

ResQ and the Baby Orangutan



Eva J. Pell

Illustrated by Mattias Lanas

For Hudson, Aspen and Landon

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Tumblehome, Inc.

201 Newbury St, Suite 201

Boston, MA 02116

<http://tumblehomebooks.org/>

Library of Congress Control Number 2019902556

ISBN-13 978-1-943431-48-9

ISBN-10 1-943431-48-5

Pell, Eva J.

ResQ and the Baby Orangutan / Eva J. Pell - 1st ed

Illustrated by Mattias Lanås

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Printed in Taiwan

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

ResQ AND THE BABY ORANGUTAN

SAVING ONE ANIMAL AT A TIME

Eva J. Pell

Illustrated by Mattias Lanas

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1. STUCK IN THE PINE BARRENS

From the bank of the pond I see my cousin Stowe, waist deep in a sphagnum bog, her arms flailing.

"Help, I'm stuck. Get me out of here," she yells.

"What are you doing?" I holler back. "We're supposed to be getting ready for a mission in Indonesia, not taking a mud bath."

"Sorry, Wheaton. While you were checking out the equipment, I wanted to sneak a look at some pitcher plants. The Pine Barrens have tons of them. I had to creep out on this bog to get the perfect picture." She points to a weird-looking plant, kind of a miniature purple horn of plenty. "I got a photo, but then I fell through. Give me your hand, and I'll yank myself out of here."



Will be interesting to see how this works. Stowe is twelve, a year older than me, and a whole head taller. At least she's skinny.

What a maneuver. Stowe tosses her cell phone up onto dry land first, and holds onto me while she slithers out of the bog onto firm ground. How I stay out of the pond is a miracle.

I look at Stowe's legs, caked in mud. "Yuck. No way are you getting into one of my space suits with that muck on you."

"Well, at least I got an awesome shot of an insect trapped in the pitcher plant." She opens up the picture on her cell phone to show me.

"Wow. That's crazy." I would say more but my cell phone is buzzing. Looks like I missed a bunch of texts.

"WHERE ARE YOU? I KEEP TEXTING BUT YOU DON'T ANSWER."

Uh oh. That would be my grandmother, Ariella. The message feels like a laser hitting my pocket. Surprised my pants don't have holes in them. Much as I don't relish a conversation, this is going to take more than a text. I give her a call, and she picks up on the first ring.

"Wheaton, what's with this note you left me about a job for **ResQ** in Indonesia?" My grandmother doesn't even take time to say hello first. "And you're out at the base?"

I wait a second to be sure Ariella has finished, and put the phone on speaker so Stowe can listen in.

"Stowe and I were hanging at the house playing cards. A call came in from Angga Rezaputra, a park ranger at

Gunung Palung National Park in Indonesia. He said that they found a mother orangutan with a bullet wound to one of her front arms—”

“We’re not a police service,” Ariella interrupts.

“I know. I’m getting to the rescue part. This female, Bella, has a baby, who’s around one. And the little guy, he goes by Buddi, is missing—may have been poached. Angga saw our new ResQ website, and how we’re the Emergency Service for the Rescue of Endangered Species. He locked on to the part about us having tools to help find missing animals. He said he was super short of staff because they all went off to do some training thing. He pushed hard for us to come help. I had to say yes.”

“You didn’t think you should check with me first?”

“I tried to call, but you left your cell phone in the kitchen when you went for a bike ride.”

“Wheaton, your parents agreed to let you stay with me for a while, and maybe come on a rescue close by for starters. Not sure they’ll go along with a mission halfway around the world.”

Ariella seems to have ignored my explanation, but she knows my mother, her daughter, who can hover with the best of the helicopters.

“Mom was worried until I reminded her that we’ve had shots for every disease in creation. Besides, it was my parents’ idea for me to take a break after finishing college so I can spend time with you, learning about the world outside the engineering lab.”

“And what about your cousin? We can’t just leave her

and run off to Indonesia after she's come down to visit for spring break."

