

Splatoon Territory Control

A Fundamentals Primer

I have decided to write this guide to try and help newcomers and those interested in improving their performance in Splatoon. Whether that be to try and enter the competitive realm, or just try to take their game to a higher level, hopefully this guide proves useful to you. This is by no means an exhaustive or definitive guide, but is intended to act as a starting point for core concepts from which additional ideas and concepts can be built upon. Corrections, suggestions, and feedback are appreciated always appreciated.

I offer my thanks to *flc (FiveLeafClover)* for providing access to his (currently incomplete) competitive guide, from which I have taken several concepts for use in this primer (particularly his definitions of control). Various map images used in this write up were also taken from: <http://squidgoals.com>.

v 1.0 – Original version

v 1.1 – 26/03/17 - Added flanking, and fixed a few spelling & grammar mistakes.

v 1.2 – Minor reordering and corrections.

v 1.2.1 – **07/06/17** - More super minor edits

Turf Control - The central element of Splatoon

Turf control is absolutely essential to all other mechanics and tactics in Splatoon, and in all modes of the game, not just Turf War. Perhaps its best attribute is that turf is visually defined, giving you immediate information to likely player positions and weapon range. It defines the front lines of engagement. It informs you of areas on the map that one team holds an inherent advantage over the other. It acts as position from which you can threaten the enemy team, and for them to threaten you; a tug of war or push and pull in the race to claim objectives. It builds your special meter to enable power shifts in the state of play... and so much more. To understand turf is to start understanding Splatoon.

Let's start diving into the actual ink of Splatoon with an example any player can relate to.

The Rollout - Defining the initial battle lines

Upon being freed from your Spawn Pad prison, every player faces an immediate choice at the start of every game...

“Do we charge straight into key locations of the map and start our fight there, spend time painting the area near our spawn to build specials first, or some mixed combination of the two?”

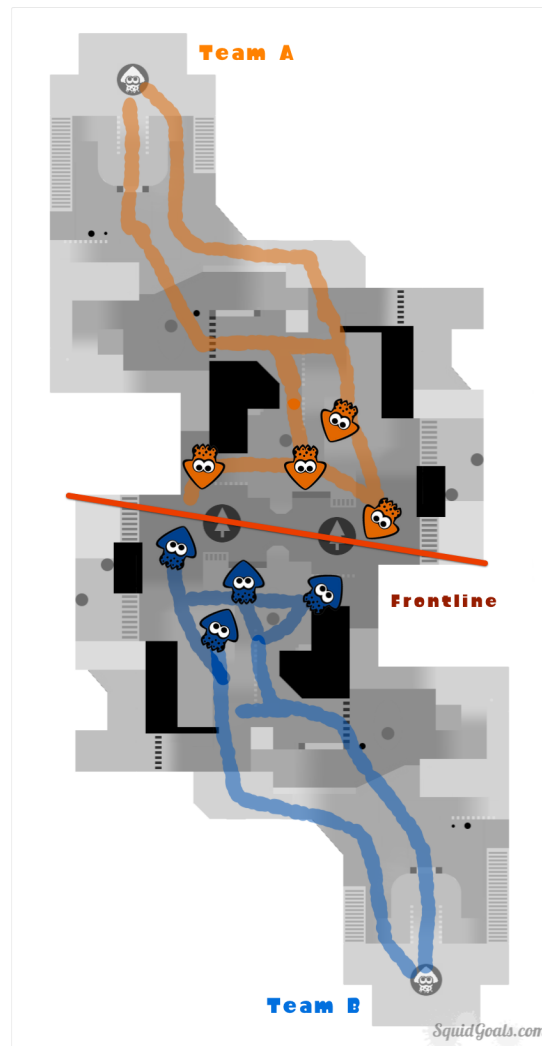
More often than not, it is far better to charge to the key locations and work from there; maybe have one teammate focus on an important special. The reasons for this are twofold.

Reason 1)

The point at which the two teams intersect defines the initial frontline at which players will fight from. The longer you spend inking up your base, the closer this line can be drawn towards your base. This can mean conceding key points on the map, which your team then has to put energy and effort into claiming, which may not have been needed in the first place.

