



# Aunty Lee's Deadly Specials

*Ovidia Yu*

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Rosie “Aunty” Lee, the feisty widow, amateur sleuth, and proprietor of Singapore’s best-loved home cooking restaurant, is back in another delectable, witty mystery involving scandal and murder among the city’s elite.

Few know more about what goes on in Singapore than Aunty Lee. When a scandal over illegal organ donation involving prominent citizens makes news, she already has a list of suspects. There’s no time to snoop, though—Aunty Lee’s Delights is catering a brunch for local socialites Henry and Mabel Sung at their opulent house.

Rumor has it that the Sung’s fortune is in trouble, and Aunty Lee wonders if the gossip is true. But soon after arriving at the Sung’s house, her curiosity turns to suspicion. Why is a storage house she discovers locked? What is the couple arguing about behind closed doors? Where is the guest of honor who never showed up?

Then, Mabel Sung and her son Leonard are found dead. The authorities blame it on Aunty Lee’s special stewed chicken with buah keluak, a local black nut that can be poisonous if cooked improperly. Aunty Lee has never carelessly prepared a dish. She’s certain the deaths are murder—and that they’re somehow linked to the organ donor scandal.

To save her business and her reputation, she’s got to prove it—and unmask a dangerous killer whose next victim may just be Aunty Lee.

## Aunty Lee's Deadly Specials Details

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Author : Ovidia Yu

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# From Reader Review Auntie Lee's Deadly Specials for online ebook

## **Susan Johnson says**

I love cozy mysteries set in foreign lands. I love reading about a different culture and I thought this would be great because it's about Auntie Lee, owner of a Singapore home cooking restaurant. Unfortunately the characters never came alive to me. The story was interesting, the tidbits about life in Singapore were fascinating and the description of the food was mouth watering. It would have been a great book if the characters weren't so flat.

Auntie Lee is hired to cater a party for well known lawyer, Mabel Sung. Unfortunately Mabel and her son are found dead and the cause is attributed to her chicken dish with buah keluak, a local black nut that can be poisonous if not cooked properly. Authorities close her restaurant while they investigate the deaths. Auntie Lee decides to prove it wasn't her food that caused the deaths and sets off to investigate. Along the way she runs into an international organ ring from China that sell organs illegally. How does that tie into the murder?

As I said it's an interesting story but I'd have to care for the characters more to get involved with the series. I was disappointed. I wanted it to be better.

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## **?Trish says**

Too bad the author didn't see fit to have Ben Ng survive to be reunited with Patrick Pang. Ruined the ending for me . . .

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## **Yulande Lindsay says**

An okay mystery but needed tightening up. Also had a little difficulty with the writer's style.

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## **Jill Meyer says**

Singaporean author Ovidia Yu has published many mysteries, but her "Auntie Lee" series are her only books published in the US. (She also has a play in print). I read - and enjoyed - her first in the series, "Auntie Lee's Delights: A Singaporean Mystery" when it was published here last year.

Yu's mysteries are sort of half-way between "cozies" and "hard-boiled", maybe trending a bit back towards "cozy". Yes, people die but they tend to do so by poison or an unspecified means. That's a bit of a relief for those readers looking for an entertaining look at a place they may never travel to. "Auntie Lee" is a wealthy widow who is renowned for her cooking. Even though Yu doesn't give recipes, the dishes "Auntie" and her partners make in their catering business and eat-in store are mouthwatering. In "Deadly Specials", Auntie is asked to cater a luncheon for the owner of a law firm in Singapore who is celebrating the turning over of the firm to her daughter. Two people die - possibly from poisoned foods - and Auntie is forced to close her

business until the murders can be solved. But, some other people are missing and presumed dead and the idea of "body parts" floating around, just waiting to be affixed to ailing bodies are also part of the story. The actual mystery is sort of second rate, but what's enjoyable about the book is the look at Singaporean society and how the city fits in with other Asian societies. The reader learns a lot more about the setting and the characters than "who done what to whom".

Ovidia Yu's mysteries - and I hope there are more coming in the series - are light, fun reads. You'll definitely be hungry after you finish.

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### **Beth Robinson says**

This was a fun and refreshing mystery, for all that the criminal part of it was serious and disturbing. Finding the answers out was the goal of the book, but not its bulk nor its tone. Auntie Lee is awesome (and most of the other characters think so too, even when she's driving them a bit nuts) and a well described character who is more than just the cooking, nosy, widow. The supporting characters have their own personalities. I can definitely see myself following them all through multiple books.

