



# Yuri Nosenko, KGB

*Was he a defector or was he a Russian agent? The truth may never be known.*

by Tom Hinckley

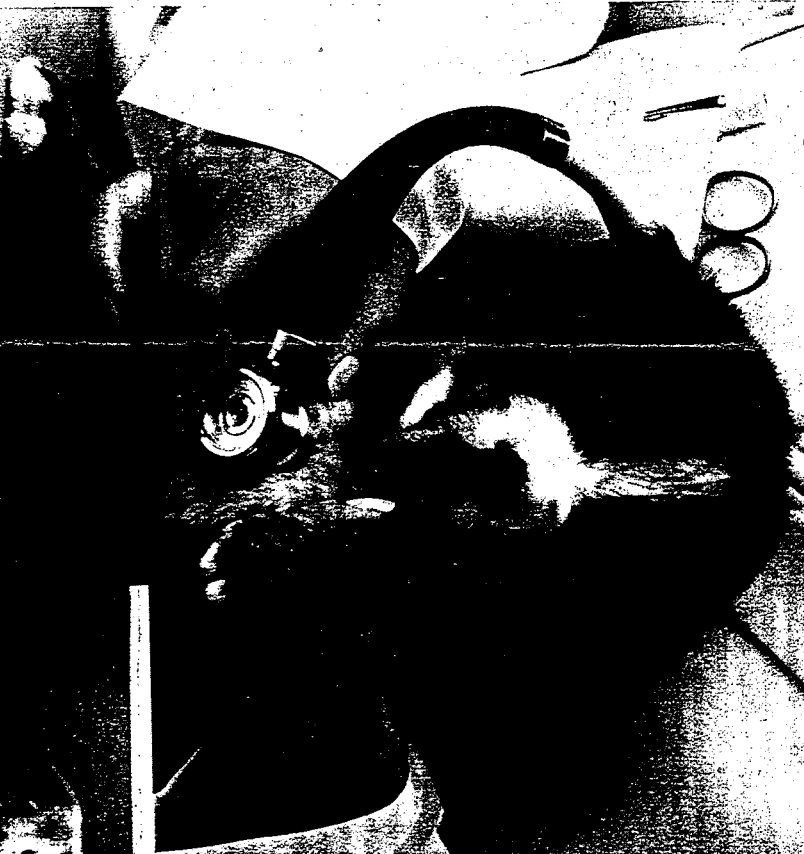
**Yuri Nosenko, KGB** is the incredible true story of a Russian defector who is suspected of being an agent sent to the U.S. to spread false information about Soviet activities. Tommy Lee Jones co-stars as the CIA agent whose involvement in the case costs him his career. (see PREMIERES, page 25).

**T**he New York Times Geneva, Feb. 10, 1964—Soviet officials said today that a member of the Soviet delegation at the 17-nation disarmament conference disappeared last Tuesday and may have defected to the West. He was Yuri Nosenko, age 36.

Yuri Nosenko, KGB, an HBO Showcase presentation, offers a rare look at Nosenko's story. It delves into the dark and dangerous world of real-life espionage, the world that former CIA official James Angleton once called "a wilderness of mirrors." The story contains all the ingredients of a first-rate spy thriller: secret meetings between CIA and KGB agents, rumors of a Soviet "mole" in the highest ranks of the CIA, a dramatic defection, and imprisonment to uncover top-secret information. And it all really happened. Tommy Lee Jones stars as "Steve Daley," a pseudonym for the real-life CIA Soviet Bloc Deputy Chief who was approached by Nosenko (Oleg Rudnik) with a proposition. In exchange for political asylum in the United States, Nosenko would provide the CIA with information on the Soviets' role in the Kennedy assassination and KGB

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infiltration of American intelligence. The offer was accepted, but in the months following Nosenko's defection inconsistencies in his story surfaced which convinced Daley that Nosenko was a "disinformation" agent, a phony Russian defector sent to mislead U.S. intelligence. Daley imprisoned Nosenko in an isolated blockhouse for three years and subjected him to brutal interrogations to uncover his real identity. Nosenko never "broke." The careers of Daley and many others who supported him were ruined. Nosenko became a U.S. citizen and a paid CIA consultant.

But the nagging question still remains. Was Nosenko a fake? The film offers no final answer. Even the writer and star disagree. Stephen Davis, who wrote the script, claims his research reveals that Nosenko was a phony while Oleg Rudnik, the Russian immigrant who plays Nosenko in the film, is convinced of his character's authenticity.

Davis is a British screenwriter and playwright with a long-standing interest in espionage and East-West relations. His works include a British telemovie about Soviet dissident Andrei Sakharov, *People From the Forest*. Davis, speaking from his home in London, says that the story of Nosenko and Daley intrigued him for two reasons: "First of all, it is the only true espionage story that seems to have gone onto the public record despite the CIA's wanting to keep it quiet. Every other spy or defector story has reached the press because it has been allowed to reach the press. But this one got out by accident."

