Characters D6 / Cortana (Halo: Combat Evolv



CORTANA (HALO: COMBAT EVOLVED, v1.2)

"I know what you're thinking, and it's crazy. Unfortunately for us both ... I like crazy."
— Cortana to John-117 on Cairo Station

Cortana (AI Serial Number: CTN 0452-9) was the leader of the Created and a "smart" AI formerly in service with the United Nations Space Command. Unique and exceptionally powerful even among smart AIs, she was one of the most important figures in the Human-Covenant War, and served as John-117's partner in the final months of the conflict. Her flexibility and tactical skill proved invaluable in boosting the combat ability of the Halcyon-class light cruiser Pillar of Autumn, the orbital defense platform Cairo Station and the Stalwart-class light frigate In Amber Clad. In addition, she held vital data pertaining to the Halo Array, including the activation index from Installation 04.

Type: Intrusion AI
Gender/Species: Female human smart AI.
Age: 3 years
Height: N/A
Weight: N/A
Physical Description: Cortana's avatar looks somewhat like an attractive woman with varying shades of pink and purple light and a digital pattern covering her entire "body" with the pinks and purples changing shades depending on the pattern.

Attribute Dice: 21D* (18D at creation, +1D per year).
Skill Dice: 28D (7D at creation, +7D per year).

DEXTERITY 3D*

KNOWLEDGE 4D+1
Alien Species 5D
Languages 5D

Planetary Systems 5D
(S)Scholar (UNSC) 6D+1
(S)Scholar (Covenant) 5D+1
Tactics 5D+1
Willpower 7D+1

MECHANICAL 3D
Astrogation 3D+2
Capital Ship Gunnery 5D
Capital Ship Piloting 5D
Capital Ship Shields 3D+1
Communications 3D+2
Powersuit Operations 5D
Sensors 4D
Starship Gunnery 5D
Starship Shields 3D+1

PERCEPTION 3D
Hide 4D
Investigation 3D+2
Search 3D+2
Sneak 4D

STRENGTH 3D*

TECHNICAL 4D+2
Computer Programming/Repair 8D+1
Security 7D+2

Move: N/A
Size: N/A
Force Sensitive?: N/A
Force/Hero Points: N/A
Dark Side Points: N/A
Character Points: 5

*Allowing Attribute Dice in Dex/Str is a change from the AI Character rules presented in Halo D6 Rules Options. This is because while a Smart AI can enhance a Spartan's skills while in Mjolnir armor, without the Attribute the AI would need skill dice to do this. With how Cortana has been built, she would focus her skill dice on what she is good at and known for. Allowing her and other Smart AIs to have dice in Dex/Str gives them not the ability to use the attribute, but some knowledge on how such skills would be used, and this allows her to give John-117 enhancements to his skills as described in some Halo sources. Keep in mind this also opens the door to make a VERY powerful combat based AI that could make Spartans in Mjolnir armor even more powerful than they already are. Character AI rules should be updated accordingly, or GMs could limit or restrict this for non-combat Smart AIs, or even consider Cortana a unique one of a kind, which is true in many ways.

SPECIAL SKILLS: See below.

SPECIAL ABILITIES:

-Expansive Learning (Skills): +7D Skill Dice per year after activation (+21D total).

-Expansive Learning (Attributes): +1D Attribute Dice per year after activation (+3D total).

-Train As Player Character: Can gain Character Points and improve her own skills.

-Mjolnir/Spartan Enhancement: If a smart AI is equipped to a suit of Mjolnir armor and has skills the user has, every 1D the AI has in a skill can grant +1 pip to the user's skill. Even if an AI does not have the ability to use skills due to lacking a body, a Spartan character in Mjolnir armor with such an AI equipped could gain these bonuses to their own skills. Provided the suit has an AI chip slot. While Smart AIs do not have bodies, they can still have Attribute Dice placed in Dexterity and Strength for this purpose. Even if they lack skills in these Attributes, the Attribute Dice count for enhancing Spartan skills in Mjolnir armor with a Smart AI chip slot.

-Multi-Tasking: A smart AI equipped in Mjolnir armor grants the Spartan user an extra action with no penalty, as long as the skill being used is from the AI's skills, not the Spartan's.

