

BEAST OF BATAAN

Written by

Christopher Carlson & Mark Jean

*Tokyo, Japan - 15 August 1945*

1 INT. IMPERIAL PALACE - TOKYO - DAY 1

A ROYAL RETINUE trails EMPEROR HIROHITO down an empty corridor.

2 INT. IMPERIAL PALACE - DAY 2

In an ornate room, a microphone and a phonograph recorder sits at one end of a long conference table. The room seems strangely empty, until the Emperor settles gravely into a chair, then begins speaking into the mic, in Japanese.

HIROHITO

To our good and loyal subjects --  
we have ordered our Government to  
communicate to the Government of  
the United States that our Empire  
accepts the provisions of their  
Declaration.

3 INT. NHK RADIO STATION - DAY 3

Guarded by MILITARY PERSONNEL, a RADIO ENGINEER puts the record on a turntable, starts the machine, then drops the needle.

HIROHITO (V.O.)

Despite the best that has been done  
by everyone ...

4 EXT. TOKYO STREET - DAY 4

Surrounded by devastation, CITIZENS stop whatever they're doing to listen to their Emperor's broadcast on loudspeakers. They're awestruck, hearing his voice for the first time.

HIROHITO (V.O.)

... the gallant fighting of the  
military and the devoted service of  
our one hundred million people, the  
general trends of the world have  
all turned against Japan's  
interest.

A HOMELESS COUPLE listens in front of a burned out building, their belongings piled in a cart. Nearby, a FIVE YEAR OLD wanders aimlessly.

HIROHITO (V.O.)

Moreover, the enemy has begun to employ a new and most cruel bomb, taking the toll of many innocent lives.

In a simple room, GENERAL MASAHARU HOMMA, 59, his wife FUJIKO, 40, and their two children, HISAKO, 18, and SEISAKU, 16, listen riveted to an old radio, absorbing the shock of their EMPEROR'S SURRENDER.

HIROHITO (V.O.)

Should we continue to fight, it would only result in an ultimate obliteration of the Japanese nation.

Aboard a Japanese destroyer, OFFICERS and ENLISTED MEN listen, crushed and demoralized.

HIROHITO (V.O.)

It is according to the dictate of time and fate that We have resolved to pave the way for a grand peace by enduring the unendurable and suffering what is insufferable.

In a military tent, a JAPANESE GENERAL reaches for his sword. Without hesitation, he commits seppuku.

5 INT. U.S. ARMY BARRACKS/MANILA, PHILIPPINES - DAY 5

In a smoke-filled barracks, GIs HOOT, HOWL and APPLAUD as BLACK & WHITE NEWSREEL plays on an improvised screen -- the JAPANESE SURRENDER aboard the U.S.S. Missouri. Newsreel segues to the arrests of war criminals: TOJO, YAMASHITA -- the 'Tiger of Malaysia,' and HOMMA -- the 'Beast of Bataan.' GENERAL MACARTHUR, surrounded by MILITARY RETINUE, speaks at a PRESS CONFERENCE.

MACARTHUR (ON NEWSREEL)

I promise the American people and the entire free world that Tojo and his military cabal will be brought to trial swiftly. Justice will be served.

Near the front of the barracks, MAJOR JOHN SKEEN, 27, a clear-eyed American patriot, cheers his general.

SKEEN

Thata' boy, Mac -- give 'em hell!

Newsreel segues to a Warner Brothers CARTOON, "Bugs Bunny Nips the Nips. The GIs CHEER.

6 INT. HOTEL MANILA/BALLROOM - NIGHT

6

A SWING BAND PLAYS "GI JIVE" in a decorated ballroom; there's an energy in the air that comes with the end of a long war. Among the DANCERS are Major John Skeen and HELEN WATKINS, 25, an American civilian with girl-next-door good looks and a spirited demeanor.

SKEEN

End of the war, beautiful girl --  
does it get any better?

HELEN

Settle down, soldier, I haven't  
stepped on your toes yet.

SKEEN

Step all you want, doll.

HELEN

Are you really a major, or did you  
just steal those bars?

SKEEN

I stole 'em -- from Major John  
Skeen, 31st Regiment, Artillery.

HELEN

Did he see any action?

SKEEN

He came, he saw, he conquered.

HELEN

That's what they all say.

They share a laugh while spinning through a maze of couples.

HELEN (CONT'D)

When do you ship home?

SKEEN

Counting the days -- I got a wife  
and kid back in Baltimore, plus a  
baby I've never seen. What about  
you?

Before she can answer, another couple swings too close,  
bumping them.

PELZ  
Out of my way, Major!

SKEEN  
Who taught you how to drive?

Snockered, FIRST LIEUTENANT ROBERT PELZ, 27, a dashing New Yorker, snatches Skeen's dance partner.

PELZ  
Sorry, sir, but tonight I dance  
with every girl in Manila!

Pelz and Helen, waving, disappear into the crowd as the band kicks into, "IS YOU OR IS YOU AIN'T MY BABY." Skeen embraces his new partner, a pretty WAC OFFICER.

SKEEN  
End of the war, beautiful girl --  
does it get any better?

Laughing like she's heard it all before, they twirl away.

7

EXT. MANILA PIER - DAY

7

A LINE OF SOLDIERS proceeds slowly toward a SERGEANT who's checking each GI's papers before allowing them to board a NAVAL TRANSPORT SHIP. Skeen pulls two Filipino dolls from his duffel to show CAPTAIN COOK, 25.

