



Some topics to consider while reading *As the River Runs*:

- Water use and distribution
- Environmental conservation
- The Australian landscape
- Ethical dilemmas
- Love and hope
- How we are changed by the world around us

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## AS THE RIVER RUNS

by Stephen Scourfield

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A secret plan is being cooked up to bring water from the monsoonal north of Australia to the south. But Government minister Michael Mooney needs to find out what opposition he might face around the river valley. He sends Kate Kennedy, his young, career-minded Chief of Staff, and political fixer Jack Cole on a 'fact-finding' trip.

Ex-greenie Dylan Ward is their guide. Respected by both the mining industry and Aboriginal elder Vincent Yimi, Dylan is unaware that he has been compromised until their journey takes some unexpected turns.



### About Stephen Scourfield

Stephen Scourfield, author, travel writer and photographer, has travelled extensively throughout the world, including more than a million kilometres around Western Australia. His first novel *Other Country* won the 2007 WA Premier's Book Award for fiction, was shortlisted for the Commonwealth Writers' Prize and longlisted for the 2009 IMPAC Dublin Literary Award.

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- 1 'Population growth will make the problem worse. So will climate change. As the global economy grows, so will its thirst'. Did *As the River Runs* change the way you think about the future of water use and the redistribution of water in Australia?
- 2 Discuss the characters Kate and Dylan. Did you personally relate to either of these characters?
- 3 When Dylan takes Kate and Cole to see Henry Gorge he explains that the point of them visiting the gorge is 'just to see it'. Is it possible for governments and policy makers to make objective and informed decisions about something they've never seen or experienced?
- 4 'We are what we are – how can we so quickly become something so completely different?' Was Kate simply waiting for an opportunity to embrace a different life or did her transformation come from a more primal place?
- 5 "Reckon the country's got all sorts of justice," says Airplane'. Is the country's justice or retribution more effective than man's law? Did Jack Cole get what he deserved?
- 6 What did you think of the Premier's reaction to Michael Mooney's 'fact-finding' Kimberley trip? If you were in the Premier's position would you have dealt with the situation differently?
- 7 'We call 'em songlines, but other people follow a path. A destiny. No big difference. We've all got beliefs of one sort or another – or, at least, the fortunate do. More than anything, I believe in belief.' Is it important to you to have beliefs? Do you feel differently about the world around you when you believe in something?
- 8 Have you travelled in the Kimberley? If so, what did you think of Scourfield's descriptions of the landscape? If not, did reading *As the River Runs* make you want to visit the Kimberley?

**Q. All of your previous works of fiction have an ethical focus, particularly in relation to the environment. What is the main ethical issue for this novel?**

*As the River Runs* is set against the contemporary issues of landscape and water use. Around the world, from China to Africa, freshwater is the source of concern and conflict – many see it as the resource issue of today and, even more so, tomorrow. And in looking at this, *As the River Runs* is saturated with the sort of ethical issues that are very much the themes of my previous books, including *Unaccountable Hours*.

**Q. It could be said that *As the River Runs* is a loose sequel to *Other Country*. How do you see these two novels in relation to each other?**

I started writing *As the River Runs* in 2007, as *Other Country* was on the press. It is the world that is predicted in that previous book. The characters in *As the River Runs* are those that start to appear on the peripheral in *Other Country*. And while *Other Country* looked at broad landscape issues across the Kimberley, *As the River Runs* looks at the specific landscape issue of water, in a particular river valley. The book is sequential (if not a sequel) to *Other Country*.

In *Other Country*, set in the Kimberley in about 1990, cattle station brothers Ace and Billy are divided over future directions. Ace wants to live the frontier cowboy life the old fashioned way – Billy wants to diversify. He's interested in pursuing eco tourism and conservation alongside raising beef. And the physical and social landscape of *As the River Runs*, set almost 20 years later, is very much the future that he predicted. In this sense, although it is fiction, *As the River Runs* and *Other Country* are a 'fictional case study' of a remote and sensitive area over two decades of rapid change.

**Q. Your characters are often shaped and/or changed by their relationship to the landscape. Why does such a powerful change occur for Kate?**

There is the love that Kate Kennedy quickly finds for the landscape of the Kimberley and, in parallel, the love she finds for Dylan Ward. The effect of both is so deep, it is irreversible. But *As the River Runs* not only shows that dramatic change is possible in Kate. It also shows how individuals seem to 'change' when they move place.

In the city Dylan Ward had seemed a bit too 'green', a bit too sincere and a bit too soft. But in the raw, red frame of the Kimberley landscape, and among people whose respect he has earned, he looks confident, strong and knowledgeable. By changing location, we are seen differently. The purpose of *As the River Runs* is to show how we all, in our various ways, can be changed by the world around us and be reminded that we belong in landscape and nature. How simple it is to be human and to be in love.

**Q. What are you hoping your readers might find in, or take away from, this novel?**

I hope *As the River Runs* shows that we can change dramatically, if we allow dramatic change to happen. There are strong, moralistic voices in the book, as much as there are selfish and deceitful ones. In that, it is a book of hope. Love and honesty overcome all odds.