

A composite image featuring a woman in 1920s-style blonde hair and a jeweled headband on the left, holding a large, multi-colored fan. The background is a Venetian canal scene with a gondola and St. Mark's Basilica under a purple and pink sky. The right side of the image has a solid gold background with white text.

# BOOK CLUB KIT


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## ISLAND *of the* MAD

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LAURIE R.  
KING





# ISLAND of the MAD

*A letter from*  
**LAURIE R. KING**

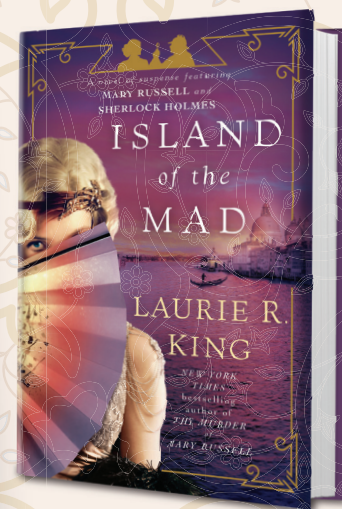
Dear friends of Russell & Holmes,

So, I started out thinking that I'd be writing a book set in the Tower of London—but my little writing craft took an unexpected turn at Tower Bridge and ended up in . . . Venice? Yes, *Island of the Mad* begins with a burnt dinner and a phone call, and quickly dives into cabarets and women's clubs, trains and gondolas, a Bedlam invasion and the full-hearted, much-sequined, heavy-drinking spirit of the Twenties. Oh—and Cole Porter.

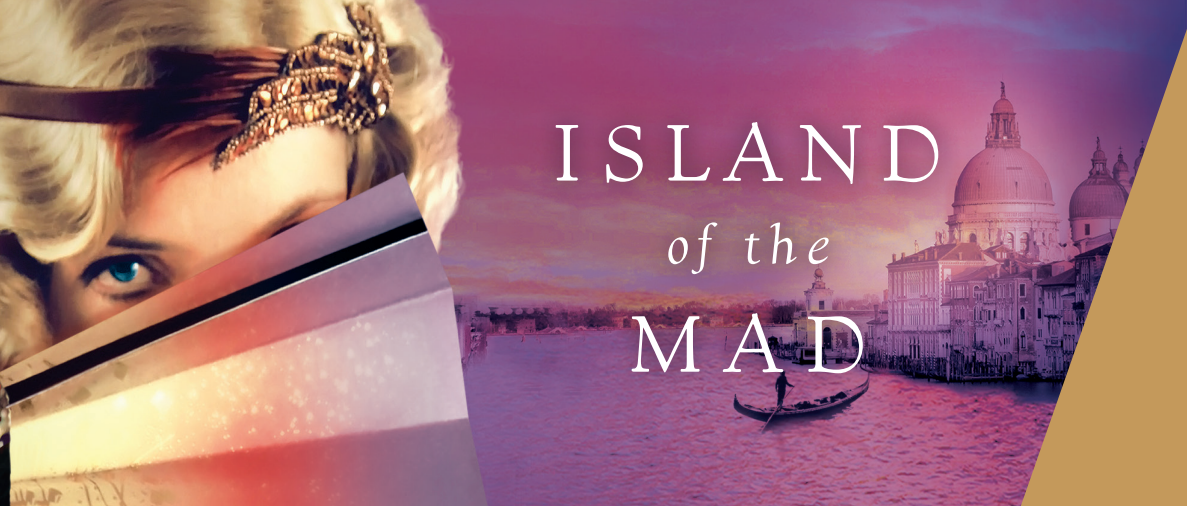
*Island of the Mad* finds Mary Russell and her husband Sherlock Holmes searching for a University friend's missing aunt, a woman who has spent years behind the barred windows of the infamous London insane asylum known as Bedlam. Lady Vivian's trail seems to lead to Venice—a place Russell is happy to visit, although Holmes is considerably less enthusiastic about this city of masks and watery deceptions. Clearly, some past adventure bears a dark shadow. However, his brother Mycroft urgently requires a report on Mussolini's Blackshirts, and Russell is determined to go, so . . .

I had a load of fun writing this story, which ended up—as all good historical fiction aims to be—both a welcome diversion from modern times, and an intriguing window into the present. I hope you enjoy reading *Island of the Mad* as much as I enjoyed writing it.

