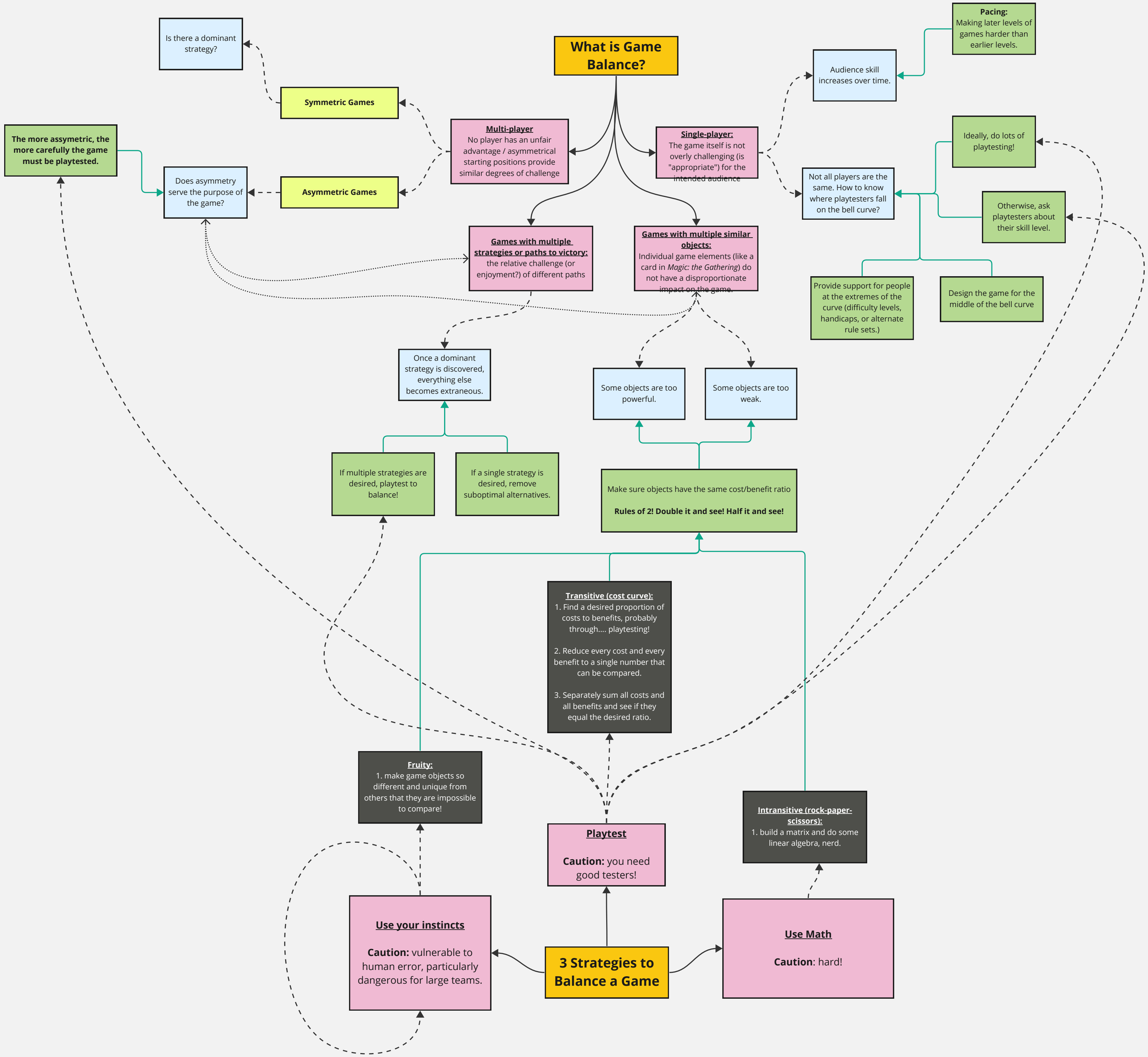
What is Game Balance?
Multi-player
No player has an unfair advantage / asymmetrical starting positions provide similar degrees of challenge
Single-player:
The game itself is not overly challenging (is "appropriate") for the intended audience
Symmetric Games
Is there a dominant strategy?
Asymmetric Games
Does asymmetry serve the purpose of the game?
The more assymetric, the more carefully the game must be playtested.
Audience skill increases over time.
Pacing:
Making later levels of games harder than earlier levels.
Not all players are the same. How to know where playtesters fall on the bell curve?
Ideally, do lots of playtesting!
Otherwise, ask playtesters about their skill level.
Provide support for people at the extremes of the curve (difficulty levels, handicaps, or alternate rule sets.)
Design the game for the middle of the bell curve
Games with multiple strategies or paths to victory:
the relative challenge (or enjoyment?) of different paths
Games with multiple similar objects:
Individual game elements (like a card in Magic: the Gathering) do not have a disproportionate impact on the game.
Once a dominant strategy is discovered, everything else becomes extraneous.
If multiple strategies are desired, playtest to balance!
If a single strategy is desired, remove suboptimal alternatives.
Some objects are too powerful.
Some objects are too weak.
Make sure objects have the same cost/benefit ratio
Rules of 2! Double it and see! Half it and see!
Transitive (cost curve):
1. Find a desired proportion of costs to benefits, probably through.... playtesting!
2. Reduce every cost and every benefit to a single number that can be compared.
3. Separately sum all costs and all benefits and see if they equal the desired ratio.
Fruity:
1. make game objects so different and unique from others that they are impossible to compare!
Playtest
Caution: you need good testers!
Intransitive (rock-paper-scissors):
1. build a matrix and do some linear algebra, nerd.
Use your instincts
Caution: vulnerable to human error, particularly dangerous for large teams.
3 Strategies to Balance a Game
Use Math
Caution: hard!