The story is very rooted in place with personalities and motives and interrelationships being dependent on the mix of history and cultures in Singapore. I enjoyed it a great deal. The first one was perhaps clearer but this one was more exciting. The mystery was not obvious and was uncovered well with realistic side trips.

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### **Jaylia3 says**

My favorite cozy mysteries have some extra element to intrigue me and hold my interest, and the Auntie Lee series is a perfect example. Set in Singapore there's an international multicultural cast of Singaporean residents who are ethnic Chinese, Indian, Malay, Eurasian, and Filipino, plus there's lots of woven-into-the-plot tidbits about life in Singapore, including its laws--this time around especially relating to medical practices and gay rights--culture, family dynamics, and, of course, food. Auntie Lee, a wealthy widow of a certain age, runs a restaurant featuring Singaporean specialties just for the fun of it. She's curious, nosy, likes to be around people, and is determined to be of service, even when her "services" aren't exactly appreciated.

As this book opens Auntie Lee and her restaurant crew are catering a party that becomes the scene of two deaths: the hostess, a highly controlling local bigwig who owns her own law firm, and her bedridden formerly wildchild son. Food poisoning? That's the easiest answer. Auntie Lee would get a slap on the wrist for being careless and everyone could just move on with their lives. The police are under pressure to accept that explanation and close the case, but Auntie Lee has other ideas. With distractingly delicious gifts of homemade delicacies and the ability to act strategically befuddled Auntie Lee pursues truth without worrying about the trouble she's stirring up.

This is the kind of book that makes me miss hanging out with its characters when I've finished reading. Though the focus is on Auntie Lee the narrative point of view shifts around between the characters, and there are several developing relationships (including maybe a love interest for Auntie Lee?) that I look forward to catching up on in future books.

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## **Kim Tong Lim says**

This the author's second book in the series on kiasu, kaypoh Auntie Lee helping to solve crimes in Singapore. Her first book is Auntie Lee's Delights. The main characters in the first book continue in this second fictional story. Familiarity got me into the second book very quickly.

Ovidia Yu changed her writing style from the first book. The sentences are short and to the point. It is easy to follow and quick to grasp.

Auntie Lee uses her famous Peranakan food to get her around to talk to people and get to the bottom of sudden deaths of two people during a house party. Who can refuse good food and an elderly owner of her restaurant, Auntie Lee's Delights? Readers are introduced to the various delightful Peranakan food. These are cleverly weaved into the story.

Read this novel to the end to uncover the real culprit(s) and the motive(s) for the deaths.

kiasu - fear of losing out

kaypoh - a busybody, meddling

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## **Becky says**

Things turn deadly when Auntie Lee is hired to cater a party for a local law firm!

Rosie Lee is known for her tasty Peranakan specialties, which leads to a special request from the Sung Law Firm. Mabel Sung hires Auntie Lee to cook for a party honoring the new promotion of her daughter, Sharon. For the buffet, they have two specific requirements - a nasi lemak spread and Auntie Lee's special chicken buah keluak. The chicken dish is one that has its risks, if prepared incorrectly the nuts used in the dish can be deadly. When both Mabel Sung and her son Leonard are discovered dead, fingers immediately begin pointing at Rosie and the buah keluak. But Rosie knows her food can't be responsible. Never one to stand idly by, Auntie Lee quickly inserts herself into the investigation. This time, though, catching the killer is the only way to clear her own name and save her business!

There is an undeniable charm to Ovidia Yu's series. These characters - Rosie, Nina, Cherrill, Mark, Selina, Salim... are so richly drawn. All of their personality quirks, their signature mannerisms, everything about them comes through.

As with the first installment, Auntie Lee's Delights, the plot is fun and moves along at a rather quick pace. But, as with the first installment, the somewhat choppy prose is still present. Fortunately, it's much less of a distraction this time around. Whether this is a mark of improvement, I honestly can't say - I suspect it's more the investment in the characters at this point that's allowed me to move past some of this. The biggest issue I noticed in this particular outing is the repetition. It is consistent, though, so I believe it's intended. As a style quirk it's easy to look past and doesn't detract from the overall readability.

I'll warn you - these are food based mysteries and I don't know about you guys but there are no Singaporean style restaurants in my area! Yu's description of the meals and dishes prepared by Aunty Lee set my stomach immediately growling. As a tiny bonus she does include some recipes, including the potentially deadly buah keluak! Don't worry, macadamia nuts are an alternative!

