

Wading into the pool of MJOLNIR armor designs was a much deeper step than I had anticipated. I knew from the video game that there were a *lot* of armor variations, as well as a few different standalone versions, and even different generations around those versions. It wasn't surprising to see that they were so interested in advancing and refining the technology behind the armor, as it represented not only a significant investment but also a highly potent tool. It did make the branches a bit harder to follow, though.

Even worse, for later generations, the UNSC seemed to have an obsession with generating hundreds of variations, some with minor differences that seemed to do very little beyond cosmetic changes. Other modifications were attempts to create specialized units, Spartans equipped for stealth and infiltration, melee combat, long-term deployment, electronic warfare, or handling specialized ordnance.

Thankfully, there was a bit of light at the end of the tunnel, in that almost all of these spliced armor types were modular additions. On top of that, they almost never interacted with the undersuit beyond linking into the control unit. This meant that with only a few different iterations, I would be able to get a firm grip on the various distinct variations by completing only a few different iterations. For some of them, I would even be able to reuse the undersuit to make different sets, clearing them out even faster.

First, I would have to get to the versions of the armor that had that level of modularity, which meant clearing Generation 1. I quickly produced a Mark V suit, which only contained two differences from the Mark IV, making it a relatively easy upgrade. The Mark V was the first suit to include shields, and was also where the implementation of the Memory-processor superconductor layer, which was the massively powerful computing layer that enabled a fully functional Smart AI to inhabit the armor.

After the Mark V, I was able to skip a bit and produce a Mark VII, which had some minor technological improvements, and led right into the development of the Generation 2.

The process of creating armor began to spiral together at that point, as I was trying to cover everything that I could, including the wide variety of outer-layer variations. Eventually, after producing six functioning iterations, I was through the earlier versions and could finally see the Generation 3 MJOLNIR power armor, the highest generation the tech tree had to offer.

While technologically superior in most ways, the Gen 3 was actually *weaker* than the Gen 1, though the armor still used polymerized LiNb. In fact, I was fairly sure this was done on purpose, so that the slightly weaker Spartan IVs could use them.

Thankfully, I didn't have that problem. I was already building these armors around a reinforced and strengthened ALEO unit, the same form that Riggs and Murtaugh eventually ended up in after a frequent stream of upgrades, as well as my robotic doppelgangers. This version could handle the most powerful version of the armor, never mind the generation designed for the weaker wearers. I would likely be reversing the lowered power levels when I made my own versions, while also including the various technological upgrades.

As I took a deeper look at the Gen 3 armor, specifically as I was copying down the first design version I could see, it became rather apparent that this generation was in a similar boat to the Spartan IV augmentation program, Project Orchid. As I had observed when working my way through that branch, the UNSC saw the Spartan IV's as unilateral success, something they could present to the public and continue to invest in. It was a program they integrated into their hierarchy, meaning that it was not a one-and-done project that was hidden away after completion. It received constant updates, iterations, tweaks, and shifts.

While individually these changes were never enough to be called a new version, they still represented a steady stream of improvement, ranging from small changes in implementation to adjustments in the materials used for specific implants.

The Gen 3 armor, and technically a good chunk of the Gen 2, worked the same way. There was no Mark IIX, IX, or X, just one generation improved over time. What all that meant for me was that while there was only technically one Gen3 MJOLNIR Powered Assault Armor, I had to rebuild it three times, with each time the product being noticeably different, as whole different adjustments, tweaks, and updates were implemented.

And this didn't even include having to rebuild the outer layer over a half-dozen times to unlock the frankly ridiculous number of modular additions or changes that the Gen 3 boasted.

After another few hours of work, the parts finally settled into place, and the final download of information locked itself into my mind. I had officially gotten everything out of the MJOLNIR armor project that I wanted, and then some. When I was done, I quickly changed out the last outerlayer I worked on, the [Rakshasa armor variant](#), with the bog standard normal Gen 3 outer layer.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the entire project was the personal shield system. This system went through more iterations than any other part throughout the armor's entire lifespan, from the moment it was developed until the very end of the branch I had access to. The first version added to the armor had been a near copy of Covenant systems, barely understood enough to produce it themselves. The final versions, however, were incredibly precise, capable of shifting shape, reacting to certain dangers, and adapting to a variety of combat applications.

