

# Globe Review

SUDOKU, R2 • PASTIMES, R8



DAN BRINZAC/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Jeffrey Archer on his first novel in seven years: 'I really was determined that the public... would say, "He's back on form." That's important.'

## A true impression

Jeffrey Archer's latest novel, set in the high-rolling world of fine art, is getting serious notice, perhaps on the strength of his *Prison Diaries*. He talks to **SIMON HOUP** about his collection and about doing hard time

NEW YORK

Jeffrey Archer is exasperated. For 10 minutes or so, he'd been having a perfectly convivial conversation here in the lounge bar of the Pierre Hotel on Fifth Avenue. But a moment ago, though it is only 3:30 on a sunny weekday afternoon — teatime for the British biorhythm — and the place is all but empty, a hotel employee abruptly dimmed the lights as if setting the stage for a sozzled piano crooner.

"Hello? Hello!" trills Archer, whirling around and fixing the employee in his sights. "Could we have the lights?" The hapless dimmer tries stammering a defence, something about hotel policy and the time of day, but quickly folds and scurries away to right the wrong. "When I was a boy, this was a great hotel," Archer says, with a good-help-is-so-hard-to-find-these-days shake of his head. "Now it's gone flat."

And damned if he hadn't just been getting airborne about his new book, too, spinning out the myriad threads of good news: about the fourth printing in 10 days, about the 120,000 copies in distribution in England alone. But this book means a lot to Archer, more than you might imagine, and he's not about to be thrown off his rhythm by an errant houseboy.

*False Impression* is his first novel in seven years, an unprecedented dry stretch since he began writing fiction in the mid-1970s, but then he's had his hands full. There was a brief attempt to revive his intermittent career as a Conservative politician with an aborted run for mayor of London in the summer of 1999; a trial and conviction for perjury and perverting the course of justice in 2001, stemming from a 14-year-old libel case in which he'd created a false alibi to cover up an extramarital affair and an association with a prostitute; two years served of a four-year prison sentence; and three well-received *Prison Diaries* that grew out of the experience.

Which may partly explain why, at 65, though he continues to sit in the House of Lords as Lord Archer of Weston-super-Mare, he's spent most of the time since his release from prison in July, 2003, at work on *False Impression*. It took more research and writing than any of his other 11 novels, and it was still the \$15-million (U.S.) deal signed while he was stuck behind bars that drove him to write.

No, says Archer, he needed to do this one for himself. "I really was determined that the public at least, the people who read me, would say, 'He's back on form.' That's important."

See ARCHER on page R2



JIM ROSS/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

## Waist deep in alligators

Blues legend Watermelon Slim's done a lot of things most people shouldn't try. He shares some of the lessons with **BRAD WHEELER**

He is more watermelon than slim. Oh, William Homans III is trim enough — 155 pounds or so, stretched uniformly and unremarkably over an average man's length — but his thinness is not defining.

Homans (a.k.a. Watermelon Slim) is fruitish, though, in a fruity-peculiar kind of way. The bluesman under the lights at Toronto's Silver Dollar Room is a sight: a character, from the bottom of his vintage white-leather shoes to the top of his Bermuda hat. His outfit (light-weight short-sleeved shirt and slacks) was ill-chosen for a spring Canadian tour, and the colour is more salmon than melon-pink.

Based in Oklahoma, his blood thinned by the state's oppressive heat, perhaps he's chilly. But, after one short instrumental number, Slim announces to the crowd: "We are warmed up."

His band the Workers, with Toronto's Maureen Brown sitting in on drums, play a variety of styles, taking Howlin' Wolf's *Smokestack Lightning* out of Chicago and into Southern rock territory. A western swing rhythm is applied to the Delta blues *Kokomo*, which Slim introduces by way of "Here's Fred McDowell, how about that, c'mon?" The "c'mon" is the lingo of an old truck driver — Slim's previous long-time occupation.

The band is more than serviceable, but eyes are on the frontman. He stands behind a makeshift table that consists of a piece of plywood resting across a keyboard stand. On the contraption sit harmonicas, various bits of miscellanea and a slide guitar, which he plays by rubbing a small, 80-year-old glass bottle of silver polish across the open-tuned strings. Just as often, he steps away from the instrument, singing and cupping his hands around a microphone and mouth-harp.

With his pockmarked face, Slim, 57, could pass for Tom Waits's older brother. His missing teeth do not mar his harp playing, but his coarse baritone is jaw-grindingly delivered. "I couldn't catch a cold, I couldn't pitch a fit," he sings on the romping *Hard Times*. "I'm waist deep in alligators, sometimes I'm neck deep in bullshit."

