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Ballantyne's Background



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While the movements of units from the Second Australian Imperial Force are taken from history, the characters and situations described here are entirely fictional.

Any resemblance to persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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From the outset, the aim was to create a figure who comments on political issues from a not entirely orthodox perspective.

That placed certain restrictions on the possibilities.

He should be a Senator rather than an MHR and a member of one of the two major parties rather than a Green or independent cross-bencher.

Given The Author's political leanings, he would not come from the Coalition.

So he will obviously be a member of the ALP.

He also needed to be able to draw on contacts in a variety of situations across the whole of a particular state or territory.

On that basis, he must come from one of the Territories rather than a State.

The Northern Territory seemed more likely to deliver a figure with contacts in the Indigenous community.

Those contacts are part of a more extensive network. Ballantyne might not know almost everyone in the Territory, but his vast circle of acquaintances collectively do.

Giving him access to significant financial resources means he *could* run as an Independent *if necessary*, so he is relatively unconstrained by Party or factional discipline.

So there we have the origins of a character.

From there, things fell into place reasonably rapidly.

I made him the fourth generation of a family with significant holdings in the hospitality industry. That took care of the money side of things.

A doctor would have links to significantly different sections of the community.

However, The Author wanted Ballantyne to be a graduate of his own alma mater.

JCU's medical school only opened in 2000.

Since he needed to be well into his forties, Ballantyne must have done something else before Medicine.

If he paid his way through University by joining the Army Reserve straight out of school, he must have been a member of the Army Cadets in high school.

So that delivers links to Defence Force personnel in the Territory.

The ADF may not be a Labor stronghold. If he's known and respected there, he'll pick up a strong personal vote, including people who would not, under normal circumstances, vote Labor.

He also needed links to the Territory's Indigenous community, which, logically, would come from marrying into a powerful clan from Arnhem Land or somewhere around Uluru.

The *need to have done something before Medicine* tilted things towards Arnhem Land.

If his son was going to be looking at a gap year around the time the series of stories started, he must have been born just as Dad was starting at JCU's Medical School.

The chronology, therefore, needed to get Dad into Arnhem Land before that.

Fieldwork involved with a Doctorate in Something looked plausible.

He could have been a geologist, but that would have implications for his relationship with a prominent land rights clan.

Alternatively, he could have been doing Anthropology or Behavioural Sciences.

But from there, straight into Medicine? *No, don't think so.*

Marine Science, on the other hand, looked to be a natural fit.

If he's been working on the toxicology of venomous marine life, he'll need to do fieldwork.

Arnhem Land is a logical venue for it.

The Author concedes it is possible that there's a forty-something descendant of a family who owned pubs in Townsville and across the North with a Ph. D. In Marine Science and a medical qualification who's married to a Gumatj Yolngu woman.

If such an individual does, in fact, exist, it would be a remarkable coincidence.

The back story of a remarkable family provides a location for information that might otherwise intrude on a developing narrative.

Desmond Ballantyne was born in Townsville on Valentine's Day, 1976.

His father, James Ballantyne, is an accountant based in Townsville.

After primary education at St John Fishers, he attended the Catholic high school. Our Lady's Mount, the predecessor of Ignatius Park, on Stanton Hill.

James studied commerce and economics at the University College of Townsville and James Cook University.

That's where he met his wife Elaine, daughter of a Chinese family who owned several supermarkets and corner stores across Townsville.

Desmond's grandfather, Doug Ballantyne, was a publican who owned several hotels, motels, and terrorist operations across the North between World War II and his death in 1995. Doug married twice.

His first wife, Maria, was the daughter of the Italian family who owned the cafe next door to the hotel in which Doug's father, Don, had a half-share.

Doug joined the Army in May 1940.

He proposed to Maria just before he enlisted.

She immediately moved to work in the kitchen at Norm Ballantyne's hotel in Mareeba.

The couple were married in Cairns early in 1941 when Doug was on pre-embarkation leave. Their first daughter, Maria, was born in Mareeba in December 1941.

Doug was a member of the 2/25th Battalion stationed at Darwin between October 1940 and February 1941.

From Darwin, the battalion moved back to Brisbane before active service in North Africa and Syria as part of the 7th Division.

They were on garrison duties in Lebanon immediately before returning to Australia in February 1942.

They landed in Adelaide in March of that year, moved to Caboolture in May and from Brisbane to Port Moresby via Townsville in September.

Pre-embarkation leave in August did not give Doug enough time to travel north.

The battalion fought on the Kokoda track and took part in the Australian advance towards Gona before being withdrawn to Australia for rest and reorganisation in January 1943.

