

■ Video game review

'Halo 2' a must-have for casual, hard-core gamers alike

What this sequel lacks in plot, it makes up for in perfect presentations and multiplayer gaming depth

BY ANDREW MCCOLLUM
DAILY EMERALD FREELANCE REPORTER

There's a balance to making a sequel to a successful video or computer game. The developer, at the very least, is expected to match the quality of the first game. If the game is too different from the original, it may not feel like a sequel at all. If the game doesn't make enough changes, consumers may feel like they are getting ripped off. This predicament is made all the more tenuous when the sequel is for a game that has changed the genre, sold hundreds of thousands of systems and is still widely played three years after it was initially released.

Bungie Software, the developer of "Halo: Combat Evolved" and most recently "Halo 2," has created a game that has all the workings of a great sequel.

"Halo 2" is by far the best game made for the Xbox. It is also the best console multiplayer game and possibly the best console game ever made. A combination of a solid single player game and a phenomenal multiplayer game makes it a must-buy for both hard-core and casual gamers alike.

The game's single-player mode is pretty much standard first-person shooter fare. Players reprise their roles as Master Chief, a stoic super-soldier. In "Halo," Master Chief fought against The Covenant and single-handedly destroyed Halo, a planet-sized alien weapon in the shape of a

ring. "Halo 2" finds Earth in peril as The Covenant is out for revenge on humans for the destruction of Halo. The plot develops fairly linearly and is semi-intriguing; it has a few twists — some predictable, some not. I don't want to spoil too much of the plot that Bungie has been fairly secretive about over the past few years.

What "Halo 2" lacks in plot it more than makes up for in ambiance, game play and presentation. "Halo 2" makes the player feel like a hero in a massive war. Characters ward off huge ships and drop dozens of Covenant soldiers, drive down a bombed-out highway in a tank swatting off incoming enemies with your turret, board a mechanical spider and tear it apart from the inside and pick off unsuspecting Covenant soldiers from afar, all in the first few levels.

Although the single player is ok, "Halo 2's" multiplayer is clearly its best feature. The game has four-player splitscreen multiplayer and can have up to 16 players through system link or Xbox Live. At first glance, "Halo 2" multiplayer looks almost identical to "Halo," but after a few matches one sees the many differences. One of the first things players will notice is the size of the maps; each of the 12 (one of which is unlocked when the game is beaten on "Heroic") levels is quite intricate and most of the maps are huge.

One of the most obvious additions

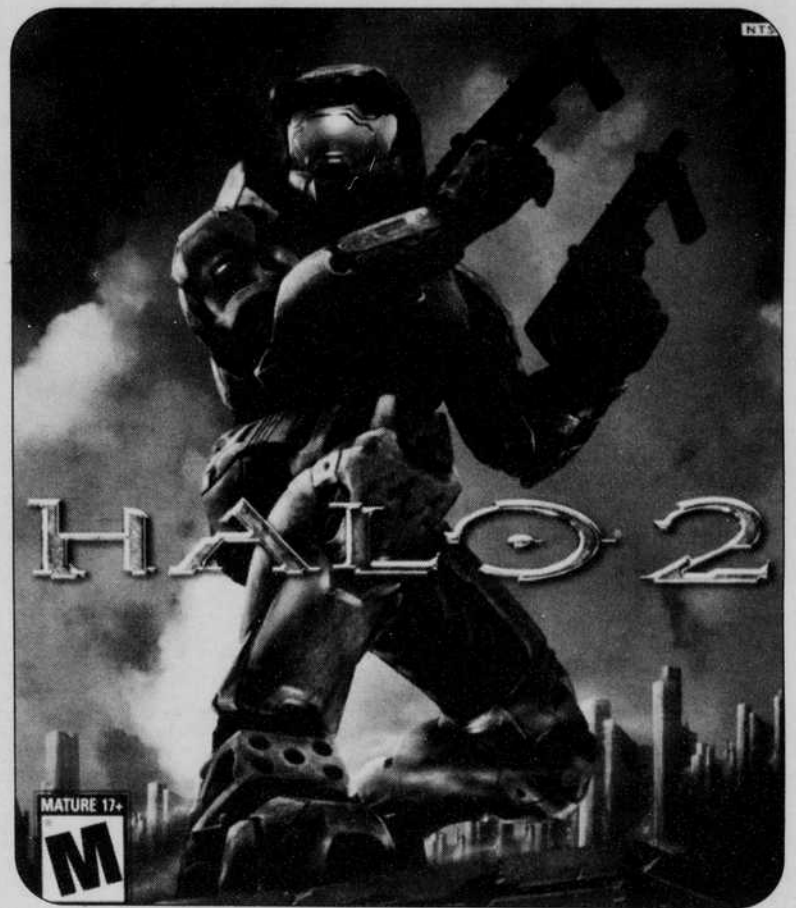
is the ability to dual-wield weapons. While running around levels, players will be able to pick up an additional weapon with their free hand, forfeiting their ability to throw grenades. This adds an incredible layer of depth to the game, as players can experiment with over a dozen different combinations.

