

CATEGORY	Roleplaying	REQUIRED	PIII 300, 64MB RAM, 150MB hard-drive space, DirectX card
DEVELOPER	ION Storm	WE RECOMMEND	PIII 500, 128MB RAM, 750MB hard-drive space, Glide card
PUBLISHER	Eidos	MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS	None

Deus Ex



Ambitious, assured, and awesome...*Deus Ex* is a game guaranteed to please just about everybody.

Go buy this game. That's all I really have to say about *Deus Ex*. A whole bunch of "Go buy this game." I'll run on about its depth, innovative design, atmosphere, and all that stuff, but the bottom line is this: Get it.

Deus Ex began its life as another tremendous game idea in the head of Warren Spector. That's not such a big deal — a tremendous game idea runs through his head

every single day. But this one stuck in his noggin for some reason, and it got sketched out into a design doc. And from there it was sent into full-fledged production in the Austin wing of ION Storm. And for a couple of years, Spector and his team worked with complete freedom, well out of the ION Storm limelight, just plugging away at their game.

And now it's here, and it's fantastic. The game looks and plays a lot like *System Shock 2*, which of course derived from Spector's own *System Shock*. A first-person 3D game rendered with the *Unreal* engine, its graphics are on par with the best of last year's action games, but *Deus Ex* isn't a game intended for accelerator-monkeys. Its emphasis is squarely on story and character development.

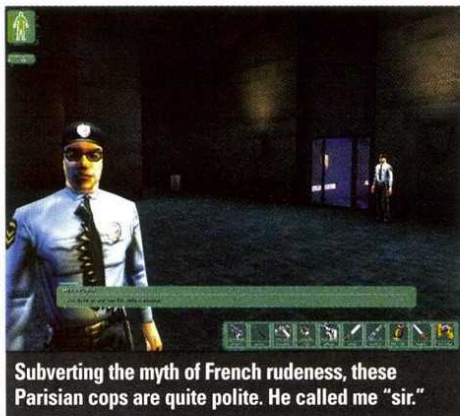
You are J.C. Denton (that's your code name, anyway, and it's how everyone will refer to you throughout the game). You've just been inducted into UNATCO (United Nations Anti-Terrorism Committee) as a badass special agent, working for the same agency that employs your equally badass brother Paul. Your broad charge is to wield the committee's unilateral power to fight a terrorist cell calling itself the National Secessionist Forces (NSF). As a bizarre

plague ravages the populace, the NSF is hijacking shipments of the antidote.

Needless to say, there are wheels turning within wheels. In the game's early missions, you drop the hammer on NSF forces in New York City, retrieving a stolen cache of the antidote. But before you get a chance to feel good about busting up the NSF hijacking, it becomes clear that these "terrorists" might not be the threat they've been made out to be, and that your brother is in grave danger from UNATCO itself, and that UNATCO may just be a front for a darker government agency, and...

The threads of conspiracy just keep on unraveling, and weaving together in new and surprising patterns. There's no way to divulge even tantalizing hints about the game's labyrinthine plot without spoiling secrets, so I won't even try. Let's just say that each and every one of the classic conspiracy theories — Area 51, the Illuminati, men in black, secret quarantine centers, Majestic 12, shadow governments, etc. — plays a part in the massive, deliriously complex storyline.

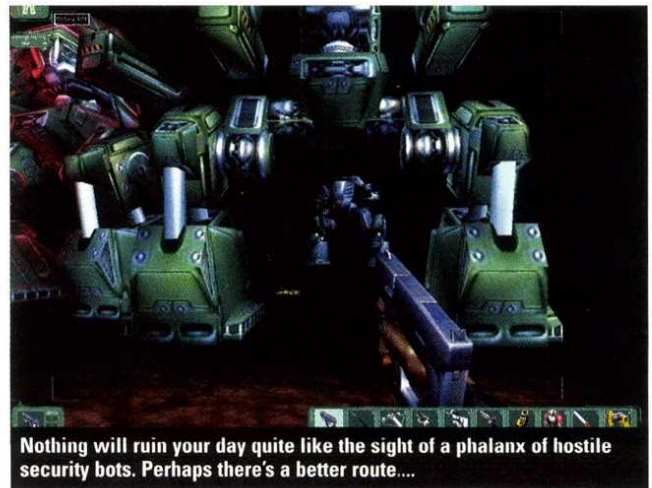
Best of all, the game's many branches lead to a wide variety of "Choose Your Own Adventure"-style side alleys, many of which send the rest of the story off in a direction that will seal off yet other side alleys. It will take some 100 hours of investigating before you explore every route to the three possible endings.



