

Audience with Lord Archer

Jeffrey Archer's new book, *Next in Line*, the fifth in the William Warwick series, sees the Chief Inspector investigate the kidnapping of Princess Diana – someone Archer also counted as a friend, writes **Kerry Parnell**

It takes a brave man to pen a thriller about the Royal Family when you are friends with some of them – but then, Lord Archer has never been one to shy away from a challenge.

"I sent it to three members of the Royal Family," the best-selling author and former politician tells *Insider*, "and all three of them loved it."

While he's not divulging who those three royals were, you don't have to be his fictional detective William Warwick to deduce one is Sarah Ferguson.

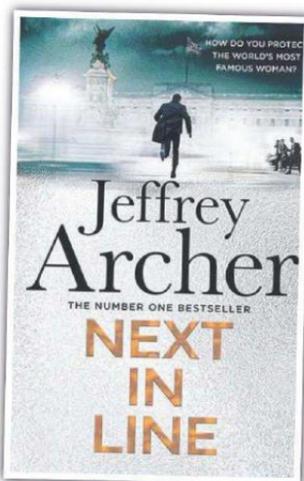
"The Duchess of York has written a profuse critique for the American papers," Archer goes on to say.

Another, most likely, is Camilla, Queen Consort: "She's already read it."

Archer isn't worried about the timing of the book either, coming straight after the Queen's funeral. "You can't miss my affection for Diana or my respect for the Royal Family," he says.

The novel, *Next in Line*, the fifth in the William Warwick series, sees the Chief Inspector joining the Royalty Protection division and investigating the kidnapping of Princess Diana – someone Archer counted as a friend.

The 82-year-old, known to his millions of readers worldwide as "Jeffrey Archer" rather than by his life peerage title, meets us in his penthouse apartment in London, on the banks of the Thames.



Sporting a blue sweater and shirt, black trousers and slippers, he explains most of his novels begin life by someone telling him a story, sitting on the same sofa we're perched on in his sumptuous apartment, which is all cream walls, tiles and marble, with – like the characters in his novels – priceless artwork hung on the walls.

This time, it's all about Royalty Protection.

"I knew quite a few people attached to Diana, so I called on them and talked it through," he says.

The book teases whether it could be based on a true story and while most of it is clearly an enjoyable romp, many little details are based on fact.

One real scene is where Diana hosts a charity dinner at society jeweller Asprey, where many of the well-heeled guests

pocket the silver salt cellars and pepper pots.

"Ken Wharfe (Diana's former protection officer) gave me that. Of course, he couldn't leave her side because his job was to protect her, not pepper pots," Archer says.

Having run many charity events with Diana, he had a lot of affection for her.

"She knew how to wind any man around her finger, me included. She was very, very good at it. But it was always with a purpose. We always came out with more money for the charity," he said.

"She didn't go just to be famous and beautiful. She wanted to do something."

The author had a bird's-eye view of the Queen's funeral from his penthouse and said he found the whole day staggering.

