



How to Start a Fire

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From a bestselling writer, a story of unexpected friendship-three women thrown together in college who grow to adulthood united and divided by secrets, lies, and a single night that shaped all of them

When UC Santa Cruz roommates Anna and Kate find passed-out Georgiana Leoni on a lawn one night, they wheel her to their dorm in a shopping cart. Twenty years later, they gather around a campfire on the lawn of a New England mansion. What happens in between-the web of wild adventures, unspoken jealousies, and sudden tragedies that alter the course of their lives-is charted with sharp wit and aching sadness in this meticulously constructed novel.

Anna, the de facto leader, is fearless and restless-moving fast to stay one step ahead of her demons. Quirky, contemplative Kate is a natural sidekick but a terrible wingman ("If you go home with him, might I suggest breathing through your mouth"). And then there's George: the most desired woman in any room, and the one most likely to leave with the worst man.

Shot through with the crackling dialogue, irresistible characters, and propulsive narrative drive that make Lutz's books so beloved, *How to Start a Fire* pulls us deep into Anna, Kate, and George's complicated bond and pays homage to the abiding, irrational love we share with the family we choose.

How to Start a Fire Details

Date : Published May 12th 2015 by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

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Author : Lisa Lutz

Format : Hardcover 337 pages

Genre : Fiction, Womens Fiction, Chick Lit, Adult, Contemporary

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From Reader Review How to Start a Fire for online ebook

Dee says

Meandering and pointless, this was a real struggle to get through. I was expecting light chick lit or maybe a touching story of female friendship, but this was neither. Each chapter abruptly jumps across time and space in the lives of three women and makes the book feel like a long collection of unconnected episodes that are dry in themselves, yet don't add up to any greater whole. Flat characters. I had no idea what these women were thinking or feeling, and couldn't picture or bring myself to care about their worlds.

Reading this felt like flipping through the channels and watching odd snippets of meaningless sitcoms. Here's one of the women at a party, here they are visiting their newly-married friend, and here's them drunk on a camping trip. If this was all moving towards some worthwhile end, then it moved too slow and I jumped off half-way through.

More reviews on my blog.

Ilyssa Wesche says

I ran out of library books last night and had to go to my rainy day - in this case snowy day - book pile. I always wonder if I'm more apt to give 5 stars to a book I unexpectedly love. That's certainly what happened here - I was actually expecting a fluffy book based on misunderstandings and secrets (which I usually don't like) but instead got a very thoughtful and story about three women whose friendship that evolved over time. Plus addiction! I do love some addiction woven into fiction.

Even the jumping back & forth in time helped the story develop.

I cannot recommend this enough.

Kristin says

I've been wanting to read Lisa Lutz for awhile, because I have so many friends who are into the Spellman Files, but I just haven't been ready to commit to another series. Et voilà, a stand-alone. Perfect!

The more I read, the more I wanted to read. I did a lot of putting off other things because I'd set the book down and then decide I just had to get back to it immediately. Lutz clearly has a gift for characterization and plot. She follows three women over the course of twenty years, but she jumps around in time and events have a profound effect on the women, yet Lutz somehow remains consistent in characterization. (I wonder if she wrote it chronologically and then jumbled it up?) I've noticed a lot of authors using non-linear timelines lately, and I love the idea, but it's not always executed that well. Here, it worked perfectly. The slow unraveling of plot threads on the reader's part echoed how the characters must feel as they discovered long-kept secrets. The large cast of supporting players, particularly family members, were fleshed out with equal care.

I really don't want to give any plot elements away, so I won't say too much more. There is a lot of food for thought within these pages about the families we're born into versus the families we choose; nature versus nurture; truth, lies, lies of omission, and the reason we choose one or the other; punishment and penance; innocence and guilt; and all kinds of other big ideas swirling around the subject of friendship. Through it all runs Lutz's subtle fire metaphor, never overdone and tying up the ending perfectly. Not that everything ends tidily-ever-after. I finished the book and wished for some flames I could stare into while I digested all I'd read. Extraordinary.

The fine print: received ARC from Edelweiss.

Alisha Marie says

I wanted to love this book so, so bad. Here's the thing: I LOVED Lisa Lutz's Spellman Files series. While some were better than others, The Spellman Files never failed to make me feel better about life and made me laugh so hard along the way. I assumed that How to Start a Fire would be just as good as The Spellman Files series...but it wasn't not even a little bit.

