= I Love Bees =

I Love Bees (also known as ilovebees or ILB for short) was an alternate reality game (ARG) that served as both a real @-@ world experience and viral marketing campaign for the release of developer Bungie 's 2004 video game Halo 2 . The game was created and developed by 42 Entertainment . Many of the same personnel had previously created an ARG for the film A.I. titled The Beast . I Love Bees was commissioned by Microsoft , Halo 2 's publisher .

I Love Bees was first advertised by a hidden message in a Halo 2 trailer ; players who investigated the titular website discovered that the pages appeared to be hacked by a mysterious intelligence . As players solved puzzles , audio logs were posted to the ilovebees.com site which gradually revealed more of the fictional back @-@ story , involving a marooned artificial intelligence stranded on Earth and its attempts to put itself back together . 250 @,@ 000 people viewed the ilovebees website when it was launched in August 2004 , and more than 500 @,@ 000 returned to the site every time the pages were updated . More than three million visitors viewed the site over the course of three months , and thousands of people around the world participated in the game . I Love Bees won numerous awards for its innovation and helped spawn numerous other alternate reality games for video games .

= = Overview = =

Alternate reality games or ARGs are designed to involve fans of video games or other media in a form of viral marketing which CNET described as encompassing " real @-@ life treasure hunting , interactive storytelling , video games and online [communities] " . I Love Bees began when jars of honey were received in the mail by people who had previously participated in alternate reality games . The jars contained letters leading to the I Love Bees website and a countdown . At around the same time , theatrical trailers for Halo 2 concluded with the Xbox logo and a URL , Xbox.com , that quickly flashed a link to ilovebees.com , ostensibly a hacked site related to beekeeping .

Both events , not connected publicly for several weeks , caused the curious to visit the website ilovebees.com. The site , which appeared to be dedicated to honey sales and beekeeping , was covered in confusing random characters and sentence fragments . Dana , the ostensible webmaster of the ilovebees site , created a weblog stating that something had gone wrong with her website , and the site itself had been hacked . Suspecting that this was a mystery that could be unraveled , Halo and ARG fans spread the link and began to work on figuring out what was going on .

The gameplay of I Love Bees tasked players around the world to work together to solve problems , with little or no direction or guidance . For example , the game presented players with 210 pairs of global positioning system coordinates and time codes , with no indications to what the locations referred to . Players eventually figured out the coordinates referred to pay phones and the times to when the phones would ring ; one player in Florida stayed by a phone while Hurricane Frances was minutes away in order to recite answers to prerecorded questions . Other phone calls were made by live persons known as " operators " ; these calls allowed players to interact with the characters of the games in spontaneous and occasionally humorous ways . Other players treated the corrupted data on ilovebees.com as encrypted files to decipher , or used image files found on the web server to solve puzzles . After players completed certain tasks , they were rewarded with new installments to an audio drama which revealed the reasons for the ilovebees.com malfunction .

Over time , the game 's mechanisms for contacting players grew more complex . Players were sent messages via email , called on their cell phones , and travelled to arranged meetings between players and characters . The game culminated by inviting players of the game to visit one of four cinemas where they could get a chance to play Halo 2 before its release and collect a commemorative DVD .

= = Plot = =

The game 's plot begins with a military spaceship crashing to Earth in an unknown location , leaving

the craft 's controlling artificial intelligence or AI damaged . This AI , known as the " Operator " or " Melissa " (from the Latin for " very sweet , " etymologically akin to Latin melis , " honey ") , is not alone ; other AI programs share its system . In an effort to survive and contact any surviving allies , Melissa transfers herself to a San Francisco @-@ area web server , which happens to host a bee enthusiast website known as I Love Bees . To the distress of Dana Awbrey , the website 's maintainer , Melissa 's attempts to send signals began to appear largely as codes , hidden in images or other text , interfering with the operation of the I Love Bees site and corrupting much of the content .

Dana , attempting to regain control over the corrupted website , accidentally erases data which comprises part of Melissa 's memory . Furious , Melissa lashes out at the webmaster , obtaining pictures of her using the webcam on her computer and promising to take revenge . Alarmed , Dana announces that she is removing herself from the situation and is taking a previously planned trip to China earlier than expected .

All AI units contain a program called SPDR , short for System Peril Distributed Reflex . As SPDR attempts to fix Melissa , random dumps from Melissa 's memory began to spill into the website , largely detailing Melissa 's history and revealing the presence of a malicious Trojan @-@ horse virus known as the " Pious Flea . " The Spider tries to erase the Flea but is outwitted , as Melissa erases the Spider instead of the Flea . The Flea continues to overwrite Melissa 's programming with its own mysterious goals , with it eventually being revealed that it is actually an espionage AI more properly called the Seeker , built by the Covenant .

