# BATTLE ISLE ★★★ '93

## "The Moon of Chromos"

**INSTRUCTIONS • BACKGROUND**

## "INSTRUCTIONS"

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## "BACKGROUND"

### "Across the Abyss and beyond"

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# PREFACE

Welcome to Battle Isle ´93. With this program we'd like to say a big "thank you" to all our old friends (and battle veterans) as well as to our our new players who are venturing for the first time into the gigantic Battle Isle universe.

Whereas the original story of the Battle Isle Saga is set deep in the vastness of space, the contents of this disk take a gigantic leap forward into the future, with new maps, new units and new sounds. All the features of the original have been retained, but developed even further.

"The Moon of Chromos" is actually a chapter in the epic Battle Isle Saga, and the next big part, Battle Isle II, to be published towards the end of the year, will be a strategic experience of a scope never previously seen.

**Till then, we hope you enjoy "Battle Isle ´93 - The Moon of Chromos".**

Your Blue Byte Team.

# INSTALLATION

## MS-DOS compatible AT

Battle Isle ´93 - The Moon of Chromos can be played directly from disk.

It can, however, also be installed on your hard disk. The disk contains the installation program "INSTALL.EXE". If you have any queries concerning the use of drives and directories, please consult your user manual. Once started, the program will take you through the installation procedure. The program will copy all the data automatically.

You will require approximately 1 MB free memory on your hard disk.

After the program has been successfully installed, you can start it by typing "moon" and pressing the RETURN key.

When playing from disk, you should keep an empty DOS disk handy to save your game positions.

## New Controls

The program contains a number of new functions in addition to those in Battle Isle.

With the <F5> and <F6> keys, any joysticks which are connected can now be switched on or off independently of each other. If your game port has only one joystick connection, you may experience difficulty controlling the cursor when in the two-player mode (the cursor may move into the upper left-hand corner); should this happen, simply switch off the second joystick by using <F6>.

**IMPORTANT:**

If you turn your joysticks on or off by using <F5> or <F6>, BOTH joysticks must be in the central position. This calibration makes it possible for the joystick to be connected even after the program has started (simply turn the joystick query on and then off again by means of the function keys).

THE <F5> AND <F6> KEYS CAN ONLY BE USED IN THE GAME ITSELF AND NOT IN THE MENU MODE OR DURING THE OPENING AND CLOSING CREDITS!

**Mouse Control**

This extended version of Battle Isle can now be played with a mouse.

To make this possible, a "MOUSE" selection has been added to the "DISC"-Menu. This gives you the following options:

-SIDE 1 / SIDE 2

"SIDE 1" allows the player who controls the left half of the screen to use a mouse. Similarly, "SIDE 2" allows the mouse to be used in the right half of the screen.

-SLOW / MEDIUM / FAST

These are used to set the sensitivity with which the mouse reacts to your movements. "SLOW" means that you have to move the mouse quite a long way to move the cursor on the screen. This setting is  suitable for high-resolution mice, e.g. those with 800 DPI. "MEDIUM" is the most suitable setting for "normal" mice with 300 DPI, and is the most comfortable to use. "FAST" allows you

to control the mouse with very small movements and is recommended for low-resolution mice (<300 DPI).

The <F7> and <F8> keys allow you to control the mouse while the game is in progress.

<F7>            Turns the mouse on and off.
<F8>            Allows you to set the mouse's sensitivity, as described above.

## Basic Features of Mouse Control

Mouse control works in a similar way to the joystick control. The hexagonal cursor follows the mouse's movements. The left-hand mouse button replaces the joystick's fire button, i.e. to choose the select icons, press the left mouse button, keep it pressed and then move the mouse in the desired direction.

## Additional Features of Mouse Control

To make it more comfortable to use the mouse, you can use the right-hand mouse button to scroll in any direction, without having to move the mouse over the whole table.

To do this, press the right-hand mouse button and then move the mouse in the direction you want. The cursor will continue to move in this direction as long as you keep the mouse button pressed.

In addition, you can interrupt the movement of the cursor by pressing the left mouse button while simultaneously keeping the right-hand one pressed down. The cursor will stop as long as you keep the left button depressed. When you release the button, the

cursor will begin to move again.

# Commodore Amiga

## Playing from the Disk

Before you start the program, you should make a back-up copy. Your user manual will tell you how to do this.

Insert the disk into the "DFO:" drive and start your computer or reset it. The program will now load by itself.

To store game positions you will need an empty formatted disk labelled "DDS". If you have any queries regarding disk formatting, please refer to your user manual.

## Installing on a Hard Disk

When you start the installation program, you can choose between a number of processor versions. The program disk contains different versions to suit your processor. Turbo cards can be used even when there is no hard disk available; however, optimal acceleration can only be achieved if a hard disk is attached. Open the disk by double-clicking on the disk symbol. After a short time, two symbols, called icons, will appear in the open window. One of these starts the main program, while the other is used for installing on the hard disk. Click on the second icon to start the installation program.

Follow all the instructions which appear on the screen, and after a short time you will be able to start the program from the hard disk.

# General

After installation has been successfully completed you can access and set up eight new 2-player maps and 24 new 1-player maps, using new passwords. As usual, these will be given to you after you have successfully completed a map. To help you get started, we will give you the first two passwords:

1-player mode:          LUMIT
                        LUNAR

2-player mode:          LUPOS
                        SONNE

The rules of the game have, of course, not been changed. In addition to the new maps and new terrains, Battle Isle ´93 also provides you with new units.

The modified terrain modules offer a huge variety of new playing features in the game.

The units' characteristics have also been changed - take note of the range, attacking strength and armour of your units when playing. The location of the units is also an important factor - be careful that you don't let yourself get hemmed in.

# The Game - Background

The principle behind Battle Isle is that of a game of strategy, which in many respects is similar to chess. Compared to chess, however, Battle Isle has a much more flexible set of rules which make it easier to get into the game, while at the same time not losing any of its complexity or challenge. As in the "game of kings", you move a group of figures with varying characteristics over the playing area. Your sole objective is to put your opponent out of action, which can be achieved by capturing the enemy Headquarters (comparable to checkmate) or by beating all your opponent's men. In contrast to chess, however, you do not only have to think about the figures' different characteristics, but you also have to pay attention to the geographical features of the playing area.

The game's wide range of possibilities does not mean there has been any loss of realism. You will find that the game has all the same features of strategic warfare as Battle Isle, from the setting up of warehouses (the Depots) to the repair and manufacture of figures (units), using important raw materials.

In Battle Isle, both players can deploy their men at the same time, since they simply give their units orders which the troops then carry out by themselves. This would be difficult to do in a board game, but in Battle Isle the computer is there to deal with all the orders you enter.

Battle Isle can be played against another player, which makes it even more enjoyable. So that one player does not have to wait for the other to move, Battle Isle is divided into so-called "command cycles". This means that while one player is moving his units, the other player can use his units to perform various actions, which might involve attacking an enemy unit or setting up depots. In this way, when playing in the "two player mode", both

players are busy at the same time and can keep an eye on their opponent's tactical manoeuvres.

When a player has finished his moves, he indicates this to the computer. Only when both players are ready to change the command cycle, will the computer change the way in which the moves can be made, i.e. the player who could previously only deploy his units will now be able to sent them into action, while the other player will be able to move his unit. This alternation between the movement and action cycles might seem a bit confusing at first, but when you have played Battle Island for the first time you will realise that this clear distinction is the best solution to the problems which were referred to earlier.

Initially, you can only plan your moves, whether you are deploying a unit or sending it into action. That is to say, you can deploy your units and even see their actions immediately, but the movements as such will only be carried out when both players are ready to change the command cycle. This is especially important for the player who is in the action cycle, since all the attacks which he plans will only be carried out after the cycle has been changed. This has a number of 'realistic' advantages which will become clear later.

# Game Functions and Controls

After a brief loading period you will find yourself in the Menu Section of Battle Isle ´93 where you will be able to choose from a number of options and settings which are important for playing the game.

## Main Menu

There are four items in the Main Menu. Three of these access further sub-menus from which you can choose settings which are important to the game.

## Start

Allows you to enter the game with the options set up in the Menu.

## Options

Sub-menu for various settings.

## Disk

Allows you to load saved games. You can also see who the best Battle Isle players are.

## Exit

Allows you to leave the program after checking, if you want to save your game position.

# Options Menu

## Map Code

When you choose this item, you can use the keyboard to enter the password for a map. You will be given the password when you have successfully completed a game against the computer. You will receive the remaining passwords when you play the maps one after the other.

