

Hitchhikers Guide to the Apocalypse

Chapter 1 Winter Wonderland

Mum: So you are finally leaving?

Son: Yes bag is packed, I have my trusty travel book and I am ready to go.

Mum: Ah yes, how to see the world on a shoestring, just don't do anything stupid because it was in a book.

Son: Everyone calls it The Hitch Hikers Guide to the Apocalypse, Mum.

Mum: Whatever, just stay safe and come home early if you need to.

I gave Mum a hug and then shook Dad's hand. It turns out the only thing that will survive the end of the world is cockroaches and toxic masculinity.

“Stay safe son,” he said in a gruff voice.

I jumped into a self-driving car to the airport. First stop Antarctica.

From the guidebook

Antarctica once an isolated and empty frozen land is now the greatest skiing destination on Earth. In fact, it's the only skiing destination, after all snow melted on every other mountain.

There you will find rich retirees getting one last tick on the list before they kick the bucket, wealthy young people with nothing better to do and poor young people working in the hotels wondering if they will ever be let out to see the snow.

Watch out for the robotically enhanced Olympic athletes. They are frighteningly fast and dangerous on the slopes. Also, they are extremely rude to traditional humans and never tip the staff.

If you are going for work, make sure to bring gum boots that cover the whole of your legs.

You will never forget the smell of penguin shit.

Day One

Can't wait to start my new job. I've been lucky enough to get work at one of the most exclusive hotels. The pay is terrible but I get free food and accommodation so it will be worth it.

Day Two

Finally off the plane. The Hotel is in West Antarctica right next to the highest mountain range, the Vinson Massif. I was ordered to go straight to my bunk. I only have four hours to rest before I have to start my first shift and I want to make a good impression.



Image Credit (Abrahamsen, 2012)

Day Three

I'm in hell. What have I done? I am basically a prisoner, and the prison guard is a cold-blooded malfunctioning AI. They tell me it was built by using historical data of how human hotel managers operated.

They must have been watching Fawlty Towers because this place has the serenity of a volcanic eruption. Every morning we line up to get our tasks from the Hotel Allocation Logistics system (HAL).

You always have to be nice to HAL otherwise it will lock you outside in the cold and refuse to let you back in. Basically it takes all of the complaints the guest make and then assigns staff to various parts of the resort. The problem is that it causes the majority of complaints, so fixing the problems requires working around its bugs. Today's challenge is trying to stop the cleaning robots from killing the guests.

The Dirt Identification Cleaning System (DICS) decided that the children were biological waste so it started spraying them with disinfectant. To be fair to the system some of the kids were gross.

The only way to fix this was to turn the machines off and on again. This meant I had to catch them first.

It makes me laugh to think that everyone was worried that AI would enslave humanity. The real danger was that we would become slaves to constantly fixing these stupid robots.

Eventually I turned it into a game, getting the kids to help me lure them into a corner. Using children as bait wasn't ideal but it worked.

Day Four

I never thought hell would be this beautiful. The cracks in the ice irradiate a magical blue light. The ice is so dense that it absorbs the other colours. But the blue light has such a short wavelength that it gets scattered instead. This is reflected in the streams, rivers and ocean.