With the assistance of other characters revealed by audio chapters , the fictional protagonists break into a secure military installation and manage to deactivate a Forerunner device which is implied to begin the firing sequence of the Halo installations . However , the price paid for the deactivation is a powerful energy transmission alerting the Covenant to the location of Earth . Whole again , Melissa sees how she has been manipulated by the Pious Flea , and returns to her time . I Love Bees ends with the Covenant invading Earth , corresponding to a major plot point in Halo 2 .

Due to Bungie 's commitment to the development of Halo 2 during I Love Bees ' run , they were unable to assist 42 Entertainment with story creation , and so the ARG 's story is only tangentially related to the main Halo storyline . The events of I Love Bees were , therefore , originally not considered to be Halo canon . In a 2006 interview , however , Bungie 's content manager Frank O 'Connor expressly confirmed that I Love Bees is part of " things that we embrace as canon . " References to elements of I Love Bees have since appeared in the 2006 Halo Graphic Novel and the 2009 Halo Encyclopedia , both of which are official canon .

= = Development = =

I Love Bees ' developer , 42 Entertainment , was founded by Jordan Weisman , the former creative director for Microsoft 's Xbox division . 42 Entertainment had previously created the first ARG , The Beast , which had been used to promote the movie A.I .. Other members of the I Love Bees team included Sean Stewart , a World Fantasy Award @-@ award @-@ winning author who served as I Love Bees ' writer , and Jim Stewartson , I Love Bees ' technical lead who produced the first commercial 3D game delivered by the internet . Weisman stated that the goal of I Love Bees was to utilize every person who interacted with the game , and to use any electronic resource to do so : " If we could make your toaster print something we would . Anything with an electric current running through it . A single story , a single gaming experience , with no boundaries . A game that is life itself . "

42 Entertainment conceived I Love Bees as a radio drama , and used the pay phones as a way to excite players . Chris Di Cesare , Microsoft 's director of marketing , stated that the radio drama 's similarities with War of the Worlds was intentional , and that " [ILB] remains true to the radio drama tradition of Orson Welles that we were shooting for and also allowed us to tell the story in an unorthodox way . " In order to prevent non @-@ players from being scared by the sounds of gunfire from the pay phones , 42 Entertainment established passwords that had to be repeated . Stewart described writing for the game as more enjoyable than writing printed fiction , both for the money

and the unique experience of ARGs as opposed to other media :

The audiences that we built for those campaigns are having a different experience . They ? re having a collective experience in which they literally bring different pieces , one to the next , swap them back and forth , gossip about them . They have an element of cocreation and a collaborative nature that doesn ? t really have an analog that I ? ve been able to think of in the arts .

= = Reception = =

I Love Bees is credited with helping drive attention to Halo 2 ; former Electronic Gaming Monthly editor Dan Hsu stated in an interview that " I Love Bees really got existing gamers and other consumers talking about the universe of [Halo] . " Billy Pidgeon , a game analyst , noted that I Love Bees achieved what it had been designed to do : " This kind of viral guerrilla marketing worked ... Everyone started instant messaging about it and checking out the site . " I Love Bees not only received coverage from gaming publications , but attracted mainstream press attention as well . At its height , ilovebees received between two and three million unique visitors over the course of three months . 9 @,@ 000 people also actively participated in the real @-@ world aspects of the game . The players of I Love Bees themselves were quite varied . The target demographic for the promotion was younger males , but one player noted that even middle @-@ aged men and women were engaged in the game .

I Love Bees received several awards for its innovation . The design team was one of the recipients of the Innovation Award at the 5th annual Game Developers Choice Awards . I Love Bees was also announced as the winner of a Webby Award in the Game @-@ Related category , presented by the International Academy of Digital Arts and Sciences .

= = = Legacy = = =

Along with 42 Entertainment 's previous ARG known as The Beast , I Love Bees is credited with bringing greater attention to the fledgling marketing form ; I Love Bees not only helped assuage fears by marketers about the costs of ARG failure , but attracted interest from other game developers in using alternate reality games to promote their own products . Before I Love Bees , The Guardian stated that " ARGs were destined to join Letsbuyit.com and Barcode Battlers in the e @-@ dustbin of nice ideas that never really caught on " ; the explosion of broadband internet access and a renewed interest in codes allowed I Love Bees to become wildly successful . Bungie would later use another ARG called " Iris " to promote Halo 2 's sequel , Halo 3 .

I Love Bees also attracted attention in the wider discussion of user @-@ based marketing and cooperation . Author Charles Leadbeater argued that I Love Bees was an example of " We @-@ Think " collective thinking ; Leadbeater noted that after the " puppet masters " began the game , I Love Bees " displayed all the characteristics of a mass movement , propelled into existence in a matter of weeks simply by collective enthusiasm guided by a few cyberspace ' avatars ' " . The game proved successful with gamers , as well as attracting nontraditional players who had no experience with Halo before joining the game .