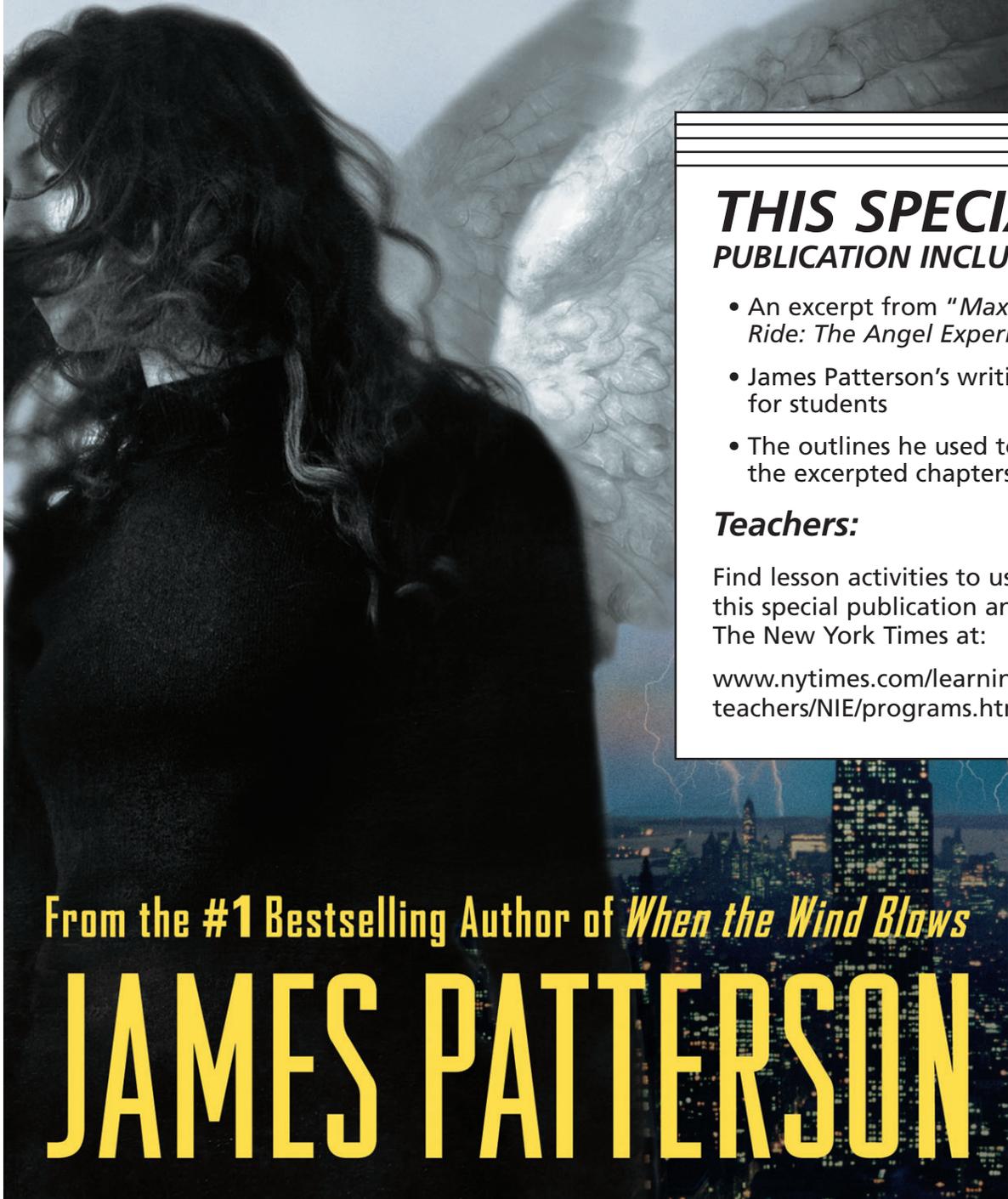


MAXIMUM RIDE

THE ANGEL EXPERIMENT



THIS SPECIAL PUBLICATION INCLUDES:

