# HALO WARS

FREE E-MAGAZINE! READ IT, PRINT IT, SEND IT TO YOUR MATES...

INTERVIEW

## GRAEME DIVINE

The game's lead writer speaks!









FEATURE

## MULTIPLAYER MAYHEM

Skirmish mode explained

## EXCLUSIVE PLAYTEST

HALO WARS

Everything you need to know about the RTS of the year!

WWW.GAMERZINES.COM Contact Us Tell a friend





"This supplement will tell you everything you need to know about Halo Wars"

# WELCOME

Branching out from a series as popular as Halo is always going to be a difficult undertaking for any developer. You've got the diehard fans concerned that it won't be anything like Halo, and the others hoping that it's going to offer something different. It's testament to Ensemble Studios' skill that Halo Wars manages to effortlessly satisfy both groups.

Okay, it's a totally different genre, but this is Halo – its world, its character, its universe, everything looks and feels just right. Warthogs leaping gaps and bounding over rocky terrain, Elites cutting a swathe through UNSC grunts, Locusts and Hunters, Scarabs and Spartans. The only change is that you're viewing them from a totally new perspective. Instead of being in the thick of battle on the surface, you're controlling events from above. But it instantly feels familiar, with exceptional audiovisual detail making those initial steps into new territory seem a whole lot more welcoming for Halo fans.

But it's also been a chance for Ensemble to branch out and explore the universe a little more – you get settings you've never seen in a Halo game, vehicles you've never piloted (or faced off against) and the chance to finish the fight as an army instead of just one man. Oh, and plenty of all-too-fleeting glimpses at how a CGI Halo movie could look in the sublime cut-scenes.

We've spent several enjoyable hours with the game, and this special supplement carries an extensive hands-on playtest which tells you everything you need to know about Halo Wars, as well as an interview with Graeme Devine, lead writer at Ensemble Studios.

Enjoy the issue.

**Chris Schilling, Editor**

# Contents


## Playtest
Our massive eight-page hands-on playtest will let you know exactly why this is one of the most exciting Xbox 360 games you'll see this year.

