

A green American engineer, captured after the fall of the Philippines, must survive the Bataan Death March, hell ships, and a brutal Chinese labor camp—while forging an unlikely alliance with a British spy and Chinese resistance fighters—to bring himself and his men home.

8	~8 hr	\$24.85M	\$3.11M	57 Days	2 Countries
EPISODES	RUNTIME	TOTAL BUDGET	AVG / EP	SHOOT	LOCATIONS

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Project Overview

A limited series based on true historical events — a cross-border production spanning the Philippines, China, and the United States

● Key Facts

Title	Guests of the Emperor
Genre	Historical War Drama / Survival / Resistance
Format	8 Episodes × 55–70 min / Approx. 480 min total
Tone	Gritty, Earnest, Historically Immersive, Morally Complex
Rating	TV-MA (Mature Audiences)
Producer	Douglas Ross, p.g.a.
Historical Basis	Bataan Death March, Hell Ships, Hoten Camp, Unit 731
Core Themes	Resistance · Friendship · Betrayal · Justice vs. Revenge · Memory & Silence

● Key Differentiators

GENERIC POW DRAMA	GUESTS OF THE EMPEROR
American-centric	Multi-national ensemble (US, UK, Filipino, Chinese, Nisei)
Villains as caricatures	Complex antagonists (Murada's tragic arc, Matsuda's bureaucratic evil)
Prisoners as passive victims	Active resistance (sabotage, espionage, Chinese underground)
War ends at liberation	Postwar reckoning (Unit 731 cover-up, Fort Detrick, security certificates)
One-note tone	Range: survival horror, buddy drama, spy thriller, legal reckoning

● Logline

"A green American engineer, captured after the fall of the Philippines, must survive the Bataan Death March, hell ships, and a brutal Chinese labor camp—while forging an unlikely alliance with a British spy and Chinese resistance fighters—to bring himself and his men home."

Budget Analysis

Total budget US\$24,850,000 — leveraging Hengdian partnership, ~50–60% savings vs. traditional production

\$24.85M

Grand Total

\$23.90M

Subtotal (A–F)

