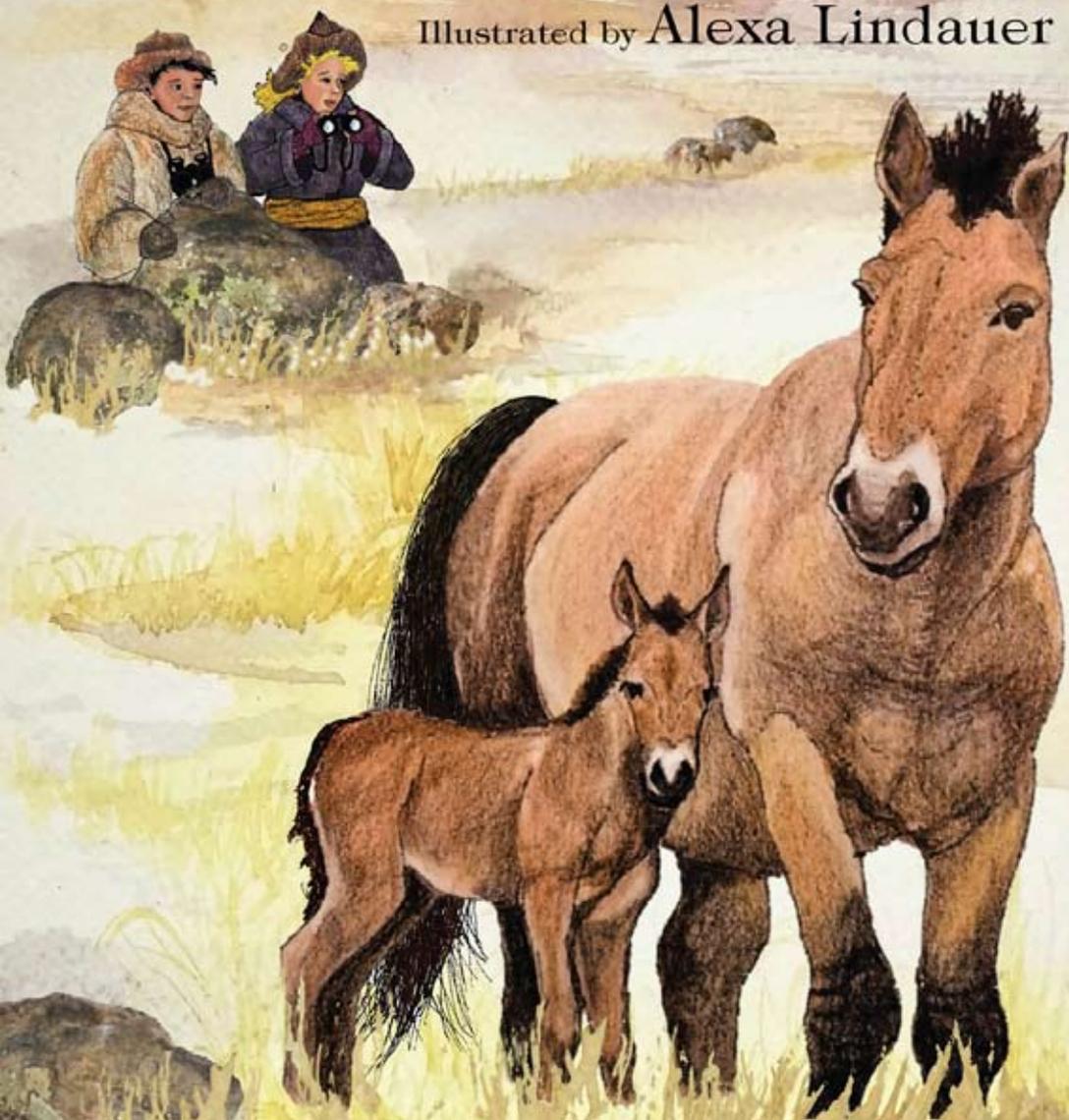


ResQ Takes on the Takhi



Eva J. Pell

Illustrated by Alexa Lindauer



For Aspen, Hudson and Landon

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SAVING ONE ANIMAL AT A TIME

Eva J. Pell
Illustrated by
Alexa Lindauer

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CONTENTS

1. <i>Dynochute</i> Express	<u>1</u>
2. Welcome To ResQ Headquarters	<u>5</u>
3. Needed In Mongolia	<u>8</u>
4. Ariella Enters The Picture	<u>13</u>
4a. Stowe LeBlond's Log	<u>19</u>
5. Preparing For Departure	<u>20</u>
5a. Stowe LeBlond's Log	<u>24</u>
6. Loaded Up And Ready To Go	<u>26</u>
7. Fast Trip To Mongolia	<u>29</u>
7a. Stowe LeBlond's Log	<u>35</u>
8. Munuu Preps ResQ	<u>37</u>
9. Gear Readied For Rescue	<u>42</u>
10. Off To Hustai Nuruu National Park	<u>48</u>
10a. Stowe LeBlond's Log	<u>51</u>
11. Some Dead Clues And A Collar	<u>54</u>
11a. Stowe LeBlond's Log	<u>62</u>
12. Stopping At A <i>Ger</i> Hotel	<u>64</u>
12a. Stowe LeBlond's Log	<u>71</u>
13. Night Ride	<u>73</u>
14. What's Wrong With That Mare?	<u>77</u>
15. Explaining Ourselves	<u>81</u>
15a. Stowe LeBlond's Log	<u>85</u>

16.	Sick Foal Headed To Ulaanbaatar	<u>87</u>
	16a. Stowe LeBlond's Log	<u>94</u>
17.	Designing A Herding Device	<u>96</u>
18.	Takhi-Herding-Sound System Ready To Go	<u>101</u>
19.	No More Time To Wait	<u>107</u>
	19a. Stowe LeBlond's Log	<u>111</u>
20.	Scoping Out The Terrain	<u>113</u>
	20a. Stowe LeBlond's Log	<u>122</u>
21.	Horses En Route To Find Horses	<u>124</u>
22.	Seeking Shelter	<u>132</u>
23.	Reunited	<u>141</u>
24.	Herding Horses Begins	<u>145</u>
25.	Unwanted Guest	<u>151</u>
26.	Taking Care Of Sunshine	<u>158</u>
27.	Another Long Night	<u>167</u>
	27a. Stowe LeBlond's Log	<u>170</u>
	27b. Stowe LeBlond's Note To Her Parents	<u>172</u>
28.	Another Foal Headed To Ulaanbaatar	<u>174</u>
29.	Driving The Herd Home	<u>178</u>
30.	Saying Good Bye	<u>184</u>
	Acknowledgments	<u>189</u>
	About the Author	<u>190</u>



1. *DYNOCHUTE EXPRESS*

It's a long way from here in Hoboken, New Jersey, to my cousin Stowe's house in Vermont. We only get to see each other once in a while when our parents have time to drive us. But those days are over—thanks to the Dynochute.

