

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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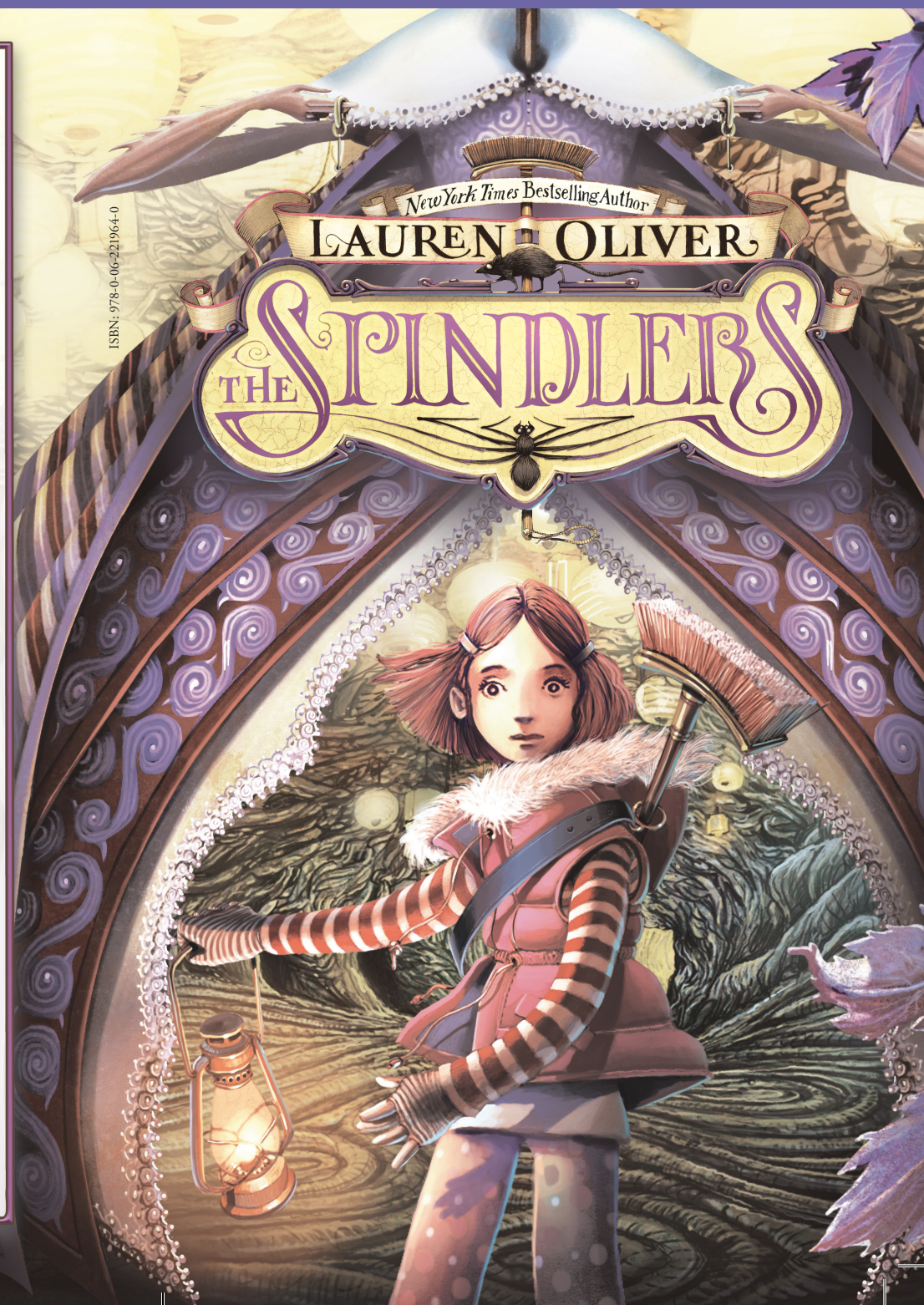
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DISCUSSION GUIDE

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ABOUT THE BOOK

One morning Liza Elston realizes that her younger brother, Patrick, is acting strangely, and she knows straightaway that the spindlers—wicked spiderlike creatures—have stolen his soul. Armed with a broom and accompanied by her new friend Mirabella, a quirky rat, Liza enters a mysterious and captivating underworld beneath her home while in search of the spindlers' nests. She bravely faces perilous otherworldly obstacles—from tree snakes to shape-shifting serpents—in order to rescue her brother from the spindler queen and the Web of Souls.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does Liza know that the spindlers have taken Patrick's soul and that an imposter has taken his place? Why does she feel guilty about what has happened to him?
2. The word *changeling* appears in the title of Chapter 1; however, it never appears in the chapter. What is a changeling and what clues in the story help readers determine the meaning of the word? Why is this word a good choice for the title of Chapter 1?
3. Liza meets Mirabella early on in Liza's search for her brother. Who is Mirabella and how does she help Liza in her search? Is Mirabella a loyal friend? Support your response with details from the story.
4. Mirabella takes Liza through the troglod market. Describe the market and the troglods. What surprises does the market hold for Liza?
5. Along the way on her journey to save her brother, Liza encounters many unusual creatures (for example: troglods, lumer-lumpens, nids, hobgoblins, and nocturni). Choose any two of these creatures. Describe what they look like and then explain the role they play in the story.
6. Liza and Mirabella are captured on the palace grounds and taken to dark caverns beneath the palace to appear before the Court of Stones. Why are they taken as prisoners? What happens during their appearance before the court?
7. What is the Feast of the Souls and why is it important that Liza find her brother before this event takes place?
8. Liza's nocturna tells her, "Follow the river upstream and take the road that leads through the Live Forest. It's a shortcut. But be careful not to wake the trees" (p. 104). Liza forgets the nocturna's advice about the trees. What happens as a consequence, and how do Liza and Mirabella deal with this challenge?
9. Liza is spellbound by the gurgling River of Knowledge, but Mirabella warns her to stay away from it. Why does Mirabella warn her against the river?
10. Liza is curious about a bush that grows unusual-looking seeds. Mirabella explains that they are seeds of hope and that hope grows. At the end of the story, who does Liza give seeds to and why?
11. The seeds are a symbol for hope. Identify another symbol in this story and explain its significance. Then think of a symbol from a different story you have read and determine its meaning, too. Does every story contain symbols?
12. Liza faces a number of challenges along her journey to rescue her brother. One such challenge is crossing a large chasm that joins two opposite mountain peaks. What opposition do they face at the bridge and how do they manage to reach the other side?
13. Liza and Mirabella are tricked by four beautiful and kind women who offer them all they can eat from the Groaning Table. The women, in reality, are scawgs. What are scawgs and what danger do they pose to Liza and Mirabella?
14. To reach the Web of Souls, the place where her brother's soul is held, Liza must pass safely through three rooms. If she is successful, the queen promises Liza she can have her brother back. Discuss Liza's journey through the three rooms. How would the story's ending be different if the queen had kept her word?
15. A quest is an adventure in which the main character overcomes a series of obstacles. What major obstacles does Liza confront when attempting to save her brother? How might the descriptions of Liza's adventures be different if they were written from Mirabella's point of view? Rewrite one chapter of the story from Mirabella's point of view.