

GENRE: ROLE-PLAYING

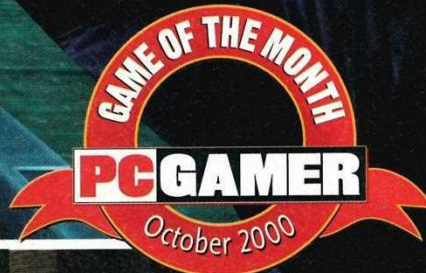
# DEUS EX

Ever wanted to be a secret agent pacifying dissidents? You have? Sicko.

There's something about this fellow I don't trust. Hmmm.



This year, bondage-style armoured suits with visors are sooooo in.



**THERE'S NOTHING LIKE A GAME**

While most of the voice-acting is superlative, it occasionally goes a little awry, especially in Hong Kong and Paris. Our favourites are the hilariously camp American sailors, who are so excitable you keep expecting them to burst into an elaborate rendition of 'Guys and Dolls'.



**JOHN** Romero was right. Ion Storm was – let's be honest – formed as a reaction to the programmer-led Id, crystallising around a single rule: design is law. Games should be more about the art than the artist; more about the painting than the paintbrush. Game design – that's where it's at; the rest is just distracting ephemera. At the only level that counts, the ancient ASCII-based *Nethack* is superior to the slickly vacuous *Vampire*. Repeat after me. Design. Is. Law.

Yes, *Daikatana* stank, it still stinks and will forever smell of decomposed half-ideas, but the best first-person game in the world was based on its ideas. Now, with the introduction of *Deus Ex*, it is no longer a given that *Half-Life* is the best. The two best first-person games were created using an engine licensed from an external source. With *Half-Life*, it was Id's *Quake*. With *Deus Ex*, the basis is Epic's *Unreal* technology.

The advantages of this method are pretty evident. Even with a lesser team – fresh-faced Raven creating *Heretic II*, for example – games move from conception to completion much quicker if a licensed engine is used. When an entire

This is a brilliant part of the game. We won't spoil it...



# sex

## THE (NEW) WORLD (ORDER)

The chance to choose your ethnic origin is a particularly welcome addition to the game. Especially because the insults that get thrown at you upon reaching the Eastern levels vary according to your background. Or am I going mad? Your character is nameless though...



### A bloke

First up is your common-or-garden white European gentleman. He appears to have something of a receding hairline, but don't worry about that, he's still a fine choice.



### Another bloke

Choosing this chap allows you to ask "Is it because I am black?" to oncoming terrorist troops without worrying too much about sounding like Ali G. His hair is still receding though.



### A third bloke

Tricky to identify this gentleman's racial background? Looks a bit Native American, but it's hard to tell. He's even balder than the rest though. He'll be J.C. 'Wiggy' Denton soon.



### A bloke I met in a pub once

This chap looks almost identical to several barmen of our acquaintance. And, even better, he is clearly more follicularly blessed than his peers. Choose him.



### A bloke you'd avoid

And... who's this weirdo? Isn't he a little old to be saving the world? Yes, he still has a full head of hair, but really does need to turn to the Grecian 2000. Choose him and be ridiculed.

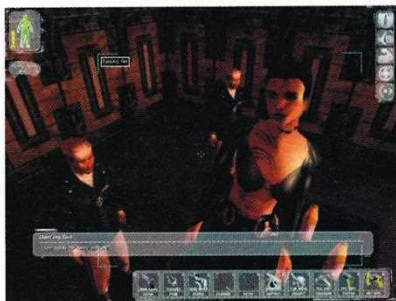


Your brother has unfortunate facial hair.



Gunther Hermann

He's laughing on the inside. Actually, that's a lie. Inside he's metal. And wants to kill you.



development cycle can be devoted to the central game mechanics, the extra time can enable a team to hone their art further. You want a random prediction? In ten years' time, the amount of work a team will have to do on a game engine will be next to nothing. With *Deus Ex* as an example of the strengths of this methodology, it'd be a brave person to mumble sourly at the inevitable march of history.

But why is *Deus Ex* so important?

