

*MAXIMUM RIDE*  
THE  
ANGEL  
EXPERIMENT

JAMES PATTERSON



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For Jennifer Rudolph Walsh; Hadley, Griffin, and Wyatt Zangwill

Gabrielle Charbonnet; Monina and Piera Varela

Suzie and Jack

MaryEllen and Andrew

Carole, Brigid, and Meredith

*Fly, babies, fly!*

## **To the reader:**

The idea for *Maximum Ride* comes from earlier books of mine called *When the Wind Blows* and *The Lake House*, which also feature a character named Max who escapes from a quite despicable School. Most of the similarities end there.

# MAXIMUM RIDE

THE ANGEL EXPERIMENT

## WARNING

If you dare to read this story,  
you become part of the Experiment.  
I know that sounds a little mysterious—  
but it's all I can say right now.

Max

# PROLOGUE

Congratulations. The fact that you're reading this means you've taken one giant step closer to surviving till your next birthday. Yes, *you*, standing there leafing through these pages. *Do not put this book down.* I'm dead serious — your life could depend on it.

This is my story, the story of my family, but it could just as easily be your story too. We're all in this together; trust me on that.

I've never done anything like this, so I'm just going to jump in, and you try to keep up.

Okay. I'm Max. I'm fourteen. I live with my family, who are five kids not related to me by blood, but still totally my family.

We're — well, we're kind of amazing. Not to sound too full of myself, but we're like nothing you've ever seen before.

Basically, we're pretty cool, nice, smart — but not “average” in any way. The six of us — me, Fang, Iggy, Nudge, the Gasman, and Angel — were made on purpose, by the sickest, most horrible “scientists” you could possibly imagine. They created us as an experiment. An experiment

where we ended up only 98 percent human. That other 2 percent has had a big impact, let me tell you.

We grew up in a science lab/prison called the School, in cages, like lab rats. It's pretty amazing we can think or speak at all. But we can — and so much more.

There was one other School experiment that made it past infancy. Part human, part wolf — all predator: They're called Erasers. They're tough, smart, and hard to control. They look human, but when they want to, they are capable of morphing into wolf men, complete with fur, fangs, and claws. The School uses them as guards, police — and executioners.

To them, we're six moving targets — prey smart enough to be a fun challenge. Basically, they want to rip our throats out. And make sure the world never finds out about us.

But I'm not lying down just yet. I'm telling *you*, right?

This story could be about you — or your children. If not today, then soon. So please, please take this seriously. I'm risking everything that matters by telling you — *but you need to know*.

Keep reading — don't let anyone stop you.

— Max. And my family: Fang, Iggy, Nudge, the Gasman, and Angel.

Welcome to our nightmare.

PART 1

*FLOCK  
FRIGHT*

The funny thing about facing imminent death is that it really snaps everything else into perspective. Take right now, for instance.

*Run! Come on, run! You know you can do it.*

I gulped deep lungfuls of air. My brain was on hyper-drive; I was racing for my life. My one goal was to escape. Nothing else mattered.

My arms being scratched to ribbons by a briar I'd run through? No biggie.

My bare feet hitting every sharp rock, rough root, pointed stick? Not a problem.

My lungs aching for air? I could deal.

As long as I could put as much distance as possible between me and the Erasers.

Yeah, Erasers. Mutants: half-men, half-wolves, usually armed, always bloodthirsty. Right now they were after me.

See? That snaps everything into perspective.

*Run. You're faster than they are. You can outrun anyone.*

I'd never been this far from the School before. I was totally lost. Still, my arms pumped by my sides, my feet crashed

through the underbrush, my eyes scanned ahead anxiously through the half-light. I could outrun them. I could find a clearing with enough space for me to —

*Oh, no. Oh, no.* The unearthly baying of bloodhounds on the scent wailed through the trees, and I felt sick. I could outrun men — all of us could, even Angel, and she's only six. But none of us could outrun a big dog.

*Dogs, dogs, go away, let me live another day.*

They were getting closer. Dim light filtered in through the woods in front of me — a clearing? *Please, please . . .* a clearing could save me.

I burst through the trees, chest heaving, a thin sheen of cold sweat on my skin.

*Yes!*

*No — oh, no!*

I skidded to a halt, my arms waving, my feet backpedaling in the rocky dirt.

It wasn't a clearing. In front of me was a *cliff*, a sheer face of rock that dropped to an unseeable floor hundreds of feet below.

In back of me were woods filled with drooling bloodhounds and psycho Erasers with guns.

Both options stank.

The dogs were yelping excitedly — they'd found their prey: *moi*.

I looked over the deadly drop.

There was no choice, really. If you were me, you'd have done the same thing.

I closed my eyes, held out my arms . . . and let myself fall over the edge of the cliff.

The Erasers screamed angrily, the dogs barked hysterically, and then all I could hear was the sound of air rushing past me.

It was so dang peaceful, for a second. I smiled.

Then, taking a deep breath, I unfurled my wings as hard and fast as I could.

Thirteen feet across, pale tan with white streaks and some freckly looking brown spots, they caught the air, and I was suddenly yanked upward, hard, as if a parachute had just opened. *Yow!*

*Note to self: No sudden unfurling.*

Wincing, I pushed downward with all my strength, then pulled my wings up, then pushed downward again.

Oh, my god, I was *flying* — just like I'd always dreamed.

The cliff floor, draped in shadow, receded beneath me. I laughed and surged upward, feeling the pull of my muscles, the air whistling through my secondary feathers, the breeze drying the sweat on my face.

I soared up past the cliff edge, past the startled hounds and the furious Erasers.

One of them, hairy-faced, fangs dripping, raised his gun. A red dot of light appeared on my torn nightgown. *Not today, you jerk*, I thought, veering sharply west so the sun would be in his hate-crazed eyes.

*I'm not going to die today.*