- An excerpt from "Maximum Ride: The Angel Experiment"
- James Patterson's writing tips for students
- The outlines he used to write the excerpted chapters

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From the #1 Bestselling Author of *When the Wind Blows*

JAMES PATTERSON

Maximum Ride is a novel about six pretty amazing kids who are brought up in a science lab and have some remarkable powers, like — *they can fly*. The story, I think, is as good as *Spider-Man*, and I love Spidey.

When I was researching *Maximum Ride*, I talked to dozens of scientists, and they told me that things *like* what happens in *Maximum Ride* will occur in our lifetime.

Anyway, in this excerpt from the book, the kids — led by Max, who is the story’s narrator — arrive in New York City. Here’s what happens next.

(By the way, the kids are being pursued by Erasers. Erasers are part human but can morph into wolves, and they are *nasty*.)

— James Patterson

75

“Oh, my God,” I muttered, staring at the lights below us. Most of New York City is at the bottom part of a long, thin island — Manhattan Island, actually. You could tell exactly where it began and ended, because suddenly the dark landscape was ablaze with lights. Streaming pearls of headlights moved slowly through the arteries of the city. It looked like every window in every building had a light burning.

“That’s a *lot* of people,” Fang said, coming up beside me.

I knew what he was thinking: We all tend to get a little claustrophobic, a little paranoid when we’re around lots of people. Not only had Jeb constantly warned us about interacting with anyone for any reason, but there was always the possibility that one of those strangers could suddenly morph into an Eraser.

“Oh, my gosh, oh, my gosh,” Nudge was saying excitedly. “I want to go down there! I want to walk on Fifth Avenue! I want to go to museums!” She turned to me, her face alight with anticipation. “Do we have any money left? Can we get something to eat? Can we, like, go shopping?”

“We have some money,” I told her. “We can get something to eat. But remember, we’re here to find the Institute.”

Nudge nodded, but I could tell half of my words had gone right out her other ear.

“What’s that sound?” Iggy asked, concentrating. “*It’s music*. Is there music below us? How could we hear it, way up here?”

Central Park was a big, relatively dark rectangle below us. At one end, in a clearing, I could see an enormous crowd of people. Huge floodlights were shining over them.

“I think it must be a concert,” I told Iggy. “In the park. An outdoor concert.”

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“Oh, so cool!” Nudge said. “Can we go? Please, Max, please? A real concert!” If it’s possible for someone to bounce up and down with excitement while flying, Nudge was doing it.

The park was pretty dark. There were hundreds of thousands of people down there. Even Erasers would have a hard time finding us in that crowd.

I made an executive decision. “Yes. Try to come down right behind a floodlight’s beam, so we won’t be seen.”

We landed silently among a group of thick-trunked oaks. We took a moment to shake out our legs, and fold in our wings and cover them with windbreakers. After a quick head count, I led the way toward the crowd, trying to look casual, like, *Fly? Me? Nah.*

The music was unbelievably loud: Speakers taller than Iggy were stacked on top of one another, three high. To me it felt as if the actual ground was vibrating.

“What concert is this?” Iggy asked, yelling in my ear.

I peered over tens of thousands of heads to see the raised stage. Thanks to my raptorlike vision, I had no trouble making out the musicians. And a banner that said Natalie and Trent Taylor. “It’s the Taylor Twins,” I reported, and most of the flock whooped and whistled. They loved the Taylor Twins.

Angel kept close to me, her small hand in mine, as we stood among the crowd. We were enough on the edge that we avoided the sardine effect of the people closer to the stage. I think we all would have freaked out if we’d been that hemmed in, that unable to move. Iggy put the Gasman on his shoulders and gave him his lighter to burn, like thousands of other people. The Gasman swayed in time to the music, holding the lighter high.

