

down the tree. He caught hold of a springy young sapling, and to it he fastened his hunting knife, with the blade pointing down the trail; with a bit of wild grapevine he tied back the sapling. Then he ran for his life. The hounds raised their voices as they hit the fresh scent. Rainsford knew now how an animal at bay feels.

He had to stop to get his breath. The baying of the hounds stopped abruptly, and Rainsford's heart stopped, too. They must have reached the knife.

He shinned excitedly up a tree and looked back. His pursuers had stopped. But the hope that was in Rainsford's brain when he climbed died, for he saw in the shallow valley that General Zaroff was still on his feet. But Ivan was not. The knife, driven by the recoil of the springing tree, had not wholly failed.

Rainsford had hardly tumbled to the ground when the pack took up the cry again.

"Nerve, nerve, nerve!" he panted, as he dashed along. A blue gap showed between the trees dead ahead. Ever nearer drew the hounds. Rainsford forced himself on toward that gap. He reached it. It was the shore of the sea. Across a cove he could see the gloomy gray stone of the château. Twenty feet below him the sea rumbled and hissed. Rainsford hesitated. He heard the hounds. Then he leaped far out into the sea. . . .

When the general and his pack reached the place by the sea, the Cossack stopped. For some minutes he stood regarding the blue-green expanse of water. He shrugged his shoulders. Then he sat down, took a drink of brandy from a silver flask, lit a perfumed cigarette, and hummed a bit from *Madama Butterfly*.²¹

General Zaroff had an exceedingly good dinner in his great paneled dining hall that evening. With it he had a bottle of Pol Roger

and half a bottle of Chambertin. Two slight annoyances kept him from perfect enjoyment. One was the thought that it would be difficult to replace Ivan; the other was that his quarry had escaped him; of course the American hadn't played the game—so thought the general as he tasted his after-dinner liqueur. In his library he read, to soothe himself, from the works of Marcus Aurelius.²² At ten he went up to his bedroom. He was deliciously tired, he said to himself, as he locked himself in. There was a little moonlight, so before turning on his light he went to the window and looked down at the courtyard. He could see the great hounds, and he called "Better luck another time" to them. Then he switched on the light.

A man, who had been hiding in the curtains of the bed, was standing there.

"Rainsford!" screamed the general. "How in God's name did you get here?"

"Swam," said Rainsford. "I found it quicker than walking through the jungle."

The general sucked in his breath and smiled. "I congratulate you," he said. "You have won the game."

Rainsford did not smile. "I am still a beast at bay," he said, in a low, hoarse voice. "Get ready, General Zaroff."

The general made one of his deepest bows. "I see," he said. "Splendid! One of us is to furnish a repast²³ for the hounds. The other will sleep in this very excellent bed. On guard, Rainsford. . . ."

He had never slept in a better bed, Rainsford decided. ♦

21. *Madama Butterfly*: a famous opera.

22. Marcus Aurelius (mār'kəs ð-rē'lē-əs): an ancient Roman emperor and philosopher.

23. repast (rĭ-păst'): meal.

Connect to the Literature

1. What Do You Think?

Explain what you think happens to Rainsford and Zaroff at the end of the story.

Comprehension Check

- Before arriving at the island, what is Rainsford's position on hunting?
- Why has Zaroff begun hunting human "game"?
- What tricks does Rainsford use to avoid capture?

Think Critically

2. **ACTIVE READING PREDICTING** How accurate were the **predictions** you made in your **READER'S NOTEBOOK** as you read the story? Discuss with a classmate the **details** in the story that either helped or misled you.

3. What is your reaction to Zaroff's statement: "We try to be civilized here"? Explain your answer.
4. Look over the chart of qualities that you created for the Connect to Your Life activity on page 38. In your opinion, which of these **character traits** most help Rainsford win the game? Support your choices with details from the story.
5. Why do you think Rainsford chooses to confront Zaroff in the end, rather than simply ambush him?
6. Do you think that Rainsford's views on hunting have been permanently changed by his experience of being hunted? Why or why not?

THINK ABOUT

- Rainsford's conversation with Whitney at the beginning of the story
- his last encounters with Ivan and Zaroff
- the last line of the story

Extend Interpretations

7. **What If?** Imagine that Rainsford's friend, Whitney, has formed a search party that lands on the island. Find a point in the **plot** of the story where Whitney's arrival might take place and describe the possible consequences of this event.
8. **Connect to Life** Early in the story, Rainsford declares that "the world is made up of two classes—the hunters and the huntees." Do you agree? Explain your opinion.

Literary Analysis

CONFLICT Most stories are built around a central **conflict**, or struggle. This story, for example, centers on the deadly competition between Zaroff and Rainsford. A conflict may be either external or internal. An **external conflict** involves a character pitted against an outside force, such as nature, a physical obstacle, or another character. An **internal conflict** is one that occurs within a character's own mind.

Cooperative Learning Activity

Make a chart like the one shown below. Working with a partner, go back through the story and list as many instances of each kind of conflict as you can. When you are done with your chart, discuss the following questions with a larger group:

- Which conflicts added the most excitement to the story?
- Which conflicts revealed something important about one of the characters? Explain.
- Why do you think Connell chose to include each of the other examples you found?


