Fish Upon A Star

A relaxing pixel-based RPG with a unique rhythm-based fishing mechanic.

Marooned on an uncharted planet, will you find your way home?
... Or will you make a new one?

Executive Summary

Title

Fish Upon A Star

Genre

Pixel RPG / Life Sim / Rhythm Game

Version

V1.0

The Big Idea

The player is a space explorer who finds themselves marooned on this inhabited planet. The player must try and gather up the missing pieces of their ship in order to escape. However, over the course of the game, players will become engrossed in the every-day-lives of the planet's inhabitants, and at the end of the game, will have to ask themselves whether or not they really want to leave.

Category

Fish Upon A Star is a **casual single-player life sim RPG**, mixing the quaint relationship building experience of *Stardew Valley* with the **emotional depth** of *Spiritfarer* and a **rhythm-based fishing mechanic** reminiscent of *Crypt of the Necrodancer*. Through a semi-linear narrative, players will fall in love with the **whimsical sci-fi world**, and find themselves relaxing to the beautiful soundtrack by renowned lo-fi artist Sleepy Fish.

Platforms

Designed primarily for the PC, where it can be used as a "game between games" and make use of a nice "live wallpaper" feature where it can display scenery from the game and play the soundtrack. **Releasing later on home consoles, focusing on a Switch release**, given the heavy marketplace success of other cozy games on Switch.

License

Like other cozy games, *Fish Upon A Star* plans to deliver an extremely emotional and individualized experience to each player. **Players will walk away from the game with favorite moments, favorite locations, favorite characters, favorite songs, and even favorite fish.** The game is rife with potential for **DLC expansions**, and, like *Terraria*, there's a lot of room to build serialized stories from it via a graphic novel. **The game's Official Soundtrack (OST)** is likely to make a lot of sales and win awards, being fronted by Sleepy Fish.

Play Mechanic

Gameplay is broken up into a few primary mechanics: **Traversing the world**, **Rhythm-based Fishing,** and **Solving Puzzles.**
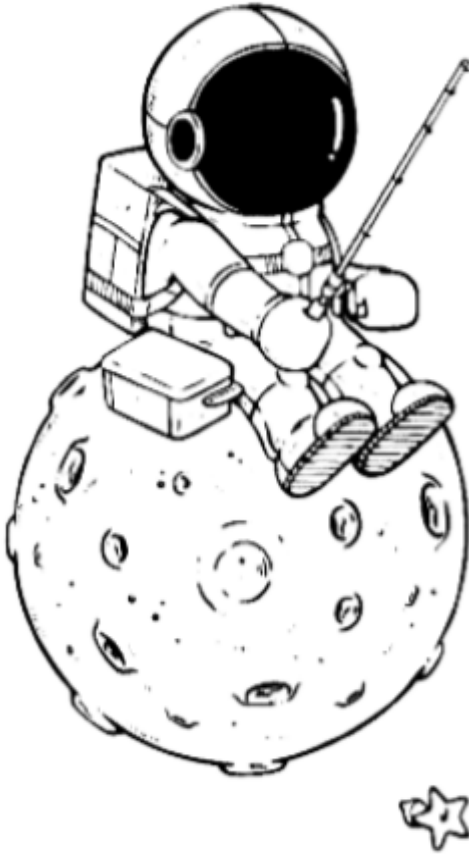
Traversing the world

While traveling through the world, the player controls their character from an overhead perspective. They can walk around the environment, interacting with NPCs and objects. Here, they're able to open their journal and review game objectives, in-game memories, relationships with NPCs, and any notes they take themselves.

Fishing

Fishing takes the form of a rhythm-based minigame, set to the soundtrack. Players will press the WASD keys to pull their rod in different directions, and press the space bar to reel in their catch. They'll react to ripples in the water and the movement of the fish to know what buttons to press and when.

Solving Puzzles

Throughout Fish Upon A Star, players will encounter different kinds of puzzles, from reassembling parts of their ship to fixing a musical instrument. These will occur in pop-out minigame windows where the player can perform actions like sliding or rotating tiles, connecting different wires together, etc.

