

# Fanaticism Evolved

Charting 10 years of ~~obsession with~~ the game I grew up with.

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# In The Beggining

## (AKA - How I Discovered Halo)

When I first got my X-Box I couldn't be happier, having played games like Sonic on the master system and Mario on the SNES I was excited that here was a gaming machine that could do so much more and I didn't have to mess around getting the right disks installed on my computer first in order to do so.

At first I stuck to games that were big at their time, if I remember rightly Midtown Madness and other such games, yes, unlike many others I actually ignored the first Halo game on receipt of my original Xbox.

One day however, triggered by a conversation with friends about Halo being the only game with no cheat codes. I decided that I should take the last of my bundle out to test, it had only taken a year and half.

Honestly I wasn't expecting much, I had never forayed into FPS games before and wasn't sure what to expect. But when I put the game in I know that something caught my attention and hooked me in.

I think looking back it must have been the fact that Halo didn't mess around. Halo was there to deliver a solid, playable story that didn't stop long enough to let you catch your breath and by god did it do it well.



# Halo: Combat Evolved

"were just getting started"

John 117 - Master Chief



Now I won't bore you with some fabrication of events, the truth is that I don't fully remember what happened back then aside from a few details. I think everyone had the same initial reaction of simply wow as they step out onto halo for the first time in the second level, seeing the landscape that is both familiar yet distinctly alien at the same time.

I vaguely remember remembering the silent cartographer level as I hit that point in the game and then kicking myself for not playing this game sooner based on that level. And who could forget Echo 419 (R.I.P) as she surprised the grunt by flying *Inside* halo.

I remember playing Halo with my dad, each night when he got back from work. We would end up spending HOURS fighting flood and the pure dread as 343 Guilty Spark left us yet another time to fix some maintenance drone or something that frankly, could have waited as far as I was concerned.

I distinctly remember getting told off (my dad included) for playing flood levels while my brother was trying to sleep and causing him to be scared. I remember that sheer moment of frustration as the flood killed us for the umpteenth time at the doors of the library, I remember staying awake after everyone was asleep with my duvet cover over the tv simply because I HAD to see what happened next.

I also firmly remember the sheer terror evoked as I ran like hell (several times) to get away from the wildcat destabilisation of the reactorcore that was threatening to engulf me on that final run of the maw.

A little while later I picked up a copy of halo for the PC because I wanted to see some of the awesome things that were being done with the map editor. It was about this time that I came across and subsequently into a halo community, known as Halo Centre it served as a community gathering spot for intelligent people that loved the halo community.

Not long after that the bombshell dropped that was the announcement of halo 2 and once that happened it's safe to say that the addiction that is halo took over. Without going into masses of irrelevant detail things went quite quick from there on in. Me and friends (some newfound through halo love) spent our lunch breaks at high school speculating on some of the things that had been released to the public.

# Halo 2: The Obsession Takes Hold



We spent far too much time asking what if, how will this happen, did you see that, what was that brute thing. We covered it all one way or another, it was around then I became a HBO lurker and stayed that way for a few years for the most part.

I remember hanging on for the weekly updates, wondering what little morsel we were going to be thrown this week for us to devour. I remember fondly a family holiday not long after I love bees had started, where the site had basically started to fall apart.

Somehow understanding my parents had helped me rig a laptop to run from the cars power supply so I could pour through the web code in some of my spare time to try and find any tidbits that would be useful. I did this for most of the 8 hour car drive and my search yielded, nothing. When I came back from holiday i found that I had been chasing a dead end and the ARG had moved on to the point I couldn't jump back in easily. After that I kinda went dark I the community again if I remember rightly.

Now I'm iffy on the timeline of how events happened here but somewhere along the line halo centre shutdown, I drifted a little and after a while came to be a regular lurker of HBO and posting not too long after that, I remember halo 2 dropping and the mounting excitement that lead up to that event but then it all becomes on big ring world shaped blur for there on out but I shall try and put as much as I can into order..



## My H2 launch Experiance

The halo 2 launch was not as largely anticipated as the rest of the launches partly due to my age at the time parky because as much as I was loved halo, I wasn't *hooked* on halo. As much as some people mightn't like it, halo 2 ensured that I was caught like a fish on bungies rod a goodness, but it nearly wasn't.

