

The Most Dangerous Game

Short Story by Richard Connell

What does it take to be a SURVIVOR?

You probably know that water, food, and shelter are necessary to live. But when it comes to survival, what **traits**, or qualities, help a person succeed? That's the question posed in "The Most Dangerous Game," the story you are about to read.

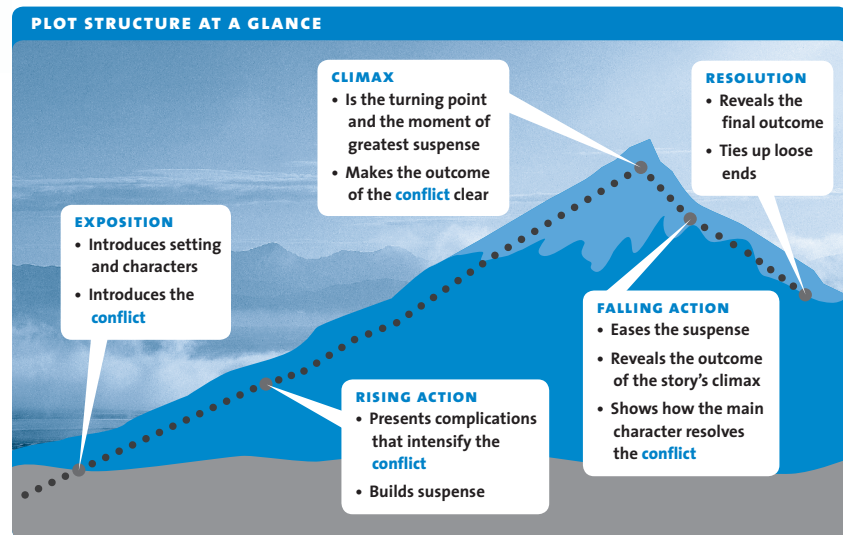
Traits of a Survivor

1. resourcefulness
2. intelligence
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

QUICKWRITE Think about movies you've seen or books you've read in which one person survives against the odds. What qualities or abilities do survivors share? Write down a list like the one on the left of qualities a person needs to survive. Then, discuss with a partner which traits you think are the most important.

Text Analysis: Conflict

Plot is the series of events that make up a story. At the heart of any plot, is a **conflict**, or struggle, between opposing forces. A plot usually follows a pattern like the one shown in the diagram below.



Sometimes, however, writers may play with the sequence of events creating a plot that is **non-linear**. A writer may use **flashbacks**, or interruptions in the action of the story to tell about events that happen in the past. To create **suspense**, a feeling of anxiety or dread, writers may use **foreshadowing**, dropping clues in the text to hint at complications that will happen later in the story. As you read, look out for the use of these techniques and how they influence the conflicts the main character faces.

Reading Strategy: Visualize

Good readers use a writer's words to **visualize**, or form images of the story's setting and characters. To visualize a story:

- pay special attention to descriptions and word choices
- look for **sensory details**, ones that appeal to one or more of your senses
- reread lengthy descriptions to catch details you might have missed

Vocabulary in Context

Note: Words are listed in the order they appear in the story.

tangible (tǎn'jə-bəl) *adj.* capable of being touched having form and substance
*Rainsford didn't believe Ship-Trap Island was a real, **tangible** place*

quarry (kwôr'ē) *n.* the object of a hunt; prey
*The hunters followed their **quarry** for hours before taking the fatal shot.*

disarming (dīs-ār'mĭng) *adj.* removing suspicion; inspiring confidence
*Rainsford's fears were put at ease by the general's **disarming** smile.*

cultivated (kŭl'tə-vā'tĭd) *adj.* refined or cultured in manner
*One could tell from the many collectibles that he was a **cultivated** gentleman.*

amenity (ə-mĕn'ĭ-tē) *n.* something that adds to one's comfort or convenience
*The ship offered every **amenity** a traveler would desire.*

condone (kən-dŏn') *v.* to forgive or overlook
*Rainsford would not **condone** the general's actions.*

droll (drŏl) *adj.* amusingly odd or comical
*Rainsford enjoyed the general's **droll** sense of humor.*

scruple (skrŏŏ'pəl) *n.* a feeling of uneasiness
*Most sailors had **scruples** about traveling to the abandoned island.*

solicitously (sə-lĭs'ĭ-təs-lē) *adv.* in a manner expressing care or concern
*"Are you feeling alright," the general asked **solicitously**.*

imperative (ĭm-pĕr'ə-tĭv) *adj.* absolutely necessary
*It is **imperative** that Rainsford follow the rules set by the general.*

zealous (zĕl'əs) *adj.* intensely enthusiastic
*The men were **zealous** about beginning the hunt.*

uncanny (ŭn-kăn'ē) *adj.* so remarkable as to seem supernatural
*The general's skills as a hunter are **uncanny**.*

**SET A PURPOSE
FOR READING**

Read this story to find out what one hunter thinks is the most dangerous game.

The Most Dangerous Game

Short Story by

RICHARD CONNELL



BACKGROUND Hunting for big game, such as lions, rhinos, and leopards, was a popular sport among wealthy people in the early 20th century, when Connell was writing. These people had time and money to spend on travel and on satisfying their thirst for conquest, danger, and excitement. The two main characters in “The Most Dangerous Game” are experienced hunters in search of a greater challenge.

A CONFLICT

Foreshadowing occurs when the author plants clues in the text to hint at what’s to come. Circle the words in lines 1–6 that hint at possible conflict.

“Off there to the right—somewhere—is a large island,” said Whitney. “It’s rather a mystery—”

“What island is it?” Rainsford asked.

“The old charts call it ‘Ship-Trap Island,’” Whitney replied.

“A suggestive name, isn’t it? Sailors have a curious dread of the place. I don’t know why. Some superstition—” **A**

“Can’t see it,” remarked Rainsford, trying to peer through the dank tropical night that was palpable as it pressed its thick warm blackness in upon the yacht.

10 “You’ve good eyes,” said Whitney, with a laugh, “and I’ve seen you pick off a moose moving in the brown fall bush at four hundred yards, but even you can’t see four miles or so through a moonless Caribbean night.”

“Nor four yards,” admitted Rainsford. “Ugh! It’s like moist black velvet.”