"I know. That's why she has to join us. Stowe knows everything about the natural world, I mean, not as much as you, but almost."

Stowe pipes in, "Please Grandma, don't send me home. I can't miss out on the adventure. And I've read so much about orangutans. It'll be so cool to see some in person."

"Have you checked this out with your folks? Don't assume because you're home-schooled, you can go off to Indonesia without asking."

"Oh, I know. I talked to my mother and she's fine with me going. Spring has come early back home. The snow's turned to an icy slush, and ski practice was cancelled. She did say I have to keep logs on everything, so I don't slip in my schoolwork."

Neither one of us bothers to mention that both moms said we needed to check with our grandmother first. And we didn't tell our parents that there might be poachers involved.

"Wheaton, is the **ECAPS** fueled up for the trip around the world? And have you checked to be sure the **HeliBoaJee** is in good working order? I'm guessing we'll need to use it in all three modes – **Helicopter**, **Boat** and **Jeep**." Our grandmother likes to be prepared.

"All our vehicles are in great shape. Trust me. The ECAPS is ready to blast off. It's been sunny, so the solar cells have generated all the hydrogen we need. The methane fuel tanks are full too, thanks to a recent garbage dump, and I have the powdered aluminum stashed for our return fuel."

“And do you have all the gear we need for the rescue?”

“Before we biked out here, we packed and loaded everything in your car. But most important, we need you and your cameras,” I add. Yeah, I’m sucking up, but our grandmother is a famous wildlife photographer, and she does want to document all our rescues.

Stowe and I look at each other, fingers crossed. There’s a pretty long silence, and I wonder if we’ve lost cell phone connection.

“I will agree to go,” Ariella says, “with one condition. We can assist in locating this missing baby orangutan, but our work needs to be at a distance. Under no circumstances is ResQ to be in direct contact with any poachers. These people can be dangerous. Understood?”

“Got it,” we say in unison.

“All right then. I’ll get my stuff together and see you soon.”

The two of us bump fists, then elbows, and twirl around, just like we’ve been doing since we were old enough to stand.

“We’ll be waiting for you on the tarmac next to Hangar #36. Bye.”

I hang up before Ariella has time to change her mind.

2. PREPARING FOR RESCUE

As I say goodbye to my grandmother, I remember my mud-encrusted cousin. “Stowe, you better get back to our hangar and clean yourself up before Ariella gets here. There’s a bathroom you can use, right inside the door. Oh, and best to keep this soggy boggy adventure to ourselves.”

“Got it,” she says as she races off.

I follow, walking down Hangar Road inside the McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst military base. A jeep passes me, and the driver gives me a wave. A while back, Ariella introduced me to an Air Force lieutenant colonel in charge of technology development. She got interested in the inventions I’m developing for ResQ and invited me to work with one of her teams on some special projects. I do get paid, but she also gives us space to store our vehicles.

When I get back to the hangar, Stowe is waiting for me, all cleaned up, wearing a t-shirt with a logo that says *Endless Winter*. Interesting choice for a trip to the tropics.

Before I can comment on her wardrobe, my cell phone buzzes.

“ALL PACKED UP. LEAVING NOW. BE AT THE BASE SOON.”

“Ariella’s on her way,” I tell Stowe.

“Is there time for you to show me the ECAPS and all that stuff you guys were discussing before?”

“Sure. Follow me.”

As we walk into the hangar, Stowe gives me a funny look. “I’ve been meaning to ask you, when did you start calling Grandma, Ariella?”

“Since we’ve gone into the rescue business together.”

“Hmm. Should I call her that too?”

“Why not, it’s her name?”

“I know. It seems a little weird...”

Stowe gets distracted as she focuses on a picture sitting on my work table. “Our last family photo with Great Grandpa Gordino.” She reaches out and touches the image of his face.

“Yeah. Grandma thought we should keep his picture here, at least until we have real headquarters.” Our great grandfather died about a year ago. He owned a chain of pizza stores, but, like his daughter, his real love was wild-life. When he got sick, GG told Ariella that when he was gone she should sell the stores and start ResQ.

