception = =

When Cortana 's role greatly expanded in Halo 3 , Fairfax New Zealand noted that the character " has inexplicably had a sexy makeover . " According to Cinema Blend , the " love story " between Master Chief and Cortana in this game provides " a focus to the game that an epic war between species can not accomplish . As Chief , the player needs something to anchor them into the story , and that happens to be Cortana . "

Part of Cortana 's appeal has lain in her good looks . In 2007 , the character was ranked as ninth on the list of top " Xbox babes " by Team Xbox , featured by GameDaily 's " Babe of the Week " , and listed as the sixth most " disturbingly sexual game character " by Games.net. In 2008 , GameDaily ranked her as the 38th " hottest game babe . " In 2009 , 1UP.com ranked the character as the fifth best video game computer , noting that as Cortana 's sanity waned in the video games , her clothing appeared to decrease as well . In 2010 , GameTrailers included her on their countdown of the top 10 " babes who are out of your league " at number two . In 2011 , UGO.com included her on the list of the 50 " video game hotties " , calling her " a certified hottie " in spite of being " just ... a big pile of ones and zeroes . " In the " battle of the beauties " feature , Complex chose her over GLaDOS for her more human @-@ like voice . In 2012 , MSN included her among the 20 " hottest women in video game history " while Revision3 ranked her the third sexiest " video game girl . " Thanh Niên ranked her as the fourth most sexy female video game character in 2015 .

Aside from appearance , the media found other aspects to praise . In 2007 , Cortana was named one of the 50 greatest female characters by Tom 's Hardware for the character 's determination and fearlessness , which meshed perfectly with the game 's protagonist . In 2010 , Cracked.com ranked her as first on the list of the supporting characters in video games . In 2011 , UGO.com ranked her as the second best video game companion , while Maximum PC included her in the list of the 25 of gaming 's greatest sidekicks .