

AARDE – earth

INTRO:

VO: This is a podcast about the sea. Because I - Threes Anna - I love that sea. But I'm also worried and sometimes even scared. What actually happens in, and with, and on, and under that water.

Listen.

INTRO: Hello, sea do you hear me. Let me ask you something, are you my friend or my enemy.

Song: Sea are you my friend or enemy.

Swimming, storms, plastic soup, missing, diving, fishing, energy, overfishing, sea level rise, wind farms, transport, the wall of Europe, drowning.

VO: Drowning yes. I had read in the Island newspaper that the beachcomber was finding more and more items of boat refugees on the beach. It is autumn 2023 and I am on the beach. It is storming and raining. Tourists are not there because they don't let their dogs out in this weather. And then I see it lying there, half still in the water, a washed-up rucksack. The waves try to grab it again, that little blue rucksack, but I am faster. All the zips are open, the bag is empty except for one zip, all the way inside, that is still closed. There is some kind of buttoned-up plastic bag inside.

Song: sea

VO: I call Maarten the beachcomber. And two hours later he drives into our yard.

Song: are you my friend?

T: with a van full of stuff from boat refugees, which he is going to take to the beachcomber museum.

Song: or enemy?

T: with a van full of stuff from boat refugees, which he will take to the Beachcomber Museum.

Song: or enemy?

T: this is the first episode in the series SEE. And it's called: EARTH

Maarten: I say you used to find bags on the beach sometimes but I've already got, well I think I'm down to my tenth bag, so to speak. Most of them are empty and some are indeed full. Yes it's a weird one, late last year we had a child's life jacket, then you hope it just belongs to a beachgoer, but. I had this one this week, it had a toothbrush from the Italian army in it and then I picture them coming ashore there in Italy, being handed out a basic kit with a toothbrush and a shaving cream, and soap.

T: do you find a lot of stuff in the bags?

M: so far almost all empty, I am every time, well

T: hey do you have one of those bags too!?

M: bag of brown powder. Well we'll open it inside in a moment. M: yes.

T: yes.

TO INSIDE

VO: first my pouch.

M: it's just pebbles.

T: yes

VO: then Maarten opens his pouch

T: It's actually exactly the same.

M: I thought it was a brown...

T: no it's clay, it's clay.

M: ... drug-like something was.

T: no ya, this is just clay

K: I also think it's loam.

VO: it's loam, says Kees.

K: African soil.

T: this is soil. Ah man this is just soil. From the... Oh this really gives me goosebumps.

M: gosh. Two bags, two bags, one with pebbles and one with some kind of loam. I brought my own soil with me.

T: yes

K: it's just soil.

M: goosebumps from this.

T: yes me too. Yes, terrible

M: huh

K: it's a random piece of soil. Really no nicely picked out at all or anything. Just a handful.

T: no, he picked from the ground

K: and put it in a bag.

T: maybe in front of the door of his house

M: gosh, well

T: well is of course because it has been in the sea for so long, that's why your loam, is wet, has become clay, and this is of course also...

M: hey! Well (sniffs) I dare to smell it now for the first time. (Laughter) Always learned from my grandfather with beachcombing, if you come across weird brown bits, don't smell it.

T+K: laughing

M: (sniffs again) it doesn't smell. It's a...

T: no, it smells like soil.

M: you naturally expect it to be a narcotic or I don't know what.

T: that sea knocked those bags, those backpacks, loose, and those little bags they have in the smallest, with us it was in the smallest compartment of the backpack

M: with me too. That's the first time I've found this

K: find

M: find, all the bags so far, was say one more time some clothes in it or a toothbrush and an iPhone charger. It's been going on since 2021.

App message sounds

M: I'm getting an app from Suse now, another backpack found post 27.

Yes. No it's... It's been like that since Thursday say. Coming from all corners I get messages. And this was lying there on Friday (sigh) morning.

VO: Martin shows me a picture.

M: so first I think, in the dark, dead seal. At least was my

T: yes

K: what's that?

T: a leg.

K: a leg?

M: well, in the end it's just a whole pair of trousers

T: oh a whole pair of trousers

M: with a piece of back

K: did you find it?

