

DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR

■ £34.99 | Pub: Eidos | Dev: Ion Storm | ETA: February 6 |
www.deusex.com

REQUIRES: PIII 1.2GHz, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card
DESIRES: P4 2.8GHz, 1GB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

It was a **PC ZONE** Classic, and you voted it **Game Of The Year 2000** along with half the games-playing world. **Richie Shoemaker** casts a critical eye over the sequel



IMPERSPECTIVE

DEUS EX

Reviewed Issue 93, Score 94%

The graphics may have baggy eyes, flecks of grey hair and a leathery neck, but the mind is still as sharp as a tack. And since it's available at a mere fiver, you would do well to try this out first before attempting the sequel. Not only for the sake of continuity, but because it's still a very, very deusexy game.

STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

Reviewed Issue 137, Score 94%

Yet another over-egged *Star Wars* cash-in, this time aimed to hijack the role-playing genre? Actually no, it's brilliant – turn to page 70 to see why.



Sure, we all loved *Thunderbirds 1-5*, but by the time he got to *24*, Brains was pushing his luck.

IF YOU'D care to turn to the Rear View section of the magazine, page 139 to be exact, you'll see that sitting proudly atop the role-playing game column in *PC ZONE*'s A-List is *Deus Ex*. In case you have difficulty locating it, it's the one with the picture of a guy who evidently forgot to remove his spectacles from their case before putting them on.

Now *Deus Ex* (pronounced 'juice sex' if you happen to be of North American origin or 'dayasex' if you're English) is perched where it is for one very good reason: because Ion Storm's debut sci-fi thriller is one of the

most intelligent and absorbing titles ever committed to CD-ROM. It's also a game that, along with *Half-Life* and *Solitaire*, is one of the few that it should be your duty to play. From the intricate layering of gameplay styles through the tangled web of its branching techno-thriller plot, *Deus Ex* remains as invigorating today as it was three and half years ago, despite the obvious graphical senility.

IN WITH THE NEW

Sadly, nothing lasts forever, and having almost single-handedly propped up the genre for most of the 21st century, it looks like we'll be seeing a new game ruling *PC ZONE*'s role-playing roost next month. When you consider that most games have about as much longevity as a

free-range egg, *Deus Ex* has had a bloody good innings. What's more, seeing as it won't be falling far down the *PCZ* pecking order, we shouldn't be too mournful – especially now the sequel *Invisible War* is done, dusted and ready to take the rightful place of its illustrious predecessor.

Sadly, it's with regret that I must inform you I just lied. Turn a few pages and you'll find the

“*Invisible War* is not what we were hoping for – and in the case of many fans, demanding”

game which will replace the first *Deus Ex* at the top – *Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic*.

Put bluntly, *Invisible War* isn't nearly as good as its

illustrious predecessor. There are RP elements of course, but essentially, *Invisible War* is a first-person shooter – admittedly a very, very good one – but not what we were hoping for, expecting or in the case of a great many fans, demanding.

The changes have come about, whether Ion Storm or Eidos choose to admit it or not, thanks to the concurrent development of both Xbox and

PC to console than it is from console to PC.

By necessity then, it seems that greater emphasis was put on making the console version more accessible, and as such seemingly insignificant PC-specific features that helped foster a sense of realism have been taken away. And all this because the over-sized Xbox controller can't deal with them.

SAY IT AIN'T SO

The developer has had to simplify much of the mechanics of the game – and as is so often the case, there's a fine line between streamlining a game and dumbing it down. It would be a touch unfair to accuse Ion Storm of wholesale retardation, but it's certainly true it's taken simplification a touch too far for the likes of us PC players, who



"Excuse me sir, but do you have a licence for that weapon?"

like nothing better than to wear away every key and button we have available to us.

It's the interface that has obviously received the most attention. Whereas before the inventory's capacity was based on the size and weight of each item, this time round it's simply comprised of a number of slots (one per item), à la *Resident Evil*. So, a packet of cigarettes will take up the same space in your backpack as shoulder-mounted rocket launcher – clearly sick and wrong.