## Skirmish mode
How to play multiplayer without having to go online.

## Interview
We talk exclusively to the game's lead writer, Graeme Devine.

WWW.GAMERZINES.COM Contact Us Tell a friend



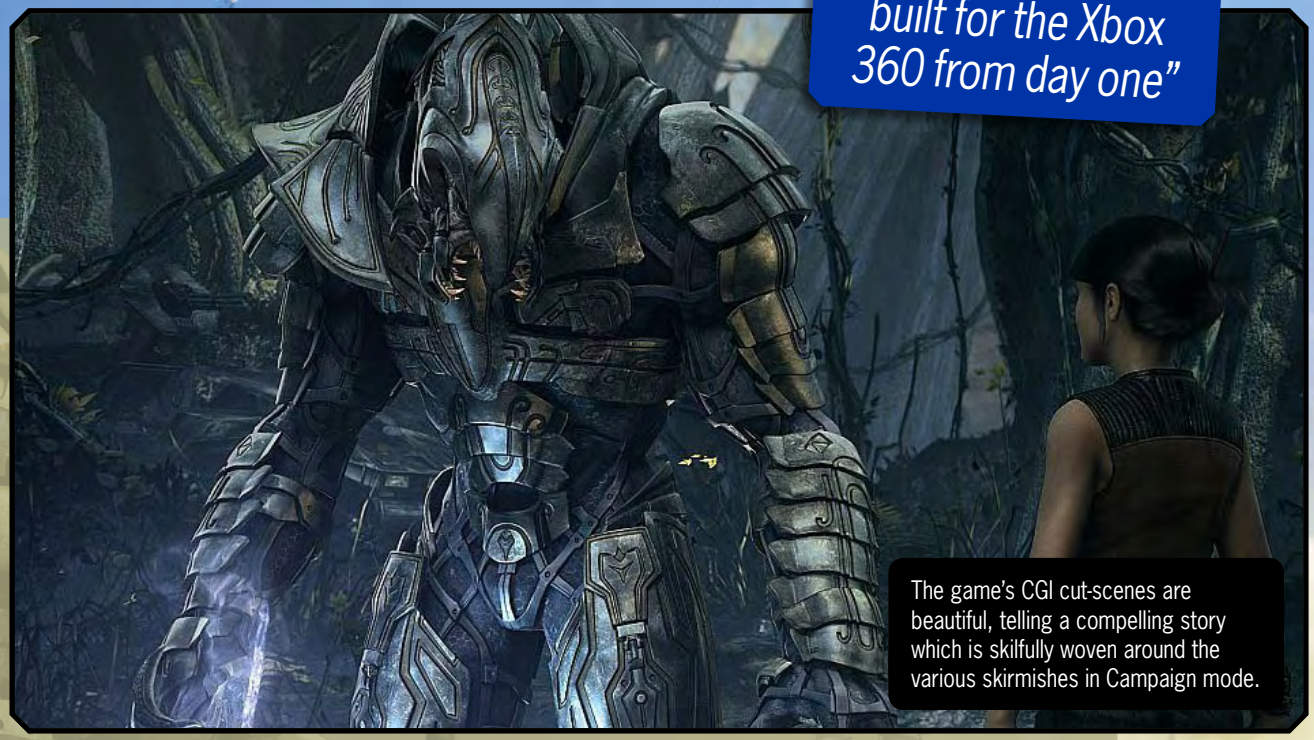



**Publisher:** Microsoft Game Studios
**Developer:** Ensemble Studios
**Heritage:** Age of Empires series
**Link:** www.halowars.com
**ETA:** 27th February

OFFICIAL PLAYTEST

# HALO WARS

"Halo Wars has been built for the Xbox 360 from day one"



The game's CGI cut-scenes are beautiful, telling a compelling story which is skilfully woven around the various skirmishes in Campaign mode.

## A real-time strategy blockbuster?

The humble RTS has never really worked on consoles, with traditional controllers being no match for mouse and keyboard control. The genre's complexities make porting PC strategy games a near-impossibility – with orders difficult to execute accurately and at speed, menus tricky to navigate and uncommon commands often mapped to unwieldy combinations of buttons.

Clearly fed up with holding LT while pushing the analogue stick up-right and pressing Y just to execute a strategic retreat, developer Ensemble Studios has crafted an RTS which has clearly been built for the Xbox 360 from day one. Halo Wars contains none of the thumb gymnastics required by many of its peers, instead bolting an intuitive and accessible control scheme onto a remarkably solid and surprisingly tactical strategy game that just happens to be based in the Halo universe – which is a good thing.

Initially, it all seems a little 'My First RTS', the game's tutorials patiently explaining the



It's best to mix up your units a little rather than sending a battalion of tanks alone – one unit of anti-vehicle troops and your best-laid plans can go to waste.

CONTROL Close Issue Print Page Search Issue Zoom In Zoom Out Toggle Full Screen Previous Page Next Page

# Behind Enemy Lines

## The art of the Covenant



Jackal | Hunter | Arbiter

## Jackal

Jackals are the Covenant's anti-infantry units, and can be particularly devastating from sniper towers – even taking down Spartans in just a few shots. Meanwhile, Brute units are the Covenant's special forces, with powerful plasma guns which can take out UNSC infantry units in seconds.

## > Halo Wars continued

simplest of commands. Yet genre stalwarts have the option to skip these, and it's clear that Microsoft is perhaps aiming more to entice fans of action games – especially those who loved Halo – rather than preaching to the converted. Venture further however, and even enthusiasts will have to admit that this is a game with real depth – perhaps beyond the expectations of many. Those vehemently opposed to real-time strategies may not find what they're looking for, but if you've ever been curious enough to take your first tentative steps into new and unfamiliar territory, it's likely that Halo Wars will be the perfect entry point for you.

