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Ferruccio Zamuner

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Chapter 1

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1.1 Amiga Report Editor

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EDITOR

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1.2 Review: Aminet 10 CD-ROM

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Review: Aminet 10 CD-ROM

By: **Jason Compton**

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The day WILL come when I will no longer be able to come up with a clever way to introduce Aminet CD-ROM reviews. Until that day, I'm going to keep trying...

Aminet. You know it, you love it, you can own it on CD-ROM. Well, the update installments every two months, plus the yearly 4-CD compilations. By my math, there are 18 different Aminet CDs out there (10 installments

plus two annual 4-packs) these days.

And they've got that AmigaGuide browsing interface that has pretty much become a standard. Search, configure tools for un-LHA, view, etc. Have a good time.

Aminet 10's "theme" is fonts, and there are some 330 megs of font data in various (bitmap, Adobe, CG) formats. A bit disturbing is the fact that 230 megs on the CD are mods. This is considerably more than the last CD and, while mods are always nice, seeing them fill considerable bulk on an Aminet CD-ROM (when not all are new) is a little upsetting.

As of late, Aminet CDs have begun including older versions of commercial software--in effect, "coverdisking" programs. This time around, the goodies are PageStream 2.2SE and Typesmith 2.5SE. In PageStream 2.2's case, "SE" means "no manual but you can buy that for \$40 and get some fonts, too." In Typesmith's case, "SE" means "No AREXX, help, or professional-grade output but you can buy the full version for \$50." Let's face it, if you're going to do some serious work with either, you'll want the manuals. But they make for interesting inclusions.

By percent content, games are next in line. They're sorted into "best", "compatible", and "other", being those games which require some effort to get running. And there you have it.

The other usual categories of fun stuff round out the rest of the CD, a grand total of 636 compressed megs of data. What can I say? There are other CD compilations of random and categorized files, but why not just get it from the source? If you're looking to dabble in print media, or considering taking the plunge for PageStream 3.0, you may well appreciate the added bonus. Of course, if you have an IV to Aminet, you know perfectly well you can just FTP to your heart's content.

Aminet CDs are running 25 DM/ US\$20 these days.

Published by Stefan Ossowski's Schatztruhe GmbH

Veronikastr. 33

D-45131 Essen

Germany

1.3 Review: Aminet Set 2

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Review: Aminet Set 2

By: **Jason Compton**

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Geeze, if you miss one Aminet CD in the series you may as well just wait it out and pick up the Aminet Set.

Aminet Set 1 last year took on the mammoth task of actually putting all of the Aminet on CD-ROM. It took four of them.

A year passed, and it took another four CDs just to get up to date. That's Aminet Set 2. The snapshot was taken on October 21, 1995, which means it's getting a bit old and gives you some idea just how long it took me to sit down and get this review written.

Each disk is labeled (a bit confusingly) in lower-case letters, to avoid conflicting mentally with the first set, and perhaps future sets. They are broken down into roughly logical divisions of Aminet subdirectories (although the "Fun" category of demo, game, dev, disk, and hard certainly covers a lot of definitions of the word).

How can I even begin to pretend it's possible to look through 2 gigs of programs and offer a verdict? The set is configured with the tried and true, more or less, AmigaGuide interface which I like a great deal for being fast and functional. Searches do go on for a while, but what would you expect? Disk a is the launch point, as it has the master index. You can copy the search utility to a hard drive for convenience, because the first disc is the only one with the global search.

It also has something that sets Aminet Set 2 a bit apart from being an overwhelming compository of Amiga-only information, and that's the Project Gutenberg book texts. Nothing says we can't have a little culture.

In addition to this and the new files, each disk has some Aminet Set 1 Top-10 chart material to fill out the CDs.

What more can be said? Amiga Report is on the first disc since the docs directory is, so I'm relatively pleased.

If you missed a couple of discs last year, or are a big believer in preserving collective wisdom, Aminet Set 2 is a very good investment at the price (roughly US\$45). If you're looking for near-instantaneous access to a whole lot of Amiga software it is equally suitable. Picking up a set such as this gives you a very broad collection of Amiga files, enough to stave off mod-and-game cravings for quite some time, as well as providing a nice collection of utilities and other software. It is, after all, a year's worth of Aminet.

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1.4 Review: Digital Universe and Distant Suns

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Review: Digital Universe and Distant Suns

By: **Jason Compton**

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Distant Suns was the standard for "home observatory" software on the Amiga for many years. Unfortunately, it has faded into disuse and relative obscurity as of late--the biggest event since the 1994 release of V5 was the abandonment of the program by its developer (Mike Smithwick) and his publisher (VRLI) when DS5 failed to sell a single copy in the span of a month.

Another publisher, Chaocity, picked up VRLI's Amiga software line and released DS5.01 (the .01 apparently accounted for the labeling change) and has promised upgrades, but none have surfaced yet.

Around the time that happened, Syzygy Research and Technology of Canada released The Digital Universe. A monumental undertaking, DU ships in one (or optionally, two) lay-flat 3 ring binders on 14 (!) floppy disks. (A logical candidate for CD-ROM, but so far none has been made).

On the very surface, both programs roughly do the same thing--give a "sky" or "planetarium" (configurable) view of the cosmos. You can orient yourself at a given position (Select from a list of cities, give coordinate information, or in Distant Suns, put yourself somewhere else in our solar system) and see what the view would be like. Of course, this is a 2-d representation, so you can change the direction of view as well.

Both programs will identify bodies for you, and you can set the date to virtually anything you please. Check out the configuration of the heavens on your birthday or any other date in history you feel might be important to you. Identify constellations...you get the basic idea.