Laurie R. King







# ISLAND of the MAD

## Discussion QUESTIONS

*The trail leads Russell and Holmes through Bedlam's stony halls to the warm Venice lagoon, where ethereal beauty is jarred by Mussolini's Blackshirts, where the gilded Lido set may be tempting a madwoman, where Cole Porter sits at a piano, playing with ideas. . . .*

1. Can an insane asylum function as an actual asylum, a place to shelter from the world? Can quiet routine be a more effective way of treating mental illness than modern drugs and treatment? Or does it depend on the mental illness?
2. Were you surprised to learn that men could commit their female relations to asylums? How has this changed, and how does it remain a possibility?
3. Women's clubs, women's communities: Is separation the only way women can be themselves in the Twenties? How about today?
4. *Island of the Mad* has a number of non-traditional characters in it: the many LGBTQ characters Russell and Holmes meet in Venice; Cole Porter—a gay man in love with his wife; Russell and Holmes themselves, with their remarkable difference in age. Are these just the oddities of a libertine city in the Twenties, or do complex relationships appear in all times and places?
5. Fascism rose across Europe in the Thirties, including in England. Why do you think that Rosa Lintorn-Orman's British Fascisti, and later, Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists, failed to take hold in England, as Fascism did in Germany and Italy? Is it rooted in their greater losses in the First World War? Is it due to the different governmental systems? What does it say about the rise of Fascist impulses in our own twenty-first century?
6. People read historical fiction to explore places and ideas they are unfamiliar with. How important is solid research to you in reading a book like *Island of the Mad*?
7. Venice is both a place and a state of mind—and in this book, it is almost more a character than a stage for the story. Could this story have been set in any other time or place?
8. As with *Forrest Gump*, the fictional Sherlock Holmes engages with and inspires a towering historical figure, in this case Cole Porter, who has decided to completely give up writing commercial music. Do you enjoy this blend of fiction and reality?





# ISLAND of the MAD

## INFO SHEET

### *Interesting things about...*

#### **Bedlam:**

- Bethlem Royal Hospital, which gave English the word "bedlam," was established in 1247, first as a priory, then a hostel, becoming a hospital for the insane by 1403.
- The statues of "Melancholy" and "Raving Madness" have resided at Bedlam since the late 1600s, in its three different sites. One of the figures was Oliver Cromwell's porter.
- The buildings that housed Bedlam from 1815 to 1930 now hold the Imperial War Museum.

