

Commandos and Desperados in Feudal Japan

ZOHEB MASHIUR

In *Shadow Tactics: Blades of the Shogun*, Mimimi Productions has married the gameplay of Commandos with intrigues and conflicts of Edo Japan. Ninjas are, of course, a no-brainer for stealthy tactics games so it's frankly odd that it didn't happen before 2016. The scope of the game is pretty tight compared to the sprawl of some of the older examples of the genre, focusing on the adventures of a group of five operatives serving the Shogun in a time of civil strife.

The operatives are a diverse enough bunch. Hayato is a true ninja, taking down foes silently at range or up close. Yuki is his self-declared apprentice, a street urchin who lures enemies into traps. Butting heads against him is Aiko, an assassin who eschews stealth for blending in with disguises. All three are agile, able to move discreetly and unconventionally up the walls and along the rooftops of the fortresses and towns their missions take them to. Standing with his feet planted firmly on the ground is the rock-solid master samurai Mugen, a blademaster who can take enemies on three at a time and is the only one who can duel other samurai. Hobbling behind him is Takuma, the one-legged sniper and grenadier, whose pet racoon-dog Kuma can charm entire crowds of unwary foes.

Each character, apart from unique rules governing their movement (Takuma can't swim, Yuki can walk on tightropes) and utility (Aiko and Yuki drag corpses slowly, Mugen can tuck two bodies under his arms and sprint) has a set of parallel abilities – roughly comparable to MOBA characters. Everyone has their own single

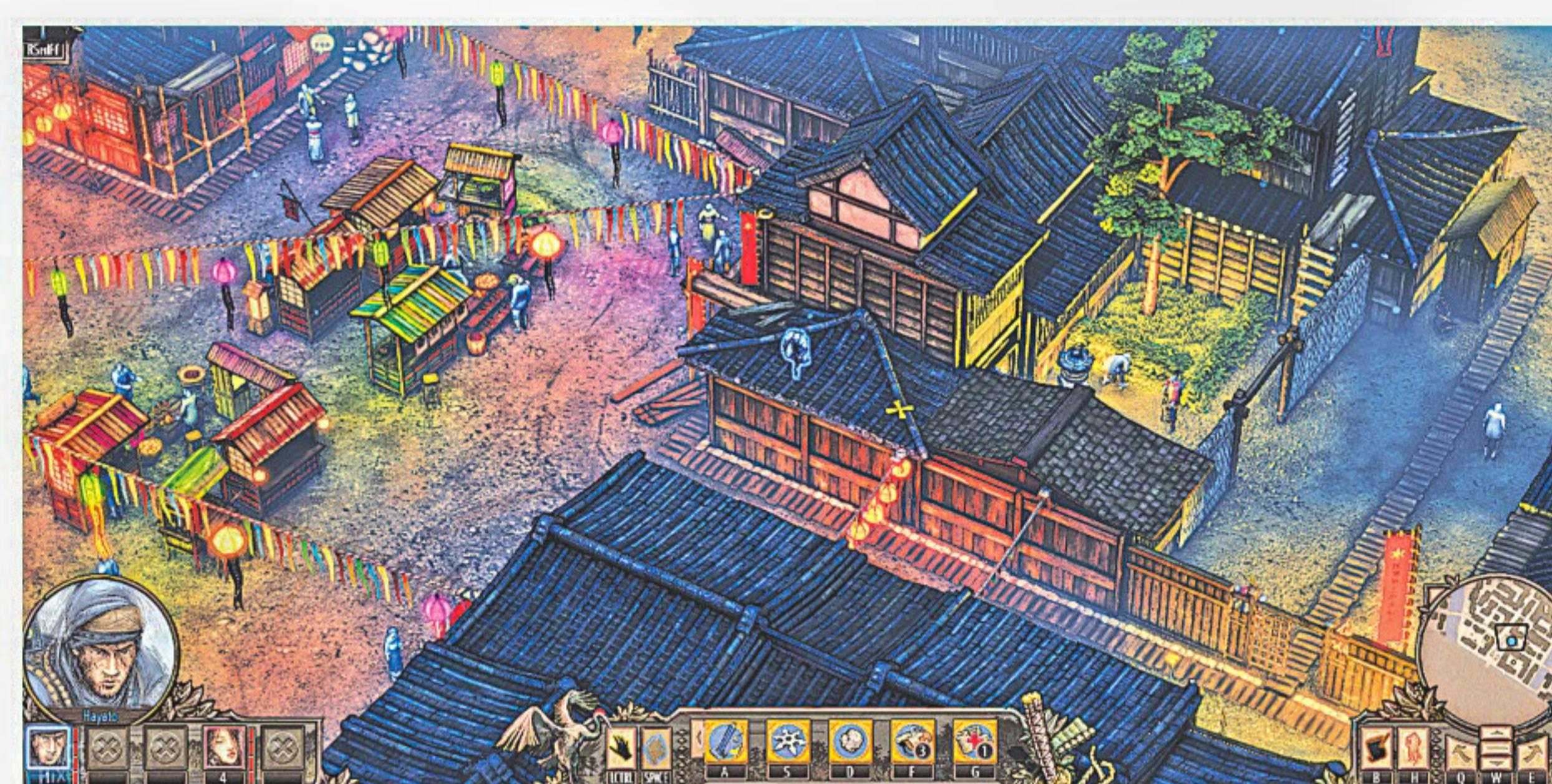
target kill move and unique method of distracting and diverting enemies. Then there's the character's completely unique skill (Yuki's little trap, Hayato's shuriken). Rounding the skillset out are a handgun and medikit each. Making every character a unique combination of a limited pool of capabilities helps make them distinctive, and every level is designed to be challenging but traversable by the combined abilities of the characters assigned to it. Helping the player combo these skills is Shadow Mode, which allows setting up actions for characters to execute simultaneously at the touch of a button.

The game is character-driven in a way rare for the genre. Apart from playing differently, everyone has an instantly recognizable visual palette and design and – wonder of wonders – *an actual personality and motivation*. It's hard to not feel attached to the Shogun's Blades when Hayato gives up trying to stop Yuki calling him 'sensei', or watching Aiko and Mugen carry on fiction's most courteous romance. This game didn't need personable characters and an engaging plot. Mimimi went the extra mile and it paid dividends.

The art and sound design are similarly above and beyond the bare necessities. The characters and settings are vibrant and lush, environments with a bevy of details that can be highlighted for interactivity. And the whole set up is as interactive as a game in the genre must be, with some additional mechanics that keep the challenges fresh and inventive. For example: enemies follow characters' footprints in the snow, and night missions introduce clever twists on guards' lines of sight. These mechanics are core to the designs of



GAME REVIEW



their respective levels, rather than the inconsequential features many major developers hype in their franchises.

It would have been easy for Mimimi to cash in on our nostalgia for a good real-time tactics game, something to remind us of days spent fiddling about on Commandos at *dawats* instead of socializ-

ing. Not only did they bring back in a dead genre, they made something at *least* as good as the classics.

Zoheb Mashiur is a prematurely balding man with bad facial hair and so does his best to avoid people. Ruin his efforts by writing to zoheb.mashiur@gmail.com

TEA MEANS
ISPANI
MIRZAPORE



LIVE LIFE
TO THE FULLEST
ANYWHERE
ANYTIME

Whether indoors or outdoors, convenience is redefined with Ispahani Mirzapore tea bags SMART PACK. Now available in an affordable pack of 25 tea bags. Enjoy life to the fullest.

ISPANI CARELINE
09 678 77 11 00

www.ispahanibd.com [f/IspahaniTea](https://www.facebook.com/IspahaniTea)