

# ***This Can't Be Real...***

by TJ Rempel



When a deer hunter gets images like these, its time to scramble the jets! TJ Rempel did everything in his power to make the 1000 km round trip from his home turf work out in order to slip into this monster's kitchen. Follow along as TJ recounts the exciting events around his hunt for this special animal!

This isn't an epic story filled with ups and downs, years of history, trail camera images, shed hunting and close calls which is how I always thought harvesting my biggest whitetail would go. To be honest, I'm not the hunter who dreams of giant whitetails when my head hits the pillow. Its smoked backstrap smothered in black garlic butter that keeps me motivated to be in the woods. What led up to me being in a photo with this monster buck and you reading these words was an unbelievably selfless act by a friend, an incredibly supportive wife, and me being a struggling bowhunter with a tag in his pocket late in the season...

My hunting season started strong with a successful early season elk hunt. Then my target buck in the Bowzone, while taking his time, finally showed up in early October. However, after 50 days and over 20 sits from that first appearance, I still found myself sitting, frozen in a deer stand. I was beginning to contemplate

the life choices that put me there! On one hand there was total happiness doing the thing I love most, but on the other, I was feeling the weight of having a three-week-old baby and a three-year toddler at home. We had also just returned from a whirlwind trip to Toronto to fulfill my wife's dream of seeing Taylor Swift perform. It was rude how Taylor didn't factor in hunting season with her tour dates, but I digress. With 10 minutes of legal light left I felt my phone vibrate and saw a text from a friend. This friend had a mule deer draw and the notification banner showed a small photo which looked like a giant muley. Excited for him, but needing to focus on the task at hand I decided I would look at the picture once I was back at my truck. The night ended uneventfully, and once back at the truck I looked at the photo my friend sent. This was no mule deer! Once I could speak again, I called him immediately. It turned out his son had taken the photos. I messaged his son to congratulate him on seeing this incredible deer and set up a call in the morning to get the story of his encounter.



It turned out, while driving in the middle of the day on a road my friend's son had travelled many times before, this buck stood in a field less than 200 yards away for close to 20 minutes, completely unbothered by the presence of a vehicle. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. We discussed how unfair the hunting gods are, given how he had just tagged out the week prior. I couldn't resist. I had to do something I've never done before, and asked if he would mind if I tried to hunt this deer. Selflessly, he said sure.

Now that I had one approval, the next was the scariest one of all. I would need to broach the subject of my wife going solo with the kids, dogs, chickens and ducks for the next three days. I'll spare the details, but although she didn't outright say yes, she didn't say no; which every husband knows, means yes. Fifteen minutes of scrambled packing and I was on the road!

I assessed my situation. It was going to be a 1000-kilometer round trip, to an area I had never hunted before. The buck was located on private land. I didn't

TJ made a hail-mary trip for this incredible whitetail. And, except for some dicey moments, it couldn't have worked out much better. This 220 inch giant sports 31 inch main beams! Its G2s and G3s range in length from 11 6/8 -13 6/8 inches. It scores over 190 inches as a 5x4 typical. Let that sink in! TJ's buck will net over 211.



know where the landowner lived, had no contact info, and only three days left of the season. I had been hunting fairly steady for three months already, and I might come home to the locks changed and all my stuff frozen in the snow! For the first time ever, I had to ask myself why I was hunting. I live by the creed, "You can't eat the antlers", and pride myself on the fact we haven't bought red meat in well over a decade, but obviously this new quest had nothing to do with the meat. I was needed at home. I wanted to continue watching our first son become a brother, and our newborn evolve into herself. Those precious moments are more valuable to me than any antler is, and I was leaving them. But, when an opportunity at truly a once-in-many-lifetimes buck falls into your lap, I just had to try and see it for myself.

After successfully avoiding the speed traps on the drive, I managed to get to the spot during the last hour of legal light.

The field was packed! I watched over 40 deer chasing each other, fighting, eating, just being deer. It was awesome. After the season I had been having, just watching this many deer without the constant sound of dogs barking and traffic noise was a welcome change of scenery. After dark I drove to the nearby farmyards to ask for permission and any contact information I could for the land the deer were on. Meeting landowners is one of my favorite parts of hunting. No one was home at the first two houses but the third was opened by a wonderful lady who invited me into her home filled with the aroma of a delicious meal of deer steaks sizzling in the pan. We talked for 20 minutes and she shared their history with the land, how the area has changed through time and how important family is. Their family previously owned the quarter of land where the buck was last seen, but had sold it a few years ago. She gave me permission to hunt on their land and passed on the number of the new owner.

