



Rothilda von Rotortod:

OVERTURNED

III. The attack

3. Ascension

The annunciation

Alfons Heimenross was overwhelmed. The whole large parade ground, which had been called "Wind Square" for quite some time, was filled with the busy whirring of pinwheels. Everyone who had come to celebrate the wind had brought one of the miniature windmills.

It was completely windless that day. But the pinwheels had an autonomous drive and could move under their own power. Could there be, Heimenross asked himself, a more fitting symbol for the inexhaustible, eternally self-renewing source of wind?

With solemn determination he entered the stage. Framed by mock-up rotor blades, it seemed as if it was lifted up by silent propellers.

"The Wind be with you," he exclaimed, arms outstretched, towards the cheering crowd.

"And with your spirit!" it echoed back.

Thousands of arms stretched out towards Heimenross for the wind salute. The sunlight glittered in the wings of the pinwheels. Like a sea of pearls, the sparkle flooded around the golden windmill column that adorned the center of the square.

"Friends! Companions! Comrades in faith!" Heimenross started again. "You all know that today is a great day. Not because it is my birthday – but because with this day, which I have dedicated to the Wind, I want to show all of us whose children we really are. Children of the Wind – that's what we are! We would be nothing without Him and His breath, which gives us the strength to live!"

"Thanks be to the Wind!" it echoed across the square in many-voiced singsong. Heimenross put on a worried face. "Unshakable is, we confess, our covenant with the Wind!" he stressed. "And yet there are still some among us who do not profess the power of the wheel."

Heimenross paused briefly. An indignant murmur went through the crowd. The experienced orator let it swell a little, then raised his voice: "Very truly I tell you: These unbelievers are like graves covered with shining marble slabs. From the outside they seem pure and bright, but inside they are all rotten and putrid! However, their betrayal will not stop us. It is they who will be harmed. They themselves will lose salvation through their betrayal and fall prey to eternal damnation!"

"So be it!" replied the crowd in chorus. "Yes, so it shall be!"

Heimenross let the murmurings on the square die down completely before he talked on. His voice now took on a more conciliatory tone: "But today, in order to let the last darkened souls be enlightened by the glory of the Wind, I have decided to set a sign. A sign I will bear witness to with my own life!"

In response to these words, a group of trombonists took position on both sides of Heimenross. While they sent a clattering fanfare across the square, a starry sky flared up on the large screen behind the speaker's platform. The stars were constantly in motion, as if they were being whirled around by mighty cosmic winds. Only a luminous point in the middle of them did not move from the spot. Gradually it grew bigger and bigger until it could finally be recognised as a spaceship. In the end it took up the entire width of the screen. Like a big alien bird it hovered over the heads of the crowd.

Heimenross took another deep breath. "This is the ferry that will carry me into the heart of the wind," he proclaimed.

Thousands of eyes stared at him in disbelief. No one understood what he wanted to say. And nobody had ever seen a spaceship like the one on the screen, with trembling wings, ready to take off into the cosmic night.

"Yes," affirmed Heimenross, "I will leave the Earth. But you should not feel sorrow for this – on the contrary, may joy fill your hearts! For look, we have long

since planted the pillars of our faith everywhere on our planet. Our bond with the Wind is sealed, nothing can destroy it. So my mission on this planet is fulfilled. But there are still countless regions in the universe that are trapped in total darkness. Regions that know nothing of the Wind's redemptive power. This is where, the Good Wind willing, my journey will take me, so that even the darkest corners of the universe will be enlightened by the power in which our own planet shines."

Restlessness spread among the audience. Here and there some broke out into loud sobs.

Heimenross bent slightly forward. Tenderly, like a mother stroking her child over the head, his fingers touched the edge of the lectern. "Fear not!" he shouted to the crowd. "Even though my body will no longer be present on this planet, I will still be among you."

An assistant in a long puffy wind robe as worn by the wind servants for some time entered the stage. With his hands he reverently clasped a golden pinwheel. He lowered his head devoutly when he handed it over to Heimenross.

Heimenross solemnly presented the windmill monstrance to the crowd. "Behold!" he proclaimed. "This is the wheel that seals our bond! Whenever it spins, my breath will touch you from its wings. Then take the wings, break them and spread them among yourselves. Thus I will always be in your midst and strengthen your community, so that you may devote all your energies to serving the power of the Wind, from which and for which we all live!"

