

y Gene Alloway

With the click of the mouse, you can fly around a planet, scan its surface, investigate a binary star system, or watch a collision of galaxies. However, you won't find any aliens around the next moon here. Redshift 2 supplies a load of entertainment, but it is of a much more cerebral kind. Redshift 2 is a new version of a multiple award winning title, an introduction to astronomy and man's understanding of the universe surrounding our planet. It is a beautiful, well done, and information rich work, better than many texts on astronomy. While you may not be shooting at a machine that looks like an octopus in space, you definitely embark on an adventure from the moment you start the program.

[The Celestial Spheres](#)

Redshift 2 has many parts which together create a well-rounded presentation of astronomy and space missions for beginners as well as those with more advanced knowledge in the area. Like the original version, Redshift 2 has tutorials to help you understand and use many of its powerful features which I will talk more about below. It also has 3-D and 2-D animations and simulations, 700 plus photos, maps of the Earth, Moon, Mars, a number of videos, sky charts, and nearly 300,000 named astronomical objects with data, all supplemented by the complete Penguin Dictionary of Astronomy to help you understand concepts, terms, events, and abbreviations. New in this version, Redshift 2 has 10 guided tours consisting of movies and narration covering binary stars, supernovae, and several other themes and astronomical events. There are more objects: a surface map of Venus

based on the latest data, information on and paths of satellites, probes, and manned spacecraft through the night sky and the planets. You can even place yourself on these man-made objects or comets and asteroids as they fly through space. Lastly, new and updated photos and videos have been added. All of this has been done with data and support from American, Russian, and European scientists and space organizations. The result is a wonderful achievement in collaboration and design.

Features Galore

Many companies load their discs up with information but design no helpful, intelligent presentation or set of tools for using the resources. Not Maris. There are literally so many features I cannot describe them all here. However, I have identified three main areas where most of the features fall: learning, moving around, and reporting.

Learning is a very important component for there are many advanced concepts within Redshift 2. The three main parts to the learning aspect of the disc are the Guided Tours, which give you an overview of basic astronomical concepts and phenomena, the Dictionary of Astronomy which gives you ready access to astronomical definitions and concepts as you use the program, and the Tutorials which show you how to get the most out of the program. The Guided Tours and the Tutorials are their own "branches" of the program, but the Dictionary is available anytime you click on an astronomical object. Both the Guided tours and the Tutorials help give you a feel for both the kind of information you will see on the disc and how you can get the most out of it. The Dictionary is much more of a supplementary and support tool. When you click on an object in the sky, a list of data and information about the object appears, and any term, abbreviation, or symbol in blue and underlined is clickable and brings up another window with an entry from the Dictionary. Even then, entries will have links to other entries in the Dictionary. Together, these things provide a great foundation to getting the most out of a very rich environment.

oving around has both the most fun and the most visually rewarding set of features. A user can move from location to location either looking up at the sky or down on surface maps of Earth, the Moon, Mars, and Venus, or from planet to planet in the solar system or even through time from 4712 B.C. to 11,000 A.D., to see how the stars will look in the future. Once you have moved to a location, you can, when looking at the globes of the planets, choose your direction of view: from above, below, leading, trailing, outward toward Pluto, or inward toward the Sun. You can even choose the distance you want to view the planet. If you are looking at the sky from the surface, you can choose time of day, year, longitude and latitude, and even what class of objects you want to see. The actual pop-up screens that help you do this are a curious mix of simple and complicated tools which require both some experimentation and an occasional reference to the very well-done 67 page manual. There are tools which work as easily as a click and others which you can enter in latitude and longitude on different inner planets down to the second. The result of all this is an amazing flexibility to position yourself as an observer anywhere in the solar system, to see the planets, to see their night skies, and even to see some of their formerly hidden surfaces. You can even "ride" a space probe through Jupiter's moons or set the Earth spinning on its axis.

Reporting allows you to use the information within Redshift 2 to generate information, movies, and even data for you. After you have investigated the surface of Mars or the Rings of Saturn, or looked up what azimuth means, and what the sky looked like the day you were born, you can actually start generating information based on your interests and the data found in Redshift. For example, you can print, or copy and paste entries from the Dictionary of Astronomy. You can choose a star, comet or planet in the night sky and generate a visibility report for that object to find out when it is best seen and where to look for it. You can even find out when the next eclipse will occur in your section of the night sky. However, the best report you can generate is a movie. Redshift 2 has a movie tool which allows you to record actions as you perform them. Once you choose to record a movie, you set the file name and the size of the area to be recorded by the movie. You can also set how many frames or pictures are displayed per second in the movie. For instance, you can record an approach to Jupiter then slowly swing beneath it and up again to its north pole. All the movies are saved outside the program so you can include them in reports, web pages, or just for fun.

[On the Dark Side of the Moon](#)

As wonderful as I think this program is, I do believe it has one weakness. Redshift 2 has a steep learning curve if you want to do more than just the basics. It can be intimidating at first because of the wealth of tools available and the complexity of some of them. Also, there is a wealth of new terms and concepts which are useful to know. The data which pops up when you click on an object is impressive but very technical. Also, the Penguin Dictionary of Astronomy is not the best for a new user. Incredibly informative yes, but not introductory in many instances. Now, I like a challenge like this, and I am looking forward to learning a lot over time. However, for some folks, it may just be too much.

[Conclusions](#)

Redshift 2 is an example of the best of popular adult reference multimedia. In its original version, it won no less than 10 awards from both sides of the Atlantic. I see no reason why this won't happen again. If you are looking for an entertaining, challenging CD-ROM which you will go back to time and again, I can suggest no better product. It is a superb addition for anyone, high school or above, who is looking to improve their digital reference library.

[Pros](#)

- A Wealth of useful features
- Superb graphics
- Guided Tours
- Nearly infinite flexibility in choosing a view
- Easy to Jump right in
- Excellent documentation

Cons

- Has Some Complex features
- Technical Data can be Intimidating
- Interface can become cluttered with pop-up screens

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