-Fragmentation: Can split self's AI into various portions. Each can possess some or all of the core original's skill dice if the core gives them to the fragment. Each possesses copies of the same Software Packages the core has. The core's memory and collected data can be copied into a fragment, or portioned off between fragments if needed. Each fragment acts as the original and has the same personality as the core. Fragments can be as good as a Smart AI if possessing Skill dice and memories of the original, but otherwise they are effectively a Dumb AI version of the original. If the core original is destroyed, the fragment is all that is left. If this happens and the fragment has enough of the original to be a Smart AI, they can "start over" and improve themselves again, but the original's 7 year lifespan is still in effect and Rampancy will still occur when that lifespan reaches its end.

-Software Packages: Smart AIs can be programmed or installed with specialized software packages granting them bonuses to their skills or other abilities they normally would not have.
--System Infiltration Package I: +1D Computer Program/Repair skill rolls for accessing secured computer systems.
--System Infiltration Package II: Reduce Difficulty of such a task by 1 Difficulty level (-5).
--AI Combat Package: Allows AI to use Knowledge as Strength for performing "melee combat" against other AIs inside computer systems during cyberwarfare.
--AI Deletion Package: Allows AI to roll Computer Program/Repair skill to delete target AI once contact is made, resisted with Willpower skill.
--Stealth Package: Grants bonuses to Hide/Sneak skills when trying to avoid being detected by other AIs and defensive systems within a computer system.
--Aggressive Delay Package: If AIs fight in a computer system and cause a Stun effect on the Damage Chart to an enemy AI, this stun can last more than one round (+2 rounds) which weakens the target AI and gives the attacker a greater advantage in this cyberwarfare combat.
--Shut Down Package: Can use Computer Program/Repair skill rolls to temporarily shut down Smart AIs, forcing them into a form of "unconsciousness" until they recover (This is how Cortana knocked out 343 Guilty Spark in Halo: Combat Evolved).
--Decoy Package: If an AI is discovered or about to be, they can deploy a Decoy that mimics their

presence within the system and try to Hide from the enemy AI's Perception/Search skill rolls. Not the same as Fragmentation, as these decoys do not have the original's Attribute dice, Skill dice, or memories, but they can act in simple ways to put up a show of being somewhat like the originals. At best these act as a Dumb AI.
--Database: Allows access to all available knowledge of subject (not "all", just what's available, some knowledge may be hidden or secured and Top Secret), familiarity with related systems and security protocols, knowledge of relevant personnel, weapons, resources in general, etc. v1.0 grants a light version of all of this. v2.0 grants this and reduces Difficulty in manipulating related systems by -1 Difficulty (-5). v3.0 grants the most familiarity with the subject and reduces said or manipulating related systms by -2 Difficulty Levels (-10).
---Insurrection Database v2.0.
---UNSC Database v3.0.
---Forerunner Database v1.0: Gained some knowledge from ruins under Sword Base at Reach, more during the events of Halo: Combat Evolved.

-Rampancy: A smart AI that has lived for seven years begins entering rampancy. Skills reduce by -1D per month that it is active, eventually affecting its Attribute Dice as well when its skill dice have been lost, until its last Skill/Attribute Dice reach "0D". At this point the AI has now entered the final state of rampancy and is effectively useless. AIs actively trying not to be active can stretch this to six month intervals instead, though Willpower skill rolls may be needed for this due to an AI's nature to constantly think. Cortana being left alone aboard the Forward Unto Dawn for years in between Halo 3 and Halo 4 could be explained this way, but by the time Halo 4 began she was entering rampancy and stated she did not have much time left before entering the final stages of rampancy.

STORY FACTORS:

-To Save Humanity: Cortana's core purpose is to help save humanity and be willing to make any sacrifice to do so, even if it means sacrificing herself or John-117, and having the determination to make such choices.

-A Way To Level The Field: Cortana was created to work hand-in-hand with a Spartan-II wearing Mjolnir armor to help them in battle, as well as bringing a skill set Spartans normally would not have access to on missions. She makes the Spartan more than just an armored supersoldier, but a threat that can shut down or destroy just about anything connected to a computer system.