### AVOIDING PITFALLS

Let's start with those controls, because it's here that Ensemble skilfully avoids the pitfalls most developers fall into when crafting a console-based RTS. Simplicity is the key – the left analogue stick scrolls around the map, while the right pans and zooms. The A button selects units, or the build areas of your base, and X sends them to move and attack. The Y button

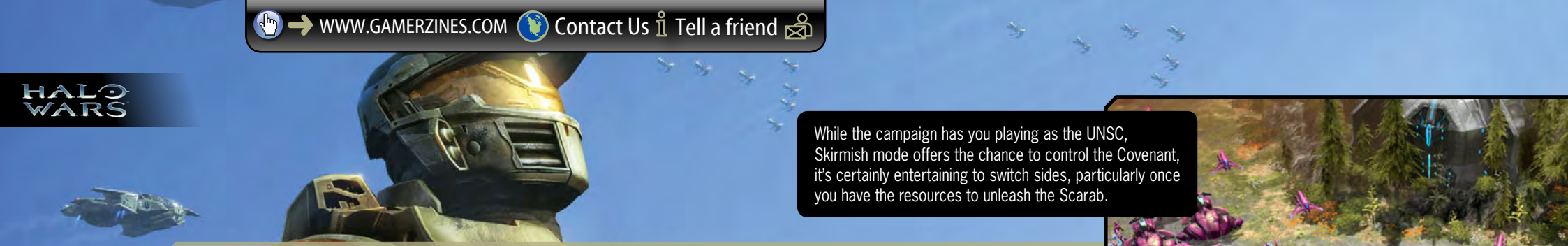


Deathmatch mode ups the pace, allowing you to quickly amass an army of powerful vehicles, with training time reduced for every unit and a boat-load of resources to start you off.

"Simplicity is the key with the controls in Halo Wars"



Different leaders have different play styles – we beat the more measured General Cutter in one battle before being surprised by the aggressive approach of Forge in the next.



## > Halo Wars continued

uses each unit's special ability, while the D-pad zips you immediately to any alert, your base or your army, with Up used for special commander powers. You can use the triggers to fast-scroll and sub-select units, with the bumpers used to select units on a global or local basis. Selecting a small on-screen group of units is simply a case of holding the A button and dragging the cursor over those you wish to issue an order to.

This simple and elegant system eschews menus almost entirely, keeping the action on-screen at all times – apart for those occasions when you're upgrading your base. This keeps things feeling more immediate, maintaining the sort of frantic pace you'd expect from the Halo games, while affording players the level of instant control the best PC strategies provide.

> "While the focus is on combat, it's vital to keep your bases in order"

While the focus is on the combat – and more on that shortly – it's vital to keep your bases in order to ensure your units are efficient in the field. Your base initially has just a few spaces on which you can add buildings – start with a supply pad and you can build up your resources quicker. These can be spent on other additions – a barracks will train ground troops, a depot sends vehicles into the fray, an air pad provides you with Hornets and Vultures, while a field armoury

>



While the campaign has you playing as the UNSC, Skirmish mode offers the chance to control the Covenant, it's certainly entertaining to switch sides, particularly once you have the resources to unleash the Scarab.



If you feel like one of the two races has a bit of an advantage, you can pit one UNSC force against another – that way you can't blame the game if you lose!



Warthogs are best utilised in the early game – scouting out enemy emplacements and securing base positions before beating a hasty retreat.

ROLL OVER THE BIG PICTURE

## > Halo Wars continued

offers research into special buffs and upgrades. Meanwhile, a reactor increases your base's tech level, offering you more advanced units but at greater cost. All of these buildings can be upgraded to increase their efficiency, and you can build auto-fire turrets to protect the base. All straightforward stuff for strategy veterans, but it's implemented in a wonderfully unobtrusive way – a booming voice informs of any completed buildings or upgrades, as well as notifying you when your base is then under attack, so you can just set the wheels of construction in motion while still keeping an eye on the bigger picture.

> "All buildings can be upgraded to increase their efficiency"

There's a rock-paper-scissors approach to combat >



Though initially fairly flimsy, Warthogs can be upgraded with a grenadier or machine gunner to add a bit of clout to their attacks.





The Elephant is General Cutter's special unit. It's a mobile base which can be used to train infantry units away from home.

## > Halo Wars continued

which keeps the early game straightforward before things get progressively more complex. Initially, all you need to know is that vehicles beat infantry, which beat aircraft which beat vehicles. And that knowledge is perfectly fine for the first couple of missions of the game's campaign, which is undoubtedly the best jumping-off point for newcomers.

