

The

PC GAMER

TOP 50

PC GAMES OF ALL TIME

PC games come and go by the dozen every month, but some linger on our hard drives and in our memories longer than others. The PC has enjoyed more than its fair share of stunning releases over the years, but as technology advances and the software base increases, it becomes more difficult to sort the games that lay claim to greatness from those that actually achieve it – never mind placing them in any kind of order. So over the next 12 pages we present what we believe to be the definitive list of the best games ever to be released for the PC. Of course, the situation's ever changing, but for now, at least, these are, quite simply, the very best games you can own...

50

Unnecessary Roughness

Accolade £44.99

Date Released: February 1994

Recommended: 286

Not an American Football fan? Well, sadly you're missing out on one of the PC's best sports games. *Unnecessary Roughness* is a slickly-presented program, which blends the best from a number of older American Football titles. The wise bods at Accolade obviously decided to take inspiration from their rivals' successes – and in the process turned out the best gridiron bash on the PC. All the complexity which can stifle an American Football game is here, but so too is an extremely playable game that puts both your tactical brain and arcade skills to the test. Every NFL team and player is accurately modelled on the real thing and pictures of all the players are included. There are huge playbooks for both offence and defence, which you can customize totally. The presentation's superb – complete with ball-by-ball commentary and a very flexible camera system – but the gameplay's the real star. Down at the line of scrimmage the game 'feels' like the real thing. For fans and non-fans alike, there's no better American Football game on the PC.



49

Shadowcaster

Electronic Arts £44.99

Date Released: October 1993

Recommended: 486

There's a welcome trend in the PC games market at the moment to make games easier to use and play. The software companies have at last realised what any gamer/player could have told them a long time ago – that awkward control systems and confusing statistics hamper gameplay, not improve it. One game type in particular has come under criticism for this: the RPG. Inheriting a large amount of complex statistics



and numbers from its paper and pencil ancestry, the RPG often boasts confusing control systems which require a lot of effort to learn. The response to this has been a move towards simplicity and intuitive control systems, the most extreme example of which is *Shadowcaster*. Something of a cross between an RPG and a shoot-'em-up in the *Wolfenstein* (No.34) mode, *Shadowcaster* is an admirable attempt to show that RPGs don't have to be the boring, complex and number-heavy. It's easy to play, has some neat ideas and sports some great 3D. Maybe not the future of RPGs, but who cares? This is a fantastic game in its own right.

48

PGA Tour Golf Plus

Electronic Arts £34.99

Date Released: June 1989

Recommended: 386

No doubt this will be a rather controversial choice – it's the only golfing game in our Top 50, after all, and there will always be those who prefer the likes of MicroProse *Golf* and the *Links* series – but *PGA* earns its place by being the most accessible and playable golf sim of the lot. Sure, there are games that offer more realistic representations, but do you really want to get bogged down in such fiddly technicalities as the angle of the clubhead and your feet positioning? Far more enjoyable is the *PGA* approach, which offers the illusion of realism without forcing you to learn reams of intricate (and irrelevant) details. Wind, club selection and the pitfalls of the course itself are all you need to worry about here, and since the swing-o-meter is so instinctive, you can concentrate on your game without having to battle against an overly complicated interface. It may be old, but games as good as this deserve a look-in even ten years down the line...



47



Chuck Yeager's Air Combat

EA/The Hit Squad £34.99

Date Released: June 1991

Recommended: 386

In these days of Gouraud shading and texture-mapped polygons, all too often the gameplay ends up a poor second to the technology. *Chuck Yeager's Air Combat* is the complete opposite. Featuring over 20 aircraft, past and present, this is a game that enables you to make virtually any silly duelling combination you can think of. It's simple to get into, immensely playable and, most of all, fun. It's not a game that pushes the PC to its limits, the graphics are dated and the computer opponents nowhere near as good as those in *Evasive Action* (No.12). But it's not meant as a serious challenge to the likes of *TFX* (No.26) or *Strike Commander* – it just offers the perfect hour or two of dogfighting. You don't need a powerful PC either.

46

A-Train

Ocean/The Hit Squad £19.99

Date Released: February 1994

Recommended: 286

Trainspotters will certainly get their kicks from this railway management game, but don't think it's just a computerized Hornby set-up. *A-Train*'s a lot more than that. You get to control the planning and running of a railway company – laying new tracks, buying trains, planning timetables (and so on). As in the *SimCity* games, you're working with a few basic building blocks – tracks, stations, freight and passenger trains – but by using these you have to suss out how best to serve the community, make a profit and build up your business (you won't be surprised to learn that *A-Train* was originally a Maxis title). Once you've got a fairly stable railway set-up, you can expand into other areas by buying commercial property – and even playing on the stock exchange. *A-Train* uses the same kind of isometric graphics as *SimCity 2000* (No.1), but even if it pales next to Maxis' latest effort, it's still head and shoulders above all other business/city simulations.

Fascinating, absorbing and now quite cheap, *A-Train* is worth a place in any games collection – and don't be put off by the subject matter. It's brilliant fun.



My All-Time Favourite PC Game...

