



Read Rhyme Repeat

The Most Dangerous Game

Theater Adaptation
by Jill Craddock

The Most Dangerous Game
Rhyming Reader's Theater Adaptation by Jill Craddock

Characters

NARRATOR

RAINSFORD, expert hunter, going on expedition

GENERAL ZAROFF, fellow expert hunter

NARRATOR

Buckle your swash; it's like an episode of Lost,
How Rainsford lands astray at sea.
He simply fell off his yacht. Life has no guarantees.

ZAROFF

It was night, it was dark, but deaf ears to fear, had he,
Although his ship fair shuddered with a sense of the eerie.
Suddenly, Rainsford heard, distant and distinct, the shots of a gun,
And startled, jumped up to see what the Devil was going on.

NARRATOR

He leaned over into the inky black, lost his balance,
And, that, I'm afraid, was that.

RAINSFORD

True, there was no dramatic jet-plane crash.
Still, I believe I made a fairly big splash.

NARRATOR

Here's how it went: he'd heard shots, so that gave him a clue.
Shots may mean trouble, but they also meant people,
And with people, to save himself, he had to rendezvous.

RAINSFORD

In the water, trying to swim,
I kept hearing shots and a distressing din.
Finally, I clawed my way up a cliff,
And followed bushes, and bullets, to a game I've rued ever since.

ZAROFF

The jungle finally opened up to reveal my palace filled with light.
How fortunate that Rainsford found his way to me that night.

RAINSFORD

Still suffering from shock—and scaling huge iron gates—
I rang the bell, and was met by a huge mute who meant to mutilate.

NARRATOR

His name was Ivan. He was terrible, Russian, and ridiculously strong.
His thick black beard draped the barrel of his gun, gray and long.

ZAROFF

Wait, Ivan.
Is this Sanger Rainsford in my humble home?
Rainsford of hunting fame?

RAINSFORD

Yes, sir, that would be me.
How ever do you know my name?

ZAROFF

Rainsford wrote the book on my favorite sport.
His was the final word on big-game hunting, in short.
I was honored to be at his service that night,
That my castle, from the wind and the sea, was his port.

NARRATOR

But Zaroff knew more, risked more, was more ready to play,
In ways that Rainsford, the expert, would have nary a say.

ZAROFF

Rainsford never cared for rules. No way I could take him for a fool.
If there were kangaroo in Kathmandu, he'd poach them two by two.

RAINSFORD

It's true.

ZAROFF

As for me, I welcome you and see you need comfort and rest.
Ivan will take you to the special wing as our most honored guest.

RAINSFORD

Indeed, then. I'm indebted; you are most gracious and hospitable.

ZAROFF

Stuff and nonsense. Meet me in the oak dining hall.
I will sit under the head of a moose.
And you and I shall dine on roast goose.

RAINSFORD

(Enters the dining hall)

Mind if I sit under this staggering Cape buffalo?

ZAROFF

I'd be delighted. Its death was quite a moment for me, if I do say so.

RAINSFORD

Cape buffalo. I'd have to say. It's the world's most dangerous game.

ZAROFF

Maybe. He cracked my skull.
But he was not the wiliest beast I could name.

RAINSFORD

Is that so?
Any on this island?
Could we have a go?

NARRATOR

Zaroff has imported them all.
Big game is life at his island chateau.

RAINSFORD

It must be expensive to get tigers across the ocean,
If you were to have the notion.

ZAROFF

Tigers bore me, Rainsford.

NARRATOR

But don't let him short-change you.
Believe me when I tell you, this man lives for danger.

ZAROFF

Still, Caesar was born to be king.
The sirens were born to sing.
And no matter what I may want,
As God watches his sparrow, he created me to hunt.

NARRATOR

He was only five when he outgrew the little birds,
And turkeys became his mark preferred.
At ten, he killed his first bear,
And it has escalated, ever since, from there.

RAINSFORD

A man must fulfill his function.

ZAROFF

Indeed. But there is no greater bore than perfection.