\$0.95M

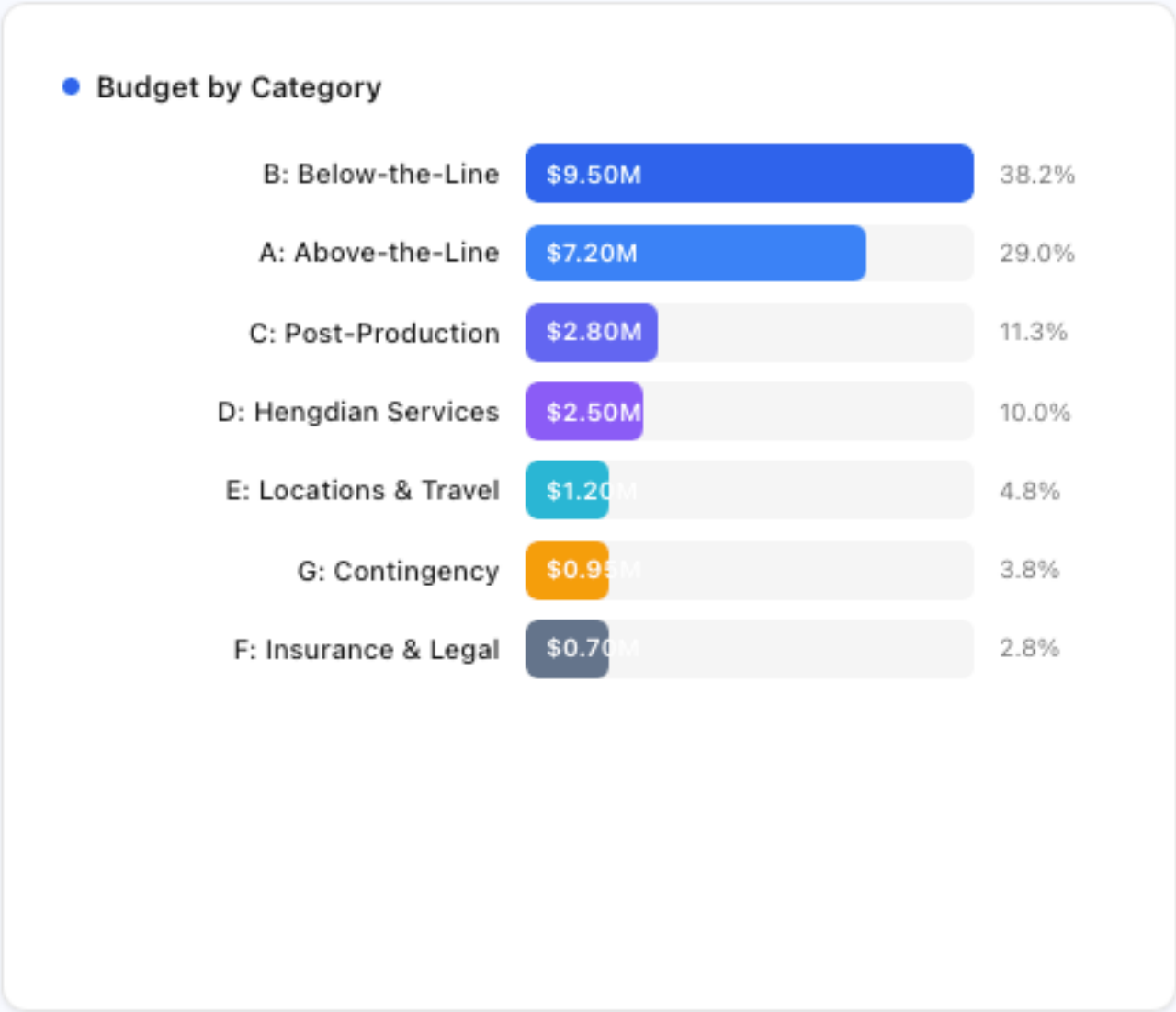
15% Contingency

\$3.11M

Cost Per Episode

~50%

Hengdian Savings



● Hengdian Cost Advantage

LINE ITEM	TRADITIONAL	WITH HENGDIAN	SAVINGS
Locations & Sets	\$3–5M	\$500K	~80%
Costumes & Props	\$1–2M	\$200K	~80%
Extras	\$1M	\$200K	~80%
VFX	\$5–8M	\$3–4M	~40%
Local Crew	\$2–3M	\$1M	~60%
Travel & Lodging	\$2–3M	\$1M	~60%
Total	\$40–60M	\$20–30M	~50–60%

Note: Hengdian World Studios provides ~80% of sets pre-built — 1930s–40s Chinese streets, Japanese-occupied city, factory interiors, prison camp, etc.

● **A: Above-the-Line \$7.20M**

A1 Writer/Producers	\$1.85M
A2 Directors	\$0.75M
A3 Lead Cast (3)	\$3.38M
A4 Supporting Cast (12)	\$0.69M
A5 Day Players/Stand-ins	\$0.15M
A6 Casting	\$0.12M
A7 Other (Legal/Agents/PR)	\$0.56M

● **B: Below-the-Line \$9.50M**

B1 Production Mgmt	\$0.31M
B2 Camera Dept	\$0.81M
B3 Lighting & Grip	\$0.61M
B4 Sound	\$0.11M
B5 Art Dept	\$0.61M
B6 Wardrobe & Makeup	\$0.58M
B8-10 Local/Transport/Catering	\$0.61M
B7 Equipment & Misc	\$5.86M

● **C: Post-Production \$2.80M**

C1 Editorial	\$0.19M
C2 Visual Effects	\$0.96M
C3 Sound Post	\$0.26M
C4 Music	\$0.37M
C5 Color & Finishing	\$0.19M
C6 Titles & Graphics	\$0.12M
C7 Deliverables	\$0.13M
C8 Post Supervision	\$0.08M

Episode Breakdown

An 8-episode narrative arc — from innocence lost to postwar reckoning

EPISODE 1

The Builder

\$2,800,000

A young American engineer leaves his family for peacetime Manila, only to watch his world collapse when Japan attacks. Bill and Perry speed through blacked-out Manila as air raid sirens wail.

EPISODE 2

First Blood

\$3,200,000

Bill survives his first combat at Lingayen Gulf, witnessing heroism and horror before the retreat to Bataan. The American flag is lowered. The surrender begins.

EPISODE 3

The March

\$3,500,000

On the Bataan Death March, Bill watches men die by the thousand — and learns the cost of witness. "Never give up" is born. Díaz is shot.

EPISODE 4

Never Give Up

\$2,500,000

Survivors reach Cabanatuan, where starvation and disease kill half the camp. Perry's mentorship gives Bill purpose. Hope flickers.

EPISODE 5

Guests of the Emperor

\$3,200,000

The hellish voyage to Japan-occupied China. Prisoners meet their jailers — including a sadistic Nisei guard. "I will not rest until the last of you dies."

