



## Curse of the Spellmans

*Lisa Lutz*

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THEY'RE BAAAAACK.

Their first caper, *The Spellman Files*, was a *New York Times* bestseller and earned comparisons to the books of Carl Hiaasen and Janet Evanovich. Now the Spellmans, a highly functioning yet supremely dysfunctional family of private investigators, return in a sidesplittingly funny story of suspicion, surveillance, and surprise.

When Izzy Spellman, PI, is arrested for the fourth time in three months, she writes it off as a job hazard. She's been (obsessively) keeping surveillance on a suspicious next door neighbor (suspect's name: John Brown), convinced he's up to no good -- even if her parents (the management at Spellman Investigations) are not.

When the (displeased) management refuses to bail Izzy out, it is Morty, Izzy's octogenarian lawyer, who comes to her rescue. But before he can build a defense, he has to know the facts. Over weak coffee and diner sandwiches, Izzy unveils the whole truth and nothing but the truth -- as only she, a thirty-year-old licensed professional, can.

When not compiling Suspicious Behavior Reports on all her family members, staking out her neighbor, or trying to keep her sister, Rae, from stalking her "best friend," Inspector Henry Stone, Izzy has been busy attempting to apprehend the copycat vandal whose attacks on Mrs. Chandler's holiday lawn tableaux perfectly and eerily match a series of crimes from 1991-92, when Izzy and her best friend, Petra, happened to be at their most rebellious and delinquent. As *Curse of the Spellmans* unfolds, it's clear that Morty may be on retainer, but Izzy is still very much on the case...er, cases -- her own and that of every other Spellman family member.

(Re)meet the Spellmans, a family in which eavesdropping is a mandatory skill, locks are meant to be picked, past missteps are never forgotten, and blackmail is the preferred form of negotiation -- all in the name of unconditional love.

## Curse of the Spellmans Details

Date : Published March 11th 2008 by Simon & Schuster (first published January 1st 2008)

ISBN : 9781416532415

Author : Lisa Lutz

Format : Hardcover 362 pages

Genre : Fiction, Humor, Mystery, Funny, Womens Fiction, Chick Lit

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## From Reader Review Curse of the Spellmans for online ebook

### Mark says

The second book in "The Spellman Files" is just as funny as the first. Isabel "Izzy" Spellman, having grown up in a highly dysfunctional family of private investigators in San Francisco, is distrustful of everyone, is not deterred by locked doors, social boundaries (really, she's not deterred by boundaries of any kind), and always has to get to the bottom of mysteries, even when it would be better for her if she just let it go. Now thirty and working in the family business, she gets in over her head when a new neighbor moves in next to her parents' house (and place of business), a gardener with the suspicious name of "John Brown," who is evasive about his background, his movements, mounds of shredded trash and the locked office in his house. Izzy is certain that he is up to something sinister, and is determined to find out what, even if she has to maintain a level of surveillance that's usually reserved for stalkers.

However, suspicious behavior isn't limited to Mr. Brown. There's also the members of her own family such as: her father Albert, who seems to be having a REAFO (Retirement Age Freak-Out) as he appears to be covertly changing to a healthier diet and attending a yoga class; her mother Olivia, who is sneaking out in the dead of night to regularly vandalize someone's motorbike; her perfect brother David, a successful lawyer who has suddenly taken to binge-watching television in his bathrobe and pajamas while drinking bourbon; her best friend Petra (and David's wife) who has gone off to Arizona with no explanation; her 15 year-old sister Rae who is busy stalking her new "best friend," and regular acquaintance of Izzy's, SFPD Inspector Henry Stone to the point that his one attempt to give her a driving lesson ends with Rae accidentally running him over with his own car.

All the while, Izzy has a new case: finding out who is vandalizing a local neighbor's holiday lawn tableaus in an eerily accurate recreation of the same vandalizations committed in '92-'93 by Izzy and Petra (although Izzy's knee-jerk reply is always, "I don't know what you're talking about."), when they were at their most rebellious and delinquent time.

