


[Create an account](#)
[Home](#) [Your Account](#) [Submit Review](#) [Top 10](#)

MAIN MENU

[M/C Reviews](#)
['events'](#)
['screens'](#)
['sounds'](#)
['style'](#)
['words'](#)
[Feature Issues](#)
[What's On](#)
[Your Account](#)
[Send Reviews](#)
[Statistics](#)
[Top 10](#)

WHO'S ONLINE

There are currently, 39 guest(s) and 0 member(s) that are online.

You are Anonymous user. You can register for free by clicking [here](#)

USER'S LOGIN

Nickname:
 Password:

Don't have an account yet? You can [create one](#). As a registered user you have some advantages like theme manager, comments configuration and post comments with your name.

TOTAL HITS

We received [1791172](#) page views since September 2002

SYNDICATION




Gorilla Tactics: Interviewing Joe Boughton-Dent regarding *Donkey John* and

Posted on Sunday, 14 November 2004 @ 00:00:00 by [Jodi Crome](#)

Conducted by Tama Leaver

In August 2004, an Australian political "game" saw Prime Minister John Howard hybridise with a 1980s split-screen version of *Donkey Kong*, and *Donkey John* www.donkeyjohn.com/donkeyjohn was born.

Tama: Could you please explain the genesis of *Donkey John* and how it was put together?

Joe Boughton-dent: In May 2004 I was contracted to do some work helping to co-ordinate the Timor Sea Justice Campaign in Sydney. The Campaign aims to pressure the Australian Government into changing its hardline position in negotiations with East Timor over maritime boundary negotiations. East Timor does not have maritime boundaries with any of its neighbours and the sooner it establishes these borders the sooner it will have access to revenue from oil and gas resources in the Timor Sea, money it desperately needs to rebuild infrastructure levelled by Indonesian-backed militias. The oil and gas negotiations involve complex legal arguments, but are also a clear-cut question of justice. Under international law, East Timor has a legitimate right to a larger share of the resources in the Timor Sea. At the time, the Australian Government was refusing to acknowledge the validity of East Timor's claim.

I felt the best way to gain support was to simply alert people about what was going on. If it was possible to raise general awareness of the issue, I was confident the Howard Government could be put in a situation where it was called on to defend an indefensible position. *Donkey John* was one of the first ideas I came up with for getting the message across in a simple and appealing form.

The initial idea came to me during a solo car trip from Canberra to Sydney during which my mind often wandered and I started thinking of possible cartoons that could express what was going on. Eventually I stumbled across the word play of Xanana Gusmario, a fictional blend of the Italian plumber and the East Timorese President. In the mid-eighties I spent a lot of time playing the hand-held game *Donkey Kong*. Funnily enough, the first time I clocked the score on the original game was at some political event my activist parents had dragged me to. Once I had invented Xanana Gusmario there was only ever one format for the game—an Internet-based parody with John Howard filling the role of the angry, barrel-throwing monkey.

I decided to keep the project separate from my coordinating work with the Timor Sea Justice Campaign, as I was unsure of what would come of the idea, and I didn't want to be soaking up the limited resources available to the general campaign.

As such, *Donkey John* was a side project that only became a reality thanks to the skills and generosity of two people in particular: Kaho Cheung, who did all the coding and design work; and Tom Spiers, who was responsible for the illustrations and splash screen. Both guys gave up a lot of time. Kaho worked really hard to get the game-play right, giving it the infuriatingly addictive quality of the original.

T: Do you believe the political message behind the game is being clearly received?

J B-d: There are difficulties, of course, in monitoring what individual players take away from the game. The Internet can be very one-sided that way. You put something up on a site and then others take it from there, interacting with the content in whatever way they choose. As a form of feedback, I have become addicted to typing "donkeyjohn" into search engines. Something that stands out is that although there is no discussion forum on the *Donkey John* site, the game pops up in a lot of other online forums, and people are taking the chance to explain, or ask questions about, the politics behind the game.

As far as I'm concerned, it's an ideal situation. Political campaigning like this isn't meant to be a sledgehammer. Rather than preach bumper slogan soundbytes, it aims to chip away at ignorance and apathy; to catch people off guard, get them thinking about what the oil deal means to East Timor and what they can do to affect the situation. That's not to say we were totally above a few bumper sticker moments of our own—the loadscreen was designed as a gateway to the game that shouted the main political points and also hinted at some of the subtler stuff to follow.

RELATED LINKS

[More about Feature Issue Articles](#)
[News by Jodi Crome](#)

Most Popular Feature Issue Articles Review:

[Editorial: Reality TV and its Realist Angles](#)

ARTICLE RATING

Average Score: **0**

Votes: **0**

Please take a second and vote for this article:

- Excellent
 Very Good
 Good
 Regular
 Bad

OPTIONS

 [Printer Friendly](#)

Is the message missing the mark? I don't think so. The feedback I have indicates people like the game and enjoy the parody. And considering it was put together for only \$33 (for the domain name), the site has gained a fair share of publicity. As far as I know it has been covered in Sydney's main papers, on radio, street presses, and popped up on websites based as far a field as Europe and the US.

T: Do you believe that political simulation games will become a substantial part of political communication in Australia?

J B-d: Online games are just one way of passing on a political message. The real battle is to engage people's imagination when it comes to politics, get them thinking, talking, and taking action on issues that, if given the opportunity, they really do care about. Personally I think such a goal is too big an ask for a simple Internet game.

Games, songs and other examples of creative political expression are outlets that reflect frustration with the way things are and a desire for change. I am optimistic that the ballot box will catch up, but in the meantime these are just some of the ways we can keep ourselves sane, and entertained. Looking at *Escape from Woomera*, the genre is going to go a lot further, which is great. If you can combine a few good ideas I think it helps engage a wider audience. Lets hope the politicians pick up on that one.

Tama Leaver is currently completing a PhD in English, Communication and Cultural Studies at the University of Western Australia where he also teaches cybercultural studies and literary theory. His doctoral thesis is entitled "Artificialities: From Artificial Intelligence to Artificial Culture – Representations and Constructions of Identity and Embodiment in Contemporary Speculative Texts" and his research interests also include cybercultures, contemporary film, new media and science fiction. He has publications in the *Fibreculture Journal*, *Outskirts*, *Limina*, *Reconstruction and Comparative Literary Studies*.

0 comments

[Login/Create an Account](#)

The comments are owned by the poster. We aren't responsible for their content.

No Comments Allowed for Anonymous, please [register](#)

All logos and trademarks in this site are property of their respective owners.
Comments are property of their posters, and may not necessarily reflect the view of the *M/C Reviews* editorial team.

supported by



Copyright © M/C, 1998-2004 | ISSN 1441-2616 |

[About M/C](#) | [Contact M/C](#) | [Site Map](#) |

[XHTML](#) | [CSS](#) | [Accessibility](#) |

[PHP-Nuke](#) Copyright © 2005 by Francisco Burzi. This is free software, and you may redistribute it under the [GPL](#). PHP-Nuke comes with absolutely no warranty, for details, see the [license](#).