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he Animaniacs, for those who have missed their existence, are a cartoon series that have been wildly lauded by kids of all ages (especially the adult variety). The Animaniacs heralds back to a time when Bugs Bunny rules the beginnings of movie features and cartoons were meant for adults. Stephen Spielberg out his money and weight behind getting them up and running, spinning off a sequel series (Pinky and the Brain) and launching a renaissance in adult-oriented yet child-safe cartoons. The Animaniacs Arcade Pack CD utilizes paint and vocal artists from the series in order to combine into powerful gameplay.

Now, a caveat. As in academics, a software reviewer is supposed to lay their prejudicial cards out on the table before criticizing a game. Therefore, I have to make an admission up front: I am an Animaniacs nutcase. I tape every show (including Pinky and the Brain) and cut all the commercials. In addition to this admission of total geekdom, I must also confess an absolute abhorrence of all this commercialized; especially badly-licensed endeavors that seek to promote purchase of a title of shoddy quality by slapping well known characters in order to draw purchase from weary parents badgered by children who desperately NEED that Neo-Geo Thundercats He-Man Ninja-Turtle PowerArmour Beetle Borg Light Saber Deluxe Power Ranger Barbie Monster factory. (Please, dear readers, insert appropriate trademarks, registered names, and other obvious property entitled owned copyrights to the aforementioned phrase.)   My point, circumlocutorily made: I ABSOLUTELY HATE IT WHEN

SOMEONE SCREWS UP CHARACTERS THAT I ENJOY. I am a hard sell on things marketed with trademarked characters.

But then again, the Animaniacs are not just Warner Brothers' property; they are the property of the Speilberg himself. And after his initial fiasco into the gaming world in licensing E.T. to a shoddy Atari game cartridge whose legendary badness includes the all too true fact that the extra cartridges ended up in a landfill in Mexico, Spielberg has been more careful with his properties when lending them to gamemakers.

The result of his hard-earned lesson so many ages ago?

This Animaniacs CD is just a hair short of the sublime gaming experience.

Are you Pondering what I'm Pondering?
The game starts with a wacky new rendition of the Animaniacs theme song. They already won my heart when I found out on both Mac and PC platforms the title song's animated computer desktops represent Macs — in fact, in the title song, we have:

We're Animaniacs; We've been digitized for Macs;
When click upon your mouse button you cause us to react;
We're Animaniacs!

ake that Bill Gates!
The pro-Mac song got me in the mood; the title sequence where the Animaniacs find out they are trapped in a computer is extremely funny and up to par with their normal antics on television. The core of the CD is five arcade games, each with nonviolent and entertaining

games. None of the games are real stinkers; only one is weak; and all are pretty darn addictive. I go over each title below.

Parental Revenge: Baloney's Balloon Bop!
Oh God, what parent has not nearly wanted to destroy Barney and his incessant incantation of friendship to the tune of "This Old Man?"   Such detestation of the purple dinosaur has already spawned such rather violent reactions such as the Barney Blaster After Dark module; but here in the world of Animaniacs, they have no fear of striking him down with parody and good, clean fun. And "Baloney," the orange-yellow dinosaur, is featured as a target for the ringing chorus of dropping anvils in the Balloon Bop.

The game plays like a version of breakout; you have a trampoline you control in the middle of the screen (like a puck) to bounce Yakko into the air and have him pop balloons above him. If you miss Yakko, he bounces below, and if caught by the ever-present Baloney, he gets an "Extra-squishy big hug!"   (A fate truly worse than death!)   Each hug costs you a life. Ricocheting Yakko into balloons is a good game of angles, helped by being able to pop special balloons that offer power-ups or that toss down anvils to stun old Baloney (But never fear, adult censors of good taste!   He just gets stars, chuckles, and cries out "That was fun! Can we do that again?")   In addition, in later levels, the game adds in indestructible bumpers to increase the speed of your ricocheting speed and pterodactyl pals for Baloney that you can hit, impede your progress, and refill the screen with balloons. This is an amazingly fun game, and extremely well-executed; the physics are well handled and the challenge level addictive.

