

CITIZEN

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Toys You Never Dreamed Of

Occultic and sadistic products may be among this Christmas shopping season's hottest items— unless families take a stand.

This article includes graphic descriptions of toys and characters that are not suitable for children.—Editor

by Tom Hess

Lest you think it's safe to begin Christmas shopping, think again. Hollywood's most celebrated murderer—the grotesquely disfigured Freddy Krueger—is making a killing on screen, at the box office, and in toy stores.

The star of the five-part film series "A Nightmare on Elm Street," which has grossed more than \$200 million in theaters and video sales so far, is proving to be a toyland commodity:

► **Freddy's Glove** by Marty Toy Inc., for children 10 and up. Although not dangerous, this plastic toy is modeled after Freddy Krueger's razor-tipped glove, the weapon he uses to mutilate and kill teenage victims in their sleep.

► **The Freddy Game** by Cardinal Inc., for children 8 and up. Players are told that Freddy has "possessed" someone. "Your job... is to expose Freddy, and try to eliminate him before he goes on one of his nightmarish rampages. Freddy, of course, will do everything to keep his identity a secret until the time is right for him to attack!"

► **Freddy Krueger Stick-up** doll by Lexony International, recommended for children 6 and up. The doll's arms and legs move.

► **Freddy Squish'em** doll by LJN Toys

Ltd., for children 4 and up. This squeezable doll introduces very young children to the Freddy character. Also available are the *Freddy and Victim Spitballs*—rubber balls that feature the faces of Freddy and a startled, mutilated victim.



Freddy Krueger's glove is only one of several dark and violent toys being marketed this Christmas season.

These products are available at most major retail outlets, including K-Mart, J.C. Penney and Toys R Us.

Here are a few other surprises that await you:

► **Mad Scientist Monster Lab** by Mattel. The package reads: "Make disgusting, gross monsters... then sizzle the flesh off their bones." Also, *Mad Scientist Dissect-An-Alien*: "Yank out alien organs dripping in glowing alien blood," (Mattel discontinued this toy line last year, but many stores still stock it.)

► **Real Ghostbusters** by Kenner. This toy line features innocuous figures that

transform into grotesque monsters: Granny Gross Ghost (a grandmother whose jaw drops, revealing horrific detail), Hard Hat Horror Ghost, Tombstone Tackle Ghost, and Terror Trash Ghost.

► **Nintendo** game cassettes. Although some Nintendo games are innocent fun, others glorify violence against women and police. Some lead young players into a Dungeons and Dragons-style landscape of violence and occultic forces.

Freddy's Revenge

Matchbox Toys USA announced in September it would market a talking, 17-inch-tall Freddy Krueger doll in time for Halloween. Gene Morra, senior director of marketing for Matchbox, heralded the Freddy Krueger character as "a folk hero" and "the Mickey Mouse of the 1990s." Independent surveys confirmed Freddy's popularity.

The National Coalition on TV Violence released results of a poll earlier this year in which 100 children ages 10 to 13 said they knew more about Freddy Krueger than Abraham Lincoln, George Washington or Martin Luther King. Eighty-nine percent had seen at least one episode of "A Nightmare on Elm Street," and 62 percent reported seeing at least four episodes.

"What I like about Freddy is he kills people," said one 10-year-old.

The Freddy Krueger character is described as the product of 100 maniacs who raped a nun in a mental ward about 40 years ago. Freddy grew to be so evil that the

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people of Freddy's peaceful hometown, Springwood, burned and buried him.

In one scene from the fourth "Nightmare" film, a teen is daydreaming on his water bed when the bikini-clad woman from a poster on his wall appears inside the transparent mattress. She swims naked, beckoning him to join her. He does, and she turns into Freddy. "How's that for a wet dream?" he cackles as he strangles his prey.

Matchbox's Morra told Cox News Service its Freddy doll was targeted at teens and young adults.

"We're marketing this for kids 12 and older. We're not advocating that little kids go see this movie, but we do think young adults will buy the toy."

William Swindell, associate director of the American Family Association, was skeptical, however.

"How many teenagers do you see carrying around dolls? These toys are intended for a much younger audience."

AFA expressed its concerns to Matchbox, which said it would destroy 160,000 Freddy Krueger dolls that had not yet been shipped. Forty thousand had already been delivered to stores when Matchbox made its decision.