EPISODE 6

The Factory

\$2,800,000

Bill and Perry build a secret resistance network with Chinese patriots Lao Gao and Li Lishui — and begin sabotaging Japanese production. Murada's backstory revealed.

EPISODE 7

The Escape

\$3,000,000

Three prisoners attempt a desperate escape. Betrayal leads to a public execution that shatters the camp's soul. Bill is dragged to the blockhouse — 30 days alone in the dark.

EPISODE 8

Never Again

\$3,850,000

The B-29 raid, the atomic bomb, liberation — and the impossible task of returning home to a country that wants him to forget. Bill confronts a Unit 731 doctor working for America.

● Budget Distribution by Episode



Blue bars = Peak-budget episodes (Ep3 Death March, Ep5 Hell Ship, Ep8 Finale)

Character Guide

A multi-national ensemble — American, British, Chinese, and Japanese-American destinies intertwined

LEAD · Protagonist

LT. WILLIAM "BILL" ANDERSON

Late 20s, American civil engineer. From innocent idealist to battered survivor — carrying terror, decency, and hard-won authority in the same frame. A full arc from insecure everyman to broken survivor, with a postwar button that haunts.

Arc: Innocent idealist → Battered survivor

Casting: Tom Hanks / Colin Firth lane — restrained, emotionally legible, early 30s

TIER 1 · Mentor

MAJOR ROBERT PERRY

40s, British MI6 intelligence officer. Anderson's mentor, chess partner, and moral counterweight. Multilingual, married to a Chinese woman, revealed late as an intelligence operative. Intelligence as armor.

Arc: Hidden identity → Spiritual anchor

Casting: Ralph Fiennes / Benedict Cumberbatch lane — must speak Mandarin convincingly

TIER 1 · Antagonist

LT. DAVID MURADA

20s–30s, Japanese-American (Nisei). Stanford-educated, his family lost everything to internment. Now brutalizes American POWs to prove his loyalty to Japan. A villain with tragic backstory, not caricature.

Arc: Victim → Abuser → Self-destruction

Casting: Michael Fassbender lane — volatile, wounded rage beneath sadistic calm

TIER 1 · Chinese Hero

LAO GAO 老高

50s, Chinese factory foreman. The moral anchor of the series. Dignified, resourceful — feeds, protects, and aids the POWs while his own family starves. Years of grief behind stoic eyes.

Arc: Silent observer → Backbone of resistance

Casting: Ken Watanabe lane — quiet authority, emotional restraint

TIER 2 · Comic Relief

SGT. JOE CHAPMAN

30s, streetwise, gambling, wisecracking enlisted man. Funny until he's not — escape attempt leads to execution. Comic relief turned tragic.

Arc: Comic relief → Escapee → Executed

Casting: 30s, can play both "funny" and "broken"

TIER 2 · Betrayer

CPL. PETE ALIOTTO

19, young, nervous, vulnerable. Betrays the escapees under torture. The collapse of innocence.

Arc: Innocence → Broken → Betrayal

Casting: ~19, must convey fear and moral struggle

● Additional Characters

CHARACTER	DESCRIPTION	ARC
S1C. FERDINAND MERINGOLD (20s)	Soft-eyed, fragile — the tragic heart of the escape	Fragility → Executed
LI LISHUI 李立水 (Teen)	Brave Chinese boy who helps the prisoners	Child's perspective → Heroism
COL. GENJI MATSUDA (50s)	Camp commander. Bureaucratic evil, not sadistic	Mask of order → Collapse
DR. ISAHATO YOSHIMURA (40s)	Unit 731 doctor, vivisections. Postwar: works for America	Evil as science → Immunity
JEAN ANDERSON (20s)	Bill's wife. Grounds the home front	Waiting and longing
JULIE ANDERSON (6→9)	Bill's daughter — the face of what he's fighting for	Growing up as anchor
SGT. JORGE DÍAZ (20s)	Filipino soldier. Dies heroically on the Death March	A hero's fall
YOSHIO KAI (20s)	Nisei engineer, conflicted, helps sabotage	Torn loyalties

Market Analysis

WWII drama demand is strong, but the China-Burma-India theater, the hell ships, and the moral compromise of Unit 731 have never been fully dramatized

● Market Gaps This Series Fills

- 1

The CBI theater is underrepresented — most WWII dramas focus on Europe or the Pacific islands
- 2