I always prioritize gaining hunting permission early in the year and here I was at the bitter end, knowing full well the landowners could be tired of the challenges that come with allowing hunters on their land. I stared at the phone number a long time before pushing the call button. It rang for what felt like forever and eventually went to a voicemail. I left a message and prayed I would get a call back.

After another sleepless night I timed my arrival to the field well before legal light. In the darkness I saw an unmistakable frame of antlers towering over a large dark figure, backlit by the snow and early morning light. That 'first look' through the spotter was unforgettable. The rarity of seeing a wild whitetail deer reaching this caliber is a memory I will cherish forever.

In order for me to be able to hunt him he had to travel west into the next quarter, go east onto public land where the access required a long detour and the predominant winds would work against me or walk 1000 yards north onto public land.



*Check out the balls of ice this dominant buck developed. These occur when a fresh snow falls and sticks in the trees during November. As the bucks get lathered up from chasing does through the pine boughs and branches, snow adheres to their neck, eventually turning in to ice balls from the constant motion. They will manage to get rid of them later in the winter. It goes to show how hard these big breeders charge during the rut.*



As I was trying to make sense of how his antlers were so big, a beauty of a 4x4 with a split G2 walked into the field. Immediately the big guy postured up, ears pinned back and stomped sideways towards the new intruder. It was an incredible sight. The hefty 4x4 took the hint and gave the monster buck some more space. This encounter brought the big guy to within 150 yards. With my spotting scope zoomed all the way back, his frame touched both sides of the field of view.

After feeding for a while he started to walk. Suddenly I realized the majestic whitetail might be on course to cross into the property I had just gotten permission on! Sheer panic set in. Everything was packed away in the back and now I was scrambling from my driver seat to get my rifle out of its case, find bullets and the rangefinder. I crawled out the passenger seat and leaned against a tree as I realized he was going to appear on my side any second.

After what seemed like forever, I saw a massive set of antlers against the trees 300 yards out. But instead of continuing west, he had turned north, now walking away from me!

I didn't know what else to do so I started moving north. I trailed behind the buck 350 yards, with absolutely zero cover between us. I was anticipating him breaking into a run and out of my life at any second, or turn back into the bush he had come from. There were many other options he had that would've saved his life, but that didn't happen. Yard by yard we slowly closed in on the crown land, my disbelief and adrenalin growing with every step. My hands were frozen as I gripped the cold stock of my rifle, however as the distance between