#### **Venice:**

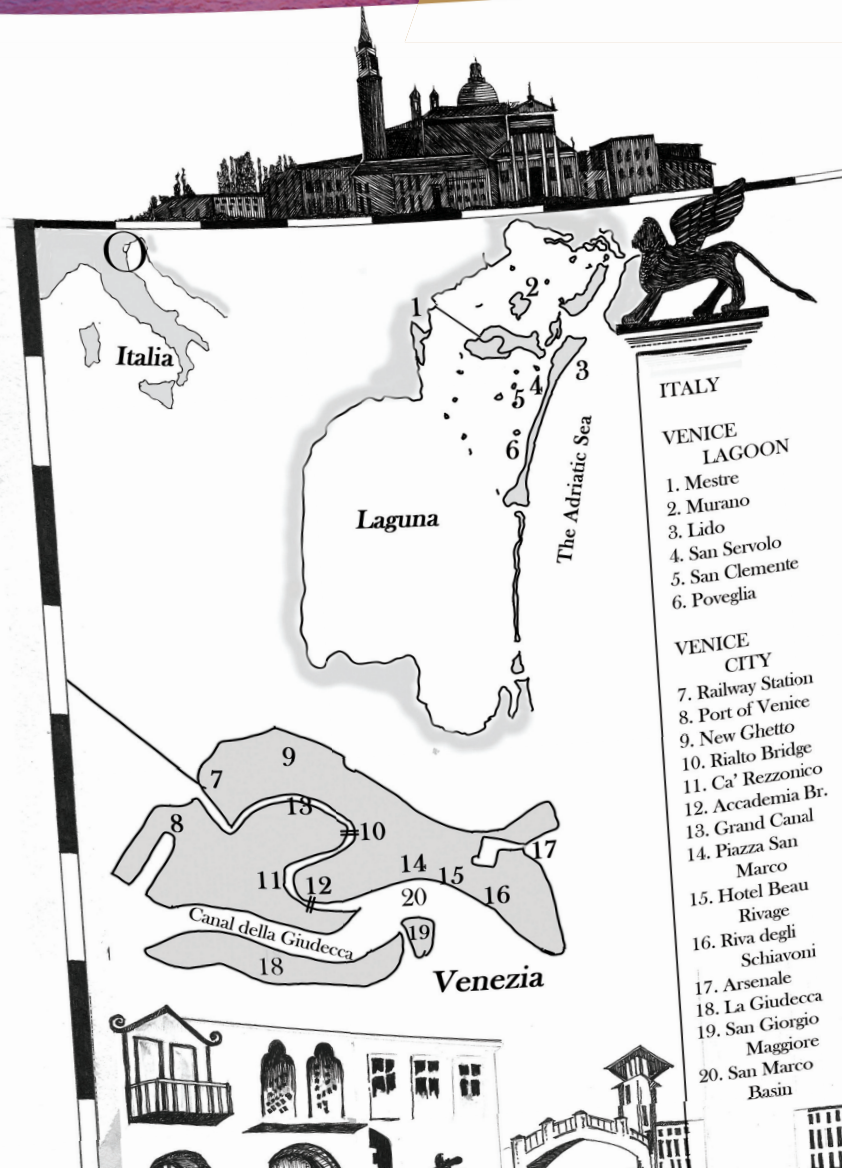
- Venetian citizens could post anonymous complaints in a "Bocca di leone" (lion's mouth) to be found across the city.
- The statues atop the San Marco columns (now copies) were pieced together from various originals. St. Mark's Lion, originally a monument to a Turkish god, had its tail down beside its leg and lacked wings; St. Theodore is the pastiche of a 1st-century BCE Persian and a 2nd-century CE Roman figure atop a 15th-century crocodile intended to be a dragon.

- The San Marco columns came from Tyre in 1125, and were originally three. One of them went overboard at unloading, and may still be in the San Marco Basin.
- "Spolia" is the term for looted art. Much of the San Marco Basilica is spolia brought by Fourth Crusaders: the marble façade; the iconic horses; the bronze doors; various reliefs and columns. But not the bones of St. Mark himself: those were stolen by merchants in 828.
- Venice has only 400 licensed gondoliers. The first woman to pass the exam was Giorgia Boscolo... in 2010. Her comment? That childbirth was more difficult.
- Shoppers do not touch the produce in a Venetian market. Do. Not. Touch.
- The language of Venice is not Italian, but Venetian. "Ciao" was originally Venetian.



# ISLAND of the MAD

# MAP







# ISLAND of the MAD

# ANYTHING GOES

*A Russell & Holmes version*

(Perpetrated by Laurie R. King)

In olden days a glimpse of stocking  
Was looked on as something shocking,  
But now, Holmes knows,  
Anything goes.

Good authors too who once knew  
better words,  
Now only use Holmes/Russell words  
Writing prose,  
Anything goes.

*Sherlock is mad today  
Russell is bad today,  
Facts are all wrong today,  
And short is long today,  
And here is there today  
No matter where today  
My Island of the Mad goes.*

And though he's not a great romancer  
Holmes knows that his gal will answer  
At the propose:  
"Anything goes!"

When Mrs Hudson, nearing eighty,  
In night clubs is getting matey  
With gigolos,  
Anything goes.

*If Russell's car you like,  
If Bedlam bars you like,  
If Mary's club you like,  
If Tillie's pub you like,  
If Mycroft's flat you like  
(He's not so fat, you like)  
You'll love Lido's Romeos!*

When blue-bloods take to the asylum  
Because life can't help but rile 'em,  
Then heaven knows,  
Anything goes.

When Friday night, the set that's smart  
Goes crashing a costume party  
In gleaming clothes,  
Anything goes.

