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November Recap: Laurie R. King
By Beth Proudfoot

Several years ago, a friend turned me on to local author Laurie R. King. *The Beekeepers Apprentice* hooked me and wouldn't let me go. I rushed out to find all the other books in the series, and then King's other series, and then her other books that have nothing to do with either series. I became a junky. I'm sort of a readaholic anyway, but the Laurie R. King books, when I find them, go right to the top of the towering stack on my nightstand.

So, when our program chair, asked me who I'd like to have come speak at our writer's club dinner, Laurie R. King was my first suggestion. King was a little elusive, however, and I'd almost given up hope when Edie announced that she would be speaking at our November meeting. Oh, rapture! There was a pause, while I clutched my hands to my heart and thanked the Universe for this wonderful gift. Then Edie said, "We've been experimenting with an interview format for some of our speakers. Would you like to interview Ms. King?"

Would I!

I had another commitment that night. It didn't matter. One of my kids was sick. I called my sister. I arrived, late and breathless, to meet Ms. King only a couple of minutes before we were "on." I confess, I gushed a bit. I was nervous as hell. King, on the other hand, was a rock. A solid woman, with a beautiful, unlined face topped with a dramatic sweep of white hair, she exuded a slow, calm, inner peace.

She was reluctant, at first, to speak about her early career, but what she ended up saying was very encouraging, at least for those of us who are having trouble selling our work. *The Beekeepers Apprentice*, a historical mystery set in 1920's England, was rejected all over town when she first tried to sell it. So, she switched gears and wrote a contemporary police procedural, *Grave Talent*. This one sold, and its success (it won the Edgar for Best First Novel) helped her get *Beekeeper* into print. Soon, she had two series going. Ironically, the *Beekeeper* series is now by far the most popular.

I asked about her writing schedule. Her contract with her publisher extends for a couple of years, and she's committed to writing a book about every six months. She spends three to four months on a first draft – that's ten to twelve pages every day. Until recently, she wrote those ten pages longhand with a fountain pen. She doesn't outline, and has only a vague story idea before she begins. Part of the fun, for her, is pulling all the pieces together at the end to make it all work. This brought up, for me, the serial novel, *Naked Came the Phoenix*, which she wrote with twelve other top-tier mystery writers. Each writer had a month to write a chapter. King's unenviable job was to come up with the ending. She said it was fun, and she was able to tie up all the pieces with only a couple changes to Chapter Eleven.

King was an academic theologian before she became a mystery writer, and her analytical talent, in addition to her research skills, have served her well. When she begins her research on a book, she checks out all sorts of materials from the library (her husband, a professor, has a university library card, which helps). Then she reads them, marking interesting passages with Post-it flags. Her characters travel a lot in 1920, and for her research on historical exotic places, she loves to read *Baedeker's Guides* (I'm guessing at the spelling, here). Apparently, they have all kinds of interesting details, like which inns have fleas in the beds!

Our interview was over all too soon. In the back of the room, I bought a copy of *Folly*, which Laurie (we're on first-name terms, now, having shared a podium) autographed as a memento of a thrilling evening. It now has a permanent place on the top of the stack.

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