

review: **Flying Nightmares**

by Christopher A. Myrick

Type: Flight & Strategic Simulator

Publisher: Domark (415/513-8929)

Retail Price: 69.95

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Requires: 68020 or better (including Power Macs), 4 MB free RAM (8 MB recommended), 3.5 MB free space on HD, 256 color graphics capability, System 7.

Protection: None

After a night of fitful rest (hey, at least you got some sleep) and a breakfast of pseudo-edible food facsimiles, you walk into the CIC on the U.S.S. Tarawa and look at the readout from the Tactical Amphibious Warfare Data System (TAWADS). The situation is straight out of your worst nightmare. The Marines you committed to battle are taking heavier casualties than expected (aren't casualties always heavier than expected) and the SAM site at the big airbase at Vila Salazar is still active. While pondering your next moves as task force commander you wonder what happened to the pilot of the AV-8B Harrier II you ordered to attack the base. Maybe he fell foul of patrolling F-16s, or perhaps he was jumped by the F-5 Tigers or maybe he reached the base, only to be shot down by the combined fire of the ZSU-57-2 and ZSU-23-4 mobile AAA cannons.

Instead of spending the rest of your morning coming up with possible scenarios regarding the fate of that single pilot, you realize that the Marines on East Timor need close air support (CAS) and they need it as soon as possible. You also know that the Special Forces assault on Vila Salazar will meet a premature and violent end if you don't neutralize the anti-aircraft defenses. CH-46 and CH-53 assault helicopters won't stand a chance against the radar guided missiles and guns ringing the airbase.

"Neither will my Harrier," you think to yourself, but, hey, you wear the uniform and take the pay, you fly the hairy missions. Moving swiftly, you alter Battle Plan Saber and add another CAS mission in support of the Marines. You decide that two aircraft will fly, one tasked solely with supporting the Marines while the other will both support the Marines and attack Vila Salazar's defenses. The CAS mission, while far from being a milk run, is routine so you

have no qualms about assigning one of your fellow pilots to the mission. The CAS-Air-Defense-Suppression mission is guaranteed to be a true nightmare, a flying nightmare, and you can't ask your men to take on missions you wouldn't fly yourself. So you put yourself down for that mission. Before you leave the CIC, you delay the Special Forces helicopter assault by another hour, hoping that your mission will increase the odds for them. Inspecting your Harrier II before takeoff, you note the mixture of AGM-65E Mavericks and AGM-88 HARMs loaded on your aircraft. You hope the Marines will remember to designate targets for your laser guided Mavericks and that the Indonesian radar operators forget to turn their radars off when your HARM is burning through the air at Mach 4. You gladly note the presence of a few AIM-9M Sidewinders, knowing that the Indonesian Air Force will not take kindly to your attacking their base.

As you prepare for takeoff you begin to wonder if today is the day you spoil your record of equal numbers of take-offs and landings. Only time will tell, time that promises to be a flying nightmare!

Initial Briefing. Wait a minute! Didn't I just do a typical strategic simulation (war game) action and plan the movements and actions of a land unit? Didn't I then act as if I was getting ready to play a flight simulator? What's going on? Am I talking about two games or one of those neat PC-compatible games where your flight simulator interacts with the strategic simulator, affecting the outcome of the simulation? What I am really talking about is Flying Nightmares, the latest offering from Domark. Flying Nightmares is both a strategic simulator complete with mission planning, supply concerns, and cryptic unit designations and a full fledged AV-8B Harrier II flight simulator. It is also a port from the PC-compatible world. As such Flying Nightmares is breaking new ground in the Macintosh game arena; we've had flight simulators (both the good, the bad, and the ugly) and strategic simulators, but now that Flying Nightmares is available, we have a strategic/flight simulator where you can control air, land, and sea forces as well as influence events with your flying skills.

Nightmare in East Timor. A couple of days ago you and the rest of your amphibious assault force were happily cruising in the South Pacific, getting ready for Operation Ocean Guardian, when a Flash message from the National Security Adviser told you that because of ongoing events in East Timor and the UN response to those events, Operation Ocean Guardian was now Operation Ocean Saber. Your task is a simple one. You are to neutralize the military-junta-controlled Indonesian armed forces on East Timor and dissuade them from further military actions. By any means necessary. Did you ever wonder why the simplest tasks are always the hardest?

Time is never on your side when you really need it and Operation Ocean Saber is no exception. Instead of having the massive striking power of a full Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) and the crushing weight of an aircraft carrier battle group, you have to go to battle with an understrength MEB and a handful of AV-8B Harrier IIs that the Tarawa happened to have on board. Still, you command a moderate sized task force, as shown by the order of battle below.

Ship Name	Ship Class	Ship Type
Tarawa Assault Ship	LHA-1	Amphibious
Whidbey Island Ship	LSD-41	Dock Landing
Austin Landing Ship	LPD-4	Dock
Ogden Landing Ship	LPD-5	Dock

Cleveland	LPD-7	Dock
Landing Ship		
Denver	LPD-4	Dock
Landing Ship		
Pfc. Dewayne T. Williams	T-AK 3009	Vehicle Cargo Ship
Kidd	DDG-933	Guided
Missile Destroyer		
Duncan	FFG-10	Frigate
Clark	FFG-11	Frigate
Antrim	FFG-20	Frigate
Kalamazoo	AOR-6	
Replenishment Oiler		

Not a small task force by any stretch of the imagination and even without the support of an aircraft carrier, you still have a lot of offensive striking power. Your striking power is provided by the MEB and their assorted hardware, including assault and attack helicopters, M1-Abrams main battle tanks, heavy artillery, and assault vehicles. Long range striking power is provided by the handful of AV-8B Harrier II fighter bombers launched from the Tarawa. While the destroyer and frigates constitute most of your close range defensive power, the task force's Harriers can engage incoming raids at long range, hopefully whittling them down to a manageable size before they get within range of the fleets' SAM defenses.