## Setting

Allows you to enter a sub-menu, where you can choose important settings.

## Player

You can enter the players using this sub-menu. Don't forget that not all the maps allow you to enter any player you like! You will hear a warning signal when a combination is not possible.

# Settings Menu

This sub-menu allows you to choose important default settings.

## All Shops/Hide Shops

You can normally look into all your opponent's buildings and transport vehicles, and can thus decide quickly whether you want to capture a certain building or destroy a vehicle. The setting "HIDE SHOPS" means that neither player can look into his opponent's buildings or vehicles.

**Limiting Moves**

You can usually play the game without any limitation on your moves. However, when you have mastered the game, it is an additional challenge if you are only allowed to deploy a certain number of units per cycle. You can set the limit at 4, 8 or 16 moves per cycle - the lower the limit, the more difficult the game becomes.

**Colour Selection**

This allows you to choose the colours during the game. In "Palette 1", the first player's units are green and the second player's are blue (Amiga: Green/Blue). Unfortunately, some people have difficulty in distinguishing green and blue; to help these players to distinguish the units, "Palette 2" makes the units gold and blue (Amiga: Gold/Pink).

PC ONLY: By selecting MONOCHROM laptop owners can customise the game for their machines.

# Disk Menu

From the Main Menu you can access the Disk Menu, where you can carry out all the loading operations.

**Load (& Save)**

When you choose this menu option, the game will ask you to enter a file which contains a saved game. Press any key from 0 - 9 to select the appropriate file. You will then have to insert your Saved Game disk, if you did not start the game from your hard

drive. To save a game position, you must actually be playing the game. When you and the other player are ready to change mode, do not press the Space bar as normal (the F1 key on a PC), but "D" for "Disk". The program will ask you to enter a number from 0 to 9, which you can enter again later, as described above.

### Rating

This is a sort of High Score List, where you can call up the four highest scores achieved on the active maps and the names of the players who scored them.

# Controls

The experienced players among you will notice that certain symbols, which normally allow you to control the game, are missing from the screen. In "Battle Isle ´93 - The Moon of Chromos", all the control functions have been integrated into the cursor, thus giving you the widest possible view of the map section. At the start of the game, you will see the cursor in both tactical displays as a hexagon framing a field. Using the joystick you can move this cursor along the hexagons on your tactical display - the cursor will follow the movement of the joystick. When the cursor reaches the edge of the display, the map will move a short distance in the desired direction. When you have reached the edge of the whole map, you will not be able to move the cursor any further.

When you press the fire button, an "X" will appear in the cursor. The "X" in the cursor indicates that you will exit the current

function as soon as you release the fire button and return the joystick to its normal position. You are then returned to the standard control mode and the cursor will assume its normal appearance.

If you keep the fire button pressed and move the joystick in one of the eight possible directions, the cursor will again assume different forms. The new form will depend on a number of factors.

The appropriate symbol will only appear in the cursor if the action to be carried out is possible. Don't be surprised if the same symbol does not always appear when you move the joystick in a particular direction; this shows that the computer has temporarily taken control, so as to prevent a wrong move being made.

**1.** The eye is the symbol for a view of the whole playing area on the general map. This allows you not only to move the tactical display section quickly and accurately, but also to get a quick view of the general state of play. In addition to a rough representation of the geographical conditions, you can also see all your opponent's units and his position.

**2.** "I" stands for "Inventory". This symbol can only be accessed when the cursor is on a building (Headquarters, factory, depot) or a transport vehicle, or transporter. It allows you to look inside a building or transport vehicle and to carry out further actions. More about this later.

**3.** The question mark represents information, and you will be given important data relating to the field under the cursor. If the cursor is not on a unit or part of a building, you will receive general information, including the number of units which you and your opponent have. This information does not, however, indicate the quality of the units.

If the cursor is over a unit, you will be given its relevant values.

**4.** The movement symbol can only be accessed if your cursor is above one of your units. You must also be in the movement cycle of the game. If you select this symbol, inform the unit below the cursor that you wish to move it. Your tactical display will then indicate the range of the unit.

**5.** The "!" is similar to the movement symbol; here too your cursor must be over one of your own units, and you must be in the so-called action cycle. This symbol informs your unit that you wish to deploy it, usually to attack an enemy unit. As when moving a unit, the tactical display will show you all the possible attacks which you can make.

**6.** The double arrow means that you have carried out all your moves and that you want to change the playing cycle.

**7.** You can only access the spanner symbol when you are looking at the inventory of a building. It means that you wish to repair the unit under the cursor.

**8.** Like the spanner, the hammer can only be used inside a building. You can use it to have a new unit manufactured.

Experience has shown that it is a good idea to play a "trial run" of the game first. After a short time, when you are confident about using the controls, you'll have no trouble giving Skynet Titan's robot troops hell.

## "Across the Abyss and beyond"

by Thomas Jakowatz
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# Prologue

## The young man and the dying legend

The gentle, melancholy strains of a concert overture filled the hovertaxi, suffusing the heart of the solitary passenger with a feeling of tranquillity. Now and then, the driver glanced nervously at his passenger. Higg turned round and looked back at the city below.

He adjusted his focus and examined his reflection in the window of the hovertaxi. Whenever he looked at his face, which was rarely, memories came welling up from deep down in the depths of his soul, the words gnawing at him like rats gnawing through a wooden partition.

"Ugly mug" - "Monster" - "Mask Face"

"I'll take my mask off if you take yours off!"

For Higg was not like others; he was a living stigma, an abomination, a thing incapable of death, doomed to eternal life.

He peered at his reflection and realised for the thousandth time how different he was from all other living creatures. Sadness overwhelmed him as he called up the few memories he had of his father.

His father had been a government scientist, carrying out top-secret experiments in genetic engineering in his laboratory at home. One fateful day, when Higg was four years old, his father had left the door of the laboratory unlocked.

Higg had entered the laboratory, fascinated by the com-

plicated scientific apparatus. On the bench he saw a flask of blue liquid. With the curiosity of a four year old, he picked up the flask and drank…

When his father returned, he found the boy lying on the floor in a coma. Higg was rushed to hospital, where the liquid began to do its work, making him mutate into a strange new creature.

When the doctors realised what his father had accidentally created, they began to study the boy carefully. It soon became clear that his metabolism was working 10,000 times faster than that of a normal Drull, so that he was able to grasp and process complicated data in a matter of seconds. Seized by an insatiable thirst for knowledge, he  read the entire contents of the National Library in less than a month, acquiring an unimaginable amount of knowledge in the process. Because all his faculties worked in nanoseconds, time seemed to stand still for him; so the scientists built him a device which enabled him to bear the slow passage of time. In less than a year, he was able to control his body to such an extent that, with the help of chip implants, he could adjust the speed at which time passed.

Using his DNA code, the scientists were able to create artificial hybrids, creatures with no personality, whose sole purpose was to serve their masters by acting as living computers. But Higg was not a clone, like these creatures raised in their biotanks. Comparing their abilities to his was like comparing a candle to the power of the sun. And whereas the average life expectancy of a Drull was 130 standard years, Higg had already been living for 328 years and still looked like a twenty-year-old.

After they had unravelled his DNA, the scientists had no further use for him, and had cast him aside like a child exchanging an old

toy for a new one. He had been returned to his parents. In the course of time, encouraged by his father and gently guided after his father's death by his mother's wise hand, this  detritus of genetic experiments had become the most respected historian on Chromos.....

He broke off his reminiscences of the distant past - his parents had now been dead for more than 200 years - and concentrated on the present.

The taxi had altered course slightly and was now flying over the outskirts of the city. Higg looked at the instrument panel and calculated that they would be arriving at the Military Hospital in eight standard minutes. He turned his implant control off and was back in his "fast time". To the taxi driver, eight minutes were a short time, but to Higg they seemed like  weeks. He would need them, for he was going to visit a legend.

Gloomy shadows filled the room, and only the regular monotonous wheezing of the artificial respirator broke the silence. The crooked heap which lay on the bed bore little resemblance to the Katai of old. No longer able to control his body, his mind, still as active as ever, dwelled on the things which had been and anticipated that which was yet to come. Yanga concentrated and tapped into the hospital's data sphere. He called up his personal data niche: there was no message waiting for him. Suddenly the niche flashed: "Higg Darbol wishes to speak to you. YES/NO?." He blinked, transferred to the data network and called up the data on him. Microseconds later he had scanned the entire data catalogue into his brain implant and transferred back to the niche. He read through the data, puzzled.

Why would an Immortal want to talk to him? He gave his consent.

