

# Queer Video Game Preservation Through Synthesis & Rewriting the Past.

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Video game preservation, queer games, lesbian representation, archival, retro gaming, queer game theory, ludonarrative

## INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses the intersections between ludonarrative techniques, game preservation, retro gaming practices and queer (specifically, lesbian) representation. It argues that the synthesis of a new, explicitly queer, creative artefact made for a retro console can be considered a form of queer game preservation. As part of the research on this topic, I have engaged firsthand in creative research practice in order to create the video game *Dead Line* (Vincent Haley Moore, 2024) which is a short video game that runs on Nintendo's 1989 console the Game Boy. This paper describes the processes, research and underlying theory that informed the development of this creative artefact. In synthesising this game, I was able to creatively engage and respond to these areas of interest in my artefact creation, whilst also creating a final artefact that is harmonious in both medium and narrative metaphor – i.e. by creating a game about preservation that runs on a historically important console, I demonstrate the value and active act of queer video game preservation in a creative, narrative, and tangible way.

Key areas of study for this paper and the accompanying creative research include ludonarrative techniques, video game preservation and queer (game) theories. These existing research areas greatly informed my creative process, as they are represented ludically and narratively throughout the creative artefact. One such example includes the main narrative in *Dead Line* (Vincent Haley Moore, 2024), which revolves around a lesbian relationship that metaphorically represents the complex relationship between software and hardware and the difficulties in video game preservation. This is best exemplified in the multiple endings which represent different perspectives and solutions to the video game preservation issue.

The concept of video game preservation has several unique challenges due to games' inherent complexity as an artform. These complexities have resulted multiple 'methods' and 'definitions' of digital game preservation. These methods can range from migration, emulation (including software and/or hardware), archival/collection of source material, artefacts and associated documents, as well as 'documentary style' approaches that aim to document 'games in play' (Harkai, 2022; Lee, 2018; Newman, 2012; Olgado, 2019). Through researching this paper, I have come to see all these methods of video game preservation as having an important role, especially when done in conjunction with each other. As mentioned previously, the multiple endings

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in *Dead Line* (Vincent Haley Moore, 2024) directly refer to, and metaphorically represent through ludonarrative techniques, several of these methods (i.e. the Archival, Emulation, and Documentary endings) and ask the player to come to their own conclusions of what is ‘right.’ The one thing that the game explicitly criticises is the wilful destruction or refusal to act on such an issue, which are represented in their own different endings (Corrosion and Decay endings) that players are also able to attain.

This paper also covers particular creative decisions that were made in game development, which also propelled further research questions. One such example is the choice to create a game that was natively playable on an ‘outdated’ (or ‘retro’) console. This allowed me to further examine the meaning of ‘preservation’ in the video game space, asking such questions as: is game preservation about ensuring that the software remains playable, or is it also about preserving the hardware, the aesthetics and techniques required to create games on these specific devices? Furthermore, it prompted questions such as why video game preservation matters and what is worthy of ‘archive,’ especially when considering a queer context.

By considering game preservation as not only as the archival of particular materials, but also the techniques, aesthetics, gameplay and even feelings that these types of games invoke or contain, we can examine how the creation of a new object for retro technologies can be considered a new form of video game preservation. This is particularly interesting in the case of marginalised groups that are often excluded from archived history. In the case of video games, while queer players have always existed, games are often not created by, nor created for, LGBTQIA+ people, this being even more evident in the ‘classic’ or ‘retro’ games era i.e. 1970s-1990s (Clark, 2017; Süngü, 2020). This results in a lack of traditionally published (i.e. non-homebrew) retro archival artefact content that includes stories of queerness. By creating new video games for retro hardware, this can be seen as not only an act of preservation in a video game context, but also a queer one as well. It is a radical act of queer reclamation, of rewriting our knowledge, history and story into of an era of gaming in which we were not considered or represented.

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## **BIO**

Vincent Haley Moore has completed their bachelor's degree in Creative Industries (Digital Media) and is currently set to complete their Bachelor of Creative Arts (Honours) in 2024. Their areas of interests are intersection of games and narrative, archival and retro gaming practices and the inclusion of gender diverse, lesbian and autistic voices in games. They plan to pursue their PhD in Creative and Performing Arts at Flinders University, commencing 2025, where they will continue to study in these areas.

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