For the next six months, the troops trained on the Atherton Tablelands.

Doug and Maria's second daughter, Elena, was born in January 1944.

After further service in New Guinea, the battalion was back in Australia in February 1944 and was stationed at Strathpine near Brisbane and subsequently on the Atherton Tablelands.

They left Townsville in June 1945 to participate in the Australian operations in Borneo. They remained there on garrison duties before returning to Australia in February 1946.

The battalion was disbanded in March, and Doug headed back north to take over running the hotel in Innisfail.

In the meantime, his father had bought out the other partners.

A third daughter, Julia, arrived in February 1947, followed by James in June 1949 and Donald in April 1952.

However, complications after the birth of Siobhan in June 1954 were too much for her mother, who died shortly afterwards.

At that point, the eldest daughter, Maria, was twelve and a half. Elena was ten and a half, Julia just over seven, James five and Donald two.

Had Maria been a year or two older, she might have been drafted into looking after her siblings.

Doug married Joyce Murchison, the bookkeeper in the Mareeba hotel, in August 1955.

It was a marriage of convenience that soon became rancorous.

Joyce sued for divorce in 1959, alleging adultery with a barmaid, Angelique Marvell (a.k.a. Annabel Marvin).

While there was no concrete evidence to back up the allegation, Miss Marvell's appearance in the witness box caused a minor sensation.

She detailed a lurid account of a tempestuous affair that reached the pages of Brisbane's **Sunday Truth** and its Melbourne equivalent.

Although Doug vigorously denied the allegations, the judge granted Joyce the divorce and a generous settlement.

Doug was forced to sell the hotels he had inherited from his father, who had died the year before.

The balance of the proceeds from the sale of the hotels would allow Doug to buy another property in any major centre.

He decided to try his luck in Townsville based on suggestions that the place was about to go ahead.

There were rumours of a University College and an Army barracks in the not-too-distant future.

While he looked for something suitable, he had persuaded eighteen-year-old Maria to put her plans to attend Teachers' College in Brisbane on hold while she looked after her siblings.

Elena was sixteen and would be drafted into the same duties when she finished Senior at the end of 1961.

The 1960 Credit Squeeze provided Doug with the opportunity he was looking for.

The owners of the Northern Star Hotel in Hermit Park had decided to build a block of motel units at the rear of the premises.

The project ran over budget, and, unable to borrow more and service their existing debt, the owners were forced to sell.

Doug picked up the Northern Star for a reasonable price and had enough left to buy a share in the Waterview Hotel in South Townsville.

Maria moved to Brisbane in 1962, graduated from Teachers' College at the end of 1963 and was appointed to Railway Estate State School in Townsville at the start of 1964.

She would have been transferred to Julia Creek from the beginning of 1965 but married ex-Brisbane and Sydney footballer Ronnie Holloway. He had moved north as captain-coach of Souths Football Club and managed the Waterview.

In the meantime, Doug had bought out the other partner in the Waterview. Bert Forno was in the throes of a divorce after drinking a substantial hole into the business's profits.

At this point, Doug made several important decisions.

He had a sponsorship arrangement with Parks Football Club. He hired Ronnie's mate Brian Morshead to manage the Northern Star while he played for Parks.

Brian would pick up the finer points of the hotel trade along the way. Once Doug was satisfied with his progress, he planned to expand his interests.

Meanwhile, Elena looked after her younger siblings through 1962 and 1963 before moving to Brisbane to attend Teachers' College.

Julia took over that role in 1964, but by that time, James was in Year 10. Donald was in his last year of primary school, and Siobhan was turning ten, so she could enrol for an Arts degree at Townsville's University College.

She completed the degree in four years rather than the usual three.

She was the first real beneficiary of Doug's decision to establish a family trust that would prevent a repetition of his earlier divorce's disastrous consequences.

As a divorcee, he could not remarry (in Church, at least).

He had resolved, having inflicted the "evil stepmother from hell" on his children, to make it up to them by setting them up for life.

All the hotels' profits went into the Trust, which also provided the capital to expand the family company's business interests without needing to borrow money and pay interest.

Doug paid himself the basic wage but lived, ate and drank at The Star *gratis*.

The hotel's utility and a courtesy car got him around the city.

While he might have been drawing the basic wage, his lifestyle was headed towards the other end of the financial spectrum.

So the business provided his spending money and catered for most of his living expenses.

The Trust looked after the Kids under pretty strict rules. It covered all education expenses up to the end of High School.

From there, it was up to the individual.

