

# Jungle Red



Julia Spencer Fleming



Hank Phillippi Ryan



Lucy Burdette



Hallie Ephron



Rhys Bowen



Deborah Crombie



Susan Elia MacNeal



## Jungle Red Writers

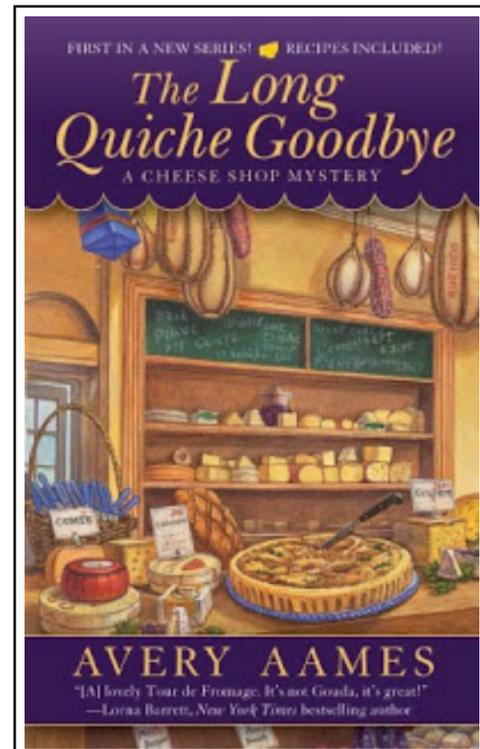
7 smart and sassy crime fiction writers dish on writing and life. It's The View. With bodies.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 20, 2011

### Tales of the Teapot: Interview with Best First Agatha Nominee Avery Aames

As befits a mystery author, [Avery Aames](#) has an alias. As [Daryl Wood Gerber](#), she appeared in *Murder She Wrote*, *Matlock*, and *Hart to Hart* - evidently good preparation for landing a starring role as a Best First Agatha award nominee for *The Long Quiche Goodbye*. Today, she talks with us about persevering to publication, planning a series, and, of course, cheese.

**JULIA:** What was your path to publication? Did you work your way through small presses? Land a deal with a major press? Win a contest? Everyone has a different story to tell.



**AVERY:** My story is different than most. I started as an actress and TV and screenwriter. I was lucky enough to get a show on the air called "Out of this World," for which I created the format, but soon after, my husband needed to move out of California for his career. It's hard to do "Hollywood meetings" 3,000 miles away, so I focused on my next love, which was writing mysteries and thrillers. I wrote a number of them and I submitted them to agent after agent. Though I found plenty of agents that liked my writing, none felt that he/she could sell what I'd written. I was "close" they told me. Years of this went on (I actually won a queen of rejection contest from my online Sisters in Crime group, Guppies - you have to be rejected a LOT to win. Personally I like to call it queen of perseverance). Finally I was so frustrated writing what I wanted to write that I decided to "write to the market." Cozies with strong hooks were selling. At the same time, I had a discussion with an agent with whom I'd connected about the work-for-hire market. A work-for-hire is writing a book using a "hook" that a publisher creates. Remember I was a screenwriter first. In Hollywood a producer could say, "I really like your heart-wrenching drama, but could you write *Shrek* instead?" [Hint: the answer is, "Sure!"] Lo and behold, about three months later

when I decided I had suffered enough rejection and had given up hope of ever becoming a published writer and I was ready to QUIT, the agent called me and said Berkley Prime Crime was looking for an author who could write about a cheese shop proprietor. I had catered and I had run restaurants. I was a gourmet cook and I loved cheese. I said, "Sure!" [I'm a quick study.] The rest is history. I received an offer, I wrote the first book, and it's a success. So as Avery Aames, I write cozies.



