



## Jerrilyn Farmer

**Dim Sum Dead**  
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### Cooking Up Dim Sum Dead

Hey, I'm asked. Your Madeline Bean culinary mysteries — how do you come up with all those off-beat plots?

Specifically? Well, okay — here is my secret for cooking up a Mad Bean plot: I throw out a lot of good ideas. As I work on each story, I keep throwing away ideas. When I've discarded all the easy ones and all the cute ones and all the familiar ones and even all the rather clever ones, the idea-air starts to get pretty thin. The trick is not to lose my nerve. It's only when I'm practically blue in the face with lack of good ideas that I suddenly hit upon some twist that is so unexpected, even I have to chuckle — an idea so wicked that I smile to myself and then begin to type. In this way, I try to spin my cozy amateur sleuth puzzles into something that fits my view of the 21st century — a daring and surprising dish of a culinary mystery.

For *Dim Sum Dead*, it started with a "new" fad that tickled me. I had been surprised to learn that the game of Mah-jongg was making a comeback, thanks to Internet versions of the old game. I must say, this idea appealed to me personally because my mother played Mahj with her "girlfriends" while I was growing up in Lincolnwood, Illinois. I fondly remember the evenings when it was her turn to be the hostess to the group and I would listen to the happy sound of the mah-jongg tiles clacking on a special card table set up for this event in my living room. I knew I would love to write about this game that was the rage of the 1920s-1960s, if there was a way to tie it into a contemporary story.

This is when the research phase kicks in hard. I love to research. So I read all the material I could dig up — including the startling claim that Noah had played the game of Mah-jongg on the Ark, where for forty days and forty nights, East was the prevailing wind, just like in the game! I also met with friends, and friends of friends, who played the hippest versions of the old Chinese game, and learned that mah-jongg had lately become a big-money gambling attraction in the hills of Hollywood. I smiled. This was just my protagonist's stomping ground. Perfect.

As I thought about it, I realized how much fun it would be to write a parallel story about a bunch of good old gals who still played the older version of mahj. Against all that, I wanted to weave in tales of China and of traditional Chinese cooking, which my delicious research led me to discover had as much to do with Confucian philosophy as with culinary techniques. And so — it's murder Hollywood style. People are mad about playing the Chinese game Mah-jongg and the only trick is staying alive. It's hip Hollywood pitted against the old movie crowd. It's a precious antique mah-jongg set that disappears while everyone is dying to get their hands on it. It's a funny look at L.A. with the sunglasses stripped off.

And so, somehow, a Mad Bean plot evolves — like an exotic meal of tempting delights. To make it juicy, I like to juxtapose the spicy against the sweet, the hot against the cool, the deadly against the just, the misled and weak against the strong, the moral against the decadent. As I write, I stir it all up and hope like hell it will hold together when I have to serve it up to guests.

And now, it's time to sample the meal. I truly hope you enjoy my *Dim Sum Dead*.