

Introduction

The wacky family of investigators is back for another installment of spying, secrets and sleuthing. In the fourth installment in the Spellman series, we find Isabel Spellman a little more grown up, moving into a shareholder role within Spellman investigations. Still, she faces opposition from an enemy PI, a nosy mother with a secret, a bothersome sister who always gets into trouble and many more colorful characters that *Spellman* fans have come to love.

The Spellmans Strike Back is the fourth installment in the critically acclaimed, bestselling, Edgar- and Macavity-nominated series by Lisa Lutz. The Spellman family is in the midst of another wild investigation, trying to maintain their private investigation business while at the same time keeping tabs on each other. This time, however, all of the Spellmans will have a little bit of growing up to do as they wrestle with issues of trust, family, life and death.

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss the budding romance between Isabel and Henry Stone. Why do you think Henry tries so hard to get her back? Why does Isabel resist at first? What finally makes her give in?
2. In your opinion, did Olivia really think that her new dictum, the Daily Rule (p. 18), would work? Was there ever any hope for rules in the Spellman household, or do the Spellmans only respond to more subtle and obscure coercion?
3. Why do you think Connor stays around after Isabel's mother institutes the "Mandatory Lawyer Dates"? What do we eventually discover that Olivia knew? Why do you think Connor stayed with Isabel despite the secret he was keeping from her?
4. Which is your favorite of Isabel's "Mandatory Lawyer Dates"? Do you think she's learned a lot about relationships by studying what not to do, or is she really as nonchalant about her love life as she would lead us to believe? Have you ever tried to botch a date to see how spectacularly wrong it could go?
5. What is the big secret of "Prom Night 1994"? Were you surprised when the story was told? Was it as big of a deal as Isabel made it out to be? Why do you think her mother still wants it to be kept a secret, even after Isabel says she can talk about it?
6. At one point Isabel states: "Every once in a while a thought hit you and you're unprepared for it and suddenly it seems like your world is coming to an end. Most of the time it isn't"(p.146). Discuss this quote in the context of the mystery behind what's happening to the Spellman residence and how David, Rae and Isabel respond.
7. When talking about Jeremy Pratt, Isabel comments "Less-judgmental folk would say that he was finding himself, but some people have the luxury to look; other's don't" (p.157). How did Isabel find herself over the course of this book? How has she changed over the course of the series? Is it for better or for worse? Do you think she is happy with the changes?
8. Do you think that Isabel and Olivia's scheme to punish Rae aesthetically in the chapter "The

“\$500 Payback” (p. 291) is a fitting one? Without resorting to anything too sinister, what might you have done to teach Rae a lesson? Do you think Isabel and Olivia bond through their shared efforts to reign in the youngest Spellman?

9. Both Isabel and Rae take on wrongfully accused cases (Merriweather and Schmidt, respectively). One has a positive outcome while one has a negative one. What message do you think Lutz was sending? Is it possible that despite our best intentions, we can't change the way things are?

10. How did you score on the quiz Isabel gave Demetrius Merriweather?

11. What do you think of Isabel's final reflection on the book's last page? Do you agree with her theory, or do you have your own?

Enhancing Your Book Club

1. Rae served her community service at a local garden, but you don't have to be almost incarcerated to help out! Check out some places to volunteer around your area and see if your book club can make a day out of it!

2. Rae and Isabel get wrapped up in the cases of accused criminals Merriweather and Schmidt, respectively. Do you think our legal system leaves too much room for wrongful convictions? Research another case of someone who's been wrongfully convicted and discuss the merits and shortcomings of the American legal system.

3. Have a mini-marathon of Isabel's favorite shows: *Get Smart*, *Doctor Who* and *The Wire*. Have your book club talk about which show was their favorite and why.

4. Henry makes a habit of stocking healthy snacks, but Isabel and Rae prefer junk food. Bring either to your next book club gathering and share!