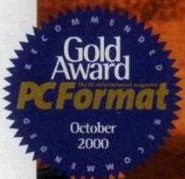


Deus Ex

It thinks it's an RPG. And a first-person shooter. Not to mention a conspiracy-based thriller and a morality play. And it's terribly charismatic. *Deus Ex* is quite possibly schizophrenic.



TRICKY COVES, BEST GAMES EVER. You see one, it convinces you that it's the finest piece of entertainment software to make its home in silicon, and then eventually something better comes along and the original apple of your gaming eye is cheapened.

Some of us can remember when *Manic Miner* was the best game ever, you know. And then *The Sentinel* was the best game ever, and you can doubtless trace this lineage all the way to *Half-Life* and, possibly,

Quake III Arena. All of which seems to make the nomination of anything as the best game ever something of a futile exercise. How can you call anything the best game ever when you know something better will be arriving in the shops sooner or later? How can you do that? Call yourself a reviewer?

When faced with such an argument, the only rational thing to do is wedge the tip of your tongue right down between your lower lip and jaw, push your tongue forward against your lower lip, waggle your hands flaccidly and go "Errghhnnmmmm!"

No, honestly. Of course today's best game ever will be bettered. It would be a conceit of the highest level of cretinous chuckle-headedness to even imagine that any game today is the undeniable zenith of computer gaming. We repeat: "Errghhnnmmmm!" The great thing about computer games is that they become more dazzling year on year, and fingers crossed, they'll become more inventive and imaginative. And while today's classic game will be next year's budget-priced Classic Game, let us celebrate it now rather than look too far ahead and mourn its passing prematurely.

Get on with it!
All right then. *Deus Ex* is the best

What's the story?

Set in a near-enough-to-be-recognisable but far-enough-to-have-cool-technology future, a plague is sweeping the world and there's only one cure. As JC Denton, nano-augmented agent of UNATCO, your job is to foil the evil NSF who plans to snaffle the cure. That's the story at the beginning, anyway. But as you'll find out, *Deus Ex* plays its cards very closely to its chest...



Need money? Nick someone's PIN and help yourself to their cash.

Deus Ex* wrenches the coveted Best Game Ever crown from the grasp of *Half-Life

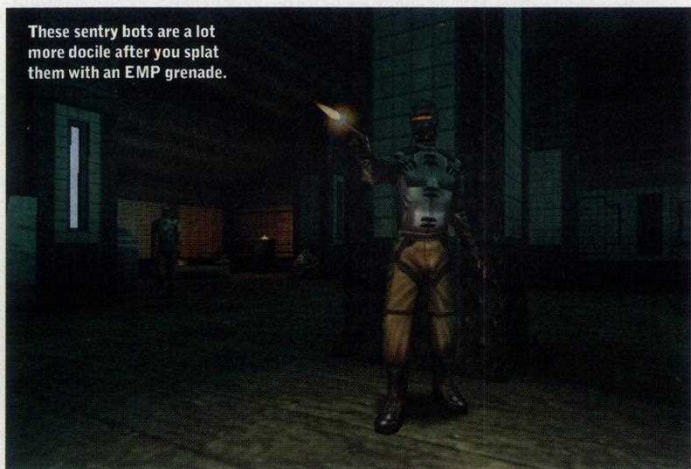
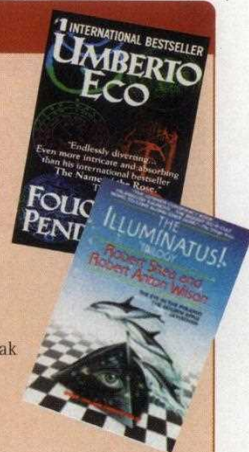
Suggested reading

We weren't joking when we said that some background reading might help you out in *Deus Ex*. As it is, the game is crammed with reading material – pick up any newspaper or book in the game and you're presented with some relevant, interesting and often entertaining words.