I'm starting to feel an intense annoyance for anything but straightforward time lines. Unless you're having one chapter be in the present time period immediately followed by the next one being in the past, for the most part, it's way more trouble than it's worth. This was doubly true in How to Start a Fire. The timeline in this book was so scattershot. Some took place in 1999, some in 2011, some in 199-whatever, and there was no sense of order to it. I kept having to refer back to figure out what had happened in the last chapter where the timeline took place to figure out what was happening in the current chapter. Finally, I said "Screw it!" and stopped paying attention to the dates. I just didn't care. In fact, that "I don't care" mantra, continuously played through my head while I was reading How to Start a Fire.

I didn't care. I didn't care about the annoying main characters. I didn't care about the supporting characters. I didn't care for the ever-loving dull plot. In fact, had this book been written by anyone other than Lisa Lutz (and hadn't been a review book), I would have not bothered to finish. When I finished How to Start a Fire, I didn't feel like my time was well-spent. I just looked at my TBR stack and thought "I should've been reading one of you instead".

However, the absolute criminal thing about How to Start a Fire was how unfunny it was. This is the same author who wrote about the hot ass mess that is Izzy Spellman, who wrote the crazy, manipulative (and always hilarious) Rae...the same author who wrote about this incredible and zany family. And then we got this? A book where boring characters did boring things while leading woefully unfunny lives. And the only thought I'm left with after reading this is "What exactly was the point?" I have yet to find an answer to this question.

Nurse Lisa In Ohio (PRN Book Reviews) says

Title: "How to Start a Fire"

Author: Lisa Lutz

Format: ebook via Samsung Galaxy Nook ereader.

Release info.: newly released, May, 2015.

Genre: fiction, adult fiction, chick-lit, drama, changing POV, female MC's, strong female MC(s), includes swearing, some sexual situations & adult themes.

Read: May 12-13, 2015.

My GR rating: 5 of 5 "WOWSA" stars!

Brief remarks:

Holy Moly!

I'm stingy with that fifth star typically, but I'm THROWING IT MADLY at this latest creation by Ms. Lutz!

I cannot remember now how I found and fell in love with Lisa Lutz's "Spellman" series but, I am super glad I did as not only is that series a HOOT, it led me to reading this book too. "How to Start a Fire" will definitely go down as one of my top 3-5 novels read in 2015. (May even have the winner here.)

I simply devoured this book; I just so totally and completely succumbed to the intense, twisty, REAL storyline and fell arse over tea kettle in love with the three main, or leading, ladies that this book is focused on. I really like characters that are flawed, struggling, bounceback, fall, you know: like we all are! I related to the 3 gals in this book right away; when I wasn't reading about them, I actually found myself thinking about them and the stories that were unfolding as though I knew them; you know, like for REAL! Now that is a damn fine piece of literature IMHO if I'm thinking about it when I'm not reading (and thus hurry up to read again as quickly as possible)!

This is not what I'd call an easy read, despite finishing it quickly. I just invested extra time in reading as it was so un-put-down-able for me. I felt my emotions tugged a lot, but no mind eff's or anything like that. This was just a really, really good novel and deliciously thought provoking.

Heavy but fascinating; a five star worthy work of art!

I hope you enjoy it, too fellow readers!

Cheers,

Lisa (@NurseLisainOhio)

Jenna says

This book is solidly of the genre of literary fiction books that are too well-written to be categorized as chick lit, yet still recount the stories of several dissimilar, quirky, late-blooming, thrown-together-by-chance girlfriends throughout their life trajectories from college to middle age.

As often happens in such books, the story is told from the alternating points of view of the three friends, as well as from the perspectives of various key family members or other associates with whom these women's lives intersect.

And, as also often happens in such books, the story is not told chronologically, but rather cuts rapidly back and forth to different spots on the timeline until at the very end, the story has been completely revealed and all missing pieces have fallen into place. This book lies at the further end of the "screw chronology" spectrum in that it almost reads as though the author cut up the entire manuscript, scrambled it on the floor, and scooped it back up again: it really skips around, and my guess is that this may annoy some readers. It did not bother me, but I was distracted trying to think of how the author kept track of everything, and what to

reveal when: did she have a giant spreadsheet, or a wall mural like Faulkner??

I wish I had more to say about this book. It was perfectly competent. The dialogue is fizzy and engaging. The characters were...hm. Let's say they were fine to spend some time with, for the most part. They sort of fall into the three buckets of: The Pretty One, The Messed-Up One, and The Weird/Unconventional, Benevolent Slacker One. That list reflects the progressive degree to which the characters were fleshed out and interesting, with the Pretty One on the Least end and the Weird One on the Most end. Kind of predictable, I guess.