SKEEN  
What say, Cookie -- are my kids  
gonna go for these?

COOK  
They'll love 'em -- it's from their  
dad.

LIEUTENANT (O.S.)  
(calling)  
Major John Skeen? Major Skeen?

Skeen turns to see a YOUNG LIEUTENANT hustling up the line. He shares a look with his buddy before acknowledging the summons.

SKEEN  
I'm Major Skeen.

The lieutenant hustles over, salutes, then hands him a sealed order -- Skeen opens it, reads.

SKEEN (CONT'D)

Fucking army -- they want me to report to JAG.

COOK

So don't go -- you were half-way to Baltimore, they never found you.

LIEUTENANT

I'd go along with it, sir.

He indicates TWO MPs approaching along the line -- Skeen crumples the order in his fist.

SKEEN

Son of a ...

(to Cook)

Save my place, I'll be right back!

He grabs his duffel and follows the lieutenant.

COOK

(grinning)

Hey, Jack -- write if you get work.

8 EXT. JAG HEADQUARTERS - DAY

8

A jeep pulls to the curb in front of an ornate mansion, headquarters for JAG (Judge Advocate General). The lieutenant and MPs watch Skeen grab his duffel off the back.

LIEUTENANT

Good luck, sir.

SKEEN

Wait right here.

He climbs the mansion's front steps.

9 INT. COLONEL BROWN'S OFFICE - DAY

9

Skeen enters the office of LT. COLONEL BERNARD BROWN, 55, a by-the-book officer working through stacks of paper.

SKEEN

(saluting)

Major John Skeen, sir.

Brown looks up with tired eyes, indicates Skeen should sit.

SKEEN (CONT'D)

Sir, I hope this won't take long --  
I'm scheduled to ship out at 1300.

BROWN

Sorry to disappoint you, Major, but  
you've been assigned to the Judge  
Advocate General's staff, reporting  
to me.

SKEEN

How could that be, sir, I ...

BROWN

War Crimes. You are now the chief  
defense counsel for General  
Masaharu Homma, the man behind the  
Bataan Death March.

Skeen conceals his shock with good-natured humor.

SKEEN

Excuse me, sir, but this must be a  
mistake -- I did pass the bar, but  
I never tried a case in court, in  
fact, I've never actually been in a  
courtroom, I was commissioned right  
after graduation.

BROWN

Well look at the bright side, Major  
-- now you get some experience.

SKEEN

With all due respect, sir, I  
haven't seen my family in four  
years.

Brown offers a manila folder -- several photographs spill  
onto his desk. Skeen can't avoid the grizzly images:  
emaciated prisoners, a mass grave, a beheaded torso. Brown  
tucks the photos back into the folder and slides it across  
the desk. Skeen doesn't pick it up.

BROWN

Is there a problem, Major?

SKEEN

Believe me, sir, a mistake has been  
made -- I'm not qualified to handle  
this case.

BROWN

Anything else?

SKEEN

Well, yes, sir -- I feel I'm, well, prejudiced, and wouldn't provide satisfactory defense for a Japanese officer.

BROWN

Is that everything?

SKEEN

No, it's not, I've got sixty-five points, I've done everything the Army ever asked, I earned my ticket home -- dammit, sir, I'm shipping out in two hours!

Brown's expression turns grim, his voice ominous.

BROWN

Major Skeen, this goes all the way to the top. General MacArthur. Pick up the folder.

Skeen stares with locked jaw, stunned by the turn of events.

10

EXT. JEEP (TRAVELING) - DAY

10

A grim-faced Skeen drives through the Luzon countryside. Riding shotgun is CAPTAIN FRANK CODER, 30, brusque with stocky build.

CODER

So how we supposed to defend this butcher after what he did to our guys?

Skeen ignores the question. In back, Lieutenant Robert Pelz, 27, the ladies' man with a healthy sense of humor from the Hotel Manila, shakes his head.

PELZ

I know I'd sleep better if I was prosecuting instead of defending.

CODER

I heard he used to entertain his troops by tossing babies in the air and spearing 'em on his sword.

CAPTAIN GEORGE FURNESS, 43, wire-rim glasses, genial with a calm demeanor, dry wit and patrician Boston accent, is reading a file.

FURNESS  
 (disapprovingly)  
 Funny, I haven't come across that  
 yet in the file.

Coming around a bend, the jeep skids to a halt -- a herd of goats are crossing the road.

CODER  
 Oh, yeah, these nips are cruel sons  
 of bitches -- I had a buddy on that  
 March, walked the whole nine yards,  
 let the Beast of Bataan hang is  
 what I say.

The jeep continues on, threading through the goats.

PELZ  
 I can't figure out why they picked  
 me for a big case like this. I've  
 just been doing low level courts  
 martial. What about you guys?

FURNESS  
 I used to do real estate law in New  
 York.

CODER  
 Last I saw a courtroom was the time  
 I got drunk and stole a chaplain's  
 jeep. They made me dig a hole six  
 by six by six, then bury a match.

Laughing, they look to Skeen, who shrugs.

SKEEN  
 I'm in artillery.

PELZ  
 (grinning)  
 Gentlemen -- I believe we're ready.

Skeen pulls to a stop at the guard house of BILIBID PRISON, a decrepit Spanish fortress. He gives the on-duty MP a copy of their orders.