The concept of weapon ammo has also been altered in that only one type is required to fire all the weapons in the game, although a flame-thrower will use up more ammo than a pistol. It's a system that should work, but it feels wrong because it's difficult to judge how much ammo each weapon will swallow up with one shot, and a visual prompt would have been handy.

Then there's the non-existent damage modelling, where four shots to the head

are about as effective at bringing down an assailant as a gentle squeeze on the thigh. Another minor irritant and further evidence of having to pander to the needs of the console market is the disappearance of the Reload key. Hardly crippling, but it's annoying nonetheless.

SHOOT TO KILL

But perhaps the biggest change, one that alters the nature of the gameplay quite significantly, comes by way of a

reduction in the number of augmentations and skill modifications you can install about your person. In my opinion, it was these 'biomods' that contributed greatly to *Deus Ex*'s sense of freedom; being able to change your character's skills and emphasis towards combat, stealth or otherwise. Certainly, there were plug-ins that, as it turned out, were next to useless, but the fun was in exploring the possibilities.

There were ten augmentation slots in *Deus Ex*, with over 20 biochips to choose from, and you could upgrade each three times. Now there are only five slots, 15 skills and two levels of upgrade. There were also 11 separate skills in the original game that could be advanced through four stages of training, from 'untrained' to 'advanced'. These skills have been done away with. You do the math.

With the simplification of the interface and the streamlining

of augmentations and elimination of skills – which has meant throwing out the old 'wobbly arm' weapon skills – what was originally a unique first-person RPG now comes across as an over-complicated shooter. Whereas before you were forced to think of varied solutions because your combat skills were often underdeveloped, here, since your combat abilities aren't held back, it's all too easy to get carried away and just shoot your way through certain situations. And the more you resort to violence, the more of a shooter the game becomes – and the subtly crafted role-playing and adventure elements become wasted and ignored.

Of course, whether you go around all barrels a-poppin' or take a more leisurely route through the game is a matter of choice. Perhaps it's a good thing Ion Storm has made the game more accessible to pure

HEY BOY, HEY GIRL

SEX MATTERS

Alex D is a fittingly androgynous sobriquet, when you consider that you can choose to take the role of either a man or a woman in the game. Depending on your choice, the other characters in the game may treat you in different ways.

An amusing instance comes early on when you meet a local businessman in a bar – who, it transpires, is gay. As an attractive male, you'll find yourself becoming the target of his less than subtle advances (and yes, I did visit his apartment later on).

If you play as a woman, you try and get him paired off with a guy dancing in the corner. In the end, the results aren't going to change the course of the game, but it's a fun and unique approach all the same.



Dancing Queen, anyone?

"What was originally a unique first-person RPG is now an over-complicated shooter"



Mayor Livingstone took the direct approach for this year's fireworks display...

combat FPS fans. In doing so, however, a great many RPG purists may well be put off. And this would be a shame because even though the central character may not stand up to as much internal probing, the storyline, environments and missions certainly do.

FEAR OF A BLEAK PLANET

Set 15 years on from where the original left off, you play Alex D (no relation to Chuck), a nanotechnologically-enhanced inductee of a scientifically enlightened organisation called Tarsus. With me so far?

JC, the central character from the first game, is but a distant memory. His legacy – The Collapse – resulted in the eradication of corrupt governments and shadowy organisations, and city states

instead administered by huge international corporations. These corporations subcontract matters of defence, health, law and education, often to subsidiary shadowy organisations. In other words, it's much the same as before but with other people in charge.

Things start simply enough: you're an augmented being, a product of science and so-called progress. Ranged against you and your kind are the luddites, The Order, hooded rainbow warriors who're far from being the lovable tree-hugging type you might expect.

