Mordhau developer denies it was planning a “toggle” for diversity [Updated]

Enlarge / A bunch of white guys fighting with medieval weaponry in *Mordhau*.

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Since its launch in April, medieval combat sim *Mordhau* has been a surprise hit for freshman development studio Triternion, selling over a million copies as of last month. But the online multiplayer game’s use of exclusively white male avatars has troubled some players looking for a more diverse set of character customization options.

Triternion has said that it plans to add more avatar variety in the future, but the studio created additional questions around those plans in a recent interview with PC Gamer. In that piece, the magazine quoted *Mordhau* developers as saying they were considering giving players the ability to turn off the pending customization options on the client side, effectively re-homogenizing the look of the characters on their own displays.

In response to a question about “adding female playable characters and changing character’s skin tones,” PC Gamer quoted Triternion’s Mike Desrosiers as saying, “Whatever stance we take officially, some group of people are going to be upset with us. And so, ideally we’d put the power in the

players’ hands and give them the option to enable and disable different things.”

Later, when asked again about “giving the option for players to disable” planned racial- and gender-based character customizations, developer Andrew Geach reportedly told PC Gamer, “Yeah, that seems to be the current thinking. It’s not set in stone, it depends how our community is in the future. Maybe if it calms down in the future, the game still has a lot of players, a lot of toxicity, a lot of racism, a lot of politics, everything, people argue in chat about all sorts of nonsense.”

Don’t change your plans for me

After that article was published Monday (but before it was updated with a more detailed transcription Tuesday), Triternion took to Twitter to deny it was ever considering those reported plans. “We do not, nor have we ever, had plans to add a toggle to hide other ethnicities or ‘disable characters that aren’t white’ in *Mordhau*,” the company tweeted. “Any claims to the contrary are false.”

Triternion’s tweet is somewhat undercut by an April forum post on the *Mordhau* Steam page. There, a developer and moderator with the handle “crush” wrote, “We are still looking into adding female characters post release as was promised… The realism complaint is valid, so when we add them we might add a simple client-side toggle (for both female and male characters) which would let you disable them.”

A careful parsing of all the statements involved suggests there might be some miscommunication or confusion over the differences between a potential *gender*-based toggle and the possibility of a similar *ethnicity*-based toggle. As “crush” indicated on Steam, the former plays more directly into a complaint that having female avatars could somehow hamper the “realism” of the game’s medieval setting.

That’s an argument that seems to arise whenever women are added to combat-heavy games, albeit one that seems unconcerned with all the other obviously unrealistic elements that invariably crop up in such games. Concerns about historical “realism” didn’t stop *For Honor* from successfully integrating female fighters into its medieval combat from day one. Triternion is also facing reports of rampant, unmoderated racism and other toxic behavior in its in-game chat and other player communication channels. Speaking to PC Gamer, Desrosiers seemed unwilling to put in the kind of strict, automated chat filters that other games have implemented to stem such behavior.

“If we take an official stance and we put an official filter list on all the words in chat, people will, first, find a way around it, and it might catch innocent words, or people might claim we’re censoring,” he said. “So we’d rather put the power in the player’s hands [to mute problematic players].”

On Twitter, Triternion acknowledged that “as a small indie team, have a lot to learn when it comes to dealing with toxicity/racism in a large community.” The company has promised an “official statement coming soon” on all of these matters, and we’ll be sure to update you when it’s released.

Update (July 3): In a more detailed statement posted on the *Mordhau* forums, Triternion attributed the confusion over this issue to a “misunderstanding” caused by Desrosiers and Geach’s PC Gamer interview. These game artists are “both uninvolved with character development went into a verbal interview with minimal PR experience and ended up answering some of the questions in a misleading way,” the statement reads, in part.

“The responses given were referring to the gender part of the questions, which were based off an old controversial ‘gender toggle’ idea, with the intention being to give the player options to play the game with only female characters, only male characters, or both,” the statement continues. “This

concept was brought forth by one of our developers and posted prior to the game’s release as a response to a large number of heated debates regarding the topic of realism. The idea to give players this ability was simply a theoretical solution to a difficult problem and was never intended to be the official stance of Triternion on this topic.”

While this gender-toggle idea was briefly considered, Triternion said, it was soon dismissed in internal discussions “as it would undermine the customization players work hard to create,” according to the statement. Despite the “ill-informed” statements to PC Gamer, Triternion says “our official stance is that these toggle options are out of the question.”

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