

→ Finals

Some months are better than others, but this month is astounding — amazing games everywhere you look



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■ Enemies range from the otherworldly (left), to the genetically engineered (above). *Deus Ex* lumps together every paranoid conspiracy



■ You can hit this mech with EMP grenades, hack a computer and shut it down, or become invisible and sneak by — it's your choice

■ PC

Deus Ex

■ Publisher: Eidos ■ Developer: Ion Storm

Truly divine

Every once in a while a game comes along that restores the faith of even the most jaded among us. And though in some ways it runs over the territory first explored by *System Shock 1 & 2*, *Deus Ex* is exactly that kind of game.

Put simply, this is a complete package. The story is involving, the dialog smartly written (if not always well delivered), and the game world itself is fully interactive and truly feels alive, in often startling ways. There are hundreds of NPCs to interact with, and

every one seems to have their own personality.

But most of all, the gameplay is every bit as smart as the world. As a cybernetically enhanced agent of UNATCO, the United Nations Anti-Terrorist Coalition, your job (at least to begin with) is to track and eliminate the forces of the National Secessionist Front. The way you go about this, however, is completely open-ended. You have a selection of eleven skills, plus nine slots for additional "nano augmentations," or augs, and depending on which skills and augs you decide to enhance, it will completely change the way you play

the game. You could, for example, choose the invisibility aug and lock-picking skills, then spend the game sneaking around. Or you could choose the targeting aug and upgrade your



■ Mistakes always have repercussions, even if it's just embarrassing and not dangerous

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The Finals Rating System

Since we're living in a time when even average games are pretty good, we at **Next Generation** will continue to demand even better. Note that a three-star rating is a typical "good" game, so expect to see a lot of them.

★★★★★	REVOLUTIONARY
★★★★☆	EXCELLENT
★★★☆☆	GOOD
★★☆☆☆	FAIR
★☆☆☆☆	BAD

● Denotes a review of a Japanese product

WHAT'S THE STORY?

One of *Deus Ex*'s most notable features is its incredibly intricate storyline. Penned by noted eBook author Sheldon J. Pacotti, *Deus Ex* pulls together just about every conspiracy theory and secret society of the last 1200 years, from the Illuminati to the Hong Kong Triads and evil government plots at Area 51 to the heroic French Underground. What's more, it actually hangs together pretty well, and despite the reported 10,000 lines of dialog, you're never lost or overloaded. Well done.



gun skills to become a walking death machine. Either way is equally valid, and every single obstacle in the game has multiple ways it can be overcome. The sense of freedom this gives you is

truly astounding.

And further, your actions have consequences. Although the general direction of the story is fairly linear, the details are remarkably fluid, and

■ Men in Black are not the most dangerous enemies in the game, but they have a nasty habit of exploding when they die so they won't leave behind any evidence



■ Wiping out an entire squad of government troops is probably going to get you in trouble later (left), but handling strange technical puzzles requires a different set of skills (above)

this is true even about apparently trivial acts. For example, entering the woman's bathroom at UNATCO headquarters means that your boss gives you a verbal reprimand later. Shoot the wrong man during a mission, and you can be sure of a follow-up investigation into your conduct. It's this kind of constant response to things you do that make the game one of the most immersive, involving experiences ever.

Deus Ex was built using the original *Unreal* engine, and for the most part it looks excellent. The character animation is a little stiff, but the environments are rock solid, and while nearly all the settings are some kind of gritty urban sprawl, there's a fair amount of variety, from the dirty New York docks to the colorful markets of Hong Kong.

But the *Unreal* engine does bring some baggage: it really only runs well if you've got a 3Dfx-based accelerator and run this under Glide. Using Direct3D results in a choppy, unpredictable frame rate (and even a few crashes). It's by no means unplayable, but be forewarned the experience is less than ideal without a Voodoo card.

That, however, is quite literally the only serious criticism you can level at *Deus Ex*. The controls and interface are smooth and highly intuitive, the world is immersive, and the game itself is huge — even if you ignore the secondary quests and goals that pop up continually, you can be assured of 30-40 hours of playtime before you hit one of three, completely different yet totally logical endings. — Jeff Lundrigan

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: This is hands-down one of the best PC games ever made. Stop reading and go get yours now.