But to get a grip on the massively conspiratorial story, there are some volumes you really ought to look at. They're worth reading anyway, but *Deus Ex* is a lot more entertaining if you've digested them:

● *The Illuminatus Trilogy*: Robert Shea and Robert Anton Wilson

- *Foucault's Pendulum*: Umberto Eco
- *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail*: Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, Henry Lincoln
- *Flicker*: Theodore Roszak
- *From Hell*: Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell



These sentry bots are a lot more docile after you splat them with an EMP grenade.

game ever. That much is clear. Beyond that, things get a little muddy because of the wonderful way in which *Deus Ex* wrenches the coveted Best Game Ever crown from the grasp of *Half-Life*. The problem is that the *Deus Ex* we've played is almost certainly markedly different to the *Deus Ex* you'll play. At least with *Half-Life* we could marvel at all the lovely things it did and know for

and persuade you to go and read some books. Sorry about that.

Not that you'd suspect *Deus Ex* of such possibilities. When we first saw it a couple of years ago, we foolishly thought it would turn out to be quite a nice first-person shooter with RPG overtones and a pleasant line in realistic locations. Then we got a sniff of the conspiracy-based story, and that

as surpassing a good few of them. Where it excels is in weaving a credible illusion of complete freedom. In actual fact, you're prodded along a fairly linear storyline, but a game where you have absolute freedom to do whatever you wish is far beyond today's technology. *Deus Ex* at least fools you into thinking you can do pretty much anything in its realistic gameworld.

(An aside: *Deus Ex*'s designer, Warren Spector, originally wanted to do a game based entirely within one city block, the theory being that working within a restricted locale meant you'd be able to engineer absolutely every possibility into it and make every location utterly realistic. It's a fabulous idea, but let's at least be grateful that he came up with the globe-trotting brilliance of *Deus Ex* instead.)

Tight as a...tight thing

So, yeah. *Deus Ex* has been so tightly

designed that you believe you can do anything. If you want to pick up that vase on the sideboard and sling it around, feel free. It won't accomplish anything, but then again doing the same thing in real life wouldn't either. And you'd probably have to clear up the mess. And pay for the vase. And discover it was a priceless heirloom. That's not the point – if you want to pick the vase up, or the chair, or anything else that you'd want to pick up in real life, you can. The illusion is maintained, and that's partly what *Deus Ex* is all about.

Moving stuff around is just a clever party trick; the beauty of *Deus Ex* is that it extends the freedom illusion further than you've ever seen before. No puzzle has a single solution, or even a pair of slightly contrived ones. You just work your way through as you see fit. Need to get through a locked door? All right, you could pick the lock, or try to break the door down, or maybe create a noisy

It might well make you question your own morality and persuade you to read some books. Sorry about that

certain that you, the reader, would experience them as well, and, probably, react in the same way we did.

This time we can't be so certain. We're fairly sure that, whatever your gaming persuasion, you'll find *Deus Ex* a most rewarding and enthralling experience. It'll thrill you, chill you and, in a rather pleasing development on the computer gaming front, it might well make you question your own morality

pleased us. As time went by, we heard more and more good things about *Deus Ex* and began to wonder if this might turn into something big. Now we actually have it, and heaven help us if it doesn't actually live up to virtually every single one of our expectations, as well