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**JULIA:** "Write what you know" is the oldest piece of advice around. Is your mystery based on your own

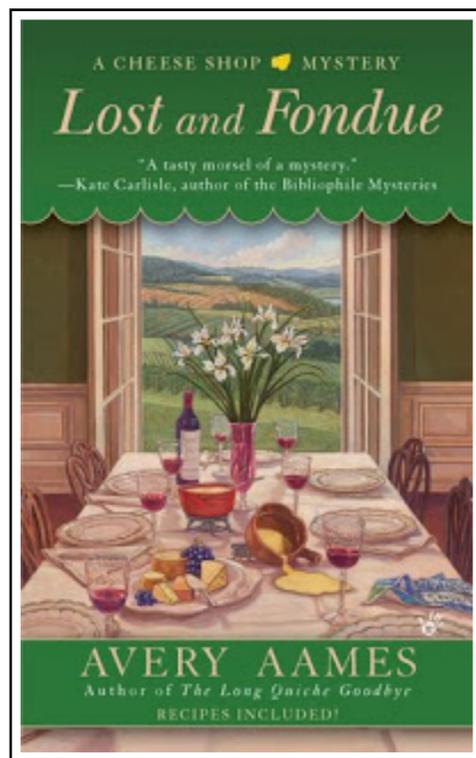
interests/vocation/experiences?

**AVERY:** As I said above, I had catered and run restaurants. I am a gourmet cook. I adore cheese. I have to do a lot of research about cheese (poor me). In addition, the grandmother in the series runs the local theater. As an actress, I know the ins and outs of theater. So yes, **I'm writing what I know...within reason.**

**JULIA:** Tell us a bit about your background in short stories and screenplays. Were there any challenges in writing a full-length mystery like *The Long Quiche Goodbye*?

**AVERY:** A screenplay has got to have structure; it must be told visually in a short amount of time. In essence, it looks like an outline for a novel. There aren't a lot of feelings added to the page; not a lot of description, either. Those are for the actors and the directors to create. Short stories also have to have structure and, let's face it, they can't have as many words as a novel, so I approach them in much the same way as I do a screenplay. How can I tell this story in the least words possible? As far as writing a novel is concerned, I like to start every one with an outline. **I feel comfortable with structure.** Then I expand on that story with feelings, descriptions, and action. The beauty of writing a novel is that you can be the actor, director, and writer all in one. You get to tell the whole story, every facet. That said, I still enjoy all forms of writing and--big reveal--I dream in 'screenplay' format.

**JULIA:** How much thought and planning did you put into *Quiche* as the first in a series? (I only discovered the term "story arc" after I was told my book would actually be published.)



**AVERY:** I put a lot of planning into the series. As a work-for-hire, I was given a "bible" that included some of the back story for characters, but it did not include any future stories or any arcs for the characters. I immediately thought of threads that would take my character through some life challenges for book two. While writing book two, I thought about book three, and so on. There are threads that need to be woven together, answers that need to be explained in each book. It's like watching a life evolve. There is not a sweet wrap-up at the end of the book. Like a serial of any kind, **there has to be something intriguing at the end of the book to bring the reader back for more.** And yes, I've included a romance (or two or three) in the series, so those threads play out over the course of time.

**JULIA:** What's your writing process? Outline or organic?

**AVERY:** Once I have an outline, I write organically, does that make sense? I like to have a road map when I'm driving, but often I'll take detours, as long as I know how to get back to the main road. I love to sightsee. Many times I'll be adhering to my outline and realize that this scene or this thread needs to be inserted. It's fun.

**I'm always delighted when my characters "surprise" me with a new scene,** especially if it's funnier or more action-packed than my outlined scene. For example, there's a scene between Charlotte and Rebecca around a garbage dumpster. That specific locale was not in the outline. {P.S. my editor likes to see a full outline so she knows where the book is headed. Not all editors need this, but she does, and we agree on so much.}

**JULIA:** Having your debut mystery nominated for an Agatha is an amazing experience. There were only about 15 gazillion mysteries published last year. What did you do when you found out?

