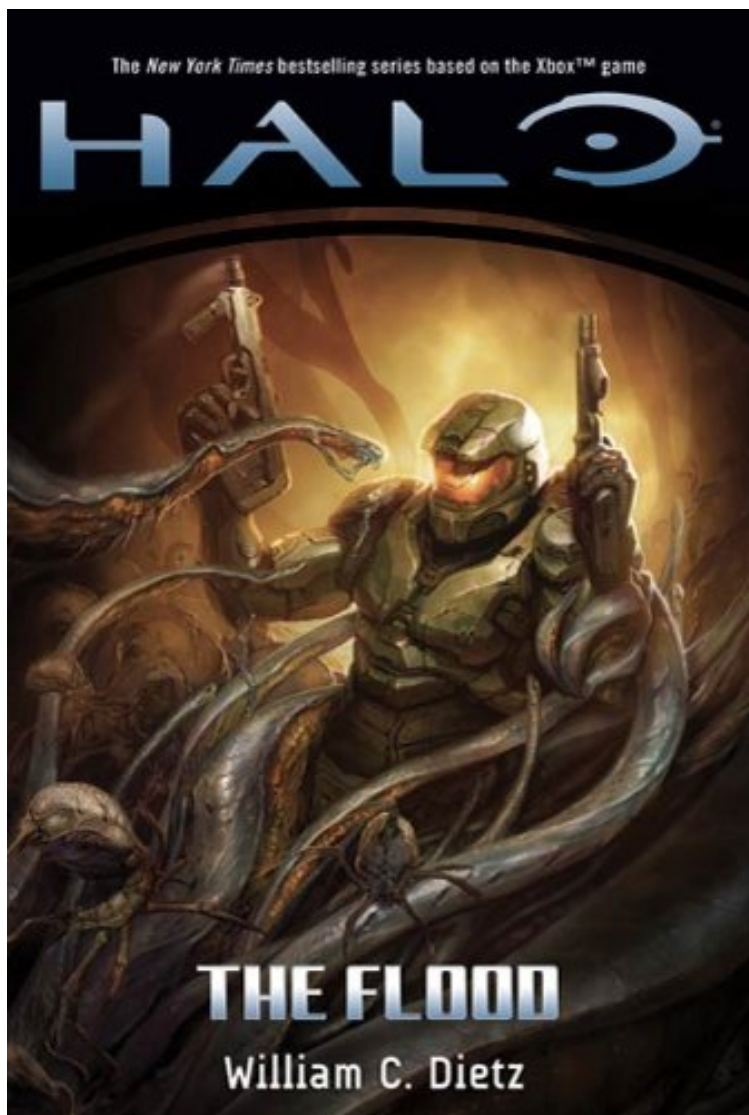


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Halo: The Flood



*Par William C. Dietz
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteur REACH HAS FALLEN. THE COVENANT WAR MACHINE RAGES ON. HUMANITY'S LAST HOPE LIES WITH THE CREW OF THE PILLAR OF AUTUMN THE INDOMITABLE CAPTAIN JACOB KEYES, STAFF SERGEANT AVERY JOHNSON, THE AI CORTANA, HUNDREDS OF FEARLESS MARINES . . . AND SPARTAN 117, THE MASTER CHIEF. Having barely escaped the battle for Reach, the crew of the Pillar of Autumn is forced to make a jump into Slipspace in hopes of evading the vast alien alliance hell-bent on wiping out humanity. But their destination brings them to an ancient mystery and an even greater struggle. In this far-flung corner of the universe floats a magnificently massive artificial ring world . . . a construct from a long lost race. The humans' only hope of survival is to crash land on its surface and take the battle against the Covenant to the ground. But they soon

discover that this enigmatic ring world is much more than it seems. Built 100,000 years ago by a civilization known as the Forerunners, this "Halo" is worshipped by the Covenant---a sacred artifact that they hope will complete their religious quest for supposed transcendence. They will stop at nothing to control it. Engaged in a fierce ground battle, Master Chief and Cortana go deep into the Halo Construct to uncover a dark secret; this enigmatic ring world is also the universe's most dangerous weapon. Its purpose: the destruction of all sentient life. For the Forerunners built the Halo to battle the universe's most vicious enemy---a virtually unstoppable and suddenly reawakened force known as The Flood. At the Publisher's request, this title is being sold without Digital Rights Management Software (DRM) applied.