Technology

This game should be made with the **Unity engine** using custom assets. Unity presents a simple and straightforward engine, and since Fish Upon A Star is mechanics-light, Unity is perfectly suited to achieve what we want.
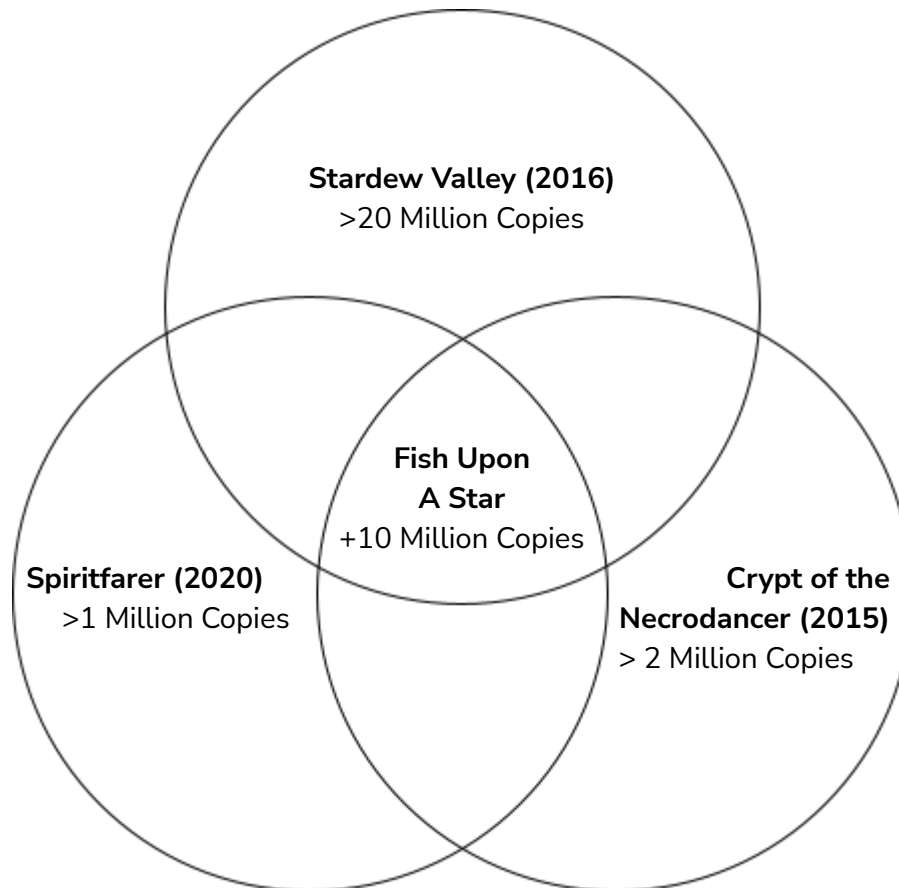
Target Audience

Targeting teens and young adults who **love casual games like Stardew Valley**: the sort of game where players can gradually learn about the world and its characters, building relationships as they follow an emotional overarching narrative. Also appeals to **rhythm game players** (since fishing is a rhythm-based minigame), and **collectors/completionists** who may want to find every item/collectible/secret in a game.

Marketing Summary

Fish Upon A Star has a great chance to succeed in the market. All of its comparables performed very well, particularly for indie titles:

Stardew Valley (2016)
>20 Million Copies

**Fish Upon
A Star**
+10 Million Copies

Spiritfarer (2020)
>1 Million Copies

**Crypt of the
Necrodancer (2015)**
> 2 Million Copies

Marketing Plan

Many successful indie games are brought to life through a combination of publisher funding and crowdfunding. Some of the most successful indie games in the crowdfunding space were life sims, (Puff Pals, $2.5M), narrative RPGs (Divinity: Original Sin 2, $2M), or pixel-based visuals (Sea of Stars, $1.2M). Fish Upon A Star would likely see its best success by developing a demo using in-house funds, then moving to crowdfunding for initial funding, and to garner widespread attention from players and publishers alike, then to close the final development stretch through publisher funding.

Key Features – USP's (Unique Selling Points)

- Unique rhythm-based fishing game
- Deep, emotional narrative
- Customizable character and homes
- Award-winning soundtrack
- Romanceable NPCs
- Relaxing charm

High-Level Design Document

Product Overview

Fish Upon A Star is a **cozy, pixel-based, mechanics-light RPG** in which the player controls a space explorer marooned on a distant planet. The player will integrate into four different towns and villages while **searching for the parts of their ship** and passively following the myth of the legendary Wish Fish.

