

# Shadow Tactics

Monday, November 21, 2016 12:28 AM

Have you ever dreamed about being an expert ninja who prowls past his enemies and takes them out with his shuriken? How about a veteran samurai who assassinates his opponents with one blow. Perhaps you would prefer to be a marksman, master of disguise or a clever thief? Luckily you will have the chance to play all five characters in this stealth-oriented, Shadow Tactics: Blades of the Shogun.

During the peaceful Edo period of Japan the team of five: Mugen, Hayato, Takuma, Yuki and Aiko; fight against the mysterious Kage-sama -- who plans to overthrow the Shogun. The story is flushed out in thirteen missions giving you the option to play them on easy, normal or hard. The story is used as means to introduce the mission and characters and therefore lacks suspense. Their personalities come to life throughout the mission with their brief banters and swift strategy plans -- all of which you can hear in both English and Japanese.

The five characters have their own specialty; Hayato is a ninja who uses a shuriken, Mugen is a samurai who can kill multiple enemies, Takuma the mysterious old man who is an expert marksman, Yuki is a clever thief and Aiko the geisha who is a master of disguise. Among having different weapons they also have different HP, tools such as rocks; sake bottle; whistle; blinding powder and all of them carry one health pack. Each character has their own strength and weaknesses which plays a key role in strategy. Hayato the ninja, can make close to medium range kills with his shuriken without being noticed. Compared to Yuki who has to resort to short range kills or luring enemies to her trap which usually brings attention to the other guards; turning your situation from bad to worse. Samurai Mugen can kill multiple enemies at once and because of his high HP he can take on more enemies even if they notice him. Mugen's samurai strength is strong enough to take on powerful samurais that would otherwise kill other characters in almost an instant. However, Mugen lacks mobility and is unable to jump from high or low places or climb buildings and walls. Takuma who has wooden leg also lacks mobility and suffers from the same weaknesses. Aiko was probably the most versatile of all the characters. Not only does her hairpin serve as a weapon which is surprisingly fast. She has the ability to temporarily blind enemies and can disguise herself as a friendly ally. This allows her to not only slip past enemies but she can also distract them, allowing your other character to easily get a kill or sneak past. This game would be too easy if it gave you all five characters at once. On average you will be working in a team of two and the game decides your characters by mission. You will have to work with your characters strength and weaknesses to quickly come up with a quick and effective strategy.

Controlling a character is simply and has an easy learning curve. All actions are highlighted that tells you which button to press. Generally you will move one character at a time however some strategies might require multiple characters. In this case the game gives you a planning tool called Shadow Mode. Since there is no way to pause the game Shadow Mode dramatically slows down the game and darkens the map almost as if it was night time. The advantage to Shadow Mode and most important is that you can use it to plan your strategy and reserve one action per character. Once you have reserved your plan you can choose to execute or cancel the strategy. One could essentially control two characters by creating a waypoint to a bush. Or you can have someone like Yuki to blow her whistle to distract the enemies while Hayato runs past them. Just remember that only one action can be planned per character and all of them can be executed simultaneously.

Strategy depends on how well you can skillfully hide, sneak or kill the enemy to complete mission successfully. Think you can Rambo your way through the enemy, well guess again. Getting caught is almost entirely not an option. For one, your character will more than likely die if you are caught by an enemy. Enemies have a cone like range that you can view anytime and will be highlighted as green.

When the enemy spots you the cone gradually fills up as yellow until it reaches you. Once they spot you it turns red and other guards and samurai will quickly spot you and shoot you. Hayato, Yuki and Aiko all have considerably low HP and takes on average two to three seconds for a kill. In that amount of time an enemy can spot them and start to shooting. Even if you do manage to escape, the guards will alert the other samurai and patrol the area. Although you may die a lot, the game encourages you to constantly save. Allowing at least three game saves to be stored and load any time. You will even notice after one minute of not saving a timer will begin, letting you know when was the last time you save and even changing colors from green, yellow and red to indicate how long it's been since you last save.

Every mission offers new challenges that are more dangerous and complex from the previous. The maps are in a three-quarter top-down mode and contain multiple interactive objects. Despite some objects being part of the mission, they are optional if you wanted a challenge. Other objects you can use against the enemy such as cattle, boulders, pulleys, watchtowers and wagons. Depending on environment there might be extra precautions you may have to take when dealing with the enemy. For example when the mission was in a snow environment enemies could spot my foot tracks in the snow and follow to the bush I was hiding, which I could also use to my advantage when setting up a kill.

With endless ways to make use of your characters, skills and environment to outsmart, sneak or kill the enemy. Shadow Tactics: Blades of the Shogun has high replay value. Allowing you to challenge yourself on different difficulties and unlock secret badges -- revealed to you after you beat a mission. The environments beautifully depict Edo period of Japan and its characters are equally charming.

Story: 6

Graphics: 8

Gameplay: 10

Music: 7

Total: 8/10