Higg knocked on the door and heard a faint "Come in." He pushed the door open and entered the room. As he approached the heap on the bed, he was shocked by what he saw before him. He could sense the General activating his implant, trying to get into his data sphere. He activated his own implant and listened to the stream of data.

/WHAT DO YOU WANT?

//INFORMATION!

/WHAT ABOUT?

//AS YOU KNOW, I AM A HISTORIAN. I AM REQUESTING INFORMATION ABOUT "OPERATION RACE".

/"OPERATION RACE"??? HOW DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THAT???

//I HAVE MANAGED TO RESTORE THE LOST DATA LOG OF NEOKATAI DECRAS. IN IT, DECRAS SAYS "OPERATION RACE" WAS THE CAUSE OF THE ALEXMANDARIN PUTSCH! THIS IS NEW INFORMATION!

/WHY DO YOU WANT TO KNOW ABOUT IT?

//MY DEAR KATAI, THAT'S NO CONCERN OF YOURS!

/I WILL TELL YOU NOTHING!!! GET OUT!!!

Higg activated his ICE implant and leaped into the General's sphere. Brutally he pushed forward, using his mental powers to paralyse the General. Yanga had no chance to defend himself. Nanoseconds later, it was all over. Yanga's self was pushed, gently but firmly, into a niche in his head.

//NOW YOU WILL TELL ME EVERYTHING I WANT TO KNOW!!!
/
/
//I'M WAITING, GENERAL!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
/
/
/
/
/IT WAS A WORLD THAT HAD FALLEN APART……………

# "Across the Abyss and beyond"

## Chapter 1
## The Betrayal

**(Extracts from the Journal of Neokatai Decras)**

Destruction came slowly, almost stealthily…. and it came from out of our own ranks…. The Council of Elders had changed…. the longer…. in power, the greedier…. became for even more power….. immortality…. to try to gain the advantage in the game against Skynet Titan.

Drechsler treatments extended life…. gene strike prevented madness from consuming the brain…. madness affected their decisions…. could not be reconstructed.

Our military stalemate was broken…. machines slowly drained the life out of us. Critics from the ranks of the military were silenced. Leading citizens who expressed doubt about the leaders…. exiled. Hasan, the cybernetics expert…. developed ROOM…. gigantic data bank…. Elders stored their intellects in it. Their souls were forgotten…. obsessed with the dream of immortality…. supply of energy crystals was exhausted…. rationing and economy measures…. moved from the countryside to the cities…. only a handful of troops ready for action…. near end…. apocalypse…. approaching…. Skynet Titan…. same problems…. couldn't maintain any more troops…. Elders…. trying to find a solution…. found by the computers…. desperate search in space…. explored the thirteen moons….KARIBU 1…. launched…. on moon EIGHT…. direct hit…. Skynet was faster…. launched many enormous spaceships from the north…. Elders….

desperation…. computer forecasts…. only six standard months left…. Skynet has enough supplies…. we are all doomed…. Operation RACE …. was born.

### Alexmandarin

The Dakatai lay sleeping on his bed, overcome by exhaustion. He had been on his feet for thirty eight standard hours. As Commander in Chief of the Legio Imperia he had spent the past few days gathering together all his troops who still had any supplies of energy left. Even as he slept, his brain was still active, trying to work out what the Council of Elders were planning. They must be intending to invade the northern hemisphere - the base of Skynet Intelligence.

Although he was only one meter fifty tall, Alexmandarin was stocky - the joke among his subordinates was that he was one meter fifty square. They also made jokes about his bald head. But the Dakatai was a feared and respected commander, renowned for his limitless energy, his ability to get things done, his brilliant improvisational skill and peasant cunning on the battle field and his utter ruthlessness. He rolled over as he was woken by his vidiphone. In a split second he was wide awake. "Light" - piercing light filled the room. "Receive" -his voice was harsh.

The vidiphone flickered into life, and Council Member Marsus appeared on the screen. "Good morning, Dakatai", said the ghostly voice of the Council Member. Alexmandarin nodded as he looked at the Face-SIM. He could never get used to the idea that Marsus' intellect had been transferred to a computer chip, and that the face before him was merely a computer simulation. He had never understood how a human being could agree to be made

into an artificial  form, simply for the chance of immortality. He frowned. It was weird - he was fighting against a computer, and yet here he was taking orders from an artificial intelligence network, ROOM, where the intellects of all 24 Elders were preserved. He shuddered.

"We are planning an offensive. Orders are being issued to your Headquarters as we speak. The Operation has the code name RACE. You are not to delegate this mission to one of the Katais, but are to carry it out yourself. You will be personally responsible for the success of this mission. Our simulations indicate that there is a 52.456% chance of success. That should be sufficient for a man of your talents."

Alexmandarin activated the data processor implanted in his head and called up the data on RACE. He stared uncomprehendingly and stammered, "A space invasion? You want me to capture moon EIGHT with my remaining troops?"

"Exactly, Dakatai. I wish you luck. Message ends." The picture disappeared, leaving Alexmandarin speechless.

**(Extracts from the Journal of Neokatai Decras)**

The Council built…. new type of spaceship, called Arks. Alexmandarin…. his second-in-command, Katai Yanga, Commander of the First Sapper Battalion…. proceeding with construction of the Arks…. to make the Third Battalion ready for action…. spy satellites were orbiting moon EIGHT. Skynet's troops were becoming active…. the maps and data were examined to find a suitable landing place…. found craters approximately 250 standard miles from Skynet's base …. the troops…. embarked. Operation RACE began 65 standard days after Skynet's invasion of the moon.

**In Space**

The hollow roar of the engines stopped, and the crew was suddenly subjected to the weightlessness of Space. Alexmandarin glanced at the tactical screen of his command post and saw that the other two Arks had also cut their engines. He looked about him at the activity on the bridge of Ark 1. The Ark had been built for two purposes, firstly to transport troops, and secondly to serve as a command post after landing. Most of the bridge was designed to serve as a battle centre, and only a small part was taken up by the ship's controls. In the past, the robot troops had been controlled from a MILOP console or a command post, but now, thanks to the latest technical developments, the Commander was no longer a lone figure at a control desk. The rest of the bridge was taken up by fifty five Neokatais. All the information from these control centres were fed into his command centre, from which he coordinated the actions. He changed the picture and looked into the hold, where hundreds of DEMON R-1B and SCORPION tanks were waiting for him to press a button to make them roar into life. He changed the picture again and looked into the troops' living quarters. Some of the men had got up from their acceleration bunks and were checking their equipment. The only Drullian fighting unit, the First Sappers, were in Ark 3.

Ark 2 contained the Supreme Command of the Air Battalions. He activated the message laser and beamed it towards Ark 3.

"Dakatai, is everything all right with you?"

Katai Yanga's calm face appeared on the screen. It never ceased to amaze Alexmandarin how calm the Commander managed to remain. Some people said that Yanga had lost a lot of his drive since being badly wounded at the Gold Sea, but that was nonsense; his former recklessness and almost suicidal aggression had simply been tempered by caution. He had

changed, the Dakatai thought to himself.

"Yes, everything is proceeding according to plan. We'll be landing in our crater in T minus 16 standard hours. Get your troops ready and reconnoitre the area to the north of the crater."

"It'll be a pleasure. Over and out."

Alexmandarin stared at the blank screen and tried to shake off the feeling of foreboding which had seized him. He was just about to beam the laser towards Ark 2 to speak to Katai Quwe, the Acting Commander of the Sappers, when the screen indicated that an urgent message was coming through. He pressed the switch and Striger, the Ark's Technical Officer, appeared on the screen.

"What is it Striger?"

"Very bad news, Dakatai! We are in great danger. I must discuss the situation with you in private."

Alexmandarin felt the eyes of the crew fixed on him. He activated his force field sphere to cut himself off from the bridge.

"Give your report, Striger."

"We've been tricked, Dakatai. One of the processors in the engine control panel broke down, and when I changed it I discovered that it was a non-standard model. The thing is, it was the processor that checks the fuel consumption, and it's been giving inaccurate data; we've got less fuel than we thought - in fact, if we want to get back, we should have turned back 30 standard minutes ago. Now we only have enough fuel to get to moon EIGHT."

Alexmandarin stared at Striger in disbelief. He called up the data on the ship's position. The figures spoke for themselves. It was too late to turn back - they had been betrayed.

Just then, an urgent message came in from Chromos, from

the capital itself.

