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Patriot Act Game Pokes Fun at Law

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HAMILTON, N.J. -- In this send-up of "Monopoly," players don't pass "Go" and they don't go directly to jail - they go to Guantanamo Bay.

Instead of losing cash for landing on certain squares, they lose civil liberties. And the "Mr. Monopoly" character at the center of the board is replaced by a scowling former Attorney General John Ashcroft.

"Patriot Act: The Home Version" pokes fun at "the historic abuse of governmental powers" by the recently renewed anti-terrorism law, according to its creator's Web site.

But while it may be fun, creator Michael Kabbash, a graphic artist and Arab civil rights advocate, is serious about how he feels the law has curtailed Americans' freedom.

The object of the game is to be the last player to retain civil liberties. "I've had people complain to me that when they play, nobody wins. They say 'We're all in Guantanamo and nobody has any civil liberties left,' " he said. "I'm like 'Yeah, that's the point.' "

The real Patriot Act, passed after the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks and renewed earlier this month, gave law enforcement new investigative and prosecutorial powers. Critics say it unacceptably impinges on civil liberties, but the government defends the law as a vital tool that has helped prevent another terror attack.

Kabbash decided to keep Ashcroft as the visual focus of the game, even though he stepped down in January 2005, because "he really is the icon that people associate with the Patriot Act."

In a nod to President Bush's prewar comments, the "Go" space in is renamed "Bring It On!" Players roll the dice to determine how many civil liberties they start out with, accumulating them from a variety of categories: U.S. citizens get 5; non-citizens 1. Whites and Asians get 5; Arabs 1. Ultra right-wingers get 6; Democrats 3 or 4.

Kabbash created a few full board sets but is also distributing the game free over the Internet, with the game board and playing cards all printable.