Resigning the Chain: Book 3, Chapter 12 "Pursuit"

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Author's Statement

Chris Thomas

The submitted piece is the first half of the twelfth chapter in a book Chris is currently writing for his thesis project. The book is entitled "Resigning the Chain" and is the last in a trilogy about the journey of Benjamin Devros, a marine who went AWOL from Afghanistan early into the 2002 conflict. The underlining theme in the three books is religion. Each book addresses this topic differently; the first from an Asian/middle eastern perspective, the second from a European perspective and the third from an American perspective. Chris submitted to us this section of chapter 12 because he saw it as one of the many thrilling portions of his book and he wanted readers to understand that though religious philosophy plays a major role in this novel, it isn't the only thing the book offers readers.

Resigning the Chain: Book 3, Chapter 12 "Pursuit"

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The branches were becoming harder to see as the light escaped from every corner of his vision. What had originally been a clear trail was now a congregation of shadows and Devros was certain he’d left the original path eons ago.

“God damn it,” he whispered as he pushed his legs as hard as they would let him. He stole a moment to look down at his watch and wished he hadn’t. After nothing but running for half an hour he was close approaching his record time for a straight sprint without stopping. His head and face were soaked in sweat and his muscles ached in places he never knew they could. He tried to make himself think of a time since basic that he’d ever pushed himself this hard, but couldn’t remember a single moment outside of Ramstein. He wanted nothing more than to throw himself to the ground and let the earth cradle his wounds. It’s at times like these that you begin to give yourself excuses to take a break. “Why is it I’m not stopping?” he said to himself.

A loud whizzing sound engulfed his left eardrum. He felt the pain shoot through his body. His hand instinctively came forward to coddle the fresh wound at the side of his head. The bullet had only grazed him but it felt far worse. He didn’t break his stride but instead turned to get a quick estimate of how many were already close enough to hear him. “One...three...seven, shit!” he said to himself.

The branches continued to become an obstacle for him and his stride was obviously being affected by it. Every other step, it seemed, he’d have to wrestle with a patch of forest that seemed to suddenly sprout in front of him and had no intention of parting the way for neither he nor anyone else.

“I’ve got to stop, I’ve got find somewhere...” he thought. His eyes scanned the woods but meet only what had become an all too familiar sight of blackness. “CRAP! COME ON! It wasn’t that far away from the road!” he yelled.

A loud blast broke from behind him. Another rushing bullet flew past, this one hitting a tree just ahead of him, shattering bark across his oncoming path. “You idiot, be quiet,” he told himself.

Devros could feel his pursuers gaining, their footsteps were less than a league behind his now and they were clearly in range to hear him speak. He knew it wasn’t long before the Blackhawks were overhead with their searchlights. “Then maybe I’d have some light,” he thought. It was then that Devros spied a shunt of moonlight forty-five degrees to his right. “Finally, there it is,” he said. It was the field he had been running towards since escaping from their car.

With what little strength he had left, he changed his heading to match the opening and pushed himself into a full run, straight towards it. His pursuers noticed the shift change and he could hear the senior officer issue orders to pursue in the new direction. By now Devros’ clothes were soaked to the point.
where he looked as if he had just taken a swim in them. The small pack on his back was
tn't helping either, it built up heat and kept causing drops of sweat to pour
down his back side and collect in his pants. With all the commotion, he never
realized that his clothes could weigh him down. When he made the course correction
he closed some of the gap between him and his pursuers. It was only now that he
conceded he may not make it out of the field and into the river, his primary goal.

“Where is he?!?”
“Just there!”
“If you have a shot, take it!”

Devros began to put voices with a face as several soldiers came within
his peripheral vision. Everything but hope melted away and the single goal of at
least getting to the field filled his every atom. He pushed himself into a full-on
sprint and kept his arms busy smashing through any natural resistance from the
forest. The seconds passed and the clearing drew closer as did the soldiers. He
could see the field now, just in front of him. It was almost a mile wide and twice that
length, filled with tall grass and sitting in the middle of it, an old barn that he
remembered from high school. His mind drifted, for a second, to those days now
made it a comfortable home there, away from humanity.

Just as with the branches in the forest, now Devros was pushing aside
graz shoots and spider webs, taking in all manner of swift cuts, occasional bits
and mud finding its way onto every portion of his body. He continued to crawl like
this several minutes before spotting the river. The good news was it appeared to
be only three quarters of a mile from his position. The bad news was the original
search party had determined that he was definitely in the field somewhere and now
there appeared to be twenty or so soldiers scouring the field in a standard search
pattern.