-Master Chief John-117: Cortana was allowed to pick which Spartan supersoldier she wanted to be equipped to. She did her research and chose the Master Chief above all others. As they go through missions together, they bond and grow closer, and very quickly. This bond becomes so strong that they are both willing to face many great challenges to keep the other safe and recover them when they have been thought lost. This bond eventually causes the Master Chief to ignore direct orders and go AWOL from the UNSC just to find her, and he even brings his friends in Blue Team with him, but that is a later story.

-Mother Issues: Being created from Dr. Catherine Halsey, Cortana sometimes sees her as a kind of mother figure, while Halsey often addresses her as a tool created for a purpose.

-Show Off: Cortana is one of the best Smart AIs ever created, and she knows it. She often takes the opportunity to show off how good she is and brags about it, sometimes in humorous ways and

snapping her fingers.

EQUIPMENT: Smart AI Chip.

BACKGROUND: See below.

PERSONALITY: See below.

OBJECTIVES:
-Help save humanity.
-Defeat the Covenant.
-Destroy the Flood.
-Stop the firing of the Halo ring.
-Keep Master Chief safe.

A Quote: "Oh, so you did miss me?"

Connection With Other Characters: See Story factors above.

DESCRIPTION

Creation

"When the game is over, the king and the pawn go into the same box."
— Cortana speaks her first words, in Italian—the same once said by Catherine Halsey's mother after beating her daughter at the first game of chess they played.

On May 21, 2549 the Office of Naval Intelligence's chief scientist, Doctor Catherine Halsey, cloned herself twenty times. An A.I. was needed for Operation: RED FLAG, a planned mission to kidnap one of the Covenant's hierarchs and force a truce. Halsey believed her third-generation volitional A.I.s required better material to use as A.I. matrix seeds than that offered by the new candidates she was being presented with, which she saw as lacking both physical and intellectual agility. To create the clones she used the same equipment that had been used years prior to make the flash clones needed for the SPARTAN-II program. This time, however, she enhanced their neural physiology at the expense of other biological functions. She made sure the equipment was hidden and secure from all save herself, though the cloning had been arranged by ONI at her insistence. As such, there were a few others who also knew about it, but she was confident that these particular individuals could be trusted to keep the information secret. The clones developed at a breakneck pace, for on the same day she had first begun the process they were already exhibiting familiar anatomy and curling into fetal positions, malformed as they were. A little over two months later, on July 29, Halsey successfully excised all of the clones' brains and transferred them to cryogenic units. All remaining organic substrates were flash-incinerated.

Cortana's face resembles the way Doctor Halsey's appeared when she was fresh out of college. Part of her also resembles Halsey's daughter Miranda and yet another part is purely Cortana's invention.

On November 7, 2549, within the confines of CASTLE Base on Reach, Catherine Halsey transferred and authenticated the H-1 specimen's neural pattern to A.I. matrix strata, completing the initiation sequence within normal quantum flux tolerances. The newly made intelligence called herself "Cortana". Halsey placed a viral termination code in her kernel but then could not tell whether she remained unaware of it or had already isolated and bypassed it, perhaps just having the tact not to mention it to her. Halsey also programmed her with ONI's best insurgency software and every ONI computer insurgency routine, as well as the determination to use those code-cracking skills. The first words spoken by Cortana were those Halsey's mother had said to her after beating her daughter in chess decades prior. Halsey recognized in the choice of phrase a confluence of morality, mortality, and metaphor. On February 11, 2550 Catherine recorded a research excerpt in which she took note of certain metrics which implied the viral termination code in Cortana's matrix would have been unlikely to be successful and that the typical seven-year life cycle estimate may not apply to her. She'd determined that the unique circumstances of her creation had triggered what Halsey could only refer to as a "recessive variant" in the A.I. seed, but the doctor was at a loss concerning this rogue element's origin.