As the player collects parts for their ship from wherever they've found their way to—some lost at the bottom of a lake, some in a jungle, and some have even been repurposed by NPCs—they will also be able to **build and furnish a home in each town,** using the money they earn from fishing. Along the way, they'll also **interact with the locals**, getting to know them and **helping them** to solve problems, building relationships along the way. The focal point of the game is **rest and relaxation**, luring the player in with a simple premise that gives way to **a surprisingly deep story, with an emotional twist ending.**

Part 1. Concept & Story

The Core Concept

Fish Upon A Star exists in a living, breathing sci-fi world full of delightful and quaint characters and locales. It should always feel intriguing and interesting, but not necessarily happy - characters and locations will sometimes explore more serious themes, like "chosen family vs. blood family" or dealing with grief and loss.

Over the course of the game, the player will explore the question: **"What *is* home? Is it where we're from, or is it where we belong?"** At the beginning of the narrative, the gameplay pushes the player towards the goal of wanting to return to their home planet, and the player will feel motivated and attached to their home planet, despite never really having set foot there themselves. Throughout the rest of the game, the player will gradually become more and more attached to the world they're in, and the inhabitants that they're interacting with regularly. When they reach the end, they are given a choice on whether they want to return to their home planet, or remain on this one. **The goal of the game's narrative should be to make that decision as difficult as possible.**

Player Character

The player character serves as a blank slate for the player to project onto. However, there are a few elements which will not change from player to player, which serve as the foundation for who the player character was before the events of the game - things that the player has little to no influence over. The player character is hardy, inquisitive, clever, and adaptive; all traits that the player themselves will need to exhibit in order to complete the game.

The player character is a space explorer, and they take their job (and the responsibilities that come with it) seriously. They also have some major attachment to their homeworld. There will be 3 generic attachments (which will evolve through gameplay and player input):

1. Family Attachment
2. Responsibility Attachment
3. Purpose Attachment.

This character exists as a vehicle for the player to progress through the story and project onto, ultimately being the vehicle by which they return to (or discover) their home.

Moods

Emotional. The game should be fun to play and entertaining, but also thoughtful. Every line of dialogue should have meaning behind it, and every quest line and puzzle completion should bring with it a sense of emotional weight, positive or negative.

Whimsical. Fish Upon A Star leans more on the "fi" part of "sci-fi." There's definitely an atmosphere of real and believable science, but it's underpinned by a large amount of suspension of disbelief, predicated on the silly or far-fetched nature of the planet.

Reflective. Each bit of emotional interaction that the player has should leave the player taking that emotional weight into themselves and considering what it means to them. The player should be thinking, feeling, and playing all at once.

Theme

The overarching theme of Fish Upon A Star is expressed as "finding your home." At the beginning of the game, the player is made to feel like "finding home" means returning to their home world. Over the course of the game, characters and locations will be designed to make the player question what "home" really means to them.

In the final moments of the game, the player will have to answer that question when they decide whether to return to their planet, or remain on this planet. The question is made deeper and more difficult by NPCs like the Wish Fish, who may need the player's help, or by NPCs who have developed a relationship with the player character.
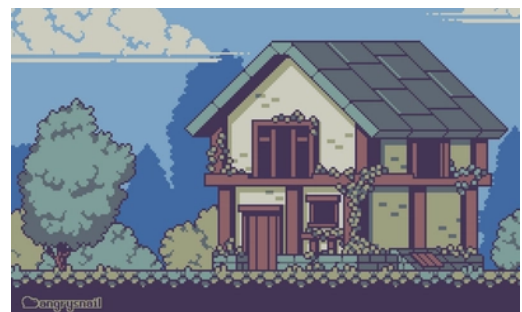
Narrative Description Of Gameplay – aka "The Grabber"

> *Player Controlled Actions and Effects are **CAPITALIZED**. The Player Character is referred to as "Holden" in this write-up, though the PC can be fully customized to the player's liking.*

After an opening cinematic depicting Holden's starship crashing into the surface of the planet, shedding parts across the sky as it plummeted, all goes black. Fade-in from black on an unfortunate disastrous scene: the interior of the ship, in ruins, and Holden unconscious in his chair. Eventually, he comes to, and **MOVES** out of the seat, standing on the bridge.

> **Holden**: "Computer, status report?"
> **Ship Computer**: ERROR: C_rrently experienc*ng ship-wide c463strophic fail4re. Tw3nty-three m%ssion-critical syst^ms are @ffline. Er2or l0g tr*ncated here; for7y-sev!n-tho=sand 3rrors h4ve been &dded to the d*tab8se.

With nothing else to do, Holden **LEAVES** the ship. He finds himself at a crash site in the middle of a strange forest. Smoke billows up from the ship, and deep cuts in the terrain can be traced back to where it first made impact. As Holden surveys the area, he sees a young woman wearing a traditional-looking dress with long hair peeking at him from behind a tree. She hides, and Holden cautiously **APPROACHES** and **SPEAKS** to the woman.