Technically speaking, I had other shield types that I could hypothetically make more energy-efficient and tougher, or at least more stable and less likely to pop under repeated damage. Those systems, however, were not nearly flexible enough to provide full coverage for a moving, fighting individual. They made formidable barriers in certain circumstances, but could not compete with MJOLNIR in terms of flexibility. Or, really, come even close.

I was already trying to figure out how to make it small enough to wear inconspicuously. At the moment, on a normal person, I could fit the shield generator and power source in a large, hardshell backpack, which was not small enough in my book.

Pushing the design puzzle out of my head for a moment, I stood from my seat and stretched, my back popping as I groaned. I had been working nonstop since the free fall tunnel had started producing materials, and I was definitely looking forward to lying down for a bit.

I made my way up to my room, had a quick snack, and crawled into bed. I couldn't help but giggle a bit to myself out of excitement, both at the progress I had made throughout the day, but also at the fact that, when I closed my eyes, I immediately linked up to my robotic Doppelganger, who was currently standing down in my lab.

Clad in Generation 3 MJOLNIR power armor.

As I "woke up" in the lab, I was very careful to move slowly, lowering my arms as gradually as I could. When I was done, I slowly looked around, moving at a snail's pace so as not push the armor too hard and throw myself around.

The internal HUD for the armor blinked, and for a moment, I was stunned by one of the most nostalgic sounds I had heard in a long time. An unignorable beeping filled my helmet, a warning that my shields were down, before a slow-growing hum overtook it. The hum was made even more visceral as I could feel the energy build up, feel my shields establish themselves around me.

I just barely managed to keep myself from jumping up and down.

I let out a long breath and slowly shifted forward, attempting to take a step off the assembly station. Of course, my attempt failed rather spectacularly, as I threw myself off the platform and tumbled forward, eventually landing on my back, where I stayed for a long moment. When I was certain I hadn't miscalculated, and the armor hadn't pulled the robot I was controlling to pieces, I slowly began to get used to the armor, starting with my hands, working my way up to my arms, wiggling my feet, and flexing my knees. It wasn't overly complicated, I had experienced sudden increases of strength before, after all, including every time I stepped into a Doppelganger. It was just never to this degree.

Eventually, I was able to stand and walk around, quickly transitioning into running and jumping. Soon enough, I was bored of bouncing around the workshop, so I quickly made my way to the massive, ship-building assembly room. The Winter-class prowler was still there, untouched for now, and even better, the remains of the original baseball stadium, on which the whole facility was built to save time during the first week of the Halo tech tree, were still intact.

I couldn't help but smirk before using my interface to quickly send Samwise a message.

The intact structure, including rows of seats, the two dugouts, an announcer's booth, concession stands, and more, had been kept in case we ever wanted to restore the field, sometimes after we moved the large-scale assembler. Now, however, it was going to be my playground.

I jumped and ran up the stairs, pushing myself to see how fast I could move. The connection between the improved ALEO frame and the armor was near perfect, a modification

to the unit itself, not the armor. This made the suit feel like a second skin, with every shift, turn, and twitch magnified and enhanced. The more I got used to it, the more I flowed along like I had been born this way.

I was tearing up seats from the concrete and throwing them across the stands when several MRVNs arrived at the stadium, carrying with them crates of weapons onto the field. As I made my way down, dozens and dozens of shades started to make their way through as well, carrying armored panels, empty crates, and more, lugging them past me and further down the long underground facility.

When one of the MRVN units cracked open the box, revealing an array of classic Halo weapons, I quickly sent Samwise a thank you message, before diving back in to arm myself.

After about hemming and hawing about what loadout to take, I eventually settled on my choices, quickly stocking up on ammo. I turned to head down into one of the dugouts, but stopped to snag a little extra, dropping it by the entrance to the offices and locker rooms as I went.

For a few minutes, I waited in the back, letting the MRVNs and shades work, doing my best not to giggle and cackle to myself. When all of the MRVNs had cleared out, and both Samwise and Murtaugh had given me the all clear, I reached behind my back and grabbed my [battle rifle](#), tugging it free from the maglock with a massive grin on my face.

"Alright, Murtaugh... send them in."

