

Speak of the Devil

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Hot Ticket

Food F-i-i-i-ght

I could smell the 50,000-pound pile of tomatoes before I saw it. Spoiled produce funk carried on the breeze, as I walked to a field at Pleasanton's Alameda County Fairgrounds. I knew that the tomatoes used in Tomato Battle were unsellable—staff was quick to point out that food wasn't being wasted, but rather food going to waste was being used—I just didn't fully comprehend that the tomatoes would be rotten. Eew.

But I was committed. The giant food fight inspired by Spain's *La Tomatina* was a bucket list-worthy event too intriguing and unusual to miss. After a couple hours of music, beer tasting, and a costume contest (think bottles of ketchup, bowls of spaghetti), I joined 3,000 others clamoring through a gate to the battlefield.

Wearing old clothes and cheap swim goggles, I pushed toward the pile. The

first tomato hit my head with a hard thwack. Rotten perhaps, I thought, but not soft enough! Another tomato to my arm left an immediate welt. Two more hit my right kidney, and I wondered how long I'd last. Soon, my feet sank into a soup of mud and tomato guts, and eventually, I was stuck, grabbing half-blind at whatever ammo I could find on the ground. Within 10 minutes, I was dripping with tomato juice—bits of skin and seeds clumped in my hair, down my shirt, and in my ears—with a goofy grin on my face.

I'm not sure who won the battle—not the decimated tomatoes and certainly not smelly, bruised me—but I'm totally going back for more.

Tomato Battle NorCal returns to Pleasanton on September 29. Tickets (\$50) and information at tomatobattle.com. —LEEANNE JONES