“It will be light enough in Rio,”¹ promised Whitney. “We should make it in a few days. I hope the jaguar guns have come from Purdey’s. We should have some good hunting up the Amazon. Great sport, hunting.”

20 “The best sport in the world,” agreed Rainsford.

“For the hunter,” amended Whitney. “Not for the jaguar.”

“Don’t talk rot, Whitney,” said Rainsford. “You’re a big-game hunter, not a philosopher. Who cares how a jaguar feels?”

“Perhaps the jaguar does,” observed Whitney.

“Bah! They’ve no understanding.” **B**

“Even so, I rather think they understand one thing—fear. The fear of pain and the fear of death.”

30 “Nonsense,” laughed Rainsford. “This hot weather is making you soft, Whitney. Be a realist. The world is made up of two classes—the hunters and the huntees. Luckily, you and I are hunters. Do you think we’ve passed that island yet?”

“I can’t tell in the dark. I hope so.”

“Why?” asked Rainsford.

“The place has a reputation—a bad one.”

“Cannibals?” suggested Rainsford.

“Hardly. Even cannibals wouldn’t live in such a Godforsaken place. But it’s gotten into sailor lore, somehow. Didn’t you notice that the crew’s nerves seemed a bit jumpy today?”

40 “They were a bit strange, now you mention it. Even Captain Nielsen—”

“Yes, even that tough-minded old Swede, who’d go up to the devil himself and ask him for a light. Those fishy blue eyes held a look I never saw there before. All I could get out of him was: ‘This place has an evil name among seafaring men, sir.’ Then he said to me, very gravely: ‘Don’t you feel anything?’—as if the air about us was actually poisonous. Now, you mustn’t laugh when I tell you this—I did feel something like a sudden chill. **PAUSE & REFLECT**

50 “There was no breeze. The sea was as flat as a plate-glass window. We were drawing near the island then. What I felt was a—a mental chill; a sort of sudden dread.”

B CONFLICT

Reread lines 20–25. In your own words, describe the conflict between Rainsford and Whitney.

PAUSE & REFLECT

The author has just provided you with important information about the setting. What happens to Captain Nielsen and the crew when they get near Ship-Trap Island?

1. **Rio:** Rio de Janeiro (rē’ō dā zhə-nâr’ō): a city on the coast of Brazil.



tangible (tǎn'jə-bəl) *adj.* capable of being touched; having form and substance

VISUALIZE

Reread lines 66–69. Circle the words that describe the night. To which sense or senses do these descriptions appeal?

“Pure imagination,” said Rainsford. “One superstitious sailor can taint the whole ship’s company with his fear.”

“Maybe. But sometimes I think sailors have an extra sense that tells them when they are in danger. Sometimes I think evil is a **tangible** thing—with wavelengths, just as sound and light have. An evil place can, so to speak, broadcast vibrations of evil. Anyhow, I’m glad we’re getting out of this zone. Well, I think I’ll turn in now, Rainsford.”

“I’m not sleepy,” said Rainsford. “I’m going to smoke another 60 pipe up on the afterdeck.”

“Good night, then, Rainsford. See you at breakfast.”

“Right. Good night, Whitney.”

There was no sound in the night as Rainsford sat there but the muffled throb of the engine that drove the yacht swiftly through the darkness, and the swish and ripple of the wash of the propeller.

Rainsford, reclining in a steamer chair, indolently puffed on his favorite brier.² The sensuous drowsiness of the night was on him. “It’s so dark,” he thought, “that I could sleep without closing my eyes; the night would be my eyelids—”

70 An abrupt sound startled him. Off to the right he heard it, and his ears, expert in such matters, could not be mistaken. Again he heard the sound, and again. Somewhere, off in the blackness, someone had fired a gun three times.

Rainsford sprang up and moved quickly to the rail, mystified. He strained his eyes in the direction from which the reports had come, but it was like trying to see through a blanket. He leaped upon the rail and balanced himself there, to get greater elevation; his pipe, striking a rope, was knocked from his mouth. He lunged for it; a short, hoarse cry came from his lips as he realized he had 80 reached too far and had lost his balance. The cry was pinched off short as the blood-warm waters of the Caribbean Sea closed over his head.

He struggled up to the surface and tried to cry out, but the wash from the speeding yacht slapped him in the face, and the salt water in his open mouth made him gag and strangle. Desperately he struck out with strong strokes after the receding lights of the

2. **brier** (brī'ər): a tobacco pipe.



When he opened his eyes, he knew from the position of the sun that it was late in the afternoon. Sleep had given him new vigor; a sharp hunger was picking at him. He looked about him, almost cheerfully.

“Where there are pistol shots, there are men. Where there are men, there is food,” he thought. But what kind of men, he wondered, in so forbidding a place? An unbroken front of snarled
130 and ragged jungle fringed the shore. **PAUSE & REFLECT**

PAUSE & REFLECT

Why does Rainsford ask himself “what kind of men” live on the island?

quarry (kwôr'ē) *n.* the object of a hunt; prey

What kind of animal do you think might have been the quarry?

He saw no sign of a trail through the closely knit web of weeds and trees; it was easier to go along the shore, and Rainsford floundered along by the water. Not far from where he had landed, he stopped.

Some wounded thing, by the evidence a large animal, had thrashed about in the underbrush; the jungle weeds were crushed down, and the moss was lacerated; one patch of weeds was stained crimson. A small, glittering object not far away caught Rainsford’s eye, and he picked it up. It was an empty cartridge.

140 “A twenty-two,” he remarked. “That’s odd. It must have been a fairly large animal, too. The hunter had his nerve with him to tackle it with a light gun. It’s clear that the brute put up a fight. I suppose the first three shots I heard was when the hunter flushed his **quarry** and wounded it. The last shot was when he trailed it here and finished it.”

He examined the ground closely and found what he had hoped to find—the print of hunting boots. They pointed along the cliff in the direction he had been going. Eagerly he hurried along, now slipping on a rotten log or a loose stone, but making headway;

150 night was beginning to settle down on the island.

