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FEATURE

Haute Future: How Fashion Designers Improved Deus Ex

by [Jeff Cork](#) on Apr 24, 2015 at 09:00 AM

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One of the many things that Eidos Montreal is hoping to convey with Adam Jensen is that he's a cool guy. Sure, the Deus Ex hero is powerful, smart, and loaded up with an arsenal big enough to make Inspector Gadget envious, but he doesn't just roll out of bed and head to work. He might not care to admit it, but you can tell he spends a bit of time in front of the mirror every day. His wardrobe is not only functional, but also stylish. The art team designed Jensen's trademark coat for Human Revolution, but for Mankind Divided they turned to people who make clothes professionally. Here's the story of their collaboration with Acronym as well as a look at the new coat's hidden functionality.

Let me start off by being absolutely clear – before we visited Eidos Montreal's offices to take a look at the game, I never would have guessed that I'd be writing about fashion, let alone a coat. I come from the "good enough" school of style. For me, dressing up typically means that I'm wearing clean pants and my hoodie is zipped all the way up. Note: I am not endorsing this lifestyle.

Still, when I watch movies or play games that are set in the future, my eye is drawn to the often ridiculous clothing that people are wearing – yes, even more ridiculous than a grown man dressing like a 14-year-old. You can spot it in the puffy gray Nehru jackets that heads of state wear. Or the

bondage gear that a graffiti artist

presumably squeezes into every morning.

And my favorite, the garb that newscasters

and reporters wear, which typically looks

like a '90s-era prom collided with a fake-

flower store. I get why creators do it; it's an

easy visual shorthand for, "This ain't the

world you're used to!" That doesn't erase

the empathy I feel for the fictional

characters who have to clown it up.

Adam Jensen's jacket from Deus Ex: Human Revolution

Deus Ex: Human Revolution definitely delivered on the news-anchor front, but Jensen's clothes – his coat, in particular – managed to be futuristic without being completely ridiculous. A big part of that came from the art team not to start completely fresh. It's evocative of a classic trenchcoat, but it has some forward-thinking elements in it as well. Most importantly, it's something that feels fairly timeless, to the point where people could wear it today and not look like a goon. At one point, Square Enix even sold reproductions of the coat on its online store.

"My dad wears Adam Jensen's jacket [from Human Revolution] every day in the winter time," says executive art director Jonathan Jacques-Belletete. His father found the coat while helping his son move, and he loved it. "He didn't know it was Adam Jensen's. [He said] 'Can I have it?' And my dad is a businessman. He says, 'Oh, this looks good!'"

How does the Deus Ex team approach something like a coat? Do they take an existing garment and add a few shiny patches or some rivets? Like Dubeau said in [my previous feature](#), one of the keys is to essentially dial your imagination back a bit.

"I think a good thing for making products and fashion design is not to invent anything from scratch," says Jacques-

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Belletete. “Even better than that is

consulting with real designers, which we didn't do on Human Revolution. One of the things that I used to say a lot – almost at the end of the [Human Revolution] project – is, ‘Man if we had done that, it would have made our lives so much easier.’ We're game designers, and the funny thing about game designers is we have to create entire worlds. So we have to create fashion design, we have to do urbanism, we have to do architecture – all these things – but we're none of those things. We tend to invent them. It's good to go to the real people.”

Jacques-Belletete says he's happy overall with the way his designs for Jensen's original coat ended up. Martin Dubeau, art director on Mankind Divided sees the coat from Human Revolution as a starting point of sorts for the sequel. They worked on the new coat internally for a while before they decided to work with an external collaborator.

“We turned around the concept for many months, and at the end of the day we thought together that the best avenue would be to work with someone externally – a company called [Acronym](#) from Berlin. They have this approach of functionality in their garments that's really interesting. They can hide an iPhone somewhere in a pocket, or you can just pull something and the whole coat turns into a backpack. They're really good with transformation and functionality. I really like what they're doing.”

Acronym is an independent design company that has worked with well-known clients including Nike and Burton Snowboards, as well as non-clothing projects such as developing the UI for a mind-mapping software utility.

“It wasn't that far off from [original design], but I think it added on that thing

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that we missed,” Dubeau says. “It was a good collaboration together, about a month long.... Today, a professional to this was really interesting.”

“We studied everything about Deus Ex: Human Revolution that we could get our hands on,” says Errolson Hugh, co-founder of Acronym. “The team at Eidos Montreal was a great help in this regard, and they supplied us with almost more information than we could process. We were basically plunged into a Deus Ex indoctrination camp upon arrival in Montreal. Tours, briefings, interviews with the team – we would have needed high-bandwidth, direct-to-brain interfaces to be able to absorb any more than we did.”

As Dubeau says, the new coat design isn’t a shocking departure from the one in Human Revolution, but it definitely builds off the ideas that Eidos Montreal introduced. Some details are more noticeable than others. “Inside of his coat there’s a Renaissance pattern,” he says “It’s like the Renaissance is still close to his heart, but he doesn’t show it to anyone.” It’s not entirely clear in the image above, but you can catch a glimpse of the golden fleur-de-lis pattern in the lining. Jensen had a more subtle pattern in his Human Revolution coat.