ExtraitC0127 Hours (Ships Time), September 19, 2552 (Military Calendar) / UNSC Cruiser Pillar of Autumn, location unknown. The Pillar of Autumn shuddered as her Titanium-A armor took a direct hit. Just another item in the Covenant's bottomless arsenal, Captain Jacob Keyes thought. Not a plasma torpedo, or wed already be free-floating molecules. The warship had taken a beating from Covenant forces off Reach and it was a miracle that the hull remained intact and even more remarkable that theyd been able to make a jump into Slipspace at all. Status! Keyes barked. What just hit us? Covenant fighter, sir. Seraph-class, the tactical officer, Lieutenant Hikowa, replied. Her porcelain features darkened. Tricky bastard must have powered down and slipped past our sentry ships. A humorless grin tugged at Keyes mouth. Hikowa was a first-rate tactical officer, utterly ruthless in a fight. She seemed to take the Covenant fighter pilots actions as a personal insult. Teach him a lesson, Lieutenant, he said. She nodded and tapped a series of orders into her panel new orders for the Autumn's fighter squadron. A moment later, there was radio chatter as one of the Autumn's C709 Longsword fighters went after the Seraph, followed by a cheer as the tiny alien ship transformed into a momentary sun, complete with its own system of co-orbiting debris. Keyes wiped a trickle of sweat from his forehead. He checked his display theyd reverted back into real space twenty minutes ago. Twenty minutes, and the Covenant picket patrols had already found them and started shooting. He turned to the bridge's main viewport, a large transparent bubble slung beneath the Autumn's bow superstructure. A massive purple gas giant Threshold dominated the spectacular view. One of the Longsword fighters glided past as it continued its patrol. When Keyes had been given command of the Pillar of Autumn, hed been skeptical of the large, domed viewport. The Covenant are tough enough, he had argued to Admiral Stanforth. Why give them an easy shot into my bridge? Hed lost the argument captains dont win debates with admirals, and in any case there simply hadnt been time to armor the viewport. He had to admit, though, the view was almost worth the risk. Almost. He absently toyed with the pipe he habitually carried, lost in thought. It ran completely counter to his nature to slink around in the shadow of a gas giant. He respected the Covenant as a dangerous, deadly enemy, and hated them for their savage butchery of human colonists and fellow soldiers alike. He had never feared them, however. Soldiers didnt hide from the enemy they met the enemy head-on. He moved back to the command station and activated his navigation suite. He plotted a course deeper in-system, and fed the data to Ensign Lovell, the navigator. Captain, Hikowa piped up. Sensors paint a squadron of enemy fighters inbound. Looks like boarding craft are right behind them. It was just a matter of time, Lieutenant. He sighed. We cant hide here forever. The Pillar seemed to glide out of the shadow cast by the gas giant, and into bright sunlight. Keyes eyes widened with surprise as the ship cleared the gas giant. He had expected to see a Covenant cruiser, Seraph fighters, or some other military threat. He hadnt expected to see the massive object floating in a Lagrange point between Threshold and its moon, Basis. The construct was enormous a ring-shaped object that shimmered and glowed with reflected starlight, like a jewel lit from within. The outer surface was metallic and seemed to be engraved with deep geometric patterns. Cortana, Captain Keyes said. What is that? A foot-high hologram faded into view above a small holopad near the captain's station. Cortana the ship's powerful artificial intelligence frowned as she activated the ship's long-range detection gear. Long lines of digits scrolled across the sensor displays and rippled the length of Cortana's body as well. The ring is ten thousand kilometers in diameter, Cortana announced, and twenty-two point three kilometers thick. Spectroscopic analysis is inconclusive, but patterns do not match any known Covenant materials, sir. Keyes nodded. The preliminary finding was interesting, very interesting, since Covenant ships had already been present when the Autumn dropped out of Slipspace and right into their laps. When he first saw the ring, Keyes had a sinking feeling that the construct was a large Covenant installation one far beyond the scope of human engineering. The thought that the construct might also be beyond Covenant engineering held some small comfort. It also made him nervous. Under intense pressure from enemy warships in the Epsilon Eridani system the location of the UNSC's last major naval base, Reach Cortana had been forced to launch the ship toward a random set of coordinates, a standard procedure to lead the Covenant forces away from Earth. Now

