

# Hooked, in time

It takes a master storyteller like Jeffrey Archer to plod through a dull beginning and build an epic saga that will leave you hooked for the next instalment

JEFFREY Archer has been likened to the great Alexandre Dumas, hailed as a master storyteller, and his readers have long agreed: over more than 40 years of writing bestsellers he has sold more than 250 million books.

Yet when you start reading his latest novel – claimed by his publisher to be his most ambitious work yet – you may wonder what all the fuss is about.

*Only Time Will Tell* (Macmillan, \$49.99) opens with a quick, curious hook but then becomes quite dull indeed.

The reader is introduced to a boy named Harry Clifton – the first of six characters awarded their own sections in the book, all telling the same story from different perspectives.

Opening with a child and writing almost 100 pages about them is risky, for children in adult literature are rarely interesting. Lesser authors might not have taken the chance, and perhaps this is where Archer's mastery comes in: he knows what he is building, and how important the foundations are.

The book does become engrossing, eventually, and Archer's classic page-turning power arrives in force.

Harry Clifton is the only son of Maisie, a poor waitress with low expectations of life, and the late dockworker Arthur.

When he is singled out as a spectacular chorister and awarded a scholarship to the aristocratic St Bede's boarding school, everything changes, most especially Harry's hopes for the future.

The mystery driving the narrative is of Harry's father.

Arthur has died in mysterious circumstances at the dock, owned by the wealthy Barrington family, and by dramatically combining the fortunes of the Clifton and Barrington families Archer sets up the perfect scaffold for a long-running saga.

Known as *The Clifton Chronicles* and likened to *The Forsyte Saga*, the epic will stick with

Harry Clifton through most of the 20th century. By the end of the first book, you know him very well, and want to know more.

Archer structures his book cleverly – after Harry's first instalment we meet the hardworking, loving Maisie, then the deeply unlikeable Hugo Barrington, the mysterious Old Jack Tar, Giles Barrington, son of Hugo and Harry's best friend, and Emma Barrington, Giles' sister and Harry's first love.

Each instalment takes up where the last left off, but from the point of view of the new character, advancing the story through the years and the

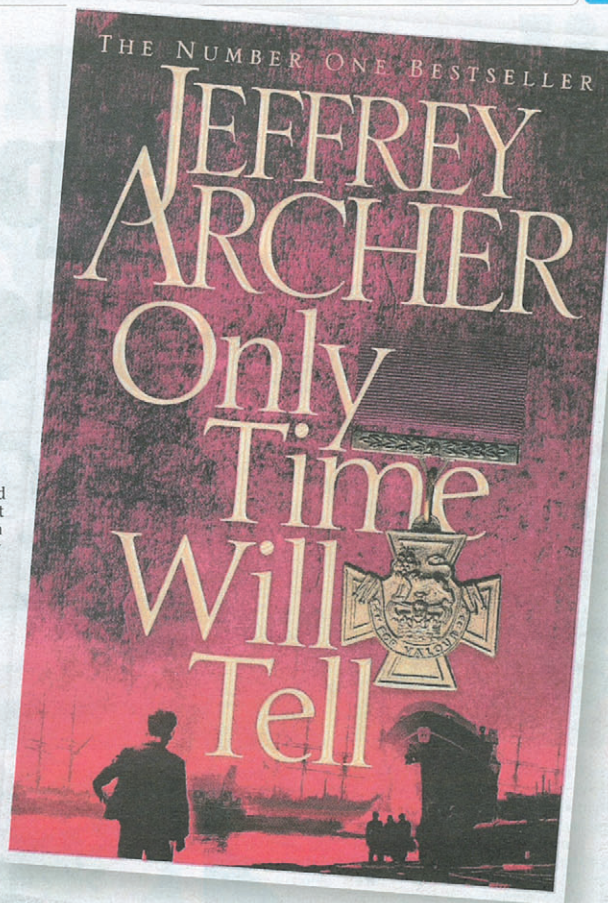
**Cliffhanger:** The first book in *The Clifton Chronicles* series by Jeffrey Archer (left)

drama, which escalates with every page. Ultimately with the benefit of hindsight, you will realise that those earlier plodding pages spent in Harry's childhood are crucial to the story and to the reader's relationship with the main protagonist.

As a saga, the book ticks a lot of boxes: there is class snobbery, scandal in the aristocracy, paternity issues, a wicked villain and a henchman with a limp, a heroine with a heart of gold, and star-crossed lovers who can never be together.

By the time you make it to the last page, the drama of Harry Clifton's young life takes the reader to the edge of the cliff, where they must hang until the next *Clifton Chronicles*, due out next year.