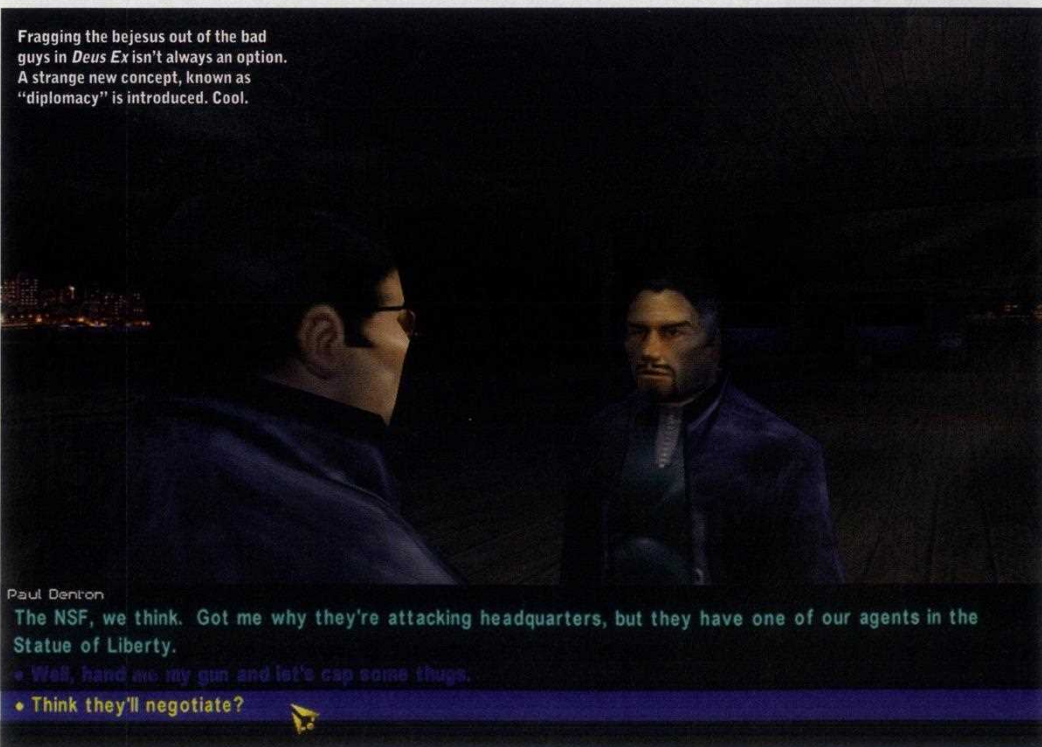


Some developers like to pay their dues. This crowbar's genuinely there by way of homage to *Half-Life*.



What frightful vandalism! Actually, we think it's an improvement. Perhaps we should go cap the thugs who did this...

Fragging the bejesus out of the bad guys in *Deus Ex* isn't always an option. A strange new concept, known as "diplomacy" is introduced. Cool.



Paul Denton

The NSF, we think. Got me why they're attacking headquarters, but they have one of our agents in the Statue of Liberty.

• Well, hand me my gun and let's cap some thugs.

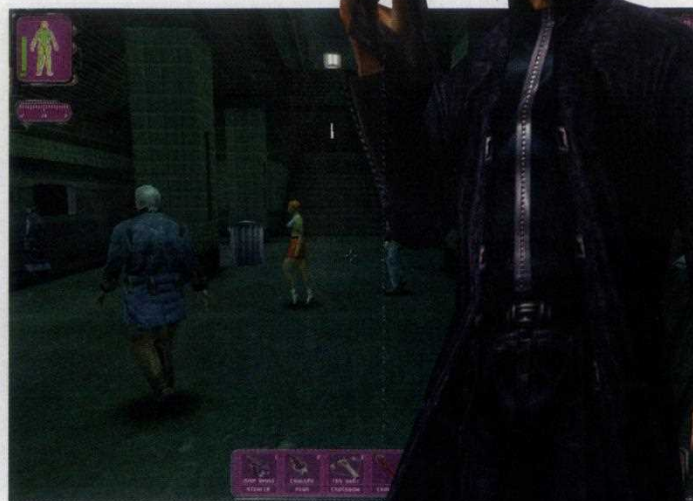
• Think they'll negotiate?



On second thoughts, you'd better not come on in after all. The water's really rather horrid, you see.



No time to play pinball. Unless the machine's actually a secret trigger for opening up a hidden room, of course.



Don't sleep in the subway. In fact, don't hang around too long – it's not a very pleasant place.

had. It's easy to look at all the supplementary bits that *Deus Ex* throws at you on top of all the first-person stuff and feel overwhelmed, terrified that you've been bamboozled into buying some stat-heavy RPG. Relax. It's really not like that. On the surface it looks like the sort of thing that requires at least a box full of 12-sided dice to play, but spend a few minutes exploring *Deus Ex*'s minimal menus and they become second nature. You have a finite inventory to juggle around, but organising it is basic, common sense stuff. The weapons have a terrifying number of stats attached to them, but it's easier to ignore them and just see how they perform in action. As skills go, you can browse and upgrade them if you have the reagents. Health is dealt with in a similar way and... Look, if the heavy-duty end of *Deus Ex* is too much for you, then we're surprised that you managed to turn your PC on in the first place. Frankly, this is the friendliest, most straightforward RPG ever.

And yes, it really is an RPG. You play it from a first-person perspective

The inimitable Mr JC Denton, valiant dispenser of cattle prod-related justice.