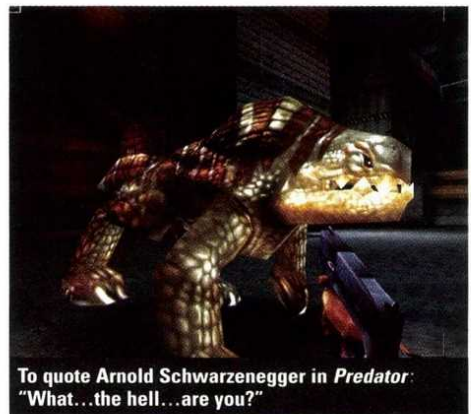
Subverting the myth of French rudeness, these Parisian cops are quite polite. He called me "sir."



Ever stabbed a Man in Black while invisible? I didn't think so.



Nothing will ruin your day quite like the sight of a phalanx of hostile security bots. Perhaps there's a better route....



To quote Arnold Schwarzenegger in *Predator*: "What...the hell...are you?"

You must be prepared for close-quarters combat with all manner of man and mechanism.



WE'RE FREE-FORMING

Deus Ex is set up as a truly free-form game. You're free to make a surprising number of choices within each mission, and while the game is linear in the mission-to-mission sense, you could still end up playing through an unrecognizable version of the same game your buddy loaded up and ran through. They'd be like discussions of parallel universes; you'd both have visited the same locales and encountered the same characters, but the variations made possible by your decision-making will quickly spread a rippling butterfly effect over the game.

The different approaches distinguish themselves early. There is no set way to approach any mission objective. You can go in stealthily, sticking to the shadows and silently subduing guards before hotwiring a security keypad. Or you could get through the same door by coming in with guns blazing and then punching through it with a heavy weapon. Unlike shoot-'em-up 3D action games, or even critically acclaimed stealth-fests like *Thief*, *Deus Ex* makes no preconceptions about what approach you'll take to the game world. You're free to get it done any way you can — with the understanding that your choices will have real repercussions later. For example, if you pulverize an enemy with a heavy weapon, you won't be able to

retrieve important items from the corpse. If you skip side quests, you might be missing a critical keycode and be forced to find a different route around a locked door (but a route will be there, somewhere).

J.C. Denton will evolve according to your choices, as well. Being a cybernetically modified agent, you'll continually upgrade yourself with augmentations picked up throughout the game. Each "aug" you pick up has two possible applications, and once you pick which one will be incorporated, the other becomes unavailable. Thus, if you pick up a leg augmentation, you might have to choose between a Stealth aug and a Speed aug. One will make you near-silent, the other will make you incredibly fast. Bit by bit, you'll mold yourself into a carefully customized character. (You'll also have to deal with the classic cyber-moral dilemmas about the shifting nature of humanity. Spector keeps you on your toes.)

There's an awesome amount of weapons, skills, and augmentations available. Even a partial list would be exhaustive. Pistols, sniper rifles, crossbows, combat knives, high-power GEP guns; stealth legs, light-amplification optics, even invisibility — you can eventually earn the ability to do just about anything. You earn experience points with successful completion of mission objectives, and through bonuses for discovering locations

and successfully using skills. You can then spend these points on increasing your proficiency in any skill (you're either Untrained, Trained, or an Expert in a skill) from among a list that includes computers, demolitions, marksmanship, medical, and others.

IT'S A CONSPIRACY

Just a small sampling of some of the twisted conspiracy theories trotted out for *Deus Ex*:



ROSWELL'S LEGACY

Did the U.S. government recover alien corpses at a UFO crash site in 1947? Is the government in collusion with aliens today?



ILLUMINATI

Is a top-secret international cabal of satanic industrialists secretly manipulating world events? Fnoord.



THE FEMA SURPRISE

Does the Federal Emergency Management Agency exist only as a means to one day suspend the Constitution?

MAN OR MACHINE?

Welcome to the wonderful and existentially troubling world of cybernetic human augmentation.



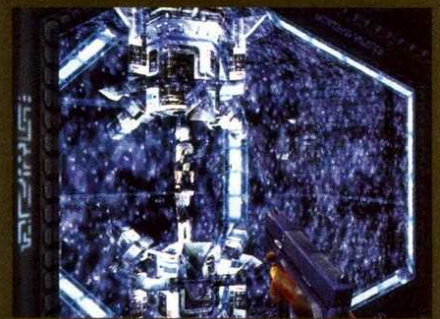
>>> REPAIR BOTS

Repair bots and medical bots are where you can repair damage and implement augmentation upgrades.



>>> AMPLIFIED VISION

Handy eye-amplification augmentations will let you see bad guys in pitch darkness.