To illustrate this concept, let's consider the two extremes of a possible rollout strategy and see what happens.

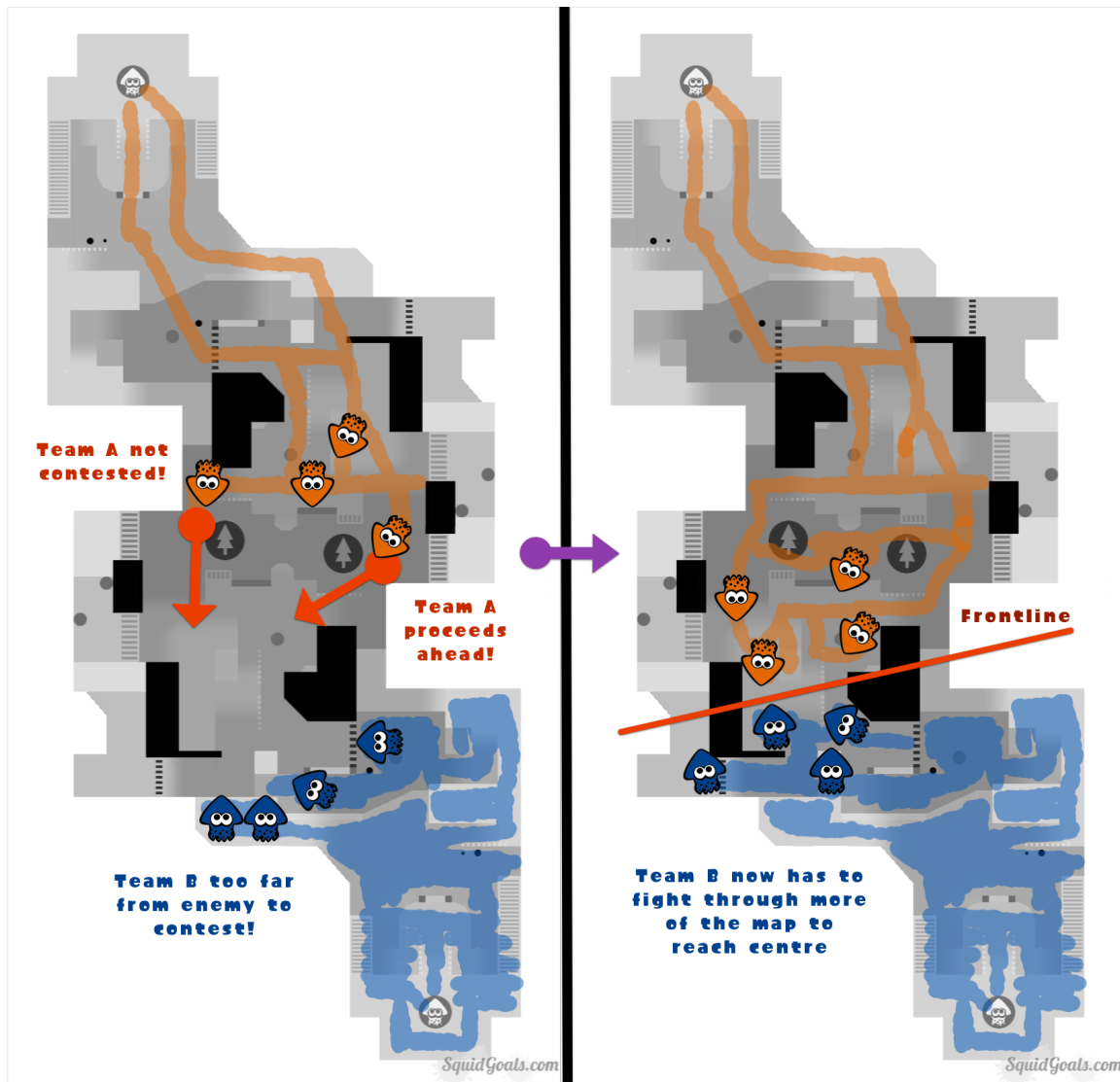
First, let us consider an opening rush approach:



Scenario 1 – An equal rollout

Two equal teams reach each other at the same time with roughly the same speed. Unsurprisingly, this more or less occurs in the middle of the map. It is around this point, which I call the frontline, where the initial skirmish for control and dominance occurs. What happens after this point is something for another time, but this is just to illustrate both teams are more or less on equal footing with this approach. The same inherent advantages and disadvantages are held on each team's side of the map, and both have to break through each other's side in order to make any addition progression.

