The intent of this article is to teach Halo strategy. Halo players skilled in solo missions sometimes find the online experience frustrating. The rules governing play between computer and human opponents are completely different, with a healthy dose of lag thrown into the mix.

These tips, with luck, will stop you from dying immediately upon entering Blood Gulch, the Halo demo map.

To win at multiplayer Halo, you must understand the nature of online shooting games. Your computer must communicate with others in the game, and with the server host, over your internet connection. Unlike play with computer opponents, this isn't instantaneous.

Ping is a measure of time it takes to receive a response from an information packet sent to the server host. Ping directly affects your in-game lag, or the difference in what you see on the screen from where your opponent actually is. Ping and lag determine the distance you must adjust your aim. If you don't adjust, you shots will hit where you opponent used to be, not where he is.

So. *How can you hit someone when you lag?* Clearly you must predict where they will be in the future and aim there. The lower your ping, the less distance you have to predict.

Predictability defines multiplayer Halo. Let me say this again. Predictability *defines* multiplayer Halo. If you can guess where you opponent will be in 1/10 of a second, you can shoot him. Conversely, if you make your movement unpredictable, your opponent will have a difficult time shooting you. Everything you do must revolve around this goal.

Basic Strategy

Movement

Shoot ahead of your opponent while strafing rapidly back and forth, left and right. Then hide, and reload. Lather, rinse, repeat.

Let's break this down. Strafing is the most basic difference between online and solo play. It absolutely confounds your opponent's ability to predict where you'll be; thus, they can't easily hit you. .. unless you do it wrong. Your guy moves in four directions. If you strafe only left and right, a second shooter at your oblique can pick you off as if you were standing still. Unless you're absolutely sure you aren't being tracked, stutterstep backward every few feet in addition to lateral strafing.

Skilled players can move their aim from one side of you to another almost immediately. The speed and duration of your lateral strafing depends on your opponent. In general, better opponents require more frequent direction changes. Certain otherwise exceptional players take this too far and do what look like repeated sideways twitches, but they don't move far enough to require aiming adjustments. Their opponents have only to aim dead center and at least one in three shots will hit.

But I digress. Slow, predictable strafing is only marginally better than running in a beeline at your opponent. Spice it up or die quickly.

Even exceptional players can be lax in technique. Some will strafe in a predictable manner you can parrot step for step, and then it's just a matter of slight forward lead adjustment to make every shot hit. Circular strafing suffers from this.

Movement is the most fundamental skill in this game. Always, always, ALWAYS, be moving. A stationary opponent is a dead one. If you're behind a hill, move anyway. Learn how to snipe and move at the same time. The de facto rule of sniping is that you never do it from the same place twice. Fire a few shots in succession and then go somewhere the hell else. Don't use the gunner positions on any vehicle if someone isn't actively driving you somewhere.

Terrain

Hiding is an extension of terrain use. Blood Gulch is loaded with hills, valleys, trucks, and various other implements to hide in or behind. Hills are the most easily defensible areas in the game. They allow you to shoot downward at an opponent that can't hide.

Running over open ground is an invitation to die. Move from hill to hill, minimizing your time in an open position. Like a western outlaw, always have your back to a safe place. If you're at all familiar with SWAT, this is an adaptation of the 'slice of pie' room entry technique.

Jumping

Jumping will kill you. You wouldn't know this joining most servers and watching the populous hop themselves silly. In Halo, the ability to change direction mid-flight is VERY limited. If you're trying to be unpredictable, jumping is the worst possible thing you could do, because the jump trajectory and descent rate is fixed. Nearly all high-level sniping occurs when a middling opponent is in mid-jump.

Nothing is worse than watching an opponent shooting at you while you're reloading. When you want to reload in a firefight, hide first. Then come out of hiding *somewhere else* and start shooting again. Always have a full clip. In the army, recruits learn never to pass up an opportunity to eat, sleep, or use the john. Same applies to reloading.

Leading

At 50 ping, expect to have to lead (shoot ahead of) your opponents by 1-3 feet. This increases to 5 feet at 100 ping, and around 7 feet at 150 ping. Beyond 150 ping, rely on weapons with splash damage and prepare to waste a lot more ammunition.