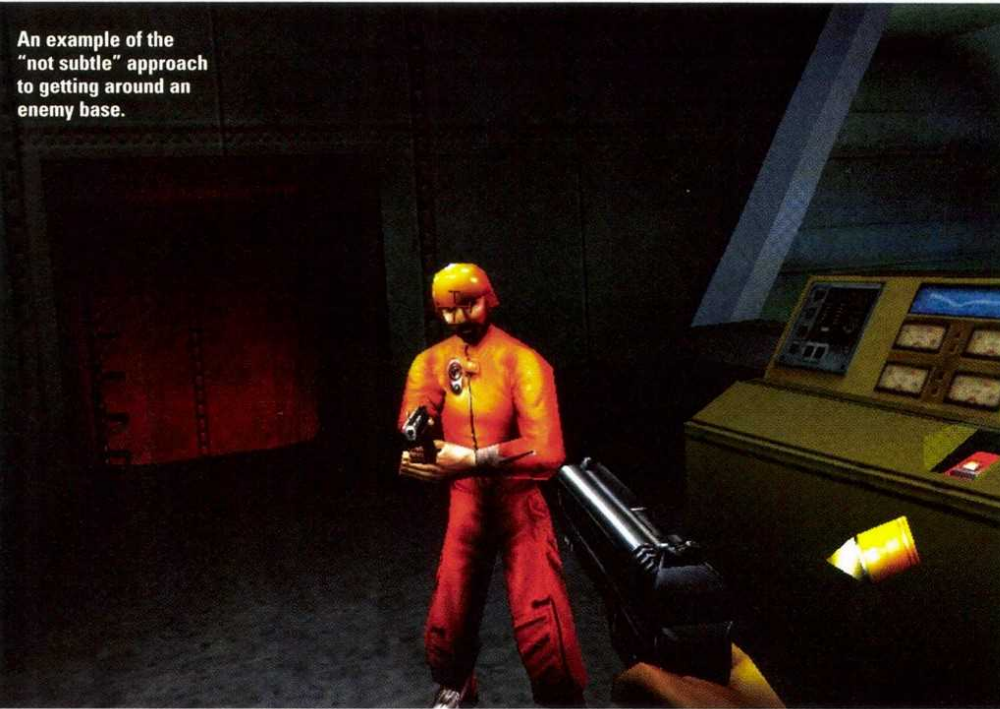


>>> CYBER SECRETS

When you uncover the nasty secrets behind your cyber-augmentation, I guarantee you won't be happy about your status as half-man, half-machine.

drop tantalizing hints about the machinations going on around you. You overhear scripted snippets of conversations that lead you off down absorbing side alleys of plot exposition. By the end(s) of the game (there are three variant endings, depending on different branches at key points in the story), you'll be able to fully appreciate the careful construction and elaborate choreography of the plot — a minor miracle when you consider just how much freedom you're granted within the structure of each mission.

An example of the "not subtle" approach to getting around an enemy base.



MORE THAN AN INVENTORY

But *Deus Ex* is more than just an impressive collection of stuff. The genius of the game is the endlessly clever uses you can put everything to. At times, it seems like the game is reading your mind — the myriad of combinations and experiments always seems to yield a new and thrilling result. In fact, the limited inventory space puts a premium on thoughtful selection of items.

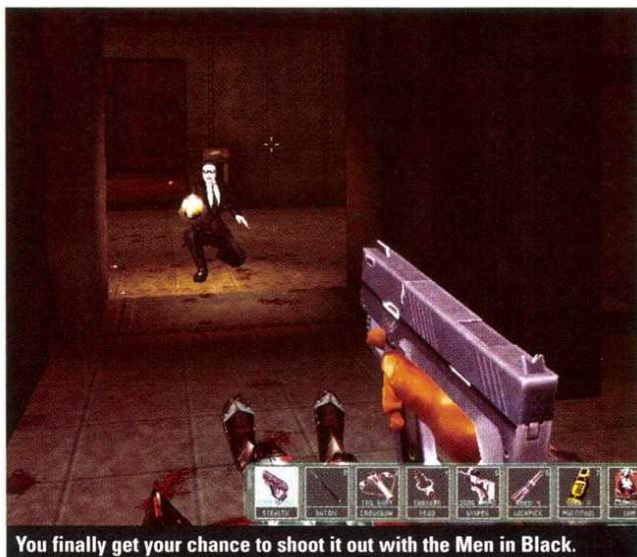
The whole game world is a laboratory for your personal approach to mission-solving. When hostages need to be rescued from a subway platform wired with explosives, you can use Electromagnetic Pulse grenades to disable the bombs and then subdue the guards without injuring the hostages. Not feeling so humanitarian? You can just sneak into an airshaft, set up a

sniper's nest with a clear view of the explosives, and shoot them — triggering an explosion that kills everyone in the place. You won't win too many friends with the latter approach, but there's nothing stopping you, either. It's truly a free-form game.