Let us now turn to the other extreme example:



Scenario 2 - When one team doesn't roll out at equal speed to the other.

For the same amount of time, Team B remains close to their base, but boy, they've done an excellent job making sure every inch of turf is covered. Now all of their specials are ready to go. At the same time, though, Team A has already reached the middle and encounters absolutely no sign of resistance. They are then free to proceed claim the entire centre of the map uncontested, claiming any key objective in the process; let's say it's a Splat Zone; and can then proceed further into the map until they encounter the enemy team.

Now the frontline is drawn on unfavourable terms to Team B. Now Team B has to fight through Team A's resistance before they can even think about neutralising or capturing the zone. All of Team B's specials are ready to go, but using them to break through only lets them get back to equal terms in Scenario 1.

Reason 2)

Leaving as much of the base unpainted as possible reacts as a safe "reserve" of turf that you and your allies can use to safely build up their specials after death. Exhausting this area immediately means your team cannot build special unless they travel back to the frontline, which then increases the risk of death. Furthermore, the enemy can redraw the frontline during any downtime on your team, making it even harder again. This places your entire team at a significant disadvantage, as the enemy team can now advance with considerably less fear of retaliation from powerful specials, such as an Inkzooka or Bubbler, and may compromise your team's ability to fight back if your control is diminished to unfavourable map positions.

A converse argument can be made against this approach for Rainmaker, where unpainted territory in your base is basically a free pass for the fish to traverse through. Everything in moderation, however, as they say.

Understanding Turf Control

Shifting the balance of power

You may not have realised it, but we have already discussed very real and detailed aspects of control using a common and very relatable example that every player has experienced. Somewhere in your mind you're probably already piecing things together and it's all starting to make sense... and yet we haven't even discussed WHAT control even is. This is no accident, dear reader. By appreciating the relevance of these concepts, one can now start to analyse these concepts on a deeper level.

One of the greatest fallacies I continue to see perpetuated at lower levels of Splatoon play is "You can just walk around, paint, and still contribute to the team". This stems partly due to how Turf War is typically presented as part of Splatoon's overall package; that since turf is the central objective, kills, deaths, and enemy engagement have inherently less value. Nothing could be further from the truth. You can paint half the map your colour, but if you have no way of preventing the enemy team from doing the same, your team will lose this turf and have to reclaim it, because you actually aren't "controlling" it at all.

So... what IS control?

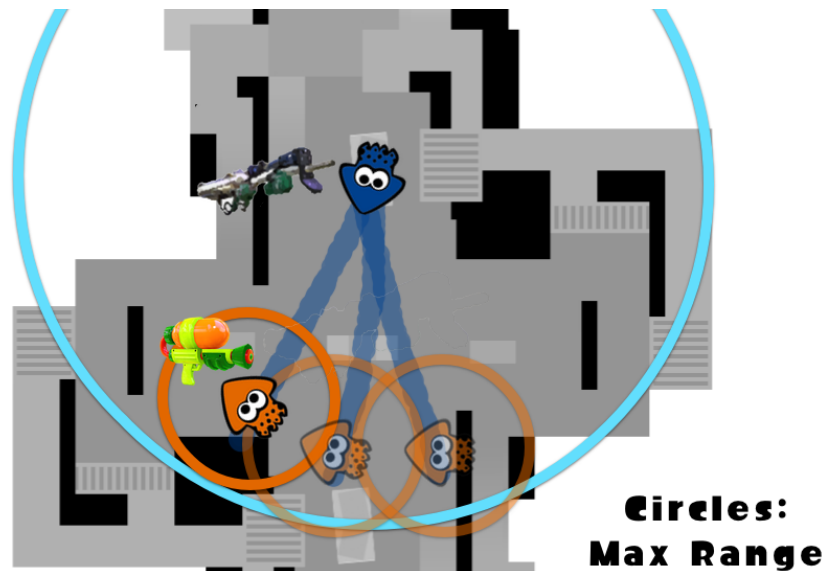
Control is when you perform actions in the game that result in you and your team implementing some form of change, whilst simultaneously denying the enemy team from doing the same.

