

# Any first-person game

>> Ultima Underworld's creators, WARREN SPECTOR and DOUG CHURCH (among others), latched on to something very special with this first-person RPG. Its legacy can be seen in nearly every first-person game in some form or other, and is certainly one of the most important games in the history of PC gaming.

**1** When you and the team created *Ultima Underworld*, did you realize the impact that the first-person perspective would have on the future of PC gaming?

**Doug Church:** As a team, we could tell that there was a very powerful sense of player involvement, which the perspective really helped. I don't think we ever figured something like *Doom II* (or any first-person game) would ship a zillion units.

**Warren Spector:** I guess I always had a sense that *Underworld* was unlike anything anyone had ever seen before — and cooler! Not to contra-

dict Doug, but I really did think we were going to change the world, and thought we'd be the ones to sell a zillion units. Frankly, if we hadn't shipped within a month of *Ultima VII* and *Wolfenstein*, and if we'd gotten a bit more marketing and sales support, we might have done a lot better.

**2** Compare the size of the team and the amount of work needed to build a game like *UU* with the resources required for *Deus Ex*.

**DC:** Back on *UU*, the core three people built levels, wrote conversations, and wrote code. We built the game and the editor, and then used the tool we wrote to build the levels.

**WS:** Nowadays, we have much larger teams and specialization is the order of the day. There are about 35 people on *Deus Ex*, and everyone does their bit on the assembly line. The need for passion and commitment hasn't changed.

**3** How has technology helped (or hindered) the design process? Are developers getting lazy by giving us style over substance?

**WS:** Any developer who gets lazy doesn't stay in business for long. The fundamentals of game design are fundamentally unchanged. I was

reminded of that not too long ago when I reread Chris Crawford's 1982 book *The Art of Computer Game Design* (long out of print but available online at: <http://www.vancouver.wsu.edu/fac/peabody/game-book/Coverpage.html> or <http://members.xoom.com/kalid/art/art.html>). You know what? For all the dated game and technology references, there *still* isn't a better book on game design.

**DC:** As the complexity of the games rises, the time required to even get the basics together is large. This gives us less time to play and iterate the designs we do come up with. Look at the huge leaps in the technology over the last 20 years, and then compare our design progress. It is pretty sad.

**4** What ideas would you like incorporated in first-person games to advance the genre?

**WS:** What I'd like to see in gaming, in general, regardless of genre or platform, is more of a sense of player control and a greater effort to offer players real choices with significant consequences (that go beyond succeed/fail or live/die).

**DC:** As Warren says, I think our big problem is reliance on old approaches, and unwillingness to embrace real interactivity. As long as we are thinking of how clever our design is, or how sneaky some twist is, we are keeping our player from being the centerpiece. When the player stops thinking "What do I want to do?" and instead is asking "What does the designer want me to do?" we have stopped being an immersive interactive experience, and started being a puzzle game. There is nothing wrong with that, but I think our most powerful future games will be of the immersive type.



"Have you heard the one about the priest, the minister, and the rabbi?"



Following on the tradition set in *UU*, *Deus Ex* has one of the most immersive game worlds we've ever seen.

THEN

## Ultima Underworld

>> DEVELOPER: ORIGIN >> RELEASE DATE: 1992



It's a moving person. And he'll talk to you. This was revolutionary stuff.

### REMEMBER THE BIT WHERE...

You ran around dungeons and cities in first-person, seeing other characters and talking to them. The movement system worked superbly using the mouse, and the level of interaction with the game characters was unmatched. If there's any game on this month's classic CD to keep on your hard drive, make it *Ultima Underworld*.