

BOLDREWOOD

EPISODE 1: "IN BAD COMPANY"

Based on the true story documented by Rolf Boldrewood

Written & Created by

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First Draft

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TEASER

FADE IN:

EXT. AUSTRALIAN BUSH - DAWN - 1863

TITLE CARD: "NEW SOUTH WALES, AUSTRALIA - 1863"

The sun rises over vast, empty bushland. Eucalyptus trees stretch to the horizon. The landscape is beautiful, harsh, alien.

A single RIDER emerges from morning mist. JACK WINDSOR (25, English gentleman, well-dressed but dusty) sits tall in the saddle. Exhausted but determined.

He stops at a CREEK. Dismounts. His horse drinks gratefully.

Jack splashes water on his face. Stares at his reflection. Hardly recognizes himself—beard growing, face sunburned, clothes stained with travel.

He pulls out a LETTER. Worn, read many times. We glimpse fragments:

"...position awaiting you at Marsden Station...respectable situation...make your fortune in the colonies..."

Jack carefully refolds it. Looks toward the horizon.

JACK
(to his horse, English
accent)
Well, Britannia. Let's see what fortune
awaits.

He remounts. Rides toward his destiny.

CUT TO:

INT. COMFORTABLE STUDY - SYDNEY - DAY (PRESENT: 1895)

An ELDERLY MAN (70s, distinguished, weathered) sits at a desk.
This is the NARRATOR—Jack Windsor, thirty years older.

The room is filled with books, mounted animal heads, Aboriginal
artifacts. Comfortable prosperity.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
I was twenty-five years old when I
arrived at Marsden Station. Fresh from
England. Educated. Well-mannered.
Completely unprepared for the Australian
bush. And utterly ignorant of the
company I was about to keep.

He picks up an old PHOTOGRAPH. Faded. Shows several young men—
including his younger self—standing beside horses. One man
stands out: handsome, confident, slightly dangerous.

NARRATOR (V.O.) (cont'd)

This is Dick Marston. The best horseman, the best shot, and the finest bushman I ever knew. Also a cattle-duffer, a thief, and the man who nearly destroyed my life. But I'm getting ahead of myself...

He sets down the photograph. Stares at it with complex emotions—affection, regret, loss.

SMASH TO BLACK.

MAIN TITLES: "BOLDREWOOD'S AUSTRALIA - IN BAD COMPANY"

ACT ONE

EXT. MARSDEN STATION - HOMESTEAD - DAY - 1863

Jack rides up to a large but weathered HOMESTEAD. Corrals, sheds, workers moving about. A functioning cattle station.

DOGS bark. STOCKMEN stop work to stare at the newcomer.

Jack dismounts. Stiff from riding. A STATION HAND (Aboriginal, 30s, capable) approaches.

STATION HAND

You the new bookkeeper? Mr. Marsden's expecting you.

JACK

(relieved)

Yes. Jack Windsor. Is my horse...?

STATION HAND

(taking reins)

I'll see to her. You look done in. How long you been riding?

JACK

Three days from Sydney. Rather underestimated the distance.

The Station Hand grins—city folk always do.

STATION HAND

Welcome to the bush, mate.

INT. MARSDEN HOMESTEAD - OFFICE - DAY

JAMES MARSDEN (50s, weathered squatter, practical) sits behind a rough desk. The office is functional—ledgers, maps, rifles on the wall.

Jack enters. Still dusty from travel.

MARSDEN

(standing, shaking
hands)

Windsor? James Marsden. You made good
time. Most new chums take a week from
Sydney.

JACK

I'm eager to begin work, sir.

MARSDEN

(approving)

Good. We need a proper bookkeeper. Last
man kept the accounts like a drunken
spider. Can you ride?

JACK

I hunted in England, sir. Foxes, mostly.

MARSDEN

(amused)

This ain't England, lad. You'll learn to
ride properly or you'll break your neck.
Can you shoot?

JACK

Shotgun, sir. Some rifle work.

MARSDEN

We'll start you on the accounts. But
every man here works stock when needed.
Drought's bad this year. Lost cattle.
Bushrangers. Every hand counts.

JACK
Bushrangers, sir?