Once he looked down at me, and his face was so full of happiness I almost started crying. How often had I seen him look like that? Like, twice? In eight years?

We listened to Natalie and Trent until the concert ended. As soon as the rivers of people began to flow past us, we melted into the shadows of the trees. The branches above us were thick and welcoming. We flew up into them, settling comfortably.

“That was awesome,” Nudge said happily. “I can’t believe how many people there are, all crowded into one place. I mean, listen... *There’s no silence, ever.* I can hear people and traffic and sirens and dogs barking. I mean, it was always so quiet back at home.”

“Too quiet,” said the Gasman.

“Well, I hate it,” Iggy said flatly. “When it’s quiet, I can tell where the heck things are, people are, where echoes are bouncing off. Here I’m just surrounded with a thick, smothering wall of sound. I want to get out of here.”

“Oh, Iggy, no!” Nudge cried. “This place is so cool. You’ll get used to it.”

“We’re here to find out what we can about the Institute,” I reminded both of them. “I’m sorry, Iggy, but maybe you’ll get a little more used to it soon. And Nudge, this isn’t a pleasure trip. Our goal is to find the Institute.”

“How are we gonna do that?” Angel asked.

“*I have a plan,*” I said firmly. God, I was really going to have to get all this lying under control.

76

Basically, if you put a fence around New York City, you’d have the world’s biggest nontraveling circus.

When we woke up at dawn the next morning, there were already joggers, bicyclers, even horseback riders weaving their way along the miles and miles of trails in Central Park. We slipped down out of the trees and casually wandered the paths.

Within an hour, speed skaters were rushing by, street performers were setting up their props, and the

paths were almost crowded with dog walkers and moms pushing jogging strollers.

“That lady has six white poodles!” Nudge hissed behind her hand. “Who needs six white poodles?”

“Maybe she sells them,” I suggested, “to kids with big wide eyes.”

“Something smells awesome,” Iggy said, swiveling his head to detect the source. “What is that? It’s over there.” He pointed off to my left.

“There’s a guy selling food,” I said. “It says honey-roasted peanuts.”

“I am so there,” said Iggy. “Can I have some money?”

Iggy, Angel, and I went to buy six small bags of honey-roasted peanuts (they really did smell like heaven), and Fang, Nudge, and the Gasman went to look at a clown selling balloons.

We were walking over to join them when something about the clown caught my eye. She was watching a sleek, dark-haired guy strolling down a path. Their gazes met.

A chill went down my back. Just like that, my enjoyment of the day burst. I was swept into fear, anger, and an intense self-preservation reflex.

“Iggy, heads up,” I whispered. “Get the others.”

Beside me, Angel was wound tight, her hand clenching mine hard. We walked fast toward the others. Fang, doing an automatic sweep of the area, saw my urgent expression. In the next moment he had clamped a hand on Nudge’s and the Gasman’s shoulders and spun them around to walk quickly away.

We met on the path and sped up our pace. One glance behind me showed the dark-haired guy following us. He was joined by a woman who looked just as intent and powerful as he did.

A flow of heroically suppressed swear words ran through my brain. I scanned the scenery for escape routes, a place where we could take off, a place to duck and cover.

They were gaining on us.

“Run!” I said. The six of us can run faster than most grown men, but the Erasers had also been genetically enhanced. If we couldn’t find an out, we were done for.

Now there were three of them — they’d been joined by another male-model type. They had broken into an easy trot and were closing the space between us.

Paths merged into other paths, sometimes narrowing, sometimes widening. Again and again, we almost crashed into bikers or skaters going too fast to swerve.

“Four of them,” Fang said. “Pour it on, guys!”

We sped up. They were maybe twenty yards behind us. Hungry grins marred their good-looking faces.

“Six of them!” I said.

“They’re too fast,” Fang informed me unnecessarily. “Maybe we should fly.”