RAINSFORD

So you increased your arsenal collection?

ZAROFF

No.

RAINSFORD

Fine-tuned your game selection?

NARRATOR

In a manner. Zaroff had invented an animal anew.

RAINSFORD

Invented an animal? Who are you?

ZAROFF

“Invented” is not the proper word. I am no Dr. Frankenstein.
But I have prepared for myself something new in the hunting line.

RAINSFORD

A new sort of hunt? Well, that sounds ideal.
And it must be something to satisfy your zeal.

ZAROFF

Yes. And it is the quarry that’s the key.
This quarry is able to reason and think, just like you and me.

RAINSFORD

Wait. What quarry? No animal reasons or thinks.
Exactly what do you expect me to believe?

ZAROFF

Rainsford, you are a hunter more than mildly ambitious.
To better your skills, this opportunity is propitious.

RAINSFORD

What have you got here? An entire zoo?
Elephants alone are 3,000 pounds.
Could you hope by yourself to take one of those beasts down

ZAROFF

I don’t need elephants. They smell awful. No.

RAINSFORD

Then it must be some oversized, inbred rhino.

ZAROFF

Dangerous, indeed, but once again—no.
I did profit selling rhino horns, and briefly they perplexed me.
They were aggressive and a challenge, but they can barely see.

NARRATOR

Rainsford had missed the hint: Zaroff's so-called animals reason and think.
Even the cleverest African elephant has several missing mental links.
But Zaroff could tell, Rainsford was getting the picture; he was right on the brink.

RAINSFORD

Oh! You've crafted a method to trap the African leopard!

NARRATOR

Well, you're getting closer, Rainsford, to the right weight.
Take note, the leopard weighs the same as the game he assassinates.

RAINSFORD

Assassinates? Are you shooting at heads of state?

ZAROFF

Heads of state, now they are men who can reason and think.

NARRATOR

But as for game on this island, they would pretty much stink.

RAINSFORD

No, you'd be better off with gorillas and chimpanzees.
Oh, is that what you're trying to tell me?
Scientists say primates can reason and think.

ZAROFF

You are ninety-nine percent there.
Those scientists report primate brains are close to ours, but for a hair.

RAINSFORD

So then it's gorillas? Chimpanzees?
What have you got? Traps set in trees?

ZAROFF

Rainsford, come on man, you're quicker than a primate.
Only one animal exists to dominate.
Primates are slow. But leopards are merely fast.
Hippos are mean, and elephants forget five minutes past.

NARRATOR

Rainsford. You need to think.
The only animal that can keep up with Zaroff would be—

RAINSFORD

Oh!

ZAROFF

You understand? Nudge, nudge, wink, wink?

RAINSFORD

Zaroff, I'll be honest. I'm afraid of what you speak.
A true sportsman only hunts the weak.
Hunting and murder are not one and the same.
You're confused, General. More than that, you're deranged.

ZAROFF

So, will you or won't you then join me on the range?

RAINSFORD

Good heavens, you're a murderer. I didn't come here to kill a man.

ZAROFF

Murder? Murder? That's not the game.
Rainsford, a reminder. Life is kill or be killed.
The weak in this world don't last very long.
They're here for our pleasure; we're the sturdy and the strong.

RAINSFORD

But. But you're hunting people! They're human!

NARRATOR

It's a dangerous game.

RAINSFORD

But they're men!

ZAROFF

Yes. And they're mostly the same.

RAINSFORD

What kind of monster are you, General?
You're a beast, twisted and mental.

ZAROFF

No, they are the beasts with at least the capacity for the mental.

RAINSFORD

Who?

NARRATOR

Tramps from lost ships.
Mongrels no one will miss.

ZAROFF

They're a gift from the sea
To feed the gift God gave to me.

RAINSFORD

Ship-Trap Island.

NARRATOR

Look out the window.

RAINSFORD

Lights. Is that a channel? I didn't know.

NARRATOR

No. It's his brand of smoke and mirrors, bringing ships to crushing blows.