Bleak darkness was blacking out the sea and jungle when Rainsford sighted the lights. He came upon them as he turned a crook in the coastline, and his first thought was that he had come upon a village, for there were many lights. But as he forged along, he saw to his great astonishment that all the lights were in one enormous building—a lofty structure with pointed towers



Monitor Your Comprehension

plunging upward into the gloom. His eyes made out the shadowy outlines of a palatial chateau; it was set on a high bluff, and on three sides of it cliffs dived down to where the sea licked greedy lips in the shadows.

160 “Mirage,” thought Rainsford. But it was no mirage, he found, when he opened the tall spiked iron gate. The stone steps were real enough; the massive door with a leering gargoyle for a knocker was real enough; yet about it all hung an air of unreality. F

He lifted the knocker, and it creaked up stiffly as if it had never before been used. He let it fall, and it startled him with its booming loudness. He thought he heard steps within; the door remained closed. Again Rainsford lifted the heavy knocker and let it fall. The door opened then, opened as suddenly as if it were on a spring, and Rainsford stood blinking in the river of glaring gold

170 light that poured out. The first thing Rainsford’s eyes discerned was the largest man Rainsford had ever seen—a gigantic creature, solidly made and black-bearded to the waist. In his hand the man held a long-barreled revolver, and he was pointing it straight at Rainsford’s heart.

Out of the snarl of beard two small eyes regarded Rainsford.

“Don’t be alarmed,” said Rainsford, with a smile which he hoped was **disarming**. “I’m no robber. I fell off a yacht. My name is Sanger Rainsford of New York City.”

F VISUALIZE

Reread the description of the castle in lines 151–163 and fill out the graphic organizer below.

Details from Story



What I Visualize

disarming (dĭs-är'mĭng) *adj.*
removing suspicion; inspiring confidence





The menacing look in the eyes did not change. The revolver
180 pointed as rigidly as if the giant were a statue. He gave no sign that he understood Rainsford's words, or that he had even heard them. He was dressed in uniform, a black uniform trimmed with gray astrakhan.³

"I'm Sanger Rainsford of New York," Rainsford began again. "I fell off a yacht. I am hungry."

The man's only answer was to raise with his thumb the hammer of his revolver. Then Rainsford saw the man's free hand go to his forehead in a military salute, and he saw him click his heels together and stand at attention. Another man
190 was coming down the broad marble steps, an erect, slender man in evening clothes. He advanced to Rainsford and held out his hand.

In a **cultivated** voice marked by a slight accent that gave it added precision and deliberateness, he said: "It is a very great pleasure and honor to welcome Mr. Sanger Rainsford, the celebrated hunter, to my home."

Automatically Rainsford shook the man's hand.

"I've read your book about hunting snow leopards in Tibet,⁴ you see," explained the man. "I am General Zaroff."

200 Rainsford's first impression was that the man was singularly handsome; his second was that there was an original, almost bizarre quality about the general's face. He was a tall man past middle age, for his hair was a vivid white; but his thick eyebrows and pointed military moustache were as black as the night from which Rainsford had come. His eyes, too, were black and very bright. He had high cheekbones, a sharp-cut nose, a spare, dark face, the face of a man used to giving orders, the face of an aristocrat. Turning to the giant in uniform, the general made a sign. The giant put away his
210 pistol, saluted, withdrew. **G**

"Ivan is an incredibly strong fellow," remarked the general, "but he has the misfortune to be deaf and dumb. A simple fellow, but, I'm afraid, like all his race, a bit of a savage."

3. **astrakhan** (ăs'trə-kăn'): a fur made from the curly, wavy wool of young lambs from Astrakhan (a city of southwest Russia).

4. **Tibet** (tə-bět'): a region in central Asia.

cultivated (kŭl'tə-vā'tīd) *adj.*
refined or cultured in manner

G VISUALIZE

You've just read a detailed description of General Zaroff. Circle the words or phrases that describe him. What do these details lead you to believe about him?



“Is he Russian?”

“He is a Cossack,”⁵ said the general, and his smile showed red lips and pointed teeth. “So am I.

“Come,” he said, “we shouldn’t be chatting here. We can talk later. Now you want clothes, food, rest. You shall have them. This is a most restful spot.”

220 Ivan had reappeared, and the general spoke to him with lips that moved but gave forth no sound.

“Follow Ivan, if you please, Mr. Rainsford,” said the general. “I was about to have my dinner when you came. I’ll wait for you. You’ll find that my clothes will fit you, I think.”

It was to a huge, beam-ceilinged bedroom with a canopied bed big enough for six men that Rainsford followed the silent giant. Ivan laid out an evening suit, and Rainsford, as he put it on, noticed that it came from a London tailor who ordinarily cut and sewed for none below the rank of duke.

230 The dining room to which Ivan conducted him was in many ways remarkable. There was a medieval magnificence about it; it suggested a baronial hall of feudal times with its oaken panels, its high ceiling, its vast refectory table where two score men could sit down to eat. About the hall were the mounted heads of many animals—lions, tigers, elephants, moose, bears; larger or more perfect specimens Rainsford had never seen. At the great table the general was sitting, alone. **H**

“You’ll have a cocktail, Mr. Rainsford,” he suggested. The cocktail was surpassingly good; and, Rainsford noted, the table

240 appointments were of the finest—the linen, the crystal, the silver, the china.

They were eating *borsch*, the rich red soup with whipped cream so dear to Russian palates. Half apologetically General Zaroff said: “We do our best to preserve the **amenities** of civilization here. Please forgive any lapses. We are well off the beaten track, you know. Do you think the champagne has suffered from its long ocean trip?”

H VISUALIZE

Underline the words and phrases that help you visualize this “remarkable” room.

amenity (ə-mĕn’ĭ-tē) *n.*
something that adds to one’s
comfort or convenience

5. **Cossack** (kɒs’ăk): a member of a southern Russian people, many of whom served as fierce cavalymen under the Russian tsars.



PAUSE & REFLECT

Rainsford is uncomfortable with the general's judging him. What do you think the general is trying to do here?

“Not in the least,” declared Rainsford. He was finding the general a most thoughtful and affable host, a true cosmopolite.⁶

250 But there was one small trait of the general's that made Rainsford uncomfortable. Whenever he looked up from his plate, he found the general studying him, appraising him narrowly. **PAUSE & REFLECT**

“Perhaps,” said General Zaroff, “you were surprised that I recognized your name. You see, I read all books on hunting published in English, French, and Russian. I have but one passion in my life, Mr. Rainsford, and it is the hunt.”