Set 20 years before the Halo event, you control the crew of the Spirit of Fire, a UNSC ship in the orbit of a planet named Harvest, now under UNSC control after a prolonged battle against the Covenant. As veteran Sergeant Forge, you're sent down to the snowy wastes to rescue a series of pinned-down crew members, valiantly fighting against the Covenant resistance. Forge leads from his Warthog, whose special ability is to ram enemies – not particularly useful against other vehicles, but perfect against the infantry here. Though it's viewed from a distance, there's still that familiarly springy feel to the Warthog's movement, as you lead a cavalry charge into enemy territory, the vehicles having



The Banshee is the Covenant's standard air unit. It's quick but not too strong, so probably best used as a scouting vehicle.



Forge's special ability is the Carpet Bomb – a powerful air strike which can be directed towards a line of enemies or a base.

## > Halo Wars continued

no problem with the bumpy terrain, leaving tyre tracks in the snow as they skid into position. Once you have the marines, you need to swap to controlling the ground troops, who are the only units able to pass through the Covenant shields, destroying the generators so vehicles can pass through.

Though your ultimate aim is to destroy the Covenant troops attacking your base, score bonuses are awarded for completing optional objectives – the first mission offering points for killing 100 grunts. With gold, silver, bronze and tin medals awarded depending on how long you took, your kill-to-killed ratio and the side objectives completed, there's the potential for plenty of replay value, particularly on the Heroic or Legendary difficulty levels.

Mission two then sees Forge attempting to stop the Covenant from detonating a mysterious holy relic – gradually introducing more ideas and units into the equation before the third mission mixes things up further, with enemy Elites trapping Forge and potential love interest Professor Anders, with the player taking command of some Grizzly Tanks to fight their way through as backup. That accomplished, you then have to protect Anders while she hacks some bridge controls to provide an exit and racing away before Covenant forces can arrive in numbers. Brilliantly, there's an optional objective which sees you killing Covenant pursuers by deactivating the bridge while they're crossing, while the brisk pace is maintained – none of these missions should take players more than 20 minutes to complete.

> "There's the potential for plenty of replay value here"

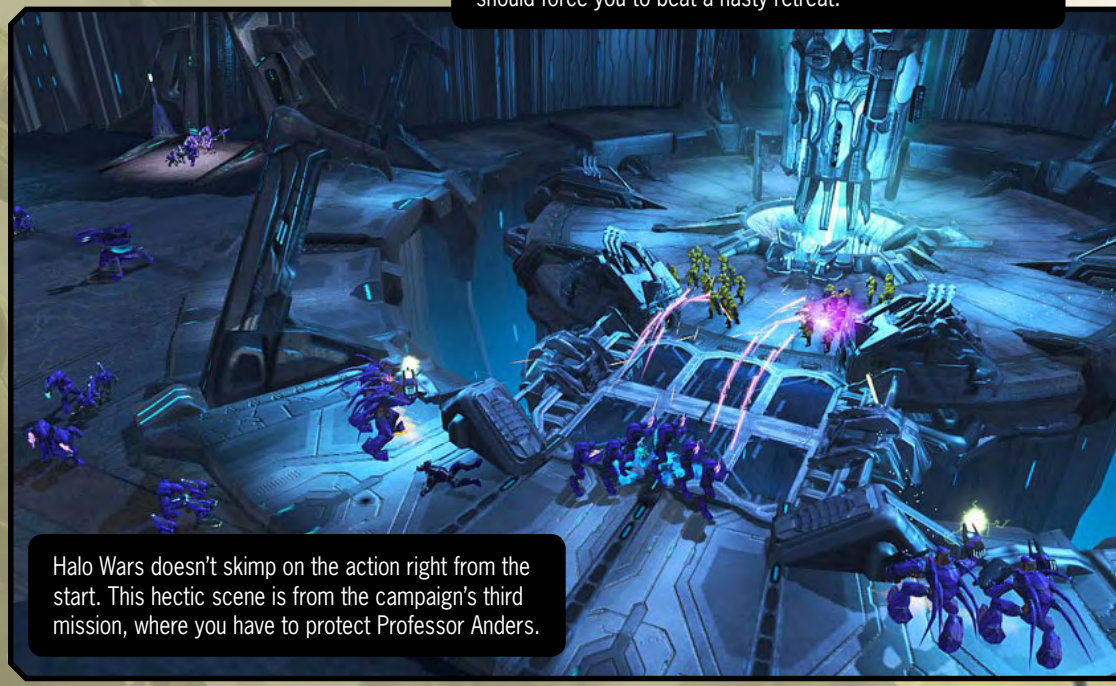
### RESCUE MISSION

The artifact sends the UNSC to a planet named Arcadia. With alien forces inside the city limits, you're tasked with rescuing the populace by guiding them to cargo transports, and ensuring the ships themselves are kept intact. This terrific mission is a real balancing act, forcing you to keep tabs of at least three different areas of the battlefield, with frequent alerts on your mini-