*Isle of the Mad, today  
We won't be sad, today  
(That's not a fad, today)  
Cole Porter's rad, today!  
It's ironclad, today  
That we'll be glad, today  
Wherever Island of the Mad goes.*

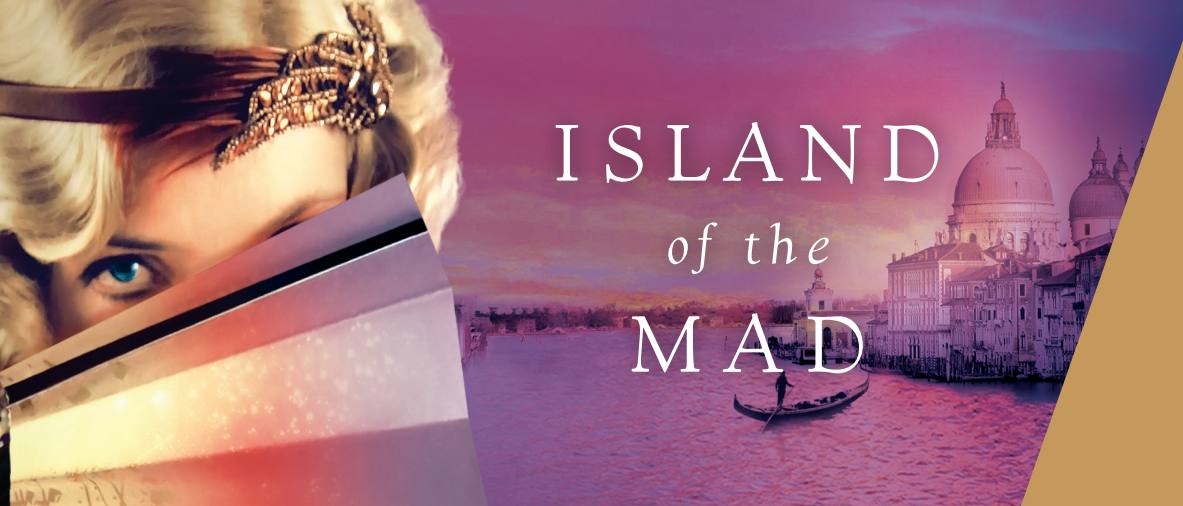
When mothers lock out kids and  
father  
Because they decide they'd rather  
Read Laurie's prose,  
Anything goes.

And though he's not a great  
romancer  
We love that she's bound to  
answer  
At the propose:  
"Anything goes!"



*In celebration of Island of the Mad, the  
15th novel in the Holmes & Russell series.  
Original song and lyrics by Cole Porter—who  
changed and added verses to keep up with  
scandals and society figures.*





# ISLAND *of the* MAD

## DRINKS & FOOD *recipes*

### Zaleti (or Gialletti)

These “Little Yellow Things” are not too sweet, ideal for dipping in espresso or dessert wine. Makes 2 dozen

#### Ingredients:

- ½ c. butter, softened
- ½ c. sugar
- 3 egg yolks
- ¼ c. milk
- 1 grated lemon rind (yellow zest only)
- 1 t. vanilla extract
- 2 T. grappa, or orange or almond liqueur
- ½ c. dried currants or cranberries
- ½ c. pine nuts (more for top, if wanted)
- 1 t. baking powder
- 1 c. finely ground cornmeal
- 1 ½ c. flour
- ½ t. salt

#### Instructions:

1. Half an hour beforehand, pour liqueur over dry fruit, set aside. Can also toast pine nuts, for stronger flavor.
2. Beat butter and sugar in a mixer until light and fluffy. Beat in egg yolks, milk, and vanilla.
3. Stir in lemon zest, currants, and pine nuts.
4. In a bowl, combine cornmeal, flour, salt, and baking powder. Add to the liquid in 4-5 portions, stirring well after each addition.
5. With wet or oiled hands, shape into ovals, pressing tops into more pine nuts if desired.
6. Place on lightly greased cookie sheet 2 inches apart.
7. Bake at 375 degrees for 12 to 15 minutes, until golden around the edges.
8. Cool on wire rack. Dust with powdered sugar if desired.