MARSDEN
(grim)
Morgan's gang. Operating Victoria way,
but they range north. Keep your rifle
loaded. And don't ride alone after dark.

This clearly wasn't in the letter advertising the position.

MARSDEN (cont'd)
Your quarters are in the men's hut.
Meals with the hands. Work starts at
dawn. Questions?

JACK
No, sir. Thank you, sir.

MARSDEN
(softening slightly)
You'll do fine, Windsor. You've got
education and you rode three days
without complaining. That's more than
most new chums. Just remember—out here,
a man's word is everything. Break it,
and you're finished. Understood?

JACK
Understood, sir.

EXT. MEN'S HUT - EVENING

Rough building. Several STOCKMEN sit outside, smoking, talking. They eye Jack as he approaches with his swag.

One man stands out: DICK MARSTON (28, handsome, confident, charismatic). He rises, extends a hand.

DICK

Dick Marston. You're the new bookkeeper?

JACK

(shaking hands)

Jack Windsor. Pleased to meet you.

DICK

(grinning)

English, eh? Well, we won't hold that against you. This is Jim, Red, and Tommy.

The other STOCKMEN nod. Friendly enough.

JIM

(Aboriginal stockman,

25)

You ride?

JACK

Learning, apparently.

RED

(ginger-haired, 30s,
Irish)

Jesus, another city man. They'll have
you breaking horses by week's end.

DICK

(to Jack)

Don't let Red scare you. We'll teach you
proper. Can't have you getting killed
before you've fixed the accounts.
Marsden's books are a bloody disaster.

They laugh. Jack relaxes slightly. These seem like good men.

TOMMY

(youngest, 20)

You been warned about Morgan?

JACK

Mr. Marsden mentioned him.

DICK

(serious now)

Morgan's the real thing. Not some
jumped-up cattle thief. He's killed
seven men. Maybe more. Rides at night.
Comes out of nowhere. If you see him,
you run. Don't be a hero. Understood?

JACK

Understood.

DICK

(brightening)
Good! Now, you hungry? Cook's made stew.
It's terrible, but it's food.

They head toward the cookhouse. Dick's arm over Jack's shoulder.
Welcoming. Friendly.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
Dick Marston took me under his wing from
the first day. He was everything I
wasn't—confident, capable, at home in
the bush. And I admired him. God help
me, I admired him.

INT. COOKHOUSE - NIGHT

Rough tables. Twenty STOCKMEN eating, talking, laughing. Jack
sits with Dick, Red, Jim, and Tommy.

The food IS terrible. Jack eats anyway, too hungry to care.

RED
(to Jack)
So what brings an Englishman to the
arse-end of the world?

JACK
(carefully)
Opportunity. And perhaps a fresh start.

DICK

(knowing)
Trouble back home?

JACK
Nothing criminal. Just... family expectations I couldn't meet. Younger son. No inheritance. Make my own way.

DICK
Fair enough. Plenty of us out here for the same reason. The bush doesn't care who your father was. Just what you can do.

JIM
And if you can stay on a horse.

TOMMY
Which you can't.

They laugh. Not cruel-teasing. Jack smiles.

JACK
I'll learn.

DICK
That's the spirit. Tomorrow, I'll start teaching you. By the time you leave Marsden's, you'll ride like you were born here.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

He was as good as his word. Dick Marston was the finest teacher I ever had. Patient, skilled, generous with his knowledge. I learned more in those first months than in all my years in England. And I learned to trust him. That was my first mistake.

ACT TWO

MONTAGE - JACK'S EDUCATION - WEEKS PASSING

A) RIDING LESSONS

Dick teaches Jack proper bushman's seat. Jack falls off. Gets back on. Gradually improves.

B) CATTLE WORK

Jack helps muster cattle. Dusty, hard work. He's terrible at first. Slowly gets better.

C) SHOOTING PRACTICE

Dick sets up targets. Teaches Jack to shoot rifle from horseback. Jack misses wildly. Then hits.

D) BUSH CRAFT

Dick shows Jack how to track, read weather, find water. Jack takes notes.

Dick laughs—"You don't write the bush down, mate. You learn it."

E) EVENING CAMPFIRES

The men sitting around fire. Telling stories. Jack gradually accepted. Laughing with them.

