

FROM THE EDITORS

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I came across this ICE recruitment ad and felt that it was worth everyone's notice, because as scholars of science fiction, it's part of our duty to the public to translate and critique SF in such a way as to help the public understand the critique of our own world that SF so often embodies.



If you're not familiar with the wildly popular *Halo* series of video games, which are tremendous fun, this ad might seem like just garden-variety white nationalism. ICE is the guys with the vehicle and the flood is immigrants: the sort of horror that delights at least fifty million Americans. Calling immigrants a "flood" dehumanizes them, while having the approach to immigration be represented by a vehicle-mounted machine gun rather than Justice with a blindfold makes it clear that this isn't some kind of compassionate white nationalism. It would be ghastly even were it not published by the official Homeland Security and White House accounts.

But if you are the sort of SF fan or scholar who has played much *Halo*, there's an extra dimension of vileness to this ad. Because the words Destroy the Flood are in all caps, it's not clear,

other than to someone who knows *Halo*, that “flood” isn’t primarily intended to evoke water, here. It’s Flood, with a capital F. Per Wikipedia:

Millions of years ago, a powerful interstellar species known as the Precursors seeded the galaxy with life. One of their created races, known as the Forerunners, attacked their former masters and drove the Precursors into near extinction. A few Precursors turned into a dust, intending to regenerate themselves in the future. This dust became defective, infecting and contorting organisms into a new parasitic species, connected by a hivemind: the Flood... The Forerunners conceived the Halo Array—ring-shaped megastructures and weapons of last resort that would destroy all sentient life in the galaxy to stop the Flood’s spread. The array could be activated from the Ark, a repository of sentient life outside the range of the Halos. Exhausting all other options, the Array was activated, ending the Flood outbreak. The surviving Forerunners reseeded life and left the Milky Way galaxy.

So the capital-F Flood is a parasitic hivemind created by the defective dust of a defeated people, not just a natural disaster. They’re not even themselves people: they’ve lost their status as people because they’ve been conquered and assimilated into a race so toxic that the only way to defeat them is to destroy all life. In the series, the Flood is driven by a desire to infect any sentient life of sufficient size. Someone who’s not familiar with *Halo* or SF, and who has a touch of empathy, just sees this poster as yet another example of the sheer crassness of the current regime. The demographics ICE intends to recruit from—ex-husbands with restraining orders and people who failed the police psych exam, it appears—have likely played an awful lot of *Halo*, and understand perfectly what the ad’s rhetoric is really intended to evoke.

The ad’s visuals work in a similar way. The arch ascending behind the soldiers might just seem like something artsy or maybe generically sci-fi if you’ve not played *Halo*, but if you have, you understand that it’s the arch of a Halo, a weapon of genocide. And hardly anything is more white nationalist than genocide.

Like so much about the regime’s rhetoric, this ad is designed to draw young people, primarily white and primarily male but with more diversity than one might hope, into white nationalism. And if it takes framing people who came here to work as fruit pickers or home health care aides or neurologists as a parasitic hivemind, the regime clearly has no problem going there. But if we, as scholars familiar with explaining SF to laypeople, can take the time and energy to show these young people’s families and friends what’s really being marketed, we might take another step closer toward making Nazis bad again.

I’ve not even touched on the role that AI plays in the *Halo* series, as this piece is already overlong. Enjoy the rest of this issue, where in addition to our usual palette of reviews, we have a group of papers on utopia and dystopia in the Turkish SF tradition. Write me at icampbell@gsu.edu.