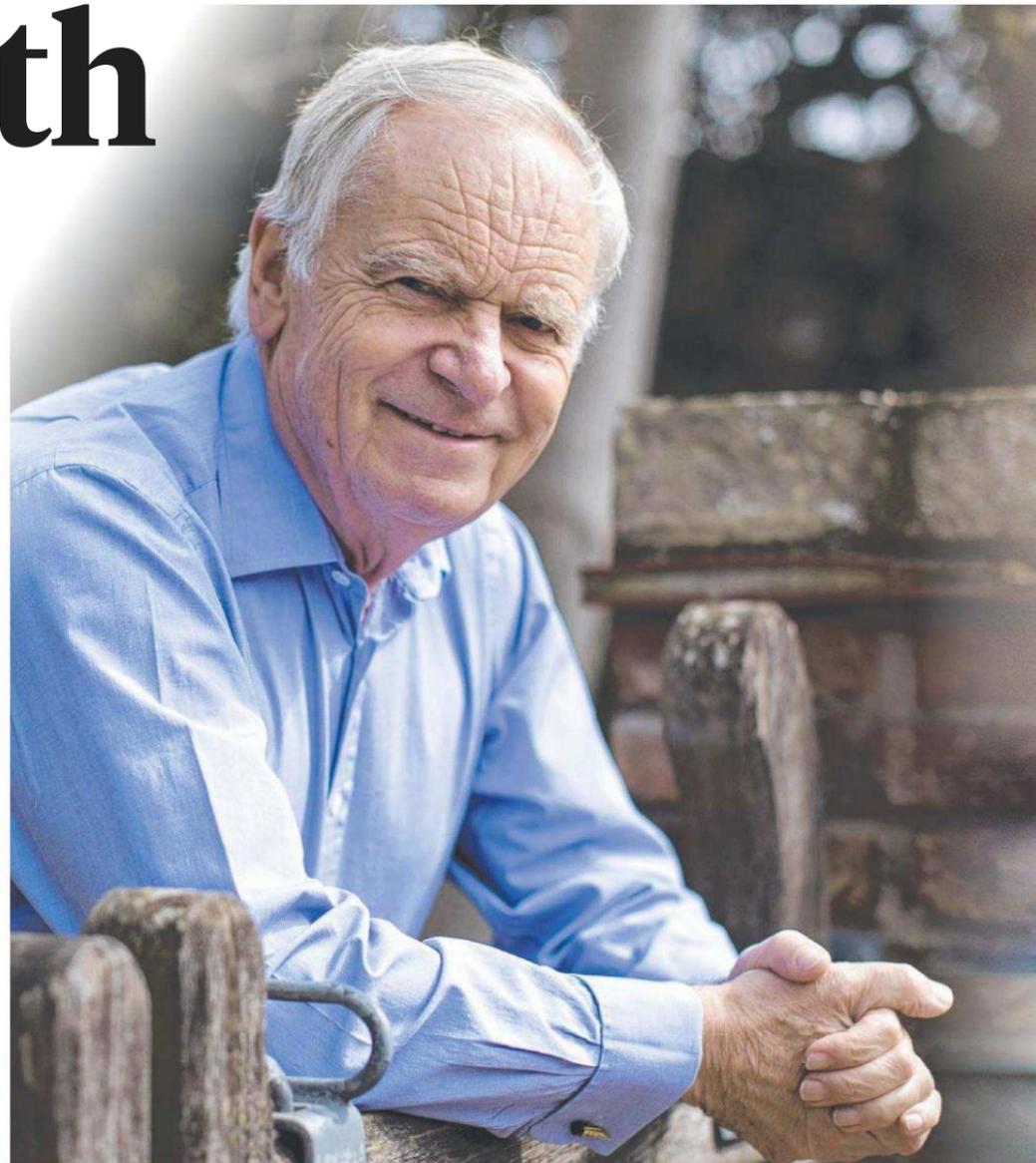
"It was done so beautifully. The highlight for me was the breaking of the rod over the coffin. It's the end of an era. She's gone," he says.

And it's another formidable woman to whom Archer looks for the future success of King Charles III's reign – Camilla.

"The wonderful thing is that he's married to a very sensible, down-to-earth, practical, wise, nice lady who I know very well," Archer says.

"And over the years that I've known her, she never changes. She is just a nice human being.

"He's lucky to have someone that solid and sensible within a yard of him."



That is something Archer himself might appreciate, given the support of his own wife Mary over a career of ups and downs in the public eye, both as politician and penman, which in the early 2000s included a two-year stint in jail for perjury.

Back to the present and the royals, Archer says one thing he hoped was that the Queen's funeral would help forge a reconciliation between Harry and Meghan and the new monarchy, but the author says he fears Harry's own tell-all book deal may scupper that.

"I was hoping it would draw them all together and we'd all be getting on to the next phase, but I don't think so," he says. "I'm very sad. I fear for the book. I know they're writing the chapter on the funeral, so I suppose that's what the book will end on.

"They paid him a lot of money – something like £20m.

You want to calm it down if you're paid £20m?

"I always say, rather cruelly, I could survive in California for about a week. It's not a state that I'd want to stay in – it's one temperature and they're all wanting to be celebrities ... And (Meghan) is now a big celebrity. How it will end? I have no idea."

Next in Line hits the shelves this week, but Archer has already written the next book in the series. It continues the royal theme, thanks to a serendipitous conversation on a cruise where a fellow guest, who worked for the Palace, shared what the author says is "the best story I've ever been told".

"I sat there gasping," Archer says. "Sometimes you get a good short story from people. What you rarely get is a book. But he gave me a book in five minutes.

