

Monty's Escapade 2

The Curse Below

Copyright © 2025 T.J. van Someren

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise—without the prior written permission of the author.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and events are either products of the author's imagination or used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

This novel is part of the World of Durn franchise. All characters, settings, and story elements are original creations of T.J. van Someren. World of Durn is a copyrighted universe intended for expansion into novels, illustrations, games, and other media.

First Edition

ISBN: 9789465315249

Cover design and illustrations by T.J. van Someren

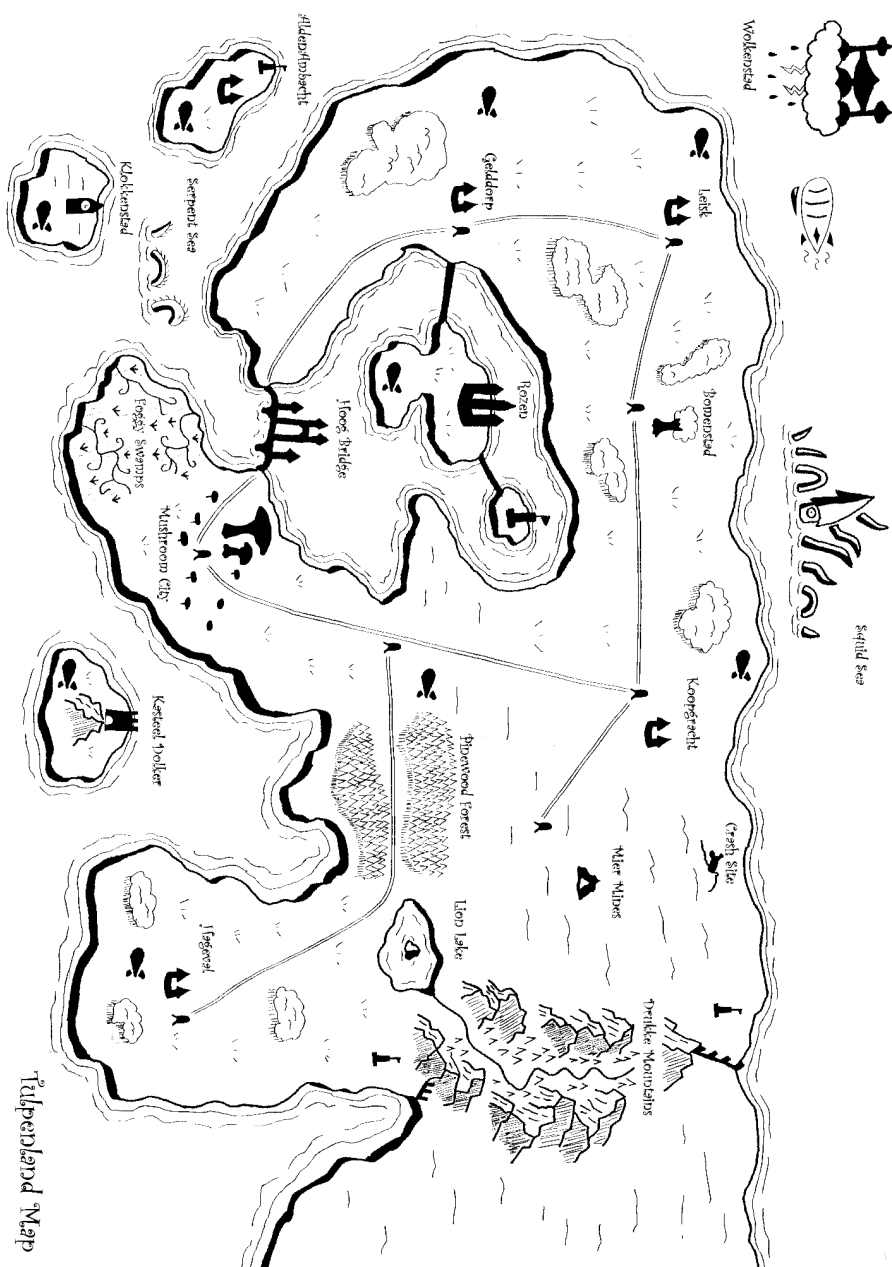
Published in The Netherlands

Table of Contents

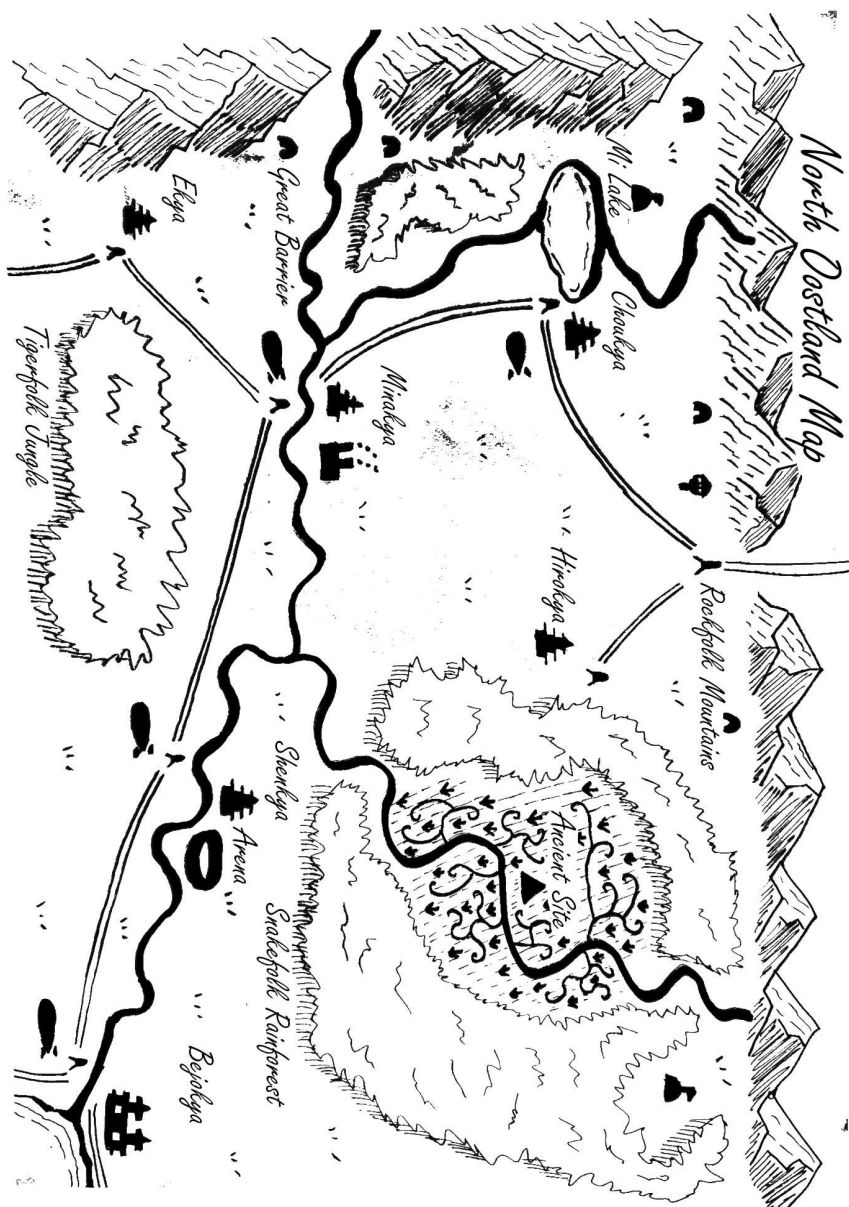
Author's Note	4
Tulpenland Map	5
Rolland Map	6
North Oostland Map	7
South Oostland Map	8
East Oostland Map	9
The Toxic Proposal	10
Whispers in the Shadows	45
Tangled Webs of Interests	66
Operation Crownfall	79
Echoes of Global Scheming	87
Forges of War	110
Coils of Defiant Vines	121
Tempest of Shattered Skies	127
Dominion Over Ruined Realms	142
Durn World Map	157
About The Author	158