Internal Conflict

Zaroff	
Rainsford	

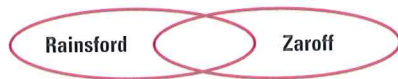
External Conflict

person vs. person	
person vs. nature	
person vs. obstacle	

Writing Options

1. Recollection Diary Rainsford's experience on the island probably haunted his thoughts for years. Think of an experience you have had that has affected you deeply. Record the experience in a diary entry. Place the entry in your **Working Portfolio**. 

2. Comparison of the Hunters In what ways are Zaroff and Rainsford similar and different? You could use a Venn diagram to record your thoughts. Then write a paragraph in which you highlight similarities and differences between the characters.



Writing Handbook

See page 1155: Compare-Contrast.

Activities & Explorations

1. Trial Arguments Are Rainsford's actions justified at the end of the story? Write either the defense's or the prosecution's opening arguments in his trial. Present your argument to your class. ~ **SPEAKING AND LISTENING**

2. Illustrated Map What other dangers has Zaroff hidden on his nightmarish hunting ground? Create an illustrated map of the island. Include details from the story, such as the chateau and Death Swamp. Then add your own features with notes explaining the dangers of each one. ~ **ART**

3. Book on Tape Adapt a scene from the story as an audio book excerpt. Decide whether you want to keep all the narration or turn the scene into a drama by adding dialogue. ~ **SPEAKING AND LISTENING**

Inquiry & Research

War Games Today, a nonlethal version of Zaroff's "game" takes place in arcades and on mock battlefields in many countries around the world. In these games, participants "shoot" each other with lasers and paintballs. Players call these war games "harmless fun." Do you agree? What is your opinion of war games?



Real World Link

Read the magazine article on page 61 before writing your opinion.

Vocabulary in Action

EXERCISE A: CONTEXT CLUES On your paper, fill in each blank with the word that best completes the sentence.

- Rainsford will _____ the hunter by using a trick he learned in Uganda.
- Society does not _____ the actions of a cold-blooded murderer.
- His _____ and strength made the general believe that he had found a worthwhile opponent.
- A _____ sense of humor amuses some people.
- Zaroff's _____ behavior at the beginning of the story contrasts with his businesslike approach to the hunt.

EXERCISE B: ASSESSMENT PRACTICE Identify the relationship between each pair of words by writing *Synonyms* or *Antonyms*.

- solicitously**—indifferently
- affable**—disagreeable
- tangible**—physical
- quarry**—trapper
- imperative**—required
- disarming**—offensive
- zealous**—passionate
- stamina**—vigor
- amenity**—crudeness
- deplorable**—distressing

VAG

WORDS
TO
KNOW

affable
amenity
condone

deplorable
disarming
droll

elude
imperative
quarry

scruple
solicitously
stamina

tangible
uncanny
zealous

Building Vocabulary

For an in-depth lesson on word relationships such as synonyms and antonyms, see page 849.

Grammar in Context: Choosing Precise Verbs

In the following excerpt from “The Most Dangerous Game,” carefully chosen verbs help convey Rainsford’s complete exhaustion after his escape from the sea.

He **flung** himself down at the jungle edge and **tumbled** headlong into the deepest sleep of his life.

Think about how the tone of the sentence would change had the author written, “He lay down at the jungle edge and went into the deepest sleep of his life.” Experienced writers often avoid using such common verbs as *be*, *have*, *make*, *go*, *say*, and *lie*. Although there is nothing wrong with these verbs, more precise verbs often work better.

Apply to Your Writing Using precise verbs in your writing can help you

- clarify meaning and characters’ actions
- create vivid images
- strengthen the mood or tone of a story

WRITING EXERCISE In the sentences below, replace each underlined verb with a verb that creates a more vivid picture. **Usage Tip:** Make sure the verbs you select agree in number with their subjects.

Example: Original General Zaroff sits back in his chair and says what he is thinking.

Rewritten General Zaroff settles back in his chair and reveals what he is thinking. (Both new verbs are singular to agree with the singular subject.)

1. Rainsford walks over the uneven ground.
2. His heart beats wildly as he runs.
3. Rainsford climbs up the tree.
4. General Zaroff follows him.

Connect to the Literature Look at the paragraph on page 42 that begins, “Rainsford sprang up . . .” In three places in the paragraph the author could have used the word *jumped*, but he chose more precise verbs instead. Can you name the verbs he used? How do they improve the story?

Grammar Handbook Subject-Verb Agreement, pp. 1204–1206



Richard Connell

1893–1949

Other Works
Ironies

Early Years Even as a young boy, Richard Connell loved to write. When he was only 10 years old, he covered baseball games for his father’s daily newspaper in Poughkeepsie, New York. By 16, Connell was city editor for the *Poughkeepsie News-Press*. As a Harvard student, he edited two school publications, the *Daily Crimson* and the humor magazine *The Lampoon*.

His Varied Career While a soldier during World War I, Connell edited his army division’s newspaper. In 1919, he became a freelance fiction writer.

Though he focused mostly on short stories, publishing over 300 in American and British magazines, he also wrote novels and screenplays. His career flowered in the 1920s and 1930s, bringing him fame and wealth. Yet for all that he produced, his writings today are for the most part unknown to the public. “The Most Dangerous Game” is the only one of his stories that is still widely read.

Author Activity

From Story to Film Later in his career, Connell became a screenwriter. Find out what movies he wrote the screenplay for. Then, with classmates, discuss other books, movies, or TV shows that may have been inspired by Connell’s story.



LaserLinks: Background for Reading
Contemporary Connection