

Deus Ex And Human Enhancement

[Adam Koper](#) examines the role of human enhancement in the Deus Ex series

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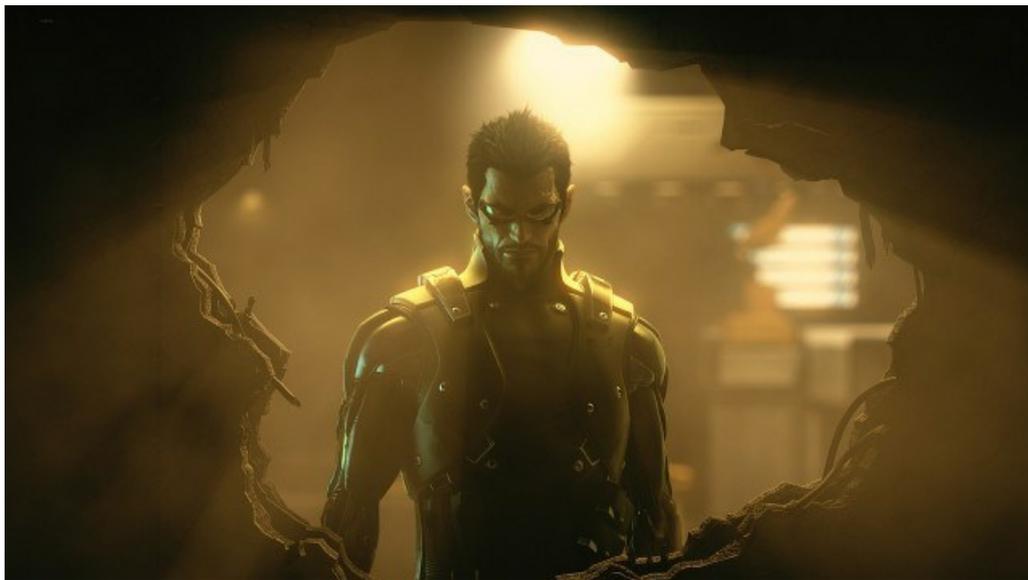


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The [Global Challenges Foundation](#) recently added nanotechnology to the list of risks that could threaten human existence, claiming that it could be used in future for surveillance purposes and the rapid creation of large arsenals. But what would a world in which nanotechnology is widespread look like? The *Deus Ex* series gives us a detailed answer, as the series revolves around the issue of human enhancement – the idea that humans could one day develop technologies to enhance their own physical capacities. Characters from the series make use of biomechanics and later nanotechnology to upgrade their abilities, turning themselves into deadly cyborgs.

The obvious example of this from the series would have to be Adam Jensen, the protagonist of *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*. During an attack on his employer's headquarters, Jensen is badly injured, and only survives due to the biomechanical augmentations given to him during his recovery. He effectively wakes up a cyborg, complete with his own robotic arms and a pair of sunglasses stapled to his face.

"I never asked for this" is Jensen's classic response to the whole situation. Naturally he finds it hard to accept the changes made to his body, but nevertheless he carries on in his job as the security officer for Sarif Industries, a company specialising in biomechanical augmentation.

Jensen's situation and his reaction to it raise some interesting questions – what does it mean to be human? And how would human enhancements affect our own world if they ever became available?

The series itself provides us with some interesting suggestions. While Jensen may adapt physically to his new and improved body, which can be upgraded throughout the game to provide better cloaking devices

and improved stealth abilities, mentally he finds it hard to accept the change. It's plain to see that a person would need to be mentally prepared for dramatic biomechanical enhancements.

The original *Deus Ex* followed JC Denton, a secret agent augmented with nanotechnology as opposed to Jensen's biomechanics. Set in 2052, over two decades after *Human Revolution*, the game focuses on the implications of nanotechnology for wider society. Society has been divided in two, between those who can afford human enhancements and those who cannot, while a plague that is spreading across the world threatens to destabilise the global order.

With this dystopian setting as a backdrop, Denton sets out to recover a stolen shipment of the plague's vaccine from a terrorist group. As the game goes on, we learn that the vaccine is only being given out to members of the world's elite, and so Denton decides to turn on his masters and fight back.

All of this paints a very bleak picture for the future. Whether human enhancements will lead to greater inequality and the division of society is anybody's guess. Nevertheless, *Deus Ex* shows the direction in which we are headed; human enhancements are indeed real and their prevalence is growing. Even as far back as the late nineties, engineers such as Kevin Warwick have been experimenting with human enhancements. Warwick famously had a microchip implanted under his skin, which used a proximity sensor to open doors and turn lights on and off.

But enhancements can get much more exciting than that. Another example would be the cumbersome exoskeletons that have been in development over the past few years. While they may be large and inconvenient at the moment, the security company Lockheed Martin is already working on an exoskeleton for military purposes. This device will supposedly reduce the burden of heavy loads, while maintaining the mobility of the user. In the future, we might even see nanotechnology itself being used for similar applications.

Ultimately, it seems as though the issues dealt with in *Deus Ex* will be with us within a few decades. While we needn't worry right now, human enhancement is becoming more prevalent, and is likely to become a divisive issue for us in the coming decades.



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