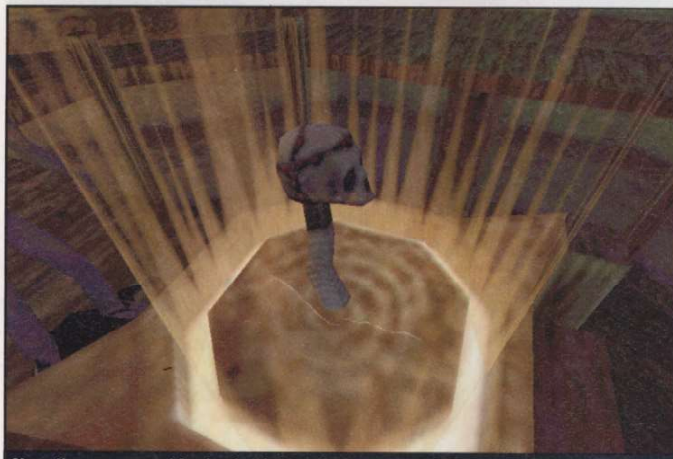Jack the Ripper gets all Hari-Kari in the opening sequence and a million children scream.

Michael LeRoi, ordinary bloke by day, "Walker between the worlds" by night.

Along the way, you get loads of weird 'voodoo' weapons – like this skull-on-a-stick thing.

"Shadow Man... Shadow Man... does whatever a shadow can."

SHADOW MAN

⭐ £34.99 • Acclaim • Out now

***Shadow Man* is macabre and in the worse possible taste, *Charlie Brooker* loved it**

TECH SPECS

MINIMUM SYSTEM Processor P166 **Memory** 32Mb **ALSO REQUIRES** 3Dfx Voodoo graphics card or equivalent **WE SAY** Use a P200 or above

ALSO CONSIDER

TOMB RAIDER III (Eidos, £29.99)
Classic platforming action with buxotic Lara Croft. Nowhere near as spooky as *Shadow Man*, but excellent fun nevertheless.
PCZ #72, 91%

MDK (White Label, £9.99) Quirky platform-hopping action from the same minds that once spawned the mighty *Earthworm Jim.*
PCZ #50, 90%

PC ZONE RECOMMENDED

Shadow Man, a platform game, is also available on the Nintendo 64. We're pointing this out right at the start of a review of the PC version because it's potentially funny. The Nintendo 64 is the spiritual home of every cutesy-pie game on the market; it specialises in recreating saccharine cartoon kingdoms peopled by goggle-eyed, gurning anthropomorphic scallywags. It is, therefore, very popular with young children – and especially their parents. Flustered mothers and fathers can simply dump their squawking little humanoid in front of *Banjo Kazooie* or *Mario* in exchange for a few hours of blissful, innocuous silence.

Unless they accidentally buy *Shadow Man*, that is. Yes, it's a platform game, and yes, it's available on the N64, but by crikey it's unpleasant, and by crikey it doesn't mess about either. The very first thing prospective players see is an engine-driven cut-scene in which none less than Jack the Ripper impales himself on a ceremonial dagger in order to enter the afterlife and construct a "Cathedral to Pain". You can hear the cries now - Mum! *Muuuuum!*

THE GAME NOW STANDING ON PLATFORM ONE

Okay, now we've twice referred to *Shadow Man* as a 'platform game', but it prefers to describe itself as an 'action adventure'. This is nonsense: it's a bloody *platform game*, right, and should have the guts to present itself as such, because it happens to be a damn good one.

The premise (based on the gory, gloomy comic of the same name) runs roughly as follows: you, yes *you*, are Michael LeRoi – ordinary bloke by day, "walker between the worlds" by night. Your mission is to scramble around in the nether world collecting the souls of the dead, before re-entering Earth to track down five deeply antisocial serial killers selfishly intent on kick-starting the apocalypse. All very Sisters of Mercy.

Now, if this sounds like a load of po-faced goth rubbish to you, don't worry – *Shadow Man* is actually a pretty classy construction that gradually draws you into its world, even if you don't normally get off on death, chains, and the eternal suffering of the damned. Plus it's got swearing in it, and there's something refreshing about hearing the lead character in a platform game bellowing "Shit!" at opportune moments.

