

Rainsford's character in "the most dangerous game"



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

"The Most Dangerous Game" is a short story and thriller by Richard Connell, which takes place after World War II on a remote island. The story chronicles the misadventures of a distraught castaway, as he makes his way through a mad man's playground, narrowly escaping death at each turn. General Zaroff, the castaway's captor, forces Rainsford into a game of murder that ends in Zaroff's demise. Rainsford, the protagonist, is an embodiment of our inner man, the beast that dwells just below our outer psyche, the part of us that others, even those held close, fails to see. Throughout the story, Rainsford's beliefs, temperament, sense of self and ultimate state of consciousness morph as the story progresses, which makes him a hard to miss, dynamic character. The most notable change in Rainsford is in his beliefs. Rainsford, an adept hunter, initially believes that animals experience no fear or recognizable emotion. He demonstrates this when he jubilantly states, "Who cares what a jaguar feels?"(11). He later insinuates that animals have no intelligence as he proudly declares, "Bah, they have no understanding" (11). Rainsford takes his egotistic beliefs and opinions further by ridiculing the animals he hunts and by partitioning his humanity from their primitive existence. His paradigm shifts dramatically when Zaroff announces his plans to hunt Rainsford down. He is released into the island's dense jungle and abandons his treasured humanity in order to survive. During Zaroff's challenge, Rainsford imitates the very animals he gallantly hunts. As the hunted, he feels the dreaded fear of the hunter, Zaroff. Briefly, Rainsford attempts to turn the tide on Zaroff by tapping into the fox's trickery to confuse Zaroff. By doing so he acknowledges an animal's intelligence. While awaiting Zaroff's approach, Rainsford experiences anxiety while hiding in a tree, paralleling the jaguar. In the process, Rainsford

changes. He shows an understanding, if not mutual respect, for animal emotion, in those actions. Rainsford's shifting temperament changes next. He originally hails himself a marvelous hunter, best of his field, top of his class. Likewise, he thinks of himself as an elite class, hunter; while the other, seemingly weak, people are destined to be hunted. Before his capture, he tells his companion, Whitney that "the world is made up of two classes-the hunters and the hunted" (11). He goes on to state, "Luckily you and I are the hunters" (11). That fact does not hold true. The minute Rainsford steps onto Shiptrap Island, he becomes the hunted. He is also shocked that despite his best efforts, using all of his extensive hunter knowledge, he is not able to evade Zaroff. He eventually comes to the realization that he is not the best hunter and anyone can suddenly become the "hunted" (11). Along with his thoughts and temperament, Rainsford's consciousness also begins to warp. During his initial meeting with Zaroff, Rainsford holds himself as a civilized member of society. After the unveiling of Zaroff's plans to hunt humans, he draws a wedge between Zaroff and himself under the grounds that he respects life yet Zaroff, an insane brute, does not. All his preconceived notions soon change. The first hint of the monster inside of Rainsford is evident when "he [feels] an impulse to cry aloud with joy...he [hears] the sharp crackle of breaking branches as the cover of the pit [gives] way...he [hears] a sharp scream of pain as the pointed stakes [find] their mark." (24). as his trap finally works on one of Zaroff's dogs. In his tone, an apparent blood lust is audible if not visible from the sheer enjoyment found in the potential loss of life. Even after beating Zaroff at his own game and essentially earning his freedom, Rainsford still feels a hidden, inner impulse, a burning desire from inside. That impulse may very well be his animal

instinct taking over when he says, " I am still the beast at bay" (25). After uttering those words he goes and defies his own logic and sanity by butchering Zaroff. Rainsford enlists himself into the ranks of the savage. His entrance into the realm of insanity becomes indisputable when he peacefully slumbers in Zaroff's bed after committing murder. He becomes much like the animals and moves even closer to Zaroff, losing the ability to differentiate right from wrong. All things considered, a great deal can be learned from Rainsford's experiences. He is an dynamic character whose brazen behavior helps us further diagnose the human condition. All people are good, yet all hold the potential for evil. Philosophers analogize humans to rolling stones. All must roll but not all must wade in the same moss. Humans are born good natured but social pressures twist a human's perception of life, much like Rainsford on Ship Trap Island. The darkness inside of him is only awakened by the stress of General Zaroff's challenge. His mind struggles to accommodate to its new environment and living conditions. Rainsford simply serves as a warning that the same beast dwells inside us all. Or is it already out?