The "Hell Ships" have never been dramatized — tens of thousands of POWs died in these floating coffins
- 3

Unit 731 is a buried horror — the US-granted immunity for biological weapons data has never been fully explored on screen
- 4

The Nisei traitor is a complex antagonist — Japanese-American citizens who fought for Japan are a fraught, unexplored corner of WWII history
- 5

Chinese resistance is not a footnote — Lao Gao and Li Lishui represent thousands of civilians who risked everything to help Allied POWs

● Comparable Titles

TITLE	PLATFORM	PARALLEL TO GUESTS
The Pacific	HBO	Intimate, brutal, character-driven → Multi-front survival arc
All the Light We Cannot See	Netflix	Emotional, visual, hope amid horror → Civilian resistance thread
Transatlantic	Netflix	Forgotten history, ensemble, urgency → Cross-cultural alliance
Masters of the Air	Apple	Prestige production, true events, male ensemble → Brotherhood under fire
The Zone of Interest	A24	Evil as bureaucratic, morally complex → Matsuda, Murada, Ishii
Shōgun (2024)	FX	Cross-cultural, political, brutal → Proves FX can do Japan-era prestige

"Band of Brothers showed us the European theater. The Pacific showed us the island campaign. Guests of the Emperor shows us the forgotten war."

● Platform Fit Analysis

Netflix

High Fit

Global reach, successful WWII originals (Transatlantic, All the Light), appetite for international stories

⚠ Possible saturation? But Guests is distinct

Apple TV+

High Fit

Prestige branding, Masters of the Air audience, deep pockets

⚠ Slower release cadence

HBO / Max

Medium Fit

Historical drama pedigree (The Pacific, Band of Brothers)

⚠ New leadership post-merger, WWII saturation

Amazon Prime

Medium Fit

International co-production model

⚠ Mixed track record with prestige drama

● Primary Audience

DEMOGRAPHIC	%	APPEAL
Men 35–65	45%	War history, survival stories, male ensemble
Women 35–65	35%	Character-driven drama, emotional arcs, family stakes
History Enthusiasts	15%	Accurate period detail, untold stories
International (Asia)	5%	Chinese co-production, cross-cultural cast

● Secondary Audience

DEMOGRAPHIC	APPEAL
Veterans & Military Families	Authentic POW experience, brotherhood themes
Japanese-American Viewers	Murada's complex backstory (provocative, potentially controversial)
Chinese Domestic Market	Lao Gao, Li Lishui as resistance heroes, Hengdian production stamp

Production Plan

Hengdian World Studios strategic partnership — 80% sets pre-built + Chinese market rates

● Shooting Plan (~57 Days Total)

LOCATION	EPISODES	DAYS	CONTENT
Hengdian (China)	5-7	36	POW camp, factory, city, Unit 731, Hell ship, Train
Hainan Island	2-4	14	Jungle, Death March, Cabanatuan
Maryland, USA	1, 8	7	Home front, Fort Detrick

● Hengdian Resources Available

RESOURCE	AVAILABILITY	ADVANTAGE
Existing Sets	1930s-40s Chinese streets, Japanese-occupied city, factory interiors, prison camp	80% of locations pre-built
Costumes & Props	WWII Japanese, American, Chinese military and civilian wardrobes	Major rental cost reduction
Technical Crew	Experienced with Chinese historical dramas	Faster shooting, lower day rates
Extras	Large pool of trained extras	Essential for crowd scenes
Stunt Coordination	Experienced with war sequences	Action quality without Hollywood rates

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● Historical Framework & Real Event Mapping

HISTORICAL EVENT	EPISODES	HISTORICAL BASIS
Fall of Philippines	1–2	Lingayen Gulf landings (Dec 1941), MacArthur's retreat
Bataan Death March	3	65-mile march, 10,000+ deaths, Filipino civilian rescuers
Cabanatuan Camp	4	"Zero ward," 50% death rate, underground networks
Hell Ships (Tottori Maru)	5	Torpedoed by submarine, Lisbon Maru sinking
Hoten Camp (Mukden)	5–7	Forced labor for Mitsubishi, "Guests of the Emperor" speech
Unit 731	8	Biological weapons research, vivisections, postwar immunity
Fort Detrick / Operation Paperclip	8	Japanese war criminals recruited by US

