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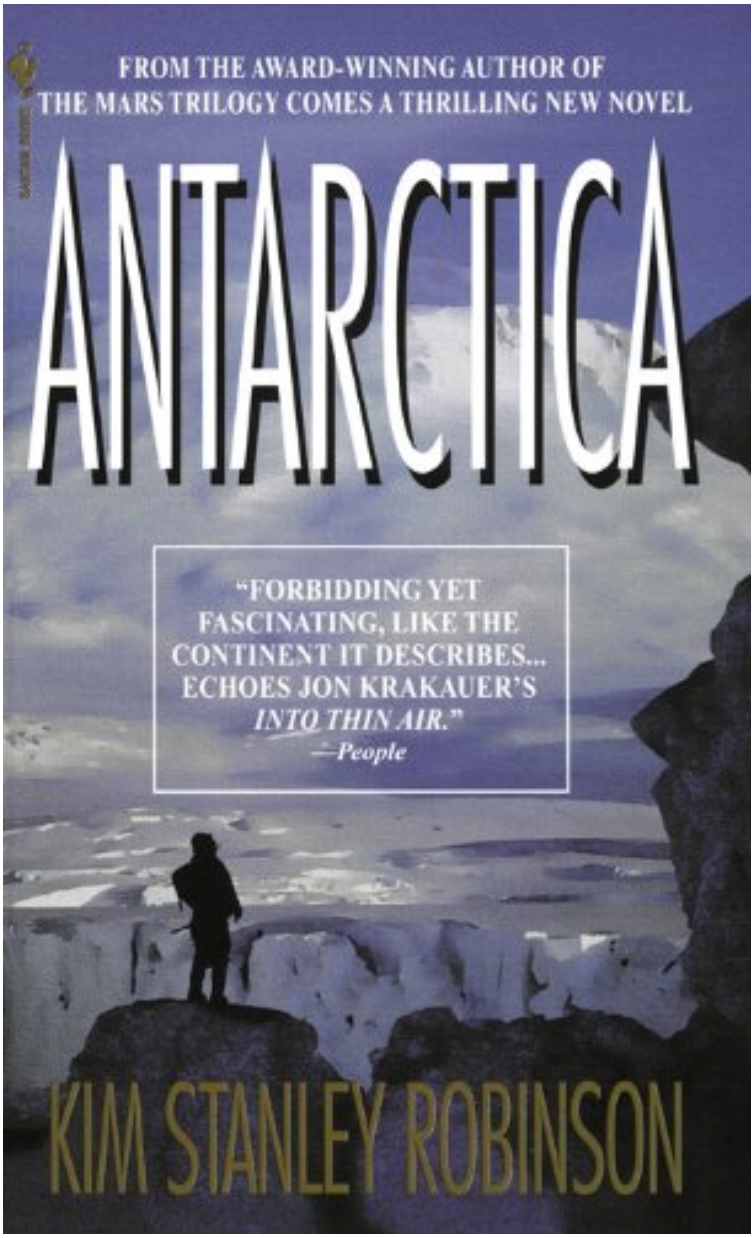
Antarctica: A Novel



Par Kim Stanley Robinson
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(Mobile ebook) Antarctica: A Novel

Par Kim Stanley Robinson : Antarctica: A Novel before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Antarctica: A Novel:

Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurThe award-winning author of the Mars trilogy takes readers to the last pure wilderness on Earth in this powerful and majestic novel. Antarctica may well be the best novel of the best ecological novelist around.Locus It is a stark and inhospitable place, where the landscape itself poses a challenge to survival, yet its strange, silent beauty has long fascinated scientists and adventurers. Now Antarctica faces an uncertain future. The international treaty which protects the continent is about to dissolve, clearing the way for Antarcticas resources to be plundered, its eerie beauty to be savaged. As politicians wrangle over its fate,