I had my limited edition copy reserved at a well known electrical company here in the uk, but before info about the limited edition dropped I had also reserved a copy at GAME uk. Now the reason for this Is because this store was the only one that could Garuntee me a copy as apparently GAME had run out.

Well, midnight rolls around, it's my brother's birthday and after a bit of too and fro-ing me and my dad go down to the store for my game, or so we thought, it turns out that they had given my copy away.

After a moment of panic, we decide to hot foot it down to GAME, we get there and thankfully they still have copies of the game (unlike my other reservation). With heart pounding I get to the front of the queue and they ask me which version I reserved pushing my luck I said limited edition. The conversation went on and after a bit of cheek where I convinced them that I had actually reserved the limited edition (despite what it said in the book and that their employees must have made a mistake) I got my copy.

I had school the next day, so I took the game home, played ten minutes or so and got up to the destruction of the Cairo then had to quit, but that was enough to wet my appetite. The following day it was all we could talk about in my social circle. I tried to avoid any spoilers I could while we compared notes on what we had seen so far.

It's safe to say that it became cemented not only as a fun hobby in my spare time but also as a social conversation point with friends, which is one of the things I love about Halo.

## Social integration like never before.

Halo 2 quickly became the staple of sleep overs and generally hanging out, blasting each other's faces off on headlong and relic when in groups (often becoming me vs world as my friends started to work together to take me down) or blasting off in entirely new ways as if it was just a couple of us campaigning we'd have fun and games with the sputnik skull and new Mombassa's bridge or other such areas.

Bungie had somehow found a way to break that gap between geek and cool among my social circles, a first time that any game had done so (or at least a game that wasn't tied to an anime series, Pokemon anyone?).

Me and friends would piece together what we could from the background stories, some of us picked up the Halo books at about the same time and ploughed through those and discovered the background to the Spartans that had never been revealed in the games (and still hasn't really) and subsequently spent time getting our heads around that.

Halo 2 is also the game that got me into online gaming on a broad scale, while I had played Halo PC online it was never as community driven as my Halo 2 (and subsequent)

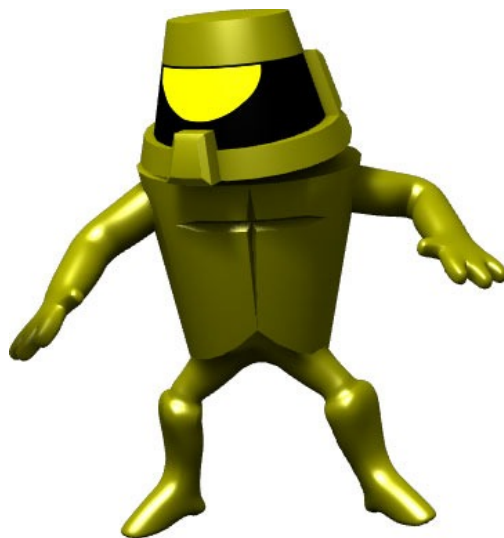
forays. The game introduced me to the idea of clans and as a result community gaming.

During this time I was drifting around a couple of clans, one being the Clan of Bobs from halo wiki, a fantastic Group of guys who shared some good laughs, I was involved with a couple of others to but they always ended up closing down after not too long.

After drifting for a while I ended up back at hbo and start to post a little, more and and slowly nut surely integrated myself into the community there, I'd tried bnet and didn't like the forum structure, as much as I lived halo wiki the discussions seemed too scattered. HBO on the other hand was filled with like minded people who just wanted to chat about the halo universe, and thats where I felt like I belonged.

Groaning several times a week at StuntMutt enjoying the various offerings of BOLL, HBO just felt right, and through the last few years has become my Internet home from home.

With bungie on the helm, halo 2's glorius campaign and multiplayer making way for more from the universe, HBO accepting me into the fold things were right in the world and things went kinda quiet, or at least as much as they ever do at HBO and in bungies orchestrations.





# Halo 3



The next thing I distinctly remember is the halo 3 announcement, and those glorious glorious chords from non other the Marty "McAwesome" O'Donnal. To this day those 5 chords in that order still excite me, maybe it's because I wasn't here from the start but the "halo rift" doesn't do as much for me as that opening shot from that teaser.