After texting Stowe to let her know I'm sending my latest invention to bring her down for a visit, I head up to the rooftop of 12 River Road. It's kind of windy up here, but with my feet firmly planted on the tar-papered surface I hit the STRETCH button on the computer screen and watch my beautiful transporter tube extend from its home in the dilapidated old chimney. Small thrusters guide the Dynochute in an arc above the treetops. In two minutes and thirteen seconds it arrives at its destination—Stowe's front porch in Vermont. I send a text. "DYNOCHUTE HAS LANDED. PREPARE 4 DEPARTURE."

A camera is mounted on the Dynochute opening. I hear a

door slam, and seconds later my cousin appears on screen. Must be warm in the house. All she has on are leggings, a t-shirt and her pink fluffy slippers.

Then I send another text message. "HERE COMES TRANSIT SUIT. CALL 4 FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS."

A large container lands with a thud on Stowe's wooden porch.

Stowe, with her phone now perched under her chin, inspects the brown transit suit and bright red helmet I've sent to protect her. "Quite the color combination. I'm going to look like an apple tree."

"But you love trees. Anyway, put it on so I can get you down here. A guy from Mongolia left a phone message at ResQ headquarters and said he's calling back soon. Ariella's out and you're better at talking to people than me." Plus, twelve-year-old girls sound a lot more grown up than eleven-year-old boys.

"Okay. Timing's perfect," she says. "I'm so ready to escape from the mountain of schoolwork Mom's piled on me. Give me a sec. I need to go back to the house and grab some stuff I want to bring along."

Stowe returns lugging an over-stuffed backpack. She kicks off her slippers and pulls on the suit.

"Put your pack in the compression-proof box the transit suit came in," I tell her.

"Check. I'm ready, but are you positive the Dynochute is strong enough to hold me?"

"No worries," I assure Stowe. "It's shape-memory polymer. Gets stronger as it stretches."

“No worries for *you*, Wheaton Ivan Guinto, mighty inventor. You’re standing on the roof waiting for me. I still remember that chocolate bar you sent through the Dynochute. It arrived here as a pile of chocolate chips.”

“That was before I perfected the slow-down for landing. And the crazy way you ski is way more dangerous than a little ride in the Dynochute.”

“Yeah, but on skis, I’m in control.”

