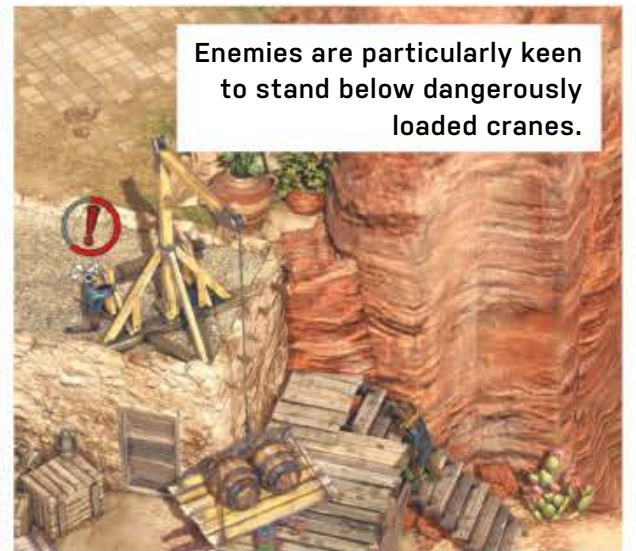Use stealth tactics to take
out powerful bad guys.

Enemies are particularly keen
to stand below dangerously
loaded cranes.

Lead Cooper and his gang on
a quest of redemption.

The Western
setting creates
atmospheric levels.

REAL-TIME
TACTICAL
WESTERN

Desperados III
The quiet bunch

THE BANDITS OF THE WILD WEST are an inquisitive bunch. They can be enticed to wander away from their buddies by something as innocuous as seeing a cat, or discovering footprints. A medical bag thumping down just inside their cone of vision is irresistible, curiosity overcoming all fear when near railroad tracks or the dangerous end of a horse. Funnily enough, the hard-eyed outlaws who go to investigate these things don't come back.

Desperados III is from the same studio that brought us *Shadow Tactics* in 2016, and hews closely to the real-time stealth tactics template laid down in that game, inherited from the *Commandos* and *Desperados* games of the late 90s and early 00s. This being the Wild West, everybody has guns, but guns are loud, and noise brings bandits. The bad guys are more than capable of killing your team of infiltrators, and the guards they can summon will finish you off easily.

This is a game of stealth and teamwork, of hiding bodies in bushes and exploiting the curious cowboys who find nothing wrong with their compadres vanishing as long as they don't see it. Right-clicking on a bad guy gives you their vision cone, suitably graduated to reveal the effect of distance and cover. Stay out of those cones, don't make a noise, and you can get away with anything. Lead character John Cooper has two six-shooters, but your main weapons are quick-save and quick-load, the game actively encouraging you to bang away at F5. This takes nothing away from the tension, with each arrangement of outlaws, cover, and environmental hazards its own puzzle to solve.

The bandits here love to stand in the shadow of loose rocks, or below piles of wood suspended from cranes. Special enemies have particular attributes signalled by their attire: Poncho-wearers are impossible to distract, and those in long coats are particularly tough. These guys are ripe for leaving until last, before dispatching with a long-range shot or the hatchet of your strongest fighter. One character's voodoo magic enables you to kill multiple enemies at once or turn guards on each other, which leads to *Hitman*-like levels of planning as your gunfighters skulk in the bushes, wriggling into position before springing their trap.

Not all levels are straightforward slaughters, however. Some take a more investigative form in which you don't need to hide, but listen to street chatter to identify both target and method of dispatch. The environmental kills take a larger role in these sections, as you make deaths look like accidents, the booms these unproblematic exits make providing a satisfying payoff for all the sneaking around that leads up to them. Badges, optional objectives you're told about after a level, along with time targets, encourage replay, and you're treated to a map-view replay of your actions once a section is complete—all the better to scrutinize and improve your tactics.

We're not sure whether it's the change of setting or that developer Mimimi Games has learned a lot since *Shadow Tactics*, but this is the more compelling of the two games, and our dusty heroes here have a profane charm that's entirely suitable. **–IAN EVENDEN**

VERDICT
8

Desperados III

⊞ **DEAD GOOD** Stealth tactics in the Wild West; sharp graphics; good performance.

⊟ **DEADWOOD** Lots of cussin'; no character stands out; do cowboys and voodoo mix?

↗ **RECOMMENDED SPECS** CPU, 3GHz quad-core. RAM, 12GB. GPU, GTX 760, Radeon HD 7870.

$50, desperadosgame.com, Rated M

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