(Give or take the odd unobtrusive and well-done cut-scenes, you have crosshairs for your weapons (if you're using one) and you can always shoot people if you really want to. But deep down it's still an RPG, and a very profound and challenging one at that. It's also one of the first games we've played that's made us seriously question our own ethics. Don't laugh. To be perfectly honest, we had qualms early

▶ diversion and hope someone comes out so that you can sneak in, or perhaps just wait and see if someone comes and unlocks it anyway. That, or you could always find another way into the room. And that's just one door. Now expand that plethora of possibilities to fill one extremely large game and you might just appreciate just how liberating the whole *Deus Ex* experience is.

You can play it as an assassin, or as a gung-ho gunfighter, or as a creeping

bodies away somewhere quiet. It pays to be tidy – someone else might find the bodies and sound the alarm.

The result? We've completed the mission in question, gone back to HQ to collect a tidy bonus, then we've been dissed soundly by Ms Navarre, our Manichean, gun-toting partner. Such are the intricacies of *Deus Ex* – whatever you do, you earn the respect of some and the contempt of others. Either way you earn credits, which can be spent on upgrading your skills and further moulding your route through *Deus Ex*. What do you want to excel at today? All manner of skills can be bought and upgraded. You can be a demolition expert, or a master lockpicker, or a 707@11y1337 h@xor, or many other things. However, you have to specialise because gaining absolute proficiency in any of the available skills costs bucketloads. Early on in the game, you can buy a basic Trained qualification in nearly every discipline, but as for mastering them, you have to choose the way in which you want to play *Deus Ex* and concentrate on upgrading certain skills. Chosen not to be a crack marksman? You might as well throw that sniper rifle away, then. You'll never hit anyone with it and it's just taking up valuable room in your inventory.

Your inventory?

Oh yes, the inventory. And the skills section. And the health section. And the mission notes, and the picture archive, and the log of every conversation you've

Heaven help us if it doesn't live up to virtually all of our expectations, as well as surpassing a good few of them

stealthy agent. You can try a combination of these approaches if you wish. All of them can work, with startlingly disparate results. So far we've adopted the silent and stealthy approach, killing only when necessary. We've learned the benefits of sticking to the shadows, creeping past enemy guards and, when a path is blocked by the bad guys, knocking them unconscious with a tranquilliser dart or a shot from a rather handy cattle prod. Then we've searched them, nicked all their gear and stashed their comatose



Suffering from pesky bullet holes? Go and pay the friendly family doctor Jaime a visit to get those lumps of lead dug out. It's pronounced 'Himey', you know.

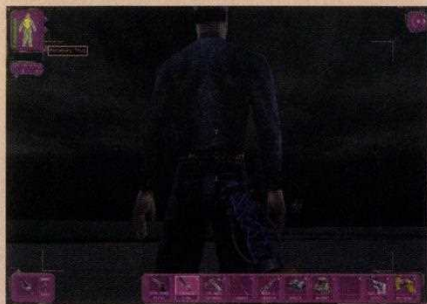


Rounding a corner, our hero JC suddenly finds himself in the middle of a war. Let the troops take care of all that fighting business while you carry on sneaking around.

In the lap of the gods



✓ You run into hundreds of people, and you can talk to or fight with every single one. Non-hostile characters are always good for a chat. Many let slip vital information, and you can review previous conversations to see if something that made no sense early on is actually a clue.



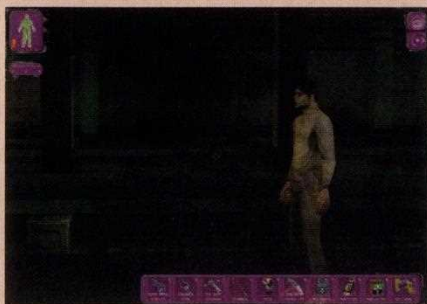
✓ As for the bad guys, it's easy to believe you're up against real people. If they hear a noise, they become edgy and it's harder to sneak up on them. And as for taking them down, we've found creeping up on them and delivering a charge prod to the jacksie to be an effective trick.