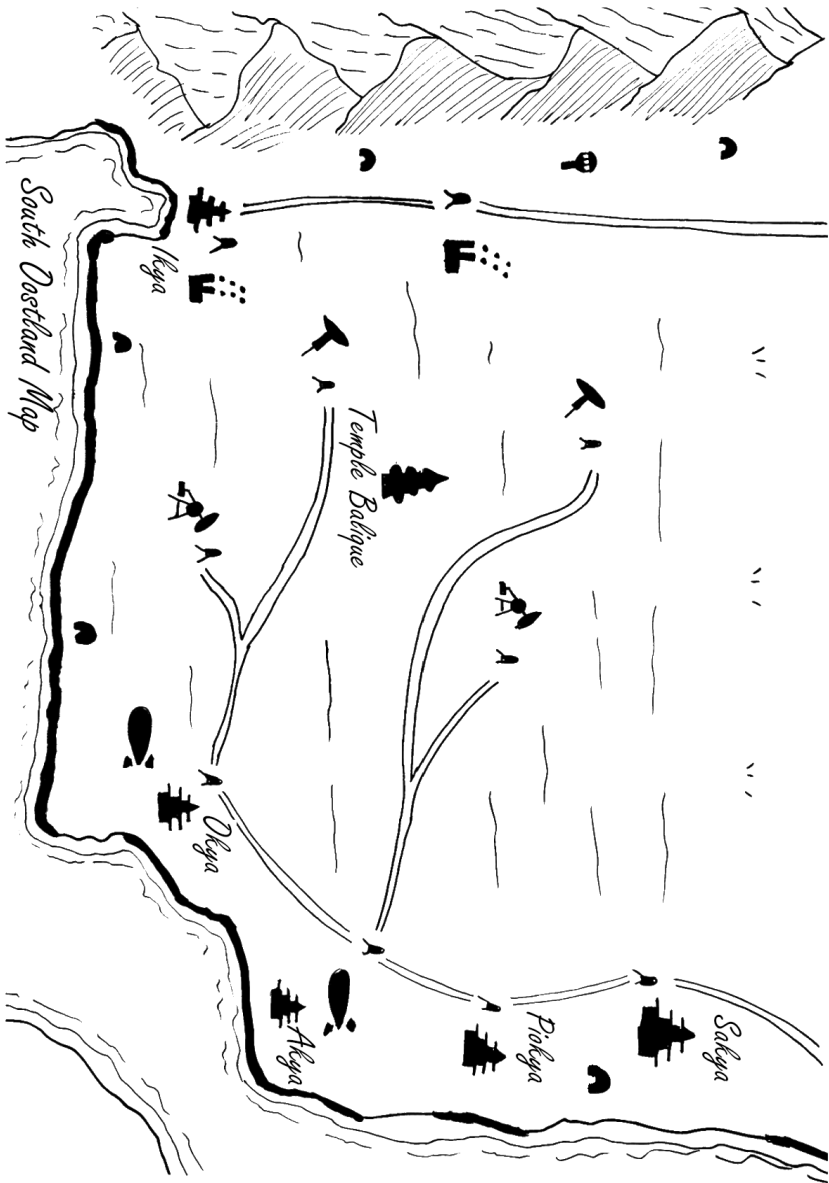
Author's Note

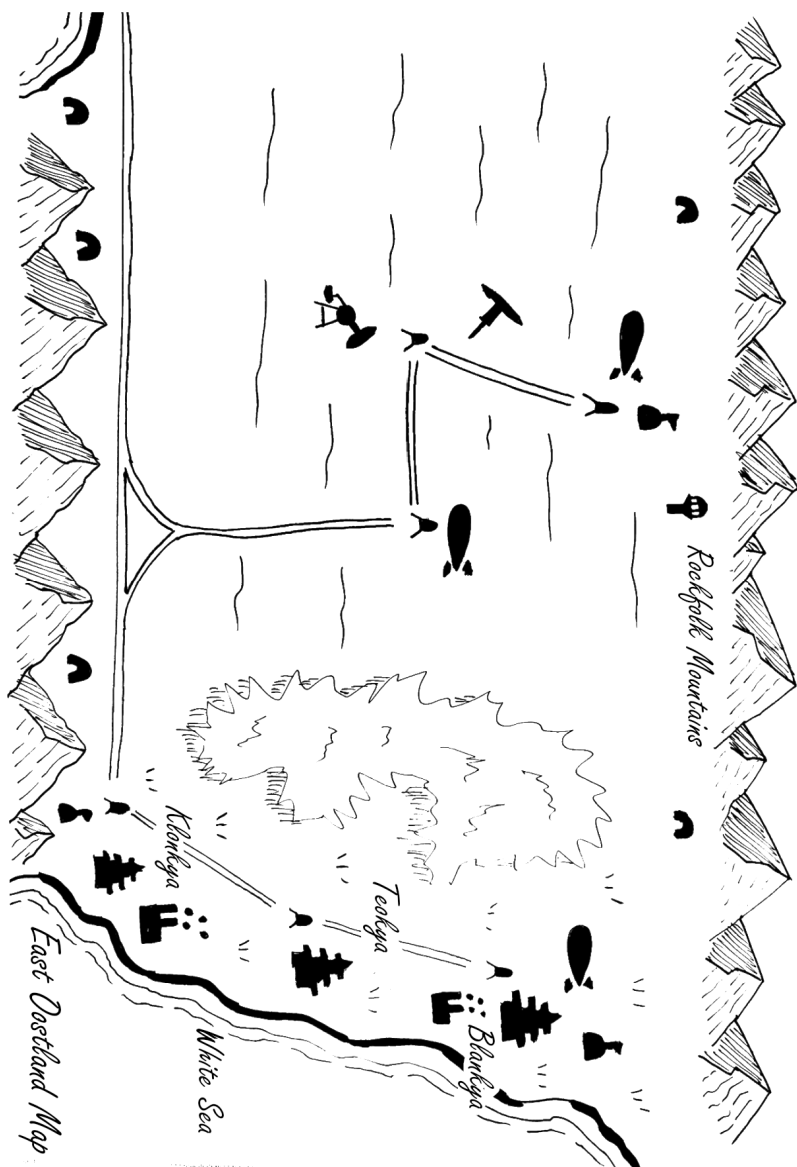
This second book began taking shape in July 2025, after two months of reflection and time at home. It continues the story of Monty, carrying forward the core elements established in the first book—the dieselpunk world, the layered history, and the social struggles—but now infused with a fresh blend of mystery and science fiction. Despite these new flavors, it remains firmly grounded in the world the first book built, expanding its scope while staying true to its roots.











