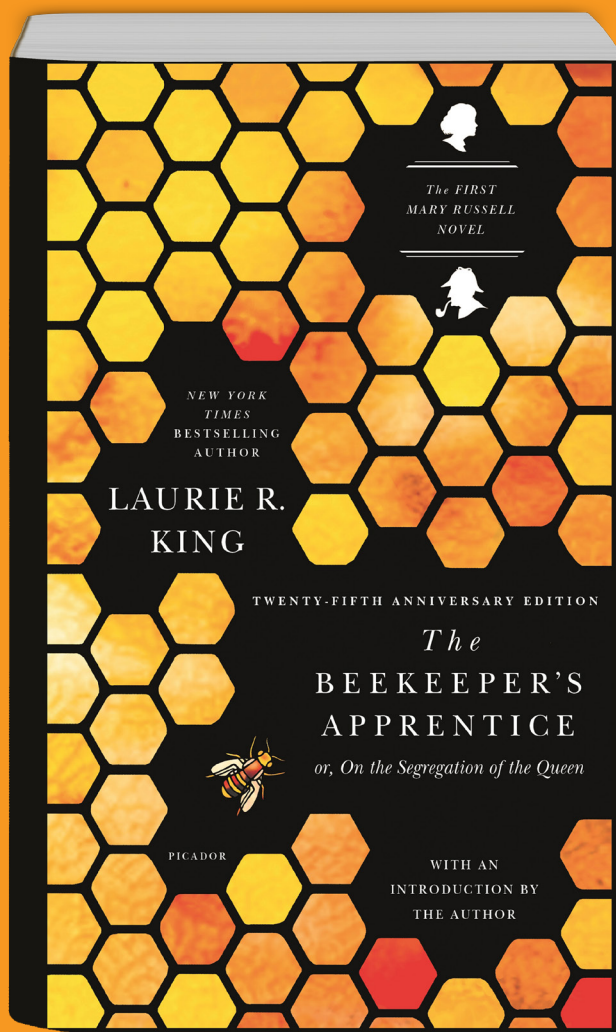


*The*  
BEEKEEPER'S  
APPRENTICE  
BOOK CLUB KIT

*Celebrating the 30th Anniversary of the beloved  
mystery series that introduced Sherlock Holmes to Mary Russell*



PICADOR



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## LETTER FROM LAURIE

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IT IS HUMBLING, AND AMAZING, to usher into being a character that touches people's lives. When I was a young mother, kids off to school, who sat down and wrote, *I was fifteen when I first met Sherlock Holmes...* Well, I did *hope* that people might read those words.

*The Beekeeper's Apprentice* is now celebrating its 30th anniversary in print. Mary Russell has changed that young mother's life in so many ways—as she changed the old curmudgeon, Sherlock Holmes, over the course of what is now a series. Mary Russell—a gawky, egotistical, orphan who literally stumbled across the “retired” Sherlock Holmes as he was studying honeybees near his Sussex home—became first protégée, then partner, of the Victorian detective. Russell and Holmes—to his considerable surprise—now face some of the most intriguing cases of the Twentieth Century together.

In writing these stories, I wanted to respect Arthur Conan Doyle, preserving his genius while allowing The Great Detective to make his way into a vastly different era. I also wanted *The Beekeeper's Apprentice* and subsequent episodes to paint a historically accurate picture—of the Great War, the changing role of women, the political and social concerns of various countries, and the myriad of issues that find their way into the Russell “memoirs.”

Most of all, I wanted them to be fun. I hope you feel that you've met some new friends, as you read and discuss.

Laurie R. King



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**LAURIE R. KING** somehow turned a theological degree into an award-winning, bestselling career in crime writing. A third-generation Northern Californian who writes mostly about other parts of the world, she has published a book a year since 1993, and still finds stories she wants to tell.

Saying impertinent things about Sherlock Holmes in the first few Russell Memoirs endeared her to the Baker Street Irregulars, who not only invited

her to give a paper at their annual

dinner, but later made her one of them. She also writes contemporary novels, standalones, short stories, and nonfiction, co-edits collections of Sherlockian fiction, and enjoys meeting Russell readers online and at conferences.