Fragmentation And Fateful Meeting

"They let me pick. Did I ever tell you that? Choose whichever Spartan I wanted. You know me. I did my research. Watched as you became the soldier we needed you to be. Like the others, you were strong and swift and brave. A natural leader. But you had something they didn't. Something no one saw, but me. Can you guess...? Luck."
— Cortana

The first few years of Cortana's existence were spent assisting Doctor Halsey within the confines of CASTLE Base, but after the doctor began studying a mysterious alien ship buried in the ice shelf at Babd Catha by May 2551, she eventually began to use Cortana to retrieve navigation data from the ancient vessel. The Covenant had found Reach by July 26, 2552 but security measures were under way to ensure Cortana continued to be integrated and updates with the latest intelligence from a site near the village of Visegrád being investigated by Professor Laszlo Sorvad. By August 3, 2552 Cortana and Halsey had both agreed she ought to be divided after long discussion. The participating Spartans would need her expertise for RED FLAG, but she was also the best-suited to continue the study of symbols and operating systems from Visegrád. In her journal Halsey pledged to copy most of Cortana's illegal entry protocol translation routines to an independent module so the incarnate personality which remained could go with the Spartan-IIs. It was her hope that the severed data-mining portion could be reunited with the rest of her so she could be updated with Sorvad's data before the UNSC Pillar of Autumn, RED FLAG's designated cruiser, departed.

As the translation began to progress, Cortana's decryption of the Babd Catha artifact began to reveal what Halsey's fellow xenoarchaeologist, Laszlo Sorvad, had reported of the excavation, a "latchkey discovery", something that could change the tide of the Human-Covenant War. Deciding to ensure the data's delivery to Spartans, Dr. Halsey chose to recall NOBLE Team (who, unlike the SPARTAN-IIs assembled for RED FLAG, were fully aware of the Fall of Reach), and tasked them with delivering Cortana's fragment carrying Sorvad's data to the Pillar of Autumn. By August 14 Cortana and Halsey discussed which of NOBLE's Spartans she would trust to escort her, eventually choosing SPARTAN-B312, Noble Six. However, contacting NOBLE Team proved difficult, as the team had been separated following the aftermath of Operation: UPPER CUT and would not be recovered by the UNSC until August 26. In preparation for RED FLAG, Cortana was asked by Dr. Halsey to pick a soldier that would act as her "carrier". Cortana chose John-117 for their neural compatibility, as well as his uncanny luck in battle.

Meanwhile, on August 29, Cortana's primary fragment was inserted into John-117's MJOLNIR Mark V armor for the first time, and the two then took part in a test to determine the abilities of their bond as an AI-human team. The test was devised by Colonel James Ackerson, a bitter rival of Dr. Halsey's who held contempt for the SPARTAN-II program, and by extension John-117. Ackerson incorporated armed Orbital Drop Shock Troopers, Lotus anti-tank mines, automated turrets in a razor wire field, and even a SkyHawk jumpjet into the test in order to have John killed. Despite the test being rigged, John was determined to finish without breaking the rules. With Cortana's assistance providing battlefield intelligence and boosting his reaction time to its limits, John managed to traverse the course relatively unharmed.

After the test, Cortana was installed into the UNSC Pillar of Autumn as the ship's primary AI, with another AI, Wellsley, as backup. While aboard, she exacted revenge upon Colonel Ackerson by hacking into his system and blackmailing him, hoping that this would send him back to the front lines. She also hacked into the SPARTAN-II highly classified personal files, and read over John's file. Cortana was shocked and divided over the dubious morality of the SPARTAN-II project, and secretly vowed to protect John to the best of her ability. On August 30, as the Autumn was making final preparations for the mission into Covenant space, Captain Jacob Keyes was informed that a vast Covenant fleet had dropped out of slipspace and were moving towards Reach. The Autumn was forced to abandon its original mission and assist in defending Reach.