● Proposed Creative Team

ROLE	CANDIDATE TYPE	NOTES
Showrunner	Experienced WWII/historical drama (e.g., The Pacific, Masters of the Air)	Ensemble management skills required
Director Ep 1–2	Director with war/period experience	Set the visual language
Director Ep 3–4	Director with survival/thriller background	Death March intensity
Director Ep 5–8	Director with Chinese co-production experience	Maximize Hengdian advantage
DP	Naturalistic, handheld for action, composed for drama	References: The Pacific, 1917
Composer	Minimalist, mournful, with Asian instrumentation	Strings + erhu

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● Key Budget Assumptions & Risk Notes

Hengdian Partnership	Assumes existing relationship with Hengdian World Studios. Letter of intent required
Exchange Rate	1 USD = 7.2 RMB (adjustable)
Tax Incentives	China co-production may qualify for provincial film incentives (up to 30% of qualified spend). Not included in budget
Contingency	15% is aggressive for a production of this scale. Consider 20% (+\$1.2M) if financing allows
Cast Assumptions	Based on Tier B+ to A– talent. If A-list attached, add \$3–5M to Category A
VFX	Hengdian VFX rates are significantly lower than US/UK. If outsourcing to Western vendors, add \$1–2M
Post-Production	Assumes Hengdian post facility for VFX. If outsourcing, add \$0.5–1M

Funding Strategy

Diversified financing structure — Hengdian in-kind, Chinese co-production, international presales + platform license fees

● Recommended Funding Sources

SOURCE	AMOUNT	NOTES
Hengdian in-kind (sets, costumes, crew)	\$2.5M	Already reflected in Category D
China co-production financing	\$5–8M	Provincial film funds, private equity
US tax incentives (Maryland)	\$1–2M	Film tax credit (25–30%)
Presales (international distribution)	\$5–10M	Key territories: UK, Japan, France, Germany
Streaming platform license fee	\$8–12M	Netflix, Apple, HBO advance
Equity financing (gap / supergap)	\$3–5M	Completion guarantee required
Target Total	\$24.85M	

● Funding Structure Visualization



Execution Roadmap

From current phase to delivery — a ~12-month project advancement timeline

● Production Cash Flow Timeline

- WEEKS 1-4
Pre-production (Maryland + Hengdian)
Cumulative: \$1,500,000
- WEEKS 5-6
Production — Block 1 (Maryland)
Cumulative: \$2,800,000
- WEEKS 7-8
Production — Block 2 (Philippines / Hainan)
Cumulative: \$4,200,000
- WEEKS 9-12
Production — Block 3 (Hainan)
Cumulative: \$8,500,000
- WEEKS 13-20
Production — Block 4 (Hengdian)
Cumulative: \$18,000,000
- WEEKS 21-30
Post-Production
Cumulative: \$23,000,000
- WEEKS 31-34
Delivery & QC
Cumulative: \$24,850,000

● Business Milestones

- IMMEDIATE (1-3 MONTHS)
Hengdian letter of intent secured  Complete
- 60 DAYS
Attach Showrunner
- 90 DAYS
Complete pilot script + Series Bible (50+ pages)
- SHORT-TERM (3-6 MONTHS)
Attach Director Ep1-2 → Approach Talent Agencies → Prepare Teaser Reel
- PACKAGING (6-12 MONTHS)
Submit to Netflix/Apple/HBO/Amazon → Secure Financing → China Co-Production Approval

Highlights & Risk Assessment

A holistic evaluation of the project's core strengths, potential risks, and opportunities for Hengdian

● Core Strengths

- Unique historical material — Hell Ships and Unit 731 never dramatized
- Hengdian cost structure — 50–60% savings vs. traditional
- Multi-national ensemble — covers US, UK, Chinese, Japanese-American audiences
- Genre hybrid — war + survival + spy thriller + legal reckoning
- Comparables validated: The Pacific + Shōgun market tested
- Postwar reckoning differentiator — not "liberation = the end"

● Risk Factors

- 15% contingency may be low — recommend 20%
- Cross-border political sensitivity (Unit 731 / Nisei subject matter)
- Uncertainty of China co-production approval
- Must attach showrunner — ensemble management is critical
- Potential WWII content saturation on streamers
- A-list cast surcharge (\$3–5M) not yet included

● Hengdian Opportunities

- \$2.5M in-kind contribution reduces cash pressure
- Showcase Hengdian's capability to host major international productions
- Chinese co-producer identity in the global market
- China domestic distribution potential (Lao Gao / Li Lishui hero arc)
- 36-day Hengdian shoot = local economic stimulus
- Establish long-term Hollywood producer partnership channel

Guests of the Emperor · Project Brief

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Based on true events. Inspired by survivors. Never Give Up.