Soul Hunters

BY THE CREATOR OF THE TV SERIES THE PRISONER

GEORGE MACKENZIE

Soul Hunters

By the same author

THE COOLER
THE MAN FROM YESTERDAY
CHANCE AWAKENING
TARA KANE
THE GOERING TESTAMENT
TRAITOR FOR A CAUSE
ULTIMATE ISSUE
FERRET

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"Soul Hunters"

Yuri Andropov's definition of spies in his speech to commemorate the foundation of the Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti – the KGB

"It's a great huge game of chess that's being played – all over the world – if this is the world at all, you know."

Lewis Carroll: Through the Looking Glass

Prologue

He looked very ordinary. In his late twenties, thin, a shock of hair, studious, not very well dressed. They had booked him on an Intourist package tour, and his passport described him as a research assistant.

Today was the reason they had sent him. He was due to meet his contact, briefly, at ten minutes to noon at the corner of Nevsky Prospekt and Gogol Street.

There was really no reason why he should be uneasy, Gregson told himself. Nothing suspicious had happened. Not as far as he could tell. Nothing unusual. It was probably nerves now that the moment had come.

"Stop at the first lamp post past the traffic lights, by the colonnade, and look at the street map, like a tourist who is trying to find his bearings."

The contact would approach him, a helpful stranger offering to put a visitor in the right direction. It would only last a few moments. Then the stranger would disappear, and Gregson would have the roll of film.

That was all. He would become an ordinary tourist again. Then a week later he would deliver the roll of film to them in London.

It was so simple. Nothing to worry about. "Just don't draw attention to yourself," they had said. "Be part of the group."

Now it was time. He had spent the morning looking at some of the landmarks of Leningrad, like the tourist he was, then he had strolled to the meeting place.

Gregson had bought a small street guide, and he stood

by the fifth archway of the colonnade, next to the lamp standard nearest to the traffic signals. He had timed it pretty well. His watch said 11:49. He began to play the pantomime, examining the guide book, turning to the index, finding the street map he wanted, looking at it with a furrowed brow. He was the picture of the puzzled tourist looking for a destination.

A few people were passing, but nobody seemed to notice him. He kept turning the pages, then looking at the map again. He was beginning to feel foolish, standing there, giving his performance to the empty air. He'd been doing it for a couple of minutes, which seemed like an eternity. He wondered how long he should wait.

There was a contingency arrangement, of course. If the meeting at the lamp post aborted, the instructions were to sit, at four o'clock, on the left hand bench outside the railings at the entrance to the Lutheran church of St Peter, near Zhelyabov Street. His contact would appear then.

It was now just after 11:51. He knew it was unwise to loiter too long. Of course, things could always go wrong with a split second arrangement, but they had taught him that punctuality was part of the system, part of the security. Being late was like fumbling with the password.

No, he had waited long enough, decided Gregson. The best thing was to go back to the hotel, and then try at the church in the afternoon.

Then the contact came. She was a rather stout middle aged woman with a shopping basket, and startled Gregson. He had expected a man. No reason, they hadn't told him who it would be, but he had simply assumed it. He had of course wondered who the contact would turn out to be. He had even had a romantic vision that it might be a beautiful girl, but he had quickly dismissed that as nonsense. No, the contact would definitely be a man, he had convinced himself of that. Maybe a dissident.

"I see that you are looking at the map," said the woman in Russian. "Are you a stranger?"

"I am looking for the Hermitage," replied Gregson, as arranged. "Ya zabludilsya. I have lost my way."

"Here, I will show you." She took the guide book from his hand, and looked at the street map. "There it is." She indicated the spot, and passed the book back to him, and as he took it, she slipped a small container into his hand. It was done swiftly, unobtrusively. The film has been delivered.

"Do svidaniya," said the woman. And she walked off rapidly.

He slipped the spool into his pocket with a sense of enormous relief. The foreboding had vanished. The link up had been made, from now on he didn't have to take any more real risks. He wasn't too worried about getting the roll of film out of the country. It would be easy to hide among his things. No reason why they should search his belongings anyway. No, from now on it was plain sailing.

That was when the car pulled up at the pavement, alongside him. It was a black Chaika, the official car of many Soviet government departments. The door opened and two men got out. They were hatless, and their hair was cut short.

"Excuse me," said one of them in English, and stood in front of Gregson. His companion was behind Gregson.

"Kay Gay Bay," said the man, pronouncing it the Russian way, and he flashed an identity card with his photograph. "You are under arrest."

Gregson felt the blood draining from his face. "This is . . . this is ridiculous," he stammered. "I am an English tourist. I am staying at the Moskva Hotel with the Intourist party. You can check."

"You are Stephen Gregson, and you have been engaged in espionage," said the man who spoke English.