The Toxic Proposal

For a month, Monty, Molezart, and Dug had held Wolkenstad, the gleaming, floating city of Tulpenland, a marvel of engineering suspended among the clouds, barely two decades old. From the edge of its shimmering platform, they gazed out as the horizon darkened with the ominous hum of engines. Molezart, the elder mole with silvered whiskers and a voice steeped in hard-earned wisdom, squinted at the approaching shadows. “The Tulpenland Hemelmacht fleet hovers beyond our floating city,” he said, his tone heavy with unease. “How can we protect this city from their wrath? Surely they wouldn’t hurt their own populace to retake it?” Monty’s paws gripped the polished railing, his heart pounding as the sleek airships loomed closer, their silhouettes like vultures circling a fragile dream. What did Tulpenland seek—submission, or a darker design veiled in the clouds?

Within the soaring halls of Rozen’s Palace of Governance, where tapestries of tulip fields shimmered under torchlight, Foreign Manager Cecilia Verona returned from Oostland, her expression a mask of calculated triumph. She faced her brother, Cassilius Verona, the Rijksdirecteur, who sat enthroned at the council’s ebony table. “I’ve secured a deal with Tesimundo Minagu, the Ashi-Gar Khan,” she announced, her voice sharp as a blade. “Oostland will take sixty thousand molefolk off our hands for their labor camps.”

Cassilius’s eyes gleamed with ruthless satisfaction, his fingers drumming the table. “Well done, sister. We keep trade flowing with Oostland, pocket their coin, and rid ourselves of those vermin. Better yet, this clears the path to retake Wolkenstad for Amari. She’ll have her shipyards humming with warships once more, and our skies will

bristle with power.”

Cassilius rose from his throne-like seat. He moved to the high windows, where the moon’s glow painted the tulip fields in ghostly hues. His voice, when it came, was soft, but laced with dangerous calculation.

“Monty will rebel again. He always does. And this time, it won’t be here — it will be in Rolland.”

Cecilia raised an eyebrow. “Rolland? The Ashi-Gar just finished chaining the rockfolk to their fuel refineries and crystal extraction sites. They’ll have no patience for a second front.”

Cassilius’s lips curved into something colder than a smile. “Precisely.”

He turned, hands clasped behind his back.

“Tesimundo Minagu thinks he’s clever, using our unwanted to fuel his empire’s new provinces. But Rolland is volatile. The soil rejects foreign boots. The rockfolk may be shackled, but they remember the weight of their fists and the sound of cave-horns. All it takes is Monty’s spark. A whisper. A fire in a single barracks.”

Cecilia exhaled, seeing the shape of it now — the broader game, as her brother always played it.

“If Monty stirs up rebellion in Rolland,” she said slowly, “Oostland will be too busy bleeding itself to keep an eye on their borders.

Cassilius’s eyes gleamed.

“Exactly.”

Back in Wolkenstad, Monty, Molezart, and Dug slipped through the broken iron gates of the telegraph spire. The wind howled through shattered windows, but inside the chamber, the voice-horn still thrummed with faint power. Monty turned the brass dials, the runes flickering. He cleared his throat.