**(Extracts from the Journal of Neokatai Decras)**

Skynet prepared…. surprise…. massive forces attacked the capital…. capital…. destroyed. The Council Members…. in ROOM…. ordered total retreat. Troops were disbanded…. fled in panic…. all directions. Skynet destroyed every living creature…. could find. New government formed…. military administration. Skynet's attack…. probably last troops with any energy supplies. Attack…. stopped today all over the country. All our attempts at resistance were stamped out. Only a few survivors near the capital. Alexmandarin and his Katais have set off to capture moon EIGHT…. mine crystals and manufacture troops. Only chance…. to capture Skynet's transporters undamaged…. We landed in the crater and began the race against time.

## Chapter 2
### Landing in the crater

The crater lay silent and deserted, a flat plain four standard miles in diameter, surrounded by rocky cliffs. This moon of Chromos had a thin atmosphere and lower gravity than the planet itself.

High up on the edge of the crater, three silver points appeared, growing larger as they came closer. The silence was shattered by the roar of the rocket motors. If anyone had been standing at the edge of the crater, he would have been able to make out the details of the Arks - one-mile-high silver needles, four hundred standard metres in diameter, guns and rockets trained on the

moon's surface. The needles, buzzing like an angry insect, were lowered. Suddenly, to the north, rockets took off. Microwaves searched the sky, looking for a target to which to guide the deadly rockets. The Arks' bays opened and rocket launchers emerged from within, while the ships' laser probes registered the danger. There was an explosion of blinding light, and glistening missiles hurtled towards the rockets. Shells exploded between the ships and the enemy rocket launchers. Spears of light many metres in diameter shot out of the ships and sped towards Skynet's rocket emplacements; the Horsemen of the Apocalypse spread their havoc among Skynet's troops. Suddenly, another network of rays shot up from the centre of the crater towards Ark 2, and light spears scored a direct hit on the ship. A huge hole appeared where the silver stern of the ship had been, and the shattered metal screamed as the transporter crashed to the ground, hurling chunks of metal and rock into the air. Silence returned as the remaining Arks landed. The doors opened, loading ramps and communications antennae appeared, and the gun ports and rocket containers awaited their next targets. A stream of vehicles drove down the ramps and proceeded to secure the area around the landing site. Fighters soared into the sky, ready to protect the Arks.
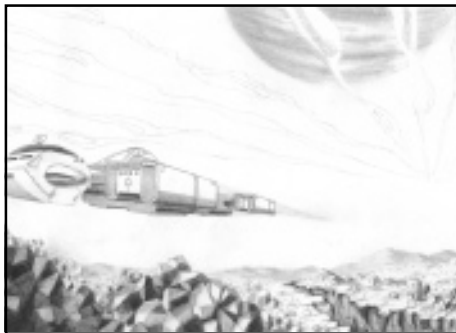
The imaginary observer at the crater's edge would have seen small flashes of light towards the west, as Skynet's tanks began to approach. A few of the missiles hit their targets. Tanks exploded, and an explosion hurled one of the fighters against Ark 3, smashing the plane to smithereens. Wreckage rained down on the DEMON troops and buried them. One of the energy magazines on the outer skin of Ark 3 exploded, putting two guns out of action. The nose of Ark 1 disappeared in a sheet of flame.

Now a hail of defensive fire was falling on Skynet's troops. Light

spears, rockets and high-speed missiles wiped the tanks off the face of the earth. Finally, peace and silence returned again. For the time being.

### Alexmandarin

He activated his force field sphere to cut himself off from the crew. He did not want anyone to see his face. He was close to tears, but he controlled himself and regained his composure. He activated his Tac-Com (Tactical Communicator), and Yanga's face, streaked with black from the smoke, appeared on the screen. Quwe's screen remained blank; only static crackled on his frequency.

"Situation?."

He had not quite managed to control his voice, and Yanga raised his right eyebrow quizzically. There was a troubled look in his eyes as he answered, "Bad. The energy magazine on the port side was hit, and that's destroyed half our energy supplies. The explosion tore a hole fifteen metres wide in the hull, and killed some of my drivers and soldiers. We were just fortunate that it only destroyed an empty hold -most of the vehicles had already been driven out. Just a moment, please."

Yanga leaned out of camera range. When he came back into view, he was holding a report.

"I'm transmitting a copy of the report over to you now, Dakatai."

Even on the monitor, Alexmandarin could see Yanga turning pale as he read the report. A green light on the console indicated that the report was in the computer's memory, and he called it

up onto the screen.

10% of the troops had been lost, and 23% of the vehicles had been destroyed. The Sappers had enough energy left for 12 standard days, starting tomorrow.

He turned off his force field and looked round the bridge. The crew was trying frantically to contact Ark 2, while outside a rescue party was trying to reach the ship. It was hopeless. He looked at the crater on the large screen. Around the smoking remains of Ark 2 there was frantic activity, as the rescue party desperately tried to find survivors in the ruins of the ship's bridge. He summoned his orderly, Hopti. The little Neokatai left the main tactical display and picked his way over to him, bowing slightly when he reached Alexmandarin. He's a capable man, Alexmandarin thought, but I can't stand his manner.

"Launch some reconnaissance planes to the area where our glorious leaders think Skynet is, and order the BUSTER scouts to reconnoitre the crater up to the edge of the cliffs."

The man bowed again, returned to his place and entered the orders into the command console. Immediately, the duty Operators prepared their units to carry out the orders. Maps were copied onto the vehicles' computers, the combat programs were adjusted to the surrounding area, and the DEMON R-1b's checked the machines one last time. He could have given the orders directly via his battle console, but it was difficult to break old habits. Now he turned his attention to Katai Yanga again.

"Form up your Sappers again. Have your Technicians look at Ark 2. The fighters, bombers and Transporters that are still intact must be hidden. The Ark didn't explode and burn out, so some of the vehicles in it must have survived the crash."

"We're already doing that, Daktai. It was the first order I gave when the battle had died down. According to Jorda, the head of

the technical section, the lower parts of the Ark are still reasonably intact; but because it crashed nose first, the bridge was totally destroyed. There were no survivors. A specialist team is opening the main hangar with laser cutters right now; once the hangar is open, we'll try to get the undamaged equipment out with the rescue vehicles."

Alexmandarin took the news calmly; he was getting used to bad news. Besides, he wouldn't have accepted a Dakatai commission if he'd been the sentimental sort. He decided to mourn the lost men when he had a quiet moment; now he had no time. The present belonged to the living, the dead now had all the time in the world. Alexmandarin remembered something his father used to say: "If you worry too much about the dead, you'll soon be one of them yourself."

The troops from Ark 1 would be operational for another 23 days, and he would be a damned fool to waste any of this precious time feeling sorry for himself.

"Good, Katai Yanga. Keep your people in reserve; they are to act as my back-up troops. You will come in to clear up when things get difficult. Save as much energy as you can. My units have enough energy for 23 days. They will clear a nice wide path to Skynet - and then your experts can deliver us from this evil."

### Yanga

Yanga leaned back tensely. This was his first action since the Battle of the Gold Sea, where he had been badly wounded and Quwe had saved his life. And now Quwe was dead.

The bridge of Ark 3, where he was sitting, was a simplified version of the one on Ark 1. Since his troops were not ROBO troops, there was no need for any battle controls, so his job was easier than Alexmandarin's. His second in command had been

Neokatai Decras, the man who had rescued Katai Barlok from his bunker at the Battle of the Gold Sea.

"Reorganise the Sappers and keep them ready for action. We're going to be cleaning up. We've also been granted the great honour of destroying the Skynet battle module, or whatever it is that controls the ROBO troops here on moon EIGHT. Get your old storm troops together - you will carry out this mission personally. I'm relying on you. That's all for the moment. I'll call you again when I have more information.  Dismiss. Thank you."

The Neokatai saluted and left. On the surface he was perfectly calm, but his heart was pounding with excitement. He was going into battle again!

### Alexmandarin

He watched the monitor carefully. Slowly the crater was coming back to life; the BUSTER units were spreading out in all di-rections to reconnoitre the area and seek out enemy units.

Alexmandarin watched the planes take off towards the place where the enemy base was thought to be. They would photograph every square metre of the ground and convert the pictures into a tactical battle map. In a few seconds, the planes had disappeared out of camera range. He swit-



ched to the camera on board the planes. The computers were already beginning to convert the pictures into map form. He spoke to the Operator of the BUSTER units.
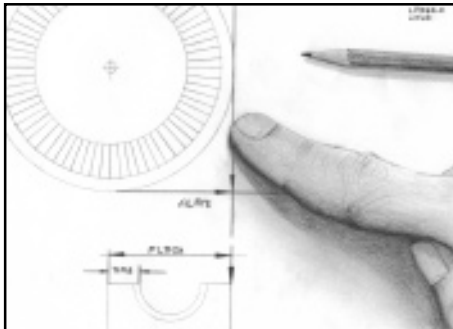
"Direct your units to the south. There's supposed to be a

passable ravine there."