Stowe blows GG a kiss and then runs into the high bay area. “What on earth is that strange thing? Looks like a giant upside-down ice cream cone.”

“That, Cuz, is the ECAPS, our personal mini-space shuttle. At a speed of 17,500 miles per hour, it’ll get us where we need to go super fast.”

“Whoa, Genius Boy, I had no idea you were building something like this! And you mean that solar wall really fuels this thing?” Stowe asks.

“Yup.” I ignore the “Genius Boy” part. Stowe usually spares me that kind of comment. “The hydrogen I use as jet propulsion fuel is produced by splitting water using the energy from the sun. You are feasting your eyes on the backside of an array of tiny, three-dimensional solar panels.”

“And can you really make enough hydrogen to get the ECAPS launched? We tried solar power at our house in Vermont. We ended up in the dark a lot of the time.”

“This is Wheaton-designed technology. And we have a lot more sun in New Jersey, in case you missed it. But don’t worry. I have a backup fuel if it’s cloudy.”

“All right, oh brilliant one,” Stowe says, throwing up her hands. “And you call this marvel ECAPS because that’s SPACE spelled backwards?”

“Good catch, puzzle queen.”

Stowe starts to move on and then stops in her tracks. “So we’re really going up into space in that thing?” She takes a deep breath and gives me a half grin. “I guess I’m in your hands.”

Stowe's nervousness seems to evaporate as she wanders over to another vehicle based on one of my designs.

"Is this that *Heebiejeebee* Grandma referred to?"

"Yup, that's my HeliBoaJee. It is the ultimate convertible—Helicopter, speed-Boat and Jeep—"

"I get it, like the Swiss army knife of all-terrain vehicles," she interrupts.

The tour is cut short as we hear a car door slam.

Stowe races out ahead of me. "Hi, Grandma," she says. "I'm so excited to be going with you and Wheaton on this rescue."

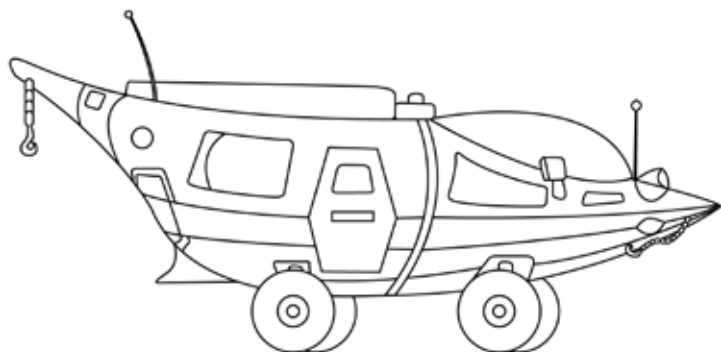
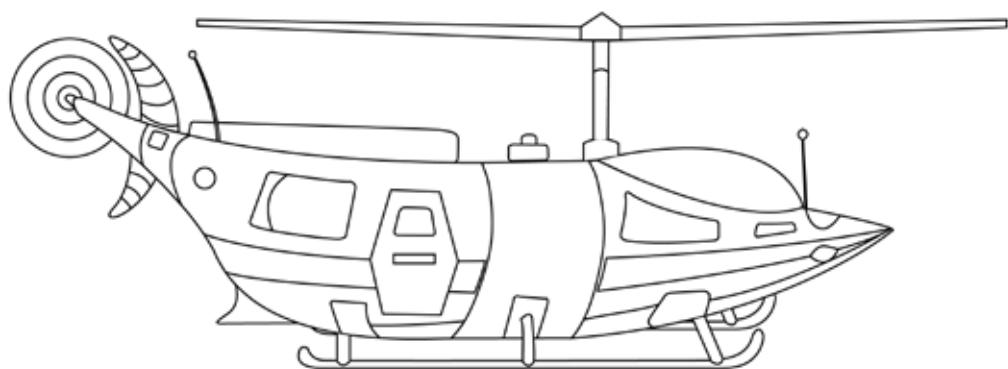
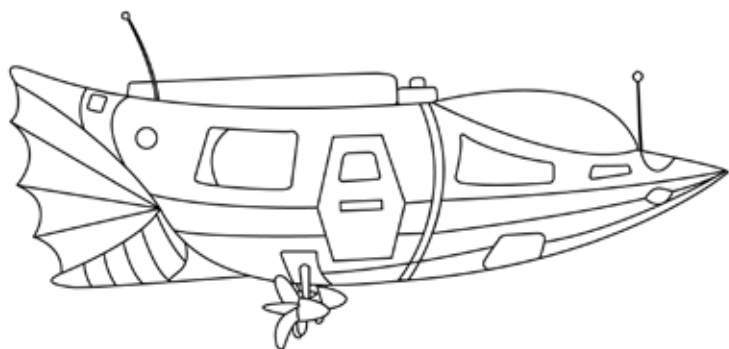
Ariella smiles at us, and then points a finger at me. "We're not going quite yet. I need some details from you kids."

