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Most Dangerous Game Notes and Thematic Analysis

1. Explain how Rainsford feels about animals at the start of the story. Use a quote from the text to support your answer.

At the beginning of the story, Rainsford feels that animals... _____

Quote as Evidence: _____

2. When Rainsford first enters the mansion on Ship-Trap Island, he meets Ivan:

“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.”

How does the author describe Ivan in a way that might remind the reader of an animal?

3. Describe how General Zaroff is characterized when Rainsford first meets him:

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 mustache were as black as the night from which Rainsford had come. His eyes, too, were black and very bright. He had high cheekbones, a sharpcut 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 pistol, saluted, withdrew.

"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."

"Is he Russian?"

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

4. When General Zaroff invites Rainsford to dine with him, he tells him, "We do our best to preserve the amenities of civilization here." What does Zaroff mean when he says "civilization?" Give examples from the story of things Zaroff thinks are "civilized."

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5. General Zaroff is a former Russian aristocrat who left Europe after the Russian peasants, inspired by the ideas of Karl Marx (communism), revolted against the Czarist Empire. The Czar ruled Russia like a king, and the common people (serfs) were made to work the lands like medieval peasants. When the people overthrew the Czar in 1917 and established the Soviet Union, aristocrats who had been loyal to the Czar had to flee from Russia to avoid being imprisoned and murdered.

General Zaroff describes his move to the island: "After the debacle in Russia I left the country, for it was imprudent for an officer of the Czar 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."

Explain how General Zaroff's background and history as a military officer for the Czar might have influenced him to take up hunting as he does on the island:

6. General Zaroff brags to Rainsford: "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."

A. Explain how Zaroff might believe that reason is a hallmark of civilization.

civilization NOUN 1: an advanced state of human society, in which a high level of culture, science, industry, and government has been reached 2: those people or nations that have reached such a state 3: any type of culture, society, etc., of a specific place, time, or group: Greek civilization 4: the act or process of civilizing or being civilized: Rome's civilization of barbaric tribes was admirable 5: cultural refinement; refinement of thought and cultural appreciation: The letters of Madame de Sévigné reveal her wit and civilization.

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- B. Do you agree with the statement that “instinct is no match for reason?” Give two examples to support your position.

instinct NOUN 1: an inborn pattern of activity or tendency to action common to a given biological species 2: a natural or innate impulse, inclination, or tendency 3: a natural aptitude or gift <an instinct for making money> 4: natural intuitive power.

reason NOUN 1: a basis or cause, as for some belief, action, fact, event, etc. <the reason for declaring war> 2: a statement presented in justification or explanation of a belief or action 3: the mental powers concerned with forming conclusions, judgments, or inferences 4: sound judgment; good sense 5: normal or sound powers of mind; sanity.

7. When Rainsford is horrified to learn that General Zaroff hunts human beings, Zaroff reacts thus:

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--"

How does this statement further reveal Zaroff's feelings about civilization? And in what ways does General Zaroff consider himself to be civilized?

8. Infer how Rainsford's feelings about animals might have changed by the end of the story. Do you think he has become more empathetic towards other non-human living creatures, or does he still believe in the superiority of the human species? Give a quote to support your answer.

9. The author of “The Most Dangerous Game” plays with our notions of predator and prey, human and beast, civilized and barbarous. Explain how this **juxtaposition** (NOUN - an act or instance of placing close together or side by side, especially for comparison or contrast) has made you think. Explain a new insight you have as a result of reading this story.

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Essay #1:

1 page

Read the following two excerpts, one from “The Most Dangerous Game,” and the other from “The Descent of Man.” Then write a one-page essay defending, challenging, or qualifying the statement: In human society, it is best to allow the strong to thrive and the weak to perish.

“The Most Dangerous Game”

"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--lassars, blacks, Chinese, whites, mongrels--a thoroughbred horse or hound is worth more than a score of them." – General Zaroff

“The Descent of Man,” by Charles Darwin

With savages, the weak in body or mind are soon eliminated; and those that survive commonly exhibit a vigorous state of health. We civilised men, on the other hand, do our utmost to check the process of elimination; we build asylums for the imbecile, the maimed, and the sick; we institute poor-laws; and our medical men exert their utmost skill to save the life of every one to the last moment. There is reason to believe that vaccination has preserved thousands, who from a weak constitution would formerly have succumbed to small-pox. Thus the weak members of civilised societies propagate their kind. No one who has attended to the breeding of domestic animals will doubt that this must be highly injurious to the race of man. It is surprising how soon a want of care, or care wrongly directed, leads to the degeneration of a domestic race; but excepting in the case of man himself, hardly any one is so ignorant as to allow his worst animals to breed.

The aid which we feel impelled to give to the helpless is mainly an incidental result of the instinct of sympathy, which was originally acquired as part of the social instincts, but subsequently rendered, in the manner previously indicated, more tender and more widely diffused. Nor could we check our sympathy, if so urged by hard reason, without deterioration in the noblest part of our nature. The surgeon may harden himself whilst performing an operation, for he knows that he is acting for the good of his patient; but if we were intentionally to neglect the weak and helpless, it could only be for a contingent benefit, with a certain and great present evil. Hence we must bear without complaining the undoubtedly bad effects of the weak surviving and propagating their kind; but there appears to be at least one check in steady action, namely the weaker and inferior members of society not marrying so freely as the sound; and this check might be indefinitely increased, though this is more to be hoped for than expected, by the weak in body or mind refraining from marriage.

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Essay #2:

1 page

Read the following three excerpts, two from “The Most Dangerous Game,” and the other from the Bible. Then write a one-page essay defending, challenging, or qualifying the statement: Human beings are superior to animals.

“The Most Dangerous Game”

Passage 1

"It will be light enough in Rio," 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."

"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."

"Even so, I rather think they understand one thing--fear. The fear of pain and the fear of death."

"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[...]"

Passage 2

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 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 Caucasus 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."

Genesis 1:20-31

And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven. And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth. And the evening and the morning were the fifth day. And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so. And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind: and God saw that it was good. And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the

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sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so. And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

[Staple your essay to the back of this packet.]