MP  
 Tough luck, sir. Drive ahead.

Skeen accelerates into the prison yard. Pelz taps Skeen on the shoulder.

PELZ

Major, tell me I'm wrong, but I swear you and I have met somewhere before.

Skeen remembers, but he's not in the mood.

SKEEN

I highly doubt it, Lieutenant.

He parks in the shade of the only tree left standing in the barren terrain.

SKEEN (CONT'D)

If you fellas don't mind, once we're inside -- I'll do the talking.

Coder shrugs, a grinning Pelz half-salutes.

11 INT. BILIBID PRISON CORRIDOR - DAY 11

In the dim corridors of Bilibid, the four officers plus assigned Nisei translator KISHIMOTO walk past cells holding JAPANESE PRISONERS and FILIPINO COLLABORATORS. They reach a separate cell-block where MASTER SERGEANT WILLIAMS, 30s, tough and bulky, checks Skeen's papers, then unlocks a heavy wooden door.

12 INT. HOMMA'S CELL - CONTINUOUS 12

The defense team finds Lieutenant General Masaharu Homma, 59, dressed in prison garb, writing at a small field desk in his windowless cell. He stands. Japanese general and American officers stare as if across a firing line. He's not what they expected: tall and powerfully built, a commanding yet disarming presence, handsome.

SKEEN

(to interpreter)

Okay. Tell him my name is Major John Skeen, United States Army.

Kishimoto does SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION -- Homma bows to each attorney as he is introduced.

SKEEN (CONT'D)

This is Captain Furness, Captain Coder and Lieutenant Pelz. We've been assigned to act as his legal counsel.

(MORE)

SKEEN (CONT'D)

His arraignment will be in two days before a United States military tribunal -- does he understand what an arraignment is?

Kishimoto and Homma speak rapidly in Japanese.

KISHIMOTO

Yes, he does.

SKEEN

Good. In order for us to do our job, we'll need to ask him a number of questions.

As KISHIMOTO TRANSLATES, Pelz mutters to Coder.

PELZ

I guess if you have to meet the Beast of Bataan, better here than some jungle, right?

The general's gaze falls on Pelz, unnerving him.

HOMMA

I'm a soldier, Lieutenant Pelz.  
Not a beast.

The Americans are stunned that Homma can speak English.

HOMMA (CONT'D)

The press called General Yamashita the Tiger of Malaysia -- they had to give me a contemptible name, too. It makes for a good headline.

CODER

GIs gave you that name, not the press.

HOMMA

Forgive me, but I haven't spoken English for several years.  
(ironic smile)  
There was a war, so I'm a little out of practice.

Unsure how to interpret this comment, Skeen gathers himself.

SKEEN

Do you want to conduct this interview in English?

HOMMA

As you wish -- I've already spoken with two American Army psychiatrists and some officers from the prosecution.

FURNESS

The prosecution?

HOMMA

At Yokohama. They questioned me for two weeks.

FURNESS

(to Skeen)

That's illegal. Defense counsel should be present when prosecution questions an accused.

HOMMA

In Japan this would be common practice.

CODER

Well, I've got news for you, bud -- you ain't in Japan anymore.

Homma nods deferentially but Skeen gives Coder a look.

SKEEN

Captain Coder, see if we can get transcripts of those interviews.

Homma picks up a sheaf of papers from the desk.

HOMMA

Gentlemen, please, if you will permit, I wrote some notes in preparation for my defense.

He motions for Skeen to sit at the table, for the others to sit on his bunk -- no one accepts the invitation. He puts on his glasses.

HOMMA (CONT'D)

(reading)

Firstly, I wish to thank the United States Army for providing your service and thank you for your impartiality in taking my defense.

Skeen and Furness share a raised eyebrow.

HOMMA (CONT'D)

(reading)

Every commander has his own way of discharging duties. What is good in one country may not hold as much good in another. Especially Oriental way is vastly different from Occidental one and American way is not our way.

CODER

That's for damn sure.

HOMMA

(reading)

Whether I discharged my duty rightly or wrongly should be judged by persons who understand and appreciate our way. Nevertheless, I have tried ...

SKEEN

Okay, thanks -- may I?

Homma gives him a look before handing over his valuable ream of notes.

HOMMA

I have tried to respond to the accusations against me.

SKEEN

We'll be sure to read this.

He gives them to Furness.

SKEEN (CONT'D)

Now tell me, General Homma -- how do you want to plead?

Homma returns Skeen's question with an enigmatic stare.

13

INT. HIGH COMMISSIONER'S RESIDENCE/HOLDING CELL - DAY

13

*Manila - 18 December 1945*

MPs remove Homma's handcuffs in the spartan room. The general struggles to smooth the wrinkles out of his military uniform. The CACOPHONY FROM THE STREET draws him to a barred window. He looks outside.

14 EXT. HIGH COMMISSIONER'S RESIDENCE - CONTINUOUS 14

An apprehensive Skeen leads Furness and Pelz into a THRONG of hostile FILIPINOS, angry GIs and aggressive REPORTERS and PHOTOGRAPHERS. They climb the steps of the elegant, shell-scarred mansion.

