

# Jacques-Belletête

## reorganizes Shanghai



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Eleven years ago, *Deus Ex* immersed gamers in a future that had attained technological singularity. One that posited the effects of human augmentation in a world of social upheaval and terrorism, with a conspiracy-laden narrative that referenced everything from the Illuminati to the French Situationists. So prescient that in its fictitious future the World Trade Center in New York no longer existed, having been destroyed by terrorists.

Its sequel, *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* – which has Jonathan Jacques-Belletête as its art director – takes place a quarter of a century earlier, in 2027, at the birth of trans-humanism. A cyber-Renaissance – visually manifested in a sepia tint reminiscent of historical manuscripts – and baroque styling are fused into modern clothes and interiors.

*Human Revolution's* future depiction

of Shanghai's Hengsha Island is something to be seen. A monolithic structure dubbed Pangu, after Chinese mythology's first living being, which created and separated earth and sky, supports a two-tiered architectural landscape composed of distinctly different strata. A city above a city, a concept that seems utterly preposterous yet strangely plausible – if one were to overlook Shanghai's sinking situation.

Historical precedent exists. The open skies of Mary King's Close, a side street in Edinburgh with tenements reaching seven storeys, disappeared when the Royal Exchange was built right over it in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, while continuing to remain populated. Chinese society seems likely to accept such architectural stratification as well; upwards of a million people already rent small rooms within Beijing's underground bunkers.

Coincidentally, *Human Revolution's* future Shanghai shares traits with the

more elegant Beijing 2050 proposal, the work of local architecture practice MAD. The proposal specifically details a floating island above Beijing's central business district that horizontally links 'digital studios, restaurants, business centres and government functions', emphasizing 'connectivity and interdependence' versus the 'segregated and competing glass boxes of Western downtowns'. Such notions also inform the Steven Holl-designed Linked Hybrid complex in Beijing: a 'sky loop' interconnects buildings, incorporating galleries, cafés, retail, and a fitness club with swimming pool. A city within a city.

It comes as no surprise that a mockumentary on Hong Kong served as inspiration for the way Hengsha is shown in the game. There's an intentional hubris in its depiction akin to the allegorical myth of Icarus that *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* so liberally references. Yet it's undeniably fascinating, as if a god reorganized entire cities and suspended one atop the other.