Turf Control is explicit and very clearly defined as a visual cue; anywhere you have painted and can actively hold down is what you control. The enemy team cannot advance through your ink without putting their ink on top of yours, and you cannot advance through theirs. However, if you do not provide any form of resistance to these attempts, then your team will rapidly lose control of this turf. Running around and mindlessly painting only satisfies the first half of our control definition; if they can just charge in and claim it free, then it's not really control. The turf may as well have not been there in the first place.

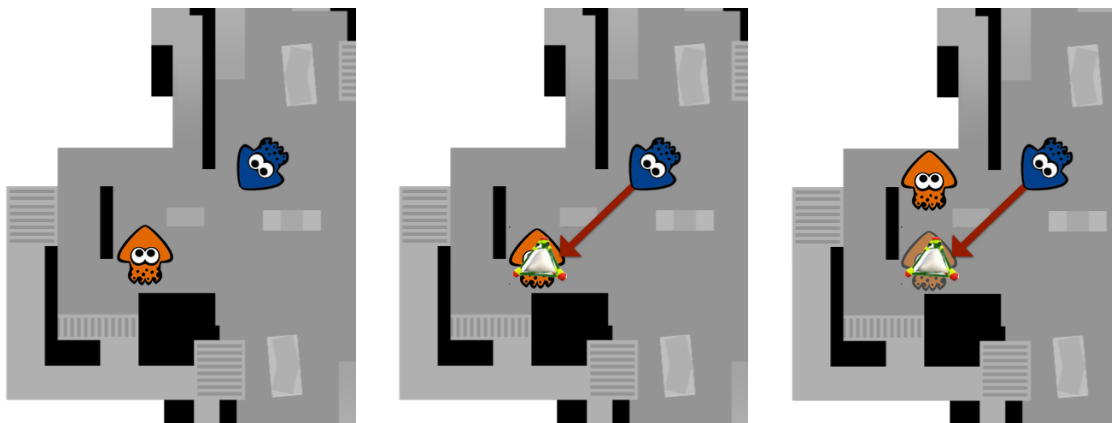


This is not control, and never will be.

Changes in turf control can be denied through a few means. The first method is zoning; where you actively threaten the enemy from encroaching on your territory. This most obvious technique to zone is by using range; if you outrange your opponent, then they cannot safely displace your attempts to threaten them without making themselves vulnerable. However, this only works in direct confrontations, as players can make use of speed, cover, alternative pathways, and specials to work around range issues. Another zoning technique is through the use of Splash Walls and Bombs. Splash Walls act as a literal stop sign for the enemy team, whilst acting as a point of safety for the user from which they can harass the enemy team. Bombs threaten enemies the possibility of death, forcing them to act in a more immediate manner to avoid said death threat. This reactive behaviour may not always be in their best long-term interest, either, as it may enable you to capitalise on their movement to gain a kill. Both stop enemy players from acting in a manner that would otherwise be attempts to erode your turf control.



Being outranged means you cannot directly contest opponents, but the use of other techniques can work around this.



Bomb zoning forces players to move in ways they don't really like, which can be exploited.

The second method in denying turf control change is by “sharking”. Sharking is basically keeping your position hidden to the enemy, creating the illusion of safety for them to take control of your turf without fear. You remain hidden in an ideal location along the path they are likely to move through to take your turf, and then attack when its too late for them to properly retaliate or retreat. This punishes their attempts to gain control, shifting the balance back into your favour.



Sharking has its own kind of reward...