Throughout montage, Jack's appearance changes—beard grows, skin darkens, clothes become worn. He's becoming a bushman.

END MONTAGE

EXT. CATTLE YARDS - DAY - TWO MONTHS LATER

Jack works confidently now. Separating cattle. Moving them through yards. Dick watches approvingly.

MARSDEN approaches on horseback.

MARSDEN

Windsor! A word!

Jack rides over.

MARSDEN (cont'd)

The accounts. I've reviewed your work. Excellent. You've found three errors the last man missed. Saved me two hundred pounds.

JACK
(pleased)
Thank you, sir.

MARSDEN
You're wasted on just bookkeeping. I'm raising your wages. Ten pounds a year extra. And you'll work stock full-time. Keep the books in the evenings.

JACK
Thank you, sir. I won't disappoint you.

MARSDEN
You haven't yet. Dick Marston says you're a natural. High praise from him. He's the best stockman I've got.

Marsden rides off. Jack grins—he's succeeded.

Dick rides up, grinning too.

DICK
Ten pounds extra! Well done, mate. You've earned it.

JACK
Thanks to your teaching.

DICK

(serious)
Jack, you've become a proper bushman.
Not many English gentlemen manage it.
I'm proud of you.

This clearly means a lot to Jack. Finding acceptance, success, identity.

DICK (cont'd)
Listen, a few of us are riding out
tonight. Checking the north run. Want to
come?

JACK
Night riding? Marsden said—

DICK
Marsden's too cautious. Morgan's down
south. We'll be fine. Besides, you need
to learn night work. Can't be a proper
stockman without it.

JACK
(convinced)
Alright. What time?

DICK
After dinner. Meet at the yards. Don't
tell the old man—he fusses.

Jack nods. His second mistake.

INT. MEN'S HUT - EVENING

Jack prepares for the ride. Checking rifle, gear. Red enters.

RED
(quiet, urgent)
Jack, a word.

JACK
What is it?

RED
This ride tonight. With Dick. Don't go.

JACK
Why not?

RED
(struggling)
Just... trust me. Stay here.

JACK
Red, what's this about?

RED
I can't say. But Dick... he's not what
you think. None of them are.

JACK
(defensive)

Dick's been nothing but good to me.
Better than anyone in England ever was.

RED

(giving up)

Fine. I tried. Just... keep your eyes
open, Jack. And remember what Marsden
said. A man's word is everything. And
some men's words ain't worth shite.

Red leaves. Jack troubled. But not enough to change his mind.

EXT. CATTLE YARDS - NIGHT

Dick waits with Jim, Tommy, and THREE OTHER STOCKMEN Jack
doesn't know as well. They're armed. Serious.

DICK

Ready, Jack?

JACK

Ready.

They mount. Ride out into darkness. The moon is half-full—enough
light to see by.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

I should have listened to Red. But I was
young, confident, eager to prove myself.
And I trusted Dick Marston. That was my

third mistake. The one that changed everything.

EXT. BUSH - NIGHT - RIDING

The group rides through moonlit bush. Eerie. Beautiful. Dangerous.

Jack rides beside Dick.

JACK
(whispering)
Where exactly are we going?

DICK
North run. Like I said. Checking for strays.

But something feels wrong. The other men are too tense. Too alert.

They reach a CLEARING. Dick signals halt.

DICK (cont'd)
(to the group)
Right. You know what to do. Jack, you're with me and Jim. We'll take the east side.

JACK

East side of what?

DICK

(finally honest)

Old McDonald's cattle. They've been grazing on Marsden's grass. We're just... redistributing them. Fair's fair.

Jack goes still. Understanding dawning.

JACK

You're stealing cattle.

DICK

(correcting)

Borrowing. McDonald's rich as Croesus. A few head won't hurt him. And Marsden's lost plenty this year. We're just evening things out.

JACK

This is cattle-duffing. You're thieves.

JIM

(calm)

Welcome to the bush, mate. This is how it works. The big squatters steal from each other. We're just small-time.

TOMMY

(eager)

Come on, Dick. Let's move before the moon gets higher.

DICK
(to Jack)
You coming? Or you heading back?

JACK
I... I don't...