major corporations begin probing for its hidden riches. Adventurers come, as they have for more than a century,seeking the wild, untamed land even as they endanger it with their ever-growing numbers. And radical environmentalists carry out a covert campaign of sabotage to reclaim the land from those who would destroy it for profit. All who come here have their own agenda, and all will fight to ensure their vision of the future forthe remote and awe-inspiring world at the South Pole. Praise for Antarctica Forbidding yet fascinating, like the continent it describes . . . echoes Jon Krakauers Into Thin Air.People [Antarctica] should be included in any short-list of books about the frozen continent.... Compelling characters...a rich and dense story...Robinson has succeeded not only in drawing human characters but also in bringing Antarctica to life. Whatever happens in the outer world,Antarcticaboth the book and the continentwill become part of the reader's interior landscape.The Washington Post Book World Theepic of Antarctica. This is the James A. Michener novel of the South Pole. If the meaty one-word title didnt give it away, the writing would. The whole human history of the continent is here.Interzone Antarcticawill take your breath away.Associated Press A gripping tale of adventure on the ice.Publishers Weekly Passionate, informed...vastly entertaining.Kirkus s Robinson writes about geography and geology with the intensity and unhurried attention to detail of a John McPhee.The New York Times Book ExtraitAuthor's NoteDear Reader:When I was researching my Mars novels in the early 1990s, I kept running across references to Antarctica.It was the part of Earth most like Mars, and scientists studying Mars often went to Antarctica to do research.I had read about the classic Antarctic explorers when I was young, and now, reading about it again, my interest was rekindled.And in the acknowledgments of one book, the author said "Thanks to the National Science Foundation for sending me down to Antarctic as part of its Antarctic Artists and Writers' Program."That caught my eye.I made inquiries, and the administrators at NSF told me that the artists and writers they sent south had to be doing art or literature that was specifically about Antarctica.They would not, for instance, send me down there to do research for a book about Mars (I asked).So, I thought, I'm going to have to write a book about Antarctica.I made a proposal; the people at Bantam were agreeable, and NSF selected me for their program in 1994.In October of 1995 I finished Blue Mars, and within two weeks was flying to New Zealand, to wait for an LC-130 Hercules flight to Ross Island, Antarctica.In the months preceding my trip I had contacted various Antarctic scientists who had helped me with my Mars books, and they had generously invited me to visit them at their research sites around the continent.But when I got down to McMurdo, I found that all my plans were in the air. Some of my scientists had not made it down themselves, and the Antarctic weather made all scheduling completely unreliable.Only at the moment of a flight could you be sure it was really going to happen.At first this was disorienting, even maddening.But when I became used to, I realized what it was:it was Freedom.I had no idea what I was going to be doing even three or four days in advance.Depending on weather, and other people's plans, I might be at the South Pole, I might be on top of Mt. Erebus, I might be in the Dry Valleys.But no way to tell in advance.It was completely unlike ordinary life in that regard.So I relaxed, and had six weeks of unscheduled Freedom.I spent ten days in the Dry Valleys, helping glaciologists set weather stations on glaciers; I went to the South Pole, and partied with the crew there over a wild Thanksgiving. I helicoptered to the top of Mt. Erebus, and crawled inside a glacier with a mountaineer friend.I spent a glorious week with a team of geologists on Roberts Massif, a part of the Transantarctic Mountains that is like a rock island sticking out of the ice sea of the polar cap. I sat in a helicopter fighting winds to get back to McMurdo, and then sat in a hut at Cape Crozier when the winds proved too strong, eating emergency rations with a group of nematode scientists (wormherders) and trying to make radio coms with McMurdo. I got outrageously cold, and ate huge meals, and laughed a lot, and listened to a million stories.And of course all the time I was thinking, what about my story?What story will I tell?I wanted Antarctica to be more than just an exotic backdrop for a story that could have happened anywhere.I wanted to do more than just retell the classic stories in updated form.I wanted to tell Antarctica's true story.In this desire I found that science fiction was the perfect form for the subject.For one thing, Antarctica is a science fiction place already; it takes high tech to live there at all, and it looks like another planet entirely.Then again, the next hundred years down there are clearly going to be more interesting even than the last hundred.You can see it coming, like a slow motion train wreck:there are people who want to make Antarctica a wilderness "World Park," left untouched by humanity; while at the same time there are poor southern countries, struggling with debt and over-population, looking at the estimated 50 billion barrels of oil that lie under the ice down there, and thinking there is no good reason not to extract it.So the outlines of my story were clear.If some southern governments went to Antarctica in search of oil, and some radical environmentalists tried to stop them by means of non-lethal sabotage, and even the slightest thing went

