

Meet the man who accidentally started an assassin hiring website

Level: Intermediate

1 Warmer

a. Match the halves to make words that describe people who kill others for money.

hit	killer
contract	gun
assas	man
hired	sin

b. Scan the article to see which of these words it uses.

2 Key words

a. Find words in the article that match the definitions below. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

1. something that attracts your attention and is easy to remember _____
(subtitle / standfirst)
2. a strong feeling of wanting to find out about something _____
(paragraph 4)
3. property or money that you receive from someone when they die _____
(paragraph 5)
4. funny, silly, slightly crazy _____ (paragraph 12)
5. become involved in a situation in order to try to stop or change it _____
(paragraph 12)
6. evil or dishonest _____ (paragraph 14)
7. something that is not what people claim it is and is designed to trick people
_____ (paragraph 14)
8. when private or secret information is told to other people _____
(paragraph 14)
9. money that you give to someone or to an organization to help them
_____ (paragraph 16)
10. try to influence politicians or people in authority on a particular subject
_____ (paragraph 16)

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b. Use some of the key words above to complete these sentences.

1. Their plan is to _____ for stricter laws to control toxic waste.
2. Just out of _____, where were you last night?
3. All your _____ help pay for simple eye operations, allowing the children to go to school and learn to read.
4. The prime minister wanted to find out who _____ the story to the newspapers.
5. When she walked in, John was playing a very _____ tune on the piano.

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He just wanted a catchy website name. Now, Bob Innes informs the police about people who are trying to have their enemies killed

Erum Salam

Fri 17 Dec 2021

- 1 In October 2005, Bob Innes bought the website domain name "rentahitman.com." * He was a business school student in North Carolina who wanted to offer website traffic analysis services: the "hit" was a play on words about the number of clicks on a client's website.
- 2 Little did he know that by 2021, he would be involved in hundreds of legal cases, handing people to the police for trying to pay for assassin services. In December 2021, a woman was found guilty, after she tried to have her husband killed through Innes' website.
- 3 Innes' website traffic analysis services idea was not a success, but he kept the domain name.
- 4 Then, in 2010, he returned to its inbox out of curiosity and was surprised to find a client – just not the type he had been looking for.
- 5 Innes had received a message from a woman named Helen. She was in Canada and wanted three family members in the UK murdered for cheating her out of her father's inheritance. He didn't respond.
- 6 But she sent a second email, which included names, addresses and other information. Innes felt that he had to do something. So he responded, pretending to be able to do what she wanted.
- 7 "Do you still require our assistance? We can put you in contact with a Field Operative," he replied.
- 8 Within hours, Innes had the legal name, location, and phone number of a woman who wanted other people killed.
- 9 "I truly felt that three people's lives were in great danger," he says.
- 10 Innes gave the information to the police, and soon found out from detectives that 'Helen' was wanted in the UK for "more serious charges".
- 11 Innes realized his \$9.20 website had just saved the lives of three people.
- 12 After Helen's arrest, Innes went back to a relatively normal life. He never planned on being a detective, or a criminal catcher. He didn't have the training. He was just a man with a wacky website name who happened to intervene in a crime.
- 13 He kept the site running, filling it with jokes and clues to show it wasn't real. "Your point and click solution," the website says when you search for it on Google.
- 14 The warning message on the front page reads: "Everyone should know by now that the Dark & Deep webs [sic] are not safe places to shop for your nefarious deeds. There are lots of potentially dangerous sites, full of viruses and fraud. Your privacy is NOT guaranteed, and your information could be leaked to thousands of sites, including law enforcement!"
- 15 But, the email requests for assassin services kept on coming.
- 16 The site runs completely out of pocket, and Innes accepts donations to help with the running costs. He also plans to set up an internet safety program, to help educate people on the dangers of the internet and to lobby for tougher laws for people who try to commit violent crimes online.
- 17 Does he ever worry about keeping the website? "He feels he has no choice. "As long as these emails keep coming in, I will continue to act," he says. "So far, nearly 150 lives have been saved as a direct result of the site and my actions."

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* *rentahitman.com* when spoken out loud reads as "rent a hitman dot com"

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3 Understanding the article

a. Are these sentences True or False according to the article? Correct any that are false.

1. Bob Innes bought the domain name over fifteen years ago simply as a joke.
2. The domain name costs him just under one hundred US dollars.
3. He was surprised to get an email from a woman who wanted him to murder three members of her family.
4. He immediately wrote back to her asking for more details.
5. After she gave more information about herself and the people she wanted killed, Innes contacted the police.
6. Unfortunately, the police never managed to find the woman.
7. Innes realised that his website could save lives.
8. He put unserious information on his website to show that he was not a killer, but people still contacted him for hitman services.
9. Innes has finally started to make money from the website and domain name.
10. Innes plans to run courses to help people protect themselves online.

4 Key language

a. With a partner, and, if possible, without looking at the article, write in the missing letters to complete the phrases from the article. The first letter of each word is given to help you. Then go back over the article to check your answers.

1. a play on w _ _ _ _ _
2. I _ _ _ _ _ did he know
3. f _ _ _ _ guilty
4. out of p _ _ _ _ _
5. running c _ _ _ _ _
6. as a d _ _ _ _ _ result of (something)

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b. Now match them with their meanings.

- a. losing money
- b. the money you need to keep a business going
- c. when something happens that is clearly because of another thing
- d. he was unaware of something
- e. a clever or funny use of a word that has two different meanings
- f. when someone official says that you have done something illegal

c. Now use them to complete these sentences.

1. He was _____ of murder and sent to prison for 20 years.
2. That one mistake left him thousands of pounds _____.
3. The aim is to cut our _____ by ten thousand dollars this year.
4. They lost their home _____ the storm.
5. _____ that the man he was searching for was standing right behind him.
6. Dorothy particularly likes jokes that are _____.

d. Finally, use these phrases in sentences of your own.

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these questions.

- Have you ever changed your email address? What did you do with the old one?
- Do you have any old email addresses, websites or social media accounts that you no longer use but are probably still active?
- Do you have / have you ever had a website? If yes talk about security, updates and information on this website. If not, why not? How might a website be useful to you in your life?
- What information would you not put online or send via email or messaging app?
- How else could you get this information to someone who needed it?
- How do you protect yourself online?

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6 In your own words

a. Work with a partner or in small groups.

Discuss and build on your answers to the last discussion question in task 5 and write a comprehensive list of internet safety do's and don'ts.