Saints Row game review: An open-world mess beyond redemption

Enlarge / You'd be excused for confusing this screen with the *Watch Dogs* series; it's but one way the new *Saints Row* feels creatively bankrupt.

The trouble begins as you attempt to make sense of what's going on in this game, which structurally resembles any *GTA*-like game of the past 15 years. As a professional criminal, you take on gigs to raise your notoriety, either through linear campaign levels or various missions dotted around an open-world map. The game opens with you hanging out with three housemates, each with their own hustles and enterprises on the side, and these characters' voice acting and camaraderie are solid enough. Too bad you barely spend time with them. Instead, you'll waste the campaign's first five hours working for some kind of American black ops organization, all while dressing like a counterfeit cosplay knockoff of Master Chief.

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Are you dismantling criminal rings? Battling terrorists? Doing dirty work for a government that needs secrets buried? It's all unclear because the dialogue in these missions mostly focuses on your character bickering with their commanding officer in repetitive, unfunny fashion. These missions take place on largely linear paths and offer few creative or amusingly over-the-top paths to success. Run forward, shoot basic pistols and machine guns, and repeat, with an occasional crudely animated cutscene suggesting that these missions are more exciting than they really are.

Why are these linear levels not overcharged with, say, a full

arsenal of shoulder-mounted rocket launchers, a tank driving on top of another tank, or other ridiculousness that matches the irreverence of the series' past 15 years? Is it because the writers at Volition want me to care about a whiny commanding officer who otherwise doesn't exist in the course of normal gameplay? If this portion of the game is supposed to be fun or funny, I sure didn't get it.