

'Assassin's Creed' makers defend 'creative liberties' in black samurai row

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'Assassin's Creed Shadows' is set in feudal Japan.

The makers of "Assassin's Creed" defended their "creative liberties" on Tuesday after nearly 100,000 people signed a petition launched in Japan against the introduction of a new black samurai character.

Ubisoft's "Assassin's Creed Shadows", set to be released in November, is the latest edition of a franchise that has been set in various periods of history across the world.

'Shadows' allows players to step into the shoes of two heroes: female assassin Naoe and Yasuke, a black samurai presented as a 16th-century historical figure who was kidnapped by Portuguese slave traders on the east African coast and taken to Japan.

Critics in Japan launched a [petition](#) on June 19, a month after game-maker Ubisoft unveiled a trailer featuring the protagonist, lamenting a "serious lack of historical accuracy and cultural respect".

Its author accused Ubisoft of having made factual errors and "a serious insult to Japanese culture and history that can be understood as racism" against Asians.

While the petition did not dispute the existence of Yasuke, it claimed that he had never received the samurai title. It was signed by some 95,000 people as of Tuesday.

The plea called on France-based Ubisoft to halt the game's release and show greater respect for Japan's culture and traditions.

The game's makers responded on Tuesday in a statement addressed to its "esteemed Japanese community" which explains its "creative liberties and historical inspirations".

"Since the announcement of Assassin's Creed Shadows, we have received many positive reactions, but also some criticism including from you, our Japanese players," the statement said.

"Our intention has never been to present any of our Assassin's Creed

games, including Assassin's Creed Shadows, as factual representations of history, or historical characters," it said.

The designers said they had collaborated with consultants, historians, researchers and internal teams at Ubisoft Japan "to inform our creative choices".

"Despite these sustained efforts, we acknowledge that some elements in our promotional materials have caused concern within the Japanese community. For this, we sincerely apologize."

Samurai expert Julien Peltier told AFP in March that while the figure of the famed warrior is "fascinating and we'd like to know a lot more about him, we don't know much and that makes him the subject of every fantasy".

In Tuesday's statement, the games designers said: "While Yasuke is depicted as a samurai in Assassin's Creed Shadows, we acknowledge that this is a matter of debate and discussion."

The "Assassin's Creed" universe has been set in ancient Egypt, the Crusades, revolutionary France and the Viking period.

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