Julia had her fees paid while she completed the Arts degree and picked up a scholarship from the Queensland Government to add a Dip. Ed. onto the B.A.

That was the way Doug liked it.

While he was happy to see the Trust pay tuition fees, the generosity did not extend to living expenses.

Since the Department of Education was picking up the tab, Julia didn't need the money to pay her fees, but Doug gave it to her anyway.

Maria had done her teacher training before the trust arrangements kicked in.

Still, she could polish off an Education degree as a part-time student between family commitments.

The Trust had come good with a deposit on the Holloway family home.

James would be the next cab off the rank, and although he wasn't inclined to play along at first, Doug ended up getting his preferred option in the end.

Having bought into the Waterview, Doug had the beginnings of a business model.

He was looking at buying into established businesses in temporary difficulties, but sound enough as a proposition when you took temporary setbacks out of the equation.

While he tended to look at hotels, he would consider motels, caravan parks and tourist resorts, provided they fitted his essential criteria.

The trust would provide the capital, so interest rates wouldn't be an issue.

When he bought something at the right price, it went straight back onto the market with a price tag covering what it owed the trust, plus a handy 20%.

After all, he reasoned, you have to build your capital reserves.

Once Doug had trained Brian Morshead, he was happy to leave the protege to run The Star or the Waterview, and Ronnie had done the same with a youngster from Souths.

So Doug had three blokes who could be slotted into a new acquisition to set things right.

Now he needed people to look after renovations.

That was the other factor.

The sixties had seen a couple of fires that had reduced prominent hotels to ashes.

They may or may not have been insurance jobs, but Doug wasn't interested in that side of things.

Even with an insurance job, rebuilding something would make a big hole in the family trust reserves. It might even mean he'd need to borrow money, and you can't sell beer and counter meals out of a pile of smouldering ashes.

And he liked the big old country-style pubs as long as they were structurally (and electrically) sound.

Buy one for the right price, do it up, and sell the renovated premises at a premium. That was the way to go.

But he needed people to look after renovations, and he had daughters.

Siobhan was too young to enter that side of the equation.

Still, Elena was back in the north after her teacher training. Julia would probably be appointed to a High School in Townsville when she finished the Dip. Ed.

He didn't want either of them to marry a soldier.

He needed some combination of a builder, a plumber, an electrician or a painter, and he wasn't sure the latter was essential.

So, if Elena married a builder and Julia married a sparkie, that would be ideal.

He was pretty sure he'd be able to find a plumber who would look after the odd issue with pipes and drainage for a small financial or alcoholic consideration.

Painters also tended to be willing to take a drink, and the job wasn't that tricky if you had a reasonable idea of what you were doing.

Set that side of things up, and he'd only need to turn James or Donald into an accountant to manage the books, and he'd have all those bases covered.

Fortunately, he lined Elena up with John Brimble through a combination of good luck, good management, encouragement and a firm veto on anyone who didn't arrive with appropriate tradesman's credentials.

John was a young bloke who'd done his time as an apprentice carpenter, was looking to get into building and knew what side his bread was buttered on.

Then Julia did the right thing and found the required sparkie in the form of Dan Fraser.

Doug had the combination he wanted, and he was already building up the rest of the network he reckoned he needed.

The Northern Star sat in the middle of one of the commercial strips along Townsville's main arterial roads.

Consequently, several bank branches and real estate agents were in the neighbourhood.

It made sense to encourage the bank johnnies and real estate salespeople to call into The Star for a couple of beers after work if they were so inclined.

Suppose he wasn't in the office or elsewhere on the premises. In that case, you could usually find Doug in a spot where he could monitor the public bar, the saloon bar and the main points of entry and departure.

He went out of his way to get to know the regulars and what they did.

Anyone who might be helpful would receive a modest proportion of the publican's hospitable largesse.

He looked after himself in that regard as well.

In the official and often-rehashed version of events, medical advice suggested he was allowed a daily ration of two ten-ounce beers.

He argued that he was better off drinking three sevens "because they would last a bit longer". He could occasionally be coaxed into a fourth "because it mightn't hurt that much."

But he would always shout in turn, and there was no quibbling about his companions' consumption of spirits or beer in larger containers.

Having found someone whose expertise might prove helpful, he carefully drew them into his burgeoning network.

He provided advice, *gratis*, of course, on matters that might be cause for concern.

These practices skirted around the edges of things some twenty years later in the post-Fitzgerald Royal Commission anti-corruption environment.

As far as Doug was concerned, it was all sound business practice.

Once a potential investment came across his radar, Doug would get whoever he thought might help cast an eye over the property.

