Help Wanted: Bambi (Counter) Assassin

A Buck Knifing
Hunter survives whitetail attack

Paul Cheatham, 61, of Herrin, Illinois, didn’t expect to be involved in a fight for his life when he walked in the woods last fall to check one of his deer food plots. Since it was prior to the season, he was armed with only a pair of binoculars.

“I saw a buck trailing a doe come out as I walked up to the woods,” said Cheatham. After entering the woods he noticed a six-pointer standing about 20 yards away walking toward him. “I could tell he was rutting,” said Cheatham. “His neck was swollen, and he was snorting and kept smelling my trail as he walked toward me.”

Cheatham stood still, thrilled at the opportunity to be this close to a wild whitetail. The deer stopped 6 feet away. “We stood there looking at each other. Then I took one step backwards and he came at me.”

Cheatham grabbed the deer by the antlers. “He threw me around like a rag doll. He knocked me down, but I threw my legs up around his shoulders and hung on.”

Cheatham was afraid to let go. The deer was not trying to get away—it was trying to kill him. “I was afraid that if I let go he would stab me through a lung or some other vital area.” As the struggle progressed, punctuated by brief moments of rest, the deer started getting the upper hand.

As Cheatham fought, he rolled onto his side and felt for his pocketknife in his pants pocket. The tiny penknife was a pitifully small weapon, but he was able to get it out and stab the deer in the side. “It closed and cut my fingers a couple of times, but I finally managed to stab the deer several times in the throat. I just held on to him until he bled to death. We must have laid there 30 minutes—I was too scared to let go.”

After the experience Cheatham immediately reported the incident to the Illinois Conservation Department. After examining his injuries, the scene of the attack, and the dead deer, the officer dismissed Cheatham and no charges were filed.

“I weigh 180 pounds and that deer probably didn’t weigh more than 130 pounds, but he darn near killed me.” —Leroy River

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Bambi tastes great, too!

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