Although please note: if we agree that the Russell Memoirs are historical fact, as Russell firmly asserts on her Twitter feed, then Laurie should be regarded as Ms Russell's literary agent. Either role is fine with her.



photo credit: Josh Edelson



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# BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION GUIDE

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1. In an Editor's Preface, King playfully discloses the "true" origin of the story at hand: that what follows will be the actual memoirs of Mary Russell, which were mysteriously sent to her out of the blue, along with a trunk full of odds and ends. Do you think King did this in order to bring the world of the novel closer to our own, or simply as part of the Sherlockian game? What effect does this metafictional device have on the rest of the novel?
2. Protagonists in mystery novels are often solitary, either orphans or unmarried. How would *The Beekeeper's Apprentice* be different if young Mary was still living at home with her parents? Or, if she were a young orphan in 2015 instead of 1915?
3. It is 1915, the Great War is raging, and the men of England are in the trenches. How does this particular time grant Mary Russell freedoms usually reserved for men? Do you see things in the story that she could not have done, even two years before? Would she have thrived if born into a different, more oppressive social climate, say, a century earlier?
4. What does Mary Russell's initial opinion of bees tell us about her? Does her disdain for their mindless busy-work and adherence to the hive's social structure reflect her own attitude toward society? Or is her scorn that of a 15-year-old seeking to regain her dignity after the embarrassment of not recognizing Sherlock Holmes?
5. Holmes uses the game of chess to sharpen Mary Russell's analytical and strategic thinking. How does chess – and, in particular, the Queen – serve as a metaphor throughout the story? In what ways does King use the game to comment upon the master-apprentice relationship?
6. Russell and Holmes don disguises throughout *The Beekeeper's Apprentice*, and their work sometimes requires them to cross dress. How does Mary Russell's world change when she dresses as a man?

7. Watson is eternally known as the great detective's sidekick. Who, in your opinion, is a more effective foil for Holmes, Watson or Russell? What different aspects of Holmes's personality emerge in the presence of each? What would happen if Holmes were paired with a different partner, one more timid or less tenacious?
8. At Oxford, Mary Russell concludes that theology and detective work are one and the same. In your opinion, how are the two subjects related—or not?
9. At Oxford, despite the amount of work, and even though the ongoing War has made the colleges a shadow of their normal selves, Mary Russell finds a new home and begins to make friends her own age. Did this light-hearted side of her surprise you? Do you wish she could get up to more simple hijinks in Sussex?
10. The art of deduction is constantly at play in *The Beekeeper's Apprentice*. Mary Russell not only notices that Watson has shaved off his mustache, she looks more closely and decides that it was done "very recently". Is King encouraging the reader to be more perceptive throughout the novel? Does every detail of our lives hold a mystery and a story?
11. What are some crucial differences between Patricia Donleavy's background and that of Mary Russell? What mental and emotional strengths do both women have in common, and what separates them? Holmes comments: "A quick mind is worthless unless you can control the emotions with it as well." How does this maxim apply?
12. At what point in the novel did you suspect that Russell's adversary was a woman? When you read a mystery, what assumptions do you typically make about the gender of the villain? In what ways does King toy with the reader's assumptions about gender throughout the novel?



# MAIN CHARACTERS



(NOTE: many of the names and dates are sources of contention in the Sherlockian world. The below reflects information from the Russell Memoirs.)

**Mary Judith Russell:** born January 2, 1900, in San Francisco. Russell (as Holmes calls her) is American/English, Jewish, and recently orphaned when *The Beekeeper's Apprentice* begins. Her mind is very like that of Sherlock Holmes, but she definitely has her own take on matters.

**Sherlock Escott Leslie Holmes:** born January 6, 1861, in Berkshire, England. His stories, narrated by his flat-mate and good friend Dr John Watson but written by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, describe his career as the world's first "consulting detective" in Victorian London. Brilliant, misanthropic, and dedicated to the pursuit of justice.

**Clara Hudson (Clarissa):** born May 7, 1856 in Edinburgh. According to Arthur Conan Doyle, she rents rooms to Holmes and Watson starting in 1881—although later Russell memoirs reveal that Mrs Hudson's history with Holmes is a little more complicated.