“To the fleet overhead — this is Monty of the Molefolk. We want peace. No war, no blood. We only ask for our

own place beneath the sky. Leave us be.”

A moment passed. Then the horn crackled, distorting before steadying into a clipped, imperious voice.

“This is Vice Admiral Leopold Würger of the *Hammer of Resolve*. We have an alternative.”

The three molefolk leaned in as Würger continued:

“You will be granted the *Passenger Princess*, a luxury airship once belonging to the Verona Family. She can carry sixty thousand souls in comfort and warmth. We will escort you to the Country of Rolland.”

Molezart blinked. “Rolland? But that’s—”

“—Where you will be delivered into honorable servitude under the Ashi-Gar Khanate,” the Vice Admiral finished.

“Refuse, and Wolkenstad will suffer a cleansing. Our battlecruiser is fitted with venomous gas shells — the likes of which this city has never endured.”

Monty reeled, his hand tightening on the horn. “There are still *humans* in this city! You’d sacrifice your own kind?!”

A pause — then Würger’s voice came, colder than winter steel.

“They are patricians, yes. Heirs of merchant dynasties and floating city estates. But their holdings will not be wasted. Lady Amari of the Lucht factories will assume their assets. The realm profits, with or without their breath.”

Dug stepped back, his fur bristling.

“That’s not a deal. That’s a coffin dressed in silk.”

Monty stared out the shattered window at the looming silhouette of the battlecruiser. The skies had never felt so narrow.

In the shadowed chamber of Wolkenstad’s telegraph spire, Monty, Molezart, and Dug huddled around the flickering voice-horn, its brass dials casting faint glimmers on their tense faces. The wind howled through the shattered windows, carrying the distant thrum of the Hemelmacht fleet. Monty’s claws tapped nervously against the console, his voice low but resolute. “We’ve no choice. We take their

deal.”

Molezart’s silvered whiskers twitched, his eyes narrowing with doubt. “Bluffing, perhaps? Würger wouldn’t gas his own people, would he? Patricians, merchant heirs—surely they’re too valuable to Tulpenland’s coffers.”

Dug’s fur bristled, his voice a rough growl. “I wouldn’t bet our lives on his mercy. We don’t test that kind of threat. We agree, and we move.”

Monty nodded, his decision settling like a stone in his chest. “It’s done, then. I’ll tell him.” He leaned into the voice-horn, turning the dials until the runes glowed faintly. “This is Monty. We accept your terms.”

Aboard the *Hammer of Resolve*, Vice Admiral Leopold Würger stood on the battlecruiser’s bridge, his gloved hands clasped behind his back as the horizon burned with the glow of Wolkenstad’s glass spires. The voice-horn crackled, delivering Monty’s surrender. Würger’s lips curled into a thin, satisfied smile. “You’ve chosen wisely,” he replied, his voice clipped and imperious. “The *Passenger Princess* will descend to Wolkenstad’s airfield shortly. Prepare your people.”

In Wolkenstad, Monty, Molezart, and Dug wasted no time. They scrambled through the city’s gleaming avenues, rallying the sixty thousand molefolk. At the central broadcast tower, Monty seized the radio, his voice steady despite the weight in his heart. “Brothers,” he began, the words echoing across the city’s glass domes and steel walkways, “Tulpenland’s fleet offers us passage to Rolland aboard the *Passenger Princess*. It’s a hard choice, but it’s life—our lives. Gather at the airfield. We leave together.” Within hours, the molefolk converged on Wolkenstad’s vast airfield, a sea of fur and wary eyes under the flickering gaslights. Above, the *Passenger Princess* descended through the clouds, its opulent hull gleaming like polished ivory, a luxurious airship once the pride of the Verona

family. Its shadow fell over the crowd, promising refuge—or a silken cage.

As the molefolk streamed aboard the *Passenger Princess*, they crossed the threshold from Wolkenstad's windswept airfield into a world of opulence that seemed to mock their plight. The airship's interior unfolded in breathtaking splendor: vast chambers adorned with velvet drapes and golden chandeliers, a grand dining hall with tables set for feasts never to be served, gaming parlors with polished poker tables gleaming under soft lamplight, and a shimmering swimming pool reflecting the glow of ornate sconces. Kitchens stood stocked yet silent, their hearths cold. The ship was a hollow palace, its lavish halls echoing with absence—no human footfalls, no trace of the Verona family's once-lively retinue.