Distant Suns, from start to finish, takes an approach very forgiving to amateurs and astronomical ignoramuses. The 128-page manual is filled with instructions on how to set up various events of note, such as observing the exchange of Pluto and Neptune as most-distant planets, showing that in 4145 AD, Polaris will no longer be the "North star", and so on. The program even comes with a few preconfigured "projects" of events, just click on the "time forward" button and go.

Digital Universe takes a much more comprehensive approach. The base user manual is written and printed in what appears to be TeX, with the standard TeX font that can't help but seem solemn and serious. (The XiPaint manual

is the exact same way.) Copious amounts of stellar objects have been cataloged in the program, and new modules are coming monthly.

At the risk of sounding superficial, I'd also like to take this opportunity to point out one very significant difference between the two programs--their interface. Distant Suns is showing its age. It was clearly designed with an ECS machine in mind, is relatively uncooperative to being mode-promoted, and has menus which, while functional, aren't very attractive.

Digital Universe, straight from its opening animation, shows that things are going to be different from now on. The program's interface is based on MUI. There are those who harp, whine, and moan about MUI, but this program has done an excellent job of turning it into a serious dash of class without going overboard and making the program a pig to use.

Digital Universe is also the much more illuminating and informative program. It seems that virtually every object in the sky has at least two pages worth of vital data, and quite a few have extended encyclopedic entries, complete with pictures. (Viewed through AmigaGuide, which DOES have some problems with MUI, which are supposed to get sorted out.) All this data and information, in print form, takes up over 700 pages--Syzygy knows, because for US\$65 they'll sell it to you. Personally, it's a take it or leave it affair for me, because I love the hypertext integration and am so used to reading important information off a screen that I'm not set off by it. (Avid Amiga Report readers presumably feel the same way.) Even clicking on something trivial like the Sun gets very interesting very quickly.

DU seems to pay a lot more attention to detail, right down to asking you the temperature in your area for better calculating refraction if you choose to view your sky with refraction accounted for.

It's almost embarrassing how much time I've spent with Digital Universe, magnifying and identifying to my heart's content various objects out of the NGC, or turning every possible object on and marvelling at just how much STUFF there is out in space...

Both programs will allow you to generate animations of events over time. Digital Universe supports some printing--Distant Suns lets you save the view to an IFF for later printout.

There's a great big galaxy out there, so if you're going to be inside screwing around on your Amiga the least you can do is stick your head out the window, note what you see, and fire up a program to help you learn more about it. Both Digital Universe and Distant Suns can get you there--DU is

a much more comprehensive program, with upgrades and updates (two upgrades are available on Syzygy's Web site, along with several new modules for new stellar objects and updates to the on-line encyclopedia), not to mention the Web site's information on new events and discoveries in the astronomical world. Distant Suns is a cheaper, more introductory setup, and may be frustrating to those who know they could be getting more from their exploration.

Both programs will take advantage of an FPU (highly recommended. It's a big universe out there, and there's a lot to keep track of.), and you'll need a hard drive.

Digital Universe: Demo on

ftp://ftp.aminet.org/aminet/dirs/aminet/biz/demo/Dig_Universe.lha.

Syzygy Research and Technology

Box 75

Legal, AB

T0G 1LO

Canada

US\$ 129.95 for Digital Universe software and manual

US\$ 64.95 for Digital Universe hardcopy Encyclopedia

Chaocity

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1.5 Review: Online Library CD-ROM Volume 1

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Review: Online Library CD-ROM Volume 1

By: **Jason Compton**

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Danny Amor has gotten pretty good at whipping CD-ROMs out. He's been behind da capo, World Info, the upcoming da capo 2 and co-compiled the Workbench Add On CD. Inbetween, he put together the Online Library CD-ROM. Entirely based in HTML, OL is similar in concept to World Info, which similarly only required an HTML browser to operate. The CD is broken up into a number of different categories, ranging from humor to science to Star Trek, with news, political documents, and hundreds of Project Gutenberg books in various languages thrown in. Online Library is multilingual, supporting the four "standard Amiga

languages" for navigation (English, French, German, Italian) with the occasional text in a different language. The bulk of the texts are English, but some books (The Divine Comedy, for example) are only in their native language.

Some may be drawn to the drinks recipe list. While I'm no legendary drinker, it's nice to know that I can check on the drink Dale Larson promises to get into me the next time we see each other.

The HTML is sound without being flashy--any browser should have no trouble dealing with the output as it's all very straightforward. It would have been nice to have a browser on the CD itself ready to go, but these are relatively easy to come by.

Amiga Report fans may be pleased to note that there is a licensed collection of AR on the disc, from the first issue through AR 3.05, with an inexplicable gap to 3.13 (the last issue included on the disc.)

Just about any CD is going to be an eclectic collection of information, but Online Library seems to revel in it. Never before did I think I would see five translations of the Bible in the same place as a collection of RFCs. Nor did I anticipate that Amiga Report would rate the same category as The Federalist Papers or the articles of Fredrick Douglass.

There are a few animations and MIDI files tossed somewhat randomly on the disc, as there is no direct way to access them through the Web browser.

Configuring CDs for this sort of thing is difficult, but not impossible.

Will you enjoy using Online Library? I think the best way to answer that question is this: How much do you enjoy reading Amiga Report, relative to printed publications? If you find it a hassle to read things on a computer screen, you'll still be happier with hard copy (although buying just the 19th century classics on the CD will get pretty expensive.) On the other hand, if you don't mind a bit, Online Library will be second nature to use.

Approximately US\$30.

Published by Amiga Library Services

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Chandler, AZ 85224-3687

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