What initially seems to be a simple choice – to side with the techno-evangelists or go with the quasi-religious fanatics – soon develops into a political and moral quagmire of half-truths, outright lies, alliances and hidden agendas. What you

do and who you believe depends on what you do or don't uncover, either by speaking to the various NPCs or reading journals and other material left lying around. Your course through the game will depend not on what is overtly right or wrong, but what you *think* is right or wrong.

Needless to say, you're kept on your toes from beginning to end, to the point where you start to question not only what's said but sometimes how it's said.

On my first play through the game, I'd pretty much decided who I was going to side with halfway through. A couple of instances caused me to waver momentarily and the storyline descended into *Max Payne* silliness on one occasion, but I stayed true to the cause. Then, almost at the last scene, a character said

MISSED OPPORTUNITY

MULTIPLAYER MAY BE MISSING, BUT WE MISS THE OPTION TO EVOLVE

Despite the potential for mucho multiplayer fun and the use of the party-friendly Unreal engine, it isn't surprising Ion Storm elected to leave out a multiplayer mode. It was no big draw in the first game and so it isn't something we're going to start getting worked up over now. However, what's very much missed is the emphasis on character development, a cornerstone of any RPG, which has been relegated to a minor role here.

What's more, weapon add-ons are little more than power-ups. Plus, despite having over a dozen biomod augmentations to call upon, you can only install five, and these are only special abilities that are little more than Force powers in the game. In all honesty, there was as much character development in *Jedi Academy* as there is here.

something in a way which made me stop and think: "Oh Lord God nooo. What have I done?" I almost sunk to the floor in an over-dramatic Charlton Heston fashion, believing I had condemned the entire human race to extinction. Rarely does a game make you question your own judgement in such a way, and it's this one aspect above all else – as was the case with the original game – that makes *Invisible War* such a uniquely compelling and unforgettable experience.

MISSION POSSIBLE

Although a typical mission will involve getting into a certain area to find some important piece of evidence, it's the means by which you can complete your objectives in virtually any order that makes *Invisible War* such a

unique experience when compared to the typical first-person shooter. Rarely are you forced down a pre-set path, unless concerned with deteriorating health or a lack of necessary hardware. Rather, the game offers a number of ways to approach any situation.

One room that required my immediate investigation was being patrolled by guards (who can be easily distracted or, if necessary, eliminated and their bodies hidden). Had I chosen to slip past the security though, I would have found a grate offering another way in, albeit with cameras to negotiate



I see someone has a couple of implants of their own...





He must be evil. The eyes are a dead giveaway.

along the way. However, it was only once I'd entered the apartment and completed my objective that I found another means of entry which would have involved playing the cast members off against each other. Unfortunately, I'd hacked down one of them on my way in, and in doing so had cut off a lucrative source of future revenue.

BEAUTIFUL GAME

Graphically, *Invisible War* is a visual feast. It's certainly true that the first game lacked a certain finesse in the graphics department and Ion Storm has certainly made amends here. The Unreal technology is superb, and although the levels are all doused in perpetual twilight and gloom, there's a

very real and tangible sense of foreboding, a feeling that's made all the more intense by the tightly-packed levels.

Adding to the mood are some wonderful shadow and lighting effects. Swinging bulbs cast lengthening shadows as they arc gently from the ceiling, and by crouching behind a dimly-lit doorway you can watch as the silhouette of a guard creeps past outside.

Pick up a wine glass and hurl it against the wall and its shadow will race to meet it. Even flailing bodies contort through the air as you hurl them around the place, shadows warping across the floor and walls in a rather macabre yet perversely satisfying dance. (I even maxed out my Strength enhancement just to see how

A game riddled with deceit, conspiracy and static discharge.

far I could hurl corpses, which is quite far as it happens.)

INTELLIGENCE SERVICE

Of course, such graphical finery comes at a price. Even at a standard 1024x768 resolution with shadows dancing and detail on high, you're going to need a PC at least as good as the recommended spec. Even then, frame rates will suffer when the lead starts flying.