**AVERY:** I found out in late February and had to keep quiet until the nominations were announced. Hard to do!! I'm so thrilled, and as they say on the Oscars, it really is an honor to be nominated. I'm in good company. I know all of the other "best first" authors, and they write beautifully! Yes, there are a gazillion mysteries published; however, only people who attend Malice Domestic are the ones who get to vote for the Agatha Awards, and the conference attendees have their favorites. I think nominees are often "known" within the community. **I've been attending Malice for a few years,** and I've made some wonderful author and fan friends. What is loveliest about this nomination is how excited the fans have been for me.

**JULIA:** I really enjoyed your series video trailer on Amazon. What gave you the idea, and how was it put together?



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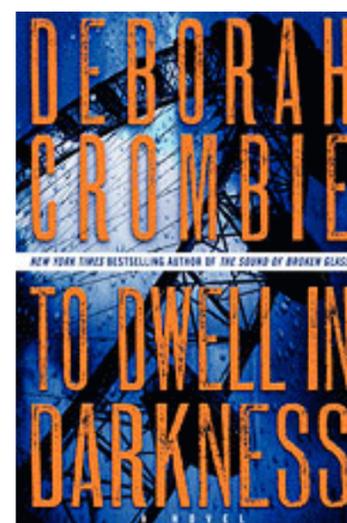
 **Hallie Ephron** @HallieEphron 18 Aug  
She's writing like a demon and sharing her insights Hank Phillippi Ryan @JungleReds [tinyurl.com/oglz8l5](https://tinyurl.com/oglz8l5) and... [fb.me/tPFz9EM7](https://fb.me/tPFz9EM7)

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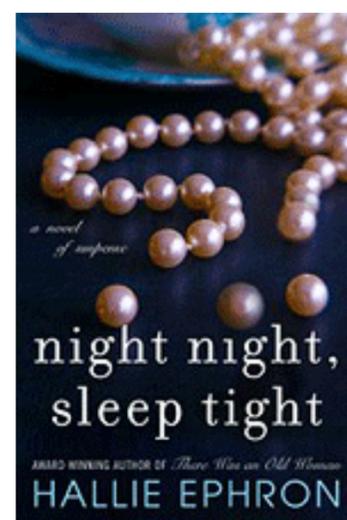
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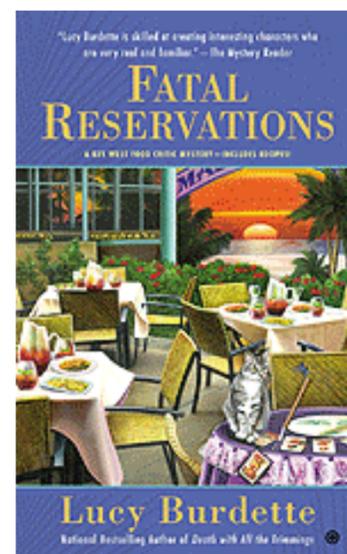
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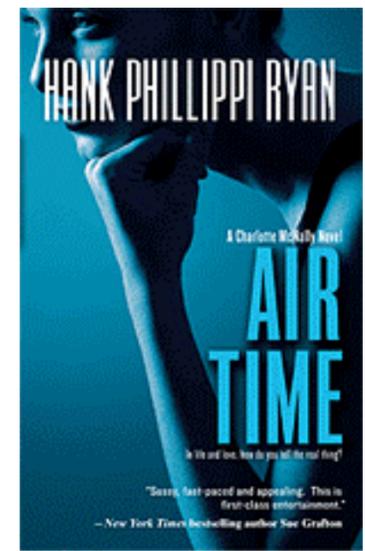