Anyway, gloomy setting aside, *Shadow man* compares to two

Scene from the secret marshmallow-toasting level *(Not really – Ed)*.

Shadow Man: every serial killer's favourite superhero.

Now that's inviting.

Comic relief is provided by this bizarre snake-in-a-hat bloke thing. Honest.

previous and well-known games. The first and most obvious is *Tomb Raider*, and the second is *MDK*, Shiny Entertainment's

> **❝***Shadow Man* **grows on you. The graphics, which seemed unremarkable at first, soon started to appear spectacular❞**

wilfully bizarre quirk-a-thon from 1997. As with those titles, *Shadow Man* combines enjoyably tricky platform-hopping shenanigans

with shooty-bang-bang combat interludes and occasional flashes of arbitrary problem solving. It's also very, very immersive.

DIG YOUR OWN HOLE

Very, very immersive? Well, yes. Not at first, it has to be said. Our first impression of *Shadow Man*

led us to believe it was something of an also-ran. Then, slowly, a strange thing happened. You know how sometimes when you meet someone for the first time, they strike you as plain and unattractive – and then, after a while, it dawns on you that you enjoy looking at their face, that they are beautiful, that you want to kiss them, hold them and nibble their earlobes? Well, *Shadow Man* is a bit like that (except that it's resolutely non-sexual).

It grows on you. The graphics, which seemed unremarkable at first, soon started to appear spectacular, while the gameplay, which in the beginning felt awkward, unwieldy and boring, became strangely gripping instead. It even manages to be genuinely scary in places, especially if you play it at night on your own with a pair of headphones, which is something *Castlevania* and *Splatterhouse* (*Shadow Man's* two great spiritual forebears) never really managed to do.

Even *Shadow Man's* most irritating feature – the way you can't just save your precise position, but must repeatedly go back and re-tackle sections in which you die – works in the game's favour. When something like *Shadow Man* serves up traditional helpings of hard gaming cheese, it may frustrate and annoy, but it also raises the stakes, making each jump and manoeuvre all the more crucial. Cleverly, it never forces you to backtrack *too* far – you always come away thinking 'perhaps if I have just *one more* crack at that last bit...' – the hallmark of any truly addictive game.

SO, THEN...

So, then... yes, we enjoyed *Shadow Man*, and shall continue to enjoy it after filing this review, hence the fact that it's earned a *PC ZONE* Recommended award. It's a robust 3D platform game with some excellent visuals, its own unique atmosphere, and peculiarly compelling action. Don't expect a complex adventure or an epoch-shattering, processor-bending, pioneering epic. It's a platform game, plain and simple, and takes a bit of getting into. But once you're in, it's worth it. PCZ

LEST WE FORGET

Rather tastelessly, *Shadowman* weaves references to real-life killers into its fictional premise. At one point, a character cracks wise about Jeffrey Dahmer, while the game actually begins with Jack the Ripper recounting how he disembowelled his victims as an act of love. He actually reads aloud their names, one by one.

We're sure Mary Ann Nichols, Annie Chapman, Elizabeth Stride, Catherine Eddowes and Mary Kelly would've been *overjoyed* to discover that more than a century after their violent deaths at the hands of a deranged serial murderer, their names were used to provide a tiny splash of authenticity to the introductory sequence of an arcade-action computer game.

Still, it's nothing compared to the indignity they suffer at the *Jack the Ripper* exhibit at The London Dungeon. There, *actual photographs* of their mutilated corpses are projected on the walls for all the family to enjoy, while a grisly commentary lingers over the more horrific details of their slaughter.

We've all cracked gags about Fred West or Jack the Ripper in our time, but isn't using the names of the *victims* for the sake of entertainment just a little bit *too* sick? It wouldn't happen with someone murdered last week – just because these poor women were killed over 100 years ago, are we supposed to think it's okay?

PCZ VERDICT

🔼 **UPPERS** Solid arcade platformy action • Atmospheric horror theme • Slick design, luvverly visuals • Strangely addictive

🔽 **DOWNERS** Takes a bit of getting into • Just a platform game, at the end of the day • Slightly bad taste — uses names of real murder victims

80 Super Mario for serial killers