“Stowe, trust me, you’ll be fine. Remember to seal the compression suit and lock your visor in place on the helmet. I’ll be watching through the camera mounted by your right ear. Are you ready?”

“Ready as I’ll ever be.” She marches to the opening and in preparation for the trip sets the compression box on the ledge of the Dynochute, with her legs straddling the sides.

There is no prep time. As soon as I push the TRANSIT button, the box catapults forward and she’s sucked in feet first, zipping through the tunnel. The howling wind coming out of the Dynochute sounds like a souped-up vacuum cleaner.

In 75.2 seconds, Stowe decelerates, landing inside the chimney as she crashes into the container that preceded her.

Stowe shoves the box out of her way as she crawls out the exit door. “Phew, it stinks like something died in there,” she says, flipping up her helmet. “How old is this stack?”

“Old. But who cares about a little smell. How’d you like the Dynochute? Pretty cool, huh?”

“Well, it beats the long bus ride.”

I can't believe that's all she can say. 260 miles divided by 75.2 seconds is 3.46 miles per second.

"You were flying at 12,456 miles per hour. That's a speed that would make Superman jealous."

"Sorry Wig, I don't want to hurt your feelings." Stowe rubs her hand through my mop of hair and gives me a grin. "But hurling through the Dynochute—in *the dark*—it's a little hard to know where you're going to end up, or in what condition."

"Well, now you know." Of the two of us I'm not usually the one who's doing the reassuring.

"Next time, how about a pillow for the landing," Stowe says, rubbing her bottom.

Stowe flips off her helmet. Her scrambled-egg hair is standing straight up. She yanks her legs out of the transit suit and we both look down at her glittery toenails.

"I assume you have shoes in your backpack?" Not waiting for an answer, I hoist it out of the transit box and hand it to her. "What's in this? It weighs a ton."

"You did say something about a call from Mongolia. I figured I better be ready. Now let's get to the phone before that guy calls back."

2. WELCOME TO RESQ HEADQUARTERS

“Let’s go down the outside stairs,” I say, leading the way.

Stowe’s bare feet slam the spiral steps, skipping every other metal rung. I take a little longer, hitting each step. Don’t want to twist my ankle.

We reach the street and I tell Stowe to close her eyes. “I’ve got a surprise for you. Hold on to me and I’ll make sure you don’t step in any dog souvenirs.” I guide Stowe to the storefront at the entrance of the old building Ariella, our grandmother, inherited from her father. “Okay, you can open them now.”

“OMG,” she cries. “It’s one of GG Gordino’s old pizza shops!” And then Stowe zeroes in on the hand-carved wooden sign mounted above the door.



Below is a collage of pictures—animals from all over the world.

“Yes!! Ariella’s done it. Like she promised her father she would.” But then Stowe’s happy face turns sad. “I miss GG so much. Remember all the times he took us to the National Zoo.”

“Yeah and his l-o-n-g stories about animals going extinct around the world.” We both laugh, remembering how it sometimes took GG a while to get to his point.

“Do you think he wanted to start ResQ himself?” Stowe asks.

“Nah. He loved the pizza business. But that was his thing. He’d be fine with his daughter selling the stores—”

“To save animals,” Stowe finishes the sentence.

“He’d be happy knowing that with the money Ariella got from selling Gordino’s Pizza, she’ll be able to fund ResQ for

decades. And who knows, maybe I'll get royalties from my inventions to help keep us going too."

I push open the front door and wave to the guys who work in the pizza shop. "This is my cousin Stowe. We're heading upstairs." They nod and glance down at her bare feet. There is a sign in the window that says NO SHOES NO SERVICE. Wonder what they'd think if they knew she's just come out of the chimney!

We exit through the back of the store and run up the stone steps. By now Stowe's feet have to be beyond cold.

The building's got four floors. On the second landing I unlock the door and stretch out my arm. "Welcome to ResQ headquarters."

Stowe looks around and takes a deep breath. "That must be extra garlic on the pizza. Smells awesome." Good old Stowe, always focused on food.

"Yeah, maybe the smell is creeping upstairs, but here we're in Command Central." Our grandmother has knocked out interior walls so what used to be an apartment is now a big open space. We're just getting started, so all we have are a few desks and a worktable.

Stowe lays her phone face down. As she walks away I hear a text vibration, which she ignores. Looks like the ringer's been turned off.

Stowe goes over to photographs our grandmother hung on the wall from our first rescue. "Wonder how the little orangutans are doing these days?"

She starts to say something else, but we're interrupted by the ringing of the ResQ phone.

3. NEEDED IN MONGOLIA

As the ringing continues, I look at Stowe and point to the phone.