“You have some wonderful heads here,” said Rainsford as he ate a particularly well cooked filet mignon. “That Cape buffalo is the largest I ever saw.”

260 “Oh, that fellow. Yes, he was a monster.”

“Did he charge you?”

“Hurled me against a tree,” said the general. “Fractured my skull. But I got the brute.”

“I've always thought,” said Rainsford, “that the Cape buffalo is the most dangerous of all big game.”

For a moment the general did not reply; he was smiling his curious red-lipped smile. Then he said slowly: “No. You are wrong, sir. The Cape buffalo is not the most dangerous big game.” He sipped his wine. “Here in my preserve on this island,”

270 he said, in the same slow tone, “I hunt more dangerous game.”

Rainsford expressed his surprise. “Is there big game on this island?”

The general nodded. “The biggest.”

“Really?”

“Oh, it isn't here naturally, of course. I have to stock the island.”

“What have you imported, General?” Rainsford asked.

“Tigers?”

280 The general smiled. “No,” he said. “Hunting tigers ceased to interest me some years ago. I exhausted their possibilities, you

6. **cosmopolite** (kōz-mōp'ə-līt'): a sophisticated person who can handle any situation well.



see. No thrill left in tigers, no real danger. I live for danger, Mr. Rainsford.”

The general took from his pocket a gold cigarette case and offered his guest a long black cigarette with a silver tip; it was perfumed and gave off a smell like incense.

“We will have some capital hunting, you and I,” said the general. “I shall be most glad to have your society.”

“But what game—” began Rainsford.

“I’ll tell you,” said the general. “You will be amused, I know.

290 I think I may say, in all modesty, that I have done a rare thing. I have invented a new sensation. May I pour you another glass of port, Mr. Rainsford?”

“Thank you, General.” ❶

The general filled both glasses and said: “God makes some men poets. Some he makes kings, some beggars. Me he made a hunter. My hand was made for the trigger, my father said. He was a very rich man with a quarter of a million acres in the Crimea, and he was an ardent sportsman. When I was only five years old, he gave me a little gun, specially made in Moscow

300 for me, to shoot sparrows with. When I shot some of his prize turkeys with it, he did not punish me; he complimented me on my marksmanship. I killed my first bear in the Caucasus⁷ when I was ten. My whole life has been one prolonged hunt. I went into the army—it was expected of noblemen’s sons—and for a time commanded a division of Cossack cavalry, but my real interest was always the hunt. I have hunted every kind of game in every land. It would be impossible for me to tell you how many animals I have killed.”

The general puffed at his cigarette.

310 “After the debacle in Russia I left the country, for it was imprudent for an officer of the Tsar⁸ to stay there. Many noble Russians lost everything. I, luckily, had invested heavily in American securities, so I shall never have to open a tearoom in Monte Carlo or drive a taxi in Paris. Naturally, I continued

❶ CONFLICT

Rainsford and Zaroff are having a conversation about hunting. Review the dialogue in lines 260–293. Circle what Rainsford thinks of as the most dangerous game. What clues in this conversation hint that there is more conflict to come?

7. **Crimea** (krī-mē’ə) . . . **Caucasus** (kō’kə-səs): regions in the southern part of the former Russian Empire, near the Black Sea.
8. **debacle in Russia** . . . **Tsar** (zär): a reference to the 1917 Russian Revolution, in which the emperor, Tsar Nicholas II, was violently overthrown.

CONFLICT

Underline the sentence in this paragraph that states the conflict the general faced in his past.

to hunt—grizzlies in your Rockies, crocodiles in the Ganges,⁹ rhinoceroses in East Africa. It was in Africa that the Cape buffalo hit me and laid me up for six months. As soon as I recovered, I started for the Amazon to hunt jaguars, for I had heard they were unusually cunning. They weren't." The Cossack sighed.

320 "They were no match at all for a hunter with his wits about him, and a high-powered rifle. I was bitterly disappointed. I was lying in my tent with a splitting headache one night when a terrible thought pushed its way into my mind. Hunting was beginning to bore me! And hunting, remember, had been my life. I have heard that in America businessmen often go to pieces when they give up the business that has been their life." **1**

"Yes, that's so," said Rainsford.

The general smiled. "I had no wish to go to pieces," he said. "I must do something. Now, mine is an analytical mind,

330 Mr. Rainsford. Doubtless that is why I enjoy the problems of the chase."

"No doubt, General Zaroff."

"So," continued the general, "I asked myself why the hunt no longer fascinated me. You are much younger than I am, Mr. Rainsford, and have not hunted as much, but you perhaps can guess the answer."

"What was it?"

340 "Simply this: hunting had ceased to be what you call 'a sporting proposition.' It had become too easy. I always got my quarry. Always. There is no greater bore than perfection."

The general lit a fresh cigarette.

"No animal had a chance with me any more. That is no boast; it is a mathematical certainty. The animal had nothing but his legs and his instinct. Instinct is no match for reason. When I thought of this, it was a tragic moment for me, I can tell you."

Rainsford leaned across the table, absorbed in what his host was saying.

350 "It came to me as an inspiration what I must do," the general went on.

9. **Ganges** (găn'jêz'): a river in northern India.



“And that was?”

The general smiled the quiet smile of one who has faced an obstacle and surmounted it with success. “I had to invent a new animal to hunt,” he said.

“A new animal? You’re joking.”

“Not at all,” said the general. “I never joke about hunting. I needed a new animal. I found one. So I bought this island, built this house, and here I do my hunting. The island is perfect for my purposes—there are jungles with a maze of trails in them, hills, 360 swamps—”

“But the animal, General Zaroff?” **K**

“Oh,” said the general, “it supplies me with the most exciting hunting in the world. No other hunting compares with it for an instant. Every day I hunt, and I never grow bored now, for I have a quarry with which I can match my wits.”

Rainsford’s bewilderment showed in his face.

