Toadstone: Video Game Design

Kiana Ramcharitar

I have designed a single-player video game titled *Toadstone*, following a canine main character of the same name. The game has a bird's eye view perspective, taking inspiration from games such as *Stardew Valley* (2016), *Hotline Miami* (2012), and *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to The Past* (1991). Assisting the bird's-eye-view perspective, the screen would have its left and right sides blurred out to reflect the way dogs with close-together eyes like Toadstone see the world (Takune). This would allow players to see the world around them in a wider lens than first-person or even third-person, which would be imperative to *Toadstone*'s collecting mechanic. *Toadstone* would also feature a combat element which increases in challenge as the game progresses. The game would immerse players in rich story-based gameplay that revolves around a loveable main character. Overall, *Toadstone*'s objective would be to find all of the itemized collectibles known as "Hounds," which are modelled after the real-life relic known as a "toadstone."

When approaching my game design, I wanted to create something original. All of my favourite story-based games have original characters, worlds, and items, so I started researching

various types of relics and collectibles from the real world and from other video games. After a bit of digging, I came across toadstones. Obscure in recent popular culture, the prevalence of toadstones practically disappeared by the end of the Medieval era. In their cultural prime, toadstones were fabled to be found in the heads of toads, believed to be the antidote to the poison that a toad's skin secreted (Geological Collections Group). However, toadstones are actually the fossilized teeth of a now-extinct ray-finned fish called Scheenstia, or Lepidotes (Gregorová, R. et al). The magical reputation of toadstones led to them being deemed "the jewel of kings," and to be set into rings worn by royal families (Prim). The apparent lost history of toadstones was deeply interesting to me, and I knew I wanted to include parts of it in my game.

In *Toadstone*, finding a new Hound would uncover a new memory for the main character, which were all previously lost or stolen. The memories will feature cutscenes and playable content. The incentive to uncover all of Toadstone's memories would encourage the player to earn and seek out the entire backstory and complete the game. The player would be able to keep track of all of their itemized Hounds– each with their own minorly unique design– by navigating an in-game menu and UI. The UI would be reminiscent of the ones in *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of The Wild* (2017) and *The Last Of Us* (2013).

Additionally, each Hound in the player's inventory would allow the player to view the associated memory by selecting a pop-up option reading "View Memory." Aside from the mechanical function of Hounds, the more relics collected, the more Toadstone's blocky exterior will soften. This will emphasize the journey our hero takes as he returns to his gentler, more peaceful self.

Toadstone's design will largely represent a blocky bull terrier. His 2D features are made up of sharp angles, emphasized by stiff, blocky movements. Toadstone's colours will pull largely from the browns and yellows in the game's colour palette, and he will have a dark brown circular pattern on the top of his head, much like the ancient woodblock artworks of toadstones from the Medieval age (Nature Picture Library). Toadstone's paws will also be the same dark brown as the symbol on his head.

This game's internal character design will fill a niche that I am always seeking: a character who finds his way back to himself. Often in video games, the characters learn a thing or two about the world or characters around them, but Toadstone will learn about himself, both current and past, while an exterior threat looms. Toadstone's story will have a personal meaning to myself and perhaps others who can associate with the overarching metaphor: a dog made evil by the world around him can reflect the dismay that comes with being a queer person in

the current political climate. To further Toadstone's story, I would include a twist near the end of the story where the villain causing the exterior threat was also the one who stole Toadstone's memories originally. All in all, my video game's story will carry the game aesthetics, establishing *Toadstone*'s story as one that a variety of people can associate with and remember fondly.

Furthermore, *Toadstone* certainly would feature five of the aesthetic elements from the MDA model outlined by Game Design Knowledge. The largest aesthetic in *Toadstone* is currently Narrative, the game's hallmark being the world-building and extensive character lore. Another important feature of the game is the ability to explore the game's universe, which outlines *Toadstone*'s second aesthetic: Discovery. The action of traversing both through the physical maps and Toadstone's memories conveys the game's world-building to the player. While searching for the Hounds that are scattered throughout the game, the players can discover more about the physical map as well. It would be impossible to enjoy the game while staying in one area for too long, making Discovery essential to the player's progression through the game.

Fantasy will encapsulate *Toadstone*, as the game deliberately plays with in-game immersion and world-building. A primary example of this is the mechanic of playing as a dog;

the player is forced to shed their usual constraints of being a human in society and act as a dog would. Toadstone will sniff out Hounds, walk on all fours, and bark instead of speak. This lack of spoken language would encourage a wider audience as well. Additionally, there will not be any explicitly stated pronouns for Toadstone in the game, which allows players to more personally associate with the game's hero. Furthermore, because Toadstone is a dog, there will be no inherent societal expectations of him.

The final two aesthetics in *Toadstone* are Submission and Challenge. Submission will be encouraged but not required, as players can return to the game's different maps to explore and find new things. These bonus items would vary from cosmetic items for Toadstone to extra Hounds separate from the main storyline. The main game will only require players to collect the minimum Hounds and their memories. Challenge slightly comes into play by an increased number of enemies, and an increase in enemy difficulty, in each map as the game progresses. The game as a whole will not prioritize challenge over leisure, but there will be a story-driven pressure to collect Hounds and fight enemies.