I bit my lip, keeping a tight grip on Angel’s hand. *What to do, what to do. They were closer, and even closer —*

“Eight of them!” said Fang.

77

“Left!” Iggy said, and without question we all hung a sudden left. How he knew it was there, I have no idea.

Our path suddenly opened into a wider plaza surrounded by vendors selling all kinds of stuff. Some brick buildings were on the left, and a big crowd of kids was passing through a metal gate.

I caught a glimpse of a sign: Central Park Zoo.

“Merge!” I whispered, and just like that, we melted smoothly into the horde of schoolkids. Fang, Iggy, Nudge, and I ducked down to be shorter, and we all wormed our way into the middle of the group, so we were surrounded by other kids. None of them seemed to think it was weird we were there — there

must have been more than two hundred of them being herded through the gate.

I repressed an urge to moo and peeped over a girl's shoulder. The Erasers had spread out and were searching for us, looking frustrated.

One of the big creeps tried to push past the policeman at the zoo gate, but the cop blocked his way. "School day only," I heard him say. "No unauthorized grown-ups. Oh, you're a chaperone? Yeah? Show me your pass."

With a low snarl, the Eraser backed away and rejoined his companions. I grinned: stopped in his tracks by a New York cop. Go, boys in blue!

We reached the entry gate: *the moment of truth*.

We got waved in!

"Pass, pass, pass," the gate person muttered, motioning us through without looking at us.

Inside the zoo, we scrambled off to one side, then paused for a moment and slapped high fives.

"Yes!" the Gasman said. "School day only! Yes! I love this place!"

"The zoo!" Nudge said, practically quivering with excitement. "I've always wanted to see a zoo! I've read about 'em — I've seen them on TV. This is so great! Thanks, Max."

I hadn't had anything to do with it, but I smiled and nodded: magnanimous Max.

"Come on, let's get farther in," said Iggy, sounding nervous. "Put some distance between us and them. Jeez, was that a lion? Please tell me it's behind bars."

"It's a zoo, Iggy," Nudge said, taking his arm and leading him. "*Everything* is behind bars."

Like we used to be.

78

"Oh, man, look at the polar bear!" The Gasman pressed his face against the glass of the enclosure, watching as the huge white bear swam gracefully in

its big pool. The bear had an empty steel beer keg to play with, which it was batting through the water.

I'll just tell you flat out: We'd never seen any of these animals before, not in real life. We didn't grow up going on field trips, having Sunday outings with the 'rents. This was a completely different, foreign world, where kids swarmed freely through a zoo, animals were in habitats and weren't undergoing genetic grafting, and we were strolling along, not hooked up to EEG monitors and blood pressure cuffs.

It was wild.

Like this bear. Two bears, actually. A big main bear and a smaller backup bear. They had a pretty large habitat, with huge rocks, an enormous swimming pool, toys to play with.

"Man," said Gazy wistfully. "I'd love to have a pool."

Or, hey! How about a house? Safety? Plenty of food?

Those were about as impossible as a swimming pool. I reached out and rubbed Gazy's shoulder. "That would be really cool," I agreed.

All these animals, even though they were stuck in enclosures, probably bored out of their minds, possibly lonely, still had it so much better than we'd had it at the School. I felt edgy and angry, nervous, still coming off my adrenaline high after being chased by the Erasers. Seeing all these animals made me remember too much about when I was little, when I lived in a cage so small I couldn't stand up.

Which reminded me: We were here to find the Institute, whatever that was. In just a short while, we might know who we were, where we came from, how our whole lives had happened.

I rubbed my hand across my mouth, really starting to feel twitchy and kind of headachy. But Nudge, the Gasman, Angel, and Iggy were having a great time. Nudge was describing everything to Iggy, and they were laughing and running around. Just like normal kids. I mean, except for the retractable wings and all.

“This place gives me the creeps,” Fang said.