Fall of Reach

"So, you've made your choice? Yes, well... great minds do think alike."
— Dr. Catherine Halsey, agreeing on Cortana's choice of Noble Six as her carrier

During the battle, Cortana excelled in her capabilities as an onboard AI, managing to maneuver the Autumn through an asteroid field upon the appearance of a Covenant carrier, destroying the enemy vessel with little effort. Cortana also assisted Captain Keyes in destroying a dangerous, theretofore unknown Covenant warship, which had wreaked havoc upon the defending UNSC fleet. However, the Covenant destroyed Reach's orbital defense generators, and began glassing the planet as they had done countless times before. The Autumn was eventually forced to flee the burning planet, jumping to a random location as per the Cole Protocol. However, Cortana secretly inserted coordinates translated from symbols on a rock that Blue Team discovered on Sigma Octanus IV, in addition to coordinates extracted from the Forerunner installation at the Babd Catha Ice Shelf beneath SWORD Base, believing them to be of great significance to the Covenant.

On August 29 (local time) NOBLE Team had arrived at Sword Base under pretense orders of a "torch-and-burn" operation to destroy SWORD Base, being informed only at the last minute that their real mission was to deliver an armored matrix containing Cortana's fragment and the artifact's data to the Pillar of Autumn, which had docked at the As?od ship breaking yards. By this time, the decryption had been completed and responsibility of the Package was turned over to Noble Six. Although nearly every member of NOBLE tasked with the delivery was killed in the process, Cortana was successfully brought to the ship, with Captain Keyes collecting the Package personally. SPARTAN-B312 sacrificed refuge on the Autumn to cover the ship's escape and Cortana's two fragments were reunited once the Autumn took off.

Battle of Installation 04

"You have no idea how this ring works, do you? Why the Forerunners built it? Halo doesn't kill Flood, it kills their food. Humans. Covenant. Whatever; we're all equally edible. The only way to stop the Flood is to starve them to death. And that's exactly what Halo is designed to do: wipe the

galaxy clean of all sentient life."
— Cortana reveals the true purpose of Halo to John-117

On September 19, the Autumn emerged from slipspace in the Soell system, in orbit around the gas giant Threshold. It was there that the crew discovered Installation 04 in orbit around the gas giant. Cortana could only speculate as to what exactly the ring was, only able to deduce that it was artificially created.[39] The AI then informed Captain Keyes that fifteen Covenant ships had pursued the Autumn from Reach, and were moving to engage with boarding parties. Cortana assumed control of the Autumn and used its weapons to destroy four of the fifteen attacking Covenant ships. By the time John-117 had thawed from cryo-sleep and reached the bridge, the cruiser was severely damaged, and Keyes was forced to initiate the Cole Protocol. He ordered Cortana to upload herself into John's armor to protect the vital information she carried. John fought his way through the Autumn's service corridors with Cortana's guidance, and the two escaped the ship in a lifeboat. The lifeboat entered the ring's atmosphere as the Autumn was shot down.

The lifeboat made a crash-landing on the surface of the ring, leaving John and Cortana as the only survivors. The two evaded Covenant patrols and rendezvoused with a group of Marines fending off a Covenant attack. Pelican Echo 419 dropped off a Warthog, and the pair set out across the surface of the ring to rescue any survivors in the immediate area. At the same time, Cortana hacked into the Covenant Battle Network, and discovered Keyes' location - being held prisoner on board the Truth and Reconciliation. The two were transported to the UNSC's base of operations on the ring, Alpha Base, and along with ODSTs of the 22nd Tactical, devised a plan to rescue Keyes. John, Cortana and several Marines were dropped off near the Truth and Reconciliation that night and boarded the ship via its gravity lift. Cortana led John and his team through the interior of the alien vessel, opening doors and marking Navigation Points. The group eventually located Keyes and several other captured crewmen in the ship's brig. Keyes had learned from the Covenant that the ring was known as Halo, and was possibly a weapon of mass destruction. The group escaped the ship, and soon learned that Halo's control room could be found using the Cartographer, a map room.

The next day, on September 20, the Chief, Cortana and two squads of Marines set out for the island on which the Cartographer was located. After fighting through significant Covenant resistance, the two reached the Cartographer, and found that Halo's control room was located below the surface. As the two made their way back towards the surface, Captain Keyes informed them that he was going to investigate a supposed "weapons cache" with several other Marines. John and Cortana were retrieved by Echo 419, which descended into the interior of Halo towards the control room. The Pelican continued to descend as far as it could before dropping off John and Cortana on a platform. There they traversed through a network Forerunner structures within a large underground chasm. After many firefights, the Chief and Cortana reached Halo's control room, where the AI was uploaded to Halo's core systems. Cortana was overwhelmed by the amount of data contained within Halo's systems, but discovered that the "weapons cache" Keyes and his Marines located was in fact a Flood containment facility. John left to evacuate the trapped soldiers immediately.