Devros figured he hadn't any choice but to keep crawling and hope he
made it at least as far as the barn before they found where he had originally cut a
trail. “Just get behind the barn and run, they won't notice. Just get behind the
barn,” he repeated to himself. The words felt good; they gave him reassurance
and he honestly felt like he could make it.

“Look! THERE!”
“SIR! We have trail leading north towards the center!”

These statements were followed by a series of short burst whistles and a
lot of movement. Devros came to a full halt. He made his body motionless and
perked his ears. Readying himself onto his knees and the points of his feet, he
prepared himself to run. There would be no more words unless they tagged him so
he was listening for either movement in his direction or the sound of guns cocking.

Training his ears south, he heard footsteps closing in. They were light
but quick and he allowed himself a minute before they had a clean shot. He still
wasn't close enough to the river to make a clean run for it but there was the barn.
He had shifted his direction towards it and it was only a few meters away now. He
stuck his hair back and chanced a look towards it; the wall he faced was on the
east side of the barn. The structure itself was a larger version of an Australian
style complex. It was about 10 meters high and 12 meters long. The barn had three
levels to it; the first used to be a massive collection center that had stalls lining the
walls and open space in the middle. Above that was a secondary collection center
and Devros remembered it holding offices and tool closets. The third level was a
small attic and storage area. The east wall had a few places along it where boards
had rotted away and created doorways into the first level of the building.

The footsteps became louder and Devros could hear the sound of guns
being readied. He knew it had to be now. Taking the gun from his pack, he aimed
the barrel toward a nearby private, the one close enough to get a good shot.
Taking the safety off he steadied his arm, which was shaking now from muscle
exhaustion. “One shot, all I get is one shot and then aiming won't be part of the
equation... damn,” he thought. Devros crouched himself down and got onto his feet. His hand was losing its focus as the soldiers drew so close he could hear their breathing. He pulled back the trigger, fired the weapon and sprang from the field in a mad dash for the closest opening against the barn wall.

“AHH! SHIT! HE HIT MY LEG!”

“Open fire!”

The soldiers answered Devros’ one shot with a thousand replies. Not bothering to figure out where they were aimed he continued to run straight for the opening. One meter, two, three, four; as he neared the exposure, he felt his legs begin to give out. The blood had been poorly circulating through them since he began for the barn and now they were finally giving up on him after all this time. Fighting spasms and searing pain Devros kept running, not noticing the flicks of blood dropping onto what was left of his shirt and pants. The bullets flew so rapidly, one even went just past his eyes. It looked like a blaze of light, almost like a small asteroid or bug zipping by on its way to somewhere else. The opening came up on him, one meter away now. Devros hurled himself into it and balled up into a gymnastic tumble as he rolled through a stall and than through its worn down wooden fence, directly into the middle of barn’s first level corridor.

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“He’s inside.”

“Hold your fire!” yelled Langdon. The soldiers immediately ceased their weapons fire and stood from their crouched positions. The ones that weren’t completely exhausted stood at parade rest and awaited their orders. Langdon paused for a moment and then signaled for Frahm to come closer.

“Yes, sir?” Frahm asked in a stance of complete attention, hand in a perfect salute. He had been chasing down Devros on foot and longer than any of the rest of them, yet he stood completely stone still awaiting orders from the man he still acknowledged as his superior. “I’ll put him in for Major if they don’t break me for this,” Langdon thought.

“Have the men surround the structure and keep close watch over any cracks in the wall. I want a double contingent at the rear; I don’t want him going for the river. Once the men have created a perimeter, I want you to give your whistle a single blow, clear?”

“Yes, sir!” Frahm gave a salute and waited ten seconds before Langdon returned it. With the orders confirmed he set out making Langdon’s orders come into reality. Before he could get too far, however, Langdon stopped him.

“Captain,” Frahm turned to face the Colonel and re-positioned himself back into a full attention posture. “Did you see if we actually hit him?” Frahm’s answer was immediate, almost regretful in tone and was followed up with a another steady salute.

“I think just his arm sir.” Langdon didn’t respond; he knew it wouldn’t help matters. Instead he meet Frahm’s salute and watched as the young officer jogged away to carry his orders out.