**Dr. John H. Watson:** born 1854. Watson served with British forces during the Second Anglo-Afghan War, was wounded, and sent home to London, where he met young Sherlock Holmes and agreed to rent a flat together. Not intellectually Holmes' equal, nonetheless he is a partner in confronting crimes.

**Veronica Beaconsfield:** a fellow Oxford undergraduate who forms an unexpected friendship with Mary Russell. Hijinks ensue.

**Ali and Mahmoud Hazr:** two Englishmen who claim to be Bedouin brothers and guide Russell and Holmes through a time in Palestine.

**Patricia Donleavy:** Russell's maths tutor at Oxford, a woman Russell respects, whose real story is unexpected and whose betrayal is devastating.

**Mycroft Holmes:** Sherlock's brother, seven years older, brilliant but physically lazy. Mycroft is something high in the British government—or as Holmes tells Watson, "All other men are specialists, but his specialism is omniscience." And, "occasionally, he is the British Government."



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## WHAT'S ON THE MENU?

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Mary Russell is not a cook—but that doesn't mean she doesn't like to eat. If your book club likes to add a themed menu, Twenties-style food is easy to provide. It's also fun to glam the table up with black or gold plates, fancy paper napkins, and “firework” party picks—with a bandeau (feathered or glittery) for the ladies or thin moustache for the gents?

A light snack for a morning or afternoon meet? How about scones and jam, with clotted cream if available, and a nice pot of fresh tea? You could even do a tasting: plain, fruit, and cheese scones, with a choice of Darjeeling, Assam, and Earl Grey teas (although Russell doesn't care for the last.)

Lunchtime or a more substantial afternoon tea? Precede your scones with an assortment of small, crustless sandwiches—egg salad, grated cheese with chives and mayonnaise, cucumber and cream cheese—with devilled eggs and maybe some vegetables with dip, with small cakes or pastries after the scones.

If an actual dinner is on the books, start with the above buffet of small pieces, but add in hot meatballs, small quiches, shrimp, and the like.

And of course, for a Twenties theme, we can't forget the drinks—whether it's champagne cocktails or fizzy apple juice with fruit in it, the Twenties was all about festive drinks. Any of the classic cocktails (or as mocktails) will do: Gin Rickey, Sidecar, White Lady—and above all, the Bee's Knees!



## Mrs Hudson's Scones

**2 cups flour**

**1 T. to 1/3 cup sugar (savory or sweet scones)**

**1/2 t. salt**

**2 1/2 t. baking powder**

**1/2 cup (1 stick) butter (cold or frozen)**

**1/2 cup milk, buttermilk, light cream, or sour cream**

**1 egg**

Mix together dry ingredients in a bowl. Either grate frozen butter into the dry ingredients, or cut cold butter into small pieces and work into flour mix with a pastry cutter, forks, or your fingers until the pieces are no larger than small peas.

Beat together the milk and egg, stir into flour mix with a fork. You want it well moistened, but not over-mixed. If it doesn't hold together, add another T milk; if it's extremely sticky, add a little more flour.

For drop scones, spoon 1/4 cup a few inches apart on a lined or greased baking sheet. For smooth scones, either pat on a floured board into a 3/4" thick circle (two circles if you want smaller scones) and cut in 8 triangles, or pat out and cut into circles with a 2 1/2 inch glass.

Refrigerate, or at least let rest in a cool place, for 15 minutes. Brush tops with cream or beaten egg, and sprinkle with coarse sugar (parmesan cheese for savory) if desired.

Bake in 400° oven 16 to 25 minutes, or until golden brown at the bottom and light brown on top.





