

**coverstory**

BY GEORGE DICKIE

Paramount+ brings an iconic videogame to television with 'HALO'



Pablo Schreiber stars in "HALO," premiering Thursday on Paramount+.

Almost a decade in development, a sci-fi action series that's based on an iconic videogame finally arrives amid much anticipation on Paramount+.

In "HALO," an adaptation of the Microsoft videogame franchise first introduced in 2001 that premieres Thursday, March 24, an epic 26th century battle of good versus evil plays out in a conflict between humanity and an alien threat known as the Covenant.

At the center of it is Master Chief John-117 (Pablo Schreiber, "American Gods"), a supersoldier fighting for the United Nations Space Command, who through a series of events winds up reconnecting with his humanity and questioning his existence as a walking weapon.

That leads to him going rogue and taking up the protection of Kwan Ha (newcomer Yerin Ha), a shrewd, audacious 16-year-old from the Outer Colonies who he meets when her outpost on the planet Madrigal is decimated by a Covenant attack. Her goal is to liberate her world from UNSC control, and their partnership puts him in direct conflict with his superiors in the UNSC military.

The series, which was originally developed for Showtime by 343 Industries and Steven Spielberg's Amblin Entertainment, also stars Natascha McElhone ("Californication"), Jen Taylor ("Halo: The Fall of Reach"), Bokeem Woodbine (" Fargo"), Shabana Azmi ("Fire"), Natasha Culzac ("The Witcher"), Charlie Murphy ("Peaky Blinders") and Danny Sapani ("Penny Dreadful").

As one would expect of a videogame adaptation, the series is loaded with breathtaking special effects and action sequences. The latter was the easy part for Schreiber. The muscular 6-foot-5-inch actor who had extensive military training when he filmed "Den of Thieves" in 2018. But taking on the videogame was another matter.

"I grew up without television or videogames," the Canadian-born actor explains, "and so I'm on a new journey of learning about 'HALO' that started when I was approached with this. ... I've had all this military training, so I know how to carry guns, use guns. I've shot every gun you can imagine. But as soon as I get into the 'Halo' universe, I get killed by all the beginning stages, and all the grunts can kill me continuously. So, it's been humbling, but I'm getting better as I practice."

But "HALO" isn't strictly about action and effects. The series also promises to explore more deeply the personal stories and humanity, or lack thereof, behind the iconic characters that the game's fans have come to know and love, all set within an epic battle for the future of humanity.

"We set out to build a huge, epic sci-fi 26th century world, with brutal aliens, with Spartan supersoldiers, artificial intelligence, military politics and ancient mystery ...," executive producer Kiki Wolfkill explains. "(So) we really tried to explore: How much of our humanity are we willing to sacrifice in order to save it?"

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