15 INT. COURTROOM - DAY 15

Skeen enters a grand ballroom, its floor to ceiling French windows overlooking Manila Bay. He's unnerved by the charged atmosphere of LIGHTS, MOTION PICTURE CAMERAS, POPPING FLASHBULBS and a PACKED AUDIENCE. He takes his place at the defense table as MPs deliver a composed Homma to the adjacent chair. Next to them are translator Kishimoto, Furness, Pelz and Coder. Emerging from a bevy of JAG PROSECUTORS, Schwartz hands Skeen a document. Skeen pages through a list of specifications -- Furness and Pelz read over his shoulder.

DONOVAN (O.S.)  
 (on microphone)  
 Is the accused now ready to enter  
 his plea?

Overwhelmed, Skeen glances up at the five Commission judges seated on an elevated platform: presiding judge MAJOR GENERAL LEO DONOVAN, Filipino MAJOR GENERAL BASILIO VALDEZ, plus BRIGADIER GENERALS ARTHUR TRUDEAU, ROBERT GARD, WARREN McNAUGHT, all men in their 50s and 60s.

SKEEN  
 General Donovan, sir, I -- can we  
 have a minute, please?

Donovan, covering his mic, confers with General Trudeau. Homma anxiously looks from the judges to Skeen whispering with his colleagues -- he can see they're floundering.

DONOVAN  
 (on microphone)  
 How does the accused plead?

SKEEN  
 Sir, at this time, ah, we're seeing  
 five of these specifications for  
 the first time.

Further trying the court's patience, Skeen again confers with colleagues. Unexpectedly, Homma stands, picks up the table microphone -- a HUSH falls over the courtroom.

HOMMA  
 I plead not guilty.

The GALLERY ERUPTS in protest. Skeen, struggling for ballast, glares as Homma sits back down.

DONOVAN

This Commission will reconvene in two weeks -- on the 3rd of ...

FURNESS

Sir, excuse me, please, but we would like to place before the court a motion to postpone trial for two months, in order to locate and interview witnesses, most of whom are now in the United States, China and Japan.

Across the aisle, lead prosecutor Meek confidently stands to address the judges.

MEEK

May I remind the Court of General MacArthur's mandate to proceed expeditiously.

DONOVAN

Motion to postpone denied. Major Skeen, do you have anything else?

SKEEN

No, sir.

DONOVAN

This Commission will reconvene ...

PELZ

General Donovan, may the defense say one thing more, sir?

Skeen looks with annoyance at his colleague.

PELZ (CONT'D)

Sir, these incidents occurred over three years ago. It will take a tremendous amount of research and investigation ...

DONOVAN

I understand that. The Commission will now be in recess and reconvene on the 3rd of January, 1946.

The generals depart as Skeen, steamrollered, gathers his papers without returning the concerned looks of his co-counsel.

FURNESS

What do you think, John?

SKEEN

I think three days ago I was on my way back to Baltimore.

He indicts Homma with an accusatory glance, then shoves papers into his briefcase.

HOMMA

Major Skeen -- you're not the only one who wants to go home.

Skeen stares as the MPs lead Homma away.

16 EXT. HIGH COMMISSIONER'S RESIDENCE - DAY

16

JOURNALISTS confront Skeen with QUESTIONS as he exits the courthouse. Waving off their queries, he starts down the steps, passing a GROUP OF REPORTERS, including New York Times correspondent ROBERT TRUMBULL, gathered around prosecutor Meek.

MEEK

General MacArthur wants to send a message to the whole world that Japanese war mongers will not be tolerated in a civilized society

...

(a look to Skeen)

... and we're confident that all patriotic Americans feel the same way.

TRUMBULL

You'll ask for execution, right?

MEEK

I can tell you this, boys -- it won't be three weeks in Shangri-la.

REPORTERS LAUGH as Skeen escapes down the street.

17 EXT. DOWNTOWN MANILA - DAY

17

Coder navigates past burned out buildings, makeshift merchant stalls, UNEMPLOYED FILIPINOS, WHORES, PICKPOCKETS and EX-GUERRILLAS still in jungle uniform. He enters a two-story building and climbs a narrow stair behind TWO GIs hefting a desk over their shoulders.

18

INT. DEFENSE OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

18

Coder enters an office crowded with ARMY PERSONNEL delivering file cabinets, desks and supplies. He joins Pelz, Furness and Skeen meeting around a conference table -- Skeen stares as Coder nonchalantly grabs an empty chair, spins it around and straddles it. STREET NOISE filters through the open windows.

PELZ

... graduated second in his class from the Military Academy, which I gather is their West Point. An observer with the Brits in France during World War I, and here's the kicker, awarded the British Military Cross. Attaché to the embassy in London, four years. Traveled extensively in Europe, Russia, the Middle East and even the U.S. of A. Resident officer in India, had commands in China and Formosa, regarded as one of their top generals.

Coder scoffs.

PELZ (CONT'D)

But get this -- his first marriage ended in an ugly divorce when the wife decided she'd rather be a geisha. He got the news in London and started drowning his sorrows in the sauce, actually tried to kill himself jumping out a hotel window.

The men exchange looks. Outside, a SIREN BLARES.

PELZ (CONT'D)

In the end, he gave her his entire estate and this is what he said, and I quote, 'I have paid for the funeral of my love.' After that, he had a series of disastrous love affairs until he met a broad by the name of Fujiko, herself already divorced and fifteen years his junior. The psyche boys say high intelligence with a tilt toward the emotional, artistic, which they claim is an unusual profile for a career officer in the Imperial Army.