“I wanted the ideal animal to hunt,” explained the general. “So I said: ‘What are the attributes of an ideal quarry?’ And the answer was, of course: ‘It must have courage, cunning, and, above 370 all, it must be able to reason.’”

“But no animal can reason,” objected Rainsford.

“My dear fellow,” said the general, “there is one that can.”

“But you can’t mean—” gasped Rainsford.

“And why not?”

“I can’t believe you are serious, General Zaroff. This is a grisly joke.”

“Why should I not be serious? I am speaking of hunting.”

“Hunting? Good God, General Zaroff, what you speak of is murder.” **PAUSE & REFLECT**

380 The general laughed with entire good nature. He regarded Rainsford quizzically. “I refuse to believe that so modern and civilized a young man as you seem to be harbors romantic ideas about the value of human life. Surely your experiences in the war—”

K PLOT DEVELOPMENT

In order to create suspense, the author has used **foreshadowing**, planting clues in the text to hint at what’s to come. Circle the places in the text where Rainsford asks question of Zaroff.

What does Rainsford want to know?

What animal do you think Zaroff “invented”?

PAUSE & REFLECT

Rainsford’s question is finally answered. What is Zaroff speaking of?



Monitor Your Comprehension

condone (kən-dōn') *v.* to forgive or overlook

droll (drōl) *adj.* amusingly odd or comical

scruple (skrōō'pəl) *n.* a feeling of uneasiness that keeps a person from doing something

What does Rainsford feel uneasy about?

PAUSE & REFLECT

Reread lines 408–410. The general says he enjoys hunting men because unlike other animals they can reason—they have feelings, ideas, and beliefs of their own. Why does this fact make them interesting prey?

“Did not make me **condone** cold-blooded murder,” finished Rainsford, stiffly.

Laughter shook the general. “How extraordinarily **droll** you are!” he said. “One does not expect nowadays to find a young man of the educated class, even in America, with such a naïve, **390** and, if I may say so, mid-Victorian point of view. It’s like finding a snuffbox in a limousine. Ah, well, doubtless you had Puritan ancestors. So many Americans appear to have had. I’ll wager you’ll forget your notions when you go hunting with me. You’ve a genuine new thrill in store for you, Mr. Rainsford.”

“Thank you, I’m a hunter, not a murderer.”

“Dear me,” said the general, quite unruffled, “again that unpleasant word. But I think I can show you that your **scruples** are quite ill-founded.”

“Yes?”

400 “Life is for the strong, to be lived by the strong, and, if needs be, taken by the strong. The weak of the world were put here to give the strong pleasure. I am strong. Why should I not use my gift? If I wish to hunt, why should I not? I hunt the scum of the earth—sailors from tramp ships—lascars,¹⁰ blacks, Chinese, whites, mongrels—a thoroughbred horse or hound is worth more than a score of them.”

“But they are men,” said Rainsford, hotly.

“Precisely,” said the general. “That is why I use them. It gives me pleasure. They can reason, after a fashion. So they are **410** dangerous.” **PAUSE & REFLECT**

“But where do you get them?”

The general’s left eyelid fluttered down in a wink. “This island is called Ship Trap,” he answered. “Sometimes an angry god of the high seas sends them to me. Sometimes, when Providence is not so kind, I help Providence a bit. Come to the window with me.”

Rainsford went to the window and looked out toward the sea.

10. **lascars** (lās'kərz): sailors from India.



“Watch! Out there!” exclaimed the general, pointing into the night. Rainsford’s eyes saw only blackness, and then, as the
420 general pressed a button, far out to sea Rainsford saw the flash of lights.

The general chuckled. “They indicate a channel,” he said, “where there’s none: giant rocks with razor edges crouch like a sea monster with wide-open jaws. They can crush a ship as easily as I crush this nut.” He dropped a walnut on the hardwood floor and brought his heel grinding down on it. “Oh, yes,” he said, casually, as if in answer to a question, “I have electricity. We try to be civilized here.”

“Civilized? And you shoot down men?”

430 A trace of anger was in the general’s black eyes, but it was there for but a second, and he said, in his most pleasant manner: “Dear me, what a righteous young man you are! I assure you I do not do the thing you suggest. That would be barbarous. I treat these visitors with every consideration. They get plenty of good food and exercise. They get into splendid physical condition. You shall see for yourself tomorrow.”

“What do you mean?”

“We’ll visit my training school,” smiled the general. “It’s in the cellar. I have about a dozen pupils down there now. They’re
440 from the Spanish bark *Sanlúcar* that had the bad luck to go on the rocks out there. A very inferior lot, I regret to say. Poor specimens and more accustomed to the deck than to the jungle.”

He raised his hand, and Ivan, who served as waiter, brought thick Turkish coffee. Rainsford, with an effort, held his tongue in check.

“It’s a game, you see,” pursued the general, blandly. “I suggest to one of them that we go hunting. I give him a supply of food and an excellent hunting knife. I give him three hours’ start. I am
450 to follow, armed only with a pistol of the smallest caliber and range. If my quarry eludes me for three whole days, he wins the game. If I find him”—the general smiled—“he loses.”

“Suppose he refuses to be hunted?”

CONFLICT

Reread lines 438–451. In your own words, describe the game that Zaroff plays with his “pupils.”



“Oh,” said the general, “I give him his option, of course. He need not play that game if he doesn’t wish to. If he does not wish to hunt, I turn him over to Ivan. Ivan once had the honor of serving as official knouter¹¹ to the Great White Tsar, and he has his own ideas of sport. Invariably, Mr. Rainsford, invariably they choose the hunt.”

“And if they win?”

460 The smile on the general’s face widened.

“To date I have not lost,” he said.

Then he added, hastily: “I don’t wish you to think me a braggart, Mr. Rainsford. Many of them afford only the most elementary sort of problem. Occasionally I strike a tartar.¹² One almost did win. I eventually had to use the dogs.”

“The dogs?”

“This way, please. I’ll show you.”

The general steered Rainsford to a window. The lights from the windows sent a flickering illumination that made grotesque
470 patterns on the courtyard below, and Rainsford could see moving about there a dozen or so huge black shapes; as they turned toward him, their eyes glittered greenly.