“Okay, I’ll answer,” she says, picking up the receiver. “Hello! *Emergency Service for the Rescue of Endangered Species*, Stowe LeBlond, naturalist, speaking.” She switches the phone to speaker.

“Hello. My name is Batar Munkherdene, calling from Mongolia to speak with Ariella Gordon, wildlife photographer. Do I have right number?” The man speaks slowly, but we have to listen hard to understand him.

“Yes, you do,” Stowe says in her most mature voice. “She isn’t here at the moment but I can speak for ResQ. Wheaton Guinto, our engineer, is with me on speaker phone.”

“Hi Mr. Munkherdene,” I say, trying to make my voice sound deep.

By now he may have figured out we're kids, and could be wondering why the two of us aren't in school. If he needs to know, we'll explain that I'm in grad school and Stowe's home-schooled.

"I would prefer to speak with Ms. Gordon, but I will describe problem to you." The caller does sound a little unsure of us.

"What kind of rescue do you need Mr. Munk...her ... deneee?" Stowe asks.

"You can call me Munuu. I am director of a project for Preservation and Protection of Takhi."

"Takhi?" I mouth to Stowe.

Stowe does what looks like a little galloping motion, but then holds up her hand, signaling she'll explain later.

Munuu continues. "I work with team of people from around world who are involved in breeding these beautiful horses. We are in process of reintroducing this endangered species back into the wild."

I get it now, and give Stowe a nod.

"The horses live in what are called harems—one stallion, group of mares and some foals. We conduct annual census of all reintroduced horses to see how many we have and how they are doing in natural habitat," Munuu tells us. "For few years, two American scientists who work for a wildlife organization have been coming to Hustai Nuruu National Park to conduct surveys. This year they let me know that one harem is missing."

"What do you think happened? Did they all die?" Stowe butts in.

“It seems unlikely. Last time they were counted, harem had ten members. If they died we would have found remains. We guess they left park. There is a lot of uninhabited territory around park. Based on when they were last seen, we guess they are somewhere east of park and west of Khentii mountains.”

“ResQ’s pretty good at finding missing animals,” I say.

“Yes, I read about you and your advanced search tools on internet,” Munuu says. “Part of what we need is to locate harem to see how many horses are still alive. But if you find takhi, we would also like you to figure out how to drive group back into park. Long-term, an isolated harem will not survive.”

Hmm. I think the problem just got a whole lot more interesting.

“How much time do you think this will take?” Stowe asks a good question. We’ve both got school. This sounds like a big project.

Munuu’s speech starts to speed up. “It is end of October, so we only have little time before winter comes and we have to stop. Temperatures here get very cold, too dangerous to search. Hail and snow can become problem. If we do not find horses soon, it will be too late to go into field. Takhi maybe roam even farther away from rest of horses.

“Can ResQ help us find these horses and figure out way to bring them back to park?”

Stowe and I look at each other and stick our thumbs up at the same time.

“You betcha, Munuu,” Stowe blurts out. “Give us ’til tomorrow to get organized, and we’ll be there. Wheaton’s developed something called the Finder —a bionic dog on a drone.”

“It’ll be useful in locating the lost horses,” I add. “We’ll think about how to move them. I have a few ideas.”

“This is outstanding news.” Munuu seems to hesitate a moment and then asks, “Can you tell me, what are your fees?”

“Oh, don’t worry about that. Ariella, um, Ms. Gordon, requests that our clients make a donation to support the next rescue,” Stowe tells him.

No time to worry about fees now. We need to seal the deal.

“Munuu, we’ll be flying in on a super-speed private aircraft.”

Stowe gives me a nod. She knows I’m referring to the ECAPS, our mini space shuttle.

“You want to fly into Chinggis Khaan Airport in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia’s capital,” Munuu says. “It is about 60 miles from Hustai Nuruu National Park. I will let the authorities know you are coming.

“When you get here I will fill you in on details about park, and provide special maps and anything else you might need. Please text me when you know your arrival time. I look forward to meeting you.”

“Same here. See you soon,” I say.



As I hang up we see our grandmother Ariella, in her usual black jeans and black shirt, leaning against the wall on the other side of the room. Her long white braid is swung over her shoulder, and her arms are folded across her chest. Wonder how long she's been standing there?

“Well, hello, Stowe. How did *you* get here? And who are you two seeing soon?”

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Eva Pell is a PhD biologist, internationally known for her study of air pollution effects on plants. She was the Sr. Vice President for Research and Dean of the Graduate School at the Pennsylvania State University and was Under Secretary for Science at the Smithsonian Institution. She and her husband have three grandchildren, and reside in State College, Pennsylvania. This is her second book in the ResQ series.