

The Glass House:

Creating and Maintaining Investment in Stories through Interactive Narrative

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Elements of Effective Interactive Narrative:

Theme:

Theme is one of the most important elements of a game. In fact, theme can solely dictate whether a player wants to play a game. Ideally, an interactive narrative employs thematic resonance, which means familiar themes with an unexpected twist. For *The Glass House*, an apocalyptic theme draws players in, but the world-building and game world-interaction will be what keeps players invested.

Mechanics:

The tools and rules that dictate how a player interacts with the narrative. Ultimately, mechanics are the theme. Without an alignment between theme and mechanics, ludonarrative dissonance occurs, a detriment to any game. In *The Glass House*, mechanics include resource management, player-character management, and Immediate and Future Story cards to form the branching narrative.

Meaningful Choices:

Player investment relies on meaningful choices because players need to feel like their choices matter. Choices need to have stakes, and the consequences for those choices must feel real. In *The Glass House*, players' choices directly impact the story, and the world around them, resulting in the Future Story card mechanic. Players are given no choice but to care about the choices they're making if they want to succeed. The players' choices can either produce rewards or result in the downfall of everything they have worked for.

Balance:

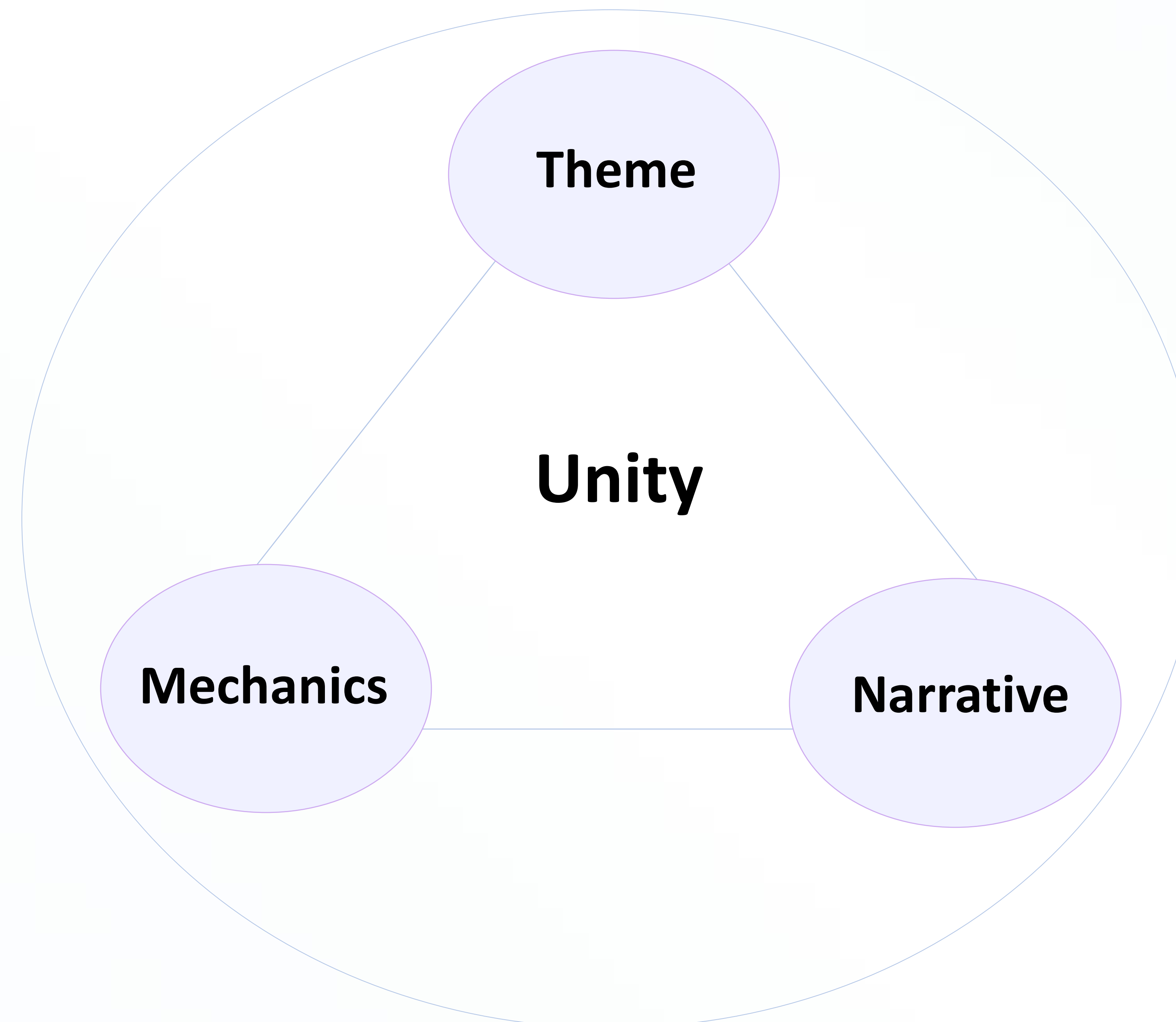
The key to balancing a game is the perception of balance. Instead of creating an equal number of obstacles and advantages, a game should contain the correct amount of imbalance. Challenges should be difficult enough that players feel a sense of accomplishment after overcoming them, but not so difficult that upon failure players don't want to try again.

