

In-depth Coverage Report

Screenwriting Competition 2023

THE LOST PRINCESS

READER'S BIO

Harry is a screenwriter and filmmaker with experience as a script editor on several independent projects. He has worked as a reader with the London-based production company Midsummer Films and led screenwriting workshops for new writers at the University of Kent, where he also won an award in the Best Writing category from the National Student Television Association. Harry holds master's degrees in both Screenwriting and Film. Originally from West Yorkshire, Harry lives and works in South London.

PREMISE

THE LOST PRINCESS presents a world and lineage rich with history and character. However, it often struggles to convey the fundamental emotions behind its complex relationships and the power-play that defines it, despite the intrigue that lies in the relatively unknown goddaughter of Queen Victoria.

Wasting little time, TLP gets to grips with Gowramma's baptism in its first scene. However, despite the reputation of Queen Victoria, we don't really know the significance of this as a transformative step. Though we get brief flashes of Gowramma's past environment shortly thereafter, don't be afraid to make sure we know — through dialogue or through action — exactly how important this is to her. Is she now able to bring attention to her home province, potentially bettering the lives of people there? Yes, she's young, but does a misguided or idle comment cause a chain of action to occur? Find an action or beat that conveys her past and consider how the present might change because of her baptism.

Similarly, though Mrs. Drummond impresses the need to "show progress" to Gowramma, it's difficult to gauge exactly what this means. Feel free to define a threshold for success/failure early on, as well as the consequences of either. If she's appointed her goddaughter, does Queen Victoria tell her the responsibilities she'll have to abide by? Is the confirmation a test of these skills, one that takes the necessary three months (and then additional time for her studies) to prepare for? What does success look like? Is it scoring certain grades? If she fails to do that, what might happen then?

You've done well to bring about some of these ideas within the first fifteen pages as a minor hook, but I'd encourage you to go further. Establishing that pressure early on allows you to build tension much more easily and, more importantly, build a causal chain.

STORY STRUCTURE

Carrying on this notion of causality, feel free to promote Gowramma to a more proactive position in your first act. As it stands, her early struggle with education ("making progress") doesn't impact the more important beat of the move to Edinburgh. Of course, there's logic in Mrs. Drummond not wanting a "bad influence" on Gowramma, but if this was a result of her actions and not a consequence of an off-screen development (from her father's ceremonies), it would be more impactful as a result.

From this, you can develop the chain of events by centring more of the narrative on Gowramma's actions. Once she arrives at Windsor Castle, try to set targets for Gowramma to achieve, in line with the overarching goal of being up to standard for the coronation. As it stands, while she experiences a variety of activities and events, from scene-to-scene (largely), Gowramma is caught in the flow of those around her: brought to new places and told what to do. Naturally, she's a child and being taken care of, but there are many more opportunities you can grasp to push her forward as our protagonist. Does she openly or secretly disobey her guardians, like sneaking off more regularly to meet Patrick before they are discovered by Major Drummond?

In that particular instance, it may be that she manipulates the Drummonds into sending her back to London, insisting that she wants to stay in Edinburgh, prompting them to punish her by sending her back down. There are choices you can make, but putting Gowramma in the driving seat of where she's going and why is critical.

CHARACTERS

The key point for developing Gowramma's character will be to clearly define her goals. While it's tentatively true that she wants to prepare for the coronation, a missing sense of struggle (what it means to succeed and what the consequences are of failing to prepare) undermines this. Is there a separate goal to this idea, one that goes back to the premise? Is it to improve the lives of those back home, perhaps in the ideals/name of her mother (and doing so can be achieved by staying on-track for the coronation)? Is it to fall into a romantic idea of love, as she may have read about or been long inspired by? Again, you can clarify it and structure more of her actions around this, particularly as Duleep enters the frame.