“You too? I’m going nuts,” I admitted. “It’s flash-back city. And I have —” I started to say “a headache,” but then didn’t want to complain or have Fang tell me to see a doctor again “an overwhelming desire to set all these animals free.”

“Free to do what?” Fang asked drily.

“Just to be *out*, to escape,” I said.

“Out in the middle of Manhattan?” Fang pointed out. “Free to live without protection, without someone bringing them food, with no idea of how to take care of themselves? They’re better off here. Unless you want to fly to Greenland with a polar bear on your back.”

Logic is just so incredibly annoying sometimes. I shot Fang a look and went to round up everyone.

“Can we leave?” I asked them, trying not to whine. Very unbecoming in a leader. “I just — want to get out of here.”

“You look kind of green,” the Gasman said with interest.

I *was* starting to feel kind of nauseated. “Yeah. Can we split before I upchuck in front of all these impressionable kids?”

“Over here,” Fang said, motioning us to a big crevice between two huge manufactured rocks. It led back to a path that must have been for the zookeepers — it was empty and roped off.

I managed to get out of there without crashing, screaming, or throwing up. What a nice change.

79

“You know what I like about New York?” the Gasman said, noisily chewing his kosher hot dog. “It’s full of New Yorkers who are freakier than we are.”

“So we blend?” Iggy asked.

I glanced over at him. He was licking an ice-cream cone that was like a mini him: tall, thin, and

vanilla. He was already just over six feet tall — not bad for a fourteen-year-old. With his height, his pale skin, and his light reddish-blond hair, I’d always felt he was the most visible of all of us. But here on this broad avenue, we were surrounded by gorgeous supermodels, punk rockers, Goths, and leatherites, suits, students, people from every other country — and, well, yeah, six kids with bulky windbreakers, ratty clothes, and questionable hygiene didn’t really stick out.

“More or less,” I said. “Of course, that won’t help with the Erasers.” Automatically, I did a perimeter sweep, a 360 around us to pick up signs of trouble.

“Speaking of which,” Fang said, “we seem to be dealing with version 6.0.”

“I was thinking the same thing,” I said. “This year’s crop looks more human. And there are females. Which is a bummer.” Even as I said the words, I was examining every face we passed, looking for a hint of feral sleekness, a cruel light in the eyes, a hard slash of a mouth.

“Yeah. We all know how bloodthirsty females are. Dirty fighting and so on,” Fang said.

I rolled my eyes. What a comedian.

“Can I have a burrito?” Nudge asked as we approached yet another street vendor. She faced me, bouncing backward down the sidewalk. “What’s a nish? I can have aburrito, right?”

“Ka-nish,” I corrected her. “It’s like a square of mashed potatoes, fried.” I was scanning every building — for what, I didn’t know. A big sign that said The Institute?

“What’s sauerkraut?” Angel asked.

“You don’t want it,” I said. “Trust me.”

We each got a burrito, hot and wrapped in foil.

“I like being able to just buy food as we walk along,” Nudge said happily. “If you walk a couple blocks, there’s someone selling food. And delis. I love delis! They’re everywhere! Everywhere you go, there’s everything you need: food, delis, banks, sub-

way stops, buses, cool stores, fruit stands right on the street. This is the best place, I'm telling you. Maybe we should always live here."

"It would certainly be convenient for the Erasers," I said. "They wouldn't have to track us down in the middle of nowhere."

Nudge frowned, and Angel took my hand.

"But you're right, Nudge," I said, sorry for raining on her parade. "I know what you mean." But it was costing money, and we were running out. *And we had a mission.*

Suddenly, I stopped dead, as if I'd been poleaxed.

Fang examined my face. "That pain?" he asked quietly, glancing around as if planning where to take me if I suddenly crumpled.

I shook my head and inhaled deeply. "*Cookies!*"

He looked at me blankly.

