

MIDDLE EARTH IN THE BALANCE

BC

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From an interview with Kees Zoeteman, the Netherlands' deputy director-general for the environment, in the November 19, 1997, issue of the Dutch newspaper Het Parool. In a public-television interview three days earlier, Zoeteman revealed his belief in elves and gnomes. Translated from the Dutch by Rachael Levy.

HET PAROOL: What have the reactions been to your television interview?

KEES ZOETEMAN: Overwhelmingly positive. People were surprised and a little amazed. But I've been trying to tell people it's not just about gnomes; it's about nature spirits, it's about the world of the unseen.

HP: What do you mean?

ZOETEMAN: Gnomes. Dwarves or elves. Tree spirits and "landscape angels." There are countless beings around us that we cannot see, but we can feel them.

HP: What do you feel?

ZOETEMAN: I can feel their warmth in my heart. You can connect with them and feel their energy. Basically, you can communicate.

HP: Do you ask questions if you're worried about something at work?

ZOETEMAN: Of course.

HP: What do these nature spirits look like?

ZOETEMAN: Gnomes are a few decimeters tall. Elves are very small, a few centimeters. A landscape angel is meters tall. It's a glowing being of various colors, and it uses energy to maintain nature's growth processes.

HP: What does this mean to you?

ZOETEMAN: It helps instill a feeling of respect and thanks for nature.

HP: You're really sticking your neck out on this. People will say, "Zoeteman is going crazy."

ZOETEMAN: Yeah, but it is good to call attention to this side of reality. If you open yourself up to this world, it's not crazy; it's enriching. We live in this technical world, in concrete buildings where you have to focus your energy inward in order to endure. The dimension of the supernatural has been lost.

HP: Did you know there is some talk about building a gnome theme park inspired by [the deceased Dutch artist] Rien Poortvliet?

ZOETEMAN: Oh yeah? I didn't know that. Rien Poortvliet never saw a real gnome, but he was able to draw them quite beautifully.