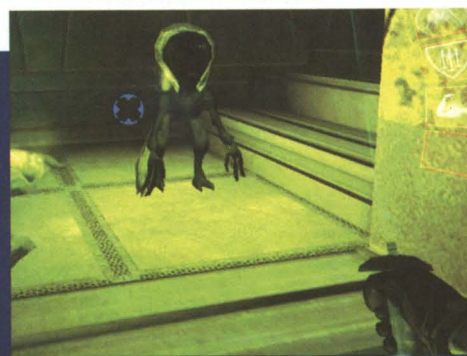
As to the enemy AI, I must admit that while there were no instances of utter stupidity to report, it never once surprised me with a display of super-

human tactical awareness either. Partly due to the small focused levels and partly because you rarely fight more than three or four enemies at any one time, it's rare to see any cognitive team-dynamics on show. Saying that, troops advanced and retreated as you would expect, and when given the chance, enemy soldiers did seem to react to audio cues. For instance, a grenade launched in a cave had the desired effect of bringing every nasty around bearing down on me, which led to a tense, very enjoyable and ultimately futile and short-lived engagement.

THE THIRD COMING

Despite being paced and plotted with precision and offering a level of graphical loveliness and interaction easily on a par with any action game currently available, *Deus Ex* doesn't cut the mustard. The fact remains that *Invisible War* neither runs at the full-pelt pace to satiate the FPS drone, nor offers the depth of character development to satisfy the seasoned role-player – or indeed the veteran *Deus Ex* fan.

“The Unreal technology is superb, and there's a real and tangible sense of foreboding”



Funny, it looked bigger in *Alien*.



SECOND OPINION

PAUL PRESLEY

It took me a while to identify exactly what it was about *Invisible War* that was leaving me cold, disappointed and underwhelmed. Initially, I'd put it down to the clumsy interface, the cramped, claustrophobic levels, the dated feel to the engine and the simplified style of gameplay in comparison to the first *Deus Ex*.

However, after several days of navigating confusing dialogue, illogical narrative structures and some horrendous story editing, it hit me. *Invisible War's* biggest cause for complaint is that it displays absolutely none of the polish, care and attention to detail that made the first game such a stand-out classic.

It's worth bearing in mind that there's still a full two months before the UK release (the game is already on sale in the US), and any patches will likely be incorporated. Don't expect any major changes to the game, though.

By stripping out a hefty chunk of what made the original such an engorged and richly diverse exploration of character and narrative, *Invisible War* is literally only half the game its predecessor was. Saying that, although there are more visceral action games around, few are as intelligent, demanding or rewarding as this.

Deus Ex: Invisible War will sadly go down in history as a disappointment. Despite being a great game, we were all expecting more. Let's just hope *Deus Ex 3* will be the game this should have been. [E]

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ An intelligent story full of intrigue
- ✓ Multiple paths to complete dozens of non-linear objectives
- ✓ A beautiful and highly interactive experience
- ✓ Stunning visuals and physics
- ✗ More shooter than RPG
- ✗ Over-simplified interface and gameplay elements

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More style, less substance – but still as intensely involving and rewarding as ever



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Welcome to PC ZONE's biomod emporium, where a fine selection in the best of human augmentation devices await your delectation...

BIOTOX ATTACK DRONE

Stick this chip in your arm and on activation it launches a drone that attacks and immobilises any nearby organic foe.

NEURAL INTERFACE

Out of stock sadly, this cranial implant available on the black market enables you to hack into security terminals and turn off security cameras.

VISION ENHANCEMENT

Stick this little chap behind the iris and you'll be able to spot enemies through walls.

HEALTH LEECH DRONE

Another plug-in available from shady retailers, this leg implant will break down nearby corpses and add organic biomass to your own to improve your health.

THERMAL MASKING

Set into your skeleton, this biomod acts like the Cloak augmentation – but this baby only renders you invisible to drones and robots.