# RUSSELLISMS



Sherlock Holmes scholars collect and discuss the many “**Sherlockisms**” in the Conan Doyle stories, those short, pithy statements uttered during the detective’s cases (“‘Elementary,’ said he.” “You know my methods, Watson.” “The curious incident of the dog in the night-time.”) Similar phrases from the Russell Memoirs are called **Russellisms**, and are treasured by her followers, who drop them into conversations, rank them on social media polls, and admire them on t-shirts or coffee mugs. Russellisms from *The Beekeeper’s Apprentice* include:

- ☛ He said nothing. Very sarcastically.
- ☛ “My God,” he said in a voice of mock wonder, “it can think.”
- ☛ I crawled into my books and pulled the pages up over my head.
- ☛ “When faced with the unthinkable,” I said shakily, “one chooses the merely impossible.”



artwork credit: Mercedes C. Fuller



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# FUN FACTS

(BEHIND-THE-SCENES RESEARCH)

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Laurie never takes Russell to a place she hasn't been herself, whether the Sussex Downs, Oxford, or as Israel was called in 1919, Palestine. This may be one of the reasons Russell and Holmes travel the world as much as they do in the series: so Laurie can, too.



 Oxford



 Sussex



 Israel/Palestine



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# A B R I E F C H R O N O L O G Y

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A detailed chronology of the Russell memoirs can be found on the Laurie R King website (under BOOKS → RUSSELL & HOLMES) but briefly:

**January 6, 1861:** Holmes' birth date (at least, according to the Russell memoirs)

**January 1881:** Watson & Holmes take rooms from Mrs Hudson on Baker St

**March 1888:** the Irene Adler case (Conan Doyle's "A Scandal in Bohemia")

**January 2, 1900:** Mary Russell born

**1903:** Holmes "retires" to Sussex

**April 8, 1915:** Russell nearly trips over Holmes on the Sussex Downs

**Dec 1918-Feb 1919:** *O Jerusalem*

**December 1920-February 1921:** *A Monstrous Regiment of Women*

**1923:** *A Letter of Mary; The Moor; Justice Hall*

**1924:** *The Game; Dreaming Spies; Locked Rooms; The Art of Detection* (a Kate Martinelli novel); *Language of Bees; The God of the Hive; Pirate King; Garment of Shadows*

**1925:** *Dreaming Spies; Murder of Mary Russell; Island of the Mad; Riviera Gold; Castle Shade; The Lantern's Dance*



## ART IN THE BLOOD



In Arthur Conan Doyle's story, "The Greek Interpreter," Holmes comments that he and his brother Mycroft inherited their ability to observe and deduce from a grandmother born into a family of artists: "Art in the blood," he tells Watson, "is liable to take the strangest forms."

Followers of Mary Russell have embraced this dictum with all their hearts, producing everything from cosplay videos to tattoos, illustrated stories to oil paintings, pirate haikus to crossword puzzles. Some of these can be seen on the Laurie R. King web site, the "Fun Stuff" page.



artwork credit: Steven E. Gordon



artwork credit: Mercedes C. Fuller



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## AN INTERVIEW WITH LAURIE R. KING

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***The Beekeeper's Apprentice* is only the first in a long and increasingly rich series of mysteries. Would you give us some insight into how it all started, and where you got the idea for the character of Mary Russell?**

The Russell books began with the thought, What would Sherlock Holmes look like if he were a woman? How would that cold, discerning mind change, and how would it remain the same? And because two similar objects are more interesting when they are close enough to set each other off, I wanted a time and a place where the two versions could meet.



photo credit: Iden Ford

The latest setting for an Arthur Conan Doyle Holmes story is at the start of the Great War, in August, 1914. The society that gave birth to Sherlock Holmes did not survive that terrible war, and the Holmes stories written by Doyle after 1914 were all set beforehand, with Holmes firmly locked into the era of gaslights and hansom cabs.

But what if Holmes *had* survived the War? What if he had been permitted to grow and change with his country? *Beekeeper* opens in the spring of 1915, when the nation is beginning to feel War's transformation. By choosing that time, I defined a great deal of what the series would become—the story not only of a young woman, but of an era.

Mary Russell is a woman of the Twentieth century; through her, Holmes enters the modern age.

**Many people have stepped into Conan Doyle's shoes and performed the difficult task of evoking Holmes's voice. How were you able to make your revival of Holmes**

**more than an act of ventriloquism, and really bring him to life in these pages? Did you feel intimidated by the task of writing an iconic literary character?**

If I have succeeded in “restoring Holmes to life” as one reviewer put it, it may be because I did not try to write Holmes stories, but put Holmes in the role of supporting actor. I was free to let him evolve in ways he would not have if these had been pastiches set in and around his Baker Street days.

