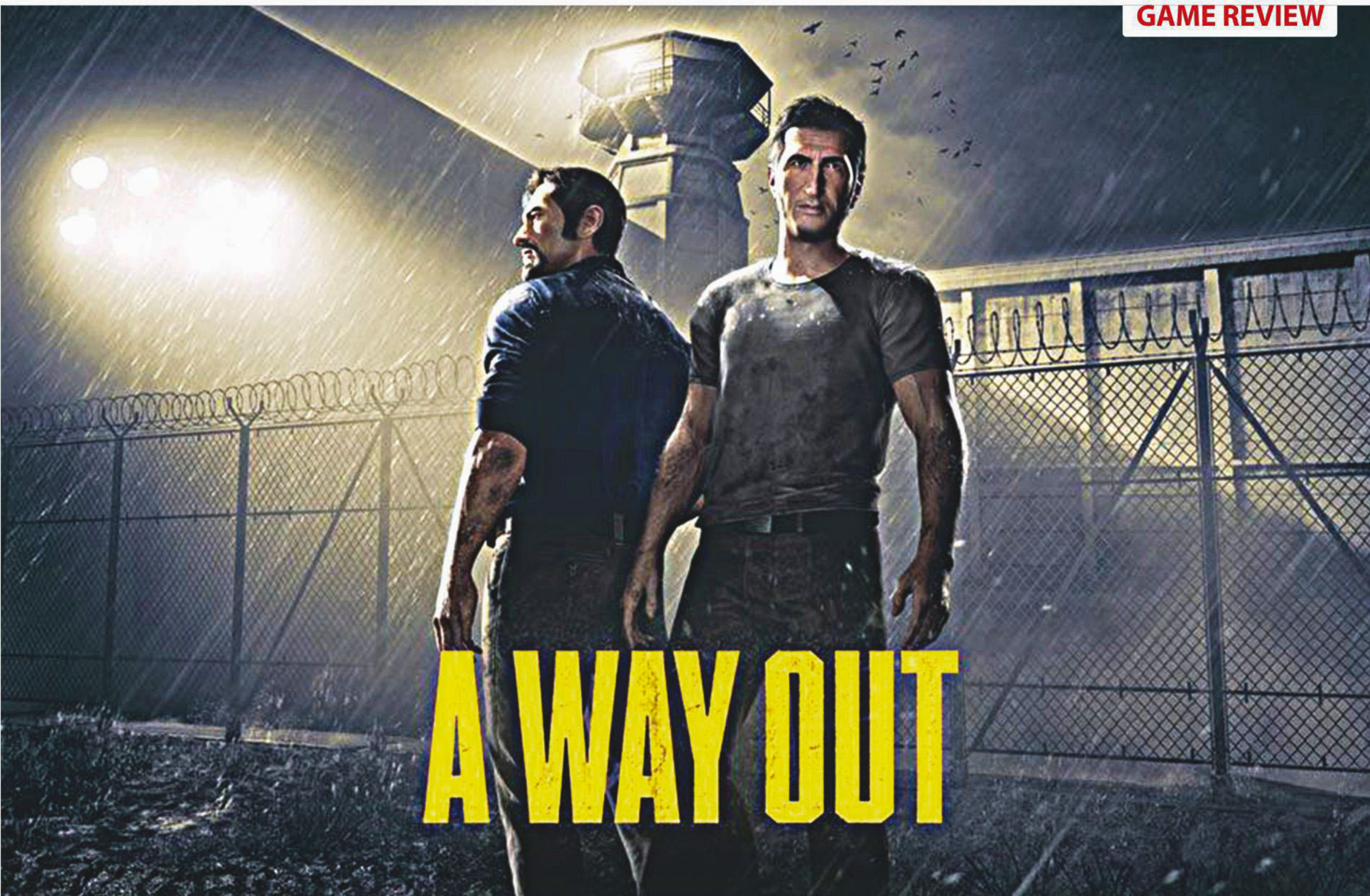




A Mixed Bag of Emotions

NONY KHONDAKER

Developer: Hazelight

Publisher: EA

Engine: Unreal Engine 4

Platforms: PC, PS4, XB1

Release Date: March 23, 2018

Since 2016, EA has been running a program called EA Originals where they look for promising indie games and provide them full funding without any publishing fees. The latest product of this program is *A Way Out*, a story driven co-op experience created by Swedish filmmaker Josef Fares, who previously directed *Brothers: A Tale of Two Sons*. Ever since its E3 reveal in 2017, *A Way Out* got a lot of gamers excited but probably not as much as Fares himself who confidently stated "It is impossible to not like this game". Is his statement true?

At least for the opening act of the game, it isn't. The game opens with the two protagonists, Vincent and Leo, flying in an aircraft and reminiscing how they escaped prison. This leads to a flashback which essentially becomes the first chapter of the game. The pacing in this act is excruciatingly slow and the gameplay was anything but fun. The missions were extremely linear and offered no alternate ways of approaching them. My friend, who I

brought in to play with me, was quickly frustrated and repeatedly wanted to leave. The game posed no real challenge thanks to the laughably broken AI and the convenient plot holes and deus ex machinas. We were pausing the game every now and then and looking for difficulty settings which sadly weren't there. The first real challenge arrived when we had to climb up a tunnel by standing back-to-back and synchronously performing QTEs.

After we laughed our way out of the prison, the protagonists had a conversation which revealed that they were both framed by Harvey who also killed Vincent's brother, Gary. This chapter also featured one of the most fun segments of the game which was paddling a boat against the current. The segment required perfect coordination and we screamed our lungs out every time the boat approached a rock. The boat eventually sank and we then had to break into the country house of an old couple, who were surprisingly more vigilant than the entire prison security. After tying them up and changing clothes, we got to fool around the house. Starting from playing musical instruments to petting farm animals, the house was packed with fun, interactive mini-games. Lastly, we had to fix a broken truck and set out on our way to the city. Within this

