RIP to Crucible, Amazon Games’ first PC shooter: 2020-2020

Enlarge / We’ve previously put these Amazon Games mascots behind prison bars; now, they’re in flames. RIP, Crucible. We hardly knew ye.
Amazon Games / Aurich Lawson

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As it turns out, Amazon’s idea of a *Crucible* couldn’t handle the intense heat and pressure of the games industry.

After launching in May of this year, *Crucible*, Amazon Games’ first large-scale shooter title for PC, will stop receiving updates and matchmaking support on November 9, the studio announced on Friday (at the exact end-of-week hour that bad game-news stories are typically sent to pasture). The company is taking the extreme measure of offering a “full refund” for any purchases made during the free-to-play game’s lifespan, and it’s directing customers to make refund requests through either Steam Support or Amazon’s own contact form, depending on where purchases were originally made.

This followed the game’s formal delisting from Steam in July, which followed painfully low concurrent player counts (as low as 200) that made it difficult for players to successfully matchmake with each other. Though the game launched with considerable attention, including a promotional blitz on the

Amazon-owned game-streaming platform Twitch, it only briefly maintained a player population exceeding 10,000 users.

Not the ping we were looking for

According to Amazon, the game's July delisting was meant to let the developers test and implement a "roadmap" of future content and fixes, and this included features that were woefully missing from its retail launch. As an "action-MOBA" game (think *League of Legends* or *Dota 2*, mixed with shooter mechanics), *Crucible* failed to clarify key information to players in terms of where they might find teammates and objectives on the massive map, and it launched without *anything* in the way of player communication options (meaning, no text or voice chat, nor a visual "pinging" system).

On top of those issues, the game launched with three significantly different gameplay modes, which stretched the issue of character balancing all over the place. One of Amazon Games' first big changes before the Steam delisting was to focus its matchmaking to a single gameplay mode, but the damage had already been done.

In a Friday post titled "Final *Crucible* developer update," the game's devs placed the blame on two factors: "the feedback we've heard from you, paired with the data we've collected." But the letter doesn't explain what that data spelled out—which was likely scant data, gathered from whatever miniscule playerbase remained after the Steam delisting. We'd been keeping an eye on *Crucible*'s Steam updates and saw the developers continue to post detailed patch notes, which we thought might be paid forward by an official "relaunch" at a later date.

Weirdly, Amazon Games has promised to *continue* patching and touching up the game in its 30-day end-of-life period before shutting down development and "transitioning" its staff to the

upcoming MMORPG *New World* (which received its own delay from this fall into 2021) and “other upcoming projects.” Once the game’s matchmaking service is shut down on November 9, its client will continue to support “custom” peer-to-peer matchmaking—which we seriously appreciate at Ars, as opposed to making a game die with its servers—and the staff will host a last-hurrah matchmaking frenzy with fans before that November 9 date.

Friday’s news follows this week’s Amazon Games report at Wired (full disclosure: Conde Nast is the parent company of both Wired and Ars Technica), in which staff writer Cecilia D’Anastasio follows the ups and downs of nearly a decade of game development within the company, based on insider accounts. That included the story of *Crucible*‘s considerable six-year development journey (reportedly hampered by Amazon management’s insistence on using its hacked-together Lumberyard rendering engine), along with claims that the game nearly launched in 2018. Though developers wanted to launch it while “battle royale” fever was peaking, executives reportedly feared launching anything short of “a billion-dollar product.”

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