## "Deus Ex is a culmination of many action-RPG games"

Let's examine its family tree. Pay close attention. *Ultima Underworld* begat *System Shock*, which begat *Thief* and *Shock 2*. Then *Shock 2* met *Half-Life* in a bar, shared a few drinks and begat *Deus Ex*. They then let *Thief* and *Floor 13* (ancient black-and-white you-are-a-Government-Black-Agency game) be God-parents. Then the child grew up and put pictures of *Syndicate* on its wall, fancied *Diablo* at school and hung out with *Exile*. And read Voltaire, Guy Debord, The

Illuminatus, Grant Morrison, Machiavelli and pretty much the whole content of a decently stocked bookshelf. And wore shades even at night. Or, in more prosaic terms, *Deus Ex* is a culmination of many action-RPG games. This sort of thing gets us critical types all excited.

*Deus Ex* is a first-person action RPG. You play J.C. Denton, a special agent for UNATCO, an extended branch of the police. The world is a day-after-tomorrow affair with the current trends (globalisation, corporate power increasing, democratic power falling, terrorist direct action on the rise, fade to Socialist Worker opinion columns...) stretched to extremes. A modern plague, called the Grey Death, haunts the streets, and the vaccine - Ambrosia - is in fatally sort supply. Access is limited to those with power, wealth or both. The locations in the game are either based on real-world areas, or are authentic enough to make you believe they are.

You're probably wanting to hear about how *Deus Ex* plays. So, imagine I'm telling you a story. Give me your hand and let me take you on a journey through some hypothetical *Deus Ex* scenarios.

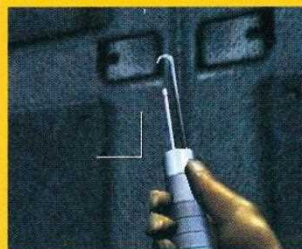
You find yourself looking at a tower. You have to blow up a generator inside.

## CRITICISM I

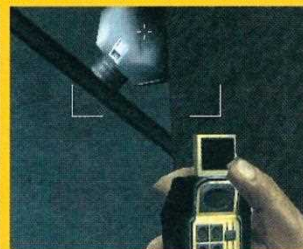
Oh yes. Direct3D owners note: there is considerable slowdown during some of the more frenetic moments, and to get the best results you have to drop the texture quality somewhat. A patch is being worked on. A beta of this patch is on CD GAMER, and it makes a real difference. Unfortunately it just missed the DVD deadline. It'll be with you next issue, though.

## BREAK AND ENTER

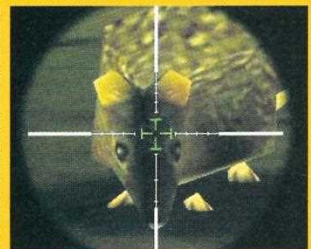
Given *Deus Ex's* complexities, it's reassuring to know that the whole hacking, electronics and lockpicking side of the game is relatively straightforward. When working with electronics and lockpicking you use up your hardware resources of lockpicks (suprisingly) and multitools, while the hacking is based on your skill level, and how long it takes you to break into a system.



Lockpicks in the future are based around nanomachines hardening in the lock, allowing it to turn. They are grey.



Multitools are general purpose devices capable of taking over almost every system in the game. They are yellow.



Hacking features computer-style screens. But we couldn't show one of those. Instead we have a shot of a rat.



Many female NPCs are scantily clad. But, occasionally, some are minging.



The military robots are spraypainted green to stress their environmental concerns. Really.



I don't know about you, but I'm hard.

**THINGS TO MAKE AND DO**

As expected in a game so firmly set in the Looking Glass aesthetic, the world's a riot of completely extraneous detail and things to pick up and fiddle with. *Deus Ex* – it's even more interactive than the real world! (Stop exaggerating – Ed).



Firstly, there's a variety of wild-life. Dogs, rats, pigeons and fish all appear. And cats die if you jump on them.



*Deus Ex* takes the approach of insecure intellectuals everywhere by quoting passages at length from great works.



And the mirrors are perfect when you need to see how bad-ass you look with your new sniper rifle. I'm so cool.

