

review: **Eat My Photons!**

by Bart G. Farkas

Type: Arcade/Action

Publisher: Eccentric Software (800/436-6758)

Retail Price: \$59.95

Street Price: \$39.00

Requires: 030 Mac or higher, 2.5 MB RAM, System 7

Protection: None

here are ever more exciting releases penetrating the Mac games market. Add to that the great shareware (like the new Wolf 3D) that will suck tens of thousands of man-hours out of the U.S. economy, and what do these facts give me? High expectations, that's what. I expect real quality and cutting edge stuff in every new product, at least to a certain degree. When I see a title like "Eat my Photons" from a small company called "Eccentric Software," then I can expect to see a great new game right? Let's find out.

Been Done Before. Eat my Photons is basically Stellar 7 and Zone of Avoidance combined. Your goal is to protect your base from ever-approaching drones (and later fighters) that want nothing more than to blow your base, or you, up. You initially have a choice of fighting a space-bound challenge or go blasting on good old terra firma. The ground-based game very closely resembles the venerable Stellar 7 and involves cruising around blowing up drones that are honing in on your base. There are energy spheres that, when you run into them, regenerate your shields and weaponry. There are, of course, obstacles littered throughout the landscape which do little but add to the considerable clutter on your radar screen. Speaking of such, why even bother to put a radar screen in when the blips on it are so close together that they are indistinguishable at a glance (which is all you get in an action game such as this). The radar can be scaled out slightly to give a closer radar view, but this is of little help. Probably the best feature (or should I say the only feature) for finding distant enemy drones is to use the targeting computer, which looks and acts much like a fighter HUD. This is a decent feature because it enables you to target energy spheres, bases, fighters and drones. Of course, a good radar system would eliminate the need for a semi-automated targeting system that takes away from the game.

fter you have destroyed all of the ground-based nasties, you move onto the space portion of the battle. This differs from the ground version only in the number of obstacles and the ability to fly through space instead of being held on a single plane by gravity. Unfortunately, if you thought it was difficult to find the enemy on the ground, you are in for even more difficulty in space. Of course, the targeting computer can tell you where to go everytime, but for me, that kind of guidance really takes the fun out of an action game. You end up just pressing the target button, lining up the targeting box, blowing up the drone, and pressing the target button again. It might be a blast for some, but hey, to each their own.

Out of Control. You can choose to control your craft with keyboard, mouse, or joystick. However, I use a Thrustmaster and could not get it to work at all with Eat my Photons. By far the easiest means of control was the keyboard (accepting that I could not use a joystick). This allows not only for the traditional keypad direction control but also keeps your fingers close to the weapons selection control and targeting keys. Speed control is achieved with keys 1-0 representing 10 percent to 100 percent throttle. This works OK, but I guess I have just gotten used to the “press-the-forward-key-and-accelerate” style of play that other games of this genre have adopted.

Basically the controls are more than adequate as there are a wide variety of ship functions that can be controlled. These range from weaponry selection, to releasing chaff, to adjusting mouse sensitivity. Now we get to the basic control problem. Eat my Photons just doesn't feel right. More often than not, you find yourself targeting a bad guy, trying to turn to meet him and going way past him. There is a “lead” on the control that makes finite adjustments difficult, to say the least. I did find myself adjusting to this annoyance with time however.

Sight and Sound. The sound in Eat my Photons is of excellent quality, and you have the ability of toggling the music, engine sound, and sound in general off. Graphically, Eat my Photons falls into the middle of the pack with the space-battle screens looking better than the ground play due to the lack of clutter. Ground combat suffers from the aforementioned ground clutter however, and it can make identifying a bad guy a tough job until you get used to it. Your cockpit has numerous essential and non-essential flickering lights and color which do not detract from game play.

There is a brief online help area that includes all of the essential keys, and a brief rundown on the bad guys.

Eat This! Eat my Photons looks like a decent first attempt at creating something really cool. In fact, from some of the little niceties in this game one would have to expect that the next game from Eccentric could indeed be ground-breaking. Adding some network play and better graphics (especially 256 colors) to Eat my Photons would be an excellent idea for example (we hear that's coming in a PPC version). Tackling those bad guys with a friend by my side would indeed add greatly to this game. Although Eat my Photons is a somewhat decent start from this new game publisher, I expect future releases to outshine this one.

Pros

- Good sound
- Online help
- Two types of battle (space and ground)
- Control over all aspects of your craft

Cons

- No network play
- Repetitive
- Cluttered graphics at times
- Movement controls difficult and cumbersome