[Warfare 101](#). Flying Nightmares can be compared to Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. When it is good, it is really good, and when it's bad, it is really bad. The Dr. Jekyll character is apparent when you are using the game as a strategic simulator. Like most simulators of this type, you have a lot of control over individual unit movements and actions. Flying Nightmares ships with a pre-designed battle plan, Battle Plan Saber, that may or may not allow you to successfully defeat the Indonesians (I didn't succeed, but my flying skills were suspect). Although you can use this Saber as your primary battle plan you can react a lot faster to the changing tides of battle than the computer can so Flying Nightmares also allows you to change existing battle plans or create your own plan from scratch.

Making a battle plan requires a lot of time and information but Flying Nightmares streamlines the process by letting you use the Tactical Amphibious Warfare Data System (TAWADS). TAWADS provides you with information on both the enemy and friendly forces. Integrating this knowledge with current supply status (check the Tarawa's hold) and the capabilities of the forces at hand allows you to devise a battle plan that will bring the Indonesians to their knees. Like any strategic simulation, the key is to be flexible, always keeping track of what the other guys are doing, what your guys are doing (as opposed to what you told them to do) and the general flow of the conflict. I devised my own battle plan, Battle Plan Minnow, where the centerpiece of the plan was a series of airstrikes designed to cripple the enemies air defenses and take out the air force. All I succeeded in doing was crippling my own air wing through my crippled flying. The President was not amused.

Unfortunately, Flying Nightmares also has a Hyde side that reaches its greatest manifestation in the flight simulator aspect of the game. Flying Nightmares is equipped with two Harrier flight models, a simplified version and a version that is very close to the real thing. The realism of these flight models is hard to attain because of the poor graphics engine included with Flying Nightmares. Graphics are of low to moderate quality, perhaps a notch better than Red Baron but definitely not in the Hellcats, Valkyrie or F/A-18 Hornet class. As an example, look at the explosion in figure 2, where a Harrier has just downed an enemy aircraft. The explosions are the funny looking line with little balls on their ends.

Additionally, the cockpit graphics are simple (for an idea of how complex they could be, check out Graphic Simulations F/A-18 Hornet or even Spectrum Holobyte's Falcon MC), and worse yet, it is hard to fly close to the ground or water because you don't get the sensation of low altitude provided by other flight simulators.

Other areas where Flying Nightmares is deficient include:

- The manual is liberally sprinkled with typographical errors and does not provide as much information about flying the Harrier as it should.
- The Harrier is not an easy plane to fly, and Flying Nightmares doesn't make it any easier. There is a built in training simulator on board the Tarawa that you can use but even this starts you off on the deck of an assault ship, not on land.
- The interface shows its PC-compatible heritage with obscure DOS fonts and an acute lack of basic Mac features such as command key equivalents, the ability to run in the background (using MultiFinder or System 7). When using TAWADS you have to time your mouse clicks very carefully because the game may or may not register them. There appears to be no pattern to its ability to do so.
- The manual claims that Flying Nightmares ships with a Gravis MouseStick II set, but a thorough search of the included disks didn't turn one up. On the plus side, Flying Nightmares does support the Thrustmaster control systems.
- There is a persistent bug where the Harrier's engine sound disappears, especially if you're firing multiple Hydra rocket salvos.

Performance. On a 68030 machine Flying Nightmares is so slow as to be almost unplayable, at least in the flight simulator mode. In strategic simulator mode the game runs at a decent speed and the various time compression options allow you to control the pace of the action. I suspect that both the flight simulator and the strategic simulator would benefit from faster 68040 Macs and from what I've been told, on the new Power Macs (for which Flying Nightmares has been optimized), the performance of both simulators reaches the level where the game is very playable. Domark would have done well to design the game so that it performs at decent frame rates on slower Macs, instead of aiming at the high end. After all, what is the proportion of Power Macs to 68030s and 68040s?

Flying Nightmares can run at resolutions up to 640 by 400 and uses the full 13" screen. The colors in the flight simulator appear washed out, but those in the strategic simulator are sharp.

Summary. Flying Nightmares has set two milestones in the Macintosh game arena. It is the first integrated strategic/action simulator for the Mac and it is also the first game with code optimized for Power Mac use. As a strategic simulator, Flying Nightmares is on a par with classics like Harpoon and Carriers at War, but as a flight simulator, Flying Nightmares lacks the refinement to which Mac users are accustomed. Unfortunately, Flying Nightmares' DOS heritage is apparent in many places and this too detracts from the game. Performance of both the flight simulator and strategic simulator is a function of CPU speed; the faster and more advanced your CPU, the better the game will be. Because of this, I wouldn't recommend Flying Nightmares as a flight simulator to anyone with a CPU less than a 68040, but if you are more interested in the game as a strategic simulation, drop by your local Mac dealer and check it out. My advice to Domark would be as follows: Nice idea guys, but it is still rough around the edges. A bit of work on the interface and performance problems and Flying Nightmares will be a great game.

Pros

- Good strategic simulator with a lot of control over unit movements and actions
- First integrated strategic/action simulator for the Macintosh and Power Mac
- Supports the MouseStick II (if you can find the MouseStick Set) and Thrustmaster
- Dual flight models allow you to choose between the realistic AV-8B Harrier II and a simplified version

Cons

- Graphics in the flight simulator are poor, making it hard to maintain situational awareness
- Poor performance on older 68030 Macs
- DOS heritage is apparent, resulting in a poor interface lacking basic Mac features such as command-key equivalents and multifinder ability