"Like I said, we have to get to Gunung Palung National Park in Indonesia to rescue a baby orangutan."

"And where, to be precise, is this park? You do understand that Indonesia is made of 18,000 islands? Orangutans are found on Borneo and Sumatra. Which island is the park on? Where do we land? Will Angga be meeting us?"

I guess I am short on details. Rather than make eye contact, I text Angga with the relevant questions. Lucky for me he answers before the interrogation can continue.

"Okay," I say without looking up. "We're headed to Borneo. Angga suggests we land at Ketapang Airport, a small airstrip on the west coast. He'll let the authorities know we're coming. They'll give us a place to stash the ECAPS away from snooping eyes. From there we take the HeliBoaJee to the park. He'll text more instructions when we land."



Ariella points to the hangar. “Let’s get our gear stowed for the trip. It’s 4:00 PM here in New Jersey and 4:00 AM tomorrow in Borneo—”

“Yikes. It’s 4:00 AM? I forgot about the time change. Must have woken Angga up. I hope he won’t be irritated with me before we even get there.”

Ariella arches her eyebrows and continues. “If we get going soon, we should land around sunrise. That’ll give us a head start searching.”

I hand Stowe a headset with a built-in microphone. “This will be helpful for writing your logs. I designed it for keeping records during our rescues. It converts what you say into grammatically correct and spell-checked paragraphs. And there’s a feature that does Google searches for extra information. You can download your files to a computer later.”

“Awesome. My logs will be perfect!” Stowe gives me a thumbs up as she positions the headset on top of her tangle of yellow curls.

Ariella drives the HeliBoaJee up the ramp into the ECAPS. Once it’s locked in place, we go to load the rest of our gear. I point to one box marked fragile. “This is the **Finder**, my latest invention. I’ll explain more about it when we get to Borneo.”

“So mysterious.” My cousin gives me a wink.

With everything stored on board, I hand my companions helmets and shiny blue space suits we’ll wear for the flight.

“So cool, my favorite color!” Stowe says. “They don’t look anything like those robot suits you see in the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum in D.C.”

“Correct, these are the latest model. They’re designed to fit almost like a second skin. Turn on your sleeve computer. As we travel into space, it’ll adjust the pressure so you won’t self-destruct.”

“That’s reassuring,” Stowe says with a dramatic shudder.

To get the ECAPS to the launch pad, I send a signal that lifts the spaceship onto a pair of rails. We open the high bay door and send the ship down to one of the runways on the base where we can launch clear of any trees. Another command from me positions it for lift-off.

We climb a ladder, flip open a small door above us, and squeeze into a tight compartment at the tip of the spacecraft. I sit down in the pilot seat. Stowe plops down beside me in the co-pilot chair.

Ariella peers down at Stowe. “You’re in my spot, Missy.”

“But I’m the navigator.”

“You can do your job from back there.” Ariella points to a seat behind me. The navigation system is mounted on a gooseneck, like a lamp. Ariella bends it back into Stowe’s lap as she sits down and straps herself in.