He's in trouble a few songs later, standing unsteadily at the front of the stage, reaching perilously to the far side of his table. As he leans on the board, he almost causes the whole thing (and himself) to topple over. "I wouldn't advise you try that," he suggests, composure regained.

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Truth be told, Slim's done plenty of things that the rest of us should

probably avoid. Is *Hard Times* a blues cliché? Well, it is and it isn't.

"Everything I've said and sing about in these records is true," Slim says a few hours before the Silver Dollar gig, citing *Check Writing Woman* from his new, acclaimed *Watermelon Slim & The Workers* album. "It's all true."

Sitting upstairs in the blues and jazz room at the sprawling Sam the Record Man store in downtown Toronto, Slim speaks at length on his life and times. He has just finished an in-store solo performance on the main floor, but the interview afterwards is not a public event. He is no soft talker, though, even raising his right hand in preacher fashion at times. So, as customers browse, they hear the history of an oddball.

"If I kick off right now, I have no regrets," says the songwriter, who suffered a heart attack in 2002. "I've lived fuller than any three other people. I've got a great education, I fought in a war, and I've fought against a war. I've been a husband and a father. I've had more pedal-to-the-metal sex than anybody there ever was. I've been a philanthropist and I've been a criminal."

"I've done a lot of stuff."

True enough — the skinny on Slim is actually obese.

See WATERMELON on page R2

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### SYNDICUS



PUBLISHING

BACK TO SCHOOL

The man who runs Canada's biggest entertainment company helps out an ambitious student magazine at Queen's University.

See page R3

TELEVISION

WHO LOVES YA, BABY?

Not John Doyle — he explains why the new *Kojak* remake makes for such joyless viewing.

See page R3

### THE NATIONAL BALLET OF CANADA

KAREN KAIN, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



"You can almost hear Shakespeare's familiar words whispered underneath the dancing"

EYE MAGAZINE

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# THIS JUST IN

## Pitt and Jolie planning an African birth, report says

**Cape Town.** A local governor in Namibia said Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt told him they will have their baby in his country, a South African newspaper reported yesterday.

Samuel Sheefeni Nuuyoma, the governor of the Namibian province where the couple is staying at a heavily guarded lodge, said he met with the two stars on Friday, according to *The Sunday Times*.

"They are having the baby here and they talked about giving the child a Namibian name," Nuuyoma was quoted as saying. He said Jolie had made the choice because "she loves Namibia."

Jolie spent several weeks in Namibia in 2002 while shooting the film *Beyond Borders*.

The couple has been shielded by heavy security at a secluded beach resort. The newspaper said they have visited various game reserves and wildlife foundations.

Pitt's publicist said in January that Jolie, 30, is pregnant with his child. It was unclear when the baby will be born. She has had the names of her two children changed to reflect the fact that Pitt, 42, intends to become their adoptive father. *AP*

## Jeff Healey doing well after cancer surgery

**Toronto.** Guitar virtuoso Jeff Healey has come through his second operation in a year for cancer.

Healey had a malignant tumour removed from his left thigh on Wednesday at Mount Sinai Hospital in Toronto, but he was "up and around" on Thursday, his publicist said in a statement, and he is expected to recover quickly. Healey, 40, had another tumour of the same type removed last May.

Healey, who was born with a rare gene defect that makes him susceptible to cancer, lost his eyesight as a baby to retinoblastoma, a form of eye cancer. He plans to return to his radio show on Toronto's Jazz-FM next week. *Staff*

## Suspect arrested in rapper's shooting

**Detroit.** A suspect in the shooting death of rapper Proof was arraigned Saturday on weapons charges.

Mario Etheridge, 28, of Detroit, is charged with carrying a concealed weapon and discharge of a firearm in a building. His lawyer entered not guilty pleas on his behalf.



MICHEL EULER/ASSOCIATED PRESS

**Now holed up in Namibia, Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie plan to have their baby there, a newspaper says.**

Etheridge has been in custody since he surrendered Wednesday; his lawyer has said the shooting was in self-defence.

Detroit police said they were told by witnesses that Etheridge shot Proof early Tuesday after Proof shot

Army veteran Keith Bender inside a nightclub on Eight Mile Road. The thoroughfare, which divides Detroit and its northern suburbs, was made famous in the 2002 film *8 Mile*, which starred Eminem.

Bender remained in critical con-

dition Saturday, according to a hospital spokesperson.

Proof, 32, whose real name was Deshaun Holton, was a member of the group D12 and the best man at Eminem's January wedding. His funeral is set for Wednesday. *AP*

## Opus Dei wants disclaimer on Da Vinci Code movie

**Rome.** The conservative Catholic group Opus Dei has asked for a disclaimer on the upcoming film based on the best-selling novel *The Da Vinci Code*.

