

CONSPIRACY **365**



malice

GABRIELLE LORD

SCHOLASTIC

SYDNEY AUCKLAND NEW YORK TORONTO LONDON MEXICO CITY
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Prologue

I skidded my motorbike to a halt outside Winter's house. The place looked great now it had been painted a really cool blue and the garden was full of plants and trees. But I wasn't in the mood to appreciate it. Winter had called me earlier, her voice agitated.

'Something really weird came in the mail today,' she'd said. 'And Cal, there've been other things too.'

I didn't like the sound of that at all and had stopped packing for my trip to flight school. I couldn't quite believe that I'd managed to score a place on a prestigious pilot training program and I'd been thinking of little else for weeks now. Although I had noticed Winter hadn't been her usual self for the past couple of days. Had I been neglecting Winter? I'd grabbed my keys and headed out the door.

Things had been awesome for all of us in recent months. Mum seemed happier than she had been in ages and Gabbi was doing well in

school. And as for my friends, we'd never been closer after all we'd been through—the huge and dangerous quest to discover the truth about the Ormond Singularity, the bomb at the City Hall and then the final showdown with Sligo and Elijah on the Sapphire Star cruise ship. Now all that was behind me, I had a real chance to achieve my dream, to become a real pilot . . . just like Dad and I had always talked about.

But there was no time for those thoughts now as I arrived at Winter's house. I pulled off my helmet, used my key to get in, and ran upstairs to the study where I could hear voices.

Winter and Boges barely greeted me, completely engrossed with what looked like an ordinary, stamped envelope.

'You said something came in the mail,' I said. 'Is that it?'

'It's what's inside that's worrying me,' said Boges, his face serious. 'Take a look.'

I took the envelope and opened it, frowning because for a minute I thought it was empty. Then I saw a scrap of torn newspaper, which I lifted out carefully. My thoughts immediately flicked to the vicious articles that reporter Ben Willoughby had written about me long ago, before we became almost friends. I wondered if he was up to his old tricks again.

But I quickly realised this didn't look like his handiwork. It looked like the top right corner of a very old newspaper. There were four words—two in thick black print, and another two, added like an afterthought, in scrawling handwriting.

As I read them, a chill crept up my spine.