### The second engagement

The BUSTERS headed south and were soon in the vicinity of the ravine. The Operators were soaked with sweat as they sat staring at their monitors, watching the tactical symbols superimposed on the map. As the BUSTERs approached the ravine, the map grew clearer and more detailed. Shortly before they reached it, the Operator ordered the unit to stop.

"Dakatai, the units are at the entrance to the ravine."

"Good. Send out a probe, and we'll see what's up ahead."

Alexmandarin rubbed his eyes and tried to concentrate; but his weariness made his thoughts wander again. He thought of his wife and children, but thought less and less about how he and the others were going to get out of this trap alive. The plane's tactical symbol appeared on the screen as it flew into the ravine. The Dakatai was the first to see the enemy.

"Get ready to attack enemy forces in the ravine. Copy the planes' data to the BUSTER units."

The BUSTERs raced off at once, and the planes' cameras were switched off.

"Yanga, get your planes in the air and proceed to one standard mile from the ravine. Operators, launch the PIRATE ground combat units."

A new symbol representing the PIRATE ground combat planes appeared on the screen.

Alexmandarin called up the external view of Ark 1 and Ark 3, and saw 32 of the planes take off to the south. He activated the map and calculated that the planes would reach the ravine in three standard minutes.

"Enter the data on all the targets ten seconds before you fly over

them, then the BUSTER units will have enough time to pinpoint most of them and destroy them."

He analysed the situation. The BUSTERs had covered almost half of the ravine. Eight of the twenty four vehicles had been destroyed. So far they had noted sixteen targets. He looked at the counter: two more minutes to target. The fighters left the belly of Ark 3 and took off.

He changed channel and spoke to the leader of the fighters.

"Do you hear me, WILD THING?"

"Roger, this is WILD THING. I can hear you, Dakatai. Have received the situational analysis and am  awaiting your orders."

"Synchronise your counter with mine. The PIRATE units will attack the marked targets in 1:30 minutes. Your estimated time of arrival will be approximately 5:00 minutes. You will attack all remaining PVA units, so that I can break through with my tanks and the infantry in 30:00 minutes."

"Roger, I'll attack in 4:25 minutes. Over and out."

The BUSTER units had been decimated even further, and now there were only seven of the 16 left. But they had pinpointed nine more targets. Only 0:45 minutes before the PIRATEs released their load.

The Operator typed orders on the keyboard, and the data in the BUSTERs' memories were copied to the attack computers on the PIRATE planes. Now the planes knew where they had to search. 0:10 seconds to go.

The PIRATE symbol passed over the ravine. More symbols appeared on the screen.

"Launch rockets" barked a voice in Alexmandarin's ear. He watched as the Operator released devices to jam the enemy's tracking systems and activated his own electronic defences. Only four rockets hit the target. The remaining PIRATEs began to

attack. The attack computer launched the air-to-ground missiles, and immediately almost all the targets were wiped off the screen. In 2:00 minutes the fighters would reach the ravine. Then the way would be clear…

## Chapter 3
## The Lava Sea

**(Extracts from the Journal of Neokatai Decras)**

We made slow progress…. only light resistance. The enemy seemed to be waiting for something. Some PIRATE and COBRA units…. saved from Ark 2. Morale…. good. Fighters…. first victory…. satisfied…. Alexmandarin and Yanga ordered…. ZEUS, the new generation of mobile command vehicles. Ark 1 and Ark 2…. in contact. The terrain…. dead and barren. There are no landmarks…. Men are becoming apathetic…. 20 more days before the energy runs out.

The BUSTER units report a sea of lava two days to the south. The Dakatai has ordered the TITAN Transporters to be assembled in Ark 1 and Ark 2. Technician Striger says he can have four of them ready for action in three days.

The Daktai ordered the PIRATEs to circle ten standard kilometres around our main group, and one of the Operators found traces of crystal deposits. Yanga was ordered to take charge of the matter, and sent Jorda and his men to investigate.

**Jorda**

He sat with his Troop Leader on board a HERMES transcopter, watching the pilot working in the cockpit. There was plenty of room in the transcopter for him and his twenty men. Jorda was

the youngest Neokatai in the Sapper Battalion, a position which he owed to his courage as a Commander. It had only been his presence of mind that had got his men back safely after his Commanding Officer had cracked up. Jorda was two metres fifteen tall and was built like a bodybuilder. He was a simple man, happiest with his men on the battlefield. His Troop Leader, Quintus, was a different sort of person altogether. One centimetre shorter than Jorda, his wild temper caused many problems for his superiors, and Jorda had his hands full keeping Quintus out of trouble. Luckily, though, not many people were willing to start an argument with these two musclemen.

If you needed someone to carry out an impossible mission or go through hell and high water for you, then Jorda and Quintus were your men. If you'd told Quintus to go to Hell and kick the Devil up the backside, he would just have answered care-lessly, "How hard?"

Jorda asked the pilot how the search was going, but only got a noncommittal reply. They had been searching the area for half an hour already, and had so far found nothing. The monotony of the terrain beneath them made the men's task harder. Like most of the men, Quintus was staring intently at the ground through his tele-scanner, but nothing could be seen in this barren waste.



Because of the thin atmosphere, the men were wearing EXO suits, the latest development of the battle suit. The suits had a liquid metal coating which could be moulded to any shape. A newly

developed oxygen gel was smeared onto the bare skin under the suit, and gave the wearer several days' supply of vital oxygen. All the body's secretions were absorbed by the material and transformed into energy. The silver suits were so light that the wearer felt as if he were naked. Each man carried a crystal converter battery which supplied the suit with energy for several months. The soldiers were equipped with the new STONER VII multi-function weapons, which were powered direct from the suit. These weapons bore no relation to the old guns which the infantry used to carry in the past; they had a range of up to a mile, and could fire a variety of lasers, small shells and rockets. In the hands of a professional, the STONER VII was a deadly weapon; and these were the cream of professional soldiers.

"We've found it", the pilot reported, pointing to a spot in the north-west. Jorda set the telescanner to maximum magnification and studied the spot. He searched the surrounding area for any sign of Skynet's PVA emplacements, but found no trace of infantry or laser batteries. He glanced at the co-pilot's battle console, but not even the system's sensitive sensors could detect any emissions, search beams or heat. All the readings were green.

He activated his suit, and the silver immediately encased his body. The silver was charged with energy, causing the gel to release the oxygen. A few seconds later he was able to breathe freely. No good for anyone who suffered from claustrophobia! His suit automatically scanned the surroundings for signs of danger, but there was no indication of DEMONs or other enemy forces.

"Prepare to land. Target 1.8 standard miles, compass bearing 176 degrees. Have your weapons ready. Quintus, take half of the men and approach from the right. We'll keep our troops 500 standard metres away."

### Alexmandarin

The ZEUS was at the centre of the battle unit. Alexmandarin leaned back and looked across at Yanga. The giant ZEUS, 40 metres long and 15 metres wide, with a cruising speed of 88 standard miles per hour, was the pride and joy of the Technicians who had developed it. There was room for four Operators, two leading Katais, a troop of Sappers and two drivers.

Alexmandarin was determined to "stay on the ball", as he put it; in other words, he was going to be at the front line.

"There they are again!", one of the Operators said. Alex-mandarin and Yanga swung their chairs round and looked at the main screen. There was the unidentified plane again, right at the limit of the sensors' range. The computer plotted its course, speed and altitude, but could not identify it. The sensors on the roof of the ZEUS registered the enemy search beams, and warning lights flashed on the battle consoles. Alexmandarin heard a buzzing in his headphones.

"That's the third time in half an hour - let's hope they're not going to attack just yet, we don't have any protection here on the plain."

Yanga nodded and looked back at the screen, then looked round the room absent-mindedly. Suddenly his face brightened.

"If you were the enemy, where would you attack us in the next few days?", he asked, pointing at the tactical map.

The Dakatai pictured the details on the map yet again. He looked at the sea of lava before him and thought. He'd known what the answer was for some time, but he wanted to see how Yanga was getting on, so he hadn't yet said anything.

"I'd attack when we'd crossed the lava sea to the south-east and covered the twenty miles, and everything was safe and sound in the Transporters. I'd attack with a large number of fighters, and if, against all the odds, we managed to break through, I would

have collected enough equipment on the other side of the sea to prevent a bridgehead from being set up. That's how I'd do it."