wrong with that sabotage, then people would be in deadly trouble immediately.But I also wanted to retell the old stories of the classic era of exploration, because they were too good not to tell.How to do that in the context of my tale?Well, part of my story concerned a wilderness adventure expedition, caught in the crossfire between oil interests and environmentalists; and suddenly one member of that expedition was a Chinese feng shui guru, transmitting his adventures to a Chinese TV audience and therefore telling them all the old tales, in his own way.With this appearance of Ta Shu, all the pieces of my puzzle were in place.I could have him retell the old stories, and tell my new story of sabotage gone wrong, and within that framework I could also tell many of the stories of the people who work down there in Antarctica, keeping the whole show going. McMurdo is like a very small American town stripped to its essentials, with people from all walks of life doing their jobs down there to keep the town running; and the basic absurdity of running a town in such frigid hostile conditions was the source of daily hilarity for all.I did my best to weave all these people's stories into the novel as well, and just as the six weeks of travel down there was a joy, the year of work on the novel after I got back was a joy as well.The whole experience was tremendous fun, and I trust that that is a feeling that will touch the reader as well.Sincerely,Kim Stanley RobinsonChapter OneHello my friends.Thank you for joining me on this voyage across the bottom of the Earth.As you can see, I have nearly completed the flight south from New Zealand.Soon we will arrive on the frozen continent.As we approach our landing, we see that deep in the big notch in the continent called the Ross Sea, a magnificent volcano has risen from the sea floor.This volcano makes a triangular island seventy kilometers across, and it rises around four or five thousand meters from the sea floor.Every measurement of this volcano's height comes up with a different figure, a fact that confirms what the eye sees immediately, that the inner line of Erebus's form creates a knot of lung-mai or dragon arteries that is precisely contiguous with its outward form, so that we see it in all five dimensions at once.This sometimes makes ordinary calculations of its height difficult.Now we have landed, my friends, and are being driven across the sea ice to McMurdo.The little town, as you see, is placed in a scooped-out hollow on the tip of a long peninsula of the volcano island, an arm of lava that surged down off Erebus to the west not so very long ago, leaving a final lava cone at the very tip.How strong the dragon arteries of this island!As we approach the tip of the peninsula and our landfall, let me recall for you the story of the first human landfall on Antarctica, which happened on January 24th of 1895.When Borchgrevink's expedition approached the Antarctic Peninsula, they were aware that all previous landings had been on islands offshore, and that no one had ever stepped on the actual land of the continent before.Borchgrevink and his ship's captain were rowed toward the rocky beach by a sailor, and as they approached they saw their chance at history.Borchgrevink began to move to the bow of the boat to climb out, and the ship's captain began to wrestle with him, claiming for some reason that he had the right to go first.The two men were wrestling still as the boat coasted up to the rocky beach, and seeing it the seaman rowing them leaped over the side into waist-deep water, and ran up to the shore ahead of the entangled officers.Thus he was the first human ever to step on Antarctica. What was his name?I can't remember.On the slope of the town, now, we look back toward the airport on ice, and beyond it, across some fifty kilometers of the Ross Sea, to the mainland of the continent.It is a superb prospect.Over there mountains jump immediately out of the ocean: peaks taller than Fuji and Mont Blanc stand within twelve kilometers of the ocean, and the whole range, as you can see, is complex, multifaceted, and deeply riven by glacial valleys, down which slanting beams of yellow sunlight glow.On certain days optical effects in the air create fata morganas in which the mountains appear five times as tall as they do now.Oh my, yes.This view from McMurdo is very strong, bringing into play simultaneously all the landscape's oppositions: hsu-shih or empty-full, yin-hsien or invisible-visible, chin-yuan or near-far, also finite-infinite.Thus naturally the fifth dimension, li, the emptiness before all spacetime, is strongly evoked as well; and also that value of a landscape that goes beyond all notions of beauty, its i-ching or density of soul, and its shen-yunor divine resonance.Here in the town itself, the views are all kao-yuan,looking up; before anything else, therefore, I am going to walk up to the top of Observation Hill, the volcanic cone at the end of the peninsula, overlooking the town as you see.Up here, as you see as I climb, the perspective changes to p'ing-yan, the level perspective from a nearby mountain which gives a view horizontally to distant mountains, shading into infinity.I like p'ing-yan very much.The buildings below me comprise McMurdo Station, Ross Island. The town resembles one of the rusty mining towns of Mongolia.But this shen-yuan angle, looking down from above, is but one part of the picture.We will find soon enough that the seemingly haphazard and emptied village we look down on is actually inhabited by a civilization wielding all the latest in futuristic technology. It is a strange place, as you will see.The peninsula, however; the island; the sea ice studded with icebergs;

