



12/06 • 8:00 PM THE HOLIDAY

12/10 • 7:00 PM ERNEST SAVES CHRISTMAS

12/12 • 7:00 PM PULP FICTION

12/15 • 4:00 PM THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS

12/15 • 6:00 PM THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS

12/22 • 2:30 PM THE MUPPET CHRISTMAS CAROL

12/22 • 4:30 PM THE MUPPET CHRISTMAS CAROL

12/23 • 6:30 PM WHITE CHRISTMAS

12/24 • 6:00 PM IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE

12/26 • 7:00 PM SCROOGED

12/27 • 8:30 PM HOWL'S MOVING CASTLE

12/29 • 2:00 PM ALADDIN

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PHOTO BY RACHEL MAYFIELD

In Safetyville USA, no one is safe.

Safetyville under seige

Nerf blaster enthusiasts storm Safetyville USA

BY RACHEL MAYFIELD / rachelm@newsreview.com

A storm is brewing in Safetyville USA. More than 20 people have convened in the town hall for preparations, restless as the rain lashes against the walls outside.

Inside, the ground is littered with cases of ammunition. I survey the area from a small corner, watching as people strap on kneepads and double-check their arsenal.

Once everyone's been briefed, they head out with unspoken intention to find their bases and get the lay of the land. The streets, slick with water, could soon be covered in blood—or worse: tiny foam darts.

The shriek of a whistle pierces the air.

Click! Whir! Thwap! Blaster-wielders duke it out across intersections and behind buildings. It's an all-out war, and the lives of Safetyvillagers are on the line—which begs the question, where are the residents of Safetyville?

A quick Google search reveals that no one lives in Safetyville. It's actually one of several miniature cities designed by Safety Center Inc. to teach kids how to safely navigate traffic. But when it's not in use for educational purposes, it can be rented out for birthday parties, party parties or even a Nerf war. That's what Blaster Town, a local Nerf blaster enthusiast group, did Sunday, Dec. 1.

One of Blaster Town's lead organizers, Brandon Powell, says its creation earlier this year was almost a necessity. "I own over 1,000 Nerf blasters," he tells me. "If I don't turn it into a business, then it's already something with an unsavory name."

That "unsavory name" is hoarding, and Powell believes if he doesn't do something productive with his collection, it could become a problem.

Powell says his interest in the plastic Hasbro toys first grew out of his involvement with cosplay.

"A lot of people use [Nerf blasters] as costume pieces. I used to collect them and paint them and do that for people. And then I started collecting them to play with 'cause I found out people were modifying them to be very powerful."

Powell shows me one of his own modified blasters, which sports a custom shaft made with PETG, a type of thermoplastic. The result is a pretty powerful rig that shoots neon foam at about 175 feet per second.

"As a kid, I would watch cartoons, and then I'd watch the commercials for these great toys. And it was never *that* when I got the toy," Powell explains. "You could barely hit something across the room. So I want toys to act like they do in the commercials."

Tinkering with blasters to increase range or rate of fire is pretty common in the Nerf community, so common that the first round at Safetyville was restricted to non-modified "stock" blasters, just to keep things interesting.

As the second round begins, though, participants are allowed to use their own gear. One gearhead brings out a child-sized, battery-powered jeep that, after some troubleshooting, was driveable by the final round.

The day is slowly winding down, and everyone starts gearing up for one final battle—a *Purge*-style free-for-all, where Nerf-ers abandon friends, teams and the laws that govern civilized society. It's a rousing success.

For Blaster Town's members, the Battle for Safetyville was just a test run. The group is planning a full season of games next year that will include another visit to the educational city on Feb. 15—as well as a lot more excitement.

"More theater, more gaming, more mysteries," Powell tells me. "I don't think most of these guys have seen a war like we just did; and this is just us trying stuff on a rainy day!" □

Blaster Town returns to Safetyville Feb. 15, 2020. Safetyville USA, 3909 Bradshaw Road. For more info, visit the Blaster Town Facebook page.

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