

# Teammates for Life

John Henry and Desirai Labrada met online playing Halo and then got married among the fans and scenes of the game.

By William Richards

Star Wars' Anakin Skywalker and Padmé Amidala only had robot witnesses when they tied the knot. The video game theme wedding of **John Henry** and **Desirai Labrada** hosted United Nations Space Command Marines and the Halo video game hero Master Chief. Unlike the Skywalkers, this **Winter Park** couple didn't have their nuptials in a galaxy far, far away. They met, fell in love and married around the sub-culture of Halo, a multi-player online video game.

During the Orlando Science Center's Otronicon convention in January, a string quartet intoned Halo's dramatic score. They played among the war-torn rubble, palm fronds and artificial waterfall of Ivory Tower, a level in Halo 2 that wedding decorators recreated as the backdrop for the ceremony. A 10-foot auditorium screen completed the scenery with a gigantic image of the video game's sky-reaching pillars. Yes, there was even a red-eyed robot sitting in the front row.

## A Halo Romance

John and Desirai chose to marry on an incarnation of Halo's landscape because of the special place the sci-fi shooter game holds in their hearts. The couple "met" while playing Halo on Xbox Live, an online gaming

site, in December 2004.

When John first trained his sights on his bride-to-be, her character was dressed in flaming pink battle armor and wielding a deadly weapon. John's roommate had added Desirai to his Halo friends list while John was at work. He didn't know if she was male or female until he heard her voice through his headphone set. He was curious about the new player, so the two of them started gaming online frequently.

After playing with John, Desirai found she was soon able to recognize his voice from the other online players in her Xbox headset. "You could just tell the other guys

were different," Desirai says. "They were testosterone filled and 'let's kill stuff.' He was a little bit more sensitive and a little bit more quiet. He laughed differently, so he stood out from the other guys."

Desirai still says that John is the better player. He started showing her around the different levels in Halo, training her to jump from hidden places and sneak attack enemies. Desirai has also learned which weapons work best and where they're located in Halo's virtual environments.

Desirai worried she may have lost track of John the day she discovered his character wasn't online.

He finally responded to an invitation to call her, and the video game lovers began talking on the phone more than they shot at each other online.

## Ivory Tower Ceremony

In 2005, when Desirai and John started dating, she still lived in New York, more than 800 miles from his home in Melbourne, Fla. Desirai had wanted to study digital art and design at Winter Park's Full Sail University, so she decided to fly to Florida for education and for love.

"At the time, I didn't think it was possible," Desirai says. "It was just like a distant dream, and [John] said, 'If you want to do it, you should go do it.'"

continued



John Henry and Desirai Labrada met playing Halo online and decided to get married that way, too.

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and Desirai were  
by Trey Morabito  
the role of Halo's  
Master Chief, who  
became a notary just  
before their ceremony.

Everything seemed to fall into place for the couple after they settled in Winter Park and Desirai began attending school. Full Sail changed her life so drastically that Desirai and John planned to have their wedding on-campus.

The Halo gamers also wanted to have a fun wedding that expressed their personalities. Full Sail's Director of Public Relations **Kristin Weissman** recommended linking Desirai's idea for a Halo video game theme wedding to the Orlando Science Center's Otronicon convention that John and Desirai had volunteered for in the past.

On January 17, in a crowded Orlando Science Center auditorium, Halo's hero Master Chief made his way to the stage dressed in his futuristic green

and black battle armor, followed by John and his groomsmen. The suited stuntman playing the role of Master Chief and wedding notary was **Trey Morabito**, who has performed in Universal Studio's Terminator and Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure shows. He became a notary specifically for John and Desirai's wedding.

In her long white dress, Desirai was escorted by two Halo-uniformed marines to the stage, decorated to look like the Ivory Tower, one of Desirai's favorite levels. She likes the aesthetic of the benches, palm trees and waterfall. It seemed like a great place to get married com-

pared to some of Halo's more hostile combat landscapes.

And in this holy Halo ceremony at the Otronicon convention, Master Chief pronounced the couple teammates for life.

In addition to four floors of gaming and thousands of fans, Otronicon featured a Halo 3 competition on a giant IMAX screen. This year, the bride and groom kicked off the tournament in a Match Made in Halo death match. For the occasion, John and Desirai once again returned to the game that first united them for nightly three-hour training sessions. "I was happy to see her back playing," John says. **L**

See more photos from this Halo-inspired wedding  
at [CentralFlorida-Lifestyle.com](http://CentralFlorida-Lifestyle.com).