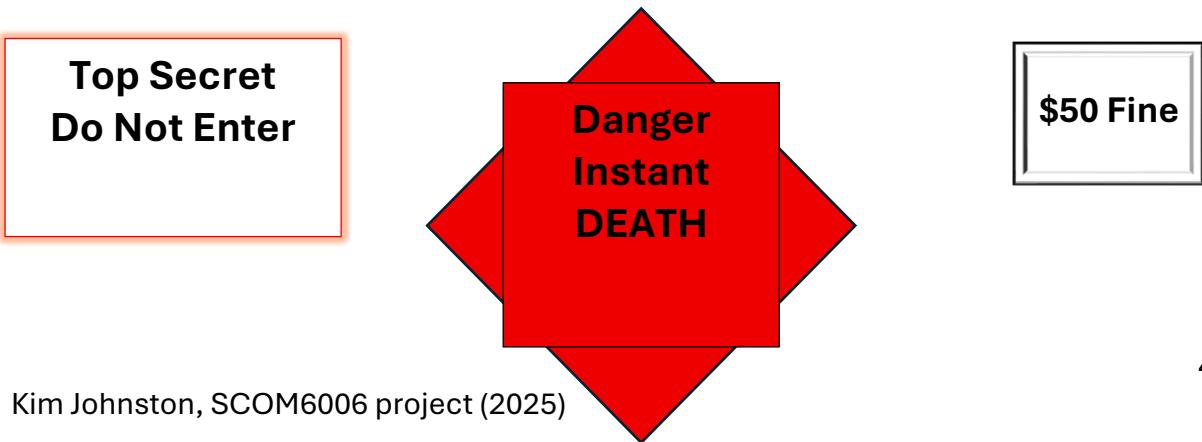
The natural sculptures made in the ice from the wind and water look alive. Here more than anywhere else I have been you can see how the ocean, land and air are connected.



Photo Credit (Carvajal, 2025)

If only I had more time to enjoy it. One of the ongoing problems for the hotel was flat earth conspiracy theorists frequently visiting to try and prove the globalists wrong. It became a serious problem with them needing to be rescued from; jumping off a cliff; sky diving into an ice chasm or trying to make the penguins confess.

Eventually the hotel installed a fake scientific base a short distance away. Conspiracy theorists were lured there with big signs that said; Top Secret Do Not Enter; Danger Instant Death ;and \$50 fine.



The hotel staff filled a warehouse with old documents, beakers full of coloured water and a machine that goes ping. Staff are sent out every 6 hours to collect the conspiracy theorists, try and explain that it's a fake. Then charge them \$50.

So today in between resetting the cleaning machines and being yelled at by the guest I drove out to our secret lab. You would think that the unlocked gate and lack of guards would have tipped them off but no.

Inside was an eclectic collection of the Dunning-Kruger effect. Normal procedure was to let them yell at you until they became exhausted and then drag them back to the hotel. Today I thought I would try something different. I turned to them and whispered "if you want to know the truth you have to follow me". Then I ran outside and pointed straight to the sun.

There was an awkward pause and before they started rambling again I ran back to the car and said, "Quickly before they get away." They followed me back to the car and I drove up the nearest hill. I got out and pointed at the sun again.

Most of them just stared at me looking confused. Then one of them slowly started to speak.

"The sun is going back up. It's the afternoon. It should be going down."

"Exactly, now you know the big secret."

They all looked at each other and nodded, then I drove them back to the hotel.

Of course, the sun doesn't set in the Antarctic summer. It dances around the sky like it is doing a waltz with the clouds. There is no such thing as the afternoon either as we are in every time zone simultaneously. This is because in summer the tilt of the Earth's axis means that the south pole is always facing the sun.

But explaining that could wait for another day. For now they all believed that they understood something that no one else did.

