

= Covenant (Halo) =

The Covenant are a fictional theocratic military alliance of alien races who serve as the main antagonists in the first trilogy of the Halo video game series . They are composed of a variety of diverse species , united under the religious worship of the Forerunners and their belief that Forerunner ringworlds known as Halos will provide a path to salvation . After the Covenant leadership ? the High Prophets ? declare humanity an affront to their gods , the Covenant prosecute a lengthy genocidal campaign against the technologically inferior human race .

The Covenant were first introduced in the 2001 video game Halo : Combat Evolved as enemies of the playable character , a human supersoldier known as the Master Chief . Not realizing the Halos were meant as weapons of destruction rather than salvation , the Covenant attempt to activate the rings on three separate occasions throughout the series , inadvertently releasing a virulent parasite known as the Flood in the process .

To develop a distinctive look for the various races of the Covenant , Bungie artists drew inspiration from reptilian , ursine , and avian characteristics . A Covenant design scheme of purples and reflective surfaces was made to separate the aliens from human architecture . The Covenant were generally well received by critics who appreciated the challenge they provided to players ; several critics lamented the change of the main enemies from Elites to Brutes in Halo 3 and conversely praised their return in the later Halo : Reach .

= = Game development = =

Like most of the other characters and species in the Halo universe , the Covenant were slowly developed during the initial concept phase and refined as Halo : Combat Evolved progressed . During the course of development of Halo , the designers decided upon three " schools " of architecture , for each of the races represented ? the humans , the Covenant , and the Forerunners . For the Covenant , the team decided on " sleek and shiny " , with reflective surfaces , organic shapes , and use of purples .

Like the character designs , Covenant technology , architecture , and design continually changed throughout development , occasionally for practical reasons as well as aesthetics . According to Eric Arroyo , the Covenant cruiser Truth and Reconciliation , which plays a major role in Halo : Combat Evolved , was to be boarded by the player by a long ramp . However , due to technical considerations of having a fully textured ship so close to the player , the designers came up with a " gravity lift " , which allowed the ship to be farther away (thus not requiring as much processing power for detail) as well as adding a " visually interesting " component of Covenant technology .

The art team also spent a large amount of time on Covenant weaponry , in order to make them suitably alien yet still recognizable to players . At the same time , the designers wanted all aspects of Covenant technology , especially the vehicles , to act plausibly . Bungie ended up looking at films and other media for inspiration on almost every aspect of the race .

= = = Species = = =

To design the various species of the Covenant , Bungie 's artists looked at live animals and films for inspiration ; as a result , the species within the Covenant bear simian , reptilian , avian , and ursine characteristics .

= = = Elites (Sangheili) = = =

One of the strongest and toughest foes and allies of the game , Elites (who are from Sanghelios) are called Sangheili in the fictitious Covenant language . They stand around 8 ft 0 in (2 @ .@ 44 m) and feature recharging personal shields . The Elites initially had simple mouths , which developed into pairs of split mandibles substituting for the lower jaws . Bungie concept artist Shi Kai Wang noted that project lead Jason Jones had , at one point , been insistent on giving the Elites a tail .

While Wang thought it made the aliens look too animalistic , the idea was eventually dropped due to practical considerations , including where the tail would go when the Elites were driving vehicles . " At one point , we considered just having the Elites tuck their tails forward , between their legs , " Wang noted , " But [we] abandoned that ... for obvious reasons . " According to Paul Russel , when Bungie was bought by Microsoft and Halo was turned into an Xbox launch title , Microsoft took issue with the design of the Elites , as they felt that the Elites had a resemblance to cats that might alienate Japanese consumers .

=== Grunts (Unggoy) ===

Among the other races developed were Grunts , or Unggoy (from the planet Balaho) , viewed in game 's fiction as cannon fodder . Depicted as squat and cowardly fighters , Grunts panic and run if a player or an NPC kills their leaders . In the novels Halo : Fall of Reach and Halo : The Flood , it is told that the Grunts are methane breathers and described as dog @-@ like . They have methane suits that allow them to remove the breathing apparatuses they usually wear to sustain them in a non @-@ methane atmosphere . In Halo Reach , if a player kills a Grunt in a particular way , their methane tank will ignite causing them to fly and bounce around the area out of control , causing damage if they hit the player .