FURNESS

That's funny -- sounds a lot like  
MacArthur.

Pelz rechecks the file.

PELZ

Oh, yeah -- and he likes to sing in  
the shower.

SKEEN

(smiling)

Okay, thanks, Lieutenant.

(to Coder)

You got a problem with your watch?

CODER

I was detained, but so what -- this  
case is a fucking joke.

There's a tension around the table, which Furness tries to  
diffuse.

FURNESS

John, if you don't mind, I'd like  
to spend a few days looking at case  
law. I think we may have some  
legitimate questions pertaining to  
chain of command.

SKEEN

On what basis?

FURNESS

The charge says he failed to  
control the members of his command -  
- that's not saying he did  
something, it's only saying he  
didn't do something. I've got more  
law to look at, but something here  
doesn't sit right. I think the  
army is opening up a huge can of  
worms, maybe even more than they  
realize.

Skeen and Pelz nod respectfully at the analysis.

SKEEN

That's good, George, keep us  
posted.

(to Coder)

Did you discover anything in the  
prosecution's Q & A at Yokohama?

CODER

He repeats the same bullshit he wrote down on paper, has a comeback for nearly every specification. Just one more sneaky Jap trying to save his yellow ass.

An uneasy silence prevails.

FURNESS

You know, Frank -- it might make it a little easier if you tried to think of it as not defending the enemy, but simply upholding the law.

CODER

You learn that crap at Harvard?

Furness shakes his head with a wry smile.

PELZ

I learned it at City College, but hey, try this one -- every beast is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

CODER

Maybe that works for guys who spent the war pushin' papers around some desk, but not ...

SKEEN

That's it, Coder, we get your point -- and this is mine.

(gives folder)

You're on your way to Tokyo, to track down witnesses and go through archives at the War Ministry.

CODER

Not a chance.

SKEEN

Maybe you're not listening, my friend -- that was an order.

A smiling Coder looks away, watches the army personnel positioning the last desk in the corner.

CODER

Okay, Major -- anything for the war effort.

PELZ

Hey, Frank, really make a run for that General Wachi -- he was Homma's Chief-of-Staff.

CODER

Yeah, sure. When I find him, I'll run a bamboo shoot right up his ass.

SKEEN

Look, Coder, none of us want to be here, so just do the job.

CODER

I've been doing the job from Leyte to Mindanao, this is nothing to me -  
- what about you, Major, where did you serve?

Skeen clenches his jaw, doesn't answer.

CODER (CONT'D)

Right. You'll get your witnesses.

He grabs the folder and goes. In the awkward silence, the irrepressible Pelz raises his hand.

PELZ

Can I go home now?

SKEEN

Sure -- go see Colonel Brown about getting yourself replaced.

PELZ

I tried that already.

SKEEN

Yeah -- me, too.

They share a smile.

FURNESS

I'd suggest you gentlemen stick around. This is the biggest trial any of us will ever see.

SKEEN

Too bad our client's guilty as sin.

PELZ  
 (joking)  
 As your attorney, sir -- I would  
 advise keeping that to yourself.

They laugh, their first lighthearted moment in days.

19

INT. JAG HEADQUARTERS - DAY

19

In a darkened office, Skeen and lead prosecutor LT. COLONEL FRANK MEEK, 40, and Naval officer LIEUTENANT BENJAMIN SCHWARTZ, 35, view confiscated JAPANESE FILM on a pull-down screen: an imposing GENERAL HOMMA on horseback reviewing his TROOPS.

MEEK  
 There's your boy, Major.

SCHWARTZ  
 Cuts quite the profile.

Ignoring their comments, Skeen keeps his eyes on the screen: AMERICAN and FILIPINO POWs MARCHING along a dusty road.

MEEK  
 This was their staging area near  
 Balanga.

Image of JAPANESE GUARDS herding POWs at bayonet-point.

SKEEN  
 How did we come by this?

MEEK  
 Confiscated from a Jap film unit.  
 Somebody obviously made a big  
 mistake leaving this baby in the  
 can.

Image of GIs lapping water from a dirty puddle.

SCHWARTZ  
 I must say -- it's very generous of  
 them to let us see their home  
 movies.

Image of HEADLESS CORPSE tied to a tree.

MEEK  
 That's just the kind of people they  
 are -- damned considerate.

The horrific images flicker across Skeen's face.

20

INT. JAG HEADQUARTERS - DAY

20

Meek escorts Skeen from the screening room into JAG's central office, a large hall decorated for Christmas; a STAFF OF ARMY LAWYERS, SECRETARIES, CLERKS and ASSISTANTS work full-tilt with CLACKING TYPEWRITERS and RINGING PHONES.

MEEK

I'd invite you to sit down for a drink but I'm due at Colonel Brown's office.

(offering hand)

Anyway, Major, next time I pour.

SKEEN

(shaking hands)

Colonel, there is one thing. Some of us were a little concerned that Homma was interviewed in Yokohama without defense counsel present.

MEEK

(laughing)

Oh, come on, Major -- did you actually think I was going to sit on my hands when we'd just captured the most notorious criminal of the war?

SKEEN

It's a question of fairness, sir.

MEEK

'Fair?' Is that what you just said, Major? Fair? Because if it is, I would ask whether your General Homma thought about fairness when he forced 75,000 soldiers to march eighty miles with no food and no water under a tropical sun for days on end and subject them to the most heinous acts of torture. Was that fair, Major?

