

BALANTRAE

Feature · Historical Adventure/Family Drama · 93 pages

PASS

STRUCTURE	CHARACTER	DIALOGUE	PACING	PREMISE
6/10	5/10	3/10	4/10	8/10

PASS RATINGS

PREMISE

 Excellent Good Fair Poor

STRUCTURE

 Excellent Good Fair Poor

CHARACTER

 Excellent Good Fair Poor

DIALOGUE

 Excellent Good Fair Poor

ORIGINALITY

 Excellent Good Fair Poor

SCORE CARD

Premise	..	8/10
Originality	6/10
Dialogue	3/10
Structure	6/10
Pacing	4/10
Character	5/10
Tone	4/10
Overall	5/10

LOGLINE

When a coin toss sends his favored twin brother to war in 1745 Scotland, the overlooked Henry Durrisindeer inherits everything – including his brother's fiancée – only to spend twenty years battling James's return as pirate, spy, and extortionist until both brothers must choose between lifelong hatred and dying together.

SYNOPSIS

ACT ONE

In 1745 Scotland, Lord Durie receives word of Prince Charles's rebellion and decrees that one of his twin sons must join the uprising while the other pledges loyalty to England – hedging the family's survival regardless of outcome. James, the older twin and heir, is engaged to Alison Graeme, whom his younger brother Henry secretly loves. The brothers argue bitterly over who will go: James craves glory while Henry argues duty. They flip a coin; James wins the right to war. Alison, devastated, throws the coin through a stained-glass window screaming 'I wish you are killed!' – a curse that will echo through decades. A year later, Colonel Tam Macmorland arrives with news that James died in an ambush at Kulidon. Lord Durie, devastated, convinces the grieving Alison to marry Henry to preserve the family line – though she still loves James and Henry knows it. The marriage is arranged, not chosen.

ACT TWO

James is revealed alive – saved in battle by an Irishman named Francis, he escaped on a ship only to be captured by the pirate Teech. James kills Teech in a duel, becomes pirate captain, accumulates treasure, and flees to America where Francis dies of swamp fever and James murders another pirate to eliminate witnesses before burying his treasure. From Paris, James begins extorting his family – demanding 1000 gold monthly from Henry, who pays secretly to protect his father from the truth. Henry and Alison have a daughter, Katherine, but the marriage remains emotionally distant; Alison fantasizes about James during intimacy. Mackellar, the family steward and Henry's only true friend, eventually reveals the extortion to Alison, who writes to cut off the money. James returns to Scotland. Henry reveals that James has been pardoned by England in exchange for becoming a spy – making his 'heroic' rebellion a sham. Lord Durie still favors James despite everything. James taunts Henry about Alison's enduring love; Henry slaps him with playing cards, demanding a duel. In the snowy yard, Henry wounds James near the heart. Mackellar declares James dead – but when they return for the body, they find only blood and footprints leading to the shore. James has escaped by boat. Henry suffers a complete mental breakdown.

ACT THREE

Alison nurses Henry back to health, and the couple finally begins to reconcile emotionally. Years pass; Lord Durie dies never having acknowledged his favoritism's damage. Henry becomes Lord Durrisindeer. Katherine grows into a young woman who adores her Uncle James despite never

truly knowing him. An aged James returns with his devoted Indian servant Secundra Dass, but the power dynamic has shifted – Henry now possesses evidence of James's piracy and treason. Henry offers James two choices: leave forever with travel money, or live nearby in poverty. James chooses to stay, living in a hut pretending to be a cobbler, continuing to torment Henry. James proposes an expedition to America to retrieve his buried treasure; Henry insists on accompanying him with Mackellar and a guide named Sir William. During the journey, James appears to die – actually a Yoga-induced suspended animation learned from Secundra. When hired men plot to steal the treasure, Secundra revives James, who kills the conspirators. Henry deduces the deception and insists on finding his brother despite warnings of hostile Indians. He finds James and Secundra captured by natives and walks calmly toward them to attempt rescue. In the final battle, Henry, James, William, and Secundra fight side by side against the Indians. All die except Mackellar, whom James knocks unconscious to save him. Mackellar buries the twin brothers together, writing an epitaph naming them 'Lord James-Henry Durie' – finally united as one. On a Scottish shore, Alison and Katherine sense the brothers' deaths.