> **Holden:** "Hey, there - I mean you no harm. My ship is damaged. Can you help me?
> **Mehrun:** "მე არ მესმის შენი."
> **Holden:** "Damn... my universal translator must be offline..."

The camera pans to the top of the ship, where an antenna is clearly broken off. Holden **SPEAKS** to the girl again.

> **Holden:** "I need your help. Have you seen something that looks like this?"

The Journal appears in full-screen, displaying many technical illustrations for the ship. Holden **FLIPS THROUGH** the different schematics, navigating the journal pages until he finds a diagram showing the antenna that's meant to go on the top of the ship. He **SELECTS** the diagram, showing it to the woman. She immediately raises a finger, looking at him excitedly. She starts walking away, then stops, turning to face Holden. Holden **FOLLOWS** her into the forest.

She takes him to the edge of a nearby lake where the ship has clearly torn through and knocked over several trees. Some bushes are still smoldering. She points towards the water, indicating that the translator is in the water. Then, she hands Holden a fishing rod. Holden **CASTS THE ROD**, then plays through the first fishing mini game, **MOVING THE ROD TO THE RHYTHM OF THE WATER** as Mehrun instructs him in her language. Eventually, he CATCHES the antenna for the translator! The two of them **CELEBRATE**.

Holden **RETURNS** to the ship and **INTERACTS** with a panel on the outside. A small puzzle minigame plays out where Holden must **RECONNECT** the antenna back to the ship, **CONNECTING WIRES** and **FLIPPING SWITCHES**. When he's finished, he turns back to the woman.

> **Holden:** "Can you understand me now?"
> **Mehrun:** "You can speak our language? … How is that possible?"

Holden can **CHOOSE** whether to explain the ship's technology to Mehrun, or try to hide the fact that he is from outer space from her, choosing one of the following dialogue summaries:

Holden: "I must have hit my head harder than I thought… I probably wasn't making any sense to you, and I couldn't understand you at all. But I'm better now.

Holden: "I'm a traveler, not from this planet. The piece of my ship you just gave me allows me to speak any language, to communicate with people from other worlds."

Mehrun and Holden exchange a few lines of dialogue before she indicates to Holden that he should come with her to the village. Without anything else to do in this area, Holden FOLLOWS her to Gadwood Village.

Story Mechanics

Each "Chapter" of the game is broken up into different locations, with some very straightforward goals. Solving these goals will allow the player to find their ship parts, upgrade their equipment, and ultimately progress the story and move to the next area.

- The locals may need help building a bridge, which will allow them to trade with the next town over (and allow the player to access the next town over).
- A machine may be broken, and needs repaired, but the only person who can repair it is in a deep depression.
- A local contest is open, and the winner gets an "all-expenses-paid trip" to the next zone.

Progress in the story is always optional. Players can stop any time if they get attached to an area, and can simply spend the time and effort to improve their home there and fish there casually.

Intro Cinematic

The game begins with **character creation**, where the player will not only choose the looks of their character, but also some identifying information about them, and about their time on their homeworld. The player will be able to **choose what attaches them to their homeworld**, choosing from several option trees to build a backstory they feel very attached to. This character creation process ends when the player character leaves for their space exploration mission.

(to replace diffi
Season shuttle
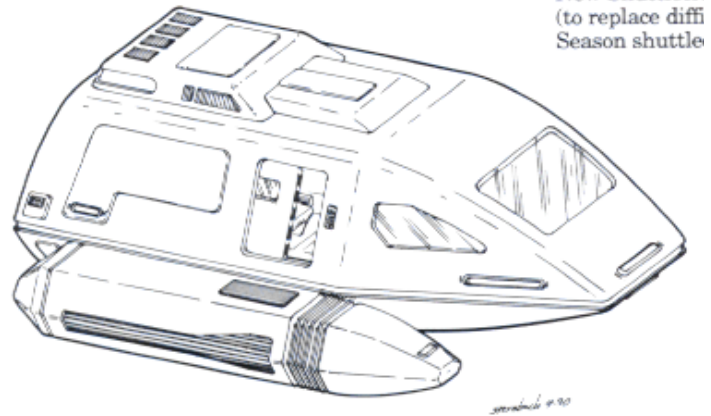
After this is a series of dialogues, while the player is seated in the captain's chair of the ship. The player is on their ship, exploring previously-uncharted territories in the galaxy. They're taking readings of a nearby planet, which is a pre-warp civilization. While taking readings and traveling just outside the orbit zone of the planet, something suddenly and sharply collides with their ship.