=== Jackals and Skirmishers (Kig @-@ Yar) ===

Jackals , or Kig @-@ Yar , (from the moon of Eayn , orbiting Chu 'ot) carry energy shields or ranged weaponry . Shield or armor colors denotes the rank of each caste . In some cases , such as with the Jackals , the overall design was honed once the enemy 's role was clearly defined . They look like bird @-@ like creatures or raptors . This particular species did not come into the Covenant in the same way as other species . They work as mercenaries , as their culture is based on piracy and do not follow the religious beliefs like the other species . In the Halo book , Halo : Contact Harvest , it was revealed that Jackals were the first species in the Covenant to encounter humanity . The resulting events initiated the start of the Human @-@ Covenant War .

=== Hunters (Mgalekgolo) ===

In addition to basic troops , there are Hunters , or Mgalekgolo , (from the planet Te) who according to Bungie 's mythology are actually collectives of alien insects singularly known as Lekgolo encased in tough armor . Initial concepts were less humanoid @-@ looking and softer than the final shape , with angular shields and razor @-@ sharp spines .

=== Engineers (Huragok) ===

Floating , serene aliens known as Engineers , or Huragok , were pulled from Combat Evolved , but made later appearances in the Halo novels . They also appeared in Halo Wars , Halo 3 : ODST , and Halo : Reach . They serve no actual combat role , although in Halo 3 : ODST , Halo Wars and Halo Reach they can aid players or enemies . They are actually artificial lifeforms created by the vanished technologically superior race known as the Forerunners , and are enslaved by the Covenant to build , repair and maintain their technology .

=== Prophets (San 'Shyuum) ===

The Prophets , or San 'Shyuum , (from the planet Janjur Qom) serve as the royal rulers of the Covenant , and were primarily designed by Shi Kai Wang and Eric Arroyo . Originally , the Prophets were built in a more unified way , with the gravity thrones they used for flotation and movement fused with the Prophet 's organic structures . The characters were also designed to be feeble , yet sinister . The three Prophet Hierarchs were each individually designed .

===== Brutes (Jiralhanae) =====

Brutes (from the planet Doisac) are one of the new fighting forces that were added in Halo 2 . They were made physically taller and stronger than the Elites , with their society organized around tribal chieftains . Inspired by the animators watching biker films , the Brutes incorporated simian and ursine elements while retaining an alien look . Wang 's final concept for the creature , replete with bandoliers and human skulls , was simplified for the game . Brutes were meant to typify the abusive alien menace of the Covenant and in the words of design lead Jaime Griesemer , to serve as " barbarians in Rome " .

For the final installment in the Halo trilogy , Halo 3 , designers had to refine the Covenant for the move to more powerful Xbox 360 hardware . Bungie was dissatisfied with the Brutes in Halo 2 ; they were added in late in development , resulting in the Brutes functioning merely as " damage sponges " and " not interesting to fight . " Their design was also limited , being little more than hairy apes with a bandoleer (reminiscent of the Star Wars character Chewbacca) . With the Elites leaving the Covenant in the game 's story , the Brutes became the player 's main enemy , necessitating radical changes in the character 's behavior and design . For the new look of the Brutes , concept artists took inspiration from rhinoceros and gorillas . The designers added armor with buckles , gauntlets , and leather straps to bring them more in line with the Covenant aesthetic . The more seasoned the Brute , the more ornate clothing and helmets ; the armor was designed to convey a culture and tradition to the species , and emphasize their mass and power . Designs for Halo 3 took cues from ancient Greek Spartans . Character animators recorded intended actions for the new Brutes in a padded room at Bungie . A new addition to the Brute artificial intelligence was a pack mentality ; leader Brutes direct large @-@ scale actions simultaneously , such as throwing grenades towards a player .