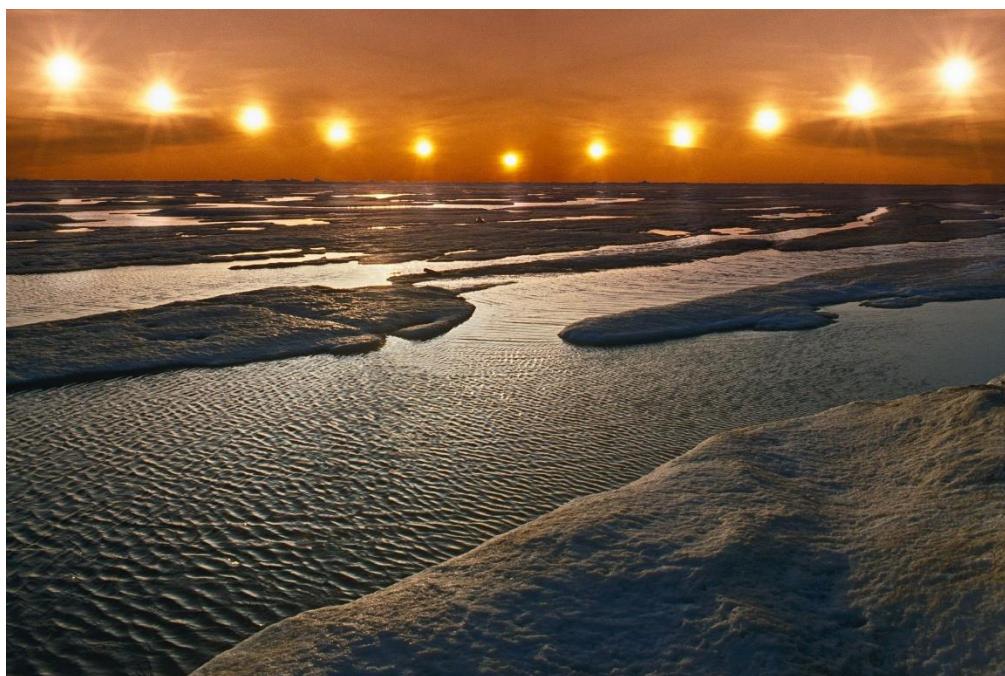


Photo Credit (Burdick, 2017)

Day Five

Fun fact: 90% of serious skiing accidents happen on your last run of the day.

It is a great example of how statistics can be misleading. Of course, the majority of serious accidents happen on your last run of the day. The real question is who are the insane 10% of people who get seriously hurt and decide to go for one more run?

Today I was allocated to the hotel's ski slopes. The hotel is located right next to Mount Vinson, the highest mountain in Antarctica. At 4,892 meters elevation it is intimidating just to look at. The mountain is so tall that even the snow doesn't want to fall on it. Instead, it is reluctantly pushed up by the wind.

Only an idiot would try to climb it.

But wherever there are mountains there are idiots.

Originally only experienced mountain climbers could trek to the summit. There was skill and planning responsibility taken by anyone brave enough to take on the mountain.

Today anyone who can afford a lift pass can reach the top.



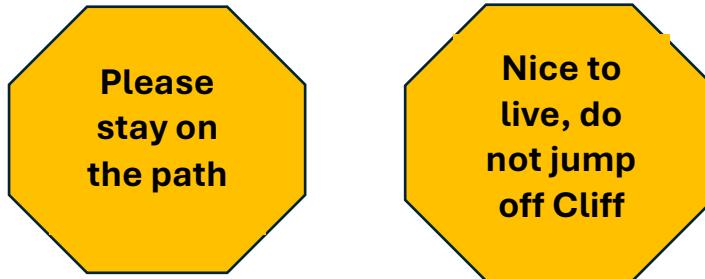
Photo Credit (Berman, 2022)

The sensible tourists ride the lift to the top. Take some photos and go back down. Billionaires are seldom sensible. Maybe all the money has gone to their heads. Maybe their robotic enhancements make them feel invincible.

To make matters worse the mountain is far more dangerous than it used to be. Global warming has melted the ice in an unpredictable way. Water flows beneath the glaciers making them unstable. Cracks can suddenly appear, swallowing anyone unlucky enough to be standing on them. Avalanches fire down the mountain side destroying everything in their path.

To try and stop their guests from dying the hotel did the only sensible thing. They put up some signs saying “please stay on the path.”

They had to be put up in multiple languages and sometimes got lost in translation. My favourite was one that said, “nice to live, do not jump off cliff.”



The signs increased safety in the same way that alcohol improves driving.

Like most jobs at the hotel, rescuing people was done by robots. They were made to look human so that they didn't scare people. All of them were installed with an overly cheery personality. No matter how bad the situation they would reply with automatic responses like:

“Thank you for choosing our service.”

“May I please prevent you from falling?”

“Life is good, let's not die today.”

As with the cleaning machines, my job was to fix them when they went wrong. At least these machines could recognise the humans from their lift passes. The problem was they couldn't tell the difference between the humans and each other.

This meant that they would try to save the rescuer and make the whole situation more dangerous. My day went something like this.