Yanga looked a bit disappointed as he realised that the Dakatai was just testing him.

"I assume you've already ordered Striger to salvage the fighters from Ark 2. Anyway, we won't be in the Transporters, we'll be crossing with the WHALE units. I wondered why you'd brought them."

Smiling, the Dakatai replied, "As you know, on Chromos we didn't have much cartographical information about moon EIGHT, but the maps showed not only this crater, but also a sea shore. Something told me I'd better take something to cross it in. Call it my instinct - It usually turns out to be right. By the way - what's your assault party doing?"

### Jorda

Tears streamed down Jorda's face as he sat in front of the dome, cradling his dying friend and comrade Quintus in his arms. He would never again have to get Quintus out of trouble. Yet despite his terrible injuries, Quintus was still fully conscious. He looked across the plain, then looked up at Jorda.

"Why me?", his eyes seemed to be saying; but Jorda had no answer. A soldier lived, a soldier died, he gave of his best for his country and his platoon, so that the Daktai could be proud of his troops. SHIT!!!

They had managed to reach the dome without much trouble. Sapper Rasche got the door open, and they charged into the dome, expecting heavy resistance; but none came. Quintus activated his sensors, but found no sign of life. He looked round, studied the control panels on the wall and transmitted the pictures to Ark 1. The Technicians analysed them and informed

him that this was probably the control centre of a mining site where the valuable crystals were brought to the surface. Jorda was exultant. Cautiously, the men spread out and began to search the control centre.

The corridors had been built for the thin maintenance robots which were standing motionless in their niches, and the roof was so low that a man could only walk bent double. Innumerable machines without control cells lined the walls of the centre. They were all shaped like dice and were designed to carry out Skynet's orders. The further the men moved into the Technodrome, the less room they had to move. They squeezed through the corridors and reached the entrance to the mine itself. A robot as big as a ZEUS stood at the entrance; behind it, only the blackness of the mine could be seen.

They were standing in a huge area which had been dug out of the earth. A message from Ark 1 informed Jorda that, since there were traces of various metals and other substances, there must be a factory in or near the station. Cursing, Jorda led the men back to the control room, and started to search to the right. After a time, they found a large supply corridor and were able to stand upright again. They were cautiously moving forward when, suddenly, all hell broke loose. From both ends of the corridor, they came under a hail of fire. Jorda was hit several times, and although his suit deflected some of the shells, the sheer force of the fire finally knocked him off his feet.

A Sapper was hit by a light spear, and exploded in a blaze of light. Jorda's optical equipment indicated four targets in the corridor ahead of him, and he fired his STONER at them. A light spear shot out of his gun and silenced one of the weapons, blowing it into atoms. The energy released by the explosion rushed along the corridor, knocking several of the Sappers over.

Jorda threw himself to the floor as the Sappers opened fire on the batteries. When he got up again, he set his gun to fire explosive shells, so as to conserve energy, and destroyed another of the gun emplacements. A burst of fire sent him flying. He aimed his gun at the opposite wall and fired three shells into it, sending shrapnel flying through the corridor. The explosion had ripped an enormous hole in the wall, and he crawled through it on all fours and found some cover. Setting his gun to use high-velocity ammunition, he blew up the two remaining emplacements, thus putting an end to the resistance.

It was some time before the smoke cleared and the fires were put out. He looked round, and suddenly stumbled over Quintus. Aiming his scanner at Quintus, he switched on the mediscan. A greenish laser probe seemed to emerge from his eye, and the three feelers of the probe slowly moved over his friend's motionless body. The computer in his silver suit compared the data to those in his health data bank, and reported that Quintus' injuries were so severe that he would die within the next few minutes. Only his silver suit had kept him alive this long. Quintus looked into Jorda's eyes and asked for one last favour - that the surviving soldiers should carry him outside so that he could see his home planet for the last time.

Quintus lay in Jorda's arms, his breathing becoming more irregular, as Chromos appeared over the horizon. The planet grew ever larger, and ten minutes later the sky was filled with its breath-taking splendour. Quintus gave one last sigh, and his suit was extinguished. The transcopter landed quietly as Jorda screamed his anguish into the barren wasteland.

**(Extracts from the Journal of Neokatai Decras)**
Saved…. mine at the Lava Sea is operational, so we can now

supply ourselves. Striger has re-programmed the station so it is now working for us. There is a factory near the station…. safeguarded our supplies. Troops are now on the shore of the Lava Sea. TITAN Transporters are being adapted to carry out decoy manoeuvres, and the WHALEs salvaged from Ark 2 are ready to cross the Sea. Now we have a supply of energy crystals, Alexmandarin has slowed the pace down a bit.

During the night, some PIRATE bombers tried a surprise attack, but our anti-aircraft defences destroyed them. Decras has ordered more fighters to be built, and the factory is producing 10 a day.

The Transporters set off this morning. As we planned, there was only light defence. Skynet seems to be swallowing the bait, while we are crossing further to the north with the WHALEs. Skynet attacked the Transporters with massive forces, and then, at the height of the attack, we sent our reserves in. That turned the tables! We completely destroyed the enemy, and had the sky to ourselves. Our WHALEs landed on the opposite shore under heavy fire, but because we had the air supremacy, the losses on the ground were only slight. My men and I had to sit in the ZEUS, twiddling our thumbs. Damn!!!

At last, we were ordered into action to set up a bridgehead. We were in action all night - I destroyed at least 6 DEMONs and blew up a PYTHON with a light spear.

In the early hours, Skynet tried to drive us back into the Lava Sea. They broke through our central section, and it took vicious hand-to-hand combat to drive them out. The landing strip has been "christened" - now Transporters are landing with supplies from the factory every hour. We can replace our material losses, but you can't replace the dead men…. We have lost 12% of our forces.

Found a headquarters and a factory to the north of our bridgehead. We captured the factory and Striger's men got it working again. We have now extended our bridgehead as far as the factory, making a semi-circle 11 miles across. Tomorrow our tank units will set out with the Sappers. Alexmandarin has set up his command centre in the headquarters building. Thanks to the mine and the two factories, our energy problem is solved for the time being - now we can advance into the heart of the Skynet base…

### Alexmandarin

He returned from the hill where the dead Sappers and Technicians had been buried in a short ceremony. The dead men would live on in the minds of the survivors.

He entered the ruined building which now served as his headquarters, passing the guards at the entrance. In the command centre he saw Yanga at his console. Alexmandarin leaned over the console and studied the map, then turned and looked out of the window.

"I feel terrible - thirty men lost. It could have been you or me - but instead, we're still on the treadmill, waiting for it all to end. I don't know what the point is any more. Our planet is doomed, and so are we. The factories and the mine are all well and good, but it's not over yet. We need a spaceship to get us off this heap of rock, so we can go back and fight on our home planet. We've got to fight and win here, just so we can carry on fighting somewhere else. That's all I've done all my life - all I can remember from my childhood is hunger and fighting!"

He shook his head, and his face seemed suddenly old. Yanga looked at him closely, searching for a sign that would mean danger for all of them, a sign that Alexmandarin was cracking up

and would not be capable of commanding the troops; but all he saw was a profound sadness and a certain feeling of disgust. He relaxed.

It was true, things had gone wrong, but the situation was not hopeless. There was a light at the end of the tunnel. All he wanted to do was defeat Skynet here and get off moon EIGHT so they could get back to Chromos and help the people there.
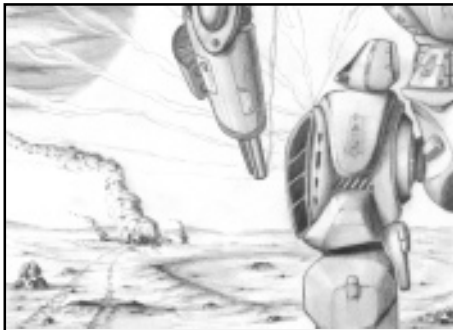


"Go and rest for a while, Dakatai." His voice was soft and soothing, and Alexmandarin was tempted to follow his advice. Go on, rest, said a voice in his head, you've done enough, let someone else pick up the pieces.

Alexmandarin reached into his pocket, took out some tablets and swallowed them. His weariness lifted and he began to concentrate on the next step. So much to do, so little time left.

