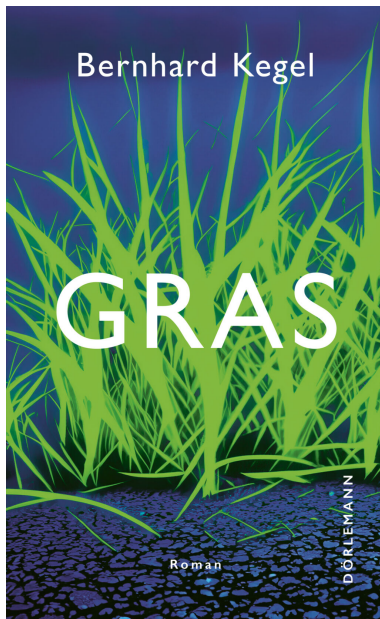




by Bernhard Kegel
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Fiction

Grass *Gras*

review

In Bernhard Kegel's thought-provoking science fiction novel, an unknown grass species sprouts up across Berlin and takes an aggressive hold over the metropolis, proving resistant to all herbicides. 'Grass' paints a catastrophic picture of the consequences of climate change, as nature rebels against centuries of human appropriation.

Nathalie, a postgraduate biology student, notices delicate, almost luminous green stalks of grass poking between the cobblestones of a square in Berlin. Fascinated, she starts to track the grass's unusually fast growth. The square soon resembles an alpine meadow, but the idyll is short-lived as the grass invades neighbouring districts and destroys motorways and pavements.

A race against time begins for Nathalie, her fellow scientists, and the authorities as they try to work out where the grass came from. The grass proves to be an unknown and genetically mysterious species. Conspiracy theories abound, including the idea that the grass was developed by bio-hackers in an illegal lab. After a couple of years, the grass has completely colonised Berlin: the city is unable to function and the authorities are eventually forced to evacuate all residents, hoping in vain that an effective herbicide might be developed that will enable them to regain control.

The story of the grass's growth is told in flashbacks, alternating with

scenes from an apocalyptic present day, where Nathalie lives in hiding in what is now the wilderness of West Berlin, having refused to be evacuated. She has become obsessed with studying the plant and is by turns horrified and awed by nature's attempt to fight back after centuries of human domination. She takes care of a young girl, Marie, whom she finds abandoned in the city, obtaining food and water for them both and protecting them from the wild animals and vicious thugs who hide in the grassland. The plot takes an absurd turn when Nathalie and Marie befriend a baby mammoth – the offspring of two mammoths developed in a lab using DNA from the Siberian permafrost – who has escaped from the zoo during the city's evacuation.

'Grass' is a fine example of climate change science fiction, delicately treading the line between a catastrophic forecast and a portrait of hope for the future. The scenes of panic-buying, conspiracy theories, public protests and international health emergencies are frighteningly reminiscent of Covid-19, but with a climate change twist.

Find out more here: <https://doerlemann.ch/7012>

press quotes

'...you can't shake the feeling that Berlin author Kegel has in fact written a roman a clef about his almost ungovernable home city.'

Tobias Rüther, Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung

Nature fights back against climate change in a gripping sci-fi novel about Berlin's domination by Invicta, an aggressive new species of grass that rips the city apart. Was the grass developed by accident, or by bio-hacker terrorists? A natural mutation or criminal genetic tampering? And how – or should – humans resist nature's return to power?

Eve Mason

about the author



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Bernhard Kegel was born in 1953 in Berlin and studied Chemistry and Biology at the Freie Universität Berlin, gaining his doctorate in 1991. Today he is a dedicated jazz guitarist and a full-time writer. Since the publication of his debut novel, *Wenzels Pilz* ('Wenzel's Mushroom'), in 1993, he has written a wide range of novels and non-fiction works: literary treatments of his specialist subjects that have delighted both experts and non-scientific readers alike. He lives with his family in Brandenburg and Berlin.

Previous works: *Wenzels Pilz*, Piper (1993) *Das Ölschieferskelett*, Ammann (1996) *Die Ameise als Tramp: Von biologischen Invasionen*, Ammann (1999) *Sexy Sons*, Ammann (2001) *Der Rote*, Mare-Buchverlag (2007) *Epigenetik: wie Erfahrungen vererbt werden*, DuMont (2009) *Ein tiefer Fall*, Mare-Buchverlag (2012) *Tiere in der Stadt: Eine Naturgeschichte*, DuMont (2013) *Die Herrscher der Welt: Wie Mikroben unser Leben bestimmen*, DuMont (2015) *Abgrund*, Mare-Buchverlag (2017) *Ausgestorben, um zu bleiben: Dinosaurier und ihre Nachfahren*, DuMont (2019) *Käfer*, Matthes & Seitz (2019) *Die Natur der Zukunft. Tier- und Pflanzenwelt in Zeiten des Klimawandels*, DuMont (2021) *Ausgestorbene Tiere*, DuMont (2021)

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