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The Development of Overwatch

Blizzard Entertainment's hit game *Overwatch* rose from the ashes of their failed project, *Titan*, and brought together many ideas from the blizzard team. Idea's rarely come out of nowhere. A majority of the time there are factors that lead up to the formulation of an idea, no matter how large or small an impact on that idea they may be. *Overwatch* is no exception. To understand the level of work that goes into a AAA game, you must analyze the minds behind it as well as the games that came before it (no matter if that game succeeded or failed).

Titan, which began development in 2007, was a huge MMO project that Blizzard had high hopes for during the earlier stages of its development. The team believed that because they developed *World of Warcraft* and it became such a huge success, they had the necessary experience to pull off another large scale project such as *Titan*. The game was intended to have violent battles between in-game factions that players could take part in, as well as everyday work that the player could do while they were not on the front lines. The game was going to give the player free reign on how they play, as most MMO's do. If the player wanted, they could continue to work or interact with other players and NPCs without ever seeing a battlefield. *Titan* also offered class selection as a core mechanic where the player would choose a class that fits their play style the best. Unfortunately, Blizzard had too many aspirations for the game that proved to be rather difficult to accomplish.

Blizzard intended on creating a new AI system that would completely change the way the players interact with NPCs altogether. They wanted to give the players the ability to create and maintain relationships with NPCs that would dynamically change the way those NPCs viewed and interacted with the player. The team even planned to implement the ability to start families with NPCs. According to Kotaku journalist Jason Schreier, Blizzard even went out of the way to hire former developers of the *Sims* series in order to get the interactions to be the best they could be. Even with all the work and effort they put into the game, it fell quite short of the goal they were attempting to reach. Eventually the blizzard team came together to discuss how the game was going and they agreed that it was not the game they had originally planned on developing. The devs lost their passion for the project and it ultimately came to a close in September of 2014 when Blizzard officially announced its cancellation. There are still rumors of a small band of Blizzard devs continuing their original goal, but no sign of progress in the 6 years after its official cancellation leaves little room for hope.

7 years of development with seemingly nothing to show for it leaves a bad taste in the mouth of Blizzard developers. On the other hand, everything that went wrong for *Titan* is a great learning experience for future projects. Current Game Director of *Overwatch*, Jeff Kaplan, had been a part of the *Titan* team for around 5 years. In a polygon article, Kaplan stated "We learned mostly what not to do while working on *Titan*." The positive outlook on the disaster that *Titan* came to be is a large factor in the success of *Overwatch*. Being able to put aside the feelings that arise from wasting 7 years of work is a valuable asset to have in a team leader such as Kaplan as it trickles down to the developers working under his supervision.

In both a positive and negative way, Blizzard is just a bit obsessed with their own games. The *Titan* development team was striving so hard to make the new project live up to the legacy of *World of Warcraft* that they lost sight of what was important. While the *Titan* project did end up becoming a crucial learning experience, it ultimately failed as a project and did take up a decent amount of the company's resources. On the more positive end of obsession, Blizzard devs took a page out of their smaller, yet largely successful game *Hearthstone*. *Hearthstone* is relatively simple in terms of mechanics and gameplay, easy to understand but has a lot of depth to deck creation, play style, and lore. Kaplan and the *Overwatch* team wanted to replicate that idea with their new project, instead of striving to match the overwhelming success and intricacies of *World of Warcraft*.

When *Overwatch* began development the dev team decided it was best to start from scratch, rather than building on ideas and assets from *Titan*. While the team didn't necessarily abandon the ideas of *Titan* entirely, they did focus a lot more on the design of *Overwatch* as a whole. One of the main ideas that derived from work on previous games was the incorporation of a class system. This class system, however, was a bit different than the system already implemented in *WoW* and the system that was intended for *Titan*. The old class system featured the ability to choose a class that has access to a large variety of certain skills and abilities that pertain to the class. *Overwatch* brought an important change to that system. The new class system would feature a lot more classes with a smaller selection of set abilities, rather than a broad class type. A key change from *Titan* to *Overwatch* is the genre of game. *Titan* was supposed to be an MMO and *Overwatch* was being developed as an FPS. This change was a defining factor that the two projects were not the same; some people believed that *Overwatch* was a continuation of the *Titan* project, just under a new name.

Overwatch made an impact on the game community with its release, making a huge statement that it was indeed its own game and own concept. The 6 vs. 6 FPS made its public debut in May of 2016 with a fully refined class system and clear gameplay objectives. The game looked nothing like the project it took the place of, and it mirrored the idea of *Hearthstone* as a whole. *Overwatch* had relatively simple rules

and mechanics, capture/escort/defend the objective and kill the opponents who are trying to stop you. In terms of gameplay, the team decided that a first person camera view would benefit the play style much more than the default blizzard third person camera seen in WoW and most other MMOs. Blizzard strayed away from the open world design that was intended for *Titan* and made *Overwatch* a match based system where each game would be a different experience depending on the map, teammates, and hero selection.

Aside from gameplay, *Overwatch* brought an entirely new idea to Blizzards games. They broke off from the usual universe that spans across their games. *Hearthstone*, *World of Warcraft*, and even *Heroes of the Storm* all take place in the same fictional universe. *Overwatch* broke away from that trend and began its own universe for players to follow and fall in love with through character design and development, story plot through game modes, and masterful cinematics that give a much closer look into the world of the Overwatch Heroes. Blizzard wanted to make it clear that *Overwatch* was not the child of some old project, that it was and is its own project with unique attributes and gameplay. Blizzard found the sweet spot between completely ignoring/trashing their previous works and designs while creating a new project and creating a carbon copy of a previously failed project. *Overwatch* is the perfect combination of developer ideas, both new and old.

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