In general, I looked forward to returning to this book, and for the most part, never eyeballed my giant pile of library books and asked myself why I wasn't reading one of those instead. Yet, as I approached the end, I realized there was no There there, and for me the book did not climax in some Big Idea other than that we all collectively muck through our intersecting lives as best we can and that sometimes we Eff things up but sometimes things turn out OK.

It probably sounds like I'm damning this book with faint praise. It's better than I'm making it sound. But I won't be reflecting upon it any further after this. And you know, that's OK. I'm OK, and you're OK - that seems like an ending to this review that is befitting to the worldview reflected in this book.

Karyn Niedert says

RELEASE DATE: May 12, 2015

RATING: 5 Stars Blew off a a three week tropical vacation with Vin Diesel to read this book-AND IT WAS WORTH IT!!

GENRE: Literature/Adult Fiction/Chick Lit

AUDIENCE: Fans of previous Lisa Lutz books, readers who enjoy Fannie Flagg will like this book. The subjects touched in this book are too light to be in the Janet Evanovich/Jennifer Crusie range but not as deep as Kristin Hannah. Just read it. You'll like it.

SERIES: Standalone

REVIEW: I've loved Lisa Lutz since her first Spellman book, along with the quirky way she plugs her previous books in future books in the series. She doesn't take herself too seriously, and her humor jumps off the pages. I want to be Rae Spellman when I grow up.

"How to Start a Fire" is a breakout novel for Lutz. She's shedding a lot of the immature gags of her previous books and has jumped with both feet into alcoholism, assault, and growing up. None of these subjects are for the faint of heart, and Lutz knocked the ball way out of the ballpark.

The book starts off with how the core of Anna, Kate and George's relationship cemented itself, and grows from there. I loved how bad ass and ruined Anna was. I felt a kinship with Kate, and how she had her life mapped out until it was pulled out from under her. I liked how George knew she was with the wrong guy, but couldn't figure out how to make better choices.

The book's chapters jump between years and characters, so it is kind of difficult to keep up unless a reader is willing to just let go and enjoy how the story unfolds. If you feel better about it, keep a little flow chart. My first three or four chapters were rough because I like a linear storyline, but the writing as well as the characters won me over. I am grateful she gives readers a good ending.

I'm giving "How to Start a Fire" one of my rare 5 star ratings. Lisa Lutz made me laugh. She made me cry. She earned the score.

*Tremendous thanks to Netgalley and Houghton Mifflin Harcourt for an ARC.

FYI: Other books by Lisa Lutz include:

The Spellman Files (Spellman Book 1)
Curse of the Spellmans (Spellman Book 2)
Revenge of the Spellmans (Spellman Book 3)
The Spellmans Strike Again (Spellman Book 4)
Trail of the Spellmans (Spellman Book 5)
The Last Word (Spellman Book 6)
Heads You Lose

Melliane says

Mon avis en Français

My English review

I always have a great pleasure while reading Lisa Lutz's books, she has an undeniable talent to draw us into her stories. The Spellmans was one of my favorite series and it's true that the release of a new novel could only intrigue me. In addition, while the author is known for her humorous and ultimately a little chick-lit novels, we can find here something very different. Yes, here we follow three young women, their hopes, their demons, their life and their mistakes.

Lisa Lutz often presents her novels in different formats and that is how we find emails, conversations theater play like and others and it's true that I always find it very interesting. But that's not all, and I think this may be the most unsettling point for readers, each chapter happens to be a different year. It is true that it is sometimes difficult to really understand these leaps in time, we don't have a real logical sequence and we pass from past to future while following the three young women during their lives. It is therefore in this kind of story that we need to be really careful not to miss anything and so ignore a bit the years to really appreciate everything. I enjoyed this change even if sometimes it is true that we must be concentrated not to be too lost in the course of events.

As I said it before, we follow three very different women here. Anna is the leader of the group, a young rich girl who drift in life because of drugs, alcohol and men. This is a young woman living in excess and who does not necessarily think of the consequences of her actions on her friends. A young woman well in every respect, destroying her life without her having any problems about that. It is also true that she is going through a lot of trials and on some points, we understand how after a childhood such as hers, she feels free to the point of acting as she desires. Then there is Kate. I think that she is the character that I preferred. Kate does not come from a big family like Anna, she does not have big dreams of freedom and wealth, no, she wants only to take care of the bar of her grandfather. Yet this dream will never come true ... Driven by her friends, she will follow them, assist them, and keep secrets of each and eventually evolve keeping everything to herself. This is not necessarily something simple and although Anna and George are there for her, they do not necessarily have the skills to understand her. And even if they are still present in difficult times, they also