Opus Dei, portrayed as a murderous, power-hungry sect in the novel by Dan Brown, wrote in an April 6 letter to Sony Corp. that a disclaimer would show respect to Jesus and to the Catholic Church.

A Sony Pictures Entertainment spokesman declined to say whether the film, slated for release next month, would bear a disclaimer. *AP*

## Ashanti cancels tour date after cousin is killed

**Johannesburg.** Ashanti pulled out of a concert over the weekend after her cousin was killed by a 17-year-old drunk driver, authorities said.

Quinshae Snead, 20, was on her way to Ashanti's hotel to fetch something for the singer before a concert Saturday when the car she was riding in was rear-ended, police said. Snead was flung from the car as it rolled over and thrown into the path of another car.

The 17-year-old unlicensed driver had stolen his mother's car, said a police spokesman. He was arrested for drunk driving and hospitalized. The driver of the car Snead was riding in was also taken to hospital. *AP*

# Never mind the critics — Archer is still out to impress himself

ARCHER from page R1

Because, really, at this point he doesn't need any more money. He's worth at least \$100-million (U.S.), not including his art collection, which includes pieces by Picasso, Miro, Sisley and Lowry, numbers between 300 and 400 pieces, and would reap huge financial windfalls if liquidated. "I've got a Vuillard bigger than that wall there, and I think I paid \$200,000 for it," he declares. "Is it \$15-million? I haven't got a clue, because I don't care, I'm not going to sell it. It's up on the wall. I'm not a seller."

Speaking with Archer is to be confronted with a clutch of contradictory images at once: of a man vilified in his home country as a scoundrel (and friend of Margaret Thatcher) who is a charming drinks companion; of an enormously rich

and successful author who deeply craves approval; of a man whose embrace of art is shot through with aspects of a competitive sport; of a man who preens with the tools of self-effacement.

Let's stay for a moment on his art collection, and listen closely to his words. "It's mainly Impressionists," he avers. "But I regret that. If I could have my life over again, I would collect Italian Renaissance." Why? "If I had to name the 10 pictures I most love on earth, eight of them are in Italy. It's not my fault — I mean, I do love Picasso. I do love Monet, Manet, Matisse, I love them all. But Caravaggio? Bellini, Bernini? Fra Angelico? Luini? I just sit in front of them and think, Wow. And they're not expensive compared with the French Impressionists. French Impressionists are stuupid prices." (Did we mention that his collection

is primarily French Impressionists?)

This brings us back to *False Impression*, which is set in the rarefied world of fine art. Archer's heroine is one Anna Petrescu, a comely young art expert suddenly dismissed on the morning of Sept. 11, 2001, from the employ of a Wall Street banker who has designs on a client's van Gogh painting put up as collateral on a faltering loan. As Anna is being escorted out of her office in the north tower of the World Trade Center, a plane crashes a few floors above her. Clawing her way out, she recovers and then decides to take advantage of the fact that she is presumed dead, jetting off to England, Japan, Romania and elsewhere to help the client save her painting from the evil banker's clutches.

Though movie audiences in New

York last week recoiled at the trailer for a film set on one of the doomed Sept. 11 flights, Archer says his Manhattan publisher had no compunctions about *False Impression* being perhaps the first work of popular fiction to use the events of that day as material for a plot point. So far, critics in the United States do not seem bothered.

Not that Archer would care much, mind you: He says he has little time for critics (who are, after all, often dismissive of his novels). "If I wrote *Bleak House*, they'd say it was too long," he says with a Cheshire-cat grin. Still, he brightens visibly, indeed seems to physically expand in his chair, when he mentions the reviews for his *Prison Diaries*. "They compared me to Dostoevsky, George Bernard Shaw, Pepsys and Dickens. And we're talking about *The Times*" — his voice

seems to break with pride here — "The Independent, and The Mail on Sunday. Serious papers. Now I'm writing a novel again, they've decided how I'm no longer Dostoevsky, Pepsys. . . ." He trails off, then suddenly brightens. "But then, there's been a lot of people saying this is as good as *The Da Vinci Code*."

Archer's son William, a well-dressed documentary cameraman who lives in New York, saunters into the lounge, greets his dad with a big smile, then retreats. The two are due to leave in a while for the Oxonian Society, where Archer will give an address.

He is speaking now about how much he accomplished in prison, about the million words he wrote and the screenplay he finished and all the reading he got done — "the whole of Dickens and the whole of Shakespeare," he declares, then adds with a clarifying punch, "37 plays of Shakespeare." Yes, prison can be a good experience; it's provided him with a raft of stories he'll be letting out into the world over the next few years.