The screen starts shaking and alarms start blaring, informing the player of a collision with an unknown object. The ship's computer attempts to correct course and stabilize, but it's no use. The ship is headed for a crash landing on the nearest planet. As the ship enters the planet's atmosphere, the screen fades to black, and the sounds of a spaceship hurtling through the atmosphere before crashing into a forest can be heard.

When the player comes to, they ask their computer for a status report, but it does not reply. They attempt to run a manual diagnostic, only to discover that **the ship is entirely without power.** They realize they're not hurt, so they stand up from the chair. At this point, the player gains control over the character, and the opening cinematic is over.

Story Beats

The player character is a space explorer, mapping uncharted planets. In the opening of the game, some unknown object in space **collides with the player's ship, marooning the player** on the nearest planet and crashing their ship into many pieces. The player survives this crash, and the locals of the wooded lake area **Gadwood Valley** come to their rescue, taking them in and making them a part of their society, even providing them a house and returning part of the player's ship. When the player connects that part to their ship, they run diagnostics and discover they're missing several pieces of their ship, so that's their goal now: **collect the missing pieces.**

The player joins in on the locals' culture and takes up fishing to support the community (and themselves). One night, the player encounters a gigantic fish in the lake that doesn't look like any other fish. He tells the village elder about it, and the elder informs him that this was likely **the mystical Wish Fish**. Legend says that if you catch it, it grants you a wish. The player

realizes that they may not be able to collect all their ship parts, but since they're fishing anyway, it might be worth trying to catch the Wish Fish, too. The fish swims north, presumably to Solora Shore, the beach town. The player helps the community repair a bridge and clear the way to Solora Shore, then heads there.

In the quaint beach city of **Solora Shore**, the player helps the citizens similarly to Gadwood, fishing off the pier for coastal ocean fish. They find some ship parts (including the transport pattern buffer, facilitating fast travel) and also have another encounter with the Wish Fish, who travels north into the ocean. The player helps repair a small ship, and in exchange, the captain sails them north to Raft City.

Raft City is a floating ramshackle scrapyard community, where the player will get to experience deep sea fishing. They have ANOTHER encounter with the Wish Fish, which swims away to the north again, and it starts to feel like maybe the Wish Fish is leading them somewhere. The player helps the community of Raft City get their anchor weighed (which has kept them stuck for quite some time) and helps to open up a trade route north to Kaldstern Mountain for materials. So, the player heads north, half-chasing their parts, and half-chasing the Wish Fish.

Kaldstern Village is a stonework village nestled at the foot of a massive mountain of the same name. Here, they do ice fishing. The player encounters the Wish Fish beneath the ice and gets pretty close this time, but then the Wish Fish takes off beneath the ice and swims UP THE WATERFALL. The player repairs the gondola which takes villagers up the mountain, used for pulling down resources from the mountain for their trade. Once the gondola is repaired, the player heads up to the mountain peak, where the villagers say a piece of the player's ship must land. Strangely, though, they insist that this must have been a BIG piece of their ship.

CRATER LAKE AND WIZARD ISLAND
WEDNESDAY, 23 JUNE 2010

The player arrives at **Crater Lake**, a large lake at the peak of the mountain, which is incredibly alien in nature. Strange, bioluminescent flora and fauna can be found here. They find the last piece of their ship here, as well as very unique and interesting fish. While they're fishing here, they catch something. Something BIG. Try as they might, they can't seem to reel this one in. And, all of a sudden, **the player is actually pulled INTO the water.** They go down, down, deeper and deeper, until there's almost no light. Then, suddenly, there seems to be more light ahead. How is this possible? The player loses consciousness before they can find out.

The player comes into consciousness in a strange, metallic room. There's a large glass wall in front of them with water in it, almost like an aquarium. Suddenly, the Wish Fish appears behind the wall. Then, even more strange than all of that... **It talks**. It informs the player that their ships collided, and the Wish Fish crash landed in this lake. It turns out, **the thing that caused your ship to crash was actually the Wish Fish**—whose name is actually Rimor Nausicaäs, a female space explorer. She explains that during her crash, many of her ships systems were damaged, and she was going to give up hope until she found the player, and thought that perhaps their systems might be compatible. She then asks the player if they would be willing to give her some of their ship's parts, so she can go home. The player cannot go home themselves if they do this. And this is the final moment of the game's story: **Will the player give up their only hope of returning home, so this fish explorer can go home? Or will they keep their ship parts so they can go home themselves?** This is really a test to see if the player understood the point of the game, which was to create a NEW home on this world, with these people. But there's also no right or wrong answer, as the player may have their own ideas for their reasons to return home.

