

[EV]Garniso's Halo 2 Vista Review

First of all let me start this review by giving a little of my background info. I have been playing Halo PC since early 2004 along with BF2, BF2142, some of the COD series, AA, and multiple hours on Halo2 Xbox when it first came out. Many of you may know me as [EV]Garniso or have played on our servers so are aware that I have put in many long hours going over Halo PC's multiplayer aspect (especially dedicated servers).

Game Overview: One of the most notably new features with Halo 2 Vista is the ability to jump directly into the game while it installs. This is very cool feature to have however it is prone to problems and when it does work, the game is almost impossible to play due to system lag. The game does not support many options for users to customize their video settings aside from level of detail, no vsync, and anti-aliasing. However when it comes to customizing your multiplayer character, users get a larger choice of colors, symbols, and to play as either a Spartan or Elite. For those wanting to play with a controller, H2V supports the use of an Xbox360 controller and has menu options designed for controller use. Support for the usage of a controller has drawn major criticism for the auto-aim the controllers receive when compared to the keyboard/mouse.

Campaign: Halo 2 Vista is pretty much exactly like its Xbox counterpart when it comes down to the campaign aspect. The graphics are some of the best when it comes to a DX9 game and each campaign level is modeled very well. (*Note: My system specs can be found at the end of this article). The enemy AI has been improved significantly since the original game but don't expect anything grand from your friendly forces. I have found that on the Heroic difficulty the game is quite easy expect in certain areas where the sheer amount of enemies that the game throws at you can be overwhelming. The campaign does have its hiccups though. Friendly forces tend to get stuck running into walls/objects instead of following you, I can guarantee you that you will die a couple of times from friendly AI fire (especially Marines with the battle rifle for some reason), the amount of damage that a weapon will inflict varies throughout the game (You might be able to kill an elite with a Cov. Carbine in 6 head shots or 15 head shots....no I'm not kidding), and Pelicans tend to do their own thing sometimes. Aside from this, H2V's campaign is both fun and challenging especially if you are new to the game.

Multiplayer: The multiplayer aspect of H2V is indubitably the biggest factors for buying the game and in my opinion it currently falls short in many areas. However before I start my critiquing, I will go over some of the positives. H2V sports a much improved netcode that reduces lag and cuts down leading distances when compared to Halo PC. I also like H2V's built in Windows/Xbox Live system because it brings community building tools (matchmaking, friends list, and party groups) that allow new/non-clan players to become more involved instead of relying heavily on 3rd party applications. For those who enjoy playing custom maps, H2V now allows gold members to download custom maps as they wait in the serve lobby. Now for my major critiques of H2V's online play:

1. Silver/Gold Accounts: This is the one feature that I absolutely hate. With a silver account you can play online but with limitations such as not being able to access gold

servers, not being able to use the quick match function, and not being able to use the server filtering options (which is utterly outrageous to pay \$50 for a game and only be able to use half of the options that you already paid for). As of right now the only thing that the \$40/year Gold accounts get you, aside from the aforementioned, are the achievements. I would like some stat tracking with gold accounts such as kills, deaths, hours played, and weapons stats (Similar to what EA does the with their BF2 accounts for free *cough*).

2. The Server Browser: The server browser needs some major revision because it does not display anywhere close to the same amount of info that HaloPC did. The browser is very dark and when coupled with the dark lettering, reading the list can be difficult (especially when it comes to telling if the server is gold only or locked). The server ping is now a cell phone style 3 bar graph which makes it very difficult to tell exactly what latency you are getting. One option I was stunned to see missing was direct connect via IP. This option, which is basically like standard power windows & locks in cars, is commonly used by clans to get into match servers and its absence is like a slap in the face.

3. In-Game Scoreboard: My complaint with this is that during a CTF game, the only thing that this window will show is the number of flag captures a person has and their ping. No longer does it list the number of kills/deaths/or assists that us Halo PC players are used to. I have no idea why they would leave this out but as a non-capper, I find it to be a disappointment to not be able to see how I am doing.

4. Text Chat System: The in-game text chat system makes no distinction about whether you are typing globally or to your team. Text is now less intrusive on the screen but in doing so I find myself not even seeing half of the chat. Also, the text system no longer shows when a player is killed & who killed them. Instead, transparent wording appears in the upper left hand part of the screen. Now while some may like this, this new system has a tendency to lag and sometimes it doesn't even show up making it hard to know who killed you or if you got the person going behind a corner. Text chat is now absent from the post game report, so if you don't have a mic or are not using the voice chat system, you can forget about telling your opponents good game. I do like the ability to be able to bounce out of chat mid-sentence, go fight, and then be able to come back and pick up where you left off.

5. Voice Chat System: The voice chat system has its pluses and minuses. It is a good system to have when you have non-clan players on and it allows for better teamwork. However, it is a system that quickly becomes abused by immature players. Already I have found several of these players and while they can be muted, the process takes up valuable game time while you click through several menus. The overall quality of the system is extremely poor (basically like/lower than the quality of the xbox version) and is utterly useless for those who use Ventrillo or Teamspeak. There is an option for push-to-talk but it has yet to work for me.

Dedicated Server: If I was a game server provider I would have second thoughts about offering H2V hosting right now. Microsoft decided to tie dedicated servers into their Live system by requiring them to have their own unique gamertag (yes just like the one every player must have). This gamertag becomes the name of the server so you can forget about any fancy naming stuff and hope that the name you want is not already taken! When it

comes to administrative stuff, your only option is to use a program that runs along side the h2server program called "h2admin" because there is no Rcon support (until they add it in). That means you either need access to the operating system the server is running on or your provider will need to write a lot of scripts. The H2V server has many positives. Admins now have the option to record the post game stats for each game (a plus for clans), send global messages to the players on the server, and the ability to set the server to shuffle through a list of up to 100 custom playlists (aka gametypes). Any mistakes that are made in the way a gametypes is written are now skipped over instead of crashing the server like in HaloPC. Finally, the modding community can rejoice as custom maps can be loaded directly onto the server to be enjoyed by anyone with a Gold account.

Final Comments: Halo 2 Vista is an amazing game when it comes to graphics and the single player campaign. However at its current state the game is prone to numerous installation and general running problems. The online multiplayer still needs major revision before it comes up to today's current standards. For those wanting to know when they should buy the game, I suggest that you wait a couple of months so that Microsoft has time to release updates. With some work & updates, Halo 2 Vista has the potential to be a great game.

My System: P4 @3.20GHz w/ 800Mhz FSB, Nvidia GeForce Go 6800, 3GB of RAM, 80GB Hitachi HD (2X40GB Drives) @ 7200RPM in RAID 0 Mode, 500GB WesternDigital eSATA @ 7200RPM, & Windows Vista Business