**CRITICISM II**

I didn't have the heart to put this in the main review, so I'll slide it in here. *Deus Ex*'s stunningly coherent design philosophy falls apart when dealing with corpses. You right-click over the corpse to pick up what they're carrying. Then you click again to pick the corpse up and move it. But, if your inventory is full, you can't pick up their stuff, so you can't pick up the bodies then go and hide them somewhere. A Bad Thing.

Guards patrol outside, dogs yapping with their probably rabid mouths. You shrug, reloading the assault rifle. Noticing a ladder on the side of the building, you climb up to the roof. You hear the barking of the mutts; this tells you your cover has been blown. At this point you give up all pretence of subtlety, charging down a ramp into the building proper. Alarms go off as troopers start to locate you. Ducking between crates,

**"True cutting-edge interactive storytelling."**

you return fire. Realising you're outnumbered, you pull out a LAM grenade, attaching it to a wall before retreating. As the pursuing pack approaches, the motion sensors activate the grenade. Taking advantage of the confusion you charge, liberally spraying bullets. Downstairs, you

locate the generator, lobbing another couple of LAMs through the door to reduce hi-tech to wreck. A sprint to the roof, leaping into your escape helicopter, and out. Chaos. Death. You're an ultra-bad-ass mo-fo raining annihilation on the second summer of love.

Rewind. You find yourself looking at a tower. You have to blow up a generator inside. Guards patrol outside, dogs yapping with their probably rabid mouths. You shrug. You've broken into more dangerous places than this before. Waiting for a gap in the patrol routes, you crawl silently to the ladder, ascending to the roof. Looking through the skylight you notice two guards chatting, spouting conspiracy theories about the government. You listen for a

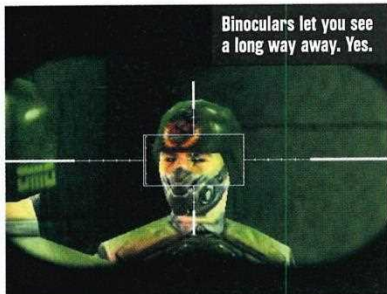
while, then lob a gas grenade which, of course, reduces them to choking heaps, clawing at their eyes. You leap down, applying knock-out blows to the backs of their heads. All's silent. You head down, noticing a couple more guards walking long patrol routes. When one turns his back an electric prod to the back of the neck brings him crashing to the floor. His yelp attracts the attention of his partner, who turns the corner only to get a face full of pepper spray. A truncheon blow and he collapses. From then on, it's easy. You go down to the floor below and crawl into the computer room. By hacking the computer

system you're able to program an auto-destruct of your target. You retreat back to the roof and escape. No-one will know you were ever there. Death count? Zero. That's it, you've done, no more tears to be shed by the mother of the world, thanks to you.

Rewind. You find yourself looking at a tower. You have to blow up a generator inside. Guards patrol outside, dogs yapping with their probably rabid mouths. You shrug, shoulder your sniper rifle and put high-calibre rounds through each of the guards' (and the dogs') heads. You hate patrolmen and you've never been too fond of dogs either.

Rewind. You find yourself looking at a tower. You have to blow up a generator inside. But by doing a few favours to your street-friends and throwing around a little cash, you've managed to gain every single security code, key and password for the facility. The second you find a security console, those gun-turrets on the





Binoculars let you see a long way away. Yes.



At the start of the game, your main foes are these guys: NSF terrorists. You may boo now.



If you want, you can sit back and watch the fight between your allies and foes.



first floor are going to be turned against their makers. The rest will be a mop-up.

Rewind.

You find yourself looking at a tower. You have to blow up a generator inside. For you, that's not enough. You shoulder your LAW missile launcher and fire a blast at the main doors, demolishing them in seconds. This blast in turn sets off the fuel-drums you dragged there earlier, wiping out anyone who had the misfortune of being on the ground floor.

Rewind.

You find yourself looking at a tower. You have to blow up a generator inside. You head back to the alleyways and entertain yourself by playing with a basketball you found lying around. You throw it at some stray cats. Perhaps you'll go play pool in a bar later and have a few drinks. The mission can wait. Governmental Agents just wanna have fun, right?

Get the point?