I was amazed at Lisa Lutz's ability to keep so many plates spinning while making me laugh out loud frequently, and at the end, hope that Izzy comes out of this crazy ride at the end a little wiser and somewhat saner. I'm already looking forward to the next installment of this whacky, funny family.

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### Indigo Editing/Ink-Filled Page says

"Without a doubt the restraining order put a cramp in my investigation of Subject."

That's not how the second in Lisa Lutz's series on the Spellman family of private investigators starts. No, a lot more happens before thirty-year-old Izzy Spellman is legally restrained from being near her parents' neighbor/subject of her own personal investigation/boyfriend.

The Spellman parents run a PI firm, and daughters Izzy and Rae help them; Izzy's been spying since she was twelve and Rae since she was six. Oldest child David has long distanced himself from the family and its business, becoming a lawyer whose only connection to their work is to sometimes send business to them. The problem is that Izzy, in particular, just can't stop. Everyone is a suspect to her, and with the help of a portable recorder, she has transcripts of lots of conversations, from witness interviews for actual cases to her

mother suggesting to the cop Rae has befriended that he pose as Izzy's fiancé so that the social worker will stop bugging the family about age-inappropriate friendships.

That kind of device works in the book—what would a first-person narration by a PI be without some transcripts?—but the copious use of footnotes doesn't. Why do readers even need to be told, “5Morty likes to Yiddishify my name” in reference to her lawyer calling her “Izzila”? And wouldn't it be stronger to just include “1Who happened to be my partner in crime during most of my delinquent years” at the end of the sentence, “Now David is a lawyer married to my best friend, Petra” instead of in a footnote?

Izzy is an incredibly immature thirty-year-old, which is what leads to a lot of the mishaps and miscommunications that drive a funny-snappy/funny-silly beach read like Curse of the Spellmans. This “charm” would be completely off-putting—when Izzy spends the night at her boyfriend's, the startled reader may have to remind herself that Izzy's not a teenager but a grown woman—but Lutz redeems Izzy in a couple ways. This female screwball-detective-novel character is not a “dumb broad.” Her lack of social graces just makes her refreshingly outspoken and frank. And while this reviewer isn't in the habit of rewarding anyone for being immature, the current media trend—in ads, in movies, and the like—is for men to be unsettled goofballs and women to be super-responsible homemaker CEOs. So if we ever have to go the route of, if you can't beat 'em join 'em, finally, finally here's a grown woman who is allowed to follow her impulses, no matter how selfish.

Review by Kristin Thiel, Indigo Editing, LLC, originally posted at Seeing Indigo.

ISBN: 978-1-4165-3241-5; 1-4165-3241-2

Publisher: Simon and Schuster

Pub Date: March 2008

Hardcover: \$25.00

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### Alli says

Not worth re-reading and/or suggesting to anyone else. Although at times it was funny, overall I felt bad for the characters and myself! I felt like the author was talking down to me, the fact that the protagonist is a 30 year old woman who narrates in a more juvenile way than her 16 year old sister makes her INCREDIBLY hard to empathize with or to root for at all...

Basic Summary - Isabel Spellman works as a PI for her parents and has a 15-year-old sister who is a bit crazy but idolizes Isabel. The driving force behind the entire novel is that Isabel believes her parents' new neighbor is suspicious...and that's it. She stalks him, tries to break into a less than exciting locked room in his apartment, follows him, etc etc...Perhaps not surprisingly, he turns out being a good guy with valid reasons behind his "suspicious behavior." Really. That's it. This only comes to a head in the last two chapters or so. The only way readers can get through the rest of the book is with the comic relief of Rae (Isabel's sister) and Henry Stone - a cop who has somehow become sucked into the weirdness of the Spellman family and adopted Rae as his own personal project (mainly because he can't get rid of her).

Not the WORST but definitely left me feeling less than satisfied.

