

## OUT OF TIME

STEVE HAWKE

### ABOUT THE BOOK

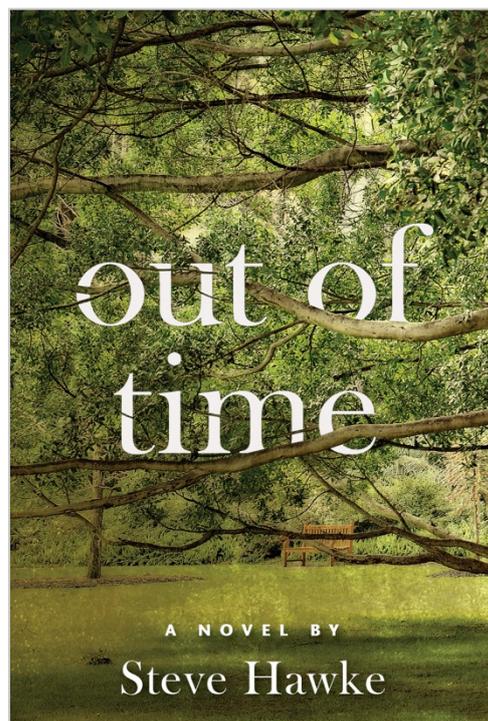
Joe and Anne's relationship has finally found the sweet spot and they are looking forward to what retirement brings. But time is not on their side. Inexplicably, Joe – a gifted architect – finds himself misplacing his possessions, making miscalculations, blanking parts of his day. As Joe's condition worsens, he and Anne face the agonising question: what is the point of no return? This is a story that takes place at the end of life – but not at the end of love.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Steve Hawke grew up in Melbourne, then lived in the Kimberley for many years, before settling in the Perth hills. His first adult novel, *The Valley*, was published in 2018. He has also written the stage play *Jandamarra* (2008 and 2011), the libretto for the dramatic cantata *Jandamarra: Sing for the Country* (2014 and 2019) and the children's novel *Barefoot Kids* (2007). His non-fiction writing includes *Noonkanbah: Whose Land, Whose Law* (1989), the biography *Polly Farmer* (1994) and *A Town Is Born: The Fitzroy Crossing Story* (2013).

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the meaning of the novel's title?
2. What is the metaphorical significance of the ficus and the role it plays in Joe's life?
3. How do Joe's experiences with his uncle and aunt, George and Betty, affect what is to come for him?
4. What do Joe's experiences with Constable Green, the retirement village staff and Centrelink staff have in common? What do they reveal about Joe's character?
5. How would you describe the relationship between Anne and Joe at the beginning of the novel? Would you say that theirs is a 'successful' partnership?
6. How is Joe's friendship with Eric affected by Joe's condition?
7. How does Joe's family structure absorb the shock of what is happening to him?
8. What is it about Joe that causes him to move from his *passive sins of omission ... to active concealment* (p. 141)?
9. How do the visits to the north-west for Anne and Joe together, and for Anne alone, provide solace?
10. What are the stages that Joe moves through in facing his condition?
11. How does the chapter titled 'The Bag' (p. 167) show the distance between Joe and Anne? Do you think that they come to bridge this distance? What is it about each of them that allows their relationship to recover from conflict?
12. What does the mobius loop mean to Joe, and what do you think it symbolises in the novel?
13. What is the role of humour in this book?
14. To what extent is Anne responsible for Joe's final act?
15. How would you describe Joe's professional legacy?
16. How might you define 'quality of life'? If one is suffering from an incurable disease, with progressing symptoms, then how does one know when 'it is time'?



## INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR

***You've described the impact of dementia on your mother, Hazel, as fundamental to why you decided to tackle this book. In what ways has your own personal experience shaped Out of Time?***

Over a period of years I was witness to Alzheimer's slowly stealing away my mother's memory, then reason, then sense of self. When this grand theft was complete, and it was no longer possible for her to live in her real home, I was part of the process of finding and committing her to a 'home' as they are euphemistically called. As such places go it was a good one; but having spent many, many hours there, I am of the opinion that a dementia facility is as close to hell on earth as I've come across. In *Out of Time* I have Joe say, 'A man with no memory, no self-awareness, no connection to those who love him. What the hell is he but a shell? I know, absolutely and deep in my guts, that that is not for me.' It probably won't take deep insight on the part of the reader to guess that this is pretty much my own sentiment.

Please remember that the book is about a whole lot more than just dementia, but a large part of it has come out of my exploration of the implications of holding such a view. Let me tell you, it is not a simple matter. And the more you think about it, the further you push the hypotheticals, the more complicated it gets.

***Was your intention in writing this book to make a contribution to the debate on voluntary euthanasia?***

No. Of course, there is impingement, or overlap. But in fact, although I am no expert on the issue, to the best of my understanding none of the voluntary euthanasia regimes in place or being contemplated in Australia extend to the situation of dementia sufferers. And dementia is a tricky one, to put it mildly, in the euthanasia discussion, because it is very much about mental capacity rather than physical pain and suffering. No easy answers!

***You say that the book 'is about more than just dementia'. Can you elaborate?***

I like to call it a Bassendean love story.

Leo Tolstoy famously wrote, 'All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.' At the risk of being presumptuous, I'm afraid that on this point I must disagree with the great man. The paths to happiness, and the models for happiness in relationships and amongst families, are, I would suggest, infinitely variable. And personally, I find these intricacies – the habits and accommodations and strategies of couples and families, who find ways to make things work – more interesting and more rewarding to explore than the other side of the coin.

Joe and Anne and their daughter Claire – Drongo, Badger and Bear, as they sometimes call each other – are engaged on a journey of love, and the struggle to give that love life against the odds.

***Are you at heart an optimist or a pessimist?***

If there is one thing that I try to avoid, it is binary distinctions like this. All people and most issues are complex and full of shades of grey. And in relation to what? In terms of me and my own life I tend to the fatalistic – que sera, sera and all that; deal with things as they happen – and I think I lean to the optimistic. If you are asking about the world at large I would describe myself as a realist, and as the years go by I think the evidence pushes me more towards the pessimistic end of the spectrum.



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