the distant mountain range, so far yet so clear: all beautiful.As we descend to town, I want to remind you that this Ross Island is tangled deeply in the dragon arteries of history.It is the island both Robert Scott and Ernest Shackleton used as their base of operations.Therein lies a sad story.The first time they came down was in 1902, on the ship Discovery, in an expedition commanded by Scott.Shackleton was a junior officer, from the merchant marine rather than the navy, but a strong personality.Scott not so much so; withdrawn, and at first somewhat at a loss concerning what to do in this new land.People had stepped on the continent for the first time, as I said, only seven years before.In human terms, it was a blank slate.The geographical societies of imperial Europe had declared it the next great problem for their imperial-scientific study, and the geographical society in England convinced the British Admiralty that dedicating a ship to the exploration of this new continent would be a good thing strategically.Part of the normal course of the business of the empire.So in the same year that we in our country were fighting the Boxer Rebellion against the oppression of these British colonialists, other men in other offices in London, occupied with other arms of that world-spanning empire, agreed that a single badly built boat, a clunker, a lemon, could certainly be spared for such an unpromising venture.In the same spirit they agreed to send Captain Robert Scott, who had been recommended to them for unknown reasons by the head of the Royal Geographical Society.And so two years later Scott and his men landed on Ross Island, and built the hut that you can see on the point at the other end of town--that little square building in the center of the screen, badly exposed to the wind.We will visit it later.Scott had not spent his two years of preparation very usefully, however, and once on Ross Island he had no very clear brief; just exploration and science, as far as his formal orders went.But geology and the other earth sciences were in their infancy as well, this has to be understood.Without feng shui they had no way to read the inner shape of the landscape, and without plate tectonics they had no real understanding of why the Earth looked the way it did, or what might have happened to it in the past.They thought mountains were the result of the Earth shrinking, and the overlarge crust then buckling in lines; or alternatively, perhaps they were the result of the Earth expanding, and lava mountains leaping up out of the resulting cracks.Wegener would soon articulate every schoolchild's notion that South America and Africa must once have been joined, but that idea was scoffed at for another half a century; the truth is they did not think there had been time for continental drift to have happened, for they were just beginning to come to grips with the tremendous age of the Earth. Lord Kelvin at that time maintained that the Earth, because it was still radioactive, could not be more than a few million years old. So all earth sciences in 1902 were a kind of taxonomy, gathering information in hopes it would help some later generation of scientists better to pierce the veil of the past.This being the case, Scott's scientists took weather data, kept records, gathered rock samples, surveyed the territory, and tested methods of travel to see how they would work.Never had men worked in weather quite so cold as this; it averaged thirty degrees Centigrade colder than the Arctic, and the storms could be brutal, even then.So they wandered around in short sledging trips away from Ross Island.Their sledging worked, except in the Dry Valleys on the mainland immediately across from them, sledges being for travel over ice and snow.They did not know how to use the sledge dogs, however, to pull the sledges for them, and had brought along no one who could teach them; they thought they had, but the man didn't really know, and you cannot teach what you do not know.Nansen had learned from the Inuit how to do it, and crossed Greenland using the dogs, and Amundsen learned from Nansen.It was not so hard; the dogs like it.It is only a matter of training and the right harnesses, and off they will go as if it were their destiny to pull humans across the ice--their first act of partnership perhaps, long ago when the whole world was ice.But Scott never learned that about dogs.What he learned instead was the dogs' own pleasure in hauling.This is the critical point, my friends; this is the crux of the matter.Scott and his men discovered that even though manhauling wasn't as efficient as other methods, efficiency was not the highest value.Much more important was the act's own shen-yun, its divine resonance. And they found that it is a very satisfying thing to haul your home across the snow and ice of this world, setting camp after camp.It appeals to something very deep and fundamental in our collective unconscious.That there is a collective unconscious, my friends, never doubt; it may not be exactly as Carl Jung described it, but it exists most certainly, as the very structures of our brains.The human brain grew from about three hundred cubic millimeters to about fifteen hundred cubic millimeters during the time that we were living the lives of nomads, carrying our homes across the surface of this world; and much of that growth occurred in ice ages, my friends, ice ages when even China itself was a kind of Antarctica.And so the structure of our brain reflects that coevolution, and even now, in landscapes of snow and ice such as those we are looking at, our brains fairly hum with the fullness of their complete structure, resonating under the impact of all the coevolutionary forces that blew it

up like a balloon.And so Scott said damn the dogs, and damn the motor tractors, and damn the hot-air balloon, and the Siberian ponies, which alas could not endure the cold; and even the skis, which in those days were like long planks, and which at first the British tried to use with only a single ski pole, so far out of touch were they with snow and their own bodies.None of that mattered; they had discovered the pleasure of hauling their homes with their own power alone, on foot.Quickly they learned to use two ski poles, and they stomped along on the skis as if they were on two long snowshoes, but only to float themselves better in their walking.It was walking on this Earth they had fallen in love with.Revue de presseForbidding yet fascinating, like the continent it describes . . . echoes Jon Krakauers Into Thin Air.People [Antarctica] should be included in any short-list of books about the frozen continent.... Compelling characters...a rich and dense story...Robinson has succeeded not only in drawing human characters but also in bringing Antarctica to life. Whatever happens in the outer world,Antarcticaboth the book and the continentwill become part of the reader's interior landscape.The Washington Post Book World Theepic of Antarctica. This is the James A. Michener novel of the South Pole. If the meaty one-word title didnt give it away, the writing would. The whole human history of the continent is here.Interzone Antarcticawill take your breath away.Associated Press A gripping tale of adventure on the ice.Publishers Weekly Passionate, informed...vastly entertaining.Kirkus s Robinson writes about geography and geology with the intensity and unhurried attention to detail of a John McPhee.The New York Times Book