(Skeen is silenced)

One more thing -- the Commission doesn't want the accused wearing that Jap general's uniform in court.

He turns on his heel, leaving Skeen in his wake.

21 INT. HOMMA'S CELL - NIGHT

21

Homma tears the blankets off his bunk and throws the ragged futon against the wall. He's stomping on his bedding when the cell door opens -- Skeen stands in the threshold carrying a rumpled gray suit on a hanger.

HOMMA

Bedbugs.

He tosses the futon and blankets back on the bunk, then invites Skeen to sit at the desk.

SKEEN

You'll wear this at the trial.

He lays the suit on the bunk.

SKEEN (CONT'D)

Best I could do.

Homma doesn't respond, his gaze riveted on the suit. Skeen sits in the chair opposite the desk.

SKEEN (CONT'D)

Alright, if you don't mind, I'd like to get started. There's a lot of ground to cover.

HOMMA

I admired General MacArthur. I thought of him as a good soldier and was quite satisfied to have fought against him for my honor. But now -- why must he rob me of my self-respect?

SKEEN

This was a decision by the Commission, not MacArthur.

HOMMA

I think you are naive, Major.

SKEEN

Maybe that's my problem because I'm having trouble trying to figure out how to defend you against the charges -- bayoneting, beheading, burying alive ...

HOMMA

Major Skeen, your own American army, its discipline worthy of the highest praise, committed hundreds of crimes in Japan during the first months of occupation, including rape, robbery, murder.

SKEEN

That's got nothing to do with this.

HOMMA

Sorry -- I believe no American commander is awaiting trial for these crimes.

SKEEN

Are you telling me you excuse this behavior?

HOMMA

I do not.

SKEEN

Then help me understand why so many atrocities occurred under your command?

HOMMA

Major, did you lead an army into battle?

SKEEN

I'll ask the questions.

HOMMA

Men can do terrible things they would never contemplate in the peace time. It's a kind of insanity. Some allowance should be made for this state of mind.

He picks up the despised suit and hangs it from a crevice in the cement wall.

HOMMA (CONT'D)

If you don't mind, I am feeling very tired.

Dismissing his attorney, Homma lies down on his bunk. None too happy, Skeen goes to the door and raps impatiently.

SKEEN

Have it your way, General.

Homma hears the door open, then slam shut.

22 EXT. TOKYO - DAY

22

Coder drives his jeep through the shattered remnants of an urban neighborhood, staring at the pitiful sight of REFUGEES living in its skeletal remains. When the jeep stops at a checkpoint, Coder is surrounded by ragged children begging for handouts. He shoos them away and continues on.

23 INT. TOKYO/WAR MINISTRY - DAY

23

CAPTAIN SANGER leads Coder down a corridor filled with U.S. ARMY PERSONNEL and JAPANESE BUREAUCRATS. They enter a small office where SONOKO, 25, pretty and demure, waits nervously.

SANGER

This will be your office for the next few weeks. Sorry it's not bigger.

Coder drops his briefcase on the desk.

CODER

Better than a foxhole.  
(pointing at Sonoko)  
What's this?

SANGER

This is Sonoko Sasaki. The Colonel thought you could use an assistant.

CODER

Don't need it. I'm kind of a one man show here.

SANGER

Unless you speak Japanese, a translator is pretty much a necessity.

Sonoko, avoiding eye contact, stands and bows. Grunting, Coder sits at his desk and starts pulling papers from his briefcase.

SONOKO

Excuse please, Captain Coder, but I wish to thank you for this honor. Before the war I studied English at the Iowa State.

CODER  
 (ignoring her)  
 That's great.

SONOKO  
 I was asked to search for General  
 Homma's 14th Army records.

CODER  
 Well, good -- that should keep you  
 busy.

She picks a box off the floor and puts it on Coder's desk,  
 then points to a dozen others stacked in the corner.

SONOKO  
 It is the full archive, including  
 orders of each day, medical records  
 and all court martial.

Coder's unable to conceal his surprise. Sanger gives him a  
 'see what I mean' look.

SANGER  
 I'll let you two get acquainted.  
 If you need anything, just give a  
 shout.

After Sanger departs, Coder glances at his new assistant.

CODER  
 What did you say your name was?

24 INT. HOSPITAL TENT - DAY

24

Underneath a huge Red Cross tent, Skeen scans through  
 paperwork at a make-shift admitting desk; FILIPINA NURSES  
 assist PATIENTS, both American and Filipino, with their  
 physical therapies; a small group of CHRISTMAS CAROLERS  
 stroll among the beds -- there's a spindly Christmas tree in  
 the corner.

HELEN  
 Hey, Major.

He turns to see Helen Watkins, dressed in Red Cross uniform  
 and carrying a tray of blood samples.

SKEEN  
 Well, hello, there ...

HELEN

Don't you remember our dance,  
soldier?

SKEEN

Oh, yeah -- Hotel Manila. What are  
you doing here?

HELEN

I'm a volunteer. I can empty a  
bedpan with the best of them. My  
name's Helen. Helen Watkins.

SKEEN

John Skeen.

HELEN

I know. I saw your picture in the  
paper yesterday. What's all this  
about you and the war crime  
business, I thought you were  
practically home.

