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[SiN Episodes: Emergence](#)

It's all about the swamp...

SiN Episodes: Emergence is exactly what someone would expect from a game based on the Valve engine. Do you remember how you could play different mods on the old Half-Life? Install and activate from the menu. This time it's somewhat different but nonetheless I felt like I was playing a small variation of the City 17 incident. But only for the first 3 minutes, right about until a beautiful woman wearing only a small bikini and some pixel-shadered water was calling my name from a dark swamp. Confused? Me too. I have to be honest and confess that I remember too little from the original Sin game which appeared in 1998. Based on the Quake II 3D engine, it was supposed to beat Half-Life to a pulp, but was rushed on the market way before its time, hence the trillion bugs reported which ranged from problems with the AI to the complete lack of sound. Even if most of the problems were corrected in a later patches, SiN will always remain in our memory like the one that could have but didn't. Even so, Ritual Entertainment, the developer of SiN Episodes: Emergence is no stranger from success and you might remember some over the top successes: Heavy Metal Fakk 2, Star Trek Elite Force II and the not-welcomed Counter Strike: Condition Zero. I find it a little ironic that Ritual has taken a long walk from trying to beat Valve with a Quake based game to a sequel based on the Source engine and distributed via Steam. I am not trying to be rude here or imply anything, but my professional opinion is that Ritual and Valve opened a very ugly door to a room where game developers and marketing hacks shook their hands with the obvious desire to empty our wallets. SiN Episodes is the first in a long line of, hmmm, episodes that will appear way more often than regular games. They would argue that in the end the gamers are the ones with a clear gain in gameplay hours, but it doesn't take the brain of a mathematician to figure how much money a monthly appearance will bring and \$20 for a game that lasts 5-6 hours is only fair to the producers' bank accounts. **Story:** You play the character of John Blade (this has got to be one of the blandest names I have ever seen in a game), the boss of the largest security company in Freeport city. Why would a city need security companies? Let's check out some history. The action takes places somewhere around 2037, in the city of Freeport. Ten years prior to these events, the police force in the city has collapsed and hiring private security companies seemed to be the best solution. A major biochemical firm called SiNtek, led by Elexis Sinclair, has developed a powerful drug, called U4 that has done terrible damages on the streets. This is only the beginning, because she appears to have much more ambitious plans. She is helped by Viktor Radek, the leader of a crime cartel, but his real status in the affair is unknown. From what I could gather, John has fallen purposely in the hands of SiNtek, so he can plant a device on Victor. Something went wrong and the evil but ravishing Elexis injects him with something that is far worse than any drug. This is the point where I stop writing and everyone starts playing. **Concept:** Besides being a first person shooter, Ritual has tried implementing a very unique and welcomed feature. I'm not sure if it has a name and I must admit I had my doubts about its functionality. In principle it says that anyone, either a hardened veteran or an inexperienced console owner will go through the game in the same pace because SiN will slowly adapt to the style and performance of the player. For example, if I were to be really good and I just can't seem to miss their heads all the time, the enemies (whoever they are) will start wearing helmets. The same goes with body shots and as a supplement I think there is one more feature. I am not sure, it might be just my imagination, but if you kill them too fast, next time there will be more waiting for you just around the corner. I am positive that a lot more parameters have been implemented but you'll have to discover them yourselves. **Gameplay:** This is the easy part. It's not the most

complex game I have ever played and except two or three buttons throughout the game that were obviously there for me to push, it's not going to give an average gamer any problems. The AI is not the most brilliant one and it certainly it doesn't even rise to the one found in Half-Life 2. Some of you might disagree with this opinion after getting shot through the wall before entering the room, but this is not an evidence of proficiency; it's just a glitch in the "critically acclaimed" auto-level feature - don't they just love this expression. Another problem is the small number of weapons, three to be more precise, that doesn't do justice to the high number of enemies you'll encounter. I would have liked to kill them in more than four ways. I'm saying four because death by lead poisoning is not the only way to go. John also uses grenades which I can say without any reserve that are in my top five grenade ranking system. Of course, every weapon has a second useless fire mode. The pistol has some kind of magic bullet that would cross, in theory, through multiple opponents, if you can get them to stay in line. The shotgun has some ricocheting properties than can affect even you (not using that function again!). The machine gun has the power to sprout out grenades, but when I say power I mean it's shooting them like tennis balls; very imprecise and totally useless in small and medium quarters. Nonetheless, the game is quite attractive, not just because of Elexis, but because of the variety of levels and the way the story is told. It's like starting in the middle of a book and trying to fill in the blanks. **Video:** It might be enough to say it's just another copy of Half-Life 2 and sometimes it gives you the impression that someone has used some copy/paste techniques directly from the previous engine. Thinking in this manner would be very wrong because if we take a closer look, we'll find that the textures have been greatly improved, the fire effects have now reached version 2.0 and the character animations have been drastically reworked (even if you can still recognize some Combine soldiers underneath the costumes). Unfortunately, this entire upgrading means that something has to be reduced in order to keep the minimum recommended system at the Half-Life 2 level and that something was the richness of the level design. The Source engine is capable of a lot more than SiN is offering. The rooms are a little empty and filled with the same stuff most of the time (you know, explosives barrels and dangerous chemicals). If we are talking about level design, we should mention that the main problem which plagued the forgotten version of 1998, the loading times between levels is now almost gone (almost gone means the loading screen is more frequent and less durable). The average computer has about 1 GB of Ram so, unless you're defragmenting the hard drive while playing, it shouldn't be an issue. **Audio:** All I can say about SiN is that it has the coolest menu track I have ever heard and I'm including here the NFS series. Otherwise, I see no other notable sound features. The voice acting is not something to be ignored and I would like it to remain the same and not lose it somewhere in the ninth episode when the actors just got tired of it. **Multiplayer:** SiN Episodes is a single player oriented breed which is getting rarer these days. I would like to say multiplayer would have been nice, but when you got Half Life, the cost of servers would have been just a waste. **Conclusion:** I have to admit that it didn't fulfill my expectations but that is just because I was waiting a totally different game. I know the auto-level thingy has to be adjusted but I find myself wanting more. Valve has me. Ritual and the evil alliance have won. It's got my attention and now I HAVE to play the second part. Even if it's just to see what's that swamp all about... You can find some in-game trailers I've made here: [Gameplay Trailer #1](#) [Gameplay Trailer #2](#) [Gameplay Trailer #3](#) [Gameplay Trailer #4](#)