"Also, upon investigation, it became clear that the story of Daley and Nosenko was a story in which all the Cold War conflicts and issues boiled down to an eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation between these two men, each of whom carried an enormous historical burden. So that, and the extent to which it is an untold story, made *Nosenko* something I could hardly resist investigating and writing about."

Davis spent a year researching the script with the help of Edward Jay Epstein, an author who first uncovered the Nosenko story while writing a book about Lee Harvey Oswald. Davis retraced Epstein's steps by reviewing



Tommy Lee Jones and Oleg Rudnik

countless documents and interviewing dozens of past and present intelligence officers in the United States and Europe. It was not an easy job. "At first the most familiar sounds I heard were telephones being slammed down in my ear," says Davis. "But once I had managed to persuade people of my good faith and my lack of bias—and once they found out I wasn't working for the KGB—there was an incredible feeling of the burden of this case on people's minds. You could feel their anxiety to tell their side of it, whichever side it was. This case brought so much heart-ache to so many people. It has never brought clarity or enlightenment to any who were involved in it. So in a way it was like trying to investigate the most sensitive and personal areas of their private lives."

Davis' conclusion that Nosenko was a fraud came from his research. "I didn't take a brilliant mind to realize that Nosenko really told a great many untruths," says Davis. "And it is difficult to believe in his genuine character on many levels. It is possible to believe that Nosenko's main loyalty was to himself. It's possible to believe that he was a phony, but not one sent by the KGB to be a phony. The best analysis is that he might have been a disinformation agent working in the Geneva disarmament conference who decided to exploit the situation and defect. But he made the mistake of never telling the

truth and committing so many falsehoods and lies, then allowing himself to be beaten into a corner by the CIA, who misread the case. But you can't throw out any of the hypotheses. Every way you turn it around you find it's like a Rubik's Cube that won't ever quite work out."

Actor Oleg Rudnik, who has appeared in *Moscow on the Hudson* and *2010*, didn't do much research to play Yuri Nosenko—he didn't have to. Formerly a stage and television director, Rudnik legally immigrated to America from Russia with his wife and two children in 1976. He still speaks English with a thick accent and occasionally hesitates when reaching for the right words. But there is no hesitation in the powerful performance



Screenwriter Stephen Davis

he delivers in the film. He plays Nosenko as a man intensely driven to escape from Russia and live free in America. For Rudnik, that was the key to the character—along with his personal belief that Nosenko was a genuine defector. "You should understand that this is my personal opinion," Rudnik explains. "But because of my experience previously as a Soviet citizen, the situation was very clear to me. If a Russian were to be sent to America for disinformation or some undercover work, he wouldn't have been a KGB officer because any KGB person, I believe, would be very closely watched by the CIA or FBI. Someone like myself, for example [with no obvious connection to the intelligence community], would be sent instead. I used to work for the United States government soon after I arrived here, and if I had wanted to pursue that career, I could have."

Rudnik also feels that if Nosenko had been a fake, he would most likely have broken under Daley's interrogation. "The tragedy, in my opinion, is that Nosenko never expected anything close to what happened to him. He expected the so-called *la dolce vita* because that is how he saw the West. But suddenly he was under this great stress of imprisonment and interrogation. Now, I've never seen this gentleman. I just happened to hear his voice on tape. I don't know what kind of man he is intellectually, but I believe that he definitely wanted a better life. I deeply believe that any intelligent person who has been able to see both sides of this world, the East and the West, would prefer to live in the West. I may be exaggerating, but I think even Gorbachev would, if he had the opportunity."

"But even if Nosenko is a fake, we should respect him for being strong for three years, right? When we find ourselves in a real situation like that, it is not so easy. My uncle spent 20 years in one of Stalin's labor camps. But so what? It is nice to be able to say that and then say that for Nosenko it was only three years. But if anybody tells you or me today that we are sentenced to six months in prison, that six months is a long, long term. It is only easy when it's over."

If there is one thing that Davis and Rudnik agree upon, it's that the drama of Nosenko is so compelling that the authenticity of the little character really doesn't matter. "I knew from the beginning that this was about two individuals," says Davis. "It was about their conflict, the maneuvering they went through and what it cost them both. And I was delighted with both Oleg and Tommy in the roles. They seemed to live those characters. The film is alive with the electricity between the two of them."

According to Davis, the real-life conclusion of Nosenko's story may be a long way off, and the one man who could answer all the questions—Nosenko himself—may well wind up carrying the truth to his grave. "I spoke to somebody who currently knows Nosenko," says Davis, "and I asked him what Nosenko would say if I sat down with him and said, 'What is the truth of the matter?' According to him, Nosenko would probably say, 'It doesn't matter. Whatever you say. Put it down.'" □