



# TERRORBULL GAMES

'The Bunker' PO BOX 560, Cambridge CB1 0FL | +44 (0)845 643 1513 | [www.terrorbull.co.uk](http://www.terrorbull.co.uk)

## WAR ON TERROR BOARD GAME, AN 'UNLIKELY CULTURAL PHENOMENON'

Cambridge, UK, 31 March 2008 - ***War on Terror, the boardgame* gained widespread notoriety before it was even released. A year on and the game continues to provoke strong reactions but its acceptance into museums, galleries, universities and TV sitcoms has turned it into something of a cultural icon.**

While many well-established games publishers would be happy with annual sales of just 3,000, new independent publishers, TerrorBull Games, have not only confounded expectations by selling over 10,000, but have achieved this success while battling fierce opposition from the High Street and even the toy and game industry itself.

***War on Terror, the boardgame*** was initially a private project, conceived of just before the Iraq War and designed as a fun but thought-provoking challenge to various accepted ideas about the 'war on terror'. After deciding to start their own publishing company to release the game, debutant designers, Andrew Sheerin and Andy Tompkins knew there was no turning back when they woke up one morning to find themselves on the front page of the local newspaper under the headline: "*Terror Boardgame Branded 'Sick'*"

Despite the fact that no one had seen or even played the game at that time, ***War on Terror, the boardgame*** was decried by journalists, politicians and pundits all over the world. The Sun called the game 'Sick', the Daily Mail reported 'Fury', while the BBC focussed on 'Outrage'. Even the gaming community was highly sceptical, dismissing the game in advance as an inevitable 'novelty' or 'cash-in' product.

But all that changed when people started playing the game. ***War on Terror*** societies and game evenings sprung up. Keen fans began submitting photos of themselves wearing the game's 'EVIL' balaclava in increasingly strange situations (sky diving, running naked in the street, stood outside the White House and even engaged on the 'front line' in Iraq). Surprised to find not just an intelligent satire, but a playable and addictive game inside the colourful box, people started turning in rave reviews. Playboy called it '*one of the most thought-provoking games [they've] seen in years*' while New Internationalist celebrated, '*at last, a boardgame with attitude*' and awarded it a coveted 5 stars. Amnesty International thought it might be '*genius satire*' while academics and war veterans alike wrote letters of congratulations for producing both a fun and educational game.

Things became increasingly busy for Tompkins and Sheerin as TerrorBull Games was invited to Los Angeles for the world's first ***War on Terror*** tournament, which was covered by Al Gore's Current TV. An independent documentary crew also started recording their adventures, while in the UK the game was used in the acclaimed Channel 4 sitcom, *The IT Crowd* (series 2).

## War on Terror board game, an 'unlikely cultural phenomenon' (page 2)

Now, five years on from the invasion of Iraq and just over a year on from launch, **War on Terror** is stocked by independent game shops all over the world. The game is also sold by prominent and respected institutions such as the ICA, the Political Cartoon Gallery, New Internationalist and Amnesty International. Additionally, **War on Terror** looks set to play an increasingly educational role in the future. Recently the game was accepted into the permanent collections at both the Victoria & Albert and Imperial War museums in London. And now it's being used as a teaching aid in several schools and universities. Dr. Nick Megoran, lecturer in Geopolitics at Newcastle university said of the game that it was a "*cleverly crafted satire that can be used by educators to provoke students to think critically about one of the most important issues of our time*".

And yet, life is far from easy for TerrorBull Games. Although being perhaps the first game in history to be available in both your local game shop, the local art gallery and the local museum, there are still plenty of obstacles. The High Street have universally turned their back on the game, claiming it will upset customers and damage their reputation. TerrorBull Games also continue to be banned from the major international Toy Fairs, all of which claim the game is unsuitable and 'sick'.

Co-director of TerrorBull Games, Andrew Sheerin, responded:

*"It's really interesting how this game we used to work on late into the evening and play with our friends has become this unlikely cultural phenomenon. A really diverse swathe of the general public have taken the game to heart and we've had some esteemed professionals getting in touch to say how much they appreciate and respect the game. It's in museums, universities, in Playboy, in Forbes ... As ever, the last people to realise what the public actually want are those most removed: the big business owners; the chain stores; the out-of-touch industry bodies. They claim to be working in the public's interest, but really they're just protecting their own. The simple truth is that this game is too politically sensitive and they don't want to rock the boat."*

Terrorbull Games are currently working on a 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of **War on Terror**, as well as designing and testing their next release, which they hope will open up a similar level of debate that **War on Terror** has achieved.

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### 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. Further information and presspack 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