The one behind Gregson put his hand in Gregson's pocket and pulled out the container.

"You see, the evidence," said the other triumphantly. "Proof."

Then Gregson knew it was a set up. They had laid a trap for him. It all figured. They knew he was keeping the

appointment. They saw the woman make contact, but they did not arrest her. She was one of them. They knew what she had passed to him, and they knew where he had it, because they had been watching him the whole time.

"You are making a mistake," argued Gregson. "I don't know what you are talking about."

They took him by the arms, and pushed him into the car.

"Where are you taking me?" cried Gregson.

The car door slammed, and shot off along Nevsky Prospekt. There were two men in front, but they had not said a word, and didn't even bother to look at him.

Gregson sat squashed in the back seat, jammed between the two KGB men. Their elbows dug into his ribs. But worse than the discomfort was the fear he felt.

"I want to see the British consul," said Gregson.

They laughed, and Gregson suddenly wondered how expendable he really was to London.

1

He stuck on the moustache and regarded himself critically in the mirror. Yes, he looked the part of the investigator, unscrupulous, ambitious, a stalwart of the state's security machine.

Evgeny Alekseivitch Borisov, People's Artist of the Soviet Union, studied his reflection. He saw a face which served its master well, and was adept at concealing his real thoughts. He leant forward and smoothed down one side of the false moustache.

They had given him the star dressing room, as befitted his status, but the Maxim Gorky State Russian Dramatic Theatre in Minsk was the city's oldest, and its facilities did not measure up to what Borisov was used to in Moscow. There was no TV, no refrigerator, and the sofa needed re-covering.

Not that he could complain about conditions on this provincial tour. He had been given a double room on the eighth floor of the Yubelinaya Hotel. The hotel resembled a concrete box on stilts, but, unlike the theatre, it was modern, comfortable in an impersonal way. A chauffeur-driven car had also been provided, to take him to and from the theatre.

Borisov wondered if the double room was the idea of Lev Kopkin, the stage manager. He didn't trust Kopkin. Kopkin had another role on the tour – he was the eyes and ears of the Ministry. He watched all of them. And he knew of course about Maya.

Typical of the little arse licker to ensure that Borisov had a double room to team up with Maya if he felt so inclined. It gave him something to put in his report.

Borisov extricated a cigarette from his packet of *Javas*. It would be his last smoke until after the performance. He lit it, and grimaced. The carton of American cigarettes he had been given had spoiled him. Pity they were all gone.

Never mind. He could tell he would be good on stage tonight. *Autumn of the Investigator* was a play he enjoyed.

There was a tap on the door, and without waiting to be asked, Maya came in. She was already made-up for the stage, and it enhanced her good looks. As always, she wafted perfume.

She rushed over to Borisov, and hugged him. "No," she warned, "don't kiss me. You'll smudge my make-up."

He had had no intention of kissing her. In fact, she was beginning to take things for granted just a little too much. This bursting into his dressing room, for instance, when he was getting ready to go on.

"I've got to finish off, Maya Aleksandrovna Petrova," he said, mock severely. "I'll see you later."

She pouted, and gave a good rendition of tossing her head. "How do you know I'll be available?"

"You'll be available," said Borisov, turning his back and reaching for some powder.

But she didn't move. "Listen," she trilled. "I've got some fantastic news. They've asked me to do *Alya* at the Sovremennik. Can you imagine?"

He had heard about the play. It was all the trendy rage in Moscow. It was set in a gymnasium, and the characters were a women's handball team. He winced.

"I'm sure you'll bounce about very prettily," he remarked.

"Pig!" cried Maya, and slammed the door of the dressing room.

Do I really need her, wondered Borisov, as he finished off his make-up. Was it vanity that required her in his bed? Because she was half his age, and reminded him of his days as a young actor? She often bored him, with her continuous back stage gossip, and her not very subtle efforts to use their

relationship to promote her own career. Yes, she was very good looking, she had a desirable body, and she made love the way she acted, enthusiastically. Trouble was she was starting to get on his nerves.

Ah, well, reflected Borisov, all that will soon be resolved.

Exactly thirty minutes before curtain up, and right on cue, Kopkin banged on the door for the half hour.

"I know," called out Borisov. To his surprise, Kopkin entered. He carried a bouquet of roses.

"From the Union of Byelorussian Writers," he announced. "I'll put them in a vase. Or do you want them sent to the hotel?" The little eyes behind the gold rimmed glasses gleamed with pleasure. "You have no concept, Evgeny Alekseivitch, what a success this tour has been. The people of Minsk are overwhelmed. I can tell you everybody is absolutely delighted."

Clearly, thought Borisov, you've had a pat from the Ministry.

"Just put the flowers anywhere, will you?"

"By the way," announced Kopkin. "We have our return flight. We leave Minsk at eleven in the morning on Saturday. We'll have a week in Moscow before we depart for London."