COMMENTS

STRENGTHS

- The coin toss scene crystallizes the entire story's themes in a single dramatic image. Two brothers, one coin, a decision that will poison twenty years. When Alison throws the coin through the stained-glass window, cursing James, the writer creates a visual metaphor that resonates through every subsequent scene – fate, choice, and love all shattered together. This is sophisticated dramatic construction that announces a writer who understands how to make theme visible.
- The power reversal in Act Three demonstrates genuine structural thinking. For two acts, James holds all the cards – he's the favored son, the romantic figure, the one Alison loves. Then Henry gains evidence of James's piracy and treason, and suddenly the tormentor must choose between exile and poverty. This inversion gives Henry agency he's lacked and creates fresh dramatic tension when the story could have become repetitive. The scene where Henry presents James with his two options is the script's most satisfying moment of character payoff.
- The final image of Mackellar writing 'Lord James-Henry Durie' on a shared grave achieves genuine emotional resonance. After ninety pages of fraternal warfare, the brothers die fighting side by side, and the epitaph acknowledges what the story has been about all along – these two men were halves of a single identity, unable to coexist in life but finally united in death. The parallel scene of Alison and Katherine sensing the deaths from Scotland adds a mystical grace note that elevates the ending beyond simple tragedy.
- The script commits fully to its epic scope, spanning twenty years across four continents with genuine ambition. The Jacobite rebellion, piracy, Indian mysticism, and American frontier violence are woven into a family drama that never loses sight of its emotional core – two brothers who cannot stop destroying each other. This ambition, while creating pacing challenges, demonstrates a writer thinking cinematically about what historical drama can achieve.

WEAKNESSES

- The dialogue throughout requires complete revision by a native English speaker. Beyond the grammatical errors noted in the language assessment, the dialogue lacks the rhythm and subtext that distinguish professional screenwriting. Characters state their feelings directly rather than revealing them through behavior or implication. James's taunts feel written rather than spoken; Henry's suffering is announced rather than dramatized. The biblical Jacob/Esau reference is intellectually interesting but lands with a thud because the delivery is so stilted. Every conversation needs to be rewritten with attention to how people actually speak – with interruptions, deflections, and meanings beneath the words.
- The pacing suffers from significant structural imbalances across multiple sequences. The dining room argument about who goes to war covers the same ground three times before reaching the coin toss – it runs approximately three pages when one would suffice. The pirate sequence (Teech, Francis, treasure burial) runs twelve-plus pages but feels disconnected from the family drama that provides emotional stakes. The money extortion subplot repeats across several scenes without escalation after we understand the situation. Conversely, James's time in India – where he meets Secundra Dass and learns the Yoga abilities crucial to the fake death plot – is rushed through in a single page of montage, undermining the credibility of both Secundra's devotion and the suspended animation. The expedition preparation delays the climax with card games and logistics. The forest chase sequence suffers from confusing geography with deaths occurring off-screen.
- The tonal whiplash between swashbuckling adventure and Gothic family psychodrama undermines both modes. The pirate sequences play like a different, lighter film – Teech is a cartoon villain, the treasure burial is adventure-movie material. But the family scenes aim for the psychological complexity of a Brontë novel. The script never finds a unified tone that can contain both registers. A rewrite should either darken the adventure elements to match the family tragedy or find moments of dark humor in the family scenes that bridge to the adventure. Currently, the reader experiences two different movies awkwardly spliced together.
- Several supporting characters require development to fulfill their dramatic functions – see CHARACTER NOTES for specific analysis of Alison, Lord Durie, and Secundra Dass. Additionally, the script's market positioning is complicated by its period setting and epic scope requiring a substantial budget, while the language issues would immediately disqualify it from serious consideration in its current form. The combination of high production requirements and fundamental craft problems creates a significant commercial obstacle.

CHARACTER NOTES

HENRY DURRISDEER

The younger twin brother of James, Henry begins the story as the overlooked son – less favored by his father Lord Durie, secretly in love with Alison who is engaged to James. He is described with short hair and simple dress, contrasting with James's romantic appearance. His only true friend is Mackellar, the family steward. When James leaves for war and is presumed dead, Henry inherits everything including Alison as his wife – but she never stops loving James, fantasizing about his brother even during intimacy. Henry becomes the target of James's extortion, paying secretly to protect his father from the truth.

Areas for improvement: Henry's passivity in the first two acts, while thematically appropriate, risks losing audience sympathy. He endures too much without fighting back, and his suffering becomes repetitive before the duel provides release. The mental breakdown is stated rather than dramatized – we need to see his psychological unraveling in specific behaviors, not just be told he 'suffers a breakdown.' The script should add earlier moments of resistance, small victories that keep us invested in Henry before his major turn. His reconciliation with Alison after the breakdown happens off-screen; showing this process would strengthen both characters.

Notes: Henry works as a protagonist because his internal conflict is clear and his choices escalate. The scene where he presents James with two impossible options – exile or poverty – is dramatically satisfying because we've watched him suffer for so long. His decision to rescue James despite everything earns the shared epitaph.