I spun in a circle to see where the aroma was coming from. Duh. Right in front of us was a small red storefront. Mrs. Fields. The scent of cookies right out of the oven wafted out onto the street. It smelled like Ella's house, like safety, like home.

"I must have cookies," I announced, and went into the store, Angel trotting at my side.

They were fabulous.

But not as good as homemade.

80

"So what's your big plan for finding the Institute?" Iggy asked.

"I'm tired of walking," Nudge said. "Can we just sit for a minute?" Without waiting for an answer, she sank onto some broad stone steps in front of a building. She rested her head in her hands and closed her eyes.

"Uh..." *Just walk around until we see it* didn't seem like a good response. But Iggy had hit the nail on the head: I didn't know how to find the Institute.

I didn't know what it looked like or even, really, if it was in New York City.

The Gasman and Angel sat down next to Nudge. I was struck once again by what incredibly cute kids they are — for mutants.

"How about a phone book?" Fang suggested. "Every once in a while I see one."

"Yeah, that's a possibility," I said, frustrated by not coming up with something better. We needed an information system of some kind — like a computer we could hack into. A large marble lion caught my eye; this building had two of them. Very fancy-schmancy.

I blinked and saw four lions, like images superimposed on one another. They flickered in front of my eyes, and I shook my head a bit. I blinked again, and everything was normal. A heavy weight settled on my chest — my brain was malfunctioning again.

"So what are we going to do?" Iggy asked.

Yeah, leader, lead.

Stalling for time, worried that my head might explode at any moment, I looked up at the building in front of us. It had a name. It was called the New York Public Library of Humanities and Social Sciences. Hello. *A library.*

I jerked my head at the building. "We're going to start in here," I said briskly, and clapped twice to get the younger set on its feet. "I figure they've got computers, databases..." I let my voice trail off and started purposefully up the steps. Nudge, Gazzy, and Angel followed me.

"How does she do that?" I heard Fang ask Iggy.

81

Inside, the library was awesome. None of us had ever been inside one, and we were staring like the out-of-town yokels we were.

"May I help you?" A young guy was standing

behind a polished wooden counter. He looked faintly disapproving, but not like he wanted to rip our lungs out, so I figured he wasn't an Eraser.

"Yes." I stepped forward, looking as serious and professional as a fourteen-year-old mutant who had never been in a library can look. "I was hoping to find information about a certain institute that I *think* is in New York." I smiled at him, putting real warmth into it, and he blinked. "Unfortunately, I don't know the whole name or where in New York it is. Is there a computer I could use to search? Or some sort of database?"

He glanced over all of us. Angel stepped up next to me and put her hand in mine. She smiled sweetly at the guy, looking, well, angelic.

"Fourth floor," the guy said after a pause. "There are computers in a room off the main reading room. They're free, but you have to sign in."

"Thank you so much," I said, smiling again. Then we hustled to the elevators.

The Gasman punched number four.

"Well, aren't you the charmer?" Fang muttered, not looking at me.

"What?" I asked, startled, but he didn't say anything. We rode upward, hating being in a small enclosed space. Sweat was breaking out on my brow by the time the doors slid open on the fourth floor, and we leaped out as if the elevator had been pressurized.

We immediately found a bank of computers with instructions on how to surf the Net. All we had to do was sign in at the desk. I signed "Ella Martinez" with a flourish, and the clerk smiled at me.

That was the last cheerful thing that happened for the next hour and a half. Fang and I searched in every way we could think of and found a million

institutes of one kind or another, in Manhattan and throughout New York state, but none of them seemed promising. My favorite? The Institute for Realizing Your Pet's Inner Potential. Anyone who can explain that to me, drop a line.

Angel was lying under the desk at our feet, murmuring quietly to herself. Nudge and the Gasman were playing hangman on a piece of scrap paper. Violence occasionally broke out, since neither of them could spell their way out of a paper bag.

Iggy was sitting motionless in a chair, and I knew he was listening to every whisper, every scraped chair, every rustle of fabric in the room, creating an invisible map of what was happening all around him.