Our grandmother slides in next to me. She’s so tall her knees are up near her chin. At least we won’t be in here too long.

I crane my head back in Stowe’s direction. “Could you send a quick text to our parents and let them know we’re

headed out? I did promise my mom we'd check in before leaving. Your mom's always so cool, but might as well let her know too." Texting—the perfect form of communication. Provides information without the need for conversation.

"Done," Stowe reports in a flash.

I call into the control tower to confirm the airspace is safe for our takeoff. After double-checking the order for the launch, I take a few deep breaths. Sure don't want Ariella or Stowe to think I'm nervous. But of course Stowe notices.

"Slow your leg down, Wheaton. You're shaking the whole spaceship."

Ariella puts her hand on my shoulder, and my knee stops shaking.

"Everybody ready?" I ask in my most commanding voice.

"Yes," Ariella and Stowe call back.

My cousin is already half in orbit. "Let's get going. This so beats doing schoolwork. Feels like I'm about to ski down Mt. Everest."

"Okay guys, count down—10,9,8,7,6,5,4,3,2,1." And with that I yell, "BLAST OFF."

The ECAPS lifts off, streaking through the sky so fast it feels like we're being riveted to the backs of our chairs.

Indonesia is literally on the other side of the world. Stowe, our navigator, sets our course flying west to Borneo.

Borneo



Borneo National Parks

1. Tanjung Puting National Park
(Kalimantan, Indonesian Borneo)
2. Kutai National Park
(East Kalimantan, Indonesian Borneo)
3. Gunung Palung National Park
(West Kalimantan, Indonesian Borneo)
4. Betung Kerihun National Park
(West Kalimantan, Indonesian Borneo)
5. Danum Valley Conservation Area
(Sabah, Malaysian Borneo)

STOWE LEBLOND'S LOG

*Pine Barrens, New Jersey**April 10**4:00 PM*

We went down to the military base in the Pine Barrens where Wheaton has all his equipment stashed. The base is kind of weird. All these officers running around doing stuff. Wheaton knows a lot of them because of the secret work they do together.

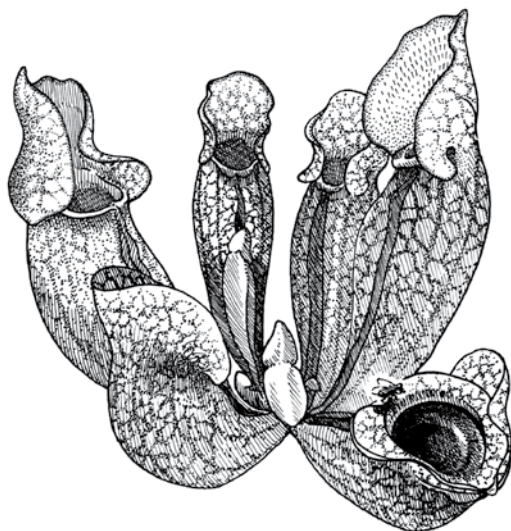
The coolest part of the Pine Barrens is obviously NOT the base, but the woods and wetlands all around. We have sphagnum moss growing along the stream at home in Vermont, but you should see the amount growing along the ponds down here. In some places it's filled in, so it's squooshy when you walk on it. And in other spots, it's floating over the water like an anchored raft.

These sphagnum mats are a great place for pitcher plants to grow. Most plants survive by capturing carbon dioxide from the air and converting it into sugars. They get nutrients from the soil or water. Pitcher plants do those things too, but they also eat insects. They get their name because they have these leaves in the shape of a pitcher, maybe eight inches long. The ones here are purple, although I think they come in other colors too. At the top they have a small entrance, looks like a collar. There are small glands that send out nectar, which attract insects. When the hungry bugs start lapping up the nectar, they sometimes slip and

fall down into the pitcher. Guess that's what happens when you're a sloppy eater 😊.

