


# Hands-on with Halo: Reach: Tip of the Spear

By **kombo** - May 4, 2012

 *Warning: if you don't like spoilers, why the hell are you reading a preview?*



The end of *Halo: Reach*'s fourth mission, Nightfall, revealed that the Covenant are invading agricultural planet in greater numbers than anyone could have predicted. By the start of next mission, Tip of the Spear, the war for Reach has really begun. The opening cinematic sees a formidable force of Warthogs, complete with an escort of Falcons, the more versatile version of *Halo 3*'s helicopter-like Hornets, barreling forward under a hot, noonday sun.

As a contingent of banshees unleashes volleys of plasma on the approaching 'Hogs, the one containing Noble Team Spartan 6 "does a barrel roll," as one random marine may put it, and throws Noble 6 from the passenger seat. Opening his (or her – it's up to the player) eyes, he grabs the grenade launcher in front of him, gets his bearings, and begins the mission.

The grenade launcher is best for scattering large groups of enemies like Jackals and Grunts, but when it comes to Elites and their newly hyperactive dodging abilities, there's not much the thing can do. Elites now jump, roll and dash nimbly to and fro like maniacs, making hitting them with anything – on any difficulty – much more of a challenge than it has been in the past. Frankly, they're a more than worthy adversary for Noble Team, and a welcome change from the Brutes of *Halo 3*.

After pushing through Covenant troops and deadly fuel rod turrets over slightly hilly terrain, Noble 6 and Kat (a female Spartan with a bionic arm) are met by a Pelican drop ship with a special delivery: a rocket-equipped Warthog. The Rocket 'Hog hasn't been seen since the original *Halo* on PC, and it, too, is significantly more powerful in *Reach*. It's capable of unleashing six rockets in one quick volley every three seconds; that's 120 rockets per minute, and a whole lot of firepower.

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 Thankfully, Tip of the Spear provides plenty of enemies to use as fodder. The following areas contain standard troops, Ghosts and a new vehicle: the Revenant. The sleek, f 

two-person vehicle is aesthetically similar to *Halo 2*'s Spectre, though its large, driver-controlled cannon makes it a hell of a lot more useful.

Nevertheless, the Rocket 'Hog demolishes it, along with everything else in its path, undeterred by volleys of plasma and sizzling grenades as it approaches the first of two enormous anti-air guns that must be destroyed. Noble 6 enters, blows up the core, and high-tails it out of there as the enormous gun erupts in a stunning explosion of blues, purples and oranges.

Approaching a heavily occupied structure identified as a mining facility, Noble 6 is informed that there's an Elite Zealot inside – and he's a high priority target, though not the primary objective. Pushing through the other forces in time to eliminate him before he escapes, though, will nab players another new weapon: the concussion rifle. It's the sleek, red successor to the brute rifle, not as powerful as its *Halo 3* counterpart, but with a surprising amount of force behind every shot. Enemies are often pushed or flung aside, or at least thrown off balance, by the rifle's projectiles, which explode on impact and have a large splash radius.

On the other side of the structure is a plasma launcher, which can lock onto any target and hurl up to four homing plasma grenades at once, and a few Grunt-occupied Ghosts to test it out on. Around the corner lies the second AA tower, this one housing Hunters and Drones. Hunters' older projectile launchers have replaced the beam weapons they've used in more recent games, and their move set has seen some changes, including a tendency to shield their "faces" with their heavily armored arms.

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Drones have a few new behaviors, as well. Like the rest of the AI, they're noticeably more intelligent. They retreat, find cover and attack in waves, making them a much more formidable threat than in past games. Their flight patterns are much more unpredictable, as well.

Soon a Falcon lands, and players are treated to one of the game's brief on-rails sections, during which they can only aim and shoot. Fortunately, they're treated to a versatile new type of turret, and it's basically a grenade launcher on crack; it emits rapid volleys of large grenades that can be remote detonated when the trigger is held down, just like with its little brother.

The Falcon flies through a canyon, past bridges with turrets, vehicles and other enemies, all wasted in the face of the grenade turret. Finally, the goal is in sight: an enormous Spire that's been generating "electromagnetic cloaking fields" (whatever that means). It's surrounded by an overarching, translucent blue shield bubble, and as soon as the Falcon passes the barrier, it loses power, plummeting to the ground. Again, it's lights out for Noble 6. One can't help but wonder why the Spartan finds himself on the ground so often. Once again, he comes to facing a weapon. This time, however, he shakes off the crash and straps on a jet pack.

The subsequent slope is littered with enemies and huge boulders. Aggressive, Jackal-like Skirmishers armed with focus rifles leap from boulder to boulder, and Elite squads roam the ground between the rocks, making this section challenging to traverse, even with the jet pack. Thankfully, there are a number of choices players can make here.

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The goal is to ascend to the top of the Spire and deactivate its shields, which isn't nearly as easy as it sounds. A full jet pack charge will get Noble 6 about halfway up, and that's a viable option, if he can navigate past the anti-air Shade turrets. He can also go in at the bottom of the tower, taking a page out of the Master Chief's book and shooting his way through. If he's *really* lucky, he can even use the jet pack and some clever timing to hijack a Banshee in midair. Players skillful enough to pull this off will be treated to the purple flying machine's slightly tweaked abilities, including a new, more intuitive control scheme, and the capability for the powerful fuel rod cannon to lock onto other banshees and turrets.

Once the Spire's been traversed and the few remaining enemies on top dispatched, Noble 6 hits a switch, and the enormous bubble shield disperses. A cut scene kicks in, and the Spartan leaps into a waiting Falcon with the rest of Noble Team. A gargantuan human frigate descends from orbit and fires a powerful Mass Acceleration (MAC) round into the spire, only to be destroyed by a "goliath" cruiser.

The Spire is decimated, however, and all hope is not yet lost.

*Halo: Reach comes out September 14, and Bungie was kind enough to invite us out to sunny San Francisco this week to spend two full days exploring every aspect of the game.*