RAINSFORD

That's a high-tech trap you've crafted to bait your lure.

ZAROFF

I am refined and civilized.
Of that, please be assured.

RAINSFORD

Civilized? You're barbaric. You shoot down men.

ZAROFF

You don't seem to comprehend.

RAINSFORD

There's nothing more to say. I've got to leave tonight.

ZAROFF

First, you must come with me to visit my training site.

RAINSFORD

Training? No, thank you.

ZAROFF

I'm no barbarian.
A dozen Spaniards just wrecked on the rocks.
Ivan's breaking them in.

RAINSFORD

Ivan?

NARRATOR

He leads them in regimes of exercise.
The food they get is the best that money buys.

ZAROFF

The term "barbarian," it rather does offend.
I prepare them well for conflict; themselves they're ready to defend.

RAINSFORD

Your food is not the point!
Please, General, would you let me leave this joint?

ZAROFF

It's just a game, I will admit, but dangerous nonetheless.
When the time comes after our preparations, you and I should hunt, might I suggest?

RAINSFORD

Why would anyone agree?

ZAROFF

They may taste victory.

RAINSFORD

And your record?

NARRATOR

He has not lost.

RAINSFORD

So one can just refuse this "game."

NARRATOR

And face Ivan. The outcome is the same.

RAINSFORD

Either way the man is the dead.

NARRATOR

Or lame.

ZAROFF

One man almost won.

We were stuck on the bogs, and I had to call out the dogs.

RAINSFORD

Dogs?

ZAROFF

Ah, yes, their eyes glow so green at night.

RAINSFORD

Please excuse me, General. I'm not feeling quite all right.

ZAROFF

Oh, I'm sorry then. Sleep tight.

NARRATOR

I suspect sleep will put up a fight.

(Both exit. Next scene is morning. ZAROFF is ready for hunting.)

ZAROFF

How are you feeling today, Rainsford? Better, I hope, than me.

I'm seriously suffering, from boredom, ennui.

I could have done last night's hunting in my sleep.

RAINSFORD

I wish to leave this island immediately.

ZAROFF

But you've only just arrived.

Eat some breakfast. Have a glass of juice? Some tea?

RAINSFORD

I want off this island without delay.

NARRATOR

Hmmm. I smell a touch of fright.

ZAROFF

Rainsford, calm down, we'll have a proper hunt tonight.

RAINSFORD

No. I mean to tell you without a single doubt.
No, no, and no. I want out.

ZAROFF

So I should notify Ivan he's in for a fight?

RAINSFORD

General, you don't mean... Me?

ZAROFF

Don't look like that, Rainsford. It's the highest form of praise!

NARRATOR

You'll be my cleverest ever adversary.

RAINSFORD

Absolutely not, General. By all means, quite the contrary.

ZAROFF

You must concede the stakes are worth it. Either way, you'll leave.

NARRATOR

Dead or alive. And if you breathe on day three,
You travel to the mainland on a ferry.

ZAROFF

You can trust me.

RAINSFORD

I don't agree. You must let me free!
I thought you had respect for me.

ZAROFF

Of the utmost, so please let me give you a tip.
In the spirit of good sportsmanship,
Avoid the swamp.
It's filled with sand that's quick.

RAINSFORD

How gracious of you.

ZAROFF

Well, my favorite bloodhound just died there.
It was a dreadful affair.

RAINSFORD

I am not your quarry!

ZAROFF

We'll see.
You'll have a head start.
And then tonight, we have a date.
When the sun goes down, I exit my gates.

NARRATOR

It's best for me to give the most scientific account:
Between Rainsford and the General, the tension was paramount.

RAINSFORD

The one thing I knew when behind me the gates were closed,
The straight-line strategy was the worst way to go.

NARRATOR

Good thinking, buddy.
Your trail would be too easy.

RAINSFORD

My legs barely kept me upright.

NARRATOR

After all, who exercises when in such a fright?
Beneath the waist, the man was like a noodle.

