

# Half-Life: Opposing Force

***Half-Life: Opposing Force*** is an expansion pack for Valve's science fiction first-person shooter video game *Half-Life*. The game was developed by Gearbox Software and Valve and published by Sierra On-Line on November 19, 1999. *Opposing Force* is the first expansion for *Half-Life* and was announced in April 1999. Randy Pitchford, the lead designer on the game, later noted that he believed Gearbox was selected to develop *Opposing Force* because Valve wanted to concentrate on their future projects. Over the course of development, Gearbox brought in a variety of outside talent from other areas of the video games industry to help bolster various aspects of design.

*Opposing Force* returns to the same setting as *Half-Life*, but instead portrays the events from the perspective of a U.S. Marine, one of the enemy characters in the original game. The player character, Adrian Shephard, is sent in to neutralize the Black Mesa Research Facility when a scientific mishap causes it to be invaded by aliens, but quickly finds that the Marines are outnumbered and slowly being beaten back by a second alien race and black operations units.

*Opposing Force* was received well by critics, many describing it as the new benchmark title for expansion packs, in a similar fashion to how *Half-Life* revolutionized the first-person shooter genre. Other reviewers, however, thought that the game still had many of the negative aspects of other expansion packs, although it was still regarded as an exceptional add-on.

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## Gameplay

Half-Life: Opposing Force



The cover art for *Opposing Force*, depicting the game's protagonist, Adrian Shephard

<b>Developer(s)</b>	Gearbox Software Valve
<b>Publisher(s)</b>	Sierra Studios Valve (digital)
<b>Director(s)</b>	Randy Pitchford
<b>Producer(s)</b>	Randy Pitchford
<b>Designer(s)</b>	Rob Heironimus
<b>Programmer(s)</b>	John Faulkenbury
<b>Artist(s)</b>	Brian Martel
<b>Writer(s)</b>	Stephen Bahl Rob Heironimus Kristy Junio Randy Pitchford
<b>Composer(s)</b>	Chris Jensen
<b>Series</b>	<i>Half-Life</i>
<b>Engine</b>	GoldSrc 



*Opposing Force* introduces new weapons and allows the player to command small squads of soldiers

As an expansion pack for *Half-Life*, *Opposing Force* is a first-person shooter. The overall gameplay of *Opposing Force* does not significantly differ from that of *Half-Life*. Players are required to navigate through the game's levels, fight hostile non-player characters and solve a variety of puzzles to advance.<sup>[1]</sup>

The game continues *Half-Life*'s methods of an unbroken narrative. The player sees everything through the first person perspective of the protagonist and remains in control of the player character for almost all of the game. Story

events are conveyed through the use of scripted sequences rather than cut scenes. Progress through the game's world is continuous; although the game is divided up into chapters, the only significant pauses are when the game needs to load the next part of an environment.<sup>[2]</sup> *Opposing Force* also features an extended multiplayer, incorporating the various new environments and weapons into the original deathmatch mode used in *Half-Life*.<sup>[3]</sup> After release, a new capture the flag mode with additional levels, items and powerups, was created by Gearbox for the game.<sup>[4]</sup>

For the most part the player battles through the single-player game alone, but is occasionally assisted by friendly non-player characters. Security guards and scientists will occasionally help the player in reaching new areas and convey relevant plot information. However, *Opposing Force* also features fellow U.S. Marines who will assist the player in combat to a far greater degree than security guards. Three types of Marines are featured in the game: the soldier will simply provide fire support for the player with a submachine gun, shotgun or machine gun, the combat medic is capable of healing the player and other non-player characters, while the engineer can cut through doors and remove obstacles, allowing the player and their squad to proceed unhindered.<sup>[5]</sup> A selection of enemies from *Half-Life* populate the game, including alien creatures such as headcrabs and Vortigaunts.