it appeared that the men and women aboard the Pillar of Autumn had succeeded in leaving their original pursuers behind, only to encounter even more Covenant forces here . . . wherever here was. Cortana aimed a long-range camera array at the ring and a close-up snapped into focus. Keyes let out a long, slow whistle. The constructs inner surface was a mosaic of greens, blues, and brown trackless desert, jungles, glaciers, and oceans. Streaks of white clouds cast deep shadows on the terrain below. The ring rotated and brought a new feature into view: a tremendous hurricane forming over a large body of water. Equations again scrolled across the AIs semitransparent body as she continued to evaluate the incoming data. Captain, Cortana said, the object is clearly artificial. There's a gravity field that controls the rings spin and keeps the atmosphere inside. I can't say with one hundred percent certainty, but it appears that the ring has an oxygen-nitrogen atmosphere, and Earth-normal gravity. Keyes raised an eyebrow. If it's artificial, who the hell built it, and what in God's name is it? Cortana processed the question for a full three seconds. I don't know, sir. Regulations be damned, Keyes thought. He took out his pipe, used an old-fashioned match to light it, and produced a puff of fragrant smoke. The ring world shimmered on the status monitors. Then we'd better find out. Sam Marcus rubbed his aching neck with hands that trembled with fatigue. The rush of adrenaline that had flooded him when he'd received Tech Chief Shephard's instructions had worn off. Now he just felt tired, strung out, and more than a little afraid. He shook his head to clear it and surveyed the small observation theater. Each cryostorage bay was equipped with such a station, a central monitoring facility for the hundreds of cryotubes the storage bays held. By shipboard standards, the Cryo Two Observation Theater was large, but the proliferation of life-sign monitors, diagnostic gauges, and computer terminals tied directly into the individual cryotubes stored in the bay below made the room seem cramped and uncomfortable. A chime sounded and Sam's eyes swept across the status monitors. There was only one active cryotube in this bay, and its monitor pinged for his attention. He double-checked the main instrument panel, then keyed the intercom. He's coming around, sir, he said. He turned and looked out the observation bays window. Tech Chief Thom Shephard waved up at Sam from the floor of Cryostorage Unit Two. Good work, Sam, he called back. Almost time to pop the seal. The status monitors continued to feed information to the observation theater. The subject's body temperature was approaching normal at least, Sam assumed it was normal; he'd never awakened a Spartan before and most of the chemicals had already been flushed out of his system. He's in a REM cycle now, Chief, Sam called out, and his brainwave activity shows he's dreaming that means he's pretty much thawed. Shouldn't be long now. Good, Shephard replied. Keep an eye on those neuro readings.

We packed him in wearing his combat armor. There may be some feedback effects to watch out for. Acknowledged. A red light winked to life on the security terminal, and a new series of codes flashed across the screen: WAKE-UP SERIES STANDBY. SECURITY LOCK [PRIORITY ALPHA] ENGAGED. x-CORTANA.1.0--CRYOSTOR.23.4.7 What the hell? Sam muttered. He keyed the bay intercom again. Thom? There's something weird here . . . some kind of security lockout from the bridge. Acknowledged. There was a static-spotted click as Shephard looped in the bridge channel. Cryo Two to Bridge. Go ahead, Cryo Two, a female voice replied, laced with the telltale warble of synthesized speech. We're ready to pop the seal on our . . . guest, Cortana, Shephard explained. We need the security code, the AI finished. Transmitting. Bridge out. Almost instantly, a new line of text scrolled across the security screen: UNSEAL THE HUSHED CASKET. Sam hit the execute command, the . . . Presentation de l'diteur REACH HAS FALLEN. THE COVENANT WAR MACHINE RAGES ON. HUMANITY'S LAST HOPE LIES WITH THE CREW OF THE PILLAR OF AUTUMN. THE INDOMITABLE CAPTAIN JACOB KEYES, STAFF SERGEANT AVERY JOHNSON, THE AI CORTANA, HUNDREDS OF FEARLESS MARINES . . . AND SPARTAN 117, THE MASTER CHIEF. Having barely escaped the battle for Reach, the crew of the Pillar of Autumn is forced to make a jump into Slipspace in hopes of evading the vast alien alliance hell-bent on wiping out humanity. But their destination brings them to an ancient mystery and an even greater struggle. In this far-flung corner of the universe floats a magnificently massive artificial ring world . . . a construct from a long lost race. The humans' only hope of survival is to crash land on its surface and take the battle against the Covenant to the ground. But they soon discover that this enigmatic ring world is much more than it seems. Built 100,000 years ago by a civilization known as the Forerunners, this "Halo" is worshipped by the Covenant---a sacred artifact that they hope will complete their religious quest for supposed transcendence. They will stop at nothing to control it. Engaged in a fierce ground battle, Master Chief and Cortana go deep into the Halo Construct to uncover a dark secret; this enigmatic ring world is also the universe's most dangerous weapon. Its purpose: the destruction of all sentient life. For the Forerunners built the Halo to battle the universe's most vicious enemy---a virtually unstoppable and suddenly reawakened force known as

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