SKEEN

I was, until the army suddenly  
decided I was a lawyer.

HELEN

The trial hasn't even started and  
you're already famous.

A new arrival passes by on a stretcher -- she checks to see  
the identity of the patient.

SKEEN

Don't remind me -- reporters from  
all over the globe, movie cameras,  
I mean, everybody and his brother  
is watching this thing and I'm a  
guy who doesn't even like to get  
his picture taken.

HELEN

Better get used to it.

A FILIPINA NURSE arrives with a chart.

NURSE

Sir -- I'm sorry but the patient  
you're looking for, Captain  
Koznicky, died yesterday.

Skeen closes his briefcase.

SKEEN

(to Helen)

He was an aide to General Wainwright, actually sat at the table when we surrendered to Homma at Corregidor.

HELEN

He wouldn't have testified for you -  
- Peter hated the Japanese, they tortured him.

SKEEN

Was he a friend?

A pained look crosses her face.

HELEN

All the boys from Bataan are my friends.

Her eyes fill with tears.

SKEEN

You okay? I didn't mean to ...

HELEN

I should go.

Puzzled, he watches her hurry away.

25

INT. BILIBID PRISON CORRIDOR/HOMMA'S CELL - DAY

25

Sergeant Williams carries two cups of coffee down the corridor, unlocks Homma's cell, then enters. Homma sits at the desk swatting mosquitos and calmly answering Skeen's questions.

SKEEN

General King turned over all vehicles to your forces on the day of surrender in Bataan -- why didn't you use them to help transport the prisoners?

Williams places the cups on the desk and leaves.

HOMMA

This is a good question. In the last days of fighting, the American army intentionally destroyed most vehicles. We had no parts for repair.

(MORE)

HOMMA (CONT'D)

(slight smile)

The 14th Army was by no means mechanized. Our primary transportation was walking and bicycle. I even had to purchase 3000 Filipino ponies.

Skeptical, Skeen makes a note on his clipboard. Homma hands a coffee to his attorney, takes the other for himself.

SKEEN

Explain to me who was in charge of the transport and feeding of prisoners?

HOMMA

That was General Kawani.

SKEEN

Where do we find him?

HOMMA

He's dead. Committed seppuku after the surrender. But you should talk to General Takatsu -- it was his responsibility to carry out the order.

SKEEN

Takatsu?

(flipping through notes)

He's a witness for the prosecution.

Homma can't hide a look of betrayal.

HOMMA

I'm not surprised. This is a difficult time for us -- everyone is afraid they are the next one to be arrested.

SKEEN

Okay, what about specification 4?

(reading)

'Widespread raping and brutal mistreatment of American and Filipino women throughout ...

HOMMA

I prosecuted every case of rape brought to my attention, we court-martialed over one hundred men.

(MORE)

HOMMA (CONT'D)

If my conscience wasn't clear, do you think I would have given myself up to the Americans? It is not the way of the Japanese to be alive with shame.

SKEEN

So tell me this -- did you and your conscience ever meet up with 1,200 American soldiers marching to their death on the East Road?

Homma stands, manifesting his full stature as an Imperial General.

HOMMA

(CURSES in Japanese)

I was fighting a war in Corregidor, not supervising prisoners!

Skeen glares at his client.

SKEEN

I would advise you not to raise your voice in court.

HOMMA

I'm simply trying to explain my feelings concerning these charges.

SKEEN

Your feelings are irrelevant.

He abruptly goes to the door, knocks. The general shakes his head in frustration.

SKEEN (CONT'D)

Lt. Pelz will come by this afternoon to discuss your decision to bomb Manila after General MacArthur declared it an open city, and ...

HOMMA

It's a false charge -- MacArthur was warehousing materiel for his troops there.

SKEEN

... and Captain Furness will come tonight to go over your attack on the white flag at Corregidor.

HOMMA  
Wainwright lied to me!

The door opens and Skeen departs. Homma angrily sweeps his papers off the desk.

26 EXT. WACK WACK CLUB/VERANDA - NIGHT

26

With the SOUNDS OF SWING echoing from the club, Helen gazes out at harbor lights; at night, the devastation of Manila isn't so visible. Skeen, carrying two beers, threads past OTHER COUPLES to join her at the railing. He shows her a coin.

SKEEN  
Look what I got back in change -- a  
Japanese yen. Want a souvenir?

HELEN  
No thanks.

He takes aim and fires -- the coin pings the helmet of an MP on the street. The guard looks around, wondering where it came from. Skeen and Helen smother their laughter.

HELEN (CONT'D)  
Good shot.

SKEEN  
My first hit of the war.

HELEN  
(toasting)  
Death to the Emperor.

SKEEN  
(clinking bottles)  
Banzai.

From inside the club, the MUSIC STOPS and the SINGER'S VOICE can be heard on the microphone.

SINGER (O.S.)  
Okay, people, this is it ... ten,  
nine, eight ...

HELEN  
C'mon, we're going to miss it!

She grabs his hand and leads him running across the veranda and into the club. Laughing, they thread past exuberant SOLDIERS and CIVILIANS to the edge of a packed dance floor.

SINGER/CROWD

... three, two, one -- Happy New Year!!!

Bedlam. Helen and Skeen share a smile, then kiss -- she's more passionate than he expected. When they part, he sees that she's crying. The celebration swirls around them as the BAND PLAYS "Auld Lang Syne."

