



• The Covenant invades Earth! A chunky, blocky, brown, deserted depiction of Earth, anyway.

# HALO 2

The simplest enigma

PUBLISHER: Microsoft DEVELOPER: Bungie/Hired Gun GENRE: First-Person Shooter AVAILABILITY: Retail ESRB RATING: Mature  
 MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS: 2GHz CPU, 1GB RAM, 7GB hard drive space, Windows Vista MULTIPLAYER: 2-16 players VERSION REVIEWED: Retail Box

## REVIEW

**Y** Time's slapped a big gold "console classic" sticker on *Halo 2*, I can see why. *Halo 2* was a benchmark for FPSing with analog sticks; its dual-wielding expertly worked the button layout of an Xbox control pad. Co-op was a blast. Vast multitudes still play on Xbox Live, and for good reason—its simple matchmaking tools and party system (which let you tag along with friends from match to match with minimal effort) were a revelation and a revolution. For consoles. In 2004.

### A CARNIVAL OF SORTS

Transported to PC in 2007, however, Bungie's console classic looks downright primitive—especially when landmark games like *Half-Life 2* and *Battlefield 2* have reset the bar for what a PC FPS can and should do.

If you're considering picking it up for the single-player campaign, reconsider: Switching viewpoints between Master Chief and one of the game's nonsensically religious outer-space shark-monkeys was, and is, a narrative disaster—and the game's ending, an abortion on the Xbox, is still an abortion here. The original *Halo's* story was better. The shooting-gallery-style gameplay was simple then and is even more so now, as the chunky, Muppetey Covenant seemed unprepared for the precision and speed of the mouse. Enemies and effects look slightly sharper and shinier, but textures and level structures that worked just fine on the Xbox look gross on modern PCs. Characters not clad in shiny helmets or made of pure energy have a bad case of cookie-dough face, and corridors and stairwells consist of repeating patterns of trapezoids and triangles. It's all fun and colorful, but so is a carnival—and equally run-down.

### UNIVERSAL QUESTIONS

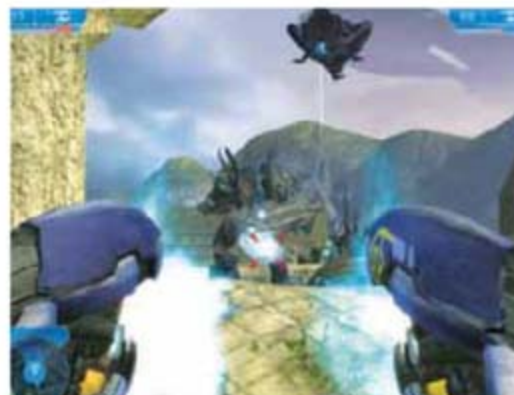
As proof of concept for Games for Windows Live, *Halo 2* is partly convincing. You won't have trouble finding a game online, and enough folks

## WHY WINDOWS VISTA?

play to keep a half-dozen or so public servers full at any time—though unless you happen to have a dozen friends with *Halo 2* and Windows Vista, you'll have to settle for whatever mode the masses are playing, which is usually Slayer (death-match)...or if you're lucky, Team Slayer (even the more "complicated" modes are simplistic; suck it up or sit it out).

The control scheme makes few concessions for PC gamers. Instead of using a run key, you move at the console version's "max speed," which barely qualifies as a light jog. Plug in an Xbox 360 control pad and you're treated to instant transformation of HUD elements and generous aim assist. Nearly two dozen maps populate the game—though the online community's already settled on its subset of choice. Despite some silly level design (and spawn points that stick you in instant-frag situations), the fun weapons and vehicles prevail through brute force—no apologies or excuses.

But I'm left with the same questions I had when *Halo 2* for PC was first unveiled to thunderous confusion: Why Windows Vista? If the answer really is just GFW Live, then why no cross-platform play, when the game would clearly benefit from the immense Xbox community? If it's as simple as technical constraints, then why even bother? A game this simple shouldn't be so damn puzzling. • Sean Molloy



• Dual-wielding makes perfect sense on a console, but it's less intuitive with a keyboard and mouse.

### VERDICT

• Lots of multiplayer maps to choose from; GFW Live implemented decently.

• Not many people online; primitive visuals and gameplay; Vista required.

6/10

AVERAGE





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