The halo 3 build up was full of win and I truly don't think I have been so excited for a game as I was for halo 3. I think bungie set the bar high for themselves there because I truly do not think they can beat themselves there.

The live action work which also served as a glimpse at the ill fated halo movie that was being knocked around back then blew me away. Seeing brutes brought to life like that was amazing, seeing marines fight like their lives depend on it and making it believable.

Seeing the armoury being created also made the entire thing so much more believable, bungie truly cemented in my mind at least was the final stand, this would be the all or nothing for the halo franchise and, once again, they delivered.

I think bungie has only once made their advertising come even close to being as memorable, and that was the birth of a Spartan video for Reach's ad campaign.

But the live action wasn't the only advertising that got people hooked, the Iris ARG drew people in as well. It even got a little help from a rouge who impersonated the AI on the HBO forums. now I'm sure their aim was to cause havoc but all it did that I could see was increase anticipation.

While I never got deeply into the Iris ARG I did enjoy seeing what people found. The problem with ARG's for halo is they concentrate far too much on America which means after a certain point if you're outside of the states there is little to hold your interest. Also they require a lot of concentration to be dedicated near constantly to them to keep a handle on what's going on, but none the less it's fun seeing what information tidbits can be gleaned from them.

The teasers made me clamour for every little scrap of info I could find and every piece of info I could find made me want even more, if Halo 3 had a flaw in its marketing the truth is I don't see it. It was pretty much the best ad campaign and buildup I have seen for ANY product.

# Halo 3 Launch Story

Sorry guys and girls but thanks to the Legendary Edition and the issues I had last time I ordered mine via amazon, It came that morning, no midnight launch fiasco, move along.

## First impressions

My first impressions were pretty much "Blam! me this game is gorgeous!". Now, I knew it was going to be of course, I'd seen every screen shot I could that wasn't a campaign spoiler but when it's actually fluid in front of you, it takes on a new sheen.

From my playthrough, I don't think there was a single level I didn't have a "woah that's awesome" moment on, the cinematography and story telling in H3 was the best of the series as I recall it.

Everything from the plot twists to the dialogue deliverance to the camera angles were bang on cue. The music sounded amazing as always, it was classic halo with a twist in just the right places, easily one of Martys finer moments.

As for the multiplayer well halo 2 had started to really lose its multiplayer shine for me in the end, halo 3 was a breath of fresh air, even if I was a little disappointed that there were no spiritual successors to headlong, relic or terminal, all had which had become fond favourites of my group.

The introduction of equipment really served to mix things up and make maps continuously fresh because of the different effects they could have on the course of the game. Unfortunately some of them were denied their full potential however. If you'll forgive me a reminiscing it's with great joy I recall

## Forward Unto Dawn

Going forward from launch Bungie were most definitely involved with Halo 3 and it was quite clearly their baby and woe betide anyone who messed with it. The support for H3's online community and the community as a whole back then was truly second to none.

Humpdays, building an entire map to allow people to make use of Forge in completely different ways than it was originally intended. Bungie hit the nail on the head with the community from there on out and while they may not have given us headlong, relic or terminal back they certainly offered the goods where it counted.

I think that this was probably the golden age of Bungie as I have experienced it so far, Bungie got it right and were quick to admit it when they didn't. It is their support of this game and their community as well as their charity work that brought me to respect Bungie far more than any other game company.

Bungie even found a way to show recognition to the fans that managed to stand out among the tidal wave of fan-generated content with Recon, attributing it to only those who were deemed worthy and I don't think I ever saw something that didn't actually deserve the award.

And even later, as Bungie started to release the Vidmaster achievements, combining them with the Halo: ODS1 achievements when that was released, to enable people to unlock that last armour piece themselves. As much as people complained they had removed its meaning, the move was something of genius that only served in the long run to show that Bungie do actually care about the community that has built up around them and their games.

Some of my favourite campaign moments from the Halo series were in this game, some of my best online memories are from this game also. Here truly is a game that, even if she looks a bit dated next to Reach, still stands the test of time simply because it runs like a well-oiled machine.