It's a nice twist, though, the inclusion of the food. While culinary mysteries aren't rare, it's the overall Singapore setting as well as the cultural details AND the food that elevate this series beyond the normal cozy fare.

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### **Kay says**

#RWLChallenge: A book that takes place in S.E. Asia (own voices).

I don't know what to make of this. A great cozy mystery but there were so many subert homophobic, racist and prejudices that I don't know how to rate this. It's also really repetitive and could easily have been 100 pages shorter.

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### **Glen says**

Aunty Lee, restaurant owner/sleuth, finds another case.

While catering for an obnoxious lady lawyer and her more obnoxious son, the jerks are killed, and one of Aunty Lee's dishes is framed for the deed. Aunty Lee has to get her establishment out from under the cloud of suspicion and find the real killer. This leads her to a Christian prayer group, organ sellers, and a bunch of other illicit activities. For a place that's so law abiding, there sure is a lot of crime going on in Singapore.

Pretty good stuff.

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### **PopcornReads says**

Book Review & Giveaway: Award-winning author Ovidia Yu has been entertaining Singaporean readers with her delightful Aunty Lee mystery novels and now it's our turn in the U.S. We were fortunate to review Book #1 in the series, Aunty Lee's Delights, when it was finally published in the U.S. last year and are delighted to be reviewing Book #2, Aunty Lee's Deadly Specials. Even better, the publisher has provided us with a copy for our giveaway at <http://popcornreads.com/?p=7838>. Whoot! Don't worry if you haven't read Book #1 because Book #2 will read just fine as a stand-alone novel, although I warn you that you will get hooked on the ever feisty and lovable Aunty Lee.

So, who is most likely to love Aunty Lee's amateur sleuthing adventures? I'd say if you like Agatha Christie's Miss Marple or Alexander McCall Smith's Precious Ramotswe then you're going to love Aunty Lee. The same is true if you like cross-cultural novels, mysteries with a food theme, and/or cozy whodunits.

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## Doreen says

So many fiction series start out well then hit a sort of sophomore slump: Ovidia Yu's Auntie Lee mystery series manages not only to avoid this pitfall but to improve (vastly, in my opinion) on her debut. While the food writing and observations regarding Singaporean mores and personalities are as excellent as before, the mystery is much stronger, with a denouement that felt far less contrived than in its predecessor. It's not a perfect book by any means -- it doesn't feel like a seamless read due to several rather odd transitions -- but it was an incredibly satisfying read for a crime novel junkie like myself, who misses her Southeast Asian homeland.

I also felt that Ms Yu was getting more comfortable with her characters, and with saying perhaps unpopular things. Her first book in this series felt much more circumspect in her treatment of homosexuality; *Deadly Specials*, however, has a liberal tone in addressing the subject. Similarly for her gentle poking at both government and Singaporean rigidity, exemplified by Auntie Lee's casual, "Suitable art is just propaganda" when warned that the portfolio she's about to look at may contain art that's not very "suitable" for a lady of her age and station. But what I really enjoyed were Ms Yu's observations, via a discouraged Auntie Lee, regarding the purpose of life

Why bother cooking chicken curry and catching murderers and exercising to lose weight when at the end of it all you wound up dead and not caring about anything?

(don't worry, she bounces back and tells you) and, even better, her critical examination of class and privilege and religion, extrapolating the issues in the book to hint at how they're a universal problem

"According to [her], the laws necessary to maintain social order are not the same as God's laws. To her, that meant she had a God-given right to save her son by any means that did not upset the social order."

Heady stuff for a cozy mystery, and very promising for future installments. I already have the third book on my wish list!

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## Marlene says

Originally published at Reading Reality

For a book that uncovers a very serious topic, Auntie Lee's *Deadly Specials* still retains its feel as a cozy mystery. While so much of the trouble revolves around Auntie Lee's catering business, the case she finds herself in the middle of deals with the very dark side of compensated organ donations and medical tourism.

A lot of the people involved in this case turn out to be really sick, and they didn't get that way from eating Auntie Lee's cooking – not that they don't try to blame the whole thing on her and her catering. Auntie Lee would probably have involved herself anyway – she does that for fun – but attacking her catering business closes out her one method of dealing with loneliness and widowhood – by fixing other people's food and fixing other people's problems.

