Hands-on with Halo: Reach: Firefight

By **kombo**   -   May 4, 2012

Three comrades and I are holed up at the top of a heavily fortified slope, brows dripping sweat and hands white-knuckled, clutching our weapons (controllers) as if they were our frantically beating hearts themselves. I hear the beat of Covenant war drums in the distance, and several Phantom drop ships enter my field of vision. They spread out in front of me, coming to a hovering stop high off the ground at strategic points throughout the battlefield. From the insectile hulls pour dozens of majestically bestial Elite, their mandibles snapping wildly in anticipation.

Our only weapons are sniper rifles. I wonder how long weâ€™ve been up here, and where all the ammo is coming from – I swear it should have run out hours ago. As the first Elites come into range, bottlenecked between the boulders and outcroppings littering the slope spread out below me, I see my shot, take it – crack! Like ducks in a row, three Elites fall. "BE THE BULLET," says a familiar voice in my head. I smile.

This scenario was created by Bungieâ€™s own community director Brian Jarrard (also known as "SKE7CH") using Firefightâ€™s new suite of customization tools, which add a level of depth that the last *Halo* game, *ODST* lacked. "SNIPERTIMEZ," as Jarrard calls it, was one of my favorite modes at this week's two-day *Halo: Reach* marathon in San Francisco. Each player was limited to a sniper rifle and pistol, though the pistol saw little use, since the sniper rifle damage had been cranked up to 200%. Almost every enemy could be killed in one shot, but the sheer number of them ensured the mode was still challenging, especially when the Elites were armed with snipers, as well.

But custom weapon sets and rules, infinite ammo and highly, *highly* customizable waves of enemies are only some of the features new to *Halo: Reach*'s Firefight mode that will have fans foaming at the mouth.
Â

Firefight, a riff on Horde mode from *Gears of War 2*, pits up to four players against wave after wave of increasingly difficult enemies, with a few variables thrown in from round to round and map to map. Though it was introduced in *ODST*, the lack of matchmaking and general repetitiveness may have stopped the mode from really taking off in in that game. Now that it's been fleshed out to a ridiculous degree for *Halo: Reach*, though, I can almost guarantee that it will become most *Halo* fans' favorite mode.

Each wave of enemies can be customized down to the most minute details, including what enemies spawn, what types of weapons they'll carry, what order they appear in, whether they're flown in on a drop ship or simply spawn somewhere on the map, and more options.

In *Reach*, players decide exactly when "skulls" – which, when activated, trigger changes in health, physics, damage, or other variables – will be flipped on or off, and best of all, they can even create up to three custom skulls. Custom skulls, designed by players, can affect speed, jump capabilities or weight, damage, ammunition, and nearly any other variable. Alternately, they can even affect how the waves of enemies behave.

Another option new to custom Firefight matches includes whether players can pick up weapons off the ground, meaning custom gametype designers can force players to stick with whatever weapon and ability loadout they spawned with, whether that be snipers and pistols or just giant Brute hammers. Loadouts are also customizable, and they can be turned off entirely, along with armor abilities.
Â

Two players can even take control of Elites in the attacking Covenant forces in the new Firefight versus mode. The two Spartan players must do their best to defend against the hordes of Covenant troops and rack up points, just like in normal Firefight, but in versus, killing the opposing Elite players is immediately awarded with extra lives. In turn, the Elites must gain the upper hand by eliminating the Spartans until they're out of lives. The round ends, and the players switch sides. The team with the most points at the end of two (or more) rounds wins.

Ã¢â‚¬Â¨In another custom Firefight scenario, my teammates and I find ourselves spread out atop a multi-tired, sprawling building, with grassy slopes on either side and a covered

boulevard extending from the front of the building beneath your feet to a Covenant-occupied plaza in the distance. Phantoms unload troops on either side of the building, as well as in the plaza, which happens to be cluttered with cover that even the lowliest of Covenant troops are more than smart enough to take advantage of.

Again, I find myself with unlimited ammunition, though in this match the full range of *Reach*'s weapons is at my disposal – if I dare to brave the Ghosts, Wraith and Hunters patrolling the wide-open slopes where the ordinance has been dropped by allies far overhead. It's worth it, though. The drops contain a rocket launcher, a Spartan laser, a target locator (which can call in a hail of devastating fire from the sky, decimating an area wide enough to contain three Wraiths), and more.
Â

Suddenly, two enormous, shimmering pods drop from ships overhead and strike either side of your building, a squad of Brute shock troopers pouring from each. A wraith on the beach begins its assault in earnest, hurling enormous balls of crackling plasma with deadly accuracy despite its distance, and more troops pour into the plaza and begin their push up the boulevard. As the Brutes begin to ascend to your position, you hit the thruster on your jet pack, fly into the air and lay waste to everything in sight with lasers and rockets, thanking Bungie for that infinite ammo option.

With *Reach*â€™s Firefight, Bungie has taken the essence of *Halo* – the grenades, headshots, enemies, and everything else we love – and packed it into a highly customizable, practically endless mode complete with matchmaking and co-op. Whatâ€™s not to love?

Halo: Reach *comes out September 14, and Bungie was kind enough to invite us out to sunny San Francisco to spend two full days exploring every aspect of the game. Keep an eye out for the rest of our coverage!*

[Click here to go back to the index!](#)

kombo