Unfortunately for the insects, the “pitcher” is lined with these hairs that bend downward. For the bug, getting out would be like having to walk up a tube against rows and rows of bristles—impossible. If that's not bad enough, there's water at the base of the pitcher (of course, since it's a pitcher), and the bugs can't stay afloat so they drown. And then the plants release enzymes that digest most of the bug – sort of like our stomachs do, I guess. All that's left at the end is the bug's skeleton. No wonder these plants are called *carnivorous*. I've taken a couple of pictures on my cell phone, including one that shows the insects being captured.

I read there are 32 different types of pitcher plants in Borneo. I'll keep my eyes peeled for them. That's all for now. I have to go.



3. ON OUR WAY TO BORNEO

Our little ECAPS is quite the SPACEship. On the ground it may look weird, but once launched, it soars like the best of them.

As I tilt the ECAPS to follow the curvature of the earth, Ariella peers out the window. “Look away from the earth at all the stars out there.”

“Wow,” Stowe says. “But they’re not twinkling.”

“Right. On earth the starlight bends a little as it travels through our atmosphere, creating that effect,” I explain.

“So if we lived out here no one would ever have written *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star*?” Stowe gives my shoulder a little nudge. Then she changes subjects.

“How high up are we?”

“About 400 miles.”

“Do we have to worry about being hit by space debris?” I think Stowe’s seen too many movies.

“Relax. You’re more likely to have something fall off a pickup truck and hit your car on the road, than to be clobbered out here by some random object. There’s lots of stuff flying around, but space is, well, space, it’s big.”

Then I turn my attention to the controls. “Give me a minute to convert us over to the methane fuel for the rest of the trip.”

“When you’ve got that taken care of,” Ariella says to me, “maybe we should talk a little about the orangutan we’re supposed to be rescuing. Since *you* accepted this mission, what do you know about these apes?” She’s not ready to let me off the hook for leaping into this trip without looking.

“Not much, I guess. They have a whole lot of red hair, and they’re smart, right?”

“Really, Wig,” Stowe says, messing her hand through my hair, “sounds like you, except for the hair color.”

Urggh. So what if I don’t waste time getting regular haircuts.

“The two of you need to focus. This flight is only going to last 90 minutes, and since we didn’t take the time to prepare, we need to review some things about these animals.” Ariella gives me one of those needle nose looks. I’m not making fun of her sharp nose. Well, you get the point.

“Orangutans are very special. They are the only great apes found in Asia, not Africa,” Ariella tells us. “Babies are especially precious to orangutans because they only give birth once every seven years. Most animals mate every year.

For them, losing a baby may be very sad. For orangutans who only have four or five in a lifetime, losing babies is a serious threat to species survival.”

“Wow, I can see why Angga is so worried,” I blurt out.

“If the baby was poached, who’s it sold to?” Stowe’s asking a great question. “Zoos wouldn’t buy those animals, would they?”

“Today no credible zoo would ever take a baby or even a healthy adult from the wild. If you see a baby orangutan in a zoo it was probably born there.

“But poachers don’t think twice about selling these babies as pets.” Ariella’s mouth sags and her eyebrows lift. “Not long ago I saw a very sad picture of a little orangutan in a cage hanging on a wall. It was so thin, and the big bright eyes you see in baby orangutans in the wild were half closed.”

I start thinking about my little brother, and what would happen to him if he escaped from my mom. We have to find this baby.

“I know this is a stupid question, but why are these people called poachers and not regular old hunters? Do they like eggs or something?”

“Wheaton, you can be such a dork sometimes.”

“Kids!” Ariella’s shaking her head at us. “Hard to know why the same word can mean two different things. Poacher is an old word, maybe derived from the French word *poche*, which means pocket. People who trespass and pocket game that is not theirs, are called poachers. And when you poach eggs, the white forms a pocket around the yolk.”