## Chapter 4
## The empty desert

**(Extracts from the Journal of Neokatai Decras)**

We've been heading south-west for four days now, travelling through a monotonous, featureless landscape. The Dakatai decided to stay at the bridgehead with Katai Yanga, and put me in charge of the ZEUS. There doesn't seem to be much of Skynet's airforce left, and we haven't been bothered much. Every morning our fighters take off from the bridgehead, and the Operator hands

over control to my Operator. It never stops. I spend hours on end at the command post with only one thought in my head - "Onwards, onwards!!!"

On board the ZEUS, half the men are on duty while the other half sleep. We're fortunate here, but the morale of the Sappers, crammed into the PYTHON, is at rock bottom. They have a short stop every six hours to stretch their limbs and have something to eat, then they set off again. Some of them have complained to their officers, the others are getting on with their work bitterly. The fighter pilots and tank commanders are doing marvellous work, circling us to draw Skynet's fire away from us in case they attack. Their morale is absolutely first-class, unlike the troops in the battle vehicles. Hopti, Dakatai Alexmandarin's orderly, is my second-in-command. He's a strange fellow, with a rather crude sense of humour, but he is excellent at his job. We manage to get along all right on the whole.

Our scouts estimate that we will be in the centre of the desert by tomorrow. Beyond that lies a range of mountains -and that is where our destination lies.

### Alexmandarin

The Daktai lay on his bunk, breathing regularly and dreaming. Silently the door opened and Yanga's shadow fell across the room. Noiselessly he moved across to the bed and sat down on a stool next to it. He looked at Alexmandarin's face and wished, not for the first time, that he could see into his mind. He wanted to read his thoughts to find out what the dark shadows were which haunted him. The stool creaked, but Alexmandarin's sleep was too deep to be disturbed by the noise. He activated the intercom in his ear and listened to the voices of the pilots, on lonely watch far to the north. Someone reported the position and status of his

unit. Routine messages. His thoughts turned to Decras, his former Commander and second-in-command, who was now trying to put out the flames which he himself had deliberately kindled.

**(Extracts from the Journal of Neokatai Decras)**
**First day of battle...**
**8:00**

We came across a patrol of several BUSTER scouts and destroyed them before Skynet had a chance to react. They have now located our position and they will probably attack us in the next few hours. I've put the men on red alert, and have notified Alexmandarin. The Dakatai has only had the reinforcements ready since this morning, and is sending them off immediately. For the moment I have to fend for myself. To the south-west the mountain range is visible; we should be in the foothills in one day's time.

**11:00**

Some CONDOR units tried to disperse our group, but they were repulsed by our BLITZ anti-aircraft tanks. We only sustained light losses. I have re-grouped the Sappers to act as a rearguard, so I can use them as reserve troops if necessary.

**13:00**

Our group came under heavy fire, and I was forced to disperse the men so that they would not make such easy targets. Our PIRATE fighter bombers put the enemy artillery out of action.

**16:00**

The vanguard found a road running east to west. Some of the men followed the road to the east and found two more mines. I have informed the Dakatai about the situation.

Alexmandarin ordered me to secure the road at the point where we had crossed it and wait for reinforcements. I am not to try to capture the mines until the reinforcements get here.

**18:00**

I have dispatched some Sappers with PYTHON tanks to the west to advance along the road as far as the mountains. They should reach their destination by midnight Chromos time.

**23:00**

The Sappers have dug trenches along the road and laid mines over a wide area. The rocket launchers and our light artillery will be in position by dawn. For safety, we have buried the ZEUS up to its antennae.

**Second day of battle**
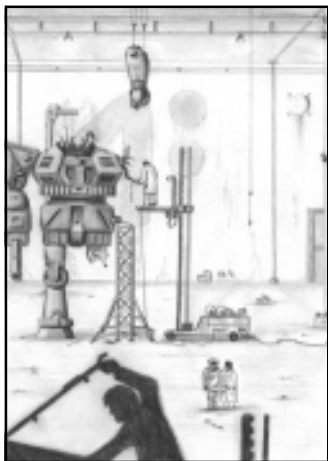


**5:00**

Hopti was on guard duty last night, so I was able to get six hours unbroken sleep for the first time for days. Was rudely awoken by the orderly - several SCORPION tanks were trying to break through our defences. We were well hidden in our positions, so we were able to beat off the attack without suffering significant losses. A MAM-MUT group tried to escape to the east - the tanks were probably accompanying it. I sent the COBRA fighters off to follow them.

**6:00**

The COBRAs have returned. Their pilots report that the MAMMUTs tried to escape to the mine, but all eight of them were

destroyed. However, during the night Skynet did manage to secure the aldinium mines. The fighters came under heavy bombardment and had to fly low over the ground to avoid being shot down. One COBRA was hit and had to make an emergency landing.

**8:00**

The reinforcements have set off and will be brought here tomorrow evening in TITAN Transporters. I have ordered the emplacements to be extended and told the men to dig in deeper.

**9:00**

Skynet has tried to break through again to get a transport convoy through to his headquarters. This time, twenty BLADE tanks attacked us. They got through to our first line of guns but our concentrated fire wiped them out. We sustained medium losses - several tanks and three guns are out of action. We will wait one more day.

**11:00**

A massive attack force is approaching from the west; we can make out several combined units. I have ordered our fighters to take off.

**13:30**

The attack on our positions lasted almost two and a half hours. Our circle, about a mile wide, was breached - overrun, in fact - at several points. The first attack came from the south, and we came under heavy bombardment as the enemy tried to destroy my tanks. The attack lasted for half an hour. At the same time, Skynet launched a combined attack from the east and west with heavy BLADE tanks, trying to break through our first line of guns. When I saw that the biggest concentration of forces was in the east, I re-directed our air power there. As I expected, the attack was soon stopped. Burned-out tanks blocked the road, and the

advancing

DEMON R-1b infantry was forced to drive through our gun fire without proper cover. A few managed to break through our positions, but they were wiped out by our troops in close combat, and we were able to secure the positions.

The situation was quite different in the west. Skynet attempted to wipe out our positions by a combination of rocket and artillery fire, and after an hour of constant bombardment there were gaps at many points of our defences, which Skynet took advantage of. The BLADE tanks were supported by PIRATE ground combat planes, and broke through the outer edges of our positions, forming a corridor through which the infantry could advance. We
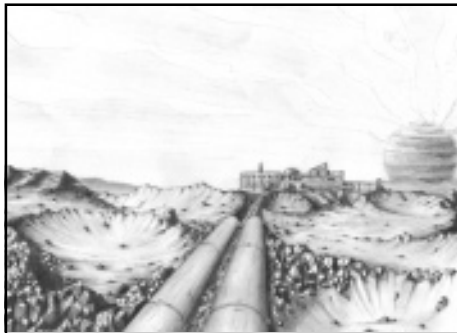


threw all the reinforcements we had at the Skynet forces, and sustained very heavy losses, but at least we were able to prevent the enemy from advancing any further. The Skynet infantry made two attempts to break through our ring of defences, but they were repulsed by our soldiers, who fought heroically. Two groups under Jorda's command fought their way to the SCORPION tanks and wiped them out - but only eight men out of the sixty survived. Neokatai Jorda was among the dead. This heroic action was the deciding factor in the battle in the west. While our DEMON infantry mopped up the area, the Sappers set up new LIGHT artillery and FLAME rocket launchers and repaired the damaged ROCKY bunkers and pathways. Some of the damaged BLADE tanks were brought to the rear and are being repaired and re-programmed. A grenade pierced the armour

plating at the front of our ZEUS, killing six Operators and destroying some of the communications equip-ment. Some of our troops were cut off at the front, and we lost contact with them for a few minutes - but that was long enough for them to be massacred.



### 15:00

Our front line has been repaired again, thanks to the air forces who came to our aid from the bridge-head. In the past four hours we have lost almost a third of our units; one more attack like that, and I won't be able to attack the Skynet battle module. There is intermittent bombardment from the south. I hope Skynet needs crystals urgently and we will manage to stop them from breaking through.

### 16:00

Our First Sapper Battalion has suffered very heavy losses -only half the men are still capable of fighting, the other half is either wounded, dead or missing in action.

### 18:30

The TITAN Transporters have landed, bringing reinforcements and supplies. Our wounded were flown out on one of the TITANs under heavy fighter escort. Now I'm back to full strength I have decided to capture the mines immediately. I will send a combined force of tanks and infantry to the aldinium mines with heavy PIRATE cover.

### 23:00

We have captured the mines. The PIRATEs blew a corridor through the enemy's defensive positions and put his light spear

batteries out of action. Then our heavy infantry moved into the corridor, supported by the BLADE tanks we had captured, and fought their way through to the main buildings. We blew the building open with a mine attached to one of the tanks, and then had to kill the Skynet troops one by one. I consider that the loss of Mine 1 was worthwhile, although Alexmandarin cursed me over the intercom for blowing it up. But it's better for one mine to be destroyed than not to have anything at all, and anyway our Technicians will be able to repair the damage to Mine 1, even though it will take months.