"I'm not sure he's not

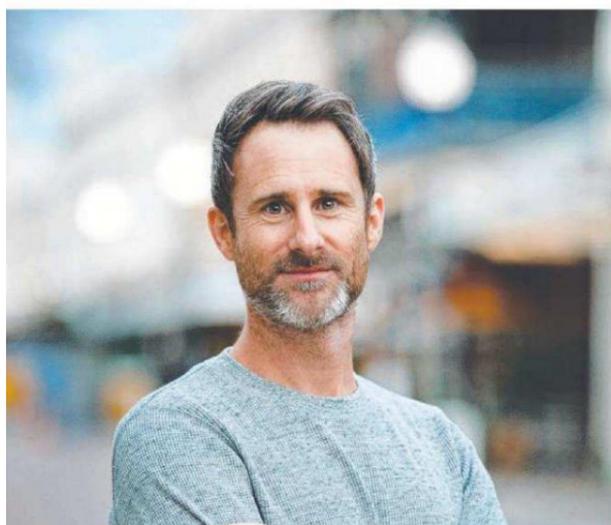
regretting that now.

"When I rang later and said I had finished it, I could sense he was getting worried. But the person he served was the Queen, so it makes it all right."

So, does the original storyteller want royalties?

Archer looks aghast. "He only gave me five lines. It's like, Kane and Abel – a story of two men, both born on the same day, one with nothing, one with everything. Do you want a cut, or do you want to write the 600 pages?"

Fair enough. **Next in Line is out October 5, published by HarperCollins. It's our new Book Of The Month, which means you can get it for 30 per cent off the RRP at Booktopia by entering the code NEXT at checkout. Love books? Come and share your thoughts on royals, reading and more at the Sunday Book Club group on Facebook.**



Author Craig Silvey says books are 'salve for the soul'.

New Craig Silvey book

MERCEDES MAGUIRE

The bones of a new story sat in his bottom drawer for years. He'd had the spark to write a tale about a lonely young girl and her rescue dog but the time wasn't right.

Craig Silvey is a big believer in the idea that stories find us at the right time, both as readers and as writers. And as the world retreated during the pandemic, as borders closed

and households went into lockdown, Silvey pulled the unfinished manuscript out of his drawer. This week, the Fremantle author launched *Runt*, the story about a little girl called Annie Shearer who lives in the town of Upson Downs which is slowly dying from drought, and the rescue dog that becomes her best friend and the family's salvation.

"I had this notion of a girl who likes to fix things and a very loyal and athletic dog

who are a very tightly bonded team," he says. "But I hadn't had the opportunity to develop it any further than that. And then a couple of things happened. The first was that I finished the final edits for *Honeybee* and suddenly found myself with a clean creative slate for the first time in years and I was looking for something very different to pour my efforts into.

"*Honeybee* was an emotionally exhausting book to write so I suppose I was

looking for something that felt like a bit of a departure.

"The second thing was the global pandemic. We found ourselves isolated and locked down and lots of us were nursing private anxieties and economic uncertainty and I suppose it was in those conditions that I reached down and picked up my notes and started spending my days in the very admirable company of Annie Shearer and her best friend *Runt*.

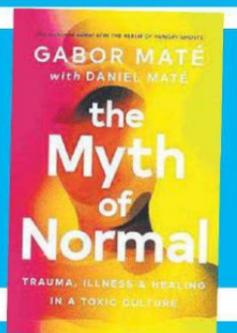
"I think I found great

SUNDAY BOOK CLUB



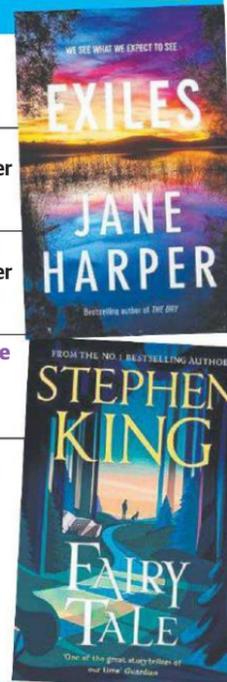
Jeffrey Archer (opposite) has written a new novel revolving around an investigation into the kidnapping of Princess Diana. Below, Charles and Diana in 1987.