A variety of new alien non-player characters, labelled "Race X", appear in the game as well, often engaging in combat with the aliens from Xen. The player also encounters human opponents in the form of a detachment of black operations units who have been sent to destroy the base in the wake of the failure of the U.S. Marines to eliminate the alien threat.<sup>[6]</sup> A limited selection of *Half-Life*'s weaponry is allocated to the player to defend themselves with, although several new weapons such as a sniper rifle, combat knife and a variety of alien weaponry are also present in the game.<sup>[7]</sup>

# Synopsis

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## Setting

*Opposing Force* is set in the same location and timeframe as that of *Half-Life*, taking place at a remote New Mexico laboratory called the Black Mesa Research Facility. 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.<sup>[8]</sup> *Opposing Force*, however, shows the events of *Half-Life* from the perspective of a different protagonist. The player assumes the role of Adrian Shephard, a U.S. Marine Corporal assigned to the Hazardous Environment

Combat Unit, a specialized unit sent in to Black Mesa by the government to quell the alien threat and silence all witnesses. However, after Shephard becomes isolated from his fellow Marines, he must ally with the Black Mesa personnel and attempt to escape the base.<sup>[6]</sup>

## Plot

*Opposing Force* opens with Shephard riding on a V-22 Osprey with his squad. His squad discuss their deployment, somewhat irritated that they have not been told what they are being deployed for. However, as they are nearing their Landing Zone at Black Mesa, airborne alien creatures attack the Osprey formation, causing Shephard's Osprey to crash land. Shephard regains consciousness in a Black Mesa medical bay, tended to by the science team, learning that the Marines are being steadily beaten by the alien forces from Xen and orders have come through to pull out. Consequently, Shephard departs to reach an extraction point and escape the facility.<sup>[9]</sup> However, Shephard is prevented from reaching the extraction point by the enigmatic G-Man, forcing the evacuation craft to leave without him.

Other Marines who have also been left behind team up with Shephard and attempt to reach another extraction point near Black Mesa's Lambda Complex, but en route they come under attack from black operations units seeking to thoroughly contain the situation and eliminate all survivors.<sup>[10]</sup> Shephard makes it to the Lambda Complex alive, and briefly sees Gordon Freeman as the latter teleports to Xen in the final stages of *Half-Life*. To escape the teleportation chamber, Shephard is forced to enter a separate portal, briefly taking him to Xen before depositing him in an entirely different area of the facility. The facility is now heavily damaged, and it soon becomes clear that a new alien race, Race X, has exploited the situation to mount a localized invasion, attacking both human and Xen forces in Black Mesa indiscriminately.<sup>[11]</sup> Fighting between the black operations units and Race X quickly intensifies.

Shephard soon encounters more stranded Marine units in the wreckage of the base, and tries to break through the black operations units to reach an escape point past the facility's storage unit, but meets heavy resistance from both Race X and the black operations units.<sup>[12]</sup> A surviving Black Mesa security guard reveals to Shephard that the black operators intend to detonate a tactical nuclear weapon in the base, thereby totally sealing it off and killing everything in it.<sup>[13]</sup> After successfully neutralizing the guarding black operations unit, Shephard disarms the device and proceeds to the nearby storage areas, intent on escape. However, the G-Man rearms the device as Shephard departs. The storage unit has become a thick battleground between Race X and the black operation units, and although Shephard manages to evade them, he is informed by another security guard that something very large is coming through an alien portal blocking the exit path.<sup>[14]</sup>

At the portal, Shephard discovers a gene worm, a massive creature facilitating the Race X invasion. Shephard is able to wound the creature and force it back through the wormhole, but just afterwards he is teleported onto an Osprey by the G-Man. As the G-Man congratulates Shephard on his accomplishments, the nuclear device detonates in the background, destroying Black Mesa. The game closes with the G-Man detaining Shephard someplace where he can tell no one of what he has seen and cannot be harmed, pending further evaluation.<sup>[15]</sup>