### Third day of battle
### 6:00

Hopti woke me and said the Dakatai wanted to speak to me. It was a short conversation. He ordered me to abandon our position and head towards the mountains, for the last stage of our battle for moon EIGHT. The satellite we launched yesterday was able to pinpoint a strong defensive emplacement before it was destroyed just before it reached the mountains. Skynet seems to be preparing a warm welcome for us. We set off in three hours to attack the enemy.

### 9:00

We are moving along the road, preceded by the tanks and shielded by the fighters and fighter bombers, heading for Skynet's fortifications.

### 10:00

We have left the road and will attempt to attack the enemy on his left flank. Our fighters have reported that they have made contact with the enemy.

### 10:15

The artillery bombardment has started, and some vehicles

have been destroyed. Our light and heavy artillery has dug in and will support our advance.

Have travelled to the front line in a BUSTER and seen the enemy's emplacements two miles ahead of us. Skynet has positioned his defences around a city at the head of a ravine which leads into the mountains. That is where our destination lies.

Skynet has put three rings of defences around the city. I could see light spear batteries, rocket batteries and a large number of tanks dug in. The DEMONs look like ants from this distance, but hour by hour they are extending and strengthening the positions.

**11:00**

We loaded a unit of damaged tanks, hovercraft and other vehicles which were no longer fit for battle with explosives and sent them towards the Skynet emplacements. We watched the scanners to see how Skynet would react. Half of the vehicles were stopped before they reached the first ring of defences, but the other half broke through and blew huge holes in the defences. Our heavy infantry followed the tanks and with the help of our fighters we were able to set up camp among the burned-out tanks by 17:00. We repulsed three Skynet counter-attacks. We are now three miles from the city, one mile away from the second ring of defences.

**19:00**

Have ordered an elite paratroop unit to prepare for a night drop. They are to enter the city and find the Headquarters, then our bombers will take care of the rest.

The paratroops have landed all over the city. On the return flight, the Transporter was brought down by rockets. The troops fought their way through the city, detonating buildings and starting fires, until they were wiped out. No sign of the Headquarters - perhaps it is underground?
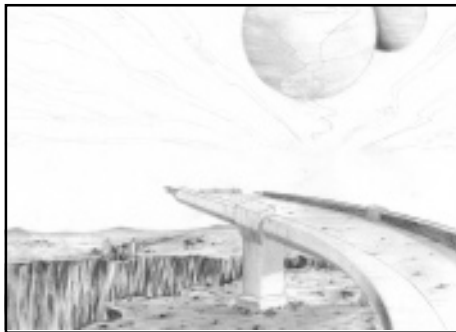
**Fourth day of battle**
**6:00**

Our landing strip is ready, and reinforcements and vehicles have arrived from our bridgehead in the north, on the shore of the Lava Sea. As our landing strip is within the range of our artillery, our losses were only slight.

**7:00**

Have informed Alex-mandarin of yester-day's events, and have



explained my plan to him. The Dakatai agrees with the plan.

Striger is flying back to the crater to make preparations for my plan.

**8:00**

During the night, the Sappers dug an underground passage up to the second ring of defences. They exploded a mine underground which put the defences out of action, and I ordered all our tank units to advance and break through the ring; but our tanks had no sooner reached the emplacements when the enemy unleashed a surprise attack. Skynet had hidden tank units in the no man's land between the emplacements, and they attacked our units from the rear, while other units broke through the defensive line we had captured and tried to reach our command vehicle. While our men were trying to fight off the surprise attack from the rear, Skynet deployed a troop of elite infantry near our ZEUS, and we didn't notice until it was too late. I would have been killed myself if Hopti hadn't had the presence of mind to activate my force field

sphere just as the atomic grenade came flying through the bulkhead. I just had time to activate the emergency MILLOP console and turn it to automatic before I lost consciousness.

**12:00**

I have recovered consciousness and am ashamed that I am still alive. My army has been defeated, and I, its General, am still living. Alexmandarin saw that I had failed, and ordered the remaining troops to join the battle for the city. My tanks were wiped out and the troops were driven out of the first ring of defences. One of the Sappers managed to fight his way through to my sphere with some of his men, opened it with the Override Code and rescued the most important thing, the MILLOP console. Although he was not used to using the console, miraculously he managed to assemble our men at our rear position and re-group them. He rescued me, too, when I was unconscious.

Yanga put my plan into action at once, and Ark 3 took off from the crater, heading for the turmoil of battle. While our artillery kept the enemy pinned down in front of our emplacements, the Sapper managed to collect our pilots together to carry out a counter attack, which gave us a short breathing space.

The Ark finally decided the battle; we watched it appear over the horizon firing with all its guns, and scattering the enemy troops. As it headed towards the city, it was hit by missiles and crashed. The explosion as it hit the ground was terrible, and set off a chain of explosions which raced through the entire city, turning into a sheet of flame. After that, we met with no more resistance from Skynet.

**14:00**

I have the statistics of our losses here before me. They are dreadful; 75% of our men and materials have been lost, and only 35 of the Sappers are still alive - the rest are either dead or

missing. I hang my head in shame. Strangely enough, the men do not blame me, but I know I am to blame, and cannot live with the shame. This evening, Alexmandarin and Yanga are coming to discuss what we should do next.

15:00

A reconnaissance plane has discovered a space port hidden in the mountains to the north of the city, with three spaceships. I have sent the Technicians to investigate.

16:00

I cannot feel happy. One of the space ships is operational, and we could use it to fly home. My heart is heavy with sorrow, but I do not have the courage to use the pistol which is in my lap.

17:00

I have reached a decision - it is the only solution. I am going to end it all.

May my wife forgive me....

# Epilogue
## The Abyss

He went out alone into the night and left our positions without being seen. He took off his silver suit, picked up his STONER gun and took a mine with him in a gravcarrier. He made his way through the burning city and entered the ravine, looking for the Skynet module.

The Daktai and I arrived late in the evening, by which time Decras had four hours start on us. I took six men and set off after him. We crossed the city and soon reached the ravine. It was not difficult to follow Decras' track, for every few metres we found DEMON robots which he had destroyed. We found a supply corridor which had been blown open, and entered it, following the shaft deeper and deeper into the mountain.

We passed through a damaged ventilation shaft and found ourselves in a huge hall. In the middle of the hall was a cube whose sides were 10 metres long. There was a strong smell of ozone. Suddenly, we heard a groan which seemed to come from the cube. We saw that the left side of the cube was completely destroyed - the mine had pierced the Durexcrete and blown the controls to pieces. Skynet's control module had been destroyed.

The groaning grew louder. We walked to the other side of the cube, and what we saw there made the blood freeze in our veins.

A nightmarish scene met our eyes. Before us stood an Endo Battle Skeleton, two metres tall. Two arms hung on each side,

one holding tools and the other a weapons pod. Its body was covered with huge spikes.

Decras was kneeling on the ground, while the creature towered over him. He was covered in blood. A knife flicked out of the weapons pod with supernatural speed. One of the soldiers opened fire with a light spear, making the creature stagger. Decras collapsed. Now we all opened fire on the Endo skeleton, and the creature fell to the ground. The weapon pods opened, and two mini-cannons fired at us.

We dived for cover behind the cube. A lucky shot from me hit
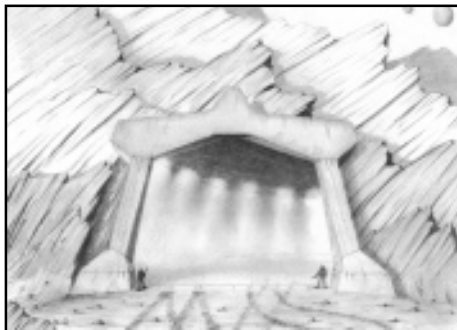


the Endo skeleton, ripping off its left weapons arm. A hidden door opened in the wall behind the creature, and the machine hurtled to-wards it. One of our grenades hit the machine in the back, the explosion hurling the creature into the opening. The door closed behind it and, try as we might, we could not open it.

As Decras lay dying, he confessed to me. The tragic thing about the whole story is that Decras died with the shame of a double failure upon him - for the machine which had escaped from us was in fact the Skynet command module. It escaped to a small space ship and took off from moon EIGHT, to report to its Big Brother, while we were left behind among the ruins to prepare to return home. But that is another story....