At the airship's bridge, a human pilot, clad in a crisp Tulpenland uniform, approached Dug. His face was unreadable as he pressed a ring of ornate brass keys into Dug's paw. "She's yours now," he said curtly, then turned without another word. A sleek *Valk* helicopter hummed into view, its blades slicing the misty air. The pilot and his crew boarded it in silence, the craft lifting off to carry them back to Tulpenland's mainland, leaving the molefolk alone in their gilded vessel.

Below, in the shadowed depths of Wolkenstad's lower levels, where the city's factories and hangars sprawled, the wreckage of the *Expedition of Liberation*—a once-mighty assault carrier—lay in ruin. Its crumpled hull groaned under the weight of its defeat. Hemelmacht helicopters swarmed the site, their engines a menacing drone as they hovered above the mangled steel. Ropes unfurled, and engineers in dark uniforms ziplined down with precise efficiency, their tools glinting as they began assessing the carrier's damage. Blueprints were unrolled, and hushed orders passed between them, their work already laying the

foundation for the ship's restoration—and Tulpenland's next move.

As Dug gripped the wheel of the *Passenger Princess*, the airship's engines thrummed to life, lifting the vessel from Wolkenstad's airfield into the mist-shrouded sky. Flanking it on either side, two Hemelmacht corvettes materialized from the clouds, their sleek, weathered hulls cutting through the air with disciplined precision. These were no grand ships of the line; corvettes were lean, independent warships, built for solitary missions rather than the might of a full fleet. The Hemelmacht had deemed the battlecruiser *Hammer of Resolve* and its seven frigates of the Fleet of Justice—currently moored in Wolkenstad's skies—too vital to spare for a mere escort. Those ships would remain, guarding the city until the shattered *Expedition of Liberation*, the fleet's flagship, was salvaged and restored in the lower hangars.

Dug squinted through the bridge's wide viewport, his claws tightening on the controls as he studied the escort ships.

"Molezart, what are those? Never seen their like before."

Molezart, his silver whiskers catching the dim glow of the console, peered out with eyes clouded by memory.

"Corvettes," he said, his voice heavy with the weight of years. "I toiled on their frames in the Lucht Fabriek, back when Wolkenstad's forges still sang. Only sixty were ever built—smaller, older warships, nimble enough to carry Cheetah jeeps and heavy-lift transport helicopters for ground raids. Barely twenty remain in Tulpenland's service now. The rest were sold off to foreign powers when the newer frigates took over the skies."

The corvettes held their course, silent sentinels guiding the *Passenger Princess* toward Rolland, their presence a quiet reminder of the Hemelmacht's watchful grip.

In the soaring, torchlit halls of Rozen's Palace of Governance, Grand Fleet Admiral Otto Luffsein stood before a massive window overlooking the moonlit tulip

fields. The voice-horn on the ebony council table crackled, carrying the clipped tones of Vice Admiral Leopold Würger. “Sire, the molefolk are en route to Rolland aboard the *Passenger Princess*.”

Otto’s weathered face broke into a rare, approving nod. “Excellent, Würger. Rijksdirecteur Cassilius will be pleased.” He turned, his boots echoing on the polished floor, and gestured to an aide. “Signal the northern ports. The cargo ships from North Newfound are to deliver one hundred thousand antfolk slaves to Wolkenstad’s factories. They’ll breathe life into the forges and begin repairs on the *Expedition of Liberation*.”

The aide hesitated, quill poised over parchment. “One hundred thousand, sire?”

Otto’s eyes glinted with cold ambition. “Indeed. And they’ll do more than mend the assault carrier. They’ll lay the keel for a new strike carrier—smaller, leaner, with fewer guns but designed as a platform for our future. Wolkenstad’s shipyards will forge the RAAF jet fighter, a weapon to redefine the skies. We’ll also import Kraai automaton loyal wingmen from the Sorrow Isles to bolster our carrier strike groups.”

The aide scribbled the orders, the weight of Otto’s vision settling over the room like a gathering storm. Wolkenstad’s factories would hum once more, fueled by chains and ambition, as Tulpenland’s dominion stretched ever skyward.

In the shadowed grandeur of Rozen’s Palace of Governance, Finance Manager Christiane Verona stood before a private telegraph console, its runes glowing faintly as she connected to her brother, Rijksdirecteur Cassilius Verona. Her voice, sharp and precise, carried a note of triumph. “Cassilius, word from the Bellatrix Consortium. Our nephew, Carolus Verona, has been positioned to claim the seat left vacant by Bellatrix’s death in the Mier Mines during the molefolk uprising.”