By now, people will be describing *Deus Ex* as a hybrid of several genres. That would be a mistake. *Deus Ex* doesn't merge the play-mechanics of singular genres, it just includes them. The primary characteristic of a hybrid game is that it demands you to perform tasks that would otherwise be separate. *Deus Ex* is about personal inclination and – this is the important one – it's about freedom. *Deus Ex* destroys the traditional relationship between gamer and game. This relationship is one where the game dictates to the gamer what to do to have fun; it's a dictatorial axis that, until now,

has never been challenged, let alone be reversed. Look, everyone! Genuine interactive entertainment.

This theory also suggests some more great things. Lots of games we previously thought were impossible to create, are actually feasible. For example, since *Deus Ex* has shown how one level can be played in such opposing ways without losing any entertainment value, things like, say, superhero games where you can play as radically different characters become possible. Previously, received wisdom would have stated that no level would be as satisfying to play as a steroid-powered Hulk-clone or a shadow-clad Batman analogue; hence such a game could never exist. *Deus Ex* annihilates that defeatist thought in a

## "This sort of thing gets us critical types all excited."

burst of near-future cool. It has raised the stakes, and all that remains to be seen is if the industry is willing to follow. (Which may not happen. After two years, only a fraction of the ideas which ran wild through the heart of *Half-Life* have been assimilated in its peers. Most FPSs are still pretending its maintained genius never happened, hoping everyone will forget how sublime the genre can be.)

Despite all the ultraviolence – or lack of



These guys are harder than nails. Nails made out of diamonds. From Newcastle.

it, depending on your inclination – *Deus Ex* is a role-playing game, featuring sophisticated character development. Firstly, you have the skill system: there are eleven skills, varying from the predictable weapon classes (pistol, rifle, heavy weapons and melee) and survival (swimming) to intrusion (lockpicking and computer hacking)... and you only have a bare minimum of points to spend on advancing them. While each only has four levels, the differences between classes are unbelievably large, with the highest, and oh-so desirable levels being incredibly unattainable.

This extreme system means that, unlike the superficially similar *System Shock 2*, by the end of the game your character won't necessarily be competent in most things.

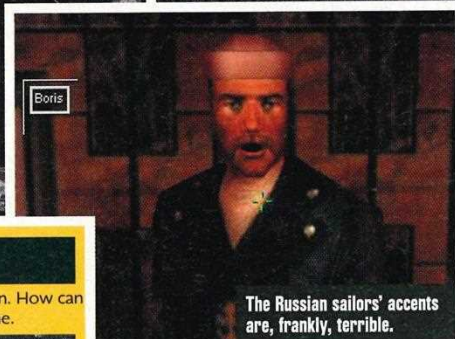
### DUM-DUMMITY DUM

While *Deus Ex* is admirably well devoted to the Future, there's one aspect that's more than a little bit retro: the stirring theme music which is uncannily similar in tone and style to that of top chopper series *Airwolf*. We assume it's ironic.



It's the girl from Atari Teenage Riot. Say hello, everyone.

Much to Ross' distress, it appears pattern baldness still abounds in the future.



The Russian sailors' accents are, frankly, terrible.



**ROBOT STRONG**

*Deus Ex* features satanic robots with missile launchers. C'mon. How can you resist? Get to the shops now, will ya. You're wasting time.



Ways to take out a robot include: grenades, GEP guns, LAW launchers, ECM grenades and booking a nice little restaurant and bringing flowers.

**SYSTEM MISER**

How *Deus Ex* will play on your PC

■ Supported resolutions: All resolutions from 640x400 up to 1280x1024

■ Scaleable options: World texture detail, object texture detail, detail textures, decals

**VERDICT:** *Deus Ex* is a bit of a system-hog, with some moderately severe Direct 3D problems. Which will hopefully be fixed when the patch is finalised. Come to *Deus* with minimum specs and expect some severe loss of framerate when things get busy. A top-end 3D card (particularly a Voodoo) will help things, as you might expect, really.



**THE HARDER THEY COME**

Original gangsters will appreciate *Deus Ex*'s range of difficulty levels. The highest of these – Realistic – is a real challenge, even for the most talented gamer, essentially making you *Rogue Spear*-vulnerable against a world full of baddies. A level to choose for the eighty-third time you replay the game, methinks.

