

Halo 2: Masterpiece Across Editions

Halo 2 is widely praised by critics and players as a masterful sequel and one of the best entries within the Halo franchise. When *Halo 2* originally released on November 9th, 2004, it quickly gathered acclaim for its exciting campaign and extensive multiplayer modes (Kasavin). Each element of *Halo 2* contributed to a rich player experience including its strong voice acting, compelling cutscenes, diverse level design, and carefully crafted score which is consistently laud as the best soundtrack in the entire series by fans. Whether playing the original release on console (Kasavin), the ported pc edition (Butts), or the anniversary edition in the *Halo: Master Chief Collection* (Zamora), *Halo 2* is worth playing through.

Author Dustin Hansen partially credits the immense success of *Halo 2* to innovative gameplay decisions like easily swapping between weapons and grenades and *Halo 2*'s restrictive dual-wield weapon system that forced players to strategically approach each area of the game (Hansen, 233-234). Game mechanics like Master Chief's (MC) health regenerating armor were also improved upon, and re-enforced the mythos of the MC by allowing players to charge headfirst into battle without worrying about immediately falling to enemy fire (Hansen, 232). Players are rewarded with a sense of empowerment when they confidently approach combat situations through supporting dialogue from allied NPC's and well-balanced weaponry.

Despite the many strengths of *Halo 2*, critics agree some aspects of the game that can be improved. Author Robert Zubek notes in his book *Elements of Game Design*

that a player's experience and judgment of whether a game is good or not is a highly subjective metric that is dependent on what types of games a player likes, and which aspects of those games make the experience enjoyable (21). For many fans, the most enjoyable aspect of a Halo game is playing as the iconic Master Chief so splitting the main campaign levels between playing as the MC and the Arbiter, an alien antagonist, left many players disappointed. One player notes that many of the MC's levels are vehicle-based resulting in the campaign feeling unbalanced when compared to the Arbiter levels and thus difficult to become invested in (Bad Cyborg).

Conversely, many players embraced the parallel storytelling of the campaign and enjoyed the dichotomy of the MC and the Arbiter while other player subsets found their niche within *Halo 2*'s innovative, skills-based, multiplayer matchmaking (Kuchera). The final cliffhanger ending will always be controversial, but long-time fans know that such endings in the Halo franchise signal even greater things to come. Though not every aspect of *Halo 2* will appeal to all players, the fact that even critical reviews rank *Halo 2* highly speaks to the game's quality. Everyone should experience *Halo 2* at least once so they can appreciate the franchise's masterful storytelling, unique gameplay, and iconic characters.

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