DICK
(intensely)
Jack, I brought you because I trust you.
Because you're one of us now. Every man
here has done this. It's not murder.
It's not robbery. It's just... bush
justice. The squatters take from each
other all the time. We're just doing the
same. No one gets hurt.

JACK
(weakly)
It's still theft.

DICK
(harder)
Then ride back. But if you do, you're
not one of us anymore. You're just
another bloody English gentleman who
doesn't understand how things work out
here. Your choice.

The men wait. Watching Jack.

FADE TO BLACK.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

EXT. CLEARING - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Jack struggles with the decision. Everything he was taught says this is wrong. But these are his friends. His only friends.

JACK
(finally)
I'll come. But just this once. To see.
I'm not... I'm not committing to
anything.

DICK
(grinning)
That's my boy. Come on.

They ride off. Jack following, already sick with dread.

EXT. MCDONALD'S CATTLE STATION - BOUNDARY - NIGHT

The group reaches a FENCE. Beyond it, CATTLE graze peacefully.

Dick dismounts. Cuts the fence wire efficiently. Not his first time.

DICK

(to Jack)

Simple. We move twenty head through the gap. Drive them to the river. Swim them across. By morning, they're mixed with Marsden's herd. No one's the wiser.

JACK

And if we're caught?

JIM

We won't be. McDonald's hands are ten miles away at the main station. We're alone out here.

They enter. Start cutting out cattle quietly. They're skilled—the cattle move without noise.

Jack sits on his horse, paralyzed. Not helping but not leaving.

DICK

(riding up)

You alright?

JACK

No. This is wrong, Dick. You know it is.

DICK

(sighing)

Jack, McDonald runs fifty thousand head. We're taking twenty. He'll never even notice. But Marsden's short this year. Lost cattle to drought. These twenty head might be the difference between him surviving or losing the station. We're helping our boss. That's all.

JACK

Then why not ask Marsden to buy cattle from McDonald?

DICK

Because McDonald won't sell to Marsden. They've been feuding for twenty years. Over what, nobody even remembers. Pride. Stupidity. So yes, we take cattle. Because otherwise, good men lose everything while rich bastards sit on their thousands. That's the bush, Jack. You adapt or you die.

He rides off. Jack sits alone in the darkness.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

I told myself that night I was just watching. Learning. That I'd never do it again. I told myself a lot of lies that night.

The cattle are moved through the gap. Twenty head. Quiet. Professional.

Suddenly—RIFLE SHOT in the distance. Everyone freezes.

DICK
(urgent)
Ride! NOW!

They spur horses. Stampede the cattle toward the river. Chaos.

More SHOTS. A VOICE shouting in distance—McDonald's men, somehow alerted.

The group races through bush, driving cattle. Jack swept along, no time to think.

EXT. RIVER - NIGHT

They reach the water. Cattle plunge in. Swimming across.

The stockmen follow. Horses swimming. Dangerous.

Jack's horse panics in deep water. He nearly falls. Jim grabs his reins.

JIM
(shouting over water)
Stay on! Don't let go!

They make it across. Scramble up the far bank.

Behind them—LIGHTS. McDonald's men reaching the river. Too late.

MCDONALD'S MAN (O.S.)

(shouting)

I see you, Marston! I know it's you!
This ain't over!

But they're safe. On Marsden land now. The cattle mixed with larger herd.

The group stands, panting, exhilarated. Except Jack—he's terrified.

DICK

(laughing)

Christ, that was close! Who the hell tipped them off?

TOMMY

Doesn't matter. We made it.

JACK

(shaking)

We were nearly caught. Nearly shot. Over twenty cattle.

DICK

But we weren't. And Marsden's got twenty more head. That's a win, Jack.

JACK

I want no part of this. Ever again.

DICK

(serious)

You're already part of it. You were there. You helped. If McDonald's men report this—and they will—you're as guilty as the rest of us.

This hits Jack hard. True.

DICK (cont'd)

(softer)

Look, I'm sorry. I shouldn't have brought you along on your first run. But you did well. You kept up. You didn't panic. I'm proud of you.

JACK

(bitter)

Proud? I'm a criminal now.

DICK

No. You're a bushman. There's a difference.

They ride back to the station. Jack silent, shattered.