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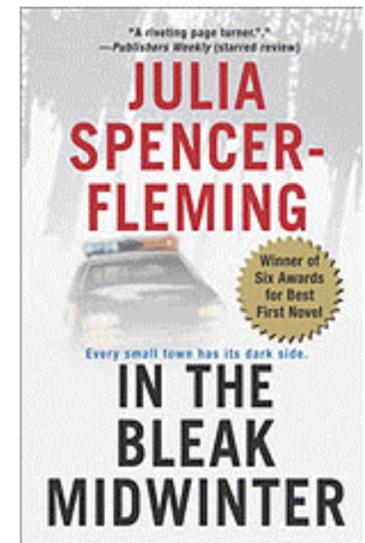


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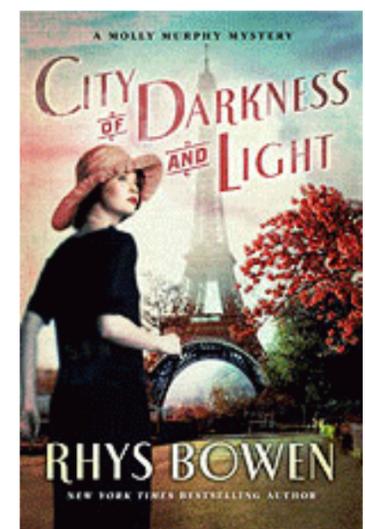




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**AVERY:** Thank you so much. Trailers are fun, fun, fun! Because I come from a screenplay background, I decided to make the movie myself. **It's another artistic way for me to express myself.** Combining artwork and storytelling and music is stimulating. I'm not sure whether a trailer will ever sell a book, but it's something different to offer a fan who visits my website. There are sneak previews and trailers and book club questions and recipes and photographs on the website, as well. For the trailer, I took Mac classes in moviemaking to learn the best techniques; however, there's still so much to learn. Don't look for me winning an Oscar for editing anytime soon. {Note: making a trailer is like writing a short story. You can't be verbose. You have a minimum of time, no longer than a minute, to intrigue the reader.}

**JULIA:** How did there come to be so many cheeses in the world? The sheer variety is staggering. And what can cheese be made from besides milk from Elsie?

**AVERY:** *Elsie!* Too cute. For centuries, cheese has been popular in Europe. Large manufacturers of cheese have existed for a long time in America. But the boom in America and elsewhere to make artisanal cheeses is, indeed, staggering. Artisanal farms are springing up everywhere. According to the American Cheese Society, "Artisan or artisanal implies that a cheese is produced primarily by hand, in small batches, with **particular attention paid to the tradition of the cheesemaker's art,** and thus using as little mechanization as possible in the production of the cheese." I think the allure is that not everyone needs to raise a huge herd to make a good cheese. And the variety of locations and therefore the variety of tastes enhances this allure. *Terroir*, the French word for "earth" which denotes the characteristics bestowed by climate, geography, and geology upon a region, is what counts. What the cows, goats, or sheep feed on makes the cheese taste special. If they eat clover or lemon-grass or live in a rocky versus flat lush area, it translates into a flavor in the cheese. In addition to the big three, you will also find buffalo milk cheese and in rare instances camel milk cheese. By the way, I tried my hand at making ricotta cheese from scratch. It turned out delicious, but it was hard work.



**JULIA:** What's next? What are you working on?

**AVERY:** Book 2, [LOST AND FONDUE](#), comes out in May. Book 3, *CLOBBERED BY CAMEMBERT*, is in the editing process at the publishers. I'm just starting Book 4: *TITLE TO BE DECIDED*. {Yes, I make up all my own titles.} I'm also finishing up a thriller that means a lot to me. **I love writing thrillers.** Who knows if it'll sell? I'll be dedicating it to my nephew, whose life's journey gave me the impetus for the story. I'm also writing short stories occasionally, when the mood strikes.

**JULIA:** Do you blog? Enjoy social media? Where can we visit you?

**AVERY:** Yes, I blog at Mystery Lovers Kitchen, a blog for writers who love to cook up crime. (Recipes included)

<http://www.mysteryloverskitchen.com>

I also blog at Killer Characters, a blog where authors' characters steal the limelight.

