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# With This Game...

Two members of the "Halo Nation" take their gaming to the next level

// WORDS: EMILY L. FOLEY PHOTOS: RFPHOTOGRAPHY.COM



**S**ure, you say you're a gamer, but are you a true fan of that videogame of choice? Well, it all depends on how you define "true fan," and one Florida couple has upped the ante on that definition forever. On January 17, 2009, Desirai Labrada and John Henry united in marriage at a wedding that was themed after the wildly popular videogame *Halo*. We're talking a fully tricked-out *Halo* theme, and the whole thing was the bride's idea.

The couple met in December 2004 while playing *Halo* on Xbox Live. Twenty-nine-year-old Labrada was in New York, while Henry, 27, lived in Florida. Soon the two were regularly playing online together using the "voice chat" feature, where players audibly communicate through headsets. One day, when Labrada signed on and found Henry absent, she realized she missed him and left him her phone number through the voice-message feature of the game. Henry made quick use of the offered digits, and soon the two were talking more than they were playing. Two months later, the couple met in person, and three months after that, they moved in together in Winter Park, Fla., where Labrada began studying at Full Sail University, known as the "Harvard of Game Schools."

Fast-forward to January 2008: The happy couple is talking marriage, and Labrada has her epiphany. "I wanted to personalize our wedding,"



As this cautionary tale shows, casual gaming can sometimes end in the tragedy of marriage.



she shares. "And since we are gamers who met playing *Halo*, it was perfect." As for the fact that *Halo* is a violent videogame and perhaps not the most romantic wedding theme? "I looked at it as a creative challenge to not ruin the game or our wedding," laughs Labrada.

Labrada spoke with her alma mater about staging the wedding, and the Full Sail staff loved the idea and ran with it. The wedding was dubbed "A Match Made in *Halo*," and scheduled in conjunction with Otronicon, the school's gaming convention held annually at the Orlando Science Center. The university even found local vendors to donate their services to the event—everything from the wedding rings to the DJ was donated to the couple in a massive community-building effort spearheaded by the Full Sail staff.

The couple shared their big day with about 80 invited guests and 200 Otronicon spectators.



A string quartet played the *Halo* theme as the bride walked down the aisle to a stage designed after the "Ivory Tower" map of the game. The officiate? None other than *Halo*'s main character, the Master Chief, wearing full Spartan armor. But one sign that Labrada is more than just a hardcore gamer? The idea of her dressing up as character Cortana was nixed. "I wanted to wear a beautiful, white gown," she says. However, Labrada did have her game emblem embroidered on the sleeve of her gown, and the bridesmaids wore pendants bearing the same emblem. The groom and his groomsmen wore custom-made ties bearing Henry's emblem.

Rather than a first dance, the couple had a one-on-one *Halo* tournament, and there was no traditional bouquet or garter toss. Guests competed for the items in "guys only" and "girls only" games of *Halo*. The wedding favors were round, blue candles that represented the game's "sticky" grenades, each labeled with "Stuck to You For Life." *Halo* players may note that the date of the wedding, 1/17, even has significance, as the Master Chief's Spartan number is 117. But apparently, the date was a total coincidence, proving that the *Halo* gods were certainly smiling upon the couple.

The bride and groom received the ultimate blessing on their nuptials from none other than the creators of *Halo*, Bungie Studios. Once the company caught wind of the event, they bestowed the greatest in-game wedding gift upon the couple: Recon Armor. Labrada explains, "Recon is given to players who have done something really big in the *Halo* community. It is the most sought-after armor in the *Halo* world because it has to be awarded by Bungie, and very few players have it." The couple is now famous in the game because of their Recon, and when other players ask how they acquired the revered armor, they coyly reply, "It was a wedding gift from Bungie."