add a lot to her life. Yes Kate is a young woman we can easily understand, this means her regrets, desires and even her feeling of being lost in this life that seems to want to conform her into something she does not want to be. And finally we have George ... Oh Georgianna is a complicated young woman. They're all different the one from the other, it must be said. No, George needs a man to move on and live. And yet, although she is very beautiful and always attracts many boys, it seems that this woman does not really know how to choose a good and loving man. Oh no, because she always finds a terrible husband who uses her and throws her thereafter. Georgianna could be so much better if she could stay alone, but it appears that this condition does not suit her. And even if her friends are always there when she needs them, it is something quite difficult.

You can surely understand that, we discover three completely different persons and yet who can not live without each other. It is an intense and touching friendship that is fun to read. They pass through many things together, but always get up and move forward as best as they can. But nothing is ever simple. The story touched me and it allowed me to discover these girls with a fiery temperament. The author has perfectly managed to share the feelings of each and to make us understand their lives since they met. A very good book to discover!

Nicole D. says

I loved the Spellman Files, and I think Lutz could have had a lucrative career if she did nothing but those. Obviously she realized she had more in her, and I'm glad she did for a lot of reasons. (One of them being I don't continue on with series that long, and one of them being this book.)

This is the story of the friendship of three women, told over 25 years. It is completely non-linear. Often times I find that when a book is told in this way, it's jarring for me when the timeline changes, but Lutz did this so well that I wasn't disappointed when we changed timelines, I was excited. I couldn't wait to see "when" we were going next.

This isn't a totally unique premise the girls meet, and their bond is forged and/or tested by an "event." The success of this book hinges entirely on the storytelling and the characters! Lutz is known for her humor, and it's more subdued in this book but it's definitely still there. The personalities of these characters are great. You can see a bit of the Spellman girls in these women, but they transcend those characteristics. Honestly, I'm not sure if everybody is going to love the characters - but I did.

I finished this in two sittings. There was a suspenseful quality to be sure.

Definitely recommended.

Melki says

Stories of women who meet in college and form fast, lifelong friendships are nothing new.

Except when they're written by Lisa Lutz.

In previous novels, Lutz has proven herself both an astute observer and commentator on the games men and women play. Her dialogue is sharp, insightful and funny. She dreams up characters that come alive, women that you want to emulate and be friends with. In other words, gals who blurt out the shit you wish you'd said but only think of twenty minutes later.

She has created two of the most popular female characters in recent fiction - Izzy and Rae Spellman.

The women who start the fires in this book are not Spellmans, though I think they would all get along. S'mores and vodka would surely be passed around.

Lutz's women are intelligent and quirky. Though they don't always have the best taste in men, you can bet their couplings and subsequent break-ups will provide rich fodder for drama, humor and some damn funny lines.

"Good game," she said, perhaps a little too cheerfully.

Bradford accepted her hand, gripped it a little too hard. He drew her close to him and whispered in her ear, "I'd like to fuck that smile right off your face."

"Is that generally your goal when fucking?" Kate said.

Ya see? I *might* have thought of that comeback on the way home. Maybe.

Already this seems to be a love it or hate it book. NO - this is not as funny as a Spellman's adventure. YES - it does jump around quite a bit in time, though I honestly can't imagine this story told any other way. And, NO, the characters are not always likable. They have their strengths and weaknesses. There were points in the book where I wanted to slap each of them before hugging them . . . kind of like my real friends.

S'more flavored vodka, anyone?

Kelly (and the Book Boar) says

Find all of my reviews at: <http://52bookminimum.blogspot.com/>

3.5 Stars

"Who would you save in a fire, Keith Richards or Pete Townshend?"

"I don't know."

"The answer is Pete Townshend. A fire wouldn't kill Keith Richards."

Lisa Lutz – or more specifically, *The Spellman Files* – had been on my radar for eternity. Same as this one. I

have no idea what made me finally pull the trigger. Maybe my recent discovery that I like to do more than just dip my toe in a certain genre

Or more likely the case, because I liked the cover when this popped up for the hundredth time somewhere in my online life. Because let's get real. I'm a pretty easy sell

Whatever the case, *How To Start A Fire* wound up being one of my library checkouts that I went into with pretty low expectations since it was a mixed bag with my Goodreads friends.