An Old Favorite in New Clothes: Smoocher!
Of the 5 games, two feature the female character Dot. Smoocher is her title piece, as she runs around on various platform-like levels stunning other characters from the Animaniacs universe with kisses and then knocking them over while they are stunned. The game has a look and feel similar to the original Mario Brothers game, where you stunned turtles by bouncing blow them then jumping up and knocking them over. The game also translates the old POW square (where you would stun everything on the board) to two bundled dynamite sticks that function in the same way.

y giving Dot kisses (which are limited, you have to pick up candy hearts to get more) which fire from her, the game levels can incorporate more interesting designs and gameplay is still substantially different from the Nintendo arcade classic. Smoocher is, in my opinion, the single best game in this CD-ROM compilation. While the design is somewhat derivative, the action is fast-paced, fun, and the "villains" in each level get new and different powers or abilities that make them harder to kiss / stun.

Prop Shop Drop: An Obstacle to Greatness
Prop Shop Drop is a good idea in theory, but generally is the weakest game of the five on the title. Your object is to steer Yakko around the obstacle course and collect different glowing props without running into scenery or moving animals, actors, and lord knows what other bizarre surprises (including a twisting whirlwind that throws barnyard animals out at you. . . wonder what THAT'S making fun of?)   You can manoeuvre left and right, but have no control of your speed; the speed is determined by the vehicle you are drive. there are three: A bicycle (your beginning vehicle), the motorcycle, and the race car. You have to complete each course under a time limit, but also not get too damaged during the run.

The basic problem with this game is that while you can jump over obstacles you can never decelerate manually (except by running into things, which more often that not damage you.) Most of my friends and the one 10 year old who played this title all only fiddled with Prop Shop Drop for a few minutes and abandoned it quickly in favor of the other games on the disc. The game runs too fast for most adults and is pretty hard for most kids. Great concept, but it just didn't play as well as it conceptualized, and is part of the reason the CD lost half of a joystick.

Tee Off: When you Yearn for Crustaceans and Ninjas in PGA Golf
Tee Off is a hoot of a miniature gold course game. Control is simple, where holding the mouse button down for a period of time determines the strength of the swing, and an arrow helps point the direction of the swing. Timing and strength of your shot are the most crucial elements when on the fairway; strength of your shot and learning the terrain becomes even more important when putting.

he physics in the game are pretty impressive, especially when putting: The ground has different levels of elevation, and for one-fifth of a title they have invested some serious time in making sure the physics model felt right. The holes range from the mildly humorous to the bizarre , with Calamari Crossing taking my vote for "Miniature Golf Hole most likely to be found on the next set of Aliens."   This game takes some skill and patience, but has a lot of fun in an amazingly well-simplified interface.

Belchinator Too: When you Should Absolutely be Politically Incorrect
What can I say?   Get a gaggle of 10 year old boys together for more than 10 minutes and one can assume somewhere along the way a potty, fart, belch, or other bodily function joke will soon follow. Belchinator Too combines slick gameplay in a maze-type game structure with Wakko burping his way past the crazed robots which have rebelled against the Brain and taken over Acme Labs.

his game is reminiscent of the quality and style of Power Pete; slick graphics, cute enemies, and different power-ups to more, er, mega-belches. :)   This game, because of the size and complexity of the mazes, will probably get the most gameplay, and also wins the award for the funniest introduction of all of the games.

Gooooooooood night everybody!
What else can I say?   Buy this. Enjoy it. :)Its stable, fun, and adults and kids will get a kick out of it. Its appropriate for most all ages, and unlike Grossology, the CD "edutainment" title that tries to teach kids science but ends up being a little more graphic that most parents would like, the Animaniacs pranks are in good, clean fun. No one dies, no blood.

"So Pinky, are you Pondering what I'm Pondering?"

"I dunno, Brain, but do you think Mister Whipple will wear the gorilla suit long enough while we paper Bill Gates' home?"

Pros
• Funny, wonderful, witty entertainment
• Suitable for adults and kids (of all ages)
• All but one game are of superior quality
• Runs even better on Macs than Wintel PCs

Cons
• Prop Shop Drop well-conceived but plays poorly

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