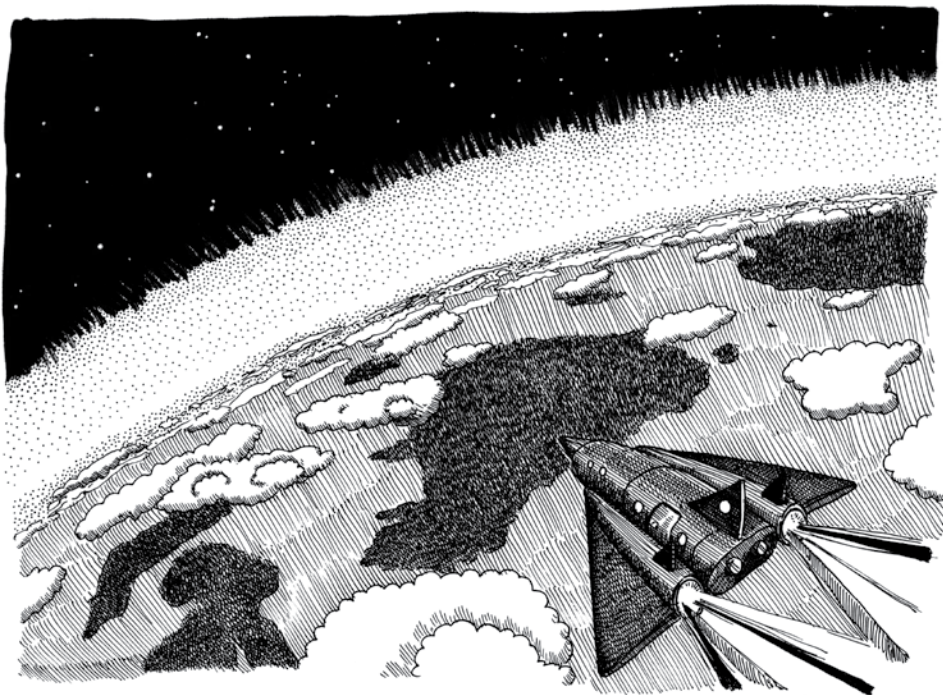
“What does it matter?” Stowe’s not that interested in word origins. “It’s a horrible thing to do.”

“Poachers don’t eat orangutans, do they?” I hold my stomach at the thought of it.

Ariella takes a breath and sighs. “The poacher’s main interest is capturing and selling the babies to make money. This usually means killing the mothers, and because these people are often poor, they will eat her.”

“Ughh. Maybe I should become a vegetarian,” I say, looking at Stowe.

Stowe gives me a nod, but then focuses on the navigation screen. “We’re passing over the equator, heading to Kalimantan, the Indonesian part of Borneo.” She gives me the coordinates for Ketapang airport, on the west coast.



On descent, we can see the outline of this huge island. All the cities seem to be along the coast. That must be where most of the roads are located. Good thing we have the Heli-BoaJee so we can travel wherever we want.

The runway stretches in front of us. "Here we go," I say, tilting the ECAPS into its horizontal landing position. A parachute propels out of the back, helping to slow us down. Our full body harnesses hold us back as we touch down on the runway. Ariella's hands grip the arm rests as we jolt to a halt.

A guy in uniform is waiting as we climb out of our craft.

"Are you the group from the USA headed to Gunung Palung National Park?" You can tell this guy is looking at the three of us, not quite believing what he's seeing.

"Yes, I'm **W**heaton **I**van **G**uinto from ResQ, and these are my associates, Ariella Gordon and Stowe LeBlond. We are here to help Ranger Rezaputra at Gunung Palung National Park. Is there a secure hangar where I can park our craft?" I point to the ECAPS and wait for a reaction.

"You flew that thing from the U.S., Mr. Guinto?"

"Yes sir. Not sure how long we'll be here. Need to keep it safe."

The guy looks at me the way most grown-ups do, like I'm a kid who could not possibly know what he's talking about. But after scratching his head, the airport person points down the airstrip. "Go park in the hangar on the end of the runway."

As he walks away, Stowe comes over and puts her arm around me. "My dear associate, while you're moving the

ECAPS, I'll go exchange some dollars for rupiahs and pick up a map."

"Good idea," I say, shaking loose. "Angga did warn me that GPS will be unreliable in some places."

"I assume we can fly up to the park in the HeliBoaJee," Ariella says to me.