Weapon Overview

Pistol-

Effective from 10 feet to approximately 400 feet. Extremely effective at middle-distance (100 feet). Two firing modes; tap fire (repeated mouse clicks), and sustained (mouse held down); tap-fire is far more accurate. Sustained is useful to finish off banshees. 3 shots minimum to kill, more with body-shots alone. Fires extremely quickly-- in practice an opponent never knows what hit them.

This is easily the most useful weapon in the game. You start with one. Never drop it unless you run out of ammo.

Shotgun-

Effective 10 feet and closer. Exceptional weapon to bring down most banshees. Poor in close combat against good opponents because of slow firing rate and lag. Kills in one shot point blank, many more as distance increases.

Assault Rifle-

Effective from 20 feet and closer. Weak weapon, but superior to the pistol in close combat. Useful in a pinch against banshees nearer than 50 feet.

Sniper Rifle-

Effective from 50 feet to infinity. 2X and 8X zoom; 8X is for extremely distant stationary targets; it slows down your mouse movement too much to track moving opponents. Kills in one shot to the head, or two to the body.

Extremely useful in tandem with the pistol; one body shot completely strips your opponents shield. The SR takes a great deal of practice because, of all weapons, it is the most affected by lag.

Flamethrower-

Useless. Difficult to obtain on most maps, range extends no further than 20 feet. Takes too long to kill. Nice for banshees, but you won't have it when you face off against one. Decent for use in base defense.

Smaller Alien Weapons-

Useless.

Rocket Launcher-

Effective from 5-15 feet, and again from 300-500 feet. Fires slow, powerful, accurate projectiles. Aim at your opponents feet and they will die from splash damage. Slow firing

rate, slow to reload. One shot kills banshees, provided you can compensate for lag. More sensitive in general to lag than the green gun.

Green Plasma Gun-

Superior weapon. Fires arcing projectiles with half the strength and splash damage of rockets, but at a far faster rate. Will overheat with rapid fire of 5 shots, time to cool is roughly the same as it takes the RL to reload. Capable of some 30 shots before ammo runs out. Superlative to take down banshees, far easier than the RL.

Coupled with the pistol, this combination covers all but the farthest range.

To sum this up, nine in ten of your kills will come from the pistol. Never drop it. Use the sniper rifle, green gun, and rocket launcher as the situation demands. Don't be afraid to drop a powerful weapon for something else if it won't help you right then; if you're dead, you won't be able to fire it anyway.

Advanced Strategy

How to Beat (read: irritate) an Expert Player

Gang up on him, distract him, or run him over when he isn't looking.

Good players hate to use vehicles because you can't shoot and drive at the same time, because they're control freaks, and because vehicles are sniper fodder. So, inevitably, they'll be running around on foot from hill to hill in the manner I've described above. This is important.

Even a top player has difficulty when more than one person fires at him, particularly in such a way as to prevent him from hiding. Throw in a third person and he'll almost certainly go down. The first method, ganging up, is the brute force approach.

Distracting is a next rung up. The goal of CTF is to bring your opponent's flag to your base. End-game ranking is determined first by the number of flags brought back, and only then by the number of kills. Even if he's dropped everyone on your team 30 times over again, if you score once, your teams still wins. The idea is to distract him enough to get him to ignore the flag carrier.

How can you distract him? The easiest way is to run him over with something. A banshee, a truck, whatever. Anything that moves. It should resemble a bullfighting session; you'll drive at him, he'll hop to one side, and you'll turn around and try it again. If you're lucky, you kill him. If not, your guy who's surreptitiously been grabbing the flag all this time may just have a chance to get back to base with it before you die. And then you win.

The last way is an extension of vehicles and additional manpower. Engage the opponent

in pistol combat; when he's looking at you, there's a fair chance he won't be watching his radar screen. Then, have someone else run him over. Expect to hear the phrase 'noob' volleyed back forth a bit; of course, if you grab the flag and win while he's dead, how much of a noob can you be? :~)

Psychologically, most people who've played for a while are absolutely convinced of their own superiority. It takes only a few kills to start most of them into a downward spiral. Frustrated people aim poorly; if you can maintain an air of detachment and keep the chat to a bare minimum (better yet, none), you can rattle even the best of players. In the upper echelons of play, every trick counts.

Scatterfire

Scatterfire is the name I've coined for a pistol technique to defeat rapid strafing. In higher levels of play, you spend less and less time aiming directly at a player. Scatterfire takes this a step further; you *never* aim at the player.