Almost immediately, I could hear the sounds of a door being kicked in, the entrance to the back room now open. I counted down for a few seconds before popping out of the room I was hiding in, and with the reticle linked up to my helmet, smoothly pulled the trigger of the battle rifle.

The rattling triple threat of each trigger pull filled the hall as I fired as fast as the gun would cycle. My large frame easily absorbed the recoil, and the absolute precision of both my artificial body and my armor meant every single shot was on target.

Down the end of the hall, my opening barrage tore through the first shade through the door, cracking its armor plates and tearing through its head and chest, dropping it after the third trigger pull. The second and third shades followed the first into the hall, and as they raised their weapons to fire, I ducked into another room.

Without slowing down, I moved around the room, finding another door along the same wall. I pulled a grenade from my hip and threw it with near-perfect aim, smashing it through the glass windows of the door. Counting down in my head again, I had barely even stepped back before the grenade detonated, the explosion causing my shields flare up a bit as debris and shrapnel skipped off them.

"Ooh, those grenades are spicy," I said, noting my shields had dipped by about twenty percent. "Note to self, throw them further."

The grenade had utterly obliterated the entire door, and as I stepped through, I could see that it had also obliterated three more shades. I stepped over them, the parts crushing under my boots a reminder that I weighed over half a ton. I pushed further down the hall, sliding my battle rifle over my shoulder and onto my back, letting go as I felt the armor lock it in place, only to [pull my shotgun free](#).

I stepped around a corner, taking in the whole scene at once. At the far end of the hall, I could see the smashed open door to the dugout and the open space beyond. Between the door and myself, however, were another half a dozen shades.

Crushing down my instinct to hide in cover, I dashed forward, my boots leaving cracks in the ground as I all but flew down the corridor. I lowered my shoulder and slammed into the first shade, hard enough to drain my shields another chunk. The shade had no such protections, however, and the hit caved in the robot's chest. The broken robot tumbled backwards, slamming into the next shade in line, knocking it down as well. The third and fourth shades were fine, however, and raised their mag rifles.

I cursed as the metal slugs slammed into my shields, each shot taking out a decent-sized chunk. Rather than retreat, however, I raised my shotgun and fired.

While playing Halo, it was easy to forget some of the scale involved. A fully armored Spartan is about seven feet tall, just about matching the average [Elite](#). A [Brute](#) would usually be head and shoulders above that. Even the [Grunts](#) and [Jackals](#) were between five and six feet tall. Not to mention that all of them were armored in fancy Covenant armor and shields, making them even larger and tougher.

And the M90 Close Assault Shotgun *still* put them down like an eight-gauge message from God.

The shades did not have a fucking chance.

Each slug hit with near-mechanical precision, tearing off robotic limbs and blowing off chunks of ceramic armor. In one case, a pair of shots nearly bisected a shade as it turned to try to get cover back outside of the hall.

Of course, despite my own lethality, the shades weren't complete pushovers. While I was tearing them to pieces, almost half a dozen mag rounds tore themselves to shreds trying to get through my shields, until finally, the already weakened fields failed.

I could feel and see as the shield dropped, a flash of golden energy marking the release of the contained plasma and quantum energy fields, as well as a noticeable release of pressure. The shields didn't exactly restrict me in any way, as that would be a significant flaw in their implementation. But seeing them essentially burst as they absorbed too much damage did make me feel as if a layer around me had been released.

Whether that was psychosomatic or real was not a question I could answer.

As the warning tones played, the armor warning me that I was vulnerable, I slowly and [methodically reloaded my shotgun](#), eyes locked onto the doorway. I could just see onto the field, though most of it was blocked by a slab of portable cover, stuck into the clay. As I walked forward, I slowed my steps, purposely taking my time to let my shields regenerate. I carefully slid my now-full shotgun into the maglock on my back, pulled off my battle rifle and reloaded it, then stored it when I was done.

As I stepped out of the hall, I reached down and pulled the pair of M6D magnums on my hips free. This was real life after all, I had no limit on the amount of weapons I could carry.

As I stepped up and out of the dugout, my suit's sensors picked up the sound of metal on concrete and amplified it, allowing me to hear it clearly. I spun around to find nearly a dozen shades waiting for me in ambush. They opened fire, and I dove sideways, covering almost twenty feet to slide behind the deployable cover that had been blocking my view.