The sobbing on the square now became louder once again. Some spontaneously fell to their knees and muttered blessings for the great windmill leader; for him, who did not even shy away from the sacrifice of his own life to spread the joyful message of the Wind to the farthest corners of the universe.

Heimenross closed his eyes and raised his arms to the sky. "Venerable Wind!" he exclaimed. "I am ready! Thy will be done on Earth as it is in heaven!"

From a thousand throats the crowd joined in the ritual words: "Truly, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof. But just breathe on me and my soul will be healed."

Heimenross remained in his place in silence for a moment. Moved by his own speech, he wiped a tear from the corner of his eye. Then he stepped off the stage.

Abandonment

A feeling of deep abandonment spread across the square. The crowd writhed in helpless convulsions, like a snake whose head had been cut off.

No one even thought about going home. Everyone stared spellbound at the big screen, which was now the last remaining connection with the beloved leader.

The pictures that could be seen there showed Heimross in the circle of his windmill disciples. Visibly moved, they led their leader to an elevator at the edge of the square. In it they all rushed down to a long tunnel, which they walked through in silence.

At the end of the underground corridor, the group reached a high vaulted cellar. In its center was a slightly elevated structure on which a kind of flight object was placed. Was this perhaps a secret rocket launching pad – the place from which the beloved leader was about to set off into space?

Heimenross now took leave of his disciples and entrusted himself to the care of a number of mechanics and engineers, who immediately engaged him in a lengthy conversation. Apparently they gave him final instructions for the forthcoming flight.

However, the way these men treated Heimenross seemed anything but submissive. Indignation spread in the crowd when the screen showed how disrespectfully the revered leader was received. He was not, as would have been appropriate for the situation, devoutly carried into the spaceship, but rather pushed rudely into the small capsule. And inside they did not carefully fasten his seat belts, but almost nailed him to his seat with brute force.

Despite all that, Heimenross let everything come over him like a prince of peace. Relaxed, he leaned back in his seat after he had received the last safety instructions and waited all alone to be raptured into heaven.

All of a sudden a thunderous tremor rolled across the square. Everyone looked around frightened. It took a while before they could locate the source of the quake. The epicenter was obviously the golden windmill column in the middle of the square. Something weird was going on inside. A loud, roaring sound emanated from it that nobody could assign properly.

But then something completely unexpected happened: The windmill column opened at its upper end. The wings bent apart and formed a small trough that resembled the calyx of a flower. And in this calyx seconds later the space capsule appeared which shortly before the beloved leader had entered.

Ah's and Oh's were echoing across the square. Now the crowd understood: the secret spaceport was right under their feet. And the launch pad went straight through the windmill column!

As soon as the space capsule emerged from the hollow column, it began to rise like a yeast dough. It quickly grew into the spaceship that had been seen on the screen during Heimenross's speech. At the end the wings were flapping apart. Immediately afterwards the countdown for the launch resounded clattering from the loudspeakers.

At the same moment, an increasingly dense darkness began to shade the heads. The retractable roof, which had recently been put in place to protect against the

vagaries of the weather, was raised. No one was to be harmed by the ascension of the windmill leader.

A tense calm lay over the square. All eyes were directed anxiously to the screen, to the unknown flying object, in which the great wind herald was feverishly awaiting his last great departure. Some closed their eyes and folded their hands to unite their thoughts with those of the departing hero. Others tore their eyes wide open, not to miss the one great moment when the incredible would become reality.

And then it happened. Hissing and roaring like a freed predator, the spaceship detached itself from the ramp. As a bright rain of sparks, the spewed fire pelted down onto the closed roof above the square.

The spaceship quickly moved away from the sight of the marvelling crowd. Wistful glances followed it until it was only a small, shining dot among many others on the screen. Not for long, and even this last sparking greeting of the intrepid celestial traveller was swallowed by the light floods of the universe.

Cosmic swarms of mosquitoes

A whirring sound woke the crowd from its torpor: the sliding roof disappeared again. Although the sun could now once again spread its full splendour across the square, the abandonment was even more tangible than before, under the protective cave ceiling. Like a forgotten torch, the windmill column shone in the middle of the square after its peak had closed again. And at the sight of the orphaned speaker's platform, from which the manna of inspiring words had rained down on them just a moment ago, tears welled up in many eyes again.