Instead, you aim a few feet to his left, and then immediately a few feet to his right, and alternate this rapidly (6-8 aim changes a second) until one of you dies. All the while you're tapping the fire button.

Exceedingly few players know how to do this. It's counterproductive against lesser opponents, for whom standard leading is far more effective. But as your opponents increase it skill, it can be invaluable.

Weapons Technique and Notes

Waste ammo! Lots of it!

Your opponents are enormously impatient. Even if you shred their shields while they strafe behind a hill, they'll wait only a few seconds before popping up again. Most are predictable enough that you'll have a good idea *where* they'll come up, so it's just a matter of unloading rounds at that general area. So what if you can't see them. Dozens of easy headshots can stem from this kind of circumstance.

As an extension, it's in your interests NOT to be impatient. Defensive is hugely less difficult than offense. Make your opponent come to you. Play on your terms, on your terrain, and you may well dictate who wins.

Effective Vehicle Use

Vehicles make and break multiplayer Halo. A good player can control Blood Gulch with a sniper rifle and a pistol from either mid-map spawn point. This weapon combination, however, is wholly unsuited to combating vehicles. It takes some 30 rounds of pistol fire to kill a player in a vehicle from close range. It's a ridiculous waste of time for a good player, which is why vehicles are such excellent diversions.

The most powerful demo combination is a machine gunner and driver. The rocket truck

fires too slowly and with too little precision to be useful as anything but quick transportation. Two players devoted to driving in circles from base to base with the flag can win a game in less than five minutes.

In general, it's a very poor idea to drive directly at any player (to run them over) if they know you're there, particularly around mid-map where the explosive weapons are located. It comes back to predictability; if they can guess where you'll drive, they can toss a grenade in your way. Erratic movement is a plus. If you DON'T want to run them over, you can end a stalemate by using the vehicle to cover the ground between you quickly, and then jumping out pistol in hand as you near.

The most powerful defensive weapon is the banshee. That's right, *defensive*. As an offensive weapon, the banshee is relegated to a supporting roll because they're so easy to take down, particularly with a moving machine gunner or a lone player with a shotgun. But one banshee hiding in the shadows on the home side can prevent the other team taking your flag for the entire game.

Clan Play

A clan is a collection of advanced players that join to become a team. They practice and match against other clans. The winning clan gets to put their fingers in their ears, wave their hands, stick out their tongues, and say 'i beat you, i beat you!'. Yeah, it's all about maturity folks.

Rotating Names

Play against a person long enough and you get a feel for their favorite techniques. Play longer, and you learn how to combat them. Player longer still, and you can use their play style against them.

Why does this matter? In clan play, the standard naming convention is CID_Name (CID=clan identifier). Everyone has a unique handle. You only have to learn a given player's style and capabilities once because they keep the same name from match to match. Lesser players can then be ignored.

Ideally, though, clans would employ rotating number lists in place of names. CID_SixNumericalDigits. Then, every second or third match, everyone would choose a different number. The upshot is your opponents have no idea who's who, and it's like playing a completely different team. To your advantage.

Slightly more difficult to implement are incomprehensible names. Certain special characters can be nearly impossible to read in the brief time they flash onscreen. Have your clan members choose names of approximately equal length with similar gibberish names. The only thing worse than not knowing who shot you is dying a second time while trying to read the name. Believe me, it works.

Who plays where?

In a game played purely for fun, positioning and strategy matter little. It takes a certain importance in clan games, however.

Playing 5 on 5, two players should be roving offense intended to irritate the other team. Two more should be on truck and gunner detail, and the last in a banshee. The banshee should be used in a predominately defensive role, and against weaker teams, in fire support of the truck.

4 on 4, same thing except without a truck gunner.

3 on 3, no truck gunner and no second roving offense.

2 on 2, you shouldn't have a roving offense at all. One person in a banshee, and another in a truck. If banshees aren't allowed, then you may have a person on foot around mid-map. As before, one person with a pistol and a sniper rifle can control the map from the mid-spawn points. Trading the rifle for the plasma gun or a rocket launcher can stop an opponent taking you flag to his base in a truck.

Future Topics:

Loads of shit. But I'm tired now.

shadow6 / muse