>




If you're playing as the Covenant, you know you're in trouble when Vultures join the fight. A couple of these hardy air units should force you to beat a hasty retreat.



Halo Wars doesn't skimp on the action right from the start. This hectic scene is from the campaign's third mission, where you have to protect Professor Anders.

## > Halo Wars continued

map requiring careful yet rapid prioritisation. It's a sign of how well-moderated the learning curve is that this doesn't seem like too big an ask, while the utopian city environment makes you yearn for a Halo level that looks like that.

Mission five of 15 – and the last we're permitted to discuss – sets you against overwhelming odds as your squad attempts to secure a defendable position until backup can arrive. With so few units initially available, it's here that your hero is most likely to perish for the first time – yet Forge can be revived by another unit remaining close for a certain amount of time. The same goes for the Spartans you control in this mission, meaning as long as your base can maintain a steady flow of new units, you'll have enough to get by until the Omega Spartans are dropped in, whereupon the tide of battle turns in your favour. You'll feel like yelling 'oo-rah!' along with your troops as the Omegas lay waste to the enemy base. Well, we did anyway.

Any questions about lack of depth of variety are blown away by those opening five missions, and of the 10 which follow, the ones we've experienced have all added their own wrinkles to the formula. From larger vehicles which can be locked into position to fire on distant targets, to missions where you've a wealth of resources to deal with one particularly fearsome enemy (let's just say Halo fans will likely know which kind of foe we're talking about), Halo Wars keeps things fresh throughout its campaign. And that's arguably not even the



Covenant dropships are useful in air-to-air battles, though they're in danger from the more powerful ground vehicles.

> "Halo Wars keeps things fresh throughout its campaign"



Forge insists that Anders isn't his girlfriend, though he's prepared to put his own life at risk to protect her. He's fooling no-one.

## > Halo Wars continued

meat of the single-player game, which can be found in the Skirmish mode – a series of 14 maps offering one-on-one or team-based games, with adaptable difficulty if you want a challenge best suited to your own abilities. The chance to play as the Covenant may be too difficult for some to pass up, particularly given the effectiveness of their special powers – the Arbiter has a Rage mode which puts him under full player control, able to destroy vehicles with just a few swipes, or to decimate groups of infantry in seconds. Meanwhile the Prophet of Truth's Cleansing Ray can turn an undefended base to rubble when fully powered-up. Each leader also has a unique unit – General Cutter can call upon ODSTs, while the Arbiter has Suicide Grunts – while the UNSC members have additional bonuses. Bases starting at a higher tech level is undoubtedly useful, though you might prefer Anders' half-price unit upgrades instead.

With a suite of online multiplayer options, Halo Wars is undoubtedly a substantial package. It's an RTS that has plenty of appeal outside the genre's usual reach, and its exceptional presentation means it looks as good as it plays. Hopefully this and the Halo setting will be enough to tempt the masses who have yet to be won over to the RTS genre, so Ensemble's swansong should be the first real breakout hit for the strategy genre on console.

"Halo Wars is undoubtedly a substantial package"

Roll over screen for annotations





While there's always plenty going on, the action is remarkably straightforward to control.

WWW.GAMERZINES.COM Contact Us Tell a friend



THE SKIRMISH MODE

# FINISH THE FIGHT

## Why Skirmish will soon be taking over your life

**As we've suggested in the main preview, it could be argued that the Campaign is merely training for Halo Wars' Skirmish and online multiplayer modes. Skirmish offers battles against up to five AI bots – you can face off against a single AI opponent or join forces with other computer-controlled leaders for 2-v-2 and 3-v-3 matches.**

The Standard ruleset starts you with limited resources and one base. You'll need to spend time waiting for your supply pad to start bringing in resources, or you can send out infantry to obtain some from crates scattered around the field.