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## **Dan Schwent says**

Why has Izzy Spellman been arrested four times in one month? Why is her mother leaving the house at all hours of the night to vandalize a stranger's motor bike? What is her father up to? Who is the mysterious neighbor John Brown? And who is recreating the string of vandalism Izzy is alleged to have perpetrated during her youth? All these questions and more will be answered in *Curse of the Spellmans*!

When you enjoy the hell out of the first book in a series, the second book is a risky proposition, like bungee jumping, hitchhiking, or eating at White Castle with a gallon of beer already sloshing around in your innards. Fortunately, my apprehension was unfounded. *Curse of the Spellmans* is a worth second book.

Much like the last book, *Curse of the Spellmans* is a hilarious tale of a dysfunctional family and the gross invasions of privacy they perpetrate on one another in the name of love. There's also a number of mysteries but the Spellmans and their supporting cast drive the tale.

Told in a manner similar to the first book, *Curse of the Spellman's* isn't a linear tale. It starts near the middle, backtracks to the beginning, and then eventually makes it to the end.

Detective Henry Stone is a prominent part of the cast since Rae latched on to him in the first book. He's also my third favorite character, right after Izzy and Rae. I already had a high opinion of him but the Doctor Who marathon clinched it, even though he prefers the ninth Doctor to the tenth.

Izzy, despite her legion of flaws, is quickly winning me over. Raised in a family of investigators, she doesn't really know how to do anything else and conducts her personal life like one of her P.I. assignments.

I think Lisa Lutz's greatness comes from being able to juggle funny moments with more serious ones and still make the book work without it becoming ridiculous. A good humorous mystery is hard to come by, in my opinion, but Lutz has consistently delivered the goods so far.

I really have no gripes about this book. There's the minor quibble about there being less of a sense of discovery but it's the second book in the series. Unless the Spellmans were going to adopt a cute kid to bring new life into the series, there wasn't a lot more to unveil.

Four out of five stars. I'll be reading the rest of this series at some point.

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## **Amanda says**

3 1/2 stars for this one.

*Curse of the Spellmans* is the sequel to *The Spellman Files*, a novel about an unconventional family that runs a private investigation firm. I really enjoyed *The Spellman Files*--it's light, amusing, and there is an inventive quality to the narrator, Izzy Spellman's, manner of conveying her story. Because of her training as a P.I., Izzy tells us everything in the form of case file reports and transcripts of secret recordings. What worked for the first novel lost some of its quirky charm for me in the second novel simply because I expected it. However, that is not to say that I didn't enjoy *Curse of the Spellmans*, because I certainly did.

Izzy Spellman is now 30 years old and has spent half of her life working for her parents' private investigation firm. Because she was exposed to this lifestyle in her impressionable years, Izzy is pathologically suspicious of everyone and everything, and she lacks the ability to compartmentalize her work life and her personal life. With skills like surveillance, lock picking, on-the-spot lying, GPS tracking, and performing routine background checks, woe upon you if Izzy thinks you're hiding something from her. As one might expect, this wrecks any chance Izzy has for a normal romantic relationship. Izzy fast-forwards through the whole "getting to know you" stage of a blossoming romance in favor of gaining DOB and SSN to rummage around in the prospective romantic interest's background. This usually leads to some serious trust issues on the part of the men who fall for Izzy and, as a result, Izzy is still single. It's just this pattern of thinking that leads her to believe that her next-door-neighbor-and-potential-future-boyfriend is hiding a criminal past behind his suspiciously average name and an even more suspiciously locked door in his home. In addition to this mystery, Izzy's family members seem to have secrets of their own and Izzy, a complete stranger to the concept of personal privacy, begins to ferret out why her brother's wife seems to have disappeared, why her mother runs suspicious errands at 2:30 a.m., why her father is rapidly losing weight, and why her loner sister suddenly has friends no one in the family has ever met.

If this sounds like another light, chick-lit screwball comedy, it is. These novels don't focus on the serious investigations of the Spellman Agency. Instead, they revolve around what happens in a family trying to keep secrets and boundaries when their bread-and-butter is to cross boundaries to discover the secrets of others. The mysteries really don't matter. They're simply vehicles for getting to know this bizarre and dysfunctional and frequently amusing family.

