

Tree Stand

Michael Champagne

Gray, cloudy skies ahead spread in all directions. The breeze comes from the northeast and carries with it a crisp delight that cools the body down to the very soul. With the breeze come snowflakes, each one embarking on their own unique excursion to the frozen ground below. Whilst the snowflakes complete their journey fifteen feet below me, I can look on forever at all the surrounding farms and barren cornfields. The winter breeze carries along the aroma of wood smoke drifting lazily across the field in front of me. Sunlight, relentlessly piercing the clouds continues to fall on the horizon, losing the constant battle with time. As the darkness begins to creep I wait. Cardinals and chickadees flick and flutter amid the bushes below causing a ruckus. Two fox squirrels chase each other chattering and rustling leaves. From a distance I hear an owl cry out early, commanding silence along the busy fencerow.

The dead quiet is pierced by a methodic crunch of leaves. Silence. Crunching. Silence. Between the trees I can see the flicker of a white tail, a bright flag standing out in the ever-darkening day. With the cold metal of my bow in my hand I continue to wait. Through the branches emerges a large whitetail buck, a monarch, his neck still broad and swollen from the rut. With antlers spread wide beyond his ears and a gray coat harmonized with his surroundings, he is camouflaged in the dim light. Flicking his tail nervously he continues in my direction sniffing at the air trying to catch my scent, but all he can distinguish is the smell of earth scent wafers and raccoon urine on my clothing. As he approaches broadside pawing at the frozen ground, I draw my bow and let out a deep breath with a cloud of frozen air bursting from my lungs. The uniform beating of my heart was all that I could hear as it throbs in my chest. Thump. Thump. Thump. Before the steam of my breath can fade away I release an arrow, piercing through the calm evening air. It slices through the silence toward its target; carrying a promise of silence. In the complete silence that surrounds me, the frigid breeze blows again and the solitary owl noiselessly glides by.

Michael Champagne is a junior in Animal Ecology. He grew up in Massachusetts and studied Conservation Law Enforcement for two years at Unity College in Unity, ME. He is a member of the International Fraternity of Phi Gamma Delta and enjoys outdoor activities including hunting, hiking, camping, and fishing.