A deathmatch game is much quicker and chaotic – offering you a base with a maximum tech level, all land and air vehicles, and ground troops available as soon as their buildings are built. Leader Powers recharge much quicker too, allowing Anders to freeze groups of enemies with her Cryo bomb, or the Prophet of Regret to wreak devastation with his cleansing ray. Deathmatch also allows you to get your Uber units out earlier. The UNSC has the powerful Vultures which are vulnerable to anti-air units but which can withstand a fair battering and deal out a barrage of missiles as their special power, while the enormous Scarab can only be built if you're holding enough bases, but is virtually unbeatable when deployed. A combination of Leader Powers and quick-fire attacks work well, but it takes some punishment before finally exploding.

The maps offer a good mix of more tactical play and all-out action – Blood Gulch has teleporters which allow you to spring surprise attacks, while the snowy Chasms offers sniper towers to defend key positions. Meanwhile, Terminal Moraine has timed bridges to access difficult to reach areas – should your units be crossing when the lights start blinking then they'd better hurry, otherwise they'll fall to their doom. Occasionally things can get a little hectic on the 3-v-3 stages, but Halo Wars is all about large-scale battles, and the battles that ensue when several forces converge are stunning.

### AVOIDING PITFALLS

The game's AI is generally very good – the difficulty adapts according to your previous performances in the field, though you can also revert to the presets of Easy, Normal, Heroic and Legendary. While AI allies tend to attack at their own pace, they can often come to your rescue in a sticky spot – one particularly pleasing occasion saw our UNSC chum step in to repair one of our armies after we unleashed a barrage of shots at an enemy base and found ourselves caught from the rear just before we were finished. The additional health boost allowed us to finish the job and our troops scraped through by the skin of their teeth. Should your buddies be running short on numbers then you can transfer any supplies which are surplus to current requirements.

While this can't quite compare to the thrill of the online battle, Skirmish feels as close to competing against real opponents as you're likely to get, and it means that solo players won't feel short-changed once they're done with the Campaign. And with the chance to add a dash of variety to proceedings with any Skulls you've unlocked – from magnified destruction physics to rainbow-tinted Scarab lasers – you'll find plenty to keep you busy for months.

CONTROL Close Issue Print Page Search Issue Zoom In Zoom Out Toggle Full Screen Previous Page Next Page




Jump in.

XBOX 360

CONTROL Close Issue Print Page Search Issue Zoom In Zoom Out Toggle Full Screen Previous Page Next Page

WWW.GAMERZINES.COM Contact Us Tell a friend



"The biggest priority with Halo Wars was to get the controls right"

INTERVIEW

# DEVINE WRITE

## Still need to know more about Halo Wars? Time for a chat with the game's writer

Realising the Halo universe from a new perspective was a challenge that lead writer Graeme Devine relished. We spoke to him about the game's plot, its unique controls, its future, and how exactly Ensemble managed to create a real-time strategy out of a first-person shooter.

**What was your first priority when you set out to make Halo Wars? What one thing above all else did you want to achieve?**

I think the biggest priority was to get the controls right. It's great to be doing a Halo game, but no one will play it if the controls are bad, and real-time strategy games on the console are notorious for bad control schemes. We actually spent the first 18 months of the project on getting the controls right, and a lot of that work is still in the product today (things like the circle menu, build from buildings and select/move controls are all the same).