## Development

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*Half-Life: Opposing Force* was announced by developer Gearbox Software on April 15, 1999.<sup>[16]</sup> In their press release, founder Randy Pitchford stated that "our number one goal is to preserve the integrity of *Half-Life* and provide new experiences that expand upon the sensation of the original", and also announced that the expansion pack would allow the player to play as one of the soldiers featured in the original game.<sup>[16]</sup> The name *Opposing Force* has a double meaning, referring both to the fact that the

player is one of the enemies in the original game, as well as to Newton's third law of motion.<sup>[16]</sup> In a later interview, Pitchford stated that he believed that Valve offered Gearbox the chance to make a *Half-Life* expansion was from a wish "to focus on their future titles".<sup>[17]</sup> In addition, Pitchford commented that Valve and Gearbox had agreed not to "severely modify" the game engine used by *Half-Life* and *Opposing Force* as it "risks breaking all of the wonderful work" that the game's custom content community was creating.<sup>[17]</sup> Substantial information on *Opposing Force*'s development direction, as well as new locations, characters and story were revealed at the 1999 Electronic Entertainment Expo convention.<sup>[18]</sup> The official website for *Opposing Force*, hosted by publisher Sierra Studios, was put online in July 1999.<sup>[19]</sup>

Over the course of the game's development, Gearbox acquired various outside talent to assist in designing some aspects of the game. In June 1999, Gearbox announced that level designer Richard Gray would be assisting in developing the multiplayer aspects of the game.<sup>[20]</sup> Several other designers subsequently joined the project in September 1999, with collective experience from the development of *Daikatana*, *Quake II*, *Doom* and *Shadow Warrior*.<sup>[21]</sup> In the subsequent two months, media releases displaying a variety of screenshots were unveiled.<sup>[22]</sup> The game was released on November 19, 1999.<sup>[23]</sup> Gearbox later released a multiplayer update in May 2000, adding a capture the flag mode to the game, along with various items to accompany the new mode.<sup>[4]</sup> *Opposing Force* was later released on Valve's Steam content delivery system.<sup>[24]</sup> *Opposing Force* was published as part of Sierra's *Half-Life: Generation* compilation in 2002,<sup>[25]</sup> and as part of Valve and Electronic Arts' *Half Life 1: Anthology* on September 26, 2005.<sup>[26]</sup>

## Reception

*Opposing Force* received a very favorable reception from critics, holding a score of 85.45% on the review aggregator site GameRankings.<sup>[29]</sup> In the United States, the game sold 108,008 copies by the end of 1999.<sup>[31]</sup> Although figures for the game's sales on Steam have not been released, *Opposing Force* eventually sold over 1.1 million copies at retail.<sup>[32]</sup>

*Computer and Video Games* reviewer Kim Randell noted that "Gearbox has obviously gone to great pains to provide a similar experience to the original". Praise was also given to the game's multiplayer; Randell stated that the new additions for multiplayer made it the area of *Opposing Force* that "really shines". Randell closed the review by concluding that *Opposing Force* is "an awesome achievement".<sup>[3]</sup> Erik Wolpaw, writing for GameSpot, noted that as most expansion packs were mediocre, "it's appropriate that Gearbox Software's *Opposing Force*, the official expansion for the genre-redefining *Half-Life*, in turn sets a new standard of quality for future action-game mission packs". Wolpaw praised the design of the single-player campaign, commenting that "you can

Reception	
Aggregate score	
Aggregator	Score
GameRankings	85.45% (30 reviews) <sup>[29]</sup>
Review scores	
Publication	Score
CVG	9/10 <sup>[3]</sup>
<i>Eurogamer</i>	7/10 <sup>[5]</sup>
<i>GamePro</i>	★★★★★ <sup>[27]</sup>
<i>GameSpot</i>	9/10 <sup>[6]</sup>
IGN	7.5/10 <sup>[1]</sup>
PC Zone	85% <sup>[28]</sup>
Award	
Publication	Award
	AIAS Interactive Achievement Award: Computer Game of the Year, 2000 <sup>[30]</sup>

sense the designers' enthusiasm as one memorable scene unfolds after another, and it compels you to keep playing". Although criticizing some elements of the game's artificial intelligence and describing some of the new models as "merely window dressing", the review concluded that *Opposing Force* was an "impassioned application of creative design".<sup>[6]</sup>

Other reviews echoed many of the positive aspects of the game. *GamePro* stated that "Gearbox has done one hell of a job in creating not just an add-on for *Half-Life*, but a continuation of a masterpiece", praising both level design and story elements, but noted that it was a little too short.<sup>[27]</sup> However, some critics dissented on the idea that *Opposing Force* was as influential as other reviewers made out.

