



# TERRORBULL GAMES

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## IS THIS THE WORLD'S MOST DANGEROUS BOARD GAME?

Cambridge, UK, 18 August 2008 – **Banned from Toy Fairs, barred from the High Street, seized by the Police and recently recalled from 130 shops nationwide, is *War on Terror*, the boardgame really too dangerous for public consumption?**

When Zavvi ordered 5,000 copies of *War on Terror*, independent publishers, TerrorBull Games, thought their luck had changed<sup>1</sup>. After a year of obstruction and rejection, they finally had a high street outlet. However, the celebrations were short-lived when the games were recalled the very day they went on sale. A Zavvi spokesman strangely claimed that “poor sales”<sup>2</sup> lay behind the same-day recall, but TerrorBull Games suspect differently. Apparently, while many at Zavvi were backing the game, MD, Simon Douglas, was unaware of the deal until the moment he saw *War on Terror* on the shelves of his own shop. Douglas reportedly “kicked off” and the games were promptly pulled.

Zavvi then refused further delivery and became reluctant to pay for games they suddenly decided they didn't want. A protracted legal battle ensued that, while almost bankrupting TerrorBull Games, ended in victory for TerrorBull as they got to keep half the games as well as getting paid in full.

Now, tired of being censored and side-lined, *War on Terror's* creators are hitting back ... by giving the game away for free. Or to be more precise, giving *the games Zavvi paid for* away for free. And what better place to hand them out than right in front of Zavvi's flagship store on Oxford Street? Inventors, Andrew Sheerin, Andy Tompkins and illustrator Tom Morgan-Jones will be doing just that at **12.30pm on Tuesday 19 August**. They plan to give away 100 games in total.

It should be noted that Zavvi's reaction to the game is not unique. HMV described the *War on Terror* as a “political minefield”. Borders refused to stock it, claiming the game will “upset customers” while Fopp said it “wasn't right” for them. Additionally, before the game was even released, it had been banned from virtually every major toy fair in the world. Essen Toy Fair organiser, Dominique Metzler, said the very idea was “sick and ridiculous”. More recently, sealing the game's reputation as untouchable, the *War on Terror* was amongst a stash of “dangerous items” confiscated by Kent police at this year's Climate Camp<sup>3</sup>.

Of course, it could be that *War on Terror* simply isn't worthy of shelf space in a competitive market. However, the game has sold over 12,000 in 18 months, in 38 countries worldwide - a figure that any mainstream publisher would be pleased with. It has also received honourable endorsement from the games community, being placed in the 'Top Ten Historical Boardgames of 2007' at the Annual Origins Gaming Awards in the USA. Moreover, *War on Terror* has drawn glowing praise from the likes of New Internationalist and Amnesty International and has even been accepted into the permanent collections at both the Imperial War Museum and the Victoria & Albert museum.

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Ironically, according to Zavvi's website, they already sell two computer games called 'War on Terror' which positively glorify and revel in excessive violence. "Stealth Force – The War on Terror"<sup>4</sup> encourages players to "bring the War on Terror home to those who would terrorise the free world" and boasts "a huge arsenal of weapons including shotguns, machine guns, sniper rifles, explosives, rocket propelled-grenades and more!" This moral inconsistency was picked up on by the New Internationalist, who wrote:

"While teenagers can buy graphic computer games allowing them to fantasize about killing Iraqis and Afghans, this game [War on Terror] has been lambasted in the press and banned by major retailers and games fairs."<sup>5</sup>

Of Zavvi's decision to recall the game, **War on Terror** co-creator, Andrew Sheerin, said:

"Zavvi are the latest in a long line of big businesses desperate to hide this from their customers. If we'd called the game 'Kill the Terrorists' we wouldn't have any problems, but it's politically sensitive and that's what this is about. You've got to ask yourself, why do Zavvi feel the need to protect their customers from a board game that is critical of war and violence, when they have no problem pushing computer games that celebrate and reward brutal and aggressive behaviour?"

Is the **War on Terror** really as dangerous as retailers, toy fairs and the police claim it is? Tomorrow, it's up to the public to decide the answer to that question.

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### Footnotes

1. Zavvi placed the order after seeing a Powerpoint presentation from TerrorBull Games at a purchasing meeting for all Zavvi (then Virgin Megastores) store managers. Watch it here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H-Ee2fheeVA>
2. The Independent, 9 August 2008 page 25 - <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/war-on-terror-boardgame-branded-criminal-by-police-889287.html>
3. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/kent/7542592.stm>
4. <http://www.zavvi.co.uk/war+on+terror-games-Stealth-Force-The-War-On-Terror/638241/qc.r10.1/p.jsf>
5. New Internationalist, issue 403, August 2007

### Editors' Notes

1. **War on Terror, the boardgame** was published November 2006 by TerrorBull Games, a new independent UK games publishing company that aims to tackle the nastier things in life, via the medium of boardgames. [www.terrorbullgames.co.uk](http://www.terrorbullgames.co.uk) | [info@terrorbullgames.co.uk](mailto:info@terrorbullgames.co.uk)
2. Hi-res images and presspack available at: [www.waronterrortheboardgame.com/presspack](http://www.waronterrortheboardgame.com/presspack)
3. **War on Terror, the boardgame** inventor, Andrew Sheerin, and illustrator, Tom Morgan-Jones, are available for interview and comment: +44 (0)845 643 1513