

**Reader's Guide for**  
***The Spellmans Strike Again***  
**A Novel by Lisa Lutz**

“Yes’ is always a better word than ‘no.’ Unless, of course, someone has just asked you to commit a felony.” (p. 378)

**An Introduction to *The Spellmans Strike Again* by Lisa Lutz**

The economy is down, and business has been slow at Spellman Investigations. But the vice president of the family firm, Isabel “Izzy” Spellman, has a plan for increasing revenue: an unpaid investigation of Roy Harkey—her old nemesis and a fellow PI. She reasons, “we know he’s crooked. If we can put him out of business, that cuts our competition by about 20 percent.” (p. 16) But old friends and new obligations claim Izzy’s attentions until her little sister, Rae, inadvertently leads her to a chink in Harkey’s armor.

Izzy is itching to get some dirt on Harkey, but she’s promised her parents, Olivia and Albert, to put paid business first. Dutifully, Izzy heads off to meet Franklin Winslow, a longtime client of the firm and a dotty old millionaire whose trusted valet has mysteriously disappeared. Over stale scones and inadvertent insults, Izzy decides to plant her friend, Len, as a temporary replacement/spy—little suspecting that he will “go all Method-actor” (p. 87) on the job.

Olivia also dispatches Izzy to meet with a new and even more annoying client. Jeremy Pratt is an aspiring screenwriter who thinks his ex-writing partner has stolen his idea, and he wants Izzy to find out what’s in her recycling. But after a couple weeks of basic garbology, Izzy begins to suspect that Jeremy is both more and less than he seems.

Meanwhile, Izzy is so desperate to bust Harkey that she even takes the bait when Henry Stone promises her a juicy lead. Henry is a 45-year-old police inspector who was unwillingly adopted by the Spellman clan after he solved Rae’s fraudulent kidnapping case a few years back. Rae still regards him as her BFF, but Izzy’s behavior toward him has cooled to arctic temperatures since he spurned her romantic attentions. Now, Henry is resorting to Spellmanesque tactics to revive their friendship—because, he claims, “that’s the kind of person you people have turned me into.” (p. 120)

Romance, however, has generally taken a backseat in Izzy's life, and her relationship with Connor is no exception. Already designated "Ex-boyfriend #12" (p. 2)—despite the fact that they are still dating—the Irish American bartender at the Philosopher's Club\* has helped Izzy weather the economic hard times with a 60% reduction in drinking expenses. But he draws the line when Olivia blackmails her into going on a series of lawyer dates.

On top of it all, unrest and a plethora of new and absurd family rules dominate Izzy's personal orbit ("Rule #26—Isabel wears a dress to work once a week" (p. 50)). Her older brother, David, is wreaking havoc with his parents' suspicious tendencies; doorknobs are disappearing from the Spellman abode; Izzy's (incredibly) old lawyer, Mort Schilling, and her (just plain) old roommate, Bernie Peterson, announce their imminent return to San Francisco; and Rae's overzealous pro bono work threatens to push Izzy over the edge.

*The Spellmans Strike Again*, the latest installment of Lisa Lutz's riotous, Edgar Award-nominated series, marks Izzy's continuing evolution. She may never be wholly grown up, but as she puts it, "it's important to note that I've come a long way." (p. 8) The streets of San Francisco will never be the same.

\* Izzy's favorite watering hole, as demonstrated in the three previous Spellman documents

### **Suggested Questions for Discussion:**

(Spoiler Warning: Don't read these questions before you finish the book—unless you really can't handle suspense.)

1. What kind of clothes could Jeremy Pratt have worn to make a more plausible—or at least less offensive—amateur screenwriter?
2. Olivia Spellman seems set on pairing Isabel off with a lawyer, but with what other professional group(s) might her daughter be more compatible?
3. In your opinion, would *Benson* be better adapted as a movie or a musical? If Len were to play Benson, who should be cast in the role created by the incomparable René Auberjonois?
4. In what ways is Isabel's resolution of the Mason Enright investigation evidence of her philosophical resemblance to Sherlock Holmes?

5. If you were to torment your family in the manner of David and Maggie, what false evidence would you plant or manufacture?
6. Are you familiar with the San Francisco food scene? If so, do you know what French bakery made the chocolate croissant that Henry brings to Isabel? Would you be willing to share your knowledge with the general public?
7. As Maggie and David approach parenthood, are there any prenatal precautions they might take to ensure that their child doesn't inherit any of David's "undesirable"\* Spellman genes?
8. Is Fred as perfect as he seems? Why does his asthma endear him to Isabel?
9. Other than removing the doorknobs and other household hardware, what would be an effective sabotage of the Spellman unit's real estate plans?
10. On a purely practical level, do the benefits of free housekeeping—as provided by Henry—outweigh those of unlimited free drinks—as provided by Connor?
11. Was Mort's excessive use of the article "the"\*\*\* a symptom of his brain tumor, or an old man's way of annoying Isabel?
12. Isabel admits, "When I kissed Henry, I wasn't imagining Ex-boyfriend #13. I was picturing Husband #1." (p. 323) Is this evidence of her newly evolved maturity, or a cavalier approach to matrimony?

\* Use finger-quotes here.

\*\* No finger-quotes in this instance.

Lisa Lutz is the author of the *New York Times* bestseller *The Spellman Files*; the national bestseller *Curse of the Spellmans*, nominated for both an Edgar and a Macavity Award; and the critically acclaimed *Revenge of the Spellmans*. Although she has attended UC Santa Cruz, UC Irvine, the University of Leeds in England, and San Francisco State University, she still does not have a bachelor's degree.