Rescue robot: “Sir please step away from the edge.”

Billionaire: “Don't tell me what to do you fancy dishwasher.”

Then the ice would break and they would fall into the edge of a chasm.

Billionaire: “Do something you glorified tin can.”

Rescue robot flies down: “Life is beautiful please may I help you?”

Billionaire: “Just get me out of here already.”

The robot gently puts the very angry guest over their shoulder and prepares to fly out. But before it can another rescue robot jumps down and starts trying to save the first one. Then they would have the world's most annoying overly polite argument.

“Please can I help you?” they would sing in harmony.

“Life is good, let's not die today” they would continue.

This would go on until I pretended to fall, thus getting the second robot's attention. This would bring it up back up to me, allowing the first robot to complete the rescue. Nothing makes you question your life choices more than an overly friendly robot telling you “life is good” one thousand times a day.

Day Six

What time is it?

This is the most common and also the most confusing question the staff get asked.

Antarctica is technically in all 24 time zones. Every line of longitude connects to the South Pole.

Logically the Hotel is closest to South America and should have the same time zone as them. But our rich and famous guests insist on not changing their sleep routines. So instead, we have the madness of operating on three times zones simultaneously.

One for the Americans, one for the Europeans and one for East Asia. Given that in summer the sun never sets this creates anarchy.

This is why I was dreading my first shift at the bar.

“Can I still get the all day breakfast?” one guest enquired.

“Yes, it’s all day,” I answered with a fake smile.

Immediately followed by, “Can I have 12 more bottles of wine please?”

“I’m very sorry but we can only sell one bottle at a time sir,” I respectfully said.

Trying to help one customer with their morning hangover while the others are drinking themselves under the table is never fun.

The wibbly wobbly times zones frequently made for wibbly wobbly customers.

Day Seven

Penguins are adorable. One of them even offered me a pebble. I think that means they want to get married?



Photo Credit (Kloza, 2020)

Day Eight

Today I was ordered to go and assist with the zoo, the odd ball collection of animals kept at the resort, none of them native to Antarctica. Our zoo had become a refuge for animals from the north pole. After all the ice melted the tundra turned into marsh land and the mosquitoes took over.

So they captured the last remaining polar bears, arctic foxes and caribou and sailed them to the south. A modern Noah's Ark. In a world falling apart it was a glimmer of hope.

Plus the polar bears only ate three of the crew.

Trying to be positive about my new job I bounced up to the head zoo keeper.

“About time you showed up!” she exclaimed.

I apologised. “Sorry I thought my shift started at 8am.”

“Exactly! Its 7.45am and you should have been here half an hour ago,” she growled.

“Start with feeding the polar bears. Even a simpleton like you should be able to handle that,” she ordered.

No one argued with Gladys. Not because she was persuasive or powerful. But because she always walked around with a massive snake around her neck. She had been here since the zoo started and claimed to have seen the birth of every baby born here.

This included species brought back from extinction using fragments of their DNA saved in rare fossils. It also included hybrids, animals that were a mix of species that were never meant to be.

These were especially common amongst the rich tourists who would take their pets with them.

Why have a boring dog, cat or bird?

When you could have a thylacine, smilodon or velociraptor raptor?

I picked up the buckets of food and started walking over to the polar bears. The problem with feeding the bears was that they couldn't tell the difference between me and a fish with legs. Previous staff had tried wearing high vis clothing to help them tell the difference. All this achieved was day glow orange polar bear poo.

I decided to try something new.

Using some bits of old pipe and trolley I built a small trebuchet. From my back yard experiments I remembered that the base must be three quarters the length of the swinging arm. I used an old sack and some rope to tie up the food at one end and made a small platform for me to stand on the other.

The wheels of the trolley would also help as it meant I would fall almost straight down instead of in a circle. Just think my parents thought I was wasting my time doing this at home.

I tested my brilliant invention with a large piece of ice. It flew just short hitting the wall of the cage. The bears growled at me and licked their lips. If I broke something Gladys might just use this to throw me into the cage.