I typed in another search command, then watched in dismay as the computer screen blurred and crashed. A string of orange words, *fail, fail, fail*, scrolled across the screen before it finally went black and winked out.

"It's almost closing time, anyway," Fang said.

"Can we sleep here?" Iggy said softly. "It's so quiet. I like it in here."

"Uh, I don't think so," I said, looking around. I hadn't realized that most people had left — we were the only ones in the room. Except for a guard, in uniform, who had just spotted us. She started walking toward us, and something about her, her tightly controlled pace, made my inner alarms go off.

"Let's split," I muttered, pulling Iggy out of his chair.

We skittered out of there, found the stairs, and raced down as fast as we could. I was expecting Erasers at any moment. But we burst out into the dim late-afternoon light and ran down the stone steps without anyone following us.

Writing Tips from James Patterson

Here's the most important thing about *Maximum Ride*: It's really fun to read, and that says it all. When most of you finish reading this book, believe me, you'll want to read another novel. Now, isn't that a miracle?

There are a couple things I did in writing *Maximum Ride* that I think you'll find helpful whether you're writing a story, a newspaper article, or a research paper.

First, I had to *observe*. I hope I got across a fair impression of what New York City's like. Some readers say I did a decent job creating realistic dialogue for a group of kids with wings. You be the judge — but only if you have wings yourself!

I *didn't* just sit down and have the words flow out of my pencil (I write by hand before it gets typed up like this). I had to experience New York and I had to get an idea — what some people call an *ear* — for how a bunch of kids might talk.

One thing that you can practice is watching and listening a lot and then writing your impressions down. If you're riding on a bus, or walking to the mall, or stuck waiting in line somewhere, watch and listen, and think about how you'd set what's happening down in words. (Those of you with iPods might try turning down the volume when you're doing this.)

Oh, and that brings me to one of my hugest pieces of advice about writing — *practice*. If you want to get good at something, you've got to do it

a lot, and that means you've got to believe you will get better and be patient about it.

So whether it's creating a scene or writing good dialogue, don't forget to try it a lot, and don't give up if your first few tries aren't fantastic.

Then there's a little thing called *research*. Even when you're writing fiction — something that's made up — you have to deal with reality. If you want people to believe what you're writing, you must have a basic understanding of the things you describe.

So when researching *Maximum Ride*, besides talking to scientists, as I mentioned, I read the science section in the paper and I went to the library and looked up articles.

Finally, if there were three words I could tell you that will make writing easier and more rewarding for you, they would be *outline*, *outline*, and *outline*!

Please listen to your teachers when they tell you to outline. You'll get better grades, and, amazingly, the work will be easier, too.

Think about it. Say you're going somewhere you've never been. Maybe someplace on the far side of Brooklyn, and there's no one around to tell you how to get there. Wouldn't you want directions or a map?

Even if you know exactly what you're going to say, writing is one of those exercises where you never get it exactly right the first time. It's not like talking, where the words flow from your mouth

Writing Tips from James Patterson (continued)

and they're pretty much gone. When you write, they're stuck right there on the page, and then along comes a teacher with a Big Red Pencil.

There will always be words, sentences, and whole paragraphs you'll want to go back and fix. But can you imagine going back and seeing that there are entire pages that need to be ripped up and done over?

If you don't know where you're going when

you start to write, it's easy to go off on in a wrong direction and — just like when you get lost in real life — you might not figure out you're going the wrong way for a long time.

So do yourself a favor and take the time to write down where you want to go. Outline!

You'll find your own system, but here's the outline I wrote for the chapters you just read. Hope it's helpful. Keep reading and writing!