The weapon balance has been tweaked since the last "Halo," removing the ultra powerful pistol and replacing it with the semi-powerful battle rifle. The first "Halo" forced everyone to be pistol-centric; in "Halo 2" every weapon seems to be a viable option.

Vehicles are no longer indestructible in "Halo 2," which means players no longer have to whittle away on the driver; they can now target the vehicle itself with hopes that it will blow up. Some vehicles can even be commandeered by players on the ground.

The graphics in "Halo 2" are some of the best available on any console. "Halo" vets will notice better-looking, more customizable character models in "Halo 2." The levels are vast, and even in huge battles the frame rate doesn't dip. On a whole, the in-engine cut scenes look good, although they do have some glitches on occasion. Battles look spectacular, muzzle flares are picture perfect and the dust kicked up by explosions looks amazing.

So what's wrong with "Halo 2"? Well, for one, the single player is relatively boring. The multiplayer levels often seem too large for four people; they were clearly intended for more than six. Vets will wonder why Bungie did not include many classic



COURTESY

"Halo 2" offers great multiplayer options and intense new graphics, but it is missing some of the better features of the previous game.

levels. A couple of updated versions of old maps are available (Blood Gulch, Battle Creek), but where's Hang 'Em High? Some suspect that Microsoft may release more maps over Xbox Live in a couple months.

Currently the Xbox Live support is spotty, but Bungie promises to fix the problem soon.

Bottom line: If you liked "Halo," buy "Halo 2." If you didn't like "Halo," rent "Halo 2" and then buy it.

Bubbles: Aromatherapy products emphasize the benefits of self-pampering

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cologne company that makes perfume in rather off-the-wall scents, such as Sex on the Beach, Cosmopolitan, Sushi and Sugar Cookie.

"Some bartenders have come in and they love trying them," Leaf said.

Other popular brands include the girly, sparkly AllyKats; Smack, a natural, hemp-seed oil based body butter company; and Oh Boy!, a line made especially for men that makes products like Studly Shower Gel and Macho Moisturizer. Shoppers can find bath bombs (round, solid bath drops that moisturize the skin and make the bath water colored and scented) in 36 scents.

Food is a recurring theme in

many of Bubble's products. Leaf presents one line of soaps as if they are cakes — rounds of soap sit in glass cake dishes ready to be sliced, weighed and purchased. In another glass case are bath truffles, white chocolate and raspberry scented skin moisturizers that are to be dropped in the bathtub and enjoyed, minus the calories. Another bath product line makes a shower gel that looks and smells exactly like a jar full of jam, plus a "toast-washer," a sponge that mimics a slice of bread. Leaf said her bath bombs and truffles are popular with customers.

"There are a lot of excuses to take a bath, but when there's a great product you can use, you think about it more,"

Leaf said. "One customer came in who didn't have a bathtub, and she started calling people on her cell phone to ask if she could take a bath at their house."

Eugene resident Wendy Stires, who recently purchased an aromatherapy bubble bath product from Bubble, said the shop emphasizes the benefits of self-pampering.

"I love that places like this support the fact that we need to take care of ourselves," she said.

One line of soap products at Bubble comes from the imagination of a University student. Business student Rachel Richardson has been selling her handmade soaps in gift shops in Oregon and Washington since high school, and after discovering Bubble,

she proposed her products to Leaf. Richardson makes soaps for Bubble that resemble race cars and elaborate cupcakes and also glycerin soaps that feature vibrant designs.

Handmade cosmetics are becoming more and more available in bath and body boutiques. The boutique Lush opened a branch in Portland over the summer. Its products were once only available to Americans in large U.S. cities, Vancouver and Victoria, B.C., and by mail order. Lush features hand-cut soaps and products that must be refrigerated to stay fresh. Richardson said the trend of making and buying handmade cosmetics is growing.

"It's becoming more widespread because more people are learning

how to (make soap)," she said. "Every time I go into Bubble, I think, 'Gosh! (The soap manufacturers) are getting good!' It's interesting to buy something and know it was handmade."

Leaf added that Bubble shoppers can have an authentic experience by choosing products in person from a small business.

"We're a nice break from the corporate stores," she said. "I hand-selected each line and we have many varieties. It's also good to smell the products in person instead of taking a chance by ordering them online."

Bubble is in Suite 129 of the Fifth Street Public Market.

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