ACT FOUR

INT. MARSDEN HOMESTEAD - OFFICE - MORNING

Marsden at his desk. Tense. Jack enters, exhausted from sleepless night.

MARSDEN
Windsor. Sit.

Jack sits. Dreading what's coming.

MARSDEN (cont'd)
McDonald sent word this morning. Twenty head stolen from his north run last night. Claims it was my men.

JACK
(carefully)
Did he have evidence, sir?

MARSDEN
(studying him)
He claims he saw riders heading toward my station. But it was dark. Could have been anyone. Bushrangers, maybe.

Pause. They both know what happened.

MARSDEN (cont'd)
Windsor, were you at this station last night?

Jack must decide. Lie? Tell truth?

JACK

(choosing)

I was at the station, sir. In my bunk.
Slept poorly—hot night.

MARSDEN

(nodding slowly)

Good. That's what I told McDonald. All
my men were present and accounted for.
Must have been bushrangers.

JACK

Yes, sir.

MARSDEN

(leaning forward)

I know what happens in the bush. I know
my men take cattle sometimes. Turn a
blind eye to most of it. But if you get
caught, I can't protect you. Understand?

JACK

I understand, sir.

MARSDEN

(standing)

Keep out of trouble, Windsor. You've got
a future here. Don't throw it away.

JACK

No, sir.

Jack leaves. Shaking. He's just lied to Marsden's face. Broken the cardinal rule—a man's word.

EXT. CATTLE YARDS - DAY

Jack works alone. Trying to process everything.

Dick approaches.

DICK
You alright?

JACK
No. I lied to Marsden. About last night.

DICK
You had to. We all did.

JACK
He knows. He knows we did it.

DICK
(shrugging)
Of course he does. But he can't admit it. That's how it works. We give him deniability.

JACK
(frustrated)
This whole system is insane!

DICK

(patient)

No. It's practical. The law's a hundred miles away. Magistrate even further. Out here, we make our own rules. Marsden knows that. McDonald knows it. Everyone does.

JACK

I came to Australia to start fresh. To be better than I was. And in two months I'm a liar and a thief.

DICK

(sitting on fence beside
him)

Jack, you think I wanted this life? I came here same as you. Educated. Family back home. I was going to be respectable. But the bush doesn't care about respectability. It cares about survival. About loyalty. About doing what you have to do.

JACK

How did you start? The cattle-duffing?

DICK

(remembering)

Five years ago. Drought. Station I worked for was dying. Owner—good man, treated us fair—couldn't pay wages. We were going to walk off, find other work. But we didn't want to abandon him. So we... acquired some cattle. From a neighbor who had thousands. Kept the

station going until the rain came. We saved it.

JACK

And then you couldn't stop.

DICK

(honest)

Then I didn't want to stop. Turns out I'm good at it. And it pays. And there's a certain... thrill to it. Knowing you're beating the system. The big squatters steal from each other all the time—land, water, political influence. We're just doing it on a smaller scale.

JACK

So you're Robin Hood? Stealing from the rich?

DICK

(laughing)

God no. I'm a thief, Jack. Let's not dress it up. But I'm a loyal thief. I only steal from those who can afford it. And I never steal from friends. That's my code. It's not much, but it's something.

Red approaches, interrupting.

RED

Dick, we've got a problem. McDonald's sworn out a warrant. Police coming from town.

DICK
(standing)
When?

RED
Tomorrow. Maybe sooner. Someone needs to
disappear for a while.

DICK
(to Jack)
You'll be fine. You weren't there,
remember? Stick to the story.

JACK
What about you?

DICK
I'll be gone before they arrive. Done it
before. Spend a few weeks in the bush.
Come back when it's blown over.

He grips Jack's shoulder.

DICK (cont'd)
You're a good man, Jack Windsor. Don't
let one night define you. You've got a
choice. Keep riding this line between
respectable and criminal. Or pick a
side. Just... choose wisely.

He walks away. Jack alone with his conscience.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Dick Marston left that afternoon. I never saw him again. Six months later, I heard he'd joined a bushranger gang. Morgan's gang. Three months after that, he was shot by police during a robbery. He died instantly. Thirty years old.