(Word to the wise – just as in the first book in the series, *Aunty Lee's Delights*, Aunty Lee cooks a lot, and it all sounds exotic and positively yummy. Even the things that may seem very strange to us, like fried anchovies. Do not read this book when you are hungry – you will find yourself spontaneously raiding your own kitchen, and possibly kitchens for several houses around!)

The story begins with Aunty Lee scouring the newspaper, and having her friend and companion Nina scouring the internet, for news of a suicide victim. A young woman came to Singapore to find her missing fiancé, and commits suicide when neither he nor his body can be found. Her young man disappeared after agreeing to come to Singapore to donate a kidney. This type of organ donation for cash is strictly illegal in Singapore, but the young couple needed the money to get married. When he disappears, she is left bereft and pregnant.

While at the beginning Aunty Lee's nose for trouble seems to be leading her to something unrelated to her own life, as usually happens the case quickly draws closer to home, even though the police and everyone else urge her to drop it – sometimes with threats.

Things start out simple. Aunty Lee caters a party for a family that seem to be movers and shakers in the Singapore upper crust. One of the fun things about Aunty Lee is that while she acts as if she is just a caterer and restaurant owner, she herself is actually a member of that upper crust. And as is often the case, the people who are looking down on her for working are really people that she could buy and sell several times over.

The house party falls apart fairly spectacularly. First a young man gatecrashes the party looking for his missing friend. Then two members of the family are found dead after eating one of Aunty Lee's more famous dishes, a delight that is notorious for poisoning diners if the dish is not prepared properly. Of course, Aunty Lee always prepares everything properly.

But even as she is cleared of any possible involvement in what now looks like a murder-suicide, the family is still determined to drive her out of business so that she publicly takes the blame for the mess. It seems to Aunty Lee that the family is moving heaven, earth and their powerful social network, in order to suppress any attempt to search for the real killer.

And that's where Aunty Lee steps in, up to her neck. Her honor is under threat. And she is all too aware that she will be prey to loneliness and depression without her business (and her need to look into everyone else's business) to keep her occupied.

As they say, curiosity killed the cat. And if Aunty Lee isn't careful, she might find herself in the same pickle.

Escape Rating B: At the beginning the case, or Aunty Lee's involvement in it, seems more than a bit shambolic. There are too many suspects, many too many motives, and no clear path to zeroing in on a single one of either. Even Aunty Lee comments to herself, or to the portrait of her late husband that she regularly talks to, that she has all the elements of a case but they aren't fitting together quite right. This recipe is missing a key ingredient.

Which she doesn't find for about the first third of the story. At that point, things start making more sense and the pace picks up considerably. We're still not there yet, but you can feel Aunty Lee closing in on a solution.

Aunty Lee sometimes plays herself for comic relief, pretending to be a confused little old lady when in fact she's sharp as a tack and surprisingly spry for her age. As well as quite well off. And the police



commissioner is an old and dear friend, which always helps when you insert yourself into murder investigations on a regular basis.

But the underlying story in Aunty Lee's Deadly Specials is not funny at all. The world of compensated organ donation is ugly and brutal. While the results in this particular case are ultimately tragic, as well as deadly for too many people who didn't even know they were on the fringe of this dirty business, the problems that are exposed are dire and have no good solutions. The needs of people who will do almost anything in hopes of a better life are easily exploited by those who have enough money to circumvent the rules. And because it all operates under the table, it becomes a criminal enterprise where even the innocent are at risk.

That part of the case leaves the reader, and Aunty Lee, with no good answers. Only hard questions.

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## **Carol says**

Review to come

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## **Nathalie S says**

What attracted me to this book was the category "A Singaporean Mystery". I've read a couple of books set in Asia of which I really know very little and it intrigues me. This book dealt with the illegal selling of body parts which I have heard is more common in Asia. The following sentences were rather chilling "Alive, Zhao Liang had been worth a minimum wage but little more. Semi-alive he had been worth millions of dollars of transplant organs. Now dead, he was worth nothing.." Fortunately, author Ovidia Yu weaves this rather dire tale with her engaging heroine Aunty Lee who owns a restaurant. She is widowed and runs her business with the help of her friend, former stewardess Cherrill who married an Indian lawyer (frowned upon in that society) and her foreign maid, Nina. There is much mention of foods unknown to me, some which sound delicious and some which sound horrifying (squid ink ice cream anyone? although to be fair, this was a Japanese creation). Highly entertaining; don't be put off by the subject matter.

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