If his friendly building inspector found structural issues, these would naturally form the basis for ongoing negotiation.

If a roof needed a ten thousand dollar replacement before the next cyclone season, the asking price was several thousand dollars too high.

Similarly, if someone who knew about hygiene spotted issues in the kitchen, they would need to be fixed.

Once the property changed hands, it went straight back on the market.

The price tag reflected what it owed Ballantyne Family Holdings, the cost of immediate repairs and renovations and a ten per cent markup that would deliver a reasonable profit margin.

Brimble Constructions and Fraser Electrical looked after those matters as they arose.

Doug worked an additional deal to cover renovations and improvements.

Both businesses could operate out of the back of a utility or work truck and the phone line that ran into their respective residences.

Still, Doug reasoned an office, and associated depot looked more substantial.

Ballantyne Family Holdings bought two suitable premises and rented them out at a price around the bottom of the going rate.

At the same time, John Brimble and Dan Fraser had a list of jobs that needed doing on Ballantyne Family Properties.

For a start, the Northern Star needed rewiring.

Doug wanted the Waterview's kitchen renovated now that a couple of decent eateries had opened up just down the street.

So if John or Dan had a couple of tradesmen with nothing to do and time on their hands, they could be pointed towards something that would add value to one of Doug's properties.

The boss would have to pay them anyway, and Doug got his work done for the bare cost of materials, though appropriate invoicing went through the books.

At the end of each quarter, Doug adjusted the price of everything on the market to cover the cost of renovations and improvements.

The overall aim was to have the improvements to the Ballantyne Holdings properties work out to what Brimble Constructions and Fraser Electrical paid in rent.

Still, it didn't always work out that way.

But the patriarch didn't get everything his way.

James hit Junior (Year 10) in 1964, did reasonably well and made some half-hearted noises about leaving school and getting a job.

Still, Doug managed to persuade him to do the extra two years, with the prospect of going to University as a reasonably attractive carrot in front of the boy's nose.

1965 and 1966 were a pretty good time to be a young bloke.

While James did start cramming for the Senior examination in September 1966, his heart wasn't really in it.

Year Nine and Ten girls, dances at The Shack, and a soundtrack that leaned heavily towards The Kinks, **Revolver** and **Between the Buttons** had far greater appeal than the bookwork.

In line with the times in regional Queensland, like Mick Jagger, James was unsuccessful in his quest for satisfaction.

As a result, when the Senior results appeared in the **Townsville Bulletin**, they weren't high enough to get him into University.

They might have equated to a job in the Commonwealth Public Service, but father and son negotiated a reasonable compromise.

James would have another go at Senior and would apply himself throughout the year rather than trying to cram two years' worth of study into the last six weeks or so.

In any case, 1967 wasn't a bad year to be repeating Year Twelve.

However, the ongoing search for satisfaction failed to deliver the desired outcome.

With a significant improvement in his result, James was off to University, and there was an additional source of friction.

Doug's plans called for an accountant in the family, but there was no way James was going to cooperate.

He was bound for academia and was looking at History or English Literature.

So he enrolled in the Arts Faculty, had a very enjoyable 1968, and bombed out.

At that point, Doug might have washed his hands of the whole thing and let his son wander off to do whatever, but he had one significant point in his favour.

James would turn twenty in 1969 and would need to register for National Service. If his birthday came up on the ballot, he was bound for the Army and, possibly, Vietnam.

Unless, of course, he was studying.

He needed to return to University, and Doug wasn't paying unless he did Commerce and Economics.

Things might change in the Federal election that was due that year, but, on the other hand, they might not.

In that case, as James could see, he was best off doing a four-year combined Economics and Commerce degree, which should take him through the Federal election after that.

If he could squeeze into the Honours program, he could stretch things further.

He might even be able to sneak into academia rather than accountancy.

Those aspirations went on the back burner after he met Elaine Chin.

Her family was establishing a string of supermarkets and convenience stores across the city and wanted a family member who was suitably qualified to look after the bookwork.

They mightn't have wanted a round-eye son-in-law, and Doug Ballantyne probably wasn't looking for a Chinese daughter-in-law. Still, there were definite advantages to the liaison.

The couple married in 1973.

Ballantyne & Chin, Accountants opened its doors the following year in a joint venture shopping centre on the corner of Ross River Road and Elizabeth Street, across from Nathan Plaza shopping centre and the Aitkenvale Post Office.

Desmond Patrick Ballantyne got a whack across the backside in the Mater Maternity Ward on Fulham Road on 14 February 1976.