As a result, there's nothing frustrating about *Deus Ex*. You won't be stuck anywhere for long. Can't figure out how to electronically bypass a door? I guarantee there's a way to sneak around it from another entrance. Security bot too tough to tackle head-on? There's got to be a security control panel where you can rig the bot to switch off (or even program it to attack its human confederates). Every goal has at least several routes to successful completion, and it's all a matter of taste to determine which route you'll go. I had a lot of trouble figuring out electronic bypassing, and wasn't too keen on head-on battles, so I invested all my experience points in stealth and sniping. I always found a sneaky way to slip past my enemies or take them out from a safe distance.

This was really rewarding to me. It's unusual to find a game that seems to be tailoring itself to your preferences as you play it.

All of these wonderful features are in service of a story that keeps surprising you, too. There's no time to get bored with *Deus Ex*; too much is coming at you all the time. Characters



You finally get your chance to shoot it out with the Men in Black.



This guy gets up close and personal with your .30-06 high-powered rifle. Big mistake.

ENTER THE CONSPIRACY

Warren Spector demonstrates a gleefully encyclopedic knowledge of conspiracy theories (his Austin offices contain a library of kook lore, and he obviously mined it for everything it was worth). As you juggle the horrifying implications of each new plot twist, you unearth a hilariously breathtaking mosaic of apocalyptic intent. The plot will take you from New York to Hong Kong to Paris to Vandenberg Air Force Base in the middle of the desert. You'll have a chance to ally yourself with any number of shady international consortium types, to make friends or enemies of Triad gangs, and even rub elbows with strange beings that may or may not be cloned descendants of extraterrestrials. This thing packs all the convolution of *The X-Files* onto one little CD-ROM.

A wealth of detail fills out every nook and cranny of the game world. The urinals work. There are beer bottles on the tables in the taverns, which you can pick up and take if you want. There are rats scuttling in the alleyways. It looks and feels like a living, dynamic world, and you always have the sense that your actions will alter it profoundly. Which they will, creating an atmosphere of dire importance whenever you try any stunt.

Deus Ex earns huge points for ambitious scope, dynamic design, and engrossing story, but has a few significant weak points that keep it out of the range of truly stratospheric



Is it just me, or do these guys have unusually large heads and big eyes?



review scores. The foremost is the clunky level of writing and voice acting displayed in almost all of the dialogue. There's lots of fascinating stuff being thrown around in every conversation, which is why it's a shame that the lines themselves are obvious and stilted, and delivered by flat, run-of-the-mill "game voices." Denton is the worst offender: it's annoying to be voiced by such a monotonous mummy of a voice actor. Before too long, I was spacebar-jumping ahead of his dialogue as soon as I could read it on the screen.

Another problem is the game's chug factor: there are slowdowns to be tolerated on almost any system (although Glide-based 3D cards will fare much better than GeForce cards, which can barely process the game). Load times are long and distracting, especially when you're moving in and out of sections of each location. Saving takes forever, as does reloading (which you'll be doing a lot of; even on the easiest difficulty setting, expect to croak at least a half-dozen times before you successfully complete each mission). It's a testament to how good this game is that I played the majority of the game on a non-Glide system and loved every bit of it.

Also, there is an unavoidable amount of crate-stacking and jump-puzzling to be waded through. There was a compromise made when it was decided that pick-ups would be located in crates strewn around the world; whether you're wandering the side alleys of Hell's Kitchen or the markets of Hong Kong, you're never very far from a random crate filled with lethal weaponry or biomechanical augmentation equipment. It might have been a necessary evil in order to



Could this well-dressed guy be part of a conspiracy? With props like this in his office, it's a safe guess.

facilitate gameplay, but I can't help but think it's a bit silly, especially in a game that's otherwise so rigorously real-feeling.

These are small annoyances, though. *Deus Ex* is a joy to play, a veritable treasure chest of gripping gameplay and plot surprises. It's a first-person 3D RPG that will satisfy action fans, roleplaying freaks, adventure gamers, and most anyone. *Deus Ex* is fantastic.

— Daniel Morris

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Huge; replayable; intricately assembled plot; a whole bunch of fun.

LOWS: 3D card incompatibilities; slowdowns; clunky dialogue and voice acting.

BOTTOM LINE: A must-own...a rare and rewarding game for fans of any genre.

PC GAMER 94%
EDITORS' CHOICE