M: yes and here sticks out, sticks out his leg. Say

K: sigh

M: you can still see the flesh in it.

K: godsiemine

M: sigh, yes, so I was glad in itself that it wasn't a whole body. And this was, say a shoe, which was found on Sunday. Well you see. There's another foot in there.

VO: then he shows another picture.

M; and here you can't see anything in it. But they say there was another foot in it. And I checked a lot of shoes recently.

T: do you look inside every shoe?

M: well as of today I do. Look at those soles of your feet. That's all worn off. That's all that you think, oh yes there has been a bit, bit of a walk with that already.

K: yes yes yes yes.

M: It's also something you don't know from a sailor's shoe on the beach. Those haven't walked for miles. You used to find the occasional trainer on the beach. But now it's just a whole stream of...

K: I did check if the laces were closed. And they were open.

M: oh!

K: when laces are closed, I don't trust that at all.

M: yes that's a good one though. K: yes. Gosh.

Sing: sea

M: Yes, everyone knows that in the Mediterranean no one looks at it anymore. But when you say that happens here 400 km away, hundreds a day go out of the sea hole.

K: and it has to go wrong. Yes it does get very close if you feel that way.

T: Maarten do you understand why suddenly so many are being found now?

M: you always have that at the end of the summer you get that southern, southern drift, all the material that has hit the water all summer in France comes this way. (Sniff) Well.

Phone goes

M: I'm still with Kees. Yes yes...come over here, just unpacked a bag and just looking at very crazy stuff coming out of this.

T: oh Suse!

M: so come on over to Kees, I'll be here for a while...see you in a bit...hi, hi, hi.

VO: A little later, Suse and Mardik drive onto the grounds. They have found two backpacks.

T: where did you find it?

S: at pole 27 north of the Slufter.

M: oh how awful this feels to feel inside such a bag. Full of sand. And then there are objects among them. Plastic bag. Yes we are interested in plastic for a moment. Tying a bracelet, again I find this so confronting because this kind of personal thing that someone has been making bracelets.

Terrible this.

Bandage drum. Band-aids. Bag of medicine.

T: amoxicillin.

M: toothbrush, toothpaste, charger. Front pockets of the bag are open. So there isn't... Oh yes nail scissors, oh! SIM cards.

S: nail scissors have been lying around

M: nail scissors have been on their way for a while.

T: those sim cards huh,

M: three sim cards. S: yes. That's still in there then. Plasticised card. This bus is going towards an accommodation centre. Bus number 10 to Calais. Guys!

VO: we also take out a wet print that has been folded very neatly

M: this note we're going to open very carefully inside for a moment. But not the little bag with ...

VO: no and also not in the second one which contains about the same as in the first backpack.

T: little do you have with you huh?

S: I was just about to say, that's your whole possession then.

M: this is all you have. S: yes.

T: oh, you have to hold that out.

M: oh those sim cards we'll have to

T: shall we take a look at that inside to see if we can decipher what it all is?

M: gosh!

GET INSIDE

M: sitting three sim cards came out of the bag

Mar: sim cards. But you'll never get anything off of those again of course or are they still dry?

M: all rusty.

VO: after hours on the cold beach, everyone is hungry.

Sound start up mobile

Mar: oh there's something on

M: there's something on it.

T: says you guys the medicine amoxicillin

Mar: yes I think that's an antibacterial thing

VO: I google the word

T: antibiotic

Mar: yes, yes

T: for respiratory, bladder the skin and the heart.

VO: meanwhile, Martin tries to unfold the wet sheet of paper.

M: GPS and then it becomes Arabic. Shall we let it dry first

T: yes dry

M: let it dry before we pull everything apart

T: yes

S: careful as currents generated by moving uh uh uh.

VO: Suse pointed her mobile at the text and read out.

S: ...if you are waiting on the highway put the same uh uh uh

K: what are you doing?

S: google translate.

K: is it translating Arabic!

S: yes. If there is a problem, knock on the walls of the truck

K: truck! This is really smugglers' thing. Yes this is really for smugglers.

S: yes if you unfold it we can read it all the way through. I think.

M: so that's your package you get and bon voyage.