===== Drones (Yanme'e) =====

Another addition to the fighting force debuting in Halo 2 were Drones , or Yanme'e (from the planet Palamok) ; the animators found the creatures challenging , as they had to be animated to walk , run , crawl , or fly on multiple surfaces . Old concept art from Combat Evolved was re @-@ purposed in influencing the Drone 's final shape , which took cues from cockroaches , grasshoppers , and wasps .

===== Society =====

Technologically , the Covenant are described in The Flood and First Strike to be imitative rather than innovative ? most of the Covenant 's sophisticated weaponry and propulsion systems are based on Forerunner artifacts , rather than the Covenant 's own research . Covenant weapons are generally based on Forerunner technology and utilize plasma . These weapons are built around a battery that generates plasma and discharges it at a target . Frank O 'Connor , Bungie 's former public relations head , hinted that there may be something more to the Covenant 's weaponry , saying " the actual technology is not plasma as we know it , but something far more dangerous , arcane , and destructive . " A few of the Covenant 's weapons are not plasma @-@ based , including the Needler , which fires razor @-@ sharp pink needles capable of " homing in " on organic foes and exploding . A weapons expert noted parallels between the Needler and ancient Greek Amazons painting their daggers pink as a psychological weapon in an issue of gaming magazine Electronic Gaming Monthly .

Bungie designed the majority of Covenant technology to mirror the aesthetic of the Elites ; the exteriors are sleek and graceful , with a more angular and complex core underneath hinting at the fictional Forerunner origins of the technology . In contrast to the sleek Elite @-@ based designs of the Covenant at large , the Brutes were given their own visual design distinct from the other Covenant . Weaponry was designed to reflect the Brute 's " souls " distilled to its purest form ?

conveyed by dangerous shapes , harsh colors , and objects that looked " dangerous to be around " . A UNSC weapon designed for Combat Evolved in 1999 that was discarded at the time was re @-@ purposed as the Brute 's " Mauler " weapon .

Covenant society is a caste system composed of many races , some of which were forcibly incorporated . Each race is required to provide a specific number of troops to remain within the Covenant . In the games , the races are identified by their common UNSC designation ; their Covenant names are supplied by the " Halo 2 " Limited Edition and " Halo 3 " Limited Edition manuals and several novels .

= = Appearances = =

The majority of events in the story arc of the Halo series occur during the " Ninth Age of Reclamation . " The Covenant 's organization of time and dates is not elaborated on in detail in the game or during any of the novelizations ; Bungie cinematic director Joseph Staten , in an interview on Halo fansite halo.bungie.org , said that the Covenant 's date system is split into seven epochs , split into the following Ages : Abandonment , Conflict , Discovery , Reconciliation , Conversion , Doubt , and Reclamation .

The 2001 and 2007 novels Halo : The Fall of Reach and Halo : Contact Harvest describe humanity 's first contact with the Covenant in the year 2525 . In The Fall of Reach , a lone Covenant ship bombards the Harvest colony with plasma , turning the planet 's crust into molten glass . The lone ship , broadcasts the Covenant edict , " Your destruction is the will of the gods , and we are their instrument " , and destroys several United Nations Space Command (UNSC) ships sent to attack it . Contact Harvest describes a lengthy ground engagement between human militia and Covenant before the total assault on Harvest . The Covenant claim that humans are an offense to their gods , but in reality , three Covenant Prophets have learned from a relic left by their gods , the Forerunners , that humans , who may possibly be genetically related to the Forerunners , have been chosen by the Forerunners as their Reclaimers . Realizing such a revelation would splinter the Covenant , the newly crowned Hierarchs decide to obliterate the humans instead and declare that a new Age of the Covenant has begun .

The Covenant 's superior technology allow them to annihilate the outer human colonies within four years ; the Covenant begin to destroy the inner colonies soon thereafter . As a defensive measure , the UNSC creates the " Cole Protocol " ; human ships are prohibited from directly traveling to human worlds to avoid detection by the Covenant , and destruction of a ship 's navigation databases and artificial intelligence if threatened with capture . In 2552 , the Covenant track the UNSC ship Iroquois to the world of Reach , Earth 's most well @-@ defended colony , by a hidden transmitter . A massive Covenant fleet arrives at Reach and lays waste to much of the planet .