ACT FIVE

INT. MARSDEN HOMESTEAD - OFFICE - NEXT DAY

Jack sits across from SERGEANT DALY (40s, Irish-Australian, sharp). Marsden present.

DALY

(Irish accent)

Mr. Windsor. You're new here. Just two months, correct?

JACK

Correct, Sergeant.

DALY

And where were you three nights ago? The night of the 17th?

JACK

In my bunk. At the station. All night.

DALY

Anyone vouch for that?

JACK

Red O'Brien. Tommy Mitchell. Several others. We played cards until late.

DALY consults notes. The alibis check out—the men covered for each other.

DALY

And Dick Marston. Where was he?

JACK

Same. Playing cards with us.

DALY

(not believing it)

Interesting. Because McDonald's men swear they recognized Marston's horse. Distinctive white blaze on the forehead.

JACK

(carefully)

Lots of horses have blazes, Sergeant.

DALY

(leaning back)

Let me tell you something, lad. I know what happens out here. I know men like

Marston. I've been chasing them for ten years. And I know you're lying.

MARSDEN

(interrupting)

Sergeant, that's a serious accusation.

DALY

(to Marsden)

With respect, sir, you know it's true. Your men steal cattle. Their men steal cattle. It's been going on for decades. I can't prove it because you all cover for each other. But I know.

JACK

(controlled)

If you know, Sergeant, then arrest us. Present your evidence in court.

DALY

(smiling grimly)

Can't. Because you're right—I can't prove anything. You've all got alibis. The cattle are mixed in with yours. McDonald can't identify specific animals. Legally, I've got nothing.

Pause. Standoff.

DALY (cont'd)

(standing)

But here's what I can tell you, Mr. Windsor. Dick Marston's gone. Left yesterday. That's not the action of an innocent man. He'll turn up somewhere

else, with some other gang. And eventually, he'll push too hard. Rob the wrong man. Kill someone. And then I'll hunt him down.

JACK

Is that all, Sergeant?

DALY

(at door, turning)

No. One more thing. You're an educated man. You could make something of yourself out here. But if you keep running with thieves, you'll end up like them. Dead, or in jail. Your choice.

He leaves. Jack and Marsden alone.

MARSDEN

(after a moment)

He's right, you know. About everything.

JACK

(surprised)

Sir?

MARSDEN

I know what my men do. I allow it because I need them. And because I'm not innocent myself—I've taken cattle in my time. Every squatter has. But there's a line, Windsor. Between borrowing cattle when you're desperate, and becoming a professional thief. Dick Marston crossed that line. You haven't. Yet.

JACK

(quiet)

I went with them. That night. I didn't help, but I was there.

MARSDEN

(standing)

I know. And you came back. That's the difference. You saw what it was and you chose differently. Now you need to keep choosing. Every day. The bush will offer you a hundred chances to become a criminal. You need to refuse. Every. Single. Time.

JACK

What if I'm not strong enough?

MARSDEN

(gripping his shoulder)

Then you leave. Go back to Sydney. Become a clerk. Because if you stay out here and keep riding that line, eventually you'll fall off the wrong side. And then you're Dick Marston. And then you're dead.

EXT. MEN'S HUT - EVENING

Jack sits alone outside. Red joins him.

RED

Heard Daly was here.

JACK

He knows everything. Just can't prove it.

RED

That's usually how it works.

Pause.

JACK

Why didn't you go with them? That night?

RED

(sighing)

Because I've already been down that road. Five years ago. Ended up in jail. Six months. Lost everything. When I got out, I promised myself—never again. I ride the line, like everyone. But I don't cross it. Not anymore.

JACK

Is it hard? Staying on the right side?

RED

Every damn day. But I'm still alive. And I can look at myself in the mirror. That counts for something.

They sit in companionable silence. The sun setting over the bush.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

I stayed at Marsden's another year. Kept the books. Worked the stock. Never duffed cattle again. Eventually, I moved on. Bought my own small station. Made my fortune honestly. Married. Had children. Lived the life I came to Australia to find.

INT. COMFORTABLE STUDY - SYDNEY - DAY (PRESENT: 1895) - RETURN TO FRAME

The elderly Jack (Narrator) picks up the photograph again. Stares at Dick Marston's face.