“Leaderboard – I remember the best thing about it was when we first got it and me and Chris were playing it, we couldn't work out which way the snap was going because we were really smashed”

Jon Hare,
Sensible Software

Stunt Island

Infogrames/Disney £39.99

Date Released: June 1993

Recommended: 486

45

If originality were the only criteria we used to evaluate games, Disney's *Stunt Island* would be the undisputed Number One in this Top 50. It's clearly the most inventive use of the flight simulator game style since computerised planes first took to the air. You become a virtual movie director on the Stunt Island of the title, storyboarding and shooting elaborate big-budget action scenes for a fictitious movie studio.

Because every variable is user-definable – locations, objects, actions and so on – it's possible to create just about anything, from a stunning car chase through a big city to a fleet of attack helicopters taking on an alien invader. All you need is patience – and a little imagination. As in real movie-making, hours of meticulous planning and effort go into creating just a few moments of final footage, but the end results are well worth it. After flying your dangerous stunts, you can edit the raw footage and then save out the final movie and play it to audiences in the screening room. A great little package, but as with many 'games' of this type, its rewards are only visible if you're willing to invest time and effort. We strongly recommend you do just that.



D/Generation

Mindscape £19.99

Date Released: March 1992

Recommended: 386

44

Originality seems to count for little with developers these days – which is why it's always great to see something like *D/Generation*, a type of game we don't often see on PC at all, let alone done properly. It's an isometric arcade adventure whose style harks back to the heady days of the 8-bit Ultimate games, but with the emphasis placed much more firmly on quick reactions and coronary-inducing shocks. Set in the near future, it



casts you as a parcel delivery boy trapped inside the high-rise HQ of a scientific research company. Deadly genetically-engineered creations, Neogens, have escaped from their lab and are on the rampage. Much of the gameplay revolves around exploration – finding objects and clues which lead you to the mysterious Doctor Derrida – but your quest is constantly punctuated by arcade scenes where you come into contact with a Neogen and suddenly find yourself fighting for survival. The game's originality is based not just in the overall concept, but in the plethora of minor touches, such as the shapeshifting Neogens, who disguise themselves as innocent office workers on later levels, and no end of complex security mechanisms. The best game of its type on the PC.

Star Trek: Judgment Rites

Interplay £44.99

Date Released: December 1993

Recommended: 386

43



There will, of course, always be those who are only too glad to poo-hoo anything associated with the original Star Trek TV series – but anyone who's ever enjoyed the adventures of Kirk (et al) will love this, probably the only game to faithfully capture the unmistakable mood of the series. Like its flawed prequel, *Star Trek: 25th Anniversary*, this is a weird hybrid of space combat action and graphical adventure, but the plot and game mechanics have been markedly improved, making for a game that is as satisfying as it is authentic. Instead of a feature-length single quest, you work your way through several TV-style episodes, each with its own storyline, and it works superbly. Everything here is as it should be, from the characters to the logical puzzles and appropriate musical score. Previous Star Trek titles failed miserably, but this one shows how well it can be done when the designers treat the subject with the respect it deserves.

Wizkid

Ocean/The Hit Squad £12.99

Date Released: February 1994

Recommended: 386

42

From Sensible Software, one of the few pop-star development teams to actually deserve all the adulation they receive, *Wizkid* is a game that's tremendous fun to play – but it's always difficult to explain why. It's anyone's guess what PC gamers made of this when it first appeared, since arcade games were a bit of a mystery to the machine, let alone one as eccentric and unusual as this. Split into two interweaving sections of arcade baddy-bashing and a series of mini puzzle-solving exercises, *Wizkid* is about as odd as they come. You play a disembodied head which looks like a sply pea with eyes, and just about every other character and object you encounter is as weird – giant flying bags of peanuts, a dog reading the paper on the toilet... There's a great amount of lavatorial humour if you're willing to plumb the depths.

The point is that *Wizkid* twists an innovative and playable arcade game with an exceedingly warped sense of humour in a way that only Sensible know how. It's a rare gem that deserves a place in everyone's collection, if only because it's totally unique.



My All-Time Favourite PC Game...

"I don't play that many games on the PC, but I'd have to say my all-time fave was Lemmings, and the latest Doom"

Jez San,
Argonaut Software

41



NHL Hockey

Electronic Arts £44.99

Date Released: September 1993

Recommended: 386

Ice hockey's such a minority sport in the UK it's a wonder this game ever got released over here. Luckily, EA knew they had a particularly fine title on their hands. The action is certainly fast-moving, with players careering down at high speed, firing shots and shoving each other into the barriers with aplomb. It's rough and tumble stuff, with matches consisting in the main of frantic scrambles from goal to goal and a few swift passes. The game creates a great feeling of being on the ice – your players are constantly on the move and it takes time to learn to control them well. Stick at it, though, and *NHL Hockey* works its magic. Pretty soon you'll be an ice hockey junkie, developing some nifty scoring techniques and learning how to foul without being reprimanded. If it's realism you value then *NHL* has it all – you'll find every one of the 24 NHL teams in here, along with over 500 players. One of the most enjoyable PC sports sim to date – and a game that's not just technically impressive, but damn playable too.