



## **Columbia takes 'Maximum Ride'**

### **Payne to adapt Patterson's young adult series**

By MICHAEL FLEMING

Columbia Pictures has acquired screen rights to "Maximum Ride," the bestselling young adult novel series by James Patterson. Studio has set Don Payne to write the script.

The protags are six children who have been genetically altered to be 98% human and 2% bird. The kids, who are bred to fly, escape a lab-rat existence and are then pursued by their scientist creators, who send a pack of part-human part-wolves called Erasers to hunt them down. The fifth installment of the book series will be published next year.

Seaside Entertainment's Avi Arad, Ari Arad and Steven Paul will produce. Patterson will be executive producer.

After producing such Marvel fare as the "Spider-Man," "X-Men" and "Fantastic Four" films as well as "Iron Man" and "The Incredible Hulk," Arad has hopes that "Maximum Ride" can hatch an original superhero franchise, with the elements of alienation and angst that resonate in those spandex-clad movie heroes.

"The 'Maximum Ride' books use man-made mutation as a metaphor of humans trying to take advantage of human frailty and interfere with nature," Avi Arad told Daily Variety. James Patterson Entertainment's Steve Bowen and Leopoldo Gout will be co-producers.

Arad first worked as producer with Crystal Sky's Paul on "Ghost Rider," and the two formed Seaside with Arad's son, Ari. This project becomes their third, after they made a DreamWorks deal for a 3-D live-action adaptation of the Japanese manga classic "Ghost in the Shell" and then a Warner Bros. deal for a movie adaptation of the Capcom game "Lost Planet," with David Hayter writing the script.

Payne's feature credits include "Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer" and "My Super Ex-Girlfriend."