"Nope. I just texted Angga, and he said there are storms between here and there. We'll be heading north over land."

STOWE LEBLOND'S LOG

*Borneo, Indonesia**April 11**6:30 AM*

The trip to Borneo only took 90 minutes thanks to Wheaton's amazing technology. He wants to minimize how much carbon dioxide we put into the atmosphere, since it contributes to global warming. The ECAPS is launched with hydrogen generated by splitting water (H_2O) with the energy from the sun. This happens on a humongous solar wall he created on the side of the hangar.

Once we're in orbit the ECAPS is fueled with methane Wheaton's generated in these giant fuel cells. They're filled with microorganisms that digest garbage and release methane, sort of like cows. I was worried it would smell yucky but Wheaton pointed out that methane is odorless. He told me that hydrogen sulfide, which smells like rotten eggs, is a by-product of the generation process. He assured me that it is removed before the methane is stored. He doesn't like that smell either.

We won't have the solar wall when it's time to come home, so Wheaton's brought along pulverized aluminum. When we need hydrogen for the return flight, he'll put his special mix in water. The aluminum will bind to the oxygen in H_2O , releasing the needed hydrogen fuel. And he got the aluminum powder from recycled soda cans. ResQ is all about minimizing waste!

Borneo is one of the 18,000 islands that make up the country of Indonesia. While as many as 6,000 of the islands are uninhabited, the rest of the islands have lots going on. More than 17 million people live on Borneo along with 15,000 plant species and more than 1,400 amphibians, birds, fish, mammals, reptiles and insects. Indonesia comes right after Brazil in having the most biodiversity in the world.

Borneo is one of the biggest islands in Indonesia and the third biggest island in the world. Mom, in case you're wondering, Greenland and New Guinea are bigger. Borneo is actually only 73% Indonesian. That part is also known as Kalimantan. 26% is part of Malaysia, and 1%, in the North, is the independent country of Brunei.

Borneo is 287,000 square miles in size. Vermont is only 9,623 square miles. That makes Borneo 30 times bigger! Before the last ice age, Borneo was connected to Asia by land bridges. When the ice melted these connections went under water and now Borneo is an island.

I guess a lot changed after the ice age. Borneo's weather is tropical, which is a nice way of saying hot and humid. I guess that's because the equator runs right through the island. The park we are going to, Gunung Palung, is less than 100 miles south of the equator! We are going to the middle of the earth, sort of ☺. The wet season is from November to March, and what they call the dry season is from April through October. Not sure that there is anything close to dry in a place that averages 150 inches of rain a year. In Vermont we have an average of 36 inches of rain per year.

We do get 81 inches of snow on average, but at least you can ski on it!

I'm excited to see this island. Looks like most of the people live along the coasts, some of which are pretty swampy. There are some tall mountains and many rivers. Most of the rivers are only navigable for around 100 miles, which means any boat that tries to go farther is going to end up lost or stuck. That's why so much of Borneo is still a mystery. Good thing we have the HeliBoaJee to help us get around. And, of course, I'm a great navigator.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This story and the characters are fictitious. My inspiration comes from the wonderful scientists and keepers at the Smithsonian's National Zoo and Conservation Biology Institute. The natural history described in this book is based upon fact as determined through the literature, and first hand accounting of people who know the orangutan and the environment in Borneo. Special thanks to Meredith Bastian, Curator of Primates for the National Zoo for her detailed reading of this manuscript. Thanks to Cam Webb who took the time to call me from Borneo and help me visualize this remarkable place. The Materials Research Institute at Penn State provided the inspiration for Wheaton's futuristic inventions. Thanks to Carlo Pantano and Edward Liszka for brainstorming with me, and helping me understand the underlying principles of the materials used in the story. Thanks to all the readers of this manuscript from its inception—especially the Writers4Kids of State College, my exceptional editor/publisher, Pendred Noyce, my husband Ira for all his encouragement, and Hudson Jeremy Pell-Gibson, together with whom the whole idea of ResQ started.

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