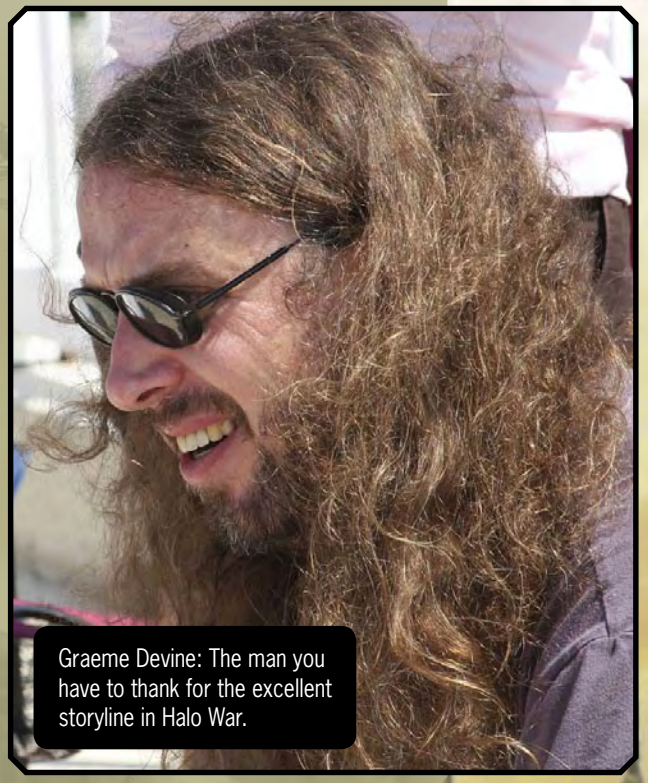


To be honest, it doesn't look good for the human race.

**The game is set 20 years before Halo.Can you tell us a little more about the plot, and how it links to the original Halo?**

In 2526 the Covenant attack the UNSC colony 'Harvest', which is one of the main agricultural planets humans have. After five years we have reclaimed the planet

>



Graeme Devine: The man you have to thank for the excellent storyline in Halo War.

CONTROL Close Issue Print Page Search Issue Zoom In Zoom Out Toggle Full Screen Previous Page Next Page

HALO WARS



Fans of the Halo series might not recognise the gameplay, but the graphically style should be very familiar.

## >Interview continued

and won it back from the Covenant but the planet is no longer livable; it's a nuclear winter, and so it's a very hollow victory for the human race. On the surface of Harvest though, near the northern pole, the Covenant have found a Forerunner structure in the ice and have been excavating it. The UNSC has sent two ships to investigate. The first ship, 'The Prophecy', is destroyed when it arrives, and a lot of that story is then told in the limited collector's limited edition comic book, but the second ship 'Spirit of Fire' is the one we follow throughout the campaign. It discovers that there is more to the situation than meets the eye, and that unless action is taken very quickly, the war may go bad for the UNSC.

**Does Halo Wars add enough to the Halo universe to tempt first-person shooter fans across to the strategy genre?**
I think seeing the combat from a different perspective – while still being deeply rooted in Halo – is something Halo fans will want to see. All the Halo action is there, the sounds, effects, physics and so forth, but instead of seeing it from the single unique perspective of Master Chief, it's from the perspective of the whole battle, and there is something pretty darn exciting about being able to both see and control that aspect of the game. It's still very visceral and combat-focused – you're not sending peasants to go and dig in the dirt!



FULL SCREEN
Click here to see watch full screen!

*"Halo Wars offers depth that isn't obvious to casual gamers"*

**Halo Wars is a more accessible RTS than some will be used to. Are you concerned about alienating hardcore strategy fans with the game's more immediate approach?**
You're absolutely right; it is more accessible, but getting real-time strategy fans to appreciate that is very important. I think that while it *is* very accessible, Halo Wars offers depth that's not immediately obvious to casual players but should be something hardcore players can latch onto very quickly. For example, the upgrade to the reactor is very expensive – much more

## > Interview continued

expensive than building a second reactor – but that cost then has to be countered against losing a building slot to build something else on around your base. It's actually a pretty interesting little strategy there, and just one of the ways that I think depth is still there, but perhaps represented a little differently than how we've seen it before in other strategy games.

**Did having a universe already in place make development easier, or did that make certain elements harder to implement?**
I think mostly it helped. It's hard to answer because we didn't go both ways. If anything, it takes a while to appreciate the story, and why you can't suddenly give humans ray guns and be done with any balance. Humans still shoot lead, while the aliens are big and have plasma rifles. But that's part of any classic alien invasion – War of the Worlds, Independence Day, etc. All these films pit humans against some overwhelming odds, and so I think we like being that lopsided. The units, vehicles and so forth were pretty balanced for the most part. We added more to the UNSC than the Covenant, because the UNSC had one pretty vital character that played through all three previous games, and we needed a little more than Master Chief this time around!