NARRATOR

But I never forgot Dick Marston. Or that night when I rode with thieves. It taught me something important about Australia. About the bush. About myself.

He sets the photograph down carefully.

NARRATOR (cont'd)

Out here, on the frontier, the line between good men and bad men is thinner than you think. Thinner than I ever imagined. It's not breeding or education that determines which side you end up on. It's choice. Small choices. Made every day. Dick Marston made his choices. I made mine. And the difference between us—between a squatter writing his memoirs and a bushranger in an unmarked grave—was perhaps just one

night. One decision. One moment when I could have said yes, and said no instead.

He closes the ledger he was writing in. We see the title: "IN BAD COMPANY - A Memoir of the Australian Bush."

NARRATOR (cont'd)

The bush forgives nothing. But it offers everything. Opportunity. Freedom. The chance to become who you choose to be. Not who you were born to be. That's the promise of Australia. And the danger. Because you have to choose wisely. And keep choosing. Every day. For the rest of your life.

He stands. Walks to the window. Looks out at modern Sydney—civilized, ordered, safe.

NARRATOR (cont'd)

I chose well. Dick Marston did not. And that made all the difference.

EXT. AUSTRALIAN BUSH - DAWN - 1863 (FLASHBACK)

The younger Jack rides alone. The sun rising. The bush stretching endlessly before him.

He sits straighter in the saddle. Determined. Choosing his path.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
Welcome to Australia. Welcome to the
bush. And God help you if you keep bad
company.

FADE TO BLACK.

END OF EPISODE

EPISODE NOTES

CHARACTER ARCS:

Jack Windsor:

- Arrives innocent and idealistic
- Gradually adapts to bush life
- Tempted by criminal activity
- Makes crucial choice to refuse
- Learns that identity is chosen, not imposed

Dick Marston:

- Charismatic mentor figure
- Reveals criminal nature gradually
- Represents seductive danger of frontier lawlessness

- Tragic end (mentioned but not shown)
- Ghost that haunts Jack's memory

Red O'Brien:

- Voice of caution
- Has already fallen and recovered
- Represents redemption possibility
- Provides moral guidance when needed

Marsden:

- Practical squatter
- Compromised but not corrupt
- Knows his men steal but draws lines
- Father figure/moral authority

THEMES:

Moral Ambiguity:

- No clear heroes or villains
- Good men do bad things (survival)
- Bad men have understandable motivations
- Law vs. justice often in conflict

Identity and Choice:

- Colonial Australia offers reinvention

- But freedom includes freedom to fail
- Small choices determine destiny
- Environment shapes but doesn't determine character

Mateship vs. Law:

- Loyalty conflicts with legality
- Bush code vs. official law
- Community bonds stronger than abstract justice
- Practical morality of frontier

CLASS AND AUSTRALIA:

- English class distinctions break down
- Breeding less important than skill
- But class consciousness remains
- Australia as escape and test

VISUAL STYLE:

Cinematography:

- Vast landscape shots (isolation)
- Harsh sunlight (realism)
- Night scenes lit by moon/fire (atmospheric)
- Dusty, naturalistic (no glamour)

Color Palette:

- Ochre and rust (Australian earth)
- Pale blue (bleached sky)
- Muted colors (authentic to period)
- Darkness in night scenes (real darkness, not Hollywood)

Pacing:

- Slow burn first two acts (character establishment)
- Tension builds act three (cattle duffing)
- Release act four (consequences)
- Reflection act five (perspective)

HISTORICAL ACCURACY:

Cattle-Duffing:

- Endemic in 1860s Australia
- Squatters stole from each other constantly
- Difficult to prove (brands altered, cattle mixed)
- Sliding scale: borrowing → theft → bushranging

Police:

- Limited presence in bush
- Sergeant Daly represents typical isolated officer
- Knows what happens but can't prove it
- Pragmatic enforcement

Station Life:

- Rough conditions accurately portrayed
- Class mixing (gentleman and stockmen)
- Aboriginal stockmen common and skilled
- Economic pressures driving crime

Bushrangers:

- Morgan was real (died 1865)
- Violent and terrifying
- Often started as cattle thieves
- Romanticized in folklore but brutal in reality

END OF PILOT EPISODE