Flanking is the other side of the coin for sharking. Flanking requires you to take an uncontrolled path, or a path you can easily gain control of, in order to reach a key location and eliminate resistance at that point. This method still requires the element of stealth and remaining undetected like sharking; if you are detected too early, the flank will fail. The longer the flank path, the greater the chance of failure... but the less chance that the enemy may anticipate it. Flanking requires aggression to start off with, and usually has the bonus side effect of being both defensive AND aggressive at the same time; you stop them from taking your turf, and you gain theirs in the process.

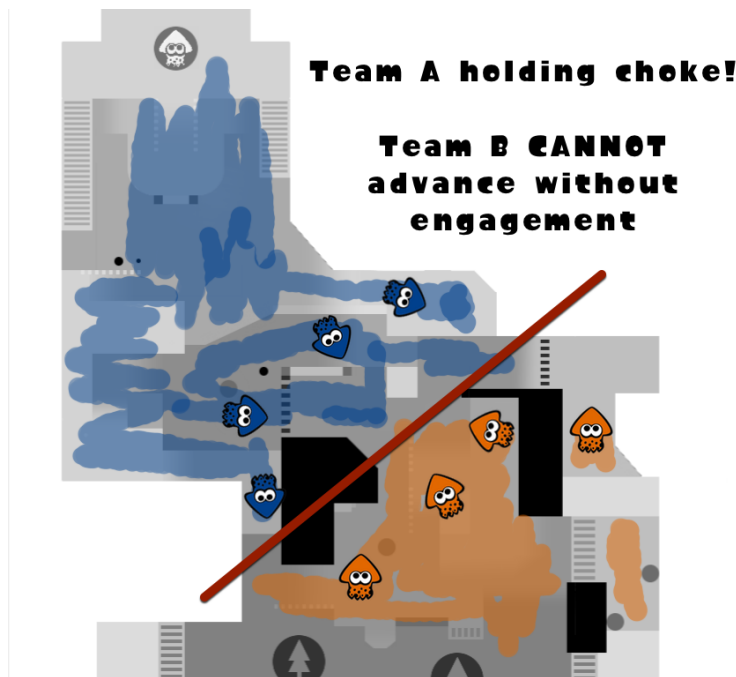


Flanks require moving through enemy territory quickly and without detection, but are potentially very powerful in maintaining and shifting control in your favour.

Map Control

Similar, but different

Map control is intimately related to turf control; it requires some form of Turf control in order to set up in the first place; but they are not strictly the same thing. Map control can be achieved through the same techniques as started above for Turf Control, but Map Control more explicitly focuses on denying specific parts of the map with active threats. A charger on the central sniper perch in Moray Towers can exert map control of the central pit by threatening enemy squids at any time, even if the centre is painted in the enemy's favourable colour. Two or three players positioned on the enemy's hill on Urchin Underpass also acts as map control around that area, acting as a natural chokepoint to prevent the enemy from advancing.



Team A controls this specific area of the map, as Team B must act against this resistance to claim this area for themselves.

Map Control can obviously refer to overall map control, or to specific areas within the map. For instance, you may hold map control on the left side of Walleye, but be denied control of the centre of the map, restricting your ability to make a much-needed push forward.

Objective Control

Through the use of smart and adaptive Turf and Map Control, a team should eventually claim control over an objective and maintain it. In all ranked modes, knowledge of what form of control is needed, and where it is required, during all stages of the game, is the key to success.

In Splat Zones, this is relatively straightforward due to the fixed position of the zone, which also lies around the centre of the map. Controlling the Splat Zone by painting it in your colour is not enough; you have to actively position you and your team in a way that prevents the enemy from claiming it for themselves. In our equal rollout example earlier, neither team would be able to claim strong control over the objective, as both teams could easily neutralise any capture without much effort.

In Tower Control and Rainmaker, one has to shift the balances in Turf and Map control along the objective's path. For Tower Control, the required path to control is fixed, and primarily needs to be moved along this path either before, or as, the tower advances. In Rainmaker, the path is flexible, and the objective can potentially move much faster towards the goal, requiring adaptability and stronger assessment of the state of play at all times to succeed.