*PC Zone* stated that "the taste left in the mouth is a bitter one", noting that "*Opposing Force* is a few excellent ideas strung together by pedestrian *Half-Life* padding", but concluded that "it was still a good weekend's worth of entertainment".<sup>[28]</sup> *Eurogamer* stated that *Opposing Force* still had similar problems to other expansion packs, commenting that "χ amount of new content has been created and it is going to be cut into the old content in a linear way to make it look like an all new game", but noted that "fortunately though the new stuff in *Opposing Force*... is pretty damn good". Although praising the level design as the game's strongest point, the reviewer felt that "towards the end of the game... they were running out of development time".<sup>[5]</sup> Reviewing for *IGN*, Vincent Lopez stated that the game "does a fantastic job of making you remember exactly why you enjoyed the original so much", but criticized this as the biggest drawback, commenting that "you may find yourself wishing for a more original experience", but concluded that "for good, and bad: it's good to be back".<sup>[1]</sup>

The game won several publication awards,<sup>[27]</sup> as well as the Computer Game of the Year Interactive Achievement Award of 2000 from the Academy of Interactive Arts & Sciences.<sup>[30]</sup> The editors of *PC Gamer US* presented *Opposing Force* with their 1999 "Best Expansion Pack" award, and nominated it as 1999's overall best game of the year, although it lost the latter prize to *Homeworld*. They wrote that *Opposing Force* "makes history by becoming the first expansion pack to be considered for Game of the Year. Yes, it really is that good."<sup>[33]</sup>

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9. Gearbox Software (1999). *Half-Life: Opposing Force*. PC. Level/area: Welcome to Black Mesa. "**HECU captain**: Shephard, you're alive! Listen, we've been cut off pretty bad and orders are coming out to pull out. Repeat: pull out! Apparently they've got other plans for Black Mesa now, if you can make your way through the transit system you can probably reach the surface where we are pulling out! Good luck. Over."
10. Gearbox Software (1999). *Half-Life: Opposing Force*. PC. Level/area: Friendly Fire. "**Black operator #1**: Why do we always have to clean up a mess the grunts can't handle? / **Black operator #2**: Tell me about it. I just want to deliver the package and get out of here. / **Black operator #1**: Yeah, sooner or later the grunts are going to figure it out."
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12. Gearbox Software (1999). *Half-Life: Opposing Force*. PC. Level/area: The Package. "**HECU soldier**: Shephard! I don't know what those black ops are up to, but it doesn't involve getting us out of here alive. We've got no choice but to fight our way out! Let's go!"
13. Gearbox Software (1999). *Half-Life: Opposing Force*. PC. Level/area: The Package. "**Security guard**: N-now don't hurt me and I'll tell you a secret! I've been hiding up here listening; these black ops have some kind of bomb! I think they're planning on blowing up the base! N-now why do you think they would do such a thing?"
14. Gearbox Software (1999). *Half-Life: Opposing Force*. PC. Level/area: Worlds Collide. "**Security guard**: I guess you're a good guy corporal. Listen, you've got to get down below, there's something coming through and it's the nastiest looking thing yet. Some of your buddies went down there a while ago, and I haven't seen them since. I've got some weapons I've piled up in here, you'd better take as much as you can carry, 'cause I think this is it. Good luck, corporal."
15. Gearbox Software (1999). *Half-Life: Opposing Force*. PC. Level/area: Worlds Collide. "**G-Man**: I admit I have a fascination with those who adapt and survive against all odds—they rather remind me of myself. If for no other reason, I have argued to preserve you for a time. While I believe a civil servant like yourself understands the importance of... discretion, my employers are not quite so trusting and rather than continually subject you to the irresistible human temptation of telling all, we have decided to... convey you somewhere where you can do no possible harm, and where no harm can come to you. I'm sure you can imagine that there are worse alternatives..."
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## External links

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- Archived official website (<https://web.archive.org/web/20010124062100/http://www.sierrastudios.com/games/opposingforce/>)

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