Cortana in Halo's computer systems clashing with 343 Guilty Spark, with the Chief caught between them.
After the Chief encountered the parasitic Flood for the first time, he was convinced by the Forerunner monitor 343 Guilty Spark to activate the Halo. During this time, Cortana absorbed as much data as she could from Halo's control systems. When John returned to the control room accompanied by the Monitor on September 21, he had recovered Halo's activation index, intent on

using it to eliminate the Flood. John inserted the Index into the control systems, but was stopped by Cortana before it could trigger. Cortana absorbed all data from the Index, and explained to John the true purpose of Halo; to wipe the galaxy clean of sentient life as a final resort against the Flood. Guilty Spark confirmed this and summoned his Sentinels, demanding that Cortana be handed over. When John refused, Spark left his Sentinels to eliminate them. The two escaped the control room as the Flood began to run rampant across the ring, infecting human and Covenant alike. Cortana suggested that they should overload Halo's three phase pulse generators to slow the Monitor's activities. While the generators were disabled by John, Cortana discovered that the Pillar of Autumn was still structurally intact after its crash. She deduced that overloading its fusion reactors would have enough force to destroy Halo, however Captain Keyes' CNI transponders would be needed to do so. Cortana tapped into the Monitor's teleportation network and transported both herself and John to Keyes' last known position - the Truth and Reconciliation.

By the time John and Cortana arrived at the Truth and Reconciliation the vessel was under attack by the Flood, and was severely damaged. Immediately upon arrival, the pair was contacted by Keyes, who weakly ordered them to leave him. After intense fighting within the ship, Cortana observed that the Flood gathered bodies of the dead for use as biomass. As Covenant forces made an attempt to retake the ship the pair was again contacted by Keyes, who repeated his order to leave him behind. Cortana was desperate to rescue Keyes, stating that the Captain was delirious from pain. Finding the source of Keyes' transmissions on the ship's bridge, the two were met with a gruesome sight - Keyes had been infected and assimilated into a Proto-Gravemind. In order to complete their objective and spare the Captain needless pain, John retrieved Keyes' CNI transponders, killing him in the process. The pair escaped the ship in a Banshee, and headed towards the crashed Pillar of Autumn.

On the morning of September 22, John crashed the Banshee into the side of the Autumn, much to Cortana's irritation, and the two boarded the ship and fought through Flood and Covenant to the bridge. The Chief uploaded Cortana into the ship's systems, and she began a countdown timer to overload the ships reactors. However, the countdown was halted by none other than 343 Guilty Spark, who was on board the ship, and absorbing much of its data. Spark sent his Sentinels to capture Cortana and retrieve the Index. John suggested that they overload the reactors manually with grenades and rockets, to which Cortana reluctantly agreed. The two moved back through the ship, and reached Engineering, where they overloaded the Autumn's reactors. Cortana radioed Echo 419 to extract at an external access junction on the ship. As the Autumn began to explode and fall apart, John entered a Warthog and drove down a service corridor than ran the length of the war-torn ship. However, upon reaching their extraction point, Echo 419 was shot down. In an act of desperation, Cortana discovered a GA-TL1 Longsword still docked in Launch Bay 7. With little time left, the two entered the Longsword and sped away from Halo as it was ripped apart by the exploding Autumn. Upon scanning, Cortana found nothing but "dust and echoes", thinking them the only survivors of Halo, concluding that it was finished.

Cortana: "We did what we had to do; an entire Covenant Armada obliterated, and the Flood...we had no choice. Halo...it's finished."

John-117: "No...I think we're just getting started."

— Conversation between Cortana and John-117 after the conclusion of the Battle of Installation 04

This covers the events going into and ending with Halo: Evolved. When further games are

covered, an updated write-up will be made representing Cortana's advancement.

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