Cross posted at This Insignificant Cinder

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### **Carol. says**

Lisa Lutz' Isabel Spellman series is a little like Janet Evanovich's Stephanie Plum. Not the recent ones but the early ones, the ones that made me laugh out loud before they got progressively more absurd and recycled the same plots. The Spellmans, however, are a family team and the nature of the family business means they can't really escape each other, although they may periodically try. Book two, Curse of the Spellmans, was just as much fun as the first and perhaps even a smidge better. I found it to be an enjoyable, light read that was a load of fun on a sick day.

The rest of this review will be continued at here, since I might be talking about author behavior (then again, I might not).

<http://clsiewert.wordpress.com/2013/1...>

or here:

<http://carols.booklikes.com/post/6455...->

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### **Barbara says**

**3.5 stars**

Thirty-year-old Isabel (Izzy) Spellman - as well as her mom, dad, and teenage sister Rae - all work for the family private detective business. Spying seems to be ingrained in the Spellman DNA because, besides taking on cases, they constantly snoop on each other and anyone else who comes into their orbit.

Izzy is always on the alert for a new boyfriend (or as she puts it, a new future ex-boyfriend), so an attractive fellow who moves in next door to the Spellmans quickly catches her eye. Izzy immediately becomes suspicious, though, because the guy's name is John Brown (sounds phony) and he's a landscaper (seems fishy). John Brown soon becomes "The Subject" of Izzy's inquiries and she engages in various ruses to try to discover his place and date of birth and his SS number - so she can pry into his life. The subject is pretty cagey though and Izzy is stymied. Then, when nosy Izzy discovers that the subject keeps a door in his apartment locked, she becomes obsessed with getting into the closed room. Izzy's increasingly desperate (and funny) attempts to break in eventually lead to a restraining order and four arrests....a serious matter, because she could lose her P.I. licence.

All this is quite entertaining and leads Izzy to other humorous situations including: meetings with a wise octogenarian lawyer who can't get the temperature of his coffee quite right; staying with a staid police inspector who has a lot of house rules; watching a bunch of episodes of "Dr. Who"; paying her teen sister Rae (a very tough negotiator) for services rendered; and more.

Meanwhile, Izzy is trying to find out who's committing vandalism on a retired teacher's yard displays....a crime that eerily resembles some of Izzy's youthful misbehavior. To top it off, EVERY member of the Spellman family seems to have a secret. Dad is working out on the sly and eating healthy; mom is creeping out at night; Rae has mysterious new friends; and attorney brother David is (uncharacteristically) dirty and drunk. Of course Izzy feels compelled to find out what's going on with everyone.

The book is entertaining but I found Izzy to be irritating. She has no boundaries, is intrusive, never asks permission, and seems oblivious of other people's feelings. In real life a person who met Izzy would probably want to move to the other side of the country.....or world. Still, the story is fun and would probably appeal to fans of comical cozy mysteries.

You can follow my reviews at <http://reviewsbybarbsaffer.blogspot.com/>

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### **Jeanne says**

Izzy's back! I was so excited to see a sequel to The Spellman Files.

So, we revisit Isabel and the rest of the Spellman family, but they're not as colorful as I remember them. The Spellman parents aren't as nosy, and her younger sister, Rae, is not the little spy she was in the first book. And her perfect brother, David, isn't so perfect anymore. Only Izzy remains in that crazy Spellman zone--ever suspicious of everyone and everything.

And this is where our story begins. A new neighbor for the Spellman's sparks Izzy's interest. Who is this John Brown? And why is one of the rooms in his home ALWAYS locked? It's up to Izzy to find out!

Along with this minute mystery, there is the wacky relationship between Rae and Inspector Henry Stone, as well as the constant, yet unsuccessful vacationing of the elder Spellmans.

I remember really liking the first Spellman book, but I can't get as excited about this one. I don't think it was as funny as the first one, which is a shame.