Borisov's face betrayed nothing. He had talked very little about the forthcoming tour of London. A season of modern Russian plays. Volodin. Dudarev. Fedotov. A cultural exchange on which the Ministry set considerable importance.

"I shall be glad when all this travelling is finished," continued Kopkin. "It is very upsetting to one's domestic arrangements, is it not?"

Was the little rat mocking him, wondered Borisov. But Kopkin looked quite earnest.

"Well, Evgeny Alekseivitch, I mustn't keep you. See you after the show." And he made his exit, still carrying the bunch of roses.

As curtain time approached, Borisov tried to shut everything else from his mind, and concentrate entirely on the role

he was about to play, go over his lines, and think about his performance. But tonight, his thoughts were on other things. It came as a shock to suddenly realise that he had been staring at the wall, unseeing, unmoving, his mind far away from the dressing room in Minsk.

Borisov, a disciplined man, seldom drank before facing an audience. But tonight he walked to the cupboard and got out the bottle of vodka. He poured himself a good measure, and tossed it back.

He sat down on the only armchair in the dressing room, and closed his eyes. He must have dozed for a good quarter of an hour, but it only seemed to have been a few minutes before again there was a knock on the door, and the call boy's voice announced:

"Beginners on stage."

Borisov opened his eyes, and awareness of what was going to happen flooded his mind. He went over to the dressing table, and gave himself another inspection in the mirror.

"It's up to you, tovarishch," he said aloud to himself, and smiled. It was a sardonic smile.

He buttoned his jacket, straightened his collar, and left the dressing room.

The curtain was about to go up.

2

The transmission came on the air about 20:45 and could be heard on the short wave band, reasonably clearly, over a considerable area of the Soviet Union, including Byelorussia and the Ukraine.

It came on unannounced, and did not identify its origin. The broadcast lasted roughly half an hour, and part of it was

taken up by the playing of Russian folk songs. The rest of the time the announcer thanked the listeners for tuning in, and promised future transmissions.

"Keep listening for us around this time on the 48 metre band, comrades. You'll hear some interesting things."

Then the broadcast went off the air, as abruptly as it had come on. The transmission caught the Fifth Department, charged with radio surveillance, completely by surprise. The jamming service, whose job it was to blot out undesirable broadcasts, was caught wrong footed.

Soviet monitors taped it, but the analysis of its contents baffled them. Nothing political had been said, and unless the folk songs were part of some complicated code, there appeared to be no point to the transmission. The only significant thing was the promise, such as it might be, that the audience would hear "those interesting things" in future broadcasts.

A full report went to Sergein Lapin, the Minister of Radio and Television, and the Fifth Department asked the Directorate Technical Facilities Group to try and trace the origin of the transmission.

The thing that worried Lapin was that, without saying so in actual words, the announcer had given the impression that the broadcast came from inside the Soviet Union.

3

He was sure Freudenhof had never changed, not since the Kaiser, not since Hitler, not since Adenauer. The allied bombers hadn't bothered with it. Jack-booted Nazis and American battle tanks had come and gone, but Freudenhof remained untouched.

Garner was wrong, of course. The sleepy Bavarian town,

nestling among forests of fir trees, had its secrets, but they weren't obvious to someone being driven through it in a staff car.

"It's Hansel and Gretel country," Rathbone had said, rather sourly, when he'd briefed Garner in room 8011 in Horse Guards Avenue. "But then, I always thought Hansel and Gretel was a pretty nasty story."

Now, looking out of the car, Garner did see some modern touches among the mediaeval ginger bread houses. There were TV aerials on the old roofs, American Express logos outside the gasthaus, and in the arcaded market square stood the granite statue of a Wehrmacht soldier, symbolising both Freudenhof's war dead, and Hitlerian art. But those were just passing glimpses.

The staff car turned along a country road lined by the ever present fir trees, until it rounded a bend, where its progress was barred by a red and white striped barrier. An American soldier stepped forward.

He was an interesting soldier. His trousers were tucked into his combat boots, laced high. The boots shone like a mirror. Round his neck he had a camouflage mottled silk scarf, and he wore a dark green beret with an embroidered coat of arms on the left side. He was armed with a pistol, and carried a clip board.

The soldier didn't say anything. He just bent down and looked at Garner in the back of the car, then at his driver.

"Captain Garner," said the driver.

The soldier checked his clip board and nodded. Almost simultaneously the red and white pole was raised.

"Welcome," said the soldier in Russian, and saluted.

The car accelerated along the country road. Garner was looking for sign posts, fences, buildings, anything, but there was nothing except fir trees.

Then they came to what looked like the entrance of a country estate. At the end of a long, beautifully kept drive stood a large country mansion. A couple of US Army jeeps were parked in front of it.