Overall, Dubois says they were looking for more of a military look for Jensen this time around, since the character is working for an antiterrorist group instead of a Sarif Industries. Acronym added a strap into the design, which is something that many of its real-world designs incorporate. The coat is also secured by magnets, rather than a zipper, so Jensen can just rip it off if it’s getting in his way.

Jensen’s arms provide a design challenge, since they become larger as they transform to accommodate various blades and pneumatic weapons. He’s not going to wear

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a sleeveless jacket (even for 2029, that would be absurd), so the elbows and sleeves have been modified to accommodate his augmentations.

“We had to think about a real way to remove the sleeve to unfold the arm,” Dubeau says. “And it works. Even at Acronym, they really thought about it. ‘How could we remove that sleeve?’” As you can see in the series of images above, the sleeves can retract and unfold as warranted.

“[We] approached Adam Jensen as if he were a real person and built a coat that would meet his needs to real-world specifications,” Hugh says. “Rather than imagine his coat, we prototyped it and made it. It exists, and if you try it on you’ll see that it fits and works beautifully.”

The end result of the collaboration is a jacket that looks interesting and plausible, while fulfilling one of the most basic criteria: A human person would wear it and not immediately feel embarrassed. “Even now, I think the crazier ones that we do are probably more wearable than some of the least crazy ones we did in Human Revolution,” Jacques-Belletete says. “I think we understand what our cyber renaissance is better than we did before, and we also understand fashion design better as well.”

Read on for the complete Q&A with Errolson Hugh, co-founder of Acronym, where he discusses the collaboration in depth, his thoughts on future design, and what people are looking for in their clothing.

A sample of some of the clothing that Acronym designed

Game Informer: Did you look at the designs from Deus Ex: Human Revolution before working on the new game's costuming? If so, what did you think of HR's overall style?

Errolson Hugh, Acronym co-founder: We studied everything about Deus Ex: Human Revolution that we could get our hands on.

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Having not been aware of the franchise when Eidos Montreal initially reached out to us, it was immediately apparent that the Deus Ex universe was designed at the highest possible level, and that it was a perfect fit for Acronym. So we knew we would be able to work together, and we knew we had a lot of work ahead of us!

The DX universe itself is beautifully realized. Anyone who has played Human Revolution can attest that it is a landmark game in this regard. Deus Ex: Mankind Divided definitely continues this tradition. From what I've seen so far, I don't think anyone will be disappointed.

What kinds of materials do you think people will be using in 2029?

Compared to product developments, materials science moves in slow tidal-like waves. Real innovation is fueled by long, deep-running currents that only swell and crest after serious momentum has been developed. Right now the environmental impact of materials is gaining in importance. The problem is no longer solved just by being more effective; the life cycle of the material and product must also be taken into account. So lighter, faster, stronger, and ideally within a system that addresses resource scarcity as well. By 2029, I would hope that performance materials that have gained this added dimension of functionality have become widespread.

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Do you think people will be expecting more functionality from their clothing in the future?

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Absolutely. Function and beauty always win out over time. If you can combine the two into a single unit, then you can't lose. Once people realize that this is possible – they never go back. Acronym was founded based on this observation back in 1999. As time goes on, we find that we spend less of our time explaining and educating, and more of our time trying to figure out how to increase our production capacity!

There's still a long way to go, though. Today's fast fashion system, although seemingly democratic in its pricing, is a bubble that will inevitably burst. It's not sustainable socially or environmentally, but a lot of things will have to change at a fundamental level before we as a society truly grasp the implications of this.

In the future, functionality will simply mean quality. And quality will be a holistic rather than a narrowly defined concept.

When you're working on something that takes place in a hypothetical future, how do you keep it grounded?

We do this by asking the same questions we always ask when we design something. Who is using it? What are they trying to accomplish? What are the specific obstacles they have to overcome? Identifying problems clearly points the way to solutions. So we approached Adam Jensen as if he were a real person and built a coat that would meet his needs to real-world specifications. Rather than imagine his coat, we prototyped it and made it. It exists, and if you try it on you'll see that it fits and works beautifully.

The key to being able to do this was the vision and integrity of the artists and designers at Eidos Montreal. Martin Dubeau, the art director on Mankind Divided, and his team had very specific

ideas in mind for the design of the game,
the character, and the entire DX universe.
It was through the team that we could
understand who Adam Jensen was, and
what he needed to be able to do.

The methodology they applied to the
design of the Deus Ex universe dovetailed
perfectly with our results-oriented design
process at Acronym. In particular, their
tenet of 'research over assumption' really
struck a chord with us. The world of Deus
Ex: Mankind Divided has been built on
this idea, and I think you'll really be able to
feel it when you play the game. The world
feels like it's just around the corner. There's
a credibility and immediacy to everything
that transports you and makes you believe
that you are actually there, in Prague, in
2029.

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