“A rather good lot, I think,” observed the general. “They are let out at seven every night. If anyone should try to get into my house—or out of it—something extremely regrettable would occur to him.” He hummed a snatch of song from the Folies Bergère.¹³

“And now,” said the general, “I want to show you my new collection of heads. Will you come with me to the library?”

“I hope,” said Rainsford, “that you will excuse me tonight,
480 General Zaroff. I’m really not feeling at all well.”

“Ah, indeed?” the general inquired, **solicitously**. “Well, I suppose that’s only natural, after your long swim. You need a good, restful night’s sleep. Tomorrow you’ll feel like a new man, I’ll wager. Then we’ll hunt, eh? I’ve one rather promising prospect—”

Rainsford was hurrying from the room.

M CONFLICT

Why do you think Rainsford dismisses himself? What might he suspect?

solicitously (sə-lī's'ĭ-təs-lē) *adv.*
in a manner expressing care or concern

11. **knouter** (nou'tər): a person who whipped criminals in Russia.

12. **strike a tartar**: encounter a fierce opponent.

13. **Folies Bergère** (fô-lē' bër-zhër'): a music hall in Paris, famous for its variety shows.



“Sorry you can’t go with me tonight,” called the general. “I expect rather fair sport—a big, strong black. He looks resourceful— Well, good night, Mr. Rainsford; I hope you have a
490 good night’s rest.”

The bed was good, and the pajamas of the softest silk, and he was tired in every fiber of his being, but nevertheless Rainsford could not quiet his brain with the opiate of sleep. He lay, eyes wide open. Once he thought he heard stealthy steps in the corridor outside his room. He sought to throw open the door; it would not open. He went to the window and looked out. His room was high up in one of the towers. The lights of the château were out now, and it was dark and silent, but there was a fragment of sallow moon, and by its wan light he could see, dimly, the
500 courtyard; there, weaving in and out in the pattern of shadow, were black, noiseless forms; the hounds heard him at the window and looked up, expectantly, with their green eyes. Rainsford went back to the bed and lay down. By many methods he tried to put himself to sleep. He had achieved a doze when, just as morning began to come, he heard, far off in the jungle, the faint report of a pistol. **N**

General Zaroff did not appear until luncheon. He was dressed faultlessly in the tweeds of a country squire. He was solicitous about the state of Rainsford’s health.

510 “As for me,” sighed the general, “I do not feel so well. I am worried, Mr. Rainsford. Last night I detected traces of my old complaint.”

To Rainsford’s questioning glance the general said: “Ennui. Boredom.”

Then, taking a second helping of crêpes suzettes, the general explained: “The hunting was not good last night. The fellow lost his head. He made a straight trail that offered no problems at all. That’s the trouble with these sailors; they have dull brains to begin with, and they do not know how to get about
520 in the woods. They do excessively stupid and obvious things.

N VISUALIZE

Underline the words and phrases in this paragraph that help you visualize the scene. How do these details affect the mood of the scene?



PAUSE & REFLECT

Reread lines 513–522. Why was the general bored by the hunt last night?

CONFLICT

The main conflict in the story has become clear. What is it?

It’s most annoying. Will you have another glass of Chablis,¹⁴ Mr. Rainsford?” **PAUSE & REFLECT**

“General,” said Rainsford, firmly, “I wish to leave this island at once.”

The general raised his thickets of eyebrows; he seemed hurt. “But, my dear fellow,” the general protested, “you’ve only just come. You’ve had no hunting—”

“I wish to go today,” said Rainsford. He saw the dead black eyes of the general on him, studying him. General Zaroff’s face **530** suddenly brightened.

He filled Rainsford’s glass with venerable Chablis from a dusty bottle.

“Tonight,” said the general, “we will hunt—you and I.”

Rainsford shook his head. “No, General,” he said. “I will not hunt.”

The general shrugged his shoulders and delicately ate a hothouse grape. “As you wish, my friend,” he said. “The choice rests entirely with you. But may I not venture to suggest that you will find my idea of sport more diverting than Ivan’s?”

540 He nodded toward the corner to where the giant stood, scowling, his thick arms crossed on his hogshead of chest.

“You don’t mean—” cried Rainsford.

“My dear fellow,” said the general, “have I not told you I always mean what I say about hunting? This is really an inspiration. I drink to a foeman worthy of my steel—at last.”

The general raised his glass, but Rainsford sat staring at him.

“You’ll find this game worth playing,” the general said, enthusiastically. “Your brain against mine. Your woodcraft against mine. Your strength and stamina against mine. Outdoor chess!

550 And the stake is not without value, eh?”

“And if I win—” began Rainsford, huskily.

“I’ll cheerfully acknowledge myself defeated if I do not find you by midnight of the third day,” said General Zaroff. “My sloop will place you on the mainland near a town.”

The general read what Rainsford was thinking.

14. **Chablis** (shă-blē’): a type of white French wine.



“Oh, you can trust me,” said the Cossack. “I will give you my word as a gentleman and a sportsman. Of course, you, in turn, must agree to say nothing of your visit here.”

“I’ll agree to nothing of the kind,” said Rainsford.

560 “Oh,” said the general, “in that case— But why discuss that now? Three days hence we can discuss it over a bottle of Veuve Clicquot,¹⁵ unless—”

The general sipped his wine.

Then a businesslike air animated him. “Ivan,” he said to Rainsford, “will supply you with hunting clothes, food, a knife. I suggest you wear moccasins; they leave a poorer trail. I suggest, too, that you avoid the big swamp in the southeast corner of the island. We call it Death Swamp. There’s quicksand there. One foolish fellow tried it. The deplorable part of it was that Lazarus

570 followed him. You can imagine my feelings, Mr. Rainsford. I loved Lazarus; he was the finest hound in my pack. Well, I must beg you to excuse me now. I always take a siesta after lunch. You’ll hardly have time for a nap, I fear. You’ll want to start, no doubt. I shall not follow till dusk. Hunting at night is so much more exciting than by day, don’t you think? Au revoir,¹⁶ Mr. Rainsford, au revoir.” **PAUSE & REFLECT**

General Zaroff, with a deep, courtly bow, strolled from the room.

580 From another door came Ivan. Under one arm he carried khaki hunting clothes, a haversack of food, a leather sheath containing a long-bladed hunting knife; his right hand rested on a cocked revolver thrust in the crimson sash about his waist. . . .