Maximum Ride: The Angel Experiment Chapter Outlines (75 to 81)

CHAPTER 75

They arrive in New York City at night, and it's jaw-dropping. The lights, the tall buildings, the neon on Broadway — everything is visible to their eagle-eye sight. They've never seen anything like this, and they're awed and amazed. So many cars, people, stores, lights, so much noise, so much food. They land in Central Park — there's a huge outdoor concert taking place, with hundreds of thousands of people. The kids stand and listen for a while — it blows their minds that such things could exist in the same universe as the School and Jeb and Erasers. Compared to the stark, serene tranquility of their home in Colorado, this is unbelievable.

CHAPTER 76

The next morning, they wake up in a new world. Central

Park is the best. There are street performers, roller skaters, families, street vendors, people walking dogs — "What the heck is a knish?" Nudge asks. Suddenly Max realizes that a sleek, long-haired guy has been following them for several minutes. Her enjoyment of the sights bursts like a balloon, and she's swept into fear, anger, and her instinctive self-preservation. "Eraser," she whispers under her breath — and they start running down a park path, barely avoiding other people. He's right on their tails and is joined by another one, a female. Ten yards on, and there's three of them, then four. They're getting closer, gaining on the kids, what to do...

CHAPTER 77

There's a huge crowd of schoolchildren taking a field trip to the zoo, and the kids instantly merge with

Maximum Ride: The Angel Experiment

Chapter Outlines (continued)

them, ducking down, staying out of sight. Max catches an occasional glimpse of the frustrated Erasers peering into the crowd of kids. The rent-a-cop at the gate pushes the Erasers back: it's school-only day — no unauthorized adults. The gate clerk ushers them inside, saying, "Pass, pass, pass..." Yes! New York is the best! They love this place!

CHAPTER 78

Now they're in the zoo — they've never been to one before. They go through most of it, staring at animals they've seen only in books. But as they continue (still looking over their shoulders), they start to become uncomfortable. They grew up in cages, just like these animals. In fact, these animals have nicer habitats than they had. It's like looking into an unsettling, twisted mirror, and soon Max has sweat breaking out on the back of her neck. "I want to set them all free," she mutters to Fang. "Free to live without protection, in an unsuitable environment, with no idea how to get food for themselves?" Fang asks dryly. "They're better off here — unless you want to fly to Greenland with a polar bear on your back." "Come on," Max mutters, and they turn a deserted corner, where they can fly out of there. Max's headache is growing more constant, and has waves of nausea.

CHAPTER 79

If there were any place in the world where they might be anonymous, it would be here. They see so many people who are so much freakier than they are. But anyone they see could be an Eraser. Apparently there are female ones now, and their looks have been refined so that they blend in more with regular people. The experiments of the School have obviously been contin-

uing — is that why the whitecoats are so desperate to get the bird kids back? To "improve" them?

Keeping on the alert, they buy street food — jeez, who came up with the idea of sauerkraut? ugh. They're walking down the avenue when suddenly a haunting aroma makes Max stop in her tracks. Her head swivels. They're outside a Mrs. Fields (or some such) cookie place. Cookies are coming out of the oven even as they stare. Without speaking, they move as one into the shop. Moments later they're consuming hot chocolate chip cookies. They're fabulous.

No one approaches them for the rest of the day, though they see any number of suspicious-looking people.

CHAPTER 80

They're not sure how to find the Institute. They need to be able to plug into some kind of information system. On Fifth Avenue and Forty-second Street, they see a huge stone building with big marble lions out front. Max blinks and sees double lions, like images superimposed on each other. Her head aches, and she shakes it and blinks again. She looks up at the building: the New York Public Library of Humanities and Social Sciences. Hmm.

CHAPTER 81

They enter the library. A librarian directs them to a computer. They get nowhere and stop when the computer crashes, the words fail, fail, fail moving shakily across the screen. It's dark now, getting late. They need to find a place to sleep. The library sure would be peaceful to sleep in, but they're hungry; they need to eat. A guard starts walking toward them: it's closing time. Max feels paranoid — there's something in the guard's eye. The kids zip out the door.