By contrast, Veerarajendra has a relatively clear conflict: he's facing deportation and wants to win the monies owed to him. You may further that latter idea by emphasising the consequences of him failing to get the £15,000 – but it's a nonetheless firm goal for him to develop through his actions. For Gowramma, identifying her end goal early on, beyond enjoying the ride of royalty, is critical to creating a more engaging protagonist.

In future drafts, take care with your "unfilmables". These are internal processes of thought or reasoning that are described, rather than seen. For instance, Veerarajendra is caught early on (pg. 3)

while thinking about Gowramma's mother. However, because we don't have a visual to match this, we can't actually see this on screen. Remember the adage of "Show, don't tell." What action indicates that feeling of *déjà vu*? Do we get a flash or a flashback in this moment? Is there a prop or item he holds that belonged to Devammaji, indicating he's thinking of her? You've got options, but be sure to always consider how an audience might understand that context on-screen and then convey it for them.

SETTING & STORY WORLD

TLP is rich with imperial, colonial and monarchical detail that creates a decidedly authentic, if occasionally overwhelming sense of tone. The opening scene itself proves a meaningful introduction to the nature of the script and, while I would advise the writer to prioritise what does and doesn't need to be mentioned (particularly the multitude of secondary characters), there's something of real value in here. The antiquated tone feels real and will certainly appeal to audiences of monarch-centred projects such as *THE CROWN*.

Going forward, you may find it meaningful to dig into Gowramma's possessions and/or private spaces to represent her change and growth. As she moves from London to Edinburgh, then back to London and elsewhere, does she keep track of her thoughts? Is there a journal of writings or drawings that might reflect her innermost feelings? I bring this up as it's a potentially meaningful way to give us insight into Gowramma's true self, one that exists before the royalty bestowed upon her. This may also take the form of a ceremony or practice from Coorg.

FINAL THOUGHTS & NEXT STEPS

TLP is an evidently studied narrative that digs into the complex reality and power dynamics of the British Empire and royal family, accessed through the experience of Queen Victoria's relatively unknown goddaughter. There's a rich and compelling depiction of this world and one that is wholly convincing. That said, I found it difficult to engage with Gowramma's plot and character as the script continued through its second act, largely due to a few key reasons:

- A lack of clarity in what she wants, secondary to the broad goal she's already on track for, which is completing the coronation.
- A somewhat sluggish pace, down to secondary exposition, repeated action and lack of immediate pressure on Gowramma. The introduction of several secondary characters also contributed to this.
- Gowramma's lack of agency in much of the script, unable to make or influence her own choices and largely being captive to the will of those around her.

There's certainly a future draft that can address these ideas more efficiently, but I'd encourage you to really dig into the concept behind the narrative.

Of course, this is an untold life story and potentially a very fascinating one at that. But I want to know more about why Gowramma is our protagonist and allow the routines and formality of royalty to sit in the background. What does she want and how does the honour of her position allow her to get closer to it? What kind of struggle does she undertake in getting to that goal and what are the risks if she fails? Fleshing out these key ideas and taking a more disciplined approach to the script's secondary

elements will certainly produce an engaging story that still wholly represents Gowramma's true identity.

PROMPTING QUESTIONS

1. Did Gowramma's mother leave her anything after her death?
2. What does it mean for Veerarajendra if he doesn't receive the £15,000?
3. What scenario might result in Gowramma being stripped of her title and/or position?
4. What does Duleep want and does that differ with those around him?
5. Does Veerarajendra utilise Gowramma's position to influence his legal case (what risks might accompany this)?

SCORING GRID

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FINE	SO-SO	NOT GOOD
Artistically		✓			
Commercially				✓	
Genre Positioning		✓			
Premise				✓	
Story Structure				✓	
Main Characters					
Minor Characters			✓	✓	
Dialogue			✓		
Visual Elements	✓				
Themes			✓		
Subplots			✓		
Predictability				✓	
Pacing				✓	
Locations	✓				
Cinematic Feel			✓		
Avoids Clichés, Tropes			✓		
Franchise Potential				✓	



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EXCELLENT ★★★★★

4.93 Average 75 Reviews

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