3/23/08

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### **Tom Carrico says**

Curse of the Spellmans

By Lisa Lutz

The brief testimonials which are included on the book jackets or paperback covers can tell a reader a lot about the book. If the blurb is from a well-respected author such as Scott Turow or Tom Wolfe or even from an established book critic like Jonathan Yardley or Michael Dirda from the Washington Post there is bound to be some credibility to the book. When the quotes (in the case of this book) come from "People" magazine, "Entertainment Weekly" and from an author you've never heard of it can be equally as telling. Curse of the Spellmans must appeal to some one; I'm just not sure who.

The short version of the story is as follows: The Spellmans are a family of private investigators who live in San Francisco. The family consists of the two Spellman parents who are approaching retirement age, an oldest son (David) who is a successful attorney, a thirty-something daughter who is the main character and narrator (Isabelle or "Izzy") and a precocious fifteen year old daughter (Rae). The reason these people make good investigators apparently is because they are compulsively nosy. The main plot begins when a new neighbor moves in next to the Spellman parents. His introduces himself as John Brown which sets alarms off in the head of Izzy Spellman. She is sure this is an assumed name and that this man is a criminal of some sort. These suspicions are confirmed when Izzy goes through the man's trash and finds that it has all been shredded. She goes so far as to date John Brown in order to acquire more information which is generally unsuccessful. There are lots of subplots involving Rae's learning to drive, Rae's first boyfriend and the Spellman parents' intrusion into all of these activities. The Spellmans are very good at snooping, especially into each other's lives. The story is written as humor and, as such, was a welcome respite from the violence and gore of several of the other nominees (the last two in particular). The problem is that to me, the book just wasn't that funny. Other reviewers have compared Ms. Lutz' humorous style to Carl Hiassen, but in my opinion she is not even close to his level. On a positive note, the dialogue this author writes is very good, it moves the story along and makes it much quicker to read which, in my mind, was a blessing.

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### **Michelle says**

So how can something be so good and coherent and yet be so random and rambling? I don't mean random in a negative way at all. In fact, I find the randomness quite charming, just as I find Isabel Spellman quite charming and funny. Izzy and the entire Spellman clan are a bunch of nut cases, but the stories work for me.

In this, the second installment of the Spellman series, Izzy finds herself busy surveilling the neighbor who is surely up to no good; her teenage sister Rae has run over her "best friend"...a forty-something-year-old inspector named Henry, and Henry, not surprisingly, is fed up; her practically perfect older brother David has

lost his razor sharp edge; her mother is sneaking out of the house at all hours; and her father, well, he's secretly on a new found health kick. And there is more...but I'll spare you the run down.

Like I said...random.

What I love about Lutz's story is that everything seems to be happening all at once, and so the novel *should* feel chaotic. Yet somehow it doesn't. She shifts from subplot to subplot seamlessly, even though she is moving from one conflict to the next quite quickly. I would liken it to a professional race car driver, taking you out for a quick spin on the Autobahn in a Mercedes Benz. Even though you would inevitably be going so very fast, the ride would be perfectly smooth. I think I'd like to try that some day.

And then, of course, there are the "mysteries" that Izzy must solve. I'll go ahead and admit that the central conflict, Izzy's obsession with the man next door's private life, was fairly easy to figure out, but the others are a bit more puzzling, so there was enough tension in the waiting to see what would happen next that I didn't get bored or want to scream "DUH!" the entire time I was reading.

Moreover, these books really aren't about the mysteries and are more about the characters and their ridiculous antics, especially Izzy and Rae...or Rae and Henry, who make quite the comedic team, actually. I'm telling you, the characters here are a breath of fresh air, and so is the story, even if it isn't so mysterious. And this is mostly because of Lutz's wry sense of humor and excellent comedic timing. In fact, I like this one a little more than I liked the first, and I really enjoyed the first.

I'm thrilled to have found these little gems, and I can't wait to read the next in the series.

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### **Jenna says**

I've given up thinking this series is a typical pi story w/a mystery.

it isn't!!! It's more a humorous fiction series about a dysfunctional family of kooky characters who work as PI's.