time, the couple broke free and called the police. This ensues a car chase where one of us had to drive and the other had to shoot at the police cars. Though clichéd, this segment felt fresh and enjoyable because of the co-op element.

After reaching the city, Leo visits his family and spends some time with them. This section also had some pretty interesting mini-games such as baseball, basketball and darts. My gripe with this section was that Vincent didn't have much to do throughout this, although, he does get his own section later. Afterwards, we had to hunt down Ray, an accomplice of Harvey and interrogate him to find out that Harvey is in Mexico.

The third chapter dealt with taking preparation for our flight to Mexico while the fourth chapter is the confrontation with Harvey through what was mostly an extended shooting gallery. The chapter ends with an exciting bike chase where we had to catch our plane before it flew off while Harvey's men were chasing us.

The fifth and final chapter is by far the most powerful segment of the game and this is where the co-op element of the game shines the most.

From a visual standpoint, *A Way Out* isn't exactly stunning. While the lighting and shadows have been masterfully taken

care of by the Unreal Engine, the character models and textures aren't all that great. Something as emotional as *A Way Out* required extremely detailed and lifelike facial animations, which the developers failed to provide. The vision behind the cinematography is excellent but it often gets marred by the poor draw distance and texture loading issues. The sound design and voice acting could also use some work. The horizontal split screen takes some time to adjust to but the camera remains inconvenient throughout the game. The combat of the game suffers severely from the lack of depth in the gameplay and the broken AI.

Despite the slow start and a plethora of issues, *A Way Out* is an enjoyable co-op experience whose 30-dollar price tag can be justified by the fun segments and the beautiful ending. It did certainly feel great to play a story-driven co-op game after a long time even though a lot of things could have been done a lot better. Get a friend to embark on this journey with you either on couch or online.

Nony Khondaker is an introvert who complements his non-existent social life with video games, Netflix and a whole lot of ice-cream. Send him memes and cat videos to cheer him up at fb.com/NonyKhondaker