I moved the trebuchet closer and tried again. It just made it over the top and then fell right in the middle of the enclosure. I put the food in, climbed up the other side and jumped down on my platform. The food didn't stay together like the block of ice.

Instead, it separated in the air landing with a splat all over the enclosure and on to the bears.



Photo Credit (Selden, 2016)

I thought for certain that I was in big trouble. But then I heard applause coming from behind me. It turns out that my experiment had been a hit with a group of the tourists who had gathered around to watch. Then a young boy ran over and yelled.

“My turn next!”

“Can you please help me push?”

Without another word he ran around the trebuchet and started pushing. I pulled from the front towards the velociraptor raptors.

We repeated the experiment for the rest of the animals. It took a few trials to work out how many children were needed to provide enough weight for each bundle. But this was still better than being bitten by an oversized prehistoric turkey.

We even used it to feed the herbivores, although it took multiple loads to feed the woolly mammoths and they bellowed loudly every time we accidentally hit one.

And then she came. The only person in the world who could make the bright orange uniforms look good.

“What do you think you are doing?” she hissed in an accusing tone.

Having never properly met I didn’t want our first conversation to be an argument, so I tried to turn it around.

“Hi Kissa, nice to meet you,” I squeaked.

“Stop playing around and get back to work,” she jeered.

“Sorry, I was asked to feed the animals,” I bleated.

“Don’t talk back. Isn’t there some mammoth shit you should be shovelling?”

Then she sauntered off. It turns out she was the zoo keepers daughter, so I spent the rest of the day shovelling mammoth poo.

It wasn’t so bad until one landed right on top of me. I guess it was karma for throwing food at them.

Day Nine

I will never complain about picking up my dogs’ poo ever again.

Day Ten

“Where is Mildred?”

I have been reassigned again, this time to the kids’ club. Mildred the lovely woman who normally ran it had a mental break down. I turned to the little girl and said, “Mildred is having a rest, what would you like to play?”

Without missing a beat she went straight onto the next question.

“Why are we here?” she demanded.

The parents often dropped their kids here and ran off. Most of them just played computer games the whole time. But the younger children still needed human contact. I crouched down to her height and looked her in the eyes.

“Your Mum and Dad love you very much but needed...”

She cut me off yelling.

“No! I wanted to come to kids’ club. Why is the hotel here?”

I smiled thankfully to hear a question I could answer.

“Well a long time ago before you were born a lot of people liked skiing and playing in the snow. But then all the snow melted except for Antarctica. So they built a hotel here,” I explained.

“But why didn’t the snow melt here?” she questioned.

“Well, Antarctica has lots of very high mountains and the higher you climb the colder it gets,” I explained while pretending to climb.

“That’s not right! Other mountains on Earth are much higher than here,” she cried.

There was a strange silence. The other children had stopped playing their games. Watching an adult proved wrong was far more entertaining. After all the stress I had been put through working here this warmed my heart. These kids wanted to learn.

“You’re right. Mt Everest is much taller. But Antarctica has something special. A polar vortex that protects it from the rest of the world.”

“Like a forcefield?” One of the other children yelled.

“Yes, exactly.”

“Does that mean Antarctica is a superhero?”

“Yes it is. It has become the protector of all the plants and animals that have nowhere else to go. It protects them using its forcefield made from super-fast winds that circle the bottom of the Earth.”

The rest of the day children kept asking me questions about how ice reflects the sun’s light keeping the air cold and how Earth used to be much cooler.

It was a strange irony that scientists once came here to drill ice cores and learn about our past climate. Now it is a refuge for the future. But if I can teach these kids something then maybe I can make a difference.

Day Fourteen

Whoa I can't believe I almost finished here. I've been too busy to write on my travel blog for the last four days. But it was a lot of the same things over and over again.

Broken robots, shovelling poo and being yelled at by the guests. I did enjoy the kids' club though. We joked about how penguins walked and animals' farts smelt. They even understood how the gases from all the poo increased global warming.

Now it's time to pack my bag and get ready for the next challenge.

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