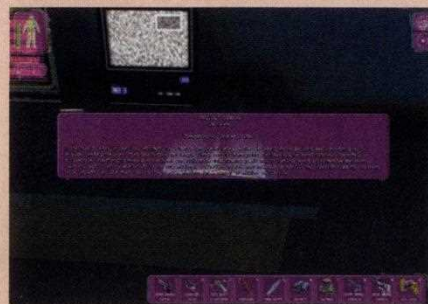
✓ New York, Paris, Hong Kong and more... *Deus Ex* prides itself on recreating the real world. Hell's Kitchen looks so dark and threatening, you expect Patrick Bateman to step out of the shadows. It's almost like being there, except you get to shoot people. Hurrah!



✓ If you have to wade in, guns blazing, then you can. You won't last long, but you can, with a choice of handguns, shotguns, GEP guns flamethrowers, rocket launchers... More cunning operatives might prefer stealthier options such as the tranquiliser darts and charge prod.



✓ You know how we said you can interact with just about anything? Well, as well as Grey Death victims, you run into a lot of junkies, all addicted to a new drug called Zyme. Just for research purposes, we tried using a phial of it, and watched in glee as the screen went all swirly.



✓ If you've done your suggested reading, and are you wondering what a story where the Illuminatus, Knights Templar, Freemasons and every other secret society are messing around in the future would be like, you've probably found it.

on in the game about whether we were on the right side, and further play only served to muddy the issue further. Y'see, you're an operative of UNATCO which, in this not-too-distant future scenario, is in charge of rationing supplies of Ambrosia, the only effective treatment of a worldwide epidemic, the Grey Plague. UNATCO makes sure the drug gets to society's high-ups, while everyone else has to suffer, and you're responsible for making sure that the status quo is maintained.

Or are you? In *Deus Ex*, nothing is quite as it seems, and we guarantee you'll spend a lot of time wondering who the bad guys really are. And if you're mad for conspiracy theories, you'll love it. We quickly spotted an obscure reference to the Freemasons, and just about every secret society known to man seems to be in on the

conspiracy. You might find it rewarding to do a little background reading before playing *Deus Ex* - it's been delighting us no end with references that we understand but which not many other people do. Smug? Us? Why, of course.

Fnord

It would be so easy to get into a long discussion about *Deus Ex*'s philosophical leanings, but that's the sort of thing that could end with us taking pride of place up our own arse. Let's just say that as well as being a brilliant game, it should make you seriously wonder about the important things in life: politics, religion, morality, death, honour, loyalty... *Deus Ex* gleefully challenges you on these issues along the way, and it's quite capable of making you forget that it's all a game, and wondering if you're really as good a person as you thought you were. Should you really have assassinated that unarmed NSF boss? Did you have any choice? That's the sort of thing you can

go back and sort out when you finally get to one of *Deus Ex*'s many possible endings (yes, there are more than one) and go back to play it again.

How long will it take you to get through? It's good for a couple of weeks of non-stop play, in which you'll see many major cities recreated in glorious *Unreal*-vision, as well as a few places that might not exist, but then again they might...

We could go on forever, but there are a few annoying little specifics we have to cover. Graphics? Beautiful. Sound? Spot on. Control? Intuitive and responsive. Animation? Fluid and occasionally spectacular. Atmosphere? Positively brimming over with it. The sort of game you'd have to be dead not to love? Absolutely.

Yes, this is the best game ever. At least, it is until *Black and White* makes an appearance, and even then Peter Molyneux's going to have to put up one hell of a fight. **PCF**

Jim McCauley

Just like in real life, when scary things are trying to tear your spinal column out, the safest option is to flee.



Atmosphere? Brimming over with it. The sort of game you'd have to be dead not to love? Absolutely

Deus Ex £35

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www.deusex.com
Min System: PIII-300, 64Mb, 3D card, Win 95
Recommended: PIII-500, 128Mb, 16Mb 3D card

How does it rate?

Deus Ex	PCF 90	85%
Half-Life	PCF 75	90%
Broken Sword 2	PCF 108	88%
Thief 2	PCF 102	86%
System Shock 2		

For and against

- ✓ Overwhelming story
- ✓ Brilliantly branching plot
- ✓ Utterly believable
- ✓ Tense and thrilling
- ✗ Almost too much to take in

Rating

95%