Motivations:

Often, players bring their own motivations to a game. This makes motivation one of the hardest aspects to control. An interactive narrative needs to contain a story that compels players to care about the world and therefore motivates them to move forward within the narrative.

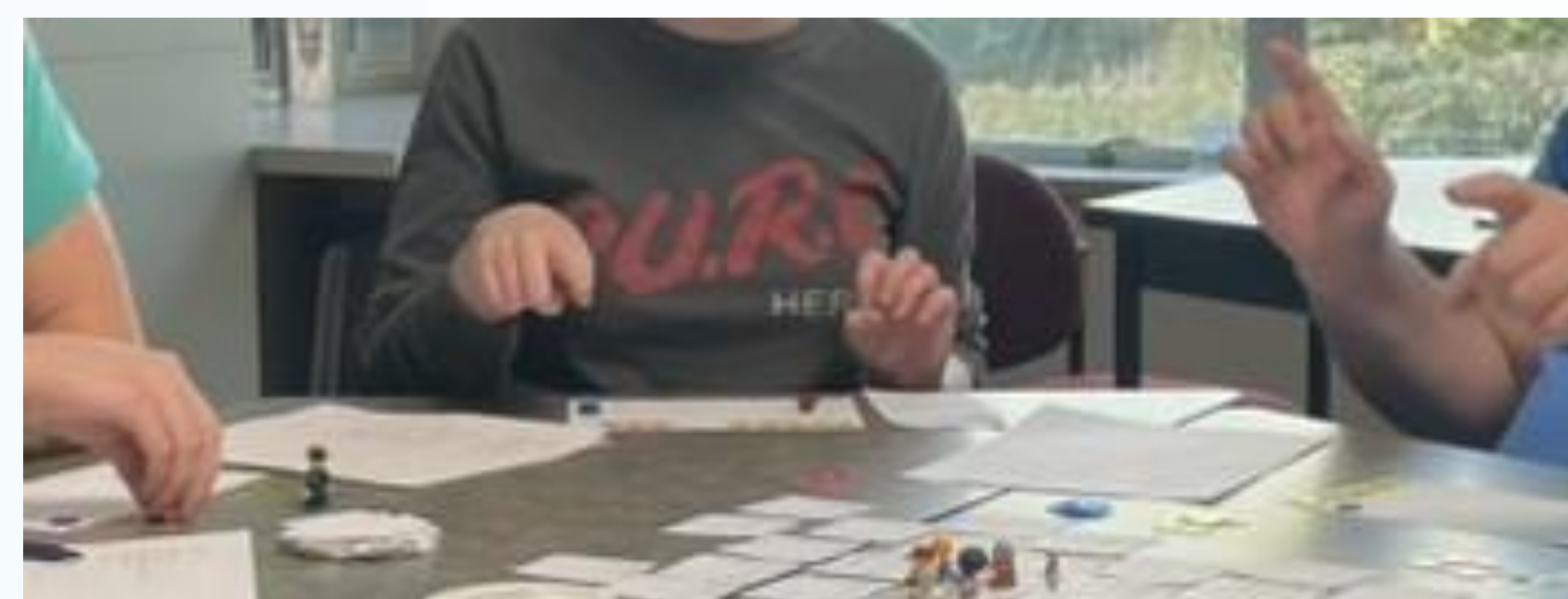
What is *The Glass House*?

The Glass House is a cooperative, apocalypse-themed board game designed to create and maintain investment through its survival-based story. Through the study of other narrative-based board games and game design, *The Glass House* was made.



Playtests:

Playtests are a crucial step in refining and polishing a board game and an interactive narrative. Playtests are when the degree of unity between theme, mechanics, and narrative is revealed. *The Glass House* Alpha was tested over two playtests with a total of eight participants. Feedback was collected both during play through notes and observations of how the players are playing and after play had finished through anonymous written feedback from each player. All this feedback now needs to be translated into actionable steps to improve player experience and investment.



Immersion:

Investment in interactive narrative also requires a sense of immersion. There are two types of immersion: absorption and transportation. *The Glass House* relies on transportation immersion, which is the process of figuratively transporting a player into another world. The world the player enters in *The Glass House* must feel believable, including the dangers and non-playable characters inside of it, so that the connections between players and their characters, and the connections between characters feel real. This belief, and immersion, in the world amplifies players' investment in the story.

Next Steps:

Art:

Art will elevate *The Glass House*'s theme, supplying visual aids to increase players' immersion and investment in the world and story.

Simplified Mechanics:

The less players need to keep track of the better. Mechanics that were underutilized or almost irrelevant in playtest will be adjusted for simplicity or removed from the mechanics completely.

Narrowed Theme for Replayability:

The Alpha version of *The Glass House* incorporated multiple themes, such as radioactive animals, insect infestations, fatal weather, supernatural cultists, and threatening survivalists, that all fell under the umbrella theme of apocalypse. In the Beta version of *The Glass House*, each of these sub-themes will be separated into individual decks to increase replayability. Players can play with one or more story decks at a time and explore a new narrative in every playthrough, and therefore become reinvested in the story multiple times.

References

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