# ISLAND *of the* MAD

## DRINKS & FOOD *recipes*

### Polpette

Makes 40-50 small meatballs

#### Ingredients:

- 2 lbs ground meat (beef or combination)
- ½ c. pistachios, hazelnuts, or pine nuts
- ½ c. pumpkin seeds
- 4 cloves garlic
- 3 lg sprigs parsley
- ¼ to ½ chili pepper
- ¾ c. grated parmesan or pecorino
- 3 oz breadcrumbs (2 slices bread or ½ c. store-bought)
- 1 egg

#### Instructions:

1. Toast nuts and seeds until light brown.
2. In food processor, scraping down after each addition, add and pulse in this order: pepper; garlic; parsley; hazelnuts; pumpkin seeds, and softer nuts—final mix should be small chunks.
3. Place in bowl, mix thoroughly with ground meat, cheese, breadcrumbs, and egg. (If too crumbly, add an egg; if too wet, add breadcrumbs.) Shape with wet or oiled hands into little balls. Refrigerate for half an hour.
4. Cook either by frying in large pan with plentiful olive oil, or by arranging meatballs on well-oiled roasting pan, drizzling with more oil, and baking at 375 for 20-30 minutes, shaking or stirring 3 or 4 times, until well browned.

#### Sauce:

- 1 onion, chopped
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 T. fresh thyme (or 1 t dried)
- 3 sprigs parsley, chopped
- 1 small carrot, shredded fine
- 1 large can (28 oz) chopped tomatoes
- Salt to taste
- Splash balsamic vinegar

1. Cook onion and garlic in a little olive oil until soft and light brown.
2. Add next 4 ingredients, bring to boil and cook over low heat 30 minutes until very thick.
3. Stir in dash of balsamic, purée lightly. (Take care if using a food processor!)
4. Add cooked meatballs into sauce, cook for 10 minutes and serve.





# ISLAND *of the* MAD

## DRINKS & FOOD *recipes*

### Cicchetti


Cicchetti (chee-ket-ee) are small bites, like Venetian tapas.

Crostini topped with one of the following:  
steamed asparagus wrapped in pancetta; shaved pecorino and arugula; shrimp topped with dill or drizzled with balsamic syrup; sliced hard boiled egg topped with a bit of herring or anchovy; mortadella sprinkled with chopped pistachios or toasted hazelnuts; ricotta cheese with herbs or pomegranate seeds or chopped shrimp; salami and radicchio; gorgonzola and shaved fennel; shellfish of any kind; anything goes here!

Or the make-it-yourself: baskets of fresh baguette slices or crostini and a variety of thinly sliced meats, wedges of various cheeses, spicy greens or sprouts, maybe fig, onion, or pepper jam . . .







# ISLAND *of the* MAD

## DRINKS & FOOD *recipes*

### Venetian Sole

Serves 4

#### Ingredients:

16 oz fresh skinned deboned filet of sole  
¼ cup toasted pine nuts  
¼ cup sultana raisins  
1 small yellow onion, diced small  
1 clove fresh garlic, minced  
1 cup dry white wine  
1 tablespoon unsalted butter  
1 bay leaf  
A pinch of chili flakes  
Salt and pepper to taste  
Pure olive oil  
2 sprigs of fresh tarragon, chopped

#### Instructions:

1. Toast pine nuts, set aside.
2. Plump the raisins in the wine by cooking over medium heat. When the wine reduces and is absorbed, set aside to cool.
3. Lightly sauté the onions, garlic, chili flakes, and bay leaf over low heat until the onions are translucent. Combine the raisin and onion mixture and keep warm.
4. Quickly sauté the sole in olive oil, then arrange on a warm serving dish.
5. Stir the butter into the onion/raisin mixture and pour over the fish, sprinkle the chopped tarragon and pine nuts for garnish.
6. Serve with sautéed greens or salad.

Special thanks to Chef Damani Thomas of  
Oswald Restaurant, Santa Cruz.





# ISLAND *of the* MAD



## DRINKS & FOOD *recipes*

### The Island spritzer

Layer in a wine glass:

Ice

3 oz Prosecco

2 oz Aperol (or 1 oz Campari)

Soda water to fill the glass

Float a citrus island on top—a slice of blood orange, or grapefruit, or a kumquat.

Salute!

(Sa-loo-teh!)

Special thanks to Chris Page of Oswald Restaurant, Santa Cruz







# ISLAND of the MAD

*Photos from*  
**LAURIE**



Rooftops



Waterfront



Venice window





ISLAND  
of the  
MAD



*Photos from*  
**LAURIE**



San Servolo window



Cappuccino and macarons



Mosaic floor