The Covenant 's first appearance in the video games is in Halo : Combat Evolved (2001) , which picks up towards the end of The Fall of Reach . A detachment of Covenant follow the human vessel Pillar of Autumn from Reach to Halo , a ring @-@ shaped Forerunner relic that the Covenant believe sacred . Wary of accidentally damaging the ring , the Covenant are forced to fight the humans on foot , and accidentally release the Flood . The Flood , a virulent parasite that infests sentient life , attack human and Covenant alike and threaten to capture a Covenant cruiser to escape their prison on Halo . Meanwhile , the human " Spartan " supersoldier Master Chief detonates the Pillar of Autumn 's engines , destroying the ring and the Covenant armada . The novelization of the game , Halo : The Flood (2003) , describes additional events not seen in the game . In the novel First Strike , The Master Chief , survivors of the Autumn and surviving Spartans from Reach destroy a Covenant fleet they learn is preparing to strike Earth , and race home to warn of the impending attack .

In the video game Halo 2 (2004) , a member of the Covenant Prophet triumvirate , Regret , arrives at Earth with a fleet . Most of his fleet is destroyed ; Regret 's ship flees to another ring , Delta Halo , and is followed by the human ship In Amber Clad and the Master Chief aboard her . The Chief kills Regret before the majority of the Covenant fleet arrives at Delta Halo , along with the Covenant 's holy city of High Charity . The death of Regret leads the remaining Prophets to promote the Brutes

as their guards , replacing the Elites . The Elites , outraged , threaten to resign from the Covenant high council ; in turn the Prophets give the Brutes carte blanche to kill the Elites , sparking a civil war . In the midst of these developments , the Flood are again released ; the High Prophet Mercy is killed by the parasite , while the last remaining leader , Truth , flees to Earth in a Forerunner ship , entrusting the activation of Halo to the Brute Tartarus . The Elites ally with the humans of In Amber Clad to stop the firing of the ring , but inadvertently set all the remaining Halo rings to be remotely activated from a location known as the Ark , placed outside the range of the Halo Array to protect certain species from the firing of the Halo rings , built as a foundry for the rings including replacing any that get destroyed .

By the events of Halo 3 (2007) , the Flood intelligence known as the Gravemind infests and captures High Charity , while the Elites assist humans on Earth in defending themselves . Truth 's forces excavate a portal to the Ark , located outside the Milky Way . The Elites follow Truth , and the Covenant Arbiter , or holy warrior , kills Truth . After High Charity arrives at the Ark , the Arbiter and Master Chief decide to activate a partially built Halo ring (the replacement for the ring that the Master Chief destroyed in the first game) destroying the Flood and sparing the rest of the galaxy . The remaining humans and Elites escape back through the portal . The Human @-@ Covenant war ends in March 2553 , and the Arbiter leads his Elites back to their homeworld .

The Covenant were featured in Halo 4 (2012) , in the form of a rogue splinter group led by Sangheili Jul ' Mdama . This faction still follows the ideology of the old Covenant religion and seeks to find a powerful weapon on Requiem , the fictional planet on which the majority of Halo 4 is set .

The group also appears in Halo 5 : Guardians , although they are not the game 's main antagonists .

== Reception ==

The reception of the Covenant as enemies in Combat Evolved was generally favorable . The ability to experience the storyline of Halo 2 from the Covenant perspective was described as a " brilliant stroke of game design " . Allowing the player to assume the role of an Elite was described as providing an unexpected plot twist , and allowing the player to experience a " newfound complexity to the story " . In addition , some reviewers thought that this provided the series with a significant plot element ? IGN referred to it as the " intriguing side story of the Arbiter and his Elites " ? and its elimination in Halo 3 was pointed to as responsible for reducing the role of the Arbiter within the series plot . In 2010 IGN ranked Covenant 26th in the " Top 100 Videogames Villains " .