If the player says no, then Rimor will understand, and will provide the player with the warp core from their ship, which had sank to the bottom of the ocean. From here, the player will be able to return to their homeworld, potentially taking along their love interest, and the game ends. Roll credits.

If the player says yes, then the player and Rimor will travel back to Gadwood, and the player will gut their ship, handing over all the parts of their ship to Rimor, who will then take off out of the lake and into the sky, and the player will continue on living on this planet instead, making their home here.

Part 2. Gameplay Mechanics

Obstacles & Objectives

- Ship Parts
  - Collecting these is the primary goal of the game. Most of them are macguffins, but some will provide key functionality, like fast travel.
- Other Collectibles
- Puzzles (e.g., repairing a part of the ship, or solving a ruins puzzle)
- Relationship Gates (must have a positive relationship with a given character)
- Quests/Problems to Solve
- Fishing Challenges

Interactions

Next, describe how the player interacts with the game to advance through the experience:

- **NPCs**
  - Communicating, buying and selling equipment/cosmetics, completing quests and puzzles to advance the story
- **Environment**
  - Entering/exiting buildings, fishing at specific locations, purchasing and building a home (placing furniture, etc.), interacting with designated objects (the ship, set pieces & puzzles, etc.)
- **Journal**
  - The pause menu, which allows players to take their own notes, review "photos" of significant events, track missing ship parts, view world map, review relationships and information about NPCs, save the game, review collectibles and field notes about fish, equip and de-equip specific fishing rods or bait, etc.
- **Fishing**
  - The core gameplay loop involves fishing in designated locations, which puts the character into a mini-game perspective (see Rhythm-based Fishing below). The player will press input keys in response to the music to catch a fish.
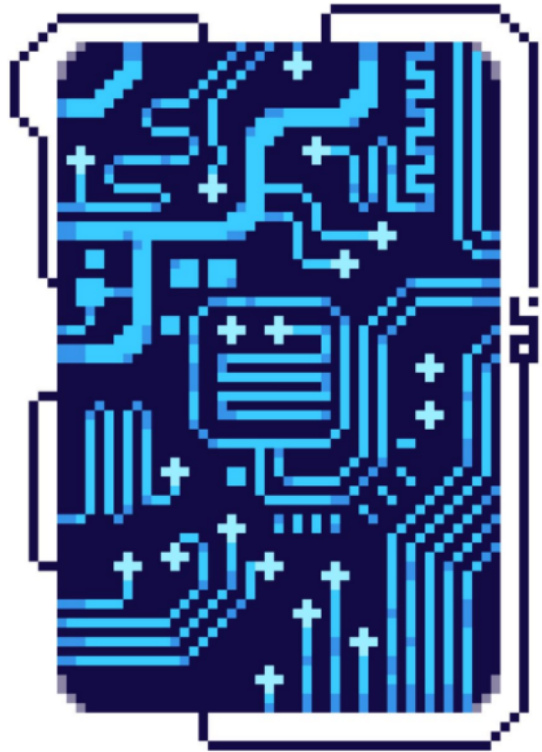
Rhythm-based Fishing

The fishing mechanic in Fish Upon A Star is very unique, and serves as one of the main selling points of the game. Fishing mechanics in video games are very divisive, and so rather than relying on a pre-existing mechanic present in another game, we want to try and make a fishing mechanic with broad appeal, low stress, and high accessibility. This takes the form of a slow and simple rhythm game, set to chill lo-fi music (come back an insert a link to a Sleepy Fish song as reference). As the player fishes, on-screen prompts, most likely ripples in the water, will telegraph to the player how to catch the fish.