<http://killercharacters.com>

I'm on Facebook and Twitter as Avery Aames and as Daryl Wood Gerber. @AveryAames @DarylWoodGerber

I have websites for both Avery and Daryl. While Avery shares trailers and sneak previews, Daryl offers up short stories and podcasts of short stories. Someday, she might put up a free PDF of one of her thrillers...just because she'd like to share one even if it isn't "officially" published.

**Have** we whetted your appetite? At Avery's website, you can read excerpts of [The Long Quiche Goodbye](#) and [Lost and Fondue](#), watch a how-to-make-a-fondue video, download recipes - even print out a bookmark. We hope you'll take the time to ask Avery a question or two...after you've run out to the kitchen to make yourself a brie-and-crackers snack!

POSTED BY **JUNGLE RED WRITERS** AT 3:00 AM



## 9 COMMENTS:

 **Rebecca** said...

Hi Avery, congratulations on your nomination, and best of luck on awards night! How fun that you worked on "Out of This World" back in the day--that show was one my favorites when I was in 4th grade (back in 1989-90). I always wished I had Evie's power to stop time.

Since you worked with a highly structured medium in screenwriting for so many years, was it difficult for you to make the transition to novels? Or did you treat the outlining in a similar way? Speaking as someone who isn't as strong on story structure compared to character development and world-building, I'd love to hear some of your advice on nailing down a clear story arc more painlessly. For me, it's often difficult to filter out the details I want to include for the sake of the larger picture.

I'll definitely be looking for your book the next time I head to the bookstore! (I'm quite fond of cheese, myself, and am fortunate to live in the Pacific Northwest, where I regularly get Rogue River Creamy's assorted blue cheese offerings. Yum!)

**APRIL 20, 2011 AT 3:52 AM**



**Roberta Isleib** said...

Oh Rebecca, you're making me drool...

Avery, I agree with Rebecca--you're lucky to have that screenwriting background. For me too, the hardest part is the story--arguably the most important!

And I do love your trailer. Maybe it will inspire me to go up to the mac store and take a class...

**APRIL 20, 2011 AT 8:51 AM**



**Susan M. Boyer** said...

Avery, congratulations on your (well-deserved) Agatha nomination! I had no idea you were an actress! I likely saw you on TV--I've probably seen every episode of Murder She Wrote at least twice. :)

Great interview!!

**APRIL 20, 2011 AT 10:07 AM**



**Hank Phillippi Ryan** said...

YAY, Avery! Remember when we were just starting out? COngratulations...and now, maybe off to make a



 **Kaye Barley** joins us the first Sunday of each month!

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Jungle Red Writers has been named one of the top 50 mystery blogs by [CourtReporter](#) and one of the top 100 creative writing blogs by [Best Colleges Online](#)

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grilled cheese. Any grilled cheese secrets??

xox

APRIL 20, 2011 AT 12:34 PM

 Deb said...

Love the trailer!!! Very fun and clever.

And I LOVE cheese. . .OMG, if anyone ever told me I had to give up cheese, I'd--well, we won't even go there.

But your series is going on my "to read" list, and good luck at the Agatha's.

APRIL 20, 2011 AT 12:57 PM



Jan Brogan said...

Welcome Avery,  
Congrats on your nomination. I think I'm more of a sucker for cheese than for ice cream - your books must be delicious.

Good luck on the Agathas.

APRIL 20, 2011 AT 3:25 PM



Dru said...

Congrats Avery and I would love to read one of your (Daryl's) thrillers.

APRIL 20, 2011 AT 6:14 PM



Rochelle Staab said...

I loved reading about your unusual route to publication, Avery. And I'm thrilled about your Agatha nomination! You are one of the most tireless writers I know; your energy and enthusiasm is contagious.

Can't wait to read LOST AND FONDUE - best of luck on the upcoming release.

APRIL 21, 2011 AT 12:34 PM

Coach Stores Online said...

hello !

NOVEMBER 11, 2011 AT 8:37 PM

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