Coincidentally, I also slammed into the pair of shades waiting there to ambush me, crushing one and stunning the other long enough for me to slam my elbow across its face, putting a dent in it that almost came out the other side.

With a smooth kip-up, I popped up out of cover and opened fire, the .50 caliber pistol rounds cracking and chewing through the shade's ceramic armor plating. An intelligent, tactical person, someone not just screwing around, would be taking cover, maybe lobbing a grenade or switching to something a bit less Hollywood than dual-wielding .50 pistols. But I happily let my shields take the technically avoidable fire as I picked the robots off one by one.

Eventually, my lack of concern caught up with me, and my cover was overrun by more shades coming up from behind. I was forced to dive over my cover while dropping my pistols, tossing a pair of grenades up onto the area above the dugout, before taking cover inside.

The explosions rocked the lowered concrete space, but nothing collapsed down on me, so I considered it a win. My dive and roll into the lowered area also put me within reach of the little extra bonus I had grabbed for myself.

After a moment to prepare, I popped up again, the Spartan Laser on my shoulder already whining as I precharged the build-up of energy. I quickly shifted my aim across the field at the dug-in shades that had come from further down the field. The aim assisting laser pointer showed me exactly where the beam was going, making it damn easy to direct.

When the scarlet beam of energy fired out from the heavy weapon, it tore across the field, charring the clay closest to me. It slammed into their armored cover, melting a head-sized hole in it after just a few seconds, before eviscerating the shades behind it. The second, third, and fourth shots did the same amount of damage, leaving the whole strip of cover a melted, broken mess.

The final, fourth shot left the Spartan Laser drained, so I dropped it to the ground and switched back to my battle rifle, all while I jumped out of the dugout, *again*. This time, however, I

had no intention of returning and instead pushed forward, all the way to the back of the field, where the now glowing metal, shade, and armor pile was.

For the next hour and a half, I fought against the shades, pushing through the various rapidly deployed barriers, obstacles, and traps. For the most part, the shades could not come even close to keeping up with me, though their weapons were effective. Despite that, however, throughout the entire "battle," I was continuously my own worst enemy. I kept fighting like I was playing a video game, running through with checkpoint confidence, happily leaping into groups of "enemy" shades.

By the halfway point, I had lost both of my weapons to gunfire and was forced to scavenge weapons from the shades or just use my fists, both of which were exceedingly effective.

When I finally succeeded in my mission, reaching the far side of the long underground cavern, both my armor and the doppelganger had taken some damage, though I was still mostly functional. I essentially limped across the finish line, all smiles and laughs.

As I half collapsed onto a bullet-riddled crate, which just barely took my weight with a groan, I got a message from Samwise, asking if I was done, and if it was safe to send MRVNs in for cleanup. Not long after I confirmed that I was, I spotted them entering from the far end of the cavern, using the same protomatter converters they used to disassemble the starships to quickly clean up the mess I had made during my rather vigorous "testing." A few minutes later, Samwise arrived as well.

"How were the results?" He asked, nudging a shade head with his foot. "At the very least, you seemed to have enjoyed yourself."

"Oh, it was a blast, Sam," I assured him, chuckling a bit. "Basically, a childhood dream come true."

He was silent for a moment, before tilting his head and making a motion for me to continue.

"Oh! And the tests were conclusive as well," I added quickly. "MJOLNIR would be a sizable power increase to an ALEO unit as well, as long as it could handle the armor. I was clearly stronger, faster, and more durable, even without the shields."

"What about the element of separation?" Samwise asked, watching as a MRVN unit converted a nearby pile of shades to water. "Do you think you will continue to make the armor and the unit that fills it separately?"

"That's probably going to take some more experimentation," I admitted. "But there are precedents for having levels of separation. It would make repairs easier, along with upgrades."

"Noted. Will this be your first project once this tree is over?"

"I think so. The shades, and their predecessors, have always been a bit of a temporary fill," I explained, looking over a pile of the robots three four feet deep. "Their tech and development were sound, but their main strength had always been numbers. With everything I've learned from this tree, I can finally design a fully robotic, non-sentient army that will have both quality and quantity. Or, at least the base for it. I'm sure I'll have things to add or mix in over time."