Fishing Loop

The typical fishing loop lasts between 20 seconds and 1 minute, determined by the rarity of the fish, difficulty multiplier, and accuracy of input from the player. The player will likely sit and fish until their inventory is full, which should allow them about 3-5 minutes of uninterrupted fishing.
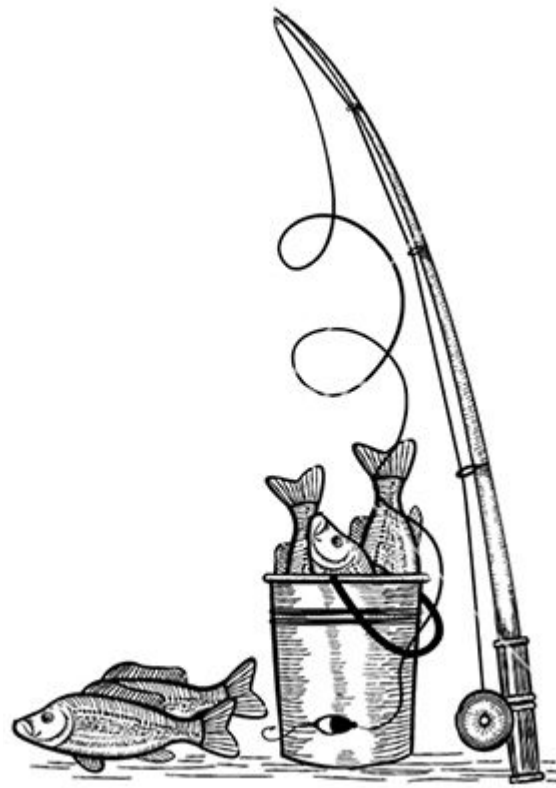
Player Input

The inputs available to the player will be the WASD keys and the space bar. The WASD keys will allow the player to pull the rod in a particular direction, and the space bar is generally considered a "big reeling in" motion. Each successful keypress will reel the fish in an amount based on how good the timing was on the input, multiplied by a dificulty multiplier (easier difficulties = higher multiplier = faster reel-in).

Difficulty Modifier

Like other rhythm games, there will be different difficulties available to the player, so they can choose their level of engagement with the rhythm-based aspect of the game. Unlike other rhyhm-based games, this is not a high-stakes, hyper-focused perfectionist wet dream. Instead, the rhythm will gently guide the player in their actions. Accurate inputs will allow a skilled player to catch fish quickly, and players who are unskilled in rhythm games can play at the easiest and most forgiving difficulties.

There are four different difficulties for fishing gameplay:

- **Relax -** Our most forgiving difficulty, with a large window of input. All inputs happen at quarter note intervals, requiring very little change in input or attention. Low-variation.
- **Groove -** Our equivalent of "normal mode." This mode will be our default point of reference. Occasionally may have an input on an eighth note, but only where it feels very relevant to the particular song.
- **Focus -** Our equivalent of "hard mode." This mode will have more variation, and frequent eighth notes. This difficulty requires the player to be somewhat engaged in the gameplay.
- **Hyper Focus -** Our "expert mode." This mode will have consistent eighth-note input, will sometimes require two-key input (e.g., pressing W and the space bar, or W and A simultaneously), and will involve syncopation occasionally.

There are no rewards for playing on higher difficulties (except perhaps Steam achievements). Playing on a higher difficulty should be a choice a player makes based on how they want to engage, leaning heavily on player choice and not excluding players who don't enjoy rhythm games, while also leaving room for rhythm game fanatics to still find some enjoyment at the higher skill levels of the game.

The Journal

One of the more unique aspects of Fish Upon A Star is the journal (in lieu of a pause menu) which creates a much more personalized gameplay experience. The player can flip through pages of the journal like tabs of a menu, with bookmark ribbons available at the bottom to "flip to the page" of whatever function you wish to perform. The journal will serve many functions, and will become an intimate aspect of the game to the player. When displayed, it shows as an open, two-page spread, to maximize screen usage.

Functions of Journal:

- Current inventory (also shows character and clothing)
- Tracking found ship parts
- Fish Index
- Furniture Index
- Map of explored zones
  - Map on right-hand page, and mousing over sections will display information on left-hand page. (Most of the functions will follow a similar format/design)
- Game settings
- Saving the game (see **Saving the Game** below)
- Referring back to previous events, either reading through previous journal entries or viewing gifts from NPCs, photos, etc. as a reference point, almost like a scrapbook
- Tracking information about NPCs in an almost wiki-like format, where the player can also take their own notes on each NPC.
  - Each NPC will likely get their own dedicated page in the journal by default, and the player can expand their entry by taking their own notes on NPCs.

Saving the Game

The game is saved through the in-game journal. Each time the player saves the game, they are prompted to create a journal entry. This behavior encourages immersion and buy-in into the game world. The important element is that, if the player simply clicks "save" without filling in the journal entry, the journal entry will auto-populate with some pre-generated phrases determined by the most recent actions and interactions.

