

Pacing the floor with Koen Arts

Koen Arts (Forest and Nature Conservation Policy researcher) describes our environmental struggles in 50 stories.

In his first book, *Wild Jaar (Wild Year)*, published last year, sociologist Koen Arts talked about his experiment of sleeping outdoors for a full year. But he was a writer long before that. 'I have been writing stories for as long as I can remember,' he says. His latest book, *IJsberen met optimisme (Worrying with optimism)*, contains 50 of his stories. IJsberen translates as 'polar bears', and is also the Dutch verb for pacing the floor restlessly like a caged bear.

The title story is about an imaginary pentathlon between the polar bear (a symbol of climate change) and football player Cristiano Ronaldo, the personification of human prowess, commerce, consumerism and

everything that has contributed to climate change and the melting away of the polar bears' habitat.

We are all familiar with the image of a polar bear stranded on a melting ice floe. Arts: 'That's a harrowing image, but I try to keep on approaching the subject with optimism and a dose of humour. My aim is to illustrate the massive challenges even more sharply. I hope that people will start pacing the floor and worrying a bit more about the topics in my book.'

Absurd

Arts studies the triangle between nature conservation, day-to-day consumption and environmental issues. 'We get served up doom and gloom about the impending destruction of the Earth on a daily basis. And yet for many people, it is still far removed from their own lives. If you don't operate inside the green bubble, what do these issues mean in your daily life?'

The topics Arts writes about range from playing golf with Donald Trump to the joys of sex in nature. The tone is consistently light-hearted, although the story about his fellow philosopher Bas Haring's scepticism about biodiversity is caustic. A few species more or less, who cares? Arts takes this idea to an absurd extreme, conjuring up a world where the only 'species' is the Bas Haring. To find out how that ends, you'll have to read the book. RK



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