

REVIEWS for Conspiracy 365: January

by Gabrielle Lord, EDC/Kane Miller, \$10.99 (192p) ISBN 978-1-935279-49-5

Publishers Weekly (December 1, 2009)

Australian crime novelist Lord launches a gripping new series that should have clear appeal for thriller fans. Australian teenager Cal is approached by a strange man who warns him that he has 365 days to survive and suggests that the recent death of Cal's father wasn't a strange illness, but murder. Soon enough, strange events as boating accident that appears to be sabotage, a break-in, and a mysterious call from a nurse who cared for Cal's dad raise his suspicions even more. When he investigates a package his uncle Rafe has hidden away, he quickly gets drawn into a conspiracy involving his family, mysterious drawings, and violent kidnappers, and finds himself on the run from the police. Lord creates a tense environment, and although the action can occasionally get over-the-top, the villains are suitably vile and entertaining, and Cal makes for an affable hero. Readers should be warned that, true to the nature of the planned series (11 subsequent books will follow throughout 2010), the book ends very much on a cliffhanger. Ages 10–up. (*Jan.*)

Booklist (December 1, 2009)

As gimmicks go, it's a good one: each month of 2010, one title in the 12-book Conspiracy 365 series will be released. The ticking clock (or calendar, in this case) is introduced immediately when a strange man accosts 15-year-old Callum Ormond on the street, shouting, "Get away! Hide and lay low until midnight December 31st of next year." It's good advice, because the following day, January 1st, includes a boat wreck, shark attack, and helicopter rescue and that's just for starters. Soon Callum is fleeing unknown assailants who are framing him for the attack of his little sister and uncle Rafe (a shady character himself). It all has to do with something called the Ormond Singularity and a group of sketches Callum's father gave him before dying of a mysterious illness. This is the kind of stuff that stretches credibility with every page, but continual time updates ("12:00 a.m.," "12:13 a.m.," etc.) at least create a sense of continual motion. The conclusion offers no answers, just the requisite cliff-hanger.

Kirkus Reviews (December 1, 2009)

Callum Ormond is a wanted teen. One New Year's Eve, he is stopped by a strange man in a cloak who tells him to go into hiding for the next 365 days. Callum believes that his father died of illness, but it turns out he was murdered. Now the murderers are after Callum's knowledge of something called the Ormond Singularity, but the only clues he has to its meaning are some drawings left to him by his father. When Callum's family is attacked and left for dead, the only person who believes in his innocence is his best friend, Boges. Kidnapped and beaten, Callum faces what might be his last minutes in a cliffhanger ending. Several factors make this book a top choice for reluctant readers, including the nonstop action, the small trim, the short length and the amount of white space on the pages. The character development is minimal, but that shouldn't affect readers who are in it for the action scenes. This is the first of a planned 12-book series, one book for each month of the year Callum must survive. (Thriller. YA)