Collecting

There are several different kinds of collectibles in the game, all of which can be tracked using the in-game journal. Groups of collectibles are:

- Ship Parts
- Songs from the Soundtrack
- Fish (especially Legendary fish)
- Furniture and Clothes
- Relaxation Points
- Photos/Memories

Customization and Building a Home

The player is able to acquire homes in each of the four different zones, either by purchasing them or acquiring them through a quest line. These homes can be decorated, expanded, and customized to suit the tastes of the player. The home will begin with minimal decorations and furnishings, but as the player progresses, they will be able to purchase furniture, build walls and doors to make rooms, and even purchase expansions for their home, adding a second floor or an addition onto the home.

   The home is where the player can sleep to save the game and pass time, as well as display items they've acquired along their journey (like collectibles, rare fish, etc.), or customize their character with new clothes they've purchased. It's also where the player can move a romantic NPC partner, if they so choose. These customizable homes are meant to serve as a sort of "home base" for the player, and to help trick them into "making a home" in the world, so that the final decision of the game is much harder.

Part 3. Development Strategy
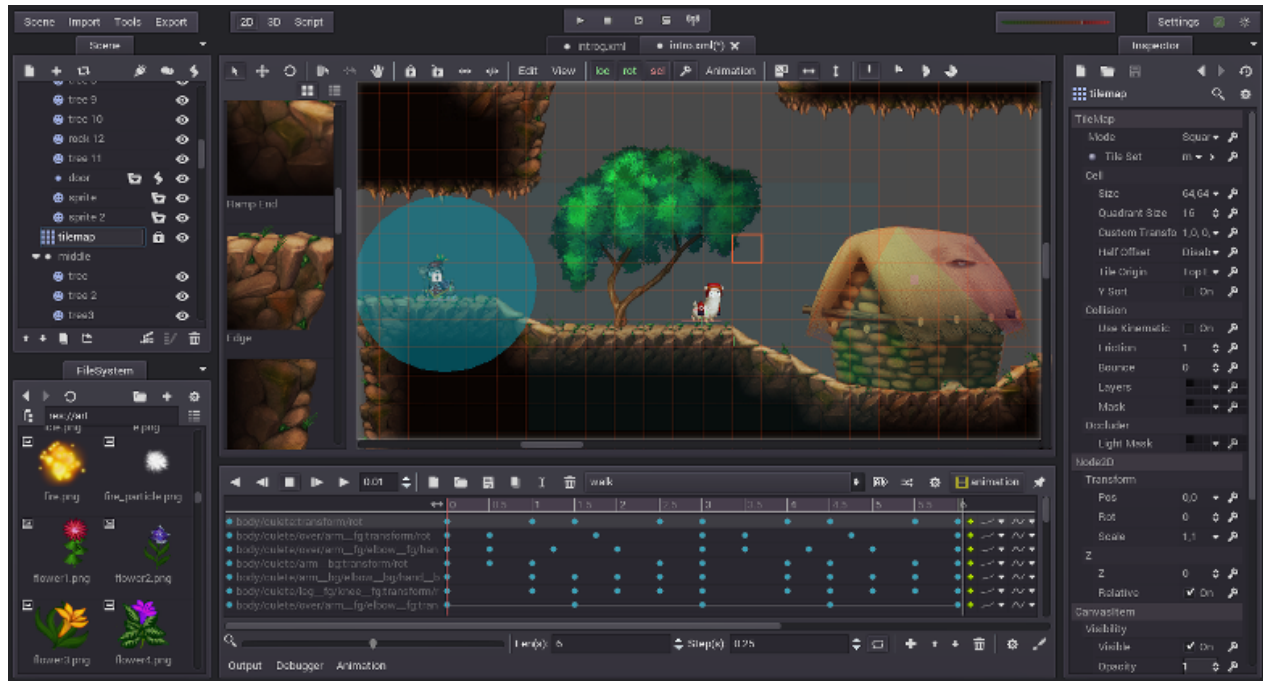
Development

Fish Upon A Star would need a talented team of experienced Unity programmers, artists, level and sound designers, and QA testers to ensure that it hit our target for quality. Unity is a suitable engine for light-weight games, and can be used for console ports as well.

Timeframe

The *Fish Upon A Star* IP would require about 4 years to complete. The first year would be dedicated to putting together a bar-raising team and developing assets to showcase for a crowdfunding campaign. The following 3 years would be dedicated to developing the game **without crunch.** It could probably be done faster, but we plainly refuse to lean into crunch culture.

Budget

To put together a team of artists, programmers, level designers, and other talent that could bring this game to life over the course of three years, *Fish Upon A Star* requires a budget of **$2.5 million**. This amount would ensure completion of the game within the timeframe at the highest standard, and help to make a splash in the market, competing with other competing titles.