JAMES DURRISDEER (MASTER OF BALANTRAE)

The older twin and heir to Durrisindeer, James is the favored son – romantic, reckless, engaged to Alison. He chooses war for glory rather than duty. After being presumed dead, he survives through luck and violence: saved by Francis the Irishman, captured by pirates, killing Captain Teech to take command, murdering witnesses to protect his treasure. He becomes an English spy in exchange for pardon, making his 'heroic' rebellion a sham. He returns repeatedly to torment Henry, using Alison's enduring love and Katherine's adoration as weapons. His servant Secundra Dass is completely devoted to him.

Areas for improvement: James's villainy becomes one-note in the middle acts. After the spy revelation, he has no new tricks – he simply taunts Henry about Alison repeatedly. The script needs to show James's own suffering, his awareness that his choices have cost him everything he wanted. His final act of saving Mackellar suggests redemption, but it's not earned by any earlier moments of doubt or regret. Adding scenes where James recognizes what he's lost – perhaps a moment alone where the romantic adventurer confronts what he's become – would make his death alongside Henry more meaningful. Currently, he's a villain who suddenly becomes a brother in the final pages without adequate transition.

ALISON GRAEME/DURRISDEER

The woman both brothers love; James's former fiancée, Henry's wife

Areas for improvement: Alison is frustratingly passive throughout the script. She rarely makes active choices – she's convinced to marry Henry, she fantasizes about James, she nurses Henry after his breakdown, she senses the brothers' deaths. The one moment of agency (writing to cut off James's money) happens off-screen. The script needs scenes where Alison chooses, where she acts rather than reacts. Her reconciliation with Henry should be dramatized, not summarized. She should have a confrontation scene with James upon his return where she can express her own anger rather than simply being the object of the brothers' conflict.

Notes: Alison represents the impossible position of women in this world – her choices are made for her by men, yet she's blamed for the consequences. Her curse at the coin toss is the script's most memorable moment. Her enduring love for James despite his betrayals creates genuine dramatic tension.

EPHRAIM MACKELLAR

Family steward, Henry's only friend, narrator figure and moral witness

Notes: Mackellar serves his function well – he's the loyal friend who reveals James's extortion to Alison, the witness who survives to tell the story, the one who writes the final epitaph. His hatred of James and love for Henry are clear and consistent. James's decision to save him by knocking him unconscious provides the story's most surprising moment of grace.

LORD DURIE

Father of the twins, whose favoritism poisons their relationship

Areas for improvement: Lord Durie dies without any recognition of his role in destroying his sons' relationship. The script needs at least one scene where he's confronted with the consequences of his favoritism – perhaps by Mackellar or Alison. His death should carry dramatic weight, but currently it's simply reported. A deathbed scene where he either finally acknowledges Henry or tragically fails to do so would give this character the resolution his importance to the story demands.

Notes: Lord Durie's favoritism is the wound that drives the entire story. His decision to hedge bets by sending one son to each side is pragmatic but morally compromising. His continued preference for James even after learning of the extortion and spy status demonstrates how deep this favoritism runs.

SECUNDRA DASS

James's devoted Indian servant who enables the fake death plot

Areas for improvement: Secundra Dass is a plot device rather than a character. We never learn why he's so devoted to James, what James did to earn this loyalty, or what Secundra wants for himself. The India sequence that should establish their relationship is rushed through in montage. For the fake death plot to land emotionally, we need to understand Secundra as a person with his own motivations. Even two scenes – one showing how James earned his loyalty, one showing Secundra's perspective on James's cruelty to Henry – would transform him from exotic servant archetype to actual character.

Notes: Secundra's complete devotion to James and his crucial role in the suspended animation plot make him essential to the story's mechanics. The reveal that he secretly speaks English, allowing him to overhear the treasure-stealing conspiracy, is a clever plot device.

KATHERINE DURRISDEER

Daughter of Henry and Alison, who adores her Uncle James

Areas for improvement: Katherine has no agency or arc of her own. She exists only to complicate Henry's situation and to provide a witness for the final mystical moment. The script could use her more effectively – perhaps she's the one who finally sees through James's charm, or she forces Alison to confront her feelings. Currently she's a plot element rather than a person.

Notes: Katherine's adoration of James despite never truly knowing him is dramatically useful – it's another weapon James uses against Henry. Her sensing of the brothers' deaths alongside Alison provides emotional closure.