Rainsford had fought his way through the bush for two hours. “I must keep my nerve. I must keep my nerve,” he said, through tight teeth.

He had not been entirely clear-headed when the château gates snapped shut behind him. His whole idea at first was to put distance between himself and General Zaroff, and, to this end, he

PAUSE & REFLECT

Now the rules of the game have been established. What do you think will happen?

15. **Veuve Clicquot** (vœv' klī-kō'): a French champagne.
16. **au revoir** (ō' rə-vwār'): goodbye; farewell till we meet again.

had plunged along, spurred on by the sharp rowels of something
 590 very like panic. Now he had got a grip on himself, had stopped,
 and was taking stock of himself and the situation.

He saw that straight flight was futile; inevitably it would
 bring him face to face with the sea. He was in a picture with a
 frame of water, and his operations, clearly, must take place within
 that frame.

“I’ll give him a trail to follow,” muttered Rainsford, and he
 struck off from the rude path he had been following into the
 trackless wilderness. He executed a series of intricate loops; he
 doubled on his trail again and again, recalling all the lore of
 600 the fox hunt, and all the dodges of the fox. Night found him
 leg-weary, with hands and face lashed by the branches, on a
 thickly wooded ridge. He knew it would be insane to blunder
 on through the dark, even if he had the strength. His need for
 rest was **imperative**, and he thought, “I have played the fox;
 now I must play the cat of the fable.”¹⁷ A big tree with a thick
 trunk and outspread branches was nearby, and, taking care to
 leave not the slightest mark, he climbed up into the crotch and,
 stretching out on one of the broad limbs, after a fashion, rested.
 Rest brought him new confidence and almost a feeling of security.
 610 Even so **zealous** a hunter as General Zaroff could not trace him
 there, he told himself; only the devil himself could follow that
 complicated trail through the jungle after dark. But perhaps the
 general was a devil—

An apprehensive night crawled slowly by like a wounded
 snake, and sleep did not visit Rainsford, although the silence of
 a dead world was on the jungle. Toward morning, when a dingy
 gray was varnishing the sky, the cry of some startled bird focused
 Rainsford’s attention in that direction. Something was coming
 through the bush, coming slowly, carefully, coming by the same
 620 winding way Rainsford had come. He flattened himself down
 on the limb, and through a screen of leaves almost as thick as
 tapestry, he watched. The thing that was approaching was a man.

imperative (ĩm-pĕr’ĕ-tĭv) *adj.*
 absolutely necessary

zealous (zĕl’ĕs) *adj.* intensely
 enthusiastic

17. **I have played the fox . . . fable:** In Aesop’s fable “The Cat and the Fox,” the fox brags of knowing many ways to escape an enemy. The cat knows only one, but is successful with it.



It was General Zaroff. He made his way along with his eyes fixed in utmost concentration on the ground before him. He paused, almost beneath the tree, dropped to his knees, and studied the ground. Rainsford's impulse was to hurl himself down like a panther, but he saw that the general's right hand held something metallic—a small automatic pistol. **PAUSE & REFLECT**

PAUSE & REFLECT

What do you think will happen next?

The hunter shook his head several times, as if he were puzzled. **630** Then he straightened up and took from his case one of his black cigarettes; its pungent, incenselike smoke floated up to Rainsford's nostrils.

Rainsford held his breath. The general's eyes had left the ground and were traveling inch by inch up the tree. Rainsford froze there, every muscle tensed for a spring. But the sharp eyes of the hunter stopped before they reached the limb where Rainsford lay; a smile spread over his brown face. Very deliberately he blew a smoke ring into the air; then he turned his back on the tree and walked carelessly away, back along the trail he had come. The

640 swish of the underbrush against his hunting boots grew fainter and fainter.

The pent-up air burst hotly from Rainsford's lungs. His first thought made him feel sick and numb. The general could follow a trail through the woods at night; he could follow an extremely difficult trail; he must have **uncanny** powers; only by the merest chance had the Cossack failed to see his quarry.

uncanny (ŭn-kăn'ē) *adj.*
so remarkable as to seem supernatural

Rainsford's second thought was even more terrible. It sent a shudder of cold horror through his whole being. Why had the general smiled? Why had he turned back?

650 Rainsford did not want to believe what his reason told him was true, but the truth was as evident as the sun that had by now pushed through the morning mists. The general was playing with him! The general was saving him for another day's sport! The Cossack was the cat; he was the mouse. Then it was that Rainsford knew the full meaning of terror. **P**

P CONFLICT

The author adds to the **suspense** by having Rainsford ask himself questions and then answer them. Circle the questions Rainsford asks in lines 647–649. How do the answers to these questions add to the conflict?



“I will not lose my nerve. I will not.”

He slid down from the tree and struck off again into the woods. His face was set, and he forced the machinery of his mind to function. Three hundred yards from his hiding place
660 he stopped where a huge dead tree leaned precariously on a smaller, living one. Throwing off his sack of food, Rainsford took his knife from its sheath and began to work with all his energy.

The job was finished at last, and he threw himself down behind a fallen log a hundred feet away. He did not have to wait long. The cat was coming again to play with the mouse.

Following the trail with the sureness of a bloodhound came General Zaroff. Nothing escaped those searching black eyes, no crushed blade of grass, no bent twig, no mark, no matter how
670 faint, in the moss. So intent was the Cossack on his stalking that he was upon the thing Rainsford had made before he saw it. His foot touched the protruding bough¹⁸ that was the trigger. Even as he touched it, the general sensed his danger and leaped back with the agility of an ape. But he was not quite quick enough; the dead tree, delicately adjusted to rest on the cut living one, crashed down and struck the general a glancing blow on the shoulder as it fell; but for his alertness, he must have been smashed beneath it. He staggered, but he did not fall; nor did he drop his revolver. He stood there, rubbing his injured shoulder, and Rainsford, with fear
680 again gripping his heart, heard the general’s mocking laugh ring through the jungle.

“Rainsford,” called the general, “if you are within sound of my voice, as I suppose you are, let me congratulate you. Not many men know how to make a Malay man-catcher. Luckily for me I, too, have hunted in Malacca.¹⁹ You are proving interesting, Mr. Rainsford. I am going now to have my wound dressed; it’s only a slight one. But I shall be back. I shall be back.”