RAINSFORD

I was pretty sure that this whole competition would prove quite futile.

NARRATOR

Feudal indeed. Guerilla warfare with a true animalistic air.

RAINSFORD

Nonetheless, job one was to create a confusing maze, me the fox to Zaroff's hound.

NARRATOR

Clever move. He did; then Rainsford climbed a tree,
Praying silently not to be found.

RAINSFORD

He was below, in my sight. But I couldn't pounce on him because he had a gun.
He knew I was up there; he lit a smoke just for fun.

ZAROFF

Yes, I played cat and mouse with my prey.
This mouse has a quick, clever brain.
With only a knife, the man crafted a trap
That left me with a shoulder sprain.

NARRATOR

But Zaroff was quick and cat-like indeed.
He kept his revolver and laughed with glee.

ZAROFF

Rainsford made a Malaysian Mancatcher trap! I knew he'd be perfect for me!

RAINSFORD

He had to go have his shoulder mended, but it was only a matter of time.

ZAROFF

This is just the contest I need, sir, but, believe it, you will be mine!

NARRATOR

Rainsford wandered silently, trying to think.
That is, until he started to sink.

RAINSFORD

The quicksand got me, and I had zero chance.
But I used to dig like a beaver, back in the day, in wartime France.

NARRATOR

Who knew? I figured with quicksand, Rainsford would be through.
But here's what he pulled off.
First, he dug himself a trough.

RAINSFORD

Let me tell you, it was a tough little trick.
Then I filled a Death Trap with sharply pointed sticks.

NARRATOR

Ever the optimist.

RAINSFORD

Then I heard the screams of anguish,
I'd won! Zaroff done—I had fulfilled my deepest wish.

NARRATOR

Ah, not so quick. Sigh. I still miss that dear old dog.

RAINSFORD

Easy, Narrator! Aren't you supposed to be unbiased?
I can do without sarcastic bits of dialogue.

NARRATOR

Agreed, sir, my apologies.
After finding his dead dog, Zaroff returned with an entire pack.
With beasts and the gun against Rainsford now, the deck was stacked.

RAINSFORD

But I made another trap.
This time, Ivan took the knife, his body the tree, his blood the sap.

ZAROFF

Rainsford must have taken physics sometime before the war.
This hunt is not fun and games anymore.

NARRATOR

With a damaged shoulder, one less dog and Soviet,
Zaroff was clearly quite upset.
But all there was between these two was jungle and the sea.
There was no turning back for Rainsford. He ran, taking the lead.

ZAROFF

I sat there at the shore. He had no choice but to swim.
I waited easily an hour, imagining the sharks tearing him limb from limb.

NARRATOR

Finally, Zaroff went to bed to for the night,
Filled with a pleasurable measure of spite.
Then, tucked beneath his satin Egyptian sheets,
Zaroff saw his curtains shift,
Thought he was having a dream.
But that's not what it seemed.

RAINSFORD

Hello, General. I swam, but the island is not as big I deemed.
So, I swam back to the very last place you ever would think—
Unless we were children playing hide and seek.

ZAROFF

He'd been lurking behind from my bedroom curtain!
The very nerve. He won the game.
I was willing to ferry him off without delay.

NARRATOR

But Rainsford said, without a smile...

RAINSFORD

I am still a beast at bay.

ZAROFF

He said it with such dread.

RAINSFORD

Only one of us will sleep in this bed.

ZAROFF

I'll take one of the guest rooms.
I really don't mind.
It's the least I can do.
You've had a rough week; take a load off.
Unwind.

NARRATOR

Rainsford declined.

RAINSFORD

Let me be more clear.
Only one of us will sleep at all tonight.
I hope you don't mind.

ZAROFF

I beg of you. What can I do?

RAINSFORD

Be sure those dreadful bloodhounds get their fill of food.

NARRATOR

I'll leave it to you to determine what he meant by that.
Here's a hint: Rainsford slept comfortable as a cat,
And General Zaroff's dogs? Well they got rather fat.