(Archer) knows what he is building, and how important the foundations are



## top five

### BESTSELLERS

- 1 **Afterlife**  
Claudia Gray, HarperCollins
- 2 **Kingdom Besieged**  
Raymond E. Feist, HarperCollins
- 3 **Letters & Numbers**  
Hardie Grant
- 4 **Wise Man's Fear**  
Patrick Rothfuss, Hachette Australia
- 5 **Losing the Last Five Kilos**  
Michelle Bridges, Penguin

### FICTION

- 1 **The Jungle**  
Clive Cussler, Penguin
- 2 **Only Time Will Tell**  
Jeffrey Archer, Pan Macmillan
- 3 **Little Coffee Shop of Kabul**  
Deborah Rodriguez, Random House
- 4 **The Saturday Big Tent Wedding Party**  
Alexander McCall Smith, Hachette Australia
- 5 **To Kill a Mockingbird**  
Harper Lee, Random House

### NON-FICTION

- 1 **Treasure Yourself**  
Miranda Kerr, Penguin
- 2 **The Happiest Refugee**  
Anh Do, Allen & Unwin
- 3 **The King's Speech**  
Mark Logue and Peter Conradi, Pan Macmillan
- 4 **127 Hours**  
Aron Ralston, Simon & Schuster
- 5 **Eat, Pray, Love**  
Elizabeth Gilbert, Allen & Unwin

### SCIENCE FICTION/FANTASY

- 1 **Kingdom Besieged**  
Raymond E. Feist, HarperCollins
- 2 **Wise Man's Fear**  
Patrick Rothfuss, Hachette Australia
- 3 **Toys**  
James Patterson and Neil McMahon, Random House
- 4 **One of Our Thursdays is Missing**  
Jasper Fforde, Hachette Australia
- 5 **The Name of the Wind**  
Patrick Rothfuss, Hachette Australia

### CHILDREN'S & YOUNG ADULTS

- 1 **Afterlife**  
Claudia Gray, HarperCollins
- 2 **Grey Wolves**  
Robert Muchamore, Hachette Australia
- 3 **I Am Number Four**  
Pittacus Lore, Penguin
- 4 **Mercy**  
Rebecca Lim, HarperCollins
- 5 **Diary of a Wimpy Kid**  
Jeff Kinney, Penguin

Source: Dymocks



## reading room reviews

### mystery

#### These Things Hidden

Heather Gudenkauf  
(Mira, \$24.75)

What sort of crime would make supposedly loving parents turn their back on their beloved 16-year-old daughter? This is the question that dominates the opening pages of this mystery by Heather Gudenkauf. With echoes of Jodi Picoult in which all the characters tell the story in different chapters, Gudenkauf unveils the layers of this mystery, in which the young Allison Glenn is being released from prison at the age of 21 after serving five years of a 10-year sentence. In small-town Iowa, she is reviled as a "babykiller", and ultimately all is revealed.

### fiction

#### Daughters-in-Law

Joanna Trollope  
(Doubleday, \$32.95)

Joanna Trollope is such an old pro at the domestic drama – known in England as "aga sagas" – that it's easy to be pulled along by her confident style. She mines the fluctuating fortunes of family life expertly, revealing much about the various relationships within an extended family. In this novel the relationships focus on those between a mother-in-law and the wives of her three sons, and the subtle and not-entirely pleasant shifts of power. Rachel has long been at the centre of her family, but after her youngest son gets married she struggles with being sidelined.

### history

#### Jerusalem, The Biography

Simon Sebag Montefiore  
(Weidenfeld & Nicolson, \$50)

How to end a book that is a biography of the city of Jerusalem? "If I were to continue the history to the present," writes Simon Sebag Montefiore, "the book would lack any clear ending and have to be updated almost hourly." Such is the nature of the site of the world's longest running conflict – Jerusalem. Capital of three faiths and the eye of the storm. Historian Montefiore has also been travelling to Jerusalem since he was a young boy. "I feel I have been preparing to write this book since I was a child," he noted.

### women

#### Women's Words

Karen Phillips  
(KP Media, \$34.95)

This is an inspirational and enlightening collection of interviews with Australian women, released in time to celebrate International Women's Day on Tuesday. Phillips, a former Young Australian Citizen of the Year and a successful businesswoman, hopes that the book will encourage readers to achieve greatness. "for it is within us all". Contributions from Prime Minister Julia Gillard, Margaret Olley, Fiona Wood, Collette Dinnigan and Kathy Lette share private thoughts on life's big questions including what does happiness mean?

### thriller

#### The Leopard

Jo Nesbo  
(Vintage, \$32.95)

Despite opening with a really grotesque murder, Jo Nesbo's recurring character Detective Harry Hole is intriguing enough to get engrossed in this big brick of a book. After his life imploded at the end of the last Nesbo thriller, *The Snowman*, Harry Hole has retired to Hong Kong to lose himself in that city's opium dens and to lose his money at the Happy Valley racetrack. But Harry is a serial killer tracker extraordinaire, so when a series of women are found with inexplicable and appalling injuries back in Norway, an officer is dispatched to retrieve Harry and get him on the case.