In the meantime, though, he has his eye on the sales of *False Impres-*

sion. This morning, his British publishers rang to report that Amazon UK has taken 11,000 copies after just over one week on the market. "And I said, 'Yeah, it doesn't mean a thing.' I mean, Maria Callas used to say, 'As long as I get one penny more than Joan Sutherland, I don't care what you pay me.' I said, 'How many books, what's your record?' They said, 'Our record before this was 10,500; you've just broken it in one week.'" He pauses to let the memory wash over him. "That is terrific fun. It's tiny, it's anecdotal, but it's — you still feel alive. You think, 'Wait a minute. You're still out there, kid. You're not dead.'"

For Archers are like sharks; they must always be moving forward. As the conversation winds down, he lingers a while to talk about the mysteries of the art-thief underworld, and to offer an invitation to view his art collection. In time, he strolls off to find William, who seems to have disappeared from the lounge. Five minutes later, he returns. "I found him," he reports. "He was at the bar with a girl." Well, he is an Archer. Jeffrey Archer grins roguishly and purrs, "Ahh, quite right."

## 'Not to put too fine a point on it, but I was a felon'

WATERMELON from page R1

Son of legendary Boston civil rights lawyer William P. Homans Jr. (who "championed the downtrodden, the oppressed and the out-and-out villainous," according to a 1997 *New York Times* obituary), the young Slim dropped out of college to enlist in the Army during the Vietnam War.

Illness landed him in an army hospital, where he taught himself to play slide blues using a \$5 balsawood guitar and a Zippo lighter as the slide. The man who returned to Boston was a hash-smoking, blues-learning renegade — one extremely active in his opposition to nuclear power and the war. "I caught myself saying the word 'gook' while I was in Vietnam, and something clicked inside of me," he recalls.

Although he released an album (the obscure, protest-tinged *Merry Airbrakes*), Slim turned to a life of crime to pay the bills, associating himself with organized-crime figures. "I knew who people were and what they did," he allows. "Not to put too fine a point on it, but I was a felon."

Suspecting he was under surveillance (he is a devoted conspiracy theorist), Slim fled west to Oklahoma, where he farmed watermelons, drove trucks and enjoyed academic

success. (He holds a master's degree in history from Oklahoma State University.)

He played blues on weekends, with a few longer tours from time to time, but it wasn't until the summer of 2004 that he devoted his full attention to music. His album of acoustic country blues (*Up Close & Personal*) earned Slim a W.C. Handy nomination in 2005, and this year's roadhouse-style *Watermelon Slim & The Workers* (released on the Toronto-based Northern Blues label) has him heading in great directions.

According to Slim, one of his fans is none other than Jerry Wexler, the storied Atlantic Records producer who coined the phrase "rhythm and blues." As well, there's a rumour afoot that the Rolling Stones might take Slim and his band on the road.

Good times come, but this is no case of overnight success.

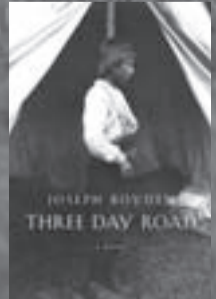
"The first time I fell on my face as a musician was in 1987, when I went to Europe after playing around the West Coast. I had myself bounced off some railroad tracks by somebody who ripped me off. I came back bruised and broken, but mendable."

And now? "We're ready for the big rooms," he says, referring to the Stones possibility. "I've been ready for the big rooms for a long, long time."

# CANADA READS 2006



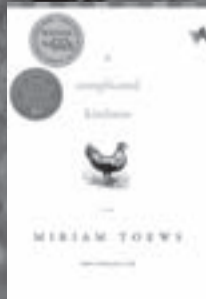
Nelofer Pazira  
defends



Susan Musgrave  
defends



John K. Samson  
defends



Maureen McTeer  
defends



Scott Thompson  
defends



April 17 to 21

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CBC Radio

Sudoku ©Puzzles by Pappocom

			6	8		9		
						9	5	2
		8						1
5		2			3			
3			8		1			7
			5			4		9
9							6	
	3	5	2					
		1		9	8			

Fill in the grid so that each row of nine squares, each column of nine and each section of nine (three squares by three) contains the numbers 1 through 9 in any order. There is only one solution to each puzzle.

Solution, tips and computer program at www.sudoku.com

Saturday's solution

8	2	4	3	7	5	1	6	9
7	9	6	1	2	4	5	3	8
3	1	5	9	6	8	2	4	7
5	4	2	7	3	6	9	8	1
6	7	3	8	9	1	4	2	5
1	8	9	5	4	2	3	7	6
4	3	1	6	5	7	8	9	2
9	5	7	2	8	3	6	1	4
2	6	8	4	1	9	7	5	3