To comfort the crowd, but also to send a final greeting to the great wind enthusiast, the entire mosaic of wind turbines, erected thanks to the departed one, was once again presented on the screen. Country by country, continent by continent, the patterns drawn into the landscape by the red luminous dots unfolded in front of a night-black sky.

For many, this was the first time that the celestial sense of symmetry that characterised the work of the beloved windmill leader became clear. Nothing was left to chance, everything seemed to follow a superior plan, guided by universal harmony. Didn't the circular arrangement of the wind turbine pillars, which could be observed in all the constructions, testify to an almost supernatural sense of form and structure?

Devoutly the crowd immersed itself into the mystical windmill circles. A mood of quiet contemplation spread across the square.

But then again something unforeseeable happened. A few sparks suddenly appeared on the screen, disturbingly twitching around the harmonious pattern of the windmill pillars. Like a swarm of mosquitoes glittering in the sun, they

approached the light circles, increasing rapidly in size. At the same time, the swarm spread further and further apart. In the end, it had grown into a whole armada of cosmic beacons that stretched almost across the entire width of the sky.

Just as the first ones were seized by a certain inner turmoil, the sirens began to wail. Questioning looks were exchanged, bouncing off each other, falling back into themselves. No one realised what was going on. No one understood anything. No one recognised anything. It was as if the world suddenly spoke to them in a foreign language.

Even the rattling words that now came out of the loudspeakers seemed incomprehensible: "Unidentified flying objects approaching Earth! This is an attack on Earth! I repeat: This is an attack on Earth! Go to the bomb shelters immediately or seek out a safe cellar room! Do not stay outside! Stay calm! All necessary measures for the safety of the population will be taken." Then it started all over again: "Unidentified flying objects ..."

A brief paralysed silence, a last glance at the light circles on the screen, which suddenly took on a completely new, no longer harmonious meaning – then the first screams of horror were heard, followed by hectic movement. A moment later the crowd disintegrated into a thousand individual pieces that quickly scattered in all directions. If the square had not been wide enough to give everyone a chance to escape, mass panic could easily have broken out.

The smile of the space traveller

Shortly afterwards the place was completely deserted. On the screen nothing but an indefinite flicker could be seen. It was not clear whether it came from extraterrestrial warriors or was due to a disturbed camera. All over the floor lay the colourful pinwheels, which had been joyfully lifted into the air a moment before. Some of them, caught in the dynamics of their own drive, were still twitching helplessly across the ground for a while. Then they too surrendered to the general immobility.

Nothing moved. The celestial celebration had given way to a great emptiness. Only one lonely man had remained in the square. Relaxed, he leaned against the golden windmill column. He didn't seem worried at all. It even looked as if a satisfied smile surrounded his lips – though it was a little more pronounced on the left side than on the right.

This man was known on Earth as "Mr Groentraed", managing director of the StarWind company, even if he felt himself to be more like "Thilio". No one suspected that he actually came from a distant planet where he had been leading expeditions to explore foreign worlds until recently.

Why he was in such a good mood, unlike all the others who had stood in the square with him? Perhaps he was thinking of the ruse that had allowed him to get to a spaceship, despite the ban on leaving the planet imposed on him; of his special space travel skills that had enabled him to break through the security cordon of his planet.

Or perhaps he was thinking back to his conversation with Heimenross, the so-called "Mister Energy"; to the messianic glow in his eyes when he had suggested him to extend his wind power mission to other planets – although the enthusiasm of the great windmill leader might have been partly due to the fact that he had not told him about the lack of opportunities to return.

Did he think of how he had advised Heimenross to present his launch into space as a public event, with a screen on which everyone could follow every step he took and even his departure? A screen that – what Heimenross did not need to know – would reveal the true purpose of the venerated wind turbines? A screen on which even spaceships approaching the Earth with hostile intent would be clearly visible?

Or did he sink in a stream of golden curls in his thoughts? Did he indulge in the fragrant crackling they enveloped him in? Was he inebriated by the celestial smoothness of a mysterious little box his fingers were playing with? By the knowledge about the life-giving power of the pills he kept in it? By the dream of all the many years they would give him on this perfectly imperfect, constantly self-reinventing planet, which in its fragility looked like a vase of precious porcelain?

Did he know something that no one but him could suspect: that this story would end well?

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