

# Veggie Vigilantes: Queering Crime Tropes in Cosy Comedy Games

**Poppy Wilde**

Birmingham City University  
Birmingham, UK  
[poppy.wilde@bcu.ac.uk](mailto:poppy.wilde@bcu.ac.uk)

**Bettina Bódi**

University of Birmingham  
31 Pritchatts Rd, Edgbaston  
Birmingham B15 2SD, UK  
[b.bodi@bham.ac.uk](mailto:b.bodi@bham.ac.uk)

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## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Focusing on *Turnip Boy Commits Tax Evasion* (2021) and *Turnip Boy Robs a Bank* (2024), developed by the LGBTQI± Canadian studio Snoozy Kazoo, this paper explores how these games subvert traditional mafia tropes, challenging entrenched representations of organised crime. This paper offers a textual analysis of the two games, and extends current research in the intersections between comedy and videogames.

Cultural fascination with organised crime spans across media - from classic films like *The Godfather* (1972) and *Scarface* (1983) to prestige television such as *The Sopranos* (1999-2007) and *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013) - inviting debates about the aestheticisation and moral ambiguity of criminality (Munby 1997; Silver and Ursini 2007; Polan 2009). Video games have similarly explored criminal worlds through series such as *Mafia* (2002-2025) and *Grand Theft Auto* (2001-present), contextualising crime within questions of race, capitalism, and urban life (Leonard 2020; Wright 2022). While these works often reproduce the glamor and violence of organised crime, this paper turns to the intersection of comedy, queerness, and criminality in video games to reveal alternative forms of cultural critique.

In the games under study, players take on the titular role of Turnip Boy, the last heir of mafia boss Don Turnipchino, in a whimsically illustrated post-apocalyptic world populated by anthropomorphic vegetables. Both games use satirical humor and “cute” aesthetics to transform the traditional mafia narrative, framing it around absurd yet subversive goals - evading taxes and robbing banks. Drawing on roguelite and bullet-hell gameplay conventions, they encourage players to engage in acts of defiance and moral inversion rather than pursuit of mastery or control. Through an

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analysis of gamic elements via the lenses of transgression (Ruberg 2019) and comedy (Bonello Rutter Giappone et al. 2022), the paper reveals how these cosy, playful games queer established genre conventions and representations.

Comedy can be used in and through videogames in various ways, from satire (Gallagher 2022), punchlines (Heßler 2022), slapstick (Garin 2022), and irony (Jayemanne and Kunzelman 2022), whilst also dealing with a myriad of complex issues around sexual humour (Poirier-Poulin 2022), the gendering and racialisation of “jokes” defined for specific audiences (Bem 2022; Jayemanne and Kunzelman 2022), and the toxicity inherent in certain forms of both videogame cultures and comedy spaces (Bonello Rutter Giappone et al. 2022). The *Turnip Boy* games are most clearly positioned as satirical – “mocking extra-textual phenomena, such as customs or social mores” (Bonello Rutter Giappone et al. 2022, 12). Our textual analysis of the games highlight how they reimagine criminality through acts of playful subversion. Mafia power structures are parodied, authority figures squashed, and capitalism critiqued through comic excess. Turnip Boy’s anarchic rebellion - destroying, looting, and mocking systems of economic and familial control - demonstrates how humor and cuteness can operate as vehicles of resistance.

The paper contributes to a growing body of work within queer game studies that explores how “cosy” or humorous design can serve as a mode of political engagement. The paper argues that the *Turnip Boy* series destabilises the moral and aesthetic conventions of crime narratives in digital play.

Queerness offers an ambiguous perspective - one that defies normative conventions, does not seek easy acceptance, and transgresses certain societal norms. Ruberg (2019, 15) argues that “queerness in a video game may lie in the opportunity to resist structures of power.” In the *Turnip Boy* games, where the mafia is humorously reimaged as vegetables, not only are capitalist structures of power resisted, but serious crime is transformed into a more whimsical interpretation that further queers power dynamics. We might similarly argue that the Turnip Boy representations of the mafia do this. Turnip Boy’s mafia, are, therefore queer. They are non-normative (literally being vegetables), they both reject capitalism and accrue wealth, they reject (mafia-) normative notions of blood relations yet rely on trust and mafia code. They steal from some, and protect others. The Pickled Gang, by embodying the mafia in a satirical way, enable us to see the queer potential of all mafia structures, and simultaneously make the danger posed by the mafia (and other central themes of the games, such as apocalypse, invasion, and war) more manageable and digestible.

Meanwhile, Turnip Boy himself subverts the potential power of his lineage by rejecting his father's legacy, subverting both capitalist and mafia structures. Ruti argues that “the rhetoric of opting out of normative society - of defying the cultural status quo, refusing to play along, and living by an alternative set of rules - has always been an important trope of queer theory” (Ruti 2017, 1) and Turnip Boy (in *Commits Tax Evasion*) certainly seems to do that, as do the games as genres themselves (see Bódi 2024), with the games “opting out” of normative genre definitions.

The paper will be of interest to scholars working across videogame studies and humour, the queer potential of videogames, cosy videogames, and those interested in the perhaps surprising intersections of organised crime and sentient vegetables.

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