BEST SELLERS



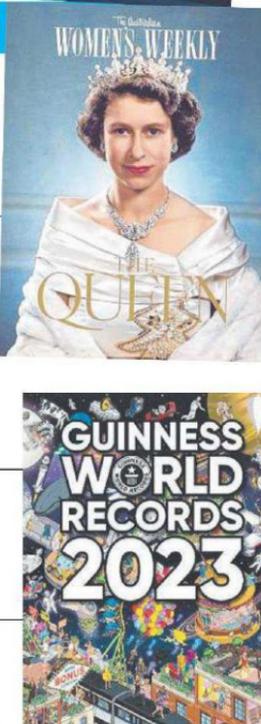
TOP 10 FICTION

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Exiles
Jane Harper
Macmillan
\$32.99 2 The Bullet That Missed
Richard Osman
Viking
\$32.99 3 Where the Crawdads Sing
Delia Owens
Hachette
\$22.99 4 Fairy Tale
Stephen King
Hachette
\$32.99 5 It Ends With Us
Colleen Hoover
Simon & Schuster
\$32.99 6 It Ends With Us
Colleen Hoover | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7 Ugly Love
Colleen Hoover
Atria Books
\$19.99 8 Verity
Colleen Hoover
Hachette
\$22.99 9 The Night Tide
Di Morrissey
Macmillan
\$39.99 10 The Ink Black Heart
Robert Galbraith
Hachette
\$32.99 |
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TOP 10 NONFICTION

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Investing with She's on the Money
Victoria Devine
Penguin
\$32.99 2 Atomic Habits
James Clear
Random House
Business Books
\$35.00 3 The Myth of Normal
Gabor Maté & Daniel Maté
Vermilion
\$35.00 4 The Queen
The Australian Women's Weekly
AWW Cookbooks
\$39.99 5 Guinness World Records 2023
Guinness World Records
\$46.99 6 Ottolenghi Test Kitchen: Extra | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7 Good Things
Yotam Ottolenghi & Noor Murad
Ebury
\$49.99 8 One
Jamie Oliver
Michael Joseph
\$55.00 9 The Girl Who Fell From the Sky
Emma Carey
Allen & Unwin
\$32.99 10 The Happiest Man on Earth
Eddie Jaku
Macmillan
\$32.99 |
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TOP 10 CHILDRENS

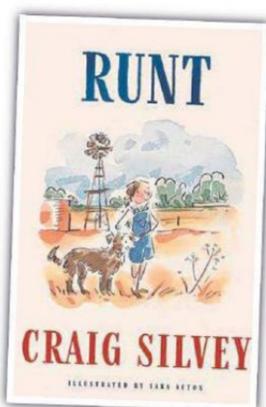
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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 The 156-Storey Treehouse
Andy Griffiths & Terry Denton
Pan
\$14.99 2 Bluey: Little Library Puffin
\$9.99 3 Do Not Open This Book for Eternity
Andy Lee
Lake Press
\$19.99 4 Bluey: Let's Get Puffy!
Puffin
\$16.99 5 Cheesy Weird! (Weirdo #19)
Anh Do/Scholastic
\$15.99 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6 The Summer I Turned Pretty
Jenny Han
Penguin
\$19.99 7 Pig the Rebel
Aaron Blabey
Scholastic
\$17.99 8 Nothing More to Tell
Karen M. McManus
Penguin
\$19.99 9 A Good Girl's Guide to Murder
Holly Jackson
Electric Monkey
\$19.99 10 The Final Gambit
Jennifer Lynn Barnes
Penguin
\$19.99 |
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no runt of literary litter

comfort but also a lot of hope in Annie's determination and her optimism, it was a really joyful book to write. I knew it was a feel-good story and it was kind of seductive, especially as the world was facing a very real calamity."

Writing beautiful stories about unique characters that move people has become a trademark of Silvey's. The author still gets messages daily from people who tell him that he changed their life, even saved it; they write to tell him



they found themselves with little to live for until they read his book Honeybee, about a trans adolescent striving to find acceptance in the world.

They write to tell him they have come out to their parents and that they have found the courage to pursue transitioning. The messages of hope and comfort from trans and gender-diverse people, he says, have been the most rewarding part of his career.

Books should be a salve for the soul, Silvey says, perhaps

that's the reason so many people turned to books during the pandemic. By the time Australia went into its first lockdown in April 2020, book sales had surged by 35 per cent compared to the same period in 2019, according to Nielsen BookScan data.

Runt, Silvey hopes, will also be a book that talks to those on the outskirts of society; the children without friends, who are a little different.

Runt is out this week through Allen & Unwin.

Source: Nielsen BookScan