You're forced into making hard decisions regarding what to spend your hard-earned experience points on enhancing. To master one category – let alone multiple categories – will mean sorely neglecting others, leading to a truly unique character. And thus a truly unique whole experience.

However, unlike in *Shock 2*, being unskilled in an area doesn't usually bar you from having a layperson's crack – you'll just be less talented. It's like comparing an untrained swimmer's doggy paddle to the swift front crawl of Duncan Goodhew: you're likely to still get to the other side, it's just that it'll take you longer. This differential is most clearly seen in the use of weapons

which uses a targeting reticle method similar to *Rogue Spear*'s. The longer you stay still, preparing your shot, the tighter the crosshairs get, and the more accurate your shot is. Unskilled? You start with a massive expanse between crosshairs, which narrows slowly. You're a master? Almost instant unnerving accuracy is the reward for all your dedication.

The implications of this are of devastating importance. While there is some narrowing of your options depending on

**"Its narrative is as deep as you choose it to be."**

choices (for example, without any hacking training you'll be unable to break into security systems without their codes) generally you can still have a go. This contrasts neatly with *Planescape: Torment*, a game which featured a similar amount of freedom. In the more traditional RPG, the thrill was seeing your choices being limited by how you've wandered its moral maze. *Deus Ex* brings a potentially fluid and interchangeable approach to gaming: *nothing* is written in stone. You can always try something else, re-making your own game-image as many times as you choose. In the intricate sprawl of a level, there's always some other approach. Being condemned to freedom has never been so heavenly.

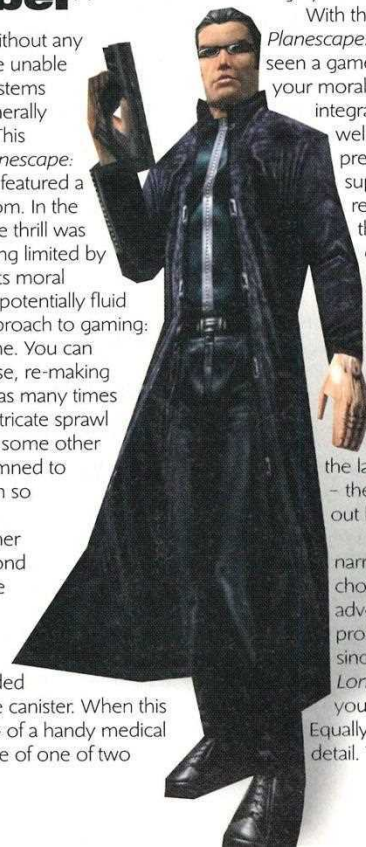
This formula is further complicated by the second way you can personalise your character. You're a finely-tuned nano-tech human machine, capable of being upgraded when you find a suitable canister. When this is installed, with the help of a handy medical bot, you have the choice of one of two

special abilities, depending on the particular canister. Do you want to hypercharge your muscle neurones for hand-to-hand bonus or strengthen myosin fibrils for lifting strength? A spy-drone or an ECM based missile-detonator? Speed boost or silent running? And, like skills, once they've been plugged in you can upgrade them over four increasing power levels.

Leaving aside the specialisation inherent in choosing what to carry in your limited inventory space, and the much-appreciated option to choose the racial group of your character (originally a gender option was planned, but re-recording the immense amount of vocal information proved impractical – forgive them), the most interesting way to define your character is through your moral choices.

With the exception of *Planescape: Torment*, I've never seen a game which judges and rates your moral performance then integrates it into the story so well, and without preaching. This isn't the superior Daily Mail-readership judgements that the *Ultima* series occasionally enforced. This is simply giving your choices an effect. From major actions, such as whether to follow your orders or your conscience; to minor ones, such as whether to investigate the ladies' toilets in your base – the results are clearly laid out before you.

The story? Oh yes. Its narrative is as deep as you choose it to be. For adventure fans, this is probably the only game since the gem of *The Longest Journey* to satiate your conversational desires. Equally, the world drips with detail. There are innumerable





Keeping the Earth free from the scum of the universe. (That's you by the way.)



(Below) Another subtle infiltration raid goes to plan.



