

# Wedded



# Bliss?

The pranksters behind Punk'd sneak into the chapel for The Real Wedding Crashers



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By Joe Rhodes

We are at T minus 60, whatever that means, hidden away in our top secret mobile command center, which is actually just a tv production truck parked out behind the dumpsters at the Mt. Charleston Hotel, 45 minutes northwest of Las Vegas, 11,000 feet above sea level

and the perfect place from which to execute a Covert Wedding Invasion (or, as I like to call it, "Operation Crab Puff.")

Our mission, should we choose to accept it – and frankly, I can't back out now, having already paid for the suit – is to infiltrate the pending nuptials of ridiculously-in-love California stereotypes Steve Jordan and Denise Woods, part-time surfers and full-time Perfect Looking Beautiful People. Based strictly on physical appearance, it's as if Sawyer were about to marry Kate on "Lost" ( if Kate were a blonde and neither of them were felons).

They have agreed, enthusiastically, to have the Biggest Day of their Lives turned into an episode of "The Real Wedding Crashers" on NBC, which means they have been conspiring all week with the show's producers, most notably executive producer Jason Goldberg (of "Punk'd" and Ashton Kutcher's BFF fame) to pull a series of ever-escalating pranks on various members of the wedding party, none of whom have any idea that they're being filmed.. Most of them will laugh when it's over. Some of them will not.

With a team of undercover improv actors pretending to be everything from priests to wedding planners to bitter friends of the bride, bad things happen at these weddings – filmed over six consecutive weekends in the Las Vegas area. Things go wrong with cakes and gowns, bridesmaids and best men, limousines, flower

arrangements and in-laws-to-be. Stuff gets broken. Food gets thrown. Vehicles explode. Parachutists drop out of the sky. And then, when its all over and the wedding guests are sufficiently suspicious and/or horrified, one of the crashers, wearing a hidden earpiece and following Goldberg's instructions from the control truck, will grab a microphone and announce, "Ladies and Gentlemen, at the request of the bride and groom, this wedding has been crashed!"

"This doesn't go to the place where Punk'd goes," Goldberg, big bearded and full of bluster, had said the night before, preparing me for what to expect. "this is tonally sillier and more fun and celebratory. And our couples embrace that. They want this to be a big, funny memorable night. And that's what we give them."

Goldberg, who the bride and groom refer to as "Captain Kirk" when he is barking instructions into their earpieces, was so worried about people discovering the true identify of "The Real Wedding Crashers" production that he registered at the Aladdin Hotel under a fake name, left his hotel suite only to enter the on-location command sites and treated the cast and crew like they were some sort of Hidden Camera Comedy Delta Force. You get the feeling that, if legally allowed, he'd issue cyanide capsules for everyone involved. Just in case.

"My team operates like the CIA," he had said. "When we go after

a mark, we have to know everything about him, what make shim tick, how will he react. The more information I have, the more comedy I can get."

"It's a great risk for us every time we go out," he continued, clearly filled with pre-assault adrenaline, emphasizing that if his cast or crew get busted before the reception then his whole episode is trashed. "We have to keep our cover as long as we possibly can, but at the same time the pranks have to get progressively bigger as we go. The whole goal of this is how long can we last and how far can we take it before someone goes, "Mom? Dad? I think we've got some crashers in here."

"I've got camera people living in cabinets for 5 hours, shooting, that can't take a break. They not only have to wear a certain color so they don't reflect through mirrors, but I tell them, don't drink too much water, cause I can't bring you out of the hide."

His point – and I would have to be unconscious not to get it – is that undercover comedy is not for the faint of heart. He's got 80 crew members, a dozen hidden cameras, hours of logistical planning and painstakingly laid-out premises at stake. He doesn't want me screwing it up.

"If I put you out there," he tells me. "You can't laugh when the stunts happen. You've got to go with it. "

I tell him I can handle it, that I've spent large portions of my life in places where I didn't belong. Classrooms, mostly. He decides, finally, that I can be trusted.

"You're one of us now," he says, smiling, just before going back to his secret hotel suite. "This is going to be fun."

And that's how I found myself here, suited up, out by the dumpsters and about to crash a wedding. Because I have not been given an ear piece – and can't hear Goldberg's directions – my only assignment is to sneak into the wedding in the company of Steve Byrne, a crasher who is pretending to be in a sour mood because he's just discovered that his ex-wife (fellow crasher Catherine Reitman) is also at the ceremony. I am to mingle with the other guests without blowing my cover, look appropriately stunned when the big pre-planned stunt occurs and then sneak back to the control truck before the reception starts.

The real guests are arriving at the hotel in chartered buses and Steve and I casually move towards the ceremony area with them, as if we'd arrived on the other bus. We sit on the groom's side, next to a couple of attractive, friendly women who seem amenable to small talk and – I hope – too distracted to notice the small beads of flop sweat appearing on my forehead. I didn't expect to be this nervous.

They ask how I know the groom and, right away, I screw up. "I worked with him a few years ago," I say, "but I don't really know him that well."

If I had an earpiece, I'm pretty sure Goldberg would be screaming right now, something along the lines of, "What? Are you a moron? If you don't know the groom that well, what are you doing at his wedding way the hell out on a mountain top? You're going to get us all killed!!!"

But it soon becomes clear that the women didn't notice the false note in my chit-chat. Or they don't care. Hey, it's a wedding, why would someone pretend to be someone they're not? Five minutes, and several fumbled phony anecdotes later, I realize I can say pretty much anything and they'll believe it.

"Why, yes, I met the bride a few years ago when I was working on the Dharma Initiative. My name is Ben, but you can call me Henry."

They wouldn't have noticed. Just like they didn't notice the hidden cameras behind the reflective surfaces on the giant Tiki idols that were on either side of the altar, or the scurrying waiters who were secretly moving equipment from the ceremony area to the reception area, cameras and wires hidden under serving trays. And why they didn't catch on when the helicopter started hovering overhead and loudspeakers announced that there was a fugitive

loose in the area, just as a guy in an orange jumpsuit appeared across the ridge, being chased by what appeared to be policemen. They bought it all.

I slipped out as easily as I'd slipped in, convinced that I could have gotten as many crab puffs as I'd wanted. This is fun, this wedding crashing stuff. And ridiculously easy. I highly recommend it. So If you see me at a country club or hotel ballroom this summer, a suspicious-looking guy in an ill-fitting suit, please don't point me out. I'll leave as soon as I'm full.

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