Ultimately, what separates the implementation and execution of different forms of control between players is primarily determined by a skill called **Awareness**. Awareness will be the topic of the next entry, but I would like to touch on some aspects of awareness in these final points.

Before the game - Team composition matters

Even before the game starts, how well your team's ability to exert, maintain, and shift balances in control will be significantly determined by overall weapon composition. Understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the many weapons available in the game will help form strategies you employ going into each and every game; which won't necessarily be the same for every map/mode combination. Weapon composition also informs you of what aspects of your own play to focus more or less on, and what weaknesses you are potentially compensating for in relation to your teammates. This in and of itself is a form of awareness.

Team composition will be something I will touch on in more detail in another entry to understand inherent risk/reward in certain plays, and to more finely tune certain strategies one can employ. For now, just be mindful that what weapons you on your team, and what weapons are on the enemy team, have can an affect on different aspects of control to varying degrees, and may in turn change how you go about shifting control during the course of a game.

Overextending

Overextending happens primarily due to a complete misunderstanding of what form of control is needed at a given point of time, as well as misreading the types and severity of control the other team may have at the same given point of time. To use our earlier example, holding the hill on Urchin Underpass is a reasonable spot to claim and pressure the enemy team from advancing back into the centre. Someone who overextends may think that pushing further and invading the enemy's base alone is a better idea, despite the large amounts of enemy turf around them, along with the enemy team being potentially active within this area. This decision places them in great danger in being taken out, as well as weakening the rest of their team's hold of the hill.



Overextending stems from misreading the type of, and location where, control should be exercised.

The other major cause of Overextending is a term known as “greed”. Greed is when, well, you get greedy, and want something at the expense of everything else. Greed can be a kill on that pesky Tentatek, or it can be claiming more turf near the enemy’s base without the support to back you up. Greed, however, is a topic best saved for awareness; we’ll come back to this topic then.

Overextending may also be pushing the hill on Urchin Underpass, but completely ignoring the Splat Zone in the process. The wrong kind of control is exerted at that specific point in time.

Tilting and throwing

Handing over advantages for free

“Throwing” is a popular term in the MOBA world (and likely elsewhere) that essentially means:

Accidentally, or deliberately giving up a superior position through an action, or series of actions, that enables the other team a chance to win that otherwise would not have existed.

Overextending could be considered of form of throwing, as this means that a player or team that had gained an advantage did not use this advantage to secure victory. A team pushing the Tower to 1 point left, and then shifting their playstyle because they have “a safe lead”, resulting in a reverse sweep KO, would also be considered a throw.

Tilt, or tilting, is related to throwing, but is not mutually required. Tilt is a metaphorical concept in that your perception and decision-making processes are “tilted” from their otherwise balanced level due to strong emotional responses. These responses are usually negative (anger, frustration, etc), but sometimes positive as well (excitement from getting a triple kill, for example). Strong emotional responses make you lose focus on what is required for a given situation. It affects your reactive and logical thought processes and fixates you on specific things, or clouds your judgment entirely, potentially resulting in poor decision-making. Perhaps more succinctly, it dramatically weakens your awareness of the situation at hand that you otherwise might have had.

Tilt is the consequence of such reactions, but it in itself is not necessarily a problem. One can be tilted, but not throw away an advantageous position. The problem is that tilting increases your likelihood of making erroneous plays that cede advantages, which is why it is better to avoid it where possible. However, arguments could be made for tilt driving players to succeed against hard odds, to vent anger to better focus on an important moment later, or to act as encouragement to your team for a good play; it really comes down to individuals and the teams they are made of.

Closing remarks

There are many, many more nuances to control than those that haven't been discussed here, and I hope that I will eventually come to these in future entries. For the sake of reader sanity, it is probably better to lay down the concepts here first, without blowing this out into a mini thesis (it's already long enough as it is, as I'm sure you'll agree!).

Go back out there onto the splatterfield, and think about your play carefully. Can you better control each stage of a game as it happens, or as a longer term plan? What would the enemy team try to do to break this? Reflect upon what you did right, and what you can do better next time.

As always, Stay Fresh!

Toadsili T

Twitter: @Toadsili_T

Discord: Toadsili T#1372