Mar: well

M: here's another one. Another sim card.

T: another one? 5 sim cards!

Mar: but different countries maybe?

M: that's another thing though, what to do with this? There is no body at all that does anything with this. There's nobody here

Mar: no because you've already been in touch with the police about previous finds.

M: I have suddenly become an expert in refugee bags and I don't want that at all. I like much more. I had 2 bottle mail from France and I like that much more. This is always the superlative. I just sat with Threes with goosebumps on my arm when we found out that two bags of earth someone brought from home and now you open that...

T: open it.

M: opens it and you find out darn that's it and now you have here of bonk on the wall of the truck when you think it's...

VO: we are trying to understand what we have found and speculate.

S: we now get a message that welcome to EU you can use the same prices as in UK

K: that's an English sim card so.

S: that's English

K: who then have a sim card for their destination

Mar: well, this is really organised. When you see this like this

S: rebooted?

K: but they're still doing it so.

S: yes those were the ones that were well packed.

K: those other ones were used, those were for Italy and France

M: it would be something.

K: yes it just might.

S: yes I assume so.

VO: we all look at the few items in front of us on the table.

M: so then you have the whole package lying here please

K: yes you can go all over Europe with this. And don't turn left because then you'll end up in Poland.

M: probably they just have their phone with the good SIM card in their pocket.

S: pocket, because of course we didn't find phone either.

Mar: no

M: I always wondered that, why are they so keen to go to England. So what I heard is that in Africa they have that one smuggler has his line running to England and the other has his line running to Germany so whether you want to go to England or not.

Mar: yes where you get in you end up there.

M: You go to England.

VO: and then we make another attempt to unfold the paper.

Mar: oh it keeps breaking down guys. Take care.

T: it has to dry first probably.

Mar: ...yes I would do that because otherwise you will pull it apart. A bit of a shame.

Yeah it's kind of hard to stay off, isn't it?

M: well

T: look solution, my hairdryer!

M+M: yes. Laughter.

Zang: sea are you friend or foe

VO: very carefully I unfold the paper.

T: oh!

M: ach gatverdamme guys.

K; this is quite awful

M; this isn't. Yes, this. We see a refugee boat at sea

K: pictograms how to cross to England makes

M: with waving people in it, neatly drawn, with a motor behind it.

S: yeah like going out dancing with your church congregation for a day.

K: yes this looks cheerful right! And nice and spacious they have it. We saw a boat like this once, wasn't spacious at all. Mutje vol

S: you also see several big ones, here's a little one in between. Let that be a child.

M: everything is described what to do when we are on the water. Human children. Uh. I need rescue.

S: yes you have to learn that in English huh, yes

M: Gosh, I did puzzle with the bottle mail. But this is a superlative.

S: This says. 'DO not travel with a boat without a motor. Stay away from large ships. They make big waves and they can't see you. Never get out of the boat, and do not try to swim. You can call 112 say that I am at sea and I need rescue.'

'I need rescue' is what they actually wrote in English.

T: yes phonetically.

M: yes

S: 'crossing into the UK is very dangerous and this information will save your life.' Not so.

'If you are a victim of torture or trafficking, you must inform the staff member at the detention centre immediately.' Sigh

T: just some pebbles and some sand. And then there's a whole family behind it.

K: all waiting until they were allowed to go to the promised land, England.

S: ai ai ai, what a search for happiness anyway.

Song: sea

M: yes the sea remains my friend, when I see what I still get as presents from the sea. Then surely... I hope the sea is my friend.

OUTRO

VO: According to the missing migrants project, over the past 10 years, nearly 65000 migrants died worldwide in search of a new home. 254 died trying to reach Britain. 23 of these were in the past year. 2 of them were never found. The body parts washed up on Texel, in autumn 2023, have not been identified. And buried on the island. The 2 plastic bags with soil have become part of the exhibition Migrants, at the beachcombing museum in de Koog on Texel.

This podcast is the first in a long series that will deal with the big sea in all its shapes and colours. The plan is to make six episodes a year. So if you subscribe, it will automatically appear in your podcast app. You can also follow me on Instagram. All credits and more information can be found in the show notes.

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