> *"The fact that we made the game for the 360 alone allows us to do much more with the controls"*

**Previous console real-time strategy games have often been developed for the PC first and then ported across. What would you say is the main advantage of having created a console-focused RTS game from the ground up?**
I think that is the single biggest flaw in other strategy games right there. The fact that we made this game for the 360 alone allows us to do so much more with the controls, and take advantage of being on a TV without having to think about how it's all going to work on a PC down the road. Halo Wars

>



You'll need to build up your forces before you attack an enemy base.



The great control system makes it easy to control your forces.

## >Interview continued

could not take advantage of the 360 controller if we had to keep thinking about the mouse and keyboard at the same time, and so those other games have found a pretty uncomfortable middle ground in my opinion that hurts both their console and PC versions in the long run.

**Do you feel you've managed to strike the balance between creating a standalone game and offering fan service to those who love the Halo series? How have you managed to ensure that it appeals to both groups?**
I think this is the best campaign that Ensemble has ever made, and it's very sad it's our last. Ensemble is also always very focused on the multiplayer experience, as that's what most of us here play every day.

I feel we're definitely there with an awesome Halo story in a very compelling campaign that has some really fantastic moments, and an online multiplayer experience unlike any other on Xbox Live. Certainly when I watch people play the game that's the impression I get. It's great to watch people play the game as you get a lot of feedback from it.

**Can you tell us any more about Bungie's involvement with the game? Were they very hands-on?**
We went up there a lot in the beginning of the game's development and talked about the story and what it meant to be a Halo game. They were pretty busy working on Halo 3, but throughout the project we would talk to them about the current build and listen to their feedback. The guys at Bungie were great to work with, and their insights were extremely valuable.

**Is there any chance of a map editor at some point?**
That would be totally awesome, but I don't think it's going to happen. We don't have the people to support the tool, and it wasn't part of the core design in the way that Forge was integrated into Halo 3.

**Which single aspect of the game are you most proud of?**
I think the campaign and campaign story are done really well, and I'm proud that we tell such a strong story in the Halo universe.

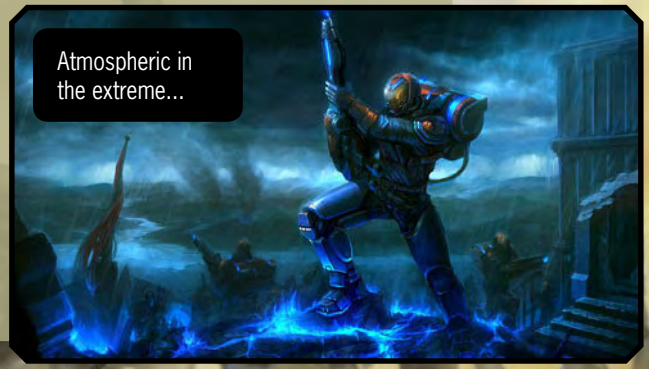
**With Ensemble sadly being wound down after Halo Wars, does this mean that there is no chance of Halo Wars 2, or is the team moving elsewhere in Microsoft to continue the fight?**
I can't comment on what's going to happen in the future. I would very much love to see (and work) on Halo Wars 2 though!

**What is the one thing you couldn't do in this one that you'd like to see in a sequel?**
I think make the Flood playable and make that work. We tried in HW to make that happen but nothing seemed to gel and feel like the Flood so we stuck with the Covenant/ UNSC playable civs. I'd love a chance to get the Flood civ working in the next one. ●




"I feel we're definitely there with an awesome Halo story in a very compelling campaign"



WWW.GAMERZINES.COM Contact Us Tell a friend

# Subscribe to 360Zine

## WANT MORE Xbox 360?
## Download 360Zine Issue 23 now!




## FREE! EVERY MONTH!
## The world's free Xbox 360 mag!

**DON'T MISS OUT AGAIN SUBSCRIBE FOR FREE!**

*Over 50,000 people have already chosen to subscribe to one or more of our GamerZines and now receive notification of each new issue as soon as it's published. Why not join them and ensure you never miss another issue again?*

# www.gamerzines.com

CONTROL Close Issue Print Page Search Issue Zoom In Zoom Out Toggle Full Screen Previous Page