HELEN

I'm sorry, I didn't, I just didn't think another year would get by ...

SKEEN

Helen, what's the matter?

HELEN

(wiping tears)

My husband was on the Death March. That's why I'm in the Philippines. A platoon buddy said he saw Tommy at the start of the March, near Mariveles, but somewhere along the road, he disappeared -- back up to the mountains or ...

(fights emotion)

... either I find him or they give me his dogtags.

He opens his arms and gives her a comforting hug. She looks over to Pelz, who's got a girl in each arm -- he kisses one, then the other, long and hard. She can't help but laugh. Skeen taps Pelz on the shoulder.

SKEEN

Happy New Year, Bob -- don't forget to come up for air.

Pelz surfaces, his face smeared with lipstick.

PELZ

I'll breathe tomorrow. Tonight, I'm on a mission from God.

He plants a wet kiss on Helen.

PELZ (CONT'D)

I'll be right back. Keep me at the top of your dance card.

SINGING along with the BAND, he claims a kiss from every woman in the club. Furness emerges from the raucous crowd, throws an arm around Skeen and Helen.

FURNESS  
Hey kids, welcome to 1946!

27 INT. BILIBID PRISON - SAME 27

CAMERA DRIFTS down the corridor past despondent prisoners as a VOICE SINGS an emotional Japanese New Year's song. CAMERA settles on Homma, his face pressed against the bars of his cell door window.

28 EXT. MANILA STREET - LATER 28

Skeen and Furness, both drunk, stagger along a city street littered with New Year's carnage and other STRAGGLERS. An ACCORDION ECHOES from a small bar where some REPORTERS are serenading TWO pretty FILIPINAS.

SKEEN  
... I'm telling you, I put in for action, I did, it's the god-damn Army's fault, they kept me teaching artillery in Oklahoma four stinkin' years. How'm I supposed to call myself a soldier, know what I'm saying? Oh, I was trainin' for the Japan invasion, but then we dropped the big one. So there you have it.

FURNESS  
We're alive, Johnny boy.

SKEEN  
Agghhh, I dunno ...

They reach the neighborhood whore house where scantily clad FILIPINAS motion them inside.

HOOKER  
Hey, soldier -- fifty cent short time, all night, one dollar, good deal.

FURNESS  
C'mon, let's start the New Year right. My treat.

SKEEN  
No, no. I got Dorothy waiting.

FURNESS

Not me -- I'm the one soldier in Uncle Sam's army doesn't give a rat's ass if I ever get home. If you met my wife, you'd understand.  
(referencing the hookers)  
You sure?

SKEEN

(grinning)  
Good night, Captain.

He salutes, then enters the adjacent door as the Filipinas engulf Furness. Skeen staggers up a flight of stairs to his spartan APARTMENT, where he collapses on the couch.

29 EXT. JEEP (TRAVELING) - DAY

29

Pelz drives on a war damaged road through an up-scale section of Manila. Hung over, Skeen leans out the window, pukes, then settles back in his seat. Pelz gives him a handkerchief.

PELZ

You'll never guess what Homma's favorite book is.

SKEEN

Mein Kampf?

PELZ

Nope, one of ours -- Gone With the Wind.

SKEEN

(imitating Gable)  
Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn.

Laughing, Pelz turns into a driveway with locked gate patrolled by FILIPINO SOLDIERS.

30 EXT. VARGAS HOUSE/TERRACE - DAY

30

Sipping coffee on a terrace overlooking Manila, Pelz questions JORGE VARGAS, 60s, a white-haired Filipino aristocrat, while Skeen, hunched over the rail, looks out over the war-torn city.

PELZ

What were your day-to-day dealings with General Homma?

VARGAS  
Very little.

PELZ  
With all due respect, you were the mayor, sir, and you had no dealings with the Japanese commander?  
(he shrugs)  
Would you know why Homma was recalled to Tokyo only three weeks after conquering the Philippines?

VARGAS  
No.

PELZ  
We have a report that you and the general played tennis together, on a weekly basis.

VARGAS  
I don't remember.

Skeen takes a seat across from Vargas.

SKEEN  
Look, Mr. Vargas, we're not here to arrest you. Our sole purpose is to gain information that might be useful in the defense of our client. Please.

Vargas lights a cigarette, inhaling deeply.

VARGAS  
Do you want them to shoot me as a collaborator? It's not a propitious time to identify oneself with a Japanese commander.

Skeen and Pelz share a somber look.

PELZ  
Do you think Homma should hang for what happened in the Philippines?

VARGAS  
Masaharu was a good man, but I'm afraid he is a victim of circumstance. Let me tell you something so you won't be wasting your time ...

31 INT. HOLDING CELL - DAY

31

*Manila - 3 January 1946*

In his rumpled suit and tie, handcuffed, Homma stands by the window gazing sadly toward the sea.

VARGAS (V.O.)  
... no Filipino will testify for  
him in your courtroom.

MPs unlock the cuffs, then escort him down a hallway toward the DIN of the courtroom.

EXT/INT. HIGH COMMISSIONER'S RESIDENCE - DAY

Patrolling the courthouse steps, MPs monitor Filipinos simmering behind barriers as CAMERA CRANES through the mansion's tall windows to find prosecutor Meek as he stands confidently before the Commission judges.

MEEK  
The prosecution is ready.

Homma watches attentively as a nervous Skeen rises from his chair.