At the same time, because he was not my central concern, I did not worry about how I would handle him—I was focused on Russell, and Holmes just slipped through. In a sense, I don’t feel I can take credit for the personality that comes across in the Russell books. Perhaps I’m just channeling Conan Doyle....

**From films to books, others have tried to create new stories for Holmes. Which are your favorites? What are your favorite film adaptations of Holmes?**

I read very few pastiches, mostly because I’m afraid my mind will remember it as something by Conan Doyle, and I’ll put it in a story somewhere down the line. I do enjoy books that take the character and deliberately work him into another time and place, such as Peter Straub’s *Mystery*, with his aging detective a clear stand-in for Holmes.

I did read, and love, two Holmes novels that explore the detective’s great old age, Mitch Cullin’s *A Slight Trick of the Mind* and Michael Chabon’s *Final Solution*. Since it will take “my” Holmes quite a while to make it there, I don’t have to worry about unconsciously adopting the story lines.

When it comes to film adaptations, I enjoy most of them, but the Grenada series with Jeremy Brett was absolutely on the mark in evoking the man and his time.

**What is your favorite Conan Doyle story?**

Why not ask me who is my favorite child? *The Hound of the Baskervilles* for its inimitable atmosphere (I know, I tried imitating it!), *Sign of the Four* for being a dashing good yarn, “Silver Blaze” for its energy, its classic Holmes construction, and for containing what is arguably the best Holmes exchange of them all; “But the dog did nothing in the night-time.” “That was the curious incident.”

**Today's murder mysteries in television, film, and books often rely upon meticulous forensic science – readers know all too well what can be done with ultraviolet lights and microscopes. What do you see as the difference between the forensic investigations of past and present, and what are the different challenges of telling a story within those two very different realms of plausibility?**

Cutting-edge forensic techniques were one of the striking innovations of the Conan Doyle stories—Holmes solves one murder based on fingerprints, elsewhere he experiments with identifying human blood. However, he generally solves his cases not in the laboratory, but by seeing, noticing, and thinking. When I wrote a book that was part Holmes, part modern-day investigation (*The Art of Detection*) one of the things that came out was how oddly similar the two periods were. Television dramas may not agree, but in fact, crime labs are used to prove cases, and only rarely to solve them.

Having said that, Holmes would have reveled in modern technology, from the Internet to DNA. He might even have developed an AI assistant, for when Russell is busy.

**You also write contemporary stories. Do Russell and Holmes have a way of sneaking into those?**

Definitely! Perhaps not Russell, but (as mentioned) *The Art of Detection* (a Kate Martinelli novel) is about a previously unknown Sherlock Holmes story, and the new Raquel Laing series finds a modern detective very much like Holmes in personality. And interestingly, both those have story lines in two time periods.

Holmes is, by all indications, a character of eternal interest and adaptability.

**Many people are curious about how to construct a mystery. Do you plot it out backwards, knowing the conclusion, or proceed forward and allow the solution to surprise you (as it does the reader)?**

I'm one of those writers who doesn't outline, who basically doesn't know what she's getting into from one chapter to the next.

When I first started, I needed a clear idea of the book's final scene before I



could begin. But about half a dozen books later, I found myself halfway into a story and realized I had no clue as to its ending. Fortunately, by that time I had a certain degree of assurance in the process: I didn't know precisely what I was doing, but I'd always figured it out before, so....

Now, when I start a book, I do have some idea what kind of story it is, who it's about, what the main events are. Beyond that, I depend on growing the novel organically. In practice, this means that the back of my mind seems to know what's going on, even if the front of my mind is in a state of blissful (or not so blissful) ignorance.



For more information on Picador Reading Group Guides email:

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The art work and merchandise shown above can be found on the LaurieRKing.com web site, on the “Fun Stuff” and “Merch” pages.

You can follow  @Mary\_Russell •   LaurieRKing •  The Beekeeper's Apprentices.

