

A look back at one of the (many) projects code-named Highlander

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Some time ago, I related a brief [history of Microsoft projects code-named *Highlander*](#). The last example of such a project involved two teams, which I named Team A and Team 1, both of which were writing a client that accesses a back-end service. Team A code named their version *Highlander* because “there can be only one”.

A colleague who worked on Team A gave me some more backstory behind this showdown.

When Team A picked the code name *Highlander*, the important part was the “there can be only one” part, and not so much that they had to prevail. I mean, they would have *liked* to win, but more important was that *somebody* win.

They chose the code name Highlander to highlight that the situation with two clients for the same back-end was ridiculous and needed to be fixed. “The internal competition was driving us nuts for years.” My colleague says that he had friends on Team 1 who also thought it was a ridiculous situation.

What made it difficult to resolve is that the two teams existed far apart in the corporate hierarchy. There was no common director or vice president or senior vice president or corporate vice president to make the decision. The nearest common manager (and therefore the person authorized to make a decision) was Bill Gates himself.

My colleague says, “Magically, the issue was resolved before we built Highlander, so maybe our code name helped.”