Sam and I chatted for a bit longer before he reminded me what time it was, and that as of an hour and a half ago, I was officially on the last day of the Halo tech tree. After that, I left the robot doppelganger behind and "woke up" back in my body, already snuggled in bed and ready for sleep.

The following morning, I woke up a bit later and required a rather large amount of coffee to get going. Thankfully, despite being worried I wouldn't have enough time during my first week, I had happily accomplished everything from my "need" list. I had all of the best tech I could get, from slipspace, medicine, and vehicles, to starships, armor, and weapons. At this point, I was only one subject away from shifting over to the "want" category.

The last thing I needed was the UNSC's terraforming tech.

The UNSC and its interplanetary divisions had spread throughout their corner of the galaxy, settling many garden worlds. They also set up several projects to turn less-than-perfect worlds *into* garden worlds. They also took on terraforming projects after the Human-Covenant war, restoring the atmospheres of glassed planets.

None of these methods of altering planets was easy, quick, or perfectly effective. There was no terraforming seed that the UNSC launched at a planet that turned it into a verdant green world overnight. The terraforming process involved massive filtration systems, gigantic mirrors deployed by satellites, and sometimes even the introduction of chemicals into the planet's cycles to shift and change its natural biome. It was slow, basic, and honestly would take centuries to do, which was why I hadn't immediately leaped to add it to my repertoire. Sure, it might come in handy, and the knowledge I gained from it would most likely serve as a solid foundation, but I was trying to come up with ways to heal the Earth on a much shorter schedule, not several lifetimes.

Either way, I copied down the plans for a few satellites, some chemical spreaders, a few filtration systems, and more, before quickly putting together the smallest versions they had, using the medium-scale assembly room to put them all together. It didn't take long, just most of the morning, to essentially uncover and lock in the entire terraforming branch. I did send silent thanks to whoever decided to make several size variations for each system, as I would not have been nearly as successful if I had been forced to build them at their larger scales.

Eventually, I might end up using some of the air filtration systems, as the larger designs were powerful enough to create bubbles of purified air that could span entire cities and didn't have any issues interfering with electronic communications, unlike the air purifiers I used around Rocky Ridge.

After I was done with my morning project, I left the medium assembly room to grab a snack. On the way, I ended up running into Jackie, who slapped my shoulder in greeting.

"Saw you had some fun last night,choom!" He said with a big smile. "That armor looked killer! When can I try it on?"

"How did you know about that?" I asked, looking at him in confusion.

"Riggs asked about it at breakfast, and Samwise showed off some footage of it," He explained. "So? Whats the ETA Genio?"

"Sorry, Jackie, but you can't wear that, at least not as you are," I explained with a frown. "That armor is too strong. Just trying to move around in it would break you. I was wearing one of my Doppelgangers, the reinforced ALEO, and that was just strong enough to wear it."

"You made armor you can't wear?" he asked, sounding confused.

"I will be able to once Frank finishes working on the first iteration of our super soldier regimen."

"English Genio, you know I can't keep up with all that," Jackie said. "What do you mean by super soldier regimen?"

"Frank is working on harmonizing standard bioware, previous bioware I developed, and the bioware I've deployed in the last two weeks," I explained. "He is attempting to work it down into the simplest, easily administered or implanted options, collecting them together, hammering out any bad interactions."

"And these will be good?"

"Imagine a regimen of treatments that can take a base human and turn them into a super soldier. Imagine being able to go toe to toe with someone rocking serious chrome, without needing a single shred of it yourself. Imagine your base biology being faster than chrome can make you, stronger than chrome can make you, even tougher than chrome can make you. Then imagine putting on a suit of armor that *doubles* that already increased strength, speed, and durability. Maybe even more."

"That... sounds nova," Jackie admitted, sounding cautious, but also clearly interested. "How heavy is that kind of work?"

"Frank is working on making it as light as possible," I assured him. "Which is good, because I plan on getting it done to my base form, this one."

"Interesting... I kinda want to hear more about this Genio... you busy?" Jackie asked. "I can make you some lunch while you go over it. I wanna hear more about that armor too."

"... Yeah, sure, I can spare an hour or so for lunch," I agreed with a nod. "Lead the way."