The AFA's victory followed Sears' decision several weeks earlier to recall and discontinue all Freddy Krueger merchandise. "Family News in Focus," a daily radio news broadcast produced by Focus on the Family, had asked listeners to contact Sears.

Neither Sears nor Matchbox will comment on their decisions. Swindell of AFA said the companies agreed to drop Freddy Krueger because neither wanted bad publicity heading into the Christmas shopping season.

Nintendo Mania

Just as disturbing as Freddy Krueger, Nintendo is even more ubiquitous. Greater than 20 percent of American homes own Nintendo systems. Nintendo will sell 50 million game cassettes this year, with gross revenues of \$3 billion, a 50 percent jump over last year's sales.

The most popular Nintendo game to date—"Super Mario Brothers II"—features an innocuous character leaping over innumerable perils to rescue a damsel in distress. But other Nintendo games feature horrific, occultic and criminal heroes:

► Dr. Vince Hammond of the National

Coalition on Television Violence describes a Nintendo game in which the player assumes the identity of a felon. "The felon throws oil cans at police cars. The oil causes the police cars to spin out of control; then the player pushes them off the road and the cars explode. The criminal is the hero."

► A San Francisco mother, Donna Ownbey, wrote *Newsweek* earlier this year about the magazine's favorable report on Nintendo, published March 6:

"You say Nintendo combat 'is not always conducted according to the Geneva Convention.' Amen! [The game] Renegade



is particularly objectionable. During one of the rounds of combat, a male figure is pitted against women wielding handbags and chains. He must kick, sock or otherwise 'kill' these women before proceeding to the next round, in which he fights a large oriental woman in hand-to-hand combat. After seeing my nephew play this game, I wrote to the distributor and asked that Renegade be removed from the market. They replied that the public should be allowed to make its own decision. They also related a fact more chilling than the game: that they had received only one letter of complaint—mine."

► The object of "Life Force" is to destroy the reptilian character Zelos. "You've gotta soar through his guts, blast past his death traps and ultimately blow out his heart," the package says.

► "Wizards & Warriors" resembles the occultic game "Dungeons and Dragons," a game that police investigators say leads some youth into satanism.

Nintendo carefully selects games for their action and levels of complexity, evaluating each on a scale of zero to 40. Toy store shelves are checked weekly to monitor sales, and new products are introduced deliberately and in limited supplies to keep business flowing smoothly.

Dr. Thomas Radecki, a practicing psychiatrist and chairman of the National Coalition on Television Violence, says Nintendo has a markedly negative effect on young players.

"I've already hospitalized two young men, ages 13 and 14. One boy played Nintendo 35 hours a week. Although he was an intelligent kid, his grades had fallen off markedly and he's having a real problem with his temper. The other one... he was having problems with aggressive behavior."

Radecki said the danger of Nintendo lies in the way it teaches children how to resolve conflict.

"Even though it's done all lightheartedly, you don't get the feeling you've killed a human being, you just killed some disgusting little creep on the screen. Still, it's rehearsing a way of thinking and a way of reacting that research shows does have some small and cumulatively harmful effect on the development of normal children. Nintendo is causing physically aggressive and verbally aggressive behavior in normal children."

One young player described for *Newsweek* the physiological effects of Nintendo.

"You just want to play it and play it until you beat it," said 14-year-old Dylan Gordon of Los Angeles. "You just get so nervous near the end. You perspire. Your heart rate goes way up. Afterwards you just want to drop dead."

Trojan Horse

Nintendo's danger may go beyond the violent or occultic. The *Wall Street Journal* reported in June that Nintendo may be "something of an electronic Trojan horse." Nintendo told security analysts this summer that it sold its game console as an innocent toy but intends to use it as a cheap computer.

Through a joint venture between its U.S. subsidiary and American Telephone & Telegraph Co., Nintendo says it will make stock-market, travel and shopping information available on home TV screens to Nintendo owners as early as next year.

"We've positioned ourselves as this innocuous game that works just fine," Peter Main, vice president of marketing for Nintendo's U.S. subsidiary, told the *Wall Street Journal*. "But it gives us some very interesting [technological] possibilities that will begin to be unveiled in 1990. It's more than a game."

Japanese households receive securities information, travel tips and shopping guides through their Nintendo devices.