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Launch of *Reach* shatters expectations

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Editor

Ten years ago, Bungie Studios became one of the most successful video game companies when it announced that it was becoming a part of Microsoft and would release its first game under the new partnership the following year, titled *Halo*. Nine years later, that one game has grown into a record-breaking franchise, an entertainment powerhouse, and an icon, just in time for Bungie's last *Halo* game, *Halo Reach*.

The game is divided into six different modes: Campaign, Matchmaking, Custom games, Firefight, Forge, and Theater, all of which have been a component of at least one past *Halo* game.

The first mode, Campaign, is set up like *Halo 3* and pretty much every other first-person shooter currently being sold. There's a storyline (set in 2552), with main characters, (the Noble Team of Spartan super-soldiers), who are on a mission (save the planet Reach from the aliens, Covenant). However, much of the changes are aesthetic or supplementary to the gameplay and storyline. There are new abilities (called armor abilities) that are similar to the equipment found in *Halo 3*, however they can be used more than one time, allow for in game strategizing and planning

ahead. Because this game is a sequel to the other three *Halo* games, some of the enemies, weapons, and the health system are similar to those found in *Halo (1)*. Also, (*spoiler alert*) there is a direct transition from the end of this game to the beginning of the first *Halo*. The graphics are also much clearer and the campaign's ties to the other game modes are evident.

The next two modes, Matchmaking and Custom Games, function relatively the same, the only difference is that the first allows you to square off against people you don't know online. Both serve as a way for players to compete against one another, teams or not, in various gametypes. Most of these gametypes have been in the previous *Halo* games, but there are a few new ones, such as Stockpile, Headhunter, and Invasion. The gameplay is similar to that of the campaign, with the same weapons, armor abilities, and awards. There are also a lot of maps within the multiplayer modes that are directly from missions in the Campaign.

Firefight is *Reach*'s answer to Horde mode; you and your three teammates fend off waves of enemies in maps with respawning weapons. Just like the Campaign, the players will recognize the maps from the Campaign.

The last two modes are unique to



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Halo games and have received upgrades from their older counterparts in previous games; Forge has new map building techniques, organization, and even an extremely large map to "forge" on, duely named "Forge World". Theater mode now allows players to record from Campaign and Firefight games instead of just multiplayer games.

Despite many of its similarities with its predecessors, *Reach* has taken all the elements that they have done well, refined them, and allowed them to work

hand-in-hand with one another to create a full gaming experience. Complete with an amazing soundtrack and a new experience system for those who like to level up, *Halo Reach* is not just another first-person shooter (FPS); it is the product of ten years of dedication, hard work, openness and courage to try new ideas in a market plagued by copycats, and continued support by players and fans. *Halo Reach* may be Bungie Studios' last *Halo* game, but it is, definitively, their best.