Positive: funny, likable characters, entertaining

Negative: it meanders a lot off topic, the investigation part of the PI story is not developed enough and footnotes? REALLY!!! It's a fiction, I don't want footnotes w/things like "more about that later." NO!!! I don't want to know later. tell me now or it isn't necessary.  
and do I really need the whole freaking back history story of Isabella's juvenile delinquency's? Or a story about her parents and their complete back history. No, I didn't.

I will say that I really liked the Rae character. I think she's a real "scene stealer".

Also, how long til Izzy & Henry realize they're perfect for each other? Unfortunately, while interested in this developing relationship, I don't have the patience to read thru the other books in the series to find out. The big "investigation" was the neighbor and her brother David. Both cases were dragged out for way toooooooo loooonnnnggggg!!!! also, it was fairly obvious what the neighbor was doing and what happened w/her brother.

I think this series would work best as a tv show.

Then it would be one hour increments of these people where the “investigation” wouldn’t be featured as much as the humor of the characters.

(And an hour would be enough as opposed to 250 some pages to slog thru.)

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## **Jennifer Rayment says**

### **The Good Stuff**

Another wild and wacky tale of the delightfully dysfunctional, yet totally loveable, Spellman family  
Would love to take mamma Spellman to some of Jake's parent teachers meeting - she totally rocks  
Love how Izzy refers to potential dates as Ex-Boyfriend #?

Don't really have to read the first book in order to understand the plot, it will help and you will love it, but you won't be totally lost if you don't

Gives you a synopsis of the first book without too much repetition for those who have read it already  
Love the relationships between all of the characters - especially between Izzy, Rae and Henry

The dialogues are hilarious -- FYI you will snort out loud - do not drink while reading - it could get messy  
The transcripts are a fabulous quirky idea

The appendix is a perfect addition

Even reading the acknowledgments is fun

Looking forward to reading the next installment of the series -- they are totally addictive to read

### **The Not So Good Stuff**

Her writing style might throw off some, story jumps around a lot, so you gotta be paying attention  
Distracts me from getting work done, since I want to keep reading

### **Favorite Quotes/Passages**

"Background: When my sister was eight years old, my brother, in the interest of explaining his legal career to Rae, taught her how to negotiate. It was a lesson he and the rest of us would soon regret. Rae took from this lesson that everything - from simple acts of grooming to household chores to homework - could be negotiated to her end."

"I pinched Rae really hard on her arm, which lately is code for "whatever you're doing, stop doing it."

"Rae took the money and headed for the door. In my family, if one loses a negotiation, we like to pretend that we have won.

"I would have given you thirty," I said

"I would have done it for five," Rae replied."

### **Who Should/Shouldn't Read**

Definitely for those who enjoy reading books about quirky families

Hardcore readers of mystery or PI style books might now enjoy  
Readers who just enjoy something a little different, this is for you  
If you just need a good laugh -- this will do it  
Obviously for fans of the first book - but you don't have to read it first

5 Dewey's

I received this from Simon and Schuster in Exchange for an Honest Review & I'm bringing you the  
REALLY good cookies at OLA for introducing me to these books

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### **Vered says**

Funny, smart, sad and ever so enduring. This one was just as funny as the first one, yet more complex, reviled more lairs, run deeper and left me feeling my heart in my throat.  
Loved it.

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### **AdiTurbo says**

So much fun! The Spellman dysfunctional and quite crazy family always manage to make me laugh, and this time, Lutz had them also go through life changes that developed the characters in an interesting ways. The plot is suspenseful, the dialogues superb - here is a writer who can write a teenager who is really smart, but who is also still child-like and speaks her age. Intelligent and fully entertaining.

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### **Andrea says**

This was a good follow-up to the Spellman Files. The first couple chapters do a fair amount of reminding the reader of characters and plot lines from the first book, and the main plot of book 2 doesn't take off incredibly fast, but if you like the characters the payoff is worth it. Looking forward to the next several books in the series.

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