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Brierley-Beare, Amy (2025)
“Congradulations on Owing Me Money!”: Dispelling the Myth of the Magnanimous Flipper in Landlord's Super. In: Digital Games Research Association (DiGRA) Australia, 16 January 2025, University of South Australia.

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“Congradulations on Owing Me Money!”: Dispelling the Myth of the Magnanimous Flipper in *Landlord's Super*

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Keywords
House Flipper 2, Landlord’s Super, Neoliberal citizenship, Boring, Gameplay Mechanics

INTRODUCTION

Building-simulation games are becoming increasingly popular in mainstream and indie gaming—particularly ones that encourage the player to take on the role of a landlord. Despite being productive (Pearce 2006) as texts, building simulations predominantly perpetuate neoliberal citizenship, reinforcing the idea that individual responsibility is the only path to personal success (Navarrete-Cardero & Vargas-Iglesias 2018; Mavelli 2022). By understanding how these texts mechanically position player subjectivities we can recognise how works reinforce or disrupt economic hegemonies. Drawing from Keever’s (2022) understanding of games as “arrangements which constitutes their users or players as ‘agents’” This paper builds on the notion that, ideologically, “videogames are sites of production” and understands that game mechanics “…invite players and agents to perform actions that support the construction of engaging stories and fictional worlds” (Dubbelman 2016, 41). Through a textual comparative analysis of two games—*House Flipper 2* (2023) and *Landlord’s Super* (2020)—I unpack the mechanical distinctions that allow for play and critically examines hegemonies within the building simulation genre.

House Flipper 2, is emblematic of the genre as a whole; set in a utopic any-town USA world where problems are only fixable by you—the landlord and house flipper. In *HF2*, building is easy, pleasurable, and rewarding. The player does not need to eat, sleep, or engage in any other bodily functions to remain upright. Contrastingly, *Landlord’s Super* is set in Thatcher era Britain, in a depressing midlands town that is often grey, raining, and includes rude, crass, and almost violent townsfolk. Players take on the role of a landlord who builds homes and rents and maintains them to different tenants. Building in *Landlord’s Super* is complex, tedious, and encourages ‘cutting corners’, as you also have to sleep, eat, wash, and defecate within a very small window of daylight. How time-consuming and painful *LS* can be is particularly evident when comparing communities of players who make content displaying their in-game homes. *House Flipper 2* builders showcase warm, architecturally complex and curated spaces that are not unlike popularised media depictions of contemporary interior design. *Landlord’s Super* players seem pleased at being able to build something that ‘almost’ resembles a house and will

Proceedings of DiGRA Australia 2025

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tend to explain the painful process to bring their basic building to fruition. I argue that the game is positioning you to be sceptical about what you're doing as a landlord and as a house flipper. It challenges you to question why you're participating and contributing to these systems and what the neoliberal and ultra-capitalist ideologies eventuate in when taken to their natural endpoint.

In their discussion of *Paper's Please* Mathew Kelly (2018, 461) argued that the game used "boring duties of labour" to rethink the politics of games and gameplay experiences. I argue that the tediousness of flipping a house in *LS* positions audiences to streamline their play avoiding these mechanics and questioning the value of what they have made and, borrowing from Kelly, creates a subjectivity formation demanding "that the player inhabits a mechanized mind-set" that sees them as cog in this unsatisfying process. The downside of this positioning is that it arguably becomes a generally unappealing and inaccessible game to most players. Whereas something like *House Flipper 2* is affirming in its narrative of success being possible through hard work, labour as something satisfying, the world as something beautiful and worth contributing to, and struggle as essentially something forgotten. The value of *Landlord's Super* then is uses mechanics to make a statement in a genre that is so set on the myth of the magnanimous hardworking flipper and landlord. This can build into further discussions around 'fun' in games and how to convey something that is not actually enjoyable to do.

BIO

Dr Amy Brierley-Beare is a games researcher and lecturer from the University of Adelaide. Her work looks at the trends and patterns in representations of romance in mainstream gaming. Brierley-Beare's research interests include productive play, emergent narrative, and audience studies.

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