# HEADHUNTER OUTFITTERS

SLED LAKE, SK

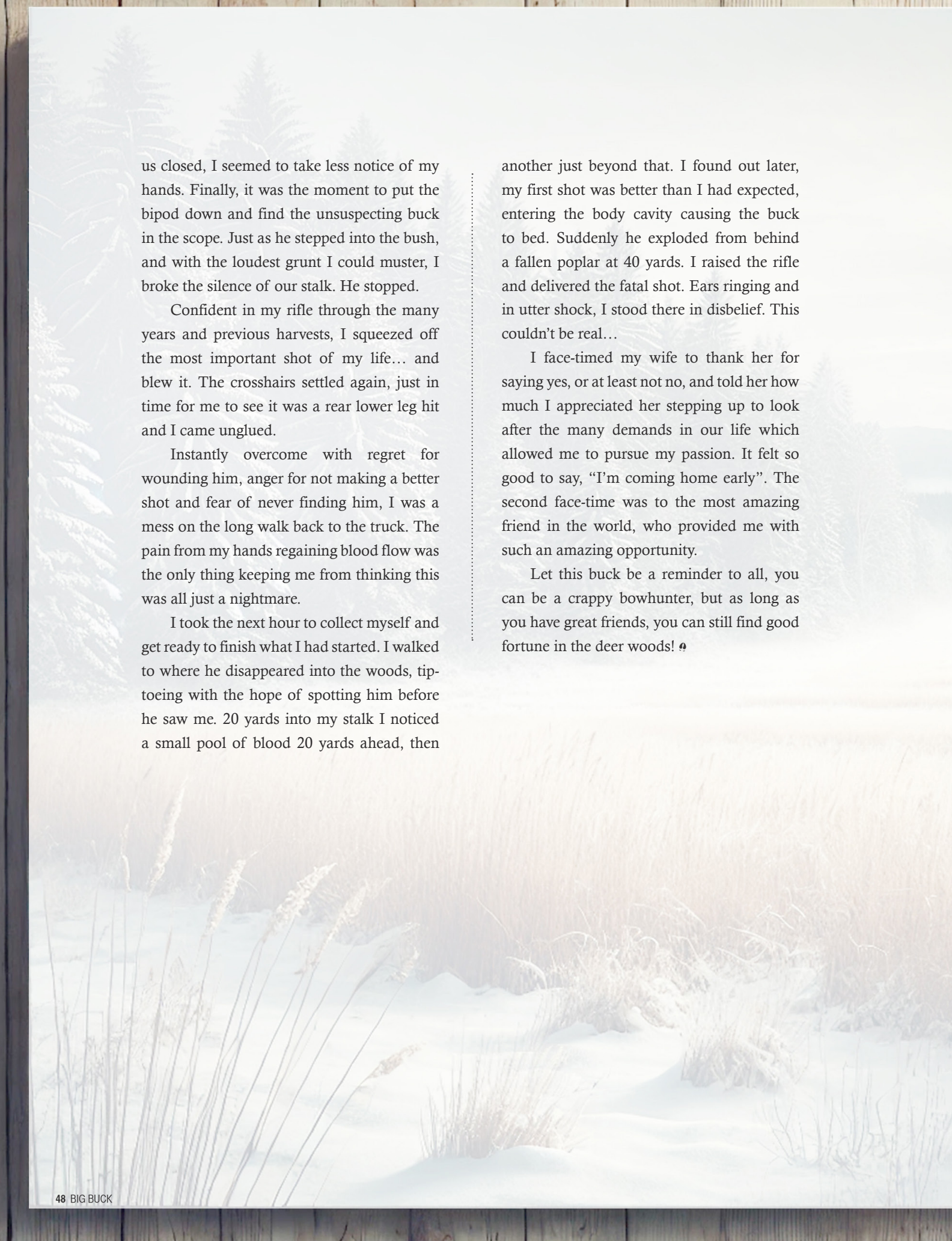
Wolf, Whitetail & Bear Hunts, Fishing, deep in the Northern Saskatchewan Forest off the shore of a beautiful, secluded lake  
Cabins & Food prepared for your comfort during your stay



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us closed, I seemed to take less notice of my hands. Finally, it was the moment to put the bipod down and find the unsuspecting buck in the scope. Just as he stepped into the bush, and with the loudest grunt I could muster, I broke the silence of our stalk. He stopped.

Confident in my rifle through the many years and previous harvests, I squeezed off the most important shot of my life... and blew it. The crosshairs settled again, just in time for me to see it was a rear lower leg hit and I came unglued.

Instantly overcome with regret for wounding him, anger for not making a better shot and fear of never finding him, I was a mess on the long walk back to the truck. The pain from my hands regaining blood flow was the only thing keeping me from thinking this was all just a nightmare.

I took the next hour to collect myself and get ready to finish what I had started. I walked to where he disappeared into the woods, tip-toeing with the hope of spotting him before he saw me. 20 yards into my stalk I noticed a small pool of blood 20 yards ahead, then

another just beyond that. I found out later, my first shot was better than I had expected, entering the body cavity causing the buck to bed. Suddenly he exploded from behind a fallen poplar at 40 yards. I raised the rifle and delivered the fatal shot. Ears ringing and in utter shock, I stood there in disbelief. This couldn't be real...

I face-timed my wife to thank her for saying yes, or at least not no, and told her how much I appreciated her stepping up to look after the many demands in our life which allowed me to pursue my passion. It felt so good to say, "I'm coming home early". The second face-time was to the most amazing friend in the world, who provided me with such an amazing opportunity.

Let this buck be a reminder to all, you can be a crappy bowhunter, but as long as you have great friends, you can still find good fortune in the deer woods! 🍀