The sniper rifle is especially cool.

books to read, e-mail logs to study and newspapers and data terminals to peek at. Of course, the important ones are noted in your log book, as are all the conversations, leaving only those who enjoy sinking up information to read them. You can savour *Deus Ex* like a fine wine. And like a fine wine it can be drunk by anyone; but those who take their time and let it breathe will notice a fuller depth of flavour.

It also possesses true cutting-edge interactive storytelling. While the broad sweeps of the tale are pre-determined, the minutiae are determined by the player, leaving a distinct and beautiful lasting

## "It reminds us of how good videoart can be."

memory. *Deus Ex* joins *Half-Life* and *System Shock 2* as the leading practitioners of this alchemy. We're reaching an age when the traditional story-telling devices in games (pure cut-scenes such as *Vampire's*) are beginning to look as shoddy as a flick-book in an age of widescreen plasma TVs. Several years ago it was held that, by definition, game and story were opposing forces. Bits of a game that are story are non-interactive, hence decorative. The bits where you actually do something are the game, with

## HOW TO BEAT FRIENDS AND INFLUENCE PEOPLE

What's a conspiracy theory without a cast of thousands of scheming people of dubious moralities, eh? Let's say hello...



This woman is (THIS INFORMATION HAS BEEN CLASSIFIED BY THE GOVERNMENT. DO NOT ATTEMPT TO DISCOVER MORE).



Anna Navarre is especially interesting when (STOP IT. THE GOVERNMENT HAS CLASSIFIED THIS INFORMATION).



Ah Gunther (OH, GIVE UP WILL YOU. THIS IS CLASSIFIED. OUR CONSPIRACY DEMANDS SECURITY) Walnut!

only a causal link to the flow of the narrative, and no genuine interaction. These strict boundaries are becoming less relevant as games improve.

But precisely how good is it? To take its two polar extremes of influence: while it's not quite as good as *Half-Life* as a shooter or *Thief* as a sneaker, the (here comes that word again) freedom to try both makes it *Half-Life's* only real peer. After two years we've finally got a genuine battle for the title of number one PC game of all time.

And hopefully it will sell millions. The bloke in the street might recall *The X-Files* and *The Matrix* and be satisfied. The pretentious poseurs will be rewarded with nods toward everything from the illuminati to the French situationists. Clearly, *Deus Ex* has influences outside the world of games; it reaches higher and drags you with it.

Games – like most other forms of entertainment – have a terrible habit of making you less than you are normally, simplifying you into a stripped-down cartoon. There's a difference between the near-autistic reduction of self required to succeed in the first arcade games (*Robotron 2084*, *Defender*) or the similarly emotionally grounded *Diablo* (get sword, kill baddie, get stronger sword). *Deus Ex* is one of the few games that succeeds in making you more than you are. Because *Deus Ex's* universe is, obviously, reduced, you feel as if you have more freedom than you do in reality, which, like *Fight Club* for example, reminds you of your own freedom in reality. It's a slap in the face, it reminds us of how good videoart can be. And this is art. It's beautiful. And I'm going to stop now before I start to cry...

KIERON GILLEN

## PCGAMER PROFILE

- Deus Ex is:
  - *Half-Life*
  - *Thief: The Dark Project*
  - *System Shock 2*
- Deus Ex is not:
  - *Daikatana*
  - *Speedy Eggbert*
  - *Plumbers Don't Wear Ties*

■ Publisher **Eidos** ■ Developer **Ion Storm** ■ Price **£35** ■ Minimum System **PII300, 64Mb RAM, 150Mb HD space** ■ Recommended **PIII, 128Mb RAM, 16Mb 3D card, 750Mb HD space** ■ Graphics Accelerator **3Dfx, Direct 3D** ■ Multi-Player **None** ■ Web Address **www.deusex.com** ■ Release Date **Out now**

## ALSO WORTH A LOOK...

**System Shock 2** PCG 75, 92%  
Deus Ex's closest bedfellow, but more about intensity than expansiveness.

**Half-Life** PCG 63, 96%  
The best game ever. Or is it? Let the debate begin.

**PCGAMER**  
Action-RPG mayhem that you need more than oxygen. This game pushes the boundaries.

**95%**