When the general, nursing his bruised shoulder, had gone, Rainsford took up his flight again. It was flight now, a desperate,
690 hopeless flight, that carried him on for some hours. Dusk came,

CONFLICT

How is Rainsford proving to be interesting prey for the general?

18. **protruding bough** (bou): a tree branch that extends or juts out.

19. **Malay** (mə-lā') . . . **Malacca** (mə-lăk'ə): The Malays are a people of southeast Asia. Malacca is a region they inhabit, just south of Thailand.



then darkness, and still he pressed on. The ground grew softer under his moccasins; the vegetation grew ranker, denser; insects bit him savagely. Then, as he stepped forward, his foot sank into the ooze. He tried to wrench it back, but the muck sucked viciously at his foot as if it were a giant leech. With a violent effort he tore his foot loose. He knew where he was now. Death Swamp and its quicksand. **R**

700 His hands were tight closed as if his nerve were something tangible that someone in the darkness was trying to tear from his grip. The softness of the earth had given him an idea. He stepped back from the quicksand a dozen feet or so, and like some huge prehistoric beaver, he began to dig.

Rainsford had dug himself in in France when a second's delay meant death. That had been a placid pastime compared to his digging now. The pit grew deeper; when it was above his shoulders, he climbed out and from some hard saplings cut stakes and sharpened them to a fine point. These stakes he planted in the bottom of the pit with the points sticking up. With flying fingers he wove a rough carpet of weeds and branches, and with it 710 he covered the mouth of the pit. Then, wet with sweat and aching with tiredness, he crouched behind the stump of a lightning-charred tree.

He knew his pursuer was coming; he heard the padding sound of feet on the soft earth, and the night breeze brought him the perfume of the general's cigarette. It seemed to Rainsford that the general was coming with unusual swiftness; he was not feeling his way along, foot by foot. Rainsford, crouching there, could not see

R VISUALIZE

Reread this paragraph and record the words and phrases that appeal to your senses.

Details from Story



What I Visualize





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.

760 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 770 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. . . .

PAUSE & REFLECT

PAUSE & REFLECT

Describe what just happened in your own words.

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*.²² T

780 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.²³ 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

T VISUALIZE

What is Zaroff’s reaction when he reaches the water?

22. *Madama Butterfly*: a famous opera by the Italian composer Giacomo Puccini.

23. **Pol Roger** (pôl’ rô-zhâ’) . . . **Chambertin** (shăm-běr-tăn’): Pol Roger is a French champagne. Chambertin is a red French wine.



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.²⁴ 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
790 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.”

800 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 repast²⁵ 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.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Who has won “the most dangerous game?” Circle the winner’s name.

PAUSE & REFLECT

24. **Marcus Aurelius** (mār’kəs ô-rē’lē-əs): an ancient Roman emperor and philosopher.

25. **furnish a repast**: serve as a meal.

Text Analysis: Conflict

Remember that most stories are built around a central conflict, or struggle. An **external conflict** involves a character pitted against an outside force. An **internal conflict** occurs when the struggle takes place within a character’s own mind. List examples of each kind of conflict in the story.

Internal Conflict	
Zaroff	<i>bored with hunting and looking for a new “thrill”</i>
Rainsford	

External Conflict	
Person vs. Person	
Person vs. Nature	
Person vs. Obstacle	

Go back to the story and find three examples of foreshadowing. What clues does the author drop that hint at future events? Do you think this technique added suspense to the story? Why or why not?

Reading Skill: Visualize

Choose at least two descriptions from the story that evoked the most striking sensory images in your mind. List the words and phrases that helped create this image and note the sense to which they appeal.

Image #1	
Image #2	

What does it take to be a **SURVIVOR**?

What characteristics help people survive dangerous situations?

Vocabulary Practice

For each vocabulary word at the left write down the letter of the word at the right that's closest to its meaning.

1. tangible ____	a. carefully
2. quarry ____	b. charming
3. disarming ____	c. comfort
4. cultivated ____	d. enthusiastic
5. amenity ____	e. funny
6. condone ____	f. necessary
7. droll ____	g. overlook
8. scruples ____	h. prey
9. solicitously ____	i. refined
10. imperative ____	j. touchable
11. zealous ____	k. uneasiness
12. uncanny ____	l. unusual

Academic Vocabulary in Writing

analyze

element

infer

sequence

structure

A **structure** can refer to a building or the way in which something is built. Write a few sentences about the structure of the plot in “The Most Dangerous Game.” How does the author build the plot? Use at least two Academic Vocabulary words in your response. Definitions for these terms are listed on page 3.

Assessment Practice

DIRECTIONS Use “The Most Dangerous Game” to answer questions 1–6.

- Why does Zaroff “invent” a new kind of game?
 - He wants to impress Rainsford.
 - Rainsford suggests a new kind of game.
 - He is bored with the animals he has already hunted.
 - He wants to hunt animals without killing them.
- Which of the following passages foreshadows danger?
 - “You’ve good eyes” Whitney said.
 - “It will be light in Rio,” promised Whitney.
 - “What island is it?” Rainsford asked.
 - “The old charts call it Ship-Trap Island,” Whitney replied.
- The main conflict Rainsford faces in this story is —
 - to protect himself from wild animals
 - to survive as Zaroff hunts him
 - to swim to shore after falling off the boat
 - to change Zaroff’s mind
- What causes Rainsford to know “the full meaning of terror”?
 - Rainsford finds out Zaroff is a better hunter than he is.
 - Zaroff has followed Rainsford all night.
 - Zaroff sees Rainsford in the tree.
 - Rainsford realizes that Zaroff is just playing with him.
- Which of the following events happens first?
 - Rainsford kills Ivan.
 - Rainsford kills one of Zaroff’s dogs.
 - Rainsford wounds Zaroff.
 - Rainsford dives into the sea.
- Which of the following events happens last?
 - Rainsford and Zaroff fight in the bedroom.
 - Rainsford builds a Burmese tiger pit.
 - Rainsford builds a Malay mancatcher.
 - Rainsford falls in quicksand.