MARKET VIABILITY

Genre Fit: Historical adventure dramas have proven viable when executed at the highest level – The Revenant, Master and Commander, Braveheart – but the market has contracted significantly for period pieces without major star attachments. The family drama elements align with prestige television trends (Succession, The Crown) but the epic scope resists the contained storytelling that makes period pieces financially viable.

Comparable Films: ['The Revenant', 'Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World', 'Rob Roy']

Target Audience: Adults 35+ who appreciate literary adaptations and historical drama. This is a prestige audience that supports awards-season releases but represents a narrower theatrical demographic than four-quadrant fare. The Robert Louis Stevenson source material provides some built-in recognition, though The Master of Ballantrae is less known than Treasure Island or Jekyll and Hyde.

Budget Range: high – The script requires period costumes and sets across multiple locations (18th century Scotland, pirate ships, Paris, India, colonial America), battle sequences, and a twenty-year timespan requiring aging makeup or multiple actors. This is a \$40-80 million production minimum, which creates significant risk given the specialized audience.

Notes: The commercial path for this material is likely through a prestige streamer (Netflix, Apple TV+) or as a limited series rather than theatrical feature. The epic scope and literary pedigree align with streaming platforms' appetite for premium content that builds subscriber loyalty rather than opening-weekend box office. However, the language issues must be resolved before any serious commercial consideration – no buyer will engage with a script that reads as translated.

PITCH ANALYSIS

PITCH LOGLINE

A story of rival brothers whose lifelong conflict spans continents and decades, ending only in mutual destruction.

COMPARABLE FILMS

The Revenant	Comparable film
Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World	Comparable film
Rob Roy	Comparable film

HOW TO PITCH IT

"Lead with the central hook. Open with the coin toss – two brothers, one moment, everything that follows."

CONTEST READINESS

CONTEST READINESS SCORE

65/100

The premise – twin brothers whose fates are decided by a coin toss, then spend twenty years destroying each other – is inherently dramatic and would stand out in competition loglines. The coin toss scene and the final shared epitaph demonstrate sophisticated thematic thinking that readers reward. The epic scope shows ambition, and the Robert Louis Stevenson source material lends literary credibility. The power reversal in Act Three and Henry's final choice to rescue James show structural sophistication that elevates this above simple adventure fare.

RECOMMENDED COMPETITIONS

Contest	Why It Fits	Deadline
Austin Film Festival Screenplay Competition	AFF values literary adaptations and character-driven drama over commercial formula – this script's moral complexity and epic family saga fit their aesthetic once the language issues are resolved.	2026-05-27
PAGE International Screenwriting Awards	PAGE's multiple genre categories include drama and historical – the twin brothers' rivalry provides a strong hook for their judging panel once dialogue is polished.	2025-12-01

UPCOMING CONTEST DEADLINES WITH LINKS

■ Deadlines change annually. Always verify current dates on the official website before submitting.

TOP TIER

Austin Film Festival Screenplay Competition

Deadline: Regular: April 24 / Late: May 27, 2026

Industry meetings, cash prizes, festival attendance

One of the most writer-friendly festivals. Strong industry access and mentorship.

→ <https://www.austinfilmfestival.com/submit/screenplay-competition>

PAGE International Screenwriting Awards

Deadline: Multiple rounds Jan-May 2026

\$25,000 Grand Prize + genre category prizes

10 genre categories: drama, comedy, thriller, sci-fi, horror and more. Strong industry judges.

→ <https://pageawards.com>

ScreenCraft Drama Screenplay Competition

Deadline: Rolling deadlines throughout 2026

Cash + meetings with top agents and managers

Strong industry judges and placement record. Ideal for character-driven dramas.

→ <https://screencraft.org/competitions/drama>

Final Draft Big Break Screenplay Contest

Deadline: Early: February / Final: June 2026

\$10,000 + Final Draft software + industry access

One of the largest competitions worldwide. Multiple genre categories.

→ <https://www.finaldraft.com/bigbreak>

BlueCat Screenplay Competition

Deadline: Early: February / Final: May 2026

\$10,000 Grand Prize + written feedback for every entry

Unique: every entrant receives written feedback regardless of placement.

→ <https://www.bluecatscreenplay.com>

MID TIER

Shore Scripts Feature Screenplay Contest

Deadline: Rolling deadlines throughout 2026

Cash prizes + industry meetings

International submissions welcome. Strong track record for drama and literary adaptations.

→ <https://www.shorescripts.com>

TOP TIER

Academy Nicholl Fellowships

Deadline: Now partner-based – apply through official Nicholl partner programs

\$35,000 fellowship

Most prestigious screenwriting fellowship. As of 2026, submissions exclusively through partner university and lab programs. Check site for partner list.

→ <https://www.oscars.org/nicholl>