The story here is about three women and their ever-changing friendship from college through middle-age. You have Kate – raised in Santa Cruz by her Czechoslovakian “deda” after her parents died in a car crash when she was 8, Anna – silver spoon sort from Boston by two still-married parents, and George – Chicagoan, only child to an Italian-American father and WASPy mother. All three of them have one thing in common

The only thing I could compare this to when my husband asked what it was about was

It's kind of about nothing at all, but much like the occasional TBS marathon of that old standard, I found myself still sitting there fully invested 14 hours later.

3.5 Stars because the timehops were KILLING ME, SMALLS! Eventually I figured out it was best to read each chapter like its own little vignette instead of trying to piece together some semblance of order and hoped that everything would tie together in the end . . . which it did. If you are a fan of stories about flawed people who you can't stop hoping will wind up with happy endings, this is a winner.

Note - I actually read the Kindle version, but with the good cover that is only an option for the paperback version. THIS is why I hate all these damn different version options here. Well, that and the fact that NO I HAVE NOT READ EVERY DANG BOOK TWO OR THREE TIMES THANK YOU VERY LITTLE. I just suck at technology so every time I click something I make it look like I did.

Snotchocheez says

Pretty competent storytelling but is almost drowned in a morass of overly sinuous, unnecessary non-linearity. I identify with and usually enjoy wanderlust stories, but the constant back-and-forth started making me feel like it was masking...dunno. Insubstantiality, maybe? Four months after reading this, I can barely remember anything about this story of three UC Santa Cruz gal-pals except for the constant leaps in time. Never a good sign. Ms. Lutz sporadically lets the reader of this know why she's a great writer, but it didn't quite start a fire for my ardor of her. I'll keep my eye out for her stuff in the future. Maybe *The Passenger*?

Shelby *trains flying monkeys* says

"All good things are wild and free." Henry David Thoreau

That's pretty much these three girls as young adults in college. Anna and Kate meet George in college after she passed out on their lawn. They throw her in a shopping cart and wheel her into their room.

These three women are written so that you can't help but watch them. You might not always like their characters but they could step off the pages at anytime and probably bitch at you about something. You have wild Anna. The rich girl with no limits. She drinks, does drugs, and sleeps with too many men.

Malcolm was still staring out the window.

"Your sister's up to something," Malcolm said.

"Always," Colin said.

"Do you worry about her?"

"I worry about anyone who might cross her."

Smart,quirky Kate, who knows when she finishes school that she will be taking over her grandfather's restaurant.

Kate was a lousy wingman. In fact George and Anna had crowned her the worst wingman in the history of wingmen, often quoting and requiting late-night warnings.

"In the morning you will notice his beady eyes."

"Right now, try to remember your last hangover."

"I have a strong feeling this guy has a sexually transmitted disease."

"If you go home with him, might I suggest breathing through your mouth."

And beautiful George. Who thinks she needs a man by her side at all times. Not necessarily the right man either. (I kept imaging her saying this)

Something about this book that did tend to drive me crazy was the time jumps. I suggest if you read this one just ignore the timings on the beginning of the chapters. It jumps around so much that there is no way you can keep up with it. I tried for a bit in the story and finally said "hell with it" and just read the book. I enjoyed it more then.

The story is not a shocking one, it follows these three women through a lifetime of a friendship. Sometimes they have hard times, sometimes they fight. The friendship endures and the story is like real life. No real ending, just stuff happening.

Kathy says

I got a preview copy of this book from the publisher in exchange for an honest review.

To be honest with you, I couldn't even finish this book. Though I don't mind when stories are not told in a

sequential manner, in this case the time-jumping was extreme, and I found it very difficult to keep the storylines straight. This read could've caught me at a bad time, but after 100 pages, I was tired of trying to keep it all straight in my mind and decided to put it away.

Melissa says

This was the most un-put-down-able book I've read in ages. This weekend, every time I'd try to go off and do something else, I'd find myself being drawn back to the couch and this book (needless to say, not much got done this weekend). It reminded me a bit of Commencement by J. Courtney Sullivan, which I also loved. My only complaint is a minor one: I found the way the story jumped around in time to be a bit confusing. I read tons of books that aren't chronological and I never have a problem with it, but in this case, I think its jumping around was a bit too aggressive. The first few chapters took place in: 2005, 1993, 2011, 2002, 1999, 1990, 2006, 2000, 2010, 1994, and so on, throughout the book. Sometimes it was hard to figure out the order things took place in, or remember when things were happening, or even who certain characters were, so be prepared to flip back and forth a bit as you read. Definitely not a reason to skip this one, though, so don't let it scare you off.
