

Maximum Ride

SAVING THE WORLD AND
OTHER EXTREME SPORTS

JAMES PATTERSON



LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY

New York → Boston → London

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The text was set in Life.

For Kelly and Kevin Okun

And for everybody out there who might love books,
if they were given books that loved them back



Many thanks to Gabrielle Charbonnet, my conspirator, who
flies high and cracks wise. And to Mary Jordan, for brave
assistance and research at every twist and turn.

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. Max and the other kids in *Maximum Ride* are not the same Max and kids featured in those two books. Nor do Frannie and Kit play any part in *Maximum Ride*. I hope you enjoy the ride anyway.

PROLOGUE

*NO MORE
MISTAKES!*

Itexicon American Headquarters

Florida, United States

“We have meticulously crafted the skeleton of our new world,” the Director proclaimed from the large TV screen in the conference room. “Parts of this skeleton are scattered across the globe. Now the time has come to connect those parts, to become one! And, as one, we will commence our Re-Evolution!”

The Director stopped speaking when she noticed that the phone was vibrating in the pocket of her white lab coat. Frowning, she pulled it out and looked at a message. The situation in Building 3 had become critical.

“It’s time,” she said, glancing at a colleague offscreen. “Seal Building Three and gas everything inside.”

Across the conference table, Roland ter Borcht smiled. Jeb Batchelder ignored him as the Director turned her attention back to the camera.

“Everything is in place, and we’re commencing the By-Half Plan as of oh seven hundred tomorrow. As you know, Jeb, the *only* puzzle piece not fitting in, the *only* fly in the

ointment, the *only* loose end not tied up is your obnoxious, uncontrollable, pathetic, useless, flying *failures*.”

Ter Borscht nodded gravely and shot Jeb a glance.

“You begged us to wait until the bird kids’ preprogrammed expiration date kicked in,” the Director went on, her voice tight with tension. “But you no longer have that luxury, no matter how soon it will happen. Get rid of those loose cannons *now*, Dr. Batchelder. Do I make myself clear?”

Jeb nodded. “I understand. They’ll be taken care of.”

The Director wasn’t so easily convinced. “You show me proof of extinction of those bird-kid mistakes by oh seven hundred tomorrow,” she said, “or you will be the one to become extinct. Do we have an understanding?”

“Yes.” Jeb Batchelder cleared his throat. “It’s already in place, Director. They’re just waiting for my signal.”

“*Then give them the signal,*” the Director snarled. “When you arrive in Germany, this foolishness must be over. It is a momentous day . . . the dawn of a new era for humankind . . . and there is no time to waste. There is much to do if we’re to reduce the world’s population by one-half.”

PART 1

*IN
SEARCH
OF HOT
CHOCOLATE-
CHIP
COOKIES*

“Lay off the freaking horn!” I said, rubbing my forehead.

Nudge pulled away from the steering wheel, which Fang was holding. “Sorry,” she said. “It’s just so much fun — it sounds like a party.”

I looked out the van window and shook my head, struggling to keep my irritation in check.

It seemed like only yesterday that we’d done the pretty impossible and busted out of the very creepy and deeply disturbing Itex headquarters in Florida.

In reality, it had been four days. Four days since Gazzy and Iggy had blown a hole in the side of the Itex headquarters, thus springing us from our latest diabolical incarceration.

Because we’re just crazy about *consistency*, we were on the run again.

However, in an interesting, nonflying change of pace, we were driving. We’d made the savvy decision to borrow an eight-passenger van that had apparently been a love machine back in the ’80s: shag carpeting everywhere,

blacked-out windows, a neon rim around the license plate that we'd immediately disabled as too conspicuous.

There was, for once, plenty of room for all six of us: me (Max); Fang, who was driving; Iggy, who was trying to convince me to let him drive, although he's *blind*; Nudge, in the front seat next to Fang, seemingly unable to keep her mitts off the horn; the Gasman (Gazzy); and Angel, my baby.

And Total, who was Angel's talking dog. Long story.

Gazzy was singing a Weird Al Yankovic song, sounding exactly like the original. I admired Gazzy's uncanny mimicking ability but resented his fascination with bodily functions, a fascination apparently shared by Weird Al.

"*Enough* with the constipation song," Nudge groaned, as Gazzy launched into the second verse.

"Are we going to stop soon?" Total asked. "I have a sensitive bladder." His nose twitched, and his bright eyes looked at me. Because I was the leader and I made the decisions about stopping. And about a million other things.

I glanced down at the map on the laptop screen in my actual lap, then rolled down the window to look at the night sky, gauge our whereabouts.

"You could have gotten a car with GPS," Total said helpfully.

"Yes," I said. "Or we could have brought along a dog that doesn't talk." I gave Angel a pointed look, and she smiled, well, angelically at me.

Total huffed, offended, and climbed into her lap, his

small, black, Scottie-like body fitting neatly against her. She kissed his head.

Just an hour ago we'd finally sped across the state border, into Louisiana, meticulously sticking to our carefully plotted, brilliantly conceived plan of "heading west." Away from the laugh riot that had been our stint in south Florida. Because we still had a mission: to stop Itex and the School and the Institute and whoever else was involved from destroying us and from destroying the world. We're nothing if not ambitious.

"Louisiana, the state that road maintenance forgot," I muttered, grimacing at hitting yet another pothole. I didn't think I could take this driving thing much longer. From the Everglades to here had taken *forever* in a car, as compared with flying.

On the other hand, even a big '80s love van was less noticeable than six flying children and their talking dog.

So there you go.