In terms of mechanics, the game will rely heavily on its unique sound design. The majority of *Toadstone* will emphasize its discovery and open-world aspect with slow pacing, calm

music, and lighter colours. These features may cross over into some more peaceful memories, as well. At various parts in which Toadstone is facing an enemy or experiencing a darker memory, the game may utilize faster gameplay and anxiety-inducing fast music, and perhaps some darker colours. Additionally, the game will not garner its length from too-challenging gameplay but by newly uncovered parts of its story. Challenge will be prevalent in the finding of the Hounds, as they will be hidden throughout the world and may require some puzzle-solving to find.

Dynamics-wise, *Toadstone* would be characterized by its music and unique colour palette. These colours would be reminiscent of a dog's vision, utilizing down-toned blues, yellows, and browns (Rajalakshmi). I was originally inspired by the TV show, Bluey's, blue-and-yellow-heavy colour palette; fans have speculated that these colours were chosen because all of the characters are dogs and those are the colours dogs see. Though not confirmed, I thought this was a very clever design element and I wanted to incorporate it in my game (Gibson). In terms of art style, I researched classic art from the Medieval age, due to the real-life toadstone's Medieval roots (Obelisk Art History). I also aimed particularly to find paintings that utilize blues and yellows. Some of these paintings include: *Mona Lisa* by Leonardo da Vinci (1503-1506), *Saint George and the Dragon* by Ralph Sanzio (1506), *The Last Supper* by Leonardo

da Vinci (1495-1498), and *The Garden of Earthly Delights* by Hieronymus Bosch (1503-1504). Finally, to further a dog's perspective, *Toadstone* would have an in-focus center screen with blurry peripherals on the left and right sides of the screen; this is how dogs with close-together eyes, like bull terriers, see the world (Takune). These dynamics will not be outright explained to the player, but they will certainly be intentional to enhance the game's quality.

I truly believe that *Toadstone* would fill a niche in the gaming community. Story-based games frequently have similar characters to each other, either in looks or development, and showcase a main character primarily discovering the world around them with minor self discovery. *Toadstone* would aim to flip the narrative, focusing inward at self-acceptance and peace with changing times and a changing self.

Links to Sound Design

Level One:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1H3Y165wK5Va5lGo1n_BuISr
x-ysP6iqH/view?usp=drive_link

Memory One:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/16hu260lO5TFwrIVETpxyp_E
00XYxt98j/view?usp=drive_link

Works Cited

Geological Collections Group (GCG). "Toadstones and Re-
    Animated Toads." *Geological*

Curators' Group Blog, 9 November 2021,

https://geocollnews.wordpress.com/2021/11/09/toadstones-
    and-re-animated-toads/

Gibson, Kelsie. "Why Dogs Love Watching Bluey, According
    to An Expert." *People*, 27 April 2024,
    https://people.com/why-dogs-love-watching-bluey-
    according-to-an-expert-
    8639804#:~:text=One%20of%20the%20most%20popul
    ar,and%20yellow%2C%E2%80%9D%20Farah%20says

Gregorová, R. et al. "'Crapaudine' (Scheenstia teeth) - the
    jewel of Kings." *Acta Musei Moraviae, Sci. Geol*, vol.
    105, no. 2, 2020, pp. 275-294.

http://scigeo.actamm.cz/en/crapaudine-scheenstia-teeth-the-
    jewel-of-kings/

Nature Picture Library. "1491 Woodblock illustration of from
    Ortus (Hortus) sanitatis - translated

from the Latin as 'Garden of Health'. Shows an apothecary
    removing a toad st Stock Photo." *Alamy,* 7 April 2025.
    https://www.alamy.com/1491-woodblock-illustration-
    of-

from-ortus-hortus-sanitatis-translated-from-the-latin-as-garden-
of-health-shows-an-apothecary-removing-a-toad-st-
image357526241.html

Obelisk Art History. "Art from the 1500s." *Art History Project*,
2022,

https://www.arthistoryproject.com/timeline/16th-
century/1500s/

Prim, Justin K. "The Magic of Toadstones." *YouTube,* 3 June
2021,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uKCkurM7LxM&list=PLu
252W4rzmGW4h4Md7MY0uROIpr6R923F&index=2

Rajalakshmi, Niranjana. "What Colours Do Dogs See?"
Scientific American, 4 October 2023,

https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/what-colors-do-
dogs-see/

solofhreaper. "Bird's Eye View Games." *Reddit*, 2022,

https://www.reddit.com/r/gamingsuggestions/comments/r9rxix/
birds_eye_view_games/

Takune. "What Do Video Games Look Like to Dogs? (With
Simulated Gameplay)," *YouTube,* 3

December 2020,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lW9RZ_xdi-
Q&list=PLu252W4rzmGW4h4Md7MY0uROIpr6R923
F

"The MDA Method." *Game Design Knowledge*, 7 April 2025.
https://www.gamedesignknowledge.com/blog-post/the-mda-
method